

# Historical Gießen

## A Walk through the Historic Town Centre

### Tourist-Information Gießen

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### Opening hours

Monday – Friday: 10.00 a.m. – 06.00 p.m.

Saturday: 10.00 a.m. – 02.00 p.m.



**A walk through the Historic City Centre**

Gießen (ca. 75.000 Residents), a young, vibrant but at the same time traditional university city, is the economic and cultural centre of Hessen. Our cityscape is characterized by the various students who live and learn in Gießen. The five outer districts of the city are: Allendorf, Kleinlinden, Lützelinden, Rödgen and Wieseck.

In 1248 Gießen was mentioned for the first time. 1944, during World War II, more than 70 % of the city was destroyed. Therefore and due to huge demolition work in the 1970ies even less historical building stock survived.

Starting point of our walk is the **Church Tower (Stadtkirchenturm 1)**, Gießen's landmark (built from 1484 to 1529). It marks the historic town centre at the church place, which is a popular



meeting point at the end of the shopping promenade (pedestrian area) with cafés and benches to take a rest. At the bottom of the tower, lines of light stones cross the ground: They show the outline of the **town church**, which was destroyed – except for the church tower – at the end of World War II. This can be seen very clearly from a bird's eye view that you get from the gallery at the top of the tower. Until 1910, the tower watchmen lived up here in the chamber of the tower to watch over the city and detect fires or other dangers as early as possible. If you would like to enjoy the wonderful view over the city and its area, you need to fetch the key to go upstairs the Church Tower. It is available for a deposit at the **Wallenfels House** situated on the right side behind the tower.

The **Wallenfels House (Wallenfels'sches Haus 3)** houses the collections of prehistory and early history of the Regional Museum and the Tibetan collection of a Himalaya expedition some Gießen professors made in the 19th century as well as the precious collection of ancient vessels of the Archaeological Section of the University of Gießen.

The **Leib House (Leib'sches Haus 2)** (the building directly behind the church tower) is also worth a visit. It belongs to the oldest half-timbered houses of Hessen (built around 1350) and accommodates the historic and folkloristic section of the Regional Museum (Oberhessisches Museum). On the ground floor miniature buildings show the historic town of Gießen and how the old town centre looked like after its destruction – nearly 80 % of the historic buildings in the town centre were destroyed by serious bomb attacks in the year 1944.

The Leib House and the Wallenfels House are connected to each other by a crosswalk. Both houses were destroyed at the end of World War II and were finally reconstructed (the Leib House in 1975 and the Wallenfels House in 1979). They are located on the foundation of a moated castle which was built in 1150 and was the origin of the city of Gießen.

Only a few metres behind the Leib House you can find the **Pankratius Chapel (Pankratiuskappelle 4)**. It was built as a makeshift after World War II according to the plan of Otto Bartning. Its construction was only

possible because it was supported by the help of Gießen's protestant communities and American donations.

Where the local studio of the Hessian Broadcasting Company (Hessischer Rundfunk) is situated (next to the city church tower), once stood the house where Wilhelm Liebknecht was born (**Geburtshaus von Wilhelm Liebknecht 5**). A bronze plate nowadays honours the town's most famous son.

The nearby **Jewish Synagogue (Beith-Jaakov-Synagoge 6)** in the Burggraben, however, is comparatively new. The half-timbered building was transferred from the nearby village of Wohra to Gießen and was opened in 1995 after a two years' construction period. The former synagogues of Gießen had been destroyed in November 1938 in the course of the November pogrom. Since 1978 there is an official Jewish community in Gießen again.

Now let's follow the historic traces across the church place to the **Arcades (Marktlauben 7)**. In September 1442 Landgrave Ludwig II, granted Gießen the rights for two markets being held once a year. Because the ancient market place was too small, the street of the arcades (Marktlaubenstraße) was created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to connect the Lindenplatz and the Brandplatz so that the market area could be extended. Since then, the arcades have been used as a part of the traditional farmer's market held on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Many people in Gießen do not only appreciate the market for its fresh regional products, but also enjoy it as a meeting point for a chat, too.

The market area also covers the Brandplatz and extends to the **Old Castle (Altes Schloss 8)**, another important historical building that was brought back to its former beauty in 1976, after it burnt down completely through a bombardment. The old Castle is the main seat of the Regional Museum (Oberhessisches Museum) containing the painting gallery, the crafts department and temporary exhibitions. The castle tower can be visited during the opening hours of the museum. The only remaining part of the original building is the so-called Heathens' Tower which served as a dungeon for robbers until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.




The tower offers a splendid view over the **Botanical Garden (Botanischer Garten 9)**, the oldest botanical garden in Germany which is still situated in its original location. For citizens and visitors the Botanical Garden is a place of relaxation and recreation in the heart of the city. The garden was a gift from Count Ludwig V of Hessen in 1609, on the occasion of the foundation of the university. Originally, it was used to raise medicinal herbs (hortus medicus). In 1802 a forestry part was added. A 200 year-old ginkgo tree dating from this period still stands here today.

On the other side of the Brandplatz you can find the **New Castle (Neues Schloss 10)**. The impressive building is a mixture of stone-block masonry construction on the ground floor and timber-framed construction on the upper floors. It was built by Landgrave Philipp the Magnanimous in a renaissance château style



(1533-1539). In the following centuries the building was mainly used by the university as a lecture room, archive, chancery, court and even as a prison. Originally, it contained a big hall on the ground floor, more than 30 metres long and almost 10 metres wide. It was often used as a reception room for groups travelling through Gießen.



The **Armoury (Zeughaus **) is situated next to the New Castle and was originally built as a military building (arsenal). Later, it also served as a harvest store, a ballroom, a theatre and a barrack. Burned down to the external walls in 1944, it was rebuilt - more or less - in its original proportions. Today, it is used by the Justus-Liebig-University as a department building.

In relation to its population, Gießen has more students than any other German University City. More than 27.500 students are currently registered at the University (Justus-Liebig-Universität, JLU) and 10.000 are attending the University of Applied Sciences (Technische Hochschule Mittelhessen, THM). The different departments of the universities are distributed throughout the city.

The small annex on the left side of the main entrance of the Armoury dates back to the founding of the JLU in 1609; it served as a campus prison of the university. In 1875 the author Ernst Eckstein (1845-1900), who lived in Gießen, wrote a successful humoresque "Besuch im Karzer" ("Visiting the University Prison"). He used his own experience for the story, since he had spent three days in the campus prison after having disturbed a lesson by playing a rather innocent trick. In Gießen the

rumour went that Eckstein's book served as a model for the famous film "Die Feuerzangenbowle" with the well-known actor Heinz Rühmann.

The nearby Senckenbergstraße was built in 1900 when the fortification walls surrounding the city in early modern times had already been demolished. Paved with basalt stone it leads to a **park (Park an der Ostanlage 12)**. This 19<sup>th</sup> century public park with a goldfish pond and a fountain is still attracting many pedestrians along the busy ring road today. On the other side of the road you can see **Villa Leutert (13)** which was built in 1884/1885 in the style of a Loire château. After World War II, the villa conducted as an American officers' casino. In 1983, the city of Gießen bought the building; it was restored and nowadays houses i. a. the registry office.

Walking just into the opposite direction, starting at the corner of the Senckenbergstraße, the park continues and you finally reach the **Liebig Memorial (Liebig-Denkmal 14)**, commemorating Justus von Liebig (1803-1873), one of the most important chemists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after whom Gießen's university was named. Liebig taught and studied at Gießen University from 1824 to 1852. His ancient laboratory is completely preserved and can be visited as a museum (not far from the railway station, next to Mathematikum). In 2003 it got the award "Historische Stätte der Wissenschaft" ("Historic Place of Science").



The park of the Ostanlage extends to the Berliner Platz where the **City Theatre (Gießener Stadttheater 15)** is located. It was built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly from donations of the citizens, as a "Monument to the Civic Spirit". Only a few cities the size of Gießen maintain a theatre uniting drama, opera, ballet and philharmonic orchestra all under the same roof.



On the left side of the theatre there is another park, known as "Theatre Park" (Theaterpark). Here you find the **Röntgen Memorial (Röntgen Denkmal 16)**, reminding of Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen (1845 – 1923) who was a professor of physics at the University of Gießen from 1879 to 1888. The monument shows a couple of parallel steel rays, as a symbol for X-rays, passing through a body (in the shape of a bone). Thus, it refers to Röntgen's most famous discovery of electromagnetic rays, named after him. Röntgen received the first Nobel Prize for Physics in 1901. He is buried at the Old Cemetery near Licher Straße.

**St. John's Church (Johanneskirche 17)** marks the end of the park; it is the largest protestant church in Gießen and was built 1891-1893 according to the plans of the architects Grisebach & Dinklage from Berlin.

Following the Goethestraße you get to the centre of Gießen. A quick detour to the left leads you to a small entrance beside the Seltersweg, Gießen's pedestrian area and "shopping mile" of today. Here you can



find one of the last remaining ensembles of **Biedermeier buildings (Gebäude aus der Biedermeier-Zeit 18 )**.

Only a short distance away in the Seltersweg you can see the house with the number 46. It dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is therefore one of the oldest buildings in the Seltersweg. A plaque on the building commemorates the author Georg Büchner, who studied in Gießen from 1833 to 1835. During his student days Büchner was one of the authors publishing the pamphlet "Hessischer Landbote" ("Hessian Courier") with its revolutionary-democratic ideas ("Peace to the Huts, War to the Palaces!")

On the way back to the church place you can visit one of the few historic timber-framed buildings in Gießen, which is the **Lion's Tavern (Gasthaus zum Löwen 19 )**, by turning to the



right into the Neuenweg . This house has been a tavern ever since it was built. Even the famous poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – coming from Wetzlar – has had a meal here according to his autobiographical text "Dichtung und Wahrheit" ("Truth and Fiction relating to my Life").

## **“Mathematikum”**

The “Mathematikum” is the world’s first interactive mathematical museum. It was founded in 2002 by Prof. Albrecht Beutelsbacher and introduced by President Johannes Rau. Within a short time it became a public magnet for all ages. The slogan “Touch mathematics” (“Mathematik zum Anfassen”) invites the visitors to try the numerous experiments themselves and become familiar with mathematics.

The location of the museum is perfect: The Gießener main station is just one minute away.

### Address:

Liebigstraße 8

35390 Gießen

### Opening times:

Monday to Friday                      9 – 18 o'clock

Weekend                                      10 – 19 o'clock

## Main station

With the expansion of the German railway network Gießen became a traffic junction early on – because of its favourable geographical position – 1849 the “Main-Weser-Bahn” reached Gießen. The current



building of the main station still contains parts of the previous building from 1850. Around 1900 the new building was constructed in the characteristic style of the period (new romanticism / “Neuromantik”).

Address: Bahnhofstraße 102

## The abattoir

From 1908 to 1913 the abattoir (“Schlachthof”) was built. Characteristic for the historical building is the water tower with his pyramidal roof. On the north side of the large roof you can see the old coat of arms of Gießen, the hessian lion with the letter “G” and the date “1910” (the date of the construction of the abattoir). Through its modern and local abattoir Gießen became a market-leader in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The abattoir is nowadays used as living space, offices, a restaurant and shops and can also be used for private occasions.



Address: Schlachthofstraße 10

## Old cemetery

Since the beginning of the 19th century no funeral services were conducted at the old cemetery anymore. It became a romantic park with old, artistic gravestones. Many famous personalities have found their final resting place here, e. g. Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, a Professor from Gießen, who specialized on physics and was discoverer of the X-rays. The cemetery was created in 1529 outside of the city because 1.500 citizens sickened and died of the plague (also known as the 'Black Death'). Due to the development of the city the old cemetery is nowadays located in the middle of Gießen. The two deceased former Jewish communities were buried on grave fields on the north side of the cemetery.

On the terrain you will find a small cemetery chapel which is ascribed (1623-1625) to architect Johannes Ebel. In 1840 the chapel began to crumble. However, under direction of Hugo von Ritgen, Professor for art history and architecture of the University Gießen, the chapel was renewed and embellished. Today the chapel is used by the protestant "Luthergemeinde" (***Luther parish***).

Address: Licher Straße

## **Art Trail**

Since 1982 the Gießen Art Trail (Gießener Kunstweg) connects 15 artworks between the buildings Philosophikum I and II of the Justus-Liebig-University. The collection of artworks of international artists was compiled by a panel and is extended from time to time. The visitor is invited to stay and explore the contemporary arts in a philosophical way. The significance of this art trail extends far beyond the city.

Address: Otto-Behagel-Straße

## “Schiffenberg”

6 km south of the city centre you can find the ‘Schiffenberg’, which is a hill that is 281 m high and home to a monastery complex from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Excavations testify that there has already been a late Bronze Age hillfort (1000



BC) on top of the ‘Schiffenberg’ and there have been fortresses ever since. Countess Clementine von Gleiberg donated the ‘Schiffenberg’ to monks in 1103 or 1105. In 1129 the church was consecrated by Archbishop Megier of Trier. From 1323 to 1809 the monastery was managed by the Teutonic Order. They expanded the monastery by two further annexes. Today the church is used for services and Open-air events in the summer. The monastery also contains a small restaurant and offers a wonderful view over the Roman wall (“Limes”) to the “Wetterau”.

Address: Domäne Schiffenberg 1

## „Wiesecker Port“

Wieseck is the oldest part of Gießen and was first mentioned 775. In the northern part of Wieseck you find the "Port", a remnant of the fortification built in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The "Port" in his present form was first mentioned in 1458 to protect and defend the ancient town.

Address: Gießen-Wieseck, Alte Busecker Straße

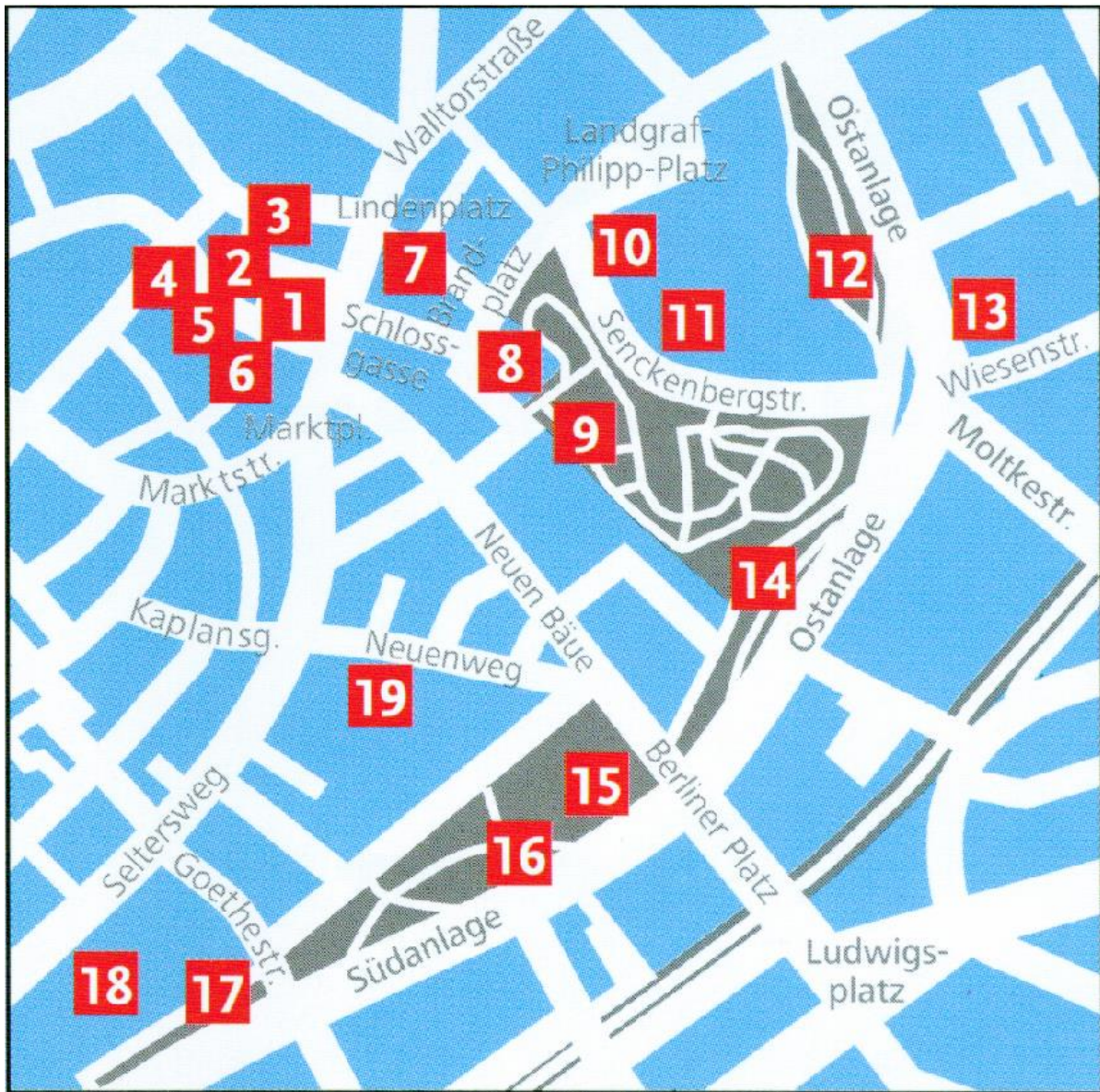
## „Badenburg“

The „Badenburg“ is located ca. 5km north of Gießen next to the river "Lahn". It was first mentioned in 1356. A wall from the residential building of the 16<sup>th</sup> century still exists today. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1834 a meeting of political oppositional members was held here which was headed by Friedrich Ludwig Weidig and Georg Büchner who wrote the "Hessian Courier". Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century the "Badenburg" was still a place for secret meetings.



Today the "Badenburg" with its restaurant is a popular destination for hikers and other visitors.





- 1** Church Tower (Stadtkirchenturm)
- 2** Leib House (Leib'sches Haus, Oberhessisches Museum)
- 3** Wallenfels House (Wallenfels'sches Haus Oberhessisches Museum)
- 4** Pankratius Chapel (Pankratiuskapelle)
- 5** Birth house of Wilhelm Liebknecht (Geburtshaus Wilhelm Liebknecht)
- 6** Beith-Jaakov-Synagoge (Jewish Synagogue)
- 7** Arcades (Marktlauben)
- 8** Old Castle (Altes Schloss, Oberhessisches Museum)
- 9** Botanical Garden (Botanischer Garten)
- 10** New Castle (Neues Schloss)
- 11** Armoury (Zeughaus)
- 12** Park Ostanlage
- 13** Villa Leutert
- 14** Liebig Memorial (Liebig-Denkmal)
- 15** City Theatre (Stadttheater)
- 16** Röntgen Memorial (Röntgen-Denkmal)
- 17** St- John's Church (Johanneskirche)
- 18** Biedermeier buildings
- 19** Lion's Tavern (Gasthaus zum Löwen)