

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

March 26, 2000

**Swissair Fare Reductions**

I trust you are aware of your eligibility as a *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber for reduced fares on **Swissair**. The savings are \$25 for each ticket between \$450 and \$600, \$50 if the fare is \$600 to \$1000, and \$150 if the regular Swissair price is over \$1000. Business class tickets are reduced \$400 and first class travelers save \$600 per ticket. Remember, these reduced fares apply not only to you but to anyone flying with you at least one leg of the Transatlantic journey.

Lately we have been working with Swissair to simplify the ticketing process for our subscribers. Now, instead of getting a price first from the main Swissair reservation center and then calling a second number to have the tickets issued, the airline has asked **subscribers to direct all calls to 800-238-0399**. There you can get a price quote, make a booking and order tickets; one-stop shopping, in other words. Remember that you must book directly with Swissair. If you have a

*Continued on page 2...*

**This Month in Gemütlichkeit**

| Features   | Page |
|--|------|
| The Goms .....                                     | 1    |
| Train Talk .....                                   | 1    |
| Altenburg's Month of Music .....                   | 8    |
| <b>Columns</b>                                     |      |
| Dear Subscriber .....                              | 1    |
| Europe Travel Briefs .....                         | 8    |
| Readers' Forum .....                               | 6    |
| <b>Hotels/Restaurants</b>                          |      |
| Hotel Alpenblick, Ernen S .....                    | 3    |
| Restaurant-Pension Drei Tannen, Niederwald S ..... | 3    |
| Hotel Croix d'Or & Poste, Münster S .....          | 4    |
| Hotel-Restaurant Castle, Blitzingen S .....        | 4    |
| Le Gitan, Zermatt S .....                          | 5    |
| Hotel Saratz, Pontresina S .....                   | 5    |
| Hotel Feiler, Muggendorf G .....                   | 7    |
| Hotel Theophano, Quedlinburg G .....               | 6    |
| Hotel Am Anger, Wernigerode G .....                | 6    |
| Romantik Hotel Kaufmannshof, Rügen G .....         | 6    |
| Hotel Carlton Opera, Vienna A .....                | 6    |
| Restaurant Beograd, Vienna A .....                 | 6    |
| Hotel Stadt Hannover, Göttingen, G .....           | 6    |
| Ratskeller, Göttingen, G .....                     | 6    |
| Junkernschänke, Göttingen, G .....                 | 6    |
| Hotel Birkenhof, Frankfurt, G .....                | 6    |
| Wolff's Art Hotel, Weimar G .....                  | 6    |
| Altenburger Hof, Altenburg G .....                 | 8    |
| Die Villa, Altenburg G .....                       | 8    |
| Wettiner Hof, Altenburg G .....                    | 8    |

# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## THE GOMS

*At the headwaters of the Rhône river is a high Swiss valley of wooden farm buildings blackened by weather, breathtaking vistas, simple little hotels and a time-honored cuisine.*

**H**ere is an absolute antidote to the traffic and noise of European cities crowded with tourists. Starting at the east end of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) the auto (or train) traveler can follow the Rhône river to its source, the Rhône Glacier, high in the mountains between the Furka and Grimsel Passes.

At Brig, the road begins to rise and passes through — and by — a number of interesting mountain villages including Fiesch, Ernen, Niederwald and Münster (all accessible by rail as well as car). This section of the upper Rhône Valley is known as the Goms (Conches Valley).

One could easily conclude it is a

place that looks much as it did a couple of hundred years ago. The area is characterized by spectacular mountain scenery and rough wooden buildings which weather to a deep brown that makes them appear almost charred.

After about 24 hours in the Goms, big-city culture hounds will probably be bored stiff. But the connoisseur of peace and quiet, awesome vistas, hearty country food, and outdoor activities, will relish every minute of his or her stay in this unspoiled corner of Switzerland.

This is not to say the area is bereft of culture. There are some 70

*Continued on page 3...*



## Great Swiss Train Rides

**S**aying the Swiss Alps are magnificent qualifies as one of the world's foremost understatement. It is nevertheless true, and viewing them "up close and personal" through a big train window is surely the most comfortable way to see them.

Four of the most scenic Alpen rail routes are the Glacier Express, the William Tell Express, the Bernina Express, and the Golden Pass

- The **Glacier Express** is the best-known of the four, billing itself as the "World's Slowest Express Train" — which it may well be, taking nearly eight hours from St. Moritz to Zermatt. It is also the most popular, and you are advised to reserve well ahead, especially in spring and

summer.

Every morning in summer, two or three trains leave from both Zermatt and St. Moritz. (One train only in winter.) From St. Moritz, where we began our journey, the Glacier Express climbs over the Bergün Pass toward the small town of Filisür with its tiny, picture-postcard train station. From there, it descends into Reichenau and turns westward to begin the long climb toward the Furka Pass. This segment is perhaps the most beautiful of the trip, an excuse to burn film. Everywhere you look, there is another mountain, another glacier worthy of a photo.

Unfortunately, the Glacier

*Continued on page 4...*

## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

problem or a question, you can always call us at 800-521-6722.

### Tipping

One of the mysteries of travel in Germany, Austria and Switzerland is tipping — when and how much. No doubt you've heard or read the general rule that goes something like... since service is already included in the price of the meal, you simply "round up" to the nearest mark, franc or schilling.

On your bill or on the menu look for the phrase *Bedienung und Mehrwertsteuer inklusiv*. It means service and tax are included and that your waiter has been paid to serve you. This is different than in the U.S. where servers are paid at or near the minimum wage and rely on tips for the bulk of their income.

So how about this "round up" business? If you're talking about a couple of coffees, beers or a light snack it's probably o.k., but after a meal in a good restaurant such a practice will get you some strange looks — at the very least.

In the U.S. a tip is payment for service. In Europe it's more of a gift for good or special service, and if your waiter has done a good job he or she expects more than just the "round up."

My own practice is 5% to 15%, depending on quality of the service. If it's downright bad or rude I don't

have a problem leaving no tip at all; the waiter was paid to do his job, did it poorly and thus deserves nothing extra from me.

Let's say your check is 86 DM and service was bad. Take your change and put it in your pocket. For average service, pay with a 100 DM bill and say *neunzig* or "90." You get 10 DM in return and the waiter gets an extra 4 DM. For top service give the 100 DM bill and say *Stimmt so*, which means something like "it's right" or "we're square." Don't leave a tip on the table, give it directly to the waiter.

I feel on much less solid ground when it comes to hotels. If a bellman or, in smaller hotels, a general handyman or lower level employee helps me with bags I tip the equivalent of about \$1 per bag. If it's the manager, owner or front desk person who escorts me to my room after check-in and helps with the bags, I don't tip at all.

How about services provided by other hotel employees? If you've stayed in the hotel for two or three days or longer, and the service was very good, you may want to consider leaving a tip for the staff that could be as much as 5% to 10% of the total bill. I know most Americans don't do that but it's a way of being remembered on your next visit.

Actually, I'm totally in the dark on tipping hotel employees and would like to hear your thoughts. What do you do?

### From the desktop

• Travel guru **Arthur Frommer** says he won't put any more information about Austria on his website until the Austrian government is rid of Jörg Haider's far right party. I'll be a lot more impressed when he says he's through publishing his travel books on Austria, Vienna and the Danube Valley. Until then, it's a grandstand play.

• Hang on you folks planning to visit the big **Hanover Expo2000** this summer, our Nick Selby spent a few days there earlier this month and we'll have his report in next month's issue. What we can say now is that most accommodations are to be found in private homes. The hotel situation in Hanover has never been good and those that are there have been booked for many months.

• Subscriber Charlotte Olstead sends us a copy of a letter received from the **Austrian National Tourist Office** in New York which asks for a contribution of \$3 to cover the shipping and handling costs of sending her promotional materials.—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".

Vol. 14, No. 3  
March, 2000

## GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

**Publishers:** Robert H. & Elizabeth S. Bestor  
**Editor:** Robert H. Bestor  
**Contributors:** C. Fischer, R. Holliday,  
Nikki Goth Itoi, Nick Selby  
Paul T. Merschdorf  
**Web Master:** Thomas P. Bestor  
**Consulting Editor:** Thomas P. Bestor  
**Subscription Dept:** Andy Bestor, K. Steffans

Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published monthly by UpCountry Publishing, 288 Ridge Road, Ashland OR 97520. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 541/488-8462, fax: 541/488-8468, e-mail [gemut@mind.net](mailto:gemut@mind.net). Web site: [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com). Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 12 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information in this publication, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy.

**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
Gemütlichkeit, 288 Ridge Road., Ashland OR 97520

### 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.

## THE GOMS

Continued from page 1

Baroque churches with great altars and works of art, and the area's long traditions of arts and craft are very much alive. The village church at Münster, for example, which contains an elaborate altarpiece from 1509, is certainly worth a look and the Baroque Church at Reckingen is also noteworthy. The village of Ernen is internationally renowned for its annual piano and chamber music masters classes.

But it is the outdoor stuff that attracts most visitors; walking, climbing, rafting and, of course, skiing. In fact, the Goms is reputed to have Switzerland's best cross-country skiing and had the 2006 Winter Olympic Games been awarded (as they should have) to Sion, the cross-country events would have been held here.

The regional tourist office at Fiesch says no holiday in the Goms is complete without a breakfast outing on the Fiesch-Eggishorn cable car. As the car slowly ascends the mountain, riders enjoy a generous buffet breakfast (38 Sfr./\$23). Another tourist office suggestion, witnessing the dawn from the Eggishorn, is one we'll leave to earlier risers.

Auto travelers will find one of Switzerland's great views from Gletsch at the valley's end. From the bend in the road to the Furka Pass, at the Belvedere Hotel, one can see not only the Rhône Glacier but views of the Bernese and Valais Alps.

If you plan a short stay, there are many hotels from which to choose, most of them simple but charming in the way that is unique to small Swiss mountain hotels. For longer visits, you might want to pick from among the hundreds of private chalet and apartment rentals available in every village. Prices for these range from 30 Sfr. to 130 Sfr. (\$18-\$78) per day depending upon season and the number of persons accommodated. Some have a minimum stay requirement of only three days. Contact the Goms Tourist Office (see box above.)

## Goms Info

### Highway distance from Fiesch to:

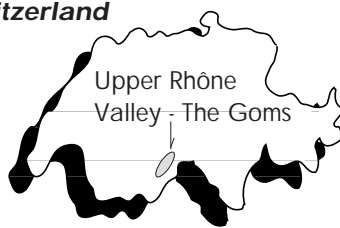
|          |                    |
|----------|--------------------|
| Geneva   | 228 km / 143 miles |
| Lugano   | 141 km / 88 miles  |
| Milan    | 219 km / 137 miles |
| Montreux | 137 km / 86 miles  |
| Munich   | 430 km / 269 miles |
| Zürich   | 170 km / 106 miles |

### Rail times from Fiesch to:

|          |                     |
|----------|---------------------|
| Geneva   | 3 hours, 10 minutes |
| Lugano   | 3 hours, 15 minutes |
| Milan    | 2 hours, 40 minutes |
| Montreux | 2 hours             |
| Munich   | 9 hours, 15 minutes |
| Zürich   | 3 hours, 15 minutes |

**Tourist Information:** Goms Tourismus, CH-3984, tel. +41/027/970 1070, fax 970 1075, email: tourismus, Web: www.goms.ch

## Switzerland



### Hotel Alpenblick

Typical Swiss mountain hotel; unpretentious but tidy and comfortable. The four story building is chalet style in the characteristic dark wood with red shutters and flower bedecked balconies. Framing the rock-edged entrance is a canopy of climbing roses and at one side of the building is a covered terrace for fine weather dining when the restaurant moves outdoors.

Guestrooms are plain, assuming you ascribe that term to wood paneled walls and ceilings, and most are furnished with a small couch, a table, a couple of chairs and a tiny TV. Many offer terraces with fine mountain views. Bathrooms in some cases are cramped but adequate and have heated towel bars. Room Number 6 is a pleasant corner double and Number 3 is also on a corner but has a very small bathroom.

We received a warm and gracious welcome at the Alpenblick.

With the recent strength in the dollar, one can now find some true bargains in Switzerland. This is one of them.

**Daily rates:** Singles 60 to 66 Sfr. (\$36-\$40), doubles 116-136 (\$69-\$81). Half

board 28 Sfr, (\$17) per day, minimum three days.

**Contact:** Hotel Alpenblick, CH-3995 Ernen, tel. 41/027/9711537, fax 9714374, email: alpenblickernen@dplanet.ch, proprietor: Fam. Imboden

**Rating:** Quality 11/20, Value 15/20

Restaurant-Pension Drei Tannen

Allow your stomach to choose a place to stay in the Goms and it will likely be the Drei Tannen in Niederwald. While huge snow flakes silently drifted down outside, we stoked up on a lunch of air-dried meats, fondue and red wine in this rustic little pub.

For Americans, fondue has almost become a travel cliché. If you find it served during the summer months, you're probably in a heavily touristed part of the country. For the Swiss, fondue is a cold weather dish and they're not comfortable eating it *or* serving it out of season. Don't ask for it during that time of year at the Drei Tannen.

Cliché or not, on a cold day in a cozy mountain restaurant, done the right way with the best ingredients, it's heaven.

Ours was served with bread cubes and small potatoes boiled in their jackets. Sour gherkins, marble-sized onions and quartered cherry tomatoes came with the air-dried meat. A Rhône Valley Pinot Noir, 1997 Uvrier from near Sion, completed an uncomplicated but delicious and memorable meal.

We weren't alone in our assessment, the place was full of locals. Our server knew everyone but us.

Upstairs are three or four very pleasant sleeping rooms with private toilet and shower.

Niederwald is a delightful little hamlet, birthplace of César Ritz of Ritz hotel fame, and the Drei Tannen is another outstanding value.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 55 Sfr. (#33), doubles 110 Sfr. (\$66)

**Contact:** Restaurant-Pension Drei Tannen, CH-3981 Niederwald, tel./fax +41/027/9711173. Proprietor:

Continued on page 4...

## THE GOMS

Continued from page 3

Fam. H. Wirthner-Volken

**Hotel Rating:** Quality 10/20, Value 15/20

**Rest. Rating:** Quality 14/20, Value 15/20

Hotel Croix d'Or & Poste

Münster (pop. 417) is considered the main village of the Upper Rhône Valley and is thought to be named after a medieval Benedictine monastery. It is home to a hotel of considerable charm, the Croix d'Or & Poste, whose rooms are crowded with *objet d'art* and antiques.

The hotel was built in 1620 for the local bishop, and its current owner, Simon Aellig, can show you a guest register with such names as Goethe (1779), the German writer and philosopher; Edward Whymper (1865-1870), the first to climb the Matterhorn; and Pope Pius XI, a guest in 1897.

The hotel's interior is a complex mix of styles from mountain rustic to Louis -the-whatever. One dining room has dark wood wainscoting and chandeliers fashioned from a wagon wheel, while another has striped wallpaper, thick burgundy draperies and high-backed white wood frame chairs with flowery red velvet upholstery.

The public rooms seem to be a series of snug, antique-furnished little nooks. In one, a fire burns throughout the day.

Guestrooms are like the public spaces — varied; no two are alike. Number 24, for example, is decorated in the French Provincial style. On the other hand, Number 35, is typically Swiss with lots of wood.

The rooms are consistently comfortable and well-equipped.

Travelers with no more than a passing interest in antiques will want to browse the hotel's public rooms — or ask Herr Aellig for a guided tour. Among the items we noted was a bible from 1634 and a cabinet containing Rosenthal china from 1890.

Given its price, location, facilities, charm and warmth of welcome, the Poste gets our unqualified recommendation.

EDITOR'S  
CHOICE

**Daily Rates:** Singles 62 to 68 Sfr. (\$37-\$41), doubles 124 to 170 Sfr. (\$75-\$102)

**Contact:** Croix d'Or et Poste, CH-3985 Münster VS, tel. +41/027/974-1515, fax 9741516. Proprietor: Simon and Ruth Aellig-Bumann.

**Rating:** Quality 14/20, Value 15/20

Hotel-Restaurant Castle

More modern accommodations are available at the nine-year-old Hotel Restaurant Castle high above the main road in Blitzingen with commanding views of the valley.

Though it calls itself a hotel, the Castle is mostly privately-owned condominiums that can be rented by the night or on a weekly basis. We reported on the property (June, 1992) shortly after it was built.

Unlike the other accommodations reviewed here, the Castle has the facilities of a four-star resort hotel; pool, spa, steam bath and an exercise room. Since all quarters were built as apartments, they are more spacious and homey than most hotel rooms.

A *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber and veteran of 30 consecutive Oktober-fests, **Jeff Durkota**, owns one of the apartments, B-21. It has two bedrooms, two baths, a living room, kitchen and both front and rear balconies with outstanding mountain and valley views.

This four-person "King Suite" rents for from 960 to 1600 Sfr. (\$575-\$960) per week, depending on the season. Interested parties can rent through the hotel or, for perhaps a slightly better price, contact Mr. Durkota directly at 717-299-6541 or 717-656-6517 (evenings).

**Daily Rates:** Junior Suite 128 to 175 Sfr. (\$77-\$105) single and 204 to 276 Sfr. (\$122-\$165) double; Castle Suite 145 to 150 Sfr. (\$87-\$90) single and 230 to 290 (\$138-\$174) double; King Suite for four persons 500 to 640 Sfr. (\$299-\$383). There are substantial discounts to these rates for stays of seven days.


**Contact:** Hotel Restaurant Castle, CH-3981 Blitzingen, tel. +41/027/970 17 00, fax 027 970 1770, email: hotel.castle@rhone.ch 17 70. Web:

www.net4u.ch/castle. Proprietors: Peter and Brigitte Gschwendtner

**Rating:** Quality 13/20, Value 12/20

Apartment/Chalet Rental

The Goms region tourist office in Fiesch maintains a list and booking service for dozens of holiday accommodations. A government agency rates them in four categories: first class, medium class, standard class and basic class. The top category is required to have furnishings "as good as new," bath facilities for every four persons; dishwasher; separate laundry room; reserved parking; balcony, terrace or lawn with furniture; radio; TV; telephone; no bunk beds; kitchen with dining table; living room that does not double as a sleeping accommodation; and a swimming pool on the property. The remaining categories have correspondingly fewer of these amenities.

Prices for the two leading classifications range from about 30 to 130 Sfr. (\$18 to \$78) per day. Many rentals can be seen on the Goms website at [www.goms.ch/tour1.html](http://www.goms.ch/tour1.html). There, for example, you'll find the rental of Firmin Bortis, a two-family chalet in Fiesch renting for from 60 to 80 Sfr. (\$36-\$48) per day, not including cleaning charges and local taxes. Some accommodations can be booked via the Internet, or you can contact the tourist office and request the *Chalet, Ferienwohnungen* brochure: Goms Tourismus, CH 3984 Fiesch, tel. +41/027/970 10 70, fax 970 10 75, email [tourismus@goms.ch](mailto:tourismus@goms.ch). 

## TRAIN TALK

Continued from page 1

Express uses the Furka Tunnel, thus missing some of the best scenery in the region. In winter this is a moot point: the pass is closed and the tunnel is your only option — whether you're in a train or a car.

After the tunnel, the train descends into the Rhône valley. While the vistas on this descent are perhaps not as breathtaking as those on the first part of the trip, they're no excuse to put away the camera and pick up your book, either. The val-

leys widen and become flatter as the train heads toward Brig and passes through a series of small towns. Outside, the Rhône rushes past castles, its path diverted only by great boulders covered by a heavy layer of snow, courtesy of the previous day's winter storm.

At Brig, the train leaves the valley and turns south, climbing to its terminus. The best views on this segment await you at Zermatt, where the Matterhorn rises above the village.

The dining car on the Glacier Express is better than most. The service is good and the car itself is comfortable. The food, while above the average of meals served in moving vehicles, shows the limitations of a small kitchen. Lunch is about \$40. You might opt to bring a picnic lunch.

Drinks are served in the special Glacier Express "leaning" glass. Its base is tilted to compensate for the steep grades and winding bends, to prevent spilling. The glasses, of course, are sold as souvenirs.

### **The Best of the Rest**

- The **Bernina Express** travels from Tirano on the Italian-Swiss border to Chur via St. Moritz, or vice versa. While this trip is only half as long as the Glacier Express, it is its equal in scenery. From Tirano at 1400 feet, the train climbs quickly to the Bernina pass at 7500 feet, past Lake Poschiavo and Lake Bianco.

The first town after Tirano is Brusio. Here you climb the famed circular trestle and begin a long series of switchbacks up the mountain, through many tunnels and along narrow ledges cut into thickly-forested terrain. The view back down the valley at sunset — steep mountains rising up either side and the last glint of light shining off Lake Poschiavo — is itself worth the ticket price.

As we climbed above treeline into the glacier region, the landscape became more foreboding, white with a fresh layer of snow piled into high drifts by a strong wind. From time to time, the train would explode

through these drifts and the snow would blow past the sides of the trains, obscuring the view momentarily and allowing for a little romantic fantasizing about murder on trains stuck in the Alps.

On the other side of the pass the train descends the steepest grade in Europe served by a non-cogwheel train and passes several ski areas before pulling into the station in St. Moritz. From there, the train follows the same route as the Glacier Express until Reichenau where it turns east toward Chur.

- The **William Tell Express** links German-speaking central Switzerland with Ticino, the Italian-speaking canton. The route begins at Lucerne aboard a paddle-wheel lake steamer for a three-hour cruise and a lunch. At Flüelen, passengers board the train which proceeds through the steep ravines and cliffs of the Reuss Valley and passes through the 15km-long Gotthard Tunnel. On the other side, as it descends, the train passes over a number of high bridges and past several charming villages.

- The **Golden Pass** links Lucerne in central Switzerland with Montreux on Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). The route is actually three speciality trains: the **Brünig Panoramic Express** between Lucerne and Interlaken; the **Salon Bleu**, Interlaken to Zweisimmen; and the **Crystal Panoramic Express** from Zweisimmen to Montreux. If you wish, you can plan a stopover for a day or so in Interlaken and take the train to the Jungfrau Joch, at 11,333 feet the highest rail station in Europe (roundtrip 159 Sfr. / \$95, discounted 25% with rail pass).

### **A Suggested Itinerary**

Some may enjoy these trains more in winter. The snow-covered scenery is spectacular and the trains will be uncrowded.

You could, for example, begin in Zermatt, staying there long enough to ride the *Gornergrat* cog railway and sample the marinated loin of lamb at **Le Gitan** (tel. +41/027/968 1940). Travel the Glacier Express on a weekday and take the first train of

the morning to St. Moritz, but bed down in nearby Pontresina (**Hotel Saratz**, Via Maistra, CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/839 4000, fax 839 4040. email: saratz@alpineclassics.ch). Stay two nights there. On the day between, take the Bernina Express to Tirano in the morning and return in the afternoon to catch the sunset in the Poschiavo valley.

All trains include both first and second class cars. Swiss Passes and Swiss Flexipasses are honored on all trains. Reservations are required on all except on the Golden Pass. Eurail and Europasses are honored, except for the Disentis-Zermatt segment of the Glacier Express.

Seats on all four trains can be reserved in the U.S. via Rail Europe, though if you can wait to book in Europe, you will save a few dollars.

Reservation fees with Swiss Pass or Swiss Flexipass:

|                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Glacier Express .....      | \$14*  |
| William Tell Express ..... | \$47** |
| Bernina Express .....      | \$14   |
| Golden Pass .....          | \$11   |

\*Does not include dining car reservation of about \$40 per person which must be made in advance but not through Rail Europe. For that contact SSG, Schweizerische Speisewagen-Gesellschaft, Oberalpstrasse 2, CH-7000 Chur. Email: ssg-chur@ssg.ch, tel. +41/081/252 14 25, fax: 284 52 75.

\*\* Includes seat reservation and lunch.

The Glacier Express is by far the most popular of these trains. Make reservations as early as two months in advance of your travel date. Second class cars are not air-conditioned but the windows do open. The panorama cars in first class are air-conditioned but windows don't open. If you want your window to open, reserve a seat in the conventional first class cars.

Without a rail pass the Glacier Express is 238 Sfr. (\$143) one way and 390 Sfr. (\$234) roundtrip, first class. Second class is 147 Sfr. (\$88) one-way and 242 Sfr. (\$145) roundtrip.



# READERS' FORUM

## Germany Recommendations

After six weeks in Germany, much of it spent in the former eastern zone, I read with particular interest your report on *A Harz Drive* in the October issue.

Indeed, Quedlinburg is a very worthwhile stop. We stayed at the **Hotel Theophano**, located right on the market square and overlooking it from our windows (Markt 13-14, 360 DM/\$180 for a double room).

Your routing evidently followed the southern rim of the Harz, whereas ours was along the northern edge of the mountains, thereby being able to include two very interesting places, the spa resort town of Bad Harzburg and the town of Wernigerode. The former has a long, tree-shaded promenade, with plenty of cafes and restaurants and a stream along its edge. There are parks and concerts, a cable car to a nearby mountaintop with the ruins of an ancient castle and hiking trails and a cafe overlooking the flatlands miles away. Once back down, there are mineral baths to soothe the body. Wernigerode boasts many fine half-timbered houses, the finest of which is the 16<sup>th</sup>-century spired Rathaus. A castle, complete with terrace cafe, overlooks the town from a nearby hilltop.

From **Hotel Am Anger** (Breitestr. 92-94, 280 DM/\$140 for a double) our spacious top-floor room overlooked not only a pretty garden, but also directly across to the magnificent view of the castle, illuminated at night. A choice between Quedlinburg and Wernigerode might be difficult, but I would choose the latter if only one could be visited.

One of our most pleasant stays was on the North Sea island of Rügen, connected by a causeway to the mainland. We made the city of Bergen our headquarters for excursions to seaside resorts, such as

Sassnitz, Binz and Göhren and to the nature-reserve island of Hiddensee. One of our best of the 21 hotels we stayed at on this trip was in Bergen, where the **Romantik Hotel Kaufmannshof** offers fine accommodation and excellent meals (Bahnhofstr. 6-7, tel. +49/03838/80450, 220 DM/\$110 for a double). Operated by Uwe Hermerschmidt and his nephew, Michael, they maintain the high standards which we have found in other hotels of the Romantik chain. Michael not only picked us up at the train station upon our arrival and delivered us there when it was time to leave, but also picked up our laundry from the local *Wäscherei* before closing time so that we would not have to return early from one of our side trips.

While in this very northeastern part of Germany, the cities of Schwerin, with its huge castle modeled after France's Chambord; Stralund, with its charming *Altstadt*; and the town of Neubrandenburg with its still-intact old city wall into which tiny houses were built; were all worthwhile stops. Everywhere the contrast between old and new, between decrepit, run-down buildings and beautifully-restored ones is striking and the amount of new construction is astounding.

We also stayed in Vienna, at the **Hotel Carlton Opera** and had dinner at the **Beograd** (Schikanedergasse 7, tel. 587 7444), where the ambience, food and live music were very enjoyable, but the air terribly smoky.

In Göttingen, we were at the *Gemütlichkeit*-recommended **Hotel Stadt Hannover** and ate one night at the **Ratskeller**. I suggest you give the latter another opportunity to redeem your report of "nice people, nice surrounding, bad food," as we found it to be very satisfactory in all three categories.

The same owners also operate the nearby restaurant **Junkerschänke**, a more upscale place than the Ratskeller and located in a delightful setting in a 15th century half-timbered building.

We were away from home for 108

days and not once set foot in an airplane, instead using trains for all land travel and crossing the Atlantic by ship.

H. MARTIN EMS  
SAN FRANCISCO CA

## Win Some, Lose Some

I love your publication and use it often as a resource. So far, our favorite tip is the **Hotel Birkenhof** as a last stop near the Frankfurt Airport. We have stayed with Frau Frichter several times and she is always warm and helpful. The rooms in the bungalow are large and very comfortable, a good place to regroup and reorganize before the trip back. Her breakfast has to be one of the best of anywhere we have stayed in 22 years of European travel. They are a picture.

On another note, I would like to share a recent experience we have had with the **Wolff's Art Hotel**. We are visiting Weimar this summer for the first time. Since Wolff's was your hotel pick of 1997, we have been anxious to stay there. We, and the other couple travelling with us, have made various attempts to contact the hotel without results. My husband called in January and was told to fax because the reservation person was not there. I did, with no response. So, I sent a follow up fax with no response. The other couple, who live in Germany, tried to communicate by email and received, what they called a "smart-allecky" response. No commitment.

We were to stay three nights and the other couple were going to stay two, so it wasn't just for one night.

By the way, have you ever visited Marburg? It is a lovely, medieval, college town north of Frankfurt. It was not bombed during WWII, so it is original. The Grimm brothers supposedly attended college there. Esslingen, near Stuttgart, is another little surprise, I have never seen mentioned.

JUDITH THEISS  
SILVER LAKE OH

(Ed. Note: This is our 14th year and we haven't scratched the surface. There is much to see in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.)





# ACCOMMODATIONS

Hotel Feiler  
Muggendorf, Germany

Would success spoil Horst Feiler? Such a question never entered our minds as we drove the lovely backroads toward the little hamlet of Muggendorf in the area of Germany known as Swiss Franconia.

Thirteen years earlier, the Feiler had been one of *Gemütlichkeit's* early discoveries — long before Karen Brown's books put it on the itinerary of thousands of U.S. travelers to Germany — and we were confident in our anticipation of a great meal and pleasant overnight. A warning sign we missed is that the hotel lost its Michelin "red" designation a few years back.

On our first visit, in 1987, we stayed in a kitschy little room with a four-poster canopied bed for about \$50 and had marvelous meals that showcased the intensely-flavored wild mushrooms personally harvested from the forest by Herr Feiler. A couple of years later we featured the Feiler in our book, the *Fifty Best Country Inns & Small City Hotels of Germany, Austria and Switzerland* (regrettably, out of print).

Our description then stands up today: "the hotel is an intriguing stone and half-timbered country cottage. The roof is red tile and window boxes burst with flowers."

"Inside is a hodge podge of fine furniture, antiques, Victorian red plush, tanks of colorful fish and a zoo of stuffed animals and birds. One of its most appealing nooks is a small, but particularly charming inner courtyard overlooked by flower-bedecked balconies and windows."

Of the restaurant and the mushrooms we said, "The dishes that these fungi become are exquisite, subtle, beautifully presented and generally indescribable."

I have a vivid recollection of Herr Feiler stopping at every table both before and after dinner. The first time

around he advised regarding menu choices and wine, and the next time he talked about his mushrooms; when and how they were gathered, and by whom. And he was there again the next morning at breakfast.

This time things were different. We arrived on a sunny Sunday afternoon and there were people everywhere; in the restaurant, in the courtyard, and at tables in various little garden niches. We were shown to a pleasant room about three floors up. There is no elevator and we hauled our own bags. (O.k., it's a three-star hotel and one doesn't always get help with the luggage.)

With our room reservation we had requested a table at dinner. It was a warm evening and we asked to be seated outdoors. A young man escorted us *through* the courtyard, past two empty tables, around a corner to the side of the building. We were shown to absolutely the worst table in the place. At that point we asked to be seated at an empty one actually *in* the courtyard and, after a few minutes, that's what happened.

We were thus pleasantly situated though the tablecloth was spotted from previous use and had not been changed. Feeling we had raised enough ruckus, we let it pass.

The four-course *Pilz* menu (89DM/\$45) — four small dishes featuring mushrooms — was good but the earth did not move. Another dish, Medallions of Maibock was an out-and-out loser, with a watery sauce, off-tasting mushrooms and ordinary vegetables.

Salads, usually a good measure of a kitchen's attention to detail, were indifferent; the appearance and texture of the cucumbers, for example, indicated they had been sliced hours before serving. Desserts were just o.k.

On this day, the Feiler did not merit its Michelin star and there was no sign of the owner, though we had seen him earlier in the evening.

The dinner without beverages was 195 DM (\$98) for two persons and the room cost 205 DM (\$103).

This is still a charming country hotel with a good restaurant, but the signs are not good. Our assessment, of course, is based on one overnight, one dinner and one breakfast. It's possible but doubtful we just hit the Feiler at a very busy time, but details like limp salad greens, dirty tablecloths, and rushed, impersonal service are not evidence of too many customers but of lowered standards. And where, in all this was Herr Feiler? When we walked through the restaurant after dinner on the way to our room, we noticed him at a table with friends. Did we feel slighted? Not in the least. We don't know him, he doesn't know us. The point is, Rome was burning and Feiler was fiddling.

The restaurant seating business is a special concern. Why would hotel guests be taken to such a remote table when other, better ones, were available? Is this standard operating procedure for American tourists — whom management surmises will never return? Let's hope not. Our overall impression is that the Feiler is now tremendously successful and has sacrificed quality for quantity. Too bad.

To reach the Feiler by car, proceed east from the Pegnitz/Grafenwöhr exit of the Nürnberg-Bayreuth Autobahn. The closest rail station is in Ebermannstadt, which is about a 14-minute bus ride from Wiesental/Muggendorf.

**Contact:** Hotel Feiler, Oberer Markt 4, Muggendorf, D-01346, tel. +49/09196, 9295-0, fax 362. Proprietor: Horst Feiler

**Daily Rates:** Singles 130 to 150 DM (\$65 to \$75), doubles 195 to 205 DM (\$98-\$103), apartments 250 DM (\$125), suites 350 DM (\$175)

**Hotel Rating:** Quality 12/20, Value 12/20  
**Rest. Rating:** Quality 12/20, Value 10/20

## Europe Travel Briefs

■ **Encore Vienna 2000**, is an escorted music tour sponsored by the University of Dayton. Led by professor **Edward Hatch** and **Dr. Linda J. Snyder**, the 15-day, May 22-June 7, tour begins in Prague and ends with 10 nights in Vienna. Along the way are stops in Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic and in Salzburg. Activities include musical performances, lectures, and sight-seeing. Included in the \$3500 per person, double-occupancy price is roundtrip air, ground transport, two meals daily, deluxe accommodations, and tickets to the concerts.

Contact: Edward Hatch 937-229-4239

■ **DER Tours** is now selling **Oberammergau Passion Play** packages that are not tied to an extensive European tour.

### Two-Night Arrangement

Mon., Wed., Fri. performances

|                                   |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| Superior Tourist -1st Class Hotel | \$721 |
| Guest House Inns                  | \$694 |
| Pension Type Inns                 | \$589 |
| Private Homes                     | \$526 |

Includes two nights hotel (night before and night of performance), Passion Play ticket (Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays), two breakfasts, one lunch, two dinners, English textbook, entrance to Oberammergau museum and limited local shuttle transportation. Guests receive necessary vouchers at check-in.

### One-Night Arrangement

Sunday performance only

|                                   |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| Superior Tourist -1st Class Hotel | \$536 |
| Guest House Inns                  | \$524 |
| Pension Type Inns                 | \$473 |
| Private Homes                     | \$428 |

Includes one night hotel (Saturday night), play ticket (Sunday performance), breakfast, lunch, dinner, English textbook, entrance to Oberammergau museum, limited local shuttle transportation.

Restrictions apply. Contact your travel agent or phone 800-510-6722. ☒

Off the Beaten Track

## Altenburg's Month of Music

Each summer, annual festivals at Salzburg and Bayreuth capture the musical world's attention. The performances, of course, are absolutely top rank. Many are sold out well in advance even though the best tickets can cost as much as \$150. Hotels jack up rates and reservations at fine restaurants are difficult to obtain.

One inexpensive, off-the-beaten path alternative to these mega-star, mega-bucks events is in Altenburg, in the former East Germany, about 40 kilometers south of Leipzig.

The inner city of this medieval town, which escaped Allied bombing in World War II, is under historic preservation and offers the visitor a chance to experience a prime example of pre-war Germany.

This year, the 10<sup>th</sup> annual **Altenburg Music Festival** features five concerts by the East-West Symphony Orchestra which is composed of more than 80 of the top students and graduates of the world's leading music conservatories including Juilliard, Manhattan School of Music, the Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw and other leading European conservatories. In addition there will be eight chamber music concerts and three vocal concerts.

Symphony performances are given in the Festival Hall of the castle of the Dukes of Sachsen-Altenburg and attendance is limited to 250. The chamber and vocal music is presented in the castle's Bachsaal.

Festival dates are June 23 through July 23 and ticket prices are in the \$10 to \$15 range.

The founder and still guiding force behind the Altenburg Festival is Arturo Sergi, for many years a leading tenor at such opera venues as La Scala, Covent Garden, and the New York Metropolitan.

As one might expect, Professor Sergi is enthusiastic about Alten-

burg and says the city is a hidden gem with an interesting history. Martin Luther, for example, spent a great deal of time in Altenburg and numbered the Duke and his subjects among his staunchest supporters.

The professor suggests walks through the old town and, of course, a tour of the castle, which houses one of the great organs, the Trost, built under the supervision of Johann Sebastian Bach during his tenure as Kantor of Leipzig.

Another recommended outing is to one or more of the region's many historic Porcelain factories along the "Thuringen Porzellan Strasse."

Accommodations and cuisine in Altenburg have vastly improved in the last 10 years, according to Sergi.

He terms his headquarters, the centrally-located **Altenburger Hof** (Schmöllnsche Landstr. 8, D-04600 Altenburger, tel. +49/03447/5840, fax 584499, rooms rates from about \$58 to \$95), "first-class and a bargain."

His two favorite restaurants are **Die Villa** (Friedrich-Ebert-Str. 14, tel. +49/03447/56510, fax 311281) which is part of Germany's "slow food" movement and emphasizes fresh, natural ingredients; and the **Wettiner Hof** whose *Essen wie bei Luther* speciality is the exact menu enjoyed by Martin Luther. Servers wear costumes of that era and musicians play the music he loved.

Professor Sergi has kindly agreed to assist *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers with their arrangements in Altenburg. You can reach him as follows:

Germany: Sekretariat: Rosemarie Nau, Matthausstrasse 3, D-42277 Wuppertal tel., +49/0202/50 65 21, fax 50 09, email musikakademie@hightek.com

U.S.: Arturo Sergi, 1213 Girard Avenue, San Marcos, TX 78666, tel. 512-396-8988, fax 512-396-710, email asergi@centuryinter.net. ☒