

DRESDEN

The German city on the banks of Elbe has reinvented itself from the ashes of Second World War. **BY MALAVIKA BHATTACHARYA**



The Theaterplatz square



Day 1

Much of Dresden was destroyed during the Second World War when the Allied Forces bombed the city centre to the ground on February 13, 1945. A magnificent skyline, once defined by Baroque-style spires, lay in absolute ruin. The story of Dresden is one of painful reconstruction and infallible spirit. A walking tour of the Old Town or Altstadt on your first day is a perfect way to ease into Dresden's rich history. Start at the Theaterplatz—a square bordered by the iconic Semper Opera, the palatial Zwinger and the Dresden Palace—all reconstructed with great pains to look like they did before they were bombed. The Semper Opera reopened exactly 40 years after its destruction, and even today, the Greek God of wine Dionysus sits atop the structure on a chariot drawn by four panthers, just like in the old days of 1841. Head

over Augustus the Strong's festival arena or 'party palace', with its beautiful courtyards and museums. Don't miss the statues of wine-swigging cherubic babies and the works of art including Raphael's Sistine Madonna.

Panoramic view of the city



Day 2

A river cruise down the Elbe is a perfect way to unwind after an intense walkabout. A steamship cruise in the summertime allows you to kick back and take in the sights of the 'Florence of the Elbe', as Dresden is known. The Elbe River valley lined with 18th and 19th century castles, open meadows and sprawling 20th century villas was once a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A boat tour will take you past vineyards and up to Pillnitz, the 18th-century summer palace. (www.saechische-dampfschiffahrt.de) Drive through the cool Neustadt and stop by at Pfunds Dairy—a cutesy cheese shop listed as "the prettiest dairy in the world" by the Guinness Book of World Records. Built in 1891 with floor-to-ceiling neo-Renaissance tiles and hand-painted motifs, it's a great stop for some cheese and ice cream.

The Church of Our Lady



Day 3

It's near impossible to cram all of Altstadt in a day. Return to spend some time at Dresden's pièce de résistance—the Frauenkirche, or Church of Our Lady, built entirely of stone. Much of Dresden's history is written in this massive domed structure—the 12,000-tonne sandstone dome fell to the ground in 1945, destroyed not by the bombings, but by a raging fire from within. Reconstructed with many original bricks, blackened by fire, the building is now a mosaic of old and new. Walk down to the Procession of Princes, the largest porcelain mural in the world, made with 25,000 tiles of Meissen porcelain and depicting the entire line of the Wettin dynasty. Break for lunch at Café Shinkelwache

on Theaterplatz before heading to the Grünes Gewölbe (Green Vault) in Dresden Palace. Augustus the Strong's treasury is a stunning collection of royal artefacts. Many hours can be spent in the historic Green Vault admiring the dazzling collection, but don't miss the Court of Aurangzeb and the glittery Dresden Green Diamond in the New Green Vault.