

Graz: Europe's Cultural Capital '03

Culture comes in many forms. A place that combines most of these is Graz, the provincial capital of Styria (Steiermark).

Since Graz was featured in the March 2002 edition of *Gemütlichkeit*

it has enjoyed a place in the spotlight as the 2003 Cultural Capital of Europe. This accolade has seen a slew of prestigious events crowding into the city's already busy cultural calendar. For details of these, visit the tourist office website www.graztourismus.at.

The designation, first granted in 1985 (to Athens), focuses on culture at a local, regional, national and international level. The international recognition this title confers has heralded a E57 million investment into the city's infrastructure and its events program.

Returning visitors to Graz will see major changes, not least in the rebuilt railway station and in the refurbished Hauptplatz. In January 2003, a floating amphitheater, café and children's playground was opened on the River Mur. A futuristic new **Kunsthau**s is being built, as are a children's museum and a house of literature. The **Helmut List** concert hall opened its doors early this year and the **Stadthalle** events center was finished in 2002.

These additions complement the numerous top-line attractions that the city already boasts. Most tourists already take in the gleam-

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

We are using this space this month to address an issue that has generated more reader response than any other in Gemütlichkeit's 16-year history.

This month's Dear Subscriber marks the end of political discussions in these pages. We've heard from all sides on the "boycott Germany" issue and understand and respect the arguments put forth by all. But, as many readers have pointed out, you spent your money for travel information about Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and to the extent that we have published letters about the current controversy, we have strayed from our mission. Don't misunderstand, I do not dismiss the strongly-held feelings expressed — it's just that politics isn't our thing.

Still, there remains a bit of a sticky wicket about the anti-American business and that's an issue that *does* re-

late to travel, even though it, or the perception of it, is rooted in politics. The media has vastly overplayed this element of recent events to such a degree that it is now clear some potential travelers are staying away from Europe because they — no surprise — don't wish to go where they think are not wanted.

So, is it true? Are Americans no longer welcome in Germany? Well, as you no doubt have read in your local newspaper or seen on CNN, apparently there are some anti-U.S. feelings in Europe. The question is how likely are you to become the focus of them. We think the answer is, extremely unlikely. We base our opinion on a number of factors.

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The New GEMUT.COM

Last month *Gemütlichkeit* launched a revamped GEMUT.COM, a vastly more informative, more helpful, faster and better looking website.

Our goal is to establish an online compilation of travel advice, data and resources that will become the ultimate website for the Germany-Austria-Switzerland-bound traveler (actually much of the advice and many of the services offered apply to any traveler headed for Europe). But only you, as a current, paid subscriber will have full access to all the site's features.

At the heart of GEMUT.COM is the knowledge and expertise of 17 years of publishing this newsletter, *Gemütlichkeit*, *The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria & Switzerland*.

Here's how you can view, print

and download the site's hundreds of travel stories on European travel, as well as its database of some 800 hotels — content that is restricted to you as a paid subscriber.

First, visit the site at www.gemut.com. Next, in the lower left corner enter the codes below under the Travel Stories Archive bar.

Username: **newone**

Password: **3819**

The codes change every month and are published on page two of *Gemütlichkeit*.

When you get to the site check these features:

- **10 years of Gemütlichkeit.** It's all there, the 3,000 word features on cities and regions with hotel and restaurant reviews, backroads

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

First, there is the poll we cited last month that found 70% of Germans still consider the U.S. their best friend.

And each day we hear from travelers just returned from Europe. We are still waiting for our first anti-American story.

Finally, there are the results of our own mid-April poll conducted among German citizens about their feelings toward Americans. To the owners and managers of more than 100 German hotels we emailed three questions:

1. Are Americans welcome in your hotel in 2003?
2. Has the attitude in your country toward Americans changed in the past few months?
3. If our American readers visit your country in the near future, what would be your advice as to how they should conduct themselves?

At press time we had received nearly 50 replies. As you may have guessed, all were positive. Of course, our methodology would not meet Mr. Gallup's standards; the sample has a clear financial bias and the "correct" answers were obvious. But let's admit we won't win any "scientific poll of the year" awards and take a look at what these Germans actually had to say about Americans coming to their country. Only a couple replied "yes" "no" and "same as always" to our three questions. The rest

added commentary that in all cases came through as thoughtful and heartfelt. Keeping in mind the three questions, here are a few of the responses:

Dorer, Schönwald, Black Forest

1. We welcome American guests like everytime. There is no change.

2. No the attitude has not changed at all. We love to welcome American visitors.

3. The Americans have no reason to change anything. The situation has not changed. We are all not lucky about this war, but even a part of the Americans think like us. And there are the American soldiers who are in the war and not the Germans. So we have to feel with them. — M. Scherer-Carsola

Polar-Stern, Rostock/Kühlungsborn

1. We welcome people from all over the World to our hotel on the basis of their personal character and do not discriminate on the grounds of their government's policies. — M. Scherer-Carsola

3. They should be proud of their country's democratic traditions and respect "old Europe's" historic experiences with wars and its own views about Iraq and the right way to combat terrorism. — Albrecht Kurbjuhn

Vier Jahreszeiten, Heidelberg

The most important message is that tourists from America are always welcomed in Germany. A special behavior is not necessary because nobody is doing anything. One or two taxi-drivers in Berlin or Frankfurt are not Germany.

I would like to give you a couple of examples. Two weeks ago there was a big international meeting at the Heidelberg

University. The city and the people of Heidelberg were so great, that most delegates from the USA decided to stay a couple of days longer than expected. — Prof. S. C. McKelvey

Speicher am Ziegelsee, Schwerin

The political situation between our two countries is strained, that's true. During the election campaign last year, Mr. Schröder tried to make points with dishonest tactics. Later on Mr. Schröder couldn't revise his promises "not to take part in the war against the Irak."

One day there will be a new chancellor in Germany and a new president in the USA. Between my friends I don't know any person who has anti-American feelings. We all like the American people and their country. There are millions of Germans and Europeans who feel the same way that I feel. — Margot Hirte

Kraft, Munich

Not a single person, I have talked to during the last few weeks showed anti-

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: **newone** Password: **3819**

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	Scale
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria	Value Rating	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

Continued from page 1

American feelings. People here, especially elder ones, knowing personally what "war" means, have anti-war feelings.

We know, that also most American citizens would prefer a life in peace. So everybody, who wants to visit us with peace in his mind, will be welcomed with a friendly smile!!! — Werner Andree

Zum Ritter, Heidelberg

I feel that the German and American people (other than our politicians) basically live together in the usual way. Hopefully our politicians will follow shortly! — Nicolaas Bootsma

Art Nouveau, Berlin

Germans refuse to be anti-American. They eat and drink American fast food and also like American visitors. They demonstrate against war — not all of us, but most, are against war. — Gerhard Schlenzka

Hotel Kronprinz, Berlin

Especially in Berlin, the German capital we welcome most cordially our friends from America. All those years after WW II we have been living close to our American friends in the American sector of the divided city. Many American companies have their offices here in Berlin.

Many Germans might think differently about the American politics - but we are eager to discuss this with our friends from the United States when they are visiting our country. So let's talk about it - as friends discuss their different point of views! Do not hesitate to do so, while you are here - we respect your feelings. — Kurt Hermandung

Villa Bellevue, Meersburg

I just talked to some of my employees and have to tell you truly that Americans are not only welcome in our hotels but are also our favorite guests.

I do not think that in the past few months the attitude in Germany towards American holiday visitors has changed. I would rather say that after Schröder's decision not to support the USA in the war against Irak we Germans are very disappointed about the German politics and now think that the Americans attitude against the Germans have changed.

One thing for sure: the Hotel "3 Stuben" and the Villa Bellevue is always

looking forward to welcoming American guests in Meersburg. — Tanja Drewing

St. Nepomuk, Bamberg

The Hotel St. Nepomuk exists since 1983. In the last 20 years we welcomed a lot of foreign people. Bamberg is a city of culture, universities and of open hearted citizens. We cannot even imagine to repel any people because of its nation or religion. So we also hope, that no American hesitates to visit our hotel just because we also have Islamic guests.

Since World War II, as the American nation freed Europe of nationalism, we are very proud to have you as our friends. We are looking forward to welcome every single American visitor. — Sebastian Bauer

Alpenhof, Schönau am Königsee

I had two guests which wrote me a bad mail concerning the things our government said about this war - I was shocked and did not know what to think. As long nobody starts to accuse single persons of what is happening, whether good or bad, everybody will feel well and enjoy his holiday. — Stefan Zapletal

Holländer Hof, Heidelberg

We are very happy to see the American guests in town. We are aware of the fact that some Germans do not agree with the political decisions of the near past but we are also of the opinion that there is a difference made between governments acting and American civilians travelling for holiday. — Nora Grohmann-Fey

Der Europäische Hof, Heidelberg

The official government line and the published media data differ from the general feelings in our country. Most people consider themselves to be good friends of the United States, especially as the question simplifies the political situation: Are you for or against a war in Iraq? — Ernst-Friedrich von Kretschmann

An der Oper, Munich

People can have different ideas. That is not a reason not to talk together !!

That is what we call democratic. — Nicole Santini

Birkenhof, Hanau

Surely there is a clash between the opinions from America and other countries, but that cannot mean that individual persons from the country get discriminated. We can assure you that in our region Americans are welcome and respected like ever before. Many Americans

live in the Army in this region and they are treated nicely and warm as before. — Stephanie Tschunt

Sorat Hotels, 18 in Germany

I would say that German people are quite well capable to distinguish between political decisions and states reasons, and the opinion of the individual. We do not see any reason at all why Americans should change their behavior when traveling to Germany - we know them as cheerful and culturally interested guests who can move around in Germany wherever they like. — Imke Sommer

Wolff's Art Hotel, Weimar

1. Yes we welcome American visitors in our country, in our city, and in our hotel.

3. If American visitors accept the culture of the country they visit they never need any advice. — Dr. Christian W. Wolff

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There were other responses, but these are representative. Though several expressed reservations about the war, and others were critical of the German government, there was not one anti-American comment. The cynical response to this simple questionnaire is "of course they welcome Americans, they want our money." It is a valid point, but the comments indicate that these Germans have not only given thought to this issue, but have a genuine liking for Americans.

We used the lead story space this month to underscore our own strong feelings. It is not about a Germany travel boycott; it is about whether Americans can still feel welcome in Germany. Think for a moment about how you would respond today to Germans visiting your town and you have the answer to how you will be received in their country. — RHB

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A few of the hotels we surveyed volunteered special discounts or packages.

• **Hotel Polar Stern, Rostock.** "To demonstrate our strong views about not making all Americans responsible for a foreign policy many Germans find questionable, we are offering a 10% reduction to American guests." Tel. +49/038293/82 90, email: kborn.polar-stern@t-online.de

- **Wolff's Art Hotel, Weimar.** Special-year-rate: E99 (\$108) in twin and E69 (\$75) in single rooms. Tel. +49/0364/354 060, email: call@wolffs-art-hotel.de

- **Holländer Hof, Heidelberg.** Summer in Heidelberg deal includes room, welcome drink, dinner in Zum Ritter restaurant and breakfast. Comfort single E89 (\$98), comfort double E118 (\$129), superior double E128 (\$140). Tel. +49/06221/6050-0, email: info@hollaender-hof.de

- **Hotel Acanthus, Munich.** Double E85 (\$93), minimum four-night stay must include Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Not valid during trade shows, conventions, Oktoberfest. Tel. +49/089/23 18 80, email: acanthus@t-online.de

- **Park Hotel, Lübeck.** Two-night package includes one dinner, two breakfasts, museum admission tickets, city or harbor sightseeing tour. E260 (\$285) for two persons. Tel. +49/0451/87197-0, email: info@parkhotel-luebeck.de

- **Kempinski Hotel Atlantic, Hamburg.** Standard double or single rooms from E158 (\$173), superior double or single rooms from E165 (\$173), deluxe double or single rooms from E188 (\$173), junior suite from EUR 244 (\$173). Tel. +49/040/2888 809, email: susanne.semmroth@kempinski.com 

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.

GRAZ

Continued from page 1

ing metalware of the medieval **Landeszeughaus**, where fine workmanship and delicate engraved designs belie the brutal purpose of the 30,000 pieces of weaponry and armor that they grace. For a perfectly-composed vista, open one of the 4th-floor windows which face the Landhaus courtyard and the Schlossberg hill. The armory is bang in the center at Herrengasse 16, and is open daily except Monday (E4.30/\$5 entry).

West of the center, but easily reached by Tram No 1, is the astronomically-themed **Schloss Eggenberg** at Eggenbergen Allee 90 (closed Monday, admission to interior E5.45/\$6). This bursts with Baroque pomp in its state rooms, and also hosts a couple of reasonably diverting museum collections. Even if you don't go inside, you can enjoy roaming amongst the peasants in the palace's extensive park lands.

Less mainstream sights include the small but interesting **Museum of Perception**, where your five senses will be tested and tricked. It's at Friedrichgasse 41, and opens from 2pm-6.30pm Wednesday-Monday (admission E4.00/E1.80 — \$4.40/\$2 for adults/children; www.muwa.at).

Culture, at a stretch, can even encompass the activities of local boy Arnold Schwarzenegger. Nowadays mostly known as a muscle-clad hero in Hollywood epics, Arnie started his career as just another bodybuilder. You can get an idea of how he acquired those famous muscles at Graz's football stadium, the **Arnold Schwarzenegger Stadion**. Within the building is a gym where Arnie once worked out. It's visited by numerous tourists, despite the fact that there's relatively little to see beyond a few pictures and bench presses. Find it south of the center at Stadionplatz 1; admission is free and it's open 6am-10pm Monday to Friday, 10am-9pm weekends and holidays.

Each time I visit Graz I find something new to discover and enjoy. And now, with all the extra attractions inspired by Cultural Capital status, you can be sure of one thing. As Arn-

ie has been known to say: I'll be back.

In addition to hotels and restaurants listed in *Gemütlichkeit's* March '02 issue, try these:

Accommodations

Gasthof-Pension zur Steirerstub'n

This small-scale, three-star pension provides a calm retreat just a few minutes' walk from the medieval town center. The rustic dining area (where tasty Styrian standards are dished up) is awash with ephemera evoking Styrian rural charm. Guests share space with antique stoves, garden gnomes, cut flowers, rows of dried corn and other knick-knacks, none of which would look out of place in an Austrian farm house. This personal attention to detail very much reflects the welcome offered by the manager Birgit Sommer.

Out front are tables where guests can relax amid chalked menus, potted plants and sun canopies. The building is set back from Lendplatz, and features window boxes and green wooden shutters.

The quaint clutter of the restaurant/bar area does not really extend to the 14 bedrooms. These are rather more modern and functional in feel, yet retain the odd homey touch. Rooms vary in size, though all have white walls, satellite TV and *en suite* shower and toilet. Room 13 has wood beams on the ceiling, and like the other rooms facing Lendplatz, a fine view of the hilltop clock tower.

Daily Rates: Singles E37 (\$41), doubles E66 (\$73), apartment E25 to E50 (\$27-\$55) per person

Contact: Gasthof-Pension zur Steirerstub'n, Lendplatz 8, Graz A-8020, tel & fax +43/0316/71 68 55, email: office@pension-graz.at, web: www.pension-graz.at.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Sustenance

Gamlitzer Weinstube

This traditional Styrian Beisl has been situated in the busy pedestrian square in the center of Graz since 1660. Its popularity suggests it's a good bet to continue in the same vein for many years to come. Housed in an elegant ochre building complete

with stucco façade, the interior is somewhat more relaxed and egalitarian than you might expect. Come here for local color and ambience rather than for out and out comfort. Tables can be cramped inside, though there's plenty of room outside to stretch your legs amid the hustle and bustle of the plaza. Protected beneath large umbrella canopies and bordered by potted shrubs, these open-air tables are ideal if you like people-watching.

The food includes standard Austrian fare such as succulent *Schnitzels* (E7.20/\$8 to E10.80/\$12), though I usually go for one of the dishes served in a sizzling hot pan (*pfandl*). The *Steirerpfandl* (E6/\$7) is a tasty and filling combination of minced meat, *Spätzle*, potatoes, melted cheese and mushroom sauce. As suggested by its name, wine should be your beverage of choice. There's a selection of local and regional wines to choose from for just E2.80 (\$3) per glass.

Gamlitzer Weinstube, Mehlplatz 4, Graz, A-8010, tel. +43/0316/828760, fax 832544, email: karinpeitler@gmx.at, web: www.gamlitzer.com Open 9am to 11pm Mon.-Fri. (closed weekends and holidays)

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 16/20

Landhaus-Keller

For a platterful of traditional charm, a fair measure of character, and a touch of romance, this long-established restaurant can't be beat. Diners enjoy the personal ministrations of husband and wife team Doris and Günther Huber. The interior is formal yet welcoming. Clients can gaze at historic murals, coats of arms, and floral displays in wall alcoves, all the while being soothed by background classical music. Nevertheless, on a sunny summer's day you might prefer to take to the outside, where tables overlook the splendid proportions of the adjacent 400-year-old arcaded courtyard.

The food comprises mostly regional and national dishes, reliably cooked and presented with care. Kürbiscremesuppe (E4/\$4), a vegetable soup lightened with green pumpkin

seed oil, arrives with a hunk of delicious farmhouse bread. Though *Tafelspitz* is usually associated with Vienna, it's excellent here. The beef, from Styrian cows, is lean and tender (E15/E18 — \$16/\$20, small/large portion), and apple horseradish sauce provides the perfect accompaniment. The wine list strongly showcases Styrian vintners, and you can order most vintages by the glass.

Landhaus-Keller, Schmiedgasse 9, 8010 Graz, tel. +43/0316/830276, fax 830276-6, email: office@landhaus-keller.at, web: www.landhaus-keller.at. Open 11.30am-midnight Mon.-Sat., 11.30am-3pm Sun.; closed holidays and 1st - 6th January

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20

Wintergarten Restaurant

For gourmet food that won't break the bank, my choice would be this airy restaurant within the confines of the Baroque four star hotel, **Erzherzog Johann**. It's as elegant as you would expect, with meticulous service. The food is served in a plant-filled, glass-topped atrium in the heart of the building. The feeling of openness (high ceiling, overlooking balconies), however, is perhaps not conducive to romantic dining, and at lunch you'll run into your fair share of besuited business people blowing the expense account. Capacity is only 45-60 diners, so reservations are advised.

Meals include national dishes, though often given an Italian twist by the Gault Millau-awarded chef Herbert Bergler. The menu changes weekly. There are a couple of set meals which are better value at mid-day: four courses, for example, costs E16 (\$18) at lunch or E35.40 (\$39) at dinner. Wines (mostly Austrian) are about E3.50 (\$4) per small glass. During my visit main courses cost E14-E19.50 (\$15-\$21) and included salmon-trout, bream, veal and ox, but nothing much for vegetarians. I enjoyed the venison (two kinds) mixed with a piquant ratatouille sauce. Pure Austrian, is the rich *Erzherzog Johann Torte* (cake); or there's the equally calorie-filled chestnut soufflé with spicy pears and Traminer cream, wherein I could detect chocolate, rum, cinnamon, and lots and lots of sugar. A fine way to end the meal.

Bavarian Vacation Rental Near Garmisch-Partenkirchen

This is the first in a series on vacation rentals offered by Drawbridge to Europe.

Titled "Wetterstein" for its view of that craggy row of peaks, this 754 square-foot flat, suitable for two persons, is on the first floor (our second) of a multi-family home in Grainau, a pleasant village just six kilometers from Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

The décor is typical of the region with dark wood wainscoting and beamed ceilings. There is a large living area, separate bedroom with double bed, private bath, fully-equipped kitchen, and, in the Bavarian-style, a cozy built-in circular dining corner surrounded by windows with spectacular mountain views. The sun will likely dictate your outdoor retreat, as there is both a south and east-facing balcony with furniture.


Standard amenities — phone, cable TV, and radio — are provided as well as reserved parking.

The Grainau/Garmisch-Partenkirchen location is, of course, central to many of southern Bavaria's top attractions including the Royal Castles, the Wieskirche, Oberammergau, the Abbey at Ettal, the Zugspitze, and several lakes. Munich is 50 minutes by car. Grainau is not served by rail but there is bus service to the Garmisch-Partenkirchen rail station.

Depending on the season, the price ranges from \$559 to \$618 per week. Add about another \$100 for linens, final cleaning, tax, and booking charge.

Contact: Drawbridge to Europe, Inc., 888-268-1148, email: info@drawbridgetoeurope.com, web: www.drawbridgetoeurope.com.

Wintergarten, Sackstrasse 3-5, 8010 Graz. tel. +43/0316/811616, fax 11515 Email: office@erzherzog-johann.com, web: www.erzherzog-johann.com Open 11.30am-2pm & 6pm-11.30pm Wed.-Sun.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 14/20 

Readers' Forum

St. Goar on St. Goar

Your November issue's report on the "Romantic Rhine" was fascinating. That area is one of the most beautiful scenic spots in western Germany. My ancestors on my father's side lived in the town of St. Goar for over five centuries and therefore I bear the name of this small town on the left bank of the Rhine.

One of my forefathers had been mayor of St. Goar from 1800 until 1806. The present mayor of St. Goar invited my wife and me to visit there. The highlight of our stay was attending the annual "Rhine in Flames" fireworks celebration which we watched from one of about eighty steamers that were anchored in the Rhine River between St. Goar and St Goarshausen. The fireworks lasted for about one hour and were truly spectacular. Until we saw these fireworks, we had thought that a fireworks-display on the ground of the Sidney Opera House that we had watched from our hotel room overlooking the harbor had been singularly exceptional. These fireworks on the Rhine River topped Sidney, Australia!

Over 100,000 visitors, we were told, had gathered in and around St Goar, a town of about 5,000 inhabitants. Some of your readers may be interested to know that the 2003 presentation of this event will take place on Saturday, August 2. Detailed information on all this (hotel accommodations and guesthouses) can be found on www.st.goar.mittlerhein.net.

HERBERT ST. GOAR
CHATTANOOGA TN

Affordable Bellagio Hotel

How many times have you pulled off the road for a great view, and wished there was a hotel there? Here it is: **Hotel Il Perlo Panorama** above Bellagio, on Lake Como south of Switzerland. The view north towards Bellagio and *la punta di sparti venta* (point that splits the wind) is spectacular. Last fall my wife and I sat one morning for four hours drinking coffee and staring at it. It was our fourth

Tip of the Month: Buy Point-to Point Rail Tickets in Europe

When purchasing point-to-point rail tickets your main decision is whether to buy them here in the U.S. from **Rail Europe/Gemütlichkeit** or wait until you get to Europe. In our experience, many travelers overpay for the sake of convenience. They like the security of having their rail ticket and seat reservation in hand prior to leaving the U.S. As you'll see, that can be expensive. Let's take the example of two persons traveling Munich to Berlin. Let's also assume it will be their only train trip in Europe; thus a point-to-point ticket rather than a rail pass is the obvious choice.

The savings can be considerable if you buy your tickets in Germany. Not only are fares generally lower from **Deutsche Bahn** (DB), discounts are offered for two or more persons traveling together under DB's "Plan & Save" program. The table above compares U.S. vs Germany fares on the Berlin-Munich route. As you can see, buying in Germany is substantially less expensive.

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Comparing international point-to-point prices — Germany to Italy, for example — is more complicated. First, find the U.S. price at Rail Europe's website (www.raileurope.com) or phone 800-438-7245 to access RE's 24-hour automated travel information service. Next, you'll need the price if pur-

or fifth trip there, which is not enough.


The hotel has a website, www.ilperlo.com; be sure to look click on 'photo'. If you call, the woman who owns it is Piera, and a sweetie. Try to reserve the Il Professori top-floor, front-corner, room with two balconies, or the room below it. For a group, or family, the second floor has a huge common balcony, so everybody can visit on the balcony. Double room prices are in the \$90-\$115 range.

chased in Europe. The best place for that information (and as far as we know the only place) is the website of the **French National Railways** (www.sncf.com). Unlike the Swiss, German and Austrian rail sites, the French site computes fares between major cities throughout Europe. The prices quoted are in euros if purchased from SNCF. A Brussels to Copenhagen ticket may be less expensive if purchased from the Belgian railway than from the SNCF, but the SNCF website provides a good idea of what that ticket might cost in Europe.

We recently compared a Paris-Milan trip for two persons purchased from SNCF vs the same tickets in the U.S. from Rail Europe/*Gemütlichkeit*.

Tickets bought in the U.S. ranged from \$254 to \$370 first-class for two; second-class was \$168 to \$246.

The same trip for two persons, priced on the SNCF website, was E296 (\$325) adult first-class and E202 (\$222) senior (over 60) first class. When we sought a second-class fare the computer came up with an amazing E50 (\$55) for two persons if purchased online. The regular second-class fares for two persons were E196 (\$215) adult and E134 (\$147) senior.

But even taking advantage of discounts available in Europe, those who plan to see a lot of country will find rail passes purchased in the U.S. prior to departure are usually the better value. 

Also, a great restaurant is the nearby **La Punta** with great food, service, and that delicious view.

The roads are pretty skinny, so I don't take anything bigger than a Passat. I took an S-class Mercedes once and it was white-knuckle city. You will need a car to get there, and you will need to be ready for Italian drivers.

BRYAN DANTONE
VIA EMAIL

Support for Kunststuben

I was distressed to hear my fellow Texans, the Huegele's, didn't like the "old converted living room" and prices at the two-star **Petermann's Kunststuben**. Admittedly, someone is going to get stuck next to the kitchen door but when we noticed smokers about to be seated at the table next to us last October, the restaurant picked up on our pained expressions and cheerfully rearranged all the fussy American nonsmokers together. We three tables of Americans had a ball celebrating my birthday and lamenting the prices in Switzerland (but we found our food exceptional).

Don't go to the starred restaurants for reasonable rates. The Red Guide has two other categories for great tasting local food and high value/reasonable prices. As to setting, the only "non living room" setting among the two dozen starred restaurants we've been to is the **Hotel De Ville** at Crissier which was the town hall. By the way, there are now 12 two-star restaurants in Switzerland.

ROLAND D. FREEMAN
DALLAS, TX

It Ain't a Grape

As a wine enthusiast, I particularly enjoyed your "Dear Subscriber" column in the April 2003 issue.

My passion for interesting wine combined with my passion for Switzerland has given me a bit of specialized knowledge about Swiss wines in general, and of the wines from the Valais in particular. Consequently I happened to notice a common misconception in the following paragraph towards the end of the article.

"I particularly enjoy the light red wines of the Valais. Dôle is the predominant grape and you'll see it on every menu in a range of prices."

Actually Dôle is not the name of the grape variety. It's the name of a specific kind of wine from Valais that's either 100% Pinot Noir or a blend of mostly Pinot Noir with Gamay. See, for example, the description at www.swisswine.ch/english/gloss.

"Dôle - The well-known red wine from Valais, made either from pure

Red Guides Identify Good, Cheap Hotels

Our favorite guidebook, the **Michelin Red Guide** series is on the street and there are two major changes. The first will have little impact on most North American guide users but the other we see as a boon to independent travelers.

Let's start with the less important one. The guides now offer brief descriptions for each hotel and restaurant listed. That's the good news; the bad news is they're in the language of the region. Lugano listings, for example, are in Italian, Zürich's descriptions are in German and in Geneva they're in French. Fortunately, translations of these descriptions are available at Michelin's outstanding travel planning site, www.viamichelin.com.

The change makes for bigger books. The Swiss guide is now 566 pages vs. 468 in 2002. The German guide has gone from 1269 to 1615


The other guide upgrade is major news to the cost-conscious traveler. It's the introduction of the "Bib Hotel" designation, modeled after the "Bib Gourmand." Using the icon of a blue hibendum (the Michelin Man) with his head on a pillow, this great new feature identifies hotels with a "warm welcome and good standards

of comfort and service" charging less than 90 euros (\$97) in Germany and CHF 176 (\$127) in Switzerland, for a double or twin room. There are some 240 Bib hotels in Germany and 85 in Switzerland.

The Bib symbol is placed under the hotel's listing in the main pages and also spotted on the maps at the front of the book used to highlight special hotels and restaurants.

It was always relatively easy to find reasonably priced accommodations in the Michelin listings but, other than the fact that Michelin includes no hotels it does not recommend, there was no hint as which were the best. Now with the new Bib Hotel designation — and using the handy front-of-the-book map pages — it will be rather simple to locate a good, moderately-priced hotel near wherever you happen to find yourself.

Because of their low rates, most Bib Hotels are located in smaller towns. A notable exception is in one of the most expensive cities in our coverage area, Geneva. There, the **Hotel Bel Espérance** is both a *Gemütlichkeit* "editor's choice" (Dec. 02/Jan. 03) and a Michelin "Bib Hotel." Double rooms start at CHF 140 (\$101).

In the months ahead we'll be reviewing a number of these value hotels. 

Pinot Noir, or from a blend of at least 85% Pinot Noir and Gamay (with the former dominant) plus other authorized red grapes grown in Valais."

The "at least 85% Pinot Noir" part may be marketing hype. I believe the actual regulation is that a blend must be at least 51% Pinot Noir before it may be labeled Dôle. If the proportion of Pinot Noir is less than that then it's called Goron in Valais (but only in Valais).

The same kind of blend is called by other names in other Swiss cantons. In Vaud it's called Salvagnin, but sometimes is labeled as "Pinot Gamay."

Whatever they call it, I always enjoy it!

If you would like to sample the

maximum number of Valaisian wines for the lowest cost, I recommend you plan a visit to Sierre some year during the first weekend of September for the **Vinea** event. This year it's Sept. 6-7. See www.vinea-sierre.ch. They close about four blocks of the main street in the town center for two days, pitch about 30 canopies down the middle of the street, each with long tables in a square on the four sides, and pour some of the best wines in the canton. The entrance fee is only CHF 30 (\$22), and covers all day both Saturday and Sunday. It's an amazing bargain. About 100 vintners from all over Valais (and only Valais) are usually there, and each one offers samples of multiple wines, including many of the exceptional red and white specialty wines pro-

Travel Quickies

■ Mileage Insurance Canceled

If you were thinking about protecting your hoard of frequent flyer miles by purchasing insurance on them, think again.

AwardGuard, the frequent-flier insurance offered by Privilegeflyer.com, has been temporarily suspended for new customers because of problems renewing the coverage through Lloyd's of London. AwardGuard coverage, which costs \$119 a year, would go into effect only when a frequent-flier program goes out of business and is not taken over by another carrier.

AwardGuard is, to the best of our knowledge, the only frequent-flier-mile insurance offered. Contact: www.privilegeflyer.com, tel. 800-487-8893

■ Swiss Axes Boston, DC Flights

Swiss International Air Lines, the successor to **Swissair**, has suspended its Boston and Washington flights. The airline said it would resume service to those cities in the summer, but some airline industry analysts are skeptical.

Apparently its strategy of targeting first and business class passengers and offering high-quality, high-priced service has failed and bankruptcy is a possibility. The revised tactic is to sell front-of-the-bus tickets to those who can afford them but to fill unsold seats at deep discounts available only on the Internet in order to avoid paying travel agency commissions.

Though the outlook is bleak, the feeling among industry watchers is that, for a variety of reasons, Switzerland must have an airline — the implication being more government financial involvement — even though it may be as a niche player like **Finnair** rather than a major world-wide carrier like **Lufthansa**.

■ Two for one on Swiss

Use a Mastercard to pay for a ticket on **Swiss Airlines** and a companion flies free. The offer is good for travel through the end of the year and has restrictions. Contact: www.swiss.com, tel. 877-359-7947. ☒

GEMUT.COM

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drives, travel advice, reader recommendations, even the Dear Subscriber columns.

• **Hotel database.** We keep track of some 800 hotels we've either stayed in or personally inspected. The database includes full contact info, including email and URL links where available, plus our quality and value ratings. Want to see a hotel's website or contact it via email? — just go to the database and click on the applicable link.

• **Tips & advice.** Frequently changing "how to" stories on travel in Europe including rental car advice, tapping in to the Internet from Europe, using Michelin's Red Guides, stretching your dollars in Europe, etc.

• **Improved search capability.** From hundreds of stories in our archive, find what you're looking for faster. There are now 'exact phrase,' 'all of my keywords,' and 'any of my keywords' search modes.

• **Subscriber services.** Renew a current subscription, send a gift subscription, download a sample issue, change your address, or contact any of our departments, all via email.

• **Travel shopper.** Get quotes on European car rental and transatlantic air tickets. Contact our trip planning department. Rent an apartment, house, chalet, flat or castle.

• **Trip planning links.** Here you'll find a huge collection of links specifically compiled with the Germany, Austria, Switzerland traveler in mind.

GEMUT.COM will continue to change and add new features. We welcome your comments, suggestions and criticisms. ☒

READERS' FORUM

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duced only in Valais, such as Cornalin, Humagne Rouge, and Diolinoir (reds) and Amigne, Petite Arvine, Heida, and Humagne Blanche (whites). If you enjoy Swiss wines, it's a truly remarkable event.

CARL NIEHAUS

VIA EMAIL ☒

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@fhotels.ch

Lucerne

Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, email: mail@wilden-mann.ch

Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel: +41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, Email: info@cascada.ch

Munich

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

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

Rothenburg ob der Tauber

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

Salzburg & 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

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

Pension Aviano, Marco-D'Aviano-Gasse 1, tel. +43/01/512 8330, fax 512 8330 6, email: aviano@pertschy.com

Zürich

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

Hotel 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 ☒