

Welcome to Berlin

I have visited Berlin twice over the last 20 years so I cannot claim to be an expert or have extensive knowledge. There are many guide books to the city available either in hard copy or online. You can also find numerous guides online to what to photograph.

This guide is therefore a personal take on what I found to be of interest during my last two visits, bearing in mind that the first trip in 2004 was a family trip with two young teenagers to entertain!

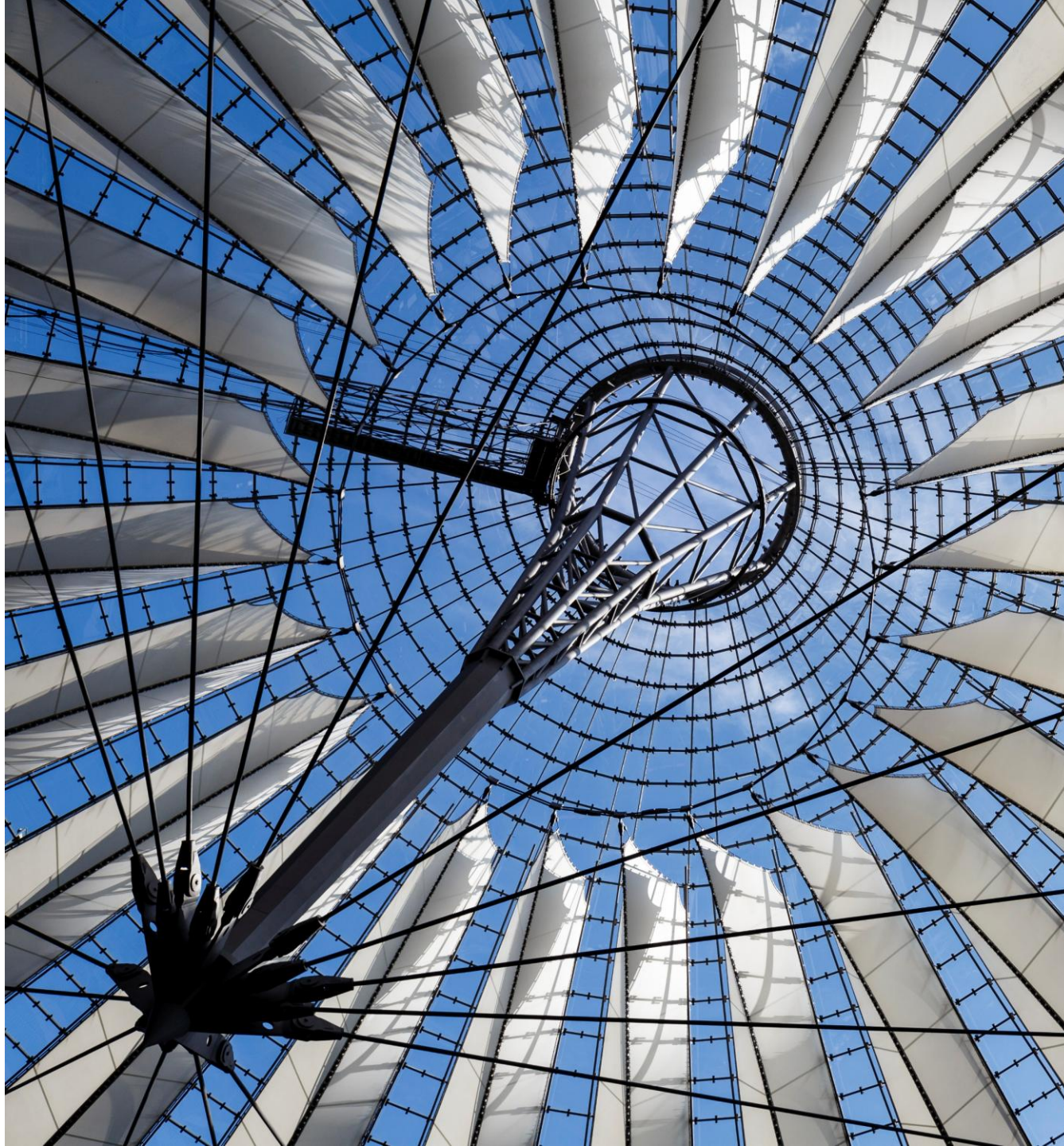
My view is necessarily through the eyes of someone with an interest in architecture and the built environment. However, Berlin is a very diverse city in terms of cultures and culture. Art galleries and museums range from conventional to seriously whacky and avant garde. It has a vibrant street art scene and it's back story as a divided city in the cold war era is endlessly fascinating.

The city has an excellent transport system allowing connections around the central area and way beyond. However, working your way round various sites in one day can be time consuming so it is good to have an outline plan for your day to group locations together.

Some of the buildings require pre-booking to visit and I have identified this in the text where applicable.

I have created a Google 'My Map' with the locations identified herein pinned and itemised. I will circulate this separately.

Chris Houldsworth





Das Center, Potsdamer Platz

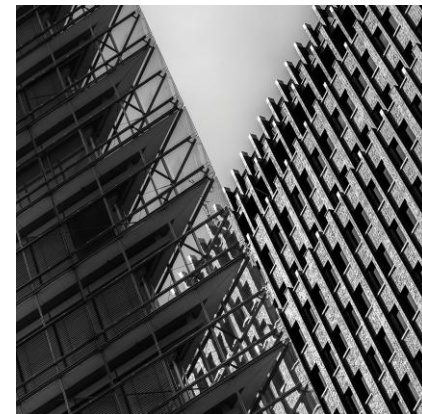
This complex, previously known as The Sony Centre, is a 15 minute walk from Ibis City Potsdamer Platz. It was designed by Helmut Jahn and is a multi-purpose commercial complex with shops, restaurants, offices, etc.

Great for spectacular structural and spatial shots using a wide angle lens within the atrium. The buildings around the perimeter are less interesting viewed from the outside but distant views can capture the cone.



Potsdamer Platz

This is an area that was divided by the wall for many years but on reunification it became an area of regeneration with buildings by numerous world famous architects, particularly along Linkstrasse. The subways are great for abstracts.

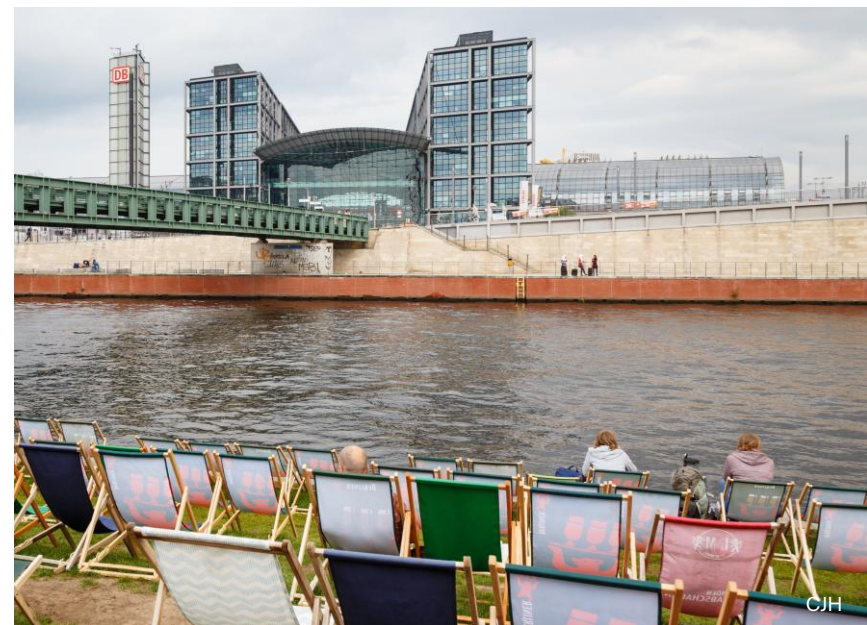




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Hauptbahnhof 3XN Cube

Berlin's main railway station is a multi-level terminus with tracks on three levels. It's worth a visit to get some interesting 3D effects. Top right is 3XN Cube Berlin, part of the new Europacity, and adjacent to the Hauptbahnhof.



Jewish Museum

This museum is just a 15 minute walk from the Ibis. Designed by the British-Hungarian architect Daniel Libeskind it has a very photographable exterior for abstract compositions. The memory Void in the basement of the building is an eerie space full of cast iron discs to represent the faces of jews murdered by the Nazis.

The museum itself is crammed full of historical Jewish memorabilia but is designed on a processional basis, like going round Ikea! Admission appears to be free but advance tickets are required)



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The Reichstag

The seat of the German Parliament, now called the Bundestag, was recreated by British architect Norman Foster and is a potent symbol of the reunification of Germany. Visitors to the dome can look down into the legislative chamber in the heart of the building but also get excellent views over the city. Foster preserved many of the features of the building which describe it's history, including graffiti scrawled by Russian soldiers during the capture of Berlin after WW2.

To visit you must pre-register for a visit and can choose a 90-minute guided tour or a self guided visit to the dome.

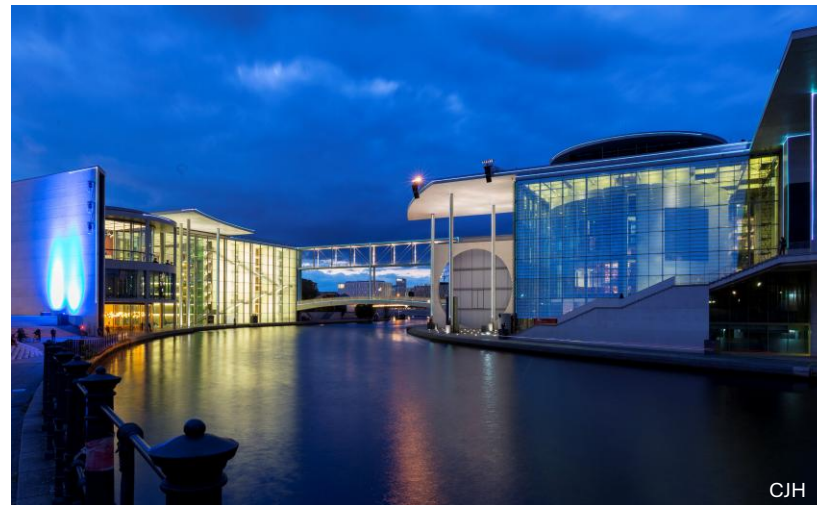
<https://www.bundestag.de/en/visittheBundestag/dome/registration-245686>



Berlin Philharmonie

A ground breaking design for a concert hall by Hans Scharoun, on which many future halls were modelled including Nottingham's Royal Centre. The exterior is designed in an Expressionist style and is clad in glistening gold cladding. Good for abstracts and detail shots.





Marie-Elisabeth-Luders Haus

Large government science building which has become a bit of an Instagram star due to its bold shapes and geometry, executed in concrete and glass. It is worth visiting at different times of the day as the light moves round it.

Unfortunately the evening light show finishes on 3rd October 2025



Brandenburg Gate

A must-see feature in the city. However, it can be busy at most times so choose your time carefully if you want a shot without too many tourists.

The Holocaust Memorial

Only 5 minutes walk from the Brandenburg Gate, this is a memorial to those murdered by the Nazis. Some of the blocks are randomly off the vertical, intentionally to disorientate.





Kurfurstendamm

A busy commercial shopping area with mainly commercial buildings but you can find some occasional shots

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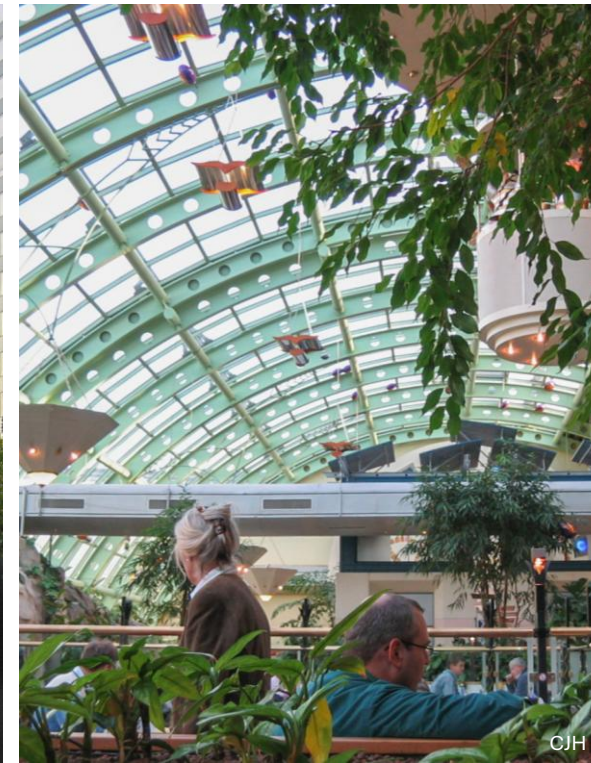
Kaufhaus des Westens (KaDeWe)

Not really a photo opportunity but the second largest department store in Europe after Harrods in London and not far from Gedachtnitskirche. It features a posh rooftop tea garden if you fancy treating yourself (below).



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Kaiser Wilhelm Gedachtniskirche

This is popularly considered one of Berlin's landmark buildings. Near to the Zoological Gardens and at the east end of the busy Kurfurstendam it is situated in the area which was the centre of West Berlin before reunification. The new church was built in 1959-63 next to the ruined church tower, the only remnant of a bombing raid in 1943. It is notable for its minimalist design and its magnificent modern stained glass.

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Hackesher Markt area

The attraction here is the restored Hackescher Hof, a notable courtyard complex situated adjacent to the Hackescher Markt. The complex consists of eight interconnected courtyards, accessed through a main arched entrance at number 40 Rosenthaler Straße. It was designed in the Art Nouveau or Jugendstil style. It is also the location of the Ampelman shop (bottom right), the place to get merchandise of the iconic green man. The nearby Hackescher Markt S-Bahn station has an interesting façade with visibility of the Fernsehturm for juxtaposed compositions.

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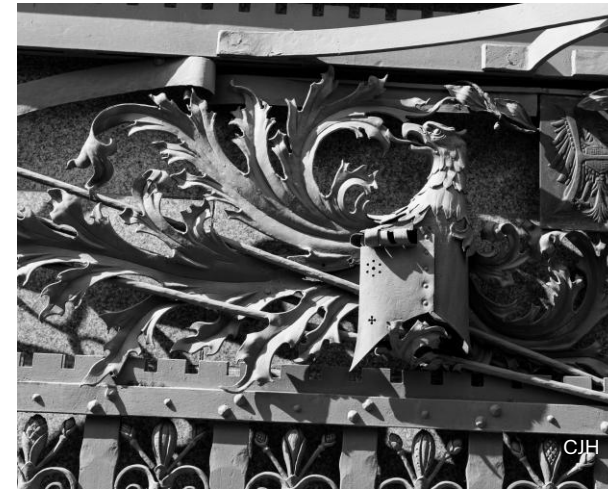


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Trams, trains and stations

Berlin is served by an efficient and frequent tram, train and metro system which also presents many photo opportunities. Many of the U-bahn and S-bahn stations survived the bombing of the second world war but still bear the scars. Later stations, such as Friedrichstrasse, are examples of GDR architectural styles. Friedrichstrasse was a famous border crossing in the cold war. Trams can make good night-time subjects but be aware of personal safety issues if venturing out at night with expensive camera gear.





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East Side Gallery

A long section of the Berlin Wall (Die Mauer) has been preserved and has become a huge outdoor gallery for street art by more than 100 artists from over 20 countries. Some of the works have since become iconic and world famous including the fraternal kiss pic of Erich Honnecker and Leonid Brezhnev.

You should also see some Trabis down there. If you wish to see more of this famous, cheaply produced car there is a museum near Checkpoint Charlie.



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Street Art

There are numerous locations to view some very creative street art in Berlin. These include:

- Rosenthaler Strasse and the Haus Schwarzenberg
- Bulowstrasse, although from recent Streetviews this area may have become less colourful of late
- The area surrounding East Side Gallery

There are various websites devoted to Berlin Urban Art.

Try:

<https://www.visitberlin.de/en/urban-art-berlin>



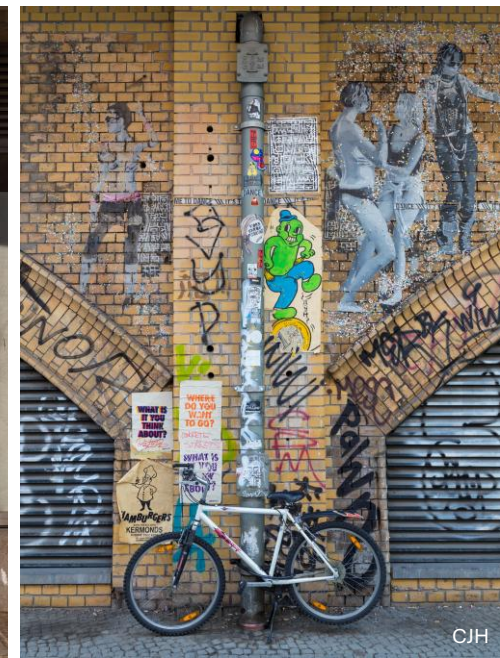
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New National Gallery (Neue Nationalgalerie)

Designed by Mies van der Rohe, this building was renovated in 2021 by the British architect David Chipperfield, restoring the magic of the original lightweight glass and steel concept. It houses a range of exhibitions. Entry to the gallery costs 16 euros but there is a free Volkswagen-sponsored art4all scheme which will get you in between 4pm and 8pm for free.

The building offers opportunities for modernist minimalist images dependent on how busy it is and the time of day.





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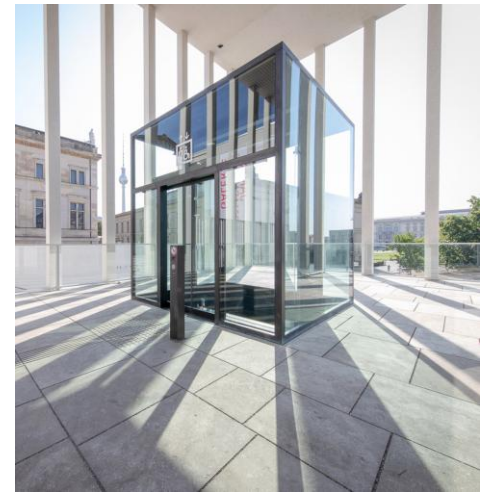
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Neues Museum

Situated on Museum Island, this houses a huge archaeological collection. The building was renovated by British architect David Chipperfield in 2003 to 2009 after lying largely derelict since the second world war. The result is both a renovated building and a truly modern museum. The interiors of the building are the real features, following an approach common to many major Berlin renovations, contrasting the original degraded building fabric with modern interventions to tell the story of the building through it's life cycle. Entry is 14 euros.

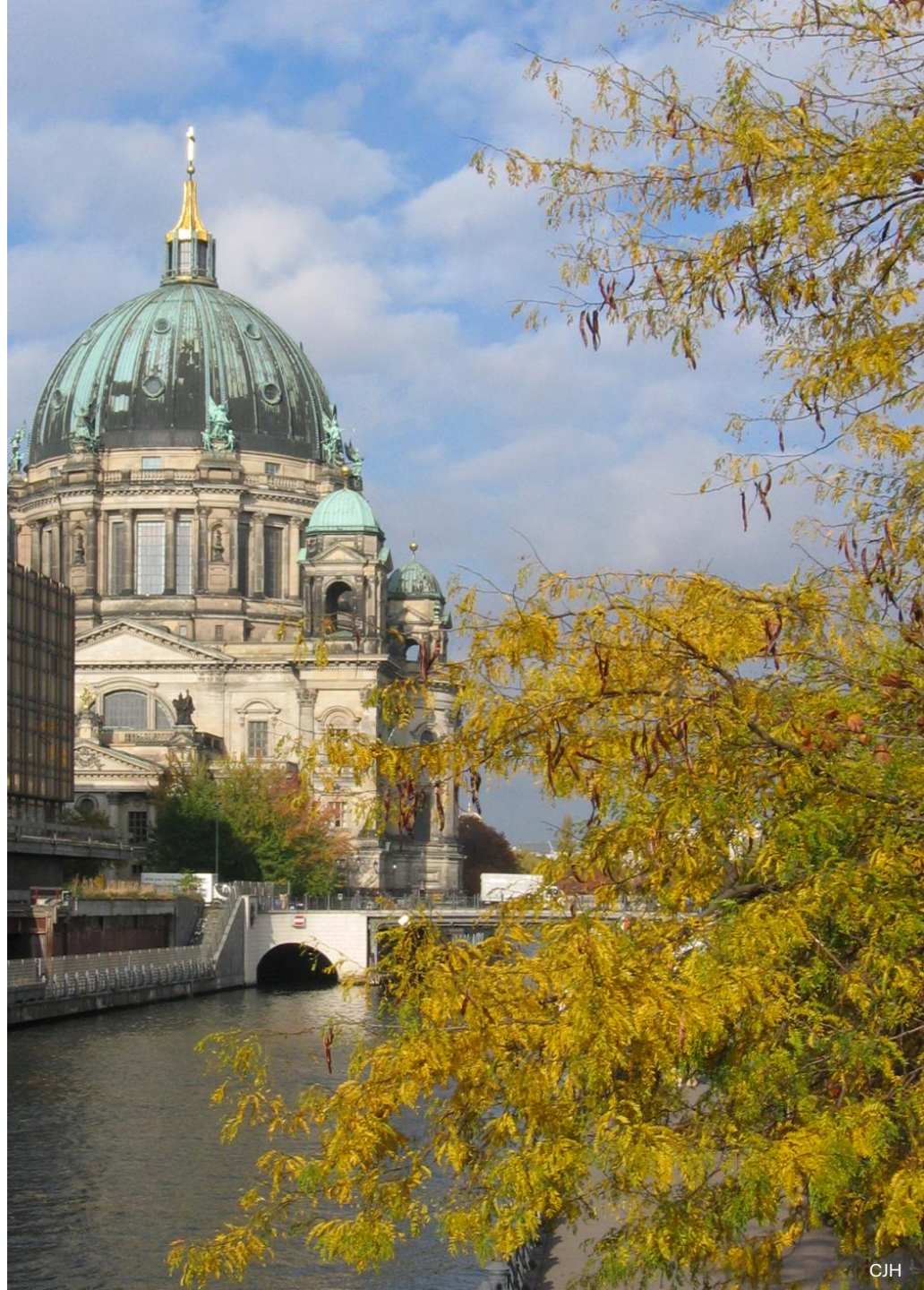
James Simon Galerie

This new gallery, adjacent to the Neues Museum, was completed in 2019. Like the neighbour, it was designed by David Chipperfield. The simple white exterior is carried throughout the interior in high quality concrete. It has been universally praised as a masterpiece of modern classical design and it needs to be experienced in the context of the overall Museum Island redevelopment.



The banks of the River Spree

It can be very pleasant to simply wander along the banks of the Spree, taking in views of The Berliner Dom and Museum Island, grabbing a coffee or a beer on the way.





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Fernsehturm and Alexanderplatz

Berlin's television tower was built in 1969 by the East German government. It is still the tallest building in Germany. You can take a ride up to the viewing platform on payment of 25 euros for a spectacular view of the city.

Alexanderplatz is Berlin's main eastern central square with lots of shops, restaurants, hotels and attractions. It is a busy spot for tram shots, street photography and for juxtaposing the soviet era buildings with the nearby church.



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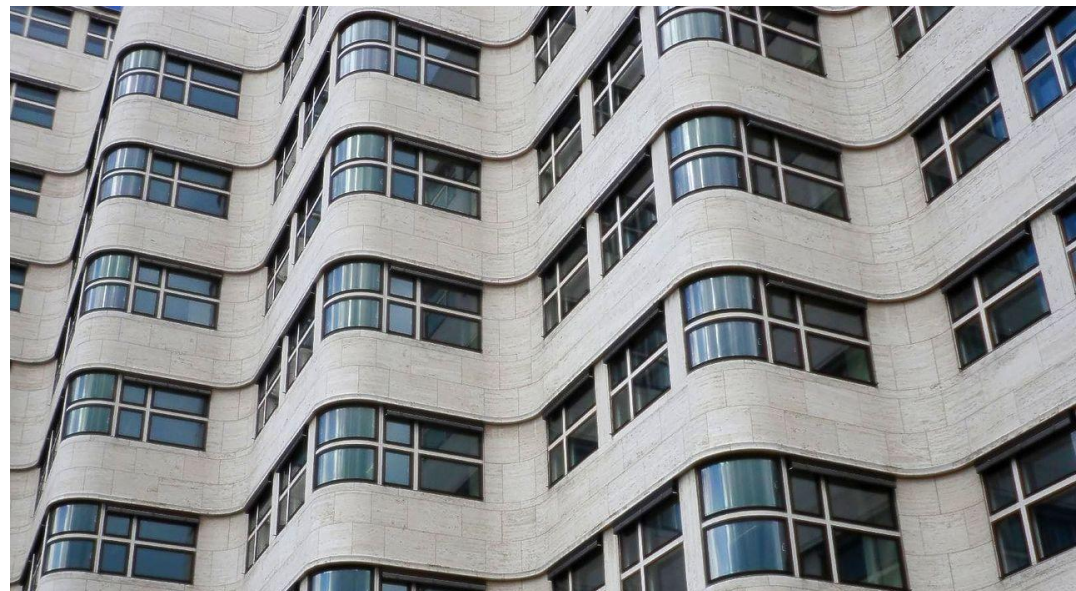


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Das Shell-Haus

A 1930's office building by local architect Emil Fahrenkamp. It was occupied during WW2 by the Naval High Command and is now occupied by the Federal Defence Ministry.





The Tempodrom

Situated only a 6 minute walk from the Ibis City Hotel, the Tempodrom is one of Berlin's major entertainment venues. Modelled on the circus tent which was the venue's original home, the major concert area in the Tempodrom can hold 3800 people and the building includes two more interior attractions: the Liquidrom, a huge salt bath with speakers, to create a multi-dimensional spa experience, as well as a bistro below a wooden floored, terrace level beer garden, open in season.

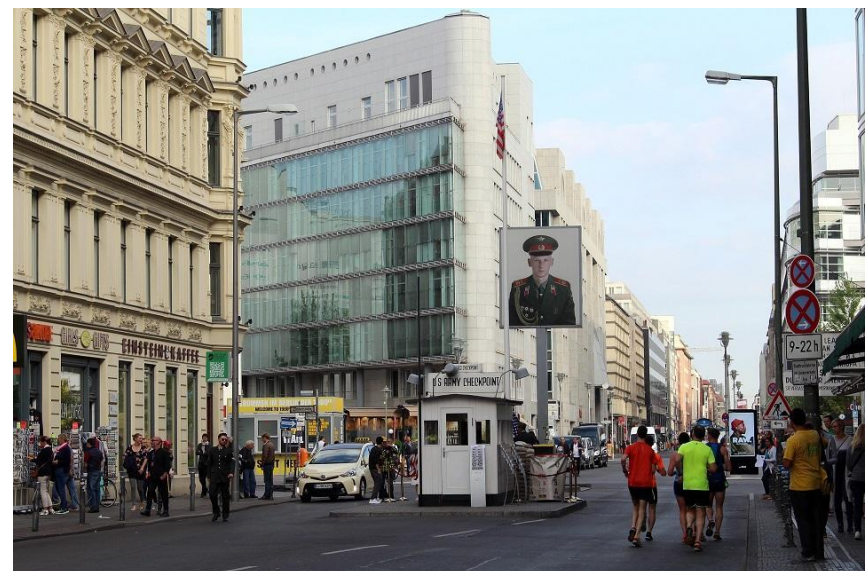


Checkpoint Charlie Museum and Crossing

This checkpoint was the third one that was established during the cold war, (the earlier ones being Checkpoints Alpha and Bravo of course). The original checkpoint was removed and the replica that is there now is a tourist attraction. However, the museum may be worth a visit and you may remember some of the iconic photos on display, if you are old enough! Tickets are 18.50 euros and reviews are somewhat mixed.

The museum is housed in a former residential block, designed by American architect Perter Eisenmann, as part of the Internationale Bauausstellung and it is often described as Post-Modern in style.

Checkpoint Charlie is a 9 minute walk from Ibis Berlin City Potsdamer Platz.





Albert Einstein Tower, Potsdam

This famous example of Expressionist architecture is situated in Potsdam, 16 miles from Berlin. It takes around 55 minutes by train plus 20 minutes walk in Potsdam.

Designed by the German architect Erich Mendelsohn, the building is known to architects and students worldwide as an icon of the style. Built to test Einstein's theory of relativity, the tower houses a solar telescope and is still an active astrophysical observatory today. External access is free but the interior can only be seen as part of a guided tour.



There are various other observatory buildings in the adjacent science park (above).





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Haus der Kulturen der Welt

The House of World Cultures is situated in the Tiergarten and is a bit of cold war history. Nicknamed “The Pregnant Oyster” it was the USA’s contribution to Interbau, the International Building Exhibition in 1957. Both JFK and Jimmy Carter gave speeches here.

Photographically, the bold shape is of interest but whether it will be illuminated at night is not known. There are various events programmed for week commencing 5th October but it might be worth a reconnaissance early in the week to see if the building is normally illuminated.



