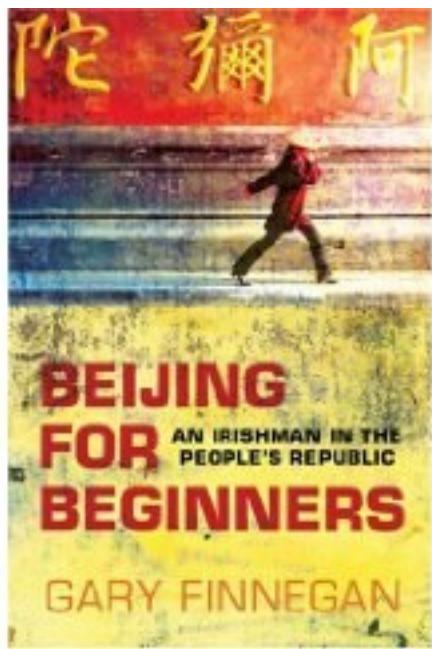


# Beijing for Beginners



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I hand over my entrance form to a young but tough-looking official. 'First time in China?' 'Yes.' 'Push green button.' The front of the desk has four buttons lighting up. Two green, two red. The first green one says 'very satisfied' and has a picture of a very happy face. The second says 'satisfied' with a slightly less ecstatic, but still moderately content smiley face. The third button is red. It reads 'not satisfied' and the face looks somewhat downbeat. The last option is a miserable-looking 'very dissatisfied'. Above the range of smileys is a question: 'How satisfied are you with the welcome you received in Beijing?' 'Eh....I'll be teaching at a...' 'Push green button!' I push the green button, the one with the mildest face of all. And that's that. I'm in. No doubt there'll be a news story at the end of the year claiming 99 per cent of tourists are delighted with the reception they get in China. There is no fifth option saying 'airport is nice, but do

something about the spitting...'. Faced with choking smog, chaotic traffic and locals who have a penchant for public spitting, Gary Finnegan finds himself in the world's fastest changing city. His attempts to adjust to an altogether alien culture make for an often hilarious travelogue, peppered with fascinating insights into Chinese history and its transforming society. From Chairman Mao to the recent surge in IVF and plastic surgery clinics, Finnegan attempts to understand modern China and learns a little about himself along the way. However, he begins with more questions than answers: Can he survive without Western comforts? Is the new consumerist China still communist? And why are people calling him Big Nose? As the attention of the world focuses on China, "Beijing for Beginners" is ideal for anyone curious about the most populous nation on earth, and the weird and wonderful things on offer for a foreigner grappling with serious culture shock.

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