

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Gemut.com: Your Essential Travel-Planning Tool

Gemut.com, the website is like our cat, in that we're not quite sure how old it is. *Gemütlichkeit's* birth date is emblazoned in memory—January 1987—but for some reason, we can't pin down the exact date the website went live. Maybe that's because when we built it, we weren't quite clear on its purpose. We had some vague idea that it might be a nice adjunct to the printed newsletter; a way of getting time-sensitive information to our readers and a place where they could access back issues.

I mention this to underline Gemut.com's transition from afterthought to essential travel-planning tool. Though we still have a long way to go—changes and improvements are in the works—there are many useful features and a wealth of solid information. True, the search feature isn't what it could be—and will be—and we've been tardy in getting back issues up on the site, but for subscribers who use it, the website is a valuable resource.

For example, we've just upgraded the **Venere** hotel booking feature. It's a snap now to locate and reserve a hotel room in Europe. Click the "Hotel Bookings" link on the left side of the main page and you'll see the simplified booking engine. Enter a city and your dates, and in a few seconds, you are looking at a list of available hotels with prices. For most listings there are exterior and interior photographs and hotel reviews posted by previous guests.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

TINY BIVIO

Take a detour to an alpine getaway on the road less traveled between St. Moritz and Chur.

It is easy to overlook the village of Bivio on a journey through Switzerland's Graubünden canton. The **Bernina Express** train route that connects **Lugano** to **Chur** won't take you there. Bus service is infrequent, at least by Swiss standards. And most guidebooks, including *Lonely Planet* and *Rick Steves*, omit Bivio entirely from their coverage of the region—which is exactly why you should go.

Situated at the junction of two historic mountain passes—the **Julier** and the **Septimer**—at the edge of the **Engadine** preserve, and just 22 km from the famed ski resort of **St. Moritz**, this alpine village of 260 residents offers convenient access

to some of the most spectacular hiking, wildflower blooms, and ski touring found anywhere in the Alps. Backcountry skiers do overrun the town during the winter high season, but they are primarily Swiss, German, and Austrian visitors, not Americans.

Summer brings hikers, mountain bikers, and motorcyclists to the winding roads and rugged terrain. (Also among Bivio's regular guests are herds of cows that arrive by train from farms near Bern to graze the surrounding pastures in summer—no wonder the milk chocolate tastes so good.) And in the spring and autumn shoulder months, you

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Readers' Forum

Traveling Solo

Recently, your office arranged a really wonderful series of small hotels for myself and a friend. First Cochem, Germany; then Bacarach, Wurzburg, Konstanz, Garmisch, Munich, and Vienna. Each was unique and had a welcoming and accommodating staff. I've been to Germany several times in the past, but nothing has compared to the lodgings set up by *Gemütlichkeit* on that trip.

For four weeks this past September and October, I took a language course in Vienna that included a private apartment. When the course was over, I made arrangements to go to my old ancestral village of Oberdorla, about 40 km northwest of Erfurt, Germany. After my visit, I spent five days in Erfurt at the **Hotel-Restaurant Gartenstadt**. This small hotel

was written up in the August 2004 issue of *Gemütlichkeit*. It was also a winner in every respect. While it is on the outskirts of Erfurt, it is only a 10-minute tram ride (#4) to the city center, and the trams run about every 10 minutes. On this trip, I traveled alone, and—tired and hungry after a busy day exploring Erfurt—headed back late each afternoon to the Gartenstadt. Each evening, I tried a different menu item for dinner and am pleased to report that each was delicious, with ample portions, and very reasonable in cost. For such a small hotel, I thought the menu was fairly extensive. The restaurant also featured a wide variety of good wines available.

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Exchange rates as of 06/30/05

1 euro = \$1.21

1 Swiss franc = \$0.78

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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There are clear explanations of guestroom amenities, cancellation and payment terms, and what is and is not included in the price. You can click zones on a map to limit the hotels displayed to a preferred neighborhood.

Venere's strength seems to be in larger cities, but the database of every online hotel reservation has strengths and weaknesses. A recent search for a double room in **Berlin** returned 96 bookable accommodations, ranging in price from €40 for the **City Hotel Ansbach** in Schöneberg to €145 for the **Savoy Berlin**. The **Swissotel Berlin** was €120.

At Gemut.com, you can also request rental car and air quotes, purchase travel insurance, download rail pass prices, book a gift subscription, renew your own subscription, contact us via e-mail and, read our latest travel alerts. But most helpful, in my opinion, is the archive of back issues. Most of the information is still applicable. Here are a few stories that may strike your trip-planning fancy:

February 2003

Rhine-bound travelers won't want to miss Jim Johnson's village-by-village coverage of the **Koblenz to Rüdeshheim** stretch. Also in that issue, we tell readers where to purchase a CD of the complete European rail timetables, report on a fascinating little museum in the **Harz Mountains** dedicated to the old East-West bor-

der, and report on **Airolo**, a pleasant Swiss surprise with two affordable hotels, a wonderful, not-too-expensive restaurant, and enough sights to keep you interested for two or even three days.

January 2002

"Styrian Wine Roads" details two auto routes that traverse this gorgeous and sparsely populated wine region of Austria. Included are recommended hotels and restaurants.

April 2002

This issue's main story deals with ground transport in Europe and addresses a long list of topics, such as: rail vs. rental car, first class vs. second class rail, how to choose the right railpass, seat reservations, railpasses vs. point-to-point tickets, overnight trains, finding inexpensive rail tickets in Germany, key rail websites, saving money by renting a car in the right location, choosing the correct car for you, avoiding hidden rental costs, insurance, and driving in eastern countries.

September 2001

A wonderfully scenic, kilometer-by-kilometer, full-day's Bavarian auto excursion over winding, quiet country roads includes a visit to Ludwig II's least-known castle on an island in the **Chiemsee**, a Schnapps museum, a model train display, and Burghausen's gigantic fortress. The drive begins in **Bad Reichenhall** but can be easily modified to start in **Salzburg** or **Berchtesgaden**.

September 1997

Our "Driving Austria" story outlines three of the country's most scenic auto trips: the spectacular **Grossglockner** via **Bad Gastein** route, the thrilling **Erzherzog Johann Road**, and the lovely run from **Maria Zell** to **Hiefiau**. Recommended hotels are included.

In the same issue is a story on a little-known way to see Berlin: via boat. Few are aware that Berlin is full of lakes, rivers, and canals, and we list more than 15 water-related sight-seeing options, including dinner and dancing on the **City Schiffahrt** from Charlottenburg to Müggelsee, evening trips featuring buffet dinner and a 1920s Berlin revue, tours on historic ships, and even theater boats.

May 1998

Weekend excursion from **Zürich** to **Pontresina**, a small Graubunden town with lower prices and much

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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 (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: **july** Password: **0954**

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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.

BIVIO*Continued from page 1*

have the place all to yourself.

In Roman times, traders en route from Milan to Munich stopped over in Bivio (which means Parting of the Ways) to replenish supplies before or after crossing the Alps. The town was formerly known as *Stalla* (Stall) for the number of horses that passed through. Accordingly, Bivio's founding families are Italian, but German is the language of business, and many locals understand at least some English. In typical Swiss fashion, conversations begin with a *Grützi*, blend Italian and German interchangeably, and end with *Merci* or *Ciao*.

Early settlers built the Catholic church **St. Gallus** in 1518, and it features a Gothic altar created by a famous wood carver from Memmingen, Germany, named Yvo Strigel. (The church is only open during regular Sunday services, and a sign outside reminds visitors that it is a place of worship and not a museum.)

After much disagreement among Bivio's founding residents, a Protestant church followed in 1671. According to the agreement, however, the new church was not allowed to add a bell tower for a period of 100 years. Aside from these two churches and a community swimming pool, there are few indoor attractions in Bivio—the point, after all, is to enjoy the outdoors.

Today, most travelers arrive in Bivio from the train stations in Chur or Tiefencastle. Drivers can follow the breathtaking *Julierpass* out of St. Moritz. (Bus service from St. Moritz is seasonal.) A handful of hotels, restaurants, and shops line the main street through town, with a few dozen homes and vacation rentals set back on side streets. You can get everywhere on foot, or by bicycle (for rent through the tourist office).

Bivio is surrounded on all sides by waterfalls, lakes, fields, and forest. Wilderness trails begin just steps from every guestroom in town. Strategically placed benches overlook the village, so you don't have to wander far to be rewarded with a view. For a short excursion, follow the 12-station

Bivio Basics**Population:** 260**Elevation:** 1,769 meters (nearly 6,000 feet)**Tourist Information:**

Kur- und Verkehrsverein Bivio, CH-7457 Bivio, tel. +41/081/684 53 23, fax 55 58, e-mail: kurverein@bivio.ch, Web www.bivio.ch

Driving Distances:

St. Moritz	22 km	14 miles
Chur	64 km	40 miles
Zürich	180 km	112 miles
Lugano	159 km	99 miles

Rail/Bus Times:

Chur	2 hours
Zürich	3 hours
Geneva	6.5 hours

Major Airports:

Zürich, Geneva, Milan, Munich

Vitapars course, a popular fitness route for locals. Or hike part of the *Stallerberg* trail, which begins directly behind the **Hotel Solaria**.

The most popular outdoor route for cyclists and hikers is to follow the *Septimerpass*, which begins near the **Hotel Post** at the north end of town. The road is paved for about a mile and then turns to dirt as you pass a few outlying farms. Soon, you begin to climb, and the route continues along a steep but not technical path, gaining 600 meters in elevation at the summit. Thankfully, the scenery—waterfalls, wildflowers, and snow-capped peaks—distracts you from the physical challenge at hand.

An easier way to cover more ground is to travel the pass by horse. From June to October, Giancarlo and Genny Torriani, who run the **Hotel Solaria**, lead horseback trips to a valley called **Bondo** on the other side of the pass. Despite the alpine location, a micro climate warms Bondo to Mediterranean temperatures that are perfect for an evening of cooking on the outdoor grill and dining in the garden of a historic family farmhouse. Overnight visitors stay at the guesthouse and return to Bivio the next day. One-day trips over the *Septimerpass* and evening rides to the nearby **Alp Natons** for wine and views are a good alternative for travelers with less time.

A few kilometers north of Bivio is **Marmorera Lake**, a manmade reser-

voir that supplies water to nearby towns during the winter months. Beyond, lies the larger town of **Savognin**, which runs a chairlift in summer and has a couple of spas, including **Bad Alvaneu** (Albulstrasse, CH-7473 Alvaneu Bad, tel. +41/081 420 4400, fax 4402, e-mail info@bad-alvaneu.ch, Web www.bad-alvaneu.ch).

For ambitious hikers, an alternative to the *Septimerpass* is to summit the **Stallerberg** and then descend to the 20-person settlement of **Juf**, reportedly the highest elevation village in all of Europe. The hike begins directly behind the **Solaria** and takes about two and a half hours each way. (Stock up on lunch supplies at the bakery in the **Hotel Solaria**.) You can also drive to Juf by heading north to Tiefencastle and then back south on a parallel road, but the journey would take almost as long as the hike.

Lodging

Bivio has a handful of hotels and many more vacation rentals, some of which are only available during the winter ski season.

Hotel Solaria

Run by Giancarlo and Genny Torriani, the **Solaria** is in every way a family business—from the friendly vibe at the front desk to an all-around do-it-yourself work ethic. Giancarlo's grandfather opened the **Solaria** as a small hotel in 1935, and the original building retains a rustic charm. Despite several renovations and expansions over the years, the family has preserved the original floor in the lobby, made of a local gemstone called serpentinite. An arched stone, which Giancarlo's father found along the *Septimerpass* and presumed to have come from an ancient Roman chapel, hangs on the wall near the front door. Black and white family portraits add to the timeless feel of the place.

With an endless display of energy, Giancarlo replaces a light bulb in a common area one moment and repairs a stone step in the entryway the next—all the while wearing his white chef's coat—for he is, first and foremost, a

EDITOR'S CHOICE

professionally trained cook. That he is also a former Swiss bobsledding champion adds yet another layer of character to the operation.

Though the hotel has only 36 rooms, it is almost entirely self-sustaining, with two restaurants, a bakery, a bar, wine cellar, laundry facility, bowling alley, and even a bocce ball court on the premises. Most guestrooms have a balcony or terrace, along with phone, radio, minibar, and TV. The décor is basic but immaculate throughout. Additional amenities include a small sauna, excellent home-made cuisine, and numerous terraces for outdoor dining.

Rooms in the original house (*Stammhaus*) are the least expensive but also among the most charming, with low ceilings and small baths. Number 202 is relatively large, with a beamed ceiling and spectacular mountain views. Number 203 is smaller, but with a pine ceiling, windows on three sides, and access to equally impressive views.

Family rooms in an adjoining 1970s-era building are darker and less attractive, although several have lofts. The Solaria's newest rooms, including Number 309 and Number 310, are found in the Valetta addition that was built in the early 1990s. During the early summer runoff, you can hear the river roaring into the valley from some of these rooms. They are tastefully designed in natural pine and white bath tile, with heating racks in the tubs. Low pile industrial carpet was installed presumably to handle the winter slush. For a special occasion, book Number 311, a corner suite on its own mezzanine floor, facing the *Julierpass*. The pitched ceiling, sofa, and balcony create a private and romantic hideaway.

As part of the **Minotel** marketing group, the Solaria occasionally offers good deals, such as three nights for the price of two. Check the Minotel website (www.minotel.ch) for information.

Contact: Hotel Solaria, Strada del Guiglia 43, CH-7457 Bivio, tel. +41/081 684 5107, fax 5290, e-mail solaria@hotelsolariabivio.ch, Web www.hotelsolariabivio.ch

SUMMER AIRLINE UPGRADES

Frequent flyers take note: if you intend to travel to Europe in business class this summer without paying full fare, you may be in for a surprise. Program rules have become extremely complex and expensive. Not all fares can be upgraded, and customers who reach the highest level of their programs get the best seats first. Check the table below for basic information, and then search your preferred carrier's website for the lowest upgradeable fares.

Airline	Miles to Purchase	Miles/Fee to Upgrade
American	90,000	25K + \$250 each way
British Airways	100-130k (or premium economy for 75k)	N/A (1st class only)
Delta	90,000	25 to 50K miles, no fee
Continental	100,000	20K + up to \$450 each way
Lufthansa	90,000	70k, no fee
Northwest	100,000	30 to 60K miles, no fee
Swiss Airlines	105,000	70K miles, no fee
United	80,000	30 to 60K miles, no fee
US Airways	80,000	20 to 60K miles, no fee
Virgin Atlantic	80,000 (or 50,000-62,500 for premium economy)	N/A (1st class only)

* Miles given for business class travel. Information compiled from the *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 2005) and individual airline websites.

Daily Rates: Summer singles CHF 70-95, doubles CHF 140-190; winter singles CHF 80-125, doubles CHF 160-250

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel & Restaurant Post

Of all the guestrooms available in Bivio, those at the four-story Hotel Post have the most character. As with most of the businesses in town, the Post has been in the Lanz family for several generations.

**Editor's
Choice**

A sprawling yellow facade marks the beginning of town at the bottom of the *Julierpass*. Enter through a slate floor lobby with arched doorways and relax in the cozy sitting area that adjoins the reception desk. In winter, a small fireplace warms the room. Arven pine walls and furnishings create a warm environment throughout the hotel, from the guestrooms to the banquet hall. Most rooms have relatively new furnishings, carpet, and bath fixtures, and are exceptionally clean.

For the best rooms in the house, reserve one of the junior suites. You can watch (and hear) cars descend the *Julierpass* from Number 55, a corner

suite. The room is done in a French motif, complete with a vase of dried lavender on the desk. The planked ceiling is painted white to contrast a French blue carpet and floral linens. A pine bed frame and antique-looking chairs complete the look. A large, elegant bath has off-white tile walls and a marble floor, with a separate bath and shower. And there is an additional half-bath near the entryway.

Also beautifully furnished, suite Number 54 features a pale-green color scheme and a loft area for the double bed, plus a rose-colored sofa and pine wardrobe. Number 53 on the same floor has only one window that faces the *Septimerpass* and a smaller bath, but is still a top pick. Cozier rooms on the fourth floor have rough-hewn beam ceilings and a more rustic décor. Number 16 is a basic, single room with a full-size bed and a small bath.

Amenities include a sauna/solarium, elevator, and TV upon request. With wall-to-wall windows on two sides framed in Arven pine, the spacious breakfast room is a great place

to start the day.

Across the street are a handful of cozy rooms in the **Chesa Lanz**, also featuring Arven pine décor (singles CHF 78, doubles CHF 128–168).

Contact: Hotel & Restaurant Post, 7457 Bivio–CH, tel. +41/081 659 1000, fax 1001, e-mail mail@hotelpost-bivio.ch, Web www.hotelpost-bivio.ch

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 82–97, doubles CHF 138–168, junior suites CHF 228

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 15/20

Hotel-Restaurant Grischuna

Norbert Elsa wears two hats in Bivio, overseeing the Hotel-Restaurant Grischuna and serving as the main tourist office contact. A third-generation property, the original part of the Grischuna was built in 1940, with a western addition tacked on in the early 1960s. Today, the hotel has 37 guestrooms, with balconies on the southern side, facing the *Julierpass*, and numerous outdoor terraces for relaxing in the mountain air. Number 32 has light wood furnishings, a small but clean private bath, and a balcony with views.

All rooms have a bath tub or shower, as well as a TV, radio, and safe. There is an elevator for transporting heavy suitcases to the upper floors, and you can rent well-tuned mountain bikes from the hotel reception desk.

Contact: Hotel-Restaurant Grischuna, 7457 Bivio–CH, tel. +41/081 659 1212, fax 1213, e-mail grischuna_bivio@bluewin.ch, Web www.grischuna-bivio.ch

Daily Rates: Summer singles CHF 67–92, doubles CHF 52–77 per person; winter singles CHF 89–129, doubles CHF 74–99 per person

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 11/20

Hotel-Restaurant Guidon

Sylva and Fritz Guidon-Andreoli have five basic rooms with pine furnishings above their roadside restaurant. All five rooms share a bathroom down the hall. The building is unremarkable, but the food downstairs is appetizing, and if all you need is a place to crash, the price is right. Across the street is a building with

two four-room vacation rentals and one three-room unit, all of which were renovated in 2003. Rooms are on the dark side, (particularly on the ground floor), and the location on the main thoroughfare can be noisy in summer with motorcycles passing by.

Contact: Hotel-Restaurant Guidon, 7457 Bivio–CH, tel. +41/081 684 5221, fax 5821, e-mail info@hotel-guidon.ch, Web www.hotel-guidon.ch

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 50–59, doubles CHF 50–59 per person; vacation rentals CHF 85–110

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 14/20

Food

Fresh grilled *forelle* (trout), cordon bleu, wild mushrooms, colorful mixed salads, and Italian staples are some of the culinary delights you'll find on Bivio menus. There are only a few restaurants in town, however, so if you plan to stay more than a few days, you may find yourself venturing to St. Moritz for a little variety. Alternatively, consider renting a vacation home and cooking some of your own meals. A small convenience market stocks a decent selection of groceries; a better idea would be to stock up in Savognin or Chur.

Restaurant Post

At the elegant Restaurant Post, you'll find traditional Swiss cuisine blended with Italian and French influences, along with an impressive wine cellar. Dine in the ambiance of Arven pine walls and mountain views. Although closed in the off-season, the Post will do for an apré ski drink or complete gourmet dinner

Contact: Hotel & Restaurant Post, 7457 Bivio–CH, Tel. +41/081 659 1000, fax 1001, e-mail mail@hotelpost-bivio.ch, Web www.hotelpost-bivio.ch

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 14/20

Restaurant Solaria

Chef Giancarlo Torriani can serve up to 200 people on a busy night, between the Restaurant Solaria, **Pizzeria Valetta**, and upstairs banquet hall. The main menu includes a mix of traditional Swiss and Italian dishes—such as a pork *Schnitzel* served with a deli-

cate mushroom sauce—as well as several vegetarian options. Culinary themes vary weekly during the high season, with emphasis on Chinese, Spanish, or other international foods.

Pizzas are cooked in a wood-fired oven, and the highlight of the pizzeria is an old-fashioned Swiss-style bowling alley, which can provide an evening's worth of entertainment. (Bring coins.) Several additions to the original hotel have created sheltered terraces for outdoor eating, all year long.

When the evening's cooking is complete and guests have moved on to dessert, Giancarlo often makes an appearance to chat with old friends, as well as first-time visitors. On quiet nights, locals drop in for a cigar at the restaurant's cozy bar.

Contact: Restaurant Solaria, Strada del Guiglia 43, CH–7457 Bivio, tel. +41/081 684 5107, fax 5290, e-mail solaria@hotelsolariabivio.ch, Web www.hotelsolariabivio.ch

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 14/20

Restaurant Guidon

The swift-flowing river of the *Julierpass* carves a path through the meadow behind the Hotel-Restau-

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 percent 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 website, with train schedules throughout Europe, as well as 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
- www.historicgermany.com Website for an alliance of historic German cities
- www.thetravelinsider.info Info on electronic devices used by travelers — cell phones, computers, etc.

rant Guidon. A popular stop for motorcyclists, the restaurant has ample parking in front, and riders can dine on the outdoor terrace while admiring the row of bikes from above. The daily menu features Swiss and Italian fare for CHF 17–19, as well as *Cordon Bleu* with fries and saffron mushroom risotto. A delightfully fresh mixed salad included red cabbage, pickles, shaved carrots, and bell peppers with a light thousand island dressing. Main dishes range from CHF 30–35, and the kitchen opens daily at 6am. The onsite *Konditorei* is a plus.

Contact: Hotel–Restaurant Guidon, 7457 Bivio–CH, tel. +41/081 684 5221, fax 5821, e-mail info@hotel-guidon.ch, Web www.hotel-guidon.ch
Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 11/20

Restaurant Grischuna

Dinner at the understated Grischuna was a treat, with the day's fresh catch (*forelle*) presented on a platter and filleted at the table, with slivered almonds on top. A stuffed tomato, green beans, and lemon wedge completed the dish. The menu here is eclectic, with everything from chicken curry Kashmir and lamb cutlet Provençal to veal cordon bleu, which is prepared with a cornmeal crust and dusted with paprika. Choose from 17 different wines by the glass from France, Italy, and Spain, as well as the local Fendant, a heavier white wine that tastes something like a Viognet. Finish the meal as the locals do, with a shot of kirsch.

On warm days, Norbert Elsa can be found tending the wood-fired grill on the lawn beside the hotel.

Contact: Hotel–Restaurant Grischuna, 7457 Bivio–CH, tel. +41/081 659 1212, fax 1213, e-mail grischuna_bivio@bluewin.ch, Web www.grischuna-bivio.ch
Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Bergrestaurant Cuolms

Located at the mid-station of the main ski lift, this on-mountain dining area is open only in winter, from 8:45am until 4:30pm. Enjoy close-up views of the surrounding peaks from the sun terrace (tel. +41/081 833 0674).

For evening entertainment, head to the **Lanzio Bar**, across from the Hotel Post, for billiards and disco music, or **La Trapla Bar** at the Hotel Solaria (winter and summer weekends only).



READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 1

able in quarter and half-liter carafes that are just right when one is traveling alone.

—THOMAS ERDMAN
VIA E-MAIL

Last Stop Langen

We took your advice and stayed at the **Hotel Dreieich** in Langen before flying home from Frankfurt. It was a nice hotel, and we got a two-room suite for €70. It was brand new, very clean, and served a good breakfast. We mentioned your name and got the lower rate, instead of paying the standard rate of €87. Thank you.

The Italian restaurant next door has good food, but they do not take credit cards.

—WOLFGANG KRAEMER
ALBUQUERQUE NM

Lakeside in Slovenia

South of Klagenfurt, Austria, in the northern part of Slovenia, is one of the most beautiful, picturesque lakes I have ever seen. **Lake Bled** is out of a fairy-tale. About two or three miles long, and less than that across, it is a stunningly clear body of water, with a castle high on a hilltop, an island in the center with a church, and a surprising lack of development along its shores.

Our hotel was the **Grand Hotel Toplice** (top-lee-cheh), right on the water, with magnificent views on the lakeside and elegant public rooms and restaurants. Our group of 36 unanimously praised the lake and hotel. Double rooms range from €130 to €200. I suggest you take a look; it's just a short haul south of the Austrian border.

—GENE LOPOTEN
LOWER GWYNEDD, PA

Hotel Bellevue in Spiez

My wife and I just returned from

a trip to Eastern Europe (with Rick Steves) and some additional time on our own in Switzerland. Here are a couple of recommendations for hotels, one with a very good restaurant:

In Czesky Krumlov, we stayed one night at the **Hotel Leonardo** (formerly the **Hotel Renaissance**,) located just a short block off the main square, Namesti Svornosti, in the heart of the old town, and not far from the castle on the hill above the town. It has been recently renovated, with very attractive rooms and a reasonable rate of CZK 2,200 per night (about USD 95) for a double with breakfast. It has no restaurant of its own but is close to many eateries in the old town area. I can recommend it as a reasonably priced hotel in a good location in this popular and beautiful World Heritage Site town. (Contact: Soukenicka 33, Czesky Krumlov 38101, Czech Republic, tel. 420 380 725 911, fax 910, e-mail hotel@hotelrenaissance.cz)

In Spiez, we spent six pleasant nights at the Hotel Bellevue, which is located next to the Hotel des Alpes that you've recommended previously in *Gemütlichkeit*. We didn't check out the des Alpes, but I don't think it can be any nicer than the Bellevue. Both have the same wonderful view over **Lake Thun, Spiez castle**, and peaks of the **Jungfrau** group. The photo on the hotel's website home page could have been taken from our room. On our last night, we enjoyed watching the **Shreckhorn, Wetterhorn**, and **Eiger** from the terrace outside our room (#2) as they were bathed in rosy pink alpenglow.

Service from the staff, led by chef/owner Walter Maurer-Aegerter and his wife, Veronika, ably supported by parents and pleasant *mitarbeitern*, was friendly and very much in the Swiss family hotel tradition. The price per night for a double with bath and excellent breakfast was CHF 136 (about \$100). The best thing about the Bellevue is the outstanding restaurant, with a large and varied menu and an excellent and extensive wine list featuring many good Swiss

wines. The quality of the food and service was superb. Even if one isn't staying at the Bellevue, a visit to the restaurant is definitely worthwhile. Dinner for two, with a moderately priced bottle of wine, costs about CHF 100—quite reasonable for the quality and variety of the menu.

I would like to add that we found Spiez to be a convenient base for visiting the **Bernese Oberland**. It is far less touristy than Interlaken, Grindelwald, or Wengen, and is close not only to the Jungfrau area but also to the cities of Thun, Bern, Murten, Fribourg, and Brienz. We had a couple of days of cloudy or rainy weather and on those days, it was a relief to be able to get to cities as an alternative to cloud-covered mountains.

Train, bus, and boat connections are convenient, as Spiez is a rail junction and lake steamer port. About the only downside to Spiez is that it is built on a hillside, and the walk from the boat dock all the way up to the railroad station may be a bit difficult for some. In summary, we can say that the Bellevue is a find in Spiez and highly recommend it. (Contact: 36 Seestrasse, tel. +41 / 033 654 8464, fax 8448, e-mail: hotel@bellevue-spiez.ch, Web www.bellevue-spiez.ch)

—MARTIN AND POLINA VITZ
VIA E-MAIL

Apartments in Goslar

I'm originally from Goslar in the Harz and recently visited the area in September. I suggest that interested parties should go on www.goslar.de to find the most reasonable apartments in the center of town. (See the links under *Gastgeber*.) Almost all private places are extremely well kept, and the prices vary from \$40–60 per night. I also traveled from there to Berlin in less than four hours.

—KARL KOERTJE
VIA E-MAIL

Zürich, Vienna, and Budapest

During the past four months we've stayed at some likeable, reasonable-value hotels which might interest your readers. In January, I stayed at the **Hotel Adler** in Zürich

(www.hotel-adler.ch) and the **Hotel du Theatre** (www.hotel-du-theatre.ch). They are both newly remodeled, stylishly modern, walking distance to the train station, and not too expensive for Zürich these days. We are going back to the Adler in June, as it is a little cheaper than the Theatre. The "Ben Bus" takes you to the airport at a reasonable cost.

On an April trip to Vienna, we stayed at the **Pension Suzanne**, half a block from the Opera House in the direction of the Musikverein, for €113 double with breakfast—an unbelievable value. It's not fancy, but comfortable with a modern and large bath. I would return if the dollar stays low.

In Budapest, we stayed at the **Starlight Suiten** on Merlag Utca (www.starlighthotels.com), which is a suite hotel with two rooms and a small kitchen. The location is half a block from the Chain Bridge, around the corner from the new Four Seasons (which is like an art nouveau museum, newly redone). My room cost €169, but was worth it. (There is also one of these hotels within the Ring in Vienna.)

On the same trip, we visited Fribourg, Switzerland, and stayed at the **Hotel au Sauvage**, which is one of the nicest small, charming hotels ever. It is a very old building, which has been carefully remodeled in fine taste, and the owners are very cordial. The food is also terrific and not sky-high in price. Not everyone speaks English, but the mistress of the house is an effective communicator.

We've also finally gotten on the cheap intra-europe flights and saved about \$1,500 on the trip. We took **Air Berlin** from Berlin to Vienna for \$39 per person and **easyJet** from Budapest to Geneva for somewhat under \$100 per person. They both threaten to charge for excess luggage weight, but neither did. I am forever finished paying high prices for European flights. Thanks for your help over the years.

—CAROL R. O'DONOVAN
VIA E-MAIL

Schloss Weitenberg

Schloss Weitenberg is a castle-hotel, owned by Baron Max-Richard von Rossler. The property has been in his family since about 1740. He is a gracious and charming host, who even agreed to a photo with our grandson. The hotel is located on the top of a bluff with a great view of the **Neckar Valley**. One of the best places to enjoy the view is the terrace, over a champagne cocktail (€7.50).

The hotel has approximately 20 double rooms, plus two junior suites, and one full-size suite. Rooms are decorated in keeping with the 1700s aesthetic, except for the bathrooms, which are very up-to-date. The only thing missing for women would be a hair blower. We paid €178 per night for a double with a cot. In the morning, we enjoyed a nice buffet, and you could ask to any type of eggs for no extra charge.

In the dining room, we counted 12 tables—most for four people but two that could seat a party of 10. There is a small room off to the side that accommodates larger/private parties. Three menus of the day were priced at €24, €32, and €56. Otherwise, prices are as follows: Starters €9.50–15, soups €7.50–8.50, vegetarian €18, main courses €21–24, desserts €8. Salads do not come with the meal and cost €9.50. Portions are generous, and I thought the quality of the food was good.

During our stay, the staff at the hotel were friendly and helpful. After talking with the receptionist, I learned that they are booked for weddings on weekends from May through September. We would definitely return.

One problem: How to find the castle? Although the address says **Starzach**, there is no town or village named Starzach, but this is what you follow from the Autobahn. As it turns out, Starzach is made up of five small villages. If you miss the one and only sign to the hotel in one of the villages, you drive around for a bit.

—JOAN GOEDEN
VIA E-MAIL 

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is intended for fast reference. Additional hotels and links to hotel websites hotels is in the **Archives & Hotel Database** sections at www.gemut.com. The required subscriber user name and password for access this month is on page 2 herein. Hotels are arranged in price order, higher to lower.

Berlin

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

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

Bern

Hotel Bristol, Schauplatzgasse 10, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 0101, fax 311 9479, email reception@bristolbern.ch

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

Lausanne

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

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

Lucerne

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

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

Munich

Hotel Exquisit, Pettenkofenstr. 3, tel. +49/089/ 551 99 0, fax 551 99 499, email: info@hotel-exquisit.com

Hotel Acanthus, An Der Hauptfeuerwache 14, D- 80331 München, tel. +49/089/ 23 18 80, fax: 2 60 73 64, e-mail: acanthus@t-online.de

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24, fax 550 3856, email: office@kraft-hotel.com

Rothenburg ob der Tauber

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

Salzburg & Environs

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

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

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

Vienna

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

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

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

Zürich

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

Hotel Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932, email: hotel.arlette@bluwin.ch

Frankfurt Airport

Steigenberger Esprit Hotel Frankfurt Airport, CargoCity Süd, D-60549 , tel. +49/069/69 70 99, fax 69 70 94 44, email: frankfurt@esprit-hotels.de

Hotel Birkenhof, von-Eiff-Str 37, Hanau-Steinheim, D-63456, tel. +49/06181/648 80, fax 64 88 39, email: info@HotelBirkenhof.de (25-minute drive from airport)

Hotel Dreieich, Frankfurter Str. 49, Langen , D-63225, tel. +49/06103/91 50, fax 52 030. email: hotel-dreieich@gmx.de

Munich Airport

Hotel Hoyacker Hof, Freisinger Landstrasse 9a, D-85748 Garching b. München, tel. +49/089/326 9900, fax 320 7243, email: info@hoyackerhof.de

Zürich Airport

Mövenpick Zürich Airport, Walter-Mittelholzerstrasse 8, CH-8152 Glattpfug, tel. +41/01/808 88 88, fax 808 88 77, email: hotel@movenpick-zurich-airport.ch

Hotel Fly Away, Marktgasse 19, Zürich-Kloten, Switzerland CH-8302, tel. +41/01/804 4455, fax 804 44 50, email: reservation@hotel-flyaway.ch

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

more authenticity and charm than it's better-known neighbor, **St. Moritz**. The train ride from Zürich is one of Switzerland's most scenic anywhere and includes segments traveled by two famous Swiss trains; the **Glacier Express** and the **Bernina Express**.

July 1999

A man who knows, Otto Wiesenthal of Vienna's **Altstadt Hotel**, gives us his favorite 18 Vienna restaurants in four categories: Mediterranean, Off the Beaten Path, Heuriger, and Music. There's also an interesting story on the experience of taking delivery of a new Porsche at the factory in Germany, including some helpful hints for purchasing a car in Europe.

December 1999

In the last issue before the new year, 2000, *Gemütlichkeit* chose its "Hotel of the Century," its "Affordable Hotel of the Century," and its "Castle Hotel of the Century," as well as the contenders in each of these categories. In looking over the list, I doubt that today, six years later, we would make a single change.

This month's login ID and password are on page two. Jump aboard www.gemut.com for this distillation of the hundreds of days and nights Liz and I, Jim Johnson, Nikki Goth Itoi, Mark Honan, Andy Bestor, Tom Bestor, and other staffers have spent seeking out the best places—and the best values—in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

—RHB

Travel Notes

■ Think Winter

With summer travel underway, we're looking ahead to winter. If you've never experienced the enchantment of Germany's *Christkindl Märkte*, consider making a special trip this year. We cannot imagine a better way to ring in the holidays. And of all the markets and tours we've evaluated over the years, "**Christmas Markets of Imperial Europe**," led by longtime *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber Karen Pasold

stands well above the crowd. With a focus on Eastern Europe, Ms. Pasold guides visitors on a 12-day trip from the Czech Republic to Germany to Poland, including stops in Prague, Dresden, Meissen, Leipzig, Karlovy Vary, Krakow, and Warsaw.

As a true Christmas Market enthusiast, Ms. Pasold has perfected her tour. You'll follow historic trading routes, stopping at markets that date as far back as the 15th century. From glühwein to potato pancakes, you sample a variety of seasonal foods and shop for unique, handmade crafts along the way. First rate hotels include the **U. Prince Hotel** in Prague, the **Taschenbergpalais Hotel** in Dresden, and the **Hotel Furstenhof** in Leipzig.

This year's tour takes place November 28 to December 10. The cost is \$2,290 per person, which includes rooms with a private bath based on double occupancy, portorage, specified lunches and dinners, ground transfers via a luxury motor coach between cities and towns, first class train double sleeper car compartments, scheduled sightseeing tours, and all admissions to scheduled activities, guides and tips. Complimentary airport arrival transfer is available in Prague. Contact: Classic Europe, 1 Glenmoor ~ Stonebriar, Frisco, Texas 75034, tel. (972) 625-6050, e-mail classicurope@yahoo.com.

■ Private Tours of Munich

By popular demand, Greg Schaffner, of Munich's famed **Acanthus Hotel**, has begun offering private tours of the city and surrounding Bavarian countryside. You'll travel on foot and/or public transportation, depending on the sights you wish to see. A native Oregonian, Mr. Schaffner, has lived in Munich for six years and traveled extensively in Europe. He caters to small groups, up to four. Tours of Salzburg are also available. *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers receive 10 percent off published rates, available on www.travelwithfriends.com.

Half Day Tour €100

Full Day Tour €160

Beyond Munich €220

*Admissions and transport not included. ☒