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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

November 28, 1994

Cheaper to Ski Europe?

Could an Austrian ski vacation possibly be less expensive than one in Colorado? The Austrian Tourist Office seems to think so. They sent us a press release complete with charts that show a one-week ski vacation in three Austrian ski areas — Innsbruck, Zell Am See and St. Anton/Arlberg — range from \$1,002 to \$1,600 per person, while a week in Aspen or Park City, Utah, is slightly over \$1,600.

Of course the ATO is hardly unbiased in these matters, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are wrong either. So we decided to do some checking on our own. First, we determined the elements of a ski vacation: air fare, ground transport, lodging, meals and lift tickets. From New York, the best roundtrip airfare we could find to Aspen in early January was \$651. According to the **Aspen Skiing Company**, a well-located bed and breakfast would set us back \$279 per night but we insisted on cheaper accommodations and were quoted \$83, or \$41.50 per person, at Aspen's **Buckhorn Lodge** (no breakfast). We assumed taxi fare from the airport to the hotel at about \$20 and we also assumed one could eat three decent meals a day in Aspen for \$40. A six-day lift ticket would be \$228. Whether we went to Aspen or Innsbruck, we would take our own skis, boots and poles, so let's call that a push.

To compare, we decided on a one-week package to Innsbruck from **Austria Ski** (1535 West Loop South, #319, Houston TX 77027-9509, phone 800-333-5533, fax 713-960-8966) for \$792 per person, double occupancy. It includes roundtrip air to Munich, ground

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria, Switzerland & the New Europe

OBERSTDORF

Though seldom visited by Americans, Oberstdorf, in Germany's Allgau, is an enormously popular ski and "cure" destination for Germans. Gemütlichkeit editor/publisher, Bob Bestor, was there recently.

Oberstdorf is about as far south as one can go and still be in Germany. In a wide, flat valley surrounded by mountains that offer some of Germany's finest skiing, this resort town is in that tip of Germany that extends into Austria about midway between Füssen in Bavaria and the Austrian city of Bregenz, at the eastern end of Lake Constance.

It is reached by rail from Kempten via Sonthofen, or from Lindau via Immenstadt and Sonthofen.

When the Iron Curtain descended after World War II, it deprived Westerners of visitation rights to some of Germany's most splendid treasures. A few, like the Pergamon Museum in East Berlin, were accessible from West Berlin on foot, by tour bus or private car, provided one was willing to put up with the tedious and often unsettling border crossing process. But driving unattended in East Germany's countryside — except on a very few West Germany-to-West Berlin corridors where western drivers were not allowed to leave the autobahn — was *verboten*. Though visitors to West Germany could see

Those driving to Oberstdorf should use *Mairs Deutschland Die Generalkarte #25* (scale 1:200,000) or *ADAC #14 Bodensee, Schwäbische Alb, Allgäu*. Approaching from the west, Lindau or Bregenz, we suggest heading south to Federal Road (red on maps) #200 which goes east to Hittsau. From there continue east on the Main Road (yellow on the map) that crosses the border from Austria to Germany at Schönalden. At this point the drive becomes especially scenic.

Driving south from Memmingen, one can take the autobahn to below Kempten but we recommend the yellow road to Ottobeuren and its fabulous church, then a leisurely backroads drive south through such towns as Untrasried and Betzigau. Below Kempten, find Sulzberg and go south on the green-edged yellow road through Ottacker, Rottach and Gindels, paralleling Federal Road 19, all the way to Oberstdorf.

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MEISSEN AND ITS PORCELAIN

Bruce Woelfel reports on Meissen and its Staatliche Porzellanmanufaktur, producer of lavish, intricate porcelain, including the famed Dresden China.

the fabulously detailed porcelain of the Saxon town of Meissen in museums, castles and shops, the place where it was made was hidden from our view. But that, of course, has all changed. This 1000-year-old city is now wide open to tourists.

Though for hundreds of years it remained relatively

unscathed — surviving fires, floods and wars — Meissen was left to molder under communist rule. At the time of unification, many buildings were nearly in ruins. The town is now being rebuilt — a huge task. Many houses lean precariously, seemingly held up by scaffolding; most have no indoor plumbing, only toilets in a rear yard.

Still, Meissen is a lively place with a colorful central market, dating back to 1150, and other smaller plazas. When we visited, a plaza on a back street was host to a "European Festival" with a boisterous audience

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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transport between Munich and Innsbruck, and six nights at the **Pension Alpina**, including breakfast. Our six-day lift ticket is \$158 and we figured eating would be a bit more expensive in Austria and that lunch and dinner would set us back \$40 per day.

So here's the breakdown for a week of skiing in Innsbruck and Aspen, assuming one flies from New York.

| | Innsbruck | Aspen |
|------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Airfare | Incl. \$651 | |
| Hotel | Incl. \$249 | |
| Breakfast | Incl. \$48 | |
| Lunch/Dinner | \$240 | \$192 |
| Lift Ticket | \$158 | \$228 |
| Ground Transport | Incl. \$40 | |
| Package Cost | <u>\$792</u> | <u>NA</u> |
| Totals | \$1,190 | \$1,408 |

Going west, the price for the Austria Ski package increases: it's an extra \$87 from Chicago, \$195 from Houston and \$231 from Los Angeles. Of course it is also true that the closer one gets to Aspen, the lower the airfare will be. You can upgrade the hotel in Innsbruck to the four-star **Hotel Sailer** for an additional \$110. I don't know the Sailer but would be willing to bet it's substantially better than the Buckhorn.

We chose Austria Ski for our comparison because we know it is a reputable company with long experience in selling Austrian ski vacations.

According to the ATO press release, many packages to Austria may also contain such additions as a welcome party and a farewell dinner. There are packages to Aspen but phone calls to travel agencies revealed that most one-week Aspen ski vacations start at around \$600 and don't include airfare.

Swissair's winter ski program may be even better. Their package includes roundtrip economy class flights to Zürich or Geneva, roundtrip ground transport between airport and the chosen resort,

seven nights accommodations, and breakfast or breakfast plus lunch or dinner. Prices begin at \$789 per person, double occupancy, from New York or Boston, \$859 from Atlanta, \$854 from Chicago and Cincinnati, \$930 from Los Angeles and \$836 from Philadelphia and Washington. The rates apply to all Swiss resorts plus Kitzbühel (Austria), Chamonix (France), Courmayeur (Italy) and Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany. For those arranging their own air transport to Europe, Swissair also offers land-only packages at 26 Alpine resorts that include seven nights hotel, breakfast or breakfast plus lunch or dinner, and transfers via first class rail or bus. Using Kitzbühel as an example, the price for a week in January at the "first class" **Hotel Jagerwirt** is \$645. Book with a travel agent or call Swisspak at 800-688-7947.

No Soap? No Way!

Our service which clips travel articles on Germany, Austria and Switzerland provides a constant source of interesting reading. The *Los Angeles Times* is among the country's most respected newspapers, but a full-page feature for business travelers to Germany had this advice on hotels: "Although more business-class accommodations now have rooms with private baths, many hotels still have shared bathrooms, so make sure to request a room with private bath if you want one. Remember that many German hotels do not provide soap."

I can't remember the last time I was in a hotel in Germany (or Austria or Switzerland) that didn't have soap. Many three-star hotels, and virtually every four-star hotel, equip guest bathrooms with a tray of complimentary toiletries containing the usual collection of shampoo, bath gel, conditioner, soap and so on. As for shared bathrooms, they still exist but seldom in hotels where American businessmen would go. In any case, every price quote for a hotel room I've ever gotten was very specific as to the facilities. The *Times* writer is about 15 years behind the times.

On the Autobahn

More enjoyable was a story by Stan White

writing in the *Placerville Times* (California) about driving on the German autobahn. After pulling into the right lane to allow for a much faster car to rocket past, Mr. White says, "I looked down at my speedometer to make sure I hadn't inadvertently parked."

Then he offered this right-on advice:

"Good road maps are essential. The best place to find them we discovered, is Germany. They are printed in German, but so are the places we were going. It only took a short time to figure out what the symbols meant and how to determine mileage ('kilomterage,' that is) between points."

"We had picked up maps at AAA before leaving, thinking they would suffice. Compared to their detailed German counterparts, the domestic variety came up short, offering a bare overview of main autobahns and secondary roads. The maze of byways simply did not appear, and without such information, we could have been seriously lost instead of just periodically off course."

"We obtained maps of Germany and nearby countries from the Reutlingen office of the ADAC (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club*; German equivalent to our AAA)."

The kind of maps referred to by Mr. White, I would add, are available at most service stations and book stores in Germany and, in this country, through *Gemütlichkeit's* retail travel store/catalog, Travel Essentials, phone 800-521-6722.

Car Rent Prices Continue Down

Two months ago we quoted an industry source who predicted a week's rental in Germany on a Mercedes Benz of "less than \$100." It sounded farfetched but just at press time we received new, generally lower, car rental rates including a price of \$109 for a BMW 316i. Last year, a week in such a car would set one back anywhere from \$290 to \$450. The Ford Escort category (also VW Golf, Opel Astra) is now \$69 per week. Rates don't include 15% value added tax or collision insurance. Phone 800-521-6722. 

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

| Rating Category | Scale | Hotel Rating Criteria | |
|-----------------|---------|-----------------------|-----|
| Unacceptable | 0 - 3 | People/Service | 30% |
| Adequate | 4 - 7 | Location/Setting | 15% |
| Average | 8 - 11 | Guestrooms | 30% |
| Above Average | 12 - 15 | Public rooms | 5% |
| Excellent | 16 - 20 | Facilities/Restaurant | 20% |

Special Designations

G By virtue of location, decor, special charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

\$ Offers significant value.

Restaurant Criteria

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Food | 65% |
| Service | 20% |
| Atmosphere | 15% |

OBERSTDORF

Continued from page 1

A couple of statistics immediately tell one what Oberstdorf is all about. This is a town with only 12,000 permanent residents but with 16,000 beds for visitors. It attracts some 2.3 million overnight guests annually which, according to the Oberstdorf tourist office, is more than any other spa or holiday resort in Germany. Visitors stay an average of 12 days, a tip-off that the 2.3 million figure doesn't include very many Americans.

Two factors account for Oberstdorf's popularity: the winter sports and the fact that in 1937 it was designated a "climatic health resort." If Germany ever adopts a bill of rights, the famous "cure" vacation will undoubtedly lead the list. And Oberstdorf gets more than its share of visitors adhering to this beloved custom. The town brims with spa hotels and sanatoriums. But unlike many European resorts, the town has kept a steady hand on growth. There are no high rises.

In winter, skiing is the main attraction. There are 40 kilometers of downhill runs and 60 kilometers of cross-country tracks. The town also has three indoor skating rinks and the world's highest ski jump. In summer there are many miles of hiking paths, tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course and nearly 40 hotel and municipal swimming pools.

Hiking and climbing are principally accessed via cable car to the 1706 meter Söllereck (easiest), the 2039 meter Feldhorn (a bit more challenging) and, for serious climbers, the Nebelhorn at 2224 meters.

Recommended excursions from Oberstdorf are the Breitach Gorge (*Breitachklamm*), a narrow, deep ravine through which surges a powerful torrent, and to the Kleinwalsertal, a pretty valley that is physically in Austria but can only be reached through Germany and in whose three little hamlets, Riezlern, Hirschegg and Mittelberg, the acceptable currency is the deutschemark.

Being virtually at the end of the road, Oberstdorf has very little

through traffic, so nearly all its hotels could be rated as "quiet." You will, however, pay a premium for the resort location.

Oberstdorf Hotels

Kneippkurhaus Christliches Hospiz

This is the only hotel in Germany authorized to use the word *hospiz* in its name, a rather dubious distinction since some mistake it as a place

**EDITOR'S
CHOICE**

OBERSTDORF

Population: 11,000

Altitude: 2,674 feet

Approximate distances from:

| | | |
|---------|--------|-----------|
| Munich | 165 km | 102 miles |
| Kempten | 39 km | 24 miles |
| Zürich | 215 km | 133 miles |

Tourist Information

Kurverwaltung und Verkehrsamt
Marktplatz 7
Oberstdorf D-87561
Phone: 08322/7000
Fax: 08322/700236

Approximate Lift Ticket Prices

High Season

(December to early January,
end January to early April)

| # Days | Adult | Child | Senior |
|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1 | \$36 | \$26 | \$34 |
| 2 | \$68 | \$49 | \$64 |
| 3 | \$94 | \$69 | \$89 |
| 4 | \$112 | \$82 | \$106 |
| 5 | \$132 | \$96 | \$124 |
| 6 | \$148 | \$108 | \$140 |

Approximate Lift Ticket Prices

Low Season

(2nd week January to end January)

| # Days | Adult | Child | Senior |
|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1 | \$36 | \$15 | \$30 |
| 2 | \$68 | \$44 | \$56 |
| 3 | \$89 | \$64 | \$81 |
| 4 | \$106 | \$76 | \$95 |
| 5 | \$124 | \$90 | \$112 |
| 6 | \$140 | \$101 | \$126 |

where people go to die. Though the Kneippkurhaus Christliches Hospiz would be a good place to spend one's last days, it is not a hospice in that sense of the word. It is, however, by far the finest hotel we saw in Oberstdorf and probably among the top 15 we've ever reviewed.

The problem here is getting in. Most guests reserve a year in advance and stay for two or three weeks, so your chances of dropping by for a couple of overnights aren't good.

However, the engaging, grandmotherly owner, Gisela Schüle, made a point of telling us that short-term guests are welcome during the occasional periods when the hotel isn't full.

The hotel's splendid public and guest rooms are decorated in that special sort of rustic elegance in which the finest country hotels of Germany, Austria and Switzerland seem to specialize. But you won't see any of the kitschy touches like acres of floral tile, drapes, carpet and wall paper, or lumber truck loads of ponderous dark wood, that so often give this decorating style a dim, somber look. Here the look is glistening and sprightly with plenty of blond wood and modern lighting.

Guestrooms are spacious with dazzling white walls, light wood trim, high-backed easy chairs in a separate sitting area, and ample, sparkling bathrooms. Many, like Number 329, have expansive windows that open onto large balconies with fine mountain views.

Top of the line in every respect.

Address: Kneippkurhaus Christliches Hospiz, Ludwigstrasse 37-41a, D-87561 Oberstdorf

Phone: 08322/701-0

Fax: 08322/701 516

Location: Central

Rooms: 108 total, 70 singles, 38 doubles; all designated nonsmoking

Proprietor: Gisela & Theodor Schüle
Prices: 170 to 239 DM (\$110-\$155) 339 to 426 DM (\$220-\$277), including all meals

Facilities: Fitness room, indoor pool, therapy pool

Credit Cards: All

Disabled: Yes

Closed: First three weeks in December

Parking: Free

Rating: EXCELLENT 18.5/20 G

Parkhotel Frank

This sedate, four-star hotel in a residential area near the center, favors massive beams and oversized furniture in a homey atmosphere.

At the Frank you'll particularly like the indoor pool and Jacuzzi, after-dinner zither music by the fire, the

Continued on page 4...

hotel's cozy nooks and corners and, in summer, an expansive outdoor terrace and lawn area.

Room Number 30, a small suite, has an extraordinary bathroom. A large oval tub is surrounded by mirrors and the room is done in small squares of gold, black, red and blue tile. There is also a double sink, hairdryer, heated towel rack and a separate room for the toilet.

Not in a class with the Hospiz (above) but otherwise the best we saw in Oberstdorf.

Address: Parkhotel Frank, Sachsenweg 11, D-87561 Oberstdorf

Phone: 08322/70 60

Fax: 08322/706 286

Location: Central

Rooms: 68 total, including 9 singles

Proprietor: Robert Frank

Prices: 45 to 205 DM (\$94-\$134), 302 to 406 DM (\$196-\$264), including breakfast and dinner

Facilities: Indoor pool, sauna, fitness room, outdoor terrace, children's playroom

Credit Cards: All

Disabled: Yes

Closed: November to mid-December, end of April

Parking: Free

Rating: EXCELLENT 17/20

Kurhotel Adula

Large, typical upscale German resort hotel, similar in style to the Frank. This one, however, is perched on a hillside above the town, affording excellent views of the valley, mountains and village — particularly from the large, outdoor, south-facing terrace.

The view is also pleasant from the Adula's huge dining room which serves good, but not great, food.

If you like the vistas and don't mind not being in the center of town, you'll enjoy the Adula as much as the Frank.

Address: Kurhotel Adula, In der Leite 6, D-87561 Oberstdorf

Phone: 08322/70 90

Fax: 08322/709 403

Location: On a hillside in Jauchen about 1.5 kilometers west of Oberstdorf

Rooms: 78 total, 24 singles, 48 doubles

Proprietor: Family Ludwig Riegg

Prices: 165 to 216 DM (\$107-\$140), 320 to 340 DM (\$208-\$221)

Facilities: Indoor pool, sauna, solarium, fitness room, massage, outdoor terrace, beauty center

Credit Cards: All

Disabled: Not suitable

Closed: Never

Parking: Free

Other: Hotel runs bus to town every two hours

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 15/20

Nebelhorn Blick

The flower-lined balconies and cheery public rooms of the chalet-style Nebelhorn look out across the valley to the town and the mountains beyond.

It is one of Oberstdorf's better hotel values. Room Number 16, probably the best room — and deal — in the house, is a junior suite that rents for 150 DM (\$98), on a self-service basis (no breakfast, make your own bed). Its side-by-side twin beds jut at an angle from a wood-paneled corner of the room. This cozy nook is bathed in light from modern fixtures recessed in the wood-paneled ceiling. Beyond the bedroom is a comfortably furnished separate sitting room that opens onto a balcony with a fine view. There is also a small kitchen, but the bathroom is unfortunately done in a garish burnt-orange tile.

Large, recently-remodeled double rooms, such as Number 40, with balcony, high, open-beam ceiling and separate sitting area, go for 180 DM (\$117).

Public rooms are most pleasant, particularly the dining room, and there is a lovely little indoor pool with adjacent Jacuzzi.

The Nebelhorn offers no transportation downtown, though a bus stops nearby every half-hour in season.

Address: Nebelhorn Blick, Kornau 49, D-87561, Oberstdorf-Kornau

Phone: 08322/4086

Fax: 08322/7341

Location: In Kornau, about four kilometers west of Oberstdorf's center

Rooms: 27 rooms including 4 singles

Proprietor: Family Gras

Prices: 75 to 93 DM (\$49-\$60), 150 to 186 DM (\$97-\$121)

Facilities: Indoor pool, sauna, whirlpool, solarium

Credit Cards: Not accepted

Disabled: Not suitable

Closed: Never

Parking: Free

Other: Lobby has no-smoking section

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20 \$

Hotel Waldesruhe

Another hotel located above the valley, west of the town center. Views are excellent. The Waldesruhe is a favorite of ski jumpers.

Address: Hotel Waldesruhe, Alte Walsenstrasse 20, D-87561 Oberstdorf

Phone: 08322/40 61

Fax: 08322/83 27

Location: West of Oberstdorf on a hill overlooking the valley and the town

Rooms: 38 rooms including 11 singles

Proprietor: Axel Brutscher

Prices: 88 to 118 DM (\$57-\$77), 176 to 300 DM (\$114-\$195)

Facilities: Indoor pool, small fitness room, sauna, terrace for outdoor dining

Credit Cards: Not accepted

Disabled: Not suitable

Closed: Last week October to December 18

Parking: Free

Other: Restaurant has excellent view of valley; no shuttle to train, taxi is 12 DM (\$8)

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

Haus Wiese

Very much a private home atmosphere. The front door is usually locked and the small reception area seldom attended. Number seven, a corner room with wide windows and a view of the mountains and village, was full of carved wood furniture and antiques but marred by an aroma that bore witness to the many smokers who had gone before.

There is a small indoor pool and management is friendly, but it's getting time for some refurbishment.

Address: Haus Wiese, Stillachstrasse 4 a, D-87561 Oberstdorf

Phone: 08322/30 30
Location: Residential area about one kilometer from the center
Rooms: 13 rooms, 4 singles, 5 doubles
Proprietor: Family Wiese
Prices: 95 to 105 DM (\$62-\$68), 170 to 210 DM (\$110-\$136)
Facilities: Indoor pool but no lift or restaurant
Credit Cards: Not accepted
Disabled: Not suitable
Closed: Never
Parking: Free
Rating: AVERAGE 11/20

Hotel Traube

Recently remodeled rooms make the centrally-located Traube another good value. One rather bizarre feature, however, is that all bathrooms are glassed-in, though a curtain can be drawn over the glass for privacy. Number 17, the "wedding room" has a canopied bed, mirrored ceiling, whirlpool tub and a balcony with a view of the mountains. Depending on the season, it rents for 180 to 240 DM (\$117-\$156).

In summer, the beer garden under chestnut trees is most pleasant.

The Traube's ebullient and friendly owner, Reinhard Scheuerl, is an avid golfer.

Address: Hotel Traube, Hauptstrasse 6, D-87561 Oberstdorf
Phone: 08322/46 48
Fax: 08322/31 68
Location: Central
Rooms: 9 rooms, including 2 singles
Proprietor: Reinhard Scheuerl
Prices: 80 to 110 DM (\$52-\$71) 130 to 240 DM (\$85-\$156)
Facilities: No lift, beer garden under chestnut trees
Credit Cards: All
Disabled: Not suitable
Closed: Restaurant closed November to mid-December
Parking: Free
Other: Restaurant has zither music four nights each week
Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Hotel Adler

Oberstdorf's top value is the Adler where a comfortable double such as

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Number seven, rents for 160 DM (\$104). The best room in the house is spacious Number 34 (220 DM/\$143) where everything from tile to furniture is handmade.

Address: Hotel Adler, Fuggerstrasse 1, D-87561 Oberstdorf
Phone: 08322/30 59
Fax: 08322/81 87
Location: Residential, close to center
Rooms: 33 rooms, 1 guest house, 8 singles
Proprietor: Otto Jäger
Prices: 85 to 95 DM (\$55-\$62), 150 to 170 DM (\$97-\$110)
Facilities: Outdoor terrace for dining, no lift
Credit Cards: Not accepted
Disabled: Not suitable
Closed: 10 November to 15 December, last two weeks of April
Parking: Free
Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20 \$

Restaurants

Adula Hotel Restaurant

Our visit to the Adula was during the off-season and the wood-paneled dining room with white stucco walls was less than a third full. We were seated at a banquette near a window with a good view of the lights of the valley and village below, including Oberstdorf's nicely-lit church steeple. We found pink table cloths, white napkins, a small bouquet of daisies and silver salvers at each place (but no silver covers, thank goodness). One meal came already dished; the other was served from a copper saute pan.

A "gift-of-the-kitchen" starter was a tomato puree and two small shrimp in aspic served in an herbed mayonnaise. Novel and tasty.

A run-of-the-mill salad buffet (9.5 DM/\$6.25) included butter lettuce, tomato slices, red and yellow peppers with sliced onions, grated carrots and sliced cucumber with the usual choice of dressings.

One main dish was *rostspies* (33 DM/\$21.50), in this case a skewer of four veal strips stuffed with a mild, white cheese and topped with porcini mushrooms. Alongside was green and white fettuccini with flecks of

ham in a thick cream sauce. Except for a small tomato on the skewer there were no vegetables. A better dish was *Poullardenbrüsten* (29 DM/\$19), several slices of chicken breast in a light reduction sauce that came with steamed broccoli sprinkled with almond slices. A side of bland white fettuccini arrived without sauce.

This was late November and it was a pleasant surprise to find the first wine of the French harvest, *Beaujolais Nouveau*. We were charged 19 DM (\$12.50) for a small carafe. Another welcome beverage was the Czech beer, Budweiser or Budvar, though it was somewhat below par. Business is slow at this time of year and the keg may have been around too long.

A good but hardly memorable meal. The bill for two persons was 126 DM (\$82), including wine and beer.

Adula Hotel Restaurant, Fuggerstrasse 1, D-87561 Oberstdorf, phone 08322/30 59, fax 08322/81 87. Moderately expensive.

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 12/20

Dampfbierbrauerei

In search of a late, inexpensive dinner one night we landed at the Dampfbierbrauerei (steam beer brewery). It is to be avoided. One finds good beer everywhere in Germany, but the *dampfbier* made on the premises was cloudy and reminiscent of a bad batch at a below average California brew pub. Three-tenths of a liter costs 3.7 DM (\$2.50).

Nor can we recommend the food. *Schnitzel* (18.5 DM/\$12) was barely passable as were the *pommes frites* served with it. *Hirschgeschnetzeltes* (19.5 DM/\$13), sauteed chopped venison in a cream sauce, had a strange taste; the accompanying spätzel was tasteless and brussels sprouts were cooked to mush.

Dampfbierbrauerei, Bahnhofplatz 6-8, D-87561 Oberstdorf. Closed Mondays. Inexpensive-moderate.
Rating: UNACCEPTABLE 3/20

READERS' FORUM

In Defense of the Geiger

My wife, Helen, and I recently returned from a month in Europe, primarily in Germany. Catching up on our reading, we noted with interest your question in the July 28th issue of *Gemütlichkeit*. The item dealt with the **Geiger Hotel** in Berchtesgaden. Two of your readers complained about problems at the Geiger, you asked: anyone been there recently?

Because of our total delight with the charming Geiger Hotel in a 1985 trip, we decided to spend three nights there this time, August 5, 6, 7. We wrote in advance to Herr Geiger, and reserved Room 205. It was a total winner in every way, and we enjoyed conversations with both Hugo Geiger and his son, Stefan. We dined there each night, and couldn't be more satisfied. You described your own experiences at the Geiger as "terrific". We can only echo that in capital letters: TERRIFIC! Probably any place can have an off moment or two but we were so charmed by the Geiger and the Geigers that we are returning next year.

Meanwhile, continue your excellent reports.

Bill Diehl, St. Paul MN

Geiger Defense, Part 2

You asked for an update on the **Hotel Geiger**. Clara and I were there several months ago and will return next March as a prelude to a trip to Southern Africa. I have lost exact count, but this will be either our 18th or 19th visit there. If Mr. Geiger were to incorporate, I would ask him for some promotional shares for free. We sent two couples there this summer and they had a fine time!

The only explanation I have of Mr. Jamieson's problems relates a little to his room. Room 12 is the oldest part of the hotel and some of the rooms are a bit worn by the years. The rooms are also the cheapest and constitute some of the best bargains available in Europe during the times of our weak

dollar. I know this is true because we have sent people to the hotel who are on strict budgets and I have always asked for rooms in the old section so that they could save money. What is "Salvation Army" furniture to some may mean very old Bavarian *Gemütlichkeit* to others. Clara and I stayed in the old wing for many years after the new wing was built. After our age and exchequers expanded, we decided to try the new wing. We actually miss the old wing but prefer the amenities of the new. Mr. Geiger has actually added a third-floor to the new wing which has an even better view of the Watzmann than the lower floors.

The hotel runs better when Mr. Hugo Geiger is there. He has an excellent personality and is an outstanding man. There is a tendency for the mouse to play when the cat's away and I'm sure that Stefan Geiger will mature into a fine hotelier with a few more years under his belt of working with his father.

Once again, this is our favorite hotel in the world (of any category or location). I suspect that the hotel was full and Mr. Jamieson was given a room which has not yet become part of the general refurbishing program. This may have been coupled with a rare instance when neither Hugo nor Stefan were present — to the detriment of the guests. It also may have been bad luck.

This is a great place and I think most folks who read your publication will agree.

Victor P Obninsky, Tiburon CA

Walking Switzerland

I have just returned from my fourth trip to Switzerland in the last six years. Normally my daughters and I take the lifts up to the top and spend the day hiking down from the mountains and we enjoy the many inns on the way down. The last trip we decided to do it the "Swiss way" - no lifts. We started in Kandersteg and finished in Lauterbrunnen. It was an experience of a lifetime. You have to be in good physical condition as you hike 7-8 hours per day. At times we were 8,000 to 9,000 ft. We stayed two nights in the mountain huts (as many as 20 people in the

room). The other nights we were in individual rooms. The scenery was spectacular and it was an experience I will never forget. If your readers are interested they can contact Andrew Sanders at IBEX TREKS (Amsterdam, Netherlands, phone 020/671-8202, fax 020/625-7312.) The cost for the 7 1/2 days was approximately \$900 per person.

I enjoy *Gemütlichkeit* newsletter very much. In Wengen we stayed at **Hotel Alpenruhe** that was recommended by you.

Carol Tanklage, Redwood City CA

Yes on Baden-Baden Hotel

Although family concerns have prevented us from traveling in recent years we enjoy our trips vicariously with *Gemütlichkeit*. In your September issue I was delighted to find that you have "discovered" one of our Baden-Baden favorites - the **Rebenhof**. We have overnighted there on several occasions and always go for at least one meal when we're in the Schwarzwald area. We agree that it has to be the best value around.

Have you checked out **Monchs-Posthotel** in Bad Herrenalb? This is another favorite. The staff has always been kind to us and we have especially enjoyed staying there at Christmas time. The Christmas Eve cold buffet was outstanding.

Thanks for helping us recall happy memories through your newsletters.

Joanne Koch, Grosse Point Farms MI

Top Salzburg Restaurant

In Salzburg, if you are interested, the best restaurant by a considerable margin this year is **Purzelbaum**.

The festival this year was very good, with a smashing production of *Boris Godunov*, and a complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies by Nickolaus Harnoncourt and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.
Donald & Jeanne Kahn, Salzburg, Austria

Europe in Review

Just returned from Europe and wanted to give you a little feedback since we used your recommendations in several cases.

- Hamburg - stayed at the **Vier**

Jahreszeiten. Great hotel, although I wonder if it is worth the price for those not on an expense account. We were very disappointed with dinner in **The Grill**.

• Würzburg - wonderful town! We stayed at the **zur Stadt Mainz** as you recommended. Great! The proprietress was welcoming and the room nice (although on the fourth floor with no elevator). Dinner in the charming dining room was marvelous — both the food and the service were special. The breakfast buffet in that same room was extraordinary. This is a “primo” place.

• Passau - another lovely town, right on the Danube. We stayed at the **Wilder Mann**. This hotel is well located and our room nice, but the lobby was cold and unwelcoming as was the staff. The restaurant was a big disappointment, considering the Michelin star. Service was well meaning but incompetent and the room is cold and bare. The food was good but nothing more and not worth its high price.

• Vienna - stayed at **Pension Altstadt** for five nights. Absolutely superior! Well located if you're willing to do a little walking (and what are you in Vienna for but to walk and enjoy). This place is exceptionally friendly and comfortable. We asked for and got room 14 and, as you suggested, it was glorious, especially the ballroom size bath.

An illustrative story - we arrived tired and frazzled in our packed rental car during the evening rush hour. There was no place to park, so we double parked to unload and one of us was going to try and negotiate traffic and return the car to the Budget office, which we could only hope to find, given the intricacies of one way streets and traffic in Vienna. The proprietor of the Altstadt, Mr Wiesenthal, and his young man, rushed down to help us with the luggage and then he insisted on returning the car to the rental office for us. He knew exactly where to go and wanted to save us the trouble. Now is that nice? Our tension level plummeted and we loved him immediately. The Altstadt has a warm, lovely lounge with compli-

mentary drinks, coffee or tea, and newspapers (including the *Herald Tribune*). The desk got us theater tickets, recommended nice restaurants and was generally very pleasant. The breakfast buffet was outstanding and served in a very cheerful room.

• Took the hydrofoil to Budapest. Easy, cheap, comfortable, pleasant. Definitely the way to go. Stayed at the **Forum**. This is a big modern hotel but I wouldn't recommend anything but big modern hotels in Budapest. We didn't see any older, charming hotels and I suspect they don't exist. The Forum was busy, bustling with businessmen and tour groups, but friendly and efficient. Our room looked across the Danube at the Palace — a gorgeous view. Our only complaint was that we couldn't get the concierge to steer us to good simple restaurants. He insisted on sending us to fancy, expensive, “international” places that he thought more appropriate for foreign guests (and from which he got commissions?). When we specifically asked him about some places we had read about, he turned up his nose and said (exact words) “Oh, not for you!”

Gundel's, incidentally, is a great restaurant, worth seeing — big, beautiful, good food, full of Americans, expensive — but only once; or so we thought. After following the guidance of our concierge three other nights, maybe a second night at Gundel's would have been a good idea.

Thank you for pointing us to some good places.

Warren Albright & Per Schelde,
Washington CT

Baden-Baden Hotels

Please do not waste space on places like the **Brenner's Park** in Baden-Baden. Leave that to Condé Nast et al and stay with the places that are not so obvious or so ridiculous in price. The best bang for the buck in Baden-Baden is the **Waldhotel Forellenhof** and your inclusion of the **Allee Hotel Bären** is also a plus.

Bruce Woelfel mentions “boiled beef” in Graz. This is the renowned *tafelspitz*, practically the national dish, and deserves to be called by its name.

In spite of my sniping, you do an excellent job.

Robert Simons, St Cloud WI

(Ed. note: We have no beef with Mr. Simons, who owns a travel company and is extremely knowledgeable about the hotels of Baden-Baden.)

(More ed. notes: Last month we published a letter by Mr. Martin Ems of San Francisco. We left out a key part of his comments about the **Hotel Domus'** convenient location. The paragraph should have read that the hotel is “a 10-minute walk to Kurfürstendamm, a 20-minute walk to Zoo railway and S-Bahn station, a 15-minute walk to the Savigny Platz S-Bahn station, the latter being far less crowded than the Zoo station.” The underlined portion was inadvertently omitted.)

MEISSEN

Continued from page 1

watching performers from Hungary, the Czech Republic, and other Eastern European countries, singing, playing and dancing. Above Meissen a fortified monastery and castle overlooks the narrow streets and low buildings.

Near the town are large kaolin deposits, one of the purest of the clays. Because it is easily molded, has a fine texture and is white when fired, it is used in the making of fine porcelain. (Kaolin is also found in Cornwall, England and in France.)

An alchemist, Johann Friedrich Bottger, discovered the secret of producing porcelain while unsuccessfully attempting to make gold in the Bruhlsche Terrasse in Dresden. In 1710, August the Strong established the first large-scale European porcelain manufacturing operation in the castle. It was later shifted to its present location.

Meissen's principal attraction, naturally, is the ceramic museum and manufacturing plant. The museum pieces are amazingly detailed, with finely painted faces. Some are large and intricate: a vase three-feet high has a movable “necklace” of ceramic flowers. On the third floor are some semi-abstract modern pieces. A 30-minute factory tour — included in the

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MEISSEN

Continued from page 7

admission price — demonstrates how the pieces are formed (using a secret formula) and glazed.

Porcelain from Meissen

MEISSEN

Population: 48,000

Altitude: 110 meters

Approximate distances from:

| | | |
|---------|--------|-----------|
| Dresden | 23 km | 15 miles |
| Berlin | 175 km | 109 miles |
| Munich | 486 km | 301 miles |

Tourist Information

Meissen-Information
An der Frauenkirche 3
Meissen D-01662
Phone: 03521/4470
Fax: 03521/454479

Location: 15 miles northwest of Dresden at the intersection of the valleys formed by the rivers Elbe, Triebisch and Meisa. In addition to its porcelain fame, Meissen is the center of the world's most northerly wine-growing area.

Walking Tour, available through the town center and the castle hill, adults 6 DM (\$4), children (10-16) 3 DM (\$2), phone 03521/4544 70, fax 03521/4582 40.

National Porcelain Factory, Talstrasse 9, open Tuesday-Sunday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., entrance 5 DM (\$3.25), phone 03521/4585 41, fax 03521/4521 17. Demonstration workshop, Tuesday-Sunday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., entrance plus guided tour 4 DM.

Porcelain Painting Workshop, Kunsthandwerkliche Porzellanmalerei GmbH Sitz Meissen, Meisastrasse 42, open Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday by appointment, entrance and guided tour 2 DM (\$1.30), phone 03521/4578 73.

Albrechtsburg, a large Gothic castle, towers over Meissen providing a magnificent view over the town. Open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., closed in January, entrance is 4 DM (\$2.60). Guided tour 3 DM (\$2).

Saxon Wine-Growers' Cooperative, Meissen, Bennoweg 6, guided tours with wine-tasting: three samples 9 DM (\$6), six samples 18 DM (\$12), *Winzerplatte* meal 7 DM (\$4.50) per person, phone (0351)7332 93.

is expensive, although prices in the museum store and an outlet store in the Dresden Hilton Hotel, are less than what one would pay in the U.S. A tea pot sells for \$200, place settings are \$300 and up. Many patterns are available

including the famous "Dresden Blue."

Getting to Meissen by car is a slow process, especially during the tourist season. One must cross and recross the Elbe in heavy traffic on a crowded two-lane road. The quickest way is to take the train. Nine trains a day take less than half an hour from the main Dresden station, running from 5:35 a.m. to 9:35 p.m., and returning from 6:00 a.m. to 9:33 p.m. It is also a pleasant trip on an old paddle boat from the piers along the Elbe near the Old Town. ☒

EUROPE TRAVEL BRIEFING

Swissair Updates

• Fredy Girardet, whose restaurant in Crissier near Lausanne is regarded by many as the finest in the world, and his top cook, Philippe Rochat, have been signed on by **Swissair** to enhance the airline's business and first class in-flight meals.

First class passengers will be served a three course menu that begins with *Velouté Safrané de Truite du Lac En Gelée à L'Oscière* and ends with *Lénoise de Guanaja Aux Oranges Confites*. Business class passengers will enjoy a Girardet chocolate dessert. Economy class passengers will be served wine and food from the Vaud region, the canton in which **Restaurant Girardet** is located.

Passengers can also take part in a drawing by leaving their business card or boarding card with their name and address. Prizes

include flights to Switzerland, dinner at Girardet and entry to the Olympic Museum.

• *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers are also reminded that they are eligible for fare reductions on Swissair. The program, now in its third year, has been extended again through March 31, 1995. The fare reduction on Swissair sale fares is \$50 per ticket for all members of the traveling party, \$400 on business class fares and \$600 on first class fares. Booking must be made directly with Swissair (800-221-4750. Ask the reservationist to access "G-star, QL2JLQ"). For more details you may phone the *Gemütlichkeit* office at 800-521-6722.

• Readers in the Washington DC area should know that Swissair, **Austrian Airlines** and **Delta Airlines** have jointly introduced service connecting Washington, Geneva and Vienna. Five times each week the Austrian Airlines A310 Airbus service will originate and terminate in Vienna. Each of the carriers will maintain the rights to a certain number of seats on the various legs of the journey.

Hotel Discounts

The Sofitel hotel chain has announced a winter sale through February 26 at its 48 properties in several European countries, including Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Rates are as low as \$110 per night per room. At Vienna's **Sofitel Belvedere**, for example, the rate is \$130 for a double room including buffet breakfast, service charges and tax — an excellent price for a four-star hotel in Vienna. To book, phone 800-763-4835.

Drive to Russia

Because it is almost impossible to rent a car in the western part of Europe and drive it into the east, independent driving vacations that include eastern countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia are difficult to arrange. However, **Overseas Motorhomes Tours** now offers a 33-day drive to the east and into Scandinavia via motorhome. The drive begins May 31 in Frankfurt and ends July 31 back in Frankfurt and includes stops in Prague, Wroclaw, Krakow, Warsaw, Kobryn (Belarus), Minsk, Smolensk, Moscow, Torzhok, Novgorod, St. Petersburg, Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Goslar.

Berndt Hess of Motorhome Tours tells *Gemütlichkeit* he expects a caravan of some 15 of his full-equipped vehicles (hot/cold water, shower, toilet, refrigerator, stove, bedding, crockery, etc.).

The package includes roundtrip air to Frankfurt, first and last night hotel, transfers, the motorhome, ferries including first class cabin Helsinki to Stockholm, guided sight-seeing including a Russian-English speaking guide to accompany the caravan in Russia, all sight-seeing admission fees, campground fees and 27 meals. In Moscow, the tour includes a visit to the Space Museum, the Moscow Circus and an optional ride in a MIG fighter jet. Accompanying the caravan will be experienced "wagonmasters" plus two security officers and a mechanic.

The cost per person for the *To Russia With Love* tour is \$6,395, double occupancy. Phone 800-468-3876. ☒