

48 HOURS IN *Beijing*

How do you begin to get your bearings in a city as frenetic as the Chinese capital? T+L asked activist turned novelist Lijia Zhang to design a two-day tour of her top picks. **By Jennifer Chen**

Day 1

MORNING Wake up at the **Opposite House** (11 Sanlitun Rd., Bldg. 1; 86-10/6417-6688; theoppositehouse.com; doubles from \$342), in the upscale Sanlitun neighborhood, and head downstairs for a fortifying breakfast of congee and dim sum at its **Village Café** (breakfast for two \$28). Next stop: the Ming-era Imperial Garden, in the Forbidden City, and Tiananmen Square. Don't go alone, says Zhang, a Beijing resident and author of *Socialism Is Great!* (Atlas & Co.). "A good guide will bring the history to life."

AFTERNOON For lunch, try Yunnanese cuisine (such as fried prawns with basil leaves) at **Dali Courtyard** (67 Xiaojingchang Hutong, Gulou Dongdajie; 86-10/8404-1430; lunch for two \$31), in Dongcheng. Walk it off by wandering the *hutong* in Houhai.

EVENING Join the art set at **Yin** (33 Qihelou St.; 86-10/6526-5566; drinks for two \$17), the Emperor Hotel's rooftop bar. A short cab ride away, **Capital M** (2 Qianmen St., third floor; 86-10/6702-2727; dinner for two \$155) serves suckling pig and overlooks Tiananmen.

Day 2

MORNING Get an early start to catch residents practicing tai chi in the 660-acre park surrounding the 15th-century Temple of Heaven, widely regarded as the best example of Ming dynasty architecture. "The mornings there burst with activity," Zhang says.

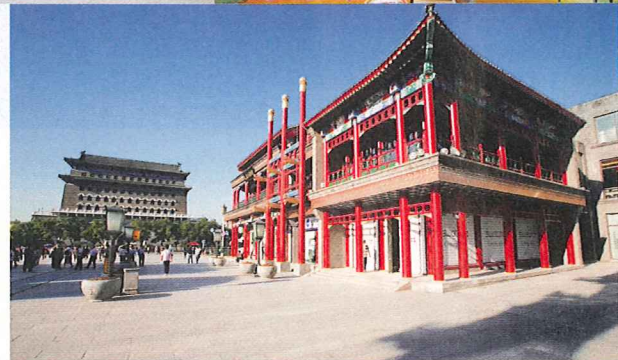
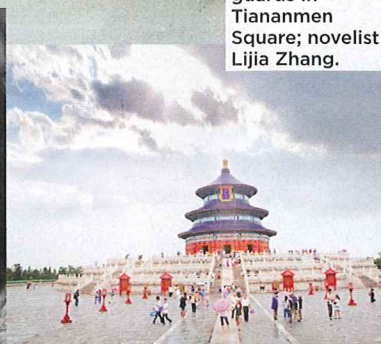
AFTERNOON The **Ullens Center for Contemporary Art** (4 Jiuxianqiao Rd.; 86-10/8459-9269; ucca.org.cn; admission \$2), in the 798 Art Zone, stages major exhibitions, though Zhang prefers to visit small, independent galleries like those in emerging Caochangdi Village and **Season's Pier** (4 Jiuxianqiao Rd., No. A05; 86-10/5978-4827), which features the paintings of Zhang's friend, artist Sunlight Fan. Take a short cab ride to **Chuan Ban** (5 Gongyuan Toutiao, Jianguomennei Dajie; 86-10/6512-2277; lunch for two \$15) for fiery dishes such as *douhua yu pian*, a fish-and-tofu casserole. Before the sun sets, drive an hour to Badaling, an accessible part of the Great Wall. "It's touristy during the day, but in the late afternoon, it's half-deserted," she says.

EVENING Head to **Courtyard** (95 Donghuanmen Ave.; 86-10/6526-8883; dinner for two \$124) for dinner in a Ch'ing dynasty courtyard house, before a visit to the nearby Donghuanmen night market for a glimpse into the grittier side of Beijing. "You'll find stalls selling roasted cicadas and fried scorpions—it reminds you that Chinese cuisine is famine cuisine," Zhang says. "We don't waste anything." Beijing may have evolved into a glittering symbol of China's outsize ambitions, but it's good to see that pockets of authenticity remain.

* **T+L POLL** CHINA TOOK TOP HONORS IN ASIA, BUT THAILAND AND THE MALDIVES WERE CLOSE ON ITS HEELS.



ZHANG'S BEIJING Clockwise from left: A Houhai *hutong*; the Temple of Heaven; inside Village Café; Capital M Restaurant; guards in Tiananmen Square; novelist Lijia Zhang.



THE TRIP PLANNER

Guy Rubin

Founder and Managing Partner, Imperial Tours

Rubin, a T+L A-List agent, can set up a private tour of Beijing with Lijia Zhang—or other insiders—as your guide. Itineraries include visits to the Forbidden City and less frequented sections of the Great Wall. imperialtours.net; 888/888-1970; day trips from \$875 per person.