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PRESS RELEASE

Leipzig – Home of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989

(9 November 2023) Thirty-four years ago, the Berlin Wall came down and unforgettable images were sent around the world. But history was also made on the streets of Leipzig in autumn 1989 – exactly one month earlier. On **9 October 1989 in Leipzig**, the **decisive demonstration for freedom and democracy** stayed peaceful and paved the way for the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 as well as the reunification of Germany.

Since 1982, peace, environmental and human rights groups have regularly invited people to pray for peace in St Nicholas Church. It was from here that the Monday demonstrations began in September 1989. After prayers for peace in several churches, **more than 70,000 people** finally gathered in Leipzig's city centre on 9 October 1989 to demonstrate without violence. The dictatorship of the former GDR capitulated to the overwhelming power of the citizens. This event is considered the **breakthrough for the Peaceful Revolution of 1989** and a key event in German and European history.

Year-round Memorials to the Peaceful Revolution in Leipzig

Leipzig has a vibrant culture of remembrance in its public spaces, underlining its significance for contemporary democracy. Numerous authentic sites of the Peaceful Revolution bear witness to the events of 1989 and can be experienced throughout the year:

Starting from the peace prayers in the **St Nicholas Church**, the protest conquered the public space in 1989. Since 1999, a replica of a column crowned with palm fronds from the nave of the St Nicholas Church has stood in the **St Nicholas Churchyard**. The artwork by Andreas Stötzner and Markus Gläser commemorates the starting point of Leipzig's Monday demonstrations. In 2003, a granite fountain designed by David Chipperfield and coloured glass cubes by artist Tilo Schulz embedded in the paving of the churchyard were added. They emphasize the importance of public space as a platform for the free expression of opinion by responsible citizens. <https://www.nikolaikirche.de/#>; <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/st-nicholas-church>

At 20 original locations in the city centre, the **open-air exhibition "Places of the Peaceful Revolution"** with German-English texts allows visitors to experience the spirit of change in the years 1989-1990. Designed as a chronological tour, the exhibition illustrates how the oppositional actions of individuals gave rise to a mass movement that brought down the dictatorship in the GDR and paved the way for German unity.

The free app **Zeitfenster (time slot)** from the University of Leipzig invites users to interactively combine historical photographs with the current camera view of a tablet or smartphone at 25 locations in Leipzig's city centre and experience historical change. In addition to interactive access, the app preserves around 300 additional retrievable artefacts, such as original documents from state security files, leaflets from the civil movement and contemporary video footage. Additional integrated German audio guides and a route navigation function turn the city of Leipzig into a virtual history trail.

<https://www.leipzig.de/buergerservice-und-verwaltung/unsere-stadt/herbst-89/mobile-apps>

Since 2009, a bell at the entrance to Grimmaische Straße has commemorated the decisive Monday demonstration on 9 October 1989, which "heralded" the end of the GDR. The **Bell of Democracy**, designed by the artist Via Lewandowsky, was a gift from the East German foundry associations to the city of Leipzig to mark the 20th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution on 9 October 2009.

Since 2012, the **Memorial Museum in the "Round Corner"** has officially been one of the sites of the European Cultural Heritage of the Iron Curtain. During the Peaceful Revolution, the Monday demonstrations passed by the former Stasi district administration building, which was peacefully occupied on 4 December 1989. Today, the "Round Corner" is an authentic site of both the history of repression and oppression in the GDR and the self-liberation from the dictatorship of the state security through the Peaceful Revolution. A piece of the Berlin Wall can be found in front of the memorial museum.

<https://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/>

<https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/memorial-museum-in-the-runde-ecke>

The modern museum **Forum of Contemporary History Leipzig** commemorates the opposition, resistance and moral courage in the GDR against the background of German division. The exhibition, documentation and information centre offers a forum for active participation in addressing contemporary German history from the end of the Second World War to the present day.

<https://www.hdg.de/en/zeitgeschichtliches-forum-leipzig>

<https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/leipzig-forum-of-contemporary-history>

Annual Commemoration with Festival of Lights and Speech on Democracy

The courage of the people of Leipzig and 9 October have gone down in the history of democracy. To commemorate this milestone of the Peaceful Revolution and to bring the brilliance of the events closer to the younger generations, Leipzig celebrates the annual Day of Remembrance with very special events: the Leipzig Festival of Lights, the Peace Prayer and the Speech on Democracy.

"Remembering Yesterday, Shaping Tomorrow" was the motto for 9 October 2023. Fittingly, the Leipzig Festival of Lights presented three extraordinary light projects that captivated visitors in very different ways. The audio-visual installation "Trabi", put twelve Trabants in the centre of attention and focused on the dramatic event of the escape of thousands of East Germans through the embassy in Prague in the autumn of 1989. Visitors could see and hear the memories of Czechs and Germans on screens in the Trabants in front of the Oper Leipzig building. A combination of light installation, choral music and a large-scale light mapping took place in front of the New Townhall with the title "We Leipzig 2023". The project "Beacon of Hope" combined light and live performance, sustainability and participation. It presented a light sculpture, current and historical messages from Leipzig on umbrellas, banners, future trees and integrated poetry slam sessions. <https://www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/home.html> and

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyOX12jICq6/>

All the light installations always have a direct content-related reference to the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 and convey this in their own artistic way to the visitors of the Festival of Lights. At the same time, the projects build a bridge to the present, reflecting the historical events of autumn 1989 and making them emotionally tangible. **On 9 October 2024 for the 35th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution** the emotions will be even stronger. The Festival of Lights will be celebrated on a much larger scale than usual. More than 15 light installations will be presented along the historic demonstration route on the Leipzig's inner city ring road. Candles played an important role in 1989, with many demonstrators holding candles in their hands as a symbol of peace. Anyone holding a candle has no place for a weapon. For this reason, candles are provided free of charge each year and can be placed on a candle podium to form an illuminated "'89".

Further Information

- Official website of Leipzig Festival of Lights: <https://www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/home.html>
- Review Festival of Lights 2023 per reel: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyOX12jCq6/>
- St Nicolas Church: <https://www.nikolaikirche.de/#> and <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/st-nicholas-church>
- "Runde Ecke" Memorial Museum: <https://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de> and <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/memorial-museum-in-the-runde-ecke>
- Forum on Contemporary History Leipzig: <https://www.hdg.de/en/zeitgeschichtliches-forum-leipzig> and <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/leipzig-forum-of-contemporary-history>