

Kita in Berlin

What is a Kita?

Kita (Kindertagesstätte) is the German term for daycare/kindergarten. It covers two age groups: **Krippe** (under 3) and **Kindergarten** (ages 3 until school entry, around 6).

Types of Childcare in Berlin

Type	Description
Städtische Kita	City-run, publicly operated with standardized programs
Freie Träger	Independent non-profits (church-affiliated like Caritas/Diakonie) with varied pedagogical approaches
Elterninitiativ-Kita	Parent cooperatives — parents actively participate in running the Kita (cooking, cleaning, board duties)
Kindertagespflege / Tagesmutter	Licensed childminders caring for up to 5 children in a home setting. More flexible, smaller groups, often shorter waitlists — good option for under-3s
Private Kita	Fully private, often bilingual. Costs €800–1,500+/month on top of what the voucher covers

Pedagogical approaches vary widely: Situationsansatz (child-led), Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, Waldkindergarten (outdoor/forest), and Bewegungskindergarten (movement-focused).

The Kitagutschein (Childcare Voucher)

The **Kitagutschein** is a mandatory voucher issued by Berlin's Jugendamt (youth welfare office). Without it, no publicly funded Kita will enroll your child.

Who can apply: Any child registered (angemeldet) in Berlin who has not yet started school.

Where to apply: Your local district's [Jugendamt](#) (based on where you live, not where the Kita is).

When to apply: Between 9 months and 2 months before your desired start date. Processing takes 6–8 weeks. Many parents apply during pregnancy.

Online application form: fms.verwalt-berlin.de

Hours Approved (Daily)

Situation	Hours
Child under 1	4–5 hours (requires proof of work need)
Child 1+ (basic entitlement)	Up to 7 hours (no proof needed)
Both parents working part-time	5–7 hours
Both parents working full-time	7–9 hours
Single parent working	Full-day with priority
Extended care	9+ hours (requires documentation)

Validity: The voucher is valid for 7 months to find a Kita. Part-time vouchers (up to 7 hours) do not expire. The voucher works at any registered Kita or Tagesmutter across all Berlin districts.

Required Documents

- Completed application form (both parents must sign)
- Passports/ID cards for child and both parents
- Child's birth certificate
- Meldebescheinigung (address registration) with child's name
- For extended hours: employer verification letter (dated, signed, less than 1 month old)
- For self-employed: Gewerbeschein or tax documentation
- For non-EU citizens: residence permit (Aufenthaltstitel)
- Non-German documents need certified translations

Costs — Berlin's Beitragsfreiheit

Since **August 2018**, Kita attendance in Berlin is **completely free** for children aged 1 through school entry — one of the most generous systems in Germany.

What Parents Still Pay

Cost	Amount	Notes
Essensgeld (lunch)	€23/month	Waived with berlinpass-BuT (low-income card)
Breakfast/snacks	Varies	Not covered by public funding; some Kitas include, others don't
Zuzahlungen (add-on services)	Up to €100/month (cap since Jan 2025)	Optional: organic food, sports, language lessons. Can be cancelled anytime with 1 month notice
Sundries	Small amounts	Diapers, sunscreen, celebration contributions

Important: Parents cannot be required to pay additional fees to secure a spot. For low-income families, apply for BuT (Bildung und Teilhabe) benefits to cover food and excursion costs entirely.

How to Search for a Kita

Search Tools

Resource	Notes
Kita Navigator (official)	Berlin's official portal. Filter by location, age, pedagogy, language. Submit Vormerkung (pre-registration). Does NOT guarantee a spot.
HeyAva	Reviews and availability info
Kita.de	Comprehensive directory
Facebook Groups	"Kitas in Berlin" and "Kita Spot Berlin" — parents share openings and tips
Community Kita Spreadsheet	Crowdsourced list of Kitas with notes from parents

Strategy

1. **Start during pregnancy** or as early as possible
2. Register with **10-15 Kitas simultaneously**
3. Use Kita Navigator AND contact Kitas directly (email, phone, visit)
4. Attend open house days (Tag der offenen Tür) — typically in January
5. Follow up every 4-6 weeks to confirm continued interest
6. Track all contacts in a spreadsheet
7. Consider neighboring districts — your voucher works across all of Berlin

8. Explore Kindertagespflege as a bridge while waiting for a Kita spot

The Shortage Reality

Timeline recommendation:

- **During pregnancy (2nd trimester):** Begin visiting Kitas and getting on waiting lists
- **After birth:** Provide birth certificate, confirm waitlist positions
- **2-9 months before desired start:** Apply for Kitagutschein
- **August:** Main intake period for the new school year (though spots open throughout the year)

Berlin has historically had a severe Kita shortage. Recent reports (2025-2026) suggest the situation has improved in some areas, but district variation is large — Lichtenberg may have openings while Pankow/Neukölln remain competitive.

If you cannot find a spot: The babysitter subsidy program provides approximately €600/month for registered families to cover babysitter costs while seeking Kita placement. Contact your Jugendamt.

Bilingual and International Kitas

Berlin has many bilingual (English-German) options. Most accept the Kitagutschein but charge additional fees:

Kita	Location	Extra Cost with Gutschein
Berlin Kids International	Prenzlauer Berg	€23 meals only
Kiddies International	7 locations, Steglitz-Zehlendorf	€23 meals + €90 activities
Kant-Kindergarten International	Dahlem	Under €200/month
Phorms PhorMinis	Mitte, Zehlendorf, Prenzlauer Berg	€135-349 (income-based) + €70 meals
Be Smart Academy	Friedrichshain, Mitte	€350

Search bilingual options on [farawayhome.com](https://www.farawayhome.com) or use Kita Navigator's language filter.

The Eingewöhnung (Settling-In Period)

Most Berlin Kitas use the **Berliner Modell**, a structured, gradual transition:

Phase	Duration	What Happens
Grundphase (base phase)	Days 1-3	Parent stays with child at the Kita for 1-2 hours. No separation attempted.
First separation	Day 4+	Parent leaves briefly (starting with minutes). Educator observes child's reaction.
Stabilization	Week 2-3	Separation time increases gradually. Educator becomes primary reference person.
Final phase	Week 3-4+	Parent no longer present but reachable by phone. Child attends for full hours.

Critical for working parents: You or your partner must be physically available for nearly a month. This is non-negotiable at German Kitas. Negotiate time off work in advance.

Documents for Enrollment

Once a Kita offers a spot:

- **Kitagutschein** (the voucher)
- **Meldebescheinigung** (address registration)
- **Passports and birth certificate**
- **Impfpass / vaccination records** — proof of measles vaccination is legally required (Masernschutzgesetz)
- **U-Heft** (child's developmental health booklet from pediatric checkups)
- Signed Kita contract

Tips for Filipino Families

Language

- Write applications and emails in German — even Google-translated German gets faster responses than English
- Many Kita staff speak limited English. Bilingual Kitas are the exception
- Your child will learn German quickly through immersion — this is one of the biggest benefits of Kita

Cultural Differences to Expect

- German Kitas emphasize **outdoor play in all weather** — children go outside in rain, cold, and snow. You need rain gear (Matschhose), rubber boots (Gummistiefel), and layered clothing
- Independence is heavily encouraged from a young age (self-feeding, dressing)
- The Eingewöhnung is taken very seriously — there is no "just drop off and go" on day one
- Parent participation may be expected, especially at Elterninitiativ-Kitas

Food and Allergies

- Kitas serve communal meals. Inform them about allergies/dietary restrictions in writing
- Filipino food preferences can be discussed, but Kitas serve German/European menus
- Many accommodate vegetarian/vegan/halal/allergy diets if communicated clearly
- Pack supplementary snacks if your child is a picky eater

Practical Tips

- Join Filipino parent groups in Berlin on Facebook for shared experiences and recommendations
- The Jugendamt process can feel bureaucratic — bring ALL documents to every appointment in a folder
- Persistence and volume of applications matter more than qualifications
- Follow up monthly by phone — spots open when families relocate

Legal Right to a Kita Place (Rechtsanspruch)

Since **August 1, 2013**, every child in Germany has a **statutory right to a childcare place from their first birthday** (Section 24 SGB VIII):

- From age 1, your child is legally entitled to at least 7 hours of daily care

- The Jugendamt is legally obligated to help you find a spot
- If they fail, you can file a **Widerspruch** (formal objection) and pursue legal action — courts consistently uphold this right
- For children under 1: no automatic entitlement, but care is available if both parents work

Key Resources

Resource	Link
Kita Navigator (official search)	kita-navigator.berlin.de
Kitagutschein application form	fms.verwalt-berlin.de
Find your Jugendamt	service.berlin.de
Berlin childcare info (English)	berlin.de
All About Berlin Kita guide	allaboutberlin.com
All About Berlin Kitagutschein	allaboutberlin.com
PaperStork expat guide	paperstork.de
International Kitas list	farawayhome.com
HeyAva (search + reviews)	heyava.de
Tagesmutter search	erstekinderbetreuung.de
Community Kita spreadsheet	Google Sheets

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