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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

April 30, 1996

April in Austria

Even though spring was a no-show this April in Europe, it's still a great month to be there. At least for us. I'd rather not hear English spoken in the breakfast room; I like staying in an almost empty resort hotel; the crowds are thin even at the three-star sights, and a bowl of soup and a beer taste all the better after a two-hour walk on a chilly, rainy morning.

In Munich, we met a neighbor who's been living in Paris for a year but who had never been to Bavaria. We showed him the Wieskirche, that wonderful Rococo church in a meadow near Oberammergau, Munich's Nymphenburg Palace (especially the glorious carriages of the Wittelsbach family) and Linderhof, for my money the wackiest but most endearing of the three castles commissioned by the maligned Bavarian king, Ludwig II. (Ludwig wasn't "mad," by the way, simply different. Alive today, he'd probably be running a terrific little hotel — on second thought a big hotel — in San Francisco.)

Over the past 17 years we have made at least half a dozen visits to each of these sights and never have we seen them with fewer visitors. (Don't expect the same this summer, however. In 1996, North Americans are expected to visit Europe in record numbers.)

Our sole *al fresco* meal was at the Wieskirche, where we had a lunch of *Leberknödel* soup, *Würstsalat* and beer at a table in the sunshine. Afterwards, however, our attempt to reach Garmisch-Partenkirchen via some *very* back (gravel), backroads failed because

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

ATTERSEE

Just 35 miles east of Salzburg is the largest lake in the Austrian Alps, the Attersee. Tourists have been coming here for more than 100 years but it is seldom visited by Americans. We found it delightful, inexpensive and a prime location from which to explore the Salzkammergut.

Most North Americans seem hell bent on getting to as many cities and three-star sights as humanly possible in the space of a two-week European trip. The idea of spending an entire vacation in an obscure village like Attersee, on a lake in Austria's Salzkammergut, is not one that's likely to catch on.

By
**Bob
Bestor**

But those clever travelers who opt for a long stay

in Attersee are in for a treat: Their vacation will be truly relaxing; at leisure they will explore a beautiful and historic part of Austria, and they will discover the meaning and delights of *Sommerfrische*, an old Austrian expression for the traditional long summer vacations in the countryside. *Sommerfrische* was a beloved custom in the late 19th century and enjoyed by all classes, from the Hapsburgs to working folk.

Book Reviews..

Austrian Castle Hotels & The Breweries of Bavaria

Castle hotels are a commodity not sold in the U.S. We simply don't have any. Maybe that's why many Americans are enchanted by them. If you are one who is we recommend *Castle Hotels in Austria*, written by a father-daughter duo, Paul V. Jameson and Hannah Jameson.

The book's early pages offer some garden-variety travel advice laced with a few Austrian travel insights that demonstrate either the authors' knowledge of the country or good research — or both. For example, their definition of

the various kinds of castles is something we have not seen elsewhere:

"A castle hotel is a castle turned into a hotel in which the ambiance of a castle survives. This definition is not precise as ambiance cannot be measured by objective criteria but is subjectively assessed. Even the word castle is not very specific as it includes five distinct categories of buildings

•*Burg is a strategically located medieval building, a fortress-like home of a nobleman, symbol of his independence and proof of his might.*

•*Schloss is a nobleman's*
Continued on page 8...

A hundred years ago, the aristocrats and the royals spent their summers at Bad Ischl (about 25 miles to the south) or on the Traunsee (10 miles east), but the bourgeoisie and intellectuals — including a couple of talented guys named Gus — discovered the Attersee. In 1893, composer Gustav Mahler came to Steinbach on the lake's eastern shore and built a small house in a meadow near the water. There he wrote a major part of his second symphony and the entire third. The house still exists and can be visited.

From 1900 to 1916, Gustav Klimt spent every summer on the lake. During this period he completed about 50 Attersee landscapes, some three dozen of which can be viewed in nearby Unterach.

With reasonable prices and unpretentious accommodations, the lake still attracts middle-income vacationers. Yuppies may feel somewhat adrift by Attersee's lack of fashionable shops and Michelin-starred restaurants but they will soon be won over by the area's charm and beauty, by a great variety of available activities and

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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they were still under four feet of snow.

On the Attersee, in the town of Attersee half an hour east of Salzburg, we walked the village's nearly deserted streets in a snow flurry. Beaches and docks were deserted and in the little lakeside towns not an umbrella table in sight. But our room in the near-empty **Hotel Oberndorfer** had a cozy sitting area with floor to ceiling windows. Ensclosed in easy chairs with feet up on the coffee table, we were able to see fish swim in the clear water below as snowflakes disappeared when they hit the water.

Our first night in Vienna, a Sunday, featured a truly miserable cold, wet rain. Many restaurants were closed but a cordial young clerk at our hotel, the **Altstadt**, directed us to a busy, cheery nearby **Beisel** where we shook the rain off our hotel-provided umbrella and dove face first into various plates of Vienna comfort food. The restaurant in question is the **Spatzennest**, St. Ulrichsplatz 1, which you'll hear more of in a coming issue.

Besides cold and wet, I have one or two other impressions of our recent trip worth passing along.

- Gone are the days of carrying travelers' checks and worrying about having cash in a land where banks never seem to be open. ATMs have proliferated and can be found even in the smallest towns. We left with only \$800 in traveler's checks (remaining from a batch of \$1000 purchased in late 1994) and came back with \$600. I exchanged \$200 upon arrival at the Zürich Airport because, having forgotten to bring leftover cash from a previous trip, I had not a single franc.

By the way, if you absolutely must change money at an airport, make it a European airport. The exchange rate at the Los Angeles airport was 1.12 Swiss francs per dollar. Eleven hours later, in Zürich, at the end of our flight, the rate was 1.17

Sfr. At 1.17 you get an additional 50 Sfr. on a \$1000, exchange or about \$43. But don't be in the position that you must make that exchange. Have enough local money on arrival to hold you until you can get to an ATM where you'll find the very best rate of exchange.

When paying for purchases use a credit card as much as possible: you get the top exchange rate; you don't have to come up with the money until later; and with the right card you'll get mileage. For the rest, use cash from the ATMs.

- The Austrian countryside offers the best hotel bargains in the three countries we cover. Everywhere we went we found clean, attractive rooms with shower or bath and toilet, in acceptable small hotels, some with charm, for from as little as \$21 per person.

- For Munich-bound travelers we'll have a report later in the year. For now, however, you should be aware that a couple of recommended establishments have slipped. First, we had bad meals at **Zum Bürgerhaus**, at Pettenkofer 1, near the **Hotel Exquisit** (still a strong recommendation in its price range). How bad? One word: micro-wave.

And, sorry to report, the **Hotel Adria** is becoming a little too worn around the edges to recommend strongly. The location is still excellent, quiet but not far from the action, and the breakfast is much improved, but at the price it is no longer a bargain.

Finally, we tried to see the **Pension Am Market**, near the Viktualienmarkt in the heart of city. We dropped in as tourists and asked to look at a few rooms. Sorry, no. We asked for a hotel brochure and were given a business card without prices. Next day I called the innkeeper, Harald Herrler, told him I would like to inspect the hotel for *Gemütlichkeit* and asked if it would be convenient to stop by later in the day. He said yes but with little enthusiasm. Upon arrival Herr Herrler first motioned toward the stairs saying "look at anything you want." He

immediately changed his mind, however, and said we would be wasting our time because he never has any rooms available. When asked if the hotel was always fully booked he said yes. In the last 10 years I figure I've stayed in and/or inspected just under 1,000 hotels. This is the first one that wasn't interested in new customers. Draw your own conclusions.

- Gas in Austria (the only country in which we purchased it) ranged from 10.94 AS (\$1.03) to 11.4 AS (\$1.04) per liter for the least expensive *Bliefrei* (unleaded) — about \$3.90 per gallon.

Tips from a Travel Pro

Don't miss this month's Readers' Forum on page 6. A letter from Mrs. Paul Wildman in our March issue elicited several responses. One was from R.W. "Johnny" Apple, Jr., Washington bureau chief for the *New York Times*, the *Times*' chief Washington correspondent and a frequent guest on such TV shows as PBS's *NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer, *This Week* with David Brinkley and ABC's *Nightline*.

Besides covering the presidential campaign, the White House and other Capitol goings-on, Mr. Apple, a *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber since 1991, recently had travel articles published in the *Atlantic* and *GQ*. In a short profile preceding his piece on the restoration of East Germany, the *Atlantic* passed along some Apple travel advice

- "In a new city never be too proud to take a half-day bus tour as an introduction; you will quickly discover what you want to see more of and what bores you."

- "Just as good cooking is at least 50% good shopping, so good travel requires good preparation — reading, studying maps, talking to friends and acquaintances who have been where you're going. It's astonishing how many people never do these obvious things."

- "Use the concierge—and if you want tickets to the opera or the theater or a concert or a game,

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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%

ATTERSEE

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by the lower numbers on their monthly credit card bill.

So, what's to do?

- Take a day or two to visit Salzburg. It's only 35 miles away by Autobahn; or a little train runs frequently from Attersee to Vöcklamarkt with connection to Salzburg.

- Board the Attersee-Schiffart for a lake tour. Have lunch aboard the ship and stop at villages along the way. Adult fares range from about \$6.50 to \$14, depending on the trip. Or, try a dinner cruise with on-board live music.

- Spend a day in Bad Ischl, the summer headquarters of Emperor Franz-Josef. See his Imperial Villa and the villa of composer Franz Lehar, whose operettas are still performed virtually every night somewhere in Austria.

- Drive half an hour east for lunch or dinner in Gmunden, a swankier resort town on the Traunsee. Walk the Esplanade and visit the Ort Chateau on an island.

- At the tourist office, pick up the little flyer *Wandertips* and select one or more of the dozen suggested walks/hikes in the region. Use the lake boat to get to your starting point, or to return to after your stroll.

- Visit Hallstatt, a town perched on a steep hillside above the Hallstätter See where salt has been mined for 3,000 years and which rates two Michelin stars. Tour the mines, see the Museum of Prehistory and don't miss the collection of skulls and bones at the Chapel of St. Michael.

- See Mahler's house in Steinbach and the Klimt house in Seewalchen (10 minutes by car).

- Take the kids to the beach in Attersee. There is a large, lakeside swimming pool and water slide.

- Rent a 22-foot sailboat for about \$150 per day. Take sailing or windsurfing lessons.

- Play a round of golf across the lake in Weyregg, tennis at the Atter-

gau Leisure Center or go fishing (licenses are inexpensive and easy to obtain).

- Attend a concert of the Orchestrinstitut Attergau in nearby St. Georgen (5-10 minutes by car).

- Find a comfortable chair by the lake and read a book.

Attersee is pretty, restful and proof that two weeks in Europe doesn't have to cost as much as two weeks in your local hospital. And it's much more fun.

Hotels/Apartments

Accommodations described include private bathroom facilities unless otherwise noted. Breakfast, too, is included in rates unless noted.

Hotel-Seegasthof Oberndorfer

We headquartered at this hotel based on the enthusiastic recommendation of subscriber Frederick Hoffman (see Readers' Forum, January 1996). "Superb" is how he described the hospitality provided by innkeeper Josef Oberndorfer and family.

We agree. Seldom have we found a more agreeable and welcoming staff. From the young woman who waited on us at dinner, who had recently won an Austrian competition for waiters, to Herr Oberndorfer himself, we — and other guests we noted — were treated with an informal friendliness that made us feel comfortable and at home.

The hotel has been recently refurbished throughout and both public and guest rooms are bright, contemporary spaces that never fail to take advantage of the building's lakeside proximity. At breakfast, dinner, or dressing for dinner in your room, the panorama of water and mountains is there for the taking.

In good weather, a stretch of lawn bordering the lake is set aside for guests who wish to sunbathe, and meals are served on a terrace by the lake. There is a dock for swimming and small boats. The latter can be rented nearby.

The room we occupied, Number 31, has a most pleasant sitting room with wide floor-to-ceiling window and door and is directly on the water

ATTERSEE

Tourismusverband Attersee
A-4864 Attersee am Attersee
Phone: 07666/7719 Fax: 07666/7919

Activities - 1996

Music Week: July 20-28, Schloss Kammer
Bicycle Day: Sept. 22, Ride a bike around the lake. The road is closed to cars.

Attersee Step-by-Step: Guided hike around lake (70km/44 miles) in five days. Luggage is carried to each overnight. 1996 start dates are May 13; June 10; Sept. 9 and Oct. 7. Price per person is 2,950 AS (\$278).

Lake Swim: 17th annual lake-crossing is July 20.

Mountain Bike Race: Sept. 21, Steinach to Weyregg

Fishing: May 15-November 20.

with a view of the hotel's little "harbor" and the villages on the opposite shore. Across the coffee table from a narrow but comfortable two-person couch, a small TV with cable connection sits on a blonde wood counter over a minibar and several drawers. This cozy area is lit by recessed halogen lights.

Outside is a large, L-shaped balcony with enough space for a sheltered table for four.

In the bedroom, the double bed faces a glass door to the balcony and the view. The location is very quiet.

Other rooms in the hotel are similarly equipped and decorated.

Reader Hoffman said the Oberndorfer's food was the "best" he had "encountered anywhere in the area." During this off-season, however, with the hotel nearly empty, the chef — one of the Oberndorfer sons — was on his honeymoon. We presume that is why our meals did not match Mr. Hoffman's enthusiastic recommendation. Calves liver was too gamey for us, though *Zanderfilet*, (white fish without bones) in butter with browned almonds, was much better. Dressings on salads were a bit bland and chunks of fish in a hearty soup seemed to lack freshness. *Spargelrahmsuppe* (white asparagus cream soup), however, was much better. A dessert of vanilla ice cream rolled in a crepe and covered with warm chocolate sauce, while not particularly inventive, was delicious. Accompa-

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ATTERSEE

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nying beer (*Zipfer vom Fass*) and a light Austrian red wine, in the Beaujolais style, were faultless examples of their genre.

The award won by our waitress is much deserved. Cheerful, friendly, knowledgeable and quick to sense our every need, she was the perfect server.

World War II buffs should ask to see the book presented to Herr Oberndorfer by surviving members of the U.S. Third Cavalry. It contains a step by step account of the U.S. Army's march through the region at the war's close as it routed German and Hungarian forces. The citizens of Attersee were delighted to be liberated by the Americans rather than the Russians, who wound up controlling much of the territory to the east, including Steyr, until 1955. General George C. Patton addressed Allied troops at Attersee in the spring of 1945 and the text of his speech is in the book.

The Oberndorfer family is remembered by several old soldiers because of the family's hospitality toward the troops. (Last year a group of these WWII vets returned to the Oberndorfer to celebrate the 50th anniversary of V.E. Day) Also in the book is a note from a veteran who had fallen ill in the spring of '45 and had been taken care of by Herr Oberndorfer's mother.

The two overwhelming impressions left by our stay at the Oberndorfer are the top to bottom, genuine friendliness of its staff, and the hotel's perfect location, virtually on top this crystal-clear lake.

Daily Rates: Low season per person 610 to 1120 AS (\$58 to \$106), high season per person 650 to 1220 AS (\$61 to \$115). Add 210 AS (\$20) per person for half-board

Six singles, 18 doubles, with radio, direct dial phone, cable TV, minibar, most with lakeside balcony, ample parking, boat dock. Major cards.

Contact: Hotel-Seegasthof Oberndorfer, Josef Oberndorfer, Hauptstrasse 18, A-4864 Attersee, Austria, tel. 07666/7864-0, fax 07666/7864-91.

Rating: 14/20 ABOVE AVERAGE **G**

Gasthof-Pension Haberl

This pension, typical of the region, is in a tiny village in the rolling upland near Attersee. Room Number 303 has a small sitting area with a sectional corner couch and separate rooms for toilet and bath. For families there is also a small adjoining room with twin beds.

Daily Rates: Low season per person 300 to 360 AS (\$28 to \$34), high season per person 330 to 360 AS (\$31 to \$34). 20% discount from children. Add 110 AS (\$10.50) per person for half-board Two singles, 19 doubles, three triples with cable TV, telephone. Most with balcony. Ample parking. Restaurant. No elevator. No credit cards.

Contact: Gasthof-Pension Haberl, Altenberg 17, A-4865 Nussdorf am Attersee, tel. 07666/8114-0, fax 07666/8114-44

Rating: 10/20 AVERAGE

Pension Alpenblick

Very pleasant welcome. Older guest rooms are similar to those found elsewhere in the region in hotels of this category; simple but clean and comfortable. The Hurler's, however, have added a new wing and room Number 210 is now the hotel's largest. Its best feature is a turret-like alcove with five double windows affording a sweeping view of the countryside and the lake in the distance. At a high season double room price of \$33 per person, it is a great value. Be sure to ask for a room in the new addition.

Daily Rates: Low season per person 300 AS (\$28), high season 350 AS (\$33) per person. Half-board add 70 AS (\$6.60) per person low season; 80 AS (\$7.50) high season. Three singles, 17 doubles, three triples, with telephone and radio, many with balcony. Ample parking. Restaurant. No elevator. No credit cards.

Contact: Pension Alpenblick, M. & A. Hurler,

Abtsdorf 56, A-4864 Attersee, tel. 07666/7543, Fax 07666/7471

Rating: 10/20 AVERAGE **G**

Gasthof-Pension Hemetsberger

Another country pension with plain small rooms; clean but without sitting areas. If you choose the

Hemetsberger, ask for Number 209 on the top floor of the guest house, a corner room with beams, slanted ceiling and balcony.

Daily Rates: Low season per person 270 AS (\$25), high season 340 AS (\$32). Add 80 AS (\$7.50) in low season for half-board; in high season add 90 AS (\$8.50).

Four singles, 19 doubles, 2 triples; most with balcony. Ample parking. Restaurant. No elevator. No credit cards.

Contact: Gasthof-Pension Hemetsberger, Abtsdorf 16, A-4864 Attersee, tel. 07666/7716, fax 07666/7716-6

Rating: 9/20 AVERAGE

Gästehaus Schmidig

This substantial three-level building is on a hillside with good view of the lake (about 2 km away) and mountains. The walk to the Attersee railway station is about 10 minutes.

The larger apartments (#2, #3, #5, #6) are particularly comfortable and well furnished; with lots of dark wood built-ins and paneling. For four persons they are an excellent value.

If one considers both location and quality, these are the best of the three apartment properties we saw in Attersee.

Daily Rates: Low season per apartment, per day 590 to 830 AS (\$56-\$78); high season per apartment, per day 760 to 1090 AS (\$72-\$103). Seven fully equipped apartments with kitchen, accommodating from two to four persons. All with radio, TV (cable end of '96), safe, direct dial phone. Larger apartments have balconies. Facilities: sauna, indoor pool, exercise room and bike rental Ample parking. No elevator. No credit cards.

Contact: Gästehaus Schmidig, A-4864 Attersee, Neuhofen 24 & 29, tel. 07666/7793-0, Fax 07666/7793-21

Rating: 14/20 ABOVE AVERAGE

Pension-Ferienwohnungen Heidi Leitner

Three pleasant, airy double rooms with balcony, toilet and shower for 210 AS (\$20) per person, low season and 235 AS (\$22) per person high season make the Leitner the best bed and breakfast

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

value in Attersee and one of the best we've seen in a long time.

A pair of two-bedroom apartments are also excellent. Both are light and cheery, have balconies with lake views (2-3 km distant) hardwood parquet floors, blonde wood trim and skylights. The combination sitting room/dining/breakfast room in each features a polished, light wood built-in banquet in the style of the region, and comfortable sofas and chairs. The small kitchens are almost nautical in their clever use of space and are equipped with all the necessities including coffee-maker, microwave oven and dishwasher. The fully-tiled bathrooms are spacious and each has a separate toilet room. Number 1 is 60 square meters, Number 2 is 65m².

These are excellent accommodations at very good prices.

Daily Rates: Low season per apartment, per day 600 AS (\$57) for two persons and 850 AS (\$80) for four persons. High season per apartment, per day for two persons 800 (\$75) and 990 AS (\$93) for four. Double, single and triple rooms per person per day 210 AS (\$20) low season and 235 AS (\$22) per day high season. Two apartments, one single, three doubles and one triple. Most with balcony. Facilities: outdoor pool, apartments have cable TV, skylights, dishwashers, balcony with lake view, swings and slides for kids, microwaves, tiled bath (no shower curtains). Ample parking. No credit cards. No elevator.

Contact: Pension-Ferienwohnungen Heidi Leitner, Abtsdorf 6, A-4864 Attersee, tel. 07666/7661, fax 7030.

Rating: 14/20 ABOVE AVERAGE **G \$**

Ferienwohnungen Häuplphof

Direct access to the lake for boating and swimming creates a strong demand for most of Häuplphof's better apartments making them virtually unavailable to occasional renters. The one free unit we inspected was in need of some refurbishment.

Two new apartments, however, were under construction during our visit and promise to be more appealing. The smaller, for two persons, will be priced at 800 AS (\$75) per day.

Daily Rates: Low season per apart-

ment, per day 520 to 1170 AS (\$49-\$110); high season 980 to 1410 AS (\$92-\$133). Seven apartments with kitchen. Facilities: TV, sauna, solarium, game room, beach access, boat dock, sun terrace, volleyball. Free parking. No elevator. No credit cards.

Contact: Ferienwohnungen Häuplphof, Mühlbath 1, A-4864, Attersee tel. 07666/7788, fax 07666/7788-8

Rating: NOT RATED

An Attersee Restaurant

1er Beisel (pronounced EYE'Nzer BYEsl) carries the reputation of being Attersee's best restaurant. A small building, right by the lake, it has wide windows whose lower quarters are lace curtained. Inside, the dozen or so tables are set with pink linen, fresh flowers, sparkling glassware and hanging over each is a pull-down ceramic lamp. Navy blue cushions trim the dark wood banquets. For better weather there is a lakeside terrace for outdoor dining.

To begin, we were served bread with that combination of fried-down pork fat with bits of meat and seasoning that one is offered as a spread from time to time in Europe. Were there to be a competition to find the food with the highest concentration of cholesterol, a little pot of this would no doubt win easily. Nevertheless, it's quite good.

The dishes that followed ranged from good to excellent. Our server, a middle-aged woman, was cool but efficient and the courses were well-timed. Only three other tables were occupied on this chilly April evening.

A man who perhaps was the owner or maitre'd took our wine order, 1993 Blaufränkisch, a red wine from Mittleburgenland for 355 AS (\$33). The red wines of Austria are not much prized by connoisseurs but this one served its purpose well, to accompany the strong taste of roast duck and grilled pork fillets.

In the "good" category were slices of duck breast in a reduction sauce flavored with orange and thyme. But accompanying the slightly chewy duck was an extraordinary concoction that consisted of a dumpling-like

dough rolled rather like a jelly-roll with bits of bacon, herbs, onion and garlic, then sliced after having been either marinated or boiled in a rich broth.

The three grilled pork fillets were served with pan juices and "riced" potatoes fried in bacon fat and herbs. Also on the plate were sauteed flowerets of broccoli and cauliflower and whole garlic cloves.


A salad of Schafkäse (sort of a cross between feta and mozzarella cheese), sliced tomatoes, and various greens, including frisée and radicchio, got a lift from an excellent Balsamic vinegar and oil dressing.

A string of very enjoyable dishes ended with surprisingly flavorful fresh strawberries and vanilla ice cream drizzled with a honey-based syrup and sprinkled with green peppercorns and powdered sugar.

But, with the bill came a bit of confusion. Neither it nor the menu made mention of the customary inclusive service charge. Having heard stories about European restaurants that no longer include the charge for service, we asked the waitress about it and were told service was not included. Thinking she might have misunderstood, we asked again pointing out that the tax was broken out on the bill but no service. She remained firm, we had not been charged for service. With misgivings, we left more tip than we would have had we been confident service was in fact included in the price.

Later that evening over a beer at our hotel, Herr Oberndorfer assured us 15% for service is always included in Austrian restaurant prices. The tip, however, is not. A nice bit of sleight-of-semantics by our waitress. She gets the 15% service *and* our 15% tip.

Nonetheless, we recommend 1er Beisel for a bit of a splurge meal. The bill for two persons was 1063 AS (\$100) including the wine, a beer, a mineral water and bread (40 AS/\$3.77).

Café-Restaurant 1er Beisel, Landungsplatz 6, A-07666/(7877)377. **Rating:** 13/20 ABOVE AVERAGE 

EUROPE TRAVEL BRIEFS

Rooms from \$119 at Sofitel

Hotel Sofitel's annual "Summer Sale" offers guaranteed U.S. dollar rates at 51 hotels in 12 countries for occupancy between June 28 and September 1, 1996. Rates are \$119, \$139 or \$159 per room, per night (single or double occupancy). Sale rates are available at Sofitel hotels in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, and Switzerland. Prices include breakfast, service charges and most taxes. Sofitel says some properties may have a limited number of rooms at these prices. Some hotels allow one child under age 12 to share the parents' room for free, with breakfast. Children over 12 pay \$50, also including breakfast. These prices represent a substantial saving. The rack rate at the **Sofitel Zürich**, for example, is approximately \$275. For reservations phone 800-763-4835.

Over 65 Discounts

Germany's **InterCity Hotels**, all of which are near major rail stations and can be booked in the U.S. through the **Steigenberger Hotel** group, offer a senior citizens rate of 95 DM (\$63) single and 130 DM (\$86) double inclusive of tax, service, breakfast, and a pass for the local transportation system. InterCity hotels are located in Augsburg, Erfurt, Frankfurt, Freiburg, Hamburg, Kassel, Kiel, Magdeburg, Nürnberg, Rostock, Schwerin, Stuttgart, Weimar and Wuppertal. InterCity reservations: 800-223-5652.

Steigenberger Dollar Rates

The Steigenberger **Frankfurter Hof** in Frankfurt has completed renovation in time for its 120th year of operation. To celebrate, they are offering a rate, subject to availability, of 120 DM (\$79) per person double occupancy (216 DM/\$142 single). Single and double room guaranteed dollar rates at a sampling of other Steigenberger properties:

Baden-Baden, **Badhotel zum**

Hirsch \$79/129; Berlin, **Sorat Hotel Spree-Bogen \$119/149**; Cologne, **Hotel Rheingold \$99/129**; Düsseldorf, **Lindner Hotel Rhein Residence \$109/139**; Frankfurt, **Steigenberger Avance Airport \$129/179**; Hamburg, **Hotel Lindner Hamburg \$129/179**; Heidelberg-Wiesloch, **Hotel Palatin \$119/149**; Munich, **Eden-Hotel-Wolff \$119/169**, **New Splendid Hotel \$99/129**; Nürnberg; **Atrium Hotel Nürnberg \$99/139**; Budapest, **Thermal Hotel Helia \$109/129**; Prague, **Hotel Diplomat \$159/\$179**; Gstaad-Saanen, Switzerland, **Steigenberger Avance Hotel \$99/169**; Vienna, **Parkhotel Schönbrunn \$119/159**. Steigenberger reservations: 800-223-5652.

50% off on Hotels

The 1996 **Entertainment Europe** discount book offers 50% discounts at more than 750 hotels in 400 cities in 35 European countries. Cost per book is \$40.00. Phone 800-445-4137 or write: Entertainment Travel Editions, 2125 Butterfield Road, Troy, MI 48084.

New Czech Map

Michelin has a new map, *Czech Republic/Slovak Republic*. Within it are maps for both capitals (Prague and Bratislava). The legend is in several languages — English is one — and includes classified historic towns, outdoor museums, wooden churches in Slovak, plus symbols pointing out rest stops on highways, ski or spa stations, parks and camping. The scale is 1:600,000. Cost is \$10 

READERS' FORUM

Rucksack Theory Debunked

I have several interesting facts to add to the debate on **Peter Lembcke** in particular and German attitudes toward tourists in general.

I thought Mrs. Wildman's letter was hilarious — did you make her up??? Anyway:

1. Mrs. Wildman should know that since it was a sub-zero December night, I was wearing my mink coat. So much for the "rucksack" attire theory.

2. Our dining experience at **Lembcke** was entirely ordinary. My **Stroganoff** was overcooked and tasted several days old. I am certain that it had been reheated at least once.

3. We have been to lots of "elegant" restaurants in northern Germany and have been beautifully treated. I deeply disagree with Mrs. Wildman's idea that shabby service is typical.

4. Finally, I want Mrs. Wildman to know that I am much more of a snob than she is.

But I try to keep it under control. Sally Woelfel, Ph.D., Aptos CA

(Ed. Note: Dr. Woelfel, of course, was at the dinner in question and is the wife of Bruce Woelfel who wrote the review of Restaurant Peter Lembcke.)

Friendly North Germans

I want to comment on the **Peter Lembcke** controversy.

Mrs. Wildman strikes me as very ill-informed about German gastronomy and the attitudes of people in Northern Germany in general. **Lembcke** is not a good restaurant by anyone's standards. All of my friends in Hamburg — a sophisticated bunch, including the publisher of *Die Zeit* — have warned me against it. When I disregarded their comments a year or so ago, I found them to be right. The food is adequate enough, but certainly nothing special, nothing inventive and nothing to seek out. The room is gloomy and a bit shabby. It cannot stand comparison with the dining room at the **Hotel Prem**, a small gem on the Alster, or the **Landhaus Scherzer**, which is precisely the kind of sophisticated place that Mrs. Wildman seems (incorrectly) to think that **Lembcke** is.

I don't want to go on at great lengths, but I really feel that I must challenge the notion that Northern Germans are "cool" to Americans. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is quite true that they are not as exuberant in general as, say, Bavarians, but as an American who has traveled in that area for twenty five years, I can testify to good treatment not only at the two places mentioned above but at many other hotels, restaurants, shops and offices

throughout the region.

I was recently in Bremen, Lübeck and Hannover. In each place, at least one person made an extra effort to see to it that I was comfortable, none of them knew that I was a journalist, and to none of them did I speak German. As a small example, I might mention a wonderful lunch in **Grashof Bistro** in Bremen, where my waitress turned out to be the wife of the proprietor, and where the three of us spent an hour after lunch exchanging ideas about cognac, a common enthusiasm. Or the ticket taker at a garden in Hannover who took fifteen minutes of his lunch time to come with us in our car to make sure that we could find our way to the local museum.

Oh, yes. *Gault Millau* is right; Lembcke is vastly overpriced.
R.W. Apple, Jr., Washington DC

(Ed. Note: Mr. Apple is the Washington bureau chief and chief correspondent for the *New York Times*.)

Friendly Folk Near Hamburg

Today I received my first issue of *Gemütlichkeit*. I can tell already that it is a good investment.

In regard to the article "Ugly Americans?", in August and September of 1995 my aunt, uncle and I flew into Hamburg and drove from there to Berlin to Wittenberg to Rothenburg O.d.T. to Renchen to Strasbourg, France, up to Untergrumbach to Heidelberg to St. Goar and flew back to the states from Frankfurt.

In northern Germany - a town called Zeven - approximately one hour from Hamburg, we were treated with great care and friendliness at **Restaurant Paulsen** (phone 04281 / 5051, fax 04281 / 8340). There was not one thing they did not help us with. Even supplying my aunt and uncle, who were first-time travelers to Europe, with wash cloths. I brought my own, having been to Europe twice before. They called the museum in town and arranged for us to see some pottery that my great-grandfather made. The museum was even pleased as they had very little information on my great-grandfather. The entire experience was good because the restaurant went out of its way to accommodate us.

The Restaurant Paulsen has good food, good service and was in range price-wise.

Joan S Wood, Horsham PA

More on Lembcke

I was interested to read about the situation regarding the dress of American tourists in Northern Germany, reactions of Northern Germans to said American tourists and the restaurant known as "**Peter Lembcke**."

In my opinion there is a bit of truth in the statement of Mrs. Wildman. Americans often underdress according to "local custom" and they often have little knowledge of German. The latter fact does more to place American at a disadvantage in Northern Germany than anything else! Additionally, an unspoken "attitude" does not help matters. A real effort to use a few German words combined with a truly pleasant demeanor usually helps a great deal. I think that the typical American informality of attire is being copied in Southern Europe, but that older citizens of the Northern climes resist this change. Northern Germans are much more formal than Southern Germans and we should be aware of this obvious fact. So what? The answer is to act in a reasonable fashion and put one's best foot forward. If this does not satisfy local custom, spend your vacation money elsewhere. "Reasonable" is an extremely subjective term and I imagine your readers know that attire worn at the **Colibri** is different than while dining at the **Atlantic Grill!**

Peter Lembcke is most definitely not an "elegant" restaurant. We have eaten there three times in the last twenty years. It is a typical North German restaurant with crowded seating, starched napery and good food. I have been there dressed in a suit, a blazer and tie and also wearing a sweater and chinos. I have never had a bad meal nor have I been treated with anything other than courtesy by the staff. Yes, the prices are now high; this is true everywhere and the only blame is on our weak dollar.

We learned about the great Hamburger love of eel at Peter Lembcke.

The famous "Hamburger Aalsuppe" sounds disgusting; it is a thick broth filled with pieces of eel and reconstituted dried apricots, prunes, etc. The fact is it tastes delicious after walking to the restaurant from our hotel on the Alster.

I prefer Bavaria to North Germany, but also enjoy the North. What Americans perceive as standoffishness in Hamburg should often be regarded as respect for the "space" of others and a desire not to intrude. If you try your German, you will more often than not be responded to in excellent English and meet interesting new acquaintances.

Parenthetically, tell your readers to visit the Fischmarkt in St. Pauli on Sunday morning starting at around 5:30 a.m. The "market" takes place on the barricaded main street along the Elbe. Fish, flowers, fruits and sundries are sold at stalls. Have a morning coffee or schnapps with a beer chaser at the "**Kapt'n Eck Cafe**." The music and ambience are wonderful and there is no problem with attire or "elegance."

Victor P. Obninsky, Tiburon CA

Rude Service in Hamburg

As an Argentine-born daughter of German parents who lives in the U.S., one could imagine I would share Mrs. Wildman's opinion on the "quality" of the American tourist. Nothing could be further from the truth. Of course, there are always those tourists - of any nationality - who "don't fit in" anywhere. Nevertheless, I personally received the same cold-shouldered treatment at a different high-priced restaurant in Hamburg last Fall, while dining with an English gentleman, his very proper wife, and my Cuban husband. I am fluent in German, we were all appropriately dressed and did not look typically American. Still, we were served by a haughty waiter, the food was not outstanding and the bill was outrageously high.

According to my personal experience, I would certainly agree with Bruce Woelfel's opinions, and find Mrs. Wildman's comments not just disturbing but a little insulting.

Caroline Capote, Memphis, TN



DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 7

call or fax the concierge from home. If he or she comes through, tip generously."

•"Off the beaten track I take with me a small pepper mill (to enliven bland grub) and my Sony shortwave radio. It's amazing how many places don't have CNN and don't sell the *International Herald-Tribune* or the *Financial Times*."

When *Atlantic* asked Apple what is the most surprising thing about Eastern Europe since the fall of communism, he replied, "How long it is taking them to learn how to cook again."

And, in the *GQ* piece on Berlin, Apple's wife, Betsey, with one of those wish-I'd-said-that lines, nailed a pricey but forgettable meal at a grand restaurant in just five words: "Deutsche Marks in cream sauce."

Oh, to be so brief, so tart and so right-on. — RHB

BOOK REVIEWS

Continued from page 7

residence from more recent times. It served no military purpose but was built for comfort and social status.

•Palais (palace) is a particularly opulent Schloss usually built for an emperor, king, or prince.

•Jagdschloss is the hunting lodge of an aristocrat. It is always smaller, cozier, and more rustic than a Schloss.

•Herrenhaus is a manor house on a country estate and is considerably less elegant than a Schloss."

Some 40 properties — each with a color photograph — are described in more and better detail than the usual Frommer or Fodor written-from-the-hotel-brochure description. It is obvious that each has been visited and researched.

In addition, excursions are suggested — usually more than one — for each hotel. Some outings are by car, bus or train; but a few, like this one from **Hotel Grünwalderhof** in Patsch in the Tirol, are on foot:

"Finally, there is a walk that all hotel guests should take at least once. A short time before sunset, take the footpath at the end of the parking lot and follow it as it climbs a small hill 5 minutes from the hotel. One side of the hill is covered with a thick pine and spruce forest and the other with grass. From its top, a majestic view unfolds of the Alps with forests, pastures, jagged mountain ridges, and plunging valleys. The snow-capped peaks and glaciers of the Stubai Alps at that time of the day still glisten in the glare of the setting sun, but darkness has already enveloped the valleys and gradually creeps up the mountainsides. Cows on the pastures are only barely visible, and even the distant clanging of their bells is dying away. Soon, perfect stillness reigns except for the soothing chirping of crickets, which only enhances the awe-inspiring, unworldly quiet that pervades the air."

If one judges the value of travel guides by their girth, at \$24.95 *Castle Hotels in Austria* is a little pricey. But for those planning a trip to Austria, and who want to carefully select one (or two or three) of these unique hotels, it will be money well spent.

You may not find *Castle Hotels in Austria* in your local bookstore. Contact: Euramco, 15 Elm Street, Canton MA 02021, fax 617-828-7666.

Bavarian Beer Guide

Attention beer lovers; here is your bible to the hundreds of Bavaria's

brewpubs and breweries, big and small. The *Good Beer Guide to Munich and Bavaria* was written by Graham Lees, member of the British Guild of Beer Writers, founder of CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale) and the Munich Cricket Club. Published in the U.K. by CAMRA, we found the *Good Beer Guide* in Hugendubel on Munich's Marienplatz for 27.80 DM (\$18.66).

In it is everything you need to know about getting a good glass of beer in Bavaria (not exactly as daunting a challenge as drilling for oil in Israel, we'll admit). The following entry for the village of Buttenheim, including the description of one of the two breweries, will give you an idea what this book is all about:

Buttenheim

Small, two-brewery village off the A-73 or parallel B-4, halfway between Bamberg and Forchheim.

There is nothing remarkable, in this part of the world, in a one-horse village having two breweries - but the beers they produce are. Their speciality is the heavily hopped Kellerbier style, but the liberal use of the bitter herb influences all 12 beers produced in Buttenheim, from the basic Vollbier through Pilsener to Märzen. Buttenheim probably produces the most hoppy beers in all Bavaria; a visit here is a must for all lovers of dry, hoppy beer. Both breweries - St. Georgen and Löwen - stem from the same family Modschiedler and stand next to one another. Both breweries offer budget priced accommodations; the St. Georgen pub serves mountainous meals.

Brauereigaststätte Geor-

gen Markt-str. 12

Tel: 09545 4460, or 4183

• St. Georgen Vollbier, Kellerbier (unfiltered and gravity dispensed), Pilsener on draught. Bottled Märzen and Dunkel. Seasonal specialties: dark doppelbock in spring and Weihnachtstfestbier (Christmas).

Hotfood

Fri-Wed 0900-2400; closed Thur.

Sleeping Accommodations

A bustling, hearty pub of crowded long wooden tables. A varied clientele clearly relishes the beer; waitresses are constantly busy refilling the earthenware mugs favoured especially for the unfiltered Kellerbier. It is particularly busy early evening when people flock in from beyond the village to eat lion-sized Bavarian meals. Not one, but two thriving Stammtische (regulars' tables). Brewery visits are possible. Call in advance."

Tasting notes at the end of the book describe and rate each of the beers offered at each brewery. For example, the Kellerbier of St. Georgen, above, has a 4.9% alcohol content, gets three out of a possible four stars (excellent) and is described thusly: "Rusty red, unfiltered. Massive hop aroma, like rubbing dried hops in the hand. A taste of apple fruitiness gives way to an explosion of hops in the mouth and an extremely dry finish."

The guide may not be available in the U.S., but the ISBN is 1-85249-114-0. Otherwise write CAMRA, 34 Alma Road, St. Albans, Herts AL1 3BW and include 8.99 pounds sterling and about \$10 for shipping and handling. 