

Sonneninsel Usedom

Presseinformation



Usedom – History and Stories

Due to archaeological finds on Usedom one assumes that the island has been settled since the Old Stone Age (70,000 – 45,000 BC). A few megalithic tombs from 4,000 to 2,000 BC are open to visitors. During the Bronze Age the inhabitants of Usedom traded their precious amber and received goods from the Mediterranean in return. During the 7th century AD the area was colonized by Slavs. The name Usedom derives from the Slavic word “uznam”. It means estuary and is reminiscent of Slavic times. Many names of villages and places ending with –ow, -in or –itz are a testimony of this era.

On the 10th of June in 1128 the population of the island was Christianized by force; a cross erected on the castle hill of the Usedom-town still commemorates this date. Since then Usedom belonged to Pomerania. After the Thirty Years War (1648) the region West Pomerania and thus the island of Usedom fell to King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. After the Northern Wars in 1720 Brandenburg-Prussia bought the islands of Usedom and Wolin and Western Pomerania as far as the Peene estuary for two million thalers. Under the reign of Wilhelm I the area prospered economically. From the 1820s onwards the island’s bathing culture and the corresponding tourism developed.

Even the First World War and the Great Depression could not hamper the growing tourism industry of the island. Many celebrities as for example the brothers Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Willy Fritsch, Lilian Harvey, Kurt Tucholsky, Maxim Gorki and many more came for a vacation. As many of the visitors up to the 1920s came from Berlin, Usedom was called the “Bathtub of Berlin”. In 1933 Europe’s largest railway bridge in Karnin was completed and thus the journey from Berlin to Usedom became even shorter.

After the seizure of power of the Nazis even on the island of Usedom hotels and inns signposted Jewish guests as unwelcome. In the meantime the Army Research Centre was being established in Peenemünde. Under the leadership of Wernher von Braun the V-2 rocket was developed. In 1945 approximately 23,000 men, women and children were killed during a bombing raid on the overcrowded town of Swinemünde, which was nearly completely destroyed. During the Potsdam Conference the western border of Poland was relocated, which meant the partitioning of Usedom between Ahlbeck and Swinemünde.

Ihr Ansprechpartner

Karina Schulz
Presse- & Öffentlichkeitsarbeit

Usedom Tourismus GmbH
Hauptstraße 42
17459 Seebad Koserow

Tel: +49 (0) 38375 244 140
Fax: +49 (0) 38375 244 145

karina.schulz@usedom.de
www.usedom.de

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After 1952 the German Democratic Republic promoted tourism on the island of Usedom and thus helped its economic recovery. Many of the hotels were converted into FDGB (Free German Trade Union Federation) vacation homes. Since 1953 with the “Aktion Rose” unreasonable searches were carried out to find pretexts for the dispossession of hotels.

After German Reunification an increasing number of investors took interest in properties on the island and triggered an enormous building boom. In 1995 the re-erected pier of Heringsdorf was opened. Due to Poland's joining the Schengen Agreement on the 21st of December 2007 the border between Ahlbeck and Świnoujście became a green line. All checkpoints were abolished by that date and traffic was left to flow freely.

The Imperial Spas of Usedom

Bansin, the youngest of the Three Imperial Spas, was founded in 1897. Four bustling visionaries – the surgeon E. Wichman from Berlin, the regional poet E. Necker from Sallenthin, an innkeeper and a village teacher – wanted to attract guests by building a public bath. Only seven years later there were ten hotels and guesthouses behind the dunes. Stars like the silent movie legend Xenia Desny or UFA-celebrities Willi Fritsch and Heinz Rühmann liked to lodge in Bansin and to meet in the dance cafés. A summer stay in Bansin was less formal than a sojourn in the classy Heringsdorf. The promenade and the street running parallel bestowed upon the village a particular charm then and today. The houses were built with space in between, so that even those in the second row benefit from the view of the sea. Bansin was the first of the Usedom seaside resorts to receive permission for public outdoor swimming in 1923. From then on the guests were allowed to walk in their bathrobes from the hotel down to the beach and swim in the Baltic Sea. A little earlier, at the beginning of the century, the Wolgast Corporation for Woodworking had developed a concept for prefabricated wooden houses and had erected scores of them along the seafront. Even today they are clearly identifiable in the ensemble built in Resort Architecture style.

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In his essay “Berlin’s Suburb Heringsdorf” Thomas Mann praised in the 1930s the elegant seaside resort of **Heringsdorf**: “You find an elegant residential and hotel area right at the sea front.” But before it became the fashionable “bathtub” of the Berliners it was simply a village with some fishermen’s cottages. In 1819 head forester Georg Bernhard von Bülow, an ancestor of Lorient, erected a first guesthouse on the Kulmberg. When the Prussian king and his sons, amongst them the later Emperor Wilhelm I, came to inspect the port of Swinemünde in 1820 the royals were Bülow’s guests. During a visit of the fishermen’s cottages the crown prince suggested the name “Heringsdorf” for the village. The first mansions were erected in the 1840s. And thanks to the brothers Delbrück and their “Corporation Seaside Resort Heringsdorf”, which was founded in 1872, the village was transformed into a chic beach resort. For members of the Berlin high society it was a must to spend the summer months on Usedom. “See and be seen” – that’s what it was all about.

Originally the little fishing village on the stream Beek consisted of two properties: the “aristocratic **Ahlbeck**” as a part of the manor Mellenthin and the “royal Ahlbeck” consisting of land King Frederick the Great had given to his veterans. As more and more spa visitors came to Swinemünde and Heringsdorf, Ahlbeck too benefited from it. In 1852 even 314 visitors from Stettin and Berlin spent their summer in Ahlbeck even though the accommodations were rather plain in comparison to those in posh Heringsdorf. In 1875 the businessman Albert Wendicke built the first hotel, the Kurhaus Wendicke, which today is called Hotel Meereswelle. When in 1896 the streets were paved and the first warm water bathhouse was erected (today the building functions as town hall) families started coming in. On one end of the town Emperor Wilhelm II had even put up a recreation home for working-class children. But it was the pier from 1898 that became the town’s landmark. It is the only one of that age still existing today. At first though, it was merely a coffeehouse flanked by little towers on all four corners. Today’s appearance, which is well known through Lorient’s movie “Pappa Ante Portas”, dates from 1938.

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Originally **Swinemünde** consisted of two villages, one on each side of the river Swine. In 1748 Swinemünde on the western bank of the river received town privileges and served as port for King Frederick II of Prussia. Since 1818 Swinemünde was district town of the administrative district Usedom-Wollin. It was mainly the district physician Dr. Kind (doctor of Theodor Fontane, who lived in Swinemünde as a child) who promoted the idea of Swinemünde being Prussia's first seaside resort. His efforts were successful in 1824. The characteristic resort buildings however were only put up at the end of the 19th century – after the land had been reclaimed by poldering and wasn't used as potato fields any longer. From then on the town grew to be even larger and more stylish than Heringsdorf. It became the town the high nobility visited. Actually Swinemünde was the first of the imperial spas, because Emperor Wilhelm II came here on a regular basis to inspect his fleet. He used it as his starting point for his yearly trips to the Nordic countries. After the Second World War Swinemünde, now Świnoujście, fell to Poland and was claimed by the Soviets until the 1950s. After that Świnoujście together with Kołobrzeg (Kolberg) and Sopot (Zoppot) developed to well-known Polish seaside resorts even during socialistic times. Today Świnoujście is noticeably thriving. With its historic buildings in Resort Architecture style and its lively promenade it forms an entity with the Three Imperial Spas of the German part of Usedom.

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Usedom Tourismus GmbH (UTG) is the official Marketing Company of the island of Usedom. As a comprehensive service provider for the tourist industry of Usedom, the regional authorities and their institutions dealing with tourism, the UTG realizes the destination marketing for the island of Usedom at home and abroad. It runs the destination portal, a booking center and is contact for supra-regional public relations activities of the island of Usedom.

www.usedom.de, flug.usedom.de, kurzurlaub.usedom.de