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Europe in decline but still a delight

What changes are we seeing in Western Europe over the last decade and more? Sadly, the mood is not positive, with economies from UK to Germany and Italy and more, floundering to the brink of a recessionary precipice, but it is a tourist's delight

Our first adventure into Europe was over 30 years ago and our travels on the continent have never ceased to enchant us. After building up an appetite through a hasty multi-city tour of UK, France and Italy, and longer work trips to England, Ireland, Germany, France and Poland, the last three decades have been at least one trip a year for a week in one or two cities, and for many years, multiple repeat visits to England and Scotland. Every trip has given us new sights to see and new experiences to savour, and having just returned, we look forward to Scotland in August.

What changes are we seeing in Western Europe over the last decade and more? Sadly, the mood is not positive, with economies from UK to Germany and Italy and more, floundering to the brink of a recessionary precipice. The prolonged Ukraine war and the aggressive posturing of the USA have also provoked thoughts of an increased defence outlay in all the countries, something they can ill afford. While it is less visible in the EU and the major cities of the Schengen zone, even the great city of London seems to be fraying at the edges, and as one drives from the central city of Westminster to the outskirts, you can see signs of poverty and witness a city clinging on in some desperation to the vestiges of a glorious past.

Economies may be in decline, but the depiction of history in every museum and monument in multiple western cities, notably Berlin, Munich, Paris, Marseilles, Rome, Florence, Amsterdam, Madrid, Barcelona, Dublin, Edinburgh and of course London, is what makes many of us history and art buffs come back for more. The first time we went to the Louvre museum in Paris and the Uffizi Gallery museum in Florence, we almost felt cheated at the amount of tradition and history to be absorbed in half a day, and it has taken repeat visits to all the cities to get some sense of satisfaction with our understanding of the culture of these wonderful locations and cities.

This is not to relegate the joys of tourism in



(For representational purpose only)

(Photo courtesy: Frimulins on Freepik)

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Eastern Europe to any inferior level. Moscow and St. Petersburg are such amazing cities, and our travels through Poland from Warsaw to Kraków to Gdańsk to Auschwitz, have left us with a sense of wonder and occasionally horror in places like Auschwitz, and more recently Nuremberg where the Nuremberg Trials House is a historian's joy to visit, watch, hear and explore.

We have had the same sense of awe in Latin America in the cities of Cartagena, Lima, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Mexico, Merida and Rio de Janeiro, but Europe still occupies a special place in our hearts. Truly, we believe that the Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower and Machu Picchu are great visual splendour, but the real discovery of Europe and Latin America lies in its historical and cultural exploration.

This time, our half day in Nuremberg between

Munich and Berlin, in Germany, had a special reason—to become shareholders in a digital AI and sustainability company with our friends Martin and Vaidehi, both university MBAs, to bring world-class solutions to companies in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Holland. It was amusing to find that the bureaucratic processes of company formation and investment are as complex in Germany as they are in our own country. A visit to the notary's office took an hour of process, as he read out the full script of the agreement in German and then in English, to ensure that we had no doubts. And, the wonderful advice we got at the Indian Embassy in Berlin made us feel that here is one country that really wants us to succeed.

Finally, a repeat visit this March to Florence in Italy took us to the Accademia Gallery, which houses the spectacular David statue of Michelangelo. One never tires of hearing the story of the “monster stone” that lay open to the weather and the elements, with the whole city hoping that it would be sculpted into David, the city hero, and who in his vanquishing of the giant Goliath with his humble sling instilled a sense of deep pride in his city. However, artist after artist, including the incredibly talented Leonardo da Vinci, decided not to take on the assignment till a message was sent to city boy Michelangelo, to come back from Rome, where he was finishing some amazing sculptures.

Legend has it that Michelangelo saw David waiting to emerge from the stone and decided to take on the assignment. Working at it with relentless energy for three years, he produced a David of such incredible beauty and raw energy that nobody can step away after just a glance at the statue. Note the extreme concentration writ large on David's face, as he waits for the perfect time to strike Goliath with his sling and stone.

David truly epitomises the best that has been in Florence, Italy, Europe and the world, and we do hope that the glories of the past in these superb countries will return soon to keep the amazing continent buoyant and vibrant.