

Hey M.,

Welcome to Berlin! I always say if Istanbul is my first love, and New York is the love of my life, then Berlin is my mistress that I go back to its quasi-Turkish arms for sex, drugs, and minimal techno. It understands me, but also forces me to a better person, even though it's all fun. For example, check how ordered and normal everything is. You don't cross the red light but you drink beer on the subway and smoke indoors... sometimes.

So I will divide this guide into neighbourhoods because Berlin is a schizoid city, it changes a lot from place to place. There might be an index at the end.

West to East, here we go.

Far Fucking West

There is a place called *Teufelsberg*. Never been, but heard it's really fucked up. It has NSA listening stations, an incomplete Nazi technical school, and a lot of trash.

Funkturm Berlin some broadcasting tower. Who cares.

Charlottenburg

The place where the old rich people used to live, now it is being filled with upper-middle class Turks so the locals are moving. Mwahahahh.

So *KURFÜRSTENDAMM* is the main street.

KaDeWe (Kaufhaus des Westens) is the Bloomingdale's of Berlin, created by Jews, bombed a lot, and now it's supposed to be interesting just because of its historical value. It's ugly as shit.

However, walk further and there is a funky octagonal church called *Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church* and hoooollllyyyy crap the renovation is mind blowing. Please go inside.

Kathe Kollwitz Museum is small and has a bunch of old and new works. Kathe is dope, I like her. If you like her too, she has a park to herself at Kollwitzplatz, but that's for later. Schaubühne is a semi-circular theatre. I ate okay Italian food around.

GO NORTH OF KURFÜRSTENDAMM AND FUCKING WALK AND GET LOST AROUND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD. If you go south the scenery will be the same but more residential. Friedenau (though it might be Wilmersdorf as well), with its ups and downs, is lovely to walk around but there's nothing to see but houses and gardens, and I'm sure you've seen more in Jersey, or even in South Brooklyn.

Follow *KURFÜRSTENDAMM* West, to Hallensee, a rich neighbourhood. There might be some attractions, I've never been.

Follow *KURFÜRSTENDAMM* East¹, to *KURFÜRSTRASSE*, where it ends at *POTSDAMMER STRASSE* to *one of the few sad red light districts of Berlin*. Amongst omnisexual toy shops and neon strip clubs, you will see the nasty prostitutes.

Go north from *POTSDAMMER* and you will forget that you were at the red light district.

Potsdammer Platz

FUCK YEAAAAAAHH I LOVE POTSDAMMER PLATZ! THIS PLACE USED TO BE WHERE THE FUCKING WALL WAS, WHERE SOME DIY ANARCHISTS CAMPED AT THE FALL AND NOW IT'S THE MONEY SHOT OF THE WEST TO THE EAST'S DEFEATED FACE.

Check *Kulturforum* with the golden buildings. Even before the wall came down right above the canal was where West Berlin (WB) rebuilt a lot of cultural centers because East Berlin (EB) kept all the old ones.

Neue Nationalgalerie was designed by Mies van der Rohe, an architect so famous that he didn't give a fuck whether his buildings would fit with the surrounding ones.

End with the *Berlin Philharmonic* and then the *Berlin State Library* that's supposed to look like a ship but then there's a casino behind it, right on Ben Gurion (Israeli Prime Minister, imagine the serving attitude) Strasse.

Before that there is also the *Bauhaus Archive* and that's one cool, informative place to learn if you can't go to Desau. Berlin is kind of all fun, even the museums.

And then you have the *Sony Center*, which is actually quite great architecture, but who am I to say? Out of one side there is the Los Angeles (sister city of WB in the 80s, the relationship seems so trashy but so juicy) walk of fame and the Mercedes building, then the Bahn building, then another commercial building until you realize that gained land by the fallen wall is owned by capitalism. A holy shit moment indeed.

They usually have some shit going on that end of the mall where they sell sausage, hot wine, and there was some slide involved as well. However if the alleys are empty, the same vibe can also be found in the Regal Cinema at Wall Street.

Then there is the actual square with *Tiergarten* (clockwise: check the gay monument, some Jewish monuments, and an old monument of Joseph or some shit) on one side and the consulates around it. Berlin's consulates are very interesting because apart from the Italian (WW2 buddy) one, which is looks like it's in shambles², the rest are very new and reflect the countries' skewed, self-aggrandizing images.

¹ All along the way, there is the neighbourhood Schöneburg to your South. I remember it being sad and barren on a cold night while I was listening to Harmonia. Walking along the river or the canal shores is always great. Daytime it shouldn't be that bad as well. But yeah, the lesson of this footnote is: Listen to a lot of krautrock and German electronic music while walking, it adds a dreary feeling that is really the charm (seriously) of the city.

² And an abandoned Iraqi one in Northwest Berlin, look it up and check it out, they still have a lot of interesting stuff left.

Up north is the really touristy area. Check the Holocaust Memorial, Brandenburg Gate, the silent room to the east of the gate, aaaaaand that's done.

However there is the ZDF headquarters somewhere close and the area around is quite nice. If you stay south of the canal and go from the north of *Tiergarten*, you will see the new German government buildings. The *Chancellery* and *the buildings that look like shelves* are particularly interesting. Try to go in the shelf buildings, there are tiny rivulets that connect them. It's the cutest shit.

Cross the canal to the Medical School of Berlin, tiny pretty campus, but cross that too for *Hamburger Bahnhof*, the modern art museum that was once a subway station and tracks. Amazing stuff, but exhausting. I don't remember going to the *Natural History Museum* but it must be cool.

If you go way north you will end up in Wedding, another hipster-Turkish neighbourhood, but poorer than Neukölln. Have a *kumpir* (baked potato stuffed with everything) or there was also another *döner* place with orange awnings right around the corner of the subway station, that was good too.

Friedrichstrasse

Ok so this is one main street that goes north-south, starts at Mitte above River Spree and stops at Checkpoint Charlie. A lot of the interesting stuff about Mitte will be here, and I will cover the eastern Mitte in the next chapter.

Going down from Oranienburger Tor, here's a list of all the shit you need to see:

Friedrichstadt-Palast: The shittiest looking mall, performance space, whatever. Never been inside because the exterior is atrocious.

Deutsches Theater & Berliner Ensemble: Former is classical German shit, latter is the theatre motherfucking Brecht found.

Boring boring boring until you come to...

Unter den Linden: HUUUUUGE street that leads up to the Brandenburg Gate, but the eastern path is more interesting. You got *Berlin State Opera* and *Komische Oper Berlin*, basically repeating the theatres above. There is a shitty Guggenheim across *Humboldt University*, did you know that Humboldts were very popular in South America because they colonized a shitton. Lastly, on the eastest side, there is the *German History Museum* and only the architecture is interesting.

So now, until you go to Checkpoint Charlie, you should walk down from Charlottenstrasse for the *Gendarmenmarkt*—the square where there is a complex Christmas market (3 Euros for going in, I think)—sandwiched between *Deutscher Dom* and *Französischer Dom*, two fucked up churches facing each other.³

³ Notice the cornices of the churches, look around a lot, BUT ESPECIALLY CHECK THE SURROUNDING RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS because they were fucking

There is a restaurant on the western side called *Augustiner am Gendarmenmark*. Kind of fancy, great sausages, but for like 12 Euros for two small ones. Couldn't afford more because of my monetary situation in Berlin. More on that later.

Go east, closer to the river, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is going to be there, along with a fancy restaurant called Foreign Affairs. The best part of the place is the illusion of how open it is (large courtyard, floor-to-ceiling windows etc.) until you realize you can't get past the most outer gate. Berlin!

Checkpoint Charlie is the most touristy area of the city as evidenced by a Currywurst Museum, never been, okay currywurst, but fuck all that and go to *Topography of Terrors*, which is an amazing but subtle museum built on a Nazi prison. *Martin Gropius-Bau* is a museum by Martin Gropius himself, and only at the end they reveal to you that most artifacts are from the Nazi era. But it's okay, considering the entirety of *Wilhelmstrasse* is old Nazi government buildings. Look and despair, they are very impressive. Somewhere along the way, under a residential building's car park, is Hitler's bunker where he shot himself.

97 Charlottenstrasse is where the NYU dorms were. Right across there is a wedding hall, a wedding dress shop, a photography studio, a diner that is not open for 24 hours, a Lidl (the poorest fucking grocery store, I don't think they have anything fresh), and an Italian imbiss (a café without a restroom, it's a common word in Germany). So you're set.

Go a couple of blocks east on Rudi-Dutschke Strasse, turn around, and you will see a façade relief of a man sucking his loooooong dick. It's supposed to be the editor-in-chief of Bild, the shitty German tabloid, because they set up shop on Rudi Dutschke's street.

If you walk west from there you will see the *Tempodrom*, which is bullshit, but more importantly, a Trabi center where you can rent the EB cars for a day. Cheap but reliable, just like the left block.

Most south, to the east the bleak Hallesches Tor (the circular gate where nothing happens until you cross the canal but that's for Kreuzberg), there is a church with the building and the spire separate, that's cool, but there is also the *Jewish Museum* and that shit's fucking dope. They have amazing art, some thought provoking displays, and all in all, amazing architecture.

Tommy Haus is a dive bar with a pool table and customers who roll weed on the tables. NYU students called it their own and became regulars at the place, surprisingly not to any dismay from the old timers.

Cross the canal from Hallesches Tor and you will encounter some fortress like structure that I have no idea about. Across though, is *Mustafa's Gemüse Kebap*, the king

bombed back in the day and now half of the remaining façades are added a new modern supplement. That's the Berlin I know and love.

of döner dürüm⁴ in Berlin. The lines are fucking long in *Mustafa's*, there used to be a location near *Hakescher Markt*, but that's gone, but apparently there's one in Friedrichsahn, so you can go to that too. But this is the original location, and it's easier to do the Berlin Bang Bang as you will go to *Curry 36* next door for currywurst, the ketchup-fries-frankfurter combo of Berlin. It's not good everywhere, but places like *Curry 36* have a flavor on its own. Try the different kinds of sausage, rostbratwurst and knacker are salty and heavy.

If you go further south there is a Turkish breakfast place to your right. It's cheap and abundant. Further south and you will basically reach one side of *Tempelhof Field* and IT'S AWESOME! Try to enter from the north as all you see will just be the field, and then you can check out the hangars on the west, they sometimes have festivals there.

Personal favourite: Go from Paradesstrasse to Wolfring. Just a weird fucking apartment complex in the city, but Berlin is Berlin because of these anomalies.

Mitte

Ok Mitte is kind of everywhere, but this is more for Museum Island, Alexanderplatz, and Hackescher Hof.

Museum Island: Oh yeaaaah best museums ever. *Altes Museum* is cool, but *Neues Museum* is takes the cake. *Alte Nationalgalerie* is okay, *Bode Museum* is surprisingly lovely, and *Pergamon* is deservedly too fucked up to be true. The last two remaining are *Lustgarten*, which is much better in the summer, and *Berliner Dom*, which is just for you to look at its sculptures and wonder.

If you cross the island to the east, there is the *DDR Museum* and it's very fun, albeit not amazing.

Alexanderplatz: Fuck this EB poser bullshit. The TV tower is dumb, so are the malls, *Nikolaiviertel* is from 1200s (I think) and it's a stupid courtyard around a defunct church. However, Alexanderplatz gives way to *Karl Marx Allee*, which has old EB residential buildings with the advertising banners from the past still on the roofs. Don't go too far, because all you'll see are the same buildings and a flimsy gate at the end of the avenue. Go a few streets farther than *Kino International* while checking the buildings on the south, and you should be fine. There is also a *Computer Game Museum*, which I spent a couple of hours while listening to Kraftwerk's "Computer World". Trippy.

There's *Volksbühne* around on Rosa-Luxemburg Platz, which is a huge theatre complex, but I remember the buildings around it being funky. Probably worth checking out just because of the spacing they have given to the building and its garden. Like, yeah, remember that most of these places were bombed and then left in disrepair in EB. So I don't know how the streets have changed, probably not that much, but I'm sure there are

⁴ Little linguistics: Gyro, probably from "to gyrate", which means "*dönmek*" in Turkish, which can have a different suffix and become a "*döner*", "the one who turns". *Dürüm* is a "thin long wrap". In Germany, Turks now use a *lahmacun* (Turkish pizza) as a wrap! That's genius! When I first learned about this I fucking lost my shit, so did everybody back in Turkey.

some differences. Still Rosa-Luxemburg is a cool street with a lot of old and new buildings (literally) in each other.

Hackescher Markt: Cool, ritzy mall of the past, now kind of in shambles but probably will pick up. Find the movie theatre and go in because the alleyway is cool. Especially around this place nearly everything is interesting if you go up north for a couple of blocks. The dancehall you mentioned is there, some new jarring buildings are around, and there is a building on Oranienburger Strasse I think and it is completely absent and the names of the Jews who lived there are painted onto the sides of the adjacent buildings. Nearby is also a Jewish cemetery.

Kreuzberg

Kreuzberg Merkez! Where my Turkish people at?! The Turks are more Turkish than the people in Turkey because they want to hold on to their culture. If you hear a lot of honking it's probably a post-wedding celebration. Listen to some Turkish rap from Germany, mainly *Cartel* and *Fuat*. I'm sure there are more but my ears couldn't handle it.⁵

You can walk from the south shore of the canal but it's only pretty, nothing more. North of the canal, until you get to Kotbusser Tor there's nothing around. I have no idea why but you walk 20 minutes from Checkpoint Charlie to get to any culture.

Kreuzburger is okay hamburger. *Santa Maria* has dollar tacos on Tuesdays but for some reason both that restaurant and its double up in Prenzlauer Berg are very salty. Germany is salty.

Museum der Dinge is just a museum household items but very interesting nonetheless. *SO36* is like the CBGB of Kreuzberg, but try to go to *Farb Fernsehen* for good music. It's tiny and lit, so drugs probably won't be that fun.

Walk more on Skalitzerstrasse, get to Görlitzer Park, check the street art on the huge walls behind you. Görlitzer is where dudes from Ghana spend time in groups and then try to sell you weed. Try to buy from a Turkish person, but you might be swindled as well. I had a Turkish dealer who went with the name Chico, and he was a lovely dude until he gypped a friend, but even then I went "Aww, that's so Chico."

If you walk south and cross the canal, you will end up in Neukölln, but I don't know that much about the place except *Sonnenallee* is a prominent avenue, that's where I found the speakeasy, so keep on dreaming. Neukölln is both more hipster and more Turkish, if you ever see a place that does a *tantuni* (oily minced meat in a wrap) get one.

HOLY SHIT I JUST FOUND OUT THAT THERE IS A *ÇİĞKÖFTEM* IN NEUKÖLLN THAT'S MY FAVOURITE FOOD BUT NOT MY FAVOURITE BRAND BUT STILL YOU GOTTA TRY IT. IT'S SO CHEAP, SPICY, AND FRESH AT THE SAME TIME YOU'LL LOSE YOUR MIND OR JUST THINK I'M

⁵ Even though what they did was exactly what black hip hop artists have done. They have reclaimed a racial slur against them ("Kanak", dunno what it means but in Turkish it might mean the composite word of "blood flow".) and empowered a culture. I love what Turkish hip hop stood for even if I didn't like it too much.

OVERRATING IT WHICH MIGHT BE TRUE BUT I FUCKING LOVE ÇİĞ KÖFTE SO MUCH THAT WHEN THEY OPENED A SHOP IN ALPHABET CITY I NEARLY CRIED BUT THEN I REALLY CRIED WHEN THEY CLOSED THE SHOP NEXT YEAR.

If you go up the canal into Friedrichshain, get ready, because this is the best place in Berlin. Here's what you need to do there:

Clubs foreword: Know who's playing and go casual. Be cool but fun. Drink *Club Mate*! It's jolts you back and very pleasant to drink as well. I would smoke a spliff and drink a bottle when I wanted to watch a movie because it would erase the fatigue weed would give.

Berghain is the Michael Bay of the clubs. Enormous warehouse, huge lines, but totally worth it because inside is just sheets of light coming at you with the best music. The gender plus one rule is important, try to go in groups of three, don't talk when you are close to the end, look at the tattooed, pierced dude named Sven, act cool, either look at his eyes or don't I forgot which, but he might let you in. Don't freak out if he doesn't, just peacefully leave.

Zur den Wilden Renate is seven rooms or some shit, complete with a casino inside. Chill rooms and fucked rooms are side by side. Astonishing.

Kater Holzig used to be the infamous Bar 22, where six people just turned a trash-filled place into the hottest club in Berlin until it closed. Some members still run *Kater Holzig* now. The best food is the 7am comedown grilled cheese.

Tresor is... well it's the easiest to get in, and upstairs is kind of okay but downstairs is like a dungeon where they pump smoke. They hold hardcore nights and they are open the most out of all clubs. Oh boy.

Waterfront is a cool spot, two floors, I got rejected once because they asked me who's playing and then sent me off. Or wait... Have I been? I think I may have and it was fun for a while.

Chalet is small and cute. More relaxing. Never been.

Attractions foreword: Just try to enter everywhere. Seriously.

East Side Gallery is cool and everything and you will probably take a photo in front of the kissing politicians. But after a while you become oversaturated, so stop by at...

YAAM, which is a young African some shit association, it was supposed to be closing three years ago but apparently it's still going strong. It will be too cold for you to check out the outside stuff like the skate park, so instead go into the cabin and get some hot jungle juice and bop your head to the music.

MTV and the *Universal Music Buildings* are horrendous. They have literally taken over the north bank of the fucking river! There are also some new, weird architecture but I forget.

Okay, the cobblestoned streets are cool as fuck, but here's the best place in Berlin: Go up Warschauer Strasse until you reach Revalerstrasse. To the right of you there

should be a huuuuuge open space. It's like a culture center with an old school hip hop club called *Cassiopeia*, a rock climbing place where you climb an old water tower, and some skate parks. This place is my favourite place in Berlin and I wanted to be here on 21st of December 2012 for the world's end, but then I made out with a friend at Renate instead. Don't really regret it, it was a cold night.

Food

Not much. Get a comedown dürüm for 3,50 Euros. I think I'm realizing how comfortable I was in Berlin when it came to my FOMO, maybe because the government allowed me to receive only 600 Euros every month from my parents. So I didn't get to explore a ton culinary-wise, I had my favourite dishes and I would go for them instead of discovering something new. Four months is also a short time to get accustomed in the midst of a fall semester.

Prenzlauer Berg

Ok last stop.

Basically follow the *Alexanderplatz* north from *Volksbühne*. You have two huge avenues, Schönhauser Allee and Prenzlauer Allee, and you will be more concerned with Schönhauser.

Go to *Kollwitzplatz* for more Kathe Kollwitz, there is a park right next to it with *Wasserturm*, water tower, where they held prisoners inside during WW2. I had thought somebody lives there now, but apparently it's closed, and the underground connecting parts to another water tower is used as space for art installations. Berlin!

There is a synagogue nearby with *Restaurant Pasternak* for Jewish food and bakery. Also *Café Anna Blume* is supposed to be nice, I think.

Follow Schönhauser north for a sports park and *Mauerpark* right next to it. It apparently has a cool flea market on Sundays. One of my biggest misses.

Ok probably one last thing is *Kulturbrauerei*. From the start, holy shit that was a huge brewery and now it's cool restaurants and stuff and even a fancy movie theatre that just plays dubbed movies! It's also where NYU Berlin is located, right in front of you after entering from Schönhauser Allee.

Filetstück was good meat, but you've probably had better. 10 Euro lunches tho.

Very close to *Filetstück*, down Schönhauser, is a café with pink tape on it instead of a proper banner. They make the best fucking breakfast pita for 3 Euros⁶ and the layout is really nice too.

Maria Bontia is a quicker *Santa Maria*. Good, but very salty.

Uhhh alright let's finish this in some weird but cool place. You could have gone to *Marzahn* and look at the old DDR (East Germany, basically) residential buildings but there's probably not else and I've heard some neo-Nazi things going on there against the Vietnamese and they are so racist that they won't care you're from Hong Kong.

⁶ What is it with 3 Euros?

So instead, from the same station, take Eberswalder Strasse to the east until it becomes Bernauerstrasse. Walk further for a park, and a weird building that is made out of sticks. So basically, this was a church until 1985 when it was destroyed by DDR because it was too close to the wall. And now they rebuilt it as the *Church of Reconciliation* but in a very deconstructed and minimalist way. Try to go on a sunny day and go inside. I think on the ground and shit there are still the remnants of the wall or something but I remember being engaged.

Wooo! This is it! This is Berlin for me. Now that I look back, I wish I had eaten more, but walking and shit-wise I think I was fine. I just needed to know some insider's knowledge too but Berlin is such a detailed city (although its pre-1900 history is just Holy Roman jibber-jabber, but still, very *kühl*) that its history leaks from its buildings. No matter how much they have tried to shut it up, something always comes up.