

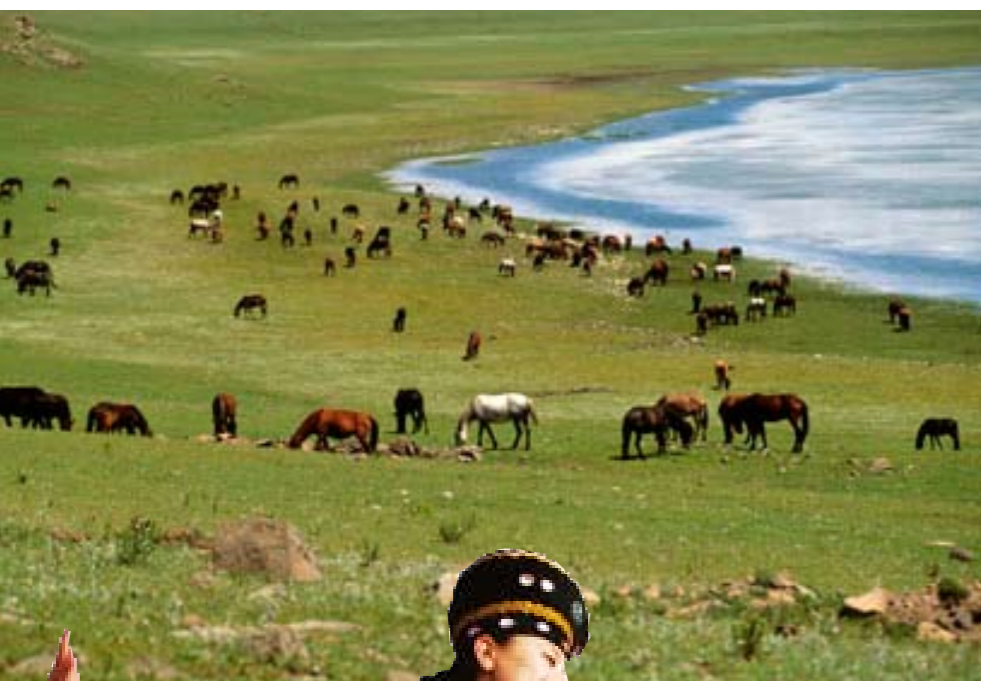
## hohhot is cool

Heading out of Beijing? Catch China in a wild and free mood in Inner Mongolia where azure skies meet rolling plains, says **DANIEL ALLEN**.

This is the place to enjoy the great outdoors. Formerly part of the great Mongol Empire that stretched from Korea to eastern Europe, Inner Mongolia, now part of China, was traditionally peopled by nomadic Mongolian families who lived in portable,

felt-covered structures called *yurts*, and kept herds of livestock.

Hohhot (pronounced hu-he-hao-te) is its capital city and dates back to 306 BC. Once an important centre for Buddhism, it has some fine Buddhist temples, but the



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Tradition goes modern at these concrete yurts designed for visitors; women dancers get into the swing of things at the annual Naadam Festival; grasslands and endless vistas are the hallmark of Inner Mongolia.

province is best known for its vast grasslands and deserts.

A three-hour drive south-west of Hohhot will take you to Kobqi Desert, or Xiangshawan, part of the Gobi Desert which stretches across much of north and north-west China and southern Mongolia. An expanse of rolling dunes that can reach heights of 50m and more, it can be accessed by cable car.

The impressive landscape can also be explored on camel-back.

About 90km north of Hohhot is the Xilamuren area, the most easily accessible grassland region for visitors. Stay overnight with a Mongolian family and, if

you're intrepid enough, sample fermented horse milk along with delicious roasted lamb.

During the annual Naadam Festival in July, visitors can witness the three major traditional sports of wrestling, archery and horse-racing, which provides plenty of opportunity to show off athletic prowess.

Hohhot is a relatively compact city of 1.6 million. Many residents speak the Mongolian language in addition to Mandarin, and you will notice the vertical Mongolian script on street signs and shopfronts. Mongolian Buddhism continues to thrive, and the temples to visit are Dazhao Temple, Five Pagoda Temple and the Tomb of Zhaojun.

Founded in 1580, Dazhao Temple is the oldest in Inner Mongolia. With deep crimson outer walls, gold tiled roofs, sacred religious scriptures and dragon sculptures, this temple has enough to keep visitors occupied for at least half a day.

The Five Pagoda Temple dates back to 1730 and has a unique architectural style: five small pagodas glazed in green and yellow stand on a base inscribed with Mongolian, Tibetan and Sanskrit characters.

The Tomb of Zhaojun, a 30-minute taxi ride to the south of Hohhot, dates back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 25). It was built to commemorate a concubine who married the chief of a fierce tribe to keep the peace and strengthen cultural ties. >>



Beautiful beaches and beer make Qingdao a prime tourist destination.

## Cheers to Qingdao

White sand beaches, Gothic architecture and beer fests make Qingdao, venue of the Olympics sailing events, a slice of China with a distinctly different flavour, says **DANIEL ALLEN**.

Picturesque scenery and a chequered past make the coastal city of Qingdao in Shandong Province one of north-east China's most appealing resorts. Located beside the Yellow Sea, this city attracts a steady stream of visitors thanks to its clean environment and diverse attractions.

Qingdao was ceded to Germany in 1898 on a 99-year lease, as part of the concession of Jiaozhou Bay on the southern coast of the Shandong Peninsula, and this colonial history has left the city with some fine examples of German architecture.

St. Michael's Cathedral, a beautiful Gothic-style church in ochre hues, still caters

to Qingdao's large Catholic population, while other fine examples of colonial architecture include the Qingdao Protestant Church and Ba Da Guan suburb, made up of eight streets bordered by classic European houses. The grassy lawns, wide streets and minimal traffic provide a contrast to typical Chinese residential areas.

But for many travellers, the most enjoyable German legacy in Qingdao is in liquid form. The city's Tsingtao Brewery, founded in 1903, still bottles beer according to German recipes, and its heady concoctions have made Tsingtao one of China's most famous beer brands, sold in more

than 50 countries worldwide.

It's no surprise that Qingdao hosts an annual International Beer Festival, to be held this year from September 19 to October 5. With Chinese and European breweries taking part, this is an energetic, alcohol-fuelled celebration of Qingdao's brewing heritage, with fairground rides, tasty snacks, beer games and live entertainment.

Tsingtao beer is perfect for washing down Qingdao's cuisine, known for its excellent seafood and delicious soups with an emphasis on soy sauce, shallots and garlic. High-end establishments such as the Shangri-La Hotel

and the Yiqinglou Restaurant serve mouth-watering local specialties such as fried spicy clams, seafood wonton and roasted fish, while for al fresco dining, you should check out Yunxiao Road and Minjiang Road, and Madao Seafood Street, near the seafront.

Qingdao has six beaches of varying quality. Shilaoren (Old Stone Man) beach, a short taxi ride from the city centre, is named after one of its prominent statuesque rocks, and is generally regarded as Qingdao's best tourist beach. With its powdery white sand, gentle surf, a full range of facilities and an attractive new boardwalk, this is the perfect spot to while away an afternoon or warm summer evening.

Although there are numerous vendors selling snacks and drinks on Qingdao's beaches, bring your own UV protection. Cover up well, especially in summer when the sun can be intense. The sea is warmest at the end of August. >>

### FAST FACTS

#### CURRENCY

Chinese Yuan (CNY)  
US\$1 = CNY 7

#### VISA

[www.cnto.org](http://www.cnto.org)  
Due to the Olympics, there are some new temporary visa rules. For details, check with the China embassy in your country.

#### BEST TIME TO VISIT

Beijing & Chengdu: March to June and September to November.  
Hohhot: April to October.  
Qingdao: April to June and August to October.

#### HOW TO GET THERE

Singapore Airlines flies 3 times daily from Singapore to Beijing. Hohhot and Qingdao are both an hour's flight from Beijing. Singapore Airlines flies 5 times daily from Singapore to Shanghai, from where Chengdu is a two-hour flight away. SilkAir flies 5 times weekly from Singapore to Chengdu.

#### MORE INFORMATION

<http://old.cnta.gov.cn/lyen/index.asp>