

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

October 16, 2000

Must Book Swissair by Dec. 31

Subscribers who wish to take advantage of the special *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber discounts on **Swissair** in 2001 are strongly advised to book no later than December 31. That is the date when the current agreement between Swissair and *Gemütlichkeit* expires. Renewal seems unlikely.

Over the past two years, in order to streamline operations and reduce costs, Swissair has undergone significant personnel and procedural changes. The airline has told *Gemütlichkeit* that the administrative cost of tracking and ticketing *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers no longer justifies the discounts provided. We proposed a booking and ticketing option that would have greatly simplified the reservation and ticketing procedure (or so it seemed to us), but to no avail.

We still believe Swissair has the best ground and inflight personnel of any airline flying the Atlantic and remains the best way to get to Europe from North America.

If, due to the demise of this program you will make your next trip to Europe on an airline other than Swissair, you are encouraged to share that information with Swissair management.

Continued on page 2...

This Month in Gemütlichkeit

Columns	Page
Dear Subscriber	1
Features	
Passau	1
Mosel Trip	1
Europe Travel Briefs	8
Best Web Sites	5
Hotels/Restaurants	
Hotel Schloss Ort, Passau G	4
Hotel Weisser Hase, Passau G	4
Hotel Wilder Mann, Passau G	4
Hotel Zum König, Passau G	5
Hotel Passauer Wolf, Passau G	5
Rest. Hacklberger Bräustüberl, Passau G	5
Rest. Heilig-Geist-Stift-Schenki, Passau G	5
Konditorei-Café Greindl, Passau G	6
Hotel Weinhaus Moselschild, Ürzig G	7

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

PASSAU

On a narrow peninsula at the confluence of the Danube, Inn and Ilz rivers sits picturesque Passau. Our Doug Linton finds no trouble whatsoever in "river city."

When Kriemhild, the heroine of the German epic saga *The Nibelungenlied*, was on her way to meet her new husband, King Etzel (a.k.a. Attila the Hun), she stopped off to visit her uncle, Bishop Pilgrim, who lived in a lovely little town on the Danube called Passau. All the merchants came out to greet her, and her uncle was so delighted he asked her to stay a few days. She apologized, and said she couldn't, because a bunch of knights were waiting for her in the next kingdom.

Besides the fact that she is later killed by Etzel, Kriemhild might have regretted that she didn't stay

longer in Passau. It really is a lovely town.

The city is blessed with an enviable location and lovely architecture. Passau sits on a slender, finger-shaped peninsula that points to the confluence of three rivers: the Danube, the Inn and the little Ilz. For the best view of this watery meeting, stand at the *Dreiflusseck* (Three River's Corner) at the end of the old town, or go up to a vantage point on the citadel, and you can watch the pale blue waters of the Inn meet the dark green waters of the Danube, while the slender black waters of the Ilz join quietly at the side. While the rivers meet, they don't blend until

Continued on page 3...

A Mosel Wine & Dine

Recently, we drove one of our favorite stretches of German road, the glorious *Moselweinstrasse*, in the Mosel River valley. Though only passing through, there was still time for dinner and a night's sleep at a small village not far from where our favorite German wine is produced. This is about that brief stay and a visit to the vineyard which produces the wine.

Great Moments in Newsletter Publishing

The Rhine gets most of the publicity but, in our opinion, the Mosel has better wine and prettier scenery. To us, the more acidic Mosels - always in slope-shouldered green bottles - are superior to their "fatter," sweeter, brown-bottled Rhine brethren.

This, of course, is a matter of

personal taste. At least as many will argue in favor of the brown bottled Rhines.

When it comes to attractiveness as a tourist destination, however, we seem to find more unanimity. The drive along the more peaceful, less trafficked Mosel, between Trier and Koblenz, is one of Germany's most rewarding 125 kilometers (actually 250 kilometers, there is a road on both sides of the river). The river twists and turns back on itself in a series of sweeping bends that confuses even drivers with the keenest sense of direction. It flows through a twisty canyon of famous vineyards — Wehlener Sonnenuhr, Bernkasteler Doctor, Graacher Himmelreich — which rise hundreds of feet from the

Continued on page 6...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

Reto Wilhelm
General Manager for North America
Swissair
41 Pinelawn Road
Melville NY 11747
email: rwillhelm@sairgroup.com

Silvio Schmid
West Coast Manager
Swissair
1970 Broadway #910
Oakland CA 94612
email: ssschmid@sairgroup.com

Phoning Home

There is something to be said for travel in Europe during the good old days before technology when there was no CNN on your hotel room's small black and white TV, a phone call to the U.S. was so expensive it was made only in dire emergency, and, of course, there were no Internet cafes or online hookups in hotel rooms where one could browse the Web for a reservation for the next hotel or send an email back to office or home. What's to be said for those low-tech days is the sense one had of being far away and unreachable.

But a case can also be made for technology. All these new gadgets make being on the road just that much easier. It won't be long, for example, before I will be able to spend part of the year in Europe and still publish this newsletter.

But one of the difficulties yet to be overcome is voice communica-

tion. It's still expensive to call home from Europe. AT&T's USA Direct service is over \$5 for the first minute of calling and more than \$2 for each minute thereafter. Of course, there are cheaper calling plans but you still have to have a phone. In Europe, you probably don't spend much time in your hotel room and, when you're out and about, public phones are hard to find and not very convenient.

Cell phones would seem to hold the immediate answer, but we have different standards in the U.S. than in Europe. The Nokia or Motorola you use at home won't work overseas.

Last year I wandered into an electronics store in Berlin and inquired about purchasing a cell phone for use in Europe. The prices were reasonable but I couldn't sign up for the monthly service because I had no European address.

Now, subscriber M J Weisman of Bala Cynwyd, PA, seems to have found a solution. He recently purchased a phone and activated it with a prepaid electronic card known as a SIM. No local address — beyond his hotel — was required.

Mr. Weisman bought a dual band Ericsson phone from Niedermeyer in Vienna (stores on the Ring, Graben and Kärntnerstrasse) for \$100 and paid about \$25 for the SIM, which provides the phone number. Instead of subscribing to a service he purchases postage stamp sized

electronic calling cards which are loaded with a specified amount of calling time. A typical card might contain 500 to 1000 AS (\$32-\$64) in calling credit which, in Austria, is used up at 9.7 AS (62 cents) per minute for outgoing calls to the U.S. and 6 AS (38 cents) per minute for local calls. Unlike the U.S., however, incoming calls are not charged.

For the traveler who wants to stay in touch with family or business, the advantages are obvious: from wherever your cell phone works you can initiate relatively inexpensive calls to virtually anywhere and receive incoming ones. How many times, for example, have you had to hang around your hotel waiting for a phone call? Now you can get it at a sidewalk café or hiking in the forest; a horrifying prospect for some, but liberating for many others.

One small complication: you'll need a SIM card (and thus a separate phone number) for each country in which you wish to use your phone. Be sure, too, to get a dual band phone.

Continued on page 8...

Keep in mind that...

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

Vol. 14, No. 10
October, 2000

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

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

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

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

HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria		Value Rating	Scale
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

Special Designation

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

PASSAU

Continued from page 1

some kilometers later. It is quite a sight to see their fluid borders continue to thread and swirl their way downstream. Of course, this is on a good day—at other times, the three rivers will be various shades of brown, but you can still see the distinctions.

Passau's history also belongs to the rivers. The city flourished as a key transit point of the salt trade, until the Bavarians finally opened up a competing salt works in 1568. The city still was able to live off the plentiful trade that went up and down the rivers, particularly the Danube. Today, the three rivers continue to bring riches. Most of the boats that dock in Passau are heavily laden with a bounty of tourists — 75,630 in 1999 alone — who arrive on day cruises from Linz or longer ones from as far away as Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, and even the Black Sea, although these have been suspended until the Danube can be cleared past Yugoslavia.

Kriemhild's uncle, Bishop Pilgrim, was one of the city's prince bishops who did double duty as leaders of both the church and state. This was a similar situation to that of the prince bishops in Salzburg, a nearby rival, who were equally well "loved" by their subjects. In both cities, the high dramatic citadels were built more to defend the prince bishops from their own people, rather than to defend their people from invaders.

What to See in Passau

But, as they say, people aren't all bad. The bishops also bequeathed the city a number of lovely baroque buildings. The foremost of these is the **St. Stephan's Cathedral**, which served as the mother church for that other St. Stephan's in Vienna, a city that was once in the bishops' domain (at its peak, the bishops' rule extended as far as Hungary).

The cathedral was originally a Gothic church, but it was destroyed in a fire in 1662. Two years later the bishop of that time, Wenzeslaus von

Passau Basics

Population: 50,000

Altitude: 290 meters/951 feet

Travel Distances/Rail Times:

City	KM/Miles	Rail Times
Berlin	607/379	7:00
Dresden	506/314	7:00
Frankfurt	443/275	4:30
Geneva	788/492	11:00
Hamburg	822/511	6:30
Munich	193/120	2:15
Paris	961/597	11:00
Salzburg	142/89	2:30
Vienna	286/178	3:30
Zürich	504/313	7:30

Tourist Information:

Passau Tourismus, Bahnhofstrasse 36, D-94032 Passau, tel +49/0851/95 59 80, fax 57 29 8, email: tourist-info@passau.de.

The office is run by a very committed staff under the direction of their friendly and extremely helpful leader, Pia Olligschläger.

Main Sights:

- Oberhaus Fortress
- St. Stephan's Cathedral
- Glass Museum
- St. Michael's Church

Thun, decided to rebuild the cathedral in the latest style, which happened to be baroque. The basic frame is Gothic — wide and with uniform rows of pillars — but the lavish stucco decorations of cherubs, fruits, vegetables and shrubbery are clearly baroque.

A second notable thing about the cathedral is that it has the world's largest church organ. (There is a larger *concert* organ in the United States, but it is not located in a house of worship.) The cathedral's organ is made up of five distinct parts: The monumental main organ is located in the back, flanked by two side organs; a choir organ stands up front; and an echo organ is hidden in the "Holy Ghost hole" in the ceiling, so named because in the olden days a white dove was lowered through this hole during Pentecost. The pipes range from an eleven-meter long behemoth to a six-millimeter pip-squeak, which

only dogs and small children can hear. During the summer and the Christmas holidays, a short organ recital can be heard daily at noon for a small admission fee. During the rest of the year, the organ can be heard during Sunday Mass.

Next to the cathedral is the **New Residence**, which the bishops built once they felt safe enough to live amongst their own people. The exterior seems fairly neoclassical, but the building's real treasure is inside. Actually, this isn't the cathedral treasury, which is also located here, but the recently-restored rococo staircase, with its lacy, vine-like stucco molding, decorative carved wooden doors, and bronze lanterns on each landing. It shouldn't be missed, and not just because it's free.

Of Passau's several museums, the privately-owned **Passau Glass Museum**, located in the Hotel Wilder Mann, is easily the most impressive. It displays the collection of local travel entrepreneur, Georg Höltl, who is interesting enough in his own right to warrant a digression. Höltl made his money in promoting a unique and low-cost means of adventure travel, called the "Rotel." Travelers on a "Rotel" tour spend the day riding around on a bus visiting sites, and then at night sleep in cubicle-sized sleeping berths either on the bus or in a trailer linked up behind. While this might sound like an adventure in itself, the real adventure comes from the locations—the Rotel tours travel throughout Africa, China, and India as well as across the Central Asian Silk Road. Trips can last for more than a month.

But back to the museum. Höltl's collection consists of an astounding 30,000 pieces of glass dating from 1700-1950. Styles include Baroque, Classical, Empire, Biedermeier, Historicism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Modern. The 18th-century etched glass, cut glass, and hand-painted glass are exquisite. The collection also displays different glass innovations such as a variety of "stone" glass, glass that looks like gold or silver, and pressed glass, sometimes

PASSAU

Continued from page 3

referred to in the United States as Depression-era glass. If you like decorative arts — or even if you don't — you will find the collection overwhelming. I would rank it as one of the best small museums I have ever seen. It is open daily 10am-4pm, 1pm-4pm in the off season.

So, we would all do well to learn from Kriemhild's mistake. Whenever traveling in the region don't pass up Passau. Its beautiful setting on the rivers, lovely baroque buildings, and impressive collection of Bohemian glass are worth a visit, and certainly much healthier than marrying a marauding Hun.

Accommodations

Hotel Schloss Ort

Though not the only hotel in town with watery views, the Schloss certainly has the best. This is because of its quiet location away from the busy roads and noisy boat docks that mar the morning serenity. The hotel is also just a few steps away from the tip of the peninsula, which is one of the best places to view the celebrated "meeting of the three rivers."

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

The castle itself looks more like a large 18th-century townhouse, attached to a portion of the old city's defensive wall, than a true *Schloss*. It gleams from a renovation last year; in fact, the entire quarter seems to be undergoing a revival.

The entrance is set on a small, cobblestone courtyard. The lobby is equally brief: a simple, efficient room with an abrupt little reception desk. The extra space has apparently been saved for the spacious restaurant hall, nicely decorated with knight's armor, medieval weaponry, a fireplace and high vaulted ceilings. The restaurant opens to three levels of vine-covered terraces with expansive views of the Inn River and the baroque *Mariahilf* (Our Lady of Succor) cloister across the way.

The 18 guest rooms are bright and

decorated in a tasteful mix of the traditional and modern. White-washed walls contrast pine floors, slender light fixtures and candle holders are fashioned from wrought iron, and nightstands are converted old wine presses. The hand-painted wooden bed frames are crisply dressed with white linen and fronted by small Persian rugs.

The staff's English is not the best, but they are friendly and open to interpreting hand gestures. The best news is that the room prices are equal to — or even a bit lower than — the competition, so you are advised to hurry and visit before they raise the rates.

Daily Rates: Singles 95 DM (\$43), doubles 148 to 210 DM (\$66-\$93)

Contact: Hotel Schloss Ort, Am Dreiflusseck, tel. +49/0851/340 72, fax 318 17

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Weisser Hase

While the White Rabbit does not have river views, it makes up for it with an exceptional staff, attentive management and large comfortable rooms. The hotel is located at the start of the pedestrian zone in three 400 year-old buildings, just across the street from the **Restaurant Heilig-Geist-Stift-Schenke**.

The reception is relatively spacious and manned by gracious English-speaking staffers who will greet you by name throughout your stay — never before have I heard so many *Herr* Lintons.

The hotel holds 108 guest rooms spread across four floors, all of which are easily reached by elevator. Rooms are large, modern and very comfortable with built-in wood furniture, thick wool carpets, and subtly toned fabrics of jade, gold and damask. The baths are glimmering white and look brand new. While the hotel lacks any local details, anyone who values comfort or space would do well to stay here.

Daily Rates: Singles 120 to 165 DM (\$53-\$73), doubles 200 to 260 DM (\$89-\$116)

Contact: Hotel Weisser Hase, tel



+49/0851/92 11 0, fax 92 11 100

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Wilder Mann

This hotel is generally considered the best in town, and is certainly the only one to have been opened by an astronaut. It is owned by Georg Höttl, a local travel entrepreneur and owner of the Glass Museum housed in the same building. When Höttl bought the hotel a number of years ago, it was in a sorry state. After a careful refurbishment—and a ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring Neil Armstrong—the hotel quickly became one of the best in town.

Wilder Mann benefits from a wonderful location, right across the square from the town hall and a few steps from one of the main boat docks, convenient for anyone arriving via boat. The interior has the heavy walls, vaulted ceilings, and polished stone floors one would expect from 400 year-old interior design.

Guestrooms are done in a traditional style with decorous Biedermeier-style bed frames, polished wooden floors, candle-style chandeliers and either prints or original oil paintings set off by gilded frames. Fans of Austria's fated Empress Elizabeth can rent the *Sisi Suite*, where she stayed on her two visits to the city. The suite is also one of the few rooms with water views, as the rest are taken up by the Glass Museum. The staff is minimal, but very friendly.

Daily Rates: Singles 60 DM (\$27), doubles 160 to 300 DM (\$71-\$133)

Contact: Hotel Wilder Mann, am

Rathhausplatz, tel. +49/0851/350 71, fax 317 12

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

As hotels in Passau tend to fill up on weekends and during the summer, it is worth briefly mentioning two additional options, located on the main pedestrian street and with views of the river (although this is a mixed blessing, since they also overlook a busy road and a bus parking lot).

Hotel Zum König

This hotel has nice rooms and a popular terrace restaurant. Rooms are divided between the main building and a quieter annex just a few steps away.

Daily Rates: Singles with shower 105 to 120 DM (\$47-\$53), doubles with tub 180 to 240 DM (\$80-\$107), annex singles 95 to 130 DM (\$42-\$58), doubles 140 to 180 DM (\$62-\$80)

Contact: Hotel Zum König, Rindermarkt 2, tel. +49/0851/9 31 060, fax 931 061

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Passauer Wolf

This hotel gets its character from owner and chef Richard Kerscher, who runs a comfortable, homey establishment that manages to be a bit more expensive than it should. The restaurant offers two pricey gourmet menus, one featuring regional dishes and the other with creative international standards.

Daily Rates: Singles 125 to 140 DM (\$56-\$62), doubles 185 to 280 DM (\$82-\$124)

Contact: Hotel Passauer Wolf, Rindermarkt 6-8, +49/0851/931 51 10, fax 931 51 50

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 12/20

Sustenance

Hacklberger Bräustüberl Biergarten

It was a close race for best in town, but the peak experience was at the tavern in the Hacklberger Brewery. This might come as some surprise as the restaurant in the **Hotel**

Wilder Mann is widely considered the best international restaurant in town, and the **Heilig-Geist-Stift-**

Schenke is easily the one with the longest history. Still, I simply enjoyed my visit to the Hacklberger more. Why? There are a couple of reasons, one of which has to do with a memorable plate of spareribs.

The brewery certainly is a sight to behold. It was built around the turn-of-the-century, when "Industry" was quickly becoming Germany's new religion. This can be seen at the Hacklberger in the way the brewery resembles the grounds of a monastery, although instead of a church, the layout is centered around a large, tiled-roof building with a big brick smokestack. The *Schenke*, or tavern, is located in a similarly styled building across the road. It rained during my visit and the restaurant was only serving indoors, though the large tree-shaded beer garden still looked inviting if you edited out the rain.

Inside the tavern, I was pleased to be the only tourist. This could be because the brewery is across the river and a bit of a walk — but not much — from the more tourist-saturated old town. From the way they joked with the traditionally dressed wait staff, the other customers seemed to be regulars. Still, I didn't feel like an intruder — in fact the others seemed to look out for me. When the waitress who brought my order forgot to give me any silverware, a young man at the table across the way, who was playing cards with his friends, called out (to translate roughly from German) "Katharina, aren't you going to bring him any silverware?"

But what about the food? All I can say is that I am thankful to this day that I decided to order the pork ribs — they were incredible and cost a mere 19.90 DM (\$8.80). The plate was blanketed by two large slabs of pork ribs, which also obscured a mound of roasted potatoes and a ladle of barbecue sauce. The meat was incredibly moist and tender, and perfectly seasoned—not too salty, as is sometimes the case in this part of Central Europe.

A spicy Hacklberger wheat beer provided the proper accompaniment,

though I like their *Pils* better. Since that day, I have tried elsewhere to relive my Hacklberger rib experience, but none can match it. I look forward to going back.

Hacklberger Bräustüberl Biergarten, Bräuhausplatz 7, tel +49/0851/583 82, fax 75 22 13. Open Tuesday-Sunday 10 am-midnight.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 16/20

Heilig-Geist-Stift-Schenke

Six hundred and fifty years have gone into the making of this restaurant, located in the Holy Ghost Monastery and charity house.

The *Schenke's* first customers were the destitute, each of whom got a bread roll and two glasses of wine per day. Since then the menu has expanded, but the monastery's wine still offers one of the best reasons for making a visit. This is because it is blessed with a six hectare vineyard in the coveted wine region of the Wachau in Austria. The monastery also has local vines in the surrounding hills, but the best wine comes from that little piece of Austria.

There are three distinct dining areas. The main room has dark wood wainscoting, lovely stained glass windows and vaulted ceilings cov-

Key Websites for the Traveler to Germany, Austria & Switzerland

- www.gemut.com Gateway site for travelers to Germanic Europe, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, traveler feedback, free travel advice and past issues (\$4 per month fee for access to 8 years of back issues).
- www.michelin-travel.com The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- www.mapblast.com Map and automobile trip planning. Locates routes and distances.
- bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- www.rail.ch Swiss and European rail schedules.
- www.switzerlandtourism.com Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- www.germany-tourism.de Germany's national tourist authority.
- www.anto.com Austria's national tourist authority.

PASSAU

Continued from page 5

ered with Gothic stenciling. In back is a large vine-covered patio that is open during the warmer months. The most atmospheric setting is the Stift's cellar room, with more vaulted ceilings and brick floors that are so uneven the chairs are three-legged so they don't wobble. (The owner says the bricklayer was tipsy when he began his work.) The bar is fashioned from a massive wooden wine press, which was brought from an old vineyard in Austria.

I visited the Stift twice. The first time I had the Hungarian woodcutter's plate, a diverse pile of grilled meat — a sausage, a pork chop and a slice of beef — arranged around a handful of French fries and some mixed pickled salads.

The woodcutter's plate was only passable, so the next time I went a little more upscale and ordered poached *Walfish* served with sauteed vegetables. The fish was delicious: a cut of pillow-soft white fish fringed by blue skin, served with a side of melted butter and a second dish filled with savory cream spiked with horseradish. A further accompaniment was a small dish of julienne vegetables in a white wine sauce.

I ordered a glass of the famous white wine but, since it was lunchtime, I mixed it with mineral water. It still tasted good.

Heilig-Geist-Stift-Schenke, Heiliggeistgasse 4, tel +49/0851/2607. Open Thursday-Tuesday 10 am-midnight.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 16/20

Konditorei-Café Greindl

A kind soul at the Passau tourist board was nice enough to recommend the Greindl, a café and pastry shop located a few streets off the main pedestrian trail. This local favorite also serves a light lunch menu, but its forte is its homemade cakes and pastries, each lovingly made, artfully decorated and—best of all—served in large slices. The Greindl also serves good coffee.

Konditorei-Café Greindl, Wittgasse 8, tel +49/0851/356 77. Open Mon-Fri. 7am-6pm, Sat. until 5pm and Sun. 11:30pm-6pm.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 15/20

MOSEL RIVER

Continued from page 1

riverside, often so steep that it would seem those who work them could do so only with the aid of a safetyline. These are vines tended entirely by hand.

Many years ago, a wine newsletter published by Robert Lawrence Balzar first introduced us to these wines when he wrote that the Mosel's vineyards produce the world's most refreshing, delicious white wine. Not the kind one sits around sipping and sloshing around in the mouth while muttering things like "intense, oaky nose," but the kind one drinks, as in thirsty. (Oak, according to one noted German winemaker, makes excellent barrels for storing wine, but is not to be used as a flavoring agent.)

Mr. Balzar's statement was in reference to the Riesling wine produced by the Sonnenuhr vineyard in the village of Wehlen near Bernkastel. Some think the finest Wehlener Sonnenuhr is made by the house of J. J. Prüm. The late Johann Josef is the grandfather of the current head of the Prüm house, Dr. Manfred Prüm.

J. J.'s grandson lives and works in the substantial old stone house which for decades has been pictured on labels of J. J. Prüm wines. If you know what to look for, you can see it along the river road just north of Bernkastel. From the front door of the house you can throw a stone into the Mosel. From the same spot you can lift your eyes to a point across the river just a little downstream and see the Sonnenuhr vineyard with its trademark sundial, also shown on the label.

A few years ago, we phoned Dr. Prüm to ask if we could visit his winery and were rather surprised when he readily agreed. Arriving in the middle of a summer afternoon, we were met at the door by the man

himself.

"I will tell you about our wines," he said immediately, "but first I want to show you something." With that he led us through a side door and into a modest little car, which he drove over the river to the top of the Sonnenuhr vineyard. He parked among the vines and from the car's trunk produced a small, insulated case containing a corkscrew, three glasses and a cool bottle of his Bernkasteler Badstube Kabinett. He poured, toasted the day and our health.

Publishing this newsletter has its moments, but none will be remembered longer than that one, glass in hand, looking up the river past the endless ranks of vines to the town of Bernkastel. Far below, on the opposite shore, was the Prüm house. Next to us stood the man who had made the wine in our glasses and whose family have made wine in this town for more than 400 years. It was nothing like work.

Back at the Prüm "ranch," the good doctor sat us down in his parlor, pulled more corks and talked about his country's wine. He seems puzzled by the lack of enthusiasm for them in the U.S. One rap he and his fellow producers are anxious to beat is the one that says German white wine must be drunk young and doesn't last more than three or four years. This, of course, is a bum rap; a fact confirmed yet again at a recent tasting conducted in London by the noted English wine scholar, Hugh Johnson. An all-star lineup of taste buds conferred greatness on more than a dozen wines from the best German post-war vintages, including '45, '53, '59, '64, '71, '76, '79, '81, '83, '89 and 1990.

Prüm sprawled in his chair, seemingly as relaxed as we, only interrupting his stories about his wine and his family history to open yet another bottle for "just a small taste." After awhile, his wife and children suddenly appeared from somewhere to join us for a few minutes. The afternoon was soon gone and it was past time to leave,

but if we had overstayed our welcome Dr. Prüm kept it a secret.

(The estate of J. J. Prüm has no tasting room and no touring facilities, it is a surprisingly small operation. However, if you write well in advance of your trip and have a real interest in the wine, it may be possible to arrange to visit the property. Making wine is a demanding, time consuming occupation and the estate cannot accommodate all requests, particularly in the fall when the vintage is brought in. And, of course, it would be inappropriate to show up at the Prüm's front door without an appointment.)

Hotel Weinhaus Moselschild

Those interested in trying the wines of J.J. Prüm (not to be confused with S.A. Prüm), might consider an overnight at Weinhaus Moselschild in the unpretentious village of Ürzig, between Bernkastel-Kues and Traben-Trarbach where the river heads straight east. The town is not far from the Prüm estate and the nothing-special hotel has an above average restaurant with a very good, but reasonably-priced, wine list.

Ürzig is a long, skinny town stripped along the west side of the river. It attracts few tourists and seems to depend entirely on the wine trade. In half an hour's walk you can see what there is to see, then go back to the hotel to sit on your balcony and watch traffic on the river.

There are distinct advantages to staying in off-the-beaten track towns like Ürzig. Obviously it's cheaper, but there's a special kind of charm to it as well. Americans are still somewhat of an oddity and perhaps treated a bit more warmly than in places where they run in packs. There is also less fanfare and red tape at hotels. It all seems very casual. You sign the registration — or sometimes not—get a room key and that's it. No credit card in advance. You are treated the way German guests are treated.

The Moselschild was like that. We showed up in the middle of the afternoon without a reservation and the hotel seemed deserted. After nosing around for a couple of min-

utes we found someone in the dining room who simply handed us a room key and said we could sign the book later. She also took our dinner reservation.

Our smallish room (Number 14) overlooked the river — and the street — from a spacious balcony equipped with a table and two chairs. The bathroom was only adequate; not well lit with little room for toiletries and done in 70s style drab, dark tile. It was clean, however, and had a serviceable corner shower.

Not a lot more can be said for the sleeping room: dark wood trim and furnishings, and one of those ugly, free-standing minibars that double as a TV stand. There was also some traffic noise but we considered it worth it to be near the water.

But one doesn't come to the Moselschild for the rooms, its restaurant gets *Bib Gourmand* / Red Menu designations from Michelin.

We were given the choice of a table on the terrace or inside. It was cool so we chose the latter.

The two second floor dining rooms are pleasant and comfortable, not grandiose. There are green tile floors, off-white tablecloths, candles, real flowers and red or blue velvet chairs, depending on the room. Leaded windows look onto the terrace and then to the road and the river.

One marginal dish among several excellent ones keeps the Moselschild from a higher recommendation.

An opener of carpaccio was so light as to be almost transparent. Virtually no oil and the mildest vinegar drizzled over about a dozen (per person) rounds of raw, razor thin, slices of *Rinder* (beef) filet. On top, chopped chives and parsley soaked in the sprightly dressing.

The offending dish of the evening was an off-tasting lamb shank covered with a thick, gooey, tomato-based, almost black, sauce. This was served with green beans and undistinguished crescent-shaped chunks of polenta.

On the other hand, thin, flat rounds of liver, sauteed with bits of apple and the sweetest onions this side of Walla Walla, were heaven on earth. Riced potatoes laced with butter were a fine accompaniment. Also included in the price (25 DM / \$11) was a small salad of lettuce in a light dressing that only suggested the presence of vinegar and oil.

The not-too-heavy desserts had wonderful and unusual flavors. Both *Erdbeer variation mit Koffee Eis* and something called *Potpourri Mosel-riesling* demonstrated that this is no meat-potatoes-Coupé Denmark kitchen. The strawberry variations included strawberry sorbet, a whole strawberry dipped in chocolate sauce, a bite or two of an intense strawberry gelatin, thin slices of fresh berries with chopped mint, and a tiny cup of cold strawberry soup, served around a scoop of coffee ice cream. The *Potpourri* consisted of an egg-shaped scoop of French vanilla ice cream drizzled with chocolate, a dollop of sorbet, a demitasse of Riesling gelatin in Riesling grape juice, and a slice of chocolate covered with strawberries. Both dishes were splashed with powdered sugar.

On the wine list we spied several bargains but, since we so rarely see it in the U.S. anymore, chose a bottle from our old friend just down the road.

The '81er Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett was a treat and the best wine value in memory; 18-years old and absolutely fresh, crisp and just a hint of gold. Only 44 DM (\$20). What a wine. What a bargain.

Next morning's breakfast was superb and included beautifully cooked scrambled eggs, creamy liverwurst, and house-made apricot jam bursting with the taste of the fruit.

The dinner for two without beverages was 101 DM (\$45) and our room cost 190 DM (\$84).

Though we've pointed out a number of it failings (especially the lamb) our whole experience at the Moselschild was greater than the

Continued on page 8...

MOSEL

Continued from page 7

sum of its parts. It would be worth going back if for nothing more than another bottle of the Wehlener Sonnenuhr.

Daily Rates: Singles 117 DM (\$52), doubles 190 to 240 DM (\$84-\$107)

Contact: Hotel Weinhaus Moselschild, D-54539 Ürzig, tel. +49/06532/9393-0, fax 93 93 93.

Hotel Rating: QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 10/20

Rest. Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

Web Site of the Month

When discussing the role of technology in travel, the Internet, of course, comes first to mind. The changes it continues to bring are of such magnitude that words like huge and life-changing seem ineffectual in describing them. Book hotel rooms, cars and flights without picking up the phone or visiting a travel agent. Last month, using **United Airlines'** much improved website, I booked a flight at a special "Internet price" and was also able to select seats from an on-screen chart.

In the last few issues we have been running a short list of the Web sites we think are the most useful to travelers to our three countries (see page 5). This month we have added a new one; www.michelin-travel.com.

For some time we have wondered what Michelin would do with its unique and valuable database of hotels and restaurants. We now know; they're giving it away. You can access the entire database and it won't cost you a dime.

When you reach the Website, simply click on "hotels and restaurants," use the drop-down menu to choose a country (Germany is *Allemagne*, Switzerland *Suisse* and Austria is *Autriche*) then type in your destination city. What you will see is the same list of hotels and restaurants you'll find in the Michelin Red Guide for that country. (Remember there is no Red Guide for Austria though some cities, notably

Salzburg and Vienna, are part of other Red Guides.)

Does this mean the end of the printed guide? Not yet. The greatest value of the Red Guide is having it with you on a trip. Features like the hundreds of city maps that spot hotels, the front-of-the-book maps that direct readers to the best hotels and restaurants, and simply having the guide at hand in the car and in your hotel room are still essential. Until we can get this same information on a very small, very portable device that can access the Internet from anywhere in Europe, including an automobile, the bound Red Michelin should still be the first guide-book to go into your suitcase.

There's one other excellent michelin-travel.com feature. For this one, click on "prepare your route." Type in a departure city and a destination city. As many as five stopover cities can also be chosen. There are also five route categories: Michelin's recommended route, a no-tolls route, the shortest route, the quickest route, and a route that favors motorways. Clicking on "plan your route" yields a route map and a list of information that might have taken a full day's research in pre-Internet days. Naturally the map can be enlarged by clicking on it and of course you get the distance in miles and kilometers plus all the highway numbers with complete directions. But there is more.

- If you choose a Berlin-Munich route via Dresden and Prague, for example, you get a list of the documents required to cross the border and drive in the Czech Republic.
- On your route's list of cities, next to each town listed in the Red Guide is a Red Guide icon. Click on it and you get the Red Guide listing of hotels and restaurants in that city. Other clicks get you a map of the area and directions.

Though these are the site's main elements, there are several other interesting and useful features. It deserves your attention.

Long live technology. 

Europe Travel Briefs

■ **The Swiss Museum Pass grants entrance to some 450 exhibitions throughout the country.**

The pass is available at www.museums.ch for 30 Sfr. (\$17) and is good for a period of one month. A full year pass is 90 Sfr. (\$51). With both passes comes a brochure listing the museums and exhibitions.

■ **Through January 7 the exhibit, "Leonardo da Vinci - Scientist, Inventor, Artist," finishes its world tour at Zürich's Landesmuseum.**

Some 250 pieces of da Vinci's work — paintings, reconstructions from drawings, moving objects — tell the story of the Renaissance master. For more info: www.leonardodavinci.ch

■ **The traveling exhibition, "Agatha Christie and the Orient," is in Basel through April 1.**

It illustrates the life of the mystery winter and her archaeologist husband, Max Mallowan, through 200 objects including a luxuriously furnished train carriage from the Orient Express, documents, books and films. For more info: www.baseltourissmus.ch.

■ **Dallas/Fort Worth is Swissair's newest North American Gateway.**

Swissair flight 7133 departs DFW at 2:25pm and arrives in Zürich at 7:35am. Swissair flight 7132 departs Zürich at 10:25am and arrives in Dallas/Fort Worth at 2:40pm. These are code-share flights operated by American Airlines (with Boeing 767-300 ER aircraft).

■ **Ski-Europe offers 7-night packages to Zermatt including airfare, transfers, three-star hotel accommodations.**

The price from the East Coast is \$995, a bit more from other parts of the country Contact: 800-333-5533, email: travel@ski-europe.com, Web: www.ski-europe.com. 