

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

May 26, 2000

Report from the "Field"

For the first time in 14 years, we took a trip to Europe that was more vacation than work. Usually the ratio is about 15% fun and 85% work-fun. This time it was 99% pure R & R. Longtime friends who had never before been to Germany, Austria, Switzerland had asked us if we would show them around.

Given Frank and Karen had never been before, and our knowledge of the area, it fell to us to set the itinerary for the four of us, a job more difficult than I ever imagined. Like everyone else, we were limited by time — 16 days — and, of course, geography. Immediately Liz and I discovered an overwhelming inclination to plan to see and do way too much. But how could we not visit Vienna? Munich? The Black Forest? The Mosel? The Rhine? The Wachau? The Tirol? Appenzell? Wengen? Kandersteg? Geneva? Graubünden? Ticino? Well, we couldn't. None of these made the final cut and we still

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

SUMMER 2000

Americans are heading for Europe in record numbers. This month some suggestions on how to survive the mad rush for hotel rooms, rental cars and top sightseeing attractions.

Tourism officials on both sides of the Atlantic expect more than 12 million Americans to visit Europe this year, a new record. Most will go between now and the end of October.

A feeble Euro — and sinking with it in lock-step, the deutschemark, the schilling, the French franc and other EU currencies — make Europe a more attractive destination, financially speaking, than it has been for at least a decade.

What this means to the traveler to Germany, Austria and Switzerland, however, is greater competition for airline seats, hotel rooms, rental cars, even tables at outdoor cafes. It also

means the most popular destinations and sights are going to be crowded as never before. The charm and tourist-livability of motorcoach musts like Salzburg, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, and Lucerne will be tested on a daily basis. And those who must visit the best-known castles, museums, and historic buildings will be well served by patience, stamina and a pair of sharp elbows. There will be many a *Stau* (traffic jam) on the major Autobahn routes — Munich-Salzburg; Salzburg-Vienna; Frankfurt-Munich; Frankfurt-Basel; Bern-Basel, etc. — and rail travelers can expect to encounter plenty of fellow American passengers.

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Readers' Forum

Support for Wolff's Art Hotel

I was very surprised at the letter concerning **Wolff's Art Hotel** (tel. 5 40 60, fax 54 06 9) in your March 2000 issue. Our experience has been just the opposite! Since you picked Wolff's as the Hotel of the Year in 1997, we have visited it four times.

Our most recent stay was about two weeks ago. We have never had any difficulty in communicating with the hotel and getting the arrangements we wanted. Each visit has been for three nights and the service has always been excellent and the restaurant top notch.

We have gotten to know Dr. Wolff quite well and find him to be very conscientious in running his hotel and making certain his guests are comfortable and well cared for.

He did tell me the hotel was closed in January which may explain the problem encountered since the regular staff was not available.

As to the "smart-alecky" response by email, it very well could have been a language difficulty in translating from German to English. Anyone who travels in Eastern Germany knows English is not widely known and I have seen some odd translations in hotel room info packets and on restaurant menus.

I would urge the letter writer and her friends to give Wolff's another try. I'm certain they would enjoy their stay!

CAPT. ROBERT R. FARGO
PENSACOLA, FL

(Ed. Note: We received support

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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wound up with a whirlwind tour. In doing so, we ignored much of the advice we so smugly pass out each month in these pages. We preach less is more but when push came to shove we were just like everybody else, trying to cram a 28-day itinerary into 16-days. Hypocrites.

Don't misunderstand, we enjoyed ourselves immensely — due in large part to our friends' fun-loving, up-for-anything, take-it-all-in-stride, easygoing outlook — but our new watchword is "do as we say, not as we do."

We started in Berlin and finished in Florence, a place we had never been and one I hope you'll indulge me a few comments, even though it's out of our territory. In between, relying on both rail and car, we raced through Cseske Budejovice and Csesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic, stopped long enough for an overnight in the Bavarian Forest, grabbed a cup of coffee in Salzburg, and had brief flirtations with Zürich, Brienz, and Lausanne.

One of the best parts of this job is that I get to tell you about our trips and you can't change the subject or excuse yourself to freshen your drink. So let's roll the highlights:

Berlin

□ **Hotel Art Nouveau** (tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40) has raised its prices but management,

location and the big, airy rooms keep it high on our list. □ A magnificent stand-up lunch at **Rogacki** (Wilmersdorfer Str. 145) for 7 cost just over \$100 and included at least two glasses of delicious Australian white wine for everyone. Can't say enough about this place. □ It's free, but lines to see the Reichstag's new transparent dome are huge. Best go late at night or early in the morning. It's open until 10pm. □ The futuristic buildings of the new **Potsdamer Platz** are breathtaking.

Czech Republic

□ The first 15 miles of road from any border entry are lined with scantily dressed hookers, cheesy bars, and crummy open-air souvenir stands. It's a sorry sight that makes an awful first impression. □ Wasn't quite so impressed with the food this time at **Budvar Brewery** in Ceske Budejovice. But still decent and very cheap. □ Cesky Krumlov is a must for everyone.

Schloss Haunsperg

□ A picture of Eike and Georg von Gernerth in front of their castle (Hammerstrasse 32, A-5411 Oberalm, tel. +43/06245/80662, fax 85680) should appear in the dictionary next to the words "hospitality" and "charm." □ Dinner at **Hammerwirt**, in the village, was not as good as on our last (1997) visit, however.

Garmisch-Partenkirchen

□ Some things should never change and the dining room at the **Gasthof Fraundorfer** is one of them. Thankfully, all was as we remem-

bered. Frau Fraundorfer still runs things with the command presence of General Patton, but with a sharper sense of humor; the food is as good as ever; Freidl's face is a bit rounder and redder, but the voice is still clear and sweet and goes down as easy as the Munich beer he uses to lubricate the vocal cords. Every night is great at the Fraundorfer, but we caught a special one. The full-house crowd got into it and near the end some patrons were standing on their chairs, singing and clapping. This place is a treasure.

Florence

First off, it wasn't easy to get a hotel reservation in early May for Florence. After about a dozen turn-downs I found the centrally located **Hotel Astoria** at www.hotelguide.com. After completing the online form, I printed it and faxed it to the hotel. Confirmation came a few days later at 520,000 lira (\$243) per night double; far more than we wanted to pay, but this was Florence, which attracts more tourists per capita than any other destination in the world.

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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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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.

Recommended Resources for Booking Hotels

From the U.S...

- **Michelin Red Guides:** Available for Switzerland and Germany.

- **National Tourist offices:** Contact these agencies (see list at right) for hotel lists and catalogs. In some cases, the most complete hotel lists will come from the tourist offices in the towns to be visited.

- **Local tourist offices:** When all else fails contact the tourist office in the towns to be visited. It's easiest and cheapest via email, but phone, fax and regular mail also work. Get a list of local offices from the national tourism offices shown here. (**Tip:** Most town listings in the *Michelin Red Guide* contain the address, phone and fax number for the local tourist office.)

- **The Internet:** The best hotel Website is www.hotelguide.com. It's easy to use and as comprehensive as any we've seen. Some hotels can be booked and confirmed by return email. For the rest, the site provides a form which the user completes online, then prints out and faxes to the hotel.

Hotel information is also available on the Websites of the national tourist offices and the sites of local and regional tourist offices, though

you'll work harder to get to it.

- **Gemütlichkeit:** All the hotels we've rated over the past seven years are in the Members' Library at www.gemut.com. Cost to access: \$4 per month, minimum six months.

In Europe...

- **Michelin Red Guides for Switzerland and Germany:** Essential for the traveler who arrives without hotel reservations but still useful for those with itineraries planned to the minute – to find restaurants, for example.

- **Internet Cafés:** Wireless Internet access is in its infancy and accessing the Web from hotel rooms is still problematic at best. However, from cafes all over Europe you can log on for a small charge and enjoy a beverage while your doing it. Before heading to Europe you should go into !Yahoo, set up a My !Yahoo page and establish an email account. It's all free. Another site for free email is www.hotmail.com. This way you can send and receive emails while you're away. By the way, you can find a list of Internet cafes at www.cybercafe.com. Print out a list of cafes in the towns you'll be visiting and take it with you to Europe.

- **Local tourist offices:** When you've struck out with the above,

these can almost always find accommodations, often at the 11th hour.

Germany

Web site: www.us.germany-tourism.de

German National Tourist Office
122 East 42nd Street, 52nd Floor
New York, N.Y. 10168-0072
Tel. 212-661-7200, fax 212-661-7174
Email: gntonyc@d-z-t.com

German National Tourist Office
Post Office Box 641009
Los Angeles, CA 90064
Tel.: 310-234-0250
Fax: 310-474-1604
Email: GNTOLAX@aol.com

Austria

Web site: www.anto.com

Austrian National Tourist Office
500 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800
New York, NY 10110
Tel. 212-575-7723, fax 212-730-4568
Email: info@oewnyc.com

Austrian National Tourist Office
11601 Wilshire Blvd. # 2480
Los Angeles, CA 90025
Tel. 310 477 2038
Email: antolax@ix.netcom.com

Switzerland

Web Site: www.myswitzerland.com

Switzerland Tourism
608 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10020
Tel. 212-757-5944, Fax 212-262-6116
Email: info.usa@switzerlandtourism.ch

Switzerland Tourism
501 Santa Monica Blvd. #607
Santa Monica CA 90401
Tel. 310-260-2421, fax 310-260-2923

SUMMER 2000

Continued from page 1

This month we're going to pass along some recommendations and advice that will help get you through the summer of 2000 as unruffled as possible.

Overall Strategy

Our main theme has always been; get away from the crowd. But if it's a first or second-time trip, and you must see such places as Salzburg, Rothenburg, the Rhine, Lucerne and Grindelwald, then grit your teeth and go for it. Book hotels as far in advance as possible and plan to visit the major sightseeing attractions when they first open in the morning. Use the afternoon for

less popular attractions and for exploring on foot, with occasional stops at an outdoor cafe for a cool drink and a snack.

For those who have already seen the Salzburgs and Rothenburgs, or can visit such places in the off-season, there are dozens of great places to visit that won't be swarming with your friends and neighbors from back home. Later in this story we'll have some specific suggestions.

Auto Rental

The news from Germany just keeps getting worse. Prices seemed to have leveled off – you can still get a midsize car with air for \$150 a week plus VAT and airport taxes — but for the first time in memory, there is an availability problem.

Rental companies seem to have underestimated the summer demand. For example, at this writing, some companies cannot confirm a midsize car with automatic transmission until July.

Suggested Strategy: Our advice is book immediately. You can always change your rental or even cancel without a penalty.

Despite the increased rates in Germany, it is still cheaper to rent there than in Austria or Switzerland.

Car vs Train

There's nothing like a car to separate one from the tourist hordes. Pickup wheels at a major airport and in a few minutes you can be driving a nearly-deserted backroad feeling

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SUMMER 2000

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like you're the only tourist in the country. But for quick transitions, say Berlin to Zürich, or Vienna to Frankfurt, a fast train is the answer. Though it isn't so easy on the pocketbook, a strategy of using rail for long trips and a rented car to explore a region is the most efficient use of your precious vacation time and also the most comfortable. Recently, for example, we trained from Berlin to Dresden where we picked up a car and headed south into the Czech Republic. Three days later we left that vehicle in Salzburg and took the train to Zürich where we picked up another car which we kept for three days driving in Switzerland before dropping it off in Lausanne where we boarded a train for Florence. For four of us it would have been considerably cheaper to do the itinerary entirely by car but time was short.

Suggested Strategy: If you don't need to cover a lot of territory, a car offers ultimate flexibility and is the best way get off the beaten track, especially in Germany and Austria (almost all of Switzerland is accessible via rail, bus or boat with a rail pass). Those with a planned itinerary that will encompass a radius of more than 400 kilometers should consider a car-rail combination, unless time is not an issue.

Train Tip: If you're traveling on a rail pass we recommend waiting until you're in Europe before making seat bookings. From the U.S. you'll pay a minimum of \$11 per person, per segment (example: Lausanne to Zürich is \$11, change trains and Zürich to Frankfurt is another \$11). Seat reservations in Europe cost only about \$2.50 to \$3.00 and can be made at most travel agencies and rail stations. Book as far in advance as possible.

Hotels

Our advice has always been to make hotel reservations prior to departure from the U.S. only when absolutely necessary — first and last nights of the trip; major cities during fair and convention times; special

hotels and cities that are frequently fully-booked, i.e., Vienna, Salzburg, and Lucerne. This summer, however, traveling without advance hotel arrangements is recommended only for the most flexible traveler. We are hearing from readers — and experiencing ourselves — that hotel rooms are already in short supply, even into October.

Suggested Strategy: Book as soon as possible, being careful to understand each hotel's cancellation and change policy. See box on page 3 for suggestions on booking hotels from the U.S. and in Europe.

Those who want maximum flexibility should purchase the 2000 *Michelin Red Guide* for each country to be visited (none for Austria).

These books have the most complete listings of rated hotels and restaurants and, except for a wireless Internet access, are the single most useful in-country travel tools available.

Guidebooks like Frommer and Fodor cover 80 to 200 cities in a country and perhaps 800 to 1000 hotels. The Germany Red Guide lists some 10,000 hotels/restaurants in 3,300 different cities, towns and villages.

Can't get a hotel in Nürnberg? Use the map on page #854 to locate nearby towns with recommended hotels. In this case you'll find 20 such towns with at least one recommended hotel and restaurant within a 10 to 30-minute drive of the city center.

The guide has many other useful features and spending an hour or so familiarizing yourself with how it works will pay big dividends when you're on the road or even trying to make bookings from the U.S. It's designed for the motorist but rail travelers will find it almost as useful.

Alternative Destinations Summer 2000

What follows are recommendations and ideas for summer destinations that are likely to be less crowded, with fewer booking problems, than the most famous stops.

Of course, big-city tourist destinations like Berlin, Munich, and

Vienna are well equipped to handle large volumes of visitors. But in these towns it might be a good summer to explore more offbeat attractions. (See box page 5.)

Eastern Germany

More than 10 years after the fall of communism, most of old east Germany, in terms of numbers of visitors, is still a secondary tourist attraction. This fascinating area has much to offer. Explore its backroads by car using *Michelin's Red Guide for Deutschland* to locate accommodations on short notice. With it, advance reservations shouldn't be necessary. You might find pretty, historic cities like Weimar and Quedlinburg fully-booked but with the guide you'll be able to locate a good bed and dinner in a nearby small town.

Don't Miss: Historic Weimar, a cradle of German culture and Europe's "Cultural City" of 1999 (millions were spent to restore it). It's still there in 2000.

Recommended Hotels: Wolff's Art Hotel & Restaurant, Freiherr-vom-Stein-Allee 3a/b, D-99425 Weimar, tel. +49/03643/5 40 60, fax 54 06 99. Rooms from about \$100.

Christliches Hotel Amalienhof, Amalienstrasse 2, D-99423 Weimar, tel. +49/03643/54 90, fax 54 91 10. Rooms from about \$60.

Romantik Hotel Am Brühl, Billungstrasse 11, D-06484, Quedlinburg, tel. +49/03946/96180, fax 961 8246. Rooms from about \$69.

Tip: Count on Meissen, near Dresden, and its famous porcelain factory to be overrun with tourists this summer.

Recommended Transport: Car

Southern Bohemia

One of the great, undiscovered treasures of Europe is Cesky Krumlov. Nestled in a curving, canyon of the Moldau and dominated by a magnificent castle, this medieval jewel will someday be a tourist destination on the order of Rothenburg, Mont St. Michel and Positano. Millions are being spent to restore the town, and that is good, but in the

process a little of its authentic charm will be lost. See it now.

Also interesting is Ceske Budejovice with its huge town square and a brewery which makes the world's finest beer, the real Budweiser or Budvar.

Don't Miss:

Exploring on foot the ancient cobbled lanes of Cesky Krumlov.

Recommended

Hotels: Hotel Dvorak, Radnicni 101, CZ-381 01 Cesky Krumlov, tel. 0337/711020, fax 0337/711024. Rooms from about \$55.

Grand Hotel Zvon, Nam. Premysla Otakara II. 28, CZ-370 01, Ceske Budejovice, tel +042/038/731 1384, fax 042/038/731 1385.

Rooms from about \$45.

Tip: A massive, simple, tasty dinner or lunch at **Budvar Brewery** in Ceske Budejovice with plenty of that great beer will set you back about \$10 per person.

Recommended Transport: Car

Bavarian Forest

Less touristy, less sophisticated and less expensive than the popular *Schwarzwald*

(Black Forest). The most interesting towns are Lam and Bodenmais, a center for crystal and glass. Excursions are possible to Passau, Regensburg and Cesky Krumlov in the

Czech Republic.

Recommended Hotels: Romantik Hotel Bierhütte, D-94545, Hohenau-Bierhütte (41 km north of Passau), tel. +49/08558/96120, fax 961270. Rooms from about \$45.

Tip: The Bierhütte has an outstanding restaurant.

Recommended Transport: Car

The Mosel

We think it's prettier than the Rhine and we *know* it's less traveled. Arrange in advance to visit wineries along the way. The **German Wine Information Bureau** (79 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016, phone 212-896-3336) has free brochures identifying wineries offering free tastings (don't taste without buying, however). Visit Trier and its Roman ruins and explore romantic wine towns such as Bernkastel Kues, Zell and Cochem.

Don't Miss: Burg Eltz, one of Europe's great fortress/castles.

Recommended Hotels: Gutshotel Reichgraf von Kesselstatt, Balduinstr. 1, Obere Mühlbrücke 9, Neumagen-Dhron, D-96049, tel. +49/06507/2035, fax 5644. Rooms from \$60. Hotel Petrisberg, Sickingenstr. 11, Trier, D-54292, tel. +49/0651/4640, fax 0651/46450. Rooms

from about \$55

Tip: Hotel Moselschild (tel. +49/06532/93930, fax 939393) in Ürzig (10

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Dodging the Crowd in the Big Cities

Scads of tourists or not, it's hard to leave the three more popular big city tourist stops of Germany, Austria and Switzerland off your itinerary. Here are a few thoughts on seeing them comfortably this summer.

Munich

Crowded

Marienplatz
The Residenz
Deutsches Museum
St. Michael's Church
Hofbräuhaus

More Elbow Room

Englischer Garten
Nymphenburg Palace
Botanical Gardens
Asam Church
Augustiner Keller*
* On Landstrasse

Munich Summer Tips: Personal favorites at Nymphenburg are the less-crowded **Carriage Museum** and the nearby **Botanical Gardens**. The **Deutsches Museum** is fabulous. See it first thing in the morning. Two interesting and less visited museums are the **Münchner Stadtmuseum** and the **Bayerisches National Museum**. Lover's of great paintings should not miss the **Alte Pinakothek**, regardless of the crowds. A highly recommended excursion is to Andechs and its monastery. Great beer and food.

Berlin

Crowded

Reichstag
Pergamon Museum
Charlottenburg Palace

More Elbow Room

Soviet Memorial
Gemäldegalerie
Sanssouci (Potsdam)

Berlin Summer Tips: Not to be missed are the new futuristic buildings of Potsdamer Platz. An 8-DM (\$4) ticket to the **Gemäldegalerie** includes entrance to the **Neue Nationalgalerie** and vice versa. The quirky but fascinating **Museum Haus am Checkpoint** will be crowded but worth the effort for those interested in the **Berlin Wall**.


Vienna

Crowded

The Hofburg
Schönbrunn Palace
Kunsthistorisches Museum

More Elbow Room

The Belvedere Palaces
Kaisergruft
KunstHaus Wien

Vienna Summer Tips: Vienna's **Naschmarkt** (daily outdoor market plus colossal flea-market on Saturdays) is a Vienna must. Get away from the crowd with excursions via tram to **Heurigen** (wine taverns) in such suburbs as Heiligenstadt, Nussdorf, and Sievering. A nice change of pace is the **Prater** (an amusement park) and music lovers may want to visit the **Zentralfriedhof** (main cemetery) with its graves of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms and the Strauss family. 

Kur-und Sporthotel Adam, Bahnhofstrasse 51-53, D-94249 Bodenmais, tel. +49/09924/94000, fax 7219. (Hotel has its own brewery.) Rooms from about \$43.

km north of Berncastel-Kues) has a fine, affordable restaurant.

Recommended Transport: Car

Bamberg

Beautiful, under-visited city almost as charming as Rothenburg. Walk the town at dusk, just as the lights come on to illuminate the old buildings, bridges and statuary.

Don't Miss: Rauchbier ("smoky" beer) at Brauerei Schlenkerla, Dominikanerstrasse 6.

Recommended Hotels: Hotel St. Nepomuk, Obere Muhlbrücke 9, D-96049, Bamberg, tel. +49/0951/98420, fax 984 2100. Rooms from about \$65

Wilde Rose, Kesslerstr. 7, Bamberg, D-96047, tel. +49/0951/981820, fax 22071. Rooms from about \$48.

Tip: Dinner just outside of town in Gaustadt at **Brauereigasthof Kaiserdom**, Gaustadter Hauptstrasse 26, tel. +49/0951/965140, fax 9651444.

Three-course meals from about \$21

Recommended Transport: Car

Lausanne/Montreux

Since no self-respecting tour bus ever misses Lucerne, here are a couple of on-a-beautiful-lake (Geneva) alternatives. Both cities are gorgeously situated and can be used as a base for excursions to the Valaisian wine country, the cheesemaking hilltop village of Gruyères, Geneva and the **Red Cross Museum**, and to France, on the lake's opposite shore.

Don't Miss: The Olympic Museum

Recommended Hotels: Beau-Rivage Palace, CH-1000, Lausanne, tel. +41/021/613 33 33, fax 613 33 34. Rooms from about \$275.

Hotel Elite, 1 av. Sainte-Luce, CH 1003, +41/021/320 2361, fax 320 3863. Rooms from about \$73.

Near Montreux: Hotel de Sonloup, au Col de Sonloup, Les CH-1833 Les Avants, tel. +41/021/964 3431, fax 964 3480. Rooms from about \$44.

Auberge De Chernex, CH-1822, Chernex, tel. +41/021/964 41 91, fax 964 68 57. Rooms from about \$65

Recommended Transport: Car or rail

Brienz

On the same lake as touristy Interlaken but a smaller, far more charming town. From here you'll find it almost as convenient as from Interlaken to explore the Jungfrau region and the villages around the Brienzensee and the Thunersee. For rail pass holders, there is frequent train and boat service.

In the town, make advance reservations to tour **H. Huggler-Wyss** (CH-3855, Brienz, phone 036/511679), manufacturer of wood sculptures.

Don't miss: Giessbach Falls (accessible via lake steamer) and **Ballenberg**, the Swiss Open Air Museum.

Recommended Hotels: Grandhotel Giessbach, CH-3855, Brienz, tel. +41/033/952 2525, fax 033/952 2530. Rooms from about \$81.

Hotel Brienzburli-Löwen, CH-3855, Brienz, phone 033/951 1241, fax 033/951 3841. Rooms from about \$64, though lake and falls view doubles are \$140 and up.

Tip: A great bargain is a double room with a forest view for 160 Sfr. (\$93) at the immensely charming **Grandhotel Giessbach**.

Recommended Transport: Rail or car

Graz

It can't match the majestic buildings of Salzburg or the glory of Vienna but this somewhat undiscovered old-world city, the capital of Styria, is definitely worth your time. Walk its old-town and pay a visit to the **Zeughaus** (arsenal), the **Cathedral**, the **Mausoleum of Ferdinand II**, the **Stryrian Heimatwerk** (craft store) and the **Farmer's Market** across from the opera house. On a warm summer night, grab a table at one of the outdoor cafés on Mehlplatz, center of Graz nightlife.

For a really off-the-tourist-track excursion, drive south to Ehrenhausen and explore one of Europe's unknown wine roads; the **Südsteirische-Weinstrasse**, along the Slovenian border. The tourist office in Graz can provide detailed information. Of course, another excursion would be to Piber, where **Lippizaner**

Stallions of Vienna's Spanish Riding School are trained.

Don't Miss: The facade of the **Hof Backerei** at Hofgasse 6.

Recommended Hotels: Erzherzog Johann, Sackstrasse 3-5, A-8010 Graz, phone 0316/811616, fax 0316/811 515. Rooms from about \$85.

Hotel-Restaurant Ohnime, Purbergstrasse 56 (on the outskirts), A-8044 Graz, tel.: +43/0316/39 11 43, fax 39 11 43 19. Rooms from about \$39.

Recommended Transport: Car or train

More Destinations

• **Coburg:** Pretty town of gardens and historic buildings 47 km north of Bamberg. See the **Veste**, where Martin Luther once lived, and **Ehrenburg Castle** where Prince Albert, husband to Queen Victoria, spent his childhood. The **Hummel** factory is in nearby Rödental. Try **Hotel Blankenburg** (tel. +49/09561/6440, fax 644199), rooms from about \$58.

• **Rust:** In the seldom-visited wine region of Burgenland, about an hour south of Vienna, Rust is on the reed-ringed Neusiedlersee, a 124 square-mile body of water only seven feet at its deepest point. Don't miss the **Heurigen** (wine taverns) for a snack and a glass of fresh white wine made on the premises. **Hotel Am Rathausplatz** (tel./fax +43/02685/6772), rooms from about \$40.

• **Lienz:** Charming 700-year-old Austrian town at the south end of **Hohe Tauern National Park**, about 25 miles from the Italian border. See **Bruck Castle** and the **Egger Lienz Gallery**. Visit **Aguntum**, once a Roman settlement. Picnic and swim at **Tristracher Lake**. **Haidenhof Gasthof Hotel** (tel. +43/04852/62440 fax 62440-6), rooms from about \$35. ☒

READERS' FORUM

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from other readers for this hotel. Dr. Wolff also sent us a letter explaining that his hotel was closed January and February, at the time of the inquiry in question. However, he also included a copy of a fax addressed to our reader in which the hotel offered a reservation on receipt of a credit card number. It seems apparent the fax was sent but not received. We

continue to recommend Wolff's Art Hotel in Weimar.)

Great Restaurant

I would like to recommend **Landhaus St. Urban** (Büdlicherbrück 1, D-54426 Naurath/Wald, tel +49/06509/9140-0, fax 9140-40), a charming, country restaurant-hotel combination set in the forest 15 miles outside of Trier. This *Michelin* one star, *Gault Millau* 17-rated restaurant owned by the Ruessel family is now producing food that rivals the best of Puck, Splichal and Danko in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The Society of Bacchus America recently awarded Egon Müller of Scharzhofberg a "Lifetime Achievement Award" for his contributions to German wine and during that visit of outstanding tastings with J.J. Prüm, Egon Müller, Fritz Haag and Armin Diel, the Society had an extraordinary dinner consisting of seven courses which included: a layered tart of foie gras, thinly sliced guinea fowl and morels, turbot and lobster wrapped in thin layers of seared potatoes, *Dorade* with *Felle* in saffron marinade, frilled scallops in sauce *Bourride*, *Vela* prepared two ways with white asparagus and morels, pear tart with thinly sliced Münster and Riesling sabayon, and duo of pears with Riesling ice cream. All the above superbly produced for about \$80, what a deal.

Chef Harald Ruessel is only 32 and will no doubt be a 3-star chef in the not distant future.

CARY E. FEIBLEMAN, M.D.
VIA EMAIL

(Ed. Note: Landhaus St. Urban's 10 rooms are priced from 110 to 180 DM (\$50-\$83))

Art Nouveau Hotel, Berlin

I recently put you to a test. You certainly passed. Last January, when I was planning a trip that was to take in Washington, St. Petersburg, London and Berlin, I surfed the net looking for a good place to stay in the Berlin. Just then, your issue (Dec. '99) arrived with the feature on Savignyplatz, with particular reference to the **Art Nouveau Hotel** (tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40). A quick surf of the net revealed similar

information about this hotel, so I made my reservations.

Before going on, let me stress that I am not new to Berlin. I lived there, in Lichterfelde, for two years (1962-64) and have been back many times since. It was just that in recent years, I spend almost all of my travel time and dollars in Asia, so I have little knowledge of the current status of Berlin hotels.

In any case, the hotel was excellent. I enjoyed a chat and some *Schnapps* with the owners, had a spacious room that would have housed several people, and the price was moderate. In fact, due to the depreciation of the Euro, taking the DM with it, prices were better than expected.

On my last trip to Berlin (1996), the area including the Ku'damm was pretty shabby. I keenly felt the loss of **Kranzler & Zuntz**. Even **Aschinger** was gone, although now apparently back. Today, however, the area is much improved, back to its earlier elegance. I am not sure what to think about Potsdamer Platz. The newly emerging set of buildings looks like it would make a good backdrop for the opening scenes of some future James Bond adventure.

JIM MARSH
VIA EMAIL

New Car Delivery in Germany

I thoroughly enjoyed Vickie Ferguson's article (July '99) on new car delivery. Over the last 40 years, I have picked up 12 cars: two Audis (which no longer has the program), two BMW's, four Mercedes, and four Porsches.

The first was a 1956 Porsche in Zuffenhausen. The factory tour was considerably different from what it is now. The cars were almost entirely handmade, with a great deal of hand soldering of seams, then grinding and sanding. The paint facility looked like a Maaco shop. The "production line" had each car on a dolly, rolled from station to station, and each engine block had the initials of the master craftsman who had assembled it.

Mercedes probably does the best job of tourist delivery, if for no other

reason than they have a higher volume of cars delivered every day, both domestic and foreign. The only fault discovered here was the lack of an English-speaking technician to explain the car on one occasion. Fortunately I speak passable German, so this was not a major problem.

The last car we picked up was a 1998 BMW 540i in May of 1998. It was delivered through a BMW owned dealership in Munich with very little hassle. During our tour of Bavaria, Austria and Switzerland, we stayed one night at your 1997 "Best Small Hotel," the **Gasthof Waldrast** (tel. +43/05672/62443, fax 62443) in Reutte, Austria. It was great- family run, with Oma, Opa, Herr und Frau Waldrast, and two delightful girls. Fantastic view of a ruined castle, which is illuminated at night. We'll go back!

Keep up the good work. Even though I average a trip to Germany, Switzerland or Austria once a week as a Delta Air Lines captain, I find your letter to be of great value.

WILLIAM GIBSON
VIA EMAIL

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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From Lausanne to Milan we rode the new Cisalpina, whose interior amenities are more airplane than rail car; small windows, limited legroom. At Milan we changed to a more prosaic — and not very spiffy — InterCity. We had a no-smoking compartment in first-class all to ourselves, but the air-conditioning was inoperative and we suffocated for about 30 minutes before moving to the dining car. At that point we were not very happy with Italy. But then came a hint of good things to come. To me, most train food is only marginally better than airline food. So expectations were not high when I ordered a small plate of tagliatelle. It was amazingly good. Sensational, in fact. The yellowish pasta looked and tasted handmade — buttery and full of eggs. It was sprinkled with chunks of delicious bacon and Parmesan

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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cheese (about this time the train was passing through Parma from whence comes the cheese and the famous Parma hams, considered the true prosciutto).

Still hungry, we asked for a single plate of sliced meat for the four of us. We had no Italian whatsoever, our waiter no English, resulting in our being served not one but four plates of paper thin slices of salami, ham and something unidentifiable but equally delicious. There was a small dispute over our wanting to return what we thought we hadn't ordered. The meat had been sliced to order, but it was finally agreed we would pay for two but eat all four. The red wine was flowing, it was no problem, and all parted friends.

We were expected at the Astoria and everyone was most pleasant. Liz and I, however, were shown to a stuffy room (#101) whose only window opens onto the breakfast room! In addition, it's on two levels. The first has a couple of straight backed chairs, a table and the bathroom. That's it. Up a steep flight of stairs in a dark, cramped, windowless, airless space is the bed. This would not do. Back to the front desk. After some deliberation, we were taken to a double overlooking the noisy street. It was small, with beat-up furnishings, but the air-conditioning seemed to work and there was a window.

From the serenity and cool of Lausanne on the lake, to the heat, traffic, noise and armies of tourists that seem to fill every corner of Florence, is a culture shock: long lines to get into the **Duomo**, the **Battistero**, the **Uffizi** and seemingly every other attraction, of which this city has too many to see in a month; and chasing me everywhere...loud, smelly, motorscooters.

When evening came, however, the temperature dropped a few degrees, the traffic eased and about 9pm we straggled into a little trattoria chosen because it had room for us and our feet were tired. Our table

in a small, overheated anteroom made us question the wisdom of our choice, but just then the restaurant's owner pointed a hand-held remote control device at an air-conditioning unit high on the wall and Florence was suddenly a better place. That little click not only cooled down the room but, like the turning point in a football game, it completely shifted the momentum of our Florence visit. The old city had begun to work a little magic.

The meal was a joy. We asked for white wine and a bottle was set on the table; no tasting ritual, no presenting the label, just bang, here it is, you pour. That we did. And drank it like water. There was good bread, splendid oil, a plate of marinated seafood, great pasta, and maybe a steak. Red wine, simple but eminently drinkable (as we proved so often), came the same way, thunk. Gelato for dessert. The cost for four about \$75. I don't remember the name of the place but it's not important because there are hundreds just like it — and better — all over Florence.

Next day, the weather cooled, the lines to see the handful of wonders we had time for — Michelangelo's fantastic **David**, the **Duomo**, the **Uffizi Gallery** — seemed more manageable, and our spirits lifted. We waited 15 minutes for **David**, 30 minutes for entrance to the **Uffizi** and about 10 minutes each for the **Duomo** and the **Battistero**.

We appreciated the controlled access to these sights. Allowing only a limited number of visitors at one time seems a good, reasonable policy, especially when your turn comes. We were able to comfortably spend nearly an hour with **David**, viewing the magnificent sculpture from different angles, even while seated at one of the benches.

That night we got a tip from a savvy American who has a second home in the nearby Tuscan hills. I'll pass it on to you. Walk across the **Ponte Vecchio** and take the first right. On your left, three or four blocks down, is **Mama Gina's** (Borgo Sant Jacopo 37, tel. 239 6009). Yeah, I know, it sounds like the tourist trap

of all time, but the food...the food...words fail me. The best veal chop ever; amazingly succulent little lamb chops; more marinated seafood, only better; and prosciutti with melon that will make you think you've never had either before. A simple restaurant, more expensive than the first night, but a truly extraordinary meal of everyday Florentine fare. The final bill of \$133 included two bottles of wine, dessert, mineral water, grappa, the whole shebang for four people.

Somewhere during that final dinner an important fact dawned on me. Not one person we had encountered in Italy; on the train, at the hotel, ticket sellers at **David** and the **Uffizi**, waiters in the most touristy sidewalk cafes, shopkeepers, taxi drivers, museum docents, no one, had been unpleasant to us at any time. We found none of the bored, jaded, barely civil attitudes one gets from behind-the-counter personnel in big cities all over the world. Quite the contrary, many seemed to go out of their way to be friendly and helpful. Good humor and a gregarious zest for life is almost universal.

On the other hand, we were advised, Italians are easily offended. Greeting a shopkeeper, waiter or desk clerk with a smiling *Buongiorno* definitely warms the atmosphere, but to withhold that greeting sends a subtle message of superiority and can result in a chilly reception. There are a couple of other cultural quirks worth passing on. In the market, one does not handle fruits or vegetables to evaluate them for purchase. And, in small shops and boutiques, window shop all you want, but when you enter the store there is an assumption you are a buyer. You will give offense if you do not purchase something.

Florence is noisy, crowded, full of American tourists, and, compared to Zürich, somewhat disorganized and not very clean. However, its buildings, its overwhelming art, its food and its people we all fell in love with. We'll be back, but not when the weather is warm, and to a different hotel. — RHB 