

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

July 24, 2000

**Flights in Europe \$99**

Let's start by correcting a substantial error in last month's issue. As several of you correctly pointed out, **Europe by Air** sells its \$99 city-to-city coupons *individually* and *does not*, as we mistakenly reported, require a minimum purchase of three coupons. This, of course, makes it a much more attractive deal. Apparently, however, the process of redeeming the coupons is a bit more complicated than just presenting a regular airline ticket an hour prior to flight time. I refer you to the letter from subscriber Gary Shirley on page 6.

**Clearing the Desk**

□ Always on the lookout for travel tips and ideas, I sometimes find them in strange places. A newsletter to which I subscribe is *Hotline*, published by the Newsletter and Electronic Publishers Association. In a recent issue, Andy McLaughlin of PaperClip Communications, a fellow newsletter publisher and frequent traveler, offered a few travel hints I thought worthy of wider distribution.

- Join every program you can. The advantage of being a "frequent whatever" is that employees see you as a different level of customer and you get better treatment. Air-

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**This Month in Gemütlichkeit**

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## COUNTRY VIENNA

*Great views, quiet walks, classic architecture, gemütlich restaurants, and an inexpensive castle hotel await the traveler willing to desert Vienna's center for its fascinating environs.*

One of Vienna's most charming features is its combination of city and countryside. From the central urban bustle of the Stephansplatz, one can hop on public transportation, and in less than 30 minutes be in the midst of the forested hills and mountain spurs of the evocative Vienna Woods.

When visitors to Vienna want a taste of the city's greenery, most limit their travels to the quaint and well-touristed wine villages of Grinzing, Döbling, or Nussdorf. Surprisingly, few visit the city's closest incursion of nature, the Gallitzinberg. This mountain spur, one of the last gasps of the Alps, sits on the

edge of Ottakring, Vienna's 16<sup>th</sup> district. The district begins at the Gürtel (Vienna's outer ring, formerly a defensive fortification) and rises gently towards the city's outskirts. Then, at the edge of town, the land climbs steeply past century-old summer villas and newer luxury apartments to the top of the Gallitzinberg, where it finally dissipates amidst the valleys and slopes of the Vienna Woods. The woods contain a network of walking trails linked to open fields, which are perfect for picnics, exploring, and providing inspiration for your next song or symphony.

But the Gallitzinberg has more

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## Accommodations

*Capsule reviews of recent hotel experiences by the Gemütlichkeit staff.*

**Hotel Gut Schmellerhof**

It was the last Friday in April. The four of us had driven from the Czech Republic, crossing into Germany at Marchhäuser just northeast of Freyung, looking for an overnight and a good meal in the Bavarian Forest countryside; perhaps a place a little more *gemütlich* than the decent but commercial **Hotel Zvon** on Ceske Budejovice's main square where we'd stayed the night before.

Relying on the maps at the front of *Michelin's Red Guide for Deutschland* which highlight especially

pleasant hotels and restaurants, we headed northwest toward the resort village of St. Englmar, 37 kilometers south of Cham, just off the main north/south road through the Bayerischerwald. There, the guide awards its coveted red roof-peak symbols to a pair of hotels, the **Angerhof** and the **Maibrunn**. But full-up parking lots and cold, contemporary architectural styles put us off both hotels. We decided to keep looking.

In the hamlet of Rettenbach, just five kilometers from St. Englmar, was the Hotel Gut Schmellerhof, to which Michelin has assigned a red rocking chair symbol — "very quiet or quiet, secluded hotel."

This, at least from the outside,

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## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

lines, hotels and rental car companies always pay special attention to their frequent travelers clubs.

- Always ask for an upgrade. Whether checking into a hotel or boarding a flight, take a minute to smile and say, "Are there any upgrades available today?" The very worst that can happen is they say "no." The best that can happen is first or business-class seats (for perhaps only a small upgrade charge) and better hotel rooms with better views. Rental car companies may put you into a larger car (make certain, however, that you aren't charged extra; in Europe if you ask for an upgrade, the understanding is you are willing to pay the higher price).

- Never accept a hotel's first price. There is always a better one available. Ask for a AAA discount, corporate rate, senior citizen, business discount, and so on. You will almost always hear a better price the second time around.

- Know who is really in charge. When travel goes bad it can get ugly. The savvy traveler knows who has the authority to help them out. A few examples: Generally, gate agents have more power than others in the airport. They have the last say on who sits where (and who does or doesn't get on). Hotel desk clerks have very little power — always ask to speak with a manager if you're

having trouble.

- Unless you have a really good travel agent who knows exactly what you want, you're better off booking your own travel. Your comfort and time is in your agent's hands. He or she has to know what kind of connection you can stand, where you want to sit on the airplane, what your minimum levels of comfort are in a hotel and that the "elite edition" Yugo is just not going to cut it for you.

My two cents worth on Mr. McLaughlin's advice on travel agents: There are a lot more sharp, caring agents than he seems to think. However, when you begin to realize you know more about the ins and outs of travel than your travel agent, it's time for a change or for you to do it yourself.

□ A few months ago, high-profile, opportunistic, travel maven **Arthur Frommer** grabbed a fair amount of publicity when he declared he wouldn't allow information about Austria on his budget travel website until the Austrian government rid itself of Jörg Haider's right wing Freedom Party.

Apparently, Mr. Frommer was only kidding because when I looked at the site on July 18 I found substantial Austrian coverage. Though Haider has resigned as head of the party he is still politically active and the Freedom Party is still very much a part of the government.

Twenty years ago Frommer's

guidebooks on European travel were reliable and respected. His *Europe on \$5 a Day* was a classic. But lately his all-purpose travel books on Germany, Austria and Switzerland lag far behind competitors like Lonely Planet and the Rough Guides.

The newest element of the Frommer travel line-up, however, *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel*, a bi-monthly magazine owned by the Washington Post company, is actually worth the money (\$14.95 for six issues). Among the interesting items found in the July/August issue:

- Roundtrip airfare (from Florida and California) and a rental car for one week are available this summer on **KLM's** charter airline, **Martinair**, for from \$539 to \$699. Contact: 800-790-4682.

- For very flexible travelers, **Airhitch** (888-AIR-HITCH) and **AirTech** (800-575-8324) will fly you standby to Europe for \$169 to \$249 one way — price depending on departure city — within a four-day "window." The companies pick the

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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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## GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
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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.

## COUNTRY VIENNA

Continued from page 1

than just greenery. It also offers a cluster of good restaurants and *Heurigen*, an inexpensive castle hotel, and one of Vienna's must-see — though seldom-visited — historic buildings. This natural outpost provides the makings of a memorable daytrip or, even better, a lovely, leafy base for excursions into the city. Those requiring a celebrity endorsement should know that Vienna's mayor, Michael Häupl, likes the area so much that he lives there.

### Looking Back

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the land on the Gallitzinberg was owned by a host of assorted heavyweights, including an Austrian fieldmarshal, a Russian ambassador, a member of the Romanov family, and a few of the empire's lesser nobility. A prince who owned the land in the 1860s, tried unsuccessfully to get the city to rename the mountain after his wife, Wilhelmina. When the city refused, the prince had all the signs leading to his property changed to say "Wilhelminenberg." The name sort of stuck, and still serves as the mountain's second, unofficial name.

Finally in 1895, the land was given to a member of the Habsburg family, Archduke Rainer. In 1908, the archduke built an imposing neo-Empire style castle at the top of the mountain, overlooking all of Vienna. The castle was converted into a hotel, christened the *Schloss Wilhelminenberg* (reviewed on page 4). The hotel's low rates, spectacular view, and easy access to downtown make it an equally good base for hikes in the woods and trips into the city. The hotel also has a good café with an outdoor terrace overlooking the city, so, even if you are not staying there, you can still linger and enjoy the view. What makes the view so spectacular is that it overlooks the center of Vienna and far off into the plain that stretches into Hungary, Slovakia and beyond.

### Getting There

Using public transportation, you

can ride the #3 U-bahn to the end station Ottakring. From there, catch either bus #46B or #146B. Both travel up one side of the Wilhelminenberg and down the other; but in opposite directions.

By car, take the Gürtel to Thaliasstrasse. At the end of Thaliasstrasse, turn right onto Johann-Staud-strasse, which climbs the Gallitzinberg. To make the complete circle around the top of the mountain, turn right at the fire station onto Savoyenstrasse, and then right again onto Wilhelminenbergstrasse, which leads back down to the foot of the mountain.

### Gallitzinberg Walks

Once on the mountain, you can explore it on foot. Its back side has routes that link to the rest of the Vienna Woods and on top is a look-out spiral tower with spectacular views of the city and the woods.

Our recommended walk takes in the *Steinhofgründe* and one of Otto Wagner's masterworks, the **Church of the Steinhof**. The route typically begins near the top of Gallitzinberg, though hearty souls can start below and battle uphill, if they prefer.

The *Steinhofgründe* is a large public park located behind the city's main psychiatric clinic. From up top, the grounds can be entered from behind the large 19<sup>th</sup>-century fire station just off of Johann-Staud-strasse, which can be reached on either of the aforementioned buses (though #46B is a bit faster).

Once inside, the path to the left leads to a large field with a children's playground, while the walkway to the right goes to a field ringed with rosehip bushes. Continue straight on the path lined with walnut trees (feel free to collect a few nuts if it's the right time of the season) until reaching a water trough carved in the bough of a tree and a small caretaker's cottage. Behind is a little duck pond and a fruit orchard. At this point, following the trail to the left brings you to a spectacular sight: a string of meadows bordered by woods that roll down to the Rosenthal river valley below and look out on the green hills of the

Vienna Woods beyond. The scene provides a wonderful backdrop for a picnic or afternoon snack.

Take the path down the slope (a 20-minute walk) where you will exit the park and walk around to the front of the psychiatric clinic. Why on earth would you want to visit a such a place? Because it is the site of architect Otto Wagner's masterpiece, the **Church of the Steinhof**, which historian Carl E. Schorske called one of "the most radically modern monumental buildings built by a European state since the erection of the Eiffel Tower."

During the day, the clinic grounds, laid out according to a plan made by Wagner, are open to the public, so you won't need any special permission to enter through the main gates. (Intrepid souls can also enter the grounds from the *Steinhofgründe*, through one of the permanent holes in the fence that is a short walk from the duck pond — follow the well-trod foot paths).

The main gates of the clinic are of brick and wrought iron bent into *Jugendstil* designs. A broad walkway lined with fir trees climbs the terraced grounds, past attractive turn-of-the-century brick buildings and a small theater (look for the bust of Franz Josef out front).

Perched high on a wide terrace above is the church, a stunning marble jewel box crowned with an imposing copper-plated cupola. The front façade is covered in white marble slabs attached by aluminum studs. Over the entrance are three slender *Jugendstil* angels, and on the front towers are seated statues of the patriarchs Moses and St. Peter. (Moses is holding a copy of the church.) Behind the angels are spectacular stain glass windows designed by the Secessionist, Kolo Moser.

The interior is astounding. The walls and floor are decorated in pure white tile accented with gold and blue mosaics. On the sides are more elaborate stain glass windows by Moser. The altar is a stunning gold dome overshadowed only by the enormous mosaic behind, designed

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## COUNTRY VIENNA

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by Remigius Geyling in glittering majolica, marble, glass and enamel. The church is only open on Saturdays at 3 pm, but if you go at any other time you can still peek in the windows. Though few visitors come here, this is one of the city most impressive buildings.

Although they are not on the Gallitzinberg, two other *Jugendstil* Wagner buildings can be found on nearby Hüttelbergstrasse. These are the graceful **Villa Wagner I and II**. The latter is now a private home, but you can still see the exterior from the street, including a lovely mosaic over the main entrance.

The other villa, however, is open to the public. It is also referred to as **Villa Fuchs**, after Austrian artist Ernst Fuchs, who has opened a private museum inside the historic building. Fuchs, a member of the flamboyantly mystical school of Viennese Fantastic Realism, has transformed the villa into his own work of art. Though certainly not for everyone, the museum is a memorable experience. It feels like visiting the artist's home. You walk in the gates, ring the doorbell and are let in to wander around the rooms on your own, or the artist's daughter might even show you around.

A few of the decorations are by *Jugendstil* artists, but most everything else is designed by Fuchs himself — not only the large, vibrant paintings and triptychs on the wall, but the sculptures, chairs, floor tiles, even the door handles and the silk wallpaper.

Outside is a small pavilion — what Fuchs refers to as a meditation room — that defies description. Its exterior is incredibly ornate and the interior even more so — almost like a large piece of architectural jewelry. The museum, located at Hüttelbergstrasse 26, is open Mon-Fri 10am-4pm (tel+43/01/914 85 75). It can be reached on Bus 148 and 152.

A visit to Gallitzinberg provides a glimpse of Vienna seldom seen by

tourists. It could easily fill a weekend or you could simply try one of the walks or restaurants on a daytrip or afternoon jaunt from the city. The Gallitzinberg is too nice for the Viennese to keep to themselves.

### Accommodations

Hotel Schloss Wilhelminenberg

This lovely neo-Empire style castle is one of Vienna's best — but least-known — bargains.

A circular drive provides a regal entrance to the graceful colonnaded structure. The enclosed cobblestone carriage entranceway leads to the spacious, ivory-colored main hall. The polished stone floor gleams with the reflection of the crystal and brass chandelier dangling from the coffered ceiling above. To the right is a small reception desk, and on the left is a grand staircase dressed with a long red carpet.

Behind the reception is the restaurant and café. The restaurant is good, if a bit pricey, but the café is certainly worth a visit. Take a seat in the enclosed terrace or on the outdoor patio with sweeping views of the city.

Spread out in back of the hotel is a spacious green lawn fringed with vineyards. There is also a small playground for children and a nearby minigolf course.

Parking is free in the lot out front.

Guestrooms are divided into standard rooms and split-level studios. Both are decorated in attractive contemporary furnishings with tastefully muted fabrics and shower-only tile baths.

With their astounding 9-foot ceilings and tall windows overlooking the city, the best rooms are the studios on the first and second floor. Because these rooms are relatively small, the height of the ceilings and windows seems all the greater. Note that the handful of standard rooms on the first two floors overlook the parking lot and those on the third floor have city views, but you will have to stand on your tip toes to look out the windows.

Most impressive about the hotel is the price — a third of what other castle and manor hotels in the city charge, and a good deal less than some without peerage.

**Daily Rates:** Single in standard room 675 ATS (\$48), single in studio 795 ATS (\$57), double in standard room 900 ATS (\$64), double in studio 1010 ATS (\$72).

**Contact:** Hotel Schloss Wilhelminenberg, Savoyenstrasse 2, A-1160 Vienna, tel. +43/01/485 85030, fax +43/01/485 4876.

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 17/20

Hotel Gallitzinberg

Not as impressive as its castle competitor, but still a small, solid, and well-run hotel in a quiet neighborhood, the Gallitzinberg is in a modern dormered building halfway up the eponymous mountain.

Little space is spent on public rooms — the reception is no more than a small wood desk in the hall entrance. However, guests who want to lounge can do so in the large breakfast room or on the small terrace out front.

Upstairs, plain double doors open onto simple rooms decorated with built-in furniture, floral fabrics, and low pile carpet. Studios are a bit bigger than standard rooms, and some offer kitchenettes and coffee and tea services. Rooms overlook either the tree-lined street or a large walnut tree out back. Two larger apartments on the top floor make decorative use of the sloping ceilings, and have skylights with electric shades.

Parking is free in the hotel's private garage.

**Daily Rates:** Single with shower only 760-860 ATS (\$54-\$61), Double with shower only 1150-1200 ATS (\$82-\$86), Studio with bath 1300 ATS (\$93), Apartment 1500 ATS (\$107).

**Contact:** Hotel Gallitzinberg, Johann-Staud-Strasse 32, 1160 Vienna, tel. +43/01/419-8770, fax +43/01/419-87705, email komark@hotelgallitzinberg.at.

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20 VALUE 10/20

EDITOR'S  
CHOICE

## Sustenance

### Villa Aurora

The Villa Aurora is reason alone to visit the Gallitzinberg. Good food, a scenic setting and marvelous view amply reward the short ride from downtown. (For guests of *Schloss Wilhelminenberg*, the Aurora is only a 5-minute walk.)

It is difficult to do justice to Aurora's wealth of offerings in this limited space. It consists of an attractive cluster of 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings surrounded by a cast-iron fence and shaded by enormous horse chestnut trees. The main structure is a lovely two-story villa with enclosed wooden sun terraces on each floor.

Curving around the back and side is a pebble patio set with green *Heuriger* tables, which are busy during the warmer months. Also to the side is a long wooden building that holds a pretty 19<sup>th</sup>-century swimming pool and *kegelbahn* (a small bowling alley) that can be reserved for parties.

Next to it is a former barn converted to a rustic banquet space. At the rear is a level grassy area and beyond that a small field with wood benches for guests to enjoy the sweeping views over Vienna. Stairs lead down to a small playground.

The interior of the villa is as charming as its grounds. The first floor consists of two large rooms. The first has aged plank-wood floors, polished wainscoting and rustic wooden tables surrounded by antique straight-back chairs.

The second room is in the enclosed terrace, with large-wood framed windows on three sides and traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century tile floors. In the evening, the windows and wood paneling glimmer with the flickering light of candles.

The restaurant is also quite kid friendly, offering a host of distractions, including an antique rocking horse and a rocking bear for children.

The food is very well prepared and presented, especially the large,

wafer-thin *Schnitzels*, which are served with an astounding assortment of greens. A particular bargain is the working-day lunch menu, which offers the Austria's Three "S's"—soup, *Schnitzel*, and *Strudel*—all for a low 86 ATS (\$6). The first course consists of *Grießnockerlsuppe* (a pillow-soft farina dumpling in chicken broth), followed by a heavenly *Wienerschnitzel* from pork served with a dollop of mashed potatoes, a splash of pickled green beans, and an enormous salad. Dessert is a hearty serving of apple *Strudel* served with a dusting of confectioner's sugar and a strand of gem-like red currants.

A la carte offerings are also tasty and well-priced. Appetizers include stuffed zucchini blossoms (128 ATS; \$9), duck breast carpaccio (148 ATS; \$11), and different soups, some served in bowls formed from hollowed-out vegetables.

Recommended main courses include the *Schnitzels* (110-148 ATS; \$8-\$11), Salzburg *Roulade* (ham, sheep cheese and pumpkin seeds rolled in a pork scallop, which is then breaded and fried; 156 ATS, or \$11), and roasted Barbarie duck breast served in red wine sauce with red cabbage (195 ATS; \$14).

Desserts are the traditional Austrian delights such as *Kaiserschmarren* (a sweet pancake broken up, sautéed in butter, dusted in confectioner's sugar, and served with plum compote), *Mohr im Hemd* (a chocolate almond soufflé served with chocolate sauce), and, of course, apple *Strudel*. Order the plum *Strudel* if they have it.

The Villa Aurora also can arrange gourmet picnic baskets for two (650-680 ATS; \$46-\$49). The breakfast basket includes fresh-squeezed orange juice, champagne, smoked salmon, and a reproduction of Eduard Manet's famous painting "Luncheon on the Grass." The restaurant admirably achieves its promise to allow guests to relive the cosy pleasures of the good old *Kaiserzeit*.

Villa Aurora, Wilhelminenstrasse 237, tel +43/01/489 33 33, open daily 10:00 am-midnight.

### Papuschek & Kohl

This unusual *nouvelle Heuriger* is located in a charming two-story house that clings to one of the Gallitzinberg's steeper slopes.

The P&K is reached via a small shady lane that winds its way from the entrance of the Steinhofgrunde down to the little garden houses that cover the Rosenthal or, "valley of roses."

The building is pearl blue with a red tile roof and a large sculpture of a sunflower just under the awning. A little wooden bridge crosses to a cobblestone patio set with wooden tables under silky white umbrellas. Above, a canopy of horse chestnuts dapples the light from the blue sky and summer sun.

During the colder months, café tables in the small rooms below the terrace with little wood-framed windows overlooking the Rosenthal, are filled with guests. The atmosphere might be called *neo-gemütlich*.

The food is a tasty departure from traditional *Heuriger* fare. The menu, printed in a blue school notebook, offers a salmon and spinach lasagna (128 ATS; \$9), roasted dumpling with egg and truffle sauce (115 ATS; \$8), and — my personal favorite — oyster mushrooms and chicken strips marinated in soy sauce and roasted sunflower-seed oil (88 ATS; \$6).

The wine list reflects the owner's taste and good judgment, with quality wines from the Weinviertel and Burgenland, as well as a few international selections.

Oddly, Papuschek & Kohl is closed during the winter and every other month between May and December. But when it is open, it is certain to be filled with Viennese enjoying good wine and good food. Papuschek & Kohl, Heschweg 185, tel +43/01/[ ], open Tue-Sat 5-11:30 pm. Closed June, Aug., Oct. and Dec.-Apr.

### 10er Marie

Though technically, not on the Gallitzinberg, this lovely old *Heuriger*, the city's oldest, is near enough

## COUNTRY VIENNA

Continued from page 5


and historic enough to warrant mentioning. It has been serving guests as far back as 1740 — a good four decades before Emperor Joseph II first allowed the wineries to directly sell their new wine.

The 10er Marie is housed in a small vine-covered cottage on a little square at the foot of the Gallitzinberg. Walk inside the gates and you will find a cluster of cosy rooms located off two pretty courtyards, one shaded by a chestnut tree and the other by a walnut tree.

In its time, this inauspicious *Lokal* has attracted some of the greats: Schubert and Strauss the elder imbibed here (though at different times), as did the tragic Prince Rudolph and his favorite *fiaker* driver.

The buffet boasts an extensive *Heuriger* menu of cream spreads (*Liptauer*, blue cheese and herb), salads, pickled vegetables and cold cuts, as well as fried and oven-roasted meats such as *Stelze* (grilled knuckle of pork), *Kümmelbraten* (crispy roast pork with caraway seeds), *Schnitzel* and roast chicken. *Grammel* (cracklings) and *Schmaltz* (lard) spreads are also available for the strong at heart. The new wines are served in carafes or *gespritz* (with a little soda water).

To visit is to experience history.

10er Marie, Ottakringerstrasse 222-224, tel +43/01/489 46 47, open 3-11 pm daily. 

## READERS' FORUM

### Advice for Europe By Air Fliers

In April my wife and I traveled to Italy and Greece and in doing so used **Europe by Air** on four flights without any real problem. However, we found that you need to allow yourself lots of extra time at the airport to locate the site to exchange the prepaid vouchers for tickets.

This was not always easy. First

you need to find the person who handles tickets for your particular airline and, since they are smaller airlines, this required a fair amount of hunting. Some of the smaller airports were not familiar with the Europe by Air vouchers so it took awhile to get tickets issued.

You also must pay the local departure taxes at this time. Once your tickets are issued you must locate the correct check-in location for your airline and then, of course, the correct departure gate.

All of this takes time in unfamiliar airports. It is hard to beat the price, however, and we have been telling friends about Europe By Air.

The reason for this e-mail however is to tell you that it is my understanding that the three-leg purchase is no longer required. Thanks for my favorite travel publication.

GARY SHIRLEY  
SHORELINE WA

### More Cheap Europe Flights

Re your June issue on cheap flights within Europe. I suggest you look at [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com). I flew Amsterdam-London, London-Edinburg the first of July this year and the fare was great. No problems at all. I checked EasyJet with several people before I booked the ticket over the internet and had a positive response from each one.

JOHN TEAGUE  
VIA EMAIL

### Recommends the Lötschental

My wife and I visited Blatten in Switzerland's Lötschental for two days at the end of May. We stayed at your recommended **Hotel Edelweiss** (Blatten im Lötschental, CH-3919 Wallis, tel. +41/027/939 1363, fax 939 1053) and absolutely loved it!

The hospitality, food and room (we stayed in your favorite #202 — wonderful views of the valley) were all excellent. Charlotte, the co-owner, was extremely gracious and told us she has very, very few guests from the U.S. In fact, we were the only Americans staying at the hotel.

Thanks to you we discovered a special, secluded valley with awe-

some scenery, great hiking, no tourist crowds and a very welcoming hotel.

LYNN PETERSON  
VIA EMAIL

### Credit Card Ripoff

On a recent tour of the Baltic states, I had occasion to make two small cash advances totaling \$32.30 for tips, souvenirs, etc. using an AT&T Universal Visa Card.

When my statement arrived I was dismayed to discover that there is a minimum \$10 fee on any cash advance, which meant I was assessed \$20 for withdrawing \$32, which the statement indicated was an annual percentage rate of 743%!

I suggest that all your readers look at the fine print in their credit agreements before making any cash withdrawals.

ROBERT A. ATKINS  
VIA EMAIL

(Ed. Note: When in Europe, *Gemütlichkeit* recommends using an ATM card to obtain cash, withdrawing \$200-\$300 each time. The fee for each withdrawal is likely to be about \$2. Use credit cards wherever possible for purchases, but not for cash advances.)

### German Wine Website

I think your readers will enjoy a website on German wine put out by the "Cork Dork." How can a site run by someone with a name like that NOT be good! He did help us prior to our last trip this Spring. Go to [www.vinonet.com](http://www.vinonet.com).

NANCY ALTHOUSE  
VIA EMAIL

### Correction

I am complimented that you printed my restaurant recommendation of **Landhaus St. Urban**, but a typo by me and one by you must have left the readers wondering if the ever inventive Germans are not only developing new biotech foods, but also space age ways of cooking them.

First, our group was served grilled scallops, not "frilled scallops", and secondly we enjoyed veal prepared two ways, not "Vela." Keep up the good work.

CARY FEIBLEMAN  
VIA EMAIL

## Expo 2000 Woes

Just returned from Expo 2000...what a dud this expo is! Poorly attended (so far) and I can see why. Acres and acres of concrete and steel...lacks the energy and excitement of Expo 86 in Vancouver. A few exhibits are really worth visiting, but most will not really interest the person looking for variety and personal interaction.

The political undercurrent is overwhelming. I call it the "Rodney King Expo" i.e. "Can't we all just get along?"

Definitely not worth spending more than one day.

By the way, the hotel people in the region are all experiencing occupancy rates way below what was predicted. When you mention the effect of Expo, they all roll their eyes and tell you it is a disaster. Room rates dropping precipitously, particularly in communities near Hannover that expected people to train to the Expo site from their town. In Wolfenbüttel, for example, we stayed in a **Treff Hotel** with an Expo season rack rate of 295 DM (\$142)...their "new" rate was 130 DM (\$63).

JOHN KOELLER  
VIA EMAIL

## Berlin Raves

Just wanted to let you know that last month, as a result of reading *Gemütlichkeit*, we stayed at the **Art Nouveau Hotel** (tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40) in Berlin and ate lunch at **Rogacki** (Wilmsdorfer Str. 145)...both mentioned in your Dec. 1999 issue. Christine at the Art Nouveau could not have been nicer and the location is excellent. The elevator is a rare gem! Anyone staying in the Savigny Platz area should go to Rogacki...it is truly an experience.

BOB PELLETIER  
VIA EMAIL

## HOTEL GUT SCHMELMERHOF

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was more what we had in mind, a substantial, three-story structure set about 50 yards back from the lightly traveled road and built in the style of region's farm houses; weathered wood and white stucco with plenty

of flower boxes affixed to terraces.

The interior was even more inviting: rambling, elegantly rustic public rooms and a series of connecting dining rooms that seemed to go on forever, with fireplaces, vaulted brick ceilings, and lots of wood trim. After a warm and cheery welcome we were quickly settled in a pair of extra-size double rooms with overstuffed chairs and couches and all the necessities. For one night only the price of each room was 220 DM (\$106).

In the early evening we soaked in the country atmosphere at an umbrella table on the terrace along the front of the hotel and sipped pre-dinner drinks brought to us by charming, white-coated young servers.

Had there been more time we might have availed ourselves of the hotel's considerable health and beauty facilities including indoor and outdoor pools, saunas, steambaths, exercise rooms and such arcane "cure" therapies as *Fangopackung*, *Lymphdrainage*, and *Akupunktmassage*.

At check-in, a large table in a quiet location in one of the dining rooms was reserved for us. We could show up at whatever time suited us. At about 8pm we settled down at our table with its pink cover and napkins in the blue and white check pattern of the Bavarian flag.

A visit to a just-average salad bar preceded a good but not great meal. This was *Spargel* (asparagus) season and either the fat white stalks or the more familiar, slenderer, green spears were part of each dish. Every asparagus rendition was excellent. *Schweinfilet* (33 DM/\$16) came with splendid *Bratkartoffeln* and baked green asparagus. *Wiener Schnitzel* (34 DM/\$16) that could have been thinner was served with several hefty stalks of white *Spargel* bathed in butter. The white variety also accompanied an incredibly bone-ridden, grilled trout (24 DM/\$12) and an under-salted breast of chicken (35 DM/\$17) in a morel mushroom sauce.

A bottle of the Spanish wine, *Evo Guelbenzu*, was 62 DM (\$30), a bit less than in restaurants at home.



The simple desserts — *Strudel* with ice cream and hot raspberry sauce over ice cream — were in the 10 DM (\$5) range.

The meal for four persons was about \$80 without beverages.

Even though the food was not stellar, the Gut Schmelmerhof has most of what we seek in a country, resort hotel: beautiful, quiet setting; spacious guest rooms, and friendly staff. We give it a strong recommendation.

For Americans, the bucolic Bayerischerwald is well off the beaten track. It will appeal to the traveler who can find fulfillment in the countryside. The nearest city of any size is Regensburg, just over 40 miles away, whose interesting old town escaped WWII unscathed. A little farther distant, but still within daytrip range, are Passau and Nürnberg.

The region is for the auto traveler; there is no rail service to St. Englmar or Rettenbach. To find these towns, you will need a good map with a scale of 1:200,000 or, even better, 1:150,000. From the Autobahn that connects Regensburg and Passau, take the Bogen exit (#107) and proceed northeast. However, you will need the proper map because between Rettenbach and the Autobahn is a maze of country lanes.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 88 to 165 DM (\$42-\$79), Doubles 190 to 290 DM (\$91-\$139)

**Contact:** Romantik Hotel Gut Schmelmerhof, Rettenbach 24, D-94379 St. Englmar, tel. +49/09965/1890, fax 189140, email hotel@gut-schmelmerhof.de

**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 16/20

## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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exact destination city but you can specify a region.

- An informative article entitled *Bargain Spas of Bohemia*.

- A list of 10 top airfare discounters was led by **Cheap Tickets** (800-377-1000, [www.cheaptickets.com](http://www.cheaptickets.com)) and **1-800-FLY CHEAP** ([www.flycheap.com](http://www.flycheap.com))

□ Speaking of guidebooks, the **Eyewitness** series has just released a Berlin book and it's a knockout. In my opinion, this nicely-bound edition with hundreds of great color photos, is now the best all-round guide to Europe's most dynamic city.

□ We sell **European Rail Passes** at prices supposedly available only in the U.S. and established by Rail Europe and its partners in Europe. However, I am duty bound to inform you that, at current exchange rates, you can get Swiss Passes and their variations cheaper by buying them at rail stations in Switzerland.

The Swiss prices are cheaper across the board. There's not room to list them all, but here are a couple of examples of the savings to had by waiting until you get to Switzerland to purchase: Here, the regular four-day Swiss Pass is \$245 first class and \$160 second class. In Switzerland you'll pay 350 Sfr. (\$210) first class and 160 Sfr. (\$138) second class. It's a better deal the longer you stay. A 21-day Swiss Pass is \$458 (1<sup>st</sup> cl) and \$305 (2<sup>nd</sup> cl) in the U.S while the Switzerland prices are 660 Sfr. (\$395) and 440 Sfr. (\$263).

□ Our favorite mid-priced hotel in Vienna, the **Altstadt** (Kirchengasse 41, tel. +43/01/526 3399-0, fax 523 4901) has added a new floor and three new suites: the White Suite with Mies van der Rohe furniture and 4-poster bed; the quiet Freud Suite; and the Camilla Suite (after owner Otto Wiesenthal's daughter) with a huge sitting room. Suite prices range from 1980 to 2780 AST (\$135 to \$189). Singles are 1280 to 1580 AST (\$87 to \$108) and doubles are 1580 to 1980 AST (\$108 to \$135). ☒

# Train Talk

## The Swiss Travel System

**The Swiss Pass** and the **Swiss Flexi Pass** are more than just national rail passes. They are integrated products that include travel throughout the **Swiss Travel System (STS)** — rail, boats, postal buses, even street-cars and buses in cities — which comprise more than 300 separate transportation companies. No other European rail passes are so all-inclusive. They also offer Europe's most generous family plan, allowing children under 16 to travel free if accompanied by a parent.

These passes are issued in both first and second class for varying periods of travel.

Two other Switzerland transportation passes to consider are the **Swiss Transfer Ticket** (introduced this year) and the **Swiss Card**. The Swiss Transfer Ticket is good for a roundtrip journey between any Swiss airport or border station and any Swiss destination. Let's say you fly into Geneva, want to spend a few days skiing in Zermatt and then fly out via Zürich. Or a business traveler arrives in Zürich, attends a meeting in Interlaken, and leaves the country by train from Geneva. The Swiss Transfer Ticket will cover both routings at a flat rate of \$71 2<sup>nd</sup>-class or \$107 1<sup>st</sup>-class (cheaper in Switzerland; see col. 1 this page). The family plan also applies to this ticket.

The Swiss Card works the same way. The only difference is that it also includes a half-fare card entitling the holder to purchase additional tickets (railway, cable-cars, etc) in Switzerland at a 50% discount. It is ideal for travelers that headquarter in a central location and take daytrips. One other important distinction: the Swiss Pass, grants a 25% discount on mountain excursions (cablecars, rack railways), whereas with the Swiss Card the reduction is 50%.

A convenience to rail travelers in Switzerland is that, unlike many other European countries, reservations are not necessary. In fact, the SBB (Swiss

Railroad) actually discourages them. In an interview in *Switzerland Network News* (a publication for travel agents) Hugo Furrer, SBB Director, said: "I realize many clients will find it hard to understand why they cannot pre-book train seats in Switzerland...reassure them they can always find a seat, since there are lots of cars and service is frequent."

Reservations can be made on some main Intercity-lines (for example Zürich-Bern-Geneva or Zurich-Interlaken/Brig), but it's compulsory only on a few of the scenic journeys like the Glacier or William Tell Express.

Frequency and quality of rolling stock are two more great features of the STS. Intercity trains run every half hour on all main lines and the comfortable SBB doubledecker Intercity trains are seen regularly on the St. Gallen-Zürich-Bern-Interlaken, Basel-Zürich-Chur and Zurich-Lucerne lines.

In addition, last May SBB introduced the first of its new ICN fleet, tilting Intercity trains with state-of-the-art design. This new equipment has shortened travel time and eventually will be extended to all major lines.

Over the last few years, Switzerland has experienced a bicycling boom with new routes being opened all over the country. It is easy to combine a bike trip with train travel. Bicycle rental is available at over 200 railway stations and travelers with a STS ticket are eligible for a reduced rental rate of 21 Sfr. (\$13) per day or 100 Sfr. (\$60) for six days. Riders can transport their bikes on almost all trains for 10 Sfr. (\$6) per day.

Traveling by train in a wheelchair has also been taken into consideration by the STS. All-trains on main lines feature wheelchair compartments (unfortunately, they cannot be pre-booked), and if help is needed, a special lift is available at all major stations, provided the station has advance notice. For more information, contact any major railway station in Switzerland. ☒