

- Car Rental Questions
- Country Hotel of the Month
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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

March 29, 1996

**Passport Achieved**

For those of you who have followed my sorry little passport saga, I finally have one. In obtaining it I learned a lesson; don't wait until the last minute. We missed New Year's Eve in Vienna because I kept putting it off. The day you decide you need a passport in a hurry, you may, as I did last December, find your government has shut down and simply isn't issuing them. And even if they are open, your local passport office wants an extra \$30 — on top of the regular \$55 fee — to give you one on short notice.

**Ugly Americans?**

Last month, contributing editor, Bruce Woelfel, took a swipe at the Hamburg restaurant, **Peter Lembke**. He wrote that he and his wife, Sally, got the "cold shoulder" from a waiter who was indifferent to their requests. Bruce praised the restaurant's decor but judged the prices too high in relation to the quality of the food. He concluded by saying the Lembcke's attitude toward tourists needs a "major tune-up."

Now we hear from Mrs. Paul Wildman, a subscriber and native of Germany who lives with her husband in San Francisco. She writes.

*When reading last month's article on Hamburg restaurants, I was partly amused and partly surprised at the writer's review of Peter Lembcke restaurant. Amused, because any German, Parisian, Swede and other Northern European who knows typical American travelers, could have predicted the scene at Peter Lembcke's. Surprised, because it still remains a riddle to Northern Europeans - as well as fashionable Romans - why Ameri-*

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## OKTOBERFEST

*Fischer/Holliday have toured breweries in Belgium, pounded 'tinnies' in Australia, tasted ale with Trappist monks, sipped wine from the Napa Valley to Würzburg and tippled Scotch whiskey all over Scotland but until recently had never been to Munich's famed Oktoberfest. Here is their report.*

**I**t was a scene we never expected to witness: Munich's annual Oktoberfest. Frankly, the thought of 70 acres of howling revelers regularly augmented by arriving bus loads of amateur drinkers never had much appeal. An event better contemplated than experienced.

Then came the autumn of 1995 and a set of circumstances that found us in

*Country Hotel of the Month*

### Hegers Parkhotel Flora Schluchsee, Germany

**W**e arrived without a reservation at this resort hotel in the southern Black Forest, 47 km (30 miles) southeast of Freiburg im Breisgau. The 34-room Flora is within sight of the lake the town is named after. It is the sort of place Germans go to for long stays; the kind of hotel where guests can leave their shoes outside the doors to their rooms for overnight cleaning.

We first tried the Adler in Häusern (66 km/41 miles northeast of Basel) which has a Michelin one-

Munich — on opening day of Oktoberfest. Always ready to 'seize the day', as the saying goes, and never ones to miss a party, we quickly put aside our preconceived notions, shed our pretense of superiority and dove into the festivities with abandon.

Each year, on the first day — this year it's September 21 (always late in September in deference to the weather) — a small group of about 1,000 *Biermeisters*, local dignitaries and work-

ers make their way through the city streets to Theresienwiese, the festival grounds. The Lord Mayor of Munich swings his big wooden mallet in the air to drive a brass tap into a large wooden beer barrel and proclaims with a shout, *O'zapft ist!*, the beer is tapped.

But the best is yet to come.

The second day begins with another parade and this is one to outshine all others. Here, there or anywhere.

At 10 a.m. a long procession of colorful floats, horse-drawn beer drays, platoons of lederhosen-clad huntsmen, marching bands, families in traditional dress from the villages of Upper Bavaria, Lower Bavaria, even Austria, Switzerland and Italy, thoroughbred horses and goats and cows and oxen, all pass the reviewing stand in one *flaggen-twirling, trommel-bashing, trompeten-blassenden* wave after another.

There are seven viewing stands with reserved seats available for 59 DM (\$42.14), but most people watch from the street, standing on benches, mailboxes and planters, in

*Continued on page 3...*

star restaurant. The woman at reception gave a curt, unsmiling *nein* to our inquiry about the availability of a room. No elaboration beyond that; no "sorry, this is Easter weekend" or "perhaps you should try the hotel such and such." Just "no."

The welcome at the Flora was much different. After a short consultation with her reservation book, the young woman at reception offered a choice between two rooms, which she would show us if we wished. One was 148 DM (\$102), the other, which we

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## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

cans, traveling in Europe, have not caught on with dress code, local customs, distinction between tourist spots and non-tourist spots, as well as overall etiquette. The writer was taken aback by the waiter's attitude and indifference towards his wishes and his mere existence as a customer at all, it seems.

First of all, elegant Peter Lembcke is not a typical tourist spot and, thus, does require - if only in unwritten terms because of today's "political correctness" rules - that customers do wear elegant clothes and no typical American tourist attire; in other words, no windbreakers, no hiking shoes, no open-neck shirts for men, and certainly no rucksacks!

Secondly, the customers should have common sense and notice at entering a restaurant whether he or she 'fits in' given the atmosphere of the place. Americans, for some unknown reason, seem to be oblivious to this and, thus, ask for it when treated shabbily.

The writer's attitude: Peter Lembcke "needs a major tune-up" in its attitude towards tourists is therefore totally unwarranted and unfortunately, typical for the majority of Americans traveling abroad. The way it should be is quite the opposite, i.e., the attitude of the writer "needs a major tune-up" towards customs in other lands! After all: When in Rome...!

(Mrs. Wildman goes on in her letter to offer her services as a certified German language instructor to San Francisco Bay Area readers. She can be reached at 415-921-3489).

Mrs. Wildman also phoned me at *Gemütlichkeit* and enlarged upon the theme of her letter, saying that most northern Germans are "cool" to Americans and the treatment the Woelfels received at Peter Lembcke would be the same at other "elegant" restaurants in the north of Germany.

The letter is a little disturbing. It implies Americans are blundering, under-dressed, insensitive boobs incurring the haughty disdain of sophisticated Europeans. But what do you think? What have your experiences been — particularly in northern Germany? Please let me know by letter or fax.

In the meantime we ought to tie up a couple of loose ends regarding Bruce Woelfel and the restaurant, Peter Lembcke.

First, of all Bruce wasn't dressed in hiking shoes or carrying a rucksack. He was wearing a sportcoat, no tie. Sally was appropriately dressed. Bruce and Sally Woelfel are hardly rubes; both have doctoral degrees and are retired college professors.

Now, how about the "elegant" Peter Lembcke? It gets no stars from Michelin for its cuisine but does rate two crossed forks and spoons, denoting "comfortable," below the three higher categories; "Luxury in the traditional style," "Top class comfort" and "Very comfortable."

The English version of Europe's respected *Gault Millau* guide for Germany has this to say about Peter Lembcke:

*The cuisine of this restaurant plods along old, well-worn paths without looking either to the right or left. Time-tested products prepared without motivation result in pure boredom. For excitement, we suggest the chef take a look at the prices of his competition. Who's paying 71 DM (\$49) for turbot or a 110 DM (\$76) for 56 grams of caviar anymore? And that's not all—the side dishes all cost extra! There isn't a more expensive restaurant in Germany. But we'd gladly pay the extra five marks for those memorable fried potatoes again!*

### Swiss Rental Resource

Lately, *Gemütlichkeit* has placed more emphasis on apartment, condo and house rental as a way of beating the high cost of hotels, particularly in Switzerland, where the strength of the franc makes prices very high for North Americans. Re-

cently I came across a great resource for anyone considering such accommodations in the French-speaking regions of Switzerland.

The booklet *Vacances a la Campagne* (Country Holidays) is just what you need. Covering most of southwest Switzerland, including the Vaud, the Jura, Neuchâtel and parts of Fribourg and the Valais, the 52-page book gives details and an exterior photo of more than 150 furnished rentals. The per week prices range from 100 Sfr. (\$87) for a "simple mountain pasture chalet" with five rooms including kitchen and WC in Buttes (southwestern corner of Neuchâtel), to 850 Sfr (\$740) for a villa with six beds in Les Charbonnières on the west shore of Lake Neuchâtel.


Want to spend a week in the Lake Geneva area but are discouraged by hotel prices that start at about 160 Sfr. (\$139) per night for a simple two or three-star hotel in Geneva, Lausanne or Montreux? How about a three-room apartment for 560 Sfr. (\$479) per week in the town of Puidoux, in the hills above the lake between Montreux and Vevey? Or, in Echichens, just outside Morges, a cottage for 450 Sfr. (\$385) per week.

Prices listed are net and include such charges as water, gas, electricity, heating and taxes. A 30% deposit confirms reservations and bedding is included in the price. Rentals are to be cleaned by departing renters or there is a cleaning charge of 60 Sfr. (\$51).

To book, simply phone or write the property owner listed under your chosen rental unit.

If the Switzerland Tourism offices in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles don't have *Vacances a la Campagne* contact Fédération du Tourisme Rural de Suisse Romande, p.a. Office du Tourisme, CH-1530 Payerne, Switzerland, phone 037/616161, fax 037/617126.

### I'm Outa Here

I'm taking my shiny new passport with the lousy photo and heading for the mountains of Austria. See you next month. — RHB 

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## GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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%

## OKTOBERFEST

Continued from page 1

crowds two to three deep all along the route. Appropriately costumed volunteers pass out wreaths of hops to the spectators and an overall feeling of good-natured jollity prevails.

An estimated 10,000 people take part in the four-mile long procession as it makes its way from Maximilianstrasse through the streets of the city center and on to the festival grounds. At Theresienwiese, an astonishing sight awaits the first time visitor: wide midways lined with about a dozen giant beer tents, 70-plus hair-raising carnival rides, a giant eight-loop roller coaster and the biggest ferris wheel we've ever seen, all intermingled with 700-odd food stalls, sideshows and games of skill.

The scene pulsates with humanity, the composition of which varies according to the time of day. During the daylight hours a family mood prevails, in the evening, when the serious drinking begins, it's strictly adults only.

The beer 'tents' are operated exclusively by Munich's six remaining breweries: Löwenbrau, Paulaner, Hacker-Pschorr, Späten, Hofbrau and Augustiner. The seating capacity of these temporary wood and canvas beer halls varies from 2,300 to 8,900, the smallest being only the size of one American football field; the others' sizes defy credibility. Each takes an average of six weeks and 1.2 million Deutsche marks (\$827,562) to construct...and presumably destruct.

The individual tents are decorated in their own style but garlands and wreaths of dried hops along with lots of blue and white Bavarian flags always seem to figure prominently in the plan. Long wooden tables are arranged in rows around a raised stand in the center where the oompah brass band leads the assembled thousands in rousing drinking songs, glass clinking toasts and general sing-alongs. Still, in spite of the huge amounts of alcohol consumed the atmosphere is one of high-spirited fun and anyone dangerously inebriated is quickly dealt with by the well-organized security force.

Ask a Münchener what he or she thinks of the Oktoberfest and the response is usually cynical; a big fuss, just for tourists, etc. But wait a bit and they'll go on to confess to an annual visit, properly attired in lederhosen and dirndl.

But there are indeed many tourists among the merry-makers, making the Fest at times look like a beery United Nations, with youthful Australians dressed in matching t-shirts with slogans like 'Down Under Drinkers' leading the most raucous list.

In spite of the crowds, however, with a little patience it's always possible to find a seat, just squeeze into a tight corner and get a conversation started in any combination of hand waving and phrase-book language that's necessary. Before you know it, every time the band launches into *Ein prosit, ein prosit, Der Gemütlichkeit* you'll be hoisting your mug like a veteran.

The party actually began almost 186 years ago in October, 1810, when a certain noncommissioned officer in the Bavarian National Guard came up with the idea of a horse race to celebrate the marriage of Crown Prince Ludwig (eventually King Ludwig I, not the mad one) and Princess Therese von Sachsen-Hildburghausen. The prince's father, Maximilian I, who had recently been elevated from prince to king by Napoleon, seized on the plan as a way to rev up enthusiasm for the new-found nationalism then sweeping the country. The event was held on a nearby meadow later named Theresienwiese — or simply *die Wies'n* — where it still takes place today.

The horse race and the ensuing celebratory excitement was such a success the event has been repeated annually ever since with only an occasional time-out for war, pestilence and/or inflation — the cost of a mug went up to 21,000,000 DM's in the 1920s!

(Sadly, the marriage was not a success, in spite of its auspicious beginning. Ludwig had a roving eye and after a couple of decades of philandering finally ran off with an Irish dancer.)

Much to our surprise, we thoroughly enjoyed the entire scene...and the festbeers...and it's not beyond the realm of possibility that come the 21st of September, 1996, we might again be on *die Wies'n*. *Prosit!*

### Food and Drink

Munich and beer are practically synonymous. Fertile farm land for the growing of barley and hops, pure Alpine water and icy caves for storage made the region perfect for the brewing of beer from the beginning.

The monks who founded Munich — or Mönch, as it was then — in the 1100s were very fond of their beer. Solid food was forbidden during periods of fast but not beer.

As a matter of fact, there were all sorts of religious restrictions for the monks to endure. One prohibited the production of beer between April and September. So in March, just before the deadline, the brothers brewed large quantities of a dark, heavily malted drink for consumption in October, sowing the seeds for the Oktoberfest several centuries later.

In Germany, where 40% of the world's breweries are located, the production of all beer is still controlled by *Reinheitsgebot*, the German Pure Beer Law of 1516, which limits the ingredients to yeast, hops, malted barley and water. Period. No chemicals, no preservatives, no added sugars or flavorings, no substitute grains. And no pasteurization. Little wonder the results are so tasty.

German beer has a reputation of being exceptionally potent, sort of a European version of white lightning, but that fame is largely undeserved. Ninety percent of the beers produced in Germany are only 4.5-5% alcohol by volume, more or less what we're used to in the U.S. The danger lies in the quantity not the content!

Most breweries serve only two styles of beer during the Oktoberfest. The traditional *Wies'n Märzen* is a dark, malty beer, while the currently more popular light-colored *Helles* is a sparkling, golden amber lager with a thick two-inch head.

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## OKTOBERFEST

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The beer comes in a heavy, glass one-liter (approximately one quart) mug called a *Maß Krug* that's distributed by dirndl-dressed waitresses who can carry up to twelve at one time, six in each hand! The trick apparently has to do with elbows digging into waistlines but you'll have enough trouble just picking up one. The correct way to hold a *Maß* is to slide your hand through the handle and grip the glass itself...not the handle.

A liter in 1995 cost 10.40 DM (\$7.42) and that's essentially one-size-fits-all, there are no smaller glasses. Some tents also offer alcohol-free beer at the same price.

The hard-working, good-natured waitresses are also purveyors of food. For nibblers there are the famous *Radi* (red or white radishes) and *Brez'n*, big, soft pretzels. Corn on the cob is sold by strolling concessionaires who also happily peddle t-shirts, hats and schmaltzy memorabilia of every kind.

Larger appetites can be sated with plates of grilled sausage and sauerkraut or roast chicken with potato salad. Traditional favorites include *Wies'n-Hendl am Spieß gebraten*, half a rotisserie chicken for 14.50 DM (\$10) and *Nürnberger Würst vom Rost mit Kraut*, little grilled sausages simmered with bay leaf, caraway seed and black peppercorns with sauerkraut on the side for 10 DM (\$6.90).

*Für den großen Hunger* — for the even bigger hunger — full meals of roast turkey, pork and duck are available for 21 to 32 DM (\$14.50-\$22).

Outside on the midway, there's even more food to tempt Fest goers. Mackerel grilled over charcoal, sausage in endless guises, herring on onion rolls, meatballs, more pretzels and *Lebkuchen*, the traditional Oktoberfest giant gingerbread hearts bearing tender sayings like 'Be mine forever' or 'True Love.' Best of all, though, is the delicious aroma of almonds roasting. Buy a bag to munch on the way home.

At the first Oktoberfest in 1810 the populace only managed to down 14,000 liters of beer, in 1995 some 840,000 liters disappeared on the first weekend alone, a new record. And by festival's end the number of whole oxen, chickens, pigs and ducks consumed are enough to make a vegetarian out of anyone!

### Tips and Advice

- **Future Oktoberfest dates**

September 21-October 6, 1996

September 20-October 5, 1997

- **Reserve a hotel room well in advance.** Hotels in Munich are often booked a year ahead of time.

- **Use public transportation.** Don't even consider driving; there's no parking anywhere in the vicinity of the Oktoberfest and it's risky to drive after even a single beer.

The city's public transportation system is excellent: safe, reliable, clean and cheap. A single ticket costs just 3.30 DM (\$2.28) but a mere 12 DM (\$8.28) buys a *Partner Tageskarte* which allows two adults, three kids and a dog (really!) unlimited use of the system for 24 hours. Single travelers can buy a *Streifen*, a strip of 10 tickets, for 13 DM (\$9).

To reach the Fest by subway, take the U-Bahn: Lines U3 and U6 to Goetheplatz or Poccistrasse or U4 and U5 to Messegelände or Theresienwiese. It's also possible to go by S-Bahn, tram, bus, taxi or even by foot.

- **Festival hours.** The Fest opens at 10:00 a.m. Monday-Saturday and at 9:00 a.m. on Sundays. Some tents close as early as 10:45 p.m., others stay open until 12:30 a.m. For a relatively calm look at the action, go at lunchtime. To sample the total experience, arrive on the grounds late in the afternoon and stake out a seat for the evening. You can stay as long as you want.

- **Don't try to steal the mugs.** Security is heavy and so are the fines!

- **The 1996 Oktoberfest brochure** provides specifics about dates, times, tickets to special events and the like. It will be available in July from the German National Tourist Office in

New York 212-661-7200 or in Los Angeles 310-575-9799.

- **Recommended reading.** *The Beer Drinker's Guide to Munich* by Larry Hawthorne, Freizeit Publishers. An interesting book that not only includes useful information about the Oktoberfest but also about 40 of Munich's best beer gardens, beer halls and beer pubs.

### Recommended Hotels

(Listed in order of preference)

Expensive

**Hotel Excelsior**, Schuetzenstr. 11, Munich 2, phone 089/55 13 70, fax 089/55 13 71 21.

**Rating:** EXCELLENT 17/20

**Hotel Prinzregent**, Ismaninger Str. 42 - 44, Munich 80, phone 089/4 16 05-0, fax 089/41 60 54 66.

**Rating:** EXCELLENT 17/20

**Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski**, Maximilianstrasse 17, Munich 22, phone 089/23 03 90, fax 089/23 03 96 93.

**Rating:** EXCELLENT 16/20

**Bayerischer Hof u. Palais Montge-las**, Promenadeplatz 2-6, Munich 2, phone 089/2 12 00, fax 089/2 12 09 06.

**Rating:** EXCELLENT 16/20

**Hotel Palace**, Trogerstr. 21, Munich 80, phone 089/4 70 50 91, fax 089/4 70 50 90.

**Rating:** EXCELLENT 16/20

Moderate to Expensive

**Platzl Hotel**, Sparkassenstr. 10, Munich 21, phone 089/ 37 03-0, fax 089/23 70 3800.

**ABOVE AVERAGE** 15/20

**Hotel Exquisit**, Pettenkoflerstrasse 3, D-8000, Munich 2, telephone 089/5519900, fax 089/55199499.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 15/20

**Hotel Domus**, St.-Anna-Strasse 31, D-8000 Munich 22, phone 089/221704, fax 089/2285359.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

**Preysing**, Preysingstr. 1, Munich 80, phone 089/48 10 11, fax 089/4 47 09 98.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

**Splendid**, garni, Maximilianstr. 54, Munich 22, phone 089/29 66 06, fax 089/2 91 31 76.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

Moderate

**Olympic Hotel**, Hans-Sachs-Strasse 4, D-8000 Munich 5, telephone 089/231890, fax 089/2318 9199.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 14/20

**Hotel Adria**, Liebigstrasse 8a, D-8000 Munich 22, phone 089/29308183, fax 089/227015.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20 \$

**Hotel Kraft**, Schillerstrasse 49, D-8000 Munich 2, phone 089/59482324, fax 089/5232856.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20 \$

**Hotel an der Opera**, Falkenturmstr. 10, Munich 2, phone 089/2 90 02 70 fax 089/29 00 27 29.

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20

**Hotel Müller**, Fliegenstrasse 4, D-8000 Munich 2, telephone 089/266063, fax 089/268624.

**Rating:** AVERAGE 11/20

**Hotel Uhland**, Uhlandstrasse 1, D-8000 Munich 2, phone 089/539277, fax 089/531114.

**Rating:** AVERAGE 11/20 \$

**Hotel Bavaria**, Gollierstr. 9, D-8000 Munich 2, phone 089/501078, fax 089/5026856.

**Rating:** AVERAGE 10/20

**Hotel St. Paul**, St.-Paul-Strasse 7, D-8000 Munich 2, phone 089/530104, fax 089/534652.

**Rating:** AVERAGE 10/20

**Hotel Ariston**, garni, Unsoeldstr. 10, Munich 22, phone 089/22 26 91, fax 089/2913595.

**Rating:** AVERAGE 10/20

**Adler**, Kohlstrasse 9, D-8000 Munich 2, phone 089/22399192, fax 089/2289437.

**Rating:** ADEQUATE 7/20 \$

## **PARK HOTEL FLORA**

*Continued from page 1*

selected, was 167 DM (\$116). It had a balcony with a view of the lake and a small separate sitting area, with two overstuffed chairs and a wooden table. Between the entry hall (which contains the closet and the door to the bathroom) and the bedroom is a wood framed archway. The bathroom is a little cramped — the stall shower will be difficult for large people — and is furnished with only the bare essentials. No facial tissues are provided and we wished for more and thicker towels.

The room itself has attractive, high-quality wood trimmed furniture and good bed lights. There is no mini-bar and the TV gets only basic channels.

We arrived in an early April snow-storm, so as soon as we deposited our luggage in the room we made for the main salon just off the two dining rooms. There we happily read our books for a couple of hours before the fireplace. We ordered drinks but never were presented with a check or asked for our room number. This is a place where such charges simply appear on the bill at checkout.

The hotel is so pleasant we wish we could say good things about the restaurant. It is not expensive and one is served a great deal of food, but most of it just wasn't very good. There was a choice of two "menus of the day" for 41 DM (\$28) but we chose from the a la carte menu, which may have been a mistake. Salad from the buffet was fine but *Hummerkrabben* (small lobster tails) were way too tough and served with bland, green noodles. *Steinpilz Rhamsuppe* — creamy mushroom soup — was better but too rich and the same could be said for tortellini stuffed with smoked salmon. The wine list was heavy with offerings from the Baden (local) region so we took the waiter's suggestion of a 1989 Spätburgunder, a red for 40 DM (\$28), and had no quarrel with it.

After dinner, like most other guests, we sat in the salon. Soon two friendly German couples, hearing our English, struck up a conversation. One of men, in his late 70s, had a particular fondness for Americans because, in 1945, a G.I. had won an argument with a Russian soldier over whose prisoner the German gentleman should be.

There is an indoor pool, a sauna and plenty of free parking. Spa facilities are available in the village.

Schluchsee is an hour from Zürich, an hour and a half from Stuttgart and three hours from Frankfurt.

Contact the Kurverwaltung, Postfach 1169, D-79857, Schluchsee for a beautifully printed brochure with color pictures of this area's many attractive hotels, pensions, guest houses and self-catering units in all price ranges.

Hegers Parkhotel Flora, Sonnhalde 22, Schluchsee D-79859, phone 07656/70326, fax 07656/70323. Rooms 115 to 210 DM (\$79-\$145).

**Rating:** ABOVE AVERAGE 13/20 G

# Budget Corner

## **Boat/Bus Tour**

A combined bus and boat tour, *Left and Right of the Danube — On the Paths of Emperors and Kings*, is available from April to October from Knauß's Reisen, Bahnhofstrasse 6, D-15344 Strausberg, phone and fax 03341-422124. The eight-day program (dates on request) starts at Kehlheim and includes stops at Passau, Regensburg, Vienna, the Wachau and Budapest. The package costs from 898 DM (\$619) per person, including seven nights accommodations, half-board, cruise, city tours and guide services. Other packages are also available.

## **Deals in Schleswig-Holstein**

Special spring packages are available at 210 hotels, inns and guest houses in the north German state of Schleswig-Holstein April 19-May 19. One night including breakfast costs from 40 to 100 DM (\$28 to \$69) per person. Special meals are listed on the menus of 500 pubs and restaurants and the Schleswig-Holstein Tourist Card lets guests take advantage of various leisure activities. The brochure *Gastlichkeit zum Schnupperpreis* is available from DEHOGA, Hamburger Chaussee 349, D-24113 Kiel, phone 0431/658629, fax 651868.

## **Swiss Hostel-Transport Combo**

"Switzerland— go as you please" offers packages that combine youth hostel accommodations with transportation passes. There is no age restriction. Accommodations are in multi-bed rooms in any of approximately 70 youth hostels throughout Switzerland. Breakfast is included.

Also included is a Swiss Pass for unlimited travel on all Swiss public transportation and a travel kit containing maps and other information.

For four nights' accommodations and a four-day transportation pass,

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the price is \$289; eight nights' accommodation and an eight-day-pass is \$429; 15 days' accommodations and a 15-day transportation pass is \$616.

Contact Jugi Tours, Schaffhauserstr, 14, Postfach, CH-8042, Zürich, telephone 011-411 360-1400, fax 011-411-360-1444.


### Hermitage Exhibit in Karlsruhe

An exhibit from St. Petersburg's Hermitage entitled *The Good Life* is at the Prinz Max Palais in Karlsruhe April 13-July 14. In conjunction with the exhibit, the local tourist office offers weekend packages from 105 DM (\$72) per person. In addition to bed and breakfast, it includes entry to the exhibition and a voucher booklet good for numerous discounts. Contact: Verkehrsverein, Bahnhofplatz 6, D-76137 Karlsruhe, phone 0721/35530, fax 0721/355343.

### Homestays in Europe

A Colorado-based company books short-term stays in English-speaking homes in several European countries, including Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Prices for the "Budget Bed & Breakfast Homestay" begin at \$49 per night single and \$76 per night double, based on a minimum three-night stay. The "Full-Service Homestay," which includes a private room, daily breakfast and dinner, guides and interpreter services, costs \$99 per night single and \$179 per night double, based on a three-night minimum. Other services are also available. Contact **International Homestays**, Post Office Box 1754, Nederland CO 80466, phone 800-876-2048, (303-642-3088 in Canada), fax 303-642-3365, E-mail: ash@igc.apc.org, Web Page: <http://www.commerce.com/homestays/>.

### Bavarian Self-Catering

The spa town of Bayersoien am See — about 20 miles north of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, on the road to Schon-gau — offers off-season, three-week apartment stays for two persons for from 840 DM (\$579). Contact: Kur-und Touristikinformaton, Dorfstrasse 45, D-82435 Bayersoien am See, phone 08845/1890, fax 08845/9000. 

# READERS' FORUM

### World Skating Championships

Over the years your fine travel letter has greatly inanced our many trips to Europe. Our sincere thanks.

Now for a challenge. We wish to attend the 1997 World Figure Skating Championships In Lausanne — March 17-23, 1997.

1. Have you a suggestion for securing three "All Events" tickets? We simply have no idea how to begin.

2. A suggestion for lodging — perhaps in the vineyards or between Lausanne and Lucerne. We greatly prefer small, cozy places to big expensive spots like **Lausanne Palace**.

3. Do you know of any packages for this event?  
Phil Good, Kewanee IL

*(Ed. Note: Ever-efficient Swiss Tourism in Los Angeles informs us as follows: Only "All Events" tickets are being sold. For side seats the price is 650 Sfr. [\$555]; for end seats 450 Sfr. [\$385] and for corner seats the cost is 300 Sfr. [\$256].*

Contact Ms. Anne Schaller, Lausanne Tourist Office, 2 Av. de Rhodanie, P. O. Box 49, 1000 Lausanne 6, Switzerland, phone 011 41 21/716 73 21, fax 011 21/616 86 47.

*Inquire to Ms. Schaller concerning package arrangements, event tickets and accommodations.*

*For lodgings we suggest the charming little **Auburge de Chernex**, in Chernex above Montreux, about a 20-minute drive from Lausanne (or use the excellent public transportation). The best double room rents for 160 Sfr. [\$137]. A less expensive alternative is to rent an apartment for the week [see page 2 under the heading "Swiss Rental Resource" .)*

### No Reply to Faxes

After receiving no response from initial reservations inquiries via fax to **Pension Heim** in Seeg and **Hotel Der Weingarten** in Rimsting, I wrote follow-up letters. In them, I enclosed International Postal Response Cou-

pons and offered to send traveller's checks to cover the room rate for the first day. This time I got immediate replies. (The postal response coupons were recommended by Frommer in his *Europe on Five Dollars a Day* books back in the 1960s — when my wife and I made our first trips to Europe. He suggested that some hotels, particularly those with modest rates, were sometimes reluctant to spend money on postage to respond to requests for reservations.)

While I wasn't too surprised that the proprietors of Pension Heim and Der Weingarten did not respond, since they are in remote areas and patronized primarily by Germans, I expected better results from big cities. Six weeks ago I wrote to **Hotel Wortz zur Weinsteige** in Stuttgart asking for a reservation. Since I haven't heard from them, I have written to **Hotel Unger**, where we stayed on our last trip to Germany 13 years ago. The Unger is a no-nonsense hostelry that caters to businessmen, but it is on a quiet street near the station and the room we had last time was clean and attractive. It doesn't have a lobby or a restaurant but they provided a good continental breakfast.

Robert F. Biehler, Chico CA

### Salzburg Favorites

Having spent some time in Salzburg, Austria in 1955 as an Army lieutenant, I have returned many times looking for the "snows of yesteryears."

My wife and I have just returned from another winter wonderland vacation in Salzburg and I want to list a few dining favorites.

**St. Peter Stiftkeller**, Europe's oldest restaurant, dates back to 803 A. D. and has typical Austrian cuisine. Highly recommended is their specialty, "St. Peter's Fish," and the excellent *Weiner Schnitzel*.

The **Stadtkrug Hotel's** restaurant on Linzergasse dates back to 1302 A. D. and is located right across the bridge from "Old Town." Their specialty is grilled trout and the house red wine is *Wunderbar!*

Also located on Linzergasse #23 is a small pizzeria which serves great pizza and has a very appealing salad bar. We ate there twice this trip.



If you have to have a hamburger, go to the very elegant **Hotel Österreichischer Hof** on the Salzach River and try their scrumptious 'Salzburger' for \$7.50.

Joe Lamendola, Baton Rouge, LA 

## EUROPE TRAVEL BRIEFS

### Summer Study in Austria

The University of New Orleans' European Centre offers a summer educational program for adults at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, from June 29 - July 20, 1996.

The program offers both credit and noncredit classes. Among the scheduled courses is *German Opera from Mozart to Wagner* which takes advantage of the nearby Munich and Verona opera festivals. In addition to classroom lectures, participants will attend productions in both cities.

Credit earned is transferable to other universities. For more information and a detailed brochure, write The European Centre, University of New Orleans, Box 1097, New Orleans LA 70148 or call 504-286-7484 or 504-286-7116.

### Walking Holidays

**Wanderweg Holidays** offers numerous guided and self-guided walking and hiking itineraries in the Swiss and Austrian Alps. Land costs range from \$330 to \$1398 per person, per week.

One of their programs headquartered at Kitzbühel's four-star **Hotel Weisses Ross**.

The 1996 price for seven nights/eight days at the Ross, with arrival any day of the week, is \$599 per person, including breakfast and dinner, based on double occupancy (\$739 for week of 17-24 August). The single traveller supplement is \$100, and the extra charge for a suite is \$80 per person.

Guests are invited to join English-speaking guides provided by the Kitzbühel Tourist Office who lead hikes and walks beginning at 9:00 a.m. each morning, Monday through Friday from mid-May to mid-October.

Contact: Wanderweg Holidays, phone 800-270-ALPS, fax 609-321-1040.

### Michelin Notes Cheap Eats

• One of the many handy features of *Michelin Red Guides* is their notation of inexpensive restaurants. Using a black diamond symbol, this year's Germany guide notes more than 1,200 establishments as offering a full meal for less than 25 DM (\$17). The Switzerland guide designates nearly 900 restaurants (or hotel with restaurant) with complete meals for less than 20 Sfr. (\$17). The 1996 *Germany Red Guide to Germany* lists a total of 8,598 hotels and 2,018 restaurants. The new *Switzerland Red Guide* lists 1,233 hotels and 864 restaurants.

Michelin says don't be fooled by "Deutschland" or "Suisse" titles. Each guide's table of contents is in several languages, interpreting the many internationally recognized symbols that explain each entry. No matter what your language, these symbols provide a complete picture of what each establishment offers.

### For Grandmas & Grandpas

Do you dream of showing the grandkids a real Swiss chocolate factory, the woodcarving school at Brienz, Lucerne's wonderful Swiss Transport Museum or the Olympic Museum in Lausanne? Provided you're a well-heeled grandparent, a Maryland company called **Grandtravel**, which guides grandparents and their grandchildren on tours of Switzerland, may be what you're looking for.

The rather grandiose language of the Grandtravel press release says the tours "have been developed by a team of teachers, psychologists, leisure counselors and educators, giving special attention to current interests, historical sites and natural attractions. Pre-departure counseling is available from Grandtravel to help grandparents and grandchildren understand each other's needs."

Cost per person, double occupancy, for the 13-day tour is \$4,450 per adult, \$4,415 per child but does not include airfare. Rates for a third person in a room are \$4,320 and \$4,285. Prices cover accommodations with private bath; breakfast, dinner and snacks daily, and a picnic lunch; transportation; the services of a pro-

fessional tour guide; a Grandtravel escort throughout; and all service charges and hotel taxes. A July 22 departure has been scheduled for children seven to 11; August 5 for those from 12 to 17.

Contact Grandtravel, 6900 Wisconsin Av, # 706, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, phone, 800-247-7651, 301-986-0790.

### Kids Cruise Free

**KD River Cruises** of Europe has introduced a new family policy whereby children under 14, accompanied by an adult, travel free on its Rhine, Danube and the Elbe cruises during July and August.

Contact: KD River Cruises of Europe, 2500 Westchester Ave., Purchase NY 10577, phone 914-696-3600 or 800-346-6525 from the eastern U.S.; and 323 Geary St., San Francisco CA 94102, telephone 415-392-8817 or 800-858-8587 from the west, including Texas, Alaska and Hawaii.

### Lech Summer Packages


Lech, in Austria's Arlberg, offers summer theme packages. One package allows visitors to choose from a variety of guided walks and hikes. The per person price for seven nights hotel plus breakfast and dinner is 3,905 AS (\$379); Seven nights bed and breakfast is 2,120 AS (\$206). Substantial discounts are offered for children.

Tennis weeks with professional instruction begin on July 13, August 10 and August 31. The program includes five, 90-minute training sessions, choice of indoor or outdoor court and seven nights in a three-star hotel, including breakfast and dinner, for 5,705 AS (\$554) per person.

Contact: Tourist Office Lech, A-6764 Lech, phone 05583/2161-0, fax 05583/3155.

### German, Swiss Hotel Deals

In 1966, Germany's 150 **Ring Hotels** and Switzerland's 25 **Idyll Hotels** offer accommodations for guaranteed dollar rates of \$85 single and \$65 per person double, including all taxes, service and buffet breakfast.

To book a room or obtain a free brochure containing information about each hotel contact Boldt International, 3123 Deep Canyon Dr., Beverly Hills CA 90213, phone 800-558-6850, fax 414-241-6379. 

# QUESTIONS ABOUT CAR RENTAL

## What to Rent

First, a caveat. Every car rental company uses the words "or similar" when discussing specific car models — as in "a Rolls Royce Silver Cloud, or similar." You will not be guaranteed a specific model, only a category. The Mercedes E200 you reserved may turn out to be a BMW 520i. An Opel Astra is interchangeable with a Ford Escort, a VW Golf, a Fiat Bravo or a Peugeot Clio, and so on.

So, what to rent? For two persons, the Opel Corsa category (or Ford Fiesta or VW Polo) is o.k., particularly if you plan to avoid the Autobahn. There is adequate luggage space (covered hatch), the car looks good and handles well. Virtually every European rental car, including the Corsa, comes with a tape player in addition to a radio.

If you plan to be 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 sometimes come with a sunroof and are perfectly comfortable for three adults.

For two couples, our choice is the midsize Opel Vectra/Ford Mondeo category, which comes with four doors. Trunk space is a bit iffy, however, and we suggest a visit to your local Ford dealer for a look at the trunk of a 1996 Ford Contour (the U.S. version of the Mondeo). Cars in this category are the same size as the Mercedes C180 and the BMW 316i, and, at almost

half the price, are a much better value.

The next category up — 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.

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 very expensive. Air is more readily available in Switzerland but only on larger, more expensive rentals. Air-conditioned cars are more common in France, Spain and Italy.

Rates for minivans increased dramatically last year and kept right on going in 1996. Besides that they're in very short supply. **Book immediately.**

## Which Country?

Germany is the least expensive and, along with Switzerland, offers the most reliable service. Germany's value added tax (VAT) rate is 15%.

For small to midsize cars, Switzerland's basic rates are about 20% higher than Germany but the VAT is only 6.5%. However, pickup a car at any Swiss airport and you'll be socked with a 9% airport tax.

Italy's basic rates are approximately double Germany's. In addition, the VAT is 19% and every renter is forced to purchase

theft insurance at from \$13 to \$18 per day. Consider this: a compact car for one week in Germany rents for \$119 plus 15% VAT for a total of \$136.85. The same type car in Italy is \$266 plus \$118 theft insurance plus the 19% tax on all that for a total of \$456.96!

Austria's rates are more than double Germany's and the VAT is a whopping 21%. Belgium's rates are about 20% higher than Germany and the VAT is 20.5%. Rates in France are about double those in Germany and the VAT is 20.6%.

There is usually no charge to pickup a car and drop it at another location within the same country. But dropping in another country will cost from \$60 to as much as \$1500.

## What About CDW?

"Collision damage waiver" insurance, if you choose to buy it at from \$14 to \$30 per day, gets you off the hook financially if you damage the rental car. (Liability or third party insurance must, by law, be carried by the car rental company.) Usually, however, there is a deductible amount of at least \$100. So, if you return the car with a \$1000 fender dent, you pay only the deductible. But don't assume you're covered for everything; there are several exclusions such as for broken windshields.

It is extremely unlikely that your own auto insurance will provide CDW coverage in a foreign country. However, Mastercard, Visa and American Express offer credit cards which, when used to pay for car rentals, provide free coverage. If you rely on these, however, you must first pay for any damage to the car — usually with your credit card — and then submit a

claim to the credit card company for reimbursement.

There are some important things to consider when relying on a credit card for this coverage:

- If you don't buy the rental company's CDW at the time of the rental, an imprint will taken of your credit card. This will used by the rental agent to obtain an authorization to charge your card approximately \$1500 to \$4000, depending on the car. This ensures the rental company that you have the ability to pay for any damages. Your card is not actually charged (unless, of course, there is damage) but your credit limit is reduced by the amount authorized. Thus, if you have a \$10,000 credit limit, with a balance due of \$2,000, and the rental company obtains a \$3,000 authorization, you won't be able to charge more than \$5,000 on your card during your trip.

- Some cars — such as high performance vehicles and very expensive models — are excluded from coverage. American Express says its CDW coverage doesn't extend to vans mounted on truck chassis. Thus if you rent a Ford Transit van in Europe you won't be covered by American Express because Amex says this vehicle has a truck chassis.

- Mastercard CDW coverage in Europe is limited to rental contracts of 15 days or less in duration. If your rental is 16 days, you may think you have coverage for 15 of the 16 days but that's not the way it works. A 16-day rental contract simply doesn't qualify for CDW coverage. The Visa and American Express coverage limit is 31 days.

- Never pay cash. 