

Cologne Cathedral

The Cologne Cathedral (German: Kölner Dom, officially Hohe Domkirche St. Peter und Maria) is the seat of the Archbishop of Cologne, under the administration of the Roman Catholic Church and is renowned as a monument of Christianity, of Gothic architecture and of the faith and perseverance of the people of the city in which it stands. It is dedicated to Saint Peter and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The cathedral is a World Heritage Site, being one of the best-known architectural monuments in Germany, and Cologne's most famous landmark, described by UNESCO as an "exceptional work of human creative genius". Cologne Cathedral is one of the world's largest churches, being the largest Gothic church in Northern Europe. For four years, 1880-84, it was the tallest structure in the world, until the completion of the Washington Monument followed by the Eiffel Tower. It has the second-tallest church spires, only surpassed by the single spire of Ulm Cathedral, completed ten years later in 1890. Because of its enormous twin spires, it also presents the largest facade of any church in the world.

The quire of Cologne Cathedral, measured between the piers, also holds the distinction of having the largest height to width ratio of any Medieval church, 3.6:1, exceeding even Beauvais Cathedral which has a slightly higher vault.

Construction of the Gothic church began in 1248 and took, with interruptions, until 1880 to complete – a period of over six hundred years. It is 144.5 metres long, 86.5 m wide and its two towers are 157 m tall.

Cologne Cathedral, despite having been left incomplete during the medieval period, eventually became unified as "a masterpiece of exceptional intrinsic value" and "a powerful testimony to the strength and persistence of Christian belief in medieval and modern Europe", as was befitting a worship-place of the Holy Roman Emperor and the traditional shrine of the Three Kings. When the present Cologne Cathedral was commenced in 1248, the site had been occupied by several previous structures, the earliest of which may have been a grain store, perhaps succeeded by a Roman temple built by Mercurius Augustus. From the 4th century the site was occupied by Christian buildings including a square edifice known as the "oldest cathedral" and commissioned by Maternus, the first Christian bishop of Cologne. A second church, the so-called "Old Cathedral", was completed in 818. This burned down on April 30, 1248.

In 1996, the cathedral was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List of culturally important sites. In 2004 it was placed on the "World Heritage in Danger" list due to nearby high-rise building and its visual impact upon the site, as the only Western site in danger. The cathedral was removed from the List of In Danger Sites in 2006, following the authorities' decision to limit the heights of buildings constructed near and around the cathedral.

Visitors can climb 509 steps of the spiral staircase to a viewing platform about 98 metres above the ground.

Source: -- Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]