



RED LIGHT: The bar at Berlin

POST-PUNK DIVA

SEX, DRUGS *UND* ROCK 'N' ROLL: BAD-BOY BERLIN IS A BOOM TOWN... AGAIN

BY SPENCER BECK

Move over, London and Paris—Berlin is back with a bang! Europe's capital of culture during the celebrated *goldenen Zwanziger* (Golden 20s) was a super-sophisticated urban playground teeming with brilliant theater, racy cabarets, avant-garde art shows, trailblazing films—and sexual experimentation (think de Sade meets Sigmund Freud). The war and the wall sidelined the city for half a century. Today, this super-charged metropolis—nine-times the size of Paris—delivers a dizzying mix of Old-World charm and post-apocalyptic camp, making it once again the focal point for travelers all over the world with a taste for the outré.

FOUR PLAY Prize-winning journalist Luigi Barzini once characterized the nightcrawlers of Berlin between the wars:

"There were men dressed as women, women dressed as men or little schoolgirls, women in boots with whips..." Seventy-five years later, Sally Bowles would feel right at home. Berlin is once again an unabashed center of free-spirited *divertissements* (to put it politely), offering a mind-bending night scene that begins at midnight and often ends midday. Panoramabar/Berghain, housed in a former electric factory, features the best trash and flash in the city...and legendary back rooms. WMF Club moves from venue to venue and offers the coolest DJs and best light displays. At 40 Seconds, there's dining, drinking and dancing for the tony "West" Berlin set, with views over the futuristic skyline of the Potsdamer Platz. And on Sundays, check out GMF Café Moskau, where gays party without irony in a Soviet-

era building bloc. For a superb tour of Berlin's night scene, contact indefatigable party boy Henrik Tidefjård (henrik@berlinagenten.com).

EIN VOGUE Leave the lederhosen at home (or save it for the leather clubs)—Berlin has reemerged as a bona-fide fashion mecca. The cheeky style of the Dietrich-era '20s and the more recent punk explosion à la David Bowie and Iggy Pop has been replaced by a schizophrenic mix of all-out glamour and subversive chic. For the former, try on Friedrichstrasse, in former East Berlin. Along with well-established German designers like Jil Sander and Hugo Boss, houses from Gucci to Ralph Lauren have opened their doors in the past few years—at prices that will make fashionistas feel less victimized. If "street" is more your style, hit Oderberger Strasse in the emerging Prenzlauer district, where



The cheeky style of the Dietrich-era '20s has been replaced by all-out glamour and subversive chic




funky-fab labels like Hasipop and Harbo + Lwig are eschewing convention completely...and taking the Paris runways by storm.

EAST MEETS WEST You can still find plenty of Wiener schnitzel and dumplings, but Berliners in the know are flocking to restaurants that feature cuisines fused far from the Fatherland. One of the best is Zoe (www.zoe-berlin.de), located in the Berlin-Mitte district. Offering a typically wacky mix of Meditter-Asian-inspired plates, the airy spot is an oasis of Berlin-meets-Miami cool. An added plus for the nicotine-challenged: Smoking is still the rule in live-and-let-live Berlin.

AH... THE GUT LIFE The fab-fusion thing getting old? Berliners who want their food straight-up can go cutting-edge or classic. For state-of-the-art Asian fare, consider Hô Vang, where the post-punk set and well-heeled politicos down Singha beers and the best Vietnamese cooking this side of Saigon. Across town, Sachs features bourgeois classics with a Berlin twist, plus impeccable service, thanks to charming host Ernie. A must: oven-baked duck with creamy savory cabbage and dumplings, followed by the chocolate mousse with lemongrass-blackberry ragout. Forget sex for one night—this is better, and you'll welcome the break.

GET A ROOM The hottest spot in über-hip Berlin is the district of Berlin-Mitte. Surrounded by cutting-edge art galleries and tarty boutiques, the spanking-new Lux 11 hotel (www.designhotels.com; rates from \$140) offers sprawling suites with mini kitchens (and limited maid service) that

combine gleaming modernism (stark-white walls, two flat-screen TVs) with a double dose of hedonism (faux-fur bedspreads and exposed bathtubs of super-chic polished concrete). The gleaming 1897 Gründerzeit-style building also houses an Aveda spa and a soon-to-open restaurant, Kudi, which will serve up a typically out-there Berlin mix of Italian/Asian fusion cuisine. Nowhere to go after the massage and sushi à la romana? The young hotties who man the front desk will happily direct the fearless deep into the Berlin night. Or, if the *Mad Max*-meets-Madonna vibe of the former East Berlin begins to work your nerve, the posh hotel Qi (www.lock-holds.com; rates from \$160) sits on a quiet, tree-lined street off the famous Kurfürstendamm ("Ku-damm" to natives). The compact rooms are dominated by supersized bathtubs placed next to the beds, so make sure you and your traveling companion are buff and beautiful before checking in. Better yet: Blur your vision with a drink in the retro-glam members-only bar, followed by a decadent "Le Chocolat" massage, one of a dozen far-out treatments offered in the hotel's basement-level spa.

GETTING THERE Lufthansa, the only airline to currently feature WiFi internet access in the air, flies non-stop to Frankfurt, with frequent connections to Berlin. www.lufthansa.com. 

GLUCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Zoe, one of the hottest restaurants in town; the roving late-night party palace WMF Club; showering off at hotel Qi; and Streckers Café and Bar on Oranienburger Strasse in the trendy Mitte District