

Town & Country

ESTABLISHED IN 1846

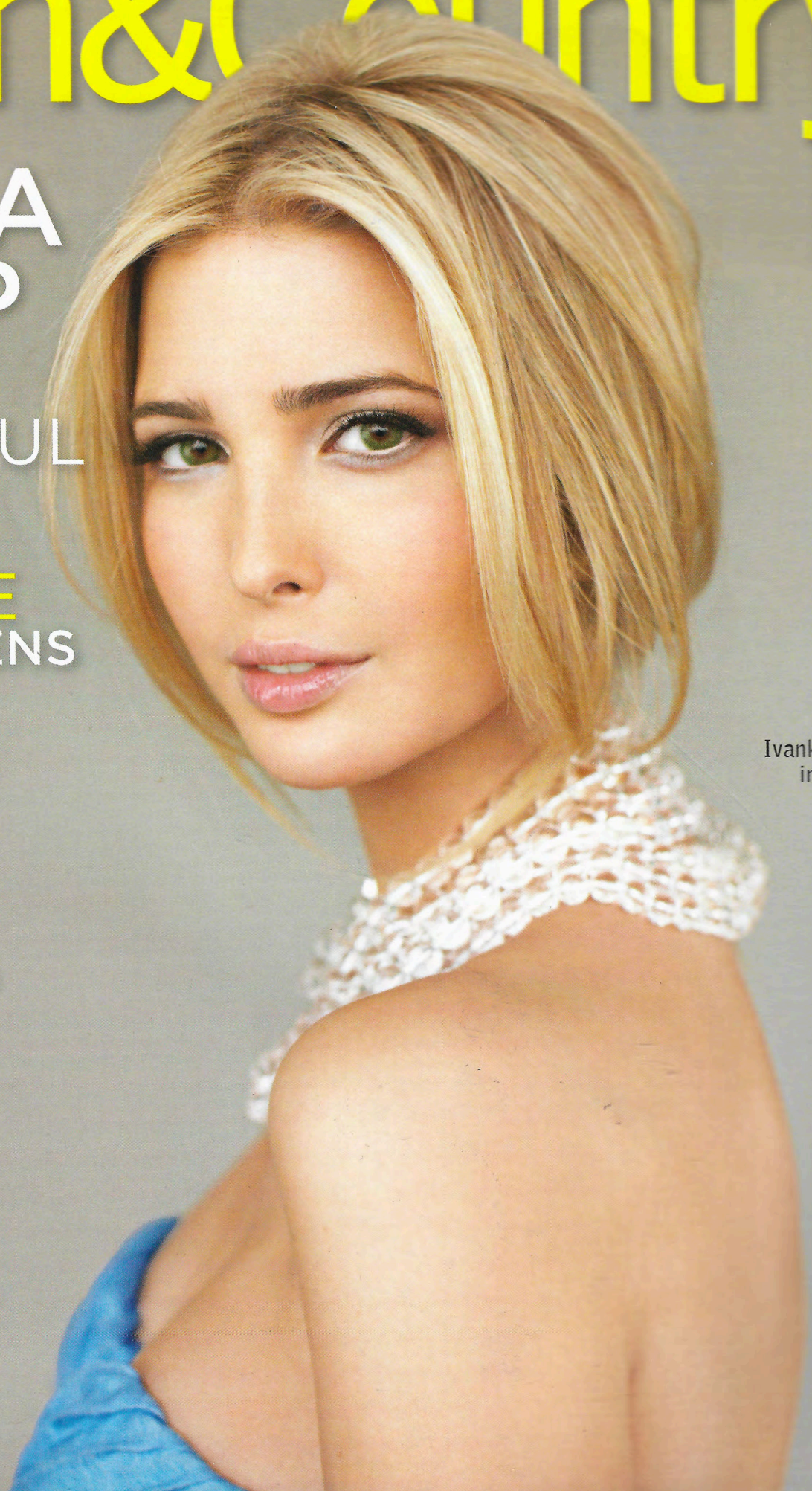
IVANKA TRUMP

SMART,
SUCCESSFUL
AND SEXY

SUN SENSE
25 TOP SCREENS
AND BLOCKS

BEIJING'S
BIG
MOMENT

DAZZLING
JEWELRY
DEEP-SEA
TREASURES



Ivanka
in M

JULY 2008 \$4.50
0 74470 08833 2 0 7>

Beijing

GEARS UP

As it prepares itself for next month's Olympics, the ancient Chinese capital of Beijing is racing to catch up with the 21st century—and meet the rest of the world.

By Heidi Mitchell

THE FIRST THING you'll notice about Beijing is the smog. It's a thick, gray soup that engulfs the city most of the year and is so omnipresent that even someone like me—who endured five years of rush-hour headaches in Los Angeles—has a hard time believing that the dense sky is man-made and not the sign of an oncoming monsoon. My

ter, Jill, who has spent the last three years traveling and working in China (on the visual-merchandising team for Prada as the lucky girl), has gotten used to it. In a recent poll, she tells me that when we drive beneath the smog, 70 percent of Beijing schoolchildren thought that the sky's natural color was gray. The second thing you can't overlook is the traffic. In an urban sprawl that's home to more than seventeen million residents (slightly more than the population of Chile), it's impossible to control, even with Communist centralized government, a massive elevated highway and not one but six ring roads circling the city.

Yet despite the sky, despite the difficulty of getting around, Beijing is the pick of the Chinese-city litter. It is the down-home Chicago to Shanghai's New York. It is where ancient crafts like kite making and Peking-opera mask painting still thrive in hundreds of parks and where many families live as their ancestors did in courtyard-style houses that, on the occasional sunny day,

BEIJING BASICS

WHEN TO GO

If you haven't already booked a flight for the Olympics, chances are slim that you'll find an empty seat. However, as of press time, the official Web site for Olympics tickets, cosport.com, still had available slots at some sporting events. A better time to see the city would be after the Olympics adrenaline rush wanes, when the summer heat (and smog) has died down and the international crowd has moved on. Fall and spring are the best seasons; winter and summer can be extreme.

GETTING AROUND

A guide is as essential as a pair of comfortable shoes and a flexible schedule. Residents don't speak much English, traffic is a nightmare, and walking across this endless city is impractical. My outfitter, **Remote Lands** (from \$1,000 per person per day; 646-415-8092; remote-lands.com), provided me with a fun-loving guide and a loyal driver and arranged some one-of-a-kind experiences—from a private dumpling-making lesson with a housewife to a tour of the 798 gallery complex on a day when it was mostly closed. An insider tip for evenings sans guide: type the name of a restaur-

ant or bar into your cell phone and send it to 011-86-10-66-9588-2929 via SMS, and the service will text back the location in English and Chinese; simply hand your phone to your taxi driver and he'll take you to your destination.

WHERE TO STAY

Since it opened, in 1989, the **Peninsula Beijing** (double rooms from \$210, suites from \$406; 8 Goldfish Lane; 011-86-10-8516-2888; beijing.peninsula.com) has been the place to stay. Its 525 rooms and suites are designed with clean lines and traditional Asian touches but are state-of-the-art (note the Wi-Fi and plasma screens). My sister and I loved the dim sum lunch in the courtyard-style restaurant, Huang Ting. Many other international luxury hotel chains (**St. Regis, Ritz-Carlton, Grand Hyatt, Regent**) have a presence in Beijing, though their locations are more suited to business travelers than pleasure seekers. Thanks to the explosion of development in the run-up to the Olympics, however, hotels are opening up almost weekly. The new darling is mainland China's first Park Hyatt, **Park Hyatt Beijing** (double rooms from \$490; *Beijing Yintai Centre*; 011-86-10-8567-1234; beijing.park.hyatt.com), which occupies the thirty-seventh through sixty-sixth floors of the city's tallest skyscraper, designed by architect John Portman. The 237 guest rooms have expansive views of the city, a beige-on-beige palette and bathrooms that were created for spa fanatics.

About an hour and a half outside town, near the busy Badaling section of the Great Wall, stands the highly conceptual **Commune by the Great Wall Kempinski** (four-bedroom villas from \$2,100; exit at *Shuiguan, Badaling Highway*; 011-86-10-8118-1888; www.communebythegreat-wall.com). Forty-two villas by twelve Asian architects snake up Badaling mountain, their exteriors ranging from the blocky red bricks and glass of Antonio Ochoa's Cantilever House to the perpendicular stone slabs of Chien Hsueh-Yi's "Airport" (my personal favorite). The Commune of the Children club is one of the best places in the world to drop a four-year-old; it has a dress-up area, a demo kitchen and a courtyard for running around outside.

Although the food in Beijing isn't much to rave about, the nightlife is vibrant. **Face Bar** (26 Dong Cao Yuan; 011-86-10-6551-6788; facebars.com), whose design was inspired by the Silk Road, is the stomping ground of hard-partying expats and allows for quick entrée into their intriguing world. The 43,200-square-foot **LAN Club** (4/F *Twin Towers, B-12 Jianguomenwai Avenue*; 011-86-10-5109-6012; lanbeijing.com) also draws expats as well as the city's social set, though the design here is far less tame; if any theme could be attached to the decor, it would be irrational exuberance. Stuffed birds, religious icons, oversized chandeliers—you name it, it's here. Should you choose to do more than sip cosmopolitans and gawk, the Szechuan menu isn't bad.

NIGHTLIFE

Although the food in Beijing isn't much to rave about, the nightlife is vibrant. **Face Bar** (26 Dong Cao Yuan; 011-86-10-6551-

6788; facebars.com), whose design was inspired by the Silk Road, is the stomping ground of hard-partying expats and allows for quick entrée into their intriguing world. The 43,200-square-foot **LAN Club** (4/F *Twin Towers, B-12 Jianguomenwai Avenue*; 011-86-10-5109-6012; lanbeijing.com) also draws expats as well as the city's social set, though the design here is far less tame; if any theme could be attached to the decor, it would be irrational exuberance. Stuffed birds, religious icons, oversized chandeliers—you name it, it's here. Should you choose to do more than sip cosmopolitans and gawk, the Szechuan menu isn't bad.

WHAT TO SEE

You can't come to Beijing and not do the touristy things, like visit **Tiananmen Square**, the **Forbidden City**, the **Great Wall**, the **hutongs**, the imperial **Summer Palace** (eight miles northwest of the city center). But you also have to add some modern stops to your itinerary: the **CCTV Headquarters**, the **National Stadium**, the **798 gallery district** (especially the new **Ullens Center for Contemporary Art**). Have your guide arrange daily schedules in advance, to avoid getting trapped in traffic.