

Discovering Berlin Small Group Tour | 20 days living in Berlin

Reading List

Berlin: Portrait of a City Through the Centuries

by Rory MacLean

Berlin is a city of fragments and ghosts, a laboratory of ideas, the fount of both the brightest and darkest designs of history's most bloody century. The once arrogant capital of Europe was devastated by Allied bombs, divided by the Wall, then reunited and reborn as one of the creative centers of the world. Today it resonates with the echo of lives lived. No other city has repeatedly been so powerful and fallen so low; few other cities have been so shaped and defined by individual imaginations.

Berlin tells the volatile history of Europe's capital over five centuries through a series of intimate portraits of two dozen key residents: the medieval balladeer whose suffering explains the Nazis' rise to power; the genius Jewish chemist who invented poison gas for First World War battlefields and then the death camps; the iconic mythmakers like Christopher Isherwood, Leni Riefenstahl, and David Bowie, whose heated visions are now as real as the city's bricks and mortar. Alongside are portrayed some of the countless ordinary Berliners whose lives can only be imagined: the ambitious prostitute who refashioned herself as a baroness, the fearful Communist Party functionary who helped to build the Wall, and the American spy from the Midwest whose patriotism may have turned the course of the Cold War.

Berlin is a history book like no other, with an originality that reflects the nature of the city itself. In its architecture, through its literature, in its movies and songs, Berliners have conjured their hard capital into a place of fantastic human fantasy. No other city has so often surrendered itself to its own seductive myths. Berlin captures, portrays, and propagates the remarkable story of those myths and their makers.

The Fall of Berlin 1945

by Antony Beevor

The Red Army had much to avenge when it finally reached the frontiers of the Third Reich in January 1945. Frenzied by their terrible experiences with Wehrmacht and SS brutality, they wreaked havoc—tanks crushing refugee columns, mass rape, pillage, and unimaginable destruction.

Hundreds of thousands of women and children froze to death or were massacred; more than seven million fled westward from the fury of the Red Army. It was the most terrifying example of fire and sword ever known.

Antony Beevor has reconstructed the experiences of those millions caught up in the nightmare of the Third Reich's final collapse. *The Fall of Berlin* is a terrible story of pride, stupidity, fanaticism, revenge, and savagery, yet it is also one of astonishing endurance, self-sacrifice, and survival against all odds.

The Berlin Stories

by Christopher Isherwood

A classic of 20th-century fiction, *The Berlin Stories* inspired the Broadway musical and Oscar-winning film *Cabaret*.

First published in the 1930s, *The Berlin Stories* contains two astonishing related novels, *The Last of Mr. Norris* and *Goodbye to Berlin*, which are recognized today as classics of modern fiction. Isherwood magnificently captures 1931 Berlin: charming, with its avenues and cafés; marvelously grotesque, with its nightlife and dreamers; dangerous, with its vice and intrigue; powerful and seedy, with its mobs and millionaires?this is the period when Hitler was beginning his move to power. *The Berlin Stories* is inhabited by a wealth of characters: the unforgettable Sally Bowles, whose misadventures in the demimonde were popularized on the American stage and screen by Julie Harris in *I Am A Camera* and Liza Minnelli in *Cabaret*; Mr. Norris, the improbable old debauchee mysteriously caught between the Nazis and the Communists; plump Fräulein Schroeder, who thinks an operation to reduce the scale of her Büste might relieve her heart palpitations; and the distinguished and doomed Jewish family, the Landauers.

The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape

by Brian Ladd

In this compelling work, Brian Ladd examines the ongoing conflicts radiating from the remarkable fusion of architecture, history, and national identity in Berlin. Ladd surveys the urban landscape, excavating its ruins, contemplating its buildings and memorials, and carefully deconstructing the public debates and political controversies emerging from its past.

"Written in a clear and elegant style, *The Ghosts of Berlin* is not just another colorless architectural history of the German capital. . . . Mr. Ladd's book is a superb guide to this process of urban self-definition, both past and present."—Katharina Thote, *Wall Street Journal*

"If a book can have the power to change a public debate, then *The Ghosts of Berlin* is such a book. Among the many new books about Berlin that I have read, Brian Ladd's is certainly the most impressive. . . . Ladd's approach also owes its success to the fact that he is a good storyteller. His history of Berlin's architectural successes and failures reads entertainingly like a detective novel."—Peter Schneider, *New Republic*

"[Ladd's] well-written and well-illustrated book amounts to a brief history of the city as well as a guide to its landscape."—Anthony Grafton, *New York Review of Books*

Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion by Celia Applegate

Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is universally acknowledged to be one of the world's supreme musical masterpieces, yet in the years after Bach's death it was forgotten by all but a small number of his pupils and admirers. The public rediscovered it in 1829, when Felix Mendelssohn conducted the work before a glittering audience of Berlin artists and intellectuals, Prussian royals, and civic notables. The concert soon became the stuff of legend, sparking a revival of interest in and performance of Bach that has continued to this day. Mendelssohn's performance gave rise to the notion that recovering and performing Bach's music was somehow "national work". In 1865, Wagner would claim that Bach embodied "the history of the German spirit's inmost life". That the man most responsible for the revival of a masterwork of German Protestant culture was himself a converted Jew struck contemporaries as less remarkable than it does us today? a statement that embraces both the great achievements and the disasters of 150 years of German history.

In this book, Celia Applegate asks why this particular performance crystallized the hitherto inchoate notion that music was central to Germans' collective identity. She begins with a wonderfully readable reconstruction of the performance itself and then moves back in time to pull apart the various cultural strands that would come together that afternoon in the Singakademie. The author investigates the role played by intellectuals, journalists, and amateur musicians (she is one herself) in developing the notion that Germans were "the people of music." Applegate assesses the impact on music's cultural place of the renewal of German Protestantism, historicism, the mania for collecting and restoring, and romanticism. In her conclusion, she looks at the subsequent careers of her protagonists and the lasting reverberations of the 1829 performance itself.

Escape from the Third Reich: The Harrowing True Story of the Largest Rescue Effort Inside Nazi Germany by Sune Persson

The Swedish Red Cross expedition to the German concentration camps from March to April 1945 was the largest rescue effort inside Germany during WWII. Led by Count Bernadotte of Wisborg, the mission became known for its distinctive buses. Each bus was purposefully painted entirely white except for the Red Cross emblem on the side so that they would not be mistaken for military targets. According to conservative figures in May 1945, at least 17,000 prisoners were transported to Sweden by these white buses.

In the first book to detail this remarkable and hazardous operation, and with never-before-published photographs of the bus journeys, the details of Bernadotte's harrowing expedition to Ravensbrück concentration camp and his secret negotiations with Heinrich Himmler are revealed

The Berlin Wall: The History and Legacy of the World's Most Notorious Wall

by Charles Rivers

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an 'Iron Curtain' has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow." – Winston Churchill, 1946

"This is a historic day. East Germany has announced that, starting immediately, its borders are open to everyone. The GDR is opening its borders ... the gates in the Berlin Wall stand open." – German anchorman Hans Joachim Friedrichs

Though it never got "hot," the Cold War was a tense era until the dissolution of the USSR, and nothing symbolized the split more than the Berlin Wall, which literally divided the city. Berlin had been a flashpoint even before World War II ended, and the city was occupied by the different Allies even as the close of the war turned them into adversaries. After the Soviets' blockade of West Berlin was prevented by the Berlin Airlift, the Eastern Bloc and the Western powers continued to control different sections of the city, and by the 1960s, East Germany was pushing for a solution to the problem of an enclave of freedom within its borders. West Berlin was a haven for highly-educated East Germans who wanted freedom and a better life in the West, and this "brain drain" was threatening the survival of the East German economy.

In order to stop this, access to the West through West Berlin had to be cut off, so in August 1961, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev authorized East German leader Walter Ulbricht to begin construction of what would become known as the Berlin Wall. The wall, begun on Sunday August 13, would eventually surround the city, in spite of global condemnation, and the Berlin Wall itself would become the symbol for Communist repression in the Eastern Bloc. It also ended Khrushchev's

attempts to conclude a peace treaty among the Four Powers (the Soviets, the Americans, the United Kingdom, and France) and the two German states. The wall would serve as a perfect photo-opportunity for two presidents (Kennedy and Reagan) to hammer the Soviet Communists and their repression, but the Berlin Wall would stand for nearly 30 years, isolating the East from the West. It is estimated about 200 people would die trying to cross the wall to defect to the West.

Things came to a head in 1989. With rapid change throughout Europe, the wall faced a challenge it could not contain, the challenge of democracy's spread. On the night of November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall was effectively removed from the midst of the city it so long divided. It was removed with pick axes and sledgehammers, but also removed from the hearts and minds of the people on both sides who only hours before had thought the wall's existence insurmountable. As one writer put it, "No border guard, no wall, can forever shield repressive regimes from the power of subversive ideas, from the lure of freedom."

The fall of the Berlin Wall is often considered the end of the Cold War, and the following month both President Bush and Gorbachev declared the Cold War over, but the Cold War had been thawing for most of the 1980s. President Reagan is remembered for calling the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and demanding that Gorbachev tear down the wall, but he spent the last several years of his presidency working with the Soviet leader to improve relations. The end of the Soviet Union came when Gorbachev resigned on December 25, 1991. The Soviet Union formally dissolved the next day.
