

# Understand Berlin

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# Berlin Today

Berlin is truly a 24/7 city, where a spirit of innovation, tolerance and levity roars with unapologetic abandon. Perpetually in flux, Berlin refuses to be pigeonholed, preferring to knit together a new identity from the yarn of its complex history. You can fairly feel the collision between past and future, what is possible and what is realistic, and the hopes and aspirations of people who've joined together from around the globe in one big experiment.

## Best on Film

**Symphony of a City** (1927) Fascinating silent documentary captures a day in the life of Berlin in the 1920s.

**Downfall** (2004) Chilling account of Hitler's last 12 days holed up in his Berlin bunker.

**Good Bye, Lenin!** (2003) Cult comedy about a young East Berliner who replicates the GDR for his ailing mother after the fall of the Wall.

**The Lives of Others** (2006) This Academy Award-winner reveals the stranglehold the East German secret police had on innocent people.

## Best in Print

**Goodbye to Berlin** (Christopher Isherwood; 1939) Brilliant semi-autobiographical account of early 1930s Berlin through the eyes of a gay Anglo-American journalist.

**Berlin Alexanderplatz** (Alfred Döblin; 1929) This stylised meander through the seamy 1920s is still an essential Berlin text.

**Alone in Berlin** (Hans Fallada; 1947) A working-class Berlin couple become unlikely Nazi resisters following their son's battlefield death.

**Stasiland** (Anna Funder; 2004) The Stasi's vast spying apparatus seen from the perspectives of both victims and perpetrators.

## Strengthening Economy

It's been a long road to recovery but Berlin is finally seeing slivers of sunlight on the horizon. Since 2005 its economic growth has consistently outpaced that of Germany as a whole, and the city is also leading the nation in job creation. Although still 3.3% above the national average, unemployment dropped to 9.7% in May 2016, the lowest since reunification in 1990.

Berlin's transformation from an industrial to a knowledge-based society is the cause. The growth of the digital economy especially has stimulated the job market. The city today attracts some of the world's brightest minds and invests heavily in such high-tech fields as biotechnology, communication and environmental technologies and transport. In fact, Berlin is ranked among the EU's top three innovative regions.

Tourism continues to be a key force economically, with the number of overnight visitors breaking new records every year; in 2015 the city registered over 12 million visitors, accounting for 30 million overnight stays – more than ever before. And that's not even counting the roughly 100 million day trippers per year. The creative and cultural fields are booming too, and their financial impact, though less tangible, cannot be discounted.

Still, the news is not all good. Berlin has the highest number of welfare recipients of any of the 17 German federal states. And although spending has been reined in, balancing the books remains tough with a debt legacy hovering around €60 billion.

## Europe's Start-up Capital

Over the past decade, Berlin has become a breeding ground for Europe's start-up economy, attracting young global talent with its multicultural make-up, relative affordability and open-mindedness. Dubbed 'Silicon Valley on the Spree', the city has given birth to such companies