

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Last Night Hotels

Increased airport security, which requires getting there earlier and staying longer, often means the "last night" hotel has to be very near the airport. Such hotels are often expensive but seldom *gemütlich*. So we settle for clean and comfortable, and look for special deals.

A couple have recently crossed my desk. Willi Isler, the courtly, former director of now closed San Francisco's Swiss Tourist Office, tells of a promising hotel near the Frankfurt Airport. It's the **Astron Hotel Frankfurt-Airport** (Moerfelderstr. 113, D-65451 Kelsterbach, tel. +49/61 07/938-0, fax +49/6107/938-100, email: frankfurt-airport@astron-hotels.de, web: www.astron-hotels.com), where he found a special price of 78.50 EUR (\$68), single or double. When Willi was there in November, transport to and from the airport was by courtesy bus from area #1 of the Lufthansa Terminal. Buses operate every 15 minutes from 5am until midnight, every 10 minutes during rush hours.

The best Astron deal we were able to find on the web was 125 EUR (\$109), still a good rate. Children up to age 12 stay free.

Astron has two other hotels in the area and a Zürich-Airport Astron opened last October.

By far the most convenient Munich airport hotel is the **Kempinski** (Terminalstrasse Mitte 20, D-85356, tel. +49/089/9782-0, fax +49/089/97822610, email: info@kempinski-airport.de, web: www.kempinski-airport.de), where

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

GETTING AROUND

For many readers it's the season for trip planning. A time to determine where to go in Europe, where to stay, and how to get from place to place. This month we discuss ground transportation options.

Unless they plan to hole up in an airport hotel for the duration of their visit, all travelers to Europe must deal with the problem of moving themselves and their belongings from place to place. Getting around in Europe can be a little complicated. The prospective traveler is faced with an array of transport options: train, automobile, bus, riverboat, motorhome, bicycle, motorcycle, horse-drawn carriage, and their own two feet. There are sellers of tours involving all these modes of transportation.

But for most of us, it comes down to car and/or rail. Since both modes of travel have unique advantages, we won't attempt to tout one over the other. Generally speaking, however,

the automobile is least expensive, much more flexible and can access places rail cannot. The train is romantic, more fun and less stressful. Though it usually isn't cost-effective, a combination of rail for long trips, and auto rental for exploring the countryside, combines the best of both worlds.

Let's start with...

Rail Travel

With the exception of our eastern seaboard, train travel in the U.S. is a novelty; a bit of charm and mystique from a bygone era, but not a truly viable method of transportation.

Europe's rail system, on the other

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Web Tips: Booking Hotels

Simply put, the Internet has changed the way many of us plan our trips to Europe. Especially when it comes to choosing and booking hotels.

We still have trusted, traditional sources such as *Michelin's Red Guides* and *Gemütlichkeit*, but the World Wide Web has introduced a new dimension to the process. For pictures of guestrooms and public rooms, and other hotel information, we no longer need rely on tourist office handouts and brochures requested by mail all the way from Europe. It can now be safely said that the vast majority of European hotels, even very small ones, have web sites, most with full color pictures, rates, contact info and special offers. They have, in effect, put their brochures online.

And, when it comes to making an actual booking, the days of waiting weeks for a mail response, or trying to get a fax through to Europe, are virtually gone; as is the frustration of language and time differences when attempting voice telephone reservations from the U.S. We now have email. It's instant, it's free. Where to find a hotel's email address? The *Michelin Red Guide* series started including them with their 2001 editions, as did *Gemütlichkeit*. And at hotel websites an email form is just a click away. Type in your message, click again, and it's done.

Our *Gemütlichkeit* itinerary planning people spend a lot of time online researching hotel rates and making bookings. Here are some of their suggestions for finding and commu-

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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www.kempinski.com/hotels/hotel-deu/index.htm) located in the terminal. Put your luggage on a cart at the hotel and roll it to the airline check-in counter. Trouble is, it's a little pricey; rack rate doubles are 210 to 345 EUR (\$183-\$300). An alert subscriber, however, reports a special promotional rate of 144 EUR (\$125) which she got by contacting the hotel directly.

At the hotel's website — one of those overdone, complicated, bells and whistles, musical introduction, not-very-user-friendly sites — we found a double room rate of 126 EUR (\$110) with breakfast for a Saturday night in May. The rate requires an airline ticket for departure on the following day. With no airline ticket, the rate quoted was 141 EUR (\$123). The weekday rate was 210 EUR (\$183), and did not include breakfast.

Swiss Rail Expands Choice

As much as possible, airport hotels are to be avoided. The railway system in Switzerland often makes that possible. Your last night hotel could be in Bern, Interlaken or even Lausanne – depending on how early you have to be at the airport. Swiss Rail's new, very-early-in-the-morning trains allow more travelers to stay out in the country the night before departure from the Zürich Airport.

For example, a 6:06am train from Lausanne arrives at the Zürich Airport rail station at 8:50am. From Bern, trains make the approximately 90 minute run to the airport about every

half hour beginning at 4:30am. From Interlaken's West Station, there's a 6:40am and a 7:40am that get to the airport at 9:16 and 10:16. Lucerne is a piece of cake. There are hourly direct trains to the airport beginning a few minutes before 5am. The journey takes just over an hour. Even if you're way down in the southeast corner of the country in St. Moritz, you can hop a 4:58am train and be at the airport at 8:50am. But for this one, you must make several train changes.

"First Night" Near Frankfurt


"First night" hotels are also important. We like them far from airports and airplanes where we can quietly begin the jet lag recovery process. A favorite spot not mentioned in these pages for several years is the **Hotel Anker** (Obertorstr.6, D-97828 Marktheidenfeld, Germany, tel. +49/09391/6004-0, fax +49/09391/6004-77, email: info@hotel-anker.de, web: www.hotel-anker.de/en/), about 45 minutes southeast of the Frankfurt Airport in Marktheidenfeld on the east bank of the river Main. The Depisch family's welcome, and the care they and their staff lavish on guests, is unsurpassed.

Perhaps a little the worse for wear from a long flight, your comeback starts as soon as you pass through the hotel's arched gates into the walled, inner courtyard. At night the gates are shut and you are safely tucked away in this private little enclave.

A main Anker attraction is its outstanding restaurant, **Weinhaus Anker**, just across the street from the hotel. It's been a few years, but I still

recall bacon-wrapped medallions of venison topped with pillows of *foie gras*, and next to them on the plate small mounds of sauteed wild mushrooms mixed with finely chopped onions, bits of bacon and other delights.

Twelve years ago, in our first review of the Anker we called it a "Mercedes Benz of a hotel; solid, not flashy, but everything works and is built to last. In two days we never encountered a single staff member, from owners to maids who, at every contact, did not give us a *Guten Tag* and a smile."

Singles are 62 to 85 EUR (\$54-\$74), doubles go for 99 to 120 EUR (\$86-\$104). 

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: **web** Password: **5440**

Germanic Travel Alert

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

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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.

GROUND TRANSPORT

Continued from page 1

er hand, is the real thing; the way millions get from A to B and back every day of their lives. (Consider this; Switzerland, a country about the size of the state of Maine, has 1800 railway stations.) But for many Americans, rail travel in Europe is more than just a mode of travel. The European rail experience is an attraction in itself. State-of-the-art equipment, speed, style, romance, and a unique way of showing us the countryside in relaxed comfort, combine to make train travel an important reason for visiting Europe.

Rail Pass or Point-to-Point Tickets?

Once you choose rail over auto rental your next decision is whether to purchase a rail pass or simply buy tickets. Though point-to-point tickets are sold in the U.S., we recommend waiting until you get to Europe where they often are cheaper. Another way to save is go second class and avoid the faster trains. For example, the normal first class fare from Frankfurt to Munich is 115.2 EUR (\$101). However, if you're willing to ride second class — perfectly comfortable and the views are just as good — aboard a regional train that takes about 40 minutes longer to get there, the price is 58 EUR (\$50).

But even at these lower prices, if you plan two or more long train trips, rail passes are almost always the better way to go.

First-Class or Second-Class?

Generally speaking, first-class train travel in Europe is quieter, roomier and about 40% to 50% more expensive than second-class. Seats are wider and there are usually fewer of them per car/compartment in first class, and more space for luggage. On a few premier trains, a meal will be included in the price of a first-class ticket.

The difference between the two classes on some trains is not great. The air-conditioned second class cars on Germany's fast ICE (Inter City Express) trains, for example, are sleek and comfortable, much more so than the average Amtrak car.

Which Pass?

To make this call requires some research. If you're sticking to one country then the rail pass for that country is the obvious choice. But if you'd like to venture into one or more neighboring countries your choices are a little less obvious. Let's say you and a companion are planning to stay mostly in Germany, but want to go to Bern, Switzerland, for a weekend. Do you buy the **German Twin Pass** and a **Swiss Transfer Ticket** (good for one roundtrip between any border town or airport and any single destination in Switzerland) or the Twin Pass and just a roundtrip ticket from the Swiss border to Bern? Or, what about the three country **Eurail Selectpass**?

The first option, a first-class, four-day Twin Pass for two is \$390 and a pair of first-class Swiss Transfer Tickets is \$236. Your total outlay is \$626. But let's say you enter Switzerland from Basel, purchase a roundtrip ticket — \$63 per person — from there to Bern and forget the Swiss Transfer Ticket. With this option you spend \$516 for two.

We think the best choice in this instance, however, is the **Eurail Selectpass**. For \$588 you get unlimited first class travel for five days in three adjoining countries. That's an extra day of travel vs. the four-day Twin Pass, plus you can swing through Austria or France — whichever you choose as your pass's third country — on your way to Bern.

But the least expensive way of all is to buy a second class Twin Pass for \$135 per person and a separate second-class Basel-Bern ticket for 63 Sfr. or about \$38 each. Your two-person total this way is \$346.

Rail Planning Resources

Obviously, the kicker in this planning process is determining the cost of point-to-point tickets. Not so easy. The websites listed on this page will provide most fares within the countries they represent, but to find a price from a city in one country to a city in another, is more difficult. For small cities, almost impossible.

Rail Europe is also a source for determining fares between cities. Dial

800-438-7245 to access their 24-hour automated travel information service. By following the recorded directions, you can obtain rail fares between most key cities. Or, at Rail Europe's web site (www.raileurope.com), you can click on "Fares and Schedules" to access a simple search procedure that provides fares and schedules for several hundred European cities. The German and Swiss rail websites' databases are much more comprehensive but provide fare information only if the cities are within their countries.

Key Rail Web Sites

Mercurio European Timetables:
<http://mercurio.iet.unipi.it/home.html>

Austrian Rail: (In German only):
<http://www.oebb.at/>

Deutsche Bahn: <http://bahn.hafas.de//bin/db.s98/query.exe/en>

Swiss Rail: http://www.sbb.ch/pv/index_e.htm

Rail Europe: <http://www.raileurope.com>

Reservations

While it is advisable — usually necessary — to purchase rail passes prior to leaving the U.S., reservations for seats on specific trains can often wait until you get to Europe. Travel guru Rick Steves claims in all his many European travels to have never made a reservation prior to leaving the U.S., a strategy we support. A standard reservation made from the U.S. is \$11 per train. If it takes two trains to get where you're going, and you want a reserved seat on both, you'll pay \$22. In Europe it's much cheaper. In Switzerland, for instance, the reservation fee is 5 Sfr. (\$3). But for most trains, reservations are not needed. We have never seen a full Swiss train and, except for special trains like the Glacier Express, reservations for Swiss trains are not accepted by Rail Europe.

Still, if you're planning a long-distance train trip within a day or so of arrival in Europe, you'll want a reservation.

Sometimes reservations are required; such as for couchettes or

sleepers, on all night trains, Swiss scenic trains, certain InterCity and EuroCity trains, and on all of what Rail Europe calls Premier trains.

Bookings for some trains can be made up to a few hours before departure, others require at least 24 hours in advance. Reservations can generally be made as early as 60 days before travel, (120 days for Eurostar; 90 days for Thalys).

If you must make a train reservation from the U.S., book it through the agent that sold you your rail passes — if possible. Steves' company, for example, sells thousands of rail passes but does not make seat reservations.

Seating

Coach cars have a center aisle and seats on either side. In first-class, seats are wider and there are usually two on one side of the aisle, and a single seat on the other side. In second-class, there are usually two seats on both sides.

Compartment cars are separated into enclosed cabins, which open to a corridor along one side of the car. There are six seats in first-class compartments and eight in second-class compartments.

Overnight Trains

Night trains are romantic and the extra cost for the best private accommodations is about what you would pay for a first-class big city hotel room.

- **Sleepers:** Offer berths, a private washstand, fresh linens and towels. First-class sleepers accommodate one or two people. Second-class compartments are for two to four people.

- **Couchettes:** Open bunks in a compartment, each with a pillow and blanket. Usually located in second-class, they accommodate up to six people and there is no gender separation. Plan to sleep in your daytime clothes. Washrooms are provided at the end of each car.

- **City Nightline:** These fast, smooth trains connect a number of major cities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. All private sleeping compartments are nonsmoking and fitted with fresh linen and comforters. The deluxe accommodations include

two beds, wardrobe, chair and table, and private toilet with shower.

Some of the city pairs served by City Nightline trains include: Vienna-Frankfurt, Zürich-Hamburg, Berlin-Zürich, Zürich-Dresden. Your rail-pass gets you aboard the train but you pay extra for sleeping accommodations. A reclining seat is \$17, couchettes are \$25-\$32, economy sleepers range from \$42 to \$101 per person, and deluxe sleepers with private toilet and shower are \$162 single and \$224 double.

Dining En Route

Food and drink are available on almost every train. Dining cars can be found on most long-distance trains, but only at "normal" meal times. Sandwiches, drinks and snacks can usually be purchased in a "bar car," and almost always from food carts that pass through the cars. In first class on many premier trains meals are served at passengers' seats.

Cheap Rail Travel in Germany

Though the German Rail passes are usually the most cost-effective way for the American visitor to see the country by train, they don't work for everyone. Some may wish to buy point-to-point tickets as they go. One advantage is that rail tickets purchased in Europe are refundable, changeable and often less expensive. Tickets bought in the U.S. carry restrictions. Here are a few discount tips for Germany.

- **BahnCard:** Those who plan to stay in Germany for several months may want to purchase a *BahnCard*, sold at German rail stations. For 140 EUR (\$122) you'll get a 50% discount on 2nd class travel for a year. The first class *BahnCard* is 280 EUR (\$244). These prices are discounted for spouses, students, young people, and older travelers.

- **Schönes-Wochenende Ticket** (Happy Weekend Ticket): For a mere 21 EUR (\$18) total, this ultra-budget option allows unlimited second-class travel on local trains for up to five persons travelling together on Saturday or Sunday.

- **Guten-Abend Ticket** (Good Evening Ticket): Costs 30 EUR (\$26) — 36 EUR (\$31) if travel will include

ICE trains — and is valid 7pm to 3am on all trains except hotel trains, most overnight trains, motorail trains and special trains. On Saturday, travel must begin at 2pm or later. For travel Friday through Sunday a supplement of 8.10 EUR (\$7) applies.

- **Sparpreis** (Saver Ticket) and **Supersparpreis** (ICE Super Saver Ticket): Offer savings on long-distance roundtrip first or second class trips. *Sparpreis* allows travel any day but must include a Friday night stay or one of the travel days must be a Saturday or Sunday.

Supersparpreis is good for travel on any day except Friday and Sunday. The trip must include a Friday night stay or the travel day must be a Saturday. The price, including ICE travel, is 228 EUR (\$198) first class. Each accompanying adult pays 114 EUR (\$99). Without ICE travel, the prices are 191 EUR (\$166) and 96 EUR (\$84). Second class travel is approximately one third less.

The more restrictive Super Saver Tickets with ICE are 191 EUR (\$166) first class and 96 EUR (\$84) for accompanying adults. Without ICE, the first class prices are 149 EUR (\$130) and 75 EUR (\$65). Again, second class Super Savers are about 33% less expensive.

For more info on these programs visit <http://bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en> and click on "International Guests."

Cautions

Remember that everything you bring to Europe, everything you acquire while in Europe, you'll carry on and off every train. The combination of a long walk and a short time between trains in a large station like Munich will cause you to reevaluate your packing priorities and vow next time to travel with wheeled luggage.

Some travelers also consider the busy train routes that connect major European cities to be very much *on* the beaten track. As a rail rider you'll find that many of your travel companions are fellow Americans. In fairness, however, we must report that in numerous long train trips over the past several winters — Berlin-Frankfurt, Zürich-Munich,

Zürich-Prague, Prague-Frankfurt, Vienna-Munich, and others — we often have had a six-seat compartment all to ourselves. It's a great way to go.

Car Rental

For the traveler who wants to explore the countryside, a rental car offers several distinct advantages. To start with, it is usually — but not always — less expensive than train travel, especially for two or more persons who start their trip in Germany or Belgium. With its sky-high rental car prices, Italy is probably cheaper by rail. But the major advantage of automobile travel is its absolute flexibility of schedule and destination. By a huge margin, there are more miles of highway than railroad track in Europe and your car departs when you decide it's time to travel. And the convenience of having your car's trunk to easily stow gear you might not be using for a few days, as well as purchases made during the trip, is another car rental perk.

And, finally, car touring does have its moments. Driving in the mountains, stopping whenever and wherever to take in a view or snap a photo, or rolling easily through undulating meadows and dark forests on quiet, traffic-free back roads, can be memorable travel experiences.

Where to Rent

Though rental car rates in Germany have risen rather dramatically in the past couple of years, *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers will probably still find that country the best place to rent. With the special rates Auto Europe offers our readers (tel. 800-521-6722 for cars in Germany and all other countries), the cost there is slightly less than in Belgium, which in general offers Europe's lowest rental car rates. The most expensive country by a mile is Italy. Switzerland is significantly higher than Germany and Austria is somewhat more expensive.

What to Rent

Be aware that car rental companies almost never guarantee a specific make and/or model. The words "or similar" are always used in the rental confirmation and the renter is promised only a category. Here are some of the principal car categories with

Approximate Rental Car Prices

With Tax, Mid-Size Cars

Austria	\$221	Holland	\$214
Belgium	\$200	Italy	\$357
Czech Rep.	\$255	Spain	\$187
France	\$231	Switz.	\$247
Germany	\$218 (\$191*)	U.K.	\$269

* Special *Gemütlichkeit* price

brief info on each. Weekly prices given are for Germany and include unlimited mileage, value added tax and third-party liability insurance, but *not* airport fees, road fees or optional insurance:

- **Subcompact:** Typical cars: Opel Corsa, VW Polo, Fiat Punto. Fine for two persons who don't mind chugging along the Autobahn's right lane. Limited trunk space. Cost: about \$151.

- **Compact:** Typical cars: Opel Astra, VW Golf, Ford Escort, Fiat Brava. Comfortable at 80 to 90 mph. Better trunk space — figure one big suitcase, two small ones and maybe a garment bag and/or a soft duffel or two. Both two-door and four-door models, occasionally with a sunroof. Fine for three adults who go easy on the luggage. Cost: about \$168.

- **Midsized:** Typical cars: Opel Vectra, Ford Mondeo, Audi A4, VW Passat. Our recommended category for four people. Good trunk size, especially the Vectra. Though a few come equipped from the factory with something more powerful than the basic 1.6 liter, four-cylinder engine, you can be almost certain your rental car won't have it. Cost: about \$191.

- **Fullsize:** Typical cars: Opel Omega, Renault Safrane. A bit more passenger room and sometimes more luggage space than a midsized. Most companies put the BMW 318i and the Mercedes C180 in this category, but in terms of luggage and legroom they are midsized cars. Cost: about \$255 - \$278.

- **Wagon:** Comes in three sizes: compact (Astra), midsized (Vectra, VW Passat) and fullsize (Volvo 850, Omega). You pay more for a wagon than for the comparable sedan. Holds more luggage but it is often exposed. For four people we like the midsized sedan better than the compact wagon; more passenger comfort and almost as much luggage room. In a

pinch, the midsized and fullsize wagons can carry five people but someone has to ride in the rear center seat.

No European sedans or wagons we know of have a front bench seat, so carrying six passengers is not an option in these vehicles. Costs: range from about \$191 to \$539.

- **Van:** Most in Europe are seven or nine-passenger with three rows of seating, similar to the U.S. The nine passenger assumes three persons per seat — three in front, three in the center seat and three in back. Seven-passenger vans have front buckets, a shorter center bench seat and a rear bench. Minivans are great for four or five people, but beyond that luggage space is a problem. Beware of relying on a credit card for CDW and theft insurance when renting a nine-passenger van. Most credit card companies claim these vehicles are on a truck chassis and thus exclude them from their insurance coverage.

Groups of six to eight people will save money and have more luggage room by renting two midsized sedans. Van cost: about \$580.

- **Luxury Cars:** Power and engineering make them somewhat safer than the run-of-the-mill Opels and Fords, but you'll pay a price. Rates start at about \$383 per week for a Mercedes 200 series or BMW 500 series. Prices go to about \$661 for a Mercedes E230 and over \$928 for Mercedes S320.

Additional Costs

- **Airport Fees:** One might say European rental car companies are nickel and dime-ing us to death, except that in many instances the extra charges add up to hundreds of dollars. Most countries now charge 11% to 15% of the total rental to pickup at an airport or rail station. Four years ago it cost 10 DM (\$5) to pick up a car at an airport or rail station in Germany. This year that charge is 15% of the total rental cost. At some point the inconvenience of hauling yourself and your luggage to a downtown location becomes preferable to the cost of getting the car immediately on arrival at the airport. That point is different for every person, but consider a two-week rental of a midsized

car in Germany: it's \$165 per week plus 16% value added tax for a total of \$383. Your cost to get the car at the airport is \$57.

- **Road Fees:** Most countries, including Germany, have such fees and charge about \$1 per day.

- **Drop Charges:** Usually there is no drop fee when the car is picked up in one town and dropped in another, provided both cities are in the same country. International drop charges, getting a car in one country and dropping it in another, start at about \$100 and go up from there. Sometimes way up.

- **Additional Driver:** Varies widely. Be sure to check at booking if you plan to have more than one driver. In Germany, Europcar assesses a flat \$20 per rental. Avis charges \$95. Others charge by the day, usually about \$5.

Equipment & Amenities

Virtually every European rental car is equipped with a radio and cassette tape player. Bigger, more expensive cars may come with CD changer and/or telephone. Most are now air-conditioned. Sunroofs can be found in all categories but requesting one at the time of booking is usually a waste of time. Ask when you pick up the car.

You'll pay substantially more for a car with automatic transmission.

Children must be strapped into a child's seat (even up to 12 years of age in some cases). Take your own or rent them from the rental company for about \$35/rental.

Insurance


By law, car rental companies in Europe must provide third-party liability insurance, which is included in the basic rental charge. The renter, however, is responsible for the car itself. Rental companies sell CDW (collision damage waiver) and theft insurance for from about \$8 to \$30 per day (plus tax, of course) with deductibles that range from about \$250-\$500. However, some credit cards offer this coverage free if you use the card to pay for the car. Find out from your credit card issuer whether your account carries such coverage and, if so, what the rules are for making a claim.

If you elect to rely on your card, be sure the term of your rental is not longer than the coverage provided by your credit card. For example, most Mastercard gold and platinum cards cover rentals only up to 15 days. If your auto rental contract is 16 days or longer you have no collision or theft coverage. Visa gold and platinum, American Express (except most corporate cards), and Diner's Club cover rentals up to 30 days.

Another option for CDW insurance is the Travel Guard Company's Protect/ Assist travel insurance. In addition to medical and trip cancellation it includes \$25,000 CDW coverage.

Eastern Travel

Not a problem anymore with most car rental companies, though rates may be higher. Not all car categories are allowed to go east.

Be sure to state your intention to visit eastern countries *at the time of booking*. Those who even *try* to take a non-authorized car into an eastern country are breaking the law. Special documentation is required from the car rental company. 

FINDING HOTELS ONLINE

Continued from page 1

nicating with European hotels.

Searching for Hotels

Though there are toll-free booking numbers in the U.S. for many European hotels, as well as online booking services, when it comes to a rate, get it from the horse's mouth. Which means that when you search for a hotel online, you're looking for the hotel's website; not the site of a booking service that might represent the hotel you seek. If there's a special discount, it will almost certainly be offered by the hotel's website. To make the deal available from a booking service means the hotel must incur the cost of both the discount *and* a commission.

Take the luxurious **Grand Hotel Victoria Jungfrau** (www.victoria-jungfrau.ch/en/) in Interlaken. It's website's "special offers" page often contains a list of dates on which certain rooms are discounted. Last month, for example, the site listed 18 nights on which a double room could

be booked for 260 Sfr. (\$154), a big markdown from its rack rates. For the night of March 25, one of the discounted dates, the Leading Hotels of the World website (www.lhw.com) quoted a double room for that same night at 890 Sfr. or about \$530.

Search Engine

Our favored web search engine is **Google** (www.google.com), a truly amazing resource. About 75% of the time we find what we are looking for by merely typing in a hotel's name and city. (One caveat: when clicking on a promising-appearing search result often you will find yourself in what looks like a hotel's web site but is actually a booking service. There may be pretty pictures and promotional text but it's not the hotel itself. Be suspicious if there is no phone, fax or email address provided for the hotel. The booking service isn't going to tell you how to make direct contact with a hotel because it might lose a commission. Tip: look for the hotel's name after the www in the URL line of the Google search results.)

Of course, your search will also turn up other hotel mentions on other websites. These can range from tourist office lists to comments about the hotel on personal websites.

Gemütlichkeit's Archives

At www.gemut.com, *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers can research an archive of some 800 hotels we've reviewed over the years. In addition to, phone and fax numbers, and our ratings, many hotels on the list contain an email address and a link to the hotel's website. One click and you're there.

We frequently get emails and calls from subscribers who ask how to access this archive of back issues and hotels. Each month a new universal user name and password are printed on page two of the newsletter. Use these codes when accessing the archives. If you encounter problems, email archives@gemut.com or call 800-521-6722 and press option #3.

Michelin Online

One of the great European travel planning web sites is www.viamichelin.com. Here you'll find Michelin's entire list of rated ho-

tels with phone and fax numbers, email addresses and most of the info found in the superb *Red Guide* series. Just click on a hotel's email address and you are presented with a form to contact the hotel or restaurant directly. No links to hotel websites, however.

(By the way, this site also has a marvelous online mapping and driving directions feature. Just type in your origination and destination points and select your route. It can be the shortest, the fastest, a motorway route, or the route Michelin recommends. Once the site delivers your route you can pull up and print a map of it and also access hotels and restaurants located within the boundaries of the map. Navigating *viamichelin* is a story in itself, but suffice to say it's a very useful website.)

Online Booking Services

The best we've found is www.hotelguide.com. It is accessed from the *Gemütlichkeit* website by clicking on its logo in the lower right hand corner of the main page. Unlike many other such services, this one lists hotel phone and fax numbers, email addresses and, in many cases, provides a hotel website link. Hotelguide sometimes offers discounts but we still recommend comparing the price quoted by any booking service with what is offered by the hotel.

Tourist Office Websites

Most tourist office websites — country, region or city — contain information on accommodations. In some cases they identify hotels offering special deals. Take the web site of the Munich Tourist Office (www.muenchen-tourist.de/english/). Clicking on "low priced offers" leads to "Munich Key 2002," a program offering hotels in five price categories plus a voucher booklet that includes free public transportation and discounts on everything from museums to restaurants to daytrips. Prices range from \$38 to \$133 per night per person. In the middle category, for example, the Munich Key buyer can select the fine **Hotel Domus** at \$102 per night double.

A Munich Key brochure can be easily downloaded to your computer and printed.

Switzerland Tourism's outstanding website (www.switzerlandtourism.com) links to the entire list of the Swiss Hotel Association (SHA) at www.swisshotels.ch and also offers a hotel booking and last-minute reservation service. In late March, a last-minute booking price for a double room at the **Hotel Savoy** in Interlaken was 128 Sfr. (\$76). A visit to the hotel's website (www.hotelsavoy.ch/) shows the Savoy's rack rate doubles at this time of year range from 120 to 156 Sfr. (\$71-\$93). In this case, the last-minute deal is a good one only if you're getting one of the hotel's better rooms.


The SHA website contains the same information found in the association's printed guidebook. At the site you'll find all the usual contact info, all the service and amenities symbols, and a link to each hotel's website.

Austrian tourism's website — www.anto.com — has information on hotels in 26 cities, though they are mostly in the four and five-star categories. Vienna's website — www.info.wien.at — connects to Wien Central Reservations, a booking service. Many hotels are listed, and the information is useful, but the contact info is for the booking service, not the individual hotels. However, since this service is operated by the Vienna tourist authority, rates are likely to be in line with what is offered by the hotels themselves.

From Germany's tourist website — www.germany-tourism.de — click on "Info Center," then "Accommodations," then "Hotels." Choosing "Individual Travel in Germany" enables a selection of the hotel catalogs of hundreds of cities, all of which can be downloaded to your own computer. (The files will be PDF documents which require Acrobat Reader, a free software easily downloaded at www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html.)

Also on that page is the logo of the German Hotel Association. Click there and you will be taken to www.iha-hotelfuehrer.de/english/index.html, an online compendium of member hotels. There are no links to individual websites but phone, fax and an email link are provided.

About Translations

Though the number of foreign websites with English versions increases daily, your search for hotels, will yield many in German. In the Google search engine, most results offer a "Translate this page" option. All you have to do is click on it. While not perfect, the translations are amazingly good. Another option is AltaVista Translations at <http://babelfish.altavista.com/translate.dyn> 

Readers' Forum

Gemut Website for Planning

Can't tell you what a thrill it is to research the ports of our upcoming river cruise using your website's archives. I just peruse your back issues, copy what I want and paste it into the page of notes that I'm compiling in Word, thereby creating a personalized guidebook! What a wonderful combination of "old world Europe" and "modern technology." Many thanks for your terrific publication.

JUDY NAGY
VIA EMAIL

Graz Restaurants

How delightful it was to read your article about Graz. My husband and I each spent two years there while going to school, and we have many fond memories of it. So nice to hear it is still "*Das Grüner Herz Österreichs*." Please try three of our most memorable restaurants there: the **Laufke** on Elisabethstrasse, the **Schubert Hof** and the **Häuserl im Wald**. Graz is really worth a trip, and is even more enjoyable because there aren't as many tourists.

And, for the *best* homemade liqueurs, visit **Josef Berka**, across the street from the **Park Hotel**!! Thank you again for the return visit!

KATHLEEN BRANYON
VIA EMAIL

Recommends Auf Schönburg

I have just read the detailed "German Castle Hotel Report" in the March 2002 issue by Bill Bohnhoff. An excellent listing of experiences. All was well until his report of **Hotel Auf Schönburg**. Had I never visited this *superb* castle, I would be sure never to do so from his write-up. However, my wife and I have stayed there at least a dozen times over the past 20 years, and although we try other German castles

from time to time, we always return to Auf Schönburg.

There are two sections to this castle — old and new. We first stayed there in the early 80s, before the new section was built — and that is where Mr. Bohnhoff obviously stayed. He is correct, there is no elevator in this old section. But there is always a strapping young man of the family who readily carries baggage up the stairs, even to the third floor.

The most interesting aspect of the old section rooms to me has always been how well the amenities (obviously added when rooms were converted for guests) have been squeezed into the available spaces. So we have always looked upon the idiosyncrasies of each of the “old section” room amenities as being very quaint. And the furnishings also are always attractive.

In the new section, there is an elevator, and all of the many rooms on the several floors are so well appointed that we have never found any fault. Also, in every room — old or new — is a complementary decanter of sherry, just the right touch for a good night’s sleep — whether on one’s first or last night, entering or leaving Germany (the castle is a 45-minute drive from Frankfurt Airport).

We have also marveled at how the quality of food has increased over the years. On the other hand, we have

Key Websites for the Traveler

- 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.viamichelin.com The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- www.travelgearnow.com Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, name-brand luggage, all at 10% off for subscribers.
- 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.

bemoaned the price increases in recent years. Our first stay in the old section ran us \$50 or so in 1983.

As to not having CNN/BBC, I suppose that TV is a strictly personal choice. In all of our visits we were either too tired (if we were staying there on our first night) after such an excellent meal and glass or two of sherry, or too busy re-packing on our last night in Germany to worry about TV.

By all means, save a time in the morning or early evening to explore the parts of the castle open to guests, and savor the exquisite views of the Rhine from this vantage point.

RIP RICE
VIA EMAIL

Munich Hotel

I recently returned from a week’s stay at **Acanthus Hotel** in Munich. We chose it from the websites of *Gemütlichkeit* and the hotel itself, and made reservations by email. When we (a group of 8) arrived, all agreed we had found a *treasure*. We could not have been more pleased!

The hotel is perfectly located, the rooms were as nice as could be, breakfast was superb, and the staff went out of their way to help us.

My husband and I had purchased a Dachshund to bring back to the States with us, and, although I had made the arrangements in advance, the hotel helped make sure I had everything in order to transport the dog without problems.

Since no one in our group spoke more than a few words of German, their ongoing help was much appreciated. For anyone not hung-up on having a major five-star hotel, but rather a very nice place to stay, with a super staff, and a great location (half a block from Sedlinger Tor Subway station and 4 blocks from Marienplatz), this should be at the top of their list. My only concern with writing you to brag on Acanthus is that your other readers will find it so appealing that I will be unable to get reservations the next time we go!

This is the third time we have used a hotel you suggested, and the third time we have been pleased, though never so much as this one.

IRIS S. SLOWEY
VIA EMAIL

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is a new *Gemütlichkeit* feature intended for quick reference. We’d like to know if you find it useful. Additional hotels and links to web-sites of these hotels can be found in the Archives section of our website at www.gemut.com. The required subscriber user name and password for access this month can be found on page 2 herein. The hotels are arranged in price order, higher to lower.

Berlin
Hotel Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40, email hotelartnouveau@snafu.de

Hotel Domus, Uhländstrasse 49, Germany D-10719, tel. +49/030/882041, fax 882 0410, email: info@hotel-domus-berlin.de

Bern
Hotel Innere Enge, Engestrasse 54, CH-3012, tel. +41/031/309 6111, fax 309 6112, email: info@zghotels.ch
Hotel Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3000, tel. +41/031/329 9595, fax 329 95 96, email: hotelkreuz@swissonline.ch

Lausanne
Hostellerie du Débarcadère, 7 chemin du Cret, Saint Sulpice, CH-102, tel. +41/021/691 5747, fax 691 5079, email: debarcadere@swissonline.ch (not in town)

Hotel Agora, Av. du Rond-Point 9, CH-1006, Tel. +41/021/617 1211, fax 616 2605, email: agora@fhotels.ch

Lucerne
Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, email: mail@wilden-mann.ch
Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel: +41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, Email: info@cascada.ch

Munich
Hotel Asam, Josephspitalstrasse 3, tel. +49/089/230 9700, fax 230 970 97, email: info@hotel-asam.de

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24 fax 5503856, email kraft.hotel@t-online.de

Rothenburg ob der Tauber
Reichs-Küchenmeister, Kirchplatz 8, Rothenburg o.d. Tauber, Germany D-91541, tel. +49/09861/97 00, fax 97 04 09, email: hotel@reichskuechenmeister.com

Salzburg
Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, Austria A-5020 tel. +43/0662/843 728, fax 843 728 8, email: struber@sbg.at
Hotel Jedermann, Rupertgasse 25, Austria A-5020, tel. +43/0662/873241-0, fax 873241-9, email: jedermann@salzburginfo.or.at

Vienna
Hotel Römischer Kaiser, Annagasse 16, A-1010, tel +43/01/512 77 51 0, fax 512 77 51 13, email: info@rhotel.bestwestern.com

Allstadt Vienna, Kirchengasse 41, tel. +43/01/526 3399-0, fax 523 4901, email: hotel@allstadt.at, web: www.allstadt.at
Pension Aviano, Marco-D’Aviano-Gasse 1, tel. +43/01/512 8330, fax 512 8330 6, email: aviano@pertschy.com

Zürich
Hotel Florhof, Florhofgasse 4, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. 41/01/261 4470, fax 261 4611, email: info@florhof.ch

Hotel Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932

Frankfurt Airport
Steigenberger Esprit Hotel Frankfurt Airport, CargoCity Süd, D-60549, tel. +49/069/69 70 99, fax 69 70 94 44, email: frankfurt@esprit-hotels.de

Hotel Birkenhof, von-Eiff-Str 37, Hanau-Steinheim, D-63456, tel. +49/06181/648 80, fax 64 88 39, email: info@HotelBirkenhof.de (25-minute drive from airport)

Hotel Dreieich, Frankfurter Str. 49, Langen, D-63225, tel. +49/06103/91 50, fax 52 030 (15-minute drive from airport)

Munich Airport
Kempinski Hotel Airport, Terminalstrasse/Mitte 20, D-85356 Munich, tel. +49/089/9782-0, fax 97822610, info@kempinski-airport.de
Hotel Hoyacker Hof, Freisinger Landstrasse 9a, D-85748 Garching b. München, tel. +49/089/326 9900, fax 320 7243, email: info@hoyackerhof.de

Zürich Airport
Mövenpick Zürich Airport, Walter-Mittelholzerstrasse 8, CH-8152 Glatthbrugg, tel. +41/01/808 88 88, fax 808 88 77, email: hotel@movenpick-zurich-airport.ch

Hotel Fly Away, Marktgasse 19, Zürich-Kloten, Switzerland CH-8302, tel. +41/01/804 4455, fax 804 44 50, email: reservation@hotel-flyaway.ch