



ARTS HUB: The Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin is Germany's national centre for the presentation and discussion of international contemporary arts, with a special focus on non-European cultures and societies. PHOTO: WOLFGANG SCHOLVIEN



IDYLIC ESCAPE: Fiji's Castaway Island.

Cyclone hit resort reopens

AFTER almost getting blown away by Tropical Cyclone Winston, Castaway Island Resort has reopened.

Castaway general manager Steven Andrews said Winston may have been classified as the strongest tropical cyclone to hit Fiji in recorded history but the reopening of the resort just three months after such a severe storm was proof that the Castaway Island family was more resilient than any storm could be.

In addition to repairing the significant damage caused by the cyclone, Outrigger Resorts, which owns and manages the property, took advantage of the down time and invested further in the resort with an upgrade and refurbishment of a number of bures and public areas.

"Our hosts, most of whom stayed on the island during the cyclone, worked tirelessly for three months," Mr Andrews said.

"They put in back-breaking days clearing debris, cleaning swimming pools, restoring gardens and making repairs to bures and thatched roofing."

Fourteen of the island's 65 bures have either been completely rebuilt or upgraded.

Berlin: turning ghosts into cash

Past remembered in a city offering art, nightlife and modern architecture

John Bishop

BERLIN is a city where the tourists come to see sights like Checkpoint Charlie, the famous Berlin Wall crossing point, little realising that most of the wall has been pulled down and the checkpoint they see is a commercial fake.

The wall that made Berlin infamous has been down for almost as long as it was up, but it's still an important part of the tourist industry. And tourism is Berlin's most important industry, ahead of the arts, construction and government.

At the 2016 Checkpoint Charlie, the uniformed guards are not genuine soldiers and one of them is Italian. The guard house is a replica. The real guardhouse was larger, and several metres further forward and blocking the cross street.

The fresh-faced Russian soldier in the big picture hanging over the street is a

Belgian actor. To pose with the "guards" for a photo costs three euros; you can choose your hat from a selection of Russian, American, French and British military hats. Getting your passport stamped costs five euros.

The souvenir shops will sell you a piece of broken concrete "from the wall" for several euros, and some are even nicely mounted for display purposes.

The displays around the area vary in quality. Some have excellent photographic accounts of the construction of the wall from 1961 onwards, and of the various escape attempts, some successful, others resulting in tragedy and death.

Berlin is a good place for a walking tour and several companies will walk you round the remnants of the Third Reich, imperial Germany, Cold War Berlin and Jewish Berlin, or you can go by bus or to the

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concentration camps.

I went on an Insider Tour of the major sights with Irishman JJ as our guide. He walked us around the memorial to the Nazi book burning, down the Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse, Berlin's main shopping streets, around what's left of the wall, past Checkpoint Charlie and then through the Brandenburg Gate to the Hotel Adlon where Michael Jackson famously dangled his baby.

The Starbucks opposite the hotel is a common tour company meeting point and charges 50 cents to use the loo - as does McDonald's

and other restaurants.

We giggled at the communist-era houses, mocked the Trabant cars (they can be hired for short drives), and were saddened by the murals in a socialist realism style (in what was East Berlin) depicting an idyllic life style under communism.

JJ showed us where the Hitler Bunker used to be - nowadays it's small road, car park and a bit of lawn outside some apartment blocks. All reference to it has been obliterated but it's not difficult to find.

Currywurst is a Berlin obsession, there's even a museum about it. It's a grilled sausage chopped up in a tomato-based onion and curry sauce, with curry powder shaken on top. Often eaten as a late-night pick-me-up after beer-drinking sessions, in small mild doses it's tasty; stronger and larger, it's a bowel cleanser.

A block away from the Brandenburg Gate is a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust - 2711 blocks of concrete, each a different size, are spread out over a wide area.

Built from 2003-05, each block was sprayed with anti-graffiti paint. During construction it was revealed that the paint was made by a company called Degesch, a subsidiary of the very large Degussa chemical company. In World War II Degussa made Zyklon B, the gas used in the concentration camps to kill Jews and others.

The Berlin authorities said that they knew this at the time the contract was awarded. One outcome of the storm of controversy is that the Degussa company now cleans and refreshes the paint each year for free.

John Bishop visited Berlin at his own expense, www.eatdrinktravel.co.nz.

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