

Beijing's *hutongs*—narrow alleys or side streets—were once a city mainstay. Back in those days, the location of a hutong, formed by the space between the *siheyuan* (courtyards of homes), was significant: In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), they were organized by social rank; the highest-ranking elite lived closest to the Forbidden City. Today, many hutongs have been demolished to make way for wide avenues and modern high-rises.

Nevertheless, everything old is new again, and the surviving hutongs in the city's northeast districts are now home to a hip revival. A leisurely Saturday spent strolling the hutongs between Gulou (the Drum Tower) and Yonghegong (the Lama Temple) offers a good dose of historic Beijing as well as its present-day underground youth culture.

10 A.M. YONGHEGONG

Begin your journey at Yonghegong, one of Beijing's most extraordinary and often-overlooked temples. Take the Beijing subway line 5 or 2 to the Yonghegong station and alight at Exit C. Walk to the Lama Temple at 12 Yonghegong Da Jie (admission: 25 yuan or about US\$3.65). Don't miss the 18-meter-high Buddha made of sandalwood; it was a gift from the Dalai Lama to Emperor Qianlong in 1750.

11 A.M. WUDAOYING HUTONG

About 100 meters up Yonghegong Da Jie from the temple—on the opposite side of the street—is the entrance to Wudaoying Hutong, which is just beginning to get hip with boutiques and eateries.

The shop Brand nü sells an array of handmade items, including delicately embroidered shoe insoles traditionally sewn by Chinese mothers for their children, from a women's artisan cooperative in Ningxia (61 Wudaoying Hutong).

Next door, Dong Liang, whose motto is "nobody is the same," carries well-cut fashions from Beijing and Shanghai designers (63A Wudaoying Hutong).

Hit the Vineyard Cafe, a popular expat haunt, for an early lunch of comfort food such as moussaka or chili con carne (31 Wudaoying Hutong).

12:30 P.M. JIANCHANG HUTONG

After refueling, follow Wudaoying Hutong until you hit a T-junction with Jianchang Hutong. Turn left.

Jianchang is lined with fruit stalls and laundry on the line, a true glimpse at old hutong life. Proof that change is coming, however, can be found at number 40, where a brand-new Boucherie Française stocks gourmet charcuterie and cheeses. One door down is the Arrow Factory, a highly acclaimed space that hosts fascinating contemporary-art exhibitions.

1:15 P.M. GUOZIJIAN JIE

Jianchang Hutong intersects Guozijian Jie, named for the Imperial College down the street on your left that is next to the Confucius Temple (admission: 20 yuan or about \$3). Linger in the temple's courtyards as the locals like to do. The Imperial College, founded in 1287, was a prep school for the Imperial Exam—

CITY WALK: Beijing

Strolling and shopping among the Chinese capital's historic hutongs *By Kristina Pérez*

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the test was open to anyone and those who passed became government officials.

Immediately on the corner to your right at the intersection is Cafe Confucius (25 Guozijian Jie). Have a strong cup of genuine Lavazza or illy coffee here before or after the temple.

Opposite the cafe is the Innerroom, which sells strangely appealing tchotchkes, such as the vintage picture-story flip-books that were popular with Chinese children from 1950 until the 1990s, a time when only revolutionary books were allowed to circulate (28 Guozijian Jie).

A few doors over from Innerroom to the left is Lost & Found, which, as the name implies, sells vintage knickknacks, including Beijing street signs, and ceramics and tea cups. It also produces retro items, such as colorful thermoses reminiscent of those once given as awards to model workers (42 Guozijian Jie). Check out the fold-out Beijing-skyline greeting cards that recall the traditional art of Chinese paper cutting.

3 P.M. GULOU DONG DA JIE

Hang a left at the decoratively painted Guozijian gate onto Andingmennei Da Jie. At No. 196 you will find a charming hobby shop with models of Chinese tanks, fighter planes and even the iconic “car of China,” a Red Flag limousine built in 1958 that was for decades the vehicle of choice for government officials.

Further down you will pass Lomography, which provides for all your Lomo photo needs (a fast-growing, popular form of photography characterized by intense colors and a fish-eye effect); pick up a disposable model (200 yuan to 300 yuan or about \$30 to \$44) and get snapping in the hutongs.

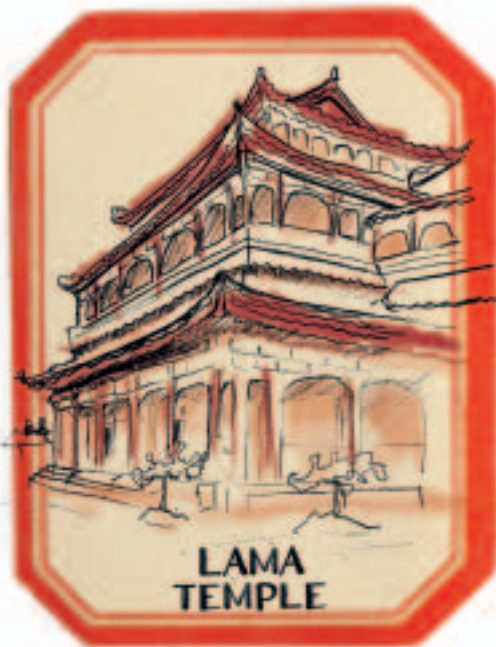
Walk along Andingmennei Da Jie, and you will come to a big intersection. Take a right on Gulou Dong Da Jie, which runs up to the historic Drum and Bell Towers, originally built in 1272 under Kublai Khan.

Halfway up Gulou Dong Da Jie, you will find The Thing, a so-hip-it-hurts clothing store with designs by Chinese graphic artists (96-1 Gulou Dong Da Jie)—sweat-shirts and T-shirts in gray, black and hot pink with cartoonish drawings and slogans in indecipherable Chinese.

On the same side of the street, just past the north entrance to Nanluoguxiang Hutong, is Paper (138 Gulou Dong Da Jie). Stop at this minimalist haven if you fancy Japanese *udon* noodles or want to try one of its famous Martinis. Otherwise turn left onto Nanluoguxiang Hutong, where Beijing gentrification is at its best.

3:45 P.M. NANLUOGUXIANG (NLGX)

To those in the know, Nanluoguxiang is better known as NLGX. Its other moniker is “centipede street,” due to the eight hutongs that trail off on either side



In the Ming Dynasty, the city's hutongs were organized by social rank; the highest-ranking elite lived closest to the Forbidden City.

of the 768-meter-long central lane. The humble hutong has had a number of not-so-humble residents, including Wan Rong, the last Empress of China, who was carried from her home here to her wedding at the Forbidden City in 1922.

There's history and culture here, if you're interested: The former residence of Mao Dun at 13 Hou'yuanensi Hutong is now a museum (admission: five yuan or 73 U.S. cents). Mao Dun was an important early 20th-century Chinese writer who translated “The Constitution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union” into Chinese. Just next door at No. 7 is the former headquarters of Gen. Chiang Kai-shek; in later years it served as the Yugoslav Embassy.

The shopping in NLGX is unique and fun: Start at the nameless shop at No. 5 of the central NLGX alley and pick up Cultural Revolution paraphernalia or the now infamous “Oba-mao” T-shirt (U.S. President Barack Obama dressed in an army-Mao suit with cap, 40 yuan or about \$6). On the opposite side of the street, Cloth & Paper stocks quilts, embroidered pillow covers and cloth tigers for children—traditionally meant to ward off disease (10 NLGX).

Esydragon, at No. 19-1, carries a selection of disposable lighters shaped like mah-jongg pieces. And next door, Feel Shanghai offers an array of silver jewelry in traditional designs as well as raw-silk Mao jackets (21 NLGX).

5 P.M. GATEAU

Stop in at Gateau for a pick-me-up piece of cake and coffee (16 NLGX). The décor is bohemian chic and the armchairs are comfy. When you're ready, make a stop at The Pottery Workshop, which features creative fusions of traditional Chinese blue-and-white porcelain with modern design (23 NLGX). Necklaces go

for 60 yuan (about \$8.75) and porcelain stools range from 600 yuan to 1,500 yuan (about \$88 to \$220).

At No. 33 is the shop of the trendy clothing brand NLGX, which has been instrumental in putting the hutong on the map. Current items include clever “PEK” T-shirts—the Beijing airport code.

A few doors down on the same side of the street is Beijing Postcards, whose owners collected old photographs of Beijing for two years before opening the shop (85-1 NLGX; postcards five yuan or 73 U.S. cents).

7 P.M. DINNER

There is no scarcity of good eats or cuisines for dinner along NLGX. On either side of the lane where it meets Qinlao Hutong, is Mirch Masala (main courses 30 yuan or \$4.40), an Indian restaurant, on the northeast corner, and Salud Tapas Bar on the southeast. Fish Nation (mains 20 yuan or about \$3) serves traditional fish and chips; the pizzas are good, too. Next door, Saveurs de Corée (mains 50 yuan or \$7.30) is the city's best Korean restaurant—try the Kimchi Jun, a Korean style pizza topped with a spicy pickled vegetable.

8:45 P.M. GRIFTED

Late-night shopping options are aplenty. Grifted is a tongue-in-cheek gift shop that carries outlandish items such as a cartoonish Socialist doll set featuring Lenin, Marx, Castro, Che and The Boss, aka Chairman Mao (32 NLGX).

Plastered 8 is one of Beijing's design success stories. Some of its goods—such as a T-shirt featuring a stained-glass image of Mao—have been sold in high-end stores such as London's Harvey Nichols. Check out the notebook imprinted with a bottle of the ubiquitous (in China, at least) Gold Fish dish-wash-

ing liquid (61 NLGX). For something more sophisticated, try Woo, which sells elegant cashmere shawls and accessories (110-1 NLGX).

9:45 P.M. CREPERIE

If you skipped dessert, pop into E-Mai, a scrumptious purveyor of waffles and crepes at No. 26. Hot Nutella lathered on a waffle just off the griddle is practically sinful.

10 P.M. PASS BY BAR

After you've licked the chocolate from your lips, you won't want to pass by the Pass By Bar (108 NLGX; drinks 20 yuan to 30 yuan, about \$3 to \$4.40). A stalwart of the NLGX scene, Pass By Bar attracts a diverse crowd of locals and tourists. In warmer months, an evening can be whiled away easily in the vine-covered courtyard.

When you're ready to pack it in, the bar is conveniently located toward the south end of NLGX, which will let you out at Di'anmen on Ping'an Da Jie. Several courtyards along the way were demolished to build the subway. This controversial move renewed debate in the city over conservation versus modernization. For now, however, NLGX should be safe: In 1990, the 700-year-old hutong was named one of Beijing's 25 protected cultural and historical areas. Last year, it was declared a Chinese government “creativity zone.”

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