

Introduction





Xi'an is located in the middle part of the central Shaanxi plain in the Yellow River valley. It backs on to the Qinling Mountains in the south, and borders the Weihe River in the north, featuring rich produce, and a favorable natural environment. As the capital of Shaanxi Province, Xi'an has jurisdiction over nine districts and four counties, with an area of 9,983 square kilometers, including 826 square kilometers

of the city proper, and a population of 6.94 million, including over three million urban citizens. Xi'an has a temperate semi-moisture monsoon climate, with appropriate precipitation and clear-cut seasonal changes.

Known as Chang'an in ancient times, Xi'an served intermittently as the capital of more than 10 dynasties for over 1,100 years, ranking first in the seven ancient capitals in China. It is regarded as one of the "four great ancient capitals of the world", together with Athens in Greece, Cairo in Egypt and Rome in Rome. As the starting point of the well-known "Silk Road," Xi'an was the political, economic and cultural center of China from the 11th century B.C. to the 10th century A.D. In the Han (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) and Tang

(618-907) dynasties, Xi'an was the most prosperous international metropolis in the world.

Xi'an is a top tourist city of China, and a well-known tourist destination in the world, due to its abundant tourism resources. Its precious relics and historical sites, well preserved, can be found all over the city, ranking first in the world in the number, level, distribution and density. The terracotta warriors and horses of the Qin Dynasty, which are included in the list of the world cultural heritages, are known as the "eighth wonder in the world"; the towering Greater and Lesser Wild Goose pagodas date back to the Tang Dynasty; the Drum and Bell towers have experienced many vicissitudes of life; and the mag-

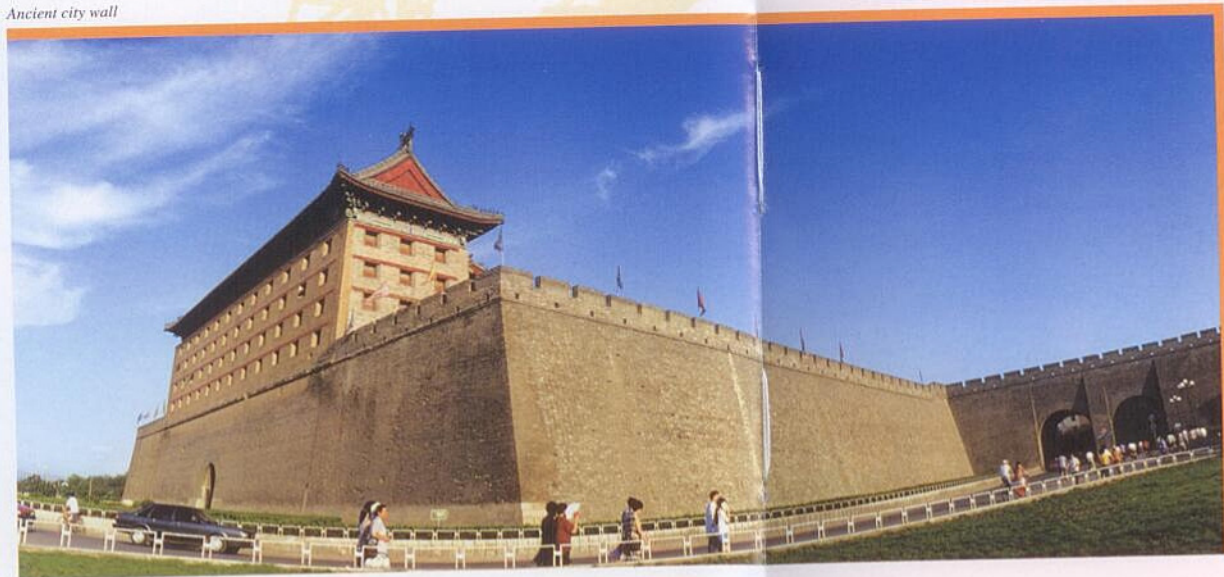


Relief sculpture of six horses in the Zhaoqing Mausoleum

nificent and well-preserved city wall, which served as solid and perfect military defense works in ancient China, is wide enough to drive five cars abreast, in addition to many religious sites, such as Qinglong Temple, Xingjiao Temple, Daxingshan Temple and Louguan Terrace.

Now Xi'an has become one of the tourist cities well received by both Chinese and foreign tourists. Its extensive and profound cultural connotations, and heart-shaking historical sites will leave a deep impression on every visitor to the city. Xi'an warmly welcomes domestic and foreign friends.

Ancient city wall



Touch Xi'an



The Best Travel Time

Spring and autumn are ideal travel seasons in Xi'an, and May, August, September and October are the best travel months. Many indoor tourist attractions in Xi'an, such as the Museum of Emperor Qin Shihuang's Terracotta Warriors and Horses, Stele Forest, Shaanxi History Museum and the Great Mosque also welcome tourists in summer and winter.

Local Flavor

Morning Bell and Sunset Drum

First constructed during the Hongwu reign period of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1398), Bell and Drum towers are located in the center of Xi'an and on Xi Dajie, respectively. Between the two towers is a wide square. Bell Tower houses the Jingyun Bell, and Drum Tower holds a

Morning bell



huge drum. The bell sounds every morning, and the drum is beaten every evening, giving the correct time and symbolizing happiness and auspiciousness. In ancient times, morning bell and sunset drum was one of the eight scenic attractions of Chang'an (present Xi'an), and now it is also a symbol of Xi'an City.

Qinqiang (Shaanxi Opera)

Qinqiang originated from folk melodies and *zaju* of the Song (960-1279), Jin (1115-1234) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties, and was formed during the Wanli reign period of the Ming Dynasty (1573-1620). In ancient China, Shaanxi and Gansu were under the jurisdiction of the state of Qin, hence the name Qinqiang. As Qinqiang is performed to the accompaniment of *bangzi* (wooden clapper), it is also known as Bangziqiang. Qinqiang has a complete tone system, 28 roles and over 2,700 plays. Its singing is sonorous, bold, touching, as well as lively, gentle, plain and exquisite. Qinqiang is one of the ancient operas with local characteristics in China.