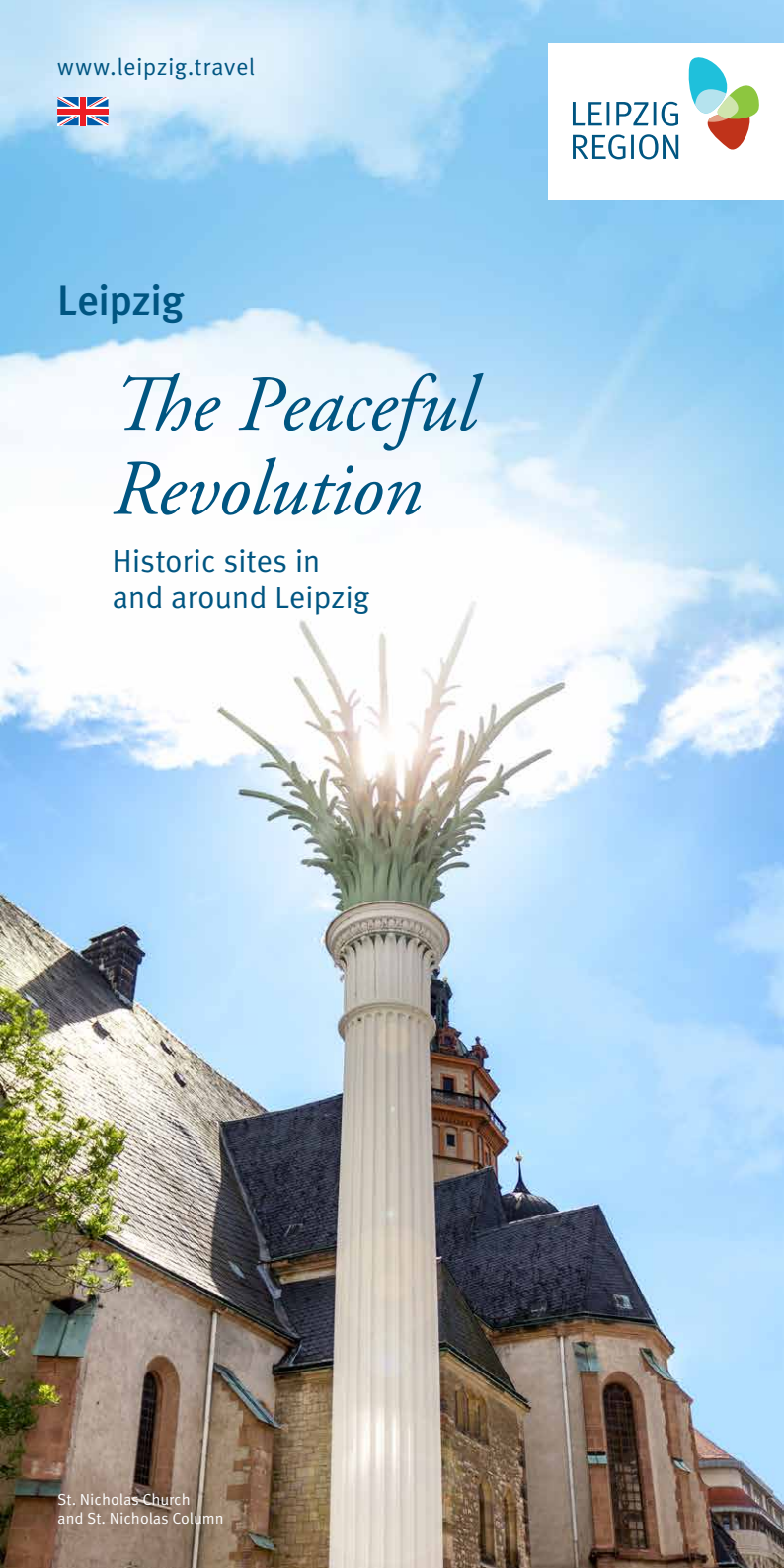
www.leipzig.travel

LEIPZIG REGION

Leipzig

The Peaceful Revolution

Historic sites in
and around Leipzig



St. Nicholas Church
and St. Nicholas Column

The beginning of the end

"Wir sind das Volk" (We are the people) – this protest song from Leipzig's Monday demonstrations represents, like no other, the energy and desire for change that rose up from the streets in autumn 1989. Many GDR citizens had already shown how unhappy they were with the living conditions under the GDR dictatorship earlier that summer, when tens of thousands fled to West Germany via Hungary. They were prepared to leave almost everything behind to start a new life of freedom in the West. But not all of those who felt constrained and controlled by the state wanted to leave their homes. Encouraged by the Solidarity trade union in Poland, by civil movements throughout central eastern Europe and even by Gorbachev's perestroika (reformation) movement, many began to hope that the GDR could also be reformed and become more democratic. These included a group of citizens who came to St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig every Monday at 5 p.m. to pray for peace. These prayer sessions were started by the city's youth pastor Wolfgang Gröger, the pastor of St. Nicholas Church Christian Führer, the pastor of St. Luke's Church Christoph Wonneberger and deacon Günther Johannsen. The sessions took place every week starting in 1982. They not only offered a place for believers to discuss their dissatisfaction with the GDR leadership, but also for dissenters, civil rights activists and opposition supporters from outside of the evangelical church.

"For an open country with free people"

On Monday, 4 September 1989, after the first prayer session following the summer break, the first Monday demonstration was held. Despite the presence of the People's Police and the Stasi secret police, over 1,000 people gathered at the St. Nicholas churchyard to demand their freedom. Signs were held high, and two young civil rights activists unrolled a banner bearing the phrase "Für ein offenes Land mit freien

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Sites of the Peaceful Revolution

The residents of Leipzig played a key role in the Peaceful Revolution. Explore the most important sites in and around Leipzig where history was written in autumn ’89. Many monuments and museums commemorate this defining period:

A St. Nicholas Church and the Pillar of Peace

This 850 year old church was the venue for the Monday peace prayers and the Monday demonstrations. The classical church column on St. Nicholas churchyard stands symbolically for all those who participated in the prayers for peace in autumn ’89. The artist Andreas Stötzner came up with the idea for the monument, which was later designed and created by sculptor Markus Gläser. He also designed the bronze plate embedded into the plaster. The footprints lead to Augustusplatz and symbolise the demonstrations on Leipzig’s inner ring road.

B Light installation on St. Nicholas churchyard

The light installation “public light – öffentliches Licht” by the artist Tilo Schulz is a metaphor for the active will of the people of Leipzig. The “plaster stones” by night represent the process of political awareness increasing in the city.

E Leipzig School Museum – School History Workshop

The museum houses a wide range of exhibitions over two floors, dealing with the history of Leipzig's schools. The workshops and events provide a unique insight into schools under the Communist dictatorship in East Germany, including the chance to experience a lesson at a polytechnic secondary school in the GDR.
Goerdelerring 20, Opening times: Mon 9 a.m. – 6 p.m., Tue – Fri 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. or by arrangement
www.schulmuseum-leipzig.de

F Leipzig Forum of Contemporary History

This exhibition, documentation and information centre explores the history of the SED dictatorship and resistance in the Soviet-occupied zone and the GDR. The permanent exhibition is currently being redesigned and will re-open at the start of November. However, temporary exhibitions are open and events take place continuously.
Grimmaische Straße 6, Opening times: Tue – Fri 9 a.m. – 6 p.m., Sat/Sun 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., **www.hdg.de**

G Leipzig Archive for the Citizen's Movement

The permanent exhibition, "Bürger auf dem Weg" (Citizens on the Move), documents the events in Leipzig from the first high-profile protest on 15 January 1989 to the decisive demonstration on 9 October 1989. The important Archive records the history of the opposition and hosts regular events.
Haus der Demokratie (House of Democracy), Bernhard-Göring-Straße 152
Opening times: Tue – Fri 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
www.archiv-buergerbewegung.de

Autumn '89 in Leipzig

4 September

First Monday demonstration on St. Nicholas churchyard during the Leipzig autumn trade fair. 1,000 people participate. West German media broadcast the events.

11 September

Over 1,000 visitors to the prayer sessions demonstrate on St. Nicholas churchyard. Many of those arrested by the police and Stasi in '89 are sentenced to months in prison following a summary trial.

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H Former central place of execution for the GDR

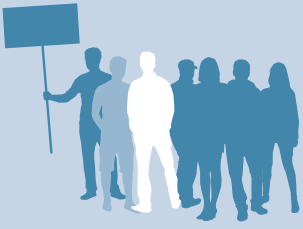
Executions took place in a closed-off area of the penal institution on Alfred-Kästner-Straße from 1960 onwards. All prisoners sentenced to death in the country – 64 in total – were executed here in complete secrecy. The death penalty was not abolished in the GDR until 1987.
Arndtstraße 48, phone: +49 (0)341 9612443
Tours: annually on Museum Night and on the Day of Open Memorials
www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de

I Stasi Bunker Museum, Machern

This is the site of the former emergency command centre built for the head of the local Stasi administration in Leipzig. It was disguised as a holiday complex. At the heart of the 5.2 hectare site is the bunker, which was erected between 1968 and 1972. In case of mobilisiation, the head of Leipzig's local Stasi administration and approximately 100 employees would have moved their offices to Machern outside Leipzig.
Lübschützer Teiche, 04827 Machern
Opening times: on the last weekend of every month,
with frequent tours from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Guided tours for groups available on request
www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de

22 September

Erich Honecker, back at work after a long illness, writes to the local leaders of the SED, telling them that these "hostile actions" are to be nipped in the bud and not to spread. He also states that the "organisers of the counter-revolutionary actions" must be isolated.



Locations in Leipzig city centre

Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing GmbH

Tourist Information
Katharinenstraße 8, 04109 Leipzig
Phone +49 (0)341 7104-260
info@ltm-leipzig.de

www.leipzig.travel,
www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de,
www.leipzig.de
leipzig.travel/blog
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youtube.com/leipzigtourismus
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European Heritage Label

Since 2012, St. Nicholas Church, the "Runde Ecke" Memorial Museum and Leipziger Ring have officially been classified as "Iron Curtain" European cultural heritage sites. For more information about the network, please visit: www.netzwerk-eiserner-vorhang.de

- Sites of the Peaceful Revolution in and around Leipzig
- Permanent signposted tour – "Sites of the Peaceful Revolution", more information available at: www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de
- Mural to the Peaceful Revolution by Leipzig artist Fischer-Art
- "Demokratieglocke" Installation

25 September

Over 5,000 people take part in the Monday demonstration. Beside reforms, they also demand that the New Forum political movement be recognised. The Interior Ministry had declined their registration that same day. The protesters march along parts of the Leipzig inner ring road for the first time. The police do not initially intervene. However, they later arrest six people.

More information on the events of 1989 can be found on the website of the Citizens' Committee of Leipzig: **www.herbst89.de**

2 October

Largest protest in the GDR since the national uprising of 1953: over 20,000 people march on the Leipzig inner ring road, chanting "Gorbi, Gorbi" and "We are staying here". The police finally intervene with special equipment. There are injuries and arrests.

7 October

While the SED celebrates the 40th anniversary of the GDR in Berlin, protests are held across the country. This includes Leipzig, where around 5,000 people take to the streets. Over 200 people are arrested on this Saturday alone.

Leipzig Festival of Lights

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9 October was the decisive turning point in the Peaceful Revolution. Today it is a local holiday in Leipzig, and a time for us to remember the events of that day. One of the highlights of the "Day of the Peaceful Revolution" is the now traditional "Speech on Democracy", which is given each year by high-ranking politicians, ambassadors and authors from Germany and abroad. At 5 p.m., the bells at St. Nicholas Church, the spiritual home of the celebrations, ring to call people to pray for peace. Later in the evening, the Festival of Lights begins.

K Leipzig Festival of Lights – emotional moments for 30th anniversary

The Festival of Lights on 9 October has been one of the highlights of Leipzig's annual calendar since 2009. In 2019, Leipzig residents and their guests will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution, turning the Festival of Lights into a major event which will be held around the entire inner ring road. Where around 70,000 people once demonstrated in support of peace and democracy in 1989, international artists will give their own perspectives on historical events and link them to a contemporary context. As they move around the 3.6-kilometre ring, visitors will witness spectacular light and video installations, and find a whole host of music, dance and other performances to experience and explore. Thousands of people are expected to visit the Festival of Lights in 2019. It will give you the chance to experience art and history in an authentic setting, and the opportunity to talk to each other and share memories. It is sure to be an emotional evening.
www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de

9 October

The decisive day: The Monday demonstration is held, with over 70,000 people taking to the Leipzig inner ring road. Their messages: "We are the people" and "No violence". Despite having almost 4,000 armed police officers and task force members, the Stasi, 1,500 soldiers from the National People's Army in reserve and 5,000 comrades loyal to the regime on the ground, the state capitulates. It is the beginning of the end of the GDR.

Walking tours and bus tours

Independent walking tour – “Sites of the Peaceful Revolution”

This signposted route through the city was installed by the Citizens’ Committee of Leipzig. It guides visitors to 20 sites associated with the fight for democracy of 1989/90. Photos and texts in German and English highlight the many facets of the Peaceful Revolution (see map). An audio guide available in eight different languages and an app – “Leipzig ’89 Rundgang” (Leipzig ’89 Tour) will guide you along the route and provide additional information. **www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de**

Independent walking tour – “MDR journey through time”

Use your smartphone or tablet to travel back in time to the GDR! Short films and photos show you what Leipzig looked like at the time, how people lived their lives, and where they demonstrated in 1989. The “MDR journey through time” tour is available on the web and as an app (in German). **www.mdr.de/zeitreise**

“ZEITFENSTER. Peaceful Revolution Leipzig” app

The app takes users on a journey back through time to the upheaval of 1989. There are 25 “windows on time” where you can download photographs from different years but showing the same location to your smartphone or tablet. Comparing these with the current view from the same angle allows different eras to mingle with each other and gives a tangible sense of the changes that have occurred over time. Further information at: **www.zeitfenster.uni-leipzig.de**

Walking tour – “Auf den Spuren der Friedlichen Revolution”

This tour brings history to life at the sites where the events themselves took place. A unique, unforgettable experience for visitors to Leipzig (in German). Start: Main entrance to St. Nicholas Church. (When: every Saturday at 2 p.m., and on request for groups) Organiser: Bürgerkomitee Leipzig e.V. (Citizens’ Committee of Leipzig) For more information, please visit: **www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de**

Walking city tour – “Peaceful Revolution – Autumn ’89 in Leipzig”

This tour focuses on key places associated with the revolution in autumn 1989, including St. Nicholas Church, Augustusplatz and the Stasi administration building. Start: Tourist Information, Katharinenstraße 8. Organiser: Leipzig Erleben GmbH. For times and other information, please visit: **www.leipzig-erleben.com**

Video bus tour “Monday: Revolution! The End of the GDR”

This tour in pictures guides you through the history of Leipzig from 1945 to 1990, exploring everyday life in a GDR city. Start: Museum in the “Round Corner”, Dittrichring 24. Organiser: Videobustour
For times and other information, please visit: **www.videobustour.de**

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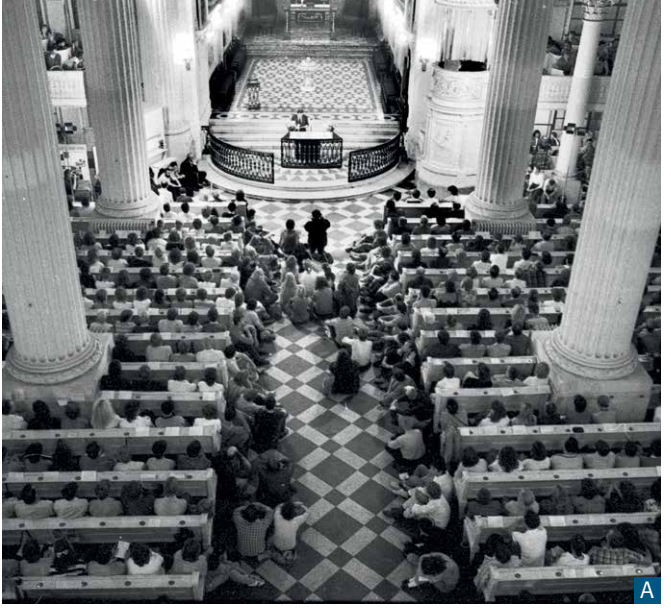
C Memorial Museum in the "Round Corner"

In the building that was the headquarters of the Leipzig Stasi administration for 40 years, is nowadays a museum. The permanent exhibition by the Citizens' Committee of Leipzig, "Stasi – Power and Banality", explores the history, structure and methods of the GDR's secret police. The collection includes around 40,000 objects related to the history of the Stasi. Featuring original leaflets, photos of the demonstrations and posters, the special exhibition "Leipzig on the Road to Peaceful Revolution" also commemorates 45 years of opposition and political resistance in Leipzig, as well as the overthrow of the GDR dictatorship in 1989. In front of the "Round Corner", as it was known, is a colourful piece of the Berlin Wall.
Dittrichring 24, Opening times: Mon – Sun 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., tours (min. 5 people): daily at 3 p.m., tours for groups on request, audio guides in eight languages, **www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de**

D BStU, Leipzig branch

The permanent and special exhibitions at this historical site explore the manipulation and tracking methods used by the GDR's secret police, and how they monitored almost every aspect of people's lives. The Stasi's files can be viewed here under the terms of the Stasi documentation law.
Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic (BStU) / Leipzig branch, Dittrichring 24, Opening times: Mon – Fri 8 a.m. – 6 p.m., Sat/Sun/Public holidays: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. (exhibitions and applications), **www.bstu.bund.de**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Menschen" (For an open country with free people). This was quickly and brutally torn away from them by the Stasi, which led to chants of "Stasi raus" (Stasi out) from the demonstrators. There were no arrests, presumably because this was all taking place in front of West German journalists who had come to Leipzig for the trade fair. One week later, the state reacted severely.

The decisive day

Leipzig, 9 October 1989: The atmosphere is heated. While civil rights activists and theologians remind the crowd to protest peacefully, the government's representatives openly threaten violence. They want to finally put an end to the situation in Leipzig. After the prayers for peace, the people form the largest mass demonstration yet. Well over 70,000 people march from what is now Augustusplatz to the city's inner ring road. Some have candles in their hands, many are chanting "We are the people". But they all have one thing in common – fear. This is because the People's Police, Stasi and armed task forces have moved into position. "No violence", people cry, again and again. But the feared violent encounter with the Stasi never comes to fruition, not even when the demonstration passes the "Runde Ecke" (Round Corner), the headquarters of the Stasi administration.

Freedom as a driving force

9 October went down in history as the decisive day of the Peaceful Revolution. It made the fall of the Berlin Wall possible, and with it the past years of rapid development in the city of Leipzig. Today, people are drawn to Leipzig not just for its lively inner city with unique passages and renovated Gründerzeit (late 19th century architecture) quarter. The city is also well-known throughout the world as an international trade fair and conference venue, and a centre for art and music.