



SHORT
BREAK

BERLIN

The city's west side has rediscovered its groove, building on its reputation as the go-to district for culture, luxury and a hint of nostalgia, says **Lollie Barr**

THIS NOVEMBER MARKS THE 25TH anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, reunifying the once-divided city into a massive creative metropolis. The former East Berlin quickly laid claim to being the cultural epicenter of the city after artists, punks, musicians, students and eventually developers moved into the previously decaying districts of Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain. As a result, today the area has become so gentrified – young, trendy Germans mingle with bum-bag-toting tourists and global hipsters sporting war-time haircuts – that the old city exists only in memories.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the spotlight has shifted, illuminating the former West Berlin as if she were a theatrical veteran in her comeback role, exuding a confidence that only comes with maturity and long-held authenticity. The shops, restaurants, theatres, palaces, parks, opera houses and outdoor squares bustle with a new-found energy as investment pours into City West, as it has been rebranded.

Among the changes are a slew of new five-star hotels – **Sofitel Berlin Kurfürstendamm** (doubles from AED 570; 0049-30-800 9990, sofitel.com), **Ellington Hotel** (doubles from AED 692; 0049-30-68 3150, ellington-hotel.com), **Hotel Q!** (doubles from AED 640; hotel-q.com,

0049-30-810 0660) and **Das Stue** (doubles from AED 1,140; 0049-30-311 7220, das-stue.com) – that have taken over buildings old and new. The **Waldorf Astoria Berlin** (doubles from AED 1,530; 0049-30-814 0000, waldorfastoriaberlin.com) inhabits a gleaming new high-rise, at the once neglected and dangerous Zoologischer Garten station, a place that feels epochs away from the hotel's gleaming black-and-white Art Deco interiors, impeccable service and heavenly Guerlain Spa. This is where Hollywood and rock royalty rest their heads: Dustin Hoffman and John Goodman were recently guests, and I spotted Steven Tyler from Aerosmith, in head-to-toe white, flanked by fans on the hotel's red carpet before

The Brandenburg Gate symbolises German unity following the fall of the Berlin Wall

The Gemäldegalerie at Kulturforum, an important centre for the arts. **Below:** Cycling in Volkspark



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scurrying into a waiting van. Sip on a signature Sesame Daiquiri at **Lang Bar** (0049-30-814 0000, waldorfastoriaberlin.com), named after legendary film director Fritz Lang of *Metropolis* fame, which was shot at the Babelsberg Studios in 1927 when Berlin was that generation's Hollywood. The studios are still in use today; *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *Inglourious Basterds* were shot there. The Lang Bar looks on to the Fifties-era **Zoo Palast** cinema (0049-180-522 2966, zoopalast-berlin.de), which reopened last November and hosted red carpet premieres at the Berlinale film festival.

This end of town has long had a history of glamour and culture. It was home to the decadent "Golden Twenties" of the Weimar Republic, when the likes of Nabokov, Kandinsky and Dietrich enjoyed political and artistic freedoms, which inspired Christopher Isherwood to write *Goodbye To Berlin* (which was later adapted into the musical and movie *Cabaret*) as the Nazi era loomed. The **Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church** (0049-30-218 5023, gedaecktniskirche-berlin.de) with its ruined steeple is a visual reminder of their inglorious legacy, when over 70 per cent of Berlin was destroyed.

Recreating a pre-war atmosphere is the exquisite Art Deco **Café-Restaurant Grosz** (0049-30-65-214 2199, grosz-berlin.de), named after George Grosz, the socially critical painter who caricatured Twenties' Berlin, and is

situated in the 1911-built Haus Cumberland on Kurfürstendamm. The Ku'Damm, as it's known to Berliners, is a 3.5km-long, tree-lined boulevard imagined by chancellor Otto von Bismarck in the late-19th century as a promenade of fine stores beneath grand residences. After a long period during which it languished, his vision has once again been realised with cafés and restaurants spilling out on to the wide promenade. And luxury brands have returned to the preserved villas between Olivaer Platz and Joachimstaler Strasse. Here you'll find clean-shaven men sporting jackets arm-in-arm with women adorned in gold with belligerent French bulldogs on leads, as well as all the big names, from Chanel and Dolce & Gabbana to Hermès.

The **Kaufhaus des Westens** (0049-30-210 1210 kadewe.de) on Tauentzienstrasse 21-24, is Continental Europe's biggest department store, and stocks a dazzling array of the world's finest designers. But it's the food hall – one of the world's largest – on the sixth and seventh floors that will have you salivating in anticipation of a worldwide culinary adventure.

On a more modernist note, the Fifties' **Bikini Berlin** (0049-30-5549 6454, bikiniberlin.de), which sat empty for a decade, reopened last year as a concept mall complex featuring carefully curated boutiques, concept and flagship stores (alongside a hotel). It has been successful in luring achingly hip young designers from the east side of town. The



The playful foyer at 25hours Hotel Bikini Berlin

LNFA Shop (0049-30-2347 2059, lnfa.de) cherry-picks the best of Berlin's designers, including Esther Perbandt, Ewa Herzog, Aurelia Paumelle and Trippen.

Sharing a border with the **Berlin Zoo** (0049-30-25 4010, zoo-berlin.de), downstairs in the complex you'll find boys with tightly coiled buns and rolled-up trousers and girls in black drinking coffee across from the glass-fronted monkey enclosure of Germany's oldest zoo, as the simians watch the hipsters and vice versa. Within the complex is the playfully relaxed boutique hotel **25hours Hotel Bikini Berlin** (doubles from AED 790; 0049-30-120-22 1103, 25hours-hotels.com) with its eclectic interiors featuring hanging bicycles, an old Morris Minor and street art in the foyer. On the 10th floor is the **Monkey Bar** (0049-30-120-22 1210) and the restaurant **Neni Berlin** (0049-30-1202 2120), which propagates a sharing-is-caring attitude to cuisine that includes everything from Middle Eastern to Spanish, with a side helping of views over the neighbouring zoo and the expansive 520-acre **Tiergarten**. Created at the end of the 17th century from a former hunting preserve as a "pleasure park for the people", the best way to explore Tiergarten is by bike.

The west side of the city is blessed with a profusion of huge parks such as the **Volkspark Wilmersdorf** and **Preussenpark**, the latter of which is great for a Thai picnic with numerous stalls on weekends. **Charlottenburg Palace** ▶

SHORT BREAK



Clockwise from top left: Enjoy a concert at Berlin Philharmonic; a sculpture frames the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, the symbolic centre of City West; pick up local designer wares at Bikini Berlin mall

and Gardens (0049-30-32 0911, [spsg.de](#)) was erected as the summer palace of Sophie Charlotte, the first queen of Prussia. Today, Rolls-Royces and Mercedes queue as newlyweds wait to be photographed in the famous Baroque gardens. Beat the crowds by attending the **Berlin Residence Concert** (0049-30-2581 0350, [concerts-berlin.com](#)), featuring masterpieces from the Baroque and early Classical eras, in the Great Orangery on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

Deep within Charlottenburg, life moves at a rather genteel pace in the elegant neighbourhoods surrounding Savignyplatz. Here, you'll find the Art Deco classic **Hotel am Steinplatz** (doubles from AED 1,163; 0049-30-554 4440, [hotelsteinplatz.com](#)), designed by August Endell. It began operating as a hotel in 1913 and was refurbished 100 years later capturing the glamour of that era with contemporary flair. Through the years, a famous roll call of names – Vladimir Nabokov, Zarah Leander, Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, as well as film stars Brigitte Bardot and Romy Schneider – passed beneath its scalloped façade. At the **Bar am Steinplatz** ([hotelsteinplatz.com](#)), both locals and guests meet to enjoy classic cocktails as well as new concoctions such as the Beetroot and Pineapple Smash.

From Kurt Weill to Bertolt Brecht, Lou Reed to Iggy Pop, Depeche Mode to Nick Cave, the western side of the city has provided a soundtrack to more than one generation. When David Bowie arrived in 1976, Berlin was wounded by the war and torn in two by the Wall. **Berlin Musictours** (0049-30-3087 5633, [musictours-berlin.de](#)) offers an insightful glimpse

into Bowie's hedonistic Seventies' Berlin, including a visit to the legendary Hansa Studio where he recorded "Heroes".

For something a little more high brow, the **Deutsche Oper Berlin** (0049-30-3438 4343, [deutschesoperberlin.de](#)) is housed in a glorious Sixties Modernist building designed by Fritz Bornemann at 35 Bismarckstrasse, while **Berlin Philharmonic** (0049-30-25 4880, [berliner-philharmoniker.de](#)), led by the inimitable Simon Rattle, makes its home at the famed Hans Scharoun-designed concert hall at the **Kulturforum** (0049-30-26-642 4242, [kulturforum-berlin.de](#)). Besides Museum Island in the east of the city, this is the most important centre for arts in Berlin, featuring the **New National Gallery** for modern art, the **Gemäldegalerie** for paintings and the **Museum of Decorative Arts**.

Berlin is known as a city of the night. While minimalist techno resounds across the eastern side, nightlife in the west is – arguably – more sophisticated. **Rum Trader** (0049-30-881 1428), the oldest cocktail bar in the city, conjures up an image of pre-war Berlin. With room for just 30, its décor has remained the same since it opened in 1975. The current owner, Mr Scholl, looks like he's stepped out of the Forties with his retro spectacles and waistcoat. The bar specialises in impeccably crafted drinks, all served in vintage glasses, and you have to ring the bell for access.

While the East thrives on youth, City West is a bugle call for the mature palate with cultural attractions, luxury brands and rich history that come together to weave a tapestry of uniquely old-school Berlin experiences. **CNT**

MY BERLIN

Owner of lifestyle tour agency Berlinagenten, **Henrik Tidefjärd**'s innovative Gastro-Rallye culinary tours takes guests to three carefully curated restaurants in an evening accompanied by a charismatic insider guide. Here, his top gastronomic tips for the city



The sweeping, glamorous boulevards of Kurfürstendamm are once again on the radar of foodies. High on atmosphere, the legendary **Paris Bar** (0049-30-313 8052, [parisbar.net](#)) has seen Madonna and Robert de Niro enjoying fish, foie gras and lamb chops. **Brel** (0049-30-3180 0020, [cafebrel.de](#)) offers a local French brasserie vibe. The artists' soup – a strikingly vivid dish made of radishes – is inspiring and delicious. Another classic brasserie is **Franke Brasserie** (0049-30-3155 1030, [frankerestaurant.de](#)) in the Wyndham Berlin Excelsior.

Totally organic, their grill offers the juiciest entrecôte in town. **Restaurant am Steinplatz** (0049-30-554 4440, [hotelsteinplatz.com](#)) situated at the **Hotel am Steinplatz** has

elevated traditional heavy Berliner fare to an art form. The Königsberger klopse (boiled veal dumplings) are melt-in-your-mouth light. Meanwhile, **Diener** (0049-30-881 5329) holds on to its storied past with old-school food and atmosphere. Dark walls are hung with portraits of artists who've frequented the establishment. You must try the eggs in mustard sauce, a local favourite. At the other end of the spectrum is **Balthazar** (0049-30-8940 8477, [balthazar-restaurant.de](#)), purveyors of "Metropolitan" cuisine that plays with a spectrum of flavours – Asian, Italian and German. The Asian lobster salad is a revelation. For a post-dinner drink, **Universum Lounge** (0049-30-3276 4793, [universum-lounge.com](#)), with its Sixties-style design, is a must.



Beef carpaccio at Franke Brasserie



Brel restaurant