THE RED TOWN HALL
Seat of Government and Landmark in the Heart of Berlin
Dear Visitors,

Welcome to Berlin’s Town Hall, known as the ‘Red Town Hall’ (Rotes Rathaus) due to its red brick façade. This building, the seat of the Governing Mayor, is at the heart of policymaking in Berlin. The state government convenes here every Tuesday in the Senate meeting room. At the same time, the Red Town Hall is a venue for encounters: conferences, readings, and exhibitions bring people with very different origins and interests together. Deserving citizens are honoured at the Town Hall, and it is where heads of state from all over the world sign the city’s Golden Book.

However, the Town Hall is also a symbol of Berlin’s eventful history. It was built more than 150 years ago on the same site that had been occupied by the city’s town hall since the Middle Ages. As the seat of the mayor, the municipal assembly, and the city council, it played a key role in the history of democracy in Berlin. This came to an abrupt end in 1933 when the Nazis took power, systematically dismantling democracy and local self-government. The Town Hall sustained severe damage during the Second World War. It was rebuilt in the 1950s, becoming the seat of the mayor of East Berlin, while West Berlin’s Senate convened at Schöneberg Town Hall. It has been the shared seat of government for reunified Berlin since 1991.

Today, the Red Town Hall remains loyal to its democratic tradition, and is representative of Berlin’s cosmopolitan outlook. In this spirit, I hope you enjoy your visit and are able to learn more about our Town Hall.

Michael Müller, Governing Mayor of Berlin
A VENUE FOR ENCOUNTERS

One of Berlin’s most iconic landmarks, the Red Town Hall was built from 1860 to 1869 to plans by Hermann Friedrich Waesemann in a neo-Renaissance style. At 94 metres (including the flagpole), its tower is visible from afar.

The Red Town Hall is the seat of the Governing Mayor and the Governing Mayor’s administrative staff, the Senate Chancellery. Every year, it attracts around 80,000 visitors - to exhibitions, tours, and formal events. When no functions are being held, visitors are welcome to tour the ceremonial rooms.

A TOUR OF THE TOWN HALL

The tour starts in the foyer, where four allegorical figures watch over the grand staircase from their lofty perch. They represent shipping, agriculture, fishing, and trade. Personalities such as Bill Clinton, King Harald V of Norway, Nelson Mandela, and Sophia Loren – along
with many other prominent visitors – have graced the red carpet that leads up the 39 steps of the grand staircase.

The Golden Book, which is one of the city’s visitors’ books, is exhibited in a display case in the gallery, and documents visits made to Berlin by many distinguished guests. The members of the city council and the municipal assembly who were murdered under the National Socialist and Stalinist regimes are commemorated by a memorial plaque.

A view of the Hall of Pillars

With its ribbed vaults in an orange-reddish hue, the Hall of Pillars is considered the Town Hall’s most attractive room. The hall, with its soaring, nine-metre ceiling - painted to resemble Siena’s Palazzo Publicco - once housed the library used by the municipal assembly. Three rows of columns featuring 26 pillars support the imposing vaulted ceiling. The structural elements of the hall are reminiscent of a Gothic cathedral. Following its destruction in the Second World War, the hall was rebuilt in a less ornate style. This is where the GDR awarded its Medals of Merit and the ‘Banner of Labour’ order. Nowadays, the Hall of Pillars is used for ceremonial activities, exhibitions, and weddings.

The Hall of Arms, which measures around 280 square metres in size, was once the venue for city council meetings; today, it is primarily used for receptions for guests of state, and for official ceremonies. The floor and the door frames are made from red Thuringian marble, while the walls are adorned with painted scagliola. The hall takes its name from the coats of arms of Berlin and all its boroughs shown in their...
historical versions, which were designed by Heinrich List. This composition is a reference to the formation of the municipality of Greater Berlin in 1920. All coats of arms of Berlin’s 23 former boroughs, along with Berlin’s coat of arms as a 24th element, are shown.

The Main Hall is, at 30 metres in length and 18 metres in width and featuring arched windows extending to 6.90 metres in height, the Town Hall’s largest room. It was planned as a venue for festivities from the very beginning. This is also where East Berlin’s city council convened until 1990. The monumental painting, ‘The Berlin Congress of 1878’, which the court artist Anton von Werner produced for the city of Berlin, once again adorns the wall at one end of the room, as it did from 1881 to 1945.

Not all of the rooms in the Town Hall are accessible to the public: Berlin’s state government holds its weekly session in the Senate Meeting Room every Tuesday. The Governing Mayor works in his office, where he meets with guests and discusses policy. The Louise Schroeder Conference Room is the scene of negotiations for coalition agreements and conferences, among other events.
ARCHITECTURE AND STYLES

The Red Town Hall and its imposing belfry, which was built to tower higher than Berlin Palace, symbolize the self-confidence of the city's middle class. The building was designed in a style based on the Italian Early Renaissance. Hermann Friedrich Waesemann designed the Town Hall with four wings and a floor plan that is almost square in shape. Middle wings spanning this square divide the building into three inner courtyards. Berlin's Town Hall sustained severe damage in the Second World War, and was reconstructed from 1951 to 1955 under the guidance of the architect Fritz Meinhardt, who made fundamental changes to its interior design. Many of the rooms were repurposed, and rooms that were ornately decorated in the past were rebuilt in a much less elaborate style. The building was listed as a historical monument in 1979. When the Governing Mayor left Schöneberg Town Hall to take up office in the Town Hall in October 1991, the architect Helge Pitz gave the building another make-over, also modernising its technical infrastructure. This is evidenced by the lift towers that were added to the outside walls of the courtyards of the Town Hall.
BERLIN’S ‘CHRONICLE IN STONE’

The Berlin Town Hall’s striking, bright red brick façade, which inspired its German name, the Rotes Rathaus or ‘Red Town Hall’, stands in vivid contrast to other buildings in the heart of the city. Its detailed design is embellished by the terracotta plaques of the ‘CHRONICLE IN STONE’: a series of reliefs that tell the story of the city’s dynamic growth up until the German Empire was founded in 1871. The 36 reliefs were created by the sculptors Ludwig Brodewolf, Alexander Calandrelli, Otto Geyer, and Rudolf Schweinitz from 1877 to 1879.

The ‘CHRONICLE IN STONE’ starts at the rear of the building at the corner of Gustav-Böß-Straße and Spandauer Straße, and runs anticlockwise around the Town Hall. The first panels illustrate the early years: the Slavic tribes converting to Christianity; the ground being cultivated; the city being founded. Around half of the reliefs are devoted to everyday urban life in the Middle Ages, and show scenes from the mediaeval justice system in the panels above the Jüdenstraße entrance: the pillory, the old courthouse, and a robbery and murder.

The panels on the front of the building on Rathausstraße show the people submitting to the elector Frederick II (‘Iron Tooth’) by giving him the keys to the city. The scene is followed by the construction of the Hohenzollerns’ palace. Other reliefs honour the achievements of the Prussian kings and the city’s industrial boom in the 19th century. The chronicle ends with German unification: in the last relief, Berliners celebrate the news from Versailles about the founding of the German empire.
A look inside the Louise Schroeder Conference Room, formerly called the Green Hall due to its colour scheme.

The signature of Barack Obama is the first in what is now the ninth volume of the Golden Book.

Office of the Governing Mayor.
HISTORY

- History of the Town Hall
- History of Berlin

1237  First documented reference to the city of Berlin
1861  Foundation stone laid
1865  First meeting of the municipal assembly following completion of the first phase of construction; official seat of the mayor
1867  Topping-out ceremony
1869  Opening of the Ratskeller
      Completion of the Town Hall
1870  First session of the city council
1871  Founding of the German Empire, with Berlin as its capital
1879  Completion of the ‘Chronicle in Stone’
1914– The First World War
1918
1920  City council meeting room enlarged
      Creation of the new municipality of Greater Berlin
1933  Interiors and grand staircase redesigned
      Municipal assembly stripped of its powers by the National Socialists; enforced political conformity of the administration
1939– The Second World War
1945
1945  Severe damage during the Second World War; new municipal assembly appointed by the Soviet occupying power
      Berlin occupied by the Allies
1948/  Non-communist city council members leave
1949  and take up office in Schöneberg Town Hall
      Berlin Blockade; division of the city
1951  Reconstruction (until 1955); major interior remodelling; rooms repurposed
1951 Reconstruction of the two halves of the city begins separately

1955 Government moves into the reconstructed Town Hall

1961 Construction of the Berlin Wall

1987 Renovation of the exterior
Berlin’s 750th anniversary celebrated in both halves of the city

1989 First ‘Round Table’ in Berlin (4 December)
Fall of the Berlin Wall (9 November)

1990 Reunification of Berlin; joint administration of the two halves of the city

1991 Extensive renovation and modernisation; seat of the Governing Mayor from 1 October on
German Bundestag votes to move the country’s seat of government from Bonn to Berlin

1999 Government and parliament take up their work in Berlin

2011 Archaeological excavations; remains of the old town hall uncovered

2012 Berlin celebrates its 775th anniversary

2019 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall

2020 The Town Hall celebrates its 150th anniversary
100 years of Greater Berlin
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Jüdenstraße 1
10178 Berlin
Phone +49 30 9026-2411
presse-information@senatskanzlei.berlin.de
www.berlin.de/senatskanzlei
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OPENING HOURS
Monday to Friday
9:00 am to 6:00 pm, when no private functions are being held.
Information is available in advance by phoning: +49 30 9026-2032

ADDRESS FOR VISITORS
Rotes Rathaus
Main entrance at Rathausstraße 15
10178 Berlin
Wheelchair access at Jüdenstraße 1

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ROTES RATHAUS ONLINE
www.berlin.de/rotes-rathaus
@regberlin