

BERLIN

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“Gay life is, and has been, part of Berlin’s culture.”

Visitors can verify that claim with a trawl through the relocated Schwules Museum (literally, “Gay Museum”) at its new home in a renovated former printing house in the Tiergarten district. Occupying more than 17,200 square feet on three levels, the once-tiny museum now boasts four exhibition spaces, a cafe, a reference library, offices, a workshop and an archive.

The existing permanent collection once on view at the museum’s former location in a Kreuzberg walk-up tenement has been retired to the archive. While a new permanent exhibition is being compiled, three temporary shows are on offer. “Transformation,” on view until the end of 2014, addresses trends in gender classification in Germany since 1800, while “Transformation — Artistic Photographies” documents the museum’s recent move and “Lesbian. Jewish. Gay,” running through Sept. 9, explores what it means to be Jewish and LGBT.

Although compelling and new, the Schwules Museum is hardly Berlin’s only, or even most popular, LGBT attraction. A recent fan foray across the city with “lifestyle guide” and entrepreneur Henrik Tidefjord, founder of tour firm Berlinagenten, took in the top shops, restaurants, cafes, bars, nightclubs and sightseeing spots in Schoneberg, Prenzlauerberg and other neighborhoods popular with both LGBT and mainstream travelers.

Tidefjord, a colorful, cosmopolitan Swedish transplant who half-jokingly refers to himself as a travel “pimp” for Berlin, makes it his business to introduce the latest and greatest on Berlin’s cultural, culinary and clubbing fronts to clients from high-end U.S. outfits such as Willing Foot and Indagare.

There’s something for everyone, he said. “Berlin is, for sure, the LGBT capital in

Germany due to the enormous [size of the] scene. Cologne and Hamburg might have big gay scenes, but you just have to look at the number of locations we have [to see] we have more to offer in all respects.”

Tidefjord’s recommendations:

- For bars, point clients to the Liberate, Heile Welt, Moebel Olfe, Roses and Zum Schmutzigen Hobby and bars along Motzstrasse.

- When it comes to nightclubs, he recommends Homopatik, Irrnhaus, Chantal House of Shame, GMF and Propaganda.

- Before a night out, hungry clients should dine at More Berlin.

- By day, they can window shop or grab a coffee on trendy streets such as Muenzstrasse, Kastanienallee, Oranienstrasse and around the Hackescher Markt complex.

Over drinks at the Liberate — a small but glitzy new spot in the former East Berlin

that attracts a mixed gay-straight crowd — Tidefjord stressed that, for all the LGBT-specific goings-on, gay and lesbian visitors will find the long-tolerant city integrated and welcoming to all.

“For most people in Berlin, it’s not about [proving] you are part of the LGBT scene [or] the need to stick together ... in a ‘gay ghetto,’” he said. “And you’re not asking yourself constantly if you can go there or do that because you’re gay. In Berlin, you just do it without being afraid.”

In fact, most LGBT visitors don’t want an exclusively “gay” travel experience, Tidefjord said.

“They have a common need and demand of exploring Berlin in an exclusive way with a private guide and discovering the hip, cool and happening scene, instead of traditional gay venues,” he said. “Plenty of gay visitors ‘travel with style,’ which means they want to hit the best restaurants, bars, galleries and shops, without an exclusive gay focus.”

See www.pinkpillow-berlin.com, www.visitberlin.com, www.schwulesmuseum.de and www.berlinagenten.com. — K.K.



The relocated Schwules Museum boasts four exhibit spaces within its 17,200 square feet.