

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

Midsummer Travel Musings

Though I can't imagine there's any connection, on the heels of our "Berlin 50" story last month, the *New York Times'* June 22 Travel Section carried a piece by culture editor, Sam Sifton, entitled *Berlin: The Big Canvas* which argues that the city may be Europe's most cultured. Many of the usual suspects are named—Gemaldegalerie, the Pergamon, Paris Bar, and some top-end hotels and restaurants—but it's beautifully written and highly informative, especially when it comes to Berlin's red-hot art community. "You could go to art galleries in Berlin for a solid week and find yourself not halfway through a master list," says Sifton. He even has praise for graffiti artists, three of whom he names. Though the story blessedly missed some of our favorites such as **Rogacki** and **Tavola Calda**, it's a must-read, especially if, like me, Berlin has set up shop in a corner of your soul. The *Times* travel articles are free online.

There's not much good news for North American travelers. Many of the problems seem related to the price of crude oil. Fuel prices that already dictate a \$300 to \$400 per ticket surcharge on transatlantic flights, threaten to send fares higher—perhaps much higher. Economists say airlines can't survive with oil at \$135 per barrel. Thus far, U.S. carriers have variously responded by cutting back on routes, reducing service, charging for checked baggage, food, and preassigned seats, and, naturally, raising fares. Most of this has so far been confined to domestic routes, but change—and not for the good—is surely in store for travelers to Europe. Want to know what's worse than \$9 per gallon of gas in Europe?: \$2,000 economy class airfares to Europe.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

MAGDEBURG

Centrally situated on eastern Germany's Romanesque Road, Saxony-Anhalt's capital traces its historic importance to the 10th-century reign of Otto the Great

Throughout four neglectful decades, East Germany's venerable cities and towns languished, run by socialist GDR bureaucrats flaunting their talents for aesthetic and environmental blunders. But then came 1990's national reunification. Five new federal states were created and—within each of them—centuries-old destinations changed from hidden-away to warmly *willkommen*. Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt's dominant (but not excessively huge) city, covers both sides of the Elbe River. South-suburban villages nestle amidst Börde-Heide meadows and farm fields. For either sidetripping or longer stays, travelers like the urban accessibility:

by Tom Bross

just about equidistant from Berlin and Hannover, temptingly close to Harz highlands holiday terrain. Another option, if you are here toward late August: venture due north from downtown, destined for the Colbitz-Letzlinger-Heide. Its vast cloak of heather reaches maximum deep-purple, picture-perfect bedazzlement during that brief period of the season.

Then & Now in a Proud Old City

Any introductory overview should start with mention of Otto I (known as "The Great," thanks to his influence on early Germanic history), crowned Holy Roman Emperor way back in 962. Ottonian

Continued on page 3...

Vienna's Heurige

One of the first things that comes to mind at the mention of Vienna is its famous coffee houses, where citizens and visitors have met for centuries to chat, read, and sip strong dark coffee, perhaps with a bit of pastry and *Slagobers* (whipped cream).

The coffee house is so much a part of the culture that it is sometimes referred to as Vienna's living room. If so, it must then follow that the city's backyard, garden, and family room is the heuriger, that extraordinary system of *gemütlich* wine taverns.

It all started a couple of hundred years ago—August 17, 1784 at 2:04 in the afternoon, to be precise, when Maria Theresa's son, Emperor Joseph II, made an historic speech that

was to bring untold happiness — and a few headaches — to countless generations of Viennese.

"Every man," he decreed, "will have the freedom to sell or dispense — year-round, in any form, at any time, and at whatever price he wants — wine, food or fruit juice that he has produced himself." And so came the Law of the Heuriger.

The old privileges (since incorporated into the civic statutes of modern Vienna) grant vintners the right to serve in their own taverns the wine they have cultivated and processed themselves. By law the tavern may only be open no more

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Exchange rates as of 6/30/2008
1 euro = \$1.58
1 Swiss franc = \$0.98

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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Coming soon to an international airport near you: the echo of half-empty halls and concourses?

One good news story of recent years seems to be turning bad. I'm talking about the proliferation of Europe's small, low-cost airlines that have opened the way for everyman to travel everywhere in Europe. It seems the small jet airplanes flown by these carriers have a gigantic carbon footprint. The *International Herald Tribune* reports that a couple flying from England to Spain put 1,400,000 grams of climate-warming carbon dioxide emissions into the air, whereas a traditional driving vacation in England would generate fewer than 20,000 grams. What's really perverse about this is the airfare for the trip to Spain is cheaper than driving the family car. (There's a lot that doesn't add up these days. Take our little town of 22,000 in Southern Oregon. This spring residents were warned to conserve water; otherwise, we were told, there will be a shortage and prices will increase. Last week the city council raised water rates. Seems we're not using enough water to generate sufficient revenue to operate the system.)

While on the subject of the scarcity of such essentials as oil, water, and clean air, it's worth noting that European car rental companies have

begun to impose "environmental" fees for larger cars and those with automatic transmissions. In France it's \$8 to \$13 per day, depending on the car.

In certain parts of Germany cars driven in designated "Green Zones" are required to display a sticker. The sticker's color depends on the car's emission level. So far the only places requiring the stickers are in the inner cities of Berlin, Hannover, and Cologne. These areas are signed "Environment Zone." Rental cars come equipped with the appropriately-colored sticker.

Put this under the heading; if you don't read the fine print, it may be read to you. Last month in Rome, Fred's rental car was broken into. The thief attained entry by breaking a window. Fred had liability, fire, CDW (collision damage waiver), and theft insurance but it still cost him \$375. Why? Because the rental company's CDW insurance did not cover the car's undercarriage, roof, wheels, tires, interior, windshield, or windows. He was charged €150 to replace the window, plus a €50 administrative fee, plus Italy's 20% value added tax on both. At current exchange rates it all adds up to about \$375.

What could Fred have done to avoid this? In Italy, really nothing other than purchase the rental company's eight euro per day additional insurance option which covers those

parts of the car not insured by the regular CDW. In Italy, unlike every other country in continental Europe, renters cannot rely on their credit card's free CDW coverage because the purchase of CDW from the rental company is required. In all other countries he could have declined the CDW/theft option and let his credit card's free, zero deductible coverage take over. Most credit cards that offer CDW insurance have fewer coverage exclusions than insurance purchased from rental companies.

Finally there is the story of Mr. and Mrs. Jones, whose confirmed business class reservation on **British Air** using **Alaska Airline** miles was botched by Alaska so badly (too complicated to go into here) that at the last minute BA would not let them travel. Alaska was clearly at fault. A complaint sent via Fedex to Alaska's CEO brought a call from an

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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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Publishers: Robert H. & Elizabeth S. Bestor
Executive Editor: Nikki Goth Itoi
Contributors: Tom Bross
 Sharon Hudgins
Consulting Editor: Thomas P. Bestor
Online Services: Kurt Steffans
Subscriber Travel Services: Andy Bestor, Laura Riedel

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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

MAGDEBURG*Continued from page 1*

master-planning solidified Magdeburg's stature as a major cultural center during and after the Middle Ages. Then, mercantile Hanseatic League membership kept things humming.

In 1209, construction began on the iconic twin-towered **Dom St. Mauritius und Katharina**, first of Germany's monumental Gothic cathedrals. It, however, is predated by another double-towered attention-getter: **Kloster unser Lieben Frauen** (Monastery of Our Lady), built 1064-1150 as one of Magdeburg's imposing Romanesque landmarks, now functioning as a concert hall with an adjoining sculpture garden. Austere Romanesque motifs also characterize **St. Petri-Kirche** and **St. Sebastian-Kirche** (both 12th-century) as well as **St. Johannis-Kirche** (9th-century origins, another acoustically resonant concert hall). Journeying from nearby Wittenberg in 1524, Martin Luther stood at St. John's pulpit to proclaim his Protestant Reformation.

Much of everything else in the inner-city *Altstadt* came crashing down when defenders battled through siege and plunder during the 17th century's Thirty Years' War. River commerce brought regained prosperity, and with it a Baroque building binge—still evident along one short side of Breiter Weg. Renaissance influences define the balconied **Rathaus**. Overlooking the central **Alter Markt**, this town hall's rooftop carillon chimes with 47 Meissen porcelain bells. Stroll here to peer up at the **Magdeburger Reiter**, a gilded equestrian statue with heavy local symbolism: guides will tell you that the crowned fellow on horseback *could, perhaps, maybe* depict none other than Otto I.

Brabag fuel-conversion plants, Krupp-Gruson machine shops, Junkers aircraft-engine assembly lines and strategic bridges guaranteed World War II air raids. The biggest blow came on January 16th, 1945, when U.S. Eighth Air Force bombers

Magdeburg Basics**Population:** 225,266**Elevation:** 55 meters (180 feet)

Visitor Information: Tourist-Information Magdeburg, Ernst-Reuter-Allee 12, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/19433, fax 0391/838/0430, info@magdeburg-tourist-de, www.magdeburg-tourist.de

German National Tourist Office, 122 East 42nd Street (Suite 2000), New York NY 10168-0072, tel. 212-661-7200, fax 212-661-7174, www.cometogermany.com.

Origins: Earliest record as a trading settlement, 805; designated a Holy Roman Imperial bishopric, 968; granted its municipal charter, 1158; Hanseatic League membership, 1275

Driving distances from:

Berlin	124 km	77 miles
Hamburg	190 km	118 miles
Leipzig	106 km	66 miles
Dresden	190 km	118 miles
Hannover	134 km	83 miles
Nürnberg	304 km	189 miles
München	447 km	227 miles
Frankfurt	197 km	122 miles
Stuttgart	417 km	259 miles
Rostock	215 km	133 miles
Quedlinburg	55 km	34 miles

Rail: Check www.bahn.de for Deutsche Bahn service from various German cities to downtown's main station on Bahnhofstrasse. Frequent hourly departures daily from Berlin via Potsdam: Hauptbahnhof (track 14), Ostbahnhof, Zoobahnhof; 1 hr. 40 min. travel time. High-speed ICE (InterCityExpress) cross-country travel eastbound from Frankfurt takes 3 hrs. 45 min.

Airports: Leipzig/Halle, 100 km/62 miles; Hannover/Langenhagen, 150 km/93 miles; Berlin-Brandenburg International (Schönefeld), also 150 km/93 miles.

Driving: Two *Autobahn* motorways intersect on Magdeburg's northern outskirts.

From Berlin or Hannover, take the A-2. From Dresden-Leipzig, drive northbound on the A-14. Heading by way of either route, exit onto the

north-south Magdeburger Ring for direct access into the city center.

Cruising: The Elbe river, plus two canals—the Mittelland and Elbe-Havel—are distinctive features of the metropolitan layout. Boarded at the Elbuferpromenade, *Weisse Flotte* excursion boats cruise the waterways on daily schedules, May through September. Passengers get closeup views of an engineering marvel near outlying Hohenwarthe: the *Wasserstrassenkreuz* (Water Bridge), a 918-meter/half-mile navigable aqueduct (the world's longest) for commercial shipping and pleasure boating that has spanned the intersecting canals since its completion in October, 2003. Magdeburg is a midpoint stopover on long-distance Elbe voyages operated by such companies as Viking and Peter Deilmann.

Guided Sightseeing: For city-center highlights, two-hour walking tours start daily 11am from the tourist office on Ernst-Reuter-Allee, €5. Or via double-decker bus departing from the Jacobstrasse side of the Alter Markt, daily 2-4pm (April-Oct.), €12.

Born in Magdeburg: Otto von Guericke (1602), inventor of the "Magdeburg Hemispheres" vacuum-tube air pump; Georg Phillipp Telemann (1681), prolific Baroque composer; Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben (1730) high-ranking Continental Army staff officer during the U.S. War of Independence.

Famous Bürgermeister: Ernst Reuter, Magdeburg's prewar mayor (1931-33) became mayor of West Berlin (1948-53) during the height of Cold War tensions.

Best Buy: Its €12.40 per-person price makes the Magdeburger Tourist Card a bargain. Valid for two consecutive days (9am-2am), this cost-saver entitles users to free citywide public transportation, two meals for the price of one at selected restaurants, plus discounts for tours as well as museums, zoo and special-attractions admittance along with 10% off the price of bicycle rentals.

needed merely 39 minutes to turn 90% of the *Altstadt* into smoldering heaps of rubble amounting to six million cubic meters. Postwar reconstruction commenced in 1951, when Russianized governmental takeover made an overdose of boxy, ponderous "Stalinist Brutalist" prefab behemoths inevitable.

Take those eyesores in stride while heading toward better, later stuff. English-style **Stadtpark Rotehorn** (on a mid-river island, dotted with ponds and picnic nooks) and **Elbauenpark** (on an east-side embankment's 345 acres/140 hectares), featuring a lakeside, tented *Seebühne* stage for operatic performances, enhance the city's reputation as Germany's third-greenest city after Hannover and Wiesbaden. Standing on Elbauenpark high ground since 1999's BUGA Federal Garden Show, the wooden cone-shaped, 600-meter/196-ft. **Jahrtausendturn** contains interactive scientific-technical exhibits. Over by the Domplatz, it's impossible to miss the radically asymmetrical, grass-roofed **Grüne Zitadel** (Green Citadel), completed

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.

three years ago. Pink, tile-encrusted and wavy, this last design project of Friedensreich Hundertwasser's life combines shops and galleries with apartments, hotel, offices, restaurant and cafés, kids' play center, and Kabarett Denkszettel.

Biking and Shopping

Bicyclists steer onto their preferred sections of the riverside **Elbradweg**—Prague-Cuxhaven overall—pedaling southward via *Mittlere Elbe* flood plains and wetlands that comprise a biosphere preserve. Consumerism blossomed after socialism imploded. Upscale shops and cafés are noticeably prevalent along Ernst-Reuter-Allee, Halberstädter Strasse, Hegelstrasse, Neustadt's Lübecker Strasse and around trendy Hasselbachplatz. Three close-together urban mega-malls popped up in the 1990s: **Ulrichshaus**, **City-Carré** and double-deck, 150-store **Allee-Center**.

Shades of the Secretive STASI

On the north side of town, forlorn, wall-enclosed, 19th-century red-brick Prussian structures and looming watch towers mark what used to be the **Prison Moritzburg-Neustadt**, a GDR detention facility for political prisoners and antiestablishment troublemakers scooped up by STASI police operatives in and around Magdeburg. Today it remains as the **Moritzburg Memorial & Documentation Center**, where visitors can see the cramped cells, interrogation rooms, and minuscule exercise yards, along with permanent displays and artifacts. At Umfassungstrasse 76, tel. +49/0391/244/5590, www.buergerkomitee-magdeburg.de.

Major Events in 2009

6th International Telemann Competition. Baroque-music concerts and recitals in church halls, March 7-15.

800th Cathedral Anniversary. Festival-weekend lineup includes Bach's B-minor Mass, concerts starting the Cathedral Choir and Leipzig Baroque Orchestra, April 24-26.

Additional celebrations, inside

the Cathedral and out on the Domplatz, Sept. 20-29.

16th Magdeburger Stadtfest (City Festival). Open-air entertainment (rock, pop, oldies, country). On stages along Breiter Weg, May 8-11.

8th International Puppetry Festival. Change-of-view theme. Magdeburg Puppet Theater, June 13-19.

Outdoor Operetta Gala, "A Sky Full of Violins." Seebühne lake stage, Elbauenpark, July 7 and 12.

Magic Hot-Air Balloon Festival. Morning and evening takeoffs, plus musical performances at Elbauenpark, August weekends.

Advent-Season Christmas Market. Alter Markt, Nov. 24-Dec. 30.

Magdeburg Hotels

Herrenkrug Parkhotel

The epitome of an old-time German spa resort, splendidly restored post-GDR. The setting amidst a riverside park lends itself to full-fledged "wellness" amenities along with such outdoor activities as golf, tennis, volleyball, jogging and bicycling. The brick-and-timber architecture, on a sprawling layout, evokes *Jugendstil* motifs, especially evident in a downright spectacular, circa-1904 ballroom. All 147 guest rooms are spacious and stylishly furnished. Evening meals are grand affairs in Herrenkrug's wood-frame-ceilinged, chandelier-illuminated Die Saison restaurant and adjacent glass-enclosed pavilion. (During the pre-reunification decades, Herrenkrug parkland was strictly off-limits to the public, used for gunnery practice and Russian officers' housing).

Daily Rates: Singles €76-90, doubles €101-120

Contact: Herrenkrug Parkhotel, Herrenkrug 3, 39114 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/85080, fax 8508 501, info@herrenkrug.de, www.herrenkrug.de.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

Ratswaage Magdeburg

Built in 1924, converted from trade-union headquarters to a four-star hotel eight decades later, this

six-story form-and-function Bauhaus structure with a light-yellow facade now encloses the Ratswaage's public spaces and 147 guest rooms—recently renovated, blue-carpeted and outfitted with light-toned birchwood furniture. All bathrooms are tub/shower combo. Preferable big-windowed accommodations overlook Breiter Weg in the upper part of Magdeburg's historic *Altstadt*. The area's shopping malls are virtually next-door.

Among on-site amenities are an extra-big indoor swimming pool, his-hers saunas and a fitness center. Add to that baskets of fresh-baked cakes and pastries in the *Wintergarten*, and a cobblestone-paved courtyard turned seasonally into a Bavarian-type beer garden, where guests can sip München-brewed Paulaner beer while seated beneath blue sun umbrellas.

Daily Rates: Singles €79-111, doubles €103-139

Contact: Hotel Ratswaage Magdeburg, Ratswaageplatz 1-4, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/59260, fax 0391/561/9615, hotel@ratswaage.de, www.ratswaage.de.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Plaza

There's nothing overtly fancy or pretentious about this sleekly modernist, low-rise building—part hotel, part apartment house—situated in east-side Magdeburg's mildly busy Sudenberg district. Either an energetic walk or public transport via the #10 tram line gets you to Hasselbachplatz's renowned churches and Elbe-side Klosterberg gardens.

A grey-marble fireplace is a welcoming touch in the upstairs reception area, directly accessible to an above-the-street balcony. Black-framed photos of bygone movie stars adorn the lounge with its convivial bar. Combined Restaurant Orangerie and Brasserie open onto a huge courtyard, used for summertime breakfasts. The Plaza's 103 guest rooms (including four suites) are done up in English country style. Take your pick: tub-only or shower-

only. Four of the rooms are specially outfitted to accommodate travelers with allergies.

Daily Rates: Singles €70, doubles €88

Contact: Plaza Hotel Magdeburg, Halberstädter Strasse 146, tel. +49/0391/60510, fax 0391/605/1100, info@plazahotelmagdeburg.de, www.plazahotelmagdeburg.de.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Residenz Joop

Nestled south of the *Altstadt* and west of the riverfront, this classic 1903, tile-roofed *Gründerzeit* villa used to be the capital city's Swedish consulate. Now it functions as an impeccably decorated, four-star *Garni* (B&B) establishment with two dozen cozily smallish bedrooms, augmented by a verdant backyard garden surrounding a wood-plank deck for drinking and snacking shaded by a century-old linden tree. Breakfasts are copious.

Located in a quiet, genteel north-Stadtfeld neighborhood, figure on a 10- or 15-minute walk northward to the Domplatz, slightly more to reach Stadtpark Rotehorn by way of the Sternbrücke pedestrian bridge.

Daily Rates: Singles €89-139, doubles €110-160

Contact: Hotel Residenz Joop, Jean-Burger Strasse 16, 39112 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/62620, fax 0391/626/2100, info@residenzjoop.de, www.residenzjoop.de.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 15/20

Best Western Geheimer Rat

The curvy rooftop turret and dormers typify *Jugendstil* shapeliness in this well-maintained former townhouse made into a 66-room hotel in 1995 and now run by the Brühl family. Location: northwest-side Magdeburg, reasonably close to the *Hauptbahnhof* at Konrad-Adenauer-Platz. If you're coming by car, garage space is available for €6 daily.

You'll like the floor-to-ceiling windows that brighten the lounge (sofa, a pair of armchairs, desk, oil paintings, bookcase, potted plants, earth-tone bare stone floor). Elsewhere, curved windows echo *Ju-*

gendstil influences. Contemporary lamps overhang La Cocagna, a yellow-walled restaurant with Mediterranean wines and ambience. For computer-networking, guests have access to a handy Internet booth on the upstairs floor.

Bedrooms are big-windowed and modestly decorated. Ask for #31, appealing because of its tall double windows (with sound-muffling drapes) overlooking tree-lined Goethestrasse. And, sure enough, a smooth bust of Goethe perches on a niche near the lounge.

Daily Rates: Singles €69-86, doubles €83-102

Contact: Best Western Hotel Geheimer Rat, Goethestrasse 38, 39108 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/73803, fax 0391/738/0599, info@geheimer-rat.bestwestern.de, www.geheimer-rat.bestwestern.de.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel in der Grünen Zitadelle

For overnights smack-dab in the heart of Magdeburg, nearly alongside the Domplatz and restfully behind one of the city's busiest streets, here's a rare opportunity to get a "close inside feel" for the quirky mindset of daredevil designer Friedensreich Hundertwasser. Tucked into his showstopper of a multi-use complex, 42 not-so-big, painted-ceilinged guest rooms (some with a mini-balcony) come equipped with individually crafted furnishings. The narrow, wildly unconventional shower-only bathrooms are surfaced with odd-shaped mosaic tiles. A tiny sauna is on-site. There's a €9.50 surcharge for breakfast, available daily from 7am in an adjoining street-corner restaurant-café called Dips.

Pay €10 nightly for garage parking.

Daily Rates: Singles €114.50, doubles €124

Contact: Hotel in der Grünen Zitadelle, Breiter Weg 9, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/6207/80, fax 0391/6207/8199, info@hotel-zitadelle.de, www.hotel-zitadelle.de.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

Magdeburg Restaurants

Ratskeller

Magdeburg's Old Town Hall is indeed old—of 12th-13th-century early-Renaissance vintage. So expect vaulted ceilings and massive stone pillars when you come downstairs to this truly *echt-deutsch* Ratskeller. Krostitzer or regional beer, heaping plates of no-nonsense food and low-key zestiness suit the scene.

Start with the *Altmärker Hochzeitssuppe* (€2.90). The *Rathausplatte* (steak, veal, pork and chicken plus carrots and fried potatoes) costs a worth-it €14.40. Or opt for the beef roulade with red cabbage and potato dumplings (€11.90). Fish dishes range €6.40-13.90, best accompanied by Saale-Unstrut wines from north-eastern German vineyards. Bargain tidbit: half price (plus just €1) for meals ordered between 3-5pm.

Contact: Magdeburger Ratskeller, Alter Markt 6, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/568/2323, fax 0391/568/2359, www.ratskeller-magdeburg.de.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 17/20

Bötelstube

Another, smaller old-timer survivor on the market square. Here the menu mainstays are local *Bötel* renditions of boiled *Eisbein* pork shanks, typically complemented by sauerkraut, creamed peas and boiled potatoes (€11.80). Other versions, some served with plump Bohemian dumplings, range €8.50-8.80. Three kinds of *Schnitzel* range €8-8.50.

The bar is amiable, woodsy booths are *gemütlich*, and enlarged photos recalling long-gone 1930s city panoramics hang on the stucco walls. Weather permitting, patrons can tuck into their meals (washed down with regional Colbitzer Pilsener beer) while seated on the restaurant's streetside *Terrasse*.

Contact: Bötelstube, Alter Markt 9, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/562/0397, www.boetelstube.de.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Le Cochon

Attractively, peacefully situated on one of the inner city's most fashionable side streets—lined with early-1900s apartments and town houses—the restaurant adds its Alsatian touch to the surroundings. Patrons seated on the shaded terrace glance to their right to see the pair of cathedral towers, only a few blocks away. Inside, shelves of homey antiques embellish the petite 80-seat dining room. The kitchen staff whips up irresistible Alsatian *Flammkuchen* treats, accompanied by sauce-doused *escargot* and fat little mushrooms. Main courses from €12.80. Open Sundays at 10am for the late-breakfast, after-church crowd.

Contact: Le Cochon, Hegelstrasse 39, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/541/9857.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 16/20

Petriförder

Peter Josef Lenné, 19th-century Germany's park-and-garden design genius, created Magdeburg's lengthy expanse of open space along the Elbe's west bank—flower beds, sculptures, clipped shrubbery and manicured lawns flanking pathways constantly used by sightseers, walkers, rollerbladers and runners. Just the right place for this casual, fairly new river-view restaurant-café, where I enjoyed a sunny afternoon seated outdoors at a top-deck table.

Lunch and dinner menus are enormous. Thick Argentinian steaks (€13.50-14.50); five different renditions of pork medallions (€13-14); chicken and turkey preparations (€12-14), lamb (€16-16.50), eight spaghetti variations (€5-7) and eight *Schnitzel* dishes (€10-12), plus two dozen choices of fish (€10-19.50). I aimed knife and fork at a hefty platter of Norwegian salmon cooked with spinach and buttered potatoes (€14). A meal-for-two with a double portion of Châteaubriand as the main course costs a not-too-outrageous €36.50.

Listed: 27 wines. On tap: Franziskaner and Hasseröder-Harz brands of beer.

Contact: Petriförder Restaurant-Café, Scheinufer, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/597/9600, www.RestaurantPetrifoerder-Magdeburg.eu.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 14/20

Flair

Chic and gossipy, WiFi-connected, at a prime streetfront location facing the city's wide main thoroughfare. Best anywhere for each Sunday's colossal 10am-1pm breakfast buffet, glass of sparkling *Sekt* included (€7.20). Snacks and vegetarian dishes (totaling a dozen choices) range €4.70-8.50. Pay €7.90-11.50 for such meat offerings as pork fillet with Dijon mustard or tasty ratatouille-risotto combined with lamb cutlets (€9.30). Pasta concoctions (rigatoni and spaghetti, for instance): €7.70-8.60; six kinds of crepes: €3.70-5.10; seafood choices from €10.20. All this augmented by seven kinds of *Bier vom Fass* and a cosmopolitan, 15-item European wine list.

Contact: Restaurant Flair, Breiter Weg 21, 39104 Magdeburg, tel. +49/0391/561/8955, www.cafe-flair.de.

Rating: QUALITY: 17/20, VALUE 13/20

Beer-Gardening...

Locals and out-of-towners consume their beer and pretzels while socializing beneath the elderly chestnut trees at **LeFrog**, a laid-back establishment in the midst of Rotehorn Park.

...and Pub-Crawling

After hours, find your way to such "in" places as **Mausefalle** (Breiter Weg 224), **Liebig** (Liebigstrasse 1-3), **Café Hirsch** (Halberstädter Strasse 140), **Hegel-Bierbar** (Hegelstrasse 37), **Likido Lounge** (Hasselbachplatz 5), **CoCo** (Otto-von-Guericke-Strasse 8) and **Krumme Lanke** (Leibnizstrasse 18). ☒

VIENNA WINE TAVERNS

Continued from page 1

than 300 days a year (though many have been granted restaurant licenses and are open every day) and is prohibited from selling any other beverages, including beer, soft drinks or coffee. A plaque, attesting to its official status as a heuriger, hangs outside each establishment.

Traditionally each summer when the vintner first draws off his new wine he hangs a pine bough—*Buschen*—above the door to let passers-by know that the year's harvest is ready for consumption.

Within the city limits of Vienna, there are some 800 families growing wine on 1,800 acres of land, producing a harvest of 12 million quarter-liter mugs or *viertels* of wine each year—white, dry, clear, sparkling wine with the seeming mildness of lemonade... and the kick of a mule.

It was our search for these wine taverns (on behalf of *Gemütlichkeit* readers, of course) that led us to the outskirts of the city, to the slopes of Kahlenburg and Nussberg and then to the left bank of the Danube where the majority of the vineyards are located.

On one such foray we took the #31 tram to Stammersdorf where, we had been told, one hundred families engage in viticulture and some 40 heurige are open at any one time, a statistic that was hard to believe as we first strolled along the exceptionally quiet Stammersdorferstrasse. Then we began to pick up the clues. A sprig of pine or wreath of fir hung over the door, the official plaque, and the sound of happy chatter and laughter from somewhere within.

Beyond the heavy wooden doors there's invariably a pretty courtyard lined with picnic tables, sheltered from the elements by a thick mass of grape vines and filled with Austrians sampling the newly pressed white wine to the strains of strolling folk singers, a lonely zither or, in the best cases, traditional *Schrammelmusik* performed by two violins, an accordion and a guitar. Places without music are said to be preferred by

the Viennese, but for us traditional music takes the experience to a higher level.

Inside the typical main house, the atmosphere is classic tavern: long, wooden tables and chairs, bustling waitresses delivering mugs of wine, and a large self-service buffet of hot main dishes or a selection of cold meats, salads and breads from which to construct a full meal or light snack. Some heurige are huge, with room for several hundred patrons at a time.

Our first stop in Stammersdorf was at **Weinhof Wieninger**, a somewhat up-market establishment, catering to Mercedes-BMW types in from the city, with an emphasis on antique furnishings, stuffed wild animals, and a decorous wait staff. A nice enough place, but the food looked uninteresting so we pushed on.

The **Feitzinger**, a few blocks away, was more to our liking; less formal with simple food and entire families, small children and dogs included, carousing to tunes squeezed out by a local accordionist. After a few minutes watching the action in the wine garden, we moved inside for a very satisfying meal of *Wiener Schnitzel*, meat loaf, potato salad, sauerkraut and salads of mixed greens. The cost, calculated by weight, was about \$30 for two. One quarter-liter of wine was a reasonable €2.5—the typical price throughout Vienna.

Another day, in Heiligenstadt, we 'discovered' what turned out to be one of the most famous heuriger of all, **Mayer am Pfarrplatz**, in a house that has remained the same since Ludwig von Beethoven lived there in 1817. The Mayer family cultivates grapes on 80 acres. Half the vintage is served in the tavern, the rest sold in bottles. There are several cozy rooms on either side of the garden and we sampled the wine in one that's built around an old wine press, made in 1617 from a single beam of oak and measuring 14 feet high by 30 feet long. There is an ample buffet, a large selection of wine,

and traditional heuriger music.

In the interest of journalism, we also paid a visit to the wine suburb of Grinzing where each evening Vienna-by-Night tour buses reportedly pull up every half hour and tourists drink to the tune of *Deep in the Heart of Texas* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. On a weekday afternoon in October, Grinzing was quiet and rather pretty.

The residents of Vienna have their favorite heuriger, of course, sometimes asking friends to come there for parties, a custom that developed during WWII when entertaining at home was difficult. The hosts invited their guests to join them...and served food they had prepared in their own kitchens.

We have heard that it's still acceptable to bring picnic meals into some heurige but never saw anyone do it and would be reluctant to do so.

There's plenty of information about heuriger on the Internet. Start with the **Vienna Tourist Board** (www.wien.info, 1 Albertinaplatz/corner of Maysedergasse). You can download a brochure with descriptions and contact info for two dozen or so well-known heurige at VTB's business-to-business website. (b2b.wien.info).

Most guidebooks describe and recommend heurige; *Fodor's Austria* is particularly helpful. Ask locals for their suggestions or just head for one of the wine suburbs and explore. The difficulty is not finding, but choosing, a heuriger with good food, wine, and perhaps music.

The new wine, incidentally, becomes 'old' on Martinmas, November 11. One source counsels that switching to the old stuff after a couple of glasses of the un-aged variety reduces the likelihood of a morning hangover.

Which brings us to an important subject. The innocent tasting white wine goes down very easily and we seriously advise traveling by public transportation or taxi so you can relax without having to worry about how to get back to the hotel.

Fortunately many heurige can be reached on Vienna's well-integrated system of subway, rapid transit, tram and bus transportation. A single ticket good for one trip in one direction, including transfers, costs €1.7. Special season tickets are €5.7 for 24 hours unlimited travel and €13.6 for 72 hours travel on the system. The "Vienna Card" is €18.5 and offers 72 hours travel plus discounts at 210 museums and sights, theaters, concerts, shops, restaurants, cafés and heurige. The latter is available at hotels and the Tourist Information Center on Albertinaplatz, at all sales offices or information booths of the Vienna Transportation System (for example, Stephansplatz, Karlsplatz, Westbahnhof, Landstrasse/Wien Mitte) or from outside Austria with a credit card (tel. +43-1-798 44 00-148)

As for the famous heuriger headache, you're on your own.

Weinhof Wieninger, Stammersdorferstrasse 78, Stammersdorf, A-1210 Vienna, tel. 292-4106, www.heuriger-wieninger.at. No credit cards.

Feitzinger, Stammersdorf Strasse 115, A-1210 Vienna, tel. 292 9642.

Mayer am Pfarrplatz (Beethovenhaus), Pfarrplatz 3, Heiligenstadt A-1190 Vienna, tel. 370 33 61, www.pfarrplatz.at ☒

Readers' Forum

Controlling Travel Expenses

We just returned from 30 days in Austria and Germany. The most we paid for a double room with bath with €88 and we booked that online for our first night because of estimated arrival, after 5pm. Took advantage of **Lufthansa's** new direct flight to Frankfurt from Seattle. Paid \$820 each, booking in advance with none other than *Gemütlichkeit's* travel department.

Traveled by train with the Germany-Austria Eurail Pass—10 trips in 30 days. In Austria we visited Klagenfurt, Graz, and Melk, where the Abbey is a must see. It's also a great place for a bike ride up the

Danube. Then to Bayreuth (of Wagner fame), on to Straubing and up to Dagmar's (Kunsthhaus, Blaiistrasse 16, tel. +49/03946/919693, fax 916147,

www.kunsthhausquedlinburg) in Quedlinburg. What a neat spot; interesting half timbered homes, nice *Hauptplatz*, churches, and homey *Frühstück* at Kunsthhaus, making friends with Luna, the resident black lab. Then to Eisenach, Bach's birthplace, also the Luther Haus, where he formulated some of his treatises, and to Worms, one of Germany's oldest towns, and its Dom. Got thirsty so off to Rudesheim and biked the Rhine up to Assmannshausen for lunch at the **Hotel Krone** (early 1500's). It is a little touristy but we found a *Gästatte* right in the town for €60 for double with bath. Finally to Wiesbaden and the **Motel One** (Kaiser-Friedrich-Ring 81, tel. +49/611/450 20 80, www.motel-one.de) around corner from train station for €72—next morning a 30-minute train ride to Frankfurt Flughafen. Great connection.

Again, all accommodations—many were three-star—included breakfast. Most were booked through the tourist office in each town; although sometimes we just walked in and inquired. We had our main meal around noon, usually the daily special at a café then something small after 6pm when restaurants reopened. We found the Pizzerias were a pretty good bargain; good table wine and open more hours.

So, although we got pounded by the exchange (€200 at ATM cost us around \$312 on my bank statement, plus an occasional foreign transaction fee) we had our usual great experience simply being there. We pack smart (one 24" roller each) and hand wash along the way.

BILL AND NANCY WOOD
SAND POINT, ID

Pay Cash, Get Discounts

Your website was a great help in planning a two-week trip last month, e.g., rented the car through

you, stayed at **Old Austria Hotel** in Vienna (a real gem) and at **Hotel Dreieich** (Frankfurter Strasse 49, D-63225 Langen, Tel. +49/06103/9150, fax 5 20 30, hotel-dreieich@gmx.de, www.hotel-dreieich.de).

Here's a tip for your readers: Credit card conversion fee is one to three percent, whereas my bank's ATM fee is a flat \$5 per transaction. I could withdraw \$500 per day (295 euros), therefore an effective 1% fee. However, three of the seven hotels we stayed at gave us 10% discounts for paying in cash, for a savings averaging over \$20 per night. Of those three discounts, one (Dreieich near FRA) was thanks to you, one by referencing Rick Steves, and one simply because I asked. It pays to do your homework, and it never hurts to inquire!

TOM STONEHOUSE
PALM SPRINGS, CA ☒

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

underling who offered an insulting 10,000 frequent flyer miles as compensation. Understand, now that the Joneses had received written ticket confirmation months in advance, and it was only through a chance call to BA that they discovered a problem; otherwise they would have been denied boarding at the gate. Vacation time had been scheduled, hotel bookings made, rail passes purchased, etc. The Joneses laughed at the 10,000 mile offer and settled as follows: Alaska paid for all nonreimbursable out of pocket expenses, put 240,000 miles in their Alaska frequent flyer account—enough for two roundtrip business class tickets on British Air to Zürich from Seattle—and assigned them a senior agent with Alaska's Partner desk to deal with in the future. The 240,000 miles to be used for the April trip were also credited back to their frequent flyer account. The lesson in all this is Alaska's reprehensible low-ball negotiation tactic, something that is no doubt standard operating procedure for all airlines. So, hang in there, stick by your guns, and by all means don't take the first offer.—RHB ☒