

24 hours in Xi'an

Contributed by Evan
Friday, 14 September 2007

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8am: Stock up on breakfast and head for the site of the Terracotta Army, an hour's drive away. Unearthed in 1974 by a peasant farmer (whom you can meet in the souvenir shop), the clay battalion is Xi'an's Pole Star. View the three excavated catacomb mud vaults who protect a grand menagerie of life-like soldiers-each unique in its features, expressions and military status, all of which were destined to be Emperor Qin's afterlife army.

11am: Head back to the city, stopping at the Mayfirst Hotel's self-serve canteen on Dong Da Jie for a quick, economical meal of steamed buns and noodles, with ice lollies for dessert.

1pm: Visit the south gate of the City Wall. The 14km-long fortification encloses Old Xi'an and is best appreciated on a bicycle (available for rental at RMB 20/hour). Take a leisurely two-hour circumambulation of one of China's best preserved city walls-its watch towers hinting of past splendor, and looming construction sites foreshadowing the city's future façade.

3:30pm: Pay quick homage to the triple-eaved Bell Tower on Nan Da Jie, the city's focal point, then head toward the Great Mosque, via the Drum Tower.

4pm: The Great Mosque at Hua Jue Xi'ang provides a tranquil escape from the twisting alleys and commotion leading up to it. Enjoy a meditative moment amid the Sino-Islamic pavilions. Save the bazaar shopping for later when it livens up.

5:30pm: Stop at the Big Goose Pagoda on Yanta Lu. It's an arduous 62-meter climb to the top, but worthwhile for the panoramic city views. The pagoda is a memorial tomb for Emperor Gaozong's mother and a library of ancient Buddhist scriptures.

7pm: Continue to an atypical tourist destination, Tang Paradise/Tang Dynasty Lotus Park. This 165-acre park is part of a government campaign to recreate the Tang gardens. Don't be surprised if your olfactory senses are tickled; this USD 157 million park is the world's largest outdoor fragrance project. Look out for the majestic water screen and attend the splendid sound, light and fireworks show (from 8:30-9pm) by the Purple Cloud building.

9pm: Return to the Muslim Quarter (which should be bustling by now) for a late street food dinner. Sample freshly marinated lamb kebabs and beef soup with brick-oven flat bread prepared by Muslim Hui minority chefs.

10pm: Spend the rest of the evening in the effervescent night bazaar dusting off layers of soot from silver ornaments and miniature warriors in search of a prized souvenir of your day in Xi'an.

TRAVEL PACK

Mayfirst Hotel (Wu Yi Fandian)
Location: 351 Dong Da Jie
Tel: 029 768 1098

Tang Paradise (Da Tang Fu Rong Yuan)
Location: Qujiang Resort

Tel: 029 8551 1888

Bell Tower Hotel (Zhong Lou Fandian)

Location: 110 Nan Da Jie

Tel: 029 8760 0000