

In this first month Berlin has proved fairly easy to access - indeed, Berliners seem to interact with a certain ease (there are exceptions). This impression is aided by the blue sky and, of course, my initial lack of knowledge with regards to the German language. The smiling waitress could be telling me to stick my head in the river in response to my request for “ein Frühstück”, but since a tasty (schmecker) breakfast arrives I’m fairly certain the exchange has been a success. Prenzlauer Berg, one of the only hills in Berlin (those that there are were mostly built with rubble after the war), and my neighbourhood for the next few months, offers a surfeit of bars, restaurants and overpriced vintage clothing shops - Spitalfields for the affluent, fashionable bourgeoisie who have colonised the area post-reunification. The current trend amongst style-conscious Prenzlauer Berg maters is a penchant for mock-Victorian perambulators (Prenzlauer Berg has the highest fertility rate in Germany). All to the good – though this population boom may be contributing to the rise of property prices and rapid gentrification visible in the area.

In any case, the first things to do when arriving are to arm yourself with an *ADAC CityAtlas* (similar to our A-Z), a copy of *Index*, which is the free gallery guide you can pick up at most art venues, and a bicycle. With these three items you’re on your way to having ‘the knowledge’. Cycling, although not without its hazards, is certainly the fastest way to get to know Berlin’s geography - and with fairly generous bicycle lanes and considerate drivers - a real pleasure. If you haven’t brought your own Fahrrad there are plenty of bike shops to peruse. There are of course bikes to be had very cheaply at markets such as the flea market (Flohmarkt) at Mauerpark, but these may well be stolen (I’ve had one lock cut already). For those who are particularly discerning about their wheels, there’s a veritable mecca of classic models available at [Aloha Berlin](#), Oderberger Strasse 35. If you’re more inclined for the occasional jaunt, it’s possible to hire bikes for roughly €9-12 per day from hostels, shops and tourist hot-spots such as

Alexanderplatz. Two points to note are that you may, with care, cycle on pavements (everyone does) and also, for €1.50 take your bike on the U-bahn.



Aloha Berlin – Fahrrad mecca

Once you have these items it's possible to traverse town fairly quickly, despite its size. For easy orientation the long straight thoroughfare that is named consecutively (east-west) Karl Liebknecht strasse, Unter den Linden, Strasse des 17 Juni, Bismark strasse, Kaiser-damm and Heerstrasse can be thought of as a central spine from which you may veer off north or south. Friedrichstrasse is also a useful route which runs from Oranienburger Tor in Mitte (north) to Hallesches Tor (south). If you're gallery hopping this includes several stops in Mitte (c/o Berlin, the old postal building, Struth Magers, and the galleries on Linienstrasse)

and the many galleries near check point Charlie on Zimmerstr., Kochstr. and Lindenstr. in Kreuzberg. If you continue down past this onto Mehring damm you'll find yourself at Templehof airport, recently closed, which is an awesome example of national socialist architecture. For exploring eastwards, north of the river (der Spree) is Karl Marx/Frankenfurter Allee, the showcase boulevard of the former communist GDR. The most useful route south-east is Koepernicker strasse, from which you may drop down to access the more eastern districts of Kreuzberg and Neukölln.

So, enough bewildering directions. You have a map and some way of getting about. If you're serious about gaining a better understanding of German, there are plenty of language schools. I was recommended [VHS](#) (Volkshochschule) which is an adult learning institution, partly state-funded, that offers a cornucopia of (reasonably priced) courses from yoga to programming for image-focussed web sites. VHS operates from several sites, so wherever you're based there should be one close-by. Although in art circles English is as prevalent as German, it really helps to have some Deutsch to aid everyday communication, and if you need to find work it's a real advantage – if not a must. At the end of these reports you'll find a few phrases for the linguistically daring. The best Wörterbuchs (English-German dictionaries) are produced by [Langenscheidt](#) – they're bright yellow and available at most bookshops. On this note, the best bookshops (Buchhandlung) I've found for art/architecture/film are [Walter Köenig](#) (Burgstraße 27), [Dussmann](#) (Friedrichstrasse 90), the bookshop at [NGBK](#) (Oranienstrasse 25), [Martin Gropius Bau](#) (Niederkirchnerstraße 7) and [Pro-QM](#) (Almstadtstraße 48-50). There are also plenty of second-hand book vendors to be found (English language books aren't cheap).

If you're lucky enough to be in Berlin while the weather is good – which it generally is into October, outdoors pursuits are available in abundance. Berlin is surrounded by lakes and forests, with one of the longest inland beaches in Europe at Wannsee, in the West. A more secluded spot, especially for FKK (nudist) enthusiasts is Teufelsee (Devils lake), at the northern tip of Grunewald forest. Close by is Teufelsberg, another man-made hill, which is topped by the

former American radar station. Surrounded by a triple fence, it's possible to slip through and climb the large tower from which vantage you have an incredible view of the city and the surrounding forest.



View of one of the radar spheres at Teufelsberg

For general swimming info go to BBB Berlin: www.berlinerbaederbetriebe.de. Here you'll find all the state run pools and sauna facilities, the latter of which you'll be thankful for when the temperature drops to below freezing. There are many indoor and outdoor pools, with the indoor facilities mostly closed in the summer. The most architecturally grand Hallenbad are Stadtbad Charlottenburg (Alte), Stadtbad Neukölln and Stadtbad Mitte. If you'd rather stay dry (good luck!) there are plenty of parks in which to frolic. I've been informed that in recent years Tiergarten, the expansive, wooded *Central Park* of Berlin, has been overrun with enormous durational barbeques.

Nestled in the Tiergarten at John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10 is the fantastic [Haus der Kulturen der Welt](#), designed in 1957 by the American architect [Hugh Stubbins](#) as a congresshall. Recently refurbished, and now functioning as an arts centre, the

shell-like arc of the main auditorium hovers over a man-made lake (in which sits an enormous bronze Henry Moore 'Butterfly'). It's common knowledge that the building's unofficial name is the "Schwangere Auster" – the "pregnant oyster". Here is currently exhibited the work of two Asian artists – Tadashi Kawamata's *Berlin Tree Huts* and a large scale "performative installation" by Qui Zhijie. Well worth a visit.



Haus der Kulturen der Welt

A striking public work recently installed at [Brandenburger Tor](#) is *At Crossroads* by Kalliope Lemos, consisting of nine Turkish fishing boats that were used to transport illegal migrants from east to west, recovered from the coast of Greece. These traditional looking craft are stacked upside-down in a massive cradle/framework which when seen from a distance resembles some kind of memorial tower or Vietnamese temple – an intriguing, resonant piece.



At Crossroads, temporarily sited at Brandenburger Tor

Lastly, fans of vocal excitement shouldn't miss the unofficial outdoor karaoke at the small amphitheatre in Mauerpark near the flea-market, which draws in hundreds of participants/onlookers on Sundays – a typical expression of Berliner *joi de vivre* and highly entertaining!

An Artists Phrasebook – Part 1

Do you have any turpentine with which to clean my brushes?

Hättest du vielleicht etwas Pinselreiniger für mich?

I say, isn't that a Caspar David Friedrich (CDF)?

Ich würde auf CDF tippen.

Would you mind holding still while I sketch that position you're in?

Könntest Du bitte einen Moment still halten, damit ich die Position skizzieren kann?

I've left my chisel's in England – no more carving for me!

Da ich meine Meißel in England vergessen habe kann ich keine Holzschnitte mehr machen!

My greatest influences are.....(Yves Klein, Naum Gabo, Rolf Harris)

Yves, Naum und Rolf waren die einflussreichsten Künstler auf mich.

I wish I knew what you were trying to get at, but in any case I really don't like that colour.

Ich verstehe das nicht und liebe nicht die Farbe.

Would you like to collaborate with me?

Hättest du Lust mit mir zusammenzuarbeiten?