

DESTINATIONS

BERLIN & POTSDAM

GERMANY



Germany

WHERE ON EARTH

BERLIN & POTSDAM

Tradition and Transition

by ELYSE GLICKMAN



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
FROM LEFT
Berlin street
art; Street food
in Berlin is a
global feast.

NO CITY DOES the “fusion” thing quite like Berlin. It not only rose from the ashes of World War II and the Cold War but found creative ways to wear its scars with honour and artistry — the Jewish Museum Berlin, designed by renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, visually exemplifies this. Since the famed wall came down in 1989, the united city has evolved into a cosmopolitan presence influencing design, architecture, art and food trends.»



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT Itay Novik of Elements of Food Tours; Currywurst at TV Tower; Chicken Schnitzel at Otto Heimke Potsdam; White asparagus.

«**THE BIG FOOD** picture of Berlin, meanwhile, has evolved in the past decade to the point that one can find food of every description from around the world, along with Michelin star restaurants that blur the lines between cuisine and design. Berlin restaurateurs and street vendors alike have made foods from other places specific to the city where they were adapted. Like pizza in New York City and tacos in Los Angeles, Turkish *döner* (grilled meats) and currywurst evolved into go-to favourites for Berliners, including vegetarians and vegans thanks to improved plant-based meat substitutes. Berlin's diversified palate is so ingrained and omnipresent that it feels like it has been around forever.

Itay Novik, chef and founder of Elements of Food, witnessed this expansion of Berlin's food eclecticism firsthand. He says it took off around 2016, the same year he founded his company, devoted to food tours and cooking classes in Berlin and Milan that embrace modern, traditional, and dishes that fall somewhere in between.

"I arrived in Berlin around 2011 when the (culinary boom) was just starting," Novik says. "At that time, we didn't have too much international variety." He cites the example of the "China Box" restaurant chain, which offered noodles mixed

with cabbage and Chinese-inspired snacks tailored for the German palate. Over the past decade, he observed that people caught on to the fact that "Asia is a big continent with different foods and flavour profiles" benefitting from an authentic approach, even when some ingredients are sourced locally.

"There was a need to re-establish a vital connection between individuals and their food and direct connections to food and the growers," he says. "As a certified guide, trained chef, and food writer, I aspire to connect locals and visitors to the source of their nourishment and the stories behind each dish via immersive food tours and encounters with the unsung heroes of nourishment — the passionate people behind the food."

Novik's most popular Berlin tours begin and end with artisanal coffee and sweets and include a visit to Markthalle Pfefferberg or a similar food hall populated with local vendors offering snacks and meals from around the globe. However, the centrepiece of his tour is a full lunch at a decidedly less-touristy restaurant that has fueled local workers for more than a century. It serves as a reminder that variances within traditional German and central European cuisines are worth exploring, comparing, and contrasting, on the tour and on one's own.



While there has been a marked uptick in global dining options since 2016, the seeds for fusion and innovation were planted decades ago. Currywurst, a snack embraced worldwide over the past couple of decades, could be Berlin's edible ambassador, as it is emblematic of how food innovation shaped the city regardless of politics and cultural shifts. Konnopke's Imbiss, wedged below the U-bahn train station at Eberswalder Straße in Prenzlauer Berg, is a currywurst shrine founded in 1960 and still operated by the founders' family members.

After World War II, Herta Heuwer set out to make sausages more exciting. Against a post-war landscape, she had few resources but came across surplus ketchup from the United States and curry powder from the British. She combined these and other condiments into a singular spicy, slightly sweet sauce that made a plump grilled sausage a sensation.

Getting the "lay of the land" is always a good idea at the start of a trip, and taking the elevator ride to the top of Berlin's TV Tower is a great place to do it. It may be super touristy, but a

virtual reality tour through Berlin's history at the tower's base and taking in views on a 360-degree observation deck at the top is a worthwhile way to do it — especially if currywurst is involved. While serious gourmands will book a reservation at German celebrity chef Tim Raue's fine dining restaurant Sphere, the more affordable Sphere Bar serves snacks, beer, wine and million-dollar views in a less formal but stylish setting. The Raue spin on currywurst is nicely done, especially when a beer or Riesling is paired with it.



Beyond currywurst, one can throw a proverbial rock in any direction, East or West, and hit a *Gasthaus* (inn) or *Stube* (bar) serving schnitzel, spaetzle in dumpling or noodle form, river fish dishes, grilled sausages, and beer brewed in-house or exclusive to the venue. However, it takes a certain degree of skill and imagination to make old school German dining exciting and relevant, particularly in style-conscious Berlin.

A short walk from the Berlin Hilton (whose prolific breakfast buffet overlooks the regal Gendarmenmarkt), several gasthausen get a little playful with the traditional gasthaus aesthetic, including Fischer und Lustig in Nikolaiviertel (Nicholas Quarter), a reconstructed “old town” district. While the outdoor patio has a festive beer garden that's a common sight in these picturesque districts, the clean interior's blend of maritime and steakhouse sensibilities provides interesting contrast to the heaping bowls of soup and dinner plates.

Restaurants throughout the city provided constant reminders that we were in the thick of white asparagus season, an institution among local food aficionados. The culinary delicacy was omnipresent throughout my stay. The large bowl of Fischer und Lustig's creamy, garlic-laden variation was a meal in itself, leaving little room for the crunchy, paper-thin Viennese beef schnitzel I ordered (or the popular redfish dish, either pan-seared or fried, with plate-filling potatoes and more white asparagus with hollandaise or butter).

Erdinger am Gendarmenmarkt, meanwhile, skewers Bavarian with dishes of the stick-to-your ribs variety, like potato soup with bacon-filled dumplings and rustic spaetzle, and signature on-tap beers. Whimsical wall decor depicts deer and other woodland creatures in traditional costume who stare at you »

Aspirational Asparagus

“SPARGELZEIT,” or white asparagus season is a dining phenomenon in Germany from mid-April to late June. Culturally, it symbolically kicks off the return of fresh produce to German home kitchens and restaurants. It is regarded as a luxury item and dubbed “white gold” for its silky texture, nutty flavour, and short growing season. It is sweeter and more tender than green asparagus thanks to a complex cultivation process in sandy soil, which prevents photosynthesis triggered by sunlight.

At the height of the season, restaurants in Berlin and other major German cities promote white asparagus as a main course, flanked with roasted potatoes or another starch, and if desired, a small side dish of chicken or fish. If it is prepared with care, the only adornments it needs are either hollandaise or butter, along with salt and pepper to taste.

White asparagus is available in North America, with its growing season taking place between mid-April and mid-June in the US and May through June in Canada. Higher-end groceries and farmers' markets may carry fresh white asparagus, either grown by local specialty farmers (primarily in Washington State and Michigan in the US, and Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec in Canada) or imported from Peru or Europe.



ALBERTO GASCO



Cook

MAKES 500 ML

Currywurst Sauce

Cola 500 ml

Tomato
Ketchup
400 mlApplesauce
6 TbsSpicy Curry
Powder 2 TbsTabasco
Sauce or Chile
Powder 1 tspWorcestershire
Sauce 2 TbsLime or Lemon
Juice 2 tsp

Salt to taste

- 1 HEAT** the cola in a pot and let it simmer down to reduce in quantity to 100 ml.
- 2 REDUCE** the heat, add the ketchup, and stir it in slowly.
- 3 STIR** in the Applesauce, curry powder, Tabasco or Chili, and the Worcestershire sauce.
- 4 STIR** in the lemon or lime juice, then let the mixture warm through for about 2 minutes.
- 5 POUR** generously on top of your bratwurst or sausage of choice and allow a little extra for fries or a dinner roll for dipping.

Adapted from a recipe courtesy of Visit Berlin.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
FROM LEFT Dutch
Quarter restaurnt
interior; Fischer
and Lustig beer;
Fischer and Lustig
entrance; Dutch
Quarter tulips;
Schnitzel with white
asparagus.



«with approval during your meal. Novik's selection for the main meal of the tour was a historic landmark off the tourist track on a side street. Henne Alt-Berliner Wirtshaus, a couple of doors down from a demarcation where the Berlin Wall used to stand, serves heaping plates of impressively tender pork schnitzel flanked by roasted potatoes and creamy mushrooms. The richness is cut with beers produced by the Berliner-Kindl-Schultheiss Brewery.

Potsdam, both a part of the Berlin/Brandenburg Metropolitan Region and a free-standing destination 24 kilometres from central Berlin, is worth a visit for detailed recreations and restorations of baroque structures



destroyed during World War II and the East German communist government. The revivals of the Stadtschloss (City Palace), the Barberini Palace, and the ongoing rebuilding of the Garnisonkirche (Garrison Church) bring back the authenticity politics and war took away. The old town charm of its Dutch Quarter and the Fortuna Gate is best enjoyed at a leisurely pace, against a backdrop where German and Asian restaurants peacefully co-exist with cute pubs and cafes.

On the traditional side of the spectrum, Otto Heimke features familiar Old World beer garden and pub settings, along with a lunch menu serving generously portioned classics, including outstanding currywurst and chicken schnitzel, my personal favourite expression of the dish. One caveat is that it is best to dine here with a smaller group as the made-to-order preparation results in slow service.

In a quieter corner of the Dutch Quarter, The Flying Dutchman fuses Dutch and German architectural and culinary influences. The building itself serves as a legacy of



King Frederick William I and Dutch architect and master builder Jan Bouman, commissioned to create the entire four-block quarter to attract and house Dutch craftsmen for work opportunities during the eighteenth century. Red bricks, curling gables and white window shutters frame its pub and sit-down dining section. Steak, locally caught fish and German standbys are enlivened with colourful heirloom vegetables from local farms and artful plating. The portions are as generous and German as meals come.

Although Berliners can justifiably be proud of the many restaurants turning out German classics in their signature style, a visit to the Markthalle Pfefferberg reveals Berliners' food wanderlust. The food hall reopened earlier this year with a complete renovation, along with Salami Social Club (pizza), Filthy Pleasures (Texas BBQ), a pop-up space that changes hands regularly, and Taqueria el Oso, which has garnered the biggest buzz for bringing authentic tacos to Germany, even grinding the corn masa and making tortillas in house.»





SERVES 2-4

Berlin-Style Meatballs

Berliner Bouletten

THIS IS a popular snack among locals and visitors wanting to switch things up from currywurst or schnitzel.

Bread Rolls
2, day-old

Onions
2, diced

Eggs 2

Parsley
1 bunch, finely chopped

Mustard 2 tsp

Salt & Freshly Ground Black Pepper
to taste

Ground Beef or Pork/Beef Mix 1 kg

Vegetable Oil
for frying

- 1 SOAK** the bread rolls in water, then squeeze them out and place them in a bowl.
- 2 ADD** the onions, eggs, parsley, mustard, salt and pepper and whisk everything together.
- 3 ADD** the ground meat and thoroughly knead everything together, then shape the mixture into round patties.
- 4 HEAT** a little vegetable oil in a frying pan and fry the patties until browned on both sides.
- 5 SERVE** with boiled or roasted potatoes. Other sides can include a dill and cucumber salad, a classic mixed green salad, or spaetzle.

Adapted from a recipe courtesy of Visit Berlin.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT Du Bonheur owner Anna Plagens; Potsdam Cathedral; Symple drip coffee; Flying Dutchman filet mignon.

to creating Japanese food with the resources and inspirations in his reach. All his soups, noodles and dipping sauces are made with intention from scratch.

Berliners love their coffee and pastries, and this was underscored with Symple starting our day and Du Bonheur ending it on a sweet note. The Symple cafe is an understated space in an upscale residential section of Prenzlauer Berg where a curated selection of coffees does most of the



«Novik turns our attention to La Victoria, firing up grilled Peruvian street food. He orders beef heart skewers, assuring us they are tender and delicious. Even with Peruvian seasoning, it's easy to understand the appeal to a German palate, with meat being the cornerstone of most meals. Novik's other spotlight was Kuma Modern Ramen, created by Berlin native Nam Nguyen. While he earned his degree in engineering, Nguyen has taken his knack for tinkering and applied it

talking. This somewhat unassuming spot is one of the places that launched Berlin's coffee revolution and its roasted-in-Berlin coffees have received accolades at the Amsterdam Coffee Festival.

Novik, with the approval of the manager on duty, demonstrates the correct way to prepare the El Carmen (distinguished with its tropical fruit and flower notes) and Black Diamond (from a father-and-daughter producer in Costa Rica) with the drip coffee method to maintain the integrity of each variety's distinctive flavours and aromas. Symple's chocolate chip scones and slightly sweet pastries prove to be just as appealing.

Du Bonheur brings together French patisserie and German konditorei sensibilities that add up to pure indulgence. Anna Plagens and Stefan Zuber opened Du Bonheur in 2013. Plagens keeps the boutique bakery busy turning out macarons, tortes,



mille-feuille, éclairs (some filled with raspberries and rhubarb), cannelés Bordelais, Paris-Brest pastries, seasonal tarts and croissants. Her foundational confectionery training in Alsace and five-year run as the production manager for Parisian pâtissier Pierre Hermé still inform what comes out of the oven. Customers appreciate her inclusive approach to fine pastry and use of gluten-free ingredients such as spelt and almond flour, as well as ingredients free of chemical additives.

The bar inside the Wintergarten Varieté Theater, founded in 1887 and at its peak during the 1920s, is a feast for the eyes. It's the perfect nightcap spot, not only because of its dinner theatre ambiance, but also its post-World War II reinvention in 1992. There's no better place to drink in the glamour of the past and the optimism for the future. 

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Book

Hilton Berlin City
www.hilton.com/en/hotels/berhitw-hilton-berlin

Elements of Food Tours
www.foodelements.net/berlin

Visit

Henne Alt-Berliner Wirtshaus
www.henne-berlin.de/eng

Sphere Bar at Berlin TV Tower
www.tv-turm.de/en/sphere-bar

Du Bonheur
www.dubonheur.de

Erdinger am Gendarmenmarkt
www.erdingerberlin.de

Fischer und Lustig
www.fischerundlustig.de

Konnopke's Imbiss
www.konnopke-imbiss.de/en

Markthalle Pfefferberg
www.markthalle-pfefferberg.com

Symple Coffee
www.symplecoffeeorasters.com

Wintergarten Varieté Berlin
www.wintergarten-berlin.de/en

Otto Heimke
www.restaurant-ottohiemke.de

Zum Fliegenden Holländer
www.zumfliegendenhollaender.com