



We finally found the classic traditional German pâtisserie we were looking for. West of Berlin, close to Tiergarten Park, is a business with a rich history: Bäckerei (bakery) Buchwald at the Bartningallee. The bakery features a showcase full of large cakes that are sold by the slice. The establishment goes back to 1852 and was built by Onkel Gustav the First. The business became famous for their Baumkuchen and it was such a success that they even delivered to the royal family. According to the people from Berlin, Buchwald has become the place where the best Baumkuchen is made.



Baumkuchen

At the far end of the store we found the bakery, where it looks and feels like time has come to a standstill. We were surprised that they still use a scale with weights and decagrams. People work very hard. The Konditoreimeister (master pâtissier) is the king of the baumkuchen and says: “The cakes consist of many layers that are baked piece by piece on top of each other.” It reminds us of very thin-layered cakes, called spekkoek in Dutch, but without the spices. He was quite willing to give us his recipes.

Baumkuchen

Ingredients: 250 g almond powder, 3 kg sugar, 3 kg flour, 3 kg butter (melted), 80 g baking powder, 800 g marzipan, 3 ltr eggs, 1½ ltr egg yolks, the seeds scraped from 10 vanilla beans, 5 Tbs cinnamon powder, 50 g lemon zest.

Melt the butter with a bit of water. Mix the sugar with the marzipan, the vanilla seeds, the cinnamon and the lemon juice. Beat eggs and egg yolks fluffy with the sugar, slowly add the melted butter and carefully add the flour and baking powder.

The Buchwald bakery makes 20 litres of this batter each day. The most interesting part is actually the preparation. In the corner stands a big oven with six large iron spits (rotisserie spikes) covered with aluminum foil. "It is almost like a large kebab grill," says the chef. "The Baumkuchen is a cake that gets cooked in an open fire." The process starts and the machine gets into action. Each spit is rolled through the batter and then baked by the warmth in the back of the oven. Werner points to a few small rings that are attached to the batter container. "That is my computer, because these rings tell me how many times the spits have gone through the batter. Every time it turns another ring is formed." Delicately the chef checks if there are no extra residues on the batter and with his finger he checks if the dough is done. Although we are several metres away from the oven, we see the sweat pouring off the chef's back. Werner is used to this heat and just smiles. After five turns through the batter we see a comb appear. This gives the cakes their special cachet. With an extra finesse the comb is pushed against the fresh batter, but not against the batter that is baked. "It is a carefully executed process, because we don't want to damage the baked layers as that would cause lumps in the batter."

Werner can control the colour by the speed of the rotisserie in the oven, but the temperature stays constant. The slower the rotation, the browner the cake. Slowly we start to recognize the cake as we know it and after nine layers it is done. Werner gives it some extra turns to deepen the colour. It takes a full day before the cakes have cooled off and can be finished. The spits are then removed from the cakes and what is left looks like a long accordion of Baumkuchen. The cakes are garnished with apricot jelly with fondant or chocolate and then cut in different sizes and wrapped. It is not a cheap cake: they cost about 35 euros per kilogram.

There are two different ways to make Baumkuchen. Werner only uses the Cotbusse method. The other method comes from the village Salzwedel. The difference is that they use a different kind of marzipan and no almond shavings in the batter. We feel a bit sick after eating the rich Baumkuchen and are ready to move on.

Although in previous city reportages we used mostly public transportation, on this trip we used the GPS in the car as our guide. The truth must be said: Berlin is a great city to drive in. Hardly any traffic jams and lots of free parking!



