



Berlin

POP 3.56 MILLION / 📞 030

Includes ➔

Sights	55
Activities	87
Tours	91
Festivals & Events	94
Sleeping	95
Eating	102
Drinking & Nightlife	109
Entertainment	115
Shopping	119

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ La Soupe Populaire (p107)
- ➔ Zenkichi (p104)
- ➔ Cafe Jacques (p105)
- ➔ Restaurant am Steinplatz (p109)
- ➔ Burgermeister (p105)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Circus Hotel (p96)
- ➔ Michelberger Hotel (p100)
- ➔ Mandala Hotel (p97)
- ➔ Das Stue (p97)
- ➔ Grand Hostel Berlin (p97)

Why Go?

Berlin is a bon vivant, passionately feasting on the smorgasbord of life, never taking things – or itself – too seriously. Its unique blend of glamour and grit is bound to mesmerise anyone keen to connect with its vibrant culture, superb museums, fabulous food, intense parties and tangible history. When it comes to creativity, the sky's the limit in Berlin. Since the fall of the Wall, the city has become a giant lab of cultural experimentation thanks to an abundance of space, cheap rent and a free-wheeling spirit that nurtures and encourages new ideas. All this trendiness is a triumph for a city that's long been in the cross hairs of history: Berlin staged a revolution, was headquarters to the Nazis, bombed to bits, divided in two and finally reunited – and that was just in the 20th century! Must-sees or aimless explorations – this city delivers it all in one exciting and memorable package.

When to Go

Spring and autumn are generally best for visiting Berlin as the weather is the most stable and cultural events of all stripes are in full swing. Summers essentially bring a population exchange as locals leave town for hotter climes and tourists, especially from southern Europe, flock to Berlin to escape the heat. This is the time of outdoor anything: concerts, festivals, beer gardens, parties, beach bars, cinema. Winters are cold and dark and life moves indoors, except during Christmas market season in December.

History

By German standards, Berlin entered onto the stage rather late and pattered along in relative obscurity for centuries. Founded in the 13th century as a trading post, it achieved a modicum of prominence after coming under the rule of the powerful Hohenzollern clan from southern Germany in 1411. It managed to cling to power until the abolition of the monarchy in 1918.

In 1701 Elector Friedrich III was elevated to King Friedrich I, making Berlin a royal residence. The promotion significantly shaped the city, which blossomed under Friedrich I's grandson, Frederick the Great, who sought greatness as much on the battlefield as through building and embracing the ideals of the Enlightenment. The best bits of Unter den Linden date back to his reign, when Berlin blossomed into a cultural centre that some even called 'Athens on the Spree'.

As throughout northern Europe, the Industrial Revolution began its march on Berlin in the 19th century, vastly expanding the city's population growth and spawning a new working class. Berlin boomed politically, economically and culturally, especially after becoming capital of the German Reich in 1871. By 1900 the population had reached two million.

World War I stifled Berlin's momentum, while the 1920s were marred by instability, corruption and inflation. Berliners responded like there was no tomorrow and made their city as much a den of decadence as a cauldron of creativity. Artists of all stripes flocked to this city of cabaret, Dada and jazz.

Hitler's rise to power put an instant damper on the fun as the dark ages of the Third Reich descended upon the world. Berlin suffered heavy bombing in WWII and a crushing invasion of 1.5 million Soviet soldiers during the final Battle of Berlin in April 1945. Few original Nazi-era sights remain, but memorials and museums keep the horror in focus.

After WWII, Germany fell into the cross hairs of the Cold War; a country divided ideologically and literally by a fortified border and the infamous Berlin Wall, whose construction began in 1961. Just how differently the two Germanys developed is still palpable in Berlin, expressed not only through Wall remnants but through vastly different urban planning and architectural styles.

Since reunification, Berlin has again become a hotbed of creativity, with unbridled nightlife, an explosive art scene and booming fashion and design industries. Sure,

problems persist – empty city coffers, high unemployment, the delayed Berlin Brandenburg Airport, to name a few – but Berlin's allure to tourists and newcomers from around the world remains unabated. It's a city that dances to its own tune, where individualism triumphs over conformity and brilliant ideas are celebrated. Few people who live here don't love it. Few people who visit will ever forget it.

Sights

Berlin is a sprawling city split into 12 official *Bezirke* (districts; for example Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg), which are subdivided into individual neighbourhoods (*Kieze*). Finding your bearings in Berlin is fairly easy. Key sights such as the Reichstag, the Brandenburger Tor and the famous Museumsinsel cluster in the walkable historic city centre – Mitte – which also cradles the Scheunenviertel, a maze-like hipster quarter around Hackescher Markt. North of Mitte, residential Prenzlauer Berg entices with pastel-coloured town houses, indie boutiques, cosy cafes and a fun flea market, while to the south loom the contemporary high-rises of Potsdamer Platz. Further south, gritty but cool Kreuzberg and Neukölln are party central, as is student-flavoured Friedrichshain east across the Spree River and home to the East Side Gallery stretch of the Berlin Wall. Western Berlin's hub is Charlottenburg, with great shopping and a famous Prussian royal palace.

Reichstag & Unter den Linden

With the mother lode of key sights clustered within a walkable area, this part of Berlin should be your first port of call. Book ahead for access to the Reichstag dome, then pick up Unter den Linden just past the Brandenburger Tor. You'll quickly notice that these

PLANNING AHEAD

- ✦ **Two months** Book online tickets to the Philharmonie, Staatsoper and Sammlung Boros
- ✦ **One month** Make online reservations for the Reichstag dome, the Neues Museum and the Pergamonmuseum
- ✦ **Two weeks** Reserve a table at trendy or Michelin-starred restaurants, especially for Friday and Saturday nights