

Dresden

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Hop on a train from Berlin and before you even notice your eyes have closed you'll be waking up in Dresden. The streets are dark but the light pours out from bars and you make your way down a sidestreet to your quirky, beaten apartment and tumble into bed, ready to wake up and tackle the next morning.

And what a morning it is: the sun shines through a solid gray sky, giving everything a cast of history and emotional depth. This is how Europe was meant to look — a bridge stretches across a sweeping river to a skyline of grand and time-battered buildings. A man plays old songs on an accordion and you follow the twisting cobblestone streets through the kind of grand edifices that only kings would build.

Upscale shops are mixed in with the glorious old buildings, people bustle every which way, and a fantastic network of streetcars takes you wherever you wish to go. Shops and cafes open onto picturesque views of a city with more charm than you could dare to hope for.

The skyline is made up of churches and synagogues and government buildings and hotels and art museums and schools. The center is surrounded by districts of hip bike stores, clothing shops, restaurants. A church with the top blown off is now used for concerts and parties. Apartment buildings have been built in bomb craters.

There are few places that live up to the beauty of the imagination — Harvard Square exists romantically only for a few days in the fall. But here is Dresden, the picture of beauty, in the heart of Europe. The riverbank sweeps majestically and curves past you and heads off into the distance as the sun sets into its flowing waters. And then you head home.