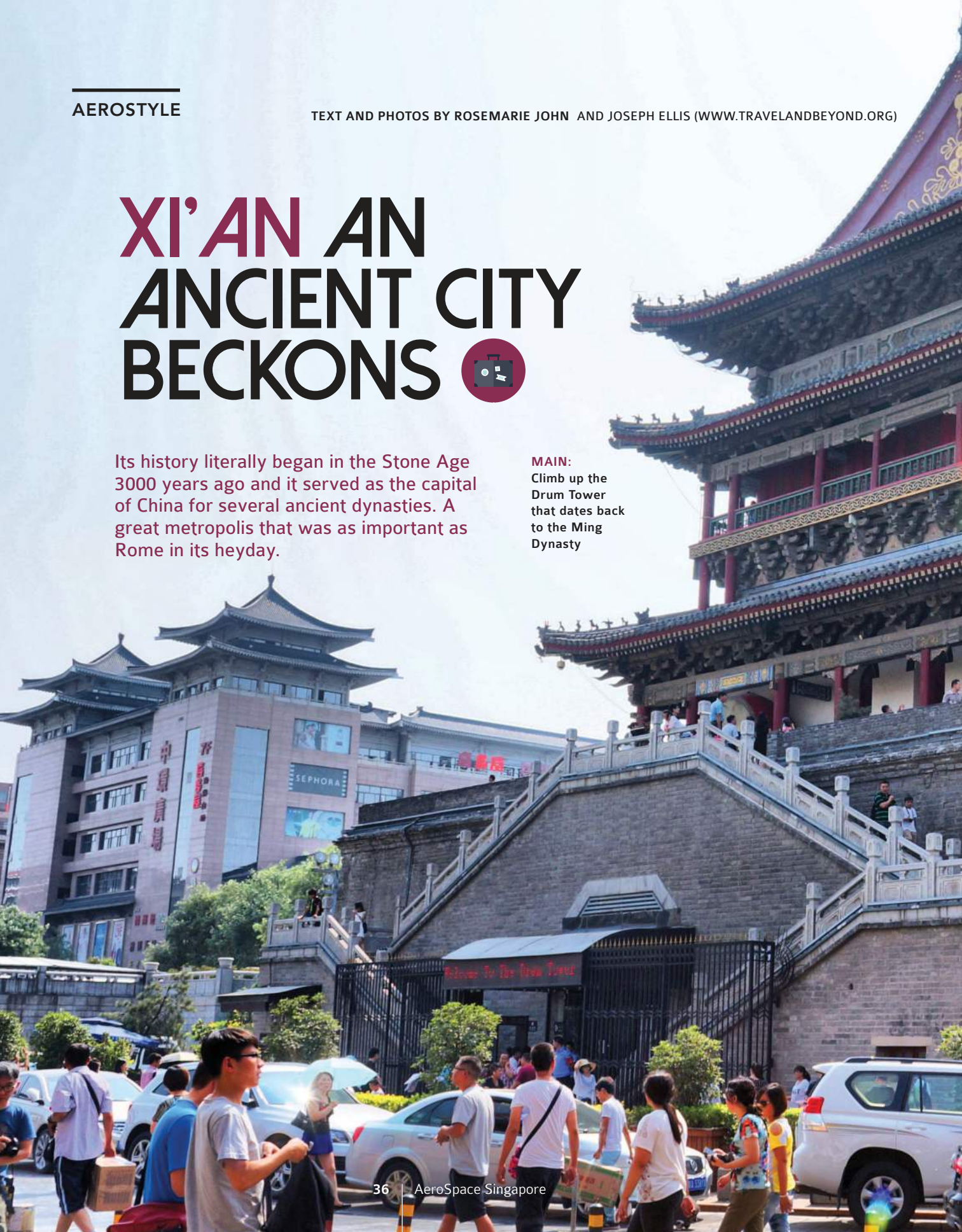


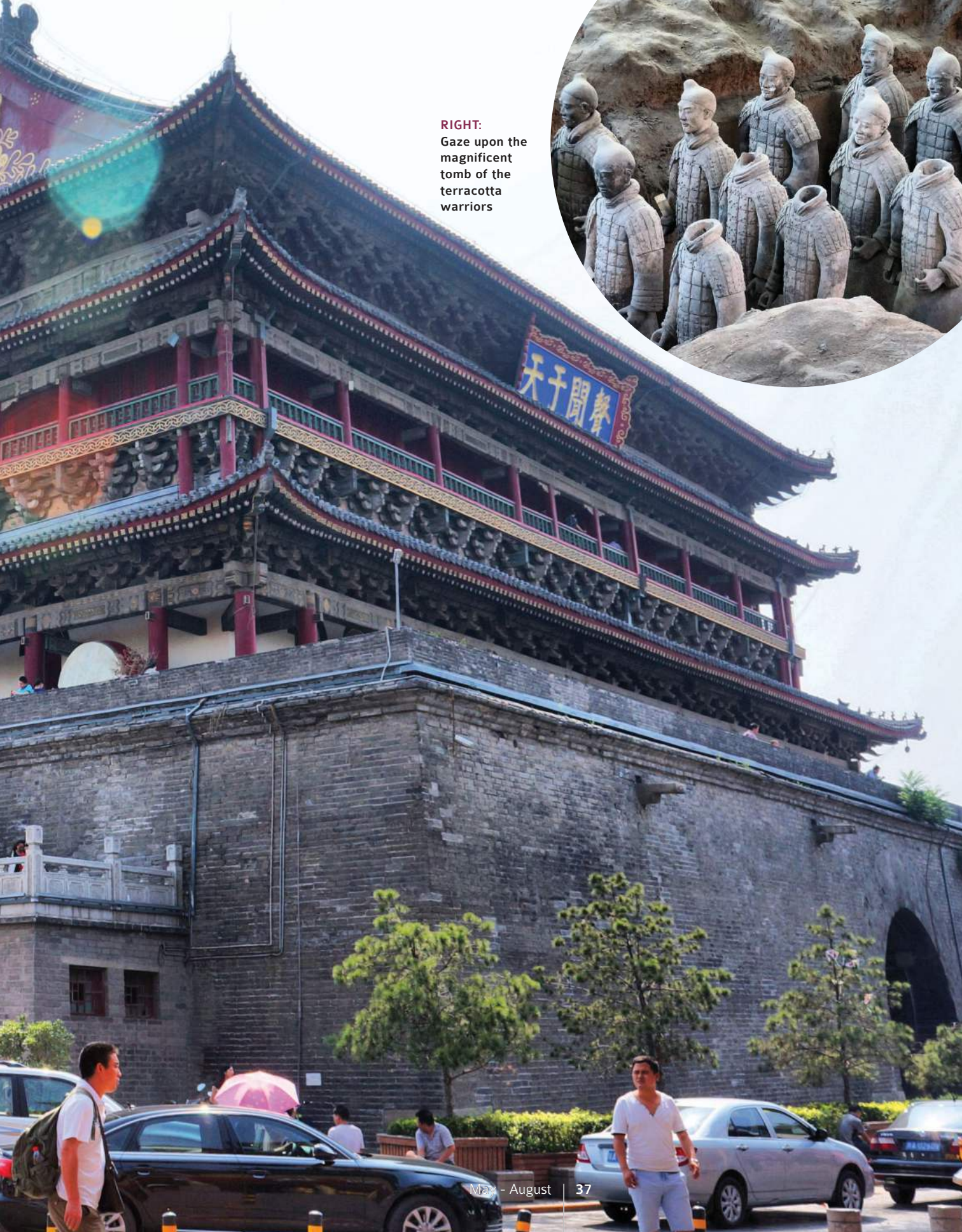
XI'AN AN ANCIENT CITY BECKONS



Its history literally began in the Stone Age 3000 years ago and it served as the capital of China for several ancient dynasties. A great metropolis that was as important as Rome in its heyday.

MAIN:
Climb up the
Drum Tower
that dates back
to the Ming
Dynasty





RIGHT:
Gaze upon the
magnificent
tomb of the
terracotta
warriors

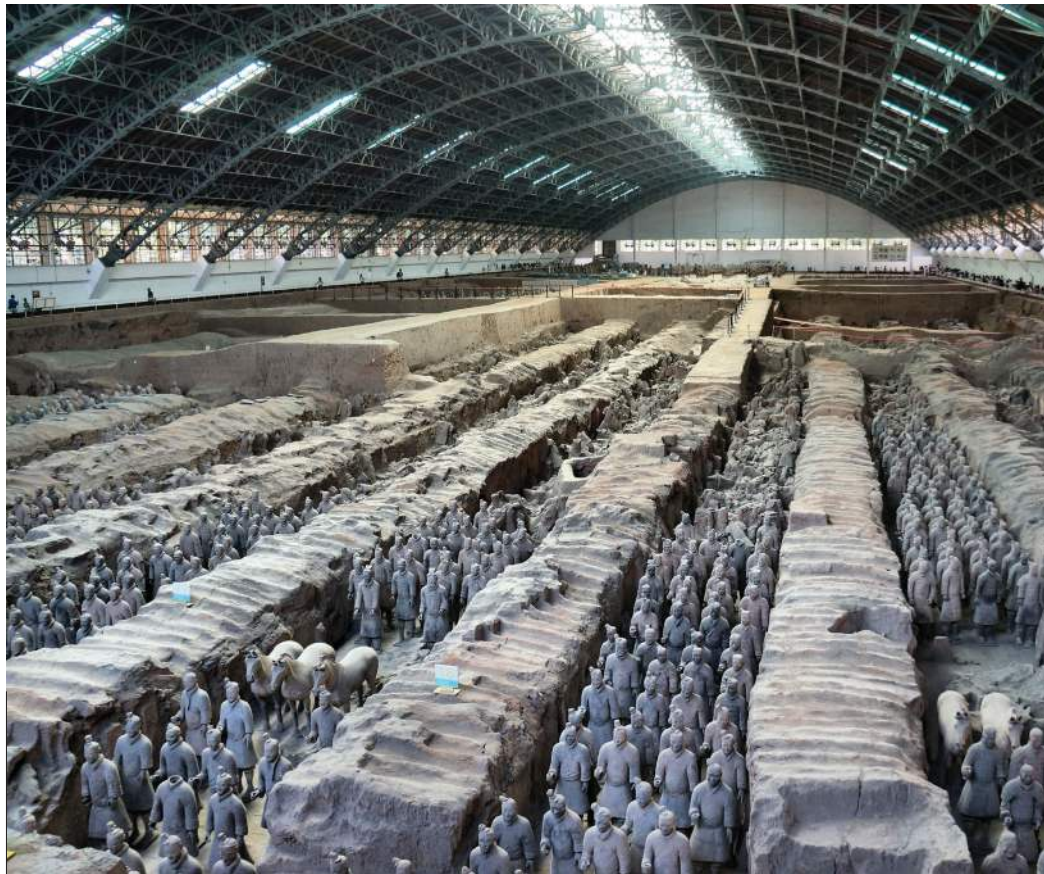




It was the starting point of the ancient Silk Road – the largest overland trade route linking China to Central Asia and Europe. It has 4000 historical sites and tombs, the grandest of them all being the Terracotta Army. Welcome to Xi'an! The ancients knew it as Chang'an, the land of perpetual peace.

Motorised cycles swerved past me, pink buses and green taxis rushed by, the grey skies of a heavily industrialised city drooped over me, but this was not just a modern metropolis. Xi'an, the capital of the Shaanxi province seemed to be amused by my presence. Many have passed through its venerable land and I, too, am another traveller who has come to gape at its treasures.

It was once the capital of China, but even after the capital was relocated, the city remained an important military stronghold for



LEFT:
The Muslim Quarter is an amazing street market for food

ABOVE:
Learn about Emperor Qin's obsessive quest for the secret of immortality

RIGHT:
The wooden memorial archway at the Great Mosque

centuries. Merchants from various parts of the world carried precious cargo to and from this land on the trade routes that they built, laying the foundation and formation of what came to be known as the Silk Road – a road that linked China, India, Persia, Greece, Rome and several other important markets of the time. The road brought with it not just fortunes but also diverse ethnic identities and religious beliefs.

The central location of Xi'an, near the confluence of the Wei and Feng Rivers, helps explain why the area was the site of several important imperial capitals for almost a millennium of Chinese history. The ancient city wall is a reminder of the city's greatness.





RIGHT:
The Huaqing
Hot Springs
transforms
into a magical
stage at dusk



It wraps itself seamlessly around the metropolis, with its construction started during the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and later on expanded by Zhu Yuanzhang, the first Emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

I climbed more than a hundred steps to the top and was dumbfounded at how well-preserved everything was. Remember, Xi'an is more than 3000 years old and was ruled by 73 emperors over 13 dynasties across a period spanning a thousand years!

The wall stands 12 meters tall, 12-14 meters wide at the top and 15-18 meters thick at the bottom. It is 13.7 kilometres in length and surrounded by a deep moat. Every 120 meters, a rampart extends out from the main wall. In total, there are 98 ramparts, which were built to deter enemies from climbing up the wall. Each rampart has a sentry building, in which the soldiers could protect the entire wall without exposing themselves to the enemy.

It would take about four hours to complete a walk around the city wall at a leisurely pace. Alternatively, you could rent a bicycle from any of the many designated stores around. From the wall you can see the ancient Bell Tower, a beautiful building which denotes the city centre within the walls.

You can also see how the modern city, with its tall apartments and office blocks, has developed outside the city wall. Within the walls, however, the Chinese Government has rightly placed restrictions on the height of a building that can be constructed. So on one side of the wall you have the monstrosity of modern architecture that we have all contributed to, and on the other side are buildings which are traditional, shorter and prettier.

The wall is decorated with many lanterns and I could just imagine how beautiful it would look at night. But as usual, time was not my



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friend. I was there for only 30 minutes during the day but I did manage to get a stunning shot of the wall from my hotel room at night.

After a few minutes walking around the wall within the area of the South Gate (Yong Ning Men), I took refuge from the sun under the gate tower. Much to my delight, I discovered that this ancient wall can offer you free Wi-Fi! I have travelled and lived in modern cities where Wi-Fi services are non-existent! So there I was sitting on stone dating back several centuries posting photos on Instagram! ^{AS}

TRAVEL TIPS

Remember when you visit this place, go through the South Gate. It's the best place to go through because it is the largest and most accessed. The South Gate is open from 8am to 10pm and tickets cost US\$9 (RMB 54 or S\$12).