

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

September 25, 1997

Every now and then we get a nice letter from a longtime subscriber who, because of advancing age, will no longer travel to Europe. Reading these letters I feel a little sad. The prospect of life without European trips is not something I want to contemplate for very long. No more *Muesli* with a mountain view, no more country drives, no more country walks, no more city walks, no more beers in cozy, wood-beamed pubs, no more wandering for hours through an old but brand-new-to-us town, no more late nights at the **Fraundorfer**, no more *Weiner Schnitzel* in a neighborhood Vienna *Beisl*, and no more *Kalbsleber*

Inside:

- Rental Prices Drop
- Readers' Forum
- Holiday River Cruises

No more of these and other simple pleasures is a flat-out bummer.

When I get such letters I'm sad for a minute or two but then I begin to think that the ability of some older people to continue to travel is a state-of-mind. I also think about my Aunt Maybelle, my mother's sister. I'd like to tell you about her.

This is my Aunt Maybelle who in the last couple of years has made a trip to Italy and another to England. This is my Aunt Maybelle who is 90 years-old, virtually blind, and who travels with a group or with grandchildren who generously invite her along. This is my Aunt Maybelle who still lives alone and cooks her own meals. This is my Aunt Maybelle who sits quietly at our loud family functions taking it all in. Since she doesn't hear so well, and doesn't see, there is a tendency to assume she's a little out of it and not following the "action." A few months ago I was disabused of this

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

DRIVING AUSTRIA

A sure-fire way of getting away from the masses of tourists who congregate around Europe's marquee attractions is to take a drive in the country. For this, Austria is unsurpassed.

We refer to roads by color — gold for Autobahn, red for federal roads, and yellow and grey for the most rural routes — because that's how they are shown on the large scale (1:200,000 or 1:150,000) maps we recommend for off-Autobahn European driving.

by
Bob Bestor

It is the 'yellow' and 'gray' roads that take one deep into the quiet countryside where traffic is light, the scenery most appealing and where a country's true character reveals itself. A sedate spin down these backroads is a most satisfying travel experience.

Berlin by Boat

Berlin's network of lakes and rivers can be accessed by an armada of tour boats.

Something generally not known about Berlin — at least on this side of the Atlantic — is that it is a city of water and therefore one of boats and ships.

Berlin is crisscrossed by rivers and canals and dotted with lakes. It is said to have more bridges than Venice and its 'harbor,' the historic Fischerinsel, is located in the heart of town.

A few kilometers to the southeast, the Müggelsee, the largest of Berlin's many lakes, is accessible by boat from the center. Likewise the wide river Havel and the beautiful Wannsee in the west.

Prior to unification, many of these inland waterways were not open to Western visitors. We recall a

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For beautiful auto trips through remote, sparsely-populated countryside where traffic ranges from light to nonexistent, it's hard to beat Austria. Unlike Germany and Switzerland, where there seems to be a village or town every few kilometers, and all too often traffic consists of long lines of cars behind slow moving trucks, there are portions of Austria, particularly in Styria, where one is reminded of the deserted backroads of Oregon and Washington.

Heavily trafficked country roads are not, of course, unknown in Austria. Just take a ride over the fantastic Grossglockner some summer day, or, on a winter weekend, try Red Road #315 south from Landeck to the Italian and Swiss borders. Though slowdowns and tie-ups can occur virtually anywhere, most of the following suggested routes are over less traveled highways.

Salzburg — Grossglockner via Badgastein

Map: Österreich Die Generalkarte #6 & #7— scale 1:200,000.

The longest and most diverse of the three drives suggested in this issue, this one begins in Salzburg and ends in Bruck or Zell am See. We suggest a stopover at Badgastein or Bad Hofgastein and then over the Grossglockner the following day.

The first portion is for those who enjoy climbing steep, narrow roads into the mountains and don't mind dodging the occasional truck in order to enjoy breathtaking mountain vistas and lovely, flower-

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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foolish assumption when, at the height of some raucous hilarity or other, it became apparent she wanted the floor. The room, of course quieted immediately. In her thin, piping voice she began to tell a slightly off-color story that related to the point of our discussion. True to her Irish heritage and the family tradition, she set it up beautifully and nailed the punch line. We all fell on the floor laughing. Nobody was being polite, it was *very* funny.

I was ashamed of myself for forgetting what a witty, clever lady she is. (After all, this is my Aunt Maybelle who knows more about the companies whose common stock she owns than some of the vice presidents of those companies.)

The other night at another dinner, I sat next to her and asked to hear the joke again so I could use it in this column. "Was it the one about the.....?," she said and then launched into a story that wasn't the one I was looking for but very funny anyhow. She went through another three or four before we decided neither of us could recall the one I was looking for.

About now you're thinking "I didn't pay good money to hear this guy talk about his Aunt Maybelle." Well, of course not. So how about my Mom and Dad? That would be Bob and Lois Bestor. He's 84, she's 79 and they just got back from

another trip to Europe, something like their 10th since their first one in 1980 (as you can see, they didn't make their first European sojourn until they were in their '60s).

My mother keeps a diary. With it she settles a lot of arguments of the "I was there on the 25th" "no you weren't, it was the 30th" variety. The trips go in there, too. Here are some of her musings on their recent "Rhine Journey."

• We boarded the Dutch ship "Esmerelda" at Strasbourg, France. It's a small ship, carrying only 130 passengers and had been chartered by the Grand Circle Travel agency which handled our tour. Crew members were all friendly and helpful. The purser, Wilhelm (pronounced Villim) was a great wit and entertained us throughout the voyage. The food was good. We had the standard European breakfast, featuring cold meats, cheeses (the Dutch cheeses were excellent), plus hard rolls, toast, croissants, scrambled eggs, sausages, canned fruit, etc. We miss the fresh fruits on these trips. The ship had oranges and bananas, but I want melons, grapefruit, peaches, all the fruits we in California are accustomed to. Europeans do tend to overcook the vegetables, but in the main, the food was acceptable and the service very good. They have a custom of serving coffee at the very end of the meal, after dessert. I tried to get coffee earlier, but to no avail.

The cabins on the ship were very comfortable. Small, but everything was there. The beds were fine and the crew made them up every day with fresh

linens.

• Sunday was a beautiful day in Speyer (Germany). We had a walking tour at 10 a.m., and that gave Bob and me a chance to go to Mass at the Cathedral. We called this the ABC tour — Another Bloody Cathedral. Mass was in German, but we could follow. The organ was marvelous, and the service about 45 minutes, so we were on time for the walking tour.

• We sailed to Mannheim that evening. This town is located at the confluence of the Rhine and Neckar Rivers and beautifully situated. Mannheim has the largest Baroque palace in Germany and wonderful displays of the Frankenthal porcelain in the **Reiss Municipal Museum**. This beautiful porcelain is manufactured locally.

• On Monday, we disembarked and loaded on to the ever-present tour buses. Ours were good; most had restrooms. Today was Heidelberg with its glorious castle high above the city with magnificent views of the bridges across the Neckar and all the red roofs of the city. Bob and I had been through the castle five times before, but went again anyway.

Lunch was at the **Zum Roter Ochsen** (Red Ox Inn) which has lots of memorabilia of the Student Prince, autographs, photos, etc. It was good (German Ravioli) and quickly served.

We rejoined the ship at Mainz which has so many things to see. The town is on the banks of the Rhine at the meeting point of the Main River. Several blocks of

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Hotel Rating Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	People/Service	30%
Above Average	12 - 15	Location/Setting	15%
Average	8 - 11	Guestrooms	30%
Adequate	4 - 7	Public rooms	5%
Unacceptable	0 - 3	Facilities/Restaurant	20%

Value Rating	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Outstanding Value	17 - 20	Food	65%
Very Good Value	12 - 16	Service	20%
Average Value	9 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Below Average Value	5 - 8		
A Rip-Off	0 - 4		

Special Designation

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

AUSTRIA DRIVES

Continued from page 1

covered houses. The second part puts you on one of Europe's great mountain highways, the highway over the Grossglockner.

Out of Salzburg, take any road to Bad Reichenhall. From there, follow the little yellow road past Thumsee and pick up #21 to the Austrian border. Then take #312 past Unken in the direction of Lofer. (If you are coming from Munich, take the Traunstein exit, head south through Inzell on #305, and then turn toward Lofer where the road intersects #21.)

At Lofer, take Red Road #311 along the Saalach river southeast to Saalfelden. This valley is enclosed on either side by several 2000-meter peaks rising steeply from the valley floor and is perhaps a mile across at its widest. At its southern entry is the Brandlhof golf course, an 18-hole layout popular with German tourists.

This road between Lofer and Saalfelden, through the Saalach Valley, not only offers mountain views but along the way there are caves open for tours. There are also places to stop for a wander through wooded gorges.

The **Rathausplatz** at Saalfelden is stunning, with a view of the 2,500 meter Breithorn framed by perfect Austrian architecture.

From here, turn toward Maria Alm and begin the ascent to Dienten, which is a ski resort and an exceptionally pretty town. In between, Maria Alm is a picturesque little village with many hotels and restaurants, and an abundance of flowers decorating the buildings. The road from there to Dienten is interesting, particularly that portion past Hintertal. But from there on it is narrow, seldom more than a car and a half wide, and climbs to the summit shortly before reaching Dienten.

At this point you can either go straight south to Red Road #311 or continue on to Mühlbach. The road south, to the main highway between Bruck and St. Johann, is very narrow — in most places wide enough for only one car (too narrow for a yellow line in the middle). There are turn-outs, of course, but traffic is light and there are few trucks. The road is curvy and most of the way is downhill. Soon you cross #311 and continue south, entering the beautiful Gasteiner Valley leading to Bad

Franz Eduard-Matras Haus.

Between Dienten and Mühlbach are many places to park and hike up a few hundred meters through the meadows for a midday repast in the shadow of the mountains. Carry picnic supplies and plan such outings for summer—our late April drive found some spots still with three to four feet of snow.

At Bischofshofen be sure to follow the Zell am See signs or you'll end up on the freeway to Salzburg or Graz. Once back on Red Road #311 heading west toward Zell am See, you'll soon see signs for the road south to Badgastein.

However one gets to the Gasteiner Valley, the overnight choices are the more up-to-date town of Bad Hofgastein on the valley floor, or venerable Badgastein, arranged in a horseshoe shape on the slope at the valley's end. It was once one of Europe's great spas and has many massive turn-of-the-century buildings.

When you wish to continue south, proceed on to the rail station at Böckstein, just above Badgastein. There you and your car take the train through the Tauern Tunnel to Mallnitz.

At Obervellach, turn west on Red Road #106, then north at Winklern and over the Grossglockner, #107. The toll is about \$25 per car. Continue north to #311 and you have almost come full circle.

Erzherzog Johann Strasse

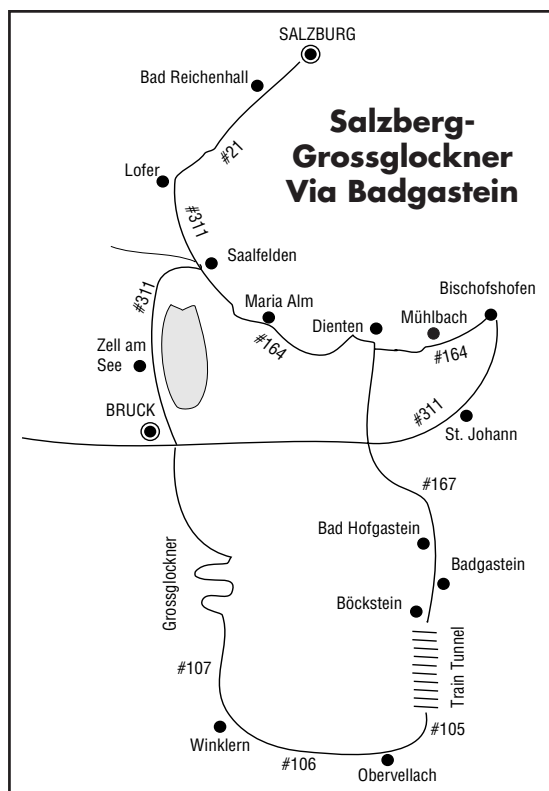
Maps: Österreich Die Generalkarte #4 & #6 -scale 1:200,000.

This fabulous little drive is not for the faint of heart.

Through the green, sparsely-settled province of Styria the route is named for the beloved Archduke Johann — grandson of the Empress Maria Theresa — who enjoyed traveling this region in the company of naturalists and archeologists.

From Salzburg, take Red Road

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Hofgastein and Badgastein.

You can also choose at Dienten to continue east to Mühlbach and on to Bischofshofen by way of the *Hoch Königstrasse*. Though this is a lesser track even than a yellow road (the map shows it in white with gray borders) it is paved and well marked. It, too, is a lovely drive. Just before Mühlbach is an astounding view of the Hochkönig, a 3000-meter peak. Despite its rugged and foreboding appearance, it is accessible by footpath. The hardy walker can even overnight on the mountain at the

AUSTRIA DRIVES

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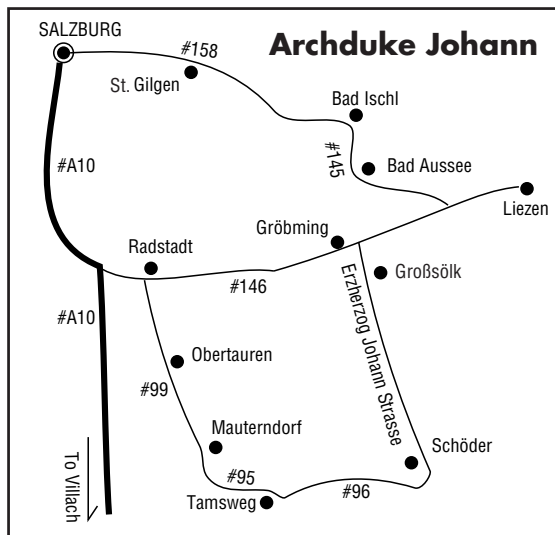
#158 to St. Gilgen and then Bad Ischl. Then go south on pretty #145 past Bad Goisern and Bad Aussee. About 25 kilometers beyond Bad Aussee, turn right (west) on Red Road #308 toward Schladming. Leave this road near Gröbming and go south on the yellow road toward Großsölk, descending a steep grade as you cross the Enns river. You are now driving the *Erzherzog Johannstrasse* (Archduke Johann Road).

Your destination is Schöder, about 35 kilometers south, and Red Road #96, a few kilometers beyond. This may not seem a great distance, but leave plenty of time, both to enjoy the scenery and to navigate this relatively treacherous track.

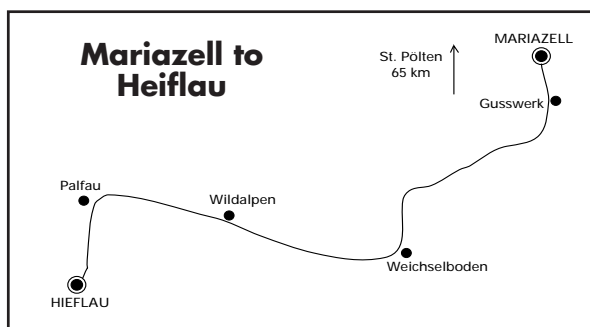
The road, which is marked "limitation for cars," is for those who like a little excitement with their driving. Much of it is single lane, particularly through the mountain passes such as the Sölker, the drive's highest point at some 5,900 feet. Little traffic is encountered, which is fortunate, because for the most part the road has no shoulders or guard rails. Along the way are many chapels and small churches, not necessarily located in the few villages and towns. Our theory is the first people to navigate parts of the road needed some place to pray.

After Großsölk, the road follows a stream, the Gros-sölkbach, for a few kilometers before continuing its climb toward the summit. Just before the peak, you will climb a steep grade and then make a hard right turn. Approximately one kilometer later, at a hard left turn, is a lovely view over the surrounding mountains. The descent takes you off the yellow road for a final few kilometers on a grey road to Schöder at an elevation of about 2,900 feet.

Although you may be relieved to see relatively flat ground and roads with lane markers, the drive is actually not that frightening. It's just a beautiful drive, one definitely worth seeking out.



On #96, turn back west. At Tamsweg, where south of the town the pilgrim's church of **St. Leonard** and its fortifications guard the Mur river, bear right onto #95 toward Mauterndorf, which has a 12th century castle. Continue north to Radstadt via the Radstätter Taurenpass and the villages of Obertauren and Untertauren. From there it's only a few kilometers west to the A10 north to Salzburg.



The *Erzherzog Johann Strasse* is usually closed in winter, so plan your trip accordingly and watch the weather if you are traveling in spring or fall — conditions on this road could go from thrilling to truly dangerous in a short time.

Mariazell to Heiflau

Maps: Österreich Die Generalkarte # 2-scale 1:200,000.

From the pilgrimage town of Mariazell (about 65 km south of the Vienna-Salzburg Autobahn, exit St. Pölten), along the Salza river southwest to Heiflau, this peaceful drive is through Austria's least populated region.

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

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

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

Though the drive is not at all difficult or dangerous, it is still a good idea to depart with a full fuel tank. And, as there are few restaurants along the way, but several lovely spots for picnics, you might also want to take your own food. With stops for sight-seeing and the picnic, figure on about three hours.

Mariazell, where you may wish to overnight, is where a Benedictine priory was founded in 1157 and Pope John Paul II said Mass on September 13, 1983. Inside the Basilica see the striking **Chapel of Miracles** and the **Schatzkammer** (Treasury) with its collection of the votive offerings of hundreds of years of pilgrims, from simple drawings by children to heirlooms of great value.

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Recommended Hotels for your Austrian Drives

Landhaus Hubertushof, Puchen 86, A-8992, Altaussee/Steiermark, +43/06152/71280. \$\$\$

Grüner Baum, Kotschachtal, A-5640, Badgastein, +43/06434/2516-0, fax 25 16 25. \$\$\$\$

Haus Hirt, An der Kaiser Promenade, Badgastein, A-5640, +43/06434/2797, fax 279748. \$\$\$

Landhaus Gletschermühle, Gletschermühlestrasse 7, A-5640, Badgastein, +43/06434/20 970, fax 23 80 30. \$

Hotel-Cafe Austria, D-5630, Bad Hofgastein, +43/06432/6223. \$

Hotel Norica, D-5630, Bad Hofgastein, +43/06432/8391-0, fax 8391-500. \$\$\$

Gasthof Römerhof, Fusch an der Grogglocknerstrasse, Grogglocknerstrasse 77, A-5672, +43/06546/218-0, fax 21 816. \$

Gasthof Zum Alten Brauhaus, 5 Wiener Strasse, A-8630, Mariazell, +43/03882/2523. \$

Schloss Haunspurg, A-5411, Obraln Bei Hallein, +43/06245/80 662, fax 85680. \$\$\$

Trumer Stube, Bergstrasse 6, A-5020, Salzburg, +43/0662/874776, fax 874 326. \$\$\$

Pension Wolf, Kaigasse 7, Salzburg, A-5020, +43/0662/84 34 530, fax 84 24 23. \$\$\$

Hotel Berner, Nikolaus-Gassner-Promenade 1, A-5700, Zell am See, +43/06542/779, fax 7797. \$\$\$

Price Code: \$=inexpensive, \$\$=moderate, \$\$\$=moderate-expensive, \$\$\$\$=expensive

BERLIN BY BOAT

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boat trip on the Havel and Wannsee a few years ago that could only explore the non-Communist portions of these waters. The Eastern zone was marked by boys beyond which our boat did not venture. Instead we drifted near the ominous floating markers and peered curiously at the communist world on shore.

Now, however, Berlin's entire network of lakes and rivers is accessible to a wide range of vessels from lake steamers to sail boats to row boats. Trips of from one hour to several days are offered and small boats can be rented. Many of the city's most important buildings and sights can be seen from the water, a

more tranquil way of viewing the city.

Larger ships have on-board food service and several offer special programs. On the Wannsee, one can attend a Caribbean party with fireworks on the water, or dance by moonlight following an elegant dinner.

Excursions can be booked to Potsdam, the Müggelsee or, if one has a few days, to Szczecin in Poland, to Mecklenburg Vorpommern or even points beyond.

Berlin's maritime side is not limited to boat rides. Ships and barges permanently moored at the Fischerinsel offer a variety of entertainment. For example, the "Kunstschiff Anna," a 220-foot former coal barge, circa 1910, offers performances of music and dance.

Experimental theater aboard the "Freie Gruppe Körperausdruck" takes place in the open air to the twittering of birds and next to hanging weeping willows.

This past summer, the "Theaterschiff la mar" hosted performances of Shakespeare's "The Tempest" and a new work by the New York Chamber Opera.

There are also a number of restaurant ships of the "never sail" variety.

Boat Trips

Berliner Wassersport- und Service GmbH, Tel. 676 94 83, Fax 676 94 01; Boat trips to Szczecin (Poland), Brandenburg and the Müritz.

City Schifffahrt, Tel. 345 77 83, Fax 345 99 33; City trips and trips to "Marchenland" (Fairyland); from Charlottenburg to Müggelsee with dinner and dancing (also rents boats).

Europäischer Verein der Gewässerfreunde Aquarius, Tel. 533 63-600; Tours of several days to Mecklenburg, Szczecin and other points.

Haveldampfschifffahrt, Potsdam, Tel. 0331/ 270 62 29; Castle tours, city tours, twilight tours on historic ships.

Havelländische Personenschifffahrtsgesellschaft, Tel. 393 30 15, Fax 393 44 95; Multiple day trips on "hotel ships" to Szczecin, Hamburg and Amsterdam.

Heinrich Zille-Revuefahrten, Tel. 362 31 23, Fax 361 60 84; Evening trips featuring buffet dinner and 1920's Berlin revue.

Reederei Bruno Winkler*, Tel. 3 91 70 70, Fax 391 80 49; City tours, excursions to Lehnitzsee, special "theme" trips including "Caribbean Night" and "Wannsee in flames." Purchase tickets at tourist offices.

Reederei Heinz Riedel, Tel. 691 37 82, Fax 694 21 92; City tours, day excursions to Müggelsee, Wannsee and Brandenburg.

Reederei Horst Schmidt, Tel. 366 51 45, 0171/ 319 22 30; Spandau to Potsdam, to the Pfaueninsel, Wannsee and the 7-lake trip (also boat rental).

Reederei Spreefahrt, Tel. 394 49 54, Fax 394 61 02; City and bridge tours; trips to Müggelsee.

Stern- und Kreis-Schifffahrt*, Tel. 53 63 60-0, Fax 53 63 60-99; City tours, trips to Potsdam, Havel tour, Müggelsee, Teltowkanal, also to Bad Saarow and Szczecin (Poland). Purchase tickets at tourist offices.

Berliner Wassetaxi - Stadtrundfahrten*, Tel. 65 88 02 03, Fax 65 88 02 04; Trips on the Spree and Spreekanal.

Weisse Flotte Potsdam, Tel. 0331/ 2915 27, Fax 0331/2910 90; Trips on the Havel and Wannsee, views of the city, trips to Werder, Caputh, Ferch, Petzow, Pfaueninsel and Brandenburg. Purchase tickets at tourist offices.

* Discount with Berlin Welcome Card.

On-Board Performances

Kunstschiff Anna, Fischerinsel 2, Markisches Ufer, Tel. 445 70 22; Konzerte, Lesungen, Concerts, readings, dance, performances and special afternoon children's programs.

Theaterschiff la mar, Markisches Ufer/ Inselstrasse, Tel. 443 10 58; Theatre productions.

MS Sanssouci, Grobenüfer, Ober Baumbrücke, Tel. 611 12 55; Concerts and parties.

Theater auf dem Schiff in Potsdam, Stadt Spiel-Truppe, Tel. 0331/748 15 03; Theater, cabaret, music and parties.

Theaterschiff TAU, Am Urbanhafen, Hohe Planufer 77, Tel. 69169 88; Theater, music, fashion, cabaret, readings and children's theater.


Restaurant Boats

Captain Schillow, am Charlottenburger Tor, Tel. 3150 5015; open daily 10 a.m.- 1 a.m.; Cafe and restaurant with international cooking and weekend brunch.

van Loon, Baerwaldbrücke, Tel. 692 62 93, open daily 10 a.m.- 1 a.m. Cafe and restaurant.

Pik-As, Urbanhafen gegenüber Planhafen, Tel. 693 02 63, 1 p.m.- 1 a.m., weekends 10 a.m.- 1 a.m.

Theme Trips

Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, Tel. 215 44 50; Guided tours: "Ab durch die Mitte" (classical city tour), Old buildings, new buildings, renovated buildings, Jewish history and stories, etc. 

READERS' FORUM

Good Hotel Value

Weimar: I commend your choice of **Pension Altenburg** (February 26, 1997), only a 10-minute walk down a small hill and across a bridge over a flowing stream into historic old-town Weimar. We especially enjoyed walking in the beautiful, well-groomed park of grassy meadows and magnificent old trees. We toured Goethe's small two-story garden house on the edge of the park, and his large, art-filled city house. We sampled several small restaurants and found all to be excellent. Our double room (130 DM/\$75) at the Altenburg was simple but modern and immaculately kept, with red, blue, and pink flowers in the window box. The two lady caretakers were especially helpful.

Dresden: We were also pleased with **Schloss Röhrsdorf** on a hill among apple orchards overlooking Dresden. The Schloss is a restored country estate, with a stable of riding horses available to guests. Our second floor, double room cost 150 DM (\$86). Days were spent touring the historic museums overlooking the beautiful River Elbe. At the Gallery of Old Masters of the Zwinger Palace we saw Vermeer's portrait of a lady reading a letter in the light from a window. In the Gallery of New Masters at the Albertinum, it was refreshing to discover paintings by Kuehl, Schlotz, and Max Lieberman.

Evening hours we walked about hamlet Röhrsdorf, or sat on the hotel's patio enjoying cool drinks and the view. The two caretakers who served our meals were a true lady and a real gentleman.

J. LLOYD SUTTERBY
HOUSTON TX

Zürich Hotels-Restaurant

Last year, in search of an inexpensive hotel in Zürich, we stayed at the **Bristol**. It scored high on the people-service scale but our room was so small we kept tripping over our

suitcases. Another problem was noise from a streetcar line nearby which had a sharp bend that forced the cars to grind their way around the curve. And, while the location is quite close to the Bahnhof, we had to hike a considerable distance to get to restaurants. This year we tried the **Scheuble**, which is even closer to the Bahnhof and much closer to Bahnhofstrasse, the lake, and restaurants. We appreciated the location and our room was a bit larger than at the Bristol. On every other count, however, (except absence of streetcar noise) the Scheuble was not very satisfactory. Most of the staff were a bit surly and the rooms, hallways, lobby and restaurant shabby. The Bristol came across as "thrifty," the Scheuble as "cheap."

We did find an excellent moderately-priced restaurant in Zürich, though. At Fraumünsterstrasse 14, we found **Trattoria Toscana**. The interior is attractive, the service professional but relaxed, and the food delicious. We ordered one green salad for the two of us, half-sized portions of spaghetti *al Capone* (bits of ham in a cream sauce), and a liter of Chianti. The bill came to 53 Sfr. (\$37). We returned the next night for half-size portions of veal *a la Marsala*, plus the green salad which we split. Another delicious meal and the bill came to 69 Sfr. (\$48). We found the half-portions were just about right for us.

We made another restaurant discovery in Germany. On a cold, windy, rainy night in Hamburg we went down to the restaurant of our hotel, the **St. Raphael**, and were told they served only a buffet dinner for 39 DM (\$22) per person.

Near the Bahnhof, on Kirchenallee, we discovered the **Block House**, part of an American-style restaurant chain but with a German Hofbräu atmosphere. The decor was attractive and cozy and all the personnel near the door said *Guten Abend* when we arrived and *Wiedersehen* when we left. They feature American beef steaks, but we opted for turkey and ordered *Putenbruststeak*, which was broiled just right and

served with the best baked potato we have had in years. We split a "Block House Salad," and each had a glass of draught beer for 47 DM (\$27). We enjoyed the meal so much we decided to find out if we had been unduly influenced by finding such a welcome retreat on a nasty night. Later in the trip we ate at the Block House opposite the Stuttgart Bahnhof and ordered the same meal. It tasted just as good. *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers who aren't afraid to risk their reputations as supersophisticated gourmands might give a Block House a try. (They can probably be found in most big German cities. I believe there are nine of them in Hamburg.) You won't get anything elegant, but you won't run the risk of squandering 200 bucks on poorly prepared dishes with fancy names and/or of getting snubbed by a waiter, either.

Other than the buffet-only dinner setup at the St. Raphael, we found the hotel to be quite satisfactory. Incidentally it appears that the **Hotel Glockenhof** in Zürich has also gone to a buffet-only evening meal arrangement. (I suppose it saves them the trouble of printing a menu and having to fuss over individual meals.) At least that was the case the night we went there, which forced us to try the **Glogge Egg** where we had barely edible gnocchi in tomato sauce, a salad, and beer apiece which cost 60 Sfr. The food, atmosphere, service, and quality of our fellow diners was at least 10 times higher the next two nights at the Trattoria Toscana for the same amount of money.

ROBERT F. BIEHLER
CHICO CA

Berlin Cafes

You can get Budvar on draught at the **Orangerie** in the **Nassauer Hof Hotel**, both the best of their kind in Wiesbaden. Orangerie belongs to a German-European edition of a "Super-Restaurants-Chefs" chain or *Jeune Restaurateurs D'Europe* "Talent & Passion." Lunch for two is approximately 100 DM (\$57).

Re: Weimar. If you are over 65 stay at the **Radisson** in Erfurt (30

minutes drive to Weimar). No exceptional food in sight but the price for seniors is 1% off for each year of age. In my case that was almost 75% off the rack rate! Erfurt itself is worth a day's sight-seeing — old town, even older cathedral, river walk, market, etc.

When in Weimar or Erfurt go to Buchenwald. See the monument and commemorative park on your left before you get to the main camp. Spend some time in the main building at the camp entrance which also served as the "bunker" or penalty compound.

Circle the camp — past the crematorium — to the right as you face the entrance. Behind the camp are two heavily wooded cemeteries. The victims of the Russian (or Communist) use of the camp (1945-52, I think) are buried here.

Re: Berlin cafes. Forget the **Cafe Kranzler**, the ultimate tourist trap. Here, they charge to use the toilets and there is a minimum during busy hours. There is a poor selection of pastries and bad service.

Instead go to the **Palais Cafe** by the Opera on Unter den Linden, two blocks from the Radisson. The Palais is the most European of all cafes and has a prewar atmosphere. Pastry selection and attitude of staff are both superior.

ANATOLE CHARI
LAGUNA BEACH CA

(Ed. Note: Longtime subscriber Dr. Chari knows whereof he speaks. He is an Auschwitz survivor and at the war's end was liberated from Bergen-Belsen. When we phoned him to clarify a portion of his letter he gave us another recommendation: **St. Hedrick's Cathedral**, behind the Palais Cafe. Buried in the crypt there is Domprobst Bernard Lichtenberg, a Berlin priest who saved Jews from the camps by declaring them "non-Aryan Christians." Dr. Chari says the Nazis did not look kindly on such activities and Father Lichtenberg was sent to Dachau. He died en route.)

Grüner Baum Gripe

Recently, I went to Austria and stayed at **Grüner Baum** in Badgastein. On the positive side, my single corner room was a delight at

an off-season price of about \$70 per day. The location was wonderful as was the walk from the Grüner Baum to Bad Hofgastein. A real pleasure to stop at a restaurant on the way for some coffee and *Kugel*.

On the other side, when I made my reservations, my letter stated that I would take half-board when I was not traveling into other parts of Austria. I had four dinners at the Grüner Baum and was charged for 10 when I paid the bill. The person at the front desk stated I did not notify the head waiter that I would not be at dinner the nights I was elsewhere. When I noted my statement in my reservation letter that I would be traveling to other parts of Austria and would only be having dinner when I was available, I was coldly told that it was my obligation to advise them in the morning that I would not be having dinner that night. I am very agreeable to paying when I receive service, however, I did not think it was my responsibility since it was clearly stated in my reservation letter of my intentions. I think a first class operation, as the Grüner Baum is, would have followed-up on my letter and made it clear to the restaurant staff of my intentions.

Also, the warm greeting of the owners was not present when I arrived nor did they ever greet me during my stay. I have stayed in many first-class inns and hotels and was never treated as coldly as I was at Grüner Baum. I met some wonderful people at Grüner Baum and my stay was delightful except as stated. I much preferred Bad Hofgastein to Badgastein. Badgastein appears very tired whereas Bad Hofgastein is full of energy and very charming.

GEORGE J BOSER
COLUMBUS OH

(Ed. Note: Hotel operators tell us the standard procedure for half-board rate bookings is that the hotel charges the guest the half-board rate each day unless notified the morning of the day in question that the guest will not be at dinner that evening. Daily notification is the responsibility of the guest. The hotel's responsibility is to advise half-board guests of this procedure.)

Europe Travel Digest

■ Rental agencies have reacted to the higher dollar by proclaiming lower prices at European properties they represent. **Interhome USA**, one of the largest, says some of its weekly rates are 40% less than four years ago and that today's prices are 18% to 26% lower than those published in its current list.

Examples of one-week prices for winter and spring bookings include: **Davos studio apartment** for two persons, March '98, \$586; **Zermatt one bedroom** (up to four persons), January '98, \$865; **Verbier luxury chalet** with five bedrooms and three baths (8-10 persons), April '98, \$2162; **Seefeld (Austria) one bedroom apartment** (up to four persons), February & March '98, \$1,214.; **Kitzbühel luxury villa** with five bedrooms and five baths (up to nine persons), January '98, \$2,540.

Idyll, Ltd., of Media, PA, says it has reduced prices on its 1998 "Untours" which typically include apartment or chalet rental for two to four weeks, roundtrip airfare and ground transportation — rail or auto rental. Two week prices from New York begin at \$1,498 per person.

Contacts: Interhome, 124 Little Falls Road, Fairfield NJ 07004, tel. 201-882-6864, fax 201-808-1742. Idyll, Ltd., P O Box 405, Media PA 19063, tel. 610-565-5242, fax 610-565-5142, email info@untours.com; http://www.untours.com.

(Editor's Note: Both the above companies have long histories of reputable and reliable service. However, to find the lowest rental prices Gemütlichkeit recommends bypassing such agents. Contact the tourist office of villages or regions in which you have an interest and ask for the list of self-catering rentals. With that in hand, the tourist authority bows out of the transaction and you are free to contact property owners direct and thereby obtain the best

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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the business district are built on the old riverbed. When they were excavating for the **Hilton Hotel** (I think), they found the wreckage of several antique Roman ships dating from 376 AD.

We saw the reconstructed bronze statue of Jupiter which was found buried and in 2,000 pieces. It had been erected in 59 AD and now again stands proudly in a square near the center of town. The statue of "The Happy Wine Drinker" was also fairly close by. The guide told us that many years ago the water was so bad that everyone had to drink wine. That doesn't sound too bad, does it?

- An interesting church is the **Church of St. Stephen** which has NINE, count'em, nine windows by Marc Chagall. Outstandingly gorgeous.

- The **Gutenberg Museum** is located right downtown in Mainz. Most interesting. A little animated movie was shown at the beginning of the tour, narrating Gutenberg's problems getting his bible off the ground. He printed 150 of that first edition. What a chore. One of the originals is in the museum along with countless old, old books, hand printed and any color had to be hand-painted.

- We left Mainz at noon — promptly-as always — and arrived at Rudesheim at 1:30 p.m. Now there is a spot!! I think the term "tourist trap" originated in Rudesheim. An entire town of souvenir shops. But there is a worthwhile exhibit called the **Siegfried Mechanisches Musikkabinett**. Old, self-playing musical instruments; early-day jukeboxes. All in beautiful condition. One machine that played four violins at the same time, plus a little pianoforte (I think). It was fascinating. They had a Welte-Mignon player piano there which was identical to one Bob and I had back in the 1940s. The records it played were recordings by Rubenstein and other great artists. It was a truly marvelous thing. We had boxes of those Welte-Mignon rolls which were valuable even then. However, we could not move them to Oregon and I stored them at Aunt Julia's and I don't know what happened to them. Today? What a

treasure! The museum had only about 12 or 15.

- Thursday the ship stopped north of the ruins of the **Bridge at Remagen**. There is a museum there with a lot of heartbreaking pictures. It was sad for many of us older ones who remembered the war vividly. I think my brother Tommy was at that assault. So we took pictures and went back to the ship and had a cold beer to make us feel better.

- Friday morning on a bus tour of Cologne we stopped at the **Cathedral**. This is a BIG one. There is a gold shrine there containing the bones of the Three Wise Men. How do they know that?

- We sailed on past Düsseldorf and many smaller villages. Had our farewell dinner on the ship tonight. They served the baked Alaska with flaming brandy over it, had the procession and the Radetsky March and it was quite spectacular and delicious.

I understand, of course, that my parents and my aunt are fortunate to be in good health and some of the older people who have written to us are not. For those I feel truly sorry. The rest of us should keep a valid passport. — RHB



EUROPE DIGEST

Continued from page 7

rates. Remember that many Europeans are more comfortable conducting such transactions in writing rather than by phone.)

- **Swissair's 1997/98 Alpine Experience Winter** offers vacations for both skiers and nonskiers starting at \$875 per person double occupancy including roundtrip air from the U.S., from November 1, 1997 through April 30, 1998.

The **Air + Land** program is available at 19 Alpine resorts in four European countries: Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland. Packages include: the Swissair flight, accommodations for seven nights at a resort or hotel of choice, all breakfasts and sometimes dinner, land travel (to and from the airport and resort), local taxes and service charges.

Youth airfares are available and some hotels offer special arrange-

ments for children. Seniors over age 62 — and a traveling companion of any age — enjoy a 10% discount on land arrangements.

City packages begin at \$62 per person, per night, double occupancy and include one night's accommodations with choice of hotel, breakfast, one day of free public city transportation, local taxes and service charges.

Contact: Your travel agent or call **Swisspak** at 800-688-7947.

- **KD River Cruises of Europe** is offering Christmas and New Year's cruises on three European rivers — the Rhine, the Danube and the Elbe.

Seven-day Christmas and New Year's Rhine cruises, departing December 20 and 27, are roundtrip from Cologne. The cruises, aboard the KD flagship *Britannia*, go as far south as Strasbourg. On Christmas Eve, the 184-passenger vessel is in Speyer, where passengers can attend Mass in the Imperial Cathedral. On New Year's Eve a shipboard ball will be held. Fares for both cruises range from \$1,330 to \$1,545 per person double, including all meals; suites are \$2,320 per person.

The seven-day Danube Christmas cruise aboard the 104-passenger *Heinrich Heine* begins December 20 in Regensburg and ends in Vienna on the 26th. Passengers can attend Christmas Eve Mass in the Austrian wine town of Dürnstein. This cruise, which starts in Vienna on December 27 and ends in Regensburg on January 2, will also feature a New Year's Eve shipboard ball. Fares for both cruises range from \$1,240 to \$1,425; suite accommodations cost \$1,780.

Christmas and New Year's Day excursions to Prague, and a full day in Dresden, highlight five-day cruises on the Elbe River aboard the 124-passenger *Clara Schumann*. The cruises, roundtrip from Dresden, depart December 22 and 29. The Prague excursion and Dresden sightseeing are included in fares of \$875 to \$1,000

Contact: Your travel agent or phone 800-346-6525 from the eastern U.S. or 800-858-8587 from the west, including Texas, Alaska and Hawaii. ☒