

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Bad Advice from Reliable Sources

If you're going to Europe in '08, you've probably already booked your trip. But if you haven't, don't let *anybody*, not even the likes of Arthur Frommer or the *New York Times*, tell you the best way to beat the strong euro is to buy U.S. dollar-guaranteed package tours or European river cruises; or that a good way to get euros is to buy a goodly pile of them here in the U.S. prior to your trip. These two awful pieces of advice are likely the result of effective spin applied to the Europe-costs-so-much problem by PR flacks of big-time tour operators, cruise companies, and money changers.

A few weeks ago, the *New York Times*' usually reliable *The Practical Traveler* column was anything but. All things being equal, I endorse the idea of paying in advance in U.S. dollars, but one must first determine if what's being purchased is good value, no matter the currency. The *Times* suggests readers buy cruises and package tours simply because their prices are guaranteed in dollars and were set more than a year ago when the dollar was stronger. That's a good idea if a cruise or package tour is your preferred mode of travel, but don't scrap an independent trip via rail or car because you think a cruise or package tour will be cheaper; it probably won't be. On a cost-per-day basis, most river cruises and ordinary, all-inclusive packaged bus tours are more expensive than independent travel.

For example, in one of his recent syndicated columns, Arthur Frommer labeled a \$1699 per person seven-day Rhine cruise in April his "top travel hit" of '08. That's \$3,398 for a one-week low-season trip for two persons from the East Coast. Let's break that down and see what Mr. Frommer and his companion could have done on their own for the same money. In April, they could have flown roundtrip from New York to Frankfurt

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

COUNTRY LIVING

The German countryside is a vast network of pretty backroads, interesting towns, and small hotels and restaurants. It all adds up to an inexpensive European vacation.

Last month's "Year of the Rental Car" story touted the advantages of getting off the beaten-path in a rental car, away from expensive big cities. This month we'll suggest places to drive your rental car; interesting, pretty and, in many cases, historic towns where the price of hotels and food is much lower. Though you'll miss the wonders of cities such as Munich and Vienna, you'll be more than compensated by the peace and beauty of authentic country life.

The Proper Equipment

As always, when driving in Europe, especially on backroads, we

recommend road maps scaled at 1:200,000 or, for even more detail, 1:150,000. If you have a GPS, so much the better; but maps remain essential.

Next to the maps and a GPS, your best traveling companions will be the *Michelin Red Guides* for hotels and restaurants—including vital information on thousands of small towns—plus *Michelin's Green Guides* for sights and history.

In recent years, we have come to rely on the same mobile phone we use in the U.S. With AT&T's overseas roaming, the cost is 99 cents per minute and we use the phone mainly to call ahead from our car

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Hovering Above Wuppertal

Most German cities can claim a singular, famous landmark. Cologne's Gothic Cathedral, Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, the Roland statue on Bremen's *Marktplatz*, Dresden's rebuilt *Frauenkirche*, Trier's ancient *Porta Nigra*, Schwerin's *Schloss-in-a-lake* and so on. Citizens of Wuppertal boast about...what?...their "slithering gray millipede."

To explain: that's one of the nicknames bestowed upon this Westphalian community's public transit system, the odd but quite amazing and thoroughly efficient *Schwebebahn*. Translation: suspension railway. Indeed, the world's only municipally operated, everyday mode of transporting passengers via carriages hanging beneath a monorail line.

Wuppertal's "meandering metal dragon" (another nickname) is quite extensive, amounting as it does to 20 stations along a 13.3 km/8.3-mile route, routinely carrying an average of 72,000 people daily as they head for work, touring, shopping, entertainment, or whatever. Hence a moveable civic landmark, functioning for more than a century.

Why does something so radical and unique exist in this mid-sized Bergisches Land city, situated on the southerly fringes of the industrial Ruhr district? And who came up with such a revolutionary mass-transit approach? For answers, let's

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Exchange rates as of 5/5/2008

1 euro = \$1.55

1 Swiss franc = \$0.95

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for about \$450 each. That would have left \$357 per day for ground transport, hotels and food. A four-door rental car including fuel (enough to cover 1,200 kilometers in a week) is about \$70 per day, and there are plenty of delightful country hotels with breakfast for \$150 per night double. That leaves \$140 a day for food. If they rent an apartment or flat in the countryside, it will be even cheaper. And, let's face it, a \$1700 river cruise is not exactly five-star luxury.

Continuing the buy-in-dollars-in advance theme, The *Times* noted that Leading Hotels of the World now offers dollar prices at 60 European hotels. That's nice, but the dollar-guarantee mumbo-jumbo doesn't mean the deal is good, it just means you are protected against currency fluctuation (in one direction) and LHW has your money in their bank for a few days, weeks, or months. As an example, the story mentioned a €440 room at the **Hotel Raphael** in Paris that can be pre-paid for \$490. It's very likely that the €440 is a rack rate and the \$490 price is simply a prettily disguised discount; similar to when an airline's published business class fare of \$9,000 is sold through other channels for one-third to one-half that amount. If both the airline and the hotel could sell their product at the higher price, they would. In any event, if you're into \$490 per night hotel rooms you probably pay scant attention to exchange rates. Let me know when €100 per night family-run hotels start

offering their rooms for a hundred bucks.

The *Times* column's most questionable strategy, however, is a recommendation to buy euros now, in late spring, for a summer vacation. Yes, that would be a good idea *provided* you knew for sure the dollar will continue to weaken, but some experts say the greenback has bottomed; it could strengthen and an early purchase would be a mistake (indeed, since the *Times'* story appeared the euro has dropped from 1.61 to 1.55). If you want to gamble you'll have more fun in Vegas or Atlantic City.

So where does the *Times* say to buy enough euros to see you through a summer vacation? One place is a company called International Currency Express. In buying euros, the exchange rate is crucial, and ICE's isn't very good. The day this is written one euro is worth \$1.55, though you won't get that bank-to-bank rate with ICE. On an exchange of \$3,000 their rate is 1.67 which yields €1795. Use an ATM card in Europe, however, and your exchange rate will be very near that bank-to-bank 1.55 rate. That means you wind up with €1935, an *additional* €140. Heeding the *Times'* advice just cost you \$217. Yes, there may be some ATM transaction fees, but nothing close to \$217 and you won't have the worry of transporting and carrying cash.

There are good reasons for being skeptical about what you read in the mainstream travel press, especially when it comes to hands-on advice like the foregoing. The slick magazines,

and even the best daily newspapers, such as the scrupulously above-board *New York Times*, are influenced by advertisers. When, for example, a cruise company's PR rep calls to suggest a story about his industry's dollar-guaranteed prices, the editor listens (yes, even the incorruptible *Times'* editor). A simple item such as this is then typically assigned to an eager, 20-something Columbia or Northwestern journalism grad who's taken a couple of backpack tours of Europe. In this way, much of the advice dispensed by the mainstreamers is written by neophytes and not generated by personal travel experiences, but by outside sources—many of whom are selling something. It should be noted here that some of the very best and most reliable travel writing is found in the in-depth destination stories of the Sunday travel sections of top dailies such as the *Times* and the *Washington Post*. It's the "travel tips" filler items that are dispensed by stay-at-home staffers.—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

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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

COUNTRY LIFE*Continued from page 1*

for same-day hotel reservations. If we're just wandering, with no specific itinerary, sometime in the early afternoon when we have a good idea where we'll be around 4 to 5pm, we consult the *Michelin Red Guide* for nearby hotel possibilities. Even on this short notice, we almost always find a room available at our first-choice hotel.

Here are seven interesting small town destinations in Germany with affordable hotel/restaurant recommendations (we'll do Austria and Switzerland in coming issues):

Seeg

This almost idyllic, way-off-the-beaten-track hamlet, about 15 km northwest of Füssen, is close to the main tourist attractions of southern Bavaria, especially the Royal Castles of **Neuschwanstein**, **Hohenschwangau**, and **Linderhof**. Among Seeg's attractive features are a quiet, comfortable hotel and a simple but authentic restaurant that serves good farm food to locals. The town's hill-top location commands long views of mountains, forests and meadows. Like many Bavarian towns, life centers around an onion-domed rococo church, **St. Ulrich**, which shelters a perfect little cemetery. The entire scene is backdropped by the jagged peaks of the Allgäu range.

Nearby towns worth a short visit include Nesselwang, Mittelberg, and Rosshaupten.

Pension Heim

The Heim is an exceptionally welcoming, small family-run hotel, already known to many readers. Room Number 20, on the first floor, is on a corner and features a snug sitting area with couch, easy chair, coffee table and TV. Its pleasant balcony, accessible from the bedroom and also from the small, adjacent dressing room, offers a fine view across the valley to the "pre-Alps" beyond Füssen.

Pension Heim, Aufmberg 8, D-87637 Seeg, tel. +049/08364/258,

email pensionheim@t-online.de, web www.pensionheim.de. Double rooms from about €70

Gasthof Hirsch

This lively "local," where tables are sometimes shared, consists of two low-ceilinged rooms; the front is casual with bare wooden tables and the back more formal, with tablecloths, napkins and flowers. There are fabric-covered light fixtures and wood banquettes around the perimeter of both rooms. The deep window wells are filled with indoor plants.

The simple food is delicious. You'll pay around €11 for such dishes as crisp, greaseless *Wiener Schnitzel*, and about the same for beef fillet on a skewer bathed in a reduction sauce of the juices and herb butter, served with French fries and mixed green salad. A half-liter of Allgäuer Bräuhaus is €2.3

Gasthof Hirsch, Seeg, Kirchplatz 3, tel. +49/08364/353.

Rügen

The island is easily accessed by rail or car via a bridge at Stralsund. From Rostock, the drive, over a busy two-lane road, is about two and a half hours—traffic permitting. Most visitors will want to headquarter in the beach town of Binz, where miles of white Baltic sand invite walkers, sunbathers and swimmers.

From Binz, easy auto excursions are possible to the fishing town of Sassnitz and the remote village of Lome for lunch high above the sea on the terrace of the **Panorama Hotel Lome**. Not to be missed is the **Prora**, the failed, Nazi-constructed monstrosity that was to be an every-man holiday resort. Had not more pressing matters, such as the Russian Front, intervened, the three-mile-long series of six-story buildings, joined in a way as to result in a single "hotel," would have accommodated 20,000 guests.

Villa Granitz

In the village of Baabe, just down the coast from Binz, the Villa Grantiz's Victorian-Gothic architec-

ture is reminiscent of our country's Old South, and feels like a private residence. Covered wooden walkways connect various wings of the house through the lovely garden. Ask for Number 123, a spacious, comfortable double with a generous sized terrace. There is no restaurant.

Villa Granitz, Birkenallee 17, D-18586, Baabe, tel. +49/038303/1410, fax 14144, villa-grantiz@t-online.de. Doubles from €58

Wreecher Hof

This is relaxed, easy-to-live-in luxury, at an amazing price. Wreecher Hof's country location, in tiny Wreechen, about nine kilometers southwest of Putbus, seems far from sea and beaches. The half-dozen thatched-roof, all-white bungalows are surrounded by well-tended grounds featuring colorful flower beds and clipped lawns intersected by walkways of red and gray pavers. A yellow awning shelters an inviting outdoor terrace that overlooks a large lily pond. The 43 guestrooms apportioned among the six cottages are five-star in terms of size and quality of furnishings. The hotel's excellent restaurant merits a red *Karte* designation from Michelin.

Hotel Wreecher Hof, Kastanienallee, D-18581 Putbus, tel. + 49/038301-850, fax 85100, info@wreecher-hof.de, www.wreecher-hof.de/. Doubles from €84

Restaurant Strandhalle

At the southern end of the Binz beach crescent sits this high-ceilinged, Victorian building stuffed with a wild mixture of antique furniture, potted plants, and the bric-a-brac of decades, including a life-size religious statue. When not smothered in some heavy, overwrought sauce (ask for the sauce on the side), the absolutely fresh fish is first-rate. Be sure also to try the grilled potatoes *mit Speck* (bacon pieces). Including a beer or two, a couple can eat well here for about €50.

Strandpromenade 5, D-18609 Binz, tel. +49/08393 31564, www.strandhalle-binz.de.

Baden-Baden

It doesn't cost anything to walk Baden-Baden's fashionable streets or browse its smart shops. For about \$10, you can even nurse a beer for an hour or so in the clubby Oleander bar of the high falutin' **Brenner's Park Hotel**. It'll taste better, of course, after you've spent a couple of hours (about \$20) at the Caracalla Baths, an aquatic festival of warm pools, Jacuzzis, waterfalls and saunas; one of the world's great public spas.

A Baden-Baden headquarters makes for easy daytrips: south through the Black Forest; a day in Strasbourg with perhaps a lunch of *choucroute* (sauerkraut with smoked pork, an Alsatian speciality) and a glass of one the region's most distinctive wines, *gewürztraminer* from the house of Trimbach; or a slow drive with stops in picturesque towns such as Riquewihr, Rebeaumeville and Colmar along the Alsatian wine road.

Hotel Rebenhof

You can enjoy upscale Baden-

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.

Baden at a downscale price from the Hotel Rebenhof, about a 10-minute drive from the center of town. The Rebenhof sits on a gentle slope surrounded by rolling vineyards on the edge of the town of Neuweier. Light wood paneling and lots of windows create an open, airy atmosphere. Modern, clean-as-a-whistle guest rooms are attractively decorated and large sliding, floor-to-ceiling windows seem to bring the vineyard indoors.

Hotel Restaurant Rebenhof, Weinstrasse 58, D-76534 Baden-Baden, tel. +49/072/23/9 63 10, fax 96 31 3, info@hotel-rebenhof.de, www.hotel-rebenhof.de/index.php. Doubles from €90.

Waldhotel Forellenhof

In a wooded setting about three miles from the city center, the Forellenhof offers good value and rustic charm. The appealing interior of a typical Black Forest farm house overflows with such country touches as carved wooden chandeliers, massive tile stoves, and dark wood wainscoting. The restaurant, no surprise, specializes in trout.

Waldhotel Forellenhof - Gaisbach 91 - 76534 Baden-Baden, tel. +49/07221/9740, fax 97 42 99, mail@forellenhof-baden-baden.de, www.forellenhof-baden-baden.de. Doubles from €89

Husum

A part of far northern Germany that attracts few Americans is the western Schleswig-Holstein, a lowland of dikes, tide flats, and marshes. In Husum, the main town, visit the **North Frisian Museum** to understand how the sea, and the disasters it has visited on the land, have affected life in the region. Your next stop might be the **Eider Dam**, built in the late '60s after the disastrous storm-tides of February 1962 claimed 315 lives.

Other than limitless sky and sea, and melancholy wind farms, there's not a lot to see here, though on long, restorative walks or bike rides atop the dikes, you'll experience the kind

of solitude found on mountain-tops and lonely beaches. Highly recommended.

Hotel Lundenbergsand

Hidden among beach grasses behind an imposing North Sea dike in the Wattenmeer National Park, is the dormered, thatch-roofed Hotel Lundenbergsand. This one's way off the beaten path, so you'll need a good map to find it near tiny Simonsberger, seven kilometers southwest of Husum.

The theme is nautical. On the walls are a ship's wheel and pictures of ships. Oil lamps hang over each table in the dining room.

Room Number 11, reached via a stairway, is compact and spare but comfortable enough for a stay of two or three nights. There is a white wooden bed, a table and two chairs, a small TV, furrowed sisal carpeting, stripped wallpaper, a painted wood ceiling edged in white molding, pictures of boats and flowers, and a chest-high window offering a long, peaceful view of sky, hedges, waving grasses and wheeling birds.

Dinner in the *Stube* featured ample portions of good but not great food, mostly from the sea. Main dishes are in the €14-20 range. A four-tenths liter glass of Königspilsener was €3.

In the summer it stays light for a long time in the evening, making after dinner a perfect time for that walk on the dike.

Hotel Lundenbergsand, Lundenbergweg 3, Simonsberg, D-25813, tel. +049/04841/83930, 839350, info@Hotel-Lundenbergsand.de, www.hotel-lundenbergsand.de,

Niederstetten

This village between Rothenburg and Bad Mergentheim is just an overnight. Stop in the early afternoon, walk through the town, climb up to the castle, and you've seen it. However, the food at the recommended hotel here, the Krone, is so good you may want to make Niederstetten your headquarters for car

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Back in the day...

20 years ago this month in Gemütlichkeit

From Dear Subscriber, April 1988

While nearly every aspect of travel in Germany, Austria and Switzerland has substantially increased in price, the cost of getting there remains reasonable. For example, Condor's 1984 roundtrip fare from the West Coast was \$819. This year it is an identical \$819 and some super-saver seats are still available at \$759. However, as we go to press, a fare increase of approximately 5% is imminent for several trans-Atlantic carriers. Fares for charter lines—Condor, Balair, Martinair, LTU—are valid throughout the summer.

When choosing an airline, you may find it of interest that in a recent survey of our subscribers, Lufthansa barely nosed out Swissair as the readers' favorite airline. Our January '88 Lufthansa experience supports the choice. Three charter carriers—LTU, Condor and Balair—received strong support. Pan Am finished last.

15 years ago this month in Gemütlichkeit

From Dear Subscriber, April 1993

Here's a story to give one pause. It was told to me by a *Gemütlichkeit* subscriber who rented a car in Germany and drove it to Hungary. His first day in the country the car was stolen leaving him with the car's keys and nothing else. Our subscriber had taken the precaution of purchasing Collision Damage Waiver insurance so he owes the car rental company only the deductible. However, the trunk was full of luggage and his estimated loss of personal belongings is near \$7,000, which is not covered by any rental car insurance.

Had he used a credit card to pay for his rental and cover the CDW he still would not have been

covered for the theft of his belongings. That set me to worrying about driving around Europe with cameras, camcorders, and laptop computers in the trunk. I was relieved to learn that as part of my homeowners policy, my insurance company, USAA, does provide worldwide coverage for such losses. Whether that is a standard feature of most such policies, I do not know, but my advice is to find out if you are covered, well in advance of any European trips, particularly those that include countries where automobile theft is more common than it is in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

10 years ago this month in Gemütlichkeit

From Dear Subscriber, April 1998

Though you'll hear more in later issues, here are a few recommendations from our just-completed trip:

- "For an inexpensive, exotic evening try **Beograd** (Mühlgasse 15/Schikanederg 7, tel. +43/1/587-4444), an atmospheric Vienna restaurant featuring Balkan food and Gypsy/Viennese music. It's the best place we've found since the Cafe Budva closed a few years ago. Reserve a table for 8pm and expect to pay less than \$20 per person.

- "The **Hotel Arlette** (Stampfenbachstrasse 26, CH-8001 Zürich, tel. +41/01/252 0032, fax 252 0923) is a good value near the Zürich railway station. Double rooms on weekends are a reasonable-for-Zürich CH 175 (\$117).

- "A top value/top hotel in Pontresina is the former **Atlas** now reborn as the **Hotel Saratz** (CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/939 4000, fax 839 4040). Great food, too. Doubles from about \$125 to \$225.

- "**Villa Pauliska** (Via Orselina 6, CH-6600 Locarno-Muralto, tel. +41/091/743 0541) offers more quality and charm for the money than anything else we saw in Locarno. Clean,

airy double rooms with wonderful high windows and ceilings and good bathrooms go for from CH-130 to 150 (\$87-\$100). Outstanding restaurant, too, with creative, five-course, fixed-price menus at about \$35. One drawback; no breakfast, only coffee. It isn't that breakfast isn't included, it's simply not offered.

Five years ago this month in Gemütlichkeit

From Readers' Forum, April 2003

Against Germany Boycott: What are we to make of the comments by Earl W. Winters, who seems to suggest that *Gemütlichkeit* provide less (no) coverage of Germany, because of the position that country has taken on the Bush administrations decision to go to war with Iraq. It's that gentleman's right to choose to boycott Germany and its products, but *Gemütlichkeit* would be remiss in its obligation and responsibility to its readers if it failed to continue full coverage of Germany, because of a reader's political persuasion. To do so, would betray the trust of your subscribers. Your quote in your *Dear Subscriber* piece is representative of how most Europeans feel: Europe is not anti-American; it is anti-Bush administration.

Mr. Winter's other concern — dare I say "anger" — seems to be misplaced. His quarrel should not be with Germany, but with the Bush administration. One wonders if Mr Winters is also going to boycott Mexico, Canada, Russia, France, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, Turkey — and the products of those countries. They, too, do not endorse the Bush war. And, oh yes, I trust that the writer will forego eating Chinese food, as he boycotts China. Please, folks. Let's get a grip and have some sanity and reason here!

BILL POLCARI, MEDFORD MA

(Editor's Note: The Villa Pauliska, Swissair, and Balair are no longer in business. Mr. Winters is no longer a subscriber, but Mr. Polcari is.)

daytrips over the maze of tiny backroads to towns such as Rothenburg, Bad Mergentheim, Tauberbischofsheim and Creglingen. Even Würzburg is daytripable.

From Niederstetten, follow the Vorbach river north for about 10 kilometers and you're in Weikersheim, which has a fine market square that adjoins the rather spectacular 16th-17th century **Schloss Weikersheim**. Its meticulously-kept grounds are extensive with formal gardens and statuary. Indoors, the Knight's Hall is much praised.

For some great country driving, proceed west to Dörzbach, then along the twists and turns of the Jagst river to Krautheim, Schöntal and Möckmühl. From there you can head north through Adelsheim and angle back east to Bad Mergentheim, Weikersheim and back down to Niederstetten.

Hotel Krone

Clean, comfortable guestrooms in a modern style more reminiscent of business conferences than German country charm. Still, it's family-run and a fine value. The restaurant is a cut above, getting a deserved red *Karte* designation from Michelin. Most main dishes are in the €14-€20 range. Winners for us were juicy *Zwiebelrostbraten* (steak and crispy onions), with wondrous roasted potatoes, and four thick lamb chops baked to rosy perfection and accompanied by butter-laden gratin potatoes under a crust of cheese. A half-liter of local red wine is about €10 and draft beer costs €2.1. Try to avoid the English menu as it doesn't list all the dishes available.

Hotel Gasthof Krone, Markplatz 3, D-97996, Niederstetten, tel. +49/07932/8990, fax 89960, info@hotelgasthofkrone.de, www.hotelgasthofkrone.de, doubles from €88

This is a part of Germany rich in backroads and interesting villages. A great euro-beater option is take a vacation rental for a week. There is good selection at www.niederstetten.de/touris/

[touris.html](#). One that looks attractive is unit #2 of **Ferienwohnung Siedler** (tel. +49/07932/8361), which comes with kitchen, bedroom, tiled bath, living room, balcony, and regional decor at the extraordinary price of €25 per night. Even at our current nasty exchange rate that's \$271 for two persons for a week in very pleasant surroundings.

The Mosel

I've always been partial to the Mosel; it's sweeping 180-degree-plus bends, the spectacularly steep, neat vineyards, and, when compared with the Rhine, fewer tourists. I suggest driving from Trier to Koblenz, or vice versa. **Burg Eltz**—a photo of which should be in the dictionary alongside the word 'castle'—is a must see in the forest 10 kilometers from Hazenport. By far the most interesting town is Trier and its many Roman ruins, including an amphitheatre that held 20,000 spectators, and some of the Roman Empire's most extensive baths. Other towns of interest along the river are Neumagen-Dhron, Berncastel-Kues, Marienburg, Beilstein and Cochem, watched over by its impressive castle.

Hotel Petrisberg

Entering its lovely grounds high above the city, your first Petrisberg impression is of an upscale, resort hotel. However, not only are you about to experience one of the warmest welcomes in all "*Gemütlichkeit-land*," but one of its great bargains as well.

Guestrooms here are simple and clean, but many have panoramic city views and the Pantenburg brothers' hospitality is legendary. Many readers return year after year.

Hotel Petrisberg, Sickingenstr. 11, D-54296, Trier, tel. +49/0651/464-0, fax 46450, www.hotel-petrisberg.de, info@hotel-petrisberg.de. Doubles from €90.

Berchtesgaden

At the east end of the German Alpine Road is Berchtesgaden, mostly famous as Adolf Hitler's vaca-

tion hideaway. Though the town itself is long on vehicular traffic and visitors, and not especially appealing, the Salzach basin is a place of astonishing physical beauty. The jagged peaks of the Watzmann, the quiet, melancholy Königsee, country churches like lovely little **Maria Gern** set in the green hills, are the stuff of full-color travel posters. And the place has an intriguing history, most of it recent rather than ancient.

Hitler, of course, had a home here, but contrary to popular opinion it was not the famous "Eagle's Nest" at the top of the Kehlstein, which he seldom visited. His Berghof was down the mountain, in the foothills of the Obersalzberg. Many of his high-ranking aides also had luxury homes here, all of which were connected by several kilometers of underground bunkers. These tunnels were used as air-raid shelters but were probably not, as it was once believed, planned as an "Alpine Redoubt" where Hitler, the SS and the Gestapo would make a last stand and prolong the war. By knowing where to look from a road on U.S. Army controlled property at Obersalzberg, you may be able to see fragments of the foundation of the Berghof which was leveled in 1952. The destruction was one of the conditions imposed by the U.S. Army when it returned the property to Germany. For an update on what happened at the Obersalzberg during and since the war—plus some extraordinary photos—visit www.thirdreichruins.com. Nearly all of the buildings and homes associated with the Nazi presence have been, or soon will be, destroyed. But as Thirdreichruins.com author, Geoff Walden, says, "History-minded tourists will continue to visit the Obersalzberg because of what happened there from 1933-1945, regardless of the further destruction of the area sites. The history happened, it cannot be erased by removing the remains." Your thirst for World War II history may have to be slaked by having a beer at the bar of the posh new **InterContinental Hotel**, built near the former site of the homes of

Martin Bormann and Hermann Göring. It is still possible, however, to visit the bunkers and tunnel complex, though they are dank, cramped, dirty and there is little to see. What we do recommend for a Berchtesgaden visit is the bus and elevator ride up to the **Kehlstein**, an electric boat ride on the **Königsee**, a drive over the high, scenic **Rosfeld Road**, a tour of the **Salt Mines**, and day-trips to Salzburg, just 20-minutes away.

Hotel Alpenhof

On gorgeous grounds five kilometers west and a little south of Berchtesgaden, in Schönau am Königssee, is the stately and staid 53-room Hotel Alpenhof, a mountain resort with exercise, wellness, beauty, and spa facilities, including indoor and outdoor pools.

Expectations fueled by the hotel's elegant entry, with its oriental rugs thrown over gleaming marble tile floors, and light wood paneling, are not quite fulfilled by the guest rooms. Though large and comfortable, for the most part they are unimaginatively decorated with drab colors and bulky furniture.

That, however, is our only quibble. The quiet Alpenhof is an ideal spot to hideout for a week or two, far from the world's stresses. Though you wouldn't be turned away, this sort of hotel is geared for stays longer than a night or two. A week in the springtime in a small double room with south-facing balcony for two persons, including breakfast and dinner, is €868.

Kur-und Sporthotel Alpenhof, Richard-Voss-Strasse 30, Schönau-Königssee, D-83471, tel. +49/08652/6020, fax 64399. info@alpenhof.de, www.alpenhof.de. Per person, per night, rates for two or more nights, with breakfast and dinner, from €55.

Hotel Gasthof Bergheimat


In the same area and only a five-minute walk to the Königssee, is the Bergheimat. Though it is a step down in class from the Alpenhof, everything is bright, shiny and clean

in this 43-room, family-run hotel. And, considering the prices of other hotels in and around Berchtesgaden, it is a good value.

A third-floor (there is a lift) double room with toilet and shower, but no balcony, can be rented for about \$110 per night. In that category we recommend Number 302, whose bed is cozily tucked under a slanted wood ceiling with skylights.

Like the Alpenhof, this is a quiet country hotel. There is no pool but in winter you can ski right to the front door.

Hotel Gasthof Bergheimat, Brandnerstrasse 18, D-83471, Schönau am Königssee, tel. +49/08652/60 80, fax 08652/608300, info@hotel-bergheimat.de, www.hotel-bergheimat.de. Doubles from €65

*(Editor's Note: A favorite of many readers, the grand old **Hotel Geiger**, closed several years ago and has stood vacant ever since. According to the website thirdreichruins.com, during the war it was used as a recreation center for Luftwaffe officers. Rumor has it that the cost to refurbish and maintain the rambling old building precludes a profitable hotel operation on the site. Historical preservationists hope to save the structure from the wrecker's ball.* 

WUPPERTAL

Continued from page 7

backtrack to the latter part of the 19th century, when traffic gridlock had already become a troublesome fact of worldwide inner-city existence.

Planners seeking solutions went underground in some locales. Budapest completed the initial link of Europe's first subway in 1896. Boston's, America's first, came on line the following year. Carl Eugen Langen, an inventor and entrepreneur, had a different idea. Owner of a Cologne sugar refinery, he concocted an 1890s scheme for swifter movement of supply-carrying goods wagons—not in ordinary fashion along the busy floor, but instead by means of tracks bolted to the ceiling. Which, in turn, sparked his farther-

etched, much larger-scale concept of a suspended people-mover railway for congested cities.

He pitched his plan to administrators in Berlin, Munich and what was then Germany's Silesian metropolis: Breslau (no in Poland). No such costly, crackpot scheme for us, they quickly responded. Langen couldn't consider Wuppertal, simply because there was no Wuppertal in the 1890s. Instead, a dozen separate towns and two mini-cities—Elberfeld and Barmen—were strung like beads on a string along the Wupper River. (Their consolidation into a single municipality didn't occur until 1929).

Langen saw an opportunity within the narrow, curving enclosure of a river valley. The serpentine terrain, plus considerable ribbon- and lace-making millwork activity, led inevitably to bottlenecked traffic slowdowns. Moreover, Barmen-born Frederick Bayer's pharmaceutical company of global aspirin renown had been in business since 1863, thereby intensifying horse-drawn traffic tie-ups long before Bayer AG's move to nearby Leverkusen.

Unfavorable soil conditions made thoughts of a subsurface U-Bahn route unrealistic. But Langen's proposal for aerial transit was accepted, with construction started in 1898. All to loud outcries against the invading monster—sure to wreak gloom, noise and fearsome accidents upon the valley. Despite opposition, the millipede grew and grew, ultimately weighing 192,000 tons. That pertains to the iron girders, fastened onto 472 triangular support frames. The complete project cost 16 million gold marks.

On October 24, 1900, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria arrived from Berlin to inaugurate the monorail's maiden run. Whereupon three cars accommodating their imperial majesties and the royal entourage swung forth from Elberfeld's Döppersberg station. Then westbound to Vohwinkel, there to be welcomed by Langen's daughter with a bouquet of roses for the em-

press. The *Schwebebahn's* inventor had died five years previously, never to see his grand plan take shape here in the Wupper Valley.

The line's first segment was opened to the general public six months later. Then passengers seated in cars suspended from electrified rails began riding to and fro via the system's entire Vohwinkel-Oberbarmen length on June 27th, 1903. Despite all those dire predictions about collapse and disaster, public enthusiasm was instantaneous. Daily ridership quickly zoomed and now averages 72,000.

Present-day carriages rolling exactly as Langens intended—by means of overhead wheels along the “big zipper” (a third nickname)—are fourth-generation offspring of the originals, their aluminum bodies handsomely done up in blue and orange, except for a few sporting advertisements or jazzy multicolor abstracts. Trains run at an average speed of 27 km/16.7 miles per hour. A full end-to-end commute takes half an hour during rush-hour periods. At other times, riders can reach Vohwinkel from Oberbarmen's Berliner Platz, or vice-versa, in merely 15 minutes. (Adult fare: €2).

Wuppertal's *Schwebebahn* mostly overhangs the waterway. Approaching the line's western terminus, riders dangle at eight-meter/26-ft. altitude between buildings and above the streets of Oberwinkel and Sonnborn. Which means the iron framework blots out daylight, so residents habitually keep shades drawn for privacy in lighted rooms. Facts of *Innenstadt* living, a tribute to human adaptability. For a different aspect of the *Schwebebahn* experience, passengers cross high over the Sonnborn *Autobahn* interchange, one of Europe's biggest and busiest highway junctions.

The stations tend to be metro-utilitarian. One exception is at Barmen's Werther Brücke, two stops from the western Oberbarmen/Berliner Platz terminus. Dating from 1902, it's a startling *Jugendstil* contraction made of iron and sheet met-

al, looking rather ominously like a train wreck at first sight. Another, closer to central Wuppertal's *Hauptbahnhof*, is the triangular Ohligsmühle station, newer than Werther Brücke by 80 years and a showpiece of free-form modernistic design.


If you're wondering what *Schwebebahn* commuting was like when Kaiser Wilhelm *und Frau* came on an autumn afternoon during the first year of the last century, in peacetime when two terrible world wars were unthinkable, plan on being in Wuppertal over a weekend. In 1975, the 75th anniversary of the route's inaugural was commemorated with the reappearance *Kaiserwagen Nr. 5*—the vintage-1900, impeccably restored shiny-red emperor's carriage, outfitted with plush upholstery, fancy window drapes, old-fashioned lamps and etched-glass partitions.

Hostesses in period attire serve refreshments while this Wilhelminian antique takes riders on special Saturday-Sunday excursions over water, bridges, rooftops and streets blinking with stoplights and usually clogged with traffic. Traffic? Up here on the millipede's iron spine? Nothing of the sort—for Wuppertal's aerial railway has always swung above it all.

Contact: Informationzentrum, Rathaus, 42269 Wuppertal, tel. +49/0202/563/6688, fax 563/8452, email: infozentrum@stadt.wuppertal.de, Web: www.wuppertal.de.

Good Wuppertal Hotel Value

The 14-room, family-run, **Hotel Rubin** is full of kitchy artifacts from another time: antique bicycles and harnesses, elaborately-carved breakfronts, bulbous hanging lamps, a doll collection, and plenty of indoor plants. If you haven't been to Germany since the '60s or '70s you'll feel right at home. Guestrooms are clean and comfortable, with necessary amenities.

Hotel Rubin, Paradesstrasse 59, D-42107 Wuppertal-Elberfeld, tel. +49/0202/24838-0, fax 24838-10 hotel-rubin@web.de, www.hotel-rubin-online.de 

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, Schaufplatzgasse 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, hotelkreuz@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, Pettenkoferstr. 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