



THE GALLIVANTER'S GUIDE[©]



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SETTING THE BENCHMARK FOR HIGH-END TRAVELLERS

The question is, is it possible to run a high-end hotel in Berlin? As Four Seasons found out, quite painfully, this is what is known as a low yield destination. Four Seasons yielded to the franchised Regent brand, whilst Ritz-Carlton, which started off very well in Potsdamer Platz, closed its fine dining room a year ago, 12 months after its star chef, Thomas Kellermann retreated to Bavaria.

So, should high-end Berlin hotels simply surrender? Well, our feeling was that many had already waved the white flag. In Ritz's Desbrosses restaurant, there was but a single member of staff that really knew what she was doing (just arrived back from Ritz-Carlton Sanya). As for The Adlon, I have never liked this hotel, which appears to be famous for being famous.

Compared to the rest of Europe, average room rates in Berlin are incredibly low, equating more to eastern Europe than west. Berlin resembles an island, with no suburbs and no manufacturing base like Munich, so it relies, to a large extent, upon tourism; but when you have high-end hotel rates averaging €120-170 a night, hotels cannot afford sufficient numbers of quality staff, so perhaps the only sensible way to go is to open small four-stars and attempt to shine at cuisine and service. Or is it?

Grand Hyatt Berlin.

You are right to gasp, because we rarely stay in anything other than a Park Hyatt, and in truth, that is what I googled when

The BEST OF BERLIN



Corridor art at Grand Hyatt Berlin.

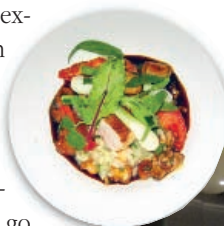
researching Berlin's hotels; but the Grand Hyatt that popped up instead looked quite interesting, so I crossed my fingers.

Upon arrival, I was very impressed with the attentive doormen. I was also charmed by the front

desk staff, but oh, the lobby was so dated that I turned to David and apologised for my mistake in selecting this property, which opened back in 1998 in the Potsdamer Platz and was now in need of a major refurbishment. What saved it? The cuisine and the service; both of which were, quite easily, the best in Berlin. Yes really.

I cannot recall enjoying great cuisine at any Hyatt, ever; the style normally fast rather than fabulous, so it was with utter amazement that I watched the choreography of service and cuisine at this hotel's speciality restaurant, Vox, which is so popular with locals that you must book ahead.

Unlike other Berlin establishments, the Hyatt staff was wholly motivated; the level of concentration simply jaw-dropping at Vox, where we watched two Japanese chefs preparing plate upon plate of wonderful sushi that was, in both our opinions, far better than the sushi at Park Hyatt Tokyo. That was not all; the fine International fare, under Chef de Cuisine, Felix Petrucco was not only à la minute, but was also supremely fresh and beautifully presented; rushed from the immacu-



The amazing Vox restaurant at Grand Hyatt Berlin performs like a 2-star Michelin.

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One of the five very comfortable Grand Suites, #542, at Grand Hyatt Berlin.

late show kitchen to our table in seconds. They even offer a whole carte of raw milk cheeses, which is a most unusual find these days, given all those EU restrictions. Restaurant Manager, Edgar Katzer could have been running a 2-star Michelin, such was



The rather dated lobby at Grand Hyatt Berlin.

the extraordinary attention to detail and service, and amazingly, this also translated through to the breakfast service, which was equally impressive (especially the late Sunday breakfast buffet which runs from 6am to 2pm). Vox also includes an elegant sum-

mer terrace, two private dining rooms, and the Vox Bar, which showcases live jazz and over 240 brands of whisky.

We also lunched at the hotel's newest venue, Mesa, which, although less accomplished than Vox is, nevertheless a clever concept, with a choice of small tapas-style plates to be mixed and matched at will. The third restaurant and bar, Tizian, is set in the lobby, around a wood burning fire and is popular with local business types.

I hear that designer, Tony Chi will be involved in a major refurbishment of the hotel's rooms and suites, which is certainly overdue, but meanwhile, make sure you opt for Grand Club accommodation, which also gives you access to the Club Lounge, which offers three daily food and beverage presentations.

Of these rooms and suites, do not take anything less than a Deluxe Club King, such as #505, which resembles a Junior

Suite. Preferably, though, opt for one of the five Grand Suites, such as #542, which is well designed and configured and can also connect with a Deluxe Double, such as #545.

I was less enamoured with the larger suites, such as the Executives and the Presidentials, but hopefully, Tony Chi will put all that to right and, I hear, knock together a few of those 326 rooms to make more



Grand Hyatt Berlin's rooftop pool.

suites, as currently, there are but 16.

At every level, you can expect comfortable beds with pillow menus and down duvets, good WiFi (charged by the minute, up to €18), Bang & Olufsen flat-screen TVs and MP3 player connections, Aveda toiletries and the classic Hyatt wet-room bathrooms, with separate loo and small colour TV.

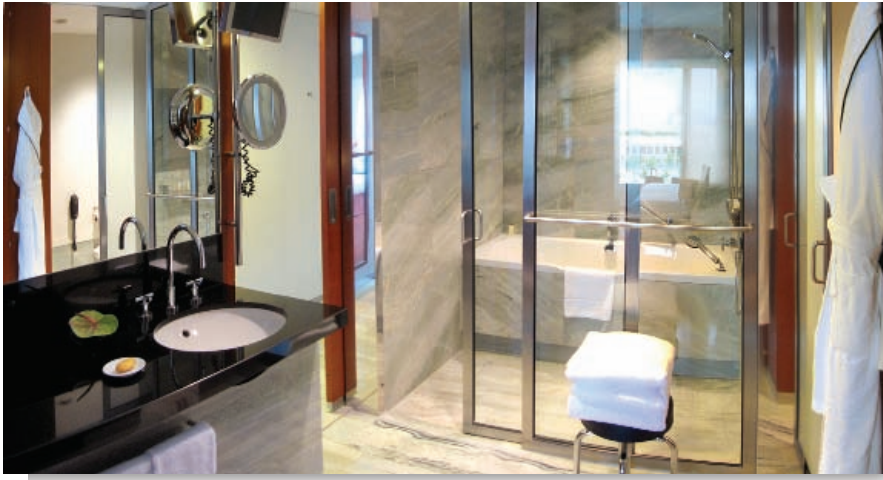
The Spa offers a pleasant rooftop indoor pool with sun terrace, a good fitness facility and Aveda and REN treatments at extremely competitive prices.

On every floor, in front of the elevators, there is a unique sculpture, which helps soften the somewhat brutalist style of the hotel. We also liked the back-lit strips of black and white Berlin photography which punctuates the wide grey corridors on every



Grand Hyatt Berlin's side entrance leads to Vox and Mesa restaurants; here showing the Mesa Terrace.

All photography by David Maslin©



A typical Grand Hyatt bathroom, with wet room.

floor. You have to believe that this hotel is somebody's personal passion. It could be



Mesa at Grand Hyatt, Berlin.

the owners or the General Manager, Fred Huerst, or maybe both; but whoever is behind the Hyatt engine, they are doing a sterling job and although I thought, initially, that I had made a mistake in staying here, I realised after just a day that Grand Hyatt Berlin was a very accomplished hotel indeed.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

Hotel de Rome, Berlin.

On the Bebelplatz, in the heart of historic Berlin, right next to the State Opera House and Museum Island, and by the legendary Unter den Linden, sits what was the headquarters of the Dresdner Bank and is today Rocco Forte's Hotel de Rome. The building has, most decidedly, retained its sense of financial gravitas; a little dark, perhaps, a little brooding, but most certainly elegant. The dramatic lobby, with its sweeping black velvet sofas and central flower arrangement draws you in as you glance to your right at the inviting Bebel Bar, which is open all day for drinks and snacks and, in the evening, has live entertainment. The cuisine here could do with some work, which is surprising, given how good the hotel's main restaurant, Parioli, is; its large, leafy terrace perfect for summer dining and its cuisine, under Chef, Jörg Behrend, unusually gourmet in style for this hotel group, embracing Mediterranean and Italian fare with a Michelin fervour. Imagine a Rocket

and Lemon Sorbet, which believe me, works.

Sadly, it was too windy for us to sample the viewsome Roof Top Terrace; an alfresco style lounge that, perhaps, could do with a touch more atmosphere.

At the other end of things, where once the bank stored gold and offered deposit boxes for customers' precious jewels, the basement vault is now the 6-treatment-room Spa de Rome, replete with a rather mysterious indoor pool that feels like a grotto, whilst the spa itself is surprisingly clinical, but happily offers The Organic Pharmacy as its chemical-free option.



The imposing entrance to Hotel de Rome.

Designed by Tommaso Ziffer and Olga Polizzi, this is a very comfortable hotel apart from the op-art style carpets in the corridors and rooms, which have the most disturbing effect upon your eyes. I also found that the door to our Junior Suite, #329, required one to slam it firmly in order for it to lock, which I found a worrying security



Our Junior Suite, #329, although viewless, was a comfortable, well designed habitat, at Hotel de Rome, Berlin.



Black velvet in the lobby of Hotel de Rome, Berlin.

aspect. I did, however, like the signature splashes of red, such as the lacquered wardrobe doors and red leather chair, and I also appreciated the fine Italian linen on the bed and the black and white bathroom mosaics, with a single vanity, deep tub, modest walk-in shower and REN toiletries. Everything worked, from Internet access to flat-screen TV, but I would not opt for anything below a Junior. Try to secure one of the four first floor Suites, such as #109, the Humboldt Suite, with wood-panelled ceilings so high as to be vertiginous. Even here, though, you only get a single vanity in the bathroom, despite the roll-top bath. Do you mind? Probably not, after you glimpse the striking views of the Bebelplatz.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★

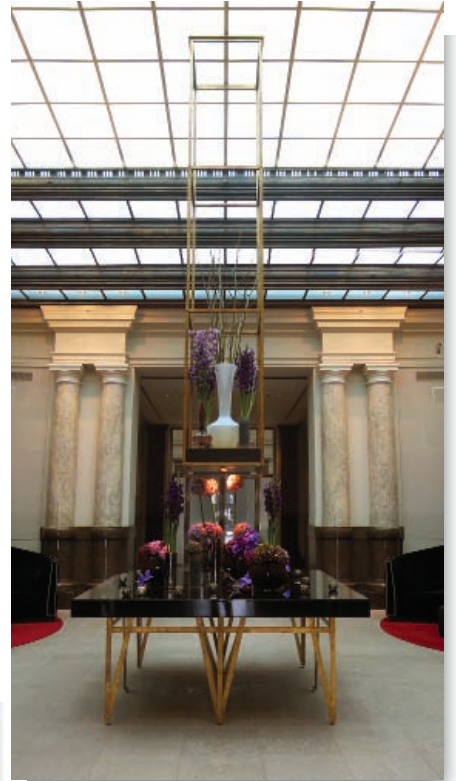
Soho House, Berlin.

Our cab could not find it and neither could we, as the address resembled a building site, replete with concrete dust. David dashed into the designated building and signalled to me that this was, indeed, it. Our driver hauled our luggage into 'reception' and all three of us gaped, as the ground floor looked like a deconstructed film set, with scaffolding poles set with spotlights and even the reception desk a seemingly makeshift island, with table tennis tables and even a children's playground roundabout. Then I saw the huge graffiti painting by Damien Hirst and I wondered, maybe, if this whole experience was meant to be 'art'.



Corner of The Bebel Bar at Hotel de Rome, Berlin.

Soho House, Berlin, opened in May 2010 in the Mitte district as a private members' club, but it is also a 40-room boutique hotel, set within what looks to be a very large late-Bauhaus monolith, on a not too salu-



The lobby at Hotel de Rome, Berlin.

brious corner in the old Eastern sector; a 1928 building that started life as a department store and also housed, at one time, the Communist Party archives.

Our arrival did not bode well, but the people at the front desk were all highly motivated and pleasant and they assured us that we would be very surprised once we saw our room. Still speechless, we followed our guide to the elevator and were, indeed, amazed when we reached the 6th floor, as it was all serious celadon striped wallpaper, carpet runners and smart cre-



Restaurant Parioli, with its spacious outdoor terrace, at Hotel de Rome, Berlin.



The old bank vault at Hotel de Rome now houses a grotto-like pool.

denzas topped with marché aux puces objects. Schizophrenia ruled, it seemed.



The late-Bauhaus monolith that is now Sobo House.

Our 'Extra Large' Room, #34, was an understatement, as it was bigger than most

grand suites and was theatrically designed, using an eclectic mix of retro styles. Rooms here range from Tiny to Extra Large and you get a lot more than you pay for; the rates just as retro as the design.

Last month, the hotel was a work in progress; Cecconi's restaurant on the ground floor scheduled to open this Autumn; but generally, there was a surprising level of friendly competence and once we got our heads around the concept, we began to relish this unusual but remarkably comfortable hideaway.

Our 'Room' meandered from the hotel's signature oversized velvet sofa to a bed so large as to be beyond categorisation; no less than 9 feather pillows barring our entrance. It was, I have to say, one of the most sleep-inducing beds ever slept in.

A huge plasma TV graced the sitting and dining area, whilst a smaller one gazed at the bed over a free-standing bathtub, adorned with the group's own full-sized Cowshed toiletries. The bathroom, meanwhile, also aimed for a sense of largesse; the twin-headed shower room big enough for an entire football team.

Everything worked extremely well. Room

service arrived within minutes, turndown came and went during dinner (although no water was left by the bed), and WiFi was, unusually for Berlin, complimentary.

The look throughout the property is a strange mix of exposed concrete brutalism and the foibles of one's maiden aunt; striking modern art and photography aligned with chintz-covered chairs and vintage record players, replete with vinyl LPs. The



The front desk at Sobo House, Berlin.

rooms are set over 4 floors and we managed to see one of the 'Medium' Rooms, #18, and liked it enormously as it was just the right size for a couple. It did not have a bathtub, but its massive shower room



Pedicure/Manicure stations at Sobo House, Berlin.

compensated admirably, and, as with the 3 other Mediums, this one had a terrace. I



Our Extra Large Room, #34, at Sobo House Berlin.



Medium Room, #18, at Sobo House, Berlin, also offers a much coveted terrace.

also liked the Large Rooms, such as #19, which was less intimidating than Extra Large.

Because this is a club, photography is banned in public areas, so we could not show you the 8th floor rooftop terrace, which is a really good place to relax, with a 12-metre heated outdoor pool tiled in green Pyrolave volcanic stone, timbered decks, loungers, lots of chintz-covered chairs and tables with parasols and a central bar



Not the usual lobby at Sobo House, Berlin.

serving drinks and snacks.

On the 7th floor, there is an attractive Club Bar and House Kitchen, offering simple but good comfort food, together with an excellent range of wines and spirits. The Lounge is a fireplaced maze of intimate seating and dining venues, with a wraparound outdoor terrace and very good young staff;



The 36-seat screening room at Sobo House, Berlin.

some of whom are ex-One Aldwych. We had one of the best Club Sandwiches ever

here and a good breakfast, too; the nostalgic price of €10 for a Full English, amazing.

In the basement, there is a 36-seat screening room, with fringed lamps, plus a cosy Library and Cowshed Relax Spa, with 4 manicure/pedicure stations and 5 treatment rooms. The gym is sited on the first floor, with a yoga/pilates studio. Sauna and steam rooms were about to open when we stayed.

There is same-day laundry, a 1-hour pressing service and a daily complimentary newspaper. If this is what nostalgia is all about, I am all for it!

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

Brandenburger Hof, Berlin.

It had been quite a while since we last

stayed here, so I was very impressed with the hotel's striking new persona, especially the 14 suites, which were made by knocking together some of the original rooms.



A corner of the Club Bar on the 7th floor of Sobo House, Berlin.

We were in one of the 8 full suites, #402, Rosalka, which, apart from a small bathroom and an overly hard bed, was a very acceptable suite, despite the high WiFi charges and challenging high-tech lighting. I also liked Suite, #102, La Wally, which offered a much larger bathroom with twin



The tranquil courtyard with its Japanese garden, at the heart of Brandenburger Hof, Berlin.



Our Suite, #402, Rosalka, at Brandenburger Hof, Berlin.

vanities, big shower and, like ours, a separate guest loo. Indeed, the first floor suites are by far the best, as these have the largest bathrooms. You must, however, book nothing less than a Junior, such as #217, with its pop-up TV and stylish bathroom.

This is an hotel for art lovers and culture buffs; a rather grown-up place, with just 58 rooms and 14 suites, set in a beautiful fin de siècle residence in the heart of Berlin and



Entrance to Brandenburger Hof, Berlin.

close to the Kurfürstendamm, with a striking glass atrium courtyard around a serene Japanese garden. From here, there are numerous jewel-like salons radiating inward; one for breakfast, another filled with with the hotel's remarkable 900-bottle wine cellar, another housing the Michelin-starred Quadriga restaurant, and all, in the summer, spilling out into the courtyard atrium, which is a lovely place in which to relax.

Staff, especially the concierge, is savvy to the extreme, but I was not entirely convinced by the experimental cuisine of new Finnish Chef, Sauli Kempainen (think veal and snails with truffles), as the fare tended towards the old 1980's Nouvelle Cuisine, where there was a lot going on, but not too much to eat. Presentation ruled here and I felt guilty if I did not like something, as

though it was not the fault of the dish, but of my taste buds. I much preferred the simpler fare served in the Quadriga Lounge, which was excellent, as was the extensive à la carte breakfast.

Legendary owner, Daniela Sauter, has im-



A salon at Brandenburger Hof, Berlin.

pressed her inimitable style upon this delightful hideaway and everywhere you turn, there is a charming design folly; the lamps alone worthy of an art exhibition. General Manager, Markus Otto Graf, has resided here almost as long, so there is a real sense of continuity, which is a rarity in Berlin.

Along with The Adlon and Hotel de Rome, it is alleged that Brandenburger Hof achieves the highest rates in Berlin, which by comparison with the rest of Europe are unbelievably low; its top suites barely equating with entry-level room rates in other major cities. This means that it is extremely good value. So if you crave tickets to sold-out performances, or long to



Dining in the courtyard at Brandenburger Hof.

access Berlin's secret places, then this is your hotel.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

AT A GLANCE

GRAND HYATT, BERLIN.

Tel: +49 30 2553 1234. **Internet:** www.berlin.grand.hyatt.com **Affiliation:** Hyatt. **Rooms:** 326 & 16 suites. **Rack Rates:** Club Deluxe Kings: €125. Grand Suites: €295. Executive Suites: €660. Daimler Suite: €2,300. Maybach Suite: €3,100, inc. tax.

HOTEL DE ROME, BERLIN.

Tel: +49 30 460 6090. **Internet:** www.roccofortecollection.com, www.lhw.com **Affiliation:** The Leading Hotels of The World, Rocco Forte Collection. **Rooms:** 146, inc. 39 suites & 4 historic suites. **Rack Rates:** Doubles: €395-495. Junior Suites: €595. Classic Suites: €700. Executive Suites: €1,100. Opera & Bebrren Suites: €1,800. Renaissance & Humboldt Suites: €2,400. Bebel Suite: €4,100, inc. tax & service.

SOHO HOUSE, BERLIN.

Tel: +49 30 40 50 44-0. **Internet:** www.sohohouseberlin.com **Affiliation:** Soho House. **Rooms:** 40. **Rack Rates from:** Tiny/Small: €100/120. Medium: €160. Big: €220. Large: €300. Extra Large: €400, inc. tax.

BRANDENBURGER HOF, BERLIN.

Tel: +49 30 21 405-600. **Internet:** www.brandenburger-hof.com **Affiliation:** Small Luxury Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 58 & 14 Suites. **Rack Rates:** Doubles: €295-345. Junior Suites to Suites: €425-525, inc. tax, service & à la carte breakfast.

Actual rates are often lower than standard Rack Rates and can vary considerably according to season.

GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



OUT OF NUMEROUS NEW HOTEL PROJECTS currently underway, one that intrigues me is **Four Seasons Resort Vietnam at Cham Island**; a 96-suite and villa property by the beach in the UNESCO Heritage site of Hoi An, slated to open in 2011. It looks as though the resort will be the only thing on the island, rather like in the Maldives. Another interesting project is Rocco Forte's historical take on **The Shepherd Hotel** in Cairo, which should re-open mid 2012.

NOW THAT DLF has stated its intention to divest itself of most of its equity in **Amanresorts**, I do hope that a sensitive buyer will be found. The latest rumour is that Khazanah, the investment arm of the Malaysian Government, is interested and that Aman Delhi will be excluded from the sale.

THE FAMILY FRIENDLY **Hillside Beach Club** is set in 30 forested acres outside Fethiye, Turkey, on its own private bay and is a great spot for watersports, including world-class diving. www.hillsidebeachclub.com

THE FORMER HOUSE of Gianni Versace on Miami's South Beach opened last month as a plush 10-suite hotel, under the name of **The Villa by Barton G.** www.TheVillaByBartonG.com

SO MANY READERS HAVE ASKED ME TO RECOMMEND a **boutique hotel in Paris** that I begin to despair, because they tend to be either four-star minimalist or so overdressed with frills, flounces and fabrics as to risk an attack of nausea, so I was greatly relieved to hear that Hospes were planning on re-vamping the bathrooms at Hotel Lancaster to better reflect our needs. Meanwhile, do as I do, and stick to the Grandes Dames.

IT LOOKS AMAZING, BUT WILL IT LIVE UP TO THE PROMISE? The beautifully refurbished palazzo, **Il Salviatino** in Florence certainly has the makings of a great new hotel, with a raft of individually decorated suites, from Juniors upwards. I like the Tegliacci Suite. www.salviatino.com. Also in Italy, but this time on Lake Como is the newly opened **Grand Hotel CastaDiva**, which has the most stunning views of the lake from endless panoramic windows and terraces. The accommodation also includes two butler-serviced villas, Villa Norma and Villa Amina, which could, most decidedly, appeal to you. www.castadivaresort.com

IDO WONDER IF **Mandarin Oriental Jnan Rahma, Marrakech**, will ever open to paying guests, other than the stars of Sex & The City 2, as the latest news is that the resort is delayed yet again until the end of this year; but isn't that what they said last year? www.mandarinoriental.com

THE HUNTER FAMILY, WHO WE FIRST MET back in the early 1990s, have, over the years, expanded their eclectic hotel empire from **Hunter's Country House** on the Garden Route and now offer equally delightful experiences throughout South Africa; all their properties represented by Relais & Châteaux. www.hunterhotels.com

IF YOU WANT TO BE A VERY Pretty Woman indeed, then check into **Four Seasons Hotel Beverly Wilshire** and take the brand new Presidential Suite in the original Wilshire Wing, or the new Penthouse Suite in the Beverly Wing (with 3 bedrooms, it is the largest in the city) then order Champagne and strawberries and say something like 'I miss keys'. Barry Design Associates have done such a good job that even Richard Gere would surely agree that this is now the best. Oh, and did I mention that you also get exclusive use of a Porsche Panamera and a fashion stylist or hair & makeup artist? It's summer, so spoil yourself. At \$20,000 and \$25,000 respectively, it is a lot cheaper than the Ty Warner Suite in New York. www.fourseasons.com

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