



TRAVEL

*page - 97*

WRITTEN BY *Charlotte Tottenham*

# BERLIN

THE PERFECT COMBINATION  
OF CULTURE  
AND COOL

SPRING // ISSUE



E

ver since attempting to learn German, I have had a tempestuous relationship with the

country. One school trip included an eighteen-hour coach ride from the UK to see the Christmas markets and test our rudimentary language skills. Crowded into the back row of a coach suffused with diesel fumes, with sleep playing hard to get and nothing but a sea of pitch black out of the window to contemplate — my first journey did not wholly endear me to the notion of travel in Germany. Unlike that teenage trip, which is remembered with little fondness, I recently discovered a very different story; the train into Berlin is fast, comfortable, immaculately clean and for remarkably few Euros I felt as though I had opted for first class. Crisp white snow-covered fields stretched out before me and my train raced past forests that would put Narnia to shame. Yet the organisation and traveller-friendly order that I encountered is not without thrill or excitement.

In David Bowie's words, "Berlin is the greatest cultural extravaganza that one could imagine". As the train slowed to weave between the architectural majesties, I shamelessly wielded my street map to identify buildings and get a sense of this diverse capital where awesome street art stands proudly beside neoclassical constructions. Berlin, kidnapped and held ransom for fifty years, as communism and fascism stunted the growth and development of this city, is now clearly making up for lost time. It is burgeoning with variety and laden with culture. Berlin has changed the way I see

the world; here form meets function in a perfect equilibrium of logic and beauty.

### SEE AND DO



### *Alexanderplatz to Zoologischer Garten –*

A good place to start in fairly disparate Berlin is to take a ride on the elevated S-Bahn from *Alexanderplatz* to *Zoologischer Garten*; take in the glorious skyline and get the measure of the city.

***The Berlin Wall –***

It is impossible to explore Berlin without being immersed in its turbulent history, and nowhere is this more accessible and engaging than at the East Side Gallery. The gallery is a series of murals along one of the longest surviving stretches of the wall. The images here range from tragic and reverential/reverent to downright subversive and satirical. Even the most absurd of the murals are emotive and the gallery is among some of the most popular and esteemed street art in the world; do not miss the chance to have a look.

At Checkpoint Charlie, be prepared for the selfie-snapping masses, but do not be deterred by the relative hustle and bustle of this area. It is heaving with free outdoor information centres that contain a comprehensive history of the erection and demolition of the wall, complete with images of successful attempts to get across to West Germany and the heart-wrenching stories of failed efforts.

Brandenburg Gate, age-old symbol of triumph and victory, was built in the eighteenth century by the Prussians and intended as a tollgate for collecting duties. Yet, when the wall went up, Brandenburg Gate was in no man's land between the two walls, visible to all but accessible to none. It became the iconic site of ecstatic celebration in 1989 when the wall was demolished.

***Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church –***

This nineteenth century church was bombed heavily during World War II, but in Berlin the consequences and relics of fascism have been somewhat obscured by more recent communist goings-on. The monumental ruins are still impressive and provide a thought-provoking reminder of bygone devastation.

***The Holocaust Memorial –***

To the south of Brandenburg Gate is the Holocaust Memorial, a large square covered with 2700 concrete pillars of varying heights. Designed by architect Peter Eisenman, the memorial is purposefully disorientating, with no specified entrance or exit, is a harrowing reminder of the past and in recent years has become an iconic image of modern Berlin.

***Beach Bar Mitte –***

Berlin is the birthplace of the urban beach bar and in the summer, the River Spree is lined with sandy beaches, deckchairs and DJs. The best spot for beach bar dwelling overlooks Museum Island, next to the sensational Berlin Cathedral; sip on a pilsner and watch the boats drift by.





## ***Olivin Sauna, Schönhauser Allee –***

After those mega Berlin nights, head here for a chance to rejuvenate and recover. It is a bargain at **€10** for two hours, but be prepared, in true German sauna style, nudity is *de rigeur*.

## ***EAT***

## ***Breakfast – Till the Cows Come Home, Schönhauser Allee –***

This is a quirky and innovative breakfast spot inside a superbly converted industrial container. Surely the best possible way to start a day of sightseeing is with organic wholefoods, fresh pressed juice and smiley baristas?

## ***Lunch – Café am Neuen See, Tiergarten –***

This eatery nestled in a leafy corner of Berlin's biggest green space, the *Tiergarten*, and bordered by the park's lake. Lunch options range from burgers and pizzas to fresh crispy pretzels and leberkäse, a popular German meatloaf. In the summer you can opt for ice-cold craft beer, followed by

post-lunch boating on the lake and in the winter, you can sit by a log fire sipping on Glühwein and then try your hand at curling on the neighbouring rink.

## ***Kaffee and Kuchen – Brotgarten, Seelingstraße –***

An afternoon Coffee and Cake break is an established part of the daily routine in Berlin. There are myriad patisseries to choose from, but Brotgarten in *Charlottenburg* has the most diverse range of baked delights. Try their delectable fluffy Berliner doughnuts, a Berlin delicacy, not to be confused with the citizens of the capital!

## ***Supper – Lokal, Linienstraße –***

This little informal restaurant on *Linienstraße* seems to be constantly busy. Everything here is, as its name would suggest, local; the chairs are handmade from wood collected in the forests that surround Berlin and the menu is carefully chosen, traditionally German, and changes every couple of months, as all ingredients are locally sourced. The menu is not in English, although very attentive waiters with impeccable English will be pleased to help with translations for those who struggle with their German! Lokal is very reasonably priced, but unsurprisingly is a huge hit with Berliners (the owners have never even needed to put a sign above the door) so be sure to book.

## ***Late night binge –***

For all those who are devoted fans of gastronomic treats after a night out, Berlin is teeming with choices. The big name in town is Curry Wurst, which is simply a sausage in curry sauce, often served with bread or fries and is ubiquitous in the capital. If you find yourself a convert of Berlin's favourite street food snack, don't miss the Curry Wurst Museum on *Scheutzenstraße*.



### SLEEP

#### ***Factory Living – Die Fabrik, Schlesischestraße –***

Housed in a transformed nineteenth century factory in the increasingly up and coming Kreuzberg district, die Fabrik is sandwiched between galleries, lively bars and Berlin's best night clubs. The staff are exceptionally friendly, the coffee is strong and the wifi is free. Request a room in the spacious top floor loft area where the skylights let in the morning sun.

*Doubles from €55; Hostel beds from €18 per person.*

#### ***Hippy Heaven – Hüttenpalast, Hobrechstraße –***

Hüttenpalast must be the only hotel in Germany to have created the perfect camping experience; where else can you find the childish novelty and carefree fun of sleeping in a vibrantly decorated caravan without being exposed to the elements? Creators Sarah and Silke are devoted to creating authentic urban camping; shun the lukewarm baked beans and soggy squalor of sleeping outdoors and wake up instead to freshly brewed coffee, a croissant and fresh fruit hung in a basket on a branch outside your door. The communal and happy-go-lucky atmosphere is enhanced by the idyllic garden they have created in the hidden backyard. With a clever combination of cable reels and hollyhocks, wine boxes and clematis and an old bathtub sprouting roses; the owners have turned a grey, disused wasteland into a striking and beautifully recycled floral hangout where travellers congregate to drink and chat.

*From €69*

#### ***Push the Boat Out – Modern Boat, River Spree –***

The more 'grown-up' option for accommodation in Berlin is the

stunningly minimalist and highly sought after self-catered Modern Boat. It is moored in a quiet bay of the Spree in a dreamy location which is a little bit further from the city centre, but still convenient for zipping around well-connected Berlin. Cook in your own post-modern masterpiece of a kitchen, soak in serene sunsets over the water or take your courtesy bicycles out for a spin.

*Book in advance as there is only one!*

*From €150*

### AFTER HOURS

#### ***Monkey Bar, 25hours Hotel, Budapester Straße –***

This bar, atop design chain 25hours Hotels' newest outpost is all about location. Despite being a popular late night spot amongst Berlin's well-heeled partygoers for its glamorous setting, this is a bar to visit at dusk as the 360° terrace has exquisite views. Watch the sun set over the city and ogle at monkeys swinging through the zoo beneath you in the *Tiergarten*. Try their Tea & T cocktail made with homemade Earl Grey Gin.

#### ***Barcel, Torstraße –***

Brand-new Barcel is marked only by a discreet origami bird above the door, instilling it with a secret speakeasy-esque vibe. Burrowed into a basement, tucked away on *Torstraße*, this sophisticated watering hole is Berlin at its best; effortlessly cool. The whole place is mellow but with a certain magical, cosmopolitan hum and thoughtful touches that make for a very singular atmosphere. The charming owner has handwritten the cocktail list into a large and fairly cumbersome book that is passed from person to person, providing the perfect opportunity to meet people, mingle and get further cocktail recommendations from other barflies.





Bookshelves are bestrewn with trinkets collected from across the globe and the walls adorned with wacky creations and photographs. The cocktails here are truly original and really made with love; try the flawlessly mixed Beetroot Sour for something a bit different.

***Clärchens Ballhaus, Augustraße –***

Clärchens Ballhaus is a bizarre amalgam of village hall and beer garden, complete with fairy lights and silver tinsel, but nonetheless miraculously pervaded by a timeless cool and has been exceptionally hip for over a century. This completely unique setting bore witness to the advent of the roaring twenties, with its riotous parties; the upstairs dimly lit mirrored room hosted illegal Fight Club-esque sword duels in the thirties; Nazi Officers' took it over for private gambling parties in the forties and more

recently it has been immortalized as a filming location for *Inglorious Basterds*. It is also a place where locals and tourists alike flood for early evening dance lessons in jazz, swing and more. It regularly hosts live music which keeps its notoriously vigorous dance floor active long into the night. Try their very boozy signature drink *Nante-Knaller* which is two parts whisky and one part Caribbean liqueur Curaçao, topped off with sparkling wine. If the music doesn't get you on the dance floor one of these certainly will!



