

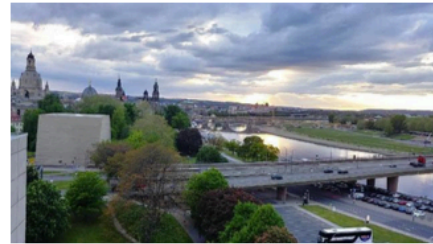


In my last article (July 2019), I wrote extensively about one of United's newest destinations, Prague, Czech Republic and how easy it can be to visit other beautiful, interesting and important places nearby. This month I will provide some highlights of a side-trip to Dresden, Germany located only 90 miles northwest of Prague.

Located on the Elbe River, before WWII Dresden was often compared to Florence, Italy due to its architecture, sumptuous art galleries, jewel and porcelain collections. On February 13, 1945 American and British bombers firebombed Dresden at night, killing an estimated 25,000 civilians and decimating the city. (You may remember Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, which details this horrific event.)

After the war, Dresden became one of the Iron Curtain countries under the occupation of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet years, reconstruction of the city was agonizingly slow and followed the typical Socialist Modern style: oblong blocks of concrete buildings. The once beautiful "garden city" still remained a palette of gray. Even the magnificent Lutheran Frauenkirche remained in ruins. Only after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1990 did the effort and funding for restoration really begin. Now, the original splendor of Dresden's architecture has been replicated, most of the utilitarian gray buildings of the Soviet era have been removed and treasures that were hidden in remote areas during the war have been returned to the city. Dresden has resumed its rightful place among the finest of Germany's cultural destinations.

One of the first things you'll notice about Dresden is its "walk ability". It is flat, easy to navigate and you only have to look up to spot the top of the completely restored Frauenkirche or the Fine Arts Academy dome (nick-named the Lemon Juicer) in order to judge which direction you are headed. Divided by the Elbe River, Dresden's Altstadt (old town) on the west side comprises the major tourist sites such as the Zwinger Palace, the Semper Opera House, the Frauenkirche and the main train station. Neustadt (new town), on the opposite side of the river, is the more "bohemian" side. Both sides offer an esplanade along the river and a stroll across the Augustus Bridge connecting the two sides offers vistas of the entire area. We stayed at the Hotel am Terrassenufer right above the river on the Altstadt side, which gave us gorgeous views and was within walking distance to everything.



The top 3 attractions are located right in the heart of the Altstadt: the Semper Opera House, the Residenzschloss (Royal Palace) and the Zwinger complex. Inside the Zwinger are 3 museums, the most popular being the Old Masters Gallery where priceless works of art by Raphael, Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian, van Dyck and Vermeer are displayed. But wait till you visit the Residenzschloss and view an unbelievable collection of gold, silver, ivory, enamel and jewel encrusted treasures amassed by Augustus the Strong, who ruled here from 1694-1733. Known as the Historic Green Vault, everything is

displayed in Baroque rooms as it would have been in his time. The famous Green Diamond, considered by many equal to the Hope Diamond and the Mountain of Light Diamond in England's crown jewels, is displayed here. Keep your eye out for the porcelain ostrich egg topped with a long neck and head resting on feet in gold trim. The audio guide included with your ticket is excellent. Also, because the collection is so vast an additional upstairs floor called the New Green Vault displays items in a more modern setting. Many of the objects are even more elaborate than those in the historic room. Admission to the Historic Green Vault is limited by timed tickets that you can order online in advance at [www.gruenes-gewoelbe.skd.museum](http://www.gruenes-gewoelbe.skd.museum), but you can usually still get in without reserving in advance by lining up before they open at 10AM. They have about 75 tickets per half-hour time-slot available for sale at the ticket desk entrance, located inside the glass-domed inner courtyard of the Royal Palace. The Green Vault is closed on Tuesdays.



A completely different kind of attraction is the Volkswagen's Transparent Factory (die Gläserne Manufaktur). This futuristic looking but fully-functional factory produced VW's racy Phaeton car until it switched to making totally electric vehicles in 2017. The striking building, which is all glass, looks like a swanky office building. But inside is an open concept, multi-story circular assembly plant. The guided tour takes small groups right onto the assembly lines on 3 levels where you stand just feet away from technicians building the vehicles. The only robots in sight are those used to insert the

windshields, install the wheels and "marry" the top and bottom portions of the body together. When the vehicle is finished, a robot places it into a glass elevator which lowers it to an available parking spot inside an adjoining glass tower until the owner comes to drive it away or it is shipped out. Visitors are encouraged to experience a virtual reality test drive (it was really fun!) as well as inspect the forthcoming driverless vehicles which VW will be testing on the streets of Dresden, shortly. You can even take a real test drive of the electric Golf after your tour. I reserved an English tour in advance at [www.glaesermemanufaktur.de/en](http://www.glaesermemanufaktur.de/en) and then paid at the reception desk on the day of the tour. They even offer half-off for seniors. Both my husband and I thought this was definitely a trip highlight.



For a fine meal and great beer don't miss Ballhaus Watzke. There are 3 locations but the one across the Augustus Bridge in Mickten is the "real thing", as the beer is actually brewed at this location. Take tram 4 or 9 from the Altstadt to the corner of Leipziger and Kötzschenbroder streets. The beautiful old yellow building houses a ballroom on the top floor and a delicious restaurant on the main floor. This is where the locals eat and you can't go wrong, no matter what you order.

Now Dresden is less than 2 hours by car, train or bus from Prague and less than 3 hours from Berlin. There is frequent FlixBus service from either city as well as frequent train service. If you travel by car, be mindful that parking is always a headache in larger cities and once you arrive in Dresden you really don't need a car.

Auf Wiedersehen und gute Fahrt! (Good-bye and have a nice trip!)