

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

The State of European Travel

Under that pretentious headline, let's get the '07 travel season underway. In a year that promises to be another blockbuster in terms of the number of American visitors to Europe, what changes are afoot?

The Euro: It's most recent run-up to \$1.35 coincided nicely with our November/December trip but now, in mid-January, it has backed off about 4 percent to around \$1.29, still a far cry from those halcyon days a few years ago when it was only worth 82 cents. Which way the euro is headed no one knows, but if Messrs. Buffet and Gates are betting on it, and they are, who are we to argue. Some say the euro could go as high as \$1.50. So don't expect much, if any, relief in '07. As usual, in the next few issues we'll be passing along dollar-saving strategies, but for now read *Ten Ways to Save* (under Travel Tips) and *Euro-Beating Tips for 2007* (under Travel Advisories) at our website, www.gemut.com.

The Swiss franc is equally robust, and you can figure meals and hotels in Switzerland will be at least 20 percent higher than in Germany and Austria.

Air Travel: Book as soon as possible; both for the best price and to get the flight you want. We're seeing high-season East Coast-Europe fares at around \$900 to \$1,100 and \$1,100 to \$1,300 from the West Coast. Just as they did in '06, those numbers are bound to rise over the next days, weeks, and months. The airlines' "yield management" software allocates seats at several price levels. The lowest are sold first; thus as time goes on the price for the remaining available seats increases. Again this year, space will be a problem.

(Bargain tip: LTU, the German airline that flies from Los Angeles, Florida, New York, and Las Vegas,

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

Stuttgart

From cutting-edge architecture and relaxing spa treatments, to exotic gardens and stylish shops, the Detroit of Germany has much to offer leisure travelers.

The best reason to go to Stuttgart, of course, would be to take delivery of your new custom Porsche direct from the factory and put it through its paces on a high-octane weekend in the Black Forest. But even if you are merely picking up a cheapo rental with the horsepower of a golf cart, Stuttgart makes a worthwhile stop on its own merits. As home to industrial powerhouses like Bosch and Mercedes-Benz, Stuttgart may be the Detroit of Germany, but this green and cultured city nestled among forests in the gentle Neckar Valley amply rewards the visitor who seeks out its more easygoing side.

When we visited in 2006, the city was still a little hung over from World

Cup euphoria. An unusually abundant crop of soccer balls hung from the trees, while multicolored flags dangled from windows and street lights. The German tricolor was everywhere—fluttering from cars, draped over balconies, emblazoned on flip-flops. A holiday feeling lingered, long after the fans had gone home.

Those visitors probably left with memories of a vibrant, livable city. Stuttgart has medieval origins and was the capital of the Kingdom of Württemberg during the 19th century, but after the destruction of WWII, little remains—the Opera House was the only significant building left standing. Although the city center has been beautifully rebuilt in both

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Switzerland's Postbuses

For extensive touring anywhere in Switzerland, choices of scenic routes on federal and regional railroads come quickly to mind. Well-known examples: Glacier Express, Bernina Express and—linking Lake Lucerne with Lake Constance (the Bodensee)—Voralpen Express. But the Swiss Travel System's "yellow fleet" of some 2,000 various-size Postbuses gives travelers access to high-altitude terrain that's impossible for trains to navigate.

The service, effectively combining passenger transport with mail delivery to outlying towns and villages, dates from 1849, when stagecoaches pulled by five-horse teams did the job. Motorization (at a then-zippy 10-12 mph) began on June 1, 1906, reason enough for anniversary commemora-

tives throughout 2006.

Interlaken-headquartered **Post-Bus Tourism** offers excursions, city tours, and even accommodations packages. Its 824 routes crisscross Swiss territory, reaching all 26 cantons. Length: 6,440 miles, triple the national SBB railway network. Vehicles used for long-distance itineraries include the 250-hp stalwarts of Europe's motorcoach industry: Mercedes-Benz, Setra, Neoplan, FBW and Swiss-built Saurer. In the mix are 29 extra-huge double-deckers and—for shorter hops—13-passenger minivans.

Motorcoach amenities include

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Exchange rates as of 1/30/2007

1 euro = \$1.30

1 Swiss franc = \$0.80

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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with connections from about 25 other U.S. cities, almost always has the lowest fares, though you can't book them via Orbitz, Expedia, Travelocity or the like. Call 800-521-6722 for a quote.)

Flying is a hassle and will only get worse, what with increased security and airlines desperate to increase revenue while decreasing services (tried to redeem miles lately?).

Choosing a seat in advance, for example, is no a longer routine part of buying a ticket. **British Air** now requires that coach and business class passengers obtain preassigned seats through the Internet and, get this, *no more than 24 hours prior to flight time*. That's in both directions, so returning BA passengers somehow have to get to a computer in Europe within 24 hours of their return to the U.S. Don't have access to a computer? Well, as the Brits might say, hard cheese; for you, it's survival of the fittest at the airport. And, according to reliable reports, seat assignment requests by phone are denied. This policy applies to all coach and business class passengers except BA Gold and Silver Executive Club members, families traveling with children, and those holding full-fare tickets (a RT full-fare ticket between Boston and London in March is \$2,074 vs. BA's online discount fare of \$501). If this works for BA, other airlines are almost sure to follow with similar policies.

Car Rental: Germany is still the least expensive European country in which to rent, Italy the most expensive. Rates do not yet reflect the recent dollar weakness, so we recommend booking ASAP. As long as your reservation is guaranteed in US dollars, and you can cancel or make changes without penalty, there's no reason not to book immediately.

A disturbing trend over the past 18 months has been the increase in post-rental unauthorized charges on renters' credit cards, such as unneeded insurance, unwanted optional winterization fees, and phantom damage. The process of picking up a car in Europe and signing the rental contract in a foreign language (some companies will provide an English copy, though they are not required to and have no legal standing) is fraught with peril. Customers of the Gemut.com travel service (800-521-6722) are given a 24/7 toll-free-from-Europe help line and urged to use it from the rental car counter prior to signing a contract if there is any question about the nature and amount of charges. You'll not find better information about the European car rental process than at www.gemut.com. There are several pertinent articles, but I especially recommend *Car Rental Advice from a Pro* and *Controlling Car Rental Charges*.

Rail Travel: The big news is that North Americans can now book and pay for city-to-city rail tickets at the websites of several national European railroads, including Germany and

Switzerland. Though purchased-in-the-USA rail passes continue to be the best deal for most travelers, for those who require only one, or perhaps two, point-to-point tickets, the cheapest place to buy them will likely be at the website of the railroad of the country where travel will commence. The German rail system (www.bahn.de), for example, offers long-distance fares as low at €29, based on advance purchase plus restrictions on refunds and changes.

In an attempt to force customers to do their rail business online, European railroads, like the airlines, have substantially reduced commissions to U.S. wholesalers such as Rail Europe and Wandrian. Those companies have, in turn, slashed commissions to retailers. This means travelers must purchase online from sellers such as www.gemut.com or wind up paying a fee to order by phone.

Rail passes are no longer priced the

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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 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:

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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.

STUTTGART*Continued from page 1*

classic and modern styles, Stuttgart does not have big historic monuments or the typical tourist attractions, so it is usually passed over by leisure travelers. That's too bad, particularly for fans of cozy cafes, world-class ballet, fine art, relaxing spa treatments, exotic gardens, fast cars, stylish shops, and cutting-edge architecture. Stuttgart proves that it's possible to be both urbane and *gemütlich* at the same time.

For such an auto enthusiast's paradise, the city is easily explored without a car. A €2.50, half-hour ride on the S2 or S3 train will get you from the airport to the Central Rail Station, from which all the major cultural sites are within a 10-15 minute walk. Frankly, the city bus tour is easily skipped—almost everyone abandoned the tour before the end anyway, right about the time the guide started pointing out major intersections and “world famous” piston manufacturers. You are better off on your own or opting for one of the off-the-beaten-track tours, like the one of major construction sites. On the Stäffele tour, an excellent workout can be had climbing the hundreds of hillside stairs that used to meander through vineyards but now provide a romantic—if steep—path through exclusive neighborhoods. Pick up a city map or book tours at the “I-Punkt” Tourist Information Center across from the Central Rail Station at the beginning of the Königstr. pedestrian shopping street.

Only in Stuttgart

Despite its heavy-industry profile, Stuttgart has a surprisingly small-town feel. Not a skyscraper or smokestack in sight. More than half of the city's acreage is green, and there are no fewer than 19 mineral springs that daily spout some 22 million liters of crystalline mineral water. No wonder they fill swimming pools and fountains with it. Since some are attributed with healing properties, there is a booming local spa industry. The **Leuze** and **Bad Cannstatt** mineral baths offer every conceivable high-tech water adventure, from waterfalls

Stuttgart Basics**Population:** 590,000**Elevation:** 804 feet**Stuttgart Tourist Office:** Touristik-Zentrum, Knigstrasse 1, tel. +49/0711/2 22 82 40, fax 2 22 82 51, www.stuttgart-tourist.de**StuttCard:** €12 for a city tour (not recommended), €17.50 includes public transportation**Driving distances:**

Frankfurt	204 km / 127 miles
Hamburg	670 km / 419 miles
Cologne	365 km / 228 miles
Munich	222 km / 139 miles
Berlin	631 km / 394 miles
Strasbourg	156 km / 97 miles
Konstanz	180 km / 112 miles

Nearest airport:

Flughafen Stuttgart

Rail connections/travel times: Stuttgart is directly connected with 13 European capitals, as well as the following German cities:

Saarbrücken	2:09
Kassel	2:50
Cologne	3:09
Düsseldorf	3:44
Hamburg	6:19
Dresden	6:39
Nürnberg	2:09
Munich	2:05

and hydrojets to chlorine-free cold and warm bathing pools. The **Berg** mineral baths offer a more tranquil 1950s feel, complete with rubber bathing caps.

VitaParc serves up a smorgasbord of wellness treatments and internationally themed baths, including the lavish Swabian Springs. Hint: In Germany, the timid should check bathing suit and mixed bathing policies. Contacts: Leuze Mineral Baths, Am Leuzebad 2-6, tel. + 49/0711/216 4210; open daily; “textile-free” bathing Wed.-Sat. 9 - 11pm; Bad Cannstatt, Sulzerrainstrasse 2, tel. +49/0711/216 9241; Berg Mineral Baths, Am Schwanenplatz 9, tel. + 49/0711/923 6516; and VitaParc in the Si Centre, Plieningerstrasse 100, tel. +49/0711/725 253.

The water is excellent, but for slightly stronger libations, search out the local wines. For centuries wine was the region's most important industry, and there are vineyards everywhere, even interspersed among the car factories and next to the rail station downtown. The main varietals are Trollinger and Riesling, and the near-

by village of Uhlbach boasts a small wine museum.

The easiest way to sample the local hooch is in one of Stuttgart's numerous cozy wine pubs, accompanied by a few hearty Swabian dishes. We visited several, detailed below in the restaurant reviews, but unfortunately missed the most celebrated **Weinstube Zur Kiste** (Kanalstrasse 2, tel. +49/0711/244 002). Open Mon.-Fri. dinner only, 5pm-midnight, Sat. 11:30am-midnight. Main courses cost €15; €4.80 for wines by the glass.) Also very appealing were **Amadeus** (Charlottenplatz 17) and **Zum Paulaner** (Calwer Strasse 45, tel. +49/0711/224 150). For beer, you can't go wrong at **Calwer-Eck-Braü**, Stuttgart's oldest brewery tavern. Unfiltered, unpasteurized, bottom-fermented beer made according to a medieval recipe is served with enormous skillet dishes in a polished, turn-of-the-century wood-paneled room with leaded glass windows (Calwer Strasse 31, tel. +49/0711/222 4944-0, www.calwereck.de).

Nothing, however, symbolizes Stuttgart more than its legendary cars. Stuttgart's name, “Garden of Mares,” harkens to its days as an aristocratic stud farm, but now most of Stuttgart's horsepower comes from an internal combustion engine. The tristar Mercedes logo crowns the rail station's tower, and the world's oldest car factory lies on the banks of the Neckar. When it opened in May, the swank new **Mercedes-Benz Museum** helped kick off the World Cup '06 party. The ultramodern double helix of glass and steel houses everything from historic “silver arrow” racecars to trucks to Princess Di's limo. There are also workshops and studios, shops and a restaurant in the spiraling 17,000 m2 space. (Mercedesstrasse 100, Stuttgart 70372, tel. +49/0711/173 0000, www.mercedes-benz.com/museum; closed Mondays.) To find the museum, take the S-Bahn (S1) towards Plochingen to the Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion stop, then follow the signs.

Not to be outdone, Porsche plans to open its über-cool, €50 million museum in 2007. For now, there is a small but high-powered collection in a rotat-

ing exhibit, including cars hot off the production line. (**Porsche Museum**, open daily, free entry. By train, take the S6 towards Weil der Stadt, to the Neuwirtzhaus [Porscheplatz] stop.)

Cultural Monuments

The heart of the city is clustered around the central park behind the Tourist Information Center and is an easy stroll. The broad avenue called Konrad-Adenauer-Strasse, which marks the park's eastern border, is better known as the "Cultural Mile." The colonnaded sandstone Opera House, also home to Stuttgart's distinguished ballet company, stands opposite the Staatsgalerie, which houses a medieval to classic modernist art collection. When we visited, a temporary Monet exhibition was in full swing, but the building probably attracts as many visitors as the art. The original 1840s neoclassical structure has been dwarfed by the postmodern addition, completed in 1984 by English architect James Stirling. It comprises a monumental horseshoe of sandstone and local travertine marble punctuated by bright pink and blue tubes and floors that look like acid green Legos (**Staatsgalerie Stuttgart**, Konrad-Adenauerstrasse 30-32).

When you reach Charlottenplatz at the end of the Cultural Mile, look for the **Café Grand Planie** at Charlottenplatz 17. This would be a great time to fortify yourself with something from their huge selection of bistro dishes, cakes, and coffees. The cheery, yellow fin-de-siècle dining room overlooks Karlsplatz, which during our visit was rollicking with the annual fish market fair from Hamburg.

Cross Karlsplatz to reach the fortress-like Altes Schloss, the heavily refurbished 16th century traditional seat of the Counts of Württemberg. It now houses a regional archeological museum, including the Württemberg crown jewels. (**Landesmuseum Württemberg**, Schillerplatz 6; open Tues.-Sun. 10am-5pm; closed Mon.). On the other side of the castle is the picturesque Schillerplatz. Here you will find the **Stiftskirche**, the basilica whose two mismatched towers also survived the bombing. Schillerplatz was for-

merly the site of the original stud farm, but it now hosts a flower and fruit market every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Market rules forbid the sale of anything not locally produced.

Crossing Planie back toward the park, you will find yourself in Schlossplatz facing the grand baroque/Neoclassical façade of the **Neues Schloss**. It was once the palace of the Württemberg kings and now serves as a government reception hall and ministry offices. At the corner of Planie and Königstrasse is the beautiful new **Kunstmuseum**, which houses a modern art collection in a cool new glass cube that seems to float above the plaza. The star of the collection is Otto Dix, but other Swabian modern artists get good billing. Restaurant CUBE on the top floor is the hot spot for a table with a stunning view of the city (see Stuttgart Restaurants, below). Contact: Kleiner Schlossplatz 1, tel. +49/711/216 2188. Open Tues.-Sun. 10am-6pm, Wed. 10am-9pm.

Hanging Out

Swabians might be busy as bees, but they also know how to chill. In summer, it seems like every patch of sunshine was decked out with café tables and people enjoying the fresh air. Cheerful beer gardens tucked in green courtyards invite a leisurely pub crawl. Here are some favorites:

- **The Bohnenviertel**, or Bean Quarter, a gritty former working class neighborhood, has been transformed into a charming and pastel-colored district of wine pubs, antique stores, cafes, and design boutiques. The main streets of the quarter, Rosenstrasse, Brennerstrasse, and Wagnerstrasse, run between Esslinger and Olgastrasse. The residential district beyond Olgastrasse is a good place to find some of Stuttgart's stäffele, the flights of stairs that used to go up through the bean gardens that gave the quarter its name. Lorenzstäffele, leading up past Engl Church, is an outstanding example.

- **Calwerstrasse** looks like one giant outdoor café in summer, culminating in the leafy Calwerplatz. Nearby Rotebühlplatz offers a Sylt seafood bistro and a charming coffeehouse.

- **Weissenburg Park** offers an Art Nouveau Teahouse Pavilion and beautiful views of the city. You can drive right up to the pavilion, but those coming by from the Bopser stop on the U5, U6, or U7 should prepare themselves for a steep 15-minute hike. The Wilhelma, a popular botanical garden and exotic animal zoo, originally built as Wilhelm I's private Xanadu, is a 19th century Teutonic fantasy of The Arabian Nights. (Wilhelma, Neckartalstr. Open daily from 8:15am until dark. Wilhelma stop on the U14.)

Stuttgart Hotels

Der Zauberlehrling

Tired of faceless business hotels or fake rusticity? The "Sorcerer's Apprentice" is the ultimate designer boutique hotel, right in the heart of the trendy Bean Quarter. It's like staying in a conceptual art gallery, or a so-hip-it-hurts club. The 17 spacious rooms are a decorator's dream, all done by the owners, and each is completely different in style. "Sunrise" is all black and white and urban Zen, complete with a gold circular headboard and small Hindu statues. A rooftop garden and open-air tub aid meditation. The stunningly modern bathroom features a wood-floored minimalist shower room with black brick and glass walls. The sink is a mere curve of thick glass thrust into a porcelain stand. "Chalet," with its cowhide floor and antler chandelier, is clean, white and bright, sort of dude ranch meets the city. "Floor to Heaven" has a round white bed and exposed, whitewashed beams partitioning off the super funky living room with oversized gilt throne, zebra-striped cushions, and glowing pink wall panels. A shower of crystal drops cascades from ceiling to floor. The huge bathroom has three separate rooms painted in hot tropical colors. The black granite sink runs the whole length of one wall, layered with huge leaves. The shower is a mango-colored room wired for sound, with a constellation of tiny LED lights in the ceiling. "Titanic" has a waterbed, clawfoot bath and turn-of-the-century nautical theme, while "Paddington" is a Victorian fantasy. "Zeitfalle," the smallest and cheapest double room at €140

including breakfast, qualifies as a high-fashion bargain. It's an imaginative use of 18 square meters, and it has a balcony overlooking the garden.

All rooms have private bathrooms, minibar, flatscreen TV, CD players, and high-speed Internet access. There are two separate buildings, and be warned that corridors tend to be dark, lighted by glowing panels in the floor.

There is also a popular but pricey international fusion restaurant.

Contact: Der Zauberlehrling, Rosenstrasse 38, 70182 Stuttgart, tel. +49/0711/23 77 77-0, fax 23 77 77-5, kontakt@zauberlehrling.de, www.zauberlehrling.de. Proprietors: Karen and Axel Heldmann. Karen is the principal designer.

Daily Rates: Singles €140, doubles from €240. Zeitfalle rates: single €110, double €140.

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 15/20

Flair Hotel Wörtz

In a good location near Charlottenplatz and the Bean Quarter, the family-run Hotel Wörtz might best be described as quirky. With its abundance of dark carved wood, stained glass windows, and ornate ironwork, it looks like a medieval castle remodeled in 1950. In reality, the building dates from 1870. Rooms at the economy end are clean and well appointed if somewhat dated, but they exude a certain old-fashioned character. At €120, Room 111 is a bargain with white plaster walls, exposed beams, a heavy leather desk chair and a balcony overlooking the garden and "castle." The dark red flowered carpet has seen better days, but everything is immaculate. The bathroom has a tub and shower with cream-colored wall tiles, scallop shell sink, and gold fixtures. Room 115 across the hall was slightly cheaper but more cramped, with only a shower, two single beds, and no balcony. Carpet was lime green and swirly, but equally faded. The "castle" has brighter and more luxurious rooms, including the hilariously baroque "Louis XVI" suite with colonnaded freestanding round Jacuzzi. Ask for a courtyard-facing room, not a front room on the busy street.

Hallways and public areas feature heavy carved wood accents, columns, and swirling ironwork. Breakfast is served on a positively baronial carved wooden counter, the light filtering through the stained glass.

Evenings are convivial at the hotel's extremely well-regarded wine pub and restaurant "Zur Weinsteige," noted for its 15,000 bottle wine cellar dating from the 19th century. The hotel has private parking and is located a few steps downhill from the Dobelstrasse U6 stop.

Contact: Flair Hotel Wörtz and Restaurant Zur Weinsteige, Hohenheimerstrasse 28-30 (at the corner of Charlottenstrasse), 70184 Stuttgart, tel. +49/0711/23 67 000, fax 23 67 00 7, info@hotel-woertz.de, info@zur-weinsteige.de, www.flairhotel.com/woertz. Proprietors: Scherle family
Daily Rates: Singles €85-160, doubles €100-300

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

Abalon Hotel

This newly built, economical, but stylish efficiency hotel is well priced if a tad out of the way, tucked below street level in an attractive Art Nouveau residential neighborhood behind the Bean Quarter. The parking garage entrance is easiest to find on Olgastrasse, but the main entrance is around the block on Zimmermanstrasse. The entrance and lobby look like an ultra-modern Montessori school, all glass and bright blue steel tubes curving to form a giant skylight. Since the hotel is built into a steep hill, all of the rooms are dug into the ground and are lower than the entrance. However, the clean, bright rooms are flooded with light. They are done with light-colored European modern furniture and parquet floors, all very practical with plenty of storage space and looking very new. Some open out into private terrace gardens, while others are designed for family holidays. Room 212, for example, sleeps 4 in one spacious room with a kitchenette and shower.

Breakfast is served in the bright, glassed-in rooftop terrace off the lobby and features a well-stocked hot and cold buffet. Excellent value and quality.

Contact: Abalon Hotel Ideal, Zimmer-

manstrasse 7-9, 70182 Stuttgart. (Garage entrance at Olgastrasse 79), tel. +49/0711/21 71 0, fax 2171 217, info@abalon.de, www.abalon.de

Daily Rates: Singles from €76, doubles from €96, suites €112.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 17/20

Hotel Le Meridien Stuttgart

This is a choice, newly renovated business hotel in a prime location across from the Schlossgarten and within easy walking distance from the central rail station. Unimaginative and pricey, but practical. Our deluxe double room fronted the busy street, but we could not hear a thing. The room was opulently and urbanely appointed with dark contemporary woods, white walls, and a black granite bathroom. Flatscreen TVs and high-speed broadband are par for the course.

Contact: Hotel Le Meridien Stuttgart, Willy-Brandt-strasse 30, 70173 Stuttgart, tel. +49/0711/22 21 0, fax 2221 2599, info.stuttgart@lemeridien.com, www.lemeridien.com

Daily Rates: Singles from €235, doubles from €275. Breakfast not included.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

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. 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.

Steigenberger Graf Zeppelin (Review by Tom Brass)

Location, location. Some travelers enjoy being hosted by Herr und Frau Innkeeper, who welcome them to their charming little place in a suburban or countryside setting. Others like staying smack-dab in the *Innenstadt*, walkably close to citified attractions. If you'd prefer the latter option and are heading for Stuttgart, Steigenberger's 189-room property stands imposingly huge and deluxe. Directly across Arnulf-Klett-Platz, architect Paul Bonatz's massive Weimar-era *Hauptbahnhof* sports a 56-meter (183-ft.) tower topped by a Mercedes-Benz star for can't-miss orientation and as a symbol of local automotive prominence.

Dating from 1931 and named for Swabia's dirigible pioneer, "das Graf" dominates the sleek, five-story Zeppelin Carré complex. Virtually around a corner: Königstrasse, high among Germany's standout shopping corridors. Comparably close: access to the vast Schlossgarten, flanked by vineyard-covered hillsides.

Thick, gold-accented blue carpeting, discreet lighting, and potted greenery soften the lobby's overt business-clientele atmospherics. Solid *Buche* beechwood-furnished guestrooms have high-speed Internet connections. Exemplary soundproofing (notice the extra-heavy draperies) muffles the clamor of traffic down on the Platz. Hotel amenities include a Shiseido Day Spa (massages, sauna, solarium, *Schwimmbad*, "wellness" treatments).

Küchenchef Thomas Heilemann's meal planning justifies **Restaurant Olivo's** Michelin star for Italian-influenced offerings that include a menu of white truffles from Alba (€42); full meals range €25-30 for such entrée choices as pork chops and sautéed tuna. Swabian specialties (*Spätzle*, *Maultaschen*, red Württemberg Trollinger wines) make woodsy Zeppelin Stüble a worthwhile, much-less-costly alternative. Cuban-kitschy Zeppelino's triples as a restaurant-bistro-cigar lounge. In its €17-28 entrée category, opt for beefsteak, swordfish or turkey schnitzel. Guests gather for buffet

breakfasts in a fifth-floor room with a panoramic view.

Daily Rates: Singles €185-225, doubles €220-240.

Contact: Steigenberger Graf Zeppelin, Arnulf-Klett-Platz 7, 70173 Stuttgart, tel. +49/0711/2048-0, fax 2048-542, stuttgart@steigenberger.de, www.stuttgart.steigenberger.de.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

Stuttgart Restaurants

Weinstube Schellenturm

Schellenturm is the place to come for a taste of Old Stuttgart. "Schellenturm" means "bell tower," and the name comes from the bells sewn onto the clothes of the prisoners who built the original tower in 1564. The current tower, formerly used to store Stuttgart's plentiful wine, inherited the name when the original Schellenturm was torn down in 1811.

Since the Schellenturm's restoration in 1980 by a group of local preservationists, the wine is still flowing freely in the squat, half-timbered stone turret. When we arrived, everyone was sitting outside at tables set under the trees, enjoying the soft lingering summer twilight. The gleaming wooden tables in the cozy round stone rooms seemed to be waiting for the winter fires to be lit and everyone to come back inside.

It took some time for the waitress to hunt up an English menu, always a good sign in a place that anywhere else would be a kitschy tourist trap. Meanwhile, we tried to decipher the specials handed to us on a little plate. Another great sign was that the chef works with only fresh market produce. It didn't take long to spot the special wild mushroom menu.

Nobody would accuse Swabian cuisine of being delicate, but the feather-light, handmade *Maultaschen* stuffed pasta pockets (€10.80, big enough for a main course) turned out to be the best of the trip. At Schellenturm, they layer a surprisingly summery minced pork and spinach stuffing loosely between four layers of fluffy handmade pasta. The effect is a light Swabian lasagna sauced with just a dollop of onion marmalade and

served with a warm Swabian potato salad in vinaigrette and baby mache salad. Sour tripe (*Saure Kutteln*, €9.80) is an acquired taste, but it was also surprisingly delicate for such a hearty dish. Soft honeycombs of pure white tripe were bathed in a tangy tomato-burgundy sauce.

We washed the starters down with a simple, pleasant local reislung by Rotenberger Schlossberg grown somewhere in the vicinity of the Daimler factory. At €4.20 for a 250ml crockful, we thought it was a little pricey for the quality. However, it was far better than the syrupy, anemic, blood-warm Trollinger trocken by the same winery. Auto factories don't seem to do much for wine.

For the main courses, we took advantage of the seasonal specials by ordering chive crepes smothered in fresh chanterelles and creamy bechamel sauce (€12.80). The *Schweinefilet mit Pfifferlingrahm* (€16.80) turned out to be a trencherman's portion of two giant pork chops on a mountain of handmade *Spätzle* (you can tell by how irregularly shaped it is) and covered with a rich brown chanterelle sauce. Swabian food, as far as I can tell, always seems to come with a main-course sized side platter of yet more potato and green salads.

By the time the fresh berries and cream (€5.80) arrived, so had darkness. Street lamps glowed softly along the quiet back streets of the Bean Quarter, inviting an evening stroll to work off one of the best Swabian meals of the week.

Contact: Weinstube Schellenturm, Weberstrasse 72, 70182 Stuttgart, tel. +49/0711/2364 888, fax 226 2699. Closed Sun. and holidays.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20

CUBE Restaurant

This was the hottest new place in town, mainly because it commands the top floor of the glass cube of the new modern Kunstmuseum, opened in 2005 and designed by Rainer Hascher and Sebastian Jehle. The minimalist restaurant was designed by Heinz Witthöft featuring all-glass walls and ceilings, furnished with banks of long chocolate wooden ban-

quettes and clean-legged chairs set on a bare stone floor. From our sky perch, we seemed to be floating over the sea of red tile roofs and the rolling hills beyond.

The menu is modern international, rather fancifully described as “Pacific Rim.” The “light and fresh” lunch menu features a changing daily special for €7.80 and a three-course set menu for €28.80.

I’m not sure what Swabians mean by “light and fresh,” but it was simply too hot even for a diehard glutton like me to consider a lunch of roast saddle of veal (€18.80) or panfried perch with asparagus gnocchi and sundried tomatoes (€16.80) or even penne arrabiata (€8.90). We opted instead for salads, one with grilled chicken and coconut dressing drizzled on greens, and the other with salmon tartare on spring greens with toasted lemon crostini (both €10.80). Although they were billed as appetizers, they were so huge that we decided against dessert. (Cakes for €2.80.)

Service from the handsome guy with perfect English was exceptionally cordial if a bit slow at the end. Food is nicely presented and well executed, if somewhat unimaginative. Location is unbeatable, especially for fans of Otto Dix. The museum houses the o.T. Bar as well as 15,000 works of contemporary, principally regional German art. The lunch crowd seemed to be well-dressed local businesspeople.

Contact: Cube Restaurant in the Kunstmuseum, Kleiner Schlossplatz 1, 70173 Stuttgart, tel. +49/(0) 711 2804441, www.cube-restaurant.de
Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Harris Kaehelofen


This restaurant is located in my favorite Stuttgart find, a perfect little plaza tucked behind Eberhardtstrasse, decorated with a small statue of “Lucky Hans” straddling a golden pig in a wrought iron cage. To find it, turn left out of Breuninger on Eberhardt. Look for an arched passage on the right between the Block House and Beauty House leading onto Geiss Strasse. You will come out into a tiny flagstone plaza ringed with tall, pastel-colored gabled houses and lined with

wine pubs.

The one behind Block House is Harris Kachelofen, a local institution. Every city has one restaurant that attracts every visiting celebrity, and in Stuttgart they all seem to come here. Dozens of autographed photos line the walls, and I was told that the owner, Mr. Beck, is quite a character and a fount of knowledge about the city and its food. However, neither he nor his lively clients were there the day I had lunch alone, so the room seemed a bit close and musty and abandoned. As luck would have it, rain made it impossible to eat out in the lovely little square, so I ended up in a corner table covered with a heavy lace cloth near a tiny wooden window.

The service, however, warmed the place. I couldn’t decide between the *Maultaschen* in onion soup or the one with cheese (€10), so the chef made me a half portion of each and then came out to ask which one I had liked best. Again I couldn’t decide, but the soup version was both light and rich, while the cheese version had been a bit too enthusiastically grilled under the broiler. They came accompanied by one of those ubiquitous huge side salads. The chef turned out to be a brawny, Spanish-speaking Bulgarian, but he certainly can cook Swabian. The proprietress offered me an umbrella for the walk back. Honest home-cooked Swabian specialties for €10-15 won’t win gastronomic awards, but perhaps this place makes it on personality.

Contact: Harris Kachelofen, Eberhardtstrasse 10, Stuttgart, tel. +49/711/24 23 78

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 13/20 

POSTBUSES

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reclining seats, air-conditioning, luggage compartment and rear-end bicycle racks, plus (in some *but not all* cases) onboard toilet facilities. A post horn’s stylized image accentuates exterior yellow color schemes. With centennial hoopla came another embellishment: an enlargement of Rudolf Koller’s depiction of a stagecoach hurtling down the Gotthard Pass, scattering a herd of cows. (Kol-

ler’s 1873 painting hangs in Zürich’s Kunsthaus).

The blowing of a post horn to announce mail delivery goes far back in continental history. Here that tradition gets wistfully patriotic. The modern *Dreiklanghorn* tootles a familiar three-note phrase—C-sharp, E, A-major—evoking the andante motif of Rossini’s *William Tell Overture*. Present-day drivers also sound the acoustic horn to signal the zig-zagging of especially narrow mountainside roads and while passing through upper-altitude cloud banks.

It’s altitude, in fact, that gives Postbus-riding a sightseeing edge over rail-touring. Amidst spectacular panoramics, experienced drivers negotiate steep ascents and descents involving hairpin turns, switchbacks and edge-of-cliff roads—impossible train-track terrain. Recognizing the topographic appeal, system organizers market nine reasonably priced, interconnected day trips, called Route Express Lines.

Itineraries and schedules are detailed online at www.postbus.ch/travel. (Swiss Rail Pass holders ride free on Postbuses but, for the special routes described below, a seat reservation may be required.) Initial passenger pickups are made at local railroad stations for timely train-bus connections.

The **Four Passes** (*Vierpässe*) version totals 101 miles roundtrip from/to Meiringen, a centrally situated Hasli Valley vacation town, near the Reichenbach Falls and the limestone Aare Gorge (*Aareschlucht*). Passengers are treated to quintessential alpine vistas as the Postbus traverses—in succession—the **Grimsel**, **Nufenen**, **Gotthard** and **Susten Passes**. Waterfalls, towering rock formations, woodsy chalets and meadows grazed by brown dairy cows epitomize Bernese Oberland perspectives. Nufenen’s 8, 130-ft. height makes it Switzerland’s loftiest auto roadway.

From Gletsch, a road-junction hamlet in southerly Valais canton, the **Rhone Glacier** and the **Finstaarhorn’s** snow-streaked, 14,018-ft.

DEAR SUBSCRIBER*Continued from page 2*

same everywhere, so we suggest checking the prices at www.gemut.com; in many cases they are lower than you'll find from better-known rail purveyors.

Booking Hotels: I'm excited about our new affiliation with Booking.com, now available at www.gemut.com (click *Book a Hotel in Europe*). It offers discount prices and a vast inventory of hotels in our three countries. Give it a try by clicking *Browse Destinations*. Then choose a country and you'll see an array of choices. Want an airport hotel? In Germany, you can book hotels near some 25 airports. Click Frankfurt and choose from 30 hotels near the airport. Looking for a specific region or city? Hundreds are listed for Germany alone. There are photos, ratings, map links, and a summary of available services and facilities. As a cross-reference, many of the listed hotels can also be found in the *Hotel Reviews* section of Gemut.com.


Bidding at Priceline.com is still the best way to get an inexpensive hotel in major cities—provided you don't mind staying in corporately-owned chains like Marriott and Intercontinental. Before you bid, check www.biddingfortravel.com to get an idea of prices and hotels.

Luggage: Last year, I put my Hartmann luggage in mothballs and switched to lighter, more versatile Eagle Creek. I also discovered Eagle Creek's clever packing folders kept my shirts and pants virtually wrinkle free, much more so than in the Hartmann fold-over hanging bag I'd used for the last dozen years. It was thus reassuring to see that, in a test lab performance conducted by Frommer's *Budget Travel* magazine, the Eagle Creek Velocity-25 rolling bag beat all competitors, including a similar, much more expensive, bag by Tumi. I tell you this because, as a subscriber, you get 10 percent off all Eagle Creek products at www.travelessentials.com with the code [gemut2007](http://www.gemut.com) (order by phone at 800-258-0758). The subscriber price on the \$340 Velocity is \$306, no shipping or tax, and the \$30 medium Pack It folder is \$27. —RHB

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peak can be seen looming high on the horizon. The Susten Pass merges the broad Maienthal and Gladmental Valleys, spread far below the **Dammastock** and **Gwätchenhorn** summits. Approaching that pass means driving across 25 bridges and through 23 tunnels.

The **Historic Route Express** is also recommended: 37 miles one-way from lakeside Flüelen (reachable by boat or train from Lucerne) to Linthal, a picturesque Linth Valley community in Glarus canton. Along the way, Postbuses travel through a string of villages: Bürglen, Brig, Grindl, Springen, Unterschächen, Urnerboden, Urigan—as well as larger Altdorf, featuring an imposing **William Tell monument**.

The road climbs along the Schächen Valley's north face and past the **Gries Glacier** toward the 6,391-ft.-high **Klausen Pass**. Here the no-frills **Klausenpasshöhe hotel/restaurant** has stood for decades as a mail-coach stopover. Then, after almost 100 downhill bends toward the Urnerboden Plateau, the driver crosses the border between Uri and Glarus cantons before the tightly winding road reaches Linthal. 

News/Deals

■ **Three Winter Value Hotels:** Looking to plan a late-season European ski vacation without breaking the bank? We found slopeside value hotels in each of our three countries

• **Salzburger Sportwelt: Ortner Farm**, Eben im Pongau, Austria, rooms from €22 per person (apartments from €49-93 per person). On the valley's sunny side at an altitude of 860m, directly next to a chairlift in the heart of the Sportwelt Amadé. Cross-country skiers will love the 60-km-long Tauern cross-country skiing track, located a mere five minutes from the farm. Contact: Mr./Mrs. Elisabeth und Anton Hoelzl, Hauptstrasse 21, A- 5531 Eben im Pongau, tel. +43/6458-8140, fax 6458-20241, ortnergut@netway.at

• **Gästehaus Schönanger**, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, rooms from €27 per person. Contact: Gästehaus Schönanger, Ms. Kathrin Stühler, Schönangerstr. 7, 82491 Grainau, tel. +49/8821 8558, fax 8821 82547, webmaster@gaestehaus-schoenanger.de, www.gaestehaus-schoenanger.de

• **Hotel Stille**, St. Moritz, Switzerland, rooms from CH 67 per person. Basic, but clean rooms share a bath. Studios have kitchen, wood-floor, terrace, garage, ski and bike storage rooms, radio, cable TV, DVD player. Apartments have the same amenities, plus separate living room and bedroom(s). Contact: Hotel Stille, Via Surpunt 58, 7500 St. Moritz +41/081/833 69 48, fax 833 07 08, hotel.stille@bluewin.ch, www.hotelstille.ch.

■ **A Walk in the Woods:** Starting in May, **Bike Tours Direct** will add hiking tours to its list of trips for 2007. You don't have to be part billy goat to enjoy one of more than 30 trips that cover urban greenbelts, vineyards, riverside strolls, and high altitude scrambles. Choose between self-guided or guided options for most hikes. Weeklong trips start at €330. Contact tel. 877-462-2423 or www.biketoursdirect.com.

■ **Try an Untour:** Forget the Sears catalog. For European travelers, the real "wishbook" is the annual Untours catalog. Download the 48-page color booklet for 2007 in pdf form at www.untours.com. The two-week trips include the Swiss Heartland, Swiss Ticino, Germany Castle, Germany Rhine, Austria Salzburg, and Austria Vienna (combined with Prague and Budapest). Per person rates, including airfare, range from \$2,083 to \$3,529. Contact tel. 888-868-6871 or www.untours.com.

■ **New Michelin Red Guides:** Updated 2007 guides for both Germany and Switzerland have hit the shelves within the last 60 days. These books are bar-none the best printed guides for driving around Europe. Order your copies today at 20 percent off at www.travelessentials.com or call 800-258-0758. 