

How to get into Berghain

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One of the most exclusive clubs in the world

In more normal times, particularly in years that lack global pandemics, Berlin is known as a premiere nightlife destination. Hailed as the techno capital of the world, Berlin is home to infamous clubs ranging from the fetish club Kit Kat, which requires sufficiently sexy dressing up for entry, to Griessmuehle, the recently closed and reopened techno haven.

However, no club is quite as infamous or sought after as Berghain—arguably the most exclusive club in the world. In contrast with other A-list clubs in other urban centres, Berghain's pull is not luxury, well-made cocktails, or intriguing shows. Situated on the border between the Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain districts (hence the name), Berghain is known instead for its perfection of the art of the techno dancefloor. With a close-to-perfect sound system, stuffed into a former power plant, some argue that Berghain's notoriety is due not to its impeccable lineups of DJs, but rather due to the fact that most of the wishful attendees spend up to three hours in the queue only to face almost-certain rejection at the door.

So stringent is the Berghain door policy that the club's bouncer, Sven Marquardt, is an international celebrity in his own right. The face-tattooed club legend has worked the door at Berghain for ages and is recognizable to any Berliner and, indeed, any fan of techno music. Many claim that Sven's selection criteria for entry at the door is based on one's "vibe", or how cool they're considered to be by the bouncer and his team. But with local legend claiming that celebrities such as Brad Pitt and Britney Spears have faced rejection, many of us are left wondering what hope we have of entry into the techno capital.

Many Berghain regulars face frequent rejection themselves, and most club goers expect a long wait and rejection at the door despite prior entry. Indeed, the line is itself an aspect of an evening out to Berghain, with beers accessible for the wait and an Instagram page with a large following dedicated to posting updates on the length of the queue (see @berghainlinelive to make sure you arrive at a time that minimises your inevitable wait). Rather than being exclusive to Berghain, this wait for club access is a hallmark of the nightlife in Berlin in general.

It was with an inevitable wait and rejection in mind that my housemate and I went to try to get into Berghain for the first time, pre-pandemic. Indeed, we had not intended to go out that night at all and chose Berghain as our destination so that, following inevitable rejection, we would have an excuse to head home and watch a movie. However, after waiting an hour and a half in line, and meeting a few other hopefuls, we found ourselves inside the techno haven before we fully realized what had happened. Prior to my Berghain access, I was rather critical of the self-conscious, exclusive door policy. However, after being allowed an inside view, I feel somewhat differently after an unparalleled club experience. Partly because I had a great evening, and whether I'll admit it or not, also in no small part due to the ego boost of being allowed entry.

The line-up was truly excellent, despite the fact that I had too-limited knowledge to know any of the DJs by name. The sound system was the best that I had experienced, and there was more than enough space to dance or have a drink without standing shoulder to shoulder. The crowd itself was concerned only with enjoying the evening and the music, likely in part due to the excitement of being afforded access, as opposed to some of the more uncomfortable social encounters one may experience during a night out. All in all, Berghain's reputation as the techno capital is earned for more than just exclusivity.

Given how enjoyable the night out was, I recommend it to anyone interested in attending a Berghain 'Klubnacht' themselves. With that in mind, my experience on that first night has led me to a conclusion about entry into Berghain: my housemate and I had not dressed up in Matrix-esque leather trench coats, nor worn sunglasses despite the hour. Rather, while certainly trying to look cool, we had worn somewhat understated (obviously black) clothing. I also believe that our

certainty of rejection and mixed desire to go home was taken as indifference towards Berghain, which, surprisingly, led to our entry.

My advice for potential Berghain aspirants is thus the following: expect rejection and make plans to do something else. Berlin has no lack of alternatives for nightlife fun. Wear black, but don't try too hard—the "Berghain uniform" of all black leather, straps and metal is probably overplayed. As other online guides will say, don't attempt entry with too many friends. Berghain is very concerned with making sure that you "make friends" in the club yourself. Two to three people in total is apparently the magic number for entry. Come across as indifferent but keen, but remember the whole time that entry is probably to some degree random. As is generally accepted, the door policy at Berghain seems to be whether the bouncers get the whim to let you in or not. I know from experience that there seems to be no particular demographic or look, beyond wearing black, required for entry. In fact, as I was leaving the club at some point early on Sunday morning, I saw two middle-aged couples just entering to begin their day. Many attendees consider Sundays to be the best time at Berghain. As much as I'd like to believe differently, I am (definitely) probably not cooler than Brad Pitt or in any way more worthy of the techno experience. I probably just got lucky.