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BERLIN

The dust covers are off and born-again Berlin has discovered its big-city buzz, says Richard Green

Whether you like your city breaks historic or hedonistic, haute or hip, Berlin city for you — a metropolitan of world-class art, culture and attractions, and a flourishing alternative. It has that big-city buzz, acres of beautiful parking and miles of meandering



BERLIN FOR EVERY BUDGET

6-8 TRAVEL

ON THE CHEAP

There is no finer place for those on a budget than the Circus Hostel (Rosa-Luxemburg Strasse 39-41K, 00 49 30-2839 1433). The rooms are spottish; the staff are very helpful and knowledgeable. Rates start from £10 in a six-bed room, up to £41 for a two-bed apartment. Head here if you are travelling alone and you'll soon be in a crowd. Or try the tidy and central Clubhouse Hostel (Kalkscheunenstrasse 2, 2809 7979): beds from £10 or doubles from £29.

Monsieur Vuong will very likely welcome you himself to his eponymous Vietnamese restaurant (Alte Schönhäuser Strasse, 46; 3087 2643). Service is bright and breezy. Large bowls of delicious food will cost you about £4. For the cheap outdoors, you can't beat Cafe am Neuen See (Lichtensteinallee 2), a beer garden with a terrific waterside ambience and pizzas bigger than the plates they are served on (from £4.50).

Don't miss the Turkish Market on Maybachufer, which provides the perfect picnic run prior to lunch in the Tiergarten. The best kebabs on the continent, meanwhile, can be found in Kreuzberg, the epicentre of Berlin's vibrant Turkish community.

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

The new Artist Hotel Riverside (Friedrichstrasse 106, 00 49 30-284900, www.tolles-hotel.de) has fin-de-siècle fittings and fine river views (doubles start at £53 B&B, or for never-say-die romantics, there's a balconied suite with water bed and whirlpool from £107). Families should head for the Boarding House (Mulackstrasse 1-2, 2838 8488), which offers designer-style apartments close to the Hackescher Hof. Family rooms for four start at £107.

For quality and quirkiness, try Daimlers (Kurfürstendamm 203, 3901 1698), inside the Mercedes-Benz showroom. This smart restaurant serves modern German/Italian cuisine (mains from £10) and sells models of every Mercedes car type, from £3. For good Italian dishes in pleasant surroundings, you won't go wrong at Sale e Tabacchi (Kochstrasse 18, 252 1155), where mains cost about £7. The fish is particularly fine.

Take a break from the big-city bustle with a canal trip. Stern und Kreisschiffahrt (536 3600, www.sternundkreis.de) is one of several companies that run river and canal cruises. It offers a 3½hr trip on the city's network of waterways, from £10pp.

NO EXPENSE SPARED

The Dorint Am Gendarmenmarkt (Charlottenstrasse 50-52, 00 49 30-203750, www.dorint.de) is a boutique hotel that offers modern design and an ultra-calm atmosphere in the newly restored city centre (doubles start at about £150, room-only). If period elegance is more to your taste, try the opulent Four Seasons, just up the road (Charlottenstrasse 49, 203 3800), which has doubles from about £200, room-only.

Borchardt (Französische Strasse 47, 2038 7110) is a Berlin institution; fine but functional décor for a knowing crowd of movers and shakers. The menu is mainly French, and mains start from £10. The Altes Zollhaus (Carl-Herz-Ufer 30, 692 3300) is a restored canal-side customs house in Kreuzberg serving both excellent German and international dishes in a delightfully tranquil setting. Five-course menus start from £23.

Berlin is home to seven orchestras and three opera houses: pick of the performances this autumn will be Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic at the Philharmonie (Herbert-von-Karajan Strasse 1, 2548 8126): tickets cost up to £70.



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