

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

July 25, 2001

Itinerary-less Travel

Stop me if you've heard this before, but *Gemütlichkeit* is all about independent travel. You won't find reviews of package tours here. I think most of us agree that choosing our own flights, hotels, restaurants, and sight-seeing destinations, and making such decisions as when to stop for a snack or find a toilet, is the way to go.

What we may not agree on, however, is how structured in advance a European trip should be. Those who have kept up with recent advances in genome research are undoubtedly aware that certain otherwise perfect human beings are born with what has now been identified as the TIO (Trip Itinerary Obsessive) gene. When each city, sight, hotel and meal of the trip is not precisely scheduled, persons with the TIO gene become irritable, experience various sleep disorders, and carry a sense of impending doom — both before and during the

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

LUCERNE

Just as it was for Queen Victoria and composers Richard Wagner and Sergei Rachmaninoff, gorgeous Lucerne is on the itinerary of virtually every visitor to Switzerland.

If there was a beauty contest for Swiss cities, Lucerne might be the one taking that stroll down the runway with Bert Parks belting out the "There she is..." song. Tucked up against rolling green hills on a shining lake, ringed by snowy peaks, and with a wide river running through it, the town and its setting are flat-out gorgeous.

To the southeast, across the lake on a high, rounded hill, is the exclusive Bürgenstock enclave, with its five-star hotels and golf course. Nearer, on the peninsula straight east and hidden in the trees near the shoreline, is the estate of the Russian composer, Sergei Rachmaninoff. The

view from his private beach is said to have inspired the famed *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. On the opposite shore, German composer, Richard Wagner, lived for a time in a modest villa where he was moved to compose the charming *Siegfried Idyll* as a gift to his wife Cosima.

Though such beauty, history and culture attract masses of visitors, Lucerne manages to remain a bit above the fray. Though virtually every tour bus in Switzerland stops here, and one in four overnight visitors is an American, the town seems to have fewer than its share of the depressing pizza parlors, tee-shirt stores and souvenir shops that blemish so many of Europe's lead-

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Readers' Forum

Regensburg Royalty

In your recent story on Regensburg you mention the palace of the Thurn and Taxis family (Schloss Emmeram). As many visitors to Regensburg have heard, Prince Johannes, late in life, married a much younger wife, Princess Gloria. Because of her somewhat wild lifestyle — clothes, hairstyles, Harley Davidsons — she became known as "Germany's punk princess." They had one son and in 1990 Prince Johannes died at 64 of a heart attack, leaving his young wife and 7-year-old son, Prince Albert. With an estate to manage and a son to raise, Princess Gloria settled down and now leads a quite conservative lifestyle.

As I found on a news web site recently, on June 24 of this year

Prince Albert turned 18 years old and now takes over responsibility for the estate. So far, his only sign of wildness is his fondness for auto racing, and some rowdiness at a Starkbier festival this past March. In any case, the family seems likely to continue to provide interesting stories for the press.

JIM MENTZER
LOS ANGELES CA

Knocks for Le Vieux Manoir

We just returned from France and Switzerland and would like to pass on some observations. Our two Swiss bases were Iseltwald and Murten. In Iseltwald, we stayed at **Chalet du Lac** (+41/033/845 84 58, fax 845 84 59, email:

abegglen@dulac-iseltwald.ch) and

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trip. Those of us fortunate enough to be born without it should try to show compassion for TIO gene carriers and understand that they cannot help themselves. Persons with the gene are strongly advised not to travel with persons without it, and vice versa. Of course, marriage between TIO carriers and non-carriers is the stuff of slapstick movies.

If you know you have the TIO gene you should move on immediately to other stories in the newsletter. TIO cannot be reversed or switched off and you need to focus on things like fax numbers and email addresses; things that will help you plan the trip itinerary down to the nearest tenth of a second.

There are some who, for as yet unknown reasons, *believe* they have the TIO gene though they actually do not. When confronted with a week in Germany without confirmed hotel reservations, for example, they may experience mild symptoms such as shortness of breath and light sweating. Researchers refer to them as "Neo-TIOs." These are people we can help; no skin patches, no needles, and no drugs with long lists of frightening side effects, just a little counseling.

Let's begin by addressing the special opportunity for flexible, footloose travel that Europe represents. Last November, we went to China. Though we weren't with a tour, every hotel and virtually every

move we made every day was planned weeks prior to the trip. For nearly all westerners, that is the way it must be when traveling in Asia. There, for several very good reasons, one simply doesn't rent a car and take off down the road.

On the other hand, Europe is uniquely suited to such travel and, I think, much superior to the U.S. in that respect. In this country, of course, there's usually no problem at the last minute finding a Holiday Inn to lay your head, or a Red Lobster, Outback Steakhouse or corporate burger joint for sustenance. That's all easy enough, but where are our small, owner-operated hotels with restaurants? Sure, there are quaint bed & breakfast inns — we have 70 of them here in Ashland — and America is not devoid of good places to eat. But the family-run hotels with good restaurants *found in almost every town in Germany, Austria and Switzerland* are of a type that simply does not exist in the U.S.

When it comes to auto touring I think we can again agree that Europe is unique. All three of our countries have complex networks of beautifully maintained, scenic country roads that can whisk us to interesting, historic towns and villages and their charming hotels and restaurants. I don't know about folks in the rest of the 50 states, but here in the beautiful state of Oregon we have some lovely backroads — though far less than in Europe — but interesting towns along them are few and far between, and European-style

country hotels are unknown. The wild coast of Oregon, for example, is ravishingly beautiful, but if you want to drive its length you'll stay — with a tiny handful of exceptions — in boring, cookie-cutter motels and eat bad food.

Let's not even discuss train travel other than to say in Europe it's an option and in this country it is not.

O.k., enough of trashing the good ol' USA; I can see you're getting a little riled up. I love this country and wouldn't live anywhere else, but we have to face the fact that in this particular cultural niche, Europe has it all over us. So let's take full advantage of it when we go there.

At *Gemütlichkeit* we think the way to do that is to try at least some travel without an itinerary. More than once we have landed in Europe and not decided until we were actually in the rental car whether to head

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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: **Pilatus** Password: **138**

Vol. 15, No. 7
August, 2001

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

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Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published 11 times each year 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 travel@gemut.com. Web site: www.gemut.com. Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 11 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.

LUCERNE*Continued from page 1*

ing destinations.

The independent *Gemütlichkeit* traveler will find Lucerne's sheer physical beauty outshines its cultural enticements. You can see most of it in two days...three at the most. Excursions, of course, would extend that.

The center of visitor activity is in the old town on the north bank of the Reuss River, where the main attractions are the **Altes Rathaus**, the painted buildings on the **Weinmarkt**, a museum devoted to **Picasso's** late works, the much photographed **Kapellbrücke**, and just sitting at an outdoor table along the river.

A short walk across the river is the large rail station, the lake port, and an impressive congress center designed by Jean Nouvel.

Two recommended sights not in this area are the magnificent **Swiss Transportation Museum**, for which you should allow half a day, and **Tribschen**, the Wagner house.

Though tacky souvenirs are not flaunted, expensive ones are. At the very center of the city is glittering **Bucherer**, where watches and jewelry with five-digit price tags are the norm. The store is worth a stroll through its several levels if only to rub shoulders with the clientele of oil sheiks, Asian package tourists, new-rich Eastern Europeans, and American dot.comers who sold before the crash.

Exploring the Region

Auto travelers should plan to park their vehicles and explore the city and the lake region by rail, boat, bus and cable car. The locally-available **Tell Pass** costs 146 Sfr. (\$83) first-class, 131 Sfr. (\$75) second-class, and is good for two days free travel and five days half-price travel throughout central Switzerland on all forms of public transport. The same pass for five days free and 10 days half-price travel costs 206 Sfr. (\$118) first-class and 179 Sfr. (\$102) second-class.

Train travelers with a **Swiss Pass**, **Eurail** or **Europass** will be covered

Lucerne Basics**Population:** 57,000**Altitude:** 439 Meters/1440 feet**Driving Distances:**

City	KM/Miles
Bern	111/69
Frankfurt	422/262
Geneva	264/164
Interlaken	68/42
Munich	368/228
Vienna	801/497
Zürich	56/35

Tourist Information: In the main railway station, open 7 days a week.

Administrative Offices: Luzern Tourismus AG, CH-6002 Luzern, Bahnhofstrasse 3, tel. +41/041/227 1717, fax 227 1718, email:luzern@luzern.org, web: www.luzern.org

Events:

- Lucerne hosts the **World Rowing Championships**, August 18-26.
- One of Europe's top music events, the **Lucerne Festival** is August 15-September 15. The festival schedule lists 80 separate performances
- The city's 4th annual piano festival, **Piano 2001** takes place November 20-25, 2001 and features pianists Radu Lupu, Arcadi Volodos, Evgeny Kissin, plus top jazz musicians and a number of young pianists, at the Lucerne Culture and Convention Centre.

For more info on these events contact the Lucerne tourist office.

for most journeys in the area.

Everywhere in Switzerland are cable car and funicular rides to mountain tops. At the top of each is a great view and a restaurant. Lucerne is no exception. Take nearby **Pilatus**, for example, which not only has restaurants but a pair of hotels, one with conference facilities. There is a lunchtime Swiss folkloric show on the mountain and the last train down at 9:20pm allows visitors to stay for a sunset buffet dinner.

In 1868, Queen Victoria (who reportedly traveled in Switzerland under an assumed name) went to the 7,000-foot summit on a mule, but the

most comfortable way to get there now is via boat to the Pilatus-Kulm station where you board the world's steepest railway. Or, the top can be reached via a series of cable cars from the Lucerne suburb of Kriens. It is best, however, to combine the two; go up one way come down the other. The boat/railway journey is a little over two hours from Lucerne and the cable car ride back down to Kriens takes 30 minutes. From there, it's a five-minute walk to the bus station and another 15 minutes by bus into Lucerne. Of course you can always walk. From the Pilatus-Kulm rail station in Alpnachstad the climb up is about five and a half hours. The decent is just under four hours.

The stress-free way to see Lake Lucerne and environs is via lake boat. The Vierwaldstättersee (a.k.a. Lake Lucerne) is a substantial, irregularly-shaped body of water with many inlets, bays, and lakeside villages. A fleet of 20 passenger vessels crisscrosses it regularly to serve such ports of call as Weggis, Bürgenstock, Vitznau, Brunnen, Rütli and Flüelen. The ride is free with most rail passes or you can purchase an all-day ticket for \$37 first class and \$25 second class. In addition to the regular service, there are special lunch and dinner cruises.

A three-day Lucerne visit might include one day for the main in-town sights as described in the *Michelin Green Guide for Switzerland*; another for a trip to Pilatus, and the last a day on the lake, stopping where the spirit moves.

Accommodations**The Hotel**

The hotel in Lucerne is The Hotel. Across from a park in a quasi residential/commercial neighborhood, not far from the rail station, this sleek marvel of glass, steel and hardwood is without doubt the most stunningly designed hotel we've seen. It is a creation of famed Paris architect, Jean Nouvel, winner of this year's Royal Gold Medal for Architecture, whose credits include Lucerne's new lake-

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side congress center, Berlin's Galeries Lafayette, and the acclaimed Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.

Here there are no "singles" or "doubles," only deluxe studios, junior suites, and garden and park deluxe suites. Stepping into one from the unremarkable, industrial hallways serves only to enhance the experience of being in these extraordinary guestrooms. All feature giant, single-pane windows; pivoting matte stainless steel cabinets for storage and entertainment components; minimalist furnishings designed especially for The Hotel by Nouvel; Brazilian cherrywood table surfaces; deeply-polished floor planks; and, on the ceiling of each room, in soothing, muted colors, a scene from one of 25 films. At night, wall sconces illuminate these guestroom ceilings, creating an extraordinary exterior view for passersby.

The Hotel's stylish Restaurant Bam Bou features Asian/French dishes prepared by a California chef, Andrew Clayton. Choose from such starters as Crab Cakes with Saffron Chilli Hollandaise (18.50 Sfr./\$11), Five Spice Foie Gras Terrine (24 Sfr./\$14) or Thom Kha Curry (17 Sfr./\$10). Main dishes are in the 38 to 44 Sfr. (\$22 - \$25) range and include Rack of Lamb Tandoori, Indonesian Marinated Duck Breast, and Wok-Fried Tagliatelle with Squid & King Prawns. The imaginative desserts are all 13 Sfr. (\$7).

Though Bam Bou is below street level it uses a clever arrangement of canted windows and mirrors to essentially "pipe" daylight into the black-walled room. In addition, the system allows pedestrians to see down into the restaurant for a glimpse of the kitchen's carefully prepared and arranged dishes.

Our sole reservation about the five-star The Hotel — other than its pretentious name — is that comfort may have been compromised in guestrooms in order to accommodate design. There are no couches, only one pleasing-to-the-eye but rather

severe leather easy chair. If there are two people in the room, someone has to sit in a straight-backed chair or on the bed.

The Hotel is currently offering discounts of 10% to 20% at its website, making the deluxe studio at about \$180 per night an excellent value in a city with Zürich-like prices.

Daily Rates: Deluxe studio 390 Sfr. (\$223), junior suite 460 Sfr. (\$263), deluxe suite 510 Sfr. (\$291)

Contact: The Hotel, Sempacherstrasse 14, CH 6002 Luzern, tel. +41/041/226 86 86, Fax 226 86 90, email: info@the-hotel.ch, web: www.the-hotel.ch/

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 14/20

Art Deco Hotel Montana

There are few better places to appreciate Lucerne's splendid setting than from the balcony of your lake-view room at this four-star hillside hotel. Built in 1910 after the completion of the Gotthard tunnel which spurred tourism in the region, the Montana has the open features — high ceilings, wide hallways, large windows — that characterize hotels constructed during that period.

Spacious guestrooms, most with lake views, are decorated in shades of rose and light pink, and have marble baths.

The funicular which carried guests to the hotel from the main street at lake level has now been replaced by an automatic elevator-like cable car. Very handy.

The hotel's classic Louie-Bar, with its splendid views, frequently offers live music; accomplished jazz and blues groups.

This is a pleasant, lively hotel. We wish, however, it was a little less expensive.

Daily Rates: Singles 150-230 Sfr. (\$86-131), doubles 260-395 Sfr. (\$149-\$226)

Contact: Hotel Montana, Adigen- swilerstrasse 11, CH-6002 Luzern, tel. 041/516565, fax 516676, email: info@hotel-montana.ch, web: www.hotel-montana.ch/

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 9/20

Hotel Schweizerhof

This palatial but sterile hotel on the lake has long been considered Lucerne's premiere stop. Ownership has been in the same family since 1861 and guests have included Mark Twain, Leo Tolstoy, Richard Wagner, Napoleon III and Kaiser Wilhelm.

However, its imposing marble columns and pilasters, crystal chandeliers, mirrored ceilings, huge paintings and overstuffed, flower-patterned furniture failed to inspire us. Beside The Hotel, the Schweizerhof seems dowdy and stuffy. Perhaps the venomous way in which a senior woman employee publicly chastised a much younger female clerk at the reception desk soured us on this *Grand Dame*.

Daily Rates: Singles 240 to 280 Sfr. (\$137-\$160), doubles 290 to 495 Sfr. (\$166-\$283). Breakfast not included.

Contact: Schweizerhof Luzern, Schweizerhofquai 3, CH-6003 Luzern, tel. +41/041/4100410, fax: 4102971, email: info@schweizerhof-luzern.ch, web: www.schweizerhof-luzern.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 8/20

Hotel Wilden Mann

Cozy, well-run hotel in the center of Lucerne's shopping district, five minutes walk from the train station. The building was a staging post for travelers crossing the St. Gotthard pass over the Alps in 1517, centuries before the tunnel was built.

Everything here is fresh and clean and there is a relaxed atmosphere in the small, comfortable lobby and dining rooms. The lounge has a wood-burning fireplace. Most of the 50 guestrooms are larger than average, all are individually decorated, and some are reserved for nonsmokers. The best are the newer "romantic" rooms such as Numbers 209 and 217, the latter with beam ceiling.

A warm welcome, comfortable accommodations and a considerable amount of old-world charm give this hotel "Editor's Choice" status.

See our review of the hotel's Burgerstube restaurant later in this story.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Daily Rates: Singles 165-195 Sfr. (\$94-\$111), doubles 260-360 Sfr. (\$149-\$206)

Contact: Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, email: mail@wilden-mann.ch, web: www.wilden-mann.ch

Rating: Quality 15/20, Value 15/20

Hotel Rebstock/ Hotel Hofgarten

The well-located Hofgarten and Rebstock are under the same management and both are housed in separate 12th century buildings near the main cathedral (early morning bells) and the Lion Monument.

Both are attractively decorated and liberally endowed with modern pictures and sculptures, though the Rebstock's Art Nouveau-style guestrooms, with their unconventional color schemes, are more imaginative. Number 122 is a spacious double with a notable antique door to the bathroom. At the Hofgarten our choice would be cozy Number 226 under the eaves.

The hotels are under the benevolent and capable rule of owner Claudia Moser, who is responsible for choosing the art that is the hallmark of both establishments.

Rebstock Daily Rates: Singles 160 to 180 Sfr. (\$91 to \$103), doubles 260 to 280 Sfr. (\$149-\$160)

Contact: Hotel Restaurant Rebstock, St. Leodegar-Strasse 3, CH -6006 Luzern, tel. +41/041/410 35 81, fax 410 39 17, email: rebstock@hereweare.ch, web: www.hereweare.ch

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Hofgarten Daily Rates: Singles 160 to 195 Sfr. (\$91 to \$111), doubles 260 to 295 Sfr. (\$149-\$169)

Contact: Hofgarten Hotel, Stadhofstrasse 14, 6006 Luzern, tel. +41/041/528888, fax 528333, email: hotel@hofgarten.ch, web: www.hofgarten.ch/

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Cascada

Easily the best value we found in Lucerne and completely renovated earlier this year. Though the clientele of this

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traditionally modern hotel is primarily business, the well-furnished, sparkling new guestrooms; convenient location next to the railway station; efficient, friendly, management; and low prices, are powerful pluses.

To those who book via the Internet, the hotel offers complimentary parking, no access fee for phone calls, a free fruit plate upon arrival, and a free room upgrade (if available).

Rooms available for nonsmoking and disabled travelers.

Daily Rates: Singles 105 to 170 Sfr. (\$60-\$97), doubles 160 to 250 Sfr. (\$91-\$143)

Contact: Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel: + 41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, Email: info@cascada.ch, web: www.tophotels.ch/cascada/index.asp

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Löwengraben

This onetime prison, last used in 1998 but now converted to a hotel with restaurant, gallery and performing arts venue, offers the most unusual sleeping accommodations ever reviewed in these pages. Virtually all guestrooms are in former inmate cells and, though such necessary amenities as a private toilet and shower have been added, most remain in the jail house configuration: one small, barred window high on the wall; the original reinforced door with only a peephole, and two basic cots. The beautifully refinished hardwood floors, too, are original.

Some rooms are larger and several have unusual décor. The Library Suite (222 Sfr./\$126), for example, still has the shelves and books that were in the original prisoners' reading room. In the Barabas Suite is a mural painted by an inmate, Barabas, while incarcerated in that very room. He was released only a few years ago and is now a well-known Lucerne artist and customer of the Löwengraben's restaurant.

In fact, not only are several former inmates customers of the

hotel and restaurant, they hold regular reunions there.

Löwengraben is not for everyone, most rooms are a bit claustrophobic. Even the more adventurous will probably find one overnight is enough to satisfy any curiosity about jailhouse life. The hotel offers five levels of accommodations and the least expensive "Budget" rooms are not recommended. "Upgrade" rooms have private toilet facilities but are still quite small. The "Up-couple" and "Unplugged" rooms are better but most comfortable will be one of the four suites. Don't misunderstand, the rooms are immaculate and were redone using good fixtures and furnishings. It's just they are so very small and basic.

For those who can't envision even one night in a jail cell, there are guided tours daily at 5:30pm (3.5 Sfr./\$2).

Daily Rates: Singles 55 to 222 (\$32-\$126), doubles 80 to 222 Sfr. (\$46-\$126). Breakfast is included only in the "Up-couple," "Unplugged" and "Suite" categories, everyone else pays 9 Sfr. (\$5).

Contact: Hotel Löwengraben, Löwengraben 18, CH-6004 Luzern, tel. +41/041/417-1212, fax 417-1211, email: hotel@loewengraben.ch, web: www.loewengraben.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 14/20

Sustenance

Lucerne is not renowned for its cuisine. In and around the old town are many restaurants whose principal clients are here-today-gone-tomorrow-forever-tourists — not a formula that makes for great meals. Michelin, in fact, confers not a single star on any restaurant. Only the tavern-like Galliker (Schützenstrasse 1, tel. +41/041/240 10 02) gets a red "Menu" (good food at moderate prices) from Michelin.

Wilden Mann Burgerstube

Though it gets its share of tourists, the cozy, beam-ceilinged Burgerstube in the Hotel Wilden Mann also has a strong local following. And for good reason,

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the traditional Swiss cuisine — with adventurous touches here and there — is excellent, and the cozy, old-world room, with carved wood wainscoting, decorated ceiling beams and mullioned windows, is the perfect venue for it.

We were fortunate to be served by Sylvia Meier, a 23-year veteran of the Burgerstube who told us she has regulars who have been coming to the restaurant since before her time.

We began with a succulent little “gift of the house” consisting of three tiny slices of duck breast arranged around a dollop of light chicken liver mousse.

After fine mixed salads, we tested a pair of old war horses and were not disappointed. Thinly sliced calves liver sauteed in butter with Swiss fried potatoes (*Geschmetzelte Kalbsleber in Butter Sautiert, Rösti*) was richly delicious if not American Heart Association-approved. A dish we’ve had dozens of times, *Wienerschnitzel*, with French fries and vegetables (*Riesenschnitzel Paniert mit Pommes-Frites und Gemüse*), fulfilled every expectation. Each cost 33 Sfr. (\$19).

Prices of main dishes in the Burgerstube range from 21 Sfr. (\$12) for roasted pork sausage with onion sauce and *Rösti*, to 42 Sfr. (\$24) for sirloin steak. Interesting first courses include oven broiled pears with herbed cheese and salad (18 Sfr./\$11) and marinated boiled beef carpaccio with grated cheese (22 Sfr./\$13).

The Burgerstube gets Michelin’s “two tire” symbol as offering a midweek “dish of the day” — usually lunch — at under 20 Sfr. (\$12).

Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

Restaurant Einhorn

Our experience at this first floor (our second) Italian restaurant is a lesson in how *not* to do it. First we allowed ourselves to be seated at a bad table and then accepted an English menu. We should have

waited for a better table and we’ve found over the years that quite often not all a house’s dishes are listed on the English menu. That turned out to be true here.

At least the place was popular, at 9:30pm every table was filled and the air was hazy with cigarette smoke. Service was slow and impersonal but the food was worse. We couldn’t finish the ponderous, heavily-spiced pasta dishes that each cost about \$11.

Normally we wouldn’t bother with a review of such a bad restaurant but this one is centrally located on a pedestrian-only street and could easily catch the unwary.

Restaurant Einhorn,
Hertensteinstrasse 23

Rating: QUALITY 5/20, VALUE 9/20

Other Restaurants


Another downtown Lucerne restaurant with a local following is the **Hotel Rebstock Wirtshaus**. An eclectic clientele of local celebs and business folk are attracted to this bustling room with its dark wood ceiling supported by thickly-hewn wood timbers. Main dishes are in the \$18 to \$24 range.

We can only report on a couple of tasty salads: *Cerevalet-Kase Salat* (wurst and cheese) in a light, vinegary dressing, and *Randen-Apfel Salat* (beetroot salad) with horseradish dressing tossed with raisins, walnuts, and apple slices. The wurst salad cost 18.8 Sfr. (\$11) and the beetroot was 17.8 Sfr. (\$10).

Hotel Restaurant Rebstock, St. Leodegar-Strasse 3, tel. 410 35 81. Can’t rate based on this light lunch.

Two popular Lucerne spots *Gemütlichkeit* staffers have recommended from previous visits are **Maihöfli**, (Maihofstrasse 70, tel. 420 60 60) and **Zunftthaus zu Pfistern** (Kornmarkt 4, tel. 410 36 50)

The latter is in an ornately decorated former guild house near the Kapellbrücke and serves the usual Lucerne and Swiss specialties.

The Maihöfli is about a 15-minute walk north of the center and offers lighter, more modern dishes. Call ahead for reservations. 

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were quite pleased both with the hotel and the village. We had a superior double with a lake view, which ran about 190 Sfr (\$109) per night. The setting is exceptional and I can’t think of a more pleasant view from a breakfast room.

We had a fine dinner there, hiked to Giessbach along the lake, and went from there to Lauterbrunnen as the jump-off point for activities in the area. One day we took the train up to the Schynige Platte and its Alpine Garden. Quite interesting, especially for those who have an interest in gardening. Also of note is the Lowa boot center at the train station, where they lend boots as well as Leki poles for demonstration to hikers. No selling pressure, just an opportunity to try before you buy. Lowa boots were selling locally for about 20% less than in the U.S. For other than the most casual hiking, poles are essential and Lekis are top drawer, especially the collapsible models, which almost everyone was carrying, including the very elderly.

We took the funicular and train combination up to Mürren. What a peaceful and precious place that is, not overrun by tourists and not excessively commercial. The view is extraordinary. We had a pleasant lunch at the **Eiger Stubli**, across from the *Bahnhof*, then walked down to Winteralp, where we caught the train for the return ride to Lauterbrunnen. Since it was still reasonably early, we then went up to Wengen, took the cable car to Mannlichen, and then hiked over to Kleine Scheidegg just in time to catch the last train down to Lauterbrunnen, leaving at 7pm. (Note to hikers: if you miss that train, plan to stay at the small hotel in Kleine Scheidegg or risk hiking down to Wengen before dark.) This remains my favorite hike of all. It’s about an hour from end to end, plus whatever time one spends enjoying the scenery, taking pictures or just resting.

In the Interlaken area, we had an especially nice dinner at **Stellambi-**

ente, in the **Stella Hotel** (Waldegstr. 10, tel. +41/033/822 8871, fax 822 6671, email: info@stella-hotel.ch). We paid about \$50 for two and enjoyed the local yodeling club while we ate. Every Thursday, the restaurant has a special event, which combined with an attractive setting and better than average food to make it a superior choice in the Interlaken area. In Kandersteg, we ate at the **Ruedihus** (tel. +41/033/675 8182, fax 675 8185, email: doldenhorn@compuserve.com), a beautifully restored old building. Enjoyable and equally reasonable.

In Murten, we stayed at **Le Vieux Manoir** (tel. +41/026/678 6161, fax: 678 6162, email: welcome@vieuxmanoir.ch). Unfortunately, as pretty as Murten is, the overall area did not please us as much as the Berner Oberland. Even though Le Vieux Manoir comes up at the top end of the scale for its service and exterior appearance, we found it disappointing. For one thing, the room we had (morning sun) was poorly ventilated and not particularly roomy. For another, the restaurant, although elegant, served food that was ordinary. Far better was our dinner at the **Ringmauer Restaurant**, right next to the ramparts in the village. And it was half the price of Le Vieux Manoir.

A few other nitpicks: After having our car scratched during the night while parked outside the hotel, we asked for copies of a few reports that had to be filed. The front desk people took care of that promptly and then levied a small charge for same. Seems petty. Worse was being charged for the cookies we found on our pillows each night. Our overall feeling was that the business aspect of the hotel was almost always "in our faces."

I should also note that Le Vieux Manoir promotes its high speed internet access from guest rooms. However, you must rent a computer for 25 Sfr. (\$14) per hour to use the access since it requires a special configuration and cabling. Few people would be pleased to pay that much, in my opinion. The alternative is a 56K hookup through the data

port in the room phone.

For our travels throughout the Berner Oberland, we used a regional rail pass. At 180 Sfr. (\$103) for three days unlimited use and four days of 50% discount, it was a time saver and perhaps a good value. We even used the pass for our trip to Zermatt. It was good all the way to Brig, so we had to pay a small surcharge from there as well as to Gornergrat.

Our last night's dinner was at **L'Hotel de Ville** (tel. +41/021/634 05005, fax 634 2464) in Crissier, outside Lausanne. We had been there in 1985, when Fredy Girardet was at the helm. Our sense was that it was somewhere between a two-star and three-star. Everything was extremely well done, but nothing was all that distinguished. Ten days earlier, we had dinner at **Chez Marc Veyrat** at Veyrier du Lac, also a three-star. A totally different experience, which was extraordinary in many ways and perhaps so far off the chart that we would not rush to pay a return visit. Far more to our liking was **Karl-Rudolf Obauer** (tel. +43/06468/52120, fax 521212) in Werfen (below Salzburg) or **Mittermeier** (+40/09861/9454-0, fax 94 54-94, email: info@mittermeier.rothenburg.de) in Rothenburg.

RUSSELL WAYNE
VIA EMAIL

Likes Hotel List & Back Issues

I have just read the July issue and I compliment you on the new web features for subscribers (hotel list and archived issues). What a great bonus!! Thank you.

Over the years, your publication has been excellent, but it is the little things like this new feature that make you stand out above others.

GEORGE KOSTELL
VIA EMAIL

To Catch a Thief

While on our vacation in Biot, France (midway between Nice and Cannes), my wife and I rented a villa on top of a hill overlooking the Med. We slept in one bedroom and my wife's sister and her husband slept in the other.

Our bedroom was one of two windows in the lovely villa that had shutters instead of barred bars in the window frames. That should have been a warning, but it was not. Also, we had not been warned by the rental agency. My wife and I slept our second night there with the shutters open and the window open - just as we would have at home. That was a mistake.

While we slept, a cat burglar crept into the room and robbed us of cash (both US and French), my wife's diamonds and most of her jewelry, our wallets and her purse. In the morning we discovered the theft. I must have disturbed the burglar when I partially awoke, because he/she did not get everything. Outside the villa we found in the dirt our passports, driver's licenses, one ATM card that had no credit card markings, and various papers valuable only to us. The thieves apparently did not want any evidence with pictures and such to connect them to the crime. A well connected group of thieves would have marketed the licenses and the passports. Now we have learned that our homeowner's insurance did not cover the jewelry because we had not listed the pieces individually on

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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.

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our policy. That came as sort of a second robbery in our minds because we had thought ourselves covered.

A lot of people out there are NOT your friends.

BARNEY HIGGINS
VIA MAIL

Bavarian Vacation Rental

I would like to recommend a great *Ferienwohnungen* at the foot of the Alpspitz in Grainau near Garmisch-Partenkirchen. On the first floor was a large living/dining room combination with television and an eat-in kitchen. A circular stairway took us to the second floor two bedrooms, (one with balcony), and a large bath. As you know, Garmisch-Partenkirchen is five minutes down the road, but more commercialized and more expensive. They usually prefer to rent these places for an entire week so we paid more per day for a shorter period. Our party of four paid a total of 696 DM (\$309) or 174 DM (\$77) per night for four nights.

Thanks for recommending the **Gasthof Fraundorfer** (tel. +49/08821/9270, fax 92 799, email: fraundorfer@gaponline.de) in Partenkirchen. Wonderful food, service, and music.

Our last night dinner at **Achat Hotel** in Langen was unfortunately the worst of the trip.

ALLAN AND CHRISTA BUERGIN
VIA EMAIL

(Ed. Note: For the Grainau vacation rental contact: *Christine Bartlechner*, *Ofenlainweg 14, D-82491 Grainau*, tel. +49/08821/81268, fax 81390, email: bartlechner@t-online.de, web: www.grainau.de/Ferienwohnungen_Bartlechner/rechtse.htm. The *Buergin's* stayed in the apartment at *Törleweg 18.*)

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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north, south, east or west from the airport. (These trips of many years ago were the result of spur of the moment urges. Throwing a few

maps and guidebooks in the suitcase was the extent of trip preparation; which is too bad, because planning for it is one of the most enjoyable aspects of travel.)

There are several advantages to "winging it," mostly related to flexibility. You can easily extend your stay in a hotel or town that turns out to be better than expected. On the other hand, if a place doesn't meet expectations you can vacate in a hurry. You also can easily and quickly move up or down the luxury ladder. For example, if you've spent several days in simple *Zimmer Frei* lodgings and suddenly get the urge for a night or two of the hedonistic pleasures of one Europe's finest hotels, you aren't encumbered by reservations or previous plans. Of course, the reverse is also true. If you're spending too much money in a chic resort or big expensive city, it's no problem to head for the simpler, cheaper countryside.

There are several factors which make "itinerary-less" travel so effortless in central Europe: the extensive network of excellent, scenic backroads; the marvelous railway systems, and the plethora of hotels in nearly all price categories.

Germany, Switzerland and Austria are compact enough that most spontaneous travel urges can be satisfied in just a few hours. One afternoon a few years ago we were puttering along a backroad north of Nürnberg when we began to reminisce about a particularly good time we'd had on a previous trip at the **Gasthof Fraundorfer** in Garmisch-Partenkirchen — lots of good food, beer, music and *gemütlichkeit*. Why not go back? Why not tonight? We called the Fraundorfer to reserve a table, hopped on the Autobahn and were there in just a few hours. Another time we decided after lunch to drive Austria's Grossglockner Road which twists its way to a height of 12,457 feet. Following another sudden urge we elected to stay in a hotel at the summit thereby turning a summer drive into a winter experience.

This kind of travel offers the freedom to do exactly as you choose;

to turn at whim down an inviting country road, or decide at the last minute to stay overnight in an out-of-the-way village. When it's all booked in advance, you'll never have the experience of waking up in the morning and realizing you may sleep that night in a town you've never heard of before.

Naturally, there are variations on this theme. One doesn't need to be completely unstructured. If you dread looking for a place to stay in the afternoon, you can plan a few hours or even a day in advance. Choose a destination for the next night and your current hotel will gladly phone ahead for a reservation, or do it yourself. Even in the summer you'll get your first choice of hotel most of the time. And who knows, you're second or third choice might turn out to be something special.

Next month: Essential tools for "winging it" in Europe. 

Inside Travel

Times Tabs Berlin Restaurants

Mark Bittman, writing recently in the *New York Times*, says Berlin is "following in the footsteps of New York and London, where imported cuisines are generally preferable to indigenous ones."

He opines that Berlin has "world-class restaurants, with beautiful surroundings and kitchens that would rate among the best anywhere."

Four very expensive restaurants recommended by Mr. Bittman include:

- **Portalis** (French) Kronenstrasse 55-58, tel. +49/030/2045 5496, fax 2045 5498
- **Vau** (Mediterranean) Jägerstrasse 54, tel. +49/030/2029 730, fax 2029 7311
- **Zum Hugenotten** (Asian fusion) Intercontinental Hotel, Budapeststrasse 2, tel. +49/030/2602 1263, fax 2602 2600
- **First Floor** (French) Palace, Hotel Budapeststrasse 42, tel. +49/030/2502 1020, fax 2502 1161 

Germanic Travel Alert

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