

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Vive la Différence

International travel is as much about toilet paper as it is about museums and old churches. Toilet paper? Absolutely. Wasn't the poor quality of that essential item one of the first things you noticed on your first trip to Europe? Didn't you wonder why? And aren't you puzzled now—even though European TP is much better today—that there are still places where it's like sandpaper? Then didn't you keep discovering hundreds more subtle little ways our cultures are different? The knife-fork thing, for example. If you're like me you're curious as to how we Americans got started putting down the knife and transferring the fork from the left to the right hand. How about your first German hotel bed? No sheets, no blankets, no spread, just the duvet, one for each person. (In traditional hotels in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, a double, queen or king bed is a rarity; for two persons it's usually two singles pushed together. The U.S.-style double bed is known as a "French bed.")

Observing and experiencing the differences in the way life's mundane little realities are handled is an endless fascination. Now, after 33 years of European travel, I realize "toilet paper"—my poster child for everyday cultural differences—is a big reason I keep going back. Of course, I'm interested in the art, music, architecture, and cuisine of Europe, but I've come to realize it's the differences in the way we live that are at the root of my travel urge.

They are also why, when I'm in Europe, the sight of a McDonald's, or a Ford, or a kid wearing a Yankee hat, is a bit of a turnoff. The more we are alike, the less reason there is to cross the Atlantic. I'm looking for things that aren't the way they are at home. In Europe, let me hear other languages, not English. It's the family-run gasthaus for me, not a

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

ISLE OF RÜGEN

The undiscovered island of Rügen in the Baltic offers ample charm without the crowds. Plan your visit before mainstream guidebooks catch on.

Say "Germany" in a word association game and you'll probably get responses such as "beer," "Alps," and "sausage," but seldom will you hear "seaside resort." That may be because, until 1989, the country's most accessible and affordable beaches and beach towns were behind the Iron Curtain. Even after that, it took most of the '90s to bring tourist infrastructure such as roads, rail, and accommodations, up to western standards. This makes the lovely and charming island of Rügen in the Baltic pretty much a newcomer to 21st century tourism. Though the Germans have known about it all along, the rest of the world is just finding out. This is all

good news for Americans looking for offbeat, affordable destinations.

Though technically Rügen is an island—and at 358 square miles, a fair sized one—it is easily accessed by rail and car over a bridge at Stralsund. The train from Rostock takes a bit more than two hours, and the drive, over a busy two-lane road subject to traffic tie-ups on weekends and holidays, is two and a half hours—provided all goes well. There are four main towns; Bergen, Sassnitz, Putbus and Binz, all with rail and/or bus service. Most North American visitors will choose to headquarter in Binz on the Baltic and those who really want to explore the island will need

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Salzburg Update

The off-peak winter season is a wonderful time to explore Austria's second most traveled city. Only a relative few of its 6.9 million annual visitors will be in town, and yet there will still be hundreds of cultural events around which to plan an itinerary. As repeat visitors know, Salzburg offers much more than the *Sound of Music*—though the movie tour does draw its share of visitors. This month, we revisit some of our favorite haunts and deliver a brief refresher on Salzburg's must-see attractions.

For starters, a first-time visit to Salzburg is not complete without stops at these historic sights:

□ Dominating the city from on high is the **Hohensalzburg**, the largest, fully-preserved fortress in central Europe.

□ The huge **Dom** (cathedral) is the first early Baroque church built north of the Alps. Completed in 1655, it succeeds two other cathedrals built on the site, the first in 774.

□ Surrounding **Mirabell Palace** are the lovely **Mirabell Gardens**, originally designed in 1690, with statues depicting the four elements from Greek mythology: fire, air, earth, and water.

□ **St. Peter's Cemetery** is one of the oldest and most beautiful in the world.

□ Archbishop Wolf Dietrich's ostentatious tomb in the **St. Sebastian** cemetery. (Mozart's wife and

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Exchange rates as of 10/3/2006
1 euro = \$1.27
1 Swiss franc = \$0.80

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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Sheraton or Marriott. Readers sometimes write praising a certain hotel because it serves a great “American-style” breakfast, but to me that’s not a plus. I don’t want bacon and eggs in Germany. Give me fresh cheese and sliced meats and muesli with yogurt. If the shower’s a tiny closet—or maybe it’s just one of those hand-held sprayers over the tub with no curtain—that’s o.k. I can live with it. It’s part of the charm.

I hate the change from real hotel room keys to cards with magnetic strips. Soon all those big heavy brass and wooden-handled keys will be gone, replaced by plastic cards, just like at the Holiday Inn.

For the most part, the way things are done in the *Gemütlichkeit* part of Europe suits me fine—at least for a few weeks. There are some customs we adopt in this country. The way Europeans drive, for example. Passing on the right is not done in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and drivers clear the left lane for faster cars. Where I live in the U.S., there are signs warning slower traffic to move to the right lane. Though it’s the law, the signs are frequently ignored. The law is the same in Germany, but there are no signs. None are needed; the culture moves people over.

Mainly it’s the small things. I like the *Guten Morgen* greetings in the breakfast room, and the little paper doily that goes around the stem of your beer glass. In fact, I find the

whole beer culture intriguing: watching pilsner glasses fill from the tap and the way it takes seven or eight minutes to get just the right ratio of beer to foamy head; the marker on the glass that proves you got what you paid for; the pencil slashes on the little cardboard coaster that denote the number of beers you’ve been served; and the bang-bang washing process, in which the glasses are dipped quickly into two separate cleaning solutions. And, though it’s a disappearing practice, don’t you get a kick out of restaurant servers that never write anything down until it’s time to pay the bill, and then, together, you enumerate what you ate and drank?

I like the feeling of being trusted at hotels with honor bars, where guests help themselves and record what they’ve consumed. And there are still a few hotels that don’t require a credit card at check-in. Sometimes the process consists simply of being handed a key. Though they may have been avoiding local taxes, we’ve stayed in hotels that never took our name; we were given a key on arrival and paid in cash on departure. Another happy custom of small European hotels is the informal way they keep track of incidentals: you are served a beer and a sandwich in the garden but you sign nothing, it simply appears on the bill at checkout.

We’ve imported some aspects of the European culture. Our country’s interest in good food and wine began about the time European vacations started being affordable by the mass-

es. In the last 30 years, croissant has gone from being a difficult-to-pronounce, virtually-unknown-in-this-country, French breakfast pastry to a ubiquitous fast food item.

A few customs are a bit confusing, at least to this American. Invited to dinner at a German home a few years ago, we took a rather expensive bottle of wine along as a gift. Our host mumbled something and set it aside without another word. Later we read that a gift of wine sends the message that you consider the host’s wine inferior. On the other hand, hard liquor, especially Scotch whiskey, is prized. If you bring flowers, make it an odd number (I don’t know why), and stay away from roses because they might mean you secretly have a crush on the hostess.

So for those of you who have been patiently waiting, we have now recognized the key roll...sorry, role...toilet paper plays in international travel. —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 PDF format from January 1993, except for the most recent 10, 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: **rgen** Password: **1122**

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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.

RÜGEN*Continued from page 1*

a car. There is also a bus service—Fahrradbus RADzfatz—that connects many of the island's towns and villages.

The main Binz attraction is its curving, miles-long, white-sand beach, where the water is surprisingly warm and only waist deep 100 yards from shore. The waves are tiny, and the beach is littered with *Strandkorbs* (covered, wicker chairs). Along its crescent-shaped length are dozens of hotels, vacation rentals, even forested campgrounds, though all are separated from it by a paved promenade, crowded on summer days with walkers, souvenir and ice-cream sellers, strolling musicians, and hurdy-gurdy operators.

Most beach-front buildings, indeed the entire town, bear the architectural stamp of the Victorian-Gothic era (1840-1880), with distinctive arches and gingerbread trim. Nearly all are painted a dazzling white and constructed of wood. The town's most impressive structure is the gleaming, totally refurbished, red-roofed, beach-front **Kurhaus**, circa-1907, whose Platz and concert shell are the town's entertainment center.

Downtown Binz is a pleasant collection of low, mostly Victorian buildings that shelter unremarkable shops and restaurants. This is a resort for "everyman," and those seeking high-end purveyors such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Hermes will be disappointed. The village can be seen on foot in an hour, including a stop at the tourist office for maps and brochures, 90 percent of which are in German. From the small, refurbished rail station, buses run—trains much less frequently—to the fishing town of Sassnitz, located at the north end of the great curving beach that starts at Binz. Not yet so westernized, Sassnitz is the ferry port connection with Trelleborg in Sweden. Walk the town's waterfront and the mile-long stone jetty, perhaps stopping for a snack at one of the fishing boat/restaurants.

Rügen Basics**Population:** 73,000 (entire island)**Elevation:** Primarily sea level

Tourist Information: Tourismusverband Rügen e.V., Am Markt 4, D-18528 Bergen/Rügen, info@ruegen.de, www.ruegen.de

Fremdenverkehrsverein Binz/Rügen e.V., Paulstrasse 2, D18609 Ostseebad Binz, tel. +49/038393/2782 and 2783, fax 30717 and 21841, fremdenverkehrsverein-binz@t-online.de

Driving distances Binz:

Berlin	302 km/189 miles
Dresden	502 km/314 miles
Frankfurt	805 km/503 miles
Hamburg	320 km/200 miles
Munich	862 km/539 miles
Rostock	118 km/74 miles

Fastest rail times from Binz to:

Berlin	3 hours, 27 minutes
Dresden	6 hours, 20 minutes
Frankfurt	8 hours, 11 minutes
Hamburg	3 hours, 58 minutes
Lübeck	4 hours, 3 minutes
Munich	10 hours, 27 minutes
Rostock	1 hour, 56 minutes
Vienna	13 hours, 30 minutes

Steam Train: Rasender Roland is a narrow gauge steam railway that connects Putbus with seaside village such as Binz, Baabe and Göhren. Fares range from €1.6 to €8, depending on length of trip.

Bike Rental: Pauli's Rad Shop, Hauptstrasse 9a, Binz, tel. +49/038393/66924, www.ruegen-bike.de. Rentals start at €5.50 per day.

Boat Trips: Three to four-hour cruises along the island's north coast past the chalk cliffs are offered by Reederei Ostsee-Tour, tel. +49/038392/3150, info@reederei-ostsee-tour.de, www.reederei-ostsee-tour.de. Prices for adults range from €11 to €16.

Just to the north of Sassnitz is **Jasmund National Park**. Leave the car in the dirt lot and follow signs to the **Königstuhl**. After about a 15-minute walk through the forest, the path emerges above snowy-white, chalk bluffs that some have compared to Dover's White Cliffs. For those driving, we suggest continuing on to Lohme, a sleepy town on the Jasmund's northern boundary. Stop for lunch or a beverage on the terrace of the **Panorama Hotel Lohme**, set on a bluff high above the sea. The food isn't special, but the views of the blue Baltic are.

But there's more to Rügen than seaside charms. From its pastoral interior of forests and rolling fields,

broken occasionally by lakes and reed-lined inlets, it is often hard to remember the Baltic is nearby. A short, 15-minute drive over narrow tree-lined roads from Binz to the excellent **Restaurant Wreecher Hof**, winds through countryside as gorgeous as anywhere in Germany.

Nazi White Elephant

Perhaps the island's most fascinating sight is a Nazi-constructed monstrosity called the **Colossus of Prora**. Envisioned as a holiday resort for the working class, it was conceived and built under the auspices of the KdF movement (*Kraft durch Freude*/Strength through Joy). Prora was to be a three-mile-long series of six-story buildings, joined in such a way as to result in a single "hotel" with accommodations for 20,000 guests. Apparently, it was Hitler's idea. He reasoned that a rested workforce would be more productive. They were to arrive by train or KdF-owned Volkswagens over the newly constructed bridge at Stralsund, or by ship. Though most of the structures' exteriors were completed, the mass tourism plan never saw the light of day. Three years after the project broke ground in 1936, the Nazis were dealing with other issues and most of the construction workers, except for a few Polish and Russian POWs, were sent elsewhere.

Set back some 200 yards from the beach, the Prora follows the curve of the bay for 4.5 kilometers. Each linked building was to have a three-story community hall to house a restaurant and covered terrace with a view to the sea. All were to be connected by a promenade running the full 4.5 kilometers. The community halls and promenade were never built, but most of the rest still stand as one long, ugly building that seems more like a prison than a resort.

The Prora has seen little use in the last 70 years. During the war, parts of it sheltered bombed-out residents of Hamburg, and after that some spaces were occupied by the Soviet Army, and later by East German forces.

Placed on a list of historic build-

ings, the Prora cannot be torn down. On the other hand, restoration and maintenance would be hugely expensive. Meanwhile, though open to visitors, its carcass continues to deteriorate. One can view a tiny cell-like sleeping room and its two narrow cots, wonder about the grand dreams of National Socialism, and browse one or more of its several museums. The **NVA-Museum** displays artifacts and documents of the army of the DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik), and the **Hands-On Museum** is a fun, but low-tech, DDR science museum several decades behind its U.S. counterparts. Perhaps best of all are the DDR furniture and appliances found in the **Prora Museum**.

Rügen Hotels

Kempinski Resort Hotel Bel Air

Rügen was a popular holiday destination for top dogs in the former East German government. No doubt some return now and wish the Kempinski, and its sleek, modern luxury, had been around “back in the day.” Binz’s top hotel is located at the lower end of the bay’s crescent, affording northerly views up the beach to Sassnitz. Its three stories of floor-to-ceiling windows and spacious terraces might have been built by some Malibu movie baron. Guestrooms are spacious, with top-class decor and furnishings, and many have water views and balconies. Ask to be on an upper floor.

One pays substantially more for this level of luxury at other German resorts, such as Baden-Baden and Sylt.

Daily Rates: Singles €180-240, doubles €210-270

Contact: Strandpromenade 7, D-18609 Binz, tel +49/038393/150, fax 15 55, ruegen.reservation@kempinski.com, www.kempinski-ruegen.de

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 15/20

Am Meer

This is another addition to the Binz beach scene since the fall of communism. One wishes, however, that the hotel’s owner had hired the Kempinski’s architect. On each of its four sides, the five-story Am Meer’s mostly

steel and glass façades round into an arched roof-line; no doubt to reflect the dominant feature of the local architectural style. Unfortunately, it seems out of place alongside its all-white, all-wood, much lower, much older, neighbors. Despite its ungainly appearance, the Am Meer has a fine beach-front location, and there’s nothing wrong with the accommodations.

On warm summer nights, the indoor/outdoor bar is a popular place to enjoy the sea breezes and some live music. Many evenings last summer, a surprisingly talented young pianist and singer skillfully belted one popular blues and rock ‘n roll tune after another from 9pm to around midnight—a whole lotta shakin’ on the Baltic.

Daily Rates: Singles €80, doubles €140-150, junior suites €190

Contact: Strandpromenade 34, D-18609 Binz, tel. +49/038393/4 40, fax 4 44 44, info@hotel-am-meer.de, www.hotel-am-meer.de

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 11/20

Wreecher Hof

It is difficult to overstate the charm of this meticulously maintained country enclave. The setting, which feels far from sea and beaches, is near the hamlet of Wreechen, about nine kilometers southwest of Putbus.

Lush flower beds, clipped lawns, statuary, and walkways of red and gray pavers, provide a handsome setting for the half dozen two-story, thatched roof, gleaming white bungalows, each housing multiple guestrooms and apartments. A bright yellow awning shelters an inviting outdoor terrace that overlooks a large pond floating flowering lily pads.

Large windows and French doors in the 43 guest accommodations ensure a visual connection between indoor spaces and the lovely grounds. In guestrooms, clean, minimalist lines are softened by deep sofas, overstuffed easy chairs, low-pile carpeting, and, here and there, a wicker piece. The result is relaxed, easy-to-live-in luxury.

We recommend all guest accom-

modations but especially Number 11, a ground floor suite with two bedrooms, a large living room, a fine view through the French doors, and two terraces. The high-season price for two people is €225; €277 for four. Number 15, a suite, is equally appealing, though a bit smaller, and rents for €165. Number 33 is a gorgeous *maisonette* on three levels with two and a half baths, full kitchen, two bedrooms, and a loft that sleeps two. The basic high-season price for two is €230; add €26 for each additional person. Number 68 a standard double at the top of bungalow Number 6, is cozy and attractive, with pitched ceiling, dormer windows, and two big easy chairs in a quiet corner. At €125, it is also a bargain.

These days, even small country hotels must have wellness facilities, and the Wreecher Hof offers massage, sauna, solarium, steam bath, and a sparkling indoor pool. The hotel has an arrangement for lowered greens fees with a nearby 27-hole golf course.

Michelin’s Red Guide for Germany awards the restaurant a deserved red *Karte* (“good food at moderate prices”) designation (see page 6).

Twenty years into *Gemütlichkeit*, it’s still exciting to discover and tell readers about special places—particularly those offering good value—like the Wreecher Hof. This is a splendid, affordable, luxurious hideaway in an as-yet-undiscovered part of Germany. Plan to visit sooner rather than later, because in a year of two, it is sure to pop-up in the Karen Brown, Frommer’s, and Fodor’s guides.

Daily Rates: Singles €65-85, doubles €82-135, suites/apartments €145-235

Contact: Hotel Wreecher Hof, Kastanienallee, D-18581 Putbus, tel. +49/038301-850, fax 85100, info@wreecherhof.de, www.wreecherhof.de

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

Hotel Solthus am See

Fourteen kilometers southwest down the coast from Binz, the thatched roof Solthus is nicely situated directly on the Selliner See. From its large deck, the view is of the boat traffic on the peaceful, reed-lined inlet.

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

While it may be a great choice for nature lovers, bird watchers, and walkers, at the price, the rooms are a bit of a disappointment in size and décor, though each has a small balcony with a water view. Number 209, for €155, is a corner double with two soft chairs, wooden built-ins, and floor to ceiling glass doors that access the balcony and provide a water view.

Also available are the obligatory wellness facilities, including an indoor pool under a glass roof.

Daily Rates: Singles €65-85, doubles €82-135, suites/apartments €145-235

Contact: Solthus am See, Bollwerkstrasse 1, D-18586 Ostseebad Baabe/Rügen, tel. +49/038303/8716-0, fax 87 16-99, info@solthus.de, www.solthus.de

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 11/20

Villa Granitz

One of those places that is more like a private home than a hotel, the three-story Granitz is the best value among the hotels listed here. Its Victorian-Gothic architecture lends a style and grace somewhat reminiscent of our country's Old South. Especially pleasant are the covered, wooden walkways connecting various wings of the house through the lovely garden; and the bright and airy, wintergarden-style breakfast room. Room Number 123, with a high season rate of €80, is a spacious, comfortable double with a generous terrace. The hotel has no restaurant, and the quiet residential location is in the village of Baabe, just down the coast from Binz.

Daily Rates: Singles €44-71, doubles €58-90

Contact: Villa Granitz, Birkenallee 17, D-18586, Baabe, tel. +49/038303/1410, fax 14144, villa-grantiz@t-online.de

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 17/20

Panorama Hotel Lohme

On a bluff high above the Baltic, the Lohme is mainly of interest because of its sea views and remote location. The 41 somewhat inconsistently decorated and designed guestrooms are spread over several

buildings—about half of them face the water. There is a fine outdoor terrace overlooking the sea, and the large dining room, with high ceiling and tall windows, is attractive.

Daily Rates: Singles €69-81, doubles €85-155

Contact: Panoramahotel Lohme, Dorfstrasse 35, D-18551 Lohme/Rügen, tel. +49/038302/9221, fax 9234, info@lohme.com, www.lohme.com

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 10/20

Rügen Restaurants

Restaurant Strandhalle

Every seaside town seems to have one: a big, bustling, noisy fish restaurant. The Binz version is Strandhalle, a barn-like, high-ceilinged hall crammed with a mish-mash of antique furniture, potted plants, and the bric-a-brac of many decades and several regimes. There are model sailing ships and biplanes, a lone chandelier, an ancient adding machine, a shiny black upright piano, and a life-size religious statue. The wait staff is decked out in white tops with green aprons and ties.

This late 19th century Victorian beauty is on the promenade at the southern end of the Binz beach crescent. Choose a table in the large hall or the glass enclosed porch with water views.

We began, as usual, with small mixed salads (€4.6) that turned out to be large mixed salads. The tart, creamy, dill-infused dressing bathed garden-fresh red leaf lettuce, corn, mache, slivers of red bell pepper, hearts of palm, red onion slices, julienned carrots, and sliced cucumbers. It was a more than satisfactory start.

With the next step, however, came a slight bobble. *Seelachfilet* (a white fish, similar to cod), fried in a light batter, was a perfect 10; obviously fresh from the sea, light, flaky, and taken off the fire at precisely the right time. Fortunately, a thick, dill-flavored remoulade came separately, because it would have overwhelmed the delicacy of the fish. Heavenly is the only way to describe the accompanying grilled potatoes *mit Speck*

(bacon)—which perhaps explains the presence of the statue. This dish was a steal at a mere €9.4. The bad news came in the form of two great hunks of smoked salmon (€14.5) smothered in an oily, caper-laced sauce. As a three-bite appetizer, the salty, smoky salmon would have been fine, but as a main course it failed. A side of creamy, gratin-style potatoes was good but not in the same league with Strandhalle's *mit Speck* version.

A half-liter of Marquesa Monastrell, a Spanish red, went down a lot better than its €9 price tag.

A simple, but glorious shared dessert (€3.9) consisting of a thin, clover leaf-shaped waffle topped with whipped cream, vanilla ice cream, and warm cherry sauce, sent us home happy—especially considering a €56 bill that included wine and beer.

Overall, the Strandhalle gets an unhesitating thumbs-up. The kitchen's ingredients are first-rate, and the cooking above average; just be sure the sauces come on the side.

Contact: Strandpromenade 5, D-18609 Binz, tel. +49/08393 31564,

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. Use discount code gemut2006.
- 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.

www.strandhalle-binz.de.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurant Wreecher Hof

In Germany, dinner out is not an eat-and-run affair. It entails the whole evening, with hours spent around the table, even after the food is long gone. That may be one reason its restaurants, especially those in the countryside, are so warm and inviting. A case in point is the Wreecher Hof. Lamps with simple orange shades hang over each table. Shelves above the large, multi-pane windows display brass and pottery without being kitschy. A long, upholstered banquet curves around one corner, and diners are seated at comfortable Thonet-style chairs. The dining area is actually three spaces, including a raised, no-smoking section and the many-windowed wintergarden.

There are three set menus ranging from €37 for three courses to the €50 five-course program. We chose from the a la carte list, however.

The obligatory opening culinary salvo of a European restaurant that takes itself seriously is the *Amuse Bouche*, a creative little bite served prior to the meal, compliments of the kitchen. Wreecher Hof's was a winner: a light-crusted mini-quiche with chopped onions, leeks, and bits of ham.

A shared *Salat Caprese* (€8.5)—sliced tomatoes and mozzarella di bufala (bufalo milk cheese)—drizzled with pesto oil, then scattered with pine nuts and fried basil leaves, was a bit of a letdown. The cheese was fresh enough, the basil crunchy and exotic, but the tomatoes had little taste. *Pfifferlinge Rahm* (cream of wild mushroom) soup also underperformed.

The momentum shifted, however, with the arrival of the main courses. One bite of the moist, tender *Kalbsbäckchen* (€21)—essentially veal pot roast—and the kitchen's earlier sins were immediately forgiven. Liberally doused in the heat-reduced cookpot remains—the kind of dark, rich, mouthwatering sauce the best German cooks are famous for—were two hefty, fall-off-the bone veal chunks on a bed of white beans, tiny, chopped

**Error's
Choice**

carrots, and ham bits. A few sage-dusted boiled potatoes helped sop up the magnificent gravy.

There was nothing wrong, either, with roasted loin of *Rehbock* (venison) (€21); two tender filets, diagonally sliced and striped with a tart-sweet fruit sauce.

Beerengrütze (€5.5) is a cooked-down, syrupy mixture of Kirsch, cherries, raspberries, strawberries, currants, blackberries, etc., served, in this case, over thin crepes with ice cream and sprinkled with chopped pistachios and fresh berries. A conventional but satisfying finish.

We ignored the Wreecher Hof's impressive wine list and settled instead for a half-liter of serviceable house Spätburgunder (€13).

Dinner was €66, sans beverages.

Contact: Hotel Wreecher Hof, Kastanienallee, D-18581 Putbus, tel. +49/038301-850, fax 85100, info@wreecher-hof.de, www.wreecher-hof.de/

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Restaurant Titanic

The only thing Titanic about this wretched place is the mistake we made in choosing it—a complete waste of €60 and God knows how many calories. We only mention this aptly-named gastronomic calamity because it occupies a prominent location in the village, affiliated with the **Hotel Merkur**. It is, of course, to be avoided. ☒

SALZBURG UPDATE

Continued from page 1

father are also here.)

☐ **Mozart Geburtshaus:** At 9 Getreidegasse, in the heart of Salzburg's *Altstadt*, is the apartment where the great man was born and lived for several years. On display are family pictures, correspondence, and several of the instruments he used.

Remember, for admission to virtually all Salzburg attractions and unlimited public transportation, the **Salzburg Card** is a worthwhile investment. A 24-hour card is €23, the 48-hour version is €29, and the 72-hour card costs €34. With it comes the

Salzburg Guide containing a city map and useful information. Hotel packages for the area also available. For more information and bookings contact: cards@salzburg.info, tel. +43/662/88987-454.

The 2006 Season

Salzburg theaters and music venues will produce a variety of plays and concerts this season:

☐ The **Landestheater Salzburg** offers Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Mozart's *Magic Flute*, Kalman's *The Princess of Czardas*, the Austrian premiere of *Grönholm Method*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* with choreography by Peter Breuer.

☐ Classical music concerts with four-course candlelight dinners are offered 300 times a year high above the *Altstadt* in the **Hohensalzburg Fortress**. Frequent concerts are also held in the Marble Hall of **Mirabell Palace**. Tickets for both venues can be purchased online at <http://en.salzburgticket.com>.

☐ The **Schauspielhaus** will kick off with a premiere of *The Woman Before* by Germany's contemporary author, Roland Schimmelpfennig.

For more information, visit the Salzburg tourist office online at www.salzburg.info.

Also this winter, the Mozart celebration continues with a contemporary art show, **Offmozart** (www.offmozart.com), consisting of 16 projects that illustrate the life, work, and commercialization of the composer.

Salzburg Hotels

There are more than 130 hotels to choose from when planning an overnight trip to Salzburg. Unfortunately, most of the ones nearest the action in the *Altstadt* are worn and overpriced to the extent that we no longer recommend them. We refer specifically to the **Elefant**, the **Weisse Taube**, and **ArtHotel Blaue Gans**. Here are few we do recommend, however:

Altstadt Radisson SAS

The best Old Town accommodations. Though corporately-owned, the *Altstadt* has created the intimate atmosphere of a small inner-city hotel.

Its entrance from Judengasse is via a simple arched doorway over which hangs the traditional Salzburg decorative wrought iron sign. The reception area is small but elegant with a patterned granite tile floor, recessed lighting and a richly burnished dark wood check-in counter.

Guest rooms are individually decorated, with views to the Salzach River, the Kapuziner Monastery, the romantic lanes of the historical old town or the fortress.

Contact: Hotel Altstadt, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria, Rudolfskai 28 / Judengasse 15, tel. +43/0662/858 6710, fax 848 5716/8, radisson-altstadt@austria-trend.at, www.austria-trend.at/en/?id=ASS

Daily Rates: Doubles €198-346

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 10/20

Ambiente-Hotel Struber

In the shadow of the Hohen-salzburg Fortress and a 12-minute dawdle to the center of Salzburg, including the Domplatz and Mozart's birthplace, the family-run, 14-room, Struber continues to offer visitors a refined, comfortable, and amicable resting place.

Impeccably dressed in warm wood, oriental carpeting, and historic city portraiture, the Struber reflects the taste, serenity, and hospitality of its owners, Frau and Herr Illmer, who personally oversee the bountiful buffet breakfasts and an always-helpful front desk (usually staffed by a family member).

Daily Rates: Doubles €140-180

Contact: Hotel Garni Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, A-5020 Salzburg, tel. +43/0662/8 43 7 28, fax 8 43 72 8-8, office@struber.at, www.struber.at

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 17/20

Altstadthotel Wolf

Once a *Gemütlichkeit* top pick, the Wolf has slipped over the years. Rooms are rather Spartan and quite small. Great location, however.

Daily Rates: Singles €68-98, doubles €98-158

Contact: Hotel Wolf, Kaigasse 7, A-5020 Salzburg, tel. +43/0662/84 34 530, fax 84 24 234, office@hotelwolf.at,

www.hotelwolf.com

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 10/20

Auersperg

Four-star, business-oriented hotel in a quasi-residential district 10 to 15 minutes' walk from the Old Town. Most of the spacious and well-appointed guestrooms have been refurbished. Parking is free, and there is a fitness room with sauna, steam bath, and roof terrace.

Daily Rates: Doubles €145-185

Contact: Hotel Auersperg, A-5027 Salzburg, Auerspergstr. 61, tel. +43/0662/88 9 44-0, info@auersperg.at, www.auersperg.at

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 10/20

Markus Sittikus

This hotel, in an attractive Baroque-style building on the edge of the right bank's commercial area, is a step up the quality ladder from most left bank hotels, but one step down in price. Guestrooms are more spacious and better maintained and furnished. The location is quiet and the welcome warm.

Daily Rates: Singles €70-79, doubles €114-130

Contact: Markus Sittikus, A-5020 Salzburg, Markus-Sittikus-Strasse 20, tel. +43/0662/87 1121-0, fax 87 1121-58, hotel@markus-sittikus.at, www.markus-sittikus.at

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Trumer-Stube

This cozy hotel enjoys a convenient location just over the river from the old town. Recently refurbished, it is a better value than other hotels in its category in the *Altstadt*. The Hirschbichlers are pleasant hosts and able to offer guests passes for on-street parking in the neighborhood.

Daily Rates: Doubles €103-133

Contact: Hotel Garni Trumer-Stube A-5020, Bergstrasse 6, tel. +41/0662/87 46 66, fax 87 43 26, info@trumer-stube.at, www.trumer-stube.at

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 12/20

Hotel-Pension Jedermann

Salzburg's best value, the Jedermann has 16 thoughtfully furnished guestrooms with hardwood floors and pleasant furnishings. There is free

Internet access in the lobby, free parking, and the *Altstadt* is a 15- to 20-minute walk (three or four minutes by bus).

Daily Rates: Singles €65-75, doubles €90-130

Contact: Rupertgasse 25, A-5020 Salzburg, tel. 0662/87 32 41-0, office@hotel-jedermann.com, www.hotel-jedermann.com

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Hotel Bergland

This sociable little three-star hotel is run by Peter Kuhn, who painted many of the colorful, stylized paintings that cover the walls. Rooms range from rustic to modern, and all have spotless, white-tiled bathrooms with shower and toilet. Off-street parking is a plus. Herr Kuhn rents bikes and offers Internet access. Buses run to the *Altstadt* from close by.

Daily Rates: Singles €60-78, doubles €90

Contact: Hotel Bergland, Rupertgasse 15, A-5020, tel. +43/662/872318, fax 8723188, kuhn@berglandhotel.at, www.berglandhotel.at

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Salzburg Restaurants

Gasthof Auerhahn

The Auerhahn's cozy, rustic dining room rates a red toque in Gault Millau. The seasonal menu features contemporary Austrian and Italian cuisine, with an emphasis on fresh fish. For dessert, try the famous *Topfenknödel*, a light, warmed dumpling made from curd cheese, nicely offset by a cool, slightly sharp cranberry puree. A four-course menu is €34, and five-courses cost €44. Prices are €54/67 with wine pairings. A la carte main dishes are €18-22.

Contact: Gasthof Auerhahn, A-5020 Salzburg, Bahnhofstrasse 15, tel. +41/0662/451 052, fax 451 0523, hotel@auerhahn-salzburg.at, www.auerhahn-salzburg.at

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 14/20

Alt Salzburg

Enjoy quality cooking in an Old World environment featuring dark vaulted ceiling, red velvet seating, gilded mirrors and other Baroque

touches. Dinner reservations advised.

Contact: Bürgerspitalgasse 2, tel. +43/662/8414760

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

Stadtkrug

Attached to the hotel of the same name, this restaurant specializes in fresh fish and a full selection of Austrian dishes and wines.

Contact: Linzergasse 20, tel. +43/662/873545

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Hangouts

At the **Hotel-Restaurant Gablerbräu**, (Linzergasse 9, tel. +41/0662/88965), on the right bank, not far from the Hotel Trumer Stube, the light Kaiser beer *vom Fass* goes down easily but the food is several notches below the Auerhahn.

Alter Fuchs (Linzergasse 47/49, tel. 882200) is a right bank, below-street-level, gathering spot for the under-40 crowd. This is a lively spot, but friendly and under control.

Not far from the Hotel Jedermann, **Die Weisse** (Rupertgasse 10, tel. 72246) is a rambling old brewpub specializing in wheat beer.

Near Salzburg

Gasthof Schorn

If hotels in Salzburg's *Zentrum* are fully booked or too pricey, Gasthof Schorn is an inexpensive and charming alternative eight kilometers south of the city at the Salzburg-Süd-Grödig exit on the Autobahn toward Hallein. There are 16 recently refurbished double rooms all equipped with private toilet and shower or tub, direct-dial phone, satellite TV, and balcony. Breakfast is buffet style and parking is free for guests.

The hotel is done in the style of the region, with elaborate frescoes both inside and out. The massive, church-like dining room has a domed ceiling, marble floors, concrete pillars, and arched side galleries. It is a lively local favorite, mostly because of what comes out of the kitchen; heaping plates of hearty, delectable food delivered by traditionally dressed servers.

Contact: Gasthof Schorn, St. Leonhardstrasse 1, A-5083 St. Leonhard-Grödig, tel. +43/06246/72334, fax 72334-40, info@gasthofschorn.at, www.gasthofschorn.at

Daily Rates: Doubles €76-86

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 16/20

Rest. Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 18/20

Schloss Haunsperg

This all-time *Gemütlichkeit* favorite, an eight-room bed-and-breakfast in a 14th-century country manor house with beautiful period furniture, is just 10 minutes south of Salzburg. The von Gernerth family's welcome is as warm as any in Austria.

Haunsperg is easy to find. Go south from Salzburg on the A10, exit at Hallein, then come back north toward Oberalm. You will see signs to the hotel which is west of the Autobahn and east of the Salzach.

Daily Rates: Doubles €135-170

Contact: Schloss Haunsperg, Hammerstrasse 32, Oberalm Bei Hallein (outside of Salzburg), A-5411, tel. +43/06245/80 662, fax 85 680, info@schlosshaunsperg.com, www.schlosshaunsperg.com

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 18/20

News/Deals

■ **Kennedy Museum:** Berlin's newest museum captures a slice of American history, from the German point of view. Opening November 11, the 4,300 square foot exhibit follows the Kennedy family from Irish origins to its rise as an American dynasty. On display will be artifacts, photographs, historical documents, books, and films, with a special focus on former U.S. President John F. Kennedy's historic visit to Berlin in June 1963—during which he famously pronounced, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*." Pariser Platz 4a, 10117 Berlin-Mitte. Open daily, 10am-6pm, admission €7, tel. +49/030/31 00 77 88, www.thekennedys.de.

■ **Rail pass offer:** Rail Europe is offering a 25 percent credit on a second European rail pass, provided you buy the first one before November 10, use it and return it to Rail Europe by December 15. The purchase price of

the second pass must be at least 50% of the cost of the first one. Info: 800-521-6722, press option 3.

■ **Online rail pass booking:** This fall, Gemut.com has introduced a new way to purchase European rail passes: via our website. Go to www.gemut.com and choose Buy a European Rail Pass from the Plan Your Trip menu on the right hand side of the page. Some of the pass prices here, including Austria-Germany and France-Switzerland, are lower than comparable Rail Europe prices. Remember, online pass orders over \$349 ship free.

■ **Virtual opera:** New on the Vienna nightlife scene is **La Divina** bar, modeled after a Vienna State Opera box, where you can watch the evening's performance on a gold-encased, wide-screen TV while enjoying a glass of champagne. (1., Hanuschgasse 3, tel. 01-513 43 19, www.ladivina.at, 11am-2am daily)

■ **Freitag Shop Zürich:** More than a decade after its founding, the internationally known messenger bag company **Freitag**, has opened a flagship store in its home town of Zürich. In keeping with the founders' vision of using only practical, environmentally friendly materials, the new store is built from rusty, recycled freight-containers. What else would you expect from a company that makes bags from used truck tarpaulins and seatbelts? Some 1,600 different bags are packed into a "four-story" showroom, with views of the city's transit bridge from the roof. The store is located in the trendy Zürich West district: Geroldstrasse 17 CH-8005 Zürich, tel. +41/43 366 95 20, zuerich@freitag.ch, Mon.-Fri. 11am-7:30pm, Sat. 11am-5pm.

■ **Trier Christmas Market Packages:** The tourist office in Trier has put together some attractive package deals for overnight stays, combined with Christmas Market tours. Activities include wine tasting and shopping. Book for Nov. 27 - Dec. 21. Prices begin at €137-161, depending on the class of hotel. Several hotels are also offering their own package deals. Visit www.trier.de/tourismus for details.