



As someone who has travelled more to Asia and North America, I was quite naive about the city of Berlin. But, I was travelling around Europe and figured I'd work out what the German capital had to offer when I arrived. I actually thought it was more exciting that way, rather than building up expectations of what it would be like.

Honestly, I was expecting a more cliché German experience... people walking the streets in their Lederhosen, currywurst on every corner and streets lined with old timber-styled houses... oh, and some of the 'Wall'. Let's just say, I was right about the wall.

It turns out that it has an alternative, underground and very modern side to it – so it was far from what I expected. So, based on my trip to Germany's capital, I've put together some of my best tips and advice on what I think you need to know before you visit Berlin.



*Berlin is a dynamic and modern city, so it may not be what you expect.*

## When's the best time to visit Berlin?

I visited Berlin in July, their summer, where temperatures range between 20-24° on most days – perfect weather if you ask me. Warmer weather means packing lighter and I find it's more comfortable to spend time outside in. The upside to travelling in the cooler months is that there are fewer lines, but I personally love the European summer – plus, it's a great escape from our Australian winter.



*Europe in summer is a great time to visit, as you don't have to take us much gear with you.*

## How to choose a hotel in Berlin

I always book accommodation based on the hop on/ hop off bus route and if there is a supermarket or a convenience store close by. As a mostly solo traveller, this helps me feel comfortable that I'm in a fairly populated area where I can get my bearings about the city easily. Plus, it's a great bonus to grab meals and snacks (if need be) from the supermarket. Arriving at my hotel, I was very impressed. The hotel I booked, located in Mitte, was a luxurious hotel complete with an indoor pool and spa services. This hotel was the most affordable accommodation I stayed in Europe actually and I had stayed in less comfortable places, including a hostel for a higher cost. And, it had air conditioning!

Logging onto the free WI-FI in my room, I worked out pretty quickly that Checkpoint Charlie is the must-see landmark in Berlin – fortunately, it was only one train ride away.



*A great tip is to pick a hotel where there are stores nearby.*

## Transport in Berlin

After finding my way to the train station or otherwise known as the S-Bahn, and working out which platform to stand at, I purchased a daily ticket on my way to CheckPoint Charlie from the ticket machine with euros (coins).

This type of ticket can be also be used on the U-Bahn, buses, trams and ferries too, as much as you like for the day. It's also quite affordable at just €7.70 Euros max (less if you're



travelling to fewer zones around the city).



*Public transport is a great and affordable way to see the city.*

A daily ticket is valid up until 3 am on the day you purchase it, which means you can go a few hours past midnight if you're out late. If you're not sure about your travels, one-way tickets are available for less and children under 14 years get it cheaper. More info can be found [here](#).

The one thing to remember with transport in Berlin is that you must validate your ticket. In my case, this was a separate machine on the platform (not on the train).

Ticket purchasing is not as strictly monitored in Berlin as in New York or London, so unless you want to take the risk and travel without a ticket, or get caught with one that hasn't been validated, you may be sprung with a fine from an officer on board.



*Make sure that you always validate your ticket, so you don't get caught out with a fine!*

## Checkpoint Charlie

Leaving the train station, it was just a hop, skip and an intersection away to Checkpoint Charlie. If you have no idea what this place is about (like how I felt) as a brief idea, it was the best-known crossing point between East and West Germany during the Cold War.

Today, Checkpoint Charlie has actors dressing up in fake uniforms of the traditional border guards to represent what the checkpoint would have been like back in the day. With multiple souvenir shops, a Checkpoint Charlie museum, and a McDonalds close by, it's now a focal point in Berlin for tourists.

Stopping in for a cheeseburger, I watched out the window at people getting their photos taken. It's one way to think of Checkpoint Charlie these days as an entertaining way to learn about the history of the wall, which I must say I was sucked into at first. However, on the flip side, realistically this place was a cold and heavily guarded area laden with sharp barbed wire. A lot of people lost their lives here trying to escape, which makes you think twice when you are there.



*Checkpoint Charlie is a point of historical significance during the Cold War.*

## Travelling around Berlin

Next up, I stepped onto a Hop On Hop Off Bus (City Circle Sightseeing), which at this particular stop took me along the yellow line (the East line), while the purple line (the West line) was a few more stops away to get onto. There are multiple sightseeing buses in Berlin to choose from, which you can buy tickets for from the bus stop or souvenir shops close by.

Most cities will normally have one main centre but because of the wall dividing the city, it can be assumed that there are three in Berlin (one each originally for the East and West and one established after the wall collapse). But, by the end of my stay, I had discovered there were in fact 6 districts all offering a unique experience about the city.



*I could easily get a feel for Berlin by hopping on one of the circle sightseeing buses.*

For the rest of the day and over the next few of my stay, my perception of Berlin changed



immensely. My assumption of Berlin was that it would be an old worldly German town. But I discovered that it really is an extremely modern international city – especially because it was mostly redeveloped after World War II.

If you're thinking about travelling to Berlin and are overwhelmed with all there is to experience, here are some of my tips to help you work out what you might like to do (and not do).

## **Things to do and places to visit**

### **The Berlin Wall – The East Side Gallery**

Don't expect to see a lot of the Berlin wall when you're there. There are pieces that are still standing – especially at the Berlin Wall Memorial along Bernauer Strasse. There's a small piece close to Checkpoint Charlie and at the East Side Gallery which has a chunk of the wall now consisting of post-wall collapse painted murals along it.

There are only a few chunks of the wall remaining around Berlin. This is because not long after the announcement that the wall could come down, Berliners chipped and chiselled pieces of concrete away themselves – they weren't waiting another minute to stay divided! You can buy broken down remains of the wall from souvenir shops in different sizes and markings on them. These pieces aren't cheap but they do come with confirmation that they are a certified piece of the original wall. There is talk that this 'concrete evidence' isn't legit though (excuse the pun), but if you are a collector, a piece still represents this tragic time in German history.



*A small section of the Berlin wall can be found near Checkpoint Charlie.*

### **Memorials**

There are stacks of memorials around the city you can visit, particularly on museum island. I was a bit overwhelmed with the choice, but I did visit a panoramic creation showing the two sides of Berlin in the 80s. Although simple, I found it captivating and very emotional. You can learn more about it [here](#).

Do expect to be disoriented at the Holocaust memorial. It was controversially designed that way by the architect to resemble a disconnect from human life. It can be described as a massive concrete graveyard. Although the tombs are nameless, this giant installation is still a sacred place so do keep being respectful in mind here.

Take note of the buildings around the city that were bombed during World War II, like the damage on Berlin's most famous landmark – the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Still standing after being bombed in 1943, it has been left as is to represent the destruction of war and as a symbol of Berlin's determination to rebuild.



*Remaining sections of the Berlin Wall is definitely a must-see when you're visiting.*



## Flea market at Mauerpark

I really enjoyed visiting the markets on a Sunday at the Mauerpark flea market. It's a great place to soak up the sunshine, eat foods from around the globe, shop for anything from jewellery to music records to kitchen appliances while listening to the buskers performing different kinds of music.



*Check out the flea market at Mauerpark.*

## The Brandenburg Gate

The Brandenburg is one of the most iconic monuments in Berlin, and in Germany in general. It has a lot of historical significance dating back to the 18th Century and most recently is seen as a symbol of peace and unity in Germany and Europe. I didn't get the chance to visit it when I was there, but you might want to check it out if it interests you.



*The Brandenburg Gate is a big tourist destination. Image by Welcome to Berlin.*

## What else do you need to know about visiting Berlin?

### Tips for the airport in Berlin

Always check your flight before you leave for the airport, particularly if you are using the free WI-Fi as my flight was cancelled on the way to the airport. I was able to organise another flight when I arrived but had to wait around for hours. Apparently, flight cancellations are quite common in Berlin.

Also, don't forget to check which airport you're flying into and out of. There are two of them, so this is very important, especially if you are planning your public transport journey around them.



*When travelling to Berlin, double check which airport you'll be flying in and out of.*

## Do I need to learn German for my visit?

You can expect that a lot of younger people (roughly under 35 years) speak English fairly well because it was a huge focus in school. But, I'd recommend learning some German, such as basic greetings and other conversational phrases to help you along. It shows a lot of respect for the culture.

## Is Berlin an affordable city to visit?

The whole city really is actually quite affordable. I found public transport, food and accommodation were all very reasonably priced which isn't what I expected. However, the exception here would be the souvenir shops, as they were still quite pricey!





*Considering it's in Europe, you would be surprised to know that Berlin isn't very expensive.*

## Shopping in Berlin

If you're only there for a short period of time and you want to do some shopping then KaDeWe is a great place to start. This is a huge department store located on a major shopping street called Tauentzienstraße. This is near the centre of the former West Berlin. Also, if like me you like to grab a few things from the supermarket to save some cash eating out – just know that supermarket operators won't pack your bags for you. They often rush everything across the line so be prepared to pack quickly, particularly if it's busy. Stores close earlier on Sundays at 4 pm (and some are not open at all) despite Berlin being a cosmopolitan city.

Even though it's not as common to see around, try on the German attire when you're there. The traditional dress for women is called a dirndl. I found many different styles at a mall in Alexanderplatz. As they are not a costume and an elegant piece of clothing, they aren't cheap. So keep that in mind if you were thinking of picking one up as a souvenir.



*You might want to try on the traditional German dress called a dirndl.*

## Do I need to carry cash or should I use a credit card in Berlin?

During my stay, I mostly paid for everything in cash (euros) as that's my personal preference but you can use cards if you wish. If you're concerned about card security, another thing to note that is if you're catching ubers, you can link to your PayPal account for added protection.

I will say that you should avoid bringing large euro notes – especially notes over 50 euros. Berliners are friendly, but they are also cautious about tourists with large bills. I was asked multiple times if I had a smaller note when only buying a few bits and pieces. This was hard when I didn't, but most challenging when people asked me this question in German!



*Supermarkets are a great place to try local delicacies without having to spend a lot.*

## What food should I eat in Berlin?

One of the most common fast foods I tried in Berlin was currywurst. This is a dish that consists of a boiled sausage, that's cut up, topped off with a curry ketchup and served with a side of fries or a bread roll. It's only a few euros and great for a snack on the go. You can't go to Berlin without trying one!

You should also try an assortment of meats, cheeses, bread and chocolate when you're there – so delicious! I'd also say that you should give the non-German cuisine a fair go when you're in Berlin.

There are lots of multicultural restaurants such as Greek, Turkish, Thai, Indian and Spanish food available. Whatever cuisine you choose, you will not be disappointed as Berlin is known for its incredible food. Something that I wasn't expecting.



*Currywurst is a German dish that you've got to try if visiting Berlin!*

## Public transport - Ubers, Taxis and Buses

I'd recommend using Ubers, as I found them to be a convenient and easy way to get around. I will say that I would avoid using taxis if travelling around Berlin. This is because there are other public transport options available that are much more affordable. You can also use the hop/on hop off buses and public transport, but just be aware of the operating times.



*There are several transport options in Berlin, but public transport is arguably the best choice.*

## Using public restrooms

What you might not know is that you need pay to use the toilets in certain public bathrooms, so you should try to always carry coins. Though if you don't have any on you, there will likely be a coin machine next to the bathroom if you only have notes. It costs roughly around 25 to 50 cents to enter the bathroom.

This is pretty common practice in Europe, but you won't have to pay in malls or most restaurants.

## Travel essentials to take for Berlin

- Take a collapsible drink bottle with you as this saves space and means you don't have to buy bottled water
- Shoulder bag or crossbody bag – a backpack is convenient, but it will make you look like a tourist and you won't be able to see it when you're carrying it so I prefer crossbody style as a better option.
- Travel wallet with RFID protection – I recently had my card information scanned and stolen at home, so if it can happen in your daily life – it could definitely happen on holiday! You can also get a credit card sleeve which I'd recommend for day-to-day use.
- Caribee Sky Master – this is a great luggage option as it can be wheeled or carried as a backpack which is ideal when travelling – especially through train stations with stairs.
- Scrubba Wash Bag – this saved me money and time going to laundromats, plus it helped separate my dirty laundry from my clean.
- Travel clothesline – take one with suction caps as you can then easily hang it up in your hotel bathroom.
- Laundry detergent – I personally choose a concentrated travel version to save on space and weight.



*If you don't know much about the city itself, Berlin may surprise you.*



## My final thoughts on Berlin

While I found Berlin to be a dynamic city, I was surprised by what I found. I didn't know much about it before my visit, so I was quite surprised how young and international Berlin is. If you've always wanted to visit Berlin – then it's definitely worth ticking off your bucket list on your trip to Europe, so that you can see what it has to offer for yourself.

**Have you ever visited a city that wasn't what you expected? Let us know in the comments.**