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Ich Liebe diese Stadt

Your Spotlight on Berlin

By Jason Hensel

The world's largest cylindrical aquarium isn't in San Diego or Sydney. It's in a hotel in Berlin. Measuring 25 meters high and housing 2,500 tropical fish, the aquarium isn't hard to miss. But it can be if you're walking down Karl-Liebknecht-Straße in East Berlin assuming that the Radisson SAS is just another hotel. Pass it by and you risk missing one of the city's hidden wonders.

From the Brandenburg Tor to the Reichstag to Berlin Wall remnants, the city offers attractions and sites easily seen and happened upon. But there is another side to Berlin that is equally as interesting and can go unnoticed by novice visitors and meeting planners. The city—already a venerable tourism and business destination—ups the ante with camouflaged event centers and sustainable practices that preserve its history while moving forward into a century that is overwhelmingly dictated by environmental and social responsibility.

ARTS EXPLOSION

Berlin has, in recent years, started to regain its position at the top of the art world. Musicians, artists, actors and filmmakers are all moving to Berlin and seeding the city with an explosive arts scene not seen since the 1920s. With more than 170 museums and hundreds of independent art galleries, Berlin may be a little overwhelming for those seeking to visit the best venues.

One way to navigate the city's art scene is via walking tours, such as those offered by GoArt! Berlin, which specializes in 20th-century and contemporary art. Guides can take groups anywhere from popular galleries to private art spaces.

If guided tours aren't your bag, then look for the bananas. Thomas Baumgärtel, a German artist known as the "Banana Sprayer," has spray painted Warhol-type bananas on the sides of art

museums and galleries that he feels are worth a visit. With so many art attractions in Berlin, the bananas make for an easy discovery guide, granted you trust Baumgärtel's opinion.

Beyond museums and galleries, art in Berlin can also be found in hotels—the one most worth a visit is the Maritim proArte Hotel. Not only does it house hundreds of pieces of art with a different theme on each floor, it is the first bio-certified Berlin hotel. The Agro-Oeko-Consult Berlin GmbH—an official European Union controlling office for ecological food production and processing—awarded the title in 2007.

The hotel's meals are composed of strictly ecologically cultivated ingredients. For breakfast, guests can choose among three bio bread and sausage variations, four salads and jams and bio honey. Planners can also order daily bio meals for attendees, such as boiled topside of beef, sliced meat or roasted pork loin, all supplied by a regional producer.

RECYCLED VENUES

Unlike some cities that consistently tear down historic buildings, replacing them with cookie-cutter, mixed-use developments, Berlin merges its history with dynamic designs. Alchemical attractions, such as the Church of the Resurrection and the New Malthouse managed by business Besondere Orte, are examples of more-than-meets-the-eye, sustainable Berlin.

Looking like a standard church on the outside, the Umweltforum Auferstehungskirche (Church of the Resurrection) in East Berlin followed ecological guidelines during its reconstruction. Built in 1895, the church was damaged in World War II and deteriorated until the Berlin Wall's collapse. Today, the church is back to its original proportions, complete with steel and glass components. Inside, the venue can quickly change from seminar seating to an exhibition hall, making it ideal for meetings, dinners and trade shows.

The Bohemian Brewery used to be Berlin's largest brewery and included the 1898-built New Malthouse. Damaged, as well, in World War II, modern reconstruction has turned the facility's fifth floor into a conference center for up to 150.

All Besondere Orte locations offer organic beverages and fair trade coffees and teas. Caterers can cook using organic produce on request. An environmental assessment and the implementation of an environmental program earned the company the distinction of "ECOPROFIT business Berlin" in 2005. The ECOlogical PROject For Integrated Environmental Technology (ECOPROFIT) is a program for sustainable economic development created in Graz, Austria, in 1991. The project aims to strengthen local authorities and companies, helping to secure sustainable economic development, enabling companies to save costs through investment in eco-efficiency and environmentally friendly business processes.

THE PARTY GOES ON

The Kaisersaal, remains of the Grand Hotel Esplanade, is another example of merging history with modernity.

The Grand Hotel Esplanade was once the center of Berlin's hip society in the 1920s, where movie stars and statesmen hob-knobbed, raising a glass to optimism and fun. But (as a recurring theme here) World War II snuffed out the hotel's life. All that remained were the Silbersaal and the Palmenhof rooms, the main marble staircase and the restrooms. Still, after the war it played host to Berlin's celebrities—such as Marlene Dietrich and Hildegard Knef—partying in the remaining rooms among the ruins.

After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the hotel was granted historical status, and Sony purchased the land on which the remains rested on condition it would be incorporated into the Sony Center. That meant moving the Kaisersaal to a new location 75 meters away. The building was cut away from its foundation, raised on a pneumatic cushion, transported

centimeter-by-centimeter on rail tracks and rotated before being set into its current location. Encapsulated in glass, the hotel is now part of the modern Sony Center and offers event space for up to 800 in the Silbersaal and Palmenhof rooms.

THE DIVING WHALE

Berlin's Sony Center is a futuristic delight that is easy to spot, but another of the city's high artistic attractions can only be found in a bank.

The axica, an event and conference center, is located in the DZ Bank AG on Pariser Platz, east of Brandenburg Tor. What makes it special is that it was designed by architect Frank O. Gehry. Resembling a head-first diving whale, this curvy glass and steel structure can immediately jar a sense of wonder. Red carpet, smooth wood paneling and lights that shimmer like fish scales add to this nonpareil venue.

But axica is just one of Berlin's many memorable, camouflaged attractions. After being severed for almost 30 years, it's not surprising that the city is finding novel ways to remember its past while moving toward a glorious artistic and responsible future. **TMP**

JASON HENSEL is associate editor for The Meeting Professional. His love affair with Berlin sees no end.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Major Airports: Schönefeld, Tegel International Airport

Currency: Euro

Electricity: 230V, 50Hz

Primary Language: German

Population: 3.4 million

Time Zone: GMT +1

Web sites:

Berlin Convention Office

www.berlin-convention-office.de

Berlin Tourismus Marketing GmbH

www.visitberlin.de

German Convention Bureau

www.germany-meetings.com

WHAT'S NEW IN BERLIN

- Construction on the new **Airport Berlin Brandenburg International (BBI)** has started at Schönefeld, and the airport is scheduled for opening in 2011. After this, all air traffic in the Berlin-Brandenburg region will be bundled at BBI, and other airports in the region will close.
- The **DomLounge** opened in September at the top of the Radisson SAS Hotel Berlin, offering 1,400 square meters of event space on two levels with views of Berlin. The Radisson SAS Hotel Berlin can now play host to events for up to 1,500.
- In September, the **Jewish Museum Berlin** opened its glass-roofed courtyard. The new event location in Berlin rounds off event space offerings at the museum. It now boasts a year-round setting for up to 800.
- The winter flight schedules for Berlin airports feature new destinations: LTU now flies from Tegel to Bangkok, TUIfly flies to Innsbruck and Cairo and AirOne flies to Rome. Ryanair and easyjet have extended their offerings and now fly to Brussels, Lyon and Stockholm-Skavsta. In January, Lufthansa relaunched its flights to London City Airport.
- Where cranes are now clearing away the remnants of the Palace of the Republic—and where beginning in 2010 they will be busy with planned new construction around the old façade of the Hohenzollern Palace—there is to be a space for art. Starting in April, it will

be housed in the **White Cube** by Viennese architect Adolf Krischanitz. The cuboid-shaped, single-story pavilion will provide a showroom for contemporary artists for two years in the heart of the German capital.

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