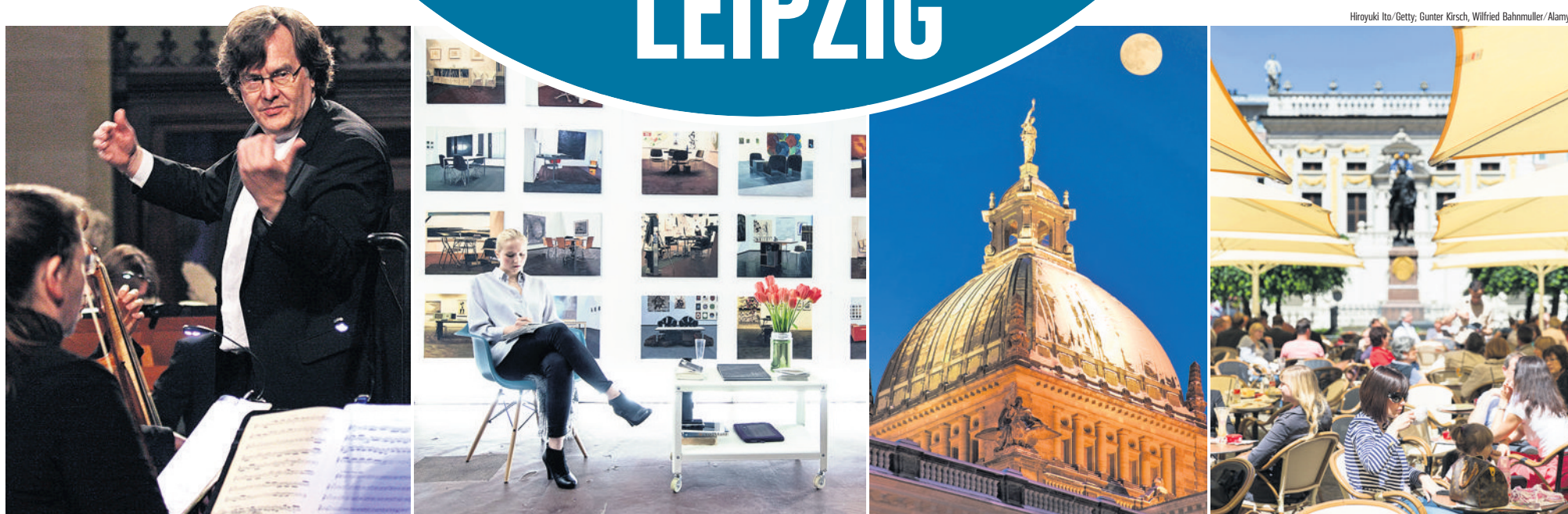


THE BIG WEEKEND LEIPZIG

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Hipster cafes, innovative cuisine, a trailblazing art scene: the east German city has turned sexy, says **Louis Wise**

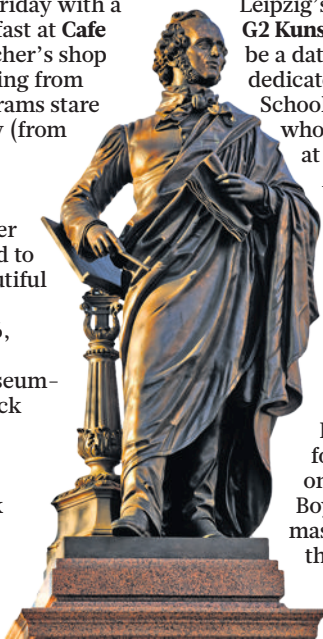
FRIDAY

Morning

Plenty of places have been called the new Berlin, but Leipzig, just over an hour away by train, is in pole position. This charming Saxon city, which celebrated its 1,000th anniversary last year and has been known for centuries as a haven for classical music, was left forgotten and neglected by 40 years of communist rule. Over the past two decades, however, it has been vigorously reupholstered, receiving an injection of cool from artists who have set up shop here and a boost from having the fastest-growing population in Germany, which makes for an intriguing mix of old and new. All this adds up to a city with a distinct identity: a great place for a weekend away.

Well, a slightly early weekend — you'll have landed just before 10pm on Thursday on one of the few direct flights from the UK, with Ryanair from Stansted. So begin your Friday with a hearty continental breakfast at **Cafe Fleischerei**, a former butcher's shop with a gorgeous high ceiling from which painted cows and rams stare down at you benevolently (from £5; Jahnallee 23).

This morning, we're concentrating on classic Leipzig. For a quick primer on the city's history, head to the **Old Town Hall**, a beautiful German Renaissance building dating from 1556, now a museum (£4.55; stadtgeschichtliches-museum-leipzig.de). After that, stick your head inside the **Gewandhaus**, home to Leipzig's world-famous orchestra. It's free to look around any time, but to catch a concert there, you'll need to book in advance — it's well worth it (tickets from



£9; gewandhausorchester.de). Visit **St Nicholas's Church**, too. It's pretty in its own right, but, more important, it was the focal point of peaceful protests against communist rule in the 1980s (nikolaikirche.de).

Afternoon

For lunch, head to **Weinstock**, on Marktplatz. This Saxon brasserie serves German classics elevated to fine dining: order the surprisingly light pork *butterschnitzel* and a glass of fruity white müller-thurgau (from £14; restaurant-weinstock-leipzig.de).

Mendelssohn conducted the Gewandhaus Orchestra for more than a decade, right up to his death in 1847. The **Mendelssohn-Haus**, where he lived and died, is now a museum, with his flat recreated upstairs and exhibits downstairs (£5.70; mendelssohn-stiftung.de).

Sidestep the city's classical-music history momentarily and explore Leipzig's newer, arty side. The **G2 Kunsthalle** art gallery used to be a data storage centre. Now it's dedicated to the New Leipzig School, the experimental painters who made the city's name anew at the turn of this century.

All works are "interesting", not least the surreal, glowing paintings by the movement's figurehead, Neo Rauch (£3.80; book in advance; g2-leipzig.de).

Back to the sounds of old Leipzig: just across the road from the Kunsthalle is **St Thomas's Church**, where Bach is buried. You're aiming for 5.30pm, because at 6pm on Fridays, the St Thomas Boys' Choir sing works by the master. Entry is £1.50 and the queues are long. The choir has been going for about 800 years; they do change the boys, though.

Evening

The liveliest addresses for a Friday night are just outside the city centre. **Restaurant B10** was founded by Paul Berry, an Australian chef whose tuna tartare and negroni chasers bring a touch of Melbourne to Leipzig (from £11; the-b10.com). After your meal, walk to the Theatre District, 10 minutes away, for caipirinhas at **Barcelona**, a cosy, low-lit tapas bar (cocktails from £4.50; Gottschedstrasse 12).

SATURDAY

Morning

Have breakfast at **Cafe Maitre**, on the wide Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse, aka the Karli, in unpretentious Südvorstadt. This French-style brasserie is a classy establishment, and locals sit out on the pavements day and night (from £5; cafe-maitre.de). On your way back to the centre of town, detour via another modern-art outpost, the **Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst**. It shows works by contemporary artists: this summer, it will host an exhibition of Andy Warhol's early screen tests. Its cafe overlooks the pretty Johannapark, one of the city's many green spaces (£3.80; gfkz.de).

In harmony From left, one of the city's orchestras in action; a gallery at the Spinnerei; the federal court; and al fresco dining by the baroque Old Stock Exchange. Below, snack time at Kaiserbad; and a statue of the city's adopted son, Mendelssohn



Afternoon

It's hipster-hunting time: make your way west to the trendy **Plagwitz** district. Down and around Karl-Heine-Strasse are the cafes and galleries trailblazing a Berlin-lite regeneration. Have a quick lunch of meatballs and mash at **Meins**, a cafe kitted out in vintage furniture, with a resident black cat (mains from £5.50; meins-leipzig.de).

Then weave down Karl-Heine to visit **Spinnerei**, the poster child for Leipzig's revival. This huge complex was once the largest set of cotton mills in mainland Europe, but was left a husk when trade shrivelled up during the GDR years. Colonised by artists, it's now a culture hub, with galleries exhibiting and selling original pieces by artists such as Claudia Biehne. It even has an art-house cinema (spinnerei.de).

Evening

Stay in Plagwitz for an aperitif on the terrace at **Kaiserbad**, overlooking the Karl-Heine canal (beers from £1.90; kaiserbad-leipzig.de). Then eat an early dinner five minutes away at **Chinabrenner**, a Sichuan restaurant that's one of the buzziest spots in town. The spicy beef with peanuts is excellent and the portions are huge (mains from £14; chinabrenner.de).

Sadly, your nightcap will be taken 33,000ft up, as you'll have just enough time after dinner to whizz back to your hotel, collect your bags and catch your 10.20pm flight.

WHERE TO STAY

Arcona Living Bach14 offers colourful flats in the heart of town (doubles from £64; bach14.arcona.de). East of the centre, the **Pentahotel Leipzig** is a jazzier proposition, with stylish rooms and a big, ritzy bar in the lobby (doubles from £55; pentahotels.com/leipzig).

GETTING THERE

Ryanair flies from Stansted to Leipzig on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; from £53 return. Or fly to Berlin — it's a 70min train ride to Leipzig from its main station (from £14 each way; bahn.com). Louis Wise was a guest of the Leipzig Tourist Board (leipzig.travel).

