



PHOTO: MEDIA INVISIBLES

A column of international perspectives on queer Berlin by expats on rotation

Hilda Hoy is a journalist, copywriter, and translator and blogs at thenwetakeberlin.de

A lake of one's own

> Ahhh, summer. The best season in Berlin means a number of things: Picnics. Open-air parties. Drinking beer in the park until late at night. Ice cream. Lakes. And dicks.

When the weather gets good and hot, just about every Berliner makes plans to head to a local lake. And inevitably, every lake visit yields a whole wealth of dick sightings. On that extra-swelting weekend back in July when temperatures were pushing 40° C, my girlfriend, a friend and I joined the hordes and headed to our lake of choice. There we were, three queer women on the crowded banks of Teufelssee, surrounded by a veritable sea of dicks – dicks from young to old, micro- to horse-sized, circumcised to au naturel. By conservative estimate, I probably saw at least 500 dicks on that sweaty day.

The penis may not be my genital of choice, but I've got nothing against it. I find Germany's laissez-faire attitude toward public nudity refreshing. What irked me on that hot day, however, was the sheer domination of dicks wherever one turned. Plenty of women were topless, sure, but I could count on two hands the number of women who were actually naked, most of them aged 60+. Meanwhile, the men peacocked around with their floppy junk on prominent display, nary a care.

Here's a bit of insight for all the male readers: Women enjoy the feel of sun and water on their naked skin as much as men do. But fact is, the stakes are much, much higher for a woman to go naked in public. There can be no opting out of the male gaze. When a woman goes naked on a public beach, her body will be sexualized, her nudity seen as an invitation for men to look, to objectify. There's also the serious question of whether it's actually safe for her to go naked in a particular space. Safety aside, on that afternoon at Teufelssee, we three kept our swimsuits on. But that still wasn't enough to stop one man from stopping, staring down at us as we lay on our towels post-swim, and lecherously sneering, "Niiiiice...." A sharp word or two from my girlfriend and he scurried off to find some other prey.

One thing I love about being a queer woman is that I feel separate from that world where men treat women's bodies as their property. Sexual objectification and harassment are still infuriating, but they don't cut as deep when men aren't your source of love, sex or validation. A summer's day by the lake, however, is a sharp reminder that sometimes that world can edge closer to mine than I'd like. August in Berlin is already pretty great, but here's my summertime wish: a lake just for queers, where women's bodies, men's bodies and trans bodies are equally free and safe to frolic in the sun, wearing as much or as little as they damn well please. After all, the dogs of Berlin have Grunewaldsee to call their own. A queer lake would be a little piece of summer paradise. <