

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

Getting Ready for '06

It's trip planning season—one of my favorite times of year. In the old days, we used to send away for catalogs and fire off letters and faxes to hotels asking for rates and brochures. I haunted bookstores, eager for the arrival of the new *Michelin Red Guides*, and watched the travel section of the Sunday newspaper for that first ad for the Condor Airlines summer charter flights—"from \$488."

The Internet has changed all that. Now it's all Google searches and filling in online forms—"click here if you've forgotten your password." Instead of a shortage of information, the traveler planning a European trip faces an avalanche of data. Not so many years ago, we were limited to a few guidebooks and tourist office handouts, most of which were fairly reliable. The problem with the Internet is similar to that of the flea market shopper: how to fish a few items of quality from a sea of mediocrity—or worse.

Search engine rankings seem heavily weighted toward quantity. "Content," more specifically the *amount* of content, is the watchword. A website that devotes 100 pages to hotels in Munich is almost certain to rank higher in a Google search for "Munich hotels" than one that has just five pages on the topic. The sophisticated software that ranks websites isn't yet sophisticated enough to know which sites have the most accurate and reliable information.

With that in mind, here are a few thoughts on planning a European vacation this year:

• **Top Websites for Travel Planning:** See our list on page 5. The ViaMiche-

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

DRESDEN

A historic city reflects on its past and embraces the future, offering visitors a full menu of cultural experiences. By Tom Bross

Residents of Saxony's state capital are immersed in 800th-anniversary celebrations and retrospectives this year, as the city's history dates from 1206. Events during that long span of time range from the culturally significant to the famously tragic.

Dresden was a humdrum market center and Slavic fishing village before the Wettin dynasty's Friedrich Augustus I came to power as elector of Saxony in 1694, when two nearby cities outdid his in size and prestige. Two centuries earlier, Leipzig already had a university and bustled with international trade-fair activity. And a tall, twin-steeped Gothic cathedral had stood on riverside Meissen's Burgberg promontory since 1290.

The free-spending elector, nicknamed August the Strong (*August der Starke*) set out to make his capital a flamboyantly Baroque "Florence on the Elbe." Flush with money from silver mines in the southerly Erzgebirge ore mountains, he put artisans to work and imported Italian stonemasons, along with Westphalian architect Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann and Bavarian sculptor Balthasar Permoser.

Most of what they achieved turned into scorched rubble after the Anglo-American air raids of February 13-14, 1945—overnight attacks during which more than half a million incendiary bombs whipped up a hellish firestorm, causing a huge death toll and destruction throughout 80 per-

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2006 UPDATE: LUCERNE

Face it, Switzerland is expensive. But look on the bright side: If it weren't, it would be overrun with tourists. Imagine beautiful Lucerne, for example, with prices at Eastern European levels; the place would be pillaged. So let's count our blessings and live with the fact that Switzerland is, for most of us, a bit of a splurge—keeping in mind, however, that lakeside strolls, mountain walks, and the glorious scenery all cost CHF 00.

Since this is as good a year as any for a splurge, we've chosen Lucerne as the first stop in a series updating favorite destinations.

Sights, Events, Activities

Old Town: Narrow lanes, pretty squares, and restored houses. Visit the Hofkirche, a fine Renaissance building, and the Baroque Jesuit Church.

Kapellbrücke (Chapel Bridge): Medieval-style, covered, pedestrian bridge from 1333.

Transportation Museum: Fantastic for train, plane, boat, car and space buffs. Great rail displays, of course, and fine collection of ship models: sailing ships, container ships, ocean liners, and full-sized life boats. A "Cosmorama" includes Mercury Space Capsule, lunar rocks, and multimedia show on space flight. Lidstrasse 5, (10 minutes by #2 bus from rail station), www.verkehrshaus.ch.

Richard Wagner Museum: Here, in Haus Tribschen, where he lived from 1866 to 1872 with Cosima von Bülow, daughter of Franz Liszt, Wagner wrote

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Exchange rates as of 1/29/06

1 euro = \$1.21

1 Swiss franc = \$0.78

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

lin and Germany and Swiss rail sites are especially useful.

• What's special about 2006?

North Americans visiting Europe this year can expect plenty of company, something to consider when planning a trip. In fact, the total number of North American visitors seems likely to approach the all-time record. The dollar buys a bit more than it did a year ago, and two major events, the World Cup soccer tournament in Germany, and Austria's celebration of Mozart's 250th birthday, promise to attract visitors in the millions.

• Transatlantic Airfares: Our advice is to buy tickets now. The longer you wait, the higher price you're likely to pay. Demand is huge and, though most airlines are adding flights, the increased capacity is not likely to create enough of a seat surplus to lower prices. Higher security fees and taxes, plus fuel surcharges, account for much of the increase in ticket prices over 2005. The Gemut.com travel service has low consolidator rates on the major airlines, including Lufthansa, British Air, Swiss, American and others. Go to www.gemut.com and click Air Tickets or phone 800-521-6722.

• Car Rental: Germany still has the lowest rates. For example, our travel department offers a subcompact for two weeks at \$353, including tax, and a compact (four doors, air) for \$432. Renting a car is trickier than ever, so

do some reading at www.gemut.com (click Car Rental).

Availability and price during the World Cup could be an issue. One company, Sixt, has already raised prices for this period. Car rental guru, Andy Bestor (abestor@gemut.com), advises early booking. You can cancel without fee if necessary.

• Rail: Starting this year, the Swiss Pass includes free entrance to more than 400 museums. For more info on '06 rail travel, see "Train Talk," page 8.

• Hotels: Cancellation penalties are increasingly prevalent. If you provide a credit card to guarantee a booking, make sure you understand the policy for canceling. Thousands of hotels can be booked through Venere, one of Europe's largest, most reliable online bookers. To use the service, go to www.gemut.com and click Hotel Bookings.

Soccer fans are justifiably incensed that some German hotels have raised rates to unconscionable heights (in some cases three to five times normal rates) during the World Cup. Of course, this applies almost entirely to the 12 host cities—and then mostly to dates around matches (no city will host more than six matches in the June 9 to July 9 time frame). Room availability and rates, however, are unlikely to be affected in non 'Cup' cities and small, country towns.

• Cell Phones: We currently recommend carrying a GSM phone to Europe. Ask your service provider about Europe roaming: with a small monthly charge you should be able to use your

phone in Europe at a per-minute charge of around 99 cents. Those who travel with a laptop computer should investigate Skype (www.skype.com), a service that allows users to make very inexpensive calls all over the world. Internet access is required.

• Guidebooks & Maps: Essential books are Michelin's Green (sights, history) and Red guides (hotels, restaurants). We're also high on Michelin's *Charming Places Germany* (\$19.95), identifying 500 mostly small, less expensive, properties.

Never travel Europe by car without detailed maps (1:200,000 or 1:150,000). Since it takes a dozen maps at a scale of 1:200,000 to cover all of Germany, the *ADAC MaxiAtlas for Germany* (1:1500,000) is our first choice. Each map in the series of individual 1:200,000 maps published by Mairs sells for \$11.95, but the all-Germany *MaxiAtlas* is \$29.95. These books and maps are 20 percent off at www.travelessentials.com.—RHB

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: **drsdn** Password: **4142**

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

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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.

DRESDEN*Continued from page 1*

cent of the illustrious *Innenstadt*. Proud Dresdners have been putting their city back together ever since.

Altstadt Contrasts

First-time visitors can get their bearings easily enough. The Elbe divides Dresden into two parts: **Altstadt** (the historic heart of town) on the south side and **Neustadt** on the north. Four bridges link the two. Don't miss an opportunity for an evening stroll across the oldest of these, the 18th-century **Augustusbrücke**, for stunning views of Altstadt's reconstructed, dramatically floodlit skyline. The panorama recalls accurately rendered cityscapes painted in an earlier era by Bernardo Bellotto, a.k.a. Canaletto.

Using the **Altmarkt** and **Neumarkt** for orientation, short walks get you to all major attractions. Overlooking the oldest of those open spaces, the blackened-sandstone **Kreuzkirche** is home of the **Kreuzchor**, a Dresden fixture since the 13th century. The 150-member boys' choir sings vespers, Saturdays at 6pm. Early-1950s photos, taken from the clock tower, depict the bombed-out emptiness that surrounded the church.

Postwar buildings flanking the square exemplify "Stalinist-Classical" architecture, partially relieved by an **Altmarkt Galerie** shopping complex. A Dresden Philharmonic concert venue, the 1969 **Kulturpalast** is another domineering GDR leftover, its west facade still covered by a gargantuan glories-of-socialism mural.

Frauenkirche Reborn

The firebombing of Dresden led to the collapse of the mid-18th-century Protestant Frauenkirche, when its 12,200-ton dome was weakened by heat stress. Now, after 11 years of epic rebuilding that cost €180 million (\$215 million), the church stands again. Don't miss a chance to step inside—either for a church service or a chorale or organ recital—to admire the frescoed crypt and lofty, 95-meter (312-ft.) cupola.

Next, walk west to Augustusstrasse for the **Fürstenzug** (Princes' Procession) frieze. On its 102-meter

Dresden Basics**Population:** 477,653**Elevation:** 113 meters (344 feet)

Tourist Information: Dresden-Werbung und Tourismus, Ostra-Allee 11, D-01067, Dresden, tel. +49/351/4919 20, fax 351/4919 2116, info@dresden-tourist.de, www.dresden-tourist.de. Visitor info on Prager Strasse (near the Hauptbahnhof) and in the Schinkelwache at Theaterplatz
Tourism Marketing Company of Saxony, 3220 SW 66th Ave., Portland, OR 97225, tel. 503-227-1750, fax 503-241-4746, www.saxonytourism.com

Flight Arrivals: Dresden-Klotzche Airport, located five miles north of the city center. Rapid-transit S-Bahn service costs €1.70 for rail connection to Neustadt (13 minutes) and Dresden (21 minutes)

Train Travel: Frequently scheduled long-distance trains, including high-speed InterCity Express (ICE).

Driving Distances:

Leipzig	67 miles	108 km
Berlin	127 miles	205 km
Munich	300 miles	484 km
Hamburg	312 miles	502 km

Best Buys: Dresden Card for transportation within the city fare zone; admission to 11 museums of the State Art Collections; discounts for bus and river tours and selected shops and restaurants; €19 per person for 48 hours; Dresden Regio Card includes transportation throughout the metro region as well as steam-train trips on the narrow-gauge Lössnitztal and Weisseritztal railways; €29 per person for 72 hours

Boat Rides: The world's oldest and largest paddle-steamer fleet, founded in 1836, offers day trips from Dresden Altstadt to Pillnitz (€14 roundtrip) and upriver to Meissen (€15.80 roundtrip), www.saechsische-dampfschiffahrt.de.

Major Events:

- Elbe Steamboat Parade: May 1
- 36th Dixieland Festival: May 7-14
- Classical Music Festival: May 25-Jun. 11
- Elbhauptfest Riverside Festival: Jun. 23-25
- Dresden 800th Anniversary : Jul. 14-23
- "White Fleet" Paddle-Steamer Festival: Aug. 18-20
- Contemporary Music Festival: Oct. 1-10
- 572nd Striezelmarkt (Christmas Market): Nov. 23-Dec. 24

(334-ft.) expanse, nine centuries of Wettin rulers and their retinues are depicted in pompous regalia on 24,000 Meissen tiles. Credit goes to Wilhelm Walther for this extravaganza of wall art, completed in 1876. His kiln-baked

tiles survived the firestorm.

Continue to the marchers' symbolic starting point: the neo-Renaissance **Residenzschloss**. Its west wing is devoted to the **Grünes Gewölbe** (Green Vault), Augustus's treasure trove of applied art, including pearl figurines, carvings, cut gems, mirrors, and alabaster goblets, plus ivory, amber, and ebony knickknacks, as well as inlaid and enameled cabinetry.

For over-the-top Baroque profusion, nothing outdoes Altstadt's **Zwinger**, across Sophienstrasse from the residence palace. As wildly conceived by Pöppelmann and Permoser, pavilions, crowned portals, and a Nymphenbad grotto—all encrusted with cherubs and mythic nymphs, tritons, and satyrs—embrace a floral courtyard with a fountain (an idyllic concert setting). Here, the impulsive Augustus had his playground for tournaments, festivals, fireworks, and weddings.

Dresden's Madonna

A century later, Gottfried Semper completed the oval Zwinger's curviness by inserting the **Gallery of the Old Masters**, another of Dresden's claims to cultural eminence. Italian paintings from the 15th to 17th centuries—by Rubens, Titian, Tintoretto, Correggio, Giorgione, and Botticelli—draw rapt attention, but none more so than a canvas purchased by August III in 1754 from Piacenza's Church of San Sisto. *The Sistine Madonna* stands tiptoe on a cloud. Two tousle-haired angels gaze upward at Virgin and Child, who look straight ahead out of Raphael's textbook-perfect composition.

A performance in the **Semperoper**, destroyed when the bombs fell and reopened exactly 40 years afterward, clinches the Dresden cultural experience. Richard Strauss affiliations are especially strong. His four best-known operas—*Intermezzo*, *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*—premiered in this massive, resplendent Theaterplatz edifice, as did Richard Wagner's *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser*.

Shopping and Snacking

Specialty shops, department stores, and the flashy **Wöhrl Plaza**

urban mall line Altstadt's **Prager Strasse** pedestrian corridor. You'll find leather goods and clothing retailers—plus **Café Mobilius**—in **Haus am Zwinger** on Kleine Brüdergasse. **Kreutzkamm**, a much older Konditorei café/bakery, has been in several Altmarkt locations since 1825.

Browse in Neustadt's pricey art galleries on **Königstrasse** and stores along parallel **Hauptstrasse**, where **Kunst und Handwerk Etzol** displays such traditional Erzgebirge Christmastime charmers as candle-powered windmill pyramids and *Rauhermännchen* (smoking men) characters. Handicraft shops and artsy studios intermingle with taverns inside **Kunsthof-Passage** on Görlitz Strasse. You can nosh on famed Dresden *Stollen* while seated amidst the baked goods, grocery, and wine-shop cubbyholes in circa-1886 **Neustädter Markthalle** (Metzer Strasse and Ritterstrasse entrances).

Excursions

Side-trip possibilities include the Oriental-themed summer palace, **Schloss Pillnitz**, 12 km (7.4 mi.) east of Dresden via Elbe steamer or riverside roadway. Take a lunch break in the suitably Baroque **Schloss Hotel** restaurant (tel. +49/351/26 140, fax 2614 400, info@schlosshotel.pillnitz.de, www.schlosshotel-pillnitz.de). Not far away, the Elbe flows through the **Sächsisches Schweiz National Park** and its bizarre sandstone rock formations—accessible from two unspoiled spa towns: **Pirna** and **Bad Schandau**.

Another dose of Baroque opulence, is 15 km (9.3 mi.) north of the capital at **Schloss Moritzburg**, August the Strong's photogenic hunting lodge (€6 admittance), in pastoral lake country. Artist Käthe Kollwitz's Rüdendorf house is an extra attraction.

A 25-km (15.5-mi.) S-Bahn line connects Dresden with **Meissen**, where a Gothic cathedral and **Albrechtsburg Castle** tower over the Domplatz. You'll find casual dining here at the **Burgkeller** restaurant and beer garden (+49/3521/414 00, fax 414 04, burgkeller@meissen-hotel.com, www.meissen-hotel.com). But the little city's biggest draw is the **Staatliche Porzellan Manufactur**, on Talstrasse,

with its demonstration workshops and *Schauhalle*, displaying some 3,000 Meissen rarities from as long ago as 1710 (€8 combined admittance).

LODGING

Kempinski Hotel Taschenbergpalais

This five-star beauty was built in 1709, first to pamper August the Strong's then-favorite mistress, and later became the mansion of a Wettin crown prince. Court architect Pöppelmann designed it as part of an ensemble that includes Altstadt's residence palace and Zwinger across the street. Gutted during the 1945 air attack, the structure reopened under the Kempinski banner a decade ago.

Pale yellow facades with white trim and sculpted ornamentation set the classical tone. Intermezzo, where meals are served on Rosenthal china, opens onto a courtyard embellished with fountains. Alongside the lobby, crystal chandeliers illuminate a grand Baroque staircase. An informal bistro occupies Taschenberg's vaulted cellars.

The 182 guestrooms (plus 32 suites) feature red elmwood furnishings complemented by lacquered black cabinetry and door frames, royal blue carpeting and neo-Art Deco lighting fixtures, beds covered in bright-red or dark-blue blankets and down comforters. Among bathroom niceties: polished granite vanity surfaces, Pierre Cardin toiletries and elmwood-framed mirrors.

Daily Rates: Singles from €152, doubles from €182

Contact: Kempinski Hotel Taschenbergpalais, Taschenberg 3, D-0106 Dresden, tel. +49/351/491 20 (800-426-3135 for Kempinski Worldwide Reservation Center), fax 351/4912 812, reservation@kempinski-dresden.de, www.kempinski-dresden.de

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

Radisson SAS Gewandhaus

Another saved-from-the-rubble success, this former 18th-century garment-makers' workshop and warehouse is now adjacent to the Rathaus and close to Pirnaischer Platz's public-transit junction. If you arrive by car, there are spaces out

front (a rarity in the inner Altstadt).

A glass dome overhangs the arched-windowed lobby lounge, warmed by an open fireplace. Primary décor, on light-toned walls and columns, consists of photos taken from Zeppelin airships during the 1920s and '30s showing the **Gewandhaus** and vicinity prior to World War II. Antique irons and sewing machines from the long-gone cloth-hall days stand on ledges in Weber's, a chic restaurant.

Doorways to the 97 Biedemeier-furnished guestrooms (and 3 suites) are decorated with molded white plasterwork. Inside, extra-large beds are covered with thick duvets; bathroom surfaces are marble. Top-floor rooms have a sloping roof line along the walls and window wells. Wellness amenities includes a swimming pool, solarium, and fitness center.

Daily Rates: Deluxe €115–250, business class €145–300, suites €400–750, breakfast €18

Contact: Radisson SAS Gewandhaus Hotel, Ringstrasse 1, D-01067 Dresden, tel. +49/351/494 90, fax 351/4949 490, info.dresden@radissonsas.com, www.radissonsas.com

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Am Terrassenufer

Skeptics yelped in the early 1900s, when developers announced plans to relieve Dresden's hotel shortage by converting a dormitory for Technische Universität students into first-class lodgings. Indeed, the 12-story prefab exterior exemplifies socialist GDR blandness. But a top-to-bottom makeover (including an inviting bright-yellow entryway) and a desirable location on an Elbe embankment make this a recommendable, reasonably priced choice. A 15- to 20-minute walk gets you to the Neumarkt.

All 189 rooms reflect socialist equality: same size, standardized appointments, and large windows. Views make a difference, however. An upper-floor room on the east-facing side rewards occupants with vistas past the **Carolabrücke** bridge, taking in the new Synagogue, Frauenkirche dome, Hofkirche and Kreuzkirche towers,

and other Altstadt landmarks.

What had been the students' cafeteria is now named Pavillon, a semicircular restaurant where Saxon specialties and Italian pastas dominate the menu. It opens onto a terrace for outdoor dining. Draft beers are poured in the two-level lobby bar, positioned for across-the-river views of Saxony's gilded-topped state Finance Ministry.

Daily Rates: Singles €82–75, doubles €100–115

Contact: Hotel Am Terrassenufer, Terrassenufer 12, D-01069 Dresden, tel. +49/351/490/9500, fax 351/490/9600, hat@hotel-terrassenufer.de, www.hotel-terrassenufer.de

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Martha Hospiz

On a central-Neustadt side street, a pair of four-story, circa-1899 buildings, connected by a sunroom walled in glass and filled with wicker furniture, enclose a backyard garden. The hotel is affiliated with the Germany-wide Christian Verband association. Furnishings and polished woodwork in both the sizeable breakfast room and 50 spacious bedrooms (with deep-pile carpeting and either brown or blue color schemes) recall prim Biedermeier styling. Prepare to pay extra for a room with private bath.

You'll find a stone-walled dining and drinking nook and downstairs, Zum Kartoffelkeller, for varied Saxon potato concoctions.

Daily Rates: Singles €72–84, doubles €102–118

Contact: Hotel Martha Hospiz, Nieritzstrasse 11, D-01097 Dresden, tel. +49/351/8176 333, fax 351/8176 222, marthahospiz.dresden@t-online.de, www.vch.de/marthahospiz.dresden. Prop: Christiana and Winfrid Tilp

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Am Blauen Wunder

This stylishly contemporary hotel in Dresden-Blasewitz overlooks the 1893 "Blue Wonder" bridge, connecting the genteel neighborhood with Dresden-Loschwitz on the north side of the Elbe. (The beloved steel suspension span, its girders painted a light shade of blue, is one reason why metro Dresden's 20-km stretch of the river—flowing upstream by way of flood-

plain Heide meadows, forested hillsides, patrician estate gardens, and Elbtal vineyards—attained designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site two years ago).

The hotel's sleekly curved contours stand out amidst the prewar *Gründerzeit*, *Wilhelminian*, and *Jugendstil* villas lining Blasewitz's fashionable streets. Crunchy white gravel and a silver metallic sign emblazoned with an image of the iconic bridge lead to the front doors and lobby, brightened by potted plants, ivy, and floor-to-ceiling glass. Framed art prints decorate all 44 guestrooms; closet and bathroom dimensions are generous. Culinario, the onsite restaurant, excels with Italian cuisine and wines for midday and evening meals.

Daily Rates: Singles €78–95, doubles €95–130, junior suite €165

Contact: Hotel am Blauen Wunder, Loschwitz Strasse 48, D-01309 Dresden, tel. +49/351/33 660, fax 351/3366 299, reservierung@habw.de, www.habw.de

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Ambiente

This 20-room boutique hostelry, in business since 1993, is situated in the serene east-side Niedersiedletz district, with Lockwitztalstrasse's shops, restaurants, and a public swimming pool right around the corner. Greco, the resident parrot, greets arriving guests in scratchy German as they pass through etched-glass entry doors to reach the reception desk. Cabinetry is cherry wood; furnishings are custom-made. Bathrooms are completely up-to-date, and the morning's gourmet-caliber buffet-breakfast will leave an impression.

Daily Rates: Singles €71–91, doubles €86–118

Contact: Hotel Ambiente, Meusegaster Strasse 23, D-01259 Dresden, tel. +49/351/2078 80, fax 351/2078 836 info@hotel-ambiente.de, www.hotel-ambiente.de. Prop: Gabriele Frölich and Günter Wuchsa

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

An der Rennbahn

In *Altstadt's* placid east-side Seidnitz neighborhood (midway be-

tween Grosser Garten parkland and a horse-race track), this is essentially a suburban inn with folksy, woodsy atmospherics—transformed from an 1890s Gasthof and Bürgerhaus into an amiable hotel a century later. Twenty-two guestrooms on the two upstairs floors are cozy and solidly furnished. Equestrian photos and artifacts cling to the *gemütlich* restaurant's oak partitions and cream-colored walls. All-you-can-eat buffet breakfasts are ample.

The brick-vaulted wine cellar, a leftover from the original Gasthof, doubles as an intimate Bierstube, and chestnut trees shade a 20-seat Biergarten. Real-life saddles, complete with stirrups, have been recycled into bar-stool seats. Tram lines #1 and #2 provide fast-enough access from elsewhere in town.

Daily Rates: Singles €69–74, doubles €84–92

Contact: An der Rennbahn, Winterbergstrasse 96, D-01237 Dresden, tel. +49/351/2125 00, fax 351/2125 050, buero@hotel-an-der-rennbahn-dresden.de, www.hotel-an-der-rennbahn.de. Proprietor: Ursala Bolz

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

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.travelessentials.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.

FOOD**Alte Meister**

You'd be hard-pressed to find a finer setting for a dressy dinnertime experience anywhere else in town than at Alte Meister. What used to be a sculptor's studio fits inside an upstairs niche against the north wall of the Semper-designed Old Masters Gallery. You'll dine on the Theaterplatz, looking directly at the Hamburg-born architect's namesake opera house—bathed in lights to intensify the visual punch.

Entrée highlights overseen by chef Dirk Wende include duck breast with honey sauce (€16), filet of pike perch (€16.50), and saltimbocca of young boar (€18)—all complemented by selections from a Continental wine list. Finish with an elderberry parfait from the dessert menu (€4.50). Reasonably priced breakfasts and lunches are served daily, indoors and on a terrace.

A long bar takes up precious space, and tables are placed close together. Take the pre- and post-performance surge of opera-goers into consideration when making reservations.

Contact: Alte Meister Café & Restaurant, Theaterplatz 1a, D-01067 Dresden, tel. +49/351/4810 426, fax 4810 479, info@altemeister.net, www.altemeister.net

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 14/20

Coselpalais

The Frauenkirch's great stone bulk looms above this restaurant/café's pediment. August the Strong kept a mistress, Countess Anna Constantia von Cosel, here. After that affair fizzled, her personal palace was put to military use. A meticulous Baroque/Rococo restoration recalls the church's history. Two lunch-and-dinner salons compete for attention, perhaps outdone by the Porzellanzimmer café—where coffee, tea, and pastries are served on Meissen tableware. (You might prefer an umbrella-shaded spot on the sandstone forecourt). Expect to spend €13–€19 for a three-course meal.

Contact: Restaurant and Grand Café

Coselpalais, An der Frauenkirche 12, D-01067 Dresden, tel. +49/351/496/2424, fax 351/498/9805

Rating: QUALITY 20/20, VALUE 19/20

Kö Nr. 5a

In Neustadt, tucked inside one of trendy Königstrasse's many courtyards, the candlelit tables of Kö Nr. 5a are set beneath old stone arches. The restaurant combines intimacy and excellently prepared entrées for a tempting culinary experience. Try goose breast with red cabbage and potato dumplings for a heaping-full Germanic meal (€14.50)—or the "Moritsburger" game-goulash stew cooked with mushrooms, brussels sprouts, and homemade bread dumplings (€12.50). Dessert is highly recommended for the apple fritters in vanilla sauce (€4.50).

Contact: Kö Nr. 5a, Königstrasse 5a, D-01097 Dresden, tel. +49/351/802/4088, fax 802/4089

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

Le Maréchal de Saxe

Similar to Kö Nr. 5a and on the same side of Neustadt street, Le Maréchal de Saxe has comparable courtyard access and invitingly modest dimensions. Here, though, the understated, chic ambience is unquestionably French, made evident by movie posters and cinema-celebrity photos from the New Wave heyday when Jeanne Moreau, Jean-Paul Belmondo, and director François Truffaut were all the rage. Fish, gratins, meat, and fowl entrées are tastefully prepared; French-wine prices vary. Dinner will cost, on average, €8.80–12.80.

Contact: Le Maréchal de Saxe, Königstrasse 15, D-01097 Dresden, tel. +49/351/8105 880, fax 351/8105 881

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 14/20


Gänsedieb

On a narrow pub-crawlers' street where twentysomething locals gravitate, a fountain depicting a man stealing two geese stands beside the Rathaus. Stroll across the square (behind the Kreuzkirche) to find this non-touristy establishment whose name means "Goose-Thief." Saxon standards include potato-and-sau-

sage soup (€3.20–5.20) and Dresdner Sauerbraten prepared with dumplings and red cabbage (€10.70), as well as Braumeister Schnitzel with pommes frites (€8.95) and several roast-geese entrées, including a remoulade with mayonnaise (€7.95). Two Dresdner desserts are on daily menus: egg-based Eierschecke (sugar-sweetened, sprinkled with raisins) and Quarkkeulchen (a cinnamon-topped cheese-curd oddity).

Gänsedieb stocks 14 kinds of Bavarian-brewed Paulaner pilsners and lagers. Dark-wood walls, bare-wood bar tables, and quirky white goose figurines complete the casual feel. There's live music — country and blues — on the first Friday evening of each month.

Contact: Gänsedieb Café-Restaurant, Weisse Gasse 1, D-0167 Dresden, tel. +49/351/8509-05, fax 351/8509 10, info@gaensedieb.de, www.gaensedieb.de

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20 

LUCERNE UPDATE

Continued from page 1

Die Meistersinger. (Wagnerweg 27, www.richard-wagner-museum)

Museum of Art: (Kunstmuseum), Modern art in Jean Nouvel-designed space on the top floor of Culture and Convention Center (Europaplatz 1)

Picasso Museum: Drawings, graphics, and ceramics, plus 200 photos capturing intimate moments of the artist's life (Furrengasse 21)

Rosengart Collection: Once a private, family collection, this important new museum features the works of Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso; also Matisse, Miró, Monet, Cézanne, and others. (Pilatusstrasse 10, www.rosengart.ch)

Lucerne Music Festival: Annually presents top-rank musicians and orchestras. Major events: **Ostern 2006**, April 1–9; **Sommer 2006**, August 10–September 17, **Piano 2006**, November 21–26 (<http://e.lucernefestival.ch>)

Culture and Convention Center: Home to one of Europe's most celebrated classical music venues, renowned for its acoustics (Europaplatz 1, www.kkl-luzern.ch)

Mount Pilatus: Two cable cars ascend year-round to the summit. From May to November, the "steepest cogwheel railway in the world" makes its 18-minute trip up 48 percent gradients on the south flank. Queen Victoria rode a mule up in 1868. (www.pilatus.ch)

Boat Trips: A variety of trips from 30 minutes to a full day are available on Lake Luzern. The fleet includes 20 boats that call at more than 30 ports. All include on-board restaurants serving beverages, snacks, and full meals. Though there is more service in summer, some trips are year-round. The Swiss Rail Pass is good for most trips. (SGV, Werftstrasse 5, tel. +41/041/367-6767, www.lakelucerne.ch, info@lakelucerne.ch)

LODGING

The Hotel

This design marvel of glass, steel, and highly polished wood is an absolute stunner; a creation of famed Paris architect, Jean Nouvel, whose credits include Lucerne's lakeside Congress Center, Berlin's Galeries Lafayette, and the acclaimed Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.

All rooms feature giant, single-pane windows; pivoting matte stainless steel cabinets for storage and entertainment components; minimalist furnishings designed by Nouvel; Brazilian cherry wood table surfaces; deeply-polished floor planks; and, on the ceiling of each room, in muted colors, scenes from art house films. At night, wall sconces illuminate them to create an extraordinary exterior view for passersby.

The sleek Restaurant Bam Bou features Asian/French dishes. Even if The Hotel is not in your future, check the website.

Daily Rates: Rooms CHF 350–540; breakfast CHF 25

Contact: The Hotel, Sempacherstrasse 14, CH 6002 Luzern, tel. +41/041/226 8686, fax 226 8690, info@the-hotel.ch, www.the-hotel.ch

Romantik Hotel Wilden Mann

Cozy, old-world charmer in the center of Lucerne's shopping district, five minutes' walk from the train sta-

tion. Blazing fireplace in the lounge. Atmospheric restaurant. Individually decorated rooms.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 165–210, doubles CHF 265–340

Contact: Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/210 1666, fax 210 1629, mail@wilden-mann.ch, www.wilden-mann.ch

Art Deco Hotel Montana

One of the better places to appreciate Lucerne's splendid setting is from the balcony of a lakeview room at this hillside hotel. Built in 1910, the Montana has the high ceilings, wide hallways, and large windows that characterize hotels of that period.

The classic Louie-Bar, with splendid views, offers live jazz and blues and 80 Scottish malt whiskies. A pleasant, lively hotel that one wishes were a little less expensive.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 210–260, doubles CHF 290–465

Contact: Hotel Montana, Adigen-swilerstrasse 11, CH-6002 Luzern, tel. +41/041/516 565, fax 516 676, info@hotel-montana.ch, www.hotel-montana.ch

Hotel Schweizerhof

A palatial but sterile *Grand Dame*. Lots of marble columns, crystal chandeliers, and mirrored ceilings, but not enough charm. At this level, The Hotel is a far better choice.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 260–500, doubles CHF 310–550; breakfast CHF 30

Contact: Schweizerhof Luzern, Schweizerhofquai 3, CH-6003, Luzern, tel. +41/041/410 0410, fax: 410 2971, info@schweizerhof-luzern.ch, www.schweizerhof-luzern.ch

Hotel Cascada

Though its rates are still below other Lucerne hotels in its category, Cascada has lost some of its value appeal. A clientele of mostly business travelers, enjoy bright, well-furnished guestrooms in a location convenient to the railway station.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 165–220, doubles CHF 245–290

Contact: Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel. +41/041/

226 8088, fax 226 8000, info@cascada.ch, www.cascada.ch

Hotel Des Balances

Once touted in guidebooks as a moderately-priced haven for budget-minded American travelers, Des Balances has gone upscale. The least expensive double is now about \$225 and doesn't include breakfast. You can do better.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 210–260, doubles CHF 280–395, breakfast CHF 27

Contact: Hotel Des Balances, Weimarkt, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/418 2828, fax 418 2839, info@balances.ch, www.balances.ch

Hotel Löwengraben

The former town prison until 1998 has been converted to a hotel with a restaurant, gallery, and performing arts venue. Nearly all guestrooms are in former inmate cells and, though such necessary amenities as a private toilet and shower have been added, they remain in jail house configuration: one small, barred window high on the wall; the original reinforced door with only a peephole, and two basic cots. Löwengraben is not for everyone; most rooms, though immaculate, are small and basic. The least expensive "budget" category of rooms is not recommended.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 69–225, doubles CHF 80–222; breakfast included with some rooms, otherwise CHF 9

Contact: Hotel Löwengraben, Löwengraben 18, CH-6004 Luzern, tel. +41/041/417 1212, fax 417 1211, hotel@loewengraben.ch, www.loewengraben.ch

Goldener Stern

Near the Franciscan church on the south bank of the Reuss river. Clean and plain. A Swiss bargain. In the hotel's country-style restaurant, try the calves liver with *Rösti* for less than \$20.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 85–100, doubles CHF 110–150

Contact: Goldener Stern, Burgerstrasse 35, CH-6003 Luzern, tel. +41/041/227 5060, fax 227 5160, hotel@goldener-stern.ch, www.goldener-stern.ch

TRAIN TALK: THE YEAR AHEAD

Rail Europe has introduced a number of changes this year that may affect how you plan your next trip to the Continent. Here are some of the most important:

❑ **Select Pass Early Bird Special:**

Buy this 3, 4, or 5-country pass before March 30 and get a free, extra day of travel in the 6, 8 and 10-day versions. In other words, you'll get 7 days travel with the 6-day pass, 9 days with the 8-day pass and 11 days with the 10-day pass. (The 5-day and 15-day versions of the pass are not part of the deal.) For example, two persons traveling together on a 3-country pass covering Germany, Austria and Switzerland can get 7 days first-class travel for \$360 per person. Passes are valid for 6 months after issue, so a pass purchased on, say, March 25, will still be good for travel on September 24.

❑ **New Swiss Pass Benefits:** One of the significant deals of the year is the inclusion of a Swiss Museum Pass with the purchase of a Swiss Pass or Swiss Flexi Pass. Your rail pass will cover admission to more than 400 museums and exhibits

throughout the country, including the Swiss Open-Air Museum Ballenberg, the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, the new Paul Klee Center in Bern, and many other popular destinations. See www.museumspass.ch for a complete list.

Tired of dragging your luggage through one train station after the next? Try the Swiss Rail's new Fast Baggage service for same-day delivery of your belongings in 45 cities and destinations across the country. Simply drop off luggage by 9am, pay the \$15 dollar handling fee (per piece), and the bags will meet you at your final destination by 6pm the same evening. It doesn't get any more convenient than that.

❑ **Price Changes:** This year, for the first time, the price of Eurail passes will be based on the euro instead of the dollar. You'll still pay in dollars, but unlike in years past, prices will fluctuate, depending on the exchange rate. Overall, prices are increasing about three to six percent.

❑ **New Rail Pass Products:** Planning a two-country itinerary? Now you can combine Germany-Austria or

Germany-Switzerland or Austria-Switzerland into one rail pass. The cost for one adult traveling five days in Germany and Austria (first class) is currently \$324. For two to five adults traveling together at all times, the price for a five-day Saverpass comes down to \$275 per person. Prices are slightly higher for the Germany-Switzerland pass: \$349 for an adult traveling alone (five days, first-class), and \$298 per person for a small group. The existing four-day, first-class Switzerland-Austria pass starts at \$328 for one adult and \$280 for two or more.

These new passes offer flexibility for those planning to visit just two of the three countries. They provide unlimited travel, and travel days need not be used consecutively.

Individual country passes are, of course, still offered, and for travel to more than two countries, the three-, four-, or five-country Eurail Select-pass is still available.

The *Gemütlichkeit* travel department is a Rail Europe-authorized issuer of all European passes and tickets. Phone 800-521-6722. 

Food

Lucerne is not renowned for its cuisine. In and around the old town are many restaurants whose principal clients are here-today-gone-tomorrow-forever tourists—not a formula that makes for great meals. Michelin, in fact, confers not a single star or even a red *Karte* (good food at moderate prices) on any restaurant. Still, the careful traveler can find good food.

Wilden Mann Burgerstube

The elegant old-world Burgerstube, with its carved wood wainscoting, decorated ceiling beams, millioned windows, and hearty stick-to-the-ribs dishes with a few modern twists, is a dream-come-true for the traveler seeking a traditional Swiss dining experience. Main courses CHF 19–39. Highly recommended. (Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, tel. +41/041/210 1666, fax 210 1629)

Restaurant Maihöfli

The reward for the 15-minute walk from the center to this pleasant, woody restaurant is fresh, creative food and attentive, friendly service. Locals who know, say Maihöfli is one of the city's best, and our one experience there merited a big thumbs up. Main dishes CHF 21–38. Reservations advised. (Maihöfli, Maihofstrasse 70, tel. +41/041/420 6060)

Hotel Rebstock Wirtshus

Lighter, innovative dishes attract an eclectic mix of local celebrities and business types to this bustling room with its dark wood ceiling supported by thick wood timbers. Moderate prices. Recommended. (Hotel Restaurant Rebstock, St. Leodegar-Strasse 3, tel. +41/041/410 3581)

Zunfthaus zu Pfistern

In the old town near the covered

bridge, the entrance to this ornately decorated former guild house is one floor above street level. Friendly service, simple Swiss dishes. Main courses CHF 18–36 (Zunfthaus Zu Pfistern, Kornmarkt 4)

Des Alpes

The attraction here is the view of the Chapel Bridge, lake, and mountains, but there are better choices in town if a table is not available on the outdoor terrace. (Restaurant, Hotel des Alpes, Rathausquai 5, tel. +41/041/410 5825)

Restaurant Einhorn

Avoid this popular and inexpensive first-floor restaurant on a main pedestrian street. The heavy, over-spiced Italian food isn't worth the calories. Slow, impersonal service and lots of cigarette smoke. (Restaurant Einhorn, Hertensteinstrasse 23) 