

# Summer Palace of Yiheyuan

Yíhéyuán 颐和园

**Just outside Beijing's Forbidden City, the Summer Palace of Yiheyuan was first built in the mid-eighteenth century during the reign of Emperor Qianlong. After being burnt down and subsequently damaged it was restored as a quintessential imperial compound, with spectacular gardens, imposing architecture, and panoramic views.**

**T**he Summer Palace or Yiheyuan (Garden of Nurtured Harmony) on the northwestern outskirts of the Forbidden City is noted for sophisticated landscaping that combines woods, a hillock, water, and architecture. Commissioned in 1750 as a villa during

Emperor Qianlong's reign, it was burnt down in 1860, and was subsequently rebuilt and given its current name. It again suffered partial damages in 1900, but was soon restored and has since remained the epitome of Chinese imperial gardens. It is now a United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site.

The park of 290 hectares is composed of a hillock in the north, lakes in the south, and a palatial compound at the northeastern corner. The principle palace (Hall of Benevolent Longevity) and its courtyard can be accessed through the main gate on the east. This exquisitely decorated building compound, arranged with axial symmetry, features architecture on a grand scale designed with intricate detail such as gabled and hipped roofs and other attributes appropriate for demonstrating imperial power.



**The Summer Palace  
in Beijing.**



**The grand scale of the building complex was meant to evoke imperial power.**

Its stately halls once served as a functional administration center to hold court and receive dignitaries. The living quarters nearby consist of separate quadrangles and appear relatively modest and intimate. A multi-story, sophisticatedly equipped grand theater also is part of the architectural complex in this area.

West of these courtyards lies a covered painting-exhibition arcade (728 meter long) that traverses the heart of the park along the northern rim of the central lake. Rising up from the lakefront is the Longevity Hill (60 meters high), on which buildings cluster amidst a landscape designed with distinct features characteristic of Chinese classical gardens. Along a north-south axial line on the hill is the courtyard of a ceremonial hall (Cloud Dispelling Hall), followed by an imposing octagonal tower (Pavilion

of Buddhist Incense) on a high platform, and a temple (Sea of Wisdom) wrapped in glazed ceramic tiles and miniature Buddhist images at the summit. Beyond these glittering architectural structures down the northern slope is a somewhat subdued and densely wooded area that also is the site of a temple complex and a few smaller buildings. The slope overlooks a narrow lake, which meanders along the secluded northern edge of the park to be integrated at the eastern foothill into a lotus pond within an elegant southern-style garden. The riverbanks near the northern gate are lined with houses that originally included commercial shops built exclusively for royal visits. The landscaping and building designs here replicate scenic spots in poetic marshy lands south of Yangzi (Chang) River, a region famous for private villas with fine gardens.

The lake area of the parkland offers impressive panoramic views projecting beyond the perimeter of the park. Here small islands and dikes in conjunction with differently shaped bridges divide the central Kunming Lake into sections that mimic picturesque areas south of the Yangzi. Major attractions, such as the Marble Boat, South Lake Island, Seventeen-Ache Bridge, Jade-Band Bridge, and a willow-tree-lined long avenue called Xiti, are among the hallmark features of the Summer Palace. The expansive vista over the unassuming water surfaces compliments the textured relief of woodlands inside and outside of the park, incorporating spontaneously true nature into an artificially molded setting.

**TzeHuey CHIOU-PENG**

## Further Reading

- Fu Xinian et al. (2002). *Chinese Architecture*. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press and New World Press.
- Lei Congyun et al. (1995). *Zhongguo Gongdianshi* [History of Chinese Palaces. Taipei: Wenjin Press.
- Liu Dunzhen. (Ed.). (1984). *Zhongguo Gudai Jianzhushi* [A history of ancient Chinese architecture]. Beijing: Xinhua Book Store.
- Cheng Liyao. (1998). *Ancient Chinese architecture: Imperial Garden*. New York: Springer-Verlag Wien.