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MIGRATION HISTORY AS AN EDUCATIONAL AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE

As of June 27, 2021:

New permanent exhibition and museum extension of the German Emigration Center

On Saturday, June 26, 2021, after five years of planning and eighteen months of construction, the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven will open its new permanent exhibition and the new museum extension with a festive ceremony. The museum will then display on 3,340 square meters of exhibition space the history of migration as an educational and visitor experience. In addition to the enhanced permanent exhibition, there are new digital thinking spaces, an Academy for Comparative Migration Research and a Garage Museum. From Sunday, June 27, 2021, the "new" German Emigration Center will be open to the public.

Six new exhibition rooms will reveal exciting insights into migration history. More than 400 new objects - the oldest from 1692, the youngest from 2021 - as well as over 200 additional audio texts and video interviews have been integrated. The ten existing exhibition rooms have been enriched by numerous new themes. Unique in the German museum landscape are also new digital thinking spaces that can be used intuitively and individually during the exhibition tour and allow visitors to cast doubt on many issues for the first time.

For the new exhibition areas, the curatorial team of the German Emigration Center spoke with more than 270 women and men from over 30 countries who themselves or their families have a migration history. "To all those involved in the conception of this 'new' German Emigration Center - architects, exhibition designers, scientists and many more - It was important that people with migration experiences contribute to this exhibition with their thoughts, opinions and keepsakes," explained museum director Dr. Simone Blaschka at the presentation of the new orientation of the award-winning German Emigration Center.

"We live together." This message is now written on the large city window of the new museum annex. "As simple as this sentence may be, this coexistence in Germany, a country of immigration, is diverse and complex," says the historian. As is the case in all countries of immigration. The museum allows historical comparisons to be made between immigration policy and the everyday lives of migrants in the United States, South American countries, Australia and the Federal Republic.

Deutsches Auswandererhaus Bremerhaven
Columbusstraße 65 \ D - 27568 Bremerhaven \ Tel. + 49 (0) 471 / 90220 - 0
presse@dah-bremerhaven.de \ www.dah-bremerhaven.de
Betrieben durch: Deutsches Auswandererhaus gemeinnützige GmbH
Geschäftsführung: Dr. Simone Blaschka



To this end, the German Emigration Center reconstructs historical rooms down to the smallest detail and enables visitors to travel back in time to real places in the history of migration. In a German-American pub in New York from 1934, visitors discover how strongly families, associations and the community supported the new arrivals.

And how Americans reacted to German neighborhoods and their customs. A "sweatshop," a sewing store, presents the exploitative working environments of Jewish Eastern European women in pre-World War I Manhattan, many of whom had emigrated through Bremerhaven. A grocery store – in America a so-called Deli – owned by a German family, illuminates among other things, the theme of social advancement.

With these impressions and knowledge in hand, the visitors enter the new museum annex, which is dedicated to 330 years of immigration history to Germany. How has the Federal Republic dealt with core issues of immigration societies since 1949? The new "Hall of Debates" provides answers to these questions. Here, four major social debates are presented, which were ignited by German refugees and displaced persons in the early 1950s, by the employment conditions of migrant workers in the 1960s and 1970s, by the right of asylum in the early 1990s, and by the so-called "dual citizenship" debate in the late 1990s. In a unique room collage, the exhibition designers from Andreas Heller Architects & Designers have created walk-in dioramas of places where the conflicts and debates took place: at demonstrations on the street, in the Bundestag, in private, as well as in retrospect in the academic world. Films, audio and video stations as well as life-size models give visitors the opportunity to gain a closer look at different perspectives.

The centerpieces of the new exhibition are the "Salons of Biographies". Here, biographies and life situations of immigrants are presented via unique memorabilia: People who went to North, Central and South America as well as Australia, and people who came to German countries or to Germany in the last 330 years. 17 themed glass displays illustrate certain aspects of migration through objects: for example, how people deal with every day and institutional discrimination.

The new annex on the history of immigration already reflects in its architecture to whom it is dedicated: the immigrants to Germany. The facade shows more than 100 portraits of 31 immigrants who have found a new home in Bremerhaven since 1887. The city of Bremerhaven is representative of numerous cities in the Federal Republic of Germany. Due to the special production process, the faces become more (in)visible depending on the weather and the angle of view. "We have created a monument to people with an immigration history. Clear and at the same time complex, our architecture captures an idea of living together, both inside and out," says Hamburg architect Andreas Heller. The new small "Garage Museum" is also part of this architectural concept: it offers a new kind of publicly accessible space in which special exhibitions on migration topics are accessible at a low threshold and free of charge.

Educational programs for children, young people and adults as well as research projects with universities now take place at the German Emigration Center bundled under the umbrella of the newly founded "Academy of Comparative Migration Studies" - in short: ACOMIS. The first exhibition in the Garage Museum will open in August. The new permanent exhibition of the German Emigration Center can be seen from Sunday, June 27, 2021.

As an important sponsor, Minister of State for Culture Prof. Monika Grütters explains: "The German Emigration Center shows us that migration is an integral part of Germany's history as well as of humanity as a whole.

The museum conveys the associated challenges for the individual as well as for society in a way that is empathetic as well as captivating. For this, I would like to thank the German Emigration Center most sincerely and wish it many more interested visitors in the future."

Bremen's State Minister for Science, Dr. Claudia Schilling, is also delighted with the result of the museum's work: "The German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven is a great project, and for me it is much more than just a museum: the German Emigration Center tells personal stories. It outlines life stories of German emigrants in the 1920s, many of whom went to America. Or life stories of immigrants, people who came to Germany to work in the 60's. And now the new arrivals here in Germany: refugees, a very current topic. The German Emigration Center receives considerable recognition throughout Germany and beyond for its concept. I am very pleased to be able to say as a senator: The state of Bremen is boasting a cutting-edge museum that makes an important contribution to social debates that affect us all. A museum that is second to none."

Melf Grantz, Lord Mayor of Bremerhaven, says: "Since Bremerhaven was founded, immigrants have shaped the cityscape. Today, people from over 160 nations live together peacefully here. Bremerhaven is a cosmopolitan city with many faces and an eventful and moving history of exchange with people from many countries and continents. That's why we couldn't ask for another museum that reflects this history more appropriately than the German Emigration Center."

The German Emigration Center is more than just a museum: Since its opening in 2005, it has developed into a nationally significant institution that offers visitors a unique leisure experience, emotionally conveys the history of migration and society to school classes, serves as a place for applied migration research for experts, and shows migrants and their descendants that their experiences are shared million times over.

CONTACT

Press / Public relations: presse@dah-bremerhaven.de

Hilka Baumann, Tel.: 0471 / 90 22 0 - 208

Magdalena Gerwien, Tel.: 0471 / 90 22 0 - 205

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