

The must-visit Brandenburg Gate was for 50 years following World War II the flash point between Russian and Allied troops, always poised for what could have quickly become an atomic war. Things have quieted down significantly now. Since Berlin was put together again as the bustling city it once was in 1991, the Gate has become a prime tourist destination.

The huge structure, designed from the entry facade of the Parthenon in Athens' Acropolis, was completed in 1791. Since then, victorious armies from Germany, Czarist and Communist Russia, England, France and the United States have marched through it on the way to or from battle. So, would you believe its first name was the Berlin Arch of Peace?

The dramatic statue on top of the Gate is called The Quadriga, showing the goddess Viktoria and her four-horse chariot. It was badly damaged during fighting at the end of WWII, but has been restored to its former glory.

However, the goddess traveled to Paris in 1806 when Emperor Napoleon claimed her as one of the spoils from his defeat of the Prussian army. However, the goddess was returned in 1820, and despite bullets, bombs and political upheavals, she's still regally riding her chariot atop the Gate.

Of course, the Brandenburg Gate isn't Berlin's only attraction, but it is at the center of many surrounding scenes. East of the Gate is Pariser Platz, the base of the famed Unter den Linden Boulevard, an upscale area of overpriced shops and cafes. West of the Gate is Strasse des 17 Juni and the Tiergarten, where many bucolic parks that used to feature strolling lovers and oomphah bands, and are now frequently transformed to ear-splitting rock concerts.

If you stroll the area on a relatively quiet afternoon, you may see some souvenir stands and street entertainers from all over Europe and Africa. You'll enjoy your visit to the historic Brandenburg Gate, but it will be only the start of an interesting visit to the capital city of Germany.

