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## Secrets of the city

From out of the way restaurants and tatty old flea markets to mountain retreats and ancient temples, Time Out goes in search of 50 of Beijing's most exciting hidden spots

### The Arts

**Baigongfang** 12 Guangming Lu, Chongwen district (tel 6718 2822, 6712 6612). Open 9.30am-4.30pm. 崇文区光明路乙12号(大宝饭店对面,左安门内大与光明路交叉口)  
Baigongfang literally translates as the hundred crafts workshop. Craftsmen, women and artists go about their work, while visitors get the chance to observe and chat with them about their creations before buying them.

**Guangmingge Teahouse** 61 Gulou Xi Dajie, Dongcheng district (tel 6401 8988). Open 9am-5.30pm Monday-Thursday, 9am-10pm weekends. 20RMB. 广茗阁茶园 西城区鼓楼西大街61号

Tucked away from Gulou Xi Dajie is a little teahouse where Mr Kang, a man who has lived in this area all his life and is fascinated by local art and culture, also runs a small theatre. During the day, second-generation Tianqiao actors perform an interesting but contrived show for Chinese tour groups, while a more authentic show of cross talk and book readings is held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings at 7pm.

**Tianqiao Le Cha Yuan Theatre** Jia 1, Beiwei Lu, Xuanwu district (tel 6304 0617).

Xiangsheng Friday-Sunday, and cultural shows Monday-Thursday. 天桥乐茶园剧场 宣武区北纬路甲1号

One of Beijing's only traditional teahouse theatres, recalls the days of impromptu acrobatics, Peking Opera and feats of strength in a charming old Beijing variety show. For a truly Chinese show (no subtitles), try the weekend Xiangsheng. Once exclusively for the middle-aged, crosstalk has had a shocking revival, thanks to headliner and national sensation, Guo Degang. Guo attracted a legion of young disciples without alienating the purists, which saved both the art and this particular theatre. Today, sleek 20-somethings pack the house, scoffing sunflower seeds with their grandparents. This is a cultural experience to revel in – once. Sit in the back, it's three hours on wooden chairs with no intermission. Performances are uneven, but the atmosphere is infectious, and English and Japanese subtitles provide cultural explanations.

### Buildings and Gardens

**Langrun Yuan, Peking University** North end of the Beijing University campus, 5 Yiheyuan Lu, Haidian district. 朗润园 海淀区颐和园路5号,北京大学北区

Hidden in the depths of the [Peking University](#) campus are beautiful examples of Qing dynasty buildings and elegant courtyards; most far better preserved than those found in hutongs. According to Ding Ning, professor from the university's art department: 'These building are so far north of the campus that they are [nearly] impossible to find. That's why so few people know about them.' The building housing the accounts department is set in a large, traditional style courtyard, while the building which houses the Chinese history department has been carefully restored to its original glory. Ding says the Economic Research Centre is by far the most impressive pieces of architecture on campus. 'This is a very special building as not all of it is visible from the front. You have to walk through the actual building to understand its whole shape,' he says. 'You can also walk through the beautiful gardens around it, where you will be able to also view the structure of the building from the sides and the back, not just from the simple angle you see it from the front.'

**Jesuit Cemetery** Jesuit Cemetery, Shiweidang Xiaoyuannei, Chegongzhuang Dajie (tel 6800 7200). 利玛窦墓 车公庄大街委党校院内

This plot of land served as a Jesuit cemetery from 1610 to 1827, when it was given to the Jesuits by Ming emperor Wang Lin. Since then it has had a rocky history. Michael Aldrich, author of 'The Search for a Vanishing Beijing' explains: 'It was desecrated during the Boxer Rebellion, rebuilt, desecrated again during the Cultural Revolution and then built into a school for the teaching of CCP cadres'. To improve the Chinese Catholics and Vatican relationship, the CCP attempted to restore the cemetery in 1980, by beautifying the tombstones of notable Jesuits and placing them in the centre of the school gardens.

**Jimingyi Postal Town** Huailai County, Zhangjiakou, Hebei (145 kilometres northwest of Beijing). 河北省张家口市怀来县 西北方向145公里

Built in the 1420s to protect the military and public post stations in the northwest region; Jimingyi is China's largest postal town. Jimingyi also served as an important stop for travellers and workers to change horses and pass on transport duties. [Chinese Culture Club](#) (CCC)'s Feng Cheng says that despite having being listed on the World Monuments Fund's watch list, not enough has been done to protect it. 'The brick surfaces of the town's wall have began to decay exposing their clay inner structure to damaging rains,' he explains. 'Seven out of 17 remaining original temples in the town are in danger of being lost.' It is the only remaining example of a postal town, and while they may not remain so for long,

Jimingyi's temples, offices, schools and traditional courtyard houses are still intact and well worth a weekend visit.

**The Luhe School** 31 *Xincheng Nanguan, Tongzhou district, (tel 6954 6337)*. 潞河 通州区新城南关31号

Set a little out of the centre of Tongzhou, the school's lovely lawns and interesting old colonial style buildings make it well worth a visit round the campus. Founded in 1867 as a mission school by the Congregational Church of America, Luhe has developed into an internationally acclaimed academic institution. It is now the biggest state-founded boarding school in Beijing. To visit the school call 6954 2095 and arrange an appointment.

**Qianshi hutong** *Qianmenwai Dajie, Chongwen district*. 钱市胡同 崇文区前门外大街  
This is where the central bank from the Ming dynasty was located as well as the place the rate of exchange was set every day. Tour and hiking guide Tony Chen, says this information was announced by tying pieces of paper with the rate written on the to the feet of pigeons that were then released into the air to spread the world. Qianshi hutong is Beijing's narrowest at 44 centimetres. Only one person can pass through at a time, a safety feature devised by the bank to deter gangs of robbers. The original bank building still stands.

### Out of town

**Hanyang Shanzhuang** *Jingziyu village, Mujiayu township, Miyun county (tel 6105 0399; 6105 0399)*. 瀚洋山庄 密云县穆家峪镇荆子峪村

This mountain retreat near the Simatai section of the Great Wall offers secluded villas for the perfect romantic retreat. Whether as a couple looking to relax in the mountains or as a group looking for some out of town fun, the villas offer clean air, mountain scenery and beautiful countryside. Prices range from 188RMB per night for a standard double room to 288RMB per night for a four-berth cabin. All rooms come with 24-hour hot water, air conditioning and TV. Spend your days walking in the mountains, fishing in the nearby lake or bird watching. Affordable dinners are provided with set meals from 200RMB to 1,000RMB for a group of ten people and as little as 30RMB per person. For large parties try the whole roast lamb for 300RMB. To get to Hanyang Shanzhuang take the Third Ring Road to the Jingshun Road, follow the road to Miyun until you get to the Great Wall Roundabout where you take the Gubei exit. Continue for three kilometers past the Yangshan Bridge. For directions in English call Peter on 138 0132 5836.

**Xiangshuihu Great Wall** *Dazhenyu village, Bohai township, Huairou county* 响水湖 怀柔县渤海镇大榛峪村

Located 40 minutes drive from Huairou city centre, Xiangshuihu offers two beautiful, solitary stretches of untouched wall, as well as a restored section. Upon entering the village, don't walk ahead to the main gate. Instead, turn right or left - both directions will lead further into the village where original sections of the wall await. Be warned: climbing is tough with much of the area unstable. A walk in the Xiangshuihu countryside can be just as invigorating and a chance to enjoy beautiful vistas of the wall. There are a selection of family run guesthouses and overnight visitors can stay with a family for approximately 20-30RMB a night and enjoy hearty homecooked food for around 40RMB for two. Take the 916 bus from Dongzhimen bus station to Huairou and then local bus or taxi to Xiangshuihu.

**Yubai Village** *Yansha Town, Mentougou District (tel 6183 7509)*. 天盛湖旅游服务中心门头沟燕莎镇鱼白村

Tucked away from Mentougou's tourist epicentre, Yubai village has the classic Chinese mountain and water setting. Activities include fishing in the reservoir, trekking through the mountains and relaxing by the lake. 40RMB affords a simple room sleeping four in a local family guesthouse. Phone Mr Pao (Chinese only) on number above to book a room and for instructions to get to the village.

### Obscure eats

**Baodu Feng Jinshenglong** *First Floor, Qinglan Daxia, 24 Dongsì Shítiao (200m west of shítiaoqiao), Dongcheng district, (tel 6527 9051)*. Open 11am-10pm. Meal for two 48RMB. 爆肚冯金生隆 东城区东四十条24号,青蓝大厦首层

Baodu Feng has been making tripe tasty for more than a century, and is one of the few Beijing laozhao still in family hands. 'Our family's way of making tripe has not changed for centuries,' says Feng Guoming, the third generation of Fengs to run this restaurant. Try yangsiyang (10RMB), which consists of four 'tough' types of tripe, accompanied by a homemade ground sesame paste or crushed chili oil for a spicy twist. If you can't chew it, follow the advice in Yang Miren's famous poem and 'Just swallow the whole bit.'

**Caribou Cafe** 32 *Qianliang Hutong, Dongsì, Dongcheng district (tel 8402 1529)*. Open 11am-10pm. Closed Mondays. Meal for two 150RMB. 驯鹿东四钱粮胡同32号,三联书店北  
Tucked away in Qianliang Hutong, a cosy little set up awaits. A large bay window overlooks the alleyway and trees, while the cartoon-covered walls of the [Caribou Cafe](#) provide interesting dinnertime banter. It offers a good selection of European fare, including meat and seafood dishes. Crème brulee, chocolate lava cake or pears cooked in red wine provide something for the sweet tooth.

**Fengnian Guanchang** 16 *Longfu Temple Street, Dongcheng district (tel 8401 5384)*. Open 9am-8pm. Snack for two 30-50 RMB 丰年灌肠 东城区隆福寺街16号

Fengnian is one of the few remaining places that serve traditionally prepared guanchang, a starchy snack made from steamed sweet potato drizzled with garlic juice. For the past 60 years customers have been coming to this small eatery to fill up on this savoury snack – they obviously know when they're onto a good thing.

**Jinxin Douzhi Shop** 193 *Guangqumennei Dajie, on the southeast corner of Ciqikou, (opposite the north gate of the Temple of Heaven) Chongwen district (tel 6712 3690)*. Open 6am-8pm. Snack for two 4RMB. 锦馨豆汁店 崇文区广渠门内大街193号磁器口十字路口东南角(天坛北门对面)

This bean juice shop is no larger than 80-square-meters but it has locals lining up along the roadside everyday for a bowl of their famous douzhi (1RMB). The shop has been around for at least 50 years and the Arabic script at the entrance clearly marks it as a place run by Huimin, or Chinese Muslims. Douzhi is usually served with complimentary salted radish

pickle, but we prefer dunking the jiaoquan (0.4RMB), crispy dough rings.

**Laoxian Fanzhuang** 20 Xinjiekou Nanjie, Xicheng district (tel 6618 1748) Open 10.30am-10pm daily. Meal for two 50-80RMB. 老西安饭庄 西城区新街口大街20号

This Islamic eatery prides itself on being one of the places where Mao Zedong used to come and get his chuan'r fix. The sofa Mao sat in and an oil painting entitled, 'Mao Zedong Comes to a Xi'an Restaurant' take prominent positions within the restaurant. While tucking into a plate of mutton stew, you feel like you're dining with the Great Helmsman himself!

**Liu Zhai Shifu** 8 Jiangjiadayuan, (Opposite the Sanlian bookstore) Meishuguan Dajie, Dongcheng district (tel 6400 5912). Open 9am-2pm, 4pm-10.30pm daily. Meal for two 50RMB. 刘宅食府, 东城区美术馆大街蒋家大院8号 三联书店对面

Around 20 metres down a hutong so tiny it doesn't even have a name, sits a little piece of lao Beijing. In stark contrast to the quiet alleyway that houses [Liu Zhai Shifu](#), the atmosphere inside brims with colour and noise. This enchanting courtyard space is packed to the brim nightly and, unless you've booked one of the 20 tables, think about dining elsewhere. Owners Mr Liu and his wife, Ms Yang, move from table to table, talking to customers, most of whom are regulars. Ms Yang explains that the Liu family have lived in this house for over 100 years. 'Nine years ago we decided to turn it into a restaurant. All we had to do was replace our furniture with tables and chairs and find a new place to live. This used to be our bedroom,' she remarks, pointing to a room in the east of the courtyard where a group of men are slurping down noodles. With a huge selection of Beijing cuisine and other dishes created by the Liu family, the food is not only fantastically good, its also very reasonably priced.

**My Book Bar** 200 metres north of Beijing International Studies University's west gate, Dingfuzhuang, Chaoyang district (tel 6547 0819). Open 9.30- 2am daily. Meal for two 70RMB. 我的书吧 朝阳区定福庄第二外国语学院西侧200米路北

This out-of-the-way café bases itself on the bookshop/café concept popular in South Korea. It has an excellent collection of Chinese literature and philosophy books out front and a cosy two-level coffee shop at the back. **My Book Bar's** main pull is the bottomless 18RMB Ily and Lavazza coffee, which has wifi junkies buzzing for hours on end and does wonders drowning out the also endless melancholy Korean soap opera soundtrack.

**Qianxi Yuan Football Fan's Restaurant** Building 15, Chunshu Yuan Xiaochu, Xuanwu district (tel 6310 2999). Open 10am-9pm daily. Meal for two 60RMB. 千禧球迷餐厅 宣武区椿树园小区15号楼

This football themed Xuanwu community compound restaurant isn't a tacky gimmick; it's an expression of the owner's obsession with the beautiful game. From the football shirt clad staff to the posters and signed memorabilia on the wall, there is no escaping the passion for the world's most popular sport. Among the standard Chinese dishes on offer, Qianxi also has a 'football specials' menu that features Tigana stir-fried celery and Ronaldo boiled pigs ears!

**The Terrace Tea House** 69 Donghuamen Dajie, Dongcheng district (tel 6525 9595). Open 10.30am-1am. Tea for two 100-150RMB. 露台茶馆 东华门大街69号

This small teahouse is situated within the shadows of the Forbidden City's east gate. A wide selection of tea is offered; expect to pay 28RMB to 58RMB per cup, and 110RMB to 580RMB for a tin of leaves. The remaining tea may be taken home or can be left at the teahouse for your next visit (an additional 10RMB per person).

**Xidan Kaojichi** 15 Zhongsheng hutong, Xidan, Xicheng district (tel 6603 2605). Open 11am-1.30pm, 4.30pm -11pm Mon- Fri; 11am-11pm Sat and Sun. Meal for two 30RMB 西单烤鸡翅 西单钟声胡同15号

Use the crowds waiting for a table as an indicator that you've hit Xidan's chuan'r Mecca. Diners must book tables at least one week in advance and decide on the food order before sitting down; management does not tolerate dilly-dallying over the menu. If you can look past the soup kitchen Nazi-like rules, try a 3RMB kebab or feast on the spicy chicken wings (3RMB) they make the 30-minute-plus wait worth it.

**Zhang Qun Jia** 5 Yandai Xiejie, Houhai, Xicheng district (tel 130 0117 6908). Bookings only. Set meal from 200RMB/person to 500RMB/person (minimum two people). 张群家私房菜 后海烟袋斜街5号

You'd be forgiven for walking right past this small Suzhou style restaurant on Yandai Xiejie, a hutong just off Houhai. Don't rely on signage, there isn't any; instead look for a faded brown door with a number 5. Zhang Qun Jia, or Zhang Qun's home, opened three years ago as a place where the Suzhou artist's friends could hang out, but it soon turned into a one-table restaurant. Most note-worthy dishes include the Yangchun noodles, Inner Mongolian organic chicken, and the Suzhou grown evergreen vegetables.

## Shops and Services

**Bannerman Tang's Toys and Crafts** 38 Guozijian, Dongcheng district (tel 8404 7179) Open 9am-7pm. 盛唐轩 东城区国子监38号

Originally from Manchuria, the Tangs have been passing Manchu toy making skills down through five generations. 'My family wanted to continue making these toys as they saw them as part of their culture and heritage. A lot of the toys are related to horses and warrior-hood, as this was the Manchu way,' says current owner Tang Yujie. Toy making for the Tangs is an absolute labour of love. They continue to use exactly the same methods as their ancestors, right down to the glue recipe. One small toy can take more than ten days to complete and sometimes it's difficult to part with them. 'He's not for sale,' states Tang firmly, when asked the price of an adorable somersaulting monkey, an ingeniously simple result of combining clay, paper and cloth. 'We do sell most of our toys, but a few of them, like this one, are just to look at. They are too precious.' Although the secrets of Manchu toy making have become intertwined with the Tang's family history, Tang says it should not be this way. 'We are the only shop that still makes toys this way and we don't want the craft to die out, after all, these toys are part of the cultural heritage of our whole country, it doesn't just belong to my family.'

**Baoguosi Flea Market** North End of Guangan Dajie, Xuanwu district. 报国寺 广安大街宣武区  
This once Buddhist temple is now home to a flea market, which is open daily and is an

interesting place to pick up old books, antiques and old toys including a lot of cultural revolutionary relics at a good price.

**Costume and Prop Street** *Xicaoshi hutong (south of Qianmen), Zhushikou, Chongwen district* 戏服道具市场 崇文区朱市口西草市胡同(前门往南).

This hutong is a hive of shops selling opera costumes, props and equipment for all your folk dancing needs. According to Feng Cheng you can find items as varied as drums, gongs, padded cloth donkeys, fake beards, spears and swords. There is one old shop named Jiu Chun, owned by an old couple and their family who have been doing these hand-made crafts for generations,' says Feng. 'They make opera costumes and also traditional Chinese style clothes.' There are rumours that this street is soon to be demolished, so best to pay a visit sooner rather than later.

**Dongdan Pottery and Plant Market** *Dongdan Gongyuan, Dongdan, Dongcheng district.*

Open 5am-4pm. 东单陶花市场 东城区东单公园  
This central open-air market located on the east side of Dongdan Park, has an interesting selection of huge ceramic pots and vases and a large variety of affordable indoor and outdoor plants.

**Fortune Teller** *Fengshui Centre, 17 Huixin Beili, Chaoyang district (tel 6489 0457; 138 0104 4895).* By appointment. Readings 600-5,000RMB 朝阳区惠新北里17号

Buddhist scholar, Xiao Hongzhu studies Yin and Yang and is well known for his predictions. In order to read a person's future, he needs information such as name, age, date, place and time of birth. Xiao also uses palms and faces to predict the future (in Chinese only).

**Hip Dog Club** *Shop 7, Phase 2, Central Park, No. 6 Chaowaijie, Chaoyang district, (tel 6533 6814).* Open 10.30am-5.30pm. 朝阳区朝外大街6号新城国际公寓9号楼(二期)底端7号商铺

This pup club is a holistic sanctuary for man's best friend. Their quaint shop not only has a great selection of dog paraphernalia imported from the United States and Hong Kong, but also stocks an impressive selection of homemade doggie biscuits. Book three days in advance to order a birthday cake, sure to make Fido the coolest dog on the block. Cakes cost 200RMB and come in pork liver, beef, lamb and chicken flavours. For cheeky pooches, ask about the obedience training classes.

**Huasheng Laotianqiao** *Shiliheqiao, on the south-east corner of Panjiayuan, Chaoyang district* 华声老天桥 十里河桥(潘家园的东南角)

This is the place where lao Beijingers buy home directions, including crickets and all the other little critters found in hutong residences. It has a vast and interesting array of traditional Beijing toys and knick-knacks and is a fun and lively place to go and explore.

**Luo Youming Traditional Chinese Bone Hospital** *Zhongyi Gushang Yiyuan 8A, Gaobeidian Bei Lu, Chaoyang district (tel 8575 3101).* Open 8am-noon, 1-5pm. By appointment only. 罗有名中医骨伤医院 朝阳区高碑店北路甲8号(华润饭店后)

102-year-old Luo Youming, a famous bonesetter no longer treats patients but her clinic by the same name continues to treat people with dislocated bones, slipped discs, neck and shoulder problems (Chinese speaking only). It costs 3RMB to register and 1RMB for a personal medical record booklet. Treatments cost between 60RMB to 100RMB. Ask to see Wang Yan, one of Mrs Luo's best students. Wang is available everyday except Friday.

**Second hand bikes sellers** *69 Dongsidi Beidajie, Dongcheng district.* 东城区东直门大街69号

Paradoxically new bikes are hard to keep, while second-hand bikes are notoriously hard find. You can rely on the bike sellers who park themselves (and their bikes) outside shop number 69 on a daily basis. Expect to pay around 60-200RMB for a set of secondhand wheels.

**Sports Equipment Street** *16 Tiyuguan Lu (east of Tiantan), Chongwen district (tel 6714 3599).* Open 9am-7pm daily. 飞旋 崇文区体育馆路16号

Tiyuguan Lu and the area neighbouring the Tiyuchang sports stadium is full of shops selling every sort of sporting equipment you could possibly think of: yoga mats, taiqi swords, fishing rods and golf clubs. There are many brand names on offer and the chance to snare a real bargain. Pick of the bunch is the Feixuan sports shop.

**Longshuncheng Chinese furniture shop** *64 Yongdingmenwai Dajie, Chongwen district (tel 6722 5608).* Open 8.30am-6pm daily. 龙顺成中式家具 崇文区永定门外大街64号

This could be Beijing's most prestigious furniture shop as rumor has it China's government compound, Zhongnanhai, is furnished solely with items bought here. It started life as a small specialist furniture workshop and has expanded, keeping its original workshop location to a single level, while production moved to a bigger factory. Even if you're not looking to deck your house like Hu's, this is still a fascinating place to visit as the shop provides information about its long and interesting history, making it also something of a museum.

## Temples and Museums

**Beijing Police Museum** *36 Dongjiaoming Xiang, Dongcheng district (tel 8522 5018).* Open 9am-4pm Tuesday-Sunday. 警察博物馆 东城区东交民巷36号

All you've ever wanted to know about the Public Security Bureau, but were too afraid to ask. The [Beijing Police Museum](#) offers comprehensive displays about the history of the PSB, criminal investigation procedures and the weapons and equipment used. A standard entry ticket costs 5RMB, but 20RMB includes admission, ten laser bullets to use at the target range and a cartoon key ring to take home.

**Beijing's Underground City** *62 Xi Damochangdong hutong (east of Qianmen Dajie),*

*Dongcheng district (tel 6702 2657).* Open 8.30am-5.30pm. 20RMB. 北京地下城 崇文区西打磨厂街62号

Beijing's [Underground City](#) was constructed between 1969-79 to protect against the threat of Soviet bombings. This series of tunnels run 18 metres deep and is rumoured to have a total distance that challenges the Great Wall. These tunnels don't just connect all the important strategic locations within Beijing, they also lead the way to Tianjin and who knows where else... Unfortunately visitors cannot access all the tunnels, but a 20-minute tour will give you a taste of the incredible world hidden beneath Beijing.

**Fahai Temple** *Moshikou, Shijing district (tel 88713976)*. Open 9am-4pm. 20RMB. 法海寺 石景山区模式口

According to Professor Ding Ning, Fahai Temple is one of the most unusual and interesting places Beijing has to offer visitors. 'Inside the temple there are these amazing Ming dynasty murals, done by court painters,' he enthuses. 'No other temple has this kind of collection.' The temple dates back to 1439 and the murals have been created using natural paints, with colours that are still remarkably bright and resonant. Fahai Temple has remained fairly low-key and does not attract many visitors, which Ding attributes to the fact that it is so out of the way with poor visitor conditions. The lighting is so bad that when Ding takes friends to the temple, he brings his own torch so that they can see the murals properly. 'But I like this element of Fahai Temple, it adds to the secret feel of the place.' To get there, catch the metro to Pingguoyuan and then the 311 bus to Moushikou, from which the temple is a short walk.

**Fayuan Temple** *7 Fayuansi Qianjie, Xuanwu district. (tel 6353 5798)*. Open 8.30am-3.30pm. 2RMB. 法源寺 宣武区法源寺前街7号

The most spectacular time to visit the [Fayuan Temple](#) is April, when the hundreds of lilac bushes that surround the temple are in bloom. In the 1930s, the abbot of the temple would have a vegetarian banquet at this time of year to celebrate the beauty of the lilacs, inviting foreign and Chinese friends to join in the merriment. However during the Cultural Revolution, the lilacs were all ripped out, but have since been replaced.

**Geological Museum of China** *Yangrou Hutong 15 Xisi, Xicheng district (50 metres west of the Xisi Dajie and Fuchengmennei Lu intersection) (tel 6655 7858)*. Open 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun. 30/15RMB adults/students. 地质博物馆 西城西四羊肉胡同15号

Despite recent renovation and expansion, the [Geological Museum](#) is not boasting wall-to-wall visitors. Founded in 1916, the new and improved museum features a large model Shantungosaurus (named after Shandong Province) guarding the parking lot. Whether it helps to draw in the crowds is yet to be seen. Prehistoric fossils, including a replica of the famous Peking Man, are a major element in the museum's high-tech revamp, as is the mass extinctions installation on the third floor. But our favourite is a multimedia display on the third floor showing how fossils are made: a small prehistoric bird gets squashed under volcanic rock while Simon & Garfunkle provide the soundtrack. Each exhibit has an introduction in both Chinese and excellent English translation.

**Museum of Ancient Pottery Civilisation** *12 You'anmen Neixi Dajie, Xuanwu district (located down the alley just north of the Grand View Garden Hotel) (tel 6353 8811)*. Open 10am-5pm 20/10RMB adults/students. 古陶文明博物馆, 宣武区右安门内西街12号 (大观园北门)

Not only is this China's first museum to specialise in pottery, but it's also one of the country's first private museums, which was opened by artist and philanthropist Lu Dongzhi in 1997. The museum houses about 3,000 items, none of which date later than the Tang Dynasty, and some of which even go as far back as 7,000 years to the Neolithic Yangshao Culture. The museum also displays a vast assortment of eaves tiles, figurines and human busts. But perhaps the most commanding figure in this basement level museum is a large bust found in Inner Mongolia. Dating from well before China's Shang period, the large alien-looking head is part of the archaeological evidence, scholars claim that proves 5,000 years of Chinese history.

**Niu Jie Mosque** *88 Niu Jie, Xuanwu district (tel 6353 2564)*. Open 8am-4pm Sat-Thur. Entry costs 10RMB. 牛街清真寺 宣武区牛街88号

Niu Jie or Ox Street, is Beijing's Muslim quarter and home to a mosque, which was founded in the Song dynasty. From the outside, the [Niu Jie Mosque](#) looks more like a Buddhist temple, with Islamic features inside. According to Aldrich, Islam has a long history in Beijing and Chinese Muslims live harmoniously within society. He attributes this to the attitude of Qing emperor Qian Long, who actively encouraged their integration and even referred to them as 'sons of the empire.' Aldrich explains that between Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese in this area, 'there has been such a degree of assimilation that unless you are looking for it, you could walk through the area without even knowing it was here.' Non-Muslim visitors are welcome, except on Friday the Muslim Sabbath. Visitors must be appropriately dressed.

**Watermelon Museum** *Huangcun County Culture Centre, Daxing district (tel 8928 1660)*.

Open 9.30am-5pm daily. Entry costs 20RMB. 西瓜博物馆 大兴县黄村镇文化馆内  
Within the Watermelon Research Institute in Daxing (China's watermelon capital) lies a whole museum dedicated to everyone's favourite summer fruit. There are exhibits detailing the history of watermelons in China, planting processes, and displays over 170 different types of watermelon.

**White Pagoda Temple** *171 Fuchengmennei Dajie, Xicheng district, (tel 6616 0211)*. Open 9am-5pm. Entry costs 20RMB. 白塔寺 西城区阜成门内大街171号

[White Pagoda Temple](#) retains much of its original structure today, making it the oldest in the city. Aldrich describes the temple as 'designed by a Nepalese, built in Tibetan fashion under the urban design of central Asian Muslim in accordance to the decree of Kublai Khan, a Mongolian ruler.' Visitors should explore the series of temples in front of the pagoda, which house some interesting examples of Tibetan art and brass work. Despite being a place of cultural and historic significance, White Pagoda Temple slips through the holes of most guidebooks and receives far fewer visitors than it should.

**Zhijia Temple** *5 Lumicang hutong, Dongcheng district, (tel 6528 6691)*. Open 9am-4.30 pm Tue-Sun. 20/10RMB adults/students. 智化寺 东城区禄米仓胡同5号

Often referred to as 'the living fossil of Chinese ancient music,' Zhihuasi is a Eunuch temple where Tang dynasty Buddhist music has been passed down from monk to monk for 560 years. It is the only place in the city where you can hear this kind of music being performed, with shows up to four times a day: 9, 10, 11am, 3pm.

**Yanhuang Art Museum** *9 Huizhong Lu, Yayuncun, Chaoyang district (tel 6491 2902)*. Open daily 9am-4.30pm (excluding Mondays). 10RMB. 炎黄艺术馆 北京市亚运村慧忠路9号

Huang Zhou, a famous Chinese artist who died in 1997, set up this art gallery in 1991. The gallery, which includes many pieces depicting the wildlife and images of Xinjiang, also displays calligraphy and watercolour pieces by other Chinese artists.

*Time Out wishes to thank Michael Aldrich, author of 'The Search for a Vanishing Beijing,' (available from [Hong Kong University Press](#)), Professor Ding Ning from Beijing University's art department, Feng Cheng from the [Chinese Culture Club](#), Tony Chen from [Stretchleg](#), Kang Weidong from the Guangmingge Teahouse and Beijing folk culture enthusiast, Han Shuo.*

*Poppy Toland and Eileen Wen Mooney*

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