

Charmed by Beijing's culture

The Chinese capital fascinates travel agency boss Albert See with its history, arts-related activities and its famous Peking roast duck

Huang Huifen

Who: Mr Albert See, 73, managing director of local travel agency ASA Holidays.

Favourite city: Beijing

Why: Beijing is the heart of China's political scene, history, culture and economy. There is so much to explore that one has to visit the ancient capital at least five times in his lifetime to cover most of its attractions. I go there mainly for business.

Favourite bookstore

I love to buy books from Wangfujing Xinhua Bookstore (No. 218, Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District, tel: +86-10-6513-2842, www.wfjtd.com) in the popular shopping district of Wangfujing. It is one of the largest bookstores in China, with mostly Chinese books on topics ranging from history to calligraphy. It is so big that you cannot finish browsing through the whole place in one day.

Best place to entertain clients

Lao She Teahouse (Building III, Qianmen West Street, Xuanwu District, Beijing Zhengyang market, tel: +86-10-6302-1717, www.laosheteahouse.com) is a historic teahouse where you can savour Chinese tea and snacks while watching performances such as Beijing opera, xiang sheng (comedic crosstalk), acrobatic and martial arts acts.

Budget about 100 yuan (\$\$19.50) a person for food, drinks and a performance.

Must-try restaurants

Dong Lai Shun (S/F, APM Mall, 138 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District, tel: +86-10-6528-0932) is a well-known establishment for mutton hotpot. You can cook the thin mutton slices in the simmering broth and dip them in a variety of sauces including peanut, spicy and garlic flavours. Budget about 80 yuan a person.

For the famous Peking roast duck, head to Quan-jude (various locations including Qianmen Street, Beijing, No. 32, tel: +86-10-6701-1379, www.quanjude.com.cn), a famous roast duck chain. Though oily, the meat is fragrant and has a good texture. Expect to spend about 100 yuan to 150 yuan a person.



ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

Good purchases at exhibitions and the Beijing Liulichang Culture Street have bolstered Mr Albert See's Chinese art collection.

Best places to buy art

I love to collect Chinese art pieces such as oil paintings, calligraphy pieces and clay teapots, so I make it a point to check out the exhibitions at hotels such as The Westin Beijing Chaoyang and Financial Street (www.starwoodhotels.com/westin), JW Marriott Hotel Beijing (www.marriott.com) and Hotel Sofitel Wanda Beijing (www.sofitel.com).

Check their websites for ongoing sale exhibitions. You can get art pieces for around 500 yuan to millions of yuan. You can bargain to get 10 to 20 per cent off

the original price.

You can also find interesting antiques, paintings, calligraphy pieces and curios at Beijing Liulichang Culture Street (Hepingmen or Peace Gate, Xuanwu District) from 20 yuan to up to 3,000 yuan. That is where I bought the Oct 1, 1949 edition of People's Daily, the main newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, for 150 yuan. It was the edition

that came out on the day the People's Republic of China was founded.

Favourite escapes out of Beijing

Take a two-hour drive to Chateau Changyu AFIP Global Beijing (Dongbaian Village, Jugezhuang Town, Miyun County, www.changyu.cn/english), a European-style town with hotel, expansive vineyards, a wine museum and a shop selling the renowned China Changyu wines. You can buy a bottle of wine and customise the label with your picture.

From end July to September, visitors can pick grapes at the vineyards.

The air in the countryside is very good. I would recommend staying one night at the hotel, which has rooms designed to look like those found in palaces. One-day admission to the village plus wine-tasting costs 120 yuan and a night's stay starts from \$149.

Fans of the Chinese classic novel Water Margin should make a trip to Dongping Lake Scenic Area in Shandong province.

That is where the novel on outlaws in the Song dynasty is set. It is located 2½ hours by high-speed

Albert See's

TRAVEL BLACK BOOK



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Wangfujing is Beijing's main shopping street.

train from Beijing.

Visitors can take a cruise (around 100 yuan) to view two Water Margin-themed stockades or tour the Water Margin TV Movie Filming Town to see realistic recreations of the scenes from the novel for about 80 yuan.

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