

When visiting friends in Berlin last summer I took the opportunity to make a one-day trip to Dresden. That taste was enough to convince me the city and vicinity are worth a future multi-day visit. The early train from Berlin allowed for a full day of touring and I used the hop-on hop-off bus to facilitate that. Dresden’s amazing story is that it was 80% destroyed by Anglo-American bombing one night late in WWII, February 13-14, 1945 to be exact. During the years following the war as part of East Germany and under Soviet control, very little rebuilding happened in the historic center. In fact, at the time of German re-unification in 1990 the only significant building that had been rebuilt was the Semper Opera House.



Other landmarks, such as Zwinger, a palace with a garden modeled in part after the Orangerie at Versailles, looked like this in 1990.

It is now beautifully restored and houses



several museums. The new orange trees, however, are grown in pots to be moved indoors during the winter months. The beautiful clock tower plays a wide-variety of music with its Meissen pottery bells.



Serious rebuilding of the Lutheran Frauenkirche, Church of Our Lady, began in 1994 when numerous private international fundraising efforts began providing the necessary funds. By 2004 reconstruction of the structure (much of it from the original stones since the church had collapsed in the aftermath of the bombing) was largely completed at a cost of EUR 93 million. In November of 2004 Queen Elizabeth II hosted a gala fund-raising concert on a State Visit in Berlin hoping to raise a big chunk of the remaining funds needed to complete the interior. By

2005 the interior was complete and the church was re-consecrated. Here it is in 1990, and today on the also newly re-built Neumarkt Square.



The Baroque interior is sumptuous.



The Fürstenzug, (the Procession of Princes) is a 101-meter long history panel depicting the rulers of the House of Witten (who governed Saxony from 1127 to 1918) in a mounted procession. It was originally painted between 1871 and 1876 to celebrate the upcoming 800th anniversary of the dynasty, but in order to make the work weatherproof, it was replaced with approximately 23,000 Meissen_porcelain tiles between 1904 and 1907 and miraculously suffered only minor damage in the WWII bombing. The last King of Saxony's reign began after creation of the panel so he is missing. Also shown are 59 scientists, artisans, craftsmen, children (only one female) and farmers and the artist included himself like a signature at the very bottom right. It is known as the largest porcelain artwork in the world.



The Fürstenzug is located on the outer wall of the Stallhof (Stables Courtyard) of Dresden Castle. These stables one-upped France's Duke of Chantilly's chateau-like stable. The courtyard where jousting events were held provided a swimming pool for cooling the more than 100 horses plus a ramp leading to the second level of the stable.



The historic center facades have for the most part been faithfully reproduced. However, since this has been accomplished almost entirely by private investment since 2000, the uses behind those facades tend to be very expensive: 5-star hotels, chic boutiques and luxury housing.





Excellent open spaces are also in place and the former palaces now house museums – porcelain, fine art, mathematics, sculpture, decorative arts, and many more.



The Sistine Madonna by Raphael in the Zwinger is particularly famous because the two cherubs at the bottom have become something of a symbol of Dresden.



As is my custom when having a one-day taste of a new city I did not visit any museums but contented myself with a city overview. However, a few unique experiences come to mind. In 1909 in central Dresden, building factories which were easily identifiable as such was prohibited. Therefore, the tobacco businessman Hugo Zietz, who was fascinated by the Orient, and whose tobacco mostly came from Turkey, decided to give the cigarette factory, Yenidze, a distinctive design, in the style of a mosque with a glass dome and a minaret-shaped chimney.



Prior to the war, an illuminated sign saying “Salem Aleikum” – may peace be with you – would greet passing train passengers. Since 1997, the Yenidze is used as an office building plus a restaurant (360° view of Dresden). For more details on its architecture, consult



<https://www.yenidze.eu/en/yenidze/architecture/>. I lunched on the terrace there because of the excellent view over the city. I was told the architect was ejected from Germany's Architecture association, but I couldn't confirm this.

In the arches under the train tracks are murals of transportation in Dresden.



The "Great Garden" (147 hectares, about the size of Hyde Park in London) is next to the Historic Center with activities ranging from boating, a zoo, picnicking, concerts and a botanical garden. It was originally established in 1676 as a hunting ground surrounding the Sommerpalais, and was located just outside the city walls of that time.

On a corner of the park sits Volkswagen's Transparent Factory, originally opened in 2002 for the hand-crafted production of its luxury car, the Phaeton. You can watch the cars moving along the assembly line and tours are available. Both the German and English names are a word play on the double meaning of transparent and glassy, referring to both optical transparency and transparency of the production process. To keep birds from flying into the glass, an outdoor speaker system emulates bird language marking the territory as "taken."



In 2016 the factory was reopened as a showcase for electromobility and now produces the VW e-Golf electric car.

Unfortunately, due to Western Europe's drought in 2018, the river was so low (almost dry) that the customary river boat cruises were not running.

On the other side of the River Elbe are three former royal palaces now re-purposed as museums and hotels with beautiful gardens leading



down to the river.

The small towns on the north bank of the river were also very inviting to visit with artists and craftsmen's studios.

Villas with varied architecture, reminiscent of the Winter Town district of Arcachon, France I visited last fall, were to be found on both sides of the river.



A guided walking tour of the historic center was included as part of the bus tour ticket and as I was the only English-speaker I had a private tour! My guide really brought the city to life for me.

I figure one needs at least a three day visit to absorb the Baroque architecture and museums. And more if hiking and/or rock climbing in the surrounding mountains or side visits to Pillnitz Castle, Meissen, and/or Saxon Switzerland are on the itinerary.



In January I took a quick trip to Iceland in hopes of seeing the northern lights (which didn't happen) and to experience The Blue Lagoon. The latter developed as a result of the pooling of the super-hot water utilized in a nearby geo-thermal power plant, completed in 1976. The minerals from the hot springs gradually filled the porous lava rock. Starting about 1981 people began bathing in the pool for its healing powers. In 1992 The Blue Lagoon company was formed and the facility was opened to the public.

Sea water is diverted into the pools to produce a uniform temperature of 98-102 F.

Various day visit packages are available (there is also a hotel) and I chose one with two different "mud" facials, a beverage in the pool and a second beverage if you chose to dine in their gourmet Lava Restaurant which my friend and I did. With this package you have your towel, bathrobe and shower slippers provided.



Keep in mind the exterior temperature is hovering around zero in January which when coming in contact with the water produces lovely fog!



Although Iceland is famous for its lamb, which I enjoyed at dinner one evening, I opted for mussels for lunch, which were superb. One unexpected surprise was the variety of high-quality local breads!

actually float! The only the Dead Sea in Jordan – Great Salt Lake, Utah,

Because the Blue Lagoon is people use it as a final stop



A special part of the time in the Blue Lagoon pool was that due to the high mineral content I could times I ever did that before was in and probably on a visit to the when in my 20's.

quite close to the airport some before departing Iceland.

Most of Iceland is lava rock The landscape is quite barren but with interesting fungi and mosses. For the same reason we saw no northern lights (rain plus 40-60 kmph winds) we also didn't get much in the way of mountain views.

on account of its 130+ Volcanoes.



Reykjavik has a serious coffee culture during the day and a serious bar and music scene in the same venues at night. There are beautiful local artisan products, especially oriented around wool and glass in the myriad of gift shops in the quaint "old town".



There is also “street art”, which I always appreciate.

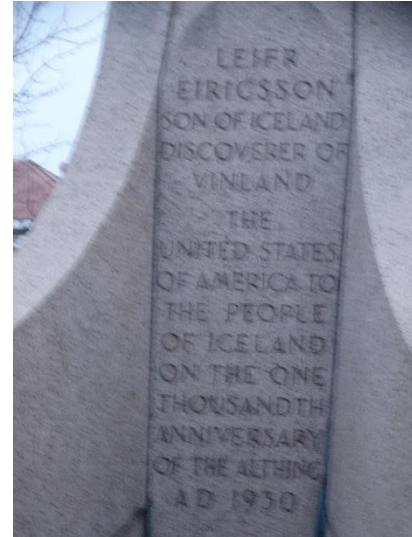


Apparently, Iceland was not populated until Irish monks arrived in about 600 A.D., but they didn't stay. The first permanent settlers arrived from Norway and Sweden in the late 800's and in 930 the first parliament was created.

This was honored by the USA donating a statue of Leif Eriksson, the first European to find North America (in 1000) on the 1000th anniversary of Iceland's continuous parliament. This, despite its history of being ruled by various of the Scandinavian countries at various times. Iceland achieved independence from Denmark in 1944. “Lucky” Leif Eriksson was the son of Eric the Red who founded the first European colony in Greenland in 986.

Not until the 18th C did Reykjavik begin to become a town. Its name means 'smoking bay' due to the steam rising from hot springs. The city's buildings are heated by this hot water.

The most notable building in Reykjavik is the Hallgrímskirkja Evangelical-Lutheran parish church with its 75-meter tall tower. The columns on either side of the tower represent volcanic basalt. The beautiful organ inside has 5275 pipes in a very unusual arrangement. The church was begun in 1945 and finally completed and consecrated in 1986 as Reykjavik celebrated its 200th anniversary as a city.



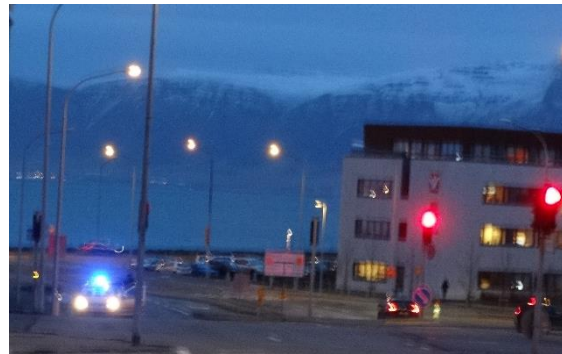
Iceland had more than 2 million tourists last year – the country's total population is 350,000 of whom more than 200,000 live in Reykjavik. Although the fishing industry and sheep farming still exist, tourism is obviously the economic driver.

Another important monument is the Imagine Peace tower presented by Yoko Ono in 2007. Between October 9 (John Lennon's birthday) and December 8 (his date of death) it sends a powerful light beam sweeping over the city during the night. The beam is activated on other occasions as well and we saw it our first two nights (Jan 7 and 8) but not the third. As I am writing this on February 18, 2019 the city will light the beam in honor of Yoko Ono's birthday today. www.imaginepeacetower.com

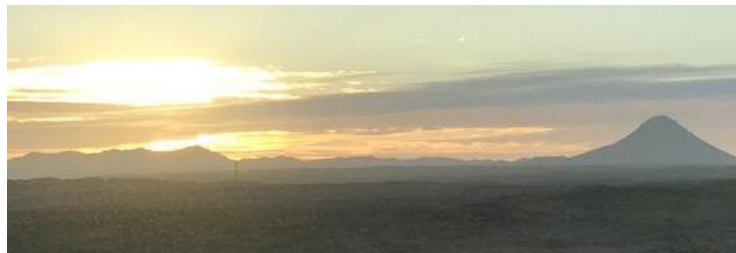
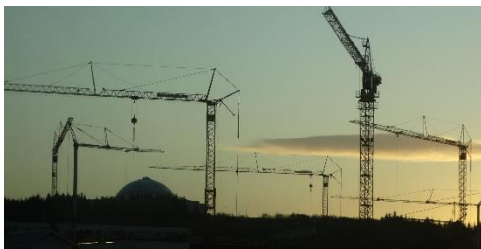
The Reykjavik Museum of Photography had an exhibition of photography from Guobjartur Asgeirsson (known as Bjartur), his wife (known as Disa), and several generations of their descendants. Bjartur began photographing in 1911 and the current generation, his great grandchildren, are brother and sister Ari and Silja Magg.



Our last morning, just before leaving for the airport (daylight started about 10 am and official sunrise was at 11 am) we could see Mt Esjan (2999' high) across the bay.



We saw sunrise en route to the airport and took some more interesting shots from the plane (aerial photo courtesy of E. Ferziger).

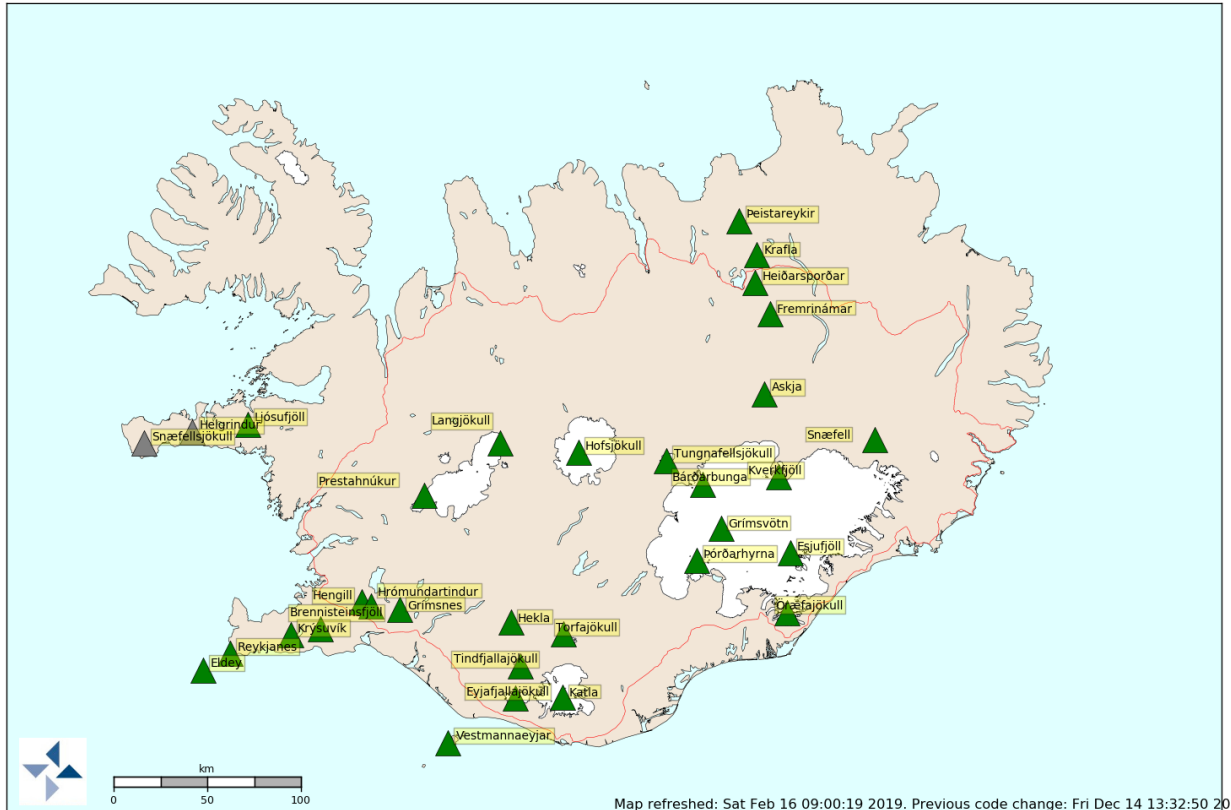







The 2010 eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull not only disrupted air traffic across northern Europe for several weeks, but caused massive flooding in Iceland. The most recent eruption was Holuhraun in 2014–2015.

The map below is issued by the Icelandic Meteorological Office and it shows the current status of Icelandic volcanic systems. It is refreshed at 09:00 UTC daily and will timely reflect any signs of unrest.

Color codes, which are in accordance with recommended International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) procedures, are intended to inform the aviation sector about a volcano's status. Notifications are issued for both increasing and decreasing volcanic activity, and are accompanied by text with details (as known) about the nature of the unrest or eruption, especially in regard to ash-plume information and likely outcomes. The color legend is given below the map.

Aviation Color Codes for Icelandic Volcanic Systems



-  **GREY:** *Volcano appears quiet but is not monitored adequately. Absence of unrest unconfirmed.*
-  **GREEN:** *Volcano is in normal, non-eruptive state. or, after a change from a higher alert level: Volcanic activity considered to have ceased, and volcano reverted to its normal, non-eruptive state.*
-  **YELLOW:** *Volcano is experiencing signs of elevated unrest above known background levels. or, after a change from higher alert level: Volcanic activity has decreased significantly but continues to be closely monitored for possible renewed increase.*
-  **ORANGE:** *Volcano is exhibiting heightened unrest with increased likelihood of eruption. or, Volcanic eruption is underway with no or minor ash emission.*
-  **RED:** *Eruption is forecasted to be imminent with significant emission of ash into the atmosphere likely. or, Eruption is underway with significant emission of ash into the atmosphere.*

[World Organisation of Volcano Observatories](http://www.iaea.org/infocentre/newsroom/news/2011/03/20110310_01.html)

Nobel Laureate author Halldor Laxness's books (Independent People, Under the Glacier, among others) give a good flavor of Icelandic culture.

The trip to Iceland was via London, so on the return I had a full day there. Since I had never seen the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, and the weather was good, I decided to make that my priority for the day. I arrived at the palace gate via Green Park about 10:40 am just in time to see the first phase of this highly choreographed ritual which was men of the “Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment at Horse Guards” riding by in their red capes and gold



helmets.

Then I began to hear the music of a pipe and drum corps and that and a contingent of replacement guards came into view. Then came another band



with another contingent of guards.



What with much ceremonial to-ing and fro-ing the whole process took about an hour with the final piece being the same Cavalry returning in the opposite direction. In the meantime, the band on duty that day played a lovely concert of at least ½ hour of pops music on the forecourt of



Buckingham Palace. I had not realized that you can go on line and see exactly which regiments

will be involved and which bands for any given day. All in all, it was a fun experience. The police in attendance were very polite in their crowd management techniques.

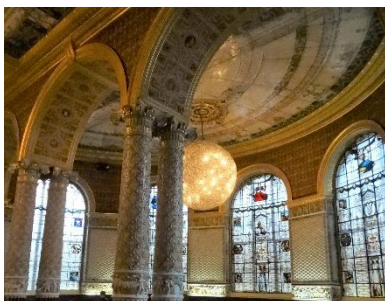
From there I walked to the Victoria and Albert Museum which I also hadn't visited before. They are noted, among other things, for their Fashion collection. The current temporary exhibit, "Fashioned From Nature" was fascinating as it traced mankind's fashion trends from the skins of cavemen and women to ecologically-attuned current designers using recycled materials. Along the way, the destructive nature of many fashion trends, such as affixing thousands of luminous beetle carcasses or butterflies to elaborate 18th C gowns, or the use of exotic furs and birds in fashions were highlighted. Over 5000 beetle wings went into the creation of this dress in the 1820's.



Salvatore Ferragamo created this fabric from the byproduct of orange juice production and Katie Jones uses scraps that would otherwise go into landfills for her designs. This message closed the exhibition.



One doesn't go to the Victoria and Albert just for its collections, but also for the building itself. The ceramics galleries include three of the dining areas plus the recently-restored staircase.





A quick run through the National Portrait Gallery completed the day before dinner at a Lebanese restaurant chosen because it was close to St Martin-in-the-Fields.

For decades I have been enjoying recorded music from this venue but had never been there. So, wonderfully, there was a concert of Bach, Handel and Vivaldi: superb acoustics, and, of course, no photography



during the concert. The orchestra was Trafalgar Sinfonia with Richard Milone as the guest violinist. And another beautiful set of organ pipes.



Interestingly, there is a large café/bar, The Café in the Crypt, at St Martin-in-the-Fields which was very busy during the after work and before and after concert time. Next time I would plan to eat there!



And, speaking of food, the antipasti plank at Jamie's Italian Restaurant at Gatwick was amazing and the meal at Iran in Shepherd Market, Mayfair where I had eaten on my last visit lived up to expectations.

Taken all together, this really made for a super one-day taste in London!

