

Forbidden City

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Coordinates: [39°54′56″N, 116°23′27″E](#)

This article is about the Chinese imperial palace in [Beijing](#). For other uses of the term "Forbidden City", see [Forbidden City \(disambiguation\)](#).

Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing

Dynasties in Beijing and [Shenyang](#)¹

UNESCO World Heritage Site



State Party  [China](#)

Type Cultural

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Identification no. 439

Region² [Asia-Pacific](#)

Inscription History

1987

Formal Inscription:11th [WH Committee](#) Session**Extension/s**

2004

WH link:<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/439>¹ Name as officially inscribed on the World Heritage List² As classified officially by UNESCO

The **Forbidden City** ([Chinese](#): 紫禁城; [pinyin](#): Z jinchéng; literally "Purple Forbidden City") was the [Chinese](#) imperial palace during the mid-[Ming](#) and the [Qing](#) Dynasties. The Forbidden City is located in the middle of [Beijing](#), [China](#). It is now known as the **Palace Museum**.

Its extensive grounds cover 720,000 square meters (appx 124 acres). The Forbidden City has 800 buildings with 8,886 rooms.

The Forbidden City is listed by [UNESCO](#) as the largest collection of preserved ancient wooden structures in the world. The Forbidden City was declared a [World Heritage Site](#) in 1987 as the "Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties."

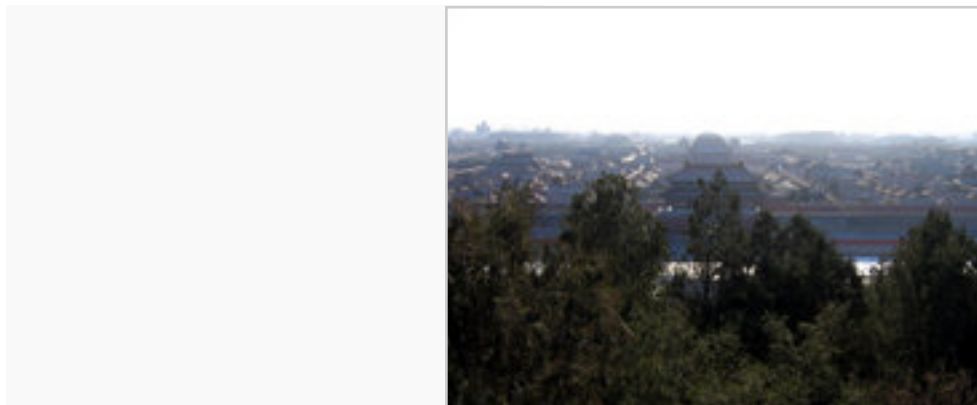
The Palace Museum in the Forbidden City should not be confused with the [National Palace Museum](#) in [Taipei](#), [Taiwan](#) island. Both museums derive from the same institution, but they were split after the [Chinese Civil War](#).

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Names



Overview of the Forbidden City

The Forbidden City is known by many names. The name by which the site is most commonly known in English, "The Forbidden City," is a translation of the Chinese name

Zijin Cheng (紫禁城), which literally means "Purple Forbidden City." It is also known as the "Forbidden Palace" in English. The palace was "forbidden" in the sense that, aside from members of the imperial household, no one could enter it without the Emperor's permission.

Today, the site is most commonly known as Gugong (故宫) in Chinese, which means the "Former Palace."^[1] The museum which is located in these buildings is known as the "Palace Museum" (Chinese: 故宫博物院; pinyin: Gù gōng Bówùyuàn).

In the Manchu language it is called *Dabk ri dorgi hoton*, which literally means the "Layered Inner City."

Description



The imperial throne inside the Palace of Heavenly Purity (乾清宫), the place of day-to-day government and imperial audiences

The Imperial Palace Grounds are located directly to the north of Tiananmen Square and are accessible from the square via Tiananmen Gate. It is surrounded by a large area called the Imperial City.

Layout

Rectangular in shape, the Forbidden City is the world's largest palace complex and covers 720,000 square meters (178 acres, or 0.28 square miles). It is surrounded by a six meter deep [moat](#) and a ten meter high wall. The Forbidden City includes five halls, seventeen palaces, and numerous other buildings.

The Forbidden City is divided into two parts. The Outer Court, which includes the southern and central sections, centres on three halls which were used for ceremonial purposes, such as [coronations](#), [investitures](#), and imperial [weddings](#). The three halls include the magnificent [Hall of Supreme Harmony](#) (太和殿), itself fronted by the [Gate of Supreme Harmony](#) (太和門). Apart from ceremony, the Outer Court also houses the Imperial Library, archives, and lantern storage. The Inner Court includes the northern, eastern, and western parts of the Forbidden City, and centres on another three halls which were used for the day-to-day affairs of state. The most important among these is the [Palace of Heavenly Purity](#) (乾清宮). The Inner Court was where the Emperor worked and lived with his family, [eunuchs](#) and maid-servants.

Buildings in the Forbidden City are arranged along three north-south axes. The central axis houses the most important buildings. It runs from [Meridian Gate](#) in the south, to the [Gate of Divine Might](#) in the north. The "Three Front Halls", the centre of ceremonies, and the "Three Back Palaces", the centre of day-to-day affairs of state, are arranged along the central axis. Along the eastern axis are a number of semi-independent courtyards. The northern part of the eastern axis served as the [Qianlong Emperor's](#) residence in his retirement. Along the western axis are several gardens and a number of religious buildings. Large parts of the western section are not open to the public. Some buildings are in bad repair; a few were destroyed by fire in [1923](#) and never rebuilt. In his memoir, [Puyi](#) thought that the fire was started by eunuchs wanting to conceal evidence of smuggling treasures out of the palace.

Walls

The [wall](#) around the Forbidden City has a gate on each side. At the southern end is the [Meridian Gate](#)^[2] To the north is the [Gate of Divine Might](#), which faces [Jingshan Park](#). The Gate of Divine Might is also called the Gate of Divine Military Genius. This is the

main gate, used by everyone but the emperor (because he used the Meridian Gate). The distance between these two gates is 960 meters, while the distance between the gates in the east and west walls is 750 meters. The walls are thick and squat and were specifically designed to withstand attacks by cannons.

There are unique and delicately structured towers on each of the four corners of the surrounding wall. These towers afford views over both the palace and the city outside.

Outside the main gate to the Forbidden City, the Meridian Gate faces a square where imperial corporal punishments were sometimes carried out. To the south of that square stands Tiananmen Gate. That is where Mao Zedong gave his famous speech on communism.

Gardens

At the northern end of the Forbidden City is the imperial garden. It is home to many trees aging 100 to 300 years old and many rare plants.

Symbolism

The royal color was yellow, and that color dominates the rooftops. On each corner of the roofs, there are small statuettes, the number of which designated the power of the person living within the building. The number 9 was reserved for the emperor. Only one building has 10 statues at each corner.

Major buildings

Major buildings include:

- Meridian Gate
- Tiananmen Gate
- Gate of Supreme Harmony

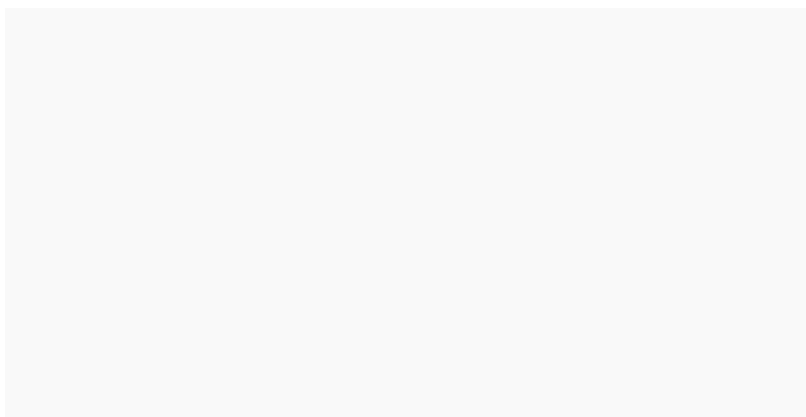
- [Gate of Divine Might](#)
- [Hall of Supreme Harmony](#)
- [Palace of Heavenly Purity](#)

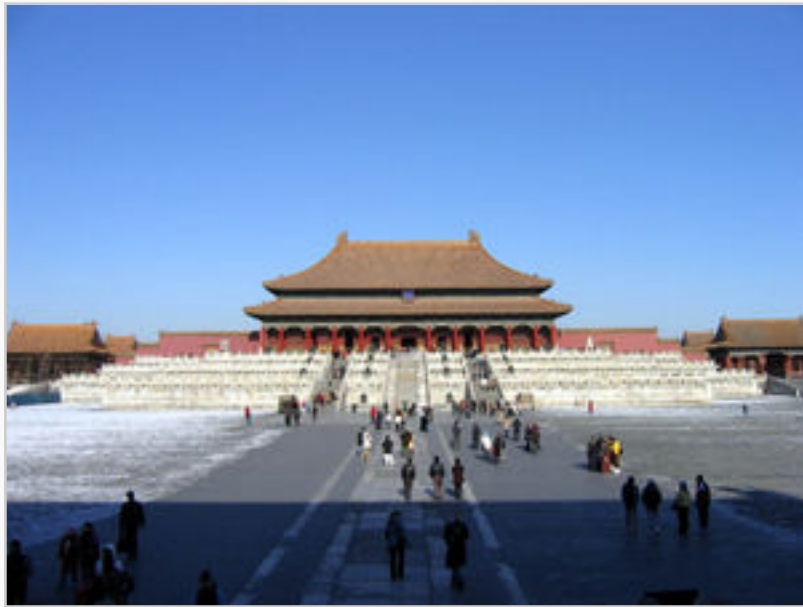
Surroundings

The Forbidden City is surrounded by royal gardens. To the west lies [Zhongnanhai](#), the complex of buildings centred on two lakes which serves as the central headquarters for the [Communist Party of China](#). To the north-west lies [Beihai Park](#), which also centres on a lake and is a popular park. To the north lies [Jingshan Park](#), also known as Jing Shan or [Coal Hill](#), where the last [Ming](#) emperor hanged himself as the rebel army overran his palace.

Today, Tiananmen Gate in front of the Forbidden City is decorated with a portrait of [Mao Zedong](#) in the center and two placards to the left and right. The left placard reads "中华人民共和国万岁" ([Traditional Chinese](#): 中華人民共和國萬歲; [pinyin](#): zhōnghuá rénmín gònghéguó wànsuì; "Long Live the People's Republic of China"), while the right placard reads "世界人民大团结万岁" ([Traditional Chinese](#): 世界人民大團結萬歲; [pinyin](#): shìjiè rénmín dà tuánjié wànsuì; "Long live the Great Unity of the World's Peoples"). The phrasing has great symbolic meaning, as the [phrase "long live"](#) was traditionally reserved for the [Emperors of China](#), but is now available to the common people. This is also true of the Forbidden City palace itself.

History





The [Hall of Supreme Harmony](#) (太和殿) at the centre of the Forbidden City

Construction

The site where the Forbidden City stands today was part of the [imperial city](#) during the [Yuan dynasty](#). When the [Ming Dynasty](#) succeeded it, the first [Hongwu Emperor](#) moved the capital to [Nanjing](#) and ordered that the [Mongol](#) palaces be razed in 1369. His son, [Zhu Di](#), was created Prince of Yan with seat in [Beijing](#). A princely palace was built on the site. In 1402, Zhu Di usurped the throne and became the [Yongle Emperor](#). He moved the capital back to [Beijing](#).

The construction of the Forbidden City started in 1406 and took 14 years and an estimated 200,000 men. The principal axis of the new palace sits to the east of the [Yuan Dynasty](#) palace, a design intended to place the Yuan palace in the western or "kill" position in [fengshui](#). Soil excavated during construction of the moat was piled up to the north of the palace to create an artificial hill, the [Jingshan hill](#).

Ming and Qing dynasty

From its 1420 completion to 1644, when a peasant revolt led by [Li Zicheng](#) invaded it, the Forbidden City served as the seat of the [Ming Dynasty](#). The following [Qing Dynasty](#) also occupied the Forbidden City. In 1860, during the Second [Opium War](#), British forces

managed to penetrate to the heart of the Forbidden City and occupied it until the end of the war.

After being the home of 24 emperors—fourteen of the Ming Dynasty and ten of the Qing Dynasty—the Forbidden City ceased being the political center of China in 1912 with the abdication of [Puyi](#), the last Emperor of China. Under an agreement signed between the Qing imperial house and the new [Republic of China](#) government, Puyi was, however, allowed and, in fact, required to live within the walls of the Forbidden City. Puyi and his family retained the use of the Inner Court, while the Outer Court was handed over to the Republican authorities. A museum was established in the Outer Court in 1914.

After the revolution

Puyi stayed in the Forbidden City until 1924, when [Feng Yuxiang](#) took control of Beijing in a coup. Denouncing the previous agreement with the Qing imperial house, Feng expelled Puyi. Soon after, the Palace Museum was established in the Forbidden City. Having been the imperial palace for some five centuries, the Forbidden City houses numerous rare treasures and curiosities. These were gradually catalogued and put on public display.

However, with the [Japanese invasion of China](#), the safety of these national treasures were cast in doubt, and they were moved out of the Forbidden City. In 1947, after they had been moved from one location to another inside [mainland China](#) for many years, [Chiang Kai-shek](#) ordered many of the artifacts from the Forbidden City and the National Museum in [Nanjing](#) to be moved to [Taiwan](#). These artifacts formed the core of the [National Palace Museum](#) in [Taipei](#).

Surviving the Cultural Revolution

During the heat of demolishing the "four olds", Premier Zhou Enlai got wind of Red Guard's plan to enter the Forbidden City. Knowing what the Red Guard had done to historical sites elsewhere, Zhou ordered all gates of the City to be closed and sent troops to guard the City. This episode is perhaps the most neglected in recent times of

the Forbidden City. For more information, read "The Future of the Past," by Alexander Stille, New York (2002).

Modern day



*This section is a **stub**. You can help by [expanding it](#).*

The Forbidden City has undergone dramatic renovations. Although great effort has been put forth to prevent the commercialization of the palace, a **Starbucks** has been placed inside it [\[1\]](#), rousing controversy [\[2\]](#). An online campaign[\[3\]](#) was, in 2007, thought to be able to provide impetus to move this coffee shop outside the walls of the palace area.

Image gallery



The imperial palace



Imperial palace staircase



The northwest tower



Rooftops of the Forbidden City



Tourists inside the



Architectures inside



Bedchamber



A guardian lion

Palace Museum

the Palace Museum

guardian lions



Ceiling of one of the buildings in the imperial garden



Nine Dragons screen



The emperor's throne



One of the many halls and palaces containing the imperial throne



Imperial roof decoration



Vessel for Fire fighting water

Influences of the Forbidden City

- Emperor Gia Long of Vietnam built a palace and fortress that was intended to be a smaller copy of the Chinese Forbidden City in the 1800s. Its ruins are in Hue. In English it is called the "Imperial City". The name of the inner palace complex in Vietnamese is translated literally as "Purple Forbidden City", which of course is the same as the Chinese name for Forbidden City in Beijing.

- [*Marco Polo*](#) a joint NBC and RAI (Italy) TV miniseries broadcast in the early 1980s, was filmed inside the Forbidden City. This was artistic license, however, since historically, the Forbidden City did not exist in the Yuan Dynasty, during the time of Marco Polo's relationship with Kublai Khan.
- [*The Last Emperor*](#) (1987) was the first feature film ever authorized by the government of the People's Republic of China to film in the Forbidden City.
- [*Giacomo Puccini's*](#) opera, [*Turandot*](#), about the story of a Chinese princess, was performed inside the Forbidden City for the first time in 1998.
- In 2004, the French musician [*Jean Michel Jarre*](#) performed the live concert in the Forbidden City, accompanied by 260 musicians as part of the "Year of France in China" festivities.
- The [*5th Avenue Theatre*](#) in [*Seattle, Washington*](#) imitates three ancient Chinese architectural achievements located in Beijing: the Forbidden City, the [*Temple of Heaven*](#), and the [*Summer Palace*](#). A nearly exact replica of the dome from the throne room of the Imperial palace in Beijing's Forbidden City graces the 5th Avenue Theatre's ceiling. Authentic dragons and hoho birds scatter the walls of the theatre with an authentic Chinese quality.
- A fictional city called [*Ba Sing Se*](#) in the cartoon series [*Avatar: The Last Airbender*](#) is based upon the Forbidden City.
- William Bell's novel "Forbidden City" a novel of modern China, is based upon a Canadian reporter and his son Alexander, or Alex for short (or Ahrek Shan Da, as most of his Chinese friends call him), who go to Beijing to report on Beijing and its people.

Reference

- [^] "Gugong" is also a generic name referring to all former palaces, another prominent example being the former Imperial Palaces ([Mukden Palace](#)) in [Shenyang](#).
 - [^] . The Meridian Gate was only used by the emperor. Technically, [Tiananmen Gate](#) is not part of the Forbidden City.
- Ho and Bronson 2004. *Splendors of China's Forbidden City*. [ISBN 1-85894-258-6](#).

See also

- [Chinese art](#)
- [Chinese Palaces](#)
- [National Palace Museum](#)

External links



[Wikimedia Commons](#) has media related to:

[Forbidden City](#)

- [Palace Museum official site](#)
- [World heritage virtual tour via immersive panoramas](#)



World Heritage Sites in China[hide]

Building Complex in Wudang Mountains | Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryo Kingdom | Classical Gardens of Suzhou | Dazu Rock Carvings | Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa | Great Wall | Huanglong | **Imperial Palaces in Beijing** and Shenyang | Imperial Tombs of the Ming and Qing Dynasties | Jiuzhaigou Valley | Lijiang | Longmen Grottoes | Lushan National Park | Historic Centre of Macau | Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor | Mogao Caves | Mount Emei and Leshan Giant Buddha | Mount Huangshan | Mount Qingcheng and Dujiangyan Irrigation System | Mount Taishan | Mount Wuyi | Chengde Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples, Chengde | Peking Man Site, Zhoukoudian | Ping Yao | Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries | Summer Palace | Temple & Cemetery of Confucius and Kong Family Mansion, Qufu | Temple of Heaven | Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas | Villages in Southern Anhui: Xidi and Hongcun | Wulingyuan | Yinxu | Yungang Grottoes

Imperial City (Beijing)

Gates Zhonghuamen · Tiananmen · **Di'anmen** · **Donganmen** · **Xi'anmen**

Forbidden City Meridian Gate · Gate of Supreme Harmony · Hall of Supreme Harmony · Palace of Heavenly Purity · Gate of Divine Might

Gardens Zhongnanhai · Beihai Park · Jingshan Park

Other structures Bell and Drum Towers

Categories: Articles with unsourced statements | Articles with sections needing expansion | World Heritage Sites in China | Forbidden City | Buildings and structures in Beijing | Museums in China | Palaces in China | Royal residences in China | Visitor attractions in Beijing | 1406 establishments

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