

Berlin's Bar Scene

Current hotspots and institutions that have stood the test of time

Berlin, March 2017 Berlin has long held a pole position among Europe's party hubs. The German capital offers a thousand and one scenarios for turning night into day, including a wonderfully diverse and sophisticated bar landscape. From old-school cocktail spots, concept bars and wine bars to brewpubs, hotel bars and hipster lounges – the next thirst parlor is usually within stumbling distance. Here's a spirited crawl to essential newcomers and been-here-forever haunts.

Living It Up in Mitte

Cosmopolitan Mitte has no shortage of upscale libation stations with zeitgeist-capturing concepts, sleek décor and fanciful drinks. Torstrasse especially is rife with hip hangouts, including perennial favorites like the Bonbon Bar, a seductively lit refuge with a tricked-out bathroom sure to fuel many a conversation; the Neue Odessa Bar, a fashionable candlelit haunt; and Muschi Obermaier, a relaxed 1960s-style playground with an international crowd. www.bonbonbar.de, www.neueodessabar.de, www.muschiobermaier.de

A growing number of restaurants is attracting patrons not only with delicious fare but also with stylish bars. The one attached to the Michelin-starred Pauly Saal restaurant in a former Jewish girls' school draws a cosmopolitan crowd with décor and drinks that harken back to the high times of the Golden Twenties. The tightly curated bar food menu provides a chance to sample Pauly Saal chef Arne Anker's exquisite morsels without the main restaurant price tag or wait list. www.paulysaal.com/bar

The name of Schwein, a new fine dining restaurant-bar, translates as 'pig' – traditionally a symbol for luck and happiness. Those who come here have indeed found both thanks to an exclusive wine selection of 50 reds and 50 whites as well as more than 100 types of gin. Owner Peter Glückstein, who is also a passionate DJ, accentuates the ambience with sounds ranging from French chansons to electro and Cuban rhythms. Truly in luck are those who complement their liquids with food from Christopher Kümper's kitchen. www.schwein.online

Near Rosenthaler Platz, Charlie Sheen finds his fictitious alter ego in the Sharlie Cheen bar, a hip yet unpretentious drinking lair. Sharlie's story is told in cute anecdotes accompanying the cocktails listed in the drinks menu. The décor alone – eye-catching ceiling lamps, black and white photos of celebs and glowing tape art on charcoal walls – provides ample conversation fodder. www.sharliecheenbar.berlin

More happening Mitte bars:

- [Bravo Bar](#) – signless hipster bar with shabby-chic decor
- [Buck and Breck](#) – classic cocktail parlor for serious drinking

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- [Bar Milano](#) – gallery-style bar celebrating the Italian aperitivo tradition

Hotels: Not Just for Sleeping

Hotel bars have gone hip, with many flaunting cool concepts and edgy interiors. In the western city center, the Lang Bar at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel specializes in classic Prohibition-era libations, while at the art-deco Hotel am Steinplatz, cocktail whisperer Christian Gentemann doles out classic and creative drinks, often made with regional spirits and ingredients. www.waldorfasteriaberlin.com/Restaurants-Lounges/Lang-Bar, www.hotelamsteinplatz.com

Also much talked about is the Monkey Bar at the 25 Hours Hotel Bikini Berlin with its 'urban jungle' flair, sprawling views over the city and the Berlin Zoo as well as seductive 2tiki concoctions and gin-based cocktails. The boutique hotel Das Stue also has front row views of the zoo. Light installations and animal sculptures pave the way to the elegant bar where classic cocktails from the 1920s and '30s are given a contemporary makeover. www.25hours-hotels.com/de/bikini/restaurant/monkey-bar.html, www.das-stue.com/en/restaurants-bar/stue-bar

The gin craze may be slowly fading but you wouldn't know it from visiting the G&T Bar at the Hotel Zoe near the Hackescher Markt. The classic Gin & Tonic reaches new levels of complexity here thanks to richly nuanced tea infusions, so-called G&T&Ts. An elegant black and gold color scheme sets the mood for a night of civilized sipping. www.amanogroup.de/en/eat-drink/g-t-bar

Another gin temple is the House of Gin inside the Hotel Palace Berlin within stumbling distance of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Its drinks menu is as thick and complex as a Dostoyevsky novel with around 150 gin varieties from such diverse places as England, India, Canada, Belgium as well as Berlin. Each one gets its own dedicated page, complete with picture and pedigree and paired with suggestions for the perfect complementary tonic. A personal consulting session is part of the experience. www.palace.de/en/house-of-gin.html

Berlin's most venerable hotel bar is the award-winning Curtain Club at the Ritz-Carlton Berlin, the realm of cocktail maven Arnd Heissen. Sitting in plush leather armchairs between a grand piano and a fireplace, patrons get to enjoy his original creations, each served in a distinctive vessel, be it a vase, a tin pot, a milk bottle or even a birdhouse. At the Bar Fragrances (also at the Ritz-Carlton), Heissen takes the concept one step further by mixing potable potions mimicking famous scents. His version of Giorgio Armani's Oud Royal, for instance, is an exotic blend of saffron-infused rum, rose water, cardhu, frankincense syrup and oud.

www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Berlin/Dining/TheCurtainClub,
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Berlin/Dining/Fragrances

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More notable hotel bars:

- [Amano Bar](#) at Amano Hotel – elegant and cozy lounge with innovative drinks
- [Rooftop Terrace](#) at Hotel de Rome – exclusive ambiance with views of Berlin’s historic center
- [Grace Bar](#) at Hotel Zoo – classic drinks amid gold-leaf-coated brick walls

Craft Beer Conquers Berlin

Craft beer culture continues to gain traction in Berlin, fuelled by such pioneering local breweries as Heidenpeters, Privatbrauerei am Rollberg, Vagabund, Schoppe Bräu, Eschenbräu, Hops & Barley and Bierfabrik, all with their own tap rooms or pubs. The varieties produced range from wheat to India Pale Ale, pilsner to lager. The Berliner Berg Brauerei has brought back the traditional Berliner Weisse, a slightly sour, cloudy local style.

Even Californian craft beer giant Stone Brewing has gotten into the game by locating its first European production base in an historic gasworks in the southern suburb of Mariendorf in 2016. Next to the brewery itself, the Stone Brewing World Bistro and Garden invites beer pilgrims to sample brews and elevated grub pub during beer garden season. www.stonebrewing.com

Berlin-based BRLO also scores high on the ‘gastro-meter’ at its BRLO Brwhouse. Forget about stale beer pretzels: kitchen master Ben Pommer, whose pedigree includes a stint in a three-star restaurant, relies on fresh produce in creating imaginative compositions. There are around 20 brews on tap, with regional and international ones appearing alongside the house brand. The quirky compound, built entirely from shipping containers, is a fitting reflection of the city’s improvisational spirit. www.brlo.de/brlo-brewhouse

After opening branches around the world, including Sao Paolo, Hong Kong and Helsinki, Scottish cult brewers BrewDogs are now bringing their fine suds to Berlin as well. Their modern-industrial flagship with brick walls and dark wood has some 30 taps dispensing their own drafts alongside a changing roster of German and international ‘guest beers.’ To keep patrons’ brain balanced, Dean Pugh and his team serve pizza and homecooked fare that pair well with the amber liquids. www.brewdog.com/bars/worldwide/berlin-mitte

Most people associate Italian drinking culture with cappuccino and Chianti, but since ‘Bella Italia’ also boasts around 600 craft breweries, it’s high time to change the perception. That’s what the founders of Birra may have had in mind when opening their beer bar in Prenzlauer Berg. Their selection on tap includes Lambrate, considered a pioneer in the Boot’s craft beer movement. The ambience is unhurried and rustic and

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nically complemented by a small selection of antipasti and snacks.

www.facebook.com/birra2016

In his Monterey Bar, owner Adrian Sampson always hits the right note. After all, his cozy vintage-style drinking den combines two of his biggest passions: craft beer and...music. Blues for rainy Sunday afternoons, wild heavy metal on long weekend nights. The Australian stores around 15000 tracks on his computer, including many rarities. The beer selection too is strong on lesser known labels like Freigeist and 3 Floyds Brewing, and there's a good whiskey selection to boot. www.montereybar.com

For the full low-down of craft breweries, pubs and shops, consult Rory Lawton's Berlin Craft Beer Map. There is also a Berlin Beer Academy and such festivals as the Berliner Braufest and the Berlin Beer Week. Several companies offer English-language craft beer tours, including Brewer's Berlin Tours, Berlin Food Tour, Berlin Craft Beer Experience and Alternative Berlin Tour. www.berlincraftbeer.com/berlin-craft-beer-map/

More craft beer destinations:

- [Hopfenreich](#) – Berlin's first craft beer bar is still going strong with local and imported suds
- [IPA Bar](#) – Hopfenreich's little sister in Neukölln boasts 100 IPAs and a 'secret' beer garden
- [Castle Pub](#) – down-to-earth craft beer oasis in the northern district of Wedding with gregarious events from karaoke to comedy
- [Kaschk](#) – café in the day time, a bar with a Scandinavia-heavy craft beer line-up at night.
- [Bierbar Herman](#) – specializes in Belgian beers, from abbey ale to lambic beer

New Frontiers in Neukölln

If a slew of recent openings is any indication, the hipster district Neukölln is notably elevating its 'liquid art' scene, although even the fanciest sipping stations are delightfully egalitarian and open to all.

On the main Weserstrasse drag, the magic of mixology is taken very seriously at Thelonius, named for the American jazz giant Thelonius Monk. Embraced by a mellow soundscape and complexion-friendly lighting, well-mannered patrons pack the narrow burrow sheathed in dark wood and forest green. Owner Laura Maria Marsuerschke, who travelled the world before returning to her Neukölln roots, is the consummate host and creator of the drinks menu. www.thelonious-bar.de

After a big run in New York and London, the lure of dessert bars has finally swapped over to Berlin. The Coda Dessert Bar is Germany's first and a paradise for those with a sweet tooth. But, as the name implies, it is also a liquid playground for hedonistic party folk

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keen on embracing new and unusual bar concepts. The imaginatively presented drinks and desserts form an ideal base for the long night ahead. www.coda-berlin.com

Berliners are increasingly curious about natural wine, and there are now plenty of bars serving the real thing. New on the scene is Jaja Bar, a small and unassuming joint with naked walls and little decoration. The ambience is warm, relaxed and welcoming, the global audience teeters between down-to-earth and hipster, and the wine selection is extensive and well curated. www.jajaberlin.com

Since the *New York Times* declared Wild Things a Berlin hotspot, the resto-bar has become a pilgrimage site for international hipster folk. Somehow owner Ramses Manneck and his team, who are also the gang behind the equally popular Industry Standard restaurant, seems to have a knack for getting things right. The focus is squarely on select natural wines that go well with tasty treats like oysters from Brittany or hummus. www.wildthingsberlin.de

Off the main Neukölln tippie track, Aisha Bennett's relaxed joint Geist im Glas feels like the extended living room of the eclectic neighborhood. The audience is global, the ambience a touch sexy and the cocktails a delight. Fans of gin will be happy too, although the home-infused vodkas and tequila are also worth a sip. It's all best enjoyed while leisurely draped across one of the thickly upholstered sofas. The bar is also famous for its weekend hangover brunches. www.facebook.com/geistimglas

Also recommended:

- [Schwarze Traube](#) – boho-chic cocktail cavern with unwritten menu
- [Bar Marqués](#) – pint-sized bar with drinks that have written history
- [Prinzipal](#) – burlesque bar bathed in the sexy glamour of the Golden Twenties
- [Würgeengel](#) – popular cocktail cavern with chic Art Deco flair
- [Limonadier](#) – classic and Berlin-inspired cocktails
- [Twinpigs](#) – classy cocktails and local craft beer in smart-woody surrounds

Stepping It Up in Friedrichshain

Next to Kreuzberg and Neukölln, Friedrichshain is another nexus of the Berlin party scene. Each weekend thousands of global revelers descend upon the clubs and bars along Revaler Strasse and Simon-Dach-Strasse, drawn by techno beats, happy-hour specials and aromatic shisha pipes.

A star on the Friedrichshain cocktail firmament is the Chapel Bar. The 'altar' is of course the bar itself where seasoned mixologists whip up both classic and out-there creations, some made with Jägermeister. www.chapelberlin.com

Resisting temptation can be tough. Forget about it when visiting Tentacion Beerhouse (Spanish for 'temptation'). Its dual ammo is craft beer and the Latin American cult spirit

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mezcal, which allegedly has psychedelic qualities. However, if you see pink after just one sip of the agave-based schnapps, it may not solely be because of its potency but may have something to do with the owner's penchant for bold colors.

www.facebook.com/tentacionbeer

Near the Märchenbrunnen (Fairytale Fountain) in Volkspark Friedrichshain, the Fairytale Bar is so hip it doesn't even have a sign. Behind the heavy black door awaits an intimate cabinet of curiosities where butterflies pop out of the 'talking' drinks menu with built-in welcome drink. Local bar veteran Mike Menke is the creative brain behind such whimsical-sounding cocktails as 'Der Froschkönig' (The Frog King), 'Schwarzer Ritter' (Black Knight) and 'Der weise Ra(h)tgeber' (The Wise Counselor). www.fairytale.bar

A standout among Berlin wine bars is Briefmarken Weine in a former stamp shop on heritage-protected Karl-Marx-Allee. The ambience is relaxed, stylish and delightfully nostalgic thanks to the original wooden shelves, faded wallpaper and old Italian black-and-white-movies. Pasta and quality cheeses, prosciutto and salami fill the belly nicely.

www.briefmarkenweine.de

Elevated Drinking in Prenzlauer Berg

Scenester haunt in the '90s, then gentrification victim and practically pronounced dead. Nightlife in Prenzlauer Berg may have seen its ups and downs but it has never lacked in fine bars. Among them: Becketts Kopf by Oliver Ebert and Christina Neves where patrons settle into burgundy-red leather armchairs to celebrate the golden era of cocktail culture between 1880 and 1920. Another top contender is Immertreu, the home base of star mixologist Ricardo Albrecht. Also dedicated to serving quality before quantity, its leather chairs, red velvet curtain and a long bar trace a visual arc back to the 1920s. becketts-kopf.de, www.bar-immertreu.de

'Humans, Beers & Sensations' is the motto of Zum Starken August, a circus-themed bar where the focus is as much on drinking as it is on entertaining the polycurious crowd with vaudeville-type events. These range from the wholesome (magic tricks, bingo nights) via the sexy (burlesque) to the outlandish (porno karaoke). Craft beers and cocktails that pack a punch fuel the fun. www.facebook.com/zumstarkenaugust

Within stumbling distance of Kollwitzplatz, Bryk Bar is the cocktail laboratory of Frank Grosser and Carsten Schröder. In a setting of art, industrial lamps and heavy armchairs, unusual ingredients are whipped into liquid taste teasers. The 'Kamasutra with a Hangover', for instance, blends rum with lemon, honey and white chocolate-horseradish foam. The free dill popcorn is positively addictive. In fine weather, the terrace beckons.

www.bryk-bar.com

Carsten Schröder's newest baby is the My June Bar around the corner. A flickering fireplace, smooth jazz and a low-key ambience form the perfect setting for deep

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conversations about life, liberty and happiness over an expertly crafted drink. The selection is not for the indecisive: the menu features around 120 cocktails along with an impressive list of top-notch whiskeys. www.my-june-bar.de

Classic Cocktail Culture in Western Berlin

Dapper drinking has long been fashionable in Schöneberg, exemplified by the Green Door that has welcomed cocktail lovers since 1995. An old-school cool pattern of checks and waves decorates the walls of this linear bar presided over by top-flight publicans flaunting a 500-drink repertory. Though not a speakeasy, the name harkens back to the Prohibition era when green doors pointed to premises serving alcohol.

www.greendoor.de

Cocktail gurus Torsten Bender and Sebastian Mathow used to showcase their mixing skills at the Green Door before realizing their dream of opening a bar of their own. Bar Zentral is an elegant drinking den tucked into a brick-vaulted S-Bahn arch near Zoo Station. The tunnel-shaped locale oozes grown-up sophistication, not in the least thanks to the winning juxtaposition of the long, blonde-wood counter and a pitch-black, enclosed back bar. www.barzentral.de

Victoria Bar on gentrifying Potsdamer Strasse also has a connection to the Green Door, having been founded in 2001 by its first bar keeper, Stefan Weber. 'The Pleasure of Serious Drinking' is the motto of this island of stylish drinking that teems with arty regulars. Insiders order the off-menu 'Hilde', created in memory of German singer-actress Hildegard Knef. www.victoriabar.de

A short stroll from Victoria Bar, Berlin gastro maven Ludwig Cramer-Klett has opened the Tiger Bar, a stylish and slightly trippy jewel for curious night owls. As with his restaurants, sustainability is key for the entrepreneur, which is why discarded orange peel may well end up as syrup under renowned bar manager Phum Sila-Trakoon.

www.oh-panama.com/en/tigerbar

Quentin Tarantino filmed scenes of *Inglorious Basterds* in Lebensstern, a Schöneberg flagship ensconced in the villa of silent movie star Henny Porten that served as an illegal casino in the 1920s. Pride of place goes to the dazzling selection of rare and noble spirits, including 800 types of rum and 200 kinds of gin. www.lebens-stern.de/en

Another a fixture on the neighborhood booze circuit is Stagger Lee, a cozy cocktail saloon complete with swinging door, brown Chesterfield sofas and burgundy-red walls. Aside from the 'usual suspects', the drinks menu features plenty of unconventional compositions such as the 'Stagger Lee Beer Old Fashioned', made with bourbon and beer sugar. Stagger Lee, by the way, was an infamous 19th-century murderer immortalized in song by the Grateful Dead, Nick Cave and many others. www.staggerlee.de

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