

The Boris in China diaries: almost ignored at the usual tourist traps, the Mayor proves a big draw with Beijing's movers and shakers

Our City Hall Editor Pippa Crerar follows the Mayor of London on his six-day trade mission to the Far East



Seeing the sights: Boris takes a peculiar side glance at his tour guide
PIPPA CRERAR, CITY HALL EDITOR



Day Three: Tuesday

10am

The sun came out for the first time since we arrived in Beijing, cutting through the interminable smog. A few sore heads among the press pack this morning after a late night stint in the hotel bar, so they were relieved to have an excuse to wear dark glasses. It's another day and another photo opportunity so we're off to the Forbidden City. But the hangovers were forgotten as we entered the spectacular 500-year-old complex, which served as the home of emperors and their households as well as the ceremonial and political centre of the Chinese government.



Baitou: the Mayor already has his own nickname in Beijing

Boris and the trade delegation made their way through the shrines, courtyards and pagodas of the City at quite a pace. The Mayor, who has been before, pointed out to some of the businessmen that there was not one tall building visible above the skyline, despite the fact Beijing is a city of skyscrapers. "Isn't that good planning," said Boris, before turning to Berkeley Homes boss Tony Pidgeley on spotting one lone tower to say: "Don't worry Tony, there's a tall building." Sir Ed Lister, Boris's planning chief, corrected him: "That's not a tall building, that's a large building." Explains much about the towers springing up on London's horizon.

The crowds of Chinese tourists thronging through the complex didn't pay Boris much attention, beyond a few curious glances at the accompanying photographers. One snapper admitted later that he mistook an old Chinese woman for the Mayor, with his shock of white-blond hair. A local guide confided that he already has a nickname in Beijing – baitou – which means white head or old age. The American and European tourists recognised him however, and we overheard more than one mention of the zipwire. Boris resisted appeals to put on a panda hat that was being worn by some British girls. "No pandas," scolded an aide. We suggested that an Imperial emperor's hat, as worn by one of the guides in the complex, might be more fitting. "Yeah, yeah, yeah," the Mayor muttered, before wandering off.

1pm

Some frustration among the press pack back at the hotel when it turned out that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had decided not to give us accreditation for the Chancellor's own press conference. Living up to the stereotype of the restrictive communist state, they even turned down requests from the British Embassy, saying only locally based journalists could get in. So the journalists busied themselves elsewhere, while one of the Mayor's press officers set off to retrieve a Boris bike from an absent colleague's room. After persuading reception staff to give him the key he burst into the bedroom, only to find a startled BBC London political editor Tim Donovan. Thankfully he was merely tucking into a Thai curry off the room service menu. As the press officer swiftly retreated, Donovan remarked "That was like an episode of Spooks," before returning to his meal.

2pm

It was finally time to abandon the car and check out Beijing's metro system, the third biggest in the world, though for some unfathomable reason we drove there. We walked down the steps of Xidane station on the number one line, ready to head five stops down to Gongzhufen. It was reminiscent of home as we all piled into the carriage before the doors shut, and I found myself squashed between Will "this takes press co-operation to a whole new level" Walden, the mayor's director of communications, and Olympic cauldron designer, Thomas Heatherwick, who had just joined the delegation. [I had hoped to interview him](#) but hadn't planned on it being quite so close up and personal.



Commuter: the Mayor takes a ride on the Beijing Metro

Further down the carriage the Mayor looked a little uncomfortable, but the rest of us were quite enjoying ourselves. Sir Michael Hintze, who regularly uses the Northern line at home

despite his vast wealth, spotted a woman with a young child and shouted out: "Hold the baby, Boris!"

5pm

After the ride on the Tube, where we were also joined by Sainsbury's boss Justin King, suffering after just having had a wisdom tooth removed, we had a long wait while Boris held more meetings. Finally the Mayor arrived at the Maya Hotel, where developer ABP, the company behind the [£1 billion Royal Docks scheme](#), really pushed the boat out for dinner. Even by Chinese standards, it was a big bash. Boris arrived to flashing lights, music and applause – it was the closest he's come to looking abashed. The top table alone seated 30 people and the room was packed with Chinese business types and media.



In his element: Boris's jokes went down well at the ABP dinner

It was not clear whether the Mayor had realised he was expected to preside over an awards ceremony, but his jokes about "eunuchs and concubines" at the Imperial city earlier in the day went down well. As the speeches rumbled on and on, it was one event the press was quite happy to leave Boris to cope with on his own, and possibly one that he wouldn't have minded joining us as we headed towards the exit.