

Berlin's buzz

Berlin is a city like no other. Its cultural scene straddles everything from opera and ballet to techno raves and avant-garde theatre productions. GILLIAN EVANS takes a look.

In 1989, the wall that had divided Berlin for almost 30 years was ripped down, heralding the rebirth of one of Europe's

most fascinating cities. Today, asserts Jenny Memisevic of Did Berlin, "Berlin is one of the most exciting European metropolises. It is a magnet [to visitors] because of its fascinating history as a divided city, the fall of the Wall in 1989 and the survival of 40 years of political division." She

adds that Berlin's rapid and dynamic development as the modern capital of Germany also appeals to students.

Berlin has an enviable cultural vibrancy, with three opera houses, two main concert halls, 35 theatres and around 170 museums, not to mention over 300 nightclubs and 7,000 bars and restaurants. It has long enjoyed a reputation for its offbeat nightlife scene and musical heritage. "You can hear live music of every conceivable kind [in Berlin]," confirms Maureen Griffin, Director of Studies at Inlingua Berlin. Even street performers, she continues, are of a high standard and range from "virtuoso Russian accordionists to African drums".

Berlin is popular with language travellers of all ages, particularly, according to Dirk Heiland of Die Neue Schule, "young people [aged] 16 to 26, interested in parties, clubs,

music and culture in general, [and] people between 45 and 65, interested in theatres, museums and opera". Many of Heiland's

older clients have been to Berlin before and "want to see the changes", he adds.

Indeed, Berlin has undergone so many changes over the past 10 years that there is always something

new to see or explore. For example, Potsdamer Platz, which was once a barren no-man's land between East and West, is currently undergoing massive redevelopment. So far, it has over 120 shops and 20 cinemas, including an Imax cinema.

Language schools in Berlin are proud of what their city has to offer, and organise tours and

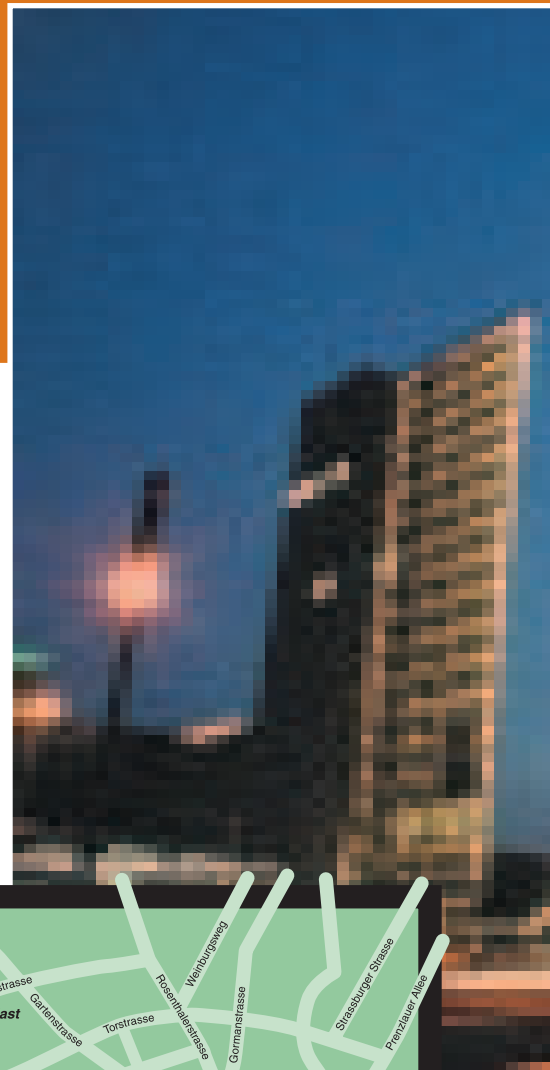
other activities for students to get to know the place and its people. Uwe Stränger at Prolog Sprachenschule says, "The cultural programme we offer is a mixture of more 'traditional' sightseeing, city walks and visiting new and popular places like the Film Museum or the Jewish Museum. In



Reichstag
The Reichstag was restored as home to the German parliament during the 1990s. Graffiti from Soviet occupation soldiers has been left exposed on the lower levels as a reminder of the past



Brandenburg Gate
Situating near the Reichstag, the 60 metres-tall Brandenburg Gate was once the main entrance into the city. It formed part of the wall dividing East and West Berlin and became a symbol of reunification



addition, we make sure that students have the most recent information on theatres, operas, ballet, clubs, etc." Prolog also arranges a *Stammtisch* (regular reserved table) at a local pub, where students can meet up with students from other classes.

There are numerous bars and clubs throughout Berlin, with the most popular nightspots being in the areas of Schoeneberg, Kreuzberg, Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain. "Friedrichshain is not so much influenced by mainstream tourists as the [other areas so] you can meet normal



Postdamer Platz has seen massive redevelopment (main picture)

‘Berlinians’ together with bohemians from all over the world,” says Ulrich Schmidt, Manager of Friedländer Schule.

According to Griffin, nightclubs and bars such as WMF, the Tresur and the Kaffee Burger are “definitely ‘in’” among students. But she adds, “[There are] countless other clubs which you can find in all parts of the city and you always discover ones you’ve never tried before.”

“Bars and restaurants are open all night, and certainly, there is a huge variety of entertainment places for every taste – no matter how hot and spicy you like it!” adds Memisevic. And travelling back in the small hours of the morning can add to the fun for students. “When it’s really late the U-bahns [subway] don’t run so you have to get home by night bus and the atmosphere on these buses full of revellers returning home is fantastic,” says Griffin.

It is also easy to discover Berlin’s cultural and historic roots. Berlin’s buildings, monuments and museums weave a tapestry of its intricate past. There is the imposing

Brandenburg Gate, the symbol of the city itself; the Russian-German museum at Karlshorst, which used to be the museum of the Soviet Army; and the East Side Gallery, which comprises a section of the original Berlin Wall that has been painted with pictures by famous artists from around the world. Berlin has also become a hotbed for modern architecture. The 19th-century Reichstag building, which is the seat of the German parliament, has undergone a facelift which included the construction of a huge glass dome with a viewing gallery that offers panoramic views of the city.

There is much to do throughout the year in Berlin, such as shopping at the Christmas markets, ice-skating at Alexanderplatz, trips to open-air cinemas and strolling through the Tiergarten park. Berlin’s multicultural population means that there is plenty of

Agent viewpoint

“Berlin is usually chosen [by our clients] for its diversity of activities. A rich culture, theatres, nightlife – the list is endless! One can say that Berlin is to Germany what New York is to the USA. So if people are looking for action, Berlin is a wonderful option. Students can do whatever they want in their free time – museums, discos, travelling to the nearby city of Dresden. This is truly an advantage of Berlin. The action never stops. The only disadvantage of Berlin is what is true of most larger cities – there are many inhabitants and many tourists, so one must watch out for [pickpockets]. We usually recommend Berlin for people who already have a basic knowledge of German so moving around [the city] does not become a problem.”

Annie Stratmann de Rangel, Regioenlace Europa SC, Mexico

“Berlin is mostly popular with university students, as it offers attractions and a social scene that few other cities have. We have been sending students to Berlin for the last six to seven years and they also find the German families quite friendly and talkative. For students coming from Belgium it’s also important not to meet too many other French speakers, and the environment is definitely very international, with few French students.”

Alain Bertholet, Langues Vivantes – Interlingua, Belgium

“Our clients generally choose to study in Berlin because it is a capital city. In their free time, they like to see the sights and sample the great variety of nightlife. There is a lot to do in Berlin and, considering it is the capital, the cost of living is relatively low. However, it is obviously more expensive to stay in Berlin than in most smaller German towns, and students may have to travel further to attend classes.”

Paul Wakeman, Global Education, Spain

international cuisine to sample, although the city itself is famous for the *Berliner Weisse*, a pale-coloured wheat beer, which is often served with a *Schuss*, a shot of sweet syrup. Annual festivals pepper the city’s calendar,

with one of its most famous being the techno music street festival, the Berlin Love Parade. However, Stränger adds, “There are street festivals every single month in one of the parts of Berlin.” Peter Klier, Director of International AMB Berlin, says students enjoy these many festivals because “they like

the difference – they have [usually] never experienced anything like this in their [home] countries”.

With so much going on, Berlin is an obvious choice for those looking for a full study abroad experience. “Berlin was ‘forgotten’ for a long time,” says Stränger. “Now students [are] rediscovering the city.” □



Nightlife in Berlin

Berlin is fast gaining a reputation for one of the best nightlife scenes in Europe, with hundreds of different bars to choose from. Choices range from quiet drinking dens to glamorous clubs