

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

April 21, 2000

Traveler's Checks Passe

I was recently amazed to read a newspaper story which advocated the use of traveler's checks in foreign countries rather than obtaining cash from Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs).

While I concede the safety of traveler's checks, using ATMs is cheaper, easier and just as safe. My bank (Wells Fargo) charges \$2 for each use of my ATM card in Europe. There are no other fees and, since the money is immediately deducted from my account, no interest is charged. In addition I get a much better exchange rate than with traveler's checks — even foreign-denominated ones.

Recently, for example, I priced traveler's checks at my bank. Those denominated in US dollars could be issued at no charge, but there was a 1.5% fee to have checks issued in a foreign currency. In addition, the exchange rate offered at purchase was not as good as I would get using my ATM card. That day my

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

HANOVER

Knowing our Germany-based writer, Nick Selby, has a crush on Hanover we sent him to town to do a preview on the coming Expo2000. His conclusion? The town is not just for Expo.

Hanover bustles and grooves; it's a no-nonsense business city, but also one graced by both royal opulence and more proletarian attractions. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder calls Hanover's posh **Hindenberg Quarter** his home, and he can often be glimpsed mingling at **Pier 51**, a trendy bar on the shores of the man-made **Maschsee** lake a few minutes walk south of the city center.

And Hanover, the German city most closely tied to British royalty, expects 40 million visitors for its **Expo2000**, which runs from June 1 to October 31. Whether you come for Expo or to revel in royal trivia, or to

take in the city's famous gardens, fountains and fireworks, this part of Germany is often under-billed.

History of Trade Fairs

Trade fairs in Hanover date back to just after the Second World War, when almost 95% of the city center was in rubble. Restricted by the Allies, until the politics of downtown reconstruction could be sorted out, the town was in a quandary: how to raise money for rebuilding and hold a trade fair when there was no city in which to hold it and no hotels for visitors?

The answer was a flash of brilliance: build a new trade fair center outside town, and put the guests in

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Sustenance

Capsule reviews of recent restaurant experiences by the Gemütlichkeit staff.

Osteria Citta Vecchia

This little Italian restaurant is located in the neighborhood west of the Marienplatz near the Karlstor. It is convenient to guests of our recommended **Hotel Asam**.



The evening did not begin well. With no reservation and a full-up main dining room, we were shown to the restaurant's second-worst table in a chilly, charmless side room (the worst table was near ours and we watched four different couples leave the restaurant rather than sit there). Then we were ignored for 10 minutes. Getting up and leaving was an option discussed but rejected mainly

because of an immediate and overpowering hunger. A lucky choice.

With this ominous preamble we were prepared for a miserable evening, when the arrival of a shared appetizer of rabbit carpaccio (paper thin slices of underdone meat) sprinkled with bits of tomato and pesto turned the tide. That dish and all that followed combined for one of the best meals of 1999. Six or seven slices of lamb loin (35 DM/\$18) in a reduction of meat juices, butter and rosemary was rich, tender and savory. Silky, cut-it-with a fork calves liver (30DM/\$15) in a sauce lightly flavored with stone-ground mustard was equally glorious. Accompanying vegetables — a

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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bank was offering 1.97 DM to the dollar on deutschemark-denominated traveler's checks. A phone call to the bank's foreign exchange department revealed the exchange rate for electronic transactions that day would be slightly better than 2 deutschemarks for each dollar. Assuming a need of \$2,000 cash I would get about 60 deutschemarks (\$30) more by using my ATM card. Add to that the 1.5% charge for issuing the checks and the difference becomes \$60. (Granted, many American Express card holders qualify for free foreign denominated traveler's checks, but be sure to compare the exchange rate to that of your bank).

Of course, if you take dollar-denominated traveler's checks to any foreign country you'll be subject to local banks' over-the-counter exchange rates, which are much less favorable than from those same banks' ATMs. And we can only offer a prayer for the poor soul who has to exchange US currency — cash or traveler's checks — at a hotel.

As to the convenience issue I'll relate a brief story. After dinner one evening in a Swiss restaurant which I had foolishly assumed would accept one of my credit cards, I was presented with a bill that required more cash than I had. However, just a few steps away from the restaurant was a bank with an ATM. My difficulty was resolved in about two minutes.

Since this was a business dinner, and I was paying, that ATM saved considerable embarrassment.

Years ago, when I carried foreign-denominated travelers checks, I would occasionally run across an off-the-beaten-track hotel or restaurant that refused to accept them for payment. And banks, of course, have limited hours of operation and aren't open at all on Saturdays, Sundays or on the many European holidays. (For example, in most European countries you'll not be able to cash a traveler's check at a bank from the Thursday before Easter until the following Tuesday.) Finally, you cannot purchase traveler's checks in the currency of most countries, including Austria, the Czech Republic, Holland, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and many, many others. If you want to rely on traveler's checks in those countries they'll have to be in dollars and not only will you pay a fee to exchange them for foreign currency, you'll get a much less favorable rate than with an ATM card.

For travel within the US traveler's checks may still have a place but if you're headed for Europe, they are no longer very practical.

Readers are advised to charge everything possible to a credit card and use ATMs for "walking around" cash.

Auto Rental Rates Increase

If you've gotten a quote on a rental car in Germany recently you're aware that the days of dirt

cheap rentals in that country appear to be over. Late last year, a midsize Opel Vectra could be booked for about \$128 per week including the 12% airport surcharge and the 16% value added tax. That same car is now \$174 (Budget Auto Rental, booked through *Gemütlichkeit* at 800-521-6722) with more price increases on the way.

What's going on you ask, the dollar is stronger against the mark than it has been in years? The main reason prices have risen is that new cars are becoming a hot item in Germany. So how does that affect the price of rental cars? In two ways:

- When cars in rental fleets reach a certain mileage they are sold on the used car market. Most companies make as much or more selling cars as they do renting them. Unfortunately, as sales of new cars in Germany have increased, the used car market has correspondingly weakened. Thus, in order to keep the same profit level, the companies have raised their rental prices.

- With a stronger retail demand

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

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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.

HANOVER

Continued from page 1

the private apartments of the widows and older folks of the town. That same system is still in place today.

Private accommodations far outnumber hotel beds, and if you're looking to stay in Hanover during Expo, you will almost certainly wind up in a private flat, with hosts Hanover residents have affectionately dubbed 'Messe Mutti' (convention mammas).

While Hanover's center was decimated and few architectural gems remain, the city's rebuilding was absolutely inspired, creating an eminently walkable downtown that is almost entirely pedestrian-only.

The Expo2000 theme is "Human-kind, Nature and Technology," and the pavilions from over 190 countries are truly impressive, with offerings like a building supported almost entirely by cardboard tubing (Japan) or one celebrating a country's natural resources and craftsmanship (Hungary). Some of the most impressive pavilions are by third-world countries such as Nepal's delightful and intricate wooden meditation building, and Ethiopia's fascinating archeological excavation display.

Notably empty when I visited, of course, was the space where the U.S. pavilion was to sit. Locals find this both achingly funny and seriously insulting. The Yanks (according to scuttlebutt which I believe totally and have heard from several sources), committed to Expo2000 in 1997 but U.S. authorities, apparently still embarrassed about the poor showing of the U.S. pavilion at Expo92 in Seville, did nothing about raising money or corporate interest for the project.

Then this year at Hanover's CeBit, the world's largest office information and telecommunications trade fair, a high-powered group of American business people took a tour of the Expo2000 grounds and asked, "Uh, where's the American pavilion?"

That evening, legend has it, in a

Hanover Info

Population: 525,000

Altitude: 177 feet

Hanover Tourist Office: Ernst-August-Platz 2, tel. +49/0511/301 420. The helpful staff here is one of the best in Germany. The office is to the right as you exit the main train station. Here, you can purchase the **HanoverCard**, which offers free or discount admission to tons of attractions and free rides on local public transport. The card costs 14 DM (\$7) for a day, 23 DM (\$11) for three days and is worth every *pfennig*. During the Expo and other trade fairs the tourist office also provides a room-finding service.

Euraide: The Hanover branch has an office in the rail station and will serve as an Expo information counter, assisting English-speaking travelers with fair-related questions plus train ticketing and reservations. The office is open 9am to 8pm daily during the fair. (No phone but you can email euraid@compuserve.com)

Expo Tickets: Available at Euraid Hanover, the Hanover Tourist Information Office and many other outlets around the world as well as on the Internet.

Tickets generally cost 69 DM (\$34) per person for the day, and grant access to all areas. Half-day tickets are available as well. For the complete rundown on the complex ticket offerings, plus information on buying tickets in the U.S., Germany, Europe and online, go to www.expo2000.de/englisch/ticket_shop_40.html.

smoke-filled room, captains of American industry put their heads (and wallets) together to hastily whip up an American entry. For months, Expo2000 officials insisted the U.S. pavilion would be completed in time, but on April 12, U.S. officials threw in the towel. There will be no American presence. On April 13 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* ran a front page editorial saying the Yanks had tried and their failure was not a snub against Germany, just an indication the whole thing had been poorly planned from the start.

The British Connection

The Hanover/Britain connection is based on a multitude of marriages (pay attention, this gets tricky). In 1714, Georg, son of Electress Sophie of Hanover, who was a granddaughter of James I of England (who was also James VI of Scotland) became simultaneously the King of both

England (the Brits called him George I) and of Hanover (Saxony, hence "Anglo-Saxon"). This bizarre union — which made several men who couldn't speak a word of English King of England — lasted until 1837.

In that context, the cause of the American Revolution becomes far clearer — George III may simply not have understood the Yanks when they said they meant business!

In any event, the royal **Herrenhäuser Gardens** and its **Grosser Garten** are in a word, jaw-dropping. They're a taste of the grand European gardens of yesteryear, and Hanover's only attraction (aside from Expo) that's not walking distance from the center (take Tram 4 or 5, about a 15-minute ride). It's a great place to either start or end your day. Duke Johann Friedrich built the gardens on his sprawling estate in 1666, and in the summer you can marvel at the Great Fountain, which fires massive columns of water to Yellowstonian heights — the record is 82 feet.

Walking through the garden's maze on a summer morning is perhaps as dazzling as the evening fireworks displays. Each year, fireworks masters from all over the world come here to exchange ideas, demonstrate new pyrotechnics techniques, and generally bedazzle onlookers who are treated to some of the world's most elaborate displays.

A Great Hanover Day

Note: This is a suggested itinerary, but the Hanover City Tourist Office has made enjoying the city center completely foolproof. Taking advantage of the walkability of the downtown, they have painted a red line — **The Red Thread** — that leads to every item of interest in town. The Red Thread guidebook, available free from the tourist office, covers the city's history and its most interesting buildings.

Even if you skip the gardens, a walking tour through Hanover's bustling center is a wonderful pastime. Starting from the **Hauptbahnhof**, go straight south along the

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HANOVER

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Passerelle, a wide shopping boulevard, towards Kröpke, where to your left you can see the classic **Hanover Opera House**. Right in its shadow is a justifiably popular new spot for some terrific morning coffee, the **Expo Cafe**.

Continuing south brings you to the 14th-century northern red-brick **Gothic Marktkirche** — still open for services — with its original stained-glass. Opposite is the beautifully renovated 15th-century **Altes Rathaus**; and inside, the **Patio Cafe** (see page 6) is a wonderful place to stop for a drink to break up the tour.

Just south is Hanover's **Altstadt**, where cobblestone streets are lined with cheerful half-timbered houses. Only two of the houses are actually from this neck of the woods; after the bombing the city fathers decided that instead of trying to rebuild what had been utterly destroyed, they'd take the remains of half-timbered houses from around the city and reconstruct them in one delightful quarter.

In front of the **Leibniz Haus**, with its dazzling Renaissance facade, is an intricate fountain. Got a wish? Walk up the fountain's steps, go to the side opposite the steps, make your wish and turn the brass ring three times.

If you're here on a Saturday, you can visit the boisterous **Flea Market**, held on the south side of the old city walls on the northern bank of the Leine River Canal. If not, head south-east on Leinstrasse and you'll come to an absolute must for lunch, the **Markthalle** (see page 5).

South, across heavily trafficked Friedrichswall, are three attractions. First is the **Neues Rathaus**, inside of which is a fascinating and free city history museum showing large models of Hanover before and after WWII. In summer ride the elevator to the top of the dome; the shaft follows the roof's contour, Eiffel Tower-style, so at the end you're tilted at about a 20-degree angle.

Next door is the **Kestner-Museum**, whose building was heavily

damaged in WWII. After the war, a new structure was built around the old one, which itself became an exhibit. There are also several floors of fabulous displays, including decorative art and one of the country's best collections of Egyptian artifacts.

Behind these two museums is one of Hanover's most distinctive attractions, the man-made **Maschsee**. This six-foot deep, three-quarter mile-long lake was one of National Socialism's early efforts to boost employment and give people a warm and fuzzy feeling about the Nazis. Thousands of men toiled to dig it out, and today, while its dark history is rarely mentioned, the lake has become a Hanoverian favorite. In summer there are firework celebrations, swimming and boating. The lake is planted with carp which are harvested for New Years' festivities. And during Hanover's Schutzenfest, held annually in early July, the parties around it are definitely to be remembered.

On the east side of the Maschsee are two of the country's finest museums: the **Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum** with 14th to 18th century European paintings including works by Monet, Corinth and Cranach the Elder; and south of it, the **Sprengel Museum**, one of Europe's finest modern art museums. The Sprengel has a massive permanent collection of works by everyone from Chagall to Picasso and Duane Hansen to Edvard Munch.

To get you back in the middle of things *and* in a holiday spirit, the best thing to do from here is take a short taxi ride to the center for a freshly-brewed Hannöversch beer at **Brauhaus Ernst August**, on Schmiedestrasse. There you can also get either a light snack or a full, heavy German meal. It's a local favorite.

Accommodations

Easy Room

As mentioned earlier, Hanover is unique in that most of what is available is in private flats, and what hotels there are seem substandard when compared with the rest of

Germany. During Expo, rooms are so expensive many visitors are staying in nearby towns such as Celle and Lüneburg, whose hotels have in turn raised their prices!

I recently stayed at the **Kastens Luisenhof Hotel**, and everyone in Hanover I mentioned this to gave a knowing nod, an approving gesture and said something like 'Ah, luxury. You are a lucky man'. Well, maybe it used to be, but I found it dark, depressing and poorly furnished.

There are three hotels I determined to be good value — one a true gem — but remember when you visit during Expo the chances are either the price will be higher than stated here or it will be fully booked.

Which leaves you with *Messe Mutti*; the wonderful Easy Room (tel. 011/49/1805 653 000), the Expo's official accommodation agency. While Easy Room can book hotels as well as private rooms, its strength is its extensive database of some 30,000 private rentals. All are checked by the city for standards of cleanliness and safety.

Determining the price of these rooms is like answering the question "how long is a piece of string?," but here are the guidelines. Costs are listed on a per-room, per-night basis and include taxes, and if you stay longer than a week you can probably negotiate a cheaper deal.

If you're within half an hour of the fairgrounds, a standard single room with a shared bath and toilet is 98 DM (\$48), and a standard double with shared facilities is 155 DM (\$76). For a room with private bath, a single is 103 DM (\$51), and a double is 169 DM (\$83).

"Upgraded" rooms, which are better furnished, larger and more pleasant are, with shared bath, 143 DM (\$71) single and 197 DM (\$98) double, and with private bath 148 DM (\$74) single and 208 DM (\$104) double.

The farther from the fairgrounds, the cheaper the room.

Landhaus Amman
This exclusive little 14-room

cottage hotel on the southeast end of the Maschsee is accessible by tram 8 and a short walk from both Pier 51 and **The Insel** (see page 6). The Amman is a wonderful, family-run gem, comfortable and private, with a sweet courtyard (beverages served outside in summer) a nice restaurant and very comfortable rooms. They also have a fine American-style bar downstairs.

Staff is excellent, and this is really the place that I would have liked to have stayed last time I was in Hanover.

What's more, the owner, Helmut Amman, is something of a local character — he's run this place for 16 years, managing both the hotel and the restaurant. And he does both well; *Feinschmecker* magazine gives the restaurant four out of five stars, and locals save it for a really special night out.

Daily Rates: (Expo) Singles 435 DM (\$214) to 490 DM (\$241), doubles 530 DM (\$261) to 590 DM (\$290); (Non-Expo) singles 295 DM (\$145) to 335 DM (\$165), doubles 355 DM (\$174) to 395 DM (\$194)

Contact: Landhaus Amman, Hildesheimer Strasse 185, tel. +49/0511/830 818, fax 843 7749

Rating: QUALITY: 14/20 VALUE 13/20

Forum Hotel Schweizerhof
(Inter-Continental)

I've never before written such a glowing report on an Inter-Conti, but this one is different. Nicely tucked away in the center but away from the noise, the Schweizerhof is a beautifully renovated grand hotel with fabulous service. The lobby, though modern, is very comfortable, and there are chess sets for guests. There are a couple of pleasant bars and a restaurant downstairs, and my favorite is the small and very cozy *Zirbelstube*, perfect for a quiet drink or even a hearty German meal.

The rooms are expensive but still decent value, even during Expo. All are spacious and comfortable, but the executive rooms are extraordinarily so and have complete offices — Web TV, printers, fax machines, etc.

But one mean trick is that breakfast is not included; it's an extra 34 DM (\$17) a person (Tip: the **Mövenpick** restaurant at Kröpke has an astoundingly good breakfast buffet for 19 DM/\$9.35 daily).

Daily Rates: (Expo) Regular doubles 550 to 675 DM (\$271-\$332). King size doubles 650 to 795 DM (\$320-\$391). (Non-Expo) Singles 375 to 675 DM (\$184-\$332), doubles 355 to 860 DM (\$174-\$423). Breakfast not included.

Contact: Forum Hotel Schweizerhof Hanover, Hinüberstr. 6, D-30175 Hanover, tel: +49/0511/349 50, fax 349 5102

Rating: QUALITY: 16/20 VALUE 12/20

Dorint Hotel Hanover

I'm a sucker for old buildings that have been renovated with absolutely modern furnishings but which retain the structure's original character. One fine example of how to do it on a large scale is the Dorint Hotel Hanover, located in a former building of the Bahlsen cookie factory.

Bahlsen still has a plant here, but the main building, an imposing oval-shaped brick structure, has been turned into 206 very modern and comfortable rooms. They're actually a little more sterile than they could have been, but the space is so nice, and the service so good, that I forgive them, and think you will, too.

Downstairs is a restaurant that changes cuisines regularly — it was Italian when I visited. There's also an exhibit of some of the factory's machinery, in a room that would make an exquisite guest bar; but sadly and to my amazement it is used only for private functions.

The Dorint is definitely a class act, except they, too, charge extra for breakfast, and then have the gall to charge an extra 4 DM (\$2) for it during the Expo!

Daily Rates: (Expo) Singles 460 to 770 DM (\$226-\$379), doubles 550 to 770 DM (\$271-\$379); (Non-Expo) Singles and doubles 235 DM (\$115) to 325 DM (\$160). Breakfast is 32 DM (\$15) during Expo and 28 DM (\$14) regularly.

Contact: Dorint Hotel Hanover,

Podbielskistrasse 21-23, D-30163 Hanover, tel. +49/0511/390 40, fax 390 4100

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 12/20

Feuchter's Lila Kranz

I only list this place because no one else on earth seems to know it's a hotel, and there's a good chance you'll be able to book during Expo for less than outrageous sums. While the rooms are clean, and there are nice extras like breakfast in bed and the fact that you're sleeping above a really nice restaurant (see page 6), the fact is that the traffic noise is pretty loud.

However, the rooms themselves are nice and clean, but unfortunately there are only four of them.

The good news is that the prices are not so bad considering the location, and they include breakfast.

Daily Rates: (Expo) Singles 250 DM (\$123), doubles 300 DM (\$147). (Non-Expo) Singles 150 DM (\$74), doubles 200 DM (\$98).

Contact: Feuchter's Lila Kranz, Berliner Allee 33, D-30175 Hanover, tel. +49/0511/85 89 21, fax 85 43 83

Rating: QUALITY 9/20 VALUE 10/20

Sustenance

While some regional foods are simply fabulous, like the sublime asparagus and potatoes that come from the Lüneberger Heide to the north, other Saxon specialties bring up some of the same feelings as the terror meal in *Indiana Jones*; brain sausage with browned cabbage, for example. Really.

Others simply sound bad but are in fact quite tasty, including *Steinhudemeer*, a smoked eel dish. That, and other fish dishes like trout in a dozen ways, and the carp you'll be lucky to get around New Years' celebrations, balance out the list.

Markthalle

Simply put, a lunch here is an absolute must when visiting Hanover. This is one of Germany's best indoor markets.

It's not much to look at but inside this covered market is absolutely teeming with fabulous stalls, selling

everything from typical Hanover specialties to Italian delicacies to sushi and Chinese food, and from fresh horsemeat and pig's trotters to foo-foo drinks with the requisite paper umbrella, and all things in between. It's a scene and a half, a popular business-person's networking place and definitely worth a trip.

Another good plan is to use this as a supply depot for picnics on the Maschsee, with everything from starters to desserts and wines (mainly Italian and German, though if you're up for something a bit different, cross the street and try the Aussie Wine Shop, which has great deals on a wide range of excellent Australian wines).

Markthalle, Königstrasse 47, tel. 341 410

The Insel

My love affair with the Insel began the moment I laid eyes on the layout - it's in a 1920's boathouse at the southeast corner of the Maschsee, and it just feels like home: wooden floors, enormous picture windows and two floors of rooms. The downstairs dining rooms are far more posh.

There are traditional regional dishes as well as sort of a continental and Asian fusion. The best deal is the three-course business lunch, for 47 DM (\$23) per person. In the evening the set menu is also good value: 89 DM (\$44) per person for four courses and 125 DM (\$61) with the wine of the day. A la carte main dishes range from 29 DM (\$14) to 44 DM (\$21).

The upstairs bar doubles as a bistro, where you can sit of an evening and watch the boats (though for drinking, plus boat and people-watching it's better to hit The Pier [see next column]), as well as sample the food, or even just stop by for something from the extensive menus for dessert and dessert wines.

Both upstairs and downstairs, service and food is excellent, and the wine cellar has the largest selection in Niedersachsen.

The Insel, Rudolf-Von-Bennigsen-Ufer 81, D-30519 Hanover, tel. 0511-83 12 14

Pier 51

Of course, for serious people watching and to perhaps catch sight of German political big-wigs up to and including the Chancellor himself, the place to be is Pier 51, a bar-restaurant that's one of the trendiest in Hanover. It's on a floating pier on the east shore of the Maschsee.

The crowd here is Cohiba cigars, serious suits and dark brown drinks in heavy crystal glasses; outside it's a bit more festive. Dress to kill. Rudolf-Von-Bennigsen-Ufer 51, tel 0511 6460 9912

Feuchter's Lila Kranz

This has been a local favorite since 1978, a lovely French-inspired interior with lots of frilly decorations but positively serious service, and dependably good seafood and wines. The daily changing menus are 98 DM (\$49) per person including wine, and while the restaurant is justifiably famous for its fish dishes, don't skip the other offerings; I had simply the best *Perlhuhnbrust* (guinea fowl) ever here, complete with an assortment of veggies and all done in a typically Saxonian sauce (39 DM/\$19).

My friend Bill went with the tender Argentine beef fillet done perfectly medium rare in a cognac and green-peppercorn sauce, and we fought over each others' plates the whole time. Dessert was a scrumptious caramelized apple pancake with vanilla ice cream.

Feuchter's Lila Kranz, Berliner Allee 33, D-30175 Hanover, tel. +49/0511/85 89 21

The Patio

In the lobby of the Altes Rathaus sits The Patio, a charming bistro offering terrific Italian and continental foods in a wonderful setting: towering vaulted ceilings, and that mixture of modern renovation and ancient building that I've already expressed a weakness for.

The best time here is for late morning coffee or a light lunch, with pasta specials such as rigatoni in a fresh sardine and caper sauce running about 11 DM/\$5.50. It's not an over-touristed place at all, and locals enjoy the relative solitude and great

friendly service.

The Patio Cafe, Altes Rathaus, Marktplatz, tel. +49/0511/300 80 40

Landhaus Amman

The restaurant at Landhaus Amman is about as comfortable as the hotel, with a very intimate dining room (the kind where they push the bar around on a trolley-cart) and a widely ranging menu that changes often. Herr Amman has been cooking here for 16 years, and Hanover residents save his restaurant for special occasions. It's a mixture of Saxonian, German and continental foods, usually done up in thematic menus.

His "Culinary Arrangement" (350 DM/\$172 for two), for example, is a little sadistic: you visit the restaurant for soup and starter courses, then are whisked off to the Opera for a performance, after which you're driven straight back to the restaurant for the main course and dessert. Highly recommended.

Landhaus Amman, Hildesheimer Strasse 185, tel 0511-830 818

Restaurant Sterne

Right behind Herrenhausen Gardens sits one of the most romantic settings for a restaurant you'll find in Germany — beneath the towering stone walls of the Georgenhof is Restaurant Sterne, run by the Santa Clausianly affable Herr Sterne, an award-winning chef who personally oversees the kitchen.

The stone house is impressive enough, but in summer the courtyard is simply idyllic: ivy-covered stone walls and tables fronting a sweet little pond.

Try the Regional Romantik Menu with a mushroom, ham and pistachio terrine appetizer that'll knock your socks off, red-beet and apple soup with crab, *Zanderfilet* with leeks in a mustard cream sauce, and two more courses plus dessert for 126 DM/\$62.

The Sterne family also operates a 14-room hotel, but I wasn't overwhelmed by the rooms.

Georgenhof & Sterne Restaurant, Herrenhäuser Kirchweg 20, tel. +49/511/702244



READERS' FORUM

Internet Tip

Recently I bought two roundtrip airline tickets from Nashville to Frankfurt, return Munich. The price per ticket was \$399.51 inclusive of all taxes on US Airways.

The purchase was made on expedia.com on a Tuesday and the tickets were received Saturday via mail. The price was exactly as quoted with no surprise charges. Expedia's page is easy and fast to negotiate and has a neat feature that allows you to select a seat. A diagram of the cabin indicates seats already selected and you just click onto an empty seat and it's yours.

I bought the tickets separately so that my charge would be on my card and my friend's charge would be on his card. This was not a good plan as I got the last ticket available on the best itinerary. Had to book a different flight for my friend. So if you're booking more than one ticket, it's best to specify the number of travelers and pay on one card.

ERSKINE HAVENS
VIA EMAIL

Swiss Mountain Trip

I would like to recommend a mountain trip in Switzerland, Niesen-Kulm near Thun. There is a spectacular view from the top. In 1999, we paid 110 Sfr. (\$68) each for the "Aurora" trip including funicular ascent and descent, overnight accommodations in the mountain guest house, dinner, and breakfast the following morning. Sunrise on a mountain top is a sight to behold! Although we were the only English-speaking guests, we had no trouble communicating and were treated royally by everyone.

PATRICIA YANNELLO
TONAWANDA NY

(Ed. Note: Contact Niesenbahn AG, CH-3711, Mülenen, tel. +/41/033/676112, fax 6762717)

Hotel Near Salzburg

I have not read anything in *Gemütlichkeit* about the **Maria Theresien Schlössl Hotel and Restaurant** (Mortzgerstr. 87, A-5020 Salzburg, tel. +43/0662/8201 91, fax 8201 9113, Horst Schneider, proprietor.). We have enjoyed staying and eating here several times.

The restaurant is excellent. Herr Schneider and his *Apfel Pfannkuchen* were recently featured on German TV.

ARTHUR MAYER
GRAND ISLAND NE

(Ed. Note: Located on attractive grounds near Hellbrunn Palace, this hotel is about three miles from the center of town. We had a pleasant lunch there one day a few years ago.)

Recommends German Hotels

Two of the places we stayed on a recent trip are worth mentioning. First, is the **Schlosshotel Lisl und Jagerhaus** at Hohenschwangau, where we had room Number 10 on the corner from which we had a view of **Neuschwanstein** from one window and of **Hohenschwangau** from the other. Room Number 20 would provide the same view.

The other hotel was in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, the **Klosterstüble**, located within the walls of the city. I would hate to guess on the date of the building but the rooms had recently been remodeled and were very comfortable. The restaurant was also one of the best of our trip.

DAN REISINGER
COLLIERVILLE TN

Hotel Altstadt Vienna

We spent the last week in February at the **Hotel Altstadt Vienna**, on a package that included going to the Coffeehouse Owner's ball, the opera, a tour of Vienna, etc. I picked the Altstadt based on the *Gemütlichkeit* naming it 'hotel of the year' a few years ago. I filed that information and when we decided to go to Vienna pulled it out and made reservations. The hotel is still as good as you described it then, the staff was friendly and helpful, we had a beautiful room in the front, and we loved Vienna. The only drawback was the

requirement for an advance payment, but I really didn't mind it that much. Not only did we love the Altstadt, with the current exchange rate it was a bargain.

Also, based on a note in a recent issue about the **Schloss Berg** having tickets for the Oberammergau Passion Play available to guests who stay three nights, we now have the tickets and reservations for July. Until I saw your brief I had assumed that probably the only way to get tickets was to spend two weeks being herded around on a bus tour.

JACK WILLIAMS
VIA EMAIL

SUSTENANCE

Continued from page 1

roasted mix of tiny new potatoes, diced carrots, thin French beans and chunks of fennel — were also without flaw. *Crostatini Frucht* (12 DM/\$6), a flat, perfect pie crust scattered with kiwi, grapes, strawberries, apple slices, currants, and blueberries, lathered with a pair of creamy raspberry and orange sauces, ended this string of wonderful dishes.

Osteria Citta Vecchia supports our contention that food rules. If what's on the plate is good enough, it can make up for a variety of ills. Service here was efficient enough but rather slow and never especially warm, and the only two red wines available by the glass — generic stuff noted on the menu as Merlot Veneto and Cabernet Veneto at 10.5 DM/\$5 per glass — were not a good match for the food. A restaurant of this quality should offer a much larger selection of open wines for those who don't want to order a full bottle.

Our meal for two persons, without beverages, was 105 DM (\$53), very good value

We strongly recommend Osteria Citta Vecchia but please take the precaution of calling ahead for reservations and make sure you are seated in the main room. Do not accept a table in the side room, on your left as you enter.

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SUSTENTANCE

Continued from page 7

Osteria Citta Vecchia, Hackenstr. 6-8, D-80331 Munich, tel. +49/089/23259885, fax 23259886.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Weinhaus Neuner

This venerable Munich restaurant — its history dates to the 15th century — is located in the same neighborhood as the Hotel Asam and the above Osteria Citta Vecchia.

The front door leads to a small entry and bar area which adjoins atmospheric dining rooms flanking it on both sides. The building is a WWII survivor, ceilings are vaulted, waiters wear white coats, and tables are elegantly set with white cloths and napkins, candles, fresh flowers and a multitude of silver and glassware.

We were seated in the room to the left at a table for four, though there were only two of us. Service was quick and friendly and we chose from a menu of mostly traditional Bavarian dishes.

The *Carpaccio Rind* (beef) we selected to lead off consisted of the usual thin shavings of virtually raw beef embellished with a variety of fresh salad greens, crispy Parmesan slivers and a piquant creamy, cheesy dressing. It was the best dish of the night.

Roast breast of duck was tender, tasty and not too oily, but accompanying vegetables were dull and overcooked. Another main dish, the ubiquitous *Tafelspitz* (boiled beef) was a little cardboardy but the *Röstistyle* fried potatoes and broccoli *au gratin* served with it were excellent.

We paid 77 DM (\$38) without beverages.

Weinhaus Neuner is recommended for its atmosphere, charm and service but we would be more enthusiastic if the food were a bit more consistent.

Weinhaus Neuner, Herzogspitalstr. 8, D-80331 Munich, tel. +49/089/2603954

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 12/20

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

for their products, auto manufacturers such as Volkswagen, Opel, Mercedes and BMW are less willing to offer attractive deals to rental car companies. And when Hertz, Avis and Budget have to pay more for their cars, guess what happens to the price you pay as a renter?

Not only have prices been affected, the variety of makes and models available to rental car companies — and thus to you, the end user — has been reduced. If BMW, for example, can sell all or most of its three-series cars to dealers, there are too few left for the rental companies.

In addition to the base rental prices, there are more and higher ancillary charges associated with renting a car in Germany. Two years ago the charge to pickup a car at a German airport or rail station was a flat 17 DM (\$9). Today it's 12% of the rental (usually a maximum charge of 100 DM/\$50).

A brand new charge this year is a 2 DM (\$1) per day "road tax." Put this one in the it-had-to-happen-sooner-or-later category. Both France and the United Kingdom introduced similar charges two years ago. Look for it next at a country near you.

Charges for additional drivers are also on the march. It used to be a spouse drove free. Now some companies charge as much as \$6.50 per day to add a second driver to the rental contract.

In some instances these extras are merely the rental companies finding ways of increasing their revenue. Some charges may be justified, however. For example, all rental companies at the Munich airport are required to have their cars washed at the same airport-operated service center. For each wash job, the company is hit with a hefty 60 DM (\$30).

Despite all this, Germany is still the best place to rent a car. To hire a midsize car there for one week is about \$155 with tax. In France it's \$217; Belgium \$174; Holland \$199; Switzerland \$212; and Italy \$526.

However, more increases are on the way. Book ASAP. The Germany car rental honeymoon is over. ☒

Europe Travel Briefs

■ **All About Switzerland** specializes in walking tours of the Swiss Alps. Dates offered this summer are June 11 to 24 and September 2 to 15.

Each tour visits three different picturesque villages off the beaten path for two days, each requiring easy to moderate walking ability, with one free day. Walks are customized according to each participant's ability. Also included are train rides on the **Glacier Express** in June and the **Panoramic Express** in September. Cost: \$2,120 per person, double occupancy, including 13 nights' accommodations, all breakfasts and dinners, a 15-day Swiss Rail Pass and guides. Airfare from the U.S. is extra. Contact: All About Switzerland 831-476-4482.

■ **The European Centre**, a joint undertaking of the University of New Orleans and the University of Innsbruck, will conduct its annual travel-study program for adults from July 2-22.

The program offers both credit and non-credit classes. Participants can choose from such courses as *The History of Opera; Sparkling Points of Contact: Literature, Music, Painting and Philosophy; Austrian Civilization; and History of the German Language: Roots, Culture and Use.*

Weekend excursions are planned to Prague, Venice and Verona, where participants will attend a performance of the opera Nabucco in the Roman Arena.

Cost is \$3,295 per person and includes 20 nights' accommodations and a variety of meals, field trips, German lessons, and entertainment. Contact: The European Centre, University of New Orleans, PO Box 1097, New Orleans LA 70148-1097, tel. 504-280-7318 or email iziegler@uno.edu. ☒