

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

January 24, 2000

It Was a Very Good Year?

For the past dozen or so years — almost as long as this newsletter has been published, in fact — our Ohio-based contributors, Claudia Fischer and Roger Holliday have been scouring *Gemütlichkeit* territory for stories. Their reports have come from cities as diverse as Ljubljana and Lübeck, Salzburg and Stuttgart, Vienna, Tübingen, Prague, Dresden, Heidelberg, Weimar and Würzburg. In the late 80s, they graphically described the travails of cold war tourism in Eastern Europe.

They've hiked for us in the Swiss and Austrian Alps; driven us through Bavaria and Baden Württemberg; searched for roots in Bremerhaven; and never given up on their attempt to turn us all into railroad buffs and one-bag packers.

Along with several million other revelers, they were at the Brandenburg Gate for the momentous fall-of-the-wall celebration on December 31, 1989.

1999, however, was to have been their 'Annus Mirabilis.' Their shining year.

For after leading tours to London, Florence, Rome and Australia...all over — they were to finally come back to the *Gemütlichkeit* fold with a story about a cruise up the Rhine.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

MURTEN

There's nothing quite so European as a walled town. One such is Murten, small but centrally located, site of an historic battle, and home to one of Switzerland's great country hotels.

They don't seem to be building walls around cities much these days. A few hundred years ago nearly every European town had to have one to survive, but changes in weaponry made them obsolete — dynamite and machine guns beat hot olive oil and rocks every time. The fact that only a few such fortresses remain intact, makes those cities all the more interesting.

A well-preserved medieval Swiss town with its wall still standing is Murten (Morat, in French), located about 30 kilometers (19 miles) due west of Bern, on the southeast shore of Lake Murten, directly along the Swiss French/German language border.

The town was built by the Zähringens, one of the great feudal ruling families that emerged when the Holy Roman Empire started to lose its grip. Before giving way themselves to the Hapsburg dynasty, the Zähringens founded several walled towns in addition to Murten, including Freiburg, Bern, and Thun.

Murten is a destination worthy of the traveler's attention not only because of its still intact wall but also for its pleasant lakeside setting and because it is the site of one of the decisive battles in the country's history (see page 4).

The town is not large and can be *Continued on page 3...*

Rhine Journey

This report begins with a disclaimer. We are NOT your typical cruisers.

Some people, we think, are born cruisers. Others have it thrust upon them.

We would fall foursquare into the latter category, for traditional cruising has never held much appeal. Too much passivity.

Forced conviviality. Contrived fun. Whatever.

That's not to say we don't like water. We love it. Any kind. And we've done our share of sailing over the years, including crossings of the Atlantic by freighter and the QE2 and so many runs up and down the perilous western coastline of Norway

that they're thinking of naming a bay or a bight after us...and including Holliday/Fischer in the daily shipping forecasts on the BBC.

So given our grump about cruising, what in the world were we doing, in late September, riding up the Rhine between Düsseldorf and Strasbourg aboard the M/V Britannia?

Call it convenience. Or curiosity. Or maybe just a much neglected service to *Gemütlichkeit* readers. Suffice to say, we were there. And a short river cruise happened to fit very neatly into a planned two-week France and Germany itinerary.

KD Cruises, hq'd in Purchase, New York, had the requisite three-

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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That cruise was followed immediately with two personal millennium challenges: Claudia went off to a two-week intensive Italian language course in Arezzo near Florence; and Roger, the native Londoner, started and finished an 18-day, 180-mile solo walk along the recently completed Thames River Trail.

Missions accomplished, they returned home in late October only to discover their Ohio home had been reduced to a virtual shell of smoke and soot. They were thus forced to spend the last two months of 1999 closeted in a motel with only their loud-snoring black lab, 'Scruppy,' for company.

They wanted us to pass this on to you in case their Rhine report should sound a bit curmudgeonly. If so, they hope you will take their 'Annus Horibilis' into consideration.

When to Buy Air Tix

"In order to get the lowest price, when should I buy airline tickets for my summer trip to Europe?" is an oft heard reader question. 'When' is always the tricky part. Wait too long and the prices get high. Buy too early and you may find you could have gotten a better price by waiting for a spring fare sale.

Right now, in late January, our airline sources are reporting strong bookings for travel to Europe, thus reducing the likelihood of spring

sales. There will, of course, be excellent fares through March 31, and possibly some good deals for travel through May, but for the high season — June through September — it's probably prudent to find the best price you can right now. Since *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers are eligible for reduced fares on **Swissair** flights across the Atlantic to most major European cities, that is a good place to begin your search.

Web Site of the Month

If European auto travel is in your future, there's a new and absolutely essential free Internet service now available at **www.mapblast.com**.

Many readers have probably already used free online interactive mapping services where the user types in a trip's starting point and destination and in a few seconds the computer screen displays a rough route map, step-by-step driving directions, trip mileage and estimated driving time. Recently friends driving from Alameda, CA, to visit us here in Ashland used such a service to plot their trip. When they arrived, the elapsed mileage (375) on their car's odometer was within a half mile of the computer-generated map's estimate. Quite amazing.

Now **Mapblast** is the first to extend its online mapping capabilities to 12 European countries — including Germany, Austria, Switzerland.

Since I was at the time working

on this month's Murten story when I heard of this new service, I first asked Mapblast for directions from Murten to Grandson, the site of the battle that preceded the Murten siege (see page 4). No problem. In short order I had a readable map, an estimated driving time of 63 minutes in a distance of 54.22 kilometers, and 32-step directions (Step 1 - Begin at MURTEN on Ryf and go Northeast for about 500 m [elapsed distance: 0.6 km]; Step 2 - Turn right on Raffor and go Southeast for about 100 m [elapsed distance: 0.7 km]; Step 3 - Bear right on Bernstrasse and go Northeast for about 500 m [elapsed distance: 1.2 km]; and so on).

Unfortunately, neither the map nor the text of directions mentions the names of towns along the route.

Mapblast won't yet replace detailed road maps such as Michelin, Mairs or ADAC, but what a great trip planning tool. Just the ability to locate small towns and to quickly determine approximate driving times and distances between towns is fantastic.— RHB

Notes for Readers

- Foreign currency prices are converted to U.S. dollars at the exchange rate in effect at the time of publication.
- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

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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.

MURTEN

Continued from page 1

seen in a day — walk the streets of the town, climb a stairway and explore the ramparts, visit the Historical Museum — but a number of pleasant destinations are nearby. The town's railway station is walkable from all the hotels reviewed here and only a short train ride away are: Bern, the capital; the medieval city of Freiburg; and watchmaking mecca Neuchâtel. All are about 30 minutes by train. Avenches, a town with extensive Roman ruins is only six minutes down the track; and picturesque, cheese-making, Gruyères is less than two hours distant.

Each summer in Avenches, the Roman amphitheater is the site of outdoor opera performances and Murten hosts a summer classical music festival. Five golf courses are within a 30 minute drive.

Murten's lake is connected via canals to the much larger lakes of Neuchâtel (Neuenberger See) and Biel (Bieler See), making possible numerous water excursions. Cities on all three lakes can be accessed by boat from Murten. In fact, from Biel, at the end of the Bieler See, one can continue on the Aare river to Solothurn, though that trip cannot be completed in one day. A trip that *can* be done in a single day is to take a morning boat from Murten to Neuchâtel, then through the canal to the Bieler See arriving in Biel at 5:30pm. Return to Murten by train.

An excursion popular with locals is to go by boat from Murten to Praz on the opposite shore and return on foot via a lakeside walking path. The walk will take about two hours.

Though hotel rooms will surely be at a premium, June 22, the holiday celebrating the great victory over the Duke of Burgundy (see page 4) would be a fine time to visit. There is a great civic celebration with a parade, music, traditional costumes and fountains filled with fresh flowers.

Murten Info

Population: 5,200

Altitude: 458 meters / 1,503 feet

Distance From:

Bern	31 km/19 miles
Biel	34 km/21 miles
Freibourg	16 km/10 miles
Geneva	122 km/76 miles
Zürich	153 km/96 miles

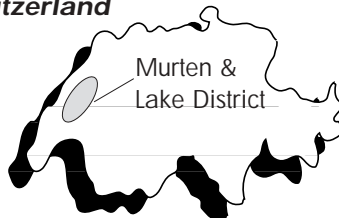
Tourist Information: Murten Tourism, Franz Kirchgasse 6, CH-3280 Murten, tel. +41/026/670 5112, fax 670 4983, email: murtentourismus@bluewin.ch

- The tourist office offers free weekly sight-seeing tours.

Hotel Deal: Hotel and sight-seeing packages are also available through the tourist office: two nights' accommodations, a boat trip, and entrance to the **History Museum** are available for 110 Sfr. (\$69), 160 Sfr. (\$100), or 190 Sfr. (\$119), per person, depending on the class of hotel selected.

Parking Meters: Be aware of how Murten parking meters work. At a nearby kiosk you insert coins and punch in your car's license plate number.

Switzerland



Accommodations

Le Vieux Manoir au Lac

It sits there on the road just outside Murten, a rambling, complicated wooden structure, sprouting a variety of turrets and gables. Impressive but not quite breathtaking.

That comes later, inside, at first sight of the hotel's main public rooms: wide windows overlooking park-like grounds and a lake; delicate Murano-glass chandeliers; inlaid wood floors; terra cotta tiles; rich wall and window fabrics; woodwork that whispers mastercraftsmen; and a perfect choice of colors, furniture, and fixtures. It's a show, but the line between opulence and kitsch is never crossed.

Add a fine restaurant, gorgeous

guest rooms, lush grounds, a lakeside location, faultless, congenial service and Le Vieux Manoir's selection as "1999 Hotel of the Year" by the prestigious European guidebook publisher, *Gault Millau*, makes perfect sense.

In recent years, a number of readers have touted this wonderful sanctuary, so we decided to see for ourselves. Our brief stay began with light lunches of perch filets in a superb lemon butter sauce and a feathery lobster and truffle lasagna. Two prices are offered for most menu items, depending on portion size. The smaller perch serving was 39 Sfr. (\$25) — 48 Sfr. (\$30) for the jumbo serving — and the lasagna was 32 Sfr. (\$20), one size fits all.

Afterward, we walked to the railway station and boarded a train to nearby (30 minutes) Freiburg, where the afternoon was spent browsing the old town. Had it been summer, we likely would have stayed at the hotel to sit by the lake with a book and a cool drink — with breaks for the occasional short swim — or perhaps have ventured onto the lake for some fishing (the hotel chef will cook your catch).

Dinner in the winter garden-style dining room, distinctive for its comfortable wicker furniture and blue and gold terra cotta floor tiles, was just informal enough that a blue blazer without a tie felt o.k. Women, however, will not be able to get by without a dress.

Fixed price menus range from 98 to 124 Sfr. (\$62-\$78) and include a multitude of courses. We passed on those, however, and started the meal with the usual mixed salads (16 Sfr./\$10 each) followed by six "00 belon" oysters (36 Sfr./\$23) which we divided. The oysters were served over crushed ice with a peppery vinegar sauce and salads were what one expects at these prices, of the finest ingredients and tossed in a delicious dressing.

A grilled chicken breast was raised from the ordinary by a sauce flavored with truffles and nutty

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MURTEN

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Jerusalem artichokes. The smaller serving — more than enough — cost 41 Sfr (\$26). A pistachio and kumquat sauce added an intriguing touch to a juicy saddle of venison (43 Sfr./\$27). The larger portion for both dishes was an additional 11 Sfr. (\$7).

We came down the home stretch with a variety of tastes from a cheese cart (18 Sfr./\$11 per person) that had been divided by origin, Switzerland and France. After that, we shared an assortment of refreshing, house-made sorbets (18 Sfr./\$11) served with fresh fruit.

In European restaurants of this caliber, just when you think you can't possibly handle even one more morsel of food, your waiter shows up with a plate of exquisite little cookies and chocolates. These were nibbled on while sipping glasses of port and wondering how quickly a second mortgage could be negotiated to pay the bill. (Perhaps it should be noted here that there is a much simpler and less expensive restaurant, the **Pinte de Meyriez**, in a separate building on hotel grounds. It was closed for renovation during our recent visit.)

Just as much care and thought has gone into furnishing and decorating Le Vieux Manoir's 30 sleeping chambers as the glorious public rooms. Each, of course, is a little masterpiece, with different shapes, sizes, fabrics and furniture. All come with the usual civilities plus walk-in closets, separate tubs and showers, heated towel racks, robes, and double sinks. Room Number 105 is done in a leopard skin motif and has a lake view; Number 106 has gingham draperies and bed covers, a separate sitting room, and a large balcony overlooking the lake; and in Number 111, a suite, the bed is in a tower room with seven windows surrounding it.

After 13 years of searching out the top hotels in all categories in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, we have seen most of the very best.

The Battle of Murten

Switzerland is well-known for its neutrality during the 20th century's two world wars, a fact that has obscured its previous reputation as having the toughest armies in all of Europe. In fact, through most of the second millennium when neighboring European countries required a little "outsourcing" to meet their military needs, the Swiss were everybody's first choice. Who did the Vatican turn to when it needed protection for the Pope? That's right, the Swiss Guards.

But tough as they were as hired swords, Swiss fighters were even better on their home grounds. Take the poor Duke of Burgundy a.k.a. Charles the Bold, a land grabbing Frenchman. In the late winter of 1476, he and an army of 30,000 showed up at the little town of Grandson near Lake Neuchâtel and made short, bloody work of a tiny Swiss garrison. Bad idea. Two days later the army of the Swiss Confederation, 18,000 strong, rolled in and showed 'ol Chuck how the sow ate the kraut. Not only did the Swiss kick a whole lot of French rear-end, they kept the Bold's artillery *and* his money.

But being Charles the Dumb as well as the Bold, he hitched up his pants, hired a new army and three months later went after another small Swiss town. This time it was the walled city of Murten to which he laid siege. Not for long, however. The Swiss Army, though not yet equipped with those many bladed Victorinox knives, came to the rescue on June 22, 1476, and this time they were weren't fooling around. Nearly 8,000 Burgundian soldiers were killed, many drowning in the only possible avenue of escape, Lake Murten (the breast stroke is not so easy when you're wearing armor). According to the *Michelin Green Guide for Switzerland*, the Duke survived but "a rich booty of fabrics, furs, and arms fell into the hands of the victors."

In Murten, they still talk about this great battle that saved the city. Each June 22nd there is a celebration and in the town's Historical Museum one can see some of the actual armor and weapons used at the battle. Much of what is displayed was captured from the French.

Grandson, site of the earlier battle, is about 80 minutes by train from Murten.

Charles the Bold? The following year, the Swiss bumped into him again at Nancy and he became Charles the Deceased. 

Is Le Vieux Manoir "best of the best?" Possibly. A few may have a slightly better kitchen and some travelers want spa/exercise/indoor swimming facilities (the hotel has none), but all things considered Le Vieux Manoir au Lac is as good as any small hotel we've seen.

Daily Rates: Singles 260 to 380 Sfr (\$163-\$238), doubles 280 to 440 Sfr. (\$175-\$275), jr. suite 440 to 480 Sfr. (\$275-\$300), tower suite 520 (\$325). A four-course dinner on the half board plan is 75 Sfr. (\$47) per person.

Contact: Le Vieux Manoir au Lac, Rue de Lausanne, CH-3280 Murten, tel. +41/026/678 61 61, fax 678 61 62, email: vieuxmanoir@bluewin.ch, web:www.vieuxmanoir.ch. Proprietors: Elisabeth and Erich Thomas.

Rating: QUALITY 19/20, VALUE 17/20

Schiff Am See

Just outside the city walls, on the lake, is the Hotel Schiff, our top choice in Murten proper. It has pleasant, well equipped rooms, some with lake views. You might ask for Number four, a double with three windows and a lakeside balcony. There is yet another window in the airy bathroom. Another pleasant room is Number 15 with a small sitting area and lake view.

The hotel's Lord Nelson restaurant, popular with locals, has fine views of the lake as do several terraces used for good weather dining.

The hotel has no lift.

Daily Rates: Singles 100 to 140 Sfr. (\$63-\$88) doubles 170-280 Sfr. (\$106-\$175)

Contact: Schiff Am See, CH-3280 Murten, tel. +41/026/670 27 01, fax 670 35 31, email: schiff.murten@hitline.ch. Proprietor: Pierre Lehmann

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 10/20

Weisses Kreuz

In the very center of the old walled town, the Weisses Kreuz offers nine spacious guestrooms spread over two venerable buildings. Most rooms have antique furnishings, high ceilings, and inlaid and herringbone wood floors. Six have lake views. Our choice is Number 33, a spacious double with ceiling beams, oriental rugs over the inlaid floors and a seven-foot tall antique clock.

Our only criticism of these accommodations is that some guestrooms are so large in relation to their furnishings that there is a feeling of coldness and austerity. Better furniture groupings and a well-placed screen or two might make them feel a bit more cozy.

The welcome is warm and the location couldn't be better.

Contact: Weisses Kreuz, Rathausgasse 31, CH-3280 Murten, tel. +41/026/670 26 41, fax 670 28 66, email: info@weisses-kreuz.ch, web: www.weisses-kreuz.ch. Proprietors: Alice and Daniel Bischoff

Daily Rates: Singles 90 to 160 Sfr. (\$56-\$100) doubles 160-250 Sfr. (\$100-\$156)

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 12/20

Murtenhof

The hotel's fortress-like facade, with black and yellow striped shutters, is appealing. However, it's bizarrely decorated rooms in a variety of themes are a little too "over the top" for us.

Daily Rates: Singles 100 to 180 Sfr. (\$63-\$113) doubles 130-240 Sfr. (\$81-\$150)

Contact: Murtenhof, Rathausgasse 1-3, CH-3280 Murten, tel. +41/026/

672 90 30, fax 672 90 39. Proprietors: Joachim family

Rating: QUALITY 8/20, VALUE 5/20 

RHINE JOURNEY

Continued from page 1

day schedule on its books, an available berth and also permitted us to jump ship in Strasbourg a day early, instead of carrying on to endstation, Basel.

KD (short for "Köln-Düsseldorf") also happens to be the largest and most venerable passenger line on the European continent, morphing into its current moniker from the Prussian Rhine Steamship Company of Cologne which first began navigating the river way back in 1826, a mere decade after the very first steamship made its tentative way up or down (history doesn't tell us which) this 1,000 kilometer long scenic and commercial artery.

Now, after some 175 years of Rhine cruising, they've naturally outgrown their initial itinerary and have expanded to such an extent that they currently operate almost 400 cruises along a multitude of Europe's prime rivers and canals including the Elbe, Danube, Main, Neckar, Saar as well the Seine, Rhône and Saone.

This means that besides swanning around in their own backyard, they also drop anchors in Austria, Holland, Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and France.

KD's US-based team whom we called for reservations and other pertinencies were, from the outset, the very essence of courtesy, helpfulness and efficiency. And joy of joys, Wunder of Wunders, you can actually reach them by phone without going circular or even being put on hold — (800-346-6525).

A further KD Cruise plus — from our standpoint at least — was the bus the company operates between Amsterdam Airport (Schipol) and the Britannia's Düsseldorf embarkation point. And while it did mean cooling our heels in Amsterdam for the better part of a day after a non-stop night flight from Detroit, there

are certainly far worse places to cool heels.

For Amsterdam these days is the epitome of laid-back 'laissez faire' ...and considerably sanitized from its trashy 60s hippydom, so a canal ride, a stroll through the old town, and a Dutch lunch pleasantly took care of the six-hour layover.

As KD, among its other many services, also arranges hotel accommodations for clients on request, the chartered bus does spend rather a long time gathering up guests from the various pickup points around Amsterdam before beginning its three-hour Autobahn run into Northern Germany.

Despite several delays we still pulled up next to the Düsseldorf loading dock in plenty of time to check into our cabin, knock back a quick cocktail and sample the buffet table before attending the all important 9pm orientation meeting. That first onboard meal set the tone for good things to come with great platters of smoked fish, beef, ham, roast pork and turkey, a variety of fresh salads, several hot dishes, an extensive array of cheese and bread and some very decadent desserts.

It was at the postprandial orientation meeting, incidentally, that the only real hiccup of the voyage occurred. A minor contretemps in which a handful of Italian-speaking passengers stormed out of the meeting because the orientation was not translated to their language. Unpleasant for all but it did get the trip off to an interesting, if controversial start.

After Dagmar Seier, our youthful guide-cum-activity director, explained the ins and outs of shipboard living, the dining arrangements, optional excursions, organized activities, that sort of thing, we all lined up, (friends and Romans included) outside the ship's only restaurant to select tables and dining companions for lunches and dinners, sign up for excursions — and for the much advertised "BIP" — an acronym whose provenance we've frank-

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RHINE JOURNEY

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ly forgotten, but whose significance is that for a 90 DM (\$47) up-charge one can enjoy specially selected wines, beers as well as nonalcoholic beverages with meals. It includes an invite to attend a special back-of-the-boat "BIP Party *mit Musik*" near the end of the cruise. Booze and Oompa-pa. We signed. Of course.

By next morning, after a good night's sleep in our ultra-compact but comfortable outside cabin ("Light packing makes for Better Living," Holliday / Fischer 1999) and a complete German style buffet breakfast of meats, cheeses, bread, fruit, cereal, yogurt and juices along with eggs, bacon, sausage, and pancakes cooked to order, we were ready to take on whatever the mighty Rhine had to offer.

Quite a lot as it turned out. And all efficiently previewed in a daily yellow news sheet slipped under the cabin door during the night.

It should be noted too, that as the ship ties up at night, sleeping on board the M/S Britannia is a pleasant, if somewhat lonely experience...single beds that turn into sofas during the day were the order of the day for the particular level of cabin comfort and cost we had selected.... and we were invariably gently rocked off to sleep to the rhythmic sound of *Rhinewasser* slapping softly against steel hull. Sort of like napping on a waterbed with built-in sound effects.

From then on, the days and nights passed according to one's own personal desires, appetites and activity levels.

Shore Activities

Each day there was an optional excursion available with prices ranging from 24 to 55 DM (\$13-\$29). And while we personally participated in only two of them, word on the water was that the quality and value of these excursions varied considerably. Some were super. Others less so. But as these outings were not

actually under KD's direct control, it's difficult to hold them to account for any inadequacies. (One might suggest a closer monitoring of the subcontractors, however.)

From reports ... and our own experiences ... the 2 1/2 hour city tour of Cologne was well run and informative, an excellent value at 32 DM (\$17). The excursions to Heidelberg and Strasbourg, on the other hand, were neither recommendable ...nor inexpensive...at 55 DM (\$29) and 40 DM (\$21) respectively.

On our Strasbourg tour, for example, we spent most of the ground time walking from a bus parking lot to the cathedral and then waiting for a 12th century astronomical clock to perform some meager and almost indefinable mechanical gyration.

The guide then gave us one or two more general ecclesiastical explanations of the cathedral interior before running off and leaving us to amuse ourselves in the adjacent square for the better part of an hour.

In retrospect, one might be better off organizing one's own city sight-seeing whenever possible as most of the highlights are within walking distance and a local guide book would probably tell you all you need to know.

(Further, we were a bit disappointed that on the up-river schedule, there were no opportunities to visit any of the pretty riverside villages and small towns that give the Rhine so much of its character.)

We did sign on for the wine-tasting tour held in the ancient cliff cellars of the Weinhaus Schwaab in Koblenz.

The cellar atmosphere alone should have made for a pleasant evening but unfortunately too many wine tasters...in too confined a space...and not enough staff...meant that we all felt a bit short changed by the event.

To be fair, too, we don't have that much experience with the region's Rieslings and are therefore

not adequately qualified to comment on the nuances of the six Spätlese and Auslese wines offered. Suffice to say they were typical and eminently drinkable. However, the rather frantic atmosphere and the cramped conditions made for a less than leisurely wine tasting evening. That said, the 24 DM (\$13) per person charge was not a bank-buster either.

Entertainment

Back on board the Britannia, there never seemed a lack of things designed to amuse and entertain...in a low key sort of way. From the well meant if slightly goofy games and activities organized by Dagmar...to the regularly scheduled cocktail parties...and a "crew show" with magic, in which your intrepid scribbler (in the spirit of investigative reporting, of course) somehow found himself trussed up in a sack with a quite voluptuous blonde. *Oh, mein Gott!*

As in all cruises, food figures heavily in the daily agenda. The substantial breakfast served between 7:30 and 9:30am is followed at 12:30pm by an enormous lunch, mid-afternoon tea/coffee with a selection of elaborate cakes and tarts and finally, a five-course dinner.

The menus were consistently more interesting than ordinary German fare although the framework was still conservatively meat and potatoes. One day, lunch began with homemade tomato cream soup, and a choice of chicken breast with curry sauce (VERY mild) or cod fish in white wine sauce and ended with *Rote Grutze* (red berries) and whipped cream.

Dinner led off each evening with either soup or seafood cocktail followed by an extensive salad buffet, choice of two hearty entrees like braised leg of lamb or roast breast of turkey, a number of very fancy desserts and an admirable table of cheeses, bread and fruit.

The food was beautifully presented both on the buffet tables and individual dinner plates, with well thought out color schemes and plenty

of fresh herbs. Even more important, the service was expert and focused. Each waiter was responsible for just two tables of six so there was plenty of personal attention for everyone during the leisurely meals.

When not eating, sleeping or excursioning, the time was spent pleasantly idling...above or below decks according to weather...and watching the passing river life. As one of Europe's busiest and most important commercial waterways, there was rarely a shortage of colorful barge traffic to study and scenery to enjoy.

The most gorgeous of it — and the main reason that the Rhine has been cruised since 1816 — came on day three on the incredibly beautiful and rightly famous stretch between Koblenz and Mainz.

Here, finally, was "Rhine Romanticism" in all its traditional glory. Evocative stuff. With cliff top castles, charming riverside villages, vine covered hills and wooded islands...and picturesque ruins popping up at every twist and loop.

This was the splendid, mystic Rhine immortalized in the music of Wagner, the poetry of Holderlin and Heine, and the paintings of Turner. And at the climactic kilometer 554, with the Lorelei in our sights, we could almost hear the sirens singing Heine's famous song, "I know not for what I am yearning." This day alone was worth the price of the trip.

A few hours, two deep locks and an energetic 'BIP' party later, we reached Strasbourg and the end of our cruise. The M/V Britannia itself would continue on for another 80 miles or so to Basel before starting the return voyage to Cologne.

So what did we really think of our Rhine River cruise?

Well, relaxing, comfortable, low pressure, excellent value...all come to mind. Plus it's a most peaceful and enjoyable way of getting over any residual jet lag.

We believe however, that cruising the Rhine should come with

written warnings. Like, river cruising can lead to obesity, high cholesterol and lethargy. In addition, and rather curiously, for a couple of curmudgeonly non-cruisers like us, it can also be highly addictive.

So watch out Elbe and Danube et al...we'll probably be coming up your lazy river real soon.

Additional cruise facts:

KD River Cruises of Europe

Phone: East Coast 800-346-6525, West Coast 800-858-8587;

Web: www.rivercruises.com

2000 Prices: Düsseldorf-Basel, four nights - \$710-\$1,330; Basel-Düsseldorf, three nights - \$590-\$1,100

M/V Britannia was built in 1969 and is called by her captain, Antonius van Ingen, "the old lady of the Rhine in her best years." ☒

READERS' FORUM

Bavaria, Odenwald Tips

My wife and I would like to advise your readers of a delightful hotel in Bavaria. It is the **Hotel Eibsee** in Grainau, approximately six kilometers from Garmisch-Partenkirchen. It is located on Lake Eibsee, halfway up the base of the Zugspitz, and has the most spectacular views in the whole area. Rooms start at \$60 to \$175 for a suite. Suite 137 overlooking the lake and the mountains is breathtaking. Food was wonderful and a snowstorm made for a fairytale setting.

But the most engaging time we spent was in a little town called Michelstadt, about 40 km from Eberbach on the Neckar. This walled city was mentioned in *German Life* magazine. We visited because of an article about a world champion pastry chef, Bernd Seifert, owner of **Zum Cafe Seifert**. This gem of a little town buried in the Odenwald, must be seen by your readers.

We found the cafe at 17 Braunstrasse and were delighted to have Herr Seifert come out and sit with us for over an hour. He indeed

is a world champion chef with many awards to his credit. He supplies the renowned **Sacher Hotel** in Vienna as well as many others throughout Europe. His pastries were the finest we have ever tasted in Germany. He specializes in candies made with a variety of fruits and herbs and his dark chocolate candies with saffron, thyme and other spices are unsurpassed.

He spent time explaining his ideas on dessert cooking and just delighted us with his willingness to talk and share his ideas and companionship. This stop must be included by your readers and indeed will be a permanent one on our trips into and near the Odenwald.

COLIN MCGOWAN
MARRIOTTVILLE MD

How Now, Brown House?

I think Bob Gillespie (Sept. '99), is mistaken about the **Brown House's** demise in Munich. True, the original Brown House (called "Brownie House" by some old-timers) is no longer there.

But adjacent to the original location is the Brown House of the '30s and today; one of two almost identical buildings a half-block apart. It is just off Maximilian Platz, about 1.5 miles west of the Opera House. About two blocks west of the Mercedes Benz showroom is a rather insignificant memorial to the survivors of NSDAP (with an eternal flame).

Traveling on west, you reach the Brown House which was the site of the signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938 in Hitler's office. We have visited there four or five times and easily recognized the office by its size and the fireplace which is seen on period newsreel film.

We have also confirmed this with people who work in the building which is now a music school. You will also see the marble staircase to the second floor where the Hitler office is located.

The Burgerbräukeller, where the 1923 *Putsch* departed to the Felderherrnhalle, was just east of the Isar

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READERS' FORUM

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river and is no longer there. However, the **Hofbräuhaus** is obviously still alive and Hitler often had meetings there both upstairs and in the basement. About two blocks away is the **Torbräu Hotel** where he occasionally stayed.

Also, a favorite restaurant was the **Osteria**, which is about two miles northwest of the Opera House. They have a guest book which might warrant inspection. The food is still good and \$\$\$\$\$. The owner is also accommodating.

LEE HOWSER, WYNONA HOWSER, JOE KENNEDY
MUSKOGEE OK

(Ed. Note: According to subscriber Bob Gillespie, the current Hofbräuhaus is a postwar building. The original was destroyed by bombs during the war.)

More Munich History

The Chamberlain 1938 Sudetenland appeasement occurred in Munich, in the westmost, second floor room of what has since become the **Staatliche Hochschule für Musik** on Arcis Strasse just south of Brienner Strasse between, Königsplatz and Karolinenplatz. This was the locale of the meeting between Chamberlain, Hitler, Daladier, and Mussolini. There is no plaque or other marking to note the historical significance of the location.

(This building was also the headquarters of the "Brown Shirts". There is a near-identical building on the other side of Brienner Strasse which is now the **Graphische Sammlung**. In 1991 my wife and I did a house exchange and lived 750 meters from the spot.)

STEPHEN & MARGARET GIBBENS
SANTA BARBARA CA

Turned Off by Letter

I read with great interest Mr. William Allin Storrer's letter regarding Munich in the November issue of *Gemütlichkeit*.

Why do words like pompous, arrogant, pretentious, overbearing and stuffed shirt come to mind

when reading his letter?

First he criticizes for using "Munich" instead of *München* in the story, but then goes on to call it "Munich" throughout his letter. He also doesn't seem to realize that this is an English language newsletter.

Nor can I understand his discourse about Swabia since his complaint is about Munich. Mr. Storrer seems to be the kind of customer every business would like to get rid of. I can think of no reason for him to resubscribe to *Gemütlichkeit* or to recommend it to any of his relatives regardless of how many different variants there are of the name.

And why anyone would want to visit his web site is beyond my imaginative powers.

JACK NEWSTROM
VIA EMAIL 

Europe Travel Briefs

■ **Swiss Rail passes have undergone a bit of a make-over this year and there's both good and bad news.** Rail travelers to Switzerland who need a single round trip pass, or a 3 or 4 day pass, will pay less than in 1999. Prices for passes of longer durations have increased, however.

Last year, a lone traveler paid \$264 first class and \$188 second class for the basic, 4-consecutive-day **Swiss Pass**. The 2000 prices are \$245 and \$160 respectively. Last year, for two persons traveling together the regular 4-day Swiss Pass was discounted to \$211 (1cl) and \$150 (2cl). That discount, now called the **Swiss Saver-pass**, applies to two or more persons traveling together and the 4-day price is \$208 (1cl) and \$138 (2cl).

Unfortunately, the 8-day, 15-day, 21-day, and one month passes have all increased by from about 4% to 14%.

The same is true for flexi passes (nonconsecutive days travel in a one-month period). Discounts are now extended to more than two persons traveling together and last year's discounted Swiss Flexi Pass has

become the **Swiss Saver Flexipass**. Prices for 3 and 4-day Swiss Flexipasses and Swiss Saver Flexipasses are slightly lower than last year, but are higher for 5 to 9-day passes.

The **Swiss Card**, which offers one round trip from any border town or airport to any single destination in Switzerland, has been reduced from \$166 to \$138 first class and from \$128 to \$104 second class. In addition, during the one-month period, the pass holder can purchase point-to-point rail tickets at a 50% discount.

Another new product, the **Swiss Transfer Ticket**, is probably best used for winter holidays and includes two free transfers by rail between any Swiss airport or border town and any single destination in Switzerland. Its prices are \$107 (1cl) and \$71 (2cl).

■ **The German leisure airline, LTU, has announced special spring, summer and fall U.S.-Germany fares.** They are valid for travel between May and October 2000 and tickets must be purchased by March 15, 2000.

For Florida departures between May 1 and June 15 and in September, the roundtrip airfare is \$558. For departures between June 16 and August 31 the roundtrip rate is \$758. October travel is \$498 roundtrip. LTU offers scheduled nonstop flights from Miami, Orlando and Ft. Myers to Dusseldorf and from Ft. Myers to Frankfurt.

From Los Angeles, for departures between May 1 and June 15 and again in September and October the fare is \$648. High season departures (June 16 to August 31) are \$898. LTU offers nonstop flights between Los Angeles and Dusseldorf twice weekly beginning May 1 and weekly nonstops between LAX and Munich beginning May 6. Offline connections from many other cities in Florida, California, Arizona and Nevada are available. Fares from the West Coast to Munich via LAX are \$40 higher. Contact: LTU 800-888-0200 or reserve on their web site at www.ltu.com.

■ **Austrian Airlines will begin new service to Vienna from Washington DC and Chicago** effective Sunday, March 26. 