

# Five years later, Berlin's wall still there —

By Yasmin Ghahremani  
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**Berlin** — For 28 years, the world knew Berlin as 103 miles of concrete, barbed wire and booby-trapped fences. The wall defined the city: a trigger point for Cold War tensions, and the nucleus of a thriving political and artistic counterculture on both sides of the divide.

Then, on Nov. 9, 1989, the seemingly impossible happened: The border between East and West opened. Only months before, two would-be escapees had died at the hands of soldiers following orders to shoot to kill. Now those soldiers stood by, politically disarmed, as people from all over the world came to dance atop the Berlin Wall and cheer its demise.

"It was a miracle," says Rainer Hildebrandt, founder of the Checkpoint Charlie Museum and an outspoken human rights activist who lived in West Berlin before the wall fell. "We always hoped for it, but it came so fast. Then it was an avalanche. A few days later it happened in Prague, then all of Eastern Europe in the next weeks, then two years later in Moscow."

Today, all that remains of the wall are a few scattered concrete panels. But as Germany prepares to mark the fifth anniversary of the opening of the frontier, the wall remains very much a part of Berlin.

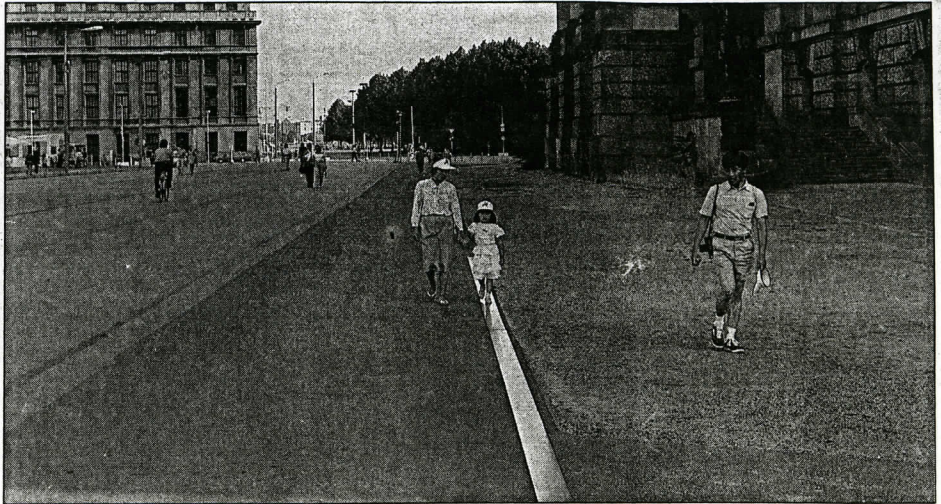
In some ways, East is still East and West is still West. On either side of the old dividing line, residents pay different rents (higher in the West), vote for different political parties, and speak with a different lingo and attitude. The initial euphoria at reunification has subsided; with tensions surfacing over the rents, higher taxes and the loss of guaranteed jobs.

Where you don't see signs of the historical division, there's evidence of the efforts to recover from it. Scaffolding and cranes clutter the landscape, and jackhammers drone almost nonstop with the sound of a city physically reuniting.

For the visitor, watching Germany's reunification efforts is fascinating. On Nov. 9, another link between the two sides will unfold when the city opens the Oberbaum bridge across the Spree River. Sealed off to traffic after the wall was built, it eventually was opened for pedestrians who had permission to cross.

To get an idea of the turmoil that preceded the fall of the wall, visitors should check out the German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum) at 2 Unter den Linden. The curators have scheduled an exhibit to commemorate the mass demonstrations held in East Berlin on that eventful date nearly five years ago. More than half a million people took part, demanding the resignations of ruling leaders. The museum will showcase some 150 banners and posters carried in the protest in an exhibit Nov. 4 through Dec. 2.

The permanent collection at the Checkpoint



A family walks along a line of history, near the Reichstag, representing where the Berlin Wall once stood.

Charlie Museum (Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, 44 Friedrichstrasse), is the best place to get a complete look at the struggle against the wall. The small, two-story building, marking the former Allied crossing point into East Berlin, is crammed with photos, documents and home-made escape contraptions.

For Nov. 9, the museum is preparing a display of art from and about the wall. It will be shown in the Prussian Statehouse (Preussischen Landtag) at 5 Neideckirchner Strasse.

## Mural-covered segment remains

If you're expecting to see the wall itself, you're likely to be disappointed; most of it has been destroyed. A few memorial chunks are visible at Potsdamer Platz, the Brandenburg Gate and near the Reichstag. And then there is the East Side Gallery which, at slightly less than one mile, is the longest intact stretch. On the eastern side of the Spree River on Mühlenstrasse, it is covered with murals painted by 106 artists from around the world, invited in 1990 to leave their marks on the quickly disappearing barrier. But time and human nature are taking their toll; some of the paint is flaking away, and graffiti covers some sections.

"I don't believe it will last more than five years," says Jutta Richter of the Friedrichshain Cultural Office. "Every winter, more and more of the paint disappears." An artist was hired to make minor repairs in 1991, but the borough does not have the \$3.3 million needed to properly preserve the mural.

## New memorials proposed

As even memorials to the wall begin to crumble, some people are working to ensure that Germans never forget those who sought to keep them

apart. Competing proposals for new memorials — lines that would follow the former location of the wall — are being tested.

"We all forget too much, and too fast," says Gerwin Zohlin, an artist who has proposed marking the line of the wall with a three-inch-wide copper band. "The Berlin Wall has symbolized the division of the whole world between East and West. One should not forget that. But it takes not only museums and history books. People have to remember by walking around in urban space."

Not everyone in Berlin agrees. Many East Berlin residents want to erase memories of the concrete barricade.

The cost of one of the proposed memorials is estimated at \$7 million. The Berlin Senate wants to make sure there is public support for the project. It's funding 330-foot test strips that should be in place by Nov. 9 outside the Prussian Statehouse (Preussischen Landtag) on Niederkirchner Strasse. The other proposed memorial involves a line of red bricks to mark the western side of the wall, and blue bricks on the eastern portion.

Rainer Hildebrandt of the Checkpoint Charlie Museum is working on another wall memorial, to be at the former location of Checkpoint Charlie. An office complex is being built on the site, but Hildebrandt is constructing an adjacent open-air exhibit. It will contain all 10 elements that once made up the border blockade — from the concrete panels to electrified fences and watchtowers.

Hildebrandt shares Zohlin's belief in the power of memorials. "The wall is a symbol of something that nobody believed could happen," he says. "Maybe some 50 to 100 years from now, people will be in a situation where they won't believe that the prison door can be opened. And one can say to them: the 9th of November."

Free-lance writer Yasmin Ghahremani spent the last two months in Germany.

## Give us your best shot

Nov. 30 deadline for entering

1. Only unpublished color photography from the previous 12 months is eligible. You may enter up to 10 prints of any finish you wish; size (including mat or mounting, if any) may not exceed 8 by 10 inches. Enclose a brief description of time and place with each. Only winners will be required to provide negatives or slides for reproduction purposes. Be sure to legibly label each submission with your name, address and phone number in pencil on the back.

2. No entry fee is required.

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## BERLIN BEYOND THE WALL

If you have a soft spot for castles, check out Schloss Charlottenburg. Built in 1699 as a country estate for Queen Sophie Charlotte, it was bombed during World War II. It has been rebuilt on its original foundation, and houses a group of museums, including the Romantic Art Collection of the National Gallery. It's on Luisenplatz, by Spandauer Damm and Kaiser-Friedrich-Strasse.

For a really royal sight, make the trek to Potsdam for Sanssouci Park, home to three ornate palaces and a number of galleries and gardens, many of which were built for Frederick the Great during his rule over Prussia in the mid-1700s. The centerpiece is Schloss Sanssouci, a rococo palace surrounded by elaborate gardens. The largest building in the park is the opulent Neues Palais, the one-time summer residence of the royal family. Take the S-bahn from Berlin (a 45-minute ride to the Potsdam Stadt stop, where you can take a city bus or organized tour to Sanssouci).

If you only have time for one art museum, make it the Dahlem Museum at 8 Lansstrasse. It contains a large part of the collections once owned by Frederick the Great.

For a glimpse at Berlin's counterculture, step into Tacheles, at 52-53 Oranienburger Strasse. The apocalyptic scene is complete with a backyard art garden.

## WHERE TO STAY

If you're looking for luxury, try Hecker's Hotel. Just a few steps from the famous Kurfürstendamm shopping boulevard, it offers a relaxing, quiet atmosphere. Single rooms are \$172, doubles are \$205 (assuming an exchange rate of about 1.55 German marks to dollar). Breakfast is \$10 extra. Grolman Str. 35 (Charlottenburg). 011-49-30-88-900.

Hotel Luisenhof offers an interesting alternative in the heart of Mitte. In the 19th century, it was the headquarters and stables for a coach company. Partly destroyed during World War II, it served for nearly three decades as a training facility for members of the Communist party. It was restored and reopened as a hotel in 1993. The location is close to the canal and many sightseeing attractions. Rooms are \$125 to \$212 weekdays, \$165 to \$130 weekends, and include breakfast. Kopenicker Str. 92 (Mitte). 011-49-30-270-0543.

For those on a budget, the two-story Pension Kreuzberg offers friendly service in a good location. The brownstone, constructed in the 1920s, is typical of old Berlin. Rates are \$33 to \$43 a single, \$53 to \$60 double, breakfast included. Rooms for three to five people to share cost \$20 to \$25 per person. All rooms have sinks; each floor shares a bathroom and toilet. Grossbeerenstr. 64 (Kreuzberg). 011-49-30-251-1362.

## DINING AROUND

Try Tegernseer Tönnchen to get your fill of good, traditional Bavarian cuisine. It has a fixed menu, as well as six specials that change every day. An average meal costs \$7 to \$15. Mommern Strasse 34 (Charlottenburg).

Turkish food is also plentiful in Berlin, which has the largest Turkish community outside Istanbul. One of the best places is Meyhane. There's also plenty for the vegetarian. A meal for one, with appetizer and wine, costs about \$20. Kantstrasse 143 (Charlottenburg).

A meal and drink at one of the establishments near Kollwitz Platz makes for an interesting evening. This intellectual center in Prenzlauerberg is where the political unrest in the 1980s began. Stroll down Knaack Strasse and stop in Pasternak, Anita Wronsky or Wasserturm, all good spots for coffee and tasty cafe food for less than \$20.

Nearby is Mao Thai, an excellent Thai restaurant that serves spicy soups and an excellent red curry chicken. Wörther Strasse 30.

— Yasmin Ghahremani

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