OUR TOURS

Themed tours for groups

1. 100 years of science in “Germany’s Oxford”
2. On the trail of Dahlem’s Nobel Prize winners
3. Architecture with science in mind

Customised tours on the history of bioresearch, the history of physics and chemistry, and the inception of the Freie Universität Berlin are available by arrangement.

Duration 90 minutes
Languages German, English, Italian
Cost 120 € (German), 140 € (English, Italian)
20% discount for cooperating institutions

The tour can also be booked as a 60-minute bus tour. Prices on request.

Booking
To book a theme tour, please contact:
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Background photo: The historic Dahlem campus of the Fritz Haber Institute
Title photo: Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Biology, approx. 1920
Photo credits: Archives of the Max Planck Society, Freie Universität Berlin
DAHLEM – A GREENFIELD SITE FOR SCIENCE

The discovery of nuclear fission, the first uranium reactor, the development of the electron microscope – a surprising number of scientific breakthroughs have been made in Berlin-Dahlem. With the boom in German industrialisation, from 1871 Berlin not only experienced rapid growth as a political metropolis but also emerged as a centre of scientific excellence. The district of Dahlem in southwest Berlin, notable nowadays for its elegant villas, played a particularly prominent role. Starting in 1912 with the construction of the new Kaiser Wilhelm Society Institutes, this former royal estate became “Germany’s Oxford”, as one unique scientific success followed another. Not least, because the ideal working conditions attracted scientists from all over the world. Numerous Nobel Prize winners lived and worked in Dahlem, among them Albert Einstein, Otto Hahn and Werner Heisenberg. And this great tradition of research still continues. Established in 1948, the Freie Universität occupied many of the older scientific buildings. From 1953 the campus was enlarged to accommodate the expanding student numbers, with new buildings added through to the present day.

The City Tours of the historic campus on Thielplatz highlight milestones in the history of science and follow in the footsteps of Nobel laureates. What was the secret of Dahlem’s astonishing success story? And how do we continue to benefit from it?

100 YEARS OF SCIENCE IN “GERMANY’S OXFORD”

From 1912 onwards Dahlem became a Mecca for scientific research, predating the modern concept of a greenfield campus. The momentum was provided by the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, Germany’s first organization dedicated to basic research and the predecessor of the Max Planck Society. Our standard tour offers an insight into the history of Dahlem as a centre of research. The tour follows in the footsteps of leading scientists and takes in some of Dahlem’s original buildings. Today, these buildings show little sign that they were once designed with science in mind, but they have an astonishing relevance to the present day, for it was here that modern molecular biology and early nuclear physics originated.

ON THE TRAIL OF DAHLEM’S NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS

Numerous Nobel Prize winners have lived and worked in Berlin-Dahlem – the breakthroughs they made have changed society as we know it. In 1938 Otto Hahn and Fritz Straßmann discovered that it was possible to split the atom. Their closest colleague, Lise Meitner, had by this time been in exile for some months. In the 1940s the team headed by Werner Heisenberg attempted to exploit this newly discovered nuclear power as a source of energy and constructed the first uranium reactor.

The tour follows in the footsteps of Dahlem’s Nobel laureates and explains their pioneering discoveries, as well as relating some of their moving personal stories.

Biochemist and Nobel Prize winner Otto Heinrich Warburg in his laboratory in Dahlem

ARCHITECTURE WITH SCIENCE IN MIND

The process of designing buildings with science in mind is as dynamic as science itself. The first scientific institute buildings in Dahlem concealed their modern inner lives behind traditional facades. Only after 1945 did architecture shake off its bonds and allow this internal functionality to be reflected externally as well. In the 1960s the French architectural team of Candilis/Josic/Woods designed the “Rostlaube” building in a style which complements the elegant villas of Dahlem. It is now as much a feature of Dahlem as the original buildings of the early 20th century.