

**DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER**

### **This Month's Ramble**

**Auto rental:** This process in Europe gets, in Alice's words, curiouser and curiouser. If you're 70 and want a car in Sweden you have to book one with automatic transmission *and* produce a note from your doctor confirming that you drive daily. True story.

**GPS vs. Maps:** Don't expect your rental car's GPS to work in any country other than the one in which it was rented. And don't expect there to be instructions in English. A GPS does not replace, but supplements, a good 1:200,000 or 1:150,000 scale map. We have had several experiences with GPS-equipped cars and in each case were glad we also had brought maps.

**Berlin:** To better serve U.S. customers, our favorite Berlin hotel, the **Art Nouveau**, now has a toll-free number from the U.S. Ring them at 888-517-4342.

**River Cruises:** I admit that watching the scenery slide by your bedroom window while floating down the Danube or Rhein is an appealing notion, but I'm always stunned by the cost of river cruises. The per-couple, per night prices for the cheapest cabins start at around \$450. Upgrade to a midrange cabin and you add about another \$170 per night for a tidy \$620 total. Compare that to a top-class hotel such as the lovely **Traube Tonbach** in Bairsbronn where a double room with breakfast and dinner is about \$350 per night—and dinner comes from the kitchen of one of Germany's six Michelin three-star hotels.

**The Euro:** Our diminishing dollar is now worth about €.73. A €100 hotel room costs \$137. Still, most dollar-guaranteed rental car rates sit at January levels. Those who made a euro-guaranteed rental car booking in January, when the dollar was worth €.77 have lost money — \$35 on a E500

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

**On the road with the publishers...**

## Germany on \$100/day

**T**he plan was to drive without hurry from the Bodensee to Dresden, and along the way find *good* hotels with *good* restaurants at *good* prices, mainly in small towns. The further plan, with no advance reservations, was to spend no more than \$100 per person/per night for bed, breakfast, and dinner at these better than average hotels. Here's how it turned out:

### **Tuesday-Bad Wurzach**

From our rented apartment in Hohfluh, near the Brünig Pass between Interlaken and Lucerne, we rolled our suitcases half a block to the bus stop, from there to connect 15 minutes later to the 10:57am train at the Brünig-Hasliberg station. With a single change in Zürich we were in Lindau just after 3pm. A brief taxi ride got us to the local

Avis office where the gum-chewing, smooth-talking agent urged us toward a BMW 118 as if it were a Rolls Royce. "This is all we have at the moment, sir," he responded to my observation that our reservation was for an intermediate car and the 118 is a compact. Avis Lindau is in a former gas station and a quick scan of the lot indicated Mr. Slick might just be telling the truth, there didn't seem to be any larger vehicles. I dismissed the thought of calling Auto Europe's toll-free-from-Europe helpline. I knew from past experience they would have leveraged a bigger car out of Avis — provided one was available in Lindau — or switched us to Europcar, but that would take time and we were running out of daylight. We could exchange cars a few days later when we met our friends in

*Continued on page 3...*

## Historic Wels

**O**n the much-traveled east-west road and rail routes between Vienna and Salzburg, most travelers bypass this smallish Upper Austrian city in favor of a sidetrip to Linz by Tom Bross on the Danube or picturesque Steyr, to the southeast. But Wels, clustered on the left bank of the River Traun, deserves more than a cursory glance from the window of a train. Its Roman history, baroque architecture, summertime concerts, and choice of value hotels are a winning combination.

Named Ovilava circa-15 B.C., it burgeoned as a Roman trading center and provincial capital during Hadrian's imperial reign. Here you can retrace the original encirclement of Roman walls while learning about dozens of pre-Christian finds.

Enrichment, mainly resulting from agricultural bounty in the surrounding Innviertel countryside, peaked in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. That explains the long symmetrical **Stadtplatz**, lined with splendid Baroque housefronts and parapets, especially the stucco-encrusted **Rathaus**. Two towers serve as bookends for the square: the medieval **Lederturm** and the **Stadtfarrikirche**, first chronicled in 888, topped by an onion-bulb dome and admired for its Gothic stained-glass windows. Several arcaded courtyards branch from the Stadtplatz. Find your way to the especially charming **Haas-Hof** vaulted passageway, an unchanged 16<sup>th</sup>-century Renaissance classic.

*Continued on page 6...*

**Exchange rates as of 4/30/2007**  
**1 euro = \$1.365**  
**1 Swiss franc = \$0.83**

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

*Continued from page 1*

booking. On the other hand, folks who took our advice and booked early in U.S. dollar-guaranteed rates haven't lost a penny. An adjustment in dollar rental rates seems imminent, so our advice is to book ASAP.

**Rail:** A frequent question is '1st-class or 2nd class?' on European trains. One traveler summed up my own feelings this way; "It's nice to have the peace and quiet of the 1st class car. No screaming kids or noisy teens. Many times we had the whole car to ourselves and could really stretch out, take our shoes off, put our feet up, and enjoy the views. Of course if you like the close group culture thing, go with the 2nd class. To us the money was well spent. How often do you get to Europe? Serenity Now!" Well put. I must say, however, that 2nd-class on Germany's ICE trains is amazingly comfortable.

**FF Miles:** Perhaps we who hoard frequent flyer miles should begin to accept the reality that it's getting next to impossible to exchange them for transatlantic business class tickets. I recently spent 90 minutes on Delta's Skymiles website trying to find two seats on Delta, or its partner Air France, anytime in '07. June through October? No way. November-early December? A handful of dates were offered. The mileage price tag with multiple stops in low season? A mere half a million miles for two persons. One travel-savvy, longtime *Gemütlich-*

*keit* subscriber with "Elite Platinum" status on American Airlines, and who spent more than \$60,000 on tickets just to Brussels in '06, had limited success trying to use some of her many miles for business class to Rome. Even though she booked on the very first day award seats were available, she could only get business class one way. American, of course, charged her the full 90,000 miles, even though the return trip was in coach. One American AAdvantage service rep told her she was on a waiting list for business class on the return; another told her American maintains no such waiting list. What chance do the rest of us have when an airline's very best customers can't get what they want many months in advance of their planned vacations?

**Wine:** I'm a fan of the light, red wines of Germany and Switzerland, but they are almost impossible to find in the U.S. Longtime subscriber Nancy Althouse tips us off to Niche Import Co. of New Jersey ([www.ourniche.com](http://www.ourniche.com)), which carries a number of red wines from Baden-Württemberg, including several Spätburgunders (Pinot Noir) and Trollinger, a Württemberg speciality. They also import German chocolates and coffee from Alois Dallmayr.

**Passports:** Need to renew yours? Better hurry. It's taking an average of 10 weeks. You can pay an extra \$60 for "expedited" government service but it still can take as long as four weeks. There are some private companies ([www.itseasypassport.com](http://www.itseasypassport.com)) that can

get it done in one to two weeks for about \$75 (plus, of course, the government's normal \$97 fee). Need a passport immediately? You'll have to use a private firm and it will cost \$175, not including the \$157 government fee for a new adult passport processed by an expeditor.

**Good idea:** At Autobahn rest stops in Germany, it might cost as much as half a euro (68 cents) to use the toilet. Many places, however, will credit that amount to a purchase, such as food or drink, from the station's retail store.

**Film:** A couple of years ago in this column there was a discussion of German-made films, and movies whose stories are set in Germany. Now comes *The Lives of Others*, which won the 2006 Academy Award as the best foreign film. I think it's not the just the year's the best foreign film, but the best film period. Don't settle for a dubbed version, see it with English subtitles.—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](http://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: **drve** Password: **8373**

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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

**\$100 PER DAY***Continued from page 1*

Leipzig. For now, the little Beamer would have to do.

Previously, using our U.S. cell phone (99 cents per minute with Cingular's overseas roaming) and the *Michelin Red Guide for Germany*, we had made a reservation from the train at the 18-room **Hotel Adler** in Bad Wurzach, 58 km north of Lindau. The Adler gets both Bib Gourmand ("good food at moderate prices") and Bib Hotel ("good accommodations at moderate prices") ratings from Michelin.

The Beamer's excellent and easy-to-use GPS guided us to the Adler's front door in the center of the village. A friendly but preoccupied man, who we later deduced to be the owner-chef, handed us a room key and pointed toward the stairs...all four flights.

The Adler's pride is obviously its sleek, wood-paneled, halogen-lit dining room with snowy tablecloths and gleaming crystal. As to what comes out of the kitchen, "Good food at moderate prices" nails it. Though a nearby table of 30-something French speakers were turning up their noses and sending back dishes, those served to us testified to careful, skillful, and creative preparation. Our man in Bad Wurzach can cook. Triangles of tasty baked *Saibling* (a kind of lake trout) rested on a bed of housemade noodles with leeks. An intensely flavorful reduction sauce raised the stakes on a juicy pork chop *Iberico* (imported from the Iberian peninsula), and a side of creamy polenta was swirled with bits of truffle. Main dishes range from about €14 to €17. A crisp mixed salad cost a mere €3.8 and half a liter of local Spätburgunder was €9. A shared boat of vanilla ice cream came generously doused with a lovely hot, sweet/sour raspberry sauce.

The double room was €78 and the dinner, without beverages, €45, for a total of about \$166, well under our \$200 limit.

Though the room was in need of new carpeting and there is no elevator, the Adler's accommodations offer good value. The restaurant, however, is the real attraction.

Bad Wurzach is best reached by car as the nearest rail station is 20 minutes by bus.

**Contact:** Hotel Adler, Schloss Strasse 8, Bad Wurzach, D-88410, tel. +49/07564/93030, fax 930340, [b.gut@t-online.de](mailto:b.gut@t-online.de), [www.hotel-adler-bad-wurzach.de](http://www.hotel-adler-bad-wurzach.de)

**Daily Rates:** Singles €47, doubles €78  
Longer stays/weekends are discounted.

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 15/20

**Restaurant:** QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 18/20

**Wednesday-Waging am See**

Again using Michelin, we ferreted out another "double-Bibber," this one in the town of Waging am See—the "See" being the Chiemsee, east and a little south of Munich. We dawdled along backroads and took five hours from Bad Wurzach instead of the three it would have had we used the Autobahn.

Unmistakenly Bavarian, the **Landhaus Tanner** sits in a meadow on the edge of town and, at three stories tall, looks bigger than its seven guestrooms would suggest. The welcome was warm and we were soon ensconced in a lovely corner room (Number Seven) with slanting beamed ceilings, blonde wood trim, and separate sitting area with couch and easy chair upholstered in bright, primary colors. There is a balcony and a large, well-lit, all-tile bathroom featuring a spacious, glassed-in shower. Some hotels would call this a junior suite and at €88 it's a great bargain.

The high-ceilinged dining room glows with modern Bavarian charm. There are plank floors, light wood paneling, banquets lined with checkerboard padding and pillows, and the usual country knickknacks. Franz Tanner, the young chef-major domo, is apparently building a following. Nearly every table was occupied on this Wednesday night, mostly by a stylish under-50 crowd.

Though the food fell short of the previous night's creative excellence, dinner was a pleasant and satisfying experience. The dishes were straightforward and familiar but well prepared. Rich, buttery calves liver (€16) served over chard, with bite-size chunks of sautéed leeks and au gratin potatoes, and first-rate rack of medium-rare, herb-crusted lamb (€24) were all stellar.

Without beverages (two of which were big glasses of a wonderfully intense Spätburgunder, €7.2) the dinner came to €53, making our room, dinner, breakfast total about \$190. Breakfast, by the way, was a superb layout that included eggs to order.

We put Landhaus Tanner in the "find" category. It is suitable for longer stays and would make a convenient and comfortable east Bavarian headquarters. Waging is directly on the Chiemsee. Salzburg, Berchtesgaden and Bad Reichenhall are all within a 40 minute drive, as are a dozen golf courses. Munich is less than two hours by rail, and Salzburg about 50 minutes, both via Traunstein.

**Contact:** Landhaus Tanner, Aglassing 1, Waging am See, D-83329, tel. +49/08681/6975 0, fax 6975 49, [office@landhaustanner.de](mailto:office@landhaustanner.de), [www.landhaustanner.de](http://www.landhaustanner.de).

**Daily Rates:** Singles €65-75, doubles €85-95, apartments (breakfast not included) €78-93

**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 18/20

**Restaurant:** QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

**Thursday-Grafenau**

At breakfast, the decision was made to veer northeast into the Bayerischerwald (Bavarian Forest) near the Czech border. First, however, came a two-hour stop for a walk around Burghausen, a charming town on the Salzach river straight north of Salzburg, but still in Germany. Looming above the town is Burghausen fortress which runs along a bluff for half a mile, the longest citadel in all of Europe. Perhaps its off-the-beaten-track location explains why the town attracts so few English-speaking visitors.

Then it was north across the Danube, mostly over backroads, into the Bayerischerwald to our destination, Grafenau, and the **Hotel Säumerhof**.

Located in a residential neighborhood, the 10-room Säumerhof is undoubtedly a product of the hit and miss 50s-60s-70s post-war construction period — and not much has been done since. It is not an attractive building. Inside, however, an urbane, well-dressed, 60-ish, woman extended a friendly welcome, then personally es-

corted us to a two-room suite — obviously an upgrade from the double room we had reserved by phone earlier in the day. Later, she would graciously bring us dinner in the rather formal dining room. Our room/suite, a throwback to the 70s in style and furnishings, came equipped with more than we needed for our one-night stay, including a stereo with a rack of CDs. The TV, however, had no English channels.

Except for one other couple, we were alone at dinner in the eerily silent, carpeted dining room. But they were soon gone and we were left to whisper alone among the potted shrubbery. Fortunately, our host Frau Endl (Herr Endl is the cook), was talkative and accommodating. For example, she recommended a specific German red wine but when we said only a half bottle, she opened a full one and charged us half price. And, even though *Vanilla Eis mit Schokolade* isn't on the menu, she had Herr Endl melt a bar of chocolate to pour over ice cream. Delicious.

Unfortunately, your reviewers didn't see eye to eye on the food. There was no argument about the *amuse-bouche*, a generous dollop of subtly smoked trout mousse on a bed of marinated beetroot. It was a clear winner, no argument. Same for small bowls of leek soup liberally laced with butter and thick cream. But Liz's venison — sautéed pink strips served on a slightly sweet green peppercorn sauce — lacked the characteristic "wild" taste she prefers. On the other hand, my filet of *Zander* (pike-perch) at €17 was the best single plate of food in a four-week trip. A three-quarter inch high triangle of the meaty *Zander* was likely first sautéed, finished in the oven, and then served perfectly moist on a bed of handmade, squid-in-its-ink pasta. Under a sprightly dressing of white wine, vermouth, fresh lemon juice, and chopped shallots, the dish flirted with greatness.

Breakfast (excellent: eggs to order, fresh orange juice) in the dining room bolstered our surmise that we may have been the hotel's only guests.

Without beverages, dinner was €62 and the room cost €83 for a total of €145 or about \$196.

Epilogue: With its 2007 Red Guide,

Michelin cruelly withdrew Säumerhof's "Bib Gourmand" designation. That may be less about the food (Michelin's decision had already been made at the time of our visit in December) and more a reflection of the hotel's general need for refurbishment. All is clean and tidy, and we were certainly well cared for, but there is a distinct air of faded glory. While the physical aspects of this hotel are only adequate, the more important "people" component is well above average. We recommend it — especially the *Filet vom Zander*.

**Contact:** Hotel Säumerhof, Steinberg 32, D-94481 Grafenau, tel. +49/085 52/40 899-0, [saeumerhof@t-online.de](mailto:saeumerhof@t-online.de), [www.saeumerhof.de](http://www.saeumerhof.de). Grafenau is not serviced by rail.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €38-50, doubles €59-100. A four-night package includes room, breakfast and four, three-course dinners for €219 per person.

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 14/20

**Restaurant:** QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

### Friday-Bad Berneck

The journey north continued. We settled on the town of Bad Berneck, 15 km north of Bayreuth, and its 29-room **Hotel Lindenmühle**, a Michelin "Bib Hotel." First, though, was a stop in Bodenmais, at the foot of the Grosser Arber, the Bayerischerwald's highest point (4,777 feet). Daytrips to Prague leave the town center at 7:30am and include lunch for €28. Bodenmais is famous for its crystal and glassware, but our interest was to determine if the **Hotel Adam-Bräu** is still recommendable. The Adam is a Brauereigasthof, a hotel that also brews beer. Probably the best-known establishment in this category is the **Brauereigasthof Aying**, in the town of Aying east of Munich.

A 20-minute tour of the Adam's guestrooms and public spaces demonstrated the vitality of a successful business. Since our last visit, guestrooms have been added, restaurants enlarged, and new, rather extensive, wellness facilities built. Though a bit kitschy, and a couple of steps below luxury, the Adam is worthy of our recommendation, especially given the prices. A spacious double room with breakfast and dinner is €112. (Contact: Bahnhofstr. 51-53, D-94249, Bodenmais, tel. +49/

09924/94000, fax 9400 100, [hotel@adam-braeu.de](mailto:hotel@adam-braeu.de), [www.adam-braeu.de](http://www.adam-braeu.de))

Bad Berneck follows the Weisser Main river as it winds through a steep ravine. At the end of the town's main street sits the three-star, Hotel Hartls Lindenmühle, in a handsome, four-story, dull red building with white shuttered windows. Multicolored floor tiles in the open, airy reception area belie the stiffer, more traditional exterior. Among the advantages bestowed by buildings of this vintage are wide hallways and the high ceiling we found in our spacious double room. The hotel's free wireless Internet access provided a chance to catch up on emails.

Gastronomically, the Lindenmühle was a step down in both price and quality from the cuisine of the past three nights. After being assured by the front desk that reservations were not needed, we were lucky to get the last table on a busy, noisy night. At €11.50, a juicy, fig-stuffed chicken breast on basil noodles, accompanied by crisp, flavorful sautéed vegetables — carrots, fennel and zucchini, took top honors. Less successful was a rather flat tasting Barbarie (Moscovy, female) duck breast (€16) with tiny gnocchi in tomato sauce. A fine local Franconian beer, Zwickl, was delivered in a ceramic mug.

With dinner at €37, sans beverages, and the room at €84, the total of \$163 was well under our \$200 per day goal.

While we wouldn't recommend making a special journey, or even a detour, the Lindenmühle is a better than adequate option if one happens to be in the region. The food was acceptable, the service friendly and helpful, and room Number 103 above average. Though the shower was a hand-held device over the tub, with just a partial glass panel to keep the splash under control, there were compensations; wireless Internet and a TV with a large screen.

**Contact:** Hotel Hartls Lindenmühle, Kolonnadenweg 1, D-95460 Bad Berneck, tel. +49/09273/500 650, fax 500 65 15, [info@lindenmuehle.de](mailto:info@lindenmuehle.de), [www.lindenmuehle.de](http://www.lindenmuehle.de) No rail service.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €59-69, doubles €89-99

**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

**Restaurant:** QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 14/20

### Saturday-Hartenstein

This day's drive took us through some of the most depressed areas of the former East Germany. Along the Czech border, inhabitants of towns such as Klingenthal are poorly dressed and seem undernourished. Though nearly all the main roads seem to have been resurfaced, most dwellings are shabby and many derelict buildings remain. In one village, we visited a sad little Christmas market where booths selling pajamas and bras hung them as decorations.

Our destination, however, was an upscale oasis in this desert of high unemployment. The **Romantik Hotel Jagdhaus Waldidyll**, in the countryside, near Hartenstein (about 20 miles southwest of Chemnitz) attracted us with its Michelin "Bib Gourmand" and "Red" (pleasant hotel) designations. Unfortunately, except for two suites at €159 each, it was fully booked. Nonetheless, we decided to live a little. After all, the \$200 thing was only a guideline.

A former hunting lodge, the building was converted a few years ago—obviously at huge expense—into a 28-room hotel. The forest setting, steep, gabled roof, and stone façade lend Waldidyll a fairy-tale atmosphere. The impressive structure is approached via a long private driveway, putting one in mind of an exclusive country estate. But five-star it is not, so we carried our own luggage up the stone stairway to reception where we were welcomed pleasantly and efficiently but with little warmth. An elevator took us to the top floor and the rather small suite, Number 301. Regardless of size, these were the most opulent accommodations of the trip—fine, smooth bed linens, top-quality sofa and chairs, and a marble-tiled bathroom with gold swans spouting water into the huge tub.

When making our room reservation by phone we had inquired about dinner and the availability of a table. No problem. So promptly at 8pm we stepped through a door marked "Restaurant" into a wonderfully inviting space of richly-paneled walls and huge, gleaming carriage lanterns—but no empty tables. Our presence immediately attracted puzzled looks from the wait-

staff. Something was amiss. Seconds later, a frazzled, embarrassed front desk functionary rushed through the door behind us and quickly directed us to a kind of overflow dining room. A meeting room, in fact. The menu prices were the same, however. Not a big deal, we came for the food.

For a time it seemed we might be in for a good, perhaps even memorable, dinner. Alas, what we were in for was little more than heavy, highly-salted beer hall fare eaten with expensive flatware on fine china and linens. The lone redeeming dish was *Oma's Kartoffelsuppe* (€3.5), a hearty, creamy, intense, smoky, marvel made remarkable by a liberal infusion of tiny, only-in-Germany, Bratwurst slices. The soup was preceded by an insufficiently tossed, multi-lettuce salad (€16 for two) heavy with pumpkin seed oil and oil-soaked croutons. Between courses toast rounds were spread with salty, bacony Schmalz. We should have quit right there. By the time the main courses arrived, the needle on the rich-heavy-salty meter was well into the red zone. An attempt to revisit my extraordinary *Zanderfilet* experience of two nights ago was a mistake. The Waldidyll version (€17.50) was leaden, oily and, above all, salty. *Erzgebirgische Rinderoulade in Schallottensosse* (€13), stuffed with artichoke hearts (there were also artichoke hearts in the *Zanderfilet* dish, hmmm), had all the flair of Tuesday night pot roast. And did I mention salt? Accompanying *Apfel Rotkohl* was tasty enough but hardly imaginative. Like parakeets in a mine, hotels and restaurants transmit distinct signals when things aren't right. The salad, obviously done in a hurried, slap-dash manner, was an early warning, but the clincher came at end of the meal. You've seen those tiny, crisp, rolled-up waffles stuck into ice cream desserts? Waldidyll's were dead stale, almost doughy. Quality control is clearly a concept with which the kitchen is not familiar.

Without beverages, we paid €52. The suite (€159) brought the total for room, breakfast (in the main dining room, finally), and dinner to \$286, well beyond the \$200 goal.

I hesitate to heavily criticize Wal-

didyll based on a single overnight. Still, a lot of parakeets died: the cool reception, no help with luggage (the hotel *does* refer to itself as four-star), the table reservation mix-up ("yes, sir, we'd love to have you join us for dinner but the only seating available is in our XYZ room"), and, of course, the miserable dinner.

This is a gorgeous property, and perhaps we caught it on a bad day. However, those little waffle things indicate otherwise.

**Contact:** Romantik Hotel Jagdhaus Waldidyll, Talstr. D-08118, Hartenstein, tel.+49/037605/84-0, fax 37605 84444, [waldidyll@romantikhotels.com](mailto:waldidyll@romantikhotels.com), [www.romantikhotel-waldidyll.de](http://www.romantikhotel-waldidyll.de). Not convenient for rail travelers.

**Daily Prices:** Singles €80-92, doubles €112-132, suites €153-195

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

**Restaurant:** QUALITY 7/20, VALUE 7/20

### Sunday-Dresden

Anxious to get the Waldidyll in our rearview mirror, we raced through breakfast and pointed the Beamer toward Seiffen, a town that lives on the manufacture and sale of Christmas decorations. From the car, we phoned

#### Key Websites for the Traveler

- [www.gemut.com](http://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](http://www.viamichelin.com) The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants, plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- [www.travelessentials.com](http://www.travelessentials.com) Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10 percent off for subscribers. Use discount code gemut2006.
- [www.webflyer.com](http://www.webflyer.com) Informative frequent-flyer forums make this a must for air travelers.
- [bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en](http://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](http://www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm) Swiss and European rail schedules.
- [www.ski-europe.com](http://www.ski-europe.com) Top Web resource for skiers with much data on Alpine resorts.
- [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com) Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- [www.germany-tourism.de](http://www.germany-tourism.de) Germany's national tourist authority.
- [www.austria.info/us](http://www.austria.info/us) Austria's national tourist authority.
- [www.historicgermany.com](http://www.historicgermany.com) Website for an alliance of historic German cities.
- [www.thetravelinsider.info](http://www.thetravelinsider.info) Info on electronic devices used by travelers—cell phones, computers, etc.

for a room at Dresden's **Hotel Martha Hospiz**, €110.

Nearing Seiffen, it became clear we were not alone in wanting to visit the former East Germany's Christmas mecca. In fact, far from the village center, *polizei* diverted traffic down a side road where one paid €4 to park about a mile from town. We joined a thick stream of bundled-up pedestrians trudging along the roadside into a stiff, icy breeze. The wind pelted us with shards of ice dislodged from tree limbs above. We had all chosen to visit on the Sunday morning of the first weekend of the Seiffen Christmas Market. Streets and shops were packed. In one of several small factories we saw nutcracker soldiers being painted by hand and women carefully carving little wooden Christmas trees. Candle-arches, the principal item for sale throughout the town, were priced from a few euros to more than €8,000. A band played and dozens of booths along the meandering main street hawked Glühwein, wurst, and, of course, Christmas decorations. On a warmer day a visit to the Toy Museum and the Erzgebirge Open Air Museum would have been in order, but given the chilly wind, and the sameness of the merchandise, an hour was enough.

Martians couldn't have attracted more curious glances than we did during a quick lunch stop at a small gasthof on the road to Dresden. Deep in the former East Germany, English-speaking tourists are still a novelty.

The GPS did its stuff again and before sundown the Beamer was parked in a lot (€5 per day for hotel guests) half a block from Martha Hospiz, a comfortable, friendly, urban hotel on the north bank of the Elbe, in a neighborhood of good shops and restaurants, about a 15-minute walk from the center.

Since Martha Hospiz has no restaurant, it technically doesn't belong in this story. However, we're pairing it with a simple trattoria, about two blocks from the hotel. Initial impressions of **Casa Grecolatino** (Königstrasse 9, tel. +49/0351/8033123) are likely to trigger thoughts of "chain" and "pizza." For sure, it serves pizza, and certainly it is chain-like, with young, inexperienced servers, a youthful clientele, gaudy

décor, and a warren of dining rooms. But Scaloppine Limone (€13.5) and Spaghetti Carbonara (€7.8) were simply delicious, the kind of pasta dishes one hopes for but seldom finds. This is not fine dining, just good food. Salad, pasta, and dessert for two cost €32.3. Add a hotel bill of €110 and our breakfast, dinner, and hotel total was \$192.

**Contact:** Martha Hospiz, Nieritzstrasse 11, D-01097, Dresden, tel. +49/0351/81760, fax 8176222,

[marthahospiz.dresden@vch.de](mailto:marthahospiz.dresden@vch.de),

[marthahospiz.dresden.vch.de](http://marthahospiz.dresden.vch.de)

**Daily Prices:** Singles €77-90, doubles €113-121

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

### Summing Up

Over six days and six nights, we ate well and slept in rooms that ranged from good to excellent. The only real disappointment was the food at Waldidyll. The best overall meal was Hotel Adler in Bad Wurzach, the best dinner atmosphere at Landhaus Tanner, and, of course, I shall never forget the *Zanderflet* at Säumerhof in Grafenau. The best room was at Waldidyll, but if I had to choose one of the six hotels for a weeklong stay, it would be the Landhaus Tanner. If I had to dine in one of the six restaurants every night for a week, it would be the Adler.

In addition to the six-night total of \$1193 for room, dinner, and breakfast we drove some 750 kilometers and spent about \$95 on gas. Only once did we have to pay to park, and that was €5 in Dresden. Lunch for us is a light meal, so figure another \$125 there. The quantity of wine and beer consumed is privileged information, but jot down another \$30 per day for beverages, including tea, coffee, mineral water, and sodas. The total cost for a pleasant, unhurried, sojourn through the German countryside was about \$1600. Of course, it can be done much less expensively; but remember, except for the last night in Dresden, we ate in restaurants that take themselves very seriously. And there are many hotels in these same towns where perfectly acceptable accommodations, with private bath facilities, are available in the €45 to €65 range. ☒

## HISTORIC WELS

*Continued from page 1*

Closer to the Traun's banks (much-used by bikers, skaters, and joggers), rock-solid **Burg Wels** is now a local history museum, art gallery, and music conservatory. Audiences gather for summer concerts on the castle courtyard.

For a proper appreciation of ancient Roman influences on local culture and commerce, spend some time at the excellent **Archaeological Museum**, which fills a former Minorite monastery and includes excavations beneath a frescoed Franciscan church that adjoins this strikingly designed complex and is centrally located, overlooking Minoritenplatz.

### Excursion to Kremsmünster

Dipping and rising by way of hilly terrain extending 18 km/11 miles south from Wels, farmland roads reach **Kremsmünster Abbey**, a Benedictine monastery founded in 777, then expanded to colossal Baroque dimensions through the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Now it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Portraits of Holy Roman Emperors adorn the Kaisersaal; more than 140,000 rare volumes fill the library galleries. All that plus the abbey's eclectic collection of great paintings (among them: Jan Breughel the Elder's *Four Elements*) and ecclesiastical treasures epitomizing the achievements of goldsmiths and silversmiths. Sizeable wine cellars are on the premises, too. (For more on the Abbey and Kremsmünster log-in as a subscriber and see our April '05 issue online at [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com))

## Wels Hotels

### Hotel Hauser

Quietly situated on an auto-free pedestrian corridor, the recently renovated Hauser gets high marks for its central location, four-star comfort, and overall stylishness. The reception area adjoins a carpeted lounge featuring a wood-burning fireplace and shelves of books, along with Edi's Bar and its white piano. Modern art is plentiful throughout. Big double windows brighten each of 42 guestrooms; plain pine floors complement Philippe Starck-designed furnishings, textiles, and Euro-modern bathroom fixtures.

Guests can surf channels on a pair of flat-screen Samsung TVs—wall-mounted in both bedroom and bathroom. They also have access to a sun terrace as well as sauna and fitness amenities.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €79-99, doubles €106-126

**Contact:** Hotel Hauser, Bäcker-gasse 7, 4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/45409, fax 45409 45, [office@hotelhauser.com](mailto:office@hotelhauser.com), [www.hotelhauser.com](http://www.hotelhauser.com)

**Rating:** QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

### Kremsmünstererhof

The 15<sup>th</sup>-century yellow façade with white window trimmings harmonizes with the Stadtplatz's fine ensemble of Baroque buildings. Sui-ting the style, moreover, is this three-star hotel's massively lavish, heraldic portal. An arcaded inner courtyard becomes a convivial *Gastgarten* during warm-weather periods, and the vaulted-ceiling in the *Caféhaus* adds a dash of Viennese flair. The 60 guestrooms are nothing fancy, but all come with TV, telephone, bath/shower, and outside views.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €40-48, doubles €60-68

**Contact:** Kremsmünstererhof, Stadtplatz 62-63, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/466 23, fax 466 2344, [kremsmuenstererhof@liwest.at](mailto:kremsmuenstererhof@liwest.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

### Hotel Greif

Seen head-on from broad Kaiser-Josef Platz, the century-old four-story "Griffin" looks timeworn and under-serving of its four-star ranking. Looks are deceiving in this case, for interiors reveal sedate Old World panache. Each of the 78 refurbished guestrooms meets contemporary travelers' demands with anti-allergenic mattresses, speedy Internet hookup, telephone, TV, minibar, and espresso-maker. Downstairs lounge and restaurant tend toward outdated stuffiness, although the staff is perky and attentive. The Greif's super-sized grand ballroom turns into a *Theatersaal* for full-scale operatic productions during the city's annual Richard Wagner Festival.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €59-85, doubles €83-125

**Contact:** Hotel Greif, Kaiser-Josef-Platz 50-51, 4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/45361/

### Wels Basics

**Population:** 56,478

**Elevation:** 317 meters (1,040 ft)

**Visitor information:** Tourismusverband Wels, Kaiser-Josef-Platz 22, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/0/7242/434/95, fax 479/04, [office@tourism-wels.at](mailto:office@tourism-wels.at), [www.wels.at/tourismus](http://www.wels.at/tourismus)

#### Driving Distances:

Munich	214 km/134 miles
Salzburg	113 km/71 miles
Vienna	204 km/128 miles
Prague	288 km/180 miles
Zürich	539 km/337 miles

**Events:** The 18<sup>th</sup> **Richard Wagner Festival** stages *Parsifal* and *The Flying Dutchman*, starring world-class performers (May 25-30)

In midsummer, the 10<sup>th</sup>-annual **Ackern in Wels** event brings locals and visitors to outlying sunflower fields for a music-and-games jamboree (July 6-August 15).

0, fax 44629, [office@greif-hotel.at](mailto:office@greif-hotel.at), [www.greif-hotel.at](http://www.greif-hotel.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 14/20

### Hotel Ploberger

Two summers ago, top-to-bottom renovations transformed this Best Western affiliate into an urbane inner-city establishment appealing to experienced, cost-conscious travelers. Advantages include a location in the heart of Wels, choice of 82 utilitarian-but-comfortable guestrooms, plus sauna and free Internet connectivity. There's no restaurant onsite, but the breakfast room exudes a cheerful ambience, with 10 kinds of fresh fruit provided each morning.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €70-94, doubles €98-125

**Contact:** Hotel Ploberger, Kaiser-Josef Platz 21, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/62941, fax 7242/62941/110, [direktion@hotel-ploberger.at](mailto:direktion@hotel-ploberger.at), [www.hotel-ploberger.at](http://www.hotel-ploberger.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

### Alexandra and Bayrischer Hof

On the north edge of town, closer to the rail station than the historic *Innenstadt*, the red four-star Alexandra and blue three-star Bayrischer Hof, stand side by side, separated by a flag-festooned common entry. Both had elite stature as prewar villas, and have been restored and retrofitted under the Platzer family's attentive ownership.

Despite price differentials, in-room amenities are comparable on both sides

of the entry—hair drier, cosmetic mirror, TV, Internet access, attractive beechwood furnishings. Guests converge in common dining and lounge areas. More overall space, costlier designer accessories, and top-of-the-line bathroom fixtures justify the Alexandra's price niche above its next-door Bayrischer Hof neighbor.

**Daily Rates:** Alexandra singles €56, doubles €84; Bayrischer Hof singles €90, doubles €122

**Contact:** Alexandra and Bayrischer Hof, Dr. Schauer-Strasse 21-13, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/47214, fax 47214 55, [office@hotelalexandra.at](mailto:office@hotelalexandra.at), [office@bayrischerhof.at](mailto:office@bayrischerhof.at), [www.hotelalexandra.at](http://www.hotelalexandra.at), [www.bayrischerhof.at](http://www.bayrischerhof.at)

**Rating:** (Alx) QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20 (BH) QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

### Kremsmünster Hotel

#### Hotel Schlair

The Schlair's well-maintained baroque-style main building is in the center of Kremsmünster, while its guesthouse, Zur Alten Mühle (the Old Mill), is just a few blocks away, literally in the shadow of the Abbey.

The main building's public rooms feature vaulted ceilings, tiled floors, heavy wood beams, an inviting salon with oversize leather furniture, a cozy bar with blazing hearth, and wireless Internet access. Guestrooms have been remodeled in a bright, modern style with recessed lighting and such amenities as cable TV with English channels and high-speed Internet connections. Good value at €86 double.

Breakfast is served in the adjoining Schlair family bakery, center of village social life for nearly 200 years, and whose wondrous pastries affirm Austria's reputation for baked goods.

The guesthouse is the town's oldest (13th century) structure and offers a handful of vacation apartments. Each is done in a traditional style with wood-trimmed furniture and herringbone hardwood floors. Other amenities include satellite TV, direct dial phones, and small kitchens suitable for light meals.

Owners-managers Maria and Erik Kux-Schlair possess the natural warmth and unflagging enthusiasm characteris-

tic of the best small hotel proprietors.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €53-61, doubles €77-86. Apartments €50-68 plus cleaning fee. Optional breakfast for apartment guests, €8 per person.

**Contact:** Hotel Schlair-Gästehaus "Zur Alten Mühle," A-4550 Kremsmünster, Franz-Hönig-Str. 16, tel. +43/7583/5258, [schlair@hotelschlair.at](mailto:schlair@hotelschlair.at), [www.hotelschlair.at](http://www.hotelschlair.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

### Wels Restaurants

#### Gerstl Bräu

Brewpubs tend to be noisy and this one's no exception: Patrons eat and quaff at street level and on an upstairs section. Moreover, they're free to bang out tunes on Gerstl Bräu's upright piano. So, if in the mood, join the mostly young Welser crowd in this popular gathering place, which has remained a favorite watering hole on the mid-city scene (via the Gortana-Passage) since it opened 13 years ago. Regional *Oberösterreichischer Schmankerl* specialties range €6.50-9.95; full-course dinners cost €7.90-18.50. You'll pay less (€2.90-6.50) for homemade soups, which are meaty enough for a decent meal.

**Contact:** Gerstl Bräu, Freitung 11, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/35/1500, [www.gerstl-braeu.at](http://www.gerstl-braeu.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

#### Schubert Stub'l

Stroll three blocks west from the *Bahnhof* in north-side Wels, to an unassuming lace-curtained housefront that's actually a neighborhood restaurant featuring nine kinds of Schnitzel (€8.20-9.50)—and where you can pick and choose at the salad bar (€3.30).

**Contact:** Schubert Stub'l, Schubertstr. 13, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/43 924

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 13/20

#### Knödelwirt

Austrian dumplings rather than Austrian Schnitzel? If that's your mindset, head farther north—beyond the *Bahnhof*—to shady Grünbachplatz and the Irger family's woodsy, *gemütlich* restaurant, dating from 1891. Patrons have their pick of various dumpling concoctions (bacon, spinach, cheese and whatever) served with soup in the ivy-filled dining room or

the 100-seat garden. Prices range €5.80-8.50.

**Contact:** Knödelwirt, Grünbachplatz 14, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/47 205, [www.knoedelwirt.at](http://www.knoedelwirt.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 13/20

#### Löwenkeller

Turning a Stadtplatz corner, poke into narrow Hafengasse, thereby discovering this sensational winery restaurant opened by Georg Raab in autumn 2006. A pair of stone lions guard the entrance. Inside, a glass canopy overhangs the Romanesque columns and arches surrounding a chic, airy dining terrace.

Entrées on the distinctively upscale menu include Viennese-type *Tafelspitz* (€14.90) red snapper (€17.90), and delectable seafood taglioni (€9.90), complemented by Austrian Wachau and Burgenland wines. Wels didn't have a bona-fide cosmopolitan restaurant until Herr Raab came along with this outstanding establishment.

**Contact:** Löwenkeller, Hafergasse 1, A-4600 Wels, tel. +43/7242/79/785, [cu@loewenkeller.at](mailto:cu@loewenkeller.at), [www.loewenkeller.at](http://www.loewenkeller.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 15/20

#### For a Snack or Coffee Break

The artful tortes displayed at **Café Mayer** (Stadtplatz 17) are the very essence of an Austrian Konditorei-bakery. ☒

## Readers' Forum

### Salzburg Report

Through an Internet travel service my wife and I bought a five-night package at Salzburg's **Golden Hirsch**. Although placed in a "classic double" on the fourth floor—which I had read somewhere are not a preferred category—we found the room very comfortable and attractively appointed.

Even more important, however, was the genuine hospitality of the staff at every turn. Besides all desk staff remembering our room number themselves for our key, there was a genuine friendliness throughout. When we mentioned that we wanted to take a day trip to Munich, the

desk clerk offered up train schedules printed from his computer. Remembering we would be flying from Salzburg airport at 6am the last day, our desk person asked us what time we wanted our taxi and wake-up call. Also, both of the hotel's associated restaurants were excellent.

ROB HUMBERSTON  
VIA E-MAIL

### Goslar Apartments

Since I'm from the Goslar, Harz, and visited the area in September, I recommend interested parties go to [www.goslar.de](http://www.goslar.de) (click the Hotels & Apartments link) to find the most reasonable apartments in the center of town. Almost all private places are extremely well-kept and the prices vary from \$40 to \$60 per night. It's less than four hours from Berlin.

KARL KOERTJE  
VIA E-MAIL

### Cultural Differences

Responding to your November *Vive la Différence* column, here are some cultural differences we've noticed over the years:

1) Regardless of the time being 1am, with streets deserted, you still wait for the "Red Man" to be replaced by the "Green Man" before crossing the street in the proper crosswalk zone.

2) Coffee at the railroad station, comes in a china cup/saucer which, after use, will be returned to the counter. Try that one in the USA.

3) To board a tram, U-bahn or local train, you buy a ticket on the honor system regardless of the lack of conductors to check and see if you actually have one. In traveling Germany/Switzerland/Austria for over 25 years, I've never been asked to show my ticket...but I still make sure I buy one and cancel it appropriately.

4) There is seldom any trash thrown out on the roadside. No beer bottles, no tissues, no McDonald containers, etc. Amazing!

HAMPTON MILLER,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA ☒

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Get rental car and air quotes, book hotels, buy rail passes and travel insurance, at [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com)