

WALK TWO: THE SUMMER PALACE

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The Summer Palace served as a place of relaxation and pleasure for the imperial family, a respite from the summer heat and stuffiness of Beijing. Like the Forbidden City, this “palace” consists of several minor buildings – including towers, temples, halls and pavilions – rather than one grand edifice. You might think you have stepped into a Chinese landscape painting as you explore the Summer Palace, walking over bridges arched towards the sky at seemingly impossible angles and beside willows dipping their branches into the still waters of Kunming Lake.

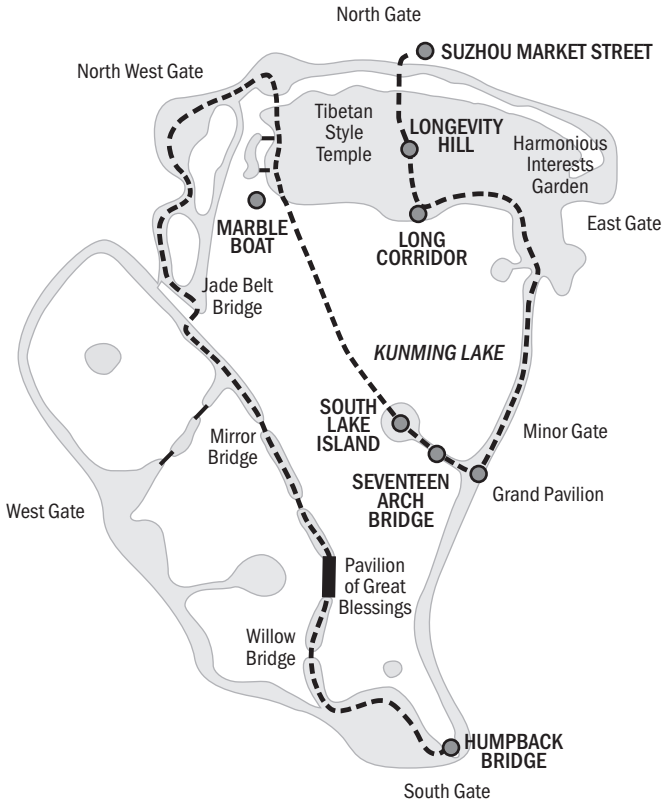
WALK TWO: SUMMER PALACE

Key Facts

- Starting Point: Nan Ruyi Men (South Gate) by boat; Xi Gong Men (West Gate) by taxi or bus.
- Suzhou Market Street, near Bei Gong Men (North Gate)
- Day to Avoid: Avoid weekends, due to large crowds

Highlights

- Summer Palace • Humpback Bridge • Marble Boat • Kunming Lake and South Lake Island
- Seventeen Arch Bridge • Long Corridor • Longevity Hill • Suzhou Market Street



1. SUMMER PALACE (SOUTH GATE)

In the heat of summer, the emperor's household retreated to the Summer Palace from the unbearable confines of the Forbidden City. Here the soothing elements of nature – water, trees, gardens – formed the imperial playground of several dynasties. But it was not until the eighteenth century that the careful hand of Emperor Qianlong designed the layout of the palace as it stands today. Despite Qianlong's legacy, it is the name of another sovereign that is most associated with the Summer Palace: that of the Dowager Empress Cixi. It was she who rebuilt the palace twice, first after a raid by French and English troops in 1860, then again in 1902 after it suffered destruction and looting during the Boxer Rebellion. Cixi, one of the most formidable and manipulative characters in Chinese history, left an infamous monument to herself in the form of the Marble Boat, which you will encounter later in your walk.

GETTING THERE:

The Summer Palace is located 7 miles northwest of the center of Beijing. Take the metro to Xizhi Men then bus 32 or 808 from the zoo. You can also get to the Palace by taxi (30-40 minute taxi ride; ¥60/\$8), or by boat (50-minute trip; ¥40/\$5 one-way, ¥70/\$9 round-trip; ¥100/\$12 including entrance ticket), except in winter

Most tourists enter at the east gate of the Summer Palace. However, to get the most out of your visit, we suggest that you take a boat ride from central Beijing to the southern entrance of the palace then walk clockwise around the lake (see "We Recommend"). Visitors with less than half a day to spare should bypass the arrival by boat and take a bus or taxi to the western entrance. If you take the western entrance you will still see most of the sites mentioned below.

VISITOR INFORMATION:

Summer Palace. Entrance Fee: ¥40 (Fall/Winter), ¥50 (Spring/Summer). Open daily 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (hours vary seasonally). Recommended Time for Visit: one full day (but can be done in less) .

WE RECOMMEND:

Here's a little-known secret: for the equivalent of about \$12, you can take a memorable boat ride from central Beijing to the Summer Palace and arrive in style. The brightly colored dragon boats take you along a renovated canal system and past parts of northwest Beijing's Haidian district you might otherwise miss. There is no obligation to take the return trip and you can opt to take a taxi or bus for a quicker way back to town after your visit to the Summer Palace. To get to the boat dock for your boat ride, take a taxi to the Beijing Exhibition Center. The ticket office is located near the canal just behind the Exhibition Center. Boat option not available in winter.

2. HUMPBACK BRIDGE

The Humpback Bridge is the starting place for a peaceful intercessory stroll around the vast Summer Palace complex. You will encounter few Westerners on this side of the palace as they usually gather on the northern side of the lake where there is a greater concentration of "must-see" tourist spots. From this southern entrance, you can enjoy pastoral scenes that inspired Chinese landscape paintings and really get a sense of the vastness of the palace grounds.

After stepping off the boat, cross over the Humpback Bridge and follow the flagstone path along the lake. Take a slight right onto the scenic West Causeway and continue walking; the water will be on both sides of the pathway.

TAKE A BREAK:

If you brought your lunch, you will find many scenic places to eat, either sitting on the grass or on the benches along the pathway. Music programmed into speakers along the walkways will serenade you with traditional Chinese tunes .

An unhurried 30- to 45-minute walk along the West Causeway from your starting point leads you to a bridge called Jade Belt Bridge, similar in structure to the Humpback Bridge. Despite the full range of pavilions, boathouses, and bridges to explore on this side of the lake, don't forget there is another side to the palace and a lot more walking to do. The temples, gardens, corridors and lakes that kept the royal court entertained will provide you with several more hours of exploration and intercession. Follow signs to the Marble Boat.

PRAYER POINTS

- Praise the Lord with your whole heart, quoting the words of Psalm 9:1-2, "I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High."
- Praise God for the beauty of his creation, which is all around you. Nature declares its Creator in every language and dialect of the world: no translation needed. Psalm 19:1-4, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."
- Believe that as you pray God is giving you spiritual victory over the enemy. Psalm 60:12, "With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies."

3. MARBLE BOAT

The Marble Boat, as one astute observer noted, is "neither marble nor a boat." It was the brainchild of Dowager Empress Cixi, one of China's most powerful women rulers, who liked to sit in it and have her tea. Had the boat been constructed with funds "from a grateful people," there would be no story to tell: but the boat has a darker history. To fund her palace reconstruction schemes, Cixi used money intended for, and desperately needed by, the Chinese navy. Some say the boat was a tongue-in-cheek way for the eccentric empress to acknowledge the source of the funding. China's naval fleet was eventually annihilated in a disastrous defeat by Japan.

Born in 1835, Cixi was an imperial concubine of the third rank who exploited her way to the top of the pecking order through

DID YOU KNOW?

The Summer Palace was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998 because it is an "outstanding expression of the creative art of Chinese landscape garden design, incorporating the works of humankind and nature in a harmonious whole."

Note: The Humpback Bridge, with its dramatic lines, makes a great spot for picture taking.

POINTS TO PONDER:

This part of the walk is serene and conducive to prayer. Use it as a "prayer lap" like Joshua and the Israelites might have done before taking Jericho. Praise God in your heart and prepare for more intense spiritual warfare as you approach the northern part of the lake. You are preparing the ground for a great spiritual harvest among the Chinese that will lead them to inherit the land that God has promised to those who follow in his ways. Keep in mind the words of the Lord to Joshua, which apply to those who keep the Lord's commands and seek his guidance: "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them." (Joshua 1:6)

Crossing the Jade Belt Bridge, recall the words of Deuteronomy 11:31, "You are about to cross the Jordan to enter and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you."

political intrigues and conspiracies. She received her great boost into power by giving birth to Tongzhi, the emperor's only son. Since her son was only five years old at his father's death and too young to rule, Cixi assumed the role of regent. Through cunning and intelligence, Cixi held on to the throne for half a century, first as regent for her son then for her nephew, Guangxu. When Guangxu started thinking for himself, Cixi locked him up, threw off every shred of pretense, and placed herself on the imperial throne. Upon Cixi's death, power fell to two-year-old Puyi, who became China's last emperor.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cixi ordered a tomb for herself three decades before she died: she designed it so that the engraved image of the phoenix (emblem of the empress) lies above that of the dragon (emblem of the emperor), a not-so-subtle reminder of her powerful reign.

TAKE A BREAK:

- Tingliguan Restaurant, near the western end of the Long Corridor, serves good but overpriced food in a pleasant setting. You can taste fish fresh from Kunming Lake along with more exotic imperial-style fare.
- Another restaurant, closer to the Marble Boat, offers a cheap cafeteria-style meal where everyone eats the same "selection of the day." Conditions are rather crowded, with strangers sitting down across from you if there is an empty seat, but the food is tasty.
- Shops near the Marble Boat offer ice cream bars, chips, sweets, and other snacks.

Visitor Information: Must pay extra for guided tour.

Point to Ponder. The Marble Boat can be seen as a monument to imperial decadence, excess, frivolity, and waste. It can also symbolize the areas of a man's life that are spent in restless pursuit of selfish desires and fleeting pleasures. Recall the words of Ecclesiastes 5:10, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless."

4. KUNMING LAKE AND SOUTH LAKE ISLAND

From the Marble Boat, rest your feet by taking a one-way ferry ride to South Lake Island. If the weather is fair, you will see rowboats, dragon boats and motorboats on Lake Kunming, but in winter the lake is covered with ice-skating locals and tourists. Kunming Lake makes up three-quarters of the park and is a man-made lake, expanded by a labor force of 100,000 workmen under the supervision of Emperor Qianlong. The excavated soil was used to build nearby Longevity Hill.

South Lake Island, your destination, contains three primary structures of interest: Hall of Infinite Space in the north, Hall of Distant View in the south, and Dragon King's Temple in the center of the island. The Dragon King Temple – dedicated to the god of the rivers, seas, and rain – is where Cixi would pray for rain in times of drought.

Enjoy a prayerful stroll around the island before heading over the Seventeen-Arch Bridge to rejoin the mainland.

5. SEVENTEEN-ARCH BRIDGE

The Seventeen-Arch Bridge (yes, go ahead and count them) stretches in graceful curves over the water to the eastern shore of Lake Kunming. The bridge is 492-feet long and features 544 chiseled marble lions at regular intervals. At the eastern end of the bridge sits a bronze

ox, dating from 1755, which was believed to have the effect of calming waters and preventing floods.

At the foot of the bridge, head north towards the Long Corridor. Just across from the east entrance of the palace, notice the Hall of Benevolence and Longevity, the palace's main ceremonial hall. It was here that Empress Dowager Cixi received members of the court, seated on the Dragon Throne. North of the hall is the Garden of Virtue and Harmony, Cixi's three-storied private theater. Look for signs indicating the Long Corridor.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the rain of the Holy Spirit to fall and bring about a harvest of souls. Zechariah 10:1, "Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime; it is the Lord who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone."
- Pray against idolatry and the worship of false gods. Zechariah 10:2, "The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd."
- Pray that the heart of idolaters might turn towards the One True God. I Samuel 12:20-21, "Do not be afraid ... You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless."

6. LONG CORRIDOR

In Chinese landscape architecture, corridors serve to shelter people from sun and inclement weather as they travel from one point in the garden to another. The Long Corridor runs parallel to the northern shoreline of Lake Kunming from the Marble Boat in the west to the Hall of Happiness and Longevity in the east and is nearly half a mile long. The 14,000 scenes painted on its ceilings and crossbeams depict memorable characters and events from Chinese folklore, mythology, literature, and history. Originally built in 1750 and made completely out of wood, the Long Corridor was an easy target for French and British troops who set it to flame in 1860. Cixi oversaw its reconstruction in 1888.

7. LONGEVITY HILL

If you are up for a challenge, head through the triumphal arch or "pailou" about halfway along the Long Corridor; it is here, where two bronze lions guard the Cloud Dispelling Gate, that your ascent of Longevity Hill begins.

DID YOU KNOW?

Empress Dowager Cixi is also referred to as the "Dragon Lady" and "Old Buddha."

POINT TO PONDER:

On your walk towards the Long Corridor and as you approach Longevity Hill, notice the names of the buildings you pass: Hall of Benevolence and Longevity, Garden of Virtue and Harmony, Hall of Laughter, Hall of Happiness and Longevity. Notice how they describe the yearning of mankind for happiness, long-life, and peaceful coexistence. Pray that visitors to these grounds will find the true source of these virtues in Christ, and will find not just longevity but eternal life. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

DID YOU KNOW?

A particularly insidious characteristic of Mao's Cultural Revolution was an eagerness to conceal certain aspects of Chinese history. Mao sanctioned the revision of history books, the destruction of certain historical monuments, and the defacing of artwork unfavorable to the platform of the Cultural Revolution and its leadership. As a result, some of the scenes painted along the Long Corridor were whitewashed or painted over.

NOTE

- Beware of young people posing as art students eager to show you, and to sell you, their “original” artwork. Firmly but politely refuse and they will generally leave you alone.
- The “temple-encrusted” Longevity Hill contains sharp slopes and staircases. If you are not feeling up to a steep climb, continue walking west along the Long Corridor towards the Marble Boat. At the Marble Boat, walk north in the direction you came from originally and look for signs that will guide you to the back of the hill and towards Suzhou Street.

POINT TO PONDER:

On a clear day, the top of the hill offers spectacular panoramic views of the Summer Palace and the skyline of Beijing beyond. Pray that the leaders of China might turn to God for wisdom and guidance. Proverbs 2:6, “For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

DID YOU KNOW?

The Summer Palace comprises 716 acres. By the end of the day, you will probably feel that you have covered them all.

Just north of the triumphal arch stands the Cloud Dispelling Hall, which was used by Cixi to mark grand ceremonies and special occasions, including her birthday. Further up the slope, the Tower of Buddhist Fragrance dominates the hill and offers fascinating views of the lake. Behind the Tower of Buddhist Fragrance is the Temple of the Sea of Wisdom, a rectangular brick structure accented by glazed green and yellow tiles. Many of the temples on Longevity Hill suffered damage at the hands of troops during various wars and rebellions. Some of that destruction can still be seen, like the small decapitated Buddhas on the lower tiers of the Temple of the Sea of Wisdom.

From behind the Temple of the Sea of Wisdom, follow the upper path on the right side then start your descent, cutting through the site of the Sumeru Temple. At its base you will find a reward for all your walking and climbing: the charming Suzhou Market Street.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that God’s creation will draw mankind to worship its Creator. Psalm 8:3-4, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”
- At the Temple of the Sea of Wisdom, pray that the hearts of those seeking wisdom will turn to God, for “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.” Remember also the words of James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”
- Pray against corruption and misuse of power in China’s government. Proverbs 10:23, “A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.”

8. SUZHOU STREET

Suzhou Street, a replica of a riverside shopping area of the 1800s, enabled imperial courtesans to experience the delights of shopping without having to step a dainty foot outside the palace grounds. The market street was restored in 1990 so that now you, too, can enjoy the canal-side specialty shops and tearooms run by shopkeepers in period dress. Leave the Summer Palace on the north side of Suzhou Street.