

Berlin's Bar Scene

Current hotspots and institutions that have stood the test of time

Berlin, April 2016 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 drinks made with top-shelf spirits. Torstrasse especially is rife with hip hangouts. Among them: 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

In late March, Berlin party people breathed a sigh of relief when a popular hole-in-the wall – the King Size Bar in Friedrichstrasse – got a new lease on life. Noise complaints had forced the tiny cult bar to close a year earlier. Now everything is just like in the 'good old days' for those who make it past the tough-but-charming doorman: pretty people, a wild vibe, the minuscule dance floor and potent Moscow Mules still rule. www.facebook.com/King-Size-137011199666489

Around the corner, cocktail-meister Michael Hanke, whose career stops have included stints at Victoria Bar and Le Croco Bleu, debuted his own bar, Ada, in January. The self-titled 'concept bar' will change its menu and design every six months to keep things fluid, so to speak. What will remain constant is Hanke's hankering for experimental drinks, rare spirits and forgotten recipes. Among them: the Hanky Panky, first concocted by the bar's namesake Ada 'Coley' Coleman, a famous female bar tender in early 20th-century London. www.facebook.com/Ada-1545293895692988

Near Rosenthaler Platz, Charlie Sheen finds his fictitious alter ego in the Sharlie Cheen bar, a hip yet unpretentious new arrival. Sharlie's story is told in cute anecdotes accompanying 27 cocktails listed in the drinks menu. All of them, plus whatever other liquids patrons fancy, are crafted at the XL-sized backlit bar. Eye-catching ceiling lamps and glowing tape art on charcoal black walls provide conversation fodder in the cozy lounge section in back. www.sharliecheenbar.berlin

Up the street, on Brunnenstrasse, Bar Milano is doing its best to popularize Italy's stylish ritual of Aperitivo – the after-work chill drink – in Berlin. Tall white walls, a marble

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counter and high stools create a gallery-style look that is as fashionable as the bar's name might suggest. The classic Spritz, made with Aperol or Campari, comes in gigantic goblets and is served alongside tasty Italian bar bites. www.facebook.com/BarMilano.de

Lost in Grub Street is the latest venture of Oliver Ebert, head of the cocktail bar Becketts Kopf in Prenzlauer Berg. Here, the shtick is 'Big Bowls': stainless steel vessels filled with potent punch for two to 12 people. Regular-sized cocktails are called 'Short Drinks' and made with artisanal spirits and perky flavor combos like lime-chocolate-jalapeño. The small 'grub' menu includes beer-can-grilled chorizo. www.lostingrubstreet.de

More happening Mitte bars:

- [Bravo Bar](#) – signless hipster bar with shabby-chic decor
- [Buck and Breck](#) – classic cocktail parlor for serious drinking
- [Larry](#) – low-key lair with vintage slot machines and 'instant margaritas'

Gin's the Thing

The one-time purview of grey-haired gentlemen and the Queen Mother, gin has of late hit the hipster radar and become the spirit *du jour*. No surprise, then, that Berlin has not only spawned its own next-gen brands (Berliner Adler, Berliner Brandstifter) but also a slew of bars dedicated to the juniper-flavored drink.

The G&T Bar spearheaded the trend with the opening of its original Friedrichstrasse location in 2013, and it has stayed true to the gin-centric concept even after moving to new stylish digs at the Hotel Zoe in 2016. 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

Liquor maestro Marcus Wolff has smoothly transitioned from the intimate Bar Marqués in Kreuzberg to the rebooted drinking den at the Hotel Palace Berlin in Charlottenburg. Called House of Gin, it features a drinks menu as thick and complex as a Dostoyevsky novel. Each of the 150 gin varieties from around the globe gets its own dedicated page, complete with picture and pedigree and paired with suggestions for the perfect complementary tonic. www.palace.de/en/house-of-gin.html

A somewhat less tony ambience reigns at Gin Chilla Bar in party-hearty Friedrichshain, which stocks an astounding selection of 200 international gins, including local stalwart Berliner Brandstifter and the famous Monkey 47 from the Black Forest. To help patrons find a favorite, the menu is divided by country and by style (fruity to floral, juniper-intense to juniper-light). www.gin-chilla-bar.de

Comeback Kid CityWest

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With plenty of construction reshaping the look of the CityWest around Zoo Station, it's only natural that new bars have emerged to help toast the developments. Among them: Bar Zentral, an elegant drinking den tucked into a brick-vaulted S-Bahn arch. Even though palm trees decorate the walls, there's not a cocktail umbrella in sight. Instead, the tunnel-shaped locale oozes grown-up sophistication, not in the least thanks to the contrast between a long, blonde-wood counter and a pitch-black, enclosed back bar. A duo of cocktail gurus of Schöneberg's vaunted Green Door delivers the gamut of cocktail mainstays alongside adventurous new concoctions. www.barzentral.de

In the adjacent arch, another newcomer, The Hat Bar, regales barflys with bewitching concoctions and smooth jazz. The concept hails from St Petersburg but the vibe is more Golden Twenties New York. Later in the evening, the admission-free jam session gets the eclectic and international crowd nodding and toe-tapping until the wee hours.

www.facebook.com/TheHatBerlin

The F37 Bar und Galerie opens a new chapter for the premises occupied by the legendary art bar Galerie Bremer from 1947 until 2006. Behind the gallery space awaits a dimly-lit salon anchored by a bar designed by Cold War-era starchitect Hans Scharoun. The focus is on classic drinks made with top-shelf spirits – just as famous former patrons like Joseph Beuys and Hildegard Knef liked it. www.f-37.bar

Chic Hotel Bars

The CityWest is also a prolific stumbling ground for exquisite hotel bars. The Lang Bar at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel oozes film-set glamour and specializes in classic Prohibition-era libations. At the art-deco Hotel am Steinplatz, cocktail whisperer Christian Gentemann doles out classic and creative drinks, often made with regional spirits and ingredients. 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 potent tiki 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.waldorfastoriaberlin.com/Restaurants-Lounges/Lang-Bar, www.marriott.de/hotels/travel/berak-hotel-am-steinplatz-autograph-collection/, www.25hours-hotels.com/de/bikini/restaurant/monkey-bar.html, www.das-stue.com/en/restaurants-bar/stue-bar

Obvious care has been taken with the design at Apartment Bar on the 6th floor of the Hotel Amano Grand Central near the main train station. Heart of the action is the long bar, which perfectly showcases an expertly stocked selection of spirits that find their destiny in drinks that appeal to light drinkers as much as seasoned imbibers. The cushiony sofas in back are perfect both for groups or quiet tête-à-têtes.

www.amanogroup.de/en/eat-drink/apartment-bar

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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 his newest 'baby', 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

More notable hotel bars:

- [Amano Bar](#) at Amano Hotel – elegant and cosy lounge with innovative drinks
- [Rooftop Terrace](#) at Hotel de Rome – exclusive ambiance with views of Berlin's historic centre
- [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 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 tapped into the Berlin market by opening its European production base in an historic gasworks in the southern suburb of Mariendorf. The campus will also house a slow-food bistro and a beer garden with seating for 600 revelers. www.berlin.stonebrewing.com

Back in town, the first bar entirely dedicated to craft beer was Hopfenreich, which opened on a Kreuzberg corner in 2014. It serves 22 brews on tap, including Hops & Barley and Heidenpeters, as well as 30 international bottled varieties. Beer releases, meet-the-brewer events and tap takeovers are all part of the busy events schedule. The same owners also run the IPA Bar in Neukölln which boasts 100 India Pale Ales by the bottle, DJs and a beer garden. www.hopfenreich.de, www.facebook.com/IPAbarberlin

Up in the northern district of Wedding, the Castle Pub has carved out a prominent spot on Berlin's beerscape. What started out as a regular Irish Pub has morphed into an oasis of craft beers with no fewer than 30 varieties on tap and even a resident microbrewery called Two Fellas Brewery. Fun events like a pub quiz, karaoke and comedy shows make this Castle a most down-to-earth affair. www.castlepub.de

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Northern Mitte is also evolving into a prime strip for sophisticated craft sippers. The first bar to land on Torstrasse was Kaschk, a café in the day time, a bar with a Scandinavia-heavy craft beer line-up at night. Unexpected feature: the two table-shuffleboards in the basement. Up on Schönhauser Allee, Bierbar Herman offers up a bewildering range of Belgian beers, 100 in all, from abbey ale and wheat beer to lambic beer and India pale ale. kaschk.de/de/, www.bravebelgians.be

A newcomer on Invalidenstrasse is The Pier, a joint venture of Holger Groll (co-founder of the cocktail bar Buck & Breck) and Donald Burke (burger meister of The Bird). Subtitled 'Badeanzüge & Bier' (swim suits & beer), it pays homage to New York's Coney Island and serves about 16 draft beers plus about 30 bottled varieties. A small bar menu helps stave off brain imbalances. www.the-pier.de

If all goes according to plan, the much anticipated launch of the first German branch of BrewDog, the legendary British craft brewery, should finally happen on Ackerstrasse in 2016. It will have 30 beers on tap and a beer garden in back. The website has updates. www.facebook.com/brewdogberlinmitte

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/

Classy Imbibing in Kreuzberg & Neukölln

The districts of Kreuzberg and Neukölln are best known for excessive partying, but of late several stylish bars have notably elevated the 'liquid art' scene. As befits these bubbly neighborhoods, even the fanciest sipping stations are delightfully egalitarian and open to all.

Shabby-chic student pubs may still dominate Neukölln's Weserstrasse, but a handful of classier venues have also wedged their way onto this bubbly party strip. One place where the magic of mixology is taken very seriously is the newcomer 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, who travelled the world before returning to her Neukölln roots, is the consummate host and creator of the drinks menu that checks all the boxes, from classics to the adventurous.

www.facebook.com/theloniousbarberlin/

Bar, pub, restaurant – Beuster Bar is the chameleon among Weserstrasse destinations. No matter if you're in the mood for just a drink or a four-course meal, this buzzing corner space smoothly casts a spell on neighbors and newcomers alike. The interior is

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homey with lots of wood, green tiles, and an eye-catching ceiling graphic in the front room that's dominated by the old-fashioned bar. www.beusterbar.com, www.facebook.com/beusterbar

With a name like Twinpigs, David Lynch fans would be forgiven for thinking that this effortlessly hip pub is a paean to the cult TV series *Twin Peaks*. In fact, it's not twisted at all but actually a place of civilized drinking. Not only properly mixed cocktails tumble into glasses here but also Berlin craft beer by Heidenpeters and Rollberg. On weekends, DJs heat up the action. www.facebook.com/pages/Twinpigs/250543855131040

Brooklyn meets Kreuzberg at the snug Bourbon Dogs that has bet its money on a trifecta of hot dogs, beer and whisky. Leather sofas, dark woods and dangling bourbon bottles create a feel-good ambience. The gourmet wieners (handmade locally by Simon the Sausage Man) and potato buns from star bakery Bekarei wash down beautifully with select local and international craft beers chased by a shot of bourbon. Crustacean lovers invade for Lobster Roll Sunday. www.bourbon-dogs.com

Also recommended:

- [Schwarze Traube](#) – boho-chic cocktail cavern with 'no menu' concept
- [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

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

At Jigger, Beaker & Glass Tony Galea and Yannick Marty create contemporary interpretations of classic cocktails and ensure that 'Piri Margarita' and 'Viking Sour' stimulate not only the taste buds but also the imagination. The name, by the way, was inspired by a book of exotic cocktail recipes collected by American author and globetrotter Charles H. Baker Jr. www.facebook.com/jiggerbeakerglass

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

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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 the slew of new classy 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 new 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 bar chef Frank Grosser. Surrounded by art by Charles Forsberg, industrial lamps and heavy armchairs, he experiments with unusual ingredients and whips them into liquid teasers. A recent concoction – 'Kamasutra with a Hangover' – 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

Classic Cocktail Culture in Schöneberg

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

Victoria Bar has been an influential beacon of sophistication on gritty Potsdamer Strasse since being founded in 2001 by Stefan Weber, the first bar keep at the Green Door. 'The

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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

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

More information at visitBerlin.com.

(20,539 characters)