

THIS ISSUE:

- Berlin Update
- Readers' Forum
- Zürich Last Night
- Europe Travel Briefing

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

March 27, 1995

Guerrilla Traveling

The U.S. dollar is now front page news. It has, as you know, lost value against the German mark and the Japanese yen. At its 1994 high, the buck was worth about 1.7 marks. These days it's fighting to hang around 1.4 DM. As I write this one German mark is worth just slightly more than one Canadian dollar. Austria's schilling marches in lock step with the mark, so the news there isn't good either. The Swiss franc I would rather not discuss.

For American companies who sell products in Europe, this is good news. For the rest of us, especially those who plan to travel this summer, it is not. When the travel season begins in earnest in June, there will be reports of \$8 Coca Colas and \$400 hotel rooms. Fearful travelers will cancel their European vacations.

This last happened in 1992. At that time the dollar dropped to about 1.36 DM. CNN and the wire services carried alarmist stories about how expensive Europe was for American tourists. One Germany-based correspondent, in the finest Edward R. Murrow tradition, reported a 21-piece box of Kentucky Fried Chicken cost 43 DM, at the time about \$30. As far as I'm concerned, anybody who eats KFC chicken in Europe deserves the \$30 price tag and the 10 pounds of saturated fat that comes with it.

But almost immediately the dollar began to recover and the press turned its attention to the hole in the ozone.

So let's get a grip, stay cool and figure out what to do now that the good ol' greenback has done an-

Continued on page 2...

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

BERLIN '95

We report on a December visit to once-divided Berlin, a city determined to regain its prewar glory and feverishly rebuilding itself.

Berlin today is a place of unbelievable construction activity, countless building cranes call attention to the more than 80 major projects under way as the city frantically prepares to replace Bonn as the capital of Western Europe's dominant nation. Still, enormous empty spaces from the destruction of World War II pervade its eastern portions.

This is a city built on a colossal scale with infinite possibilities for exploration. It still has two centers; the western part around Zoo Station and Kurfürstendamm, until late 1989 the center of West Berlin, and the eastern section around Unter den Linden, the former capital of communist East Germany and showplace of Eastern Europe. They remain strikingly different.

The modern "K'damm" area bustles with restaurants, department stores and cafés. Three miles away, beyond the Tiergarten, the other Berlin is strung out and scattered, its great wide boulevards studded here and there with rebuilt monuments, blackened buildings and an occasional sparkling new structure like the **Hotel Radisson**.

Here, in the former center of Hitler's Germany, were the majority of the city's most important edifices: government buildings, museums, theaters, offices and churches. Nearly all remain. Further east, past Alexanderplatz with its towering television antenna, along Karl Marx Allee, are reminders of communist rule — huge monotonous blocks of apartments with ground floor shops.

Built on a grand scale without the density of Paris or other European capitals, Berlin is a city of boulevards, albeit one with a complete public transportation network. Walking distances are long and the town is not easy to see on foot. Taxi travel can be time consuming and expensive. A cab from our hotel on Kurfürstendamm to Lichtenberg Station in the eastern portion took 35 minutes and cost 44 DM (\$32).

The eastern sector now sports a growing commercial area amid the rubble and emptiness. Emerging from Potsdamer Platz subway station, one sees nothing but billboards announcing work in progress, though it is only a short walk to the impressive, glass-fronted, Mies Van der

Continued on page 3...

EUROPE TRAVEL BRIEFING

Vouchers Look Better

With the sudden drop in the dollar, package deals at guaranteed dollar rates established before the dollar's recent decline, represent better value than usual. If you are heading for Switzerland this summer, you might consider some of the programs outlined in the *Look No Further. Switzerland. Vacation Planner* published jointly by **Swissair** and the **Swiss National Tourist Office**.

One program is the **Swiss Travel Invention** which offers vouchers for more than 200 hotels in six price categories from \$47 to \$168 per person double occupancy. Appenzell's **Hotel Hecht**, for example, is in the second least expensive category at \$70 per person, \$140 double. *Gemütlichkeit* rates this hotel above average with a very good kitchen. The *1995 Swiss Hotel Guide* lists double rooms at the Hecht ranging from 170 to 200 Sfr., or, at current exchange rates — \$1 = 1.16 Sfr. — \$154 to \$172.

Another of the brochure's voucher programs is for Switzerland's **Minotel** chain. The basic voucher is \$53 per person. The "countryside" voucher is \$76 per person and includes a three or four-

Continued on page 8...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

other half-gainer off the high board.

First, let's review the bidding. A few weeks ago the dollar was bumping along at around 1.55 DM and, though it wasn't a number that had us booking a month in a suite at the Brenner's Park, we could live with it. Plans were being made, airline tickets procured, cars rented, rail passes purchased and reservations booked. Then, Bingo! The dollar suddenly needs CPR. Phrases like "postwar low" are being bandied about.

So how are you affected? I'm not going to say your European vacation isn't going to be more expensive, but I will say it may not be as bad as you think. I'll also offer a couple of damage control ideas.

To begin with, car rental rates, even though they have risen dramatically in the last 90 days, are still lower than last year. Our most popular car category, the Opel Vectra/Ford Mondeo, now rents for \$149 per week plus tax. Last year at this time it was \$188. See? Already you're ahead of the game. (But don't get complacent. Book now to lock-in these rates. They are almost sure to go up.)

High season airfares may be slightly above last year. Right now air consolidator **DER TOURS** lists these roundtrip prices to Frankfurt on Delta Airlines: \$719 from New York, \$753 from Atlanta, \$798 from Chicago, \$805 from Dallas and \$892 from the West Coast. Fares from dozens of other cities are within a few dollars of these. So let's call it a push in this category.

Rail passes. You buy them in this country for dollars at prices set in the fall of the previous year so they aren't immediately affected by currency fluctuations. Though prices have increased over 1994, there are a lot more variations of passes from which to choose. It's quite possible you'll be able to find one that more precisely fits your travel requirements, thus saving money by not having to buy a more encompassing, more expensive pass than you need.

Hotels and meals in Europe. Aye, there's the rub. First, we'll assume two persons traveling together. If you planned to average 150 DM per night for 14 nights, at 1.55 DM per dollar, your hotel budget was \$1355. Those same hotels, now that the dollar is worth only 1.4 DM, will cost \$1498, an increase of \$143. (If you planned to keep hotel costs at 100 DM per night the increase is \$97.) I don't see these as trip canceling numbers.

The same goes for food, gas, ice cream, beer, the Herald Tribune, public transportation, parking and other incidentals. If you budgeted \$100 per day for these items you're either going to have to cut back or increase the budget by about \$11 per day, a total of \$154 for the two week trip.

So let's see. You saved \$78 on the car, spent about the same as last year on airfare and dropped an additional \$297 above your original budget for food, lodging and incidentals. Subtracting the \$78 car rental saving, the ballyhooed fall of the dollar will cost you about \$219, less than that for those who travel conservatively and more for big spenders. I certainly don't like the idea of parting with \$219 simply because some bottom-pinching senator from a western state voted against the balanced budget amendment, but I wouldn't let it interfere with my trip to Europe.

I'm not sure why these currencies fluctuate so wildly, but I am reminded of 1986. At that time the dollar brought 3.3 DM and we stayed at hotels like the **Hirschgasse** in Heidelberg for \$52 a night or, for \$26 per night, at the **Romantik-Hotel Bierhütte** in the Bavarian Forest. A multi-course dinner for two in the Michelin-starred restaurant of the **Hotel Feiler**, in Muggendorf near Bamberg, was less than \$30. I thought at the time, "this can't last." It seemed artificial. Something wasn't quite right, the standard of living in Germany was not much different than in the U.S. And just as things were out of whack then, they are out of whack now. In 1995, nearly \$500 (700 DM) for the best double room at that same Hotel Hirschgasse (admittedly remodeled, admittedly charming) is simply unnatural. (Currently at \$150 [210 DM] for the top

double, the Bierhütte is more realistically priced.) Bestor logic holds that currencies, like water, seek their own level. The dollar is artificially low. Like a California river in March, it will rise.

In the meantime, herewith are a few strategies for minimizing the dollar's demise.

- Cut down the time you spend in big cities. Your marks, schillings and francs will go much farther in the countryside.

- Use the *Michelin Red Guides* for Germany and Switzerland to locate hotels and restaurants with prices that fit your budget.

- Rent a car. For two or more people traveling together, a car is almost always less expensive than the train, especially if you plan to spend most of your time in small towns. Two persons renting an Opel Corsa in Germany at \$119 per week plus 15% VAT provides a per person, per day transportation cost of about \$10. For an Opel Astra it's about \$11. For four people in an Opel Vectra the per day, per person cost is a little over \$4. These figures don't include fuel or parking costs.

- Rent an apartment. Europe is full of short-term, self-catering rentals with kitchen. They begin at about \$250 per week. (For details on Austrian rentals see *Gemütlichkeit*, February, 1995; for Switzerland see our August, 1994, issue.)

- The corollary to several of the foregoing is don't try to cover too much territory. If you try to see Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, Zürich, Munich and Berlin all in a two or even three week trip you'll either need a railpass for each person in the traveling party or you'll spend long hours on the Autobahn plus at least \$20 per day in parking fees. If you limit your scope of travel to, say, the Black Forest and perhaps Switzerland's Engadine, you can get by with a small car and never drive on the Autobahn. In addition, this sort of itinerary lends itself well to apartment rental.

- Use a credit card whenever possible. You'll get the very best exchange rate, you won't be billed for from two to six weeks and if there's a dispute

Continued on page 8...

Vol. 9, No. 3
March, 1995

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

Editor & Publisher: Robert H. Bestor, Jr.
Associate Editors: Elizabeth Schiller, Bruce Woelfel
Contributing Editors: C. Fischer, R. Holliday
Design & Composition: Paul T. Merschorf
Consulting Editor: Thomas P. Bestor
Subscription Dept.: Andy Bestor, K. Steffans

Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published monthly by UpCountry Publishing, 2892 Chronicle Avenue, Hayward, CA 94542. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 510/538-0628. FAX: 510/582-8296. Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 12 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information in this publication, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy. Second-class postage paid in Hayward, CA.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:

Gemütlichkeit, 2892 Chronicle Ave., Hayward, CA 94542

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%

BERLIN

Continued from page 1

Rohe-designed, Museum of Modern Art.

Off the main boulevards, dreary housing flats are in a poor state of repair. In the Jewish quarter, where Berlin's only active synagogue has a perpetual police guard, one is struck by the rundown conditions; broken and peeling walls covered by graffiti and blockaded, torn up streets where underground services were being repaired or replaced. A few of the dark and dirty buildings had seeds of new life inside — new shops, galleries and theaters.

There are also changes near Kurfürstendamm. Savigny Platz, a ten-minute walk from Zoo Station, is lively with the businesses of former immigrants who now make Berlin their home: ethnic restaurants (no credit cards), clothing shops, including one with men's vests imported from Italy for 500 DM (\$355), displays of modern house wares, windows full of handcraft items, and tiny coffee bars. Space here is precious, merchandise is even displayed in archways beneath the elevated train lines.

In the old days, before the wall came down, Berlin had a sort of on-the-edge vitality, it was a fortified outpost surrounded by the bad guys. These days its energy springs from a determination to regain its stature as not only the capital city of Germany but the first city in all of Europe. It remains a unique destination.

Berlin Hotels

Brandenburger Hof

This showplace of Bauhaus design and contemporary sculpture is in an artfully remodeled turn-of-the-century apartment building. With its works of art and halogen lighting, the striking lobby resembles a modern museum. An especially attractive feature is the winter garden, a combination Italian monastery and Japanese garden, filled with sculptures and paintings, where concerts, art exhibitions and auctions are sometimes held. It is also the hotel's breakfast room. The dramatically lit dining

room is furnished with chairs designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Guestrooms are equally unique: a mix of contemporary and traditional design with natural oak surfaces, white walls, and cabinets and chairs by Oscar Niemeyer. Bathrooms are of granite and light terra cotta tiles. With heavy soundproofing and silent

BERLIN

Population: 3.5 million.

Altitude: 131 feet

Tourist Offices

Europa Center, entrance Budapester Strasse. Open every day. Phone 262/6031, fax 212/325 20
Zoo Station, Monday through Saturday 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Phone 313/9063
Main Railroad Station. Daily 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.. Phone 279/5209

Public Transportation

Buses are a pleasant way to see the city. The #129 is convenient to theaters and East Berlin. The tops of these double deckers provide a nice ride and view. Single-ride tickets cost 3.50 DM (\$2.50)
The S-Bahn (operated by DB, railpasses valid), is an efficient, quick way of going from one end of the city to another.

The U-Bahn (run by city, railpasses not valid) costs 3.50 DM (\$2.50) for two hours. Its lines have closer spaced stops than the S-Bahn as they circle around the city. Neither "U" nor "S" are well marked. There are station maps on trains but not in many stations. Listings of stops are missing in both. Travel can be frustrating, directions of trains are not clear and some stations are torn up.

City Walks

Old Berlin, Jewish life, meeting artists in their studios, gallery tours. Nollendorfstrasse 3, D-10783 Berlin, phone 030/2159868
Cultural Berlin, political history, political future, architectural tours, cemetery tours. Kulturburo Berlin, Kirchstrasse 16, D-10557 Berlin, phone 030/3923747

Boat Trips

Tour of historical Berlin, passing under many bridges. Daily except Monday, departing from Schlossbrücke, Charlottenburger Ufer (approximately 3 1/2 hours), Phone 030/3917070.
Steamboat trips with historical commentary. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Goltzstrasse 49, Berlin. Phone 030/21454450.
All day ride (10 hours, food on board). Daily except Monday and Tuesday from Jannowitzbrücke. Phone 030/6173900.

Misc.

The artist Christo will wrap the Reichstag in polypropylene fabric coated with aluminum. June 23 until July 6.

radiant floor heating, guestrooms are unusually well protected from outside noise.

Although conveniently located in the heart of the western section of Berlin, not far from the Kurfürstendamm, this is a truly lovely, quiet retreat. It continues to merit the rating we gave it in our July, 1992,

issue shortly after the hotel had opened. It is one of Berlin's finest.

Address: Brandenburger Hof Hotel GmbH, Eislebener Strasse 14, D-10789 Berlin

Phone: 030/214050

Fax: 030/21405100

Location: Western Berlin, five minutes walk from Kurfürstendamm

Rooms: Four singles, 83 doubles

Proprietor: Manfred Heissig

Prices: Singles 275-395 DM (\$196-\$282), doubles 330-445 DM (\$235-\$317)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Piano Bar, winter garden, conference rooms

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Good but no special rooms

Closed: Never

Parking: 18 spaces in garage under building

Rating: EXCELLENT 16/20 G

Savoy

An exquisite small hotel very close to Zoo Station and center of Kurfürstendamm, yet very quiet given the location. The Savoy's delightful manager, Francis Rabine, says his hotel attracts celebrities from orchestra leaders to film stars. We were charmed by its exquisite bar, large and elegant public rooms, and an intimate library-bar off the lobby.

The art-deco building, built in 1930, served as the Japanese Embassy during World War II, then, from 1949-1953, became British headquarters in the divided Berlin. The present owners took over in 1954.

Large, air-conditioned rooms in pink and beige, some with small balconies, are lavishly furnished with elegant desks, comfortable chairs and loveseats. Weekend special rates are sometimes available at 160 DM. (\$114) double. Breakfast is 28 DM (\$20) extra.

Address: Hotel Savoy, Fasanenstrasse 9-10, D-10623 Berlin-Charlottenburg

Phone: 030/31103-0,

Fax: 030/31103-333

Location: Center of western Berlin, 500 meters from Zoo Station

Rooms: 30 singles, 95 doubles

Continued on page 4...

BERLIN

Continued from page 3

Proprietor: Francis Rabine

Prices: Singles 254-314 DM (\$180-225), doubles 334-394 DM (\$240-280).

Weekend special: double room 160 DM (\$114). Prices do not include breakfast.

Meals: All available

Facilities: Library-bar, restaurant, outdoor terrace, sauna, hot tub, exercise room

Credit Cards: All

Closed: Never

Disabled Access: Yes

Parking: In separate building 100 meters away, 18 DM (\$13) per night

Rating: EXCELLENT 16/20 G

Hotel Residenz

Maybe the third time is the charm. Two previous visits to this hotel resulted in a "Not Recommended" review (August, 1988) and one "average" rating (July, 1992). This time was better. The Residenz is an amalgam of five pensions built for government workers around 1902. The result is several long, narrow buildings and seemingly endless halls, all connected around an inner courtyard. It serves as temporary home to movie makers and TV companies — actors, technicians and directors. A movie producer we met over a glass of wine had lived there happily for six months.

The quiet, smallish rooms are furnished with wardrobes, European-style double beds, desks, chairs and small, mostly shower-only, bathrooms. Our room had french doors opening onto a small balcony where we could look out onto the relatively quiet street. The hotel also has some studios and apartments available with kitchens. These attractive accommodations are mostly on the upper floor and have slanting ceilings and skylights.

Both the antique-filled small lobby and the elegant (and expensive) *Grand Cru* restaurant have a pleasant "Old Berlin" feel.

Service and friendliness of staff are definitely categories in which the Residenz has improved. What was

never a problem was the quality and quantity of the breakfast served in the chandeliered *Grand Cru*. One chooses from an array of fresh, dried and canned fruit; cereals; freshly baked bread; pastry and several varieties of fresh rolls; eggs, scrambled and boiled; two varieties of delicious fresh sausage; bacon; pickled fish and vegetables; yogurt; jam; chocolate; butter; margarine; various cheeses and sliced cold cuts. Unfortunately it is not included in the room price and costs an extra 22 DM (\$16).

Address: Hotel Residenz Berlin, Meinekestrasse 9, D-10719 Berlin (Charlottenburg)

Phone: 030/884430

Fax: 030/88247266

Location: On a quiet street, one block off Kurfürstendamm

Rooms: Two singles, 86 doubles

Proprietor: Herr Schwarz

Prices: Single 198-220 DM (\$141-158), doubles 260-310 DM (\$185-220)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Restaurant

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: One specially equipped room

Closed: Never

Parking: Public garage across street, 20 DM (\$14) per night

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Hotel Berliner Hof

A standard-issue, modern city hotel located in the Europa Center shopping and entertainment complex, the very heart of Berlin's western sector. Average-sized rooms are contemporary in design with white walls, blue and green drapes and natural wood Danish-modern furniture.

Same management as the Savoy.

Address: Hotel Berliner Hof am Europa Center, Tauentzienstrasse 8, D-10789 Berlin

Phone: 030/25495-0

Fax: 030/2623065

Location: Central, west

Rooms: Five singles, 60 doubles

Proprietor: Francis Rabine

Prices: Singles 195-225 DM (\$140-160), doubles 240-280 DM (\$170-200)

Meals: Breakfast only.

Facilities: Breakfast room

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Good

Closed: Never

Parking: Hotel garage, 10 DM (\$7)

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Berlin Mark

This large, centrally located hotel, just a block off Kurfürstendamm, is in an eight-story modern building constructed in 1968 by the current operators.

The average to large rooms are furnished in contemporary style with light gray and pastel walls. Number 734 is a spacious single with large bath tub and moderate noise from street-side windows. Number 735, with French-style double bed, is available either as a single or double.

Address: Berlin Mark Hotel, Meinekestrasse 18-19, D-10719 Berlin

Phone: 030/8802-0

Fax: 030/8802-804

Location: One block off Kurfürstendamm

Rooms: 14 singles, 206 doubles, 11 apartments

Proprietor: Jürgen Preisse

Prices: Singles 198-295 DM (\$140-\$210), doubles 260-335 DM (\$185-240), apartments (two rooms, max. 3-4 persons) 360-440 DM (\$260-315)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Restaurant, outdoor cafe

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Three rooms specially equipped

Closed: Never

Parking: Nearby public garage 17-20 DM (\$12-\$14) per night

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Hotel Boulevard

Readers are advised to avoid this modest, centrally-located Best Western hotel. For one thing, with prices ranging from 230 DM (\$164) for the least expensive single, to 320 DM (\$229) for a double room, it is vastly overpriced. In addition, management seems uninterested in guests from North America. Hotel Boulevard, Am Kurfürstendamm 12, 10719 Berlin.

Radisson Plaza Hotel Berlin

Built in 1979 for officials and guests of the former East German government, this huge, 600-room hotel was brightened and extensively remodeled in 1992. One of the few modern buildings in the area, it stands out in a section of the city scattered with older, blackened structures. The Radisson has all the trappings of a large, commercial hotel: outside terrace, swimming pool, health club, even a TGI Friday's restaurant.

Spacious rooms with big bay windows, natural wood walls and orange or blue drapes, are furnished with contemporary furniture and include breakfast alcoves and fax machines. The special weekend rates of 210 DM (\$150) single and 250 DM (\$180) double, breakfast included, are a bargain for this class of Berlin hotel.

Address: Radisson Plaza Hotel Berlin, Karl-Liebnecht Strasse 5, D-10178 Berlin

Phone: 030/23828

Fax: 23/827590

Location: Center of eastern section, just off Unter den Linden

Rooms: 300 total: 267 singles, 300 doubles

Prices: Singles 210-450 DM (\$150-320), doubles 250-520 DM (\$180-370)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Restaurants, swimming pool, health club

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Two rooms specially equipped

Closed: Never

Parking: Garage in building, 22 DM (\$16) per night

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

Hunting Lodge Near Berlin

Jagdschloss Hubertusstock

A rustic retreat with extensive grounds located an easy drive north of Berlin. The lodge was used for the hunting parties of King Frederick William IV of Prussia in 1847, and later by other members of various German governments, most recently by East German President Honecker. Since 1992 its facilities have been upgraded to modern hotel standards by the management of the Savoy Hotel.

Prices are reasonable for a range of accommodations including rooms and suites. The hotel offers hunting and shooting, horseback riding, hiking, sailing on the nearby Werbelinsee, biking, tennis, and squash.

Address: Jagdschloss Hubertusstock, D-16244 Eichhorst/Kreis Eberswalde

Phone: 033/36350-0

Fax: 033/36350-255

Location: About 50 km (31 miles) north of Berlin via Autobahn #11.

Rooms: 22 doubles

Proprietor: Francis Rabine

Prices: Single (occupying double room) 150 DM (\$108), doubles 190 DM (\$135)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Conference rooms, restaurant, beer garden

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Limited

Closed: Never

Parking: Abundant on site

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Inexpensive Berlin Restaurants

Ka De We, Top Floor

From the array of available choices in this fantastic food market on the top floor of Berlin's largest department store, we chose the cafeteria, a good spot for lunch, especially for those who have trouble with German menus. Main dishes of rare, thinly sliced steak with béarnaise sauce and fried potatoes, and a thick pork steak with French fries and a mixed salad of beets and green beans, were quite good. Including a shared plate of fresh shrimp plus bread, coffee and a glass of white wine the bill came to 57 DM (\$40) for two persons.

The store's entire top floor, under its vaulted glass roof, is devoted to a magnificent display of food and drink and is not to be missed. Ka De We Department Store, Tauentzienstr. 21. Moderate, credit cards accepted.

Gasthaus Krombacher

A few doors from the Residenz Hotel, is the unpretentious, friendly Gasthaus Krombacher. It has quick service and serves good traditional German food as well as some surprisingly elaborate desserts at reasonable

prices. Entrees of chicken breast cooked "fricassee" style, veal sausages with onion gravy and potatoes and shared dessert consisting a folded crêpe with chocolate and vanilla ice cream and whipped cream came to 60 DM (\$42) for two including a glass of wine. Gasthaus Krombacher, Meinekestrasse 4, 10719 Berlin, phone 881/8602. Moderate. Credit cards o.k.

Café Kranzler

Famous Berlin hangout with upscale modern decor and central location. An excellent choice for coffee, pastry and/or ice cream. Compared to the desserts the food rather is plain and of secondary interest. A buffet breakfast is served until from 8 a.m. until noon.

Cafe Kranzler, Charlottenburg, Kurfürstendamm 18-19, open 8 a.m. to midnight daily. Phone 885/7720. Moderate. Credit cards o.k.

Nordsee

For those in search of quick and reasonably-priced seafood, a good bet is Nordsee, a chain of restaurants with locations throughout Berlin. We stopped at one in the eastern section near the busy intersection of Alexanderplatz. The menu offers a wide selection including fried cod, several varieties of herring, fish sandwiches and cold salads, priced from 8 to 24 DM (\$6 to \$17). The fact that at 1:00 p.m. the shrimp special of the day was sold out shows some care goes into preparation and that dishes are not simply microwaved to order. We found little fault with paella, consisting of saffron flavored rice with chunks of several varieties of seafood and ham, and fried Seeloch (a cod-like ocean fish). Both were priced at 12.50 DM (\$9). Nordsee, Alexanderplatz. Inexpensive. No credit cards.

There are many good places to eat cheaply in this large city. For those staying near Kurfürstendamm and seeking inexpensive meals, a productive place to begin a restaurant search is Savigny Platz, a few blocks to the north. In this blossoming area of attractive shops are many ethnic restaurants. Alas, however, few accept credit cards.

READERS' FORUM

Grüner Baum Complaint

This is a report on several Austrian hotels. We highly recommend the following, as you have.

Hallstatt — Preferred **Grüner Baum** for lakeside view and good rooms, **Zauner** for good food. Salzburg — **Trumer Stube**. Vienna — **Hotel Kärntnerhof** (we had room 205 - excellent). Graz — **Hotel Erzherzog Johann**

Places you haven't recommended, but we do, include:

Dürnstein — **Hotel Schloss Dürnstein** for fabulous Danube view rooms. Food better at **Richard Löwenherz**, both owned and/or operated by siblings. Munich — **Hotel Rothof**, delightful, garden setting in business office area of the city. New, modern, friendly, excellent location and not far from U-bahn.

Disagreement: **Grüner Baum** (different from the one in Hallstatt) and Badgastein. Badgastein is a wonderful destination and the Grüner Baum was good, but I would not agree that it is the best in Europe. The food was among the best of our trip. The rooms were great, wonderful view up the valley. Great too was the location, the town and the valley into the Alps. The service, however, we found erratic and inexperienced. It was especially busy Friday and service was slow in the restaurant. Saturday night in the *Stube*, service was especially slow. No one was in the bar at 7:00 p.m. and we had to ask for a waiter. Fifteen minutes later we were told "someone is coming." A young table attendant finally arrived who was thoroughly confused by an order for sherry. She had to leave to ask somebody and came back five or 10 minutes later. Total of 30-plus minutes before we were served.

Another criticism of Grüner Baum is that one is charged for everything: from use (not purchase) of terrycloth robes to go to the swimming pool to tap water from the bar. We also found few Americans, or even English there. There are no big tour buses, possibly because it is a little difficult to get to.

This is all to the good. On the other side, we had the feeling that there was class consciousness and that the richer Germans and Austrians were dealt with more promptly and more hospitably. Perhaps our marginal hotel/restaurant language ability contributed to this. We had a feeling that there was much false formality. It was not as classy an operation as, for example, The Schloss Hotel Dürnstein which was of equal expense and number of stars. The class consciousness seemed phony, not natural, and the atmosphere at least struck us as somewhat forced formality, incongruous with the Alpine setting. *Nouveau Riche* comes to mind.

Admittedly, the first weekend in October approaches the end of the season. Grüner Baum was not full, and perhaps not fully staffed. Nevertheless, the service atmosphere was found to be less appealing than the other hotels listed above.

Carolyn and Tom Reese, Palo Alto CA

(Ed. Note: Our own experiences with the Grüner Baum and the Schloss Hotel Dürnstein have been the exact opposite of the Reese's. We welcome your comments.)

The Grüner Baum's Response

We thank you very much for your fax letting us know the complaints of Mr Reese. We were quite upset to hear that some guests have left our house and haven't been satisfied. We have checked all the complaints Mr Reese was talking about. Of course, the service at the bar should have been faster and better. The girl got confused about the order, she didn't quite understand if they like a sherry dry or a cherry brandy. So maybe this explains the long service, but of course it shouldn't happen and we will do better for the next time.

It is true that this weekend in question was a very busy one and maybe Mr. and Mrs. Reese found the service too slow. For Friday night we had a candlelight gala dinner where we served five courses and of course we don't rush them one after the other, but we served the courses slowly on purpose. Also, as it is a gala dinner, people dress up a little more than usually.

At this time of the year we are not fully booked, but we have a lot of guests who come since many, many

years. So of course this is a more personal friendly atmosphere with people we know very well, some of them are real friends and I am very sorry, that these new guests felt not treated in the same way than our other guests.

It is true that we charge for a bathrobe AS 100, which is about \$10, no matter how long people are staying. It also is correct that we charge for our water, as this water is one of the best you can find in the Alps, perhaps much better than some water of a big brand. The taste is excellent and the service is the same if they drink mineral water or Coca Cola. We charge AS 20 for a half liter, which is \$2. We always feel bad if a customer leaves Grüner Baum without real satisfaction and would like to apologize for it.

Family Blumschein, Hotel Grüner Baum, Badgastein, Austria

Dresden/Prague Report

During a week's stay in Dresden, we found the **Szeged Restaurant** upstairs at Wildsruffer Str. 4-6 to be worth a second visit. Also, **Rathskeller Restaurant** served good food at reasonable prices, but even on a rather not-very-busy night, service was slow.

On our first visit to Prague since the change in government, we were pleasantly surprised by the many changes for the better: so many more restaurants and shops and so many more people who could speak German or English. We would recommend the 15-room, 3-suite **Hotel U Tri Pstrosu** (The Three Ostriches), at Drazickeho nam. 12, 118 00 Prague 1, tel. (02) 245 10 779, fax (02) 245 10 783), beautifully situated in an old but well maintained building right at the foot of the Charles Bridge in the old Mala Strana district. For a double unit with a view over the bridge, including breakfast, the rate is 4800 crowns, US \$171.50, expensive but worth it. The hotel also serves dinner, but inexplicably requires hotel guests to eat at a set hour, while nonresidents can reserve a time of their choice. One very pleasant restaurant we found in downtown Prague is the **Restaurant Modra Ruze** in a cave-like setting at Rytirska 16.

For anyone desiring the service of

a guide and/or driver in Prague or the surrounding countryside, we highly recommend the services of Josef Severyn, Pariska 22, 110 00 Prague. tel (02) 23 22 788. Mr Severyn is fluent in English, knowledgeable about his city and country and reliable and dependable. He charges US \$7.00 per hour for his services and, if the use of his 4-seater Skoda automobile is desired, the rate is an additional US \$.40/km.

H. Martin Ems, San Francisco CA

Bodensee Restaurants

Re the Swiss side of the Bodensee: should you decide to do the Schwäbisch side, a detour to Schlier (Germany) is very rewarding. The **Krone** restaurant there beats the **Hotel Krone** in Gottlieben (Switzerland). I have tried them both — recently. This was probably the best meal — definitely the most pleasant — I have had in Germany, and this includes, in this area, the **Hoyerberg Schlössle** in Lindau and the **Mönchs Posthotel** in Herrenalb. It has the best and most reasonable wine list around. Try it, you'll like it!

Dr. Anatol Chari, Laguna Beach CA

(Ed Note: Dr. Chari's dinner for four, including two bottles of wine and cocktails, was \$75 per person, not bad for a Michelin one-star. The other two restaurants he refers to also have a Michelin star.)

German Rail Bargain

Thank you for your very informative edition on rail travel in Europe of December, 1994.

I would, however, like to inform you and your readers of some special tickets on the German railway system which could lead to less expensive travel. Anyone, even foreigners, can purchase these tickets.

The first one is called a *Bahnkarte* (train card) which works as follows. A *Bahnkarte* can be purchased in any railway station and costs DM 220 (about \$156), for young people under 26 and seniors over 60 only half that, DM 110 (\$78). This card can be used to obtain a 50% discount on any and all rail fares in Germany and is valid for one year. I used this card on my three-week stay and more than paid for the card with two medium length trips. (I am a senior citizen). I would have saved more had I known about this *Bahnkarte* before my first train ride.

The second opportunity to save

substantial sums while riding trains in Germany is to try and travel between the hours of 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. In that case you can get a *Gutenabendkarte* (good evening ticket) for DM 49 (\$35). This ticket allows you to travel anywhere in Germany between 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. You can get almost anywhere in Germany in that time span.

John McClure, Bethesda, MD

Baden-Baden Difficulties

In November, I purchased a seven-night Baden-Baden Adventure Package, reviewed in your September issue, from the Baden-Baden Tourist Office. Please advise your readers that the **Brenner's Park Hotel & Spa** is NOT available in this package. Two of the Steigenberger hotels are available in the luxury category and **Privathotel Quisana** but not Brenner's Park.

I stayed at the **Steigenberger Europaischerhof**. While the facility is nice, there are no on-site spa facilities and one must go either to the **Steigenberger Avance Hotel** (approximately two blocks away) or the public baths or spa facilities. Even though I was visiting off-season, obtaining an appointment for spa services, such as facials, massages, etc. was nearly impossible. Although in Baden-Baden for a week, I was only able to obtain an appointment for one 20-minute back massage at **Caracalla Therme**. A check of spa service availability at the Steigenberger Avance was also made and all appointment times were full. Please note I was completely flexible on the day and time. Anyone visiting Baden-Baden interested in using spa facilities, beyond soaking in a hot tub, should be advised to make any spa appointments in advance or immediately upon arrival.

Brenda Donalio, Galveston TX

(Ed. Note: We erred. As Ms. Donalio correctly states, the Brenner's Park is not part of the Baden-Baden tourist office's discount program. We apologize for any inconvenience we may have caused.)

Suggestions for Schwabia

One of the duties of your subscribers is to come clean now and then about some of their secret places, especially when it seems the editor has given too much time and attention to multi-star attractions of Germany. I want to

introduce my favorite town in the Stuttgart area, a small Tübingen without all the tourist busses.

Bietigheim-Bissingen is at the confluence of the little Metter and the Enz rivers, just before the latter empties into the Neckar some 20 miles north of Stuttgart, and has all the character that the towns along the Neckar Valley are noted for and then some. The town recently celebrated its 1200th anniversary. The *Innenstadt* is especially nice, with its extensive *Fussgängerzone* and large number of restored *Fachwerk* houses. A self-guided tour points out a number of local points of interest. The earlier fountains, parts of the original town wall and lower gate still exist. It has a nice little museum in a restored 16C building next to the *Rathaus* and a unique series of bronze statues set along the main part of the walking area, capped by a couple of controversial modern pieces at either end.

Only a few miles north, is the town of Besigheim, which also has an intimate *Innenstadt* with a nicely restored *Rathaus*. If you go, don't forget this is a wine region with its share of *Stüble* and that in the fall offers a number of *Besenwirtschaften*, or temporary restaurants at the farmhouses, offering local meat and drink specialties. Leave your calorie and cholesterol counter at home. Although the hotel accommodations directly in Bietigheim are perhaps a little modest for some tastes, I usually stay in the **Hotel Rose**, convenient to walking in the old town. There are others listed in the *Michelin Guide*.

To my mind the best accommodations and restaurant in the immediate area are in the **Alder Asperg**, which is certainly worth a stop for Schwabian specialties. There are lots of other good restaurants in the region, including **Gasthaus Schiller** right on the *Marktplatz* in Bietigheim, the aforementioned Hotel Rose (try the salmon fillet on a bed of spinach) or the **Enztal** in Bissingen (with a north German cook), but then there's no sense in giving it all away.

Go and enjoy a bit of small city Schwabia, but if you have started to understand the Schwabian dialect, you've been at the bottle too hard ("staring into the glass too deeply", they say).

Robert Barbarin, Los Angeles CA ☒

DEAR SUB

Continued from page 2

over a transaction you've got some leverage.

Last Night Hotel/ Restaurant

Travelers departing Zürich's Kloten Airport are hard-pressed to find reasonably-priced accommodations close to the airport for the last night before a flight back to North America.

The chain hotel, **Mövenpick Zürich-Airport**, for example, lists a rack rate of 200 Sfr. (\$171) for its least expensive singles and 345 (\$295) for its highest priced double room.

Last year, however, we happened on a comfortable last-night location that combined a pleasant enough hotel in the town of Dübendorf, just off the Autobahn some 10 minutes from the airport, and, in the village of Gockhausen, the *gemütlich* **Restaurant zur Rossweid**, run by Bernie Attinger with an assist from his brother, Werner. (In 1984, incidentally, the brothers Attinger were European curling champions and second in the world.)

The restaurant is rustically decorated with rough wood beams under a barn-style roof, wagon wheels, Doric windows and photos of the champion curlers. From its several separate dining areas, the restaurant's many windows offer views of the valley and the rural landscape.

The plentiful and hearty food is in keeping with the farm motif. By Swiss standards the Rossweid is a modestly-priced country restaurant.

Its best feature, however, is the Attinger family's warm welcome. During dinner, Werner Attinger, told us he and Ursula Schiess, his "significant other," offer carriage rides through the forested hills above Zürich. We made a date for the following morning. By 10 a.m. we were clip-clopping away from the restaurant in a carefully restored open coach behind Natura and Quarto, the couple's handsomely groomed horses. Against the morning chill, our hosts, elegantly turned out in top hat and tails, offered sheepskin blankets, a thermos of tea and a small flask containing a special elixir for warming the inner horseperson.

Though it didn't match the thrill of our helicopter ride some years ago to Les Diableret glacier, or the sheer beauty of the train ride to the Jungfrauoch, this placid, almost regal trot through the forest was just as unforgettable. Natura and Quarto obediently responded to Werner's commands and tirelessly hauled us and our carriage up and down the hills. After two hours behind them, I began to understand how one could develop a real affection for such intelligent, dependable animals.

We finished the ride in a light snowfall and once back at the restaurant warmed ourselves with a bowl of thick soup and a brandy.

For only two persons, the by-appointment rides in the 18th century carriage are expensive, but the 450 Sfr. (\$385) price is more realistic for a groups of four to 10. Werner and Ursula can offer several coaches, depending of the number in the party.

Restaurant zur Rossweid, Rossweidstrasse 2, 8044 Gockhausen-Zürich, phone 1/820 2840, fax 1/820 2839. **G**

The **Hotel Sonntal** is nothing special, just a straightforward, modern hotel located in an area of light industry near the autobahn. Rooms are spacious, clean and comfortable with the usual amenities.

Hotel Sonntal, Zürichstrasse 94, Dübendorf CH-8600, phone 1/821 41 81, fax 1/821 41 91. Singles 123 to 155 Sfr. (\$105-\$132), doubles 203 to 235 Sfr. (\$174-\$202).

Rating: AVERAGE 11/20 

EUROPE BRIEFING

Continued from page 1

course dinner. (Note: some MinOtel's charge a "price adjustment" of from \$5 to \$22 payable at the hotel in local currency.)

The MinOtel program is also available in Switzerland and other European countries through **DER Tours**. Also sold by DER are **Euro-Guest Cheque** vouchers for use at some 800 **Best-Western Hotels** throughout Europe. Contact your travel agent.

The main attraction of

most hotel voucher programs is not that they offer a bargain, but that they enable the traveler to fix hotel costs in dollars in advance. So be cautious. Get a rate quote from two or three hotels to compare against the cost of the vouchers for the same hotels. And, if the dollar bounces back, any financial advantage the vouchers may have enjoyed will be lost.

Phone 800-662-0021 ext. 30 for a free copy of the brochure.

Munich Pensions

The **Munich Tourist Office** publishes an annual guide to the city's many hotels and pensions. The 1995 edition contains a list of 90-plus pensions offering room — most with private bath — and breakfast, some as cheap as 69 DM (\$49) double. Most are priced in the 100 to 140 DM (\$71-\$100) range. Write or fax Fremdenverkehrsamt der Landeshauptstadt München, D-80313 München, Germany, phone 089/239 12 56, fax 089/239 13 13.


River Cruises

This year **KD River Cruises of Europe** offers 34 cruise itineraries with a total of more than 500 departures, April through October. There are 10 new offerings this year, including a trip on the Volga river in Russia. New Danube cruises of three and four nights' duration sail between Passau (Germany) and Vienna at fares of from \$600 to \$920. KD will continue its Nürnberg-Budapest cruises which include the Main-Danube canal. A "floating wine seminar" on the Mosel and Rhine rivers is scheduled for October 17-24, at the height of the autumn grape harvest. The program includes lectures, tastings

and tours of eight cellars and vineyards. For a brochure describing KD's 1995 programs, phone 800-346-6525 in the eastern U.S. or 800-858-8587 in the west.

Ludwig II Festivities

This year Bavaria celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig II, the "fairy-tale" king. Information about the activities surrounding this event are available from Fremdenverkehrsverband München-Oberbayern, Postfach 200753, D-80007 München, phone 089 597347, fax 089/593187. Information about hotels offering special arrangements is available through Discover Bavaria Incoming, Hanielstrasse 5, D-83471 Berchtesgaden, phone 08652/64971.

For example, the Prien Cure Administration (D-83209 Prien am Chiemsee, phone 08051/69050, fax 08051/690540) has a "King Ludwig Special" in which guests pay from 222 DM (\$157) for six nights/ breakfast, boat ride, castle tour, entry to the Heimatmuseum and King Ludwig sticker. 

— Bulletin — Weekend Train Special

Just at press time *Gemütlichkeit* learned of a special German weekend rail pass. It costs only 15 DM (\$10.60) and offers unlimited weekend travel on local German trains, not including the fast intercity trains. It is our understanding there are no age restrictions. The passes are available only in Germany. (A caveat: we learned of this program too late to confirm complete details.)