

HOW DANGEROUS IS BERLIN FOR CITIZENS AND VISITORS?



Is there a concerning level of violence in the German capital? Berlin has been in the news multiple times this year due to three high-profile security debates, all connected to the contentious issue of migration. The first incident involved young people and men throwing firecrackers at police and firefighters in some city areas on New Year's Eve. Later in the summer, there was outrage over fights and riots at public swimming pools. Recently, a rape committed by several men in Görlitzer Park in Berlin-Kreuzberg made headlines.

The park has an ongoing problem with drug dealers, which has become a part of the security debate. These men can be seen standing in front of the entrances, on the paths, between trees, or in the surrounding streets. On a Monday evening in August, more than 100 men belonged to the dealer scene and were counted throughout the area. Most of them were refugees from Africa, often without work permits. Some of these men address pedestrians or cyclists in a friendly tone, asking, "Hey, how are you?" or "Would you like something?" They offer marijuana and harder drugs. Most passers-by walk on despite their offers, and sometimes sellers and buyers withdraw to hand over.

Many tourists often ask if Berlin is a safe city to visit. This topic is discussed on various internet portals, including the official visitor portal Visit Berlin. While the city is considered "fundamentally safe," it's important to note that crime still occurs, and visitors should take specific security measures. This includes avoiding dark parks and corners at night.

In September, Berlin's Governing Mayor, Kai Wegner (CDU), announced a "security summit" to address the concerning situation in Görlitzer Park. He stated that the park's current state is unacceptable and must be improved. Additionally, measures will be taken to enhance the security situation throughout Berlin.

When comparing the violence statistics for major German cities based on population, Berlin ranks second with 14,135 registered crimes per 100,000 residents, following Frankfurt am Main. However, this does not necessarily mean Berlin is a dangerous city. Most crimes are related to theft and fraud rather than violence. Berlin, the largest city with almost four million inhabitants, attracts pickpockets and organized car thieves from Eastern Europe due to its location and popularity among tourists. This contributes to the higher numbers of registered crimes. On the other hand, Munich is considered the safest city in Germany, with only around 5,800 crimes per 100,000 inhabitants.

The level of danger in the city depends on various factors such as location, time, and group affiliation. For instance, the city center is concerned about security because many pubs and clubs operate without curfews, kiosks selling alcohol around the clock, and a lenient attitude towards drugs. The police often report incidents of violent encounters among intoxicated individuals at night, particularly in large underground and suburban train stations. Additionally, the presence of street dealers in Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain, as well as the drug addict scene in some parts of Neukölln, makes many visitors feel uneasy.

Women have also reported experiencing harassment, insults, sexual assaults, and attacks, not limited to crowded inner city areas. In a recent report by RBB broadcaster, two young women living

in Weißensee in the north and heading out in Mitte said they must keep their guard everywhere they go. They emphasized that the problem is not limited to parks; instead, they encounter a widespread issue at every stop and street they walk through.

There has been a significant increase in the number of assaults against women in public areas in Berlin. Between 2019 and 2022, the reported incidents of physical injuries, threats, sexual offenses, and robberies on streets and parks at night rose from approximately 3000 to 4210. Most of these incidents occurred in the pub districts of Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg.

For quite some time, travel websites have cautioned same-sex couples and Jewish individuals to avoid certain Berlin areas at night. This is due to frequent incidents of insults or attacks. On the television program "Maybrit Illner," comedian and actor Hape Kerkeling shared that he and his spouse relocated from Berlin to Cologne. They made this decision because the atmosphere in Berlin had become significantly more homophobic. They left with a heavy hearts but have not regretted their move thus far.

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