

Where the Stars Say Good-Bye - Berlin from a Different Perspective



There are many places of interest in the German capital of Berlin. A number of architectural treasures lure tourists fond of the historical atmosphere of this famous city. Especially its very moving history after World War II is what attracts a large number of travelers who come to learn about the unfortunate communist era and the differences between what once used to be East and West Berlin. However, there is yet another aspect of Berlin many respect and come to admire. The long gone past is still very real in any of the 260 cemeteries that are to be found in this city.

The cemeteries vary in size and character and all together take up 1,200 hectares of land in and around the area of Berlin. The surprising number of cemeteries is due to the fact that in the 19th century, when Berlin was made capital of the German Empire, it quickly started spreading into the surrounding areas. And thus, little towns and villages in the vicinity became absorbed - together with their cemeteries.

Nowadays, the cemeteries are a rather odd attraction for tourists. One of the reasons are naturally the personalities buried here. Graves of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Marlene Dietrich, Willy Brandt, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht are among the most visited ones. However, many ex-Berliners tend to visit these places as well; they take guided tours of the more 'fabulous' burial places and feel they are reliving the history they ran away from.

Some of the sculptures are remarkable as well as bronze statues and wall engravings, reliefs and mausoleums. A very striking experience tourists are encouraged to go for is visiting any of the five Jewish cemeteries, including Europe's largest site of Jewish burial in the Weissensee district.

The cemeteries are surprisingly well maintained, as the local authorities are aware of the importance of keeping this aspect of Berlin's history alive. However, the maintenance would not be possible without generous donations from private individuals, foundations and the state lottery.

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