


# BERLIN Beckons



A city once devastated by war and separated by an infamous wall, Berlin has grown to become a beautiful, vibrant and accessible tourist destination.

*by Barbara & Jim  
Twardowski, RN*

## **Berlin is a modern city**

that despite a turbulent past has become a wonderfully accessible destination with plenty of rich history and contemporary pizzazz.

Much of the city was destroyed during World War II and rebuilt anew, while sometimes salvaging portions of pre-existing buildings. The cosmopolitan capital works diligently to make the city accessible and was selected as the recipient of the 2013 Access City Award, an annual competition conducted amongst European Union cities.

## **Getting Around**

Two airports serve Berlin — Tegel, the main international airport, and the smaller Schönefeld ([berlin-airport.de](http://berlin-airport.de)).

Wheelchair users need to inform their airline 48 hours in advance that assistance is

needed. When our plane landed at Tegel, passengers exited on a staircase while we were loaded onto a wheelchair transport truck that drove us to the terminal.

An airport employee escorted us through security and assisted us with our luggage. The quick, efficient process is especially beneficial for people who are trying to push a wheelchair and carry luggage.

Visitors arriving or departing the city by train will likely use the main railroad station — Hauptbahnhof located in the Government District. Considered to be the largest and most modern railway station in Europe, public tours of the facility are conducted twice a week.

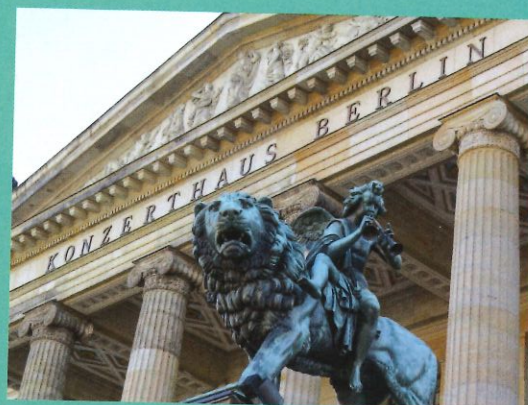
The station is also a massive shopping center with retail stores, restaurants, a pharmacy and a grocery store. We purchased

Top: Berlin's Potsdamer Platz public square was once divided by the Berlin Wall.





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**Top: The Konzerthaus Berlin** is a concert hall completed in 1821.

**Above: The Brandenburg Gate** is possibly the best known landmark in Berlin.

sandwiches, fruit and water before boarding a six-hour ride to Munich.

When booking train tickets, coordinate with the Mobility Service Centre to arrange assistance on the platform. Contact the Centre by phone, fax or email at least 48 hours prior to traveling (bahn.de).

There are no wheelchair-accessible taxis in Berlin. Fortunately, the public transportation is excellent. Almost all of the buses have a ramp. An affordable and accessible way to see many of Berlin's sights is to ride lines 100 and 200, which travel between the Bahnhof Zoo and Alexanderplatz. Be sure to buy a ticket before boarding.



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The original center of Berlin was formed along the Spree River.





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**Top:** The Reichstag is home to the German Parliament and is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Germany. The top of the building features a glass dome, inset, that provides a 360-degree view of Berlin.

Another option is to purchase the Berlin Welcome Card, which provides holders with free public transportation and discounts at major attractions ([berlin-welcomecard.de/en](http://berlin-welcomecard.de/en)).

### What To See

Much of Berlin can be seen on foot or wheels as the case may be. However, the streets and sidewalks are filled with cobblestone, which can make for a bumpy ride. Use cau-

tion when crossing busy street corners, and stay out of the highly trafficked bicycle lanes.



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One of the most recognizable monuments in Berlin is the Brandenburg Gate. This iconic landmark became a symbol of German reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Built between 1789 and 1791, the Quadriga, a chariot drawn by four horses, and Victoria, the Roman goddess of victory, sit atop the structure first made politically significant when Napoleon marched into Berlin after his victory at Jena.

The Reichstag (German Parliament) allows the public to tour the magnificent glass

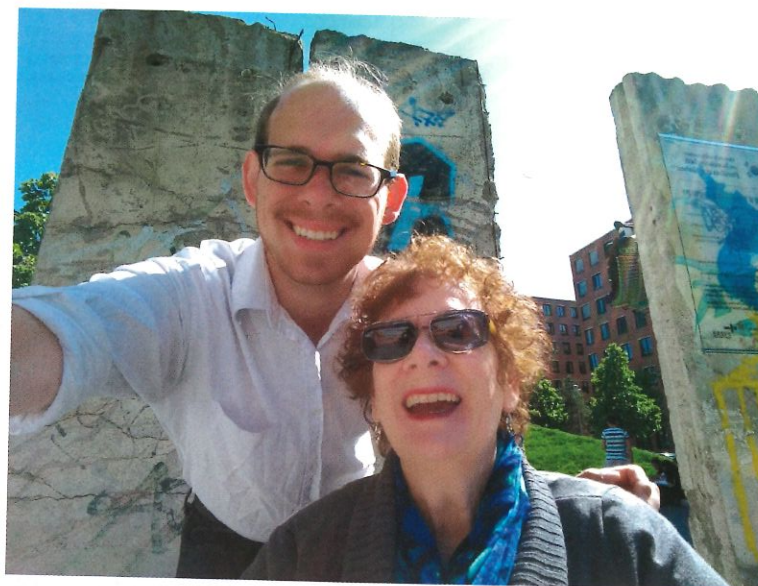


Museum Island is located on the Spree River in Berlin and is a collection of five museums dedicated to sculpture, art, buildings, history and more.





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Barbara Twardowski and her son, Weston, in front of pieces of the Berlin Wall.

domed building and see a 360-degree panoramic view of the city. Advance registration is required. You're given a date and time to tour. An extra entrance for wheelchair users ensures a short wait. The walkway ascends in a spiral shape, and the assistance of a companion may be required.

Berlin has more than 170 museums and cultural collections. An increasing number of museums have been renovated to be wheelchair accessible. One of the not-to-be-missed sights is Museum Island — a collection of five museums displaying more than 6,000 years of cultural history and art.

The Topography of Terror is an indoor and outdoor museum located on the former site of the Secret State Police (Gestapo) and Schutzstaffel (SS) buildings during World War II.

Beside it is a 200-meter long segment of the Berlin Wall preserved as a historical monument. Ramps allow wheelchair users to reach the monument, which is below street level.

From there, it's a short roll to the iconic Checkpoint Charlie. The checkpoint was the most famous crossing from West Berlin to East Berlin when the wall was in place during the Cold War.



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Top left: Classic architecture can be found throughout Berlin.

Left: Museum Island on the Spree River in Berlin.



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Checkpoint Charlie was the famous Berlin Wall crossing point between West and East Germany during the Cold War. Today, tourists can take a photo of posing soldiers in U.S. uniforms.



Right: Despite dating back to the 13th century, Germany's capital city of Berlin features many new, modern-looking buildings.

## Where To Stay

Numerous new hotels have opened in Berlin, and finding an accommodation with an accessible guest room is relatively easy.

A pioneer in welcoming guests with disabilities, the Scandic Berlin Potsdamer Platz (scandichotels.com/hotels/germany/berlin/scandic-berlin-potsdamer-platz) has 60 accessible rooms on a quiet street. Appreciated amenities include: a tea/coffee kettle, free Wi-Fi, a mini fridge,



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bercp/hoteldetail) has eight accessible rooms. The standard guest room is a bit small for maneuvering a wheelchair, but the bathroom is quite large. The staff and concierge service are excellent. The Post Restaurant with an accessible outdoor courtyard offers a delicious menu and attentive service.

The upscale Marriott Berlin (marriott.com/hotels/travel/bermc-berlin-marriott-hotel/) is in the heart of the city on a bustling street. Our spacious wheelchair-accessible "superior guest room" with a king-size bed felt like a suite and overlooked a park.

The hotel redesigned all the guest rooms in 2013 with a colorful pallet and artwork depicting Berlin. The sophisticated hotel bar, CATWALK, uses fashion as its theme and is a great place to have a cocktail.

## Online Access

One of the reasons Berlin won the 2013 Access City Award is for its up-to-date database, Mobidat, which contains information regarding the access at museums, restaurants, hotels and attractions.

This valuable information resource is available in English and is designed to educate visitors (mobidat.net). When planning a trip to Berlin, visit the city's official tourism website (visitberlin.de/en).

*Jim and Barbara Twardowski cover the travel industry writing about baby boomer and accessible travel, accommodations, culinary/ cultural offerings and destinations.* ■



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The Scandic Berlin Potsdamer Platz hotel in Berlin features 60 accessible rooms, including large bathrooms with roll-in showers.

wood floors and room temperature controls on the television. Although the morning breakfast is self-serve, staff members gladly assist guests who have disabilities.

The Crowne Plaza Berlin Potsdamer Platz (ihg.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/berlin/