

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

June 25, 2001

Hotel Database Now Online

There's good news for *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers. The database of key information on the nearly 800 hotels *Gemütlichkeit* has reviewed over the past 15 years is now on our website at www.gemut.com. It's all there, free to subscribers. You can print it out or download it to your own hard drive. To access it, see this month's username and password on page 2.

The database is arranged by country, city and hotel name. Information provided includes addresses, phone and fax numbers, quality and value ratings on a 1-5 scale, price category, date it appeared in *Gemütlichkeit*, Editor's Choice notations, and best of all, email and web addresses. Find the hotel you're looking for, choose "Click for Website" and you're there. Want to send the hotel an email? Click on "Click for Email" and a pre-addressed email form pops up. It should make booking hotels a snap. Remember, this isn't just any list of hotels, we have stayed overnight in, or inspected, all 800.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

BUDAPEST'S BATHS

Vienna-based contributor, Doug Linton, is a frequent visitor to Budapest. This month he reports on some favorite hotels and restaurants and gives us a lesson on using the city's ancient but still popular thermal baths.

Some years ago I wrote that a day at a Budapest spa and dinner at a Hungarian restaurant is the closest thing to Nirvana one will ever find in Eastern Europe. It's still true today, only more so. The baths are the same — some haven't changed that much in centuries.

What is different is that Budapest now has a few restaurants that are finally doing justice to the fabled Hungarian cuisine. In addition, it also has a number of small hotels that offer more affordable and personable lodging, so you will have a nice night once the day, and dinner, is done.

The Baths of Budapest
I have to admit I was a bit intimi-

dated my first time in the public baths of the famed **Gellert Hotel** and only visited the outdoor pool and the main pool indoors. Recently, however, I opted for the full treatment.

With the possible exception of a few brusque staffers, a day at the baths is such a pleasure it is almost addicting. And the whole procedure is quite simple if you have an idea of what to expect.

On entering, you must purchase a ticket (1600 FT / \$5.63) from a slightly cantankerous woman at the ticket office. Here you can also get tickets for extras such as a massage (2000 FT / \$7 for women, 1000 FT / \$3.50 for men), mud bath (5000 FT /

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Great websites...

myswitzerland.com

A few years ago travel websites were slow, complex, dead-end online "brochures" with a few pictures that took forever to load. Even today most Web travel sites don't offer much content beyond what they are trying to sell. Some, like the about.com sites for Austria/Switzerland and Germany, are little more than collections of links to related websites and some basic information about the countries they cover. Other than their links, they are of limited use to travelers bound for those countries.

A shining star among Internet travel sites, however, is www.myswitzerland.com, the website of **Switzerland Tourism**. Approaching the launch of a website as they might a new super-highway

or railway tunnel, the Swiss set out to build the best and most useful travel page on the Web. They just may have succeeded.

Though we have always admired myswitzerland.com's pretty graphics, its content, and the ambitious concept, at the beginning it was slow, somewhat confusing, and difficult to navigate. But the shake-down cruise is over and myswitzerland.com is, for the most part, fast, easy to use and loaded with information every Switzerland traveler needs.

No website is perfect and myswitzerland.com has its faults, but if you're headed that way you'll want to bookmark the site and use it frequently. Here are some of the features we find particularly valuable.

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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To read *Gemütlichkeit's* review of a hotel, note the issue date and look it up in the online archive (when you've entered the correct user name and password, you'll have access to both the archive and the database). The archive currently contains 90 issues, everything since January, 1993, except for the most recent 12 issues.

(Why don't we also make the last 12 issues available free at the website? It's simple, we don't think it's good business to give away a product we can sell. Many new subscribers pay \$76 for a subscription package that includes the last 12 issues. There is also some demand for issues more than a year old but we feel the benefit of offering them free to current subscribers outweighs the income we would receive from their sale.

Please try to keep in mind that the "Members Only" areas of our website are strictly value-added elements to your subscription. We have never promoted or promised free back issues or, for that matter, any website benefits in our subscription mailings. In fact, in the promotional mailing package we use to seek new subscribers, the website is not mentioned at all. We feel strongly that the annual subscription price is fully justified by what you receive in the mail each month.)

Please don't get the impression

I'm trying to make you think we have altruistic motives in providing back issues and a database of hotels on our website. No, profit is our incentive. The lifeblood of any newsletter is renewals. To obtain a new subscriber costs us approximately the price of a one-year subscription. So for *Gemütlichkeit* to stay healthy we need to keep you as a subscriber year after year. We think these value-added features provide yet another reason for you to stick with us.

For subscribers who don't have access to our website, we are happy to mail out a hard copy of the Hotel Database for the cost of postage and handling (\$3).

Gemütlichkeit Website Basics

Let's talk a bit about www.gemut.com. From phone conversations with many of you it is apparent that some are unaware we even have a website. Others are confused about how to access the free-to-subscribers features.

In each month's issue, we print a universal "user name" and password (see box at right). To log on to the website, click "Archive Issues" or "Hotel Database." You'll then be asked to enter the current month's user name and password. Next you will see a page of issue summaries and buttons to access the four hotel lists (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Other Area Hotels).

Using the Hotel Database

This is all pretty intuitive. Click on the list you want and wait for it to

load. Once it appears on your screen (and that could take a while, depending on your connection speed, your computer, and a variety of other factors) be sure to take in the explanatory information at the top. If you want to see our review of any hotel, click the "Back" button of your browser to get back to the "Archive Issues" page. You can then scroll down to the issue in question and click on "view HTML" below that issue's summary. You will then see the text of the entire issue.

Using the Back Issues Archive

The first and most important thing to know is that the back issues page contains *only a summary* of each *Gemütlichkeit* issue. As mentioned above, to view individual issues you must click on "view HTML" below each summary.

The archive has a search feature. As you will soon learn, it is of limited

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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".

Logging on to Gemütlichkeit's Website

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 "For Members Only"). To access the issues enter the user name and password published in this space each month. The July codes are:

User Name: **Danube** Password: **999**

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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.

BUDAPEST

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\$18), or a radioactive drink (not recommended). If you're not sure what you want you'll have opportunities buy these extras later.

The changing area is in a two-storied room with a gallery running around the second floor. Hand your ticket to the man at the desk and he will give you a token for the extras (on one visit it was an aluminum disc; another time it was a strip of linoleum) and a small apron, which consists of about a square foot of rough cotton fabric attached to a string. If you want do it like the locals, this will be all you will wear. The string is tied around the waist so that the square covers up the front, while the back remains open, sort of like a very small hospital gown. You can also bring your own bathing suit and on any given day at the Gellert, there are always five or six people with bathing suits, so you won't stand out.

After getting your apron, head upstairs to the changing room where a taciturn locker attendant directs bathers to a curtained changing booth. There, bathing suits or aprons are donned, and belongings stored. Before leaving, the attendant will lock your locker, and give you a bracelet with a number on it. He will also write this number on the small slate disk over the changing booth. You will have to remember where your booth is, as they are not in any logical order, although this only becomes a problem after the third or fourth massage.

Now you are ready to wash off and head for the baths. In front of the entrance to the pools is a heated rack stacked with folded sheets. These are what you will use as a towel once you are finished.

The Gellert has two pools: one at 38° C (100° F.) the other at 41° C. (106° F.). Start at the cooler one and prepare your body for the warmer one. The prime spot for both is under the fountain next to the wall, letting the warm water pour over your head and shoulders. After you have gotten

Budapest Basics

Population: 1,900,000

Altitude: 96 Meters/315 feet

Driving Distances:

City	KM/Miles
Munich	678/420
Prague	533/330
Vienna	243/151

Tourist Information: Király Útka 93, postal code 1077, tel. +36/01/352 1433, fax 352 9804.

IBUZ Main Office: Ferenciek tér 5, Budapest 5th, tel. +36/01/318 6866

Hotel Booking Service: TRIBUSZ Hotel Service, Apáczai ut. 1, Budapest 5th, tel. +36/01/318 3925, fax 317 9099. Available 24 hours.

Arriving by train: There is frequent service from Vienna, including 7 direct trains. The trip takes about 3 hours. The 1st class fare is \$49 one way, 2nd class is \$35. Hungary is part of the Eurailpass system. The 5-country Europass is also good for travel in Hungary, provided one has paid extra to add Austria/Hungary to the basic pass. Hungary is also part of the European East Pass.

Arriving by car: The drive from Vienna is easy and in some places scenic. Do not leave your car unattended on the street and choose a hotel with a secure garage. Be sure to inform your rental car company at the time of *booking* that you will travel to Hungary.

your body temperature up and are ready for the next stage, head for the steam room. Stay in the foggy heat for as long as you can (about 5 minutes) and then dive into the cold plunge pool nearby. Readjust in one of the thermal pools and then wander over to the massage room for your first massage. Usually, there is a short wait, so take a seat on the long white bench. Massage quality varies according to who you get, although most seem a bit perfunctory. Still at 1100 FT (\$3.50), it's hard to complain. After a 15-minute massage, you are on your own to repeat whatever stage you liked best or to head home.

Men and women are segregated

at the Gellert but I have it from a good source that the women's side follows a similar procedure to that described above.

Gellert Baths

Kelenhegyi utca 4-6, tel. 466-6166. Open Monday-Friday 6-7pm and Saturday-Sunday 6-5pm. Night swims in the bubble and wave pool in July and August every Friday and Saturday 8pm-midnight.

Kiraly Baths

Fo utca 82-84, tel. 201-4392. Open for men on Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9-9pm; open to women on Tuesday and Thursday 6:30am-7pm as well as Saturday 6:30am to 7pm.

Located near Margaret Bridge, this 400-year old bath was originally built for the Ottoman ruler of Buda. The most impressive view of the baths can be seen under an octagonal cupola, pierced with small windows that dramatically illuminate the steam rising from the pool.

Rudas Baths

Dobrentei ter 9, tel. 375-8373. Open Monday-Friday 6am-6pm and Saturday-Sunday 6am-1pm.

Another one of Budapest's atmospheric Turkish baths, though open only to men.

Accommodations

Hotel Gellert

This weathered Art Nouveau masterpiece could be the most prestigious hotel in Budapest, but lack of financing keeps it looking a bit like a Hungarian Angkor Wat minus the vines. Unlike Budapest's top hotels such as the **Kempinski** or new **Le Meridian**, however, the Gellert still hovers in the affordable range, although steady price increases with no comparable quality upgrades make this less true every year. Still, there are reasons to make this your home in Budapest.

The first is the thrill of driving or walking up to this still-impressive hotel with its dramatic location on the Danube at the mouth of the Szabadsag ("Liberty") Bridge and just under jagged Gellert Hill. The second is the hotel's expansive and

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BUDAPEST

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lavishly decorated turn-of-the-last-century baths, which are also free to hotel guests. Inside, the bubble pool sparkles under a captivating two-story, yellowed glass atrium supported by rows of columns and lined with galleries. Seraphim fountains gush thick pool water from walls of glazed blue tiles. In two separate halls on either side of the main bath are the thermal pools for men and women, complete with sauna, steam bath and massage facilities.

Outside, the grounds are lined with long pools and sculptured gardens for lounging in the summer sun. The overall effect is quite captivating; the air of opulent decay serves only to enhance the splendor of the experience. The Gellert's baths alone are enough reason to visit Budapest. (When the border guard asked us why we were going to Hungary, we simply told him we were going to the Gellert, an answer he found more than satisfactory.)

That said, there are certain flaws anyone contemplating booking a room here should be aware of. The first concerns the rooms. All but about 30 haven't seen major refurbishment since the 1950s, when the hotel was rebuilt from war damage. Since then, only the fabrics and carpets have been changed — though not that recently — and some of the 50s-era furnishings are beginning to make the transition from dated to collectable, thus adding to the hotel's charm. Still, at these rates, the rooms are a disappointment as they are neither Art Nouveau nor Art Modern. The 30-odd premium rooms are attractively decorated in a traditional style with quality materials worthy of the hotel, though at a higher price, of course.

The Gellert's second flaw is breakfast. It seems to be a throwback to the communist days. There are lines for everything, and where there is no line, it's because the item is gone. On our last visit, the staff and kitchen couldn't seem to cope with the crowds and most guests stood in

long lines, hoping what they wanted wouldn't be gone before they got to the buffet. The other option was to try to assemble a decent breakfast from remainders nobody else seemed interested in. A very Darwinian experience at the beginning the day.

However, the baths certainly provide enough of a counterbalance, at least for a short stay. And while they *are* open to the public, you need to be a hotel guest to enjoy the full effect. You will find a thick bath robe hanging in your room (but not any slippers, so bring your own). Then, robed and with a towel thrown jauntily over your shoulder, you will pad your way down the hall to the antique wrought-iron elevator at the end of the hallway. There, you will ring for the elevator attendant, a slightly grumpy woman in a white apron, who will transport you down to a small private room next to the main entrance of the baths. After you have finished with the baths, she will carry you back, robed and refreshed, with all the tensions of the day — and of breakfast — erased and forgotten.

Daily Rates: Singles 179-368 DM (\$79-\$161), doubles 316-368 DM (\$139-\$161)

Contact: Hotel Gellert, Gellert Tér 1, tel +36/01/385 2200, fax +36/01/466 6631, email resoff@gellert.hu, web: www.danubiusgroup.com/danubius/gellert.html

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 11/20

Hotel Art

This compact, colorful hotel is located in a narrow web of old streets inside the inner ring road. Its pink facade and decorative tin roof distinguish it from its equally decorative but more dilapidated neighbors. Having visited a number of so-called Art hotels in Europe, I am generally leery of this category: usually it means a mishmash of bright colors and sterile modern furniture. This one, however, is tastefully decorated and well-run.

The small two-story lobby is hidden behind a stand of marbled pillars studded with porcelain knobs, with a string of diamond-shaped

lamps hanging overhead. On one side is a small traditional reception desk and on the other is a modern lounge area (or pause area, as it is much too small for lounging).

Spacious guestrooms are pleasantly decorated in commercial furnishings with laminated desks, half paneled walls, gray tones and a black, bentwood-style table and chair set made of aluminum. They also have small TVs and minibars. A few have high ceilings, most have showers only, and all are quiet as the hotel is away from busy streets. A sauna and three-machine fitness room are included free of charge.

Breakfast is served in a V-shaped bar on the front corner of the mezzanine floor. The staff is friendly and efficient, giving the hotel a warm personal touch that independent travelers will appreciate.

Daily Rates: Singles 130-160 DM (\$57-\$70), doubles 170-200 DM (\$75-\$88).

Contact: Hotel Art, tel +36/01/266 2166, fax +36/01/266 2170, email hotelart@matavnet.hu, web: www.bestwestern.com

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Anna

A major goal of this Budapest visit was to find at least one small, affordable hotel in an attractive historical building. Based on previous experience, this seemed a lot to ask; most mid-priced Budapest hotels are in functional modern buildings.

The Anna, however, achieves our goal. It is in a small two-story baroque building painted clean white and jolting Hapsburg yellow. Large oak doors open to a spacious lobby with a large reception desk, gleaming tiled floors, and yellow-hued walls. An arched doorway leads to a long lounge area with a small bar at the back. The hotel consists of two older structures connected by a long modern one, all painted bright yellow. The apartments are in the older buildings, while the standard rooms line the modern part. Alongside is a tree-shaded courtyard that also has a few parking spaces offered

EDITOR'S CHOICE

free of charge. At the far back is a spacious two-story breakfast room crowned by a large chandelier.

The hotel's three apartments consist of a cluster of rooms with high ceilings, parquet floors, Persian rugs and good quality traditional furniture. The standard rooms are uniformly square with simple, spare furniture, green carpets and brightly colored floral fabrics. Tubs are reserved for the apartments, while guests in the standard rooms make do with showers. All have small TVs and direct dial telephones. One room has a special bath equipped for disabled guests. The staff was a bit reserved at first, but soon warmed up. The hotel is located on an obscure side street just off Rakoczi Utica between the Astoria and Blaha Lujaz ter M2 underground stations, but it is certainly worth the effort trying to find.

Daily Rates: Singles 110-150 DM (\$48-\$66), doubles 140-180 DM (\$61-\$79)

Contact: Hotel Anna, Gyulai Pal utca 14, tel +36/01/338 4644, fax +36/01/338 4401, email: annahotel@matavent.hu

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Starlight Suiten

If the name sounds familiar, this is because we reviewed the Starlight's sister hotels in Vienna in a recent issue. The interior is pretty much...no, exactly the same as the hotels in Vienna: bright, modern, and stylish. The only difference is the location, near the Chain Link Bridge and within walking distance to Vaci Utca and the steps and cogwheel up to the Castle District.

Daily Rates: Singles 240 DM (\$105), doubles 297 DM (\$130). Breakfast is an additional 22 DM (\$10); garage parking 22 DM (\$10).

Contact: Starlight Suiten, tel +36/01/484 3700, fax +36/01/484 3711, Email: starlighthotel@matavnet, Web: www.starlighthotels.com

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

K+K Hotel Opera Budapest

What makes the K+K so impressive is its blend of solid service, modern facilities and perfect setting.

As the name implies, the hotel is located on a side street just across from the Opera. The neighborhood is charming with spacious tree-lined streets, imposing facades, the architectural gem of the Opera house, and one of the city's best coffeehouses a few steps away.

Part of a small Austrian chain, the K+K shares a number of trademark features; the most noticeable being the hyper-Habsburg yellow that fills the interiors. Once adjusted, you will find the décor to be quite pleasing. Leather and chrome couches set on bright Persian rugs fill the palm-fronded lobby and a large slab of decoratively cracked marble backs a walnut-veneered reception desk.

Hallways and rooms sport contemporary paintings: some good, some not so. The rooms have a vaguely Asian quality with rattan furniture and an emphasis on clean horizontal lines. Baths are sparkling white and beds comfortably firm.

A long, sunny passageway connecting the front and rear of the buildings serves as the bar. An abundant breakfast is served in a cheery room off the lobby. And even though the hotel was full, guests did not have to struggle for breakfast — a welcome change from the Gellert.

Daily Rates: Singles 280 DM (\$123), doubles 340 DM (\$149)

Contact: K+K Hotel Opera Budapest, tel +36/01/269 0222, fax +36/01/269 0230, Email:

kk.hotel.opera@kkhotel.hu, Web: www.kkhotels.com

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 12/20

Sustenance

Rosenstein Restaurant

One of the best meals in recent memory was at this Jewish-Hungarian restaurant located on an empty side street near the train stations. With the exception of Switzerland, it is usually a good idea to stay away from restaurants near train stations, but the Rosenstein provides a welcome exception.

Its décor is functional with café chairs of tube metal and the tables

are set with inexpensive pressed silverware. Still, the restaurant excels in the areas that count. The food is wonderfully prepared and presented, while the staff is crisply professional and ardently dedicated to the pleasure of food.

A quick glance around the room confirmed that the Rosenstein attracts a clientele which values good food, from a table of powerfully dressed French businessmen to a Hungarian family celebrating a birthday or anniversary.

What the waiter suggested sounded so good, that I left my meal choice entirely in his hands. I started with a delicious goose consommé (800 FT/\$2.82) brimming with rough slices of feather-soft carrots and tender goose chunks. A little plate of sliced Hungarian peppers and pepper paste accompanied for that extra kick. Next came piping-hot slivers of fried pike-perch (2000 FT/\$7) dredged in crushed almonds and accompanied by a fresh salad of butter lettuce, ruby tomatoes and sweet sliced cucumbers. Based on a second visit I can also recommend the spicy fish soup and the wild boar in red wine (1800 FT/\$6.33). Portions are large but not unreasonably so.

The house white wine (1100 FT/\$3.88/liter) was a nice chardonnay from the Vylyan winery in the southern Siklosi region of Hungary.

Afterward, to accompany an espresso, the waiter convinced me to order *kindli* (250 FT/\$.88), a small pastry stuffed with walnuts. It was a simple but perfect finish. Even the espresso (250 FT/\$.88) was good, which is not true of all Hungarian coffee.

Rosenstein Restaurant, Mosonyi utca 3, tel. +36/01/313-4196, fax 333-3492, reservations recommended.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 18/20

Kispipa Restaurant

A local favorite serving good Hungarian dishes in a frumpy traditional setting, the "Little Pipe" specializes in good value four- and five-course menus, all for a low 1720 FT (\$6). For instance, the Hunter's

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

BUDAPEST

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Choice starts with pheasant soup, then game croquettes, game stew in red wine, and finishes with sweet cheese-curd dumplings for dessert.

Recently we tried the "Gourmet Menu" that starts with creamy celery root soup followed by slightly pasty liver croquettes with rice. The main course was tangy wild boar ragout in red wine and mushroom sauce, served with potato croquettes almandine (the owner is obviously partial to croquettes). Dessert was chilled rice pudding with canned fruit and whipped cream.

As the use of canned instead of fresh fruit indicates, the meal was hardly *haute cuisine*, but it was good enough and certainly a good value. One very Hungarian side dish I recommend is marrowbone; a large bone is served with a long thin fork to fish out the glistening marrow which is spread on triangles of dry toast. It's an excellent starter especially with a glass of red Hungarian wine.

Kispipa Restaurant, Akácfa utca 38, tel./fax +36/01/342 2587, open daily noon-midnight. Reservations recommended.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

Schuch & Schuch Csarnok Etterem

Using a rule that has served us well — if you don't know where to eat choose a restaurant near the main market — we made our first visit here in 1992. At the time the menus were only in Hungarian and we had to rely on a tiny German-Hungarian dictionary. We batted .500: I ordered deliciously memorable carp fillets in a paprika sauce with curd noodles, while my wife ordered tripe goulash — fine if you like that sort of thing. Nearly 10 years later, the food is still good and inexpensive and English menus have taken some of the mystery out of ordering, though the paprika carp doesn't seem to have survived the translation.

Recommended first courses include the cabbage soup with sausage, paprika and sour cream (400

FT/\$1.41) and fish soup served with sliced Hungarian peppers (450 FT/\$1.58). Be sure you get the small bowl, the large is really a main course (600 FT/\$2.11) with curd noodles and a large chunk of carp. The *Schnitzels* are good at (800 FT/\$2.82) but the Cordon Bleu's (750 FT/\$2.64) thick slab of smoked ham was a bit heavy handed. Also good are the fried carp with oven potatoes (700 FT/\$2/46) and stuffed cabbage (600 FT/\$2.11).

Schuch & Schuch, Pipa utca 2b, tel/fax +36/01/217 67 79, open Monday-Saturday 8am-11pm.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 17/20

Fatâl Restaurant

Though it's popular with friends who visit Budapest frequently, Fatâl failed to inspire. Only the size of the portions was impressive. The Fatâl Platter for two is a gigantic mountain of grilled meats that will easily feed four. Our meals were modest in comparison, but fairly bland and consisted mostly of potato slices either piled on or hidden under a thin slice of meat. Although Hungary doesn't have much of a beer tradition, the Fatâl should know better than to serve the French Stella Artois.

The Fatâl is a dud.

Fatâl Restaurant, Vaci utca 67 (entrance on Pinter utca), tel/fax +36/01/266 2607, open daily 11:30am-2 am.

Rating: QUALITY 3/20, VALUE 9/20

MYSWITZERLAND.COM

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Personal Profile:

To begin, choose "My Account" and provide your name and email address. There are a couple of advantages to this. First, mysitzerland is presented in several languages, and next time you visit you won't have to specify a language. But more important, if you request information or make bookings at the site, your data will already be loaded. Saves time.

Brochure Ordering:

Switzerland Tourism seems to have a stunning, four-color brochure for every region, town, village, and

tourist activity. There are literally hundreds of them and if you order by phone you probably won't know which to request. Click on "Ordering Brochures" on the main page and you will be presented with a simple search engine from which you can select those pamphlets that fit your needs. For the general mail-out kit there is no charge, but for specific titles like *Swiss Budget Hotels and Restaurants* or *Bernese Oberland Camping 2001* or *Switzerland on Foot - Hiking Tours*, there is a 50-cent fee.

Last Minute Hotel Bookings:

Perhaps mysitzerland's best, most elegant feature. From the front page click "Lodging/Reservations" and then "Last Minute Hotel Reservations." Next use the "Offer Assistant" to search a region or town. The result is a list of hotels currently offering discounted, last-minute prices and the dates on which they are available. For more information on the hotel click on "Info." We found a couple of very interesting deals: a 100 Sfr. (\$57) double room at the **Hotel Coronado** in Zürich (we don't know the Coronado but the online photos looked good and it offers all the services) and the **Alex Schlosshotel Tenne**, a fine Zermatt hotel (Gemüt, 97/10, Quality Rating: 15/20) for 240 Sfr. (\$137). Bookings can be made directly at the Web site.

City Deals:

Another nice feature is the attractively-priced special hotel packages offered on city pages. To get to the right place, however, requires some maneuvering. First, we clicked "Switzerland Vacations" and chose "City Breaks." From there use the "Short City Breaks" drop-down menu to pick a city. Once the city page loads, be sure to scroll down to see the offer.

Contacts:

Want to contact Switzerland Tourism in the U.S. or the tourist office of a specific region in Switzerland? It's easy; simply click on "Contact" and make a selection from the drop-down menus. You are then presented with that specific tourist office's contact information. In addition, for the regional offices in Swit-

zerland, provided you created a personal profile, all you need do is type in your request or question — brochures, hotel info, etc. — then click the “send” button and you’re done. If you haven’t first created a profile, you can do it at the time of your online request.

To find contact info for the tourist office of a small city or town is a little trickier. First click on “Switzerland Vacations” to see a list of various seasonal and activity options. If you choose “Summer Vacations,” for example, you can select a region from the drop-down menu and then from the “Surrounding Area” menu choose a city or town.

Events:

This part of the site is easy to use and contains an exhaustive list of happenings throughout the country with, in most cases, all the requisite dates, phone numbers, street addresses, web and email addresses and prices. Regrettably, only a few are in English.

Links:

This is another useful feature of myswitzerland. Links to Switzerland-related websites are arranged by broad categories. Choose “Transportation” and you see links to more than 60 Websites from **Swissair** to the **Automobile Club of Switzerland**. Many, unfortunately, are not in English. Among the 30 or so links in the “Culture” category are websites for Swiss castles and fortresses, music events calendars, and a useful one entitled *Popular Customs and Festivals in Switzerland*.


Could be Better:

Though the “Design Your Own Swiss Vacation” section sounds promising, it is merely a link to a very slow, very complex website that packages and sells flights, rail passes, car rentals and hotels.

We had a hard time getting much out of the “Top Tips” search feature. The combination of drop-down menus working in conjunction with buttons, plus the type-in box called “Detail Search,” left us scratching our heads.

Finally, there doesn’t seem to be a database of restaurants similar to the

site’s hotel listings. A “Site Search” for “Zürich,” for example, yields nothing about the city’s restaurants and the site’s “Food and Wine” section is of limited use.

Overall, however, this is a great website, the best in the world for Switzerland-bound travelers. 

Readers’ Forum

Interesting Bar in Berlin

Thanks for an excellent June issue, especially the article about Regensburg, one of my favorite cities. I visited it last summer (my third visit), stayed at the **Bischofshof**, (Krauterer Markt 3, D-93047 Regensburg, tel. +49/(0)941/ 58460, fax 5846146, email: info@hotel-bischofshof.de) had lunch at the **Wurstküche**, and thoroughly enjoyed my stay. You didn’t mention that Regensburg is the home of one of the world’s finest boys’ choirs, the **Domspatzen**, who can be heard almost every Sunday at the cathedral as well as at numerous concerts. I heard them twice last summer and have bought their records for years. The choir traces its origin back over 1000 years. I also visited a local fair or festival in the park across the Danube, on an island spanned by the stone bridge (one of the engineering marvels of the Middle Ages). There was music, food, and exhibits, with an overall theme of protecting the environment.

In Berlin, on the same trip, I stayed at the **Albrechtshof Hotel**, (Albrechtstrasse 8 , D-10117 Berlin, tel. +49/030/8860, fax 886100) north of the Spree, just across from the Friedrichstrasse station. A short walk from the hotel is a pub called **Ständige Vertretung**, which is a favorite of government workers and features a mix of Rhineland and Berlin food and drink. The story I got is that the proprietor formerly owned a pub in Bonn which was frequented by government people, and when the government moved to Berlin, he moved too. To satisfy the nostalgia of transplanted Rhinelanders, he features some of their specialties, e.g. Kölsch (Cologne) beer. The walls are covered with photographs, banners,

campaign posters, etc. that practically trace a history of postwar German politics. The atmosphere alone (although a bit smoky) was worth the wait to get seated.

JIM MENTZER
VIA EMAIL

Jewish Museum in Burgenland

I was surprised to find your feature on the Burgenland (Mar. ’01) failed to mention the **Austrian Jewish Museum**. Located just a few yards from the Esterhazy Palace, it was once the residence of Samson Wertheimer (1658-1724). The Esterhazys had a very enlightened attitude, which caused numerous Jewish families to settle in and around Eisenstadt. Wertheimer became the Chief Rabbi for the entire province, and the ancestor of several prominent Austrian families. The museum includes Wertheimer’s private synagogue, as well as portraits and documents relating to the history of Jews in Austria.


JOHN KALLIR
VIA EMAIL

A Castle in Franconia

In May we were at **Schloss Saaleck**, Hammelburg, Germany, 57 km north of Würzburg, for a one-night stay and wish now we had allowed more time for it.

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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.myswitzerland.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. 


DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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use. Searching by the word "Berlin" finds all issues containing that word. Since almost every issue of *Gemütlichkeit* will have the word Berlin somewhere in it, you're pretty much back where you started. If you're looking for just issues that have stories on Berlin, you have to get a little creative. One way is to search by a less common Berlin-related word. For example, Kurfürstendamm. That's a famous Berlin street that one might assume would be in most stories about the city. A Kurfürstendamm search will yield only handful of issues.

What I do, however, is take the results of my Berlin search and then use the regular "Find" and "Find Again" commands of my browser (on my Mac that's the Apple key + F for "Find" and Apple key + G for "Find Again") to search through the summaries themselves using the word Berlin. This way I can quickly see where and in what context the word appears in the issue summaries. If it's in the sentence "our main story this month is on Berlin" that's probably an issue I want to open. If the word appears in a description of what's in Readers' Forum for that month it may or may not be useful to my purpose.

Admittedly, the search feature of the back issues archive is a bit clunky. But if you hang in there and use a little ingenuity, you'll be rewarded.

The Hotel Database and the archive are unique, valuable travel planning tools. We use them everyday. 

READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 1

Situated high on a hill above the town, the castle is reached by a one-lane, winding road (no guard rails). Such was the ambience that one expected to hear the clanking of knight's armor and see them riding across the moat bridge.

We were given Room #10 which was in the tower and had glorious windows on three sides, which gave fantastic views of the town and countryside.

There is a restaurant for dinner, as well as breakfast. The food was excellent and well prepared. If one is looking for lots of people, this is not the place. We felt as though we were in a friend's home, creaking floors and all.

We heartily recommend Schloss Saaleck for an out-of-the-way stay. The email address is saaleck@aol.com, fax +49/09732 2023. The address is Saaleckstrasse 1, Hammelburg, Germany. The price for the room for one night, including breakfast, was 180 DM (\$79), which we found very reasonable.

We enjoy reading *Gemütlichkeit* very much, keep up the good work.

FRANCIS L. & VIRGINIA JOHNSON
VIA EMAIL

Nürnberg, Berlin Report

In Nürnberg I stayed at the four star **Dürer-Hotel** (Neutormauer 32, tel. +49/0911/208091, fax 223458, email: duererhotels@altstadthotels.com) near the **Albrecht Dürer House** in the middle of the old town. It was OK but not worthy of four stars. Should I return I would opt for the three-star **Hotel Agneshof** (Agnesgasse 10, tel. +49/0911/214440, fax 214 44 144, email agneshof.ngb@t-online.de) nearby. The old area is extensive and very picturesque and the town seems to be geared for tourists with lots of options. It is also known for its Christmas Market.

And then there was Berlin. Ah, Berlin. I stayed at the **Hotel Art Nouveau** (Leibnizstrasse 59, tel. +49/030 32 77 440, fax 327 744 40, email: hotelartnouveau@berlin.snafu.de, Web: www.hotelartnouveau.de/) and enjoyed Gerd and Christine immensely. Its a great place and I recommend it. I followed some of your recommendations to the letter including eating at **Spreer Athen** (Leibnizstrasse 60, tel. +49/030/324-1733) and **Rogacki** (Wilmersdorfer Str. 145) which I enjoyed very much. Sad to report that the light has been extinguished at **Ewige Lampe**. However, the sounds are blowing as brightly as ever at the **A-Trane** (Bleibtreustrasse 1, tel. +49/030 / 313 25 50). I really didn't stray out of the neighborhood for dinner and was

recommended to eat at **Lutter & Wegner** (Schlüterstr. 55, tel. +49/030/881 34 40) by another Art Nouveau client. I was not disappointed. Although I had visited Berlin twice before on day trips, I was not prepared for all that the city offers. I even trekked out to Oranienburg to see the vestiges of the former Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp — eerie. One of my regrets is not visiting the used "everything market" held weekends near the Tiergarten S-Bahn stop. Christine told me about it on Monday when I described what I thought I saw from the S-Bahn. Oh well, an excuse for a next time — soon.


SEVERIN JOHNSON
VIA EMAIL 

Inside Travel

■ Kid-Friendly Vienna

Through September 2 more than 100 Vienna hotels and pensions are offering free accommodation, including breakfast, for up to two children 12 or under in their parents' room. As an alternative to free extra beds in a family room, guests may also reserve a second room at a reduced rate. In addition, during this period all visitors below the age of 16 travel free on the Vienna Transport Authority's 917 kilometer network. Contact: Vienna Tourist Board, A-1025 Vienna, tel. +43/0211 14 222, email: info@info.wien.at, web: www.info.wien.at.

■ Scenic Swiss Chocolate Train

Once a week June-October the **Swiss Chocolate Train** from Montreux stops in medieval Gruyères for cheese, continues on to Broc, home of a Nestle's chocolate factory, and returns to Montreux. Passengers ride in a "Belle Epoque" carriage (vintage 1915) or a modern panorama car. Tickets include coffee and croissants, visits to Castle Gruyères and the Nestle factory, and some chocolate. Holders of a Swiss Pass or Swiss Flexipass pay \$19 for the trip. Reservations mandatory. 

Germanic Travel Alert

Free email supplement to *Gemütlichkeit*. Register online at www.gemut.com or send your email address to gta@gemut.com