

Historical Gießen

A Walk through the Historic Town Centre

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Opening hours

Monday – Friday: 9.00 a.m. – 06.00 p.m.

Saturday: 10.00 a.m. – 02.00 p.m.



A Walk through the Historic Town Centre

Gießen (ca. 75.000 Residents), a young, alive and traditional university city, is the economic and cultural centre of Hessen. Our cityscape is characterized by the students who live and learn in Gießen.

Parts of the city are in addition: Allendorf, Kleinlinden, Lützelinden, Rödgen und Wieseck.

1248 Gießen was mentioned for the first time. 1944 during World War II, Gießen was destroyed about more than 2/3 percent. Today less historical building structures 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 precinct) with its cafés and benches where you can have a rest. At the bottom of the tower, lines of dark basalt stones go through the lawn: They trace the ground plan 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 the top of the tower. Until 1910, this part of the tower was inhabited by its staff whose task it was to watch over the town in order to prevent fires or other damage.

Also the **Leib House (Leib'sches Haus 2)** (building directly behind the church tower) is worthwhile being visited. It belongs to the oldest half-timbered houses of Hesse (built around 1350) and houses the historic

and folkloristic section of the Regional Museum (Oberhessisches Museum). On the ground floor, miniature buildings show the historic Gießen and how the old town centre of Gießen 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.

If you want to enjoy a wonderful view over the city and its area, you have to fetch the key to go upstairs the Church Tower. It is available for a deposit at the **Wallenfels House (Wallenfels'sches Haus 3)** (situated on the right side behind the tower). It 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 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 after World War II according to the plan of OTTO BARTNING and its construction was possible because it was supported by the self-help of Gießen's protestant communities and American donations.

Where nowadays the local studio of the Hessian Broadcasting Company (Hessischer Rundfunk) is situated (next to the city church tower), once

was the house where Wilhelm Liebknecht was born (**Geburtshaus von Wilhelm Liebknecht 5**). A bronze plate reminds us of 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 of the Beith-Jaakov-Synagoge was transferred from the nearby village of Wohra to Gießen and was opened in 1995 after a two years' construction period. The former synagogues had been destroyed in November 1938 (Reichspogromnacht). 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, the Count, Landgraf Ludwig II, granted Gießen the rights for two markets being held once a year. Because the ancient market place was too small, the arcades (Marktlaubenstraße) were created at the end of the 19th 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 nowadays. 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



destruction. 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. The only remaining part of the original building is the so-called Heathens' Tower which served as a dungeon for robbers until the 18th 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. The Botanical Garden is a place of relaxation and recreation in midst of the hectic business of our modern world. The garden was a gift from Count Ludwig V of Hesse 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 can still be seen today.

On the other side of the Brandplatz, you 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 stores. It was built by



Count 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; archives, chancery and courts, but later also even as a prison. Originally, it contained a big hall, more than 30 metres long and almost 10 metres wide, on the ground floor. It was often used as a reception room for groups travelling through Gießen.



The **Armoury (Zeughaus 11)** is situated next to the New Castle and was originally built as a military building (arms cache). Later, it also served as a harvest store, a ballroom, a theatre and as a barrack. After it's almost complete destruction in 1944, it was rebuilt -more or less- in its original proportions. Today, it is used by the Justus-Liebig-University.

In relation to its population, Gießen has more students than any other German University City. More than 22,000 students are currently registered at the University and additionally 9,000 are attending the University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule). The University has different sections, which are situated over the entire city.

The small annex on the left side of the main entrance of the Armoury dates the founding of the university in 1609; it conducted as a 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") about this subject. He turned his own experience into the story because he had spent three days in school prison after having disturbed a lesson only 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 only about 1900 when the fortification walls surrounding the city in early modern times had already been demolished long ago. Paved with basalt stone, it leads to a **Park (Park an der Ostanlage 12)**. This 19th century public park with

a goldfish pond and a fountain is still attracting many pedestrians along the busy circle road today. To get to the other side of the road, you have to pass the subway next to the Gießener' court (Landgericht). Here it's worth visiting the **Villa Leutert (13)** which was built in 1884/1885 as a miniature copy 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 houses i. a. the registry office nowadays.

Walking just into the opposite direction, starting at the corner of the Senckenbergstraße, you pass along the Ostanlage with its park and finally reach the **Liebig Memorial (Liebig-Denkmal 14)**, commemorating JUSTUS VON LIEBIG (1803 – 1873), one of the most important chemists of the 19th century, whom Gießen's university was named after. Liebig taught and worked 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). In 2003, it got the award "Historische Stätte der Wissenschaft", ("Historic Place of Science").

The lawn of the Ostanlage extends to the Berliner Platz where the **Municipal Theatre (Gießener Stadttheater 15)** is located. It was built in the early 20th century as a "Monument to the Civic Spirit". Only



a few cities of 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 (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 trip 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 **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 18th 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

Messenger“) with its revolutionary-democratic ideas (“Peace to the Huts, War to the Palaces!”)

One of the few historic timber-framed buildings in Gießen is the **Lion’s Tavern (Gasthaus zum Löwen 19)**, a tavern to which you can make a quick trip by turning to the right into the



Neuenweg on your way back to the Church Place. This house has always been a tavern ever since it was built. Also the famous poet JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE – coming from Wetzlar – had a meal here, as he writes in his autobiographical text “Dichtung und Wahrheit” (“Truth and Fiction relating to my Life”).

“Mathematikum”

The “Mathematikum” is the first mathematical interactive museum of the world. 2002, it was founded by Prof. Albrecht Beutelsbacher and opened by the President Johannes Rau. Only after a short period of time it became a public magnet for all ages. With the slogan: “Touch mathematics” (“Mathematik zum Anfassen”) invites the museum the visitors to become familiar and more active with mathematics.

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

Opening times

Monday to Friday 9 – 18 o'clock

Weekend 10 – 19 o'clock

Address: Liebigstraße 8

Main station

The expansion of German railway network made Gießen - because of its favourable geographical position- early at a traffic junction. 1849 the "Main-Weser-Bahn" reached Gießen. The current main station building still contains parts of previous building from 1850. About 1900 the building was constructed in the characteristically style of the period (new romanticism / "Neuromantik").



Address: Bahnhofstraße 102

The abattoir

1908 to 1913 the abattoir ("Schlachthof") was built. Characteristic for the historical building is the water tower with his pyramidal roof which takes clocks in his dormers. On the north side on the large roof sheet you find the old Gießener city coat of arms, the hessian lion with the letter "G" and the date "1910", the date of the common expansion of the abattoir). Gießen secured with his modern and local abattoir a market-leading position. The abattoir is still active nowadays and can be used for private occasions.



Address: Rodheimer Straße

Old cemetery

Since the beginning of the 19th century no funeral services were done at the old cemetery. The ground became a romantic park with old designed artistic gravestones. Many famous personalities found their last 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 the year 1529 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 almost located to the centre of the city. On the terrain you will find a small cemetery chapel which is ascribed (1623-1625) to architect Johannes Ebel.

1840 the chapel began to crumble. But under direction of Hugo von Ritgen, first Professor for art history and architecture of the Gießener University, the chapel was embellished and renewed. Today the chapel is used by the protestant "Luthergemeinde" (***Luther parish***). On some grave fields on the north side of the cemetery are the two deceased former Jewish communities buried.

Gießener Art Trail

Since 1982 the Gießener Art Trail (Gießener Kunstweg) includes 15 artworks, which connect the buildings Philosophikum I und II of the Justus-Liebig-University. The artworks of international artists are compiled by a panel and extended again and again. They invite you to stay and philosophical exploration of contemporary arts, too. In its

meaning of Gießener art trail it reaches far beyond the local chamber of University and city.

Address: Otto-Behagel-Straße

“Schiffenberg”

Monastery complex from the 12th century
On the south border of the Gießener city forest raised the ‘Schiffenberg’. 281 m high and 6 km away from the centre of the city, it was built around 780. Excavations testify that there was already a late Bronze Age



hillfort (1000 BC.). Countess Clementine von Gleiberg donated the ‘Schiffenberg’ to monks in 1103 or 1105. 1129 the church was consecrated by the Trierer Archbishop Megier. 1323 to 1809 the monastery was managed by German order. They expanded the monastery by two further additions. Today the church is used for worship and Open-air events in the summer. It also contains a small restaurant. / wonderful view on the Roman wall (“Limes”) to the “Wetterau”.



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Wiesecker Port"

Wieseck is the oldest part of Gießen and first mentioned 775. In the north you find the "Port", a remnant of the fortification from the first half of the 15th century. The "Port" in his present form finds his first mention 1458. It served to protect and defend.

Address: Gießen-Wieseck, Alte Busecker Straße

„Badenburg“

Popular place of excursion at the river ‚Lahn‘.

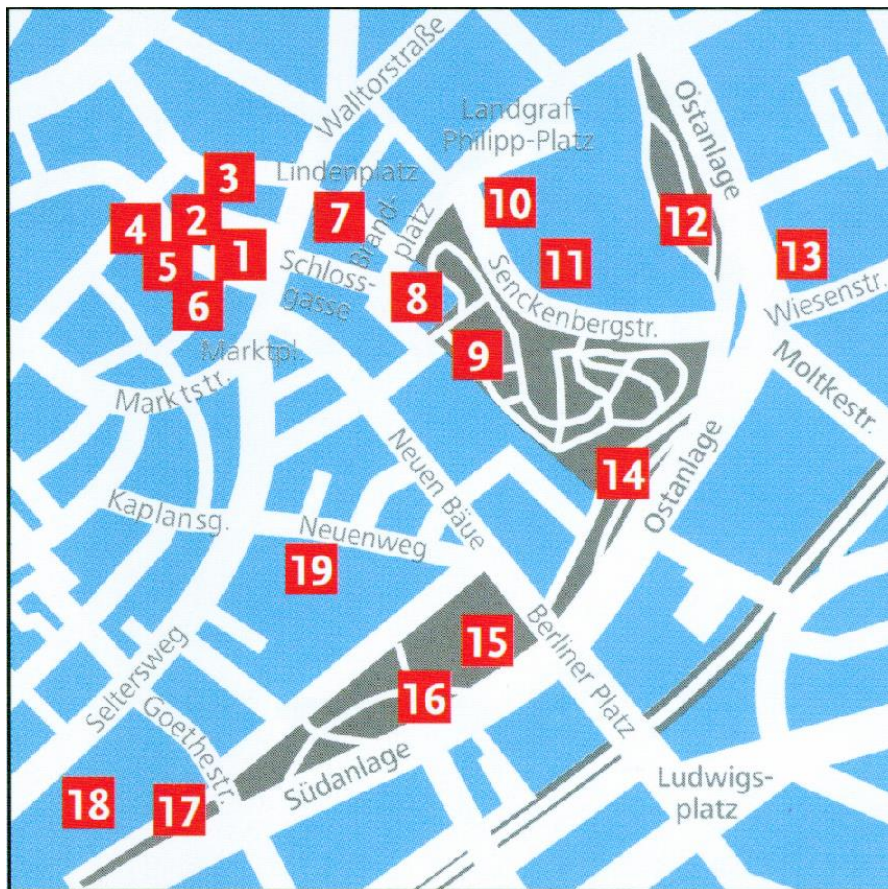
The „Badenburg“ is located ca. 5km northern of Gießen on the river "Lahn".

A wall from the residential building of the 16th century still exists. The first

mentioning was 1356. On the 3rd July 1834 there was a meeting of political oppositional members under the direction of Friedrich Ludwig Weidig and Georg Büchner who wrote the "Hessische Landbote". Until the 20th century the "Badenburg" was a place for secret meetings.

Today the "Badenburg" is a popular destination.





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