



The Berlin experience

On one sunny summer day, during our stay in Germany, we planned a day trip to Reichstag, one of the Berlin's most renowned tourists attraction. Unfortunately, it started to rain, yet we decided to go ahead with our plan.

Being an election year in Germany, we felt that a visit to see Reichstag, the meeting place of the Bundestag (the Federal Assembly), would be most appropriate. Despite rain, we took the metro, the nearest S-Bahn stops at Friedrichstrasse and then walked to the Brandenburg Gate (Brandenburger Tor), one of the landmarks of Germany.

The Reichstag is located along the Spree River and just north of Brandenburg Gate. The Brandenburg Gate is an eighteenth century neoclassical monument, which is the testament to many historical events, and the site of the silver jubilee celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Much of Pariser Platz has been turned into cobble stone pedestrian zone. It is a beautiful sight to see when Brandenburg Gate lit up at sundown.

The Brandenburg gate is topped off with a statue known as the 'Quadriga', depicting a statue of the goddess of victory driving a chariot pulled by four horses. An icon cross was added to the statue, as a symbol of Prussia's military victory over France.

Ever prepared with umbrellas and raincoats, we started walking towards the Brandenburg Gate despite rain and wind, with raincoat and umbrella. In front of the massive Brandenburg Gate, we felt as if we are in the Island of Lilliput.

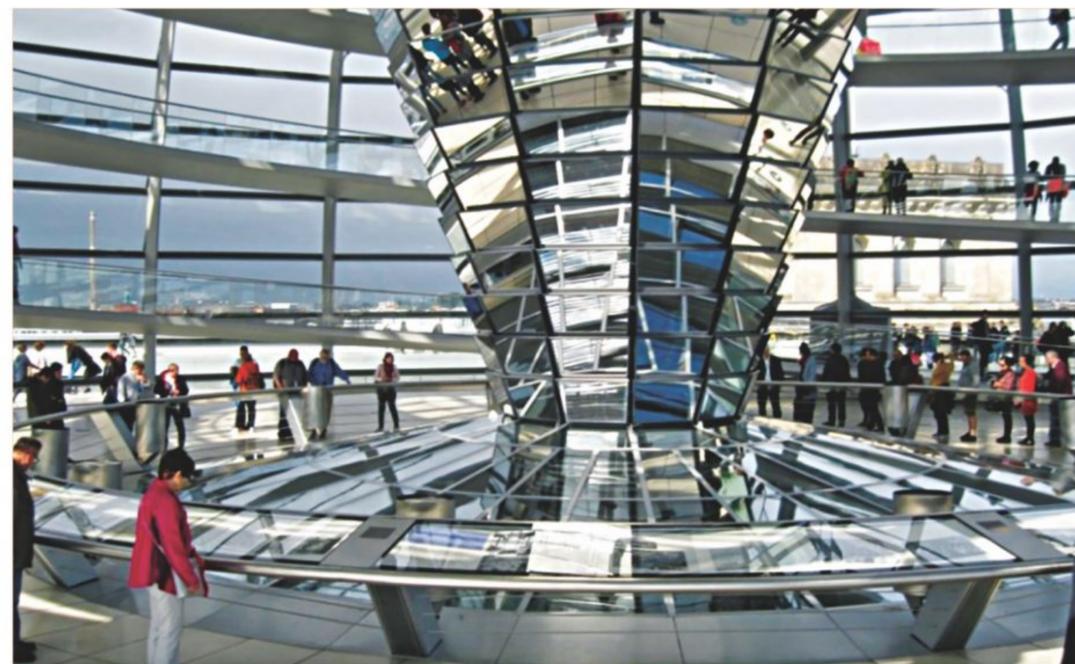
Snapshots were taken, we headed towards Reichstag. Luck was once again not in our favour — tickets were for 3pm!

The admission to the glass dome is open for public, but requires tickets. Now we had idle time, but the incessant rain somewhat spoiled our plans. We found a Berlin

Pavillion next to the ticket stand, and savoured the taste of German food.

After an early lunch, we walked towards Reichstag to spend time at the lush green lawn in front of the parliament building. It seemed like a nice place for family gatherings; the sun finally shone and seemed like a blessing again.

In 1916, the iconic words Dem Deutschen Volke ("[To] the German people") were placed above the main façade of the building. After WW II, the Reichstag



building ended up in the East Berlin, and the iconic dome of the parliament building was demolished in 1954.

In the '90s, British architect Sir Norman Foster won the contest for the renovation of the structure. He kept the outside facade intact, interior stripped and modernised, while the dome was replaced.

Foster's dome is a gleaming metal and glass structure with a ramp that spirals up to a roof terrace, giving a 360-degree view of central Berlin. I had once read that the dome is built with a vision that evokes

transparency beyond structural boundaries.

At last, the clock struck 2:45pm and the wait ended.

We took the elevator to the roof and the 20 people in the lift reached the terrace from where we picked up the easy-to-use audio guide from the counter. As we were ascending the helical ramp in the dome, we felt dizzy. It was a 230 metre ascent!

While going up the ramp, we could see majestic Berlin through the glass and reflection of people or activity on the inner mir-

heavily it rained in the morning?

Our daytrip did not end there! Seeing the cruise boats plying from the observation deck gave us an idea to take a one-hour sight-seeing tour along the Spree River. The Historic City Cruise started along the Spree River between the Reichstag and the Nicholas' Quarter. The cruise boat passed through the Federal Government's different offices.

The turquoise dome was easily identifiable from a distance and is the largest Cathedral in Berlin (Berliner Dom). There is an island on the Spree River, popularly known as Treasure Island which houses five museums. We passed the museums one by one. This is a paradise for museum lovers; shops and restaurants along the river are perfect for the care-free tourists.

After the cruise, we came back to the parliament area and took Bus #100. We got the information from Rick Steves' popular shows on travelling in Europe. His shows and books are very tourist friendly and very informative.

From Reichstag, we travelled past the official residence of the German president, Bellevue Palace; the famous Tiergarten — 520 acres of tapestry of forests, woodlands and canals.

We got off at Alexanderplatz, which is famous for shops, restaurants and other attractions. Berlin is a very green and bike friendly city. There are several hundred bike stands located around the Mall of Berlin.

There is a vibrant Turkish community in the city. As we had German fried potatoes with chicken for lunch, we opted Turkish for dinner at the neighbourhood just to tease our palate to a different taste.

A long day had ended with some memorable sight-seeing and historical excursion. And we felt rejuvenated for another adventure the next day!

By Aeman T Rasul
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