



## *Berlin*

As old-time Main Streets go, Berlin is a first-rate affair, blessed with a postcard-pretty streetscape, lots of interesting shops and adventurous restaurants, and a history chock-full of fascinating characters.

Bonus: Berlin knows how to throw a party.

My theory in such matters is that you can't go wrong in a town that makes a giant production out of its annual bathtub races. Here, they close down Main Street on a midsummer Saturday for the spectacle. Residents turn out in droves, standing five and six deep on the sidewalk to watch neighbors in crazy costumes go whizzing by in old tubs outfitted with jerry-rigged wheels and axle.

Stunts like that helped Berlin snag the “Coolest Small Town in America” title from Budget Traveler magazine a little while back. Berling also made a recent listing of the nation’s “Prettiest Small Towns.”

The town’s name has nothing to do with the city in Germany. Actually, it evolved from “Burleigh Inn,” the name of a crossroads hotel that operated hereabouts in the early 1800’s, before the town even existed in any official sense. Today’s Main Street was the busy Philadelphia Post Road in colonial times. Before that, it was a path used for centuries by the Pocomoke and Assateague Indians.

Modern-day Berlin is tiny, with a population of just 4,500, but the downtown has the feel of a bigger place. This is due in large part to Berlin’s proximity to a pair of big tourism draws, Ocean City and Assateague Island National Seashore. A few years back, I got to small-taking with a Berlin merchant, and she told me that the key to her success was the regular waves of sunburnt tourists who give Berlin a try on rainy days or when they need a break from the beach.

The star of the downtown streetscape is the Atlantic Hotel, a Victorian affair built in 1893. Just one look at that sweet wraparound porch is enough to inspire a lot of visitors to march right in and make reservations at the hotel restaurant. Strolling nearby streets, you will find lots more interesting old buildings-and a bunch of stately old trees to boot.

There is no mystery to the fact that some big-budget hotshots from Hollywood chose Berlin as the backdrop for Runaway Bride, the 1999 Julia Roberts hit. A lesser Hollywood effort, Tuck Everlasting was filmed here too.

On the shopping front, antiques and collectibles rule the day. A handful of interesting galleries give the town a modestly artsy vibe. Be sure to stop in and see the work of a talented young glassblower at Jeffrey Auxer Designs. He also offers lessons that look like great fun. Try World of Toys, too—it has an idiosyncratic mix of old school finds and newer educational games. The yam shop A Little Bit Sheepish is another Berlin shop that gets rave reviews.

That Burleigh name from centuries gone by is making a comeback, thanks to a brewery called Burley Oak. They’re a local operation through and through, right down to the partnership they launched with a local farmer to figure out whether it would even be possible to grow local barley that could be malted. You can get a taste of the answer by ordering up a pale ale called, simply enough, Local.

Just a few years ago, Berlin’s dining scene was a middling affair. The best of the old stalwarts from those days are still here-the white tablecloth Drummer’s Café at the Atlantic Hotel; the ‘50s-diner-ish Rayne’s Reef Soda fountain & Grill, and the Globe, an old theater now doing triple duty as restaurant, art gallery, and performance hall.

But they have now been joined by a few notable newcomers. Chef Justine Zegna at Blacksmith Bar & Restaurant has an interesting background, having done stints as private chef for the likes of the Foo Fighters and Perry Farrell. She is big into farm-to-table cooking-and I am looking forward to giving her Eastern Shore Banh Mi a try-it adds local scrapple to the classic Vietnamese sandwich. Siculi Rustic Italian Kitchen on Main Street has been getting rave reviews as well.

A third relatively recent arrival is the Baked Dessert Café. Open for breakfast and lunch only, they serve creative little quiches, salads, and sandwiches on top of the sweet little attractions. The owners know their way around publicity stunts too-they talked the Berlin City Council into making up a proclamation declaring their Peach Dumpling to be the town's "official dessert" and got scads of media play in the process.

Why peach dumpling? That would be because Berlin was built on the peach business. After moving here from Delaware in 1884, a man named Orlando Harrison started up a peach orchard that eventually became the largest operation of its kind in the whole country. Harrison Brothers employed nearly 500 people at its height. The company was still going all the way up into the early 1960s, by which point a tree blight had devastated orchards all over the Eastern Shore and up in Delaware.

Berlin's story is chock-full of such interesting tidbits from days gone by. It's the birthplace of Stephen Decatur, a big 19<sup>th</sup> century naval hero. It's also the birthplace of Linda Harrison, the actress who played the mute Nova opposite Charlton Heston in the original 1968 Planet of the Apes. (Her paternal great uncle? Orlando Harrison). Before winning fame and fortune in Hollywood, Linda earned her share of local fame by being named queen of the 1962 Delmarva Chicken Festival. Minister and composer Charles Albert Tindley was born in Berlin, too. The son of a slave, Tindley became a leading Methodist minister. The famed "Tindley Temple" in Center City Philadelphia bears his name. He was a composer, too, and he is often credited with helping to create the genre of gospel music as we know it today. One of his songs, "I'll Overcome Someday", morphed over the years into the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome".

If this sort of local history is of interest to you, be sure to stop at the Calvin B. Taylor Museum on the outskirts of downtown.

Everyone should be sure to check the town calendar before visiting Berlin. On top of those Bathtub Races in July, there is a big Fiddler's Convention in September, fun Peach Festival in August, a popular New Year's Eve ball drop, and much more. Last time I looked to see what was coming up, they were launching a "Hobby Horse Steeplechase" race as part of the annual Oktoberfest bash-just another fun-loving sign that this place is not resting on its laurels when it comes to living up to that title of "Coolest Small Town in America".

You typist would like to add The Maryland Wine Bar, where you can taste for \$2.00 or enjoy a glass of Maryland's best for \$11.00 or less. Served with cheese plates, it's great fun.

Nearby Road Trips

The Salisbury Two Step

Assateague Island

The Ocean City Boardwalk

*All coming soon*

This has been reproduced from the book, *Eastern Shore Road Trips* by Jim Duffy

# 2017 Events

# BERLIN

*America's Coolest Small Town*

January 9-15	Restaurant Week
April 8	Berlin Little League Parade
April 15	Spring Celebration
May 6	Jazz & Blues Bash
May 6	Touch a Truck Day
May 19	May Day Play Day
May 20	Spring Cruisers
May 29	Memorial Day Parade
June 11	Concert on the Lawn
June 17	Outdoor Movie Night
July 1	Outdoor Movie Night
July 3	Fireworks
July 7	Bathtub Races
July 9	Concert on the Lawn
July 15	Outdoor Movie Night
July 29	Outdoor Movie Night
August 5	Peach Festival
Aug 11-13	Summer Sidewalk Sale
August 12	Outdoor Movie Night
August 13	Concert on the Lawn
August 26	Outdoor Movie Night
Sept 2	Shakespeare on Main Street
Sept 9	Small Town Throw Down
Sept 10	Concert on the Lawn
Sept 21-23	Paint Berlin Plein Art
Sept 22-24	Fiddlers Convention
October 7	Fall Cruisers
October 14	Oktoberfest/Fall Sidewalk Sale
October 21	Outdoor Movie Night
Nov 24	Tree Lighting/Holiday Art Stroll
Dec 7	Christmas Parade
Dec 31	NYE Celebration & Ball Drop

**Berlin Art Strolls – 2nd Fridays, 5 pm–8 pm**

For updated information about our events visit  
[www.BerlinMainStreet.com](http://www.BerlinMainStreet.com)