

DESTINATION

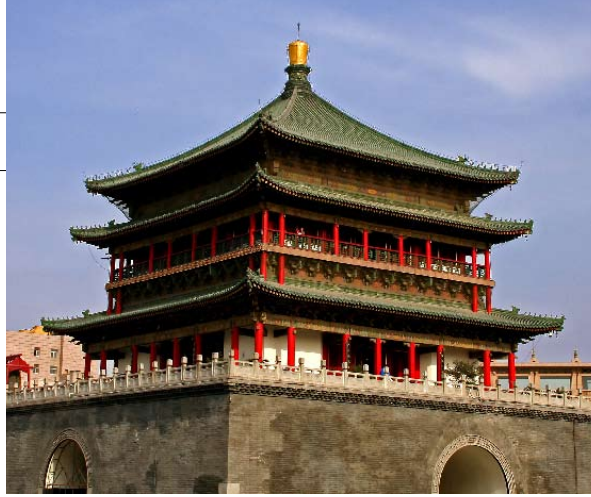
Xi'an China

Country Code: +86

Currency: Chinese ren min bi or yuan

Flight time from/to Bangkok:

2 hours 55 minutes



Above, The Bell tower atop the city walls

FROM THE AIRPORT

Bus: Airport shuttles to downtown Xi'an depart every 50 minutes, cost 20 yuan and take up to one hour.

Taxi: A metered taxi costs around 150 yuan but make sure that you have your destination written in Chinese. Ask airport officials for help with this before getting into the cab.

TABLE TALK

Cheap and chic: **Da Mai Shi Jie**

Take a stroll through Xi'an's renowned Muslim Quarter for a culinary adventure. Alfresco family-run barbecues line both sides of the street, filling the air with the smell of roasting meat. Try the succulent *yang rou chuan* (mutton kebabs) or *rou jia mo* (fried pork or beef in pita bread) accompanied by an ice-cold Yanjing Beer.

Mid-range magic: **Lao Sun Jia**

The original restaurant, opened over 100 years ago, is still the best place to sample one of Xi'an's speciality dishes, *yang rou pao mo* (mutton stock with flat bread). Other recommended dishes include *fen zheng yang rou*, two steamed buns perched on the side of a pile of minced meat and flour. Wash it down with "Eight Treasures Tea", a mix of tea, nuts and fruit. 78 Dong Da Jie (East Main Street), tel (0)29 8221-2935

Gourmet: **Pavilion**

An elegantly decorated restaurant in the style of a 6th-century Tang Dynasty teahouse and one of Xi'an's upmarket dining venues, the Pavilion offers top-notch authentic Cantonese, Shaanxi and Sichuan cuisine. Favourites with the locals include braised shark's fin and abalone. Hyatt Regency Xi'an (Kaiyue Fandian), Dong Da Jie, tel (0)29 8769-1234

136 fah thai _ november / december 2007

AFTER DARK

Cocktail hour: **GZ Bar**

The only bar of its kind, GZ is packed with jazz lovers every night. There is live jazz after 10pm by international artists. Cheap beers and good cocktails keep the atmosphere buzzing.

Dong Qi Dao Xiang, tel (0)133 5920-7823

Late night: **Babyface Nightclub**

Neon and mirrors are the order of the day at this nightclub. Many flock to the dance floor with DJs spinning tunes for the trendy Xi'an crowd. The place is usually packed after 11pm on weekends.

Nan Da Jie (by the South Gate)

HOT SPOTS

Shaanxi History Museum: Spend half a day wandering through one of China's top museums and one of Xi'an's must-sees. Housed in an impressive building, the spacious, well-organised exhibition halls boast an intriguing collection of more than 3,000 relics from China's dynastic past (with English captions). Check out the tiger-shaped statuette covered in Chinese characters that gave its owner, one General Du, imperial authorisation to mobilise over 50 soldiers at will during the Qin Dynasty. Open daily from 9am to 5.30pm. 91 Xiao Zhai Dong Lu, tel (0)29 8525-4727, www.sxhm.com

INSIDER TIPS

Pick up a present: Looking for a souvenir or gift for the family? Head for the covered market on Hua Jue Xiang, close to the Drum Tower. Wade through the usual tourist fare on offer, and you just might pick up a bargain if you have a good eye and know how to negotiate. As a general rule of thumb, divide the seller's price by four and stand your ground when you bargain.

BODY AND SOUL

Jinzheng Massage: In need of a little pampering after a long day on your feet? Head for the Jinzheng Massage Centre, which offers full body, foot and therapeutic massages using Chinese herbal medicine and traditional techniques. A 60-minute massage costs 50 yuan.

Junction of Tao Yuan South Road and the Southern 2nd Ring Road, tel (0)29 8427-2576

BOUTIQUE BEDS

Sofitel on Ren Min Square Xi'an: Very much an international-standard hotel, this self-styled six-star property is ultra modern and features internet access, a delicatessen, a steam room and an outdoor playground for children. 319 Dongxin Street, tel (0)29 8792-8888, www.accorhotels.com

DAY TRIPPING

Chen Lu: About 90 minutes from Xi'an by road, this ancient pottery village has faithfully carried on Tang Dynasty traditions. Locals joke that Chen Lu "eats pottery" – such is its enthusiasm for the ancient art. No fewer than 17 small factories turn out different styles, ranging from the sleek black *heiyou* to the ochre shades of *tiexiu hua* and the blues and whites of *qing hua*. A taxi should cost no more than 300 yuan for the round-trip (with waiting time).

IN THE KNOW

Run by a Hong Kong entrepreneur, this cabaret show delivers an entertaining artistic pageant, complete with lavish costumes modelled on Mogao cave paintings, a six-course banquet, and some spectacular music and dance acts. Enjoy a performance of the Spring Oriole's Song on the *pai xiao*, a vertical bamboo flute. With voice-overs in English, Tang Dynasty makes for a memorable night out. Dinner starts at 7pm; the show begins at 8:30pm. Reservations are recommended. 75 Chang An Lu, tel (0)29 8782-2222, www.xiantangdynasty.com

Updated by ????????