

THIS ISSUE:

- Overnight on the Wiener Walzer
- L'Auberge de Chernerx
- Cheaper Lausanne Restaurants
- Budapest Update

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

June 29, 1995

Budapest Circa 1986

Bruce Woelfel's report on Budapest brings back memories of our first visit to the city in 1986, which we described in *Gemütlichkeit's* first issue, January, 1987.

In the mid-80s, Hungary, always recognized as the most "Western" of the Iron Curtain countries, began to court tourism from the West. It built a number of four and five-star hotels and, most important, made it easy to obtain a visa. In Vienna, we simply went to the IBUSZ office (the Hungarian tourist authority) on Kärntnerstrasse and reserved a room for three at the **Grand Hotel Hungaria**. The hotel was brand new but had a cheap, plastic interior and was located about two kilometers from the desired location near the Danube. We paid about \$45 per night. The Hungaria was full of vacationing Russians and East Germans who smoked cigarettes at breakfast, in elevators and, one imagines, even while brushing their teeth.

We left Vienna by automobile for the crossing point at Hegyeshalom where we found an easygoing border. Visas were issued to us in less than an hour. (In retrospect, it was this loosening of the Hungarian border that was the leak in the dike that became the flood that brought down the Berlin Wall. It had always been a relatively simple matter for East Germans to enter Hungary and suddenly, with a relaxed Austrian/Hungarian border, they had an easy route to the West.)

I recall the drive through the countryside to Budapest as being interesting but with few places that

Continued on page 2...

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

MUSEE OLYMPIQUE

Lausanne's new Olympic Museum offers great art and great memories on the shore of Lake Geneva.

A panoramic wall consisting of 32 giant TV screens, connected like huge tiles, curves in a 180-degree arc around the Summer Games gallery of Lausanne's new Olympic Museum. Playing continuously on this video kaleidoscope are great moments in modern Olympic history. On one section of the wall, multiple images of Abebe Bikila run barefoot in the dark through the streets of Rome to win the marathon in 1960; on another it's 1956 again and the great Russian distance runner, Vladimir Kuts (pronounced COOTS, thus the couplet, "Vladimir, Vladimir, Vladimir Kuts, nature's attempt at a machine in boots") pounds relentlessly to another medal. There is no narration but the images are backed by a dramatic *Chariots of Fire*-style musical score.

Approximately every 20 minutes, on an identical wall over in the Winter Gallery, Austrian Franz Klammer plummets down the mountain in his heart-stopping 1976 gold medal run at Innsbruck. The pictures are too numerous

Olympic Museum interior

and too fast; too much to absorb at one time. You sink down on a cushioned stool, surrounded by the Games of the past. There's

Continued on page 6...

Woelfel Rides the Rails...

Overnight on the Wiener Walzer

Prague to Budapest

Our Hungarian odyssey began at 3 p.m. in Prague when we lifted ourselves and our bags aboard the Eurocity Express *Hungaria* bound for Budapest. The new first-class car was colorfully resplendent with red, blue and white carpet, red accented lighting, and mauve and blue upholstery on the individually reclining seats. The only one of its type in the train, it was the last car and although a third of its seats were assigned for smokers, its excellent ventilation

By Bruce Woelfel

Continued on page 5...

Gemütlichkeit Destination

BUDAPEST UPDATE

Budapest is a bustling, sophisticated city, immense in size and filled with friendly inhabitants. Of course, it is really two cities, Buda and Pest. On the west side of the Danube, is hilly, forested Buda and spread out on the plain across the river is businesslike Pest. (Buda, incidentally, means the "water" that comes hot out of the earth in a number of locations and to which Hungarians attribute

many healing qualities. Pest means limestone, present in many of the impressive buildings which line the Danube's eastern shore).

Being flat, Pest is fine for walking. A half day's meander of the city took us past the Neo-Gothic parliament buildings, and its array of pointed spires, courtyards, and flying buttresses, and "Hero's Square," a grouping of Neo-Greco-Roman museums facing a huge plaza.

Continued on page 3...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

invited a stop — no attractive roadside cafés, no charming towns. The villages, in fact, seemed lifeless and rundown.

For someone used to the creature comforts and cleanliness of Vienna and Munich, Budapest in 1986 was disappointing. Air quality was poor; buildings gray and dingy and the people shabbily dressed. Guidebooks were extolling the “smart shops” in this “brightest of all communist capitals” but we found none. Store windows drew big crowds but displayed only dull, 50s-style clothing and clunky appliances. The handful that sold Western merchandise accepted only hard currency, thereby eliminating most Hungarians as potential customers. The hotel choice was between big and bigger. Small, charming hotels simply didn't exist. Most restaurants we tried served big portions of heavy, listless food at extremely low prices. A huge meal for three persons in the Hungaria's dining room came to \$18 total, including several big bottles of Czech beer. One exception was **Matyas Pince** (Mathias Keller), a cellar with elaborately-painted vaulted ceilings and carved wood paneling, where we dined from a big platter of grilled meats served with sour cream and paprika sauce. Two sinister looking Russians at the next table smoked continuously and drank bottle after bottle of an orange-colored wine or liquor followed by several rounds of *Barrack* (Hungarian apricot brandy). There was a wonderful Gypsy band.

Though the city is not yet up to Western standards, Bruce reports great progress: more and better restaurants, much improved shopping and the disappearance of most of the smoke-belching little communist-built cars.

However, if you're headed to Budapest for the first time, don't expect a Vienna, Munich or Berlin. The tourism infrastructure is still behind those cities. Little, family-run hotels are scarce, air

quality is still a problem at times and many parts of town remain rundown and shabby. In addition, prices have increased substantially. Restaurants remain a bargain but hotel rates have soared. A double room at the Hilton was \$74 to \$104 in 1986; today the range is \$257 to \$318.

We mention these things to caution rather than discourage. Budapest is a great city with a fascinating history.

Things Change

Csarda Piroshka, a Hungarian Restaurant in Munich which we first recommended to you in 1988 has closed...Dresden's **Hotelschiff Elbresidenz** (*Gemütlichkeit*, August, 1994) is also *kaputt*.

Currency Update

Recently we suggested using ATM and credit cards in Europe as the best way of obtaining local currency. Since then we have learned that some European ATMs won't recognize PINs (personal identification number) with more than four digits. So, before heading for Europe make sure your PIN contains no more than four digits.

LTU Complaint

We've heard few complaints about **LTU**, the German airline, and our own experience with them a few years ago was all positive. But subscriber A. J. Dickerson of Dunedin, Florida turns thumbs down. Mr. Dickerson says the L-1011 he rode from Florida to Düsseldorf was beginning to look frayed around the edges and, worse, some of the cabin attendants had an advanced case of “attitude.” LTU, by the by, is currently offering a \$629 roundtrip for travel this fall from the West Coast to Düsseldorf.

More Discount Hotels

Here's another chain hotel discount plan. **Holiday Inn** is offering rooms for \$99 per night at 140 hotels in 23 countries. One example: the program is available in Heidelberg — a very expensive city for hotels — at the **Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza** (four stars) whose rack rates range from 302 DM (\$216) for the least expensive single to 394 DM

(\$281) for the best double. (Incidentally, the price quoted by EAASY SABRE on America OnLine for a double at the Crown Plaza was \$178.) Phone 1-800-Holiday and inquire about the “Europe for Less” program.


Swiss Advice

For the very frequent traveler to Switzerland — or for those planning an extended stay — there is **The Swiss Advisor** (published quarterly, \$74 per year, phone 800-296-9455). A couple of items of interest in the latest issue:

- How to purchase tickets to the **Zürich Opera** for from 9 to 52 Sfr. (\$8-\$45). Tickets for performances designated *Volksvorstellung* can be obtained from the opera box office beginning one month before the performance date at discounts of up to 75% off the regular performance price. Address: Billetkasse Opernhaus Zürich, Falkenstrasse 1, 8008 CH-Zürich, phone 01/262 0909, fax 01/251 5896.

- Info on the **Swiss Federal Railway's** discount hotel program for families. With purchase of a **Family Card** for 20 Sfr. (\$17), adults are entitled to a special rate of 75 Sfr. (\$65) per person, per night at three and four-star hotels in six Swiss cities — Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, St. Gallen, Zürich. One or two accompanying children under age 12 stay with them free. Kids 13 to 16 get 50% off. One adult pays 110 Sfr. (\$96). The card also allows children 6-16 to ride free when accompanied by a parent.

777 Tip

Early this month **United Airlines** began to fly the Boeing 777 on some of its routes to Europe from Denver, Chicago and Washington. The aircraft offers wider seats with greater legroom in coach. There are, however, a few exceptions. Avoid center seats in rows 16, 31, 40 and 43; they are 17 inches wide instead of 18.5 inches. The configuration is 2-5-2, so try to get an outside seat (A, B, H, J) since about half the center section seats (C, D, E, F, G) have 31 inches of leg room instead of the 777's normal 33 inches. 

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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%

BUDAPEST

Continued from page 1

Inside the Square's Fine Arts Museum one finds the largest collection of Spanish masters' works outside of Spain, including, of course, Goya and El Greco. The museum's Modern Gallery has many French greats including Monet, Cézanne and Gauguin. In 1983, seven priceless paintings, including two by Raphael, were stolen. The thieves were later caught and the pictures recovered.

Across the river, on Castle Hill in Buda, is the Matthias Church where the 15th century king, Matthias Corvinus was twice married. The Church's interior has lovely green murals of historic scenes, and boarded-up windows which survived World War II only to be shattered a few months ago by terrorists.

Budapest has become a shopping destination. We found high-quality linens at bargain prices, as well as endless varieties of clothing and leather boots. But one shopping expedition was a failure. We had been told we might find Russian caviar at very cheap prices. Sadly, those days seem to be gone forever. In gourmet food stores on the pedestrian street Vaci we found plenty of German caviar but almost none of the Russian variety.

A Budapest highlight was our hotel, the palatial Gellert on the Buda side, where we stayed in a room which looked far and wide across river and downtown. With popular thermal baths beneath its building, the hotel also serves as the city's community bathing center.

There is an outside entrance for those not staying at the hotel, but we reached the baths by walking a long corridor from our room and riding an old-fashioned cage-like elevator run by an elderly woman attendant. She equipped us with caps and slippers before depositing us in the impressive atrium, a huge temple-like room with incredible vaulted ceilings.

The main pool room, dimly lit by green skylights, was entered through separate cavernous men's and women's dressing rooms. It enclosed a 10

by 30 foot hot bath and a cooler Olympic-sized pool. Outside were various other pools and a dining terrace reserved for warmer times of the year.

We also purchased tickets through the Gellert for a folkloric performance at the **Tanne Hotel** in suburban

BUDAPEST FACTS

Population: 2,172,000, two-thirds of that in Pest.

Tourist Office: IBUSZ, formerly state tourist office, now privatized. Head office, Felszabados ter 5. Phone 036-1/1179800. IBUSZ offices are also located at Nyugati and Keleti Railroad Stations and other city center locations. Hotel rooms may be obtained through IBUSZ on a 24-hour basis at 036-1/1185707 or in the U.S. at 800-367-7878.

Distances to Other Cities

Munich 678 km 424 miles

Vienna 243 km 152 miles

Prague 533 km 333 miles

Local Currency: Forint, currently approximately 125 = \$1. Available in U.S. through Thomas Cook & Son Foreign Currency Exchanges.

Rail Service: Direct service North to Prague (six trains per day), West to Vienna (11 trains per day), and Zurich (four trains including one overnight), Berlin (one train per day), and also various services to Eastern Europe.

Hydrofoil: Summer service to and from Vienna (three times daily). Time: 4.5 hours. Cost: about \$50 one way.

Transportation: Three subway lines, primarily serving Pest side of city. Buses and taxicabs. City maps, not available at hotels, can be purchased from concessionaires in subway stations.

Principal Sights: Matthias Church and Castle District, Parliament Buildings, Dohany Synagogue, Opera House, Museum of Fine Arts, Thermal Baths, Chain Bridge.

Shopping: Good buys include embroidery, lace, china, leather goods, paprika and Hungarian wines.

Budapest. A 25-minute minibus ride took us to a rustic motel-like building where we were ushered into a gaily decorated dining room facing a small stage with dance floor and Gypsy orchestra.

The show was fun though amateurish. For 30 minutes four smiling, determined youngsters performed

acrobatic and traditional Hungarian dance steps. This was followed by a rather strident female singer. The best part of the evening came after the singing and dancing when the Gypsy orchestra strolled among the tables playing requests.

We paid about \$11 each with transportation. Dinner was 5050 Fts. (\$40).

Food

Budapest Hilton

This beautiful hotel, overlooking Pest and the Danube from Castle Hill on the Buda side, is next to Matthias Church. When completed in 1977 it was the Hilton chain's first hotel in Eastern Europe. The contemporary structure is housed in the shell of a 13th century Dominican monastery and the 1688 Baroque facade of a Jesuit College. The result is an elegant, modern building respectful of its ancient neighbors and medieval surroundings. Nearby, the well-maintained wooden cars of a 100-year-old funicular provide quick access to the shopping areas of Pest via a bridge over the Danube.

The hotel's glitzy lobby sparkles with marble and glass. Its coffee shop is a pleasant and moderately-priced place to eat (see "Food," page 4).

Guest rooms are furnished in contemporary style and, as would be expected, are large and well equipped. Many have fine views over the river and the city. Among the suites are several on more than one level. Number 420 is a large double with city and river view; Number 431 is a two-room suite with a bedroom loft and panoramic views, and Number 436 is three rooms on three levels with a view of Matthias Church.

Address: Budapest Hilton, Hess Andras ter 1-3, H-1014 Budapest

Phone: 360-1/1751000

Fax: 36-1/1560285

Location: Castle Hill, Buda side

Rooms: 323 double

Proprietor: George Nemedi, Manager

Prices: Singles 275-360 DM (\$196-\$257), doubles 360-445 DM (\$257-\$318), suites 495-700 DM (\$353-\$500)

Meals: All

Continued on page 4...

EDITOR'S CHOICE

BUDAPEST

Continued from page 3

Facilities: Bar, espresso bar, two restaurants, coffee shop, casino, wine cellar, ballroom and convention facilities, shops, and travel agencies

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Three specially equipped rooms

Closed: Never

Parking: 40 spaces in building at \$20 per night

Rating: EXCELLENT 16/20

Gellert

This huge building on the banks of the Danube is a Budapest institution, best known for its natural hot water pools and baths. Everything is on a grand scale. The lobby and public rooms, including the hotel's restaurants and meeting spaces, are huge. Halls and stairwells are equally large.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Guest rooms vary in size with the larger doubles facing the river being the most desirable. There are also a number of generously proportioned single rooms. Baths have been recently renovated and include sparkling modern fixtures. We were delighted with our spacious, high-ceilinged corner room whose French doors opened onto a small balcony.

With our **Entertainment Europe** card — membership cost \$48, phone 800-445-4137 — the room was \$99 per night.

The large bath included a stretch-out sized tub and a bidet.

An ample buffet breakfast was served in a mezzanine room whose 40' x 120' measurements were in keeping with everything else in this grand old building.

Address: Danubius Hotel Gellert, Gellert ter 1, H-1111 Budapest

Phone: 36-1/1852200

Fax: 36-1/1666631

Location: 10 minutes walk from city center, along the Danube

Rooms: 108 singles, 103 doubles

Proprietor: Matyas Radich

Prices: Singles 85-146 DM (\$61-\$104), doubles 192-226 DM (\$137-\$161),

suites 280 DM (\$200). Prices include use of thermal baths

Meals: All available

Facilities: Restaurant, coffee shop, hairdresser

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: No special facilities

Closed: Never

Parking: 90 guarded outside spaces, free

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

Hotel Opera

This conveniently located city-center hotel is operated by K+K, the same management group as the excellent **Hotel Moran** in Prague (*Gemütlichkeit*, January, 1995). Although lacking the views enjoyed by the Gellert and Hilton, the bright colors and freshness of its interior makes one less aware of the hotel's rather crowded city location.

Rooms, furnished in light birch with white walls and green accents, are modern and convenient, though not luxurious. Baths include generously sized tubs and are bright and modern. Room Numbers 203 and 204 are connecting doubles each with bath. Numbers 601 and 605 are two-level suites each with a bath and a half and very large windows.

Address: K+K Hotel Opera, Revay utca 24, H-1065 Budapest

Phone: 36-1/2690222

Fax: 36-1/2690230

Location: Center of Pest, next to the Opera House

Rooms: 115 doubles

Proprietor: Andrea Sacnyanne

Prices: Singles 159-172 DM (\$114-\$123), doubles 208-226 DM (\$149-\$161)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Restaurant, bar, conference rooms

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: No special facilities

Closed: Never

Parking: 80 spaces under building at 13 DM (\$10) per night

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

Hotel Tanne

The half-timber architecture of this suburban inn, located 20 miles west of Budapest and convenient for

automobile travelers, is reminiscent of the Alpine hotels of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Rooms are small, rustic and rather plain. But at about \$71, the simply furnished doubles are an excellent bargain. A two-room apartment suitable for three people is only 140 DM (\$100) including breakfast.

The Tanne is also the site of the previously described folkloric evening shows.

Address: Hotel Tanne, Esze Tamas u. 6, 2092 Budakezi

Phone: 36-1/1766144

Fax: 36-1/1766955

Location: 20 miles west of Budapest

Rooms: 50 doubles, 10 apartments.

Proprietor: Szollosy Mihaly

Prices: Singles 80 DM (\$57), doubles 100 DM (\$71), apartments for three persons 140 DM (\$100)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Outdoor terrace

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: No special facilities

Closed: Never

Parking: Free

Rating: AVERAGE 12/20 \$

Food

Aranybarany

This cave-like restaurant with vaulted ceilings, sheepskin-covered seats and walls, has atmosphere to burn, an imaginative menu and is centrally located, near the popular **Café Gerbeaud**.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

A creamy mushroom soup was marvelous and a chicken stew with homemade noodles satisfying. Also successful were mixed salad of cucumber, tomato and mild cheese, and lamb in paprika sauce with rice and boiled potatoes. Yogurt-filled lemon crepes with custard and powdered sugar wrapped up a fine repast. With the meal we drank a strong and very tasty Hungarian beer (5.8% alcohol). The bill for two came to \$38 including service.

Aranybarany Restaurant Csardas, Harmincad U. 4, Budapest. Phone 1172703. Moderate.

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20 \$

Kispipa Vendéglő

This busy, bistro-style restaurant with its extensive menu remains a *Gemütlichkeit* favorite. A typical meal of venison or paprika veal stew, including pre-dinner cocktails, appetizers, wine and dessert, costs less than \$40 for two persons. The clientele is a nice mix of local and foreign diners.

Kispipa Vendéglő, Akacfa u. 38, phone 36/1422587. No credit cards. Moderate.

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20 \$

Folkloric Dinner Show Tanne Hotel

The Tanne is about a half hour's ride outside the central city. Its dining room is quite elegant with crystal chandeliers and white table linen in an otherwise rustic, alpine atmosphere. Tables are arranged facing a small stage where a Gypsy band plays. The menu is a combination of *nouvelle* French cuisine and more traditional game dishes, various soups and fish. Show patrons order from the menu and we found the food surprisingly good. There was a delicious sour stuffed cabbage, onion soup topped with a kind of cheese dumpling, filet mignon with pepper sauce and fresh vegetables.

Dinner for two was 5050 Fts (\$40). The show, including transportation from the Gellert Hotel, was about \$11 per person.

Tanne Restaurant, 2092 Budakezi, Erze Tamas U. 6. Phone 176/6144. Inexpensive-Moderate.

Rating: AVERAGE 11/20 \$

Hilton Hotel Coffee Shop

The Budapest Hilton's informal Corvina Coffee Shop is adjacent to the hotel's very formal lobby. Excellent salad bar for 300 Fts. (\$2.40). On our visit, specials included maize cream soup 200 Fts. (\$1.60), beefsteak Rossini 1250 Fts. (\$10), and a chocolate sundae 160 Fts. (\$1.28). Lamb in rosemary sauce with rice, hollandaise sauce, carrots and broccoli was very good, as was paprika veal stew with housemade noodles. Lunch for the two including salad and mineral water was 3310 Fts. (\$26). Corvina Coffee Shop, Budapest Hilton, Hess

Andras ter 1-3, H-1014 Budapest. Phone 36-1/1751000. Moderate.

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20 \$

The following are unrated cafés suitable for short orders, pastries and beverages.


Anna Café

Under communist rule, Budapest had few places to sit and enjoy a leisurely cup of coffee. Anna is one of four recently privatized and remodeled coffee shops in the central city. Open 8 a.m. to midnight, it serves beer, wine and liquor as well as all varieties of pastry, made-to-order sandwiches and, of course, coffee. Located on Vaci, the main pedestrian shopping street, it is an extremely pleasant place to take a pause from shopping for a few minutes or, if you wish, much longer. It was here we purchased some very good sandwiches for our overnight train ride to Zürich. Anna Café, Vaci u. 5, Budapest, phone 1182016. Moderate.

Opera Hotel Restaurant

Informal, good for short orders as well as full meals. Wooden tables with paper covers. A club sandwich costs 530 Fts. (\$4.24), goulasch 850 (\$6.80), chicken paprika 1150 Fts. (\$9.20). Desserts range from 208 to 420 Fts (\$1.67 to \$3.36). K+K Hotel Opera Restaurant, Revay utca 24, H-1065 Budapest. Phone 36-1/2690222. Inexpensive-Moderate.

Gellert Hotel Coffee Shop

Primarily coffee and pastries, though sandwiches are also available. Open 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Gellert Hotel, Gellert ter 1, H-1111 Budapest. Phone 36-11852200. 

TRAIN RIDES

Continued from page 1

and few occupants augured well for the comfort of nonsmokers like ourselves.

Once underway we ventured next door to inspect the diner. There a friendly English-speaking host assured us of "good Hungarian cuisine." Though a bit worn around the edges, this older car was still serviceable enough and cheerfully decorated.

Too early for cocktails or dinner, we settled for cups of strong coffee (230 Fts or \$2 for a small pot) and played cards while watching the sunlight filter through lacy thin forests of silver birch between brief glimpses of small villages with onion-domed churches. But the winter's day was short, and the forests grew darker. At five we declared cocktail time and stopped our game to enjoy a small bottle each of good dry white and red Hungarian wine (770 Fts or \$6 for both).

About 7 p.m., with the blackness of night relieved only by an occasional spot of light hurtling by outside, we went to dinner and had the car to ourselves. We began with a very good mixed cabbage salad, followed by paprika chicken with *spätzle* and a beef stew with bulgar wheat. Dessert was crepes with chocolate sauce. Our small bottle of Hungarian white wine — Egri Szologazdasaganak, Sajat Teimese 1993 — was light, fruity and dry. The total for two was 3100 Fts or about \$25. At 8 p.m., we crossed into Hungary at Bratislava.

Back in our comfortable seats, we arrived in Budapest's Keleti Station at 10 p.m.

Budapest to Zürich

We had looked forward to riding the *Wiener Walzer* (Budapest to Vienna to Zürich), one of the few remaining overnight trains with restaurant. Our hope was for a good meal followed by a good night's sleep. Alas, it was not to be. Shortly before leaving the U.S. we learned the restaurant car had been discontinued, its symbol replaced on schedules by a cocktail glass meaning "snacks and beverages." There were more unpleasant surprises.

Though we had sleeping car reservations, the sleepers were added in Vienna, and we had not reserved seats for the three-hours between Budapest and the Austrian capital.

Another moment of panic came the night before our departure when we learned a railway workers' strike had closed down all but two of 11 daily Budapest and Vienna trains. The good news was that *Wiener*

Continued on page 6...

TRAIN RIDES

Continued from page 5

Walzer was still running. The bad news was we expected to be packed in like sardines with people from the cancelled trains.

We implored the very helpful Hotel Gellert concierge to phone and reserve two seats in the lone first-class coach. That accomplished, we set about obtaining dinner. At Anna Café (see page 5) on pedestrian street Vaci we found sandwiches. From another Vaci food store came Russian caviar (\$20 for 3 ounces), a bottle of dry Hungarian Tokaj wine and pastries for dessert. We paid 1380 Fts (\$11) for the food, not including the caviar, and 800 Fts (\$6.40) for the wine. With these preparations we headed for Keleti Station, arriving at 4 p.m., an hour before departure, ready for the evening's travails.

Our coats were taken and we were immediately shown to our seats by an attendant, the only passengers in a coach with 48 empty seats. The strike, we were told, had been called off at the last minute and we had lots of space to spread out and enjoy our picnic. The attendant substituted for the absent dining car, supplying food and beverages to first-class passengers.

Three hours later we neared Vienna, well fed, relaxed and looking forward to moving our possessions down the aisle to a cozy sleeping compartment. Showing our tickets we asked an official the way to our berths. He replied that our sleeping car was one track over and, upon arrival, we must disembark, walk around the head of the train and reboard.

So much for the prospect of dinner followed by an easy stroll to our beds. Feeling this was one adventure we could have been spared, we clambered onto the freezing platform with our luggage and ducked around the end of one train to search for our numbered coach on the adjacent track, all the while fearful we wouldn't find it in time and be left on the platform while our train continued to Zürich.


To our immense relief we located the compartment and a friendly attendant. It was small and cozy —

too small and too cozy for two. Someone had to climb into the top berth to free more space. I lost the coin flip and wedged my six-foot, four-inch frame into the upper berth where I had no worries about tumbling out during what was to be a semi-comfortable night.

All eleven spaces in the sleeping car were full. There was a morning competition to see who would be first to the toilets at each end of the narrow corridor, causing severe gridlock until everyone was back in their assigned spaces. It made us anxious to try the new German overnight trains which have private showers and toilets — albeit at a higher tariff.

A breakfast of juice, two fresh rolls, cereal with milk, cheese, prosciutto, butter, jam and coffee arrived 10 minutes after our wake-up call.

Sadly, the *Wiener Walzer* did not meet our expectations. Far from a luxurious "Orient Express," it is no more than a barely adequate, run-of-the-mill overnight train.

The ride was covered by our Eurailpass but the cost for the sleeper was an additional \$207. Without a Eurailpass, or one of its variations like the Europass or Flexipass, such a trip becomes expensive. The first-class, per person fare, Budapest-Zürich, is \$231, meaning the point-to-point cost for two people would be a whopping \$669. 

MUSEE OLYMPIQUE

Continued from page 1

Oregon State's Dick Fosbury winning the high jump by going over the bar backwards, of all things; and now, in the center of the wall, that's Ohioan Dave Wottle coming from way behind in a funny little hat to win the 800 meters at the wire in Munich in 1972. Apple pie American kids, a long way from home, beating the world. What memories.

It is this multiple image, black and white film-show that is the centerpiece and main goose bump provider in Lausanne's marvelous new Olympic Museum. For mainstream sports fans it's a must-see, but

MUSEE OLYMPIQUE

Inquiries:

Olympic Museum Lausanne
Quai d'Ouchy 1
CH-1001, Lausanne
Phone: 021/621 6511
Fax: 021/621 6512

Admission: Adults (age 19 & over) 14 Sfr. (\$12); ages 10-18, 6 Sfr. (\$5); Students 9 Sfr. (\$8); Children under 9 are free. No cameras allowed.

Other: There is a restaurant on museum premises and, of course, a gift shop. A small poster costs 20 Sfr. (\$17) and we paid 39 Sfr. (\$34) for an Atlanta '96 tee-shirt. Swatch Olympic watches are from 50 to 100 Sfr. (\$43-\$87). A gold replica of the *Citius, Altius, Fortius* sculpture is 2500 Sfr. (\$2,174) and a cashmere shawl was marked 1,390 Sfr. (\$1,209).

even the casual Olympic watcher will consider the two or three hours needed for a fairly thorough museum browse as time well spent.

Open only two years, the museum occupies a choice hillside site overlooking Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). Approach it from the lake, take the winding path (said to measure 1,363 Greek feet, the length of an Olympic stadium) that begins at the fountain, up the gentle slope, through the formal gardens dotted with sport-theme sculptures, and finally past the eight Greek columns flanking the museum entrance. (Among the sculptures, note the giant metal torso with "washboard" stomach entitled *Citius, Altius, Fortius* — faster, higher, stronger — and *Olympia*, a tight group of three bronze bicycle racers.)

Inside, the building's top three levels are connected by a wide stainless steel and glass ramp that spirals to a skylit dome. In the spiral's center is a black, blue and red Joan Miró sculpture.

Each visitor is issued an attractive plastic card with an Olympic logo on one side (mine featured the jagged Dolomites and the logo of the 1956 winter games at Cortina d'Ampezzo) and an electronic strip on the other. When inserted into the turnstiles, the card allows entry to the various exhibits.

The museum has been described as “interactive” and we had visions of flinging ourselves into a long jump pit or sliding down a luge run, but the only interactive items we saw were computer terminals which, in several languages, provide additional information about the exhibits and the Games. Under consideration is a “simulation room,” where visitors will be able to better “appreciate the athletes’ exploits by measuring their own performance against those of champions.”

If not interactive, the presentation is definitely multimedia. Though there are many static displays, the best and most moving exhibits — especially the film panoramas — incorporate video, sophisticated lighting and music.

A temporary exhibition, recalling the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1992 Albertville winter games, sounded uninteresting but turned out to be a dazzler. Dreamlike, surreal figures danced and flew in an extraordinary show of music and light.

The main floor gallery, which retraces the history of the Olympic Movement, was interesting but not so exciting as what was to come later in the Winter and Summer Games galleries. Here is more prosaic “museum stuff”: ancient Greek vases, a collection of Olympic torches, flags (great sculpture of the Olympic flag), and, ho hum, a life-size diorama of the office of Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Games.

Even though the Olympic Museum displays some first-rate modern art, it is essentially still a collection of athletic memorabilia, mementos of the Games are everywhere; a shiny four-man bobsled hangs here, a varnished rowing shell there. And, of course, there is a substantial collection of things like the shoes Jessie Owens wore to win four gold medals in 1936 and lots of medals, old skis, hockey sticks and javelins.

One exhibition room is reserved for philately and numismatics and displays 12,000 stamps and 600 coins linked to the history of the Games. There is also a “donor’s wall,” inscribed with such names as Coca

Cola and IBM, and a corner is devoted to the summer games next year in Atlanta.

But old stamps and Greek vases, even Baron de Coubertin and the wealthy men who support the Games, must take a back seat to the athletes and their performances. And no collection of skates, running shorts, basketballs or hockey pucks, can recall the great moments as well as film. It is the effective use of this medium that puts the Olympic Museum over the top.

On our way out we took a last look at *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, that torso with the washboard belly, and considered the Olympic motto: “You who wish to excel, forge your body and soul to discover the best in yourself, always aim one degree higher than the goal you have set for yourself: faster, higher, stronger.” Suitably inspired to aim that one degree higher, I decided to have an extra beer at lunch.

Olympic Accommodations

L’ Auberge de Chernex

For Olympic Museum pilgrims who don’t mind staying outside Lausanne, and who are among the 99% of travelers who have a heightened concern about what things cost in Switzerland these days, our top hotel recommendation is the wonderfully charming L’ Auberge de Chernex. This tiny inn (only seven rooms) in the hills above Montreux, about 20 minutes by car from Lausanne, is an outstanding value, one of the best in the Lausanne-Montreux area.

Our first review of it was six years ago (*Gemütlichkeit*, October 1988), just after L’ Auberge de Chernex and its excellent restaurant had opened. We were delighted by its simple charms and the warmth of its proprietors, Robert and Christine Meier. Thus it was gratifying to return last April and find it operated by the same obliging couple and as appealing as ever. The view to the lake is just as good, the outdoor café/terrace just as beckoning and the pretty watercolors painted by M. Meier’s mother still hang in virtually every room.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Try to reserve room Number 3 (130 Sfr./\$113), the largest in the house, whose ample windows open wide to a fine view of Montreux, the lake and the Savoy Alps on the French side.

The small restaurant is very good — attracting mostly locals from these affluent suburbs — and not expensive by Swiss standards. Main courses on the bistro card range from 26 to 33 Sfr. (\$23-\$29) and a fixed-price menu with salad, filet of salmon and cheese or a sweet is 42 Sfr. (\$36). More elaborate menus are priced at 64 Sr. (\$56) and 85 Sfr. (\$74).

Address: L’ Auberge de Chernex, Rue du vieux Four, CH-1002 Chernex
Phone: 21/964 4191

Fax: 21/964 6857

Location: In suburbs, above Montreux

Rooms: Seven total, three without private bath

Proprietor: Christine & Robert Meier
Prices: Singles 80 to 85 Sfr. (\$70-\$74), doubles 115-130 Sfr. (\$100-\$113)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Outdoor terrace

Credit Cards: All

Closed: 22 Dec. to 20 Jan.

Disabled Access: No

Rating: EXCELLENT 16/20 \$ G

Lausanne Palace

Lausanne’s finest hotel and possibly, in our view, the best in Switzerland, is the **Beau Rivage Palace** in Ouchy, near the lake.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

But up the hill on a bluff, with a fine lake view, is the town’s other five-star hotel, the Lausanne Palace.

It appears to cater a bit more to business travelers (President of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, maintains a suite there) but its excellent service, comfortable rooms and central location near Lausanne’s old town recommend it.

One has high expectations of a five-star Swiss hotel and the Palace more than lived up to ours. Perhaps it helped that we spent the Easter weekend there when the hotel had

Continued on page 8...

LAUSANNE

Continued from page 1

only a few guests. We were a party of four and each morning beneath the glittering chandeliers of the soaring lobby / breakfast room we had the gigantic buffet breakfast spread virtually to ourselves. Hovering nearby, of course, were at least two young servers ready to fulfill our every whim.

Service was top class, especially that provided by the charming and helpful concierge. If, as someone once suggested, we conduct a "conciierge-of-year" balloting, this fellow (we failed to record his name but he is the man whose picture is on the cover of the hotel's brochure) would get our vote so far in 1995.

Like so many of Europe's grandest hotels, the Palace was built early in the century, 1915 to be exact. It thus has the broad halls, high ceilings and spacious rooms characteristic of that period. Our two guestrooms, normal doubles, were furnished and decorated with a restrained but comfortable elegance. The almost opulent bathrooms were equipped, of course, with heated towel racks, oversize terrycloth robes and an array of toiletries.

The Palace offers many guest services including two hair salons, six boutiques, a night club, a fine French restaurant, limousine service, workout facilities and a cozy bar with live music.

Its restaurant, **Le Relais**, is good but very expensive. During our stay, the six-course fixed-price dinner menu was 125 Sfr. (\$109) per person. A celebratory

dinner for two couples cost — take a deep breath — 675 Sfr. (\$587). Most astounding — and here's a great reason to drink tap water — the mineral water alone cost 32.50 Sfr. (\$28). But such is the reality of five-star travel in Switzerland in 1995.

Address: Lausanne Palace, Rue Grand Chêne 7-9, CH-1002 Lausanne.

Phone: 21 / 331 3131

Fax: 21 / 323 2571

Location: Central

Rooms: 199 total

Proprietor: Evangelos Vyzas, Director

Prices: Singles 330 to 520 Sfr. (\$287-\$452), doubles 390-610 Sfr. (\$339-\$530)

Meals: All available

Facilities: Outdoor terraces, exercise room, sauna, restaurants, hair salons

Credit Cards: All

Disabled Access: Yes

Closed: Never

Parking: 14 Sfr. (\$12) per day

Rating: EXCELLENT 16/20

Food

In the aftermath of our meal at the Lausanne Palace, something had to be done about the budget deficit and we began a diligent search for less expensive sustenance. Our success can best be termed moderate.

Café du Vieil-Ouchy

The best prepared meals we found on our search were at Max and Julia Suter's hole-in-the-wall Café du Vieil-Ouchy on the lakefront. We ate in the lower room, which is about three steps down from street level and very small. Most chairs had no backs, the wooden tables were tiny and bare and the floors brick.

But what we chose from the simple, short menu was excellent. Salads were crisp and fresh and the Rösti, around which most of the dishes were built, was perfection. "Forest" mushrooms served with Rösti (hash brown-style potatoes) turned out to be very fresh, delicious morels — a terrific dish costing 20 Sfr. (\$17). Rösti with ham, cheese and roasted onion was 17.5 Sfr. (\$15) and Rösti with sausage pieces cost 13.5 Sfr. (\$12). There was also an excellent chick pea soup and a flawless house salad that included bits of bacon, onion, tomatoes and walnuts.

In summary: very plain surroundings, limited menu, simple food but well prepared from the freshest ingredients. Dinner for four including ample flagons of local wine was 117 Sfr. (\$102).

Café du Vieil-Ouchy, Place du Port 3, CH-1006 Lausanne, phone 021 / 616 2194. Inexpensive to moderate. No credit cards.

Rating: 14/20 ABOVE AVERAGE \$

Brasserie Lavaux

This restaurant, in the center of Lausanne, has the feel of an authentic Paris Brasserie, with half lace curtains, tile floors and walls and a few disreputable types peering at each other through clouds of tobacco smoke at the regulars' table.

The bistro-style food was pretty good on its own but tasted even better when we remembered the prices at the Palace. Main courses included *pâte*, *pommes frites* or rice and salad or vegetable. Our meal began with a freebie from the kitchen: a small plate of olives, slices

of salami and a few tomato wedges. Pork steak with mushroom sauce (19Sfr. / \$17) was better than average as was scallopini with morels (30 Sfr. / \$26). The Lavaux poured Cardinal Beer on draught and 5DL bottles of Dôle St. Pierre, an ordinary red wine of the region, cost 18 Sfr. (\$16).

The Lavaux is hardly stylish but the food is decent and so are the prices. Dinner for four, including wine and beer, was 174 Sfr. (\$151).

Restaurant Lavaux, Rue Neuve 2, CH-1003 Lausanne, telephone 021 / 3233640. Moderate. Credit cards o.k.

Rating: ABOVE AVERAGE 12/20

Brasserie Bavaria

Since two knowledgeable locals pointed us toward the Brasserie Bavaria, we were not only disappointed but surprised at this failed attempt to emulate a Munich beer hall / restaurant. The smoky ambience was authentic enough but the quality of the Bavarian-style food among the dishes we ordered ranged from o.k. to barely edible. For what it's worth, main courses cost from about 22 to 30 Sfr. (\$19-\$26) and tall glasses of Warsteiner beer are 4.1 Sfr. (\$3.50). We won't be back.

Brasserie Bavaria, Rue Petit-Chêne #10, CH-1002, phone 021 / 3233913. Moderate. No credit cards.

Rating: Adequate 7/20

Those who share this writer's enthusiasm for the Czech beer, Budvar — the original and true Budweiser — can find it at Café du Grütli, Escaliers du Marché #4, CH-1003 Lausanne. — RHB 