

Jonny Whitlam



BERLIN HISTORY WALKS

Discovering
the city on foot

BeBra Verlag



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Reconstruction of the feared "Death Strip" at the Berlin Wall Memorial

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FOREWORD

I moved to Berlin at twenty-one, shortly after finishing a politics degree, and guiding became my first job after university. I've been doing it ever since. More than fifteen years on, I am still exploring new corners of a city that has altered the course of world history more than once. A walk through Berlin is never simply a walk. It is a movement through layers of time, shaped by upheaval, ambition, ideology and war, each still visible if you just know what to look for.

This is what distinguishes Berlin from so many other cities visited for their postcard views. Berlin does not present itself immediately. It is not conventionally or effortlessly beautiful. It asks you to look closer, to scratch beneath the surface, and rewards you when you do. The more closely you study it, the more you find: traces of vanished regimes, experiments in architecture and urban planning, unanswered questions about memory, and moments of ordinary life lived through extraordinary times.

This book offers five walks designed to guide readers through those layers. They cover subjects that people most often ask about, but also places that help make sense of the city as a whole. They are written for both visitors and Berliners alike – anyone who wants to understand it beyond the obvious landmarks. Walking is still the best way to do that. It allows the city's history to unfold at a natural pace.

The first route in this book is similar to the first tour I ever led, albeit in more refined form than the version I attempted in 2010. It's intended for newcomers and first-timers, giving a clear starting point and an overview of the main threads that run through Berlin's story. From there, the book turns to the most notorious chapter in that story: the years of the Nazi dictatorship. The walk through the former government quarter examines some of the key sites of the regime and focuses deliberately on the institutions and the perpetrators who operated them. Understanding the machinery of the state that produced the crimes is part of confronting the past honestly.

The third walk moves forward to the era that followed. With the city divided after 1945, East Berlin became the capital of the German

Democratic Republic and the seat of a second dictatorship. Much of what the Socialist Unity Party built still stands today, from monumental architecture to vast housing estates. The tour looks at these structures and the systems behind them, as well as the lives shaped within and around them.

West Berlin, by contrast, is often overlooked as guided walks focus on the eastern landmarks: the Brandenburg Gate, Unter den Linden, the remnants of the Wall. The fourth tour explores the Kurfürstendamm and its surroundings, a district full of intricate, hidden stories that show the people who shaped, and were shaped by, Berlin.

The final walk steps out of the city centre altogether and into the Grunewald, a forest that reminds you how large and varied Berlin really is. It is a long route at twenty kilometres, and most people will sensibly choose to cycle it or break it at the midpoint near Grunewald station. The walk follows the landscape rather than a single theme, linking hidden stories with wide views and quiet paths. It ends as any good day in Berlin should: at a beer garden with a view across the water.

Thank you for choosing to explore Berlin with this book. I hope these walks help you understand the big things, find the small things, and get more from the city with each step.