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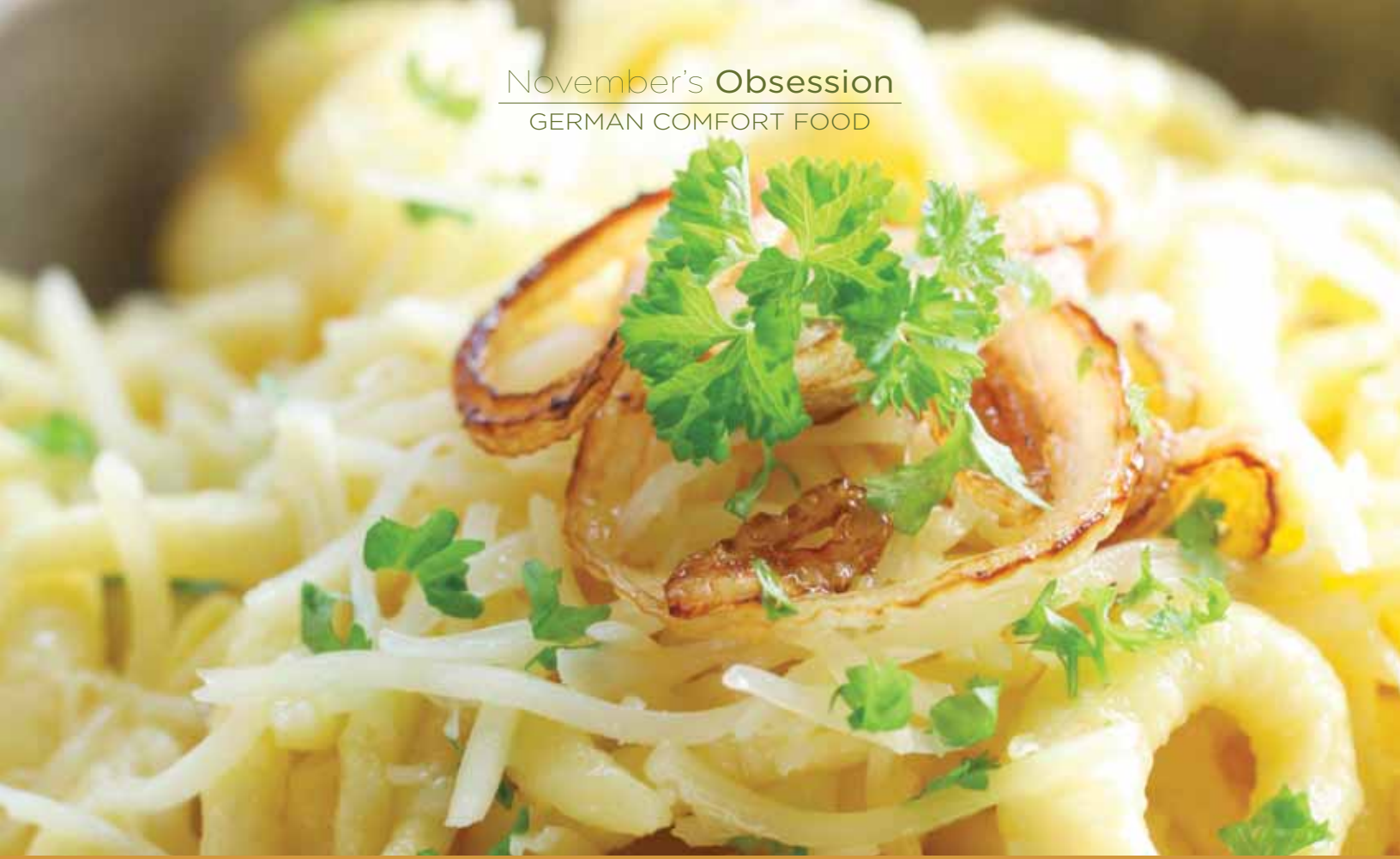
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KÄSESPÄTZLE

By Jessica Zen

After living in Germany for several years, I can honestly say that, hands down, my all-time favorite dish is “Käsespätzle.” I get it every time I find it on a menu, which is quite often. It’s basically the German equivalent of American macaroni and cheese, but it’s so much better. It’s so simple and is made with just “spätzle” (basically a really condensed egg noodle) and lots and lots of cheese. The ooey-goey cheesy bowl of goodness is then topped with either caramelized or crunchy onions for the perfect garnish.

Pair this delightful dish with an “Apfelschorle,” apple juice with sparkling water, and you’ll feel like a kid again, but in a good way. Have it during a hike at a mountain hut to refuel before you finish the rest of your route. Eat it for dinner and add some fried salami to make it extra tasty. If you want to make this dish for yourself, use this easy recipe. ■

German Cheese Spätzle (Schwäbische Käsespätzle)

Start to finish: 1 hour

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 batch homemade German Spätzle (about 5 cups cooked Spätzle, can use store-bought if preferred). Can be made in advance and refrigerated until ready use, then let warm to room temperature before baking.
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 12 ounces shredded Emmentaler or Jarlsberg (Swiss-like cheese from Norway, mild—you can also add some Gruyere for extra flavor)
- Salt

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Butter a 9 x 13-inch (or a little smaller) casserole dish.

Layer 1/3 of the Spätzle in the bottom of the dish followed by 1/3 of the cheese and 1/3 of the caramelized onions. Repeat, sprinkling each layer with some salt, ending with cheese and onions on top.

Bake for 10 minutes or longer until the cheese is melted and the edges are just beginning to get a little crispy.

Serve immediately.

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GERMANY'S HIGHLIGHT

Winter Wonderland in Kempten

By Stacy Roman



This time of year is magical in Germany. It feels as though the entire country transforms into a winter wonderland. Although the lively Christmas markets that mark the festive holiday season may look different this year, there is still plenty of frosty fun and shenanigans to be had. While many people travel to the snow-capped peaks of the Alps to well-known ski havens such as Garmisch-Partenkirchen or Berchtesgaden, why not head to the heart of the Allgäu to Kempten?

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Once known as Cambodunum, Kempten is one of the oldest cities in Bavaria. Housing thermal baths from the ancient Romans and stunning works of architectural art, you could spend your time perusing through the city center and not get tired. Snow-dusted hills surrounding the city provide ample opportunity for a fantastic day outdoors. Approximately two hours southeast of Stuttgart and a little over two and a half hours south of Nuremberg, Kempten is the perfect spot for a quick weekend getaway.

For those wanting to stay closer to town, Kempten provides a wonderfully rich historical narrative. From the towering, rounded spires of the Basilica of St. Lawrence to the crumbling castle ruins encompassing the city, it's easy to fall in love with the area. The Archeological Park Cambodunum whisks visitors back in time 2,000 years with the well-preserved remains of the ancient Romans. The cobblestone streets and central square are lined with traditional Bavarian buildings, creating a romantic, fairy-tale feeling. The Altstadt is usually transformed into a charming menagerie of alpine huts and twinkling lights for the Kempten Christmas Market during the holiday season.

However, if you're looking for a little more adrenaline or thrills, Kempten is an excellent spot for snow sports. With gently rolling hills and meadowland covered in fine, white powder, cross-country skiing is one of the more popular athletic events to check out. If you've fancied a go at trying biathlon, the Kempten region offers beginner's courses in the dual-sport of rifle shooting and cross-country skiing. There are also plenty of toboggan runs to race your friends down. Do you need a little more speed? Head 14 kilometers east to Schwarzenlifte Eschach. This family-friendly resort is great for first-timers and intermediate skiers. While the runs may not be as challenging as those in Tyrol or the Black Forest, this ski area is significantly less busy and less expensive than its glitzy counterparts. If you'd rather avoid the snow, head to the heated pools and saunas of CamboMare, an indoor aquatic paradise in the winter.

Although Kempten is a magical place to visit any time of year, it is even more enchanting during the winter. Take a stroll through the city's historical heart or gear up for a snowy adventure in the great outdoors. Escape the ordinary (and the crowds) for a quick getaway or a long weekend. It's worth a trip off the beaten path. ■

*Head to the heart
of the Allgäu for a
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*Kempten is a magical place
to visit any time of year and
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TRAVEL INSPIRATION

BERLIN:

a city for all seasons

By Karen Bradbury



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Paris in spring is a riot of flowers. Autumn turns Tuscany into a patchwork of ochre. When winter comes, Hallstatt, Austria, is transformed into a magical ice kingdom. Germany's hip capital city of Berlin shines bright throughout the year.

TRAVEL INSPIRATION



No matter the season, there's always something happening in beautiful, vibrant Berlin. First-timers and those on their 40th visit alike never want for something to do in this ever-evolving urban oasis. Once the TV tower has been conquered, photos of the Brandenburg Gate snapped and exhibits of Museum Island's world-class institutions thoroughly explored, it's time to check out what's happening on the cultural calendar. When large-scale gatherings are safe to attend, here is a look at just some of the events that will surely delight us once again.

Winter

While most of Germany languishes in a long, post-holiday slumber, Berlin bucks the trend by hosting its annual film festival. The Berlin International Film Festival, known as Berlinale, is one of Europe's biggest film festivals and attracts the world's largest public audience. Some 400 films are screened, with dramas particularly well represented. When high-profile films debut, it's not just stars from German screens who shine: actors having attended in recent years include George Clooney, Meryl Streep and Richard Gere, among others.

U.S. military members might be interested to learn that this long-standing event has a connection to their service. The idea of the festival is credited to Oscar Martay, a film officer in the U.S. military stationed in West Berlin in the aftermath



“The Festival of Lights brings Berlin’s most iconic landmarks to life with vibrant and masterful illuminations.”

©BUSCHMN/123RF.COM

of World War II. In 1950, he formed the committee that laid the groundwork for the inaugural edition of the Berlinale, which was held the following year. This cinematic celebration takes place in mid-February.

Spring

In early spring, Berlin finds itself awash in a sea of delicate blush pink flowers. The profusion of cherry blossoms can be taken in along the Mauerweg, a path running along the route where the Berlin Wall once cut the city in two halves. Following the fall of the wall in 1989, the citizens of Japan gifted Berlin with more than 9,000 trees as a gesture of hope for peace and happiness in the reunited city and country. For more immersion in Asian culture, head to the Gardens of the World in Marzahn, where the annual cherry blossom festival includes Asian music, dance, fashion, handicrafts and more.

Each year at Pentecost, Berlin’s Kreuzberg district celebrates the diversity of its people and their countries of origin with its Carnival of Cultures. Over a long weekend, locals and visitors sample street foods, peruse market stalls selling jewelry, fashion and souvenirs and take in music and performances. The highlight event is a parade with some 4,000 participants, including processions from Africa and South America.

Summer

As the weather warms up, cultural life moves outside. Roofs become open-air cinemas and parks and squares host live music events such as Classic Open Air, featuring opera, orchestras, pianists and singers. On June 21 every year, free concerts in all musical genres make up the Fête de la Musique, a jubilant celebration of the longest day of the year based on long-standing French tradition. The Long Night of the Museums, held in late August, features art, culture, performances and unexpected encounters. Beer lovers can soak up suds and a multicultural vibe at the International Berlin Beer Fest, where 2,400 brews from 90 countries are poured along the Karl-Marx-Allee. For three days, this becomes what organizers dub the world’s longest beer garden.

Autumn

Autumn starts off with a bang as elite runners line up for the Berlin Marathon. In 2018, Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge ran the fastest men’s time ever clocked, a record that still stands. In late September, the Festival of Lights brings Berlin’s most iconic landmarks to life with vibrant and masterful illuminations. When skating rinks, a toboggan run and mulled wine stands take over Potsdamer Platz, Christmastime is near. Christ-

mas market fans have some 80 venues from which to choose: Alexanderplatz, Gendarmenmarkt, Red City Hall and Charlottenburg Palace are considered the city’s best and biggest.

New Year’s Eve

Silvester, as the Germans call New Year’s Eve, is so big in Berlin it deserves its own special mention. The country’s biggest bash and one of Europe’s largest street parties sees a million revelers come out to celebrate the start of the New Year. Famous artists perform next to the Brandenburg Gate, and a Party Mile stretching from there to the Victory Column is lined with stages offering live shows, DJs and countless food and drink stands. At midnight, the skies light up with the country’s biggest display of pyrotechnics. The gathered masses beam with optimism and happiness. And for good reason. They’re celebrating a new year of hopes and dreams in one of the world’s great capitals.



Up Close and Personal *with* Mitte

by Anna Leigh Bagiackas

You could plan a trip to see all of Berlin. But you could also just plan a trip to Berlin's central borough of Mitte because this neighborhood is packed with so many things to do and see that you will need longer than you think. As a college student and Eurail pass-holding backpacker, my time in Mitte made Berlin my absolute favorite city and keeps me coming back.


Mitte is the central part of the city, located on the Spree River, and it was the birthplace of Germany's capital in the 13th century. Home to the government quarter and the city's most popular museums and sites, it was divided into East and West Berlin following World War II, adding to its layers of history.

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What to Do

Berlin has a culture and a vibe all its own. Decades and centuries of history sit alongside street art created just minutes ago, creating stark contrasts for travelers to ponder. Visit the iconic TV Tower, Germany's tallest building at 368 meters, and stop for lunch at its rotating view-filled restaurant. Then ground yourself walking through Checkpoint Charlie, one of Mitte's historic checkpoints that connected East and West Berlin. You will also find some of Europe's most recognizable sites, including Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag Building (Germany's main parliament building) and Museum Island. Here you can visit the Berlin Dom, Old Museum, New Museum, Old National Gallery, Pergamon Museum and Bode Museum.

Wander through Tiergarten Park, the largest urban park in Mitte and home to a number of important memorials including the Holocaust Memorial and the "Siegessäule" or Victory Column. Make Alexanderplatz, Mitte's central square, your base for the afternoon with its many notable sites nearby and lots of shopping and restaurants to explore.

Mitte offers lots for history buffs, particularly with WWII history. Sites include the Topography of Terror indoor and outdoor museum, the former headquarters of the Gestapo and SS and the Führerbunker, Hitler's air raid shelter and place of death. And as the center of post-war Berlin, seeing pieces of the Berlin Wall up close is also a must.

For something not as well-known, but equally fascinating, check out underground Mitte at the Berliner Unterwelten. This underground museum allows you to explore bunkers and tunnel systems, including the escape tunnel between East and West Berlin. After that, visit the DesignPanopticon, the museum for bizarre objects for an experience off the beaten path.

Mitte can be explored on foot, but boat tours along the river and bike rentals are also great options for seeing this borough. There is no shortage of shopping opportunities, from high-end brands to local artists and craftspeople. Keep your eye out for magnificent murals and spontaneous art, such as along Street Art Alley, for a taste of local Berlin.



To Eat & Drink

As an international city, Berlin is a foodie hotspot and can offer you amazing eats from all over the world. Of course, you can enjoy some traditional German fare, such as at the beer garden and restaurant Augustiner am Gendarmenmarkt. Or make your way to Shiso Burger, a Japanese Korean fusion burger joint, for something completely different. Looking for fine dining? Learn about Restaurant Tim Raue, named after one of the chef's featured on Netflix's "Chef's Table," for an Asian-inspired German meal.

Since fine dining wasn't on my itinerary as a backpacker, I sought out coffee shops, which can be found all over Mitte. Stop in Alexanderplatz for one of the many brunch spots including The Greens, a unique spot offering coffee and plants. ■



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48 HOURS IN MARRAKECH

By Mary Del Rosario

Known as the fourth-largest city in Morocco, Marrakech is a colorful city rich in history and housed by the friendliest locals. After spending 14 days traipsing through this beautiful country, I spent the last two days exploring the “Red City” and taking in all it had to offer. Though I could have easily spent at least another three days here, 48 hours in Marrakech was the perfect way to end my trip. Below are a few recommendations to tackle this city in just two days.

The Top Sights

Since Morocco is known for their Hamman spas—a type of spa treatment that uses steam to cleanse—an appointment to pamper yourself is a must-do. There are many spas sprinkled across the city, but one of my favorites was the Mythic Oriental Spa. I felt like a new person once I was done with my massage.

If you're a fan of greenery (something that is hard to come by in the desert), an experience that shouldn't be overlooked is taking a trip to the Majorelle Gardens. This large botanical garden was brought to life by French Orientalist artist Jacques Majorelle in the 1920s. In the 1980s, this oasis was purchased by Yves Saint-Laurent and Pierre Berge, who helped restore it to the beautiful garden we know today.

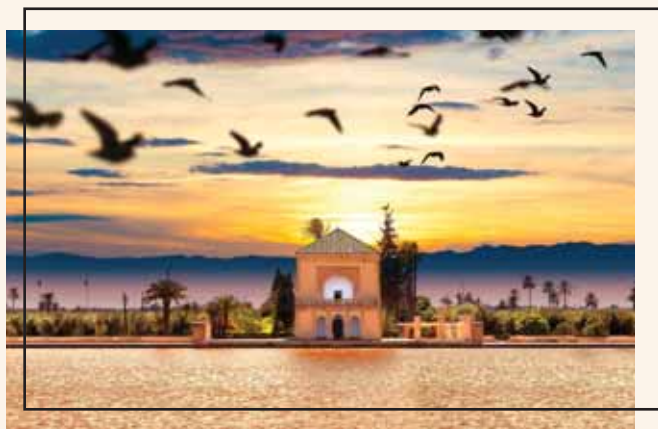
Since Marrakech differs from the European cities we are accustomed to, the best way to appreciate your trip is to appreciate the culture. From the locals offering Berber tea to the buzzing markets, it's important to be open-minded and see what the culture has to offer. To do so, be sure to look up at the Koutoubia Mosque—unfortunately, non-Muslims are not permitted to enter the mosque. This beautiful mosque was built in the 12th century by the Almohad dynasty. Standing at about 253 feet high, this place of worship is a sight to see.

With only two days to explore the best of Marrakech, walking around Jemaa el-Fnaa is the ultimate experience you won't find in any European city. Hailed as the largest market in the city's medina quarter, this square will not disappoint. With colorful spice baskets filled to the brim, snake charmers luring in tourists and a plethora of food, this market truly speaks to what Morocco is all about—colors, food, spices, noises and a community full of life.

Your Food Bucket List

If you're like me and are apprehensive about the different spices in Moroccan food, try these specialties that will get even the picky eaters wanting seconds.

- Mint tea — This refreshing and sweet tea is easily available throughout the city.
- Tagine — Any meat dish that is prepared in a special clay pot shaped in a dome and slow cooked with herbs and spices.
- Msemen — A flatbread dough that is reminiscent of a pancake. It's great for breakfast!
- Couscous — This light pasta-like dish is popular to eat on Fridays. Couscous can be prepared savory or sweet.
- Harira — A type of lentil soup that's best served with crusty bread.
- Bastilla — The flavors in this dish will explode in your mouth. Bastilla is a flaky pie filled with chicken or pigeon. ■





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