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Eat The World Neukölln: Having Cultural Immersion & Eating it Too

 May 13, 2018  #Food, #Neukölln, #Places, #Tips



A friend recently said to me that people living in Neukölln have the unfortunate habit of never leaving their Kiez. I told her everyone in Berlin is guilty of that sometimes, that winter makes us all hide out near our home comforts. No, she said. I mean they never.

It's a far cry from what was once another gritty, sparse neighbourhood in the Southeast of Berlin. People say that Neukölln has trouble shaking its reputation, but the rampant gentrification pummeling through Berlin doesn't leave much untouched. And after an enlightening tour of old Neukölln courtesy of *Eat the World*, it's easy to understand why Neuköllners wouldn't want to leave their now vibrant neighborhood.

We met in Richardsplatz, on a chilly and wet Friday afternoon. Our guide, Iris, had lived in the area for around 15 years, and enthusiastically relayed anecdotes about the place she calls home. I had come expecting to be fed, but didn't think that there would be a condensed history lesson and sociopolitical analysis involved. It was a pleasant surprise.

Our first culinary stop was at *Königliche Backstube*, a Danish-German bakery on Zwistädter Strasse. Having spent some months in Copenhagen during my studies, I have high expectations for anything claiming to be Danish. Those standards should probably be revised, all things considered, because being on a student's budget in one of the most expensive cities in Europe leaves a lot to be desired. *Königliche Backstube* was nothing like the discount bakery where I used to pick up my huge loaf of rye bread that I hoped would last me the week. Their ethos of slow baking makes for a product that is healthier and tastier than your grocery store variety. They refrain from using any additives such as baking powder that artificially raises the dough, which makes it easier to digest. Hypes about gluten intolerances might get a lot less air time if all our breads were made this way.

We sampled two types of bread, a rosemary ciabatta bread and a chocolate walnut bread. The ciabatta tasted exactly as it looked it would, rich and savoury without being too oily as I sometimes find ciabatta to be. The chocolate walnut bread was surprising, as it looked like your average German rye bread and sounds like it would taste like a dessert. On the contrary, the hints of sweetness were championed by the chocolatey

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aftertaste and balanced well with the inherent nuttiness. As a general rule, I'm not a fan of sweet breads, but this one had me giddy with satisfaction. I lament the distance from this bakery to my corner of Charlottenburg, where the most convenient place to get my bread is at Edeka. I'm told that like all large grocery stores, they get their bread delivered at 5am from a huge industrial bakery on the outskirts of town. It's pretty mediocre. I suppose that's what happens when you apply mass production to what has traditionally been an artisanal trade.



Our second stop was at a family owned cafe that could be best described as Berlin-cosy. [Zuckerbaby](#) has the usual trademark of mismatched, repurposed furniture mixed with a minimal aesthetic, but there's a feel to it that reminds me of an old friend's house, or a jazz bar where I've known the owner for the past decade. The candles dotting every table were a nice touch. Expecting to be served something savoury and in the realm of appetizers as the first course of bread might have lead me to believe, I was surprised to be presented with small lemon pastries. But the walking tour is more about the neighborhood than the food, as I came to learn.



The pastries would've been the perfect afternoon treat to have with some black coffee. Their menu boasts a nice selection of organic brunch platters that made me question why I was never hungover on a Sunday in Neukölln. One of the owners came to talk to us about her cafe and deli. She and her sister had started the place not too long ago after years and years in other industries, or *Quereinsteiger*, as it's called in German. They've been doing well, for as Iris tells us, the neighbourhood has just been waiting for this type of cafe to pop up. On a good day, several cakes from their gorgeous cake stand will walk out the door. I was tempted to bring one back myself, but I knew there might already be more cake later. And cake is all fine and well, but what I found memorable was again the atmosphere.



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GERMAN WORD OF THE DAY:

die Aufarbeitung : reprocessing, renovation (die Aufarbeitungen)

Die Aufarbeitung des Liegengebliebenen dauerte einige Zeit.

It took some time to catch up with the backlog.

9b



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WEEKLY FORECAST



It took a moment, but I realised that there was no one on their laptops or hung up on their smartphones. It was revealed that this place doesn't offer wifi, and as such hopes to encourage real conversation. And no one seemed to mind; there was a general feeling of contentedness, with people chatting softly in the background, a few lone diners reading a book or working on some papers, all of whom had just enjoyed or were enjoying what was sure to be a delicious dish.



From there, we walked through twisty cobblestone streets toward the chaotic parts of Neukölln near Karl Marx Strasse. We sampled vegan cuisine and Middle Eastern food and strange yet innovative types of old meets new cuisine, all of which are not only staples in Neukölln but in Berlin itself. One of our stops was **Prachtwerk**, an American owned concept that combines cafe, art gallery, and concert hall all within an unassuming brick building that was once an old bank. You hear so much about old neighborhood cafes and cultural hubs being turned into soulless corporate conglomerates, so it was a good reversal to see. The truth is that that bank probably just moved down the street or something, but it's still a nice idea.



Prachtwerk felt different to the Berlin cafes that I was used. It had high ceilings, tons of light, but there's something about it that I'd call subdued. There was an obvious design element to it, but the patrons weren't just a mob of typical Berlin hipster. I would've walked right by it had I not been stopped by our guide. The cafe has a stage that hosts concerts on Wednesday nights, and an art gallery in the basement. They serve a variety of drinks, caffeinated, alcoholic, or otherwise. We were brought over some cheesecake and carrot cake to sample. I don't usually have much of a sweet tooth, but I'll openly admit that between sampling the cheesecake the first time and writing this article, I went back for a second helping of it. I had it with beer the second time, which I wouldn't recommend, but it hit the spot regardless.

The tour ended just off Sonnenallee, about half past four. Everyone seemed happy and full, of cake, of stories. And it was the stories that gave narrative to our tour as a whole. The food was a beautiful touch, for in the culture of anything, even in the microcosm of a Berlin neighborhood, food is a staple, and telling of the ebb and flow of culture. Centered around food but drawing a much larger picture on the evolution of Neukölln, I felt a certain connectedness to the area. It was the area that I first lived in when I came to Berlin, and I solemnly hope that I'll be able to call it home again one day.

Eat the World currently only hosts the one walking tour in English for Neukölln. They have tours in German for almost all the other neighbourhoods of Berlin, and countless others throughout Germany. I'll be eagerly waiting for when they add more English tours to their program. Or for when I finally learn enough German to appreciate one of their current tours. Whichever comes first.

To book a tour, visit [Eat The World](#).

By Sandy Yu

Pictures by Sandy Yu



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