



Architecture

21027

Berlin

Germany
Deutschland



Berlin

Germany's capital and cultural center dates back to the 13th century and has shaped—and been shaped by—many dramatic events in European history.

From humble beginnings as a medieval trading center to its key role in the rise of the Kingdom of Prussia and modern Germany, Berlin has experienced wars, staged revolutions, been divided in two, lost and regained its place as the country's capital city.

This richly textured history is still there to be seen in the city's skyline, which manages to combine important historic symbols with cutting-edge architectural statements.

[“Berlin is the newest city I have come across. Even Chicago would appear old and gray in comparison.”]

Mark Twain,
Chicago Daily Tribune, 1892



The Berlin Wall

The Wall was both a physical barrier between West Berlin and East Germany, and the symbolic boundary between western democracy and Communism during the Cold War. Started in August 1961, the wall was 96 miles (155 km) long and had a height of 11.8 ft. (3.6 m) in the section that divided the city.

Little remains of the Berlin Wall within the city itself. A double row of cobblestones traces its 3.5 mile (5.5 km) route through the city center, while the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Strasse includes a preserved 197 ft. (60 m) strip of “no man’s land” where the wall once divided the city.

[“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall”]

President Ronald Reagan
(1987)



Berlin TV Tower

If you want to enjoy a spectacular 360° view of Berlin's skyline then take a trip up the 1,207 ft. (368 m) tall Berlin TV Tower (Fernsehturm Berlin). The visibility from the rotating visitor platform in the middle of the tower's sphere can reach 26 miles (42 km) on a clear day.

The tower consists of an 820 ft. (250 m) concrete shaft upon which sits a seven-story sphere, crowned by a 387 ft. (118 m) red and white striped antenna mast.

Constructed between 1965 and 1969, the decision to place the tower in the center of the city was as much political as technical. The East German regime needed a powerful transmitter to counter the growing influence of Western TV and chose to make a bold statement with a futuristic tower that would dominate the Berlin skyline.

The first conceptual sketches of the tower were drawn by Hermann Henselmann. He was also the architect who had been given the task of modernizing the East German section of the city. He saw straight away the potential for the tower to become an iconic centerpiece of his urban renewal project as well as a symbol of the technological prowess of the socialist state.

The Berlin TV Tower remains Germany's tallest structure and a popular destination for almost 1.2 million visitors every year.



Deutsche Bahn Tower

Located on Potsdamer Platz in the heart of the city, this impressive office block is part of the Sony Center complex, the modernist symbol of the regeneration of Berlin since German reunification in 1990.

With Berlin badly damaged during World War II and divided by the Berlin Wall for almost 30 years, authorities were determined that the regeneration of Potsdamer Platz would re-establish it as a dynamic, modern city. When Sony decided to erect its new European headquarters in the square, the company employed the renowned architect Helmut Jahn who designed an eye-catching 338 ft. (103 m) semi-circular glass and steel tower.

Opened in June 2000, the office is now home to Deutsche Bahn AG, the German national railway company, and is referred to as BahnTower. The building is the tallest structure on Potsdamer Platz.

Victory Column

Originally erected between 1864 and 1873 to commemorate famous victories in wars against Denmark, Austria and France, the Victory Column (Siegessäule) was extended to its current height of 220 ft. (67 m) during the 1930s.

The sandstone column stands upon a base of polished red granite and is crowned with a 27 ft. (8.3 m) high statue representing Victoria, the goddess of victory from Roman mythology. The column's viewing platform offers visitors a panorama of the city.



Brandenburg Gate

The Brandenburg Gate (Brandenburger Tor) is one of Berlin's most important architectural structures and a historical symbol all in one. The gate has been at the heart of German and European history for over 200 years.

Commissioned by King Frederick William II of Prussia, it was built as the grandest of a series of 18 city gates through which Berlin was once entered. Designed by architect Carl Gotthard Langhans and constructed between 1788 and 1791, the inspiration for the gate came from the entry hall of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

The gate itself is built in sandstone and consists of twelve Doric columns, six to each side, forming five separate passageways. Atop the gate is the Quadriga—a chariot drawn by four horses driven by Victoria, the Roman goddess of victory.

[“Ich bin ein Berliner.”]

John F. Kennedy (1963)





Reichstag

If there is a building in Berlin that symbolizes both the city's turbulent history and modern resurgence then it is the Reichstag (Reichstagsgebäude). Completed in 1894 after ten years of construction, the parliament building witnessed the birth of German democracy, the rise of National Socialism and the decay of the Cold War period.

Severely damaged by a fire in 1933 and almost completely destroyed during World War II, the building was partially rebuilt during the 1960s, but remained largely unused.

It was only with the reunification of East and West Germany and the restoration of Berlin as the country's capital that a complete renovation of the building took place. The renowned English architect Sir Norman Foster combined the original historical façade with modern architectural elements such as the spectacular glass dome to create a modern seat of democracy for the German Bundestag (parliament).

[“Berlin is more a part of the world than a city.”]

Jean Paul,
(1800)



Facts & Statements



With close to 175 recognized museums, Berlin is one of Europe's most cultural cities.



Two high-speed elevators take visitors to the top of the Berlin TV Tower in 40 seconds.



There are over 112 miles (180 km) of waterways and around 1,700 bridges within the city limits.



There are 285 steps to the viewing platform at the top of the Victory Column.



The Brandenburg Gate is the last remaining in a series of city gates that once served as city gates.



The barrier separating east and west Berlin consisted of two concrete walls between which was a no man's land up to 160 yards wide.

References

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