

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Gemütlichkeit: Sweet 16

With this issue, *Gemütlichkeit* begins its 17th year. That's slightly more than 200 issues and, at about 6,800 words per issue, nearly 1.4 million words, many of them correctly spelled. (Yes, we've had Wein [wine] for Wien [Vienna], a slew of "its" for "it's" and vice versa, and last month we even managed to get a major river, the Rhône, flowing in the wrong direction. Editor asleep at the word processor.)

But in the midst of it all, even if we say so ourselves, we've managed to steer thousands of travelers to some truly *gemütlich* places and saved them money in the process.

Over the years we've come to realize our chief satisfactions in producing *Gemütlichkeit* are twofold: first, in finding special places or deals to pass along to you. Believe it or not, the "we-can-hardly-wait-to-tell-them-about-this-one" reaction is fairly exciting. Our second big "feel good" comes after you use a recommendation of ours and tell us we were "right on." We've discovered our tastes are similar to yours. With rare exception, if we like a place, you like it. So, in observance of this *Gemütlichkeit* milestone, here are a few of our favorite things. Not always the best, and seldom the most expensive, but our personal favorites — in alphabetical order.

Augustiner Gäststatten: Munich's amazing, beautiful, chaotic,

Continued on page 2...

This Month in Gemütlichkeit

Features	Page
Rhine Journey, Part II	1
Airolo	1
Readers' Forum	7
Travel Quickies	8
Gemütlichkeit Hotel Recommendations	8
Commentary	
Dear Subscriber	1
Hotel/Restaurant Reviews	
Hotel Motta, Airolo S	1
Hotel Zum Weissen Schwanen, Braubach G	4
Bellevue-Rheinhotel, Boppard G	4
Hotel Günther, Boppard G	4
Hotel Castle Liebenstein, Kamp-Bornhofen G	4
Restaurant Zum Königstuhl, Rhens G	5
Zum Alten Schmiede, Boppard G	5
Restaurant Anker, Kamp-Bornhofen G	5
Restaurant Forni, Airolo S	6

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

RHINE JOURNEY II

In this second of our three-part series on the Romantic Rhine, we begin to wind our way up river from Koblenz to Rudesheim. This month we get as far as Boppard.

The route from Koblenz to Boppard — whether by ship, car, train or bike — quickly leaves signs of city life behind. In less than five miles, **Stolzenfels Castle** appears and the Romantic Rhine begins.

Painted yellow ochre, with turrets and towers, the castle stands out boldly halfway up the wooded hillside.

By Jim Johnson

Built in the 13th century as a toll station, it was destroyed by the French in 1689. When Prussian royalty ultimately rebuilt it in the mid-19th century, Rhine romanticism was at its peak, and Stolzenfels is considered the best example of Romantic construction along the Rhine.

A 20-minute walk along a dirt road leads from the river to the castle.

A series of switchbacks past stone walls thick with ivy runs deep into the forest. A stone viaduct passes overhead. Soon, what's left of the ruined foundation and outer battlements come into view, then the moat and ramparts, then the walls of the "new" castle.

Drivers will find ample parking, but viewing the castle from below during a hike up the hill gives the fortress a different perspective. With a little imagination, those rustling leaves can become French soldiers climbing through the underbrush to lay siege.

A drawbridge leads into the castle through a towered gateway, its doors studded with metal and

Continued on page 3...

Gemütlichkeit's Hidden Treasures Series...

Airolo: An Unlikely Refuge

The typical auto traveler headed for Ticino, Switzerland's Italian-speaking canton, emerges from the Gotthard Tunnel or drives the Pass road and then blows down the Autostrada to the lakeside resort cities of Lugano, Locarno and Ascona. For most, Airolo, the first town south of the tunnel, is remembered — if at all — as a sign on the Autostrada. For the majority of train travelers it's just another short stop on the way to the lakes.

Perhaps that is as it should be. This village of 1,800 inhabitants, slate roofs and narrow streets, which lies on the western slope of the Leventina, a steep, rocky upper Ticino valley, will probably never be a recommended Michelin destination.

For your editors, however, it was a quiet haven for two days and three

nights last October. Having spent a long and fruitless Saturday, first combing Locarno for a vacation rental or hotel, and then Bellinzona for just a place to stay overnight, we turned tail in the late afternoon and retraced our steps north. About 35 miles up the Autostrada we realized it might be as late as 8pm before we had gone back through the tunnel and found a place to stay. Wherever we were, it was time to stop.

In Airolo, the last town before entering the long tunnel, the 2002 *Michelin Red Guide for Switzerland* lists two hotel possibilities. We chose the first on the list.

Hotel Motta

A typical, modern business hotel — Best Western — but rooms are clean, comfortable and management is pleasant and helpful. Room Num-

Continued on page 6...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

atmospheric, beer restaurant with cheap — but great — food and beer.

Berlin: In our opinion, the most interesting city in G.A.S. (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) — probably in Europe. Go now.

Burgenland: (Austria) Reminds of Provence and Tuscany but at half the price. Some of the world's finest desert wines are made here. One of Europe's true bargain destinations.

Gasthof Fraundorfer: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Simple hotel but the most fun you can have eating at a restaurant. Good Bavarian food, too. Our last visit was October and it hasn't changed in the 25 years we've known it. Except for time out for heart bypass surgery, Friedl has sung, yodeled and played the accordion from 7pm to midnight six days a week since 1959. Yes, it's touristy but after 9pm check out the local Bavarian characters that begin to drift in.

Hotel Altstadt: Art deco hotel in a Vienna neighborhood of interesting shops and mid-priced restaurants frequented almost entirely by locals. The urbane, charming owner, Otto Wiesenthal, has an unerring touch.

Hotel Anker: Top-flight but affordable, walled hotel 45 minutes from Frankfurt Airport in Markt-heidenfeld. Terrific restaurant.

Hotel Art Nouveau: *Gemütlichkeit's* Berlin headquarters is in a fascinating neighborhood. Guests are in the capable hands of Christin and Gerd Schlenzka.

Hotel Beau Rivage Palace: (Lausanne) Numbah 1, baby.

Hotel du Lac: (Switz.) Rustic, mid-priced hotel with good restaurant in gorgeous lakeside location on the Brienzensee overlooking the village of Iseltwald's small, quiet harbor.

Hotel Les Sources des Alpes: Elegant little spa hotel beneath 3,000 foot rock wall that towers over the remote Swiss spa town of Leukerbad.

Ka De We Food Floor: Berlin department store's staggering collection of food, wine and beer, a good bit of which can be consumed on premises.

Lac Léman: (Lake Geneva, east end): Enchantingly beautiful in a never-ending, ever-changing interplay of mountains, water, sky and vineyards.

Rogacki: Stand-up lunch counter in a Berlin market. Wonderful, inexpensive food prepared before your eyes. Clientele ranges from TV stars to street cleaners.

Rösti: Swiss-style hash brown potatoes. Franchise this taste in the U.S. and make billions.

Schloss Haunsperg: (Near Salzburg) The castle hotel of castle hotels; suitably worn, authentic, full of art and antiques, and run by a titled, tweedy couple whose hospitality is unmatched. Nobody does it better than Eike and Georg von Gernerth.

Smutny: Timeless Vienna *Beisl* with hearty food and the two great Czech beers, Budvar and Pilsner Urquell.

Swiss Transportation System: The world's best. A marvel.

Sylt: (Germany) Sand dunes, windswept Atlantic beaches, luscious seafood and a great small hotel, the **Benen-Diken Hof**.

Vienna: Superior music, architecture, food and old-world charm.

Zürich Airport: As serene as a major international airport can be. Put your luggage on a cart and roll it either to the trunk of your rental car or to your train coach.

Gemütlichkeit Reviewed

The Travel Insider (www.thetravelinsider.info/2002/1220.htm) recently published a fairly in-depth review of *Gemütlichkeit*. You can also read editor David Rowell's interview with me at www.thetravelinsider.info/2002/1220bobbester.htm At his site you can sign up for Mr. Rowell's free weekly travel ezine. — 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 our 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 new codes are:

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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.

RHINE JOURNEY

Continued from page 1

held by giant, rusting hinges. The stone sides still show the scrape marks of carriages.

While access to the former ornate residential areas is by guided tour (in Germana — adults E3.50/\$3.73, children E1.50 /\$1.60), there's plenty to see in the courtyard, like the castle keep, the towers and the formal gardens. Platforms yield stunning views across the river to medieval Lahneck with its twin castles.

Most rail and car travelers follow the left side of the Rhine, and most ship passengers have either just boarded or are at the end of a day's journey. As a result, two right-bank treasures — LahNSTein and Braubach — are sometimes overlooked.

Lahnstein

From Stolzenfels, take the ferry to Lahnstein (trips run continuously), where the Lahn River joins the Rhine. There you get two castles with one stop. The **Martinsburg**, directly on the Rhine, was built as a toll house in the 14th century and expanded through the centuries. The more imposing **Burg Lahneck** was built in 1244. Badly damaged by the French in 1689, it lay in ruins until 1852, when a private owner rebuilt it, partly restoring its medieval fortifications and partly in English Neo-gothic, making for an interesting blend of architectures. The view from the castle keep is worth the climb. Tours are available between 10am and 5pm from May through September.

On the waterfront is a unique statue. In bronze glory, a man squats over a trough, his pants pulled down as he prepares — well, you get the idea. Called the **Baareschesser** the statue honors those citizens who kept the groundwater clean by not using pit toilets, although no one seems to know where the troughs were emptied. Not an important monument, but a unique photo op.

Braubach

Each hour, you can choose a 15-minute bus ride or a six-minute train trip upstream to Braubach where you'll find half-timber houses, twist-

ing alleys, a medieval town wall, and mighty **Marksburg Castle**. Built in stages since the 12th century, it's the only Middle Rhine castle that wasn't destroyed. A look at its foreboding position on a craggy peak reveals why it survived while others fell. Access to the fortress presented other obstacles, including four gates, two drawbridges and a tunnel.

To get there, it's a 30-minute walk or five-minute drive from the Old Town. There's also a shuttle-bus for E5 (\$5.33) roundtrip (Taxi-Schneider Braubach, tel. 02627 508).

Tours in English include visits to the massive inner rooms and to displays of armor, weapons and torture equipment. Entry E4.50 (\$4.78), children E3.50 (\$3.72); tel. +49 02627 206.)

Rhens, Spay, Brey

To return to the left bank, take the passenger ferry to Spay or a Köln-Düsseldorfer ship to Rhens. Despite their richly carved, multicolored-painted half-timber houses and their town walls, the villages of Rhens, Spay and Brey seem to have been entirely bypassed by tourists — all the more reason to explore them.

Spay in particular is packed with half-timber homes and alleys leading through the town wall to the river. The **Fährgasse** is especially scenic. At the end of the Burggasse, there's a small obelisk marking the midway point between Basel and Rotterdam. The **Petruskappelle** — a small 13th century chapel — is just slightly upstream across from Mainzerstrasse 2. For access to the chapel and its frescoes dating to 1237, call Frank Josef Karbach at +49/02628/2034.

Just past Spay, the northernmost Rhine vineyards begin to fill the terraced hillside, a sign that the wine town of Boppard is just around the bend.

Boppard

Boppard is not a town to be visited for its half-timber homes and castle. Yes, it has beautiful old houses, but they're mixed in with more modern buildings. And the castle, despite its historic role as a 14th-century customs house, is almost indistinguishable from other buildings.

Where Boppard stands out from many of its neighbors is in opportunities for leisure activities. Built more than 100 years ago, Boppard's **Promenade** is the longest along the Rhine. Thanks to the decision to move the highway behind the town, guests can walk from the town and its grand hotels overlooking the river directly to the promenade and the Rhine beyond without the distraction or danger of cars. The 3-kilometer (1.9-mile) walkway is a natural extension of the town itself, and the old trees lend a sense of strength and permanence, as well as a wooded canopy for pleasant, relaxed walks along the river. Along this promenade, Boppard may remind you of a small Italian village on the Mediterranean. Flowers bloom, trees provide thick cover, and couples hold hands as the sun sets over the Rhine. Even after the day-trippers leave and peace and quiet reign, the town is still alive.

Boppard also offers one of the best views along the Middle Rhine. Either by foot or by chairlift, visitors can climb 232 meters (762 feet) above the river to see it. The one-kilometer chairlift ride skims over vineyards; some vines are young with scraggly shoots, other decades old with thick, gnarled stalks. The landscape looks like crumpled paper colored with shades of green. A train charges through a cleft in a side valley.

(The train turns out to be the Hunsrückbahn. A 15-minute ride takes passengers up the steepest rail grade in Germany, through five tunnels and over two viaducts, climbing more than 350 meters (1070 feet) to the village of Buchholz. The hiking and views are sublime. Trains leave hourly in both directions and cost E2.40 (\$2.35) roundtrip.)

Five minutes on foot from the top of the lift, the view is of "the bendiest bend" in the Rhine, as signs describe it, a dramatic horseshoe curve where dense forests cloak rolling hills. Walk another 10 minutes, and the view changes to give the perception of four distinct lakes (the bendiest bend is more dramatic). As the chairlift descends, one sees the vast vineyards of the Bopparder Hamm (a favorite hiking area for locals) and, across the river, Kamp-Bornhofen and the ruins

of two castles, **Sterrenberg** and **Lieberstein**, commonly (if not accurately) known as the "Hostile Brothers." The best time for pictures of the Rhine's bendiest bend is in the afternoon. Haze is common, so bring appropriate filters.

The chairlift is E6.20 (\$6.60) RT. Get to the lift base station by foot or by the Rhine-Express mini-train, which also makes a 30-minute tour around town. Pick it up at the Market Square (E3.50/\$3.72 RT).

In 1994, Boppard tore down several houses to excavate a 2nd-century Roman fort and parts of the medieval wall. Several walls and much of the fort's foundation are intact, as is a fairly sophisticated fresh water and septic system. During the excavation, archaeologists also found 30 7th-century Celtic graves (the contents long since removed), and visitors can peer through glass into three of them.

Just beyond the ruins, several homes remain, with Roman and medieval stonework assimilated into their structures. The town wall, a 14th-century expansion of the original Roman walls, forms a rectangle, of which nearly one-third still stands. The wall was topped with 28 semicircular towers, more than half of which still exist in part or whole.

Although Boppard is the larger town, many choose to stay in Kamp-Bornhofen. Some prefer the relative quiet of the village or to have a "base camp" for visits to Sterrenberg and Lieberstein castles. From any angle, their towers and battlements seem to threaten each other. While the two ruins are worth a visit, many visitors miss out on the ornate **Bornhofen Monastery**, which has welcomed pilgrims for nearly 700 years.

From April through October, Boppard's family-owned wineries offer wine tastings Thursday evenings at 8. Contact: Boppard Tourist Office (tel. +49/06742/3888, fax 81402, email: tourist@boppard.de, web: www.boppard.de).

Accommodations

Zum Weissen Schwanen

If Braubach itself doesn't transport you to medieval times, a few minutes in Landgasthof Zum Weis-

sen Schwanen should do the trick. Here time has stood still and the pace is slow. Centuries ago, the hotel served as a way station for nobles and knights traveling the Rhine.

Today's hostelry is more a destination than a way-station. Prints from the 17th century show it in a country setting just outside the town walls, with the Marksburg Fortress looming over it. While the town has filled in around Zum Weissen Schwanen, the hotel has changed little with the centuries. In fact, one of the hotel's buildings, a mill, dates to the 13th century and, with its millstream and wheel, was recently restored to operation. The hotel's half-timber walls are draped with ivy, and gables rim the roof. Inside, the timber floor boards, plaster walls and wood-beam ceilings have also changed little.

All of its 17 guestrooms have centuries-old character with modern amenities and each is individually decorated with typical farmhouse furniture such as pine beds, rocking chairs and the occasional antique spinning wheel. The hotel's restaurant has an excellent reputation for regional cuisine and attracts customers from as far as Cologne and Frankfurt.

Contact: Landgasthof zum Weissen Schwanen, Brunnenstr. 4, D-56338 Braubach, tel. +49/02627/9820, fax 8802, email: zum-weissen-schwanen@rz-online.de, web: www.zum-weissen-schwanen.de
Daily Rates: Singles E55-E60 (\$59-\$64), doubles E75-E90 (\$80-\$94), suites E120-E160 (\$128-\$170). Free parking.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

Bellevue-Rheinhotel

At the Bellevue, a surviving grand hotels from the days when wealthy Americans made extended European tours in regal style, guests are pampered and names quickly remembered. Old World charm is everywhere, with ornately carved wood paneling, original oil paintings and etched glass. Rooms are spacious and plush. The hotel also has a swimming pool, sauna and fitness area. In the evening, live piano music flows from the Le Chopin lounge out to the veranda with its wrought-iron railing and decorative ceiling.

Arrivals by boat can't miss it. The five-story, 175-room hotel stands just across the Promenade from the Köln-Düsseldorfer landing with large block letters B-E-L-L-E-V-U-E across the third floor.

Ask for a Rhine view. If none is available, insist on a high floor so you can at least look out over the town to the hillside and enjoy the sunny southern exposure. Balconies are available for a premium.

Contact: Bellevue-Rheinhotel, Rhein-allee 41-42, D-56154, Boppard, tel. +49/06742/1020, fax 1026 02, email: info@bellevue-boppard.de, web: www.bellevue-boppard.de. *Gemütlichkeit* recommends contacting the hotel directly but bookings are also possible via Best Western at 800-780-7234.

Daily Rates: Singles E76-E117 (\$79-\$124), doubles E110-E151 (\$117-\$161), Off-season discount 25%-40%.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 16/20

Hotel Garni Günther

The Günther is next to the Bellevue, and some of the charm and ambiance seem to rub off. Though it doesn't have the upscale style, architecture and pampered service of its neighbor, it does offer the same views, more and larger balconies, a delightful sun terrace, private ownership and a cordial, intimate feeling.

The 38 modern guestrooms all have shower, WC, and the usual amenities. The best bargain may be the E57 (\$61) standard doubles. You'll pay E10 (\$10.60) extra for a room with a Rhine view and balcony. If you like to spread out, an upgrade from standard to large also runs about E10 (\$10.60).

Contact: Hotel Garni Günther, Rhein-allee 40, D-56154 Boppard, +49 06742 89090, fax +49 06742 890950, email info@hotelguenther.de, www.hotelguenther.de

Daily Rates: Singles use double rooms, prices based on availability, doubles E57-E82 (\$61-\$87). Multiple night and off-season discounts.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 15/20

Hotel Castle Liebenstein

Built into the ruins of the castle, Liebenstein feels more like a bed and breakfast than a hotel, even though

most B&Bs aren't in 11th-century castles. Thank the Nickenig family for making a fortress feel like home, but don't believe a word they say about the place being haunted. Each of the nine rooms has a Rhine view, as well as WC and shower. Number 6 is a spacious tower room with an elevated view to the river and an authentic feel. Walls are whitewashed plaster over old stones and mortar, and ceilings are supported by large wooden beams. The only downside is train noise. Freight trains generally travel the right side of the Rhine, often and through the night, and seem to clatter much more than the left side's passenger trains.

Contact: Hotel Castle Liebenstein, D-56341 Kamp-Bornhofen on Rhine, tel. +49/06773/308, fax 7686, email: hotel-burg-liebenstein@rhinecastles.com

Daily Rate: Singles E50-E90 (\$53-\$96), doubles E70-E110 (\$75-\$117), suites E110-E180 (\$117-\$192). Ghosts extra.

Rating: QUALITY 13/30, VALUE 14/20

Sustenance

Zum Königstuhl

Passing through an arched gateway of a medieval manor, I entered a deserted courtyard with a row of tables and chairs overlooking the Rhine. Thinking it closed, I turned to leave. On the wall, however, was sign: "Ring for service." An elderly man lifted a window overhead. "Hello, do you want something to eat? How about pork medallions with boiled potatoes in a nice sauce," he called down.

From a table under the shade of a spreading tree, Burg Lahneck was framed perfectly in the hills above the town of Lahnstein. Geraniums poured from weathered urns. Two rubber ducks sat incongruously but sweetly on the stone wall. The informality, charm and historic setting set the stage for a solitary but excellent lunch, cooked to order and to perfection. The pork was tender, the peas, carrots and mushrooms fresh. As it turns out, the man in the window is the chef and co-owner, with his sister who runs the hotel.

After paying, I asked my host (Willy Gerstung) for a tour of the house, once owned by the prince-

lector of the region, passed along to a series of vintners, and then to his parents. The inside dining area is elegant, a scene from the past. Place settings seemed ready for royalty. A portrait of his mother as a young woman is probably the newest piece in the house. There's a butter closet from 1771 and a bread closet from 1734.

Contact: Zum Königstuhl, 5401 Rhens, tel +49 02628 2244.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

Zum Alten Schmiede

The restaurant Zum Alten Schmiede offers seating along the marketplace in a sea of umbrellas surrounded by half-timber houses. Water rushes from a nearby fountain and the cheerful setting encourages conversation between the tables — and nationalities — as guests offer advice on menu choices and favorite villages.

When a grilled pork hock arrived, however, conversation came to an abrupt halt. Children hid behind their mothers and pointed. Perhaps they thought it was a monster, or maybe they were simply concerned for the recipient's arteries. In any case, it was huge. As conversations started up again, I went on to enjoy the extremely flavorful, tender *Schweinshaxe* with sauerkraut and potatoes, all for E8.50 (\$8.30). That's about the average price on the menu, which includes primarily traditional dishes like *Sauerbraten* with dumplings and red cabbage, *Bratwurst* with liver dumplings and sauerkraut, and beef simmered in white wine. Service is cordial, attentive and relaxed.

Contact: Zum Alten Schmiede, Kronengasse 24, D-56154 Boppard, tel. +49 06742 81142

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 16/20

Hotel-Restaurant Anker

The Anker has been in business for 450 years and in the same family for 19 generations, so somebody's doing something right.

The food is imaginative and exciting, the service friendly, and the setting relaxed (the table linens are starched, but not the servers). And the location couldn't be more convenient, immediately across the prome-

nade from the K-D ships. The creative menu comes as a surprise in such a small town. Start with an appetizer like mixed greens and lox served with cranberry-cream horseradish dressing. Continue with kangaroo steak flambéed in a honey-whiskey sauce. Or lamb with ratatouille and gnocchi stuffed with basil and ricotta cheese. Or twists on regional specialties like venison crusted with walnuts, simmered in local wine, and served with herbed *Spätzle*. They even get creative with a wok, like stir-fried turkey-breast with shallots, peppers and pineapple in a sharp curry sauce.


Prices range widely: E8 (\$8.51) for some wok dishes, E14 (\$15) for catfish or salmon steak, and E18 (\$19) for the venison. With a shared appetizer, entrée and glass of wine, two people can dine happily for E40 (\$43) — but add another E5 (\$5.32) to split the Grand Marnier parfait with orange-mint ragout.

Contact: Hotel-Restaurant Anker, Rheinuferstr. 46, D-56341 Kamp-Bornhofen, tel. +49/06773/215, fax 959960, email: hotel-anker@ngi.de, web: www.hotel-anker.com

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Teehäusje

Boppard makes for enjoyable meanderings and restful stops. For a relaxing escape in a soothing setting, visit the Bopparder Teehäusje, a charming tea room in a restored 1519 late Gothic half-timber house. It's one of the oldest buildings in Boppard and has survived wars, occupations and centuries of use relatively intact. Climb a narrow staircase to a cozy and intimate upper room, where an extensive variety of teas (green, herbal, fruit, flower petals, etc.) and pastries await. If it's warm try the refreshing iced chai — green tea extract mixed with milk, sugar, cinnamon and other spices. In good weather, sit outside on a quiet alley lined with half-timber houses. The Teehäusje also features a retail shop with more than 100 teas, as well as tea paraphernalia and gift items.

Contact: Bopparder Teehäusje, Untere Marktstrasse 10, D-56154-Boppard, tel. +49/06742/5798, web: www.bopparder-teehaeusje.de 

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

AIROLO

Continued from page 1

ber 101 (CHF 170/\$123) has hardwood floors, white walls, light wood furnishings and colorful duvet covers. It lacks a couch or soft chair, but the bathroom has a real shower and good lighting. The somewhat skimpy breakfasts are in the attractive, sunny dining room.

On our first night at the Motta we ate in its restaurant. Though not distinguished, the food was acceptable. Salads were of fresh greens and vegetables, and entrees of veal piccata with saffron risotto, and spaghetti with porcini mushrooms and ham, were ample and edible. After that came cheese and then sorbets. Dinner for two with beer and wine came to CHF 110 (\$79).

While by no means memorable in any sense, the Motta is a solid choice.

Contact: Hotel Motta, CH-6780 Airolo, tel. +41/0918/692 211, fax 692 225, email: info@hotelmotta.ch, web: www.hotelmotta.ch

Daily Rates: CH 115 to CH 190 (\$83-\$137). Free parking.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel-Restaurant Forni

The restaurant in the Hotel Forni — across from the rail station — is perhaps the biggest reason we call Airolo a “hidden treasure.” A member of the dependable, moderately-priced Minotel chain, the hotel offers good value, but is not special. It is its kitchen that gets our hearts racing.

There are two dining areas; one a typical *Stübli* with bare-wood tables and a bar with beer taps, but the other, divided into smoking and non-smoking spaces, is a bright, inviting space of granite floors, light wood-slat ceilings, and perhaps 15 white cloth-covered tables, each lit by elegant halogen lights descending from a ceiling track.

Unusual for a restaurant with aspirations to create imaginative dishes, Forni offers a menu that ranges from simple, traditional dishes as inexpensive as a pasta for CHF 8 (\$5.75) to an innovative four-course “menu complete” for CHF 46 (\$40).

The latter began with a fine salad

Airolo Basics

Population: 1,800

Elevation: 1,142 meters/3,747 feet

Tourist Information:

Leventina Turismo, tel.: +41/0918/691 533, fax: 692 642, email: info@leventinoturismo.ch

Driving Distances:

Andermatt	26 km	16 miles
Bern	194 km	121 miles
Lausanne	220 km	138 miles
Locarno	80 km	50 miles
Lugano	87 km	54 miles
Zürich	121 km	76 miles

Fastest Rail Times:

Interlaken	2 hours, 17 minutes
Lausanne	4 hours, 36 minutes
Milan	2 hours, 49 minutes
Zürich	1 hour, 56 minutes

Mista, followed by a mini-sandwich of coaster-sized squares of feathery, flaky, filo pastry enclosing sauteed, wild mushrooms whose untamed, earthy tastes exploded in the mouth — the dish of the evening. Next came four of the tenderest, tastiest, least gamey, venison filets we’ve ever encountered. Prepared medium rare and spread with a tablespoon or two of reduced, thickened pan juices, their richness was wonderfully offset by polenta and a crunchy, fresh mound of diced celery and pears in a small pastry cup.

The big finish was a light but complicated-sounding dessert that featured passion fruit. On a large dinner plate dusted with a powder of semisweet chocolate, were arranged small portions each of passion fruit ice cream, passion fruit mousse, and passion fruit roulade, all drizzled with a sauce of, yep, passion fruit. Along for the ride were dainty, grilled skewers of fresh mango and pineapple pieces. Glorious.

Charged with selecting a half-liter of “local red wine, not too expensive” our waiter/major domo brought us a fine Ticinese merlot bottled in Losone, a suburb of Locarno. A steal at CHF 28 (\$20). In fact, over two nights, this large, serious but affable man never steered us wrong. Case in point is his urging upon us a glass of an absolutely luscious Sauterne-style dessert wine — 1997 Juracon Mülleux — for a mere CHF 5.50 (\$3.95). With the latter we kept looking at the wine list to make sure we hadn’t got our language wires

crossed and were quaffing some \$15 per thimble-full of prize-winning, late-harvest, vintage-of-the-century, 99.9-on-the-Robert-Parker-scale, nectar. Perhaps it wasn’t quite that good, but where we come from there are no desert wines in good restaurants at less than about \$7 per glass and those are invariably some cloyingly sweet domestic liquid candy.

Without beverages, dinner for two was CHF 108 (\$78).

The next night, dressed in blue jeans and in no mood for *haut cuisine*, we settled into the spare *Stübli* with visions of a fast salad, a plate of pasta and early bed. No problem says the major domo (who was not the owner, by the way), but please join us in the nicer room. We demurred, he insisted. We could, he said, order whatever we wanted, no matter where we sat. Since it seemed important, we followed our man to the same table we had occupied the previous night and dined on an extraordinary porcini mushroom ravioli (CHF 22/\$16) and a more than serviceable veal piccata (CH 36/\$26). With salads and a shared dessert of house-made mango ice cream the price for two without beverages was 81 CHF (\$58).

In a month-long trip we never had better food or wine at *any* price, even in Michelin-starred restaurants.

Contact: Hotel Forni, CH-6780 Airolo, tel. +41/0918/691 270, fax 691 523, email: info@forni.ch, web: www.forni.ch. Proprietors: Marzio and Hanni Forni

Daily Rates: Single CHF 80 to CHF 120 (\$83-\$137), doubles CHF 140 to CHF 180 (\$101-\$129)

Ratings:

Hotel: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

Rest: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 18/20

Things to See and Do

Airolo is not an unattractive town and there is enough to keep one busy for two or three days. On a Sunday, we spent a few minutes watching the town band lead a main street procession of churchgoers carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary.

• North of the Airolo is the **St. Gotthard Hospice Fort Museum** from whose site the southern ap-



proach to the Gotthard was defended. Those who came to Ticino via the tunnel may want to drive up the Pass road to the museum and to the summit for spectacular views.

- About 20 minutes by car, south of town, is Piotta and the **Ritom**. It surely has to be ranked among the great Switzerland funiculars. Not a cog wheel, it instead rides on tracks and is pulled by a cable. The ascent takes 12 minutes and portions of it are near vertical, an 88.7% grade. At the top, a 25-minute walk leads to a lake formed by a dam. Further walking leads to more lakes in this mainly treeless landscape.

To serve the many hikers and walkers that pass this way there is a restaurant by the dam where the Osso Buco looks promising.

Roundtrip fare on the Ritom is CHF 15 (\$11) for adults and 10 CHF (\$7) for kids under 16.

- A bit further south is the Michelin one-star town of **Giornico** with its 12th century church (don't confuse it with the newer church virtually on the same site).

Throughout this region one sees unique uses of granite, such as being cut into stakes and used to support grape vines that hang five to six feet off the ground. Granite slabs are also used for fencing and sometimes to edge roadways.

- You may wish to continue south to Biasca and then northeast toward Lukmanier Pass. **Lottingna** is another one-star town.

- Activities for another day might include a train trip into Lugano for a boat ride on the lake, perhaps disembarking for lunch at **Gandria**, a quaint but tourist-ridden hamlet built on the steep cliffside overlooking the lake. We had a forgettable meal of salad and flavorless pasta at **Ristorante Roccabella**.

Autobahn Advice

Drivers leaving Ticino via the Gotthard Tunnel will often encounter rush-hour type slowdowns on the Autostrada. Here's a tip that may save some time. Exit at Quinta and follow the red road to Airola where you return to the Autostrada just prior to entering the tunnel. ☒

Travel Quickies

■ Iron Curtain Museum

In **Bad Sachsa**, in the Harz Mountains very near the old East German border, the **Grenzland Museum** is dedicated to the former border between East and West — the Iron Curtain. Exhibited are items used in escape attempts — including a homemade hot air balloon — plus uniforms, photos, and weapons and equipment used to control the border. In German but with informational handouts in English. Info: www.gm-badsachsa.de/rundgang.html

■ Air Cheaper Than Rail?

Eurostar, the cross-Channel trains from London to Paris and Brussels are losing share to Europe's new budget airlines such as **easyJet** which offers roundtrip London-Paris service for \$130 to \$200. However, new track on the British side later this year is expected to cut 25 minutes off the three-hour London-Paris route.

■ More Rental Car Charges

Hertz now charges 50 cents per day (max. \$2 per rental) to award frequent flyer miles. **Avis** and **Budget** are expected to follow suit.

■ Internet Over the Atlantic

Lufthansa is testing high speed, wireless Internet access for passengers on some of its U.S.-Germany transatlantic flights and hopes to roll out Internet connectivity on all its intercontinental fleet over the next two years. It won't be free.

■ New Relais & Chateaux

Switzerland: **Park Hotel Weggis** — Weggis on Lake Lucerne; **Domaine de Chateaufvieux** — Peney-Dessus — close to Geneva; **Restaurant du Cerf** — Cossonay-Ville; **Chalet d'Adrien** — Verbier

Germany: **Landhaus "Zu den Rothen Forellen"** — Ilsenburg in the Hochharz mountains

Austria: **Taubenkobel** — Schützen/Gerbirge, in Burgenland, near Eisenstadt.

Info: www.relaischateaux.com

■ Focus on Graz

Graz is the **2003 Cultural Capital of Europe**. Info: www.austria-tourism.at/us

■ Technology at the Border

The Bavarian police are currently running a pilot project for biometric passport control at the Waldhaus crossing of the German-Czech border. Passport photos are scanned and compared to simultaneously taken live images of passport holders. Software determines whether or not the images match. In addition, the authenticity of the actual document is verified by reading certain imbedded security features.

■ Cheap Group Rates in Munich

Attention travel agents and groups: a Dutch company offers groups of 20 or more four-star hotel accommodations in Munich at E26 (\$28) per person double and E44 (\$47) single. Contact: International Hotel Reservations, Dommerswijk 21. NL 7782 PB DE KRIM, tel. +31/524 570700, fax 570724, email: info@ihrc.nl

■ Rail Timetables on CD

Of interest to travelers who carry a laptop computer to Europe: a CD-ROM (PCs/Windows only) containing German and European rail timetables is available for about \$11 from German Rail. Contact: Deutsche Bahn AG, BestellCenter Elektronische Medien, Postfach 1157, D-53821 Triorsdorf, Germany, tel: +49/02241/94 77 77, fax: 94 77 99. For more about CD timetables and how to use them see Readers' Forum below. ☒

Readers' Forum

Swiss Rail Timetables on CD

Swiss Rail (SBB) offers its timetable in paper form, interactively on its website (www.rail.ch/pv/index_e.htm), and in CD-ROM media. I have made 16 trips to Switzerland, use trains almost exclusively, and since 1996 have used the electronic timetable loaded on my personal computer to plan excursions. To extensive users of the Swiss Travel System, I highly recommend this product.

The SBB website is quite good and the information is the same as in the CD version. But Internet connections for travelers in Europe are difficult and, with its speed, user-friendliness and extra features the CD is well worth the CHF 16 (\$12) cost. However, though widely available in Swit-

zerland, the CD is not easy to obtain in the U.S. I buy mine in Switzerland or purchase it by email with a credit card from ContactCenter@SBB.CH. The postage cost — CHF 9 (\$6.50) to a European address is reasonable, but the CHF 41 (\$29) charge to send it to the U.S. is not. A friend in Europe forwards it to me. The current edition is valid 12/2002 to 12/2003.

CD installation is rapid, trouble-free, and the instructions are in the language of your choice. All the English text associated with this product is good. You must immediately update the program by downloading the latest timetable (666kb) and, assuming you would like to access the timetables of connecting trains throughout Europe, you should download the International Update (3mb). This will give you connections as far as Madrid, London, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Warsaw, Budapest, Belgrade and Rome.

To use the timetable, choose a departure station, a destination station and, optionally, 'via' stations. Enter the departure date and time. You can specify which carriers you are willing to travel on (boats, buses, etc.) or just accept all possible connections. All itineraries that fit your parameters will be presented. (This is different from the online system, which shows four itineraries.) At a glance you can see the number of changes and the total travel time. Click on highlighted words to find out anything you could possibly want to know about the journey — except the price. If you are using a pass, and your trip is within Switzerland, you may not care.

Search results can be printed with

a range of detail and the departure board of any station can also be printed. These printouts can be tailored to exclude times, dates, days of the week, etc., and can have little or extensive detail. They do have track numbers, but occasionally these are altered, so I always double-check the sign at the track.

After your query, click on the 'Graphics' button for a map of the route, with all the necessary stations. The map is large and legible, unlike the tiny Java map on the web site.

This is an impressive tool and an excellent value. It is worthwhile even when out of date by a year or two. The timetable changes very little year to year and you can always double-check the results online.

RALPH WALKER
WWW.GRUETZLI.COM

Backs Up Reader Recommend


I'll offer a strong "second" to subscriber M. Murphy's recommendation of **Hotel Stella d'Italia**. Have stayed there twice and am booked for May '03.

Right on Lago di Lugano. Lovely areas to sit/dine outside and very pretty views. Outstanding food. Rooms rather small and not for sitting, but all have balcony overlooking the lake with table and chairs. Rooms in older part a bit more desirable. Best balconies: 119, 120, 121. Very small village, no shopping, but Lugano is only 15 minutes away. Room prices, with nice breakfast buffet, around E125 (\$133) are a bargain. The drive east to Lago di Como (Menaggio) is about 30 minutes.

BILL BOHNHOFF
SANTA FE NM 

Tip of the Month:

"Personal timetables," available online at both the **German Rail** and **Swiss Rail** websites, are a great way to plan European rail travel. At www.bahn.de click on "Int. Guests" and in the next screen click "Personal Timetable" in the left column. Next, enter a city pair and follow the instructions to download a PDF file listing all the service between your two selected cities. Before leaving the U.S., determine all the possible city pairs you might use during your trip and create a timetable for each. Print them out and carry them with you. You can also download the files to a laptop or Palm Pilot.

It's the same procedure at the Swiss Rail website (www.sbb.ch). If you have trouble finding the Personal Timetable page, simply use the site search feature and type in "personal timetable." 

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is intended for fast 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 is on page 2 herein. 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, Umlandstrasse 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@hotels.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 & Environs

Schloss Haunsperg, A-5411 Oberalm bei Hallein, Hammerstrasse 32, tel. +43/06245/80662, fax 85680, email: info@schlosshaunsperg.com

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

Frankfurt Airport

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