

## Good Night, Berlin!

Hanae Ohno, 24, is sitting in the "Hostel Clubhouse" and reads "The Sorrows of young Werther". Japan and Goethe: for sure a cliché. But in a second, she will go downstairs in to the "Kalkscheune" to drink a beer out of the bottle---unthinkable to do that at home in Saitama. Hanae wants to be a conductor and for that she visited her professor in Leipzig. And once in Germany, you have to visit Berlin. Hanae wants to come back in June.

The German capital is an essential stop on the route London-Amsterdam-Prague-Vienna-Florence-Barcelona for Asians, US-citizens (after 11.9.01 not the superior number anymore), Canadians, Aussies, Scandinavians and Latin-Americans. The money has to last for a long journey and that's why these travellers look for budget accommodation, so called Backpacker Hostels. Here in Berlin you find Hostels which offer a bed in a dorm from 9 € on. Almost two dozen hostels offer Berlin, that's as much as the rest of Germany features. And the trend of the market is still boosting: just now opened in Berlin's east the "Generator" with 850 Beds, after his London role model with lots of neon and steel.

Backpackers have the choice: from a bed in meagre "Alcatraz" – but in the middle of trendsetting "Prenzlauer Berg", up to a posh bed in "The Circus" right at "Rosenthaler Platz". There is a gap between dormitories and self-cooked meals on one side and the chic of the city on the other side. The "Lette'm Sleep" in the City Centre complains about the high prices of the pubs and restaurants surrounding it. The same with "Mitte's Backpackers", a former DDR hat factory which gets slowly circumvented by office palaces and upmarket shopping arcades. It's refreshing to see all the foreign visitors, who find the city fascinating: a collision of wartime bullet holes in old buildings next to a hastily built present; here the parliament "Reichstag" with the inscription of the Russian conquerors, there the Sony-tent roof. More than Schinkel and Pergamon altars attract the sites of the youngest German history: the wall, the burn up of the books, the "Führer Bunker" and sites of memory like the Jewish Museum. Taly, Alan and Alvara, three Jewish Chileans, trace the fate of their emigrated parents back to "Auschwitz". Peter Weissbach from "Hostel Odyssee" met backpackers, who travelled all over Europe and as far as Irkutsk for their ancestry research. His guests are amazed about the difference in the metropole between Gucci and punk, ruins and glass palace, and enjoy, in accord to Paris, London and Amsterdam, the low prices: clubs with free entrance and a tequila for 2€. Where else can you get that?? They carry city maps and dictionaries around, visit Checkpoint Charly and walk over the premises of "Topographie des Terrors", they find the city rude and dirty, spontaneous and flabbergasting.

Mixed showers, ethnic diversity and experience exchange makes contacts easy in the Hostels, but who thinks there is an easy one-night stand chance is on the wrong track. Even a single man in an eight-bed dorm with girls from Ireland, India, Denmark or Canada will learn that his neighbour is still in one of the 250 Berlin Clubs or already asleep after an exhausting daytrip. But in any case you can buy condoms at the reception for 2,50€.

Although world crises like 11<sup>th</sup> Sep., floods, Asian crises and foreign exchange economy in South America have an impact on the reservations, business people are still attracted to the Hostel boom in Berlin. "Times are gone, when anyone could put some beds in an old bike factory and call it a business", says Oliver Winter from "A&O Hostels". "This is now a two-fisted business and has to be run by professionals." Headhunters catch backpackers, now with more money in their pockets than a few years ago, already at the train station "Bahnhof Zoo" and lure with rooms with private facilities the group business away from the YHA into the Hostels.

Though bondages, but most of the travellers decide already where to stay, thru recommendation from "Lonely Planet" and "Let's Go" or thru one of the 11000 web sites,

before they arrive in the city.

Rough and cheap – it still has the charm of old cinema seats, brick build receptions and tips for illegal parties. Manager Eric van Dijk from “Generator” focus on marketing, futuristic design and Internet Café.

“The one who has the lowest standard is out of the game”, says Jörg Noll from “Transit Loft”.