

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

Living with a Strong Euro

It is only similar to my age in that the number looks bigger than it feels. I refer to the fact that with this issue we enter our 19th year of publishing *Gemütlichkeit*. An amazingly high percentage of you have been with us since that first year, 1987. But whether you've been around since day one or just signed up, please know we are truly grateful. It's been a great ride so far and we hope along the way we've directed you to a hotel or restaurant you enjoyed, to an interesting sight you might otherwise have missed, a ride down a pretty back road, and in the process saved you some money.

On previous anniversaries we've brought back the cream of bygone issues by compiling a series of lists such as the 10 top hotels without running water or the 20 best restaurants that allow dogs over 100 pounds. We'll do that again sometime but at this point I think it will be more useful to turn our attention to the coming travel year.

When the subject of European travel is raised these days, one word invariably works its way into the conversation — euro. It's big, it's bad and, if you're not careful, it can bite (see the "What it Costs" list on page 8). In the early months of 2005, as you plan your trips, we will direct a substantial percentage of our efforts to helping you find ways to minimize its effects. Not only will we offer 'euro beating' strategies, we'll increase the number of recommendations for affordable hotels, restaurants, cities, and sights — see this month's story on Seeg.

We'll begin with a few brief suggestions.
Continued on page 2...

in this issue...

p1 Wiesbaden
p1 Seeg Near Füssen
p4 Key Websites
p6 Readers' Forum
p8 Everyday European Prices

GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

WIESBADEN

Yes, this fashionable 'Veezbaden' is the very same German city of 'Weesbaden' where your neighbor's son or daughter is stationed in the U.S. military.

Wiesbaden is a city of spas and casinos, elegance and luxury. Visitors come to relax, be pampered — and gamble. Some see it as Germany's answer to Monte Carlo.

By **Jim Johnson** Comparisons to Vienna are also apt, though on a smaller scale. There's a concentrated collection of buildings in historical — primarily neoclassical — style that lend Wiesbaden a sophisticated, noble and grand air. Extensive green spaces, parks and boulevards add to its bright personality. And, like the Viennese, Wiesbadeners love their cafés and afternoon pastries.

Though good values abound, most visitors aren't in town for a bud-

get vacation. They come for world-class hotels and restaurants, culture and events, spa visits and wellness programs — and for days that start with a walk up the **Neroberg Mountain**, then continue with an afternoon at the thermal baths, and end at the Casino. Or maybe an outdoor concert with dancing and afternoon tea. That's how life in Wiesbaden has been for much of the past two centuries.

Bathing in the fields

It all started with the thermal springs that are still central to life, tourism and commerce in Wiesbaden. The Romans discovered them nearly 2000 years ago, then the Fran-

Continued on page 3...

Beating the Euro...

Bavarian Hideaway

Seeg is a sweet little package: the visitor gets an almost idyllic, way-off-the-beaten-track hamlet located close to the main tourist attractions of Southern Bavaria; a quiet, comfortable hotel offering dollar-friendly prices; and a simple but authentic restaurant that serves good farm food to locals.

The gathering of buildings that comprise this tiny village are set by an onion-domed rococo church, **St. Ulrich**, sheltering a perfect little cemetery, all backdropped by a line of jagged peaks of the Allgau range. The hilltop location commands long views of mountains, forests and meadows.

Seeg works as a headquarters for seeing Southern Bavaria or as just a "chill out" hideaway.

The pretty drive from Füssen that

winds past the Hopfensee and then into the rolling hills takes less than 15 minutes. The town is an hour and 45 minutes via a direct train from Munich, but those who want to see the region's sights: the **Wieskirche**; the **Royal Castles, Neuschwanstein, Hohenschwangau** and **Linderhof**; **Ehrenberg Castle** in nearby Reutte (Austria); **Garmisch-Partenkirchen** and the **Zugspitze**, Germany's highest peak; **Ettal** with its great **Abbey**; **Oberammergau** of **Passion Play** fame; **Lindau** on the **Bodensee**, and such pleasant Bavarian towns as **Murnau** and **Mittenwald**, will do better with a rental car.

A look at a good map or atlas

Continued on page 6...

Exchange rates as of 01/27/05

1 euro = \$1.30

1 Swiss franc = \$0.84

<http://www.gemut.com>

February 2005

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

gestions, several of which we'll expand upon in coming issues:

- **Rent an apartment:** Or a house, chalet, or condo where you can cook some or all of your own meals. On a per square foot basis vacation rentals are cheaper than hotels and you control costs by paying in advance in dollars and limiting restaurant exposure. We recommend **Drawbridge to Europe** www.drawbridgetoeurope.com).

- **Try an 'Untour'** (www.untours.com): At *Gemütlichkeit* we're all about unstructured, independent travel, but this 30-year-old company's packages offer minimal shoulder-rubbing with fellow travelers and great prices that include carefully-chosen accommodations with fully-equipped kitchen; a rail pass or rental car; first-rate, location-specific reference materials; and roundtrip air, all starting at about \$1900 per person, less without air. We'll do a full story on Untours in an upcoming issue.

- **Look for 'Bib' Hotels:** Michelin's *Red Guides* identify hotels offering "good accommodations at moderate prices." The Germany guide marks hotels offering double rooms with breakfast for less than 90 euros. In Switzerland, the ceiling is 180 Swiss francs, not as good a deal. (There is no *Red Guide* for Austria.) The guides list many hotels with rooms in these lower price ranges, but those given the 'Bib' (Bibendum,

the "Michelin Man") designation are the best of the lot. *Gemütlichkeit* has stayed in or inspected a number of "Bib" hotels and found them to be excellent value.

- **Trust Priceline:** Because a credit card commitment is required before the name of the hotel you are bidding on is revealed, many are wary of the Priceline.com process. However, with the bidder able to specify a fairly specific geographic location — Munich Airport, Munich City Center South and Munich City Center North — and a level of quality — 4-star superior, 3-star quality, 2-star economy — it's hard to go very far wrong. And the savings can be huge. Here are some recent Priceline successful hotel bids, according to posts at www.biddingfortravel.com (by the way, be sure to visit this site before making a Priceline bid): **Zürich Marriott**, \$84; **Munich Airport Marriott**, \$50; **Vienna's Le Meridien**, \$91, **Mercury Vienna Zentrum**, \$50. These are 'per room' prices. To compare, I checked the Zürich Marriott's website and got a quote of \$185 per night.

- **Don't Buy 'Stuff' in Europe:** Try to leave the U.S. as fully equipped as possible. Items like batteries, aspirin, cough drops, hand lotion, paperback books in English, voltage converters, etc., are much more expensive when purchased in Europe. The battery charger for my Nokia GSM phone failed while in Austria in December and a replacement cost €25 or about \$33. Here in the U.S. at the local AT&T store it

was \$14.95.

- **Monitor Bottled Water Consumption:** At one point during our last trip I realized we were sometimes spending as much as \$15 per day on water. In Switzerland a small bottle of mineral water was often more expensive than a *Stange* (small draft beer). Restaurants will serve tap water if you ask for it and you might also bring a water bottle from the U.S. to fill from the sink in your hotel room.

- **Cover Less Territory:** Train travelers will save by limiting travel to one country. In Germany a couple with a **German Twin Pass** can ride the fastest, sleekest ICE trains for as little as \$24.30 per person, per day. Switzerland's best per day, per person rail deal is the consecutive day **Swiss Saver Pass** that ranges in price from \$11.33 to \$58, depending on number of days (the more days, the better the price) and class of service.

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: **seiw** Password: **9898**

Vol. 19, No. 1
February 2005

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

Publishers: Robert H. & Elizabeth S. Bestor
Editor: Robert H. Bestor
Senior Writer: Jim Johnson
Contributors: Mark Honan, Nikki Goth Itoi
Consulting Editor: Thomas P. Bestor
Online Services: Kurt Steffans
Subscriber Travel Services: Andy Bestor, Laura Riedel

Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published 10 times each year by UpCountry Publishing, 288 Ridge Road, Ashland OR 97520. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 541/488-8462, fax: 541/488-8468, e-mail travel@gemut.com. Web site: www.gemut.com. Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 10 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
Gemütlichkeit, 288 Ridge Road., Ashland OR 97520

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

conians took over and in 829 gave the town its name "Wies-baden" — literally bathing in the fields, since the waters bubbled up through the ground to form steaming lakes.

In 1810, ruling Dukes of Nassau built the first Kurhaus, with a casino as an additional source of income, and the city soon became one of Europe's leading spa destinations for royalty and nobility as well as for artists, writers, musicians and philosophers. Goethe came in 1814. Dostoyevsky's, *The Gambler*, is based on Wiesbaden. Wagner worked on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Wiesbaden. Kaiser Wilhelm II perhaps left the greatest impact, making it his favorite summer residence and launching an ambitious construction program. At the start of the 20th century, Wiesbaden had Germany's largest concentration of millionaires and the spa business boomed. At one time, 66 grand hotels prospered.

The city — and the country — declined during World War I, but its lack of strategic importance saved it from significant bombing in WW II.

"Jewel of neoclassicism"

Lovers of art history and architecture will find few renaissance or baroque gems here thanks both to 17th-century fires and the imperial construction spree. The **Old Town Hall**, built in 1610, is the oldest building and one of the few surviving renaissance examples.

With the extensive 19th- and early 20th-century construction, Wiesbaden is known for its neoclassic buildings. A walk through town shows the breadth of that construction. With its five towers, the 1862 **Market Church**, dominates the **Market Square**. The **New Town Hall**, built in 1887 in neo-renaissance style, was heavily damaged in WWII, and its front façade reflects the relatively hurried nature of reconstruction. To view the original 19th century architecture, go around back.

The most impressive area is the district around the "new" **Kurhaus**, the massive and magnificent Wil-

Wiesbaden Basics

Population: 270,000

Elevation: 83-608 meters (272-1,995 feet)

Tourist Info: Wiesbaden Tourist Information, Marktstrasse 6, D-65183 Wiesbaden, tel.: +49/611/17 29 930, fax: 17 29 798, email: tourist-service@wiesbaden.de, web: www.wiesbaden.de.

Nearest Airport: Frankfurt (27 km/17 miles)

Driving Distances:

Cologne	162 km	100 miles
Frankfurt	43 km	27 miles
Heidelberg	97 km	60 miles
Koblenz	98 km	61 miles
Munich	424 km	262 miles

Rail Travel: While frequent intercity trains service Wiesbaden, travelers often connect in nearby Mainz and Frankfurt. The Frankfurt Airport is serviced by both German Rail and the regional "S-Bahn."

City Tour: Many interiors are not accessible to individuals but can be visited during city sightseeing tours (in English on Saturdays only). Book through Wiesbaden Tourist Information.

Events:

- **International May Theater Festival**, May 01-31, 2005
- **International Horse Show**, May 13 – 16, 2005
- **The Classic German Street Festival**, June 10 – 11, 2005
- **Rheingau Music Festival**, June 25 - August 27, 2005 (in Wiesbaden as well as at historical locations such as at Schloss Johannisberg, the Monastery of Eberbach, and vineyards and village churches in the Rheingau)
- **Rheingau Wine Festival**, August 12-21, 2005 (street festival with 115 wine booths and wines from Rheingau and Wiesbaden vineyards, with music and other entertainment)

helminian structure that opened in 1907. The Kurhaus itself inspires awe. A massive dome towers over a foyer rich with mosaic medallions and marble statues. It houses the ornate **Casino**, where roulette, blackjack and poker are the primary games of choice. Visitors can tour the Casino and even take lessons (jackets and ties required for men and available for rental).

Across the so-called **Bowling Green** with its pools and fountains, the **State Theater**, a masterpiece of neo-baroque, opened in 1896 with an opera festival initiated by Wagner.

The **Nerostrasse** gives a sense of what much of the city must have

looked like in the early 20th century. Simple architecture stretches along most of the northern side (save for a tattoo parlor), in a variety of styles. Shops are downstairs, apartments upstairs. This is the city's pub district, popular on warm summer evenings.

For a traditional Roman-Irish bath experience visit the 1913 **Kaiser-Friedrich Therme**, with its gorgeous tile work, archways and grottos. The ritual involves a process of steam rooms, saunas, hot and cold pools and relaxation rooms.

A few blocks away, at the **Kochbrunnen** (Hot Fountain), four swan-neck spigots pour steaming water into a marble cauldron under a stone pavilion. Roman baths, medieval bath houses, and great hotels once rimmed this entire square.

Though the former **Palast Hotel** is now apartments, its stone-block structure, wrought-iron balconies, carved statues and intricate scrollwork hint at former majesty. Enrico Caruso once performed and was a guest here.

Shopping

Wilhelmstrasse is the main shopping venue with high-end shops and boutiques. Stop at **Café Blum** (Wilhelmstrasse 44-46) for the best pastries — especially the pineapple and marzipan hometown favorite, *Wiesbadener Törtchen*.

Nearby **Taunusstrasse** is Wiesbaden's "Antique Mile." At #34, the **Kunsthandel Regina-Schmitz-Avila** sells 18th- and 19th-century German furniture that rivals many museum collections. **C. Rinnelt Antiquariat** at #36 offers old books, many from the early 18th century. For art deco it's **Eckhart Lohmann Antiquitäten** at #43 for its collection of paintings, prints and sculpture.

Green space

Parks and woodlands have long been central to the Wiesbaden experience. The **Kurpark** was designed in 1852 in the style of an English garden. Drive or walk, but don't miss **Hildasstrasse**, where upscale modern homes mix with villas from the early 20th century. Older red and yellow brick villas run along the **Parkstrasse**.

The city's **Neroberg Mountain** is accessible via car, on foot, or aboard the **Nerobergbahn** funicular. Built in 1888, it remains a technical achievement, driven entirely by a water-ballast counterweight that when full pulls the car up the mountain and when empty allows it to descend.

At the top, note the plain but impressive **Soldiers' Memorial**: giant concrete blocks with bas relief WWI soldiers. On one side they are marching, while on the other they are sprawled in death beneath the words "15,680 Kameraden."

Rheingau Gateway

The great **Rheingau** wine region begins here and stretches north to Rudesheim between the Rhine and the Taunus Mountains. Worthy of excursions are towns like **Biebrich** and such wine villages as **Eltville**. Great mansions rise from many vineyards and **Schloss Vollrads** and **Schloss Johannisberg** are worth special detours. Vollrads, with its remnants of a 14th-century moated castle, is known for award-winning wines, while Johannisberg, where the 89-year-old duchess of Metternich still resides, draws regular dining guests from 100 miles away.

The **Eberbach Monastery**, where the medieval thriller *Name of the Rose* was filmed, is one of Germany's most

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, luggage, all at 10% off for subscribers.
- www.webflyer.com Informative frequent flyer forums make this a must for air travelers.
- 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.austria.info/us Austria's national tourist authority.
- <http://www.hhog.de> Website for an alliance of historic German cities.

extensive medieval complexes and includes a room nearly one-quarter the size of a football field.

Lodging

Wiesbaden's upscale demographic translates to an unusually high concentration of fine hotels, many offering excellent value.

Hotel Schwarzer Bock

The hotel's 19th-century façade was damaged during WWII and repaired quickly — though not very creatively—in the '50s. But the modern and almost bland exterior belies an historic, decorative interior. The lobby's red marble is the same as used in the Empire State Building.

Editor's Choice

Accessible, friendly and personable, the five-star "Black Ram" has all the amenities, from an indulgent staff to the last details in the spacious, elegant guestrooms.

All rooms were totally refurbished in 1997, and incremental renovations are continuous. Most view the Kochbrunnen Platz or the peaceful inner courtyard, with ivy-draped balconies and walls. To face the courtyard, request numbers 205-224 or 305-324. Rooms 223, 224, 323 and 324 have the widest views. Number 202 is especially large and faces the plaza.

The hotel's elegant **Capricorne Restaurant** is worth a visit if only for its historic private dining rooms. One, the Ingelheimer, contains 16th-century woodcarvings the hotel purchased from a private collection.

Contact: Radisson SAS Schwarzer Bock Hotel, Kranplatz 12, D-65183 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/1550, fax 1551 11, email: Wiesbaden@radissonsas.com, web: www.radissonsas.com.

Daily Rates: Singles €105-205, doubles €105-235. Senior discounts of as much as 50 percent are often available for those over 65.

Ratings: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 19/20

Fontana Hotel

This excellent three-star value is on a hill adjacent to the Kurpark, about a 15-minute walk from downtown or five minutes by bus. The

ultramodern building is in one of the city's finest residential areas. The 25 guestrooms are spacious and bright, with lots of angles that create alcoves and make the rooms feel more spacious. The best have balconies overlooking the park.

Contact: Fontana Hotel, Sonnenberger Strasse 62, D- 65193 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/1811/60, fax 1811/666, email: info@fontana.net, web: www.fontana.de

Daily Rates: Singles €75-135, doubles €118-170.

Ratings: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

Nassauer Hof

This grand hotel in the Wilhelmian style was built in 1813 and expanded during the late 19th-century spa heyday. Located very near the Kurhaus, its first guests were royalty and nobles.

Though destroyed in WW II, the Nassauer was painstakingly rebuilt in its original style. While still classic in appearance, the interior is more contemporary than the Schwarzer Bock.

There are 169 spacious, elegant rooms over five floors, and even the smallest have lofty ceilings and high-end, traditional furnishings. Ask for a room that looks to the Kurhaus and is in the historical wing rather than the more modern north wing, built in 1988. Rooms 401 and 405 are best bets.

The hotel's Michelin-starred restaurant, **Ente**, features Eurasian and Mediterranean cuisine while the less expensive **Orangerie** offers "New German" and international dishes.

In addition to its Estée Lauder Beauty Center, the Nassauer Hof features a top-floor pool fed by the thermal springs. Its arched windows frame the Market Square steeple and the shimmering reflection in the pool.

Contact: Hotel Nassauer Hof, Kaiser-Friedrich-Platz 3-4, D-65183 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/133-0, fax: 133-632, email: verkauf2@nassauer-hof.de, web: www.nassauer-hof.de

Daily Rates: Singles €223-283, doubles €273-333, excluding breakfast of €22 per person. Weekend rates are generally 35% lower.

Ratings: QUALITY 19/20, VALUE 18/20

Trüffel

The four-star Trüffel opened in 2002 as a natural expansion of the gourmet delicatessen and café/bistro operation of the same name. The target market was the same: a clientele that appreciates quality.

Editor's Choice

Designed by Milan architect, Stefano Orsi, the spaces are not only visually appealing but relaxing. Natural materials used include hardwood parquet floors, blends of dark unfinished wood with soft fabrics, and lots of whites, creams and browns. Furnishings were custom designed — from lamps to ceramic, freestanding countertop sinks and wall spigots. Each of the 24 rooms is soundproofed and air-conditioned.

For those who need to stay in touch there are answering machines, faxes, Internet connections and video players. Wireless Internet access is available throughout the facility.

Number 31 is a lower-cost, oversized "comfort" room with a view to the courtyard and a huge modern bath. Room 33, a "premium" room has less view but is huge with a bathroom that in size rivals many guestrooms. Thanks to slanting ceilings, sixth-floor rooms have the best views and coziest atmosphere. Room 61 offers a super look at the Market Church. Rooms 53, 54 and 56 have balconies

Contact: Trüffel, Webergasse 6-8, D-65183 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/99055-0, fax: 99055-55, email: hotel@trueffel.net, web: www.trueffel.net.

Daily Rates: Singles €110-145, doubles €145-195, €20 less per person on weekends.

Ratings: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

Hotel Oranien

The 126-year old Oranien combines a strong hint of Wiesbaden grand-hotel elegance with the familiarity of a small, family-run property. Owners Andrea and Gerald Kink are frequently at the reception desk, and their staff seems equally committed to ensuring guests feel at home. Even during a sold-out period, they recognized and addressed guests by name and responded to every request.

There are 85 rooms in two sections, one from the 19th century, the other more recent. Rooms are much the same in both, but the older section offers a bit more character — especially its hallways. The oversized rooms are tasteful and classic with rich colors and transmit a sense of how a designer might have designed a 1890 room with 2005 materials.

To get a sense of how little the city has changed in the last century, look at the prints on the third floor.

Contact: Hotel Oranien, Platter Strasse 2, D-65193 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/1882-0, fax: 1882-200, email: info@hotel-oranien.de, web: www.hotel-oranien.de. Hosts: Andrea and Gerald Kink.

Daily Rates: Singles €105-140, doubles €140-160. On weekends; singles €82.50, doubles €99.

Ratings: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 17/20

Sustenance

Wagner im Opelbad

The Bauhaus-style Wagner was built in 1934 as a small restaurant at the Opelbad pool on top of the Neroberg. The interior design and furnishings follow the simple, Bauhaus form-follows-function style: open floor plan, geometric shapes, natural colors, lots of chrome and glass. Even at age 70, the space feels contemporary — but in a 1930s kind of way.

In summer, sit on the wide terrace under white canvas umbrellas and look to the city, the Rhine and the Taunus mountains. At night, watch the lights of the city. Even inside, there are views from every table.

The food is creative, fresh and fun. A huge (and hugely tasty) salad featured figs with prosciutto and mozzarella. A large fig was cut and formed in a floral shape in the center, and ruby-red figs alternated with mozzarella strips between the "petals." All was topped with arugula and golden olive oil. Meat dishes include veal roulade filled with spinach and mozzarella, rumpsteak with shallot sauce, and *dippehas*, a regional specialty of rabbit and pork simmered in their juices and wine, then served with fried polenta. Fish spe-

cialties include sautéed shrimp with fresh asparagus and new potatoes, and salmon *tagliatelle* in light cream sauce. Many guests come just for desserts such as hot wild berries with fresh vanilla ice cream or *crème brûlée* with bourbon vanilla ice cream.

Entrées range from €12-18. With an appetizer, wine and dessert, the check could top €25-30 per person. A lighter bistro menu ranges from €8-13. Or just come in the evening for an aperitif. (There's even a special midnight menu.)

Contact: Wagner im Opelbad, Auf dem Neroberg 2, D-65193 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/52 51 00, fax: 59 95 68, email: info@wagner-gastronomie.de, web: <http://www.wagner-gastronomie.de/>

Ratings: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 17/20

Trüffel

Though trendy and upscale, Trüffel's Café/Bistro is neither exclusive nor expensive. Health-conscious diners will like the extensive salad entrées and wok dishes. Hurried eaters can rely on the lunch-service guarantee: food in 10 minutes or it's free. The setting is upbeat with lots of windows, mirrors and wood.

A superb market salad consists of three or four varieties of crisp lettuce mixed with radicchio, sliced vegetables, raspberries, persimmons, pears and apples, all in a raspberry dressing. Other attractive choices include salmon-watercress mousse, grilled Mediterranean vegetables with cold-pressed olive oil and warmed French goat cheese, tuna carpaccio with salmon tartar and avocado slices, ravioli with truffle filling, coconut soup with garlic and tempura lobster, risotto with fontina cheese and fresh truffles, and veal with mushroom risotto. For dessert, try Thai basil parfait with mango cream and sweet pesto.

At the upstairs Trüffel Restaurant, larger and more elaborate versions of the bistro fare are available as well as an expanded menu. To save money, come during the week for the business lunch, a three-course meal for €16.50 — not cheap but a great value given the quality.

Figure on €8-18 per person downstairs, double that upstairs.

Contact: Trüffel, Webergasse 6-8, D-65183 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/99055-0, fax: 99055-55, email: hotel@trueffel.net, web: www.trueffel.net.

Ratings: QUALITY: 17/20, VALUE 18/20

Käfer's

This Kurhaus restaurant is the social center of Wiesbaden. It even draws TV personalities from nearby Frankfurt and politicians make the short walk from the Hessian parliament. A French-style brasserie, Käfer's is as magnificent as the building in which it is housed, with wood-paneled walls and gold leaf and leather trimmed ceilings. Request the less formal and more peaceful Salon des Flacons, sans piano bar.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The cuisine features exquisite, light Mediterranean dishes with local influences and seasonal ingredients.

After taking our order, the waiter re-set the silverware based on the dishes chosen. Another server arrived with Pellegrino and a platter of fresh breads and doughy pretzels with prosciutto.

A salmon tartare first course was served atop a giant potato pancake with a dollop of butter and sprigs of dill. The bright pink of the raw fish set off the golden brown of the pancake — crisp on the outside and gooey inside. Rich pumpkin soup, served in a bell jar, followed.

The sea bass entree came encrusted in ground peppercorns and herbs and came with braised spinach. The fish, bathed in a rich brown sauce with capers and chanterelles, was firm and flaky. A sprig of rosemary lent a subtle but not overpowering perfume. This lovely presentation was finished with salad greens clasped in a cucumber ring.

"Wellness platter" sounds much too plain for a dessert that included such berries and fruits as kiwi, grapes, blueberries, and raspberries with mango sorbet in sugar mesh on a giant white ceramic square.

Dinner is served until 2am, and the Sunday brunch is highly recommended. Reservations essential.

Contact: Käfer's im Kurhaus, Kurhausplatz 1. D-65189 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/536/200, fax: 536-222, email: kaefers@spielbank-wiesbaden.de, web: www.spielbank-wiesbaden.de.

Ratings: QUALITY 19/20, VALUE 19/20

Artes Vinorum

Located off the Palace Square in the former Ratskeller, the Artes Vinorum takes visitors on a short tour of European monasteries. Inspired by wines from their home monastery near Ulm, the restaurant team has created a menu that focuses exclusively on traditional wines made by monks and nuns. There's a history and description of the various monasteries (in German, but the staff is happy to summarize) with suggested dishes from each: from the nearby Abbey of St. Hildegard in Rudesheim (chicken in Riesling sauce with herb cream soup starter) to Notre Dame des Neiges in France (snail ragout with fresh garlic and baguette or French cheese plate with baguette).

Come for the wine or enjoy traditional dishes such as boiled beef with horseradish and boiled potatoes, baked Camembert with cranberries, pan-fried pork cutlet with creamed kohlrabi, and grilled rump steak with pepper cream sauce and potato croquettes. Lighter meals are also available. Entrées range from €9-13 and wines from €2.60-5.80 per glass.

The restaurant opened in March 2004 after a full renovation of the cellar space. The vaulted ceilings and neoclassical columns create a bright, open look that defies the cellar setting. Modern chairs, tables and light fixtures complete this pleasant space.

Contact: Artes Vinorum, Schlossplatz 6, D-65183 Wiesbaden, tel: +49/611/30 00 23, fax: 30 00 24, email: Wiesbaden@DerAndechser.de, web: www.DerAndechser.de/Wiesbaden

Ratings: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20

SEEG

Continued from page 1

(ADAC Maxiatlas, \$23.96 at www.travelessentials.com) of the region will reveal interesting backroads in all directions — note the Maxiatlas gives nearby towns Nessel-

wang, Mittelberg, and Rosshaupten the red underline "worth seeing" designation — but one drive springs immediately to mind.

The Drive

The route takes in Oberammergau, the Wieskirche, the Ettal Abbey, Linderof Castle and miles of beautiful country roads. From Seeg head straight east to Rosshaupten, then northeast to Lechbruck and on to Steingaden where you will begin to notice signs to the Wieskirche, a three-star Michelin sight.

After you've seen the church, drive back to the main road and turn right toward Wildsteig and Schwaig — both tiny towns — and then right again (south) on highway 23. Pass through Saulgrub. At Oberammergau you may want to stop and take a walk around the town. Just before Ettal, turn right onto the "yellow road" (its color on the map); or you may choose to continue to Ettal and visit the Abbey. With the latter, you'll have to retrace your steps for about a kilometer and this time turn left on to the "yellow road" west toward Linderhof.

After touring the Castle, continue along this gorgeous stretch of road that winds through forest and pasture, under craggy mountain peaks on the left, and finally beside the shore of the Plansee to Reutte, in Austria. It is backroads driving at its finest. From Reutte head north to Füssen and then back to Seeg. Even though it is less than 90 miles, plan a full day to allow time for sightseeing, lunch and photo-ops.

The Hotel

The very quiet Pension Heim is an exceptionally warm and friendly family-run hotel.

Room Number 20, on the first floor, is on a corner and features a snug sitting area with couch, easy chair, coffee table and TV. Its pleasant balcony, accessible from the bedroom and also from the small, adjacent dressing room, offers a fine view across the valley to the "pre-Alps" beyond Füssen. An oriental rug is laid over the parquet floor and furniture is light wood. The small bath-

room has a stall shower.

The breakfast room is on the ground floor and looks out on the garden. There is no lift.

Would that we could tell you about a hotel this good — at this price — in every town.

Daily Rates: Singles €36 to €38, doubles €64 to €74. Surcharge of €5 for stays less than 4 days.

Contact: Pension Heim, Aufmberg 8, D-87637 Seeg, tel. +049/08364/258, email pensionheim@t-online.de, web www.pensionheim.de.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 17/20

The Restaurant

Gasthof Hirsch, by the charming St. Ullrich's church, is a lively "local" where tables are sometimes shared. It is divided into two low-ceilinged rooms; the front is casual with bare wooden tables and the back more formal, with tablecloths, napkins and flowers. There are fabric-covered light fixtures and wood banquettes around the perimeter of both rooms. The deep window wells are filled with indoor plants.

The simple food is delicious. Beef fillet on a skewer — *Spieß* — was bathed in a reduction sauce of the juices and herb butter, and served with French fries and mixed green salad. *Wiener Schnitzel* (€10.8) was crisp and greaseless on the outside, moist on the inside.

Prices tell you this is not a tourist stop. The local Allgäuer Brauhaus beer is €2.3 for half a liter, a small bottle of mineral water costs €1.7 and red wine by the glass ranges from €1.6 to €3.6.

One day a couple of years ago, we dropped in for a light, late lunch and divided a wurst salad; a great dish consisting of a generous portion of thin slices of light pink wurst and a stack of sliced onions all in a vinegar dressing and served with dark bread. It was raining hard outside so we lingered over beer and tea, reading our books into the late afternoon. The *Stammtisch* was full of grizzled road workers also driven indoors by the rain, as were three touring bicyclists at another table. The day barman,

who joined the workers in their beer, was watchful if we needed a refill of tea or beer but it was clear we were welcome to stay as long as we wished, regardless of whether or not we continued to spend our money.

Contact: Gasthhof Hirsch, Kirchplatz 3, tel. +49/08364/353.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Readers' Forum

Petrisberg Visit is Bittersweet

Wanted to tell you and members briefly about recent trip and a stay at our favorite **Hotel Petrisberg** (tel. +49/651/4640, web www.hotel-petrisberg.de, email info@hotel-petrisberg.de) in Trier, with family Pantenburg. They still are well and remain at the top of our list for both their hotel and their personal attention. We arrived with a gift as we always do for Helmut and Wolfgang, and were distressed to be told by them upon arrival that their older brother had just passed away a few days ago. We immediately advised them that we would arrange rooms elsewhere as we would understand their grief and perhaps reluctance to have to accommodate guests at this time. They replied "absolutely not, you are our guests and we will not have it changed."

They were holding services for the brother on our third and last day, and we told them that we would have breakfast as early as they wanted since they were preparing for a huge family gathering at the hotel that same day. Again, they insisted on business as usual, and much to our surprise, greeted us upon departure with gifts for my wife and me, my daughter and son-in-law and a wrapped present for my two granddaughters who were all with us. It was very emotional, and when we finished handshakes and good-byes, there was for the first time in over 10 years of visits, hugs all around and the entire family walked us to the cars and stood on the entrance porch to wave good bye.

There cannot be a better place to visit and relax and enjoy true German hospitality than at the Pantenburgs' Hotel Petrisberg in Trier. And to

think, you put us onto their hotel 10 years ago.

Finally, upon visiting Heidelberg, again an annual rite, for the first time we stayed at the **Hollander Hof Hotel** (tel. +49/6221/6050-0, email info@hollaender-hof.de, web www.hollaender-hof.de) at the *Alte Brücke* in Old Heidelberg. We have never enjoyed a Heidelberg hotel of any type, from the **Europa** to the **Zum Ritter** to the **Hirschgasse**, any more than this one. Very mid-price, jr. suite for €165 Euro, ask for number 452.

COLIN MCGOWAN
VIA EMAIL

Buy a Phone in Switzerland

This information is from my own experience — which cost me \$250 — this past September in Switzerland.

Want a cell phone in Switzerland? Go to the Swisscom store in the Zürich Airport (open 8am-8pm, 7 days). For CHF 99 (about \$83), you can get a phone that will work anywhere in Europe and a SIM card with your own Swiss phone number and CHF 25 in talk time. Rates for calls within Switzerland will be the local rates the Swiss pay. Incoming calls are free. You will need your passport to register the SIM card, and you will have to pick a language — German, French or Italian — for Swisscom. Don't worry, the default language for all phones is English! And the Swisscom people speak English, too. Just take a number when you go into the store, and wait until they call it out. You can add money to your SIM easily, by credit card or Swisscom card, as long as you are in the country. Your number will remain valid for one year from your last purchase of talk time.

The "Poste" or Post Office also sells phones, and you will find that Orange and Sunrise also have shops at the airport. If you want to bring a phone from home, it has to be a "tri-band" phone, because Europe uses a different frequency than the US. It also has to be "unlocked," which means not only must it accept another SIM card, but your carrier must authorize the use of a competitor's SIM. Check with your carrier before

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

A couple that wants to see three countries — say, Germany, Austria and Switzerland — will pay \$63.20 per person per day for each of five days for the Eurail Select Saver Pass, though the per day price drops if more days are added.

Fuel has become more of a factor when considering the overall cost of a rental car. At \$5.50 per gallon, a compact car that gets 32 miles per gallon costs about 17.2 cents per mile to operate. Drive 2,000 miles on a Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna, Salzburg, Zürich, Frankfurt tour and not only will you spend a lot of time in your rental car, the gas will cost \$344. Stick to a smaller geographic area, drive say 75 miles per day for two weeks, and you've cut fuel costs in half.

Another item to consider is the type of fuel. Always request a diesel rental car; instead of 32 miles per gallon, that same compact car with a diesel engine is likely to get 45 to 50 MPG.

Of course, there are the obvious money saving strategies we have mentioned before:

✓ Travel in the off-season when airfares and hotel rooms are cheaper.

✓ Spend more time in the country and less in the big city.

✓ Drop down a category. Go from a four-star to a three-star hotel, rent a midsize instead of a full-size car, or a compact instead of a midsize, ride 2nd-class rail instead of 1st-class, etc.

✓ Limit restaurant exposure. One subscriber reports that in Vienna he and his wife purchased "to go" meals at the **Julius Meinel** food store on the Graben which they then ate in their hotel room. Our three countries are full of shops that sell excellent, already-prepared meals for take-out.

✓ Be alert for deals. At press time we learned that **Rail Europe** will add a free day of rail travel with the 6, 8 and 10-day **Eurail Select Pass** if purchased during February and March.

We'll expand on some of these suggestions in upcoming issues. — RHB

READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 7

you go for a "subsidy code" — that's what you will need. Orange will sell you a SIM for CHF 49 that includes CHF 20 talk time. Sunrise's SIM card comes with CHF 25 talk time, and sells for CHF 65. You can register these at the Poste or at one of their stores.

Since you cannot use your cell phone in Switzerland until it is registered, it doesn't make sense to pay inflated US prices for a phone and SIM card. When you get off the plane, walk to the shop in the airport, get your SIM, register, and call home with your new number. If you are traveling to more than one country in Europe, your phone will work in all of them. Buy a new SIM in any country that you need one.

SUSAN FOX
VIA EMAIL

(Ed. note: Ms. Fox offers excellent advice and a good description of the process, but we don't fully agree with her last paragraph. We took a tri-band Nokia 6620 [available at press time from Amazon.com for \$49.99 after a \$300 rebate] to Europe in December and it worked fine in all three countries, no SIMS, no registration required. Prior to departure from the U.S. we contacted our service provider who, for \$5 per month, gave us a \$.99 per minute overseas roaming rate — Ms. Fox probably paid less than 10 cents per minute. So, if you plan to spend a lot of time on the phone, buying one in Europe is a great idea. If, however, you're like us and make only infrequent, short calls, a U.S.-purchased GSM phone may make more sense. We spent less than \$50 on phone calls and used the same phone we use in the U.S.)

Vacation Rentals in the Harz

Since I'm originally from the Goslar, Harz and just have visited the area in September I suggest that interested parties go on www.goslar.de to find the most reasonable apartments in the center of town in one of the links under Gastgeber.

Almost all private places are extremely well-kept and the prices vary from \$40 to \$60 per night. I also traveled from there to Berlin in less than four hours.

KARL KOERTJ
VIA EMAIL

What Does it Cost?

Everyday Prices - December 2004

Beverages

- Budvar beer** (.5l) Rest. Smutny, Vienna €3.20/\$4.16
- Paulaner beer** (.5l), Gasthof Fraundorfer, Garmisch-Part. (G) €2.85/\$3.71
- Feldschlössen Beer** (.5l), Rest. Bierfalken, Zürich CHF 5.50/\$4.62
- Allgäuer Brauhaus beer** (.5l), Gasthof Hirschen, Seeg (G) €2.30/\$3.00
- Obsteler Schnapps**, Gasthof Fraundorfer, Garmisch-Part. (G) €1.80/\$2.34
- House red**, (1 dl), Hotel Sofitel, Vienna €3.50/\$4.55
- House red**, (1 dl), Rest. Bierfalken, Zürich CHF 4.20/\$3.53
- Port Wine**, Gasthaus Alpenblick, Appenzell (S) CHF 9.50/\$7.98
- Coca Cola**, Hotel Sofitel, Vienna €2.50/\$3.25
- Tea**, Hotel Sofitel, Vienna €3.40/\$4.42
- Fresh Orange Juice**, Café Schwarzenberg, Vienna €3.80/\$4.94
- Mineralwater**
 - Café-Rest. Frauenhuber, Vienna €2.10/\$2.73
 - Hotel Weissbadbrücke, Appenzell (S) CHF 3.40/\$2.86
 - Gasthof Fraundorfer, Garmisch-Part. (G) €4.40/\$5.72 (large)

Side Dishes

- Muesli with fruit**, Café Schwarzenberg, Vienna €3.50/\$4.55
- Mixed salad**, Restaurant Smutny, Vienna €2.80/\$3.64
- Mixed salad**, Hotel Weissbadbrücke, Appenzell, (S) CHF 8/\$6.72
- Wurst salad**, Villach (A) €4.20/\$5.46
- Oysters (3) w glass white wine**, Rogacki, Berlin €5.75/\$7.48
- Mussels** (approx 15), Rogacki, Berlin €4.65/\$6.04
- Roast potatoes**, Rogacki, Berlin €2.10/\$2.73
- Daily soup**, Bad Hofgastein (A) €6.00/\$7.80

Main Dishes

- Berner Rösti**, Bad Hofgastein (A) €7.38/\$9.59
- Sauteed Prawns**, Rogacki, Berlin €9.45/\$12.29
- Calves Liver**, Rest. Smutny, Vienna €10.50/\$13.65
- Tafelspitz**, Rest. Smutny, Vienna €12.80/\$16.64
- Schweinsbraten**, Gast. Fraundorfer, Garmisch-Part. €8.20/\$10.66
- Geschneitztes**, Rest. Bierfalken, Zürich CHF 29.40/\$24.70
- Rehgeschneitztes**, Rest. Schlüssel, Sachseln (S) CHF 30.50/\$25.62
- Schweinssteak**, Gasthaus Alpenblick, Appenzell (s) CHF 27.50/\$23.10
- Kalbsfilet**, Gasthaus Zum Kreuz, Dallenwil (S) CHF 49.80/\$41.83

Desserts

- Ice cream**, Gast. Fraundorfer, Garmisch-Part. €2.60/\$3.38
- Apple strudel**, Hotel Sofitel, Vienna €4.50/\$5.85
- Coupé Danemark**, Rest. Smutny, Vienna €4.50/\$5.85

Other

- Diesel** (1 liter), Germany €9.54/\$1.24
- Unleaded gas** (1 liter), Switzerland CHF 1.459/\$1.23
- Paperback books** (3), Hugendubel, Berlin €29.89/\$38.86
- Map of Villach**, Austria €5.50 /\$7.15
- Cell phone charger**, Bad Hofgastein (A) €24.95/\$32.44