

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

July 27, 1998

To Train Or Not to Train

With some trepidation, your "anti-train" editor is about to again grapple with one of the great non-issues of our time: whether 'tis nobler to travel in Europe by rail or auto.

I say trepidation because "Dear Subscriber's" current approval ratings seem to be below Ken Starr's. Among other things, I've been accused of staying in expensive hotels because it makes me "feel important," and even called a "yuppie" (that one hurt, I'm 60 and a card-carrying yuppie basher). Remarks about rail travel that are viewed as unfavorable are likely to launch even more arrows in this direction. It's a tough job but somebody has to do it.

I say non-issue because I have concluded that train travelers and auto travelers are like liberals and conservatives: they'll never see eye to eye. The train-car choice has more to do with culture and life-style than with relative merits such as cost and convenience. It is a choice that gets made early in the game and is pretty much "locked-in" from then on. This little treatise then is for the "undecided."

To start with, I love trains. We've used rail in six of our last eight trips to Europe. I would rather ride a train in Europe than drive a car. I am speaking of the physical act of riding. It's some of the related stuff that gets a little sticky.

The thing about train travel in Europe is that it's a tourist attraction in itself as much as a great castle or a glorious mountain range — a real-life Disneyland "E" ticket. Nobody visits Europe to drive a cheap rental car but many go — at least in part — for the trains. Rail service to most Americans is a novelty, something we don't really have. So a speedy ICE, say from Berlin to Munich, is a great treat.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

AHR VALLEY REDS

The worldwide boom in red wine consumption is both a blessing and a curse for the Ahr Valley's makers of Spätburgunder, Portugieser, and Dornfelder reds.

The traveler interested in Germany's wine regions might easily overlook the Ahr Valley. At 506 hectares (1250 acres) and 15 miles in length, it is one of the country's smallest and most northerly grape growing areas, and well off the beaten paths for white wine tasting along the Rhine and Mosel rivers.

What's also different about the Ahr is that it produces red, not white, wines. Knowledgeable enthusiasts are discovering that German viticulture is no longer just about Riesling and Müller-Thurgau varieties. Increasingly, reds like elegant and velvety Spätburgunders; lively, fruity Portugiesers; and deeply colored Dornfelders are gaining

popularity — much faster, in fact, than the region's vintners can produce them.

These wines are seldom if ever available in the U.S. Most wineries sell out of their bottled wines domestically in less than a year and the few bottles that do make it out of Germany typically go to Japan or France. Some are so sought after they sell at auction for several hundred dollars *per bottle*.

Gemütlichkeit decided to pay a visit to several of the top wineries in the region to see how a new generation of vintners is transforming an industry that has flourished in the Ahr since Roman times.

It was a worthwhile three days.

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In Praise of Würzburg

Würzburg, say the Germans, is the gateway to the south. It's in Bavaria, albeit at the top end. Bavaria is a southern state. Ergo, Würzburg must be where the south begins.

But Würzburg doesn't feel southern. Or Bavarian, for that matter. It's more conservative. More buttoned-up. *Käse* and *Spätzle* rather than the *Lager* and *Lederhosen* of their down-country cousins. Different dress. Different dialect. Different culture. Different cuisine. Having said that, Würzburg is most propitiously positioned. Touristically speaking.

It is the start or finish (depending whether you go at it head first or

upside down) of the Romantic Road — that 180 mile stretch of heavily marketed Strasse that runs through a receiving line of 26 welcoming municipalities all the way to Füssen in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps.

It makes the perfect base, too, for day-trip discoveries of such medieval gems as Bamberg, Nürnberg and Rothenburg. Elegant Bayreuth, of festival fame, is a mere Wagnerian aria away.

Würzburg also bills itself, with some justification, as a hub for all Deutschland and by virtue of excellent high speed rail and road connections, the city is in fact directly linked to most of Germany's important cities. And with the Frankfurt Flughafen just a 90-minute ICE train

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Rail travel's status as a tourist attraction is well-deserved: the astounding Swiss rail network is more than a transportation system — it's a bloody marvel. I am fascinated just watching it in operation; the high quality of its employees and equipment, and the fact that even very small towns often have trains coming and going every five or 10 minutes. This, of course, is not news but it helps make my point that rail travel in Europe for tourists is an end in itself.

While auto travel has its moments, — stopping to picnic in a pretty spot or gliding over a deserted backroad — the car, unless you've rented a very expensive one that is fun to drive, is simply a means of transportation.

It is, however, a means that offers greater flexibility and is usually cheaper; especially if two or more travel together. Many travelers don't care to drive and that's understandable. "I would rather attempt a maiden hang-glider flight from the top of the Matterhorn than drive a car into Munich or Vienna," is the way subscriber Robert Biehler puts it.

But for others, a meandering auto itinerary via backroads is still a pleasant way to get from city to city. You'll probably save money, too.

Let's say two persons are traveling together. A compact rental car, such as the VW Golf, can be rented for two weeks in Germany for about \$235 with tax and airport charges. Add \$250 for

fuel (2,500 km) and parking for a total cost of \$485. A subcompact would be about \$425, a midsize about \$580.

Two 15-day Eurail Saverpasses total \$916. Two Europasses — five days rail in Germany, France, Switzerland, Spain and Italy — are \$522. Add Austria to the mix and the cost is \$618.

Limit your travel to Germany and the cost pendulum swings back toward rail. The German Rail Pass provides five days first class travel for two persons for \$414 or \$286 second class. For 10 days the cost for two is \$650 first class and \$456 second class.

Remember, however, that unlike those five-days-in-two-months rail passes, you can travel in the car on every one of the 14 days you have it.

Rent in Switzerland and the 14-day cost for a compact car is about \$650; a subcompact \$600 and a midsize about \$750. Travel only in Switzerland and a four-days-consecutive Swiss Pass for two is \$422 first class and \$300 second class. Eight-days is \$506 and \$380. For 15 consecutive days the tab is \$588 and \$460. The Swiss Flexipass for two is \$411 first class and \$282 second class but you get only three days travel. To add travel days, the cost is \$24 per day per person first class and \$19 second class.

In most cases, a solo traveler is probably better off financially and otherwise with a rail pass. (I can't imagine finding my way around a major European city — or even through those mazes of country roads — without a map reader/navigator.)


Besides economy, car travel offers

a couple of other advantages. The first is access. Though the rail networks of Europe are extensive, many small towns and villages do not have train service. In addition, it seems to us a little harder to get off the beaten path and away from fellow tourists when traveling by train. On the major routes, especially during the high season, be prepared to travel with plenty of other U.S. visitors.

Flexibility is another car advantage. Though there is *usually* a train going where you want to go, when you want to go — not always. With a car, of course, you set the timetable.

And finally, for those who don't pack light and/or want to shop along the way, the trunk of a rental car is a good storage place.

Trains are unique and wonderful. If you're only visiting the larger cities, they beat cars for convenience and comfort. If the trip involves more than a couple of hundred kilometers, the train gets you to your destination in much better shape both physically and mentally than a car. Auto rentals, however, are usually cheaper, more flexible and still the best way to explore the countryside. In the end, of course, it comes down to what makes you feel most comfortable and your own style of travel.

Bottom Line: I must say, the older I get the more I like trains. When I stop writing this newsletter, I'm going to put an extra pair of bluejeans in a backpack and ride those rails for about three months straight. — RHB 

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating 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.

Just 30 minutes by car from Bonn, the Ahr is an easy sidetrip from most destinations along the Rhine. Its serene, rural setting; miles of paths for cycling, hiking, and walking excursions; numerous historical sites; and alkaline thermal baths in Bad Neuenahr, make it attractive for longer stays as well.

We descended into this picturesque valley at Altenahr — the winding, narrow, west end of the valley — when vines growing high up on steeply-terraced cliffs were soaking up the last of the afternoon's sun rays. Our wine tour led us to the towns of Mayschoss, Dernau, Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, and Heppingen. Others could have been included had we more time.

Mayschoss is directly below the ruins of the oldest fortress on the Ahr, the 11th century Saffenburg, and is renowned for the founding of the first German wine growers' cooperation (*Winzergenossenschaft*) in 1868. The co-op was organized to help the vintners collectively cope with hard times brought on by several poor harvests. Today, most of the Ahr's vintners belong to one of five such co-ops, which produce approximately 70 percent of the region's wine.

Meyer-Näkel

In neighboring Dernau, we stopped first to visit Werner Näkel, owner of the Meyer-Näkel vineyard, and producer of the region's most highly-regarded red wines.

A former math teacher, Mr. Näkel left his profession to run the business that has been in his family for five generations.

Though production capacity is small — 6.5 hectares yield just seven thousand cases per season on average — he quickly developed a reputation for producing elegant and complex Spätburgunders with superior finish, according to the German wine magazine, *Wein Sonderheft*.

Quiet and well-informed, Mr. Näkel is happy to discuss his wine-making at length. However, due to high demand and low supply, he can only offer tastings for about one week in April, when the new year's

Ahr Valley Info

Tourist Information:

Ahr, Rhein, Eifel,
Markt 11
D-5374 Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler
Tel +49/02641/977301, fax 977373

Distance from:

Bonn	30 km / 19 miles
Düsseldorf	110 km / 69 miles
Frankfurt	150 km / 94 miles
Cologne	70 km / 44 miles
Trier	120 km / 75 miles

Routes through the Valley:

Rotweinstrasse (B266 and B267) for driving.

Rotwein Wanderweg for hikers.

Ahr-Radtour for cyclists—a circular route that begins in Remagen/Rhine, goes through the Ahr Valley and back to the Rhine.

Wine Tasting:

Generally available during business hours Monday through Friday and limited hours on weekends. *Appointments strongly encouraged at all wineries.* Prices per bottle range widely, but generally fall between 12 to 30 DM (\$7-\$17) for the current year's wines. The best years for Ahr Valley wines include 1997, 1995, 1990, 1985, and 1981.

Reference:

A Traveller's Wine Guide to Germany.
By Kerry Brady Stewart. Interlink Books, 1998.

German Wine Labels:

German wine quality categories are terms used to indicate increasing levels of ripeness at harvest.

There are two types of table wine:

- Deutscher Tafelwein is equivalent to French Vin de Table.
- Deutscher Landwein is equivalent to French Vin de Pays.

There are several levels of quality wine, which is made from ripe, very ripe, or overripe grapes, selectively harvested.

- **Qualitätswein b.A. (QbA):** quality wine from one of the 13 specified regions in Germany, made from ripe grapes; everyday wines enjoyed with or without meals; equivalent to French *Appellation Contrôlée* (A.C.) wines.
- **Qualitätswein mit Prädikat (QmP):** quality wine with special attributes from one district within one of the 13 regions; Made from riper, very ripe,

and overripe grapes; superior wines to drink with or without meals and on special occasions. Equivalent to French A.C. +cru. The special attributes or "Prädikats" are as follows:

- **Kabinett:** fully ripe grapes; the lightest of the Prädikat wines. Good with most foods.

- **Spätlese:** riper, late-harvested grapes; richer in body and taste; trocken or halbtrocken styles go well with many dishes; the classic style (slightly sweet) harmonizes well with richer foods.

- **Auslese:** very ripe grapes selected bunch by bunch; rich, noble wines with more intense bouquet and flavor.

- **Beerenauslese:** very ripe, individually selected berries; luscious rarity with ripe, natural sweetness.

- **Eiswein:** very ripe grapes harvested and pressed while still frozen; wines with intense sweetness and acidity.

- **Trockenbeerenauslese:** overripe individually selected berries, often dried up by a fungus which imparts a honeyed tone to the wine; extremely rich, nectar-like rarity.

Source: *A Traveller's Wine Guide to Germany.*

Ahr Valley Wine Festivals

September

Dates	Village/Town
4 - 8	Ahrweiler
11 - 13	Ahrweiler
18 - 21	Remagen
19 - 21	Bachem
19 - 21	Rech
25 - 27	Altenahr
26 - 28	Dernau

October

Dates	Village/Town
2 - 4	Altenahr
3 - 4	Mayschoss
9 - 11	Altenahr
10 - 11	Mayschoss
16 - 18	Altenahr
17 - 18	Mayschoss
23 - 25	Altenahr
24 - 25	Mayschoss
25-27	Bad Neuenahr

From April into November in the many wine villages of Germany's 13 different wine regions are hundreds of wine festivals. A complete list of these is available from the **German Wine Information Bureau**, 245 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2204, New York NY 10016, tel. 212-896-3336, fax: 212-896-3342, e-mail: sullassoc1@aol.com

AHR VALLEY

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wines are ready to be sold.

Interestingly, he has presented his wines at tastings as far away as the Westin St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. He also owns another 1300 hectares of vineyards in South Africa, which started producing Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc wines about two years ago.

Owner: Werner Näkel

Specialties:

1997 Meyer-Näkel Frühburgunder QbA trocken

1997 Illusion Nr. 1 Spätburgunder Rosee Tafelwein trocken

Address: Hardtbergstr. 20, 53507 Dernau, tel. +49/02643/1628, fax 3363

Kreuzberg

Our next tour, also in Dernau, was at Kreuzberg, founded in 1953 and run by Ludwig Kreuzberg, the youngest of three brothers, each of whom is deeply involved in the operations of the business.

Another brother, the gregarious Thomas, was our host for the afternoon, and from him we learned a great deal about the bureaucracy of wine growing in the Ahr Valley. Some years ago, the brothers' father wanted to experiment with Cabernet Sauvignon vines, but was denied government permission for no apparent reason other than that this type of grape had not been planted to date and therefore should not be introduced to the Ahr.

In spite of the state's denial, the senior Kreuzberg planted the new varietal and left his sons to deal later with the bureaucracy. Today, Ludwig has at last secured approval for the new wine and next year Kreuzberg will market the first Ahr Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

The winery's current specialty is the Frühburgunder (early pinot). And to prove to us that the wines age well, we were treated to a taste of the 1988 vintage. "They say these wines are best in six to eight years, but you can see it is still good ten years in the bottle," Thomas noted.

Owners: Ludwig Kreuzberg (with brothers Hermann Josef and Thomas)

Specialties:

1996 Kreuzberg Dornfelder QbA trocken

1997 Devon Spätburgunder QbA trocken Barrique

Address: Benedikt-Schmittmannstrasse 20, D-53507 Dernau, tel. +49/02643/16914, fax 3206

Open May-Oct. except Wednesday; Sun. from 10am, Sat from noon, Mon.-Fri. from 3pm. Has some guest rooms (see page 5).

Weingut Deutzerhof

Back in Mayschoss, we called next on Wolfgang Hehle, a former accountant, who now runs the Weingut Deutzerhof. The grand, new Deutzerhof estate lies on the outskirts of town, tucked away at the base of the hills.

In his new office and house, Mr. Hehle has built an elegant second story room for hosting small, private, catered gatherings which feature Deutzerhof wines. He grows mostly Spätburgunder (62%) and Riesling (15%) grapes, with smaller amounts of Portugieser, Dornfelder, Frühburgunder and Chardonnay.

He was named "vintner of the year" in the German publication *Alles über Wein*, which judged 1996 wines and ranked Deutzerhof in four of the top 10 places. Mr. Hehle's wines tend to be fuller than Meyer-Näkel's, but not as elegant according to *Wein Sonderheft*.

Tasting is available by appointment, while supply lasts. Prices vary widely depending on quality, for example from 15 DM (\$8.50) for the 1997 Cossmann-Hehle Spätburgunder to 48 DM (\$27) for the 1997 Grand Duc Select Spätburgunder - Auslese-trocken.

Owners: Wolfgang and Hella Hehle

Specialties:

1997 Catharina C. Riesling QbA trocken

1996 Dornfelder QbA trocken

Address: Deutzerhof, D-53508 Mayschoss tel. +49/02643/7264, fax 3232

En route to the lower end of the valley is the town of Walporzheim, which boasts the State Wine Domain (*Staatliche Weinbaudomäne*), the largest vineyard in the Ahr at 19 hectares/47 acres). The estate is located in the former Augustinian monastery of Kloster Marienthal, which was founded in 1137.

J. J. Adeneuer

The twin towns of Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler are the largest and most central areas of the valley. Here, we found the J. J. Adeneuer winery in a most unlikely location — the industrial center of Bad Neuenahr. The land surrounding the Adeneuer house has been designated by the state as an industrial development area and now, after 500 years of rural country location, the winery has become an island of tranquility in the midst of car repair shops, gas stations, hardware stores, and the like.

As we chatted over glasses of a 1997 Spätburgunder Weisssherbst Qualitätswein-halbtrocken, a white wine made from red grapes, (DM 11.50/\$6.50 per bottle), Mr. Adeneuer recounted an anecdote that illustrates the relative size of most Ahr Valley wineries. He recently traveled to France to buy new oak barrels from the same firm where the Napa Valley's Robert Mondavi Winery purchases its barrels. But while Mr. Adeneuer needed just eight of the barrels, Mondavi purchased 25,000.

In the quaintly decorated tasting room, we sampled a slightly spicy 1997 J.J. Adeneuer No. 1 Spätburgunder-Auslese (DM 34/\$19), which is bottled directly from steel tanks rather than barrels; and the house specialty, a 1997 Walporzheimer Gärkammer Spätburgunder-Spätlese-trocken (DM 34/\$19 per), which also is not barreled.

The winery has won awards in the Rheinland-Pfalz district in 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1996, and 1997. Mr. Adeneuer is happy to hold tastings by appointment.

Owners: Frank and Marc Adeneuer (brothers)

Specialties:

1997 J. J. Adeneuer No. 1

Spätburgunder Auslese-trocken
1997 Walporzheimer Gärkammer
Spätburgunder Spätlese-trocken
Address: OT Ahrweiler, Max-Planck-
Strasse 8, D-5374 Bad Neuenahr, tel.
+49/02641/344 73, fax 373 79
Open Mon.-Fri. 8-6pm, Sat. 8-3pm.

Weingut Burggarten

Lastly, in Heppingen, where the valley widens into gentler, rolling hills, we toured Weingut Burggarten, courtesy of vintner, Paul Schäfer. His family has owned the business since 1880.

Alles Über Wein named Burggarten its "discovery of the year" based on the property's 1996 wines. From 15 hectares of vines, Mr. Schäfer produces 70 percent Spätburgunder plus some Portugieser, Dornfelder, Dominar, and Frühburgunder reds.

For the past two years in July, Burggarten has hosted a tasting event with two other wineries along six kilometers of the *Rotwein Wanderweg* (red wine path). The day includes music, food, and a tasting from each of the three wineries.

Mr. Schäfer is happy to arrange tastings and cellar tours from spring to early fall. In addition, a wine pub is open from 3pm every day except Monday during the months of September and October.

Owner: Paul Schäfer

Specialties: Heppinger Burggarten Spätburgunder Weissherbst Qualitätswein-trocken, Neuenahrer Sonnenberg Frühburgunder Rotwein Qualitätswein-Trocken.

Address: Landskrone Strasse 110, Heppingen, tel. +49/02641/7011, fax 7013

Other Attractions

A few sights we missed at this lower end of the valley include the Landskrone, which provides a spectacular view of the valley, plus a 1,000-year-old chapel and the ruins of **Burg Landskrone**, built in 1205 by Philip von Schwabeben as a romantic home for his bride.

In the Heimersheim Market Square, the late Romanesque **St. Auritius Church** houses the oldest (13th century) stained glass windows in Germany.

An afternoon sidetrip that would be of interest to porcelain doll enthusiasts is to Bad Breisig (15 minutes by car from Heppingen). Here, in the old Rathaus, is a museum which displays 400 dolls from the second half of the 19th century to the end of the 1930s. Open daily except Monday: 10-12 and 3-5pm. Cost 3 DM (\$1.70). Tel. +49/02633/9425.

The Ahr Valley's present-day vintners, we concluded, are a new and energetic generation of wine-makers who seem to have delicately balanced both the hobby and commercial aspects of their businesses.

Each is unique in personality and experience, and together they comprise a lively, industrious, and memorable community. Their main concern is simple; in the current market conditions, demand far outweighs supply. And the combination of European Union and German regulations make it impossible to plant more grapes.

"I cannot hold wine tastings here because I have no more wine left," laments Mr. Näkel, even though the prices of his prize-winning Spätburgunders continue to rise.

Hotels

Hotel Lochmühle

Nestled against the bank of the Ahr among the vineyards just west of Mayschoss, lies the grandiose Hotel Lochmühle. With 104 rooms the hotel actually seems a bit too large for its setting. The original building was finished in 1974 and its rooms, though large, still retain much of the 70's green and orange styling. In a newer part, built in 1994, rooms are somewhat smaller, but decorated in lighter, more modern color schemes.

Despite a bit of a language barrier, we found the staff, managed by director Hubert Esch, to be enormously helpful and pleasant.

Our second floor room, Number 121, featured a spacious balcony that presented a panoramic view of the Ahr with bright green vine covered hills rising in the background. Every 45 minutes, the local train would come whistling into view, making its

way to the lower end of the valley and back again. A plate of fresh fruit was delivered to our room when we arrived. At night, the room was very well lit. And the bath was exceptionally clean and bright.

All rooms have phones, shower/WC, minibars, and TV (though no English channels). The older rooms on the south side have larger balconies than the newer rooms, but from any room on this side, the view makes the room. Parking is adequate and free. Amenities include an indoor swimming pool, basic exercise room, sauna, solarium, bike rentals, and cozy basement bar. Restaurants include the Ahrblick Terrace Cafe and the Lochmühle Restaurant. Room prices are somewhat steep, as the hotel caters to businesses that hold seminars and conferences on-site.

Daily Rates: Singles 109 to 152 DM (\$61-\$85), doubles 215 to 242 DM (\$121-\$136). Credit cards accepted.

Contact: Ahrrotweinstrasse/Bundesstrasse 62, (Route B267) 53508 Mayschoss, Tel +49 2643-8080 Fax +49 2643-808445

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 8/20

Pension Kreuzberg

For simple, adequate accommodations near the western end of the valley, the Kreuzberg's tiny pension in Dernau is a good alternative. The family rents just five rustically furnished double rooms in a house adjacent to its wine cellar and pub. Each has a shower and toilet.

Room Number Five is the largest and the only one with a tub instead of a shower. We found some rooms smelled a bit of cigarette smoke, but were otherwise comfortable. Breakfast includes a wide assortment of fresh foods. There is plenty of public, outdoor parking across the street.

Daily Rates: Double rented as a single 60 DM (\$34), double 80 DM (\$45). Discounts available for stays longer than 3 days.

Contact: Pension Kreuzberg, Benedikt-Schmittmannstrasse 30, 53507 Dernau, Tel +49 2643-2612 Fax +49 2643-3206

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 12/20

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AHR VALLEY

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Restaurants

Restaurant Idille

It was easy to eat well during the prime growing season of this valley. Fresh produce was abundant at every stop. The oldest Ahr Valley restaurant, **Brogstter's Restaurant/Sanct Peter**, is located in Walporzheim (Walporzheimer Strasse 134, Tel +49-2641-97750, Fax +49-2641-977525). It was established in 1246 and operates today as a combination gourmet restaurant, wine pub, and gift shop. We, however, opted for a newer establishment, certainly equal in character, if not in age.

Hidden on a hill in a residential area of Bad Neuenahr is Restaurant Idille, a charming country escape and among the best in the region. Your host is Werner Bouhs, who opened the restaurant in 1994.

In a dining room illuminated by windows on three sides, we looked out over the garden that envelopes Idille and enjoyed the sweeping view of the valley below.

The atmosphere is a tasteful mix of classic and modern design: there are worn pine floors, a high ceiling, crisp white walls, and chic wall vases full of blooming gardenias and tall, arching greens. About a dozen tables, funky chairs, white linens, an open kitchen, a seldom-used baby grand piano, and Frank Sinatra singing softly in the background, completed the ambience.

At Mr. Bouhs' suggestion, we began our midday meal with a sweet and flowery *Sekt* made from elder blossoms. Though delicious for tasting, an entire glass was too perfumy.

Fixed menu prices average 60 DM (\$34), a la carte entrees cost from 28 to 34 DM (\$16-\$19) and the cuisine has somewhat of a French touch. We tried the roasted chicken breast, served with an artistic arrangement of potato croquettes and fresh white asparagus, carrots, and snow peas; and a roasted pork filet served with similar vegetables and a light, flavor-

ful sauce. Both dishes were sprinkled with tiny, delicious, fresh mushrooms. For dessert, a decadent chocolate mousse put us over the edge of utter indulgence.

Reservations are encouraged, as the restaurant is small. Credit cards are not accepted, and lunch for two cost about 68 DM (\$36). Dinner for two is about 120 DM (\$67). There was a lengthy wine list, but after a morning of tasting we passed.

Restaurant Idille, Am Johannisberg 101, D-53474 Bad Neuenahr, Tel +49-2641-28429, Fax +49-2641-25009

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 12/20

The Lochmühle

More than anything else, we picked Lochmühle for convenience and so were pleasantly surprised by the quality of the food and incredibly attentive service. Catering to a business clientele, meal prices — like the rooms — are on the high side.

In the large dining room, with low exposed beams and pine-paneled walls, we sat at a booth next to a tall picture window. A small vase of asters and tiny lilies decorated the table. We browsed a list of several Ahr Valley wines served by the carafe, and many more offered by the bottle from elsewhere in Germany, France, and Italy. We selected a carafe of a 1995 Mayschösser Spätburgunder-trocken and a 1995 Klosterberg Portugieser-mild.

We began with tomato cream and French onion soups. Then, craving light summer fare, we ordered the vegetarian special, which turned out to be flavorful little mushrooms sauteed and served with cheese, fresh vegetables — broccoli, cherry tomatoes, cauliflower — and small potato pancakes.

A roasted chicken breast (heavy on the salt) was served over a bed of lettuce with cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, and peppers, in a creamy dill dressing. But our plans for a light meal were thwarted when our server tempted us with a strawberry sundae for dessert, complete with fresh berries, vanilla ice cream, and loads of whipped cream.

Credit cards are accepted and

dinner for two without drinks cost about 84 DM (\$47).

The Lochmühle, Ahrrotweinstrasse / Bundesstrasse 62, (Route B267) D-53508 Mayschoss, tel +49/02643/8080, fax 808445.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 8/20

WÜRZBURG

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ride away, it makes an excellent first or last night sleepover for international visitors.

Frankly, though, it's worth a whole lot more than a simple one night stay. For this is a city rich in just about everything that the curious traveler could possibly ask for. Medieval castle? Got it. Baroque churches? Sure. Eighteen of 'em. Museums? A baker's dozen. Add a simply splendid palace and park. Architects and artists with names like Balthasar Neumann and Tilman Riemenschneider. Rococo mansions. Open air markets. River cruises and excursions. Music and religious festivals. Outstanding food and wine. A world famous university with 50,000 students, established in 1582. And it all adds up to the quintessential *gemütlich* city.

But as you wander the streets and cultural centers, it's worth remembering that Würzburg exists today only by dint of a man-made miracle; for on one hellish evening, March 16, 1945, this 1,200 year-old town, this center of culture and learning, was bombed, burnt and blown to oblivion. Not a house. Not a church. Not a street. Not a public building. Was left standing. Würzburg was reduced to 2 1/2 million cubic meters of rubble.

A new unheralded, closet-sized exhibit in the Rathaus annex spells out the details in poignant words and pictures, and scrolls the names of the victims of that night's devastation. Würzburg, it explains, had reached the spring of 1945 in relatively good shape despite its strategic location in the geographic center of Germany and its importance as a railroad terminus. Just six air raids; 371 dead.

And the residents felt with the Allies rapidly approaching, they might well make it safely to the end of the war. But the Allies, specifically the British under Winston Churchill and Sir Arthur Travers (Bomber) Harris, had other ideas. All German cities over 100,000 had to be attacked, they said...“to break the will of the people.”

So, at 5pm on March 16, some 600 planes from Bomb Group 5 took off from a North London airfield. Destination Germany. 280 turned to Nürnberg. The rest went on to Würzburg.

On the ground, first alarms went off at 7pm. By 8pm, the Würzburgers were scurrying for cellars and air raid shelters. At 9:07pm, flares were seen floating over the city, and at 9:30pm the attack began. Three waves of twin-engined aircraft, (Mosquitos and Marauders, apparently) hurled 360,000 sticks of incen-

piece. Brick by brick. Church by church. Monument by monument. The indescribable immensity of this task can best be seen via three dimensional models of Würzburg “after the attack” on display in the Rathaus and in the **Fürstenbau Museum** in the **Festung Marienburg**. Only then can one truly comprehend...the miracle of Würzburg’s rebirth.

Accommodations & Food

Gasthaus Stadt Mainz

Returning to Würzburg is always a pleasure but anticipation ran particularly high this time because we would be staying at **Gasthaus Stadt Mainz**, enjoying not just the comfortable guest rooms but the marvels of the kitchen as well.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The cozy main dining room serves as the hotel lobby, neighborhood gathering place, informal salon for international visitors, headquar-

ter family atmosphere. And then slowly the action picks up again as the next wave of diners arrives.

There’s an unexpected international aura to the Stadt Mainz that begins with a menu that’s translated into 14 or 15 languages. The employees — who may come from Japan or Thailand or Nigeria — are often seen rushing out from the kitchen to help fellow countrymen order their meals. Small groups of foreigners are frequent visitors as well as occasional celebrities.

One evening during our stay, Margarethe hurried over to point out Haile Sellassie’s nephew who was doing a radio interview in the corner.

Not surprisingly, the food is *Wunderbar!* Anneliese heads up the kitchen and is well known throughout the region for her skills. In addition to the more typical German fare, Franconian specialties are heavily featured—and delicious. *Frankische Hochzeitsuppe* (Franconian Wedding Soup) and *Ochsenschwanz* (Oxtail Stew) are two favorites.

The fifteen guest rooms above the restaurant are simple and straightforward with all the necessary conveniences, a pretty touch here and there but are not fancy or luxurious in any way. There’s no room service or hair dryers or satellite TV but all is fresh and clean and comfortable. If you go, ask for room Number Six.

Gasthaus Stadt Mainz, Semmelstr. 39, D-97070 Würzburg, tel. +49/0931/53155, fax 58510. Rooms 130 to 190 DM (\$72-\$108)

Another Würzburg favorite is **Restaurant Backöfle**. This 500-year old establishment is a combination *Bierstube*, wine bar and restaurant. Casual, lightly boisterous but very good, the menu concentrates on traditional German dishes — all a cut above the ordinary with great presentation. Multi-course meals range from \$18 to \$39.

Backöfle, Ursulinergasse 2, D-97070, tel. +49/0931/59059, fax 5855027410. Moderately-priced. ☒

On one hellish evening, March 16, 1945, this 1,200 year-old town, this center of culture and learning, was bombed, burnt and blown to oblivion.

diaries and more than 200 thousand-pound bombs at the city. In 12 short minutes the job was done. Würzburg was a smoldering ruin. Flames could be seen 170 miles away. And by midnight the temperature in the streets was upwards of 1,000 degrees Celsius.

Survivors fled in panic to the Main River, or to one of the outlying parks. But more than 5,000 perished in the flames 3,000 women and 700 children — as well as countless unnamed refugees who were sheltering in the city at the time.

Such was the destruction, that the head of the American Military Government in Bavaria, Governor Wagoner, recommended leaving the city as it was...a permanent monument to the madness of war. But others said it had to stand again.

And so Würzburg was put back together again. Lovingly. Piece by

ters for the business...and the Schwarzmänn family living room. Everything happens in this beautiful room which is filled to the rafters with polished copper pots, jars of pickles and jam, deer antlers and family photographs.

At command central...the *Stammtisch*...sits Altwirten Wilhemine, mother of Anneliese and Margarethe. And it is these three women who run the show adding untold warmth and character to the establishment.

From breakfast through lunch and dinner and well into the evening, there’s always something going on. When meal service tapers off out come the books and ledgers and business is taken care of, wildflowers are artfully arranged in big bowls, potatoes and onions are peeled and gentle conversation flows. The kitchen staff wanders in with plates of food adding to the

By popular demand, we are increasing coverage of rail travel. Henceforth, Train Talk will be a regular Gemütlichkeit feature. We lead off this month with a summary of Germany's ICE trains.

Train Talk

mountain top in the country including the spectacular but expensive journey through the Eiger up to the Jungfrauoch.

Germany's ICE Trains

With a maximum speed of 280 km/h (174 mph) these high speed trains connect the major German cities (including the capital Berlin) on six lines at hourly intervals. Some trains also go to Zürich and Interlaken in Switzerland.

Amenities

- Each train has a restaurant car with two sections: the traditional restaurant and self-service bistro.
- Public phones and luggage lockers are available on board.
- With exception of the first and last car of the trainset, the complete ICE train is a nonsmoking area.
- Various radio and music channels are available via headphones in each seat. Some cars have video systems which show movies.
- In ICE trains of the second generation, first-class coaches provide plugs for computer notebooks and laptops at each seat.

- Sample travel times include: Frankfurt-Hamburg (536 km/332 miles), 3h25; Frankfurt-Munich (417 km/259 miles), 3h32; Frankfurt-Stuttgart (203 km/126 miles), 1h23; and Hamburg-Munich (823 km/510 miles), 5h30.

Reservations

- Not required but recommended. You'll pay \$10 from the U.S. but usually no more than \$3 if you wait to get to Europe to book seats.

Ticketing

- Eurailticket, Eurailpass and Europass holders are honored on all ICE trains without extra charge (except for ICE "Sprinter").

Rail Pass Notes

- On Switzerland's popular **Glacier Express**, the **Eurailpass** and the **Europass** are honored on only part of the journey. However, the **Swiss Pass** and the **Swiss Flexipass** are both good for the entire route. These passes also will get you a 25% discount on just about every ride to a

• A rail option which must be purchased in Switzerland is the **Half-Fare Travel Card**. For 90 Sfr. (\$60) per month, holders of the card get 50% off rail travel within the country.

• A similar product available in the U.S. is the **Swiss Card**. For \$166 first class and \$128 second class, you get up to a month of half-price rail travel plus one roundtrip to anywhere in the country from a point of entry such as Zürich or Geneva.

Let's say you followed our May issue's advice and rented an apartment in Pontresina for a couple of weeks and are flying in to Geneva and out of Zürich. The Swiss Card gets you to Pontresina from the Geneva airport at the start of the trip and to the Zürich Airport at the end of your stay. Between times, you travel half-fare anywhere in the country — rail, boat, Glacier Express, etc. — first or second class. Even if you buy the second class Swiss Card, you can still purchase half-fare first class tickets and vice versa. 

Europe Travel Digest

- Some 250 hotels which offer discounts to older travelers are listed in *Vacations for Senior Citizens 1998*, a free booklet available from **Switzerland Tourism**. Write, phone, fax or email: 222 No. Sepulveda Blvd. #1570, El Segundo CA 90245, tel. 310-640-8900, fax 335-0131, email: stlosangeles@switzerlandtourism.com.
- The four-star **Sunstar Park Hotel** in the Swiss resort town of Davos offers an attractively-priced fall package beginning August 15. The arrangement includes seven nights, daily breakfast buffet, daily four-course dinner, and welcome cocktail for 565 Sfr. (\$377) per person double

occupancy. Use of the hotel's swimming pool and sauna is free. Depending on season and room category, normal double occupancy, half-board prices at this hotel range from about \$70 to \$340 per person per day. Tel. +41/081/413-1414, fax 413-1579.

- **Norvita**, the tour division of **Finnair**, currently offers an early-booking discount of \$100 on winter programs that brings prices as low as \$499 for a week in Prague, round-trip transatlantic air from New York included. Bookings must be made by September 30 and travel must begin by March 31, 1999. The Prague package provides five nights at the budget-class **Aparthotel Denisa**, daily breakfast, transfers and a city tour. Additional weeks start at \$150. The hotel can be upgraded for an additional charge. Contact: 800-677-6454.

- The **Lippizaner Studfarm** in

Piber near Graz celebrates its 200th anniversary on September 24-27, 1998. Piber is the breeding farm for the Lippizaner Stallions, famous for their performances at Vienna's **Spanish Riding School**. The Spanish Riding School and the **Vienna Boys' Choir** will perform daily during the event. Contact: Graz Tourist Office via email at info@graztourismus.com or the Austrian National Tourist Office at 212-944-6880.

- A 100-year-old **steam train** will run twice this fall — September 5 and 19 — from Vitznau on Lake Lucerne to **Mt. Rigi**. A special "steam supplement" of 15 Sfr. (\$10) is being charged. Reservations are highly recommended. Contact: Rigi Railway, CH-6354 Vitznau, tel. +41/041/399-8787, fax 399-88700, email: rigi@rigi.ch. Visit their website at www.rigi.ch. 