



Sightjogging by the River Spree

Running commentary

Finding the time to keep fit and see the sights when you are in a new city can push you to the limit, which is why a jogging tour could be your answer. **Andrew Eames** breaks a sweat in Berlin

I have a friend, a hard-pressed lawyer, who's obsessed with running. The more he earns, the higher his profile, the further he runs. He can't let a day pass without completing a minimum mileage, no matter where he is in the world. Last year, on a business trip to Australia, he deliberately broke the journey at Singapore's Changi airport in order to be able to run around the airport perimeter before jumping on the next plane and continuing. Presumably he also found somewhere to have a shower first.

Anyway, Chris (not his real name) knows his running habit makes him a laughing stock and he takes it all good-humouredly on the chin, but on the rare occasions when he does stick up for what he does, he maintains that going for a run is the best way of getting to know a city when travelling on business. A high-achiever like him has no time for a traditional city tour.

And now it seems that the world's major cities are cottoning onto the likes

of Chris and his distinctive needs, with a concept called Sightjogging, which bundles sightseeing and exercise into one. First there was New York and Rome, then came several more US destinations, with Frankfurt and London having a stab at it too. And in October last year Berlin, already home to the Trabi Safari (a city tour in Trabant cars), launched its own Sightjogging outfit – which was why I found myself loitering at the Brandenburg Gate on a chilly spring morning wearing a tracksuit and trainers.

My guide was the athletic-looking Agnes Noll, a fully qualified tour leader who also confessed to a marathon or two, and when I looked daunted at this piece of information, she insisted that I shouldn't worry, there was absolutely no need for speed. She'd be requiring all her breath, she said, for the "running commentary". She asked: "Would ten kilometres be okay?" I said it would, if she promised to treat me gently.

She did. Setting off from the Brandenburg Gate, we stitched our way around the

edge of the Tierpark in the heart of the city, taking in the Holocaust Memorial, Potsdamer Platz, the embassy district, the Victory Monument/Column, the Bellevue Palace, the new Hauptbahnhof and the immensely impressive architecture of all the new government buildings in the vicinity of the Reichstag.

Agnes turned out to be an enthusiast both for her city and for the sheer pleasure of running. Berlin was an ideal place for Sightjogging, she said, being flat, spread out, and having a big green space at its centre which is three-quarters of the size of New York's Central Park. For 90 minutes we ran mostly on springy footpaths rather than pavements, dipping in and out of the park and running by the River Spree, along routes that tourists would only ever know if they walked – but by walking they would only get to see a fraction of what we saw.

We ran between the cages of the celebrated Berlin zoo, through the city's open-air gas-lamp museum, behind the

kindergarten built at enormous expense for the children of politicians, past the Chancellery where Angela Merkel works, and along the former route of the Wall. Not all of these were conventional sights, but then Sightjoggers, said Agnes, were generally interested in everything and anything, and asked more questions than conventional tourists.

In a bus tour, she added, she only had time to point out places as they drove along, and usually they'd be gone before she had the chance to talk

about them: "I get frustrated because I can't tell people what I know." On a jogging tour, however, there is more time to elaborate, and I learned how much money the city had made out of Knut, the zoo's baby polar bear, and how Ariel Sharon had once got stuck in the lift in the Bellevue Palace.

With just the two of us, the run was mercifully uncompetitive, but it's not always

so. Occasionally runners were out to prove themselves, said Agnes, particularly when they found themselves lining up alongside other nationalities. She said: "Sometimes those who start fast end up slow, and vice versa."

Sightjoggers has several strong athletes in its ten-strong team of guides, and Agnes herself was clearly able to keep up with the fastest of them, but generally she tries to blunt the competitive edge by requesting a keen group to "slow down please, or else I can't talk". That usually did the trick, she said, although she hasn't yet met my friend Chris.

As for me, I didn't really notice whether our pace was fast or slow, or even how far we'd been and how much further there was to go, until suddenly we were back at the Brandenburg Gate, and it was all over. I realised there had been so much to look at and talk about that I'd completely forgotten to feel in the least bit tired. ■

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Agnes Noll, Sightjogging guide