



Underground City

Beneath the ancient city of Beijing, an underground city of definite proportions has already begun to emerge. There are factories, stores, guesthouses, restaurants, hospitals, schools, theaters, reading-rooms, a roller skating rink, a grain and oil warehouse, and a mushroom cultivation farm. These underground production and service facilities cover a total area of 850,000 square meters and make use of more than 1,000 anti-air raid structures.

For more than 20 years, Beijing's Underground City, a bomb shelter just beneath the ancient capital's downtown area, has been virtually forgotten by local citizens, despite being well-known amongst foreigners since it officially opened in 2000.

This complex is a relic of the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969 over Zhenbao Island in northeast China's Heilongjiang River, a time when chairman Mao Zedong ordered the construction of subterranean bomb shelters in case of nuclear attack.

The tunnels, built from 1969 to 1979 by more than 300,000 local citizens and even school children, wind for over 30 km and cover an area of 85 km², 8 to 18m under the surface. It includes around a thousand anti-air raid structures.

Finding the Underground City is not easy even for Chinese speakers, as few people living quite nearby seem aware of its existence.

The easiest way is to take the subway to Qianmen, head for Qianmen Dajie and take the very first hutong on the left as you head south, Bei Xiao Shun Hutong. Follow it round as it bends right, then left, then turns into Xi Damochang Hutong (西大漠场胡同).

The entrance to the Underground City is at number 62, on the right, with a sign in English and less than a kilometre from the subway. Twenty kuai gets you in between 8.30am and 5pm.

