



Approximately 50 km to the north-west of Beijing lies the Ming Tombs, otherwise known as the “13 Tombs”. These tombs are the burial site of 13 of the 17 Ming Dynasty emperors. Of the 13 tombs, just one is accessible, the tomb of Emperor Wanli, who reigned from 1537 to 1620. This tomb was unearthed in 1956. Just 2 others have been uncovered, but the rest remain illusive.



The tomb itself can be uninspiring, however the real interest lies in the walk to the tomb. The ‘Sacred Way’ is the path which leads to the entrance and standing guard are a variety of real and mythical Chinese animals. These huge stone animals are interesting for their haunting poses, preparing the path for the Emperor to move into the what he believed to be the next life. These animals are a real highlight for children.



To get to the tomb itself, you have to walk down many flights of stairs till you are deep inside the mountain. As you descend into the mountain, you feel the coolness of the chamber. Excavated deep below are a couple of stone rooms and treasures.



The Sacred Way is 7km long, the longest in China's royal tombs. It was originally built for the first Emperor Yongle, the most powerful emperor in the Ming dynasty. Tombs were later built either to the right or to the left, and as a result the Sacred Way became the main road to all of the tombs.