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48 HOURS: LEIPZIG



Spinnerei_Maerzgalerie. Image: LTM/Tom Shulze

Cool contemporary culture complements historical riches in Leipzig, finds Jo Fletcher-Cross

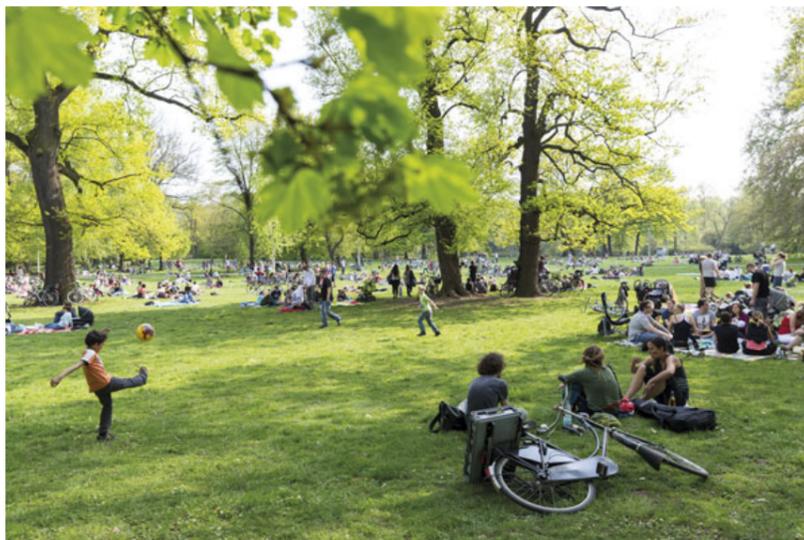
Leipzig isn't one of the most obvious places for a weekend away, but the eternal search for the new cool city break has raised its profile. Some have dubbed it 'the new Berlin' but that misses the point: Leipzig has a character that's all its own. It's true that the city has hipster coffee shops, masses of contemporary art and funky repurposed industrial architecture. There's also history, both ancient and modern — a trade city for centuries, with incredible musical riches (Bach, Mahler, Schumann, Wagner and Mendelssohn all lived and worked here), and the centre of the printing and publishing world, it also played a hugely significant role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe through the 'peaceful revolution' — adding the title of 'city of heroes' to its monikers of 'city of music' and the admittedly slightly less thrilling 'city of trade fairs and commerce'. Along with all this Leipzig has got a relaxed, laid-back attitude that's almost the opposite of the frenetic edginess of Berlin. This isn't the new Berlin, it's simply Leipzig, and all the better for it.

DAY ONE

Morning: For modern art lovers, Leipzig is a dream. Spinnerei, in the west of the city, was once continental Europe's largest cotton spinning mill; now it's home to more than 100 artists' studios and 14 galleries. It's a thriving, thrilling place to visit, not least for the staggering industrial architecture. Guided tours are available on Fridays and Saturdays and are well worth doing — the history is fascinating. While you're out west, check out Kunstkraftwerk, a massive cultural space located inside a former gas power station which hosts exhibitions and events.

Afternoon: This is a city with enormous musical heritage. Johann Sebastian Bach was the choirmaster at St. Thomas Church, from 1723 until his death in 1750, and his remains are buried in the church. The boys' choir — once led by Bach — was formed in 1212 and can be heard at services, or for just €2 (£1.85) it's possible to attend the motet performance on a Saturday at 3pm, often including a Bach cantata. Get there early: the queue begins at 2pm and doors open 15 minutes later.

Evening: In the early evening, take a stroll through Clara-Zetkin Park, a huge green space which isn't far from the centre of town but spreads out over more than 300 acres. Have a drink at the outdoor beer garden and take a walk to Sachsenbrücke, a large pedestrianised bridge where Leipzigers lounge around, listen to musicians and watch boats going up and down the river. Then head into the city for dinner: cool, relaxed Telegraph is right in the centre but tucked slightly away, offering delicious international food and excellent service.



Clara-Zetkin Park

DAY TWO

Morning: If you're in Leipzig from Monday to Saturday, head to bakery and patisserie Goebecke for fresh, warm currant buns that will set you up perfectly for the day. On Sundays the bakery is closed, so you'll have to settle for musical nourishment instead: Felix Mendelssohn lived and worked in Leipzig and there's a weekly Sunday concert in the salon of his house in Goldschmidt Strasse at 11am. It's an uplifting experience in refined and beautiful surroundings.

Afternoon: The more recent history of Germany is brought chillingly to life at the Stasi Museum. The exhibits are all in German but €5 (£4.60) gets you a good English-language audio guide. Displays show surveillance devices, explain the recruitment process and the insidious manipulation of ordinary people. It's bleak but fascinating. Clear your head with a walk over to the east side of the city to the atmospheric Old St. John's Cemetery, where Bach was originally buried and Wagner's family are interred. Right next door is the Grassi Museum — actually a complex of three fantastic museums in a stunning Art Deco building. It houses the Ethnography Museum, the Applied Arts Museum and the Museum of Musical Instruments.

Evening: Goethe went to university in Leipzig and by all accounts had an excellent time (though didn't attend many law lectures). He drank at Auerbachs Keller, a restaurant and inn dating back to 1525. A meal here's rather touristy but nonetheless atmospheric and the traditional German food is good. For a more modern hedonistic vibe, continue the night at Distillery, founded just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and one of the most famous techno clubs in the country.

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