

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

August 25, 2001

Winging It, Part 2

I may have gotten a little carried away last month and perhaps some clarification is in order. While we advocate the flexibility and freedom of traveling without an itinerary, it's not for everyone all of the time.

There are practical reasons for a planned itinerary. To insure accommodations in the most popular destination cities, for example, advance hotel reservations are necessary. If you arrive in Munich during the last two weeks of September (Oktoberfest) do not expect to find a place to stay. Similarly, most big cities in our coverage area frequently host events that not only grab all the hotel rooms for miles around but also drive up hotel prices. These are things you find out when you plan ahead.

And, of course, if there is no trip strategy there is nothing to plan for, so we free-wheeling sojourners miss an enjoyable aspect of travel.

But for those pliable souls who can deal with the occasional disappointment, planning as you go offers many rewards.

Last month we poked a little fun at travelers who head for Europe equipped with a spreadsheet itinerary that accounts for every 15-minute segment of their vacation. At the other end of that spectrum are those who have no plan whatsoever. We recommend something

Continued on page 2...

This Month in Gemütlichkeit

Features	Page
South Tyrol	1
Bavarian Drive	1
Recommended Web Sites	7
Readers' Forum	8
Inside Travel	8
Commentary	
Dear Subscriber	1
Hotels/Restaurants	
Castle Rundegg, Meran I	3
Hotel Bavaria, Meran I	4
Villa Augusta, Meran I	4
Hotel Elephant, Brixen I	4
Hotel Goldener Adler, Brixen I	4
Restaurant Forsterbräu, Meran I	4
Restaurant Elephant, Brixen I	5
Chorherrenstift Neustift, Neustift I	5

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

SOUTH TYROL

Readers have often requested coverage of the Südtirol, the German-speaking part of Italy. This month, Doug Linton reports on a recent research visit to the region.

You would think Austrians have enough mountains to keep them occupied for a lifetime. Yet, many have a special fondness for Italy's German-speaking region of Südtirol or South Tyrol, which Italians prefer to call *Alto Adige*. There they enjoy many of the same things they have at home: tasty *Knödels*, good wine, and beautiful Alpine scenery. Of course, the region does have a few differences, such as a surprising number of palm trees and a darker roast of coffee, but overall it must feel like a home away from home. One reason for the similarity is that until the end of World War I, this piece of the Alps belonged to Austria, forming the

By Doug Linton

southern portion of the Austrian province of Tyrol.

So, why would Austrians travel abroad to see things they already have and eat food they can find at home? The main reason is the differences, which stand out even more among the similarities. The weather is warmer and drier on this side of the Alps, giving the jagged mountain peaks an unexpected Mediterranean character. It is why during Habsburg times, South Tyrol was considered Austria's "balcony to the sun." The craggy landscape also provides a dramatic setting for numerous castles and ruins that attest to its long history as a contested borderland and trade route.

Continued on page 3...

Bavarian Drive

Perhaps you're exhausted by Salzburg's overcrowded venues and feel in need of a quiet day in the country, or maybe, as we were, you're in Bad Reichenhall with a free day on your hands.

By Bob Bestor

Whatever the motivation, this excursion through the southeast

Bavarian countryside traverses a variety of landscapes on its way to Germany's largest fortress, to several interesting small towns, and, via boat, to Ludwig's least-known castle. The two main attractions along the route are **Schloss Herrenchiemsee**, on an island in the Chiemsee, and the medieval town of **Burghausen** with its giant fortress.

The starting point is the Bad Reichenhall rail station. (Those

headquartered in Salzburg can drive the Autobahn toward Munich and take the Bad Reichenhall exit just over the border into Germany.)

Essential to the journey is a map of the area scaled at 1:150,000 or 1:200,000. We used the *ADAC Maxi-Atlas* (the *Falk Maxi-Atlas* is the same) at 1:150,000. The roundtrip is about 130 miles and, with stops for sightseeing and refreshments, plan to spend a full day.

At the rail station set your odometer to zero and turn left leaving the parking lot. Go straight at the Autobahn sign, heading toward Lofer on highway #21. At 12.3 kilometers (we are including our odometer readings but, for a variety of reasons, your route may vary from ours; thus your readings may not match those

Continued on page 6...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

between these two extremes. It is probably prudent, for example, to reserve first and last night hotels and in such always busy destinations as Salzburg, Munich, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Vienna, Zermatt and Lucerne. In addition, even if you do not make hotel arrangements in advance, you will probably be more comfortable with at least a rough plan of which regions you want to visit. Wherever you fall along the spectrum, keep a few days of every trip open for just browsing. Pick a backroad and head down it, stopping where and when you feel like it.

Traveling in this footloose fashion, though possible via rail, is tailor-made for the automobile. But as relaxed and free as it is, three questions must still be answered almost daily by the roving traveler: How do I get where I'm going?; What will I see?; and How do I find a place to stay?.

How Do I Find a Place to Stay?

For many, this is the most important question of the trip and there are several useful resources to rely on.

Gemütlichkeit's Hotel Database

You can either download or print it off the Internet (www.gemut.com) and take it with you, or we can mail subscribers a free copy for \$3 to cover postage and handling. In Europe, of course, you can access the hotel database from an Internet café or possibly from your hotel.

Tourist Offices

A simple and effective way to locate hotel rooms is to go directly to the local tourist office upon arrival in town. They'll offer a wide choice of available accommodations and often can make bookings. Sometimes they even offer special discounted deals.

Michelin's Red Guides

In Germany and Switzerland (no Red Guide for Austria), these books are essential for the independent auto traveler. Perhaps a better, more contemporary title for the Germany book would be "10,000 Good Places to Eat and Sleep in Germany." That's right, about 10,000 hotels and restaurants; all listed and rated, with prices, phone and fax numbers, email addresses, plus extensive information communicated via symbols on each establishment's facilities and features. The symbols are explained in several languages, including English. The Switzerland guide is smaller but no less comprehensive. These books have so many useful features there isn't space to list them all but here are a few:

☐ **City Maps:** The Germany guide has city maps for about 150 of the larger towns and the Switzerland guide contains maps of about 40 cities. Spotted on them are the hotels and restaurants listed in the guides, and in a major city like Munich that can be 200 or more. (By comparison, Frommer's Germany contains fewer than 100 Munich hotel and restaurant listings. And, of course, Michelin rates establishments in hundreds

of small towns and villages that aren't even mentioned by Frommer or Fodor or any of the other well-known, all-purpose guidebooks.)

You can imagine how handy it is to have a map of a city you're driving into for the first time, with the location of your hotel marked on it.

☐ **Distance tables:** These are in kilometers and show the distance between major cities in both Germany and Europe. In addition to the tables, the Red Guide listing for each town, even the smallest, shows the distance to three or four important cities in the region. Using these in combination with the tables, one can come fairly close to figuring the distance between any two cities in the country and in Europe.

☐ **Locator maps for best places:** These are overall maps showing towns where Michelin finds notable hotels and restaurants. An auto

Continued on page 7...

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:

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Publishers: Robert H. & Elizabeth S. Bestor
Editor: Robert H. Bestor
Contributors: Doug Linton, C. Fischer, R. Holliday, Jim Johnson
Web Master: Paul T. Merschdorf
Consulting Editor: Thomas P. Bestor
Subscription Dept: Kurt Steffans
Subscriber Travel Services: Eric Poole, Andy Bestor

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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.

SOUTH TYROL

Continued from page 1

South Tyrol also has a fascinating, contradictory nature. During Habsburg days, it was one of the monarchy's largest producers of wines. Given its southerly climate and attachment to a white wine producing country, Tyrol became known for its warm weather and fine red wines. Then after the First World War, the situation was reversed. Suddenly it was a northerly region attached to a red *and* white wine producing nation and began to emphasize its cooler weather and fine white wines. So, while Austrians see it as far south, and Italians as far north, the Tyroleans consider themselves to be right in the center.

For North American travelers, South Tyrol tends to be neglected altogether — I visited in the middle of summer and didn't hear even one American accent. It is an interesting destination off the well-trodden tourist route.

To get a picture of the region's main roads, think of an olive-shaped compass: at the north just below the Brenner pass is Sterzing, at the south the provincial capital of Bolzan, to the east is the former bishopric of Brixen, and to the west is the 19th-century spa town of Meran, with all four points being connected by a ring road. The Autobahn runs over the Brenner down the eastern curve to Brixen and Bolzan, and then around to Meran, while a smaller, two-lane road does the full circle, paralleling the Autobahn and then continuing past Meran to Sterzing. As always, this lesser road is the one to take, as it follows the contour of the landscape and provides a more intimate view of the small villages and the countryside. Ironically, it will get you there faster than the Autobahn, especially in summer when, perversely, traffic and highway construction projects reach their peak.

Like traders and travelers for millennia, I entered Italy via the Brenner Pass, crossing over from Innsbruck. I wasn't alone. It was the traditional start of the European

holidays and traffic slowed to a crawl all the way down to Brixen, so I exited at Sterzing and took the narrow, windy two-lane road up the 2094-meter Jaufenpass. The drive takes in thick forests fading into the green slopes above the tree line, and then drops down stunning switchbacks to Meran.

Meran is blessed with three types of buildings: castles, villas and the porticoed, centuries-old houses of the old town. While many European spa towns were spoiled by the post-war construction of massive concrete blocks, Meran has managed to remain relatively free of such indelible scars. The only exception is the '70s-era design of the 'new' spa facilities (the old 19th century one, though still intact and quite beautiful, is reserved for conferences and such).

The town owes its architectural good fortune to strategic moments of both attention and neglect. Until the mid-19th century, it was known mostly as a *Kühstadt* (cow town). That was when a boosterish mayor decided to transform it into a *Kurstadt*, or spa town. He was helped immensely when Empress Elizabeth and her court paid a visit in 1870 and again in 1872, initiating a rush that resulted in the construction of one beautiful villa after another. Meran's main attractions were, and still are, the healing effect of the warm climate, and strolls along the town's numerous, manicured walking trails or promenades.

When Tyrol became part of Italy at the end of the First World War, Meran lost its clientele: Austrians were now part of another country and Italians did not have to travel far to find warm weather. The town's recent success has allowed it to maintain historic treasures while avoiding the negative effects of modern mass tourism. Augmenting the lovely architecture is Meran's setting along the swiftly flowing Passer river and the verdant slopes of the surrounding valley.

The drive from Meran to Bolzan is not so interesting in itself, but does pass through one of the area's most important wine regions, Terlan and

Girlan. I decided to save the provincial capital of Bolzan for later, and instead continued to Brixen. Here the road follows the contours of the Eisack river valley, winding along the steep, rocky river bed while jagged mountain peaks watch sternly in the distance.

Brixen is the stately home of the prince-bishops who ruled the area for more than 800 years. Highlights include the cathedral, the large square, the prince-bishop's palace, and the narrow lanes of the old town, including two porticoed streets. You will enjoy the town's historical atmosphere, especially when combined with a memorable stay at the **Hotel Elephant** and a visit to the **Neustift Monastery** (more below).

The return to Austria was via a different route; up the Puster valley, past Bruneck (a historic town that is also worth visiting) and across the border. The countryside is a bit more rolling and pastoral than other areas of Tyrol and the drive provided the additional pleasure of short glimpses of the Dolomites near the border. Near Vietschach, the sky arranged a wonderful farewell. When I stopped for one last look at Tyrol, the sun broke through a blanket of clouds and sprayed a dazzle of light over the little village.

Hotels in Meran

Castle Rundegg

One of the town's two castle hotels, the Rundegg certainly has the best location, as it is only a short walk above town. This small 17th century structure has a peaked tile roof and windows flanked by the distinctive red-and-white shutters traditional of the region. The hotel has all the features one expects of a castle: thick, whitewashed walls; vaulted ceilings; heavy wood beams and a small selection of antiques. One of the most graceful details is the lovely garden surrounding the hotel, with its small pond and cluster of patios arranged to catch the sun. The grounds are ringed by a cradle of trees, masking the outer wall and seeming to blend into the green moun-

Continued on page 4...

SOUTH TYROL

Continued from page 3

tain slopes away in the distance.

The lobby, lounge, restaurant, and bar occupy a compact ground floor space, and the extensive pool and beauty farm facilities are located below. Thirty guestrooms are divided between the castle, farmhouse and a newer coach-house, all of which are connected by an underground passage. The Rundegg's décor in the public areas as well as the rooms has traditional refinement, as opposed to the brasher elegance of luxury hotel chains like Kempinski. Most rooms have hardwood floors with Persian rugs, good quality classically-styled furniture, and pale aubergine or dark burgundy fabrics.

The white-tiled bathrooms have medium-sized tubs and double sinks with marble counters.

Management and staff are friendly and conscientious, and contribute greatly to the hotel's charm. The food at the restaurant is good although not transcendent. Breakfast, however, was memorable with tender local *Speck* and a flavorful fontina cheese as the main attractions.

Daily Rates: Singles 195,000-245,000 ITL (\$92-\$116), doubles 320,000-520,000 ITL (\$151-\$245).

Contact: Castel Rundegg, Schennasstrasse 2, I-39012 Meran, tel. +39/0473/23 41 00, fax 23 72 00, email info@rundegg.com, webpage www.rundegg.com

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

In addition to castles, Meran has a number of attractive hotels located in 19th century villas. Some are quite lavish and expensive (such as the **Hotel Palace**), while others are waiting to be freshened up. One good choice is the **Hotel Bavaria** (tel. +39/0473/23 63 75, fax +39/0472/23 63 71), newly remodeled with a spacious garden and pool. A smaller, more 'homey' option is the **Villa Augusta** (tel. ++39/0473/22 23 24, fax ++39/0473/22 00 29) located a short walk from the old town. For a double room with breakfast the Bavaria charges between 222,000-

318,000 ITL (\$105-\$150), while the Augusta costs 115,000-155,000 ITL (\$54-\$73).

Hotels in Brixen

Hotel Elephant Brixen

Although the weather *is* warmer on this side of the Alps, one doesn't expect to see many elephants. You would have though in 1551. Toward the end of that year, Emperor Maximilian returned to Vienna from a visit to his uncle's kingdom in Portugal. He was accompanied by an elephant, which the uncle gave him as a farewell gift. The elephant made it as far as Brixen and then decided to stop for a few weeks to rest. The only place with a stable big enough was a small tavern outside of town. When word got around, the tavern was deluged by crowds eager to see the new tourist attraction. When the elephant finally moved on, the tavern's savvy owner commissioned a fresco for the front of the building to capitalize on the animal's historic and profitable visit.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Besides this wonderful story, the place has been blessed with owners whose good taste and commitment have turned a modest, elephant-sheltering tavern into an excellent hotel.

The lobby and public rooms are attractively decorated in antiques, brass and marble, all of which are kept to a bright polish by the attentive staff. Guest rooms come in either a French style with white furniture and green fabrics, or a more preferable Italianate style with stained hardwood furniture and paneling accented by Persian rugs and burgundy fabrics. The white tile baths have been recently renovated and include good-sized tubs and sinks with marble counters. The best rooms have balconies or terraces.

The 44 rooms are divided between the main house and a smaller but still historic dependency located in the garden across the street. The garden itself is one of the hotel's most charming features. There is a swimming pool and an immaculate green lawn with sun chairs if you like lying around, but more impres-

sive — especially considering the hotel's location right in the middle of town — is the long path that goes around the large apple and pear orchard and then under a tall cherry tree, which was weighed down with fruit during my stay. Wrought iron benches along the way encourage quiet reflection, except for one under the cherry tree which was covered with stains.

There is also an interesting little museum displaying cookery, table settings and menus from the hotel's long history, as well as an engraved throne made from the back left leg of its most famous guest.

Daily Rates: Per person 136,000 to 193,000 ITL (\$64-\$91) without breakfast, 160,000-213,000 (\$75-\$100) with breakfast and 213,000-277,000 ITL (\$100-\$131) for half board a la carte.

Contact: Family Falk/Heiss, Weisslahnstrasse 4, I-39042 Brixen, Italy, tel. +39/0472/83 27 50, fax 83 65 79, email elephant.brixen@acs.it, web: www.acs.it/elephant.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Goldener Adler

Owned by the same family that runs the Finsterwirt (see restaurants below), this 500 year-old hotel located in the heart of the old town has been recently and tastefully renovated, offering modern comfort without sacrificing its historic ambiance. The best rooms have small balconies overlooking the river.

Daily Rates: Singles 80,000-100,000 ITL (\$38-\$47), doubles 150,000-200,000 ITL (\$71-\$94)

Contact: Mayr Family, Adlerbrückengasse 9, I-39042 Brixen, Italy, tel. +39/0472/20 06 21, fax 20 89 73, email info@goldener-adler.com, web www.finsterwirt.com/index.html

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurants in Meran

Forsterbräu

This lively beer garden, owned and operated by South Tyrol's brewery, is just what you would hope for: good beer and hearty food served in an attractive outdoor courtyard under the shade of large chestnut trees. Dishes include *Tiroler Speck-*

knödel, racketball-sized bread dumplings studded with diced bacon (7500 ITL/\$3.53); *Schlutzkrapfen*, a ravioli stuffed with cheese, herbs, then drizzled with brown butter (8000 ITL/\$3.77); and thinly sliced veal fried in beer batter (22,000 ITL/\$10.37). The menu also recommends beers to accompany a multicourse meal: *Pils* with the appetizer, a pale beer for the main course, and a double bock with dessert.

Forsterbräu, Freiheitstrasse 90, 39012 Meran, tel +39/0473/23 65 35, fax +39/0473/21 25 35, open Wednesday-Monday 10am-11pm.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

Meran also has two notable coffeehouses. Located on a cobblestone plaza next to the river and the former Kurhaus, the Italian-style **Café Darling** (Winterpromenade 5) has a bar that serves wine made from its own vineyards. **Café König** (Freiheitstrasse 164), an Austrian-type *Konditorei*, is a grandmotherly sort place to go during the day for coffee and a pastry (open Monday-Saturday 9am-6:30pm).

Restaurants in Brixen

Elephant

In addition to quality accommodations and a tranquil garden, the Elephant also has an exceptionally good restaurant, which provided the best meal of the trip. The menu features Tyrolean specialties served with a gourmet flair. I began with a plate of flavorful *Schlutzkrapfen* (18,000 ITL/\$8.50) dusted with freshly grated Parmesan. Next came a delicious pile of sautéed portabello mushroom slices stacked on top of a tender venison steak and bathed in a reduction sauce (36,000 ITL/\$17). Both were a delight.

Accompanying the meal was a very good red wine bottled especially for the hotel by a local vintner. Reserve a table on the terrace during the summer or in the centuries-old tavern room in winter.

Open Tuesday-Sunday, on Monday opened for hotel guests only, noon-2pm and 5pm-10pm.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurant-Künstlerstübele Finsterwirt-Oste Scuro

This restaurant has two parts. The first serves rustic Tyrolean cuisine in a pretty, tree-shaded courtyard, or indoors in an attractive tavern. The second part offers a fancier, more refined mix of Tyrolean and international foods upstairs in the richly decorated *Künstlerstube*.

Tyrolean dishes include a creamy and very delicious wine soup with cinnamon flavored croutons (9,000 ITL/\$4.24), tender dumplings filled with mushrooms or spinach (13,000 ITL/\$6) and a heavy venison goulash (25,000 ITL/\$12). International dishes include such fantasies as an appetizer of scallops in Riesling sauce with black band noodles and eggplant cakes (30,000 ITL/\$14) and, as a second course, rack of lamb baked in an herbed potato crust (34,000 ITL/\$16).

Finsterwirt-Oste Scuro, Domgasse 3, I-39042 Brixen, Italy, tel +39/0472/20 06 21, fax +39/0472/20 89 73, email info@finsterwirt.com, webpage www.finsterwirt.com, open Tuesday-Sunday 10am-11pm, closed first two weeks in July.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE

Chorherrenstift Neustift

Gemütlichkeit highly recommends a visit to the 12th-century Augustine monastery in Neustift, known for its excellent white wine. The scenery is lovely, especially on a walk up the vineyards or along the river leading to the monastery.

Tours can be made of the 18th-century library at select times, and visitors are free any time to wander around the courtyards and visit the church and cloister.

Chorherrenstift wine can be purchased either by the bottle in the small wine shop in front of the monastery, or enjoyed by the glass at a small wine tavern just across the way.

In addition to its white wines — the Sylvaner is particularly good — the monastery also serves a fruity burgundy and a dense, slightly bitter

Lagrein, a local grape variety. Simple accompaniments include a board stacked with thinly sliced *Speck* and brown bread (12,000 ITL/\$5.66).

Chorherrenstift Neustift, tel/fax +43/01/36 189, open Monday-Saturday 10am-7pm.

Rating: Quality 13/20, Value 12/20

An Assembled Meal

One of the best dinners in Tyrol was gathered from small shops in Brixen and enjoyed in the evening on the balcony of my room at the Hotel Elephant. Here's where to go to assemble such a meal.

Wine: Stampfl, Trattengasse 18, tel +39/0472/83 60 01, open Monday-Saturday 9am-1pm and 4pm-10pm. Located on a central, residential street, this basement wine shop offers vintages from all over the world, but specializes in the fine wines produced nearby. A selection of wines by the glass is available at a bar in the back of the store.

Cheese: Casa del Formaggio, Domgasse 4, +39/0472/83 60 68, open Monday-Friday 8am-noon and 2pm-6pm; Saturday 8am-noon. A lovely, well-stocked cheese shop tucked away on a narrow street fragrant with the products sold there. The two venerable Italian women proprietors offer cheeses from throughout Italy, as well as a small assortment of Tyrolean mountain cheeses.

Meat: Schanung, Adlerbrückengasse 3, tel +39/0472/83 62 02, open Mon.-Fri. 8am-noon and 2pm-6pm; Saturday 8am-noon. South Tyrol is justly famous for its *Speck* (bacon) and *Kaminwurz* (small string sausages so named because they are traditionally hung to dry over the hearth, which makes it look as if the chimney has sprouted roots). Other than local farmhouses, this local chain of delicatessens is one of the best places to sample these Tyrolean specialties, as they still produce them according to traditional rather than industrial methods. They also sell *Graukäse*, a rubbery, flavorless cheese that must be an acquired taste.

Fruit and bread: The town's bakeries all seem to live up to the

Continued on page 6...

SÜD TIROL

Continued from page 5

high, local standards, so it's hard to go wrong anywhere. Regional specialties include excellent multigrain breads and *Schüttlebrötchen*, a dry, long lasting bread that I found to be about as enjoyable as hardtack.

There are also many small fruit shops selling perfectly ripe Italian produce.

(Editor's Note: When telephoning Italy from abroad, do not drop the zero before the area code as is the case with other European countries).

BAVARIAN DRIVE

Continued from page 1

shown here) turn right and cross the Salzach River and follow the signs to Traunstein.

Shortly thereafter turn right onto highway #305, the **Deutsche Alpenstrasse**. As the road begins to climb note the sheer rock face on the right.

At 19 km the houses of the village of Weissbach are spread over a meadow and three kilometers beyond is **Glacier Garden**, a "natural museum" of glacial erosion. There is a place to leave the car for the 15-minute walk to the garden.

Continue on #305 toward Ruhpolding and Reit im Winkl.

At 27 km is an open meadowland scattered with large farm buildings. To your right is a small lake.

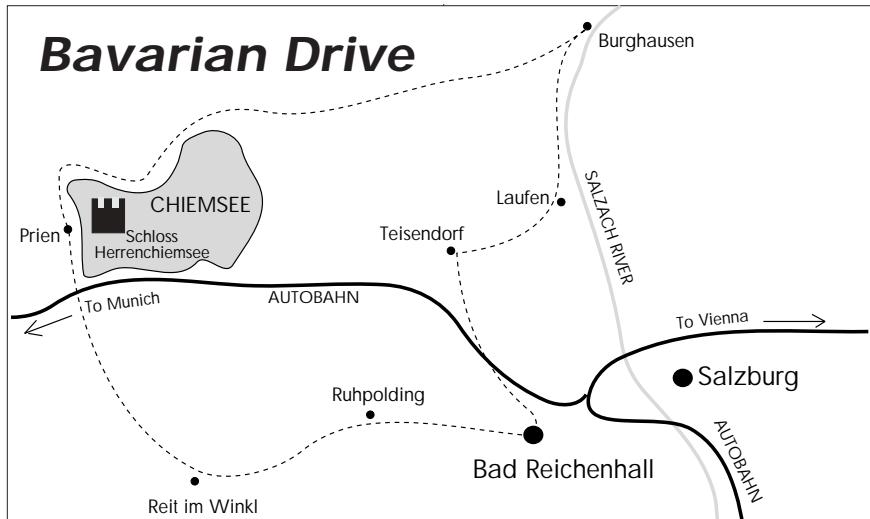
At 29.9 km is a turnout offering great views of the valley. Between late October and late April snow here is a possibility. The road begins to descend.

At 32.4 km we turned right for a short auto tour of Ruhpolding, a typically well-groomed Bavarian town with many traditionally painted houses. Near the Rathaus is a **model train exposition**.

At 41 km we were back on the road to Reit im Winkl. This portion of the drive is quite scenic and from Seehaus to Seegätterl the road is flanked by lakes and dams.

At 61.5 bear right into Reit im Winkl, staying right toward Mar-

Bavarian Drive



quartstein. If the model train exhibit was for the kids, the town's **Schnapps Museum** is for adults.

As you leave Reit im Winkl the road rises and to your right will be some ski jumps. The Maserer Pass at 793 meters (2600 feet) is crossed at 67 km.

Next are three small villages; Oberwössen, Brem and Unterwössen just before Marquartstein at 77 km. You are now on the Chiemsee plain with the mountains in your rearview mirror.

At 80 km is a roundabout; go three-quarters of the way around and follow signs to Bernau. Using your map and road signs, continue on #305 under the Autobahn to Prien. At 94 km you will drive under some railroad tracks and enter Prien, there will be a large McDonald's on the left. At 95.7 km turn right and follow signs to Chiemsee.

Near the Prien/Stock *Hafen* (harbor) are several parking lots charging about 4.5 DM (\$2.10) to park the car while you take a boat to **Herrenchiemsee Castle**. Allow at least 90 minutes for the roundtrip: 15 minutes on boat to the Herreninsel, a 20-minute walk to the castle, a 35-minute castle tour, 20 minutes more back to the boat, and then the 15-minute return by boat to the parking lot. You may want to add lunch and a visit to the museum (included in the 11 DM/\$5.12 castle tour ticket) to that schedule. The roundtrip boat ride costs 10.80 DM (\$5).

Herrenchiemsee, undertaken by Ludwig II after the more famous Neuschwanstein and Linderhof, was his final fling at fantasy castles. Modeled after Versailles, it was never finished and the young king spent only a week there. His building spree had emptied the Bavarian treasury and he drowned under mysterious circumstances in Lake Starnberg, south of Munich.

Back in the car, retrace your steps until you see signs to Wasserburg and Rimsting. If you've followed our route exactly, at 102.7 km you will turn right to Seebruck. On maps this is a yellow road edged in green (scenic) and runs along the lake. At 108.7 km make another right turn toward Seebruck and at 110 km, at the crest of the hill, is a fine view of the lake. Continue on, following the Traunstein and Seebruck signs. At 118.1 km, on the north end of the lake, head left to Obing and Seon. This, too, is a yellow road and in some places is quite narrow with sharp turns. Follow the signs to Seon and, at 122.7 km, make a right across from a large farm. Beyond the lake on the left is **Kloster St Lambert**.

In the center of Seon, turn right. To know where to turn, watch for a square white sign with a wide black band which bends to the right. These are often used to guide motorists through small towns. The black band indicates the direction of the main road; it may be straight, or curve left or right.

At 124.7 km you should be on a narrow road with no centerline headed toward Altenmarkt, and at 130.6 km is highway #304 where you'll turn right. There is no sign. Cross the Alz River and note the falls on the left. At 131.1 km go left toward Trostberg. Check the map and make sure to take the road from Trostberg northeast through Kirchweidach. We made the right turn at 135.4 km and began to see signs to our destination, Burghausen.

Those who fancy putting a standard-shift European car through its paces on a quiet German country road will be right at home here. This smooth route twists, turns and dips its way through high meadows with distant views and past large, prosperous-looking farms.

At 161.1 km, enter Burghausen. Ignore the rather unattractive, commercial part of town and follow the *Stadtmitte* or Burg signs. Michelin gives Burghausen two stars (worth a detour) and another two stars to its castle.

The fortress, which seems to run forever along a bluff overlooking the Salzach, guards the border to Austria. Below it, by the river, is an attractive old town of three and four-story pastel houses placed along the contour of the street. Though the Green Guide says to walk up to the castle, there is an upper parking lot that will save climbing. More information in English can be found at <http://www.teleport.com/~ludwig/>

To return to Bad Reichenhall, drive southwest out of town along the Salzach toward Freilassing. Those with enough time and energy can visit **Tittmoning**, another medieval town with a fortress similar to Burghausen's. If you have had enough, continue along this red road, number 20, to Freilassing and straight on to Bad Reichenhall.

For a little more of the countryside, turn right off this road at Laufen and follow signs to Teisendorf. From there look for signs to Anger and Piding. Just before Anger is a high place with a wonderful view of open pastures and the mountains across the valley with Klosterburg St Peter

and Paul nestled between. 

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

traveler can quickly determine which of these special places is within an easy drive. It is then a simple matter to look up hotel and restaurant phone numbers under the town listings and call for reservations.

❑ **Restaurant finder:** While Michelin is famous for its ratings of expensive restaurants, of even greater value to the ordinary traveler is the notation of simpler, cheaper places serving good food. In the listings, the word "Menu" in red type indicates "moderately priced establishments that offer good value for money and serve carefully prepared meals, often of regional cooking." Other restaurants, which "serve simple meals for less than 25 DM" (\$11) are marked with a tire symbol.

❑ **City information:** In Germany, Michelin covers about 2500 cities, towns and villages and supplies a wealth of information for each: postal code, telephone area code, altitude, population, number of chair and ski lifts, location plus phone and fax numbers for the tourist office, availability of recreational activities such as golf courses and a listing of the major sites are just some of the notations for each town.

How do I get where I'm going?

The Right Maps

Don't think that nice map the tourist office sent you for free is in any way suitable to guide you in your backroads travels. Each of our three countries has a complex network of roads and detailed maps are essential. A scale of 1:200,000 (one centimeter equals two kilometers) or 1:150,000 (1 cm=1.5 km) is best. A scale of 1:400,000 will do in a pinch but forget anything above that. Use the free map to get an overall perspective of the country. Be advised that at a 1:200,000 scale it takes several maps to cover a country.

Various map publishers, such as Germany-based Mairs and ADAC, the German Auto Club, sell meticulously detailed maps. One product we particularly recommend is the

1:150,000, spiral-bound *Maxi-Atlas for Germany* published by Falk and ADAC (doesn't matter which company's atlas you get, they are exactly the same). The advantage is you carry one book that covers the entire country rather than the 24 individual maps it takes to encompass Germany at this scale. The *Maxi-Atlas* is a kind of travel guide in itself – one that can direct you over Germany's most beautiful backroads to pretty, historic towns that aren't even mentioned in guidebooks.

Similar atlases are available for Austria and Switzerland. Purchase them in Europe or phone 800-521-6722 (ask for your 10% subscribers' discount).


Such detailed maps and atlases are fundamental to the wandering traveler with no set itinerary. They display all roads, from Autobahns to footpaths. Here are some of their key features:

- Scenic roads are edged in green and panoramic views along the way are marked with a red or purple rosette. A wine route is marked "Weinstraße." Roads shown in yellow or gray are usually the quietest and least traveled.

- The names of picturesque

Continued on page 8...

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, travel tips 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

Continued from page 7

towns are enclosed in a red box.

- Places of interest are underlined or marked with stars; the more stars, the better.

- There are many other symbols used to mark such things as golf courses, chair lifts, rack railways, youth hostels, waterfalls, churches, cemeteries, toll roads, tunnels, bridges and so on.

- Make sure the map you purchase shows its legend in English as well as German. Most do.

What will I see?

When you're cruising through the countryside you need a good guidebook to provide background on the charming town you've just rolled into, or the significance of that monastery on the hill.

In our opinion, the best references for European sights, history and culture are found in *Michelin's Green Guide* series. There is a separate book for each of our three countries. Leading cities and sights are starred according to importance: three stars is "worth a journey," two stars "worth a detour" and one star "interesting." There are suggested walking and driving tours with descriptions and ratings of the sights along the way, maps of the most important cities, and a few pictures.

The guides are updated at three to four year intervals after three years of research and travel. First drafts are done by several top freelance travel writers, each of whom is familiar with the assigned region. The book's overall editor visits every sight covered in the book. A chief editor oversees the book's editor who, in turn, oversees the freelancers. Cartographers and editors decide on maps for selected towns. Finally, fact-checkers confirm such details as hours of operation and prices. When compared with guides like Fodor and Frommer it is the pros vs. the amateurs.

With the proper maps, enough reference materials to help locate your style of accommodation and a willingness to fly just a little bit

blind, winging it on the backroads of Germany, Austria and Switzerland can be a wonderfully rewarding and relaxing travel experience. ☒

Readers' Forum

Phoning Home

For callbacks to the U.S., I now use prepaid cards from www.nobelcom.com. Though the stated per-minute rate was 16 cents, the actual charge was only 10 cents. It varies by country, but was about as good a deal as I've seen.

Nobelcom offers several cards. Some have connection charges and very cheap per-minute rates. Others have no connect charges and have higher, but still inexpensive, per-minute rates.

We used their Global Call from Switzerland; it works throughout Western Europe. With this card, calls are carried by the AT&T network.

RUSSELL WAYNE
VIA EMAIL

Apartment in the Emmental

We used your publication to help plan a trip to Europe and thanks to *Gemütlichkeit* got in touch with the Emmental Tourist Office (Emmental Tourismus, Schloßstrasse 3, CH-3550 Langnau, tel. +41/034/402 42 52, fax 402 56 67, email: info@emmental.ch) who found the perfect accommodations for the 10 days we were in the Emmental region of Switzerland.

Hans and Ruth Kern own and operate the **Berghaus** in Eggwil (CH-3537, Eggwil, tel./fax +41/034/491 23 68, web: www.berghaus-eggiwil.ch). They were excellent hosts, very helpful and informative and even helped us find the farm where we believe our Swiss-American ancestor was born.

They have a summer apartment as well as bed and breakfast rooms. We used the apartment, and cooked most of our own meals in the well-equipped kitchen. The apartment costs 45 to 85 Sfr. (\$27 to \$51) per day, depending on season and number of guests.

ANDREA GANGER
VIA EMAIL ☒

Inside Travel

Winter Packages a Super Deal

Gemütlichkeit recommends **Ski Europe's** 2002 SuperSki Weeks packages for both skiers and non-skiers. This year's program offers Alpine packages priced at from \$499 to \$1159 per person, 17 destinations are \$799 or less. The arrangement includes airfare, seven nights hotel with breakfast, and a one-week car rental.

Ski Europe is a reliable, U.S.-owned company that has marketed package vacations to European ski destinations for at least 15 years. The firm's president, Richard Davidson, has been a *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber since 1988.

For reservations and information, go to www.ski-europe.com/superski/search.php or call 800-333-5533. To receive Ski Europe's free email newsletter go to www.ski-europe.com.

Jewish Museum Opens

Berlin's **Jewish Museum**, one of the city's top tourist attractions for the past three years despite being empty, opens September 9. This first permanent exhibition will offer visitors a journey through German-Jewish history and culture from earliest records to the present. Jewish contributions to German culture will be presented along with the everyday life of regular Jewish citizens, the history of persecution and the new beginning of Jewish life in Germany.

Designed by renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, the building's dramatic and symbolic architecture has drawn more than 350,000 visitors since 1999 to its empty interiors and unusual exterior.

The museum is at Lindenstrasse 9-14 and will be open daily except on certain religious holidays. Admission will be in the \$4 range. ☒

Germanic Travel Alert

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