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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

May 31, 1995

Getting the Best Hotel Rate

Major hotel chains behave like airlines. An unoccupied hotel room, like an empty airplane seat, is revenue forever lost. And like airlines, hotels use advance bookings to determine future occupancy rates. As soon as the crystal ball predicts empty beds, the discount programs are trotted out. That's why, for example, one can book a double room at the **Hotel Sofitel** in Zürich this summer for \$138 when the lowest "rack" or published rate for the cheapest double room is about \$215.

These larger chain hotels have a variety of discount programs ready to dust off anytime the house isn't full. They are so numerous it becomes difficult for in-house and outside reservations services to be consistent in their price quotes.

A San Francisco television station recently performed a hotel booking experiment. Though limited to large, chain hotels in San Francisco — Hiltons, Marriotts, Hyatts, etc. — the results are instructive to anyone reserving a hotel room anywhere in the world.

The survey first called each hotel's 800 toll-free booking number to ask the double room rate on a specific date. The next call was to the hotel directly, again requesting a double room on the same date. The third call, like the second, direct to the hotel, differed in that the caller aggressively sought the best possible price, such as AAA or AARP membership discounts, corporate discounts or any other special rates that might lower the price. Four hotels were surveyed. The results?

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

DRIVING IN EUROPE

This month Gemütlichkeit offers advice on renting and driving a car in Europe, wrapping it all up with five of our favorite backroads routes.

In these weak-dollar days, economics dictate, among other things, our mode of travel in Europe. Most of us go there in twos, threes and fours and the cost of two, three or four rail passes is usually more expensive than one rental car. The countryside is cheaper than the city and the way to get deep into it is by car. (Europe's network of trains is indeed remarkable but many villages and country hotels aren't served by rail.)

In 1995, rail passes increased in price while rates for the most popular categories of rental cars — at least in Germany and Switzer-

land — dropped. Two weeks in a snazzy little Opel Corsa — perfectly comfortable for two persons — in Germany is slightly less than \$275, including tax. Figure another \$160 for enough fuel to go 1400 miles (more than 100 miles a day and you're spending too much time in the car) and the per person/per day transportation cost is a little over \$15. The per person/per day cost of a **Eurailpass** is \$33. The **Flexipass**, at \$398 per person, is cheaper overall, but it only allows five days travel in two months' time. That's nearly \$80 per day. A better deal is the **Europass** which limits travel to five days in three countries for \$280 or \$56 per

person/per day. Even the second-class **German Rail Twinpass** (five days travel in one month for two adults traveling together) costs two persons a total of \$267. That's still \$26.70 per day/per person and travel is limited to Germany.

So, let's say you've done all the math and reluctantly decided against those splendid European trains. Now you want to know what kind of car to rent and what to expect on the highways of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Here are our thoughts on these matters as well as a look at of some of our favorite backroads drives.

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Gemütlichkeit Destination

ZELL AM SEE

Zell am See is a pleasant, though busy resort, well-situated as a base location for exploring Austria's lovely Pinzgau region or as a stopover for north-south and east-west travelers. And, since it is on the main line between Salzburg and Innsbruck, there is frequent rail service.

The region has a multitude of hotels from which to choose as well as a substantial list of *Frühstück-*

pensionen (bed & breakfast) and vacation apartments. In fact, a booklet published by the Zell am See tourist office lists nearly 100 apartments for rent.

In winter, Zell am See is the center of a highly popular ski region. In summer the town still bustles, but the pace slows somewhat and hotel prices are lower.

Though the town itself has no special charm and can be seen in no more than

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Special Business Class Fares on Swissair

This summer, in addition to the price reductions already exclusively available to *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers, Swissair now offers subscribers even greater reduced rates in Business Class on selected flights from Chicago and Los Angeles. In order to qualify, you must purchase an economy class excursion fare. This fare has no advance purchase requirement, no minimum or maximum

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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• Except in one instance, where the 800 quote and the quote direct from the hotel were exactly the same, no two calls to the same hotel yielded the same price quote (though even in this case the aggressive, discount-seeking caller later got a lower price).

• In all cases the lowest price was obtained by the discount-seeker. In one instance, the 800 toll-free service quoted a \$185 rate, the hotel slightly less and the discount seeker was offered a rate of \$69.

• In every case but the one mentioned above, the price quoted by the hotel was lower than that quoted by the 800 toll-free service.

• Here's how it played at one hotel. The 800 toll-free service said the hotel was fully booked. The "non-discount" direct-to-the-hotel caller was told rooms were available and given a quote. Finally, the discount-seeker was not only told rooms were available but was quoted a substantially lower rate than the second caller.

One thing seems crystal clear: in order to obtain a discount you must ask for it. Last month, for example, we called to book a room at a Hilton Hotel in San Diego. "Yes sir," said the toll-free booking service, "we can offer you a queen-size room for \$139." We next asked this simple question, "Don't you have a better rate than that?" "Well, sir, the best I can do for that room is our special 'bounce-back' rate of \$109." Had we not asked for the lower rate we would have paid the extra \$30. And who knows, we might have done better calling the hotel directly.

The San Francisco results coincide with our own experiences over the past nine years. We have always recommended getting a price quote from both the hotel in Europe and from any U.S. reservation service, especially when booking well-known

chain hotels. We suggest a fax inquiry seeking the lowest rate for the type of room desired. Ask about special rates: weekend rates, senior citizens rates or any other discounts that might be available. (A word of caution: this could not only get you the cheapest room but the least desirable one as well. If you need a quiet room, a view room, a balcony, etc., be sure to specify that in your inquiry.)

Smaller, family-operated European hotels don't offer the variety of discounts one finds at a Sofitel, a Steigenberger or a Hilton, but still they are often open to negotiation. In April, we were at the **Hotel Landhaus** in Saanen, Switzerland, about three kilometers down the road from chic and expensive Gstaad. The hotel was virtually empty, the manager complained, because certain affiliations with other hotels in the region — including Gstaad — forced her to agree to rates higher than she felt necessary. She strongly indicated a willingness to cut room prices on a case-by-case basis in times of low occupancy.

The moral of all this is: ask for the room you want, then ask for the lowest price.

Easy Money In Europe

We had just been presented with the bill following dinner in a Lausanne restaurant. There were six of us. Foolishly I had assumed the restaurant would accept one of my credit cards. I was mistaken, the bill required more cash than I had. So what now? Not surprisingly — remember we were in Switzerland — only a few steps up the street from the restaurant was a bank. It had an ATM that accepted my Citibank Visa. In two minutes I had the cash I needed. Now, back in the office nearly a month later, my Visa bill discloses that the 600 Swiss francs the machine spit out cost me \$535. That's an exchange rate of 1.12, considerably better than the over-the-counter rate of 1.10 or 1.09 in effect at that time in Switzerland. In addition there was a \$10 transaction fee (2% or maximum \$10, minimum \$2) and about \$3.00 interest figured from the transaction date. In the past couple of years ATMs have proliferated in

Europe. We recommend their convenience and the favorable exchange rate. On our April trip we took a few traveler's checks but didn't cash a single one; our sole source of local currency was ATMs. Use a debit card instead of a credit card; you won't pay interest and the transaction fee will likely be less (make sure your credit card doesn't charge a conversion fee).

Traveler's checks are not yet extinct and you will still want to carry some. If you buy them in a foreign denomination, be sure to shop the exchange rate. Traveler's checks from American Express or Thomas Cook may be free but a bank is almost certain to offer a better exchange rate.

Odds & Ends

The May issue of the excellent *Consumer Reports Travel Letter* (subscriptions \$39, phone orders 800-234-1970) evaluates hotel voucher programs. Among those in which the average voucher costs more than the hotel's rack rate are: MinOtel (11% higher), German Hotels' Wundercheck (2%); Best Western's Euro-Guestcheque (1%). Not all vouchers were above rack rate. CRTL noted these good deals: Best Western-Darmstadt, Germany \$91 and Nürnberg \$104; Holiday Inn-Frankfurt \$135, Hamburg \$135, Munich \$107; Geneva \$135; Wundercheck-Baden-Baden, \$112.

Vienna's *Kursalon im Stadtpark* has reopened and concerts will again take place each day, April-October, at 4-6 p.m. and 8-9:30 p.m. Mozart's birthplace, at Getreidegasse 9 in Salzburg, has been completely renovated and is now open daily.

Travelers who want to see Berlin's historic Reichstag for the first time are advised to skip the town during the period June 17 to July 6 when the famous old building, bullet hotels and all, will be covered in a silver polypropylene fabric, courtesy of the artist Christo. Those who have already eyeballed the Reichstag, but who would like to see what it looks like gift wrapped, may encounter difficulty finding accommodations. The city's hotels are rapidly filling for this event. ☐

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

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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%

DRIVING EUROPE

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CHOOSING A RENTAL CAR

For two persons the Opel Corsa (Ford Fiesta and VW Polo are also in this category) is fine, especially for those who plan to avoid the Autobahn. There is adequate trunk space (covered hatch), the car looks good and is fun to drive. Virtually every European rental car these days comes with a tape player in addition to a radio and the Corsa is no exception.

If you plan to spend significant time on the Autobahn, move up to the next category — Opel Astra, Ford Escort, VW Golf. These cars are comfortable at 80 to 90 mph and have a larger trunk — figure one big suitcase, two small ones and maybe a garment bag and/or a soft duffel or two. They come in both two-door and four-door models, occasionally with a sunroof and are perfectly comfortable for three adults who go easy on the luggage.

For two couples, our choice is the midsize Opel Vectra/Ford Mondeo category, which comes with four doors. Trunk space is a little iffy, however, and we suggest a visit to your local Ford dealer for a gander at the trunk of a 1995 Ford Contours (the U.S. version of the Mondeo).

The next size category — Ford Scorpio/Opel Omega (both about the size of a Ford Taurus) — is substantially more expensive. To get a bit more legroom and trunk space you'll pay two to three times the cost of the Vectra/Mondeo. And by the way, the pricey BMW 316i or Mercedes 180C cars are no larger than the Vectra/Mondeo category.

Those who must have customary American amenities and size will pay dearly. The typically available full-sized cars such as the Volvo 960, BMW 730 and the big Mercedes Benz models start at around \$600 per week plus tax. Air-conditioned cars in Germany are rare and fabulously expensive. Air is more readily available in Switzerland but only on large, more expensive rentals. Some mid-sized cars in France come with air.

Rates for minivans have skyrocketed in 1995 and substantial savings can be realized by renting two mid-sized sedans.

Finally, we don't recommend renting in Italy or Austria. Rates in both countries are very high and Italy requires the purchase of theft insurance which is about \$14 per day.

THE EUROPEAN DRIVER

In general, drivers in Europe are better than American drivers (o.k., o.k., California drivers). They are better trained, much more predictable and, believe it or not, more courteous. Rarely do they cut you off, pass on the right (illegal) or follow too closely in situations where passing is impossible. In addition, a motorist attempting to turn from a side street or driveway into a long, slow line of vehicles almost never has to wait to join the line. In California, that driver is trapped until the last car passes; in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, he or she will be quickly waved into the line.

But what about those Autobahn bullies who tailgate at 100-plus mph? Well, for one thing, Germany has cracked down and the practice has diminished in the last few years. By the way, if you're being tailgated you are going too slow. Move over!

On the other hand the natives want you to drive by their rules. Pass on the right, fail to signal or do something unexpected and they'll let you know with a scowl, a wagging finger or, yes, a flash of the headlights. (We'll never forget the story of a friend who had driven all day through rain and snow from Italy to Garmisch-Partenkirchen where it was a clear but very cold day with much snow on the ground. At a stop light he pulled his mud-covered Fiat alongside a spotless, gleaming Mercedes driven by an ample German matron. She first eyeballed the Fiat for a few seconds and then, after making eye contact with my friend, scowled at his dirty car while shaking her head from side to side and wagging an index finger at this abomination.)

Almost without exception, Euro-

pean motorists will drive faster than you; not only on the Autobahn but in towns and on country roads. On narrow alpine roads, especially, the locals know the road better and are simply willing to go faster and pass in places you wouldn't dream of. So when another car looms in your mirror, get out of the way.

THE AUTOBAHN

Gemütlichkeit's philosophy has always been tied to backroads travel; leisurely meanders through the pretty countryside, stopping at whim to look at a church or quaff a beverage under a chestnut tree.

But for most of us, there will come a time in almost every trip when we have to get somewhere fast. Then, it's thank the Lord for the Autobahn. But these wondrous roads, particularly in Germany where there is no speed limit, are serious business. At 80 to 135 miles per hour things happen much more quickly than on our more sedate (but less predictable) freeways and turnpikes.

First-time Autobahn drivers will either enjoy the fast driving or be appalled by it. One quickly learns that only the fastest drivers — 180 to 240 kilometers per hour (113 to 138 miles per hour) — can live in the left lane. At lower speeds they are repeatedly required to vacate the left lane by faster cars. Some cars will come up on them so quickly they virtually materialize in the rear view mirror, left turn signal blinking and occasionally — if the car in front is slow to react — headlights flashing. It doesn't take a car going 125 mph long to overtake one going 90 mph.

Left Lane/Right Lane Dilemma

Picture this: you are in the right lane cruising at a sensible (for Germany) 140 kmph (88 mph). Suddenly, just as you round a long curve, is a giant truck going 60 mph *in your lane*. Your rearview mirror reveals a BMW in the left lane closing like a low-flying jet at about 115 mph. The choice is to either stand on the brakes and pray you don't rear-end the truck, or jump on the accelerator, switch to the left lane, and pray the 'Beamer' doesn't rear-end you.

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DRIVING IN EUROPE

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The foregoing scenario underscores a major Autobahn danger; the huge difference in speed between lanes. If there are only two lanes in your direction, the left one will have vehicles traveling 50 to 80 mph faster than the big trucks in the right lane which are only going 60 miles per hour — slower on hills. Those who want to drive 75 to 100 mph are caught in a no-man's land, too slow for the left lane and too fast for the right. A high level of concentration is required for this sort of driving, particularly if you venture in that 75-100 mph no-man's land.

Running With a Fast Crowd

If you have a fast car and want to compete with the left lane fliers you'll have to be especially alert. Passing a 75-mph line of traffic when you're going 110 becomes a major problem rather quickly if one of them decides to change lanes in front of you. There might be some bailout room on the left shoulder but that's your only escape. Watch every vehicle in the right lane very carefully for the first sign of a lane change.

ALSO TO CONSIDER

Signage

Autobahn signs are a bright blue, except in Switzerland where they are green and the signs for secondary roads are in blue.

Yes, They Have Radar

Though you won't get a ticket on the German autobahn for speeding (unless there is a posted speed limit) you can for other violations. On lesser highways, particularly in the countryside, there are radar speed traps. Justice is swift; one pays on the spot in cash.

Maps and Other Driving Aids

Don't think that nice map the tourist office sent you for free is in any way suitable to guide you in your backroads travels. Each of our three countries has a complex network of roads and detailed maps are essential. Use the free map as a planning device and for an overall perspective of the country. A scale of 1:200,000 (one centimeter equals two kilometers) or

1:150,000 (1 cm=1.5 km) is best. In Austria and Switzerland, the *Die Generalkarte* series published by Mairs Verlag of Germany fits the bill nicely. The Austria series consists of nine maps and includes Italy's Südtirol. Four maps are required for Switzerland. In Germany, your choice is *Die Generalkarte* (37 maps) by Mairs or the 1:150,000 *ADAC Karten* (24 maps) published by the German Auto Club. Michelin rules the roads in France and their series for that country includes 40 individual maps at a scale of 1:200,000.

These maps do more than help you find your way. Scenic roads are edged in green and symbols or special markings indicate such things as panoramic views, picturesque towns, historic towns, special routes (wine roads, for example), footpaths, churches, castles and even golf courses.

As every *Gemütlichkeit* reader knows (see *Gemütlichkeit*, February 1995), we strongly recommend *Michelin's Red Guides* for Germany and Switzerland (there is no *Michelin Red Guide* for Austria). They are essential to the auto traveler for many reasons, not the least being their many city maps. For example, you probably don't want to spend \$6 to \$10 in advance on a map for a midsize city such as Bamberg. Since you'll see the city on foot, and a town plan is available free at the tourist office, the principal need is for something in the car to get you to your hotel when you arrive and get you out of town when you leave. *Michelin Red* does that for about 150 cities in Germany and about 40 in Switzerland.

Five Favorite Backroads Drives

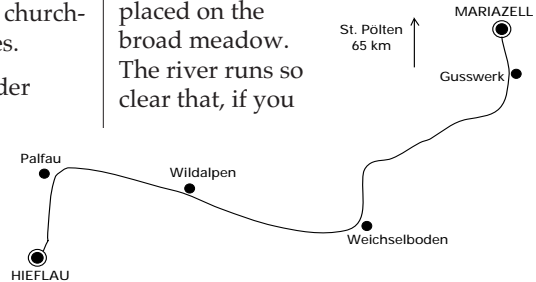
#1 Mariazell to Hieflau Austria

Necessary maps: *Die Generalkarte #2 Austria*

This beautiful, peaceful route, from the pilgrimage town of Maria-

zell (about 65 km south of the Vienna-Salzburg Autobahn, exit St. Pölten), along the Salza river southwest to Hieflau, is through some of Austria's most uninhabited countryside. Before setting out, fill your gas tank and purchase food and drink for a picnic lunch. There are few restaurants along the way, but several lovely spots for picnics. Including stops for sight-seeing, figure about three hours.

The countryside is quietly spectacular. The road runs beneath limestone cliffs eroded into extraordinary formations and the ravine slopes are covered with green conifers and deciduous foliage that make this drive especially lovely in the fall. In places where the valley widens, the farms and grazing cattle seem like set pieces, perfectly placed on the broad meadow. The river runs so clear that, if you



look closely, you will be able to see fish swimming — from your moving car.

The few villages that comprise civilization along this road, such as Weischelboden, Wildalpen, Palfau and Grossreifling are tiny and very quiet.

Our recommendation is to over-night at Mariazell, where a Benedictine priory was founded in 1157 and Pope John Paul II said Mass on September 13, 1983. The town attracts pilgrims who come to pray for the indulgence of the Madonna of Mariazell. Inside the Basilica see the striking Chapel of Miracles and the *Schatzkammer* (Treasury) with its collection of the votive offerings of hundreds of years of pilgrims, from simple drawings by children to heirlooms of great value.

Simple, inexpensive rooms are available at *Gasthof Zum Alten Brauhaus*, just off the town square, no more than a couple of hundred yards from the church.

Gasthof Zum Alten Brauhaus, 5
Weiner Straße, 8630 Mariazell, tel.
03882/2523.

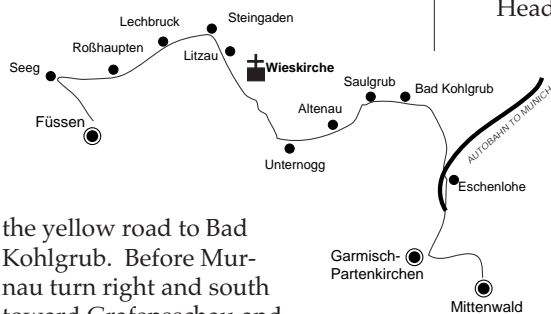
#2 Füssen to Mittenwald Germany

Necessary Maps: ADAC #15

Traffic on the German Alpine Road in Southern Bavaria is heavy at all times, but especially in summer. Here is a route from Füssen east to the charming town of Mittenwald via the most deserted of country lanes. Füssen is the town nearest Bavaria's famed Royal Castles and Mittenwald is known for its violin-makers. Along the way is one of Germany's most renowned churches, the Wieskirche ("church in the meadows"), a Rococo masterpiece.

You may want to start from Seeg, a village 14 kilometers northwest of Füssen, and its friendly and inexpensive little **Pension Heim**. From Seeg, first go east to Rosshaupten then on gray and yellow roads to Lechbruck and on to Steingaden. Just south of Steingaden, from red road #17, get on the gray road to Litzau and the Wieskirche. This part is very tricky, the signs are mostly for hikers. Follow the ones pointing to the Wieskirche. After visiting the church — 30 to 45 minutes — return to the gravel road and continue southeast to Unternogg and Altenau. This is true backroads travel, more trail than highway. There are many places to stop for a picnic in the woods.

Upon reaching the red road go left toward Saulgrub and then right on



the yellow road to Bad Kohlgrub. Before Murnau turn right and south toward Grafensschau and on to Eschenlohe. From there you must go south on the major highway through Garmisch-Partenkirchen then east and finally south, taking the

yellow road at Klais into Mittenwald.

It's easy to become confused, and you may have to stop often to consult the map, but this drive is worth it.

Post-Hotel, Obermarkt 9, D-8102 Mittenwald, telephone 08823/1094, fax 08823/1096.

Pension Heim, Aufmberg 8, Seeg D-87637, tel. 08364/258, fax 08364/1051

#3 Marktheidenfeld to Coburg Germany

Necessary maps: *Die Generalkarte #16-#14 for Germany, or ADAC Karte #9-#10.*

The scenery on this drive is pleasant and restful rather than spectacular. On it you will cross the Main River on a little ferry, visit a pilgrimage church in a meadow, encounter interesting medieval towns, pass by Franconian vineyards, see few tour buses and enjoy some of Germany's prettiest farm country.

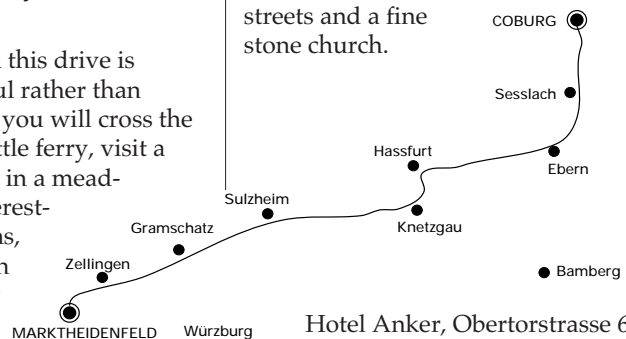
Begin at Marktheidenfeld, just north of the Autobahn between Aschaffenburg and Würzburg where are found the excellent **Hotel Anker** and its **Weinhaus Anker**, a wonderful restaurant. In Coburg, 47 kilometers north of Bamberg, you might overnight in the country at the moderately-priced Schloss Neuhof. The hotel is actually in **Neu Neerhof**, six km east of town. Coburg itself is worth at least a day's sightseeing.

Head north from Marktheidenfeld to Karbach and Zellingen, through Birkenfeld and Billinghausen. At Zellingen, go through the tower gate and cross the Main. From there go to Retztadt (where there is a wine festival each July) and Gramschatz.

Then it's Hausen and St. Hubertus-Verein, a pilgrimage church and an Augustinian Monastery. Then on to Fährbrück, Opferbaum, Schwan-

feld and the interesting wine town of Wipfeld (great stone house and barn). Next, cross the Main again, this time by ferry (1 DM).

Go on to Lindach, Kolitzheim and Herlheim. Next is Alitzheim and then along the edge of the Steigerwald Naturpark to Knetzgau and north to Hassfurt, another interesting town. Continue north to Hofheim then east and a little south to Ebern, once a walled city and full of half-timbered buildings. From here use the map to pick your own route into Coburg. One way is via Sesslach, yet another picturesque town with narrow cobbled streets and a fine stone church.



Hotel Anker, Obertorstrasse 6, Marktheidenfeld, D-97828, tel. 09391/60040, fax 09391/600477

Schloss Neuhof, Neuhofer Strasse 10, Neu Neerhof-Coburg, D-96450, tel. 09563/2051, fax 09563/2107

#4 Bern to Brienz Switzerland

Necessary maps: *Die Generalkarte #2 Switzerland*

The obvious and quickest way from Bern to Brienz is via the Autobahn along the south shores of the Thunersee and the Brienzensee through Interlaken. Our route, however, goes through the Emme Valley and into the Bernese Oberland by way of the Glaubenbüelen Pass. On it you'll see picturesque farm villages of the Emmental and finish with a wonderfully scenic and panoramic mountain pass road.

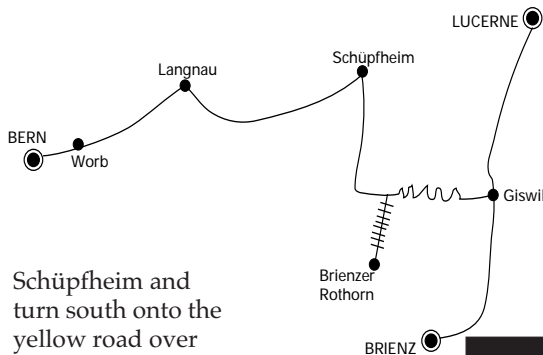
Actually, we began at Worb and its excellent and moderately-priced **Gasthof zum Löwen**. From there proceed via Zäzwil to Langnau, a prosperous Emmentaler farming town and site of a simple country

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FAVORITE DRIVES

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hotel offering good value, the **Landgasthof Hirschen**. The kitchen is better than average and you may want to stop for lunch. Then continue on to



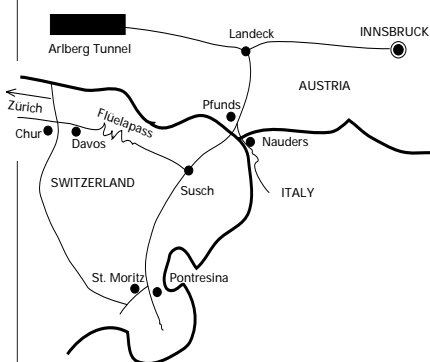
Schüpheim and turn south onto the yellow road over the pass (make sure it is open) to Giswil. Once down the mountain at Giswil you can elect to turn right to Brienz or go left to Lucerne.

Gasthof zum Löwen, Engensteinstrasse 3, Worb bei Bern CH-3076, tel. 031/83 23 03, fax 031/839 58 77.

Landgasthof Hirschen, Langnau CH-3550, tel. 035/21517, fax 035/25623.

#5 Innsbruck to Switzerland Austria/Switzerland

Necessary maps: *Die Generalkarte # 8 for Austria and Die Generalkarte #1 and #3 for Switzerland.*



Motorists traveling west across Austria and into Switzerland will encounter heavy traffic if they choose the traditional Arlberg Tunnel route and then Bludenz and Feldkirch. A much more scenic way into the coun-

try — though it will take a bit more time unless your ultimate destination is southern Switzerland — is to turn south at Landeck on red road #315. Just north of Nauders at the Italian border, veer right and a little west on red road #27, entering Switzerland at Schalkl. Then follow the signs towards Zernez, staying on #27, passing through Scuol.

At Susch, you can choose to continue on south to such destinations as St. Moritz, Pontresina and Lugano, or go northwest over the beautiful Flüelapass to Davos and on to Zürich.

ZELL AM SEE

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a couple of hours, its location on the lake surrounded by mountains is quite lovely and nearby are two of Austria's most notable attractions. Visitors should take one day to drive the spectacular Grossglockner Road and another to cross the Gerlos Pass, stopping at the Krimml Waterfalls.

Hotel Berner

Top value among the hotels reviewed here. Chalet-style building in a residential area with flowered balconies and pleasant grounds. Most guestrooms have separate sitting areas and private balconies. Many have separate rooms for toilet and bath/shower. Restaurant offers a selection of vegetarian dishes. Very warm welcome. A sedate, comfortable hotel.

Address: Hotel Berner, Nikolaus-Gassner-Promenade 1, A-5700 Zell am See

Phone: 06542/2557

Fax: 06542/25577

Location: Residential area five minute walk from center

Rooms: 27 doubles, 3 suites, all with lake view, balcony, cable TV, radio, phone, hairdryer

Proprietor: Eric & Anita Berner

Prices: Singles 700 to 1350 AS (\$69-\$132), doubles 1100 to 2300 AS (\$108-\$225)

Facilities: Indoor/outdoor pool, outdoor terrace

Credit Card: Visa

EDITOR'S CHOICE

ZELL AM SEE

Population: 8,000

Altitude: 2,484 feet

Tourist Office

Kurverwaltung Zell am See

Brucker Bundesstrasse

A-5700 Zell am See.

Phone 06542/2600-0

Fax 06542/2032

Disabled Access: Not suitable

Closed: November

Parking: Free

Other: Free pickup at rail station

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20 G \$

Hotel Feinschmeck

Recently refurbished with lots of mirrors, marble and brass, this family owned and operated hotel couldn't be more centrally located. Guestrooms are large and modern with the usual four-star amenities. Most appealing of the public rooms is the atmospheric, cozy Franz-Josef Stuberl, where, depending on the hour or the occasion, locals drop by for a glass of wine, a bowl of soup, afternoon tea or a late-night brandy. The welcome is lively and friendly from energetic and effervescent Phillip Prodingner, who has taken over the Feinschmeck's management from his parents, Gerhard and Frieda.

Address: Hotel Feinschmeck, Dreifaltigkeitgasse 10, A-5700, Zell am See

Phone: 06542/2549

Fax: 06542/254949

Location: Center

Rooms: 27 doubles, 2 singles with cable TV, radio, phone

Proprietor: Phillip Prodingner

Prices: Singles 870 to 1370 AS (\$85-\$134), doubles 1380 to 2280 AS (\$135-\$223)

Facilities: Sauna, solarium, two restaurants

Credit Card: All

Disabled Access: Not suitable

Closed: Never

Parking: Free

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20 G

Der Waldhof

Typical Austrian resort hotel with above average amenities and such guest activities as wine tastings and candlelight fondue dinners. Gues-

EDITOR'S CHOICE

troom furnishings and decor do not quite match Der Waldhof's stylish, almost elegant, public rooms.

Address: Der Waldhof, Schmittenstrasse 47, A-5700, Zell am See

Phone: 06542/2853-0

Fax: 06542/2853-28

Location: Residential area, five minute walk from center. Free shuttle to train station

Rooms: 48 doubles, 5 singles with cable TV, radio, phone, minibar

Proprietor: Josef Loferer

Prices: Singles 1010 to 1740 AS (\$99-\$170), doubles 1820 to 3280 AS (\$178-\$322)

Facilities: Sauna, fitness room, Jacuzzi, heated outdoor pool, massage

Credit Card: All

Disabled Access: Not suitable

Closed: Nov. to mid-Dec., first two weeks in May

Parking: Free

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

Hotel Heitzmann

Very good four-star hotel in town center. Refurbished three years ago. Several guestrooms, including the gorgeous wedding suite, come with private Jacuzzi. Hotel also offers vacation rentals on the lake's opposite shore starting at about 1100 AS (\$110) per day for four persons.

Address: Hotel Heitzmann, Loferer Bundesstrasse 4, A-5700, Zell am See

Phone: 06542/2152

Fax: 06542/215233

Location: Central

Rooms: 30 doubles all with satellite TV, phone and radio.

Proprietor: Rudi Heitzmann

Prices: Singles 890 to 1260 AS (\$87-\$124), doubles 1480 to 2220 AS (\$145-\$218)

Facilities: Steam bath, sauna, solarium, massage

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Yes

Closed: Nov. to early December, two weeks in April

Parking: Free

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Pension Alpenrose

Simple bed and breakfast.

Earthy, friendly. All but two rooms have private balcony.

Address: Pension Alpenrose, Schmittenstrasse 22, A-5700, Zell am See

Phone: 06542/2570

Fax: 06542/2570-35

Location: Residential area 10 minutes walk from center

Rooms: 17 doubles with telephone, most with balcony.

Facilities: TV in rooms can be rented

Proprietor: Family Gruber

Prices: Singles 300 to 380 AS (\$29-\$37), doubles 600 to 720 AS (\$59-\$71)

Facilities: No lift, sauna

Credit Cards: Not accepted

Disabled Access: Not suitable

Closed: Never

Parking: Free

Rating: ADEQUATE 6/20 \$

A Gem of a Restaurant

Gasthof Steinerwirt

Where one finds locals having a drink and playing cards one finds good food. Though this is still a theory and not yet a law, it seems to be a more reliable way of choosing a restaurant than looking at the cars parked out front (an unpretentious restaurant with well-heeled customers is supposed to mean good food) or trying to pick up subtle quality indicators from the menu posted at the entrance.

Actually, a tip on the Gasthof Steinerwirt, where we enjoyed two of the best down-to-earth meals of the past year or so, came from Phillip Prodingner, whose Feinschmeck Hotel is next door. The four ruddy-faced card players at a nearby table were simply icing on the cake.

Though most tables in the Steinerwirt's wood-paneled main dining room are covered with white and pink linen and have a vase of cut flowers, its easy going atmosphere is right up our alley. You'll feel perfectly at home in blue jeans.

The Steinerwirt's menu lists the same tried and true Austrian dishes as thousands of other Austrian restaurants; but like the Green Bay Packers of the 60s, who used the same basic plays as other teams, the Steinerwirt just executes them better.

Prosaic dishes like Schnitzel or Cordon Bleu are raised to a higher level at the Steinerwirt. In both, the crust was perfectly crisp and greaseless. The Cordon Bleu's cheese was

pungent and nicely melted and the veal in the Schnitzel tender and delicious. Accompanying *pommes frites* were perfection. Salads glistened with the freshest greens and vegetables, and the dressing had just the right tang to it. It seems pointless to describe such meals, since we've all had these dishes before. Seldom, however, have we had them this good.

Other starred items in our notes were a terrific celery soup and a dessert called *Heidelbeerpalatschinke mit Vanillia Eis*, a hip-enhancing combination of warm blueberry-filled crepes with powdered sugar and cinnamon, vanilla ice cream, sliced almonds and *Schlagobers* (whipped cream).

Steinerwirt serves very good Tauern Gold *vom fass* (18 AS/\$1.78) and what for us was a first, *Jungwein Premiere*. The time was November and, like France's Nouveau Beaujolais, *Jungwein Premiere* is the first red wine of the vintage. Delicious. A small carafe for two persons was 70 AS (\$6.93)

Not including wine and beer, the meals for two persons averaged about 450 AS (\$44).

This place is worth going a bit out of your way for.

Gasthof Steinerwirt, Dreifaltigkeitgasse, Zell am See, A-5700, tel. 06542/2502, fax 06542/357871. Credit cards o.k. Inexpensive to moderate.

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 15/20 G \$ ☒



Apartment/Chalet Rentals

Interhome, a Swiss company, says it is Europe's leader in weekly villa, chalet and apartment rentals and boasts 20,000 listings in 13 countries.

A recent news release from the company recommended booking early for the 1995/96 ski season and offered a few examples of available rentals guaranteed in dollars: a studio for two persons in Grindelwald in early December for \$696/

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SWISSAIR DEAL

Continued from page 1

stay, and allows for one free and one paid (\$50) stopover. The upgrade to Business Class is available for an additional \$500 each way from Los Angeles, or \$400 each way from Chicago.

For example, the Gemütlichkeit subscriber economy excursion fare from San Francisco is \$1388 — \$1538 less the \$150 subscriber reduction — making the roundtrip via Los Angeles \$2388. The normal Business Class fare is \$3448.


There are restrictions:

- Offer is good only on flights from Los Angeles, SR107/109/106/108, and on SR 125/124 (Mon/Tues/Wed) from Chicago. It is not applicable to any other gateway or flight number.

- Upgrading is for the transatlantic portion only. One way is permitted. Travel must be completed by 28 October 1995.

- Seats are capacity controlled. The upgrade is on a confirmed basis only, waitlisting is permitted, but standby at the airport is not.

- Reservations and ticketing must be done by Swissair. The offer is good from US origin cities provided there is a Swissair published fare and the routing is via Los Angeles or Chicago (Mondays/Tuesdays/Wednesdays only).

Swissair's MD-11 aircraft offer six abreast seating in Business Class with generous seat recline and legroom. There are more flight attendants to attend to your needs and to serve the several courses of your in-flight meals. 

TRAVEL BRIEFING

Continued from page 7

week; a two-bedroom apartment for six persons in Verbier in February for \$1,317/week; a one-bedroom luxury condo for three persons in Innsbruck in December for \$1,292 per week. The literature also says a "simple but adequate" studio in Château d'Oex can be rented for as little as \$250 per week.

In addition, Interhome is currently offering a 5-10% discount on all bookings made before the end of June and a 20% discount throughout 1995 (except during the period July 8 to August 12) on condos in Lucerne.

Also of interest is the company's standby program which offers discounts of up to 50% on bookings made less than one week prior to arrival.

Interhome, 124 Little Falls Road, Fairfield NJ 07004, phone 201-882-6864 or 800-882-6864 (bookings only), fax 201-808-1742.

1/2 Off Hotels

For those who aren't bothered by the mind-numbing similarity of large, business style hotels, membership in **Entertainment Europe** offers real value. For \$48 one receives a membership card good for 50% off at some 700 hotels in Europe. *Gemütlichkeit* recently reviewed EE's 1995 directory of participating hotels and found 10 in Austria, 15 in Germany and 19 in Switzerland. In addition there are 18 participating hotels in Budapest and two in Prague.

For the most part these are big chain hotels of the Sheraton, Radisson, Marriott genre and located in major cities.


Their value, however, is undeniable. In Lausanne, for example, members can select the 116-room Hotel de la Paix or the 54-room Victoria. Double rooms at the Victoria range from 190 Sfr. to 265 Sfr. The EE 50% discount makes them 95 to 133 Sfr. At today's exchange rate of 1.2 Sfr. to the dollar, that's four-star accommodations for from \$79 to \$110 double. Having just returned from a trip that included five nights in Lausanne, we can assure you such prices are a tremendous bargain. Doubles at de la Paix go for from 215 to 310 Sfr. or, at the EE discount, 113 to 155 Sfr. (\$94-\$129).

For cost-conscious travelers who plan to spend much time in major European cities this summer, the \$48 would be well spent.

Here's how the program works:

- You must identify yourself as an Entertainment member when making a reservation.
- The discount applies only to a hotel's published rack rate, not to any group, convention, corporate or other discount. According to the EE directory, if a hotel advertises a special promotional rate to the general public that is lower than the Entertainment discount, 10% will be deducted from that rate to ensure EE members get the best price.
- Participating hotels are not likely to accept

reservations for the 50% discount once their projected occupancy rate reaches 80%

For more information call 800-445-4137 or send check for \$48.00 to Entertainment Travel Editions, 40 Oakview Dr, Trumbull, CT, 06611. VISA and Master Card Accepted. 

READERS' FORUM

Austria Train Deal

I received your April 1995 issue in the mail today and noted the German train deal that Jerry Elenz wrote about. Not only is this offer for local trains a great deal, the 15 DM price for travel all weekend is for up to and including five people! That works out to as little as 3 DM per person. The offer runs through December 31, 1995 and may be purchased at any German rail station.

There is another interesting train offer from Austria to other European countries. The **City Star Ticket** (easy to pronounce even for non-German speakers!) allows travel from any Austrian city. There are City Star Tickets from Austria to the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, and Italy. The first person pays the discounted price, the 2nd through 5th passengers pay 1/2 the discounted price. It depends partly on how far within Austria and also how far from the Austrian border that one is traveling but it doesn't take much travel to make this a very attractive option.

John Nielsen, Vienna Austria 