

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

Be Careful Out There

An issue never addressed in these pages is security while traveling in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. I didn't think it was necessary, these are safe countries. That's a careless assumption and, to tell the truth, I've been a careless traveler: I've seldom made copies of passports or credit cards and I carry credit cards loose in a back pocket with a money clip in a front pocket. Despite the fact that our family owns a business that sells all manner of travel security items such as money belts, locks, and other devices, Liz and I set forth on trip after trip, year after year, with no more concern about our own safety, and that of our belongings, than if we were headed for the local grocery store.

All that changed last November in Brussels' Midi rail station. It happened in less than 30 seconds. Just off the Eurostar train from London, we were prowling the station for an ATM that could spit us a few euros. As we peered at a wall map near a street exit, a young man approached and asked a question in French. When I turned away from the map to respond, there was a flicker in the corner of my right eye; someone had passed close behind and I sensed had brushed my rolling suitcase and the briefcase attached to it by a strap and clip. I immediately looked down to see that the case containing my laptop computer, camera, portable GPS, mobile phone, noise-canceling headphones, passports, airline tickets, rail passes, and all other travel documents, was gone. Fortunately, I lifted my head in exactly the right direction. Thirty feet away I spotted it in the right hand of a tall man coolly walking—not running—toward the exit. Yelling "Hey man, you stole my briefcase," I took off in blind, instinctive, pursuit. Without breaking stride, the thief dipped his right

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

YEAR OF THE RENTAL CAR

The logic is inescapable: the countryside is cheaper than the city; there are many more miles of highway in Europe than railroad tracks; rental car is the choice in '08.

With such a feeble dollar isn't it time to set aside, at least for a while, the famous-destination model of European travel? The classic Paris-Venice-Munich-Vienna sort of itinerary is not only expensive, it's often a stressful succession of crowded airports, rail stations, hotels, restaurants, and sights. The big-city traveler stays in a centrally-located hotel where employees speak English, he marches off each day with battalions of other North Americans to view renowned pictures and buildings, orders food off an English menu, congratulates himself on successfully negotiating the public transportation system, and

all the while pays top euro.

Now is the time to be where the pace is slower and the dollar goes much farther; to wander around small towns and villages and explore the countryside. But getting off the more familiar path requires some research, a little savvy, and a willingness to stick your nose a little deeper into a different culture. A travel style done best by car.

The aforementioned Paris-Venice-Munich-Vienna itinerary is tailor-made for the train. One is whisked from city center to city center, with no worries about \$50-plus per day parking, or driving in heavy traffic on unfamiliar streets.

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Franconian Beer Route

We all know that as the value of the dollar sinks into the sunset, traveling in Europe is becoming increasingly expensive. While Baby Boomers nostalgically recall seeing Europe on a paltry \$5 a day (a short 40 years ago), Generation X-ers now complain that they can no longer cross the Continent on a mere \$50 a day. For once, we're all in the same boat.

It's enough to make you cry in your beer.

But don't despair. It's still possible to vacation in many parts of Europe without going into debt for the next decade. Changing your focus from the costly capitals and other pricey places to smaller towns and country villages can save enough

money to make a two-week vacation in Europe well within your budget.

For instance, consider following some of the "beer routes" that criss-cross the Franconia region of Germany. Located in the northern half of Bavaria, Franconia covers an area of 30,000 square kilometers (11,580 square miles), much of it still rural, with quiet little farm villages, half-timbered market towns, medieval castles, baroque churches, and old monasteries nestled among its green rolling hills and dense forests.

Franconia also boasts more breweries per square kilometer than anywhere else on Earth, which

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Exchange rates as of 4/3/2008

1 euro = \$1.57

1 Swiss franc = \$0.99

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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shoulder, set my case gently down and kept walking right out the door. I never saw his face and, by the time I retrieved the briefcase, both men had faded into the night. A few bystanders witnessed this little scene but, other than a brief turning of heads, none reacted. It wasn't until it was all over that we began to notice the posted "Watch out for pickpockets" signs.

Such things happen quickly, and you simply aren't ready for them—especially when the only sleep you've had in the last 24 hours is about a three-hour doze on an airplane.

That wasn't the end of our Brussels brush with bad guys. Next day on the street, as I stopped to figure out something on my new mobile phone, my wife saw a man walk past us, then stop a few feet away to eyeball the back pockets of my blue jeans. When he saw her watching he immediately turned and walked away.

Brussels, of course, is not Germany, Austria or Switzerland—countries I have for years presumed to be extraordinarily safe. I'm not so sure anymore. While boarding a train in Geneva, a longtime neighbor and family friend was jostled in a crowd. It wasn't until the train had left the station that my friend realized that his wallet with cash and credit cards was gone. (This story has a feel-good ending: overhearing my friend and his wife discussing their plight, an Egypt-

ian couple sitting across the aisle insisted my friends use their cell phone to cancel the stolen credit cards and call their hotel in Milan. They also tried to give the temporarily-destitute Americans €100 in cash.)

Here's another story that makes me think twice about security in our part of Europe. A couple I know, Jim and Sue, faithful *Gemütlichkeit* readers for 20 years, were loading several pieces of luggage onto a train in the Stuttgart rail station. Sue stood guard over the luggage out on the platform as Jim transferred it into the rail car. The first piece he loaded was a small one with all the important stuff; passports, tickets, etc. He tossed the valise onto the seat nearest the door in the empty car, returned quickly through the vestibule, down the steps, and in less than 10 seconds was back with the second suitcase. Of course, by then the valise with all the goodies was gone. From police photos, Sue identified two young males she had seen on the platform prior to boarding. With a resigned shrug, the police told her the men were Algerians who in the past had been deported but were able to sneak back into the country.

As many of you do, I follow Untours' "Idyllchat" listserv (www.untours.com). Recently there was a thread about security with many postings that related experiences with pickpockets and thieves. Of course, the places where these bad things happen are all places that attract the most American tourists—Rome, Paris, Florence, and major rail

centers. Nobody seems to get their pockets picked in places like Mittenwald, Steyr or Pontresina.

Lessons learned? Henceforth we won't dawdle in airports or rail stations; my briefcase will be lashed to my rolling suitcase; and my cash and credit cards will be in an interior, zipped pants or jacket pocket (at www.travelessentials.com you get 10% off travel security items and travel clothing with hidden pockets using discount code *gemut2008*). In my hotel will be photocopies of all important documents, including passports, credit cards, and such key phone numbers as bank and credit cards contacts. In addition—and this is a great suggestion from the Idyllchat list—I'll scan all those documents and send them to my Google email account as an attachment. That way I'll be able to access and print them at any Internet cafe. I'm told that having a copy of a passport speeds up the process of replacement abroad.—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".

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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

CAR RENTAL '08

Continued from page 1

But for the countryside, get thee to a rental car. It has the ability to quickly and comfortably take you places the vast majority of tourists never go. You move on your own schedule, the car is there whenever you need it. Trains are fast, comfortable, and romantic, but there are a lot more miles of highway than railway in Europe. If you want to be in the company of other Americans and visit big cities, rail is the way to do it. (The exception to this, of course, is Switzerland, where nearly every hamlet can be reached on a Swiss Pass that includes trains, postal buses, and lake boats.)

Comparing costs between rail and car rental is difficult because of the profound differences in their very nature. One is public, the other private. But the main difference lies in the way they are used. A four-day, second-class German Twin Pass for \$362 (\$492 first-class) may be just right for a couple whose itinerary is, say, Frankfurt-Cologne-Hamburg-Berlin-Frankfurt. All they require is four days on a train. But for a couple who plan to explore the Franconian wine country's back roads, discover the Bavarian Forest, or meander the curves of the Mosel river, the rental car is really the only choice. For two weeks it will cost them a little less than \$500 plus fuel, but the car will be at their disposal 24/7 for 14 days. And, if needed, they can take it anywhere in western Europe, the only added cost will be fuel.

Renting a car in Europe has become more complicated in recent years. The rental car shopper must be knowledgeable about insurance, currency exchange, European automobiles, and the many ways rental companies and brokers obfuscate charges added to the basic rental rates, many of them mandatory.

Rental Car Prices

The price difference between the lowest and highest prices on a two or three-week rental can be considerable for the same car category. To-

day, March 26, Travelocity's website quotes a compact car for two weeks in April, from Frankfurt Airport (I found it very difficult at Travelocity to get an off-airport price), for \$642. The website's fine print boasts there's no prepayment, the amount due will be collected at the time of rental. What that means, of course, is *the rental is guaranteed in euros, not dollars*. If the dollar continues to fall, the rental will ultimately cost more than \$642. In addition, since payment will be made in Europe, it is

European Rental Car Rates

Typical one-week rates for a compact car (four doors, air, manual transmission), including VAT and road fees:

- United Kingdom: \$252**
- Germany: \$262**
- Slovenia: \$276**
- Switzerland: \$297**
- Belgium: \$298**
- Spain: \$303**
- Sweden: \$322**
- France: \$342**
- Holland: \$342**
- Czech Rep: \$343**
- Austria: \$376**
- Denmark: \$380**
- Croatia: \$397**
- Poland: \$403**
- Slovakia: \$410**
- Hungary: \$429**
- Norway: \$488**
- Italy: \$495***

**Includes mandatory CDW/theft insurance*

highly likely your credit card will impose a three percent foreign transaction fee—another \$19. The fact is, you really won't know how much the rental will cost until you get back to the U.S. and your credit card bill arrives in the mail. Excuse the plug, but contrast the Travelocity/Hertz deal with Gemut.com's price for the same car with Avis for \$567, guaranteed in U.S. dollars, prepaid but cancelable without penalty up to and including the day of rental.

It's important to remember here that online dollar quotes that do not specifically state that the price is guaranteed in U.S. dollars are actually guaranteed in euros and thus are only an estimate. In this case, the guaranteed euro price is €416.90. In order to get to the \$642 quote, Travelocity/Hertz used an exchange rate of 1.54. The *actual* exchange rate on March 26 was 1.584, making the real price in dollars, \$660. I leave it to your judgement the morality of using an incorrect exchange rate to make online rates more appealing.

Beyond the Basic Price

- **Value Added Tax:** Virtually every car rental quote includes this tax. It ranges from 7.6 percent in Switzerland to 25 percent in Norway. Germany is 19 percent, France 19.6 percent, Italy 20 percent, and Austria 21.2 percent. You must pay it and, except in very rare, extraordinary circumstances, it is not refundable.

- **Premium Station Fees:** In Germany, if your rental originates at an airport or rail station the fee is an additional 19 percent. Here's how it's figured: if the base rate of the car is \$100 you add the 19 percent VAT to get a price of \$119. That's if you pick up downtown. If the rental commences at an airport or rail station, however, the price becomes \$119, plus the 19 percent "premium station" fee, for a total of \$142.

Austria's "premium station" fee is 15 percent, Switzerland's is 19 percent; and Italy is 14 to 17 percent. For these countries, substantial savings can be achieved by arranging to pick up the car at an off-airport/rail station office. Some countries charge a flat fee; in France it's about \$45, Holland is around \$80, and Belgium about \$40. There is no additional charge for returning a rental car to an airport or rail station.

- **One-Way Charges:** If you want to rent a car in, say, Berlin and drop it in Munich, it's very likely you'll pay no more than if you returned the car back to Berlin. With a couple of minor exceptions, this is true of most European countries; seldom will you

be charged a one-way fee within the same country. But if you want to drop that car in another country, you'll pay an international one-way charge. These range from about \$100 to over \$2,500. One-way fees on rentals that involve Italy are expensive, typically in the \$500 to \$1500 range. A one-way rental between Scandinavia and Italy, provided you can find a rental company that will do it, will be at least \$1500, prohibitively expensive for most. It's the same when pickup is in an eastern European country and the drop is in a western European country (and vice versa); very expensive or impossible. So don't paint yourself into corner by booking "open jaw" travel that has you arriving in, say, Frankfurt and leaving from Rome, or Warsaw, without first fully understanding the cost of travel between the two cities, be it car, air, or rail.

- **Extra Drivers:** Must be arranged at the rental counter, not when booked. The added drivers must be present and have a valid driving license. Be sure, however, to inquire about cost when you book

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.

the car in the U.S. Prices range from free to as much as €15 per day.

- **Insurance:** This is a complicated topic but here, in general, is what you need to know:

- > Liability and fire insurance is always provided in the basic rental rate.

- > Collision (CDW) and theft insurance is optional. The renter is responsible if the car is damaged or stolen. Except in countries where you must purchase it (Italy and Ireland, for example), we recommend rentals be paid for with a credit card that provides free CDW and theft coverage. Don't listen to those who say your credit card offers only "secondary" coverage. That's true, but you don't *have* any other coverage in Europe unless you purchase it from the rental company—something you don't want to do, especially since the credit card coverage is so much better. The CDW/theft insurance sold by rental companies costs \$10 to \$25 per day and usually has a high deductible, between \$400 and \$3000. Your credit card insurance is free and zero deductible.

Proponents of CDW/theft are fond of saying that in the event of damage you "just walk away" at the end of the rental. Not so. You don't "walk away" until you've paid the deductible. In addition, failure to file a police report is often grounds for invalidating purchased insurance. Some CDW policies also exclude one-car accidents. In other words, if you get a dented fender while your car is parked and you can't locate the driver of the other car, you're on the hook for the damage repairs. Many CDW policies also exclude damage to the car's roof, windows, wheels, undercarriage and interior.

- > Finally, be sure to decline the rental company's offer of CDW/theft. Your credit card company can easily email you a letter that proves you have insurance coverage. We suggest you carry that letter with you to Europe to show at the rental counter. If you do not refuse the proffered insurance two bad things happen: one, you pay for expensive

CDW/theft insurance, and, two, your better credit card coverage is invalidated.

- > American Express card members may find it worthwhile to enroll in the company's Premium Car Rental Protection. The cost is \$16 to \$25 per rental but coverage is "primary" and there are several other benefits.

(Recommended reading: "Credit Cards and Car Rental Insurance" at www.gemut.com).

- **Transmission:** An ability to drive a car with standard transmission will save you money if you rent a car in Europe. In addition, automatic transmissions are rare in vans and station wagons. Earlier, we mentioned a price of \$567 for a compact car for two weeks from the Frankfurt airport. The same car with automatic is \$831. The message is clear, learn to drive a 'stick.'

- **Navigation:** When available, GPS (Global Positioning System) only works in the country of rental, though some devices may cover major highways in other countries. GPS is sporadically available on European rental cars and it's safe to say the larger and more expensive the car, the better chance it will come with a factory-equipped device. In Germany, if your car is midsize or above, and the supplier is Avis or Europcar, you have a good chance of getting a free GPS. In other countries, however, there is much less availability. The one-way rental of cars with GPS is often not permitted. Portable GPS is sometimes an option and the daily charge ranges from about \$10 to \$20 per day.

- **Other Costs:** There are plenty of other ways rental companies pile on extra charges. The most common are registration fees, road taxes, contract fees, cross-border fees (usually to go into eastern countries), winterization charges, congestion charges, and eco surcharges. Inquire when booking.

Choosing the Car Category

First, come to grips with the reality that there are no Ford Victorias or Lincoln Town Cars in European

rental fleets. That kind of passenger room and trunk space doesn't exist. You can rent S-class Mercedes, 7-series BMWs, and Audi A8s, but they start at about \$1200 per week, require two credit cards at pickup, can't be driven into Italy or any eastern country, and are probably excluded from insurance coverage by your credit card. So get used to the idea of Opel Astras, VW Passats, Opel Vectra station wagons, VW Tourans, and seven and nine-passenger minivans with limited luggage space.

Subcompact: Typical cars: Opel Corsa, VW Polo, Fiat Punto. Okay for two persons not interested in burning up the Autobahn. Trunk space is small and frequently there is no air-conditioning.

Compact: Typical cars: Opel Astra, VW Golf, Ford Focus, Peugeot 307. Comfortable at 80 to 90mph. Good trunk - figure one big suitcase and two small ones, or two large ones. Should also be room for a garment bag and/or a soft duffel or two. Both two-door and four-door models, occasionally with a sunroof. Fine for three adults who go easy on the luggage. Air-conditioned.

Intermediate: Typical cars: Opel Vectra, VW Passat, Renault Laguna, Audi A4. Our recommended category for two couples. O.K. on the Autobahn but underpowered with four people and luggage.

Full-size: Typical cars: Mercedes C-class, Opel Signum, Peugeot 607. Full-size is a misnomer. Most of the cars in this category are no larger, in some cases smaller, than the intermediate VW Passat. If you want a nicer car, by all means rent a full-size; but if you're only moving up for extra passenger and luggage space, forget it, you're wasting your money. (Read "The Myth of the Full-Size Rental Car in Europe" at www.theeuropetraveler.com)

Station Wagon: Sometimes referred to in Europe as a Kombi. Come in three sizes - compact (VW Golf, Opel Astra), midsize (Vectra, VW Passat) and full-size (Volvo

Best Big City Hotel Deals

The dollar is getting killed by the euro but did you know you can book double rooms in three and four-star hotels in many of Europe's major cities for as little as \$60 per night?

It's being done every day and you can do it, too. You just have to be willing to pay in full in advance. You also have to commit to the deal without knowing the name of the hotel where you'll be staying. But fear not, it's worked for me a couple of dozen times without a single hitch.

Of course, I'm talking about **Priceline.com**, where you bid online for a certain class of hotel in a specifically defined area of your destination city. You don't know the name of the hotel until your bid is accepted, but I've always wound up in Sheratons, Marriotts, and Hiltons. The deal is then non-refundable and can't be changed. This may sound a little adventurous, but it really isn't. You have a geographic guarantee and if you restrict your bid to four or even three-star hotels it's virtually impossible in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland to get a dud.

Here's how it works.

Major multinational hotel chains frequently have empty rooms, especially on weekends, and especially in cities that have more hotel rooms than visitors. Guided by the principal that it's better to get a few euros rather than none, the hotels are willing to drastically cut the price of those rooms. But they don't like to advertise such huge discounts. That's where Priceline comes in and where the opportunity is for travelers like you and me.

Today, for example, Marriott's booking site is quoting from €129 (\$204) to €255

(\$403) for a double room in May at the **Renaissance Munich Hotel** in the Schwabing district. At the website **BiddingForTravel.com** (BFT) I see there has been a successful bid of \$78 for an April stay at this hotel. Since hotels often don't release rooms to Priceline until the last minute, it could be too early to book for May. But by continuing to monitor BFT, I'll get an idea not only of successful bid prices and which hotels are accepting bids, but when to start bidding. Since you might have to wait until only a few days before your planned visit to make a successful bid, BFT recommends reserving a cancelable backup (hey, when the dollar is like this it's dog-eat-dog out there). You would be wise to spend some time reading the useful bidding strategy advice on BFT.

Here, from BiddingForTravel, are a few recent successful bids:


Amsterdam, Mövenpick, July, \$126
 Berlin, Courtyard Marriott, April, \$57
 Berlin, Marriott Berlin, April, \$102
 Berlin, Marriott, May \$100
 Brussels, Marriott, March, \$110
 Brussels, Hilton, April, \$129
 Budapest, Marriott, April, \$80
 Budapest, Ramada, April, \$70
 Cologne Marriott, February, \$76
 Düsseldorf, Renaissance, March, \$62
 Florence, Hotel Kraft, March, \$131
 Frankfurt, Mövenpick, March, \$52
 Hamburg, Renaissance Hotel, April, \$62
 Hamburg, Renaissance Hotel, July, \$58
 Hamburg, Renaissance Hotel, May, \$76
 Milan, Hotel Mediolanum, April, \$109
 Munich, Renaissance, April, \$78
 Pari, Hotel Concorde Lafayette, Aug, \$126
 Paris, Sofitel Bercy August \$139
 Prague, Hilton, April, \$75
 Rome, Sheraton, March, \$100
 Salzburg, Renaissance Congress Ctr, May, \$75
 Venice, Hilton, March, \$135
 Vienna, Renaissance, April, \$70
 Zürich, Marriott, February, \$90

V70). You pay more for a wagon than for the same model sedan. Can hold more gear but it is often exposed. For four people we like the midsize sedan over the compact wagon; more passenger comfort and almost as much luggage room. In a pinch, the midsize and full-size wagons can carry five people but someone has to ride in the rear center seat.

No European sedans or wagons we know of have a front bench seat, so carrying six passengers is not an option in these vehicles.

Vans: Mostly seven and nine-passenger vehicles with three rows of seating, similar to US minivans. The nine-passenger assumes three persons per seat—three in front, three in the center seat and three in back. Seven-passenger vans have front buckets, a shorter center bench seat or two buckets, and a rear bench. Minivans are fine for four or five people, but beyond that, luggage space is a problem.

Do not plan to rely on a credit card for CDW and theft insurance when renting a nine-passenger van. Some credit card companies exclude it from their insurance coverage. Vans become scarce every summer. Book early. It may be cheaper to rent two midsize sedans.

Luxury Cars: Power and engineering make them somewhat safer than the run-of-the-mill Opels, VWs, Skodas, and Fords, but at a hefty price. Expect to pay more than \$500 per week in Germany for an E-class Mercedes, 5-series BMW, or Audi A6. Weekly prices exceed \$1200 for S-Class Mercedes, 7-series BMW, or Audi A8. 

FRANCONIAN BEER ROUTE

Continued from page 1

makes it a beer lover's heaven. Many of the breweries operate an adjacent Gasthof—a cozy tavern, usually with an outdoor beer garden—where you can sample a variety of fresh beers made on the premises, accompanied by regional specialties such as *Ziebeleškäs*, a hearty

appetizer of herbed fresh white cheese, with butter and rye bread; carp cooked in dark beer; and *Blaue Zipfel*, Franconian pork sausages and onion rings simmered in a spicy sweet-sour sauce.

Several breweries offer overnight accommodations, too, often at a lower price than standard tourist hotels (especially breweries located outside the major cities). A good strategy is to reserve a room for a few days at a brewery Gasthof-Hotel and use it as a base for exploring that part of Franconia—by car, by bicycle, or on foot. At some of these hotels, the room rate is slightly lower if you stay for four or more nights. And at rural breweries the price of a mug of the local beer is less than you'd pay for the same brew at a tavern or restaurant in a large city.

Given the density of breweries in Franconia, it's usually only a short distance from the brewery hotel where you're staying to several other breweries in the area, some of which offer guided tours showing how different types of beer are made. After tasting those beers, you can return to your own "brewery home" every night to compare the results. But a word of caution: Germany is very strict about drinking and driving, so have a "designated driver" if you're planning to go from one brewery to another, sampling along the way. Or save your beer drinking until the evenings, after you've checked into a hotel and can walk from one brewery to the next.

One of Franconia's beer routes is the *Aischgründer Bierstrasse*, which follows the Aisch River for 50 kilometers (30 miles) from Bad Windsheim (57 kilometers southwest of Würzburg) to the tiny town of Uehlfeld, passing seven small family-owned breweries along the way (www.bierstrasse.de).

A good base for exploring this part of Franconia is the **Hausbrauerei-Gasthof Kohlenmühle**, a brewery hotel-restaurant in Neustadt an der Aisch. The brewery's buildings surround a spacious cobblestone courtyard, which serves as

a Biergarten in nice weather, with another, more rustic, beer garden nearby on the river bank. Little indoor shops and outdoor kiosks sell freshly baked bread and pastry, several kinds of sausage, made-to-order sandwiches, grilled fish, and game terrines to go with the *helles* (light-colored) and *dunkles* (dark) beers on tap, both served in traditional stoneware mugs (half-liter, €2). You can also order snacks and full meals from the reasonably priced *Biergarten* menu—or eat indoors in the restaurant, which has a more extensive menu (soups and salads, €3; main dishes, €7 to €15; lighter, but still substantial dishes, €4 to €7). The modern hotel has only 12 rooms, including eight doubles (doubles with breakfast, €68 to €74), so it's wise to make reservations in advance (www.kohlenmuehle.de; info@kohlenmuehle.de; tel: 49/09161/66227-0)

If the Kohlenmühle is full, try some of the small Gasthäuser in other villages along the Aisch River, as well as Bad Windsheim, which has a larger selection of accommodations in a range of price categories.

Easy day trips from your base in any town along the Aisch include the **Fränkisches Freiland Museum** in Bad Windsheim, an interesting open-air museum of rural Franconia from the 15th to the 19th centuries, with three historic brewery buildings, a beer tavern, and a beer garden on site. In the opposite direction, just beyond the other end of the beer route at Uehlfeld, you'll see several carp ponds around Höchststadt an der Aich, on the way to **Schloss Weisenstein**, an impressive baroque castle in Pommersfelden, slightly north of the A-3 Autobahn from Würzburg to Nürnberg. And Neustadt an der Aisch is a pleasant little walled town with gothic gateways and watchtowers, a central square surrounded by several half-timbered houses, an attractively arcaded stone *Rathaus* (City Hall), and plenty of places to sit outdoors and sip the local beers.

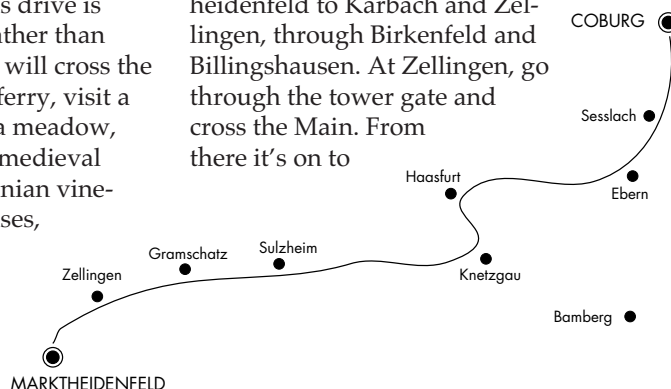
Between the famous Franconian

A Franconian Drive: Marktheidenfeld to Coburg

Necessary maps: ADAC Maxiatlases for Germany \$29.95 at www.travelessentials.com (use code Gemut2008 for a 10% discount).

The scenery on this drive is pleasant and restful rather than spectacular. On it you will cross the Main River on a little ferry, visit a pilgrimage church in a meadow, encounter interesting medieval towns, pass by Franconian vineyards, see few tour buses, and enjoy some of Germany's prettiest farm country.

Begin at Marktheidenfeld, just north of the Autobahn between Aschaffenburg and Würzburg, where are found the excellent **Hotel Anker** and its **Weinhaus Anker**, a fine restaurant. In Coburg, 47 kilometers north of Bamberg, you might overnight in the country at the inexpensive **Hotel-Gasthof Löhnert**, where double rooms start at €53. The hotel is ac-



tually in Scheuerfeld, 2.5 km west of town. Coburg itself is worth at least a day's sight-seeing.

Head north from Marktheidenfeld to Karbach and Zellingen, through Birkenfeld and Billingshausen. At Zellingen, go through the tower gate and cross the Main. From there it's on to

Retzstadt (where there is a wine festival each July) and Gramschatz.

Then it's Hausen and St. Hubertus-Verein, a pilgrimage church and an Augustinian Monastery. From there to Fahrbrück, Opferbaum, Schwanfeld and the interesting wine town of Wipfeld (great stone house and barn). Next, cross the Main again, this time by a tiny ferry.

Go on to Lindach, Kolitzheim and Herlheim. Next is Alitzheim and then along the edge of the **Steigerwald Naturpark** to Knetzgau and north to Hassfurt, another interesting town. Continue north to Hofheim then east and a little south to Ebern, once a walled city and full of half-timbered buildings. From there use the map to pick your own route into Coburg. One way is via Sesslach, yet another picturesque town with narrow cobbled streets and a fine stone church.

Hotel Anker, Obertorstrasse 6, Marktheidenfeld, D-97828, tel. +49/09391/60040, info@hotel-anker.de, www.hotel-anker.de, doubles from €104

Gasthof Löhnert, Schustersdamm 28, D-96450, Coburg-Scheuerfeld, tel. +49/09561/8 3360, www.hotel-loehnert.de, hotel-loehnert@t-online.de, doubles from €53

cities of Bamberg and Bayreuth, you can meander along another short beer route just south of the A-70 Autobahn, on a small road that runs from Geisfeld and Heiligenstadt to Plankenfels and Eckersdorf. This also takes you through part of the **Fränkisches Schweiz**, the "Franconian Switzerland," a mountainous region of thick forests, dramatic gorges, and rocky cliffs. Several scenic hike-and-bike trails cross this area, too.

Recommended places to stay include the **Brauerei-Gasthof Rothenbach** (www.Brauereigasthof-Rothenbach.de; wirt@Brauereigasthof-Rothenbach.de; tel: +49/09198/92-92-0) in the little community of Aufsess, home to four breweries, or one brewery for every 375 inhabitants (as noted in the 2001 *Guinness Book of Records*). Double rooms with breakfast at the Rothenbach range from €54 to €66, and the menu of rustic regional specialties offers dishes

from €4 to €15. Another comfortable place to stay is the **Gasthof-Brauerei Reichold** in nearby Hochstahl, with 28 rooms starting at €56 for a double, with breakfast, and a very reasonably priced menu featuring Franconian foods (www.reichold.de; h.reichold@t-online.de; tel: +49/09204/271).

At bit north of there, much closer to the A-70 Autobahn, is the **Brauerei-Gasthof Schnupp** (www.brauereigasthof-schnupp.de; info@brauereigasthof-schnupp.de; tel: +49/09203/99-20) in Neudrossenfeld, which features nesting storks on top of the brewery chimneys; double rooms priced from €65 to €88, with breakfast; and a regional menu with cold dishes from €4 to €8 and main dishes from €5 to €16. The Schnupp also offers a special, all-inclusive rate of €36 per person for an overnight in a double room, breakfast, the evening meal, and bicycle-route map.

Simpler, less expensive accommodations are available in this part of the Fränkisches Schweiz, too, such as the **Gasthof Brauerei Mager** in Pottenstein (only three rooms, double with breakfast, €35; www.magerbrauereien.bierland-oberfranken.de; tel: 49-09243-333), and the **Gasthof-Brauerei Krug** in Breitenlesau (double room with breakfast, €38; www.krug-braeu.de; tel +49/09202/835).

Any of these brewery hotels is a good base for day excursions to **Schloss Greifenstein**, an imposing castle on a hill between Aufsess and Heiligenstadt; the massive baroque pilgrimage church of **Vierzehnheiligen** (Fourteen Saints) near Staffelstein, with its adjacent monastery brewery; and the cities of Bamberg, Bayreuth, Forchheim, and Nürnberg (the capital of Franconia). Beer connoisseurs will definitely want to visit the **Franconian Brewery Museum** in Bamberg (www.brauereimuseum.de)

and the **Maisel Brewery and Cooperage Museum** in Bayreuth, another Guinness record-holder (1988) as the largest brewery museum in the world (www.maisel.com/museum).

A two-week vacation on these Franconian beer routes will surely whet your appetite for returning to this part of Germany in the future, to follow the 500-kilometer (300-mile) **Bier-und-Burgenstrasse**, the "Beer and Castle Route," that extends from Bavarian Passau in the south, through the eastern part of Franconia to Bayreuth, Kulmbach, and Kronach, and northward into the region of Thuringia, past Weimar to Bad Frankenhausen (www.bierundburgenstrasse.de). With the money you saved on the first trip, you can already begin dreaming about the next one.

References:

- www.bierregion-franken.de
- www.franconiabeerguide.com/conen.asp
- A useful booklet (in English) is *Private Braugasthöfe*, with information on 60 brewery restaurant-hotels throughout Germany (www.braugasthoefe.com)
- Serious Franconian beer route travelers should also look for *Die neue Fränkische Brauereikarte* (The New Franconian Brewery Map), by Stefan Mack. 

News/Deals

■ **Frankfurt for Free.** A cluster of skyscrapers along the River Main in Frankfurt accounts for the German financial capital's "Mainhattan" nickname ("Bankfurt," too). If you like terrific high-altitude views, head for downtown's curved, glassy Zeilgalerie department store, where Gr. Eschenheimer Strasse and the swanky Zeil shopping boulevard intersect. Take an elevator or escalator to the rooftop *Dachterrasse*—which combines a budget-priced light-luncheon café with a free-admittance wraparound observation deck (*Aussichtsplattform*) for outdoor

panoramics. Snack and gaze as long as you wish. Bring your camera.

Info: Zeilgalerie, Zeil 112-114, tel. +49/069/920/7340, www.zeilgalerie.com, Mon-Fri 10am-8pm, Sat 10am-4pm


■ **Swiss Hotel Deals:** Swiss hoteliers are not famous as price slashers, so with the dollar and the Swiss franc at parity, the tiniest crumb of a discount is a welcome event. Switzerland Tourism's website currently offers ZürichBREAK, a "three nights for the price of two" deal at selected Zürich hotels. Search for ZuerichBREAK or ZürichBREAK at www.myswitzerland.com.

These days what passes for a bargain in Switzerland may not look that way to Americans. Here's are three that fit that category.

• **Poschiavo (Graubünden):** Two nights in a double room at the **Hotel Albrici** (welcom@hotelalbrici.ch, www.hotelalbrici.ch) for CH-280 per person. The package includes a welcome drink, one four-course dinner, one six-course dinner with wine, and one pizza lunch.

• **Lucerne:** One night in a "romantic" double room at the **Hotel Wilden Mann** (mail@wildenmann.ch, www.wilden-mann.ch), plus welcome aperitif, four-course dinner, two-hour lake cruise in first-class. Price CH-220 per person.

• **Lausanne:** Two nights in a deluxe room or junior suite with lake view at the five-star, **Hotel Beau-Rivage Palace** (info@brp.ch, www.brp.ch), welcome glass of champagne, chocolates and champagne in the room, full buffet breakfast in Salon Grammont or continental breakfast in your room, candlelight dinner in elegant La Rotonde, body massage or facial treatment, free access to spa, fitness center and tennis courts. Price: CH-1070 for deluxe double, CH-1325 junior suite.

(*Editor's Note: We consider the Beau-Rivage Palace Switzerland's finest hotel. The current rack rate for one night in a deluxe double is CH-795, CH-1150 in a junior suite.*) 

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is intended for fast reference. Additional hotels and links to hotel websites is in the **Hotel Review** sections at www.gemut.com. Hotels are arranged in price order, higher to lower.

Berlin

Hotel Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40, info@hotelartnouveau.de, www.hotelartnouveau.de

Hotel Domus, Uhlandstrasse 49, Germany D-10719, tel. +49/030/882041, fax 882 0410, info@hotel-domus-berlin.de

Bern

Hotel Bristol, Schauplatzgasse 10, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 0101, fax 311 9479, email reception@bristolbern.ch

Hotel Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3000, tel. +41/031/329 9595, fax 329 95 96, hotelkrenz@swissonline.ch

Lucerne

Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, mail@wilden-mann.ch

Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel. +41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, info@cascada.ch

Munich

Hotel Exquisit, Pettenkoflerstr. 3, tel. +49/089/551 99 0, fax 551 99 499, info@hotel-exquisit.com

Hotel Acanthus, An Der Hauptfeuerwache 14, D-80331 München, tel. +49/089/23 18 80, fax: 2 60 73 64, e-mail: acanthus@t-online.de

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24, fax 550 3856, office@kraft-hotel.com

Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Reichs-Küchenmeister, Kirchplatz 8, Rothenburg o.d. Tauber, Germany D-91541, tel. +49/09861/97 00, fax 97 04 09, hotel@reichskuechenmeister.com

Hotel Hornburg, Hornburgweg 28, D-91541, tel. +049/09861/8480, fax 5570, hotelhornburg@t-online.de, www.hotelhornburg.de

Salzburg & Environs

Schloss Haunsperg, A-5411 Oberalm bei Hallein, Hammerstrasse 32, tel. +43/06245/80662, fax 85680, info@schlosshaunsperg.com

Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, Austria A-5020 tel. +43/0662/843 728, fax 843 728 8, struber@sbg.at

Hotel Jedermann, Rupertgasse 25, Austria A-5020, tel. +43/0662/873241-0, fax 873241-9, jedermann@salzburginfo.or.at

Vienna

Hotel Römischer Kaiser, Annagasse 16, A-1010, tel. +43/01/512 77 51 0, fax 512 77 51 13, info@rkhotel.bestwestern.com

Altstadt Vienna, Kirchengasse 41, tel. +43/01/526 3399-0, fax 523 4901, hotel@altstadt.at, web: www.altstadt.at

Pension Aviano, Marco-D'Aviano-Gasse 1, tel. +43/01/512 8330, fax 512 8330 6, aviano@pertschy.com

Zürich

Hotel Florhof, Florhofgasse 4, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. 41/01/261 4470, fax 261 4611, info@florhof.ch

Hotel Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932, hotel.arlette@bluwin.ch

Frankfurt Airport

Steinberger Esprit Hotel Frankfurt Airport, CargoCity Süd, D-60549, tel. +49/069/69 70 99, fax 69 70 94 44, frankfurt@esprit-hotels.de

Hotel Birkenhof, von-Eiff-Str 37, Hanau-Steinheim, D-63456, tel. +49/06181/648 80, fax 64 88 39, info@HotelBirkenhof.de (25-minute drive from airport)

Hotel Dreieich, Frankfurter Str. 49, Langen, D-63225, tel. +49/06103/91 50, fax 52 030, hotel-dreieich@gmx.de

Munich Airport

Daniel's Hotel, Hauptstrasse 11, Halbergmoos-Goldach, D-85399, tel. +49/0811/55120, fax 551213, info@hotel-daniels.de, www.hotel-daniels.de

Hotel Hoyacker Hof, Freisinger Landstrasse 9a, D-85748 Garching b. München, tel. +49/089/326 9900, fax 320 7243, info@hoyackerhof.de

Zürich Airport

Mövenpick Zürich Airport, Walter-Mittelholzerstrasse 8, CH-8152 Glattbrugg, tel. +41/01/808 88 88, fax 808 88 77, hotel@movenpick-zurich-airport.ch

Hotel Fly Away, Marktgasse 19, Zürich-Kloten, CH-8302, tel. +41/01/804 4455, fax 804 44 50, reservation@hotel-flyaway.ch