

Episode 25: Snow in Berlin

Summary

Nick and Wendy have been to Berlin twice together, and it snowed both times. In this conversation they talk about these two snowy experiences in the German capital.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about two trips that we've taken together to Berlin, which is the capital of Germany, and these two trips were quite a long time apart actually, nearly 15 years.

Wendy: Wow, yeah, I guess it was that long.

Nick: So it makes us feel a little bit older than, uhh, we'd like to be. Umm, in fact, these are the only two times that you've ever been to Berlin.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: Umm, I went once before, before I'd even met you. And what's interesting about it is that both times that we went together, it snowed.

Wendy: It did, yeah, and that is a really memorable part of both of the trips for me.

Nick: Yeah, and so I think it's somewhat rare for it to snow in Berlin, certainly it doesn't snow all the time. Umm, and so it's just a complete fluke¹ that that happened both times that we were there. And so the first time, it was in early November, early-to-mid November, which is really early for it to be snowing even in places where it snows a lot more often than in Berlin. And I remember that because we were there on the 9th of November which is this important day in the history of Germany, umm, where in the 20th century lots of things seemed to happen, lots of important events happened on the 9th of November, and so that's why I remember, even still, that we were there on that particular date, all the way back in 2002. And, so we were there and it snowed, uhh, a little bit, not too much I don't think.

¹ fluke: lucky accident

Wendy: Umm, no I guess it wasn't that much, but, yeah, I definitely remember standing there in the cold and watching the snowflakes come down and, uhh, at the time I probably hadn't seen that much snow in my life. Uhh, you know, I'd spent most of my life in the United States, in the southern part of the United States, up until that point. So I grew up in Alabama where it very rarely snowed, and then I went to study in Florida where it never snowed and then I'd been living in Europe for, I guess, a couple of years. Umm, so, yeah, I'd seen snow a few times in Paris but it was still a real novelty² for me. It was something really special.

Nick: And of course much later when we moved to Geneva, we saw snow all the time in Switzerland. But yeah, at this time, it was a bit of a novelty. And I remember, umm, I'd borrowed a camera from our friend Jessie and ... because she had a much better camera than I did, but we were both using film cameras back at that time. And I actually didn't load the film correctly in the camera, so none of the photos that I took worked. Umm, but I do remember being at the Brandenburg Gate, it was snowing, and I took what I thought was a good photo - I'll never know - umm, framing the Brandenburg Gate with these snowflakes coming down, uhh, as well. But that was the first trip that we ever took together.

Wendy: Yeah, we were a very new couple at that point.

Nick: And so it was a nice little moment for us to be in Berlin in the snow. And so then many, many, many years passed, and we just didn't ever have the chance to go back, or for whatever reason we never went back to Berlin, and then last year for your birthday we took a surprise trip to Berlin.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: Well, a surprise for you.

Wendy: Yeah, you knew, 'cause you planned it. Yeah, but I didn't know where we were going, and, uhh, I tried not to look, even when we were in the airport, I tried not to look at the sign above the gate because I, you know, wanted to keep the surprise a surprise for as long as I could, but I kind of suspected that it might have been Berlin.

Nick: And so we went for, uhh, just a weekend, and it was actually quite a ... even quite a short weekend. We were there for only about 40 hours. And, lo and behold³, it snowed!

Wendy: It did!

² novelty: something that's new and exciting

³ lo and behold (idiom): surprise! (something you say when telling a story to someone)

Nick: And so I remember that we went to dinner at, I think, a Vietnamese restaurant, and then as we left the restaurant and began walking back to the hotel where we were staying, it started snowing. And we were right at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin which is a very poignant⁴ memorial. Umm, it's this entire city block, which is now taken up by this memorial and you have all of these different, uhh, blocks which represent coffins, or, uhh, the dead, from the Holocaust. And so to see that ... to see it snowing on that memorial, even I think added more, umm, feeling to it.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, and I remember the first time when we were in Berlin, I think they were still building it, or I don't know if they'd even started building it but they had a sign up explaining that it was going to be there and what the symbolism was behind it, and then, so this last time that we went there we got to see it actually completed.

Nick: Yeah I remember that as well, because I think it was just an abandoned, essentially, city block at that time, all the way back in 2002. And so to see the snow settle on top of these blocks was, you know, it was really quite an interesting thing to see. And so we walked back and it was snowing, not super hard, but it was snowing quite a bit. But then we went back to our hotel and we went to sleep and then we woke up the next morning, it had snowed a lot.

Wendy: Umm-hmm, yeah I think it probably just kept snowing all night.

Nick: And so certainly there was much more snow everywhere compared with what it had been when we'd come home the night before, even though it had been snowing the night before as well. Umm, and so our hotel was right next to the Tiergarten, which is the main park in the centre of Berlin. Umm, and so we just decided on the Sunday morning to basically walk around this park for a few hours. And when we call it a park, it's more like a city forest or something like that. It's not just an open space with grass - there's a huge number of trees, there's little rivers running through it, umm, little paths that you can walk along. And so we spent basically our whole morning there, because the snow itself had stopped, it wasn't snowing when we were there, but there was all this snow that had fallen the night before and it was really magical.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, it was beautiful. Umm, there were statues that were covered with snow, and little bridges that went over the creeks⁵ and the ponds⁶ and those were covered with snow too and, yeah, it was a really beautiful sight.

⁴ poignant: moving (emotionally)

⁵ creeks: very small rivers, also called *streams*

⁶ ponds: tiny lakes, often artificial

Nick: And so that was actually on your birthday.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: And there really weren't many other people around either.

Wendy: No.

Nick: So we were just kind of walking by ourselves, playing in the snow, basically.

Wendy: Yeah, it was great.

Nick: Umm, and so it's interesting, because we're usually, I guess what we would call, uhh, cultural tourists, for lack of a better term⁷. So we like to get out, do things, visit places, see whatever the attractions are in a particular place. But I think on this day we were really happy to just wander⁸ around, without a care in the world, umm, and it felt like Narnia, really, to be in this kind of snowy forest, just right in the middle of Berlin. It was really quite amazing.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah. Yeah especially because, you know, it was this surprise trip, so, umm, nothing was planned as far as⁹, you know, the way we would normally plan a trip to a city. We would, you know, do some research¹⁰ in advance and see what all the major sites were and decide what museums we wanted to go to, or if we wanted to do walking tours or things like that. But this time we were really just there just to enjoy being away, and celebrating my birthday, and, uhh, that was a great way to do it.

Nick: Yeah, and so we were lucky that our hotel happened to be there. Otherwise, we probably wouldn't have thought of that as an idea of something to do. But yeah, like you said, we had nothing planned so we just walked around for a few hours in the park and it was really amazing, took a lot of photos, maybe threw a snowball or two, and, uhh, generally just had a really nice time. And so it's funny that this has now become what we think of when we think of Berlin, 'cause we've been there twice and it snowed both times, and so that's what Berlin is to us.

Wendy: Yeah.

⁷ for lack of a better term (fixed expression): something you say when you've described something in a non-perfect way but you can't think of a better way to say it

⁸ wander: to walk without purpose or without a fixed destination

⁹ as far as: to the degree or extent that, in relation to.

¹⁰ research (uncountable noun, never *researches*): careful study; in this case Wendy means looking in a guide book or online for recommendations

Nick: It's this city where it snows.

Wendy: Yeah, that's definitely the image that comes to my mind when I think of Berlin.

Nick: And so this time, the second time, was in the middle of January, so it was more likely, I guess, for there to have been snow. Umm, but, I'm not sure if we'll keep trying to go back - if we ever go back - uhh, during winter, so we can see more snow, or if we should actually go in summertime when everybody else goes, because that's also a really great time in Berlin as it is throughout most of the European cities as well. Umm, so I'm not sure if we'll see snow there again or not.

Wendy: Yeah, I don't know. I think if we went and it didn't snow, we might be disappointed, so maybe we should just go in the summer so that we know that there won't be snow, and we can just experience the city in a different way.

Nick: Yep, for sure, umm, because it's a great city, it has all these things to offer. Umm, it's really fascinating in terms of its modern history and all of that, but for us, for now, we just think of it as a snowy city that we visit every 15 years.

Wendy: Yep.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why doesn't Nick have any photos from their first trip together to Berlin?
2. Why did Nick and Wendy go back to Berlin the second time?
3. What did Nick and Wendy do the morning after it snowed on their second trip to Berlin? Why was this unusual for them?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. He did a lot of _____ before buying his new computer, and he got a great deal.
2. A lot of people have smartphones now so they're not a _____ anymore.
3. I was just in the middle of sending a text to my brother and, _____, he walked into the room as I was typing.
4. The movie was funny at times but also quite _____. I cried twice.
5. The children like to feed bread to the ducks who live in the two _____ at the park.
6. We beat the best team in the competition but there's no chance we could do it again. It was a complete _____.
7. Golf courses often have _____ and ponds that act as hazards for the players.
8. There have been a lot of car accidents on that road. It's not safe, _____ I'm concerned.
9. Sometimes the best thing to do when you arrive in a new city is just _____ and see what you discover.
10. Have you seen the construction work that's being done in the city centre? It looks like a war zone, _____.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to Berlin or, if not, would you like to go? What are your impressions of the city?
2. Is snow a novelty for you like it was for Wendy? How often does it snow where you live?
3. Do you like it when it snows in cities or do you think it just makes everything more complicated?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. He borrowed a friend's camera and didn't load the film correctly.
2. It was Wendy's birthday.
3. They walked around the Tiergarten, a park (and zoo) in Berlin, for a few hours. It was unusual for them because they usually plan a busier itinerary.

Exercises

1. research
2. novelty
3. lo and behold
4. poignant
5. ponds
6. fluke
7. creeks
8. as far as
9. wander
10. for lack of a better term