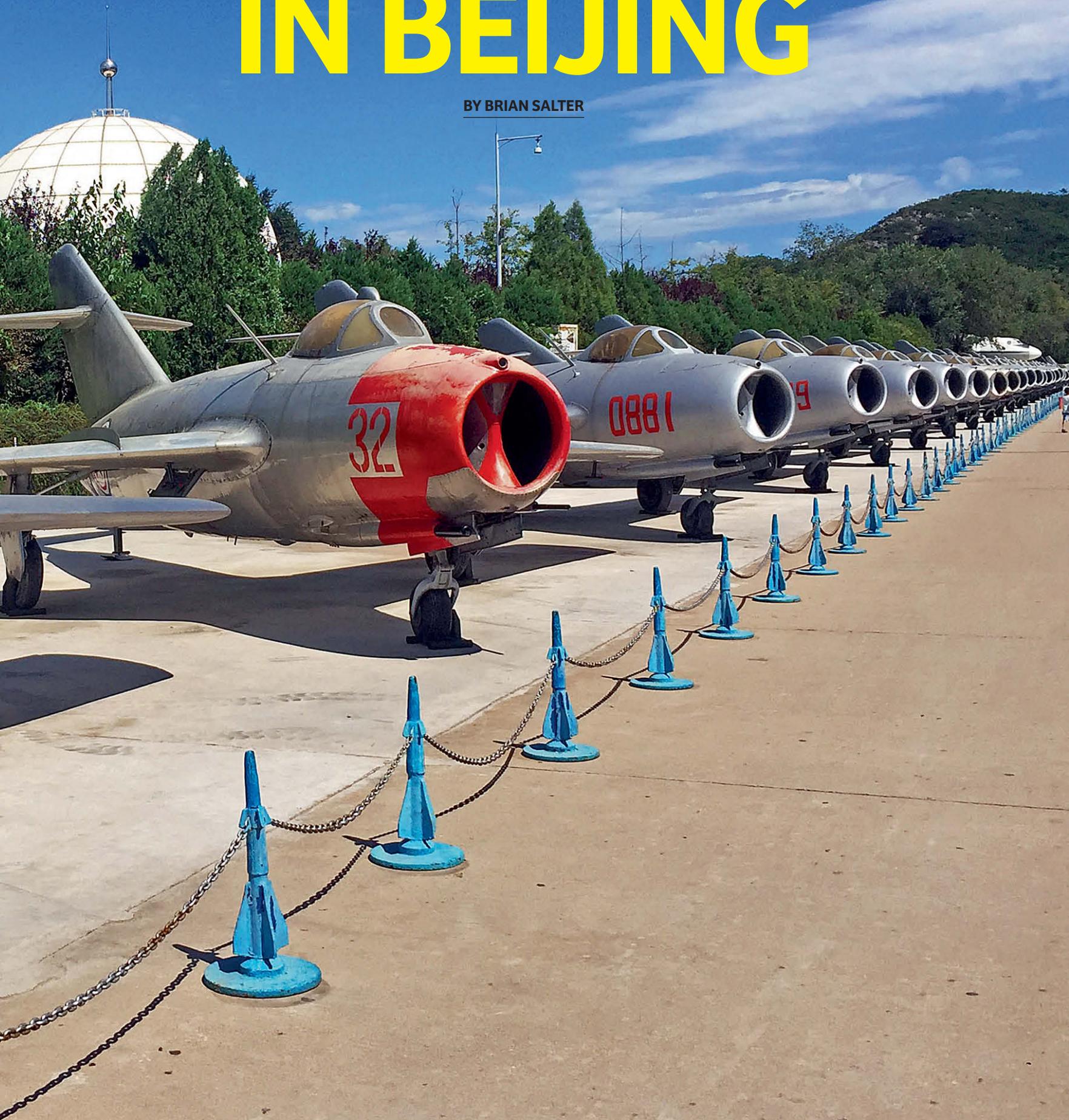


WITH THREE AVIATION MUSEUMS IN THE CHINESE CAPITAL...

# FLYING HIGH IN BEIJING

BY BRIAN SALTER



# AIRPLANE ENTHUSIASTS ARE SPOILT FOR CHOICE



**FANCY A FLIGHT?** 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 (China Aviation Museum)

**A**viation lovers are a special breed the world over. 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 yesteryears; and if this sounds a bit like you, then maybe you should consider taking your next holiday in Beijing, which outshines itself by having not one, not two, but three museums (with a fourth soon to be built in the northeast of the city) devoted to the wonders of aviation and aerospace.

Beihang University (previously known as Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics) was founded in 1952 – out of the merger of the aeronautical departments of nine other universities and was China’s first university dedicated to aeronautical and astronautical engineering. So, it is no surprise that it should have its own museum.

Here, you will find model aeroplanes on display, some small gyrocopters and a collection of aircraft motors. You can also get up close to some wing structures, individual ailerons, landing gear and aviation tyres... but the real stuff that most visitors come for is the collection of two dozen interesting aircraft, of which the best-known is a Northrop P-61 (the only one of four outside the United States). There are plenty of other mouth-watering planes too, such as a Republic P-47, a Tupolev Tu-2, an Ilyushin Il-10, a Lavochkin La-11 and a MiG-9. There’s even a DC3 (one of the most iconic airplanes of all time), 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 the display hall. But Beihang is more than just aircraft. You will also find matter-of-fact satellites strung up from the ceiling, as well as a display of Chinese space rockets such as Shenzhou, and other explorer vehicles; and if you want to know what the

well-dressed (Chinese) astronaut is wearing, you need not look further...

Then, let’s head towards Beijing’s Capital Airport, near which can be found the Civil Aviation Museum. Because of its difficult-to-find location, it rarely has many visitors (on the three occasions that I have been there, the staff have outnumbered visitors by four-to-one); but the journey is well worth the effort.

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’ licences and little bits that fell off the backs of aircraft – they’re all here. Uniforms, compasses, tickets... you name it.

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’s a Y-7 flown by China Southern – a double turboprop with a maximum capacity of 48 people, and used from 1970 until 2001. There’s a Trident – a three-engine medium-short range jet from De Havilland – that was used as a “special plane” by China’s leadership. Behind it is an Airbus A310, that came into service with China Eastern in 1985. This one was the very first wide-bodied plane bought by China and, when its flying days were over, Airbus repurchased it and gave it to the museum as a gift.

There are other pretty planes too, not least an ex People’s Liberation Army Air Force AVIC Y-5 biplane, a C-46, which had flown the ‘Hump Route’ supplying Chinese resistance fighters during the Japanese occupation in World War II and a Lisunov Li-2.

Between 1950 and 1952, new routes opened up – mainly from north China to the southwest of the country 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! But let’s turn our attention to the best of them all – the China Aviation Museum, also known as the Datangshan Aviation Museum, thanks 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!

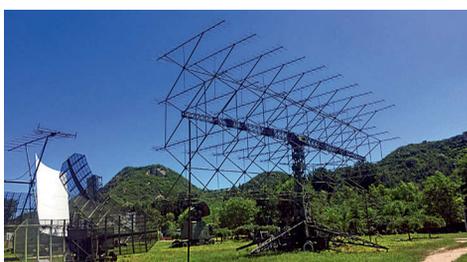
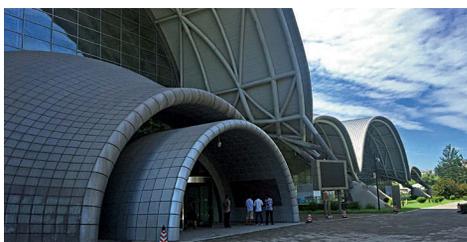
It was first opened to the public at Shahe-



Looking over into the distance is an aircraft graveyard where old planes have been parked, hopefully awaiting the time they will be refurbished to look as good as new



**A SIGHT OF MAGNIFICENCE:** This Irkut-14 has had parts of its wings removed to be able to squeeze in to the display hall. (Beihang)



**REVISITING HISTORY:** (From top) Chairman Mao aboard the IL-14 (Civil Air Museum); The main building is apparently designed to resemble the shape of an aircraft engine mounted on a wing (Civil Air Museum); An LLQ-110 long distance surveillance VHF radar which once had a range of 400km (China Aviation Museum)

zhen Air Force Base in 1989, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army Air Force, and expanded 20 years after that. Covering over 1,000 acres, and 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, you will be spoiled for choice.

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 line-up of planes used by the Great Helmsman, Chairman Mao himself. There's a Li-2 used by him in June 1956, an Ilyushin IL-14 used by Mao on 23 occasions in 1957-58, and an IL-18 he used on July 21 1967 – his last ever plane ride when he flew from Wuhan to Shanghai. Turning left, one is faced with 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 anti-submarine aircraft and so on. Beautiful!

Across the so-called Hero Avenue, is a display of fighter and attack aircraft such as F-5s, F-6s, F-7s, F-8s, A-5s... while if you keep on walking, you end up at the end of Hero Avenue at the 'Integrated Hall', which



**THE A-TEAM:** (from top) Cabin crew in 1973 ; A picture of a flight attendant taken in 1947 (It wasn't until 1995 that married girls were accepted as cabin crew — both archived in Civil Air Museum)



**SPREADING WINGS:** A Y-5 aircraft is parked on the museum's periphery (Civil Air Museum)



**BEHIND THE SCENES:** An assorted collection of aircraft engines can be found on the ground floor (Beihang)

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 also almost 2,000 photographs, cultural relics, sand table exhibits, and audio and video tablets.

But what's this? Looking over into the distance is an aircraft graveyard where old planes have been parked, hopefully awaiting the time they will be refurbished to look as good as new. Meanwhile, there's 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. If you ever wondered where Chinese MIGs go to rest in peace, you need wonder no more.

And then, of course, there's yet another part of the museum that is located inside a cave that extends for some 600 metres into the side of Datang Mountain. This long U-shaped cavern, which takes up 5 acres, was part of the tunnels and underground bunker system of Shahezhen Air Base, and is now filled with row upon row of yet more planes and exhibits, including the Y-5, which was used to scatter Premier Zhou Enlai's ashes on 15 January, 1976.

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

[wknd@khaleejtimes.com](mailto:wknd@khaleejtimes.com)



**Travelwings.com**  
get your wings to fly

**EID HOLIDAYS**  
fixed departure



**INCLUDES FLIGHT + HOTEL  
+ TRANSFER**

**BOOK NOW  
PAY LATER**



**ISTANBUL**

**1999 AED**

3 Nights

**BAKU**

**2299 AED**

3 Nights



**ARMENIA**

**2399 AED**

4 Nights

**MALDIVES**

**2569 AED**

4 Nights



**THAILAND**

**2799 AED**

4 Nights

**KENYA**

**3999 AED**

4 Nights



**800-TWINGS (894647)**

**customer.care@travelwings.com**

**www.travelwings.com**