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DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

January 23, 1996

Buy Air Tix Now?

Those planning a summer trip to Europe may be wise to purchase airline tickets now.

Heinz Niederhoff, president of **DER Tours**, one of the largest consolidators of transatlantic airline tickets, says advance bookings between Europe and North America are very strong and some summer flights are already sold out.

He expects his firm's high-season prices for flights on **Delta, United, Lufthansa, Northwest, USAir** and other carriers to be slightly higher than in 1995 but says there will be fewer seats for sale.

"The question this year is not price, but availability," said Mr. Niederhoff. "If I were personally in the market for airline tickets I would buy them now."

One factor in the predicted transatlantic seat shortage is increased demand from Europe. The weak dollar makes the U.S. and Canada vacation bargains for most Europeans. The summer Olympics in Atlanta will further swell the seat demand.

And Europe still hasn't lost its allure for Americans. The European Travel Commission predicts a record nine million Americans will visit Europe this year.

Will there be the usual spring fare war? Probably, but it likely will be brief and fare cuts won't be as deep as in past years. One airline official warns a fare war would seriously deplete the summer inventory of transatlantic seats and make postwar ticket sales very much a seller's market.

Airline ticket consolidators such as DER Tours purchase tickets in

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

VALUE LODGINGS IN THE EMMENTAL

Switzerland can be affordable as our self-catering expert, John Herbert, demonstrates in this report on inexpensive lodgings in the rolling hills of the Emmental.

In early October, 1995, the Paris *Herald Tribune* reported that "In August the Swiss welcomed fewer tourists than in any August since 1952." There is one reason for this. The increasing value of the Swiss Franc has dramatically boosted prices for foreign tourists, even other Europeans.

By
John
Herbert

One way to conserve on expenses in Switzerland is

to stay in an apartment instead of a hotel. As an article in the August 1994 edition of *Gemütlichkeit* pointed out, apartments are often less expensive than a one-star hotel if one is going to stay three to four days or longer. The article mentioned certain towns such as Ringgenberg, near Interlaken where prices are particularly low.

On a trip to Switzerland in September 1995 we discovered a region where apartment prices are at

least as low, if not lower, than Ringgenberg. This is the Emmental, about a 600 square mile region of rolling farmland just northeast of Berne. It may contain the most inexpensive tourist accommodations in Switzerland.

Scattered around the Emmental are huge old farm houses with long sloping roofs and flower pots in every window, plus herds of bell-ringing cows.

Though it doesn't have the famous Swiss Alps, they aren't far away. We liked the location, not only because it is picturesque, but because a number of day-trips can be made to major tourist attractions. Using Langnau, the largest town in the Emmental, as a starting point, one can drive to Berne in 35 minutes, Lucerne in 60 minutes (on a slow winding road) and to Interlaken in just under an hour, much of it on the Autobahn.

We made reservations in advance for a four-day stay in September through the office of the Emmental Regional Tourist Agency (Pro Emmental, Schlo-ssstrasse 3, CH- 3550 Langnau i E., phone 035 2 42 52, fax 035 2 56 67). Because of the many

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EXCURSION FROM SALZBURG

This "tale of two spas" combines a scenic train ride with a walk between two towns through some of Austria's loveliest countryside.

Salzburg is a five-star *Gemütlichkeit* destination at any time of the year.

A spectacular setting.

Enough culture, history and old-town flavor

By
Claudia Fischer &
Roger Holliday

to keep even the most jaded traveler occupied for several days. And when all that fails, there's always superb shopping and dining within easy walking distance from wherever you happen to be holed up.

We invariably drop our bags at the **Hotel Struber**, a family-run affair with just 20 bedrooms that stands

literally in the shadow of Hohensalzburg Castle. The Illmer family looks after us with tender loving care and has done since we first happened on this neighborhood jewel some 10 years ago. Public rooms and guest rooms are all done in pine. There are bowls of flowers everywhere. And the breakfast buffet of juice and fresh fruit, various meats and cheeses and eggs cooked to order is all about rosy cheeks and long life.

Last September, however, after two days of incessant and unnaturally heavy rain, we wanted out. A break from a soaked city.

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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bulk from major airlines and resell them, usually through travel agents. The retail prices for such tickets are typically less than what the airlines sell them for. The exception is a particularly fierce fare war when, usually for only a few days, airlines make very deep fare cuts. Such a war this year seems unlikely.

In this context it should be remembered that *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers — and those who travel with them — qualify for **Swissair** price reductions of from \$50 to \$600 depending on the fare and class of service. For example, Swissair's current roundtrip fare from Los Angeles to Switzerland is \$1,008. The *Gemütlichkeit* discount at that fare level is \$150 per ticket, making the roundtrip fare \$858. This is not just for flights into Switzerland. For this price one can fly, via Switzerland, to and return from a variety of central European cities.

For fare quotes and to book a Swissair flight at the lower *Gemütlichkeit* prices phone 800-238-0399.

Top Hotels: U.S. vs Europe

When last we spoke, your humble but procrastinative servant was desperately seeking to renew his expired passport. It was mid-December and, except in cases of "life and death," the government had decided to temporarily deny these important documents to U.S. citizens. According to a gleeful functionary at the San Francisco passport office, it didn't matter if you had rented the Swiss side of the Matterhorn for a private New Year's Eve party; there were no passports to be had unless you could prove that your Aunt Helga was *tot* — not merely dying mind you, but an actual person with a death certificate to prove it.

I tried to use *Gemütlichkeit's* political clout but the strings I pulled were all attached to air.

So we stayed home and took a short trip between Christmas and New Year's Day to the

Monterey Peninsula, one of this galaxy's prettiest chunks of real estate.

Since **The Inn at Spanish Bay**, on the elite 17-Mile Drive that runs along the coast between Pacific Grove and Carmel, was offering a special midweek deal we decided, as the saying goes, to "live large."

Over the past few years, my rare U.S. hotel experiences have been business-related forays limited to the genre that includes Hilton, Marriott, Quality Inn, Red Lion, Holiday Inn, etc. Of course, there has also been the occasional bed and breakfast stay in conjunction with a weekend getaway. But **The Inn at Spanish Bay** promises luxury far beyond Hiltons and Marriotts and is, I believe, considered among the finest resort hotels in the U.S. It is part of the Pebble Beach Company's holdings which include The Lodge at Pebble Beach, Spyglass Hill Golf Course, the Pebble Beach Golf Links where the final round of the AT&T golf tournament (formerly the Bing Crosby) is played, and other resort facilities.

As one who has reviewed hundreds of European hotels, I simply cannot resist comparing this hotel with the best resort hotels I've seen in Germany, Austria and Switzerland; such as the **Victoria Jungfrau** in Interlaken, the **Grüner Baum** in Badgastein, Austria, Baden-Baden's **Brenner's Park**, the **Beau-Rivage Palace** in Lausanne and Switzerland's **Les Sources des Alpes** in Leukerbad.

As you no doubt have already deduced, I am about to take a couple of whacks at **The Inn at Spanish Bay**. After I tell you we encountered not one unpleasant employee, first-rate accommodations and a matchless oceanside setting among low dunes and Monterey cypress, beside a delicious golf course — **The Links at Spanish Bay** — you may ask why. Well, pleasant though it was, **The Inn at Spanish Bay** demonstrates that the great five-star resort hotels of Europe are unique, possibly even worth what they charge. It didn't take us long to realize that it takes more than a beautiful location and a friendly young staff to equal them:

- Upon check-in at the ISB we were given a key and verbal directions on finding our room. In a hotel of similar class in Europe one is always escorted to the room.

- When the bellman arrived with our luggage he merely piled it on the bed, gave us a big smile and left. No explanation of how to operate room gadgets such as the gas-lit fireplace. (This was a person who shares in the automatic \$17 per day gratuity charge for bellmen, concierge and house-keeping — not restaurant or bar.)

- Our standard size guestroom was quite luxurious with comfortable furniture and the before-mentioned fireplace (which we learned how to operate after a call to "hotel services"). However, compared to European resort hotel rooms, which are typically designed for longer stays, this one was short on closet and storage space. The bathroom design, too, came up a bit short. It's always nice to have a separate bathtub and shower, but to put both in the same room with the toilet is not up to five-star European standards.

- Later that evening in the bar we witnessed a revealing little event. It happened so quickly and was so seemingly insignificant we almost missed it. A flick of the hand epitomized the gap between American hotels like **The Inn at Spanish Bay** and the best of Europe.

Here's what happened: On the bar were several square trays containing various dry snacks such as peanuts and other crunchy, thirst-inducing mixtures. The friendly woman bartender was busily mixing drinks, keeping things shipshape and chatting with customers. While gathering some empty glasses and giving a swipe or two to a spot of water, she picked up a few bits of broken peanuts or crackers lying on the bar and **PUT THEM BACK IN THE TRAY**. It was a quick reflex action, of course, something she probably wouldn't do consciously, but it speaks volumes about the level of professionalism and training among hotel employees. I kept trying to imagine a black-tied Madhu Kwatra, for many years the Barchef at the **Brenner's Park**, recycling snack scraps. It was an image

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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%

EMMENTAL APTS.

Continued from page 1

vacancies it wasn't really needed. We could have done just as well by visiting the Langnau office on arrival and making our choice on the spot. There is a second tourist office in the town of Burgdorf 14 miles away.

Those who want advance information should write to request the *Holidays on a Farm* brochure (it also lists accommodations in towns and villages) and the *Welcome to Emmental* brochure, which has an excellent detailed map. The accommodations guide lists 47 apartments and eight *Zimmers* (B & Bs). The brochure is in English, German and French. It describes the amenities of each apartment and lists the owner's name, address and phone number. If you want to stay in one of the atmospheric old farm houses, look for the words *Bauerhof mit Betrieb* below the address.

We chose four possibilities, faxed them to the tourist office in Langnau and asked for verification of price and availability. All were available. We selected one and asked the office to make the reservation for us. In our case no deposit was required. A few days later the owner sent precise directions. The two tourist office employees we talked with spoke excellent English.

Our apartment was a few miles south of Langnau in the second story of a renovated house next to the village cheese factory where about 20 local farmers bring their milk each day. It contained a kitchen, dining room, living room, bedroom and bathroom. The kitchen and bath were modern. We paid was 69.3 Sfr. (\$59.00) per day including the final cleaning and local tax. Based on the apartment brochure, our price was typical for a one bedroom unit. Some apartments were much more rustic; under the heading "heating," a few units listed "firewood."

The 47 apartments listed in the guide are scattered over 30 towns, villages and farms. For those who intend to use an apartment as a base for making trips to such locations as Berne, Interlaken and Neuchatel, we

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OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN

HUNGARY & AUSTRIA

Canadian John Herbert is a frequent contributor to Gemütlichkeit. With Canada's dollar able to buy even less in Europe than our own, he has, out of necessity, become an authority on budget travel.

Hungarian Border Towns

There aren't many places in Europe where you can spend a relaxing day or two in the delightful setting of an ancient town, with prices that remind you of the 60s instead of the 90s. Hungary has a couple of such cities, both of which are just across the border from Austria. Sopron (40 miles from Vienna) and Kőszeg (50 miles) are each worth a day's exploration.

Sopron is the larger (60,000 people) and more interesting of the two towns. It has a marvellous old-town center with winding cobblestone streets and 14th century buildings. The centerpiece is the town square with churches, outdoor cafes and an old bell tower. If Sopron were located in Austria or Switzerland it would be a well-known tourist attraction.

Try to avoid arriving from Austria on Saturday morning. We found ourselves in a mile-long line of cars that took an hour to reach the border. Most Austrians were coming over to shop, as just about everything is cheaper than at home.

We decided to stay in a *Zimmer* (bed, no breakfast) arranged through the helpful office of Locomotiv Tourist which is just a few steps away from the town square at Uj Utca 1. There were six or seven rooms available even on this busy weekend. Our place was in the home of the Nemeth family at 27 Gazda St. It consisted of a bedroom and attached living room, with a private bath and sink. The toilet, however, was down the hall and shared with the family. The house was on a typical residential street, a six or seven minute walk from the main street. The price was 1800 forints or about \$13 a day.

If you prefer more upscale accommodations, try the three-star **Palatinus Hotel**, one of ten hotels in the town. It is located in the center of the old-town at 23 Uj Utca St. Though the exterior looks ancient the interior has been modernized. A double room will be about \$60-\$70.

Kőszeg is only 35 miles from Sopron. Though much smaller, it is perhaps of greater historical interest because of a major defeat inflicted by the local population on the Turks in 1532. Kőszeg is a picturesque place, especially the old-town center. Much of the original wall that surrounded the town is still in place. It is pleasant on a sunny day to stroll around and inspect the hodgepodge of architectural styles found in the old buildings. Prices are similar to Sopron. A meal for two in one of the town's better restaurants runs about \$10-\$15.

A couple of points about Hungarian travel:

- Currency exchange - There are a number of banks and private exchange offices in every tourist town, but here we find the post office offers a better rate than most.

- Driving - Hungary is one of the most pleasant countries in Europe in which to drive. Roads are in good condition, there are few cars, many of which are the awful East German-made Trabants that won't go over 60 m.p.h., thus reducing the number of drivers cruising at the usual European speed of 90-plus m.p.h.. Gas prices are similar to Austria.

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EMMENTAL APTS

Continued from page 3

suggest getting a place near the Berne-Thun Autobahn. Try such towns as Zäziwil, Oberthal, Signau or Biglen.

The limited selection of *Zimmers* appear to charge about 25 Sfr. (\$21) per person, per night. ☒

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Continued from page 3

- It may have been good luck but we ran in to a number of English-speaking employees at the restaurants, tourist offices, etc., certainly more than the guidebooks had led us to expect.

- Hungary has been discovered. Last year it had the fourth highest number of foreign visitors in all of Europe. Only France, Spain and Italy had more.

South Austria

Last fall we made a short return visit to one of the most pleasant, but least known (at least to North Americans) regions of Austria, the Klopeiner See area about 20 miles southeast of Klagenfurt. We cut short a rain-plagued stay in Graz and headed for this area, known for its warm temperatures and sunny days. We weren't disappointed.

There is much to see in a three or four-day stay. The upscale resorts of Pörschach and Velden on the Wörther See are 25 miles to the west and the Slovenian border is less than 20 miles to the south. At the moment Slovenia is the only easily visited part of the former Yugoslavian Republic. (Skip Ljubljana, the dull, traffic-clogged capital city and head for a day-trip to Bled, a pleasant resort just south of the Austrian border.)

We arrived about 4 p.m. in the village of St. Kanzian, on the north side of the small Klopeiner See and headed for the local tourist bureau on the main street for help in finding accommodations. You realize there are plenty of places to sleep in this small region — approximately five square-miles — when you are handed a 95-page accommodations guide which lists over 300 apartments and bungalows. There is possibly more of this sort of accommodation here than in any other part of Austria.

The helpful English-speaking clerk in the tourist office explained we were now in the low season (after Sept. 15) and there were many vacancies. After describing our needs — a one-bedroom apartment — she recommended several places in our price range. At our request she made several phone calls to inquire about availability. There was no answer to the first three calls. Perhaps it was because it was at a time of day when the stores were open. (In Austria you want to take advantage of open stores, it doesn't seem to happen too often.)

The building was only a few years old and had a variety of accommodations for from two to eight persons. About half the units were vacant. We chose a top (third-floor) apartment with one bedroom, a bathroom and a large room combining a compact kitchen, a dining area and a living room area. We also had a large south-facing balcony with a pleasant view. Everything was very up to date including the satellite TV which carried CNN and Sky TV.

A welcoming gift of a bottle of wine (choice of red or white) soon arrived. There was no pool but the building had a washing machine.

For our three-night stay the charge was 471 schillings (\$46) per day including taxes and cleaning. A longer stay would reduce the daily cost. Prices in the accommodations book showed this to be typical for the region. Most apartments are in private homes, but there are a number of small apartment buildings such as the one we stayed in.

By far the best time to visit is during the low season, April and

May, and September 15 to October 15. Prices double in the busy summer months and many places close from mid-October to April.

For more details on apartment rental in Austria see the February, 1995, edition of *Gemütlichkeit*.

Our apartment owner's address: Familie Prasenc, Hubertshof, Seenweg 52, A-9122 Seelach am Klopeinersee Austria, phone 04239/2269, fax 04225/2822

For a copy of the accommodations guide contact:

Tourismusverband Klopeiner See Klopeiner Str. 5, A-9122 St. Kanzian Austria, phone 04239/22 22, fax 04239/30 65 ☒

Swift Swiss Road Justice

There is a second way to save money in Switzerland. Don't become involved in an automobile accident. One rainy day last September we nudged the back of the car in front of us when it stopped suddenly. We were at fault.

The car we hit had very minor damage to its bumper. The bottom portion of the central section had been pushed in about one inch or so. Nothing else. Our car had a small dent in the front hood.

Very soon two efficient Swiss policemen (one English-speaking) were filling out the endless paperwork. My deceased mother's maiden name was required. Pronounced guilty by one of the policemen who phoned a local judge to determine my fate, I hoped for a warning. No such luck. I was assessed a hefty 280 Sfr. (\$237) fine, payable immediately. As I had only 210 Sfr. I was escorted to the nearest bank where one of the policemen accompanied me inside. We both stood in line and within seconds of the bank making the currency exchange, the remaining 70 Sfr. were safely in the hands of the Swiss police.

Safe motoring in Switzerland.— John Herbert

The fourth call, to a house only three blocks away (but in the neighboring village of Seelach), paid off. It was arranged for us to visit the 12-unit apartment and meet the owner.

SALZBURG EXCURSION

Continued from page 1

From puddle jumping. And umbrella spikes. And dripping, morose tourists.

Our standard antidote to any such claustrophobia is to scan the guide books for some neat, accessible place that we've never been before...and go visit.

So when our Frommer's guide said that Badgastein was Austria's premiere spa town, had a gorgeous setting in one of the most beautiful spots in all of Austria and was just 90 minutes away by train, we pulled out our European East Flexipasses (10 days for \$299) and jumped on the 11:08 Intercity, direction Innsbruck, for the 62-mile ride.

The journey through the Salzach Valley was simply stunning and probably worth the trip itself. Past classic fairy tale Austrian villages with their onion-topped churches. Alongside green meadows filled with grazing sheep and cows. Through forests thick with aspen and pine. Hey, this was the *Sound of Music*, *Heidi* and *Ricola* all rolled up in one convenient package!

At Scharzach the train headed south and started a breathtaking climb that launched us into the clouds and the trees on the north slope of the Tauern massif until suddenly at 3,500 ft. we were like two hovering hawks peering down on our destination...the Michelin two-star town of Badgastein.

As we left the station and turned left in search of a center, the town appeared to be all about ski lifts, *Sesselbahnen* and snow plows. But the tourist office at the bottom of Kaiser Franz Josef Strasse began to give us the flavor of what was to come. For, besides the accommodations brochures (in case we needed to stay) and winter sports info, there was a useful little booklet to get us in the right mood called the *Scientific Principles of the Health and Treatments of Badgastein!*

A couple of minutes later we also discovered why all the guidebooks were breathing so heavily about this place.

A mountainside covered with dramatically perched homes and hotels. A main square dissected and undermined by a roaring waterfall and a 360 degree vista of some of the

finest scenery we've ever witnessed.

This waterfall, the Gasteiner Ache, is the real clue to Badgastein's success and the reason royalty and aristocrats have been journeying to this spot for centuries.

It appears that a certain Frederick, Duke of Styria, started the craze back in the 15th century when he came to Badgastein looking for treatment for a gangrenous injury. The waters of the Ache healed the wound. The Duke was deliriously happy. And the world has been beating a path there ever since. For curing. And touring. And skiing. And such.

After admiring the frothing Ache — just looking at these waters makes you feel better — studying the plaques celebrating visits by such cultural biggies as Mozart, Schiller, Goethe and the like, and poking our noses into the charming but now disused 15th century St. Nicholas Church, we found ourselves quite serendipitously at the start of the Kaiser Wilhelm Promenade...a beautifully prepared and manicured hiking path through a forest of pines, punctuated by bird boxes, squirrel crossings, viewing decks...and as always sensational vistas. This was a path made for walking.

It was no lonesome trail, however. Striders of all ages and outfits marched along and there was much nodding and *Grüß Gott*-ing (hi, there). But walking in Austria is a pretty serious business and our sneakers, jeans and jackets were pretty poor substitutes for the *Lederhosen*, hiking boots, *Alpen Stock* and knapsacks of our co-walkers.

After some 30 minutes of Kaiser Wilhelm Promenading, we reached a small village anchored by a hotel and a few shops and faced a critical decision. Should we retrace our steps to Badgastein and eat, drink and sight-see before taking a train back to Salzburg...or was there still enough time to take the trail to Bad Hofgastein, a one-star Michelin site some seven miles away.

Hikers and locals questioned about the state of the trail and the time needed to walk it differed wildly. And the threatening sky and a 4:30 appointment with a return train had us in a serious quandary. In the end, the sights, the sounds and splendid mountain scenery won out and we set off for Bad Hofgastein with one eye on the weather and the other on our watches.

The Gasteiner Hohenweg, for this was the official name of our new trail, turned out to be simply world-class. *Fabelhaft. Wunderbar. Ausgezeichnet.* Take your pick.

It was a trail too, that anyone in reasonable shape could quite easily navigate.

There were, to begin with, very few ascents or descents, always important criteria for our kind of hiking. And it was well marked throughout its length.

In the course of the three hours it took to reach Bad Hofgastein, we traversed fields and woods. Hugged hillsides grazed by sheep, cows, goats and deer. Passed pretty little *Gasthöfe* advertising luncheons of goulash and venison. Walked under waterfalls. Through isolated farmsteads. And clambered over stiles.

There were fellow hikers to nod or *Grüß Gott* to. Benches or tree trunks to relax on. And even the occasional porta-john.

It was therefore with a bit of sadness (tinged with relief that the weather had cooperated) that we reached the trail's end and turned down into the pretty little city of Bad Hofgastein.

With no time to explore — and having missed the bus to the station — we managed to find a spare taxi and caught the train to Salzburg with only seconds to spare.

This was a day to remember, however. A super train ride. A visit to two great spa towns. And a hike through some of Austria's most remarkable scenery.

Excursion Notes:


Holliday/Fischer recommend allowing about five hours for the seven to eight mile walk in order to spend more quality time in the spa towns, to relax at a farm or *Gasthof* along the trail - and above all, to enjoy the splendid views.

Trains leave Salzburg station for Badgastein at 07:57, 09:08, and 11:08 and return to Salzburg at 15:40 and 17:40.

Salzburg Hotels:

Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse, A-5020 Salzburg 35, phone 0662/849274, fax 0662/843728-8, doubles 1050 AS (\$102).

Hotel Trumer Stube, Bergstrasse 6, A-5020 Salzburg, phone 0662/87 47 68, fax 0662/87 43 26, doubles about \$95-\$175.

For further information about Badgastein, including hotel recommendations, we refer you to the March, 1993, issue of *Gemütlichkeit*. 

READERS' FORUM

Swiss Tourist Chief Replies

Under the headline *Swiss Deals Afoot?*, your November issue contained a by-line primarily touching on my country's expensive hotel rates, our dramatic decline in overnights and the need for discounts, special deals and price-cutting.

Tourism, as you correctly mention, is indeed big business in Switzerland and has been for more than 100 years. In 1994, a total of 20.1 million overnights were recorded in our hotels by guests from abroad who spent approximately 11 billion US dollars.

The numbers are off this year (1995) but way below the 30% mentioned in your article. I am enclosing the latest statistics which show an increase (!) for the month of October of 3.1% for guests from abroad (incidentally, the same increase was recorded for American travelers) and a cumulative decrease for the period of January through October of 7.1% for guests from abroad and 7.3% for visitors from the United States.

The main reason for the decline is undoubtedly a factor which we cannot influence: the increasing strength of the Swiss franc versus most currencies. Against the U.S. dollar, it reached some all-time highs this year and, during the last 12 months, the dollar lost almost 15% of its value in comparison to the Swiss franc accounting for an "automatic" 15% increase for all services purchased by an American visitor.

As you know from your travels to my country, Switzerland has a very high standard of living with above-average wages and salaries, plus a well-maintained touristic infrastructure which is one of the best in the world. The Swiss tourism and hotel industry is, therefore, faced with rather high "fixed costs" (labor, rent, capital improvements, etc.) which limit its flexibility for substantial discounts. However, I would like to point out that one can enjoy Switzerland's

combination of scenic beauty and its many attractions at very affordable prices by observing some general guidelines such as:

- Selecting accommodations outside the "big cities" and choosing from the thousands of country inns and three-star hotels which provide a clean, safe and hospitable environment. As you know, we have a public transportation system which is punctual, modern and comfortable, linking every hamlet, village and vacation resort with our major cities.

- Ordering the "Special of the Day" in Swiss restaurants known as the *Tagesteller* or *Plat du Jour*: a full meal that costs from \$15-\$25, seldom more, or enjoying lunch in the cafeteria of one of the larger department stores at approximately \$10 per person.

- Arranging for your rental car prior to leaving the United States or taking advantage of one of the special passes sold in the U.S. for the use of the Swiss Travel System (trains, busses, lake steamers, etc.)

We at **Switzerland Tourism** can provide your readers with detailed information about cost controlled travel in Switzerland. In this context, I appreciate your own efforts in offering your readers information on substantial discounts off rack-rates, and I will make sure that we keep you abreast of any new hotel packages with attractive prices for visitors from the United States.

Pricing certainly plays a major role when people decide on where to go on their next vacation. However, I feel that the security, stability, quality of products, scenic beauty, cultural variety and broad infrastructure which Switzerland offers, combined with our new approach to marketing and branding, will help us remain one of the top five European destinations for visitors from the USA.

Thank you for all the support we get from the readers of *Gemütlichkeit*.

Eric Buhlmann
Director USA West
Switzerland Tourism

Recommends Hotel Guide

I have been subscribing to your newsletter since spring and am enjoying it immensely. You really do cater to the German speaking travel world!

Here is a tip for your readers and especially for your German speaking/reading ones. There is a hotel and restaurant guide published by the VARTA battery company of Germany which is worth its weight in gold. The book contains 1048 pages of hotel and restaurant listings, maps of Germany and even city centers.

There is a list of the "chains" such as Hyatt, Arabella, etc. if one wishes to book something in those places. The little hotels in out of the way places are featured. For example, in Eisenach I stayed at the **Sophien Hotel** and **Pension Klostergarten** this summer and ate at the **Hotel Kaiserhof** in the city center. All were recommended and all were very good. The Pension Klostergarten lies on the outskirts of town, up a hill, and is very quiet. All rooms are newly decorated and have lovely bathrooms. Friendly service. A single room with breakfast was \$52.

I can also recommend the **Parkhotel Bilm** in Sehnde, a suburb near Hannover. The hotel is a former villa, is very comfortable, has a swimming pool and a sauna in the basement, and lies in a very quiet rural area. Breakfast and a warm supper are included in the price. Single rooms (small) from 119-145 DM (\$81-\$99).

I found these places in the VARTA guide. It costs about \$40 and can be found more easily in Germany. Once you catch on to the "shorthand" and symbols used in the book, you have an invaluable resource for travel in Germany.

One more point: this summer I was in the former East Germany after an absence of about nine years. This is the area to visit now before other tourists find it. I recommend Sachsen and Thuringen, especially Dresden and the so-called Luther areas. Next year will be a Luther year, so it is best to go before all the summer crowds.

Not to be missed: the Wartburg in Eisenach, but be sure to take the first or second tour of the day. After that

the place is overrun. The Wartburg is the second most visited castle in Germany.

Rosalie Streng, Des Plaines, IL

Hotels In Germany

On August 7, 1995 my wife and I met some friends for lunch in Salzburg. Late in the day they asked us about where they should spend the night. Since we were close to Berchtesgaden, we suggested they might like the area and they could tour some of the local sights the next day.

We drove to Berchtesgaden, and as we knew the quality of the **Hotel Geiger**, we went there. Even though it was the peak summer tourist time and we had no advanced reservation, we were able to obtain three rooms. The evening dinner was also excellent and our friends enjoyed the hotel so much they stayed a second night (my wife and I continued to Graz where I had some business). Hugo Geiger was greeting all the guests and was very cordial and relaxed. I hope son Stefan can carry on the tradition established by the father.

We also stayed at **Hollander Hof** in Heidelberg in May and enjoyed the hotel and central location. On August 4, 1995, we drove up to Heidelberg to see the performance of *The Student Prince* at the castle - it was a beautiful evening and almost a sellout and we purchased our tickets an hour before the performance began.

Edward Raethner, Budapest

Austrian Country Hotel

During a recent business trip to Austria, I "stumbled upon" a delightful hotel worthy of consideration by your readers — the **Oberndorfer Seegasthof**, in Attersee (Hauptstrasse 18, A-4864, tel. 76 66/364-0, fax 76 66/36 491, doubles \$140 to \$242).

Located on the northwest edge of the Attersee, it is perfectly situated for an overnight stay for those passing through between Salzburg and Vienna...or, preferably, for a resort vacation. The lake and mountain views are eye-popping; the hospitality provided by innkeeper Josef Oberndorfer and family (an 84-year, three generation tradition!) is superb; and the accommodations are pleasant, reasonably priced and convenient.

The menu at the hotels restaurant provides the frosting on the cake—it is simply the best food I encountered anywhere in the area. (The fresh lake trout is out of this world—worth a trip to Attersee for that alone!)

The Oberndorfers work hard to provide a perfect experience for their guests. And, from my perspective, they have succeeded. Your readers are advised to see for themselves.

Frederick W Hoffman, Dearborn MI 

EUROPE TRAVEL BRIEFS

Travel On-line

Easily the best travel site we've found on the Internet is **Hotel Anywhere!** (<http://www.earthlink.net/~hotelanywhere/>).

This grid has links to just about everything travel related on the Internet, interlinking over 18,000 separate travel related web sites and growing by roughly 300 - 500 new links per week. Browsers can search by type (airline, hotel group, travel magazine) or by geographic area.

Included in Hotel Anywhere!'s table of contents are:

- Direct on-line reservations search and booking tools.
- Agents (including some 1200 adventure travel specialists and tour operators.)
- Airlines (links to some 240 web sites.)
- Auto rentals, motorcoaches, and RV's (links to over 40 web sites)
- Cruise lines (links to over 100 web sites)
- Golf (links to over 50 web sites.)
- Lodging chains and groups (links to over 80 web sites)
- On-line travel magazines (links to over 100)
- Skiing (links to over 45 web sites)
- Tools for travellers
- Travel related USENET News-groups (9 active)
- Other travel directories and travel information (over 400 sites)

The Hotel Anywhere! pages are largely free of graphics making searches relatively quick.

Other sites of interest include:

•**The Austrian Tourist Office** (USA): <http://www.anto.com/>

•**The Austrian Tourist Office** (Austria): <http://www.austria-info.at/index.html>

• Those looking for a Munich hotel room should try the hotel page of the **Munich Tourist Office's** web site: <http://www.netplace.com/netplace/hotels/hotels.html>.

Of the two Austria web sites, the most interesting and useful seemed to be the Austria-based one. We wished, however, for a complete listing of hotels for the various cities and/or provinces, similar to that provided by Mörbisch on the Neusiedlersee.

'96 River Cruise Fares

This year **KD River Cruises of Europe** will operate eight-day cruises in both directions between Nürnberg and Budapest or Nürnberg and Vienna, and seven-day cruises between Nürnberg and Vienna. The eight-day cruises are aboard the 104-passenger Heinrich Heine, the seven day cruises on the 106-passenger Wilhelm Tell. The sailing season runs from mid-May to mid-October and departures are weekly.

Fares for the eight-day cruises range from \$1,120 to \$1,425 in May and from \$1,260 to \$1,605 in July; fares during the rest of the season are \$1,400 to \$1,780 and suites are \$355 to \$445 higher, depending on departure date. May fares for the seven-day cruises are \$905 to \$955, July fares range from \$1,020 to \$1,120 and fares on all other dates are \$1,130 to \$1,245.

All cruises include the Main-Danube Canal which was completed late in 1992 and is the culmination of 1200-year dream of an inland waterway from the North Sea to the Black Sea.

The eight-day cruises to or from Budapest take in four countries — Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary — and call at three national capitals: Budapest, Bratislava and Vienna.

Ports in Germany include Regensburg, Kelheim, Straubing and Passau.

Austrian ports in addition to Vienna are Krems, Melk, and Linz.

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 7

impossible to summon.

Now you've heard the small stuff. How about some big stuff?

About 7:15 p.m. on our first night in the hotel, while dressing for dinner after an hour's walk along the beach, a soapy Liz was in the shower when suddenly the water went off.

After a couple of minutes of fiddling with faucets I called my new pals at "hotel services" and was told there would be no water for our room (and several others) until about 9:00 p.m. "There was a burst pipe this afternoon, sir, and the repair was scheduled for this time. You should have been informed."

Yes, we should have been informed, but we were not. No phone message, no note under the door.

I asked for another room but was told the hotel was full. When an assistant manager offered to bring us bottles of Evian I told him it was not a matter of thirst but of bathing. At that point the assistant manager ran out of ideas. I had one for him, how about 50% off the room charge? He agreed so quickly I am sorry I didn't ask for more.

Somehow we muddled through and had a decent dinner.

The only other glitch was a phantom, un-itemized \$26 mini-bar charge on the final bill. I protested we had had only one drink and two Perriers. The cashier offered no documentation and quickly voided the charges. (ISB calls it an "honor bar." I guess that means guests have to rely on ISB's honor not to overcharge.)

One reason for the superior service in Europe's finest hotels is sheer size. The Inn at Spanish Bay has 270 rooms; Les Sources Des Alpes has 22, the Grüner Baum 90, Brenner's Park 100, the Beau-Rivage Palace 109 and the Victoria Jungfrau 209. A key to the level of service in any hotel is the ratio of employees to guests. In Europe that ratio is typically about two to one — two employees for each guest and sometimes as many as three to one. A tiny but exquisite hotel we reviewed several years ago, the **Rosalp** in Verbier, Switzerland, boasted 56 employees for nine rooms. The Pebble Beach

corporation's Office of Human Resources says about 500 employees are assigned to The Inn at Spanish Bay. Assuming 400 guests in 270 rooms that's one and a quarter employees for each guest.

But a more important element than the quantity is quality. Employees in Europe's top hotels — bartenders, desk clerks, concierge staff, waiters — are well-trained, closely supervised and held to a high standard. They often work in the same hotel for decades. They are viewed by their customers — and themselves — as craftsmen (and women). My guess is that most of The Inn at Spanish Bay's pleasant, young employees have little formal training and their jobs are, for the most part, brief stops on the way to somewhere else.

How much did it cost? For our midweek package, probably a little less than an off-season deal at any of the European hotels mentioned earlier. For about \$430, not including breakfast, we got two nights in a standard double room plus vouchers good for free bike rental for a day, a half-hour massage and tickets to the fabulous Monterey Bay Aquarium. Normally, the ISB's doubles go for \$375 per night plus tax and the \$17 gratuity.

Except for the water fiasco, we enjoyed our short visit to The Inn at Spanish Bay. Not a single employee was unpleasant; some were just a little overmatched. We will go back. But when we return to Europe we will appreciate all the more those little two and three day splurges at the likes of the Beau Rivage Palace, the Brenner's Park and the Victoria Jungfrau. ☒

TRAVEL BRIEFS

Continued from page 7

Both the Heinrich Heine, built in 1991, and the Wilhelm Tell, built in 1987, accommodate passengers in twin-bedded cabins facing the river with private bathroom facilities, TV, radio and telephone. Dining rooms allow single meal seatings and each ship also has a bar, observation lounge, sundeck and sauna. The Heinrich Heine has an outdoor

swimming pool.

Book with a travel agent or KD River Cruises of Europe, 2500 Westchester Av., Purchase, NY 10577, phone 914-696-3600 or 800-346-6525 from eastern U.S.; and 323 Geary, San Francisco CA 94102, phone 415-92-8817 or 800-858-8587 from the West, including Texas, Alaska and Hawaii. ☒

TRAVELERS' DIGEST

Eric Weinberger suggests the following in a December 17, 1995, *New York Times* story on St. Moritz:

- **Hotel Languard**, 14 Via Veglia, St. Moritz-Dorf, phone 82/33137, fax 82/34546. Doubles \$212 low season, \$275 high season.

- **Hotel Belvedere**, 42 Via del Bagn, St. Moritz-Dorf, phone 82/33905, fax 82/39492. Doubles are \$177 low season, \$212 high season.

- **Hotel Sonne** in St. Moritz-Bad, 11 Via Sela, phone 82/30362, fax 82/36090. Doubles \$133 in low season, \$150 high season.

- **Restaurant Radi**, Piazza dal Rosatch, St. Moritz-Bad, phone 82/33022. Popular with locals. A la carte dinners for two are about \$45 to \$55, half a bottle of house wine about \$12.

- **Central Bistro and Grill**, 6 Via del Bagn, St. Moritz-Bad, phone 82/36224.

A *Santa Barbara News Press* story on Berlin by Everett Potter suggests...

- A visit to the Sony and Daimler-Benz-sponsored **Info Box** in the former no-man's land between East and West Berlin to see "architectural models, filmed presentations, computer games and an interactive data bank" all relating to the massive building project taking place in the 17 surrounding acres. Info Box, Leipziger Platz 21, phone 30/22 66 240.

- The **flea market** held Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., in Berlin's Tiergarten at Strasse des 17 Juni, featuring "some of the best antiques, bric-a-brac and collectibles in the city," including old Leica cameras and 1930s fashion magazines.

- The **Kunst and Nostalgemarkt an der Museuminsel** market held Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Am Zeughaus, beside the canal near the Pergamon Museum. This market is adjacent to the indoor **Berliner Antik and Flohmarkt**, open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily except Tuesdays in Am Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse.

- **Tacheles**, a former department store turned alternative art center, at Oranienburger Strasse 53-54, phone 30/282 3130. Nearby is **VEB OZ** (Auguststrasse 93), a trendy, seedy bar noted for its furniture, notably seats removed from Trabant automobiles.

- Use of the Berlin **WelcomeCard**, good for two days travel on public transport and three days of reduced admissions at museums and major attractions. Cost: 29 DM (\$20). ☒