



Aviation lovers in Beijing can get their fill with numerous museums and attractions showcasing historic and groundbreaking flight vessels

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**A row of over 50 Shenyang F-5 (MIG-type) fighter jets. Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**

Aviation lovers are a special breed. They are in their element spending a day on a patch of grass at the end of a runway, watching planes take off and land. Others drool at the sight of historic airframes from yesteryear, and if this sounds a bit like you, then Beijing is the place for you with not one, not two, but three museums devoted to the wonders of aviation and aerospace, with a fourth soon to be built in Futura City in Beijing.

Beihang University, previously known as Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (BUAA), was founded in 1952 from the merger of the aeronautical departments of nine other universities, and is located in the centre of Zhongguancun Science Park.

BUAA was China's first university dedicated to aeronautical and astronautic engineering. Therefore, it is no surprise that it should have its own museum. Visitors are only allowed in on Tuesdays and Saturdays after 9:30 am, and all other days are reserved for students at the university.



**A collection of Z-8, Z-6 and Z-5 helicopters, built by the Harbin Aircraft Manufacturing Corp., based on a Soviet Mi-4 helicopter design. Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**

In the museum, there are model airplanes on display, small gyrocopters and a collection of aircraft motors. Visitors can also get up close to some

wing structures or individual ailerons, landing gear and aviation tires. However, most visitors come for the collection of about two dozen interesting aircraft of which the best-known is a Northrop P-61, which is one of four of these aircraft that are outside of the US. There are plenty of other planes to get excited about, which include a Republic P-47, a Tupolev Tu-2, an Ilyushin Il-10, a Lavochkin La-11 and a MiG-9. It is also home to one of the most iconic airplanes of all time the DC3, which has had its engines removed, as well as a smart Irkut-14, which also has had its wings removed to be able to squeeze it in to the display hall. However, Beihang University's museum offers more than just aircraft. There are also satellites strung up from the ceiling, as well as a display of Chinese space rockets such as the Shenzhou, and other explorer vehicles.



**A Y-5 aircraft is parked on the museum's periphery. Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**

Another site for aviation lovers is Beijing Capital International Airport, which is where you can find the Civil Aviation Museum. Because of its hard-to-find location, it rarely has many visitors, but the journey is well worth the effort.

Many of the exhibits were donated by a local businessman and former pilot. Want to see what a "trolley dolly" in the 1940s looked like? Want to gaze at timetables and route maps from yesteryear? Or private pilots' licenses and little bits that fell off the back of aircraft - it is all here. Uniforms, compasses and tickets, you name it, and it is probably available.

One of the prize exhibits - an IL-14 transport aircraft that Stalin sent in 1954 to Chairman Mao as a gift - is one of the few planes that are actually inside the museum, but numerous historical planes can be found around the perimeter of the grounds.

There is a Y-7 flown by China Southern - a double turboprop with a maximum capacity of 48 people, which was used from 1970 until 2001.

There's a Trident - a three engine medium-short range jet from De Havilland - which was used as a "special plane" by China's leadership. Behind it is an Airbus A310, which came into service with China Eastern in 1985. This was the very first wide-bodied plane bought by China. When its flying days were over, Airbus repurchased it and gave it to the museum as a gift.



**Cabin crew in 1973 Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**



**This picture was taken in 1947. It wasn't until 1995 that married women were accepted as cabin crew. Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**

There are other pretty planes too, which include an ex People's Liberation Army Air Force AVIC Y-5 biplane, a C-46 that had flown the "Hump Route" supplying Chinese resistance fighters during the Japanese occupation and a Lisunov Li-2.

The importance of the plane and the route is that between 1942 and 1945, the China National Aviation Corporation, together with the US

Tenth Air Force division, undertook an airlift between Dinjan, India and Kunming, China - a distance of around 800 kilometers. The Allied pilots called it "The Hump" as they had to fly over the eastern Himalayas. The Hump airlift contributed in no small part to the victory by resupplying the Chinese army and US Army Air Force based in China. Between 1950 and 1952, new routes opened up, mainly from North China to Southwest China, as well as regional routes in the southwest. By the end of 1965, Beijing had become a network hub with 51 domestic routes and six international routes to five countries. China now has more than 2,700 civil transport aircraft owned by over 50 transport enterprises and 45,000 qualified pilots including over 13,000 captains. China's aviation industry has come a long way! The China Aviation Museum is also known as the Datangshan Aviation Museum due to its location adjacent to the mountain of the same name. If you have no time for any other museum in Beijing, you should make time for this one.



**An assorted collection of aircraft engines Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**



**A line of 59-type 100 mm calibre anti-aircraft artillery, which could fire 15 rounds a minute, with a range of 21 kilometers. Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**

It was first opened to the public on Shahezhen Air Force Base in 1989, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army Air Force, and it expanded 20 years after that. Covering

over 1,000 acres with more than 15,000 items on display, including more than 300 aircraft, 53 ground-to-air missiles, 32 radars, 61 anti-aircraft artilleries and more than 100 pieces of cultural relics, it is an aviation lover's dream.

The long approach road is actually the old runway, and as you round the corner at the end of the runway entrance, the first thing to meet the eye is a lineup of planes used by the Great Helmsman, Chairman Mao himself. There is a Li-2 he used in June 1956, an Ilyushin IL-14 he used on 23 occasions in 1957-1958, and an IL-18 he used on July 21, 1967 - his last ever plane ride when he flew from Wuhan to Shanghai. There are also a number of military planes such as Tu-2, Tu-4 and B-6 strategic bombers, a converted DC-8, an electronic jamming plane HG-5, an SH-5 water reconnaissance and an anti-submarine aircraft.



**The Y-5 used to scatter Premier Zhou Enlai's ashes in 1976.**

**Photo: Courtesy of Brian Salter**

Across Hero Avenue is a display of fighter and attack aircraft such as F-5s, F-6s, F-7s, F-8s and A-5s. Further down Hero Avenue you will arrive at the Integrated Hall, which was opened in 2011. This was built to showcase the history of China's Air Force, and along with numerous aircraft and weapons, there are almost 2,000 photographs, cultural relics, sand table exhibits and audio and video tablets.

There is also an aircraft graveyard where old planes have been parked and await the time they will be refurbished back to their original glory. In addition, there is a collection of helicopters, radar equipment, anti-aircraft artillery, ground-to-air missiles, not to mention a row of over 50 Shenyang F-5 (MIG-type) fighter jets.

Another part of the museum is located inside a cave that extends for some 600 meters into the side of Datang Mountain. This long U-shaped cavern, which takes up five acres, was originally part of the tunnels and underground bunker system of Shahezhen Airbase, and is now filled with row upon row of more planes and exhibits including the Y-5 that was made by Nanchang Aircraft Company, which was used to scatter Premier Zhou Enlai's ashes.

Entrance to all three museums is free, though you do have to show ID before you are allowed in.

For Beihang Air and Space Museum, take Line 10 to Xitucheng station and walk 500 meters to the university. The museum is in building 19. For the Civil Aviation museum, take bus 359 from Sanyuanqiaodong station - a total of eight stops - and get out at Hepingnongchangdong station. For the China Aviation Museum, take the subway to the very last station on line 5 - Tiantongyuan North - and then bus 945 to Asuwei. From there,

walk 100 meters and turn right, then at the T-junction turn left and at the next T-junction turn right.

Newspaper headline: Eyes to the skies

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