

A watercolor illustration of a traditional Chinese courtyard. In the foreground, a man with brown hair, wearing a blue jacket and orange pants, stands next to a bicycle. He is holding a small, stylized tree with a thick, twisted trunk and red, round fruits. The tree is placed on a small wooden platform. In the background, there is a traditional Chinese building with a red roof and ornate decorations. The sky is yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is artistic and colorful.

# Endless Beijing

Janaina Camara

Janaina Camara is a Brazilian journalist who worked for the Xinhua News Agency during her six-year stay in Beijing. She published a book entitled *Quintessence of Beijing and Shanghai* in Brazil and was a contributor to the *Confucius Institute* magazine.



I lived in Beijing from 2007 to 2013 in six different neighborhoods. It's hard to say which was my favorite, or perhaps I have no such preference. In every corner of the city you can see Beijing's royal magnificence, its drastic changes over the centuries, and also a future presented to all its citizens as well as to the world at large. Not only are people from all over China are attracted to Beijing, but also residents and tourists from so many different countries and regions around the world that the names of some may be unknown to you.

Beautiful memories flood my mind as I write about Beijing. I can still clearly remember my first trip in the city on the third day after my arrival. It was in June, and very hot — a typical summer day in northern China. There was no such thing as a “smart” phone back





then, not to mention any function like an online map check. All I could do was to buy a large map at a newsstand because I wanted to go to Tian'anmen Square.

You may find it hard to believe, but such a big and totally strange metropolis did not seem that complicated to me, even though I could neither recognize any Chinese characters nor speak the language. I couldn't even tell the difference between a laundry shop and a clothing shop. Throughout my first days in the city, I was nothing but "blind" in the face of so many Chinese characters.

Despite all this, things weren't that bad. In Beijing there are signs almost everywhere on streets and lanes written in either English or pinyin, especially in commercial districts where many foreigners gather. Of course there were also many friendly old local residents ready to help. The secret lies in having an open mind and having a spirit of exploration and taking risks. I'd also heard that Beijing is a very safe city, a fact which has not changed till this day.

I boarded Metro Line 1, which runs through Beijing from east to west along the famous Chang'an Avenue, and passes by Tian'anmen Square and the Forbidden City. Despite how constantly jam-packed it was, I didn't run into any trouble thanks to the bilingual announcements over the loudspeaker. I arrived at Tian'anmen Square without any problems. Amazing!

As I exited the station and returned above ground, Mao Zedong's



portrait came into view. On the other side of the square was Chairman Mao's Memorial Hall, behind which stood the Qianmen Gate Tower. A model of royal architecture, it was an important passageway leading to the imperial palace. I felt the fiery red wall of Tian'anmen Gate Tower was a stark contrast to the grayish-white buildings which were constructed around the square in the 1960s. You can find the magnificent gate tower in almost any tourist travel guide. Upon my arrival in Beijing, it left a deep impression on me. Though everything I saw was so great, I felt there lacked a green touch. There were hardly any green plants in the square, nor were there any benches for people to have a rest. Both the summer heat and winter cold are more pronounced in the large square. Tian'anmen Gate Tower was the gateway to the Forbidden City. From its opening in 1421 until the early 1920s when Puyi — China's last emperor — abdicated the throne, the Forbidden City had been the place where emperors of the



Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1616-1911) dynasties handled state affairs and resided. I had to brace myself because it would take at least two hours to walk from here all the way to the exit on the other side.

Actually, walking is the best way to explore Beijing. Although it's hard for me to say which part of the city is my favorite, I can tell you without hesitation that the most fun way of exploring is by using your feet! But of course you'll still need the help of the 18 metro lines running through the city, and with over 300 stations you'll easily find one or two around your location. In addition, for someone as bold as me, riding a bicycle is also a good choice. But for now let's just walk and have fun. Don't forget to wear your comfortable shoes!

