# trave

#### my kind of place Dresden, Germany

noenix from the fire

The once-devastated city has been restored to its glorious best, with many modern attractions, writes David Whitley

#### Why Dresden?

There's an overwhelming sense of a city trying to grasp back what it once had. The day that everything changed was February 13, 1945, when Allied bombers unleashed a firebombing campaign of unprecedented savagery. Dresden, long regarded as the most beautiful city in Germany, was obliterated.

That which was lost was largely built in the late 17th century and early 18th under Augustus the Strong, the autocratic ruler of Saxony who had an enormous appetite for all things blingy and self-aggrandising. The Altstadt (Old Town) became a Baroque masterpiece. Over the decades since the end of the Second World War, the pieces of the jigsaw have been painstakingly put back together. Hugely expensive, faithful reconstructions have returned key chunks of the Altstadt to their former sumptuousness

But Dresden's appeal isn't all about beauty and backstory. Across the Elbe River, the Neustadt (New Town) acts like a younger brother that's just about on speaking terms but prefers to go its own way. It crackles with life – and doesn't feel the need to rebuild the past to create a fizzing, optimistic present.

#### A comfortable bed

To go for the full-on Augustus the Strong feel, why not stay in the enormous palace that he had built for his mistress? The Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski (www.kempinski.com; 0049 3514 9120) is an audacious behemoth of stucco ceilings and lacquered furniture. The rooms, mercifully, aren't all-out gaudy. Superior rooms cost from €160 (Dh789).

Located on the Neumarkt in the heart of the Altstadt, the OF Hotel (www.qf-hotel.de; 0049 351 563 3090) has a more modern slant – bright, spacious and airy rooms, doused in neutral professionalism. Doubles from €139 (Dh686). For a bargain, the Aparthote

Frauenkirche (www.frauenkirchedresden.de; 0049 351 6560 6100), finally resurrected in 2005, is a glorious fantasyland of coloured marble. From there, walk past the Fürstenzug, a giant, porcelain depiction of all Saxony's rulers. Speaking of porcelain, the world's largest collection can be found in the Zwinger complex (www.skd. museum; 0049 351 4914 6679) - an extraordinary palace built for Augustus the Strong. He also amassed a fantastic collection of art by Europe's Old Masters there,

Grosser Garten is an enormous, 200-hectare park, with walking trails and handsome tree cover around the central palace. Created to host Augustus the Strong's many lavish festivities, it's now home to a cute miniature railway, a small zoo and, oddly, a see-through Volkswagen factory.

#### **Book a table**

As a general rule, Altstadt dining is proudly traditional. But Alte Meister (www.altemeister.net; 00493514810426), wit

#### Shopper's paradise

The Altmarkt Galerie (www.altmarkt-galerie-dresden. de) has 200-plus mostly generic chains-but Dresden's most enjoyable shopping is found in the Äussere Neustadt. Walk along Rothenburger Strasse, dipping into the streets that branch off it, to find all manner of amiable independent stores. They sell everything from brightly coloured Latin American fashion to fun knick-knacks (elephant-shaped watering cans, world-map-covered umbrellas). The Kunsthofpassage connecting to Alaunstrasse is the highlight it's a network of courtyards given a gorgeously playful makeover by local artists, speckled with galleries, craft shops and cafes.

#### **Don't miss**

About 15 minutes' walk beyond the Grosser Garten is one of the most astonishingly ambitious artworks that you're ever likely to see. The Panometer (www.asisi.de; 0049 351 860 3940) – a converted gas cylinder - offers a 360-degree chance to take in 18th-century Dresden in all its glory. At nearly 30 metres high and 100 metres in diameter, Yadegar Asisi's carefully researched masterwork is packed with near-photographic-quality detail Take Tram 1 or 2 to get nearby from the Altstadt.

#### travelling with kids

## Solving being driven to distraction

driving holiday in New Zealand taught us that being cooped up in a car for hours at a stretch isn't all that bad.

Within the first hour of picking up our rental car in Auckland, both my daughters vomited. We're at the beginning of a 10-day holiday. The plan is to drive to Christchurch and then Queenstown, before looping back up to Auckland. Except that the car is now smelling to high heaven.

We stop off at a grocery store and buy cleaning supplies, wondering if we're doing the right thing by driving so many miles with two active young children.

Then comes the first surprise of our trip. "We'll help you clean up," says my elder daughter, Ranju. After steadying ourselves, we decide to take up her offer. And so it begins, this bonding trip taking us so far from home

A driving holiday requires proper planning. We have to make sure that there are tasty snacks and drinks, particularly in those long sections where there's no rest area for miles. We bring along games and lis-ten to audiobooks. What's surprising is how much we discover about each other. There's something about a moving vehicle and beautiful scenery that brings out the poet and philosopher in travellers. So it is with our family.

Our younger daughter, Malu, has always been interested in geography. The vast expanses of New Zealand give full play to her imagination. Except with a twist.

Rather than asking ques-



The Neumarkt in Dresden. The city has been rebuilt in the time since Allied bombing raids during the Second World War. Athanasios Gioumpasis / Getty Images

Neumarkt (www.aparthotelsfrauenkirche.de; 0049 351 438 1111) comes with kitchenettes. plants brightening the lounge area and washer-dryers – a big bonus for those visiting Dresden as part of a multiple-European-city jaunt. Studios from €70 (Dh358).

#### **Find your feet**

The key Altstadt attractions are within a couple of hundred metres of each other. The octagonal

Younger, and a series of Canalettos depicting Dresden in its heyday. For dazzlement, however, the Historisches Grünes Gewölbe and Neues Grünes Gewölbe inside Dresden Castle (www.skd.museum: 0049 351 4914 2000) display the ludicrous treasures hoarded by Saxony's ruling Wettin family over the centuries.

including Raphael and Cranach the

#### **Meet the locals**

Just to the west of the Altstadt, the

tremendous terrace for warm evenings, does it very well. Expect dishes such as saddle of veal with mustard crust, radishes and potato cake (€21.50 [Dh110]). The Neustadt veers more towards international cuisine, while the Äussere Neustadt (Outer New Town) goes for laid-back boho. Villandry (www.villandry.de; 0049 351 899 6724) is the classiest option, with a gastropub-meets-art-gallerylook, a menu that changes daily and mains for about €20 (Dh99).

#### What to avoid

As with many European cities, most of Dresden's major attractions close on Mondays. But the Castle, for unexplained reasons, closes on Tuesdays instead.

#### **Getting there**

Air Berlin (www.airberlin.com) flies direct from Abu Dhabi to Berlin Tegel Airport, with return flights costing from Dh3,115. From there, a one-change busand-train connection to Dresden's main station takes about two hours and 45 minutes, and costs from €19 (Dh94) if booked online (www.bahn.de).

disorientating, and a few times

or turn right at reception, I end

up on a different floor to the one

I expect. Some of the floor panels

like it has been shattered and is

about to collapse beneath you,

but apparently this is part of the

design. It's great to be able to

open a window to fresh air, but

guests. There's no gym or spa,

A slick, smart and sane place

very affordable city. You could

find somewhere cheaper, but it

may be more Iron Curtain than

to stay, in a fascinating and

hypoallergenic sheets.

The bottom line

guests can use.

The verdict

sometimes when I did this I could

smell cigarette smoke from other

but there's a facility close by that

are made of glass that looks

when I come out of the restaurant

### hotel insider Hotel Townhouse 27, Belgrade, Serbia

### A boutique stay that avoids an Iron Curtain vibe

#### The welcome

I find the hotel's quietly smart entranceway without difficulty. Various family members work at the hotel, and the welcome is personal, genuine and professional, without being overbearing. The building was originally built in 1929, but it has been extensively reconstructed, and the interior is thoroughly modern, with neutral colours and a high-quality, boutique-style finish, with wood, stone, steel and glass elements. The interiors are given some individuality with sculptures, drawings and photographs by the Serbian artist Gabriel Glid.

#### The neighbourhood

The hotel sits on a fairly quiet residential street in Belgrade's old city, within walking distance of all the main sights, shopping areas and restaurants. It also has a pleasant neighbourhood feel rather than a touristy one, with several squares nearby, and oneoff cafes and restaurants.

#### The room

My room faces a beautifully quiet



A room at Hotel Townhouse 27 in Belgrade. Courtesy Hotel Townhouse 27

internal courtyard and feels like a compact studio apartment. There's a Bang & Olufsen TV system, a private work area with a designer lamp and excellent Wi-Fi. The bathroom is compact, with a shower, but no bath. I sleep very well. There's a Nespresso machine and a good-sized minibar. The property has 20 rooms in total

business guests. I'm travelling just outside the main tourist season, and the breakfast is filled mainly with business types from elsewhere in Serbia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

#### The food

There's an attractive ground-floor cafe that does a good cappuccino (I enjoy sitting by the window and looking out at the almost-Parisian street scene) and an excellent buffet breakfast comprising hot and cold items, from salad to imaginative Serbian specialities that will set you up for a long day of sightseeing. It's open throughout the day for snacks, but the menu on these occasions is rather limited, and I find myself going out to nearby cafes such as the ubertrendy Supermarket, just round the corner. The hotel's room service is provided by Supermarket, too.

#### Loved

The comfort of the room, the area and the ambience. It's a rare place where I almost feel too much at home: I'm sad to leave.

The downstairs areas are slightly

#### Hated

The hotel caters to tourists and

Cleaners are gracious and friendly;

restaurant staff cheery and helpful.

(all different, without being

have balconies.

The service

The scene

eccentric), and some of the suites

#### \* Rosemary Behan

Rooms cost from €130 (Dh641) per night, including tax and breakfast. Hotel Townhouse 27, 56 Maršala Birjuzova Street, Belgrade (www.townhouse27.com; 00381 11 202 2900).

tions, as children do, Malu ends up answering questions. She has studied quite a lot about the land and its geology. She can point out specific rocks and tell us about the age of the country. For any parent, discovering the depth of your child's knowledge is a particular pleasure. It often doesn't happen at home, when one is caught up in the routine of homework and extra-curricular activities. It's taken a trip to a country that's thousands of miles from home and driving for hours at a stretch to bring out the

teacher in our 12-year-old. It's a little different with Ranju, 18. She's a practical sort and helps her father changing the oil, filling up petrol and examining the spare tyre. Ever the diplomat, she even mediates a quarrel between my husband and I while Malu sleeps. We're shocked to discover that not only have we failed in our resolve never to fight in front of the kids, but that our child is mature enough to mediate our petty quarrel - and that she's good at it.

(We had little choice, we tell ourselves later. How long could one bottle up simmering resentments while cooped up in a vehicle?)

Ten days later, we return the car to the rental agency, hoping that it doesn't still smell of vomit. We giggle and chuckle among ourselves as we stand in line to hand over the papers. We've explored a beautiful land and had some wonderful experiences. Best of all, we have got to know each other in a way that we wouldn't ever have at home. That alone made the holiday worth it.

\star Shoba Narayan