

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

We Are Not Loved?

The fact that you pay \$49 per year for this simple little publication — 8 pages per month, no pictures, no color — is fairly convincing evidence that you have much more than a fleeting interest in European travel, specifically Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Unlike *National Geographic* or *Travel & Leisure*, *Gemütlichkeit* isn't about idle page flipping, breathtaking photos, and impossible dreams of \$2,000 per night beach-side huts. It's a nuts and bolts, how-to publication built for people who actually travel. In other words, you're the real deal.

Maybe that's why *Gemütlichkeit* survived both the Gulf War and 9/11 — you kept traveling. Your need to spend time in Europe overcame your apprehension.

This time, however, a new and decidedly unpleasant theme has been adopted by the we're-staying-home-this-year crowd. Anti-Americanism. The media, naturally, is pouring gasoline on the flames. The chancellor of Germany uses the Iraq war issue to get reelected and suddenly the term 'anti-Americanism' starts popping up in news reports. And if you're a reporter assigned to write a story about anti-Americanism you go out and find examples of it. You grab a 19-year-old kid at a Berlin anti-war rally and quote him. After all, he has great wisdom and knows it's all about oil. A two-year old book written by a Frenchman about why the French don't like Americans is suddenly a story on the networks' nightly news shows. You see a "Bomb Iraq, then bomb France" bumper sticker and you put it in your story. It feeds the fire.

An online Google search of news headlines using the word "anti-American" finds more than 1000 articles. One of them, a [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) story, equates anti-war protests with

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

INTERLAKEN

Interlaken is often dismissed as the touristy town good only for excursions in the Lauterbrunnen Valley and the glorious Jungfrau region. Our Jim Johnson says otherwise.

For most travelers, Interlaken is a base from which to enjoy the nearby mountain villages and alpine scenery of Switzerland's Jungfrau region. This correspondent, however, though delighted by the villages and the mountains, became enthralled with Interlaken itself — its history, its architecture, its charm (much of it hidden) and its lack of pretense.

This conclusion was reached during six December days spent walking through back streets, narrow alleys and pleasant hiking paths in and around the town. Just behind my hotel, I explored the empty grounds of Interlaken's 14th-century castle. A five-minute walk away in Matten,

once home to the area's patrician farmers, I stared down cows and listened to farmers yodel while loading hay into a 400-year-old hut. In Unterseen, the oldest part of Interlaken, I walked past centuries-old mills and canals, factories from the days of the Industrial Revolution, the town's 17th-century palace, and a medieval moat that once protected the 500-year-old houses that line it.

A short distance along the Lake Brienz shoreline is Bönigen, once just a farming community but for more than a century now an active lakefront resort complete with ship landing, beaches and 19th-century hotels as well as farms and medieval houses. Across the lake looms the

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Gemütlichkeit Recommends...

A Vacation Rental Source

We are pleased to recommend to our subscribers, **Drawbridge to Europe**, a broker for European vacation rentals.

As has been pointed out a number of times in these pages, finding the right apartment, chalet or house to rent for a week or more in Europe is a kind of Catch-22. Making a sight-unseen choice from the U.S. is a gamble most of us would rather not take. On the other hand, waiting until arrival in Europe you may find the best properties already booked. So, if you can't choose a vacation rental in person, the next best solution is to place yourself in the hands of a trusted, knowledgeable, expert. We think Drawbridge fills the bill. And as a small enticement from Drawbridge, *Gemütlichkeit* readers who book a European vacation rental to Europe through June 1 of 2003, will receive a

\$20 certificate toward any purchase of maps, books and travel merchandise at www.travelgearnow.com.

Owners Karin Volpert and John Spillman have been finding vacation rentals for travelers since 1996.

Ms. Volpert was born and raised in Germany and thus offers a native's insight to the German-speaking countries. Her husband, John, has lived abroad and traveled extensively throughout Europe.

Most of the rental properties Drawbridge represents have been personally chosen and inspected during their frequent trips to Europe. In Switzerland, for example, Ms. Volpert has seen every property her company offers, and nearly all those in Germany and Austria.

They represent 55 properties in Switzerland, 38 in Austria and 40 in

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

anti-Americanism and makes this incredible statement: "analysts warn that a whole generation of America-haters is being created, a European generation which they say believes Americans deliberately bomb civilians and kill Arab babies." The writer does not say which "analysts" and attributes this extraordinary declaration to exactly no one.

A few stories try for at least some balance. Near the bottom of a *Washington Post* piece on the subject we found this: "There are issues where we disagree, and Iraq is certainly one," says Reinhard Buetikofer, a spokesman for Germany's Green Party. "But Americans should not misunderstand the criticism when they hear it. People may criticize, they may even use words that can sound offensive, but it does not mean they want to break the friendship with the United States."

How friendly are the Germans? One wire service story reports on a recent poll on that very subject. More than 70% of Germans, say the pollsters, regard the United States as their country's best friend.

Deep in a *New York Times* story, Joshua Falish, an American who lives in Frankfurt, says on his walking route to work he still sees about 10 Germans each day wearing New York Yankee caps.

And remember the outpouring of sympathy throughout Europe follow-

ing 9/11. The French newspaper, *Le Monde*, on 9/13 headlined, *Nous sommes tous americains* — "We are all Americans."

But let's face it, not every German — or Swiss, or Austrian — is going to welcome you with a glad cry of joy. That, however, has always been true. The question is, are there more anti-U.S. feelings now than five years ago? I doubt anyone knows. Unlike consumer confidence, there is no index for anti-Americanism. If you visit Europe often enough you're going to run into a shopkeeper, a hotel clerk, a waiter — somebody — who will make a point of being rude to you. In 30 years of traveling in Europe I've had that experience about half a dozen times, not more. In 1995, the tourist office in Göttingen, Germany, scheduled an appointment for *Gemütlichkeit* to tour the city's finest hotel. We reported at the agreed upon time and the owner was summoned by the front desk. He strode briskly into the lobby and approached us cordially. A few seconds into our conversation, however, his attitude toward us abruptly changed. After asking where *Gemütlichkeit* is distributed, he said he had no interest in having his hotel reviewed and quickly escorted us to the door. There could, of course, be a variety of reasons for the man's behavior that day but the one that makes the most sense to me is that he simply doesn't care for English speakers, most likely English speakers from the U.S.A.

In the situation at hand, we must differentiate between a disagreement over a single issue and that emotionally-charged term, anti-Americanism. One German hotel owner's brief email to us said it all, "Europe is not against America but against the war Mr. Bush wants." In a later email that same hotelier wanted to know if he should put a "We Welcome Americans" banner on his website.

Everyday at *Gemütlichkeit* we talk to travelers just returned from Europe. Lately, we've been asking them how they were treated, if they felt any animosity from Europeans. So far, outside of a few more lively than usual political discussions, it's been business as usual. They still want to see you.

The current huffing and puffing is over one issue and even best friends don't agree about everything.

Consider the following statement
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Using Gemütlichkeit

- Foreign currency prices are converted to U.S. dollars at the exchange rate in effect at the time of publication.
- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

Logging on to 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:

User Name: lake Password: 3838

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

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POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
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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.

INTERLAKEN

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towering ruins of the 13th-century **Ringgenberg Castle**.

In the nearby village of Wilderswil, a well-marked trail flows around and through the village, past a collection of medieval houses built around a square. A covered bridge, circa 1738, crosses the Lüttschine River to a 12th-century church and the 600-year-old **Gasthaus Steinbock**. It's but a short climb to the medieval farming village of Gsteigweiler where there's nary a hotel nor restaurant.

In Interlaken's very center is the Höhenweg, a wide promenade along the Höhematte, a 35-acre meadow set aside in 1864 where no trees can be felled, no buildings constructed, and the land can't be divided. However, once a year, when the farmers lead their cows from the mountains, the pasture takes on its old purpose as a holding area for cattle.

Those who enjoy historic architecture could devote an entire vacation to Interlaken. Beyond the medieval buildings, Interlaken is a collection of treasures from the mid-19th-century Industrial period through early 20th-century *Jugendstil*.

None of this is to diminish the delights of the surrounding mountains and Alpine villages like Mürren (see *Gemütlichkeit*, July 2002), Grindelwald and Wengen, all of which are easily reached by train from Interlaken's East railway station.

Accommodations

Grand Hotel Victoria-Jungfrau

There is no hotel experience quite like that found at the great, grand Swiss hotels and the VJ is one of the greatest and grandest.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Höhenweg is dominated by the hotel's long *Belle époque* facade, striped awnings over every window, and signature Victorian tower.

Inside are high, wide corridors, marble fountains, dazzling crystal chandeliers, and 10-foot high, wood framed, beveled glass doors that open to elegant salons.

The term "swimming pool"

Interlaken Basics

Population: 5,000

Elevation: 567 meters/1860 feet

Tourist Information:

Interlaken Tourism, Postfach 369, Höheweg 37, CH-3800 Interlaken, tel.: +41/033/826 53 00, fax +41/033/826 53 75, email: mail@InterlakenTourism.ch, web: www.interlakentourismus.ch.

Driving Distances:

Basel	95 km	59 miles
Bern	34 km	21 miles
Frankfurt	537 km	334 miles
Geneva	166 km	103 miles
Lausanne	77 km	48 miles
Lucerne	47 km	29 miles
Innsbruck	369 km	229 miles
Munich	435 km	270 miles
Zürich	79 km	49 miles
Zermatt	89 km	55 miles

Typical Rail Times:

Berlin	9 hours, 24 minutes
Bern	0 hours, 54 minutes
Geneva	2 hours, 51 minutes
Lausanne	2 hours, 15 minutes
Munich	7 hours, 17 minutes
Salzburg	8 hours, 50 minutes
Vienna	11 hours, 56 minutes
Zürich	2 hours, 17 minutes

doesn't begin to adequately describe the VJ's extravagant natatorium of Roman opulence and Art Deco ritz. Under an arching roof that opens to the sky, azure columns rise from the water. Each narrows to a black cylinder that supports a white, basketball-sized, light globe. Nearby are the hotel's four indoor tennis courts. Outside are several more.

And, of course, framed in almost every window, floating in and out of the clouds, is the imposing mountain for which the hotel is named.

Guestrooms are sumptuous havens of elegance and comfort with every convenience. Many have huge, brilliantly lit, marble baths with separate showers and Jacuzzi tubs. Even the standard rooms, though a bit smaller, are posh.

There are three restaurants, the most ambitious being **La Terrasse**, a shimmering room of floor to ceiling windows, dazzling silver, gleaming crystal and snowy linens. Always there is a pianist and hovering tuxedoed servers. To be in this room on a summer evening, as the last of the sun lights the Jungfrau, is a lifetime memory.

The food is another story. It is

expensive and we approach meals here with expectations that have not always been fulfilled. The cuisine is rich, substantial and "Old World;" the service stiff and correct, though not unfriendly.

Victoria-Jungfrau's less serious restaurants are the more contemporary, **Jungfrau Brasserie**, which features lighter fare of fresh Swiss products, and **Pastateca**, which serves Italian and Asian pasta dishes.

By any measurement, this is one of the world's finest hotels. For most, it is a destination for very special occasions. Check the hotel's website for discount deals. On offer at the end of February was a double room with breakfast *and* dinner in any of the restaurants for two persons for CHF 590 (\$432) per night.

Contact: Grand Hotel Victoria Jungfrau, Höheweg 41, CH-3800 Interlaken, +41/033/828 28 28, fax 828 28 80, email: interlaken@victoria-jungfrau.ch, web: www.victoria-jungfrau.ch

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 430-620 (\$106-\$128), doubles CHF 530-850 (\$140-\$220), not including breakfast.

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 12/20

Hotel du Nord

Although parts of the du Nord date to the 12th century, the feeling is much more late 19th or early 20th century with a loving blend of rustic charm and contemporary style. Fifth-generation owner Simone Engel, who took over from her parents in 1999, grew up in the hotel and has a passion for it and her hometown. Like her veteran staff, she's personable, warm, and attentive.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Public spaces are bright and cheerful with special accents from shimmering candles to colors that match just right.

Guest rooms are generally spacious with a harmony of soft colors in upholstery, carpeting and drapery. Rooms 404, 406, 407 and 409 are top-floor doubles with balconies and mountain views. Bathrooms are mid-size and offer a tub with shower.

Contact: Simone Engel, Hotel Du Nord, Höheweg 70, CH-3800 Interlaken, tel.: +41/033/827 5050, fax: 827

827-5055, email: mail@hotel-dunord.ch, web: www.hotel-dunord.ch.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 145-175 (\$106-\$128), doubles CHF 190-300 (\$140-\$220). Free parking and shuttle service to golf course.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

Hotel-Gasthof Hirschen

The Hotel-Gasthof Hirschen has been in the same family since 1666, and Frau Marian Graf — the cordial, ninth-generation innkeeper — has succeeded, during a recent renovation, in balancing history and tradition with modern comfort.

A step into the Hirschen is a step back in time. The 20 guestrooms come with modern amenities and lots of warm wood, soft-colored fabrics and rustic touches. Number 6 is a large double with view to the Jungfrau, while Number 26 looks over the garden terrace and lawn. The hotel's farm produces meat, cheese, vegetables and berries for hotel use and general sale. The Hirschen is about a 10-minute walk from the Ostbahnhof.

Though the Hirschen looks better to us than it did on our first visit in 1994, the three "suburban" hotels listed below are better value.

Contact: Hotel-Gasthof Hirschen, CH-3800 Matten-Interlaken, tel. +41/

033/822 1545, fax: 823 3745, email: gasthofhirschen@bluewin.ch, web: www.hirschen-interlaken.ch

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 90-140 (\$66-\$103), doubles CHF 180-260 (\$132-\$191)

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 10/20

Hotel Bären

Located in the quiet community of Wilderswil, the Hotel Bären, an inn since 1706, has a typical country feeling — nothing plush, but certainly clean, pleasant and tasteful. Antiques decorate public spaces, and bears are everywhere, from wood carvings and stuffed animals to painted pottery.

Most of the 50 guestrooms are larger than average and the slanting roof lends character to top-floor chambers. In addition to a sauna, TV lounge and small fitness area, guests can also make use of a self-service laundry room and free use of bicycles and mountain bikes. Rail travelers should note that the hotel is an 8-10 minute walk from the generally taxiless Wilderswil station.

The included breakfast is one of the best and most complete anywhere.

Contact: Gabi and Fritz Zurschmiede-Melo, Hotel Bären, CH-3812 Wilderswil, tel.: +41 033 828 3151, fax: 828 3152, email: info@baeren.ch, web: www.baeren.ch.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 78-130 (\$57-\$66), doubles CHF 130-210 (\$95-\$154).

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 12/20

Gasthaus Steinbock

It's just a three-minute walk from the Wilderswil train station, past historic houses, across the covered wooden bridge, over the rapids of the Lütschine River, past the early medieval village church, to the 14th-century Gasthaus Steinbock. Rooms are mid-sized and straightforward, but the character of the overall setting more than makes up for any shortcomings.

Contact: Gasthaus Steinbock, CH-3814 Gsteigweiler, tel.: +41 033 823 3001, fax: +41 033 823 3015, email: info@steinbockgsteig.ch, web: www.gastro-genial.ch.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 85-95 (\$62-

\$70), doubles CHF 150-160 (\$110-\$117)

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 15/20

Hotel Schlössli am See

For travelers seeking a lakeside location, the Hotel Schlössli am See in Bönigen offers good value on the Brienersee. In this pleasant combination lakefront resort and medieval farming village, the Schlössli has been a landmark for more than a century. Guests can relax outdoors on a private beach or on the hotel's extensive lakefront lawn.

The Schlössli's exterior and public spaces are a bit past their prime, but guestrooms were recently renovated and are clean, comfortable and full of character.

The hotel is reached easily by car, bus (12 minutes and CHF 3.20/\$2.31 from Interlaken Ost station) or ship. Request a north-facing room with balcony in the old building, but specify one whose views are not obstructed by the large tree out front.

Contact: Hotel Schlössli am See, CH-3806 Bönigen bei Interlaken, email: info@schloessli.com, web: www.schloessli.com.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 70-130 (\$51-\$95), doubles CHF 100-210 (\$73-\$154)

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 14/20

Sustenance

Stocker's Degusta

Located in the center of town, this cozy chalet-style restaurant gets a Michelin "Bib Gourmand" designation for "good food at moderate prices." A meal of salad, entrée and dessert will start at about \$35.

Owner/chef Leo Stocker, who once toiled in the kitchens of the Grand Hotel Victoria Jungfrau's Restaurant La Terrasse, lightens and brightens traditional Swiss dishes.

The farm house interior has a refined rustic charm.

Contact: Stocker's Degusta, 3 Centralstr., CH-3800, Interlaken, tel. +41/033/822 00 29, fax 822 00 29

Rating: Quality 14/20 Value 12/20

Restaurant Rustica

The menu at the Hotel Bären's Restaurant Rustica in Wilderswil

Key Websites for the Traveler

- www.gemut.com Gateway site for travelers to Germanic Europe, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, traveler feedback, travel tips and past issues (free access to back issues for subscribers; see log-on info on page 2).
- www.viamichelin.com The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- www.travelgearnow.com Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, name-brand luggage, all at 10% off for subscribers.
- www.mapblast.com Map and automobile trip planning. Locates routes and distances.
- bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm Swiss and European rail schedules.
- www.ski-europe.com Top web resource for skiers with much data on Alpine resorts.
- www.myswitzerland.com Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- www.germany-tourism.de Germany's national tourist authority.
- www.anto.com Austria's national tourist authority.
- <http://www.hhog.de> Website for an alliance of historic German cities.

makes four points about the roasted chicken: it's from the neighborhood, delivered fresh, has never had animal feed, and should be eaten with the fingers. Any concern about etiquette disappears when the server returns with a finger bowl and outfits you in a cloth bib.

This is an upbeat and informal dining spot in a 300-year-old building with plenty of old wood and character. The resident-to-tourist ratio is high, and the prices are quite moderate; main dishes average around CHF 20 (\$15) with several choices under CHF 15 (\$11). For those who prefer knives and forks, trout, lamb and a half-score of *Rösti* options stand at the ready.

Contact: Restaurant Rustica at Hotel Bären, CH-3812 Wilderswil, tel. +41/033/828 3151, fax: 828 3152, email: info@baeren.ch, web: www.baeren.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Ristorante Arcobaleno

Owners Giacomo Verardo and Giuseppe Fanciullo serve up traditional Italian food in an atmospheric setting in Interlaken's Unterseen neighborhood. Entrées are priced between CHF 20-38 (\$15-\$28) with most falling toward the lower end.

Popular menu choices include a seafood risotto, time-honored *Saltimbocca*, penne pasta with salmon, and whisky-flamed jumbo shrimp with hot peppers and tomatoes served over risotto.

Contact: Ristorante Arcobaleno, Hauptstrasse 18, CH-1800 Unterseen, tel. +41/033/823 1243

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 14/20

Restaurant Pizzeria Da Rafmi

While most area restaurants have Swiss country settings, Pizzeria Da Rafmi goes south of the border for a distinctly Italian feel with a splash of art deco added in.

During one evening visit last December virtually every customer in the restaurant was Italian (or Italian Swiss) and/or known to the servers. Despite a full house, service was quick. The bread was warm, fresh and dense, and the salads colorful, cool and creative.

New German Rail Pricing

Last December 15, most train travel in Germany became less expensive. Although some short routes saw as much as a 10% increase, ticket prices for routes longer than 180 kilometers (112 miles) dropped as much as 25%.

The bigger change, however, is in discounts for advance purchase, which apply to both long and short routes. Under the *Plan und Spar* (Plan and Save) program, you can reserve a seat one day in advance and receive a 10% discount off one-way and round-trip fares. For three days in advance, the discount increases to 25% but requires a round-trip purchase. For seven days, the discount is 40% but requires both a round-trip purchase and a weekend stay. Two caveats: First, change penalties are as high as E45 (\$48) but don't apply to missed connections. Second, although German Rail says the supply will be sufficient, the number of discount seats available is limited on any given train.

Up to four individuals traveling (and reserving) with the primary passenger receive a further 50% discount, whether or not they are family members. And children up to 14 years old traveling with their parents ride for free (the limit had been 11).

German Rail has also reduced the cost of its BahnCard (a frequent traveler card program) from E140 (\$151) to E60 (\$65) in second class

and from E280 (\$301) to E150 (\$161) in first class. The card is good for one year. Since BahnCard holders receive an additional 25% discount, it's a worthwhile purchase for anyone planning to spend more than E560 (\$602) in second class travel or more than E600 (\$645) in first class travel over the course of a year. BahnCard holders also receive 25% off travel in Austria and Switzerland.

With the new price structure, it's important to consider all discounts when deciding whether to purchase German Rail or other passes.

For more information, go to www.bahn.de and click on "International Guests," where you can review plan details, check timetables and purchase advance tickets.

Rail Passes

The above changes are related to individual rail tickets purchased in Germany and have no bearing on the cost of German Rail passes sold in the U.S. The price for these, incidentally, remains the same as in 2002. One of the best rail bargains around is the second class **German Rail Twin Pass** (two persons traveling together), which offers per person, per day travel throughout Germany for from \$24 to \$34 depending on the number of days of travel purchased. First-class passes cost from \$34 to \$49 per day. To compare these rates with prices for individual trips in Germany, visit www.bahn.de, and select "International visitors."

Il Giardino

Try this Italian restaurant for its *fondue chinoise a discretion*, an all-you-can-eat broth fondue with a variety of meats and vegetables and an attractive salad and fruit bar. The fondue special is Thursday through Saturday evenings and costs CHF 33 (\$24) per person.

Contact: Il Giardino, Hotel Interlaken, Höhweg 74, CH-3800 Interlaken, tel.: +41 033 826 6868, fax: +41 033 826 6869, email: Interlaken@bluewin.ch, web: www.interlakenhotel.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20 ☒

In a simple risotto *mari et monti* (sea and mountains), the rice was cooked to a just-right *al dente* with plenty of baby shrimp and firm mushrooms. Other entrées — such as veal scallopini, gnocchi with tomatoes and gorgonzola, and grilled salmon — range in price from CHF 22-34 (\$18-\$25) with an average around CHF 27 (\$20).

Contact: Restaurant Pizzeria Da Rafmi (Weisses Kreuz), Höhweg, CH-3800 Interlaken, tel./fax: +41/033/822 5383

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

Beating the Big 'Premium Station' Car Rental Tax

The tax on rental cars at airports and rail stations in Germany, Austria and Switzerland has gotten out of hand. In Switzerland and Austria it's 15% and Germany just raised it's fee for such pickups to 17%. This from a country that five years ago levied a flat charge of DM 10 or about \$4 to \$5 for anything from a subcompact to an S-Class Mercedes. And the 15% or 17% is figured on the *entire cost of the rental*, not just the basic charge. For example, a car whose base rental price is \$200 per week in Germany jumps to \$232 with the 16% value added tax. The 17% airport tax is figured on the \$232 and comes to an extra \$39 — a total of \$271. If you extend this rental to three-weeks, the airport charge becomes \$117. Need a midsize wagon for a month in Germany? You're looking at an extra \$150 to rent it at an airport or rail station.

The obvious solution, of course, is to get the car at a location other than an airport or rail station. Inconvenient? Compared to going immediately upon arrival to an airport rental car counter, absolutely. But only you can decide how much such convenience is worth.

To help you make that decision here is some information regarding public transport to and from four major airports in Germany, Austria, Switzerland.

Frankfurt

Taxi: A taxi to the center of town costs about E20 (\$22) and takes 20 to 30 minutes, depending on traffic. The nearest Frankfurt **Avis** location, Schmidt Str. 39, is just across the river north of the airport. **Europcar's** most convenient non-tax rental office is northwest of the airport near the Autobahn at Am Industriehof 3-5. Taxi to it in about 20-30 minutes at a cost of about E25 (\$27). This location will be more convenient to travelers who want to avoid downtown traffic.

Rail: From the airport it costs only E3.15 (\$3.40) to go to the main rail station. The trip takes about 10 minutes. But if you want to get to a

rental car location, your best bet from there is a taxi.

The Frankfurt Airport has two terminals and two rail stations. To catch a train to downtown, follow the signs marked "Regionalbahnhof" from the departure/arrivals hall in Terminal 1 to platforms 1-3 on level 01 (underground railway station), via the escalators. Trains to Frankfurt depart from platform 1. From Terminal 2, take the Sky Line (runs every two minutes) to departure hall B in Terminal 1 and then follow the "Regionalbahnhof" signs as described above. The Sky Line rail shuttle that connects the two terminals does not allow luggage carts on board.

Other Info: There are two gas stations at the airport. BP is not far from Terminal 1, next to the **Sheraton Hotel**, on the access road to the visitors' bus garage P 36. There's an Esso station near the **Steigenberger Airport Hotel** (at the turning circle on Unterschweinstiege, next to the A 3 highway exit).

The English version of the airport's website (www.frankfurt-airport.de) recommends "minute trips" for travelers who have time to kill before their next flight. There are 14 recommended walking tours of the airport and its shops.

Munich

Taxi: Price of a taxi from the airport to the city center, which is where you'll have to go to pick up a rental car if you want to avoid the airport tax, is E50 to E53 (\$54-\$57).

Rail: A single trip ticket on S-1 or S-8 is E8 (\$9) and takes you to the main rail station. If there are several in your group buy a "Partner Ticket" for E15 (\$16) which is good for 24 hours travel for up to five persons throughout the Munich transportation network. From the main station, a taxi to one of several downtown car rental offices will cost from about E10 to E15 (\$11-\$16). The airport rail station is on the lower level; follow the "S" signs.

There is also a bus from the airport to the main rail station. Cost is E9 (\$10).

Other Info: For some flights at the Munich Airport you can check-in the night before, get a boarding pass and check baggage. For details, visit www.munich-airport.de and select the English version.

Munich Airport has a number of attraction for passengers who have long layovers or arrive hours prior to their flight. There are historic aircraft to tour, an outdoor "viewing hill," a multimedia show, something called a MovieRide simulator, and an outdoor kids' playground.

Tip: For questions about the Munich Airport, email info@munich-airport.de. *Gemütlichkeit* got a response to its question within 15 minutes. Otherwise, from 6am to 11pm (Germany time) phone +49 89 9 75-00 for airport info.

Zürich

Rail: There are trains every few minutes to and from the airport's terminal B. The trip downtown takes 10 to 16 minutes, depending on the train. A 2nd class ticket is CHF 6.60 (\$4.84). Taxi fare is about CHF 50 (\$37) and the ride is 20-25 minutes.

Vienna

In Vienna, the best way to the center of the city is via **Vienna Airport Lines** buses that link the airport with the city's two trains stations — West Bahnhof and Sud Bahnhof — and a city center terminal at the **City Hilton Hotel**. Price is E5.80 (\$9) per person and includes three pieces of luggage. Schnellbahn 7, a local train, also connects the airport with the center of Vienna. The trip takes about 25 minutes and costs only E2.91 (\$3).

Taxi: (www.viennaairport.com/englisch/info/taxi.asp) When going to the airport, it is cheaper to take an airport taxi (*Flughafen Taxi*), such as "Airport service Mazur" or "C & K Airport Service" than a normal city cab because airport taxis charge flat rates. Your hotel can order one for you. The price for as many as four persons is from E23 to E27 (\$25-\$29), depending on your city location. ☒

Readers' Forum

Grindelwald Hotel

You had a small piece in the Dec./Jan. issue on the **Hotel Belvedere** (tel. +41/033/854 5454, fax 853 5323, email belvedere@grindelwalk.ch) in Grindelwald, and I want to second that recommendation.

I was with a group of about 120 skiers with the Far West Ski Association (FWSA) in Grindelwald last year; a group so big that it had to be broken up in several hotels. I was lucky enough to take the Belvedere. I'm sure the other hotels were fine, too, but none of them had the experience that we had.

Owner Urs Hauser is a real enthusiast for Grindelwald, his hotel, and sports. Each day there was a separate event, often run by Urs himself. The first morning was a ski tour, which is common in ski areas, but still welcome. But, he also took us out curling in the ice rink in Grindelwald, which turned out to be great fun, even if the rest of us didn't have a clue what we were doing. And, you mentioned the toboggan. Urs took us out on that as well. The toboggans are handmade by an 80-year-old man in the South Tirol, and he is on allocation. Urs would like to buy about 20, but can only buy 1 or 2 a year. Great Fun.

BRUCE WALKER
SAN PEDRO CA

Swiss Restaurants

You can add **Petermann's Kunststuben** (Seestr. 160, CH-8700, Küssnacht, tel +41/01/910 0715, fax 910 0495, email kunststuben@access.ch) in Küssnacht, Switzerland, to your list of disappointing culinary stops. We went to Petermann's in December and were sorely disappointed. The dining room looks like an old converted living room and reeks of pungent odors. We were seated next to the kitchen door that remained in constant motion all evening. The food was thoroughly average but for a premium price.

Contrast this to many wonderful meals we have enjoyed at **Hotel Restaurant Balm** (tel. +41 041/377 1135 fax 377 2383, email: info@balm.ch) in Meggen just 10 minutes from the

Luzern Bahnhof. The owners, Berti and Oscar Stofer, have created an epicurean excursion into excellence at reasonable Swiss prices. There are many more great and reasonably-priced restaurants out there and finding them is half the fun.

ROBERT AND ROSE HUEGELE
CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

(Editor's Comment: Petermann's gets two Michelin stars, one of 10 such restaurants in Switzerland. Only two Swiss restaurants receive Michelin's highest, three-star rating.)

More Swiss Restaurants

I would like to recommend the **Restaurant Stellambiente** at the **Hotel Stella** (tel. +41/033/822 8871, fax 822 6671, email: info@stella-hotel.ch) in Interlaken. We had a most pleasant dinner there on our latest visit. Fine, creative food and a warm reception. Plus the local yodeling society was there for dinner and serenaded all of the diners with a few songs. We'd happily return.

While based in nearby Iseltwald, we took a day-trip to Zermatt and, on the way back, dined at the **Ruedihus** (tel. +41/033/675 8182, fax 675 8185 email: doldenhorn@compuserve.com) in Kandersteg. It's a lovely old building surrounded by an herb garden. After a day of hiking down from the Gornergrat, it was a most welcome, low-key evening. Fine if you're in the area and worth a detour (as Michelin would say).

RUSSELL WAYNE
VIA EMAIL

Schaffhausen/Stein am Rhein

We enjoyed the October 2002 issue very much because it dealt with places we have visited. Schaffhausen is a very nice town and we did visit the **Munot Fortress** which is well worth the stop. You do have a great view of the river and the town. Stein am Rhein is a fantastic village. We loved our walk through the old village with the beautifully painted buildings. We also visited the **Rheinfall**, one of the highlights of our trip. The falls were running full and we were able to get some fantastic video where it looks as though the water will come right over our heads.

The outdoor museum at **Ballen-**

berg is also well worth seeing. We visited there for just a few hours, but, as your article states, you could easily spend three days to see it all. While in Brienz, we highly recommend a ride on the **Rothornbahn** which is a beautiful ride up the mountain and, on a clear day, a wonderful view at the top.

CONNIE TRITT
VIA EMAIL

Will Boycott Germany

Enclosed is my check for renewal. I ask that you concentrate more on what you — and our Secretary of Defense — term the "New Europe" countries. Though Germany is the home of my ancestors, I am ashamed of those who now occupy seats of power and hence give direction to the country. Though they may not support our actions, the least they could do is stay out of our way as we attempt to stop a dictator. Perhaps the "New Europe" still remembers the 1930s when the world stood by and watched another "little dictator."

I will not spend any more of my money traveling to Germany — or buying their products — this year or in the future, and I so expressed my displeasure to the German delegation in this country. Again, I hope to see more of the New Europe — including Spain and Italy.

EARL W. WINTERS
BELLA VISTA AR

(Editor's Comment: The "New Europe" in our subtitle was added in 1990 when eastern Europe opened to travel. It was meant to refer to the former East Germany and to the countries of Hungary and Czechoslovakia (now two countries: Slovakia and the Czech Republic). We felt these were reasonable excursions for travelers to Germany, Austria and Switzerland. A reader survey some years ago about expanding our coverage area was clear as to your preference; focus on Germany, Austria and Switzerland with occasional stories on logical forays to destinations like Alsace, the German-speaking parts of Italy, and to Prague and Budapest. Our coverage will remain in line with that survey.

For our thoughts on the other matters raised by Mr. Winters, see this month's Dear Subscriber column.)

Travel Quickies

■ Tour for Rail Buffs

A Railfan's Trip to Germany, May 22 to June 6, is a 15-night tour conducted by the **Society of International Railway Travelers** that will feature a range of rail trips from high-speed to steam. Cities to be visited include Berlin, Düsseldorf, Dresden, Leipzig, Bochum, Chemnitz, Wernigerode, and Utrecht, Netherlands.

Among the rail journeys are Germany's new 205 mph Cologne to Frankfurt ICE3; an ascent via steam train and traditional wagons to northern Germany's highest summit, the Brocken; the narrow gauge Selketalbahn in the Harz Mountains, and a 1900-vintage country local near Dresden.

Tour cost is \$3320 per person double occupancy and includes first-class hotels, most meals, private guides for a variety of museum and city tours, public transport cards, entrance fees, private group transfers, and the services of a full-time tour leader, Werner Schorn, a retired official of the Germany Federal Railway. Not included in the price are rail passes and trans-Atlantic air. Contact: Angela Walker, 800-478-4881, email: awalker@irtsociety.com, web: www.irtsociety.com. ☐

Tip of the Month:

A tremendously useful and informative website for European automobile trip planning is www.viamichelin.com. Click "Driving Directions" and enter your departure and destination cities and countries. As with the usual map sites, you are then presented a route with directions and mileage. But with ViaMichelin you also get a list of cities on the route that have Michelin-rated hotels and restaurants. Click on a city's bed symbol and a list of hotels comes up. Same for restaurants, just click on the crossed knife and fork. Of course you can then click on each establishment to see all the info Michelin lists for that hotel or restaurant, plus a brief text description. It's actually more data than you get in the *Michelin Red Guide*.

Once you've clicked on a bed symbol or knife and fork symbol, in addition to being presented with a list of establishments, there is a menu of further information to be mined. One example: click on "Tourist Attractions" and you get a list of the town's major sights. Click on an individual attraction to get information about that particular sight, including address, phone, hours of operation and a description.

Throughout the process you can save the information found to a folder of your own and in this way create a mini-guide for your itinerary.

In addition, those who carry hand-held computers such as Palm Pilots or PocketPCs, can download entire Red Guides to these devices for prices starting at about \$32. ☐

VACATION RENTALS

Continued from page 1

Germany, almost all of those in southern Germany.

One reason Drawbridge gets the 'official' *Gemütlichkeit* stamp of approval is their familiarity with, and knowledge of, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The newsletter, *Country Vacations*, says Drawbridge's "particular forte in city centers and the three German-speaking countries sets it apart from other villa-rental companies."

See photos, prices and descriptions of Drawbridge properties at www.drawbridgetoeurope.com, phone 888-268-1148 or info@drawbridgetoeurope.com.

Tip: Check out the two-bedroom apartment in Wertheim, Germany, referenced Brigitte-Castle View #182. ☐

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

and see if it isn't true for you; I've met a helluva lot more anti-German Americans than anti-American Germans. — RHB

Correction: Subscriber Russell Wayne has reminded me that the hotel I referred to in the February issue as the Hotel du Lac in Iseltwald, Switzerland, is the **Chalet du Lac**. Either way it's a gem. ☐

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, Engenstrasse 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@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 ☐