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**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

January 27, 1995

John Madden, the TV pro football commentator, intrigues me. Lately, I've thought about his huge popularity and tried to understand the reasons for it. I have concluded — and this is hardly a news bulletin — that Madden has a special knack for communicating his information. He is simplicity itself — with a little humor thrown in. He cuts through all the mysterious, mostly extraneous, football jargon and speaks in clear, simple English. He brings his subject and himself down to our level. It occurs to me that *Gemütlichkeit* should be more like John Madden. Sometimes we get mired in things that aren't important and, worse yet, don't get our message across in a plain, straightforward fashion.

Our resolution for the New Year, therefore, is to be more Madden-like. Such a resolve is no doubt easier in the talking about than in the living up to. It's quite possible that Madden, like the very best in any field, makes the difficult look easy. If this was Madden's newsletter he'd say, "what the heck. This isn't brain surgery. We know some stuff. You pay us for what we know. Here it is... this is bad... this is good... boom... what else do you want to know?"

Thus begins the *Gemütlichkeit*-John Madden era. In keeping with our resolution we will henceforth underline information we deem to be particularly important or useful to the reader.

So, as Madden might put it, what's with 1995?

As this is written we are only 27 days into the New Year, but from all

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

PRAHA IN WINTER

Just as American travelers of the 50s and 60s discovered cities like Munich, Salzburg and Vienna, travelers in 90s are discovering Prague. They are finding "old world" enchantment and low prices.

Ten years ago, Prague was a secret. The rare traveler who took the trouble to obtain a visa, brave the border crossing and then endure lousy accommodations, found a wondrous, truly "old world" city where the calendar was stuck on 1938.

Then everything changed and the town is now crawling with tourists. Some say the secret of Prague was whispered on TV to Connie Chung. Others attribute the change

to that share-and-share-alike thing known as communism taking a harder fall than leisure suits. Though historians can't agree exactly what happened, we're going to take the high road and not blame Connie for this one.

People who are supposed to know these things say more Americans went to Prague in the summer of 1994 than visited Paris — a fairly astonishing assertion. But why not? Except for hotel rooms, Prague is still inexpensive. Another reason for so many visitors

is this business about it being the continent's best example of "old world" Europe. Remember, the film *Amadeus* was shot there because the movie's producers decided Prague looked more like 18th century Vienna than anyplace else, including Vienna.

But that was before McDonald's and American Express turned up on Wenceslas Square. Now the Czechs, schooled by opportunistic Westerners, are rapidly learning one of the prime rules of capitalism: keep raising the prices until people stop giving you money.

In the last two years, for example, the cost of a subway ride has skyrocketed. Admittedly the increase is from an almost-free (to us) 9 cents to a merely dirt-cheap 20 cents, but it is a symptom of the times. Four dollar dinners are now \$8. Renegade cab drivers quickly discovered they could charge rich softies from the West \$2 for a 50 cent cab ride. That was the early days, now they've boosted the prices and demand \$30 for a \$12 ride.

In general, though, Prague remains a terrific

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SWISS HOTELS ON LAKE CONSTANCE

Gemütlichkeit looks at six hotels on Lake Constance — two of which are exceptional.

The southwestern shore of the Bodensee (Lake Constance) is mostly in Switzerland. Though it doesn't possess the breathtaking dramatic Alpine scenery or the affluent surroundings of Switzerland's other major lakes, it has its own distinctive beauty and charm.

In addition, there is much to do and to explore in this region. For example, using the Hotel Krone (or any of the other hotels reviewed here) in the tiny hamlet of Gottlieben on the *Untersee* of the Bodensee as a base, one can do day trips to such interesting towns as Stein am Rhine, Schaffausen and the Rhine Falls to the West or the busy German town of Konstanz only a few kilometers East. Other interesting options include boarding a car ferry to the German side to such cities as Meersburg, Friedrichshafen and Lindau; a drive southeast along the lake stop-

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indications to date — the volume of phone calls to tourist offices, early airfare and car rental bookings, the number of calls and orders to the *Gemütlichkeit* office — '95 could be a record-breaking year for European travel.

Crowded Destinations

A heavy flow of tourists to Europe will, of course, be a factor in your trip planning. Expect such cities as Prague, Budapest, Rothenburg, Munich, Berlin, Vienna, Salzburg, Zürich, Geneva and Lucerne to be jam-packed from mid-June to early October. Hotel rooms in Prague, especially, will be hard to find in the high season. You may want to spend more time than usual in small towns and in the country. In a later issue we'll have some specific suggestions along those lines.

Airfares & Airplanes

As this is written, very low fares to Europe are in effect. In early January, you could have gone roundtrip to London from New York for \$199. Through today (1/27/95) you can — provided you can get a seat — fly roundtrip to Europe for about \$400 from the East Coast, \$500 from the Midwest and \$600 from the West. Not to worry if you missed this sale, there will be others to stimulate February to May travel. From a strictly airfare point of view, right now is perhaps the best time to visit Europe. One piece of advice: stay in touch with the airlines or a travel agent, especially if you're flexible enough to go at the drop of an airfare. Some sales are only for a day or two and are often not advertised except via fax to key travel agents. And don't forget such lesser-known airlines and charter carriers as LTU, Balair, and Martinair.

The big question is what will fares be this summer. Last summer they held up better (or worse, if you will) than at any time since the Gulf War. A reliable industry source tells us that the number of seats already booked for the summer of '95 — mostly groups — is substantially up over a

year ago. This does not bode well for the consumer because if the airlines can manage to fill their airplanes without cutting prices they, of course, will not do so. Still, there are many airlines and plenty of seats to fill to Europe. Most major carriers are right now in the process of selling blocks of seats to consolidators like DER Tours who will resell them at prices lower than the airlines will.

It remains to be seen, however, if buying from a consolidator will ultimately be your best deal. If the airlines' own advance summer sales begin to lag, say in March and April, companies like Continental and TWA will undoubtedly lower prices. Other carriers are sure to follow. Often these airline sale prices are less than consolidator prices. In any event, we expect summer airfare wars to be fewer, shorter in duration and less bloody (higher fares) than in the recent past. By the end of February we will know the consolidator fares. Air ticket shoppers will then know what they have to fall back on in the event the big fare wars fizzle out. Such a strategy, of course, carries some risk. If the airlines are able to get their price it means summer sales are strong and the shopper who waits too long may find himself or herself talking to a consolidator who has a good price but can't make a reservation on fully booked airplanes. In any event, for those planning to travel this summer we recommend, for now at least, that you wait to purchase tickets at least until the consolidator prices are known. You should also keep in mind that as a subscriber you are entitled to a \$50 per ticket fare reduction on Swissair (800-521-6722 for info), substantially more if you're flying full-fare economy, business class or first class.

And finally, whenever you go, from now to next November, figure on your flight being full.

Auto Rental

This is the golden age of auto rentals — at least in Germany where the weekly price of a midsize, four-door car is slightly less than \$14 a day, not including tax or collision insurance. In

Switzerland, rates are lower than last year but well above Germany prices. The same Ford Mondeo goes for \$20 per day plus tax. France, Austria and, in particular, Italy are much higher. It is also possible to pick up a car in Germany and drop it in another country without having to take out a second mortgage. If the drop is in Zürich, Paris or Vienna, the drop charge may be as little as \$60. Opel Astras and Opel Vectras can be driven into Eastern Europe but not dropped off there. Bottom line: fly in and out of Germany and save big on car rentals.

However, the savage rate war responsible for these low prices is cooling down. Evidence of this rumored "cease fire" came in early January in the form of a massive rate hike on the BMW 316i from \$109 per week to \$299. We are waiting for the other shoe.

Because car rental rates in Germany are unlikely to remain at current levels, we recommend you book a car and pay for it now (800-521-6722), thereby locking in these low rates. Since there are no cancellation or change charges, you lose nothing except the use of your money for a few weeks or months.

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As you can see, with reasonable airfares and low car rental prices, the 1995 traveler has a good start on a reasonably-priced European vacation. But what about hotel rooms? As to that, I offer this little experiment. In the first five pages of the 1994 Michelin Red Guide (1995 not yet out) I counted 24 hotels for which the most expensive double room price was 150 DM (\$99) or less. Eight of those were under 110 DM (\$73) double. The '94 guide has 905 pages of hotel listings. If this ratio holds over those 905 pages, then in Michelin alone one can find the address, phone and fax number of over 4,000 hotels with rooms under \$99 double and of those some 1,500 are under \$73! Michelin doesn't include "dumps" in its Red Guides.

Europe will still be affordable in 1995. ☐

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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%

PRAGUE

Continued from page 1

bargain. Unlike some of the city's cab drivers, most other businesses haven't yet figured out how to charge locals one price and visitors another. Except for hotels, prices are a throwback to Europe of the 50s and 60s. New hotels are opening but a high-season room shortage still pushes rates to the gulping point. Thus the town is a much better bargain in the off-season when hotel rooms are heavily discounted.

Things are changing rapidly and the time to see "Europe as it once was" is as soon as you can. Following is Bruce Woelfel's Prague report. — RHB

A Winter Visit to Prague

Our train from Dresden to Prague passed vine covered slopes, wispy white birch forests and, along the river, large villas with boat landings. As we pondered the murky weather we wondered about our destination. When a chilly winter fog reduced visibility to zero, we imagined a place as gloomy as London. Reality, however, was quite different. Prague is neither gloomy nor reminiscent of London.

As seen while crossing the Vltava river, the city is a network of distinctively designed structures: gilded towers shining in an unexpectedly bright light, onion-shaped spires and multiple turrets and steeples in an endless variety of lacy designs. The setting is dominated by the 16th century Renaissance structures of Hradcany Castle and its towering cathedral.

Walking Prague's cobblestoned streets, we found it also to be a city of elegant Baroque building facades, alive with gold detail and delicate pastels of pink, yellow, blue and green. Each front is different. A rose-colored, four-story townhouse emblazoned with an elaborate, gold-lettered, coats-of-arms, is set between immaculate white-painted stone buildings with dormer windows. Unlike Berlin, which still shows extensive war damage, buildings in Prague seem to be either carefully maintained or restored to perfection. In the "Old

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PRAGUE TRAVEL ADVISORY

- **Getting Around.** Once in Prague, forget your car. Auto travel is slow and frustrating. Trams are the best bet. Even in winter, long lines of cars and trucks snake along single lane boulevards and bridge crossings while trams zip past, their tracks magically clear. They are cheap and fast, with stops spaced at rather long intervals. Many have heated seats which are very welcome in winter. Three subway (Metro) lines each with 10 or more stations provide fast longer distance travel. Buses are also useful in reaching some destinations, although they are slowed down by other road traffic.

Single ride tickets for all public transportation — underground, trams and busses — are about \$.20 per ride and can be purchased from *tabak* shops or from vending machines in the metro stations. One-day tickets, also valid throughout the system, are 50 Kcs. (\$1.85), and five days are available for 170 Kcs. (\$6.30).

- **Taxis.** To be avoided. Prague cab drivers are predatory overchargers. If you must use a cab, hire only the state-owned taxi service (tel. 02/20 29 51 or 02/20 39 41.) One day, tired of walking, we were thoroughly bilked by an aggressive driver who illegally drove on streetcar tracks to speed us back to our hotel and then demanded more than \$30 for the 10 minute ride. We bargained him down to about \$12, but realized later that a better course would have been to plead insufficient funds then go into the hotel for assistance. Our concierge told us afterwards that only two companies are reliable: City Cab and Fo. Look for one of these or do not ride a taxi in Prague.

- **Prague Map.** Because good maps may not be readily available in Prague, we recommend obtaining the Prague city map published by the German Auto Club (ADAC) prior to your trip. Scaled at 1:20,000 it has a complete street index and displays subway and transit stops. (\$6.95 plus \$2.50 shipping, 800-521-6722.)

- **Czech Money** Though we recommend charging everything possible when traveling, credit cards are not widely accepted in Prague and one must carry at least some local currency.

The koruna is fairly stable these days, about 27 to the US dollar. In the U.S. it is possible to obtain korunas through the currency offices of **Thomas Cook & Son** (phone 1-800-CURRENCY). On a recent day, the financial pages of our local newspaper showed an exchange rate of about 27.7 Kcs. to the dollar. That same day Thomas Cook was selling korunas for slightly less than 23 to the dollar plus a commission of about 1% or \$3.95, whichever was greater. At that rate, for \$250, plus the \$3.95 commission, one would receive 5725 Kcs. But be sure to spend all your Czech money before leaving the country. On the day in question, Thomas Cook would have bought back those same 5725 korunas for only about \$186. Once in Prague, change money only with the state bank which charges a 1% commission. Some private services charge as much as 9%. Whenever changing money be sure always to shop the exchange rate.

- **Information Sources in Prague** - There is no central tourist office in the Czech Republic. Various private travel agencies call themselves "information centers" and compete for tourist business. The largest of these is CEDOK, phone 242/13495 in Prague or 800-800-8891 in the U.S.. Though several agencies can find accommodations (examples: CEDOK; CDM, tel. 249/10251; and **Ave Ltd**, tel. 242/23226) one can book many Prague hotels through the toll-free numbers of international chains like Best Western (800-528-1234). However, don't go to Prague with a hotel reservation.

Perhaps the best resource for North American tourists is the American Hospitality Center (Male namesti 14, tel. 02/36 74 86). The English-speaking

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PRAGUE

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Town," for example, the cathedral-like Town Hall displays a red and blue royal coat-of-arms and its gilded astronomical clock is flanked by pigmented figures of medieval knights.

We also found Prague to be a lively city, full of street musicians, shoppers and sightseers.

Such an alluring, complex city, so full of life and culture, demands exploration. After four days of constant walking, subway, bus and streetcar travel, we only scratched the surface.

The Castle District is particularly intriguing. Following a bus ride up the steep slopes to Hradcany, where we gazed at the stained glass windows of huge St. Vitus Cathedral, we descended on foot via tortuous cobblestone alleyways that passed tiny dwellings, one or two closet-sized rooms each, formerly inhabited by artists and writers, including Franz Kafka.

Later we visited the grave of this master of irony and black humor. His tomb, in a brooding forest, is in the city's only Jewish cemetery, watched over by a woman caretaker who handed me a yarmulke to wear and showed us where to look. The grave is marked by a single five-foot high stone labeled with one final irony: his name is chiseled between those of the mother and father whom he detested.

Prague is an affordable city. Clothing is inexpensive, though department store goods had a 50s look about them. Crystal glassware is widely sold at reasonable prices (see "What to Buy in Prague"), but imports from Eastern Europe do not seem to be available. This is a country that looks to the West not the East for trade.

Restaurants are also inexpensive. Palatable food is available in numerous pub-like places off the major shopping street Narodni trida. For about \$4 one can enjoy a hearty, filling meal.

Good coffee, in numerous hole-in-the-wall shops, is about \$1.25, more in the fancier establishments. The won-

derful Art-Deco cafe at Hotel Europa with high ceilings and colorful murals is a good example. But beware the kind of coffee you order there unless you want an early cocktail hour. One morning we innocently asked for "Prague Coffee" which came in a large mug enriched by sugar, cream, cinnamon and ... a shot of liquor.

For us, four days wasn't enough. The Jewish quarter, with evidence of a rich culture tragically ended, needed more time. The river and its bridges were worth another half day. The shopping district around Wenceslas Square, site of the 1969 confrontation between Czechs and Russian tanks and, 20 years later, protests against the police beatings of students, which brought about the end of the communist state, needed at least two more days.

We put Prague at the top of our list of places to return to ASAP.

Moderately Priced Hotels

(Ed. Note: Prices in Prague, including those for hotel rooms, are constantly changing. The 1994 off-season double room rate published by the "Best Western" reservation service for the City-Hotel Moran was about \$60. In December, our Bruce Woelfel paid \$110.

Several of the hotels listed below, the Moran being an example, have U.S. reservation services. Of course, a U.S. 800 number is very convenient and these reservation services claim their prices are at least as cheap as dealing directly with the hotel. With Bruce's reservation, that proved to be the case, but we still recommend obtaining a price quote from the hotel as well as through toll-free services in the U.S.

Prague hotels quote rates either in Czech korunas (Kcs.) or German marks. Because of that, and the fact that rates are changing so rapidly, the hotel rates listed herein are approximate for December 1994 and expressed in U.S. dollars only. As usual, breakfast is included in the price unless otherwise indicated.)

City-Hotel Moran

This small hotel, a member of the "Best Western" marketing group, is only a 10-minute walk from the town center and perfect for independent travelers. Though hardly a "grand"

hotel, with banquet halls and a fancy French restaurant, the newly renovated Moran is sparkingly modern and clean. Everything including lobby, dining room and guest rooms is pleasantly in harmony. Many hotels are a jumble of styles, with different areas reflecting the ideas of various decorators or owners. Not so the Moran. All is accomplished with panache and each part belongs to the whole: lobby, restaurant, guest rooms, corridors.

The restaurant/breakfast bar, just off the lobby, feature simple modern decor: marble floors, light wood wainscoting with green panels and a large gold-framed oil painting.

Breakfast consists of cereals, juices, breads, rolls and croissants, scrambled eggs, sausages and bacon. Room service is prompt and cheap: a bottle of white wine was 240 koruna (\$9); a "club" sandwich of ham, cheese and hard boiled egg was 180 koruna (\$6.50). The Moran's restaurant serves simple Czech food at low prices. Dinner (about \$20 for two with a glass of wine) included Beef Stroganoff with ham, spätzle, tomato, lettuce and sweet red pepper garnish.

Guests are served by a friendly and efficient staff. As a moderately-priced city lodging, the Moran leaves little to be desired and, in winter at least, is a good value.

Address: Best Western City-Hotel Moran, Na Morani 15, CZ-120 00 Praha 2

Phone: 24/915208

Fax: 29/7533

Location: Ten minutes from the town center, near the Vltava River and the Karlovo Namesti Metro stop

Rooms: 57 doubles

Proprietor: Johannes Aldrian, Director

Prices: Singles, \$79 to \$130, doubles \$110 to \$206. Book in the U. S. through 800-528-1234

Meals: All available

Facilities: Bar

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Good, specially-equipped rooms available soon

Closed: Never

Parking: \$9.25 per night

Rating: EXCELLENT 16/20 \$

Hotel Meteor Plaza

The Meteor occupies a rather unimaginatively renovated Baroque building with origins from 1307. It is, however, in a fine location five minutes from Wenceslas Square near the Namesti Republiky metro stop.

Though adequate in size and amenities, guestrooms are somewhat dark with drab brown and beige furnishings. Rooms facing the street are only quiet with the windows closed. Those located on the inner courtyard or the narrow side street are more peaceful.

Address: Best Western Hotel Meteor Plaza, Hybernska 6, 110 00 Praha 1
Phone: 242/20664
Fax: 242/13005

Location: Near Wenceslas Square

Rooms: 7 singles, 81 doubles

Proprietor: Dr. Sustek

Prices: Singles \$135, doubles \$162 (\$95 winter rate booked from USA)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Solarium, fitness room, whirlpool and sauna

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Four rooms specially fitted

Closed: Never

Parking: \$15 per night

Rating: AVERAGE 10/20

Maximilian

This new "residential" hotel-pension, aimed at business travelers, is located in a quiet part of town in the old Jewish quarter. Built in 1904, it originally was a private residence. Guestrooms are rather formally decorated and have chandeliers.

Address: Maximilian Hotel, Hastalska 14, CR 11000 Praha 1

Phone: 7242/62941

Fax: 7242/62941/110

Rooms: Two singles, 70 doubles

Proprietor: Gabriela Buzkova, Asst. to General Manager

Prices: Singles \$126 to \$166, doubles \$160 to \$200

Meals: Breakfast only

Facilities: Cafe-bar

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Not suitable

Closed: Never

Parking: Hotel garage

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

WHAT TO BUY IN PRAGUE

Prague is alight with Bohemian glass and crystal shops. If you have always wanted a complex, classic chandelier, Prague is the place to buy it. Even with shipping and handling, the price tag will be less than you think. A lovely decanter and six matching glasses can be purchased for about \$30. Select from hand-painted flower designs or the mauve or green colors the Czechs love. I bought a set of show-stopping goblets, very contemporary in soft golds, greens, and rose for about \$45 and have seen similar art-glass items in Neiman Marcus and Rosenthal stores for about \$250. Indeed, those with patience and an eye for quality can find real treasures.

Krasna Jizba, an excellent arts and craft store on Narodni Street, offers subtle hand-crafted jewelry made by local artisans. I could not resist a necklace and matching earrings for \$14, and a hand-painted silk scarf for \$20. This store also has whimsical folk art, housewares, and sophisticated clothes by local designers, which sell for MUCH more in Paris.

Czech folk artists are renowned for their marionettes with carved wooden faces that are startlingly realistic, from very cheap to expensive. You can even commission an artist to make one of yourself. Truly an amazing signature piece for your foyer or for a bookcase-top one-of-a-kind conversation piece! The Hotel Moran owners chose to personalize their hotel's postcard with two life-size marionettes of themselves. The faces are so photographically accurate that I instantly recognized the people who greeted me so kindly upon arrival!

Finally, as a die-hard Kafka fan, I could not resist a KAFKA! PRAGUE! t-shirt which at \$22 was no bargain.

Stores selling the above merchandise are located in the central pedestrian zone — a most pleasant and educational stroll past architectural masterworks. Start at the top of Wenceslas Square and head straight down toward the river. Continue on to Old Town Square, in "the center of everything." For the art collector on a budget, Prague is a city not to miss!

— Sally Lloyd Woelfel

Hotel Adria Praha

The Adria is a centrally located four-star hotel in a renovated 14th century building with a yellow Art-Deco facade. The rear of the hotel faces an attractively landscaped public park. The large, modern guestrooms are well decorated and furnished. Attractively designed bathrooms include oversized bathtubs. Besides a bar off the lobby, there is a cafe and a grotto-like wine restaurant on a lower level.

Address: Hotel Adria Praha, Vaclavske namesti 26, Praha 1, Czech Republic

Phone: 24219274, 242/19285

Fax: 242/11025, 261/529

Location: Center of city, near Wenceslas Square

Rooms: Seven singles, 59 doubles, three studios, five apartments

Proprietor: Gabriela Buzkova

Prices: Singles \$127-\$149, doubles \$155-\$182, studios \$201-\$220, apartments \$255.

Meals: All available

Facilities: Bar, outdoor terrace

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: One specially equipped room

Closed: Never

Parking: Public garage

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 12/20

Ambassador

A large, pleasantly renovated, Art-Deco hotel in the center of Prague. Larger than average rooms are comfortably furnished with imitation period pieces. Quiet rooms facing an inner courtyard are decorated in brown and gold with crystal chandeliers.

Hotel facilities include modern snack bar, pub, gourmet restaurant, disco and casino.

Address: Interhotel Ambassador - Zlata husa, Vaclavske namesti 507, 111 24 Praha 1, Czech Republic

Phone: 242/12185

Fax: 242/26167

Location: Facing main boulevard in center of city

Rooms: 30 singles, 142 doubles

Prices: Singles \$120-\$180, doubles \$150-\$220, suites \$200-300

Meals: All available *Continued on page 8...*

LAKE CONSTANCE

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ping at Swiss lakeside towns such as Romanshorn, Arbon, Horn and Rorschach; perhaps winding up in Bregenz in Austria. Other possibilities include venturing inland to St. Gallen and/or Appenzell. Zürich is an easy drive for a day of shopping.

During our stay, we drove and walked along the lake shore and explored the little town of Gottlieben. However, our most interesting outing was an afternoon in lively Konstanz.

Early in the 15th century, rival popes gathered here with thousands of their supporters to determine several matters, the most important being who would be the one and only pope. After a long and difficult negotiation, the election of Martin V was recognized by all parties.

We parked on the Swiss side in Kreuzlingen and walked across the border without even being asked to show our passports. With exception of Berlin, Konstanz is about as multicultural as a German town gets. Ambling down its crowded, pedestrian-only streets we bumped elbows with many nationalities; especially Turks, who are responsible for some of Germany's finest street food — Giros. Every hundred yards, or so it seems, is a little stand roasting layers of meat on a vertical spit which is sliced as needed for these delectable sandwiches.

Something we missed on this trip but will see next time is the Napoleon Museum at Arenenberg, a few kilometers West of Kreuzlingen.

Here are our thoughts on several hotels we either stayed in or inspected. They are listed in the order of our preference.

Schlössli Bottighofen

EDITOR'S CHOICE

This is a near-perfect little hotel full of charm and elegance directly on the Bodensee. The rather plain, four-sided, four-story building's white exterior, capped by a high, steeply-pitched roof with dormer windows, relies on candy-stripped shutters to give it its "little castle" look.

In warm weather, its restaurant extends service to a very pleasant lakeside garden with white tables and chairs under massive chestnut trees.

The Schlössli's 11 rooms are beautifully decorated, meticulously maintained and come with the usual amenities such as clock radio, minibar, direct dial phone and cable TV (9 channels). Number 34 is a corner room and offers a lake view from one window. Number 31 is also on a corner and slightly larger. The pristine bathrooms are equipped with such extras as hair-dryers, heated towel racks and terry cloth robes.

This is an exceptional small hotel.

Address: Schlössli Bottighofen, CH-8598 Bottighofen (near Kreuzlingen)

Phone: 072/75 12 75

Fax: 072/75 15 40

Location: On the water

Rooms: 11

Proprietor: Bruno Lüthy

Prices: Singles 110 Sfr. (\$85) to 150 Sfr. (\$115), doubles 180 Sfr. (\$139) to 260 Sfr. (\$200)

Facilities: Restaurant, lakeside garden terrace

Credit Cards: All

Disabled: Not suitable

Parking: Free

Rating: 17/20 EXCELLENT G

Romantik Hotel Krone

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The enclave of Gottlieben boasts a population of nearly 300, a 13th century castle which was once used as a prison for the deposed anti-pope John XXIII, and the excellent Romantik Hotel Krone.

The Krone's half-timbered, historic building is in a very quiet location on the lower lake. Its warm, snug interior is notable for low ceilings and dark wood.

It's easy to feel at home in the unpretentious but very comfortable guestrooms. In our room, Number 114, a typical double, we particularly appreciated a pair of easy chairs. Rooms are equipped with the usual amenities: cable TV, minibar and radio.

The Krone has a particularly fine restaurant. Among the highlights of

two dinners: *blaufelchen*, a perch-like lake fish fried very crisp and served with lemon, tartare sauce and boiled potatoes; superb, fresh morel mushrooms with a chicken stuffing in a cognac sauce; a frothy, buttery watercress soup; tournedos of beef in a reduced wine sauce; filets of sole with morels and a marvelous rack of lamb. From the Krone's extensive wine list we chose, while in a celebrative mood, 1981 Lynch Bages, a Bordeaux for 115 Sfr. (\$88) and a Pinot Noir from Aigle on Lake Geneva for 27 Sfr. (\$21).

Owner-Maitre d'hotel Georg Schraner, who speaks excellent English, greets guests with an urbane warmth and is happy to offer recommendations regarding sight-seeing in the region.

We rate the Krone slightly below the Schlössli Bottighofen. However, since the hotels are of such differing styles, that preference may be attributed to a matter of personal taste. The Krone and the Schlössli are small hotels of exceptional quality and clearly superior to others reviewed here.

Address: Romantik Hotel Krone, Seestrasse 11, CH-8274 Gottlieben

Phone: 072/69 23 23

Fax: 072/69 24 56

Location: On the water

Rooms: About 25, many with water views

Proprietor: Georg and Ingeborg Schraner-Michaeli

Prices: Singles 85 Sfr. (\$65) to 125 Sfr. (\$96), doubles 135 Sfr. (\$104) to 260 Sfr. (\$200). Book through Swiss Travel Invention (800-688-7947) and the guaranteed-in-dollars double room price is \$172

Facilities: Restaurant, lakeside garden terrace

Credit Cards: All

Disabled: Not suitable

Parking: Free

Comments: Not a convenient hotel for train travelers

Rating: 16.5/20 EXCELLENT G

Hotel Bad Horn

This rather large, lakeside hotel is in Horn, near Arbon, on the Bodensee's southeastern shore.

The four-star Horn offers more services — fitness room, private boat dock, multiple restaurants, bars and a disco — than the foregoing hotels but at the expense of charm. Many of the hotel's guestrooms are decorated like a ship's stateroom with dark wood paneling, shiny brass fittings and various other nautical touches. All have the standard four-star amenities including spacious, well-lit bathrooms, most with double sinks.

Address: Hotel Bad Horn, Seestrasse 36, CH-9326 Horn
Phone: 071/41 55 11
Fax: 071/41 60 89
Location: On the water
Rooms: About 40
Proprietor: Urs Hatt

Prices: Singles 75 Sfr. (\$58) to 160 Sfr. (\$123), doubles 140 Sfr. (\$108) to 280 Sfr. (\$215)

Facilities: Fitness room, garden terrace with lake-view, grill restaurant

Credit Cards: All
Disabled: Not suitable

Parking: Free
Rating: 15/20
 ABOVE AVERAGE

Seehotel Schiff

We first stayed in this hotel in 1988, again in 1991 and, based on our 1994 visit, can still recommend it.

This is another hotel directly on the water and each of its 18 rooms offers at least a partial lake view. The large, airy rooms, like most of the hotel, are decorated in light, knotty wood with simple furnishings and are equipped with a radio and telephone but no TV.

The informal dining room and, in good weather, the outdoor deck-terrace both have excellent lake views.

The Schiff carries the Swiss Hotel Association's *Landgasthof* or Country Inn designation which the SHA Guide describes as a "...locally typical restaurant, providing good cuisine, a com-

fortable lodging sector, and sufficient parking space. It stand out through high quality services and personal attention to guests. These country inns offer food service and pleasant rooms of real Swiss quality."

Address: Seehotel Schiff Mannenbach, CH-8268 Mannenbach
Phone: 072/63 41 41
Fax: 072/63 41 50
Location: On the water
Rooms: 18
Prices: Singles 80 Sfr. (\$62), doubles 140 Sfr. (\$108)
Facilities: Restaurant with lake view
Credit Cards: All
Parking: Free
Rating: 13/20 ABOVE AVERAGE \$

tourist path, and want a spotless, well-equipped hotel room with extremely friendly, helpful service, this might be the place to hide.

Address: Hotel Thurgauerhof, CH-8570 Weinfelden
Phone: 054/62 62 62
Fax: 054/61 27 30
Location: Town center
Rooms: About 75, some designated nonsmoking
Proprietor: Peter Kieni
Prices: Singles 95 Sfr. (\$73) to 105 Sfr. (\$81), doubles 160 Sfr. (\$123) to 180 Sfr. (\$139)
Facilities: Two restaurants, hairdresser
Credit Cards: All
Disabled: Not suitable

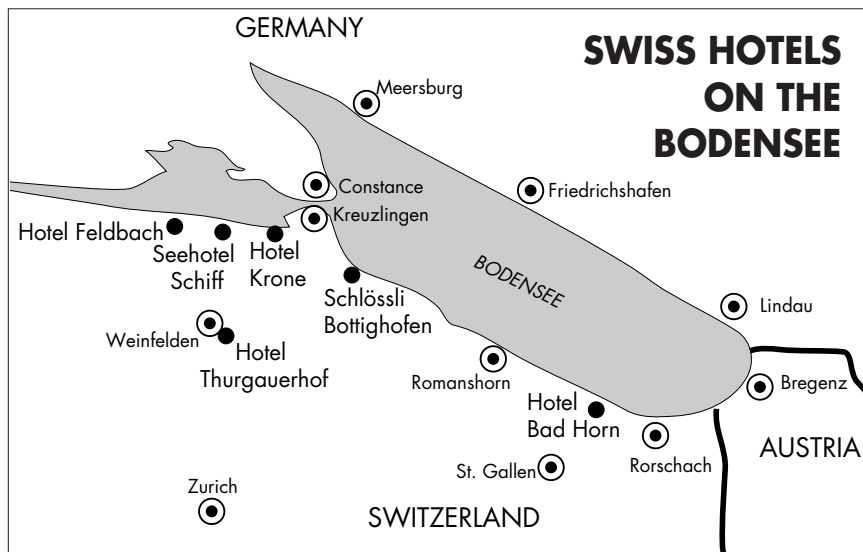
Parking: Free
Rating: 14/20
 ABOVE AVERAGE G

Seehotel Feldbach

We were disappointed with the Feldbach. The greeting was brusque and none of the hotel's guestrooms are in the turreted, fortress-like main building. Instead they are in a charmless, rather strange, modern structure

that is more like an office building than a hotel. The ordinary guestrooms are alike in size and decor.

Address: Seehotel Feldbach, CH-8266 Steckborn
Phone: 054/62 62 62
Fax: 054/61 27 30
Location: On the water
Rooms: 28
Proprietor: Markus Hofmann
Prices: Singles 110 Sfr. (\$85) to 120 Sfr. (\$92), doubles 150 Sfr. (\$115) to 180 Sfr. (\$139)
Facilities: Restaurant with lake view, garden terrace
Credit Cards: All
Disabled: Special facilities available
Parking: Free
Rating: 9/20 AVERAGE



Hotel Thurgauerhof

There's not a thing wrong with the Thurgauerhof. In fact, much is right with it, particularly the genuinely warm welcome one gets from the friendly Kieni family. Though it's within a 30-minute drive of the lake, the problem with this hotel is that it doesn't quite belong in this group. The Thurgauerhof does a big convention business and thus attracts a business clientele. And, with 75 rooms, it is much larger than the other hotels discussed here. It simply isn't one of those cozy, cunning, atmospheric little country hotels Switzerland is famous for.

However, for those who might like to experience life in an ordinary Swiss town that's off the beaten

ADVISORY


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staff stands ready to help with maps and guidebooks, restaurant and concert reservations, sight-seeing tours and other services.

Train Information is available 24 hours by phoning 242/17654.

• **The Prague Concierge.** Don't expect the concierge in your Prague hotel to be equal to his or her western counterpart. The special skills required of the knowledgeable concierge are, in our experience, sorely lacking in such Eastern Europe cities as Dresden, Prague and Budapest. Years of communist rule, which decreed Russian as the only alternate language, have created a shortage of English speakers. In addition to the language handicap, young hotel employees do not have the experience or the training to give visitors advice regarding such decadent Western pursuits as good restaurants and theater.

• Prague Facts

Population: 1.2 million
Altitude: 591 feet
Approx. distances from:
Berlin 350 km 219 miles
Munich 369 km 231 miles
Budapest 533 km 333 miles
Vienna 292 km 183 miles
Zürich 675 km 422 miles 

PRAGUE

Continued from page 5

Facilities: Bar, disco, night club, casino, 3 restaurants

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Fair, no special facilities

Closed: Never

Parking: Public garage

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 12/20

Other Best Western Hotels in Prague

Hotel Bila Labut:
winter double \$132; summer double \$168

Hotel Alta (4 km outside of Prague): winter double \$84; summer \$108

Other Hotel Options

DER Tours sells Prague city packages that include two nights lodging and a city sight-seeing tour. The high season, per person double occupancy price for two nights at the **Hotel Forum** ("first class") is \$268 or \$448 single occupancy. At the **Hotel Diplomat** ("Superior First Class") the double occupancy price is \$278 and the single price is \$448.

We have also had positive reports on our recommendation of the **Villa Eva**, which has eight rooms with toilet and shower and is located about 10 minutes from city center. The price is about \$40 double. Villa Eva, Franty Kocourka 14, 150 00 Praha 5, Smichov, Czech Republic, phone 00422/534776. Proprietor: Milan Matousek.

Sustenance in Prague

Don't go to Prague for the food. Mostly it's stick-to-the-ribs stuff with an emphasis on meat and starch. Vegetables are limited. Most of the pub-style restaurants don't offer a menu in English nor is any English likely to be spoken by servers. For those amenities you have to stay with major hotels and top-class restaurants.

The restaurants below are representative of many found throughout Prague: one very plain and cheap, the other at a higher level of style and price, but still serving simple dishes.

Ceska Hospoda,

With its wooden tables and benches and simple rustic decor, this cafe on a narrow side street, five minutes from Wenceslas Square, has the atmosphere of a small beer hall. Similar establishments are found throughout the central area. An air of friendliness and congeniality permeates the cozy interior and the Hospoda's casually dressed owner presides.

Steins of the excellent local beer are served to a principally male clientele, most of whom seem to know one another. Like entering a private club, we at first felt uncomfortable. Our convivial host, however, quickly found us a table with some friendly Czechs and went in search of an English menu. We instantly regretted our language deficiency which made it impossible to converse with our tablemates. Although the English menu soon arrived — along with the marvelous Czech beer — we preferred to order from a list of specials which were not translated on the menu. Our host patiently answered our questions in his limited English vocabulary.

Roast chicken came with boiled potatoes and apricot compote. The beef special turned out to be boiled beef with a light gravy, served with rice and a tomato garnish. The food was wholesome and not as loaded with fat as we had been warned. Although hardly in the gourmet category, our meal was satisfying and tasty. The bill for two including drinks came to 186 koruna (\$7). Ceska Hospoda, V. Krakovske, Krakovska 20, Praha 1. Phone/Fax 261/537. No credit cards. Inexpensive.

Restaurant Adria

Restaurant Adria was more sumptuous and difficult to find. The restaurant is located on the third floor of a building near the pedestrian shopping area by Wenceslas Square. Originally a residence of the Thun family, the building was built in 1810 in Italian Renaissance style and contains sculptures by a locally respected artist. An outdoor terrace is open during warmer months.

We were met on arrival by the formally dressed host and manager. Guests are first invited to select from a display of cold appetizers in a refrigerated glass case presided over by a man in a white suit and a chef's toque.

Next, we were shown an eight-page English menu listing international and Czech dishes as well as macrobiotic vegetarian cuisine. One of our choices was onion soup au gratin with crisp croutons and a pleasant touch of garlic, followed by fried breast of chicken with red cabbage, boiled potatoes and onions. Another entree of roasted rabbit with red cabbage, dumplings and boiled potatoes, was preceded by a delicious thick potato soup enhanced with carrots, mushrooms, garlic and bay leaf.

Unlike many Czech restaurants, the Adria accepts major credit cards. Our bill for two, including drinks and a 30 koruna (\$1.10) per person "cover" charge, came to 511 koruna (\$19).

This is a nice find; more deluxe but with uncomplicated, good food at very low prices.

Restaurant Adria, Narodni tr. 40, Praha 1, phone 242/28065. Credit cards o.k. Inexpensive. 