

DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER

### Are Road Maps Obsolete?

Remember the early '90s when it was the rare rental car in Germany that had air-conditioning? These days 'air' is standard on all cars except subcompacts like the Opel Corsa and the VW Lupo.

Now there's a new gadget that's almost as sought-after as air-conditioning was 15 years ago. It's the GPS (Global Positioning System), and as of right now, many, if not most, European rental cars above the subcompact category have it.

Here's how it works: a satellite tracks your vehicle's location and, based on maps that have been loaded via CD into the car's factory-installed GPS unit, the device guides the driver via both visual and voice prompts to whatever address the driver has selected—be it a small town, an airport, or a specific street address.

Because there are still cars in their fleets without them, rental companies are reluctant to guarantee a GPS, but your next rental is very likely to come with this feature mounted into the vehicle's dashboard.

So is it time to throw away your 1:200,000 scale maps for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland? Based on a December experience involving two vehicles with GPS devices, absolutely not.

Let me begin by saying, while I'm not a technical whiz, I'm not a klutz either and am probably a bit above average for my age group when it comes to electronic gear, such as mobile phones and laptop computers.

The first car we picked up last  
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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## THE UNTOUR

*The Untour style of European travel combines the best of independent and guided travel, delivering as much or as little in-country assistance as you desire.*

**G**oing on 19 years now, *Gemütlichkeit* has been all about independent travel. Fly to Europe, pick up a car at the airport or hop a train and, except for reservations at special hotels or in key cities, proceed as the By Bob mood strikes. Less structured itineraries create more opportunities for spontaneity.

It is a style of travel for which the three countries we cover are well suited: vast networks of speedy highways and peaceful back roads, excellent rail systems, thousands of welcoming small hotels, and every few kilometers another interesting town or village. As you can imagine, it would require special circumstances

for us to put our stamp of approval on a more structured way of travel. The Untour, we recently discovered, combines the freedom of independent travel with some of the comforts of a guided service—without the usual disadvantages of either.

Created and marketed by Idyll, Ltd., a 30-year-old, family-owned company based in Media, Pennsylvania, the name Untour, like the concept behind it, has the simple genius of why-didn't-I-think-of-that inventions like Velcro and the safety pin. It consists of two weeks in a private dwelling (house, condo, apartment, or chalet) in one of 10 European countries, including Switzerland, Germany,

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### A better way to book a bike tour...

## BikeToursDirect

**M**any of the articles written by longtime *Gemütlichkeit* contributor Jim Johnson have been researched from the seat of a bike. He believes it's the best way to explore a country, get to know its people, and find a region's hidden treasures.

Drawing on his cycling experiences and contacts, Jim recently founded BikeToursDirect to make it easier for travelers to find, plan, and book bike tours in Europe. The company and its website, [www.biketoursdirect.com](http://www.biketoursdirect.com), provide a central resource and one-stop shop for European cycling tours. In addition to details on available tours, the site has helpful information on how to choose a tour and prepare for an upcoming trip.

As the name implies, BikeToursDirect deals directly with the 30 Eu-

ropean bike tour operators it represents, as well as with local and regional tourist offices. Jim says that Europe-based tour operators still have excellent prices despite the declining dollar. Tour operators based overseas offer many weekly and even daily departures, and many travelers tend to like the camaraderie of an international clientele, something generally not available with U.S.-based tour companies.

On many routes, clients can choose between guided and self-guided tours. One-week, self-guided tours start at less than €550 and include lodging (usually in three-star hotels), luggage transfers, bike

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**Exchange rates as of 02/27/05**

**1 euro = \$1.32**

**1 Swiss franc = \$0.86**

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

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December, an 'E' series Mercedes, at least had a section in its GPS instructional manual in English. Still, getting it to do its stuff was mostly trial and error. But despite the poor documentation and the fact that we had never operated a GPS before, we had it up and running about 20 minutes after picking up the car. It got us out of Munich in darkness and to our apartment in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

At one point we came upon a Munich intersection where the traffic was backed up for several blocks and not moving. I turned down a side street in the general direction of our destination and immediately the GPS plotted a new route. Of course, it wasn't aware of the traffic jam (that's no doubt the next generation of these devices), but once we were on a different street it apparently no longer saw the bad intersection.

That's the good news. The problem with this GPS was route selection, at least in the countryside. The next day we drove to Murnau from Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and when it came time to return, we punched in the address of our apartment back in Garmisch. Somewhat overconfident of the device's ability to get us back, we paid little attention to where we were going until we realized it was taking us miles out of our way. Instead of straight south, it directed us east, by way of Oberammergau. Take a look at a map and you'll see just how misguided we were.

A wandering drive the following day to Füssen yielded similar results; on the return the GPS insisted on a route that was obviously not the most direct.

The second car was a garden-variety Opel Astra. Its GPS had no instruction manual and was quite different than the Mercedes' device, but with the previous car's experience behind us, we soon got it going. (Hint: first get the device to talk to you in English.)

This one was a bit more intuitive and seemed to have more features, though perhaps we just hadn't known enough to take full advantage of the Mercedes GPS.

For a while, all went well, and the device deftly guided us east through the Bavarian countryside toward Appenzell in Switzerland. At the border, however, it all came to an end. Though the GPS continued to tell us how many kilometers remained to our destination, it ceased providing directions. But instead of owning up to its limitations, it kept offering up bogus directions: "Prepare to make a U-turn in 100 meters." We decided it did not have Switzerland's streets and highways in its database.

So don't leave home without your maps. You'll always need them for perspective and, for now at least, their wealth of information, such as which roads are scenic and which towns are interesting and historic. You can also fall back on good maps when your GPS tells you to do something stupid.

**Super Munich Hotel Price**

Based on subscriber surveys and the volume of e-mails and phone calls received in this office, I think it's safe to conclude that Munich is the European city most visited by *Gemütlichkeit* readers. And "where should I stay in Munich?" is probably the single most frequently asked question.

Thus, the good news I am about to report carries a bit more weight than if its subject were located in some out-of-the-way hamlet in far northern Germany.

In what is easily the best major city hotel deal in our three countries, Munich's **Hotel Acanthus**, long a favorite of dozens of *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers and featured in *Karen Brown's Germany* guide, as well as the *Michelin Red Guide 2005 Deutschland*, is currently offering readers an amazing double room rate of €85. The deal, valid throughout 2005, requires a minimum two-night stay and blacks out certain

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**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 [www.gemut.com](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: **marc** Password: **2468**

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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.

## THE UNTOUR

Continued from page 1

and Austria. With a price that's guaranteed in U.S. dollars comes a roundtrip airline ticket from the U.S. to Europe, a rail pass or rental car, and about as much or as little in-country assistance as the traveler desires. An Untour representative also escorts arriving travelers to and from airports and provides stacks of useful reference materials, as well as an arrival orientation.

The Untour avoids many of the day-to-day difficulties encountered by other travel modes. The independent traveler, for example, had better be ready for a few surprises and disappointments. A hoped-for hotel—or entire town—may be fully booked, and the last hotel available may not fit the budget. Then there's all that packing and unpacking. And experienced rail travelers are quick to point out that you will carry everything you take to Europe, plus everything you acquire while in Europe, on and off every train you ride.

At the other end of the travel spectrum is the follow-the-lady-with-the-flag, every-minute-of-every-day-is-accounted-for, traditional motorcoach tour marketed by such companies as **Globus** and **Cosmos**. Most day-to-day decision-making and problem-solving is in the hands of the tour operator, and travelers simply go with the flow. That the escorted tour traveler knows his or her costs in advance is, for many, a big plus. On the other hand, the guided tours' relentless itineraries—"bags in the lobby at 7am"—the forced camaraderie, and "herd" style of travel are oft-heard criticisms of the genre.

After a first bus tour through Europe, followed by a few independent car or train experiences, it occurs to many that staying put, perhaps in a flat or apartment, has possibilities. It's cheaper than a hotel and you save more money by cooking some or all of your own meals. Still, there are a few hurdles. Groceries, for example: What do I buy, and where? Will I have to prepare everything from scratch? What if nobody speaks English at the butcher shop? And who

### Untour Basics

**Address:** Idyll, LTD., P.O. Box 405, Media, PA 19063

**Tel:** 888-868-6871

**Web:** www.untours.com

**E-mail:** info@untours.com

Phone, write or e-mail for a free Untours 2005 catalog. (On page 46 is a photo of Berit and Albert Greutert in front of their home in Switzerland.)

#### A Sampling of 2005 Untour Prices\*

Persons	Austria	Germany	Switzerland
2	\$2,129	\$2,279	\$2,149
3	\$2,031	\$2,169	\$2,010
4	\$1,944	\$2,036	\$1,903
5	\$1,878	\$1,998	\$1,846
6	\$1,836	N/A	\$1,779

\* New York, Boston, or Newark departure. Add-on fares from other cities.

**Untours ground transport:** In Austria, it's a 14-day rail pass. In Switzerland, the rail pass includes lake boats and buses. Ground transport for the German Rhine Untour is via rail and riverboat, and for the German Castle Untour, a rental car.

**Resources for those considering an Untour:** Sign up for the free informative e-mail chat list, Idyllchat, at [www.untours.com/talkbroker.html](http://www.untours.com/talkbroker.html). At the same URL are dozens of Untourist trip logs with photos and descriptions.

wants to commit a week or more of precious vacation time to a rental unit that could turn out to be all wrong?

The Untour addresses these and other concerns. Beyond cost and convenience, the principal Untour advantage is that the traveler actually lives among the local population. As the company's catalog points out, "Untourists have neighbors" and frequently develop a sense of belonging to the village that is their temporary home. Many develop friendships with locals and return to the same town year after year.

Idyll markets Untours for three regions of Switzerland: the Swiss Heartland, the Swiss Oberland, and Ticino. Germany's two Untours are the Rhine Valley and Castle Untour, the latter offering accommodations in a 14th Century Bavarian Castle near Ansbach. In Austria, Untours are available in villages near Salzburg and in apartments in Vienna.

Untours are also offered in France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Holland, Prague, and Budapest. With an Un-

tour sampler, you can divide your time among two or three locations, such as: Prague-Vienna, Vienna-Salzburg, Venice-Paris, Rome-Venice, or even Prague-Budapest-Vienna.

Each property has a fully-equipped kitchen; bedding and towels are also supplied. Knowledgeable, English-speaking locals provide the advice and help. Except for a brief arrival orientation, travelers are on their own to explore the country via their rail pass or rental car. For those who prefer to arrange their own air transportation, Untours are also sold as ground-only packages. Either way, in these weak-dollar times, they are an extraordinary value.

For the Untourist who needs it, there are several levels of support. First, Idyll produces several publications tailored to fit the needs of its clientele. Included with the usual destination descriptions and restaurant recommendations are dozens of hiking and walking itineraries, bike routes, tips on local etiquette, and suggestions for stocking up at local markets.

Two of the booklets prepared for the Swiss Untour, a *Planning Guide* and an *Arrivals Guide*, have solid information useful to any Switzerland visitor, but especially the Untourist. There are diagrams of the Zürich Airport's arrival halls and rail station, key rail schedules, meeting points, important phone numbers, addresses of local Untours employees and landlords, and a lot more. The *Swiss Heartland Dream Book*—each region has its own—is a sort of mini guidebook with information about the area's cities and towns, suggested daytrips, restaurant recommendations, a menu and food section, and even recipes.

In the unlikely event that the printed materials cannot answer a question, Idyll provides toll-free access to its main office in Pennsylvania. On-the-spot assistance is also available from Switzerland-based Untours employees; our *Arrivals Guide* listed 10 such local contacts.

The real day-to-day support, though, comes from the Untours landlords. Quite often, they will be your neighbors.

It was our good fortune to wind up in **Chalet Berit** in the village of Sachseln on Lake Sarnen, south of Lucerne, where Albert and Berit Greutert are legendary Untour hosts. One of Idyll's most frequent customers, Dr. Vance Roy, a retired American neurologist, liked Chalet Berit and the Greuterts so much that he and his wife, Barbara, now permanently rent the chalet's top floor (there are three), where they live year-round.

At the start of our own abbreviated Untour, Albert and Berit met us at the railway station (regular Untour guests are met at the Zürich Airport), grabbed our bags, loaded us into their car, pointed out restaurant and grocery store possibilities during a quick tour of Sachseln, and then got us up to speed on the apartment. Waiting for us in the fridge

were beer, wine, cheese, bread, sliced meat, orange juice, homemade jelly, butter, and milk. And, unlike those \$5 bottles of mineral water sitting on the coffee table of your hotel, it's all part of the service.

The Greuterts live next door and the morning after our arrival, Berit knocked on the door to invite us for dinner. To our amazement, Dr. Roy assured us this is standard operating procedure. As we were to discover, Greutert hospitality is extraordinary.

From March to October, every second Wednesday, some 80 to 100 "Untourists"—many of them returning for the 3rd, 10th, or even 20th

time—arrive at the Zürich Airport and from there are escorted to the properties they have chosen. Those bound for one of four Greutert apartments will be met, as we were, at the Sachseln railway station by Albert or Berit, or both.

Except for the initial orientation that gathers all Untourists in the region, and one optional group activity, such as a visit to a local

line ticket is currently running from about \$800 to \$900, one wonders how Idyll can include a rail pass/rental car, two weeks in an apartment, on-the-ground assistance, and still make a profit. Sometimes these prices are discounted. Right now, for example, the April 20 and May 4 Swiss Untour is reduced to \$1,519 per person. May 18 is \$1,689.

So, which Untour property should you choose? It is first important to understand that the price is the same regardless of the property one is assigned to—and, though the overall quality is excellent, there are differences among the apartments. You should also be aware that there is a cadre of loyal customers who know which are the best places and return to them year after year,

reserving as far in advance as possible.

Perhaps the best way to learn about the Untour experience is by signing up for **Idyllchat**, a free, customer-driven e-mail list. Enroll at [www.untours.com](http://www.untours.com), and immediately you'll find in your e-mail box a daily dose of half a dozen or so chatty, friendly, useful e-mails put there by Idyll's knowledgeable customers. For newcomers to the Untour way of travel, it's an extraordinary resource. E-mail a question about where to eat, where to walk, where to shop, what to take along, etc., and in 30 minutes to 72 hours, you'll have 10 to 20 responses from savvy travelers who have "been there, done that."

## Three Heartland Restaurants

At **Gasthof zum Kreuz** in Dallenwil, about 20 minutes by car from Sachseln, the atmosphere and food find a perfect middle ground between elegance and simple country. With a fine veal chop fetching CHF 49.8 and a lovely rack of lamb (small portion) at CHF 38.5, zum Kreuz is a bit of a splurge. Add to the main dishes a first course and dessert, and one must figure on at least \$50 per person without beverages—still good value at the price. Get a bit more for your money by choosing the four-course menu at CHF 67. **Gashtof zum Kreuz**, Städtlistrasse 3, tel. +41/041/628 2020, Web: [www.kreuz-dallenwil.ch](http://www.kreuz-dallenwil.ch).

The welcome is especially friendly at **Schlüssel**, a brightly-lit, modern restaurant in the center of Sachseln. Salads from an attractive, ample buffet of fresh ingredients, main dishes of veal *Cordon Bleu* with *Pommes Frites* and *Reh Geschnetzeltes* (chopped bits of sautéed venison served in a rich wine sauce), all accompanied by local *Eichhof* beer and followed by a shared *Coupe Denmark*, constituted a better-than-average meal of familiar Swiss dishes. The salad buffet is CHF 7.5 and the main dishes are in the CHF 30–35 range. **Restaurant-Café Schlüssel**, Sachseln, tel. +41/041/660 3646.

**Gasthaus Engel**, a convivial place with simple food, stands slightly below the Schlüssel in price and quality, and several steps down the culinary ladder from zum Kreuz. Still, it's a friendly spot. **Hotel Engel**, Sachseln, tel. +41/041/660 3646.

vintner or cheese-maker, you will not sightsee or socialize with fellow Untourists—unless, of course, you choose to. Your own apartment and rail pass or rental car are the means to your independence.

Roughly speaking, Untours are priced from \$900 to \$2,800 per person, with the average around \$2,000. A high-season Austrian Untour is \$2,189 for each of two people. More Untourists under one roof means lower prices. For two couples on the same Austrian Untour, the per-person price falls to \$1,944, and drops to \$1,836 if there are six travelers.

When one considers that a high-season roundtrip transatlantic air-

*Gemütlichkeit* monitors the list daily and finds plenty of solid, first-hand information that would benefit any frequent traveler to Europe—Untour customer or not.

In addition to our four-day stay in Chalet Berit, *Gemütlichkeit* was able to inspect several other Untour properties in the Swiss Heartland:

#### Chalet Berit Sachseln, Switzerland

The middle flat of a typical Swiss, dark-wood-over-concrete-block, three-story structure has four small rooms—two bedrooms, kitchen, sitting room—and a fairly spacious bathroom with a window and add-on corner shower. Through the apartment's small, curtained windows, the view is of town, lake, and mountains. There is a TV with satellite, a stereo with a nice selection of CDs, several dozen paperbacks in English, a few games, and a telephone with a calling plan that is so good, it costs only pennies per minute to phone the U.S. Restaurants and a grocery store are five minutes away on foot, and the rail station another five minutes.

(Perhaps it should be noted here that Switzerland, with its marvelous public transport system of trains, buses, boats, cable cars, and funiculars, is particularly suited to the Untour style of travel. With public transportation close to every property, the daytrip possibilities are virtually limitless. This smorgasbord of easily-accessed destinations is perhaps the most pleasant aspect of the Swiss Untour.)

Our dinner in the Greutert home was a relaxed affair that our hosts seemed to enjoy as much as we did—which was considerable. We met children and grandchildren and felt as at-home as we would with good friends in the U.S. Ordinary package tourists almost never—and independent travelers seldom—get this close to a European family. We must emphasize, however, that in every sense of the word, the Greuterts are special; one cannot imagine this level of hospitality from all Untour hosts. Landlords: Albert & Berit Greutert.

#### Von Moos Lower & Upper Giswil, Switzerland

The upper apartment is clearly the better of the two. It has a double and a single bed, a combination tub/shower, balcony with excellent view, full kitchen and nice living room with built-in bookcase and wooden ceilings, walls, and floors. The owners try to have one meal with their guests.

The lower apartment is smaller and feels a bit closed in, though the bedroom is brightened by windows in adjoining walls.

The von Moos family owns the local *Metzgerei* (butcher shop), and we were invited to sit down at the kitchen table for a snack. Afterwards, Frau von Moos wouldn't let us leave without taking along some delicious air-dried meat and a few sausages.

We rate the lower von Moos 'average' and the upper apartment 'above average.' Landlords: Lisabeth & Leo von Moos.

#### Gasser-Mügler Lungern, Switzerland

Lungern is considered one of the prettiest villages in the Untour portfolio. The views from both the living room and bedroom of this spacious apartment take advantage of the building's lakeside location. A large, recently remodeled kitchen is also a major plus. The bathroom is next on the remodel schedule.

Owner Lukas is a sculptor, and his work is featured throughout the house and yard. Perhaps the only caution is that guests must climb a narrow spiral staircase to the third floor. We rate this property 'above average.' Landlords: Lukas & Alice Gasser-Mügler.


#### Künzler 1 & 2 Hohfluh, Switzerland

These are the two best properties in the group, and Number 2, on the top floor, with its sleek modern decor, highly-polished hardwood floors, and many-windowed living room opening to a wide balcony, is the clear overall winner. The entire apartment and balcony are aimed directly at the Wetterhorn Alps and

Rosenloui Glacier, a stunning mountainscape that seems almost close enough to touch. There are two bedrooms, each of which has an adjoining full bath. This would be a terrific living space anywhere, but the view moves it into the 'very special,' category.

The lower apartment, Number 1, which can accommodate five people, has a pleasant sun porch and a dishwasher, and is more traditionally decorated. It, too, faces the view, but doesn't take full advantage of it.

The lone caveat with Hohfluh is that it is a 14-minute bus ride to the nearest rail station. We rate this property 'excellent.' Landlord: Margaret Künzler.

When it came time to leave Chalet Berit, there was an early morning train to catch. As we stepped outside the apartment into the chilly, pre-dawn darkness, we found both Berit and Albert waiting with the car and trunk lid open to drive us to the station. Nineteen years of writing this newsletter and there's still no real English translation of the word *Gemütlichkeit*. We can tell you where to find it, though—try an Untour in the Swiss Heartland. 

#### 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 percent 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 website, with train schedules throughout Europe, as well as 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
- [www.historicgermany.com](http://www.historicgermany.com) Website for an alliance of historic German cities

## Vacation Rentals from a Trusted Source

Selecting a European vacation rental sight-unseen can be a risky proposition. Glossy brochures and fancy websites do not always tell the complete story of a property. And unlike a hotel stay, when you pay cash in advance, you cannot easily leave after the first night if the accommodations disappoint.

The ideal is to choose your vacation rental in person. If that's not possible, the next best solution is to place yourself in the hands of a trusted, knowledgeable, expert. We think **Drawbridge To Europe** fits the bill.

Owners Karin Volpert and John Spillman have been finding vacation rentals for travelers since 1996. Ms. Volpert was born and raised in Germany and thus offers a native's insight to the German-speaking countries. Her husband, John, has lived abroad and traveled extensively throughout Europe. The couple regularly inspect a portfolio of rentals that includes properties throughout our three countries.

Last December, based on their recommendation, *Gemütlichkeit* booked a Drawbridge apartment in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

**Apartment Zugspitze**, only a five-minute walk from the central shopping district on the Garmisch side of town, fulfilled our expectations. Located in a quiet residential neighborhood, just across the street from the **Hotel Staudacherhof**, it consists of two spacious main rooms, plus a bathroom and kitchen, all of which open off a spacious foyer. The living room and bedroom, which are side by side and share a wide balcony with a fine mountain view, are each about 350 to 400 square feet.

To the left of the foyer is a larger-than-average bathroom with shower over tub, and across the foyer is a kitchen equipped with all basic utensils and appliances including an oven and a refrigerator with a large freezer compartment. Parking is in an underground garage, and there's satellite TV and a portable radio.

Though the apartment is most comfortable for a couple, the living room sofa-bed allows the Zugspitze to accommodate a family of three or four. Weekly rental \$833 to \$928.

Here is a brief roundup of the most desirable Drawbridge properties in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland:

### Switzerland

Drawbridge's **Eiger** properties are clean and comfortable apartments on the edge of Grindelwald, with great views of the Eiger from the balconies. These vacation rentals, consisting of one to four rooms, are not fancy, but in typical Swiss fashion, well maintained.

The Eiger Studio (#955) is located on the first floor and has a small kitchen with a stove but no oven. Eiger 4-rooms (#952) is a first-floor apartment with three bedrooms that sleep up to eight people (\$1,315–1,900).

On the second-floor are two one-bedroom units: #953 for \$804–950 per week and #954 for \$512–658. The Eiger's owners have two additional apartments in their own chalet a few kilometers down the road towards Interlaken.

In the neighboring village of Schwendi is another studio (#956) on the first floor of a beautiful chalet. Two twin beds pull down from the wall, and there is a small corner kitchen. Access to a terrace and garden with mountain views compensate for the small indoor space. Rates are \$438–548.

### Germany


The **Werner Vineyards** are located in the rolling hills of the Schwarzwald (Black Forest) and Rhine Valley. Two apartments are located within a working, family-owned vineyard, 10 minutes from the town center on foot. The décor in both is rustic, with exposed beams and wooden furniture.

Nearby activities include hiking, fine dining, and wine-tasting. Apartment A (#269) is a studio located on the first floor, and Apartment B (#268) is a one-bed-

room unit on the ground floor. Both apartments cost \$595 per week.

### Austria

The most popular Drawbridge rental in Austria is **Koppl-Hof** (#12), a house just outside Salzburg that sleeps seven people in three bedrooms in a quiet and sunny countryside location. Amenities include walking paths, country-style furnishings, and a fully-equipped kitchen. At \$1,136–1,414 per week, this home offers good value for a large group.

Visit the Drawbridge website for photos and more details on these properties. Contact: Drawbridge To Europe, 98 Granite St., Ashland, OR 97520, tel. 888-268-1148, fax 541-482-7779, e-mail: [travel@drawbridgeto-europe.com](mailto:travel@drawbridgeto-europe.com), Web: [www.drawbridgeto-europe.com](http://www.drawbridgeto-europe.com). 

### DEAR SUBSCRIBER


*Continued from page 2*

dates, such as Oktoberfest and trade show periods.

At this price, which includes a buffet breakfast, it is one of the better values we've seen in recent years.

To those headed for Munich this year, I suggest reserving space as soon as possible. Over the years, we've had more letters of praise for the Acanthus than any other Munich hotel. It's just inside the Ring, very near the Sendlinger Tor, and thus only a few steps from Sendlinger Strasse, the pedestrian-only street that leads to the Marienplatz.

Along the way, you can stop at what I consider to be one of Europe's most beautiful churches, the **Asamkirche**. Parking is available in the hotel's small garage for €10 per day. Mention the *Gemütlichkeit* "Euro-Saver-Promotion 2005."

(Hotel Acanthus, An der Hauptfeuerwache 14, tel. +49/089/23 18 80, e-mail [acanthus@t-online.de](mailto:acanthus@t-online.de), Web [www.acanthushotel.de](http://www.acanthushotel.de)) —RHB 

## TRAVEL QUICKIES

■ **Michelin Scores with New Bargain Hotels Book Germany:** *500 Charming Hotels and Inns* is the latest in Michelin's series of books that identify affordable European accommodations. Most listed hotels in the new Germany guide offer rooms under €100. The book is color-coded by geographical region and has interior and exterior photographs and a brief description of each property, plus practical information. Michelin inspectors have visited all establishments and each has given an objective opinion on what particularly attracted them to the selected properties. The book lists for \$20, but you can buy it for \$16 at [www.travelessentials.com](http://www.travelessentials.com) or by calling 800-258-0758.

■ **Basic Germany, Austria Tour:** Those looking for a comfortable way to visit the **2005 Oktoberfest**, plus see some of the most popular sights of southern Germany and Austria, might consider **Wonderful Austria & Germany**. Personally escorted by Ursula Triezenberg, the 14-day, 13-night itinerary includes Vienna, Salzburg, Berchtesgaden, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Innsbruck, and Munich. Sights include the **Spanish Riding School**, **Schönbrunn Palace**, **Monastery at Melk**, **Königsee**, **Austrian Crystal Factory**, **Neuschwanstein** and **Linderhof** castles in Bavaria, **Nymphenburg Palace**, and Oktoberfest.

The double-occupancy, land-only price of \$2,370 includes all four-star hotels with breakfast, five dinners, ground transport via first-class mo-

torcoach, and entrance fees. Contact: Ursula Triezenberg, tel. 541-488-5076, e-mail: [utrt65@charter.net](mailto:utrt65@charter.net).

■ **Opera and Dinner for €62:** It's easy to forget that the Slovakian capital, Bratislava, is less than an hour by car from Vienna. With face-value ticket prices for the great **Vienna Staatsoper** as high as €257, an evening excursion from Vienna to the **State Opera of Bratislava** has some appeal. For €62 per person, **Elite Tours** (Operngasse 4, tel. +43/01/513-22-25) offers chartered bus transport to Bratislava, dinner, a stroll through the old town, and a ticket to the opera. *Gemütlichkeit* readers report seeing excellent productions of *Tosca* and *Carmen*. One termed the experience a "wonderful evening."

■ **Vienna Zentrum to Airport in 16 Minutes:** With the recent introduction of a new high-speed rail link from the **City Air Terminal** to **Vienna International Airport**, visitors can now maximize their time in this great Old World city. No longer is it necessary to stay near the airport to catch even an early morning flight. The **City Airport Train (CAT)** now connects the city center with the airport in just 16 minutes. Trains depart every half-hour beginning at 5:05 a.m., and the one-way cost is €9 for adults and €5 for kids under 15. Purchase tickets in cash on board the train. The City Air Terminal is next to the **Vienna Hilton Hotel**.

■ **World Cup Tickets:** The World Cup soccer tournament returns to Germany, June 9 – July 9, 2006 in Köln. Ticket

sales began in February, according to the German National Tourist Office. Visit [www.fifaworldcup.com](http://www.fifaworldcup.com) or call +49 180-526-2006 for information.

■ **Magritte Exhibit in Vienna:** Vienna's BA-CA Kunstforum ([www.kunstforumwien.at](http://www.kunstforumwien.at)) will host a comprehensive retrospective of works by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte, April 7 – July 31. The exhibit focuses on magical conceptual images from the 1920s to the 1960s. More than 70 works are on loan from international museums and private collections. The museum is open daily 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., till 9 p.m. on Fridays.

■ **New Vienna Hotel:** A new luxury hotel has opened in Vienna's historic district. **Style Hotel Vienna** occupies an Art Nouveau building across from the Café Central in Vienna's Herrengasse. Its 78 guestrooms and suites come with air-conditioning and wireless high-speed Internet. An Italian restaurant and hotel bar are located onsite. Contact: Style Hotel, 1st district, Herrengasse 12, tel. +43/01/227/80-0, Web: [www.stylehotel.at](http://www.stylehotel.at).

■ **Trier Museum Closed Until May:** According to the tourist office in Trier, the **Trier Roman Archaeological Museum** (Rheinisches Landesmuseum) is closed until mid-May for restoration and construction in preparation for a major 2007 exhibit, "Constantine the Great." Contact: Weimarer Allee 1, 54290 Trier, tel. +49/651/97740, Web: [www.landesmuseum-trier.de](http://www.landesmuseum-trier.de).

### BIKETOURSDIRECT

*Continued from page 1*

rentals, route planning, maps, and route descriptions. Guided tours with ride-along guide, support van, and dinner start at less than €750.

The BikeToursDirect website now features more than 140 tours in 27 European countries including nearly 50 in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Some routes cover familiar ground like the Salzburg Lakes Tour, Salzburg-Vienna, Bavarian Lakes,


Lake Constance, the Romantic Road, and bike trails along the Danube, Mosel, and Rhine.

Many other routes introduce riders to less-traveled territory like the Mur Bike Trail in Austria's Styria, the Elbe Bike Path near Dresden, the Brandenburg tour near Berlin and Potsdam, and the Spree Bike Path near Poland. Custom programs are also available.

Visitors to the site use a simple search engine to specify destinations, dates, level of difficulty, and price range. Search results present

tour summaries and thumbnail photographs. A click on a tour name reveals complete tour information, additional photos, and a link to an onsite reservation form.

BikeToursDirect handles all bookings and payments and does not mark up tour operator prices.

Contact Jim and BikeToursDirect at 1638 Berkeley Circle, Chattanooga, TN 37405, tel. 877-462-2423, fax: 802-609-6264, e-mail: [jjohnson@biketoursdirect.com](mailto:jjohnson@biketoursdirect.com), Web: [www.biketoursdirect.com](http://www.biketoursdirect.com). 

## To Ride or Not to Ride

Thinking about making your next trip to Europe a cycling tour? (See page 1 BikeToursDirect story.) It can be a challenging and exhilarating way to see a region. Here are some factors to consider before you book:

### Do I need to be an athlete?

Anyone in reasonable shape should be able to enjoy a bike tour. Most tours cover about 20 to 40 miles per day and are designed for travelers who enjoy a leisurely pace. When you read tour descriptions, pay close attention to terrain and average daily distances. First-timers may be more comfortable on a guided tour.

### Does "self-guided" mean I'm totally on my own?

No, with self-guided tours, the tour operator still organizes the hotel reservations and the luggage transportation from hotel to hotel. The accommodations are usually the same as on guided tours, and you often follow the same routes.

### If I choose a self-guided program, can I ride with other people?

Self-guided tours are designed for individuals, not groups. It's possible that other people may be riding on the same tour, but you

shouldn't count on it.

### How does luggage transport work?

Both guided and self-guided tours include luggage transport from hotel to hotel, unless otherwise noted. Leave your suitcases in a designated area, and you'll find them in your next hotel when you arrive. In general, one suitcase up to 50 pounds and one small carry-on are allowed.

### What are the routes like?

You usually travel along paved bicycle paths or lightly traveled back roads through the countryside or from village to village. Routes are selected for their charm and beauty, as well as for their cultural and historical importance. Especially in the southern countries, tours often switch to meadow and forest paths or side roads. During some stretches, short distances on roads with traffic are unavoidable.

### What if my bike breaks down along the way?

On guided tours, the guide will make the necessary repairs. On self-guided programs, you should be prepared to make basic repairs—like fixing flats. If there's a difficult repair, you may have to call the tour operator's emergency service num-

ber or go to a repair shop in the nearest town. Let the tour operator know, and you'll be reimbursed for repair costs. Since many tours are in the countryside, you may wish to rent a mobile phone or get your home mobile phone activated for international travel.

### What should I pack?

Rule #1: Pack light. Try to limit yourself to just a carry-on bag. It's tough but doable, especially if you plan ahead. If you need help, *Pack It Up* by Anne McAlpin is superb. If you're not sure if your suitcase is too heavy, walk 100 yards or so at a fast clip, without stopping. If you're uncomfortable, it's too heavy.

On most tours, you're on the move with little time for laundry and drying. When possible, travel with fast-drying clothing—from undergarments to pants. Local outfitters are a good resource, or you can check sites like **Travel Essentials** ([www.travelessentials.com](http://www.travelessentials.com)) or phone their staff at 800-258-0758. Note that the absolutely worst fabric to ride in is cotton. It holds moisture and can make you miserable in heat or cold. Synthetics or synthetic blends are best.

## Readers' Forum

### Austria Accommodations

From an early morning arrival in Zürich, we made a lengthy but fairly easy drive to Goldegg, Austria, a village on a lake east of Zell am See. We stayed three nights at **Hotel Seehof**, with a balcony room overlooking the lake. The €104 per person price included a marvelous buffet breakfast and five-course dinner with excellent menu choices and food preparation—exceptional value in our opinion, plus a pleasant, helpful staff.

A short, pretty drive led us to the Altausee, near Bad Aussee, and

**Hubertushof**, a small former hunting lodge in the foothills with views of the Altausee in the distance. Our spacious two-room suite (#6) with balcony was nice, but the balcony faced southwest and only caught afternoon sun. The owner is an elderly countess, who personally served us breakfast. The walls were adorned with dozens of deer skulls that date back 150 years. There was no elevator, and a long, steep set of stairs. At €150, it was not a particularly good value.

Next, we spent one night at **Raffelsbergerhof** in Weissenkirchen on the Danube, in the Wachau. Our compact room was located up

several flights of stairs and had no view. This place gets good reviews in various travel guides, but we wouldn't recommend it at €115.

We then headed to Vienna for four nights at **Pension Aviano**, which you've mentioned several years ago. We stayed in junior suite #413, which, as you described, is very spacious. I'd go a step further and say, given the location and that specific room, it's the best value (€145) we've had in a major city in decades. Only the breakfast, which was adequate, detracted from a fabulous bargain.

BILL BOHNHOFF  
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