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Twenty Years Fall of the Wall 2009: Reunited Germany Celebrates its Dynamic Future - Special Tours, Unusual Deals and Highlights

The Fall of the Wall in 1989 moved the world. The peaceful revolution in eastern Germany and the following reunification are historically unique. The events twenty years ago triggered a dynamic change in Germany that is reflected throughout the country. Today, all over Germany, the perspective of the past in a new present can be found and makes it a fascinating travel destination, a country where East and West come together. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of "The Fall of the Wall," cities from Berlin to Leipzig will be hosting special festivals, exhibitions and events.

From the very beginning, the Berlin Wall fell under the spotlight of world politics. On 26 June 1963, the US President John F. Kennedy visited Berlin and uttered the now famous words: "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words: Ich bin ein Berliner." Twenty-four years later, at the city's Brandenburg Gate, President Ronald Reagan, called on Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Soviet Union, to "tear down this wall!"

When Hungarian border soldiers pulled down the barbed wire fence to Austria on May 2nd 1989, the cries within East Germany for freedom of travel became increasingly vociferous. East German citizens took refuge in West German embassies in East Berlin, Warsaw, Prague and Budapest. Then, at the beginning of September, the Monday demonstrations began in Leipzig, which later spread to other towns and cities. "We are the people" was the chant echoed by hundreds of thousands of protesters, who demanded civil liberties such as free speech and unrestricted travel. On November 9th thousands of East German citizens flooded to the checkpoints in Berlin and demanded they be opened. Not long after, East and West Germans danced together on the Berlin Wall until the early hours of the morning. > www.berlin.de

Berlin will be the center of celebrations in 2009. In Berlin, its residents and visitors to the city will commemorate the events of 1989 and 1990 with an extensive cultural program, including an open-air exhibition on Alexanderplatz from May 7th to November 9th. During the same period, another exhibition charting the urban development of the new Berlin will be on tour around the city. A number of museums are also devoting space to the theme alongside their permanent collections. On November 9th, the date the Berlin Wall fell, the story of this historic event will be symbolically retold and celebrated with concerts and a street festival. > www.berlin.de

Today, the Berlin Wall Trail covers around 160 kilometres of the former border, including the one-kilometre stretch of wall on Mühlenstrasse, the longest that still stands. Here, after the border was opened, artists from all over the world painted the east-facing side of the wall with impressive graffiti, known as the East Side Gallery, one of the largest open-air galleries in the world. The history of the old East Germany is also remembered at a number of other locations in the city, such as the Checkpoint Charlie Museum which commemorates the famous border crossing and tells the story of the Berlin Wall. > www.berlin.de

More celebrations will take place all over Eastern Germany, because the Berlin Wall was just a small section of the almost 1,400 kilometer long inner German border. It extended all the way from the Baltic coast to the Bavarian Forest and separated East Berlin, Mecklenburg-Western Pomeranian, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Saxony - now federal states in the reunified Germany - from the west. The border represented much more than just a physical boundary. It was also part of the Iron Curtain, the ideological frontier between two totally different societies: the communist states of Eastern Europe and the western democracies.

Leipzig, the birth place of the peaceful revolution in 1989, takes center stage in the celebrations of the Fall of the Wall. Since 2007, Leipzig has held the annual Night of the Candles on October 9th to commemorate the pivotal evening of the peaceful revolution. Artistic light installations, authentic photographs, documentaries and musical contributions set the scene for the program highlight, when thousands of residents and visitors arrange candles in the shape of a huge 89. Musical accompaniment to this symbolic gesture is provided by local choirs. Twenty years later, the festivities are set to take place over several days and will be extended to the city ring road, where the people of Leipzig demonstrated for freedom and democracy in autumn 1989. > www.leipzig.de

The exhibition "Leipzig on the path to the peaceful revolution" will be on display from January 15th to December 31st in the Stasi Museum, which is located in the building that housed the Leipzig branch of the Ministry for State Security for 40 years. Here, visitors can learn all about the infamous East German secret police, their functions, equipment and methods. > www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de

Potsdam, today the capital of the state Brandenburg, also played a role in the history of the two Germanies: Cecilienhof, where the Potsdam Conference took place in 1945, is today a great hotel and open to the public, as is the formerly inaccessible Glienicke Bridge between Berlin and Potsdam, where the Cold War powers used to exchange captured spies. It is also the starting point for the group guided tour entitled "Border Trails amid World Cultural Heritage", which will be offered from April to the end of November 2009. > www.potsdam.de

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in northeast Germany is home to numerous museums and exhibitions that bring the region's history to life, including the Museum of East German History in Tutow, Prora Documentation Center on Rügen Island and the Eichenthal bunker. You can also discover these attractions on a self-driven Trabant tour. The Trabant was the old GDR car model, driven by most of its citizens. > www.auf-nach-mv.de

Guests of the Waldhotel Rennsteighöhe near Erfurt in Thuringia can come face to face with East German history by booking the "Experience Reality" package and sleep in a former bunker operated by the Ministry of State Security as part of an informative 16-hour program. > www.waldhotel-rennsteighoehe.de (German only)

Also in Thuringia at the former inner German border lies Point Alpha, one of the major border observation posts from the Cold War period and now an interesting museum and monument. Themed guided tours and hikes concentrate on different aspect of its history. > www.grenzmuseumpointalpha.de

The Green Ribbon Experience is a project initiated by a number of regions in Germany to protect and breathe new life into the fragile scenery and historic heritage along the former border. It ties together precious natural habitats from Travemünde on the Baltic coast to the old East German frontier near Hof in Bavaria, crossing nine of Germany's sixteen federal states along the way (Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Hessen, Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony). When it is finished, locals and visitors alike will be able to explore the beautiful natural habitats that thrived under the protection of the Iron Curtain. A network of walking trails, cycle paths and kayak routes - signposted and interspersed with themed information boards - will make this a reality by 2009.

Grenzfahrten, a tour operator specialising in off-road experiences along the old East German border, organises customised tours for thrill-seekers in a Mercedes-Benz Unimog. The action takes place along the Green Ribbon in the Thuringian-Franconian region and can be tailored for individuals or as group excursions. > www.grenzfahrten.de/ (German only)

More information on all events and tours to celebrate the Fall of the Wall soon to come on > www.cometogermany.com

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