



Explore

All event details are accurate at time of press and subject to change. For travel directories, see p89. Visit www.thebeijing.com by Apr 12.



Apr 13: Peking Man Tour
A prehistoric occasion. See listing, right.

Nobody's really going far this month. We're all settled into the daily grind, the Spring Festival break is a pleasant but fading memory, and summer vacations are still a few months off. Still, it's around this time that just staying put starts to feel like a journey from one world to another. April is the bridge from skies over to the sweltering city of flip-flops, terrace bars, outdoor chaum³ and musty yellow skies. If you're not sure how to plug the ever-so-brief gap between those two dimensions and the regimes their extremities impose on us, get out and discover a bit more of Beijing. **Ninety Percent Travel** offers the pick of this month's events around Beijing – you might even learn something from their "Dragon Backbone Night Walk" and "Herbal Medicine Hunt." See the event listings for details.

Having friends and family over to visit is always great, but it's equally challenging. Shepherding your group into multiple taxis. Giving directions to each driver. Explaining to the waitress that your sister's friend doesn't eat salt. Persuading your sister's friend that she really should eat salt. Cringing at your elderly relative's mildly racist comments. The responsibility can get just a little too much, especially when you're holding down a day job.

Bespoke Beijing (www.bespoke-beijing.com) is a new concierge service that aims to take the burden off your hands. Travelers are given a mobile phone programmed with useful contact numbers, including emergency contacts, a helpline for dealing with language difficulties and numbers for recommended restaurants, bars and other places of interest. Founder Sarah Keenlyside says, "We're categorically not a luxury concierge. Our prices are deliberately reasonable and we don't require membership from users. We're basically your buddy in Beijing if you don't have one, or if they're busy getting on with their own lives while you're here!"

In other travel news, **Emirates Airlines** will upgrade its existing Dubai-Beijing service as of August 1. Passengers will fly on the 517-seat Airbus A380 – the world's largest commercial passenger jet. Mark that, planespotter. On the ground, **Starwood Hotels** celebrates the launch of their latest property this month. The **Sheraton Qiandao Lake Resort** in Hangzhou opens on April 2. Closer to home, **Xi House**, a boutique hotel featuring 30 rooms, a Mediterranean restaurant and a bar, opens on April 20 in, of all places, 798 art district. I suppose 798 is almost far enough away to justify staying the night. *Laili Shaw*

Apr 2
The Dragon Backbone Night Walk
Discover the central axis of Beijing, known as "the Dragon's Backbone," on a night walk. Free. **Ninety Percent Travel** (51 1791 6648) www.90percenttravel.com

Apr 4
Rural Beijing Village by the Wall Walk
Travel to rural Beijing to see an "authentic" village in the mountains near the Great Wall. **RMB 350** (includes lunch and transportation) 8:30am-6:30pm. **CCC (6432 9341)** www.chinaculturecenter.org

Apr 13
Peking Man Site and Marco Polo Bridge
Travel to the UNESCO-listed site of the caves where the earliest Beijingers lived, and visit the museum at the Peking Man site. Then drive to Marco Polo Bridge and revel in its lion carvings. **RMB 350**, 9:30am-5:30pm. **CCC (6432 9341)** www.chinaculturecenter.org

Apr 15
Miao Minority "Sister Festival"
Fly to Guizhou and take part in this Miao festival showcasing that minority's culture. **RMB 5,500** (includes return flight, hotel and homestay, English-speaking guide, private transport, meals, entrance tickets and visit to a local home). **WestChina Adventure Tours (135 8168 2703)** www.westchina.net.cn

Apr 17
Botanical Gardens and Wofosi Temple
Escape from the city for a day to enjoy a picnic lunch in the midst of the botanical gardens, then visit Wofosi Buddhist Temple. To register, e-mail events@foclub.com or call 139 1109 8002. **RMB 290**, 8:45am.

Apr 17
Great Wall Architecture Trip
Hike on the Great Wall and see the wild flowers. Meet in front of McDonald's at the Giza Mall, on the southeast corner of Dongzhimen Qiao. **RMB 330**, 8am-7pm. **Ninety Percent Travel (51 1791 6648)** www.90percenttravel.com

Apr 19-27
Mali Snow Mountain To Cizhong
On this nine-day hike, follow the same trail that pilgrims take on their way to Mt. Kawagebo. Start from Kunming and travel to the northwestern part of Yunnan

province on the Tibetan plateau and visit the isolated village of Yubeng. Sign up at least two weeks in advance. **RMB 9,900** (without airfare). **GoAdventure (5166 9102)** www.goadventure.com

Apr 24-25
Herbal Medicine Hunt
A two-day hiking tour takes you back to nature, where you'll learn about all kinds of local plants and traditional Chinese methods of converting grasses into medicine. Meet in front of McDonald's at the Giza Mall, on the southeast corner of Dongzhimen Qiao. **RMB 330**, 8am-7pm (the next day). **Ninety Percent Travel (51 1791 6648)** www.90percenttravel.com

Every Wed
Cambodia: Angkor Wat
Explore Cambodia, from Phnom Penh to Angkor Wat, on this five-day tour. **RMB 5,900** (includes round-trip airfare, minimum two people). **Asialive Travel (8823 7217)**, contact@asialive.net.cn www.asialive.net.cn

Every Fri
Five-day Trek to Tiger Leaping Gorge and Lijiang
Hike along one of the deepest gorges in the world, through minority villages and along snow-peaked mountains. Sign up at least one week in advance. **RMB 9,900**. **GoAdventure (5166 9102)** www.goadventure.com

Every Sat
Taiwan Charm and Grandeur
Jump the strait for a ten-day trip exploring mystic temples, gold-mining villages and the lighter side of former headhunting tribes, as well as the natural beauty of southern Taiwan (including Sun Moon Lake, Taroko Gorge and Kenting National Park). **RMB 12,200**. **TUI China (8519 8999)**, private-tours@tui.cn www.tui.cn

Every Fri-Sun
Hakka Villages and Xiamen
Spend the night in a tulou, a circular earthen building that can house an entire village. Also included is a bus tour along Xiamen's coastline, with an optional extra day on Gulangyu Island. **RMB 3,500-4,500** (add **RMB 800** for an extra day). **WestChina Adventure Tours (135 8168 2703)** www.westchina.net.cn

Every Sat
North Korea Discovery
A four-day trip to visit China's dear neighbor. **From RMB 6,750**



Emirates trades up
The clouds gather over Dubai. See left.