

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Media Ignores Real Travelers

I spend most days immersed in emails and the Internet. Registration for both Google Alerts and Yahoo Alerts is free, so I request Web searches for a variety of key-word phrases, such as "travel in Germany," "European travel," "country hotels Switzerland," etc. It keeps my in-box full of publicity releases and European travel stories culled from the media. There's a lot of garbage to sort through—kind of an exercise in electronic dumpster-diving—but it keeps us up-to-date.

Based on these online information harvests, as well as occasional flip-throughs of magazines such as *National Geographic Traveler*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, and *Travel & Leisure*, I've concluded that about 80 percent of European travel sellers—and those who write about European travel—are aiming at perhaps one-percent of the market.

- A press release blithely speaks of Tuscan villas priced from \$5,000 to \$26,000 *per week*.

- A magazine suggests travel without luggage—you send it via LuggageForward.com. Sounds OK until you discover the price for two medium bags from the U.S. to Germany RT is \$900.

- A food writer touts a restaurant in Spain that charges \$240 per person for a 26-course tasting menu.

- A 30-something male travel writer tells of the 140mph Autobahn speeds he achieved in a Porsche 911 rented in Munich for a mere \$1200 per day.

A large percentage of those who write about travel seem bent on creating the illusion that most European travelers transition smoothly from their *Architectural Digest* homes to the first-class cabins of transatlantic jetliners to \$2,000 per night suites in

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

The Jungfrau

The small villages of the Jungfrau region are perfect places to launch a mountain adventure or watch others compete in alpine events.

The north face of the Eiger, a massive triangle of cracked rock rising 6,000 vertical-feet—in the truest sense of the word *vertical*—is probably the most impressive wall in the Alps. The ice-sheathed Mönch and Jungfrau, just a bit higher than the Eiger at 13,475 and 13,642-feet respectively, flank out on the ridge to the right marking the starting point for the most glaciated area in Europe. Add countless other jagged peaks and valleys to the view, in every direction, and you have the Jungfrau region—a natural wonder of ice and rock.

Of course this region of the Bernese Oberland, in central Switzerland, is more than just dramatic

mountains—the human touch of villages, railways, and cable cars delicately weaved into the landscape inspire as much awe as the mountains themselves. The villages of Lauterbrunnen and Wengen offer ideal starting points for mountain adventures as well as a full lineup of alpine events for visiting spectators. Nearby, Mürren is more remote, but views are spectacular.

The Early Days

The first evidence of humans in the Jungfrau region came in the 12th century, when an Augustinian monastery, home to over 1,000 monks, was founded in Interlaken. In the next century, groups from

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Vienna 2007

Even repeat visitors must be extra-attentive to keep track of goings-on in Austria's capital. Exhibitions and entertainment offerings pop up on event calendars. Hotels open, others get handsomely refurbished; restaurants deserving to be discovered are everywhere. Perhaps we bypass, or simply forget about, certain worthwhile attractions.

Vienna's cultural richness broadens what-to-see, what-to-do prospects. Consider the numbers: three opera houses, five concert halls, two major symphony orchestras, 26 museums (11 in the fine-arts category), five prominent theaters, four palaces (Hofburg, Belvedere, Schönbrunn, Liechtenstein). Size matters, too: 23 spread-out districts; population totaling 1.6 million within city limits.

Spending €18.50 for a 72-hour **Wien-Karte**, valid for free public transportation via subway, bus and tram, amounts to a good investment.

There's a lighter, looser side to all the sophisticated bounty. My annual wintertime trips coincide with the **Wiener Eisraum** (January-February), when the Rathausplatz becomes an ice-skating rink. Stalls purvey hot *Glühwein*; strands of lights switch on after dark (nightly closing time: 11pm).

What's new, what's ahead

- Coming attraction at the **Kunsthistorisches Museum** (www.kmh.at): *Late Works of Titian*, Oct. 18-Jan. 6.

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Exchange rates as of 4/1/2007

1 euro = \$1.34

1 Swiss franc = \$0.82

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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Paris, Rome, and London.

It's the high end of the travel market that has created this disparity. With five-star resort hotels the major funders of tourism marketing consortia, guess what gets emphasized in ads and press releases? The sale of business and first-class seats is an airline's first order of business, so that often drives its marketing. Reflecting the needs of advertisers that pay the freight, slick-cover travel magazines have become catalogs offering travel products few can afford.

So where do those of us in the real world turn for travel information? After *Gemütlichkeit* and www.gemut.com, consider these:

- **Rick Steves.** Though his business is package tour-driven, the guidebooks and website are crammed with practical information and trustworthy advice. The rail section at www.ricksteves.com is the best of its kind on the web, and the "Graffiti Wall's" 100 or so discussion topics are a valuable resource — "Savvy Seniors," "Flying Within Europe," "Nude Beaches" being examples. User code gemut2007 buys Steves' books for 10 percent off at www.travelessentials.com.

- **International Travel News (ITN).** It has all the panache of your phone book, but ITN's 166-plus pages are heavy with reader input, planning-level details (web addresses,

phone numbers, etc.) and a huge variety of interesting ads. Cost is \$18 per year, www.intltravelnews.com.

- **Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine/website.** \$14.95 per year. A category of features labeled "How" is the mag's strength and offers stories such as "Self-service hotels in Finland," and "Travel networking websites." Advertisers offer budget to mid-priced travel products. Coverage of Germany, Austria, Switzerland is sparse, however. The companion website (www.frommers.com) has several good features, including a series of "bests" (best small villages, best spas, best cathedrals) in more than 30 European countries. The "Travel Talk" forums are lively and interesting but beware of erroneous info from neophyte travelers.

- **Ed Perkins.** The founder of the defunct *Consumer Reports Travel Newsletter* now writes a syndicated travel column on consumer travel issues. Links to his columns are published in the free weekly email newsletter of www.smartertravel.com. His info on travel insurance; issues with airlines, hotels and car rental agencies; and using credit and debit cards while on the road, seems particularly well-informed.

- **Michelin Red Guides.** The single most valuable resource for the independent traveler to Europe. The notorious, starred restaurant ratings are just one drop in the bucket of the Guides' useful info. A great new feature of the 1600-page '07 Germa-

ny book is two pages of maps spotting the nearly 400 "Bib Gourmand" restaurants that "offer good food at moderate prices" (three-course meals under €30, not ultra high-priced, starred restaurants). Other maps locate the more than 250 "Bib Hotels" offering "good accommodation at moderate prices" (most double rooms are less than €90). These few pages alone are worth the \$26 (10 percent off www.travelessentials.com with user code gemut2007). On the road, travelers can instantly find excellent nearby establishments, thereby enabling them to see Germany comfortably and affordably without a pre-set itinerary.

Another new compilation is a list of more than 300 wellness hotels. Of course, all the great old standbys are there as well: tourist office info, a mileage chart, vineyard info, a list of school holidays, international dialing codes, and a lot more. —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: **jngr** Password: **4339**

Vol. 21, No. 3
April 2007

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

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Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published 10 times each year by UpCountry Publishing, 288 Ridge Road, Ashland OR 97520. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 541/488-8462, fax: 541/488-8468, e-mail travel@gemut.com. Web site: www.gemut.com. Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 10 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
Gemütlichkeit, 288 Ridge Road., Ashland OR 97520

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

JUNGFRAU*Continued from page 1*

the Upper Valais in southwest Switzerland founded several villages on the west side of the Lauterbrunnen Valley, including Lauterbrunnen, Mürren and Gimmewald. Wengen was settled around that time by emigrants from the Aare Valley.

Until the turn of the 18th century, these villages survived off dairy farming and mining (iron, lead, and zinc), but saw many hardships: bloody religious conflicts (the Reformation), disease (the Plague), and natural disasters (in 1776 the village of Ammersten was wiped out by an avalanche and never rebuilt.)

Then came tourism, now the region's lifeblood. In the early 19th century, mountaineering became popular, and in 1811 the first climbers reached the summit of the Jungfrau. Ensuing years saw the publication of not only guidebooks to the area, but poems and other works of art that inspired many to visit. Hotels began to sprout and the 1890's saw the construction of the Bernese Oberland Railway, from Interlaken to Lauterbrunnen, as well as the Wengernalp and Mürren railways.

In 1912, the Jungfrauoch railway station was completed—still a marvel to human ingenuity. This is a good place to begin your tour of the area. The railway takes passengers straight through the north face of the Eiger, offering glimpses of the world below through windows thousands of feet high. The final destination, the highest rail station in Europe, is perched on the saddle between Mönch and Jungfrau. Once there, you can fight for space on the observation deck, or venture out onto the glacier for a short walk or hike. There are several well-marked paths, but be sure to dress appropriately (don't forget sunglasses, as the glare from the snow can be intense) and know what you're getting into; the altitude makes it tough to breathe once you start moving. Swiss Pass holders ride free as far as Wengen and get a 50% discount from there to the top. Otherwise it's CHF 157 RT

Jungfrau Basics

Population: Lauterbrunnen 930, Wengen 1,405, Mürren 427

Elevation: Lauterbrunnen, 796 meters (2,612 ft), Wengen, 1,274 meters (4,280 ft) < Mürren 1638 meters (5,374 ft)

Visitor information: Lauterbrunnen, CH-3822, tel. +41 / 033 856 8568, fax 8569, info@lauterbrunnen.ch, www.wengen-muerren.ch, CH-3823

Wengen, tel. +41 / 033 855 1414, fax 3060, info@wengen.ch, www.wengen-muerren.ch

Driving distances from Lauterbrunnen:

Zürich	138 km	86 miles
Bern	68 km	42 miles
Basel	158 km	98 miles
Lausanne	170 km	106 miles
Lucerne	79 km	49 miles
Interlaken	13 km	8 miles

Rail/bus times from Lauterbrunnen:

Basel	2:40
Bern	1:30
Geneva	3:30
Interlaken)	0:20
Lausanne	2:50
Lucerne	2:15
Mürren	0:23
Wengen	0:14
Zürich	2:40

Coming events:

Jungfrau Marathon, September 2007

Lauberhorn World Cup ski race, Jan. 2008

from Lauterbrunnen.

Down at lower altitudes, where dairy cows graze and wildflowers bloom, there are countless activities to keep you busy for days. In the summer, the most popular time to visit, you can hike on any number of well-marked trails. Easy paths are marked with yellow signs, and more demanding mountain hikes—requiring sturdy boots, foul-weather gear, and experience—are marked with red and white signs. Trail maps can be picked up at tourist offices in the villages. If you're feeling adventurous, there's no shortage of more extreme activities. Walk down any street in Interlaken, Wengen, or Lauterbrunnen and you'll come across scores of outfits that offer paragliding, skydiving, and the like.

Winter in the Jungfrau

In winter, skiing has been the main attraction since the first ski-funicular was built in 1912. Between the interconnected *pistes* (ski trails) of Grindelwald, Wengen, and Mürren there's plenty of terrain for ski-

ers of all abilities. If you prefer to spectate, each January Wengen hosts the oldest and most revered downhill race on the World Cup circuit. The impressive Lauberhorn downhill course twists, turns, and plummets 3,360 vertical-feet over nearly three miles. The finishing gate is at the Allmed train station, but the best place to watch the race is at Wengernalp, where you can see about one-third of the course, including two big jumps and a few high speed corners. The fans are almost more entertaining than the race. The hill opposite the course is packed top to bottom with thousands of screaming, chanting, drunken ski hooligans. Faces are painted. National flags are waving. Cowbells are chiming. And the rich aroma of cheese fondue drifts freely through the air, emanating from the portable fondue cookers lugged up the mountain by the truest Swiss fans. Then there's the awards ceremony in Wengen center, where there is a stage, Jumbotron screen, and enough beer and food vendors to feed an army. (Incidentally, the Swiss Army is on hand throughout the weekend, equipped with skis and shovels, serving not only as crowd control but also ski course maintenance.) The party continues long into the night. National songs and chants are belted throughout the crowded, car-free streets at regular intervals, and costumed marching bands roam the town. The festivities last three days, with the slalom and combined (one run downhill, one run slalom) races drawing slightly less attention.

Another great spectator event is the Jungfrau marathon. Each September 4,000 runners labor over 26.2 miles, gaining 5,000 feet in elevation from the starting point in Interlaken to the finish line at Kleine Scheidegg.

Lauterbrunnen, easily accessible by car or train, is a great place to base your stay. The long, narrow Lauterbrunnen valley, with 72 waterfalls and sheer walls rising thousands of feet straight up, rivals any scenery in the world. The village is the starting point for trains and cable cars to many of the higher mountain

villages and offers great hikes. A short walk from the center of town brings you behind the impressive, 1,000-foot Staubbach waterfall, offering a view of the valley through a fine, sparkling mist.

Wengen and Mürren are also great options, with no cars and unrivaled alpine perches above the valley. Wherever you are, you won't have much use for a car—most of the attractions are accessible only by cable cars or trains.

Jungfrau Region Hotels

Among Lauterbrunnen, Wengen, and Mürren, there are hotel options for all tastes and budgets.

Hotel Staubbach

According to its current owners, Craig and Corinne Rochin-Müller, the Staubbach is the first structure in Lauterbrunnen to be built as a hotel, in 1891. Being first out of the gate, the founders were able to snag what is arguably the best site in town, with an unrivaled view of the Staubbach Waterfall and down the length of the valley. The Rochin-Müllers, who bought the hotel eight years ago after it had been closed for a few years, are slowly but steadily chipping away at renovations, trying to restore as much of the original Victorian style as possible. They've sanded and refinished the wide, creaky hallway pine planks that add a lived-in charm to the place, and most common spaces have been decorated with ornate rugs and matching upholstered furniture. The breakfast room has huge windows that catch the sublime view. A large TV lounge (no TV's in the rooms) and a self-service coffee-and-tea room provide the guests with ample opportunity to mingle and share travel stories. There are framed pictures from the early days of tourism in the valley, high ceilings, chess tables, and a relaxed atmosphere that encourages conversation. The friendly staff takes the time to know the hotel's guests.

Room 20 is outfitted with two twin beds (pushed together) with a

EDITOR'S CHOICE

large, light wood headboard. There's not much space in the room but a balcony overlooking the valley makes up for that. Rooms 24 and 23 are connected, with a shared bathroom in 24 and a sink in 23. They are south-facing, missing out on the waterfall, but with an impressive mountain view nonetheless. Most of the rooms have private baths, although there are public bathrooms on each floor as well. There are cozy budget rooms in the attic and an elevator to help out with heavy luggage or tired legs.

Contact: Hotel Staubbach, CH-3822 Lauterbrunnen, tel. +41/033/855 5454, fax 5484, hotel@staubbach.com, www.staubbach.com.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 60-100, doubles CHF 80-120

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Silberhorn

Owned and run by the von Allmen family for over 100 years, the Silberhorn has an easy, understated elegance. The large Swiss chalet-style building which sits above the cable car station on the western slope of Lauterbrunnen village, just a few minutes walk from the train station, has been expanded several times. A long glass-enclosed dining room was recently tacked to the front of the hotel. Here, wicker chairs with pale green cushions create a comfortable perch to sip a beverage and look over the valley. The main dining room, an earlier addition to the building, also has a stunning view through large picture windows. High wood-paneled ceilings add to the room's bright, open feel. The reception area and lounge have comfy brown leather couches and impressive paintings of the surrounding peaks. The public restaurant is enclosed by wood walls and furnishings and has an open fireplace and ceramic tile floor.

The friendly, professional staff apologizes for the size of single rooms that are actually comparable to double rooms in many hotels. Room 10 is one such, with light

EDITOR'S CHOICE

wood paneling on the walls and ceiling, a small desk, wooden wardrobe, and wall mirror. Double rooms are especially inviting, each with a leather chair, couch, small table, and balcony. Every year, the owners renovate a few more rooms in a handsome décor that matches the common spaces.

Contact: Hotel Silberhorn, CH-3822 Lauterbrunnen, tel. +41/033 856 2210, fax 855 4213, info@silberhorn.com, www.silberhorn.com.

Daily Rates: Single CHF 90, double CHF 160-190

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Oberland

After working in Lauterbrunnen hotels for over 20 years, Mark Nolan, an affable Aussie, along with his Swiss wife, Ursula, who grew up in the area, bought the Oberland seven years ago. Mark, who can often be found working the front desk, is happy to suggest hikes and activities, or chat about the rich history of the area or the building, which is located in the center of town.

The front desk and lounge area is spacious, with comfortable couches and a large fish tank. The guest dining room is bright, with white tablecloths, high ceilings, and plenty of windows.

Room 21, a double, has a balcony with chairs looking over the eastern slope of the valley. A small TV is mounted in a corner, near the ceiling, and a framed print of the Jungfrau hangs above the bed. The tasteful furniture is light wood and typically Swiss.

Contact: Hotel Oberland, CH-3822 Lauterbrunnen, tel. +41/033 855 1241, fax 4241, info@hoteloberland.ch, www.hoteloberland.ch.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 70-80, doubles CHF 120-150

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Bahnhof

Owned by Walter von Allmen, this budget hotel has a convenient location but not much charm. The attached restaurant serves as reception, and other than that there's no

common space aside from the hallways, which are happily filled with spider plants and other greenery.

Overall, the hotel is sparsely decorated but clean, giving it a new, somewhat sterile feeling. The location, as one might guess, is directly across from the train station, making for easy transport of luggage and little chance of missed trains. Room 203 is a double with metal twin bed frames that seem to come straight out of a hospital. There's a gray carpet, a 12-inch TV with cable, and one window offering a view that follows the cable car line up the west wall of the valley towards Winteregg and Mürren. Other rooms have a little more character, with wooden headboards and exposed rafters.

Contact: Hotel Bahnhof, CH-3822 Lauterbrunnen, tel. +41/033 855 1723, fax 1847, info@bahnhof-hotel.ch, www.bahnhof-hotel.ch.

Daily rates: Single CHF 60-80, double CHF 110-150.

Rating: QUALITY 7/20, VALUE 8/20

Hotel Jungfrau

The chill in the air might not just be from the high altitude, but also from the frosty personality of the hotel manager. That aside, the rest of the staff is friendly and the Jungfrau's location is unbeatable—it stands alone at the Wengernalp train station between Wengen and Kleine Scheidegg. Each of the 23 double rooms has a fine view of the surrounding Alps. There are open fireplaces in the lounge and restaurant, creating a warm, snug feeling throughout. Access to the sauna is free for all guests. For the upscale traveler this is a wonderfully remote, luxury location accessed only via rail from Lauterbrunnen (leave your car in the station parking lot). Fortunately, the restaurant is excellent, because the daily rates include dinner.

Contact: Hotel Jungfrau, CH-3823 Wengernalp, tel. +41/033 855 1622, fax 3069, www.wengernalp.ch

Daily Rates: Doubles CHF 350-510, discounted 25-50 percent for single. Prices include breakfast and dinner.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 8/20

Alpenruhe Kulm

Gemütlichkeit first reviewed this modest, three-star property in 1993, and we've checked up on it periodically ever since. Located a short walk from the village center, it remains under the stern but capable generalship of its redoubtable owner, Frau Marion Prevost. The Alpenruhe is a model of efficiency, and the somewhat plain guest and public rooms are immaculately maintained. In all, there are 45 beds in 27 rooms, all with bath/WC or shower/WC, telephone, radio, TV and balcony with mountain and valley views.

Contact: Alpenruhe Kulm, Wengen, tel. +41.33/856-2400, fax 856-2401, alpenruhe@wengen.com

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 96-111, doubles CHF 160-208

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Alpenruh

Our Mürren recommendation, the 26-room Alpenruh (not to be confused with the Wengen hotel of similar name), is built against the hillside next to the cablecar station. It offers fantastic views, bright and airy rooms, and a cozy atmosphere. Mountain view rooms have terraces.

Contact: Hotel Alpenruh, CH-3825 Mürren, tel. +41/33/856-8800, fax 856-8888, alpenruh@schillthorn.ch, www.alpenruh-muerren.ch

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 95-140, doubles CHF 160-260

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

Jungfrau Restaurants

The Jungfrau region is not known for its fine cuisine, but Swiss standards such as wurst, *Rösti*, and fondue are top-flight.

Restaurant Oberland

The cozy Oberland has just seven solid wooden tables, but a lot of history. If you're lucky enough to land at the round *Stammtisch* (regulars' table) in the corner, you'll be eating where, in the restaurant's early days (nearly 120 years ago), Swiss politicians, down from the capital at Bern, gathered to discuss policy and make secretive deals. The menu is dominated by many versions of *Rösti* and

other Swiss fare. Oberland's *Rösti* is a combination of potatoes, cheese, onions, a fried egg, and several juicy bacon strips. Prices are reasonable, anywhere from CHF 15-35 for main dishes.

Walls are decorated with old trophies and plaques, and a small outdoor stone terrace with tables and wire chairs looks over the Staubbach waterfall.

Contact: Hotel Oberland, 3822 Lauterbrunnen, CH, tel. +41/033 855 1241, fax 4241, info@hoteloberland.ch, www.hoteloberland.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 10/20

Restaurant Bernerhof

The salad bar is as good as you'll find in Switzerland, with lots of colorful options. Highlighting the rest of the menu are sizzling Hot Stone plates for grilling beef, pork, and veal at the table. There are also several *Rösti* options, and a fantastic fondue. Prices are in the CHF 25-36 range.

The décor is somewhat less-than-inspiring, with an eclectic mix of baby carriages, plants, and bizarre

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.

wall hangings. The staff is accommodating, and the service generally good but it can be slow when it comes time to get your bill.

Contact: Restaurant Bernerhof, 3823 Wengen, CH, tel. +41/033 855 2721, fax 3358, bernerhof@wengen.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 12/20

Ristorante Da Sina

One of the few places in the region to forgo the standard Swiss-German fare, this Italian restaurant and pub, tucked on a side street in Wengen, offers a bountiful selection of pasta and brick-oven pizza. Although the chef might throw a few extra toppings on your pie without warning, the quality does not disappoint. The pasta with clam sauce is delicious, with perfectly balanced flavors in the creamy sauce.

The large patio is perfect for warm sunny days—although there are better views in town—and the interior is pleasant. Decorative pottery adorns the walls, and red and white checked tablecloths create a classic, quaint feeling. Prices are standard for Italian food in the area, with main dishes in the CHF 15-30 range.

Contact: Ristorante Da Sina, 3823 Wengen, tel. +41/033 855 3172

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

Restaurant Alpstübli

Perched on the slopes of Wengernalp, the restaurant of the upscale Hotel Jungfrau not only serves up delicious food but offers a splendid view of its namesake mountain. Inside, a large copper stove is the centerpiece to an intimate dining room. Antique furniture and exposed wood beams add to the homey feel. In winter, alfresco dining is facilitated by benches equipped with sheepskin blankets at the outdoor tables.

The menu is—naturally—Swiss-German. Prices are above average but the food is better than average, too—fine dining, in fact. The hearty soup with sausage, bacon, and toasted bread squares is the perfect way to cap a long day on the slopes.

If you're looking to converse in German with the staff, you might be disappointed: most of them are Swedes who prefer to speak to you in English.

Contact: Hotel Jungfrau, 3823 Wengernalp, CH, tel. +41/033 855 1622, fax 3069, wengernalp.ch

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20


Restaurant Bahnhof

Divided by a wooden, decorative half-wall, this restaurant has one menu but two distinct personalities. One side has the feel of a diner, with Formica tabletops, paper place mats (with a map of the surrounding lift networks and ski *pistes*), and large glass sugar dispensers at each table. The wood paneling on the walls is plastered with plaques and trophies and little baskets with bags of chips and other snacks for sale are scattered throughout. The restaurant's other half is outfitted with flower-patterned tablecloths and has white painted walls covered with old black and white photos.

The menu consists mainly of typical Swiss-German dishes, from sausages to the obligatory fondue. A plate of spaghetti Bolognese-style was a little rich and salty, but not disastrously so. A selection of omelets makes the Bahnhof a good choice for a hearty breakfast.

The clientele provides for some local color, as railway workers often stop in for a cup of coffee. Prices are reasonable (entrees from CHF 15) and pretty standard for the kind of food served.

Contact: Restaurant Bahnhof, 3822 Lauterbrunnen, CH, tel. +41/033 855 1723, fax 1847, info@bahnhof-hotel.ch, www.bahnhof-hotel.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 8/20, VALUE 10/20 

VIENNA

Continued from page 1

- Oscar Kokoshka's expressionist landscapes and portraits comprise a noteworthy Albertina retrospective, Oct. 12-Feb. 24 (www.albertina.at).

- In the Lower Belvedere: 250 French-Austrian modernist paint-

ings—Cezannes, Gauguins, Van Goghs, Klimts, etc.—March 14-Aug. 14. Klimt's famed and sexy, *The Kiss*, is in the permanent collection.

- Mozart and family resided (1784-87) at Domgasse 5, where the composer completed *The Marriage of Figaro*. Concurrent with last year's 250th-birthday hoopla, the restored five-story residence (www.mozarthausviennt.at) opened to the public and remains a stellar attraction.

- For lunch in chic settings, we like four relative newcomers: The Albertina's **DO&CO Café** has an outdoor terrace (Albertina Platz). Look toward St. Stephen's spire at **Cantino**, atop Haus der Musik (Seilerstätte 30). Museums Quartier's **Glacis Beisl** specializes in classic Viennese cuisine (Museumsplatz 1). View a skyline panorama through **Sky Café** windows on Steffl department store's 7th floor (Kärtner Strasse 19).

- Towering over west-side Esterházy Park (one block from Mariahilfer Strasse), a wartime air-raid bunker recently became an aquarium (www.haus-des-meeres.at), with a *Kletterlange* climbing wall on one of its concrete flanks.

- **Österreichische Werkstätte** cooperative (www.austrianarts.com) displays artisan-crafted glassware, silverware, ceramics and jewelry (Kärtner Strasse 6).

Vienna Hotels

Top-echelon, "name-brand" hotels exemplify urbane prestige: **Imperial**, **Sacher**, **Bristol**, **SAS Palais**, **Das Trieste**, and ultra-deluxe **Palais Coburg Residenz**. But there's no lack of less-pricey alternatives. The tourist-office website (www.vienna.info) compiles 350 accommodations. Many can be booked online at www.gemut.com — click "Book a hotel in Europe."

Hotel Am Stephansplatz

Renovated top-to-bottom in 2005, unbeatable location a few steps from the cathedral; 56 two-part bay-windowed rooms with oak-veneer furniture, dark acacia parquet flooring,

flat-panel TV, stoneware-tiled bathrooms with radiant heat; three non-smoking floors. Bright, amiable breakfast room/bar overlooks St. Stephen's.

Stephansplatz 9, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/534/050, fax 534/05, office@hotelamstephansplatz.at; www.hotelamstephansplatz.at, doubles from €185.

Pension Aviano

Long recommended by *Gemütlichkeit*, the Aviano's central location is unbeatable: three short blocks from the Staatsoper, closer still to the Albertina. Turn a Kärntnerstrasse corner at Marco d'Avianogasse to enter a turreted patrician structure, built in imposing late-19th-century *Gründerzeit* style, housing a four-star pension with 17 guest rooms at third- and fourth-floor levels (elevator accessed). Each is brightened by a chandelier, harmonizing with traditionally classical-type furnishings. Double-paned windows and thick burgundy-colored draperies reduce shopping-street noises to a dim hum. Bathrooms, though a tad small, provide toiletries and a hairdryer. TV, telephone, minibar and PC connection are bedroom standards. Guests start their mornings with buffet selections in a cheerful window-walled breakfast room.

Marco-D'Aviano-Gasse 1, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/512 83 30, fax 51283 30-6, aviano@secrethomes.at; www.secrethomes.at, doubles €115-149

Opera Suites

Don't be put off by the nondescript stairs leading one flight up to the reception desk. You'll be on Vienna's swankiest shopping street, with close-up views of the Staatsoper's imposing bulk. All six guestrooms are clean, reasonably sizeable, decently furnished, with flat-screen wall-mounted TV as well as a kitchenette, plus terry-cloth robes in the small bathroom.

Kärntner Strasse 47, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/512/9310, fax 523/96/4317, opera@netland.at; www.opera-suites-vienna.com, doubles €125-180.

Levante Parliament

Opened last May in a 1908 Bauhaus edifice, this artsy, cutting-edge-modern 70-room beauty stands close to Vienna's Rathaus and neoclassical *Reichsrat* Parliament. Guestroom comforts, fixtures, and accessories—with glass partitions and avant-garde lighting fixtures—are downright spectacular, epitomizing sleek, minimalist décor. Surreal glass sculptures created by Bulgaria's Ioan Nemtoi accentuate public areas. Fitness facilities are topnotch; same for "wellness" amenities (sauna, solarium, massage).

Auerspergstrasse 9, 1080 Wien, tel. +43/01/228/280, fax 228/2828, parliament@thelevante.com; www.thelevante.com, doubles are €275.

Hollmann Beletage

You'll feel right at home in this four-star, 16-room designer hotel, a few squeezed-together blocks between St. Stephen's and *Donaukanal* embankments. Guests socialize in the lounge (graphic-art blowups affixed to wall and ceiling), invitingly stocked with a piano and shelves of books. Bedrooms allow generous space for low-slung, contemporary furnishings and totally modern bathrooms. The Heilingkreuzerdorf courtyard contains an outdoor dining salon. Robert Hollmann, a stage actor and chef, does the hosting and cooking.

Köllnerhofgasse 6, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/961/1960, fax 961/1960/33, hotel@hollmann-beletage.at; www.hollmann-beletage.at, doubles from €140.

Hotel Altstadt

Gemütlichkeit's 1994 "Hotel of the Year" is better than ever. Though a bit removed from the center, Otto Wiesenthal's upscale, Art Nouveau-style pension is behind the Neue Rathaus in a neighborhood of interesting shops and restaurants.

Leading Italian architect, Matteo Thun recently masterminded the construction of eight new rooms and a suite giving the hotel a total of 28 rooms and 14 suites.

Kirchengasse 41, 1070 Wien, +43/01/522 66 66, fax 523 49 01, hotel@altstadt.at, www.altstadt.at, double from €139

Bergwirt

If you'd prefer to overnight in an outlying district rather than *Innere Stadt* Vienna, head southwest to the Heitzing neighborhood, best-known as Schloss Schönbrunn's locale. Monika Grauer and Anna Rischer run this circa-1911, yellow-with-white trim *Jugendstil* property, uphill from the *U-bahn* station. Forty-nine lace-curtained bedrooms are spare but comfortable. Pine wainscoting and an old-fashioned porcelain-tile stove make the *Gaststube* cozy. The hotel's beer garden, at adjacent Montecucoliplatz, gets zesty in summertime. (A few doors down Maxingstrasse, at #18, a plaque tells us that Johann Strauss composed 1874's *Die Fledermaus* while residing there).

Maxingstrasse 6, 1130 Wien, tel. +43/01/877/3413, fax 877/3413/13, hotel.bergwirt@chello.at; www.hotelbergwirt.at, where doubles are €98.

Vienna Restaurants

Zum Weissen Rauchfangkehrer

Prior to torte-making renown, Franz Sacher began his culinary career here, in the former chimney-sweepers' guild house. Now Iris and Alexander Stauder run this positively sensational exemplar of a traditional, quality-caliber Viennese restaurant. Two of four tastefully decorated dining rooms are nonsmoking. Cooked-to-perfection meals are in the €23-29 range.

Weihburggasse 4, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/512/3471, rauchfangkehrer@utanet.at; www.weisser-rauchfangkehrer.at.

Griechenbeisl

Enjoying food and drink in a *Beisl* (old-time *Gaststätte*; familiar local cuisine) clinches anyone's truly Viennese experience. This is the oldest, dating from 1447, its backside hacked into a section of the 13th-century city walls, its foundations of Roman origin. Six dining rooms

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(Mark Twain Zimmer among them) ooze *Alt-Wiener* ambience. Copious main courses: meat (€14.60-19.90), fish (€17.20-18.80). One wishes the food matched the surroundings.

Fleischmarkt 11, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/533/1977, fax 533/1977/12, office@griechenbeisl.at; www.griechenbeisl.at.

Figlmüller

Since 1905, the city's veritable *Wiener Schnitzel* epicenter. Bare tables, wooden benches, usually jam-packed—but waiters wear tuxedos and the colossal breaded-veal cutlets are the size of catchers' mitts (€9.50-13.50, depending upon side-dish preference).

Wollzeile 5, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/512/1760, fax 512/1760/20, www.figlmuller.at.

Plachutta

Tafelspitz (boiled beef with fried potatoes and applesauce or horseradish sauce, €16.50-21) rivals *Wiener Schnitzel* as the city's iconic dish. Here, it comes in a pan of clear beef-and-vegetable soup, in classy surroundings (dark woodwork, shiny brass, low lighting) featuring window-nook tables and a buzzing bar scene. Excellent wine list.

Wollzeile 38, 1010 Wien, tel. +43/01/512/1577, fax 512/1577/20, wollzeile@plachutta.at; www.plachutta.at

Weibel's Wirsthaus

Open for lunch and dinner (until midnight) at street level and upstairs in one of Vienna's most venerable buildings, aptly *gemütlich* with dark woodwork and kitschy knickknacks. Menu offerings overseen by Hans Weibel include such Austro-Hungarian stalwarts as fried chicken (€14.50), rumpsteak (€19.20) and veal goulasch (€14.30). Weather permitting, waitstaff brings meals out to the 30-seat Schanigarten.

Kumpfgasse 2, 1010 Wien, tel. & fax +43/01/513-3110, www.weibel.at. ☒

Travel News & Notes

■ **The cream of the Christmas market tours:** Karen Pasold's annual "**Christmas Markets of Imperial Europe**" emphasizes superior accommodations and delves deeper into the European Christmas culture than the standard, highly-commercialized Nürnberg-Salzburg-Munich-Rothenburg itineraries operated by the major tour operators.

This year's 13-day, 12-night tour starts November 25 in Prague and visits Dresden, Meissen, Leipzig, Karlovy Vary, Krakow, and Warsaw. First-rate hotels are Prague's **U. Prince, Taschenbergpalais** in Dresden, **Hotel Furstenhof** in Leipzig, **Hotel Fancuski** in Krakow, and Warsaw's **Bristol Hotel**.

The \$2,990 per person, double occupancy price includes all breakfasts and dinners, three lunches, ground transport via first-class rail or luxury motor coach, scheduled sightseeing tours, all admissions to scheduled activities, guides and tips. Contact: Classic Europe, 1 Glenmoor, Frisco TX 75034, tel. 972-625-6050, classicurope@yahoo.com

■ **Art in Europe:** Several prestigious art events will take place in Germany and Switzerland this summer: The international art exhibition **Documenta**, comes around only once every five years. This year's event, the 12th since 1955, takes place in Kassel, Germany, June 16-September 23 (www.documenta12.de). In Switzerland, the annual **Art Basel** festival runs June 13-17 (www.artbasel.com), with contemporary works from 300 galleries around the world. Also in Germany, the **Münster Sculpture Project** commences June 17-September 30 with the works of 35 artists. This one takes place only once every 10 years (www.skulptur-projekte.de).

■ **New rail travel options:** The long awaited Eurail Germany-Czech Republic pass is now available. The 2nd class saver pass can be purchased for as little as \$251 per person for five days travel in a two month

period. The five-day 1st class pass is \$294. The 10-day, 2nd class saver version allows for unlimited travel for less than \$39 per day per person.

Also new, is the Eurail Austria-Hungary pass, ideal for travelers who plan to tour cities in eastern Austria, such as Vienna or Graz, combined with an excursion to Budapest. The 1st class saver pass costs \$198 for four days of unlimited travel in a two-month period. Additional rail days cost \$20 to \$25. Purchase these passes through Gemut.com at www.railkey.com/tickets/default.asp?AFF=GMT, or phone 800-521-6722, press option 3.

■ **Lake Geneva by train:** The Lake Geneva Regional Pass, covering local travel by train, boat, bus and cable car for periods of five or seven consecutive days, includes two or three days of free travel, and three or four days of reduced fares. Purchase a pass from any railway or ferry ticket office in the region. Popular excursions include the wine train from Vevey to Chexbres, which meanders through the vineyards of Lavaux; and the Vevey-Chardonne-Mont-Pélerin funicular, which leads to the Plein Ciel tower with stunning lake and mountain views.

■ **The Alps on IMAX:** This spring, the film studio that brought us *Everest*, returns with another big-screen climbing thriller, *The Alps*. Set atop the highest peaks of the Swiss Alps, this film tells the story of narrator John Harlin, an accomplished climber, skier, and writer, who at the age of 47, plans to climb the north face of the Eiger, the mountain that took his father's life 40 years earlier. Avalanches, severe winter weather, and the heavy IMAX equipment gave the crew from MacGillivray Freeman Films the challenge of their careers. The film debuts in IMAX theaters across the United States this month. Visit www.thealps.com. ☒

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Get rental car and air quotes, book hotels, buy rail passes and travel insurance, at www.gemut.com