

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

River & Canal Cruising On Your Own

In our April issue on getting around in Europe we ignored the most comfortable way of all: sail the continent's canals and rivers in your own boat. Far fetched? Not as much as you might think. Paul and Linda Merschorf of Alameda, California, did just that. After renting a canal boat in France a few years ago, and finding it such an enjoyable experience, they decided to sell their power cruiser on San Francisco Bay and purchase a used, 42-foot, diesel-engine canal boat in Holland. It was less expensive than most second homes.

It was difficult to give up their San Francisco boat but the idea of spending slow-paced summers in Europe on their own canal cruiser, Flojita (Spanish for little lazy one), was too good to pass up. Linda is a teacher in the Oakland school system and Paul has been successful in a number of advertising ventures.

As this is written they are in the midst of their second summer on the waterways of Europe. Last year they eased their way into the heart of France from Holland through Belgium. (Last winter, the boat was moored at a riverside marina in France's Bourgogne region.) Ultimately they plan to see Berlin, Prague, Dresden, Basel, perhaps Vienna, and certainly Paris. Using a cell phone and a laptop, Paul is able to dial-up the Internet from aboard Flojita and keep up with emails and at least let his clients know he's still

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

MÜRREN

Deep in the Bernese Oberland, tiny Mürren sits perched on a shelf above the Lauterbrunnen Valley. It is perhaps the least touristy of Switzerland's best-known mountain villages.

The time has come to round up all those cliches we travel writers seem to resort to when describing the Swiss Alps, because this month we're talking about Mürren.

By Bob Bestor It's a small but modern, car-free village set at the foot of the Schilthorn on a terrace 2,000 feet above the Lauterbrunnen Valley (Number #1 on *Gemütlichkeit's* "essential" Swiss destinations, see Dec. 2001).

For our money, there is no more scenic spot in Switzerland; a beauty among beauties. Not subtle charm but ravishing in-your-face, quadraphonic, surround-sound good looks. A knockout.

Some visit Mürren for its remoteness and sense of being far from life's

pressures; others, of course, for the walking, hiking, climbing, and other outdoor pursuits. For us, however, Mürren's mountain views are the best special effects movie ever. It's a front row seat with a giant screen. Across the narrow valley loom the great triumvirate of peaks — Jungfrau, Mönch, Eiger. Almost perpetually wreathed by swirling clouds and mists, they change from minute to minute and one simply feels compelled to sit and gaze in awe. In Mürren you will eat, sleep, read, maybe even swim or workout at the village's fine Sportszentrum, but mountain-watching is the main attraction.

Despite its isolation and glorious vistas, the town has at least one mild critic. European travel guru, Rick

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APARTMENT RENTAL

It doesn't take many auto or rail trips through Europe before one begins to ruminate on what it would be like to stay in one place for a week or two — or six months. Packing and unpacking, checking in and out of hotels, finding the next hotel, hauling luggage on and off trains, and rushing to see a city's top tourist attractions in one or two days is not only tiring it's not the best way to experience different cultures.

Sooner or later, you start to think about renting an apartment, flat, condominium, house or castle. You want to stay put for a while. The more you consider the idea, the more appealing it becomes. You will cook your own meals, visiting quaint markets each day to gather rich cheeses, marvelous baked goods, exotic meats and wonderfully fresh produce. You

will take daytrips in a rental car or on the train. You will sit for hours at a neighborhood sidewalk café and become a regular. You will eat breakfast outdoors each morning on your apartment's balcony which has a lake or mountain view, preferably both. You will save money.

It sounds good and it can happen — if you are careful.

Let's start with the saving money part. You can rent a studio apartment in our three countries for as little as \$250 per week for two persons. But more realistic numbers are \$350 to \$500 and up. To get the most for your money, avoid package deals and large rental agencies.

Case in point: On a residential street in Interlaken is the **Swiss Inn**, an unimpressive, rambling family-

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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alive. Food and supplies are purchased along the way.

Interestingly, the Merschdorfs meet other Americans, Canadians, Australians, and of course many Europeans doing exactly the same thing.

The tale of their first summer, which included a busted propeller far from any shipyard, a near capsizing, scary trips through dark tunnels and churning locks, as well as a succession of hidden, charming little Belgian, Dutch and French towns, makes for pleasant reading in a book Paul has written titled *European Canals: Adventures Aboard the Canal Cruiser Flojita*. If you'd like to know the Merschdorfs did it, or just want an interesting read on a very different way of seeing Europe, the book can be downloaded for \$9.99 at www.europeancanals.com.

Expert Travel Advice

Another book for the traveler, though not specific to Europe, is Anne McAlpin's *Travel Tips You Can Trust*. The author of the bestselling book, *Pack It Up*, Ms. McAlpin attended universities in Spain and Germany and started her travel career on cruise ships — she's been through the Panama Canal 98 times. An ability to cleverly communicate her ingenious packing methods has made her a frequent guest on Oprah Winfrey, Good Morning America, the Today show and other daytime talk staples.

Now, with *Travel Tips You Can Trust*, Ms. McAlpin proves her exper-

tise extends beyond being able to fit into an 18-inch rolling suitcase just the right combination of clothing, shoes and gear to be perfectly outfitted for every occasion on a two-month African safari.

Forgetting for a moment the sensible travel advice, of which there is some 250 pages worth, "Tips" earns its \$16 price tag if only for the contact information and checklists (10 things to do early, men's and women's weekend wardrobe, crucial pre-departure items, etc.).

With the destination orientation of most travel guides these days, a general reference is a welcome addition. You'll find guidance on such basic topics as insurance, passports, immunization, and necessary travel documents from passports to child custody papers. There are chapters on family travel, women traveling alone, and good advice regarding security. There's also hard-to-find, offbeat info, such as requirements for children's safety seats in automobiles, the low-down on kids flying alone, guidelines for tipping on cruise ships and a section on where to take your complaints.

At \$15.99, *Travel Tips You Can Trust* is a worthwhile addition to your travel bookshelf. Order it at www.travelgearnow.com and get the 10% subscriber discount.

Add Austrian Air

Last month in our story on airline ticket buying we failed to include this important website; **Austrian Airlines** at www.austrianair.com. The site frequently offers low-price, online

specials.

Saratz Gets Expensive

Regrettably for travelers, the Swiss Franc has strengthened versus the dollar by about 10% in the last few months. This, plus an increase in prices at certain hotels, has caused us to reevaluate some of our "Editor's Choice" selections.

A longtime favorite in Pontresina, the **Hotel Saratz**, is now quoting high-season double rooms at 416 Sfr. (\$275). When we first began to recommend the Saratz in 1998, doubles were 180 to 318 Sfr. (\$115-\$203). This is a very pleasant hotel but \$275 edges toward five-star territory — and there the Saratz is not. Try **La Colli-na** which quotes high-season doubles at about a third less.

Passport Warning

One reader found this out the hard way: in order to be allowed to leave the U.S. *you must have at least six months left on your passport* —RHB

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 June codes are:

User Name: **Jung** Password: **9742**

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	Scale
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	Hotel 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.

MÜRREN*Continued from page 1*

Steves, describes Mürren as “pre-fab rustic” and tags one of its best hotels — the **Alpenruh**, our editor’s choice — “yuppie rustic.” He may have a point. Being of fairly recent construction, many of the town’s buildings lack the authentic weathered look of older Swiss houses, and hotel rooms do have TVs, phones, private baths, and floors that don’t squeak. Still, when it comes to T-shirt shops and throngs of tourists roving the streets, Mürren lags far behind the likes of Grindelwald and Zermatt. And there’s nothing “pre-fab” in sight when you lift your eyes to those awe-some rock piles.

As mentioned, Mürren is relatively remote and getting there is part of the attraction. Auto travelers will leave the car in the public parking facility at Lauterbrunnen and go the rest of the way via the **Bergbahn Lauterbrunnen-Mürren Mountain Railway** (BLM), about 30 minutes. The first leg is aboard a funicular which ascends some 700 meters (2,300 feet) up the steep (61% gradient) flank of the valley to the Grüttschalp station (alt. 4879 feet). The journey’s next leg is the approximately six-kilometer scenic run via narrow gauge railway past Winteregg to Mürren. If your starting point is the Interlaken Ost station, travel time is about 55 minutes.

Once in Mürren, it’s likely you’ll have further need for the narrow gauge rail line as well as the various cable cars that connect the Lauterbrunnen Valley with Mürren, the Schilthorn, and tiny Gimmelwald. The **Mürren-Schilthorn Holiday Pass** provides six consecutive days of travel on all the region’s transport facilities. The price is 130 Sfr. (\$83) or 85 Sfr. (\$54) for children and holders of **Swiss Rail Passes**.

If you just want the Lauterbrunnen-Mürren roundtrip it’s 19.60 Sfr. (\$13). The trip is free with a **Swiss Rail Pass**, 50% off with a **Swiss Card** and 25% off with a **Eurail Pass**.

Parking in the Lauterbrunnen public garage costs nine Sfr. (\$6) per day or 59 Sfr. (\$38) per week. For

Mürren Basics**Population:** 427**Elevation:** 1639 meters / 5377 feet

Tourist Information: Mürren Tourismus, CH-3825 Mürren, Tel. +41 / 033 / 856 8686, fax 856 8696, email: info@muerren.ch, web: www.wengen-muerren.ch

Driving Distances to Lauterbrunnen:

Zürich	131 km	82 miles
Interlaken	12 km	8 miles
Munich	361 km	224 miles

Guided Walks/Hikes: Kurt Huggler, once a world-ranked ski racer, now organizes and leads hunting, hiking and walking outings. His offerings include easy to moderate walks. One such is a two to three hour jaunt to a hunter’s hut for breakfast. Along the way you’ll see marmots and mountain goats. Rates start at 12 Sfr. (\$8). Contact: Kurt Huggler, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41 / 033 / 855 3627, fax 855 1247. Mobile phone +41 79 656 5257.

stays of seven days or longer you can reserve a parking space by contacting Parkhaus Lauterbrunnen, tel. +41 / 033 / 828 7400, fax 828 7401, email: parkhaus@jungfrau.ch.

Though Mürren is a destination, not a headquarters from which to branch out, you’ll want to explore the area. Here are a few suggested activities:

Schilthorn Excursion

Many say the two-stage cable car from Mürren to the Schilthorn (9,744 feet) is a better mountain-top excursion than the famed and pricey ride to the higher Jungfraujoch (11,401 feet). The Schilthorn has a pointed top upon which has been built a viewing platform and revolving restaurant, the **Piz Gloria**. From here one can see more than 200 mountain peaks and 40 glaciers. The Schilthorn was featured in the James Bond film, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. In the Touristorama, visitors can watch a special 10-minute version of the movie.

Some may be tempted to walk back down to Mürren from the Schilthorn, but be advised the shortest route is three hours and there are some very steep, gravelly sections.

The Falls

In some places the rock walls of the Lauterbrunnen Gorge are vertical, making for a number of waterfalls, the most celebrated being the **Trümmelbach Falls** which thunder their

way through and over the rock to the valley below. These spectacular falls — three Michelin stars (worth a journey) — are the 20,000 liters per second runoff from the Mönch, Eiger and Jungfrau glaciers.

Rick’s Favorite

A bit further along the south-facing terrace which underpins Mürren is Gimmelwald, a town Steves made famous. (Locals are somewhat mystified — and perhaps a mite peeved — at his choice of this not-very-prosperous hamlet of fewer than 200 souls, with virtually no hotels or restaurants, as a destination for his many tour groups.)

Nonetheless, the village is authentic and unspoiled, despite the waves of American tourists. From Mürren, it’s a five-minute train ride (every 15 minutes) or a fairly flat 20 to 30-minute walk.

Walking/Hiking

The options are endless, especially when combined with rail and/or cable cars. For starters, one could take the flat 60 to 90-minute stroll to Winteregg and Grüttschalp along a scenic path with almost constant views of the valley and the Bernese Alps, then return via rail.

A somewhat more strenuous hour’s tramp is the path toward Channelegg which climbs gently through the forest to Mittelberg Alp. Further up to Oberberg Alp you can visit an Alpine dairy. From there walk down the forest path to Winteregg (30 minutes) and then along the panorama path to Grüttschalp or back to Mürren. From Winteregg or Grüttschalp, you can catch the train back to Mürren.

As they are throughout Switzerland, trails and paths are well-marked, though you may feel more comfortable with the tourist office’s 1:33,333 scale map with 44 suggested walks. Paths marked by solid yellow signs can be walked without difficulty. But a red band means the trail is for experienced hikers. Two red stripes and most of us are way in over our heads. Estimated walking times are marked in hours (Stunden or Std.) and minutes (Minuten or Min.).

Accommodations

Hotels in Mürren are surprisingly uniform in amenities and quality. All we inspected were clean and comfortable, but unlike other Swiss car-free towns like Grindelwald, Zermatt and Wengen, there are few luxury offerings. In the mountain tradition, guestrooms are on the small side and the decorative emphasis is wood. Most, but not all, have Eiger-Mönch-Jungfrau views. TV, direct-dial telephone, and *en suite* toilet and shower or bath are the norm.

Rates are lower in summer and, for those who will stay a week or longer, there are many apartments and flats with cooking facilities.

Hotel Edelweiss

South-facing guestrooms in this square, modern building near the rail station seem to hang out over the valley; which means they have extraordinary, unobstructed mountain views. Most have balconies.

These are straightforward accommodations in a family-run hotel. There is a pleasant common room with fireplace and piano.

In summer, the hotel offers a one-week package for 765 Sfr. (\$490) per person that includes breakfast, dinner and a five-day rail pass that covers the entire Jungfrau region (49 Sfr./\$31 supplement for the Jungfrauoch).

Daily Rates: Singles 95 to 130 Sfr. (\$61-\$83), doubles 170 to 240 Sfr. (\$109-\$154)

Contact: Hotel Edelweiss, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41/033/856 5600, fax 856 5609, email:

edelweiss@muerren.ch, web: www.edelweiss-muerren.ch

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 10/20

Hotel Jungfrau

A bit more rustic than the Edelweiss and the views are not quite as good.

Among the hotel's better rooms is Number 225 with small sofa and a balcony. There are two rooms specially equipped for disabled guests.

Across the street, the hotel's less desirable Haus Mönch annex has about 30% lower rates than those listed below.

Daily Rates: Singles 85 to 145 Sfr. (\$55-\$93), doubles 170 to 290 Sfr. (\$109-\$186)

Contact: Hotel Jungfrau, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41/033/855 4545, fax 855 4549, email:

mail@hoteljungfrau.ch, web: www.hoteljungfrau.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 9/20

Hotel Bellevue-Crystal

In a Victorian building in the village center, the Bellevue is another typical, no-frills mountain hotel. Rooms are small for the most part and some have outdated features such as a wash basin in the bedroom. Many have small wooden balconies. A larger room is Number 18, but it has the Schilthorn view rather than the more favored Jungfrau outlook.

Daily Rates: Singles 75 to 95 Sfr. (\$48-\$61), doubles 150 to 230 Sfr. (\$96-\$147)

Contact: Hotel Bellevue-Crystal, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41/033/855 1401, fax 855 1490, email: bellevue-crystal@bluewin.ch, web:

www.muerren.ch/bellevue/

Rating: QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 9/20

Hotel Blumental

Located on the main walkway through town, the Blumental has two of the more pleasant guestrooms in town; Numbers three and 17. Both are larger than average, have a pair of soft chairs, a desk, a balcony, and windows in the bathrooms.

Every night during the winter season, there is live music — accordion, yodeling — in the restaurant.

Daily Rates: Singles 65 to 95 Sfr. (\$42-\$61), doubles 130 to 190 Sfr. (\$83-\$122)

Contact: Hotel Blumental, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41/033/855 1826, fax 855 3686, email:

blumental@muerren.ch, web: www.muerren.ch/blumental. Proprietor: Family von Allmen

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 10/20

Hotel Alpenruh

By a narrow but distinct margin, this is the hotel we think offers the best combination of quality and value. It has an open, sprightly feel the others seem to lack. The restaurant, though its menu doesn't venture far from the tried and

EDITOR'S CHOICE

true, is especially good. Weather permitting, meals can be taken on the terrace and the hotel can even arrange for your breakfast to be served at the top of the Schilthorn.

Rooms seem a tad larger and brighter than the competition and 21 of the 26 have *the* view. The remaining five look to the Schilthorn.

Daily Rates: Singles 95 to 135 Sfr. (\$61-\$86), doubles 180 to 260 Sfr. (\$115-\$167)

Contact: Hotel Alpenruh, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41/033/856 8800, fax 856 8888, email:

alpenruh@schilthorn.ch, web: www.muerren.ch/alpenruh

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 11/20

Apartments

Haus Myrrena

For those who plan to stay a week or more, Mürren offers a few dozen self-catering apartments, flats and chalets.

One is Haus Myrrena in the center of town. It has a balcony on one side and terrace with lawn furniture and a barbecue on the other. It is attractively furnished in modern Swiss style and has three bedrooms, living room, kitchen and one bath. There is a telephone, TV set, VCR and stereo.

Prices range from about \$360 per week in the low season to about \$810 in summer and around \$1200 in winter.


Like many rentals in Mürren, the property is listed by the local agency, Top Apartments.

See this property on the web at www.xs4all.nl/~hanr.

Contact: Top Apartments, Ch-3825, Mürren, tel. +41/033/855 3706, fax 855 3053, email: topapartments@muerren.ch. Franzi & Pascal Ramponi-von Allmen.

There are a number of other self-catering options in Mürren. Contact the tourist office or Top Apartments.

Sustenance

If you take the halfboard arrangement at your hotel, it will cost 25-30 Sfr. (\$16-\$20) for a three or four course dinner. 

APARTMENT RENTALS

Continued from page 1

operated, apartment/hotel. A couple of years ago we visited it but concluded it wasn't something we could recommend to *Gemütlichkeit* readers. This month, in the 'special offers' section of **Switzerland Tourism's** website (www.myswitzerland.com), Swiss Inn is offering one-week apartment packages for \$575 per person. The deal includes seven nights in an apartment, roundtrip rail from Zürich plus 50% off on other rail travel (the **Swiss Card**), and two days rental of a 'Smart Car,' a cute but tiny vehicle made by Mercedes Benz. There are a couple of other minor amenities such as free coffee or tea in your room and arriving customers are met at the Interlaken rail station. Doesn't sound bad, \$1150 per week for two people and you get a car for two days and some rail transportation.

A closer look, however, calls this deal into question. According to prices found on the Interlaken Tourist Office's website —

www.interlaketourism.ch — three-room apartments (the Swiss Inn offer is two rooms) can be rented for around 700 Sfr. (\$449) per week. Add a Swiss Card for the rail component at \$110 per person and you've spent \$669 for two persons. Rent a subcompact car (larger than the 'Smart Car') for three days in Interlaken for \$115 and the total tab is \$784. By constructing the package yourself, you've saved 32% and are driving a better car for three days instead of two.

Finding a Place to Rent

Ideally, you will select a rental property after personally viewing several. You either do this on the first day or two after arrival in Europe or in planning for a future trip. Choosing a property and immediately moving in is possible, of course, only when there are vacancies. Winter in popular Alpine towns, and summer in resort towns such as in Austria's lake district, are likely to be the most difficult without advance reservations.

On the other hand, prices are substantially lower in summer at most ski resorts and, in shoulder months

like April, May, October and November, vacancies are plentiful.

For those seeking an on-the-spot rental we suggest arriving at your destination when the tourist office is open — usually 8am to noon and 2pm to 6pm on weekdays, and 8am to noon on Saturdays. The tourist office will provide a list of apartments and a local map. (In rare cases, you will be directed to an agency which handles local vacation rentals.) Sometimes each apartment is marked on the map. If not, take a few minutes to scan the list, then ask the office to mark your choices on the map. The search, without a list and map, is difficult, because many rentals will not have a sign outside (*Ferienwohnungen* or apartment).

While most tourist offices will provide a list of properties, it's usually up to you to deal directly with the owner. Some will arrange appointments with owners for you, but most do not. A few smaller offices keep an unofficial list of vacant apartments which is useful.

Rental Agencies

Personally choosing a rental property, however, may not be possible and you are left to make a decision based on pictures, your own intuition, and the advice and recommendations of others.

Though most North American vacation renters use an agency, we recommend they be part of that process only under one condition; the booking agent fully understands your needs and has personally inspected the property in question. Given that one condition is met, renting through an agent is probably worth the additional cost versus booking directly with the property owner. Almost by definition, that condition excludes big agencies such as **Interhome**, the world's largest. The company lists thousands of properties throughout Europe, making it highly unlikely the booking agent you deal with will have personally seen many — if any — of the listings. Interhome has a fine, easy-to-use website (www.interhome.com) with plenty of photos and no doubt offers many outstanding properties. The problem is which are outstanding

and which are tired and worn. Years of comparing hotel brochures with the real thing have taught us pictures can be misleading.

In addition, you will pay top dollar to rent through a company such as Interhome. Your money will be divided among the agency, the property owner, and perhaps one or two property management firms. Small agencies are better for a couple of reasons: the person you deal with is more likely to have personally seen the properties offered and there are fewer middle men. Such agencies typically add 25% to the price set by the property owner. Still, it's worth it if you get what you're looking for.

A great example of a small agency you can trust is **At Home in France** (see ad in this month's advertising insert). This is a small company whose owners spend six weeks each September and October in France looking for potential rental properties. They apply rigorous standards in their selection process and wind up representing only about 150 different properties. Since their success depends almost entirely on repeat business, it makes perfect sense for them to put clients into well-maintained, good value properties that live up to their photographs. Unfortunately, as you might guess from the name, At Home in France rents only in France. But it's an example of the kind of agency you're looking for.

So let's assume you don't have a rental agent you can trust (*Gemütlichkeit* knows of none), and for whatever reason you need to book sight unseen. You must rely on intuition, the Internet, written descriptions, and pictures. Since you also want a good price you want to deal directly with property owners.

Using the Internet

Where do you start? The Internet has thousands of web sites offering self-catering rentals in our three countries. Many sites are owner-operated and full of pictures. The problem is finding them. Rental agencies pay search engines to have their sites appear at the top of the lists that result when using general search phrases such as "apartment rental Austria" or "self-catering Switzerland." You

often will have to scroll far down the list to find individual properties. If you don't know the specific names of properties, use a phrase like "ferienwohnungen austria" or, better yet, the word "ferienwohnungen" with the name of the town or region where you want to find a rental. The results are likely to be in German but if you use the Google search engine (www.google.com) just click on "translate this."

To get the most from the Internet you need the names of individual properties in the region or town where you want to stay.

Using Tourist Offices

Such information — often in the form of fairly elaborate, full color catalogs or brochures — is available from local tourist offices. But first, of course, you need to know how to contact them. You can start by writing or emailing the U.S. offices of the German, Swiss, or Austrian tourist authorities to request a detailed list of local tourist offices. (Tip: the *Michelin Red Guides* for Germany and Switzerland display contact information for the tourist office in each town listed in the guides. Another source is the Internet. Go to www.google.com and search, for example, for "tourismus tirol" or "tourismus murren")

With this information in hand you can contact the local tourist offices and ask for a listing of vacation rentals.

Making the Choice

Once you have lists of properties supplied by town or regional tourist offices, you can begin to create a short-list from which to pick a vacation rental. Choose a few properties that seem to fit your requirements and price range.

Your next stop is the Internet. Let's say the first possibility on your short-list is **Haus Heimhof** in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The info from the tourist office may have Haus Heimhof's web address, making it a relatively simple matter to checkout the property online. If you don't have the web address, go to www.google.com and search using the name of the property together with the name of the town; for example, "Haus Heimhof Garmisch-Partenkirchen" or "Ferienwohnun-

gen Haus Heimhof Garmisch-Partenkirchen."


If you like what you see, you will want to contact the owner. Usually you can do so via email right from the property's website. You can also communicate via regular mail which, of course, is much slower but preferred by many Europeans. Fax is also acceptable. It is probably not a good idea to telephone.

Below are some further notes on renting self-catering accommodations in our three countries:

- Apartments or flats in private homes are the most common rentals. Often they are one floor (usually top floor or basement) converted into a self-contained apartment. Complete privacy is typical and one rarely hears the home's other occupants. Usual amenities: one or two bedrooms, a bath and a kitchen/dining room that may also include a couple of easy chairs. Rarely found: separate living room, dishwasher, washing machine. Often found: TV and telephone.

- The difference between *Ferienwohnung* and a *Ferien-Apartment* is the latter usually has a combined sleeping/living area plus cooking facilities and bath, whereas a *Ferienwohnung* is a full-fledged apartment with separate living room, bedroom, full kitchen, bath, etc., usually with its own entrance. Sometimes it is a separate cottage or bungalow.

- Most rentals begin and end on Saturday, but one advantage to off-season travel is the willingness of owners to rent for periods less than a week. This is especially true if you are prepared to rent immediately and the apartment is vacant. Because of the cleaning charge usually made in addition to the regular rental charge, you will always pay slightly more per day when renting for less than a week. There are fewer days over which to apportion this fee which ranges from about \$30 to \$100. Most owners include other charges such as state tax, heating, etc., in the rental price, but always ask.

- Even at \$500 per week (\$71 per night), you will have more comfort and space than in a three-star hotel at nearly twice the price. 

Inside Travel

■ Picasso in Lucerne

The **Collection Rosengart** recently opened its doors in Lucerne. The 20th century collection focuses mainly on two important 20th century artists, Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso. The museum owns more than 100 works by Klee from all periods of his life. The Picasso collection, however, concentrates on works done after 1938. The collection contains other major names including Cezanne, Monet, Matisse, Braque, Leger, and Miro. From April through October, the museum is open daily from 10am to 6pm, from November to March 11am to 4pm.

■ Minotel Discounts

The moderately-priced **Minotel** chain of more than 100 European hotels currently offers three nights for the price of two, seven nights for the price of four and 10 nights for the same price as six. The offer is valid at all participating hotels provided the booking is made at the Minotel website and payment is made via Minotel vouchers, Swiss Vouchers or with a credit card. Contact: email: solutions@minotel.ch, web: www.minotel.com

■ Best Western Discounts

Best Western Swiss Hotels now offers last-minute specials at its online Best Western Shop. Discounts range from about 5% to 30%. Contact: www.bestwestern.ch/eng/last-minute/E_index.htm

■ Inter-Conti Hotels 50% Off

Inter-Continental Hotels' 'Whole World Half Price' promotion is available seven days a week through 8 September 2002. The 50% off deal includes breakfast and is being offered at about a dozen Inter-Continental hotels in Germany, Austria and Switzerland plus hotels in Prague, Budapest and elsewhere in Europe.

Info: www.intercontinental.com, click on "offers."

■ World Heritage Status for Jungfrau Region

The Swiss alpine region of **Jungfrau-Aletsch**, including the 24-km-long Aletsch glacier, is the first natu-

ral area in the Alps to be awarded World Heritage status. The Jungfrau-Aletsch joins such World Heritage sites as Yellowstone National Park, the Serengeti, the Grand Canyon and the Great Barrier Reef. Info: www.weltnaturerbe.ch

■ Swiss National Exhibition

Switzerland's first National Exhibition since 1964 runs until October 20. For the first time, the exhibition is held not at a single venue, but spread out over a region, the Land of the Three Lakes. The event combines a lakeshore exhibition and floating platforms at Bienne, Morat, Neuchâtel, and Yverdon, along with a passenger ship for the Jura. Activities include concerts, shows, musical clubs, and "funparks." Rail and speedboats shuttle among the various venues. Event tickets are discounted with the purchase of a **Swiss Rail-pass** to \$31 for a one-day ticket and \$76 for a three-day pass. Children under 16 are free with a parent.

■ Reserve Panoramic Coaches

Several international trains connecting Switzerland with major European cities offer Swiss panoramic coaches with very large, curving windows. Seating on these panoramic cars can be requested when booking. Here are some routes and train numbers which offer these cars:

Switzerland-Amsterdam: Chur-Zürich-Basel-Frankfurt Airport-Cologne-Amsterdam, trains #2 and #3 (opposite direction); Interlaken Ost-Bern-Basel-Frankfurt Airport-Cologne-Amsterdam, trains #104 and #105 (opposite direction).

Switzerland-Vienna: Basel-Zürich-Innsbruck-Salzburg-Vienna, trains #163 and #162 (opposite direction).

Switzerland-Nice: Basel-Lucerne-Lugano-Milan-Genova-Nice, trains #345 and #344 (opposite direction).

Switzerland-Venice: Zürich-Lugano-Milan-Verona-Venice, trains #355 and #354 (opposite direction).

Seats on these panoramic coaches can be reserved from the U.S. for \$11. In Europe the reservation charge is about \$3.

■ Frequent Flyer Award Tips

Exchanging frequent flyer miles

to get an airline ticket can be tricky and frustrating. Tim Winship, a columnist for **Smarterliving.com**, says "award seats" generally come available in airline computer reservation systems 331 days prior to the flight, making that date the best opportunity to exchange your miles for tickets.

On the other hand, it is sometimes easier to book within two weeks of a desired flight because that is about the time unsold seats may be made available as award seats.

If you don't mind traveling on Christmas or Thanksgiving, Mr. Winship says that while award seats are tough to come by on dates near major holidays, they are often available on the holidays themselves.

And finally, he recommends Delta's *Award Travel Tips*, which each week lists city pairs with the most award availability over the next three months.

■ Factory Stores in Switzerland

Outlet stores have come to Switzerland. **Foxtown Factory Stores**, featuring some 140 international brand products, mainly clothing, are in operation at three Swiss locations: **Rumlang**, near the Zürich Airport; **Villeneuve** at the east end of Lac Léman, and **Mendrisio**, south of Lugano. A few of the labels sold are Adidas, Bally, Bottega Veneta, Diesel Irregular Outlet, Dolce & Gabbana, Esprit, Gucci Outlet, Hanro of Switzerland, Krizia Outlet, Nike, Oshkosh b' Gosh, Petit Bateau, Polo Ralph Lauren, PRADA, Reebok, Salvatore Ferragamo, Samsonite, St. George's-Missoni, North Face, Versace Company Store. Info: tel. +41/0848/828 888, email: info@foxtown.ch, web: www.foxtown.ch 

Readers' Forum

Advocating Adelboden

Allow me to recommend highly a town and hotel which my wife and I have visited which is truly a hidden treasure. The town is Adelboden in the Berner Oberland of Switzerland. It's up the valley from Frutigen. This town has great accommodations and a lovely main street. In the summer it is ideal for hiking at all levels of difficulty. It has numerous lifts, gondolas,

cable cars and most natives speak English.

The hotel that we highly recommend is the **Huldi & Waldhaus** (tel. +41/033/731531). When we've stayed there we have rarely met any Americans. Most guests are British, French or Germans. The Gygax-Nikles family is the most accommodating host and the food is exquisite.

This town/hotel just hasn't been discovered by Americans. I would hope that *Gemütlichkeit* would check out the area and the hotel. But don't push it too hard — we don't want to lose our room in the Waldhaus where the best rooms are. Request the room that Burt and Karen Johnson use, they'll know! We were last there on 9-11-01. The compassion shown us was incredible! This is our most favorite place in the Alps.

BURT AND KAREN JOHNSON
EAST BERLIN, CT

Berlin Restaurants

I just returned from a pleasant five nights in Berlin at the **Art Nouveau** with the Schlenzkas. It was a return visit to this lovely little hotel. I was in town to attend a conference at the Estrel Center which was about a 45-minute commute. The extra distance was worth the trouble.

Not all was rosy. On a chilly and rainy Sunday evening I wandered across the street to **Leibniz-Klaus Restaurant** and ordered *Putenbrust Malaysia*. It was an o.k. meal as the weather was foul and the restaurant was close. The experience ended on a very sour note as I became sick a few hours later. On subsequent evenings I saw tour buses — a sure sign to stay away.

The Schlenzkas steered me to two new restaurants which I would rate as excellent values:

Grüne Ente, Dahlmannstr 20 (off the K'damm near Adenauer Platz), tel. 31 01 65 15

This charming restaurant serves nouveau German food in a modern and light fashion. The prices were very moderate and the "offen" wine was excellent

Puvogel, Pestalozzistr. 8 (north of Kantstr. near Schlutterstr.), tel 313 43 64

This is a small six-table place that serves excellent continental/German food in a very nice atmosphere complete with oriental rugs. It is chef-owned and his wife, who has excellent English skills, takes care of the front of the house. I had an excellent beef dish with a nice salad with a glass of wine all for 20 EUR (\$19) What a value! I got the impression that the real stars just came from the ocean as they had lots of fish dishes on the menu that evening.

Both these places were less than I would pay in Des Moines

SEVERIN JOHNSON
DES MOINES IA

Germany Hotels Recommended

We have just returned from almost a month in Germany and Austria. We spent the first four and the last four nights at the **Acanthus Hotel** in Munich and highly recommend it. The staff was very friendly and helpful (in fact one of the desk staff is an American from Oregon), the location is excellent, the buffet great — just a very pleasant experience. When we returned for the last four nights, we were greeted as old friends and asked about our trip during the previous three weeks. They even kept a t-shirt that our 12-year-old grandson had left. The rooms are excellent — though a bit small if there are three in a room. Thanks for recommending this hotel.

We would also like to recommend the **Ringhotel Johanniterbad** (tel. +49/0741/530700, fax 41273, email: johanniterbad@ringhotels.de) in Rottweil. This is an interesting town and not at all touristy. The hotel desk staff speaks English and were very helpful to us. In fact, one of them helped us track down a cousin's phone number. The food in their dining room was some of the best of the trip. Even with three people, the room and bath were large enough for us. We would definitely return to this hotel.

A staff member and my cousin recommended that we visit **Burg Hohenzollern**. The tour was in German (English tours for groups only) but we were able to easily follow because of the guide and also an English history was available. This is

definitely a three- or four-star treat. In fact, our grandson liked it much more than Neuschwanstein, which has become too touristy.

We also recommend **Harburg Castle** and **Wallerstein Castle** (excellent tours in English). Both are near Dinkelsbühl and well worth a stop.

JOAN GOEDEN
RIVERSIDE CA

More German Hotels

Here is some info on places stayed during our recent trip to Germany:

Oberammergau: Hotel Friedenschöhe, König-Ludwig Strasse 31, www.friedenschoehe.com. This is just a great guest house run by the Eric Schmid family, who are wonderful people and make you feel so at home. It is in a quiet location, with a beautiful view of Koffel Mountain, just minutes from town. Rates are very reasonable. Bookings can be breakfast-only or half-board (excellent food we might add.) We have stayed here before and will always put it number one on our list for Oberammergau. Excellent English spoken.

Baden-Baden: Hotel Am Markt, Marktplatz 18. Run by the Bogner family. This is on a quiet cobbled square where Baden-Baden old town meets the famous Friedrichsbad (Roman-Irish Bath). This is a small, well-kept hotel. The restaurant is for residents only and closed for dinner on Sundays and Wednesdays. The food was excellent. Excellent English spoken.

Rothenburg ob der Tauber: Hotel Spitzweg, Paradeisgasse 2. Run by Klaus Hoher and built in 1536. In 1984 it was restored and turned into a small hotel. Rooms with breakfast are reasonably priced. Centrally located inside the wall. Klaus is a wonderful host and speaks excellent English. Rothenburg is very charming and we would go back.

Lindau/Bodensee: Hotel Brugger, Bei der Heidenmauer 11, Erwin & Berta Brugger. A lovely, reasonably-priced hotel. Lindau is on Lake Constance and Hotel Brugger is minutes from the town activity.

FRED & MARION UNGER
MAPLE GLEN PA

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 websites 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: hotelkrenz@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@rkhotel.bestwestern.com.

Altstadt Vienna, Kirchengasse 41, tel. +43/01/526 3399-0, fax 523 4901, email: hotel@altstadt.at, web: www.altstadt.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 Glattbrugg, 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