

Inside the National Aquatics Center

During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, much of the spotlight will be on the National Aquatics Center, and with good reason. At the National Aquatics Center, gold, silver and bronze medals will be awarded in 42 events in categories like swimming and diving. Obviously, if you're a fan of water sports, the National Aquatics Center is where the action will be this summer at the Beijing Olympics.

The National Aquatics Center was inaugurated on January 28, 2008, after four years of construction. The groundbreaking happened in December of 2003, and construction began immediately after on the state of the art facility. By the end of 2005, the concrete structure was finished and the steel structure was nearly finished being installed. In August of the following year, the first of the air cushions was installed, and by the end of the year, membrane structures were also introduced on the outside of the National Aquatics Center. In 2007, decorating, municipal engineering works, and electro-mechanical equipment was completed and installed, finishing the construction of the facility.

The "Water Cube", as the National Aquatics Center is also known, is hailed as an environmentally friendly facility. Among the "green" design choices include surface water exploitation and enhanced air-conditioning and ventilation systems. However, the most impressive aspect of the environmentally sound design is the outer surface of the National Aquatics Center. The outer surface can collect up to 10,000 tons of water from rain, 70,000 tons of water that is clean, and 60,000 tons of water for the swimming pool each year, along with saving approximately 140,000 tons of recycled water every year.

The National Aquatics Center is also sure to turn heads with its futuristic and high-tech look. Supposedly, the facility will last 100 years due to the strength of the membrane structure's stability. Adding to the aesthetic wonders of the facility is a moat that surrounds the National Aquatics Center. This moat of sorts also has a practical effect, keeping spectators from touching the bubbly surface of the facility. Designers are sure that birds will steer clear of the "Water Cube" as well, as they do not rest themselves on transparent or semitransparent objects.

If you're attending the Beijing Olympics this summer, you'll be glad to know that the National Aquatics Center is also easily accessible, whether you choose public transportation or a personal vehicle to reach the facility. The "Water Cube" is located close to the Olympic Green Central Zone, and is also on the Beijing Subway Olympic branch line, that will service travelers to the National Aquatics Center, among other destinations. If you would rather drive yourself, there is a large amount of parking space available in an underground parking lot

beneath the venue, as well as in a separate parking lot to the north of the National Aquatics Center.

Besides its useful features, the National Aquatics Center is, let's face it, just plain cool. It produces an instantly distinctive, modern look that also provides environmentally friendly perks. It seats 17,000 people, while using all of the latest technology to amaze each and every one of them. Have we mentioned that it looks cool? During the daytime, it will give a translucent blue shine, while at night it will provide glowing bubbles to impressed visitors.

In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, many stars will be born. With the National Aquatics Center, the people of Beijing already have a star in the making that will help this summer's Olympic Games have a flavor all their own.

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