

APEC2014

The APEC meeting is bringing leaders from all over the world to Beijing. More importantly, the occasion of the summit is giving many of us a few extra free days. If you are among the lucky ones and want to escape the hustle and bustle of the capital, here are a few tips for how to best enjoy the short break.

Tianjin

You might not have enough time to travel far, but you can explore the whole world in miniature by visiting Tianjin. Italian villas, Bavarian houses, French castles: Tianjin foreign concessions have them all.

Walking through the quietude of the Great Five Avenues you may find yourself pleasantly confused by the display of European architecture. Is this really still China? A guided tour is recommended if you want to discover the history behind these magnificent buildings.

The Haihe river is perfect for a romantic evening cruise. Departing from the Tianjin Eye, the world's only panoramic wheel on a bridge, the cruise will enable you to admire the spectacular colored lights of the city.

Feeling hungry? Tianjin Food Street (Shipin Jie), which is actually a two-story building filled with more than 50 restaurants and food stalls, is said to be the largest food market in China.

**Where to stay:** In Tianjin there are a diverse range of choices for accommodation, from hostels to well-known luxury hotels. In the vicinity of the Food street there is also a Hotel Street.

**Getting there:** By bullet train, of course. Trains depart throughout the day from Beijing South Station. It is a short 35-minute trip to Tianjin Station or Tianjin South Station.



Shanxi

Taking the bullet train, destinations in Shanxi are easily within reach from Beijing, and therefore perfect for a short holiday.

If you still aren't tired of city life, you can explore the capital of Taiyuan. If you want to refresh your mind and body you can opt for a trip to see the Mengshan Buddha. If the weather allows, the city of Pingyao is literally an open air museum. If you're willing to travel further, there are some breathtaking hiking trails in Datong and its surrounding areas.

Taiyuan and Mengshan

The Shanxi Museum in Taiyuan is the ideal place to immerse yourself in Chinese history. The "inverted pyramid" building boasts four stories of Chinese artifacts and is considered by many travelers one of the best museums in the whole country. Better yet, it's free!

Despite becoming industrialized in recent years, Taiyuan, or "City of the Dragon," as it was known during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), retains plenty

of memories of its past, thanks to its temples and grottoes.

If you are more into hiking than studying history, the Mengshan Mountain Buddha is the place to go. Located 20 kilometers southwest of Taiyuan, it is home to China's oldest sitting Buddha statue. Measuring 63 meters in height, it is the world's second largest statue of its kind.

The approximately 1,500-year-old statue was opened for public viewing less than 10 years ago, so it still isn't on the well-beaten tourist track. You can either ascend the mountain leading to the statue on foot, or use an electric cart.

Pingyao

The entire historical town of Pingyao is protected by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The city bears well-preserved testimonies of both Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. This jewel-box walled city is pleasant to explore on foot, being mostly off-limits to cars.

Pingyao is also a treasure trove for local culinary traditions. While there, do not forget to taste the tender Pingyao beef and the Pingyao Wantuo, a snack dating back to the Ming Dynasty. It is made of thick white flour noodle dough, served fried or cold.

Datong

Datong is a cluster of both natural and historical beauty. Setting off from Datong, you can visit the Yungang grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site holding 51,000 Buddhist statues, as well as the peaks of the Hengshan mountains, with their distinctive dramatic forms.

Visiting the Hanging Monastery, you will find yourself greeted by a synthesis of the natural and of the human; all three of China's major belief systems (Buddist, Taoist and Confucian) are represented in the mountain monastery.

The halls of the building are literally suspended 50 meters over the ground, forming a hiking trail that is certainly not for the faint of heart.

**Where to stay:** Taiyuan offers all sorts of accommodation options, from budget hostels to luxury hotels.

If you decide to spend the night in the charming old town of Pingyao, some of its historical mansions have been converted into hotels and guest houses.

Datong too has a number of cheaper accommodations as well as more up-market options.

**Getting there:** By bullet train, it takes only three and a half hours to get from Beijing to Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi.

From Taiyuan Railway Station you can hire a taxi or take a bus to Pingyao. The journey takes approximately 90 minutes.

Mengshan is 20 kilometers from Taiyuan, and easy to reach by car or taxi.

By train, it takes six hours to reach Datong from Beijing.

Hebei

Whether you prefer relaxing on the beaches of Qinhuangdao or exploring the ruins of the Great Wall in Shanhaiguan, Hebei's coast makes for a great

autumn escape.

If you want to feel like an emperor on your vacation, Chengde is your destination of choice.

Qinhuangdao

Qinhuangdao, resting on the shores of the Bohai Sea, is well-known for its sandy beaches.

During summer, you would be advised to avoid the beaches along Beidaihe and Nandaihe on account of

the thronging crowds, but in autumn, you can enjoy the beach in peace.

Moving inland, you can find natural reserves like Lianfengshan Park, where you can observe and hear a wide variety of birds.

Shanhaiguan means literally "the pass of mountain and sea." It is the

point at which the Great Wall meets the expanse of the ocean.

This section of the Wall is called the "Old Dragon's Head," because the fortification once featured a dragon's head, dipping its mouth into the water.

Chengde

Chengde is a mountain city that

was once the holiday retreat of Qing emperors. The site boasts 120 preserved palaces, pavilions and pagodas, built in an harmonious mix of Han, Tibetan and Mongolian styles. The serenity of the Imperial Summer Palace of Mountain Resort and the spirituality of the Putuo Zongcheng Temple – a smaller replica of the Potala Palace in Tibet Autonomous Region – are actually best experienced in autumn, when there are less tourists but the beauty of the forests and grasslands, including the Ten Thousand Tree Garden, are still intact.

The Palace resort was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994 and houses a museum where objects used by emperors and empresses are on display.

If you are looking for even more natural wonders, head to the Bashang Grassland to enjoy a fairy tale atmosphere while watching the sun rising over the Seven-Star Lake.

**Where to stay:** Being a holiday resort area, all needs are catered for in Qinhuangdao.

At the mountain resort in Chengde it is possible to sleep in one of the Mongolian yurts, which were once the exclusive domain of tribal delegations.

**Getting there:** The high speed train is once again a good option to reach Qinhuangdao from Beijing South Station. There is a train that connects Qinhuangdao to Shanhaiguan.

The train ride from Beijing to Chengde takes approximately four hours.

Global Times

SURPRISING HOLIDAYS  
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