

**DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER**

### **Avoiding Car Rental Problems**

The proper position to assume at European rental car counters these days is "on your toes." More than ever, renters need to be aware of a few tricky elements in the rental process. Substantial inconvenience and extra costs may be the penalty for inattention.

Seemingly minor items that many renters pay scant attention to can create major problems.

A spare tire, for example. Does your car have one? It's a question you need to answer before leaving the rental station. There is a thriving black market in Europe for auto parts, and rental cars are sometimes returned without a spare wheel and tire. It's an absence easily overlooked when rental stations are under pressure to fuel, vacuum and wash cars as quickly as possible in order to return them to service. This year two customers of *Gemütlichkeit's* car rental booking service found out the hard way that they didn't have a spare tire. In one case, the customer was in a remote part of Italy and the inconvenience was major; instead of discovering the Tuscan countryside, she found herself dealing with tow trucks, auto dealerships, car rental companies and shelling out substantial taxi fares. The money, of course, is reimbursable, but lost vacation time can never be adequately compensated.

### **Unbelievable Fuel Prices**

Here's a relatively minor item that can cost you \$50 to \$225. It's early morning and you're in your rental car headed for the Munich Airport to catch a flight home. Running just a few minutes late you

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## THE SAALACH

*Small villages, big valleys, mighty mountains, affordable hotels, simple cuisine, and a traditional way of life are the main attractions of this quiet river valley southwest of Salzburg.*

**B**arely 45 minutes from Salzburg, the Saalach Valley offers a quiet, rural escape.

The Saalach River is the lesser-known sister of the Salzach, the river that divides Salzburg's Old and New Cities. The two streams almost touch near Zell am See, then merge about 100 kilometers (62 miles) down-river just past Salzburg. During its flight of independence, the Saalach expresses its own personality, and its valley has great charm.

Except for a brief sojourn in Germany, the Saalach spends its entire life in Salzburg Province, where two major tourism consortia — the **Saalfelden-Leogang Holiday Region** and

the **Salzach Valley Vacation Region** — take admirable advantage of the Saalach's diversity and draw. By representing most towns, hotels and attractions in the area, they make things easy for visitors.

There are few large towns in the region, part of Salzburg's Pinzgau district; smaller villages are more typical. Many farmers still plant and harvest by hand, and village life revolves around the church and the market square. Towns seem 'lived in' and not focused only on tourism. Through the centuries, much of the region's income has come from the salt trade, a fact reflected in the prefixes "Saal" and

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## Readers' Forum

*(Readers' Forum is one of this publication's most popular features. This month we'll try to make up for the scant amount of space devoted to it in the past few issues.)*

### **Less Expensive Hotels, Please**

I would like to see more reviews of lesser-priced lodgings. Definitely!

99% of your picks are way out of bounds for me. I like to be more like the natives over there. Closer to average citizens.

Your article on Austria's Lungau is a perfect example! I love it. I leave April 19 for three weeks in Germany, Austria and *der Suisse*. I expect I will spend many days in the Lungau area! Especially at the **Hansalhof**. This is exactly what I look for.

PETER ANDRESHAK  
WASUAU, WI

### **Happy With Current Mix**

It seems to me that over the years you have maintained a very good balance with respect to value of accommodations. I am a little concerned about the Aim Higher folks. Perhaps they should rent an apartment on the Queen Mary and leave the rest of us in misery.

MAYNARD WOOD  
VIA EMAIL

### **A Little Luxury is O.K.**

We are original subscribers, and I just want to tell you to keep up the great job. More specifically, we traveled to Italy last month, and seeing your repeated comments that it is so much better to forget taking American Express traveler's checks, but

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**Exchange rates as of 11/22/04**  
**1 euro = \$1.30**  
**1 Swiss franc = \$0.86**

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

*Continued from page 1*

decide to let Avis top off the gas tank. You filled up yesterday in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and can't have used more than four gallons. It'll cost a few extra bucks but it's worth it for the convenience, right? Well, yes, provided you consider \$60 or \$70 a "few extra bucks." You see, Avis is currently charging €3.19 per liter if they have to fill your tank when you return your car to the Munich Airport. Four gallons equals about 15.14 liters. At €3.19 per liter that's €48 or approximately \$62 at today's exchange rate — approximately \$15.50 per gallon. If you want to let them fill up a 14-gallon tank figure on about \$218.

**Don't Like Your Car?**

Sometimes the car offered at the rental car counter doesn't suit the customer's needs. It's too big, too small, doesn't have automatic transmission, doesn't have a stick shift, isn't a diesel, is a diesel, and so on. If the voucher specifies a feature not on the car offered — automatic transmission, for example — bringing the discrepancy to the attention of the rental agent usually solves the problem. (If it doesn't, we'll tell you what to do a bit later in this article.) But let's say your voucher/reservation and what you're being offered are in sync; you simply want something better. At this point the agent may offer an upgrade. Do not assume it's out of the goodness of his heart. The upgrade is going to involve addition-

al cost and you need to know precisely how much.

Some rental agents are quick to offer a larger, better car but soft-pedal the added cost. In some instances we are aware of, customers have been offered upgrades for "only an additional €5 per day." Figuring it would cost them less than \$50 per week, several said O.K. Much later, back in the U.S., they were shocked when their credit card bills arrived and they found the charge to be much higher than anticipated. When they heard "€5 per day," these customers understandably assumed it meant €5 more than what their voucher called for. What the not-so-bright (or not-so-forthright) rental agent meant, however, was that the upgrade was only €5 higher than the company's walk-in counter rate — a price much higher than the discounted rate specified by these customers' vouchers.

**Extra Driver Charges Vary**

Need a passenger to share driving duties? The counter agent will be happy to add another name to the contract and then charge you as much as \$135 per rental. Exactly how much each additional driver will cost is probably something you'll want to know before committing to do so.

**Insurance Problems**

Of course, the classic rental-car-surprise-charge-on-the-credit-card-bill involves the purchase of the optional theft and collision insurance. If your initials appear on the contract in the "Ja" or "Qui" portion of the insurance box it could cost you several

hundred dollars. In any case, our advice is to rely on a credit card for collision and theft coverage — it's free and there's no deductible.

**Smart Renter Strategies**

Here's a short check-list that should help smooth your European rental car experience.

- When booking a car in Europe, find out if the rate is guaranteed in euros or U.S. dollars. Many companies guarantee their overseas bookings in foreign currency. If you reserved a car guaranteed in euros on August 1 for pickup on November 6 you will pay about 8% more in U.S. dollars than on the booking date. In addition, when issuing a quote in foreign currency, most companies estimate the price in dollars using a very favorable exchange rate. When it comes time to pay, however, it is very likely you won't get such a friendly rate of exchange.

- If you need to change a *Gemütli-*  
*Continued on page 8...*

**Using Gemütlichkeit**

- 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**

Back issues in text format from January 1993, except for the most recent 12, are available free to subscribers only at <http://www.gemut.com> (click on "Members"). To access the issues enter the user name and password published in this space each month. The new codes are:

User Name: zach Password: 3331

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**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
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**HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY**

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria	Value Rating	Scale	
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

**Special Designation**

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

## SAALACH VALLEY

Continued from page 1

“Salz” that append many place names.

### Headquarters

The towns and villages make great “base camps” for both adventurous and cultural exploration. Adventurous types can hike, raft, climb, paraglide and bike (from tough downhill terrain to gentle bike paths). Others can just watch or take in the atmosphere.

For those who want a hint of adventure, towns offer guided hikes from two hours to a full day, often with van shuttles to and from trailheads. The focus is as much on culture as exercise. An hour’s hike can put relaxed walkers within a snowball’s throw of glaciers. Many visitors hike through one or more of the region’s geologically wondrous chasms. Or just walk between villages and picnic in an alpine meadow.

But the charm, history and scenery are just as accessible to the more sedate traveler. Customs live strong in the Saalach Valley, like the autumn *Almabtrieb* when farmers drive their cows from alpine meadows to the warmth and safety of barns. The entire village turns out with bands and costumes. Even the cows are festively dressed; if one carries black it means death or injury has befallen one of the herd — or the farmer’s family — during the previous season. Or look at the baroque parish church in Leogang, where iron links form a chain around the outer wall. For centuries, village women have contributed the symbolic links to protect their men from injury, illness and death.

### Down River

The headwaters of the Saalach are nearly a mile high in the Hinterglemm, a narrow valley that dead-ends in the Kitzbühel Alps near the Salzburg-Tirol border. Powered by glacial melt, it flows east toward Zell am See and passes remote farms, hamlets and villages.

Just north of Lake Zell, the sediment-rich waters of the Saalach make a sharp jag to the north. Here the valley spreads broadly with farmland

## Saalach Valley Basics

**Elevation:** (Lofer) 626 meters / 2054 feet

**Tourist Info:** Salzburger Saalachtal, A-5090 Lofer 310, tel: +43/6588/8321-0, fax: 6588/7464, email: [tourist-office@lofer.net](mailto:tourist-office@lofer.net), web: [www.salzburger-saalachtal.info](http://www.salzburger-saalachtal.info)

Saalfelden Leogang Tourism, Bahnhofstrasse 10, A-5760 Saalfelden, tel: +43/6582/70660, fax: 6582/75398, email: [info@saalfelden-leogang.at](mailto:info@saalfelden-leogang.at), web: [www.saalfelden-leogang.at](http://www.saalfelden-leogang.at)

**Nearest Airport:** Salzburg

**Driving Distances:** (from Leogang)

Salzburg	66 km	41 miles
Innsbruck	141 km	87 miles
Vienna	365 km	226 miles
Munich	167 km	104 miles
Zürich	417 km	259 miles
Stuttgart	387 km	240 miles

**Transportation:** Train travelers should note that there’s no rail service along the Saalach between Saalfelden and Salzburg. While it’s a hour’s drive north from Saalfelden to Salzburg (or 90 minutes by bus), the rail route requires a 30-kilometer (18-mile) ride south to Zell am See that then connects with the Salzburg Sprinter in a nearly 270-degree arc for the two-hour journey to Salzburg. Those bound for Munich first have to head west toward Innsbruck.

Buses connect most of the towns with frequent service between Saalfelden and Lofer and frequent train connections between Leogang and Saalfelden.

**Best Bets for Transfers and Excursions:** Eder Reisen organizes daily excursions to points in and beyond the region including Salzburg, Neuschwanstein, Berchtesgaden, the Grossglockner High Alpine Road, Werfen Ice Caves, Venice, Vienna and Hallein Salt Mines.

Eder Reisen and Taxi, A-5761 Maria Alm, Dorf 7, tel.: +43/6584/7191, fax: 7191-4, email: [office@eder-reisen-taxi.at](mailto:office@eder-reisen-taxi.at), web: <http://members.magnet.at/eder.reisen.taxi>.

and forests. Ribbony waterfalls spill from sheer cliff walls.

The Saalach first finds civilization at **Saalfelden**, a delightful town with medieval ramparts and a market square — but also traffic and a discreet McDonalds. A best-bet here is **Pinzgau Museum in Ritzen Castle**, featuring four floors of cultural, religious and archeological exhibits plus mining displays.

East, in the mountains, the village of **Maria Alm** is remote and compact, with most conveniences within walking distance. It’s a prototypical Alpine town — with all the pros and some of the cons. Tourists, attracted by the

village’s history, charm and pastoral setting, flock to its ski slopes and to “traditional” folklore evenings with oompa music, lederhosen and dance.

### Leogang, heart of the region

A short detour from the Saalach (and overall a more desirable destination than Maria Alm) is **Leogang**, the geographic heart of the region and an old farming village that has grown up a bit thanks to prosperous skiing seasons. Typically for the region, Leogang earns most of its tourist money during the ski season. But from late spring to early fall, those crowds are gone and the infrastructure remains. The pace is slow, the visitor count low and the service more attentive.

In old dialect, “Leogang” meant “Path through the Swamp.” The swamp has been reclaimed through the centuries and now a small river, the “Black Leo,” flows through the valley. Villages and settlements grew up along the old path, and Leogang is more a linear town than a traditional one built around a central market square and church.

Surrounded by sunny and serene alpine meadows at an altitude of 2,500 feet, it sits against a backdrop of snow-topped mountains. Take the cable car to the top of **Asitz Mountain** for the glorious view. The Steinberge (Stone Mountains) and Steinernes Meer (Stone Sea) dominate the northern panorama and over the summit of the Asitz, the snowy peaks of the “Dreitausender” — glacial mountains higher than 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) — fill the southern view.

It’s a three-hour hike back to the bottom (long but not strenuous), and mountain huts seem to appear when most needed to abate thirst and hunger. Just watch out for mountain bikes, since Leogang is also site of BikeWorld, Europe’s largest mountain bike camp.

Leogang’s **Hütten** section is worth a visit, a small village that once housed miners and other mountain workers. The **Mining Museum** gives a hint of life during six centuries of mining (mostly silver, copper,

lead and nickel), an experience made even richer with a tour to the mine itself. The tour follows a series of steep ladders and can be strenuous—and is definitely not for the claustrophobic.

### **Natural Wonders**

Back on the Saalach, just 10 minutes north of Saalfelden, a collection of three natural wonders are easily explored. The **Lamprechtshöhle** is one of Europe's largest cave systems. About 700 meters (2,150 feet) are accessible to visitors who can climb 392 steps along a series of underground waterfalls and streams. The setting is not entirely controlled, and high water still threatens from time to time; red lights signal immediate evacuation. As interesting as the natural setting are the inscriptions on the walls and ceilings dating as far back as 1823, as well as crosses marking where people have died trying to find the end of the cave (or, according to legend, treasure). It wasn't until 1993 that a Polish team found another exit more than a mile high atop the Steinberge.

Two chasms — both protected natural monuments — lie within a five-minute drive or bus shuttle. During the last Ice Age, glaciers cut narrow clefts through the limestone walls of the Saalach Valley. In the

### **Key Websites for the Traveler**

- [www.gemut.com](http://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](http://www.viamichelin.com) The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- [www.travelgearnow.com](http://www.travelgearnow.com) Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10% off for subscribers.
- [www.webflyer.com](http://www.webflyer.com) Informative frequent flyer forums make this a must for air travelers.
- [bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en](http://bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en) German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- [www.sbb.ch/index\\_e.htm](http://www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm) Swiss and European rail schedules.
- [www.ski-europe.com](http://www.ski-europe.com) Top web resource for skiers with much data on Alpine resorts.
- [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com) Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- [www.germany-tourism.de](http://www.germany-tourism.de) Germany's national tourist authority.
- [www.austria.info/us](http://www.austria.info/us) Austria's national tourist authority.
- <http://www.hhog.de> Website for an alliance of historic German cities.

**Vorderkaserklamm**, the rift runs 80 meters (250 feet) deep along a 400-meter (1300-foot) gorge. The **Seisenbergklamm** runs 600 meters (nearly 2000 feet). At some places, the opposing walls are close enough to touch as misting waterfalls pour into frothy streams.

### **The "Pilgrim's Cathedral"**

Farther north, **St. Martin**, a traditional rural village surrounded by mountains, is well-known for the so-called "Pilgrim's Cathedral" at **Maria Kirchenthal**. The mountaintop masterpiece was designed by Fischer von Erlach, Austria's leading baroque architect (he built Schönbrunn in Vienna). Even before its completion in 1708, pilgrims trekked on foot from throughout Salzburg and Tirol. Today's traveler still has to climb (on foot, bike, car or taxi) a winding hillside road past shrines to the Stations of the Cross. While the external and internal architecture are stunning, the votive paintings are equally impressive. Each was contributed by a pilgrim as thanks for holy rescue from illness or accident and explains the story in words and pictures. Paintings portray falling trees, floods, avalanches, overturned boats, attacking soldiers, fires, and deathbed scenes.

Just to the north, **Lofer** is more of a patrician market town than farming village, which shows in the ornate and formal architecture. The city is also well-known as a center for outdoor sports and home base for rafting companies and adventure outfitters. Here, where the Saalach narrows, its rapids draw whitewater fans from across Europe.

From Lofer, it's barely 30 minutes to Salzburg. Or detour west through the Strub Pass and follow the tumbling waters of the Loferbach in what amounts to a 75-kilometer (46-mile) circuit around the base of the Steinberge. Most of the route is secondary or farm road. The pass divides the provinces of Salzburg and Tirol, and the ruins of an old castle and toll station mark the site of battles through the centuries.

### **Rural life in Unken**

Downstream from Lofer, in **Unken** — less a town than a collection of

rural villages spread across alpine foothills — the **Kalkofengut Farmers Museum** gives a powerful sense of rural life. The thick-walled house was last renovated in 1681 and its rooms have changed little through the centuries. The kitchen still has two open fireplaces and the arched ceiling, caked black with soot, once held hooks for meats that smoked slowly overhead. The museum is filled with exhibits from the 15<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including butter churns and molds, tobacco cutters, kitchen utensils (no forks — just knives and spoons), religious carvings, weaving machines, spinning wheels and curiosities like castration clamps and massive hairballs coughed up by favorite cows. Photographs show former residents through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century engaging in such old customs as stilt-dancing. Signs are in German but not necessary.

Before it reaches a tab of German territory, the Saalach relaxes (thanks to flood-control dams) before reentering Austria in a forest lakescape near Bad Reichenhall. Just past Salzburg, it joins the Salzach for a mutual flow into the Inn River, the Danube and, ultimately, the Black Sea.

### **Lodging**

#### **Krallerhof**

A farm for 300 years, the Krallerhof began its transformation to five-star hotel in the 1950s. It's still a half-star short, but guests don't notice the difference. This resort hotel with all-inclusive options has become a destination unto itself. Its 100 sumptuous guestrooms range from large to huge. Service is stellar. The hotel staff can take care of everything: tee-time at nearby golf courses, excursions, dinner reservations in one of the hotel's six restaurants and salons (opt for patio dining).

The €3 million Refugium wellness area and "beauty farm" includes six different types of sauna, relaxation grottos, treatment areas and an indoor swimming pool. An outdoor pool is set into a meadow with views to two mountain ranges. Nearby are tennis courts.

In the Vinothek, the sommelier

can recommend from a list of 250 wines. While the hotel is modern, many public spaces use “recycled” wood — floors, carved beams and walls — from old farm houses. The hotel is extremely popular with Austrians and Germans but hasn’t yet been “found” by Americans.

**Contact:** Krallerhof, Rain 6, A-5771 Leogang, tel: +49/6583/8246-0, fax: 8246-85, email:

[reservations@krallerhof.com](mailto:reservations@krallerhof.com), web: [www.krallerhof.com](http://www.krallerhof.com). Proprietors: Altenberger Family.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €118-135, doubles €228-306, includes buffet lunch, five-course dinner, afternoon coffee and pastries, activities program, free or discounted use of sports facilities.

**Rating:** QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 15/20

### Vitaloase zu den drei Brüdern

The “Vital Oasis at the Three Brothers” is an excellent choice for travelers who wish to escape to an exotic Alpine country retreat.

Named for the three mountain peaks looming over the modern farm-turned-hotel, drei Brüdern features an “oasis of the senses” with aroma grottos, alpine hay baths, and saunas that open to a private pond. The Sabbia Med desert chamber has a floor of warmed sand where guests can lie as the sun rises and sets over a desert scene staged with murals and props. Take a Cleopatra bath in a copper tub with milk, roses and orange blossoms, or get a wax- or mud-pack. Then enjoy the “fitness platter” of three flavorful cutlets coated in natural grains and seeds and served atop a fresh garden salad.

Rooms were renovated in August and blend modern conveniences with traditional reminders — such as an old-style tile oven and windows and doors with Romanesque arches. The tower suite climbs from the living room to an octagonal bedroom with a vaulted wooden ceiling and a 120-degree mountain view.

**Contact:** Vitaloase zu den drei Brüdern, Reith 11, A-5091 Unken, tel. 06589-4522, fax 06589-45223, email: [vitaloase@dreibrueder.at](mailto:vitaloase@dreibrueder.at). web: [www.dreibrueder.at](http://www.dreibrueder.at). Proprietors: Faistauer Family.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €56-82, doubles €104-150, includes dinner, afternoon snack, spa.

**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 16/20

### Salzburger Hof

Rooms are spacious and service is familiar and friendly at this modern yet traditional four-star hotel located in the heart of Leogang’s recreation area. All double rooms have balconies. Those on the “mountain side” open directly to Asitz Mountain, while on the “sunny side” the view is of the slightly-more-distant Steinberge range. The hotel restaurant attracts guests from throughout the area, always a good sign.

**Contact:** Salzburger Hof, Sonnberg 170, A-5771 Leogang, tel: +43/6583/7310-0, fax: 7311-67, email:

[office@salzburgerhof.co.at](mailto:office@salzburgerhof.co.at), web: [www.salzburgerhof.co.at](http://www.salzburgerhof.co.at). Proprietor: Hörl Family.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €75-89, doubles €130-168.

**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 15/20

### Hotel Das Bräu

A brewery and hostelry for much of its 400-year history, Das Bräu now distinguishes itself as one of the region’s finer historic hotels. Its restaurants have also gained considerable recognition. The building has been as much restored as renovated and bears a strong sense of history and rustic charm.

Guestrooms are individually furnished and feature Austrian antiques. Number 326 is a superb, spacious double with marble, hand-painted wood, a hand-decorated farmer’s closet and small sitting area. As with most rooms, the view is to farms and mountains.

**Contact:** Hotel Das Bräu, Number 28, A-5090 Lofer, tel: +43/6588/8207, fax: 82077, email: [dasbraeu@aon.at](mailto:dasbraeu@aon.at), web: [www.braeu.lofer.at](http://www.braeu.lofer.at). Proprietors: Brüggler and Rainer families.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €50, doubles €80  
**Ratings:** QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 16/20

### Gasthof zur Post

St. Martin is a tiny alpine village, which puts the Gasthof zur Post both at its heart and fringe. The former overnight stop for post coach riders

and passengers, the old inn abuts farmhouses, barns and fields to one side and the medieval church and cemetery on the other. Annie Meindl and her family have made a great effort to keep the rooms as original as possible while still offering modern conveniences. The third floor features the old dancing room, which today serves as a common parlor to a half-dozen guest rooms. Number 9 has antique beds, wooden floors, 19<sup>th</sup>-century paintings and a view of a chestnut tree backed by mountains.

**Contact:** Gasthaus zur Post, A-5092 St. Martin bei Lofer, tel: +43/6588/8502-0, fax: 8502-94, email:

[info@gasthof-post.info](mailto:info@gasthof-post.info), web: [www.gasthof-post.info](http://www.gasthof-post.info). Proprietor: Meindl Family.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €28-32, doubles €46-56 (higher prices for rooms with separate bedrooms and living rooms).

**Ratings:** QUALITY 12/20 VALUE 14/20

### Gasthaus Kirchenwirt

Built in 1326, the Kirchenwirt is Salzburg Province’s oldest inn. It’s fun to look at centuries-old paintings of the town. In one, the Kirchenwirt looks much as it does today.

History lives in the guestrooms and public areas, too, with plenty of antiques, oil paintings, portraits and the requisite antlers. Number 20 is a best-bet, a spacious room with a huge bathroom and a view to the Steinberge. The fourth generation of current owners, Lisi Unterrainer, makes guests feel at home and a private, walled-in garden is perfect for quiet lounging.

**Contact:** Gasthaus Kirchenwirt, Leogang Nr. 3, A-5771 Leogang, tel: +43/6583/8216, fax: 8459, email: [hotelkirchenwirt@nextra.at](mailto:hotelkirchenwirt@nextra.at), web: [www.hotelkirchenwirt.com](http://www.hotelkirchenwirt.com). Proprietors: Johannes and Elizabeth Unterrainer.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €65-72, doubles €130-142

**Ratings:** QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 14/20

### Food

#### Café Restaurant Bachmühle

At this restaurant, the only people made to feel more welcome than first-time guests are sec-

EDITOR'S CHOICE

ond-time guests. By then, Maria and Franz Riedelsperger know their new friends by name and are apt to sit down, swap stories and become part of their lives. This, of course, after a splendid meal.

Maria gets full credit for the kitchen, where typical fare includes potato-crusted perch in a white wine sauce, grilled trout, roast duck with dumplings and red cabbage, and braised venison with cranberries. Before dessert, take a stretch in the private garden.

While the indoor area is charming, the view from the balcony demands outdoor dining.

The Riedelspergers bring equal commitment and hospitality to their 16-bed hotel. When an Italian guest mentioned car trouble, Franz offered his own for the afternoon.

**Contact:** Café Restaurant Bachmühle, Sonnberg 148, A-5771 Leogang, tel: +43/6583/7132, fax: 7472, email: [bachmuehle@sbg.at](mailto:bachmuehle@sbg.at), web: [www.bachmuehle.sbg.at](http://www.bachmuehle.sbg.at). Proprietors: Maria and Franz Riedelsperger.

**Ratings:** QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 16/20

### Gasthaus Kirchenwirt

Though the Kirchenwirt has served guests for almost seven centuries, Elizabeth Unterrainer's family has run it for a mere 120 years. Today guests are welcomed cordially with an offer of sparkling wine and a bowl of fresh, wild mushrooms: "We can prepare them however you want," she says, and then tempts with dishes such as herbed chicken and roast shoulder of veal. At a nearby table, a server pours steaming broth over bread dumplings dense with mushrooms.

Kirchenwirt is a small inn in a small town, but menu choices are appealing and well-prepared. Appetizers include red caviar mousse, goose liver parfait with truffle honey and port-wine pear, and regional cheeses might be served with chutney. Salmon is tossed with fresh pasta in saffron oil, and mountain lamb roulade comes with garlic polenta — a perfect complement of flavors.

Dining is spread over several rooms, each with wood paneling and

plank floors, so that even crowded evenings seem quiet. Service is attentive and helpful. The range in price for main courses is €9-15.

**Contact:** Gasthaus Kirchenwirt, Leogang Nr. 3, A-5771 Leogang, tel: +43/6583/8216, fax: 8459, email: [hotelkirchenwirt@nextra.at](mailto:hotelkirchenwirt@nextra.at), web: [www.hotelkirchenwirt.com](http://www.hotelkirchenwirt.com). Proprietors: Hannes and Elizabeth Unterrainer.


**Ratings:** QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 15/20

### Priesteregg

This oversize mountain hut hidden in forests and rolling pastures, is a favorite of local farmers who enjoy its traditional, rustic setting. Order what they do: the *Hutessen* ("hut dinner"). Servers bring out what looks like a medieval torture device: a cast-iron cone with serrated sides that sits atop a metal basin. The purpose soon becomes clear. A flame is lit beneath the basin which is filled with beef broth and julienne vegetables. As the broth starts to simmer, the servers arrive with platters laden with beef and pork cutlets. The servers then demonstrate: hang a cutlet on the cone and let it sizzle. The finished product is eaten with baked potatoes and a variety of sauces. The meat is marinated to perfect tenderness and drips juices into the basin, which guests are urged to dip into with spoons. It's "all-you-can eat" including a bottomless wooden bowl of fresh salad and garlic bread for €15. Spareribs (cooked) can be substituted for the cutlets.

**Contact:** Priesteregg, Sonnberg 22, A-5771 Leogang, tel: +43/6583/8255, fax: 82554, email:

[priesteregg@eunet.at](mailto:priesteregg@eunet.at), web: [www.priesteregg.at](http://www.priesteregg.at). Proprietors: Hubert and Renate Oberlader.

**Ratings:** QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 14/20 

### READERS' FORUM

*Continued from page 1*

take an ATM Plus card instead, we decided to get one (we're probably in the small minority of folks in the US who didn't have one!) I made sure that the ATM card had the Plus logo on it and what a handy thing it was! It worked perfectly in small and large towns alike — no problem! The ex-

change rate was better than I could have gotten in the banks, I only paid a \$2.00 service charge once at a machine — the others, no charge.

I noticed in your Sept 04 edition that you wanted comments about whether your subscribers "craved comfort and sometimes a little luxury" — we do!

We have discontinued a lot of magazines over the years, but we won't cut our *Gemütlichkeit!* Instead of coasting on your past achievements, I appreciate the fact that you continue to put updated things in your publication which are so useful — like first night sleep and eat recommendations. It sounds like a small thing, but can kickoff a trip in such a special way!

LINDA AND DOC CORNUTT  
DALLAS TX

### Favors Moderately-Priced

Generally speaking, I would side more closely with Mr. Craig Haley's requests for reviews of moderately-priced accommodations. I'm in the 30-something demographic range and travel to Europe to enjoy the different culture, rather than to escape to a different form of comfort and luxury as requested by Mr. Kurt Kreuger in the next letter. I would contend that *Gemütlichkeit* does a good job providing reviews that are closer to the "comfortable" end of the scale than the "affordable" end. While I enjoy these reviews and hope to one day sample some nights in some of these properties, I inevitably resort to other Internet resources to find affordable lodging.

Frankly, my favorite accommodation in Germany is an **Ibis** hotel. While this chain doesn't offer distinctive properties with features and luxuries unique to any one city, I believe them to be an excellent value. Every one I've stayed in (at least 17 so far) has great proximity to train stations, very clean rooms, great European-style breakfasts, excellent coffee with a *Schluck* in the bar at night, perfectly firm mattresses, lots of hot water, and very courteous staff. On the downside, the rooms are usually small and the furniture is "Ikea-modern," but that's a trait

shared with many European hotels with rates less than 150 euros/night. I've also had good experiences with several **InterCity** hotels.

Here are some other non-chain hotels we have also enjoyed that are in the affordable category: **Hotel Schaeper-Siedenburg** in Bremen, **Inselresidenz Strandburg** on Juist, **Gasthof Auerhahn** in Salzburg, **Hotel Domschatz** in Quedlinburg, **Hotel Kapelle** in Innsbruck, **Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten** in Bad Reichenhall, and **Panoramahotel Lilienstein** across from Königstein.

I do pay close attention to your restaurant reviews, as I'm always looking for a handy lunch and am more willing to splurge on an enjoyable dinner. Your reviews of **Thüringerhof** in Leipzig were right on, and we have enjoyed fine meals there on two different occasions now. Several of your Nürnberg recommendations had great food, but were crowded. Restaurants worthy of your review might include: **Hotel Kapelle** in Innsbruck, **Kleiner Olymp** in Bremen, **Jan Paukert** in Prague, **Koebes** on Juist, **Thomas Brauhaus** in Leipzig (next to the Thomaskirche), **Steigl** pub in Salzburg, **Aussichtsreich** in Stuttgart (this is just 10 minutes walk from where I'm temporarily living, so I enjoy their hospitality frequently!), **Schoendorf Brauhaus** in Böblingen, **Henne** and/or **Kleine Markthalle** in Kreuzberg/Berlin, and **Tolle Knolle** in Konstanz.

Thanks for the opportunity to add feedback. I always look forward to every issue with bated breath, and I save every issue as a great reference for our next trip-planning efforts!

DAVID THAEMERT  
VIA EMAIL

### **GPS Makes a Difference**

We've just returned from a week in Germany using several recommendations from the *Gemütlichkeit* newsletter. For the first time we had "navigation" or GPS, in our rental car, and what a difference it made. No more searching for signs along the road or studying several maps to find our way. We simply punched in the town or street address and followed the directions (the system can be pro-

grammed for English).

Using the **Gasthof und Pension Hofmann**, in the small town of Altenstein (*Gemütlichkeit*, March 2001) as a base, we explored Franconia, including the cities of Bamberg and Coburg. Bamberg is a well-preserved medieval city spreading across seven hills. Known for its smoky *Rauchbier*, Bamberg's half-timbered houses and its location along the Regnitz River make it an interesting city to walk. When we returned to the Gasthof we sat on our little balcony and watched the sun set, after which we enjoyed a good German meal prepared to order by the owner, Jarek Trejgis. Herr Trejgis is an accomplished chef who takes great pride in the meals he prepares. He and his wife Wiola are gracious hosts. In Rödental we passed up the **Hummel** factory tour and instead visited the **Engel-Puppen** factory down the road, on the "German Toy Street", and watched the handwork that goes into making German dolls.

Our last two days were spent in Volkach, a charming town in the Franconian wine area, where we stayed at **Zur Schwane** (Hauptstrasse 12, Volkach am Main, web [www.schwane.de](http://www.schwane.de)), a Romantik hotel that knows how to cater to its guests. The warm hospitality of hotel manager Andreas Poth and staff made our visit a most pleasant one. Our room — €90 for a double — was clean and comfortable. Zur Schwane operates a family winery (35% of the wines are sold on the premises) and Herr Poth gave us an interesting tour of the candle-lit wine cellar. The dining room, with its *kachel ofen*, dark oak ceiling and painted wall panels, looked more like something you would expect to find in Austria or Switzerland. The dinner menu included local specialties which were tastefully prepared and served with great attention. The breakfast buffet had a bountiful display of fresh bread, rolls, home made sausage and cheeses, yogurt, muesli and fruit and several types of eggs. About a two-hour drive from Frankfurt, we hope to return to Zur Schwane.

INGRID DETWEILER  
CONCORD, MA

### **Avoiding Airport Rental Tax**

You've mentioned in the last issue or two the savings of renting a car at a location other than the airport or train station - perhaps a suggestion or two about a good location (assuming you've got luggage, etc.) near Frankfurt/Munich airports where this might be accomplished.

KURT VINCENT  
NASSAU, NY

### **Bavaria Still Number One**

The Black Forest is great but we still prefer Bavaria as our number one area of Germany. We used Staufen as our base to tour the BF and stayed at the **Hotel Kreuz-Post** (Hauptstrasse 65, tel. +49/07633/ 95320, fax 953232, web [www.kreuz-post-staufen.de](http://www.kreuz-post-staufen.de)) which had very nice rooms and excellent food but was really more of a restaurant with rooms than a hotel. After breakfast on the day the restaurant was closed, there wasn't a staff member to be found for the rest of the day. Another downside: there is no place one can just sit and have a glass of beer or wine. The restaurant is very formal and the weather was too cool to sit at one of the outside tables. Stayed at the **Villa Hugel** in Trier for two days, a true *gemütlichkeit* experience. Very good, although modern, accommodations and very friendly staff. It is located in a residential district, just a 5-minute walk from the Roman baths. My husband enjoyed the complimentary sauna and pool.

Our last night was at the **Hotel Westend** in Frankfurt, an interesting small hotel reminiscent of a villa, one block from the skyscrapers. It was OK for a last night, full of beautiful antiques and with a nice breakfast including eggs to order, but the carpet in our room was literally threadbare and the wall covering needed to be updated. In good weather an inviting rear garden is used for breakfast, but we're still searching for the "perfect" last night hotel. Any suggestions?

VIRGINIA KIEHN  
VIA EMAIL

### **Berlin Hotel**

I recently spent a week in Berlin. In choosing a hotel, I looked for loca-

tion, price, security, and of course, *gemütlichkeit*. I found **Hotel Gendarm**, Charlottenstrasse 61, from your hotel database. My criteria were met in full measure at Hotel Gendarm. I'd like to return to Berlin someday, and will stay again at this hotel.

ROBERTS HORNER  
ST. PAUL, MN

### Rothenburg Advice

Last spring we spent four nights at the **Romantik Hotel Marksturm** in Rothenburg. It was a delight. The owners, Stephen and Lilo Berger could not have been more hospitable. Though we had to climb stairs to our second floor room, the accommodations were in a suite and the parking space was free. Good breakfast buffets and dinners whipped up by the owner-chef Stephen added to the wonderful atmosphere of the hotel that has been owned by his family for over 100 years.

The city hasn't changed much since I visited it in 1955 while stationed near Munich in the U.S. Army. There is much to see and do in and around this medieval gem and luckily there weren't many tourists while we were there. Here a few musts:

- Walk the fortress walls around the city
- Take the **Night Watchman Tour** (an hour and a half) which starts every night in the Hauptplatz at 8pm
- Have dinner at the "Hole" ("Hell" in English), the oldest restaurant in town — small with great food and atmosphere
- Drive one hour north to the city of Würzburg to see the **Schloss and Residenz**
- Visit Kathe Wohlfahrt's Christmas village shops which have decorations and unique treasures you won't believe.

While paying the bill, the room rate was lower than originally quoted, even with a suite. Last but not least, the girls who waited on us, manned the front desk, carried our luggage and were generally very helpful, were fabulous.

BILL WOOD  
VIA EMAIL

### Gemüt Has it Right, Except...

Re: Your query to provide more higher end or lower end hotel reviews. This subscriber feels you've got just about the right mix, as it now stands. However, an occasional review of a posh watering hole would not be unwelcome.

Re: Your announcement to cut to 10 issues

It seems to me that travelers who can pay the freight for an Atlantic hop, plus all the attendant costs while abroad can easily take a hit for the price increase that would allow you to continue publishing 11 issues. Why not put it to a vote? I'll wager that the response will overwhelmingly favor continuing the 11 issues.

On another matter, I must tell you that I find it irritating and annoying that you no longer provide equivalent dollar amounts in your evaluation of hotels and restaurants. (Yes, I'm aware of the exchange rates that appear at the bottom of the face page, but I want those dollar amounts provided within the text.)

It seems to me that this should be a basic service that you owe your subscribers. Is laziness creeping in??

BILL POLCARI  
MEDFORD, MA

*(Ed. Note: The reason we no longer show prices in both local currency and U.S. dollars is that our newsletters are referenced for several years beyond their publication date. A €90 hotel room was \$76 in July of 2001; today it is \$117. Such a huge difference is misleading — especially to less sophisticated travelers.*

*With regard to the number of issues published per year; since 9/11 a variety of factors have combined to insure that soon enough we will be forced to raise the subscription price. The move to 10 issues simply delayed the inevitable.)* ☒

### DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

*chkeit / Auto Europe booking while in Europe — add days, get a different car, etc. — do not deal directly with the car rental company. Instead, use the toll-free-from-Europe phone number on your voucher. It's staffed 24/7.*

- Make sure your car has a spare

tire. Be sure, too, to check for damage before leaving the rental station. If any is found, have it noted on the rental contract. Otherwise you could be held responsible. It's a good idea, too, to make sure that everything on your car is in working order: lights, radio, turn signals, emergency brake, even the clutch. Three days into a rental, one *Gemütlichkeit* customer lost the clutch on his Avis midsize car in the U.K. In addition to the inconvenience, Avis took the position the clutch was o.k. at the start of the rental but the customer wore it out through improper use. This is a man for whom our travel service has booked 27 cars — all standard transmission — in Europe since 1996, was born and raised in Germany, and never drove an automatic transmission vehicle until he emigrated to the U.S. as an adult.

• Heed the fine print on your voucher or reservation. Every voucher issued by *Gemütlichkeit's* travel department carries this warning: "Client is advised to return the vehicle with a full tank of gas and to retain copies of gas receipts." If the rental company has to fill your tank the price will be astronomical.

Our best single piece of advice is to book through a company that offers a 24/7 toll-free-from-Europe "safety-net" help-line. *Gemütlichkeit / Auto Europe* offers such a service and it is the answered prayer of the traveler in trouble. Supposing the agent at the counter tells you he doesn't have the midsize car with automatic transmission specified on your reservation? Show him the toll-free number and ask to be connected to the help-line. As the number one booker of rental cars in Europe (more than Hertz or Avis), Auto Europe has powerful leverage with its principal suppliers: Avis, Europcar, Sixt, Hertz and National, and the 24/7 help-line folks know where to find supervisors and vice presidents. As far as we are aware, this service is unique to Auto Europe — and to *Gemütlichkeit* readers who have access to specially discounted Auto Europe rates. Those who book directly with Hertz, Avis, et al, will just have to fight their own rental car counter battles. —RHB ☒