Beijing is well-known not only as the capital of China, but also as a place with beautiful and influential architecture. Three of the most popular architectural tourist destinations in Beijing are the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, and the Summer Palace.

Construction of the Forbidden City began in 1406 and was not complete until 1420. It was the imperial palace for the Ming and Qing Dynasties (A.D. 1366-1712) and it served as the political and ceremonial center of China for over 500 years. It is the largest surviving palace complex in the world at 720,000 square meters and it housed over 6,000 people at its height. The city is called "forbidden" because no one was allowed to enter or to leave without the emperor's permission and, in fact, there were even restrictions on the emperor's travel outside the city. The Forbidden City is the quintessential example of Chinese palatial architecture and its style heavily influenced architecture throughout East Asia and beyond. The palace is characterized by red walls, yellow tile roofs, painted pillars, and carved beams. There are 980 surviving buildings in the Forbidden City surrounded by a 7.9 meter high square wall. The most recognizable building in the Forbidden City is the Hall of Supreme Harmony. This hall is located on the central axis of the city. The Ming Dynasty used the Hall of Supreme Harmony on a day-to-day basis as a place for the emperor to meet with his advisors, but the Qing dynasty only used the hall for official ceremonies like coronations and weddings.

The Temple of Heaven was also built between 1406 and 1420 by the Yongle Emperor, the same emperor who built the Forbidden City. Yongle means "perpetual happiness" and the Yongle Emperor, born Zhu Di, is considered to be among the most ambitious of the Chinese emperors, partially because of his building projects. The Temple of Heaven is a series of symbolic, Taoist buildings. The Temple was used by the Ming and Qing dynasties for annual ceremonies to pray to Heaven for plentiful harvests. In ancient Chinese belief, the circle symbolizes Heaven and the square symbolizes Earth, so many of the buildings in the Temple of Heaven are designed to reflect the harmony of these two symbols. For instance, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests and the Circular Mound Altar are each round buildings that stand in square courtyards. An interesting feature of the Circular Mound Altar, the
Temple's main altar, is the acoustics. They are so good that even whispers are audible to everyone in the building. The Circular Mound Altar was designed with this acoustic quality to ensure that Heaven heard the Emperor's prayers.

The **Summer Palace** is a royal garden and residence built in **1750** by Emperor Qianlong. In 1998, it was placed on the World Heritage List because of its beautiful landscape garden designs. The Palace has two main features: Longevity Hil and Kunming Lake. **Longevity Hill was named in 1752 by Emperor Qianlong in honor of his mother's 60th birthday.** It is 60 meters high and holds many of the buildings of the Summer Palace on its southern slope. Kunming Lake is a 2.2 square kilometer man-made lake. It took 10,000 workers 14 years (1750-1764) to create the lake. It covers approximately three-quarters of the grounds of the Summer Palace. It is a recreation of the West Lake in Hangzhou. Kunming Lake even has a duplicate of West Lake's Su Di Dike and the dike's six bridges. Kunming Lake's three islands, Nanhu, Tuancheg, and Zaojian, are modelled after three famous fairy tale islands. The Summer Palace is a popular tourist destination, but it is also a recreational park for people who live in the area.

The Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, and the Summer Palace have all been included on the World Culture Heritage List. Beijing might be changing into an international, metropolitan city, but you can still trace its past through these royal buildings.