

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

How to Catch a Falling Dollar

In *Gemütlichkeit's* 17 years there have been four periods in which the U.S. dollar has dropped quickly and significantly against European currencies — 1988, 1991, 1995 and right now. In the past year or so it has slipped some 30% against the Euro. And the Swiss franc, a dear currency anytime, has risen about 27% against the dollar. This means that a 100 euro/\$86 hotel room in April of 2002 now goes for about \$118 and what was a CHF 200/\$115 hotel room in Switzerland is now \$155.

Has the dollar hit bottom? Some experts think it has not. At its low point in the mid-90s the dollar was worth about 1.37 German marks and 1.09 Swiss francs. Today, a single greenback gets you 1.28 Swiss francs and would fetch about 1.65 deutschemarks if that currency were still around. Some say the dollar will stabilize at 80% of the euro. If they are right that 100 euro hotel room will cost \$125.

One sign we may be near the end of a falling dollar is the media. They have just begun their usual bleat about how expensive Europe is, and it was very near the end of each of the last three dollar swan dives that assignment editors began sending reporters to the streets of Rome and Paris to find Iowans and Oregonians buying \$10 cokes and \$12 espressos.

Though the media is absolutely correct, traveling in Europe *has* gotten more expensive in the last few

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

ZERMATT '03

Many of Europe's highest mountains, including the country's signature peak, attract walkers, hikers, climbers and just plain gawkers to this car-free village whose charm survives all the tourists.

In the middle of the 19th century, Italians who came over the Alps from Cervinia were amazed to find a modest village of sleepy alleys, sturdy cabins and wooden storage barns on the other side of "their" mountains. The citizens of Zermatt were equally surprised—and promptly closed their doors and shutters in fear.

Today, the welcome is far more cordial—and international. Zermatt's a world center for mountain biking, hiking, paragliding and year-round skiing. To support tourism, the town has 116 hotels and boarding houses with 6,800 beds (plus another 1,500 holiday apartments with 6,500 beds), 38 mountain restaurants, 10 aerial

cableways, one underground railway, the highest cable car in Europe, and 80 certified mountain guides. Not bad for a town with only 5,600 residents.

Beyond its lofty recreation options, Zermatt is just plain scenic. The aquamarine Mattervispa River carries frigid glacial melt through town, gurgling over rocks pulled from the moraine. On all sides, massive mountains loom in full majesty. Indeed, 29 of Switzerland's 35 peaks higher than 4,000-meters (13,120-feet) are in the Zermatt region. Century-old huts stand on stone, mushroom-shaped stilts (they keep the rats out) and promise to outlast the most modern construction.

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Hidden Treasures...

The Old German Capitol: Weimar

Like many of our "Hidden Treasure" destinations, Weimar is not so much hard to find as it is unsung and under-visited. For the visitor who cares at all about Germany's history, this former capital of the failed Weimar Republic is a must. Established in 1919 following the "Great War" (World War I) the Weimar Republic lasted only 14 years. It marked a period of ineffectual government, inflation so virulent that bushel baskets of deutschemarks were required to purchase a single postage stamp, and finally led to National Socialism and Adolf Hitler.

Except for East Berlin, historically it was perhaps the most important city in the old East Germany. Sometimes called the "Athens of Germany," it was never a spawning ground for extreme politics, but a cradle for great literature, music and ideas.

Given its important place in German history, one might expect more in a physical sense than the small-town atmosphere of this placid city of 60,000. A visit to the small chapel in the town's **Alter Friedhof** (old cemetery) underscores Weimar's role in the development of German culture. Beneath its ancient floors, the **Ducal Vault** houses the ornate sarcophagi of the royal family of the Grand Duchy of Saxe-Weimar. But impressive as they are, these fancy caskets play second fiddle to a pair of plain, side by side, polished wooden coffins which bear the remains of two of the most revered citizens in German history, Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller. Weimar was the physical and creative headquarters for both.

The genius Goethe, who created *Faust* and directed the National The-

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months, the sound bites never tell the whole story. For example, a chunk of almost every European vacation budget is airfare and those are about as cheap as they've ever been. Rail passes have remained pretty stable for the past three years (but watch out in 2004 if the euro stays strong), and you can still rent a four-door, air-conditioned car in Germany for slightly less than \$30 per day including tax.

That leaves food and lodging. Let's talk first about some tactics to save money on hotel bookings.

Head for the Countryside

Youngest son Andy, his wife Margaret, and 18-month-old daughter Amanda, left at the end of May on a two-week trip to Germany. At **Gasthof-Pension Hofmann**, (Altenstein, 96126 Maroldsweisach, tel. +49/09535 391, fax 1441, web: www.gasthof-hofmann.de) in the tiny but interesting town of Altenstein, near Coburg, they'll stay several days and pay E21 (\$25) per night per adult (kids under six free) for a room with private bath, a small sitting area with couch, and a balcony with a spectacular view. The price includes a cooked-to-order breakfast. This is their second time at the hotel, and it's an easy drive to such interesting destinations as Bamberg, Coburg and even Nürnberg.

Find the "Bib Hotels"

A day or so prior to their depart-

ture from the U.S., they asked about a first-night hotel. Out came the *Michelin Red Guide for Germany*. On map page #5 in the front of the book we noted one of the new "Bib Hotel" symbols spotted next to the town of Bad Soden Salmünster, 61 km east-northeast of the Frankfurt Airport. Photos on the website of the **Berghotel Berlin** (Parkstrasse 8, 63628 Bad Soden-Salmünster, Tel. +49/06056/91220, fax 91 22 55, web: www.berghotel-berlin.de, email: info@berghotel-berlin.de) were convincing enough to email for a one-night reservation. In a few hours came a E75 (\$89) quote for a double room with baby bed. Nobody even asked for a credit card.

This story illustrates a couple of ways to save money on hotels in Europe. The first is to spend more time outside major cities where prices are much lower. The German and Austrian countryside abounds with inexpensive accommodations and one way to locate them in Germany is to do as Andy did, use the new "Bib Hotel" symbol in Michelin to find inexpensive hotels the guides say offer "a warm welcome and good standards of comfort and service."

Stay Put

Another dollar-saving tactic is to stay longer in one place. Most country hotels discount for multiple night stays. The previously-mentioned **Gasthof-Pension Hofmann** offers a super seven-night deal that includes breakfast and dinner for about \$425 per week. That's a little over \$30 per

night, per person.

Typical of longer-stay deals in Austria is the resort hotel, **St. Peter**, in Seefeld, which offers seven nights for the price of six, a 14% saving.

Lower Expectations

Next, you might consider stepping down in class. Those accustomed to five-star luxury may not care that hotel rooms in Europe are 30% more expensive than they were a year ago. On the other hand they will discover that some three and four-star hotels are just as luxurious as those in the five-star category — and often have more charm. (Remember, the stars have to do with services — availability of room service, whether or not the hotel has doormen, etc. — and not quality.) In Berlin, for example, the **Hotel Adlon**, a five-star with 24-hour room service, uniformed doormen, and plenty of officious

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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:

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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	Hotel Scale	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.

ZERMATT

Continued from page 1

Hiking is easily the primary outdoor summer activity. Visitors follow maps and well-marked trails. Some join tours or hire guides. Popular outings include a three-hour expedition along a snowy ridge from the Klein Matterhorn to the Breithorn for CHF 135 (\$105). A four-hour glacier excursion costs about 110 CHF (\$85).

Zermatt seems far more laid-back than most mountain resorts. People of all ages are dressed for their activity of choice, not to make a fashion or net-worth statement. Since everyone walks in this auto-free town, there's more social interaction on the streets. Most everyone is relaxed and smiling as they stroll the town. Even the new **Casino Zermatt**, which opened in December, doesn't have a dress code.

From the base stations, an extensive network of 31 lifts carries visitors to a variety of peaks, lookouts and trailheads. The Klein Matterhorn and Rothorn base stations are served by lifts, while the Gornergrat features a funicular railway. Anyone who visited in the past and was confused by the multiple offers of Zermatt's several cable car companies will be pleased to learn that the four companies merged last year. There's one timetable, one rate chart, one website and, significantly, one company issuing tickets.

This cooperation helped create the new **Peak Pass**, which offers unlimited travel for stays from 3-21 days, a best bet for visitors who plan to log extended mountain time. A three-day pass, for example, is CHF 154 (\$119) and a five-day pass CHF 200 (\$155). Or choose any three days during a five-day visit for CHF 170 (\$132). Children from 6-16 are half-price.

A highlight of any visit is the Klein Matterhorn, at 3,883 meters (12,736-feet) the highest peak served by the region's cable cars and the highest viewing platform in Europe. ("High Alpine Zone. Move Slowly," signs warn.) At the summit station, it's another three minutes on foot through a tunnel that emerges to bright sunshine and deep snow.

Zermatt Basics

Population: 5,600

Elevation: 1,605 meters (5,264 feet)

Tourist Information: Zermatt Tourism, Bahnhofplatz, P.O. Box 247, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41 027 966 8100, fax +41 027 966 8101, email zermatt@wallis.ch, web www.zermatt.ch.

Driving Distances:

Basel	401 km	324 miles
Bern	138 km	86 miles
Frankfurt	754 km	469 miles
Geneva	241 km	150 miles
Lausanne	173 km	107 miles
Milan	237 km	147 miles
Munich	660 km	410 miles
Vienna	922 km	573 miles
Zurich	257 km	160 miles

Fastest Rail Times:

Frankfurt	7 hours, 43 minutes
Geneva	3 hours, 41 minutes
Milan	3 hours, 40 minutes
Munich	9 hours, 38 minutes
Paris	7 hours, 51 minutes
Vienna	14 hours, 25 minutes
Zürich	4 hours, 46 minutes

Important Arrival Info:

Auto — No private cars are allowed in Zermatt. Park in the open-air lot in Täsch for CHF 9-11 and take a shuttle train (every 20 minutes) the last 3 miles to Zermatt. If you park in a garage, take a garage taxi to the Zermatt entrance. Most hotels provide electric car shuttle service from the station and village entrance. Another option is to park in free park-and-ride lots in Visp and take the Zermatt Railway.

Train — For those who come by rail, it takes 90 scenic minutes to climb the final leg up the rugged Visp Valley from the village of Brig to Zermatt (note that the private Matterhorn Gotthard Railway does not recognize any rail passes). From its starting point at 672 meters (2,204 feet), the train travels 44 kilometers (27 miles) past six sets of steep climbs until it reaches Zermatt at 1605 meters (5,264 feet).

Major airports: Zurich, Milan, Geneva

A short walk across the snow leads to another tunnel, this one carved into the glacier. Exhibits explain glaciers and geology en route to an almost magical grotto 15 meters (49 feet) below the surface with ice sculptures carved from giant blocks.

Then it's outside again to a view that almost overwhelms: mountains to the horizon, their peaks reaching into a rich, blue sky.

Lodging

(Rates listed here are for summer, which is high season for most hotels. Also, unless otherwise stated, rates

include both breakfast *and* dinner.)

Hotel Perren

Zermatt's Hotel Perren, just a short distance from the train station, consists of the original building constructed in the 1950s and renovated in 2000 and a newer building added in the 1970s. Thus, if you want the most up-to-date rooms and facilities, ask for the "old wing." Regardless of age, the hotel offers a pleasant mix of rustic and modern. The lofty lobby opens to a lounge with piano and fireplace, and a glass elevator brings guests to the upper floors.

Rooms seem to have been designed with American tastes in mind; they're large and cheerful with blond larch woodwork and substantial bathrooms, most with both bath and shower. The best room in the house is easily 402, a top-floor suite with balcony overlooking the parish church and the Matterhorn. French doors separate the bedroom from the spacious living room with work area and couch. A slight step down is Number 303, a deluxe room with nearly 31 square meters (334 square feet) of space, not including ample closets. The standard rooms, located in the new wing, are smaller but still comfortable.

The hotel is owned and operated by the Perren and Bregy-Biner families, who have lived in Zermatt for generations. Members of the families know all the best trails (ski, bike or hiking) and are usually on hand to share tips—or to discuss their best runs of the day.

Contact: Hotel Perren, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/967 0145, fax 967 5562, email:

hotel.perren@reconline.ch, web: www.reconline.ch/hotel-perren

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 125 (\$97), doubles CHF 230-299 (\$178-232)

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 15/20

Admiral

With 24 rooms spread across four floors, this quiet and cordial three-star hotel is delightfully cheerful and welcoming. The staff quickly learns names and any special interests and needs and is quick to help or offer suggestions. The hotel is quite convenient, just five

EDITOR'S CHOICE

minutes from the train station and tourist office, and 15 minutes from the lift to the Klein Matterhorn.

Most rooms in the five-story hotel have balconies. Number 302 is simple but spacious, more than comfortable, with a bath/shower combination and a large balcony looking to the Matterhorn. It's also farthest from the Gornergrat Railway tracks, which can get noisy during early-morning runs.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 100 (\$78), doubles CHF 180 (\$140)

Contact: Hotel Admiral, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel. +41/027/967 1515, fax 967 5058, email info@hotel-admiral.ch, web www.hotel-admiral.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 16/20

Grand Hotel Zermatterhof

The Grand Hotel Zermatterhof proudly declares its five-star presence with decorative letters stretched across the building's exterior. Maybe guests being chauffeured to the hotel by the hotel's horse-drawn carriage need a reminder where they're headed. But any doubts they're about to experience a very grand hotel are removed when they approach the elegant, wood-carved, marble-inlaid reception desk.

Although the Zermatterhof has its origins in 1879, it undertook exten-

sive remodeling in 1987. Of its 84 rooms, 26 are suites and nearly 60 offer a view to the Matterhorn. Along with other amenities, the hotel offers a wellness area with swimming pool, sauna, steam room and fitness center.

In the standard room category, Number 519 is especially spacious and bright, thanks in part to a skylight and to larch wood floors and furniture. The view is to the Riffelalp and other peaks east of the Matterhorn. Room 410 looks to the Matterhorn and has an especially large bathroom (with shower-bath) and walk-in wardrobe, as well as a convenient desk/work area.

Among deluxe rooms, Number 406 is on a corner with a large balcony and views north into the valley and west over old wooden huts to the Matterhorn. Number 403 is typical of the more recently renovated rooms, with blue and cream wall fabrics framed by larch, an embossed ceiling, and built-in Bose speakers, even in the bathroom.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 345-440, (\$267-347), doubles CHF 610-680 (\$473-527), suites CHF 950-1480 (\$736-1,147). Transfer from train station: CHF 12 (\$9) per person with luggage.

Contact: Grand Hotel Zermatterhof, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/966 6600, fax 966 6699, email: zermatterhof@zermatt.ch, web: www.zermatt.ch/zermatterhof.

Rating: QUALITY 18/20 VALUE 16/20

Alex Hotel

The Alex is quite likely Zermatt's most eclectic hospitality establishment. It's much more like an all-inclusive resort — with bar, nightclub, dancing, outdoor restaurants, grassy terraces, tennis courts, saunas, and large swimming pool with grotto. Cancun meets Switzerland.

Some might find elements of the Alex a bit brash. For example, a billboard on the front of the hotel pulses messages Times Square-style to passersby. Amid carved angels, stained glass and statues, ceiling paintings are more reminiscent of Keith Haring than a village artist, and sometimes go a little over the top.

If any Zermatt hotel has the prototypical après ski atmosphere, it's definitely the Alex. Some travelers may find this too frenetic and commercial for their tastes, but the hotel's guests seemed to like it all just fine. They also seem to like the sumptuous — if often somewhat kitschy — guest rooms (67 in all). Mention the word *romance* when you're making your reservation (if that's indeed what you want), and the Alex staff will choose the perfect room, including fireplace, four-poster bed, two-person Jacuzzi and chilled champagne.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 170-230 (\$132-178), doubles CHF 320-440 (\$248-341)

Contact: Alex Hotel, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/966 7070, fax 966 7090, email hotelalexzermatt@spectraweb.ch, web www.hotelalexzermatt.com.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 14/20

Mountain Hotels

Those who desire more of a mountain lodge experience — with most or all of the comforts — will find three choices, including a five-star resort, along the Gornergrat Railway, which climbs 696 meters (2,283 feet) over 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) from Zermatt to the Gornergrat summit. At the very least, it's a great day-trip and if your Zermatt stay is more than a couple of nights, one of them should be in a mountain hotel.

Riffelalp Resort

During the 20-minute ride and 591-meter (1,938-foot) elevation gain on the Gornergrat railway from Zermatt to the Riffelalp Resort, the four-car train passes through a tunnel the length of a football field. At the Riffelalp station — an oversized booth, really — a one-carriage electric train, the highest tramway in Europe, carries guests another five minutes along a mountain ridge to the five-star Riffelalp Resort.

The hotel is perfect for guests who want to mix indoor luxury with exploration of the great outdoors. Zermatt's extensive network of mountain hiking trails starts at the front door. After a rigorous hike, a multi-course dinner awaits, and the sauna and pool are just seconds away.

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.

The first Riffelalp Grand Hotel was built in 1884 and served guests until a massive fire in 1961. In 1988 the hotel was rebuilt and reopened. Additional construction was finished in 2000 to create today's resort.

Public spaces — grand and luxurious — feature lofty wooden ceilings, carved wood trim, marble surfaces, and granite floors scattered with colorful rugs. A popular spot is in front of the large fireplace with a view to the Matterhorn. The design employs many elements found in chalets but on a grander scale.

Guest rooms have plenty of wood in furniture, walls and ceilings. Many beds have hearts carved in their headboards. Room 108 is especially spacious with a large balcony that presents a view to the Matterhorn. Room 109 is a junior suite with bath and shower in one room, toilet in another. Ultra-comfortable beds with plush down comforters can lead to massive cocooning, especially since guest rooms also feature CD players, televisions and Bose speakers.

Recognizing that some guests may wish to pursue indoor activities rather than explore, the hotel offers a variety of amenities including a two-lane bowling alley, free Internet access, a small cinema, billiards and a "vinothek" for wine tastings, plus restaurants, a grotto-like pool and various wellness facilities.

Daily Rates: Singles 265-345 CHF (\$205-267), double 490-630 CHF (\$380-488); jr. suites 800 CHF (\$620)

Contact: Riffelalp Resort, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/966 0555, fax 966 0550, email: reservation@riffelalp.com, web: www.riffelalp.com.

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel-Restaurant Riffelberg

From the Riffelalp station, it's another 15 minutes and 373 meters (1,223 feet) of elevation through the tree line to the Hotel-Restaurant Riffelberg. Passengers who leave the train at Riffelalp can watch it continue its climb across moss-covered rock and grassy ridges. The Matterhorn dwarfs it like a toy.

The four-story hotel lies across a pasture lorded over by goats. Much

of the structure dates from the middle of the 19th century, when priests made the trip from Zermatt on mules. The most recent renovation was in 1987. Markus and Marianne Meier have managed the hotel for three years, and the young couple's pride in their mountain home and the 29 rooms under their care is evident.

As a three-star hotel, the Riffelberg has the requisite amenities such as direct dial phones and private bathrooms. Guestrooms are plain, basic and somewhat worn, but nonetheless clean and comfortable. Under the same ownership as the Zermatter Hof, much of the hotel's furniture consists of high-quality hand-me-downs. For a two-window view of the Matterhorn, as well as to the Klein Matterhorn and to sheep pastures, Room 3 is the best choice.

The best view is perhaps from the dining area with a breathtaking panorama of the Matterhorn, the Gorner glacier and other peaks topping 4,000 meters. There's also a small granite-topped bar and a sauna area with Jacuzzi.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 135 (\$105), doubles CHF 240 (\$186)

Contact: Familie Markus and Marianne Meier, Hotel-Restaurant Riffelberg, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/966 6500, fax 966 6505, email: riffelberg@zermatt.ch, web: www.zermatt.ch/matterhorn-group/
Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Kulm Gornergrat

At an elevation of 3,100 meters, the Gornergrat is the last stop on the Gornergratbahn. On one side, a row of riffled glaciers flows imperceptibly through a wall of 4,000-meter mountains creating a debris field of ground boulders. Glacial melt pours from swirls of unworldly blue ice. On the other side of the mountain lies Italy, though it might as well be Mars. There seems to be no world beyond the Gornergrat, especially as the clouds move in.

Iron letters spell out "H-O-T-E-L 1-9-0-7" on the meter-thick walls of the Hotel Kulm Gornergrat, Europe's highest two-star hotel. It stands on the summit like a fortress, and as a monument to solitude as the last train

screeches down the tracks into the consuming clouds. On a promontory below the hotel, steinbocks clamber in the scree — either defying death or offering living proof of Darwin's theories.

Two miles up, with clouds filling in, the hotel feels like an island in the sky. After the last train departs, there's no way down and nearly nine hours until the next one. Agatha Christie would have found easy inspiration.

Rooms are utilitarian: four plaster walls, plain furnishings, and a sink. Showers and bathrooms are shared.

West-facing rooms look out to the Matterhorn, while east-facers view awesome sunrises (weather permitting, of course).

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 127-138 (\$98-107), doubles CHF 206-216 (\$160-168) (slightly higher for Matterhorn view)

Contact: Hotel Kulm Gornergrat, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/966 6400, fax 966 6404, email: gornergrat.kulm@zermatt.ch, web: www.zermatt.ch/matterhorn-group
Rating: QUALITY 11/20 VALUE 11/20

Food

Restaurant Whympfer-Stube

The Restaurant Whympfer-Stube, named for the Englishman who was in the first group to summit the Matterhorn — is a small downstairs restaurant with plenty of rustic charm and intimacy. There is a bar with six stools and a few tables. The dark wood decor gives the sense of a deep-woods cabin. This is a favorite stop for home-bound mountain guides.

The menu isn't extensive — mostly a variety of fondues and cheese and meat platters, with a couple standard dishes like pork cutlet and *coron bleu*. A specialty is the *Fondue Plausch*, a cheese fondue with dried meat, cherries, pears, tomatoes, mushrooms, and onions. The cost is CHF 30 (\$23) per person, with a minimum of 3 people. The Whympfer platter, for CHF 24 (\$19), consists of dried meat, cold ham, bacon, sausage, cheese and nuts. You can also order two appetizers and no entrée: for example, a platter of dried meat

served on a wooden board with the traditional pearl onions, pickles and tomato; and a platter of raclette, cheese melted and served on a plate with boiled new potatoes, pickles and pearl onions. Delicious fresh bread comes on the side.

Contact: Restaurant Whymper-Stube, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/967 2296.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurant zum See

The Restaurant zum See is in a 600-year-old former farmhouse in a mountain hamlet about 145 meters (475 feet) above Zermatt. It's a traditional village with about 20 chalets, sheds, cabins and barns. Woods and mountains close in on all sides. On pleasant days, guests sit on the sunny stone patio facing ancient sheds and barns. Inside, guests enjoy the warmth of the open kitchen and seasoned dark wood.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Like many rewards, getting to lunch (the only meal served) at the Restaurant zum See requires effort. As owner Max Mennig says, "We're really well situated — only 40 minutes on foot." Or take the lift from Zermatt to Furi and walk down a well-worn (and easy) mountain trail for 15 minutes. After lunch, it's another 20 minutes — quite pleasant — downhill to town.

Max and wife Greti take full advantage of local produce, cheeses and meats (dried or fresh). Most vegetables—beets, lettuce and herbs, for example—come from their garden and breads, pastas and desserts are made on the premises.

The Restaurant zum See excels at traditional cuisine with a creative, international bent. Lamb filet provençale, calf's kidney in a mustard cream sauce, and filets of rabbit in a morel cream sauce are examples. There is also more conventional fare, such as dried meat, local cheeses and *Rösti*—those delicious fried potatoes. Nearby Italy is fully represented with a variety of pasta dishes. Desserts are heavenly like a rhubarb torte — sweet, sour and custardy — piled high with house-made cinnamon ice cream.

Most entrées fall between CHF

17-29 (\$13-22), with an average price of about CHF 24 (\$19). (On the way back to town, don't miss the Ricola Herb Garden with the 13 different herbs used in Ricola's products.)

Contact: Restaurant zum See, CH-3920 Zermatt, tel +41/027/967 2045, fax 967 2873, web www.zumsee.ch

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 17/20

Restaurant Le Chalet "Da Giuseppe"

Mention to any Zermatt resident — and to many visitors — that you had a fantastic Italian meal, and they just assume it was at Giuseppe's. Indeed, the superb food and warmth of welcome he and his cozy restaurant bring to the dining experience, have brought Giuseppe Battaglieri a loyal following. The music of Italy—first opera, then ballads — creates an authentic Italian ambience, as do the Italian-speaking regulars discussing the day's news at the bar.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Service is exceptional. Your server greets you, hangs up your coat and within seconds of arriving you're treated to a small flute of sparkling wine followed by a dish piled high with excellent bruschetta. After another perfect appetizer, the server asks, "Shall I bring your entrée, or would you like a break?" Then, after a delightful platter of ravioli, you hear something entirely unfamiliar: "Would you like more?" An affirmative nod and you're quickly served another small portion — an experience repeated at dessert.

The menu features such dishes as mussels in spicy red sauce, ravioli stuffed with wild mushrooms and spices, fried calamari, stuffed artichokes, rabbit with polenta, mushrooms sautéed with garlic and parsley, lamb cutlet and, of course, pasta. Then desserts like panna cotta. Can't make up your mind? Order the "surprise" four-course dinner for CHF 60 (\$47). Entrées range from CHF 20-42 (\$16-34) with most pastas about CHF 26 (\$20) and meat dishes around CHF 36 (\$28). It's all very inventive and pleasant.

Contact: Restaurant Le Chalet "Da Giuseppe," CH-3920 Zermatt, tel. +41/027/967 1380

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 18/20

WEIMAR

Continued from page 1

ater, is often referred to as the greatest German of them all and his pal Schiller — as in Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in the glorious choral movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony and the *William Tell* drama — is not far behind. Their impact on Germany is demonstrated by the literally thousands of Schiller *Strassen* and Goethe *Platzen* in towns all over the country.

Among Weimar's other famous citizens: the painter, Lucas Cranach the Elder; J.S. Bach and Franz Liszt, both of whom directed the local orchestra; Walter Gropius, founder of the original Bauhaus, which altered forever the course of modern design and architecture; and the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Of course, there is a **Cranachhaus**, a **Lisztthaus**, a **Bachstube**, a **Schillerhaus**, a **Goethehaus** and even a **Goethe Gartenhaus** in the town's lovely **Ilm Park**, all of which can be visited.

The **Deutsches National Theater**, where the Weimar Republic's constitution was adopted in 1919, was almost totally destroyed in World War II but today offers a schedule of music and drama whose frequency and quality are extraordinary for a town of this size.

Visitors can also take in a variety of palaces and museums or make the grim, five-mile pilgrimage to Buchenwald, one of the largest of Hitler's concentration camps.

Even if most Americans know little of Weimar, the Germans, of course, are in love with the town and fully aware of its historical significance. Soon after unification, the government began pouring millions of deutschemarks into making it a showplace and it was Europe's Cultural Capital in 1999. Weimar is by far the smallest city so named and follows such European metropolises as Madrid ('92), Lisbon ('94), Copenhagen ('96) and Stockholm ('98).

Lodging

Wolff's Art Hotel & Restaurant

Stunning interior design — a 90s version of Bauhaus / Art Nouveau —

and a fantastic collection of Polish and Czech poster art combine to make this hotel a visual delight.

Two extraordinary guestrooms are numbers 13 and 14. We give a slight nod to the former but both are huge with massive white wood beams, dormer windows, lofty ceilings and large, well-furnished separate sitting areas. They are the best rooms we found in Weimar.

Most guestrooms, like Number 2, a light, airy corner double, have tiled floors (not to worry, there is radiant heating under all floors), high ceilings and windows, modern halogen lighting and spacious, sparkling, fully-tiled bathrooms.

The 35-room Wolff is actually four buildings located in a residential area about 10 minutes' walk from the center.

Beer enthusiasts should note that the hotel's restaurant is the only place in Weimar which serves Singer beer, made by a brewery "museum" in a nearby town.

Wolff's is the creation of an East German engineer, Dr. Christian Wolff, who purchased the property from descendants of a Jewish family, most of whom died in nearby Buchenwald. As a memorial to the family, Dr. Wolff has erected a tiled monolith that is a striking focal point of an outdoor conversation pit.

Factoring in the warm welcome with extraordinary decor and amenities, we rank Wolff's as Weimar's best hotel.

Daily Rates: Singles E110 to E150 (\$129-176), doubles E135 to E175 (\$158-206)

Contact: Wolff's Art Hotel & Restaurant, Freiherr-vom-Stein-Allee 3a/b, D-99425 Weimar, tel. +49/03643/540 60, fax 54 06 99, email: call@wolffs-art-hotel.de, web: www.wolffs-art-hotel.de.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 13/20

Christliches Hotel Amalienhof

The centrally-located Amalienhof is traditional, old world, the Wolff's equal in warmth of welcome, and not far behind in comfort.

There is no restaurant or elevator but our room, Number 203, had a

high ceiling, good furniture and good reading lights. There were two windows, a comfortable sofa, desk, table and two hard chairs. Overhead lighting was only adequate and the bathroom — a one person affair — had no toiletries or washcloths and for soap only a dispenser of the liquid variety

The basic buffet breakfast, in a small but pleasant room, offered a limited selection, but the items served, notably the cheese and the diced fresh fruit, were first-rate.

Daily Rates: Singles E70 to E85 (\$82-\$96), doubles E95 to E105 (\$113-\$124)

Contact: Christliches Hotel Amalienhof, Amalienstrasse 2, D-99423 Weimar, tel. +49/03643/54 90, fax 549110, email: amalienhofweimar@t-online.de

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Food

For all its culture, Weimar is not noted for gastronomy. For the most part, food is straightforward and portions are large.

At the pub-style restaurant in the **Hotel Zur Sonne**, Rollplatz 2, one can get a good three-course meal for less than E14 (\$16). **Sommer's Weinstuben**, at Humboldtstrasse 2, just around the corner from the Christliches Hotel Amalienhof, has plain wood tables, a big tile stove, old photographs on the walls and acceptable food. The beautifully restored **Gasthaus zum weissen Schwan**, Frauentorstr. 23, where Schiller and Goethe hung out, is charming and the most popular place in town. Food is stick-to-the-ribs-heavy and plentiful. The best meals we had were at the **Residenz Café**, Grüner Markt 4; a noisy, smoky, student hangout that serves the great Czech beer, Budvar. 

Readers' Forum

Berlin Report

We just returned May 7th from a 15-day trip to Berlin, Dresden, Seiffen, Nürnberg and Salzburg. We did not encounter any anti-American comments or treatment. In fact, one gentleman at our Berlin hotel (Art Nouveau) sought me out in the breakfast room to express his feelings of friendship for Americans. It made my day.

The **Hotel Art Nouveau** was everything you said it was, and more. Herr Schlenzka was very gracious and helpful. What a gracious, spacious old place to stay, about as far away from the "Holiday Inn plastic" as one can get. First time guests need to be aware that the hotel occupies the 4th floor of a professional office building, with only a small sign and a call button outside the locked building door. Our cab driver was convinced that we had given him a wrong address, and it would not be his fault if we found ourselves lost there.

Herr Schlenzka gave us the names of two restaurants, both excellent. **Puvogel** (Pestalozzistr. 8, 10625 Berlin, tel. +49/030/313 4364, 6pm-1am, no credit cards) serves excellent traditional German food in a quiet friendly atmosphere on a back street which is in easy walking distance from the hotel. **Ristorante Tavola Calda** (Leibnizstrasse 45, 10629 Berlin, tel. +49/030/324 1048, no cards) is about a block from the hotel on the same street. You walk right past it going to Puvogel. They serve excellent Italian food (Northern, I think, but I'm no expert). And, if you want to speak Italian (I can't), this is your place.

I could go on about Dresden, Seiffen, Nürnberg and Salzburg, and the ease of rail travel. Maybe in another letter. This was a wonderful trip and we can't wait to go back.

FRANK HODAPP

VIA EMAIL 

Travel Quickies

■ Stuttgart Hotel Discount

Last month we provided a list of hotels in Germany offering special deals to *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers. We failed to mention one of our favorites, **Hotel Wörtz zur Weinsteige** in Stuttgart (Hohenheimer Str. 28-30, tel. +49/0711/236 7000, fax 236 7007, email: info@hotel-woertz.de, web: www.hotel-woertz.de.) The hotel is offering subscribers a welcome drink and 10% off all its room prices.

■ Take it Off, Take it All Off

The **Museum of Fine Arts** in St. Gallen looks (leers?) at the role of striptease in art in an exhibition of 54 works of 31 artists over 500 years.

There are traditional nudes, avant garde video, Lucas Cranach's "Venus and Cupid," and even a live male go-go dancer. The exhibition, which not surprisingly is breaking museum attendance records, runs through August 24.

■ Ticino Itineraries

The tourist office of Switzerland's Italian-speaking canton, Ticino, has created a collection of 17 walking itineraries through the canton. They are described on cards, and divided into the three main tourist destinations: Lugano and Mendrisiotto; Lago Maggiore and valleys; and Bellinzona and Alto Ticino. The cards indicate the time necessary to complete each walk, access possibilities, best time of year for each, and places to eat and drink along the way.

The collections can be purchased for CHF10 (\$7.80) and are available in English from Ticino Turismo, at local tourist offices in the region or at <http://www.ticino-tourism.ch>.

■ Cycling the Bodensee

A bike trail runs between Bludenz and Bregenz, in western Austria. (An interesting Bludenz stop is at the **Suchard Chocolate Factory**.) The trail runs along the Ill River to Feldkirch with its medieval *Altstadt* and towering **Schattenberg Castle**. It then follows the Rhine northward and on to Bregenz, on Lake Constance (the Bodensee). This year the renowned Bregenz summer music festival runs July 16 to August 19, with many performances, including Bernstein's "West Side Story" taking place on a giant stage that floats on the lake.

From Bregenz, cyclists can join the International Lake Constance Loop, around the lake through Germany and Switzerland. A shortcut is via ferry to Konstanz and then back to Bregenz along the south shore. The total length of the ride — Bludenz to Bludenz — is 200 miles, including the lake loop. Those who don't want to cycle all the way around the lake can board lake boats for certain portions of the loop. Web: www.austria.info/us; email: info@oewnyc.com.

■ Travel Wisdom via email

There's a new way to get information about travel to Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It's "Gemut

Travel," a *Gemütlichkeit*-sponsored email distribution list. Got a question about travel? Send it via email to the list. It's seen by everyone on the list (at this point a couple of hundred frequent-traveling *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers) and soon you'll have several answers.

One caveat; if you join the list you're going to see all the email questions and answers created by everyone on the list (unless you opt for a daily digest of all list traffic).

The idea is to share the expertise of a lot of very savvy, experienced travelers to Europe. You can join the list at www.topica.com/lists/germanictravel. It's free.

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

desk clerks, the least expensive rack-rate double room is E350 (\$417). At the more architectural and decoratively interesting, **Brandenburger Hof**, an elegant, very upscale four-star hotel, rack-rate doubles start at 240 (\$286). It works just the same at the other end of the scale. In Vienna, we love the three-star **Kaiserin Elisabeth** in the very heart of town. It's double rooms this summer are E200 (\$238). But equally well-located in the center is the **Pension Aviano**, where rooms are just as large and only a little less well-appointed. There, high season double room prices range from E122 to E145 (\$145-\$173).

Shop Hard

Don't fail to get a price directly from the hotel. Its become a world of Internet and independent toll-free booking services, but sometimes the best deals are at the source. And, since some hotels use their website to fill beds on slow nights, always check the hotel's own website (as opposed to booking service sites).

Saving on meals while traveling is pretty much common sense: eat where the locals do, buy the makings of a picnic lunch at a grocery store, and stay away from restaurants where you get more than one set of silverware.

The dollar will return, but in the meantime, a few itinerary adjustments, some prudent buying and Europe is still affordable.—RHB

We Recommend

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

Berlin

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

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

Bern

Hotel Innere Enge, Engestrasse 54, CH-3012, tel. +41/031/309 6111, fax 309 6112, email: info@zghotels.ch

Hotel Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3000, tel. +41/031/329 9595, fax 329 95 96, email: hotelkreuz@swissonline.ch

Lausanne

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

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

Lucerne

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

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

Munich

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

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

Rothenburg ob der Tauber

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

Salzburg & Environs

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

Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, Austria A-5020 tel. +43/0662/843 728, fax 843 728 8, email: struber@sbg.at

Hotel Jedermann, Rupertgasse 25, Austria A-5020, tel. +43/0662/873241-0, fax 873241-9, email: jedermann@salzburginfo.or.at

Vienna

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