

Germany: 25 years after the wall fell

By Kim Foley MacKinnon



The Reichstag Dome in Berlin offers 360-degree views.

A quarter of a century can seem both like a lifetime and a blink of an eye, depending upon your perspective. To a 15-year-old, it may as well be 100 years ago, so visiting Germany with my teenage daughter this year, the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, was a revelation to both of us. I, of course, remember hearing the historic news and watching broadcasts on television, but as a teenager myself back then, it had seemed a bit remote.

Our recent trip took us to Munich, Regensburg, Leipzig and Berlin. Germany isn't by any means stuck in the past, but it doesn't shy away from its history either, good or bad. We toured amazing high-tech museums, like the BMW Museum in Munich, and sobering ones like the Stasi Museum in Leipzig. We enjoyed a walking tour

of Berlin with a guide who abashedly admitted to sleeping through the night when the wall was pulled down just miles from her house. And we were charmed by the small UNESCO World Heritage City of Regensburg on the Danube River.

Munich

There's nothing like a walking tour to get you acquainted with a city, but when you're short on time, a bike tour lets you cover a lot more ground. Munich is a fantastic city to explore by bicycle, with lots of bike lanes and law-abiding drivers. Radius Tours offers a guided three-hour city tour that my husband and daughter thoroughly enjoyed, while I visited the newly opened Museum for Egyptian Art. Later, we all saw the excellent BMW Museum, where even if you are not a car aficionado, it is impossible not to be impressed.



Regensburg dates back 2,000 years.

Regensburg

The 2,000-year-old town of Regensburg is best seen by foot, with its winding streets and narrow alleyways. With historic sites dating back to the Romans, it's fortunate that it was barely touched by

bombings in World War II that destroyed many other towns. A great starting point is the free World Heritage Visitor Centre, where you can get an overview of the area. You can also sign up for inexpensive walking tours at the tourist center. Among the must-see sites are the Stone Bridge, dating back to 1146 and St Peter's Cathedral, with its stunning 14th-century stained-glass windows.

Don't miss a stop at the "Historische Wurstkuchl" or Historic Sausage Kitchen, down by the Danube to snack



An aerial shot of Leipzig, which has a music trail.

on small Regensburg pork sausages, supposedly the oldest sausage kitchen in the world. We also took a leisurely river cruise down the Danube, a lovely way to spend the afternoon.

Leipzig

In October 1989, Leipzig earned its name as the home of the "Peaceful Revolution." More than 70,000 people gathered to demonstrate for freedom, and despite an enormous military presence, no one was injured. A month later, the Berlin Wall came down. Beyond this milestone, the city is rich with musical history,

with its most famous residents including Bach, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Mahler. We followed the Leipzig Music Trail (where notes embedded in the sidewalk guide you to 23 sites) and spent an afternoon at the surprisingly high-tech Bach Museum. Other city highlights were exploring the covered arcades, seeing architectural marvels, and dining at Auberbachs Keller, the restaurant where Johann Wolfgang von Goethe set a scene in “Faust.” We were amazed at how the Stasi Museum, the headquarters of the secret police who spied on everyone from residents to their own employees, was preserved in time.

BERLIN

It was a good thing our trip ended in Berlin, because it’s likely if we started there, we wouldn’t have wanted to leave. The Adina Apartment Hotel Checkpoint Charlie proved to be the perfect base for our explorations, just blocks from the site it was named after, the military border crossing between East and West Berlin. Like everyone else, we stopped for photos, before taking an informative walking tour. We also opted for the City Circle Hop On/Hop Off bus, which gave us a good idea of the layout of the city and made stops at 18 sites (one near our hotel). Having booked tickets well in advance, we toured the impressive Reichstag Dome, an architectural marvel that has 360-degree views and is home to the German parliament. We then wandered around the city, making stops at the Brandenburg Gate and Museum Island, along with scores of tourists, but we also ventured off to quirky places like the Ramones Museum & Bar and down alleys where the graffiti seemed elevated to new levels. We barely scratched the surface, but it was enough to make recent history come alive.



A remnant of the Berlin Wall.

SPECIAL EVENTS

There are scores of special events in 2014 and 2015 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the year when Germany was reunified. For information, visit the German National Tourism Board at www.germany.travel, which has links to various events and city tourism websites.

Published: September 24, 2014