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Telling Beijing's
Stories

Autumn Scenes Return Once More

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The breathtaking autumn foliage of the dawn redwood forest at
Cherry Valley of the National Botanical Garden in Beijing

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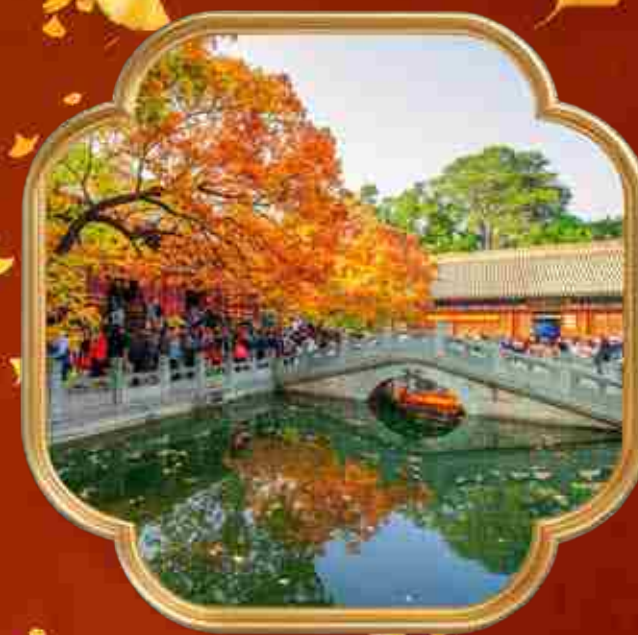
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in Beijing

Autumn Scenes Return Once More

Text by Ma Kai Photo by Wu Fulai

Lu Xun (1881–1936) remarked on the unusual intensity of Beijing's autumn colours, while Xie Bingying (1906–2000) admired the extraordinary height and clarity of its skies. While these observations remain true, they only touch the surface. Autumn in Beijing is a season of both spectacle and substance. It stretches from the Start of Autumn (one of the 24 solar terms) to Frost's Descent, a period of several weeks in which each day has its own character.

The ancients divided the season into three stages: early, middle and late autumn. Early autumn runs from the Start of Autumn to roughly the White Dew, a time of cooler mornings and evenings and fading cicada song. Middle autumn extends from the White Dew to around the Cold Dew, bringing clear, high skies and a balance between day and night. Late autumn reaches from the Cold Dew to about the Start of Winter, marked by stronger west winds, falling leaves and the richest autumn colours, almost touching the edge of winter. Throughout the season, Beijingers observe customs such as "tieqiubiao" at the Start of Autumn, "worshipping the moon" at the Autumn Equinox and "admiring colourful leaves" at Frost's Descent. Together, these traditions and seasonal divisions form the capital's distinctive autumn calendar.





▲ Chrysanthemums in full bloom at Beihai Park



▲ The Autumnal Congee Festival at Lingshui Village, Mentougou District



▲ A robotic dog greets visitors at the China International Fair for Trade in Services

Early Autumn: Heat Lingers but the Season Turns

Beijing's autumn arrives gently, not abruptly. Even at the Start of Autumn, the days remain hot and dry. A Zhou Dynasty (11th century–256 BC) book on phenology records three signs of the season: cooling winds, descending dew and fading cicada song. Though the midday sun still scorches, morning and evening breezes bring a welcome coolness. Cicadas no longer sing with midsummer vigour; their fading chorus bids summer farewell.

Each year, on the day of the Start of Autumn, villagers at Lingshui in Beijing's Mentougou District, hold their Autumnal Congee Festival. This three-century-old tradition began with scholar Liu Maoheng (1631–1691), who offered free congee made from millet, red jujubes and coarse grains to those in need. Today, visitors can donate grain and receive a cultural keepsake.

At the Start of Autumn, urban Beijingers observe “*tieqiubiao*,” a custom born from the belief that summer heat suppresses the appetite and causes weight loss. In the past, people weighed themselves during this period; those lighter than at the Start of Autumn ate heartily to prepare for the colder months. Affluent households prepared braised meat or stewed chicken, while ordinary families made dumplings. Although the practice has faded, modern Beijingers still embrace the tradition as a welcome way to recover after the summer heat.

Early autumn celebrations call for seasonal freshness. Beyond meat, ripe chestnuts from Beijing's suburbs are sweet and tender, while pears are crisp and juicy. Freshly picked walnuts, with their soft kernels, offer a subtly sharp, distinctive taste of the season.

In early autumn, colourful leaves have not yet swept across the

mountains and plains; instead, the season's beauty lies in quieter details. At Beihai Park, chrysanthemums bloom in shades of gold and rust against red walls and ancient buildings. Old persimmon trees along the city's streets and alleyways bear pale green fruit, still a month from ripening. Meanwhile, the Western Hills remain lush, their ridges sharply outlined against a clear, cloud-streaked sky.

In the autumn of 2026, Beijing hosted the China International Fair for Trade in Services at Shougang Park, a former steelworks, showcasing achievements in the digital economy and creative industries. The China Service area debuted 140 innovations across 12 sectors. Robots served as shop assistants and postal workers, while visitors enjoyed virtual strolls through Yuanmingyuan and 360-degree projections of Qi Baishi's (1864–1957) art.

Middle Autumn: Full Moon, Blooming Flowers and Vibrant Events

Beijing's middle autumn is idyllic, with clear skies, gentle breezes and pleasant temperatures perfect for outdoor activities. In Fangshan District, homestays at Pofeng Ridge welcome the harvest season, with golden corn, fiery chillies and crimson persimmons spread across wooden racks. This mountain custom celebrates both the year's bounty and the richness of rural life.

The Mid-Autumn Festival centres on family reunions, with moon worship, moon cakes and reunion wine. For moon viewing, Wanchun Pavilion in Jingshan Park offers panoramic views from the Beijing Central Axis's highest point. In Beihai Park, the White Dagoba shimmers in the lake, while the Five-Dragon Pavilion offers a lakeside view of the moon's reflection. Near the Forbidden City, visitors watch the moon rise above the ancient walls.

Moon viewing goes hand in hand with traditional Chinese operas featuring festive pieces such as *Tianxiang Celebrations*, *Chang'e Flies to the Moon* and *Osmanthus Silhouette in the Moon Palace*. Games are equally important. In *A Dream of Red*



▲ A Mid-Autumn Festival lantern display at the Temple of the Moon Park



▲ Doubles competition at the China Open



▲ Ditan (Temple of Earth) Book Fair

Mansions, Grandma Jia's family admired the moon at Tubi Villa before playing the flower passing game to the beat of a drum. Thus, the moon becomes a companion for drinking, performing and playing. The ancients called this "playing with the moon," expressing a sense of intimacy between the earthly world and the moon palace.

The Mid-Autumn Festival nights in old Beijing glowed with street lanterns, while markets near Zhengyang and Desheng gates bustled all night. Lantern walks and riddle games added to the festive atmosphere. Today, grand light shows in parks and resorts feature hundreds of lantern displays, iron flower dancing and animated characters. Extending from the Mid-Autumn Festival to Chinese New Year, these displays have become lasting cultural and tourist attractions.

Old Beijing celebrated the Mid-Autumn Festival by "inviting Lord Rabbit," a clay figurine with a rabbit's head and an

armoured body riding a tiger. Offerings included moon cakes, watermelons, soybeans and osmanthus flowers. Although Beijing lacks the abundance of osmanthus found in the region south of the Yangtze River, the Summer Palace and Fragrant Hills Park now feature extensive osmanthus groves. After dark, the tiny golden blooms release a subtle fragrance. Beijingers preserve this fleeting scent by making osmanthus sauce or wine, or keeping potted plants in their courtyards.

Beyond floral scents, Beijing offers a distinctive bookish charm. The "Me and the Temple of Earth" Book Fair took place in the park from mid to late September 2026. The 2026 book fair was the largest to date, with a main exhibition area spanning over 20,000 square metres and more than 500 booths across nine spaces. More than 400 publishers and bookstores participated, with book booths accounting for 80 percent of displays. The event attracted

836,000 visitors, hosted over 150 cultural activities and welcomed dozens of writers and scholars, making it a highlight of the autumn season.

The Beijing Performance Season features dramas, operas and concerts at venues such as the National Centre for the Performing Arts and Beijing Performing Arts Centre. Artists from around the world present more than 100 shows, with autumn evenings offering an especially captivating atmosphere.

In the past, Beijingers observed a middle autumn tradition of walking clockwise around the White Dagoba of Miaoying Temple three times for good fortune on the eighth day of the eighth lunar month. Today, the temple still bustles with activity during the Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holidays. The nearby bookshop attracts tourists, while evening concerts bring the ancient surroundings to life.

Middle autumn ushers in Beijing's

vibrant sports season. The China Open brings tennis stars to the Diamond Court at the National Tennis Centre, while the World Table Tennis China Smash unfolds at Shougang Park.

As middle autumn draws to a close, Beijing's first touch of autumn colour appears—not in the ginkgoes or maples, but in the Chinese ash trees lining Wusi Street and Dongsi Shitiao. Turning gold by early October, these trees serve as autumn's messengers. While the rest of the city remains largely green, the ash trees herald the brilliant colours soon to come.

Olympic Forest Park's autumn blooms have arrived. Mist-like pink muhly grass drifts across the slopes, glowing softly in the gentle light and drawing visitors into a dreamy haze. Nearby, delicate white *Aster fastigiatus* rise on green stems, adding a serene contrast. Dense clusters of cosmos sway in the breeze across the hillside. Visitors wander slowly, pausing to admire or photograph the subtle, romantic beauty of middle autumn.

Late Autumn: Leaves Turn Red, Frost Descends and Winter Nears

Late autumn is Beijing's radiant, lingering farewell to the season.

The Double Ninth Festival anchors autumn in old Beijing, where traditions such as climbing high and admiring chrysanthemums flourished. Tianning

Temple once drew scholars for its blooms, while locals displayed courtyard pots in a custom called "showing autumn." Writer Wang Zengqi (1920–1997) admired specimens at Lao She's (Shu Qingchun, 1899–1966) residence in Fengsheng Hutong, where his elder brother Shu Zixiang helped cultivate over 300 clusters across 100 varieties. A violent storm once destroyed more than 100 plants, leaving the family heartbroken. For Lao She, these flowers were daily companions, not mere ornaments. Today, although courtyard houses have dwindled, public exhibitions thrive. Parks host shows around Cold Dew, featuring chrysanthemums in yellow, white and purple. Visitors stroll leisurely as cool fragrances drift by.

Beijing's autumn foliage peaks around Frost's Descent. Fragrant Hills draws crowds, now easily reached by subway. For equally vibrant colours with fewer visitors, head to the Badaling or Mutianyu sections of the Great Wall. From the beacon towers, red leaves contrast strikingly with the grey Wall, while crimson mountains stretch towards the horizon like waves.

For a distinctive autumn atmosphere, visit Beijing's ancient temple ginkgoes. Tanzhe Temple's Emperor Tree, named by Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1735–1796), stands 30 metres tall. Fourteen centuries old, it turns golden like a vast umbrella before Pilu Hall. At Dajue Temple, one remarkable ginkgo, dubbed "Mother Surrounded by Nine Children" has a

central trunk surrounded by nine younger ginkgoes. From afar, they resemble a grove; up close, a single tree is revealed.

Autumn in Beijing is also a season of movement. The 2026 Beijing Marathon, held on October 18, ran from Tian'anmen Square to the "Bird's Nest" stadium, tracing the city's journey from past to present across more than 40 kilometres of changing scenery.

Regular runners say the route has evolved into a city-wide festival. Spectators, volunteers and cheering crowds energise late-autumn Beijing, blending the season's beauty with a vitality all its own.

Autumn in Beijing holds much more. Diaoyutai's Ginkgo Avenue, Sanlitun's Dongwu Street and the south gate of Olympic Forest Park teem with visitors. Whether admiring flowers, climbing hills or jogging through the city, everyone finds their own special way to experience the season.

What makes Beijing's autumn unforgettable is not its attractions, but its way of life. People follow nature's rhythms, eating, drinking and enjoying themselves with the changing seasons. This calm, unhurried approach to life lies at the heart of the old capital's autumn charm.

Lao She called Beijing's autumn "a paradise," perhaps referring not only to its scenery but also to its residents' love of life. In this sense, there is truly little to fault in Beijing's autumn.

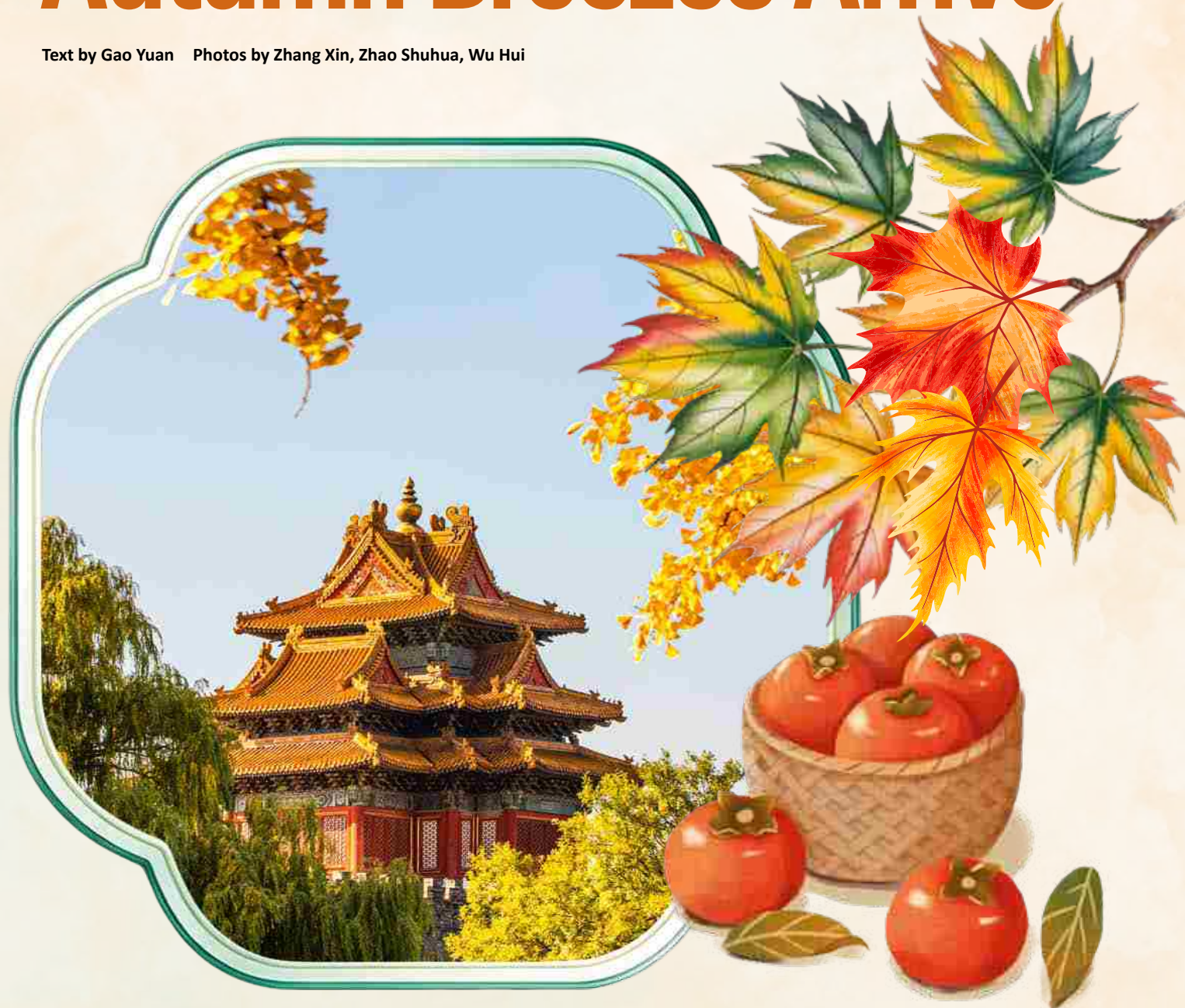


① Visitors capture osmanthus blossoms in full bloom at the Summer Palace
② Tourists pick Jingbai pears
③ The 2025 Beijing Marathon
④ Pink muhly grass at Olympic Forest Park



Enjoying the Foliage as Autumn Breezes Arrive

Text by Gao Yuan Photos by Zhang Xin, Zhao Shuhua, Wu Hui



Autumn in Beijing is crisp and expansive. The sky is clear and blue, while warm, bright sunlight enhances the grandeur of the ancient capital. As summer's deep greens quietly fade, the most spectacular sight of a Beijing autumn is the foliage that heralds the season. On the trees, leaves paint the forests in vibrant hues; as they fall, they dance like a flurry of butterflies, resembling a beautiful watercolour painted by nature. It is no wonder the great writer Lao She (1899–1966) once said, "Autumn in Beiping (the former name of Beijing) is paradise."



▲ A tourist takes a selfie beneath a ginkgo tree on Wusi Street

When Golden Leaves Flutter Across the City

As the crisp days of autumn deepen, Wusi Street gracefully enters its most poetic and truly evocative season. Situated in the historic Dongcheng District, this celebrated thoroughfare derives its name from the iconic Red Building of Peking University, which famously served as the intellectual cradle for the momentous May Fourth Movement of 1919. Yet, whilst its revolutionary heritage is significant, it is the street's natural transformation that captures the imagination each year. As the chill in the air grows sharper, the magnificent ash trees lining the street undergo a spectacular metamorphosis, turning a brilliant, radiant gold that covers the entire street in a warm, luminous glow.

Directly opposite the storied Red Building, the faint, earthy aroma of brewing tea drifts pleasantly from Chang Chun Tang, a time-honoured traditional Chinese medicine pharmacy. Standing proudly just outside the shop's entrance is a particularly tall, leafy ash tree, which is invariably among the very first on Wusi Street to don its yellow autumnal attire. As the soft, slanting autumn sunlight filters through its dense canopy, the leaves shimmer and catch the light like delicate sheets of beaten gold foil, quite rightly earning it the affectionate

local moniker of the "Gold Tree." For the city's younger generation, strolling leisurely along Wusi Street with a limited-edition autumn tea in hand, pausing to capture a photograph beside this magnificent specimen, has become a popular and quintessential way to savour the capital's breathtaking autumn scenery.

However, Wusi Street is far more than merely a prime vantage point for viewing the turning yellow leaves; it is a cultural corridor steeped in the enduring charm and historical gravitas of the ancient capital. To the east stand the National Art Museum of China and the Guardian Art Center, two prestigious artistic landmarks celebrated for their outstanding exhibitions. To the west, the street leads towards the grand Palace Museum, the tranquil Jingshan Park and the elegant Wenjin Street. If you head westwards and turn at the Shatan intersection, one of the distinctive turrets of the Forbidden City suddenly comes into view. The celebrated author Lao She once famously declared Wenjin Street to be the most beautiful street in Beijing, noting: "It has everything here: the imperial moat, a turret of the Forbidden City, Jingshan Hill, Beihai Lake, the White Dagoba, red walls, the library and massive stone lions. How beautiful, how gorgeous!" Through Lao She's evocative words, the distinctive, timeless charm of Beijing is brought vividly to life.

The esteemed folklore scholar Deng Yunxiang (1924–1999) possessed a profound appreciation for this leisurely, unhurried charm. In his masterful essay "The Splendid Autumn of the Capital," he painted a truly breathtaking, atmospheric picture of the season in the ancient capital, focusing on the Forbidden City's turrets, the tranquil moat, and the ancient cypresses. "In early autumn, just sit by the back river of Zhongshan Park," he urged his readers, describing "a clear blue sky, clouds like white cotton, the dazzling golden finial of the turret, bright yellow glazed tile roofs, vermilion pillars and the clear, emerald water of the moat reflecting it all. It looks like an oil painting filled with light and moisture, framed by the dark green silhouettes of old cypress trees." He wrote with palpable emotion, "This is Beijing's unique imperial autumn scenery; nowhere else can you experience such intense and moving autumn colours!"

Besides the magnificent ash trees, the ubiquitous poplars are also among the very first to sense autumn's arrival. Found thriving throughout the city's bustling streets and winding alleys, their broad leaves begin their descent to the earth whilst still displaying a striking duality of half-yellow and half-green. On windless, crisp afternoons, these broad leaves twirl gently in the air a few times before settling softly onto the asphalt. The distinct crackle of yellow poplar leaves underfoot as one walks evokes a deep, resonant sense of nostalgia for the passing of the year.

Whilst both Beihai Park and Yuyuantan Park boast tall avenues of poplars, the most beautiful in autumn are undoubtedly those lining the eastern causeway of the Summer Palace. Planted densely from south to north along the lakeshore, they form the largest concentration of poplars within the entire park. In the warmth of spring, their delicate, heart-shaped leaves emerge small and glossy green. Throughout the summer, vast expanses of deep green foliage flutter and rustle in the breeze. By the time autumn arrives, as the leaves turn yellow and drift to the ground, one can almost hear the whispering sound of the season and sense its breath, with every golden leaf perfectly mirrored in the still autumn waters.

Yet, for all their beauty, the ash and poplar trees are merely the gentle prelude to Beijing's spectacular autumn colours; the true "crown jewel" of the season is undoubtedly the ginkgo. As the days of late autumn set in, Beijing's ancient ginkgo trees gradually and majestically shift from a vibrant emerald green to a brilliant gold, composing a truly magnificent and sweeping autumn sonata of changing colours.

The ginkgo, colloquially known as the "grandfather-grandson tree" due to its slow growth, or the "duck-foot tree" from the distinct shape of its foliage, grows at a slow pace and lives for an exceptionally long time, thereby earning its title as a botanical "living fossil." Scientific research suggests that following the Quaternary glaciation, ginkgoes survived in the wild only in China. Their cultivation in the Beijing area dates back more than a thousand years. Today, these towering, ancient trees stand as silent, enduring witnesses to the vast and rich history of the ancient capital.

Among the many ancient ginkgoes in Beijing, the most famous is the King of Ginkgo, situated at the Tanzhe Temple in Mentougou District. At nearly 1,400 years of age, this magnificent specimen was bestowed the title of "Emperor Tree" by Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1735–1796).



▲ Fallen golden ginkgo leaves carpet a street in the ancient capital



▲ Capturing a visit to a hutong in the autumn of Beijing

Lush and leafy, the ancient ginkgo stands majestically before the Pilu Hall. Local legend has it that whenever a new emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) took the imperial dragon throne, a new branch would spontaneously sprout from the ancient trunk. In botanical reality, however, this is simply a natural growth characteristic of the species, whilst the romanticised notion of "one emperor, one branch" is merely a later, poetic invention.

On the west side of the Emperor Tree stands another ancient ginkgo, which is more than 600 years old. When Emperor Qianlong visited the temple, he noticed that its vigour was slightly less, yet he thought the two trees looked remarkably well matched from a distance, so he named it the Consort Tree. Interestingly, both of these trees are male and bear no fruit; the emperor had unwittingly paired a mismatched

couple. Meanwhile, in striking contrast, two female ginkgoes dating from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), located in the temple's eastern courtyard, bear abundant fruit every autumn.

Dajue Temple, nestled at the foot of Yangtai Mountain, is renowned for its ancient trees. Among them, a thousand-year-old ginkgo standing before the Hall of the Buddha of Infinite Life is particularly famous. Remarkably massive, its dense canopy shades more than half of the serene courtyard, whilst its thick trunk requires six or seven adults joining hands to encircle it, earning it the title of the "Crown of the Western Hills' Ginkgoes."

Seasoned Beijingers have their own map for admiring these golden ginkgoes: the avenue outside the east wall of the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse is the city's most iconic spot for viewing the golden leaves in autumn; the Temple of Heaven and Ditan Park (Temple of Earth) are among its oldest concentrations of ginkgoes; Ritan Park (Temple of the Sun) and the embassy area of Sanlitun boast tranquil corridors; and the campuses of Tsinghua and Peking Universities enchant visitors with their picturesque roads. Furthermore, the Old Summer Palace, the Olympic Forest Park and historic temples such as Fayuan, Wuta, Biyun, Hongluo and Jietai also feature ancient ginkgoes. As a general rule, the older the temple, the more likely you are to find these majestic golden guardians.

A Thousand Forests of Bright Red Leaves

"The red leaves of the Western Hills are splendid; the heavier the frost, the deeper their colour." In late autumn, the Western Hills unfold beneath a crisp blue sky, their vibrant red leaves set against layer upon layer of undulating peaks. Famous historical sites such as Fragrant Hills, Badachu Park, Biyun Temple and Xiangshan Temple nestle amid this colourful scenery, attracting throngs of visitors who are utterly captivated by the mesmerising autumn beauty.

The Western Hills form a natural extension of the Taihang Mountains. Because they guard the city much like a protective, outstretched arm, they have been known since ancient times as the "Right Arm of the Divine Capital." Here, mountains wind into the distance, springs flow freely, lush vegetation flourishes, and ancient temples dot the landscape. Since the Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, the area has served as an unrivalled retreat for literati to compose poetry and paint. The modern poet Xu Zhimo (1897–1931) once remarked, "The soul of Beijing lies entirely in that streak of sunset glow over the Western Hills."

When considering the Western Hills, the most famous sight is undoubtedly the spectacular red leaves of Fragrant Hills. Renowned both at home and abroad, they have been widely celebrated since the Jin Dynasty. Emperor Xuande (1425–1435) of the Ming Dynasty visited Fragrant Hills several times during the golden days of autumn, composing the poem "Red Leaves," which vividly depicts the hills blanketed in brilliant red foliage.

Emperor Qianlong also deeply loved

climbing mountains and composing poetry, writing more than 1,300 poems related to Fragrant Hills. He built Jingyi Yuan (the Garden of Tranquillity and Pleasure) there and specifically created a scenic spot called "Splendid Autumn Woods," praising the dazzling display of red, yellow, vermillion and green brought forth by the heavy, biting autumn frost.

When discussing red leaves, most people usually first think of maples. In fact, the most representative species behind the red foliage of Fragrant Hills is the smoke tree, with reportedly as many as 100,000 individual trees growing there. Famous scenic areas such as Badaling National Forest Park, Xishan National Forest Park and Pofeng Ridge are also dominated by smoke trees. In recent years, Xiangshan (Fragrant Hills) Park has introduced more than 20 varieties of colourful-leaved trees. Together with over 5,800 ancient trees, they transform the park each autumn into a rich tapestry of emerald green, golden yellow and brilliant red, creating a truly magnificent mountain forest scene.

The leaves of the smoke tree are distinctly and elegantly oval-shaped.

▼ Dajue Temple's historic ancient ginkgo tree





▲ Ginkgo trees in the courtyard of the Fragrant Hill Hotel

In autumn, they turn gradually from green to red, passing through shades of pale yellow, orange, light red, deep red and purplish-red, creating rich layers of dazzling colour. Smoke trees are generally not as tall as maples, growing only to about the height of a person, allowing visitors to wander deep into the dense forest and experience the profound, immersive feeling of being completely surrounded by red leaves.

In earlier times, the most common way to reach Fragrant Hills to see the red leaves was by rickshaw, while the most novel was riding a donkey. Lin Haiyin (1918–2001), author of *My Memories of Old Beijing*, wrote a travelogue titled “Riding a Little Donkey to the Western Hills,” recounting a thrilling journey in which she clutched the reins tightly, fearing that the donkey might slip into a deep ravine.

Writer Yu Dafu (1896–1945) also wrote fondly of riding a donkey through the Western Hills in *The Four Seasons of Beijing*, describing crisp mornings, red persimmons, mist-shrouded trees and farmers carrying fresh fruit into the city, and declaring that one could admire

the scenery for a month without ever tiring of it.

Deng Yunxiang’s description of Fragrant Hills is rich in the beauty of autumn colour. He noted that farmers in the Western Hills mostly planted persimmon trees. After their leaves are touched by frost, the glossy, deep rose-red surfaces shine brilliantly beneath the autumn sun, covering the mountains and fields with a radiance unmatched by any spring scenery. In those days, therefore, one of Beijing’s most seasonal and delightful late-autumn pleasures was heading to the mountains to admire the red leaves around Badachu and Cherry Valley in Fragrant Hills.

Folklore scholar Zhang Jiading (born 1941), who grew up in Fragrant Hills, summarised its autumn beauty as the “four reds”: red leaves, red persimmons, hawthorn and red jujubes. Persimmon leaves begin to turn red around the Frost’s Descent solar term, glowing brilliantly beneath the autumn sun, while clusters of persimmons resemble small red lanterns hanging high in the trees. By late autumn, the “fire persimmons” hang alone from bare

branches, creating a distinctive seasonal scene. Hawthorn, known locally as *shanlihong*, hangs in clusters of red fruit and provides the main ingredient for old Beijing’s candied hawthorn skewers. Red jujubes grow in bunches like red agate, their sweet fragrance drifting from the tips of the branches.

What makes Fragrant Hills worth lingering over is not just its red leaves, but also a quiet and elegant garden. The Fragrant Hill Hotel, designed by architectural master I.M. Pei (1917–2019), nestles amid the lush greenery. Behind the main building lies a small, exquisite garden designed by Chinese landscape architect Tan Xin (1938–2024). Though modest in size, it captures the essence of Chinese landscape design. Tan cleverly borrowed the mountains, springs, whispering pines and red leaves of Fragrant Hills as a backdrop, weaving them together with the changing scenery of the four seasons to create 18 scenic spots rich in both aesthetic and literary appeal.

The scenery in this garden changes

with the four seasons, becoming especially magnificent in autumn. Around Liuhua Pool at its centre stand ancient pines, cypresses and two 300-year-old ginkgoes. At the height of autumn, the pines remain emerald green, the maple leaves blaze fiery red and the ginkgoes shimmer with gold. In a corner on the west side of the pool, dozens of red carp swim beneath the surface. As the fish glide through the water, their ripples contrast with the stillness of the unusual rock formations, creating the dynamic yet tranquil scene known as “Golden Scales Playing in the Waves.”

The most distinctive feature is the “tree of three shadows.” When designing the hotel, I.M. Pei drew on Suzhou architectural style and boldly incorporated a white wall more than 10 metres high. Tan Xin paired this wall with a clear pool and a Chinese pine. Under the warm sun on a clear day, the tree casts shadows on the wall and ground while its reflection appears in the water, the three images complementing one another and bringing the white wall to

life. This distinctive scene has made the Fragrant Hill Hotel a popular spot for autumn photography in Beijing.

Splendid Autumn Colours Paint the Sky

Beijing’s autumn colours are captured in every vibrant leaf. Since 2002, Beijing has carried out a colourful tree species afforestation project where the suburban plains meet the mountains, planting more than 266.67 square kilometres of colourful foliage forests. More than 20 years later, these forests have matured into vast, continuous stretches of brilliant autumn colour.

For autumn scenery in a forest park, the closest option is Olympic Forest Park within the city. From late October to late November, thousands of *mu* (one *mu* is approximately 666.67 square metres) of colourful foliage gradually take on their autumn hues. The first to welcome the season are the sumac trees on Yangshan Hill in the South Park, setting the forest ablaze with colour. Close behind,

ginkgoes, Amur maples, ash trees and dawn redwoods scattered throughout the park don their brilliant autumn colours. The most dreamlike scenery lies in the North Park, where vast swathes of pink muhly grass bloom like soft pink clouds, spreading across the landscape like rosy brocade.

Over 400,000 trees line both banks of the Grand Canal Forest Park in Tongzhou District. When autumn arrives, the red leaves of smoke trees and maples, together with the yellow leaves of ginkgoes, drift to the ground, forming a colourful blanket. Looking along the canal, the autumn scenery on both banks is reflected in the river, adding a touch of tranquillity. Here, visitors can enjoy not only the bright autumn scenery but also the “wind-swept reed marshes” wetland landscape, which recreates the canal scenery of the past. Today, the wetlands along the canal are filled with endless reeds, giving them a wild charm. Wooden boardwalks wind among the reeds, with viewing platforms built by the water. Immersed in the landscape, visitors can





▲ Colourful foliage frames the stone steles at Baiwang Mountain Forest Park

appreciate another kind of autumn beauty, occasionally spotting a few egrets in flight that, together with the withered lotus on the water, create an elegant autumn scene.

Baiwangshan (Baiwang Mountain) Forest Park lies 3 kilometres northwest of the Summer Palace, at the easternmost end of the Western Hills scenic area, making it the closest place to the city centre for viewing red leaves. According to folk legend, during the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127), the legendary heroine She Saihua (commonly known as Dowager She) climbed the mountain to watch her son Yang Liulang battle the Liao (AD 916–1125) army, hence its other name, Wang'er Mountain (Mountain of Looking at the Son). Baiwang Mountain's colourful forests consist mainly of autumn foliage trees such as Amur maples, smoke trees and sumacs. Because the mountain lies on the shady side of the Western Hills, temperatures are lower and frost arrives earlier. After the first frost, the leaves turn red one after another, making this one of the capital's most beautiful spots for viewing autumn foliage.

There are two excellent places to admire red leaves at Baiwang Mountain: the Friendship Pavilion, where open woodland and gentle slopes create the feeling of being immersed in a red mist, and Lanfeng Pavilion at the summit. From here, looking west towards the overlapping peaks of the Taihang Mountains, the forests appear completely drenched in colour, like a raging flame. On the nearby slopes, brilliant red leaves contrast with green pines, making the

▼ A tourist in *hanfu* dances gracefully under ginkgo trees



autumn colours appear even more vivid.

To enjoy Beijing's deep autumn scenery, follow the trail of colourful leaves into the suburbs. Pofeng Ridge in Zhoukoudian Town, Fangshan District, is the largest concentration of wild smoke trees in North China, boasting one of the region's most spectacular mountain landscapes of red foliage. The mountains here are gentle, with trees rising and falling with the terrain. Because temperatures are slightly lower than in the urban area, frost arrives earlier. After the first frost, the smoke tree leaves gradually change from yellow to orange and then from orange to red, shifting layer by layer to create a magnificent display of autumn colour.

There are two popular spots for admiring and photographing the red leaves at Pofeng Ridge: the Yingzuiyan (Eagle's Beak Rock) viewing platform at the peak, which overlooks the entire red-leaf valley, and Qiufeng Pavilion halfway up the mountain, where the staggered steps provide a natural frame for the scenery. Large swathes of crimson and purplish-red foliage intermingle across the mountainside, while rolling ridges in the distance stretch towards the horizon. Whether stopping to admire the scenery or take photos, visitors can feel immersed in an ocean of red leaves.

Chinese literati have historically harboured a sense of sorrow towards autumn. Though autumn is a colourful season, some people are particularly drawn to the tranquillity of reeds and withered lotus. Reed flowers are among the most distinctive sights of autumn, and the ancients left behind many beautiful verses expressing their fondness for them.

In Beijing, the reed flowers at Taoranting Park form one of the capital's distinctive autumn sights. As early as the Qing Dynasty, reeds grew here in dense clusters, lending the area a wild, natural charm. The scenic areas around Huxin Pavilion and Fengyutongzhou Pavilion contain more than 2,000 square metres of reeds. Whenever the autumn wind brings



▲ A bird's eye view of Hongluo Temple amid colourful autumn foliage

cooler air, the silver-grey reed plumes sway gently in the breeze, shimmering beneath the warm autumn sun.

As the city enters late autumn, the reeds in Yuanmingyuan Ruins Park also reach their best viewing period. Water covers about a third of the park, and graceful reeds can often be seen along the lakeshores. When their flowers bloom, they sway in the wind, appearing especially ethereal. Around Yulinglong Hall, Shizi Grove and the Fuhai scenic area, this scenery can last until December. Across the lake, withered lotus stems take on varied forms, complementing the continuous reed marshes along the shore. At sunset, warm golden light pours down, edging the reeds in gold.

It mingles with the deep brown of the withered lotus, the deep blue of the lake and the orange-yellow sky, creating a transcendent scene with a clear, cool and distinctive charm. This natural scenery within the imperial garden, with its quiet yet profound power, evokes the beautiful sentiment that "autumn days surpass spring mornings."

Autumn in Beijing is a vibrant scroll painted by sunlight, blue skies and colourful leaves. Nature generously splashes its pigments across the landscape, adorning the ancient capital with a rich and varied beauty. Such captivating autumn scenery makes it easy to understand why people become so deeply attached to the season.

Autumn Unfolds in a Series of Wonderful Shows

Text by Zhang Yan Photos by Tong Tianyi, Zhang Xin, Zhang You, Wang Jianzhong, Zhao Shuhua, Gong Yuexian

Autumn in Beijing invites people to step outside and enjoy its pleasant weather.

Each of the city's four seasons has its own distinct character. Summer's heat drives Beijingers to seek shade and cool relief, while the bitter cold of winter calls for heavy clothing. Autumn, however, offers an ideal balance of pleasant temperatures and sunshine. Beijingers cherish this fleeting season with particular enthusiasm. From traditional tea tastings and moon viewing to modern pursuits like "city walks," cycling and themed markets, the ways people enjoy autumn are constantly evolving. While the clear, bright backdrop remains unchanged, the methods by which residents make the most of this time are quietly changing.

Beijingers bring vibrancy and colour to each autumn.



Listening to the Rhythm of Autumn in the City

Autumn is Beijing's most comfortable season. The clear, refreshing air and pleasant temperatures encourage residents to venture outdoors. This mild weather also brings the city's performing arts scene to life. Performances take place at venues across the capital, from prestigious institutions such as the National Centre for the Performing Arts, the Beijing People's Art Theatre and the National Theatre of China to cultural hubs like the Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre and the Beijing Performing Arts Centre, as well as historic venues such as Zhengyi Temple Theatre. Whether it's a drama, traditional Chinese opera, musical, dance drama or symphony, attending a performance is an excellent way to experience the city.

The Beijing Performance Season, an annual autumn tradition, has become a defining feature of the city's cultural landscape. In recent years, the event has expanded to include a wider variety of performances across more areas of the city. Alongside high-quality dramas and traditional Chinese operas, the programme now features international productions, avant-garde works and university showcases. The 2025 season brought together over 80 organisations, presenting 446 performances across more than 30 theatres. New venues such as the Drum Tower West Theatre and the Star Theatres have also joined the festival, extending Beijing's performing arts scene beyond major theatres into local neighbourhoods and public spaces.

The Beijing Performance Season returns in 2026 for its fifth year, with significant enhancements. Under the theme "Unveiling the World and Gathering Plays," the International Drama Performance Season marks the first large-scale showcase of global theatrical works since the Beijing Performance Season began. The festival will feature 120 productions from over 20 countries and regions, spanning more than 10 art forms, including drama, musicals, opera, traditional Chinese opera and puppetry. Notably, 18 productions will have their national premieres, 12 will debut in



▲ A still from *The Marriage of Figaro* at the National Centre for the Performing Arts



▲ A Silk Road Influencers' Beijing Tour event at the Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre

China and 24 will be staged in Beijing for the first time. The impressive lineup includes renowned works such as *Chicago*, *The Magic Flute* and *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*.

The true appeal of the event lies not only in the diversity of the performing arts but also in the map it creates of Beijing's theatrical landscape. This guide reveals

that theatres are far from isolated cultural landmarks; rather, they have long been woven into the fabric of the city's urban life.

Experience an opera at the National Centre for the Performing Arts, enjoy a drama by the Beijing People's Art Theatre at the Capital Theatre, catch a musical at the Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre or step inside the Zhengyi Temple Theatre for a

traditional performance. Each venue has a unique character that reflects a distinct facet of Beijing's urban culture. For those familiar with the city, choosing a theatre production can also become an autumn sightseeing experience. Moreover, modern theatregoers are rarely satisfied with simply taking their seats and waiting for the curtain to rise. Recent years have seen a steady increase in innovative performance spaces across Beijing, blurring the traditional boundaries between theatres, commercial districts, streets and cultural tourism zones. The stage now extends into the city itself, transforming Beijing into a vast performance space.

Autumn in Beijing is enriched by dramatic narratives, while music fills the season with a rich variety of sounds. Classical music enthusiasts can attend world-class concerts at renowned venues including the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing Concert Hall and Forbidden City Concert Hall. Those who appreciate both visual and auditory artistry can explore the melodious worlds of opera and musical theatre. However, Beijing's autumn music scene extends far beyond traditional concert halls. Just as theatrical performances spill into historic alleys, local communities and rooftop terraces, musical events frequently move from indoor stages to open lawns



▲ A performance at Beijing Concert Hall

and riverbanks. In these outdoor settings, music takes on a completely different character. Lush green spaces, gentle breezes and dynamic performances combine to create a festival atmosphere, transforming a simple concert into a social gathering and a weekend retreat.

Taking place in October, the 29th Beijing Music Festival delivers a breathtaking auditory feast for the season. Between October 9 and 20, nearly 700 artists and

9 acclaimed orchestras from 32 countries converged on the capital to showcase opera, symphony, chamber music and innovative cross-genre interpretations. Marking the 270th anniversary of Mozart's birth, the organisers focus on the composer's masterpieces as a central theme throughout the event. Even more compelling is the festival's initiative entitled "Travelling with Music," which seeks to forge deeper connections between musical performances and the city's urban landscape, cultural tourism and commercial sectors.

At Central Green Forest Park, located in Tongzhou District, the Beijing Grand Canal Music Festival provides another wonderful option for enjoying music. This vibrant musical celebration features an array of genres popular among younger generations, including rap, pop and rock, while also offering a variety of leisure activities. Attendees can enjoy energetic musical performances alongside food and beverage stalls, bustling markets and picturesque backdrops for social media photos, together creating a unique cultural and leisure space that combines metropolitan flair with everyday charm. Aside from enjoying the music, visitors are encouraged to stroll around, sip coffee and browse the market stalls between sets. Ultimately, the event evolves into a

▼ Dongsi Hutong Museum



comprehensive urban leisure experience.

Attending theatrical performances and enjoying live music are no longer formal cultural outings that require careful planning; instead, they have become an integral part of autumn life for Beijingers, whether that means catching a play on a Friday evening or attending a concert on a Saturday afternoon. Once the curtain falls, theatregoers can continue their evening with a leisurely stroll through the surrounding streets. Although the auditorium lights may have dimmed, the capital's vibrant nightlife is only just beginning.

Finding the City's Best Autumn Views

In recent years, exploring urban areas on foot has emerged as a favourite pastime among young people eager to rediscover their surroundings. In Beijing, however, this style of sightseeing is hardly a new concept. The capital boasts a labyrinth of traditional alleyways, courtyards of all sizes and vibrant community spaces tucked away in its historic neighbourhoods, making the old city particularly well suited to exploration on foot. Indeed, these ancient lanes offer some of the finest walking experiences in autumn.

Dongsi makes an ideal starting point for an autumnal stroll through the historic alleyways, retaining an authentic community atmosphere where neighbourhood schools stand side by side with newly opened coffee shops. As autumn arrives, the ancient trees lining the lanes turn vibrant shades of gold and crimson, lending the narrow streets an air of peace and tranquillity. Wandering along historic alleys such as Dongsi Santiao, Sitiao and Wutiao, visitors might spot lazy cats dozing in the sunshine on tiled roofs or local residents engaged in casual conversation. The relentless hustle and bustle of city traffic gradually fades away, replaced by the traditional rhythms of everyday life in old Beijing. Tucked away within these neighbourhoods, the Dongsi Hutong Museum and the Shijia Hutong Museum preserve a wealth of local history and heritage. These alleyways are far more than mere architectural relics of historical



▲ Intangible cultural heritage exhibits at a shop in Liulichang

significance; they continue to serve as vibrant spaces where local residents live out their daily lives.

Heading west towards Qianmen, visitors will discover the areas surrounding Yangmeizhu Xiejie and Liulichang. Liulichang, historically celebrated as a centre of scholarly pursuits in the capital, remains deeply rooted in traditional arts, including rare books, the four treasures of the study, antiques, calligraphy and fine paintings. To this day, the enduring legacy of these cultural traditions is evident in time-honoured establishments such as Yidege and Rongbaozhai. Meanwhile, Yangmeizhu Xiejie draws visitors with its rich literary heritage, having been home to numerous scholars and writers over the centuries. For instance, Courtyard 25 once housed Liang Shizheng (1697–1763), a prominent grand secretary during the Qianlong era (1736–1796), while Courtyard 61 became the first Beijing residence of the renowned author Shen Congwen (1902–1988). Other notable historical figures who lived in the vicinity include the master brush-maker Dai Yuexuan (1880–1959), the celebrated Peking Opera performer Yang Xiaolou (1878–1938) and the legendary Pingju Opera artist Xin Fengxia (1927–1998). Drawing on this unique cultural atmosphere, Yangmeizhu Xiejie is now lined



▲ International visitors at Rongbaozhai Art Gallery

with creative boutiques and independent bookshops. Whenever visitors grow tired from exploring the alleyway, they can easily step inside one of these establishments to browse for hidden treasures.

To infuse this autumn walk with youthful energy, visitors can make their way from the former Imperial Academy along Guozijian Street towards Wudaoying. With decorative archways and crimson walls, Guozijian Street retains the dignified

solemnity befitting its history as a prestigious centre of higher learning. Yet, upon turning the corner, visitors are greeted by the vibrant atmosphere of Wudaoying Hutong, where coffee shops, international eateries, unique boutiques, live music venues and creative spaces offer a wealth of experiences. For many young people, this seamless blend of the ancient and the modern constitutes the greatest appeal of Beijing's alleyways. Rather than losing their historic character to the demands of contemporary life, these neighbourhoods have managed to preserve their original charm while brimming with renewed vitality.

There is little need for a rigid itinerary when exploring Beijing's historic alleyways in autumn. Visitors can wander from Dongsi to Shijia Hutong, explore the area between Guozijian and Wudaoying or make their way from Yangmeizhu Xiejie to Liulichang. Along the way, a brilliant ginkgo tree, a cosy coffee shop or a creative design store might unexpectedly become the highlight of the excursion. Enjoying autumn in the capital does not require travelling to distant destinations. Simply stepping into a quiet lane and spending a leisurely afternoon there can provide all the fulfilment one could wish for.

Exploring the City's Autumn Charm

Autumn is the ideal season for cycling. At almost any time and in nearly any location, riders can simply unlock a shared bicycle and set off along the capital's interconnected network of streets. As the wheels turn, cyclists gain a fresh perspective on the city's scenery, discovering sights that might easily go unnoticed during their daily commute.

For a truly authentic introduction to the capital, a cycling journey can begin along Chang'an Avenue. This wide, smooth thoroughfare runs straight through the heart of the city, offering a remarkably straightforward route. Along the way, cyclists pass an array of Beijing's most iconic landmarks, including Tian'anmen Square, the National Centre for the Performing Arts,



▲ Yangmeizhu Xiejie



▲ A hutong food stall

the National Museum and the Fuxingmen area. Together, these sights form a sweeping urban panorama that reflects the capital's distinctive character.

The advantage of cycling along Chang'an Avenue is that riders can choose a route of whatever length suits them. Those with ample time can easily extend their journey by exploring the surrounding streets. Alternatively, anyone eager to enjoy the crisp autumn breeze can opt for a leisurely short ride starting near Jianguomen, following the avenue before turning onto Fuyou, Wenjin and Jingshanqian streets.

Moreover, pedalling a few kilometres (km) along Nanchang and Beichang streets, which run alongside the Forbidden City, offers some of the most quintessential Beijing scenery the capital has to offer.

Cycling along the Beijing Central Axis provides an entirely different perspective of the metropolis. Setting off from Yongdingmen Gate and heading north, cyclists encounter a remarkable sequence of the city's most significant historical landmarks, including the Temple of Heaven, the Altar of Agriculture, Tianqiao, Qianmen and the Bell and Drum Towers. This monumental north-south axis now serves as one of the premier routes for

exploring the historic capital. As they ride, cyclists do more than simply pass by ancient monuments; they also experience firsthand how these enduring structures blend seamlessly with the rhythms of modern urban life.

The journey begins at Yongdingmen Gate Tower on the southern edge of the Central Axis, where travellers can admire the ancient yet resilient cypress trees surrounding the nearby Temple of Heaven. Passing through Tianqiao and Qianmen, riders find themselves immersed in bustling streets lined with time-honoured shops and lively crowds, offering a vivid glimpse of everyday local life. Upon entering the former imperial city, cyclists notice a striking shift in architectural style and colour, as crimson walls, golden tiles, grand gateways and wide boulevards combine to create an unmistakable urban landscape. The true freedom of cycling lies in the ability to pause at a moment's notice, allowing riders to stop whenever a sight catches their attention. Upon reaching Jingshan Park, visitors can park their bicycles and ascend to Wanchun Pavilion. From this elevated



▲ Chengxian Street outside Guozijian

vantage point, they can see how the streets, palaces and rooftops they have just passed form a harmonious whole, bringing the majestic scale of the Beijing Central Axis into breathtaking perspective.

The autumn scenery in Beijing extends far beyond the bustling city centre, with the suburban districts offering an even more

pronounced seasonal atmosphere. Heading north towards the Wenyu River, cyclists are greeted by a breathtaking natural landscape. Situated along the Beijing Grand Canal Cultural Belt, this waterway was once a vital component of the historic canal network that sustained the ancient capital. While the river still flows through the metropolis today,

▼ A field of rapeseed flowers at Wenyu River Park



its banks have been thoughtfully transformed into tranquil spaces where the public can relax, exercise and immerse themselves in nature. With fewer skyscrapers and less traffic than central Beijing, the area provides an ideal environment for cycling, boasting expansive woodlands, lush lawns, serene wetlands and picturesque waterfronts. As autumn arrives, ginkgo, maple, crabapple and hawthorn trees gradually take on vibrant hues, creating a stunning tapestry of golden yellow, orange-red and deep green along the riverbanks. Cyclists gliding past become a charming part of this living landscape. Recently, Wenyu River Park officially opened 8 dedicated green cycling trails totalling 14 km across the Changping Phase II, Chaoyang Phase I and Chaoyang Phase II areas, offering riders even more room to explore. Cruising along the shaded pathways, cyclists occasionally ride close to the water's edge, weave through dense clusters of trees or catch sight of waterfowl resting along the shore. Here, the conveniences of the city remain within easy reach, yet the peaceful openness of the countryside unfolds all around.

Cycling through Beijing takes riders past the grand, orderly expanse of Chang'an Avenue, the rich historical heritage of the Central Axis and the natural tranquillity of the Wenyu River, revealing the many facets of the capital with every turn of the pedals.

Enjoying the Spirit of Autumn in the City

For Beijingers, embracing autumn has always meant far more than simply admiring the red leaves scattered across distant mountains and fields. Thanks to the crisp, refreshing autumn weather, locals love to gather a few friends in a quiet spot, brew a fresh pot of tea and while away half a day. Historically, teahouses, public parks, tranquil pavilions and elevated terraces have served as ideal settings for enjoying this seasonal pastime. Established in 1915, Laijinyuxuan in Zhongshan Park famously served as a vibrant gathering place for prominent figures during the 1920s and 1930s. Leading intellectuals such as Li Dazhao (1889–1927) and Lu Xun (1881–1936) frequented the establishment to sip tea and converse with companions. Following careful restoration, Laijinyuxuan continues to operate as a traditional teahouse today, demonstrating that this cherished custom remains an integral part of autumn life in Beijing.

Nowadays, enjoying autumn is no longer confined to traditional teahouses. In recent years, a wide variety of new venues has emerged across Beijing where people can sit back and take in the autumn scenery. In particular, rooftops and elevated terraces tucked away within hutongs are offering young people a fresh perspective on the city. For instance, the Terrace in the Breeze Project has opened 75 rooftop terraces in succession, transforming previously



▲ Laijinyuxuan at Zhongshan Park



▲ The White Dagoba of Miaoying Temple viewed from the terrace of a nearby coffee shop



▲ A cafe near the White Dagoba of Miaoying Temple

underused spaces into accessible public areas where urban residents can relax and enjoy their surroundings.

These terraces offer a fresh perspective on the capital's autumn scenery. For example, waterfront buildings around Shichahai feature wooden staircases leading to rooftop observation decks. On a crisp autumn afternoon, visitors can enjoy drinks or savour desserts on a terrace, gazing down at pleasure boats drifting across Qianhai Lake or looking up towards the historic eaves of the Bell and Drum Towers. Warm sunlight bathes the grey brick walls, wooden furniture, shimmering lake and surrounding alleyways, all set against the distant urban skyline. Similarly, the neighbourhood surrounding the White Dagoba of Miaoying Temple offers an exceptional setting for enjoying autumn. While a historic pharmacy on Fuchengmennei Street preserves its traditional Chinese character, a contemporary coffee shop right next door exudes a sleek, modern atmosphere. Sitting on its elevated terrace with a hot cup of tea or coffee on a clear autumn day, visitors can admire the striking White Dagoba standing out against the azure sky.

By comparison, brewing tea around a portable stove offers a more modern interpretation of the traditional pastime of sipping tea amidst autumn scenery. The refined scholarly gathering, once characterised by a modest table, a charcoal fire, a simmering pot of tea and simple snacks, has been revived in hutong courtyards, creative art parks and even mountain retreats. After wandering through the alleys near Yonghegong Lama Temple and Guozijian, visitors can easily gather around a stove on a rooftop terrace. Alternatively, they can stroll down Dongsi North Street, where ancient architecture and trendy boutiques intertwine, before finding a quiet courtyard open to the public in which to relax. At the foot of the Great Wall, brewing tea while taking in panoramic views of the valley provides yet another wonderful escape. While traditional teahouses historically emphasised indoor tranquillity, today's younger generations increasingly favour gazing over the grey-

tilled roofs of narrow alleyways or watching the mountain landscape gradually shift from daylight to twilight near the Great Wall. As the tea gently simmers over the charcoal fire and conversation flows freely, Beijing's captivating autumn beauty unfolds in an atmosphere of complete relaxation.

The themed fairs held across Beijing add an extra layer of vibrancy to the city's autumn atmosphere. In recent years, a growing number of themed fairs and cultural festivals, ranging from autumn harvest celebrations in the suburban districts to specialised events centred on bread-making, coffee, craft beer and handicrafts, have transformed seasonal scenery into immersive urban experiences that visitors can actively explore, savour and take home.

The recent launch of the 2026 Beijing Bestseller Book Fair 2.0 offers a unique experience for book lovers. With its simple displays of inventory and slightly imperfect books, the fair invites visitors to discover hidden gems by sifting through piles on the floor. This leisurely approach is ideally suited to a crisp autumn afternoon, encouraging visitors to take their time searching for treasures. Beyond books, interactive exhibitions trace a book's journey from

warehouse to reader. Equally captivating is the Plan B Music and Life Festival at Shouchuang Langyuan (Vintage). Evoking nostalgia with vintage cassette players, black-and-white televisions and faded posters, it explores decades of musical evolution. The festival, themed "Recalling Life Perception," combines performances, exhibitions, fairs and salons, offering young urban residents a blend of music, artistic expression and everyday charm. For culinary delights, festivals such as the Beijing Olympic Forest Park International Carbohydrate Festival, Juicy Taco Fest and Just Right Food Festival offer a taste of the world without leaving the city. Additionally, various vintage and handicraft fairs provide opportunities to discover unique items and treasured collectibles.

Autumn celebrations in ancient times were formal and elaborate. Today, although those traditions have faded, people still cherish the season's beauty. On crisp autumn days, locals and visitors flock to plays, concerts and bustling fairs. They cycle along historic lanes or share tea around a stove. Despite changing customs, the simple pleasure of stepping outdoors to embrace the capital's beautiful autumn scenery and relaxed atmosphere endures.

▼ 2025 Bestseller Book Fair



A Taste of Autumn That Lingers

Text by Ma Kai Photos by Zhang Xin, Shi Jiaying



Autumn in Beijing is practically perfect, save for one thing: it just doesn't last long enough. Its seasonal delicacies are equally fleeting, each with its own brief window. Hesitate for even a moment, and that distinctive, authentic flavour is gone. So locals rush to savour them while they can, creating a lively seasonal food frenzy that captures the true essence of a Beijing autumn better than any picturesque landscape.

Dawn: The Awakening of Autumn Flavours

Beijing's autumn mornings awaken to a distinctive, mellow aroma.

The aroma drifts from a street-side breakfast stall, where *miancha* (literally, "flour tea"), a warm, sesame-topped grain snack, is prepared. Despite its name, it has nothing to do with tea; instead, it is a thick paste slowly simmered from finely ground millet flour. The veteran chef uses a long-handled ladle to pour a steady stream into a coarse porcelain bowl, creating an even base. Then, with remarkable precision, he uses chopsticks to "pull" threads of sesame paste across the surface in dense, concentric circles, finishing with a sprinkle of stir-fried sesame seeds.

There is an unwritten rule for eating *miancha*: no spoons. Instead, diners rotate the bowl and sip directly from the rim. The warm, silky millet paste and rich, savoury sesame instantly awaken the taste buds, while the comforting warmth travels from palms to stomach, warding off the crisp chill of late autumn in northern China.

The perfect companion to *miancha* is a deep-fried dough cake with sugar. The dough is rolled out, slashed down the middle and stretched, with one side coated in thick brown sugar. In the hot oil, the sugar melts and caramelises into a deep amber crust, while the plain side turns fluffy and golden. Each bite combines the chewy softness of the fried dough with the crisp sweetness of caramelised sugar.

If *miancha* and deep-fried dough cakes with sugar seem too heavy, there is another option: millet porridge. A bowl of thick, creamy millet porridge paired with a small dish of *babao* (eight-treasure) pickled vegetables makes a perfect breakfast. The glossy, soy-scented pickles are crisp yet tender, their savoury flavour complementing the mild porridge perfectly.

Both proso and foxtail millet are harvested in autumn, making this the season to enjoy them at their freshest and most fragrant. Drought-resistant

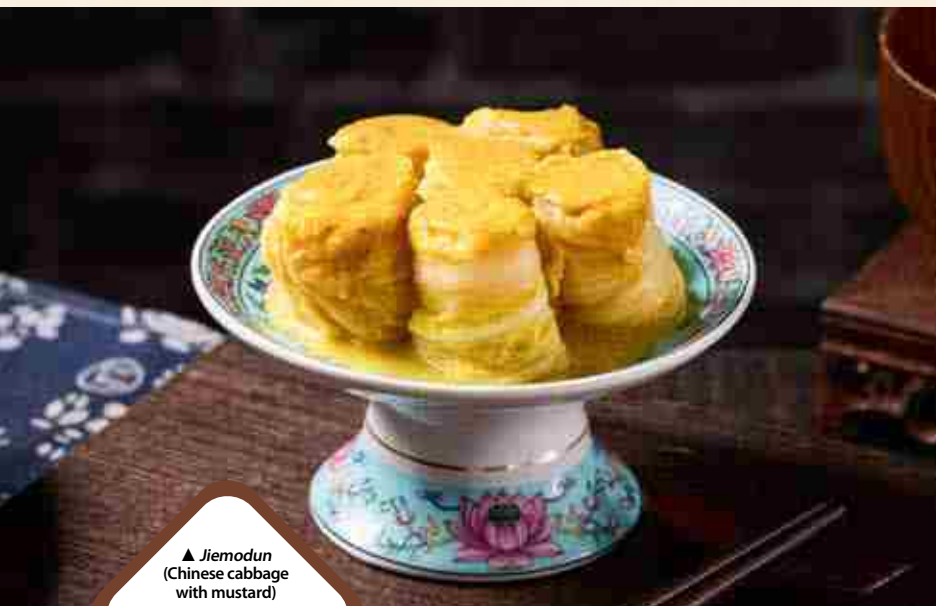
proso millet thrives on the northern hillsides, ripening in the crisp autumn air. In old Beijing, many families grew it at the foot of the city walls. Harvested after the White Dew solar term, the freshly milled flour carries a faint,

distinctive fragrance that signals the arrival of the year's new grain.

Foxtail millet, hulled to produce yellow millet, is even more common. In the villages surrounding Beijing, few autumn sights are more striking than

▼ Seasonal Beijing snacks in autumn





▲ Jiemodun
(Chinese cabbage
with mustard)



▼ Baodu
(quick-blanching
tripe)

vast fields of golden foxtail millet. Harvesting requires care: sickles skim the ground, while the heavy ears are handled gently to keep the plump grains from scattering. After threshing, drying and hulling, bright yellow millet emerges. Porridge made from the new crop develops an exceptionally rich layer of grain oil, with an aroma that aged rice simply cannot match.

Old Beijingers have a deep reverence for the new harvest. Autumn is the season for “putting on autumn fat” and “eating new grain,” with proso flour and new millet among the quintessential foods for “tasting the new.” A dawn visit to a breakfast stall for fresh proso or new millet porridge is about more than flavour; it is about consuming the season itself. As the autumn wind rises and leaves turn yellow, the new grain becomes hot food, and the entire season settles warmly into the belly.

The *babao* pickles served with millet porridge also deserve attention. While recipes vary, old Beijingers swear by the version from Liubiju, a time-honoured pickle and sauce brand. Kohlrabi forms the base, thoroughly pickled before being combined with cucumber, lotus root, cowpeas, shredded ginger and peanuts, then steeped in sweet bean paste. The savoury sauce permeates every ingredient, while the vegetables retain their crisp texture, evoking the distinctive crunch of autumn leaves underfoot.

In earlier times, Liubiju’s pickles were served at the imperial court, gracing the tables of the Forbidden City. Indeed, pickled vegetables have long enjoyed considerable status. *Rites of Zhou* mentions “salted vegetables,” indicating their presence on aristocratic menus more than 3,000 years ago. Alongside sun-drying, salt-pickling was a primary method of preservation, while the distinctive aroma of pickled vegetables ensured their enduring popularity through the ages.

In Beijing, pickled vegetables took deep root. Several of the city’s time-honoured brands specialise in pickles: Liubiju, founded in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and now nearly 500 years old; the southern-style Guixinzhai, with a 290-year history; and Tianyuan Jiangyuan, the youngest of the three at over 150 years old.

Every late autumn, old Beijing families would clear a space for several jars or crocks. In addition



▲ Zhizi barbecue

to storing stacks of cabbage and bundles of radishes, pickling was one of the season’s most skill-intensive household tasks.

The simplest method is quick pickling. Buy a watermelon radish, peel it and rub it with a handful of fine salt. As the salt dissolves and penetrates the flesh, the astringency disappears. Just before serving, drizzle it with freshly fried chilli oil for a perfect accompaniment to porridge or wine. Celery, cucumber strips and coriander stems can be prepared the same way, creating a refreshing side dish in minutes.

A more meticulous method is soy sauce pickling. Dark soy sauce is mixed with water, star anise, Sichuan peppercorns, bay leaves and dried chillies, then boiled and cooled before the vegetables are added. More refined households prepare a thick sauce from yellow soybean paste and sweet bean paste, ideal for delicate ingredients such as peanuts, walnuts and chestnuts.

Another method is “clear pickling.” Coarse salt is boiled into a strong brine and left to cool before whole mustard tubers and white radishes are submerged, with enough liquid to ensure even salting. Leafy vegetables are layered with salt, stacked neatly and pressed beneath a clean stone slab to remove excess moisture.

Today, with higher standards of living, supermarket shelves are lined with ready-to-eat pickles, and the annual pre-winter pickling frenzy has largely faded from home kitchens. Yet pickling for pleasure offers a nostalgic connection to the old way of life. A steaming pot of millet porridge served with homemade pickled potherb mustard, soybeans and sliced mustard tubers warms not only the stomach, but the entire body and soul.

Midday: The Richness of Autumn Flavours

By noon, the water is already boiling in the woks of a *baodu* (quick-blanching tripe) restaurant.

An old Beijing saying goes, “To savour autumn, have *baodu*.” Traditionally, autumn is believed to chill the spleen and stomach, while the stomachs of cattle and sheep are considered exceptionally robust, making *baodu* a seasonal favourite. The tripe is washed, sliced and blanched for mere seconds, producing a crisp, tender texture. Whether it truly nourishes the stomach is debatable, but the craving for that satisfying crunch when autumn arrives is undeniable.

Baodu includes both beef and lamb tripe, with each cut requiring precise preparation. Smooth tripe, omasum, abomasum and leaf tripe all demand

different blanching times; even a second too long or short can ruin the texture. Perfectly cooked *baodu*, dipped in sesame sauce, should crunch like a fresh cucumber—loud enough for the next table to hear.

While *baodu* may be considered the art of blanching, *zhizi* barbecue is the art of grilling. Much of its appeal lies in cooking the meat yourself. A *zhizi* is a round iron griddle with narrow slits that allow charcoal smoke and heat to infuse the meat. Thinly sliced, marinated meat is tossed with leeks and coriander, spread across the griddle and turned with chopsticks. As it sizzles and curls, the aroma of roasting meat fills the room, whetting the appetite.

“Embracing the Moon” is the name given to a special *zhizi* dish for the Mid-Autumn Festival. When the meat is half-cooked, long chopsticks are used to shape it into a ring before an egg is cracked into the centre. As it sets, the yolk resembles a

▼ Osmanthus sticky-rice lotus root



full moon. The egg is then mixed with the meat, adding richness and creating a more tender texture.

After the barbecue, a copper pot takes centre stage once again, this time for chrysanthemum hot pot.

A small purple copper pot sits over charcoal, filled with gently simmering broth. Chrysanthemum hot pot favours delicate flavours, with paper-thin slices of mandarin fish and chicken breast, plump shrimp and softened glass noodles. As the broth boils, chrysanthemum petals are scattered in, floating and curling as they release a fresh floral fragrance into the steam.

By the end of the meal, the flavours of chrysanthemum, fish, chicken, shrimp and noodles have melded together. Ladled into a white porcelain bowl with a few wolfberries, the pale yellow broth is as soothing to the eye as the palate. Each sip brings the freshness of chrysanthemum, followed by the broth's umami and a lingering sweetness, warming the body from within.

The dish is said to have imperial origins. In her later years, Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) reportedly had the imperial kitchen prepare chrysanthemum hot pot every late autumn to mark the season's end. During the Beiyang government era (1912–1928), Tong He Tang's version became the most famous. Today, few restaurants still serve it. When the chrysanthemum arrives at the table, conversation pauses as diners wait for its floral fragrance to rise from the broth.

To cut through the richness of the meat, lotus root makes a perfect palate cleanser. Autumn lotus root is a gift of the water, and the white roots grown in the once-imperial waters of Jade Spring



▲ Dalu (northern Chinese gravy) noodles

Hill are exceptionally tender. In the past, farmers entered the city carrying freshly harvested roots still coated in black mud. Elders consider autumn lotus root particularly nourishing, its plump roots reviving appetites wearied by the summer heat.

Sweet-and-sour lotus root is an elegant dish for entertaining guests. The best choice is freshly dug white lotus root, particularly the “first joint” section, with its ivory skin and snow-white flesh. Sliced thin enough for light to pass through, it is blanched, chilled to preserve its crunch and tossed in a sweet-and-sour sauce with minced ginger to highlight its natural sweetness.

Osmanthus sticky-rice lotus root is a “lady” from Jiangnan (the region south of the Yangtze River) that travelled north via the Grand Canal. Preparing it takes patience: soaked glutinous rice is packed into the lotus root, which is sealed and slow-simmered in brown sugar and osmanthus syrup until soft and sticky. Sliced and drizzled with osmanthus honey, it provides a cool, sweet contrast to a rich meat feast and has become a favourite autumn treat in Beijing homes.

Lotus root grows beneath the water; osmanthus is said to fall from the moon palace. While admiring osmanthus is traditionally a southern custom, its fragrance immediately turns Beijingers' thoughts to food. Beyond osmanthus lotus root, the flower flavours cakes, steamed buns, flaky pastries, glutinous rice jujubes and sauces, filling each with its distinctive scent.

Jiמודun (Chinese cabbage with mustard) offers a sharper contrast. Cabbage segments are briefly blanched, layered in a jar with mustard powder, sugar and rice vinegar,

then sealed for several days. Served pale yellow and dotted with mustard seeds, each bite combines sweet, sour, crisp and spicy flavours, while the mustard's pungency cuts instantly through the richness of the meat.

Another autumn-exclusive cabbage dish is *wenpo* (hawthorn) mixed with Chinese cabbage core. *Wenpo* is blanched, peeled, pitted and simmered with rock sugar into a jelly-like state. The bright red hawthorn shreds are mixed with crisp cabbage core. The contrast of richness and mildness embodies the balance deeply understood on the Beijing dining table.

Dusk: The Mellow Depth of Autumn Flavours

The midday meat feast ends well before sunset. As dusk falls and appetites return, thoughts turn to a single craving: a bowl of noodles.

Beijingers follow seasonal rules for noodles. Summer calls for cold-rinsed *zhajiangmian* (fried sauce noodles), while autumn demands *guortiao* (literally, “pot-lifted”) noodles, served straight from the boiling water. The sauce combines diced meat with yellow soybean and sweet bean

pastes, simmered until glossy. Seasonal garnishes also shift: summer cucumber and bean sprouts give way to blanched cabbage, shredded carrot, celery and soybeans in autumn.

Dalu (northern Chinese gravy) noodles are all about the gravy. Broth is enriched with dried mushrooms, shrimp, lily buds and black fungus, then thickened to coat every strand, with beaten egg added in delicate ribbons. In a perfect bowl, once the noodles are gone, only a thin film of oil remains.

As the autumn chill deepens, *cuan* noodles with lamb take over. *Cuan* refers to briefly blanching thin slices of lamb marinated with leek, ginger, soy sauce and sesame oil, dropping them into the pot as the noodles finish cooking. Within seconds, the lamb is tender and ready to serve with coriander and white pepper, the hot broth, noodles and meat warming diners from within.

After noodles, a cup of tea will soothe the stomach and aid digestion. An old saying goes: “Spring tea is bitter, summer tea astringent; for the best cup, wait until autumn's White Dew.” Though Beijingers favour jasmine tea, autumn evenings call for White Dew tea. Its leaves, matured by summer sun and dew, produce a mellow fragrance and golden liquor. Sipped slowly

after a full meal, it brings the autumn evening to a comfortable close.

Autumn also calls for crabs. Guijie Street now promotes hairy crabs in autumn, bringing another seasonal delicacy to this famous food street.

The tradition is hardly new. Vendors once hawked crabs through the hutongs, while the legendary Zhengyanglou restaurant enjoyed first pick, fattening the crabs on egg wash and sorghum before steaming them plain. Devotees used the “eight crab tools” to extract every morsel, then reassembled the empty shells into butterflies—a feat of patience and artistry enjoyed with warm yellow rice wine.

If you lack crabs or find shelling tedious, there is “mock crab.” Egg whites are stir-fried to resemble crab meat, yolks mimicking roe, finished with a ginger-vinegar dressing. It delivers a surprisingly convincing and elegant illusion, satisfying the craving on an autumn night.

Every flavour on Beijing's autumn table has its appointed time; miss it, and you must wait another year. This urgency sets the city bustling each autumn as people rush to savour every fleeting taste of the season. Only after eating and drinking your fill can you say that autumn has not passed in vain.

▼ Noodles with fried soybean paste

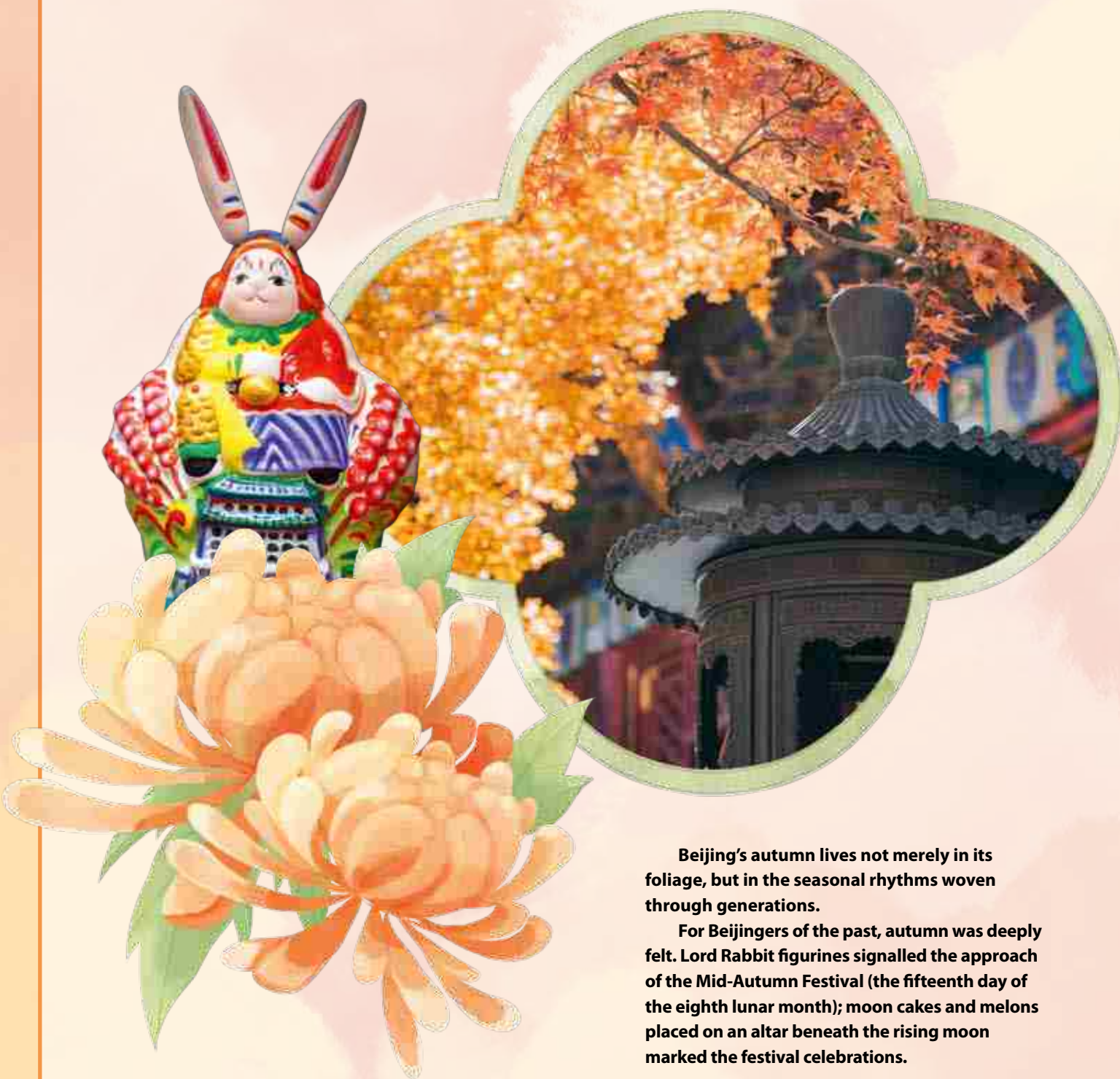


▼ Hairy crabs



Autumn's Wonderful Festivals

Text by Zhang Jian Photos by Zhang Xin, Tong Tianyi, Zhang You, Zhao Shuhua, Jiang Litian, Qu Bowei



Beijing's autumn lives not merely in its foliage, but in the seasonal rhythms woven through generations.

For Beijingers of the past, autumn was deeply felt. Lord Rabbit figurines signalled the approach of the Mid-Autumn Festival (the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month); moon cakes and melons placed on an altar beneath the rising moon marked the festival celebrations.

Then, as westerly breezes strengthened and chrysanthemums flourished, outings to high peaks heralded the Double Ninth Festival (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month), giving seasonal life a rich ritual rhythm.

Customs have evolved: moon worship in courtyard homes has become rare, Lord Rabbit figurines now appear in intangible cultural heritage workshops and creative stores, and climbing high for the Double Ninth Festival has become mountain hiking in sneakers. Chrysanthemums once seen only in princes' mansions now bloom in public parks. Though old rituals fade, the moon still waxes full, flowers return each year and families still gather to enjoy the autumn scenery, keeping the city's autumn spirit alive across generations.



▲ Traditional decorations at a shop on Yangmeizhu Xiejie

A Full Moon Over the Capital, Families Reunited

In old Beijing, the festive atmosphere of the Mid-Autumn Festival arrived early in the streets and markets. From early in the eighth lunar month, Tu'er Ye, or Lord Rabbit figurines, appeared for sale. At Dong'an Market, Qianmen, Dongsì, Xidan and bustling temple fairs, stalls stood in rows. Vendors arranged the figurines in tiers, large ones above and smaller ones below, forming hill-like displays that Beijingers dubbed "Lord Rabbit Hill."

Lord Rabbit's origins are difficult to trace precisely. During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Beijingers honoured the moon with paper depictions of a rabbit standing upright and holding a pestle for grinding herbs. They called this figure the "Jade Rabbit." Over time, it stepped off the paper and took on a new form, moulded in clay, dressed in robes, crowned and seated, becoming a deity worthy of human devotion.

The title "Lord Rabbit" carries a delightful meaning. In Beijing dialect, "lord" conveys both respect and easy familiarity. This was no remote deity: placed on altars for offerings, Lord Rabbit could be taken down for children to play with once the rituals concluded. In the late 1930s, Lao She (1899–1966) wrote an essay on the subject. Having observed clay figurines across Beiping (Beijing), Tianjin, Jinan and Qingdao, he considered Beiping's the finest, praising its Lord Rabbit for "boasting many varieties and meticulous craftsmanship"—some bearing paper flags

on their backs, others shaded by paper umbrellas. Intriguingly, he distinguished them from ordinary figurines: they appeared in markets only a fortnight before the Mid-Autumn Festival, making them, like moon cakes, true "seasonal items." So cherished were these figurines that even children refrained from casually smashing them, instead treating them with considerable ceremony.

Today, Lord Rabbit can still be seen throughout Beijing, but has moved from street stalls to museums, parks, heritage workshops, creative stores and festive markets. Near Qianmen, on Yangmeizhu Xiejie, a small shop sells traditional Lord Rabbit figurines in various sizes, decorated with golden helmets and armour, alongside newer designs in fresh themes and colours. Visitors, including children, can paint their

▼ Attaching ears to a Lord Rabbit figurine





▲ Lord Rabbit figurines at Longfusi

own clay Lord Rabbit, adding details to the brows, eyes and armour. Though no longer central to moon worship, the craft endures, woven into the lives of Beijingers.

Like Lord Rabbit, moon cakes once played a central role in festival offerings. Today they are seasonal treats, but their original role was devotional, with their round shape symbolising reunion. They were also important gifts exchanged between relatives and friends during the festival.

Old Beijing's festival flavours inevitably bring to mind Beijing-style moon cakes. Names such as *zilaihong*, *zilaibai*, *tijiang*

and *fanmao* are familiar, with the first two the most representative. Zhengmingzhai, a time-honoured Qianmen brand, once specialised in them. *Zilaihong*, made with sesame oil dough, bakes to a reddish-brown hue with a deep red stamp on top, revealing rock candy, nuts and fruit shreds within—crisp, aromatic and sweet. *Zilaibai*, made with lard, emerges nearly milky white with a small red dot on top, filled with white sugar and hawthorn for a finer texture. Red and white, these were more than mere varieties, representing a seasonal taste familiar since the eighth



▲ A portrait of Lao She, author of *Lord Rabbit*

lunar month. Although Zhengmingzhai has closed, the cakes are still around, with other time-honoured brands such as Beijing Daoxiangcun continuing the tradition.

Today, beyond Beijing-style varieties, Cantonese, Suzhou and other regional moon cakes can still be found in the capital, adding to the flavours of the festival. Hundreds of years ago, however, Beijing's Mid-Autumn tradition centred not on admiring the moon, but worshipping it. In *Seasonal Customs and Scenery of Yanjing* (expanded edition), Deng Yunxiang (1924–1999) documented the old ritual in detail. After moonrise, his mother placed a tall table by the north room steps, draped it with cloth and laid a red carpet beneath. Offerings included moon-worship paper, a Lord Rabbit figurine, cockscomb flowers, moon cakes, pears, grapes, crabapples and half a watermelon cut into a decorative shape. With candles flickering and incense curling into the autumn night, families bowed to the moon before going indoors to share cakes and fruit. Over time, urban moon worship gradually gave way to moon appreciation. Today, Beijingers may no longer set up offering tables in courtyards, but on the fifteenth night of the eighth lunar month, many still head to Shichahai, Beihai, Lugou Bridge, the Great Wall or a nearby park to admire the moon.

Today, the festival celebrations in Beijing grow ever more varied. The city's Altar of the Moon was once an imperial site where during the Ming and

Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, emperors worshipped the moon, though this solemn rite took place at the Autumnal Equinox rather than the Mid-Autumn Festival. Today, the ancient sacrificial ground is a public park, where moon-related traditions have taken on new forms. Around the festival, lanterns, stalls, riddle contests and performances transform the once-sacred site into a lively gathering place. Where ancestors once burned incense beneath the moonlight, people now stroll among lantern displays and vendor stalls. Young people celebrate through moon-viewing, night walks and exhibitions, while families and friends gather for festive meals. However the customs evolve, people continue to gather beneath the full moon and enjoy the autumn scenery, giving this ancient festival new life with each generation.

Climbing High for Autumn Views During the Double Ninth Festival

After the Mid-Autumn Festival, Beijing's autumn deepens. The foliage begins to change colour, morning and evening breezes carry a chill, yet the



▲ A moon cake decorated with a Jade Rabbit motif



▲ A portrait of Deng Yunxiang, author of *Seasonal Customs and Scenery of Yanjing* (expanded edition)

sky seems ever higher. On the Double Ninth Festival, Beijingers traditionally left the city centre to climb to higher ground, bringing food and drink along for the journey.

Climbing high has long been a cherished custom of the festival. Historical records trace the tradition

as far back as the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 25), with references found in *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital*. Why did the ancients choose to climb high on this particular day? The festival falls at a pivotal point in the changing seasons—the lingering summer heat has receded, while winter has yet to arrive. The crisp autumn air creates ideal conditions for outdoor excursions and mountain hikes in the ancient capital. Since antiquity, climbing high during the festival has also carried profound symbolic meaning, serving as a ritual for seeking blessings and warding off misfortune. Over time, the custom expanded to include enjoying the autumn scenery, festive banquets, gatherings with relatives and friends and expressions of longing for distant loved ones. Today, the festival has acquired another important cultural dimension: honouring and respecting the elderly.

▼ *Zilaihong*



By the Ming and Qing dynasties, the festival had become a cherished autumn custom in Beijing. Residents celebrated by wearing dogwood leaves, drinking chrysanthemum wine and enjoying Chongyang (Double Ninth) cakes, while eagerly planning excursions to elevated viewpoints. Since travelling to the outer suburbs was impractical for many, city dwellers sought higher ground closer to home. Those in the northern part of the city frequented Zhenjue Temple, the Earthen City Wall ruins and Diaoyutai. The earthen mounds near the city wall ruins were not particularly high, but from the top, visitors carrying food and drink could admire the mist-shrouded trees around Jimen and the expansive autumn

panorama. The Vajra Throne Platform at Zhenjue Temple offered another vantage point. From its summit, visitors could follow the winding river with their eyes until it disappeared towards the distant Western Hills.

For residents in the south, the festival offered a different set of destinations: Tianning Temple, Fazang Temple, Yandun and Taoranting were all popular haunts. Where natural hills were lacking, pagodas accommodated climbers; where pagodas were absent, tall platforms sufficed. The liveliest destination was Tianning Temple, which uniquely combined two prized festival activities—climbing high and admiring chrysanthemums. When the autumn blooms unfurled, visitors

streamed in to climb and admire the floral displays, creating such a vibrant scene that contemporaries spoke of “all the city’s carriages and horses” converging there. This beloved tradition persisted well into the late Qing and early Republic of China period (1912–1949), when Beijingers still flocked to Tianning Temple to climb its pagoda and admire the chrysanthemums.

Climbing high during the festival was not limited to ordinary people. In fact, the imperial family also observed the tradition. During the Ming Dynasty, emperors would ascend Wansui Hill, now known as Jingshan Hill. Liu Ruoyu recorded the imperial custom in *Zhuozhong Zhi*: “On the first day of the ninth lunar month, the imperial palace begins serving flower cakes; on the fourth day, the empress, imperial concubines and their eunuchs change into chrysanthemum-patterned robes; on the ninth day, the emperor climbs Wansui Hill and drinks chrysanthemum wine.” Today, from the summit of Jingshan Hill, visitors can see the rooftops of the Forbidden City spread out below, with the Drum Tower and Western Hills in the distance. This is Beijing, a city that never stops growing.

Beijingers’ autumn custom of “climbing high” endures, even as the traditional destinations have changed. During the festival, suburban destinations such as Fragrant Hills, Badachu and the Great Wall buzz with activity. Locals and visitors set out in hiking gear to enjoy the autumn colours, track their progress on sports apps or take part in outdoor activities such as cycling and off-road adventures.

Today, the festival celebrations may seem far removed from those of centuries past, yet the tradition remains unbroken. People still take autumn’s finest scenery as their cue to venture outdoors, seeking elevated spots to enjoy the views and spend time with family and friends. What have changed are the trappings of the outing. Baskets of food have been replaced by backpacks and sneakers, and the routes themselves have changed as well. Yet



▲ Zhenjue Temple (Five-Pagoda Temple)

the essential ritual of climbing high and gazing into the distance still belongs, unmistakably, to autumn in Beijing.

Beyond the custom of climbing high, other traditions of the festival have also endured, most notably the enjoyment of Chongyang cakes. In earlier times, people enjoyed this delicacy during the festival, and its name carries a clever homophone in Chinese, as “cake” sounds like the word for “height.” Just as ascending high symbolises progress, eating the cake expresses a sincere wish for advancement, peace and good fortune. In modern times, however, the cake has taken on a richer significance tied to honouring the elderly. Each year, as the festival draws near, Beijing Daoxiangcun enters its peak sales season for this traditional treat. Once merely a seasonal food, Chongyang cake now serves as a heartfelt way of expressing gratitude and affection. While it may not be an extravagant gift, its faithful appearance each year on this special day transforms the idea of “respecting the elderly” into something tangible—a visit made, time spent together and genuine care shown.



▲ Flower cakes of the Double Ninth Festival

Chrysanthemums Scent the Air, Flowers Keep Blooming

In addition to climbing high, admiring chrysanthemums is another cherished tradition of the Double Ninth Festival.

Beijingers have long cultivated and admired chrysanthemums. In earlier times, as soon as autumn arrived, flowers

grown in places such as Fengtai gradually made their way into the city. Yellow, white, purple and red blooms filled courtyard residences, teahouses and taverns. Some families would arrange hundreds of pots in layers, creating a display resembling a small hill. Known as “Chrysanthemum Hill,” or “Nine-Flower Hill,” it was much like the large, three-dimensional flowerbeds seen at today’s chrysanthemum

▼ Tianning Temple Pagoda under the moonlight





▲ A giant cat-shaped plant sculpture at Ritan Park

exhibitions. During the Qing Dynasty, Prince Ning Hongjiao was a celebrated chrysanthemum enthusiast in the capital. He established a garden within his residence, introduced southern varieties and even experimented with grafting them onto wormwood. When autumn arrived, the garden burst into a brilliant array of colours. He would host banquets amid the blooms, inviting scholars and notable figures to drink, admire the flowers and compose poetry together. Over time, more than 100 varieties were selected from the garden. The painter Wang Yange was commissioned to capture them in detailed sketches, and his work, featuring 120 varieties, was compiled into the *Chrysanthemum Manual*.

While ordinary Beijingers could not simply enter a prince's residence, they still had their own places to admire chrysanthemums. In addition to Tianning Temple, Fayuan Temple was also renowned for its flowers. With courtyards

filled with blooms and trees, the temple was open to all. As a result, visiting in late autumn, whether to admire the flowers, take a leisurely stroll or catch up with acquaintances, became a favourite seasonal outing for many Beijingers.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, Beijing produced another devoted chrysanthemum enthusiast, Liu Wenjia. He built a residence and garden known as Jie Garden beside Jingye Lake at the foot of the northern city wall. He consequently became known as the "Old Man of Jie Garden." He was also called "Chrysanthemum Liu," a name once widely known throughout Beijing. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the garden contained more than 1,000 varieties of chrysanthemums, making it a remarkable sight. Each autumn, as the flowers burst into bloom, growing numbers of visitors came to admire them. In 1960, at the age of 76, Liu donated the garden to the state.

A municipal forestry and parks agency then transferred the garden's extensive chrysanthemum collection and cultivation methods to Beihai Park. From that point onward, the park established a dedicated team and continued to cultivate and preserve these autumn flowers across successive generations.

In Beijing, fine chrysanthemums were initially found only in the homes of senior officials and aristocrats. Over time, temples opened their gates to the general public, offering places where ordinary residents could gather to enjoy the blooms. Later, prized varieties and cultivation methods from private gardens gradually found their way into the city's public parks. What began as a refined pastime for a small elite evolved into a beloved autumn tradition enjoyed by people across the city. Blooming even after the first frost, the chrysanthemum, with its symbolism of purity and resilience, became a fitting emblem of Beijing's late autumn character.

In 1987, the chrysanthemum and the *yueji*, or Chinese rose, were jointly designated as the city flowers of Beijing.

In autumn, Beijingers have their own cherished map of places to enjoy chrysanthemums. Parks such as Beihai, the Temple of Heaven and Taoranting, along with the National Botanical Garden and Flower Port, all burst into bloom during the season. Traditional favourites, newly developed varieties and artistic forms such as Single-stemmed, Daliju, Cliff and Pagoda-shaped Chrysanthemums can all be admired side by side. The grand

"flower hills" and "flower towers" that once belonged exclusively to imperial gardens now brighten public parks, making these spectacular displays accessible to everyone. At the 2025 Beijing Chrysanthemum Culture Festival, the main venue in Beihai Park showcased more than 40,000 potted chrysanthemums representing over 600 varieties. These stunning displays stretched through the park's classical landscapes, creating a colourful autumn spectacle. Today, visitors who once strolled among the flowers with their parents return with children of their

own, eager to share the experience with another generation. They may not know the name of every flower, but they make the journey each autumn simply to admire the colours, take photographs and share their favourite blooms on social media. This seemingly simple annual ritual has itself become a heartfelt tradition passed from one generation to the next.

At the Temple of Heaven Park, the chrysanthemum show continues Beijingers' cherished autumn tradition. Traditional favourites and newly cultivated varieties surround the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, while red walls, blue tiles and colourful potted blooms come together to create a picturesque autumn scene.

A city's culture lives not only in its architecture and ancient texts, but also in its gardening traditions and seasonal rituals. Two or three centuries ago, teahouses and taverns in Beijing hung notices outside their doors announcing the arrival of a new "chrysanthemum hill" and inviting passers-by to admire it. Today, people simply use their smartphones to find where the blooms are at their best, then gather friends for an exhibition at Beihai, the Temple of Heaven or the National Botanical Garden. After enjoying the flowers, visitors might stop for a drink, buy a cultural keepsake and share their photos on social media. The way people are drawn to the flowers has changed, yet the joy of admiring them has only grown livelier. This may be the essence of seasonal customs. Rather than a rigid passage from past to present, they are living traditions that, despite changing times, still bring people together to enjoy the same pleasures in the same season.

Every year, the Mid-Autumn Festival still brings thoughts of reunion. During the Double Ninth Festival, people climb high to gaze into the distance. As late autumn arrives, chrysanthemums burst into bloom, drawing flower lovers from across the city. The seasons follow their timeless rhythm, and autumn reveals some of its finest beauty in Beijing.

▼ An international visitor admiring chrysanthemums at Beihai Park



▼ A chrysanthemum exhibition at Ritan Park



A Trendy New Look for Lord Rabbit

Text by Gao Yuan Photos by Tong Tianyi



▲ Hu Pengfei

A handful of clay and a palette of pigments are all that is needed to bring a figurine of Lord Rabbit, also known as Tu'er Ye, to life—solemn yet playful, dignified yet endearing. According to legend, Lord Rabbit is Beijing's tutelary deity, bringing peace and auspiciousness to the mortal realm. During the Mid-Autumn Festival, Beijingers traditionally "invite" a Lord Rabbit into their homes to pray for safety, or give one to their loved ones as a token of good fortune.

For Hu Pengfei, founder of Jitufang, a Beijing-based studio producing Lord Rabbit figurines, this tradition holds deep personal meaning. For more than a decade, he and his team have crafted hundreds of figurines in a wide variety of shapes and sizes each year for the Mid-Autumn Festival exhibition at the Beijing Folklore Museum.

Inside Jitufang's showroom in Songzhuang, Tongzhou District, a massive display cabinet spans an entire wall, showcasing more than 100 Lord Rabbit figurines. Among them are solemn traditional figures, newer designs with upturned, smiling mouths, trendy creations incorporating lion-dance elements and unpainted raw clay figurines.

A major highlight of this journey came at the 2026 Longfu Temple Spring Festival Market, where Hu introduced Lord Rabbit to Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi personally attached a flag bearing the *fu* (blessing) character to the figurine—a crowning achievement for Hu and a profound source of encouragement for all inheritors of intangible cultural heritage.

Hu hails from Liuying Village in

Fengxiang, Shaanxi Province, a renowned centre of folk art and the birthplace of Fengxiang clay sculpture. Surrounded by this rich artistic tradition, he developed a passion for painted clay figurines at an early age. As a teenager, he travelled across several provinces with veteran artisans, sculpting Buddha statues for temples and painting ancient architecture. This rigorous training laid a strong foundation for Hu's later work, shaping his distinctive aesthetic and use of colour. In 2000, equipped with his family's traditional craftsmanship, Hu moved to Beijing. He initially set up a stall at Panjiayuan Antique Market, where he met a traditional Beijing Lord Rabbit figurine maker surnamed Liang, beginning his lifelong connection with the craft.

Hu did not set out with a preconceived plan to modernise Lord Rabbit figurines, but he had a clear vision for how they could evolve. Convinced that today's youth would embrace the figurines if presented in the right way, he began experimenting with new designs. Knowing that younger consumers favour cute, endearing aesthetics, he made his rabbits rounder and gave them more cheerful expressions. Recognising their preference for bright colours, he also revamped the palette, making it richer and more vibrant so the figurines would catch young shoppers' eyes as auspicious gifts.

The positive market response gave Hu the confidence to persevere. "It is precisely



▲ Creative Lord Rabbit figurines

because so many young people loved our products that we were able to keep going," he recalls. In 2007, he registered the "Jitufang" brand, evolving from an independent artisan into the head of his own brand. Throughout this journey, Hu has remained committed to a core philosophy: respecting tradition while appealing to contemporary tastes. "We create folk art for the public," he says. "It is the art of the people, and what matters most is that ordinary people love it."

Hu's Lord Rabbit figurines fall into three main categories. The first comprises classic old-Beijing styles—figures riding black tigers, white elephants or kylin, dressed in armour and red capes, evoking nostalgic memories of Mid-Autumn Festivals past.

The second category retains traditional silhouettes while adding a more festive charm. Traditional Lord Rabbit figurines typically wear solemn, stoic expressions, reflecting the dignified reserve of immortals, but Hu's figures radiate warmth, their narrow eyes curving into gentle smiles. The third category embraces entirely avant-garde designs, including chubby fortune-bringing rabbits, rabbits playing with golden cicadas, riding on magical gourds.

Hu has also introduced innovations in craftsmanship and colour. He mixes cotton fibres into the clay to prevent cracking, applies a protective coating for a glossier finish and incorporates fluorescent pigments and glitter to create a dazzling effect. While some credit Hu as one of the main driving forces behind Lord Rabbit's return to the public eye, he modestly describes his contribution: "I have simply brought Lord Rabbit out of the museum and back into the community, bridging the gap between this traditional craft and today's youth."

From humble temple fair stalls to the vibrant Longfu Temple markets, and from a traditional folk craft to a modern China-chic symbol, Hu has achieved his goal through the simplest of ideas: creating what people love. Through this unassuming yet profound approach, he has breathed new life into this ancient intangible cultural heritage, weaving it into the everyday lives of modern consumers and creating a vibrant cultural bridge between tradition and the present.

▼ Attaching an eye to a mecha-style Lord Rabbit figurine





▲ Zhang Ying

Endless Blooms

Text by Ma Kai Photos by Zhang Xin

In September, the first autumn breezes sweep through the Summer Palace, gently rippling the surface of Kunming Lake. At Yangyun Pavilion, visitors can climb the steps, pass through a Western-style bell-shaped gate and enter a small square courtyard. In 2022, the Summer Palace's Imperial-Style Flower Arrangement Innovation Studio was established here, alongside the Base for the Protection and Inheritance of Chinese Imperial-Style Flower Arrangement. The flower arrangement team prepares lessons, practises and trains apprentices here daily. Zhang Ying, a senior flower arranger and team member, is a fifth-generation inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage of "Traditional Flower Arrangement."

A Room Full of Cultural Lessons

At the studio, award-winning flower arrangements line one wall, retro court paintings hang above, vases are mounted in a staggered pattern and a bookshelf is crammed with volumes on gardens, flowers, culture and history. Albums showcasing her work and stacks of award certificates fill a nearby desk. When domestic tourists, students and international visitors arrive, Zhang and her colleagues introduce each painting and artwork in turn. Many remark that they never imagined receiving such a cultural lesson within a flower arrangement studio.

Zhang, now 50, speaks with the crisp accent of a native Beijinger. Her studio is filled with objects collected over the years, including a traditional Chinese painting inscribed "*lǚduan jiqing*," serving as a highlight of the team's cultural introduction. Standing before it, she calmly explains *lǚduan*: originally referring to "the tip of a shoe," it later came to denote Lunar New Year's Day, evoking the idea of all the world's beauty converging in a single auspicious moment.

Inscribed with calligraphy by Emperor Qianlong, the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) scroll depicts a bronze vase holding 10 plants, symbolising perfection. Yet as Zhang explained, Chinese flower appreciation goes far beyond aesthetics, with each bloom embodying moral ideals relating to family and country.

Flanking the painting are wall vases, each with a story of its own. Originally known as "sedan chair vases," they accompanied officials on long journeys, holding freshly picked wildflowers as "flower companions." Later, these vessels found their way indoors. These historical details are not the findings of any one individual; rather, they form a shared educational resource developed by Zhang and her team through comparisons of historical records, ancient paintings and furnishings within the Summer Palace.

Having repeatedly entered the Forbidden City to document the floral

displays in its halls, Zhang and her team meticulously recorded the number and form of each vessel. She believes that only by thoroughly understanding this legacy can they confidently share the traditions of imperial-style flower arrangement with the public. Zhang explains that they are also a new generation of specialists dedicated to preserving the Summer Palace.

Zhang spoke of the history of imperial flower arrangement with deep respect, citing "*Hua Jiu Xi*" by Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) scholar Luo Qiu, which describes nine supreme courtesies. These included double curtains, jade vats, engraved pedestals and newly composed poems, honours once bestowed upon meritorious officials and later extended to flowers in full bloom.

Zhang explains, "A properly arranged vase can take most of the day, from admiring the blooms and listening to music to drinking wine and composing poetry." She noted that the ancient Chinese practised horticultural therapy as early as a millennium ago, reflecting both their refined aesthetic sensibilities and profound reverence for nature. She and her team hope one day to bring "*Hua Jiu Xi*" to life as a dynamic programme, showing just how seriously ancient Chinese regarded a single flower.

One of the proudest works of Zhang and her team is "*Jin Xiu Guan Hua*." Here, "*guan*" refers to a rooster's crest, while "*hua*" means flower. The ancients saw five virtues in the rooster: its red comb resembled a scholar-official's hat, symbolising literary virtue; its claws resembled a warrior's sword, representing martial virtue; sharing food with companions embodied benevolence; fearless fighting represented bravery; and crowing faithfully at dawn symbolised diligence. "Personifying animals or plants is what culture is," Zhang says. When praised for weaving culture into her flower arrangements, she waved her hand dismissively: "This wasn't my doing;

the ancient Chinese achieved mastery through a comprehensive study of it. For instance, magnolia, crabapple and peony together express the Chinese people's longing for a better life."

The team has collected more than 300 historical paintings depicting traditional flower arrangements, recreated over 100 imperial-style arrangements and produced more than 1,000 contemporary pieces.

An Artisan Nurtured at the Summer Palace

Zhang doesn't just absorb knowledge from books; she brings what she learns to life, personally recreating traditional works and developing innovations of her own.

Zhang's main job is plant protection, inspecting trees, monitoring pests and diseases and pruning branches in the former imperial garden. This daily work also grounds her floral art. As a result, the Summer Palace's green spaces have become a treasure trove where Zhang and her team often go in search of inspiration.

The team members bring a variety of skills to the studio. Creating a single piece requires the members working together, each contributing their expertise in shaping, weaving or selecting seasonal flowers.

Before inserting a single bloom, Zhang asks herself: Which historical record documents this vessel? At what

angle is it depicted in ancient paintings? What did this flower symbolise? Without answers, she refuses to proceed. The same principle guides her colleagues. In 2018, they submitted a proposal for "Research on the Seasonal Styles of Imperial-Style Flower Arrangement and the Regulation of Winter Branch Flowering Periods in the Summer Palace," securing funding from the Beijing Municipal Administration Centre of Parks.



► Replica of "Tribute to the Ancient Capital Beijing"



▲ Flower arrangement created by Zhang Ying

Zhang transforms observations from daily life into floral art through creative parallels. At a national flower expo, she drew inspiration from an imperial-style basket. Unable to find one, she bought a plain lampshade and wrapped it in silk thread until it resembled an imperial treasure. Nearly three months of work produced a golden dried-flower basket that won the expo's first dried-flower gold award and was later permanently preserved by the organisers.

At the 2019 Beijing World Horticultural Exposition, her piece "Prosperity Brought by the Dragon and Phoenix" combined a cloisonné Guanyin vase, Summer Palace magnolia branches, amaryllis, dragon-like deadwood, handmade kite pendants and peacock feathers. Many of her peers felt this approach departed from tradition. However, after consulting numerous ancient paintings, the team confirmed that imperial-style flower arrangements had historically incorporated such

materials. Ultimately, their efforts earned them the grand prize.

"Tribute to the Ancient Capital Beijing" marked the pinnacle of Zhang's work for the Master Artisan Competition. Seeking to distil three millennia of Beijing's history and its eight centuries as a capital into a single floral work, she centred the design on an iconic *huabiao* column, with traditional *dougong* brackets at its structural heart. Metal ribbons embedded with shards of glass and pearls ripple down from the brackets, shimmering and glowing as light falls upon them. This interplay of softness and strength quietly echoes the solemn yet spirited soul of the ancient capital. Her floral palette draws on Beijing's chrysanthemums and roses, intertwined with vivid gloriosa lilies and sculptural succulents at varying heights, weaving warmth and coolness into a cohesive whole. No story of Beijing is told outright, yet through craft alone, Zhang has created a floral homage to the ancient capital. This achievement honours not only Zhang herself but also the Summer Palace as a whole. Without the vessels, flowers and festive traditions of the former imperial garden, such creations would never have been possible.

Overcoming Challenges Together

In 2026, the Summer Palace prepared floral displays for a Chinese New Year exhibition in Madrid. When fresh flowers failed customs inspections, Zhang's team assembled the arrangements in advance, marking each flower's position before shipping and selecting high-quality artificial materials to complement locally sourced fresh flowers. Despite the seven-hour time difference, they provided late-night video guidance, adjusting angles and leaf positions. The imperial-style arrangements added to Madrid's festive atmosphere, and when Spain's Prime Minister visited the Summer Palace on April 12, Zhang's team welcomed him with their floral artistry.

Traditional Chinese culture is an

ocean so vast that even a lifetime of study yields only a handful of pearls. Yet Zhang, who first encountered imperial-style flower arrangement in her thirties, considers herself fortunate to have followed this path ever since.

Zhang's career has been marked by a series of challenges. For the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, her unit sent her for training in flower arrangement. She has devoted herself to the craft ever since.

The Summer Palace sought intangible cultural heritage status for imperial-style flower arrangement. With no precedent to follow, Zhang's team and relevant departments worked together from scratch. In 2023, Imperial-Style Flower Arrangement was added to Haidian District's intangible cultural heritage list despite fierce competition. The announcement brought immense relief to the team. Zhang recalled, "It was all worthwhile. Everyone felt proud and honoured." The recognition went beyond a certificate, granting the craft, long preserved in ancient texts, official status and a new generation of inheritors.

The next challenge came with the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. In late 2021, Zhang's team was tasked with decorating two Olympic hotels and the VIP room at Wukesong Gymnasium within a month, despite limited resources. Drawing on years of experience with peonies, the team developed a dried-flower approach, supplementing scarce supplies with hand-processed branches.

One of the works was to build an arrangement over three metres tall, where balance was critical. Even a slight shift in the two-metre branch could topple it. Working on a raised platform with little room to move, she judged each angle from memory, standing through the night until her legs trembled. When she finished, the hotel's foreign supervisor gave a thumbs-up.

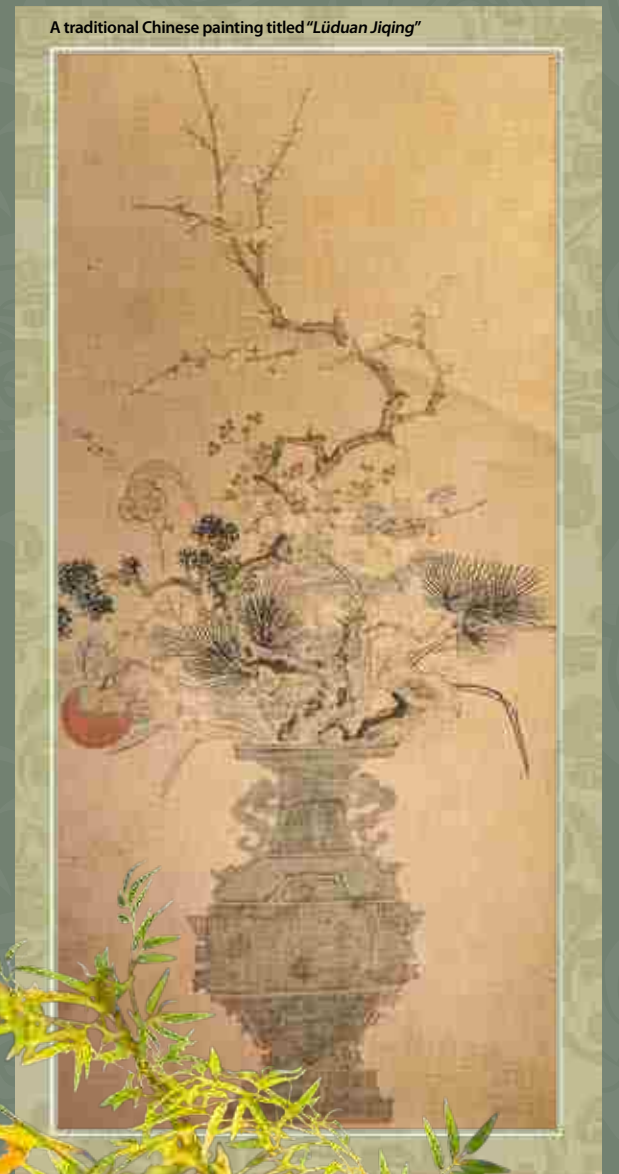
With support from the Summer Palace, Zhang's team has won more than 50 awards in national and municipal competitions, participated in over 10 research projects and received three technology progress awards and five software copyrights.

Recently, Zhang has ventured into another frontier: virtual reality (VR). Through VR headsets, audiences can immerse themselves in imperial-style flower arrangement without fresh blooms or vases.

This represents the Summer Palace's efforts to preserve and pass on the tradition through digital technology. Developed by Zhang's team, the software has also been introduced to schools and museums.

Zhang has passed on her practical expertise to younger colleagues, who have since distinguished themselves in municipal and national competitions. Looking back, she remains most grateful to the Summer Palace. A leader once told her, "What you display for visitors complements the Summer Palace beautifully, and we all appreciate your efforts." She has treasured those words ever since.

Flowers continue to bloom thanks not only to the Summer Palace, its heritage and its people, but also to their collective efforts. One can create a floral arrangement, but preserving a craft requires an entire team.



▲ Zhang Ying's flower arrangement

CAPTURE AUTUMN IN THE CAPITAL WITH BEIJING MAGAZINE

Photos by Tong Tianyi, Zhao Shuhua, Wu Hui

Autumn paints Beijing in vivid hues, transforming the capital into a living masterpiece. In this ancient city, the season brings together the grandeur of imperial gardens, the tranquillity of temples in the Western Hills, the lively atmosphere of urban alleyways and the sweeping waterfront vistas of Beijing's sub-centre.

Join *Beijing* magazine in capturing the capital's most breathtaking autumn scenery, where ancient landmarks and modern cityscapes blend seamlessly.



ROUTE 1 Historic Architecture and Woodlands of the Western Hills

Photography Route: Tanzhe Temple → Dajue Temple → Baiwangshan Forest Park

Recommended Times and Locations: Capture red walls and ancient trees at Tanzhe Temple in the early morning, followed by historic pathways and sweeping eaves at Dajue Temple later in the morning. In the afternoon, photograph centuries-old ginkgo trees against red walls. As evening approaches, head to Baiwangshan Forest Park for vibrant autumn foliage and panoramic city views from the main peak.

Recommended Shooting Techniques: Use a wide-angle lens to capture panoramic views of ancient temple halls, towering trees and surrounding forests. Switch to a telephoto lens to highlight shadows cast on red walls, intricate eaves and colourful foliage across the valleys. Wait quietly and photograph the resident cats from a distance to capture candid moments among the trees.



Photography Tips

Mastering Light and Shadow: Make the most of the golden hours of early morning and late afternoon, when the light is warm and flattering. Avoid the harsh midday sun, and take advantage of the soft, even light on overcast days to photograph historic architecture, flowers and plants.

Botanical and Wildlife Photography: When photographing flowers and wildlife in parks, use a telephoto lens with a shutter speed of at least 1/400s. Shoot quietly from a distance to avoid disturbing small animals, and incorporate autumn flowers to create atmospheric compositions.

Lens Selection: Use a wide-angle lens for sweeping landscapes and architectural panoramas, a medium focal length for documentary-style street photography and intimate garden scenes, and a telephoto lens to isolate subjects from crowds and capture subtle light and shadow, autumn leaves on ancient trees and charming wildlife moments.

ROUTE 2 Imperial and Modern Gardens

Photography Route: Fragrant Hill Hotel → Beihai Park

Recommended Times and Locations: In the morning, capture reflections in the pools, views framed by latticed windows, the interplay of light and shadow on white walls and intricate courtyard details at Fragrant Hill Hotel. In the afternoon, focus on picturesque scenes featuring the red walls of Jingxin Studio and Chanfu Temple in Beihai Park. As evening approaches, photograph the iconic White Dagoba and its serene reflection on the lake.

Recommended Shooting Techniques: Use moon gates and diamond-patterned latticed windows to frame your compositions. Capture panoramic views of the White Dagoba and the long bridge from Yong'an Bridge, then photograph the lake scenery from Wulong Pavilion. For smooth, mirror-like reflections on the water, use a tripod and a neutral density filter to take long-exposure shots.



ROUTE 3 Urban Culture and Landscapes

Photography Route: Wusi Street → Olympic Forest Park

Recommended Times and Locations: In the morning, capture atmospheric shots of the Red Building of Peking University and street life along Wusi Street, focusing on tree shadows against red walls and sightseeing buses in motion. In the afternoon, explore the woodlands and wetlands of Olympic Forest Park, photographing delicate plants and flowers while keeping an eye out for cute cats hiding in the undergrowth. As evening approaches, capture sweeping views of Olympic Lake and its expansive reed beds.

Recommended Shooting Techniques: Use a wide-angle lens to capture panoramic street scenes and documentary-style images of urban life. Switch to a telephoto lens to compress perspective, isolate subjects from crowds and capture details such as autumn leaves and small animals.



ROUTE 4 Rivers, Lakes and Ecology in Beijing's Sub-centre

Photography Route: Grand Canal Forest Park → Central Green Forest Park

Recommended Times and Locations: In the early morning, capture the S-shaped bend of the canal from the Moon Island Observation Deck in Grand Canal Forest Park and reed beds along the west bank. In the afternoon, explore the flower gardens and landscaped grounds of Central Green Forest Park. As evening approaches, capture sweeping panoramic views from the Xingluo Yunjian Observation Deck.

Recommended Shooting Techniques: Use a wide-angle lens to capture the canal's sweeping S-curve and panoramic views of lakeside pavilions and surrounding forests. Switch to a telephoto lens for striking backlit shots of reeds, then use a medium focal length to highlight the intricate details of floral displays.



A Colourful Guide to Autumn Foliage in Beijing

Photos by Zhang Xin, Hu Fei

In Beijing, golden autumn is a colourful relay, gradually unfolding to the rhythm of time. From crimson leaves in the mountains to golden ginkgoes in the city, the scenery's beauty evolves throughout the season. By seeking out its peaceful, off-peak moments, visitors can truly savour the rich layers and colours of autumn.



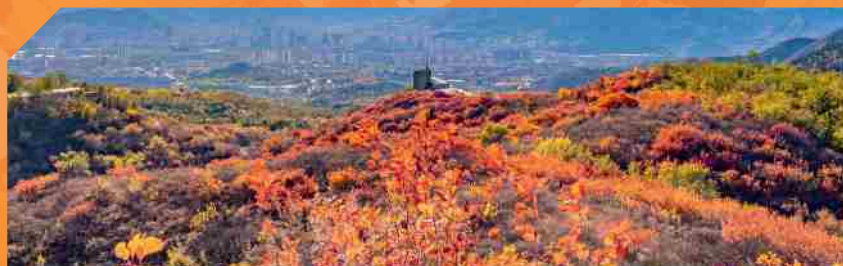
SEPT. 15–OCT. 31 Birch Forests

Attractions
Beiling Mountain, Labagoumen



OCT. 15–NOV. 20 Ginkgoes

Attractions
Ditan Park, Tiantan Park, Zhongshan Park, Yuanmingyuan, Capital Hotel, Olympic Forest Park



OCT. 20–NOV. 10 Smoke Trees

Attractions
Fragrant Hills Park, Pofeng Ridge, Badachu Park, Western Hills National Forest Park, Wucui Qianshan



OCT. 25–NOV. 15 Ash Trees

Attractions
Wusi Street, Beiluoguxiang, Dongsi Shisantiao, Qinghua East Road



NOV. 1–25 Red Maples

Attractions
Fragrant Hills Park, Pofeng Ridge, Summer Palace Rear Lake