

Beats of Berlin: A Techno Culture Heritage Walk



Co-funded by
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Tour Title: **Beats of Berlin: A Techno Culture Heritage Walk**

General Information

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Primary Themes: Techno Culture, freedom and creativity, conflicts between culture and commerce.
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Target Audience: 1-8 participants, people interested in the dynamics of sub-culture and urban development
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City / Country: Berlin / Germany
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Starting location: Topography of Terror / Surviving Wall Segment
Niederkirchnerstraße 8, 10963 Berlin
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Distance: 6,5 km (including one subway ride)
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Estimated Duration: 2,5 hours
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Material needed: "Beats of Berlin"-Booklet, charged phone, usual city tourist gear, map application like googlemaps
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Accessibility Level: Easy to medium, mostly along sideways but with curb cuts, stairs and ramps.

Support Material

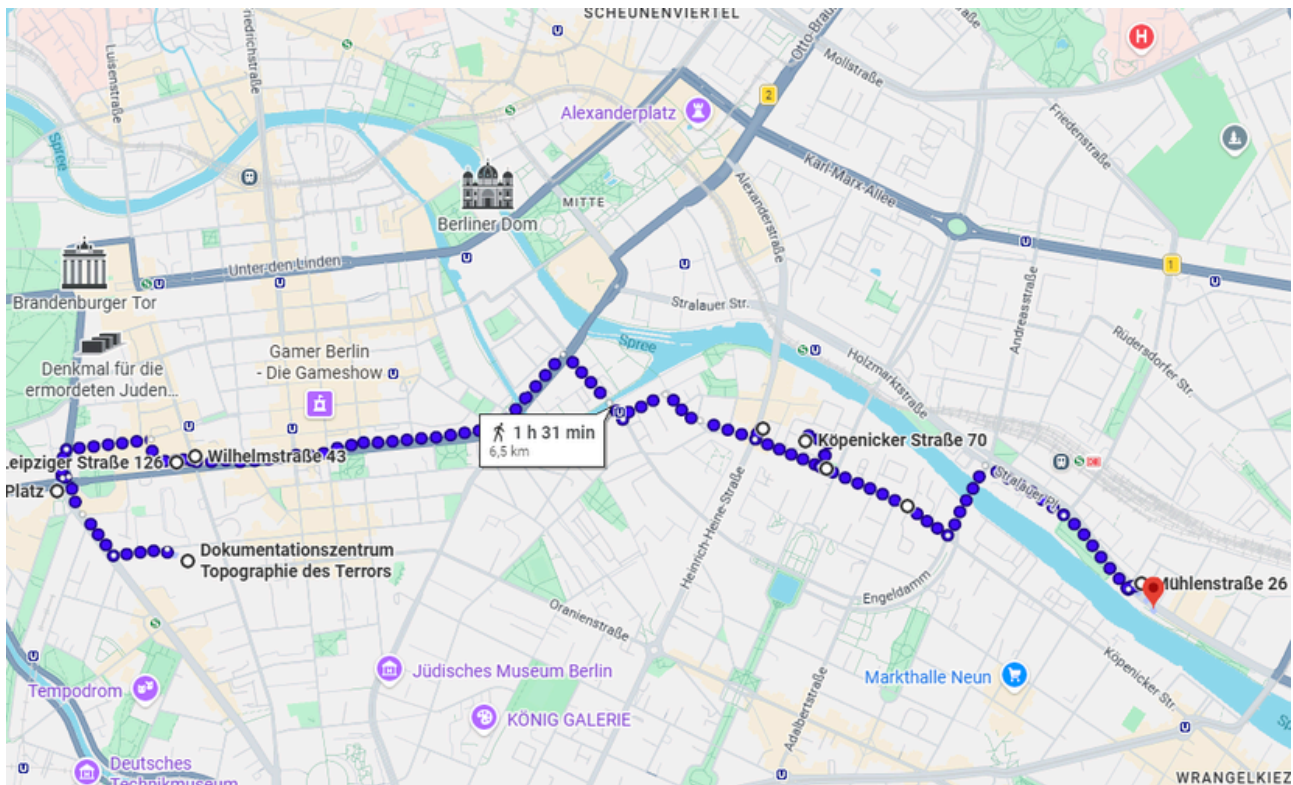
Learning Objectives

The tour explores the founding years of the Berlin techno scene as a nexus of music, urban space, subcultural identity, architecture reuse, politics, and inclusion as well as its ties to Berlin's post-reunification history, abandoned spaces, and freedom movements.

Objectives

- Understand how post-Wall Berlin created the conditions for the techno culture
- Understand how the techno culture has formed spaces and places
- Gain awareness that cultural expressions and spaces are not automatic but must be negotiated and sometimes defended
- Learning to think about other neighborhoods. Where are there "free spaces"? Who uses them? What could or should be defended, changed or created?

Practical Information



Intineary: Exhibition Topographie of Terror --> Sony Center --> Former Club Tresor (original location) --> Former Club E-Werk (original location) --> Former Club Walfisch / today's KitKat Club --> Former Club Planet (original Location) --> Today's Tresor Club --> Eisfabrik & Spreeufer --> East Side Gallery

Support Material

Accessibility

Sidewalks and curb cuts

Most of the tour takes place on standard city sidewalks in Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Pavements are generally paved and wide enough for groups. However, there are occasional high kerbs and irregular curb cuts at crossings as well as some narrower sections along the Spreeufer and older streets. Participants using wheelchairs or with limited mobility may need support at a few crossings and kerb edges.

Stairs, ramps and elevators

The route includes one U-Bahn journey between two stops. On this segment, not all stations are fully barrier-free; access may involve stairs and escalators, and elevators are not guaranteed or can be out of service. All outdoor stops themselves are reachable at street level without mandatory stair use, but individual shortcuts or lookouts (e.g. closer to the water) may involve steps.

Rest areas and seating

There are several possibilities to rest along the route: benches and seating areas near Potsdamer Platz, scattered seating along the Spreeufer, some ledges / low walls where people can sit near East Side Gallery. However, continuous, planned rest stops with guaranteed seating are limited, especially in the middle section of the tour.

Accessible restrooms

There are public or semi-public toilets at major transport hubs (e.g. Potsdamer Platz, Ostbahnhof), shopping centres near the central stops and gastronomy near the stops of the tour. However, restroom access is not guaranteed and typically depends on cafés/restaurants.

Safety

Standard urban safety rules apply:

- stay with the group
- be aware of traffic and bicycles
- keep valuables secure

Support Material



Before the Tour

Introduction

Before starting the tour, participants should enter with the mindset of urban investigators, not just club tourists. The aim is to prepare them to look at Berlin not only as a city of famous nightlife, but as a city shaped by control, collapse, experimentation, commercialization and protest.

Activate prior knowledge

No specialist knowledge is required, but some contextual knowledge is necessary. Participants should know that Berlin was divided by the wall and why, that the wall restricted movement across the border, and that, when the wall fell, this created large areas of un-used space.

Set the scene

Put simply, techno originated in Detroit in the mid-1980s. But while Detroit birthed techno, Berlin's post-wall club scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s with its abandoned spaces, 24-hour parties, and open cultural environment amplified techno's reach and helped propel it to worldwide popularity.

Ask a guiding question

Ask: Why would abandoned spaces play such a huge role and prove to be a perfect fit for this new music?

Brainstorm

In pairs, ask participants to name three types of urban spaces that are usually considered "leftover", "undesirable" or "in-between" for example ruins, vacant lots, basements, border zones or industrial buildings. Then ask: Why might such places become important for culture and how, who might have left them empty in the first place?

Framing

Clarify that this is not simply a tour about clubs or nightlife. It is a civic heritage activity about how Berlin's techno culture emerged from the collapse of old systems of control, how it reused abandoned urban infrastructure, and how it later became entangled with commercialization, tourism, and protests.

Facilitator guidance

The facilitator should set the tone early: this is not a nostalgic celebration of "wild Berlin", but a civic exploration of how urban space is claimed, transformed and contested, and how social and cultural identities are formed.

Support Material



During the Tour

Stop 1: **Topography of Terror / Surviving Wall Segment**



Facilitation Tips

- Begin with pause before explaining. Ask participants to first observe the place carefully rather than immediately interpret it. Ask: What do you notice first here? How does this place feel? How does it feel to begin a tour about nightlife and freedom in a place like this?
- Link the stop to the wider tour theme: control, collapse, and the emergence of new freedoms in urban space, establish the guiding question of the tour: what happens when systems of control collapse, and who fills the spaces left behind?



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Topography of Terror stands on the actual former headquarters site of Nazi repression. Between 1933 and 1945, this was where the Gestapo, the SS leadership, and later the Reich Security Main Office were based.
- Besides the indoor permanent exhibition, the grounds include a 15-stop outdoor site tour and preserved traces of history, including remains linked to the former Gestapo prison area and a surviving section of the Berlin Wall.
- This wall segment survived because staff at the Topography of Terror worked to save it at a time when the Wall was otherwise planned to be removed completely from the city center.



Solutions

- Participants shall reflect for 1 minute on control, suppression and freedom and write down what they are grateful for.

Stop 2: **Potsdamer Platz/Sony Center**



Facilitation Tips

- Before giving background, ask participants what kind of place this feels like and let them form an impression from the architecture, scale, and atmosphere.
- Help participants notice contrast. Guide them to compare this space with the previous stop. The contrast between a site of terror and a site of polished redevelopment. Also, contrast this to how the place was in 1989.

Support Material



During the Tour



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Potsdamer Platz was once one of Berlin's busiest urban hubs, but after World War II and during the division of the city it became a border zone shaped by emptiness and the Berlin Wall.
- The former Sony Center (today called the Center am Potsdamer Platz) was designed by architect Helmut Jahn as an ensemble of buildings gathered under a large, tent-like roof.
- What participants see today is largely the result of post-reunification redevelopment. The area was rebuilt as a new commercial and entertainment quarter, with restaurants, cinemas, offices, and striking contemporary architecture.
- But in 1989 the area was a vast sandy, muddy wasteland of ruins, empty plots and improvised paths where the Wall and the "no man's land" had been.



Solutions

- Participants shall bring images from different time periods in the correct chronological order. The Solutions are 1 to 4, 2 to 1, 3 to 3 and 4 to 2.

Stop 3: The symbol of techno in Berlin: the former "Tresor"



Facilitation Tips

- Since we stand on a sidewalk at a busy street, ask participants to be weary of traffic.
- Mediate the fact that on this stop there is not much to see, since now it is a different building with a commercial unit.
- Invite participants to imagine the atmosphere of the early 1990s and set the scene with decaying abandoned buildings as the real starts of the early techno culture where dancefloors appeared sometimes just for one night, sometimes long enough for people from all over the world to dance there. From this atmosphere Tresor emerged.
- Tresor can open a conversation about who gets to shape urban culture, why temporary or unused spaces can become important, and whether such moments of openness still exist in cities today.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Tresor opened in March 1991 in the vault of the former Wertheim department store. Its original setting in an underground vault became one of the most iconic spaces of early Berlin techno.
- Numerous DJs have performed at Tresor, and some of them actually started their careers here.

Support Material



During the Tour



Solutions

- Participants shall choose when Tresor was open at this site. Correct answer is 1991 - 2005.

Stop 4: Power Plant of Sound: E-Werk



Facilitation Tips

- Use the building to discuss a different scale and transformation. E-Werk helps participants see how a former industrial utility space (a power plant) could become one of the major techno venues of the 1990s. That makes it a strong stop for talking about how huge urban infrastructure can be repurposed into culture.
- Invite participants to compare E-Werk with Tresor. Tresor represents a rough underground vault atmosphere, while E-Werk points to a larger, more spectacular and increasingly visible club culture.
- This is a good place to ask how a scene changes when it grows. E-Werk can open discussion about the moment when techno was no longer only marginal or hidden, but became internationally attractive.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- E-Werk was a former power plant that was transformed into a club in the early 1990s. The building had previously been linked to Berlin's power infrastructure and was rediscovered for nightlife after the political and urban upheavals following reunification.
- It became one of the most important techno clubs of the 1990s in Berlin. E-Werk helped show that techno was no longer only a small underground scene, but a growing cultural force with international visibility. DJs such as Sven Väth, DJ Hell, and Paul van Dyk played there.
- On 24 July 1997, the E-Werk closed as a techno club. A Luxembourgish company is the current owner of the building.



Solutions

- Participants shall reflect on the professionalisation of the techno scene. What might have been gained, what might have been lost.

Stop 5: Subway Heinrich-Heine-Straße/Walfisch, KitKat



Facilitation Tips

- Before moving to the next site make a quick stop at the subway station. Explain that Heinrich-Heine-Straße was also a "ghost station" during the division of Berlin. After

Support Material



During the Tour

the Wall was built in 1961, trains from West Berlin passed through the station without stopping while the platforms in East Berlin were closed and heavily controlled. The station reopened on 1 July 1990. Then go to the corner building at Heinrich-Heine-Straße / Köpenicker Straße.

- Use the stop to show continuity across different phases of Berlin nightlife. This site connects the early 1990s Walfisch, often described as one of Berlin's first real afterhour clubs, with the later KitKatClub, which has been at Heinrich-Heine-Straße since 2007. That makes the location a good place to talk about change over time, a theme that we will encounter later again.
- Bring to life the gritty atmosphere of Walfisch without framing it as "anything goes," but as a place where openness also comes with codes, expectations, and selective access. That is an opportunity for discussing who feels included in a scene and who may feel excluded.
- Let participants react to the reputation of KitKat. Some may associate KitKat mainly with hedonism or provocation. Rather than avoiding that, use it to ask why some cultural spaces become controversial, and whether controversy itself can become part of a city's identity.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Even back in the days of the GDR, the pub Zum Walfisch was located in the above-ground areas of the Heinrich-Heine-Straße underground station. With the rise of techno culture, the owners wanted to start hosting parties which proved a success thanks to DJ Der Würfler's idea of trying out after-hours parties.
- The door policy was quite relaxed, so alongside the crowd from the Tresor, the club ended up with a wild mix of people, including gays, punks and hooligans.
- Around 1993, the owners sold the venue. Initially, the Black music club Boogaloo moved into the premises. From 1997, the Sage Club took over, and in 2007 the KitKatClub joined them. Since 2012, Walfisch Revival parties have been held there regularly.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to describe a typical night out tour according to the musician Inga Humpe. The correct answer is Tresor, Planet, Walfisch.

Stop 6: Planet: The "Pretty Sister" of Tresor



Facilitation Tips

- Since we stand on a sidewalk at a busy street, ask participants to be weary of traffic.
- Mediate the fact that there is not much to see, because today the site shows appartement houses.

Support Material



During the Tour

- Highlight the different mood of Planet, which opened in 1991. It is often remembered as one of the key clubs of the early scene, but with a warmer, more playful, and in some accounts less aggressive atmosphere than Tresor. That makes it useful for showing that Berlin techno was never just one single style or feeling.
- Use the site to talk about experimentation and transition as the club is closely linked to the crew that later went on to shape E-Werk. That helps participants see how the scene evolved through temporary, improvised spaces and then expanded into larger venues.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Planet was one of the important early techno clubs of reunified Berlin. It operated roughly 1991 to 1993, in the former Alte Berliner Seifenfabrik, which later was demolished.
- Following the closure of Bar 25 on the opposite bank of the Spree whose site was due to be sold to investors as part of the Mediaspree urban development masterplan the famous Club Kater Holzig opened here in the old soap factory.



Solutions

- Participants are asked to go to the next stop first and then decide if the picture presented is actually of the Entrance of the Club. Answer: It's not.

Stop 7: Today's Tresor: From Underground to Institution



Facilitation Tips

- Use the building itself and ask participants to take in the scale, the raw concrete, and the industrial atmosphere.
- Invite participants to compare old Tresor and today's Tresor. Discuss what changes when an iconic underground club survives by moving into a larger, more established setting.
- Highlight that this is more than just a nightclub. Kraftwerk is also used for exhibitions, performances, and other cultural events.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Today's Tresor has been located here in the former Berlin-Mitte power station on Köpenicker Straße since May 2007. The club moved there after leaving its original site near Leipziger Straße, carrying some original elements with it, including lockers from the old club.

Support Material



During the Tour

- Today's Tresor has been located here in the former Berlin-Mitte power station on Köpenicker Straße since May 2007. The club moved there after leaving its original site near Leipziger Straße, carrying some original elements with it, including lockers from the old club.
- The old Tresor entrance is now a museum exhibit. The original steel door from the first Tresor club at Leipziger Straße is on display today in the BERLIN GLOBAL exhibition at the Humboldt Forum.
- The stop therefore connects to the wider heritage recognition of Berlin techno. In 2024, Berlin's techno culture was added to the German national inventory of intangible cultural heritage, explicitly recognizing the social and cultural importance of the city's club culture, festivals, and parades.



Solutions

- No Challenges or riddles at this stop.

Stop 8: Eisfabrik & Spreeufer: Ruins and Visions



Facilitation Tips

- Start with the contrast between ruin and redevelopment. The Eisfabrik is one of the oldest surviving artificial ice factories in Berlin, while the surrounding Spreeufer has been heavily reshaped by new development.
- Use the Spreeufer to discuss access and ownership. A good question here is: who gets the river? The stop can open reflection on public access, private redevelopment, and how the waterfront becomes a contested spaces in a changing city.
- Highlight the Mediaspree protests which often used techno parades as a form of protest. Ask if this can serve as meaningful protest form or not.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The Eisfabrik is one of the oldest surviving artificial ice factories in Germany. Ice was produced here from 1896 to 1995, and the site became important for supplying a growing Berlin before electric refrigerators were common.
- The protest culture around Mediaspree was closely tied to Berlin club and subcultural scenes which makes the protests a strong example of nightlife, urban politics, and activism overlapping.
- Mediaspree protests sometimes became protests on the water. In the action called "Investorenbejubeln" ("cheering on the investors"), protesters followed a Mediaspree investor boat tour in rubber dinghies and paddle boats, and the boat trip was reportedly cut short.

Support Material



During the Tour



Solutions

- Participants are asked to walk along the Spree near the Eisfabrik for 2 minutes and look for signs of exclusion and signs of openness. They answer who won here and why? much of the Mediaspree development still went ahead, with only limited public access to the waterfront.

Stop 9: Ostgut & Mediaspree



Facilitation Tips

- Use the stop as another example of a famous club which disappeared because of MediaSpree.
- Note that the Ostgut crew and spirit did not disappear. They moved into another former power station nearby. There, in 2004, Berghain opened, which has since become the global symbol of Berlin techno and nightlife.
- Let participants react to the idea of myth. Ostgut has a legendary status in Berlin club history as does Berghain. Ask how myths are created around places, and why some clubs become symbols of a scene, feel or image.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Ostgut was one of the key Berlin techno clubs for hard techno and queer, gay and fetish-friendly parties of the late 1990s and early 2000s.
- The place was torn down to make room for the arena project in the area, which makes the site a good example of how important cultural places can vanish physically while their influence continues elsewhere. Ostgut is the direct predecessor of Berghain.



Solutions

- No Challenges or riddles at this stop.

Stop 10: Eastside Gallery



Facilitation Tips

- Highlight that the tour ends as it began: At the Berlin Wall.
- Note the double character of the site: memorial and artwork. The East Side Gallery is not just a colorful wall with famous murals. It is also the longest preserved section of the Berlin Wall. Encourage participant to hold both meanings together: celebration of change and reminder of violence and division.

Support Material



During the Tour

- Use this as a closing reflection on the whole tour. The East Side Gallery works well as an ending because it brings together many themes from the route: division and reunification, urban change, cultural expression and commercialisation.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The East Side Gallery is the longest preserved continuous section of the Berlin Wall still in existence. It runs for about 1.3 kilometers along Mühlenstraße between Ostbahnhof and Oberbaumbrücke.
- It was turned into an open-air gallery in 1990, shortly after the Wall fell. 118 artists from 21 countries painted the wall, making it one of the best-known artistic responses to the end of division in Berlin.
- The site matters because it combines memory of suppression, artistic transformation, and also the question of commercialisation of memory and art within Berlin City marketing, the same as techno culture itself.



Solutions

- The tour closes with a quiz, where we have one question for each stop. The correct answers are: Topography of Terror, Potsdamer Platz, Detroit, 1993 - 1997, Inga Humpe, the pretty sister of Tresor, 2007, Spree, 1998, 1,3km.

Support Material



After the Tour

Quick Debrief Circle

At the end of the tour, invite participants to stand or sit in a circle. Ask each person to share one short response. This helps everyone recall the experience and hear different perspectives.

You can ask e.g.:

- Please share what stayed with you from the tour.
- What is one thing you learned today that you did not know before?
- Which stop stayed in your mind the most?

Heritage and the Present

After discussing the stops, invite participants to connect the tour to present-day issues. This is especially useful because many of the places on the route are not only about the past, but also about current debates. You can ask e.g.

- Did this tour change the way you see this or even another city? How?
- Did the tour raise any issues that are still relevant today?
- Do you think aspects of the spirit of the early techno culture are still alive? Which ones?

Make the Tour Matter personally

To make the tour more personally meaningful, you can invite participants to connect the themes and places explored in Berlin to their own hometowns, everyday surroundings, and their own sense of agency. You can ask:

- Is there a place in your hometown that feels unused, overlooked, or full of potential?
- What kind of cultural or social space is missing where you live?
- Do you feel people like you can shape places in your town or city? Why or why not?
- If you could change one public place in your hometown, what would you do?
- If you created a short heritage or culture tour for your hometown, which place would you include?

Support Material



References

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=61950833>