

Land und Leute



Berlin: Deutschlands Hauptstadt



Touristen am
Brandenburger Tor.

The origins of Berlin lie in the twelfth century. In its long history Berlin has served as the capital city of many German states and forms of government, including the monarchy of the Hohenzollerns, the Third Reich, and the German Democratic Republic. In 1990 Berlin became the capital of a newly united Germany. History, geography, and politics have all contributed to make Berlin a cultural center of Europe.

Berlin is both a **Stadtstaat** (*city state*) and a **Bundesland** (*federal state*) and it is the most populous city in Germany (3.4 million people). Berlin's population is diverse, with almost 13% consisting of foreigners from 185 countries, the largest group from Turkey.

Historically, Berlin was a center of education, commerce, culture, and science. This tradition is still alive today. Berlin has more than 250 state and private centers for scientific research, including nineteen colleges and universities, as well as 150 theaters that offer programs ranging from the classics to the newest artistic forms, three world-class opera houses, and seven symphony orchestras. It is also the home of

179 museums. With five major museums, the **Museumsinsel** (*Museum Island*) is one of the most important museum complexes in the world. Separate from the **Museumsinsel** are other well-known museums such as the new Jewish Museum (**das Jüdische Museum**), opened in 2001. Each year Berlin hosts the international film festival, the **Berlinale**, founded in 1951. Visitors to Berlin are struck by the wide variety of architectural styles, ranging from palaces to the remnants of the socialist architecture of East Germany to the modern office buildings erected after unification.

Berlin is a favorite tourist destination. Some of the sights that attract visitors can be found on various websites, attractions such as the **Brandenburger Tor** (*Brandenburg Gate*) at one end of the famous street **Unter den Linden**, the **Reichstag** where parliament meets, the **Sony Center**, **Friedrichstraße** with its elegant shops, the **Holocaust Mahnmal** (*Holocaust Memorial*), **Checkpoint Charlie** from the days of the **Berliner Mauer** (*Berlin Wall*), and the memorial East Side Gallery, a 1.3 kilometer-long section of the Berlin Wall with over 100 paintings from artists all over the world. Perhaps surprisingly, Berlin also offers a wide choice of outdoor activities, because approximately one-fourth of Berlin's 888 square kilometers consists of green space and one-tenth is covered by lakes and rivers.



Die Ruine und der neue
Teil der Gedächtniskirche
in Berlin.

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Geburtstage



Zwei junge Leute mit Geburtstagskuchen.

Birthdays are very important to people in German-speaking countries. They seldom forget the birthday of a family member or friend—they write, call, give flowers and/or other gifts. Birthdays are celebrated in different ways. The “birthday child” (**Geburtstagskind**) may have an afternoon coffee party (**Geburtstagskaffee**) with family members and friends or a more extensive birthday party in the evening. At the **Geburtstagskaffee**, candles are placed around the edge of a birthday cake (**Geburtstagskuchen**) and blown out by the person whose birthday it is. Although the **Geburtstagskind** is often taken out by family members or friends, he or she usually gives a party or brings a cake to work. Be-

sides giving presents (**Geburtstagsgeschenke**), it is common to send a birthday card or make a phone call. Common greetings are: **Herzlichen Glückwunsch zum Geburtstag!** (*Happy Birthday!*) or **Alles Gute zum Geburtstag!** (*All the best on your birthday!*). Often friends or family place ads in newspapers (**Geburtstagsanzeigen**), in which the **Geburtstagskind** is congratulated on her/his birthday.

In Austria and the predominantly Catholic regions of Germany, name days (**Namenstage**) may be celebrated with as much excitement as a birthday. **Namenstage** commemorate the feast day of one’s patron saint. Florist shops in these areas typically remind people whose name day is being celebrated.

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Landschaften



Beachvolleyball am Strand
(*beach*) der Insel (*island*)
Rügen an der Ostsee.



Triburg im Schwarzwald liegt
auf einer Höhe von 600 bis
1038 Meter.

Whether poet, tourist, or native German, people have admired the variety and beauty of the German scenery (**Landschaft**) for centuries. The northern part of Germany offers sandy beaches along the Baltic (**Ostsee**) and the North Sea (**Nordsee**), and marshlands as well as large islands with spectacular chalk cliffs, like those on Rügen, Germany's largest island. A drive toward the south brings one through moors, heaths, and lakes. But after only a few hundred kilometers the landscape changes to one of forests and small mountainous areas. This Central Upland Range (**Mittelgebirge**) separates northern from southern Germany. In the center of Germany are the Harz Mountains (**der Harz**), which appear in many German stories and legends. Going south one encounters the terrace landscape (**Tiefebene**) merging into the Rhine Valley, a natural and major north-south travel artery, bordered by the Black Forest (**der Schwarzwald**). The alpine foothills encompass much of Bavaria with its hilly landscape, broad plains, and the Danube Valley. The German Alps (**die Alpen**) are only a small part of the Alpine mountain range and they extend from Lake Constance (**der Bodensee**), Germany's largest lake, to Berchtesgaden. On the border with Austria is Germany's highest mountain, the **Zugspitze**, where one can also find spectacular mountain lakes. In all parts of the country one is never far from the many rivers that are used for commercial transport as well as recreation—rivers such as the Elbe, Oder, Main, Rhein, and Mosel.

Although the southern border of Germany lies at approximately the same latitude as the Canadian/U.S. border, Germany enjoys a moderate climate. There are seldom sudden, extreme fluctuations in temperature, and precipitation is usually plentiful. The marine climate in the north keeps the winters there milder than in the south, where the climate is also affected by the Alps.

With a variety of landscapes and a moderate climate, it is easy to understand why Germans are famous for their love of nature and the outdoors.