

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

May 26, 1998

Trip Tips

The summer travel season is here and something like 10 million American are headed for Europe — and they're all on your flight. (Yeah, those three kids in diapers are sitting next to you all the way to Frankfurt. Sorry, but the phony little captain's wings and cheesy Ajax Airlines coloring books won't help. Before this is all over, uppermost in your mind will be one word: parachute.)

Depending on the departure city, you'll sit stuffed in that narrow metal tube for from seven to 11 hours. That feelin' good, well-groomed jet-setter who boarded the plane in the U.S. is disgorged at Frankfurt a ruffled, dyspeptic, bad-hair wreck who for sure ate too much and maybe even has a slight hangover. But this is the low point, the bottom. From here on, your trip graph line is headed up.

How high it goes depends on an almost infinite number of factors. Such as? Well now, that's why you subscribed, isn't it? To get the most out of your trips to Europe. To find out the good places to go and the bad places to avoid. How to make it easier, how to make it more fun, how to make it cost less.

Well, let's talk about it. Take a seat here at the *Stammtisch* and let me order you a *Pils*. You don't look so good; maybe a little hair of the dog will help. In the meantime let's talk about your trip.

- First, let me tell you about the jet lag. There is no cure for it. But there are some things you can do to ease the pain. My best advice is go to your local health food or drug store and buy melatonin. Take a three-milligram pill about half an hour before you want to sleep on the plane. Don't drink alcohol on the flight and every time they bring

Continued on page 2...

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

LIENZ

We find absorbing history, culture, the great outdoors and even a touch of Italy in the principal town of eastern Tirol, the sunniest part of Austria.

It was a faintly auspicious sign for the Austrian town of Lienz when, on the very last day of World War II, a bomb landed in the courtyard of the seven century-old Bruck Castle without causing any damage. Because, later on, after years of war, occupation, and economic hardship, Lienz succeeded in converting its castle into a viable historical museum. One featuring paintings by Albin Egger-Lienz, Franz V. Defregger, and Hugo Engl; plus Roman archeological finds from nearby Aguntum; and collections of hand-carved cribs and traditional farmers' tools.

Today, the locals consider their

home to be one of Austria's hidden treasures — historically, culturally, and naturally. They have beautifully restored the heart of a medieval town and made it accessible to tourists from all over the world.

Remarkably, however, according to the tourist office and local hotel proprietors, few Americans travel to this region, (although interestingly the town maintains a partnership with the town of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which was formed through the famous skier, Pepe Stiegler). Instead, Lienz receives an abundance of vacationers from Italy. Most restaurants offer Italian translations before or instead of English. And most hotel employees

Continued on page 3...

Swiss Country Getaway: Pontresina

A few years ago, the city of St. Moritz in the Swiss canton of Graubunden copyrighted its name. So, if you are thinking about opening a restaurant and calling it the St. Moritz, don't. You might get sued.

In terms of name-recognition, St. Moritz is to Graubunden as Michael Jordan is to the NBA. The town's fame, however, may have taken some of the spotlight from some of its lesser-known but more charming neighbors. Pontresina, for example.

In the improbable event that Mr. Jordan had a relatively unpublicized teammate who was just as good a player as he was, and an all-round better fellow to boot, that person would be to the NBA what Pontresina is to Graubunden: an unknown

superstar.

While nearby San Moritz, with its postwar architecture, traffic and commercialism, has been somewhat spoiled by success, this lovely little town at the head of the Bernina valley retains its character as an authentic Swiss mountain village.

And, there is the matter of cost. St. Moritz has a *Gemütlichkeit* Hotel Rate Index of \$127 (average lowest priced single room rate among leading three-star hotels) while Pontresina's GHRI is \$100.

The village lies on a hillside, with most of its hotels, shops and restaurants gathered along one, long, sloping street. Buildings are typical of the Upper Engadine, with thick walls, arched entrances and small, deep-set windows. Many are

Continued on page 5...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

around a tray of water or juice, grab some. I still have a tough time getting my days and nights sorted out, but with the melatonin-no-alcohol-lots-of-liquid regime, at least I feel decent on arrival. Then, when you get to your first hotel, take a long walk.

- Forget traveler's checks. Instead get a four-digit PIN (personal identification number) for your ATM card and/or credit card and use them to obtain local currency. ATMs are virtually everywhere in Europe. You'll get a much better exchange rate and it's far more convenient.

- To save on hotel rooms in big cities, check with the 800 reservation numbers of the major chains such as **Hilton, Marriott, Sofitel, Intercontinental** and **Steigenberger**. Also check "Click-it Weekends" online at www.travelweb.com. These hotels sometimes have amazingly low weekend specials.

- For travel over long distances in Europe, consider the new **Eur Air Pass**. For \$90 per leg (minimum three legs), you can fly between any of 50 European cities. For example, your \$270 could get you from Frankfurt to Berlin to Zürich to Vienna; or from Rome to Munich to Geneva, and so on. Contact: 888-387-2479.

- Get the most out of your rail passes. For example, the **Eurailpass**, **Europass** and **German Rail Pass** are also good for travel on some Mosel

and Rhine river routes. These passes are also accepted on the public transportation systems of several major cities. On Lake Constance, German Rail Pass holders get a 50% reduction on ships operated by Bodenseeschiffahrtsbetriebe. Or, you can take a bus down the Romantic Road. For a fee of \$40 first class and \$25 second class, you can add the Czech Republic to your German Rail Pass.

The **Swiss Pass** and the **Swiss Flexipass** are good for travel on lake steamers and on the transportation networks of 30 Swiss cities. These passes, along with Eurail and Euro-pass are good on the Bernina Express and a portion of the Glacier Express.

- Follow *Gemütlichkeit's* recommendations for hotels, restaurants and things to see and do. Here are a few we think offer good value in five popular destination cities:

Berlin

Pension Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, D-10629, tel. +49/030/327 744-0, fax 327 744-40. Doubles about \$100.

Restaurant Zlata Praha, Meinekestr. 4, tel. +49/030/881 9750, fax 341 9247. Old world atmosphere, hearty food and great Czech beer. Moderate.

Don't miss: The fabulous sixth floor at **Ka De We** department store. Stay for lunch.

Munich

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstrasse 49, Munich, D-80336, tel. 089/594823, fax 5503856. Doubles from about \$125.

Augustiner Gaststätten, Neuhäuser Str. 27, tel. +49/089/2318 3257, fax 2605379. Inexpensive.

Don't Miss: The **Carriage Museum** at Nymphenburg Palace.

Salzburg

Hotel Trumer Stube, Bergstrasse 6, Salzburg, A-5020, +43/0662/874776, fax 874326. Doubles from about \$75.

Zum Fidelity Affen, Priesterhausgasse 8. Inexpensive.

Don't miss: Get things in perspective with a walk through the gravestones in **St. Peter's Churchyard** followed by a cold beer at **St. Peter's Stiftskeller**.

Vienna

Pension Altstadt, Kirchengasse 41, A-1070, +43/01/526 33 99 0, fax 49 01. Doubles from about \$100.

Restaurant Boheme, Spittleberggasse 19, Vienna, A-1010, +43/01/523 3173. Moderate.

Don't Miss: The **Schatzkammer** (treasury) in the **Hofburg**.

Zürich

Hilton Hotel, (Zürich Airport) Hohenbühlstr. 10, CH-8152 Glattbrugg, tel. +41/01/810 3131 fax 810 9366. About \$132 per night double. (Book through 800-445-8667 and ask for rate code P3)

Restaurant Mère Catherine, Nägelihof 3, CH-8001, tel. +41/01/262 2250. Moderate.

Don't Miss: The stained glass windows by **Marc Chagall** in the **Fraumünster**. — RHB 

Gemütlichkeit Travelers' Advisory

When phoning Europe from the U.S., don't dial the first zero in the city code.

Vol. 12, No. 5
May, 1998

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

Editor & Publisher: Robert H. Bestor, Jr.
Associate Editors: Elizabeth Schiller
Contributing Editors: C. Fischer, R. Holliday, Nikki Goth Itoi
Design & Composition: Paul T. Merschdorf
Consulting Editor: Thomas P. Bestor
Subscription Dept: Andy Bestor, K. Steffans

Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published monthly by UpCountry Publishing, 2892 Chronicle Avenue, Hayward, CA 94542. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 510/538-0628. Fax: 510/582-8296. e-mail gemut@pacbell.net. Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 12 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information in this publication, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy. Periodicals postage paid in Hayward, CA.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
Gemütlichkeit, 2892 Chronicle Ave., Hayward, CA 94542

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.

LIENZ

Continued from page 1

and shopkeepers speak Italian, although English is also widely understood.

Contemplating history

Emerging from the Felbertauern tunnel at the southern end of the Hohe Tauern National Park, one immediately senses a place quite different from the Alpine towns bordering the northern edge of the park (Zell am See, Gerlos, Krimml).

Lienz sits in a historically strategic location — a wide valley at the junction of the Isel and Drau rivers. The jagged Dolomites lie to the south. The Italian border is just 40 km (25 miles) away, and the main ridge of the Alps, stretching through the Hohe Tauern National Park, frames the northern view.

Granted a town charter in 1252, Lienz now serves as the administrative capital of East Tirol.

The town's Hauptplatz is at the "V" formed where the two rivers merge. The train station is just across the street, next to the Drau, and the tourist office is located on the neighboring Europaplatz. A short stroll about the town center immediately reveals that Lienz is a real business community, as opposed to one that relies only on tourism. The refrigerator manufacturer Liebher provides work for many residents, as do several schools, and an assortment of small businesses and crafts.

A logical first outing is a 1.5 km drive west to visit **Bruck Castle**, which rests on a wooded hill 52 meters above the valley. Since the hill offers a view of almost the entire basin, the castle has proven itself an essential defensive asset time and time again over the centuries.

There, you'll walk through galleries filled with the eerie, war-themed paintings of Egger-Lienz, the town's most famous artist. For us, the most fascinating part of the castle was a Gothic chapel that houses original frescos from the 15th century.

Bruck Castle is open from Palm Sunday through November 1, 10am

Lienz Info

Population: 13,000

Altitude: 678 meters, 2,224 feet

Distances from:

Vienna 180 km, 113 miles
Klagenfurt, 147 km, 92 miles
Salzburg is 3 hours by rail

Rail Connections: Spittal-Millstättersee from Salzburg; Sillian, Italy or Schwarzach-St. Veit from Innsbruck.

Lienz Tourist Office:

Europaplatz 1, A-9900 Lienz/Osttirol
tel. +43/4852/65265, fax: 65265-2
Open M-F, 8am-noon, and 2-6pm, Sat. 9am-noon. In summer: Saturday 5-7pm and Sunday, 10am-noon and 5-7pm.

Upcoming Events:

Lienz's annual Stadtfest takes place during the second week in August each year. Cost is about 50 AS (\$4).

Ask the tourist office about the summer concert series at Hauptplatz.

to 5pm daily, except Sundays; and from mid-June through September, 10am till 6pm.

Back in the valley, the Parish church of **St. Andrä** (also called St. Andrew's), which overlooks the Isel, is another significant monument. Lienz's oldest church, it was converted from the Romanesque parish church of St. Andreas to a Gothic basilica in 1430, and has been fully restored with historic ledgers portraying the last Count of Görz (Leonard), and altars that date from Baroque times.

Fun in the sun

Locals boast Lienz gets the best of Austria's weather in both winter and summer, which is conducive to a host of outdoor activities. At **Zettlersfeld** and **Hochstein**, the city operates two modern cable cars which carry visitors up to the spectacular views from 1800-2000 meters (5,906-6,562 feet) above the valley floor.

Another popular outdoor destination lies about 4 km (2.5 miles) outside of Lienz, where **Tristacher Lake** glistens in the sunshine. It welcomes guests to the towns of Amlach and Tristach, which offer miles of walking trails, horseback riding, golf, an airfield for small planes, and tennis courts.

Fishing is yet another Lienz lure, and several hotels (including the

Traube and Sonne, see below) offer special packages for anglers. Though springtime, when the melting snow brings the rivers rushing to life, is best, there are several locations which can be fished all summer long.

Another worthwhile excursion is to **Aguntum**, a Roman settlement that dates back to the 1st century and thrived as a focal point for the trade of metals and raw materials from the Alps. The site is 4 km (2.5 miles) east of Lienz along Route 100. Guided tours are available between 9am and 6pm from June 1 through October 30.

Hotels

Haidenhof Gasthof Hotel

A number of quaint hotels can be found right in the town center; however, some of the most appealing establishments are located on the north side of the Isel River. This is one example.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Kreissl family has run the Haidenhof since 1919. It is located a five-minute walk from the base of the Zettlersfeld cable car and close to St. Andrew's church. Despite its 1970's decor — bright orange drapes and bold, patterned wall paper in orange, green, and red — the Haidenhof is a find for its scenic, remote location, and its quality service.

Our first floor room was already comfortably heated when we arrived, and an extra door between the foyer and the main room insured a quiet night's sleep. All rooms — five singles, 11 doubles, and six suites — have balconies. Those on the east side are flooded with morning sunshine and offer sweeping views of a lush field with the town center and the rugged, snow-capped Dolomites beyond.

Other amenities include modern phones, televisions, and rental bikes.

All of the Haidenhof's bathrooms are small, but feature deep tubs. Towels are predictably thin.

Breakfast is standard Austrian fare — cold cuts, cheese, yogurt, cereal, soft boiled eggs — certainly adequate, though hardly a highlight of the hotel.

Continued on page 4...

LIENZ

Continued from page 3

A modern recreation room decorated in bright red and natural wood fixtures occupies the top floor. It features several exercise machines, a sauna, solarium, massage therapy by appointment, and a small whirlpool.

We especially liked the Haidenhof's common spaces — every corner of the main floor's public rooms offers a cozy nook for sitting, reading, or sipping a nightcap.

In warm weather, the Kreissl's move several dining tables outside to a spacious deck. And inside, at a stylish, curving bar, a handful of guests can sit comfortably and chat with Herr Kreissl while enjoying a glass of one of the locally produced wines.

Daily Rates: Singles 470 to 625 AS (\$38-\$50), doubles 940 to 1250 AS (\$76-\$101).

Contact: Haidenhof Gasthof Hotel, Grafendorfstrasse 12, A-9900 Lienz, tel. +43/04852/62440 fax 62440-6. Proprietor: Kreissl family

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Sonne

At this modern, Best Western affiliate, management caters to guests who return regularly, summer after summer, and also to business travelers who use the 1,000-person conference room and four smaller meeting rooms.

The Sonne has 124 beds in 62 rooms and apartments, all with television, telephone, radio, minibar, and separate toilet and shower facilities. Most rooms have tubs, although a few have standing showers.

Lighting in the bathrooms is dim; towel racks are abundant. Though the hotel's corridors and some of the older rooms leave one with a stale, institutional feeling, the newer rooms on the fourth floor are more tastefully decorated and have larger windows that make them much brighter.

For entertainment, guests can partake in wine tasting ceremonies in the Sonne's vaulted cellar, listen and dance to Tirolean music, or enjoy

specially scheduled fondue dinners. There is ample parking underground, plus a sauna, recreation room, and a sunny rooftop garden with a patio.

Daily Rates: Singles 660 to 820 AS (\$53-\$66), doubles 1320 to 1640 AS (\$106-\$132)

Contact: Hotel Sonne, Best Western RT-Conference Hotels, Südtirolerplatz 8, A-9900 Lienz, tel. +43/04852/63311, fax 63314

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 11/20

Gästehaus Masnata

Maria Masnata runs a comfortable guest house with a couple of spacious, modern double rooms and three small but functional apartments with kitchen. The latter can accommodate two to three guests each.

The house is located within walking distance of the Hochstein cable car. Each room and apartment has a balcony, but none have phones. There is plenty of room for parking. The apartment on the first floor has a smaller kitchen, but a nicer bathroom than the others.

Frau Masnata is a lively host who has owned the house since 1969. She lived previously in Africa and Italy and speaks excellent English, as well as Italian. She says her house is frequently full in the summertime, so prospective visitors are advised to call ahead.

Daily Rates: Singles 260 AS (\$21), doubles 480 AS (\$39).

Contact: Gästehaus Masnata, Drahtzugasse 4, A-9900 Lienz, tel. +43/04852/65336. Proprietor: Maria Masnata

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

Altstadthotel Eck

This centrally located hotel has been run by the same family for more than 500 years. Its newly renovated rooms are large with high ceilings, dramatic drapery, and comfortable sofas and chairs. It offers one single room, five doubles, and three suites. All include shower/WC, telephones, and satellite TV. The hotel's corridors are attractively decorated, and breakfast is hearty.

The Eck's Terrassencafe, on the

second level, provides a great place from which to observe activities on the Hauptplatz below. The menu includes five different beers on tap and snacks such as Gulasch soup (AS 46/\$3.71), bruschetta (AS 32/\$2.59), and apple strudel (AS 42/\$3.39)

Daily Rates: Singles 420 to 550 AS (\$34-\$44), doubles 840 to 1100 AS (\$68-\$89)

Contact: Altstadthotel Eck, Hauptplatz 20, A-9900 Lienz, tel. +43/04852/64785, fax 64785-3. Proprietor: Grausgruber family

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 12/20

Romantik Hotel Traube

The most stylish hotel in Lienz is the Traube, a member of the Romantik hotel chain. Founded in 1586, the place exudes a strong sense of history that parallels that of the town as a whole. Its large rooms—16 singles and 37 doubles — have all the amenities expected of a four-star establishment, and the management is friendly and helpful.

First-time visitors shouldn't be discouraged by the plain side of the building that faces the parking area. On the Hauptplatz side, the hotel looks quaint and lures its guests into a bygone era with an impressive collection of antiques.

In warm weather, the Traube runs an outdoor sidewalk cafe, and guests can linger for hours by the rooftop swimming pool. The hotel also offers two high quality restaurants; one serves traditional Austrian cuisine and the other offers Italian specialties (see below).

Daily Rates: Singles 790 to 1200 AS (\$64-\$97), doubles 1580 to 2400 AS (\$127-\$194).

Contact: Romantik Hotel Traube, Hauptplatz 14, A-9900 Lienz, tel. +43/04852/64444, fax: 64 1 84. Proprietor: Willi family

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 11/20

Restaurants

Adlerstüberl Restaurant

Exhausted after a full day of sight-seeing, we wandered late one brisk February evening into the Adlerstüberl, just off Hauptplatz, and were pleasantly surprised by its cozy atmosphere and friendly staff.

This casual restaurant serves specialties of the region, along with Austria's popular Gösser beer.

The restaurant is divided into several small dining rooms, with tables arranged around the perimeter of each. We opted for the Tirolean farmer's special — slices of roasted pork smothered in gravy and sauerkraut — and a delicious sirloin steak, grilled with onions and accompanied by a healthy portion of french fries.

The menu (available in English) also lists a number of salads as well as the usual staples. An additional plus: our waitress gladly brought us a whole carafe of ice water upon request.

The restaurant accepts Visa and Mastercard and dinner for two without drinks cost about 250 AS (\$20).

Adlerstüberl Restaurant, Andrä Kranz Gasse 5, tel. +43/04852/62550
Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

Mamma's

The less expensive of the Traube's restaurants, called Mamma's, also exceeded our expectations. From the hotel's street level parking lot, we descended a flight of stairs into a Ratskeller-like dining room filled with many large, round, family-style tables and a few cozier booths. The restaurant was bustling, yet the servers were attentive and conversational.

In a modern, open kitchen, the chef prepared a range of Italian specialties. All the pasta is homemade. The lasagna in particular was baked to perfection — with a brownish tomato sauce that tasted of braised vegetables and a delicate balance of cheeses.

Mamma's wine list includes a number of Italian Chianti's and merlot's. And even after finishing every last bite of our entrees, we were still tempted to try the tiramisu and a couple of cappuccinos to bring the evening to a proper close.

Dinner was about \$40 for two persons including wine.

Mamma's, Hauptplatz 14, A-9900

Lienz, tel. +43/04852/ 64 4 44

Rating: QUALITY : 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Sunny's Restaurant

How appropriate that the Best Western in town runs a good old-fashioned American steak house on its premises.

Sunny's large dining room occupies the street level of the hotel and tables near the front windows provide a good vantage point for observing the midday activity on Südtirolerplatz.

Cheery yellow walls, stainless steel fixtures, and natural-colored wood tables make for an atmosphere that's fun, light, and airy. With items like sirloin steak sizzled on the grill, Italian antipasti, Belgian waffles, and baked potatoes loaded with toppings, the place is suitable for casual breakfast, midday, or evening dining.

A three-course dinner for two was a somewhat pricey 640 AS (\$52), without beverages.

Sunny's Restaurant, Südtirolerplatz 8, A-9900 Lienz, tel. +43/04852/63311
Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 10/20

PONTRESINA

Continued from page 1

decorated with the unique plaster designs known as *sgraffito*.

It is a setting that offers a good view across the Ova da Bernina, the river which runs through the floor of the valley below, to the Bernina peaks.

In summer, when the weather is especially pleasant, with low humidity and cool nights, Pontresina is a town of walkers, hikers and climbers. In the late afternoons they flow like rivers out of the mountains to fill up every sidewalk table on the main street.

A good spot to watch these comings and goings is from a table in front of the **Hotel Schweitzer Hof** where one of our favorite beers, Pilsner Urquell, is served on draft. It's a great place for an *alfresco* lunch or a late afternoon refresher.

One of the most popular walks is

a nearly level route between Muottas Muragl and Alp Languard, a distance of some four miles. Take the chairlift from the village to Alp Languard, at an elevation of a little over 8,000 feet, and walk eastward around the mountain to Muottas Muragl where there is a restaurant. You can descend on foot in about an hour and a half, or faster via the Muottas Murgl funicular.

Though most visitors come for the outdoor activities, there are one or two cultural attractions.

The small **Santa Maria Church**, located at the highest point in the village, attracts visitors to its murals which date from the 15th century and cover virtually every inch of every interior wall.

A daily summer diversion is the orchestral concert from 11 a.m. to noon in the Tais forest.

In St. Moritz, the **Engadine Museum** is of interest.

Where does Pontresina fit in to a European vacation? Here are two possibilities: as a weekend excursion from Zürich or Geneva (or even Innsbruck or Munich); or, by renting one of the town's many *Ferienwohnungen* (holiday apartments), for a longer stay of a week or more.

Here are our recommendations:

Weekend Excursion

Hotel Saratz

Several years ago (September, 1993) in an issue that featured Pontresina, we reported on a friendly but somewhat worn out hotel that catered to young families. Though still counting many families among its clientele, the former Hotel Atlas has been refurbished, recast from dowdy to hip, and renamed.

It is now the Saratz and a modern new wing has been added. The two completely different buildings are separated by the hotel's new focal point; a glistening, Art Nouveau-style common area. This open, high-ceilinged space with recessed halogen lights, floor to ceiling windows and a floor surface that is half dark

Continued on page 6...

PONTRESINA

Continued from page 5

green slate and half unfinished hardwood, is where the formalities of check-in are done seated at a large wooden desk while quaffing a welcoming glass of champagne or juice. The room's backdrop is a high wall of rough beige stone broken only by an open fireplace, hooded by the same stone. Placed discreetly to one side is a small, round wooden bar.

In the old wing, the good parts of the great old Victorian building were, of course, kept intact: the squeaky wood floors, the wide corridors, the high windows and ceilings.

The breakfast/dining room — probably once a grand ballroom — has 20-foot ceilings and massive windows that rise to at least 15 feet. In the center of all hangs a monstrosity of a chandelier with 15 etched glass globes. It is perfect. There are tall, gilded mirrors and a stuffed eagle keeps its eye on things from a high perch on the far wall. At the other end, a small orchestra balcony overlooks the floor.

We stayed in the new wing. The most attractive element of our double room, Number 164, was the four-panel, nine-foot high French door/window unit that offered a sweeping unobstructed view across the Ova da Bernina to the peaks beyond. Fixtures and furnishing were all in character: clean, simple and modern. Bed linens and mattresses were top quality and there were tiny furrows in the tightly woven carpet. The well-lit bathroom

had a heated, rough slate floor, separate tub and tiled shower.

The room's two wicker chairs were firm and comfortable but not for curling up with a novel on a snowy afternoon.

Inexplicably no toiletries are provided, not even hand soap.

Breakfasts from a well-stocked buffet in the huge former ballroom are a delight.

The Saratz offers two choices for

60ish Spaniards who were seated with us at this table for five.

Their company was welcome but the single menu was inconvenient and the room had no warmth or ambience.

Our server was pleasant enough but seemed a little harried.

Expecting to get something local, or at least Swiss when we ordered a beer *vom fass*, we were served an odd-tasting Foster's from Australia.

After that we ordered the Swiss beer, Klosterbräu, which was more to our liking.

The food, however, saved the day. *Scaloppine di vitello alla piastra* (27.5 Sfr./\$19) was two juicy little rounds of veal buried in a delicious melange of fresh greens and lettuces, slivers of sauteed fresh yellow and red peppers, and a liberal sprinkling of flavorful, tiny, sauteed wild mushrooms.

Equally good and similarly presented was *tagliata di filetto d'agnello*, bits of lamb filet folded into rucola greens, intensely flavored cherry tomato chunks and paper thin slices of Parmesan.

We divided a splendid *Wintersalat* (12.5 Sfr./\$8.50) which

contained many of the same ingredients of the entrees' salads plus small pieces of smoky ham, croutons and a warm, thin slice of goat cheese which had been slightly browned on each side just before serving.

Five deciliters of one of the house's open wines — Grumello, an Italian red — cost 26 Sfr. (\$18). For dessert we asked for a single *Kugel* of vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce (not on the menu) to share and were charged 2.5 Sfr. (\$1.70).

Zürich to Pontresina by Rail

It is hard to imagine a more relaxing way of getting to Pontresina from Zürich than by train. The ride, one of Switzerland's most scenic, takes 3-hours, 46-minutes, and service throughout the day is hourly.

There are quick and easy changes at Chur — where riders board the distinctive red cars of the **Rhaetian Railway** — and again at Samedan. Though it is a private line, **Swiss Passes**, **Europasses** and **Eurailpasses** are all honored on the Rhaetian line.

Out of Zürich, the route runs along the south shore of the Zürichersee, then by the Walensee; lovely scenery but the best is yet to come. Four stops after Chur, at Filisur, the real fun begins. The track rises from 1919 feet at Chur to 5,863 ft. in Pontresina. There are many twists and turns and the tracks cross several arched, stone bridges that span deep canyons. In places, passengers look hundreds of feet straight down.

This segment of the route is also traveled by two famous Swiss trains; the **Glacier Express** and the **Bernina Express**.

If you're traveling at mealtime, there is a restaurant car for the approximately 90-minute run between Zürich and Chur. Otherwise, sandwiches and beverages are available from a minibar cart. Our minibar driver was a middle-aged guy who could have been a VP at your local bank.

In case you don't have one of the aforementioned train passes, roundtrip Zürich-Pontresina fares are 181 Sfr. (\$123) first class and 109 Sfr. (\$74) second class.

dining; the very informal **Pitschna Scena** and the more traditional **Restaurant Saratz**.

The somewhat funky Pitschna Scena gave every sign early on of being a disaster — until the food arrived.

We were shown to a rather odd side room which in summer is the entrance to a terrace. Sitting on slatted patio chairs, we shared a single clip board menu with three

The meal was amazingly good; light but very satisfying. Without beverages we paid 69.5 Sfr. (\$47).

The following evening in Restaurant Saratz, we found the menu priced about the same and the cuisine similar in style.

An appetizer of *Besaola-Carpaccio auf Rucolasalat*. (half portion 12.50 Sfr. \$8.50; full portion 17.50 Sfr./\$12) was air-dried meat served with slightly wilted rucola greens, thinly sliced Parmesan, all in a superb oil and vinegar dressing.

A full portion of *Maccharoni mit Knoblauch, Peperoncino, tomatoen and Basilikum* (16.50 Sfr./\$11) was penne pasta in a spicy, creamy sauce. Morel mushrooms, fresh chives and bits of smoked ham mixed in with the veal put the pizzazz in *Engadiner Kalbsgeschnetzeltes mit Pilzen, Blattspinat and Kartoffelpizokel* (half portion 27 Sfr./\$18; full portion 33 Sfr./\$22).

After the main courses, we divided selections from the proffered cheese cart (12 Sfr./\$8) and a dessert, *Engadiner Sauerrahm* (9 Sfr./\$6), a pudding with wild berries. Not to be missed from the cheese cart is *Rohmilch-Käser Speciality Rolf Beeler*.

In this room, the Czech beer, Pilsner Urquell is available on draught.

We splurged a bit on the wine with happy results. A Tuscan red, 1993 Flaccianello from Della Pieve (63 Sfr./\$43), was terrific, soft and mouth-filling, with a long finish.

Without beverages, our dinner for two cost 80.5 Sfr. (\$54).

There are a couple of welcome departures from the norm at Restaurant Saratz; each table is set with a pitcher of water and many menu items offer a half-portion option for about 80% of the full portion price.

For those who occasionally weary of stodgy formality, the Saratz is a fresh breeze. The emphasis is on youth. (Near the hotel's front entrance is parked manager Adrian Stalder's Harley-Davidson motorcycle, which he sometimes uses to fetch arriving hotel guests from the

railway station.) The clientele is young and the style low-key and relaxed, but with no compromise in quality or service.

Daily Rates: Singles 110 to 178 Sfr. (\$75-\$121), doubles 180 to 318 Sfr. (\$122-\$216). Breakfast included.

Contact: Hotel Saratz, Via Maistra, CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/839 4000, fax 839 4040. email: saratz@alpineclassics.ch. Proprietor: Adrian Stalder

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 13/20

Apartments

Though the Saratz is good value, it is not cheap. For those willing to commit a week or more to Pontresina, a wide range of self-catering options are available. Most offer more living space at substantially less money than at a hotel. The trade off is you don't get hotel services; you make your own breakfast and your own bed.

Among several rentals inspected last month in Pontresina, *Gemütlichkeit* found a wider range of quality than price. The same, of course, is true for hotels, but if you make a mistake there you're usually not stuck for a full week or more. So, absent a recommendation you can trust, our advice is, if at all possible, to look before you rent.

All the apartments we inspected come with direct-dial telephone, cable TV, bed linen, towels and a fully-equipped kitchen, in some cases even to the extent of food staples such as salt and spices.

Typically not included with the prices quoted is a cleaning charge — expect to pay from 50 to 100 Sfr. (\$35-\$68) — and garage parking. Minimum rental is usually seven days.

Switzerland Tourism's classification system for apartments has four categories: First Class, Medium Class, Standard Class and Basic Class.

Chesa Nouva

This bright, sunny apartment, located very near the center of things, is perfect for two persons but would be a bit cramped if a second couple were added.

The main room consists of a sitting and dining area adjacent to a sparkling kitchen. Large French doors open on to a pleasant outdoor terrace. There is a separate bedroom and the sitting room sofa pulls out to make a second bed.

Chesa Nouva had the look and smell of being recently remodeled. The building in which it is housed is a ho-hum blocky modern style, but this apartment is the best we saw and the only one to have a dishwasher.

This is rated a "First Class" apartment.

Daily Rates: 120 Sfr. (\$82).

Contact: Chesa Nouva, Chesa Miramunt, CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/842 7844. Proprietor: G. Gredig.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Chapütschin

A short walk above the town, this pleasant apartment in a handsome rock and stucco private residence would equal Chesa Nouva except for the fact that it is one large room. The sofa must be converted to a bed each night.

Nonetheless, one or two persons would be very comfortable here. The room is on two levels, there are lots of natural wood built-ins, and four windows look out on the view. Rated "First Class."

Daily Rates: Summer 90 Sfr. (\$61), winter 100 Sfr. (\$68).

Contact: Chapütschin, CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/842 7449, fax 842 7670. Proprietor: Elisabeth Costa-Dörig

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Chalet Alpina

In a more traditional, country-style building is the Chalet Alpina, operated by Erika Kaiser, an enthusiastic, vigorous 70 year-old who retains a zest for the vacation apartment rental business.

This first floor (our second) rustic rental is clean as a whistle, offers better views and is larger than Chesa Nouva, but not so light and airy. Furnishings and decor are somewhat

Continued on page 8...

PONTRESINA

Continued from page 7

drab and catch-as-catch-can.

There is a bedroom, a sitting room separated from the kitchen, and a long balcony that can be accessed from both the bedroom and sitting room. The bathroom has an odd color scheme but there is a skylight, slanting ceiling and a shower with curtain over tub.

Also rated "First Class" by Switzerland Tourism.

Daily Rates: 110 Sfr. (\$75). Price includes parking garage.

Contact: Chalet Alpina, CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/842 6407. Proprietor: Erika Kaiser

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 11/20

Chesa Quadrella

Guests walk up two flights of stairs to reach this "Medium Class" apartment above a sporting goods shop on Pontresina's main street.

There are good views from the rooms and a balcony, but these are only adequate accommodations.

Daily Rates: Summer 105 Sfr. (\$72), winter 130 Sfr. (\$88).

Contact: Chesa Quadrella, Giassa Stipa, CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/842 7689, fax 842 7689. Proprietor: Nora Gossweiler-Sauer

Rating: QUALITY 7/20, VALUE 7/20

Europe Travel Digest

■ Here is a really good deal. This summer, **American Express** card holders (and non-Amex card holders, as well) can book a room for three nights at any of 48 **Hilton** hotels in 35 European cities and get a fourth night free — or, get seven nights for the price of five, or 10 nights for the price of seven.

At press time, using the rate code EV (non-Amex card holders should use code MU), *Gemütlichkeit* phoned the Hilton reservation system and was quoted a price of \$104 per room, per night, for a three-night stay beginning Friday, June 4. The fourth

night would be free, making the average per night cost \$78 for two persons. The price includes breakfast. The offer is valid June 1 through September 18. Hilton has hotels in Basel, Berlin, Budapest, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Geneva, Mainz, Munich, Prague, Vienna, Weimar and Zürich. Contact: Hilton 800-445-8667 (ask for rate codes MU or EV) or American Express 800-843-2273.

■ An idea for a different sort of vacation comes from the **Alphorn Academy** in Montreux. The package includes accommodations for one week at a four-star hotel, breakfasts, lunch one day at a local mountain restaurant, and a daily four-hour alphorn lesson. The price is 990 Sfr. (\$685) plus 80 Sfr. (\$55) for alphorn rental. The price for a non-alphorn playing companion is 890 Sfr. (\$615) and includes daily cooking lessons.

An advanced course is scheduled September 12-19 in Charmey near Gruyère, and a beginners' class is August 29-September 5 in Montreux.

Contact: Alphorn Academy of Switzerland, P. O. Box 9, CH-1820 Montreux, tel. +41/041/960 3903, fax 960 3843, email francissch@vtx.ch, or visit their website at www.lyoba.ch/alphorn-academy.

■ The mountain town of **Lech** in Austria's Arlberg is a delightful summer destination. A brass band plays every Sunday morning in the village and the tourist office offers a wide range of organized activities from golf instruction to cooking lessons and, of course, plenty of hiking. Drink a glass of champagne as you ride a cable car at sunset to the Alps' highest casino.

Lech hotels in all price categories offer a variety of special packages. The **Hotel Madlochblick**, for example, has a seven-day "Experience the Wonders of Nature" package that includes all breakfasts and dinners and necessary equipment such as rucksacks, walking sticks, thermos flasks, rainwear and mountain bikes.

Participants will be taken to alpine meadows, introduced to Kneipp hydrotherapy and medicinal herbs by the Schuler family and invited to supper at the family refuge. Per person rates are from 5,250 to 5,600 AS (\$423 to \$451).

For more packages and info contact: Hubert Schwärzler, Lech

Tourismus, A-6764 Lech, tel. +43/5583/21610, fax 3155, email lech-info@lech.at. Web site: www.lech.at.

■ **KD River Cruises of Europe** has scheduled its 1998 "floating wine seminar" on the Rhine and Mosel rivers for October 10-17, during the grape harvest. Prices for the eight-day cruise are from \$1,280 to \$1,485 per person double for cabins, \$1,855 for a suite, and includes several on-board seminars, tastings at seven different cellars and vineyards. The latter range from Kloster Eberbach, a medieval monastery, to Baden Central Wine Cellars, Europe's largest and most modern. The cruise, which is aboard the 104 passenger *Heinrich Heine*, begins in Cologne and ends in Basel. Contact a travel agent or phone 800-346-6525 from the eastern U.S. or 800-858-8587 from the west. Website: www.rivercruises.com.

■ **Switzerland Tourism's** 1998 edition of *Switzerland for Festival Lovers* is available free of charge. The brochure details highlights and booking arrangements of the packages available for Switzerland's top summer festivals.

This year, for example, the renowned **International Festival of Music** in Lucerne offers the Berlin Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony, in addition to a long list of top performers, headed by violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter. For more info on the festival check the web site www.lucernemusic.ch. Phone 310-335-0125, fax 310-335-0131 for the free brochure.

■ More important dates for travelers to Switzerland: **Opera Festival Avenches**, July 3-22; **Classic Open-air Festival Solothurn**, July 10-19; **Montreux Jazz Festival**, July 3-18; **Zürich Festival**, June 26-July 19; and **Vine-Growers' Festival of Vevey**, July 29-August 15.

■ The just-released **1998 Michelin Red Guide for Europe** (includes 67 main European cities) is in book stores priced at \$24.95. In Vienna, **Restaurant Steiereck** was given a second star and single stars were awarded to **Academie**, **Fadinger**, **Selina**, **Jahreszeiten** and the **Bristol Hotel's Restaurant Korso**.

In Salzburg, **Restaurant Karl-Rudolf Obauer** won a second star while **Brandstätter** and **Pfefferschiff** were given one rosette.