

DESTINATION

LEIPZIG

Town Hall



Leipzig — Big City Fun, Small Town Charm

By Christina Fernandes



If you think of Eastern Germany as stuck in the past, with lots of Soviet remnants and little charm, don't visit Leipzig. Your illusions will be shattered.

I admit that as a "Wessie" (a German from the former West) I had to readjust my image of the East after visiting this fabulous city.

Of course my stereotyped views of the ex-DDR were not exactly fair; in fact they were totally unfounded. The only place in the region I had ever been was Berlin-Pankow, the part of the capital that used to be socialist. But after almost two decades as one unified country, it seems that the "Ossies" (Germans from the former East) still struggle

for acknowledgement that they have just as much to offer as the West in terms of history, culture and, generally, things to do.

On the rare occasions I used to think of the Eastern cities, of which Leipzig is one of the most prominent, my mind would conjure up images of concrete, Soviet-style apartment buildings and a drab atmosphere. Luckily for visitors, this is far from reality.

Not only was the weather excellent while I was there (somehow I had always thought the skies above the ex-DDR were constantly grey), but Leipzig is a treasure trove of sight-seeing gems.

The City at a Glance

If you are into classical music, Leipzig will definitely be your cup of tea. The composer Johann Sebastian Bach was cantor at the Thomas Church from 1723 to 1750, 19th cen-

tury composers Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn Bartoly used to live here and Richard Wagner was born here in 1813.

Museums are ten a penny in Leipzig as well — whether you are interested in the region's former socialist spy apparatus, applied art, anthropology or the city's history in general.

Architecture fans will also find plenty on offer to feast their eyes on; Renaissance buildings especially, with their elaborate decorations, are strongly represented.

If you are looking for a bit less intellectualism and a little more nature, Leipzig's zoo is the way forward. It's one of the oldest and most diverse in the world and the most popular leisure facility in town.

You will also find all the regular European fare in Leipzig — plenty of churches, street cafés, markets and shopping streets.

And if you can't be bothered to coordinate the details yourself, you can always take one of the organised tours of the city and its surroundings offered by the Leipzig Tourist Information.

History & Culture

Leipzig has seen its fair share of troubles and you can bear witness to its struggles on your visits if you so wish.

It is here that the peaceful revolution of 1989 was born. On October 9 that year, 70,000 people assembled in Nikolai Church to say a prayer for peace and then continued into Leipzig's streets in a non-violent demon-



Skyline

stration for freedom of opinion, assembly and travel in the DDR.

These so-called Monday demonstrations entered German history books as the first peaceful revolution in the country, as other DDR cities followed Leipzig's example and brought about the changes that eventually led to Germany's re-unification.

You can visit the Archives of the Citizens Movement, the Museum in the Round Corner (housed in the former headquarters of the Stasi, the DDR's spy apparatus), the Contemporary History Forum and the Nikolai Church to learn about this part of Leipzig's, and the region's, history.

All of these places can be visited in one go and on foot. Leipzig's historical centre is relatively small and can be covered easily in a day. How much time you need in total depends on how long you wish to spend in each museum.



Thomas Church

A short walk from Nikolai Church you will find the Old Townhall, one of the most beautiful Renaissance buildings in Germany. In the same area, you can also visit Katharinen Street, a particularly scenic stretch that is home to a string of Renaissance buildings.

From here, you can stroll on to Thomas Church, where Johann Sebastian Bach was cantor, and you can also visit his grave and see a Bach sculpture here.

After visiting the church, you can make a trip to the Grassi Museum which has applied arts, anthropology and musical instruments on offer.

If you haven't quenched your thirst for museums after this, you can visit plenty more, including the Mendelssohn and Schumann houses (where the composers used to live), the Museum of Antiquity, the Gallery of Contemporary Art, the Bach Museum and the German Book and Literature Museum.

All the information you need, including a map and a suggested city walk is available at the Leipzig Tourist Information.

Culinary Delights

Leipzig's inhabitants are well known for their hospitality and there is many a place to amuse your taste buds here.

If you feel homesick for Bahrain, you may want to visit Zum Arabian Coffee Baum, one of the oldest coffee houses in Europe.

The establishment is housed in a charming Renaissance building and it has a quintessentially European flare, save for a little room on the third floor, which strangely is filled with Persian carpets, Arabian furniture and lamps as well as shishas.

The café is home to a small museum where you can learn about its past, so it's a good place for a quick bite of history and a sip or two of java.

The Coffee Baum is not the only historical culinary establishment in the city. The Auerbachkeller pub was made famous through its mention in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's drama *Faust*. The writer studied in Leipzig from 1765 to 1768 and you can view sculptures of scenes from his drama in this historic waterhole.

For a great selection of gastronomic delights visit the "Drallewatsch", a stretch designed solely for the pleasure of the palate. A diversity of foods and drinks are on display here.

Leipzig offers up international fare — including Italian, Chinese, Indian and everything in between — alongside traditional German cuisine. You can find cafés, pubs and bars ranging from funky lounges to homey inns.

Shopping

There are 28 historical passages in Leipzig. Today, their antique hallways are filled with modern shops and restaurants. These are great places to visit if you feel like having your cultural fancy tickled at the same time as hunting a bargain.

Looking for more standard fare? Small boutiques next to established international chain shops throng the Flaniermeile, the city's shopping street. You will also find all the well-known German department stores here.

For an extraordinary shopping experience, visit what used to be the largest spinning mill in Europe. Today it's the place with the highest density of art in Germany. You will find everything from fashion and furniture designers to art galleries and carpenters here. The distinctive atmosphere within the brick walls is an added bonus and you could visit a musical or dance performance after doing your shopping.

The fancier shoppers among you may want



Evangelical Church

to visit the Mädlerpassage with its designer boutiques for suitable offers.

For some quick shopping before climbing on or after hopping off the train, the arcades in the Central Station are a great pit stop.

Finally, if you want to buy souvenirs, the Market Arcades, located in the main market square, are the place to go.

If my visit to Leipzig has taught me one thing it's this: East is most certainly not least. I am not disappointed by having my misconceptions shattered; in fact I'm delighted with my newfound appreciation for the ex-DDR.

For information visit www.leipzig.de. ●



Renaissance Facade