

Shaanxi (Shǎnxī) 陕西



Shaanxi is Chinese history, ancient and modern. Peruse any text on China and the pages for this province are laden with the words 'centre', 'nucleus' and 'heart', not to mention the ubiquitous 'cradle'. Shaanxi's influence may even extend to the most fundamental of Western concepts about the Middle Kingdom – the name 'China' is possibly derived from the Qin dynasty (pronounced 'chin'), whose capital was near Xī'ān.

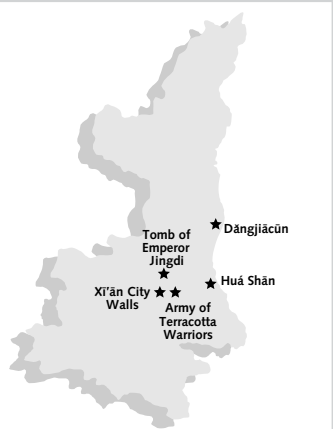
It may not look much like the centre of Chinese civilisation these days, but in its time the Wei River valley occupied a perfect location. The land was fertile enough to feed a large population, nomadic invaders were close enough to necessitate military strength and it was the crossroads of major trade routes and China's main link with the outside world.

And while emperors and prime ministers were busy plotting the expansion of an empire, another complementary facet of Chinese culture was quietly evolving in the Qinling Mountains to the south. These mountains were the home of many of China's reclusive sages, those who found government service overly corrupt, or simply unfulfilling. Most famous of all was Lao-tzu, who – according to one legend – was brought to Lóuguāntái by the border pass guard, Yin Xi, to transmit his wisdom: the end result being the terse and mysterious *Tao Te Ching* (Dào Dé Jīng).

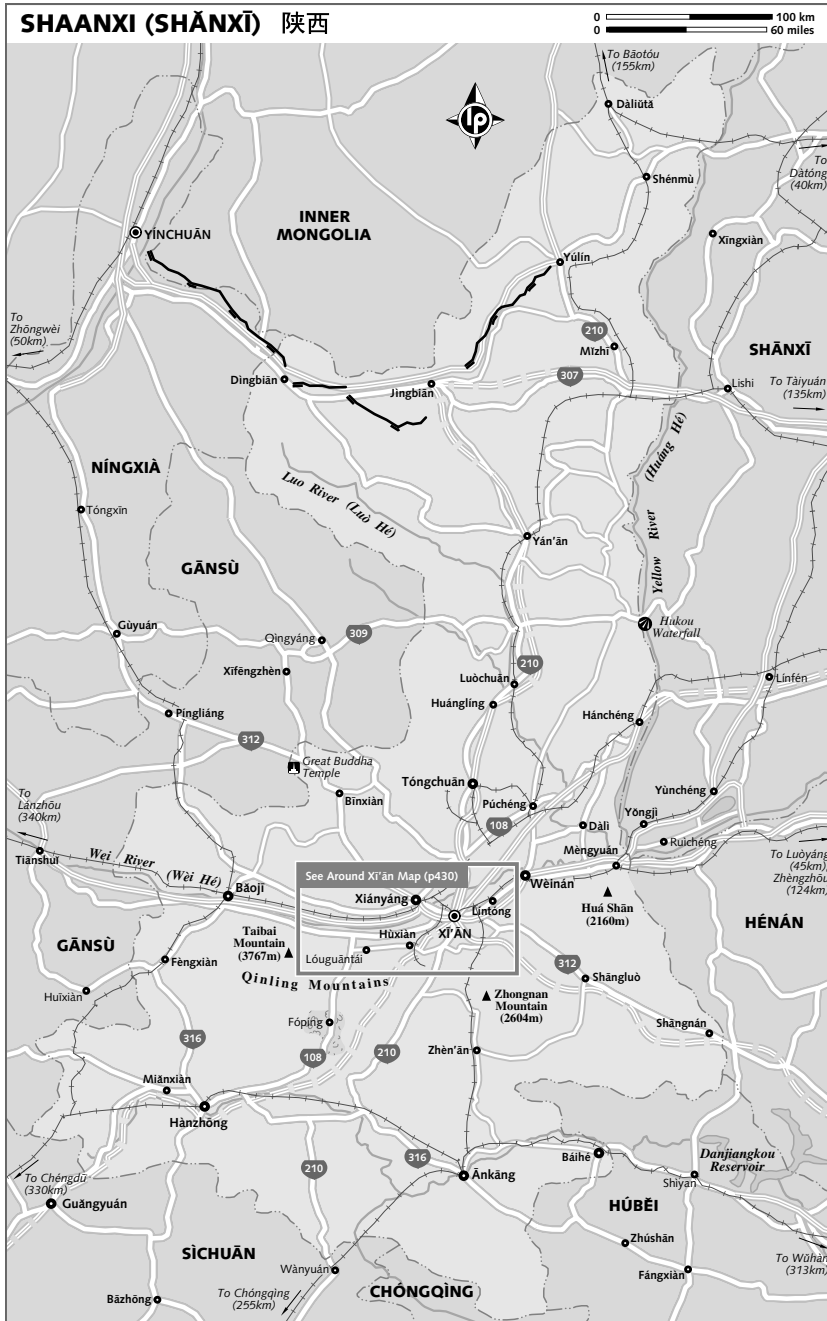
For travellers, what matters most is that Shaanxi is loaded with extraordinary archaeological sights. Yet keep in mind that history didn't stop with the ancient world. In 1935 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) finally found respite in the loess caves of Yán'ān, and, for the next decade this new haven in the hills became the CCP's broadcast centre for revolutionary thought.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Take stock of China's imperial beginnings at the imposing **Army of Terracotta Warriors** (p428)
- Look down on enthralling excavations at the **Tomb of Emperor Jingdi** (p431)
- Get some perspective while strolling atop Xi'ān's formidable old **city walls** (p424)
- Scale the granite cliffs of Taoism's sacred western peak, **Huá Shān** (p433), for inspiring views of the sunrise and the Qinling Mountains
- Take time out to visit rural China in the village of **Dǎngjiācún** (p435)



■ POPULATION: 62.1 MILLION



History

Who lies beneath the sands of Shaanxi time? The Zhou people of the Bronze Age, spreading from their Shaanxi homeland, conquered the Shang and established their dominion over much of northern China. Later the state of Qin, ruling from their capital Xiányáng (near modern-day Xi'an), became the first dynasty to unify much of China. The following dynasties, including the Han, Sui and Tang, were based in the great capital of Cháng'ān (Xi'an), which was abandoned for the eastern capital of Luòyáng (in Hénán) whenever invaders threatened.

Shaanxi remained the political heart of China for over a millennia until the 10th century. With the migration of the imperial court to pastures further east, the area's fortunes declined. Rebellions afflicted the territory from 1340 to 1368, again from 1620 to 1644 and finally in the mid-19th century, when the great Muslim rebellion left tens of thousands of the province's Muslims dead.

Famines have regularly decimated peasant populations, and it was these dismal conditions that provided the communists such willing support in the province during the country's civil war.

Geography & Climate

Shaanxi is part of the Loess Plateau, an area covered by thick layers of microscopic silt that began blowing down from Siberia during the Ice Age. The hallmarks of China's 'yellow earth' are cave houses (*yáodòng*) and a fissured, treeless landscape.

Running across the south of the province are the Qinling Mountains, the major north-south watershed in China and home to a number of endangered species, such as the golden-haired monkey, crested ibis and giant panda. Permits are often required to travel in this area, though it's slowly opening up to individual travellers. Inquire about ecotourism at the **Foping Nature Reserve** (www.fpnr.com); expect to pay upwards of Y500 for entry.

Shaanxi is usually either bloody hot or bitterly cold. Annual rainfall is a sparse 50cm, most of it falling June through August. Spring (April and May) and autumn (September and October) are the best times to visit.

Language

Locals like to joke that Xi'an's dialect is the 'real' standard Mandarin – after all, it was the

ancient capital of China. Those unfunny linguists, however, prefer to classify the Shaanxi dialect as part of the central Zhongyuan Mandarin group. Parts of the province also speak Jin (see p404).

Getting There & Around

Xi'an has one of China's most well-served airports (see p427). Rail and road connections are quite good east and west of Xi'an; however, travelling north or south is more problematic.

XI'AN 西安

☎ 029 / pop 3,256,000

Long before the country – and other countries – kowtowed to Běijīng, there was Cháng'ān: a thriving city of emperors, courtesans, poets, monks, merchants and soldiers; a place where many of the world's great religions coexisted and Chinese culture reached an apogee of creativity and sophistication. Cháng'ān – present-day Xi'an – was the fabled beginning and end of the Silk Road, a swirl of colours, lute music and desert dust, where camel caravans unloaded goods from across the Eurasian continent and packed up aspects of China that went on to influence the world. But, like all great metropolises, it had to come to an end. Destroyed in rebellions that marked the decline of the Tang dynasty, by the 10th century Cháng'ān was no more.

Xi'an today sits in the fertile Wei River valley, one of the epicentres of early Chinese civilisation. The area was home to the capitals of several major dynasties (historians can count 11), stretching all the way back to the Zhou in the 11th century BC. The remnants of this ancient world are everywhere – from the First Emperor's Terracotta Army to the Muslim influence that still characterises the city.

Understandably, Xi'an is one of China's major attractions, but the modern city is also one of the country's great polarisers – you either love it or hate it. Most people only spend two or three days here, but history buffs could easily stay busy for a week. Topping the list of sights in and around the city are the Terracotta Warriors, the Tomb of Emperor Jingdi, the Muslim Quarter and the City Walls. With a little more time, throw in the pagodas, museums or any number of sites outside the city. Better still, arrange an overnight trip to nearby Huá Shān or Hánchéng.

Orientation

Xi'an retains the same rectangular shape that once characterised Cháng'ān, with streets and avenues forming a neat grid pattern.

The central block of the modern city is bound by the city walls. At the city centre is the enormous Bell Tower, from where Xi'an's four major streets connect: Bei, Nan, Dong and Xi Dajie. The train station stands at the northeastern edge of the city centre.

Most of the tourist facilities can be found in the vicinity of the Bell Tower. However, some of the city's sights, such as the Shaanxi History Museum, Big Goose Pagoda and Little Goose Pagoda are located south of the city walls.

MAPS

Pick up a copy of the widely available *Xi'an Traffic & Tourist Map* (Y8). This bilingual publication has exhaustive listings and is regularly updated – even the bus routes are correct.

Information

CD BURNING

Burn digital photos onto CDs at the youth hostels (per disc Y25), or at **Kodak** (Jiǎdá Shùmǎ Zhōngxīn; Nan Dajie; per disc Y30) near the Bell Tower.

INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

All hostels and many hotels offer internet access. There are few internet cafés inside the city walls.

Hàngōng Wǎngbā (per hr Y3) Turn west off Nan Dajie at the KFC and look for the Night Cat disco.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Tour Easy (www.toureeasy.net) The online survival guide to Xi'an.

MEDICAL SERVICES

In the event of an emergency, call ☎ 120.

MONEY

ATM (Qūkuānji; ☎ 24hr) You should have no trouble finding usable ATMs. When in doubt, try the southeast corner of the Bell Tower intersection.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng) Juhuyuan Lu (38 Juhuyuan Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm); Nan Dajie (29 Nan Dajie; ☎ 8am-6pm) You can exchange cash and travellers cheques and use the ATMs at both of these branches.

POST

Post Office (Yóudiàn Dàilù; Bei Dajie; ☎ 8am-8pm)

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (Gōngānjū; ☎ 1682 1225; 136 Xi Dajie; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) Visa extensions generally take five days.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guōjī Lúxíngshè) Main Office (☎ 8524 1864; fax 5526 1453; 48 Chang'an Beilu); Branch Office (☎ 8760 0227 ext 227; 2nd fl, Bell Tower Hotel, Xi Dajie) The Bell Tower Hotel office is best for organising tours.

Golden Bridge Travel (☎ 8725 7975, fax 8725 8863; Rm 219, 2nd fl, Bell Tower Hotel, Xi Dajie) An alternate choice down the hall from CITS. It gets mixed reviews from readers.

Sights

INSIDE THE CITY WALLS

Bell Tower & Drum Tower 钟楼、鼓楼

The **Bell Tower** (Zhōng Lóu; admission Y20, combined Drum Tower ticket Y30; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm, shorter hr in winter) originally held a large bell that was rung at dawn, while its alter ego, the **Drum Tower** (Gǔ Lóu; Beiyuanmen; admission Y20, combined Bell Tower ticket Y30; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm, shorter hr in winter), marked nightfall. Both date from the 14th century and were later rebuilt in the 1700s (the Bell Tower initially stood two blocks to the west). Musical performances are held inside each from 9am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 5.30pm. The Bell Tower is entered through the underpass on the north side.

Muslim Quarter

The backstreets leading north from the Drum Tower have been home to the city's Hui community (Chinese Muslims) for centuries. Although Muslims have been here since at least the 7th century, some believe that today's community didn't take root until the Ming dynasty.

The narrow lanes are full of butcher shops, sesame-oil factories, smaller mosques hidden behind enormous wooden doors and proud, stringy-bearded men wearing white skullcaps. Good streets to stroll down are Xiyang Shi, Dapi Yuan and Damaishi Jie, which runs north off Xi Dajie through an interesting Islamic food market.

Great Mosque 清真大寺

One of the largest mosques in China, the **Great Mosque** (Qīngzhēn Dàsì; www.xaqzds.com; Huajie Xiang; admission Y12, free for Muslims; ☎ 8am-7pm, 8am-5.30pm Oct-Mar) is a fascinating blend of Chinese and



INFORMATION

- ATM 取款机 1 A6
- Bank of China 中国银行 2 B6
- Bank of China 中国银行 3 A6
- CITS 中国国际旅行社 4 B3
- CITS 中国国际旅行社 5 A6
- Golden Bridge Travel (see 5)
- Hàngōng Wǎngbá 汉宫网吧 6 A6
- Kodak 佳达数码中心 7 A6
- Post Office 邮电大楼 8 B6
- PSB 公安局 9 A6

- Shaanxi History Museum 陕西历史博物馆 19 C4
- Tang Dynasty Arts Museum 唐代艺术博物馆 (see 13)
- Tang Paradise Theme Park 大唐 Paradise 主题公园 20 D4
- Temple of the Eight Immortals 八仙庵 21 D1

- EATING**
- Bell Tower Hotel 钟楼饭店 (see 5)
 - Dé Fā Cháng 德发长 (see 12)
 - King Town No 1 秦唐一号中国餐馆 31 B6
 - Lǎo Sūn Jiā 老孙家 32 B6
 - Mǎogōng Xiāngcǎiguān 毛公湘菜馆 33 B3
 - Wúyī Fāndiàn 五一饭店 34 B6

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- 8th Route Army Memorial 八路军西安办事处纪念馆 10 B4
- Bell Tower 钟楼 11 A6
- Bell Tower Square 钟鼓楼广场 12 A6
- Big Goose Pagoda 大雁塔 13 C4
- Drum Tower 鼓楼 14 A6
- Folk House 高家大院 15 A5
- Forest of Stelae Museum 碑林博物馆 16 B6
- Great Mosque 清真大寺 17 A6
- Little Goose Pagoda 小雁塔 18 B3

- SLEEPING**
- Bell Tower Youth Hostel 钟楼青年旅社 (see 8)
 - City Hotel Xi'an 西安城市酒店 22 A6
 - Han Tang Inn 汉唐驿 23 A6
 - Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel 金花豪生国际大酒店 24 B2
 - Melody Hotel 美伦酒店 25 A6
 - Prince Hotel 王子国际酒店 26 A6
 - Qixian Youth Hostel 七贤庄 27 B4
 - Shuyuan Youth Hostel 书院青年旅舍 28 A6
 - Sofitel 索菲特人民大厦 29 B5
 - Wényuàn Dǎjiùdiàn 文苑大酒店 30 A6

- ENTERTAINMENT**
- Shaanxi Grand Opera House 陕西大剧院 35 C2
 - Tang Dynasty 唐乐官 36 C3
- TRANSPORT**
- Advance Train Ticket Booking 代售火车票 37 A6
 - Airport Shuttle Bus 民航班车接待处 (see 25)
 - China Northwest Airlines 西北民航局 38 A2
 - Long-Distance Bus Station 汽车省站 39 C4

Islamic architecture. Facing west (towards Mecca) instead of the usual south, the mosque begins with an obvious Chinese temple feature, the spirit wall, designed to keep demons at bay. The gardens, too, with their rocks, pagodas and archways are obviously Chinese, with the exception of the four palm trees at the entrance. Arab influence, meanwhile, extends from the central minaret (cleverly disguised as a pagoda) to the enormous, turquoise-roofed Prayer Hall (not open to visitors) at the back of the complex, as well as the elegant calligraphy gracing most entryways. The present buildings are mostly Ming and Qing, though the mosque is said to have been founded in the 8th century.

To get here, follow Xiyang Shi several minutes west and look for a small alley leading south past a gauntlet of souvenir stands.

Folk House 高家大院

This well-rounded **historic residence** (Gāo Jiā Dàyuàn; 144 Beiyuanmen; admission Y15, with tea Y20; ☎ 9am-10pm) also serves as an art gallery, entertainment centre and teahouse. Originally the home of the Qing bureaucrat Gao Yuesong, much of the residence has been tastefully restored, and includes reception rooms, bedrooms, servants' quarters, an ancestral temple and a study (now the teahouse).

Tours start with an optional marionette or shadow puppet demonstration (Y10). As the complex currently belongs to the Shaanxi Artists Association, you can also visit artists'

studios; if you're interested in traditional Chinese art, this is a great place to consider a purchase. Prices are reasonable (from Y150) and the artwork (paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, photographs and tea ware) is of particularly high quality.

Don't try to find this place looking at the street numbers, as No 144 isn't where it should be.

Forest of Stelae Museum 碑林博物馆

Housed in Xi'an's Confucius Temple, this **museum** (Bēilín Bówùguǎn; 15 Sanxue Jie; admission Y30; ☎ 8am-6.30pm) holds over 1000 stone stelae (inscribed tablets), including the nine Confucian classics and some exemplary calligraphy. Although the main exhibit often leaves foreigners scratching their heads, there are nevertheless a few points of interest. The 2nd gallery holds a Nestorian tablet (AD 781), the earliest recorded account of Christianity in China. (The Nestorians professed that Christ was both human and divine, for which they were booted out of the Church in 431.) The 4th gallery holds a collection of ancient maps and portraits, and is where rubbings (copies) are made, an interesting process to watch.

Worth the admission fee alone is the fantastic sculpture gallery (across from the gift shop), which contains animal guardians, pictorial tomb stones and Buddhist statuary. There are also two temporary exhibits usually on display near the main entrance.

The museum is reached by following Shuyuan Xiang east from the South Gate.

8th Route Army Memorial 八路军西安办事处纪念馆

The Communist Party's austere Xī'ān **headquarters** (Bālùjūn Xī'ān Bānshìchǔ Jìniànguǎn; Beixin Jie; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) was located here from 1937 to 1946. The memorial consists primarily of old photos (no English) and one room dedicated to the activist Helen Foster Snow, the wife of journalist Edgar Snow.

OUTSIDE THE CITY WALLS

City Walls 城墙

Xī'ān is one of the few cities in China where the old **City Walls** (Chéngqiáng; admission Y40; ☎ 7am-10.30pm, 8am-6pm Oct-Mar) are still standing. Built in 1370 during the Ming dynasty, the walls are 12m high, up to 18m thick at the base and form a rectangle with a perimeter of 14km. The walls are surrounded by a moat, and the park-like strip in between is popular with traditional musicians.

Most sections have been restored or rebuilt, and it is now possible to walk the entirety of the walls in a lazy four hours. You can also cycle from the South Gate (bike hire per half-hour Y15). Access ramps are located inside the major gates with the exception of the South Gate, where the entrance is outside the walls; there's another entrance inside the walls beside the Forest of Stelae Museum.

To get an idea of Xī'ān's former grandeur, consider this: the Tang city walls originally enclosed 83 sq km, an area seven times larger than today's city centre.

Big Goose Pagoda 大雁塔

Xī'ān's most famous landmark, this **pagoda** (Dà'yàn Tǎ; ☎ 8521 5014; Yanta Nanlu; admission Y25, plus Y20 to climb the pagoda; ☎ 8am-6.30pm, 8am-6pm Nov-Apr) was completed in AD 652 to house the Buddhist sutras brought back from India by the monk Xuan Zang. Xuan Zang spent the last 19 years of his life translating scriptures with a crack team of linguist monks; many of these translations are still used today. His travels also inspired one of the most well-known works of Chinese literature, *Journey to the West*.

Surrounding the pagoda is **Da Cí'en Temple**, one of the largest temples in Tang Cháng'ān. The buildings today date from the Qing dynasty.

Bus 610 from the Bell Tower and bus 609 from the South Gate drop you off at the pagoda square; the entrance is on the south side. Of note is the evening fountain show held on the square (see p426).

The **Tang Dynasty Arts Museum** (Tángdài Yìshù Bówùguǎn; admission Y5; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), on the eastern side of the temple, has a small collection specifically devoted to Tang clothing, architecture and artefacts.

Little Goose Pagoda 小雁塔

This **pagoda** (Xiǎoyàn Tǎ; Youyi Xilu; admission Y18, plus Y10 for 'pagoda mounting'; ☎ 8am-6pm) is in the pleasant grounds of Jianfu Temple. The top of the pagoda was shaken off by an earthquake in the middle of the 16th century, but the rest of the 43m-high structure is intact.

Jianfu Temple was originally built in AD 684 to bless the afterlife of the late Emperor Gaozong. The pagoda, a rather delicate building of 15 progressively smaller tiers, was built from AD 707-709 and housed Buddhist scriptures brought back from India by the pilgrim Yi Jing. You can mount the pagoda for a worthy panorama of Xī'ān.

Bus 610 runs here from the Bell Tower; from the South Gate take bus 203.

Shaanxi History Museum

陕西历史博物馆

Shaanxi's **museum** (Shǎnxī Lìshǐ Bówùguǎn; ☎ 8525 4727; 90 Xiaozhai Donglu; admission Y35; ☎ 8.30am-6pm, 9am-5.30pm Oct-Apr) is often touted as one of China's best, though you may come away feeling there's some unfulfilled potential here. Regardless, what is on display definitely makes for an illuminating stroll through ancient Xī'ān.

The ground floor covers prehistory and the early dynastic period. Particularly impressive are several enormous Shang and Western Zhou dynasty bronze tripods (*dǐng*), Qin burial objects, bronze arrows and crossbows, and four original terracotta warrior statues.

Upstairs, the second section is devoted primarily to Han dynasty relics. The highlights include a collection of about 40 terracotta figurines from the Xianyang Tombs (see p432). There's also an imaginative collection of bronze lamps, Wei figurines and mythological animals.

The third section focuses primarily on Sui and Tang artefacts: expressive tomb guardians; murals depicting a polo match; and a series of

painted pottery figurines with elaborate hair styles and dress, including several bearded foreigners, musicians and braying camels.

Most exhibits include labels and explanations in English. Take bus 610 from the Bell Tower or bus 701 from the South Gate.

Temple of the Eight Immortals 八仙庵

This is Xī'ān's largest Taoist **establishment** (Bāxiān Ān; Yongle Lu; admission Y3; ☎ 8am-5pm) and an active place of worship, purportedly built on the site of an ancient wine shop. The temple was constructed to protect against subterranean divine thunder. Scenes from Taoist mythology are painted around the courtyard. On Sunday and Wednesday mornings, there's a popular **antique market** here.

Bus 502 runs close by the temple (east-bound from Xi Xinjie).

Tang Paradise Theme Park 大唐芙蓉园

The city's most popular destination for Chinese tourists is probably this 165-acre Disneyfied **theme park** (Dàtáng Fúróngyuán; Yanyin Gonglu; admission Y50; ☎ 9am-10pm), which aims to re-create an entertainment-oriented version of the Tang dynasty.

Sleeping

If you're arriving by air and have not yet booked accommodation, keep in mind that representatives at the shuttle bus drop-off (Melody Hotel) can often get you discounted rooms at a wide selection of hotels.

BUDGET

All hostels in the city offer a similar range of services, including bike hire, internet, laundry, restaurant and travel services. Ask about free pick-up from the train station if you make a reservation.

Qixian Youth Hostel (Qīxián Zhuāng; ☎ 8744 4087; www.hihostels.com; 1 Beixin Jie; 北新街1号; dm Y30-50, tw Y150, s Y280; ☎) This is the most secluded hostel, set in a traditional courtyard house with spacious rooms; the four-bed dorms feature snazzy attached bathrooms. Young communists should make a beeline for this place, as it adjoins the 8th Route Army Memorial (opposite). Take bus 610 from opposite the train station.

Shuyuan Youth Hostel (Shūyuàn Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 8728 7720; www.hostelxian.com; 2 Shuncheng Xiang; 南门里顺城西巷甲子2号; dm Y30-50; tw/d Y160; ☎) The longest-running and best-

equipped hostel, the Shuyuan also has an excellent location next to the South Gate. The laid-back lounge and courtyard areas are great places to hang out with fellow travellers. It's 20m west of the South Gate along the city walls. Take bus 603 from opposite the train station.

Bell Tower Youth Hostel (Zhōnglóu Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 8723 3005; www.xianhostel.cn; 3rd fl, Post Office Bldg, 1 Bei Dajie; 北大街1号; dm Y40-65, tw Y180; ☎) If you're urban at heart, this will probably be your pick, as it's smack in the middle of everything and has a distinct downtown buzz to it. Rooms are more cramped than other places, but some have great views of the Bell Tower, and the staff are exceptionally friendly. Take bus 603 from opposite the train station.

Han Tang Inn (Hāntáng Yī; ☎ 8723 1126; www.hos.telxian.com; 211 Xi Dajie; 西大街211号; dm/tw/tr Y50/160/210; ☎) West of the Muslim Quarter, the Han Tang has a cosy lounge area with TV and internet access, as well as access to basketball and badminton courts. The entrance is easy to miss; it's just west of Watson's. Take bus 611 from opposite the train station.

MIDRANGE

City Hotel Xī'ān (Xī'ān Chéngshì Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 8721 9988; www.cityhotelxian.com; 70 Nan Dajie; 南大街70号; s Y266, tw Y300-600; ☎) One of the better midrange options near the Bell Tower and a reader favourite. The modern rooms are quiet and reasonably priced. The entrance is down an alley 20m west off Nan Dajie. All major credit cards accepted.

Melody Hotel (Mèilǚ Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 8728 8888; mlho.tel@163.com; 86 Xi Dajie; 西大街86号; s Y328, tw Y400-600; ☎) Overlooking the Drum Tower, the Melody is a reliable midrange choice that sports orange throw cushions in clean but otherwise uninspired rooms. An exercise room, restaurant and bar are on site.

Wényuán Dàjiǔdiàn (☎ 8310 3000; 45 Xi Dajie; 西大街45号; s Y328, tw Y420-488; ☎) This large but serene three-star hotel claims to be the 'intellectuals homeland'. No-one can explain what exactly this means, but at any rate it's more stylish than its competitors across the road. Ideally located for evening strolls through the Muslim Quarter.

Prince Hotel (Wángzǐ Guójiǔdiàn; ☎ 8763 2222; fax 8763 2188; 32 Nan Dajie; 南大街32号; s/tw Y680/780; ☎) With a promising location next to Louis Vuitton, the Prince achieves international standards of comfort, though it would

certainly benefit from a more daring interior decorator (at least there's cable TV to watch). All major credit cards accepted.

TOP END

There's no shortage of familiar global chains in Xī'ān. Remember to always ask about discounts.

Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel (Jinhuā Háoshēng Guóji Dàjiūdiàn; ☎ 8842 1111; www.hojochina.com; 18 Huancheng Nanlu; 环城南路西段18号; d Y1360-1600; 📶 📷 📺) Located just outside the South Gate, HoJo's new 19-storey tower has great panoramas. The postmodern interior (featuring a white piano encased in a giant glass-and-steel ball) is more Shànghǎi than Xī'ān, but the bottom line is competitively priced five-star chic.

Sofitel (Suǒfèitè Rénmín Dàshà; ☎ 8792 8888; www.sofitel.com; 319 Dong Xinjie; 东新街319号; d Y2000; 📶 📷 📺) Xī'ān's self-proclaimed 'six-star' hotel is undoubtedly the most luxurious choice in the city. Curved lines and abstract art lend a familiar modernity to the place, although there's unfortunately not much in the way of local character. Reception is in the east wing; discounts out of season exceed 50%.

Eating

Hit the Muslim Quarter for fine eating in Xī'ān. Common dishes here are *májiàng liángpi* (麻酱凉皮; cold noodles in sesame sauce), *fēnzhēngròu* (粉蒸肉; chopped mutton fried in a wok with ground wheat), *ròujiāmó* (肉夹馍; fried pork or beef in pita bread, sometimes with green peppers and cumin), *càijiāmó* (菜夹馍; the vegetarian version) and the ubiquitous *ròuchuàn* (肉串; kebabs).

Best of all is the delicious *yáng ròu pàomó* (羊肉泡馍), a soup dish that involves crumbling a flat loaf of bread into a bowl and adding noodles, mutton and broth. You can also pick up mouth-watering desserts like *huāshēnggāo* (花生糕; peanut cakes) and *shìbing* (柿饼; dried persimmons), which can be found at the market or in Muslim Quarter shops. A good street to wander for a selection of more typically Chinese restaurants is Dongmutou Shi, east of Nan Dajie.

Wūyī Fāndiàn (Dong Dajie; dishes Y1-10) This cheap ground-floor restaurant is good for staple northern Chinese food, like pork dumplings and hearty bowls of noodles. It's popular with locals and always frenetic and noisy; there's some English on the menu.

King Town No 1 (Qintáng Yìhào Zhōngguó Cānguān; 176 Dongmutou Shi; meals Y10-40) Red tableware and an inviting, modern interior set this place apart from its old-school neighbours. Downstairs serves tempting homestyle dishes (Y4 to Y16; no English); upstairs is a classier Sichuanese-Cantonese restaurant (Y12 to Y40; English menu).

Máogōng Xiāngcàiguān (☎ 8782 0555; 99 Youyi Xilu; dishes Y18-38) Dine under the reassuring gaze of the Chairman at one of the most popular and slickest restaurants in town. The Hunanese fare on offer includes smoked pork (Y28; No 2003), super-spicy deep-fried chicken (Y32; No 4012) and all the ribs you can eat. The best branch (锦绣店; jǐnxiùdiàn) is across from the Little Goose Pagoda. There's an English menu.

Lǎo Sūn Jiā (2nd fl, Dong Dajie; dishes Y20-40) The English menu at Xī'ān's most famous restaurant (over a century old) is unfortunately as restricted as an imperial concubine's foot. It doesn't matter, though, because all you need is a fantastic huge bowl of *yáng ròu pàomó* (Y21).

Dé Fā Cháng (2nd fl, Bell Tower Sq; dumpling banquets from Y60) Dumplings are the speciality here: banquets are a minimum five courses and feature every sort of dumpling shape you could possibly conceive of, from walnuts to flowers to stars and even miniature animals (thankfully these cost extra). Bizarre but delicious.

If you're desperate for Western food, there's no shortage of fast food in town. Otherwise, most top-end hotels serve buffets. The **Bell Tower Hotel** (Xi Dajie; buffet per person Y100) has been recommended by readers.

Entertainment

Xī'ān has enough going on at night to keep most everyone occupied. A number of travellers enjoy the evening **fountain and music show** (🕒 8pm winter, 9pm summer) at the Big Goose Pagoda Sq; it's the largest in Asia. If bars and clubs are more your thing, wander down Nan Dajie, which has the largest concentration of dance spots in the city (look for the lights on the side streets). A more laid-back strip of bars and coffee shops is located near the South Gate on Defu Xiang. Xī'ān also has a number of dinner-dance shows – you either love 'em or find them irrepressibly cheesy.

Tang Dynasty (Táng Yuègōng; ☎ 8782 2222; www.xian tangdynasty.com; 75 Chang'an Beilu; performance only Y200, with dinner Y410) The most famous dinner theatre

in the city stages an over-the-top spectacle with Vegas-style costumes, traditional dance, music and singing. It's dubbed into English.

Shaanxi Grand Opera House (Shàngè Dàjūyuán; ☎ 8785 3295; www.tangdynastyshow.com; 165 Wenyi Lu; performance only Y198, with dinner Y278) Less known but no less impressive are the provincial performances by this group.

Shopping

For those who have always dreamed of owning a set of miniature terracotta warriors to serve as bookends or even to protect the backyard from an invasion of barbarian garden gnomes, you're in the right place. You'll be able to find local souvenirs at all the major museums, though these generally cost a small fortune. If your wallet isn't feeling up to the challenge, it's best to hunt down gifts in the Muslim Quarter, where prices can be as much as 20 times cheaper. Make sure that your purchase isn't so cheap that it will crumble in your luggage, though.

Xiyang Shi is a narrow alley running north of the Great Mosque and is probably the best stop for souvenirs. You'll find terracotta warriors, Huxian farmer paintings, shadow puppets, lanterns, tea ware, 'antiques', Mao memorabilia, T-shirts... you name it. Quality varies (almost everything is fake), so check purchases carefully and bargain hard – but don't confuse this with being rude. Smiling always helps. Close by near the Drum Tower is a covered market selling dried fruits and delicious cakes; great for snacks or an ascent of Huá Shān (p433).

Near the South Gate is the Qing-style Shuyuan Xiang, the main street for art supplies, paintings, calligraphy, paper cuts, brushes and fake rubbings from the Forest of Stelae Museum (p423). If you're after high-quality artwork, make sure to visit the Folk House (p423). Serious shoppers should also visit the antique market at the Temple of the Eight Immortals (p425) on Sunday and Wednesday mornings. The Temple of the City Gods (Chéngguāng Miào) also used to have an eclectic market, though at the time of writing it was closed for renovation.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Xī'ān's Xianyang Airport is one of China's best connected – you can fly to almost any major Chinese destination from here, as well as several international ones.

China Northwest Airlines (Xībēi Mínhángjǔ; ☎ 8870 0000; Laodong Nanlu; 🕒 8am-9pm) runs most flights to and from Xī'ān. It is also somewhat inconveniently located, 1.5km from the West Gate (Xi Mén). Daily flights include Běijīng (Y1050), Chéngdū (Y630), Guǎngzhōu (Y1490), Shànghǎi (Y1260) and Ürümqi (Y2050).

On the international front, there are four flights weekly to Hong Kong (Y1858) with both China Northwest Airlines and **Dragonair** (港龙航空; Gǎnglóng Hángkōng; ☎ 8426 0390; Sheraton Hotel, 262 Fenghao Donglu). However, many Hong Kong residents choose to depart from Shēnzhèn (Y1630), which has much better connections. China Northwest Airlines also has flights to Macau, Seoul, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Nagoya, Fukuoka, Niigata and Hiroshima in Japan.

There are numerous other outlets around town, as well as at most hotels, that sell airline tickets and are more centrally located.

BUS

The most central **long-distance bus station** (qìchē shēngzhàn) is opposite Xī'ān's train station. Note that many more buses run to Huá Shān (10am to 6pm) from in front of the train station.

Other bus stations around town (where you may be dropped off if you arrive by bus) include the **east bus station** (城东客运站; chéngdōng kèyùnzhàn; Changle Lu) and the **west bus station** (城西客运站; chéngxī kèyùnzhàn; Zaoyuan Donglu). Both are located outside the Second Ring Rd; bus 605 travels between the Bell Tower and the east bus station, and bus 103 travels between the train station and the west bus station. A taxi into the city costs Y20 to Y30.

For day trips around Xī'ān, see the relevant sights for transport details.

TRAIN

A new train station (*huòchē zhàn*) north of the Second Ring Rd is planned for 2008; until then a temporary station may be set up south of the city, although no-one could confirm this. At the time of writing the old station was still operating as normal.

In any case, buy your onward tickets as soon as you arrive, as sleeper berths are hard to come by. Most hotels and hostels can get you tickets (Y40 commission); there's also an **Advance Train Ticket Booking Office** (Dàishòu Huòchēpiào; Nan Dajie; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm) in the ICBC Bank's south entrance. Otherwise, brave the surging chaos of the main ticket hall.

BUSES FROM XĪ'ĀN'S LONG-DISTANCE BUS STATION

Destination	Price	Duration	Frequency	Departs
Huá Shān	Y25	2hr	3 daily	11am, noon, 2.30pm
Yán'ān	Y78	5½hr	40min	6.40am-4.20pm
Hánchéng	Y47	4hr	half-hourly	7am-4pm
Zhèngzhōu	Y131	6½hr	hourly	7.30am-4.30pm
Luòyáng	Y90	4hr	40min	6.40am-5.50pm
Tàiyuán	Y160	8hr	hourly	8am-4pm
Píngyáo	Y136	7hr	hourly	8am-4pm

Xī'ān is well connected to the rest of the country. Deluxe Z-trains run to/from Beijing West (soft sleeper only Y417, 11½ hours), leaving Xī'ān at 7.23pm and Beijing at 8.28pm. Several express trains also make the journey (Y274, 12½ hours); departures begin late afternoon.

Other destinations include Chéngdū (Y122, 16½ hours), Chóngqìng (Y113, 14 hours), Guǎngzhōu (Y430, 26 hours), Guǐlín (Y334, 27 hours), Jǐ'nán (Y208, 15 to 17 hours), Kūnmíng (Y343, 37 hours), Lánzhōu (Y175, 7½ to nine hours), Luòyáng (Y87, five hours), Píngyáo (Y86, nine to 11 hours), Shànghǎi (Y333, 16 to 21 hours), Tàiyuán (Y99, 10 to 12 hours), Ūrúmǐqí (Y287, 31 to 40 hours) and Zhèngzhōu (Y79 to Y133, six to eight hours).

Within Shaanxi, there are two overnight trains to Yúlín (Y160, 12 to 14 hours) via Yán'ān (Y100, eight to 10 hours) departing at 10.10pm and 10.40pm. Buy your tickets in advance. There is also a 7.15am train to Hánchéng (Y24, 4½ hours).

Getting Around

Xī'ān's Xianyang Airport is about 40km northwest of Xī'ān. Shuttle buses run hourly from 6am to 6pm between the airport and the Melody Hotel (Y25, one hour), stopping off at other hotels on the way. Taxis into the city charge over Y100 on the meter.

In the city itself, it's easiest to bike or take taxis, which are relatively cheap with a flag fall of Y6. You can hire bicycles at the youth hostels (average Y10 for four hours).

Of course, seasoned China travellers will no doubt be itching to try out the public buses, which go to all the major sights in and around the city. Bus 610 is a good one: it starts at the train station and passes the Bell Tower, Little Goose Pagoda, Shaanxi History Museum and Big Goose Pagoda. Remember that the packed

buses are a pickpocket's paradise, so watch your valuables.

The official word on the city's first metro line is that it will be completed in 2009; many residents, however, say the year 2100 is a better estimate.

AROUND XĪ'ĀN

The plains surrounding Xī'ān are strewn with early imperial tombs, many of which have not yet been excavated. But unless you have a particular fascination for dead bodies and burial sites, you can probably come away satisfied after visiting just one or two sites.

The Army of Terracotta Warriors is obviously the most famous; however, be sure to try and get to the Tomb of Emperor Jingdi as well. Another major attraction is Famen Temple, famous for Buddhist relics – in particular four of the Buddha's fingerbones.

The downside here is that the major sites are in totally different directions. If your time is limited, you'll have to pick and choose. Tourist buses run to almost all of the sites from in front of Xī'ān train station – note, however, that when the current train station closes (p427), the bus routes may change. Ask your hotel for an update.

Sights

EAST OF XĪ'ĀN

Army of Terracotta Warriors 兵马俑

The actual sight of the **Terracotta Army** (Bīngmǎyǒng; www.bmy.com.cn; admission Y90 Mar-Nov, Y65 Dec-Feb; 兵马俑 8.30am-5.30pm) initially proves to be so boggling that you can't get your head around it. It's hard to imagine, after all, that a subterranean life-size army of thousands has silently stood guard over the soul of China's first unifier for over two millennia. Whether Qin Shi Huang was terrified of the vanquished spirits awaiting him in the afterlife, or, as most

archaeologists believe, he expected his rule to continue in death as it had in life – either way, the guardians of his tomb today offer some of the greatest insights we have into the world of ancient China.

The discovery of the Army was, like many major discoveries, entirely serendipitous. In 1974 peasants drilling a well uncovered one of the largest and most important finds of the 20th century: an underground vault that eventually yielded thousands of terracotta soldiers and horses in battle formation. Over the years the site became so famous that many of its unusual attributes are now well known, in particular the fact that no two soldier's faces are alike.

Unfortunately, because you can't get that close to the soldiers *in situ*, some people come away feeling disappointed. To really appreciate a trip here you need background info – if you're not with a guide, the best place to start is with the documentary film in the on-site theatre. The film gives a brief overview of the historical context of the warriors, as well as a primer on how they were sculpted. From here you can then visit the site in reverse, so as to save the most impressive pit for last.

Start with the smallest pit (Pit 3, containing 72 warriors and horses), which is believed to be the army headquarters due to the number of high-ranking officers unearthed here. It's interesting to note that the northern room

would have been used to make sacrificial offerings before battle. Moving on to the next pit (Pit 2, containing around 1300 warriors and horses), you'll have the chance to examine five soldiers up close: a kneeling archer, a standing archer, a cavalryman and horse, a mid-ranking officer and a general. The level of detail is startling: the expressions, hairstyles, armour and even the tread on the footwear are all unique.

The largest pit (Pit 1) is the most imposing. Some 6000 warriors and horses stand here in rectangular battle array, facing east. The vanguard of three rows of archers (both crossbow and longbow) is followed by the main force of soldiers, who originally held spears, swords, dagger-axes and other long-shaft weapons. The infantry were accompanied by 35 chariots, though these, made of wood, have long since disintegrated.

Almost as extraordinary as the soldiers is a pair of bronze chariots and horses unearthed just 20m west of the Tomb of Qin Shi Huang. These are now on display, together with some of the original weaponry, in a small museum to the right of the main entrance.

If you'd like to hire an English-speaking tour guide at the site, you shouldn't have too much trouble. Outside the entrance the price is Y100, while inside you can often talk the guides down to as little as Y50. Keep in mind, however, that the lower you push down their

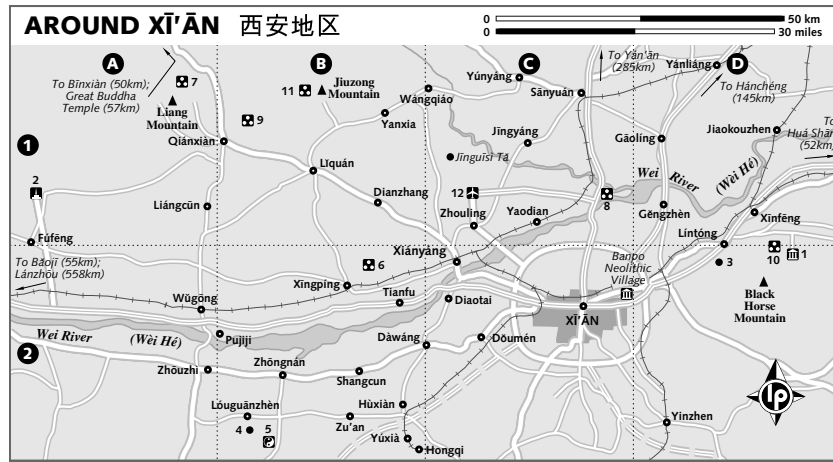
THE MAN BEHIND THE ARMY

History belongs to the winners – or so we often say. But China's history has its own little twist: it wasn't so much dictated by conquerors as it was written by Confucian bureaucrats. Whether or not an emperor got a decent posthumous write-up depended on just how well he treated his staff. No-one better exemplifies this than Qin Shi Huang, who, as the first person to unify China, could have become an unassailable patriarchal figure – if he hadn't eternally ticked off the scholar-official class.

The First Emperor was definitely a chronic overachiever. His accomplishments in 36 years of rule (which began at age 13) are nothing short of amazing. He created an efficient, centralised government that became the model for later dynasties; he standardised measurements, currency and, most importantly, writing (thus getting around the tricky dialect problem); he built over 6400km of new roads and canals; and, of course, he conquered six major kingdoms before turning 40.

But like many classic Type A personalities, Qin Shi Huang struggled with some serious issues: he was a fanatical, paranoid control freak, he enslaved hundreds of thousands of people to work on massive construction projects, he ordered almost all written texts to be burnt and (so legend has it) he took criticism so badly that he buried 460 disapproving scholars alive.

All of that coupled with an adherence to Legalist philosophy (archrivals of the Confucians) did not make the First Emperor popular with later historians. He's essentially remembered as the tyrant he was – but who nevertheless set a precedent for autocratic rule that continues to this day.



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Army of Terracotta Warriors 兵马俑	1	D2
Famen Temple 法门寺	2	A1
Huaqing Hot Springs 华清池	3	D2
Louguantai National Forest	4	B2
Louguantai 楼观台	5	B2
Mao Tomb 茂陵	6	B2
Qian Tomb 乾陵	7	A1
Tomb of Emperor Jingdi 汉阳陵	8	C1
Tomb of Prince Zhang Huai 章怀墓	(see 9)	
Tomb of Princess Yong Tai 永泰墓	9	B1
Tomb of Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇陵	10	D2
Zhao Tomb 昭陵	11	B1

TRANSPORT

Xi'an Yang Airport 咸阳机场	12	C1
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fee, the faster they'll push you through the site (though you can go back). Expect these prices to be jacked up on peak days.

The Army is easily reached by public bus. From the Xī'ān train station parking lot, take the green Terracotta Warriors minibuses (Y7, one hour) or the less-frequent bus 306 (Y7, one hour), both of which travel via Huaqing Hot Springs. The parking lot for all vehicles is a good 15-minute walk from the site. If you don't feel like walking, electric carts (Y4) zoom back and forth to the ticket office. There's a self-service cafeteria inside (Y38), but the restaurants across from the parking lot are better. If you can, avoid meal times entirely.

Tomb of Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇陵

In its time this **tomb** (Qín Shìhuáng Líng; admission Y40; ☎ 7am-6pm) must have been one of the grandest mausoleums the world had ever seen.

Historical accounts describe it as containing palaces filled with precious stones, underground rivers of flowing mercury and ingenious defences against intruders. The tomb reputedly took 38 years to complete, and required a workforce of 700,000 people. It is said that the artisans who brought it all into being were buried alive within, taking its secrets with them.

Still unexcavated, all there is to see for the time being is a mound (and occasional performances). If you're interested, the tomb is about 1.5km west of the Army of Terracotta Warriors. Take bus 306 from Xī'ān train station.

Huaqing Hot Springs 华清池

The natural hot springs in this **park** (Huáqíng Chí; admission Y70 Dec-Feb, Y40 Mar-Nov; ☎ 7am-7pm, 7.30am-6.30pm Nov-Mar) were once the favoured retreat of emperors and concubines during the Tang dynasty. The most famous bather of all was the femme fatale Yang Guifei, a concubine often given the blame for bewitching Emperor Xuanzong and bringing about the devastating An Lushan Rebellion in 756. She's since inspired stinging idioms like, 'hóngyán huòshuǐ – a beautiful face that causes catastrophe' (don't try this on your guide).

There are still public bathhouses here, though you're better off exploring the forested areas of the park, or hiking up to the Taoist temple on Black Horse Mountain (Lí Shān). The temple is dedicated to Nǚwā, who created the human race from clay and also patched up cracks in the sky.

Additionally, there's a small **museum** (Líntóng Bówùguǎn; admission Y24) with an interesting collection of Buddhist artefacts five minutes' walk up the road. Given the exorbitant entrance fee for what's essentially a park, consider skipping it if you're not on a tour. Both the Terracotta Warriors minibuses and bus 306 stop here on the way to and from the Warriors.

Banpo Neolithic Village 半坡博物馆

The **Banpo Neolithic Village** (Bānpō Bówùguǎn; admission Y20; ☎ 8am-6.30pm) is of enormous importance for Chinese archaeological studies, though as a tourist site it gets mixed reports. Parts of it were unbearably cheesy (Neolithic

matriarchs wearing nylon stockings) before renovation began in 2004. At the time of writing it still hadn't reopened, but hopefully it's been given a touch more class.

Banpo is the earliest example of the Neolithic Yangshao culture. It appears to have been occupied from 4500 BC until around 3750 BC. As less than a quarter of the site has been excavated, little is really known of the early agrarians. However, circumstantial evidence indicates that the culture was possibly matriarchal; also of interest are shamanistic relics that have been unearthed.

The Banpo ruins are divided into three parts: a pottery-manufacturing area, a residential area and a cemetery. These include the remains of 45 houses or other buildings, over 200 storage cellars, six pottery kilns and 250 graves.

The electric trolley 105 from Xī'ān train station and bus 15 from the Bell Tower run past (ask where to get off); it's also generally included on tours. The entrance fee will almost certainly double or triple (or even quadruple) when it reopens.

NORTH & WEST OF Xī'ĀN

Tomb of Emperor Jingdi 汉阳陵

The **Tomb of Emperor Jingdi** (Hàn Yánglíng; ☎ 371 5373; admission Y45 Mar-Nov, Y30 Dec-Feb; ☎ 8am-7pm) is easily Xī'ān's most underrated highlight. A Han dynasty emperor influenced by Taoism, Jingdi (188-141 BC) based his rule upon the concept of *wuwei* (non-action or non-interference) and did much to improve the life of his subjects: he lowered taxes greatly, used diplomacy to cut back on unnecessary military expeditions and even reduced the punishment meted out to criminals. The contents of his tomb are particularly interesting, as

they reveal more about daily life than martial preoccupations – a total contrast with the Terracotta Army.

The site has been divided into two sections, the museum and the excavation area. Buy admission tickets at the museum, which holds a large display of numerous terracotta figurines (over 50,000 were buried here), including enuchs, servants, domesticated animals and even female cavalry on horseback. The figurines originally had movable wooden arms (now gone) and were dressed in colourful silk robes.

However, the tomb itself, which is currently being excavated, is the real reason to make the trip out here. Inside are 21 narrow pits, parts of which have been covered by a glass floor, allowing you to walk over the top of ongoing excavations – it's a must for any amateur archaeologists. It culminates with a giant window through which you can see a large cross-section of one of the pits.

Unfortunately, getting here can be tricky. You can either try to find a Western Tour that visits the site (see p433), hire a taxi (figure on Y200 for a half-day) or take your chances with minibus 3-16, which leaves east of the Xī'ān train station parking lot at the bottom of the entrance ramp. Just make sure that they'll pick you up as well. Alternatively, because the tomb is located about 20km north of Xī'ān on the old airport road, you could potentially stop here if you're taking a taxi to the airport. In any case, take food with you.

A final note: Emperor Jingdi's tomb is also referred to as the Han Jing Mausoleum, Liu Qi Mausoleum and Yangling Mausoleum – if you get confused, consider yourself normal.

Famen Temple 法门寺

Thick with elderly Buddhists, this **temple** (Fāmén Sì; temple & crypt/museum Y28/32; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) was originally built to house four sacred fingerbones of the Buddha, presented to China by India's King Asoka. In 1981, after torrential rains had weakened the temple's ancient brick structure, the entire western side of its 12-storey pagoda collapsed. The subsequent restoration of the temple produced a sensational discovery. Below the pagoda in a sealed crypt were over 1000 sacrificial objects and royal offerings – all forgotten for over a millennia.

Unless you plan on lining up with the pilgrims in the crypt, it's best to head straight over to the museum (left of the temple entrance),

which has four main galleries. The main exhibits are the elaborate gold and silver boxes (stacked on top of one another to form pagodas) and tiny crystal and jade coffins that originally held the four sections of the holy finger. Also on display are ornate incense burners, glass cups and vases (imported from the West along the Silk Road), statues, gold and silver offerings, and an excellent reproduced cross-section of the four-chamber crypt, which symbolised a tantric mandala (a geometric representation of the universe).

Famen Temple is 115km northwest of Xī'ān. Tour bus 2 from Xī'ān train station (Y18, departs 8am) runs to the temple and returns to Xī'ān at 5pm. The temple is also generally included on Western Tours (see opposite).

Xiányáng 咸阳

☎ 0910 / pop 976,200

Over 2000 years ago, Xiányáng was the capital of the Qin dynasty. Its chief attraction today is the **Xiányang City Museum** (咸阳市博物馆; Xiányáng Shì Bówùguǎn; Zhongshan Jie; admission Y20; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), which houses a remarkable collection of 3000 50cm-tall terracotta soldiers and horses, excavated from a Han dynasty tomb in 1965. The museum also holds an interesting chronological exhibit of horses in ancient China.

Buses run regularly to Xiányáng from Xī'ān's long-distance bus station (Y7, one hour). From Xiányáng's bus station, you'll see a clock tower ahead on the left-hand side of the road; turn right at this intersection and then left at Xining Jie.

The museum is 20 minutes by foot from the bus station on Zhongshan Jie, a continuation of Xining Jie.

Imperial Tombs 皇陵

A large number of imperial tombs (*huáng líng*) dot the Guānzhōng plain around Xī'ān. They are sometimes included on tours from Xī'ān (see opposite), though none are so remarkable as to be destinations in themselves.

In these tombs are buried the emperors of numerous dynasties, as well as empresses, concubines, government officials and high-ranking military leaders. Admission to the tombs varies from Y15 to Y45; opening hours are 8.30am to 5pm daily (closing later in summer).

The most impressive is the **Qian Tomb** (乾陵; Qián Líng), where China's only female emperor, Wu Zetian (AD 625-705), is buried

together with her husband Emperor Gaozong, whom she succeeded. The long Spirit Way (Yù Dào) here is lined with enormous, lichen-encrusted sculptures of animals and officers of the imperial guard, culminating with 61 (now headless) statues of leaders of ethnic groups in China who attended the emperor's funeral. The two stela on the ground each stand more than 6m high. The Wordless Stele (Wúzi Bēi) is a blank tablet; one story goes that it symbolises Empress Wu's absolute power, which she considered inexpressible in words. Behind this is a small hill that you can jaunt up for spectacular views of the countryside.

The mausoleum is 85km northwest of Xī'ān; tour bus 3 (Y12, departure 8am) runs here from Xī'ān train station and returns in the early afternoon. The following four tombs are only accessible by taxi or via an organised tour (see Tours, opposite).

Near the Qian Tomb are the tombs of **Princess Yong Tai** (永泰墓; Yǒng Tàì Mù) and **Prince Zhang Huai** (章怀墓; Zhāng Huái Mù), both who fell afoul of Empress Wu and were posthumously rehabilitated.

Other tombs include the **Zhao Tomb** (昭陵; Zhāo Líng), which belongs to the second Tang emperor, Taizong, who died in AD 649. This tomb set the custom of building imperial tombs on mountains, thus breaking the tradition of building them on the plains with an artificial hill over them. It's 70km northwest of Xī'ān.

Finally there's the **Mao Tomb** (茂陵; Mào Líng), a cone-shaped mound of rammed earth almost 47m high, and the largest of the Han imperial tombs. It's the resting place of Emperor Wudi (156-87 BC), the most powerful of the Han emperors. It's located 40km northwest of Xī'ān.

Great Buddha Temple 大佛寺

This large **temple** (Dǎfó Sì; admission Y8) is quite a distance from Xī'ān, about 115km to the northwest outside Binxiàn (彬县). However, it is easy to reach on public transport and, better still, it opens up a route to the Taoist temples of Kōngtóng Shān in Gānsù (see p873). The main Buddha is 30m high and 34m wide; the grotto's exterior is framed by an impressive three-storey fortress tower. Two other caves house nearly 2000 arhat sculptures, shrines and stela.

Buses to Binxiàn (Y32, four hours) leave from Xī'ān's long-distance bus station. From Binxiàn it's around 7km north to the temple

complex; a motorcycle taxi will cost Y10. From the temple it's easy to flag down buses back (up till about 3.30pm).

Tours

One-day tours allow you to see all the sights around Xī'ān more quickly and conveniently than if you arranged one yourself. Itineraries differ somewhat, but there are two basic tours: an Eastern Tour and a Western Tour. Youth hostels have also begun Panda Tours to an endangered animals centre (more zoo than reserve) in the Louguantai National Forest, outside Lóuguāntái.

Most hotels run their own tours, but, as more than one reader has griped, be extremely cautious when booking. Ask what is included (admission fees, lunch, English-speaking guide) and try to get an exact itinerary, unless you don't mind being herded through the Terracotta Warriors faster than you can say 'earthshaking at home and abroad'.

EASTERN TOUR

The Eastern Tour (Dōngxiàn Yóulǎn) is the most popular as it includes the Army of Terracotta Warriors, as well as the Tomb of Qin Shi Huang, Banpo Neolithic Village, Huaqing Hot Springs and possibly the Big Goose Pagoda. Most travel agencies (p421) charge Y300 for an all-day (9am to 5pm), all-in excursion, including admission fees, lunch and guide. The youth hostels also run dependable tours.

It's possible to do a shortened version of this one on your own using the tourist minibuses, which pass by Huaqing Hot Springs, the Terracotta Warriors and the Tomb of Qin Shi Huang. Hiring a taxi for the day (around Y180 for all sights) is another option. It may not save you money, but it will give you more control over your schedule.

WESTERN TOUR

The longer Western Tour (Xīxiàn Yóulǎn) includes the Xiányang City Museum, some of the imperial tombs, and possibly also Famen Temple and (if you insist) the Tomb of Emperor Jingdi. It's far less popular than the Eastern Tour and consequently you may have to wait a couple of days for your agency to organise enough people. Travel agencies charge from Y500 upwards; CIT'S also hires out private cars (Y980 per day). A taxi for the day will cost anywhere from Y300 to Y600, depending on what you want to visit.

HUÁ SHĀN 华山

One of Taoism's five sacred mountains, the granite domes of Huá Shān were once one of those mythical places where 500-year-old hermits became one with the universe while surviving on an invigorating diet of pine needles and wild herbs. The spectacular scenery is still here: knife-blade ridges, twisted pine trees clinging to ledges, and vast, transcendent panoramas of green mountains and countryside stretching away to the horizon. The Taoists, however, have long been replaced by droves of happy-go-lucky visitors from all walks of life, seemingly loving every minute of the tough climb. So forget about all that New Agey Laotzu stuff – pull on some cloth slippers or high heels and get ready to have some fun!

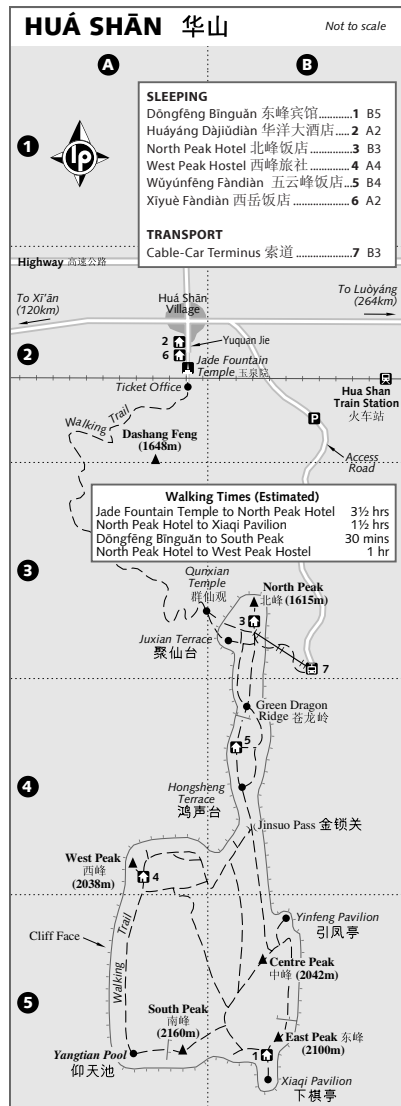
The Ascent

There are three ways up the mountain to the **North Peak** (Běi Fēng), the first of five summit peaks. Two of these options start from the eastern base of the mountain, at the cable-car terminus. If your legs aren't feeling up to the task, an Austrian-built cable car is the easiest route. It can get you to the North Peak in 10 scenic minutes (one way/return Y60/100; from 7am to 7pm).

The second option is to work your way to the North Peak under the cable-car route. This takes a sweaty two hours, but two sections of 50m or so are quite literally vertical with nothing but a steel chain to grab onto and tiny chinks cut into the rock for footing.

The third option is the most popular and the one that will leave the most memories, both physically and psychologically. A 6km path leads to the North Peak from the village of Huá Shān, at the base of the mountain. It usually takes between three to five hours to reach the North Peak, and another hour or so to get to any one of the others (figure on a minimum eight hours to do the entire circuit, starting from the trailhead). The first 4km up are pretty easy going, but after that it's all steep stairs, and from the North Peak on to the other summits it's also fairly strenuous. Several narrow and almost vertical 'bottle-neck' sections can be dangerous when the route is crowded, particularly under wet or icy conditions.

Then again, the scenery is often sublime. Along **Green Dragon Ridge** (Cānglóng Líng),



There is accommodation on the mountain, most of it quite basic and overpriced, but it does allow you to start climbing in the afternoon, spend the night, and catch the sunrise from either the East Peak or South Peak. Many locals actually make the climb at night, aided by torches (flashlights) and countless tea and refreshment stands. The idea is to start at around 11pm to midnight, which should get you to the East Peak at sunrise. In summer this is certainly a much cooler option, but you do miss the scenery on the way up.

Admission is Y100 (Y50 November to March). To get to the cable car (*suǒdào*), take a taxi from the village to the parking lot (Y5) and then take a shuttle bus (Y10) the rest of the way.

Sleeping & Eating

You can either spend the night in Huá Shān village or on one of the peaks. Take your own food or eat well before ascending, or you'll be left with instant noodles and processed meat at the top – a proper meal can be eye-poppingly expensive. Don't forget a torch and enough warm clothes.

In the village, look for hotels along Yuquan Jie, the road leading up to the trailhead.

West Peak Hostel (Xifēng Lúshè; dm Y30-50, tw Y360) A rustic place atop West Peak that shares the premises with an old Taoist temple.

North Peak Hotel (Běifēng Fàndiàn; dm Y35) This small place is as busy as an anthill, but it is good to know about if you need to stop earlier than planned.

Huáyáng Dàjiǔdiàn (☎ 0913-436 6178; tw Y100, with shared bathroom Y40; 🍽️) This fairly clean place is 100m from the Huá Shān trailhead. Make sure to bargain.

Wúyúnfēng Fàndiàn (dm/tw Y50/160) This hotel occupies a strategic location if you're planning on doing a circuit of the rear peaks the next day.

Dōngfēng Bīnguǎn (dm/tw Y80/520) Anything near the East Peak – given the sunrise – is going to cost you. It does have the best location on the mountain, though.

Xiyuè Fàndiàn (☎ 0913-436 4741; fax 436 8213; tw/tw Y200/320; 🍽️) This hotel is right near the Huá Shān trailhead and has more creature comforts than any other place in the village.

Most mountain accommodation consists of either dorms or private rooms – neither have their own bathrooms and expect nothing remotely luxurious.

Getting There & Away

From Xī'ān to Huá Shān, it's easiest to catch one of the private buses (Y25, two hours) that depart from in front of Xī'ān train station throughout the day. You'll be dropped off on the main street (Yuquan Jie), which is also where buses back to Xī'ān leave, from 7am to about 5.30pm. Coming from the east, try to talk your driver into dropping you at the Huá Shān highway exit if you can't find a direct bus. Don't pay more than Y10 for a taxi into Huá Shān village. There are few buses (if any) going east from Huá Shān. Pretty much everyone catches a taxi to the highway and then flags down buses headed for Yǔnchéng, Tàiyuán or Luòyáng. If you can't read Chinese, try to find someone to help you out.

Alternatively, you can try the train. The nearest station is at Mèngyuán, on the Xī'ān–Luòyáng line, about 15km east of Huá Shān. This station is also referred to as Huá Shān, and is served by nearly a dozen trains a day in either direction. Maps of Huá Shān have comprehensive timetables (in Chinese), which will give you a good idea of when the next departure is. Trains to and from Xī'ān take two to three hours (hard seat Y31). Infrequent minibuses run between Huá Shān train station and the village (Y3, 30 minutes); a taxi will cost a minimum Y15.

HǎNCHÉNG 韩城

☎ 0913 / pop 150,000

Hǎnchéng is best known for being the hometown of Sima Qian (145–90 BC), China's legendary historian and author of the *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian). Sima Qian chronicled different aspects of life in the Han dynasty and set about arranging the country's already distant past in its proper (Confucian) order. He was eventually castrated and imprisoned by Emperor Wudi after having defended an unsuccessful general.

Hǎnchéng makes for a good overnight trip from Xī'ān. It boasts a handful of historic sights, but is far enough away to be off the main tourist circuit. Best of all, you can spend the night and savour homemade noodles in the neighbouring little village of Dǎngjiācūn.

Orientation

Hǎnchéng is built upon a hill. At the top is the new town (新城; *xīnchéng*), at the bottom is the old town (古城; *gǔchéng*). Hotels, banks and transport are all in the new town.

The train station (火车站; *huǒchē zhàn*) is at the northern end of the new town, the bus station (客运站; *kèyùn zhàn*) is two blocks east on Huanghe Dajie. The street Longmen Dajie (龙门大街) runs from the train station south to the old town.

You can change cash at the **Bank of China** (中国银行; *Zhōngguó Yínháng*; cnr Renmin Lu & Zhuangyuan Jie; 🕒 8am–6pm).

Sights

CONFUCIUS TEMPLE 文庙

The best sight in Hǎnchéng's old town is the tranquil **Confucius Temple** (Wén Miào; admission Y15; 🕒 8am–6pm), with dilapidated Yuan, Ming and Qing buildings, a half-moon pool, towering cypress trees and glazed dragon screens. The city museum holds peripheral exhibits in the wings. There are two other temples nearby, which are currently being renovated. A taxi here is Y5.

DǎNGJIĀCÚN 党家村

This 14th-century **village** (admission Y30; 🕒 7.30am–6.30pm) was obviously constructed according to the tenets of feng shui, occupying a sheltered location in a loess valley. Once the home of the Dang clan, successful merchants who ferried timber and other goods across the Yellow River, it's since evolved into a quintessential farming community. There are 125 preserved grey-brick courtyard houses here, remarkable for their carvings and mix of different architectural styles. The elegant six-storey tower is a **Confucian pagoda** (Wénxīng gé).

Dǎngjiācūn is 9km northeast of Hǎnchéng. To get here, take a minibus (Y2, 20 minutes) from the bus station to the entrance road, from where it's a pleasant 2km walk through fields to the village. Otherwise, you can take a taxi from Hǎnchéng (Y15).

THE TOMB OF SIMA QIAN 司马迁祠

The **Tomb of Sima Qian** (Sīmǎ Qiān Cí; admission Y35; 🕒 8am–6pm) probably used to be an exquisite place, built atop a hill overlooking fields and the nearby Yellow River. Unfortunately, the scenery has suffered somewhat from an elevated expressway that now dominates the landscape. The circular tomb isn't much to look at, but despite all that, it's quite popular with picnickers.

The tomb is 10km south of town. To get here, take bus 1 from the train station to its terminus at Nánguān and then switch to

which connects the North Peak with the **East Peak** (Dōng Fēng), **South Peak** (Nán Fēng) and **West Peak** (Xī Fēng), the way has been cut along a narrow rock ridge with impressive sheer cliffs on either side.

The South Peak is the highest at 2160m, but all three rear peaks afford great views when the weather cooperates.

the green Simǎ Miào bus (Y2.5, 20 minutes). You'll have to catch a taxi back (Y15).

Sleeping

The best option is to spend the night in Dǎngjiācūn, where you can find homestays for Y10 (dorm accommodation). The home-cooking here is simple but fantastic.

If you'd prefer to spend the night in town, try the white-tiled **Tiānyuán Bīnguǎn** (天园宾馆; ☎ 529 9388; Longmen Dajie Beiduan; 龙门大街北段; tw/s Y148/228; 🚻), across from the train station, or the plush **Yínhé Dàjiǔdiàn** (银河大酒店; ☎ 529 2111; fax 529 2888; Longmen Dajie Nanduan; 龙门大街南段; tw/tr Y300/358; 🚻).

Getting There & Away

Hánchéng is really only accessible from Xī'ān, although there is one train that comes down from Běijīng via Tàiyuán.

Half-hourly buses leave Xī'ān's long-distance bus station for Hánchéng (Y47, four hours) from 7am to 4pm daily. Buses back to Xī'ān (Y50) run until 6pm – though these may drop you off at the east bus station. If you're in an exploratory mood, you can also cross over the Yellow River into Shǎnxǐ from here.

The best train to Hánchéng (Y24, 4½ hours) leaves Xī'ān at 7.15am. Going back to Xī'ān, you can either catch the 6.28am (6½ hours) or the 1.56pm (4½ hours) train.

Also of note is the 2.53pm local train, which passes through Píngyáo (Y99, arrives 9pm) and Tàiyuán (Y115, arrives 10.47pm) before terminating at Beijing West (Y216, arrives 8.30am). The return train departs from Beijing West at 7.43pm, arriving in Hánchéng at 1pm the next day.

YÁN'ĀN 延安

☎ 0911 / pop 117,200

Depending on whom you believe, Yán'ān was either communism's promised land or the location for the ominous beginnings of Emperor Mao's twisted dystopian rule. Either way, it's irrefutably the place where the Long March finally came to an end in 1935, a beleaguered 9500km away from its start in Jiāngxǐ province. Yán'ān served as the communists' power base until 1947, and it was from here that they fleshed out the ideologies specific to the Chinese revolution.

As such, Yán'ān is hallowed ground for patriots, and this otherwise nondescript backwater manages to pull in four-million photo-

snapping 'red tourists' annually. For most foreign travellers, though, the town does little more than elicit long yawns and drooping eyelids – there's little reason to come here unless you've got a penchant for political history.

Orientation

Yán'ān is intriguingly spread out along a Y-shaped valley formed where the east and west branches of Yan River (Yán Hé) meet. The town centre is clustered around this junction, while the old communist army headquarters is at Yángjiǎng on the northwestern outskirts of Yán'ān. The train station and south bus station are at the far southern end of Yán'ān, 4.5km from the town centre.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Beiguan Jie;

☎ 8am-7pm) Inconveniently located, but has an ATM.

Internet café (Wǎngbā; Yán'an shi Dajie; per hr Y2) On the 2nd floor of the post office.

Post and telephone office (Yóudiàn Dàlòu; Yán'an shi Dajie)

PSB (Gōngānjū; Yán'an shi Dajie) There is an office at the Yán'ān Bīnguǎn.

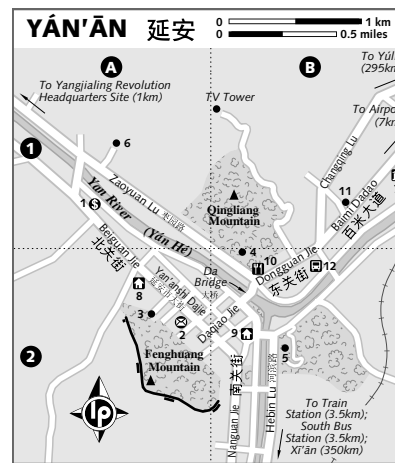
Sights

During their extended stay, the communist leadership moved house quite a bit within Yán'ān. As a result there are numerous former headquarters sites.

One of the most interesting sites is the **Yangjiǎng Revolution Headquarters Site** (杨家岭革命旧址; Yángjiǎng Géming Jiǔzhǐ; ☎ 211 2671; Zaoyuan Lu; admission Y16; 🕒 7am-7pm summer, 7.30am-6pm winter), 3km northwest of the town centre. Here you can see the assembly hall where the first central committee meetings were held, including the 7th national plenum, which formally confirmed Mao as the leader of the party and the revolution.

Nearby are simple **dugouts** built into the loess earth where Mao, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai and other senior communist leaders lived, worked and wrote. Further uphill are **caves** that used to house the secretariat, propaganda and personnel offices.

Further south is the last site occupied by the communist leadership in Yán'ān, the **Wangjiāping Revolution Headquarters Site** (Wángjiāpíng Géming Jiǔzhǐ; ☎ 238 2161; Zaoyuan Lu; admission Y10; 🕒 7am-7pm summer, 8am-5.30pm winter). Of note primarily is the improvement in living standards enjoyed by Mao and top-ranking comrades.



Both of these sights can be reached by taking bus 1, which runs from the train station along the road east of the river and then heads up Zaoyuan Lu. Bus 3 runs along the other side of the river along Zhongxin Jie; get off when it crosses north over the river. Both of these start at the train station. Bus 8 also passes by all these places and can be caught from Da Bridge.

More accessible from the town is the **Fenghuangshan Revolution Headquarters Site** (Fēnghuángshān Géming Jiǔzhǐ; admission Y9; 🕒 8am-5.30pm summer, 8am-5pm winter), about 100m north of the post office. This was the first site occupied by the communists after their move to Yán'ān, as reflected by the relatively primitive lodgings of the leading cadres.

In the east of town is the **Yán'an Revolution Museum** (Yán'ān Géming Jiǎnshǐ Chénliè; Baimi Dadao; admission Y16; 🕒 8am-5.30pm), which has a tiny exhibit of farm tools, weaponry and grainy B&W photographs from the good old days. It's located behind the Wénhuà Yìshù Zhōngxīn (文化艺术中心), across from two cooling towers. Take bus 9 here.

Treasure Pagoda (Bǎo Tǎ; admission Y40; 🕒 6am-9pm), built during the Song dynasty, stands on a prominent hillside southeast of the river junction.

Qingliang Mountain (Qīngliáng Shān; ☎ 211 2236; admission Y10; 🕒 7am-8pm) is a pleasant hillside park with some nice trails and a few sights, including **Ten Thousand Buddha Cave** (Wàn fú Dòng) dug into the sandstone cliff beside the river. The cave has relatively intact Buddhist statues.

INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1	A1
Internet Café 网吧	(see 2)	
Post & Telephone Office 邮电大楼	2	A2
PSB 公安局	(see 8)	

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Fenghuangshan Revolution Headquarters Site		
凤凰山革命旧址	3	A2
Qingliang Mountain Entry Gate 清凉山售票处	4	B2
Treasure Pagoda 宝塔	5	B2
Wangjiaping Revolution Headquarters Site		
王家坪革命旧址	6	A1
Yán'an Revolution Museum 延安革命简史陈列	7	B1

SLEEPING

Yán'an Bīnguǎn 延安宾馆	8	A2
Yàshèng Dàjiǔdiàn 亚圣大酒店	9	B2

EATING

Night Market 夜市	10	B2
Rotating Restaurant 亚圣大酒店	(see 9)	

TRANSPORT

CAAC 中国民航	11	B1
East Bus Station 汽车东站	12	B2

Sleeping

Capitalist roaders and counter-revolutionaries take note: sleeping does not come cheaply in Yán'ān.

Yàshèng Dàjiǔdiàn (☎ 213 8336; fax 213 8063; Erdao Jie Zhongduan; 二道街中段; tw Y238-268; dishes Y14-40; 🚻) Located in the centre of town, the once-stylish rooms here are clean but less than luxurious. The best food experience in town is found in the rotating restaurant on the top floor of the hotel.

Yán'an Bīnguǎn (☎ 211 3122; fax 211 4297; 56 Yán'an shi Dajie; 延安大街56号; s/d from Y480/580; 🚻) It will tout that world leaders lodge here, yet the unimpressive rooms – and indifferent service – aren't really worth the money, unless it offers its usual 20% discount.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are daily flights to Xī'ān (Y420) and Běijīng (Y960) from the airport (飞机场), 7km northeast of the town.

The airline booking office **Civil Aviation Administration of China** (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 211 1111; 🕒 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm) is located on Baimi Dadao. A bus service (Y5, 8.30am) connects the office with the airport.

BUS

From Xī'ān's long-distance bus station, there are buses to Yán'ān (Y78, 5½ hours) every 40

minutes from 6.30am to 4.20pm. The schedule back to Xī'ān is essentially the same. Buses arrive and depart from the south bus station (汽车南站; *nán zhàn*).

At the east bus station (*dōng zhàn*), there are minibuses to Yúlín (Y51, five hours) every 40 minutes from 5.30am to 5pm. Heading west, there are departures to Yínchuān in Níngxià (Y92 to Y99, eight hours). Buses leave at 8am, 9.30am and 10.30am; sleepers leave at 2.40pm and 4.30pm. You can also get into Shānxī and Hénán.

TRAIN

Heading back to Xī'ān are overnight trains (Y100, eight to 10 hours) leaving at 8.46pm and 10.08pm. Unfortunately, advance tickets in Yán'ān can be hard to come by – consider taking the bus instead. A taxi from the train station into town costs Y10.

YÚLÍN 榆林

☎ 0912 / pop 505,000

A one-time garrison town with a smattering of local character inside its old earthen walls, Yúlín is a rapidly expanding outpost on the fringes of Inner Mongolia's Mu Us Desert. If you happen to be passing through – following the Great Wall, or visiting Genghis Khan's Mausoleum (p894) – this is a good place to break up the trip.

The main north–south pedestrian street in the elongated old town (divided into Běi Dàjiè and Nán Dàjiè) has several restored buildings, including what appears to be an early 20th-century **Bell Tower** (钟楼; Zhōng Lóu). Four kilometres north of Yúlín are some badly eroded 15th-century sections of the Great Wall and a prominent four-storey **beacon tower** (镇北台; zhèn běi tái; admission Y20; 🕒 8am–6pm).

Sleeping

Chángchéng Fàndiàn (长城饭店; ☎ 328 3109; Yuyang Lu; 榆阳路; tw Y60, without bathroom Y40) Five minutes' walk east along the walls from the main bus station.

Yúxī Dàjiùdiàn (榆溪大酒店; ☎ 336 3800; Xi Renmin Lu Zhongduan; 西人民路中段; tw/tr Y168/188; 🍷) Decent accommodation by the regional bus station. Staff say the 2nd floor is haunted.

Getting There & Away

There are daily flights to Xī'ān (Y590) from the airport, 10km east of town.

Yúlín has two bus stations. If you get off the bus inside the town walls (near the south gate), you are at the main bus station (汽车站; *qì chē zhàn*); the regional bus station (客运站; *kè yùn zhàn*) is located a little further northwest.

The main bus station has sleepers to Xī'ān (Y130, 10 hours) at 5pm, 5.30pm and 6pm. You can also get frequent buses to Yán'ān (Y51, five hours), and morning buses to Tàiyuán (Y89, eight hours) and Yínchuān (Y94, five hours).

The regional bus station has half-hourly buses to Dàliùtǎ (Y7, 1½ hours), from where you can travel by bus or train to Dōngshèng and Bāotóu in Inner Mongolia. Note that the buses to Dōngshèng pass by Genghis Khan's Mausoleum. There are also nonluxury buses going to Xī'ān (Y103, 10 hours) throughout the day.

The train station is 1km west of town. There are three trains to Xī'ān (Y109 to Y144, 12 to 14 hours) via Yán'ān departing at 7.25am, 4.20pm and 6.04pm, but don't count on being able to get sleeper tickets.

Taxis around town and to the train station are Y5.