

= Underground City (Beijing) =

The Underground City (Chinese : 地下城 ; pinyin : Dìxià Chéng) is a Cold War era bomb shelter consisting of a network of tunnels located beneath Beijing , China . It has also been referred to as the Underground Great Wall since it was built for the purpose of military defense . The complex was constructed from 1969 to 1979 in anticipation of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union , as Sino -Soviet relations worsened and was officially reopened in 2000 . Visitors were allowed to tour portions of the complex , which has been described as " dark , damp , and genuinely eerie " . Dixia Cheng has been closed for renovation since at least February 2008 .

= = Location = =

The tunnels of the Underground City run beneath Beijing 's city center , covering an area of 85 square kilometres (33 sq mi) 8 to 18 metres (26 ? 59 ft) under the surface . At one time there were about 90 entrances to the complex , all of which were hidden in shops along the main streets of Qianmen . Many of the entrances have since been demolished or blocked off for reconstruction . Known remaining entrances include 62 West Damochang Street in Qianmen , Beijing Qianmen Carpet Factory at 44 Xingfu Dajie in Chongwen District , and 18 Dazhulan Jie in Qianmen .

= = History = =

At the height of Soviet -Chinese tensions in 1969 , Chinese chairman Mao Zedong ordered the construction of the Underground City during the border conflict over Zhenbao Island in the Heilongjiang River . The Underground City was designed to withstand nuclear , biochemical and conventional attacks . The complex would protect Beijing 's population , and allow government officials to evacuate in the event of an attack on the city . The government claimed that the tunnels could accommodate all of Beijing 's six million inhabitants upon its completion .

The complex was equipped with facilities such as restaurants , clinics , schools , theaters , factories , a roller skating rink , grain and oil warehouses , and a mushroom cultivation farm . There were also almost 70 potential sites where water wells could easily be dug if needed . Elaborate ventilation systems were installed , with 2300 shafts that can be sealed off to protect the tunnels ' inhabitants from poison gases , Gas- and water -proof hatches , as well as thick concrete main gates , were constructed to protect the tunnels from biochemical attacks and nuclear fallout .

There is no official disclosure about the actual extent of the complex , but it is speculated that the tunnels may link together Beijing 's various landmarks , as well as important governmental buildings such as the Zhongnanhai , the Great Hall of the People , and even military bases in the outskirts of the city . The China Internet Information Center asserts that " they supposedly link all areas of central Beijing , from Xidan and Xuanwumen to Qianmen and [the] Chongwen district " , in addition to the Western Hills . It is also rumoured that every residence once had a secret trapdoor nearby leading to the tunnels . In the event of a nuclear attack , the plan was to move half of Beijing 's population underground and the other half to the Western Hills .

The tunnels were built by more than 300 ,000 local citizens , including school students , on volunteer duties . Some portions were even dug without the help of any heavy machinery . Centuries -old city walls , towers and gates , including the old city gates of Xizhimen , Fuchengmen , and Chongwenmen were destroyed to supply construction materials for the complex .

Since the complex 's completion , it has been utilized by locals for in various ways as the tunnels remain cool in summer and warm in winter . On busy streets , some portions of the complex were refurbished as cheap hotels , while others were transformed into shopping and business centers , or even theaters .

While the complex has never been used for its intended purpose , it has never been fully abandoned either . Local authorities still perform water leakage checks and pest control in the tunnels on a regular basis .

= = As a tourist attraction = =

The complex was officially opened in 2000 , but has been closed for renovation since at least February 2008 . While it was open , visitors were allowed to tour portions of the complex ; the Underground City was popular with foreign tourists but remained virtually forgotten by local citizens . Though there are many other entrances , foreign visitors entered approved sections accessed via a small shop front in Qianmen , south of Tiananmen Square , at 62 West Damochang Street . Tour groups could enter free of charge and without prior permission while individual tourists not part of a group were charged 20 yuan (US \$ 2 @. @ 40) each .

The official tour took visitors only on a small circular stretch of the Underground City . Inside the complex , visitors could see signposts to major landmarks accessible by the tunnels , such as Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City , and could see chambers labeled with their original functions , such as cinemas , hospitals , or arsenals . A portrait of Mao Zedong could be seen amidst murals of locals volunteering to dig the tunnels and fading slogans such as " Accumulate Grain " , and " For the People : Prepare for War , Prepare for Famine " . Rooms with bunk beds and decayed cardboard boxes of water purifiers could be seen in areas not open to tourists . Visitors on the official tour would also pass by a functioning silk factory in one of the underground staff meeting rooms of the complex , and be given a demonstration of the process of obtaining silk from silkworm cocoons . They had a chance to buy souvenirs at a tourists ' shop operated by the state @-@ owned Qianmen Arts and Crafts Center and the China Kai Tian Silk Company .