

# XI'AN THROUGH THE SENSES

LET YOUR JOURNEY BEGIN

## THE EASTERN PROMISE OF XI'AN

**Formerly a home to emperors, poets, merchants and warriors, Xi'an is the jewel in the crown of China's great ancient capitals, possessing a wealth of cultural and historical treasures waiting to be uncovered.**

Nothing gives a greater understanding as to what is at the heart of modern-day China than travelling back to its origins to discover the country's rich, dynamic past. With impressive pagodas, ancient architecture and illustrious sites of historical importance, a journey to the city of Xi'an is like stepping back in time to the beginnings of Chinese civilisation.

Located in the Shaanxi province of North Western China, Xi'an dates back over 3,000 years and stood as the country's capital for over a millennium, with 73 emperors overseeing their rule from this illustrious city. Famed for being the eastern terminus of the Silk Road – an ancient trading route for Chinese silk that spanned as far as the Mediterranean Sea – Xi'an was usually the first port of call for visitors to the East, and has a long tradition of welcoming guests from across the globe. In the last few years the city celebrated its historical connection with the Silk Road after the Eastern-most part of the trail was awarded a place on the United Nation's World Heritage List.

While it is no longer China's political capital, today Xi'an still plays an important role in the economic revival of China, having evolved into a cultural, industrial and educational powerhouse for the whole nation. It houses facilities for China's space exploration programme and was named one of the country's 13 emerging megacities, demonstrating how its legacy of countrywide significance continues unabated.

Blending a progressive, modern way of life with a skyline full of breath-taking Chinese antiquities, this city sees the truth behind the legends come to life in its endless list of museums, monuments and masterpieces. Xi'an is a living history book, making it a must-see for the intrepid traveller who is ready to explore the genuine mystery and allure of China.

### Stunning sights

Even the towering walls that surround Xi'an seem to signify its grandeur and majesty, giving a glimpse into how important it is both nationally and internationally. You will find that some of the landmarks situated here are among the world's oldest, including the prized Army of Terracotta Warriors and Horses. This subterranean life-size army of thousands has silently stood guard over the soul of China's unifying emperor Qin Shi Huang for more than two millennia, and each statue includes an intricate level of detailed stone carving that has been remarkably well preserved to this day.

The buildings also pay testament to its established reputation as a cultural melting pot and, at every turn, there is another piece of heritage waiting to be revealed. Outside the walls you can marvel at the Buddhist Famen Temple, which boasts records that go back as far back as 67 AD, and contains a 13-storey high brick pagoda as part of the monastery. Inside the walls, you'll find the city's Grand Mosque – the first ever to be built in China – and the Eight Immortals Temple, which contains texts and illustrations dedicated to the ancient Eastern religion of Daoism.



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## Local luxuries

Nonetheless, as you'd expect from any city, Xi'an is buzzing with the activity and life you'd see in any international hub. You can find fashion houses and fine clothes in South Street, where you'll see Prada, Marc Jacobs and Louis Vuitton. Or, to get your finger on the pulse of Xi'an's youth culture, scope out the student-populated Shida Lu – packed with beauty salons and boutiques.

Of course, there's a wealth of traditional local delicacies to sample too. Dumpling fanatics will want to try Dǎfāchǎng Jiǎoziguǎn, as this 100-year-old restaurant is famed for its treats stuffed with beef, pork and mushrooms. Meanwhile, Dǐng Dǐng Xiāng showcases what modern Xi'an is all about. It possesses a clean, cafe atmosphere over four floors with aspirational snaps of Europe in scattered picture frames on the walls, while a well-dressed crowd peers down onto the street, drinking beer and eating Chinese classics such as generously portioned hotpots.

## Natural splendour

There are also pockets of paradise within the city itself, mainly on the grounds of its numerous palaces, where you can relax and absorb the serene ambience of the city. For example, at Daming Palace and Park, huge green spaces fuse with equally impressive ancient structures, originating from the Tang dynasty in 634 AD. At Huaqing Palace, which was built by the emperor Xuanzong near hot springs at the foot of Li Shan in Lintong District it is possible to take hot baths and relive the spa's former glory for yourself. Nature lovers will also enjoy a trek to Taiping National Park, where visitors can witness a gorgeous waterfall and admire the largest area of wild Zijing flower – the city flower of Hong Kong – in north China.

Blending a sense of history, serenity and contemporary culture, Xi'an is the perfect getaway for those who want to delve in to the heritage of the East while indulging in all the modern comforts you desire from a relaxing break.



# SIX MUST-SEE SIGHTS OF XI'AN

**In a city so imbued in history, it's hard to know what to see first. In this guide, find out the need-to-know facts of Xi'an's most famous historical monuments and what it is about its cultural relics that attracts thousands of international visitors every year.**

## 1. Terracotta Warriors and Horses

Intricately detailed and staggering in number, this collection of over 8,000 terracotta soldiers dates as far back as third century BCE. They were built for the emperor Qin Shi Huang, who was the first ruler of the unified Chinese states. The vast army was constructed because either the emperor was terrified of the vanquished spirits awaiting him in the afterlife, or – as most archaeologists believe – he expected his rule to continue in death as it had in life.

These guardians offer some of the greatest insights we have into the world of ancient China, but the discovery of this grand spectacle was entirely by chance. Uncovered as recently as 1974, the statues were only found when farmers were digging a well just 1.6 kilometres from the tomb itself. The statues are still studied intensively by international scholars and no trip to the city is complete without taking in this awe-inspiring display of ancient craftsmanship.



1. Terracotta Warriors and Horses



## 5. Bell Tower

### 2. The Xi'an City Wall

One of the oldest and best-preserved Chinese city walls, the Xi'an city wall was built in 2nd century BCE and measures 13.7 kilometres in circumference. The site is under national protection, but locals and tourists are still free to enjoy it by walking atop and absorbing the panorama of the Xi'an skyline. The best way to see it is by cycling all the way round – and there are many bicycles available to hire at the top of all the gates. Intrepid explorers will keep their eyes peeled for a staircase down inside a covered structure: enclosed are the remains of a gatehouse that hides a calligraphy collection history lovers will covet.

The wall comes alive at night when it is lit up and makes for a pleasurable stroll. Walking around the landscaped park around the base of the exterior walls in the glow of the shimmering lights gives you a new perspective on the battlements and towers.

### 3. Forest of Stone Steles Museum

'Steles' are stone slabs erected for monumental purposes and this museum houses a growing assortment of steles gathered from as early as 1087. Altogether there are 3,000 steles in the museum, which is divided into seven exhibitions halls, and they mainly display works of calligraphy, painting and historical records.

Notable steles within the collection include the Kaicheng Stone Classics, a group of Confucian works carved as a reference document for scholars, and the Nestorian Stele, which was erected in 781 AD to document 150 years of early Christianity in China. Another unusual example is an 18th century stele depicting a Yangtze River flood control project.

Admirers who fall in love with the steles will be glad to know ink rubbings of the stones are available to buy within the museum – they are much easier to take back on the plane than the tablet itself!

### 4. Big Wild Goose Pagoda

Originally constructed in 652 AD, this pagoda was initially five stories high and one of its many functions was to hold sutras and figurines of the Buddha that were brought to China from India. Many incidents have befallen the structure that has led to its development and redevelopment. The Empress Wu Zetian had the pagoda rebuilt and added another five new stories by the year 704 AD, but unfortunately a massive earthquake in 1556 heavily damaged the pagoda and reduced it by three levels, explaining its current height of seven stories.

Renovated in 1964, the pagoda currently stands at an impressive 64 metres tall and from the top it offers views over the whole city. The grounds feature an astounding fountain and beautiful water features, while there is occasionally a music show to witness during the day. Tourists can also find pleasing parks and Western-style eateries nearby.

### 5. Bell Tower

This iconic symbol of the city is not only a historical monument in itself, but also the subject of many myths and legends. One such tale recounts how, in the great river that flowed across the centre of Xi'an city, there was an active dragon that caused many earthquakes. A government official ordered the blacksmiths of the whole city to make a long iron chain in order to lock the dragon down and sink it to the bottom of the river. He then instructed 5,000 craftsmen to repair the Bell Tower in order to use the structure to restrain the dragon. It is said there were no more earthquakes in the area thereafter.

The tower is so named because it contains several large bronze bells from the Tang Dynasty, including the jingyun bell that was cast in 711 AD and measures 247 centimetres high, weighing in at a colossal 6,500 kilograms.

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## 6. Daming Palace

The sheer scale of the buildings contained within the site of Daming Palace is enough to blow you away by itself and witnessing the architecture is a breathtaking experience. Recently added to the World Heritage List, the palace was originally commissioned by the Emperor Li Shimin as the summer palace for his father, Emperor Li Yuan. However, it became the centre of the Tang Dynasty when many more Chinese emperors chose it as the site from which to deal with state affairs.

The palace premises themselves make for a peaceful walk and entry to the area is free, but you won't be able to ignore the grand sense of history on offer. Since the 1950s, the archaeology work to Daming Palace has been extensive and uncovered many new grounds. You can learn about the palace's past by visiting the Daming Palace Heritage Museum and – for a small fee – gain access to its cultural relics preservation and exhibition area.



## XI'AN SPECIALTIES: WHAT TO EAT IN THE ANCIENT CAPITAL

**Fancy a taste of the real Xi'an? Just bite into some of the special local delicacies available in this classical metropolis. If you want to dine like a native, here are a few dishes bound to tantalise your tastebuds.**

The Shaanxi province is well known for its particular style of cooking: making elaborate use of everyday ingredients, meals can encompass tasty hotpots, hearty stews and delectable dumplings. Characterised by strong flavours, nourishing meals and an emphasis on savoury aromas such as salt, garlic, onion, and vinegar, Xi'an has its own particular take on the province's approach to cuisine.

The people of Xi'an take their food seriously, and the local dishes are fervently promoted and defended by the people who live here. As a result, you'll find that quality and passion will be at the heart of everything you eat. There are several treats that must be sampled to appreciate Xian's distinctive culinary offerings. Why not impress your travel companions by asking for one of these four local dishes wherever you choose to eat out?

### Yang Rou Pao Mo

One of the signature recipes of the area, Yang Rou Pao Mo is a mutton stew served with unleavened bread. It is popular with both locals and visitors as the dish has a very unique custom attached to it. Before the stew is served, you will be asked to break the unleavened bread into a bowl. The trick is to break the bread into the smallest pieces possible before it is taken to the kitchen to be filled with the mutton stew. This task may prove to be hard on your fingers, but once you have prepared your bread, you pass your bowl to the chef who will stir it into a pot of hot mutton soup. After five to ten minutes, he will ladle the soup and bread back into your bowl with a quantity of mutton, adding chilli paste, caraway and a specially salted sweet garlic to enhance the dish.

Said to provide a warming energy boost, this delightful stew is best experienced at Lao Sun Jia and the Tong Sheng Xiang restaurants, where they have been serving it for over a century. For those who aren't mutton fans, you can instead ask for it 'niu rou' – a version served with beef instead of the traditional meat.

### Xi'an Liangpi

This remarkable dish is a tasty blend of noodles and spices, but with a strange twist – it is served completely cold. Liangpi is typically made from rice flour that is mixed with water and, depending on the variety, washed until only the gluten remains. The pancakes are steamed, cooled, cut into thin strips and placed into a bowl with julienned cucumber and bean sprouts. The dish is then layered with a variety of different sauces and the final result will depend on where you go, as each outlet has its own special recipe. The additions vary vastly, but typically include vinegar, salt, chilli oil and smashed garlic in water.

The inimitable blend of tangy, spicy, hot, cool, crisp, moist and chewy sensations with every bite means liangpi offers every possible flavour and texture in just one simple, distinctive plate.



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## Guan Tang Baozi

Deriving from the national dish tangbao – or soup-filled buns – Guan Tang Baozi are Xi'an's own adaptation of this Chinese indulgence. Not unlike Shanghai xiaolongbao, these dumplings are filled with meat mixed in savoury gravy and eaten with a vinegar dipping sauce spiked with chilli and Sichuan pepper.

Many street food sellers will serve their own delectable variation of this treat, but for the widest selection in a relaxed setting you can head to Jia San Guan Tang Baozi. Here, you can give your palate a pleasing journey while having fun watching the waiters carrying stacks of bamboo steamers piled several feet high.

## Hu La Tang

Though the Henan province just west of Shaanxi is credited with the creation of this nourishing and spicy soup, the true origin of the recipe for Hu La Tang is unknown. Its main ingredients are beef broth and capsicum peppers and it's possible that the latter vegetable came to the country along the Silk Road. Since the recipe gained prominence in the Tang Dynasty and the rulers of the empire were based in Xi'an, it is likely that the residents of the city were amongst some of the earliest adopters of this dish.

However it came to be so popular, it is now a national favourite. Some herbs and flavourings such as ginger, aniseed and fennel can be added to improve the flavour, as well as to make the mixture piquant and hot. The taste is said to give you a comforting glow throughout your body, so it is a traditional winter warmer for the Chinese people, but can be enjoyed any time of year due to its exceptional taste.

In northern China, Hu La Tang is one of the most popular elements of breakfast. A regular part of the typical morning routine is to get up early in order to go out and eat the soup to prepare for the long day ahead.



# WALKING THE SILK ROAD

**For over 1,600 years, merchants, traders, monks and soldiers who journeyed to China's ancient capital of Xi'an to witness its magnificence travelled via the Silk Road. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, discover what makes this former trading route so special.**

Conjuring up images of merchants on camel-led caravans, pilgrims braving bandits on the open road and bazaars of the Far East filled with treasures beyond imagination: the mere mention of the Silk Road to any medieval adventurer would have them wide-eyed with wonder. This transcontinental trading route was the main corridor between the East and West for centuries, beginning and ending in the ancient Chinese capital of Xi'an.

The road derives its name from the lucrative trade in Chinese silk carried out along its length, with the early origins of the route emerging during the Han Dynasty in 206 BC. This was significantly expanded in 114 BC and dealings on the path became a major factor in developing classical civilisations of China, India, Persia, Europe and Arabia. The ability to trade goods facilitated long-distance political and economic interactions between nations and, though silk was certainly the major trade item from China, many equally important commodities were exchanged – including religions, philosophies and various technologies.

As Xi'an was the terminus of the route, Tang Dynasty emperors chose it as the city from which to rule the country due to its advantageous position and the immediate access to expensive merchandise that changed hands every day.

## Legacy of culture

The origin of the Silk Road as we have come to know it begins in second century BCE. A general called Zhang Qian was sent to the Far West by Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty to make contact with Yuezhi, a nomadic tribe. The emperor feared the Xiongnu people – a group who previously attempted to invade the Kansu province of Han Dynasty – would try to make a rally for power. The Yuezhi were the enemies of the Xiongnu, and so the emperor hoped to strike an alliance in order to defeat them.

Unfortunately, Zhang Qian was captured by the Xiongnu en route and imprisoned for ten years, during which time he married a nomad wife and had a son. However, he remained intent on completing his mission and eventually he escaped, continuing his journey further west. When he finally reached his destination in 128 BC, he was surprised to find the Yuezhi living in peace and no longer interested in taking their revenge on the Xiongnu.



On his return, Zhang Qian told the emperor of what he saw in the West, delighting him with detailed accounts of unknown kingdoms and tempting the emperor into dispatching successive missions. Each assignment returned with an increasing amount of luxurious Western wares such as fur, perfumes and even horses. Simultaneously, the demand for precious Eastern produce – predominantly cultivated silk – was growing rapidly, leading to valuable diplomatic contacts and economic relations between East and West.

The network of the Silk Road flourished during the Tang Dynasty and products like precious gems, exquisite clothing and spices were exchanged daily. At the height of its popularity, the route stretched 4,000 kilometres, reaching as far as the Mediterranean Sea and attracted famous travellers like Alexander the Great and Marco Polo.

The Silk Road maintained its status for over a millennium and a half, but it disintegrated in the 15th century when the Ottomans gained supremacy at Constantinople. Ottoman rulers of the day reviled Westerners because of the continuing crusades, so retaliated by embargoing trade with Europe. By the end of the Ming Dynasty, China was once again shut off from the outside world, thus ending centuries-old exchange of culture and religion between East and West.

## A world treasure

Though it hasn't been used as an official route for centuries, its historical importance remains and China has been campaigning for it to be recognised internationally for a number of decades. Starting in 1988, UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) began to investigate the trade route's role in promoting cultural diversity across the Eurasian hemisphere.

As the road spans so many countries and landmarks, the process of becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site has been a long one. Originally, in 2008, China identified 48 sites along the Silk Road that could be of significance. But in 2011 UNESCO proposed that, due to the vast scale of the Silk Road, the application should be divided into corridors. A joint proposal from China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan encompassing a channel running from central China to the Tianshan Range of mountains was put forward and was approved by the committee in June 2014.

Sites that fall under this protective status include some of Xi'an's most famous monuments, such as the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, Daming Palace and the Xingjiao Temple. Other notable attractions include the tomb of the Silk Road's pioneer Zhang Qian himself and the Bin County Cave Temple – a wondrously ornate Buddhist temple in the middle of the Chinese landscape. Even sections of the Great Wall are incorporated in this special passage.

The award of UNESCO World Heritage status means that even today the Silk Road connects China to the rest of the world through its dynamic heritage. The iconic conduit remains as a vein filled with cultural riches, leading back to the beauty of Xi'an in the heartland of the Shaanxi Province.



## MAKE THE CONNECTION: **TRANSPORT IN XI'AN**

**As you'd expect from a city at the forefront of modernisation, Xi'an has a developed transport system that allows easy passage to the rest of China. If you want to explore this ancient capital, find out how you can make your way there – and back out to your next destination.**

It doesn't matter whether you're starting your adventure in Xi'an or arriving from somewhere else in Asia: as a major urban hub located in the heart of China, there are plenty of ways to reach your destination. Just take a look at the range of cities you can reach from Xi'an's centre and work out how you will take the next step on your journey.

### By air

Located 40 kilometres to the north of the city, Xi'an Xianyang International Airport will be the first port of call for a majority of visitors. Covering an area of five square kilometres, it is the largest airport in China's northwest. In 2012, the airport handled 23,420,654 passengers – that's almost half the passengers London Heathrow dealt with in the same time span – making it the busiest airport in northwest China and the 8th busiest in the nation.

As Xi'an is in the centre of China, it takes no more than two hours by air to travel to or from most of the key Chinese cities you'll want to visit, so you can connect to Beijing, Shanghai and countless other areas on the mainland in a relatively short space of time. International flights are available to Helsinki, Bangkok, Paris, Moscow, Seoul as well as Tokyo and Hiroshima in Japan, and Singapore via Chengdu. This means a speedy flight to Xi'an fits neatly into any tour.

It's easy to get to the terminal too, as there is a regular bus service that will take you from the city to the airport for ¥26. And don't worry if you're arriving very early or extremely late: as long as there is an arriving flight, there will be a bus.

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## By train

Because it is regarded as the gateway to the West, Xi'an plays a significant role in the Chinese railway system. Six of China's main railway lines intersect here and, as a consequence, the city is linked with all of the country's provincial capital cities.

There are two main rail stations in Xi'an that transport both everyday passengers and tourists, Xi'an City and Xi'an North – the latter of which runs a high-speed rail service. The high-speed train from Xi'an North Station to Luoyang-Longmen runs several times a day with services starting at 7am. The distance of 400 kilometres takes around 90 minutes, so you can carry on your journey through China in no time at all.

The line runs as far as Zhengzhou and has been so effective at transporting passengers between the two destinations, that air travel became uncompetitive and all passenger flights between the two cities were suspended within 48 days of start of the regular rail service.

Another high-speed service has recently opened between Xi'an and Baoji, taking just two hours to get between the two cities. You can also take the high speed train to Wuhan, Taiyuan, Guangzhou and more. With further development planned for 2020, high-speed services are set to improve vastly in future even more.

You can also travel to Beijing and Shanghai via regular train but – for supreme comfort on these services – it is recommended that you book a luxury soft-class sleeper. Costing around ¥1000, they consist of two soft beds with quilting, a small sofa seat and cosy little extras such as slippers. Some cabins even have a private bathroom, offering you a tiny slice of seclusion on what can be a very crowded method of public transport.

## By bus

Xi'an is ranked as the second largest highway transportation hub in China because of its excellent roads, supported by five national highways that span the length of 345 kilometres and twelve provincial freeways that cover 266 kilometres. It's no surprise, then, that in recent years buses have become a very popular way to travel between cities within the mainland.

Presently, there are seven large long-distance bus stations, all of which are built in the main urban area. Below are a few examples of destinations you can get to from the city centre by bus:

- From **Xi'an Bus Station of Shaanxi**, you can reach about 18 provinces and municipality cities, such as Shanghai, Shandong, Henan, Sichuan, Gansu and Tibet
- **Xi'an Coach Station** has 600 scheduled departures every day and plays an important role in connecting the city with surrounding counties and towns, such as Huxian, Zhouzhi, Qinzhen and Fengyu
- At **Sanfuwan Long-Distance Bus Station**, destinations include Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin as well as cities in Zhejiang, Fujian and Henan

There are also buses departing from Xi'an North, Xi'an East, Xi'an South and Xi'an West bus stations. Most of the buses in the same station leave for cities and counties in the same direction within Shaanxi Province, so you can choose the right station if you know the direction of your intended end point.



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# XI'AN SHOPPING

**Whether you want a small souvenir to take home or you're looking for some bargain buys, Xi'an is packed with boutiques, shops and stalls for you to browse. Here are some top shopping tips from across the city.**

Picking up a small trinket to bring back from your journey or even finding a unique, dressy little number that has an exotic story behind it is par for the course when you're on a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. Part of the joy of shopping in Xi'an is the sheer amount of variety on offer: if you desire thrift-store chic, designer dresses, special souvenirs or one-of-a-kind art pieces, you'll find plenty of stores, markets and shops to choose from. This whistle-stop tour of Xi'an's best places to buy will give you an idea of how you can get started on your retail therapy spree.

## Department stores

If you're looking to hit the high street and scope out some contemporary Xi'an style, you won't go far wrong by sticking to North, South, East or West Avenue – easy to find from the recognisable Bell Tower. Highlights include **Kaiyuan Shopping Mall**, a reputable shopping centre located in the centre of Xi'an, which boasts reasonable prices and a good range of shops. You can also investigate **Parkson Shopping Centre**: with a longer presence in Xi'an than most of the other middle-end department stores in its category, it is famed for goods such as household appliances, electronics, books and music – all of which can be picked up at bargain prices.

Lovers of luxury will want to head to **Zhongda International**, which has a reputation for being the most decadent shopping centre in Xi'an. You can go there by foot from the Bell Tower and it's an excellent place to find an extraordinary outfit for a special evening dinner or a formal banquet. Fashion label lovers, however, will discover the most well known brands in **Printemps China Department Wang Fujin Store** – situated along the Chang'an International Square, just outside the North Gate of Xian City. Trendsetters will not be able to resist its allure, as both tourists and Xi'an's elite flock here to stock up on high-end fashion from Chloe, Gucci and Fendi.

## Souvenirs

Reminders of your Xi'an experience are a must and there are plenty of places to pick up a tiny replica of a terracotta soldier or other examples of exquisite local craftwork. At **Xi'an Antiques Market** near the Small Wild Goose Pagoda, you can pick up a myriad of antiques and it's the perfect place for an adventurous treasure hunt. Wares include furniture, silk rugs, jewels, calligraphy, paintings and more. There are also two halls for exchanging antiques where you can meet many fellow enthusiasts to trade tips and gifts.

Of course, you may want something with a traditional touch and this can be found at the **Peasant Painting Gallery** in the Gaoxin District. Renowned for its display of authentic Shaanxi crafts, the gallery specialises in paintings that illustrate daily life from the Qin and Han dynasties, including harvests, village traditions and farm animals. Bright, colourful and simple, these etchings prove to be inspirational for most visitors, so it's worth visiting to admire the creativity even if you don't end up buying anything. You may also be lucky enough to catch a workshop from local professional craftsmen, who will teach you how to cut and paint in a genuine Chinese style.

**Xi'an Tang Dynasty West Market** located at Lao Dong Nan Lu is currently the largest fully functioning antiques and artefacts trading centre in China. You will know you have found the right place, as a grand monument – a replica of an ancient ship named Qian Sui Shi – decorates the entrance to the market.

The market comprises of buildings in Tang Dynasty style, with pavilions and corridors laid out in a grid-like manner, echoing the city's classical past. There are more than 700 antique stalls within the two-storey building, offering a wide collection of antiques, paintings, calligraphy, bronze sculpture and exclusive art objects.

As usual, at all these markets it is worth haggling to see if you can get an extra-special price. Though the sellers may seem insistent, they will eventually yield if they sense that you are not going to budge on your initial offer.

## Supermarkets

From names you know to some new supermarket experiences, Xi'an's convenience stores are usually centred on established communities or university areas. The most recognisable of these is **Wal-Mart** on East Street, providing a familiar environment for the Western visitor. For any specialty goods from back home, you can also try **Metro** – a German supermarket known for its cheese, biscuits, meat and spices from around the world. It's so popular, it attracts many customers from outside the city, but you will need a membership card to enter.

If you're ready for something different, then head to **Epin Life** – an integrated supermarket that is managed by a traditional Chinese company. You can find many imported commodities here, including household items and health care products, as well as specialty, fresh-cooked and import food. For convenience, though, you'll go to your local **Vanguard**. Vanguard is one of the largest retail chain enterprises in China and now a household name throughout the country, renowned for its cheap, fresh and abundant produce. There are more than ten branches in Xi'an, so you'll be able to find one wherever you're staying.

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# STEPPING OUT IN XI'AN

**Want to get your finger on the pulse of Xi'an's nightlife? When the sun goes down, the beating heart of the city's entertainment scene just begins. From concerts and operas to lively bars and hangouts, there's no end to the fun that's on offer.**

You could easily make the mistake that Xi'an is all about classical culture. While the city exudes a sense of history, it is also full of the excitement of any modern metropolis. Its active nightlife is an experience for any traveller and, after a long day of sight seeing, there's nothing better than going out on the town and absorbing the true soul of the city. Discover for yourself a few ways to revel in the spirit of Xi'an when the sun sets.

## Bars

There's a good selection of bars around town and, if you don't know where to start, you can always head to De Fu Xiang Street for a few laid back drinks. Here, you'll find almost 20 bars next to one another, including **De Fu Lou Café & Bar**, which is one of the first bars to ever open in the city. It's a favourite for locals – and sports fans will be pleased to know they screen football most nights.

For something with a relaxed vibe, **Vice Versa** near the Forest of Steles Museum has a relaxed atmosphere that attracts a healthy mix of residents and visitors. A cultural blend of East and West, it functions as a café and restaurant during the day, but at night transforms into a lively bar serving a mix of Western and Asian beers and cocktails. If only a pint of the real stuff will do, head to **The Belgian Bar**. Boasting a huge selection of hoppy brews and an envious location facing the city wall, it's the perfect place to enjoy good company while appreciating Xi'an's sights.

## Theatres and Concerts

As you'd expect from a city with such a rich history, it's possible to see dance and music faithful to Xi'an's illustrious past. Colourful, bold and full of ornate costumes and props, **Tang Dynasty Dance and Music Palace** showcases some of the best traditional Chinese opera from over a thousand years ago. Each dance has an air of authenticity, as it has been recreated using various historical records as well as ancient art and relics discovered in Xi'an. To complete the excursion, opt for a combined dinner and show ticket, where the enticing prospect of a tasty dumpling meal before the main event completes a magical evening out.

**Shaanxi Grand Opera House** also has a renowned reputation: blending poetry with skilled playing of musical instruments, singing, dancing and equally stunning garbs, the shows give you an impressive view of ancient China and its distinct customs.

For something a bit off the beaten tourist track, **Yisu She** is home to one of the oldest drama societies in China. Revered for its style of Qin Opera that originated in the Shaanxi province, this theatre is one of the most attended by the regional populace – perfect for going native and seeing a bit of behind-the-scenes culture.

## Cinemas

If you want to improve your command of the local language, there's no better way to take in the genuine Mandarin dialect than seeing one of the latest cinematic releases.

Recently renovated, **Hongguang Cinema** now has six lavish show halls, all equipped with digital stereophonic facilities and embellished by gold décor. But you needn't move on from the venue after the movie, as film fanatics can enjoy themselves in the cinema's other facilities, including its karaoke rooms, dance floor, tea house and bar. **Oscar International Cinema** is another five-star cinema located conveniently in the city centre, boasting equally impressive dining, shopping and a few other extras. Its stunning audio-visual add another dimension to your viewing, making a visit to the Oscar International essential.

Wanda Cinema is one of the most-visited cinemas and plays both new Chinese movies as well as popular international films. You can even catch your favourite picture in 3D here, so if there's a must-see blockbuster showing, you can don your specs and watch it in comfort. For those who like the flair of something a bit more retro, **Xi'an Bell Tower Cinema** has a slightly more worn-in vibe and is conveniently located near one of the city's most-visited monuments. Pop by after taking in the beauty of the Bell Tower itself for a fun-filled day out.

## Nightclubs

Hands down, the most popular hotspot in Xi'an is **I+I**: two dance floors play a mixture of J-Pop and hip hop, while a relaxed open-air bar on the fifth floor has live music every night. You'll find a lot of tourists here, so you'll definitely make a friend or two while you get your party on. You can also sashay to some Latino music at **Havana Bar** in the Sofitel Hotel. With a Colombian band and great cocktails, you can try your hand at some salsa while sipping a Cuba Libre or mojito.

If you just want to get into the groove and do some serious moves on the dance floor, then **Ku La La** regularly features an extensive roster of DJs and is all about current Chinese dance music. **Salsa** is also extremely fashionable and your best bet for a fun visit is on Friday and Saturday nights. The dance floor is usually less crowded, so you will have a bit more room to throw some shapes, but get there early as they sometimes decide to limit the number of people allowed in.

XI'AN THROUGH THE SENSES



# HOW TO MAKE YOUR STAY IN XI'AN STYLISH

**Exploring the classic culture of China's ancient capital can be done in the height of luxury. Just check out these four premium hotels to find out how you can live it up and explore modern comforts amidst the city's antique surroundings.**

It's no wonder Xi'an was popular with a number of emperors over the centuries: there is an inherently regal atmosphere that permeates every building. So if you're planning a trip to this sophisticated city, you'll want to stay in a hotel that makes you feel like royalty.

No matter if you're looking for a fashionable boutique venue or somewhere that exudes opulence, Xi'an's premier offerings provide comfort and extravagance beyond compare. Take a look at these four favourites, all of which are bound to add their own sense of majesty to your vacation.

## The Westin Xi'an

With a stylish and progressive facade, this hotel expertly combines all the modern comforts you'd expect from a contemporary venue while remaining sensitive to its surroundings. It's located right in the centre of Xi'an, just a few footsteps from the Big Wild Goose Pagoda and its exclusive shopping district. Features include Heavenly Spa, which is the ultimate place to relax and unwind. Upon entering, you'll be offered a choice of herbal teas before indulging in an extensive range of sumptuous treatments, such as luxurious body scrubs and wraps.

The hotel also boasts its own museum – the Xian Qujiang Museum of Fine Arts. Spanning 7,000 square metres, it showcases exceptional Chinese art and antiquities through different dynasties. Containing treasures such as a rare collection of Ming and Qing Dynasty porcelain, the world's only gold suit of armour and a rare stone Buddha head that measures nearly one metre high, it's bound to impress. Guests are free to peruse the collection at leisure, so you can lose yourself in this immense collection of history.

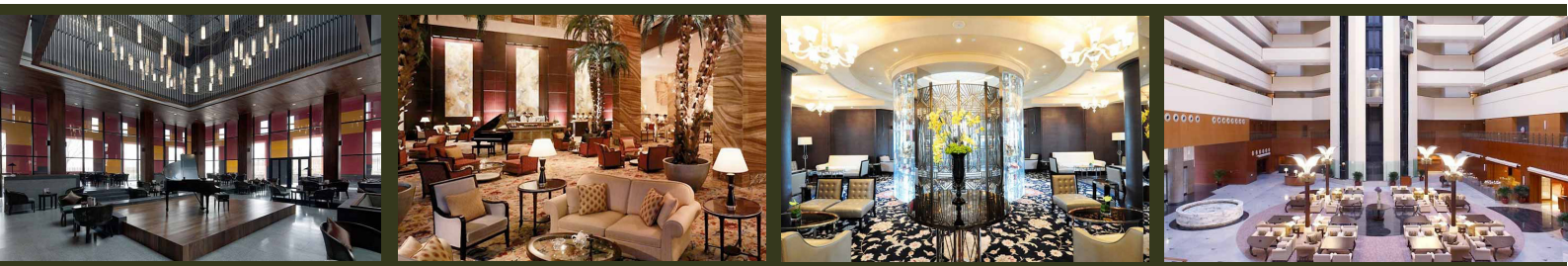
Dining at The Westin Xi'an spans from the simple to the exotic, but is always a sensory delight, emphasised by exquisite service and captivating mood of the restaurants. Indulge in traditional cuisine from across the country with the authentic Chinese menus at Five Zen5es, or savour fine Japanese dishes in an elegant setting at signature venue Mai.

## Shangri-La Xian Hotel

Blending an innovative use of light with opulent surroundings that are beyond compare, the Shangri-La Xi'an is the perfect place to enjoy the city's ancient charms. The rooms make the most of the hotel's illuminating qualities, as floor-to-ceiling windows offer beautiful vistas of the ancient capital's landscape, offset by fashionable and tasteful furnishings throughout the interior décor. The suites exemplify spacious, modern living quarters, mixing Asian and Western influences and making the accommodation ideal for relaxing in comfortable surroundings.

With three restaurants, there is an impressive range of dining options: Siam Garden, Tian Xiang Ge and Yi Café offer a choice of Cantonese, Japanese and European cuisines. Be seen at these trendsetting designer venues, showcasing culinary magic for your indulgence. Chefs like the talented Allan Tse brings 40 years of experience to every recipe, creating Cantonese fare with a modern twist.

After a long day of sight seeing, you can indulge in a spa treatment, stretch and flex in the 24-hour state-of-the-art gym, or simply relax in the indoor heated swimming pool.



XI'AN THROUGH THE SENSES



## Sofitel Legend Peoples Grand Hotel

With an architectural style that hints at neoclassical, French and Russian influences, you could be forgiven for thinking the Sofitel Legend Peoples Grand Hotel was actually a diplomatic embassy. That's because when it opened in 1953 it was used as a state guesthouse to welcome guests with its individual Art Deco interiors.

Located inside the city walls, just within walking distance of the historic Bell and Drum towers and adjacent to modern shopping and entertainment areas, the hotel has the best location for guests to experience Xi'an's picturesque environs. And its premises are equally scenic, as the grounds include 40,000 square metres of landscaped gardens and stunning water features.

The hotel is so enriched with history and culture that it has the quirky addition of its own private museum for guests to visit. Featuring memorabilia from its illustrious past, precious items include a gold serving platter, used for VVIPs when it was Xian's only hotel licensed to accommodate foreigners. 40 years of experience to every recipe, creating Cantonese fare with a modern twist.

After a long day of sight seeing, you can indulge in a spa treatment, stretch and flex in the 24-hour state-of-the-art gym, or simply relax in the indoor heated swimming pool.

## Grand Park Xi'an

The four turrets of this spectacular hotel imitate the pagodas that can be found all over this ancient capital, embodying the quintessential ambience of the city. It's modelled on the nearby pagodas, standing in homage to the spectacular monuments of the Ming Dynasty.

The modern décor is balanced by traditional Chinese elements and centred on a large atrium, giving a sense of spaciousness throughout. A first-rate gym offers views of the entire city, meaning you can admire the sights while working up a sweat on your daily workout. Its most spectacular feature is the Veranda Café: guests may relax in an oasis of charm and tranquility, and gaze at the stars under a vast skylight. You can choose a range of dishes from exquisite a la carte selections as well as international and Asian buffets, all created with the chef's deft culinary skills.

Just a 15-minute walk away from some of the city's hottest attractions, its central location makes it perfect for travellers who want to be within easy reach of Xi'an's bustling centre.



Grand Park Xi'an



## LET YOUR JOURNEY BEGIN

XI'AN THROUGH THE SENSES

