

Berlin for Visitors – and Ex-Pats



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Note to AWC-Berlin members

I developed this for our visitors, but I hope it will be helpful to you as well. And I welcome additions to it that go beyond Mitte, its current emphasis, in order to make it more valuable to you as well as to your visitors. Please send suggestions and/or corrections to me at ctessi@gmail.com.

Note to all

This is a work in progress. Its emphasis at present is on our neighborhood in Mitte (central Berlin) with the exception of major sites, such as the palace in Potsdam, Sanssouci. In time, I will add more information. In any case, there is far more to see, to do, to eat, to drink than we can address here. So, don't limit yourselves to what we've recorded.

Where available, I have included links to English-language sites. Otherwise, links are to German sites; if you use Chrome as your browser, it will offer the option to translate to English. While that translation isn't always perfect, you'll know more than trying to read the German. (If links no longer work, just search the topic in your browser.)

I've avoided including fees and rates since they change periodically. So, always check rates in advance at the websites for transportation, museums, etc.

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OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN MITTE

Our neighborhood in Berlin Mitte is near where Berlin was originally settled in the 12th century. Also of note, it is where the city was divided for roughly 45 years. We live in the section that was East Berlin during Communist times. The Mauerweg (the Berlin Wall) is just minutes away. The Communists, of course, told East Germans that Americans and their capitalistic system were evil. Many of our friendly neighbors were East Berliners and some wish that the old times could come back.



We live right on the River Spree and from early spring through late fall, we enjoy sitting on our balcony, watching freighter, tourist, and private boats go through the locks across from us. We are at the Historischer Hafen, the historic harbor where many old ships are anchored. Across from us are the locks that all ships must pass through when they want to enter the center of Berlin. Our balcony view is not

made interesting just by the constant flow of ships and boats of any kind, but also by the herons, cormorants, swans, ducks, and many other species that frequent the area. (We even have a resident fox that is wily enough that it is only occasionally seen.)

Our building is the only residential one on this block. It survived World War II, despite being bombed and damaged, particularly its roof and upper floors. The cellar bunker is still intact. It's only in recent years that our building was converted from rental units to condos, and we feel very lucky to have purchased one of the last available. On both sides of our building are offices and embassies (Brazil, Angola). Several other embassies are nearby as well, including those of Australia, the Congo and Nigeria. The Netherlands Embassy is directly across the river from us.



The red balloon on the map shows our location, and numbers 1, 2, and 3 show the locations of the following hotels. Other numbers correspond to restaurants described further on.

HOTELS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

The following hotels are within walking distance of our condo. Friends who have stayed at them have been pleased with them. Click on the links to check rates. Note that rates are generally lower if paid in advance. All have English-speaking staff.

1. [Derag Living Hotel Grosser Kurfürst](#): The most "German" of the three hotels. It offers suites at reduced rates if you stay 5 nights or more.
2. [Park Plaza Hotel](#): Similar to U.S. boutique hotels. Thus far, this has been the hotel of choice of most of our visitors.
3. [Art'otel Berlin-Mitte](#): The most "artsy" of the three hotels and the closest to our condo (by just a few steps).

Most German hotels, including those above, offer rates with or without breakfast. Although a German breakfast is a unique experience, we recommend booking without breakfast unless you want a full breakfast daily. Then, if you want to, you can choose a single day on which to have the hotel breakfast and on other days get coffee and a croissant or similar at a nearby bakery or café (there are 2-3 in easy walking distance).

You may also want to check [airbnb](#), which has several units in our neighborhood, if that option interests you.

WiFi: Generally free. Check hotel services before you book.

[Electrical outlets](#): Check this site for info on electrical outlets in Germany, in particular section titled "Rules of Thumb for Appliance Voltage Compatibility." Most hotels will loan adaptors for use during your stay.

GETTING AROUND

Public transportation: Each of the above-noted hotels is less than a block away from of a major public transportation stop for the underground (U-Bahn: U2 Stop: *Märkisches Museum*; the  on the above map shows the entrance) and a 10-15 minute walk to the *Jannowitzbrücke* S-Bahn station, which is in the top right hand corner of the map; these are mostly above-ground trains. Buses are also available nearby (the 147 line goes to the main station (Hauptbahnhof), and trams can be reached via connections.

Fares

The [Berlin Welcome Card](#) includes free transportation throughout its valid time period (2-5 days) in zones AB, which covers the center of Berlin, or ABC, which extends to the suburbs and the Schönefeld airport, where eventually will be Berlin's new main airport. See section below titled Sightseeing.

Without the Welcome Card, you must purchase either an AB or an ABC ticket, the difference being that that the ABC ticket allows travel beyond the AB region. For most visitors, the AB ticket is sufficient. One-way, single-day, 7-day, short rides (up to 3 stations), and group day tickets for 5 people are available (all 5 must travel together).

Important information re Berlin's public transportation system

Berlin has an honor system for public transportation. There are no barriers and you can just get on any train. However, you must have a **validated** ticket in order to travel. That means that you must buy a ticket and you must **validate** it by putting a time stamp on it before boarding. Having a non-validated ticket is like having no ticket at all. Validation machines are yellow or red boxes in each station and must be used to validate your ticket before entering the train. Multiple day tickets (including those with Welcome Card) require validation only at first use. The time limit for validated travel is 2 hours in one direction.



Tickets are checked randomly on board, and those doing the checking look like fellow travelers. If they find you do not have a validated ticket, you will have to leave the train with them at the next station and pay a heavy fine (currently 60€). If caught, just pay it; they have heard every excuse, including "I'm a tourist and didn't know." And, if you've read this, you do know!

Doors do not open automatically; you must push the lighted button (at about waist level). This conserves energy if no one is getting on or off and also keeps the cold out in the winter and the heat out in the summer.

Note: The same applies to escalators in stations and elsewhere: As you approach one with no one on it, you will think it is not working because it is not moving. Just

step onto it, and it will slowly begin to move. Those truly not working have a red sign indicating so.

Stations are announced in advance, including connections, but announcements are in German, and English translations are given only for “mind the gap” situations and at major connections (to the airport, for example). So, it’s a good idea to know in advance the name of your destination station and how many stations there are before it. And be sure you are going in the right direction!

If you rent a bike and want to use public transportation with it, you must buy a separate ticket for your bike. Generally, bikes are allowed on S-Bahn and U-Bahn trains, as well as regional trains, but not on trams and buses. Note: You must board only those cars that display a bike on the outside of the car.

Taxis

Public transportation usually suffices, but if you want a taxi, they are mostly clean, and comfortable, and they generally available outside hotels and, of course, at airports. Or you can flag one down just about anywhere. Drivers are generally honest, friendly and knowledgeable; many speak English. Germany does not have the hassle one has to endure in other countries when hiring a taxi at an airport, but the distance to Mitte means an expensive ride. Thus, a taxi from the airport makes most sense when there are 3-4 in your group and/or you have a lot of luggage. Otherwise, buses or trains are the best alternatives.

Walking

Berlin is a great walking city. Walking is generally safe, even at night, even for lone women.

BEWARE OF BIKES. While some bike paths are in the street, many are on the sidewalks, where there is a ‘red’ lane for bicyclists and another for pedestrians. So, be alert!

CROSSING STREETS: Vehicles have right of way except at pedestrian crossings and where traffic lights designate walk times. Pedestrian traffic lights are called Ampelmann, a holdover from East Berlin.

German pedestrians are serious about crosswalks, and most will not cross at streetlights unless the pedestrian sign is active – even when there are no cars coming in any direction. Some crossings have buttons to push that activate the pedestrian sign. Note: If the button has 3 round dots on it, it means that that crossing has sounds to alert blind people when to cross.

Non-traffic light pedestrian crossings are marked with a broken line on each side, and drivers recognize that, at these crossings, pedestrians have right of way. Without that marking, autos have the right of way – and take it! So, be cautious.

SIGHTSEEING

[Berlin Welcome Card](#): A tourist card that gives free transportation in Berlin plus discounts on some sightseeing and cultural options. It also includes a city map and transportation guide as well as other resources. Rates vary depending on length of stay. Fares that include free transportation throughout the ABC zone are slightly higher than those covering the AB zone, but they worth it if you know you are going to do enough ABC travel to warrant the additional cost. You can purchase either card in advance online or at a variety of service centers, including most public transportation stops, as well as at the airport on arrival. There are 48-hour cards, 72-hour cards, and 5-day cards.

[Berlin Welcome Card Museum Island AB](#): A more expensive version that, in addition to 3 days of free transportation (in AB area), includes free entrance to some of the many museums in Berlin, particularly to the museums of Museum Island. (See section below titled Museums). Unless you're going to do a lot of museum visiting, the regular Welcome Card is probably enough.

Boat tours: There are several of these. We recommend the following one that leaves from the dock right outside our building, so within easy walking distance of above hotels.

[Reederei Riedel Spree Cruise](#) (departs/returns at number 5 on the map): This offers a 3-hour narrated tour (English with headsets) along the River Spree and a canal. This is the tour we have taken most often with our visitors. Narration is in German, so we recommend English audiotape for an additional few Euros. Weather allowing, we recommend taking this early in your visit in order to get an overview of the city. There is a 25% discount with Berlin Welcome Card. There are morning, afternoon, and on Fri-Sat evening cruises. There is also a Fri-Sat 2-hour night cruise at 19:00. We usually take the 3-hour afternoon tour with our guests. (Remember: Europe uses a 24-hour clock so, for example, 2 pm is 14:00) Note: Schedules noted above are for spring through fall. If you're here in the winter, check online for what is available.

Bus tours: Again, there are multiple options for a land-view perspective before or after the boat tour. Consider the following, both of which allow on and off at their various stops. We can help identify departure points.

[City Circle Tour – Yellow Line](#): Hop on and off over the whole day or stay on for single 2.5 hour tour. 18 stops. Headsets in English. (No discount with Berlin Welcome Card).

[Berlin City Tour](#): Hop on and off this 2-hour tour (13 stops) with live commentary in English and German (in designated buses) or with pre-recorded commentary in English. (Discount with Welcome Card).

Walking tours: There are a variety of walking tours, but we haven't taken any so are not sure which to recommend. The following is just a sampling.

- [Free Walking Tours of Berlin](#)
- [Discover Berlin Half-day Walking Tour](#)

Walking on your own in the city: Many options, including

- Tiergarten: Berlin's answer to NYC's Central Park or San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, the Tiergarten covers 530 acres. Located in Mitte (city center).
- Grunewald: A wonderful walking/hiking/biking area just a short train ride from Berlin center (with your AB or Berlin Welcome Card ticket).
- Wannsee: Also just a short train ride from Berlin. Also offers boat tours, ferries, and even sailboats to rent.
- Or just explore the city by foot.

Bike tours: Again, a variety of tours are available, but we haven't taken any as we have our own bikes (eBikes, to be specific). [Fat Tire Bike Tours](#) is the one we see most often. Most hotels offer bike rentals, as do hundreds of shops.

Specialty tours: There are many unusual options. One is to rent an East German car, called Trabi, and ride in a convoy around the city to see the sightseeing spots. These old cars still have wooden roofs and give you a feeling of East communist cars.

Or join a group bike (up to 8 people arranged in a circle who are biking and drinking beer while experiencing the city).

A Google search will bring up a multitude of choices for all types of tours.

Some recommended sights

The options for selective sightseeing in Berlin are endless so do not consider the following list all-inclusive. For the most part, we are giving website links so that you can learn more about each, and in some instances we are adding comments about our own experiences.

[Checkpoint Charlie:](#) A must-see, especially if you remember the Berlin Wall going up and/or coming down. I first saw it on an excursion in 1972 when I was working at the US Air Force Base in Wiesbaden. We stayed in West Berlin, of course, but took a bus tour into East Berlin, which was like going from a Technicolor movie to a black and white one. The original checkpoint is still there, and for a small fee you can get your picture taken with the "guards." There is also a Checkpoint Charlie Museum, with an entrance free (discounted with Welcome Card). It shows how people escaped hiding in cars, suitcases and other devices. Unless it is of particular interest to you, we suggest doing more sightseeing instead.

[Holocaust Memorial](#) (The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe): In Berlin Mitte, a sobering memorial. One can wander among the stae that are arranged in a grid pattern on a sloping field. Across from the US Embassy, it is a short walk from the Brandenburg Gate, which is included among the stops on most on-and-off bus tours. There is also an information center that includes the Room of Names, names of all known Jewish Holocaust victims.

[Reichstag](#), where the German parliament meets and so the equivalent of the U.S. Capitol. A must-see. Built in the late 1800s, it was severely damaged in 1933 and fell into disuse after World War II. Its full restoration was completed in 1999 and includes a huge glass dome erected on the roof and giving an impressive view of the city. Open daily, free admission, but advance registration is required; this can be done online at least 2 days in advance or, if capacity allows, at the service center at least 2 hours before the visit (so online advance registration is recommended). You must have your passport with you when you enter the site.

[Brandenburg Gate](#): The iconic symbol of Berlin. Where Kennedy gave his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech. During the Cold War, the Gate was on the East side of the Berlin Wall representing the division of Germany, so when the Wall came down, it became a major site of reunification. It is near the Reichstag and is one of the stops on the bus tour. Definitely worth leaving the bus and seeing it up close, or just including it on one of your walks about town.

[“The Alex” at Alexanderplatz](#): This is the TV tower (Fernsehturm), Berlin’s highest construction, that one can see from our condo balcony. Book admission in advance to avoid long lines and enjoy its 360-degree view of the city. Or go whenever you want and wait in line, length of which varies depending on time and day. Enjoying dinner above the city is a special treat, particularly in the evening (again, book in advance)

Some sights near Berlin

Berlin and surrounding areas have many parks, lakes and rivers that we recommend visiting.

Short train rides take you throughout the county of Brandenburg with its 2,000 pristine lakes and forests. Since the end of the Communist era, there has been little development there, so it is touted as Europe’s nicest vacation area with lots of national parks, some with wolves and most with *Wildschwein* (wild boar). We’ve seen the former only from afar through a train window and the latter not all, but their ubiquitous presence is obvious from their earth upheavals; they are active at night and generally stay away from people during the day.

You can easily rent bikes at many suburban train stations, even eBikes that are worth trying out as they give you an extra push when riding up a hill or battling headwinds. Also, if you interested in “water hiking”, there are many boat rentals as well as houseboats that you can rent for a few days or weeks. Canals, lakes, and other waterways provide thousands of miles for exploring the pristine area.

[Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp](#): The only concentration camp easily accessible from Berlin. An interesting and sobering experience. If you go, we suggest the guided walking tour (info at link above) Availability is noted in their on-line calendar. Tour is 6-hours, including travel time, and leaves from an easily accessible S-Bahn station in Berlin. Note: It requires an ABC public transportation ticket: If you already have an AB ticket, you can get an extension for the C portion. (If you have an AB Welcome card ticket, you must purchase an R/T ABC ticket to visit Sachsenhausen; you can't extend the Welcome Card AB ticket.)

[Sanssoucie Palace](#): Grand palace of German kings. Located in Potsdam (a short S-Bahn ride from Berlin with an AB ticket), this is the former summer palace of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia and is considered among the rivals of France's Versailles. The buildings and the grounds are very impressive.

For more options beyond Berlin, check out the following sites:

- [Outside of Berlin](#)
- [Ten Great Trips from Berlin](#)
- [Day Trips from Berlin](#)

Museums

Museum options in Berlin are endless.

[Museumsportal Berlin](#): An online resource for information about 200 museums, memorials, and palaces. Also offered is a MuseumPass Berlin good for three days to a wide range of museums, etc., with either free entrance or a discount of at least 25%.

- Most, but not all, museums are closed on Monday. Check before going.
- Several museums are closed in part or completely for renovation or expansion. So check this site or the museum site itself before planning a visit

[Museum Island \(Museumsinsel\)](#): A group of five museums on a small island in the River Spree. Berlin Welcome Card has a version that includes free entrance over a three-day period (see above). There is huge construction going on there now, so check beforehand for what is open or closed

[Jewish Museum Berlin](#): One of the largest Jewish Museums in the world, its permanent exhibition documents two millennia of German-Jewish history. Easily accessible by public transportation. Check online for entrance fee. Also see *Architectural Digest's* article: [A Tour of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin](#).

ENTERTAINMENT

Classical music: Symphonic, chamber, and solo music performances abound, so I'll limit myself to those we are most enthusiastic about.

[Berlin Philharmonic](#): Consistently ranked as one of the world's best orchestras, its current chief conductor is Simon Rattle, who has announced that he will retire in 2018. The orchestra's concert hall is designed so that the audience surrounds the stage, as shown in this picture. Tickets are hard to come by, but try; you'll be pleased if you succeed. It's located near Potsdamer Platz so is easily accessible by public transportation. There is an almost weekly free lunchtime concert in the foyer, but seating is limited so many sit on the floor or stairs.

[Konzerthaus Berlin](#): Located in Gendarmenmarkt in Mitte, we either walk here or take the U2 to Stadtmitte for easy access. Its performance halls for orchestra and chamber music are beautiful and are sometimes used for other events as well.

[Hanns Eisler Berlin \(Hochschule fuer Musik\)](#): Berlin's Juilliard, with frequent performances by very talented student-artists, some during lunchtime. Tickets are reasonably priced, and some performances are free. Like so many other venues, it is within easy walking distance from our place.

[Mendelssohn Remise](#): Almost weekly lunchtime concerts in the ancestral home of the Mendelssohn family. Intimate, easily accessible by walking or U2.

And that's just a sampling above of classical music venues. Now on to opera!

Opera: Berlin boasts three opera houses, which are among Berlin's features that first drew us here.

[Staatsoper Berlin](#): (Berlin State Opera): Our favorite opera house of the three. Daniel Barenboim is resident conductor. Permanent home is the opera house on Unter den Linden in Berlin Mitte, which is within walking distance from our place, but it is closed for remodeling. And so, performances are at the Schiller Theater Berlin until the opera house reopens.

[Deutsche Oper Berlin](#): Germany's second largest opera house. Also home to Berlin State Ballet. During Communist Era, the only one of Berlin's three opera houses that was in the West. Rather bland visually when compared to the other opera houses. But very good performances. Easily accessible from our neighborhood via the U2.

[Komische Oper Berlin](#): Specializes in German productions of opera, operetta, and musicals. Easily accessible from our place by foot or U2. (An aside: In the past, we saw several performances here conducted by Kirill Petrenko, now the chief conductor of the Bavarian State Opera, and just recently selected to succeed Simon Rattle as the chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.)

Some other entertainment

[Bar Jeder Vernunft](#): If you enjoyed Cabaret (the movie or musical), this is the place. Indeed, we've seen Cabaret performed here. The audience is seated mostly at tables in an intimate, mirrored tent-like setting that transports one back to the 1920s. The performances range from chansons to cabaret to comedy, but they are all in German, so chanson evenings are probably the best choice. Not easily accessible, so taxi is probably best.

[Tipi am Kanzleramt](#): Europe's largest permanent tent-stage. Located next to the Chancellor's office (thus the Kanzleramt in its name). Offers chanson, cabaret, musicals, and concerts. We've not been so can't personally recommend.

[Friedrichstadt Palast](#): A bit of Las Vegas in Berlin, specializing in "show" pieces with acrobats, dancers, etc. Not generally to our taste, but popular among tourists.

[Admiralspalast](#): A legendary theater in Berlin that offers theater, concerts, musicals, and comedy shows. We went once and enjoyed a performance by a legendary (over 100 years old) vaudeville performer.

[Clubbing](#): There are a wide variety of clubs in Berlin, but they are not on our agenda. If interested, check out this link: [The Top 10 Berlin Clubs](#).

SHOPPING

Department stores and malls

[KaDeWe](#): The largest department store on the continent, maybe the most spectacular department store in the world. KaDeWe is Germany's Harrods (we prefer it to Harrods). Just about everything a department store can offer, plus, plus. Its landmark is the 6th floor Food Hall, a combination grocery-deli-chocolatier-restaurant-bar where you can taste specialty beers and champagnes, lobster or German sausages, and much more. It has something for everyone. Have lunch or at least a drink here, but don't miss browsing the various food sections offering selections of just about every kind of fish, vegetable, wild game, sausage, fruit, wines, chocolate, etc. Easy access via U2 from U-Bahn station near your hotel; exit at Wittenbergplatz.

[Alexanderplatz](#): Berlin's largest square. Lots of stores including Galeria Kaufhof (department store), Primark (a very popular Irish clothing retailer, with great bargains), and the newly opened Decathlon, which offers a wide array of sports equipment, clothing, etc. Nearby is The Alex, Berlin's TV tower (see section titled sightseeing).

[Alexa](#): Popular mall adjacent to Alexanderplatz. Numerous shops, as well as a food court, a bowling alley, and a fitness club.

[Friedrichstrasse shops](#): From Leipziger Strasse to Unter den Linden, there are numerous shops in this area, including many high-end ones, such as the French department store Galerie LaFayette. Just a short walk from Checkpoint Charlie.

[Bikini Berlin](#): New, trendy shopping mall. Not to our taste, but it's drawing a lot of tourists. It is in the Western area of Berlin, A short distance from it is the famous Gedächtniskirche, a monument of how Berlin was destroyed. The Ku Damm (as the Kurfürstendamm is called) is worth a stroll.

[Mall of Berlin](#): Even newer than Bikini Berlin at the famous Potsdamer Platz. Variety of high- to mid-end shops. Do not miss exploring the Potsdamer Platz construction.

Chocolatiers: Two chocolatiers are worth visiting. Both are near Gendarmenmarkt and within walking distance of each other. And both have restaurants.

[Fassbender & Rausch](#): Even if you don't like chocolate, stop by. They have amazing chocolate sculptures, including for example, the Reichstag.

[Ritter Sport](#): Not as fancy, but also not as pricey! And still fun.

Open-air markets

Holiday markets: Christmas, Easter, Oktoberfest, and other holidays and special events stimulate open-air markets with everything from food to beer to crafts to clothing to candles and more.

[Turkish market:](#) Tuesdays and Fridays from 11:00 to 18:30 (11 am to 6:30), including winter months. Endless stalls with fresh fruits and vegetables, cheeses, sweets, household items, fabric, etc. Also, food stands. Locals go regularly, but also fun for tourists. On the Landwehr Kanal in Kreuzberg near Kottbusser Tor. A short walk from U1 (Kottbusser Tor station) or U8 (Schönleinstrasse Station)

Flea markets (Flohmarkt)

[Flea Market at Strasse des 17 Juni:](#) One of the oldest and most famous flea markets in Berlin. Open Sat-Sun 10-5.

[Flohmarkt am Mauerpark:](#) One of the newest flea markets in Berlin. Sundays 8-6.

[Art Market at Zeughaus:](#) Not really a flea market. Offers artwork by Berlin artists. Sat 11-5, Sun 10-5.

EATING AND DRINKING

Some restaurant recommendations: There are 100s of restaurants in Berlin, so the following is just a sampling, most easily accessible from the above hotels and our condo. But don't limit yourself to these.

[Marinehaus](#): (number 4 on map) A short walk from the above hotels and even closer to our condo, Marinehaus is a very German restaurant. Lots of atmosphere. Not fancy, but food is good, and you'll generally find more locals than tourists there. Though primary focus is on fish, we also recommend the schnitzel. Also, good prices.

[Lutter & Wegner](#): Classy, traditional, historic restaurant at Gendarmenmarkt. Mid-range. Good food. Link is to their menu. This is a restaurant where they seat you, rather than your selecting your own table. Near Statdmitte U2 stop.

[Augustiner am Gendarmenmarkt](#): Good Bavarian restaurant. Love their beer. Link is to their menu. Near Statdmitte U2 stop.

[Deckshaus Bistro](#): A boat/restaurant on the River Spree, just outside our building. A fun place for lunch or dinner or just a glass of beer or wine, weather permitting.

[Maximillians](#): Another good Bavarian restaurant. Try their [Weisswurst](#) (white sausage), a traditional Bavarian sausage. Beer is good here too, though I prefer Augustiner's. Near Statdmitte U2 stop.

[Good Time](#): Our favorite Thai restaurant, and not just in Berlin. Great food, beautifully presented. At Hausvogteiplatz U2 station.

[Das Meisterstück](#): Restaurant and craft beers. At Hausvogteiplatz U2 station.

[Brasserie](#): Pricier than the others but excellent food and service. At Gendarmenmarkt. Another restaurant where they seat you, rather than your choosing your table. Statdmitte U2 station.

[KaDeWe](#): Visit their 6th floor market with fresh foods and a variety of cafes. Wander through to check them out and then make your pick: seafood to schnitzel to bratwurst and more. Also champagne and beer bars. There is a buffet cafeteria on the 7th floor, but choosing one of the 6th floor options is more fun. At U2 Wittenbergplatz station

Lunch options in our neighborhood: The following have good to very good food and very reasonable lunch prices.

[Suppengrün](#): (Number 6 on map) Best soups ever. Great for lunch. Walkable from above hotels and from our condo. Standup tables only. They also offer "to go" (*zum mit nehmen*) service. Inselstrasse 1A.

[Chez Gustave](#): (Number 7 on map) French Bistro food in Berlin: Salads, quiches, baguettes, galettes, and more. Tasty and reasonable. Inselstrasse, 13.

[Cana](#): (at the canal side of hotel number 1): Arabian cuisine. Business lunch buffet, Mon-Fri. Tasty and reasonable. Also open evenings with full menu.

[Shezan](#): (Number 8 on map) Indian cuisine. Tasty and reasonable. Across from Cana. Also open evenings with full menu.

Beer

Unless you simply don't like beer, don't leave Berlin without trying some, whether in one of the restaurants above or a brewery or a bar. And/or at one of the special events noted below.

[Berlin breweries](#): Lots to choose from as you can see from this link. Most serve beer as well as food. We've been to Meisterstuck (see above) and Brauhaus Georgbrau (in Nikolaiviertel, the historic area across the river from us).

[Berliner Bierfestival](#): If you're lucky enough to be in Berlin the first weekend in August, don't miss the annual Bierfestival, also known as the Bier Meile (a mile of beer). Free entrance and just about every kind of beer, along with lots of food options and entertainment. It's great fun.

Oktoberfest in Berlin: Not as large as the one in Munich (thank goodness) but still fun. We recommend the one at Alexanderplatz. (Generally from late September into early October)

Restaurant Protocol

Menus: Many, but not all, restaurants include the English translation on their regular menu. Other restaurants will have a separate English menu that probably is not as complete as their regular one, and restaurants that cater mostly to locals may have just a single English menu for you to share. Most, but not all, wait staff speak English fluently or "functionally" (as I describe my German).

Seating: In most restaurants (except the more exclusive), you just walk in and sit at your choice of table (unless there is a "Reserviert" sign on it). Once seated, that table is yours till you choose to leave; it is very unusual to be asked to leave to make way for other guests. At the same time, it is common to share your table if you are seated at a table larger than your party. This can be a fun way to get to know some locals – or other tourists.

Tippling Service and VAT (value added tax) is included in menu prices in restaurants, so a typical US tip is not required. However, it is usual to round up the total by 5% to 10% to a full Euro amount, e.g., a bill for 13.30 € would round up to 14€. Many restaurants have a sign saying, "Tip not included." This distinguishes a tip for good service from the 17% service fee that is generally included.

Water: Water is not free. An old German saying is that a glass of water costs as much or more than a glass of beer. When you order water, you will be asked whether still or carbonated (usual phrase is: *mit oder ohne* – with or without). Do not ask for table water.

Ice: Not generally served and may or may not be provided if you ask for it.

Bread: Not routinely served. If not served, and you ask for bread, there is likely to be a charge.

Splitting checks: Generally acceptable, indeed general practice in many restaurants. The waiter is likely to ask: All together? Or, more likely in German, “*Zusammen?*” If not asked, tell.

MISCELLANEOUS

For more sightseeing, entertainment, shopping ideas, check out your typical tour guides (Rick Steves, Lonely Planet, TripAdvisor, etc.) as well as the following.

- [Visit Berlin](#)
- [Berlin.de](#)

Cash vs Credit Cards

Major shops and restaurants accept credit cards, but many smaller ones do not. If they do accept them, they are likely to require that the card have a chip (lacking on many US credit cards). So, it's best to be prepared to pay in cash. ATMs are everywhere, but charges may apply. Check with your credit or debit card provider about charges if you plan to use it to get cash at an ATM in Germany. (And the German bank will likely impose a charge as well).



Smoking: Not allowed inside stores and restaurants, but generally allowed where there is outside seating (sidewalk cafes, etc.). Allowed in some bars, but not all. You will see a lot more people smoking on the street than in the U.S., though numbers here are diminishing. Smokers congregate outside office buildings and stores during breaks.

Alcohol: Don't be surprised to see people on the street and on public transportation with beer bottles and sometimes other alcohol bottles. Except during sports event times, and sometimes late at night, they are usually well behaved.

Homeless people: As in any major city, it's not unusual to see homeless people, some of whom may approach you for a handout. Just shake your head and they will move on—unless, of course, you choose to give them some change.

Dogs: Don't be surprised to see dogs in restaurants and stores. But you may be surprised at how well behaved they are there and everywhere.

Some courtesy words: Greet people in the morning with *Guten Morgen* (goot-en morg-en), in the afternoon with *Guten Tag* (goot-en tahg), in the evening with *Guten Abend* (goot-en ahb-ent). (Don't worry about pronunciation; they will be pleased by your effort.) Please is *Bitte* (bit'tah), thank you is *Danke* (dahn'kah). Even if that is all you say in German, the natives will be pleased by your doing so. And many enjoy the opportunity to speak English with you.

Questions, corrections, suggestions: ctessi@gmail.com.

Enjoy your time in Berlin.