



HELLO GORGEOUS!

DON'T FRET. IT'S NEVER EASY TO BE THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK.
UNDERSTAND A CITY'S KEY NEIGHBOURHOODS, HOWEVER, AND YOU'LL SUDDENLY FEEL MUCH MORE AT EASE.

BESPOKE
Beijing

NEED-TO-KNOW NEIGHBOURHOODS



BEIJING SEEMS A LITTLE...WELL **LARGE,
DOESN'T IT?**

Actually it's more manageable than you think...

...The key is to ignore the bits you're not going to be spending time in (and the fact that there are 20 million people squeezed in here somehow) and instead familiarize yourself with just these 5 neighbourhoods - safe in the knowledge that the remainder is merely modern urban sprawl and you're not missing much. The city will suddenly seem instantly more manageable, we promise.

> **Gulou**

- * Houhai Lake
- * Lama Temple
- * Confucius Temple
- * Hutongs
- * Drum & Bell Towers
- * Nanluoguxiang
- * Wudaoying Hutong
- * Prince Gong's Mansion

> **The Center**

- * Tiananmen Square
- * Forbidden City
- * Jingshan Park
- * Beihai Park
- * National Theatre ('The Egg')
- * Mao's Mausoleum
- * National Museum of China
- * Wanfujing Walking Street
- * Qianmen
- * Dashilan

> **Sanlitun**

- * Sanlitun Bar Street
- * Tai Koo Li
- * Workers' Stadium

> **CBD**

- * Rem Koolhaas' CCTV Tower
- * China World Hotels & Malls
- * Park Hyatt

> **798**

- * UCCA etc



THE OUTSIDERS

The Great Wall Lies 80km north of Beijing (a 90-minute drive)



The Temple of Heaven Lies south of The Center, just off map.



The Summer Palace Is in the far north-west corner of the city, around a 40 minute-drive from downtown.



SANLITUN

PARTY CENTRAL

NEED TO KNOW

In many ways a complete contradiction, Sanlitun is at once Beijing's **sleek international, cocktail drinking** quarter; but also the city at its most **tacky, debauched, attitude-filled**

and far-too crowded. It's where you'll find a two story Alexander McQueen boutique and a **world class** design hotel quite literally a stone's throw from an alley filled with smoky snack stalls, fake **DVD shops**, pushy **beggars** and too much neon.

If you're looking to **shop, party or people watch** though, this is the place. Always **buzzing**, and with the most focused collection of Beijing's best restaurants and bars, it's where you'll likely be spending your **evenings**

THE VIBE

Busy, colorful, modern, 21st century Beijing in all her glory – dressed up and ready for fun, an argument or some serious shopping.



Traffic:

The reality? it's a mess. Flashy fast cars and four wheel drives are given priority over pedestrians by local wardens, traffic lights barely matter, and the sheer number of people mean you can wait an eternity for a cab. It's very walkable though.



Subway:

Just one: Tuanjieshu (Light Blue Line 10). If your hotel is walking distance, great. If not, we strongly recommend hiring a car.



A LITTLE CONTEXT When people talk about 'Sanlitun', the generally accepted focal point is the area's main outdoor mall, Tai Koo Li (also known as 'The Village') and the buildings and back streets that run north of it. About a 15 minute walk away to the west is key landmark the Workers' Stadium, which people also consider part of the area. Once upon a time a network of hutongs and low-rise apartment buildings surrounded by foreign embassies, it's now almost unrecognizable thanks to the sheer scale of urban development. Now, world-class literary festivals, high-restaurants and mega brands are the order of the day, and the area will never be the same again. Beijing's urban rich wouldn't want it any other way.

ANYTHING ELSE? Despite Beijing's impeccable safety record, when night falls, it's Sanlitun that occasionally lets the side down. It's therefore worth exercising a little caution if it's past midnight and you see a group of people looking for trouble – and frankly worth avoiding the Sanlitun 'back street' alley altogether.



HOW LONG WILL I BE SPENDING HERE? As much or as little as you can manage. But you'll certainly want to come here for drinking and dining, so assume this is your 'go-to' evening place

GULOU

COOL CENTRAL

NEED TO KNOW

Centred around the ancient Drum and Bell towers, Gulou is Beijing's 'old town'. It's where you'll be going to see Beijing's famous **hutongs**, its independent boutiques, its cafes and boutique hotels. Where

hipsters and cool kids exist side by side with the city's hardened *laobaixing* (ordinary people). It's also where the city's loveliest secondary sights are located – from the **Lama Temple** (everything a Buddhist shrine should be) to the

lovely Guozijian Street and **Houhai Lake** - at its best in the mornings.

THE VIBE

Relaxed, ramshackle, tree-lined, pretty: where traditional architecture meets contemporary cool.



Traffic:

Can be a nightmare on these narrower streets, but there are lots of places where people get dropped off, making it easier to catch one too.

Walkable?
Delightfully!



Subway:

There are several subways to access this large area from:

- *Nanluoguxiang (Yellow Line 6)
- *Shichahai (for Houhai: Green Line 8)
- *Yonghegong (for Lama Temple: Blue Line 2)
- *Gulou (for Drum Tower: Blue Line 2)



A LITTLE CONTEXT The area's emergence as a creative hub for music, independent boutiques and cafes kicked off back in 2004 when a backpacker-turned entrepreneur opened the now legendary Pass By Bar on a sleepy, 700m-long lane called Nanluoguxiang: However it was trendsetting boutique Plastered T-Shirts (opened a year later on the same street) that proved the catalyst for the area as an incubator for all things creative. Nanluoguxiang has since become an overcrowded, chaotic snack street of sorts, but it's nevertheless worth visiting for the one or two gems that remain (including Plastered) and for the bustling, festive atmosphere. Make the visit more rewarding by drifting off into the side alleys to the west and you'll end up at the beautiful Houhai Lake.

ANYTHING ELSE? The whole area around the Drum & Bell Towers is chock-full of great restaurants and shops, but most of them are hidden. That's what Bespoke's for!



HOW LONG WILL I BE SPENDING HERE? As much time as possible to soak up the 'real' Beijing. This is the city's best side by a long chalk

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THE CENTER

POWER BASE

NEED TO KNOW

Home to **Tiananmen Square** (the Communist Party's power base) and the **Forbidden City** (the former imperial power base) – Beijing's geographical center is the most **politically and historically significant** part

of the entire country. But don't make the mistake of thinking that this is where 'it all happens' in Beijing. Unsurprisingly, the closer you are to the beating heart of a repressive, one-party regime, the less likely you are to be kicking up your heels of

an evening or spotting radical artwork in the streets. Instead it's the domain of the **state sanctioned**, the five-star and the **sensible**, of undercover police, **awe-inspiring buildings** and serene imperial parks.

THE VIBE

These days, relaxed, festive and visually striking. You can literally feel the pride emanating from the Chinese tourists that flock here. For the locals, though, a sense of edginess still permeates.

Traffic

Due to the 'no stopping' rule and the wide boulevards, traffic flow is good in this area. The flipside is the difficulty of hailing a cab anywhere near here.

Walkable?

Yes! But vast. You'll need regular rest stops.



Subway

Three stations on the key subway lines make The Square a cinch to get to:

*Tiananmen East & West (Red Line 1);
*Qianmen (Blue Line 2).

NB: when you exit the Forbidden City to the north, there are no subway stations for miles around.



A LITTLE CONTEXT In 1406, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty made the decision to establish his court in Peking. Commissioning a grand, walled palace (now known as the Forbidden City) as his power base, Beijing has been the Chinese capital ever since. 'Tiananmen', meanwhile, literally means 'Gate of Heavenly Peace', and refers to the main arched gate at the entrance to the Forbidden City. When Chairman Mao came to power in 1959, he not only destroyed the imperial ministries on the corridor that ran south of this Gate, widening it to create the enormous 'Tiananmen Square', but added his portrait to the Gate, where it remains to this day.

ANYTHING ELSE? You'll be able to see from the map that Qianmen, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City and Jingshan Park all run along the same north-south axis and are therefore easy to navigate through from south to north. The total area covered by these four is nevertheless vast, so expect to do a lot of walking (and for distances to be much longer than they appear on a map).

HOW LONG WILL I BE SPENDING HERE? Certainly a large part of your sightseeing time: it's where most of the good stuff is! Aside from the Forbidden City and Square, there's the old commercial areas of Qianmen, Dashilan and Wangfujing, the Forbidden City, and just north of it, the joyous and beautiful Jingshan and Beihai Parks.



THE CBD

HIGH-RISE GLAM

NEED TO KNOW

Like a different world, Beijing's Central Business District is an **ultra modern** bubble of air-conditioned, **designer-clad** calm perched at the east end of the city's central Chang'an Avenue. This is the **slick**, 'we mean

business' side of Beijing, where the multinationals have their headquarters and those with money buzz between the lightly perfumed **shopping malls** and **5-star hotel** lobbies. There's plenty of **impressive architecture** here too – Rem

Koolhaas's quirky CCTV tower being the highlight.

THE VIBE

Decidedly calmer, classier and more...vertical than the rest of Beijing – the main drawback being that

you could be anywhere in the world. The CBD is a conscious retreat from the chaos, character and grit of the real Beijing.

Traffic:

The roads leading to the CBD are two of the widest (and busiest) in the city, so expect jams at peak hours but for traffic to keep moving the rest of the time.

Walkable?

Yes, very. But occasionally hard to navigate due to the huge roads and underpasses



Subway:

During rush hour it's definitely best to get to this area by subway. The nearest stop is Guomao on the central Red Line 1 (Yonganli is fine too)



A LITTLE CONTEXT Until the fall of the Qing Dynasty, no buildings in Beijing had been permitted to be higher than the Forbidden City (this would have been a slap in the face to the emperor you see). When the Communists came to power in 1959, the ban was lifted. In 1985, the China World Towers kicked off a building boom and instantly became the most vertiginous buildings in the capital. Today these dated, brown glass towers are dwarfed by those that surround it. However Beijing's current tallest building, the China World Tower Phase 3, was only completed in 2010.

ANYTHING ELSE? Just that the China World Malls (which run through the basements of the connecting skyscrapers) are a reliable place to find international drug stores, supermarkets, restaurants and familiar big brand stores. This area of town also has a decent number of high end Chinese and Western restaurants.



HOW LONG WILL I BE SPENDING HERE? The CBD is an area that's worth seeing from just two perspectives – either a car window, or from the sky-high bars of the Park Hyatt or China World Summit Wing hotels on a clear day.

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Beijing

798

COMMUNISM MEETS CONTEMPORARY

NEED TO KNOW

Put simply, 798 is a self-contained **Mao-era** munitions factory in the northeast corner of Beijing, with as much **historic value** as the Forbidden City and as much **contemporary art clout** as

New York's Meat Packing District. With its truly glorious **industrial** landscape, Communist Propaganda slogans and plethora of cool **cafes and hip boutiques**, this area is worth a mention in its own right. Not to be missed.

THE VIBE

Hip, industrial and of course arty. It's where you'll spot everything from a Chinese Vogue fashion shoot to a VIP-attended art soiree. And then some.



Subway:

Sadly there isn't one in sight.

Walkable?

Wonderfully so! It's one of the most fun places in Beijing to get thoroughly lost in the maze of factories.

Traffic:

Getting to 798 is easy thanks to the airport expressway. Getting away from 798 after 3pm, however, can be hellish. Go earlier in the day or be prepared to grin and bear it.



A LITTLE CONTEXT Often written off as 'just a load of art galleries', this area is often misunderstood. But Bespoke LOVES 798. Loves it. Why? Because this is the only place in Beijing where you can see Chairman Mao's China in all its (now-defunct) glory. This sprawling complex of 1950s-era munitions factories also boasts the most cohesive collection of Bauhaus buildings in the world (it was built by the East Germans) – half of them still daubed with Communist propaganda slogans. If that's not enough to intrigue you, then there's its emergence as the home of the Beijing contemporary art scene: the survival of which – whether you're interested in art or not – signifies a huge step forward in the country's acceptance of the avant garde and the daring. Chairman Mao would not approve.

ANYTHING ELSE? The further off the beaten path you go, the more interesting stuff you'll discover. Including abandoned 1950s German factory equipment, a now defunct locomotive station and a wonderful skywalk to rival the New York Meatpacking district's Highline. NB: Closed Mon.



HOW LONG WILL I BE SPENDING HERE? 798 warrants a one-off, half-day visit. And because it's easily accessed via the airport expressway, it's much quicker to get here from downtown than you might think.

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