The combined concentration- and extermination camp Majdanek was built in August/September 1941.

Ordered by Heinrich Himmler, the camp was built by the Zentralbauleitung der SS und Polizei under the command of Odilo Globocnik, the SS-und Polizeiführer des Distrikts Lublin. At first a concentration camp should be built near the cemetery at Lipowa Street. In the summer of 1941 Jewish POWs from the Lipowa Camp started to prepare the territory south west of the cemetery. Because the German civil administration was against these plans, Globocnik decided to build the concentration camp outside Lublin, on the Dziesiata Fields. When the camp was already under construction, the name was changed into more popular "Majdanek" (from the name of the suburb Majdan Tatarski). The camp administration was located at Gartenstraße 12.

Until April 1943 the camp was named "POW camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin" but already in November/December 1941 first groups of prisoners (not only the Soviet POWs) were sent there, among them a group of 200 Jews from the Lublin Ghetto, groups of Jews from the small towns around Lublin and Polish peasants from the Lublin district.

The next group (2,000-2,500 people) of the Jewish Lubliners was sent on 24 April 1942 from the small ghetto at Majdan Tatarski (this ghetto was established after the liquidation of the big ghetto and was located close to the old airfield). From this group only 120-200 young men were selected for work. All others (mostly women, children and old people) were executed at Krepiec Forest, 11 km from Majdanek. Here the Nazis carried out the mass executions of the Majdanek prisoners and Jews from Majdan Tatarski, until the construction of the gas chambers at the camp site was finished. From early 1943, the victims were cremated at Krepiec Forest on pyres.

The camp was located only 3 km south of the Lublin centre. Today the camp site is part of the city, at the road to Zamosc. With 2.7 km² it was even larger than Auschwitz-Birkenau. Majdanek should become the largest concentration camp outside the German Reich.
In the centre of the camp ten fields were planned, surrounded by electric barbed wire and watchtowers. Each field should contain 20 barracks for prisoners and two barracks for necessary equipment.

In three gas chambers the people were gassed mostly by carbon-monoxide (this information is from the camp underground reports which are kept at the museal archive). The victims' belongings were sold, their hair too! The bodies were burned in a crematory. Forced labourers worked in about 20 barracks (workshops and storerooms) and outside the camp.

Prisoners who didn't die by starvation, exhaustion or illness often were hanged, shot or gassed. The biggest mass murder in Majdanek happened on 3 November 1943. In course of the "Aktion Erntefest" 16,000-18,000 Jews were shot this day.

See the Commemorative Plaque!

In July 1944, the camp was evacuated because of the advancing Red Army. It was originally estimated that during its existence about 300,000 prisoners (more than 50% of whom were Jews) passed through the camp, and that approximately 78,000 of them died. More recent research indicates that the total number actually deported to the camp was in the region of 100,000 - 120,000, although a definitive figure is yet to established.

Resistance organisations were active during the camp's existence. A few prisoners could escape and informed others about the structures and conditions in the camp. The report of a Slovakian Jew is kept in the Majdanek archive. He escaped from the camp together with another inmate. They bore witness to their fellow Jews in Hungary and Slovakia.

See a rare document, drawn by a fugitive. He (she?) knew the location of the prisoners' field and the storerooms very well. The gas chamber is not correctly placed, perhaps because it was not yet built. Therefore the fugitive must have escaped before October 1942.

Since 1944 the former camp site is a memorial. Today the visitor can still see the workshop barracks, two gas chamber buildings, the crematory, some prisoners barracks and a few remainings of SS buildings.

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