

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

September 18, 2001

The words that appeared in this space a little over 10 years ago seem appropriate today.

To Travel or Not to Travel

Among the very best days of my life was Saturday, October 6, 1973. Liz and I were in Copenhagen. It was the first day of our first trip to Europe. Her brief diary entry for the day reads, "Our room at the Royal was across the street from Tivoli Gardens which is closed now. After collapsing for a short time we walked along the Strøget and just looked. Had a beer in a small, quiet pub, walked back, had dinner and bed."

While those few lines don't begin to reflect the sense of excitement and discovery we both felt, they are enough to take me back to Copenhagen again for the first time. I can feel the chilly night, see the unfamiliar architecture and remember that snug, friendly pub and how good the beer tasted and how I knew immediately that traveling in Europe was for me.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

WÖRTHERSEE

One of Austria's best-loved summer playgrounds is in Carinthia, the country's southernmost province. Our Doug Linton has just spent a few days in the area scouting good hotels and restaurants.

Just west of Klagenfurt, in the Austrian province of Carinthia, sits the Wörthersee, a beautiful 17-kilometer-long lake. Its warm waters, surrounding greenery, and views of snow-capped mountains have soothed and inspired European vacationers for decades.

By Doug Linton Composers, especially, seem attracted to the lake.

Brahms wrote his 2nd Symphony while summering here in the 1870s. Gustav Mahler composed five symphonies in just seven summers on the lake, as well as his *Kindertotenlieder*, or *Songs on the Death of Children* (OK, so inspiration is not always cheery). Alban Berg, too, owned a cottage nearby, where he

worked on his racy opera, *Lulu*, as well as his twelve-tone violin concerto.

Great composers weren't the only ones to gather around the lake during the autumn of the Habsburg empire. By the end of the 19th century, the Wörthersee blossomed as a summer resort for Austria's rich and powerful, who flocked to the lake to enjoy the summer sun and the warm, swimmable lake water. They snapped up lakeside property and built luxurious villas and manor homes. With the collapse of the empire, most of these grand homes were sold off and converted to hotels, thereby giving

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Essential Germany

Rare is the Europe-bound traveler who doesn't have to deal with two limiting factors; time and money. Given the current strength of the dollar and transatlantic airfares that remain at mostly

By Bob Bestor affordable levels, time is often the scarcer commodity. "I only have a few

days, what should I see?" is a question we often hear and one that has caused us to examine our own priorities. Just what are the essential places and sights for the traveler to Germany? A collection of essential classical music would, of course, include names such as Beethoven, Bach and Mozart; but how about Greig or Janacek? By the same token, everyone should probably see Rothenburg ob der Tauber and Munich, but do Weimar and Frankfurt belong on

such a list of "essentials"? Judgments like these are extremely subjective. But as usual, we're ready to make them. This issue begins a three-part series on what, in our opinion, are the 10 leading destinations in each of the three countries we cover; in other words the essential Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

We'll start with Germany and list the destinations in order of our preference, as if we were advising a first-time traveler what to see in each of the three countries. Here, then, is our top 10 for Germany

#1. Countryside of Southern Bavaria

To a friend who had never been to Germany, and who had only enough time to see a single city or region, we would recommend the

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Next day we went on to Paris and I recall how we immediately dropped our bags at the hotel and plunged into that marvelous city. Our first walk, mouths agape, started at Palais des Congrès, down the Avenue de la Grande Armée, through the Arc de Triomphe, along the Champs Élysées, through the Place de la Concorde, ending, after numerous stops, at the Louvre. Dream stuff for a kid from a Nebraska farm clan who grew up in a small lumber town on the coast of Oregon.

There have been many trips since and, while I doubt nothing will ever match the first one in sheer "ge-whiz-l'm-in-Disneyland" excitement, the final approach to Vienna, Zürich, London, Paris, Copenhagen, Munich or Frankfurt, is still a sizable thrill. Though the main purpose of our trips these days is work rather than play, I can't wait for the next one. I like to plan travel, talk about travel, write about travel and, most of all, to travel.

And we don't intend to stop now. Whatever happens in the Persian Gulf in the months ahead, it seems that the word "terrorism" is one we will be seeing and hearing with great frequency. We may have to begin to regard travel to Europe the way we do other dangers in our lives. Live with them. Possibly you are concerned and cautious about some of the things that kill Americans every hour of every day — things like

alcohol, butter, red meat and driving an automobile. But if you're like me you haven't given them up. Red meat once or twice a week. Olive oil instead of butter. Swissair to Zürich instead of Pan Am to Frankfurt. Caution, not abstention.

By the way, wouldn't it be wonderful if a televised news conference by the Surgeon General could have as much effect on smokers as a few Rand Corporation terrorism experts speaking on CNN have had on airline bookings to Europe? Cigarette companies, like airlines, would be going out of business. Also, think for a moment about all the smokers who are canceling plans to travel to Europe fearing they may die at the hand of a terrorist.

They can stay home, we're going. It's just too damn much fun. — RHB

(The above Dear Subscriber column is from Gemütlichkeit, January, 1991)

Further Thoughts

As we've all heard, the game has changed. The question is, how much and in what ways. Though at this point, with the carnage only a week behind us, it may seem a bit insensitive to do so, let's for a moment try to project how the events of Sept. 11, 2001, will affect the traveler to Europe.

Based on the experience of the Gulf War, travel to Europe will slow markedly in the next few months. Though November through March fares are already very low, transatlantic ticket prices in the short term seem bound to drop. The difference

from last year is that attractive fares may continue into the spring and summer.

However, with most airlines already talking about domestic schedule reductions of 10% to 25%, that, too, becomes a possible — perhaps even likely — transatlantic scenario. And once reduced supply matches lowered demand, fares will increase. For the next six to eight months, however, cheap airfares to your favorite European destinations should be the order of the day.

Car rental rates in Europe don't figure to be much affected by a lack of American customers. Most European car rental revenue comes from domestic bookings. Rates are tied more to such factors as the used car market and the rental car companies' ability to cut good deals with manufacturers, than the number of American tourists. In addition, the dollar has slipped in the last few

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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

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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.

WÖRTHERSEE

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the modern-day visitor a wonderful choice of architecturally-attractive lodgings.

Even today, the Wörthersee continues to attract Austria's idle rich and others who spend their summers boating on the lake or soaking up the sun on the docks. In the evening, they make a splash in the lake's casino or at one of the plentiful nightspots. This all gives the Wörthersee a glitzy beach-town quality that has led some travel writers to label it the St. Tropez of Austria.

The three main resort towns on the lake are Maria Wörth, Velden and Pörtschach. Though a small two-lane road rings the lake, the best way to get from town to town is via ferry boat. The best is a converted 1909 steamboat that in summer runs a couple of times a day. The steamer trip from Velden to Pörtschach is 95 AS (\$6.38), while a trip to Maria Wörth is 130 AS (\$8.72). Other boats charge approximately 70 AS (\$4.70) for the one-hour trip, which operates hourly from 9am until 5pm. An additional night ferry runs at 8pm and 11pm. If you have a license, there are motorboats and sailboats for rent. If you don't and still have an urge to pilot your own skiff, you can putter around in a little electric boat for 180 AS (\$12) an hour.

Located on a small peninsula, Maria Wörth is the smallest and the most historic of the lake's three prime resort towns. The main attraction is its picturesque church, which dates from the 9th century and is located on a small, meditative rise above the lake. The setting is attractive and tranquil, although less so when overrun by those multifarious tour groups.

At the far west end of the lake is Velden, considered to be the hippest of the three, with its yacht harbor, casino, and an attractive castle. It also has a sweeping harbor promenade, which is particularly pleasant in the evening.

My own favorite is Pörtschach. It has an old beach town atmosphere, a lively main strip, and a large, tree-shaded park with long promenades.

I also spent an evening at a small streetside club listening to the best boogie-woogie, barrelhouse piano player I have ever heard, a young Austrian whose frizzy shock of hair, blissful expression, and fiery playing made him seem like a cross between Jerry Lee Lewis and Bozo the clown. I can't guarantee he'll be there every night, but if he's not someone else is sure to be. It's just one example of the summer surprises found on the Wörthersee.

Accommodations

Villa Miralago

Another surprise was this place. Certainly there are other, more chic, lodgings on the lake, but none has the welcoming, homey charm of this graceful, early 20th-century villa.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Located on the lake, just a short walk from Pörtschach, the Villa Miralago occupies terraced, tree-shaded grounds that include a large grassy lawn and an ornate wooden boat house and dock. The lake view is particularly nice; a small island just offshore gives the impression that yours is the only house on the lake.

The villa was run for more than 40 years by a genteel Austrian lady. When she died nine years ago at age 90, it was sold into the friendly and slightly chaotic Semmel-Werzer family who had the good judgment to give the rooms a new coat of paint, and then more or less leave it as it was. Consequently, the Miralago retains the charming authenticity of an aging villa hotel: high ceilings, beautiful double doors with graceful brass fixtures, decorative tile floors, and antique furniture that ranges from almost regal to slightly scruffy (some might call it character).

Breakfast is served in a sunny, spacious room overlooking the lake. Afterwards, guests can take up a sun chair on the lawn, splash around the boat dock, or just enjoy the view

from one of the villa's spacious porches (one even has a telescope for an evening look at the stars). The latter provide ample space for lounging, which is why most people come here.

Guests are extremely loyal. I met a man who first came to the villa as a boy in the 1950s. He has been back just about every year since then and was visiting with his son's family.

The hotel's 13 rooms have interesting shapes and sizes. Number 3, which overlooks the water, is good for families with children, as it is quite spacious and has an extra sitting room. Number 17 is on the top floor with a great view of the lake, an enormous WC, and a quirky little sitting room in one of the villa's towers. A number of rooms also include balconies.

If you want noble and immaculate, try the Seeschlüssel. But if you want a regal B & B offering great value, this is the one.

Daily Rates: Singles 450 to 950 AS (\$30-\$64), doubles 1,500 to 1,900 AS (\$101-\$128)

Contact: Fritz Semmelrock-Werzer, Hauptstrasse 129, A-9210 Pörtschach, tel +43/04272/2430, fax 24304.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 18/20

Schloss Leonstain

Given its reputation and its rates, I had high expectations for the Leonstain, reputedly one of the Wörthersee's best hotels. It certainly has a loyal clientele that fully books the hotel during the season. It even has an impressive claim on history. Brahms stayed at this 17th century castle during his visits to the lake, and it is here he composed the aforementioned 2nd Symphony. The exterior is inspiring, with thick, white-washed walls covered in vines, topped with a spire and a sloping, terra cotta roof. And verdant gardens enclosed by peaceful, porticoed walkways are meditative enough to strike just about anyone with the Muse.

It is only when one gets to the guestrooms that the sour notes start to chime. Most accommodations are

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WÖRTHERSEE

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rather small and Spartan with heavy furniture and a type of green felt carpet that would look more appropriate on the fairway of a mini-golf course.

The staff has also developed a complacency that often follows success. Maybe they treat repeat customers better, but I'll never know because I'll be staying somewhere else.

Daily Rates: Singles 1,110-1,390 AS (\$74-\$93), doubles 1,800-2,880 AS (\$120-\$193)

Contact: Schloss Leonstain, Leonstainerstrasse 1, A-9210 Pörtschach, tel +43/04272/28 160, fax 28 23, email info@schlossjetzt.com, web www.schlossjetzt.com

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 11/20

Seeschlössl

The Seeschlössl is a charming retreat located in a small Baroque castle right on the lake.

The small front porch of the Habsburg-yellow castle opens to a dark reception room with beautiful parquet floor, a small desk on one side and a wide staircase on the other. Accommodations are nobly decorated with a mix of reproduced and original antiques, hardwood floors with Persian rugs, and fabrics in bright peach and sea green. The tile baths are spacious and modern with double sinks and large tubs.

Breakfast is in a traditional wood-paneled room dominated by a large, knobby porcelain stove. The cast-iron framed back porch, facing the lake, is scattered with rattan sun chairs and cloth sunshades. After the long green lawn, at the water's edge is a small beach next to a large boat dock.

The exceptionally pleasant staff will have you feeling right at home, even if you don't live in a castle.

Daily Rates: Singles 998-2,900 AS (\$67-\$195), doubles 1,520-2,900 AS (\$102-\$195)

Contact: Seeschlössl, Klagenfurter Strasse 34, A-9220 Velden, tel +43/04274/28 24, fax 28 24 44, Web: www.seeschloessl@aon.at

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 15/20

Sustenance

Schiffwirt

After hearing many good reports about it, even from waiters at other pricey places around the lake, I can now attest to my own sublime experience at Restaurant Schiffwirt.

They take an artistic approach to seafood preparation at this restaurant, treating it as though it were some kind of profound mystery. There is even a small brochure of arty photos spiced with recipes and "thought-for-day" kind of sayings.

By its name, I expected to find Schiffwirt housed in some sort of boat replica, but fortunately it is more tastefully located in a small house in a quiet corner of the lake. The atmosphere is comfortably nautical with a touch of elegance and a wry sense of humor. I sat in the small room in the front of the house that was decorated with a surprising number of fish heads mounted face forward, mouths agape as if shocked by what the restaurant serves. There was even a little mounted eel head.

Appetizers included two delicious choices, a plate of smoked freshwater fish (120 AS/\$8) and a grilled plate of Mediterranean shellfish brimming with scallops, calamari, octopus, clams, mussels and scampi (125 AS/\$8.40). A slightly peppery fish soup (49 AS/\$3.30) also contained a potpourri of mussels, clams and a scampi which had flung one of its claws over the edge of my small soup tureen. Then came a salad of mixed greens and marinated tomatoes with side dollop of vinegary potato salad. It was included in the cost of the main course, but served separately as not to distract from the full majesty of the fish.

Guests unsure of what to order may suddenly find the Schiffwirt's owner presenting them with a large platter of assorted fish from which to choose. He will even discuss options for cooking it: grilled, poached or pan fried. I picked the trout (174 AS/\$12), which was lightly breaded with spiced flour, then pan-fried whole and served with a lemon wedge and

a rosette of garlic butter. The flavor was extraordinary: fresh, firm, fleshy, excellent.

Other fish choices include locally-caught pike and carp, as well as a wide selection of saltwater fish flown in from the sea, all served whole and therefore more suited to groups of two or more.

Dessert of choice is chocolaty nut crepes for 60 AS (\$4). This was my final Wörthersee meal, which is unfortunate as it deserved a repeat visit.

Schiffwirt, Klagenfurter Strasse 172, A-9210 Pörtschach, tel. +43/04272/22 71, open Mon.-Thur. 5pm-midnight; Fri.-Sun. 11am-3pm and 5pm-midnight.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

Tschernitz

Since this restaurant also came highly recommended, I was surprised to find it completely empty. It didn't take long, however, to realize it was the season's first really sunny day and everyone with any sense was stretched out near the lake soaking up sun. Since I had driven a long way and was hungry, I decided to stay despite the awkwardness of being the only guest.

For a fairly pricey restaurant in such a beautiful location, the atmosphere at the Tschernitz is rather dull, even imagining it full of customers. It is located in a simple, somewhat modern house with a small patio, both of which are huddled close to the busy two-lane road that runs around the lake. Consequently, outdoors there is just enough traffic noise to be bothersome, while indoors one is left thinking, "Here I am at this beautiful lake, stuck eating indoors!"

Not surprisingly the service was crisp and responsive. After all, I was the only customer.

The food was good, though not great value. I started with *Triestiner* fish soup (65 AS/\$4.37), a mildly flavored broth containing chunks of tomato, onion slices, and flakes of salmon, pike and stockfish. Other starters included *Tafelspitz* — slices

EDITOR'S CHOICE

of Austrian-style boiled beef and vegetables — jelled in aspic and served with a creamy chive sauce. The *cappelletti* pasta stuffed with mushrooms and served with browned butter (125 AS/\$8.39) also looked good.

Main courses include fresh Wörthersee pike (245 AS/\$16) and roast lamb with rosemary potatoes (260 AS/\$17). I settled for *Wiener Backhuhn* (165 AS/\$11), a small chicken boned, breaded and expertly fried so that it was crispy on the outside and juicy but not at all greasy on the inside. It was fantastic. Accompanying it was about a kilo of sticky and much too finely-diced potato salad, topped with arty sprigs of fried parsley. Dessert was at an ice cream shop in town.

Except for the fried chicken — which I frequently find myself thinking back on — I don't know what the big deal is about the Tschernitz. Unless you are looking for exceptional fried chicken served in a formal atmosphere, you will do better at the other restaurants reviewed here.

Tschernitz, Süduferstrasse 112, A-9220 Velden, tel/fax +43/004274/3000, open Wed.-Mon. 11am-midnight.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 10/20

Alt Wiener Hof

Most restaurants at the Wörthersee cater to a captive audience of tourists, and for that reason aren't particularly good.

The Alt Wiener Hof, however, is an exception. Located in a little village just a short drive from the lake, it is one of those good Austrian places one finds in the countryside, with hearty dishes served in large portions and at reasonable prices. The Bürger family rolls out a warm welcome which makes the restaurant a pleasant and homey place to visit.

Soups run about 30 AS (\$2), while main courses — bread dumplings with wild mushrooms and *Schnitzels* and such — hover just above 100 AS (\$6.70). The portions are truly enormous: I heard one table gasp with astonishment when their *Speckknödel mit Linsen* (a large bacon dumpling

served with lintels) arrived looking like someone had dropped a large softball in a bowl of bean soup.

This is also a good place for dessert, particularly the colorful plate of cream cheese dumplings served with wild berries and whipped cream (58 AS/\$3.90).

Alt Wiener Hof, Roseggerstrasse 119, A-9220 Velden, tel/fax +43/04274/51347, open (May-Sept.) Wed.-Mon. 11:30am-10pm and (Oct.-April) Wed.-Mon. 11:30am-2pm and 5:30-9:30pm.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

Kakl Buschenschank

A *Buschenschank* is a farmer's stand that offers only locally produced food and drink, a country version of a Viennese *Heuriger* although serving *Most* (apple cider) rather than wine. Usually it's a little shed or farmhouse, with a half dozen or so wooden tables set out under apple trees, serving thick slices of bread piled high with shaved ham or salami, made to be washed down with a mug of yeasty apple cider. The *Most* is served pure or diluted with a half measure of apple juice.

Although only about a 10-minute drive from Velden, this Buschenschank seems like another world. Turn off the main road and soon you are enveloped by rolling green fields dotted with small farmhouses, and, on the horizon, smoky-blue, snow-capped Alpine peaks.

Clientele is a nice mix of farmers, people from the surrounding towns, and a couple of swank holiday-makers fresh from the lake.

The fare is simple but very good. *Osokollobrot* (38 AS/\$2.55) is a long, thick slice of dark, chewy brown bread covered with thin slices of air-dried beef and topped with a wedge of egg, a slice of tomato, and a crinkled Italian pepper. *Belegtes Brot* (34 AS/\$2.28) is bread topped with a sampling of the different meats the house has to offer.

Larger appetites or groups can order butcher blocks served with mounds of sliced meats, bread spreads, pickles, and a basket of bread for 60-70 AS (\$4-\$4.70). Those

who don't like ham can try the tasty *Haussulz*; meat and vegetables in aspic splashed with roasted pumpkinseed oil (65 AS/\$4.36), or the *Essigfleisch*, a large pile of marinated beef and onion slices (48 AS). *Most* is served by the quarter, half, and full liter, for 12, 22 and 40 AS (\$.80, \$1.50, \$2.68) respectively.

Good food, convivial drink and a relaxed atmosphere make the Kakl a wonderful place to watch the day's sun go down.

Kakl, Unterjeserzerstrasse 18, Velden, tel/fax +43/04274/46 86, open Tue.-Sun. 5-10pm, April 1 – June 23 and July 8-Sept. 29 and Oct. 14-Nov. 15.

A final note: for good coffee and pastries you can't go wrong at either the **Julischka Politzky** (Corso 3) in Velden and **Café Wienerroither** (Hauptstrasse 145) in Pörschach. ☒

THE ESSENTIAL GERMANY

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countryside of Southern Bavaria. This region's culture is as different from our own as any part of Germany. Other strong reasons for the number one ranking are its extraordinary physical beauty, the presence of several Michelin three-star sights, and the fact that its hotel and restaurant prices are among the lowest in the country.

Best Towns: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Berchtesgaden, Mittenwald, Bad Reichenhall, Lindau.

Top Sights: The Bavarian Royal Castles of Neuschwanstein, Hohen Schwangau, Linderhof, and Herrenchiemsee; the Wieskirche; the Abbey at Ettal; the Königsee; the Kehlstein and Obersalzberg,

Suggested Activity: Drive the backroads, staying off the Deutsche Alpenstrasse as much as possible.

A Place to Stay: Gasthof Fraundorfer in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Ludwigstr. 24, tel. +49/08821/9279, fax 92799, email info@gasthof-fraundorfer.de) Doubles \$62 to \$76

Food Suggestion: Dinner at Gasthof Fraundorfer in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

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ESSENTIAL GERMANY

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#2. Berlin

A vast, vibrant and diverse European capital whose last 100 years have been as eventful as any city's in the world. Great museums and orchestras, cutting edge architecture, huge parks, an amazing network of rivers and lakes, nonstop night life, the finest and most varied cuisine of any city in our three countries, and, with Munich, the best shopping in Germany. Best of all, it's half the price of Paris, London or Rome.

Top Sights: Potsdamer Platz, Berlin Film Museum, Jewish Museum, Checkpoint Charlie Museum, Kaiser-Willhelm Memorial Church, Topography of Terror, Soviet Memorial, Pergamon Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Neue Nationalgalerie., Charlottenburg Palace, Reichstag, Brandenburg Gate, Gendarmenmarkt, Tiergarten, Berlin Zoo, the Olympic Stadium, Airlift Memorial, and Dahlem Museum.

Suggested Activity: Walk east down the fashionable Ku'damm, passing the Memorial Church, and ending up for lunch on the food floor of the famed Ka De We department store.

A Place to Stay: Hotel Art Nouveau, (Leibnizstr. 59, tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40, email hotelartnouveau@snaflu.de) Doubles \$98 to \$126.

Food Suggestion: Wegner & Lutter, Schlüterstr. 55, tel. +49/030/881 34 40

#3. Munich

All first-time Germany itineraries should include at least two full days in the Bavarian capital. This city will destroy any preconceived notions that Bavaria is nothing but ruddy-cheeked, fat farmers. Most Münchener are fit and fashionable. Though its politics are different, Munich is every bit as sophisticated as Berlin.

Tourists love it for its great beer, Bavarian food, and upscale stores.

Top Sights: Marienplatz, Nymphenburg Palace (especially the Car-

riage Museum), Englischer Garten, Deutsches Museum, the Residenz, Alte Pinakothek, BMW Museum, Asamkirche, Bavarian National Museum, and the Hofbräuhaus,

Suggested Activity: Have just one beer at the Hofbräuhaus. If you don't drink — or even if you do — take a long walk in the Englischer Garten (beware of nude sunbathers).

A Place to Stay: Hotel Asam, Josephspitalstrasse 3, (tel. +49/089/230 9700, fax 230 970 97, email info@hotel-asam.de). Doubles \$137 to \$151 (not including breakfast), or Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49 (tel. +49/089/594823-24 fax 5503856, email kraft.hotel@t-online.de) Doubles \$70 to \$121.

Food Suggestion: Spatenhaus an der Oper, Residenzstr. 12

#4. Rothenburg ob der Tauber

The quintessence of medieval, fairy-tale charm. This beautifully preserved city sits on a bluff in gorgeous countryside, its ancient walls following four bends in the Tauber river. Probably attracts as many tourists (mostly tour busses) per square foot as any town in Germany; still, if you haven't seen it you should. Stay overnight and avoid some of the crowds.

Top Sights: Tilman Riemenschneider's fantastic carved wood altarpiece in St. Jakobskirche. The Rathaus.

Suggested Activity: Walk the town.

A Place to Stay: Hotel Reichsküchenmeister, Kirchplatz 8, (tel. +49/09861/9700, fax 970409, email hotel@reichskuechenmeister.com) Doubles \$61 to \$116.

Food Suggestion: Eisenhut Hotel-Restaurant, Herrngasse 3-7

#5. Mosel River Valley

These are subjective choices and we'll no doubt hear some dissenting views, but we regard the Mosel as quieter and prettier than the more famous Rhine. We like the wine better, too.

Best Towns: Trier, Bernkastel

Kues, Beilstein, Cochem

Top Sights: Miles of steep, terraced vineyards, Eltz Castle, the castle at Cochem. In Trier, see Porta Nigra and the Roman Baths and Amphitheatre.

Suggested Activity: Take a day or two to drive its length.

A Place to Stay: In Neumagen-Dhron, Gutshotel Reichgraf von Kesselstatt, Balduinstr. 1, (tel. +49/06507/2035, fax 5644, email info@gutshotel-kesselstatt.de), doubles \$79-\$121. Or in Trier, Hotel Petrisberg, Sickingenstr. 11, (tel. +49/0651/4640, fax 0651/46450) Doubles \$77 to \$84.

Food Suggestion: Hotel Weinhaus Moselschild, Ürzig, tel. +49/06532/9393-0

#6. Heidelberg

This ancient university town's wondrous setting on the meandering Neckar river is perfected by the great castle which sits above it. The student population gives the *Altstadt* an atmosphere unique in Germany.

Top Sights: Heidelberg Castle

Suggested Activity: Don't miss the castle, take a Neckar boat trip.

A Place to Stay: Hotel Hirschgasse, Hirschgasse 3 (tel. +49/06221/4540, fax 454-111, email www.hirschgasse.de) Doubles \$210 to \$256.

Food Suggestion: One of the student bars, called *Historischer Studentenlokal*, such as Zum Roten Ochsen, Hauptstrasse 217.

#7. Bamberg

A relatively unsung city that approaches Rothenburg in medieval charm. The town is at its most enchanting at dusk when the illumination of the buildings and statuary is just beginning to take effect.

Top Sights: Domplatz, Dom, Altes Rathaus

Suggested Activity: Try a *Rauchbier* ("smoky" beer) at Brauerei Schlenkerla, Dominikanerstrasse 6, one of the city's 10 breweries.

A Place to Stay: Hotel St. Nepo-

muk, Obere Muhlbrücke 9, (tel. +49/0951/98420, fax 984 2100, email gruener@hotel-nepomuk.de) Doubles \$98-\$123.

Food Suggestion: Dinner just outside of town in Gaustadt at Brauereigasthof Kaiserdom, Gaus-tadter Hauptstrasse 26, tel. +49/0951/965140, fax 9651444.

#8. The Black Forest

We include the Schwarzwald with the tiniest of misgivings. Though the region is very much on the beaten track, there are two towns, Freiburg and Baden-Baden, that shouldn't be missed. Another big plus is the wine of Baden-Württemberg, particularly the reds, which are largely underrated and unknown.

Best Towns: Freiburg, Baden-Baden, Triberg, Freudenstadt

Top Sights: The Hochstrasse (high road) from Baden-Baden to Freudenstadt. Freiburg's Cathedral.

Suggested Activity: Visit Triberg, a clockmaking village.

A Place to Stay: Hotel Dorer (tel. +49/07722/95050, fax 950530, email hotel-dorer-schoenwald@t-online.de) in Schönwald in the heart of the region. Doubles \$70 to \$88

Food Suggestion: The hotel

#9. Hamburg

Except for Berlin, few Americans venture north of Frankfurt and so miss this great port city. Like Berlin and Munich, Hamburg is full of fine restaurants, top-flight shops, theaters, museums, and concert halls. It has one of Europe's finest ballet companies.

Top Sights: St. Michael's Church, Fine Arts Museum, the Sunday morning Altona Fischmarkt and, of course, the notorious Reeperbahn, the city's legal and lively "red light" district.

Suggested Activity: Go west along the north shore of the Elbe to Wedel. There you'll find the *Schiffsbe-grüssungsanlage*, a place where the many ships traveling the Elbe between the sea and Hamburg are saluted. As each ship passes this point, the flag of its home country is

raised and its national anthem is played over a speaker system.

A Place to Stay: Hotel Abtei, Abteistr. 14 (tel. +49/040/442905, fax 449820, email abtei@relaischateaux.fr) Doubles \$163 to \$233 or

Hotel Hafen Hamburg, Seewartenstr. 9 (tel. +49/040/31113-0, fax 311 13755, email info@hotel-hamburg.de) Doubles \$84-\$112

Food Suggestion: Fischereihafen-Restaurant, Grosse Elbstr. 143, tel. +49/040/381816

#10. Island of Sylt

Nature is the main attraction on this sliver of an island in the north sea (reached by car train). It is a place of wind, sand dunes, heavy surf, sea birds, and fine hotels and restaurants. It has long been a hideaway for Germany's rich and is a complete change of pace from the rest of the country. Take warm clothing, even in summer.

Best Towns: List, Westerland, Keitum, Kampen.

Top Sights: The sand dunes and beaches; Keitum's Heimatmuseum

Suggested Activity: Beach walks and bike rides, drive north to List, Germany's northernmost town

A Place to Stay: Hotel Benen-Diken-Hof, (tel. +49/04651/938 30, fax 93 83183, email: info@benen-diken-hof.de) in Keitum. Doubles \$123 to \$213

Food Suggestion: Restaurant Sansibar, Hörnumerstr., Rantum, tel. +49/04651/964646, fax 964647

Readers' Forum

Been There, Done That

Having very recently returned from two months in, mostly, central Europe, I would like to share a few of many outstanding items with you and your subscribers.

Berlin – Just a couple of blocks away from your previously-featured Art Nouveau Hotel and the Spree Athen Restaurant, the **Marjellchen Restaurant** is another excellent choice. Located at Mommsenstr 9

(tel. 883-2676), it features traditional East and West Prussian cuisine. We had dined here two years ago and found it just as good this time, both times with owner Ramona Azzaro on hand to personally supervise. A meal for two, consisting of *Schweinenieren* (pork kidneys) in a delicious sauce, *Königsberger Klops* (excellent meatballs in a lemony-caper sauce), along with a Berliner Weisses (beer) and mineral water came to 56.50 DM (\$27) per person.

Vienna – Your July, 2000 issue referred to **Wilhelminenberg** and its Schloss in the Vienna Woods. Lunch there on the terrace overlooking the city was delightful. A thick potato soup with mushrooms and a dessert of *Heidelbeer Knödel* (blueberry dumpling) with (far too much) whipping cream plus a mineral water cost 170 AS (\$11). Your article had mentioned the nearby Church of the Steinhof as a worthwhile stop, but it is currently, and probably for some time, closed for renovation.

We highly recommend the **Restaurant Puerstner**, located at Riemergasse 10, tel. 512-63-57, not far off Parkring. It is a very large subterranean place in a very rustic setting and divided into several smaller areas. A meal for two of *Leberknödel*-

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 2

weeks.

For deals on European hotel rooms, keep your eyes on the major chains like Steigenberger, Sheraton, Marriott, etc.

We'll keep you posted on all these matters. In the meantime, I like the sign hung on the New York street stand selling American flags; "These colors don't run." — RHB

READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 7

suppe (liver dumpling soup), snails baked in garlic butter, *Gebackenes Allerlei* (beef, pork and chicken *Schnitzel*), a glass of the house red and two mineral waters came to 580 AS (\$40). Reservations highly recommended.

Lugano – We have always experienced fine stays at hotels belonging to the Romantik group of hotels. One of the very best has to be the **Hotel Ticino**, Piazza Cioccaro 1 (right at the foot of the funicular leading down from the train station), tel. 41-91-22-77-72. Owned and operated for, I believe, the past 18 years by Claire and Samuel Buchmann, they are excellent hosts. Our corner room, number 4, at 460 Sfr. (\$284) including a generous breakfast buffet, offered three windows overlooking the piazza and its outdoor food markets, radio but no television. The hotel has its own excellent but quite pricey restaurant and is located within easy walking distance of the shopping area of Lugano and the shore of Lake Lugano.

Füssen – Anyone in or near this area of Bavaria should make an effort to see a performance of the musical *Ludwig II*, performed in a new theater built for just this production. It is located on the outskirts of Füssen on the shore of Forggensee, from where one looks across the lake to the castles of Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau. The production of the story of the life of King Ludwig II of Bavaria is quite remarkable and the staging, lighting and settings need to be seen to be believed. The

theater has its own fine restaurant for those who wish to dine prior to the performance, which starts at 7:30. Performances are sold out far in advance, but tickets can be obtained by writing Ludwig Musical AG & Co., Schrangengplatz 15, D-87129, Füssen, or by phone, +49/01/805 583 944.

Finally, although you do, of course, always mention air travel to and from Europe, I should like to point out that travel by sea is also still an option and we experienced excellent passages on *Seabourn Sun* eastbound and *Queen Elizabeth II* westbound. And no jet lag!

H MARTIN EMS
SAN FRANCISCO CA

Lucerne Memories

Your article on Lucerne and the area around the lake brought back memories of visits several years ago. Your readers may be interested to know that this region is the birthplace of the nation of Switzerland.

The Swiss-German name of the lake, Vierwaldstättersee, means "lake of the four forest cantons". The men of three of these cantons met in a meadow near Rütli and formed a defensive alliance, pledging to accept no magistrates over them except of their own choosing. One of the cantons, Schwyz, gave its name to the country, and its coat of arms, a white cross on a red field, became the national flag.

Near the town of Schwyz, which has wall paintings illustrating this history, is Altdorf, which was the home town of William Tell. No one knows how much of his story is fact and how much legend, but the town has erected a large statue of him. In any case, Switzerland became one of the first democracies of Europe, and the first with a federal system.

JIM MENTZER
LOS ANGELES, CA

Bad Dürkheim Hotel

Eat your heart out. We're here in Bad Dürkheim attending the grand opening of their 17th Wein und Wurstfest. We'll raise a glass in *Ein Prosit* to you.

I'd love to tell you about **Hotel Weingarten** where we've stayed for about the past seven years for this festival, but I'm afraid then I wouldn't be able to get a room. They were just upgraded to 4 stars from 3, and their rates are still reasonable. Within easy walking distance to the festival grounds, as well as the *Stadtmitte*. All in all, a great bargain.

Nice people, Frau Sauer and crew. Excellent English, German, and Internet connection, too.

Hotel Weingarten, Triftweg 11a-13, Bad Dürkheim, D-67098 Germany, tel. +40/063/2294 010, fax 2294 0155, singles 100 DM (\$47), doubles 144 DM (\$68), including a great buffet breakfast with newspapers from around the world.

(But don't tell anyone.)

BOB & SHARRELL RANN
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

Inside Travel

■ Upscale Christmas Market Tour

Karen Pasold, an especially knowledgeable travel planner as well as longtime *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber, will lead the 11-day "Christmas Markets of the Imperial Cities," starting November 26 in Prague.

Cities to be visited besides Prague, are Budapest, Dresden, the village of Pirna on the Elbe, Meissen, Burg, Berlin, Kraków and Vienna. Hotels include Prague's **U. Prince**, the **Kempinski Taschenbergerpalais** in Dresden, **Le Meridian** in Budapest and Berlin's **Westin Grand**. Two overnights are enroute via rail in first-class private sleeper compartments between Berlin and Kraków and Kraków and Budapest.

The per person price is \$1495 double occupancy. Special airfare between most major U.S. cities and Prague is available for about \$450.

Contact: Karen Pasold, Classic Europe, tel. 972-625-6050, email: classiceurope@yahoo.com

Germanic Travel Alert

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