

What is dresden known for

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On the Elbe in the state of Saxony, Dresden is a city of Baroque wonders that have been resurrected since the war. The Wettins were a long line of Electors and Kings who ruled the state and kingdom of Saxony their seat in from Dresden between the 13th and 20th centuries.

None of these rulers wielded as much power as Augustus II the Strong in the 18th century. He is the man to thank for the astounding wealth of the Staatliche Kunstsammlung (State Art Collections), which are so large they have to be organised across different historic buildings in the city. There are invaluable gold treasures, paintings by Renaissance masters, oriental porcelain, classical sculpture, ceremonial weapons and more than you could ever squeeze into one trip.

Frauenkirche was totally destroyed in 1945. At first its rubble was left in Neumarkt as a war memorial, but it was eventually moved to storage in the 1980s to prepare for a future reconstruction.

This was finally begun in 1994, using a lot of the preserved material (3,500 individual stones), and work was completed in 2005. The new gilded cross and orb atop the dome were forged in London as a gesture of reconciliation, while the damaged former cross can be found to the right of the church's new altar.

One of Germany's most lauded Baroque edifices, the Zwinger was ordered by Saxon Elector Augustus II the Strong in the late 16th century as a space for lavish court festivities.

One of many theatrical elements is the Nymphenbad (Nymph's Bath), a fountain in a hollow enclosed by sculptures of nymphs that are set in niches and crowning the balustrade.

The collection was started by Augustus I in the 16th century, but really took shape in 1746 during the reign of Augustus III when a big chunk of the Duke of Modena Francesco III's collection was purchased.

Named after its architect Gottfried Semper and opened in 1878, Dresden's resplendent opera house is one of the world's most respected performing arts venues.

This was the second opera house at this location, after the first burned down in 1869. Semper had also designed the original one, which was completed in 1841. The marvellous Neo-Baroque/Italian Renaissance hall was gutted during the war and reopened in the mid-1980s.

In the 19th century the Semperoper staged world premieres for operas by Wagner and Richard Strauss (Elektra, Salome, Der Rosenkavalier). If you can't catch a performance, there are guided tours of the exuberant interior in English and German throughout the day at 15 to 30-minute intervals.

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But you can also view the Dresden Armoury, an astounding assortment of ceremonial armour, weapons and regalia, and the Turkish Chamber, one of the most significant collections of Ottoman art outside Turkey.

Also in the palace is the Kupferstich-Kabinett, the 500,000-strong collection of sketches, prints and drawings, by artists like Albrecht Dürer, Goya, Michelangelo, Jan van Eyck, Rubens and Rembrandt.

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