Changing Berlin

HERE, I AM IN BERLIN AGAIN AFTER 26 YEARS. IT HAS ALL CHANGED

By Mohammed Reza Amirinia

CATEGORY: TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



POTSDAMER PLATZ
The City's Cultural Hub

BRANDENBURG GATE
A Symbolic Monument

CHECKPOINT CHARLIE
Gateway of the Cold War

MUSEUM ISLAND
Five Museums, One Island

REVISITING AFTER 26 YEARS

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Here, I am in Berlin again after 26 years. It has all changed. I can no longer recognise the difference between East and West

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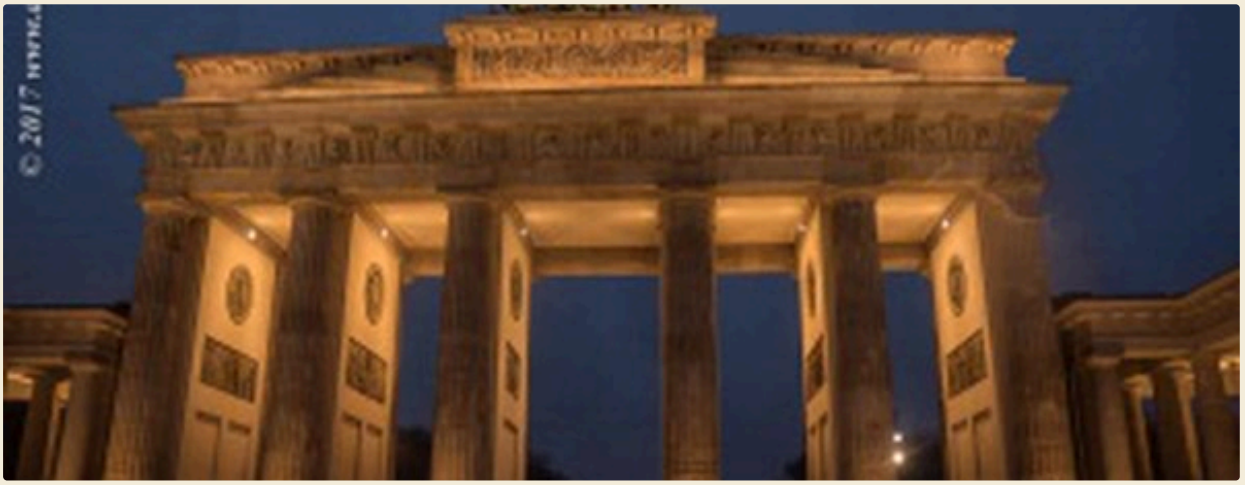
Berlin Palast

It was the summer of 1990 when I visited Berlin for the first time, shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. I was on a train journey with my family from Frankfurt to Berlin and we were supposed to get off at Berlin Central Train Station in what was West Berlin. By mistake we departed at the Berlin Friedrichstraße station in East Berlin. The station looked very old but it had a very interesting style.

We eventually got a taxi. Our driver had to take us to an address in West Berlin. We passed through streets lined with grey-coloured blocks of apartments. A variety of eastern European cars such as Moskvitch, LADA and Trabant dominated the roads. As we arrived in the west part of the city, it was as though we had entered a different world. I could immediately see two distinct architectural styles and diverse cultural settings. The city was very busy and tourists from all over the world were rushing to Berlin to see the changes.

II

Here, I am in Berlin again after 26 years. It has all changed. I can no longer recognise the difference between East and West. My guide started a tour of the city from Potsdamer Platz, a place that used to be no man's land between two walls in the communist era. A small part of the wall is kept as memory and a line on the ground shows its directions. The platz has now developed into an upscale cultural hub of the city. Indeed, the Theater am Potsdamer Platz built in 1998, has become a worldwide prestigious theatre for musical performances and, during the annual film festival, the Berlinale Palast screens films during the film festival. It is surrounded by cinemas such as CINEMAXX and other screens in the high rise building of Sony Center. There are also hotels, restaurants, cafes and Arkaden – the large shopping mall. You could do all your shopping in a relaxed environment.



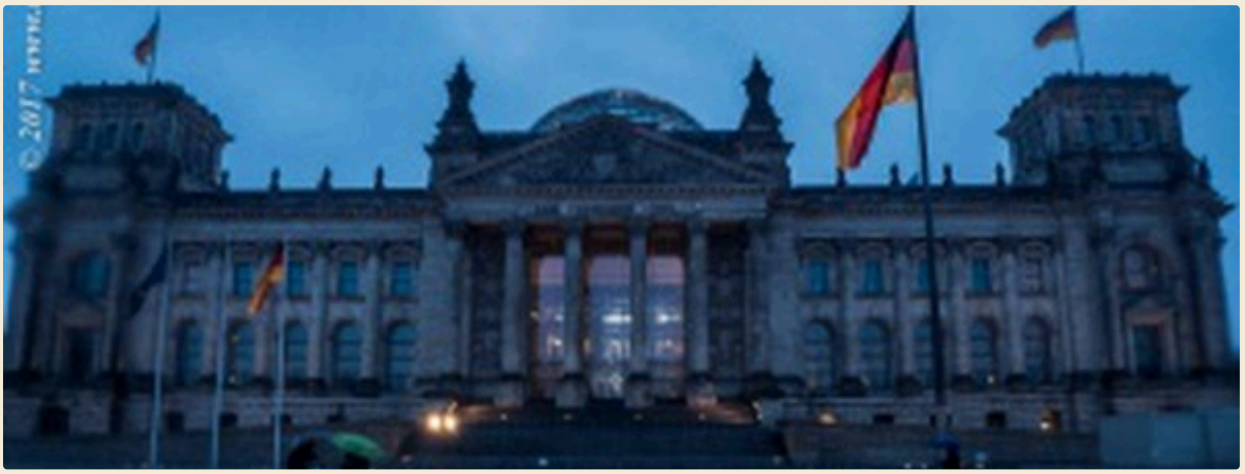
the Brandenburg Gate at night

The German Spy Museum located in Leipziger Platz near Potsdamer is a "must see" attraction to understand the awareness of spying and intelligence activities during the division between the east and west of the city. Leipziger Platz, an octagonal square, was another casualty of the war which became a no man's land, but now has become a vibrant place at the centre of Berlin.

I was in the city last year to attend the 66th Berlin International Film Festival. Despite the cold winter, Berlin is heated with the joyful enthusiasm of watching new cinema releases. I was told that, at this time of the year, Berlin was always very chilly and often snow-covered, but I was lucky with the weather; there were just infrequent showers. Besides viewing the latest films of the world of cinema, it was a great opportunity for me to spend some time in the city and to recapture my perception of one of the greatest historical capital cities in Europe.

III

I was curious to see the changes in the city. There was no sign of the old Russian cars except in museums or showrooms. I kept asking my guide to show the eastern part of the city. He said that there is no longer any difference between East and West. In fact, the houses and buildings are more authentic and expensive in the East, as it is highly developed and more people would like to live there.



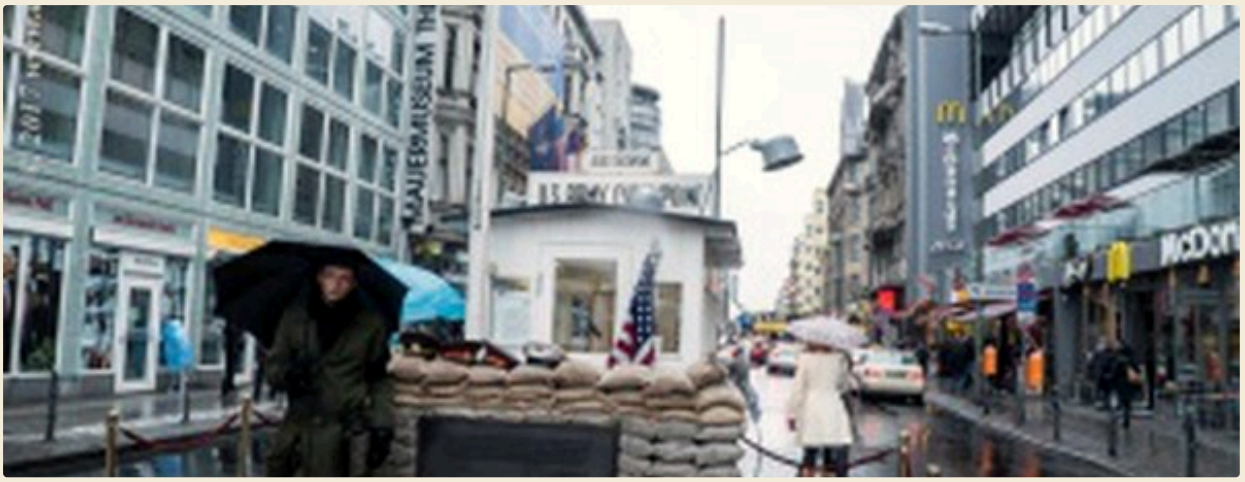
The Reichstag building

I took the train to Brandenburg Gate, built in the eighteenth century and in a place that once the city gate and which has now become one of the most famous landmarks of Berlin. The gate, which witnessed many marches and events throughout its history, is a symbolic monument of Europe and a mighty display of the power of Germany. The gate at the entry to a large leafy boulevard leads to the victory column and is not only a major tourist attraction but is one of the most photographed places in Berlin.

There is a large open park in front of the Gate. In the north side, there is the Reichstag building, built in 19th century, another symbol of German Empire and which has housed the German parliament since reunification.

Along the trendy boulevard of Unter den Linden, which is lined with lime trees on both sides you will find embassies such as those of the United States and Russia., We turned right into to the Friedrich Straße, which is a major shopping area in Berlin including several boutique shops and large department stores such as the French branch of the Galeries Lafayette. The posh street and one of cultural hubs of the city looks very classical with many stylish buildings. The street leads to the eastern part of the city where Checkpoint Charlie is located.

IV



Checkpoint Charlie

The historic location of Checkpoint Charlie was the main gateway on the border between East and West Berlin, during the cold war. This historic site is a major attraction in the city and the kiosk and the guard resemble those images from films when East Berliners tried to escape to the west during the life of the wall. The Checkpoint Charlie Museum (Mauer Museum) is the exhibition of the security of the border control and tells astonishing tales of escape as well as possessing an extensive display of innovative tools and hidden places used in getaway cars as people sought ever more intricate ways to try to escape to the west.

In the corner of Friedrichstraße and Zimmerstraße, you can visit "The asisi Panorama – The Wall" to view the panaromic story of Berlin as seen on both sides of the wall in the 1980s. There are also parts of the wall outside for picture opportunities.

After that long walk into historyI returned towards Unter den Linden to visit the Gendarmenmarkt, a seventeenth century is symbol of coherence and the site of three significant landmarks of the city in the centre of Mitte neighborhood: the Berlin Konzerthaus or the Theater am Gendarmenmarkt built on 1821, Französischer Dom (the French Cathedral) and The Neue Kirche (German Church) built in seventeenth century. A magnet for tourists, the centre of the square is ornamented with the statue of Friedrich Schiller, the famous German poet and philosopher who died in 1805.

V

On the south side of the Unter den Linden is Bebelplatz, thee famous square surrounded by Die Alte Bibliothek (the old library) and the Berlin State Opera House. The square is also well known for another reason, as the site of book burning by the Nazis during a notorious ceremony on 10th May 1933. A memorial under a glass plate in the square symbolises the burnt books and is there to remind people of the cruelty of the Nazis.



Bebelplatz – where books were burnt eighty years ago

Museum Island on the River Spree in the centre of Mitte is where many historical buildings are located. The eighteenth century UNESCO world heritage site consists of five adjacent museums. The complex comprises the Pergamon, the Neues, the Bode, the Altes and Alte Nationalgalerie Museums on a small island but you will need to spend at least a day to see the wonders of the world that these museums reveal.

Just opposite the Museum Island, the Zeughaus built in the late seventeenth century is the oldest building in Unter den Linden. This unique structure, built in the baroque style, houses the German Historical Museum which chronicles German and European history and is one of the most important attractions in Berlin.

On the entry into the small Island, there is the Lustgarten Park. The Altes Museum built in new classical style in 19th century is located in the north-western side of the park and, on the eastern side is the Berlin Cathedral which was built in the early twentieth century.

VI

Last year I only had time for a short tour as my main interest was to see the films at the Berlin Film Festival. It is festival time again in Berlin from the 9th to the 17th of February, a fantastic period to be there for the Berlinale and to experience one of the best international events in Europe. This year, I believe this year there are even more exciting films to be featured.

I just wish I was there to see them!

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