

TRAVELOGUE

The city of music

About an hour's drive away from bustling, busy Frankfurt is the modest city of Mannheim. While it may fly under the radar for the average traveller, a closer look yields a more dynamic picture of this small city.

A few years ago, while vacationing in Vienna, I came to fulfil a long-cherished dream of going to the opera. The Vienna Opera opened its grandiose, hallowed doors for me — but only so far. I formed a part of their “standing room only” audience; a one-and-a-half-hour-long wait and a seatless, cordoned-off area at the farthest end, away from the stage greeted those, like myself, with not a lot of spending power. I'd say the performance that followed was spectacular, except the only recollections I have of it are aching feet and cramped muscles from standing for literal hours.



Fast-forward to the present day, when I finally managed my first seat — a real seat — at one of Germany's oldest opera houses, Nationaltheater Mannheim. Undistracted by any physical discomfort, I was free to enjoy Puccini's 'La Bohème' in all its splendour, followed by an orchestral performance of Carl

Orff's Carmina Burana in the same week. Unlike the Wiener Staatsoper (the recipient of many an accusation of elitism), this was not a recreation exclusively for wealthy older folk. I was surrounded by teenagers and college students, no doubt taking advantage of the same student discount that I was. This was reason enough to fall in love with Mannheim, UNESCO's titleholder for “City of Music.”

Mannheim also ranks as one of the most inventive cities of the world (according to Forbes magazine) and it's not hard to see why. This is where Karl Benz (founding father of Mercedes-Benz) built the world's very first automobile in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, it was on its streets that the first car was ever driven, and it became the starting point for the world's first road-trip by car, undertaken by Karl's wife, Bertha Benz. The world's first bicycle can also be credited to Mannheim, where

Karl Drais, earlier on in the century, built a two-wheeled “draisine” — the precursor to the modern-day bike.

My celebration of Mannheim, however, lies less in its conception of our most commonly used transportation devices, and more in its invention of the delectable dessert, “Spaghetti Eis:” an ice cream dish made to look like a plate of spaghetti. Created in the '60s by the Eis Fontanella parlour, the sundae comprises of a whipped-cream base, topped with vanilla ice cream that has been squeezed through a chilled press to resemble noodles. The “noodles” are then topped with a strawberry coulis and thinly grated white chocolate, to give the appearance of marinara sauce and grated parmesan. It's a perfectly harmonised, delicious mix, and the overwhelming popularity of Spaghetti Eis — now a staple at any ice cream salon throughout the land — makes sense.

Another attraction of the city is the Ba-

rockschloss, erstwhile home of the German Prince Elector Karl Phillip. The architects of the eighteenth century palace had the lofty ambition of making it grander than the Palace of Versailles, and did so by installing exactly one more window than Versailles. Today, it forms part of the University of Mannheim — deemed “the Harvard of Germany.”

It isn't surprising that Mannheim doesn't star in the average person's Europe bucket-list; it boasts neither of elaborate churches or museums, nor of any significant feature by way of nature. But if you're raring to go to the opera, are interested in seeing the most ornate university (located within a palace complete with ceiling frescoes and larger-than-life sculptures) and enjoying a spaghetti ice-cream delight, there simply is no other place to go.

By Tonima Hossain
Photo: Tonima Hossain

MUSING

The crime of tardiness

Have you ever waited for a friend or an acquaintance so long that you fell asleep? I did. Once I had woken up from a power nap only to find that my guests, who were supposed to grace my humble abode 2 hours' prior, had not even left their home yet! Perception of time is a complex matter; while to some people, 6 o'clock means 6 o'clock, to others, 6 o'clock is 7:00, 7:30 or even 8 o'clock.

Every “deshi” wedding begins at 7:30 in the evening as per the invitation card. No, never. If you ever arrive at a wedding reception at 7:30PM, you will find the entire venue deserted. The uniformed waiters will give you strange looks. The bride and the groom are always late to their own wedding, so are their guests and sometimes, the Mughlai wedding cuisine. At a friend's wedding in Dhaka, I had waited until 10PM for the food to be served. When the clock struck past 10,

because it was getting late, I left the party on an empty stomach that was grumbling loudly enough for anyone standing next to me to hear. Not many agonies can measure up to the agony of attending a wedding and not being able to eat the sumptuous wedding dishes!

I have often found myself in awkward situations because of my timeliness. Tardy Bangladeshis who come to live abroad also bring their tardiness with them. Their clothes and English accents change, but their sense of time remains very much unchanged. I arrived at people's houses here in the U.S. only to learn that they were not expecting me to arrive so early (read, on time). One family was not up from their good night's sleep when we rang their doorbell at 12PM. They invited us to go over at 12:00 to have lunch with them, and so we did, but only to discover them in their

pajamas. To this day, I do not know who were more embarrassed that day, the guests or the hosts.

People showing up late for lunch or dinner to my place is very common, yet I finish all the preparations in time, secretly hoping that my guests would be maximum 10 minutes late. People are usually 30 minutes to 2 hours late. The food grows cold and I have to reheat it all in the microwave oven, something which I do not like to do because food always tastes better when warmed on the stove. But I feel physically and mentally drained when I have to wait for someone too long. By the time my tardy guests arrive, I am usually tired and to some degree, irritated, so I just reheat the dishes in the microwave oven.

People who are chronically late do not value their own time or the time of others. One of the few attributes of a person that

troubles me is a person's tardiness. I actively try not to make a person wait for me; I think it is unfair on any person. When I have an appointment, I am usually present at the spot at least 5 minutes before time. I would rather be early than late for anything. And if I am ever late, I always let the other person know. But a lot of people do not have the courtesy to text or call the person waiting to tell them that they are running late. People who are always late make the lives of other people, who respect time, difficult. I have lost countless hours from my life simply because someone did not appear on time.

Time is precious! Every second gone is gone for good. You cannot rewind time even if you bang your head against a wall one-hundred times. Your skull will likely crack but the time lost won't come back.

By Wara Karim