

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

May 25, 2001

"It's the Seat, Stupid"

Minutes before a recent Hawaiian Airlines flight from Honolulu to Los Angeles, a boarding lounge announcement offered business class upgrades for \$250 per person. The flight was not full — there would be plenty of room in coach — and yet a line of about 20 people formed instantly to get the eight or 10 available seats. With more room, a choice of movies, free drinks and a fancier menu — though not necessarily better food — these travelers hoped to lessen the pain of five and half hours trapped in a metal tube.

I know the feeling. When confronted with a 10 to 12-hour West Coast-Europe flight, I want one of those big chairs. Forget the food, the movies, or the personal service, because frankly it's not all that much better than economy. I just want to avoid that jam-packed coach cabin and get some sleep. To slightly alter the right-on catch-phrase of the 1992 presidential election, "it's the seat, stupid." My flight goal is to get to the other end ready to tackle the baggage recovery, the rental car counter and a couple hours of driving. Unfortunate-

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

REGENSBURG

Urban planning strategies that encourage city center living — and 20,000 university students — bring vitality to the old center of this medieval Danube town whose ancient buildings survived WWII.

Regensburg surpasses every German city with its outstanding and vast buildings.

— Emperor Maximilian I, 1517

Viewed from a vantage point just across the Danube, Regensburg has changed surprisingly little since Emperor Maximilian's visit nearly five centuries ago. More than 1,300 medieval buildings

pack an Old City barely a half-mile square. Thanks to the city's dual role as an ancient and medieval religious center and trading crossroads, church spires share the skyline with the Italianate towers of merchant homes.

The buildings are remarkably intact. Allied bombs touched only the southern fringe of the city, and its relative prosperity during the Middle

Ages was followed by centuries of decline, when the city couldn't afford to tear down or build. Call it "preservation through poverty." At the same time, the impoverished city was of no interest to wars that ravaged nearby towns. In fact, most buildings were untouched until recent—and thoughtful—restoration.

But Regensburg is no museum. In the early 1950s, city leaders decreed that commercial use would be confined to the first two floors of any historic building. (And tax breaks are given to owners who open their buildings' courtyards to foot traffic.) More than 14,000 residents live in the upper floors. In 1965, the University of Regensburg was founded; today,

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Destination Update

Inexpensive Berlin

Think Paris, London, New York or Rome. You might raise a skeptical eyebrow if we told you you could find a spacious, quiet, two-room suite in a pleasant hotel for less than \$150 per night in a chic, centrally located neighborhood in any of those cities. And then, if we said you could dine well for less than \$30 per person in a classy bistro on the most glittering thoroughfare in town, you'd excuse yourself and move to another seat.

The truth is you probably won't find deals like that in the cities mentioned above. You will, however, in Berlin, Europe's most dynamic and exciting capital. Not everyone would agree that Berlin belongs with Paris, London or Rome. Certainly it didn't 13 years ago, when it was two towns, one a democratic outpost in a communist wilderness, the other a drowsy, war-

torn relic. But the new, united Berlin is about to join the ranks of Europe's great cities — if it hasn't already.

And amazingly it's not priced like a great city. Using the Michelin's *Main Cities of Europe* Red Guide, we compared rates at the top hotels in four leading European towns — London, Rome, Paris and Berlin — and found Berlin's to be far below the rest.

For example, the average price for the top double room in the four leading hotels of Paris — **Plaza Athénée**, **George V**, **Ritz** and **Meurice** — was \$676 per night (not including the Bristol, whose best doubles go for a whopping \$908) vs. an average of \$320 for Berlin's **Adlon**, **Ritz Carlton Schlosshotel**, and **Grand** hotels.

In Rome, the **Hassler Villa Medici**, the **DeRussie** and the **Hilton** logged in

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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ly, there are no \$250 business class upgrade offers at the departure gates of transatlantic flights. That's a line I would be happy to join.

Swissair's website currently quotes a San Francisco-Zürich roundtrip business fare at about \$7,800. Perhaps you, like me, wonder how airlines are able to maintain such amazingly high fares for a service that offers just one significant advantage over economy — a larger seat. The answer is easy, few pay that much.

Many business class travelers are frequent flyers who get upgrades because they're the airlines' very best customers. Some biz class flyers work for companies who have negotiated special deals for their traveling employees. Others are there by virtue of mileage saved in frequent flyer accounts (a coach-to-business class transatlantic upgrade is typically 50,000 miles), and still others have purchased discount tickets through a consolidator, or have obtained tickets through special two-for-one credit card deals. Or, your business class seat mate could be an airline employee.

Recently we flew business class, San Francisco to Zürich. When we boarded in Zürich for the return, the cabin was about a third full. The MD-11 configuration in business class is two-three-two. Maybe 60% of the "twos" were occupied and the center section of "threes" was nearly empty. Ten minutes before departure, however, the cabin filled with a rush. A few of the new arrivals were kids in their

early 20s who wore jeans and slung backpacks into the overhead bins. Did they pay \$7,800 each for their seats? Though I've learned never to judge a book by its cover, I don't think so. It wasn't so much their youth and their gear but their demeanor that gave them away. Many had been assigned to middle seats and they took their places without so much as a glance around to see if an aisle or window was available. They just looked happy to be there. You don't pay \$7,800 for an airline ticket and then find yourself in a middle seat without at least a pained look crossing your face.

Obviously, the economy cabin had been oversold and passengers were upgraded, a last-resort for Swissair, but one that still happens.

Did the influx bother me? Not in the least. I hadn't paid \$7,800 for my seat, either. However, considering it was April, a time when Swissair offered some extremely low coach fares, it did set up the ludicrous possibility of a passenger who had paid \$400 for the flight sitting next to one who paid \$7,800. It's very unlikely, but imagine if you forked over \$7,800 and found yourself in a middle seat flanked by \$400 payers, each on an aisle.

Consider, too, the plight of a fellow passenger in the seat ahead of me. After dinner, ready to sleep, he discovered his chair would not operate. Swissair's MD-11 business class seat tilts well back, but best of all a footrest/platform beneath the seat deploys to near horizontal position. It's not a bed but it's good enough that I can sometimes log as much as five or six hours sound sleep on an overnight

flight. Despite attempts by the cabin crew to make it work, the man's footrest wouldn't budge from under the seat. Facing some nine sleepless hours until touchdown in Zürich, and seeing no empty seats elsewhere in the business class cabin, he asked if seats were available in first class. The attendant quickly replied that there were but an upgrade was not possible. She then brought a crew member's valise and a pillow as a substitute footrest and the man meekly accepted his fate. Did he pay \$7,800 for his seat? Again, I don't think so or there would have been a ruckus and demands to see the captain.

Outside of using miles, there are a couple of ways to get into business class without paying the full load. For example, an American Express Platinum card holder can buy two business class tickets for the price of one on several transatlantic airlines, including Swissair. Diner's Club's Carte Blanche card has a two-for-one program with **British Air**. In addition, many airlines

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Using Gemütlichkeit

- 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".

Back Issues of Gemütlichkeit

Except for the most recent 12, back issues in text format from January 1993 are available free to subscribers only at <http://www.gemut.com> (click on Members' Library). To access the issues enter the user name and password published in this space each month. The June codes are:

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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.

REGENSBURG

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many of the area's 20,000 students make their homes downtown alongside thousands of Baby Boomers who were once urban pioneers. The concentration of downtown residents, a lively student presence, and the prosperity of nearby high-tech giants, has created a livable, upscale environment.

Even so, tourism has just recently arrived in Regensburg, perhaps due to the attraction of nearby Nürnberg and Munich. Still, the city has been gearing up for visitors for years, giving today's guests the best of both worlds: a strong tourism infrastructure without an overwhelming tourist presence.

Regensburg was established around 500 BC as Radasbona, a Celtic settlement. On the same site in 179 AD, the Romans founded Castra Regina, a garrison to guard the Empire's frontier at the Danube's northernmost point. Visitors can still walk the perimeter of the original Roman garrison and in places see the remains of its walls.

The city became a bishopric in 739, finished the great stone Danube bridge in 1146, and became a major trade center. Its merchants built elaborate patrician homes in the form of Italian fortresses (19 of which still stand), **St. Peter's Cathedral** plus a multitude of churches and monasteries.

When heavy taxation ended prosperity, new construction stopped and old buildings had to be maintained rather than demolished. Preservation through poverty.

City Walks

A compact Old City and an extensive pedestrian zone make Regensburg perfect for walking. Early morning is the best time to start your exploration. The stores are dark and the streets are silent, except for the bells and chimes that echo from church to church. Overhead, one after another, windows turn bright and the city awakens.

With a day of walking ahead, the first stop should be the **Haus Heuport** for a fortifying breakfast. If it's sunny, sit out front and people-watch in the plaza. Otherwise, find a window table upstairs in the massive main dining room, formerly the ballroom of a patrician castle. The view couldn't be

Regensburg Basics

Population: 142,000

Altitude: 300-470 meters/900-1,300 feet

Driving Distances:

City	KM/Miles
Berlin	482/300
Frankfurt	323/201
Hamburg	705/438
Munich	94/63
Nürnberg	107/68

Tourist Information: Regensburg Tourist Information, Altes Rathaus, Rathausplatz 3, D-93047 Regensburg, Email: tourismus@regensburg.de, Web: www.regensburg.de

Arriving by train: Fast ICE trains offer frequent connections to most major German cities, including the Frankfurt Airport (approximately four hours).

Events:

Bach Week: in various churches throughout the city, in June.

Bavarian Jazz Weekend: Jazz bands perform in July.

Autumn festival (Herbstdult): on the Dultplatz at the Oberpfalzbrück last week in August and first in Sept.

Traditional Christmas market (Christkindl-Markt): at the Neupfarplatz from the Friday before Advent through December 23.

Christmas craftwork market: on the Haidplatz from early December until December 23.

better: the west façade of St. Peter's.

The cathedral is built on the site of the former Romanesque cathedral and reveals how Gothic styles evolved from its construction dates of 1276 to 1252. The evolution of stained glass is more distinct; the mosaic style of the medieval windows excites the spirit with their rich colors and powerful images. The painted 19th-century glass seems flat and lifeless in comparison. Recognizing a dying art — and the impact of acid rain and car exhaust on limestone and green sandstone — the Bavarian Government created a cathedral stonemason school. In summer, visitors can watch the stonemasons work in the cathedral garden.

Today's visitors see the cathedral in a new light. Since the first stone was laid, smoke from stoves and fireplaces

had coated the cathedral with dense black soot. In 1997, careful sandblasting revealed its true colors for the first time in centuries. (Tours in German available May-Oct. for 10 DM/\$4.70.)

The former merchants' district lies to the west of St. Peter's. The cobblestoned district contains tempting storefronts — an enticing mix of merchandise from antique to kitsch, from fashionable to obscure. A meandering walk passes two of the city's most striking patrician castles: the 13th-century **Kastenmayerhaus** with its four-story tower, and the **Goldener Turm**, with its imposing golden tower and Renaissance courtyard. The route leads quickly to the **Altes Rathaus**, a complex of buildings and courtyards. Construction started with a 13th-century patrician castle and ended with the Baroque town hall finished in 1723. Special points of interest along organized tours of the Rathaus include one of the last original torture chambers in Europe and the Imperial Hall, where the Perpetual Diet—in many ways Germany's first parliament—met for nearly 150 years. (Tours daily 9am-4pm; in English from May-September, daily except Sunday at 3:15pm, admission 6 DM/\$2.80.)

The Altes Rathaus also houses the city's **Tourist Information** office and is the meeting place for 90-minute tours of the Old City. (In English on Wed. and Sat. at 1:30pm from May-Oct. or by special arrangement. Cost is 10 DM/\$4.70.)

A two-minute walk north crosses the 16th century Italianate **Fish Market** to the Danube and to the **Steinerne Brücke**, an architectural achievement as impressive today as when it was built in the early 12th century. Resting on 16 massive pillars, the stone bridge stretches more than 1,000 feet across the river. As the only river crossing within miles, the bridge played a central role in the city's growth as a trade center. Today, it provides a panorama of the Old City's spires, towers and steep-sloped roofs—dominated, of course, by St. Peter's.

From the banks of the Danube, it's a short walk past the former **Hotel Zum Weissen Lamm** (where Goethe once stayed en route to Italy) and the **Oskar Schindler Haus** to the **Porta**

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REGENSBURG

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Praetoria. The archway leads into the **Bischofshof**, the former bishop's residence built between the 13th and 16th centuries, past the 13th-century parish church of **St. Ulrich**, and into the **Domplatz**.

The nearby **Neupfarrplatz** provides a unique view of ancient and medieval Regensburg. Recent construction uncovered the foundations of a former Jewish settlement. Due to their contribution to the Regensburg's mercantile growth, the Jews and local citizens lived peaceably together within the city walls. In 1519, however, following years of economic decline, the town council banished the Jews and razed their houses and the synagogue. Archaeologists found cellars, walls, wells, steps and roads and gained a better insight into the Jewish quarter. And, when they probed deeper, they found that the ghetto had in fact been built over Roman ruins.

Today, visitors can descend two flights of stairs adjacent to the Neupfarrkirche and see the simple excavation from vantage points along a metal walkway. Beyond the walkway and recessed lighting, there's nothing artificial about the site: no explanatory signs and no protective glass. It feels far less like a museum than a private look into two layers of the past.

No visit to Regensburg is complete without a visit to the **Schloss Thurn und Taxis**, a former Benedictine abbey acquired by the Thurn and Taxis family in 1812 as their private castle. While still the family's ancestral home, three main sections are open to the public. The palace, with its magnificent furnishings, paints a vivid picture of court life in the 19th century.

It also houses the **Thurn and Taxis Museum**, a branch of the National Museum of Bavaria, with an extensive collection of jewelry, watches, porcelain place settings, dueling pistols and other family treasures. Finally, the royal stables (**Marstallmuseum**) display the family's coaches and carriages, much of them used in the family business: a monopoly on private and official mail throughout Western Europe from the early 16th century to 1867.

Excursions

Regensburg is so beautifully situated, the surroundings were bound to attract a city. — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The countryside around Regensburg invites exploration into a hilly landscape of cliffs, rivers, forests and woods. No car is needed. Just six miles down the Danube — about 45–60 minutes by boat — the **Walhalla** rises 358 steps above the river. This Doric marble temple — erected in the style of the Parthenon between 1830 and 1842 for King Ludwig I — stands as a monument both to the glory of the heroes of the German-speaking world and to the excess and nationalism of the period. (Boats leave from the **Steinerne Brücke** and cost 18 DM/\$7.95 round-trip; one-way ticket, 12 DM/\$5.30). Allow three hours. The climb to the temple is strenuous; some may prefer to go to Walhalla by taxi (about a 30 DM/\$13.25 ride) then descend to the river and return by boat.

In the opposite direction, a four-hour upstream journey ends at the **Kloster Weltenburg**, Bavaria's oldest abbey. The boat runs from Regensburg only 11 times each year. Otherwise, travel 30 minutes by train to Saal, continuing 10 minutes by bus to Kelheim, connecting there by boat to Weltenburg. The train/bus-connection runs almost hourly, and tickets cost about 11 DM (\$4.85) each way. Most of the trip covers the relaxing stretch between Regensburg and Kelheim, a medieval village at the confluence of the Altmühl River (here part of the Main-Danube Canal). From there, cameras start clicking for the scenic 30 minutes to Weltenburg.

Shortly after Kelheim, the **Befreiungshalle** (Liberation Hall) looms atop the Michelsberg, a classical rotunda built by Ludwig I to commemorate Bavarians who had died in the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. From here, the river narrows and curves between limestone cliffs, and the captain points out unusual stone formations. It narrows further as the boat passes the gorge of the **Donaudurchbruch**, where the Danube broke through the limestone plateau millennia ago.

Moments later, the walls of the abbey appear, the boat docks, and it's a five-minute walk to the inner courtyard for lunch and a half-liter of Asam Bock

(a dark beer from the world's oldest monastic brewery). The adjacent abbey church belies its drab exterior with brilliant paintings, stucco and statuary that epitomize the Baroque period.

Boats also make the six-hour voyage from Kelheim up the Altmühl Valley past medieval towns, castle ruins and craggy cliffs to the postcard-perfect village of **Berching**. (30 DM/\$13.25 one-way, 40 DM/\$17.65 round-trip). Consider Berching to be an undiscovered Rothenburg, it's peaceful and walkable, with little traffic and few tourists. The town is ringed by 30-foot walls and protected by towers and turreted gates. Visitors can walk along the top of the wall or explore the maze of alleys and passageways. A perfect stopping point along the wall is the **Wehrmauer-Stub'n** (Badturmstraße 2), an intimate, out-of-the-way restaurant that attracts more locals than tourists. When innkeeper Hans Danler learned that one of his guests that evening was American, he brought his wife out, introduced her, and gave the American a huge embrace that was almost as endearing as the venison steak with *Spätzle* and wild mushrooms.

Shorten the trip back by taking a half-hour bus trip to Neumarkt and connecting with German Rail for the 50-minute ride to Regensburg.

Accommodations

Sorat Insel-Hotel

Perched on the Oberer Wöhrd, a small island that divides the Danube, the Sorat Insel-Hotel is just a five-minute walk across the **Steinerne Brücke**. This short distance yields two key benefits: a perfect panorama of the *Altstadt* rising above the Danube and refuge from the bustle of the city.

Once a factory that forged and gilded metal for churches across Europe, the hotel takes great advantage of its building's massive wood beams and sturdy brick walls.

The lobby is an airy three-story atrium, and the rooms and suites are spacious, brightly decorated and with all modern conveniences. A large fitness center includes a sauna and a solarium. Most of the rooms offer south-facing views of the *Altstadt* and the Danube. Number 301, on the eastern corner, has windows on two sides, also allowing downstream views

of the Steinerne Brücke and the fast-flowing river. Like other top-floor rooms, it has the added touch of the original slanted ceilings.

Its Brandner restaurant features exotic fare like ostrich filet, French pigeon and wild boar. A lobby bar overlooks the river. In-house parking is 17 DM/\$8 per day. One room is wheelchair accessible.

Daily Rates: Singles 200-260 DM (\$88-115), doubles 240-300 DM (\$106-132)

Contact: Sorat Insel-Hotel, Müllerstrasse 7, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49/(0)941/81040, fax 8104444, email: info@sorat-hotels.com

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Bischofshof am Dom

Once the palace of the bishops, Bischofshof may contain the oldest hotel room in Europe. One side of Number 119, the Porta Praetoria suite, is part of the wall from the ancient Castra Regina, making it 1,822 years old — sort of. The remainder of the hotel, while not as ancient, is unquestionably historic. A walk along the arcade has changed little over the centuries: Gothic columns and arched, double-arcade windows, filled with flowers and overlooking the cobblestone courtyard with its fountains and chestnut trees.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Rooms 117 and 118 offer superb courtyard views with the added bonus of the cathedral in the background. In Number 321, in the newly renovated south wing, the cathedral is almost close enough to touch.

The Bischofshof has arguably the best service and most professional staff in Regensburg, making guests feel like the royalty who have stayed there through the centuries. The hotel restaurant ranks among the city's finest.

Daily Rates: Singles 125-185 DM (\$55-82), doubles 225-325 DM (\$99-143), suites available from 260 DM (\$115)

Contact: Hotel Bischofshof am Dom, Krauterer Markt 3, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49/(0)941/58460, fax 5846146, email: info@hotel-bischofshof.de

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 17/20

Hotel Münchner Hof

The Hotel Münchner Hof is ancient, its cellar dating from the 9th century. Therefore, when the hotel underwent extensive renovations four

years ago, the owners followed strict preservation guidelines. The result is modern rooms and public spaces built in, around and under remnants of medieval architecture. Many rooms have Gothic beams running through walls and ceilings. Others have doorways built into 14th-century stone arches. All are spacious and well outfitted: blond-pine floors, high wooden ceilings, wrought-iron chandeliers, and bathrooms with space-age, pod-like showers and with faux-marble tiles.

The staff's genuinely warm and friendly nature rounds out an overall relaxing experience.

Most guestrooms overlook the Tändlergasse, a narrow and charming medieval street lined with shops and boutiques and perfect for people-watching. (Number 411 provides enough height for both perspective and distance from street noise.) Those overlooking the courtyard have little view but almost total quiet. The adjoining restaurant features popular Bavarian specialties at reasonable prices.

Quality and service can be uneven and, paradoxically, is best when the restaurant is crowded. Perhaps locals know the chef's night off. In any case, the restaurant is under new management since this article was written.

Daily Rates: Singles 115-150 DM (\$51-66), doubles 150-200 DM (\$66-88)

Contact: Hotel Münchner Hof, Tändlergasse 9, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49(0)941/58440, fax 561709, email: info@muenchner-hof.de

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Altstadthotel Arch

In its three incarnations, the Altstadthotel Arch has evolved from a 12th-century patrician home to an 18th-century private mansion to a warm and inviting family-run hotel. Renovations in 1996 retained much of the lush atmosphere of the past, while also providing modern amenities.

The entrance is off the Haidplatz, through a courtyard and up a wide wooden staircase. Rooms (each named for a local street) are spacious (especially the two-room suites) and decorated in rich colors. Views aren't a major factor in choosing a room, since there's a choice of a back alley or the

small courtyard. Rooms on the third floor, however, have maintained much of the older architecture including the original wooden beams and offer great views of the Old City.

Daily Rates: Singles 128-170 DM (\$57-75), doubles 160-210 DM (\$70-93); suites from 220 DM (\$97)

Contact: Altstadthotel Arch, Haidplatz 4, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49(0)941/58660, fax 5866168, email: arch@onlinehome.de

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Sustenance

Regensburg is a culinary destination for Bavaria and beyond. The city's relative wealth helps fuel the restaurant scene, as does the presence of so many downtown residents. Perhaps because tourism is still building, travelers will find prices much lower than in comparable establishments in major cities. Visitors who time their trips can enjoy regional dishes that take advantage of the tender asparagus (spring) and wild mushrooms (late summer) that dominate the city's restaurants.

Bischofshof Restaurant am Dom

The Bischofshof Restaurant am Dom extends the reputation of its hotel with professional and cordial service, a peaceful setting and reasonable prices. In fact, given its deserved gourmet reputation, the restaurant is a downright bargain.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The extensive menu changes often and consists of a number of regional dishes, like roast pork knuckle with dumplings and cabbage salad; venison with horseradish, creamed vegetables and steamed potatoes; and medallions of veal with *Spätzle* and salad. Even with an appetizer such as fresh tomatoes and mozzarella with basil and a dessert like peach Melba, a three-course dinner can come in under 50 DM (\$22). Fixed-price meals are hearty but as inexpensive as 22 DM (\$10).

Wine by the bottle can double the cost of dinner, although the prices are quite reasonable for quality wines like Regensburger Landwein Müller and Würzburger Stein. Beer comes from the original brewery of the bishop (more than 350 years old).

Restaurant Bischofshof am Dom, Krauterer Markt 3, D-93047 Regens-

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REGENSBURG

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burg, tel. +49/0941/59086.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 18/20

Dicker Mann

Since it's hidden at the end of an alley off the Haidplatz, most of the clientele at the Dicker Mann is local. The restaurant fills the first floor of an old house with tables spread through sprawling rooms. With the turn-of-the-century Empire furniture, old paintings on the walls, and dried flowers on each table, one gets the sense of dining at grandmother's. Perhaps because of the homelike setting, it's not the place for a quick meal. Service was unrushed, but few guests seem to be in any hurry.

Bavarian specialties dominate the menu. A typical dinner: rich potato soup, tender slices of veal served with wild mushrooms in an onion cream sauce, and apple strudel served warm, swimming in vanilla sauce, dusted with confectioner's sugar and cinnamon. Cost: 35 DM (\$15.45). For 20 DM (\$8.82), a lighter appetite can get a Brotzeitbrett, a substantial wooden platter with potato/pickle salad, fresh tomatoes, coarse bread, and slices of ham, roast beef and chicken.

Dicker Mann, Krebsgasse 6, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49/0941/57570.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Historische Wurstküche

Nine centuries ago, workers on the Steinerne Brücke received their meals at a riverside kitchen. That same kitchen — the Historische Wurstküche — serves up more than 100,000 Regensburger *Bratwurst* each day to locals and visitors. On a sunny day, guests can wait an hour or more to sit elbow-to-elbow on slat benches. When the weather doesn't cooperate, the kitchen building itself offers several tables of indoor seating — but smoke permeates every fiber of clothing. The Danube overflows its banks almost annually — to clean out the kitchen, Regensburger joke — and signs nearby to the ceiling mark the dates and levels of especially cleansing floods.

Outside, waiters weave their way through rows of trestle tables, take orders, and race to the grill, where white-bonneted cooks tend to the

charcoal and to the finger-sized sausages: turning them, serving them, adding new ones. Like assembly-line workers, the waiters hold out plates for the right count of sausages — followed by ladles of fresh sauerkraut and sweet mustard — and race back to drop off orders and pick up new ones. With the river, bridge and Old City as backdrops, it's lunch theater at its best. You'll get your fill for 15 DM (\$6.65).

Historische Wurstküche, Thundorferstrasse 3, Regensburg 93047, +49/0941/59098. No credit cards.

Rating: QUALITY 6/20, VALUE 18/20

Uli's Dampfnudelküche

If it's mid-morning, get to Uli's before the line starts—although that may be well before opening time on Saturdays. It's a Regensburg institution—or perhaps addiction. The nondescript shop lies at the base of a seven-story patrician house built in 1260. Inside, only one dish is being prepared: steamed dough with vanilla sauce. One size and one price, 8 DM (\$3.60), fit all. During any visit to Regensburg, a trip to Uli's is required—and may result in return visits. Yes, they're that good. (Closed Sunday and Monday.)

Uli's Dampfnudelküche, Am Watmarkt 4, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49/0941/53297



BERLIN UPDATE

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at \$543 and London's **Dorchester, Connaught**, and **Claridge's** averaged \$593.

The price differences among these top hotels extends, in more or less the same ratio, to all hotel categories.

As an example, *Gemütlichkeit* currently recommends Berlin's **Art Nouveau Hotel** to most travelers. It is in the diverse but affluent Sauvignyplatz neighborhood (see Dec. 1999), just off the Ku'damm. The hospitality is tops, guestrooms are comfortable, airy and cleverly decorated, and breakfast is from a well-stocked buffet. The best room, a huge two-room suite, rents for 340 DM (\$148) per night, others range from 180 DM to 270 DM (\$78-\$118).

Berlin restaurants are also amazingly affordable. Walking the Ku'Damm late one afternoon we were attracted to **Dressler**, a stylish bistro. It

was new, slick and had "big city upscale" written all over it. A beer *vom fass* at the art deco bar was a modest 6.90 DM (\$3). We decided to return later for dinner, which, with salad, main course, wine and a pair post-prandial Sambuca's, cost 139 DM (\$60) for two persons.

A decade after unification, what's still most impressive about Berlin is the scope and pace of construction. The first Berlin stop for some ICE trains from Leipzig and points south is the Ostbahnhof. They then skirt the "Mitte" (the center of the old East Berlin) as they roll west toward Zoo Station. Looking left (south) one sees a forest of cranes and dozens of excavation sites. Though the most ambitious of them all, the futuristic Potsdamer Platz is nearly complete, tunnels are being bored and foundations laid for giant new rail stations, U-Bahn and S-Bahn terminals. Massive government buildings and private sector projects are starting to go up. American cities thump their chests when a new stadium or sports arena is built. Berlin seems to have dozens of projects of that scope underway. Even for travelers who have visited Berlin as recently as a year or two ago, the changes are stunning.

At any price, Berlin is not to be missed. Plan at least four nights, three full days to sightsee. Here is a short update on where to stay, where to eat, and what to do (see also past Berlin issues in the Members' Library at www.gemut.com).

Where to Stay

The previously mentioned **Art Nouveau** is our top mid-range Berlin choice. Owners Christin and Gerd Schlenzka, who have hosted many *Gemütlichkeit* readers in the three years since opening, speak excellent English, are helpful in recommending restaurants, shopping and sights, and can even arrange for concert and event tickets. They are the ones who showed us **Rogacki**, the marketplace lunch counter that is an absolute Berlin must.

The city's finest hotel — and for our money the best in Germany — is the **Ritz Carlton Schlosshotel** in the suburb of Grunewald, 15-20 minutes by public transport from the city center. Prices are high but through September 1, 2001, you'll pay 225 Euro

(\$201) per night in a deluxe room and 430 Euro (\$393) per night in a luxury suite. The price includes breakfast. The catch is you must use an American Express card to book and pay for your stay. Get details on this special at www.ritzcarlton.com.

For well-located, inexpensive accommodations try the **Hotel Carmer 16** on a quiet street at the eastern edge of the Savignyplatz neighborhood, not far from the Ku'damm. Rooms are spacious and well-equipped.

Where to Eat

Over the past few years we have made a number of recommendations including **Paris Bar**, **Florian**, **Spree Athen**, **Ristorante Mario**, and **Tavola Calda**, all within walking distance of the Art Nouveau. Since we first reviewed it in the late 80s, Paris Bar has become a staple of every Berlin or Germany guidebook and is now loaded with tourists. Florian, too, has become more well-known, but its kitchen has yet to fail us, though we have heard the occasional discouraging word about service. Tavola Calda and Ristorante Mario, relatively unknown outside their neighborhood, are still recommended, especially the former. Of course, the stand-up lunch counter at **Rogacki** is a unique, not-to-be-missed culinary experience.

The Spree Athen, which features a multi-course dinner and a Berlin cabaret singer with piano accompaniment, is still fun but recently the singer was mediocre and the food uninspiring.

Moving on to restaurants not previously reviewed by *Gemütlichkeit*, let's start with **Samos**, an inexpensive, no-frills Greek restaurant just down the street from the Art Nouveau. Forget the Germanic menu items here, this is the place for hummus, tsatziki, dolma, feta cheese, pita bread, and lamb dishes such as souvlaki, all with good Berliner beer or cheap house red wine. About \$15 per person buys heaps of good food, though modest appetites can get by for much less with just a plate of mixed Greek appetizers.

The very attractive **Dressler**, an art deco Paris-style bistro mentioned earlier in this story, gets a restrained recommendation. Late in the afternoon the place buzzed with activity. But returning later for our 8pm dinner

reservation, we found the main dining room only a quarter full; seldom a good sign. The service was not very skillful or attentive but the food was better than average. A watery dressing marred the green salads but things took a definite upturn with entrees of six hefty scampi (40 DM/\$18) in a garlic-butter-lemon sauce served with spinach and both white and wild rice, and a pair of tender calves liver steaks (34.5 DM/\$15) with grilled onions, browned apple slices and buttery, garlicky mashed potatoes. Dinner for two was about \$60 with beverages.

The French publishers of Michelin's Red Guides are stingy with their stars, especially if the restaurant is not in France. This was the conclusion we came to after a faultless dinner at **Restaurant Adermann**, in the Mitte just north of the Pergamon Museum. This downstairs bistro/tapas bar, upstairs elegant dining room with pianist, is in an historic 200-year-old house in the old East Berlin. The dining room's parquet floor is so precious and fragile that a thick, translucent plastic cover has been placed a few inches above it. The old floor is still visible.

In a celebratory mood, we chose the fixed-price, seven-course menu at 120 DM (\$52) per person. Expensive, yes, but it was seven beautifully crafted small dishes, the best of which was a juicy, absolutely fresh *Zanderfilet* (white lake fish) rolled in bacon. Just as good were supple slices of saddle of lamb in a red wine reduction.

You don't have to spend as much as we did at Adermann. Three courses a la carte will be in the \$35 to \$45 per person range. Or, for even less, you can eat downstairs.

Another splendid dining choice is **Wegner & Lutter** in the Savignyplatz neighborhood where the ebony wood trim, brass rails, and friendly service, combine to create a cozy, clubby charm. The traditional dishes are skillfully prepared with first-rate ingredients. Try braised-then-baked lamb chops (34.5 DM/\$15) in a richly intense red wine sauce; fall-over-the-plate *Wiener Schnitzel* (32 DM/\$14) any Vienna restaurant would be proud of; or perhaps calves liver with *Spargel* (36.5 DM/\$16) sprinkled with crunchy bread crumbs in butter. Top support-

ing cast members included wonderful roast potatoes and a warm potato salad with just the right touch of vinegar and *Speck*. An Italian red wine, Pomino Rosso (68 DM/\$30) was worth every pfennig.

Things to See & Do

Berlin is huge. The sights most tourists want to see are in an area of about 100 square kilometers, running from Spandau and the Havel in the west to the Soviet War Memorial in the east. You'll need the **Berlin Welcome Card** for 32 DM (\$14), it provides 72 hours unlimited public transport — busses, S-Bahn, U-Bahn — plus discount coupons for much of what you'll want to see.

In no particular order, here are our favorite Berlin sights:

Potsdamer Platz: Sit under the Sony building's vast dome in its futuristic outdoor atrium while remembering before the war this ground was Berlin's Times Square and just a few years ago was a vacant lot in no-man's-land between the two Berlin's. Do not miss the **Berlin Film Museum**.

The Ku'damm: One of the world's more interesting streets and a great stroll, day or night. Some thought its vitality would be stolen by all that's happening in the *Mitte*, but it's busier than ever and still Berlin's upscale

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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 (free access to back issues for subscribers; see log-on info on page 2).
- 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.sbb.ch/index_e.htm Swiss and European rail schedules.
- www.ski-europe.com Top web resource for skiers with much data on Alpine resorts.
- 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.

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shopping hub. The **Europa Center** (see the water clock) is worth a look as is the bombed-out **Kaiser-Willhelm Memorial Church**.

Ka De We's Food Floor: Europe's largest food hall: 400 different kinds of bread; 1,200 varieties of sausage, bacon and ham; 1,300 cheeses and dozens of places to have lunch.

Topography of Terror: There are only remnants left of the foundation of the former Gestapo and SS headquarters. Powerful, nonetheless. Nearby is a large chunk of the Wall.

Checkpoint Charlie Museum: Fascinating chronicle of the Wall that divided Berlin for some 25 years.

Soviet Memorial: Dedicated to the Soviet soldiers lost in the 1945 Battle of Berlin. Before 1989 every Western tour bus was required to stop at this outlandish but oddly moving monument in Treptow Park. The remains of the soldiers rest in mass graves located around the principal monument. One of the terms of unification was that Germany would continue to preserve and maintain this and the other Soviet WWII memorials on German soil.

Old East Berlin: Go walk the streets off Oranienburger Strasse, away from the new construction, and see crumbling buildings still with bullet holes. A strange sight on Oranienburger is the **Tacheles**, a decayed former department store occupied by squatters while the building's ownership is being resolved after unification.

Museums: There are dozens but no one should the **Pergamon** and its thousands-of-years-old antiquities, the most spectacular being the **Pergamon Altar** and the **Ishtar Gate**. You can see Raphaels and Vermeers at the **Gemäldegalerie** and then go next door on the same entrance ticket to view far-out modern stuff in the **Neue Nationalgalerie**.

This is far from a complete list, we've left out dozens of extraordinary sights: **Charlottenburg Palace**, the **Reichstag**, **Brandenburg Gate** (under repair this summer), **Unter den Linden**, the **Gendarmenmarkt**, the **Tiergarten**, the **Zoo**, the **Transport** and

Technical Museum, the **Olympic Stadium**, the **Airlift Memorial**, the **Jewish Museum**, the **Dahlem Museums**, Berlin's rivers and lakes, and much more. You'd best get there while it's all still affordable.

Hotel/Restaurant Data

(Editor's Choice Selections Underlined)

Art Nouveau, Leibnizstrasse 59, D-10707, tel. +49/030 32 77 440, fax 327 744 40, Email: hotelartnouveau@berlin.snafu.de, Web: hotelartnouveau.de/ (Top double: \$118, Q-16/20, V-16/20, MOD) ☉

Hotel Carmer 16, Carmer Strasse 16, D-10623, tel. +49/030 311 00 500, fax 311 00 510, Email: office@berlin.nethotels.com (Top double: \$93, Q-12/20, V-16/20)

Ritz Carlton Schlosshotel, Brahmstrasse 10, D-14193, +49/030 895 848 00, Email: SchlossVJ@aol.com, Web: ritzcarlton.com/ (Top double: \$349, Q-19/20, V-13/20)

Paris Bar, Kantstrasse, tel. +49/030 3 13 80 52 (Price: MOD, Q-13/20, V-13/20, EC)

Restaurant Adermann, Oranienburgerstr. 27, tel. +49/030/28 38 73 71, fax: 28 38 73 72, Email: restaurant@adermann.de, Web: adermann.de/ (Price: EXP, Q-17/20, V-16/20)

Restaurant Dressler, Kurfürstendamm 207-208, tel. +49/030/883 3530 (Price: MOD, Q-13/20, V-15/20)

Restaurant Florian, Grolmanstr. 52, D-10623, Berlin, tel. +49/030/313 91 84 (Price: MOD, Q-16/20, V-16/20)

Restaurant Wegner & Lutter, Schlüterstr. 55, tel. +49/030/881 34 40 (Q-16/20, V-17/20) ☉

Ristorante Mario, Leibnizstr. 45, tel. +49/030/3241048 (Price: INEXP, Q-13/20, V-15/20)

Rogacki (lunch only), Wilmersdorfer Str. 145, Tel. +49/030/343 825-0 (Price: INEXP, Q-15/20, V-20/20) ☉

Griechisches Restaurant Samos, Leibnizstr. 56, tel. +49/030/883 6111 (Price: INEXP, Q-12/20, V-16/20)

Spree Athen, Leibnizstrasse 60, tel. +49/030/324-1733 (Price: MOD, Q-10/20, V-10/20)

Tavola Calda, Leibnizstr. 45, tel. +49/030/3241048 (Price: MOD, Q-14/20, V-15/20) ☉

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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market business class seats to consolidators and tour operators who, after reselling them for less than half the airline's price, are still able to make a profit and pay commissions to travel agents. Many of these deals, however, require the purchase of other travel products such as hotel, car or rail — items you might be needing anyway.

So the advice today is don't pay retail for business class — almost nobody else does.— RHB ☉

Readers' Forum

Speaking of Berlin

My recent visit to Berlin included staying at the **Art Nouveau Hotel** and found it to be all that you said it would be. The hosts were very helpful and gracious. They suggested **Vogelweide** (Bayerische Strasse 32) which was a good dinner choice. The *Schnitzel* was excellent and HUGE. Look it up for a *gemütlichkeit* experience. Sorry to say we did not have the same feeling about **Florian**. Food was okay if a bit overpriced, but the service was the most indifferent of any experienced during our five day stay in Berlin.

Another positive find was the **Zillemarkt** (Bleibtreustr. 48) near Savignyplatz. Hearty portions of old world favorites at reasonable prices and attentive service to boot.

GARY KLEINHANS
VIA EMAIL ☉

Inside Travel

■ New Services from Austrian Air

Via code shares with United Airlines, **Austrian Airlines** has broadened its service to Vienna. This allows Austrian to offer U.S.-to-Vienna service from 20 major U.S. cities. The code share flights are routed through one of Austrian's three U.S. gateways, New York, Chicago and Washington, DC.

In addition, Austrian has introduced a "**Discover Europe Pass**," which allows travel among 73 European and Russian cities for \$349 for the first three trips. Up to seven additional trips are available at \$99 each. Accompanying children get a 33% discount. The pass must be purchased in conjunction with a roundtrip ticket from North America to Vienna.

Contact: 800-843-0002, web: www.austrianair.com.

■ Free Online Germanic Travel Info

Germanic Travel Alert (GTA), our email supplement, contains the latest hotel, air, car and rail deals plus other timely info on travel to our three countries. Send your own and friends' email addresses to hotstuff@gemut.com. ☉

www.gemut.com

The website for travelers to
Germanic Europe