

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

May 26, 1999

Hallucinations

It's nearly June and my thoughts have turned, as they seem to at this time of year, to umbrella tables.

This is the time when Europe moves outdoors and thousands of them — maybe even millions — are sprouting all over Germany, Austria and Switzerland. From early mornings through the long evenings when there is still light in the sky at 10pm, they are the center of Europe's daily life. For millions every day they are the breakfast, lunch and/or dinner table — and, of course, a favored place to drink beer, which, by the way, is another topic occupying my thoughts, and not just at this time of year.

In my brain, you see, is a slide projector. Up there also is a screen. The slides are almost continuously projected on to the screen. The problem is I have no control over the projector. It selects slides at random. Oddly enough, one of its favorites right now is of a glistening half-liter glass of a deep golden liquid with a frothy white top. The glass sits on a red and white checkered cloth and displays an inscription in gold. It says *Budvar*.

There are other slides. In one, what's in the glass is a bit paler and in the background are snow covered mountains. In another, the liquid is very dark and the wooden table on which it sits has what appears to be names, dates and initials carved deeply into it.

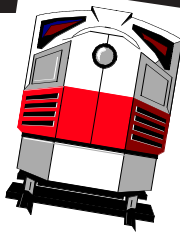
Well, I won't bore you with more slides. Anyway some of them are not for family viewing (remember, the projector has a mind of its own; I cannot tell it what to show).

So between the slides and umbrella tables I have been dwelling lately on how good it is to be in

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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



TRAIN TALK

Trains in Europe are more than a means of transport, they are a tourist attraction in themselves. Welcome to the first issue of Gemütlichkeit devoted to rail travel.

There is nothing quite like the experience of riding a European train.

First, there are the ever-changing views through the wide windows: stunning postcard vistas of the Alps and gentle pastoral outlooks over

meticulously maintained pastures and fields. Even those

sometimes not-so-savory peeks into the backyards of city dwellers are at least interesting, if not inspiring. And you never have to be alert for road signs or other drivers. It's just you and the view.

Then there is the restaurant car. Maybe the food isn't one-star Michelin, but around sunset with a glass of wine or a cool beer vom fass, a meal on rails can be a memorable one.

The best part, though, is the total absence of stress. Your only decisions are whether to read, sleep or watch. You have no control. The train will get there when it gets there — on time, of course. In the meantime, the phone won't ring.

Though rail travel seems to have cornered the market on romance, there are drawbacks, minor to some, major to others.

For two or more persons, renting a car is almost always less expensive than touring by train, and the gap is widening. Car rental rates in Germany are lower than they were 10 years ago while the price of the standard, 15-day Eurail pass has risen dramatically in that time.

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Mini-Tour...

North Country Pilgrimage

Our journey was born when a Hamburg hotel employee told us about his family's vacation home on Sylt, the slender wisp of an island suspended on the wild North Sea from Germany's northernmost border, nearly 200 kilometers and a 50-minute train ride from Hamburg. The island, though tiny, is known for its rich agriculture, spectacular landscape and wildlife preserves, and is accessible only by ferry or by car-train.

In fact, Christoph exclaimed, that very Sunday just happened to be *Biikebrennen*, an annual festival of ancient and pagan origin in which islanders build huge bonfires of driftwood and old Christmas trees

on the beach to bid the ships a cheerful farewell. Few outsiders find themselves on the North Sea in late February, so seeing the festival would be a memorable experience. Could we make it?

When serendipity calls, we listen. Sylt

became our mission impossible.

By Nikki Goth Itoi
& Lydia Itoi

We began our trek across Schleswig Holstein at Travemünde, a popular spa resort town on the Baltic Sea, only 15 minutes' drive out of Lübeck, another Hanseatic port on our itinerary. There, we walked past a stone church, half-timbered houses and seaside shops

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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Europe and to stop occasionally when the spirit moves and have a beer. In fact, on a short plane ride up the coast last week I made a list of my favorite places to have a beer in Europe.

To nondrinkers, I first salute your intelligence and then tell you that most of my favorite places work just as well as soft drink destinations.

So, without further palaver and in no particular order, here are some great places to have a beer...or two.

• **Gasthof Fraundorfer**, Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Ludwigstr. 24, D-82467, tel. +49/08821/9270, fax 92799) One of the most *gemütlich* inns in all of Germany. Make advance dinner reservations and stay until the locals start showing up about 9:30pm. Huge helpings of good Bavarian food. Freidl plays the accordion and sings Bavarian folk tunes.

• **Budvar Brewery**, Ceske Budejovice. Czech Republic. The best beer in the world in a pleasant atmosphere. Excellent food at astonishingly low prices.

• **Hotel Forsthaus Graseck**, (Graseck 10, D-82467, tel. +49/08821/54006., fax 55700) Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The hotel, reachable only by cable car, is no longer recommend for overnights, but find a spot on the terrace to watch the hikers returning from the trails and enjoy

the wonderful view of the rugged Wetterstein range.

• **Augustiner Gastätten**, (Neuhauser Str. 27, D-80331, tel. +49/089/23183257. fax 2913054) Munich. In summer, sit in the inner courtyard and drink the city's best beer while tucking away a plate of the city's best brewery grub.

• **Englischer Garten**, Munich. In good weather, the Chinese Tower in Munich's wonderful city park attracts thousands of Münchener. Beer is served by the *Maßkrug*, a full liter, so if you're not alone you might consider sharing. Even if you're drinking apple juice, the setting is idyllic and the scene fascinating.

• **The Prater**, Vienna. The sometimes weird and wild amusement park is definitely worth a visit. It's also a prime people watching venue while quaffing a Gösser Bier from Styria.

• **Smutny**, (Elisabethstrasse 8) Vienna. Order the Czech beer, Pilsner Urquell, in this authentic old-world *Beisl*. Check out the tile work and the light fixtures.

• **Zeughauskeller**, (Bahnhofstrasse 28) Zürich. One of the great dining rooms of Europe. Order a *Stange* (Swiss-German for a short beer). You might be seated next to a farmer or a billionaire financier — in Switzerland there's less difference between the two than you might think.

• **Ewige Lampe**, (Niebuhrstr. 11a, tel./fax +49/030/324 3918) Berlin.

Friendly neighborhood blues and jazz joint. The music is first-rate and the beer inexpensive.

• **Brauereiaussschank Schlenkerla**, (Dominikanerstr. 6, tel. +49/0951/56060) Bamberg, Germany. This town is said to have more breweries per capita than any city in Germany, ergo, the world. One of them is this cozy spot. The catch is that what they brew is called *Rauch Bier* or smoky beer. It is said to taste like liquid ham and takes a little getting used to.

Of course, this is only a partial list. There are many more slides.

Serb Hangout?

In August we gave a strong recommendation to the **Restaurant Beograd** (Schikanedergasse 7, tel. +43/01/5887/7444) in Vienna. I am virtually certain that this inexpensive, atmospheric little spot is owned, operated and, at least in part, patronized by Serbs. Like most people in business they are probably happy to see any customer as long as they can pay their bill. However, given the current times — and this is only a guess — right now Americans may not be among their most favored patrons.

If anyone has been there within the past few months I would appreciate some feedback. — RHB

Under Construction: www.gemut.com

Take a sneak preview, if you like, of the website for travelers to Germany, Austria & Switzerland. You can even download a recent back issue.

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria	Value Rating	Scale	
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

Special Designation

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

TRAIN TALK

Continued from page 1

Luggage is another rail headache...er, backache. Everything you bring to Europe, everything you acquire while in Europe, you'll carry on and off every train. The combination of a long walk and a short time between trains in a large station like Munich will cause you to reevaluate your packing priorities. Blessings on the inventor of rolling suitcases.

Finally, some travelers feel the busy train routes that connect major European cities are very much *on* the beaten track. As a rail rider you'll find that many of your travel companions are fellow Americans.

In fairness, however, we must report that in numerous long train trips over the past four winters — Berlin-Frankfurt, Zürich-Munich, Zürich-Prague, Prague-Frankfurt, Vienna-Munich, and several others — more often than not we have had a six-seat compartment all to ourselves. It's a sweet way to go.

Pass or Point-to-Point Tickets?

Once you choose rail over car rental your next decision is whether to buy a rail pass or simply purchase point-to-point tickets. Europe travel guru, Rick Steves, who probably knows as much about rail travel on the Continent as any American, estimates that as many as 10% of rail pass buyers would be better off buying tickets as they go.

While Steves notes that point-to-point tickets can be purchased in the U.S., he recommends waiting until you get to Europe to buy them and, where possible, avoiding the faster, "supplement-required" trains.

For example, the normal 1st class fare from Frankfurt to Munich is 224 DM (\$123). However, if you're willing to ride 2nd class — perfectly comfortable and the views are just as good — aboard EC 62, departing Munich at 20:46 and arriving Frankfurt at 44 minutes after midnight, the weekday price is 59 DM (\$32). There is a restaurant car and you don't change trains.

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Hotels On Rails

New in European train travel is the "hotel train."

Sleepers and couchettes, of course, have always been an option on overnight trains but aboard the double-decker CityNightLine trains, deluxe, two-bed compartments come with wardrobe, table and chair, *and a private bath with shower.*

Beneath "deluxe" are two categories: "comfort" and "economy:"

Comfort compartments are smaller and have two washing facilities but no private shower or toilet

Economy category is even smaller with one wash basin and either two or four bunk beds.

For those who don't need a private compartment, hotel trains offer reclining seats.

They have dining cars, of course, and also offer room service.

Currently, there are three CityNightLine "hotel train" routes: between Berlin and Zürich; Zürich and Hamburg; and between Vienna and Dortmund, Germany. (See adjacent box for schedules.)

Europasses, Eurailpasses and German Rail Passes are accepted on these trains but reservations are mandatory and pass holders must pay a supplement for the sleeping accommodations. See the box above for pricing for both point-to-point tickets and rail pass holders. All prices include breakfast.

There are also a few "hotel train" routes within Germany called InterCityNight. Service on these is similar to the CityNightLine trains though the accommodations offered are sleepers and couchettes, neither of which offers private toilet or shower. Prices, naturally, are cheaper. A pair of pass holders taking the Berlin/Frankfurt and Berlin/Munich routes, for example, will pay \$53 per person in a sleeper and \$26 in the more primitive couchette (sleep in your clothes). A reclining seat is \$12. Prices on the Hamburg to Munich route are slightly higher.

Point-to-point tickets on the Berlin/Munich and Berlin/Frankfurt routes are \$129 per person double in a sleeper and \$102 in a couchette.

The InterCityNight trains offer a restaurant and a bistro car. If you are going, say, from Berlin to Frankfurt on the night train which departs at one minute past 10pm, you can board early and have dinner before departure.

CityNightLine Prices (per night, per person/one way)

Category	Point-to-Point		Rail Pass holders
	Adult	Child with own bed	
Deluxe Single	\$316	\$235	\$163
Deluxe Double	\$220	\$215	\$117
Comfort Single	\$242	\$213	\$129
Comfort Double	\$192	\$173	\$103
Economy Double	\$150	\$135	\$60
Economy Quad	\$93	\$39	\$53
Reclining Seat	\$74	\$67	\$14

CityNightLine Timetable

CNL 359 dep: 1950 arr: 0440 arr: 0610 arr: 0835	Berliner Zürich HB Leipzig Dresden Berlin	↑ CNL 358 arr: 0934 dep: 0020 dep: 2250 dep: 2035
CNL 470 dep: 2045 arr: 0930	Komet Zürich HB Hamburg	CNL 471 arr: 0835 dep: 2010
CNL 223 dep: 1943 arr: 0745	↓ Donau Kurier Dortmund Vienna	CNL 222 arr: 1039 dep: 2130

TRAIN TALK

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But even at these low rates, if you plan to see a lot of country, rail passes are almost always the better way to go.

Which Pass?

So it's decision time again. Which pass? To make this call you have to do some advance trip planning. If you're sticking to one country then the rail pass for that country is the obvious choice. But if you'd like to venture into one or more neighboring countries the picture gets a little murkier.

Let's say you're planning to stay mostly in Germany, but want to

spend a day in Bern, Switzerland. Do you buy a German Rail Pass and a Swiss Card which is good for one roundtrip anywhere in Switzerland (total of \$418 1st class or \$302 2nd

class for four days in Germany and the one Switzerland trip)? Or do you go for the Europass (1st class only, five days, five countries: Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, Spain for \$348)? As you can see, the Europass is the better deal but the cheapest way is to buy a 2nd class German Rail pass (\$174) and a roundtrip ticket from the Swiss border to Bern, about \$42, for a total of \$216.

Resources

Obviously, the kicker in this planning process is determining the cost of point-to-point tickets. Not so easy. The websites noted on this page (inset) will provide most fares within the countries they represent, but to find a price from a city in one country to a city in another, is more difficult. For small cities, almost impossible.

Rail Europe, however, can help. Call 800-438-7245 to access their 24-hour automated travel information service. By following the recorded

directions, and using your telephone key pad to punch in the names of departure and arrival cities, you can get rail fares between most key cities.

Another Rail Europe resource is its web page (www.raileurope.com). Go to the rail section and click on "Fares and Schedules" for a simple search procedure that provides fares and schedules for about 450 European cities. The German and Swiss rail websites' databases are much more comprehensive but, as previously mentioned, usually do not provide fare information if the cities are in different countries.

Reservations

With your rail pass you can board the train but you are not guaranteed

a seat. Practically speaking, finding an open seat is seldom a problem, but we always feel more comfortable with a reservation.

They are compulsory on certain InterCity and EuroCity

trains and any train with an "R" in the schedule.

Where and when to make the reservation is another matter. For a garden variety reservation between, say, Berlin and Hamburg, Rail Europe charges \$11 per person. Some high-speed and special trains charge even more, up to \$25. However, it is much cheaper to book seats in Europe and you can do so easily at any train station and at most travel agencies. Last winter, we paid from 3 DM (\$1.65) to 5 Sfr. (\$3.33) per person for our made-in-Europe reservations.

Bookings for some trains can be made only a few hours before departure, others require at least 24 hours in advance.

Stevens says that in 24 years of European train travel he has never made or needed a reservation before arriving in Europe.

Bookings in the U.S. can be made through **Rail Europe** (800-438-7245) or **DER Tours** (800-549-3737).

Overnight Accommodations

With your Eurailpass you can reserve a sleeper, couchette or sleeperette by paying a supplement. (Also see *Hotels on Rails* story page 3.)

Sleepers are 1st class bedrooms for one or two passengers, or bedrooms for two or three persons in 2nd class. All have a washbasin. Toilets are located at either end of the car. Couchettes are open bunks with a pillow and blanket, which, for a charge usually of \$28 (about \$8 less if booked in Europe), allow you to lie down during the night, but afford little privacy. In 1st class there are four couchettes per compartment; in 2nd class, four or six couchettes per compartment. In all cases couchettes are shared by both sexes. Available on some trains, sleeperettes are reclining seats in 2nd class.

You may be asked to give up your rail pass and passport for the night to the train staff. In this way you can sleep through the night and be undisturbed during border crossings and ticket checks.

Be aware that some overnight trains do not carry normal seating cars, only sleeping cars. When they do it is often 2nd class only.

In the Station

In most European rail stations posted timetables show departure and arrival times and track numbers. These are recognized by the color of the background. Departure timetables usually have a yellow background, while arrival timetables are in white. Trains are listed chronologically from 00 to 24 hours. Fast trains are often shown in red. Next to the time, or at the top, you will find the names of important intermediate stops, as well as the track number from which the train departs. Major train stations also provide this information on computerized indicator boards.

Youth, Senior Discounts

Travelers under 26 can obtain rail tickets at a 30% discount at travel agencies throughout Europe. The *Let's Go* guidebooks carry a list of budget travel offices which are usually located in or near major train stations.

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Pass Perks

All rail passes come with bonus transportation privileges. These extras usually entitle the pass holder to free or discounted rides on certain local public transportation systems, lake steamers, riverboats, buses, funiculars, cable cars to mountain tops, sometimes even discounts on hotels and museum entrance. Each pass has its own set of perks, most of which are spelled out in the documentation received with the pass.

Eurailpasses and Europasses, for example, qualify for special fares on high-speed premier trains such as Thalys, AVE, Artesia and Eurostar. On the latter, the regular one-way 1st class fare London to Paris on the Eurostar is \$219. With a Europass or Eurailpass the price is \$155.

Here is a summary of some of the extras offered with the various passes.

Eurailpass & Europass

For Travel in Germany

- Discount on normal fares Travemünde to Trelleborn (Sweden) ferry on the 'TT-Line.'* **50% off**
- Discount on full fare aboard 'TR-Line' Rostock - Trelleborg ferry.* **50% off**
- Reduced fare on Freiburg-Schauinsland rack railway.
- Boat day trips operated between Passau and Linz (Austria) by 'Wurm & Kock.' **50% off**
- Mountain railroad Garmisch-Partenkirchen - Grainau - Zugspitzplatz and some cable cars in area. **25% off**
- Europabus routes #189 and #190/190A, May through December, primarily from Frankfurt south on the Romantik and Castle Roads. **75% off**

* Eurail only

For Travel in Switzerland

- Lake steamers on lakes Biel, Brienz, Geneva, Lucerne, Murten, Neuchâtel, Thun and Zürich. **Free**
- Boat service Schaffhausen-Kreuzlingen. **Free**
- Boat service on Lake Constance between Rorschach and Romanshorn. **35% off**
- To the summit of Mt. Pilatus (near Lucerne) by funicular from Alpnachstad, as well as by cable car from Kriens. **35% off**
- Entrance fee to Transport Museum Lucerne. **35% off**
- Bürgenstock funicular. **35% off**
- Jungfrau Region Railways. **35% off**
- Vitznau/Rigi Railways. **35% off**
- Good on Disentis-St. Moritz segment only of the Glacier Express. Add the rest for \$98 plus resv. fee.

For Travel in Austria

- Puchberg am Schneeberg - Hockschneeberg rack railway. **10% off**
- St. Wolfgang -Schafbergspitze rack railway. **15% off**

- Boats operated from May to October by Austrian Railways on Lake Wolfgang. **20% off**
- Boats operated by Austrian Railways on Lake Constance. **50% off**
- Day-trips between Passau and Linz by 'Wurm & Kock'. **50% off**
- Bicycle rentals at railway stations. **50% off**
- Boats operating between Melk, Krems and Vienna. (DDSG - Blue Danube Schifffahrt GmbH) **15% off**

German Rail Passes

Travel to Other Countries

Pass holders can purchase additional tickets for travel to any destination in Austria (pass already includes Salzburg), Denmark and the Czech Republic.

- Austria excursion: 1st class \$60; 2nd class \$42
- Denmark excursion: 1st class \$45; 2nd class \$30
- Czech Republic excursion: 1st \$40; 2nd \$25

These tickets are available at German Rail Pass Aid Offices upon presentation of a valid German Rail Pass.

River and Lake Trips

- Ships of the Köln-Düsseldorf Rheinschifffahrt AG, between Cologne and Mainz on the Rhine and the Mosel route between Koblenz and Cochem.
- The payment of a supplement is needed for a trip on a hydrofoil. Ships with cabins are not included.
- On the Lake of Constance German Rail Pass holders are granted a 50% reduction on all steamers operated by Bodenseeschiffahrtsbetriebe (BSB).

Swiss Rail Passes

The Swiss Pass and the Swiss Flexipass are accepted by the four Swiss speciality trains: Glacier Express (lunch reservations made locally only), William Tell Express, Bernina Express, and the Golden Pass. Seat reservations, however, are mandatory and range from \$11 to \$14. The seat reservation and meal on the William Tell is \$47. On the Bernina Express the reservation is \$14 plus \$34 for train and bus through Italy.

- Unlimited travel on lake steamers.
- Unlimited travel on 30 major city transportation systems.
- Unlimited travel on all postal and most of the private bus lines.
- 25% discount on excursions to most mountain tops.
- Special rates for bicycle rental at major train stations.

Austria Rail Passes

- Discounts on steamers and bikes.

EUROPE BRIEFING

Continued from page 1

down to the white, sandy beach, which was waiting patiently for the summer sun and holiday visitors in their striped, canopied beach chairs.

Next, we headed northwest on Route 76, which felt more like a country road than the main thoroughfare. As we left the shore, the scenery changed from coastal *Fördes* to rolling farmland and forests dotted with lakes in the *Holsteinische Schweiz* district, named for its resemblance to Switzerland's many lakes. Along the way, we stopped at the town of Plön, which nestles around a beautiful lake, and got out to watch the sunlight play on the water. A small brick church spilled its congregation out into the cobblestone market square as we sipped our coffee in a café across the street.

About an hour later, we arrived in the old Viking town of Schleswig, where we would later return to spend the night at the **Hotel Waldschlössen** (see below). Remnants of the town's marauding past, including a 4th-century ship, are enshrined in the *Archäologisches Landes-Museum*, and ruined Viking fortifications can be seen at various archeological sites around the city. Today, Schleswig is a quaint, picturesque, and thoroughly civilized city on a quiet lagoon, surrounded by fields, trees, sea and sky. We decided, however, to put off exploring the old sailors' quarter and the imposing **Dom St. Peter** and press on to Sylt.

Another hour of fast, focused driving on Autobahn A-7 brought us to Flensburg, a mere 8 kilometers from the Danish border. And from there, we followed signs west to Niebüll, the terminus for the car-train to the edge of the world. We were disheartened to learn that the last train would leave the island at the absurdly early hour of 7:30pm, just when the bonfires would be getting underway, and that it would cost 139 DM (\$76) to spend just three hours in Sylt. Should we do it? After coming so far, we couldn't give up now.

We pulled in line behind a shiny BMW and managed to get our rental car on the top level of the double-decker train. Then for forty thrilling minutes, we swayed and rattled over waterlogged farmland that gradually fell away until we were crawling along a strip of land only inches wider than the train tracks.

When we finally reached the outer North Sea shore, the wind was pummeling the sand dunes, whipping the rain against our elated faces. Never mind, we had made it, and the raw power of the winter wind was absolutely exhilarating.

The weather being what it was, we decided our short time on the island would be best spent eating *Grünkohl*, the frost-kissed kale with sausages and pork that is a tradition eaten during *Biikebrennen*. Every restaurant on Sylt has its own version, but all offer stiff shots of *Lütten Klaren* or rye whisky to "aid digestion" after such a hearty meal. We took refuge in the cheerfully decorated bistro of the **Hotel Stadt Hamburg** in Westerland (see below). The *Grünkohl* and veal soup were marvelous, profoundly savory and comforting on a blustery day, but the bland, overcooked seafood pasta with provencal vegetables and tomato pesto deserved a pass. (Hotel Stadt Hamburg Bistro, 25980 Westerland/Sylt, Strandstrasse 2, tel +49/4651/8580, fax 858-220. Dinner for two cost 62 DM/\$34 without drinks.)

All too soon, we were back on the car train, trying not to think about the disappointment of missing the main event. The most important thing, we consoled ourselves, was that we had seen the wild beauty of Sylt for ourselves, overcoming every obstacle. We had dipped our feet into two very different seas in a single glorious day, and besides, the bonfires were probably rained out anyway.

At that moment, the miracle happened. As the train slowly pulled away from the island, one by one the fires sprang into view, the high flames leaping through the darkness. We looked back as we continued to move out over the water like a ship leaving a friendly port, and the

flickering lights in the distance wished us goodbye and Godspeed.

Hotels

Hotel Stadt Hamburg

Visitors remember this high class hotel in Westerland — Sylt's main town — first by its white facade and matching white picket fence; and second by a striking and colorful decor that tastefully incorporates aristocratic Landhaus accents. "Laura Ashley was never so bold!" the hotel's management proudly proclaims.

Repeat summer guests are the mainstay of the Stadt Hamburg. They return year after year to enjoy the lush garden views, cozy common areas, and the pleasant service it provides. The hotel has 72 rooms and suites, each individually decorated, and it has been run by the Hentschel family since 1919.

Contact: Hotel Stadt Hamburg, 25980 Westerland/Sylt, Strandstrasse 2, tel +49-4651-8580, fax +49-4651-858-220, email: hsh-sylt@t-online.de

Rates: Singles from 152 to 290 DM (\$84-\$159), doubles 250 to 410 DM (\$137-\$225). Breakfast not included, 27 DM (\$15). High season runs May to October. Winter rates are significantly lower.

Rating: Quality 17/20, Value 12/20

Hotel Waldschlössen

Travelers looking for an off-the-beaten path overnight in Schleswig Holstein should try the Waldschlössen in Schleswig. This large hotel sits just two kilometers from the town center on a quiet, forested hillside. The current owners have run the place since 1955, and rooms in both the older and newer parts have been designed with a modern touch.

All guestrooms have a shower or bath, direct dial phone, minibar, color TV and safe. There is also an indoor swimming pool and Jacuzzi for house guests. The standard doubles were roomy and many offered views of the countryside.

Room Number 174 on the ground floor has its own terrace and more space than some of the other doubles we saw. For a special occasion, suite Number 333 in the east building has

a king-size bed, teal colored carpet, two large windows, and an enormous bath including a white marble tile whirlpool tub and a private sauna.

Contact: Hotel Waldschlössen, Kolonnenweg 152, 24837 Schleswig, tel. + 49/4621/38 30, fax 38 31 05. Email:

waldschloesschen@schleswig.de
Website: www.schleswig./waldschloesschen

Rates: Singles 105 to 155 DM (\$58-\$85), Doubles 145 to 195 DM (\$80-\$107).

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE, 16/20

READERS' FORUM

Baden-Baden Superstar

We just spent five nights at the **Brenner's Park-Hotel** (Schillerstr. 6, D-76530, tel. +49/072212/9000, fax 38772) in Baden-Baden. The hotel is a standard-setter. We have never had better food, service, etc. This is a superlative hotel in a beautiful setting.

This was our second visit. The last was 10 years ago.

LOUIS J. LYELL
JACKSON MS

On Our Side

The author of the *Wall Street Journal* article on Weimar you mentioned last month certainly had an agenda that had nothing to do with travel advice. It's too bad some people will take him at his word and miss a wonderful travel experience, though others will be glad to have their own biased opinions confirmed in a respected paper.

In September of '97 we spent not 30 minutes in the city but three days and enjoyed every one of them and found something new to do and see everyday. We were treated warmly and were happy to see the city was not flooded with Americans.

We have been to Germany many times, east, west, north and south. We have always been treated with courtesy and in most cases friendli-

ness. My fractured German once elicited a smile but to date no one has fallen over laughing, they are just too polite. The locals will patiently listen to struggling German even though their excellent English would save them lots of time.

CORINNE E. BURKHARTSMEIER
SAN RAFAEL, CA

Also Agrees

I also read with interest the *Wall Street Journal* article by Ed Ward trashing the city of Weimar.

Mr. Ward must be a very inexperienced traveler. My wife and I took *Gemütlichkeit's* advice and visited the city last August before it became the European City of Culture for 1999. Your suggestion was a good one. We stayed at the **Pension Altenburg** (recommended in your February '97 issue) for three nights. Obviously, there was a lot of construction going on all around the city, but it was not a major distraction from our visit.

We found none of what Mr. Ward had to say to be true. Everyone was friendly, the people were not rude and language was not a problem. We had a great three days and could have stayed another day or so. The food was outstanding, the culture displays even at this time were of great interest, there was more to see than the three days allowed. Weimar is definitely not a creepy or eerie city. To the contrary, our visit there was all one could expect - great food, friendly people, numerous sights to visit, first class facilities, and good prices.

I can only assume from Mr. Ward's article that he needs to travel more and see more of what is to be seen and not dwell on the past. Perhaps a copy of *Gemütlichkeit* would help him travel a little more educated.

My wife and I look forward to a return visit in the near future just to see all the construction completed and enjoy the city's great hospitality.

WALTER SCHELLHASE
KERRVILLE, TEXAS

P.S. We have also made a *Gemütlichkeit* castle trip, staying in all the castle hotels you recommended. They were all great. Thanks.

Europe Travel Briefs

Web Hotel Deals

A place to find some very low weekend hotel rates is on the Web at the **Click-It Weekends** site (www.queensmoat.com/Travel-Web/clk_hotels.html).

Posted weekly are special prices that apply for the coming weekend at dozens of hotels worldwide. All are major marketing chains but some of the discounts are incredible. Book online or phone the chain's 800 phone number.

You can register at the site and be sent weekly email listings with the prices for the forthcoming weekend.

Of course, there may be only one or two rooms at these prices and once they are gone you will be offered prices higher than posted on the Web. But even these higher prices are still well under rack rates.

Here are some recent *per room* prices listed on the site for Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Vienna, 1550 AS/\$123 (**Hotel Inter-Continental Vienna**)

Berlin, 122 DM/\$68 (**Forum Hotel Berlin**)

Frankfurt, 222 DM/\$123 (**Forum Hotel Frankfurt**)

Frankfurt Am Main, 172 DM/\$96 (**Le Meridien Parkhotel**)

Frankfurt am Main, 237 DM/\$132 (**Hotel Intercontinental**)

Hamburg, 90 DM/\$50 (**Le Meridien Hamburg**)

Hamburg, 172 DM/\$96 (**Hotel Inter-Continental Hamburg**)

Hildesheim, 180 DM/\$100 (**Le Meridien Hildesheim**)

Leipzig, 155 DM/\$86 (**Hotel Inter-Continental Leipzig**)

Munich, 180 DM/\$100 (**Forum Hotel München**)

Nürnberg, 110 DM/\$61 (**Le Meridien Grand Hotel**)

Stuttgart, 170 DM/\$94 (**Hotel Inter-Continental Stuttgart**)

Cointrin/Geneva, 175 Sfr/\$118.

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EUROPE BRIEFS

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(Forum Park Hotel Geneva)

Montreux, 142 Sfr./\$79 (Royal Plaza Inter-Continental)

Zürich, 145 Sfr./\$81 (Hotel Inter-Continental Zürich)

Passion Play Report

According to the Oberammergau site on the World Wide Web (www.oberammergau.de), tickets for next year's **Passion Play** are sold out. The site's actual wording, however, includes the phrase, "for the time being we can't accept further ticket orders," seems to hold a glimmer of hope for those determined to attend this a once-in-a-decade event.

The reason there are no tickets now is because they are committed to tour operators. Some of these are likely to be returned and made available for sale to the general public. (Note: you can't just purchase a play ticket. You must also commit to accommodations; hotel, pension, private residence, etc.)

If you want to insure tickets to the play contact a reliable tour operator such as **DER Tours**. This old-line, Germany-based company has a number of packages that include Passion Play stopovers, ranging from an 8-day Germany tour for \$1,821 per person to a 14-day Eastern East Europe itinerary for \$2,537. None include air.

Those who aren't willing to endure a package tour will probably do well to request ticket order forms from Oberammergau's web site. The site also shows which overnight accommodations still have space and last time we looked there were still openings. You might want to lock in a room now and then ask the assistance of your host in getting tickets.

Eastern Germany Festival

Here's an off-the-beaten-path summer destination. **Altenburg**, which is 49 kilometers (24 miles) straight south of Leipzig, is one of those preserved old German towns that the West has begun to discover since unification. It has a glorious castle, an interesting and original *Altstadt*, the world's foremost play-

ing card museum, and a month-long summer music festival that runs June 25 through July 25.

In weekly concerts in the castle's festival hall, the East-West Youth Symphony Orchestra will perform the music of Mozart, Richard Strauss, Shostakovich, Bernstein, Mahler, Telemann, Dvorak and Schumann. In addition, there will be frequent evenings of chamber music and vocal presentations at several venues. Visiting ensembles include the Moscow Quartet and the Petersburg Quartet. The event concludes with a July 25 Opera Gala.

The force behind all this is Arturo Sergi, an American opera singer (and *Gemütlichkeit* reader), who in 1991 founded Altenburg's International Music Academy.

Contact: Altenburg Tourist Office, Markt 21, D-04600, Altenburg tel. +49/03447/594 174, fax 594 179.

TRAIN TALK

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Senior discounts are available in a few countries. Persons over 60 get a 30% discount aboard most trains in the UK. There is a 50% discount for males 65 and over and for women 60 and over in Austria. Travelers over 65 get 50% off in Scandinavia, except in Norway where the age is 67. Seniors may be required to purchase an ID card.

Cheaper Rail Tickets in Germany

Rail passes don't fit everyone's needs. You may wish to buy your tickets as you go. In such cases, you'll be looking for the best deals. If you do so, there is at least one advantage: rail tickets purchased in Europe are refundable and changeable. Tickets bought in the U.S. carry restrictions.

Here are a few discount tips (by the way don't expect the German Tourist Office in the U.S. to have information on these programs. They referred us to an information number at Deutsche Bahn (German Rail, +49/01805/996633.)

• Those who plan to stay in Germany for a long time will want to consider the purchase of a **BahnCard**, sold at German rail stations. For 240 DM (\$132) you'll

get a 50% discount on 2nd class tickets for a year. Buy a second card for your spouse and pay 120 DM (\$66). The price for children under 18 is 18.6 DM (\$11)

Travelers over 59, under 23, or students under 27 can purchase the BahnCard for 120 DM (\$66).

• **Guten Abend** tickets (Good Evening tickets) — purchased at rail stations — allow 2nd class travel anywhere in Germany between 7pm (2pm Saturdays) and 2pm the next day for discounted rates. For travel on Fridays and Sundays a supplement of 15 DM (\$8) applies.

Prices: 2nd cl 1st cl.
Non ICE: 59 DM (\$32) 99 DM (\$54)
ICE: 69 DM (\$38) 109 DM (\$60)

For example, if you're headed for Frankfurt from Munich on a weekend, the normal 1st class fare is 224 DM (\$123) or 147 DM (\$81).

However, if you're willing to ride 2nd class aboard EC 62, departing Munich at 20:46 and arriving Frankfurt at 44 minutes after midnight, the price is 74 DM (\$41). There is a restaurant car and you don't change trains.

• **Schönes-Wochenende** tickets (Happy Weekend tickets) are good for up to 5 persons — at least 3 of them under 18 — traveling together on the weekend, anywhere in Germany, from midnight Saturday until Monday 2am, for a *total* of only DM 35 (\$19) for *all* travelers. Valid on all local trains, 2nd class only. Can be purchased in Germany and from Deutsche Bahn offices in the UK and in Paris.

• **Sparpreis** (Saver Ticket) and **Supersparpreis** (ICE Super Saver Ticket) offer savings on long-distance roundtrip 1st or 2nd class trips. The *Sparpreis* allows travel on any day but must include a Friday night stay.

The *Supersparpreis* offers travel on any day except Friday and Sunday plus Friday night stay-over.

Per Person Prices:

	1 Pers.		2-4 Pers.	
	Saver	S-Saver	Saver	S-Saver
2nd cl. (no ICE)	219 DM	109 DM		
2nd cl. (ICE ok)	299 DM	249 DM	149 DM	125 DM
1st cl (no ICE)	329 DM	164 DM		
1st cl. (ICE ok)	449 DM	374 DM	225 DM	187 DM