

BERLIN DISTRICTS

Berlin – with an area of 890 km² and nearly 3.5 million inhabitants - has been divided into districts (*Bezirke*) since 1920 (20 districts then). After 1990 reunification and until 2001 there were 23 districts. A reform effective 1 January 2001 has created **12 districts** (the aim was to create administrative areas with similar population size each) by joining some of the 'old' districts into larger 'new' ones.

Three districts with already high population number (Spandau, Reinickendorf, Neukölln) were left unchanged; in two cases three 'old' districts formed a new one (Mitte, Tiergarten, Wedding formed the Mitte district; Prenzlauer Berg, Weissensee, Pankow formed the Pankow district); in the remaining cases two of the 'old' districts formed one new district (Charlottenburg and Wilmersdorf, Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg, Zehlendorf and Steglitz, Schöneberg and Tempelhof, Marzahn and Hellersdorf, Lichtenberg and Hohenschönhausen).

Every district has its own administration. Each district consists of several city parts (*Ortsteile* or *Stadtteile*).

DISTRICT 01 – MITTE

<http://www.berlin-mitte.de>

(Consists of old districts **Mitte, Tiergarten, Wedding**)

Mitte, as the name says (Mitte = centre, middle) is the central district of Berlin. It's **39.5 km²** large and has over **320,000** inhabitants. It's divided into 6 city parts (Mitte, Moabit, Hansaviertel, Tiergarten, Wedding, Gesundbrunnen).

In spite of the 2001 reform that joined Mitte, Tiergarten and Wedding into one district Mitte, generally when Berliners refer to Mitte they still mean only the original Mitte area, excluding the areas of Tiergarten and Wedding.

All important institutions are based in the new Mitte district, including the *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat* (the two houses of parliament), the government offices, many embassies, etc. Most of the historic sights and monuments of Berlin are also in Mitte (eg. the Museum island, the famous 'Unter den Linden' boulevard, *Brandenburger Tor* (gate), the Humboldt university, the States Opera, the ZOO, and many more).

After reunification **Mitte** (74,000 inhabitants, 10.7 km²) has been the area most changing face. It has come back to play the significant role of the centre of Berlin and has seen a huge amount of development, new buildings, retail and office complexes of stunning modern architecture, hotels to cater to the millions of tourists visiting reunited Berlin's sights each year... Galleries, theatres, restaurants, bars, cafes, and more, attract Berliners and visitors alike.

One of Berlin's most important avenues, *Friedrichstrasse*, is 2 miles long and goes from the border of Kreuzberg and the former East Berlin part of Mitte through to the district's former

Western part. The famous Checkpoint Charlie (today a tourist magnet) is the point where the heavily guarded border between the Eastern and Western sector used to be. The originally Western part of Friedrichstrasse is today one of Berlin's most exclusive and expensive areas, with high end shopping and offices. In this area Friedrichstrasse crosses *Unter den Linden*, the magnificent boulevard plastered on both sides with monumental centuries old period buildings, including the States Opera, Humboldt university, etc.

Tiergarten (89,000 inhabitants, 13.4 km²), similarly to Mitte, has seen a (partial) revival after reunification. It's here that the government quarter is based (after being largely moved from former West German capital Bonn). In contrast with the modern government and Chancellor office complexes are the monumental buildings of the parliament (*Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*). Tiergarten also houses *Schloss Bellevue*, the residence of the German president, and many embassies, many of stunning design and architectural concept.

Potsdamer Platz (square), the former no-man's-land where the Berlin Wall once stood, has been fully rebuilt and today features the most stunning modern construction and highrise office towers, but also the famous Ritz Carlton hotel and a large entertainment complex with cinemas, restaurants, cafes, etc.

Tiergarten is named after the massive park (Berlin's largest) that forms the area's southern part. (*Tiergarten* = zoological garden). The park boasts many hectares of woods, lakes, walking paths, and is very popular among Berliners including for summer barbecues. It's unique for such vast parkland area to be located in the very hear of a metropolis.

Tiergarten was a former West Berlin district. It boasts a mix of residential and commercial buildings, many of them period/classic, as well as new construction. The fantastic new main rail station of Berlin (*Hauptbahnhof*) is located in Tiergarten. Opened in autumn 2006 it's Europe's largest rail junction and by far the most stunning one. The station, a super modern steel and glass building, includes a shopping mall and numerous cafes and restaurants, and is the pride of modern Berlin.

Despite the district's importance, there are still parts of Tiergarten that managed to avoid the revival of recent years. Here, solid period blocks are awaiting the attention of investors and developers to bring them back to top standard through renovation and updating.

Wedding (160,000 inhabitants, 15.4 km²) is one of the original working class districts of Berlin. It's one of the smallest (old) districts with 15 km². In spite of several companies being based here, there is a high unemployment rate (nearly 25%) among the population of Wedding. This is likely to improve gradually due to the proximity to the new government area in Mitte/Tiergarten and the increasing change from industry into service sector.

Wedding is one of Berlin's poorest areas and also one of those with highest foreigner numbers (nearly 30%). Immigrants are mostly from Turkey and Arabic countries. Social problems are relatively frequent in parts of Wedding.

Wedding hasn't seen much of the boom Berlin has experienced in the 1990's. Wedding is a mix of large concrete housing estates and classic apartment buildings often in poor condition, but as many areas of Berlin also has several green areas and parks. There are several parts of Wedding that are popular and offer solid buildings and good rental potential, but more than in other districts, it's important to know where to look, when purchasing in Wedding.

DISTRICT 02 – FRIEDRICHSHAIN-KREUZBERG

<http://www.friedrichshain-kreuzberg.de>

Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district is 20 km² large and has over 260,000 inhabitants. It was created by joining two districts – Friedrichshain (former East Berlin) and Kreuzberg (former West) – separated by the river *Spree*.

The two areas are structurally different: Kreuzberg boasts a very large immigrant (mostly Turkish) population at 33%, Friedrichshain has a foreigner rate at less than 9%.

Both areas have the advantage of being centrally located, with excellent accessibility, and are becoming increasingly trendy with Berliners, in particular Friedrichshain, a hip area very popular with younger population.

The district has in recent years been attracting a large number of media, marketing, high-tech and IT companies to the new '*Media-Spree*' business quarter – an area on both sides of the *Spree* river (the northern bank – Friedrichshain and the southern bank – Kreuzberg). (Among the many media companies are MTV, Universal, BMG who have set their European headquarters in Friedrichshain's *Media-Spree* area.)

The area of *Media-Spree* is also poised to see some of the largest development Berlin has seen in recent years. Massive real estate projects are planned for completion in the next 2-3 years (and several have already been completed). Among them high end office buildings and towers, the huge O2 Entertainment Arena, as well as luxury loft apartments.

For more on *Media-Spree*: www.mediaspree.de

Friedrichshain (approx. 105,000 inhabitants, 9.8 km²) boasts many period apartment buildings and has been undergoing a large scale regeneration, with renovation works carried out everywhere. It also features a popular park (*Volkspark Friedrichshain*). Friedrichshain has been attracting large numbers of young Berliners who rent one of the refurbished or unrefurbished classic apartments (young couples, singles, students, etc).

Also visible is the increasing shift towards more affluent inhabitants, including young executives working in the many locally based international companies. The vibrant nightlife scene, cafes, bars, clubs, restaurants, etc are well present in Friedrichshain and partially also Kreuzberg.

Friedrichshain is expected to continue to see substantial growth in coming years. Many compare it to Prenzlauer Berg (today one of Berlin's best areas) 5 years ago. Demand for housing in Friedrichshain is constantly higher than supply and apartments rent out fast.

Kreuzberg (approx. 155,000 inhabitants, 10.4 km²) has traditionally been a working class district and is still today a more downscale area than Friedrichshain. However, Kreuzberg's multicultural mix is growing in popularity, and has mostly avoided the social problems often seen in other areas with high immigrant population (such as Neukölln, Wedding). Much of the area has been gentrified in recent years and Kreuzberg is predicted to have a good future.

DISTRICT 03 – PANKOW

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-pankow/index.html>

(Consists of old districts **Pankow**, **Prenzlauer Berg**, **Weissensee**)

The **Pankow** district has over 340,000 inhabitants living on a large area of 103.1 km². It consists of 13 city parts. The entire areas of today's Pankow district was part of East Germany before unification.

The most sought-after part is **Prenzlauer Berg** (140,000 inhabitants, 10.9 km²) area. It's been largely regenerated in recent years and is today an established area to live for both intellectuals, families, artists, executives, etc. (5 years ago it was particularly popular with hip young Berliners and students, today while still trendy it's growing into a more and more upscale area.)

Prenzlauer Berg with its many period buildings is the single largest area of Berlin in terms of the number of preserved classic (late 19th and early 20th century) properties. Most of the buildings have been renovated in the last few years. The district also features many cafes, bars, restaurants, clubs (in particularly near the *Kollwitzplatz* square).

Weissensee (74,000 inhabitants, 30.2 km²) is named after the lake *Weisser See*. The lake and surrounding park are an attractive green heart of Weissensee. The area consists of a mix of period buildings, newer construction, as well as industrial production and warehouse areas. Some parts of Weissensee have been gentrified, many are of rather poor standard.

A sought-after area is the Composers' quarter (with streets named after famous classical composers). However, less than a kilometre westwards is a much less popular part of Weissensee, with a mix of (often unrefurbished) residential and light industrial buildings. When buying in Weissensee it's important to do your homework.

Most of **Pankow** (approx. 125,000 inhabitants, 62 km²) is an established area, with residential and commercial buildings.

One of the most sought-after parts of Pankow is the city part Niederschönhausen with its early 20th century villas and classic apartment buildings. The castle '*Schloss Schönhausen*', once residence of East Germany's (GDR) president and later location of negotiations preparing Germany's reunification, is also located here. Niederschönhausen is a green part of Berlin with several parks.

DISTRICT 04 – CHARLOTTENBURG-WILMERSDORF

<http://www.charlottenburg-wilmersdorf.de>

Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf has over 320,000 inhabitants living on 64.7 km². It consists of 7 city parts (Schmargendorf, Grunewald, Westend, Halensee, Charlottenburg, Charlottenburg Nord, Wilmersdorf). The district is very well connected by public transport and easy to get around without driving.

Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf is the most prestigious district of Berlin and has one of highest incomes per household in Germany. It boasts high standard buildings (classic as well as newer construction) on tree-lined avenues.

Charlottenburg (approx. 180,000 inhabitants, 30.3 km²) is upscale and exclusive in its large part. It was part of the former West Berlin. Prior to its 1920 inclusion into larger Berlin (*Gross-Berlin*) Charlottenburg was the richest commune in Prussia.

It features the largest retail and shopping areas in Berlin, as well as most of the city's 3-5 star hotels. Berlin's most famous shopping boulevard *Kurfürstendamm* (called *Kudamm*) including Europe's largest department store KaDeWe are in Charlottenburg.

So are many historic sights and some of Berlin's most well known landmarks (such as the ruin of the Memorial Church '*Gedächtniskirche*'), theatres, the Berlin Opera, the Technical University, countless boutiques, designer emporiums, cafes, bars, upscale restaurants, etc. Castle *Schloss Charlottenburg* with surrounding park is a popular visitor destination. The Olympic stadium and Berlin's largest exhibition and conference area (160,000 m²) are also in the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf district.

In WWII the district suffered heavy destruction, many of the historic period buildings have disappeared. However, Charlottenburg as well as Wilmersdorf still feature some of Berlin's best properties, with rarely any unrenovated or low standard building to be seen in much of the district's area.

Charlottenburg consists of a wealthy and chic area in its south (high end residential and retail buildings, upscale restaurants, cafes, etc) and a good but less upscale area to the north (Charlottenburg-Nord). At the eastern edge of Charlottenburg is the ZOO, and at the north-west border (belonging already to Spandau district) is *Siemensstadt* (Siemens-city, HQ of Siemens as well as housing of its employees).

Wilmersdorf (approx. 145,000 inhabitants, 34.4 km²) is a traditional, established residential area (part of former West Berlin). It is also the most expensive part of Berlin, in particular in its city part Grunewald which boasts the most exclusive villas and houses and the highest prices in the city. Many prominent Berliners live in Wilmersdorf.

Although there are many houses and villas to be found in this district (in particular areas like Grunewald), Wilmersdorf boasts, similarly to Charlottenburg, upscale apartments in renovated classic buildings. Wilmersdorf is more quiet than Charlottenburg, although it also offers many restaurants, cafes, galleries, boutiques, as well as sports and leisure facilities. The shopping boulevard *Kurfürstendamm* goes from Charlottenburg all the way to Wilmersdorf.

Charlottenburg as well as Wilmersdorf also have many post-war apartment blocks built in the 1950's-1970's. They are generally in good condition, well cared for and popular due to their location.

Both Charlottenburg and Wilmersdorf are very established, prestigious areas popular with wealthier families and better-off professionals. Infrastructure is the best in Berlin and locals can easily get along purely by the excellent transport links. Demand for property here has always been strong, and supply isn't keeping up, making renting and selling generally trouble-free.

DISTRICT 05 – SPANDAU

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-spandau/index.html>

Spandau (approx. 230,000 inhabitants, 91.9 km²) lies at the western end of Berlin. It consists of 9 city parts (Hakenfelde, Falkenhagener Feld, Staaken, Wilhelmstadt, Gatow, Kladow, Spandau, Haselhorst, Siemensstadt).

The Old Town of Spandau (*Spandauer Altstadt*) features centuries old landmarks including the oldest residential building in Berlin (*Gothisches Haus*). Much of Spandau has retained its original village feeling.

Spandau is more popular with families looking for more quiet environment away from the hustle and bustle of the inner city districts.

DISTRICT 06 – STEGLITZ - ZEHLENDORF

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-steglitz-zehlendorf>

Steglitz-Zehlendorf (over 295,000 inhabitants, 102.5 km²) consists of 7 city parts (Steglitz, Lichterfelde, Lankwitz, Zehlendorf, Dahlem, Nikolassee, Wannsee).

It is the district of Berlin with the highest income per household and very low unemployment. The average age of local population is significantly higher than the Berlin average.

Zehlendorf (approx. 100,000 inhabitants, 70.5 km²) is a very green district and includes among others leisure areas such as Grunewald (shared with Wilmersdorf) with its seas and woods particularly popular in the summer. The Berlin Botanical garden and several museums are also located here. The city part Dahlem houses numerous scientific facilities as well as the Free University. Much of Zehlendorf consists of high-end villa colonies, many with quiet village feel.

Steglitz (over 195,000 inhabitants, 32 km²) consists of high-standard apartment buildings as well as turn of the century villas and houses (in particular in the city part Lichterfelde). The shopping street *Schlossstrasse* is Berlin's second largest shopping area (after *Kudamm* in Charlottenburg). Steglitz shares the Berlin Botanical garden with Zehlendorf.

Both Steglitz and Zehlendorf are sought-after by better-off Berlin families and well paid professionals. Demand for property (rentals and sales) is consistently strong.

DISTRICT 07 - TEMPELHOF-SCHÖNEBERG

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-tempelhof-schoeneberg/index.html>

Tempelhof-Schöneberg has about 350,000 inhabitants living on an area of 53.1 km². It consists of 6 city parts (Schöneberg, Friedenau, Tempelhof, Mariendorf, Marienfelde, Lichtenrade).

The international **airport Tempelhof** is located in the northern part of the district. Tempelhof is expected to be closed in or after 2011 (along with Tegel airport) after opening of the new mega airport (Berlin Brandenburg International Airport) to the south of Berlin.

Much of Tempelhof-Schöneberg area has apartment blocks, including many classic ones. Tempelhof also houses several industry facilities. Schöneberg is one of the Berlin areas least destroyed in the WWII and hence boasting many original buildings. Due to reasonable prices and many bars and restaurants it's popular with middle-aged singles and younger families. The city part Friedenau was originally built as a villa quarter, however, due to lack of housing the villas were pulled down and apartment buildings were raised instead.

DISTRICT 08 – NEUKÖLLN

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/index.html>

Neukölln, with an area of 44.9 km² has approximately 310,000 inhabitants, about 30% of which are immigrants, mostly from Turkey and Arabic countries.

Neukölln, until 1912 called Rixdorf, have already at that time had a very bad reputation as a bastion of crime. Today Neukölln is still considered the most troubled part of Berlin, and one of the worst in all Germany. This is mainly due to the frequent social problems, high crime and very high unemployment (close to 25%).

Neukölln is more known for its infamous large highrise housing estates. However, there are also classic apartment buildings in its northern part, and pockets of the original villages such as in city parts Britz and Buckow, as well as Rudow except in the huge and badly reputed Gropiusstadt housing estate.

DISTRICT 09 – TREPTOW-KÖPENICK

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-treptow-koepenick/index.html>

Treptow-Köpenick is the largest district of Berlin in terms of area – it lies on massive 168.5 km² and has less than 240,000 inhabitants; the lowest population density of all Berlin. It consists of 16 city parts (Alt-Treptow, Plänterwald, Baumschulenweg, Johannisthal, Niederschöneweide, Altglienicke, Adlershof, Bohnsdorf, Oberschöneweide, Köpenick, Friedrichshagen, Hirschgarten, Rahnsdorf, Grünau, Müggelheim, Schmöckwitz).

About ¾ of the area is formed by water, woods and parks. It's the district with the largest water areas (forming 36.5% of its total size) and largest woodland area (42.8%). The river *Spree* flows through all of Treptow.

Berlin's tallest office building, the 125 m high *Treptowers* are located on the Spree river near the *Treptower Park*. In the city part Adlershof a science quarter was built in recent years; it includes several research institutes of colleges as well as about 400 technology companies. There's also Berlin's largest media area with new TV production studios. The Old Town of Köpenick with its castle *Köpenicker Schloss* is an interesting area for visitors.

Treptow-Köpenick is considered more of a family type district, similarly to Spandau and Reinickendorf, and partially also Steglitz-Zehlendorf.

DISTRICT 10 – MARZAHN-HELLERSDORF

<http://www.marzahn-hellersdorf.de>

Marzahn-Hellersdorf has a population of about 260,000 inhabitants and an area of 61.4 km². It was part of former East Berlin. The district consists of 5 city parts (Marzahn, Biesdorf, Kaulsdorf, Mahlsdorf, Hellersdorf).

Marzahn is known for its vast communist-built concrete housing estates (mostly from 1970's), high crime rates and social problems. It's one of Berlin's areas with worst reputation, along with Neukölln (and partially Wedding). Many people have left Marzahn in the last decade and this trend still continues today.

Although Marzahn is infamous for its concrete panel block housing (*Plattenbau*), there are also some green areas and a park.

Hellersdorf had a village character until 1980 when large apartment block complexes were built; today they house 70% of Hellersdorf's population.

DISTRICT 11 – LICHTENBERG-HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN

<http://www.berlin.de/ba-lichtenberg/index.html>

Lichtenberg-Hohenschönhausen has approximately 265,000 inhabitants living on 52.4 km². Both were part of former East Berlin. The district consists of 10 city parts (Friedrichsfelde, Karlshorst, Lichtenberg, Falkenberg, Malchow, Wartenberg, Alt- and Neu-Hohenschönhausen, Fennpfuhl, Rummelsburg).

The regional and long-distance train station Berlin-Lichtenberg is located here (apart from a couple of other regional train stations). The zoological garden *Tierpark Berlin-Friedrichsfelde* spreads over 160 hectares. The local high street *Weitlingstrasse* is well known in Berlin, it boasts many smaller individual shops (although it's by no means a higher-end or upscale area).

Lichtenberg is by some viewed as the next area to be regenerated and improved similarly to what happened to the now sought-after Prenzlauer Berg and the trendy Friedrichshain that has been going through great changes these years. It remains to be seen whether Lichtenberg will follow soon or not, geographically it borders on the more popular Friedrichshain and boasts good transport links and infrastructure. A drawback for some is the reputation for being somewhat of a neo-nazi stronghold.

However, Lichtenberg is generally a safe area and much of its housing stock consists of period apartment blocks, many already renovated, but many still to be refurbished. Although much of the district's housing are apartment buildings, the city part Karlshorst has many houses and villas.

DISTRICT 12 – REINICKENDORF

Reinickendorf has over 250,000 inhabitants and 89.5 km². It was part of former West Berlin (French sector) and consists of 10 city parts (Reinickendorf, Tegel, Konradshöhe, Heiligensee, Frohnau, Hermsdorf, Waidmannslust, Lübars, Wittenau, Märkisches Viertel).

The important international **airport Berlin-Tegel** is located in Reinickendorf.

Reinickendorf has many faces: it has vast wood (21.6%) and water (also 21.6% of the district's size) areas, many classic apartment blocks, several areas of houses and villas (in particular in Frohnau and Hermsdorf), as well as large highrise 1960's and 1970's housing estates in the *Märkisches Viertel* area. Reinickendorf is also home to industrial production and companies small to large. The district generally lacks cultural opportunities though.

Reinickendorf is more popular with families, due to a larger number of family houses and more quiet environment (in parts of the district).

