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Gate is at the heart of Berlin

JOHN BISHOP

IF THERE is one single thing that says Berlin, it has to be the Brandenburg Gate.

Opened in 1791 as a symbol of peace, the Brandenburg Gate has come to say Berlin in the same way as the Eiffel Tower says Paris, Big Ben says London and the Harbour Bridge says Sydney.

Its 12 Doric columns in a neo-classical design echo the gateway to the Acropolis in Athens. On top is a quadriga – a chariot pulled by four horses.

In a city lacking deeply impressive landmarks, the Brandenburg Gate is the best on offer. It is where the two of Berlin's best streets meet: Unter den Linden, a tree-lined boulevard which the victorious troops of all regimes have marched in triumph, meets Ebertstrasse, once Berlin's busiest but now full of modern office blocks.

The German Parliament is a block away. Likewise, the 2711 grey concrete slabs making up the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Ceremonies to mark the reunification of Germany were held at the Gate in 1990. US

Presidents Clinton and Obama have spoken there.

Conquerors have marched through; Napoleon after he crushed the Prussians at the battle of Jena in 1806.

He took the quadriga to Paris as a trophy. It was returned after he was beaten at Waterloo.

The Nazis used the Gate as a symbol of a greater German past to sanctify their own cruel path, and in 1945 the Russians drove tanks through it in their conquest of Berlin.

During the Cold War the Gate was in East Berlin, with the Berlin Wall built just a few metres in front of it.

West Berliners could walk up to the wall and gaze into East Berlin through the Gate and wonder what had happened to their city and country.

On June 12, 1987 US President Reagan chose the Brandenburg Gate as the place to make his famous "Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall" speech and, in 1989, when the Berlin Wall did come down, the Gate was one of the first places Berliners gathered to surge through to the other side.

Nowadays the street leading up to the Gate is awash with



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BEAUTIFUL BERLIN: Brandenburg Gate at sunset (main); the colourful Berlin skyline with TV Tower, Tiergarten and Potsdamer Platz (bottom left); and the luxury Hotel Adlon in Berlin's city centre, directly opposite the Brandenburg Gate.

Photos: iStock

cafes including all the usual fast food suspects.

Backpackers and casual travellers congregate there to use their loos – which generally costs half a euro.

It's also a common departure point for tour buses and walking groups exploring the city. The road in front of the Gate is now a pedestrian plaza and is a popular place to watch

sports on big screens and see the fireworks at New Year.

In 2014, the German football team had a victory rally there after winning the FIFA World Cup.

On the plaza is the Hotel Adlon. Lorenz Adlon, who built the original hotel on the site in 1907, was twice hit by motor vehicles coming through the central arch of the

Gate, which had originally been reserved exclusively for the Kaiser. In 1921 the second crash killed him.

It was at the new Adlon that Michael Jackson very briefly dangled his nine-month-old baby son Blanket (Prince Michael Jackson II) out of a window of the presidential suite of the hotel on November 19, 2002 to the horror of the crowd

assembled below.

He later apologised "I offer no excuses for what happened, I got caught up in the excitement of the moment. I would never intentionally endanger the lives of my children".

Ironically, he was in Berlin to accept an award for his charity work on behalf of children.

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TIMELESS: A trip to Berlin isn't complete without a culture-packed, history-rich itinerary.

Photo: iStock

Culture or cocktails, it's your choice

VIBRANT and exciting, Berlin is always changing and knows how to live in the now while looking to the future, without forgetting its past. With about 180 museums and galleries, 4600 restaurants, 900 bars, 190 clubs and a year-round calendar of festivals, Berlin will keep you busy in the best of ways.

When is the best time to go?

With its continental climate, temperatures in Berlin fluctuate with the seasons and can reach more than 30C in summer and get down to -10C or lower in winter. May to September is the most popular time to visit, and autumn is not only beautiful and temperate, it's also when the Festival of Lights illuminates landmarks.

What should I see and do?

It's said Berlin has more museums than rainy days and, while it can be hard to decide where to start, the Jewish Museum provides a powerful insight into Jewish German history and the Neues Museum is where you can see Nefertiti's bust. Culture vultures should grab a Berlin Museum Pass for admission to 50 museums and galleries for three consecutive days.

The Tiergarten is a must. Here you can breathe in lots of fresh air and relax in a beer garden while marvelling at how well the 210ha park recovered after almost every tree was cut down during World War II. The Brandenburg Gate, Holocaust Memorial, TV Tower and Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial

Church are all worth visiting.

Where should I take the kids?

Zoo Berlin is the most species-rich zoo in the world with about 1500 species and 20,000 animals, Legoland is aimed directly at kids (no adults unless they're accompanied by a child), and the Trampoline Park is a popular choice. About 1800 free playgrounds have taken up residence in formerly vacant land around Berlin.

What about the night-life?

Clubbers from around the world fly to Berlin and line up for hours for the chance to get into Berghain, the notoriously difficult-to-get into club that has been repeatedly named the best in the world.

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