



BERLIN BITES

YVONNE GORDON TRIES A NEW KIND OF GUIDE IN BERLIN AND DISCOVERS A DIFFERENT SIDE OF THE CITY, ONE THAT LEAVES HER FULL OF FOOD AND FACTS

and descriptions – the Sunday market goes ‘rock and roll’ at around 3pm when people bring out the bongo drums and barbecues; an area perfect for kids is called ‘Pregnant Hill’; the anarchist area of Kreuzberg famous for its punky, no rules ‘scene’, he describes as ‘a mix of Brixton, Camden Town and little Istanbul’ and the shiny new buildings of Potsdamer Platz are ‘Gotham city without Batman’. I could listen for hours but it’s time to move on to *Vino e Libri*, a Sardinian restaurant which specialises in fish, meat and pizza from the Italian island.

The front part of *Vino e Libri* is relaxed and informal – guests can read books from the shelves over a glass of wine or watch the gridlock traffic outside. Henrik says this will be a real Sardinian experience – great food with some chaotic service thrown in.

Dishes are a twist on original Italian flavours and on this stop, the *Gastro-Rallye* gets to taste two dishes – usually black ravioli filled with salmon and strawberries in butter and dill sauce and handmade Sardinian dumplings with potato and cheese filling in berry-passion fruit sauce, both created by chef and owner Bruno, and of course accompanied by Italian wine.

Then it’s on to a ‘gourmet temple’ – *Chén Chè Teehaus*, a Vietnamese teahouse-style restaurant hidden in a courtyard off Rosenthaler Strasse. It’s a charming space with windows looking out to the garden and lots of paper lanterns. Cuisine is north Vietnamese, based on recipes from old monasteries passed down. We get an assortment of delicious dishes – fried fish, spiced pork, Vietnamese green cabbage in

This is the hottest area of Berlin, there are trends born on every corner.” I’ve just met tour guide Henrik at Rosenthaler Platz in East Berlin, for a private gastro-tour. He’s full of enthusiasm about the city’s street culture, fashion and style scenes, especially in Mitte and nearby Prenzlauer Berg.

A youthful and creative city, Berlin is always coming up with something cooler and hipper than the day before and Henrik tells me that where we’re standing is ‘the-East-Village-meets-Shoreditch’, a neighbourhood full of fashion designers, galleries, quirky shops and restaurants. “The scene is urban street wear and individuality,” says Henrik, as we peer into the café *Sankt Oberholz* spotting twenty-somethings tapping away on Macbooks – apparently there are more Macs here than in any Mac shop in the world.

Next we walk through *NoTo* ‘North of Torstrasse’, a former working-class district and another Boho chic hub, home to record labels, artists, DJs and designers, and up *Kastanienalle*, a long stretch usually so full of posers, it’s dubbed the ‘catwalk’.

I’m on the *Gastro-Rallye* tour, a gourmet tour where each course is eaten at a different restaurant, an experience that lets visitors get right under the skin of Berlin’s culinary scene and explore the latest in creative kitchens and foodie trends. A lifestyle guide takes you off the beaten track and into one-of-a-kind, lively restaurants. As Henrik talks about the latest trends, it springs to mind that taking this

kind of individualised tour is probably one of them – and it’s much better than standing on a corner in a city wondering where to eat.

Our first stop is for starters at *Der W-Imbiss*, a vegetarian snack bar, where food is a fusion of Californian, Italian, Mexican and Indian. Spicy smells fill the air, décor is whacky with lots of hanging bamboo lamps, and there’s Hawaiian music playing on the stereo.

The focus here is on fresh ingredients – salads and organic drinks. I try an *Apple-Grass* drink – squeezed wheatgrass with apple juice. When it arrives, the thick texture and bright green colour brings to mind *Dulux* paint and I definitely get the smell of cut lawn as I raise the glass, but it is fantastically sweet and refreshing. A *Mango-Lassi* is also delicious – a yoghurt and mango pulp drink, while for food, we have an *Avocado naan* pizza – a crispy naan base topped with guacamole and homemade chipotle sauce, sun-dried tomatoes and rocket. It’s light, crunchy and nicely filling.

Over starters, Henrik talks me through Berlin, pointing out on the map the areas for everything from alternative fashion, organic shops and nightlife to where to go for post-club recovery brunch on a Sunday. He is brimming with nicknames



Fish grilling on a food stall at the Sunday market

From top left:

Naan pizza and mango-lassi at Der W-Imbiss;
A toast to Berlin's gourmet tour, Chen Che
Vietnamese restaurant.

sesame seed oil, *kim chi*, tofu, miso soup and rice, all served on a bamboo tray.

The final stop on the Gastro-Rallye is Rutz for a 'dessert inspiration' – rhubarb tart, strawberry ragout and yoghurt ice cream, served on a sleek black slate with an accompanying glass of dessert wine, followed by coffee with petits fours.

Henrik takes individuals or groups for his tours and it is a great taster of different Berlin restaurants, especially if time is limited. He also works as a trend scout for media, TV and film crews so he's up to date on emerging trends and he answers all my questions about Berlin. Another advantage of the tour is that you don't have to book – we get a table immediately in each restaurant and get what feels like the best service. After the tour I feel full of food, drink and knowledge. Next day when I am exploring Berlin, I feel more of an insider than a tourist. 📍

travel file

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Aer Lingus fly from Dublin to Berlin daily (aerlingus.com). Ryanair fly between Dublin and Berlin on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (ryanair.com).

Gastro-Rallye: Henrik Tidefjärd. Tel: +49 (0)30 43 720 701; gastro-rallye.com

For information about Berlin see visitberlin.de

OTHER UNUSUAL TOURS TO TAKE IN BERLIN

Take a Trabi Safari and see the city's main sights – you pick your Trabi and drive in a convoy through Berlin with others (trabi-safari.de) or if you're brave enough, learn how to ride on a Segway (electrically-operated scooter) and take a tour of the main sights, also accompanied by a guide (citysegwaytours.com/berlin).

The Berlin at Night tour visits hidden crypts, gloomy locations and scary spectral apparitions – spookier corners of the city include the mysterious catacombs under the Schlossfreiheit (baerentouren.de).

Finally, Berlin with dog is a tour for people with dogs, taking visitors through the cosy Berlin back streets, courtyards and parks, away from the hustle and bustle of the city (berlinmithund.de).