

## **12 Days of Christmas in Germany**

We are world travellers by measure of the 82 countries and territories that we've been to or travelled to on all 7 continents.

We travel for nature, adventure and culture. Our last trip to Northern BC was a combo of nature and adventure. This one to Germany is purely culture. We booked 2 Operas, Ballet and 3 symphony concerts in 4 German cities. It was inspired by our trip to Vienna at this time (Xmas) of year. European know how to celebrate the holidays while with special Xmas markets, street decoration, music and lots and lots of beer. Except for the beer we are on our way.



**LEIPZIG**



**DRESDEN**



**MUNICH**



**BERLIN**

First Day 12-19-2024

Our first day was a debacle. The flight to Munich was perfect. In fact it was made perfect when we were able to get two seats together with mom on the aisle after being told that we both have middle seats and not together as the flight was absolutely full. I will take credit for "motivating" the flight coordinator to find a better solution. The 5 hours layover was brutal. Mom asked me to never do it again. The trouble started when we arrived at our hotel and asked for suggestions and direction to a reasonable German restaurant. They did so but mom and I are very bad with following direction on a city map, and we were time and time, and time again lost even after stopping people to ask for directions. Add the fact that it was drizzling, and a windy chill and the streets are not well lit, and you get a perfect storm. Saba bings and Safta blames. I say left you say right until we finally get back to the hotel. Each looking for a knife.





If first impressions are right German people are not too friendly. Very by the book no flexibility or maybe they could read that we are pissed off. The Christmas Market is the feature attraction. Huge. Every square and there are many and large full of beautifully decorated huts selling mainly food and Christmas things. Lots and lots of people young and old.

We vowed to enjoy the next day and beyond. After 62 years we can never be mad at each other for more than a night.

Second Day 12-20-2024

What a wonderful day it is. What a good night sleep can do. We clocked close to 11,000 steps after breakfast and went back to the old city this time with a sure step, a relaxed and enjoyable walk across the many squares, churches, Christmas huts and a panoramic view of the city from the balcony of a 30 stories tower. We almost fell into the misdirection trap of last night but this time without casualties only slightly bruised egos. Augustine's Am Mart is a classical German restaurant, and we obliged. Beef consumes (not as good as mom's)

and sausages broiled and grilled mash potatoes and German beer. When in Germany do but don't behave like they do.



Now sitting comfortably in the Opera House to watch Norma. Our favourite opera which we saw before 3 times in Toronto, Montreal and New York. This is the reason we came to Leipzig in the first place. It is rare that a Jewish Palestinian of Polish decent and Israeli and Canadian and a Bulgarian and Israeli Canadian will fly to Leipzig to watch an Opera in Italian with subtitles in German. By now our most significant impression is that the entire city came down to the Christmas market. Old, young, kids, babies. The whole town. Then we heard about a car ramming near Hanover. We are OK. Aching from the 17,000 steps we walked today but proud off it.



### Third Day 12-21-2024

Today we're headed to the second leg of our four-city tour of Germany - Munich. The original plan was to watch the football match between Bayern Munich and Leipzig in the famous Allianz arena. The tickets cost \$600. We purchased we paid only to discover that the Bundesliga rescheduled the game for Friday when we were still in Leipzig. Bayern won 5:1 in a pulsating match. At the time of writing, we do not know if the tickets were ever delivered to our hotel in Munich. I already disputed the charge with Visa, but lessons learned it must have been an online scam. We likely parted with \$600 forever.

Confirmed! Tickets never delivered. Makes my dispute stronger. The train ride from Leipzig to Munich was pleasant. Germans sure know to how to run their trains on time. We spent the rest of the day walking the old city and food market which have both been converted to another huge Xmas market swarmed by our estimate by more than a hundred thousand men, women, children and other pronouns. A significant Police presence was noticeable.

The old city architecture is classically European as you can see in the photos. What drew us back to Germany were the memories of our past trip to Vienna at this time of year and we were not disappointed. In the past two days we logged close to 30,000 steps (lately our

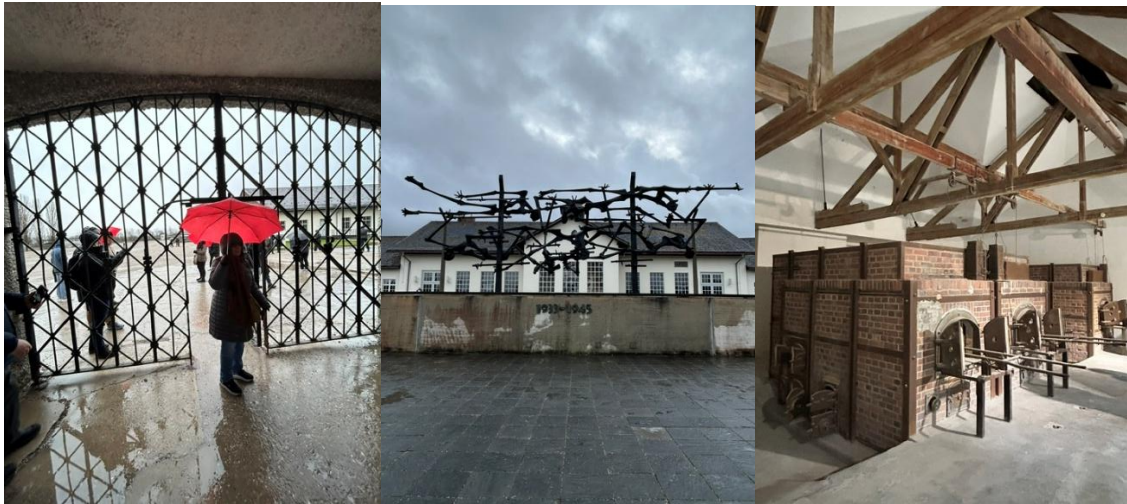
annual quota). By 3 PM we crashed at the hotel from fatigue and sheer pain and had no energy to explore the town at night (as if we do it at home)



#### Fourth Day-12-22-2024

A dreary grey and rainy day by contrast to blue bright sky yesterday. Almost to set the atmosphere for our day trip to the Dachau concentration camp. Unlike Auschwitz, which was an extermination or a death camp, Dachau was a “work” camp for prisoners of many nationalities and many native Germans who did not align with the Nazi ideology e.g., socialists, communists, Gays, Gypsy etc. But the cruelty and inhumane treatment of the prisoners was unfathomable, and most of the prisoners died from exhaustion, disease and mostly shot dead indiscriminately by the SS guards for alleged violation of conduct. Only 45000 of the 175000 prisoners were Jews but they were mostly exterminated. The degree of

inhumane medieval brutality of the SS was incomprehensible. Surprised to see so many young people on our walking tour. We end the day early at a classical Bavarian beer hall which also serves a full menu from the Bavarian kitchen. Good but emotional day.



Fifth Day 12-23-2024

There are three “must see” in Munich and we are covering them all. The old city and the Market this time a year a Xmas market. We did that the first day, Dachau in the second and today we went to the Residence palace museum. It used to be the palace of the Bavarian king way back then. The pictures tell the story of the opulence of this palace. By last calculation if you convert half of the gold and precious stones you can feed all of Africa. Really impressive.



From all the people I should not be the one to not understand the German word “Stehplatz”. Tonight, we had tickets to the Romeo & Julia ballet. Second balcony row 4 seat 26,28. I used to speak Yiddish fluently and should have known that Steh means stand and Platz means place. In other words, the tickets were standing only. There was no row 4 and the seats meant behind row 3 26, 28. No joke we stood during the entire 3 hours of the performance only to discover that both Romeo and Juliet died at the end. Who knew that there is standing room only in a performance, any performance. Safta knew: the Met in New York. Overall, the performance was OK but nothing to write home about. The German audience disagreed and applauded and screamed so loudly during endless curtain calls. But it was an experience and a first for us. It was not Gisèle which is saw and fell in love in St. Petersburg at the home of the Bolshoi Ballet.





This evening, we reached a conclusion: German people are proper, cold shouldered but civil. Do not bend the rules and offer little help to old tourists. But they are civil. Not so for our Turkish taxi driver who screamed at us like they do in a Turkish market that made us uncomfortable to say the least. We recognize this behaviour as Middle Eastern. We now understand why people all over the world resent the migrants who refuse to accept and adopt their host country standards and norms.

Sixth Day -12- 24-2024

We are now on the second of a three-leg train ride to Dresden. We had clear direction to platform 23. As the train arrived, we hopped on to it and relaxed for a while. Then we asked to confirm that this train is going to Hof our next exchange. Well, hello-NO the next one is. Now we take our stuff in a hurry and hop on the next one and to be sure ask again. Hell no. It's yet the one after that! We unload again and rush to the next one. We made it with 5 second to spare. The good news it was the right train. The bad news we are already exhausted from carrying, loading and unloading our suitcases (my job) and caring for mom on the on/off stairs where she almost fell. Who knows where we would have ended up had we stayed on the wrong train or if we missed the right train. Not in Dresden. But now we are, and the timing is working against us. Xmas eve. The famous Dresden ancient market closed at 2 PM. Tonight nothing going of course so we are writing it off as a travel day. Tomorrow Xmas day we'll start exploring the city by foot. No 5 digits steps today for the first time. In the room watching TV overwhelming anti Israel channels. Promoting the Genocide, War crimes, Colonialism narrative with constant heart wrenching visuals. No Israel response whatsoever. No wonder Antisemitism is on the rise where anti-Zionism is equated to and fuelling Antisemitism. Dinner at the hotel was good and festive. We joined some hundred or more Germans likely a group where 90+% were older than us. What a wonderful feeling. Oh by the way when travelling in Europe you have to imagine that a Euro is just like a Canadian dollar and not look at the conversion rate until you come home. And it's not the Euro's fault.

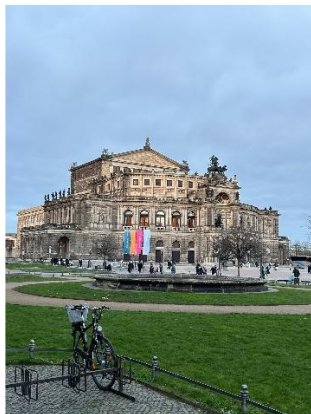
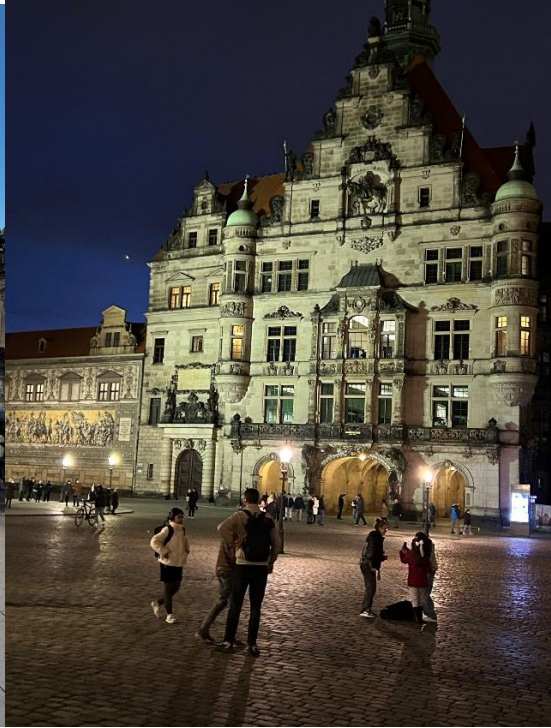
Seven Day (of Xmas) -12-25-2024

We are in Dresden today wait till you see the pics later. If the trip was one day and today was the day, it'll be a 10. Our hotel is a short walking distance to the old city of Dresden. At its centre is the Zwinger Palace square. The amazing thing about the huge complex is that it was completely levelled in 1945 by the British RAF that levelled Dresden to ruins. By that time the masterpieces were removed. The "old" city was rebuilt to its original ancient structure and architecture which is likely the most amazing reconstruction feat in the post

war era. We just left the enormous Art Masters Museum which likely holds the largest collection of paintings by such luminaries as Rembrandt, Ruben, Raphael and more. Nowhere have we seen so many masterpieces in one museum. Took us 3 hours or more and our eyes are saturated with the beauty of its all. We are in awe of the beautiful architecture which only pictures can tell.



Dresden at it was before the devastation

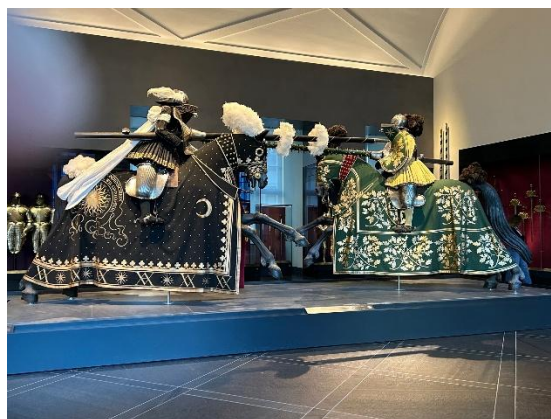


Next a Xmas concert. The concert was wonderful. 6 musicians and 2 (surprisingly) good opera singers a male and female. Classical short pieces and familiar arias. Festive and upbeat. Another long but best day so far. Only 13,000 steps.



Eight's Day – 12-26=2024

Late start by foot to the Royal Palace turned museum. Historical Treasures from the days of the Saxony rule. Plenty of artifacts and mainly implements of war: swords, guns, horse mounted spears many ways to kill or get killed. Mom says what will people not do to kill other people. What changed? We can't take our eyes off the architecture of the old city and cannot fathom that most of them were restored from the rubble of the 1945 bombing of Dresden. By far the most exciting of the three cities we visited so far. Early dinner at a classical Edelweiss restaurant in the heart of the old city. Yet another 13,000 steps. Tomorrow – Berlin



So far and out of context our most troubling impression is the sustained anti Israel TV coverage on every channel and every language. Mainstream (BBC, CNN) and opinion and analysis stations like DW, France24, TRT World (Turkey), Al Jazeera and all German channels. They use the same strategy: "Israel attacks on ... killed xx people mostly women and children etc., our reporter so and so reports on the event in a clearly one-sided manner. While he or she are reporting on a split screen videos are running showing dead babies, being dug out of rubble, women screaming etc. I am convinced that any viewer is locked on and impacted by the pictures and may not pay attention to the reporting which only reinforces the genocide narrative. No wonder that antisemitism and anti Zionism and out right anti Israel sentiments are flaring. No information from Israel is shown and so the uninformed reaches the conclusion that Israel is a pariah state. F in the information war for Israel.

Ninth Day- 12-27-2024

Arrived in Berlin by mid day. Once again German service interruption. The taxi driver dropped us off at a hotel on the same street with the same name but not the one we reserved. That meant a 30 something minutes by foot. The last thing we needed this morning. Crashed in the room and out late afternoon for a light dinner and a wonderful Flamingo show. The dancer's singers and musicians were fantastic. At the end of the show the crowd forced them back for a final sensual Flamingo duo. Great evening entertainment.



One Motel Berlin - Lobby



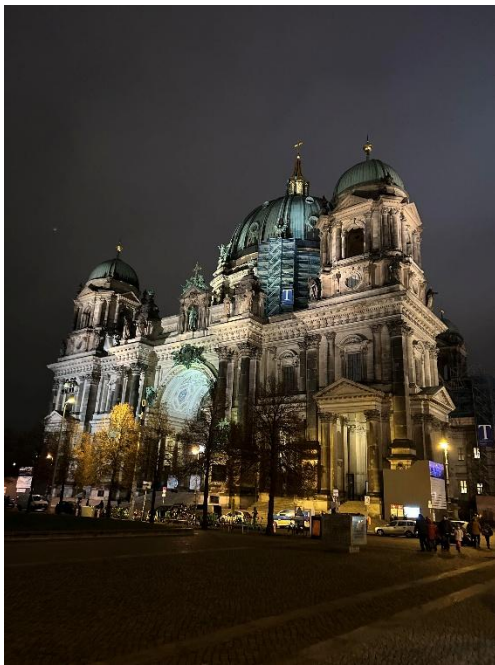
Tenth Day – 12-28-2024

We are beginning to think that five days in Berlin was a mistake. We have been to Berlin before and loved it we saw all the “must sees” and as mom admits we violated her rule of going back to a place to replicate a memorable experience. That is why it is a memorable experience. But we’ll endure. Though endurance is what we lack the most. Mom is broken from all the walking. How does she do it? We finally begin to understand why people our age prefers cruises, all inclusive and guided tours. Today we decided to hop on hop off but mainly on. Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Colombia you’ll have to wait for הגלגול הבא

The Hop on Hop Off was the right choice for today. Anything but too much walking it’s killing us especially mom. As a service? Not great in typical German fashion the audio tells you “Just the facts” - when built? who built? how tall?

Not a lot of colour or historical backdrop. But it was a good 360 view of the city and allowed us to figure out where we want to spend more time tomorrow. The Prague Philharmonic Vivaldi and Mozart concert was awesome. At least on the cultural front we are scoring well.





Eleventh Day-12-30-2024

Our second day on the Hop on Hop Off but this time we are getting off. Though it is Sunday and most everything is closed. Yesterday we tried the Jewish Museum, but it too is closed.



Hanukah, Xmas, New Year what were we thinking? As expected, East Berlin albeit reconstructed after the war still looks dreary with most building Soviet style. Today's outing was well, a bust. It is cold and windy in Berlin and hoping off near the remains of the Berlin Wall now turned a mural museum was not such a good idea. Once again walking in agony and constantly confused with our directions. We are BAD when it comes to pedestrian navigation. We don't trust each other or ourselves and thus sow doubt in anyone's attempt to take charge and tensions flare. Thank goodness we couldn't afford to travel like this when we first married as we would have long time ago been divorced. Our, now, love for the Opera came to rescue once again or today would have been a real bust. La Boheme. Wonderful rendering of the so familiar arias. Expansive staging with hundreds of extras, colourful and joyful scenes as befits this time a year. 10.





Finally, we “discovered” a nice and friendly taxi driver. An older (if we are eldest) woman. Is that the answer? I voted for turning the world over to women for the good of mankind even if it hurts your ego guys.

Twelves Day (of Xmas) -12-30-2024

Today is the day we wish we were back home. We are in one word: TIRED. In retrospect we should have kept our stay in Berlin for only 3 days. But then there are hungry children in Africa so who are we to complain. Today we explored the hopping part of Berlin by evening. It was the most enjoyable outing. It was also our first ride on the tram since we arrived. Could have saved some money for using taxis instead but we are always convenient shoppers. We circled the top Berlin Xmas market for hours and ended up in a communal restaurant having the traditional Bratwurst and beer. To top it off we watched the traditional Andre Rieu New Year concert in Maastricht on TV of course. The most enjoyable, uplifting with audience: old, very old, young, kids, men women dancing their hearts out. What a nice way to (almost) end this dreadful year.



Spend some time watching this. Fast forward if you have to just to get a feel as to how SPECTACULAR is this concert

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXG8QUW27ag>

Thirteenth – 12-31-2024

Today is “We can’t wait to come home” day. Sleeping in late way past breakfast at the hotel and lazy to go out on the town. For the first time on this trip, I finally read (100 pages) from the book *Homelands* I brought with me. This evening we’ll just go back to the Xmas market for a light dinner and a very early (4:30) wake up on the way to the airport and home. Happy NewYear to our beloved family and friend.

Net-Net better than my psychology passing grade. Good but not great. Safta scores it as 7.5 and Safta knows.

Unfortunately, our main impression especially in Berlin is the huge number of migrants mostly Muslim. But the most disturbing of all is the one-sided accusatory anti Israel news coverage especially from the BBC. If you are a “neutral” listener, you would side with the Palestinians as victims of genocide by the brutal IDF committing crimes against humanity. No interviews with or response from Israeli sources. By contrast except for a single sticker on day one no signs of antisemitism or pro-Palestinian protests in any of the cities we visited.

