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CHECK IN/CHECK OUT

Hotel Review: The Circus Hotel in Berlin

By BENJI LANYADO

THE BASICS

When a hostel (notice the “s”) opens up a hotel, you know that we are living in strange financial times. For years, the [Circus Hostel](#) in [Berlin](#)’s Mitte district has been a favorite among in-the-know backpackers, who rave about the great value, funky vibe and surprisingly nice dorms. So either the backpackers are getting richer or everyone else is feeling the pinch. Last October, the owners of Circus decided to go for it, opening a 64-room hotel (look: no “s”) on the opposite side of the busy Rosenthaler Platz. It’s an ambitious upgrade.

THE LOCATION

It’s hard to beat the location. [The Circus](#) is on the northern edge of Mitte, Berlin’s central district, where it bumps into Prenzlauer Berg. There are galleries, boutiques, bars and restaurants in nearly every direction. Many of the rooms look out onto Rosenthaler Platz, a busy collision of five roads, transit tracks, taxi stands and a U-Bahn station, so the rest of the city is in easy reach.

THE ROOM

My 78-euro (about \$112 at \$1.43 to the euro) double room would cost three times as much in any other Western European capital. Each floor has 17 individually designed rooms with ample space and tasteful (if not high-design) minimalist furniture. On a floor of dark-oak tiles, my queen-size bed was framed by an asymmetric headboard that evened out the angle of the wall and was pitted with a handy niche for an alarm clock and nightcaps. A sliding table spent most of its time at the foot of my bed, except in the morning, when I rolled it up to my chin for breakfast. Elsewhere, there are junior suites with seating areas (No. 401 comes with a large balcony), and apartments for families of four with separate kitchens and lounge areas, starting at 160 euros.

THE BATHROOM

Again, a surprise. All bathrooms come with large glass-encased showers with rainfall shower heads and are crisply finished with white ceramic tiles and basins with sparkling chrome faucets. Frosted glass on my bathroom window spared passers-by on Rosenthaler Platz from my cleaning habits and was inscribed with a German quote that I never got around to

translating. The only annoyance was a rather selfish one: there were no toiletries for me to steal, just the hand-soap pump.

ROOM SERVICE

Breakfast is served (to your room, if you desire) with last night's excesses in mind. Better, head to the in-house Fabisch restaurant, a large open-floor space named for the Jewish family that once ran a tailor shop on the ground floor. Tourists and Berliners mingle and relax on leather sofas, with draft pints balanced on large vintage-style travel chests. The back-lighted bar was loaded with spirits, and the waiters were as proficient with cocktails as they were with brewing up giant bowls of latte.

AMENITIES

The flat-screen TVs in all rooms include [BBC](#), CNN and baffling German quiz shows. The list of services that Circus offers is extensive: rental bikes, smart cars and (ridiculous) Segways; an extensive selection of Berlin-related films like "Good Bye Lenin," "Run Lola Run," "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold"; yoga equipment and discounted classes; babysitters and baby radios. But my favorite touch was the in-room booklet, written by the husband of one of the owners, that gave the history of the neighborhood, including its "cultural hibernation" during the East Germany era.

BOTTOM LINE

Magnificent value with plenty of aesthetic style. Singles start at 68 euros a night; doubles, 78 euros; suites, 98 euros; and large apartments, 110 euros. The Circus Hotel, 1 Rosenthaler Strasse; (49-30)2000-3939; www.circus-berlin.de.

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