

Post



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Bunny with an AK-47 - August 8, 2024

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SUMMARY

A better day than yesterday but I don't love Berlin and I really expected to. After a light breakfast we walk to the Gendarmemarkt which in Google Images is a big open square with beautiful buildings. In reality it is a completely torn up construction site surrounded by 'do not enter' fencing. We travel to the ethnically diverse Friedrichshain neighborhood of old East Berlin for our walking history/foodie tour which is excellent! Afterwards, we walk along the Eastside Gallery, murals painted on part of The Wall that is still standing. We visit the Marheineke Markthalle which is a nice food hall and buy a couple of cheeses and olive bread which we have for dinner in

the park by our hotel. - Karen

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DETAIL

We wake in our Telegraph building hotel room. We have a courtyard view and looking down it's all glass, the ceiling for the diners in the restaurant, perhaps having breakfast. Looking up it's blue sky, with which we're OK. Breakfast isn't included with our room, and we're not keen on spending 48 euros for the two of us to have breakfast, so we dress and wander, looking for a coffee place.

Outside our hotel room door is a metal protractor (semi-circle) with "Sleepy - Chatty - Dirty" written with an arrow to point to your choice. We don't need maid service so we move it from Chatty to Sleepy. We walk past the local Google office building and on to a street with more cafés and restaurants. At one promising place they have a few breakfast breads, including the Berliner made famous in JFK's speech. At the café L'Oui ("The yes" or maybe it's owned by Louis) we get coffee, some breakfast breads and a picture in their mirror with the words "You look like you need a coffee!". Yes, yes we do.

Today's big event is another city tour. This one was planned in advance, and is a foodie walking tour. Karen reminds me it's four hours long. Holy carp, that sounds like a long time. The setting is East Berlin. We were on the edge of that yesterday, at Checkpoint Charlie, but the start of today's tour is much further inside East Berlin so we'll need to take the train (to avoid a one hour + walk).

We have time so we walk towards somewhere Karen wants to see: "GendarmenMarkt", a big square. As we get closer I'm thinking "Wait a minute... we've been here... yesterday afternoon". Indeed this is the last place our orientation tour yesterday showed us. It still looks the same, so we start walking towards the train station. Along the way we pass a free exhibit set up by VW to commemorate the anniversary of the VW Beetle coming out. In the US there was a small kerfuffle about that, since VW chose to ignore the years they were making the car for the Nazi's. To each their own history.

As we approach our meeting place, walking from the train station, I think "this neighborhood isn't that pretty" followed by "duh, that's the point, dummy, this was East Berlin!" The buildings look all very similar one to the next. Once you learn the two flavors that the windows come in you see them over and over, on every apartment on every building. "You can get your Model T in any color you want, as long as that's black".

We meet Laura, our guide. She's seated so we don't realize, right away, that she's rather tall. She is very smiley and upon opening her mouth we gather she's originally from somewhere in the UK. Yep, London. Masters in journalism and came here just pre-covid. We learn our group will be us two and Will, a guy from the US (D.C.). When we meet Laura it looks like she has three beers. She doesn't but promises us there will be beers on the tour. These are bottles of Mate (from South America) and it's very tasty (and somewhat caffeinated).

With our Mate we have chicken Schawarma wraps. The meat is cooked on the vertical rotating spits next to a heat source. What you call it depends on where you're from, but they all mean "to turn" like a gyroscope, ergo Gyro in Greek, Schawarma in Arabic, Donner in Turkish, Al Pastor in Spanish, etc. We're learning stuff already, and yum!

We learn we're in the Friedrichscairn neighborhood, where Laura lives. We hear about the only car they had available back in the bad old days of East Berlin and East Germany. It was called the Trabante (or Trabi for short) and at its peak there was an 18 year backlog for one. When you were born you hoped that your parents remembered to put your name on the waiting list, so you could have one when you turned 18.

The little man on the traffic lights, we're told, is the Ampelman, or "Little Traffic Light Man" in German. His over emphatic "stop" pose, and overly energetic walking was emblematic of what the East German government wanted from their prisoners, er, populace.

Next to ingest? A beer (yay!). It's a tasty Pilsener (or Pils) which originally came from Pilsen (Plzeň) in Czechia. "How old do you have to be to drink in Germany?" we're asked. We guess but the answer was 14. BUT you have to have a "muttislip" or "note from your mother". How embarrassing!

We buy the beer at a Spätkauf, which means "Late buy". They're open late, they're open when other stores are closed. They have... mostly... beer. Lots and lots of beer. Single beers. Crates of beer. Cold beer, room temperature beer. Pils, radler, lager, kölsch, pale ale, weizenbier, gluten-free, etc. etc. Lots of beer. And a few other things. Spätkaufs are everywhere.

We learn about the current graffiti 'art work' that's going on. Tagging of lots of buildings. There's different types of tags and graffiti from simple tags to filled in letters ("blow-ups") and huge "pieces" (i.e. 'masterpieces'). We see the anti-nazi (Antifa) comedy theater whose logo is an AK-47 toting bunny. Most people here don't like fascists (they had bad experiences with them in the past) and as such they're happy to say they're "antifa" (anti-fascist).

Next dish is at a Syrian restaurant.
Delicious! Karen got the name so she can make it at home. Like hummus but more flavorful and with pomegranate seeds.
And... another beer, this one a whit beer from a kraft brewery down the block.

It's explained to us how there came to be so many Turkish people here (over a million?). It's the biggest Turkish population outside of Turkey. After World War II Germany needed to be rebuilt. The Allied Forces had leveled a good portion of the country. Who to do it. Men. But... one problem... the German men were all dead or injured or traumatized. So the government went to Turkey, where they were having massive unemployment, and said "Come [for seven years] and help us rebuild and we'll pay you. They did and at the end of the seven years the government said "OK, time for you to go home" and the Turkish said "But this is our home now!" So many (600,000) got to stay.

We had two delicious fusion tacos... from a Vietnamese restaurant. Wait! How did the Vietnamese get into Eastern Germany? The USSR was backing North Vietnam and so some North Vietnamese escaped and ended up in various USSR controlled territories (read East Germany).

We visit a huge old train repair yard with multiple buildings. Back in the day (World War II) the workers were slave/forced labor controlled by the Nazi's. Now? This place is for art, music clubs, rock-wall climbing, swimming, etc. etc. The climbing wall? It used to be an above ground bunker to protect "those worthy" from Allied air strikes. Everyone else less worth? Good luck, look for a place to hide... we'll see you when the bombing stops (if you're still here).

Not everyone can get into every club in town (you may just not "look right") so they'll just say "Sorry, not tonight for you". SO... there's "The Smallest Club in Berlin". It's an old, converted phone booth. On the touch screen you type in the song you want to dance to, and drop in your two euros, and the door clicks open. Once the door is closed the music starts, there's flashing lights, a mirror ball turning, a smoke machine. Karen and I dance to the Roy Orbison song "I drove all night" sung by Cindy Lauper.

We see lots of very cool art painted on the sides of the buildings by famous artist, and a vending machine for unclaimed Amazon packages. What's inside? You'll never know unless you put in your 10 euros and hit the button. Then you can retrieve your package, open it up, and see what you just bought!

Most stops and more food. Curry Wurst (Bratwurst covered with ketchup and lots of curry powder) and then a Wiener schnitzel sandwich with another beer. Finally our four hour tour over (I left out so many good stories) we accept our dessert to go (baklava) and beer-fueled hugs all around. Free at last. What a great tour. We're near the water, the river, where a mile or so of the Berlin Wall still stands.

We walk the wall, knowing we're standing in the 'dead zone'. They see you there, they shoot you dead. We take the train to another market, this time a real market with lots of very cool food booths. We inspect each carefully and then buy some French cheese and olive bread, for dinner. We return to our hotel and then go across the street, with our eclectic dinner, including delicious French red wine purchased a few weeks ago in Oslo. The weather is perfect. The sun is setting and bathing the buildings in magic hour light. Life is good.

Photos



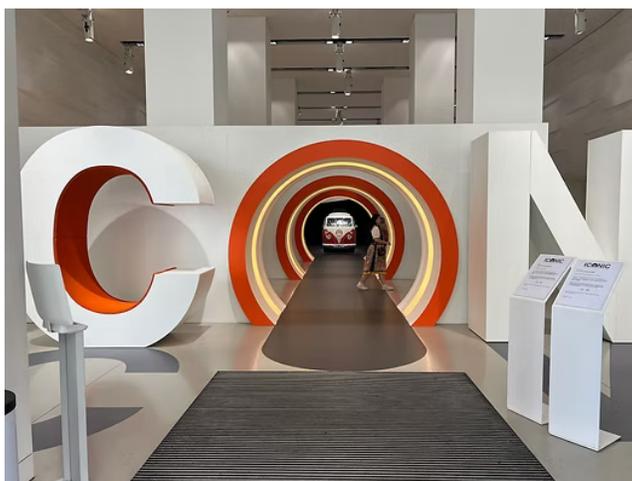
At the L'oui café they have a clever "insta" opportunity, to promote themselves. It worked for us. Yes, we DO need a cup of coffee!



The synagogue across from our hotel. Very cool.



Gendarmemarkt, what it will look like in the future. Now? It's dirt and building materials.



The entrance to the free exhibit by VW to commemorate the introduction of their "iconic" VW bug (and wagon, shown here).



Will, Karen and our guide for the next four hours, Laura, journalist originally from London.



One of the many Spätkauf ("Late buy") that we saw. The main thing they sell? Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?



A 300 year old gate, from the days of the Kaiser. This was a gated community, for the privileged class. The gate's still here, but now it's a canvas for too many taggers.



A delicious Syrian dish. Loved it. Karen will be making it back home. Served with? Yes. Beer!



Two delicious tacos. Vietnamese tacos.
Yum!



In the Vietnamese restaurant. Fun,
energetic decor. Karen and Scott trying to
look Crazy, Sexy and Cool, all at once.



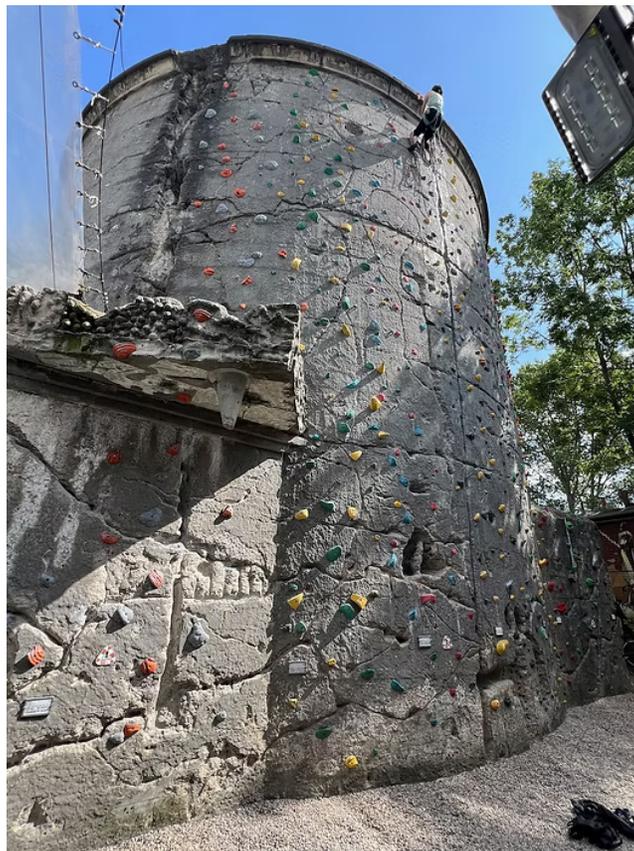
One of those cars you can rent on a moments notice using your smartphone. The company name? Miles, of course. But playful vandals always scrape off part of the E to change the company name. It's not such a big deal here, but they also have trucks, with MILES written in letters two meters tall. Now that says MILFS (when adjusted).



The smallest club in Berlin. Two euros a song. What a great business idea. There were people lined up when we came out.



Inside the "club" as we danced to a favorite Roy Orbison song. The fog machine was working, as were the flashing colored lights and the turning mirror ball.



A climbing wall. Back during WW II this was an above-ground bunker for the Nazis during bombing raids. Everyone else, good luck!



The Amphelman, or literally "Little Traffic Light Man" in both of his normal incarnations.



Laura pointed out this event coming up. Sadly we'll already be gone.



Part of the Berlin Wall is still standing. Lots of people coming to see it. We're now standing in the dead zone. Back then, if you're caught here, you're dead.



On one side of the wall famous artists were invited to add some art to the wall. This one, depicts the kissing of Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Soviet Union at the time, and Erich Honecker, the General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR.



Pall Mall cigarettes were making the devils bargain with people by the wall. Click on this QR code and fill out this form (release?) and we'll give you some free packs of Pall Mall cigarettes. Maybe you'll like them and smoke them for (your then shortened) life. Ugh.



In Paris the area known as "Le Marais" is literally "The Swamp". Berlin also means "The Swamp". When they're doing construction they need these looong pipes to pump out the water that keeps collecting where they're working. You see these in various places in Berlin.



Checking out the Markeineke Markthalle indoor market. Lots of good stuff.

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