

Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE



The inside guide to Berlin

Explore the German capital on foot and discover its quirky corners, writes Berlin local Victoria Gosling

I moved to Berlin in 2008 as the city plunged into winter. Seasons change fast and within a week I was searching the city's plentiful thrift stores for fake fur and thick gloves. I spent the winter learning my way around. Berlin's public transport network is comprehensive, cheap and runs very late indeed – ideal for zipping about and taking advantage of the museums, galleries, live music, clubbing, readings and indie cinemas that keep locals entertained over the darker months. No matter the weather, there's always something happening and there's even an English-language listings mag, *The ExBerliner*, to keep you in the know.

Summer, by contrast, is for rambling. I soon learned that a mid-season wardrobe gets little wear in Berlin. Often, summer will arrive seemingly overnight. A week later it's back to winter and then summer again, until it sticks. Temperatures are hotter than in the UK and the

weather is less changeable, although punctuated by occasional tropical downpours. If you're caught out, take shelter in a doorway – they rarely last very long and soon the pavements will be steaming.

Having survived the winter, locals make the most of the fine weather, seeking to absorb every drop of Vitamin D from the skies. Most clubs are open from Friday to Monday afternoon so you can drop by when you please, hoping that the door people will smile on you (wear black, don't talk loudly in English or appear drunk). Age is no limit to clubbing in Berlin and as I've got older, I love stopping by on a Sunday afternoon. A top spot is Kater Blau, a techno club on a boat moored on the River Spree where you can hit the indoor

My absolute favourite outdoor pool is Sommerbad Neukölln



The U-Bahn with Oberbaum Bridge in the background, main; Museum Island on the Spree River, above

dance floor or laze around on deck. Sometimes I'll go fresh from a swim in one of the city's many lidos, trying to blend in with those on their third day of partying.

Almost every neighbourhood has an outdoor pool. Open from May to autumn, these *sommerbäder* usually have two or three pools, including one for kids, a snack bar serving sausage, beer and chips, and a meadow for lounging. My absolute favourite is Sommerbad Neukölln, situated right next door to the vast Tempelhof Park. Here, there's a big pool for serious swimmers and a huge shallower pool with a spiralling

slide. Go if you've danced the night away and seen the sun come up, or want to get some laps in before the city awakes. Alternatively, make this a stop on your tour of the Schillerkiez, a neighbourhood that became highly desirable once the last plane had taken off from Tempelhof Airport in 2008. Home to a farmers' market, an artisanal ice-cream shop, and some fantastic restaurants and bars, the streets around Herrfurthplatz are ideal for low key wandering. I recommend a beer or two watching the skaters, kite surfers and cyclists on Tempelhof's former runway, followed by a trip to the Koku Vintage Store, then dinner at either La Pecora Nera, an Italian restaurant well-known for its Aperol Spritzes and rustic, seasonal menu, or two streets away at Caligari – also Italian but slightly more modern with a chic international clientele. For a nightcap, I'd suggest Keith Bar, the best kind of hipster joint. Alternatively, the Bechereck is a proper Berliner *kneipe*, a local bar seemingly untouched since the 1970s.

Only two miles away is another beloved nexus of streets, radiating off

the Bergmannstrasse. At weekends, Marheinekeplatz hosts an eclectic flea market. Grab a coffee at nearby Barcomi's and then get hunting for a Berlin souvenir – perhaps an old map of the city, or a denim jacket, a black and white photograph or some costume jewellery. Round the corner, on Riemannstrasse, is Another Country Berlin, a second-hand bookshop hailed by Lonely Planet as one of the world's best. Some books you can buy outright, some stock you can only borrow via a trust-based system. Run by volunteers, Another Country regularly hosts potluck dinners, local author readings (all in English), writing workshops and LGBTQI events – check their social media for updates. Once you have scored a little reading matter, you might consider rewarding yourself with a bite at Molinari's Café or popping over to the legendary Mustafa's Gemüse Kebap, a kiosk serving up delicious chicken and grilled vegetable kebabs on nearby Mehringdamm. Just next door is Curry 36, where the brave can sample Berlin's most famous... er... delicacy: the currywurst, a sausage topped with ketchup and curry powder.

Grittier and frankly no end of fun, the area around Kottbusser Tor is a 24-hour party destination. The evening might start with a beer on the banks of the Landwehr Canal watching the locals float by on inflatable boats before a visit to a bar or two. I love Roses, an LGBTQI mecca on Oranienstrasse, Café Kotti, popular with Turkish Berliners and bar flies alike, Würgeengel, a rowdy, clever cocktail destination named after Buñuel's 1962 film *The Exterminating Angel* and Möbel Olfe, another bar popular with Berlin's sizable gay community. Be aware that Berlin doesn't really get going until midnight, at which point if you are in a dancing mood, you might want to visit Club SO36, once frequented by David Bowie, or perhaps a tanzbar (dance bar) – either Monarch with its view over the train tracks and rotating roster of DJs or the tiny Paloma Bar accessible through a multi-storey car park. When you leave, don't forget to



pile into the fotomat kiosk and get a strip of black and white photos as a memento of your night on the tiles. And if all that dancing has made you hungry, this area is packed full of late night eateries that serve up pide (a kind of Turkish pizza), falafel, kebabs and köfte, a grilled lamb meatball best served with hot sauce and salad in pitta bread.

Sundays start very slowly in Berlin. If you're out in the streets before 10am you'll wonder if the city hasn't emptied overnight. Be warned though, brunching is a competitive sport and at exactly 10:45am all those empty tables in the top brunch spots will suddenly be filled. If you're not seated by then, be prepared to wait forever. You'll be much smugger (and less hungry) if you arrive at 10:15am. Then you can get the best table and get your order in early. My darlings are Geist in Glas (weekends only), Ankerklause, Café Mugrabi, Benedict or Hallescheshaus.

And my final tip? If you're looking for somewhere to stay, I highly recommend The Circus Berlin. Slap bang in the centre of the city, The Circus has a fine newly renovated hotel on Rosenthalerplatz and a hostel just a stone's throw away. Run by locals and full of thoughtful touches, there's a cool creative vibe and it's as far away from a soulless chain as you can imagine.

Bliss & Blunder by Victoria Gosling is published by *Serpent's Tail*, £14.99



The Brandenburg Gate, above; Victoria Gosling's novel *Bliss & Blunder*, top

SHORT HAUL



A feast for foodies

In Ibiza, Mhairi Clarke finds sunshine and a side order of Yotam Ottolenghi-style inspiration

All seasons of course present an abundant array of nature's bounty to rouse a quarterly culinary renaissance in the kitchen, however, it's the transition from summer to autumn that truly awakens my inner chef.

As I floated towards the end of my own last hurrah of summer recently in Ibiza, an invitation landed in my in box, to an exclusive dinner at Atzaró Agroturismo Hotel with internationally acclaimed chef, restaurateur, food writer and one of the globe's most influential food talents, Yotam Ottolenghi.

Who could be a better inspiration to take me, my pots, pans and epicurean enthusiasms into these golden few weeks ahead? What could possibly be a better venue... Simple, chic and with a touch of Ibiza glamour, the resort is nestled at the foot of the Atzaró mountain, against a lush backdrop of Sabina and pine tree forests. Atzaró Agroturismo Hotel is built on the site of a 300-year-old finca within a sprawling, secluded 13-hectare estate of thriving farmland, fragrant orange groves, tropical palms and Mediterranean herb and fruit gardens.

Food is one of the strongest points of the hotel, with the farm to fork philosophy connecting every dish with nature; organic vegetables, fruits and herbs are plucked daily from the Atzaró Vegetable Garden. Ottolenghi at Atzaró, I expect, will be a match made in an organic slice of Ibiza heaven. The air beneath the most magnificent lantern dressed umbrella pine tree is filled with subdued beats, clinking glasses and chilled chitter chatter in anticipation of this extraordinary event.

Introducing the menu, Ottolenghi tells guests "It's all about the produce; everything tastes so much better when it's grown around you." A self-confessed 'Ibiza virgin' (this is Ottolenghi's first visit to the island), he announces, "Tonight, we're playing with some Spanish traditions, dipping our toe in this rich environment and enjoying everything this beautifully fertile island has got."

Ingredients have been freshly picked from the Atzaró Vegetable Garden, non-vegetable elements locally sourced and a selection of local wines carefully curated to complement each stage of the menu journey.

The Ottolenghi effect; colour, flavour, bounty and sunshine runs through each of the five courses. The first course, caramelised onion

and fresh herb salsa, served with Atzaró Vegetable Garden crudités is "all about the greens" according to Ottolenghi. It's textural joy; sublimely silken with a divinely dippable texture and bursting with fresh summer flavours and goodness. The grilled Padrón peppers and muhammara cups with walnuts and pomegranate molasses are a sweet, nutty, tangy twist on traditional tapas.

Next to arrive is a dish of Atzaró Vegetable Garden tomatoes with confit herbs and sesame black lime focaccia, "sharp, punchy black limes from the Persian Gulf". The fluffy, chewy texture of focaccia pairs so

I leave the white isle filled with a renewed zest for the kitchen

perfectly with the ripe firmness of the sweet, aromatic tomatoes.

The arrival of each dish is a treat for all senses; vibrant, multi-layered compositions of simple ingredients that sing. The roasted aubergine with feta cream, chermoula and orange is a joyful addition to the table. It looks too good to mess with; we do, heartily.

The chargrilled and roasted courgettes with Manchego cheese, burnt butter and pine nuts dish is earthy, mellow and utterly exquisite; the accompanying Can Axartell



Clockwise from main: Atzaró Agroturismo Hotel; guest chef Yotam Ottolenghi; one of his dishes

organically farmed white wine, a perfect pairing.

The entrance of a plate of juicy, succulent strips of shawarma lamb with pita pockets, sumac tahini, pomegranate and mint salad is a highlight. The most fragrant, warming dish with a subtle zesty, uplifting tartness – a tastebud trip and sensory delight.

A showstopping sunset pavlova with apricots, orange blossom and pistachio brings a dreamy end to the most flavourful celebration of life, love and food.

I leave the white isle filled with inspiration, creative ideas and a renewed zest for the kitchen.

The word 'Ottolenghi-fied', connoting flair and a twist to the familiar was coined by the Ottolenghi Test Kitchen team. As I board the flight home, my husband reminds me (as he does at the end of every holiday) of the old Scots phrase "Back to old clothes and porridge then."

I'm pretty sure there's a way to Ottolenghify even that...

Rates at the Atzaró Agroturismo Hotel start from €245 in low season, for a double bedroom including breakfast, yoga, wellness classes and full spa facilities and go up to €1375 in high season, atzaro.com

TRAVEL TIPS

Think before you unpack medication for your trip

There are restrictions to consider when it comes to travelling with pills, says Yolante Fawehinmi

Transferring your medication into more compact containers is one of the latest space-saving travel hacks being touted on TikTok. One TikToker suggested using an empty Tic Tac container to store your medication in, saying: "It's a lot smaller than the pill bottles." They even recommended asking your pharmacist for an extra label to stick around it.

This might sound a good idea, as it would allow travellers to maximise the space available when packing for their holiday. But experts are warning it could lead to serious problems – potentially resulting in people being unable to fly due to restrictions some countries may have when it comes to travelling with medication. There are additional safety concerns too.

"While the smaller container might marginally take up less space in your luggage, most countries require you to keep your medication in its original packaging when travelling overseas," said Steve Brownnet-Gale of pharmaceutical packaging firm Origin.

"Airport security may not be able to identify the medication if it is not in its original packaging or if the label is not clear or legible. This lack of identification could raise concerns and they may ask for additional information or documentation, delaying or even preventing you from boarding the flight."

George Sandhu, deputy superintendent pharmacist at Well Pharmacy, agrees. "Be aware of restrictions regarding controlled drugs – you may be required to

obtain an export licence prior to transporting set quantities [usually three months or more supply] into or out of the UK," said Sandhu.

"Some examples of controlled drugs include diamorphine, diazepam, codeine, morphine and fentanyl. Customers should check with individual embassies or Government advice on bringing medicine containing a controlled drug into the UK.

"For prescription medicines, a letter from healthcare practitioners may be helpful. Additionally, be aware of airline regulations regarding liquid medication."

Removing medication from its packaging can pose health risks too. Plus, the type of packaging is sometimes necessary for it to remain effective. Mitesh Desai, director at Landys Chemist, says: "In addition to the hassle of making it through the airport, you could also run the risk of diminishing the effectiveness of your medication by putting it into a different container.

"Medical packaging is designed to protect medication from interacting with elements such as light, heat, moisture and air, which can degrade the potency of medicine over time.

"When you remove your medication's original packaging, exposure to external elements can reduce the stability of the medication's formulation and contribute to a potential loss of therapeutic benefits."

And importantly, child safety concerns should not be ignored.

"Medical packaging often incorporates child-resistant features such as anti-twist child locks, to prevent accidental ingestion by curious young children, who may mistake medicine for a sweet treat," Desai adds. "When you remove medicine from its child-resistant packaging, you increase the risk of accidental poisoning or the ingestion of harmful substances by children."



Daily pill organisers are handy but may hurt the effectiveness of medicines