

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Let's Talk Insurance

Whether you think Michael Moore is a great American, or "Sicko," his movie about health insurance, should be the title of his biography, insurance, as it relates to travel, is an issue you better deal with or it could cost you thousands.

For years, I thought travel insurance was for other people. For that reason, it was not a subject mentioned in these pages until just a few years ago. Regarding our own travel, we made no advance reservations and car rentals could be canceled. If something happened and we couldn't make the trip at the last minute we would only lose the airline's cancellation charge. But along came 9/11, then Medicare and suddenly I wasn't covered if something went wrong while I was out of the country. Those events made me realize travel involves financial risks I had not previously considered. So I made sure my Medicare supplemental insurance provided overseas coverage, and we now buy travel insurance. If you haven't already, I suggest you assess your own financial exposure as it relates to travel: If you become ill and have to cancel a trip at the last minute, how much money do you stand to lose? If you are taken ill in Europe and have to suddenly return home, what will it cost? And finally and most important, if you require medical care in Europe, who will pay for it?

It is absolutely essential that you have medical coverage while abroad. If case you don't, here's a tip that will get you some fairly low-level insurance on the cheap: Travel insurance companies, such as AIG's Travel Guard (get prices at <http://www.gemut.com/content/view/903/288/>) base their premium charges on the amount of the trip cancellation/trip interruption

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

Surprising Essen

Once a coal-mining and steel-making powerhouse, Essen has reinvented itself with impressive architecture, a UNESCO World Heritage site, a world-class museum, and plenty of inviting green space.

If Germany's Ruhr Valley conjures images of coal mines and steel mills, you wouldn't be mistaken; you would, however, be a little behind the times. The mines and mills closed in the mid-1980s. And industrial roots notwithstanding, this region—and the city of Essen in particular—has quietly established a new profile in the decades since. As Germany's eighth largest city, Essen's cultural appeal begins with one of the nation's best fine-arts museums. But there's more: well-preserved pre-war buildings, historic estates, wooded greenbelts, and old factories converted into contemporary museums are all part of the mix.

Yellow Roads

The Gasteiner Valley to Bellagio

John K. Bestor, a member of our advisory board, has spent more time exploring the back roads of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Northern Italy than anyone we know. This month we revive one of your favorite Gemütlichkeit features, Yellow Roads (the color of less-traveled backroads on European road maps), with his recommended two-day drive from Austria's Gasteiner Valley to Lake Como in Italy.

For this journey you'll need 1:200,000 scale (1:150,000 are better) maps for the appropriate areas of Austria and Italy.

Badgastein to Leinz

From the winter resort and *kur* town of Badgastein, Austria, drive a short distance south to the railroad at Bockstein where you and your car take the train through the Tauern

For almost the first 1,000 years of its existence, the Ruhr River Valley's most influential city was a nondescript village huddled amidst convents and monasteries, an obscure Westphalian place vastly overshadowed by nearby Aachen and Cologne. But changes came rapidly as of 1811, when Essen-born Friedrich Krupp jump-started continental Europe's industrial revolution by investing in a small steel mill. Foundries, fueled by coal mines, proliferated throughout the *Ruhrgebiet* (two much-heard colloquialisms for this area are *Ruhrpott* and *Kohlenpott*). Ultimately iron and steel were turned into 20th-century weapons; the gigantic "Big Bertha" cannon,

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Tunnel to Mallnitz. From there the road curves downward into a beautiful valley. Continue east from Ober-Vellach toward Winklern through another lovely valley with expansive green meadows extending into the mountains. Southwest to Lienz the road rises sharply and affords an excellent view of Winklern and the valley. After a small pass, the road drops down into the industrial town of Lienz.

Lienz to Cortina

At Lienz, take Route 108 northwest toward Matrei. At St. Johann, turn left at an unmarked crossing on a yellow road which curves along

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Exchange rates as of 7/19/2007

1 euro = \$1.38

1 Swiss franc = \$0.83

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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exposure. If you've paid \$5000 in advance for a cruise down the Danube you stand to lose the \$5000. But if your only potential loss is an airline cancellation charge, your exposure may be only \$250-\$300. If you're using frequent flyer miles it's almost zero. For a two-week trip, a 65 year-old traveler will pay \$346 for a Travel Guard Protect-Assist policy that will reimburse for a missed \$5,000 cruise. But if the exposure is, say, only \$350 the insurance costs only \$46. Here's the advantage to the \$46 premium; all buyers of that policy get same the \$25,000 coverage for medical expenses, \$500,000 for medical transportation, \$1,000 trip interruption insurance, \$1,500 trip delay, \$750 baggage and personal effects loss, \$250 baggage delay, and \$250 missed connection insurance. For an extra \$22, both the \$346 and the \$46 buyer can double the medical and emergency transportation coverages to \$50,000 and \$1 million. Of course, the insurer will only pay for medical transportation deemed necessary for treatment, and only to the nearest hospital, probably not in the U.S. On the other hand, if you are hospitalized for more than seven days the policy will pay for transportation for another person to come to your bedside. If you don't want to leave the decision about whether or not you'll be flown back to the U.S., and you are unable to fly commercial, consid-

er enrolling with companies like MedJet Assistance and AirMed International. Annual membership is around \$225.

Make sure you purchase your trip cancellation insurance soon after booking your travel. With Travel Guard, any pre-existing medical conditions will be excluded from coverage. Be careful, too, where you buy your trip cancellation insurance. Sellers such as Travel Guard and Travel Insured will actually give you a cash refund for travel canceled by illness, terrorist attack, the financial demise of a tour operator or cruise line, or other covered reason. Insurance purchased from travel providers such as a cruise company or tour operator, however, won't reimburse you if the company goes bankrupt, and if you have to cancel for other covered reasons, may not pay in cash but instead issue credits for future travel.

There is one more area of insurance that warrants close attention, car rental insurance; specifically collision (known also as CDW or LDW) and theft insurance. In countries where one is able—all European countries except Italy—we recommend relying on a credit card for these coverages. There are pitfalls, however. These real-life examples illustrate three of them:

Dick and Jane (not their real names) book a premium category car in France. They expect to get an Audi A6 or similar but are pleasant-

ly surprised to be upgraded to a 7-Series BMW. A few hours later it occurs to them that their credit card CDW and theft coverage may exclude certain expensive and "exotic" cars. Indeed, they call Visa and discover their \$80,000 vehicle falls in the "too expensive" category. Dick and Jane are 100% liable if the car is damaged or stolen. Next day, at considerable inconvenience, they return the big Beamer, pay for a three-day rental (the minimum period) and begin a new contract that includes insurance (it's not possible to add insurance to a rental in progress).

Fred rents a car in Germany with a voucher he prepaid with his Mastercard prior to departure. Asked to provide a credit card upon arrival at the rental counter in Frankfurt to cover local charges (extra driver, road tax of €1.2 per day) he pulls out his American Express card. Two weeks later the car is returned with a

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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

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User Name: **nssn** Password: **2176**

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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

ESSEN*Continued from page 1*

named for Friedrich's daughter, could shoot a projectile 120km/75 miles. Patriotic sloganeers proclaimed Essen as "Army of the Reich" during World War II.

Those were the old days. Economic convulsions and new technologies—preceded in the mid-1940s by more than 200 Allied air raids—doomed both the mills and the mines. Now generous expanses of forested greenbelts soften the Ruhr basin's topography, measuring 75 kilometers/46 miles east-west and 45 kilometers/28 miles north-south. On Essen's southwestern fringe, the greenbelt meets **Gruga Park**. Developed in 1929 for a regional horticultural show (*Ruhrländische Gartenbaumausstellung*), its 173 acres of botanical gardens, tropical greenhouses, walkways, ponds, picnic spots, recreational facilities, and a music pavilion are linked by the Grugabahn mini-railway.

Bicycle paths wind 240 kilometers (150 mi) throughout the metro area. Bike rentals are available on the north side of the *Hauptbahnhof*: full-day €7, half-day €5.

Where the Krupps Lived

Nearby, amidst forested hillsides, sailors, paddlers, and *Weisse Flotte* tour-boat passengers enjoy the calm, clear water of narrow Baldeneysee, an artificial lake known fondly as the "Blue Pearl of the Ruhr," fringed with willow trees and enhanced by beer gardens and in-line rollerskating lanes along its eight kilometers/five miles of shoreline. To create this dammed-up section of the river, 10,000 unemployed coal miners did the heavy-duty dredging work in 1930-31, digging and hauling in exchange for bread and beer.

Affluence prevails in the Bredeneys neighborhood, which slopes down to touch the western arm of the lake, but nothing here or anywhere nearby can match neoclassical **Villa Hügel**, a 269-room, 185-acre estate completed in 1872. Three generations of Krupps made this their baronial home, and

Essen Basics**Population:** 586,750**Elevation:** 116 meters (380 ft.)

Visitor information: Touristikzentrale Essen, Am Hauptbahnhof 2, 45127 Essen, tel: +49/201/19/443, fax: 88/72044, etouristikzentrale@essen.de, www.essen.de

Driving distances from Essen to:

Berlin	728 km	452 miles
Frankfurt	250 km	155 miles
Hamburg	366 km	186 miles
Bonn	98 km	61 miles
Stuttgart	425 km	264 miles
Leipzig	461 km	286 miles
Munich	636 km	395 miles

Born in Essen: Karl Baedeker, guidebook publisher (1801); Heinz Rühmann, popular movie star (1902)

Infrastructure: As one might expect, considering the Ruhr area's economic importance, its *Autobahn* network covers a sizeable tangle of high-speed routes. In Essen's *Hauptbahnhof* vicinity, a stretch of the A-4 *Autobahn* swoops beneath the city center by way of the *Ruhr-schnellweg* tunnel, completed in the 1970s. The A-3 heads this way from Frankfurt via Cologne and Düsseldorf; the A-44 gets you quickly from Kassel and then Dortmund; the A-1 links northerly Bremen and Hamburg with Essen. For slower going from Frankfurt, some travelers prefer driving along a super-scenic road that curves alongside the Rhine. Continuing a bit beyond Düsseldorf, they can veer onto highways to reach metro Essen.

Rail: Essen's *Hauptbahnhof* is a key *Ruhrgebiet* rail-travel hub. Frankfurt's Rhein-Main Airport is on the national InterCityExpress network—with a schedule of frequent daily ICE departures northward from there direct to Essen (2 hours, 53 minutes).

Airport: Düsseldorf, 58 km/36 mi south

Guided Sightseeing: Free tours of Germany's tallest *Rathaus*, ascending to the postwar city hall's 22nd-floor observatory at 106 meters/348 ft. altitude; Tuesdays, 11am-12 noon.

Daily two-hour bus excursions (German narration only), all major points of interest, €10.

Events:

Essen Original, annual music, dance, literature and comedy festival on Kennedyplatz (rock, jazz, techno, reggae and hip-hop, plus a classical concert on Saturday), August 17-19

Essener Maitember, midyear celebrations all over town (plus outlying Kettwig, Werden and Borbeck) include outdoor concerts, sports competitions, art and handicraft exhibitions, dragon-boat races, food stands, May through September

Essen Geniessen, "restaurant roundabout" happens throughout the metro area, with more than a dozen eateries participating, September 7-October 21

Essener Lichtwochen (Light Weeks), city-wide illuminations, 57th annual, October 28-January 5

International Christmas Market, 250 stalls on city-center streets and squares. November 22-December 23

today family portraits and two dozen priceless Gobelin tapestries hang on oak-paneled walls. Eight years after the war ended, the mansion opened to the public for tours, chamber-music concerts, and art exhibits.

Inner-City Highlights

Alongside Steeler Strasse at mid-city crossroads, the high-domed **Alte Synagogue** is a ponderous neo-Moorish/*Jugendstil* edifice designed in 1913 by Edmund Körner. It now survives as a Jewish remembrance memorial and documentation center; permanent retrospectives delve into Naziism's repressions. Pedestrian shopping zones twist around the **Burgplatz**, where Essen's Westphalian-Gothic **Münster** (cathedral) has stood for more than eight centuries. Definitely do not bypass the **Dom-schatzkammer** in the cathedral's north chapel, which displays ecclesiastical and regal treasures crafted during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor, Otto the Great. For example, the circa-965 **Golden Madonna** is revered as the oldest three-dimensional image of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus in existence.

Another auto-free shopping zone, long, wide **Kettwiger Strasse**—developed in the late 1920s—extends from the main railroad station through the commercial heart of the city and claims to be Germany's first such "urban-renewal" development. From an entertainment perspective, the Art Deco **Lichtburg** movie theater (Kettwiger Strasse 36) qualifies as an important landmark. It opened as Germany's biggest *Filmpalast* in 1928, and was lovingly restored and reopened a decade ago.

Innenstadt pedestrian corridors converge on **Kennedyplatz**, which is spacious enough for May-June volleyball tournaments and a public ice-skating rink in winter. The well-known Karstadt department store chain, headquartered in Essen, will dominate a mammoth 200-store retail/restaurant/office complex, shaped like a spaceship, currently under construction on Limbecker Platz and targeted for completion in 2008.

Prewar Buildings

Where Lindenallee meets Hirschlandplatz, ritzy boutiques line the skylit Linden Galerie inside architect Körner's sandstone, clock-towered **Deutschlandhaus** (1928), a form-and-function, curves-and-angles, Bauhaus classic. Another eye-catcher, arcaded brick **Haus der Technik** (1922-25) faces the north side of the *Hauptbahnhof* from across Hollestrasse. Here, too: the Wilhelminian-style **Handelshof** (1911-12), which housed old-time Essen's fanciest stores, plus a restaurant and hotel (recently reborn as a four-star Mövenpick). Commuters emerging from the train station can't miss seeing the Handelshof's boosterish rooftop sign: *Essen die Einkaufstadt* (Essen the Shopping City) in blazing yellow and blue capital letters, up there since 1950.

Situated two blocks from rail station underpasses, Essen's south-side **Stadtgarten** arose from widespread wartime ruins as a cultural oasis with flowerbeds and a duck pond—delightfully serene compared with the busy weekday atmosphere on the other side of the tracks. In 1988, citizens had a brand-new **Opera House**, commissioned by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto and built inside the park. Sixteen years later, across the lawn from that white curvilinear beauty, Essen Philharmonic musicians moved into their just-completed concert hall: the handsome, courtyarded **Saalbau**. Onsite is the **Wallberg**, a restaurant and beer garden at Huyssenallee 53.

After viewing the Stadtgarten greenery, continue slightly farther south by way of Bismarckstrasse. This is the direct route to one of Germany's very best fine-arts museums, the **Folkwang**. Galleries in the 1950s-era edifice focus on 19th- and 20th-century French and German paintings (notable works by Manet, Degas, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Toulouse-Lautrec, along with Caspar David Friedrich, Max Liebermann, Max Klinger, Emil Nolde, Paula Modersohn-Becker, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner), plus sculptures and a major collection of historic photographs. In the same locale, the

Deutsche Plakat Museum is crammed with the most extensive poster collection in continental Europe: 340,000 items spanning two centuries of advertising and propaganda graphics.

You might sense a Dallas, Atlanta, or Pittsburgh resemblance on the *Innenstadt* skyline, where highrises have sprung up during the postwar period. Looming within sight of the Folkwang and the opera house, the cylindrical, 31-story **RWE Tower** houses headquarters offices for Germany's preeminent power-generating conglomerate. It stands 127 meters/416 feet, surpassing even the boxy black *Rathaus*.

Recycled "Krupp City" Behemoths

Vestiges of the Krupp's bygone empire can be seen right in town. A decade ago, developers transformed a cavernous *Jugendstil* brick machine shop, dating from the early 20th century, into the 1,700-seat **Colosseum Theater**, where Broadway road-show musicals attract capacity audiences.

Via Gelsenkirchner Strasse, head eight kilometers (five miles) to Essen's immediate northern outskirts, where the tower surmounting Krupp's former **Zollverein #12** coal-mine shaft stands awesomely tall as a landmark of symmetrical 1932 Bauhaus ironwork construction, hence its eminence as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001. Now the A-frame monolith functions as a visual gateway for tours and demonstrations—along with varied entertainment offerings and avant-garde art exhibits, scheduled year-round in what used to be Zollverein's echoing *Kesselhaus* boiler room.

This gritty old factory complex now has a chandeliered restaurant in the high-ceilinged, naked-stone compressor hall, and a swimming pool amidst the rusted blast furnaces, steam valves, and overhead pipelines. As conceived by celebrity architect Sir Norman Foster, the boiler room became the **Red Dot Museum** of international contemporary design (1,000 consumer products, ranging from screwdrivers and wristwatches to coffee pots, plumbing fixtures, arm-

chairs and automobiles).

Overall, we were impressed with the entirely new atmosphere for prewar Germany's mightiest industrial region, where coal-mining and steel-making operations ceased in 1986. Comparably impressive changeovers are evident in such neighboring cities as Duisburg, Dortmund, Oberhausen and Bochum, now linked by the Ruhr Valley's signposted **Industrial Heritage Trail**.

Essen Hotels

Ambassador

You'll have to trade location for great rates and no-frills utilitarian ambience exemplified by this mid-price-range hotel's 70 rooms in "modern-rustic" style, with shower-only-no-tub bathrooms. Guests get a copious breakfast buffet each morning, and have a sauna and whirlpool as relaxation amenities.

Daily Rates: Singles from €55, doubles from €80

Contact: Ambassador Hotel, Viehofer Strasse 23, 45127 Essen-Mitte, tel. +49/201/2477 30, fax 2026 49, info@ambassador-essen.de, www.ambassador-essen.de

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Welcome Hotel

Slick, functional, and conveniently situated on the eastern flank of the downtown core, with Essen's *Rathaus* skyscraper looming right behind, this property is an adequate 176-room choice for vacation and business travelers. A walk to the massive stone synagogue at Porsche-Platz takes just about five-six minutes. Shower-only bathrooms and rather compact bedrooms are the downside. Meals are served in a restaurant called Sunny Side and outdoors on the Sunny Flower terrace.

Daily Rates: Singles €85-125, doubles €115-155

Contact: Welcome Hotel, Schützenbahn 58, 45127 Essen-Mitte, tel. +49/201/1779, fax 1779 199, info@welcome-to-essen.de, www.welcome-to-essen.de.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 15/20

Essener Hof

Erected on the site of an 1883 inn called Heberge zur Heimat, the Bosse family's urbane, four-star hotel stands within walking distance of Essen's Hauptbahnhof. The choicest of contemporary-furnished guestrooms overlook a landscaped inner courtyard; same for the cozy breakfast room. The old-time, woodsy Lutherstube functions as a gathering place for light meals and beer-quaffing. Seafood choices top the menu in Treff Langeoog, a restaurant known for its Nordic flair and smoking/nonsmoking sections.

Daily Rates: Singles €76-119, doubles €104-165

Contact: Essener Hof, Teichstrasse 2, 45127 Essen-Mitte, tel. +49/201/2450, fax 2425 751, info@essener-hof.com, www.essener-hof.com

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 14/20

Ruhr Hotel

You'll find pension-type budget accommodations in a hotel that's been in business since 1956. The location is a leafy south-side neighborhood midway between Essen's Stadtgarten and Gruga Park. Rooms are clean, hospitable, and bare-bones comfortable, with dark solid-wood furnishings and shower-no-tub bathrooms. A substantial buffet is served in the bay-windowed breakfast room.

Daily Rates: Singles €89, doubles €98

Contact: Ruhr Hotel, Krawehlstrasse 42, 45130 Essen, tel. +49/201/778 053, fax 780 283, info@ruhrhotel.de, www.ruhrhotel.de

Rating: QUALITY 10/20 VALUE 13/20

Stadt Margarethenhöhe

Commendably, Krupp management had well-above-average subsidized housing settlements built for company employees, (inspired by the social-activist zeal of boss Friedrich's wife Margarethe) and masterfully designed by Georg Metzendorf. This four-star hotel originally centered on one of those preplanned garden colonies, dating from 1909. Guestrooms and public areas are amply proportioned and colorfully decorated. A bar and lounge augment Restaurant "M," a gathering place for brunch

every Sunday, 11am-2pm. Staying here has recreational advantages, such as direct access to bicycle paths, as well as to Gruga Park and its botanical gardens by way of scenic Lührmannstrasse.

Daily Rates: Singles from €134, doubles from €164

Contact: Stadt Margarethenhöhe, Steil Strasse 46, 45149 Essen, tel. +49/201/4386 0, fax 4386 100, info@margarethenhoehe.com, www.margarethenhoehe.com

Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 15/20

Schlosshotel Huguenpoet

These aristocratic accommodations are 16 kilometers/10 miles south of midtown Essen, in a mid-17th-century *Wasserschloss* surrounded by a moat. *Inhaber* owners Petra and Michael Lübbert give guests the royal treatment, welcoming them to their twin-turreted manor house, where deluxe touches include canopy beds and antique furnishings in 25 bedrooms, each with a separate sitting area. A black marble staircase leads down to the richly carpeted grand foyer and its three massive sandstone fireplaces. Paintings by students of Michelangelo hang in the Green Salon. (In case you're wondering, that rather odd Huguenpoet nomenclature means Toad Pool in Low German, so expect froggy figurines and emblems scattered throughout the premises).

Meals are served in Nesselrode—a formal dining room with a strong French emphasis and international wine list—and also in the Germanic, country-style Huguenpöttchen's glassed-in terrace. Tennis courts are onsite, and guests take complimentary shuttle rides to a nearby fitness club, where "wellness" therapies include exercise equipment and Ayurvedic beauty treatments.

Daily Rates: Singles from €205, doubles from €245

Contact: Schlosshotel Huguenpoet, August-Thyssen-Strasse 51, 4529 Essen-Kettwig, tel. +49/2054/120 40, fax 120 450, info@huguenpoet.de, www.huguenpoet.de.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20 .

Essen Restaurants

hôme Bar Brasserie Grill

A Euro-hip, citified restaurant with a sleek-and-shiny look and an open kitchen attracts downtown office workers as well as out-of-towners. Once meals are ordered, they're grilled right at your table, so be prepared for back-and-forth chit chat. Preferred main-course options are the beef (€17.50), lamb (€17.90) and pork medallions (€13.80). A plump *Schmitzel* is served with home fries and salad (€9.50). The hungriest customers tend toward the mixed *Grillplatte* (chicken-beef-lamb, €18.70).

Fish dishes earn equally high marks, such as tuna steak (€14.20), *Zanderfilet* (pike-perch, €13.40) and a huge seafood *Grillplatte* spiced with dabs of Dijon mustard (€18.40). American-type burgers (€8.50-9.80) appear on the menu too. Bremen-brewed Becks beer is available on tap (*vom Fass*) as a mealtime accompaniment.

Contact: hôme Bar Brasserie Grill, Rathenaustrasse 2-4, 45127 Essen-Mitte, tel. +49/201/8109 913, fax 8109

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.

911, www.home-brasserie-essen.de
Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 15/20

Brinkhoff's Pfefferkorn

This restaurant is invitingly woodsy and kitschy, located on an inner-city corner with sidewalk tables augmenting indoor seating. On the menu are 10 kinds of *Schnitzel* (€10.50-12.90), well-prepared meat dishes (€13.90-16.90), and seafood (€9.30-12.40). Guests' can choose Dortmunder Union or Essen-brewed Stauder beer as well as from an extensive wine list.

Contact: Brinkhoff's Pfefferkorn, Rathenaustrasse 5, 45127 Essen-Mitte, tel. +49/201/236 312, fax 365 4686

Rating: QUALITY 12/20 VALUE 14/20

Landhaus Rutherbach

A fair distance south of midtown clamor, in the leafy and serene Kettwig neighborhood, this place's relaxed tempo blends smoothly into the local scene. Oak beams overhang a main dining room warmed by a fireplace. Two sun terraces with glass ceilings are appropriately *gemütlich*; even more so out beneath the beer garden's chestnut trees.

Chef Holger Skrzipale oversees three-course German and French regional dinner menus ranging from €11.50 to 17.20 (meat entrées) and €13.90 to 16 (fish). His noblest effort might go into smoked-pork *Kasslersteak* with subtly soured white cabbage and buttered potatoes. After any of those, think about making the homemade raspberry parfait (€5.80) your grand finale.

Contact: Landhaus Rutherbach, Ruhrtalstrasse 221, 45219 Essen-Kettwig, tel. +49/201/495 246, www.rutherbach.de

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 15/20

Blumenhof

Elderly Esseners have emotional feelings about this café-bistro, set amidst a palmy *Wassergarten* in Gruga Park. RAF bombers obliterated the original layout during an April 1942 air raid—so what's been faithfully rebuilt implies renewed life following wartime havoc. Proprietors Jürgen Knolle and Ernst Paschetag run a

pleasantly casual establishment that appeals to families, with copious indoor dining areas and an ever-popular sun-shaded lakeside terrace.

Daily afternoon buffets (€24.50 per-person) that morph into expanded Sunday brunches are table-laden affairs ranging from salad bar to desert selections. Between those offerings are roast beef, scrambled eggs, salmon, vegetables and more, plus heaping Münster sausage plates.

Contact: Restaurant Blumenhof, Lührmannstrasse 70, 45131 Essen, tel. +49/201/856 1050, fax 856 1059, info@blumenhof-essen.de, www.blumenhof-essen.de.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 15/20

Bonne Auberge

For a change from omnipresent pork-and-potatoes Germanic fare, Essen's Alsatian-accentuated French restaurant, on the culinary scene since 1974, gets a thumbs-up. As overseen by Thierry Eidenwall, gourmet cuisine, a 120-bottle wine list, and white-tablecloth elegance, merits this establishment's coveted Gault-Millau *toque*. Weather permitting, waitstaff brings meals out to streetside tables. Aside from artfully presented appetizers and desserts, main dinner courses range €17.50-23.50. The location (closed Sundays) is three blocks south of the Stadtgarten; only a bit farther from the Folkwang art museum.

Contact: Bonne Auberge, Witteringstrasse 41, 45130 Essen, tel. +49/201/783 999, www.bonne-auberge.de


Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 15/20

Rüttenscheider Hausbrauerei

In south-side Essen's hip and trendy Rüttenscheid district, settle into the very essence of a zesty, talkative brewpub, pouring a dozen variations of beer made to *Braumeister* Volkmar Kampf's specifications. Menu choices jibe with this kind of laid-back, flirty scene, topped by such meaty specials as *Brauerschnitzel* and *Bierbrauersteak* (€10.95 each)—in addition to full-course pork lunches and dinners (€13.95-16.90). Or opt for the grilled *Schweinemedailles Hopfengarten* (€13.95) while you taste-test your beer and blend with the Euro-casual

after-hours crowd.

Contact: Rüttenscheider Hausbrauerei, Girardetstrasse 2, 45131 Essen, tel. +49/201/790 060, fax 790 070

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 16/20 

YELLOW ROADS

Continued from page 1

the river. St. Johann is about 13.5 kilometers northwest of Lienz. Follow the yellow road north along the river to the little village of Huben. Near the church, turn left toward Hopgarten, St. Veit and St. Jakob. A sign announces that St. Jakob is 21 km from Huben.

Between Huben and Dollach is a roadside marker telling a story of extremely high water in the narrow valley in 1965 and 1966 (also the year of the major flood in Venice). Hundreds of buildings were destroyed and miles of highway were also damaged or destroyed.

The village of St. Veit is accessible on a narrow Bergstrasse above the main road, and offers interesting views of the valley from both directions.

The resort town of St. Jakob is surrounded by high green meadows, and filled with hotels, restaurants and facilities for winter tourists. Much of the year, the porches, windows and balconies overflow with flowers of all kinds.

Beyond St. Jakob, the road rises to a pass and from that point follows along a saddle in the mountains somewhat above the tree line for several kilometers leading to the Italian border.

There you join a narrow, one-way road which may close at regular periods to allow traffic from the other direction. We were required to wait about 40 minutes at the border before receiving permission to travel down the mountain.

After the one-way descent proceed through the Antholzer Valley, hugging one side of the mountain above the valley floor and the river and passing through a number of small Italian villages, many with picturesque churches. Green meadows

carpet the slopes of the mountains across the valley. Your map of the region will use symbols to indicate the many picturesque views and interesting sights.

At the intersection with Route 49, proceed east to the intersection with Route 51 going south to Cortina. After 14 kms, one can proceed from that point either on Route 51 to Cortina or on Route 48. The latter is suggested because of the magnificent views of the Dolomites. The late afternoon sun particularly enhances the color.

Cortina to Como

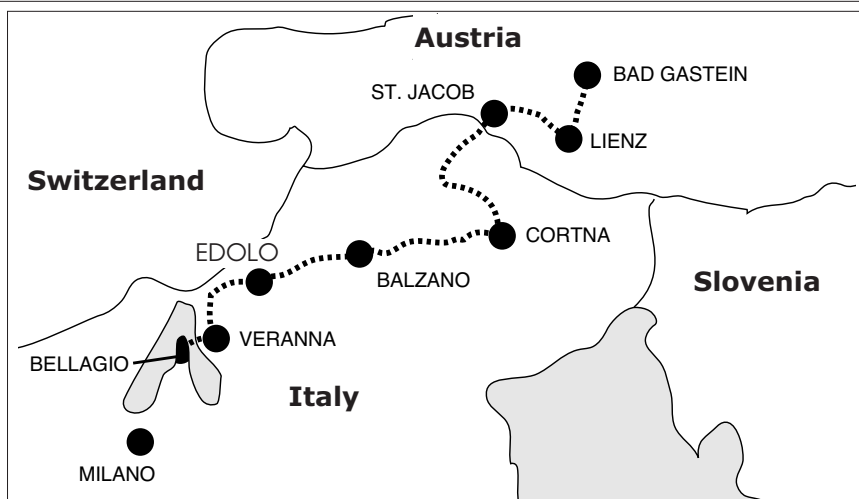
The trip from Cortina to Lake Como is both exciting and exhausting. Between Cortina and Bolzano, the road winds through four very high mountain passes with spectacular views of the Dolomites and what seems like hundreds of sharp turns. The road is two lanes all the way to Bolzano, but at times barely wide enough for two cars. When a truck or a bus is encountered, it is sometimes necessary to come to a complete stop to allow the other vehicle to proceed.

One must simply find a way through the industrial city of Bolzano to connect with route 42 going in the direction of the Mendel Pass. One way is to follow the signs to Merano and then turn left in the direction of the Mendel Pass when the roads separate. Route 42 will take you all the way to Edolo. Along this route are at least two or three mountain passes including Mendel Pass and Tonale Pass. Tonale is a huge winter sports center.

At Edolo, turn west on Route 39 toward Lake Como. Proceed south along the lake's east shore. At Varenna, board the car ferry to Bellagio. Be sure to make clear that Bellagio is your destination, otherwise your car may be positioned on the ferry so that you will not be able to disembark until the boat reaches Cadenabbia, one stop beyond Bellagio.

The Hotels

Bad Hofgastein has the advantage of being less expensive and more of a "real town" than the resort of Badgastein. Besides, if you're there out of



season, you'll find many Badgastein hotels, restaurants and shops closed.

The **Grand Parkhotel** in Bad Hofgastein is rather large and elegant in the Tyrolean style, with all amenities, including indoor pool, sauna and treatment facilities. Most guests are on the half-pension arrangement but we chose the breakfast-only option. Though we have not tried the hotel's restaurant, the small bar is pleasant for an after-dinner glass of champagne.

Number 101 is ample in size and has its own balcony with a good view of the mountains to the southwest.

Though expensive, the five-star Parkhotel is an excellent value.

Contact: Grand Parkhotel, A-5630, Bad Hofgastein, Austria, tel. +43/06432/6356, fax 8454, office@grandparkhotel.at, www.grandparkhotel.at. Double rooms with breakfast and dinner range from €198 in summer to €274. **Rating:** QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

The **Hotel Europa**, in the downtown area of Cortina, is not inexpensive but is usually open in the off-season, something that cannot be said for most hotels in town. Guest rooms are nice but small. We recommend this hotel because it is comfortable, clean and available. Our endorsement would be a good deal stronger, however, if the cost for a double room were about \$50 per night less.

Contact: Hotel Europa, corso Italia 207, 32043 Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy,

tel. +39/0436/3221, fax 868204, heuropa@sunrise, www.hoteleuropacortina.it. Double rooms cost €114 to €254, depending on season.

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 9/20

Bellagio is a small resort town on the side of a hill on an island in Lake Como. Our hotel of choice, the 48 room **Hotel du Lac**, is operated by a British couple and is thus a favorite of English visitors, many of whom come in the spring for the lovely flower gardens. We recommend a room on the front of the hotel facing the lake, such as Number 45.

There is not a great deal to do in Bellagio, but it is very restful. The town has several good restaurants that are not expensive.

In the afternoon, with a bottle of wine purchased at a nearby store, you can sit on the du Lac's porch and look out over the lake.

Each day the boat from Como brings copies of *USA Today* and we like to walk up the hill to the little book store, buy a copy, then find a table somewhere in the sun and read the news from home.

To see more beautiful gardens and flowers, take the ferry to Cadenabbia and go to the Villa Carlotta.

Contact: Hotel du Lac, 22021 Bellagio, Italy, tel. +39/031/950320, fax 951624, dulac@tin.it, www.bellagioteldulac.com. Doubles €160-190

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20

News/Deals

■ **Nolde Museum Opens in Berlin:** A museum dedicated to the influential Expressionist painter Emil Nolde is set to open on Sept. 20 in Berlin. Nolde, considered one of the greatest water color painters of the 20th century, was declared a “degenerate artist” by the Nazis and was forced to paint in secret from 1941 until the war’s end.

The results of his clandestine art—a series of 1,300 pictures he called “unpainted paintings”—will be one of the many exhibits to appear at the museum, officially called the “Berlin Extension of the Nolde Foundation Seebull.” Throughout the year, rotating exhibitions will highlight different aspects of Nolde’s art.

The opening exhibition, “Emil Nolde in Berlin, 1910-1911,” highlights the artist’s heady life in Berlin during the times of dance halls and cabarets.

Located in a former bank building on Jagerstrasse 54/55, directly off the historic Gendarmenmarkt, the new museum will feature 10 exhibit rooms on two floors, a museum shop, and a café.

Our recommended hotels include **Art Nouveau**, one of our favorites, in part thanks to the friendly proprietors who love to tell guests about the best restaurants in the area and the lesser-known art happenings in the city. Doubles from €110 (ask for the *Gemütlichkeit* discount). Contact: Leibnizstrasse 59, 10629 Berlin, tel. +49/030/32 77 44 0, fax 32 77 44 40, info@hotelartnouveau.de, www.hotelartnouveau.de

The **Hotel Gendarm** is another solid choice, with a great location among the grand buildings of the Mitte’s Gendarmenmarkt. Doubles start at €154. Contact: Charlottenstrasse 61, D-10117, (Berlin-Mitte), tel. +49/30/20 60 66 0, fax 20 60 66 66.

The Berlin Nolde museum is open daily, 10am-7pm, admission €6, www.nolde-stiftung.de.

■ **A Good Reason to Visit Lavaux:** The UNESCO World Heritage committee recently named the Lavaux Vineyards region near Lake Geneva a registered World Heritage site. Lavaux is one of several winemaking regions in the Swiss canton of Vaud; all are many centuries old. On September 22, the region will celebrate the designation with a Lavaux Festival highlighting local wine and cuisine. Contact: www.lavauxenfete.ch

■ **Hamburg Immigration Museum:** The new BallinStadt museum in Hamburg focuses on the five million people who passed through during the last century as emigrants on their way to North and South America. Computer screens display complete passenger lists from 1890 forward, allowing visitors to find the hometown and intended destination for the millions of emigrants who came through here.

■ **Train Travel:** Germany’s Deutsche Bahn AG and the French National Railway Company (SNCF) have teamed up to provide high-speed rail service between major cities in the two countries. Second-class tickets from Paris to Stuttgart cost \$133, while Paris to Frankfurt comes in at \$127. Paris to Frankfurt travel time is now three hours, 50 minutes; Stuttgart-Paris is just over six hours. Purchase tickets online at www.gemut.com.

■ **Lötschberg Tunnel Opens:** By December of this year, rail travelers will be able to cross the Alps from Germany into Italy via the world’s longest land tunnel, reducing travel times by a third between Germany and Italy. Basel to Milan travel time will be four hours. Opened this summer, the 21-mile Loetschberg Tunnel cost \$3.5 billion to build.

■ **Self-Serve Swiss Cheese:** If, on a Monday, you find yourself in the Valasian village of Grimetz, in the mountains south of the Rhône River, you might spend the day making your own Swiss cheese in an alpine hut with the cheesemaker at his Alp in Grimetz/Val d’anniviers. Brunch is included. Contact: grimnetz@sierre-anniviers.ch, www.grimnetz.ch.

■ **Chocolate Spas:** Two Swiss spas have put a new twist on the traditional mud bath treatment. At the **Grand Hotel Hof Ragaz** (reservations@resortragaz.ch, www.resortragaz.ch) in Bad Ragaz, you can wrap yourself in chocolate mousse. And at **After the Rain** in Geneva (www.spa-aftertherain.ch), you can even take a bath in chocolate. ☒

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 7

scratch Avis says will cost \$900 to fix. Back in the U.S. Fred files a claim for reimbursement. Mastercard declines citing their requirement that 100% of the rental cost be charged on the customer’s Visa card.

Finally, there’s Louise. She rents a car for a month in Germany. Almost immediately, it gets a small fender dent. She doesn’t want to go to the trouble of exchanging the vehicle but notifies the rental company who tells her not to worry, they’ll sort it all out at the end of the rental. Knowing her credit card will reimburse for the damage, Louise stops worrying and enjoys the rest of her trip. When the car is returned the rental company tells her she’ll get a damage repair estimate later and that they’ll charge her card. Back in the U.S. she waits for documentation. But by the time Louise files her claim with Visa, it’s been more than 45 days since the date of the damage and the claim is denied. Visa requires notification — not paperwork, just notification— no later than 45 days after the accident.

These are all true stories. Three cautions: make sure the car you rent is not excluded from coverage by your credit card; use the same card to pay for everything listed on the rental contract; and immediately report any damage to your credit card company. —RHB ☒

Do You Have a Question or Want to Share a Travel Tip?

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