

Osnabrück, The city of peace

General Information

The city of Osnabrück began to develop in the early Middle Ages around the bishopric established in 780 AD. By the 11th century, a new town emerged alongside the old one. For many centuries, these two towns maintained separate administrations until they merged in 1307, constructing a shared city wall. Today, Osnabrück, with a population of nearly 170,000, is renowned as one of the two key locations where the Peace of Westphalia was negotiated and concluded in 1648.

Osnabrück now boasts a thriving middle class, a dynamic economy, and diverse industries. In recent decades, it has evolved into a vibrant university hub, fostering a burgeoning start-up scene. The university and college actively support students in launching young, innovative companies, further enhancing the city's appeal.



Osnabrück, Market Place, Town Hall, © Angela von Brill

The Peace of Westphalia

The identity and activities of today's City of Peace, Osnabrück, are deeply rooted in its historical past. In the first half of the 17th century, Central Europe was engulfed in a war that inflicted unimaginable suffering. Known as the Thirty Years' War, it began in 1618 as a religious conflict and evolved into a struggle for dominance within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and across Europe. From 1643 to 1648, a peace congress took place with lengthy negotiations in Osnabrück and the neighboring city of Münster, ultimately achieving the much-desired peace known as the Peace of Westphalia. This treaty laid the groundwork for a European community of states and established principles of international law that continue to influence global relations today.

Each year, this historic peace agreement—achieved through dialogue and compromise rather than victory by any single party—is commemorated with a series of events surrounding Osnabrück Peace Day on October 25. The highlight is the hobbyhorse ride by fourth-graders, who parade through the

city on wooden horses to honor the proclamation of peace, culminating in a joyful children's peace festival held in front of the town hall.



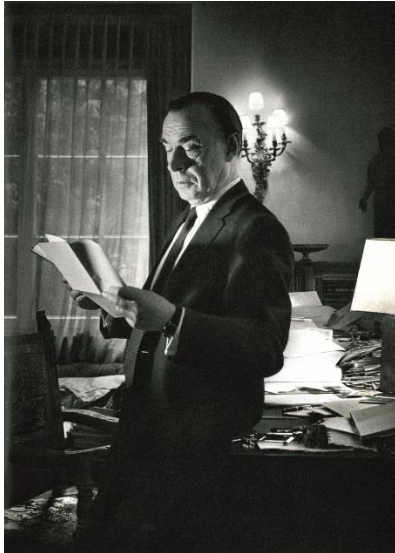
The hobby-horse-riding, a children's peace festival on the market in front of the town hall, © Friso Gentsch

Culture of Peace

After World War II, Osnabrück reflected on its historical heritage, aiming to foster reconciliation in post-war Europe through town twinning partnerships. Today, Osnabrück has maintained these partnerships and friendships with 11 cities worldwide for over 60 years.

Since the mid-1980s, the Osnabrück Peace Talks, featuring prominent figures, have significantly contributed to the culture of peace. Organized in collaboration with the city and the university, these talks focus on promoting and preserving peace.

Osnabrück is the birthplace of the globally renowned pacifist author Erich Maria Remarque. In line with his literary work and humanist, pacifist ideals, the Erich Maria Remarque Peace Centre manages his estate, showcases his life in a permanent exhibition, and hosts temporary exhibitions on war and culture. Additionally, every two years, the city and the University of Osnabrück award the Erich Maria Remarque Prize to individuals whose journalistic efforts exemplify commitment to peace, humanity, and human freedom.



Erich Maria Remarque 1967, © Erich Maria Remarque Peace Center

Culture of Remembrance

The culture of remembrance is a vital component in the identity of the City of Peace, Osnabrück. This approach is not merely about reflecting on history; it is fundamentally about learning from the past to inform the present and future. For many years, "stumbling blocks" have served as poignant reminders of the victims of National Socialism. These memorials are placed in front of the homes where individuals lived who were murdered by the Nazis for being Jewish, political opponents, or patients at the Osnabrück psychiatric ward.

An extensive exhibition at the site of a former Nazi labor education camp commemorates the police violence and forced labor that occurred during World War II. During this period, approximately 20,000 foreign workers and prisoners of war were forced into labor in Osnabrück.

Osnabrück is also the birthplace of Jewish painter Felix Nussbaum, who used his art as a form of political resistance and documented the horrors of the Holocaust in numerous works. His extensive body of work is displayed at the Felix Nussbaum House, alongside temporary exhibitions that continually explore themes of resistance, war, and peace.



So-called Stolpersteine, which commemorate the victims of National Socialism, © Angela von Brill



Felix Nussbaum, Self-portrait with Jewish passport, © Felix-Nussbaum-House Osnabrück

Intercultural and International Affairs

Osnabrück is home to over 50,000 people from around 150 nations, each with a history of immigration that enriches the city's society through diverse cultures and religions. Numerous projects support peaceful coexistence in the city, such as the annual Festival of Cultures, organized by the city in collaboration with various international cultural associations.

The annual International Weeks against Racism also aim to take a strong stand against racism and discrimination, promoting respect for all individuals. The Round Table of Religions serves as a vital forum for dialogue, fostering mutual knowledge, understanding, and peaceful coexistence among the city's various religious communities.

Another example of Osnabrück's commitment to peace is the Morgenland Festival, which showcases the musical culture of the Middle East—a region marked by numerous ongoing conflicts. Through music, the festival encourages exchange between musicians from different, often adversarial nations and blends various musical styles. This contributes significantly to fostering peaceful understanding between the Orient and the Occident.



Children's dance group of the Osnabrück Tamil Association; © Angela von Brill



Osnabrück celebrates its cultural diversity, © Angela von Brill

Contributors

The diverse culture of peace in Osnabrück is supported by a wide range of contributors. This includes the Office for Peace Culture within the City of Osnabrück's Department of Culture, which coordinates many of the projects and events mentioned. Additionally, various institutions, schools, universities, religious communities, and a broad civil society comprising numerous associations, initiatives, and dedicated individuals play a crucial role.

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