

The 2 Idiots Travel Blog
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Ultimate Kid Friendly Itinerary for 1, 2, 3 or 4 Days in Beijing, China

Why do The 2 Idiots recommend Beijing?

Why do we recommend Beijing? It's historical, a culture all its own, and, oh yes, the food is off the charts! Beijing is where the Ming and Qing Dynasties thrived with imperial families ruling for centuries. You'll find palaces, temples, gorgeous parks, and, of course, various entries to the Great Wall of China. Not only is Beijing's culture unique in how the country celebrates its spiritual beliefs — they once considered themselves between Heaven and Earth — it is also the center of communism in China and provides travelers with another unique perspective on the world.

Yes, although the language can be a barrier, we also found the people of Beijing to be extremely friendly to families, going out of their way to take care of children. It really is a magical city that everyone should visit.

CREATING AN IDEAL ITINERARY

China is harder place to visit for the first time than most. The language barrier makes it difficult to navigate and travel is very different than what you may be used to in that the services you typically find, such as Uber, or navigation apps like Google Maps, are not readily available. Although we feel very confident doing tours on our own, we found it difficult when we tried. We highly recommend first-time visitors book tours to help you on this trip, as you will have guides who can speak to you and locals in both languages and help you learn the customs quickly.

Logistics and Where to Stay

We had to find hotel accommodations for this trip, which is unusual for us. During our visit to Beijing, the Communist Party was having an event and Airbnb shutdown to avoid any issues. Although we would have liked to have tried an Airbnb, we actually feel staying at a hotel may be the better option in Beijing because the city can be so difficult to navigate. It's really great

for a first-time trip to China as the hotel can help you manage cabs and give directions — plus, they speak English.

We stayed at the Ascot Raffles City Beijing, and it just felt easier to ease into the city by staying at a hotel. We chose the hotel because it was a one-bedroom with a kitchenette, so we could have a more home-like environment. It was attached to a mall in Beijing with a Starbucks across the street so we could get coffee, as well as an American-style grocery store, where we could easily find milk for Aarav.

While the property was a good place to stay, we suggest staying at a property with similar amenities closer to Wangfujing Street, so you can walk around and enjoy Beijing. Our hotel wasn't anywhere we could walk around we had to taxi everywhere.

| Vacation days | Itinerary |
|---------------|---|
| Day 1 | Tiananmen Square Forbidden City Jingshan Park Spend evening on Wangfujing Street and enjoy Donghuamen Market |
| Day 2 | Great Wall of China (Use Mutianyu Entrance) |
| Day 3 | Visit Summer Palace Spend evening on Ghost Street (Guijie Street) |
| Day 4 | Temple of Heaven Pick from the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Bird's Nest (Olympic Stadium)- 798 Art Zone- Fragrant Hills Park |

Stepping into Chinese History

The best way to get acquainted with Beijing is through a tour of the city, especially with a guide who can explain many of the signs and customs you may not be aware of. Our guide began in the large Tiananmen Square. While home to a 1989 student protest, this isn't why you are visiting. This is the main city square of Beijing, and one of great importance to the Chinese People. In the square, you will see the Monument to the People's Heroes and the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong, who was head of China and the Communist Party from 1945 to 1976. It's a

massive square and feels impressive, but not as impressive as the Forbidden City. As “Tiananmen” means “Gate of Heavenly Peace,” it is the gateway to the Forbidden City, your next stop. Walk through the Meridian Gate, which is the main of four gates into the City.

Forbidden City is where the history of China shines. Home to the Ming dynasty through the Qing dynasty, which stretched from 1420 to 1912, you can really imagine centuries of China’s history taking place here. The rulers of China and the royal courts? Amazing to imagine. The reason it was called the Forbidden City is that commoners were not allowed in without permission; it was a city for royalty only, as the Chinese believed the emperor is the son of god and China served as the kingdom between heaven and earth. Now, commoners like ourselves are free to visit, and it’s unbelievable to see the size of the City. It isn’t just one palace. No! There are 90 palaces with 980 courtyards across 72 hectares and 8,707 rooms! You can get overwhelmed with how much there is to see, but this is where a guide can be helpful.

Next to the Forbidden City is Jingshan Park, which was originally the imperial gardens, built in 1420. It’s absolutely stunning, as one would expect of place between heaven and earth. If you climb 25 minutes up to the hill inside the park, you can find a pavilion with views of the Forbidden City. There are actually five summits here, and each one has a pavilion on it to provide the best views. However, remember, it will take another 25 minutes to get back down, and the climb could be challenging with a small child. Our son was asleep during our visit, so Natasha and Aarav stayed back and AJ went to a summit. If you have older kids who can manage the walk, by all means climb up and take in the gorgeous views.

At 72 hectares, the Forbidden City is a lot to see so this first day will be spent fully in this part of Beijing. When you are done visiting the Forbidden City, spend the evening at Wangfujing Street, arriving around 6 p.m. so restaurants aren’t closed when you are ready to eat. (We made the mistake of going later, struggling to find places that were open!) This street is filled with shops and has tons of energy. Try green tea ice cream and visit Donghuamen Market, which is where you’ll find street foods like dumplings, street meats, fruits and veggies. During our visit, AJ sampled scorpions on a stick, really more for tourists, but he just couldn’t resist the chance to eat something unique. He loved it! It was crunchy and spicy and delicious.

Walk Along the Great Wall of China

Of course, you cannot visit China without visiting the Great Wall of China, which is what we recommend you do on day two of your journey. Interestingly, the wall is not actually one large wall but a collection of smaller walls that were connected over time. It was built to protect China from its enemies, but today, you can get to the top of the wall and imagine it back in its infancy in the 1600s. It is as impressive as you would imagine a wall visible from space would be!

You can access the wall in a few different locations in Beijing, but we followed TripAdvisor’s advice for the less-crowded entrance, the Mutianyu Entrance. It absolutely did not have as near the tourists we thought. There were only small lines to the cable cars, no waits in restaurants,

and we could take pictures without people in the background and enjoyed some quiet as we took it in, which was a surprise when Beijing is such a busy city.

To get to the top of the Great Wall, you'll ride a cable car before you explore the different fortress points. At the top, it's wide but as you climb through different hallways, you may have to climb some steep stairs, so be careful with the kids. You can bring your stroller, but remember you may have to pass through some sections of the wall that require your child to climb, or that may be narrow. Many sections of the wall aren't suitable for strollers, so if you choose to bring one, be sure you use a small, lightweight stroller like [ours](#). And, wear comfortable shoes – you'll be doing a lot of walking, and you'll need them for the steep areas.

When you come down from the Wall, you can take the cable car back down, or, try the speedy toboggan rides that will take you back down. These are single-passenger and can move pretty fast, so you need older kids who can manage on their own if you want to try this — we couldn't go with Aarav — but just imagine telling friends back home you rode a toboggan down the Great Wall of China.

Just like the Forbidden City, the Great Wall is so unique and offers so much to see that you'll want to leave the entire day dedicated to this visit. Along the outside of the wall are many places you can find traditional restaurants with dumplings, hot and sour soup, and cumin chicken, which Aarav really loved. Everything we had felt authentic and really delicious. We also sampled the Baijui rice wine, which is like moonshine everyone has in every country, so it's super strong – be careful!

Experience Chinese Summer

On your third day, visit the Summer Palace, which as the name implies, was the summer palace of the imperial family of the Qing Dynasty. Just like everything in Beijing, this blew us away. Dating back to 1750, the palace sits on an expansive park with gardens and lakes. (It's wonderful for kids, who can run and play with ease.) The central Kunming Lake was entirely manmade and is 540 acres in size! The lake also has a wonderful boat ride launching from the Marble Boat, with boats that showcase the imperial family's wealth. And the 540 acres of dirt that was dug up to make the lake was used to create Longevity Hill, which is the central part of the park and features a temple at its top. It is a great place to take in the sunset at the end of the day; the views are wonderful!

We chose to visit the Summer Palace on our own, taking a taxi from our hotel, which took 50 minutes. When we arrived, there were tour guides available and we negotiated a price of \$20 for a guide to provide us with a private tour of the gardens, which included a boat ride. We entered from the East Palace Gate, which took us through the Long Gallery, which is nearly 2,400 feet long — Aarav loved running through it! We then went up Longevity Hill for the sunset before taking the last boat ride at Marble Boat, which took us to another gate. It was dark when we left the Summer Palace and our big mistake was assuming we could easily catch a taxi back to Beijing — and there wasn't a taxi to be found!

If you attempt to visit on your own, be sure to have a way back or discover, as we did, how difficult it is to do in the dark, when it is (for us) cold and you are not properly dressed (again, like us). While we were struggling to find a way back, we had Chinese grandmothers pantomiming that Aarav needed a blanket! We really should have taken a tour, and highly recommend you do when you go.

When you return to Beijing, visit Guijie Street (also known as Ghost Street), which has literally hundreds of places to eat, many of them open 24 hours. The one-mile street has more than 150 shops and is very lively at night, with lights of red lanterns criss-crossing the street. This is the best place to sample street foods, especially seafood. You'll be able to find something for everyone, including picky children.

Get Closer to Heaven

If you have a fourth day to visit Beijing, head to the Temple of Heaven, which is another collection of imperial buildings spread across 270 acres — larger than the Forbidden City! These are mainly religious buildings and places of worship built in the 1400s. The actual Temple of Heaven is the Circular Mound Altar in the southern part of the park. This is where the emperors would make sacrifices to the heavens on the Winter Solstice. At the northern park of the park is the Imperial Vault of Heaven, housing the tablets of the gods. Another temple, near the Danbi Bridge, is the Altar of Prayer for Good Harvests, one of the first buildings in the Temple of Heaven. Other temples are found on the park, as well as 60,000 varieties of trees. Make sure you visit the 500-year-old Nine-Dragon Cypress, which is the grandfather tree and were people like to sit and relax.

It could take a half a day to visit this area, so with your remaining time, you could enjoy a visit to the Olympic Stadium, where Beijing hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics, and see the stadium that looks a bit like a bird's nest from the outside (hence the name!). It still houses sporting events, and will be home to the 2022 Winter Olympic Games opening and closing ceremonies. You can visit Water Cube Park, which is the converted indoor waterpark Beijing added after the Olympics. The National Aquatics Center is sometimes open for swims, as well, if they aren't having events. There is also a spa and restaurants to enjoy, as well.

Another highlight of Beijing is the 798 Art Zone, located in the Dashanzi district. This exhibition center held the 798 Art Festival and is a hub for contemporary art in Beijing. It's art and fashion and excitement, which is a nice change of pace after all of the historic places you have toured.

If you would like to provide your child with more time to play and run around, visit Fragrant Hills Park, which is especially pretty during the fall because its maple trees turn a vibrant red.

KID-FRIENDLY TIPS

- Take your [good stroller](#) everywhere because there is a lot of walking around. It can also get very crowded in some places and it will be easier to move through crowds with your child in a stroller.
- People wear masks in Beijing because of the high pollution. Prepare for pollution in China and buy your own masks, some kids (and adults) can find it difficult to breathe on high pollution days.
- Kids may not enjoy the unique foods of China. Feed them prior to eating out, and have snacks as a backup, should they not like the foods.
- The Chinese are very kid-friendly and love kids. They will do everything possible to make sure your kids are okay, even if there is a language barrier.

OTHER TIPS

- First, read our article around Preparing for China to help you prepare before you go. Book tours to navigate Beijing versus trying it on your own. It is extremely difficult to navigate around the city and it's great having a guide explaining the different places. We used [Vivie Tours](#) and we had a great experience.
- Be careful of having political conversations in Beijing, especially around Tiananmen square. Our tour guide didn't want to answer any questions around some of the more controversial topics, and the people of China, as well as visitors, could be punished for inappropriate remarks.
- Language can be a pretty big barrier in Beijing so make sure have Google Translate with the offline translating.
- Finding a cab can be super hard and they can try to rip you off – be sure to take taxis that have and use meters. We found a couple of hotels where the bellman called a Didi car and you just paid the driver in cash at the end of the ride. We tipped the bellman.
- Traffic in Beijing can be really bad. Be sure to plan for extra time in the car.
- Restaurants can close earlier in Beijing, so be aware of times when planning to eat.
- **Foods we enjoyed:**
 - Peking Duck in Beijing is the best duck you will ever have. A special occasion dish for the Chinese, visitors must try it! Duck is air-cured for days with honey and sherry, then slow-roasted. Slices of the meat and skin then get rolled into a crepe with scallions and cucumber, topped with Hoisin sauce. It is absolutely amazing! We went to Beijing DaDong Restaurant for ours.
 - Cumin chicken was amazing. Basically Beijing's fried chicken with cumin spices, it was one of the only foods our son truly loved, and not too spicy. We had it at Mutianyu Great Wall.
 - "Hotpot" is amazing in China. It's like fondue, only much better. Sitting at a communal table with a heated center and a bowl of broth, you can cook meats, veggies, noodles, dumplings, seafood and tofu in the broth or a light batter. This is a traditional meal that dates back 800 years; definitely give it a try!
 - Try the Green Tea ice cream and cakes. There are a lot of unique desserts in China, so do try them.

- We enjoyed rice liquor called Baijui in China, which is like grappa in Italy. Make sure to have it with a mixer because it is super-strong.