

Brandenburg



Although it surrounds bustling Berlin, the Brandenburg state of mind is as far from the German capital as Shangri-La. It's a quiet, gentle state with vast expanses of unspoilt scenery, much of it in protected nature reserves. Its landscape is quilted in myriad shades, from emerald beech forest to golden fields of rapeseed and sunflowers, but it's also rather flat, windswept and perhaps even a bit melancholic.

This is a region shaped by water – not only by the rippling Oder, Havel and Spree Rivers that sinuously wend through it, but also by the thousands of ponds and lakes and the labyrinthine waterways connecting them. Water also characterises the Spreewald, where indigenous Sorbs keep alive their customs in island hamlets, and the Lower Oder Valley National Park, whose idyllic wetlands provide shelter for rare and endangered bird species. Like a fine wine, Brandenburg is best appreciated in sips, not gulps. It invites slowing down and exploring by bike, boat or on foot.

As the germ cell of Prussia, and thus modern Germany, Brandenburg is a land of great culture. Nowhere is this more apparent than in off-the-charts Potsdam, the 'German Versailles', with its wealth of parks, museums, stately palaces and the famous UFA film studios. Fine architecture awaits in the Rheinsberg palace and the Chorin monastery, while the Niederfinow ship-lift ranks squarely as one of the great technological monuments of the early 20th century.

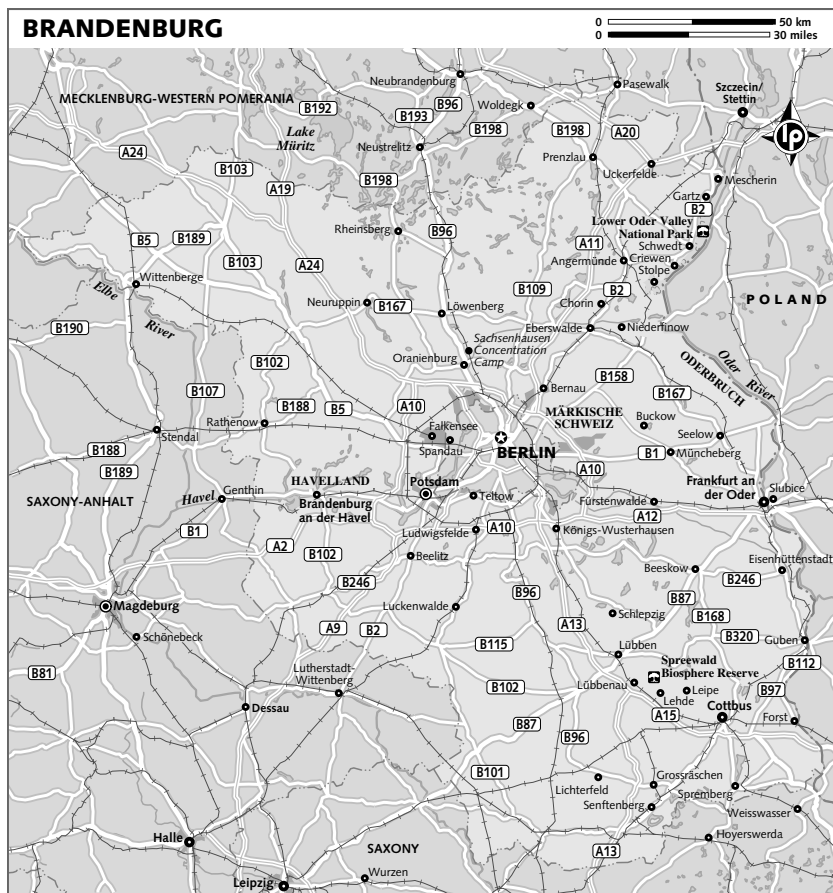
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Parks & Palaces** Tackle all of Potsdam's treasures and be sure not to miss the exotic Chinese Teahouse (p147)
- **Watery Ramblings** Take a float in the slow lane while kayaking around the idyllic waterways of the Spreewald Biosphere Reserve (p156)
- **Techno Wonders** Rub your eyes in disbelief while watching entire barges being hoisted 60m in the air at the massive ship-lift (p164) in Niederfinow
- **Music** Feast your ears on classical music during a summer concert at the romantically ruined medieval Chorin monastery (p163)
- **History of Terror** Try to grasp the horrors of Nazi Germany while touring what's left of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (p160) at Oranienburg



■ POPULATION: 2.58 MILLION

■ AREA:



Information

The excellent website maintained by **Tourismus Marketing Brandenburg** (☎ 0331-200 4747; www.brandenburg-tourism.com) should satisfy all your pre-trip planning needs and also has a room-booking function.

Getting Around

The Brandenburg-Berlin Ticket entitles you and up to four accompanying passengers (or one or both parents or grandparents plus all their children or grandchildren up to 14 years) to one day of travel anywhere within Berlin and Brandenburg on local and regional public transport from 9am to 3am the following day (midnight to 3am on weekends). It is valid on RE, IRE, RB and S-Bahn trains as well as

buses, U-Bahn and trams. The ticket costs €24 if bought online at www.bahn.de or at station vending machines, and €26 if bought from a Reisezentrum ticket agent. For timetable information, see www.vbb-online.de.

POTSDAM & HAVELLAND

The prime attraction of Brandenburg state and the most popular day trip from Berlin, Potsdam is a mere 24km southwest of the capital's city centre and easily accessible by S-Bahn. If time allows, venture another 36km west to the historic city of Brandenburg an der Havel, the centre of the watery Havelland region. Picturesque and less tourist-saturated than Potsdam, it's a perfect introduction to the state for which it's named.

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POTSDAM

☎ 0331 / pop 131,000

Potsdam, on the Havel River just southwest of Greater Berlin, is the capital and crown jewel of the state of Brandenburg. The captivating architecture of this former Prussian royal seat and the elegant air of history that still hangs over its parks and gardens prove an intoxicating cocktail to the millions of visitors who descend upon the town each year. A visit here is essential if you're spending any time in the region at all. All this splendour didn't go unnoticed by Unesco, which gave World Heritage site status to the entire city in 1990.

No single individual shaped Potsdam more than King Friedrich II (Frederick the Great), the visionary behind many of Sanssouci's fabulous palaces and parks. Although WWII bombing squadrons largely reduced the historic town centre to rubble, the palaces escaped with nary a shrapnel wound.

To emphasise their victory over the German military machine, the Allies chose Schloss Cecilienhof for the Potsdam Conference of August 1945, which set the stage for the division of Berlin and Germany into occupation zones.

The suburb of Babelsberg is the site of a historic – and now once again functioning – film studio (with a less than historic theme park).

Orientation

Potsdam Hauptbahnhof (central train station) is just southeast of the Altstadt, across the Havel River. Park Sanssouci is west of the historic centre, while the Neuer Garten with Schloss Cecilienhof is north. Babelsberg is quite a bit east of here.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Alexander-von-Humboldt Buchhandlung (☎ 200 460; Am Kanal 47) Good general bookstore.

Das Internationale Buch (☎ 291 496; cnr Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse & Brandenburger Strasse) Great selection of maps and travel books.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Potsdam Card (€11.50) Three consecutive days of unlimited public transport plus one year of discounts to sights,

restaurants and events. It is sold at the tourist office, hotels and all participating venues.

EMERGENCY

Emergency medical service (☎ 01805-304 505)

Fire & ambulance (☎ 112)

Police (☎ 110)

INTERNET ACCESS

Staudenhof (☎ 0176-5215 8276; Am Alten Markt 10; per hr €1.50; ☎ 9am-midnight or later) Enter from the pedestrian zone behind the building.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Klinikum Ernst-von-Bergmann (☎ 2410; Charlottenstrasse 72)

MONEY

Commerzbank (☎ 281 90; Lindenstrasse 45)

Dresdner Bank (☎ 287 8200; Yorckstrasse 28)

Eurochange (☎ 280 4033; Brandenburger Strasse 29)

POST

Main post office (cnr Am Kanal & Platz der Einheit)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Potsdam tourist office (☎ 275 580; www.potsdam-tourismus.de; Brandenburger Strasse 3; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar)

Sanssouci Besucherzentrum (☎ 969 4202; www.spsg.de; Zur Historischen Windmühle; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Feb)

Sights

PARK SANSSOUCI

Park Sanssouci is the oldest and most splendid of Potsdam's many gardens, a vast landscaped expanse of mature trees, rare plants and magnificent palaces. Its trump card is Schloss Sanssouci, Frederick the Great's favourite retreat, a place where he could be 'sans souci' (without cares). In the 19th century, Friedrich Wilhelm IV also left his mark on the park.

The park is open from dawn till dusk year-round. Admission is free, but there are machines by the entrance where you can make a voluntary donation of €2. The palaces and outbuildings all have different hours and admission prices. Most are closed on Monday and some of the lesser sights open only at weekends and holidays outside the main season. A two-day pass including all sights in the park costs €15/10 adult/concession.

The palaces are fairly well spaced – it's almost 2km between the Neues Palais (New Palace) and Schloss Sanssouci. Take your sweet time wandering along the park's meandering paths, away from the tourist hubs, to discover your personal favourite spot. Free maps are available at the tourist office. Cycling is officially permitted along Ökonomieweg and Maulbeerallee, which is also the route followed by bus 695 (see p153).

Schloss Sanssouci & Around

The biggest stunner, and what everyone comes to see, is **Schloss Sanssouci** (☎ 969 4190; mandatory tour adult/concession €8/5; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), the celebrated rococo palace designed by Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff in 1747. Only 2000 visitors a day are allowed entry (a rule laid down by Unesco), and the timed tickets sometimes sell out by noon – arrive early, preferably at opening, and avoid weekends and holidays. You can only take the tour leaving at the time printed on your ticket. The only way to guarantee entry is by joining the guided tours operated by the tourist office (see Tours, p152).

The 40-minute tour (in German, but excellent English-language pamphlets are available) takes in all 12 rooms of this intimate palace. The exquisite circular **Bibliothek** (library), with its cedar panelling and gilded sunburst ceiling, is undoubtedly a highlight, but unfortunately you're only allowed to peak through the glass door. Other favourites include the **Konzertsaal** (Concert Room), playfully decorated with vines, grapes, seashells and even a cobweb where three spiders frolic. The most elegant room is the domed **Marmorhalle** (Marble Hall), a symphony in white Carrara marble.

An expansion instigated by Friedrich Wilhelm IV added the **Damenflügel** (Ladies' Wing; adult/concession €2/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct), where the ladies-in-waiting had their apartments. In the eastern wing is the **Schlossküche** (palace kitchen; adult/concession €2/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), whose *pièce de résistance* is a giant, wood-fired 'cooking machine'.

As you exit the palace, don't be fooled by the **Ruinenberg**, a pile of classical 'ruins' looming in the distance: they're merely a folly conceived by Frederick the Great.

East of the Schloss, the **Bildergalerie** (Picture Gallery; ☎ 969 4181; adult/concession €2/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct), completed in 1763,

is considered Germany's first purpose-built art museum. Inside is a feast of baroque paintings, including works by Rubens, Caravaggio and van Dyck.

West of the Schloss, the **Neue Kammern** (New Chambers; ☎ 969 4206; adult/concession without tour €2.50/1.50, with tour €3/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct, Sat & Sun Apr-mid-May & mid-Oct-end Oct) is a former orangery and guesthouse, whose fancy interior includes the festive **Ovidsaal**, a grand ballroom with a patterned marble floor surrounded by gilded reliefs.

There are subtropical plants thriving west of here in the **Sizilianischer Garten** (Sicilian Garden).

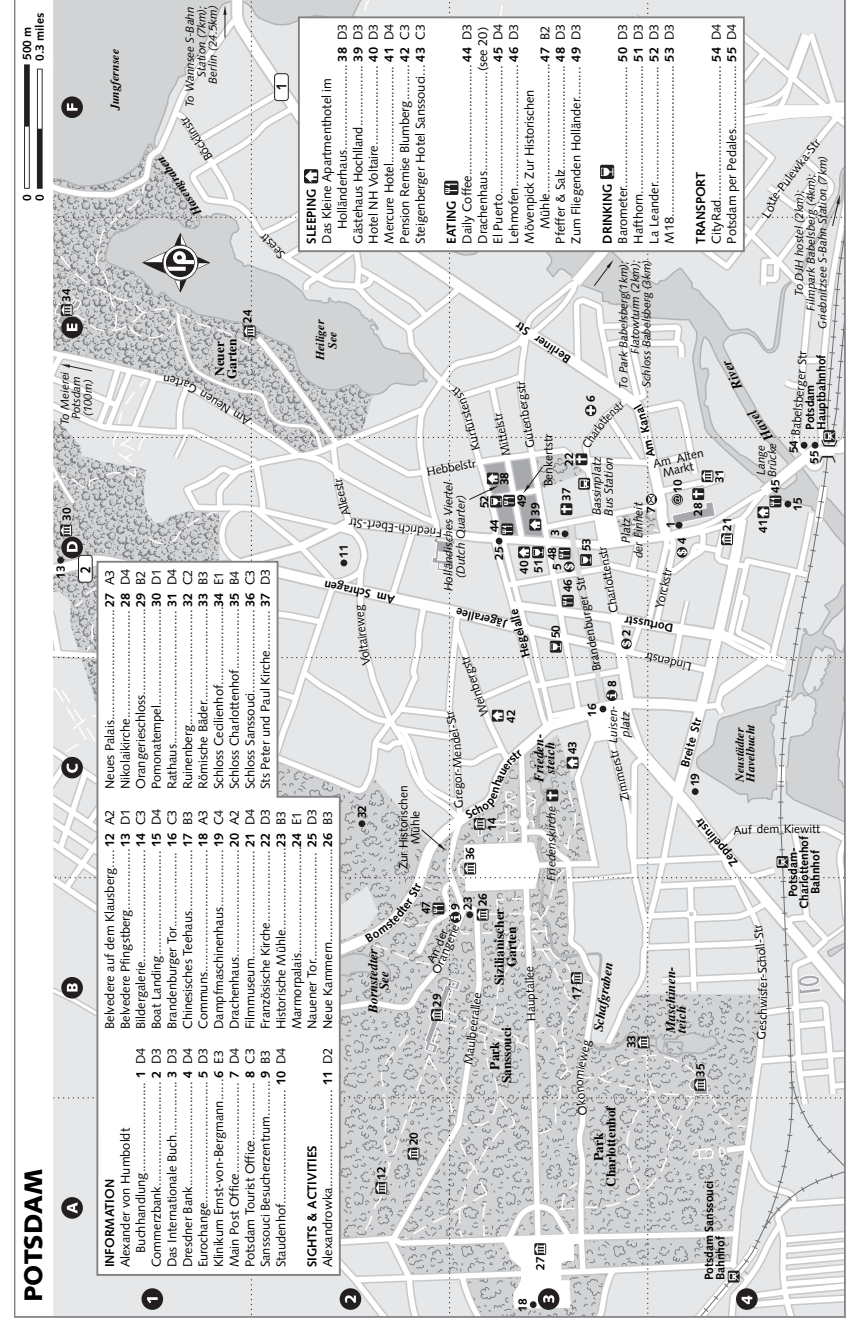
Orangerieschloss & Around

Maulbeerallee is the only road cutting straight through Park Sanssouci. Along its northern side are a number of buildings, starting in the east with the **Historische Mühle** (☎ 550 6851; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 10am-6pm daily Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov & Jan-Mar), a functioning replica of an 18th-century windmill that actually predated Schloss Sanssouci by six years. Admission buys you close-ups of the enormous grinding mechanism and a look at still-evolving exhibits.

The dominant building in this corner of the park is the elegantly ageing **Orangerieschloss** (Orangery Palace; ☎ 969 4280; mandatory tour adult/concession €3/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct), a Renaissance-style palace conceived by Italophile Friedrich Wilhelm IV in 1864. At 300m long, it is grandiose in dimension but hardly the most interesting park structure. In the central section is the **Raphaelsaal**, with 19th-century copies of the painter's masterpieces, and a tower that can be climbed (€2) in summer for views over the Neues Palais and the park. The west wing is used to store sensitive plants in winter.

From the Orangery, a tree-lined path forms a visual axis to the rococo **Belvedere auf dem Klausberg** (☎ 969 4282; admission €2; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct), a temple-like pavilion whose sumptuous interior was beautifully restored following war damage. There are nice views from the top.

Along the way, you'll meander past the fantastical **Drachenhäus** (Dragon House, 1770), a teasy Chinese palace inspired by the Ta-Ho pagoda in Canton and decorated with 16 dragons. It now houses a pleasant café-restaurant (p153).



Neues Palais

At the far western end of the park, the **Neues Palais** (New Palace; ☎ 969 4361; adult/concession with tour €6/5, without tour €5/4; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) is easily recognised by its made-to-impress dimensions, central dome and lavish exterior decorated with a parade of sandstone figures. It was the last palace built by Frederick the Great, but he never really camped out here, preferring the intimacy of Schloss Sanssouci. Later it served as a guesthouse and only the last German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, used it as a residence until 1918.

Inside awaits a series of splendid rooms, the most memorable of which are the **Grottenaal** (Grotto Hall), a rococo delight of shells, fossils and baubles set into the walls and ceilings; the **Marmorsaal**, a large banquet hall of Carrara marble with a wonderful ceiling fresco; the **Jagdkammer** (Hunting Chamber), with lots of dead furry things and fine gold tracery on the walls; and several chambers fitted out from floor to ceiling in rich red damask. Frederick the Great's **private royal apartments** (Königswohnung; adult/concession €5/4; 🕒 11am, 1pm & 3pm Sat-Thu Apr-Oct) can only be seen on guided tours.

On weekends, admission also includes a peak inside the **Pesne-Galerie** (gallery only adult/concession with tour €3/2.50, without tour €2/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) with a fine selection of works by this French painter.

The **Schlosstheater** in the south wing is only open during concerts. The pair of lavish buildings behind the Schloss is called the **Com-muns**. It originally housed the palace servants and kitchens and is now part of Potsdam University.

Park Charlottenhof

South of the Neues Palais is Park Charlottenhof, laid out under Friedrich Wilhelm IV and now blending smoothly with Park Sanssouci. It's considerably less tourist-saturated but lacks the blockbuster sights. Its anchor is **Schloss Charlottenhof** (☎ 969 4228; mandatory tour adult/concession €4/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct), which is considered one of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's finest works, although we're not quite sure why. The palace was modelled after a Roman villa and sports a fountain terrace and charming rose garden.

Nearby, the **Römische Bäder** (Roman Baths; ☎ 969 4224; adult/concession €2/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct) is a picturesque ensemble of Italian country estates and antique Roman

villas designed in 1840 by Schinkel and his student Ludwig Persius. The setting next to a pond is nice, but don't go out of your way to come here.

A same-day combination ticket for both sites is €5/4 per adult/concession.

Chinesisches Teehaus

Northeast of the Roman Baths, the adorable **Chinesisches Teehaus** (Chinese Tea-house; ☎ 969 4222; admission €1; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct) is one of the prettiest buildings in the park. The domed circular pavilion houses a collection of Chinese and Meissen porcelain, but it's the exterior that'll have you burning up the pixels. The entire building is encircled by groups of gilded sandstone figures with oriental dress and shown sipping tea, dancing and playing musical instruments. One of the monkeys is said to resemble Voltaire!

ALTSTADT

East of Park Sanssouci, Luisenplatz is dominated by the baroque **Brandenburger Tor** (Brandenburg Gate). From this square, the pedestrianised Brandenburger Strasse runs due east to the **Sts Peter und Paul Kirche** (Church of Sts Peter and Paul, 1868). Just to the southeast on Charlottenstrasse, and once the seat of the town's Huguenots, is the **Französische Kirche** (French Church, 1753).

Northwest of the churches, bounded by Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse, Hebbelstrasse, Kurfürstenstrasse and Gutenbergrasse, the **Holländisches Viertel** (Dutch Quarter) has some 134 gabled red-brick houses built for Dutch workers who came to Potsdam in the 1730s at the invitation of Friedrich Wilhelm I (they didn't stay long). The entire district has been beautifully gentrified and now brims with galleries, cafés and restaurants; Mittelstrasse is especially scenic. Further up Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse is the fanciful **Nauener Tor** (Nauen Gate, 1755), a fairytale-like triumphal arch.

Southeast of the GDR-era Platz der Einheit, on Am Alter Markt, is the great neoclassical dome of Schinkel's **Nikolaikirche** (🕒 10am-7pm May-Oct, shorter hr Nov-Apr), built in 1850. The adjacent former **Rathaus** (town hall; adult/concession €3/1.50; 🕒 2-6pm Tue-Sun), dating back to 1753, harbours several art galleries on the upper floors.

West of Am Alter Markt in the former **Marstall** (royal stables) is the smallish **Film-museum** (☎ 271 8112; www.film-museum-potsdam.de;

Breite Strasse; adult/concession €3.50/2.50, film €4.50/3.50; 🕒 10am-6pm) with a permanent exhibit on the history of the UFA and DEFA (the GDR film company) studios in Babelsberg. The cinema shows historic flicks.

Further west is the curious **Dampfmaschinenhaus** (Pump House; ☎ 969 4248; nr Breite Strasse & Zepelinstrasse; mandatory tour adult/concession €2/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-May-mid-Oct), looking very much like a mosque, but in reality housing the former palace waterworks.

NEUER GARTEN

The winding lakeside Neuer Garten (New Garden), laid out in natural English style on the western shore of the Heiliger See, is another fine park in which to relax. Right on the lake, the neoclassical **Marmorpalais** (Marble Palace; ☎ 969 4246; adult/concession with tour €5/4, without tour €4/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), built in 1792 by Carl Gotthard Langhans (he of Berlin's Brandenburg Gate fame) for Friedrich Wilhelm II, has recently been carefully restored. Though not quite as fancy as Schloss Sanssouci, the interior is still stunning with its grand central staircase, marble fireplaces, stucco ceilings and collection of Wedgwood porcelain. The most fanciful room is the upstairs **Orientalisches Kabinett**, which looks like a Turkish tent.

In the northern park, **Schloss Cecilienhof** (☎ 969 4244; adult/concession with tour €5/4, without tour €4/3; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) was completed in 1917 as the last Hohenzollern palace ever built. Looking very much like an English country manor, it was the residence of crown prince Wilhelm and his wife Cecilie. The couple's **royal apartments** (adult/concession €3/2.50; 🕒 11am, 1pm & 3pm Tue-Sun) can only be seen on a guided tour, but the palace is really more famous for being the site of the 1945 Potsdam Conference where Stalin, Truman and Churchill hammered out the post-war fate of Germany. The conference room with its giant round table looks as though the delegates have just left. You're free to explore on your own, but the 30-minute tours, offered in several languages, are excellent. Bus 692 makes it up here.

A same-day combination ticket for Cecilienhof and the Marmorpalais costs €6/5.

ALEXANDROWKA & PFINGSTBERG

A short walk north of the Altstadt is Potsdam's most unusual neighbourhood, the

Russian colony **Alexandrowka** (www.alexandrowka.de; Am Schragen). Its 13 wooden houses were built in 1826-27 by Friedrich Wilhelm III for the Russian singers of a military choir that performed for the king. Four of the families living in the colony are descendants of the original settlers. Take tram 92 or 95 to Reiterweg/Alleestrasse or Am Schragen.

For the best view over Potsdam and surroundings, head uphill to the beautifully restored **Belvedere Pfingstberg** (☎ 270 1972; adult/child/student €3.50/1.50/2.50; 🕒 10am-8pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm Apr, May & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Mar & Nov). This elegant Renaissance-style summer palace was commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm IV but not completed until 1863, two years after the king's death. A series of spiralling wrought-iron staircases lead up to the towers for spectacular 360-degree views. On the ground floor is a small exhibit chronicling the amazing restoration process this nearly dilapidated building recently went through. Also up here is the 1801 **Pomonatempel** (☎ 270 1972; admission free; 🕒 3-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr-Oct), the first of Schinkel's many buildings ever to be completed.

BABELSBERG

The eastern suburb of Babelsberg is best known as the home of UFA, Germany's one-time response to Hollywood. Shooting began in 1912 but the studio had its heyday in the 1920s, when such silent-movie epics as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (see boxed text, p152) were shot, along with some early Greta Garbo films.

Cameras are rolling again in Babelsberg, but mostly it's restyled itself as the **Filmpark Babelsberg** (☎ 721 2750; www.filmpark.de; enter on Grosse-beerenstrasse; adult/child 4-14/concession €17/12.50/15.50; 🕒 10am-6pm mid-Apr-Oct). It's a movie theme park complete with live shows, including a rather impressive stunt show, and a few poky rides. During the studio tour, you'll be whisked around the back lot for a peek at film sets and the prop and costume departments. To get there, take the S1 to Babelsberg station and then bus 690 to 'Filmpark'.

Park Babelsberg, yet another great Potsdam garden, is where you'll find the Schinkel-designed neo-Gothic **Schloss Babelsberg** (☎ 969 4250; adult/concession with tour €4/3.50, without tour €3/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun late Jun-Oct) and the **Flatowturm** (☎ 969 4249; admission €2; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-late Jun, Sat & Sun late Jun-Oct), modelled after a medieval town gate in Frankfurt am Main.

METROPOLIS

Potsdam isn't readily associated with class warfare, but it was here, at the UFA studios, that Fritz Lang shot much of his allegorical melodrama *Metropolis* (1927), which deals with exactly that. The film depicts a society literally split in two, with the Thinkers living in idle luxury above ground and the Workers toiling in subterranean caverns to serve the terrible Moloch machine. Threatened by nonviolent protest advocated by the saintly Maria, the Thinkers dispatch a robot clone of her to provoke riots. The sheer scale of the film was unprecedented (Lang hired 10,000 extras), and its relevance has endured, not just in its message of class cooperation but also in its themes of revolution, technology and voyeurism. Some elements were far ahead of their time – the robot Futura is a clear predecessor of the Terminator!

Tours

The Potsdam tourist office (see Information, p147) runs the 3½-hour **Potsdam Sanssouci Tour** (€26; ☎ 11am Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, Fri-Sun Nov-Mar), which guarantees admission to Schloss Sanssouci, and the two-hour **Altstadt Tour** (adult/concession €8/6; ☎ 3pm daily Jan-Sep). Tours are in English and German and tickets are available at the tourist office.

Weisse Flotte Potsdam (☎ 275 9210; www.schiffahrt-in-potsdam.de; Lange Brücke 6; ☎ Apr-Oct) operates dozens of boat tours on the Havel and the lakes around Potsdam, including a lovely trip out to Wannsee and Pfaueninsel (€9 return). Its sister company **Havel Dampfschiffahrt** (☎ 275 9210; Lange Brücke 6; ☎ Apr-Oct) runs nostalgic steamboat tours around the same areas. Boats depart from Lange Brücke (bridge), right below the Mercure Hotel.

Festivals & Events

Potsdam's biggest annual events include the **Tulip Festival** in the Dutch Quarter around 20 April, the **Musikfestspiele Potsdam Sanssouci** (www.musikfestspiele-potsdam.de) in early June and the **Bachtage** (www.bachtage-potsdam.de) in August/September (see boxed text, p154).

Sleeping

Most people visit Potsdam on a day trip from Berlin, but only by spending the night can you savour the town's quiet majesty without the tour bus crowds. The tourist office books private rooms and hotels in person, by phone (☎ 275 580) or online (www.potsdam-tourismus.de).

DJH hostel (☎ 581 3100; www.jh-potsdam.de; Schulstrasse 9; dm under/over 26yr €21/24; (P) ☎ ☎) Potsdam's new hostel is a snazzy 152-bed property with a 12-bed dorm for people under 26 and smaller rooms, all with shower and toilet. It's around the corner from S-Bahn station Babelsberg.

Gästehaus Hochland (☎ 270 0835; www.hochland.de; Gutenbergstrasse 78; per person €19.50, linen €5) This is a smaller and more central budget alternative to the hostel, with dorm-style accommodation and guest kitchens in two buildings on the edge of the Dutch Quarter.

Pension Remise Blumberg (☎ 280 3231; www.pension-blumberg.de; Weinbergstrasse 26; s/d €55/86; (P) ☎) Close to Park Sanssouci, this backyard pension may be petite but the rooms, all with kitchenette, are not. Bike hire is available, and the leafy courtyard is perfect for sipping your morning coffee.

Mercure Hotel (☎ 2722; www.mercure.com; Lange Brücke; s €62-120, d €77-127; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) From the outside it's undeniably an ugly GDR-era skyscraper, but all style concerns will likely evaporate the moment you enter this fully renovated property near the Hauptbahnhof and right by the little harbour.

Das Kleine Apartmenthotel im Holländerhaus (☎ 279 110; www.hollaenderhaus.potsdam.de; Kurfürstenstrasse 15; apt €80-120, ste €90-180; (P) ☎) This gem combines the charm of a historic Dutch Quarter building with an edgy, creative design scheme. Wood, steel and lots of colour give the good-sized apartments with kitchens a contemporary look. A small gym, sauna and leafy courtyard are good unwinding spots.

Steigenberger Hotel Sanssouci (☎ 909 10; www.potsdam.steigenberger.de; Allee nach Sanssouci 1; s €94-137, d €108-160; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Between the Brandenburger Tor and the Park Sanssouci gate, this high-class property seeks to evoke the glamour of 1940s Hollywood. The 133 rooms are decked out in soothing greens and earth tones and sprinkled with rattan. The spa offers some exotic treatments: hot chocolate massage, anyone?

Eating

El Puerto (☎ 275 9225; Lange Brücke; tapas from €3.20; ☎ 11am-midnight Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar)

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel NH Voltaire (☎ 231 70; www.nh-hotels.com; Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse 88; s/d from €80/110; (P) ☎) Modern, quiet and run with panache, this delightful hotel opposite the Dutch Quarter gets you first-class treatment at surprisingly moderate prices. The 143 rooms spread out across a historic Palais (preferable) and a modern annex. Local students collaborated with such famous German artists as Elvira Bach to create the cheerful canvasses sprinkled throughout. The wellness area with rooftop terrace makes for a lovely unwinding oasis.

It's fiesta time at this restaurant right in the newly revamped Potsdam harbour. Sit amid soaring palm trees, sangria in hand, tapas on the table, and watch the boats bobbing in the breeze.

Daily Coffee (☎ 201 1979; Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse 31; mains €4-10; ☎ 9am-10.30pm or later) Right by the frilly Nauener Tor, this friendly café presents you with a global menu ranging from Thai soups to wholesome wraps, crispy nachos to Chinese stir-fry. Snag an outdoor table for primo people-watching.

Pfeffer & Salz (☎ 200 2777; Brandenburger Strasse 46; pizza & pasta €5-11) In this street of tourist traps, this little Italian eatery stands out for its authenticity. All noodles are homemade daily, the antipasto counter is mouthwatering and the pizza comes crispy hot from the wood oven.

Meierei Potsdam (☎ 704 3211; Im Neuer Garten 10; mains €5-12; ☎ 10am-10pm) Just north of Schloss Cecilienhof, this brewpub is especially lovely in summer when you can count the boats sailing on the Jungfernsee from your beer-garden table. The hearty dishes are a perfect match for the delicious suds brewed on the premises.

Zum Fliegenden Holländer (☎ 275 030; Benkertstrasse 5; mains €8-16, 2-course weekday lunch €8.50; ☎ 10am-10pm) The name is apropos for this Dutch Quarter restaurant, with its traditional blue-and-white Delft tiles, wood-burning fireplace and historic etchings. The kitchen prefers no-nonsense German fare to culinary flights of fancy.

Lehmofen (☎ 280 1712; Dortusstrasse 62; mains €10-17) In a new location, this smart Turkish place is a world away from your average doner shop,

serving dishes from its eponymous clay oven. Service can be slow, though. Enter through the Stadtpalais or the Karstadt department store.

Recommended eateries in Park Sanssouci: **Mövenpick Zur Historischen Mühle** (☎ 281 493; Zur Historischen Mühle 2; mains €8-15; ☎ 8am-midnight) International cuisine from breakfast to dinner with huge beer garden and children's playground.

Drachenhäus (☎ 505 3808; Maulbeerallee; mains €8.50-14; ☎ 11am-7pm Mar-Oct, 11am-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb) Coffee, cake and regional cuisine.

Drinking

Hafthorn (☎ 280 0820; Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse 90) This low-key pub is great for quaffing a cold one in the funky beer garden or amid masklike sconces wrought from sheet metal. The giant burgers (€4) are a great hangover antidote.

M18 (☎ 280 5111; Mittelstrasse 18) This is a serious booze parlour with a bewildering menu of brain erasers – beer to whiskey, burgundy to tequila. In summer, the leafy backyard is the place to be. Salads and grilled meats provide sustenance.

Barometer (☎ 270 2880; Gutenbergstrasse 103) This vaulted cellar lounge is one for grown-ups willing to peel off the bills for serious cocktails. Access is via the back courtyard.

La Leander (☎ 270 6576; Benkertstrasse 1) The rainbow flags fly proudly over this low-key pub in the Dutch Quarter that's a good place for plugging into the local lesbigay scene.

Getting There & Away

S-Bahn line S7 links central Berlin with Potsdam Hauptbahnhof about every 10 minutes. Regional (RB/RE) trains leaving from Berlin-Hauptbahnhof, Berlin-Zoo and Berlin-Charlottenburg are faster; some also stop at Potsdam-Charlottenhof and Potsdam-Sanssouci, which are closer to Park Sanssouci than Hauptbahnhof. There's also an hourly RB train to Berlin-Schönefeld airport. Berlin transit passes must cover Zones A, B and C (€2.60) to be valid for the trip to Potsdam.

Drivers coming from Berlin should take the A100 to the A115.

Getting Around

Buses and trams operate throughout Potsdam. The most useful line is bus 695, which connects the Hauptbahnhof with the Altstadt and Park Sanssouci. Tickets cost €1.60 and a day pass €3.70.

For bike hire, try **CityRad** (☎ 0177-825 4746; per day €11; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct) outside the Bahnhofspassagen at Potsdam Hauptbahnhof (exit Babelsberger Strasse). A larger outfit is **Potsdam per Pedales** (☎ 748 0057; per day €8-12), which is headquartered at the Griebnitzsee S-Bahn station (open 9am to 6.30pm, Easter to October) and also has offices at Potsdam Hauptbahnhof and Wannsee stations (both open 9.30am to 7pm, May to September).

For a taxi, ring ☎ 292 929 or ☎ 0800-292 9298.

BRANDENBURG AN DER HAVEL

☎ 03381 / pop 75,000

About 50km west of Berlin, Brandenburg may not be Venice but it's still a city shaped by water. Set amid a pastoral landscape of lakes, rivers and canals perfect for boating, it has a historic centre with some fine examples of northern German red-brick architecture. First settled by Slavs in the 6th century, Brandenburg was a bishopric in the early Middle Ages and a margrivial capital until the 15th century. Darker times arrived when the Nazis picked the town to carry out their forced euthanasia programme for the mentally disabled, killing tens of thousands. Wartime bombing and GDR neglect left their scars, but these are gradually healing, making Brandenburg once again an attractive day trip from Berlin or Potsdam.

Orientation

Brandenburg is split into three sections by the Havel River, the Beetzsee and their various canals. The Neustadt occupies an island in the centre and is connected to the Altstadt by the Jahrtausendbrücke (Millennium Bridge), while the Dominsel is north of the Neustadt.

The train station is about 1km south of the central Neustädtischer Markt.

Information

Dresdner Bank (Neustädtischer Markt 10) Has an ATM.

Post office (St Annenstrasse 30-36)

Tourist information (☎ 585 858; www.stadt-brandenburg.de; Steinstrasse 66/67; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Fri year-round, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr)

Sights & Activities

An exploration of Brandenburg might start at the mostly Gothic **Dom St Peter und Paul** (Cathedral of Sts Peter & Paul; ☎ 211 2221; Burghof 9; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) on Dominsel. Treasures include a carved 14th-century Bohemian altar in the south transept, the vaulted and painted Bunte Kapelle (Colourful Chapel), and a fantastic baroque organ (1723). The **Dommuseum** (☎ 200 325; adult/concession €3/2; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) has outstanding medieval vestments and a so-called *Hungertuch* (hunger blanket), with embroidered medallions depicting the life of Jesus.

South of here, across Mühlendamm, the octagonal **Mühlentorturm** (Mill Gate Tower) marked the border between Dominsel and Neustadt in the days when they were separate towns. A former prison, it is one of four surviving towers that were once part of the medieval fortifications. Just beyond are the Neustädtischer Markt and the **Katharinenkirche** (🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), a vast Gothic brick church with a lavishly detailed and decorated façade. See if you can spot your favourite biblical characters on the 'Meadow of Heaven' painted ceiling. South of here, a new archaeological museum is taking shape in the once-ruined **Paulikloster** (Monastery of St Paul; ask

at tourist office for more details), while the **Steintorturm** (nr Steinstrasse & Neustädtische Heidestrasse; adult/concession €3/1; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) has a small exhibit on Havel shipping and can be climbed for nice city views.

To reach the Altstadt, follow the pedestrianised Hauptstrasse to the Jahrtausendbrücke. A little further on, the **Stadtmuseum im Freyhau** (☎ 522 048; Ritterstrasse 96; adult/concession €3/1; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) is a local history museum with much emphasis on the Ernst Paul Lehmann factory, makers of cute mechanical toys and pottery. Bearing right, you'll come to the **Altstädtisches Rathaus**, a red-brick gem-box fronted by a lanky statue of the mythological figure Roland, a symbol of justice and integrity.

Outside the city centre, the **Landesklinik Brandenburg** (☎ 782 202; Haus 23, Anton-Saefkow-Allee 2; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue & Thu) harbours a fascinating if sickening exhibit on Nazi psychiatric practices and the cruel experiments performed on mentally disabled patients.

In warm weather, Brandenburg's charms are best appreciated from the water. A number of outfitters rent canoes and kayaks, including Cafébar (right) and **Wasserwanderrastplatz Am Slawendorf** (☎ 0175-2157774), both near the Jahrtausendbrücke. There's good **lake swimming** in the Freibad Grillendamm on the Kleiner Beetzsee off the northern Dominsel.

Tours

The tourist office rents out free audio-guides (deposit required) for a self-guided English-language tour of the city's medieval churches.

Boat tours around the Havel lakes are operated by **Nordstern** (☎ 226 960; www.nordstern-reederei.de in German) and **Reederei Röding** (☎ 522 331; www.fgs-havelfee.de) and leave from Am Salzhof, just south of the Jahrtausendbrücke.

Sleeping

Backpacker Hostel Caasi (☎ 3290; www.caasi.de; Caasmanstrasse 7; dm €15-18, linen €5, s/d €30/50; 📶 📺 📺) On the edge of town, this is a good option for shoestringers, even though many of the 250 rooms are filled with long-term guests. Facilities include a kitchen for self-caterers and a pub.

Pension Zum Birnbaum (☎ 527 500; www.pension-zum-birnbaum.de; Mittelstrasse 1; s/d from €31/48; 📶) A singing host, breakfast under a pear tree and handsomely furnished, if snug, rooms

recommend this little inn that places you close to the train station and the Neustadt.

Sorat Hotel Brandenburg (☎ 5970; www.sorat-hotels.com; Altstädtischer Markt 1; s €94-186, d €110-202; 📶 📺 📺) The top-notch Sorat has 88 bright, modern rooms in pretty surroundings right by the Rathaus. Rates include a champagne breakfast and sauna use; weekend rates are significantly lower.

Eating

Cafébar (☎ 229 048; Ritterstrasse 76; breakfast €3.60) The best place for coffee and homemade nut cake, this is a teensy kiosk right by the Jahrtausendbrücke with canalside beach chairs in summer.

Herzschlag (☎ 410 414; Grosse Münzenstrasse 17; tapas €4-7, mains €7-13; 🕒 from 11.30am) Urban sophistication in sleepy Brandenburg? Look no further than this place, complete with artsy décor, lounge music, tasty cocktails and a broad menu featuring everything from tapas to fajitas to crocodile steaks.

An der Dominsel (☎ 224 535; Neustädtische Fischerstrasse 14; mains €8-14; 🕒 9.30am-10pm May-Sep, 11am-10pm Oct-Apr) The regional food – especially the fish dishes – is dependable here, but what you'll probably remember most are the fabulous Dom views across the canal. It's right by the Mühlentorturm.

Bismarck Terrassen (☎ 300 939; Bergstrasse 20; mains €8-16, two-course menus from €7.80) Discover your inner Prussian at this traditional restaurant whose proprietor may greet you in Bismarck costume and seat you in a room brimming with Iron Chancellor memorabilia. The kitsch quotient is undeniably there, but the Brandenburg food is authentic, delicious and plentiful.

For a quick fish snack (from €1.50), pop into one of the little **fishing shacks** (🕒 usually to 6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) operated by professional fisherfolk along Mühlendamm. In summer, they set up tables on floating pontoons.

Getting There & Around

Regional trains link Brandenburg twice hourly with all major stations in central Berlin, including Hauptbahnhof (€6, 50 minutes), and with Potsdam (€4.80, 30 minutes).

From the station, it's about a 10-minute walk via Geschwister-Scholl-Strasse and St-Annenstrasse-Strasse to the Neustädtischer Markt. Trams 6 and 9 will get you there as well. Free parking is available at the corner

BACH-ING MAD

The state of Brandenburg has links with many influential German composers, but few can compete with Johann Sebastian Bach – even the most blinkered techno-head has probably heard of the *Brandenburg Concertos*! These six *concerti grossi* were composed in 1721 for Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, who was then based (a tad ironically) at Köthen in Saxony-Anhalt.

Some years later, in 1747, Frederick the Great managed to lure Bach to Potsdam, where the great composer wrote *The Musical Offering* on a theme proposed by the king himself. Since then Bach's place in Brandenburg history has been assured, but it's only in recent times that his legacy has been fully celebrated. In 2000 the first Potsdamer Bachtage (Bach Days) was inaugurated, comprising a two-week festival of concerts, workshops and readings dedicated to making the master's work accessible to modern audiences.

of Grillendamm and Krakauer Strasse, just north of the Dom.

SPREEWALD

With its lush meadows, idyllic forest and vast web of gently meandering waterways, the Spreewald is great for slowing down and communing with nature. About 80km south-east of Berlin, the region has been a Unesco Biosphere Reserve since 1991 and is famous for its pickled gherkins – over 40,000 tons are produced here every year! Lübben and Lübbenau, the main tourist towns, often drown beneath the weight of visitors vying for rides aboard a *Kahn* (shallow punt boat), once the only way of getting around in these parts. To truly appreciate the Spreewald's unique charms, hire your own canoe or kayak or get yourself onto a trail.

The Spreewald is also home base to large numbers of Germany's Sorbian minority (see boxed text, p158).

Getting There & Around

Frequent regional trains depart central Berlin (eg Hauptbahnhof) for Lübben (€8.40, 1½ hours) and Lübbenau (€9.60, 1½ hours) en route to Cottbus. The towns are also linked by an easy 13km trail along the Spree. Bikes can be hired at the Lübben tourist office or from **Fahrradverleih Enrico Arndt** (☎ 872 910; Dammstrasse 10-12) in Lübbenau.

LÜBBEN

☎ 03546 / pop 15,000

Compared to Lübbenau, about 13km south-east, tidy Lübben is considerably less cutesy and feels more like a 'real' town. Activity centres on the Schloss and the adjacent harbour area, both about 1.5km east of the train station. Follow Bahnhofstrasse southeast, turn left on Logenstrasse and continue to Ernst-von-Houwald-Damm, where you'll also find the **tourist office** (☎ 3090; www.luebben.de; Hafen 1, Ernst-von-Houwald-Damm 15; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar). The Markt and Hauptstrasse are two blocks north.

Sights & Activities

The prettiest building in town is the compact **Schloss** (☎ 187 478; Ernst-von-Houwald-Damm 14; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), which contains a

progressively presented regional history museum. Behind it is the **Schlossinsel** (admission free), an artificial archipelago with gardens, a leafy maze, playgrounds, cafés and the harbour area where you can board punts for leisurely tours (from €7/4 adult/child). If you'd rather go at your own speed, rent a canoe or kayak from **Bootsverleih Gebauer** (☎ 7194; Lindenstrasse 18; per hr €7).

Sleeping

The tourist office can help you find private rooms from €13 per person.

DJH hostel (☎ 3046; www.jh-luebben.de; Zum Wendenfürsten 8; dm €14-19; ☎ ☒) This 127-bed hostel is right on the Spree, about 3km south of the train station, and also has camp sites (€9.50, including breakfast).

Hotel Spreuefer (☎ 272 60; www.spreewaldhotel.de; Hinter der Mauer 4; d €50-90; ☎ ☒) This friendly hotel has simple but adequate rooms and a central location by the bridge just south of Hauptstrasse.

Spreewaldhotel Stephanshof (☎ 272 10; www.spreewaldreisen.de; Lehnigksberger Weg 1; s €45-60, d €68-84; ☎ ☒) About a 10-minute walk north of the centre, this modern riverside hotel has its own boat landing, a regional restaurant and bike rentals.

Eating

Ladencafé im alten Gärtchen (☎ 186 956; Ernst-von-Houwald-Strasse 6; mains €4-9) Lovingly decorated, this little cottage with a small beer garden out the back serves tasty Mediterranean fare and also has local crafts and handmade products for sale.

Bubak (☎ 186 144; Ernst-von-Houwald-Damm 9; mains €4-15; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-10pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-10pm Sat & Sun) Close to the Schloss, this characterful roadside restaurant was named for a local bogeyman and has weekly concerts starring its singing proprietor. The menu is a mix of typical Spreewald dishes and classic German food, all prepared creatively and using local products whenever possible.

Goldener Löwe (☎ 7309; Hauptstrasse 15; mains €6.50-11.50) For traditional Spreewald dishes, visit this suitably old-fashioned restaurant with its nice beer garden.

LÜBBENAU

☎ 03542 / pop 15,700

Lübbenau is more picturesque than Lübben but feels more like a tourist town, especially

in the harbour areas. The entire Altstadt is a forest of signs pointing to hotels, restaurants and other businesses, making navigating a snap. Near the church you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 3668; www.spreewald-online.de; Ehm-Welk-Strasse 15; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar). The train and bus stations are on Poststrasse, about 600m south of the Altstadt.

Sights & Activities

Behind the tourist office, the **Haus für Mensch und Natur** (☎ 892 10; Schulstrasse 9; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) has exhibits and information about the Spreewald Biosphere Reserve. If you're interested in the region's cultural history, visit the **Spreewald-Museum** (☎ 2472; Am Topfmarkt; adult/child/concession €3/1/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-mid-Oct, to 5pm mid-Oct-Mar) inside a historic brick building that's gone through stints as a courthouse, jail and town hall.

Several operators offer pretty much the same **punt boating** tours, including the popular two-hour trip to Lehde (€7), a completely protected village known as the 'Venice of the Spreewald'. Here you'll find the wonderful **Freilandmuseum** (☎ 2472; adult/child/concession €3/1/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-mid-Sep, to 5pm mid-Sep-Oct), an open-air museum of traditional Sorbian houses and farm buildings. Lehde is also reached via an easy 30-minute trail.

The main embarkation points are the **Kleiner Hafen** (☎ 403 710; www.spreewald-web.de; Spreestrasse 10a), about 100m northeast of the tourist office, and the more workmanlike **Grosser Hafen** (☎ 2225; www.grosser-spreewaldhafen.de; Dammstrasse 77a), 300m southeast. Buy tickets at the embarkation points or from the captain. Active types can hire canoes and kayaks from several outfitters, including **Bootsverleih Francke** (☎ 2722; Dammstrasse 72), for about €4 per hour.

Sleeping & Eating

Check with the tourist office about the availability of private rooms (from €14) or simply walk about town and look for signs saying *Gästezimmer*.

Naturcamping Am Schlosspark (☎ 3533; www.spreewaldcamping.de; Schlossbezirk; adult/child/tent €5/2.50/5, two-person cabins €19) This four-star camp site, just east of the Schloss, has lots of amenities, including bike and canoe rentals.

Pension Am Alten Bauernhafen (☎ 2930; www.am-alten-bauernhafen.de; Stottoff 5; s €20-35, d €35-50;

☎) Charmingly decorated, large rooms and a fantastic riverside location make this big, family-run house a bargain.

Hotel Schloss Lübbenau (☎ 8730; www.schloss-luebbenau.de; Schlossbezirk 6; s €76-96, d €108-158; ☎ ☒) Check in at this handsome palace for a surprisingly reasonable splurge with all the class you can handle and lovely park surroundings. The restaurant here is your only fine-dining option in Lübbenau (dinner only; mains €13 to €26). The three-course Spreewaldmenü is great value at €24.

Otherwise, the town has a surprising dearth of decent eateries. One low-key option is **Strubel's** (☎ 2798; Dammstrasse 3; mains €4-11), which serves typical Spreewald dishes, including a fish platter featuring eel, pike and perch.

COTTBUS

☎ 0355 / pop 105,000

The southern gateway to the Spreewald, Cottbus has a pretty historic centre anchored by the **Altmarkt**, a handsomely restored square hemmed in by baroque and neoclassical town houses. East of here is the late-Gothic **Oberkirche** (☎ 10am-5pm) with its climbable tower (€1). The **tourist office** (☎ 754 20; www.cottbus.de; Berliner Platz 6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) is a short walk west of the Altmarkt, behind the Spree-Galerie shopping centre.

Cottbus, or Chosébuž, is also the unofficial capital of the Sorbian Blota region. To learn about this Slavic group's history, language and culture, visit the **Wendisches Museum** (☎ 794 930; Mühlenstrasse 12; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun) or the cultural centre called **Lodka** (☎ 4857 6468; August-Bebel-Strasse 82; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri). Its café serves authentic Sorbian dishes (eg boiled beef with horseradish).

Not far from Lodka is the **Staatstheater Cottbus** (☎ 01803-440 344; Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse 23), an Art Nouveau marvel of a theatre. Southeast of the centre, **Branitzer Park** contains a lovely 18th-century baroque Schloss, the Fürst-Pückler-Museum and the **Wasserpypiramide**, a curious grass-covered pyramid 'floating' in a little lake.

Frequent regional trains link Berlin-Hauptbahnhof and other central Berlin stations to Cottbus (€12, 1½ hours), also stopping in Lübben and Lübbenau.

Trams 1 and 3 run to the centre from the train station.

THE SORBS

The Spreewald region is part of the area inhabited by the Sorbs, Germany's only indigenous minority. This intriguing group, numbering just 60,000, descended from the Slavic Wends, who settled between the Elbe and Oder Rivers in the 5th century in an area called Lusatia (Luzia in Sorbian).

Lusatia was conquered by the Germans in the 10th century, subjected to brutal Germanisation throughout the Middle Ages and partitioned in 1815. Lower Sorbia, centred around the Spreewald and Cottbus (Chošebuz), went to Prussia, while Upper Sorbia, around Bautzen (Budyšin), went to Saxony. The Upper Sorbian dialect, closely related to Czech, enjoyed a certain prestige in Saxony, but the Kingdom of Prussia tried to suppress Lower Sorbian, which is similar to Polish. The Nazis, of course, tried to eradicate both.

The Sorbs were protected under the GDR, but their proud folk traditions didn't suit the bland 'proletarian' regime. Since reunification, interest in the culture has been revived through the media and colourful Sorbian festivals such as the *Vogelhochzeit* (Birds' Wedding) on 25 January and a symbolic 'witch-burning' on 30 April.

For further details, visit www.sorben-wenden.de or contact the **Sorbian Institute** (☎ 03591-497 20; www.serbski-institut.de) in Bautzen or the **Institute of Sorbian Studies** (☎ 0341-973 7650; www.uni-leipzig.de/~sorb) in Leipzig.

AROUND COTTBUS

South of Cottbus, in an area called Fürst Pückler Land, a giant project is taking shape as part of IBA, an international building exhibition. A vast opencast lignite mining area is being turned into Germany's largest artificial lake district. By 2010 the **Lausitzer Seenland** will be a recreational haven offering boating, swimming, golfing and other activities. You can observe and learn more at the **IBA Terraces** (☎ 035753-2610; www.iba-see.de; Seestrasse 100) viewing area and take a free tour (in German, Friday to Sunday) around what still resembles a lunar landscape. It's in Grossräschen, about 30km south of Cottbus, on the B96 just east off the A13.

For another perspective on the project, drive 20km west on B96 to Lichtenfeld, where you'll spot a huge steel construction looking a bit like a reclining Eiffel Tower. This is the **F60** (☎ 03531-608 00; www.f60.de/index_e.htm; Bergheider Strasse 4; admission €8; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb), a 500m-long conveyor bridge used in lignite mining. You can take a tour of the behemoth and peruse the exhibits in the visitors centre.

EASTERN BRANDENBURG

BUCKOW

☎ 033433 / pop 1800

Buckow is the hub of the 205-sq-km Naturpark Märkische Schweiz, a land of clear streams,

romantic lakes and gently undulating hills that has long been a popular getaway for Berliners. Its bucolic charms have provided creative fodder for numerous artists, most prominently the poet Theodor Fontane, who praised its 'friendly landscape' in *Das Oderland* (1863), the second book in his four-volume travelogue (see boxed text, p163). In the 1950s, the GDR's 'first couple of the arts', Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel, spent their summers here, away from Berlin's stifling heat. Buckow has long been famous for its clean and fresh air; in fact, in 1854 Friedrich Wilhelm IV's physician advised His Majesty to visit the village, where 'the lungs go as on velvet'. No surprise, then, that Buckow has of late reclaimed its position as one of Brandenburg's most popular spa resort towns.

Orientation & Information

Buckow is surrounded by five lakes, the largest being the Schermützelsee. Berliner Strasse, the main street, parallels the lake before becoming Wriezener Strasse, where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 575 00; www.kurstadt-buckow.de; Wriezener Strasse 1a; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Beyond here it becomes Hauptstrasse.

For nature park information, visit the **Besucherzentrum Schweizer Haus** (☎ 158 41; Lindenstrasse 33; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun).

Sights & Activities

The **Brecht-Weigel-Haus** (☎ 467; Bertolt-Brecht-Strasse 30; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 1-5pm Wed-Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun

Apr-Oct, 10am-noon & 1-4pm Wed-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is where the couple summered from 1952 to 1955. Exhibits include photographs, documents and original furnishings as well as the covered wagon first used in the 1949 premiere of *Mother Courage*. In the fine gardens are copper tablets engraved with Brecht poems. The easiest way to reach the place is west along Werderstrasse, but it's more fun strolling along Ringstrasse and Bertolt-Brecht-Strasse admiring the posh prewar villas.

Buckow is a paradise for hikers and walkers. Staff at the tourist office can help find routes matching your fitness level and also sell a variety of useful maps. In summer you can hire rowing boats or go on a cruise with **Seetours** (☎ 232; Bertolt-Brecht-Strasse 11; tours adult/child €6/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct). Tours leave from Strandbad Buckow at the northwestern end of the Schermützelsee.

Sleeping & Eating

Buckow has several high-end hotels that offer amazing value. The tourist office can organise private rooms from €15 per person. A *Kurtaxe* (resort tax) of €1 per person per night is added to most hotel bills.

DJH hostel (☎ 286; www.jh-buckow.de; Berliner Strasse 36; dm €14-19; ☎ ☒ ☒) The local hostel is on the town outskirts, close to the Weisser See, and can accommodate up to 106 people in rooms sleeping two to eight.

Bellevue Beauty & Wellness Hotel (☎ 6480; www.bellevue-buckow.de; Hauptstrasse 16/17; s/d €40/70; ☎ ☒ ☒) This swish option in a neoclassical building has 10 elegant rooms, great views, a restaurant serving updated regional cuisine (mains €8 to €18) and a good-sized fitness and spa area with pool.

Bergschlüsschen Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 573 12; www.bergschloessen.com; Königstrasse 38; s €55, d €65-75; ☎ ☒ ☒) It may resemble the house from *Psycho*, but you'd be mad (ha ha!) to complain about the upstairs views from this excellent hillside hotel.

Stobbermühle (☎ 668 33; www.stobbermuehle.de; Wriezener Strasse 2; s €54, d €78-88, apt €88-200; ☒ ☒) Fancier than Louis XIV's undies, this romantic hotel has a superb and inventive restaurant (mains €7 to €15) with a separate lobster menu. Rooms are plush and fantastically over-equipped, boasting fax machine, VCR and the odd Jacuzzi.

Fischerkehle (☎ 374; Fischerberg 7; mains €9-18) This popular historic restaurant on the southwest

shore of the Schermützelsee specialises in locally caught fish and game.

Getting There & Away

Buckow is not directly served by train but there are handy hourly train/bus connections from Berlin-Lichtenberg train station. Take the RB26 to Müncheberg and change either to bus 928 or 930 (€6, one hour) or to the Buckower Kleinbahn (weekends from Easter to October). Drivers should follow the B1/B5 to Müncheberg, then steer north towards Buckow via Waldsiefersdorf.

FRANKFURT AN DER ODER

☎ 0335 / pop 68,000

Germany's 'other' Frankfurt, 90km east of Berlin, was practically wiped off the map in the final days of WWII and never recovered its one-time grandeur as a medieval trading centre and university town. It didn't help that the city was split in two after the war, with the eastern suburb across the Oder River becoming the Polish town of Słubice. The GDR era imposed a decidedly unflattering Stalinist look, but still, the scenic river setting, a few architectural gems and the proximity to Poland (cheap vodka and cigarettes, for all you hedonists) are all good reasons for a stopover.

Orientation

The Hauptbahnhof is on the southwestern edge of the city centre. Walking north on Bahnhofstrasse and east on Heilbronner Strasse delivers you to the landmark Oderturm, a GDR-era high-rise. It borders the giant Brunnenplatz, where the tourist office is ensconced in a glass pavilion. The Marktplatz is just northeast of the square, a short walk from the Oder River and the bridge to Słubice.

Information

California (☎ 685 1316; Rosa-Luxemburg-Strasse 10; per hr €2; ☎ 8am-midnight) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 325 216; www.frankfurt-oder-tourist.de; Karl-Marx-Strasse 1; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat)

Sights

Much of Frankfurt might be called 'aesthetically challenged', but you wouldn't know it standing on Marktplatz. To the south looms the crenellated tower of the **Marienkirche** (☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), one of Germany's largest brick Gothic hall churches.

Ruined by wartime and GDR disregard, it now boasts a proud new roof and fantastic medieval stained-glass windows. These were recently returned by the Russians, who had kept them as war booty in St Petersburg for the past 60 years. Otherwise the church is bare, its treasures, including a seven-armed candelabrum and the Gothic high altar, now on display in the **Gertraudkirche** (Gertraudenplatz 6; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), south of here.

Back on Marktplatz, standing almost as tall as the Marienkirche, is the equally impressive **Rathaus** with its ornate south gable. Besides the mayor's office, it houses the **Museum Junge Kunst** (☎ 552 4150; www.museum-junge-kunst.de; Marktplatz 1; adult/concession €2/1.40; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), which presents art by GDR and contemporary eastern German artists. It also has a second location in the riverside **PackHof** (CPE-Bach-Strasse 11; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), a short walk east. Adjacent to the PackHof, in a restored baroque mansion, the **Museum Viadrina** (☎ 401 560; www.museum-viadrina.de; CPE-Bach-Strasse 11; adult/concession €2/1.40; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) presents regional history in a comprehensive but rather turgid fashion.

If you're a fan of German dramatist Heinrich von Kleist (1711–1811), you might want to follow the new Oderpromenade river walk south to the **Kleist-Museum** (☎ 531 155; www.kleist-museum.de; Faberstrasse 7; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), which chronicles the life, works and importance of Frankfurt's famous son. At the northern end of the Oderpromenade, past the bridge to Slubice, is the **Konzerthalle CPE Bach** (☎ 663 880; Lebuser Mauerstrasse 4; admission €1; ☎ 10am-6pm), a Gothic monastery church (1270) that's been turned into a concert hall. It also houses an exhibit on the life of the quirky composer Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, who was the son of the great Johann Sebastian Bach.

Sleeping & Eating

Pension Am Kleistpark (☎ 238 90; Humboldtstrasse 14; s €32-36, d €50-60; ☎) If you put a premium on value and can do without most mod-cons, you'll be happy in the large and light rooms at this property opposite Kleistpark.

Hotel Gallus (☎ 561 50; www.hotel-gallus.com; Fürstenwalder Strasse 47; s €50-80, d €63-83; ☎) Also near the Kleistpark, behind a lovely Art Nouveau façade, Gallus has 25 bright and modern rooms decked out in friendly and inoffensive colours and patterns.

Oderspeicher (☎ 401 3963; Hanewald 9; mains €6-12; ☎ 5pm-midnight Wed-Fri, 11am-1am Sat, 11am-10pm Sun Oct-May, from 11am daily Jun-Sep) This storehouse turned beer hall has a great riverside setting (with summer terrace), occasional live music and a no-nonsense menu of German classics.

Turm 24 (☎ 504 517; Logenstrasse 8; mains €9-16) The chef's ambitions are as lofty as the 24th-floor setting of this smart restaurant. The spectacular views definitely compete with such dishes as boar with walnut-herb sauce or homemade tagliatelle with salmon and lobster.

Getting There & Around

Frankfurt is served twice hourly by regional trains from central Berlin (eg Hauptbahnhof; €8.40, 70 minutes) and Cottbus (€9.60, 1½ hours).

Trams 1 and 3 run from the Hauptbahnhof to the centre; get off at Schmalzgassee. The tourist office rents bicycles.

NORTHERN BRANDENBURG

SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP

In 1936 the Nazis opened a 'model' *Konzentrationslager* (concentration camp) in Sachsenhausen, near the town of Oranienburg (pop 30,000), about 35km north of Berlin. By 1945 about 220,000 men from 22 countries had passed through the gates, which had signage reading, as at Auschwitz, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Sets You Free). About 100,000 were murdered here, their remains consumed by the relentless fires of the ovens.

After the war, the Soviets set up Speziallager No 7 (Special Camp No 7) for ex-Nazis, regime opponents and anyone else who didn't fit into their mould. An estimated 60,000 people were interned at the camp between 1945 and 1950, and up to 12,000 are believed to have died here. There's a mass grave of victims at the camp and another one 1.5km to the north.

Sights

The **Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen** (☎ 03301-200 200; www.gedenkstaette-sachsenhausen.de; Strasse der Nationen 22; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm mid-Mar–mid-Oct, to 4.30pm mid-Oct–mid-Mar, most

exhibits closed Mon) consists of several parts. Even before you enter you'll see a memorial to the 6000 prisoners who died on the *Todesmarsch* (Death March) of April 1945, when the Nazis tried to drive the camp's 33,000 inmates to the Baltic in advance of the Red Army.

About 100m inside the camp is a mass grave of 300 prisoners who died in the infirmary after liberation in April 1945. Further on is the camp commander's house and the so-called Green Monster, where SS troops were trained in the finer arts of camp maintenance. At the end of the road, the **Neues Museum** (New Museum) has a permanent exhibit about the camp's precursor, the KZ Oranienburg, which was set up in a disused brewery right in town shortly after Hitler's rise to power in 1933.

Northeast of here are **Barracks 38 and 39**, reconstructions of typical huts housing most of the 6000 Jewish prisoners brought to Sachsenhausen after Kristallnacht in November 1938. North of here is the **Zellenbau** (prison), where particularly brutal punishment was meted out.

At the centre of the grounds is the former **Häftlingsküche** (prison kitchen), which houses a new exhibit about the history of the camp. In the former laundry room opposite, you can see a variety of films, including a particularly gruesome one showing the camp after liberation.

Left of the tall, ugly monument (1961) erected by the GDR in memory of political prisoners interned here stood the various killing stations, including a **gallows**, where four prisoners could be hanged simultaneously, and **Station Z extermination site**, a pit for shooting prisoners in the neck with a wooden 'catch' where bullets could be retrieved and recycled. An exhibit documents these horrifying mass killings.

Getting There & Away

Oranienburg is frequently served by the S1 from Berlin-Friedrichstrasse (€2.60, 50 minutes) and regional trains from Berlin-Hauptbahnhof (€2.60, 25 minutes). From Oranienburg station it's a signposted 20-minute walk to the camp, or catch buses 804 or 821.

RHEINSBERG

☎ 033931 / pop 5300

Rheinsberg, a delightful town on Grienericksee about 50km northwest of Berlin, has

a strong cultural pedigree. It all started with Frederick the Great who, when still a crown prince, enjoyed giving flute concerts at the Schloss. The tradition continued with his brother Heinrich who turned the palace into a 'court of the muses'. The town also inspired Theodor Fontane's gushy travelogue called *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* (Walks through the March of Brandenburg) and Kurt Tucholsky's 1912 breakthrough novel *Rheinsberg – ein Bilderbuch für Verliebte* (Rheinsberg – A Picture Book for Lovers). Cultural events, along with the palace, its park, plenty of boating and some top-notch restaurants, still make Rheinsberg a pleasant getaway.

Information

Infolden (☎ 395 10; www.rheinsberg-tourismus.de; Rhinpassage, Rhinstrasse 19; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun) Private tourist office with internet access (€0.50 per 15 minutes).

Post office (Paulshorster Strasse 18b)

Tourist office (☎ 2059; www.tourismus-rheinsberg.de; Kavalleriehaus, Markt; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun)

Volksbank (Rhinstrasse 10)

Sights

The town's star attraction is the eponymous **Schloss Rheinsberg** (☎ 7260; adult/concession incl audio-guide Apr-Oct €6/5, Nov-Mar €4/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), prettily set right on Grienericksee and surrounded by a sprawling park. Friedrich Wilhelm I purchased it in 1734 for his 22-year-old son, Crown Prince Friedrich, the future Frederick the Great. The prince, who spent four years here studying and preparing for the throne, later said this period was the happiest of his life. In 1744 he gave the palace to his brother Heinrich, a closet homosexual whom Frederick forced into marriage with Wilhelmine of Hessen-Kassel. You'll learn this and other juicy tidbits on a self-guided audio tour (available in English).

Unfortunately, the interior, though filled with art, isn't quite on a par with what you might have seen in Schloss Sanssouci or Schloss Charlottenburg. This is not surprising, really, given that the palace was used as a sanatorium in GDR times. Still, there are a few highlights, especially the **Spiegelsaal** (Hall of Mirrors), decorated with a ceiling fresco by Antoine Pesne. The **Muschelsaal** (Shell Room) also doesn't fail to impress.

Tickets are also good for the **Tucholsky Literaturmuseum** (☎ 390 07; adult/concession/family if purchased separately €3/2/5) on the ground floor of the north wing. It is dedicated to the life of journalist, satirist, poet and social critic Kurt Tucholsky (1890–1935), who went into exile in Sweden when the Nazis came to power.

Activities

Reederei Halbeck (☎ 386 19; www.schiffahrt-rheinsberg.de, in German; Markt 11; 1hr trip from €6.50), next to the tourist office, offers a range of lake and river cruises and hires out canoes, paddle-boats and kayaks. **Rheinsberger Adventure Tours** (☎ 392 47; www.rhintour.de, in German; Schlossstrasse 42) also hires out canoes, boats and bikes, and can arrange all kinds of excursions in the area.

Festivals & Events

Rheinsberger Musiktage (Rheinsberg Music Days; ☎ 7210) Three-day festival of music round the clock – from jazz and chamber music to children's cabaret. Held around Whitsun/Pentecost in May/June.

Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg (Chamber Opera; 392 96; www.kammeroper-rheinsberg.de) A prestigious international opera festival promoting young talent, held from late June to mid-August.

Sleeping & Eating

Private rooms (from €15 per person) are plentiful in Rheinsberg – just look for the 'Zimmer Frei' signs.

Pension Holländermühle (☎ 2332; http://rheinsberg.de/hollaender-muehle; Schwanower Strasse; s €45, d €60-70; ☎ ☒) It's about a 10-minute walk from the Schloss, but the setting of this windmill-turned-pension is nice and quiet and there's a good restaurant. Rooms range from fresh to frilly.

Zum Jungen Fritz (☎ 4090; www.junger-fritz.de; Schlossstrasse 8; s €46-48, d €66-72; ☎ ☒) This sweet little inn has big-hearted owners but only nine cute rooms. The old-time German restaurant is a fine place to send your cholesterol count through the roof.

Der Seehof (☎ 4030; www.seehof-rheinsberg.com; Seestrasse 18; s €65-75, d €100-110; ☎ ☒ ☒) This top-flight option in a 1750 farmhouse has lovely rooms furnished in a modern, uncluttered country style with wooden floors and plenty of natural light. The restaurant (mains €6 to €19) serves exceptional fish dishes, including a mean bouillabaisse.

Café Tucholsky (☎ 343 70; Kurt-Tucholsky-Strasse 30a; mains €5-10) This smart lakeside café is a good one-size-fits-all option with grill parties, live

music on Fridays and fresh fish, meat and vegetarian dishes. In summer only, they also serve late breakfast starting at 10am.

Zum Alten Fritz (☎ 2086; Schlossstrasse 11; mains €6-13.50) The beautiful old porcelain, books, lamps and other old-timey décor here almost transport you back to the 18th century. Some of the dishes were even inspired by recipes from that era.

Eisfabrik (☎ 7240; Kurt-Tucholsky-Strasse 36) To feed your sweet-tooth cravings, swing by Eisfabrik, which makes its own ice cream, including some from herbs, vegetables and other unusual ingredients.

Entertainment

Musikakademie Rheinsberg (☎ 7210; www.musikakademie-rheinsberg.de; Kavalierhaus, Schloss) The academy presents year-round concerts, ballet, musical theatre and other cultural events at the palace theatre, inside the Hall of Mirrors and at other venues. Tickets are available online and from the tourist office.

Shopping

Rheinsberg is a traditional centre of faïence and ceramics; check out the local firms **Rheinsbergischer Keramikhandel** (☎ 349 510; www.rkh-rheinsberg.de; Damasscheweg 3) and **Carstens Keramik** (☎ 2003; www.carstens-keramik.de; Rhinstrasse 1).

Getting There & Around

Getting to Rheinsberg by public transport is not easy. From Berlin, the least complicated train route leaves from Berlin-Charlottenburg and requires only one change in Spandau (€8.40, 2¼ hours). Drivers should head north via the B96 and consult a map or www.map24.de for precise directions.

You can hire bikes from **Fahrradhaus Thäns** (☎ 2622; Schlossstrasse 16; per day €6-8; ☎ ☒ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat).

LOWER ODER VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

In the far northeastern corner of Brandenburg, the **Lower Oder Valley National Park** (National park Unteres Odertal; www.unteres-odertal-nationalpark.de, in German) is guaranteed to get you away from the tourist crowds. It protects one of the last relatively unspoiled delta regions in Europe and boasts an enormous range of flora and fauna. Meadows, marshland and deciduous forest make up much of the park, which hugs the Polish border for 60km but is just 2km to 3km wide in most spots. It also serves

BRANDENBURG'S FONTANE OF KNOWLEDGE

As you move around Brandenburg, you'll often find yourself following in the footsteps of Theodor Fontane (1819–98), a Huguenot writer from Neuruppin who made a series of walking tours of the March in 1859 and set down his experiences in the four-volume *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* (Walks through the March of Brandenburg), with no shortage of appreciative comments.

Looking at all the plaques, book displays and name-dropping brochures you might get the impression that Fontane was just an old travel hack who 'did' Brandenburg, but in fact he is better known to literature students as one of the first proponents of the social novel in Germany, comparable to Flaubert or Balzac in France. His most famous work is probably *Effi Briest*; the well-known 1974 film version was directed by none other than Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Fittingly, with all the French comparisons flying around, Fontane is buried in the Französische Friedhof (French Cemetery), which is integrated into the Dorotheenstädtischer Friedhof in Berlin's Mitte district. But prepare for company; he still enjoys a wide following, and there are always devotees milling about his modest tombstone.

as a breeding ground for such endangered bird species as sea eagles and black storks. More than 100,000 geese and ducks make the park their winter home. In October, the sky darkens with up to 13,000 migratory cranes stopping off on their way south.

Orientation & Information

The gateway town to the park is Schwedt, about 100km northeast of Berlin. Here you'll find most commercial activity as well as the regional **tourist office** (☎ 03332-255 90; www.unteres-odertal.de; Berliner Strasse 47; ☎ ☒ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat May-Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr).

Another good place to get oriented is the **Nationalparkhaus** (☎ 03332-267 7244; adult/child €1/0.50) in Criewen. This is the park's main visitor centre and the knowledgeable (though not always English-speaking) folks here are happy to suggest activities and hand out maps. While here, you can admire 20-odd local fish species flitting around the giant aquarium.

Activities

Boats and bikes can be hired from **Fahrrad- und Touristikcenter Butzke** (☎ 03332-839 500; www.kanufahrradverleihbutzke.de; Kietz 11, Schwedt; per day bikes €4.50-6, canoes €25-35). The company also organises customised guided and self-guided tours, including canoe-bike combinations.

Sleeping

The tourist office in Schwedt can help you find private or hotel rooms in the entire region.

Campingplatz Mescherin (☎ 033332-807 07; www.campingplatz-mescherin.de; Dorfstrasse 6; per person/car

€3/€2, per tent €3-5) To really commune with nature, try this, the only camping ground in the park. It's fairly basic, but in a lovely setting on the Oder near the northern end of Mescherin.

Getting There & Around

Regional trains to Schwedt leave almost hourly from Berlin-Hauptbahnhof (€9.60, 1¼ hours). From Schwedt, bus 468 goes to Criewen in 20 minutes (€1.30). Alternatively, take the regional train to Angermünde and switch to bus 468 there for Criewen (€9.60, 1¼ hours, every two hours).

Drivers should follow the A11 to the Joachimsthal exit, then continue on the B2 towards Angermünde.

CHORIN

☎ 033366 / pop 520

About 60km northeast of Berlin, **Kloster Chorin** (Chorin Monastery; ☎ 703 77; www.kloster-chorin.de; Amt Chorin 11a; adult/concession €3/2, parking €2.50; ☎ ☒ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) is a romantically ruined monastery near a little lake and surrounded by a lush park. Chorin was founded by Cistercian monks in 1273, and 500 of them laboured over six decades to erect what is widely considered to be among the finest red-brick Gothic structures in northern Germany. The monastery was secularised in 1542 and fell into disrepair after the Thirty Years' War. Renovation has gone on in a somewhat haphazard fashion since the early 19th century.

You enter the complex from the south and first arrive at the former cloister, with the monastic quarters off to the sides and the

church, with its sleekly carved portals and elongated lancet windows, to the north. For more beautiful architecture, walk around to the western façade, with its beautifully detailed step gable.

The church, which is said to have near-perfect acoustics, and the cloister are an enchanting setting for classical concerts held throughout the summer. On weekends from June to August, expect to hear some top talent during the celebrated **Choriner Musiksommer** (☎ 03334-657 310; www.musiksommer-chorin.de; tickets €6-22). In Berlin, tickets are sold at **Berliner Theater- und Konzertkasse** (☎ 030-241 4635; Am Spreeufer 6).

Chorin is served hourly by regional trains from Berlin-Hauptbahnhof (€7.20, 45 minutes). Trains are often met by bus 912, which takes you within a five-minute walk of the monastery. Alternatively, it's a 2.5km walk through the woods. If you're stopping off in Chorin en route to somewhere else, note that there is no left luggage (or indeed anything else) at the station.

NIEDERFINOW

☎ 033362 / pop 700

Tiny Niederfinow, about 20km southeast of Chorin, would be a mere blip on the map were it not for the spectacular **Schiffshebewerk** (ship-lift; ☎ 033362-215; www.schiffshebewerk-niederfinow.info, in German; Hebewerkstrasse; adult/child €1/0.50, parking €2.50; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), one of the most remarkable feats of engineering

from the early 20th century. Looking a bit like the exoskeleton of an aircraft carrier, it was completed in 1934 and measures 60m high, 27m wide and 94m long. Huge barges sail into a sort of giant bathtub, which is then raised or lowered 36m, water and all, between the Oder River and the Oder-Havel Canal. It's great fun, especially for kids.

The lift can be viewed from the street (free), but for better views climb to the upper canal platform and view the 20-minute operation from above. Even more memorable is a trip on the lift itself aboard a little boat operated by **Fahrgastschiffahrt Neumann** (☎ 03334-244 05; www.finowkanalschiffahrt.de in German; adult/child €6/3; 🕒 times vary). Tickets are sold at the information kiosk, which is in the car park alongside a few snack stands.

If you think this ship-lift is impressive, come back in 2012 when a second, much bigger one is scheduled to begin operation adjacent to the existing one. The new behemoth will be 130m long and able to accommodate larger barges capable of transporting 1500 tonnes of goods (the equivalent of 50 trucks). Construction was supposed to commence in 2006.

Niederfinow is served by regional train from Berlin-Hauptbahnhof (€6, 1¼ hours) with a change in Bernau or Eberswalde, or directly from Berlin-Lichtenberg (€6, one hour). The Schiffshebewerk is a scenic 2km walk north of the station; turn left and follow the road.