

Berlin's weird, wacky and wonderful

BERLIN

Try bicycling on a runway or visiting the David Hasselhoff 'museum'

BY DAVID FARLEY

The Brandenburg Gate and the Fernsehturm, the erstwhile East Berlin TV tower, are icons of the German capital, not to mention what's left of the wall. Visitors flock to the Pergamon Museum, the Alte Nationalgalerie and Checkpoint Charlie. Even the famed anything-goes techno club Berghain, with its long waits and famously finicky doorman, is on every visitor's checklist these days.

But there's another Berlin, one in which you can linger in underground bunkers, transport yourself to Southeast Asia without leaving the city and bicycle on an airport runway. Not all of this untrammelled Berlin requires traveling to the outer limits of this Mitteleuropa metropolis. As a visitor, though, you might stroll right past something that would have been trip altering in its uniqueness or, in many cases, its Berlinness. Here are some places to hit that might not have been on your radar.

BERLINER UNTERWELTEN

Underneath Berlin is a legion of formerly secret subway stations, air-raid shelters and bunkers that are open to the public. Berliner Unterwelt (Underground Berlin) takes you beneath the streets to these once-mysterious locales. Walk down subterranean tunnels that were used for smuggling people out of the former East Berlin and see remnants of Hitler's unfulfilled fantasy capital city, Germania, to be built on top of Berlin.

DAVID HASSELHOFF MUSEUM

Berlin has museums dedicated to the Ramones and the currywurst, but the quirkiest might be this diminutive collection of minutiae dedicated to the American actor and singer David Hasselhoff. Located in the basement of a



GORDON WELTERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

hostel, this hidden museum displays various items stretching from Mr. Hasselhoff's days as star of "Knight Rider" to "Baywatch" to his unlikely career as a pop singer. Why the German nation embraced the songs of Mr. Hasselhoff, however, remains a mystery.

DONG XUAN CENTER

In the eastern district of Lichtenberg, this large Vietnamese shopping and dining center feels like a walled compound containing hangarlike buildings with long aisles flanked by stalls selling things including cheap clothes and housewares. A handful of great dining options are also here. One of the best is Duc Anh, serving variations on pho and the Hanoi noodle-and-fish-sauce staple, bun cha.

HANSA STUDIOS

Fans of David Bowie have long been making pilgrimages to this studio near Potsdamer Platz — the late singer recorded his "Low" and "Heroes" albums, and the EP "Baal," here — but music fans, in general, shouldn't skip a beat to stop by. After all, U2's "Achtung Baby," Iggy Pop's "Lust for Life" and R.E.M.'s final studio album, "Collapse Into Now," were all recorded here. There are two-hour tours on select dates throughout the month.

LIQUIDROM

Looking like a pointy circus tent from the distant future, Liquidrom is a spa that only Berlin could conjure up. There are variations on the theme of saunas and steam rooms, but Liquidrom's pièce de résistance is the huge saltwater pool where visitors can float for hours while underwater techno music plays and colored lighting gently glows throughout the arch-ceiling space. You can top off the experience with a Balinese herbal massage or an aromatic oil massage. Locals come here after a night out of clubbing and debauchery.

MUSEUM OF MEDICAL HISTORY

Enlarged human brains, newborn babies with deformities encased in large glass jars, a 132-pound colon and other anatomical abnormalities are on display at this museum, associated with Charité medical school. Some see the collection of 750 objects on display as macabre and others see it as medically intriguing. This assemblage of oddities began over a century ago when Dr. Rudolf Virchow, the father of modern pathology, took a particular interest in corporal deformities (as one does) and began to forage for the unusual and the abnormal. The museum also includes an iron lung and an anatomical theater, where medical



STEFFI LOOS/GETTY IMAGES

students could watch autopsies taking place.

STONE BREWING WORLD BISTRO & GARDENS

German beer drinkers raised a collective eyebrow when the lauded California craft brewery Stone Brewing opened in a 1901 brick gasworks complex on the outskirts of Berlin in 2016. But when locals got a taste (and an eyeful) of the in-house pub and restaurant, they might have well have let out a collective burp. The massive wood-and-glass beer hall is an ideal venue for sampling one (or two) of the 25 Stone beers on tap while eating hoisin chili duck tacos, Vietnamese spring rolls and tender brisket.

TEMPELHOF AIRPORT

Site of the famed Berlin Airlift in 1948-49, Tempelhof Airport closed in 2008, and residents voted to turn it into a park. Rent a ride at nearby Little John Bikes and spend a few hours pedaling on a runway; then take a breather at one of the beer gardens (open only on weekends) sprinkled throughout the grounds. The 4,000-foot-long Nazi-era terminal building, scheduled to become an event space, is one of the largest structures in Germany and is open for two-hour tours four days a week.



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TEUFELSBERG

Set on a 375-foot-high hill of rubble in the western part of Berlin, the Cold War relics of Teufelsberg make up a mish-mash of large satellite dishes and ramshackle domed towers, many of which are coated in eye-pleasing street art. American forces were stationed here in the 20th century, apparently trying to quietly disrupt radio signals from the Eastern bloc, but other activity that went on here will be a mystery until 2020 when the site's official archives will be opened and available. Fans of Cold War history, street art and great views gravitate here. Wander around on your own or take a 90-minute guided tour.

THAI PARK

Located in Preussen Park in the western Wilmerdorf neighborhood, this weekly outdoor feast features Thai food cooked by immigrants from the Southeast Asian country. Every Saturday and Sunday (and occasionally on Friday) in good weather, Berlin-residing Thai women set up their wares on blankets in the park. And then a horde of hungry Berliners arrives to eat the made-to-order som tum (spicy green papaya salad) from the northeast region of Isan, classic pad thai, mango-spiked sticky rice and hearty pork noodle soup.



Keeping busy

Clockwise from upper left, the Cold War satellite dishes and domed towers at Teufelsberg; an emergency exit in an underground bunker from World War II; a cargo bicycle at the old Tempelhof Airport; and a pour at the Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens.