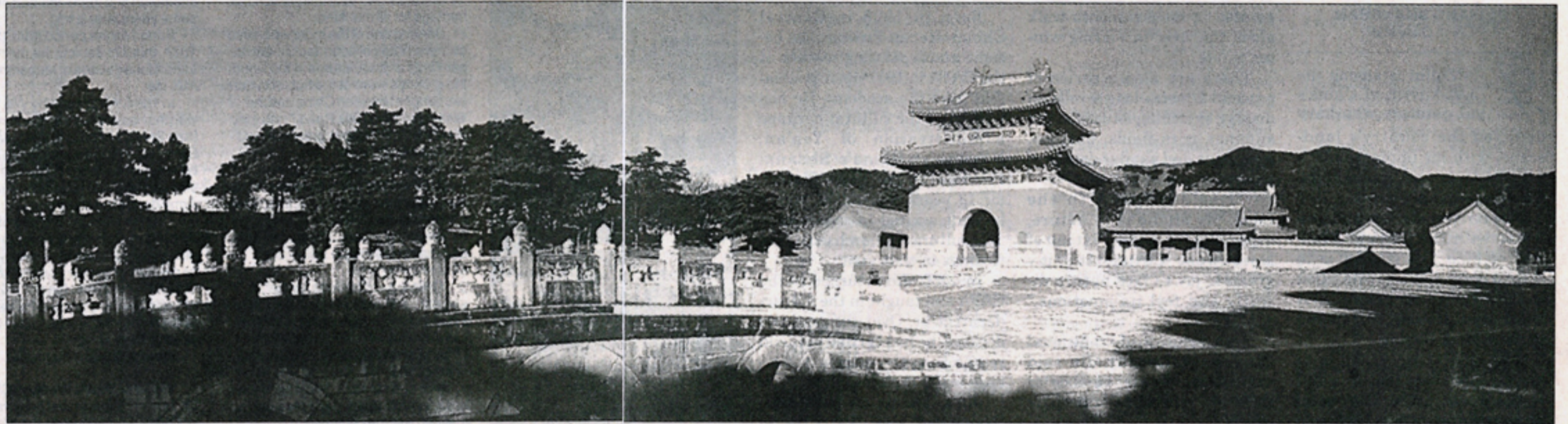


Beauty beyond the bustle

Editor's note: Finding out ways to escape the bustle of Beijing over the weekends is one of the regular activities of many local residents. There are many scenic spots within easy reach of Beijing, including mountains, beaches and historical sites. China Daily staff reporter YU NAN shares her travelling experiences.



Above: The Eastern Qing Tombs, located in Zunhua County of Hebei Province, are arguably China's largest dynastic mausoleum. **Below:** The granite walls of the burial chamber of Emperor Qianlong on which Buddhist figures and scriptures are carved.

Qing Tombs: A reminder of the past

Some people might try to convince you that a visit to ancient imperial tombs is a ticket to boredom, compared to the pleasure of immersing oneself in the sea or the fragrant air of a pristine forest.

But a one-day trip to the Eastern Qing (1644-1911) Tombs should easily convince you otherwise.

The tombs by far surpass their more famous predecessors, the Ming Tombs, but they are seldom visited owing to their relative remoteness from Beijing.

Located in Zunhua County of Hebei Province, the tombs are about 120 kilometres from Beijing — about a three-hour drive.

Listed as a world historical heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Eastern Qing Tombs are arguably China's largest dynastic mausoleum, entombing five emperors, 15 empresses, and more than 100 concubines, princes, and princesses — including Emperor Kangxi's teacher. A total of 161 members of the royal family and court are buried there.

Tomb construction began in 1661 and stopped only in 1908.

They are like a rural version of the Forbidden City and are nearly as elaborate. Tastefully restored for the most part, this imperial city is vast, grand and uncrowded.

The long Sacred Way that leads to the tombs is lined with 18 sets of stone sculptures, splendid renderings of lions, elephants, horses, camels, and unicorns, as well as army generals and court advisers.

Even though so many years have passed since the sculptures were completed, their aura of vividness is as arresting today as when they first emerged from unshaped stone.

Local people

When this resting place for the Qing emperors was completed, the imperial court sent an army of royal guards and maintenance workers to keep the cemetery clean and keep out the common people.

The descendants of royal guards and maintenance workers still live in villages surrounding the tomb area.

People who tour the Eastern Qing Tombs may take little note of the local villagers, who provide all kinds of services.

But they are the actual descendants of the Manchu keepers and guards whose families can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries.

Today, during the slack farming seasons, they make money by providing services for the tourists.

They sell ice-cream or shuttle tourists from one mausoleum to another on their motorbikes, and offer a variety of other handy services.

An elderly villager, who was selling popsicles on the Sacred Way, claimed that he was a descendent of the Jin clan, the surname of the royal Qing family descendants adopted after the downfall of the Qing Dynasty.

Proud of his own ancestry, he was eager to give every visitor his own "royal" blessing while chatting with them.

Hopes of high achievement are what old Jin tries to bestow on the tourists he talks to. He sees this as a responsibility handed down to him by his forefathers.

The Eastern Qing Tombs are the final resting place of the three rulers who did the most to enrich China's multi-ethnic history and culture that people can see today in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722), his grandson Emperor Qianlong (1711-99), and Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908), whose lives spanned the breadth of China's last dynasty, are all buried in splendid underground palaces at this site.

Yu Ling is the tomb of Emperor Qianlong, the longest ruling monarch in Chinese history. Its elaborate underground Palace is open to visitors.

Consisting of nine elaborately rated vaults 53 metres underground, this palace is divided by a series of marble doors 3 metres thick.

The burial chamber contains

sarcophagi of the emperor and five of his consorts. Qianlong also built round earthen mounds at the rear of this complex to entomb his imperial concubines.

The most intricate part of Qianlong's tomb is the granite walls of the burial chamber on which Buddhist scriptures are inscribed in handsome calligraphic style in the Han, Tibetan, Manchu and Mongol languages — another testament to the multi-ethnic culture and history that the emperor was part of.

That's why Old Jin and many of his neighbours in the village have remain so proud of their ancestry.

Travel tips:

80 yuan (US\$9.67) for an entrance ticket.

The tombs are scattered over a wide 30-square-kilometre area. You can drive around the site or rent a minibus for around 60 yuan (US\$7.26) for half a day.

Suggested length of stay: half a day. More detailed information can be found at <http://www.qingdongling.com/>.

To get there: by way passing through Yanjiao, Shanhe, Jixian and Shimen.

By Bus: Special buses leave from Xuanwumen church at 7:00-8:00 am daily. Tickets: 70-80 yuan (US\$8.46-US\$9.67).

Telephone: 0315-6945471



Feicui Island: Fine beaches without usual crowds

I wasn't very excited when my friends called me to join them for a trip to the beach on weekend. I wanted to head back when we threaded our way along the crowded and noisy expressway on our way to the beach.

But the jostling chatter of the flocks of seagulls as we got close to our destination — Feicui (emerald) Island, a newly opened coastal resort by the Bohai Sea, at the south of Golden Beach in Changli County of Hebei Province — cheered me up.

With the hovering seagulls chanting their ode to freedom, I began to realize that the resort might be different from the crowded popular ones I had been to in the past.

Feicui Island is actually a peninsula. Unlike well-established coastal resorts like Beidaihe, which is jammed with hotels and villas, Feicui is largely natural and unspoiled, with nothing more needed than its amazing natural scenery to draw you there.

Surrounded by sea in its north, east and west sides, the peninsula got its name from the colour of its pure and clean water which resembles the colour of emerald.

On the west side of Feicui Island, sand dunes stretch back to a green belt of woodland. The dunes are about 40 metres high, very common at Golden Beach but rare in other coastal areas.

Without any restaurants or hotels, the beach with its fine sand is home to only a few scattered tents. The sole buildings there are a simply-constructed toilet and a shower.

There were dozens of interesting sand sculptures on the beach. A large sand sculpture show had just finished a few weeks ago.

The breeze from the sea was variable but felt wonderful on my skin, although it gave us a bit of trouble when we tried to put our tent up. It was blown askew before we could fasten the cor-

ners in the sand.

The fine, clean sand and shallow, calm and clear water make it an ideal place for swimming. And its a great place to catch a few rays.

The joyful screams of people sliding down the sand dunes made the day even more memorable for me. Sliding down the dunes with my heart beating fast was exciting and unforgettable, and more than enough to compensate for the pain I felt later in my behind.

Visitors can also enjoy many other forms of entertainment such as horse racing, yacht racing, beach volleyball, beach soccer, kite flying or going fishing with local fishermen.

Feicui Island hasn't yet become popular among beach fans. So the picturesque views and relatively quiet beach haven't been ruined.

But the tranquility may not endure. First-timers who spend a weekend there are very likely to make it a summer heat habit.

Travel tips:

No hotels and restaurants. So a weekend stay on the soft and clean beach requires camping equipment and food. A camping spot for two people costs 60 yuan per day (US\$7.25).

There are hotels of different quality located 10 kilometres away along Golden Beach.

A beach barbecue is served at a cost of 30-40 yuan (US\$3.63-4.84).

The shower facilities are limited. It will be a good idea to bring water to wash your face.

Suggested length of stay: two or three days.

More detailed information may be found at <http://www.feicuidao.com/>.

To get there (with map):

By car (4-hour drive from downtown Beijing): Take the Beijing-Shenyang highway (240 kilometres), turn south at the Highway Exit 18, and drive down south for another 51 kilometres.

Telephone: 0335-2211121



Hands in the sand: Sand sculptors create fun on the beach of Feicui coastal resort by the Bohai Sea, Changli County of Hebei Province.



For a silent record of a newly opened Golden Beach in



The Bohai Sea

Wuling Mountains: Wonderland for trekkers

There are many wonderful mountains within easy reach of Beijing. But very few, if any, that are blessed with the stature, beauty, ecosystem and accessibility of Wuling Mountains.

Located at the border of Miyun County of Beijing and Xinglong County of Hebei, the mountain is about a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the centre of Beijing.

It's a place that satisfies the appetite of many kinds of visitors — mountain climbers, rock climbers, waterfall lovers, botanists, zoologists and bird watchers.

A State-level nature reserve, the area boasts over 1,800 plant species including its "very own" species of bellower. It is also home to leopards, gold eagles and other precious wildlife species.

Covering more than 180 square kilometres, the reserve is accessible from three directions — north, west, and south (the main entrance). Access via the South Gate is particularly appealing because it is there that you will find the very well maintained paved road that connects to the hotels and to the summit.

Along the way to the summit, people will see how biodiversity works here, as the habitat consists of mixed forests, steep cliffs, and luxuriant vegetation. There are hidden waterfalls to pleasantly surprise you in the lush forests.

Named Waitao Peak, the summit can be reached by a 40 minute drive up a winding, but generously wide paved road, followed by a 5-



minute gentle walk. It is the highest point in Hebei and part of Beijing's majestic Yanshan Mountains range.

A trek of five to six hours from the west gate to the north gate along beautiful forest pathways is arduous but rewarding, because hiking lets you enjoy every fantastic corner of the mountains, accompanied with the musical chirping of birds.

Travel tips:

It is very cool in summer, so thick long-sleeve clothes are a must.

A ticket costs 70 yuan (US\$8.47).

How to get there (with map):

Take a long-distance bus to Miyun from Dongzhimen Bus Terminal. At Miyun change to the Wuling Mountains National Forest Park bus.

By car: drive along the Beijing-Chengde Highway directly to Miyun, turn right at Songshuyu, turn onto Caojia Road and continue for about 2 kilometres.

Telephone: 010-81022403

Natural wonderland:

Wuling Mountains, at the border of Miyun County of Beijing and Xinglong County of Hebei, can satisfy the appetites of many kinds of visitors — mountain climbers, rock climbers, waterfall lovers, botanists, zoologists and bird watchers.



Filephoto