

NEIGHBOURHOODS

BERLIN



With Berlin Brandenburg airport set to open later this month, David Whitley finds out what's worth seeing in the German capital

MITTE

WHY GO?

The historic centre of Berlin can eat up days in its own right. Forget chocolate-box cutesiness – Mitte is all stern, pompous buildings, historic import and must-see museums. This is the place to do serious tourism, whether that's walking tours around the sites linked to the Nazi regime or getting a dose of classical art and antiquities on Museum Island.

It is also home to Berlin's icon, the Brandenburg Gate, with its quadriga statue of four galloping horses on top. Most tours leave from either outside here or from the Alexanderplatz TV tower.

But there are signs of real life too, notably around Hackesche Markt, where terrace cafes and indie shops line the pavements, as well as some quality street art if you start nosying down the passageways on Rosenthalerstrasse.

WHAT TO DO

Next to the Brandenburg Gate, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is a field of grey, concrete stelae of different sizes. It's deliberately abstract, and hugely unsettling to walk through.

It should be paired with a visit to Topographie Des Terrors, which is unflinching in explaining how the Nazi regime took power and the horrors of the system.

Then gear up to explore the excellent museums of Mitte. The DDR Museum, which looks at life in the former East Germany, is in equal measures grim and quirky, but Museum Island contains the big-hitters. The Neues Museum majors in ancient Egypt, the Altes Museum in Greece and Rome, the Pergamonmuseum is the place for monumental ancient architecture and the Alte Nationalgalerie houses an abundance of 19th-century art.

TIERGARTEN

WHY GO?

In a city that can be quite full on, this sprawling park is the place to chill out, go for a stroll and maybe have a drink in a beer garden. It is full of monuments and memorials, and adjoins the most energetic sections of West Berlin. Shopaholics should hit up the designer-lined Kurfürstendamm strip or newer, more indie-inclined Bikini Mall for a spree.

WHAT TO DO

There are several pretty spots in the Tiergarten, but the Rose Garden is a guaranteed winner in season. Just south of the park, the Bauhaus Archiv delves into the development and execution of Bauhaus architecture, while the German Resistance Memorial Centre looks at those who fought against Nazi rule.



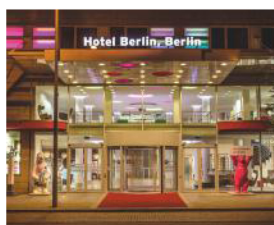
WHERE TO stay



The Hotel Oderberger in Prenzlauer Berg is set in a former public baths, now transformed into a simple Scandi-chic hotel with plenty of quirks thanks to the eccentric design of the original building. From €123 for a double. hotel-oderberger.berlin



The Weinmeister, close to Hackesche Markt in Mitte, has a bold arty streak to it, with its staircase turned into one giant mural, and rooms that are more like showcases for different artists. Doubles from €79. the-weinmeister.com



The Hotel Berlin, just south of the Tiergarten, is huge yet impressively individual, with bedroom walls given over to locals to recommend their favourite places in Berlin. Prices start at €80. hotel-berlin.de



SCHEUNENVIERTEL

WHY GO?

Technically the northern part of Mitte, Scheunenviertel has a very different vibe from the rest of the central district. Here, plenty of excellent and experimental – often vegan – restaurants abound. The frenzied pace of development along the river Spree is offset by the

delightful oddness of Beach Mitte, a massive artificial beach covered in bar tables and volleyball courts.

WHAT TO DO

The Berlin Wall ran along Bernauerstrasse, and the memorial stretching along

it today acts as a superb open-air museum. Escape tunnel routes are marked on the ground, dramatic photos of flashpoints hang from the walls of apartment blocks and the photos of the victims are printed on glass bricks. It's a really good insight into what the wall was like both visually and psychologically.



PRENZLAUER BERG

WHY GO?

Once edgy and a symbol of Berlin cool, Prenzlauer Berg has now settled into being a neighbourhood of prams, lunching mums and chilled-out wine bars. It's a place to mooch and graze, and will appeal to visitors who prefer to go at a slow pace, hopping between bars, cafes and bakeries.

WHAT TO DO

The food focus makes Prenzlauer Berg popular with gourmet tours. Plus the Mauerpark, right on the edge of the neighbourhood, is gloriously weird on Sundays, when locals gather in the concrete amphitheatre for 'bearpit karaoke' and the adjacent flea market hits full swing.



KREUZBERG

WHY GO?

Kreuzberg's reputation is hip, but its western side is surprisingly green and sedate, with gardens blooming inside a former canal. The eastern side has more energy, with its Turkish population evident in an array of kebab shops, which sit side by side with plenty of craft beer bars and globe-spanning restaurants.

WHAT TO DO

There are some traditional attractions here. The Deutsches Technikmuseum is one of those science museums that's fantastic for kids, while the Jüdisches Museum traces the history of Jewish people in Germany, before and after the Holocaust. Visitors in the city on a Thursday should tuck into the street food on offer at Markthalle Neun.

FRIEDRICHSHAIN

WHY GO?

Friedrichshain, to the east of Mitte, is where the grungy image of Berlin is still most evident. Projects like Yaam – a former wasteland turned bizarre hybrid of African street food, beach bar, club, music venue and gallery – best show off this. The area around Boxhagener Platz is also sprinkled with good local shops and restaurants.

WHAT TO DO

The East Side Gallery is the most famous remaining stretch of the Berlin Wall, and is covered in murals. There's better street art at RAW-Gelände, however. This former railway yard is now home to a Miami-esque outdoor pool in a ruined building, a skate park, several bars, art projects and some of Berlin's top clubbing. For something completely different, the Computer Games Museum provides an entertaining look at the history of video games.



DESTINATIONS

BERLIN | GERMANY



Accessible travel: Berlin is well set up for travellers with disabilities. It's pancake-flat, and most attractions and public transport options are accessible to wheelchair users.

Tours: Walking and cycling tours are abundant, available through the likes of Urban Adventures, Isango and Viator. General tours are best avoided in favour of those focused on a topic, such as Cold War history, food or street art.

City pass: The Berlin Welcome Card includes a range of attraction discounts and covers public transport. Sell it in advance and customers can use it to get the bus or S-Bahn train from the airport.

BOOK IT

Fred Holidays offers two nights' B&B at the Cosmos Hotel Berlin Mitte, with flights from Heathrow and rail transfers, departing March 5, 2021, from £300. fredholidays.co.uk

Osprey Holidays offers two nights' B&B at the four-star Leonard Hotel Berlin Mitte with flights from Gatwick departing May 23, 2021, from £225. ospreyholidays.com

✳ Germany has classified some areas of the UK as high-risk and added quarantine and testing requirements. Check Foreign Office advice.

top tip

The new airport is also a good gateway to Germany's Brandenburg region, home to historic castles, medieval churches and the Unesco-listed city of Potsdam

PICTURES: Shutterstock; Donal Sambod; Morrin Nicholas Kunz