

# Berlin:

## A Unique City In The Heart Of Europe

> Armin Gemmer

Berlin is something else! And that is true in more ways than one. The reunification of Germany has ended the isolation of West Berlin, and thus Berlin has become the epitome of the amalgamation of Europe. Nowhere else are the dogmatic contrasts between eastern and western Europe so palpable and so close to one another. And the heart of Berlin is now a mere ten years old, created out of thin air, exactly at the point where in the past the boundary between two worlds, as disparate as can possibly be imagined, was found.

### Two villages become a world metropolis

It's good to keep in mind that even historic Berlin was different from all other European cities. In Cologne, Munich and Hamburg,

there are centers from which the cities developed in concentric circles. Berlin, on the other hand, was made up of several small villages which grew together. The citizens of that Berlin did not see themselves

as part of the entire city but as residents of a city quarter. The history of the city located on the Spree began in 1307 when the villages Berlin and Cölln – Cölln was the larger of the two at that time – built a ▶



Berliner Dom

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Detail of the Ishtar Gate of Babylon

بوابة عشتار البابلية

common city hall. Nevertheless, it took another 350 years until the new locality gained importance. The Prince-electors Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia made it his capital. When Prussia was acknowledged as one of the great powers of Europe, the steep ascent of the one-time village began. By 1800, Berlin was the third largest city in Europe. When Prussia became part of the German empire, Berlin automatically became the capital of Germany.

### Prosperity through Migration

Prussia was from its very beginnings an asylum for refugees and migrants of all religions. This proved to be an astute policy, because the newcomers not only founded their own quarters but brought with them the latest techniques in production methods and were thus instrumental in the growth and prosperity of Berlin. This multiculturalism has survived until today. The residents of Berlin come from practically all the countries of the world. The Muslim community is the largest non-Christian religious community. Almost a tenth of the 3,200,000 Muslim residents of Germany, for the most part Turkish or of Turkish descent, live in Berlin. And of the 180 German mosques, 70 are to be found in Berlin with around ten times as many mosque congregations and other Islamic organizations. With its 100,000 Turkish

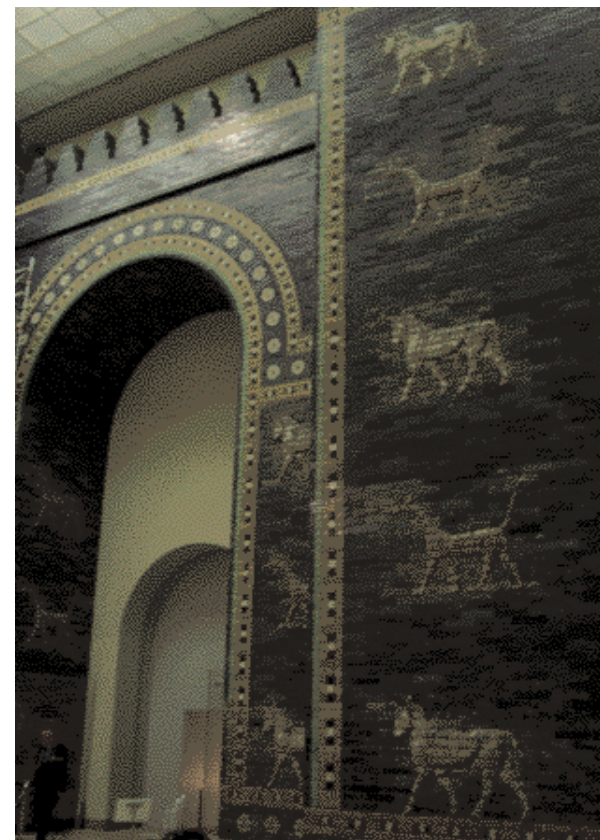
residents, the quarter of Kreuzberg is considered the largest Turkish community outside of Turkey. The Ahmadiyya Mosque, built in 1924, is the oldest mosque in Germany.

### The new center "Mitte"

Reunification was an enormous challenge for Berlin. Not only did it mean two diametrically opposed parts of a city had to blend into a new unity, but Berlin at the same time had to do justice to the expectations placed on it to become a hub between East and West. Starting with an entirely newly-conceived public transport system and a new central train station, a new part of town emerged where the former East and West met. This offers the visitor the advantage that from the symbolically rich Brandenburg Gate it is only a hop, skip and a jump to the most important sights of the Prussian era, the former GDR, post-war West Berlin, as well as postmodern Berlin.

The best place to start out on a tour through the city is from Alexander Square. The fountain of friendship, the clock showing the time around the world, and the television tower (Alex) are all imposing legacies of the "worker and peasant country" (Arbeiter & Bauernstaat) that once was the German Democratic Republic.

From the glass bulb of the Alex, it is possible



The Ishtar Gate

بوابة عشتار

to view the prestigious Karl Marx Avenue with its monumental classical Marxist-style buildings. The Rote Rathaus (Red brick City Hall), a masterpiece of Backsteingotik (brick gothic style) was the seat of the former East Berlin Magistrate and now houses the West Berlin Senate.

Via Karl Liebknecht Street one approaches the Berlin Dom (cathedral). St. Peter's in Rome was the model for this building and it is one of the most beautiful buildings in the capital city. The entire interior is decorated with artistic ornamentation which is pleasing to the visitor's eye. Between the Dom and the Alten (old) Museum, is the Lustgarten.

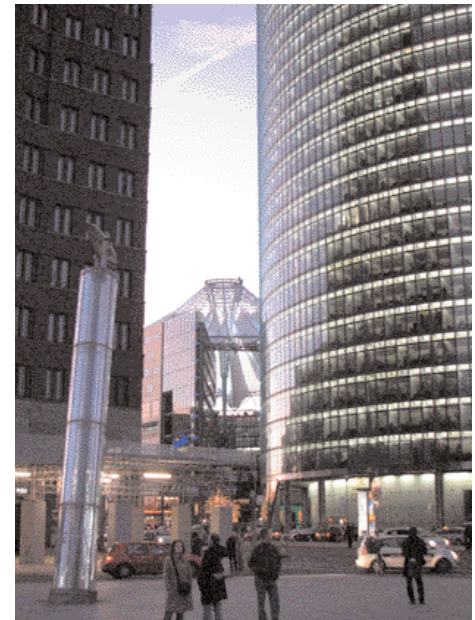
At the Berliner Dom Karl Liebknecht Street becomes Unter der Linden and terminates at the Brandenburg Gate at Pariser Platz. Two hundred meters south is the old Prussian Gendarmenmarkt, another spot you won't want to miss and which can be combined with a walk along the Friedrich Street, a modern shopping area and location of the Checkpoint Charlie Museum which tells the story of the Cold War. Back ▶



The golden Siegestsäule السيجيسول الذهبية



Statue of Friedrich Wilhelm IV تمثال فريديريك فيلهلم الرابع



Sony Center مركز سوني

on Unter der Linden, a magnificent boulevard, one continues towards the Brandenburg Gate. Not far away is Potsdamer Platz, a kind of no man's land between the former east and west sides of the city.

Nearby we find the new federal government buildings in the proximity of the restored Reichstag. Passing through Brandenburg Gate and then continuing on street "17 Juni", the Siegestsäule (Victory Column) is visible in the distance.

### The Museumsinsel (Museum Island)

The Museumsinsel, a stone's throw from Brandenburg Gate, is a work of art in itself. It is unique and not to be found anywhere else in the world – five museums on an island in the center of the river, and since 1999 listed as a cultural heritage site by UNESCO. There is an on-going dispute as to whether all the works of art on display here are rightfully being displayed in Germany and not in the countries where they were created. Nevertheless, anyone interested in the classical cultures of Islamic countries is well advised to visit one or more of the museums.

In 2009, the Egyptian Museum's collection and the papyrus collection together with the world-famous bust of Queen Nofretete and works of art dating back to the time of King



The newly built Potsdamer Platz

ساحة بوتسدامار التي بنيت حديثا

Echnaton will be on display in one place, the Neue Museum.

In the three departments of the Pergamon Museum architectural styles been reproduced together with Greek and Roman sculptures. The Vorderasiatische (Ancient Middle East) Museum provides a penetrating flash of insight into 6000 years of history, art and culture of the Middle East and the Museum of

Islamic Art has exhibits from the Islamic world from the 8th to the 19th century. It is not necessary to emphasize that the elaborate reconstructions of the Pergamon Alter, the Market Gate of Milet, the Ishtar Gate including the Processional Street of Babylon and the Façade of Mschatta are beautiful representations of the cultures from which they originated. ■