Berlin

This German city has long been known for its arts and club scenes – but now its restaurants are the star attraction

words JOEL PORTER

Berlin is booming. To add to its deep-rooted creative culture, the German capital is now one of the world's leading start-up hubs, with a thriving tech industry that's attracted thousands of new global businesses to the city. Recent immigration has swelled Berlin's population further, with a large Syrian demographic joining more well established Turkish and Vietnamese communities. The resulting impact of this new international culture on Berlin's food scene has been dramatic; with scores of new restaurants offering a taste of new cultures and cuisines, there's never been a better time to eat out.

'Since 2009, there's been huge change in Berlin', explains Billy Wagner of the Michelin-starred *Nobelhart & Schmutzig* (*nobelhartundschmutzig. com*). 'The city was always hip for Germans but with an increasingly international population, Berlin has been opened up to new ideas and heritage that's transformed our restaurant culture.'

Nobelhart & Schmutzig is one of a clutch of new restaurants that's helped Berlin double its number of Michelin stars in a decade, now boasting 26. Asian-inspired *Restaurant Tim Raue* (*tim-raue. com*) is perhaps the most famous of the bunch, with a spot on the World's 50 Best rankings to add to his two Michelin stars.

While fine dining has been able to flourish amidst the city's increasingly wealthy population, there's plenty more than tasting menus to be discovered: Berliners can now choose from a wealth of Thai, Vietnamese, Japanese, Syrian and Chinese restaurants, among others. One of the best is new lunchtime-only hotspot *Liu* (Kronenstraße 72), offering fresh spicy Sichuan noodles (when you get to the front of the long queue).

Berlin is one of the best places for vegan food in the world, with over 50 vegan restaurants and cafés serving everything from doughnuts to doner kebabs. When you add all the restaurants offering vegan and vegetarian options, the number rises to over 700.

Berliners have also embraced street food. *Markthalle Neun* (*markthalleneun.de*) is a food hall that opened in 2011 in a historic market building, and has now become the epicentre of Berlin's street-food scene. With a diverse line-up of BBQ to sushi, the highlight of the week is undoubtedly Street Food Thursdays, which showcases weekly changing guest traders to a packed local crowd. Berlin has many fantastic restaurants, but it's still worth doing your research to find the best spots. As well as our recommendations on where to eat, Berlin Food Stories (*berlinfoodstories.com*) is an invaluable insight into the city's developing food scene.

Don't turn your nose up at having a kebab for dinner – Berlin has some of the best Turkish food in the world, and the locals love it. Everyone has their

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Expect bold design at the stylish Hotel Zoo

Street Food
Thursdays at
Markthalle Neun

Dalad Khambu,
chef at Kin Dee

Thai-inspired
cuisine at Kin Dee

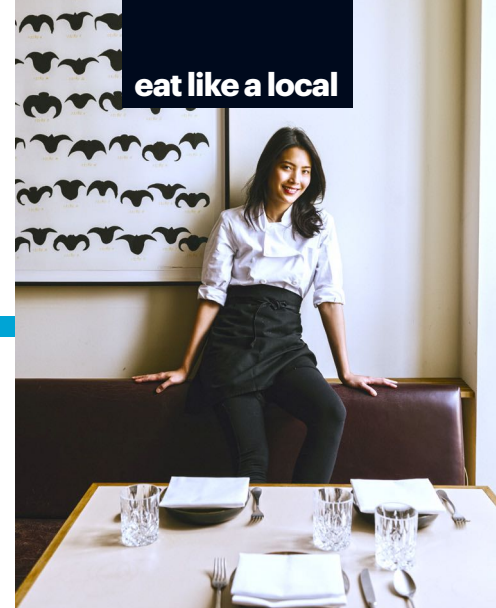Visit the charming
Schnöeneberg area

5 places to eat

Kin Dee Combining two of Berlin's biggest trends, fine dining and Thai food, Kin Dee might just be the city's best restaurant. Chef Dalad Khambu takes flavours from her native Bangkok and locally sourced ingredients to create striking modern Thai dishes that pack a punch. Highlights from the menu include clams with house-made chilli paste and a sweet green curry with beef and aubergine. Tasting menu £47 per person. *kindeeberlin.com*

Nobelhart & Schmutzig
This is Billy Wagner's love letter to Berlin, with dishes made exclusively with produce from the capital and its surrounding areas – you'll find no tuna, lemon, or even pepper on the menu here. Seated around a kitchen counter, the 10-course tasting menu is served directly by the chefs, and features crisp potato latkes with apple sauce, and venison tartare with red cabbage. Tasting menu £102. *nobelhartundschmutzig.com*

Madame Ngo With one of the largest Vietnamese communities outside of Vietnam, Berlin is not short of restaurants peddling pho and banh mi. Standing out from the crowd is Madame Ngo, a smart destination in West Berlin from one of the city's most successful restaurateurs Duc Ngo, also behind such hits as Cocolo Ramen and Kuchi. A big varied menu includes some French influences, but it's the steaming bowls of pho made with the best German beef that are the real draw. Pho from £11. *madame-ngo.de*

Panama Set in a converted warehouse, this space is full of modern artworks and colourful tropical details. Head Chef Sophia Rudolph's menu is as eclectic as the design, with a vegan version of tacos al pastor made with mushrooms; a seabass ceviche with cucumber and avocado; and curried cauliflower with cured egg yolk and soured cream. Mains from £16. *oh-panama.com*

Frea As the first zero-waste vegan restaurant, Frea has taken the city by storm with its menu of simple dishes made with local ingredients, including fresh pasta, pickles and sourdough, as well as kombucha and hazelnut milk made in-house. Any leftovers are converted into a soil substitute. Mains from £9. *frea.de*

Try the
sandwiches at
Izmir Köfte

favourite spot but it's hard to go wrong with a köfte sandwich drenched in garlic and chilli sauce at local institution *Izmir Köfte* (konakgrill.de).

Where to stay
Hotel Zoo (*hotelzoo.de*) is in the middle of West Berlin's premier shopping street, Ku'Damm, and makes an ideal base from which to explore the city. Named for its proximity to Berlin zoo, the hotel is a riot of colour and design statements, with animal print rugs, large luxurious armchairs and faux camera flashbulbs in the lifts. Rooms are more relaxed, favouring more neutral colours, but are still supremely comfortable. Breakfast is served in the hotel's huge GRACE restaurant with a buffet of fruits, cereals and pastries, complemented by cooked breakfasts from the kitchen. Rooms from £109 (*designhotels.com/hotel-zoo-berlin*).

How to do it
Direct flights from the UK to Berlin from around £20. It's easy and affordable to get around the city using public transport.

Acommodation for this piece was provided by Hotel Zoo.