

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

February 28, 1998

A Car Rental Primer

In Europe, the majority of *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers travel by auto. For two or more persons traveling together, a rental car is usually the most economical form of transport and also the most flexible.

We'll save the train vs. automobile argument for a later issue. In the meantime, here are some tips on European car rental.

- **General Advice:** The place to start the rental is Germany. Rates there are the cheapest in Europe and the airport pickup fee is still about \$12 except for **Sixt** and **Alamo** which charge, respectively, 6% and 10% of the total rental cost. Airport charges in Switzerland are 12% and in Austria 11%. Italy is the most expensive country in which to rent a car. There, you'll pay slightly more than \$300 per week for a subcompact — including mandatory CDW and theft insurance — versus about \$98 (including 16% German value added tax and using a credit card for CDW and theft insurance) for the same car in Germany.

- ✓ Virtually every European rental car is equipped with a radio and cassette tape player. Bigger, more expensive cars may come with CD changer and/or telephone. Sunroofs can be found in all categories but requesting one at the time of booking is a waste of time. Ask when you pick up the car.

- ✓ More and more cars in Germany are air-conditioned. Nearly all rental cars have it in Italy.

- ✓ You'll pay substantially more for a car with automatic transmission; in some countries, Germany, for example, nearly twice as much.

- ✓ Children must be strapped into a child's seat (even up to 12 years of age in some cases). Take your own or rent them from the

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

BERN, BABY, BERN

While the pace isn't exactly feverish, even on a Saturday night, there's a lot going on in the Swiss capital, plus plenty of good restaurants, some special hotels and miles of narrow streets for strolling.

As the Aare river works its way north though Switzerland to eventually join the Rhine, it takes many twists and turns. On a little peninsula formed by one of the river's sharper bends, the city of Bern came to be in the year 1191.

By
Bob
Bestor

Now, some 800 years later, it is one of Europe's most charming and cosmopolitan towns. With a population of 130,000, Bern is neither village nor metropolis, though it has many of the advantages of both.

It is large enough to support world-class museums and orchestras, while at the same time retaining a small town atmosphere. Every Tuesday and Saturday, for example, is market day. On these mornings the old town is packed with farmers and

vendors selling all manner of food and other goods.

Bern's sophistication comes in large measure from the influence of its university, its approximately 80 foreign embassies and consulates, and the fact that it is Switzerland's capital city. These institutions ratchet up considerably the demand for life's finer things such as top-notch restaurants, hotels, clever shops and cultural venues.

The city's principal attraction, however, is an extensive, architecturally unique, and wonderfully preserved, old town. Strollers and window shoppers can spend hours exploring its six kilometers of arcade-lined streets.

Another Bern plus is its vast and

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Europe Travel Briefing

- **Swissair has announced new nonstop San Francisco-Zürich service** beginning May 27. Five weekly flights — operating on Sunday and Tuesday through Friday — will depart San Francisco at 10:05pm and arrive Zürich at 6:05pm the following day. The return flights leave Zürich at 4:25pm and arrive in San Francisco at 7:15pm.

Swissair's other U.S. gateways are Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, New York, Newark, Philadelphia and Washington.

- **Again in 1998, *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers qualify for special Swissair fare reductions.** Economy class tickets priced to the general public at less than \$1,000 — yes, even those much lower winter sale

fares — are reduced \$50 per ticket. Economy class tickets over \$1,000 are reduced \$150. Business and first class tickets are lowered by \$400 and \$600 respectively.

These reductions apply only to current *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers plus any family or friends traveling one leg of the transatlantic journey with the subscriber or the subscriber's spouse.

To book flights at the reduced prices, phone the main Swissair reservation number, 800-221-4750, and ask the reservationist to access "G-Star, reference QL2JLQ." Once reservations have been booked, telephone Swissair's Los Angeles office, 310-335-5900, to be ticketed at the reduced rates.

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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rental company for about \$30/rental.

- **Book Early.** Prices are low this time of year and likely to rise April 1. In some countries and in some car categories, upgrades are available if booked prior to April 1. Don't worry if you have to change dates or cancel, the credit card chargeback laws in this country prevent you being charged for a travel service not received. Thus, if you pay a deposit or even the full rental price, you'll get it all back when you cancel.

- **Insurance.** By law, car rental companies in Europe must provide third-party liability insurance, which is included in the basic rental charge. The renter, however, is responsible for the car. Rental companies sell CDW (collision damage waiver) and theft insurance for from about \$12 to \$30 per day (plus tax, of course). However, some credit cards offer this coverage free if you use the card to pay for the car. Find out from your credit card issuer whether your account carries such coverage and, if so, what the rules are for making a successful claim.

One unfortunate *Gemütlichkeit* reader incurred about \$4,000 damage to his own rental car in Germany. He paid for the rental with a Visa card which provides the necessary coverage. However, Visa requires a claim be filed within 20 days of the accident and this our reader did not do. He is stuck with the bill.

You should also be sure the term of your rental is not longer than the coverage provided by your credit card. For example, Mastercard gold covers rentals up to 15 days. If your contract is 16 days or longer you have no collision or theft coverage. Visa gold, American Express (except most corporate cards) and Diner's Club cover rentals up to 30 days.

Gemütlichkeit recommends you decline the car rental company's offer of insurance and rely on your credit card for CDW and theft insurance, but only after first determining that you are in fact covered by your credit card for the specific rental you have in mind.

- **Eastern Travel.** Not a big problem from Germany to Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic or Slovakia with most car rental companies (though Hertz doesn't allow such travel). However, only certain cars — usually Opels — are allowed to travel East.

If Romania, Slovenia or countries of the former Soviet Union are your destination you'll pay a somewhat higher rate.

Be sure to state your intention to visit Eastern countries at the time of booking. Those who try to take a non-authorized car into an Eastern country may find big trouble. It is illegal to even attempt to do so. Special documentation is required, even with Opels.

Last December, an unsuspecting *Gemütlichkeit* reader tried to take a

rented Citroen ZX into the Czech Republic for a day's skiing. When told at the border that such was not possible, he, of course, realized he would have to stay in Austria. But when he asked for his car papers and passport back our reader was told the documents would not be returned and his car would be impounded.

To make a long, sad story short, after more than four hours at the border station, our man was allowed to leave with his passport but without the car, which he never saw again. Fortunately, he was accompanied by German friends who took him back into Austria where he rented another car.

In addition, he was in violation of his contract with the car rental company and his credit card was charged for the impound costs and the cost of returning the vehicle to the original pickup location.

- **Choosing a Car.** First, understand that no car rental company will guarantee a specific make and/or model. The words "or similar" are always used in the rental confirmation and the renter is promised only a category. Here are some of the principal car categories and some info on each:

- ✓ **Subcompact.** Typical cars: Opel Corsa, VW Polo, Fiat Punto. O.k. for two persons who aren't interested in burning up the Autobahn. Limited trunk space. Cost: about \$85* per week.

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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.

BERN

Continued from page 1

busy rail station, located virtually in the town center. An amazing 50 trains per day, starting at 4:50am and ending at 10:14pm, make the approximately 90-minute run to the Zürich Airport. Another 28 daily trains serve the Geneva Airport, a little less than two hours away. Interlaken is just over 45 minutes by train, Lucerne about an hour and a quarter and Lausanne just over an hour.

(Bern could be the headquarters for rail pass holders to see most of the western half of the country on daytrips. Here's just one suggestion: hop a train for the 40-minute ride to the farming village of Langnau in the Emmental. Walk the town, perhaps visit the local craft museum [Heimatmuseum], then have lunch at the **Hotel Hirschen**, one of the best kitchens in the region.)

There are also direct connections with the international rail network and Bern is the only European capital served by three different high-speed trains; TGV to Paris, ICE to Frankfurt and Berlin, and the Pendolino-Cisalpine to Milan. One can also catch an overnight train to Florence and Rome — the Talgo — or board the EuroCity Albert Einstein to Prague via Munich.

Speaking of Einstein, he lived in Bern for several years, working in the patent office and teaching at the university. He developed $E=MC^2$ in an apartment at Kramgasse 49, which is now a small museum.

For reasons we can't fathom, the best-known attraction in town is a few scruffy bears, the animal after which the city is named. They are kept in a pit just across the river at the end of the old town. When we saw them 12 years ago for the first and last time, they didn't look very happy or comfortable; but what do we know? Maybe living in a concrete hole is choice duty for a bear.

Leading a good list of Bern museums is the **Kunstmuseum**, which houses the world's largest Paul Klee collection. There are also works by Picasso, Monet, Cézanne, Manet, Cranach, Chagall and other notables.

Bern Info

Population: 130,000

Altitude: 542 meters, 1778 feet

Bern Tourist Office

Railway Station

CH-3001 Bern

Tel. +41/31/311 6611, fax 312 1233

E-Mail: info-res@bernetourism.ch

Bern Packages

Bern "à la carte" packages are available through the tourist office and include:

- ✓ Two, three or four nights with breakfast, in hotel category of choice
- ✓ Bern-Pass voucher booklet with various free offers and price reductions
- ✓ City sight-seeing tour
- ✓ Documentation on Bern and surroundings

Prices in Swiss Francs Per Person

April 30 through October 31, 1998

	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star
2 nights	172	205	232	324
3 nights	240	291	331	469
4 nights	309	377	430	614

A Few Museums

Museum of Fine Arts: World's largest Paul Klee collection. Collection of 14th to 16th century Italian art and Swiss art from 15th century to present (Duccio, Fra Angelico, Picasso, Chagall, Kandinsky, Bill). French 19th and 20th-century artists and artists from Spain and Russia.

Swiss Rifle Museum: Comprehensive collection of firearms since 1817.

Museum of Natural History: Europe's largest diorama; mammals and birds presented in natural habitat. The original Barry, the famous Saint Bernard dog.

Einstein House: At Kramgasse 49; the apartment where, in 1905, Einstein developed the principles of his theory of relativity. Open Tues-Fri. 1-5pm, Sat. 12-4pm

Swiss Alpine Museum: Renovated between 1990 and 1993; exhibits include 27 alpine topographical models, multivision, 10 audiovisual information stations, alpine data, etc.

Museum of Communication: Huge stamp collection. History of post and telecommunications.

Miscellaneous

Guides: Multilingual guides available for groups and individuals. Bern Tourist Office, tel. 031 311 66 11

Cycling Trails: Approximately 186 miles / 400 km signed routes

Hiking Routes: Marked network (250 km) in and around the city. Guided hiking tours begin at railway station, tel. 332 33 42.

House of Parliament: Free tours (except during parliamentary sessions, official holidays and special events) weekdays 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16; Sundays 10, 11, 14, 15, access to galleries during parliamentary sessions, tel. 322 85 22

For our money, the best fun in Bern is simply to explore on foot every street, lane and alley east of the railway station.

The principal east-west street which cuts through the heart of the old town keeps changing its name as it goes east. Starting out as Bubenbergplatz, it then becomes Spitalgasse, then Marktgasse, then Kramgasse and finally Gerechtigkeitsgasse. Then just before crossing the Nydeggbücke, it becomes Nydegggasse. The farther one gets toward the end of the peninsula and the bend in the river, the more exclusive the shops. A couple of interesting ones are **Heimatwerke** at Kramgasse 61 and **Kunsthandwerkanderegg**, Kramgasse 4.

Because of the arcades, most sidewalks are undercover so one stays relatively dry on rainy days.

After you've done the Marktgasse, Kramgasse, Gerechtigkeitsgasse, etc., street and find yourself at the end of the peninsula, do a 180-degree left turn and double back on one of Bern's most interesting little byways, Postgasse. It carries less foot traffic and is home to a number of interesting shops. See the purses at **Momo Haller** (#46) Postgasse, the sculptures at **Bildhauerwerkstatt** (#58), minimalist furniture at **Zona** (#60) and a fine kitchen store, **Küchenladen** (#53). Grab a bite at **Restaurant Café Postgasse** (#48), then drop by **Antiquitäten** (#50) and **Laeng's Raritäten** (#54).

Parking is a big problem in the center of Bern. On weekends you can park in front of the Parliament House (if you can find a space), but other than that there is no on-street parking. Public lots cost 32 Sfr. (\$22) per day and space is limited. Approaching the town by automobile you'll see signs that electronically display the number of available spaces at each downtown parking garage. At 1pm on a Saturday early last December, two park houses showed two available spaces, another had none and a third, not so centrally located, had 137 open parking spaces.

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BERN

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There are two five-star hotels in Bern, the **Bellevue Palace** and the **Schweizerhof**, and they are priced accordingly at between \$250 and \$300 for a double room. The starchy, turn-of-the-century Palace is a very near the Parliament House and is the first choice for high government officials and diplomats. The Schweizerhof has been criticized by some subscribers for its noisy location directly across the street from the rail station.

In our view, however, there are better choices from the standpoint of both value and charm. Two standouts are the **Innere Enge**, which, though slightly away from the center, equals the two five-stars in comfort and charm at about 60% of the cost; and the tiny, elegant **Belle Epoque** in the area of Bern's most interesting shops.

All hotels reviewed here have special weekend rates.

Restaurants are another Bern strong point. For those who must dine in opulence, both the **Bellevue Grill** and the **Schultheissenstube** in the Hotel Schweizerhof will be pleased to relieve you of about \$50 and up per person, not including beverages. For fondue and raclette, locals recommend **Le Mazot** on Berneplatz, though they remind us that only Japanese and American tourists order them in summer.

For middle of the road dining, try the restaurant at Hotel Innere Enge which serves daily specials for less than 20 Sfr. (\$14) or one of the restaurants reviewed herein.

Hotels

Hotel Innere Enge

Our top pick among Bern hotels, and an easy Editor's Choice and "G" winner, is about a 30-minute walk or 10-minute bus ride from the city center. It offers the city's best combination of hospitality, charm, guestroom comfort and value. At 60% of the price, not only are its rooms equal to or better than Bern's five-

star offerings, parking at the Innere Enge is free, representing a further saving for auto travelers.

The 138-year-old building that houses the hotel was restored and converted five years ago by the husband and wife organizers of the Bonn, Germany, jazz festival. And from the gorgeous front door with its jazz trumpet logo in stained glass, to the intimate basement jazz club with state-of-the-art sound and lighting, the Innere Enge is devoted to this unique American art form.

Don't imagine this is some sort of smoky night club with a few shabby rooms to rent upstairs. The hotel is physically and audibly removed from stylish Marian's Jazz Club and nary a decibel registers in the beautifully appointed guestrooms. (On the other hand don't think Marian's is for amateurs or unknowns; Lionel Hampton was scheduled to appear a few days after our visit last December.)

Once inside the stained glass front door, visitors are warmly received in the rather spacious reception area by a cozy fireplace and the hotel's top-flight staff. Beyond is the 1890s-style restaurant/bar with high, curving windows which overlook the city below. On clear days, the Alps, including the Jungfrau and Eiger peaks, are visible. Outside to the right is a large, inviting garden terrace.

Public and guest rooms throughout are liberally sprinkled with jazz memorabilia: here a framed original letter from Louis Armstrong, there a Dizzy Gillespie hologram.

Guestrooms have some of the most interesting pieces: Room Number one, the Clark Terry junior suite (trumpeter and teacher of Miles Davis), contains a letter from Louis Armstrong in which he urges the reader to "lose weight the Satchmo way" and maintains a "laxative once a week is very nice." Number one rents for 260 Sfr. (\$178) double and 220 Sfr. (\$151) single on weekdays and 200 Sfr. (\$137) double and 140 Sfr. (\$96) single on weekends. In fact, that is the weekend price for all rooms.

We most liked the Milt Hinton room, Number 32, with its huge expanse of windows and cathedral ceiling with exposed wood beams.

Number 20, the hotel's smallest and least expensive room has a "French bed" (double bed in the U.S.), but nonetheless is very comfortable. It rents for 220 Sfr. (\$151) double and 180 Sfr. (\$123) single.

All rooms had upgraded furnishings, bed linen and well-lit, in some cases luxurious, bathrooms.


One of the most appealing features of this hotel is the genuine warmth and friendliness of its director, Jacqueline Kaderli, one of the most pleasant people we've encountered in the hotel business in a long time.

The Jazz Club offers shows nightly except Monday. In addition, there are Sunday concerts from 10:30am to 1:30pm and on Saturday from 4:30 to 6:30pm.

We are pleased to add the Innere Enge to our list of favorite Swiss hotels.

Daily Rates: Singles 140 to 210 Sfr. (\$96-\$144), doubles 200 to 270 Sfr. (\$137-\$185)

Contact: Innere Enge, Engestrasse 54, CH-3012, tel. +41/31/3096111, 3096112

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 13/20 

Belle Epoque

Another "theme" hotel. The motif here is *Jugendstil* (a.k.a. Art Nouveau or Secessionist), a style of art and architecture that became popular in the late 19th century through about 1915 — the "Belle Epoque."

Those who choose this unique little hotel near some of Bern's most interesting shops and cafés, will be beneficiary's of the magnificent turn-of-the-century art and antiques accumulated by Marina and Dr. Phillippe D. Ledermann-Puigventós.

From this collection, said to be the world's most extensive of its kind, the couple have placed dozens, possibly hundreds of pieces throughout their hotel. In the tiny bar hangs an original poster by Toulouse Lautrec. In one guestroom (Number 33)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

is a painting by Hodler, a renowned Swiss artist (you can see more Hodlers at Bern's Kunstmuseum), and in another (Number 51) the painting "Spring on the River" by Emile Jean Patoux hangs above the bed. We ask about a simple guestroom light fixture and are told it is original and worth "several thousand Swiss francs." Even more valuable are the *objets d'art* exhibited in glass cabinets in the tiny public rooms.

The nine-year-old Belle Epoque consists of only 16 guestrooms (several of which are designated non-smoking), the small bar, a snug little reception area and a downstairs gallery whose exhibits change monthly.


Guestrooms are a little small but beautifully furnished and equipped with sparkling modern bathrooms with complimentary cosmetics. Also in each room are the usual amenities such as TV, radio, minibar and phone, and some that aren't so usual. For example, at the bedside of Number 32, a small streetside double, is a control which lowers and raises the exterior window shutters. Cost is 285 Sfr. (\$195) weekdays and 220 Sfr. (\$150) on weekends.

Probably the best room in the house is Number 51, on the top floor under the eaves with sloping ceiling. However, since the lift doesn't go that high, occupants must walk up one flight of stairs. For Number 51 you'll pay an additional 15 Sfr. (\$10).

Those who remain unmoved by Art Nouveau will enjoy the Belle Epoque's personal service and intimate atmosphere. Devotees of the style who choose to stay elsewhere should stop by for a refreshment in the Toulouse Lautrec bar.

Daily Rates: Singles 165 to 200 Sfr. (\$113-\$137), doubles 220 to 285 Sfr. (\$151-\$195)

Contact: Belle Epoque-Garni, Gerechtigkeitsgasse 18, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 43 36, fax 311 39 36

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 11/20 

Hotel Bären-Garni

A bustling, standard-issue, business-oriented hotel strategically located in the center of town within

an easy walk of the rail station.

All front desk people we encountered during a recent three-night stay were extraordinarily hospitable.

Our room, Number 210, though on the small side and without much character, was reasonably comfortable. Deluxe doubles are similarly furnished and equipped but larger.

Breakfast in the lobby/bar was adequate.

Daily Rates: Singles 165 to 170 Sfr. (\$113-\$116), doubles 220 to 270 Sfr. (\$151-\$185)

Contact: Hotel Bären-Garni, Schaufplatzgasse 4, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 33 67, fax 311 69 83

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 9/20

Hotel Kreuz

A small step down in quality from the Bären is the Kreuz, which is also near the rail station (343 steps according to the hotel's brochure) and another serviceable, straightforward, well-run hotel catering to business travelers.

Try to get a room in the newer part of the hotel such as Number 513, a normal double with functional, modern decor for 200 Sfr. (\$137) or 175 Sfr. (\$120) on weekends. All rooms come with the standard equipment such as minibar, phone, radio and satellite TV. Bathrooms are not as large as at the Bären but neither are the prices.

Daily Rates: Singles 110 to 150 Sfr. (\$75-\$103), doubles 160 to 205 Sfr. (\$110-\$140)

Contact: Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 11 62, fax 311 37 47

Rating: QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 9/20

City Hotel Bahnhof

As you might guess from the name, this starkly decorated, modern hotel is a stone's throw from the railway station.

The smaller than average guestrooms are simply and sparsely furnished. There are hardwood floors, a small wicker chair or two, and the usual amenities. Sinks are in the room, though separated from the sleeping area by frosted glass. Most rooms have a tub rather than a

shower.

Be careful about choosing your room. The street side is noisier, but cooler in summer and cheaper by 40 Sfr./\$27.

Location and price recommend the City Hotel, but the dormitory atmosphere and extra charges for breakfast (8 Sfr./\$5.50 continental, 16 Sfr./\$11 buffet) are turnoffs.

Daily Rates: Singles 105 to 153 Sfr. (\$72-\$105), doubles 135 to 191 Sfr. (\$93-\$131). Breakfast not included

Contact: City am Bahnhof, Bubenbergplatz 7, CH-3011, tel. +41/311 53 77, fax 311 06 36.

Rating: QUALITY 8/20, VALUE 8/20

Hotel Metropole

Another serviceable, centrally-located hotel. Compared to the somewhat severe modern style of the Kreuz and the City-Hotel, the Metropole has a warmer, more traditional feel.

Guestrooms are plain but have the usual TV, minibar, phone and radio. Most bathrooms have a shower rather than a tub.

Number 306, at 120 Sfr. (\$82) is a tiny single but a large window averts claustrophobia.

The hotel's two best rooms are Numbers 310 and 410 which rent for 195 Sfr. (\$134) double and 170 Sfr. (\$116) on weekends. Both are large, have been recently renovated and have two windows. In each there is a couch which converts to a third bed and the upgraded bathrooms have double sinks.

Daily Rates: Singles 120 to 150 Sfr. (\$82-\$103), doubles 160 to 220 Sfr. (\$110-\$151).

Contact: Hotel Metropole, Zeughausgasse 26/28, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 5021, fax 312 1153.

Rating: QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 9/20

Restaurants

Lorenzini

Readers who have been with us for a while will recall our report last year of an unfortunate meal at **La Terrasse Restaurant** in Interlaken's **Victoria Jungfrau Hotel**. There we paid 83

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BERN

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Sfr. (at the time more than \$60) for a single first-course risotto dish to be divided between two persons. Our “what the hell” fling turned out to a disaster. The rice was so salty and thick with cheese that the unique taste of the very expensive truffles, was totally lost.

That meal was very much on our minds when we spotted the same dish on the menu of Bern’s Ris-torante Lorenzini.

We had dropped in about 6:30pm at this upstairs Italian bistro without a reservation and were shown to a table in a virtually deserted back room. Wanting to be more in the center of the action, we asked for a table in the lively main room. With our promise to be gone by 8:30, the maitre d’/possibly owner graciously relocated us.

Lorenzini is upscale, but informal, with good lighting, parquet floors, white table linen covered with white paper and interesting art and family pictures on the walls. Very much our cup of tea.

The “gift of the house,” crunchy bread with mozzarella cheese and a light tomato sauce, was a promising start.

Naturally, we couldn’t resist the risotto with white truffles at a mere 30 Sfr. (\$21). First came the risotto, then the maitre d’. From a porcelain jar he withdrew a damp, tennis ball-size truffle and grated a generous portion of it over the rice, which we then divided.

Since it’s only about a 45-minute train ride from Interlaken, next time white truffles are in season the chef from La Terrasse should come to Bern and visit Lorenzini to learn how the dish is supposed to be made and presented. (So good, in fact, we were inspired the next day to purchase a golf-ball size truffle [49 Sfr./\$34] at **Loeb Bern**, Spitalgasse 47-51, to take back to California. Not a great idea; truffles quickly dry out.)

The rest of the meal was just as good.

A mixed salad (7.2 Sfr/\$5) of crisp greens, julienned beets, lentils, tomato wedges came with a good vinaigrette dressing.

The excellent house-made pasta dishes range from 15 to 22 Sfr. (\$10-\$15). We chose light cheese-filled ravioli and a linguine-type pasta with seafood and fresh vegetables. Both were first-rate. With them we drank a half-liter of Chianti Montalbano, 1996, for 17.5 Sfr. (\$12).

We closed by dividing an order of Lorenzini’s outstanding tiramisu (8 Sfr./\$5.50).

Dinner for two, without beverages, was 89 Sfr. (\$61).

Lorenzini is a great choice for those seeking that difficult-to-find middle ground between the formal, hushed, very expensive, temples of fine dining and traditional Gasthaus-style pubs where meals can be a little heavy and repetitive. Dishes are lighter, more creative, service is friendly and efficient and the lively atmosphere is a tonic.

This is one of Bern’s most popular restaurants and reservations are advised. The downstairs bar is also a Bern hot spot and a good place for an early evening aperitif.

Lorenzini, Theaterplatz 5, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 7850.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 13/20

Zimmermania

On a narrow little street deep in the old town is Zimmermania, a family-owned, French-style bistro. Servers wear full-length aprons, the menu is in French and French bottles comprise 80% to 90% of the wine list.

Our first contact with the restaurant was a positive. The woman who took our phone reservation seemed pleased to do so. Realizing we were tourists, she gave us directions to the restaurant even though we hadn’t asked for them.

The face-to-face welcome was equally hospitable. Our name was remembered without checking any list and we were quickly shown to a small table in one of two, narrow, side-by-side rooms. Fifteen minutes

into our meal there were no empty tables in either room.

Banquettes line the two rooms lengthwise and there is a single service aisle in the center of each. Floors are hardwood, lighting is bright and tablecloths are white with paper napkins. Large mirrors are painted with the day’s specials.

At lunch, two fixed-price specials are offered: the four-course *Menu du Czaar* for 36.50 Sfr. (\$23) and a simpler *Menu du jour* consisting of soup or salad and main dish for 17.50 Sfr. (\$12).

At dinner, fish dishes range from 15 Sfr. (\$10) for steamed mussels, to 46 Sfr. (\$32) for a fish Stroganoff with saffron rice. Specialties of the house include a house-made duck sausage with lentils 24.50 Sfr. (\$17) and *Choucroute formidable* (an Alsatian dish consisting of sauerkraut cooked with goose fat, juniper berries, white wine and usually served with a variety of meats) for 34.50 Sfr. (\$24).

We started with a mixed green salad tossed with thick, smoky chunks of ham, hard-boiled egg slices and tomato, all in a buttery vinaigrette with mustard dressing and served with a good, crusty bread.

One main course, *Emince de foie de veau aux herbettes, Rösti* (36.50/\$25) was thin slices of tender calves liver floating in a butter and sage sauce and served with that Swiss staple; shredded potatoes fried crisp and golden.

Just as good was a small, whole, rosemary-flavored roast chicken served with French fries and a lemon butter sauce —*Poussin due pays roti au romarin* (32.50 Sfr./\$22).

From the cheese cart presented after the main course, one can select from a variety of goat cheeses, several small, runny Brie and Camembert-like wheels, and aromatic cheeses such as Münster and Rambochan. We’ve never met a cheese cart we didn’t like and so picked three or four small wedges each (12 Sfr./\$8 for two persons).

Desserts include profiteroles,

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EDITOR'S
CHOICE

READERS' FORUM

Hotel Geiger Shuts Down

I have the very sad task of giving you and your readers bad news about **Hotel Geiger** in Berchtesgaden. It was closed by the new owner, Stefan Geiger, on November 1, 1997. Clara, our son Warren, and I were there the last weekend it was open. Apparently the main problems were a combination of high wages being paid to German nationals for jobs at the hotel, fewer Americans due to military cutbacks, fewer Germans due to the high value of the DM against other currencies, as well as a huge amount of deferred maintenance in the original building. Plans are apparently underway to sell the closed operation to entirely new ownership with international connections.

We were Hotel Geiger guests at least 22 times, commencing in 1976. The former owner, Hugo Geiger, and his charming wife, Monika, truly ran a fine establishment and one which can be remembered with pride and enjoyment. Hugo was the fourth member of the Geiger family to direct hotel operations and Stefan would have been the fifth.

I gather that business is very slow in the Alpenland. Berchtesgaden itself seems to really be just floating without any direction.

There is a very good hotel in Bad Reichenhall (25km north of Berchtesgaden); it is called the **Luisenhof**. The hotel is built in the spa style similar to Karlsbad or Baden-Baden and the rooms are large and comfortable and cost 300 DM (\$167) nightly (including a fine breakfast).

I partially disagree with your assessment of the **Hotel Adlon** on the Pariser Platz in Berlin. They did an excellent job of constructing a brand new hotel while making it look as if it were built in the 1900's. An example of this is the fact that room carpeting is not wall to wall, but surrounded by wood marquetry

tiles. The common area in the lobby is busy, but full of fountains, flowers and the like.

You are correct that there is more to do near the Kufürstendamm, but that should change with all the money being invested where The Wall was as well as on Unter den Linden. Anyway, we enjoyed the Adlon and were very happy to see this historic establishment reappear.

After we went to Berlin, we drove north for a few days in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The hotel pricing was fair and the food prices were very good. The highlight was Rügen, an island with a great deal of beauty; it was a popular vacation spot with Commie brass during the days of the late, unlamented "DDR." The chief town, Stralsund, was part of Sweden until 1815; the introduction of Swedish genetic threads over a number of years resulted in a current gene pool which seems to produce amazingly beautiful women. I suppose the latter remark is sexist or incorrect, but I am really too old to care a great deal about modern venial sins such as "non p.c."

Keep up the good work!

VICTOR P. OBNINSKY
TIBURON CA

Munich Airport Hotel

In the May, 1997, issue, Gary Ford talked about the **Hotel Hoyacker Hof** (tel. +49/89/3206965, fax 3207243) located near the Munich Airport at Garching bei München.

I stayed at this hotel in mid-December and can also recommend it. The price is now 150 DM (\$83) per night for a single room.

If there any negatives, they don't accept American Express cards, nor is there a restaurant, other than breakfast. Just five minutes away from the hotel is a park-and-ride facility. You can be in the center of München — Marienplatz — in 12 minutes.

ED RAETHER
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Château d'Oex Hotel

My wife and I were delighted to see you select the **Hostellerie Bon**

Accueil in Château- d'Oex as a Special Hotel your Best of '97 issue 12/23/97. We spent a week hosted by this fine hotel in early September and enjoyed every bit. Our double room was quite pleasant; good beds and great views. The food and wine selections in the restaurant were all superb. We even went in the charming village for good Pizza Margherita just to get some "plain food."

Several daytrips included Gstaad (noisy and lots of traffic), Rougemont (quiet village with wonderful "decoupage"), Leysin (up and down ski town with spectacular views), and to Aigle, crossing into France through Evian to the medieval village of Yvoire. In Yvoire, we had a tasty lunch (*Fricassee du St. Jacques, perch citron, pommes frites*, wine, about \$50) at the **Hotel du Port** on Lac Léman and wandered through the winding streets of the village before heading back to Château-d'Oex.

The 33 km drive up and down the hill from Château- d'Oex to Aigle became exhausting when sharing the narrow road with tour buses, but we braved it one more time to go to Martigny and visit the Miró exhibit and the antique auto display at the museum — worth the trip!

We enjoyed an omelet lunch at a sidewalk café in Martigny before returning to yet another great meal.

Driving the other direction to Gruyères is more pleasant, and the village and castle were fun as well. We treated ourselves to some fantastic Gruyères cheese soup and *Rösti* Gruyères, topped off with coupe d'framboise at **Hotel de la Halles**.

On our last day, we decided to lunch at Château- d'Oex's **Hotel Ermitage** and had a bad experience, food poisoning that hit us within 30 minutes with pounding heart, shakes and hot, flushed faces. We managed to recover with help from the staff back at Hostellerie Bon Accueil, and were able to hold down our last good dinner with an excellent bottle of Savigny des Beaune.

CHARLES F. SULLIVAN
TELLURIDE CO

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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✓ **Compact.** Typical cars: Opel Astra, VW Golf, Ford Escort, Fiat Brava. Comfortable at 80 to 90 mph. Good trunk — figure one big suitcase, two small ones and maybe a garment bag and/or a soft duffel or two. Both two-door and four-door models, occasionally with a sunroof. Fine for three adults who go easy on the luggage. Cost: about \$95* per week.

✓ **Midsize.** Typical cars: Opel Vectra, Ford Mondeo, Renault Laguna, Audi A4. Our recommended category for two couples. The Vectra has a particularly spacious trunk. O.k. on the Autobahn but underpowered with four people and luggage. Cost: about \$120* per week.

✓ **Fullsize.** Typical cars: Opel Omega, Renault Safrane. A bit more passenger room and sometimes more luggage space. Some companies put the BMW 316i in this category, a midsize car not suitable for four persons. The Mercedes 180 C is better but still not as large as the Omega or Safrane. Cost: about \$200* per week.

✓ **Wagons.** Come in three sizes: compact (Astra), midsize (Vectra, VW Passat) and fullsize (Volvo 850, Omega). You pay more for a wagon than for the comparable sedan. Holds more luggage but it is often exposed. For four people we like the midsize sedan better than the compact wagon; more passenger comfort and almost as much luggage room. In a pinch, the midsize and fullsize wagons can carry five people but someone has to ride in the rear center seat.

No European sedans and wagons we know of have a front bench seat, so carrying six passengers is not an option in these vehicles. Costs: range from about \$120 to \$240* per week.

✓ **Vans.** Most in Europe are seven or nine-passenger and, with three rows of seating, similar to what is found in the U.S. The nine passenger assumes three persons per seat — three in front, three in the center seat and three in back. Seven-passenger

vans have front buckets, a shorter center bench seat and a rear bench. Minivans are great for four or five people, but beyond that luggage space can be a problem. Beware of relying on a credit card for CDW and theft insurance when renting a nine-passenger van. Most credit card companies claim these vehicles are on a truck chassis and thus exclude them from their insurance coverage.

Vans become scarce every summer. Book early. It's much cheaper to rent two midsize sedans. Van cost: starting about \$500* per week.

✓ **Luxury Cars:** Power and engineering make them somewhat safer than the run-of-the-mill Opels and Fords, but at a hefty price. Expect to pay about \$330 per week, not including taxes or airport fees, in Germany for a Mercedes C200 or BMW 520i. Prices go to about \$570 for a Mercedes E230 and over \$800 for Mercedes S320. — RHB

(* In Germany and exclusive of taxes, CDW or theft insurance or airport surcharges.)

BERN

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caramel flan, various sorbets, *Tarte au citron*, *Tourte mousse au chocolat* and range from 6.50 Sfr. to 14.50 Sfr. (\$4.50-\$10).

To accompany the meal we chose everyday, open wines. A deciliter of Santenay (about 3.5 oz.) was 5.50 Sfr. (\$3.77) and a larger carafe of Le Beaujolais Nouveau (the new wine from France's Beaujolais region) was 17.50 Sfr. (\$12).

Dinner for two, without beverages, cost 91 Sfr. (\$62).

We had the impression there were many customers well-known to management dining that night. Nonetheless, the two American tourists were treated with warmth and good humor. Zimmermania is owned and run by Hans and Catherine Kunze and their son, all three of whom were much in evidence. Our server, in fact, was Hans Kunze, the husband and father.

Though the rich sauces and large

portions are not quite to our taste, we much enjoyed our Zimmermania experience and will return.

Restaurant Zimmermania, Brunnengasse 19, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 1542, fax 312 2822.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 10/20

EUROPE BRIEFING

Continued from page 1

To obtain the price reductions, subscribers must book and purchase tickets directly with Swissair. Prior to issuing reduced fare tickets, Swissair will verify subscriber status with the *Gemütlichkeit* office.

■ **The 1998 editions of the Michelin Red Guides**, easily the most useful guidebooks available to the independent European traveler, are now in bookstores all over the U.S. The German guide lists 8,180 hotels and 1,618 restaurants in 3,300 cities, towns and villages. There are 166 city/town maps. This year, a third German restaurant has been awarded three stars, **Restaurant Dieter Müller** in Bergisch Gladbach. In addition, there are 16 two-star establishments and another 186 restaurants with a single star.

The Swiss Red Guide offers data on 2,071 hotels and 850 restaurants in 920 locations. There are 57 city/town maps. After one year off the list, **Restaurant Girardet** in Crissier near Lausanne, gets back its third star and **Le Pont de Brent** in Montreux/Brent is also elevated to three stars. In all, Switzerland has 81 starred restaurants including seven with two stars and the two three-star establishments.

Gemütlichkeit subscribers get 10% off (and pay no sales tax) on Michelin guides as well as all other travel books, maps, luggage and other travel accessories from Travel Essentials (800-521-6722, fax 541-482-7472).

■ **Otto Wiesenthal of the Hotel Altstadt** (tel. +43/1/5263399, fax 5234901), a *Gemütlichkeit*-recommended Vienna headquarters, reports his 25 rooms and four suites have been "refurnished" and the hotel "shines now new in still the same old flair."