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Entertainment

Deng Xiaoping's maxim, 'When you open the window for fresh air, expect some flies to blow in', gauged the tolerable risks of China's open-door policy. But even the prescient Deng can't have imagined that opening up China to Western influences would lead to a nightlife revolution that shows no sign of stopping. On the contrary, Běijīng's strait-laced past seems ever more distant as new bars and clubs open every week. Běijīng might not be as sophisticated as Shànghǎi, or as glam as Hong Kong, but it has a distinct nightlife identity that reflects its residents desire to play as hard as they work.

Traditionally, Běijīng's bars are more laidback and a little grungier than the ones you'll find further south, something that reflects Běijīngers disdain for Shànghǎi's surface flash. That's changing and there are an increasing number of places that wouldn't look out of place in London or New York. The city's clubs are catching up too, thanks to enthusiastic promoters who fly in top-name DJs from around the world to spread the dance music gospel. The live-music scene is more parochial but you can find everything from jazz to punk and, with recording contracts hard to come by in China, Běijīng's best bands are always playing live.

Where Běijīng does lord it over Shànghǎi is in the sheer variety of entertainment options available. This is the cultural capital of China as well as the political one and the place to be if you're interested in seeing contemporary art exhibitions, modern theatre, ballet or classical music concerts. Běijīng is also the movie capital of China, which means you'll find more films showing here than anywhere else. Then there are the traditional pastimes, such as Beijing opera (*jīngjù*) or acrobatics, which are fixtures on the tourist circuit and draw regular crowds.

Thanks to the monthly expat magazines (p227) circulating in town, events listings can easily be found.

PUBS & BARS

Necessity being the mother of invention in Běijīng, as everywhere else, first came *píjiǔ* (beer, c 1903), which gradually dislodged *báijiǔ* (white spirits, the strong stuff) as the nation's favourite tipples. Later came the bars (c late 1980s). It wasn't until sometime in the mid-1990s, however, that the gift-wrapping truly came off Běijīng's tavern scene.

Despite the best efforts of the authorities, Sanlitun in Cháoyáng district remains the hub of Běijīng's bar scene. Although Sanlitun's much-loved South Bar Street disappeared under the wrecking ball in late 2005, and rumours continue to abound as to the future of the area, Sanlitun is still where you'll find many of the most popular expat bars. Sanlitun Lu, known to taxi drivers as Sanlitun Jiǔbā, which runs between Gongrentiyuchang Beilu and Dongzhimenwai Dajie is one long strip of bars. Most are firmly aimed at the tourist trade and should be avoided, but there are some good places in the surrounding streets.

Sanlitun's stranglehold on Běijīng's bar scene is loosening though, as enterprising locals and Westerners look elsewhere for cheaper rents and more innovative locations. Further west in Dōngchéng district, you'll find cool little *hútòng* (alleyway) bars in renovated courtyard houses. Nanluogu Xiang, a *hútòng* which runs between Gulou Dongdajie and Dianmen Dongdajie, is home to a thriving bar scene. Just east of that, the lakes of Qianhai and Houhai (north of Beihai Park) have become a magnet for bars in recent years. Especially popular in the summer, they attract more locals than foreigners these days. There are also an increasing number of bars in Wúdàokǒu in Hǎidiàn district (Běijīng's student heartland), the 798 Art District (p103) and around the Holiday Inn Lido Beijing (p188) in northeast Chaoyang.

Remember this is China, where change is constant, so bars open and close with a bewildering frequency. Above all, don't judge Běijīng's bars by their exterior appearances. There are plenty of swish-looking places that are dire, while many of the finest establishments look less than enticing from the outside.

SOUTH CHAOYANG 朝阳区

LAN Map pp268-9

兰会所

☎ 5109 6012; 4th fl, Twintowers Shopping Mall B-12, Jianguomenwai Dajie; cocktails from ¥60;

🕒 10-3am; 📍 Yonganli

Despite the incongruous location in an anonymous shopping mall opposite the Silk Market, this Philippe Starck-designed bar and restaurant is far from ordinary. On the contrary, the eccentric, eye-catching look of the place, which spreads through a number of rooms, is its main attraction. Paintings dangle from the ceilings, giant mirrors are everywhere and the private dining rooms are done in the style of Mongolian Yurts. The toilets are the most extravagant in Běijīng. None of it comes cheap though. There's live jazz and DJs and a big wine list.

MAGGIES Map p264

美琪

☎ 8562 8142/8143; just by the south gate of Ritan Park; beers ¥30; 🕒 7.30pm-4.30am Sun-Wed, 7.30pm-5am Thu-Sat; 📍 Jianguomen

A Běijīng legend and (in)famous enough for the odd, visiting Hollywood type to pop in, Maggies is not the place for everyone. A somewhat older crowd gathers here, as do many Mongolian ladies. But it is open late and has pool tables, while the spacious bar is a fine spot for people-watching. They serve excellent hotdogs as well.

PALACE VIEW BAR Map pp268-9

观景酒吧

☎ 6513 7788; 10th fl, Grand Hotel Beijing, 35 Dongchang'an Jie; cocktails from ¥60; May-September 5-9pm; 📍 Tiananmen Dong or Wangfujing

For liquid refreshment with a top-notch panorama, the Palace View is in a league of its own. Outdoor tables graced by a string of palm trees make this a wonderful place to escape the city and size up the view overlooking Dongchang'an Jie, the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square.

PRESS CLUB Map pp268-9

记者俱乐部酒吧

☎ 6460 6688; St Regis, 21 Jianguomenwai Dajie; beer ¥35; 🕒 4.30pm-1am; 📍 Jianguomen

If Sanlitun is just too sordid for you, seek out the dignified repose of the wood-

panelled Press Club in the top-drawer St Regis, off Ritan Lu. Its five-star bar has five-star prices, a large-screen sports TV and a lounge with a library-like ambience.

RED MOON BAR Map pp268-9

Dōngfāng Liàng 东方亮

☎ 8518 1234, ext 6366; Grand Hyatt Beijing, 1 Dongchang'an Jie; beer ¥60, cocktails from ¥75; 🕒 11.30am-2.30pm & 5pm-1am; 📍 Wangfujing

Arriving at the Red Moon, customers are met by a svelte female attendant and ushered through a looking-glass door to a gorgeous lounge bar blessed with a huge selection of wines. The lighting is subdued, soporific jazz wafts over the chilled-out clientele, and the evening's live music goes down well with those who are not in a rush to go anywhere else. The overall effect is particularly seductive and the perfect antidote to some of Běijīng's rawer bar spots. Japanese snacks are nearby, and a private function room at the rear is available for more intimate gatherings. There's also a cigar bar.

STONE BOAT BAR/CAFÉ Map p264

Shífāng 石舫酒吧

☎ 6501 9986; inside Ritan Park, southwestern cnr; beers from ¥20, cocktails from ¥30; 🕒 10am-late; 📍 Jianguomen

A lovely bar on a summer evening, this is a place to come to escape the traffic and noise of Sanlitun. There's mellow live music, an outside area where you can sit beneath the trees of Ritan Park and a refreshing ambience that comes with the shock of being so close to nature in Běijīng. During the day, it functions as an equally pleasant café. To get there after Ritan Park closes, go to the south gate on Guanghua Lu and tell the gate-people you're going to the *jiǔbā* (bar) and they'll let you in.

DŌNGCHÉNG & XĪCHÉNG

东城、西城

Bars and cafés have overrun the area around the Shichahai lakes in recent years, especially along Houhai Nanyan, running south of Houhai Lake. Yandai Xijie (Chinese Pipe Cross St) has also been ambushed by a mob of recently opened bars, cafés, arts and crafts shops, and purveyors of trinkets. Both the economics and character of the

throng of upmarket locals and expats who flock here to enjoy properly mixed cocktails around the marble bar or to recline on the fancy sofas. There's a VIP cigar lounge and an outside terrace in the summer.

CHÁOYÁNG 朝阳

The days when Sanlitun Lu was the be-all and end-all of Běijīng nightlife are long gone. These days, the increasingly tacky bars on the main drag attract mostly local drinkers, naive tourists and expat teenagers. It's rather depressing in the evenings, with beggars, DVD hawkers and touts for massage parlours and hookers crowding the pavement. But Nan Sanlitun Lu, the road running south from Sanlitun Lu on the other side of Gongti, is picking up some of the slack with a number of promising places opening up. Otherwise, there's a cluster of good, lively bars in the streets behind the 3.3 Shopping Centre (p166) on the western side of Sanlitun Beijie.

If you've spent the day exploring the galleries in the 798 Art District (p103), there are a few cafés that turn into pleasant spots for a drink in the evening. Or you can head to the nearby Lido area, where there are a few bars worth visiting.

ALFA Map p264

Āěrfǎ 阿尔法

☎ 6413 0086; 5 Xingfu Yicun, opposite north gate of the Workers' Stadium; cocktails from Y35; ☎ 11am-late; Ⓞ Dongsishitiao

With a great outside terrace, complete with cushion-strewn booths to lounge in and a water feature to fall into, as well as an in-house Asian-French restaurant to satisfy late-night hunger pangs, decent cocktails and DJs, this is a deservedly popular spot. The 80s night every other Friday packs them in. Just down from the Xinjiang Red Rose Restaurant (p133).

APERITIVO Map p264

意式餐吧

☎ 6417 7793; 43 Sanlitun Beijie; wine & cocktails from Y35; ☎ 10-2am; Ⓞ Dongsishitiao, then ☎ 701 heading east

A popular bar with the Euro-crowd thanks to the continental café-like vibe, lengthy wine list and small terrace shielded from the street by some artfully-placed shrubs. Inside, it's less appealing but they do bar food as well.

Name has resisted going down the neon sign route beloved by its competitors. Nor are there any aggressive bar touts standing outside vying for your custom. Instead, it's a laid-back joint with pleasant staff where you can sit in a rattan chair and watch the world go by through the large windows.

PASSBY BAR Map p262

Guòkè 过客

☎ 8403 8004; www.gk01.com; 108 Nanluogu Xiang; beer Y20, meals from Y40; ☎ 9-2am; Ⓞ Andingmen

Something of an institution, the Passby attracts a diverse crowd of expats, locals and travellers. The bar operates from a courtyard house which has polished beams, a low ceiling, a mezzanine floor (up the ladder) and a useful and growing library of books that are available for loan; you need to donate three books to join the library. There's also a small outside area that's normally over-subscribed in the summer. The menu offers Italian, Chinese and Western dishes and there's a fair selection of wines to choose from. It's not cheap, but it's a welcoming place where you're likely to bump into other travellers, and they do sell Lonely Planet guides.

REEF BAR Map p262

触礁

☎ 6403 2736; 14-1 Nanluogu Xiang; beers from Y10, cocktails from Y15; ☎ 11-2am; Ⓞ Andingmen A refugee from the old Sanlitun South Bar Street, the Reef Bar has the comforting feel of your local back home. Located in a tiny hutong house, there's a small bar area, a few sofas and armchairs and a wide selection of foreign beers. Run by a cheerful husband-and-wife team, the place attracts their (many) friends, as well as foreigners who live in the area.

RUI FŪ Map p262

瑞府

☎ 6404 2711; 3 Zhang Zizhong Lu; cocktails Y50; ☎ 7pm-late; Ⓞ Yonghegong or Dongsishitiao, then ☎ 106 heading west

Housed in a historic building that's been home to Qing dynasty royalty, warlords and the occupying Japanese army in the 1930s, this is reputedly one of the most haunted spots in all Běijīng. You could probably hear the ghosts screaming, if it wasn't for the resident DJ (on weekends) and the

the effort, but pack a compass. Tucked away behind the rear wall of the Confucius Temple, this cultured courtyard bar is sedately arranged with sofas and set to the chirruping of grasshoppers. Away from even the remotest action, it's well worth a detour. Arriving at night is like reaching out the light at the end of a tunnel: from Yonghegong Dajie follow Guanshuyuan Hutong (官书院胡同) round the corner, take the first right and you will see the Confucius Temple ahead on your left. Follow the road round to your right, take the first left and it's opposite the temple's rear wall (check the bar website for a map).

GUANGFUGUAN GREENHOUSE

Map p262

Guǎngfúguān de Wēnshì 广福的观温室

☎ 6400 3234; 36 Yandai Xijie; ☎ 5pm-late; beers from Y20; Ⓞ Gulou Dajie, then ☎ 60

This laid-back place on the bar-cluttered Yandai Xijie gets full marks for novelty. Formerly the Guangfuguan Taoist Temple (according to the characters carved on the lintel above the arched doorway), the shrine has been requisitioned for the city's exploding bar scene and simply decked out with art posters. The temple's roof guardians are still intact and the presence of religious statues reminds visitors that they drink on sacred turf.

HOUHAI ZOO Map p262

后海卒

☎ 6403 6690; Bldg 2, Qianhai (just off Dianmenwai Dajie); beers Y10, cocktails Y15; ☎ 10-3am; Ⓞ Gulou Dajie

An offshoot of a growing Běijīng bar empire that specialises in serving up super-cheap drinks in friendly, if rowdy, surroundings, this is much the nicest of the chain, thanks to its prime location on the east side of Qianhai Lake. It's loud and gets crowded as the night wears on, but you can't beat the prices.

NO NAME BAR Map p262

Bái Fēng 白枫

☎ 6401 8541; 3 Qianhai Dongyan; beers Y20, cocktails Y40; ☎ noon-2am; Ⓞ Gulou Dajie Perched beside Qianhai Lake, this was the first bar to open in the area and was so successful that it spawned countless imitators around the lake. Thankfully, the No

area have been redefined and there's little to differentiate the competition. But after a turn around the lakes, you can duck into nearby hutong and find some of Běijīng's best watering holes. Alternatively, you can head straight for the humming hutong that is Nanluogu Xiang, where you'll find a nice range of homely bars with roof terraces and views over the surrounding area.

BED BAR Map p262

Chuángbā 床吧

☎ 8400 1554; 17 Zhangwang Hutong, Jiugulou Dajie; beers from Y20, cocktails from Y35; ☎ 4pm-late Mon-Tue, noon-late Wed-Sun; Ⓞ Gulou Dajie One hutong north of Café Sambal (p138) is this gem of a bar, sited in a cleverly converted courtyard house. The bar area leads onto a succession of inner rooms, some with beds, and the overall effect is of a place that's both intimate and spacious. Bed can often be crowded, but there's always a spot where you can hide away. There's a DJ and small dance floor and they do finger food too.

BUDDHA BAR Map p262

Búdá Jiǔbā 不大酒吧

☎ 6617 9488; 2 Yinding Qiao; beer Y15; ☎ 2pm-2am; Ⓞ Gulou Dajie, then ☎ 60

Its name in Chinese is a clever play on the word 'not big' or 'small'. This is no longer the reclusive bar it once was, but is still worth visiting for the South American tunes that dominate the house stereo.

DRUM & BELL Map p262

Gúzhōng Kāfēiguān 钟鼓咖啡馆

☎ 8403 3600; 41 Zhonglouwan Hutong; beers Y20, cocktails from Y35; ☎ noon-2am; Ⓞ Gulou Dajie Located in between the Drum and Bell Towers, from which it takes its name, the main attraction of this bar is its splendid roof terrace. It's a great place to catch some rays during the summer. Downstairs, there are comfy sofas to sink into. There are bar snacks too.

EJE BAR Map p262

Zhóubā 轴吧

☎ 8404 4424; 20 Guoxue Hutong; ☎ 2pm-late Ⓞ Yonghegong

The self-styled (and probably accurate) 'hardest-to-find bar in Běijīng' is well worth

BAR BLU Map p264

蓝吧

☎ 6417 4124; 4th fl, Tongli Studio, Sanlitun Beijie; beers from Y20, cocktails from Y35; ☎ 4pm-2am Sun-Thu, 4pm-4am Fri & Sat; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 heading east

This is one of Běijīng's hotspots, thanks to the roomy layout, its roster of DJs, Western food, Běijīng's most popular pub quiz (Wednesdays at 9pm) and, above all, one of the best roof terraces in the city. It's packed at weekends and pretty busy during the rest of the week.

BEER MANIA Map p264

Màiní Píjūbā 麦霓啤酒吧

☎ 6585 0786; 1st fl, Taiyue Fang, Nan Sanlitun Lu; beers from Y45; ☎ 2pm-late; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 heading east

A shrine to Belgian brews, this is a small, simple establishment where the beer comes before everything. It's guaranteed that you won't have heard of some of the 75 different ales on offer. There's a happy hour from 4pm to 8pm, which is just as well as this place isn't cheap. Belgian-style snacks, waffles and chips are available as well.

BROWNS Map p264

红磨坊

☎ 6591 2717; just off Nan Sanlitun Lu; beers from Y30, cocktails from Y35; ☎ 11-2am Mon, Tue, Thu, Sun, 11-4am Wed, Fri & Sat; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 heading east

A huge, cavernous space that fills up on weekends and Wednesdays, when it's ladies night from 10pm, Browns is the sort of place where it's perfectly acceptable, indeed it's encouraged, to dance on the bar. At busy times, it is industrial drinking UK style, with the punters elbow-to-elbow with each other and conversation near impossible. That doesn't seem to worry the younger crowd who come here.

CENTRO Map p264

Xuànkù 炫酷

☎ 6561 8833, ext 6388; Kerry Center Hotel, 1 Guanghua Lu; cocktails Y75; ☎ 24hr; 📍 Guomao

A favourite with visiting foreign businessmen, older expats and younger ones out to impress, Centro is a swish lounge bar with a black glossy bar, sofas and an eccentric

carpet pattern. The service is impressive and there's live jazz during the week and a DJ on the weekends. The cocktails are good, but they should be for the prices they charge.

CLUB FOOTBALL CENTER

Map p264

万国群星足球俱乐部

☎ 6417 0497; www.wanguoqunxing.com; Red House Hotel, 10b Chunxiu Jie; beer from Y10;

☎ 11-2am (weekends until football matches finish); 📍 Dongzhimen or Dongsishitiao

With its wall-to-wall football memorabilia, live English Premiership action, big screens and yelping punters at the bar, this is the most genuine British pub in town. A must for anyone obsessed with the beautiful game and/or beer (Y10 for a bottle of Tsingdao) and/or pool and darts. There's a solid menu of pub food favourites. This is the focal point of Běijīng's amateur football scene and the place to come if you're looking for a team to join. If you sign up for the free membership, you'll get emails of forthcoming matches and events. It's an adjunct of the Red House Hotel (p186) and reception will direct you there. Or you can enter directly by going up the alley to the side of the Red House.

FACE BAR Map p264

妃思

☎ 6551 6738; 26 Dongcaoyuan, Gongrentiyuchang Nanlu; wine from Y50, cocktails from Y70; ☎ 6pm-late; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then any

🚶 heading east

Stylish and expensive, Face is the Běijīng branch of a successful Shànghǎi bar. Spacious, tastefully decorated and comfortable, it attracts moneyed locals and the expat business crew.

FRANK'S PLACE Map pp258-9

翠欧

☎ 6437 8399; Jiangtai Xilu, west of the Rosedale Hotel; beers from Y20, cocktails from Y40; ☎ 11-2am Reputedly the oldest bar in Běijīng, Frank's has shifted locations many times in the course of its life. Its latest incarnation is in the Lido area in northeast Chaoyang, an area popular with older expats and visiting business types staying in the nearby four-star hotels. Frank's caters to their needs by

providing live sport on many TVs, pints of Guinness and German beer (Y50), English-speaking staff and average pub food. The place has a chameleon-like feel; if the NFL is on then it could be an American bar, if the footie is on you could be in England. There's pool and darts, occasional live music and an outside terrace in the summer.

GOOSE & DUCK PUB

Map p264

É Hé Yā 鹅和鸭

☎ 6538 1691; 1 Bihuju Nanlu; beer Y15; ☎ 24hr; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 431 heading east

Despite the British name, this is a sports bar that gets busy when big games are on. There are also pool tables and darts and a pub food-style menu. Located opposite the west gate of Chaoyang Park, it offers two drinks for the price of one between 4pm and 8pm.

Q BAR Map p264

Q吧

☎ 6595 9239; top fl Eastern Inn Hotel, Nan Sanlitun Lu; cocktails from Y35; ☎ 6pm-2am;

📍 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 heading east

Possibly the most amenable cocktail lounge in the city, Q Bar benefits from a laid-back atmosphere, a solid music selection and some of the best-mixed drinks available in Běijīng. There's a long bar to perch at, sofas to sink into, or you can head to the large roof terrace when the weather's right.

There's a big 'Q' hanging off the side of the Eastern Inn Hotel to guide you there.

TREE Map p264

隐藏的树

☎ 6415 1954; 43 Sanlitun Beijie; beers from Y20; ☎ 11am-late Mon-Sat, 1pm-late Sun;

📍 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 heading east Another refugee from the old Sanlitun South Bar Street, where it was known as the Hidden Tree, the Tree is a long-term favourite of expats, locals and tourists alike. There's a fine selection of Belgian beers (from Y40), decent pizzas cooked in a wood-fired oven (from Y45) and low-key live music from a Filipino band. It gets busy, but has a far less manic vibe than some of the surrounding bars. It's off the courtyard of the You Yi Youth Hostel (p185).

HǎIDIÀN 海淀

LUSH Map p271

LUSH 酒吧

☎ 8286 3566; 2nd fl, Bldg 1, Huaqing Jiayuan, Chengfu Lu; beers from Y15, cocktails from Y25;

☎ 24hr; 📍 Wudaokou

For the hordes of students in Wǔdàokǒu, both foreign and local, all roads lead to Lush. During the day, it functions as a café with a Western menu, including filling sandwiches (from Y25). After dark, it becomes the epicentre of nightlife in the area. Every evening offers something different, whether it's movie screenings,

KARAOKE CRAZY

Western-style bars and clubs might be proliferating in China's big cities but karaoke remains the number one leisure pastime on the mainland. Known by the acronym 'KTV', there are over 100,000 karaoke joints in China and they range from seedy hole-in-the-wall operations that are often fronts for prostitution, to giant chains where the prices are as high as some of the notes you'll hit while singing.

For the Chinese, karaoke is where you go to hang out with your friends, or to unwind with your workmates after a hard week in the office. Westerners who aren't used to singing in public can find the experience nerve-wracking. But forget your inhibitions (alcohol comes in handy for that) and do as the locals do and you'll be surprised how quickly karaoke becomes addictive.

Although true karaoke fans will want to try crooning the latest mando-pop hits, most places have a selection of English-language songs. Some of the tunes might be a bit ancient, but you'll always find something you can sing. At the places listed below, drinks and snacks are available and the staff will happily help you out if you need backing vocals to add a semblance of credibility to your singing. It's always advisable to book ahead at weekends.

Melody (Map p264; ☎ 6551 0808; A-77 Chaoyangmenwai Dajie, Cháoyáng; small room before 8pm per hr Y35, after 8pm per hr Y109; ☎ 8-2am)

Partyworld (Map p264; ☎ 6588 3333; Fanli Building, 22 Chaowai Shichang Jie, Cháoyáng; rooms from Y49; ☎ 7-2am)

live music, a pub quiz, DJs and an open-mic night for aspiring poets and singers. There's a daily happy hour, where it's two drinks for the price of one, from 8pm to 10pm.

CLUBBING

Běijīng's clubs might not be cutting edge in comparison to Berlin or London, but they're increasingly busy as more and more locals tune into the dance music lifestyle. Popularity though, has brought a cookie-cutter approach with many places, especially those in the Sanlitun area, resembling each other. But thanks to the international DJs who fly in and out of Běijīng on an almost weekly basis, there's a fair variety in the sounds you can hear. The capital's clubs are also a good place to observe the cultural divide between East and West. Many Chinese, especially the thirtysomething businessman crowd, visit nightclubs to knock back expensive whisky with green tea (it tastes better than it sounds) and to play dice games, while refusing to set foot on the dance floor. Consequently, most dancing areas in Běijīng clubs are smaller than the ones you'll find in the West. Bear in mind that if a top foreign DJ is playing, you'll need to get tickets in advance and the entrance fee will be far higher than normal.

BANANA Map pp268-9

Bānà 吧那那

☎ 6526 3939; SciTech Hotel, 22 Jianguomenwai Dajie; Y20-30; 🕒 8.30pm-4am Sun-Thu, 8.30pm-5am Fri & Sat; 📍 Jianguomen or Yonganli It's been around a while but Banana continues to pack them in, thanks to its no-nonsense mix of happy house and other attractions, like dancers in cages, fire-eaters and bongo players. The upstairs Spicy Lounge offers a more eclectic mix of sounds, depending who is on the decks.

CARGO Map p264

咖钩

☎ 6551 6898/78; 6 Gongrentiyuchang Xilu; Y40; 🕒 8pm-late; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then any heading east

The best of the cluster of clubs located in the strip just south of the west gate of the Workers' Stadium, Cargo consistently flies

in some of the biggest names in dance music to play to a more music-savvy crowd than you get in most of Běijīng's clubs.

DESTINATION Map p264

Mùdìdì 目的地

☎ 6551 5138; 7 Gongrentiyuchang Xilu; Y30; 🕒 6pm-late; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then any heading east

☎ heading east

Běijīng's premier gay and lesbian club is a little more spartan in design than most of the city's other clubs, but that doesn't seem to worry its many fans who flock there at the weekends.

LATINOS Map p264

拉提诺

☎ 6409 6997; A12 Historical Complex, Nanxincang; 🕒 9pm-late; 📍 Dongsishitiao

Salsa has taken off in a big way in Běijīng in the last couple of years and this is one of the busiest clubs in the city. There's a big dance floor to show off your moves, the house band is from South America and guest DJs spin the latest Latin sounds.

MIX Map p264

Mìkèsī 梅克斯俱乐部

☎ 6530 2889; inside the Workers' Stadium north gate; Y40; 🕒 7.30pm-5am; 📍 Dongsishitiao Hip-hop and R&B is what draws the crowd who come here and they're some of the most enthusiastic dancers in the city. Opposite Vics (below).

PROPAGANDA Map p271

五星

☎ 8286 3679; east gate, Huaqing Jiayuan; 🕒 8pm-4am; 📍 Wudaokou

Wúdaokǒu's student crew are drawn like moths to this unpretentious club, thanks to cheap drinks, party hip-hop sounds and suitably grungy surroundings.

VICS Map p264

Wēikèsī 威克斯

☎ 6593 6215; inside the Workers' Stadium north gate; Y40 Fri, Y50 Sat; 🕒 7pm-late; 📍 Dongsishitiao

Vics is not the most sophisticated nightclub in the world but it remains a favourite with the younger crowd. The music is mostly standard R&B and hip-hop, but the

sounds are not the only reason people come here. There's an infamous ladies night on Wednesdays (Y30 and free drinks for women before midnight) and weekends see it rammed with the footloose and fancy free. If you can't score here, you never will.

WORLD OF SUZIE WONG

Map p264

Sūxī Huáng 苏西黄

☎ 6593 6049; 1a Nongzhanguan Lu, west gate Chaoyang Park; Y50; 🕒 7pm-3.30am; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then heading east

Opium-den chic with a 21st-century twist, which means traditional wooden beds to recline on while sipping fancy cocktails, decent DJs and models galore, Suzie Wong's is a Běijīng institution. While it's not as hip or exclusive as it once was, it's still pretty glamorous for Běijīng and it's always busy. You have to get there early if you want to claim a bed or a space on the small roof terrace (during the summer), or even just to get in sometimes.

BEIJING OPERA & TRADITIONAL CHINESE MUSIC

Beijing opera, or Peking opera as it is still sometimes referred to, is one of those aspects of Chinese cultural life that can seem impenetrable to foreigners. Everything about it, from the costumes to the singing style and, of course, the language, conspires to maintain its mystique. But if you've only ever seen it televised, then taking in a live performance will help you understand it far better. Bear in mind that the plot lines are simple and not dissimilar to Shakespearean tragedy, including elements of low comic relief, while the long performances aren't meant to be viewed in stunned silence. The operas have natural highs and lows, which you'll be able to gauge from the reaction of your fellow audience members. Let them be your guide. Above all, remember Beijing opera is as much a visual experience as it is a musical one (for more details on Beijing opera, see p35). You can also tune into CCTV 11, which is solely devoted to traditional opera.

CHANG'AN GRAND THEATRE

Map pp268-9

Chángān Dàjùchǎng 长安大剧场

☎ 6510 1309; Chang'an Bldg, 7 Jianguomennei Dajie; tickets Y50-380; 🕒 performances 7.30pm; 📍 Jianguomen

This theatre offers a genuine experience, and the erudite audience chatters knowledgeably among themselves during weekend matinee classics and evening performances.

HUGUANG GUILD HALL Map pp266-7

Húguāng Huìguǎn 湖广会馆

☎ 6351 8284; 3 Hufangqiao Lu; tickets Y150-580; 🕒 performances 7.30pm; 📍 Hepingmen, then heading east

Similarly decorated to the Zhengyici Theatre (p148), with balconies surrounding the canopied stage, this theatre dates back to 1807. It is the site where the Kuomintang, led by Dr Sun Yat-sen, was established in 1912. The interior is magnificent, coloured in red, green and gold, and decked out with tables and a stone floor. There's also a very small opera museum (Y10) opposite the theatre displaying operatic scores, old catalogues and other paraphernalia. There are also colour illustrations of the *liǎnpǔ* (types of Beijing opera facial makeup) – examples include the *hóu liǎnpǔ* (monkey face) and the *chǒujué liǎnpǔ* (clown face). Sadly, there are few English captions.

LAO SHE TEAHOUSE Map pp268-9

Lǎo Shě Cháguǎn 老舍茶馆

☎ 6303 6830, 6304 6334; www.laosheteahouse.com; 3rd fl, 3 Qianmen Xidajie; evening tickets Y40-280; 🕒 7.30pm; 📍 Hepingmen or Qianmen Lao She Teahouse (west of the large KFC on Qianmen Xidajie) has nightly shows, mostly in Chinese. The performances here are a combination of Beijing opera, cross-talk and acrobatics. Prices depend on the type of show and where you sit. Enter the teahouse past statues of Weituo, Sakyamuni and Guanyin on your left and an effigy of President Bush on your right. There are several halls: in the small hall there is folk music (2.30pm to 5pm Monday to Friday), and in the large hall there are folk music and tea ceremony performances (3pm to 4.30pm Friday), theatrical performances (2pm to 4.30pm Wednesday and Friday),

and matinee Beijing opera performances (3pm to 4.30pm Sunday). Evening performances of Beijing opera, folk art and music, acrobatics and magic (7.50pm to 9.20pm) are the most popular. Phone ahead or check online for the schedule. The teahouse is named after the celebrated Běijīng writer Lao She, who has a museum dedicated to him (p93). Major credit cards accepted.

LIYUAN THEATRE Map pp266-7

Liyuán Jùchǎng 梨园剧场

☎ 6301 6688, ext 8860; Qianmen Jianguo Hotel, 175 Yong'an Lu; tickets Y40-280; 🎫 martial arts 12.30pm, opera 7.30pm; 🕒 Hepingmen, then 🚶 25 This tourist theatre, across the lobby of the Qianmen Jianguo Hotel (p187) and past the mannequins outside, has regular performances for Beijing opera greenhorns, performed over servings of Peking duck and other local delicacies. The setting isn't traditional and it resembles a cinema auditorium (the stage façade is the only authentic touch), but there are also matinee shows of *gōngfū* (kung fu) performed by Shaolin monks (see p152).

SANWEI BOOKSTORE Map pp266-7

Sānwèi Shūwū 三味书屋

☎ 6601 3204; 60 Fuxingmennei Dajie; cover charge Y30; 🎫 performances 8pm; 🕒 Xidan Opposite the Minzu Hotel, this place has a small bookshop on the ground floor and a teahouse on the second. It features music with traditional Chinese instruments on Saturday night. On other evenings, you can hear live jazz here.

ZHENGYICI THEATRE Map pp266-7

Zhèngyíci Jùchǎng 正乙祠剧场

☎ 8315 1649; 220 Xiheyuan Dajie; Y380-680; 🎫 performances 7.30pm Thu, Fri & Sat; 🕒 Hepingmen

Originally an ancient temple, this ornately decorated building is the oldest wooden theatre in the country and the best place in the city to experience Beijing opera and other operatic disciplines like *Kunqu*. The theatre was restored by a private businessman with an interest in reviving the dying art, and it was reopened in 1995 after a long period of disrepair. Opera can be appreciated over a dinner of Peking duck (Y200 for a full meal).

LIVE MUSIC ROCK, POP, JAZZ, BLUES & COUNTRY

There might be an instinctive Chinese fondness for the manufactured, syrupy sound of Canto pop or Taiwanese boy bands, but some of Běijīng's residents have grittier tastes that require music with more bite and imagination. Having discovered Western rock music in the early '80s via the cassette tapes of foreign students, Běijīngers have always been at the forefront of the Chinese rock scene. Now there are all sorts of acts plugging away on an admittedly limited circuit. The best bands land record contracts with Japanese or Taiwanese labels, or obscure US ones, but most survive by endless gigging. Běijīng though, is still a backwater when it comes to international pop and rock acts, few of whom make it here.

You can find musical events of varying quality lifting Běijīng's roofs every night of the week, and there should be something up your street, whether it be rock, indie, metal, punk, folk or jazz. Check the expat mags (p227) for full listings of who's playing.

2 KOLEGAS Map pp258-9

两个好朋友

☎ 8196 4820; 21 Liangmaqiao Lu (inside the drive-in movie park); Y20 or sometimes free; 🎫 8pm-2am Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun; 🕒 Dongzhimen, then 🚶 909; or 🕒 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 Tucked away to the side of Běijīng's drive-in cinema, this is a great little venue that hosts ska and reggae DJs, as well as local punkers and a fair proportion of out-of-town acts. In the summer, you can take a break from the aural assault by sitting outside with a beer, while munching *yángróu chuàn* (skewers of lamb).

CD JAZZ CAFÉ Map p264

Sēndi Jùeshì Jùlèbù 森帝爵士

☎ 6506 8288; south of the main gate of the Agricultural Exhibition Centre, Dongsanhuan Beilu; 🎫 4pm-2am; 🕒 Dongsishitiao, then 🚶 701 heading east

A mainstay on the Běijīng jazz scene, this place has regular live performances on Fridays and Saturdays. No cover charge, but the drinks are expensive.

D-22

Map p271

D-22 酒吧

☎ 6265 3177; 13 Chengfu Lu; entrance from Y20; 🎫 6pm-2am Tue-Sun; 🕒 Wudaokou

A new addition to Běijīng's live music venues, D-22 is a friendly, intimate place dedicated to showcasing the more experimental Běijīng bands and the odd, visiting foreign act. It also shows films on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

EAST SHORE JAZZ CAFÉ

Map p262

Dōngàn Káfei 东岸咖啡

☎ 8403 2131; 2nd fl, 2 Qianhai Nanyanlu, just off Dianmenwai Dajie; 🎫 11-2am; 🕒 Gulou Dajie Cui Jian's saxophonist, whose quartet play here, opened this chilled venue by Qianhai Lake. It's a place to hear the best local jazz bands, with live performances from Thursdays to Sundays, in a more authentic atmosphere than the CD Jazz Café. Expect lengthy jam sessions in the wee hours of the morning. There's no cover charge and the drinks are reasonably priced.

JIANGJINJIU

Map p262

Jiāngjīn Jiǔbā 疆进酒吧

☎ 8405 0124; 2 Zhongku Hutong; 🎫 11-2am; 🕒 Gulou Dajie

Situated between the Drum and Bell Towers, this is a friendly café/bar that puts on lots of folk and ethnic minority, particularly Uighur, bands. No cover charge.

MAO LIVEHOUSE

Map p262

猫

☎ 6402 5080; 111 Gulou Dongdajie; from Y30; 🎫 8pm-late; 🕒 Andingmen

Běijīng's newest live venue is quickly establishing itself as the unofficial HQ of the local music scene. Moody muso types can be found boasting or bemoaning their luck over their Yanjing beers (Y10) in the separate bar, while the actual concert area is big enough to give the gigs a sense of occasion, but still small enough to feel intimate. The décor is functional and the sound tight. All sorts of bands, including some from overseas, play here. At the time of writing, the venue was only open for concerts.

NAMELESS HIGHLAND Map pp258-9

Wú míng Gāodì Jiǔbā 无名高地酒吧

☎ 6489 1613; Bldg 14, Anhuili Area 1, Yayuncun; Y30 or sometimes free; 🎫 7pm-2am; 🕒 Datun Line 5, under construction

All sorts of groups, from folk to death metal via Brit-pop clones and punk acts, take to the stage here. It's a rare night when they don't have a band on. It's one of Běijīng's larger, better-organised venues. You'll need to take a taxi to get here.

STAR LIVE Map p262

Xīngguāng Xiànrǎng 星光现场

☎ 6425 5166; 79 Heping Xijie (inside 3rd fl, Tango nightclub); from Y40; 🎫 6.30pm-late; 🕒 Yonghegong

It's a great space but eccentric management make this place a bit hit and miss. But it's the only venue in Běijīng where you'll see visiting international bands who aren't big enough to play the stadium circuit.

WHAT? BAR Map p262

Shénme? Jiǔbā 什么酒吧

☎ 133 4112 2757; 72 Beichang Jie; Y25 (includes free beer); 🎫 2pm-late; 🕒 Tiananmen Xi, then 🚶 5 heading north

If you like to get up close and personal with the bands you go and see, then this is the place for you. That doesn't mean it's groupie heaven here; rather it's just that this venue is so small that the audience might as well be on stage with the musicians. It's a good place to hear up-and-coming local talent. Just north of the west gate of the Forbidden City.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

As the nation's cultural centre, Běijīng has several venues around town where the city's increasingly cosmopolitan residents can satisfy their highbrow needs. The annual 30-day Beijing Music Festival takes place between October and November, and is an excellent time to catch international and homegrown classical music. By the time you read this the new National Grand Theater (Map pp268-9) to the west of Tiananmen Square, which will also host classical music, should be completed. Again, refer to the expat listings mags (p227) for details of what's on and what's coming up.

BEIJING CONCERT HALL

Map pp266-7

Běijīng Yīnyuè Tīng 北京音乐厅

☎ 6605 7006/5812; 1 Beixinhua Jie; Y60-580;

🎫 performances 7.30pm; 📍 Tiananmen Xi or Xidan

The 2000-seat Beijing Concert Hall showcases performances of classical Chinese music as well as international repertoires of Western classical music.

CENTURY THEATRE Map p264

世纪剧院

☎ 6466 4805; 40 Liangmaqiao Lu; Y80-880;

🎫 7.30pm; 📍 Dongshishitiao, then 🚶 701

Musical presentations here are perhaps smaller in scale than those at other venues – they feature smaller orchestras and solo performances where the violin, cello and flute get centre stage. Ballet performances are also presented.

FORBIDDEN CITY CONCERT HALL

Map pp268-9

Zhōngshān Gōngyuán Yīnyuè Tǎng

中山公园音乐堂

☎ 6559 8285; Zhongshan Park; Y50-680;

🎫 performances 7.30pm; 📍 Tiananmen Xi

Located on the eastern side of Zhongshan Park, this is the most central venue for performances of classical and traditional Chinese music. Tickets can be purchased at the concert hall box office inside the Friendship Store (p162).

POLY PLAZA INTERNATIONAL

THEATRE Map p264

Bǎoli Dàshà Guójià Jùyuán 保利大厦国际剧院

☎ 6500 1188, ext 5126; 14 Dongzhimen

Nandajie; Y180-880; 🎫 performances 7.30pm;

📍 Dongshishitiao

Located in the Poly Plaza right by Dongshishitiao subway station, this venue hosts a wide range of performances including ballet, classical music, opera and traditional Chinese folk music.

THEATREGong Li and Zhang Ziyi, big names of the big screen, might have learned their art at the Central Academy of Drama (Zhōngyāng Xìjù Xuéyuàn), but theatre (*huàjù*) never commanded much of a following in China.Spoken drama appeared in China only in the 20th century, but never won the hearts of the masses. The great 20th-century playwright Cao Yu penned tragic family tableaux, such as the stifling *Thunderstorm* and *Daybreak*. Lao She is also famed for his ironic social commentary and observations of Běijīng life, with *Teahouse* being his most famous play.

Much of the last century saw drama stubbing its toe on unexpected political corners, such as the Cultural Revolution. As a literary art, creative drama is still unable to express itself fully and remains sadly sidelined. Plays do, however, make it to the stage, so if you want to know what's waiting in the wings in Běijīng, try some of the venues below. The expat listings mags (p227) have up-to-date details of what's playing.

CAPITAL THEATRE Map p262

Shǒudū Jùyuán 首都剧场

☎ 6524 9847/6512; 22 Wangfujing Dajie; Y80-600;

🎫 performances 7.30pm Tue-Sun; 📍 Wangfujing

Located in the heart of the city on Wangfujing Dajie, this central theatre has regular performances of contemporary Chinese productions and is home to a number of theatre companies, including the People's Art Experimental Theatre. Classic plays in the Chinese language often feature.

CENTRAL ACADEMY OF DRAMA

THEATRE Map p262

Zhōngyāng Xìjù Xuéyuàn Jùchǎng

中央戏剧学院剧场

☎ 8404 6174; Y60-280; 🎫 7.30pm; 39 Dongmian-

hua Hutong; 📍 Andingmen

Situating just off Nanluogu Xiang, China's future movie stars train at this academy and can be seen here in regular performances of Chinese-language plays. Bear in mind the actors, and sometimes the directors, are students, so the productions can be hit-or-miss.

CHINA PUPPET THEATRE

Map pp258-9

Zhōngguó Mùóu Jùyuán 中国木偶剧院

☎ 6425 4847; 1A Anhua Xili, Beisanhuan Zhonglu;

Y50-100; 🎫 performances 10.30am & 2pm

📍 Andingmen or Gulou Dajie

This popular theatre has regular events, including shadow play, puppetry, music

and dance. A good place to take kids if they're rebelling over the prospect of more sightseeing.

CINEMASMovies, both domestic and foreign, are hugely popular in China, as you'd expect from the country with the third-largest film industry in the world. However, a severe shortage of cinemas (*diànyǐngyuàn*), just 1300 or so for a population of 1.3 billion, stringent censorship and a strict quota on the number of foreign films that can be shown each year means the country has never had a big cinema-going culture. In Běijīng, the combination of high ticket prices and rampant DVD piracy ensures that going to the movies is a middle-class pursuit.Chinese-language films almost never have subtitles when shown in cinemas. Before you go and see a Western movie, be sure to check whether it is screened with subtitles (*zìmù*) or has been dubbed (*pèiyīn*) into Chinese. There are a number of alternative venues in Běijīng that show Chinese movies with English subtitles, as well as Western arthouse and classic movies. They're often the best places to see films. Various foreign cultural centres and embassies also have screenings of their native cinema. See the expat mags (p227) for schedules.

Apart from that, you can offer up futile prayers for a good movie to be shown on CCTV, or you can tune into your hotel film channels. But if you have a laptop with you, or a DVD player in your hotel room, then you won't have to travel far to find someone willing to sell you something to play on it.

CHERRY LANE THEATRE

Map pp258-9

北京电影发行公司

☎ 139 0113 4745; www.cherrylanemovies.com

.cn; inside Kent Centre, 29 Liangmaqiao Lu,

Anjialou; Y50; 📍 Dongzhimen, then 🚶 909 or

📍 Dongshishitiao, then 🚶 701

Located in a Peking opera photo studio, Cherry Lane provides a valuable service in screening contemporary Chinese films with English subtitles, many of which were never shown in domestic cinemas because

the censors didn't like them. However, the screen here has seen better days and sometimes they put on a DVD of the movie rather than showing a 35mm print. Screenings take place every Friday and Saturday at 8pm.

EAST GATE CINEMA

Map p264

东环影城

☎ 6418 5931; Bldg B, basement East Gate Plaza,

Dongzhong Jie; Y60 (half price before noon);

📍 Dongshishitiao

Shows the latest big releases, both domestic and foreign, and is the only cinema in town that offers double seats (from Y140).

STAR CITY

Map pp268-9

新世纪影城

☎ 8518 5399; www.xfilmcity.com; shop BB65,

basement, Oriental Plaza, 1 Dongchang'an Jie;

Y60-80; 📍 Wangfujing

This six-screen cinema is the best place to go and see Western movies that get released in China because they always have one screening a day with the original, un-dubbed print (but that doesn't mean it hasn't been cut by the scissor-happy Chinese censors). It's a plush multiplex that feels no different from its equivalents in the West.

SUNDONGAN CINEMA CITY

Map p262

新东安影城

☎ 6528 1988; 5th fl, Sundongan Plaza, Wangfujing

Dajie; Y30 for Chinese movies, Y40-50 for foreign

films (half price on Tuesdays); 📍 Wangfujing

Don't expect a huge selection, but this is one of Běijīng's most conveniently located cinemas and there's usually a Hollywood feature showing.

Other cinemas around town worth trying your luck at include the Dahua Cinema (Dàhuá Diànyǐngyuàn; Map p262; ☎ 6525 0343; 82 Dongdan Beidajie, Dōngchéng); Drive-in Cinema (Map pp258-9; ☎ 6431 9595; 100 Dalianmaqiao; only open May to September); UME International Cineplex (Map p271; ☎ 8211 5566; 44 Kexueyuan Nanlu, Hǎidiàn) and Xinjiekou Cinema (Map pp260-1; ☎ 6225 2767; 69 Xizhimennei Dajie, Xichéng).

ACROBATICS & MARTIAL ARTS

Two thousand years old, Chinese acrobatics is one of the best deals in town. Most of today's acrobatic repertoire originates from the works of Zhang Heng (AD 25–120), who is credited with creating acts including balancing on a high pole, jumping through hoops, swallowing knives and spitting fire. Wuqiao County in Héběi is said to be the original bastion of Chinese acrobatics. As well as the following listings, acrobatic performances are also held at the **Dongyue Temple** (p94).

The monks of Shaolin from Songshan in Hénán province have gained an international reputation for their legendary fighting skills honed from a recipe of physical deprivation, spiritual illumination, patience and ironclad willpower. They can be seen in action at the **Liyuan Theatre** (p148).

See p154 for details on participating in martial arts classes.

CHAOYANG THEATRE Map p264

Cháoyáng Jùchǎng 朝阳剧场

☎ 6507 2421; 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu; Y180-380;

🕒 performances 5.15pm, 7.30pm; 🎫 Chaoyangmen

Probably the most accessible place for foreign visitors and often bookable through your hotel, this theatre is the venue for visiting acrobatic troupes filling the stage with plate-spinning and hoop-jumping.

TIANQIAO ACROBATICS THEATRE

Map pp268-9

万圣剧场

☎ 6303 7449; 95 Tianqiao Shichang Lu; Y100-200;

🕒 performances 7.15pm; 🎫 Qianmen, then 🎫 819

West of the Temple of Heaven Park, this 100-year-old theatre offers one of Běijīng's best acrobatic displays performed by the Beijing Acrobatic Troupe. Less touristy than the other venues, the high-wire display here is awesome. The entrance is down the eastern side of the building.

UNIVERSAL THEATRE (HEAVEN & EARTH THEATRE) Map p264

Tiāndì Jùchǎng 天地剧场

☎ 6416 0757, 6416 9893; 10 Dongzhimen

Nandajie; Y100-300; 🕒 performances 7.15pm;

🎫 Dongsishitiao

Around 100m north of Poly Plaza, young performers from the China National Acrobatic Troupe perform their mind-bending, joint-popping contortions. This is a favourite with tour groups, so book ahead. Tickets are pricier the further from the stage you sit. Look for the awful white tower that looks like it should be in an airport – that's where you buy your tickets (credit cards not accepted).

SPORTS, HEALTH & FITNESS

It's worth getting in touch with your embassy's cultural section, which should have useful information about teams, sports clubs, health centres and other health-and-fitness-related questions you might have.

WATCHING SPORT

The impressive National Stadium, known locally as the 'Bird's Nest', thanks to its intricate design of interlocking steel girders, will be the main venue for all future national and international athletics championships. The **Workers' Stadium** (Gōnggrén Tìyùguǎn; Map p264) in the Sanlitun area, is another venue, while athletics events are also held at the Asian Games Village, just within the Fourth Ring Rd in the north of town. With China determined to top the medals table at the 2008 Olympics, more and more emphasis is being put on athletics.

The Chinese are avid football (*zúqiú*) fans, but most prefer to watch foreign leagues like the English Premiership, Italy's *Serie A* and Spain's *La Liga*, rather than their own China Super League. A succession of match-fixing scandals, dubious refereeing and the generally poor quality of the football means that only a few thousand diehard fans turn out to watch Běijīng Guo'an, the capital's team, play their home matches at the Workers' Stadium. The national team has failed to impress in recent years too, failing to qualify for the 2006 World Cup.

Basketball is more and more popular, with China's leading player, the giant Yao Ming, who plays for the Houston Rockets in the NBA, a massive star. The Chinese league, the CBA, is televised and a number of rising young players are being tipped for future success in the NBA. The local team, the Bei-

jing Ducks, play in the far western suburbs at the **Shougang Basketball Centre** (☎ 8829 6158, 159 Fushi Lu, Shijingshan District).

HEALTH & FITNESS

Ballet

The **Western Ballet School** (Map p264; ☎ 6507 1426; 1st fl, Kempinski Hotel, 50 Liangmaqiao Lu) in Cháoyáng is a popular ballet school offering three-month courses (Y900) for children aged between four and 14.

Fencing

Swashbucklers can find a place in Běijīng to practise their epee, sabre and foil strokes. The **Fenxing Fencing Club** (Map pp258-9; ☎ 6492 9041; Olympic Sports Center, inside the Asian Games Complex, 1 Anding Lu, Yayuncun, Cháoyáng) provides equipment and tuition at a range of levels. Classes are held seven days a week from 10am.

Fitness Clubs

CHINA WORLD FITNESS CENTRE

Map pp268-9

中国大饭店健身中心

☎ 6505 2266, ext 33; 1 Jianguomenwai Dajie; per day Y200; 🕒 6am-11pm; 🎫 Guomao

A 20m pool and squash courts, as well as a steam-bath, Jacuzzi and the usual classes are on offer here. It's in the same complex as the China World Hotel (p182).

EVOLUTION FITNESS CENTRE

Map pp268-9

进步健身中心

☎ 6567 0266; Jianguomenwai Dajie & Dongsanhuan Zhonglu; 🕒 6.30am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun; per day Y100; 🎫 Guomao

Exercise on your own or join a class for aerobics, *tàijiquǎn* (taichi), hip-hop dancing, kickboxing, Latin dancing, yoga or aquaerobics. Personal training programs, fitness consultation and sports therapy are also available, and there's a 25m five-lane pool.

Football

An ever-increasing number of expat 11-a-side and 5-a-side teams play in Běijīng in a variety of leagues. If you are inter-

ested in joining a team or watching a team play, get in touch with the **Club Football Center** (p144), where you can meet like-minded folk over a pint of beer who should be able to steer you in the right direction. Games are played all over the city.

It is also possible to catch the big foreign domestic leagues from Europe on either CCTV 5 or BTV 6 on your hotel TV. Alternatively, try Běijīng sports bars like the **Club Football Center** (p144), **Goose & Duck Pub** (p145) or **Frank's Place** (p144) for live matches on ESPN or Star Sports. Phone ahead to find out what's on.

Golf

The game of golf (*gāoěrfúqiú*) enjoys high prestige in China and is becoming such a part of business life that some universities are making golf lessons compulsory for their business students. Běijīng's freezing winters though, don't lend themselves to a life on the links. Nor is it cheap to get on a course. In fact, you can pick up a basic set of clubs in one of Běijīng's many golfing stores for not much more than a day's green fees. Such is the sport's growing popularity that it's advisable to book ahead.

BEIJING GOLF CLUB

Map pp258-9

Běijīng Gāoěrfúqiú Jùlèbù

北京高尔夫球俱乐部

☎ 8947 0245; Shunyi; green fees Mon-Fri Y800, Sat & Sun Y1200 🕒 7.30am-dusk

The Beijing Golf Club's 36-hole golf course is northeast of town on the eastern bank of Chaobai River (Chaobai He).

BEIJING INTERNATIONAL GOLF CLUB

Map pp258-9

Běijīng Guójī Gāoěrfúqiú Jùlèbù

北京国际高尔夫球俱乐部

☎ 6076 2288; Changping; green fees Mon-Fri Y800, Sat & Sun & public holidays Y1400; 🕒 7am-7pm

This Japanese-designed 18-hole course is 35km north of town, close to the Ming Tombs (p197) and north of Shisanling Reservoir. Hitting that little ball around is not cheap, but the course is in top condition and the scenery is spectacular. You can rent a set of golf clubs and shoes for an additional fee. You will also have to pay the compulsory caddy fee of Y200.

Hiking & Biking

Several groups in Běijīng organise hiking and biking expeditions to villages and temples outside town. Needless to say, this can be an excellent way for visitors to get out and see sights that are more remote and difficult to reach. **Beijing Hikers** (☎ 139 1002 5516; www.bjhikers.com) organises regular hikes (Y200 per person) and is open to everyone, including children (Y150 for under 12s). The price includes round-trip transport, snacks and drinks. **Mountain Bikers of Beijing** (themob@404.com.au) coordinate one-day, 40km to 120km weekend mountain bike rides at locations outside town.

Ice Skating

Běijīng's winter chill clamps the city's lakes in sheets of ice – but the usual warnings apply about safety and ice thickness for those who want to skate (*liū bīng*). Popular outdoor venues include the lake in Beihai Park and the Shichahai lakes southwest of the Drum Tower, where local entrepreneurs will rent you skates, as well as the lakes on the campuses of Peking and Tsinghua Universities. Do not try skating on the moat around the Forbidden City.

LE COOL ICE RINK Map pp268-9

国贸溜冰场
☎ 6505 5776; basement 2, China World Shopping Mall, 1 Jianguomenwai Dajie; per 90 min Y30-50;
🕒 10am-10pm; 📍 Guomao
This is the most accessible indoor ice rink in town. Located in the basement of the China World Shopping Mall, it's easy to reach and perfect for kids. The cost varies depending on the time of day you skate; skate hire is included.

Martial Arts

Běijīng is an excellent place to stretch a leg. Legions of elderly folk start the day with a bout of *tàijíquán*, and you'll get used to seeing octogenarians doing the splits without grimacing. Certainly, if you have any interest in China's martial arts heritage, you won't want to miss out on this opportunity to learn from the experts.

Many visitors will probably settle for a dose of *tàijíquán* and some *qigōng* (exercise that channels *qi* or energy) to limber up, learn some breathing techniques and get the blood

circulating. More adventurous visitors can dig a bit deeper into China's exciting fighting arts; you never know what you'll unearth.

Visiting Běijīng's parks early in the morning and approaching practitioners is possible, if you speak Chinese. You might encounter that grand master of Eight Trigram Palm (*Bāguàzhǎng*), willing to instruct you in some deadly device. Or you might catch an early morning glimpse of a White Eyebrow Boxing (*Báiméiquán*) expert going through clandestine moves. Unfortunately, it's easy to get out of one's depth. Chinese martial arts can be bewilderingly enigmatic and some are deeply esoteric; on top of which you might find yourself learning tae kwon do (a Korean martial art), kickboxing or some jazzy health system. Another problem is that some teachers insist that students prove their loyalty by making them wait for long periods before they're admitted to a class. Also, you will probably encounter communication problems if you don't speak Chinese.

Martial arts lessons in English are held daily at the **Jinghua Wushu Association** (Map p264; ☎ 6465 3388; Kempinski Hotel, Liangmaqiao Lu). The teachers are all trained in the traditional Shaolin forms and charge Y90 a lesson. The **Evolution Fitness Centre** (p153) also has classes in English. Otherwise, check the classified pages of the expat mags (p227), as English-speaking *gōngfū* teachers occasionally advertise here. Be aware that some martial artists exploit the gullible, while a great number of teachers are decidedly substandard. Try to get a personal recommendation from other enthusiasts if possible.

See p152 for details on watching martial arts performances in Běijīng.

Massage

Walking around Běijīng's vast distances can put serious stresses on both ligaments and musculature. Thankfully, there are several places in town where you can have your feet and body massaged and reinvigorated.

BODHI Map p264

菩提会所
☎ 6417 9595; 17 Gongrentiyuchang Beilu;
🕒 11.30-12.30am; 📍 Dongsishitiao

The serene setting just moments away from the madness of Běijīng's traffic helps you shift gears straightaway, and that's before the many masseurs here get to work in one

THE SECRETS OF TAICHI

Characterised by its lithe and graceful movements, *tàijíquán* (太极拳; literally 'Fist of the Supreme Ultimate'), also known as taichi, is an ancient Chinese physical discipline practised by legions of Chinese the land over.

Considerable confusion exists about taichi – is it a martial art, a form of meditation, a *qigōng* (气功) style or an exercise? In fact, taichi can be each and all of these, depending on what you seek from the art and how deep you dig into its mysteries.

As a straightforward health regimen, taichi strengthens the leg muscles, exercises the joints, gives the cardiovascular system a good work out and promotes flexibility. It also relaxes the body, dissolving stress, loosening the joints and generating a feel of well-being.

It may look undemanding, but the 108-movement, 20-minute Yang-style long form is tiring, while the low postures of the Chen style of taichi – closest in essence of all the taichi styles to Shaolin boxing – can be excruciatingly strenuous to perform and will have your legs shaking with the strain.

Taichi is indeed a superlative system of *qigōng*, and despite being a moving sequence of *qigōng* moves in itself, the art is also taught with stationary exercises to circulate *qi*. All of the benefits associated with *qigōng* come with the practice of taichi.

As a system of meditation, taichi promotes relaxation and makes practitioners feel both centred and focused. Taichi will also introduce you to the meditation techniques of the Taoists, as the art is closely allied to the philosophy of Taoism.

Taichi can be undertaken as martial arts training as all the movements can ultimately be traced to Shaolin, although to be used effectively for this purpose requires a huge investment of time and patience, compared to other more direct martial arts. In order to use taichi effectively, the student has to learn how to relax the body during confrontation, and this requires suppressing one's instincts to tense up when threatened. Martial arts practice commences with 'push hands', a two-person routine where one student tries to unbalance the other. 'Push hands' develops sensitivity in the hands and teaches the student to relax the body in all situations. If adept at taichi, it is far easier to learn other martial arts, as the student will have learned a way of moving that is common to all of the fighting arts.

Taichi students outdo each other with fables of super-human exploits by legendary taichi masters, with anecdotes becoming more implausible at each retelling. Stories abound of masters who can crush pieces of ceramic between their fingers, fling their opponents 30ft across the room with a shrug or return hardened karate practitioners to square one. Such anecdotes dangle tempting carrots in front of students on their grueling and elusive path to mastery of their art.

If taking up taichi, a few useful pointers will help you progress in your practice:

- When executing a movement, bodily motion and power is directed by the waist before moving to the hands (observe a skilled practitioner and see how the motion reaches the hands last). The hands never lead the movement.
- When performing a form (as the moving sets are called), keep your head on a level, neither rising nor dipping.
- Practise taichi as if suspended by an invisible thread from a point at the top of your head.
- Don't lean forward or backwards and keep your torso vertical.
- Relax your shoulders and let your weight sink downwards.

of their comfy private rooms. Bodhi offers excellent foot and full-body massages, both Y138 for an hour (Y78 before 5pm, Monday to Thursday), as well as facials, aromatherapy and other treatments. You get free snacks and drinks here, and with TVs in all the rooms you can lie back and watch a DVD while being pummeled into shape. It's opposite the north gate of the Workers' Stadium, just a few metres from the Xinjiang Red Rose Restaurant (p133).

DRAGONFLY THERAPEUTIC RETREAT

Map p264
悠庭保健会所
☎ 6593 6066; 1st fl, Eastern Inn Hotel, Nan Sanlun Lu; 🕒 11-1am; 📍 Dongsishitiao, then 📍 701

This Shanghai chain has recently arrived in Běijīng. The surroundings aren't as pleasant as Bodhi, but the staff know what they're doing. An hour-long full body massage is Y120.

Running

Běijīng's toxic atmosphere might deter you from sampling extra lungfuls of air, but some groups organise runs in, around and outside town. **Hash House Harriers** (www.hash.cn) – the eccentric expat organisation ('drinkers with a running problem') that originated with the British in Malaysia – organises 8km to 10km runs most Sundays at 2pm. It costs Y50 and that buys you all the beer you can drink afterwards, as well as some food.

Skiing

Several ski resorts within reach of Běijīng lure skiers and snowboarders during the winter months. Bear in mind that the Chinese ski like they drive, so exercise caution. Nor will the slopes challenge advanced skiers and boarders.

BEIJING SNOW WORLD SKI PARK

Map pp258-9

北京雪世界滑雪场

☎ 8976 1886; Xiàogōngmén, Shìsānlíng,

Chāngpíng; entrance Y20, skiing per day Mon-Fri Y200, Sat & Sun Y340; 🚗 345 from Deshengmen, get off at Zhengfa Daxue, then minibus 3 to ski park

Not far from the Ming Tombs (p197) and the closest ski resort to town, this resort features lodging, equipment hire and two modest ski runs. Snowboarders have to pay more than skiers here: Y320 for a full day.

JUNDUSHAN SKI RESORT

Map pp258-9

军都山滑雪场

☎ 6072 5888; Cuicunzhen 588 Zhenshuncun, Changping; skiing per day Mon-Fri Y240, Sat & Sun Y380

Just 34km from Běijīng, Jundushan advertises that skiing can help people 'relieve psychic tension and return themselves to nature for intimacy with God'. Skiing charges vary according to the day of the week and how long you want to ski (1 hr Mon-Fri Y60, Sat & Sun Y80; 2 hr Mon-Fri Y100, Sat & Sun Y140; one day Mon-Fri Y220, Sat & Sun Y340). The resort also offers discounts for regular users and has a team of 'more than 30 professional skimeisters'. The resort provides ski clothing hire (Y30), sledge hire (Y20), lessons (in Chinese only), a cable car (one way/return Y15/20) and accommodation in wooden villas.

NANSHAN SKI VILLAGE

Map pp258-9

南山滑雪度假村

☎ 6445 0990/91/92; www.nanshanski.com;

Shengshuitou Village, Henanzhai Town, Miyun County; entrance Y20, skiing per day Mon-Fri Y220; Sat & Sun Y360

This popular resort in Miyun County has 10 trails for skiers of all abilities, a snowboard park and a toboggan run. It's 90 minutes from Běijīng. Packages are available (including transport, meals, equipment and use of slopes). The resort also has villas and cabins, restaurants, a car park and equipment hire.

SHIJINGLONG SKI RESORT

Map pp258-9

石京龙滑雪场

☎ 6919 1617; Zhongyangfang Village, Zhangshanying Town, Yanqing County; entrance Y20, skiing per day Mon-Fri Y200; Sat & Sun Y340

The longest trails around town and a snowboard park pack them in at this resort in Yanqing County. There are also hot springs (Y50) to warm up in. Snowboarders pay more here (Y320).

Snooker, Billiards & Pool

Snooker and pool are both very popular with the Chinese. Many tip China's teenage snooker prodigy Ding Junhui as a future world champion. You can find pool tables in many bars around town, including Bar Blu (p144), the Club Football Center (p144), Frank's Place (p144) and the Goose & Duck Pub (p145). For snooker and billiards, you can try the Xuanlong Pool Hall (Map p262; ☎ 8425 5566; 79B Hepingli Xijie, Cháoyáng; table per hr Y28; 🕒 24hr) or the Baizhifang Amusement Club (☎ 6351 4490; 13 Baizhifang Beili, Xuānwǔ; table per hr Y25; 🕒 10-2am).

Squash

Some five-star hotels have squash courts but most are for guests only, or require you to take out lengthy and pricy memberships. The best option is the Pulse Club (Map p264; ☎ 6465 3388, ext 5722; Kempinski Hotel, Lufthansa Center, 50 Liangmaqiao Lu; non-members per 45 min Y85).

Swimming

You can find pools at some four-star and all five-star hotels, but although access is free for guests, as a non-guest you will have to pay a fee. The China World Hotel (p182) charges Y150, but you get to use the sauna and gym as well. The venerable Friendship Hotel (☎ 6849 8888, ext 32; 1 Zhongguancun

Nandajie) in Hǎidiàn has a great Olympic-sized pool, costing Y100 for two hours plus a Y500 deposit. Outside hotels, the pool at the Dongdan Sports Center (☎ 6523 1241; 2a Dahua Lu, Dōngchéng; Y30; 🕒 9am-10pm Sat & Sun) is popular. You can also try the Ditān Swimming Pool (Map p262; ☎ 6426 4483; 18 Anwai Hepingli Zhongjie, Dōngchéng; Y30; 🕒 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-10pm Sat & Sun).

Tennis

Tennis (*wǎng qiú*) is a popular sport in Běijīng that draws enthusiastic crowds, so phone well in advance to make reservations for tennis events or for playing on a court. Many top-end hotels have tennis courts which can be used for free by guests and by non-guests for a fee. The Kerry Center Hotel (p186) charges Y400 an hour for non-members. Alternatively, try the Chaoyang Tennis Club (Map pp258-9; ☎ 6501 0959/0953; 1a Nongzhanguan Nanlu; non-members per hr Mon-Fri Y200, Sat & Sun Y240; 🕒 8am-noon) by the south gate of Chaoyang Park, or the International Tennis Center (Map pp268-9; ☎ 6711 3872, 50 Tiantan Lu; non-members per hr Y300; 🕒 10am-10pm), which has indoor and outdoor courts and is southeast of the Temple of Heaven Park. There are also tennis courts inside the Workers Cultural

Palace right next to the Forbidden City, at Huangjiatingyuan Tennis Club (Huángjiāti'ngyuàn Wǎngqiú Jùlèbù; ☎ 6512 2856; non-members per hr before 5pm Mon-Fri Y40, per hr after 5pm Mon-Fri Y60, per hr before 5pm Sat & Sun Y60, per hr after 5pm Sat & Sun Y80; 🕒 6am-midnight).

Yoga

Older Chinese might choose the more homegrown methods of *qigōng* and *tàijíquán* over the imported variant of yoga, but the disciplines have much in common. Both focus on the circulation of energy, called *qi* by Chinese and *prana* by Indians. Yoga Yard (Map p264; ☎ 136 1126 6962; www.yogayard.com; 6th fl, 17 Gongrentiyuchang Beilu) charges Y90 for a 90-minute lesson, or Y700 for an unlimited one-month pass. Class instruction is largely in English. A good place for a weekend yoga retreat is Mountain Yoga (Map pp258-9; ☎ 6259 6702; www.mountainyoga.cn; 6 Gongzhufen Cun, Fragrant Hills, Hǎidiàn). Located in a homely wooden house with a fine view of the nearby Fragrant Hills, there are lungfuls of fresh air to breathe in and visiting teachers to instruct you. It's Y800 for two days, which includes accommodation and tasty, all-vegetarian, MSG-free meals. A single day costs Y300.

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