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Berlin: the party goes on...

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Adrian Bridge finds a city as vibrant as ever.

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Why go?



Ever-present crowds at the Brandenburg Gate Photo: ALAMY

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Berlin is a city that is constantly reinventing itself – and especially so over the past 20 years, during which its eastern and western sides have sought to reconnect after the long period of division. It is fascinating to tune in to a place that is undergoing change on such a dramatic scale, and that is steeped in such history.

Although Berliners themselves admit that much of the city isn't pretty, it has a dynamic cultural identity. There are green spaces, flowing rivers and canals; it has artistic vibrancy and youthful vitality. Berlin offers excellent food at reasonable prices, bars that don't know the meaning of the words "last orders" and cafés where breakfast can be served until late into the afternoon. As people here demonstrated so admirably when the Wall came down 20 years ago on Monday, Berlin is also a city that knows how to party.

Travel with...

British Airways (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com (<http://www.ba.com>)), which has five flights a day from Heathrow to Berlin (Tegel). Returns from £161 per person.

Stay at...

The Grand Hyatt (0049 30 2553 1234; www.berlin.grand.hyatt.com (<http://www.berlin.grand.hyatt.com>)) on the Marlene-Dietrich-Platz in the glitzy new Potsdamer Platz, a great place to get a sense of this fast-moving city. Sixty years ago, this spot was Berlin's answer to Piccadilly Circus; 20 years ago it was a forbidding (and forbidden) piece of no-man's land. Now it is a buzzing commercial centre with restaurants, bars and cinemas. The Grand Hyatt is funky, sophisticated and arty. It has a bar with more than 200 kinds of whisky and a swimming pool with views on to Berlin Philharmonic and the Tiergarten. Rooms from 220 euros.

Too modern? Traditionalists should head for the **Adlon** (0049 302 2610; www.hotel-adlon.de (<http://www.hotel-adlon.de>); doubles from 220 euros, excluding breakfast), a stone's throw from the Brandenburg Gate. Too expensive? The Circus Hotel (www.circus-berlin.de (<http://www.circus-berlin.de>)) in Berlin Mitte has doubles from 68 euros a night and a programme of Berlin Wall-related tours.

Spend the morning...

Exploring what remains of the legacy of the Wall. Pick up a Berlin Wall History Trail Map from the tourist office (see below) and then take your choice: a tour on foot (taking in the Reichstag, Brandenburg Gate, Holocaust Memorial and Potsdamer Platz), by bike (going further afield to the Bernauer Strasse stretch of the Wall and the newly repainted East Side Gallery – see www.berlinonbike.de (<http://www.berlinonbike.de>)) or by bus (take the 100 from Bahnhof Zoo).

Fancy something more adventurous? Sign up for the Wall Ride tour as part of a Trabi safari (www.trabi-safari.de (<http://www.trabi-safari.de>)) It doesn't get more authentically East German than that.

Have lunch...

In the **Käfer** restaurant in the Reichstag (www.feinkost-kaefer.de (<http://www.feinkost-kaefer.de>)) The food (German with a modern twist) is on the pricey side, but you go there for the views of the city – and to avoid the queues to get into Norman Foster's brilliant glass dome on the roof of the country's parliament. Borchardt (0049 30 8188 6262), a popular spot with the political classes, does a mean Wiener Schnitzel and is classy and fun, but it has become a bit of a tourist thoroughfare. If you're on a tight budget, try a Berlin classic: curry wurst (sausage covered with a spicy sauce), available at kiosks throughout the city.

Spend the afternoon...

Soaking up the culture. Absolute must-sees include the Pergamon Altar, a stupendous collection of marble halls and figures from ancient Greece, in the museum of the same name; the Babylonian Ishtar Gate (also in the Pergamon) and the bust of Nefertiti (installed last month in the newly renovated Neues Museum).

Berlin has a vibrant contemporary art scene and, as befits the city in which graffiti became celebrated both for itself

and as a political statement, a rich tradition of street art. **Go Art!** (0049 30 251 6707, www.goart-berlin.de (<http://www.goart-berlin.de>)) offers guided tours of almost any aspect of the city's art life that you wish to explore.

Dine out at...

The Michelin-starred **Lorenz Adlon** (see hotel details above) if you have something to celebrate. There are exquisite lighter takes on French classics, fine champagnes and wines (yes, Germany produces some, too) and great views of the Brandenburg Gate (ask for a table that has one) – all under the beady eye of Kaiser Wilhelm II (he loved the original hotel and there is a bust of him in the restaurant).

Other top-end (but not quite as expensive) spots include the modern **European Gendarmerie** (www.gendarmerie-berlin.com (<http://www.gendarmerie-berlin.com>)) and the **Grill Royale** (www.grillroyal.de (<http://www.grillroyal.de>)) for good steaks and a younger vibe. More simply, the **Engelbecken** (www.engelbecken.de (<http://www.engelbecken.de>)), specialising in Bavarian and Austrian cuisine, is a firm favourite with the local Charlottenburg set (booking essential).

Stay out late at...

The cabaret. This is Berlin after all, darling. The following venues specialise in cabaret and musicals: **Bar jeder Vernunft** (www.bar-jeder-vernunft.de (<http://www.bar-jeder-vernunft.de>)), **Friedrichstadtpalast** (www.friedrichstadtpalast.de (<http://www.friedrichstadtpalast.de>)), **Chamäleon Varieté** (www.chamaeleonberlin.de (<http://www.chamaeleonberlin.de>)) and the **Admiralspalast** (www.admiralspalast.de (<http://www.admiralspalast.de>)). Occasionally there are reprises of the Isherwood-inspired *Cabaret* itself. After the show, of course, it's time to go clubbing...

At all costs avoid...

Some of the tourist tat at Checkpoint Charlie. The real border crossing stamps did not look like that.

Further information...

Berlin Tourism (0049 30 250 025; www.visitberlin.de (<http://www.visitberlin.de>)); **German National Tourist Office** (020 7317 0908; www.germany-tourism.co.uk (<http://www.germany-tourism.co.uk>))

Berlin Boutique Hotels

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