

Trip 56

*Sans Souci Park and the Royal Palaces

Sans Souci means “without a care,” and that’s how King Frederick II, known as the “Great,” liked to live at his sumptuous complex of palaces on the outskirts of Potsdam, in what had been East Germany. The name refers not only to the most lavish of the palaces but also to the 716-acre park itself, which is fairly riddled with an intriguing assortment of highly unusual buildings.

Both the park and most of its palace structures were created for Frederick the Great, the enlightened despot who ruled Prussia from 1740 until his death in 1786. He selected this site as his summer residence in preference to the ancestral palaces in Berlin, following a precedent set by his ancestor Frederick William, the “Great Elector,” who had built a palace in Potsdam as early as 1660. Frederick the Great’s successors, however, showed little interest in Sans Souci until the middle of the 19th century, when Frederick William IV added several dreamily romantic buildings to complete the park’s ensemble.

Sans Souci should be seen in its totality rather than as a visit to just one or two of the palaces, as all of its components work together beautifully to form one harmonious whole. Exploring it at a leisurely pace will take the better part of a day, so it is best not to attempt combining a visit here with one to adjacent Potsdam.

GETTING THERE:

S-Bahn commuter trains on route S-7 connect central Berlin with **Potsdam-Stadt**, the end of the S-Bahn line. From here you can take public bus number 695 to Sans Souci. A Berlin Welcome Card is valid for the entire trip. You could also walk from the station to Sans Souci, a distance of 1-1/2 miles.

By Car, head to the southwest corner of Berlin on the A-115 Autobahn (*Avus*), then turn right at Wannsee on the Königstrasse into Potsdam.

PRACTICALITIES:

Sans Souci Park is open daily throughout the year, although some of its attractions are closed on certain days as noted in their descriptions. The local **Tourist Information Office** (*Potsdam Information*), ☎ (0331) 275-

580, fax (0331) 275-529, website: potsdam.de, is at Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse 5 in Potsdam. Ask about the economical day ticket, which covers most sights. Sans Souci Park has its own **visitor center**, ☎ (0331) 969-42-00, website: spsg.de, in the Historische Mühle windmill behind Schloss Sanssouci.

FOOD AND DRINK:

Several restaurants and cafés in or near the park are:

Mövenpick (at the Historische Mühle windmill behind Schloss Sanssouci) Creative German and Continental dishes, indoors, outdoors, or in the beer garden. ☎ (0331) 281-493. €, €, €, and €€€

Café im Drachenhau (near the northwest corner of the park) An historic structure in the shape of a Chinese pagoda, with a full-service indoor café and outdoor tables. Light meals and drinks. ☎ (0331) 505-38-08. € and €€

SUGGESTED TOUR:

Circled numbers correspond to numbers on the map.

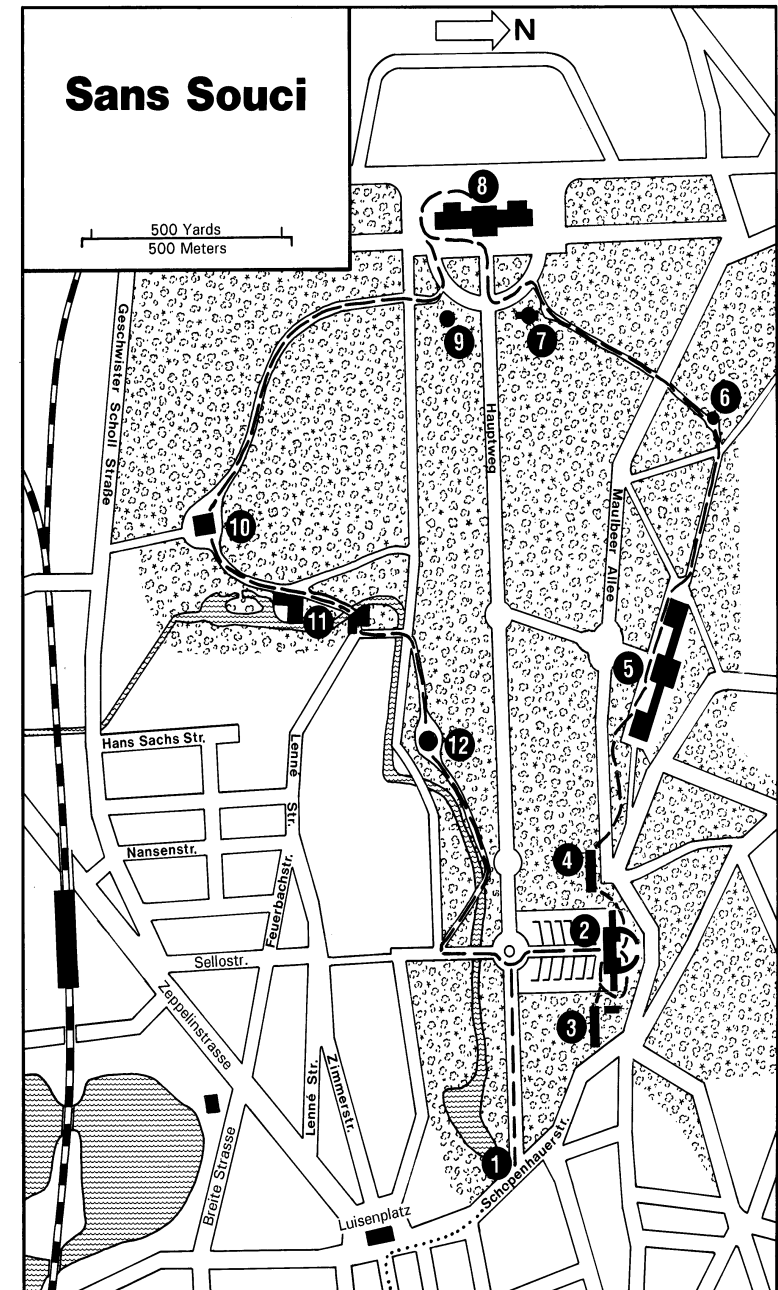
Leave the **Potsdam-Stadt S-Bahn Station** and take bus number 695 to the **Main Entrance ①** of Sans Souci Park, on Schopenhauerstrasse. If you decide to walk the 1-1/2-mile distance, refer to the map on page 310. Enter the park and turn right at the elegantly terraced vineyards. There, rising in front of you, is:

***SCHLOSS SANSSOUCI** (Sans Souci Palace) ②, ☎ (0331) 969-41-90. *Tours April–Oct., Tues.–Sun. 9–5; Nov.–March, Tues.–Sun. 9–4. €€. The tickets are for tours at specific times, so be sure to get yours early.*

Sans Souci was completed in 1747 and is still regarded as one of the finest rococo structures in Germany. Its low, single-story design and massive central dome were based on a sketch by Frederick the Great himself. This philosopher-king, very much a product of the 18th-century Enlightenment, was deeply involved with the arts and was both a talented composer and a noted flutist. He was also a friend of the French writer Voltaire, who lived in the Potsdam Town Palace from 1750 until 1753. Frederick is best known, however, as a brilliant military commander who kept his nation at war throughout most of his long reign, usually victoriously. It is said that he transformed Prussia from “a country with an army into an army with a country.”

Walk around the palace to its entrance, framed by a semi-circular colonnade, from which there is a superb view of fake ruins atop a distant hilltop. ***Guided tours** through the magnificent interior of Sans Souci Palace are conducted at frequent intervals.

Just east of the palace, at a slightly lower level, is the **Bildergalerie** (Picture Gallery) ③ with its marvelous collection of Renaissance and Baroque paintings by such masters as Caravaggio, Rubens, and van Dyck. Completed in 1764, it is thought to be the first building ever erected for



the sole purpose of housing paintings. Its brilliant rococo interior has been well restored, with the pictures hung in the original old-fashioned manner. ☎ (0331) 969-41-81. *Open mid-May through mid-October, Tues.–Sun. 10–noon and 12:30–5. €.*

Return to the palace and continue on to the **Neue Kammern** (New Chambers) ④, just a few steps to the west. This was the palace's guest house since 1774. *Open mid-May to mid-October, Tues.–Sun. 10–5; April to mid-May and mid-Oct. to early Nov., weekends only 10–5. €.*

Now follow the map through the Northern Gardens to the **Orangerie** ⑤, a late addition to the park that was completed in 1860 for King Frederick William IV. Designed to shelter delicate plants during the winter, this pseudo-Renaissance building is over a thousand feet long and contains apartments intended to house the king's sister and her husband, Czar Nicholas I, on their visits to Potsdam. You can climb the tower for a grand ***view**, and examine the 47 fake Raphael paintings in the hall. *Open mid-May to mid-Oct., Tues.–Sun. 10–12:30 and 1–5. €.*

A short stroll west through the woods brings you to the **Drachenhäus** (Dragon House) ⑥, a strange pagoda-like structure erected in 1770 as the royal winegrower's home. Happily, it now serves as a café, with additional tables outside. Just uphill from this is the restored **Belvedere**, a handsome classical structure from which you can enjoy sweeping **views** across the park. It also dates from 1770.

Turn south and follow a trail past the 18th-century **Temple of Antiquity** ⑦, a tiny imitation of the Pantheon in Rome. Just beyond this stands the grandiose:

***NEUES PALAIS** (New Palace) ⑧, ☎ (0331) 969-42-55. *Open April–Oct., Sat.–Thurs. 9–5; Nov.–March, Sat.–Thurs. 9–4. €€.*

The New Palace was built for Frederick the Great as a demonstration of Prussia's power and wealth after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. Intended as a guest palace for visiting royalty, it was instead used as a summer residence by members of the royal family. You can visit the sumptuous interiors, including the fantastic Grotto Hall, on your own during the summer season or on guided tours all year round. An illustrated guide brochure in English is available.

Walk east from the south wing to the **Freundschaftstempel** (Temple of Friendship) ⑨ of 1768, a circular Greek-style structure whose Corinthian columns bear reliefs of famous pairs of friends from ancient times. It is dedicated to the memory of Frederick the Great's favorite sister, Princess Wilhelmina of Bayreuth (see page 110).

Continue on to **Schloss Charlottenhof** ⑩, a small palace in the style of an Italian villa. It was built in 1826 for the crown prince, who became King Frederick William IV in 1840 and later went insane when he realized that the age of feudalism was over, even in Prussia. The landscaped grounds around the palace are quite lovely, and the restrained interior may be seen

on guided tours. *Tours mid-May through mid-October, Tues.–Sun. 10–5. €.*

The path leads next to the nearby **Römische Bäder** ⑪, a highly romantic ensemble of fake Roman baths at the end of an artificial lake. The group includes the Italianate home of the court gardener, and is usually open during the same times as Schloss Charlottenhof.

Stroll across the tiny stream at the **Meierei**, an Italian-style dairy of 1832, and follow around to the incredible ***Chinesisches Haus** (Chinese House) ⑫, a dream-like circular structure from 1757. Its gilded walls support a tent-shaped roof whose cupola is topped with a golden mandarin sitting under a parasol. The gilded sculptures on the porches are fantastic, and inside there is a collection of Chinese and Japanese porcelains. *Open mid-May through mid-October, Tues.–Sun. 10–5. €.*

From here you can return to the park entrance or, better, wander around the park and discover some of its many hidden surprises.

Schloss Sanssouci

