

Clockwise from main: Spree River and Berliner Dom; Currywurst Museum; Good Bank Diner, where salad leaves grow behind the counter

# Off the beaten track BERLIN

From dive bars to dining in the dark and currywurst museums, **YVONNE GORDON** explores the German capital's quirky side



After the tour, I head to the Good Bank diner ([good-bank.de](http://good-bank.de)), where rows of salad grow in glass cases behind the counter — you can't get fresher than salad leaves travelling a few feet to your plate. Leaves from the homegrown Salanova Chocolate Oak Salad are mixed with chicken, avocado, apple and cheese for a 'Chocolate Chicken Salad'. Scarlet Baby Kale is mixed with pulled beef short ribs on Swabian Spätzle noodles. Good Bank grows six species of salad — they take four weeks to grow, get 16 hours of light each day and leaves are harvested daily.

Over at the Surreal Museum of Industrial Objects ([design-panoptikum.de](http://design-panoptikum.de); €9.90), the setting is more like Frankenstein's Lab than a museum. The space is filled with all sorts of crazy objects collected by owner Vlad Korneev who

likes visiting scrap yards and wants to show everyone that "reality can be as interesting as fantasy". He shows myself and two other tourists around and then leaves us to browse in wonder — there's everything from old gym horses to dental devices, hairdryers, airplane ejector seats and even an iron lung breathing machine.

Another crazy experience is the Deutsches Currywurst Museum ([currywurstmuseum.com](http://currywurstmuseum.com); €11) — an entire museum built around a sausage with curry ketchup. The museum is as tacky as I expect, but it's fun — with a mock-up hot dog van where you can play at serving currywurst, to all sorts of interactive exhibits in drawers, in smelly shakers and even a sausage-shaped couch.

It seems only fitting to end my visit at Madame Claude, the 'upside-down bar'. It's a typical Berlin dive bar, except all the furniture is on the ceiling, even beer signs are upside down. We start talking about 'The Upside Down' and ask the barmaid if they watch *Stranger Things*. She's never heard of it but promises to inform the manager.

That's Berlin. It sometimes keeps you in the dark and leaves you a bit upside down and often, reality is stranger than fiction...

## WHAT TO PACK

Berlin is casual, so no need to dress up — though don't wear anything precious if dining in the dark in case of spillages. You can buy a Berlin Welcome card ([berlin-welcomecard.de/en](http://berlin-welcomecard.de/en), from €19.90) at the airport and it includes public transport from the airport.



## GETTING THERE

Yvonne travelled as a guest of Aer Lingus ([aerlingus.com](http://aerlingus.com)), which flies from Dublin to Berlin Tegel Airport twice daily from €44.99 one-way including taxes and charges. For more info on what to see and do in Berlin, see [VisitBerlin.de/en](http://VisitBerlin.de/en).



## WHERE TO STAY

Yvonne stayed at Vienna House Andel's ([viennahouse.com](http://viennahouse.com)), a slick modern hotel and home of Skykitchen in the arty Kreuzberg area (see must-dos), where doubles start from €120; and at luxury boutique hotel Orania ([orania.berlin](http://orania.berlin)), where doubles start from €146 — make sure to take in a hotel concert.

For more tips, deals and inspiration log on to [independent.ie/travel](http://independent.ie/travel)

## 3 must-dos...



### BERLIN BY BIKE

A Berlin on Bike tour ([berlinonbike.de](http://berlinonbike.de), tours from €24) is one of the best ways to see the German capital. You'll get to visit cool areas like the Haus Schwarzenberg courtyard, a lively space with cafés and galleries where every square inch is covered in graffiti or large murals.



### SKY-HIGH DINING

Boasting some of the city's best views, the 12th-floor Skykitchen ([skykitchen.berlin](http://skykitchen.berlin), three courses from €71) has a Michelin Star but is a casual space where scallops meet plums and shimeji, and beef comes with poverade and flamed gnocchi — all creatively presented as delicious, miniature works of art.



### MARKET FORCES

Hit the city's flea markets on Sunday afternoons — there's live music, food stalls and even a climbing wall on a tower at Raw Flohmarkt — take the U-Bahn to Warschauer Straße and cross the bridge. Nearby Boxhagener Platz has a selection of bric-a-brac mixed with antiques.

My fork is in the middle. Just above my plate." My dining companion is trying to pass some of his salad across the table for me to taste. I reach out, but can't see or feel the fork or food. It's pitch dark, and I have no idea where anything is.

Eventually, after waving my hand around in the dark a bit, I feel the fork — mistakenly grabbing it food end first. I taste the morsel and come to the conclusion that it's avocado.

We're dining in the dark at a restaurant in Berlin — literally in the pitch black. Our waiter Hedi led us to our table — he is blind, so uses his other senses for orientation. I feel totally disorientated. I can hear the clink of plates and glasses, and people chatting and laughing. I had expected my eyes would adjust to some sort of twilight after the first few minutes, but when they don't and everything remains in total darkness, it feels a bit claustrophobic.

Hedi helps me sit into the chair and puts my hands on my cutlery and drinking glass. Pouring my bottled water into the

glass is a comedy. When my first course arrives, it's two chicken skewers — not too taxing to eat in the dark, but I have to keep feeling the skewers to check I've eaten everything. Our main courses are trickier to get to grips with. We later find out the 'avocado' starter was, in fact, beetroot.

The idea behind dining in the dark ([unsicht-bar-berlin.de](http://unsicht-bar-berlin.de); from €41.50) is to give your eyes a break and let other senses take over — I don't feel my smell or hearing getting stronger, but my sense of humour does, with lots of giggles when we lose cutlery off the table and try to imagine the condition of the restaurant's floor.

We hear glasses falling off nearby tables and people colliding and apologising. When we eventually emerge into the light, my face is somehow covered in chocolate from dessert.

Dining in the dark is not unique to Berlin, but it's one of a series of fun and quirky experiences I'm enjoying on a short break in the German capital. When it comes to quirky experiences, there's nowhere like this creative, graffiti-filled city where anything seems to go.

My day also started out in darkness — on a fascinating Dark Worlds tour ([berliner-unterwelten.de](http://berliner-unterwelten.de); €12) of an underground bunker. During World War II, when the city was being bombed by the allies, civilians sheltered in underground bunkers. Most have been destroyed, but a large air raid shelter still remains under the Gesundbrunnen underground station in the Mitte area — still intact, as it was part of the station.

To reach it, we go through a metal gate from the station, into a passage and down some stairs. As we explore the concrete rooms and hear about life in the bunkers, the guide demonstrates with a torch how glow in the dark paint still remains on the walls (used in case of power cuts).

There are war artefacts in different rooms — everything from old beds and suitcases from various air raid shelters to tools, helmets and household items. One room has some old bombs in it. On a wall is a poster featuring the planes and flags of different 'enemy' countries in Europe. I am amused to see the *Irischer Freistaat* (Irish Free State) listed.