

## Project description

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First there was freedom, then unity. The fall of the Wall on 9 November 1989 was a milestone in the Peaceful Revolution and one of the most significant events in the recent history of Berlin, Germany, and Europe. It was part of a dawning of democracy in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that many of our guests experienced at first hand. Younger generations and newcomers to Berlin will know the upheavals of the autumn of 1989 only from pictures and history books. On the 30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall we will come together to celebrate hard won freedoms.

In the Peaceful Revolution courageous citizens of East Germany toppled the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Their actions paved the way for democracy in the GDR and marked a decisive step towards the reunification of Germany. The Peaceful Revolution was part of the Autumn of Nations, a wave of revolutions that swept across Central and Eastern Europe, bringing the confrontation between the Eastern and Western blocs to a close and preparing the ground for a united Europe.

These are all good reasons to celebrate. This anniversary is also an occasion to honour the victims of the SED regime and to remember that people stood up for democratic rights and freedoms again and again across the lifetime of this dictatorship.

Not all of the hopes that arose in the autumn of 1989 were to be fulfilled. But the events of thirty years ago created the conditions for us to imagine and build a better Germany. Unlike those forced to live under the rule of the SED dictatorship, we now enjoy the freedom to engage in public debate, to shape our present and future, and to work together to address the challenges of our times. Join us in Berlin to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Wall. Immerse yourself in a week of festivities full of unforgettable moments – come along, join in, remember, and debate.

Exhibitions explore the respective histories and backgrounds of each location, providing the theoretical foundation for an artistic discussion of the events of 1989/90 through media installations featuring **3D video projections**. A diverse and varied programme of events engages with the topics explored at each location. Linking the past and present, the programme includes **concerts, talks with contemporary witnesses**, panel discussions, readings, **film screenings** poetry slams, a project for young film-makers, the virtual worlds of the **MauAR app** and **VR stories** as well as the **art installation "Visions in Motion"** at the Brandenburg Gate. The evening of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall will be celebrated with a stage show and musical extravaganza at the Brandenburg Gate.

The seven historical locations taking centre-stage in this week of festivities were chosen to commemorate key events in the Peaceful Revolution and the overthrow of

the SED regime, the courage of those who opposed the dictatorship, and the dawn of a new and democratic era. For seven days over the course of the festival week, the story of the Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Wall will be brought to life at the places where it unfolded: From the processes that led to the formation of the opposition movement – explored at **Gethsemane Church** – to the largest protest demonstration, held on **Alexanderplatz** on 4 November 1989, to the scenes of joy at the **Brandenburg Gate** following the opening of the Wall, and the first encounters between East and West Berliners on **Kurfürstendamm**. Elsewhere, the festival commemorates the occupation of the **Stasi headquarters** in Lichtenberg on 15 January 1990, which finally deprived the SED of its most important instrument of power, and – in what was probably the greatest success of the Peaceful Revolution – the first free elections and the subsequent establishment of the GDR's first freely-elected parliament, which will be examined on **Schlossplatz**, now the site of the Humboldt Forum. Finally, at Berlin's iconic **East Side Gallery**, the festival celebrates a symbolic act of cultural appropriation.

## The seven historical locations

### Gethsemane Church

In early October 1989, Gethsemane Church became a focal point of the Peaceful Revolution in Berlin. A telephone hotline operating from the church served as a news agency and thousands flocked to information events held there. From on 2 October onwards, opposition groups based in East Berlin began to keep vigil at the church in the hope of securing the release of demonstrators arrested in Leipzig. As the Peaceful Revolution gained pace, Gethsemane Church emerged as an important site of resistance to the SED regime in Berlin.

### Alexanderplatz

The largest public demonstration in the history of the GDR was held on Alexanderplatz on 4 November 1989. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered to protest for a different and more democratic GDR. One of their central demands was for freedom of travel. Bearing countless banners, people were creative in making their demands public – and perfectly legally, for the demonstration had received official permission.

### Brandenburg Gate

In an attempt to contain the protests and ongoing exodus of citizens, the leadership of the SED drafted a new travel law. Then, in a casual remark on the early evening of 9 November 1989, the government spokesman Günter Schabowski announced the introduction of new travel regulations. Within the hour, West German TV stations were announcing the news: “GDR opens borders”. The people of East Berlin thronged to border crossings at the Wall within the city, and on the same evening they forced the opening of the border.

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After 28 years, the border that had divided Berlin, Germany and Europe had fallen. The scenes of jubilation at the Brandenburg Gate – *the* symbol of the division of Germany and Europe – were broadcast all around the world.

### **Kurfürstendamm**

The day after the fall of the Wall, West Berlin, and in particular Kurfürstendamm – a place of longing and a symbol of freedom and prosperity – witnessed the mass arrival of East Berliners and moving scenes of euphoria. The following days were marked by the spirit of friendship and the opportunities presented by this newly-won freedom. The "Ku'damm", as it is colloquially known, symbolizes all of West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as its citizens and politicians, who for the most part welcomed East Germans into their communities with open arms and promoted democratic developments in the GDR.

### **The former Stasi headquarters – Campus for Democracy**

Beginning in December 1989, demonstrators occupied the offices of the secret police across East Germany. On 15 January 1990, thousands of people forced their way into the Berlin headquarters of the Stasi. The SED's most important instrument of power was finally wrested from its grasp. Citizen committees tried to control the dissolution of the secret police and prevent the destruction of its records. The occupation of the Stasi offices also marked the beginnings of a still ongoing public and scholarly debate over the history of the GDR and its interpretation.

### **Schlossplatz**

Held on 18 March 1990, the first and only democratic elections in the history of the GDR represented perhaps the greatest success of the Peaceful Revolution and sealed the fate of the SED regime. A new, freely-elected parliament held session in the Palace of the Republic, until then a symbol of sham democracy and the SED's pretension to total power. The elections paved the way for a more democratic society and were an important step towards the reunification of Germany, with those parties that had promised a rapid unification winning over 75 percent of the vote.

### **East Side Gallery**

Artists created the East Side Gallery by adorning a section of the Wall in Friedrichshain with large murals. This artistic makeover marks the dawning of a unified Berlin, imbued with a new identity and confidence: liberal, international and with an affinity for art and culture – but also shaped by the tensions between fringe culture and commercialization, old and new Berliners, financial hardship and cultural capital.

### **Press Contact**

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