

## TRIER, Birthplace of Karl Marx

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When you first approach Trier, you could think it will just be another wonderful town along the Mosel river, with banks and hills covered by green vineyards, and the scenery is really superb. However, in the middle of that natural grandeur lies a town old of more than two thousand years, steeped in history but with plenty of up-to-date entertainment, the rich cultural remains of the past being a living feature in the today's town. We invite you to discover the most significant cultural features as well as historical sources and ancient human environment of this Episcopal city.

Trier owes its foundation to the Roman emperor Augustus around 16 BC and having been built near a sanctuary of the Celtic tribe *Treviri*, it was called *Augusta Treverorum*. It was early raised to "civitas" - its inhabitants thereby enjoying Roman citizenship - and became the capital of the Gallo-Roman *Provincia Belgica*.

After enduring for a certain time war and devastation by the Germanic tribes, Trier experienced again a flourishing period of renewal towards the end of the 3rd century, when emperor Constantius Chlorus changed its name to *Treviris* and made it an imperial residence and the capital of the West Roman Empire. The city therefore had the benefit of an enormous religious freedom away from the persecutions suffered by the Christians during the ruling of Diocletian and soon developed into an Episcopal community. In 311 AD, through the Toleration Edict of emperor Constantine the Great, Christianity gained more power and recognition until it was raised to the rank of official religion by emperor Theodosius.

For about hundred years, Trier enjoyed a full blooming period and became a worldwide known medieval centre of pilgrimage where people would come from everywhere to visit the tombs of famous clergymen like St Maximin and St Paulin. Later in the 18th century, a Baroque church by the famous German architect and engineer Balthasar Neumann was erected in the northern part of Trier, outside the gates of the ancient Roman town, in homage to St Paulin, the high altar and the ceiling paintings being well worth a visit.

Another place of worship was the tomb of St Eucharius, the first Bishop of Trier. In the 10th-12th centuries a Romanesque abbey-church was built on the site to honour Apostle St Matthias and holding his tomb; it is also situated outside the old Roman walls, in the southern part of the city.

Besides these places of religious devotion, a proliferation of churches was bestowed on the city, and the Roman central structure embodying the today's cathedral, the Dom, is in fact the Episcopal church erected in the 4th century - to which was added in the 11th century the Romanesque west façade, and in the 12th-13th centuries the Gothic east choir and the cloisters.

It also dates back to this famous Roman period the *Aula Palatina* - the imperial palace where Constantine was crowned emperor - that later became the castle of the prince electors and is today a Protestant church; and the *Imperiale Thermae*, a Roman bathing palace boasting the highly preserved masonry of the hot water baths and the large basements.

An extraordinarily rich and culturally diverse community therefore grew up under the protection and safety of the strong town walls built in the course of the 2nd century - the northern gate of

which, the famous *Porta Nigra*, still marvels the today's visitor. The Trier schools would teach Latin, Greek, Philosophy, Law and Medicine. High imperial soldiers and dignitaries, as well as wealthy citizens living at the imperial court, brought to the city artisans and craftsmen, also well-known artists and writers, and among the latter we may recall the poet *Ausonius* who sang the beauties of the Mosel countryside in his poem "Mosella".

Such an environment would obviously also foster trading activities and the necessary means of communication. Two of the most important Roman routes, one coming from the south through Metz, the other from the southwest through Reims, would join together before reaching Trier; a third route would connect Trier to Cologne, the *Colonia Agrippinensis*, crossing today's Bitburg. Playing a complementary part in these routes, there were obviously the bridges, and the Roman bridge of the 2nd century is a living presence of that lost wealth of the past.

In the 5th century, the city and the surrounding fields were put to fire and destruction by the crushing power of the Franks who brought with them their own beliefs and religious practices. Artistically speaking, the period was extremely poor since the Frankish constructions, simple wooden structures covered mostly with straw, did not resist the action of time; the Roman influence, however, became prevalent in some barons' and other lords' dwellings, the so-called *Pfalz*, i.e. "palace". The Trier *Pfalz*, nowadays a collegiate church, is situated on the left bank of the Mosel and can be reached by rail or Bus 8.

Following Clovis's conversion to Christianity, the monasteries and churches grew again on influence, as they were the only places, in those ancient and obscure days, yielding learning and knowledge. However, two centuries still had to pass until Trier comes again on stage, historically speaking, with the rebirth of the Roman culture under Charles the Great. After the division of the Carolingian Empire around 843, Trier fell to the East Frankish German Empire. The erection of the Market Cross at the end of the 10th century defined the centre of the medieval town, enlarged later by other buildings that can still be seen today, as St Peter's fountain, the Gothic church of St Gangolf, and the Red House.

In the 12th century, the archbishops of Trier became prince electors, and made the town the capital of their electorate. Again high prosperity alternated with despairing decline. With the break-up of the Holy Roman Empire at the end of the 18th century, Trier fell to Prussia in 1815 as a result of the Vienna Treaty, after having been in French possession for a short period. It belongs to Germany since 1945.

We could be tempted to say that our description of Trier's historical sites and monuments is somehow exhaustive, however, the well-advised visitor will soon recognize that it is but a small part of its numerous hidden treasures. A city like Trier that played such significant roles during the course of history is no doubt an open museum, and the presence of other places of interest is not to be neglected.

That's why we recommend a sightseeing tour visiting the church of Our Lady, *Liebfrauen*, the first Gothic church in Germany, which is part of the cathedral complex. Not very far, is the Electoral Palace - nowadays seat of the district government - with the east and north wings in Renaissance style as well as the Red Tower and St Peter's portal; the south wing facing the gardens is Baroque, and on the eastern side of the gardens stands the medieval city wall with the gate *Kastilport*. Then pass the *Imperiale Thermae* and continue until you reach the amphitheatre. Built around 100 AD under Trajan, who made a reputation as the "Roman empire builder", this imposing structure - a Roman arena for gladiatorial contests and animal fights holding up to 25000 spectators - is no doubt one of the very many interesting sites in Trier. The ruins are open to the public, and if you do not want to go on foot, Bus 6 will take you.

Starting at the *Hauptmarkt* (Market Place), if you walk due west towards the Mosel, you find the *Frankenturm*, a Romanesque residential tower of the 11th century, and a bit farther on the banks of the river lies the former convent of St Ermine, the famous abbess of Trier. If you take the south-westerly direction, you pass the old *Kornmarkt* with the St George's fountain; the *Viehmarkt* and the nearby *Rathaus*; the Roman baths of the 2nd century, known as *Barbarathermen*; and some more recent buildings such as the *Europahalle*, the theater, the library, and obviously the house of Karl-Marx - the birthplace of the founder of modern socialism - which was turned into a museum.

Last but not least, among the various rich museums and collections, we cannot forget the *Landesmuseum*, displaying artefacts dating back to the prehistoric and Roman times, as well as early Christian, Frankish and medieval art; the *Bischöfliches Museum*, with findings from excavations of early Christian times and also ecclesiastical art; and the *Städtisches Museum*, capturing the city's art and civilization history, and showing sculptures, paintings and objects from the Middle Ages to the 19th century originating from Trier and its surroundings.

While leaving behind us the silent fascination of the past to enjoy the hurly-burly of today's Trier we will take away with us many happy memories. Reputed to be one of the most important cities of the Gallo-Roman Empire and also of the Middle Ages, Trier is well worth visiting and alike many other German cities, its Christmas market is one of the "hot" events of the cold winter days; a curiosity to be explored during the month of December.

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