

# XI'AN (西安)



Xi'an, recognised by many as the birthplace of Chinese civilization, is one of China's most historical and interesting cities and is top of many domestic and international travellers to visit lists. Owing to its role as capital city of 13 different dynasties, Xi'an is said to tell the story of Chinese history, reminders of which can be found around the city. Aside from being home to one of China's top tourist attractions, the Terracotta Army, the city boasts numerous other sights, delicious local cuisine and a buzzing city centre.



## Attractions

**The Terracotta Army:** The Terracotta Army is probably the best-known attraction of Xi'an and given its fascinating history, it's not hard to see why. Discovered in 1974 by local farmers, the Terracotta Warriors and Horses are a clay army, buried with and designed to protect China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di, in the afterlife. The intricately designed Warriors come in different shapes and sizes and have unique facial expressions, depending on their roles in the army; for example, the generals are the tallest. Following the discovery by local farmers, the Chinese authorities began a large-scale excavation and found thousands of clay soldiers, in numerous 'pits'.



Though this area is now a museum visited by millions of people each year, it also remains an excavation site, with work still being done to uncover more clay warriors. The tomb itself is yet to be touched by archaeologists, who suggest it's best left like this because of 'the complex conditions inside'.



It's easy to spend hours wandering around this huge site, admiring the incredible product of the Emperor's workers, some of which are displayed in glass containers for visitors to get a close look at. It goes without saying that this fascinating museum and part of Chinese history is a must-see for any visitor to Xi'an.

**Getting there:** The museum is located a little way outside of downtown Xi'an, but there are several ways to get there. The cheapest is by tourism bus no.5 (306), which leaves from the east square of the train station, costs 7 RMB and takes 1 hour. It's possible to take a taxi, but you will need to negotiate the price and given that this is a tourist hotspot, it can be very difficult to get the driver to agree to a fare even close to what it should be (150 RMB). There are also numerous tours advertised around the city, which may suit if you don't wish to make your own way there.

**The City Wall:** This is China's oldest and most well-preserved city wall and is one of the largest ancient military defence systems in the world. It was built during the Ming Dynasty in order to protect Xi'an and store food supplies, while the emperor unified all other states. It stands at 12 metres high, covers 13.7 kilometres and has a moat surrounding it. There are four city gates, which were built within the wall to protect against enemies breaking in. The South Gate, known as Yongning is said to be the most beautiful of the gates and it also contains two museums, which are open to the public and are free to enter.



The South Gate is the most popular gate for tourists to enter by and nearby the entrance is a bike rental shop. Cycling around the wall is one of the best ways to see the wall and given the size of it, if you wish to do the full tour, I would definitely recommend it over walking! Single and tandem bikes are on offer and cost around 90 RMB for 2 hours and a 300 RMB deposit (which you get back upon



return of the bike). I opted for a tandem on my trip and though a bit wobbly to begin with, I was happy with the decision! We managed to do the full circle of the wall in just under 2 hours, but if you are running behind schedule it is possible to drop bikes off at any of the rental spots around the wall.

From the wall, you get to see so much of Xi'an, as well as the various sights around the wall. It's worth taking your time to make the most of the views!

**Getting there:** The South Gate can be reached by taking metro line 2 to Yongningmen Station, or by taking any of the following buses: bus no.6, 11, 12, 23, 46, 215, 239, 600, 603, 608, 713, 910, K600, K618.

To get to the North Gate, take metro line 2 to Anyuanmen Station, or bus no.6, 26, 28, 33, 37, 39, 117, 205, 206, 208, 214, 229, 236, 238, 336, 506 or 511.

**The Muslim Quarter:** This may be stating the obvious, but the Muslim Quarter is the Muslim community hub of Xi'an. It is located to the north of West Street in the city centre and is very close to the Bell Tower. The Muslim Quarter is lined with street food stands, restaurants and souvenir shops and is a vibrant and interesting part of Xi'an, with some of the most delicious food I've ever eaten! There are 10 mosques in the area, one of which is open to tourists. The Great Mosque, one of the oldest Islamic mosques in China, is very well-preserved and an interesting place to visit to understand more about the history of Muslims in China and to see the beautiful mix of Chinese and Islamic architecture.



**Getting there:** Take [Metro Line 2](#) and get off at Zhonglou (Bell Tower) Station. Take exit B and walk west until you see the Drum Tower. The street is behind the Tower.

Take bus No. 7, 15, 32, 205, 215, 221, 222, 251, 252, 612, 618 or Tourist Line 8 (No. 610) and get off at Zhonglou Xi (Bell Tower West) Station. Walk towards the Drum Tower and you will easily find the street behind the Drum Tower.

**The Bell Tower:** Built in 1384, to allow for early detection of approaching attackers, the Bell Tower marks the geographical centre of the ancient capital and is one of the city's most iconic landmarks. Streets extend to the North, East, South and West of the Bell Tower and connect it to the City Wall. Visitors can enter and climb the Bell Tower and get fantastic views over the city. The tower is definitely worth a visit, particularly at night, when it lights up and looks absolutely stunning!



**Getting there:** Take metro line 2 to Bell Tower Station, or bus no. 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 26, 29, 32, 35, 36, 37, 43, 45, 46, 118, 201, 203, 205, 206, 208, 214, 215, 218, 221, 222, 229, 235, 251, 252, 300, 302, 502, 600, K600, 603, 604, K605, 606, 608, 609, 611, 612, K618, K630, 706, Tourist Bus Line 7, Tourist Bus Line 8 (610) to Bell Tower Stop.

**Big Wild Goose Pagoda:** This is a well-preserved ancient holy place for Buddhists, located around 4 kilometres outside of downtown Xi'an. It was built during the Tang Dynasty and was given its name because of a Chinese [legend](#). There are many pleasant squares and gardens around the pagoda and it is a very peaceful and attractive tourist spot. The North Square is probably one of the most notable of these, as it is home to the largest fountain show in Asia (see entertainment for more information). Other areas worth visiting here are; the [Da Ci'en Temple](#), Shaanxi Opera Garden and the South Square.



**Getting there:** Big Wild Goose Pagoda scenic area can be reached by taking any of the following buses: 5, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 30, 34, 41, 44, 224, 242, 307, 400, 401, 408, 500, 501, 521, 526, 527, 601, 606, 609, 619, 701, 715, 933, Tourist Bus Line 6 & 8 & 9 and getting off at Dayanta Station.

You can go by metro lines: 3 to Dayanta Station directly, or line 2 Xiaozhai Station (Exit C), then walk eastward for 10 minutes.

If costs around 30 RMB to reach the area by taxi from Xi'an train station.

## Food

No matter where I went in China, I always found several dishes that I absolutely loved, but Xi'an is a place that stands out for me thanks to its huge variety of delicious local delicacies which I found to be very different to those of most other places I visited. I mostly ate from small restaurants, of which I can't remember the name, or from street food stalls. I therefore don't have many restaurant recommendations, but here are a few of my favourite dishes:

**Yangrou Paomo:** This is an extremely popular local dish, that I definitely recommend to any meat eaters! Its translation doesn't sound appetizing at all (crumbled flatbread in mutton stew), but I assure you it is delicious! It is basically a lamb noodle soup in a delicious broth, served with a local flatbread, which you should crumble into it. Restaurants serving this dish can be found all over the city, but one of the best in which to try it is one of the many branches of [Lao Sun Jia](#). This restaurant is a little pricey, so if you are looking to spend less, head to the Muslim quarter and ask almost any restaurant for it!





**Roujiamo:** Translated as ‘meat burger’, this is a kind of Chinese take on a burger and can be seen in the hands (and mouths) of locals all over Xi’an. The meat is usually pork, which has been stewed in a flavoursome broth for many hours and is then put in a thin, circular bun. It is a delicious snack, which I highly recommend, but beware - they can be very messy and greasy.

**Xi’an Kabobs:** These can be seen on food stalls across the city and are a great on-the-go snack. They are essentially meat or fish on a stick, which are cooked and then covered in cumin and chili powder. Many people are wary of trying street food and I was one of them until I went to Xi’an – it was the kabobs which changed me and I never looked back!



**Guantang Baozi:** Much like every other city in China, Xi’an has its own take on the baozi (dumpling) and this is it. Guantang baozi are hot, soup-filled steamed dumplings, which are twisted into a flower shape. Like a lot of Xi’an dishes, they are quite messy!



**BiangBiang Noodles:** These noodles look different to the majority you see in China and they are a popular dish of Shaanxi Province. These handmade noodles are flat, but thick in width and are often served with lots of hot peppers and chili oil. The name comes from the sound made when the noodles are slapped against a table to stretch them. They are delicious, but beware of the spice!

**Zeng Cake:** This is one of Xi’an’s popular sweet treats and is a steamed rice and jujube cake. It is served on sticks from street stalls all over the city, particularly in the Muslim Quarter and looks very intriguing. The cake is sweet and has a strange texture, that I personally didn’t like, but it’s definitely worth a try!



## Accommodation

**See Tang Hostel:** This hostel is located in the centre of Xi’an, down a quaint, traditional street lined with souvenir shops and food stalls. From here, the City Wall, Bell Tower and city centre are within walking distance and Yongningmen metro station is very close by. The staff here are very friendly and helpful and they offer taxi booking services, as well as tours and the rooms (private or dorm) are very comfortable and clean. The hostel also has a rooftop bar, great for relaxing after a long day of sightseeing!



**Hantang Inn Hostel:** This is a boutique hostel located inside a traditional residence in Xi’an City Centre, only a 10-minute drive from Xi’an Train Station and very close to the Muslim Quarter and Bell Tower. The staff are very friendly and offer to help with booking tours and taxis and they occasionally organise activities like BBQ’s, dumpling feasts and games nights. The rooms are clean and comfortable and the hostel restaurant serves great food!

**City Center Hostel:** So Young City Center Hostel is located within walking distance of the city's main attractions. It offers comfortable private and dorm rooms at reasonable prices and a great selection of facilities. Staff are very helpful and the hostel has a Sky Bar, where performances are frequently put on by musically talented guests, who are offered free accommodation in return! If you're looking to meet other travellers, or are a talented performer looking to save some money and show off your skills, this is a great choice of accommodation in Xi'an.



## Entertainment

Xi'an is a buzzing city with lots to do both during the day and at night. One of the best things about the city is how it has developed but also maintained its cultural heritage and historical relics and this becomes very apparent at night.

The Bell and Drum Tower should definitely not be missed at night, when they light up to provide a stunning myriad of colour and stand as a beautiful reminder among the modern shopping malls, of the city's fascinating history and culture.



Following a visit here, I would recommend making your way over to the nearby Muslim Quarter, which comes alive at night to provide you with an unforgettable experience. Be prepared to push your way through crowds and take in a range of questionable smells – just remember it's all part of the experience and is so worth it for the cultural experience!

## Bars

**1 + 1 Disco Bar:** This bar is located quite close to the Bell Tower and is a really popular place to dance and meet friends and it also sometimes puts on shows.

**KTV:** KTV (karaoke) is extremely popular in Xi'an, just as it is in many other cities. Two of the best places to go in Xi'an are Real Love (the most popular and upmarket KTV in the city) and Xialudi.

## Shows

**Tang Dynasty Dinner Show:** The Tang Dynasty Theatre Restaurant puts on a cultural show of music and dance to give visitors a taste of what the Tang Dynasty was like. This colourful performance, which features over 100 performers, will no doubt be a highlight of your trip should you choose to see it. The restaurant also offers guests the chance to eat whilst watching the show.



**Fountain Show:** I would highly recommend heading back to the North Square of the Big Wild Goose Pagoda at night to watch the largest music fountain show in Asia. Crowds gather quite soon before the show starts to secure a good position, so make sure you get there early. One of the best places to stand is close to the fence/exit, to get a face on view of the spectacular show, but get there early! Show times change, depending on the time of year, so be sure to [check here](#) before you head over.



### Getting around Xi'an

**Metro:** Xi'an has a metro system, of which 3 lines are in operation. Ticket prices vary depending on the distance travelled and tend to be within the range of 2-6 RMB per single journey. Travellers who have a [Public Transportation Card](#) enjoy 10% off fares. Click on the map to enlarge it.



**Bus:** Like most other cities in China, Xi'an has a comprehensive and convenient bus network. Buses in the city usually begin at 6:00 and run until between 19:30-23:00. Tickets cost 1-2 RMB and change depending on which type of bus you take; regular, or air-conditioned (K).

There are 3 sightseeing and 13 tourist bus lines operating in the city, taking visitors between popular attractions such as the City Wall, Bell Tower and Big Wild Goose Pagoda. It's best to ask at your accommodation where to catch these buses from, but generally you are sure to see them outside of the main attractions.

**Taxi:** Xi'an city taxis tend to be green and can be seen all over the city. They can be flagged down and usually charge by the meter in downtown. Prices of Xi'an taxis can depend on the type of car, but generally speaking the fare should begin on 8.5 RMB and increase by 2 RMB per kilometre.



If you plan to take a taxi further out to the airport or Terracotta Army Museum, you will need to negotiate a flat rate with the taxi driver before agreeing to go with them. As a foreigner, this is likely to be difficult, but you should use these figures as a rough guide on how much it should cost:

**Airport:** 120-150 RMB

**Terracotta Army:** 150 RMB

## Transport

As a popular tourist destination and an important city in China, Xi'an is easily accessible from almost anywhere in China.

**Airport:** The city is served by Xian Xianyang International Airport, which lies approximately 47 kilometres to the northwest of the city centre and is one of China's eight hub-airports. Flights to 119 domestic and international cities can be taken from here and the majority of cities in China can be reached within 2-3 hours by plane.

There are several airport shuttle bus lines that run to and from various points in downtown Xi'an every 10-20 minutes throughout the day. The journey takes approximately 1-1.5 hours and costs between 15-25 RMB one way, depending on where you take the bus from. For details on each bus line, follow this link <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/xian/getting-there.htm>

**Train:** Xi'an has two passenger railway stations; Xian Railway Station and North Railway Station, of which the first is the largest rail hub in western China and a vital station along the Eurasian Continental Bridge. Trains from this station serve most major Chinese cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Chengdu and Guangzhou and the trains to/from Lhasa also stop here.

Xi'an – Chengdu: 12-16 hours

Xi'an – Chongqing: 10-12 hours

Xi'an – Beijing: 5-6 hours (High-speed)

Xi'an – Changsha: 6 hours (High-speed)

Xi'an – Guangzhou: 9 hours (High-speed)

**Long-distance bus:** Nearby Xian Railway Station, is the city's largest transportation hub, which runs buses to around 18 provinces and municipality cities, including Shanghai, Shandong, Henan, Sichuan, Gansu and Tibet. The buses travel extremely long-distances and are therefore often sleeper buses.