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INSIDER FOOD

THE LONG WEEKEND THREE ACTION-PACKED DAYS IN BERLIN

A nap, yes—but where to sleep? Hotel prices can seriously wreck a budget. So I was happy to find the Michelberger Hotel, which was all of two weeks old when I booked a “Cosy” room for a promotional rate of \$78 a night.

Unlike a lot of self-consciously funky hotels around the world, the Michelberger is genuinely cool. And friendly and funny: hallway TV’s play a permanent loop of *The Big Lebowski* in German. Built in a refashioned factory on Warschauerstrasse in the east, the whole operation feels like a large-scale art-school project. There is free Wi-Fi and cheap coffee, and the library has wire bookshelves stuffed with travel guides and 1970’s German food magazines. The world is full of hotels with “amenities” I don’t use and gilded lobbies I’d never sit in. Here, we had more than a bed—we had a home base.

To acclimate ourselves to the city we went directly to Curry 36, a famous *Currywurst Imbiss*. For the uninitiated, this iconic Berlin street food—fried sausage topped with ketchup seasoned with curry powder—is a creation to behold. There is something beautifully, boldly bland to it, an altogether likable badness. For the price of two orders of *Currywurst* with mayonnaise-topped fries our stomachs were convinced we’d really been to Berlin. And we never had to eat it again.

On a trip like this, there are two basic approaches. One is to pay close attention to costs; structure your day around train schedules and bus routes, museum opening times and lunch deals; make lists; plot your course. The other is to just go—walk, wander, see what you see and remember to get out



IT'S EASY TO FEEL AT HOME AT THE AFFORDABLE MICHELBERGER HOTEL, IN BERLIN'S FRIEDRICHSHAIN NEIGHBORHOOD.

BERLINERS HEAD TO CURRY 36 FOR THEIR FIX OF CURRYWURST, A BELOVED STREET FOOD.



of the stores when the buying urge hits and to avoid expensive late-night taxi rides. We tried both, depending on our mood. Some days we planned well, hit our marks, saw the sights.

The Berlin Welcome Cards we picked up at the airport got us around town on the U-Bahn and discounted admission to the Jewish Museum. We saw the city from the Reichstag (free), wandered Museum Island, watched experimental films at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, and checked

out the cafés around Mitte. Other mornings we lazed about the hotel and approached emerging neighborhoods the way we felt we might if we

lived there. We took the tram to the Mauerpark flea market in Prenzlauer Berg, near the site of the crumbling Wall. I bargained for a useless Telefunken radio, and we stopped into one of the café stalls alongside the market for shots of glühwein, mulled wine spiked with rum. »

