



Shānxī

POPULATION: 35 MILLION

Includes »

Dàtóng	338
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Best Place to Eat

» Tàiyuán Noodle House (p347)

Best Places to Stay

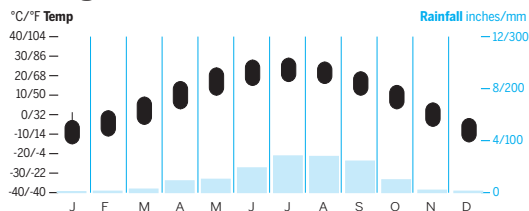
- » Jing's Residence (p351)
- » Harmony Guesthouse (p351)
- » Fóyuán Lóu (p345)

Why Go?

Waist-deep in handsome history, mountainous Shānxī (山西) meets virtually all your China travel expectations – and throws in a few surprises. If you only visited Píngyáo and jetted home, you might assume China was bursting with picture-perfect ancient walled settlements oozing character and charm from each nook and adorable cranny. For sure, basing yourself here and jumping to Píngyáo's surrounding sights is practically all you need, with time-worn temples, fastidiously arranged Qing-dynasty courtyard architecture and some of the warmest people in the Middle Kingdom. The mountain fastness of Wútái Shān, however, reveals Shānxī's other great source of magic, a Buddhist leaning that fashions some magnificent monastic architecture, a disposition further concentrated in the astonishing Buddhist cave sculpture at Yúngāng. The good-looking portrait is rounded out by the cities of Dàtóng and Tàiyuán, where history and modernity reach an engaging balance.

When to Go

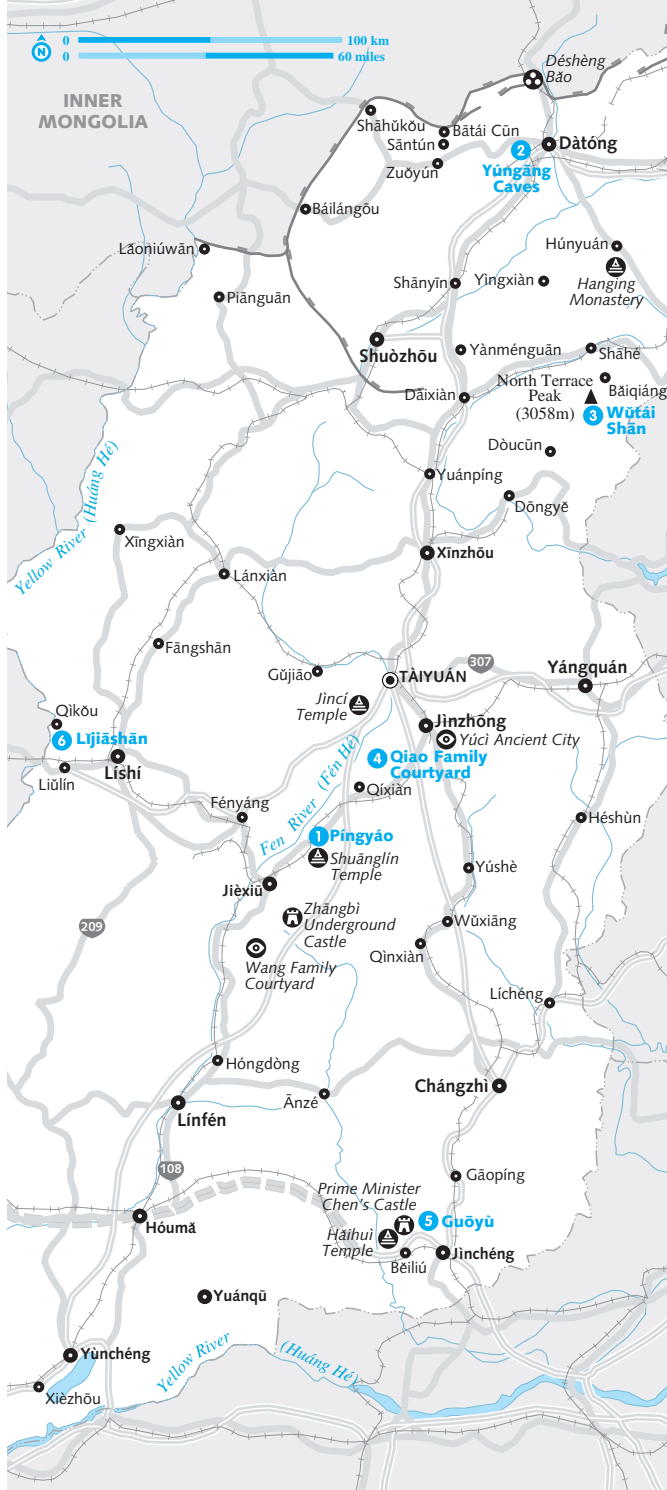
Dàtóng



May Get a jump on the sapping summer months.

Late May–early September For trips to cooler, mountainous Wútái Shān.

Late September Enjoy the comfortable start of the lovely Shānxī autumn.



Shānxī Highlights

- 1 Fall head over heels for time-warped **Pingyáo** (p349)
- 2 Discover the indescribable beauty of the Buddhist statues at the **Yúngāng Caves** (p341)
- 3 Hang up your traveller's hat in the monastic enclave of **Wútái Shān** (p343)
- 4 Explore some of China's best-preserved courtyard architecture at the **Qiao Family Courtyard** (p349)
- 5 Journey to the still-inhabited ancient walled village of **Guōyù** (p356) in Shānxī's remote southeast
- 6 Burrow your way into Shānxī's past with an overnight stay in the ancient cave village of **Lǐjiāshān** (p354)

History

Though home to the powerful state of Jin, which split into three in 403 BC, Shānxī only really rose to greatness with the Tuoba, a clan of the Xianbei people from Mongolia and Manchuria who made Dàtóng their capital during the Northern Wei (AD 386–534). Eventually the Tuoba were assimilated, but as China weakened following the Tang collapse, northern invaders returned; most notable were the Khitan (907–1125), whose western capital was also in Dàtóng.

After the Ming regained control of northern China, Shānxī was developed as a defensive outpost, with an inner and outer Great Wall constructed along the northern boundaries. Local merchants took advantage of the increased stability to trade, eventually transforming the province into the country's financial centre with the creation of China's first banks, in Píngyáo.

Climate

Dry as dust, precisely 0cm of rain in February is normal in Shānxī, with a mere 35cm of rain a year. It only really rains in July (just 12cm). Tàiyuán lows of -10°C are not uncommon in January, while summer highs exceed 30°C.

Language

Jin is spoken by most Shānxī people (45 million speakers). The main difference from Mandarin is its final glottal stop, but it also features complex grammar-induced tone shifts. Most locals also speak Mandarin.

Getting There & Around

Modern railway lines and roads split Shānxī on a northeast–southwest axis, so getting from Běijīng to Dàtóng, Tàiyuán and Píngyáo, and on

to Xī'ān is no problem. Beyond that, mountain roads and convoys of coal trucks make it slow going.

Dàtóng

大同

 0352 / POP 1.1 MILLION

Its coal-belt setting and socialist-era re-fashioning cruelly robbed Dàtóng of much charm. The city has, however, jumped fairly and squarely onto the 'restore-our-greatness' bandwagon, ploughing mountains of cash into a colossal renovation program of its old quarter. Even without its pricey face-lift, however, Dàtóng still cuts it as a coal-dusted heavyweight in China's increasingly competitive tourist challenge. Dàtóng is the gateway to one of China's most outstanding Buddhist treasures: the awe-inspiring Yúngāng Caves. The city is also a stone's throw from the photogenic Hanging Monastery, the world's oldest wooden pagoda and crumbling earthen sections of the Great Wall.

History

Dàtóng first rose to greatness as the capital of Tuoba, a federation of Turkic-speaking nomads who united northern China (AD 386–534), converted to Buddhism and, like most other invaders, were eventually assimilated into Chinese culture. Tuoba's outstanding bequest is the Yúngāng Caves, sublime 5th-century Buddhist carvings capturing a quiet, timeless beauty.

Sights

The city centre is where you'll find Dàtóng's few remaining *hùtòng* (narrow alleyways) and the city's old core. The alleys are concentrated either side of Huayan Jie, just south and southeast of Huáyán Temple. Much of the **old town** (老城区; *lǎochéngqū*) was pulled down; what replaced it was being levelled at the time of writing to restore what was there before. Illogical for sure, but this is China. At the time of research, the old town west of the Drum Tower (鼓楼; Gǔ Lóu) resembled the Somme but by the time you read this it will probably resemble a quaint ye olde quarter. Buildings being rebuilt from the soles up include the mosque (清真寺; Qīngzhēn Sì), a Taoist temple and courtyard architecture.

Huáyán Temple

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(华严寺; Huáyán Sì) This temple (shut for refurbishment at the time of writing) is

PRICE INDICATORS

The following price indicators are used in this chapter:

Sleeping

\$	less than Y200
\$\$	Y200 to Y500
\$\$\$	more than Y500

Eating

\$	less than Y40
\$\$	Y40 to Y100
\$\$\$	more than Y100

divided into two separate complexes, one of which is an active monastery (upper temple), while the other is a museum (lower temple). Built by the Khitan during the Liao dynasty (AD 907–1125), the temple faces east, not south (it's said the Khitan were sun worshippers).

Dating to 1140, the impressive main hall of the **upper temple** (上华严寺; Shàng Huáyán Sì; Huayansi Jie; admission Y20; ☉8am–6pm summer, to 5.30pm winter) is one of the largest Buddhist halls in China, with Ming statues and Qing murals within. The rear hall of the **lower temple** (下华严寺; Xià Huáyán Sì; Huayansi Jie; admission Y20; ☉8am–6pm summer, to 5.30pm winter) is the oldest building in Dàtóng (1038), containing some remarkable Liao-dynasty wooden sculptures. Side halls contain assorted relics from the Wei, Liao and Jin dynasties.

Take bus 4 (Y1) from the train station to get here.

Nine Dragon Screen

ANCIENT SITE

(九龙壁; Jiǔlóng Bì; Da Dongjie; admission Y10; ☉8am–6pm) With its nine beautiful multi-coloured coiling dragons, this 45.5m long, 8m high and 2m thick Ming-dynasty spirit wall was built in 1392. It's the largest glazed-tile wall in China and is an amazing sight; the palace it once protected burnt down years ago.

Shànhuà Temple

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(善化寺; Shànhuà Sì; Nansi Jie; admission Y20; ☉8am–6pm summer, 8.30am–5.30pm winter) This temple was originally built in 713; the current temple is a Jin rebuild. The grandiose wooden-bracketed rear hall contains five beautiful central Buddhas and expressive statues of celestial generals in the wings.

FREE Planning Exhibition Hall

MUSEUM

Decorated with Maoist slogans, the vast 1950s socialist edifice north of Hóngqí Guǎngchǎng (红旗广场; Red Flag Sq) was designed around the same time as the Great Hall of the People (p55) in Běijīng. Its **exhibition hall** (大同规划展览馆; Dàtóng Guīhuà Zhǎnlǎnguǎn; ☉9am–5pm Tue–Sun) presents Dàtóng's future guise in a huge illuminated diorama, but it's more interesting to look at the photos of old Dàtóng. The vast building also houses the library and the town museum.

Tours

China International Travel Service (see p340) offers various day trips with an English-speaking guide for Y100 (transport only) or Y225 (transport, lunch and



Dátóng

Top Sights

Huáyán Temple.....B4

Sights

- 1 Nine Dragon ScreenB4
- 2 Old TownB4
- 3 Planning Exhibition HallA3
- 4 Shànhuà TempleB4

Sleeping

- 5 Fěitiān Hotel.....B1
- 6 Garden Hotel.....B4
- 7 Tóngtiě BīnguǎnB1

Eating

- 8 Tónghé DǎfàndiànB1
- 9 Yǒnghé Fast Food.....B4

entrance tickets). Mr Gao, the manager of the train station branch, speaks excellent English and is very helpful.

Sleeping

Most hotels are situated around the train station, although there are a couple in the city centre.

Tóngtiě Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$\$

(同铁宾馆; ☎713 0768; 15 Zhanbei Jie; 站北街15号; s/d/ste Y280/280/398, discounts of 30%; ☎) There are excellent, spacious and modern rooms with traditional furnishings and elegant touches at this smart, fantastic-value hotel north of the train station. Rooms are clean and well kept, and shower rooms come with heat lamps.

Fēitiān Hotel

HOTEL \$

(飞天宾馆; Fēitiān Bīnguǎn; ☎281 5117; 1 Zhanqian Jie; 站前街1号; dm/tw/tr Y35/160/280, discounts of 30%; ☎) Right by the train station, this old favourite is a comfortable budget choice but was shut for a refit at the time of writing. Pre-refit staff could not speak English but were used to dealing with foreigners.

Garden Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(花园大饭店; Huāyuán Dàfàndiàn; ☎586 5825; www.huayuanhotel.com.cn; 59 Da Nanjie; 大南街59号; d & tw Y880-1180, discounts of 25%; ☎☎) Impeccable rooms at this intimate hotel feature goose-down quilts, carved pear-wood bed frames, reproduction antique furnishings and lovely bathrooms. It has a lovely atrium, Latin American and Chinese restaurants plus excellent staff; and a Bank of China ATM.

Eating

The local treat is *shāomài* (烧麦; Y3.50), a steamed pork dumpling with a crinkled top that's dipped in Shānxī vinegar. Most places that sell ordinary dumplings also do *shāomài*. Look for the bamboo basket steamers.

There are plenty of restaurants around the train station.

Tónghé Dàfàndiàn

CHINESE \$

(同和大饭店; Zhanqian Jie; meals Y20-30; ☎10am-2pm & 5-9pm; ☎) This popular, bright and cheery spot next to the Hongqi Hotel is perfect for a meal before catching the train. Its big round tables may look intimidating, but solo diners can still take a seat; try the Shānxī fried noodles (Y12), the pancake with meat filling (Y3.50), the tasty stir-fried

mutton slices with Chinese onion, or the egg soup (Y8).

Yǒnghé Fast Food

CHINESE FAST FOOD \$

(永和快餐; Yǒnghé Kuàicān; Xiao Nanjie; meals Y20; ☎6.50-9.30am & 11am-10pm; ☎) Next to the more expensive Yonghe Chinese Food Hall just north of the city wall, this is a handy place for a quick meal. Tick off a form and hand it to the waitress. Try the *màlà niúròu miàn* (麻辣牛肉面; Y12), a spicy steaming bowl of beef noodles and a fried egg (煎蛋; *jiāndàn*; Y1), or a *xiāngjiān cōngyóu bǐng* (香煎葱油饼; deep-fried pancake; Y3). Yanjing Beer comes by the pint (Y7). Photo menu at the service desk.

Information

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Xiao Nanjie) ATM; for travellers cheques, you need the Yingbin Xilu branch (open 8am to noon and 2.30pm to 6pm weekdays).

China Construction Bank (中国建设银行; Zhōngguó Jiànshè Yínháng; Xinjian Beilu) ATM near the train station; another branch is by Red Flag Sq.

China International Travel Service (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójí Lúxíngshè; ☎712 4882, 130 0808 8454; Tàijia Hotel, 泰佳宾馆; ☎6.30am-6.30pm) Helpful tourist information branch in the Tàijia Hotel just north of the train station.

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; cnr Da Xijie & Xinjian Nanlu; ☎8am-6.30pm) South of Red Flag Sq; there's another branch near the train station.

Dōngfāng Internet Cafe (东方网络; Dōngfāng Wǎngluò; 6th fl, cnr Qingyuan Jie & Shitou Xiang; per hr Y3; ☎24hr) Take the crummy lift to the 6th floor then go through the noisy amusement arcade to the end.

Internet cafe (网吧; wǎngbā; Xinjian Beilu; per hr Y3; ☎24hr) West of Feitiān Hotel.

Mènglàng Internet Cafe (梦浪网吧; Mènglàng Wǎngbā; Da Beijie; per hr Y2; ☎24hr)

Public Security Bureau & Exit Office (PSB; 公安局出入境接待处; Gōng'ānjú Chūrùjìng Jiēdàichù; Weidu Dadao; ☎9am-noon & 3-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Getting There & Away

Air

Located 20km east of the city, Dàtóng's small airport has flights to Běijīng (Y400), Shànghǎi (Y1450), Hǎinán Island (Y2500) and Guǎngzhōu (Y1630). Buy tickets at **Aviation Travel Service** (航空售票处; Hángkōng Shòupiàochù; Nanguan Xijie; ☎8am-7pm). No public transport goes to the airport. A taxi costs around Y40.

Bus

Example routes and fares from the **new south bus station** (新南站; Xīnnán Zhàn; ☎503 2555):

Běijīng Y120, 4½ hours, eight daily

Mùtǎ Y20, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes (6.50am to 7pm)

Tàiyuán Y92 to Y120, three hours, every 20 minutes (6.50am to 6.30pm)

Wūtái Shān Y66, 3½ hours, two daily (8.30am and 2pm; summer only)

Example routes and fares from the **main bus station** (大同汽车站; Dátóngqìchēzhàn; ☎246 4464; 20 Yantong Xilu):

Děshèngbǎo Y15, 40 minutes, regular services (7am to 5pm)

Hanging Monastery Y35, 1½ hours, regular services (6.30am to 6pm)

Hohhot Y70, 3½ hours, hourly (9am to noon)

Zuǒyún Y16, 1½ hours, regular services (6.30am to 6pm)

Train

Běijīng Y64 to Y105, six to 7½ hours, frequent services

Hohhot Y59 to Y95, four hours, frequent services

Píngyáo Y75 to Y80, seven to eight hours, five daily

Tàiyuán Y63 to Y85, six to seven hours, 10 daily

Xī'ān Y135, 16½ hours, two daily

i Getting Around

Bus 4 (Y1) runs from the train station through the centre of town, down Da Beijie before turning west along Da Xijie. Bus 30 (Y1, 30 minutes) runs from the train station to the new south bus station. Buses 2 and 15 (Y1, 10 minutes) run from the train station to the main bus station.

Dàtóng has an infestation of hand-me-down taxis from the rest of China which swarm across town.

Around Dàtóng**YÚNGĀNG CAVES**

云冈石窟

One of China's most superlative examples of Buddhist cave art, these 5th-century **caves** (Yúngāng Shíkū; ☎0352-302 6230; admission Y100, guide Y80; ☀8.30am-5.20pm summer, 9am-4.20pm winter) are ineffably sublime. With 51,000 ancient statues, they put virtually everything else in the Shānxī shade.

Carved by the Turkic-speaking Tuoba, the Yúngāng Caves draw their designs from Indian, Persian and even Greek influences

that swept along the Silk Road. Work began in AD 460, continuing for 60 years before all 252 caves, the oldest collection of Buddhist carvings in China, had been completed.

At the time of writing only 39 of the 45 caves were open, showcasing some of the most precious and elegant Buddhist artwork in China. Despite weathering, many of the statues at Yúngāng still retain their gorgeous pigment, unlike the slightly more recent statues at Lóngmén (p412). Note that some of these caves still attract worshippers (prayer cushions are laid out in Cave 20), which of course was their original purpose. Some of the caves were once covered by wooden structures, but many of these are long gone, although **Caves 5, 6, 7 and 8** are fronted by wooden temples.

Some caves contain intricately carved square-shaped pagodas, while others depict the inside of temples, carved and painted to look as though made of wood. Frescos are in abundance and there are graceful depictions of animals, birds and angels, some still brightly painted, and almost every cave contains the 1000-Buddha motif (tiny Buddhas seated in niches).

Eight of the caves contain enormous Buddha statues; the largest can be found in **Cave 5**, an outstanding 17m-high, seated effigy of Sakyamuni with a gilded face. The frescos in this cave are badly scratched, but note the painted vaulted ceiling. Bursting with colour, **Cave 6** is also stunning, resembling a set from an *Indiana Jones* epic with legions of Buddhist angels, Bodhisattvas and other figures. In the middle of the cave, a square block pagoda connects with the ceiling, with Buddhas on each side over two levels. Most foreign visitors are oblivious to the graffiti in bright red oil paint on the right-hand side of the main door frame within the cave, which reads 大同八中 (Dàtóng Bāzhōng; Datong No 8 Middle School), courtesy of pupils probably during the Cultural Revolution. On the priceless fresco to the right is further graffiti in red paint, left by what appears to be a contingent from Píngyáo.

Further damage is much in evidence. Chronic weathering has afflicted **Cave 7** (carved between 470 and 493) and **Cave 8**, both scoured by the Shānxī winds. Atmospheric pollution has also taken its toll.

Caves 16 to 20 are the earliest caves at Yúngāng, carved under the supervision

of monk Tanyao. Examine the exceptional quality of the carvings in **Cave 18**; some of the faces are perfectly presented. **Cave 19** contains a vast 16.8m high effigy of Sakya-muni. The Maitreya Buddha is a popular subject for Yúngāng's sculptors, for example in the vast seated form in **Cave 17** and **Cave 13**; the latter statue has been carved with graffiti by workers from Hohhot (p850) and other miscreants.

Cave 20 is similar to the Ancestor Worshipping Cave at Lóngmén, originally depicting a trinity of Buddhas (the past, present and future Buddhas). The huge seated Buddha in the middle is the representative icon at Yúngāng, while the Buddha on the left has somehow vanished. Many caves in the western end of Yúngāng have Buddhas with their heads smashed off, as in **Cave 39**. Buddhist figures exposed to the elements, especially near doorways, have been almost totally weathered away.

English-speaking guides are available, although almost every cave comes with English captions. Photography is permitted in some caves but not in others. For Y10 you can get your photo taken on the back of a flea-bitten camel.

i Getting There & Away

At the time of writing, getting to Yúngāng was a nightmare due to roadworks. Things should have eased by the time you read this and bus 3-2 (Y2.50, 50 minutes, from 6am to 6pm) from Dàtóng train station should be running again. At research time you had to take bus 4 (Y1, 30 minutes) to Xinkaifǎ (新开里), then bus 3-1 (Y1.50) to Jinhua Gong (晋华宫), followed by a taxi (Y10) to the drop-off from where it is a further 1km walk; due to traffic jams, the entire journey was taking 2½ hours or more. A taxi from Dàtóng will cost around Y80.

GREAT WALL

长城

The Great Wall (Chángchéng) is far less spectacular here than the restored sections found near Běijīng. Its Ming bricks – too useful for local farmers to leave alone – have all but disappeared, so just picture rammed earthen mounds, parts of which have crumbled away into nothing.

A rewarding half-day trip from Dàtóng is the wall a few hundred metres north of **Déshèng Bǎo** (得胜堡), a 16th-century walled fort containing a small farming village. Buy a ticket to Fēngzhèn (丰镇; Y15, 40 minutes, from 7am to 5pm) on any bus to Jíníng (集宁); tell the driver to drop you at Déshèng Bǎo. Buses leave from the main

bus station, but it's quicker to catch them at the train station, where they spend up to an hour trawling for passengers. The last bus back is around 6.30pm.

For something more remote, and with great hiking possibilities, try getting to **Bātái Village** (八台村; Bātái Cūn), behind which the wall snakes its way east towards Běijīng and west into the hills before turning south towards the Yellow River (Huáng Hé). Take a bus (Y16, 90 minutes, from 7am to 5pm) from Dàtóng's main bus station to Zuóyún (左云), then change to a minibus to Sāntún (三屯; Y4, 15 minutes). If you ask, the driver should be happy to take you on to Bātái (Y20 to Y30 per vehicle each way, 30 minutes). Just make sure you arrange to be picked up again!

HANGING MONASTERY

悬空寺

Built precariously into the side of a cliff, the Buddhist **Hanging Monastery** (Xuánkōng Sì; admission Y130; ☉7am-7pm summer, 8am-6pm winter) is made all the more stunning by its long support stilts. The halls have been built along the contours of the cliff face, connected by rickety catwalks and corridors.

If passengers on the bus from Dàtóng are scarce you may be transferred into a free taxi for the last 5km from Húnyuán (浑源). The same should, in theory, apply in the opposite direction. To go from the Hanging Monastery to Mùtǎ, you'll need a taxi (Y10) to Húnyuán, from where there are regular buses to Mùtǎ (Y12, 25 minutes, last bus 6pm).

MÙTǎ

木塔

Built in 1056, this charming five-storey **tower** (admission Y60; ☉7am-7pm summer, 8am-6pm winter) is the world's oldest and tallest (67m) wooden pagoda. The clay Buddhist carvings it houses, including an 11m-high Sakyamuni on the 1st floor, are as old as the pagoda itself. Sadly, visitors are not allowed beyond the 2nd floor, but photos of the higher floors can be viewed on a noticeboard to the side of the pagoda.

Mùtǎ is located in Yingxiàn (应县). Buses from Dàtóng's new south bus station (Y20) go right past the tower. To carry on to Wútái Shān (Y57, two hours), or to go back to Dàtóng, take a taxi (Y5) from Mùtǎ to the east bus station (东站; Dōngzhàn). It's more of a crossroads than a bus station, and buses stop running by about 3pm. To go to Tàiyuán, take a taxi (Y3) to the west bus

station (西站; Xīzhàn), from where there are regular buses until 1.30pm.

Wūtái Shān

五台山

0350

The gorgeous mountainous, monastic enclave of Wūtái Shān (Five Terrace Mountains; www.wutaishan.cn) is Buddhism's sacred northern range and the earthly abode of Manjusri (文殊; Wénshū), the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. Chinese students sitting the ferociously competitive *gāokǎo* exams troop here for a nod from the learned Bodhisattva, proffering incense alongside saffron-robed monks and octogenarian pilgrims. A powerful sense of the divine holds sway in Wūtái Shān, emanating from the port-walled monasteries – the principal sources of spiritual power – and finding further amplification in the astonishing mountain scenery.

The forested slopes overlooking the town eventually give way to alpine meadows where you'll find more temples and great hiking possibilities. Wūtái Shān is also famed for its mysterious rainbows, which can appear without rain and are said to contain shimmering mirages of Buddhist beings, creatures and temple halls.

There's a steep Y218 entrance fee for the area – including a mandatory Y50 'sightseeing bus' ticket (旅游观光车票; *lǚyóu guānguāng chēpiào*) for transport within the area, valid for three days – valid throughout the duration of your stay. Some of the more popular temples charge an additional small entrance fee.

Avoid Wūtái Shān during the holiday periods and high-season weekends; temperatures are often below zero from October to March and roads can be impassable.

History

It's believed that by the 6th century there were already 200 temples in the area, although all but two were destroyed during the official persecution of Buddhism in the 9th century. In the Ming dynasty, Wūtái Shān began attracting large numbers of Tibetan Buddhists (principally from Mongolia) for whom Manjusri holds special significance.

Climate

Wūtái Shān is at high altitude and powerful blizzards can sweep in as late as May and as early as September. Winters are freezing

and snowbound; the summer months are the most pleasant, but always pack waterproofs and waterproof shoes or boots for rain, as well as warm clothing, as temperatures can still fall rapidly at night. If you are climbing up the peaks to see the sunrise, warm coats can be hired.

👁 Sights

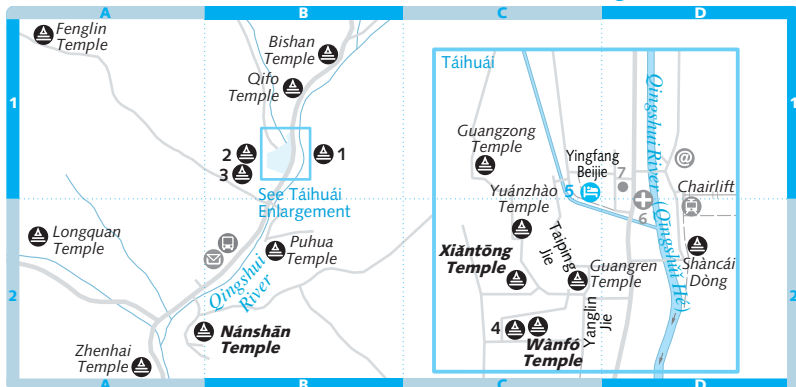
Enclosed within a lush valley between the five main peaks is an elongated, unashamedly touristy town, called **Táihuái** (台怀) but which everyone simply calls Wūtái Shān. It's here that you'll find the largest concentration of temples, as well as all the area's hotels and tourist facilities. The five main peaks are north (北台顶; *běitái dǐng*), east (东台顶; *dōngtái dǐng*), south (南台顶; *nántái dǐng*), west (西台顶; *xítái dǐng*) and central (中台顶; *zhōngtái dǐng*).

Over 50 temples lie scattered in town and across the surrounding countryside, so knowing where to start can be a daunting prospect. Most travellers limit themselves to what is called the **Táihuái Temple Cluster** (Táihuái Simiàoqún; 台怀寺庙群), about 20 temples around Táihuái itself, among which Tǎyuàn Temple and Xiántōng Temple are considered the best. Many temples in Táihuái contain a statue of Manjusri, generally depicted riding a lion and holding a sword used to cleave ignorance and illusion. You could spend weeks exploring the mountain area, investigating temple after temple.

Tǎyuàn Temple

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(塔院寺; Tǎyuàn Sì; admission Y7) At the base of **Spirit Vulture Peak** (灵鹫峰; Língjiù Fēng), the distinctive white stupa rising above, Tǎyuàn Temple is the most prominent landmark in Wūtái Shān and virtually all pilgrims come through here to spin the prayer wheels at its base or to prostrate themselves, even in the snow. Beyond the **Devaraja Hall** (Hall of Heavenly Kings) with its candlelit gilded statue of Avalokitesvara (instead of Milefo, who you usually find in this position), at the rear of the **Dàcǐ Yánshòu Hall** is an altar where worshippers leave tins of instant coffee to Guanyin. Hung with small yellow bells chiming in the Wūtái Shān winds, the marvellous **Great White Stupa** (大白塔; Dàbái Tǎ) dates originally from 1301 and is one of 84,000 dagobas built by King Asoka, 19 of which are in China. The **Great Sutra-Keeping Hall** is a magnificent sight; its towering



9th-century revolving Sutra case originally held scriptures in Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan.

Xiāntōng Temple

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(显通寺; Xiāntōng Sì; admission Y10) Xiāntōng Temple – the largest and most captivating temple in town – embraces more than 100 halls and rooms. The **Qiānbō Wénshū Hall** contains a 1000-armed, multifaced Wenshu, whose every palm supports a miniature Buddha. The astonishing brick **Beamless Hall** (无梁殿; Wúliáng Diàn) holds a miniature Yuan-dynasty pagoda, remarkable statues of contemplative monks meditating in the alcoves and a vast seated effigy of Wenshu. Further on, up some steps is the blindingly beautiful **Golden Hall**, enveloped in a constellation of small Buddhas covering all the walls. Five metres high and weighing 50 tonnes, the metal hall was cast in 1606 before being gilded; it houses an effigy of the Wenshu of Wisdom seated atop a lion.

OTHER SIGHTS

You can continue exploring the cluster of temples north beyond Xiāntōng Temple. **Yuánzhào Temple** (圆照寺; Yuánzhào Sì) contains a smaller stupa than the one at Tāyuàn Temple. A 10-minute walk south down the road, **Shūxiàng Temple** (殊像寺; Shūxiàng Sì) can be reached up some steep steps beyond its spirit wall by the side of the road; the temple contains Wútái Shān's largest statue of Wenshu riding a lion. You can spend the night here at the excellent Fóyuàn Lóu. Before you go looking for St Nicholas at **Sāntǎ Temple**

(三塔寺; Sāntǎ Sì) to the east of Táihuái, the name actually means Three Pagoda Temple.

For great views of the town, you can trek, take a chairlift (up/down Y35/30, return Y60) or ride a horse (Y30) up to the temple on **Dàilú Peak** (黛螺顶; Dàilú Dǐng; admission Y6), on the eastern side of Qingshui River (清水河; Qingshui Hé). For even better views of the surrounding hills, walk 2.5km south to the isolated, fortress-like **Nánshān Temple** (南山寺; Nánshān Sì; admission Y4) and its beautiful stone carvings. **Wānfó Temple** (万佛阁; Wānfó Gé) is perfect for a pit stop; during the summer months, there are fabulous, free performances of Shānxī opera on its outdoor stage that run all morning and from 3pm to 6pm.



Activities

Opportunities for hiking are immense, but sadly no facilities are in place to help. There are no good maps, no marked trails and no locals with any interest in hiking to show you the way. You're on your own here, so pack some food and plenty of water. A good place to start is the hills behind Shūxiàng Temple. Walk past the temple on the small road leading to the central and western peaks, and turn left immediately after the small bridge. You'll find a trail behind the houses that leads up the hillside before heading west on top of the hill. Roads lead to the summits of the five main peaks, so another option is to take a taxi up to one of them before hiking back into town using the road as a bearing.

Wūtái Shān

📍 Top Sights

Nánshān Temple	B2
Wǎnfó Temple.....	C2
Xiǎntōng Temple	C2

📍 Sights

1 Dàiluó Peak	B1
2 Sǎntǎ Temple.....	B1
3 Shūxiàng Temple.....	B1
4 Tǎyuàn Temple.....	C2

🛏 Sleeping

5 Fógúo Bīnguǎn.....	C1
Fóyuán Lóu.....	(see 3)

Information

6 Bǎiróng Dàyuàofáng.....	D2
7 CITS	D1

ridge, bread rolls and a boiled egg. Walk to the end of Yingfang Beijie alley, turn left and it's on your left (not far from the bridge).

🍴 Eating

Loads of small family-run restaurants are tucked away behind hotels and down small alleys off the main strip where you can find standard fare. *Táimó* (台蘑), the much-revered Wūtái Shān mushroom, is the local treat. Several restaurants serve up *táimó* dishes, including *táimódùn jīkuài* (台蘑炖鸡块; *táimó* stewed chicken; Y50) and *táimódùn tǔ jī* (台蘑炖土鸡; *táimó* stewed wild chicken; Y80). Also look out for the cheaper *táimódùn dòufu* (台蘑炖豆腐; *táimó* stewed tofu; Y20). Babelfish has left its mark on some restaurant names, including the 'Farm Soil Restaurant'.

📍 Information

Bring cash, as there's nowhere to change money and ATMs only accept Chinese cards. There are no proper hiking maps available, but you can pick up an OK tourist map (Y5) from Fāyīn Bookshop (法音书社; Fāyīn Shūshè) and other shops.

Bǎiróng Dàyuàofáng (百荣大药房; ☎8am-9pm) Small chemist on the main strip.

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; ☎8am-7pm) By the bus station, half an hour's walk south, just north of a China Mobile shop.

Tiānyuán Internet (天缘网吧; Tiānyuán Wǎngbǎ; per hr Y3; ☎24hr) At the back of a courtyard off the road east of the Qingshui River.

📍 Getting There & Away

Bus

Example routes and fares from **Wūtái Shān bus station** (汽车站; Qìchē zhàn; ☎654 3101):

Běijīng Y131, 6½ hours, one to two daily

Dàtóng Y67, four hours, regular (7.30am to 2.30pm; summer only)

Hanging Monastery Y56, three hours, one daily (7.40am)

Shāhé Y20, 1½ hours, hourly (8am to 6pm)

Tàiyuán Y74, four hours, eight daily (5.40am to 3.40pm)

Xīnzhōu Y43, three hours, one daily

Tàiyuán buses all stop in Dòucūn (Y15) and Dōngyě (Y30), small towns close to Fógúang Temple and Nánchán Temple, respectively. Dàtóng buses should pass by Húnyuán (浑源), a short taxi ride (Y10) from the monastery. From

👉 Tours

CITS (中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǚxíngshè; ☎139 9410 4419; ☎7am-9pm) has guides for Y300 per day. It can run tours to the five main peaks; so can other tour companies, but most do not have their own transport and just use local taxis, which you may as well arrange yourself. Return trips cost Y60 (south and east) or Y70 (north, west, central) per person, including waiting time at the top. It's on the main strip.

🛏 Sleeping

Cheaper guesthouses can be found in the vicinity of the restaurants and shops in the north of the village.

🏠 Fógúo Lóu

HOTEL \$\$

(佛缘楼; ☎654 2659; Shūxiàng Temple; r standard/deluxe Y260/360, ste Y480, discounts of 40%; 🚿) There are lovely and spacious rooms with elegant furnishings at this hotel with a gorgeous monastic aspect behind Shūxiàng Temple. Take the steep flight of steps up to the temple; the hotel is to the rear. Staff are friendly but slow; note the impressive stone staircase leading to the 2nd floor. Room prices drop when it's quiet.

🏠 Fógúo Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$

(佛国宾馆; ☎654 5962; Zhenjianfang Jie; tw & q/s without shower Y20/40, tw with shower Y80-100, tr Y120) Off a kind of modern grey courtyard, the cheapest rooms are very simple so it's worth spending a bit more for comfort. The Y100 twin rooms are clean and well kept; the Y5 breakfast includes rice por-

Dàtóng in winter, first go to Sháhé (Y42, 3½ hours, every 15 minutes, 7am to 4.30pm) then take a minibus taxi (around Y70).

Train

The station known as **Wūtái Shān** is actually 50km away in the town of Sháhé (砂河). All Dàtóng buses go via here (Y20). Example routes and fares:

Běijīng Y58, six to seven hours, two daily (8.38pm and 1.37am)

Tàiyuán Y16, four hours, regular services (8.30am to 3.52pm)

Around Wūtái Shān

Two of the oldest wooden buildings in China, dating from the Tang dynasty, are at Fóguāng Temple and Nánchán Temple; so few visitors go you may have to ask the caretaker to unlock the gates. All Wūtái Shān–Tàiyuán buses should pass through the small towns where the temples are located, so both can be seen as a day trip.

FÓGUÁNG TEMPLE

佛光寺

The elongated main hall of this Buddhist temple (Fóguāng Si; admission Y15) dates to 857. It contains a central Sakyamuni surrounded by 17 other colourful Tang statues with 296 intriguing Ming arhat statues in the flanks. Fóguāng Temple is set among farmland 6km outside the small town of Dòucūn (豆村). From Wūtái Shān, take a Tàiyuán-bound bus to Dòucūn (Y15, one hour) then a minibus taxi (Y20 return, including waiting time) to the temple, or a local bus (Y1) part of the way, leaving you with a pleasant 2km walk.

NÁNCHÁN TEMPLE

南禅寺

A further 45km southwest of Fóguāng, near Dōngyě (东冶), this even quieter temple (Nánchán Si; admission Y15) contains a smaller but strikingly beautiful hall built in 782, one of China's oldest temple halls. From Dòucūn, take a bus (Y12, one hour) to Dōngyě then a minibus taxi (Y20 return). The last bus from here to Tàiyuán (Y36, two hours) leaves around 4pm.

Tàiyuán

太原

☑0351 / POP 2.8 MILLION

Most travellers pass through Tàiyuán en route to Píngyáo, but the city has enough to keep you occupied for a day or two, from its excellent museum to a crop of handsome temples, pagodas and historical buildings.

Sights

FREE Shānxī Museum

MUSEUM

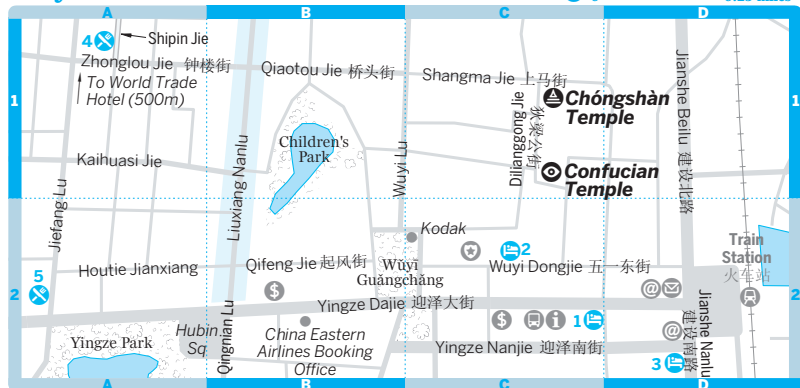
(山西博物馆; Shānxī Bówùguǎn; ☎878 9555; Binhe Xilu Zhongduan; English-speaking guide Y100, audioguide Y10; ☀9am–5pm, last entrance 4pm, closed Mon; 🚶🚶🚶) This top-class museum has three floors that walk you through all aspects of Shānxī culture, from prehistoric fossils to detailed local opera and architecture exhibits. All galleries are imaginatively displayed and most contain English captions. Take bus 6 (Y1) from the train station, get off at Yifen Qiaoxi (漪汾桥西) bus stop across the river and look for the inverted pyramid.

Twin Pagoda Temple/Yōngzuò Temple

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(双塔寺/永祚寺; Shuāngtǎ Sì/Yōngzuò Sì; admission Y30; ☀8.30am–5.30pm) This gor-

Tàiyuán



geous pair of namesake twin pagodas rises up south of the Nansha River in Tàiyuán's southwest. Not much of the temple itself is left but the area is well tended with shrubs and greenery; with the wind in their tinkling bells, the highlight brick pagodas are lovely. The 13-storey **Xuānwén Pagoda** (宣文塔; Xuānwén Tǎ) dates from the reign of Ming emperor Wanli and can be climbed. The adjacent pagoda dates from the same period but cannot be climbed. Take bus 820 or 812 from the train station.

Chóngshàn Temple BUDDHIST TEMPLE (崇善寺; Chóngshàn Sì; Dilianggong Jie; admission Y2; ☉8am-4pm) Lovely and cool in summer, the double-eaved wooden hall in this Ming temple contains three magnificent statues: Samantabhadra (the Bodhisattva of Truth), Guanyin (the Goddess of Mercy with 1000 arms) and Manjusri (the Bodhisattva of Wisdom with 1000 alms bowls). The hall at the rear is in the first stages of a rebuild. The entrance is down an alley off Dilianggong Jie behind the captivating **Confucian Temple** (文庙; Wén Miào; 3 Wén Miao Xiang; admission free; ☉9am-5pm, closed Mon), the main hall of which has been converted to a museum to the Shāndōng sage.

Sleeping

World Trade Hotel HOTEL \$\$\$ (山西国贸大饭店; Shānxī Guómào Dàfàndiàn; ☎868 8888; www.sxwtc.com; 59 Fuxi Jie; 府西街59号; d Y1258-1338, ste 2478; ☉@☎) Its marbled lobby a vast atrium-lit space slung out between its two towers (bizarrely named after – and resembling – New York's former World Trade Center), this efficient five star hotel has dapper, well-equipped rooms, but you'll need to pay extra for a view not looking straight into the neighbouring tower.

Tàiyuán

📍 Top Sights

Chóngshàn Temple.....	C1
Confucian Temple.....	C1

🛏 Sleeping

1 Chángtài Fàndiàn.....	C2
2 Héng huī Zhāo dài suǒ.....	C2
3 Jīnlín Oriental Hotel.....	D2

🍴 Eating

4 Food Street.....	A1
5 Tàiyuán Noodle House.....	A2

Jīnlín Oriental Hotel HOTEL \$\$ (锦麟东方酒店; Jīnlín Dōngfāng Jiǔdiàn; ☎839 0666; Yingze Nanjie; 迎泽南街; d & tw Y418, ste Y588, discounts of 30%; ☉@☎) A decent midrange choice, this four-star hotel has respectably furnished, decent-sized rooms with attractive shower. Rooms with computer cost Y30 more. The friendly staff members speak good English.

Chángtài Fàndiàn HOTEL \$ (长泰饭店; ☎223 0888; fax 403 4931; 60 Yingze Dajie; 迎泽大街60号; s /tr/ste Y180/298/500, tw Y238-330, discounts of 15%; ☉) Chángtài has spacious rooms, clean floors, reasonably new furnishings and chirpy staff.

Héng huī Zhāo dài suǒ GUESTHOUSE \$ (恒辉招待所; ☎416 9490 8988; 99 Wuyi Dongjie; 五一东街99号; s/tw without bathroom Y30/40, d with bathroom Y60) Very basic rooms with TVs at this friendly guesthouse, but the communal shower room isn't pretty. No English spoken.

Eating

Shānxī is famed for its noodles – including *dāoxiāo miàn* (刀削面; knife-pared noodles) and *lāmian* (拉面; hand-pulled noodles) – and vinegar, both in abundance in Tàiyuán. Mutton soup is lapped up by locals for breakfast. For more than noodles to fuel your stay, visit **food street** (食品街; Shípín Jie; Shipin Jie) and restaurants of all flavours housed in Ming-style buildings.

TOP CHOICE **Tàiyuán Noodle House** NOODLES \$ (太原面食店; Tàiyuán Miànshí Diàn; 5 Jiefang Lu; meals from Y20; ☉lunch & dinner) The place to try Shānxī's famous vinegar/noodle combo: classic forms (named after their shape, not ingredients) include *māo'ěrduo* (猫耳朵; cat's ears) and *cuōyú* (搓鱼; rolled fish). Garnishes include *ròuzhàjiàng* (肉炸酱; pork) and *yáng ròu* (羊肉; mutton).

Hǎo Gānggāng Yángzá Gēdiàn

LAMB NOODLES \$ (郝刚刚羊杂割店; cnr Fudong Jie & Liu Xiang; 府东街和柳巷的交叉口; meals Y12; ☉6am-2pm & 6-9pm) With chefs slaving over a huge vat of lamb soup near the door, this very popular restaurant specialises in tasty lamb snacks. A large bowl of *dàwǎn ròu* (大碗肉; lamb and noodles with onion; Y11) is filling, especially with a tasty *yóusū bǐng* (油酥饼; fried crisp bread; Y1). Add chilli and vinegar as you see fit. No English sign. The restaurant is around 500m northwest of Children's Park along Liu Xiang.

i Information

Streets around the train station seethe with internet cafes (Y3 per hour).

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; 169 Yingze Dajie; ☎8.30am-5.30pm) ATM accepts foreign cards. Can change travellers cheques (Monday to Friday).

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; ☎8am-7pm) Opposite the train station.

Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (ICBC; 工商银行; Gōngshāng Yínháng; Yingze Dajie) The 24-hour ATM accepts foreign cards.

Internet cafe (网吧; wǎngbǎ; 3rd fl, cnr Jianshe Nanlu & Yingze Nanjie; per hr Y3; ☎24hr)

Kodak (柯达; Kēdá; Wuyi Guangchang; ☎8am-9.30pm) Southwest end of walkway bridge north of Wúyí Guǎngchǎng; CD burning costs Y10 per disc.

Lùsè Dònglì Internet (绿色动力网吧; Lùsè Dònglì Wǎngbǎ; Yingze Dajie; per hr Y3; ☎24hr) On the 3rd floor.

Public Security Bureau Exit & Entry Office (PSB; 公安局出入境接待处; Gōng'ānjú; Wuyi Dongjie; ☎895 5355; ☎8-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri winter, 8-11.30am & 3pm-5.30pm summer) Can extend visas. 'Out of Work' Saturday and Sunday. If you walk east along Wuyi Dongjie from Wúyí Guǎngchǎng, you'll find the office about 100m up on your left on the corner.

Tàiyuán Tourist Information Centre (太原旅游中心; Tàiyuán Lǚyóu Zhōngxīn; 88 Yingze Dajie; ☎567 9966; ☎8am-7.30pm) Next to the long-distance bus station; not much use.

i Getting There & Away

Air

You can buy tickets at the **China Eastern Airlines booking office** (东方航空公司; Dōngfāng Hángkōng Gōngsī; ☎404 2903; 158 Yingze Dajie; ☎8am-6.30pm). Bus 201 (Y2, 40 minutes, first/last bus 6am/8pm) runs from the train station to the airport, 15km southeast of town; bus 901 (Y2) to Yúci also runs to the airport from the train station. In addition, shuttle buses (Y15) also run to the airport from the China Eastern Airlines booking office. A taxi costs around Y50. Example flights and fares:

Běijīng Y660, eight daily

Hángzhōu Y1150, one daily

Hong Kong Y2390, two flights a week (Monday and Friday)

Kūnmíng Y1640, two daily

Nánjīng Y880, one daily

Shànghǎi Y1290, 14 daily

Shēnzhèn Y1240, one daily

Bus

Frequent departures from Tàiyuán's **long-distance bus station** (长途汽车站; chángtú qìchézhàn; ☎404 2346):

Běijīng Y119, seven hours, every two hours (7.30am to 10pm)

Dàtóng Y92 to Y120, 3½ hours, every 20 minutes (6.40am to 7pm)

Shànghǎi Y409, 17 hours, one daily (2.30pm)

Shìjīazhuāng Y60, 3½ hours, every 20 to 30 minutes (6.30am to 7.30pm)

Xī'ān Y180 to Y190, eight hours, six daily (7am to 10pm)

Zhèngzhōu Y139, seven hours, 11 daily (7.30am to 10.30pm)

Buses from the **Jiànnán bus station** (建南站; Jiànnán Zhàn, ☎707 1219), 3km south of the train station:

Jièxiū Y37, two hours, regular services

Jinchéng Y96, four hours, every 30 minutes (6.40am to 7.30pm)

Píngyáo Y25, two hours, regular services (7.20am to 8pm)

The **east bus station** (东客站; Dōng Kèzhàn; ☎238 9025) has buses to Wútái Shān (Y74, four hours, every 50 minutes, 6.40am to 6.30pm).

The **west bus station** (客运西站; Kèyùn Xīzhàn, ☎655 2571) services:

Líshí Y70, two hours, regular services (7am to 7.30pm)

Qikou Y67, five hours, three daily (7.30am, 10.30am and noon)

Train

Direct routes from **Tàiyuán train station** (火车站; huóchēzhàn; ☎9510 5688):

Běijīng Y87 to Y165, 3½ to 14½ hours, 12 daily

Dàtóng Y63 to Y102, five to seven hours, 10 daily

Jinchéng Y64, seven hours, two daily (9.41am and 7.42pm)

Píngyáo Y8, 1½ hours, frequent services

Wútái Shān Y53 to Y89, four hours, eight daily

Xī'ān Y97 to Y106, nine to 11 hours, five daily

i Getting Around

Bus 1 (Y1) runs the length of Yingze Dajie. Take bus 611 (Y1.50) from the train station to Jiànnán bus station. For the east bus station take any bus (Y1.50) or rickshaw (Y2) heading east from Wulongkou Jie. For the west bus station take bus 611 (Y1.50) from the train station. Taxis are Y8 at flag fall.

Around Tàiyuán

JĪNCÍ TEMPLE

晋祠

The highlight of this sprawling Buddhist **temple complex** (Jinci; admission Y70; ☉8am-6pm) is the **Hall of the Sacred Mother** (圣母殿; Shèngmǔ Diàn), a magnificent wooden structure first built (nail less) in 984, then renovated in 1102. Eight dragons twine their way up the first row of pillars. Inside are 42 Song-dynasty clay maidservants of the sacred lady, the mother of Prince Shuyou, who founded the state of Jin (772–403 BC). Adjacent is the **Zhou Cypress**, an unusual tree that has been growing at an angle of about 30 degrees for the last 900 years. Take bus 804 or 308 from the train station (Y2.50, 45 minutes).

YÚCÌ ANCIENT CITY

榆次老城

A favourite location for Chinese film producers, there are over 400 rooms and halls to explore in the preserved section of this **Ming town** (Yúci Lǎochéng; admission Y60). Walk the streets and some of the gardens for free, but buy a ticket to enter the temples or the numerous former government offices. The oldest building is the impressive **God Temple** (隍庙; Huáng Miào), built in 1362. Take bus 901 (Y3, 80 minutes, first/last bus 6am/8pm) from near Tàiyuán train station.

QIAO FAMILY COURTYARD

乔家大院

Completely devoid of vegetation, this ornately decorated Qing-dynasty merchant's **residence** (Qiáojiā Dàyuàn; admission summer/winter Y60/40; ☉8am-6pm) contains six courtyards and more than 300 rooms. The complex is famously where Zhang Yimou's lush fifth-generation tragedy *Raise the Red Lantern* was filmed. All Tàiyuán–Píngyáo buses (Y25) pass by, or you can take a bus heading for Qíxiàn (祁县; Y18, one hour) from Jiànnán Bus Station.

Píngyáo

平遥

☎0354 / POP 450,000

China's best-preserved ancient walled town, Píngyáo is fantastic. Anyone with China mileage under their belt will be bewitched by the town's age-old charms, charms squandered away – or forever lost – elsewhere across the Middle Kingdom. While other 'ancient' cities in China rustle together an unconvincing display of old city walls, sporadic temples or the occasional ragged

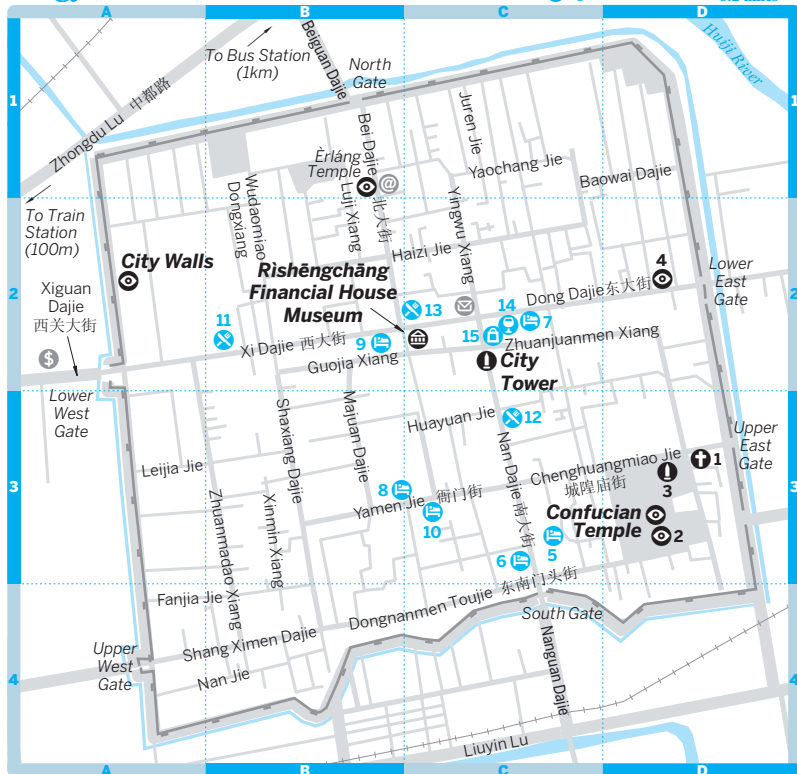
alley thrust beneath an unsightly melange of white-tile architecture and socialist-era workers' housing, Píngyáo has kept its beguiling narrative largely intact. This is the China we all think of in flights of fancy: red-lantern-hung lanes set against night-time silhouettes of imposing town walls, elegant courtyard architecture, ancient towers poking into the north China sky and an entire brood of creaking temples and old buildings. Píngyáo is also a living-and-breathing community: locals hang laundry in courtyards, career down alleyways on bicycles, simply sun themselves in doorways or chew the fat with neighbours. The only traffic jams you'll see are tour buggies bumping head-on at a corner; the town is also perfectly placed for some great day trips, with the enchanting village of Zhāngbì Cūn and its 1400-year-old underground castle the icing on Píngyáo's cake.

History

Already a thriving merchant town during the Ming dynasty, Píngyáo's ascendancy came during the Qing when merchants created the country's first banks and cheques to facilitate the transfer of vast amounts of silver from one place to another. The city eschewed the shocking reshaping much loved by communist town planners, and almost 4000 Ming- and Qing-dynasty residences remain within the city walls.

👁️ Sights & Activities

Bounded by an intact city wall, gates access the old town at various points in the east, west, north and south. The old town's main drag is Nan Dajie (南大街), where you'll find guesthouses, restaurants, museums, temples and souvenir shops galore. For anyone used to exploring the hard-edged white-tile hinterlands of Hénán or Jiāngxī, Píngyáo is a dream. If you have even the remotest interest in Chinese history, culture or architecture, you could easily spend a day wandering the pinched lanes of Píngyáo, stumbling across hidden gems while ticking off the well-known sights. It's free to walk the streets, but you must pay Y120 to climb the city walls or enter any of the 18 buildings deemed historically significant. Tickets are valid for two days; electronic audio tours are Y40 (Y100 deposit). Opening hours for the sights are from 8am to 7.30pm from 1 May to 30 September, and from 8am to 6.30pm from 1 October to 30 April.



City Walls

HISTORIC WALLS
(城墙; *chéng qiáng*) A good place to start is the magnificent city walls, which date from 1370. At 10m high and more than 6km in circumference, they are punctuated by 72 watchtowers, each containing a paragraph from Sunzi's *The Art of War*. Part of the southern wall, which collapsed in 2004, has been rebuilt, but the rest is original. Pingyáo's **city gates** (城门; *chéng-mén*) are fascinating and are some of the best preserved in China; the **Lower West Gate** (also called Fèngyì Mén, or Phoenix Appearing Gate) has a section of the original road, deeply grooved with the troughs left by cartwheels (also visible at the South Gate).

Rishēngchāng Financial House Museum

MUSEUM
(日升昌; Rishēngchāng; 38 Xi Dajie; 西大街38号) Also not to be missed, this museum began life as a humble dye shop in the late 18th

century before its tremendous success as a business saw it transform into China's first draft bank (1823), eventually expanding to 57 branches nationwide. The museum has nearly 100 rooms, including offices, living quarters and a kitchen, as well as several old cheques.

Confucian Temple

CONFUCIAN TEMPLE
Pingyáo's oldest surviving building is **Dàchéng Hall** (大成殿; Dàchéng Diàn), dating from 1163 and found in the **Confucian Temple** (文庙; Wén Miào), a huge complex where bureaucrats-to-be came to take the imperial exams.

Slogans

COMMUNIST HERITAGE
Pop into No 153 Xi Dajie for two red-blooded slogans from the Cultural Revolution that have survived on buildings within the courtyard. The one on the left intones: 工业学大庆 ('Industry should learn from Dàqìng'); the rarer slogan on the right proclaims: 认真

Píngyáo

📍 Top Sights

City Tower	C2
City Walls.....	A2
Confucian Temple	D3
Rishēngchāng Financial House Museum.....	C2

📍 Sights

1 Catholic Church.....	D3
2 Dàchéng Hall.....	D3
3 Nine Dragon Screen.....	D3
4 Qīngxū Guàn	D2

🏠 Sleeping

5 Cui Chénghǎi Hotel.....	C3
6 Harmony Guesthouse.....	C3
7 Jing's Residence.....	C2
8 Yámén Youth Hostel.....	B3
9 Yúnjīnchéng Hotel	B2
10 Zhèngjiā Kèzhàn	C3

🍴 Eating

11 Big Bowl Noodles.....	B2
12 Déjūyuán	C3
13 Déjūyuán Bīngguǎn	C2

🍷 Drinking

14 Sakura Café.....	C2
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🛍 Shopping

15 Tip-toe Tapestry	C2
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搞奋斗批改 (‘Earnestly undertake struggle, criticism and reform’).

City Tower

TOWER

(市楼; Shì Lóu; Nan Dajie; admission Y5; ☀️8am-7pm) Tallest building in the old town. Climb its smooth stone steps for fine views over Píngyáo's magnificent rooftops and inspect its ragged and forlorn shrine to a severe-looking Guandi.

Nine Dragon Screen

ANCIENT MONUMENT

(九龙壁; Jiǔlóng Bì; Chenghuangmiao Jie) In front of the old Píngyáo Theatre (大戏堂; Dàxìtáng).

Qīngxū Guàn

TAOIST TEMPLE

(清虚观; Dong Dajie) Shānxī dust has penetrated every crevice of this ancient and partly fossilised Taoist temple. With 10 halls and originally dating to the Tang dynasty, it's an impressive complex.

Catholic Church

CHURCH

(天主堂; Tiānzhǔ Táng; 2 Anjia Jie) With a brand-new snow-white statue of the Virgin Mary outside, this historic church

is the focal point for Píngyáo's Catholic Christians.

👉 Tours

Mr Deng, who runs the Harmony Guesthouse, gives reader-recommended day-long tours of the city, or any of the surrounding sights, for Y150. Also look out for **Mr Liu Wei Zhang** (☎️568 5116, 137 5342 9854; 138 Chenghuangmiao Jie), a Píngyáo resident who speaks rather basic English, but she is very kind-hearted and welcoming, and can offer tours.

🏠 Sleeping

Many of Píngyáo's hotels are delightfully converted from courtyard homes, and finding a bed for the night is not hard. Píngyáo courtyards differ from their squarer Běijīng equivalents; courtyards in Píngyáo are 目字形, meaning 'shaped like the character 目', and are more rectangular in shape. Píngyáo hoteliers are tuned in to the needs of Western travellers, which means a fair amount of English is spoken and Western breakfasts make a fair stab at mimicking the original. If you head down the back alleys, you can find rooms for around Y30 (without shower). Many hotels and hostels can arrange pick-up from the train or bus station.

TOP CHOICE Harmony Guesthouse

COURTYARD HOTEL \$

(和义昌客栈; Héyìchāng Kèzhàn; ☎️568 4952; www.py-harmony.com; 165 Nan Dajie; 南大街165号; dm Y30-50, s & tw Y80-100, d Y100-180, tr Y150-200; 📍📞📺) Ever popular, Harmony Guesthouse offers rooms off two beautifully preserved courtyards in a lovely 300-year-old Qing building. The unflagging English-speaking husband-and-wife team have created a hospitable and entertaining environment. Rooms are off two beautifully preserved courtyards. Most come with traditional stone *kang* beds, wooden bed-top tea tables and delightful wooden inlaid windows. Dorm accommodation can be found in their old guesthouse. Harmony also has a recently opened bar up the road. There's ticketing, bike rental (Y10 per day), laundry (Y10 per kg), internet (30 minutes free, till 10pm), wi-fi and pick-up.

TOP CHOICE Jing's Residence

COURTYARD HOTEL \$\$\$

(锦宅; Jīn Zhái; ☎️584 1000; www.jingsresidence.com; 16 Dong Dajie; 东大街16号; r Y1660, discounts of 50%; 📍📞📺) This supremely classy

abode features a soothing blend of old Píngyáo and modern flair: it's sleek, modish and fastidiously well finished. The themed courtyards are an absolute picture and the rooms are elegant and stylish, while the upstairs bar is the last word in nattiness. The 260-year old building is the former home of a Qing-dynasty silk merchant; views from the suites upstairs stretch out over the Píngyáo rooftops. Reserve ahead as there are only 19 rooms.

Yámén Youth Hostel YOUTH HOSTEL \$
(衙门官舍青年旅社; Yámén Guānshè Qīngnián Lúshè; ☎568 3539; 69 Yamen Jie; 衙门街69号; 7-/3-bed dm Y30/40, s & tw Y120, d/tr Y160/210; ②@☎) Also set around a gorgeous Qing courtyard, rooms here are much larger than Harmony's but rather done in, although the courtyard ambience is pleasant and quiet, if threadbare. Dorms under the eaves are clean, with OK toilets downstairs. Staff are friendly and the usual hostel favourites are here: DVD room, ticketing, laundry (Y10), free internet, wi-fi, bike hire (Y1 per hour), pool table and pick-up.

Zhèngjiā Kèzhàn COURTYARD HOTEL \$
(郑家客栈; ☎568 4466; 68 Yamen Jie; 衙门街68号; dm/d Y40/168, discounts of 20%; ②) All the dorms (no shower) are upstairs under the eaves at this pleasant place with a courtyard atmosphere just east of Listen to the Rain Pavilion. Downstairs doubles are spacious and pleasantly arranged, with shower. Next door there's another lovely courtyard belonging to the same outfit; arranged on two levels, it has pricier double rooms (Y258) elegantly decorated with period furniture, and a gracefully presented main area. Internet and pick-up.

Cuì Chénghǎi Hotel COURTYARD HOTEL \$\$
(翠成海客栈; Cui Chénghǎi Kèzhàn; ☎577 7888; www.pycch.com; 178 Nan Dajie; 南大街178号; tw & d Y388-568, ste from Y868, discounts of 30-50%; ②@) With three courtyards and more spacious and more elegantly furnished rooms than in hostels mentioned here, this decent midrange option is worth trying. The cheapest rooms off a more modern building to the side are nothing special, but the ones off the central Ming-dynasty courtyard are lovely.

Yúnjīnchéng Hotel COURTYARD HOTEL \$\$\$
(云锦成宾馆; Yúnjīnchéng Bīnguǎn; ☎568 9220; www.pibc.cn; 56 Xi Dajie; 西大街56号; d/ste Y1080/1480, discounts of 30%; ②) Good-looking courtyard compound, replete

with carved wooden screens and lacquered furniture.

Eating & Drinking

Most hotels can rustle up (Western or Chinese) breakfast, lunch and dinner. Píngyáo does not have too many bars, but courtyard hotels provide virtually all you need: bottles of chilled beer, a gorgeous courtyard to sit in, a chair and table, some grilled peanuts, the Shānxī night sky above your head, a book and some candlelight. The Chinese fast-food chain Dico's has the smallest branch imaginable next to number 49 Xi Dajie; otherwise *xiǎochī* (小吃; hole-in-the-wall restaurants) are everywhere. Some of Píngyáo's English menus are highly inventive ('clear cooks the bull's penis', 'photo meatball' and 'roast chicken skeleton', anyone?). Look out for heart-warming, soothing alcoholic infusions such as the pink *nǚ'ér hóng* (女儿红) or the clear *méiguì* (玫瑰), available for sale at the Harmony Guesthouse and other hotels and restaurants.

Déjūyuán HOMESTYLE FOOD \$\$
(德居源; 82 Nan Dajie; ☎8.30am-10pm; ②) This welcoming and popular little Nan Dajie restaurant has a simple and tasty menu of affordable dishes from lamb dumplings (Y15) to stewed eggplant (Y10). It's opposite the Tian Yuan Kui Guesthouse.

Big Bowl Noodles NOODLES \$
(大碗面; Dàwǎn Miàn; Xi Dajie; dishes from Y6; ☎10am-10pm; ②) Down-to-earth, non-nonsense noodle joint with tasty pork noodles (Y4 to Y6), braised pork noodles (Y10 to Y12), braised pork ribs (Y25) and roast-beef kebabs (Y2).

Déjūyuán Bīnguǎn SHANXI \$\$
(德居源宾馆; Xi Dajie; dishes Y10-35; ②) Superb Shānxī cuisine served in a traditional courtyard.

Sakura Cafe BAR \$
(櫻花屋西餐酒吧; Yīnghuāwū Xīcān Jiǔbǎ; 6 Dong Dajie; beers from Y10; ☎9am-late; ②) Lively, fun and adorned with red lanterns and flags, this gregarious, warm, entertaining and affordable cafe/bar has good music and is popular with local Chinese.

Shopping

Part of Píngyáo's charms lie in its peeling and weather-beaten shopfronts, yet to be mercilessly restored. Nan Dajie is stuffed with wood-panelled shops selling ginger sweets (marvel at vendors pulling the gold-

en sugary ginger mass into strips), moon cakes, Píngyáo snacks, knick-knacks and bric-a-brac, Cultural Revolution posters, jade, shoes and slippers, and loads more. Look out for red and black Shānxī paper cuts, which make excellent presents; a shop can be found at No 25 Chenghuangmiao Jie. Also look out for more hats, shoes, slippers, lacquerware and what-not along Xi Dajie. Shānxī vinegar is on sale in vinegar shops in hefty brown jars (you may not want to load one of those into your rucksack). The shutters start closing around 9pm.

Tip-toe Tapestry

SHOES

(绣品行; Xiùpín Háng; 122 Nan Dajie; ☎8.30am-9pm) Gorgeous hand-embroidered, hand-washable ladies shoes and slippers from Y45 a pair. Further branch at 18 Nan Dajie.

i Information

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Xi Dajie; ☎8am-6pm)

Industrial & Commercial Bank of China

(ICBC; 工商银行; Gōngshāng Yínháng; Xiguan Dajie) Has an ATM that accepts Visa but, like all other Píngyáo banks, does not change money or travellers cheques.

Internet cafe (网吧; wǎngbā; per hr Y2; ☎24hr) Beyond the Lower West Gate.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局;

Gōng'ānjú; ☎563 5010; Shuncheng Lu; ☎8am-12pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) Around 3km south of the train station, on the corner of the junction with Shuguang Lu. Cannot extend visas.

Xingténg internet cafe (兴腾网吧; Xingténg Wǎngbā; per hr Y2; ☎24hr) Opposite the Erlǎng Temple on Bei Dajie.

i Getting There & Away

Bus

Buses to local destinations such as Jiéxiū (Y9, 40 minutes) usually trawl for passengers at the train station, so it's normally quicker to catch them there.

Píngyáo's **bus station** (汽车新站; qìchēxīnzhàn, ☎569 0011) has buses to Tàiyuán (Y25, two hours, frequent, 6.45am to 7.20pm) and Lishí (Y36, three hours, 7am to 12.30pm).

Train

Tickets for trains are tough to get, especially for sleepers, so plan ahead. Your hotel/hostel should be able to help.

Direct trains:

Běijīng Y117 to Y154, 11 to 12 hours, three daily

Dàtóng Y75 to Y80, seven to 8½ hours, four daily

Tàiyuán Y8 (hard seat), 1½ to two hours, frequent services (6.14am to 9.53pm)

Xī'ān Y83 to Y95, 8½ to 10½ hours, five daily

i Getting Around

Píngyáo can be easily navigated on foot or bicycle (Y10 per day). Bike rental is all over the place; Xi Dajie has several bike-rental spots, including one by the Lower West Gate. Electric carts whiz around town (Y5 to Y10). Some hostels will pay the driver when you first arrive as part of their free pick-up promise.

Around Píngyáo

Check with your hostel (or other hostels), as other travellers may be looking for fellow passengers to hire a car for the day to take in the surrounding sights. Hostels also arrange tours.

SHUĀNGLÍN TEMPLE

双林寺

Within easy reach of Píngyáo, this **Buddhist temple** (Shuānglín Sì; admission Y25; ☎8am-7pm), rebuilt in 1571, houses a number of rare, intricately carved Song and Yuan painted statues. The interiors of the Sakyamuni Hall and flanking buildings are particularly exquisite. A rickshaw will cost about Y40 return and a taxi Y50 (but consider cycling out there instead).

WANG FAMILY COURTYARD

王家大院

More castle than cosy home, this Qing-dynasty **former residence** (Wángjiā Dàyuàn; admission Y66; ☎8am-7pm) is grand (123 courtyards) if rather redundant. Of more interest perhaps are the still-occupied **cave dwellings** (窑洞; yáodòng) behind the castle walls. Two direct buses (8.20am and 2.40pm) leave from Píngyáo bus station. Regular buses go to Jiéxiū (介休; Y7, 40 minutes), where you can change to bus 11 (Y4, 40 minutes), which terminates at the complex. The Wang residence is behind the Yuan-dynasty **Confucian Temple** (文庙; Wén Miào; admission Y10), housing a beautiful four-storey pagoda. The last bus back to Jiéxiū leaves at 6pm.

ZHĀNGBÌ UNDERGROUND CASTLE

张壁古堡

This fascinating 1400-year-old network of **defence tunnels** (Zhāngbì Gǔbǎo; admission Y40, guide Y20; ☎8am-6.30pm), built at the end of the Sui dynasty, was never employed for its intended use against possible attack from Tang-dynasty invaders, and

subsequently fell into disrepair. Guides speak only Chinese but are essential to prevent you from getting lost inside more than 1500m of tunnels on three levels, the deepest of which drops 26m. Small caves off the pathways were storage rooms and bedrooms, while peepholes in the floor of some of the upper levels were made to spy on and attack would-be invaders.

The guided tour includes a visit to **Zhāngbì Cūn** (张壁村), an enchanting, still-occupied Yuan-dynasty village above the tunnels. You can wander its cobblestoned streets and 800-year-old buildings for free if you don't mind skipping the underground castle.

You can only get here by taxi. To cut the cost, take a bus or a train halfway to Jièxiū (介休; Y9, 40 minutes). A return taxi from Jièxiū, including waiting time, is around Y70. Expect to pay at least double that from Píngyáo.

Qikou

☎0358 / POP 32,000

This tiny Ming river port on the banks of the Yellow River (黄河; Huáng Hé) found prosperity during its Qing heyday and is well worth visiting for its stone courtyards and enchanting cobbled pathways, which wind their way up from the banks of the river to the Black Dragon Temple. The main draw is the nearby ancient village of Lijiāshān, a seemingly long-forgotten settlement of hundreds of cave dwellings (窑洞; yáodòng), some of which remain inhabited today.

👁 Sights

Black Dragon Temple

TAOIST TEMPLE

(黑龙庙; Hēilóng Miào) They say the acoustics of this Ming Taoist temple, with wonderful views of the Yellow River, were so excellent that performances held on its stage were audible in Shaanxi (Shānxī) province (on the far side of the river). From Qikou's bus stop, follow the road down to the river, then take any number of old cobbled pathways up the hill, via the odd courtyard or two.

Lijiāshān

MOUNTAIN CAVES

(李家山) An absolute dream for travellers wanting to experience Shānxī's cave houses, this remote 550-year-old village, hugging a hillside set back from the Yellow River, has hundreds of cave dwellings scaling nine storeys. Once home to more than 600 fami-

lies, most surnamed Li, today's population numbers just over 40; the local school, with caves for classrooms, has just four pupils. Some of the stone paths and stairways that wind their way up the hill also date from Ming times. Note the stone rings on some walls that horses were tied to.

To get here, cross the bridge by Qikou's bus stop and follow the river for about 30 minutes until you see a blue sign with '李家山' on it. Then follow the dirt track up the hill for about 20 minutes until you reach the old village.

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

Qikou Kèzhàn

GUESTHOUSE \$

(碛口客栈; ☎446 6188; d/tw Y188/218; @) Overlooking the river in Qikou, this place has comfortable, yáodòng-style rooms with kang beds off two 300-year-old courtyards. It also does decent food, although there are cheaper places to eat behind the bus stop. Free internet connection in each room.

Sihéyuàn Lǚdiàn

COURTYARD \$

(四合院旅店; ☎138 3583 2614; r per person Y40 with meals) In Lijiāshān, some locals have spare caves that they will let you stay in for around Y40, including basic meals. If you can't wrangle one, fear not: this 180-year-old, wonderfully rustic courtyard has a handful of cave bedrooms that burrow into the hillside behind it. Run by Mr Li and his wife, whose family have lived here for six generations, rooms come with huge, chunky, stone kang beds and traditional Chinese paper window panes. There's electricity (most of the time), but no running water. Apart from Mr Li, who speaks good Mandarin, most residents speak only Jin. The guesthouse is up to your left as you enter the village. Look for the big red banner with '四合院旅店' on it.

📍 Getting There & Away

Two direct buses run from Tàiyuán to Qikou (Y67, four hours, 7.30am, 10.30am and noon). If you miss these, or are coming from Píngyáo, you will have to take the more complicated route through Líshí (离石).

Regular buses go from Tàiyuán to Líshí (Y70, two hours, from 7am to 7.30pm). Two go from Píngyáo (Y29, 2½ hours, 7.30am and noon). From Líshí's long-distance bus station (长途汽车站; chángtú qìchēzhàn), take bus 1 (Y1, 20 minutes) to the west bus station (西客站; xī kèzhàn) then change for Qikou (Y15, two hours).

CAVE DWELLINGS

People have been living in caves in Shānxī for almost 5000 years, and it's believed that at one stage a quarter of the population lived underground. Shānxī's countryside is still littered with (窑洞; yáodòng), especially around the Yellow River area, and Lǐjiāshān is a wonderful example. These days, most lie abandoned but, incredibly, almost three million people still live in Shānxī caves. And who can blame them? Compared to modern houses, they're cheaper and easier to make, far better insulated against freezing winters and scorching summers, much more soundproof and afford better protection from natural disasters such as earthquakes or forest fires. Furthermore, with far fewer building materials needed to construct them, they're a whole lot more environmentally friendly. So why isn't everyone living in them? Well, although most are now connected to the national grid, the vast majority of cave communities have no running water or sewerage system, turning simple daily tasks like washing or going to the toilet into a mission and suddenly making even the ugliest tower block seem a whole lot more attractive.

There's one daily bus from Qikǒu to Tàiyuán, but it leaves at 5.30am, while buses to Lìshí from Qikǒu stop running at 12.30pm. After that, though, you should still be able to land a seat in a minibus for about Y20. From Lìshí, there are regular buses back to Tàiyuán (from 6.30am to 8pm), two to Píngyáo (7.30am and noon) and two to Xī'ān (Y151, eight hours, 7am and 2.30pm).

Jinchéng

晋城

☎0356 / POP 395,000

One snug, 450-year-old pagoda aside, Jinchéng has few sights, but this small industrial town is the launch pad for a historical adventure into Shānxī's southeast. The surrounding countryside is bursting with ancient architecture, making this a rewarding stop, particularly if you are continuing south into Hénán.

The only sight of note in town is **Bìfēng Temple** (笔峰寺; Bìfēng Sì; ☺dawn-dusk), 300m in front of the train station. The dark, narrow and, quite frankly, scary steps inside its Míng pagoda can be climbed for Y3.

For accommodation, hop on bus 2 to **Zhōngyuán Bīnguǎn** (中原宾馆; ☎888 0700; Wengchang Dongjie; 文昌冻街; d & tw Y98, discounts 20%; ☹), a friendly hotel set back from the road through an open gateway, opposite the People's Hospital (人民医院; Rénmín Yīyuàn). There are a few restaurants opposite the hotel, with tables spilling out onto the pavement come evening.

Internet cafes can be found near the train station. The **Bank of Communications** (交通银行; Jiāotōng Yínháng; cnr Jianshe Lu & Hongxing Xijie), is further along the bus 2 route, a

couple of minutes' walk down the hill from the long-distance bus station. It has a 24-hour ATM. **Maps** (地图; dìtú; Y4) of Jinchéng can be bought at kiosks outside the bus and train stations.

Bus 2 (Y1, 6.30am to 8pm) runs from the train station, past the Central Bus Station, along Wencheng Dongjie, where hotels and restaurants can be found, past the Bank of Communications and on to the long-distance bus station.

Buses to Tàiyuán (Y107, four hours, from 6am to 7.15pm) leave frequently from the Central Bus Station, a 20-minute walk straight along the road from the train station. Buses to other destinations, including Píngyáo (Y104, 5½ hours, 8am and 9.30am), Xī'ān (Y159, seven to eight hours, three daily), Běijīng (Y240, 10 hours, 8pm) and Zhèngzhōu in Hénán (Y60, three hours, frequently), leave from the long-distance station.

The few trains that pass Jinchéng shuttle between Tàiyuán (Y64, seven hours, 1.17am and 4.06am) and Zhèngzhōu (Y54, 3½ hours, 2.49am and 4.57pm), from where you can change to onward destinations.

Around Jinchéng

PRIME MINISTER CHEN'S CASTLE

皇城相府

This beautifully preserved Ming-dynasty **castle** (Huángchéng Xiàngfǔ; admission Y60) is the former residence of Chen Tingjing, prime minister under Emperor Kangxi in the late 17th century, and co-author of China's most famous dictionary. It comes with tourist trappings - souvenir sellers,

FOR REFERENCE

Prime Minister Chen Tingjing was undoubtedly a man of many talents. Outside his governmental responsibilities he also inspired as a teacher, poet and musician. His surviving legacy, however, was not one of China's great works of creativity, but a dictionary. Not just any dictionary, mind. China's most famous and most comprehensive, and the last one ever to be commissioned by an emperor. Named after that emperor, the Kangxi Dictionary was a mammoth undertaking put together by Chen and Zhang Yushu, both of whom died before its completion in 1716. Multivolumed, and containing 49,030 characters, it was, until 1993, the largest Chinese dictionary ever compiled.

Appropriately enough, Chen's former residence (p355) now houses China's only dictionary museum which includes amongst its exhibits 39 versions of the Kangxi Dictionary, the oldest being a 42-volume, 47,035-character edition of 1827. Modern reprints (Y580 to Y2000) can be bought in the small dictionary shop, although you might need a spare rucksack to get one back to the hotel!

megaphone-wielding guides – but remains an intriguing maze of courtyards, gardens and stone archways, and is home to China's only dictionary museum! Frequent buses (Y12, 75 minutes, from 6am to 6.30pm) run from the long-distance station. Return transport is scarce, so it's best to take a minibus to the small town of Běiliú (北留; Y3, 15 minutes) then catch an ordinary bus back to Jinchéng (Y10).

Hǎihuì Temple

海会寺

The highlights of this active Buddhist **temple** (Hǎihuì Sì; admission Y30), where Minister Chen used to study, are its twin brick pagodas. The 20m-high **Shèlì Tǎ** (舍利塔) is almost 1100 years old. Towering above it is the octagonal **Rúlái Tǎ** (如来塔), built in 1558, which can be climbed for an extra Y10. To get here, take the bus to the castle but tell the driver you want to get off at

Hǎihuì. To continue to the castle or Guōyù Ancient Village, take a minibus from the main road (Y2) or walk (45 minutes).

GUŌYÙ ANCIENT VILLAGE 郭峪古城

This enchanting walled village (Guōyù Gǔchéng) is, for some, the highlight of a trip to this part of Shānxī. There's no entrance fee and no tourist nonsense, just the genuine charm of a still-inhabited Ming-dynasty settlement. It's best simply to wander the streets aimlessly, but don't miss **Tāngdì Miào** (汤帝庙), a 600-year-old Taoist temple and the village's oldest building. It's also worth poking your nose inside the former courtyard residence of Minister Chen's grandfather at **1 Jingyang Beilu** (景阳北路1号). Guōyù is a 10-minute walk down the hill from the castle. The bus will drop you off here if you ask.

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