



Dresden

The Jewel of Saxony

Autumn in Dresden

TEXT Robert Laws ■ PHOTOS Robert Laws

A city with a lot of charm, Dresden invites you to enjoy relaxed walks, a variety of shopping options, and doing the Herbstfest in autumn - the delights of an Oktoberfest without the crowds and hassle.



Entry into Dresden

My arrival into the city of Dresden was welcomed after spending half the day hiking in the hills surrounding Dresden. I had decided to visit a famous landmark before traveling to the city, the Bastei. It was very impressive, but tiring. I had chosen to take the scenic route to get there, hiking from a small village located on the banks of the Elbe River. The hike wasn't particularly long or strenuous, but it was more effort than I had made in some time going a vertical direction. So, when I did arrive into the city of Dresden, it was a welcome sight to park my car and get to my relaxing hotel room.

I did, however, take some time to check out the sights of the city that were located in the immediate vicinity of my hotel. As darkness was quickly engulfing the city, I made a dash from my hotel to snap a few photos while the sun was setting. After taking a quick walk from my hotel, I found a lovely spot to capture the fading light and the majesty of Dresden's city (along with a few cars making their way along the street).

After taking a few photos, I made a quick dash to a museum that was conveniently located next to my hotel, the Albertinum. This museum had apparently undergone a recent renovation and restoration and was fully accessible. After getting some directional help from two staff members, I entered the museum. The main hall, or Lichthof, is a space that will leave an impression on the visitor. It's a cavernous space within the museum that is many white walls, with windows interspersed on a few sides. What is striking is the size of the open space and way the light is cast in the space. The open space dwarfs the visitor. The remainder of the museum is also interesting, especially the sculptures (Skulpturenhalle), which is a interesting mix and juxtaposition of ancient and modern sculptures. There's an abundance of self-important figures starting out with very serious expressions on their face, both ancient and modern. The modern sculptures are most interesting because it's easy to imagine that their sculpture was made out of a desire to be remembered and revered by onlookers - who should know the importance of the subject matter. However, the sculpture now takes





up a spot among others just like it and viewed by many tourists who don't grasp the importance or magnitude of the individual in stone.

The museum is very impressive and a great opportunity to take in some culture at the beginning of my time visiting Dresden. I don't recall having much else to do during this first evening in Dresden. The time of year was late September, and there definitely was a chill in the air as I walked outside, enough for me to take notice of it and be thankful for the jacket I had purchased earlier in my trip. For this first evening, I was satisfied with my wanderings, even if they were just nearby to my hotel.

Exploring the City

The next morning took me into the city. I awoke to a perfectly blue sky, a crisp autumn morning. The temperature was very pleasant, cool enough to warrant the

need of a jacket, but not so cool as to need to dash inside constantly to warm up before venturing outside again. I took advantage of the light crowds in the early morning to walk around the Neumarkt area without the crowds. The Neumarkt being a very popular space in Dresden, it was nice to enjoy it without having to dodge people. That said, it should be noted that Dresden has several very nice open spaces that are particularly expansive and allow for unmolested strolls. Perhaps this is somewhat unique to Dresden that there is not a feeling of being enclosed within the city by narrow streets and overhanging buildings. There are areas of Dresden that do have narrow streets, but it doesn't take much walking to discover a open space nearby. The Neumarkt had this feeling to it.

The most visible feature of the Neumarkt that draws the eye is the reconstructed Frauenkirche. This building was destroyed during World War II, as was all of the



Neumarkt and Dresden generally. Fortunately for visitors today, there's been magnificent work done reconstructing the city that few people would even know what had happened 70 years ago if they didn't take the time to read about it in history books.

The views of the Frauenkirche from the Neumarkt were very impressive, even more so with the deep blue sky framing the building in the background. I spent a good while walking around the square taking photos. I also saw the statue of Martin Luther, which is positioned in the middle of the Neumarkt. There's an abundance of history in this city every direction you turn. Another striking thing about the Neumarkt is the reconstructed buildings (some reconstruction is still ongoing) of the houses and apartment buildings that surround the Neumarkt. These include brightly painted buildings and restaurant or bar

properties at the ground level. Pizza and steak are available for the hungry visitor.

From the Neumarkt and Frauenkirche, which I would return to visit later, it's a short walk to another major attraction of Dresden. I simply crossed Wilsdruffer strasse to arrive at the Altmarkt. The timing of my visit was fortuitous since I was in the city during the Dresdener Herbstmarkt, what could be called an equivalent to the Oktoberfest in Munich. It was of course much smaller than what a visitor would experience in Munich, but that smallness perhaps added to its inviting atmosphere. There were many stalls set up to sell food, drinks, souvenirs that reflected the autumn season. The entire square was decorated with objects that reflected the theme of the season. There were different types of gourds, including pumpkins, placed here and there, wheat grass, and the colors of autumn everywhere. The vendors who set up their stalls came from Germany, but also other places including Austria and Italy that I discovered.

I enjoyed a few drinks and got a thing or two to eat during my time in the Altmarkt. Another part of the Altmarkt that attracted my attention was Starbucks Coffee shop that was located in a building on the square. I believe I asked for a Pumpkin Spice Latte in this Starbucks (I had been drinking them during my travels throughout Germany), but in this particular shop they were out of the drink, or at least they were out of the spices used to make the drink. It was okay though, I enjoyed a regular latte all the same. For the American traveler it's always nice to see familiar sights, like Starbucks, when traveling. Naturally, being American it's difficult to avoid cultural exports like McDonalds and Burger King, to name just a few, while traveling. Nevertheless, it's a bit of home away from home to enter a shop where things function in a way that is familiar and expected, especially if the language spoken is not so easy to master - like it was for me in Germany.

Dresden's Impressive Views

After enjoying some drinks, coffee, and a few snacks in the Altmarkt, I headed back into the historical center of Dresden to soak up a bit more of the majestic past. On the top of this list was the famous Zwinger. This is a fa-



Food stalls offering treats and drinks



Colors of autumn in full display



Relaxed atmosphere at the Herbstmarkt



View of the
Zwinger from
the central
courtyard

mous palace that shows off the best Baroque style that Dresden has to offer. The building and gardens are very impressive and make up a nice green area within the city. Walking around the gardens and palace grounds is inspiring and feels a little more like classical Italy rather than modern Germany. The perfect blue skies made the visit even more enjoyable.

From the Zwinger it was a quick walk to arrive at the Semperoper Dresden, a picturesque opera house that was rebuilt after it was destroyed during World War II. It is perhaps the building that is representative of Dresden, often appearing on travel books and postcards about the city. The building is striking, but oddly enough - I don't recall being struck at the time I took my photos that this building was as famous or impressive as I should have been. Sometimes during my travels I spend too much time on the go and not enough taking in the sights before my eyes. Thankfully, photography helps to make up for the lapse in my scheduling enough time to enjoy everything I see.

Walking back towards the Frauenkirche I was lucky to come upon Augustusstrasse. Along this street there is an equally long wall that reveals a very impressive panorama

called Fürstenzug, or the Procession of Princes. From an acute angle, this panorama appears to extend endlessly into the distance. The Frauenkirche can be seen in the distance along with the panorama if viewed from the end of Augustusstrasse. I managed to capture this view in a photo.

It was in the direction of the Frauenkirche that I next decided to walk. For a small amount, it was possible to enter the Frauenkirche and ascend a walkway to the top. From the top there is a wonderful view of the entire city of Dresden. The view from this vantage point includes the River Elbe cutting through the city. The lovely weather of the day allowed for viewing the countryside for a long distance into the horizon. A few photos stitched together reveal an impressive panorama of Dresden. I managed to wiggle my way between other tourists, some of whom took far too much time in one spot than they should have, and making others wait to get a better location to take photos.

Walk to the Neustadt

Dresden is more than just the Neumarkt, Altmarkt, and some impressive buildings. Much of the hustle and bustle of the city happens to the north, across the River Elbe,

in what is called Neustadt. I enjoyed a long walk across the Augustusbrücke to Neustadt and along Hauptstrasse, a tree-lined pedestrian avenue leading to the heart of Neustadt, also known as Innere Neustadt. The buildings along this walk were more residential and less imposing or historic than their counterparts on the other side of the River Elbe. This allowed for a pleasant change of pace during the day. Walking back towards the historic center of Dresden, I crossed the River Elbe at Marienbrücke and in the distance I could see the building called Yenidize. This is a very odd building. At first glance, it appears to be a house of worship for a non-western religion, but what I found out later is that it's an old cigarette factory built at the beginning of the 20th century that was architecturally inspired by oriental themes. Today its use is as an office space.

Some Shopping before Departure

As the day wore on, I returned to the Altstadt and from here walked along Prager strasse. This street is the most famous commercial area of Dresden with several different shops and shopping centers along the way. There's also some interesting features on the pedestrian walking areas including a pleasing water fountain not too far



Fountain at the end of Prager Street, the shopping street

Interior of Dresden's train station



from another Starbucks. I made a few stops in different stores along the way, although I spent the most time in a store called Globetrotter that contained multiple stories of outdoors gear and apparel. I explored each level and found a few goodies to purchase along the way.

I also found a little bit of extra time to walk to the main trainstation for the city, known as the Dresden Hauptbahnhof. This historic building had recently been updated. It was a good job too. The main entrance opened to a large vaulted ceiling that was bright and had plenty of shops for travelers to grab something to read or eat as they made their way to the next destination.

From here, it was a bit of a walk back to my hotel. The Herbstmarkt was along the way, but was soon to close down for the evening. There was only limited vendors still around to sell the last few visitors a parting gift or drink. I actually collected a few things that I would eat for dinner later that evening. Not long after, I returned to my hotel and relaxed after an eventful day of touring and photography.