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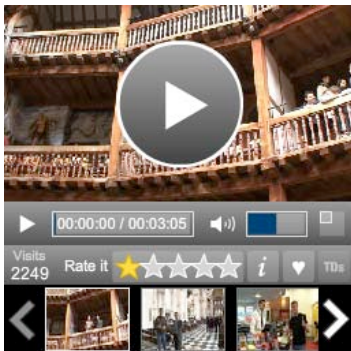
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## Berlin In Bloom

BY JAMES RUGGIA

**The German capital is rising again with a visitor rate to match**



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For almost half a century, Berlin was the fulcrum of the Cold War; the very edgy edge, where two mighty superpowers looked each other in the eye through crosshairs. In 1963, just five months before his murder, JFK assured the citizens of Berlin that we were all heirs to the same terrors and responsibilities, when he said "Ich bin ein Berliner." And it was true; the whole world shared in Berlin's dilemma; and that made Berlin Europe's most profoundly international city, a city belonging in spirit to all of us. Even today, just as Berlin is fully emerging from the rubble and ruin of its tumultuous century, citizens of the world feel revitalized by its victory. Though it may seem like ancient history now, it's only been 21 years since the fall of the Wall, and the place your clients find today is again a city of broad boulevards, linden trees, heroic statues in the Tiergarten, art galleries, brimming taverns and elegant shops.

Maybe the Wall seems like such an antiquity because Berlin has so embraced the promise of its future that even its brutally dramatic past is fading into shadow. Or maybe it was best explained by Marlene Dietrich when in her last film, "Just a Gigolo" (1978), she said to David Bowie, "Dancing, music, champagne: the best ways to forget until you find something you want to remember." These days Berlin is once again inventing moments and monuments we'll want to remember, and at the same time holding onto its history.

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## Berlin In Bloom

BY JAMES RUGGIA



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Whatever the reason, Berlin's tourism is on a roll, even as the rest of the world's tourism is declining. In the first quarter, Berlin visitation rose by 14 percent to 1.8 million arrivals, who spent a record 4.025 million (a 17 percent increase) overnights in the city. The U.S., Berlin's most important overseas market, increased 13.7 percent in hotel guests, spending 96,400 overnights in the city (up 11 percent).

Encourage your clients to visit the city now, while its renaissance is in full flower. In Berlin they'll encounter a sophisticated, urban experience that's relatively inexpensive, and yet as elegant as any to be found in Europe. The restaurants, the hotels, the arts, the shops and the theater offer world-class lifestyle experiences at moderate prices. The city's multitude of attractions in terms of museums and monuments is just one element in a fully diversified cultural encounter. Still, such sites as the Reichstag, Brandenburg Gate, Checkpoint Charlie, Museum Island, the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Jewish Museum, the Schloss Charlottenburg and the East Side Gallery command the attention of visitors. And you won't find a city in Europe that is more welcoming to Americans.

In a place as vital as Berlin, the best way to bring those attractions to life is as part of a larger experience. A broad variety of creative niche tours does the trick. For example, bicycle tours were the initial catalyst for Berlin's evolution of grass-roots touring. Cycling is a natural way to experience a city as large as Berlin; it's nine times the size of Paris, with 2,500 public parks, more than 100 miles of waterways and some 1,700 bridges. A variety of bicycle tours are conducted in English and German. A flat city, Berlin has 745 miles of clearly marked bike paths, and cyclists can take their bikes with them on the subway.

### Products & packages

A "Berlin Wall Bike Cycle Route" with Bike Tours Direct ([www.biketoursdirect.com](http://www.biketoursdirect.com)) follows the former Berlin Wall through the heart of Berlin and along the former "No Man's Land" that existed between East and West Berlin. This self-guided tour includes seven overnights, luggage transfers, bicycles and detailed maps for \$900 (land only).

For day tripping by bike there are several options. Fahrradstation ([www.fahrradstation.de](http://www.fahrradstation.de)) offers a daily highlights tour in English, as well as such special excursions as "Berlin and its Immigrants" and "City of the Cold War." Berlin on Bike ([www.berlinonbike.de](http://www.berlinonbike.de)) offers a number of specialty tours, including a "Nightseeing" tour, a four-hour tour along the path of the Wall and a "Gay Berlin" tour.

Fat Tire Bike Tours ([www.fattirebiketoursberlin.com](http://www.fattirebiketoursberlin.com)) also offers a number of specialty tours.

Berlin Tourism ([www.vistberlin.de](http://www.vistberlin.de)) keeps a full listing of locally operated niche tours and specialist guides that you can find and book on its site ([www.visitberlin.de/reiseindustrie/index.en.php?seite=bookberlin\\_guides](http://www.visitberlin.de/reiseindustrie/index.en.php?seite=bookberlin_guides)). It can arrange guides for theme walks or sightseeing tours of Berlin. Sightseeing tours without a coach are priced up to three hours from \$152, and \$44 for each additional hour. Walking tours of up to two hours start at \$152, with additional hours for \$57.

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Henrik Tidefjård ([www.berlinagenten.com](http://www.berlinagenten.com)) has been called “the most-connected, tuned-in guide in Berlin.” His wit and his thorough knowledge of Berlin’s restaurants and nightlife, as well as his overwhelming love of the city, make him a gateway into Berlin life beyond the Brandenburg Gate. He offers trendy shopping tours, nightlife tours, chocolate tours, urban living tours, Gay Berlin tours, Golden 20s and others. His restaurant dine-around includes three courses in three restaurants, and ends in a nightclub.

**Go Art Berlin ([www.goart-berlin.de](http://www.goart-berlin.de)) offers insider tours of Berlin’s high-fashion shops, design stores and artist’s studios. It also conducts tours of Jewish Berlin. The proprietor, Miriam Bers, is extremely well informed when it comes to the contemporary art scene. She customizes tours and can deal with high-profile, knowledgeable art clients. She can also gain access to special openings, private collections and more.**

The “Berlin Underground” tour ([www.berliner-unterwelten.de](http://www.berliner-unterwelten.de)) explores the bunkers beneath the city built during WWII and during the Cold War. Many of them remain in an eerie state of preservation. The tours run from 90 minutes to three hours in length, and cost between \$9.50 and \$16. There are nine different tours exploring such themes as Hitler’s Berlin, Cold War Berlin, the East German Stasi police and more.

A somewhat lighter side of the days before the Wall fell can be experienced with Trabi Safari ([cms.trabi-safari.de/opencms/opencms/trabi-safari/de/\\_main/home](http://cms.trabi-safari.de/opencms/opencms/trabi-safari/de/_main/home)), which explores East Berlin in an original GDR Trabant car. The Trabi or Trabant was the unofficial car of old East Germany, and its primitive engine and stodgy design made it a derisive symbol throughout Germany of everything wrong with the old government and society of the East. Trabi Safaris embraces the old beast with wit, offering freewheeling explorations of East Berlin. The two-hour “Wall Ride” explores the path of the Wall, and includes stops at the East Side Gallery, the Death Strip and Checkpoint Charlie, where clients experience document inspections as they used to be done. The tour costs \$113 per person, double.

Milk and Honey Tours ([www.milkandhoneytours.com](http://www.milkandhoneytours.com)) is a Berlin-based, Jewish specialty tour operator with programs in several European cities. In Berlin it customizes programs for travelers interested in the city’s Jewish history. A sample four-day package includes driving tours of Jewish and general Berlin (Eastern part of the city), with visits to the New Synagogue (Museum), the House of the Wannsee Conference, the Jewish Museum, and Museum Island; a boat tour; and a guided visit of the Pergamum Museum, with some meals.

Many of your clients will feel more comfortable with home-grown wholesalers. Brendan Vacations (800-421-8446, [www.brendanvacations.com](http://www.brendanvacations.com)) is mainly known for escorted group travel in Europe; several of these tours include Berlin. The company’s 18-day “Highlights of Eastern Europe,” for instance, which features two days each in Budapest, Krakow, Warsaw, Prague and Berlin, is priced from \$3,350, land only. Its independent three-day “Berlin Your Way,” from \$220, land only, includes roundtrip airport transfers, two nights’ accommodations and a Hop-On-Hop-Off Tour of Berlin.

Picasso Travel’s (800-995-7997, [www.nordiquetours.com](http://www.nordiquetours.com)) seven-day “Royal Triangle” combines Warsaw and Prague with Berlin. Priced from \$1,543 per person, double, it features six nights’ accommodations, breakfast daily and more.

FIT specialist Avanti Destinations (800-422-5053, [www.avantidestinations.com](http://www.avantidestinations.com)) suggests a 10-day combination of Berlin, Prague and Vienna, spending three nights in each. Though Avanti can customize a trip to suit your clients’ tastes, this basic program includes touring, a Berlin Welcome Card, transfers and connections between each town by rail.

Starting on Nov. 1, Air Berlin (866-266-5588, [www.airberlin.com](http://www.airberlin.com)) will start its twice-weekly nonstop service from Miami to Berlin. Air Berlin will be the third carrier to offer a nonstop connection from the U.S. to the

German capital, joining Continental and Delta, which have serviced Berlin Tegel from New York since 2005. The flights from Berlin and Miami will operate on Mondays and Thursdays, on an Airbus A330-200, with 276 seats in economy class and 24 in business. The carrier also serves Berlin from New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

For more information

[www.visitberlin.de](http://www.visitberlin.de)

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