

by Bobby Hickman and
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As Beijing prepares to host the 2008 Olympics this summer, visitors from Atlanta are sure to be reminded of the last-minute activities before the 1996 games here. After years of preparations for hosting the Peoples Republic of China's first Olympic Games, workers are scrambling to put the finishing touches on several new stadiums and venues.

The majority of events will take place in Beijing, with sailing, soccer and equestrian competitions scattered around the county. Eight is a lucky number in China, so the opening ceremony begins in Beijing National Stadium at 8:08:08 local time on August 8—a calendar date of 08-08-08.

Whether you visit during or after the Olympics, there is so much to do, see and experience in China's capital city. Comfortable walking shoes are a must when exploring Beijing. Most attractions are situated far from the road, but well worth the effort.

Tiananmen Square—the large plaza in central Beijing whose name means “Gate of Heavenly Peace”—serves as middle point for a number of popular tourism sites, including the Temple of Heaven to the south and the Forbidden



Did you know?

In China, having a van indicates a higher social stature than driving a BMW or sports car. The more seats a person has in their vehicle, the more people they can entertain.

It is poor manners to clean your plate in China. Eating everything that is put in front of you, it indicates you are still hungry.

When presenting your business card to a Chinese peer, hold it in both hands with the card facing your counterpart. Accept their card in the same fashion.

City to the north. Watching “The Last Emperor” on DVD provides a terrific overview of the history, magnitude and importance of The Forbidden City. With China’s most magnanimous and best-preserved ancient buildings, the palace and pavilions within the city sprawl more than 177 acres and contain 9,999 rooms. The city, also referred to as the Imperial Palace, served as home to emperors during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

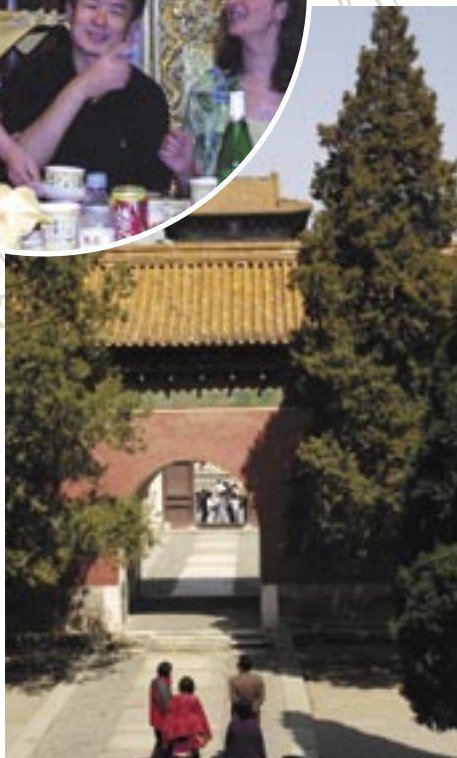
A short cab ride away from these attractions, you can even eat like an emperor at the stunning Fang Shan Restaurant (established in 1925). The waitresses at this upscale casual dining establishment are dressed in replicas of authentic dress that would have been worn during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Exquisite individually hand-painted beams with birds and flowers adorn the outside roof of the building. The inside is festooned with large golden chairs befitting of royalty, landscape paintings, and inscriptions of poetry and sayings of peace. Food is served family-style and the tea serving, out of long necked pots, is an art form unto itself.

Experience folklore and history by enjoying a performance of the Peking Opera. A pure form of Chinese opera that dates back

to the 1700s, the art form combines singing, dancing, martial arts, musical arts and literature. Painted faces, colorful robes, dramatic props, dissonant vocal sounds and rhythmic percussions ensure a lively and entertaining performance.



Many shows are subtitled in English on large screens next to the stage to ensure that viewers are able to follow the story lines.



Negotiating over price is the custom during shopping excursions in Beijing. Small items such as costume jewelry and music CD’s are reasonably priced and easily packed for a trip home. Dollar stores provide a great value, offering items that sell for between \$1 and \$10 in the states at quantities such as twelve for a dollar because the store is located close to the factory where the items are produced.

On the outskirts of Beijing are many worthy sites for short daytrips. The Ming Tombs usher visitors through a mysterious, royal underground palace adorned in marble. Burial chambers for 13 emperors that reigned from 1368 to 1644 are laid to rest in this extravagant architectural achievement. How intricate? The tomb of Emperor Wanli took half a million workers approximately six years to build.

Designated as the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” the 4,000-mile fortress known as the Great Wall of China may be easily accessed at Badaling, about 70 kilometers northwest of Beijing. Take a backpack with plenty of water so you don’t get dehydrated while climbing the steep stairs and abundant walkways. If the hiking doesn’t take your breath away, the picturesque view from one of the observations towers surely will.

Photographs and article are by Bobby Hickman and Joni Strandquest, freelance writers based in Acworth, GA, and Oak Grove, MN, respectively.