

## Visiting Leipzig by Tram

April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, 09:30 hours. Leipzig. In front of the Radison SAS Hotel, Augustusplatz. Tram station: Augustusplatz.



There and then began our three-hour tour of Leipzig on a special tram, the tour kindly provided by our host: IFTEC. The company is a partner of the SPUTNIC project competent in all matters relating to the maintenance of rail infrastructure systems and light rail vehicles. IFTEC has built its success on the sustainable cornerstones of industry knowledge; a holistic services approach; commitment to consistent quality; and close, partner-oriented customer relationships. Today, they offer services in five areas:

- maintenance of rail infrastructure systems for public transport;
- services for light rail vehicles;
- maintenance of rail infrastructure systems for industrial transport;
- construction and assembly of switches; and
- consulting.

Although Leipzig covers an area of just 297 sq km and has only 500,000 inhabitants, it has an incredible 328 km of very well-maintained tram lines.



To understand how this impressive network came to be, a little bit of history is in order: Leipzig began developing its mobility system some centuries ago, as the city was a famous European commercial centre and the oldest host of trade fairs in Germany. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a transport system not only for commercial goods but also for people.

But as you will shortly see, Leipzig was not known as just a commercial city, but also as a university and cultural centre (book printing and publishing). Therefore, there was more need for transport.



As we sat in the tram, important buildings appeared on the left, starting with the new **Gewandhaus**, built between 1977-1981. Many great artists have performed there: Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Bruno Walter, Kurt Masur and Riccardo Chailly. The venue can seat 1,900.



In front of this building is a group of bronze statues surrounding a 10 m tall obelisk. A little further there is the tallest building in the city, the 142 m **Mendebrunnen**. Built between 1968-1975, it evokes the image of an open book.



Then there is Leipzig's first high-rise building, and out front, statues of two workers, symbolising life and work, and a bell between them symbolising awareness. The Latin motto below the two figures states that mankind always wins. The bell was modeled of the clock tower in Venice. Then there is the **Opera House**, built in 1960 on the site of the former complex, itself built in 1868.



Shortly after the tram began rolling, we admired the Leipzig main **Railway Station**. Stretching 298 m long, it is one of the world's largest passenger railway stations. It was opened in October 1995. In the past there were two administrations: a Saxon and a Prussian one. In 1934 these two came to an agreement to join the two stations. Between 1996-1997, the building was completely rebuilt to accommodate a shopping centre and multi-storey car park, making a new, attractive meeting place in Leipzig.



The **Deutsche Bucherei** is more or less a national library, as it has been collecting German language literature since 1913 (more than 7.5 million titles). The brilliantly designed building was erected between 1914-1916 by Oscar Pusch. The two towers were added in 1977-1982 for the storage of more books.



The next important edifice was the former Reichsgericht, now the **Federal Administrative Court**. The monument was designed by the architects Ludwig Hoffmann and Peter Dybwad and was built between 1888-1895 in Italian High Renaissance style. It measures 126 m by 76 m and is crowned by a 68.5 m dome. Through its history, the building has been used as Court of Appeals, History Museum of Justice and Museum of Visual Arts.



The **Thomaskirche** was built in 1212 as the collegiate church of the Augustinians. It is famous because this is where Martin Luther introduced the Reformation in Albertine Saxony on Whit Monday 1539, and also because Johann Sebastian Bach was cantor and *director musices* here from 1723-1750.

The **Russian Memorial Church** honours the 22,000 Russian soldiers who fell at the Battle of Nations near Leipzig. This church, financed with Russian donations and designed by Petersburg architect Vladimir A. Pokrowski, was consecrated in 1913.



As a traditional historic trade fair centre, Leipzig has always played an important role in the development of commerce. The new **Messe Leipzig and Congress Center Leipzig** is very future-orientated, particularly in the new open relationship between East and West. The central building is a large glass hall and has almost 20,000 sq m of floor space. In front of it is a nice artificial lake. On its right rises a tower with the **Double M**, the symbol of Messe Leipzig.



The 91 m high **Volkerschlachtdenkmal** commemorates the Battle of Nations which was fought near Leipzig on October 1813 and ended in the defeat of Napoleon I. Construction of this monument commenced in 1898 and it was finally unveiled on October 18, 1913 at a ceremony attended by Kaiser Wilhelm II, the King of Saxony Friedrich August III, all the princes of the German states and the representatives of Austria, Russia and Sweden. The Berlin architect Bruno Schmitz won the competition to design the memorial, for which 26,500 blocks of granite were used on a site measuring 5,400 sq m. The guardian figures on the cupola and the archangel Michael are 12 m high. Four figures 9.6 m high grace the Hall of Fame. It is worth climbing the 500 steps to the platform to enjoy the view over Leipzig.



As we arrived at the end of the line, we stepped out to admire the view, to talk and to breathe the fresh air. Mr. Carsten Lement from VCL, a consulting company of the public transport operator LVB in Leipzig, told us about the benefit of having cameras inside the tram, on the ceiling. The cameras are positioned so that if someone tries to break one, the other catches the vandalism on tape. In the recent past, the cameras helped police find a killer. After their installation, the rate of thefts on board decreased significantly. It costs EUR 8,000 to equip a tram with a set of cameras, but the investment is worth it.



On the way back we had another opportunity to admire the green spaces and many nice buildings on the edges of Leipzig. We also went to the depot of the retired trams, which is open to visitors from May to September on the third Sunday of each month.



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