

Brandenburg



Although it surrounds bustling Berlin, the Brandenburg state of mind is as far from the German capital as Shangri-La. It's a quiet, gentle state with vast expanses of unspoilt scenery, much of it in protected nature reserves. Its landscape is quilted in myriad shades, from emerald beech forest to golden fields of rapeseed and sunflowers, but it's also rather flat, windswept and perhaps even a bit melancholic.

This is a region shaped by water – not only by the rippling Oder, Havel and Spree Rivers that sinuously wend through it, but also by the thousands of ponds and lakes and the labyrinthine waterways connecting them. Water also characterises the Spreewald, where indigenous Sorbs keep alive their customs in island hamlets, and the Lower Oder Valley National Park, whose idyllic wetlands provide shelter for rare and endangered bird species. Like a fine wine, Brandenburg is best appreciated in sips, not gulps. It invites slowing down and exploring by bike, boat or on foot.

As the germ cell of Prussia, and thus modern Germany, Brandenburg is a land of great culture. Nowhere is this more apparent than in off-the-charts Potsdam, the 'German Versailles', with its wealth of parks, museums, stately palaces and the famous UFA film studios. Fine architecture awaits in the Rheinsberg palace and the Chorin monastery, while the Niederfinow ship-lift ranks squarely as one of the great technological monuments of the early 20th century.

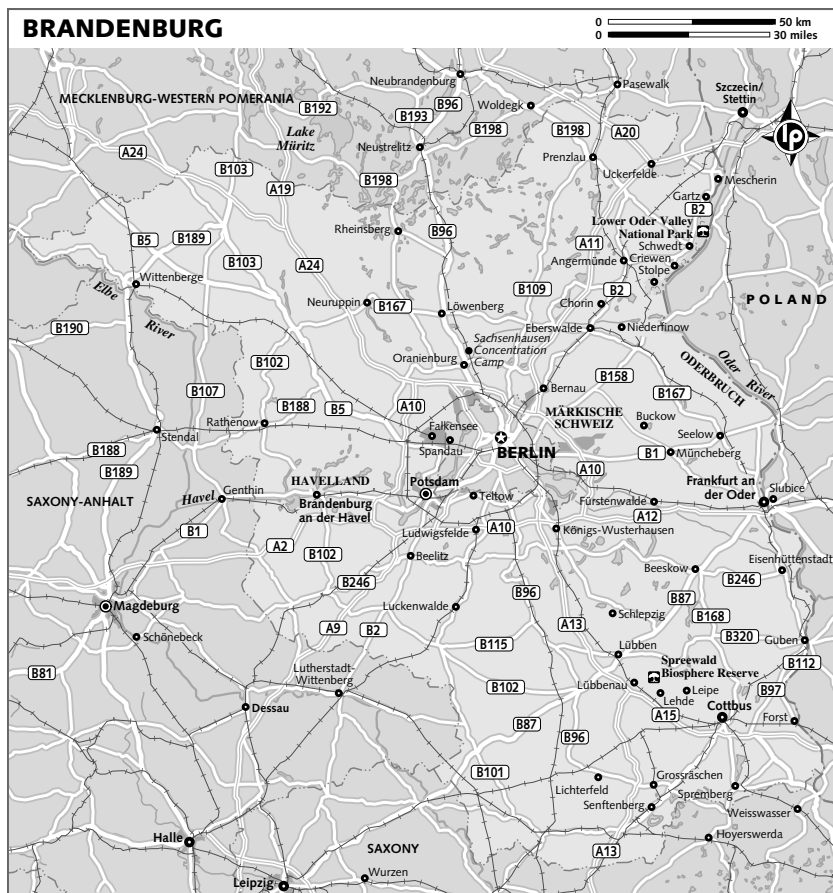
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Parks & Palaces** Tackle all of Potsdam's treasures and be sure not to miss the exotic Chinese Teahouse (p147)
- **Watery Ramblings** Take a float in the slow lane while kayaking around the idyllic waterways of the Spreewald Biosphere Reserve (p156)
- **Techno Wonders** Rub your eyes in disbelief while watching entire barges being hoisted 60m in the air at the massive ship-lift (p164) in Niederfinow
- **Music** Feast your ears on classical music during a summer concert at the romantically ruined medieval Chorin monastery (p163)
- **History of Terror** Try to grasp the horrors of Nazi Germany while touring what's left of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (p160) at Oranienburg



■ POPULATION: 2.58 MILLION

■ AREA:



Information

The excellent website maintained by **Tourismus Marketing Brandenburg** (☎ 0331-200 4747; www.brandenburg-tourism.com) should satisfy all your pre-trip planning needs and also has a room-booking function.

Getting Around

The Brandenburg-Berlin Ticket entitles you and up to four accompanying passengers (or one or both parents or grandparents plus all their children or grandchildren up to 14 years) to one day of travel anywhere within Berlin and Brandenburg on local and regional public transport from 9am to 3am the following day (midnight to 3am on weekends). It is valid on RE, IRE, RB and S-Bahn trains as well as

buses, U-Bahn and trams. The ticket costs €24 if bought online at www.bahn.de or at station vending machines, and €26 if bought from a Reisezentrum ticket agent. For timetable information, see www.vbb-online.de.

POTSDAM & HAVELLAND

The prime attraction of Brandenburg state and the most popular day trip from Berlin, Potsdam is a mere 24km southwest of the capital's city centre and easily accessible by S-Bahn. If time allows, venture another 36km west to the historic city of Brandenburg an

der Havel, the centre of the watery Havelland region. Picturesque and less tourist-saturated than Potsdam, it's a perfect introduction to the state for which it's named.

POTSDAM

☎ 0331 / pop 131,000

Potsdam, on the Havel River just southwest of Greater Berlin, is the capital and crown jewel of the state of Brandenburg. The captivating architecture of this former Prussian royal seat and the elegant air of history that still hangs over its parks and gardens prove an intoxicating cocktail to the millions of visitors who descend upon the town each year. A visit here is essential if you're spending any time in the region at all. All this splendour didn't go unnoticed by Unesco, which gave World Heritage site status to the entire city in 1990.

No single individual shaped Potsdam more than King Friedrich II (Frederick the Great), the visionary behind many of Sanssouci's fabulous palaces and parks. Although WWII bombing squadrons largely reduced the historic town centre to rubble, the palaces escaped with nary a shrapnel wound.

To emphasise their victory over the German military machine, the Allies chose Schloss Cecilienhof for the Potsdam Conference of August 1945, which set the stage for the division of Berlin and Germany into occupation zones.

The suburb of Babelsberg is the site of a historic – and now once again functioning – film studio (with a less than historic theme park).

Orientation

Potsdam Hauptbahnhof (central train station) is just southeast of the Altstadt, across the Havel River. Park Sanssouci is west of the historic centre, while the Neuer Garten with Schloss Cecilienhof is north. Babelsberg is quite a bit east of here.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Alexander-von-Humboldt Buchhandlung (☎ 200 460; Am Kanal 47) Good general bookstore.

Das Internationale Buch (☎ 291 496; cnr Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse & Brandenburger Strasse) Great selection of maps and travel books.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Potsdam Card (€11.50) Three consecutive days of unlimited public transport plus one year of discounts to sights,

restaurants and events. It is sold at the tourist office, hotels and all participating venues.

EMERGENCY

Emergency medical service (☎ 01805-304 505)

Fire & ambulance (☎ 112)

Police (☎ 110)

INTERNET ACCESS

Staudenhof (☎ 0176-5215 8276; Am Alten Markt 10; per hr €1.50; ♿ 9am-midnight or later) Enter from the pedestrian zone behind the building.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Klinikum Ernst-von-Bergmann (☎ 2410; Charlottenstrasse 72)

MONEY

Commerzbank (☎ 281 90; Lindenstrasse 45)

Dresdner Bank (☎ 287 8200; Yorckstrasse 28)

Eurochange (☎ 280 4033; Brandenburger Strasse 29)

POST

Main post office (cnr Am Kanal & Platz der Einheit)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Potsdam tourist office (☎ 275 580; www.potsdam-tourismus.de; Brandenburger Strasse 3; ♿ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar)

Sanssouci Besucherzentrum (☎ 969 4202; www.spsg.de; Zur Historischen Windmühle; ♿ 8.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Feb)

Sights

PARK SANSSOUCI

Park Sanssouci is the oldest and most splendid of Potsdam's many gardens, a vast landscaped expanse of mature trees, rare plants and magnificent palaces. Its trump card is Schloss Sanssouci, Frederick the Great's favourite retreat, a place where he could be 'sans souci' (without cares). In the 19th century, Friedrich Wilhelm IV also left his mark on the park.

The park is open from dawn till dusk year-round. Admission is free, but there are machines by the entrance where you can make a voluntary donation of €2. The palaces and outbuildings all have different hours and admission prices. Most are closed on Monday and some of the lesser sights open only at weekends and holidays outside the main season. A two-day pass including all sights in the park costs €15/10 adult/concession.