

**DEAR
SUBSCRIBER**

What's new in '09

Since that first issue of *Gemütlichkeit* in January, 1987, a number of world crises have had a temporary affect on travel to Europe. Coming immediately to mind are the stock market plunge of October 1987, the first Gulf War, various economic dips, the horrific events of September 11, 2001, and the Iraq war. The current economic calamity, however, is different in that it has touched every person I know, though in some cases it's been a knockout punch to the jaw, not a touch. Eventually, however, the worm will turn; the pendulum can only swing so far and then gravity pulls it in the other direction. Of course, the multi-trillion-dollar question is...when?

All this affects the answer to another question, one I'm more qualified to address: what is new and different about European travel in '09?

- **Currency Exchange:** For one thing a euro currently worth 1.28 dollars will make our costs in Europe a lot lower than in '08 when the euro reached a high of 1.62.

- **Air Fare:** My first reaction to the lowered demand for transatlantic air tickets caused by the current crisis was that it would reduce fares. Supply, however, is also being reduced. Each day seems to bring yet another announcement—mostly from U.S. carriers—of a discontinued flight or route. Bottom line: I don't think we're going to see much difference in air fares this year vs. last.

- **Mobile Phones:** One can now buy a basic cell phone in Europe for less than \$50 and make in-country calls for pennies a minute. Chips with additional calling time are available everywhere. If you travel to another European country purchase a SIM card for that country at a cost of \$10 to \$20. Use the same phone year after year and just buy new chips.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

Allgäuer Cheese Route

Overlooked by most North American travelers, the Allgäu is a region of Alpine peaks, small but historic towns, quiet backroads...and a lot of good cheese.

Germany's Allgäu region is one of the country's most popular tourist destinations. Travelers of all ages flock there for clean air and unspoiled picture-postcard landscapes that make them want to quit their city jobs and move to rural Germany: lush green valleys and high mountain passes; neatly kept farmhouses, their wooden balconies overflowing with pink petunias and red geraniums; snow-capped Alpine peaks reflected in the clear blue waters of cold mountain lakes—all these pastoral pleasures punctuated by the soft clanging of cow bells and the pealing of church bells. Yet the Allgäu almost never feels overcrowded, even during

tourist season.

Located in southern Germany, adjacent to the Austrian border, the Allgäu is an Alpine-and-foothills region that extends across the southwestern tip of Bavaria and into the neighboring state of Baden-Württemberg. Its boundaries range approximately from the towns of **Pfronten** in the east, **Memmingen** in the north, **Wangen** in west, and **Oberstdorf** in the south.

Hiking trails, cycling routes, and ski runs crisscross the land, and the entire region is dotted with health resorts. Although best known for its natural beauty, the Allgäu also has many cultural at-

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Wernigerode in the Harz

Like Germany itself, scenically rugged Harz highlands terrain was split down the middle for four decades prior to 1989's historic reunification, administered by two states: federal Lower Saxony and easterly GDR's Saxony-Anhalt. That twist of geopolitical fate affected the region's three most attractive old towns.

Goslar, crammed full of 1,500-plus half-timbered houses and public buildings, remained *Wessi*. With a comparable number of those *Fachwerk* standouts, Quedlinburg—a UNESCO World Heritage Site, dominated by twin-towered, utterly Romanesque Stiftskirche St. Servatius and its 10th-12th-century church treasury—wound up on the socialist side.

So did Wernigerode (pop. 35,500, municipally chartered in 1229), tucked at 240-meter/787-foot altitude into northern Harz foothills and clustered between the rocky, rushing Holtemme and Zillierbach Rivers. To get there via rental car through the spruce-forested national heartland, figure on 85 km/52.8 miles westward from Magdeburg, or (partially by way of the speedy A-395 Autobahn) 99.5 km/61.5 miles heading south from Wolfsburg, the Volkswagen-founded *Autostadt*.

In town, find your way to the central Marktplatz for a visual jolt. *Pow!* There stands Germany's arguably most fanciful, picturesque town

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Exchange rates as of 2/2/09
1 euro = \$1.28
1 Swiss franc = \$0.86

CHEESE ROUTE*Continued from page 1*

tractions worth visiting, including Baroque churches and cloisters; 39 palaces, castles, and ruins; and more than 80 museums on a wide range of subjects, from fine arts to automobiles, from cheese-making to rural life. Don't miss, for example, the massive cathedral at **Ottobeuren**, outside **Memmingen**. Michelin's *Green Guide for Germany* gives it three stars, "worth a journey."

For a good introduction to this area, begin at the **Schwäbisches Bauernhofmuseum** (Swabian Farm Museum) in the village of **Illerbeuren**, south of Memmingen between the A-7 and A-96 Autobahns. The first open-air museum built in Bavaria (1955), it presents a fascinating view of traditional Swabian farm life during centuries past.

Many of the museum's two dozen buildings are handsome half-timbered structures, some dating from the 17th century, that have been moved to the site from other parts of the region. Inside the farmhouses, barns, and workshops, are interesting exhibits about flax production, dairying, shoe making, beekeeping, and bread baking—with ready explanations supplied by the museum's friendly staff. At the *Töpferei* (pottery workshop) visitors can watch local potters shape, paint, and fire their colorful wares, which are for sale to the public. (A popular item is a large hand-painted ceramic bowl for serving *Käsespätzle*, a regional macaroni-and-cheese-style dish made with Allgäuer cheese.) The museum also schedules special demonstrations and events throughout the year.

The Cheese Route

Following the **Allgäuer Käsestrasse** (Allgäu Cheese Route) is a fun way to focus a trip in this region. You can easily spend several days driving along the narrow winding roads and stopping off at local cheese-makers to taste their products. Southward from **Wangen** you'll find cheese factories, large and small, in many locations, including

Allgäu Basics

Elevation: (Kempten) 675 meters (2,215 ft.)

Visitor Information: *General Allgäu:* Allgäu Marketing GmbH, Allgäuer Strasse 1, 87435 Kempten, tel. +49/8323-8025932, info@allgaeu.de, www.allgaeu.de

Wangen: Tourist-Information Gästamt, Marktplatz 1, 88239 Wangen im Allgäu, tel. +49/7522-74211, tourist@wangen.de, www.wangen.de

Isny: Isny Marketing GmbH, Office for Tourism, Unterer Grabenweg 18, 88316 Isny im Allgäu, tel. +49/7562-975630, fax 9756314, info@isny-tourism.de, www.isny.de

Schwäbisches Bauernhofmuseum Illerbeuren, Museumstrasse 8, 87758 Kronburg-Illerbeuren, tel. +49/8394-1455, fax 1454, info@bauernhofmuseum.de, www.bauernhofmuseum.de

Several local tourist offices provide guided city tours (in English, by prior arrangement).

Driving distances from Kempten:

Berlin	695 km	434 miles
Frankfurt	385 km	241 miles
Garmisch-Part.	101 km	63 miles
Munich	127 km	79 miles
Salzburg	268 km	168 miles
Vienna	560 km	350 miles
Zürich	232 km	145 miles

Location: Southern Germany, near the Austrian border. Extends across the southwestern tip of Bavaria into the neighboring state of Baden-Württemberg. Approximate boundaries are the towns of **Pfronten** and **Kempten** in the east to **Wangen** and **Leutkirch** in the west.

Largest cities: Kempten, population 62,000; Memmingen (northern "Gateway to the Allgäu"), population 41,000.

Transportation: Though the principal towns of the Allgäu, Kempten, Memmingen, and Wangen, are served by rail, the best way to see the countryside is by car. Hiking, biking, and horseback are also popular ways to see this region, and the public transportation network is well developed (especially bus service). Nearest international airport: Munich (two-hours by car); regional airport: Memmingen.

Discounts: Allgäu-Walsler-Card, with several categories, prices, and benefits (public transportation, ski lifts, entry-fee discounts). Check with the tourist office for the card that best suits your needs.

Recommended guidebook: *Allgäuer Sennereiführer (Allgäu Dairy Guide, 2003)*, full-color booklet with a brief introduction on the history and production of Allgäuer cheeses, and detailed descriptions of 25 cheese dairies open to visitors (only in German).

Röthenbach, Grünenbach, Schönan, Lindenberg, Scheidegg, and Oberstaufen, as well as near Wangen itself. Continue eastward to **Immenstadt, Diepolz, and Hindelang**, then northward to **Wertach, Waltenhofen, and Kempten** (the largest city in the region), returning westward to Wangen by way of **Isny**.

Look for little signs that say *Käserei* (cheese factory), *Sennerei* (dairy, sometimes with a cheese factory attached), and **Bergkäse** or **Alpenkäse** (types of Allgäuer cheeses for sale). *Biokäse* signs mean the cheese has been made according to the strict rules that Germany requires for all food products labeled "organic." Cheese-lovers know that these organic cheeses are often the best, with special, subtle flavors.

The walled city of **Wangen** is a pleasant place to stay on the western edge of the Cheese Route. Dating from the 9th century, Wangen is an historic little town filled with attractive buildings from the Romanesque to Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. Many of them have colorfully frescoed facades, as do some of the massive gate towers in the medieval city walls. Much of the *Altstadt* (Old Town) is a cobblestoned pedestrian zone punctuated by 16 gurgling fountains, several of them incorporating modern bronze sculptures erected in the 1980s that depict local legends and personalities (often in a humorous style). The bronze sculpture of St. Antony and his pigs, at the **Saumarkt** (Sow Market Square) is especially charming.

Don't miss the **Städtische Museum**, a complex of eight museums housed in a series of adjoining buildings from the 16th century, with exhibits on painting, printing, mechanical musical instruments, cheese-making, and many facets of Wangen's daily life in the past. When your feet are tired and your stomach is growling, head to the **Gastwirtschaft Fidelisbäck**, where you can sit indoors in the cozy *Stube* or outside in the small beer garden, sipping your favorite brew, eating well-prepared soups and light dish-

es, and sampling a selection of excellent baked goods, including the local bread specialty, *Seele* ("souls").

Power-shoppers will enjoy visiting the several factory outlet stores (clothing, knitwear, shoes, fabrics, chocolates) east of Wangen, along Highway 308 toward Immenstadt, and on Highway 12 between Isny and Kempten. In the village of **Missen**, between these two highways, take the little road uphill to the **Allgäuer Bergbauermuseum** at **Diepolz**, an open-air museum of rural mountain life, with farmhouses, outbuildings, animals, and a very good museum store. The plain white exterior of the adjacent **St. Blasius** in Diepolz belies its beautiful neo-Gothic interior. Be sure to go inside.

Isny, on Highway 12 between Wangen and Kempten, is another medieval walled town with a strong sense of history. Along its narrow streets are handsome gabled houses, some with street-level arcades. Both the Catholic and Protestant churches within the walls are worth a visit, as is **Schloss Isny** and its art gallery of paintings and sculptures. The **Mu-**

Key Websites for the Traveler

- www.gemut.com Gateway site for travelers to Germanic Europe, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, 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 gemut2009.
- maps.google.com Best maps on the web. Driving & walking. Zoom in-out. Great detail city & country. Satellite & terrain views.
- 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 electronics for travelers — cell phones, computers, etc.

seum am Mühlturn has exhibits on the city's history from Roman to modern times, including flax processing, spinning, weaving, and other trades historically important to Isny's economy. Today, the town is a tourist destination, a year-round health resort, and a center for cross-country skiing in winter.

On Thursday mornings, shop at the open-air food market held around Isny's **Marktplatz** (Market Square) for cheeses, honey, and fruit preserves from nearby farms. Before you leave the area, stop by the **Käsküche Isny** (cheese factory and store) on the south edge of town for a delicious selection of locally made organic cheeses and other Allgäuer food products.

Whether you stay in a five-star hotel or a little rural village, at an isolated farmhouse or in one of the historical walled towns, the Allgäu is a good place to relax from the pressures of daily life. You can even arrange to stay at certain farms to learn the process of cheese-making. Remember that in the Allgäu you'll never go wrong if you just smile and say "cheese."

Allgäu Hotels

The Allgäu is a popular tourist region with plenty of hotels, inns, pensions, and vacation apartments to suit every budget. For a closer look at rural life, stay in a traditional Allgäu farmhouse where the owners rent out rooms at reasonable prices. (Stay more than one night and the rate is usually even lower.) Look for small signs that say *Zimmer* (room) near the road or posted on the farms themselves, or contact the local tourist offices (contact info on page four) for a list of accommodations in the areas you plan to visit.

Hotel Hohe Linde Isny

The elegant lobby and public areas of this modern, family-run hotel on the outskirts of Isny are a welcoming introduction to the 34 contemporary-style rooms, many of which have balconies overlooking the beautifully land-

scaped garden. Swim year round in the large indoor pool, and relax outdoors on the garden terrace in nice weather.

Room sizes vary, from smaller singles to Number 16, a large corner suite with warm wood paneling, a sitting area, tiled bath and plenty of closet space. The four-person suite is even larger, with two bathrooms and a sitting room. Some rooms have small refrigerators; a well-stocked minibar near the lobby is available to all guests.

Members of the friendly Rimmelmele family serve their guests from the reception desk to the dining room of the Allgäuer Stuben, the fine restaurant within the hotel (see restaurant reviews). A generous breakfast buffet is arrayed in an attractive room facing the garden, with white linens and fresh flowers. Plenty of free parking space is available in front of the hotel. Bicycles can be rented for €10/day, and the Hohe Linde also offers special packages that include room, gourmet meals, and activities such as skiing and horseback riding.

Daily Rates: Singles €59-69, doubles €98-112, suites (two-four persons) €118-180. Parking included.

Contact: Hotel Hohe Linde, Lindauer Strasse 75, 88316, Isny im Allgäu, tel. +49/7562-97597, fax 975969, info@hohe-linde.de, www.hohe-linde.de

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 17/20

Hotel Bären Isny

On the main street leading to the town center, just outside one of Isny's medieval city gates, the small, family-run Bären occupies a 400-year-old building. Steep stairs (no elevator) lead to 14 large, cheerful, modern rooms (nine doubles, five singles), all with bath and shower. The plentiful breakfast buffet is served in the hotel's cozy restaurant, which also offers reasonably priced meals featuring local specialties. Limited parking on one side of the hotel. Friendly staff.

Daily Rates: Singles €42, doubles €68.

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

Contact: Hotel-Restaurant Bären, Obertorstrasse 9, 88316, Isny im Allgäu, tel. +49/7562-2420, fax 2415, info@baeren-isny.de, www.baeren-isny.de

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Blaue Traube Wangen

In a 17th-century building within the city walls, the Blaue Traube is a small, completely modern, family-run hotel. Each of its 12 large rooms (nine doubles, three singles) was renovated last year with contemporary furnishings and *en suite* toilet and shower.

Room Number 31 is one of two extra-large doubles, with exposed wooden beams, a comfortable sitting area, and a small balcony overlooking the tiled roofs of the Old Town. Some special "non-allergenic rooms" have parquet floors instead of carpeting and no goose down in the pillows and bed coverings.

If you plan to base in this area for at least six days, consider the comfortable *Ferienwohnung* (vacation apartment) in the modern annex behind the hotel. It features a large, attractively furnished, pine-paneled living room, full kitchen, and two bedrooms which can accommodate a family of four or two couples.

The small breakfast buffet is served in a sunny, modern room, and the hotel's restaurant is definitely recommended (see restaurant reviews). Limited free parking with advance reservations. Very friendly staff.

Daily Rates: Singles €52-75, standard doubles €80-98, extra-large doubles €110, vacation apartment €58 for two people (€13 extra for additional persons)

Contact: Hotel Blaue Traube, Zunftausgasse 10, 88239 Wangen im Allgäu, tel. +49/7522-6627, fax 6620, blaue.traube@t-online.de

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 12/20

Brauerei-Gasthof Schöfflerbräu Missen

For those who seek the quiet of a country village, away from the bustle of larger towns, the Schöfflerbräu is a good headquarters for exploring

ALLGÄUER CHEESE

With so many contented brown cows grazing in the Allgäu's green meadows, it's easy to see why this is such an important cheese-making area. Cheese has been produced in Germany since the Celtic era more than 2,000 years ago. Historical records show that in the Allgäu region, cheese was being made in monasteries during the Middle Ages, as well as by individual farmers for their own household use. But commercial cheese production did not begin in the Allgäu until the early 1820s, when experts from Switzerland were brought in to begin making the **Emmentaler** and similar types of firm cheeses for which the Allgäu is famous today.

By the late 19th century, dairy farming and cheese-making had become the most important agricultural industries in the Allgäu, supplanting flax growing and linen weaving of earlier times. During the 1800s several types of cheese became characteristic of this region, including **Limburger** and **Romadur** types that were originally introduced to the Allgäu from Belgium in the 1830s.

Dozens of different cheeses—firm, semi-soft, and soft—are now made in the Allgäu, primarily from cows' milk but also from that of sheep and goats. One of the most flavorful is **Bergkäse (Alpenkäse, Almkäse)**, made during the summer from the raw milk of cows that have grazed on the tender meadow grasses, herbs, and wildflowers of high Alpine passes. The small geographic region now produces one-third of all the cheese made in Germany.—Sharon Hudgins

this part of the Allgäu. Decorated in traditional Alpine style, this family-owned business has been an inn and tavern since 1468 and a private brewery since 1868.

Above the large downstairs dining areas, the hotel has six large modernized rooms with private toilet and shower. Each can be rented as a single or a double. (Six more lower-priced rooms share a toilet and shower on the same floor.) Staying at the Schöfflerbräu is like being a guest in a big Bavarian farmhouse with a good restaurant downstairs (see restaurant reviews), an excellent brewery on the premises, and a beer garden outside.

The hearty breakfast buffet is served in the one of the cozy dining rooms and features local Allgäuer cheeses, fresh Alpine butter, and several kinds of homemade jams. Free parking in the large lot by the hotel. Friendly staff.

Daily Rates: Singles €26-39, doubles €64-68, plus six additional rooms with shared toilet and shower €22 per person

Contact: Brauerei-Gasthof Schäf-

flerbräu, Hauptstrasse 15, 87547 Misen-Wilhams, tel. +49/8320-92015, fax 92016, info@schaeffler-braeu.de, www.schaeffler-braeu.de

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Adler Bad Wurzach

Though it offers excellent value at less than €80 for a double room, the Hotel Adler's main attraction is obviously its sleek, wood-paneled, halogen-lit dining room with snowy tablecloths and gleaming crystal. Michelin bestows Bib Gourmand status ("good food at moderate prices") upon its kitchen. Read our review on page six.

Our double room was €78 and the dinner, without beverages, €45, for a total of about \$160 for two.

Though the room was in need of new carpeting and there is no elevator, the Adler's accommodations are more than adequate.

Bad Wurzach is best reached by car as the nearest rail station is 20 minutes by bus. The Adler is on the main square.

Daily Rates: Singles €47, doubles €78 Discounts for longer stays and weekends.

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

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 15/20

Allgäu Restaurants

The Allgäu offers a wide range of good places to eat, from cozy little *Gasthöfe* serving traditional Swabian or Bavarian cuisine to upscale restaurants with good ratings in gourmet guides. Local specialties include many varieties of Swabian *Maultaschen*, large ravioli-like squares of pasta with a meat, spinach, or cheese filling, and *Allgäuer Käsespätzle*, little flour-and-egg dumplings boiled in water, then mixed with grated local cheeses and garnished with browned onions. Allgäu cheeses turn up as an ingredient in many dishes and on cheese platters at the end of a meal.

Restaurant Adler Bad Wurzach

Though a nearby table of 30-something French speakers were turning up their noses and sending back dishes, everything that came our way testified to careful, creative preparation of fresh, quality ingredients. Triangles of tasty baked *Saibling* (a kind of lake trout) rested on a bed of house-made noodles with leeks. An intensely flavorful reduction sauce raised the stakes on a juicy pork chop *Iberico* (imported from the Iberian peninsula), and a side of creamy polenta was swirled with bits of truffle. Main dishes range from about €14 to €17. A crisp mixed salad cost a mere €3.8 and a half-liter of local Spätburgunder was €9. A shared boat of vanilla ice cream came generously doused with a lovely hot, sweet/sour raspberry sauce.

This outstanding yet affordable restaurant well deserves Michelin's Bib Gourmand designation.

Contact: See Hotel Adler, page five.
Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurant Allgäuer Stuben *Isny*

The Hotel Hohe Linde's Allgäuer Stuben serves fine meals at moderate prices in an elegant setting. Award-winning chef Karl-Heinz Rimmel focuses on fresh regional and seasonal ingredients, well-prepared and presented with style.

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

Freshly made soups (€3.80-6.80) include tomato cream soup with basil and gin. Salads with meat or filled pasta toppings are large enough to eat as a main course (€10.80-16.50). Some of the fish dishes exhibit a Mediterranean or Asian flair (€16.50-21.70), and main meat dishes, such as pork medallions in cream sauce, or Provencal-style lamb cutlets, are cooked to perfection (€16.80-21).

Regional specialties include the chef's own take on classic *Maultaschen* (€9.80), *Käsespätzle* (€7.60), and apple pancake with raisins (€6.50)—all as beautifully presented as the higher-priced dishes. The wine list offers exceptionally good values for a restaurant of this level, with high-quality local whites (€4.80-6.50 for a 1/4-liter glass) and reds (€5.40-6 per glass).

Contact: Hotel Hohe Linde, page four
Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 17/20

Gasthof Schöfflerbräu *Missen*

Sample traditional Allgäuer fare in the Schöfflerbräu's *gemütlich* setting. The award-winning kitchen turns out fine examples of such dishes as crusty pork roast in caraway-seasoned dark beer sauce, with housemade dumplings (€8.90); *Allgäuer Kässchnitzel*, pork cutlets stuffed with ham and cheese (€9.80); venison ragout with dumplings and cranberry sauce (€12.90); and other wild game dishes with noodles (most are about €16). Several items on the extensive menu are listed with a "Land Zunge" logo, indicating that they're made with the best local Allgäu ingredients.

All the beer is fresh from the family's brewery next door. Once a

month the restaurant hosts a "Sudabend" where customers can watch beer being made in the Guinness-record-setting "smallest portable brewery in the world," a shiny copper contraption next to the bar. Afterward, guests can drink the previous month's brew, and on some evenings live music is provided.

Contact: See Gasthof Schöfflerbräu, page five

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

Museumsgasthaus Gromerhof *Illerbeuren*

This popular *Gasthaus* in an historic half-timbered building at the edge of the Schwäbisches Bauernhofmuseum offers a lengthy menu of traditional Swabian dishes. The list includes *Allgäuer Hochzeitssuppe*, a meaty wedding-feast soup (€4.30); *Allgäuer Zwiebelrostbraten*, roast beef with onions and little *Spätzle* dumplings (€14.80); *Kässpätzle* with Allgäu cheese, served in an iron skillet (€8.20 for a huge portion that can easily be shared by two people), and a tempting array of cakes and tortes.

Eat indoors in the woody, well-decorated dining rooms or outside in the beer garden under the shade of chestnut trees. Entry to the restaurant is outside the museum entrance, so you don't have to buy a museum ticket to eat there.

Contact: Museumsgasthaus Gromerhof, Museumstrasse 4, 87758 Illerbeuren, tel. +49/8394-594, fax 1470, gromerhof@t-online.de, www.gromerhof.de

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurant Blaue Traube *Wangen*

Chef-owner Franz Kresser serves hearty dishes typical of the region in his ground floor restaurant in the Hotel Blaue Traube. The menu offers a large selection of succulent main dishes made from pork, beef, and veal (€12.30-17.80); fresh fish from the nearby Bodensee (€13.80); six kinds of traditional Swabian specialties

(€6.50-8.50); and a dessert “from grandmother’s cookbook,” apple-*Spätzle* with cinnamon-toasted hazelnuts, vanilla ice cream, and whipped cream (€4.90). Several good regional wines are priced at €3.90-4.80 for a 1/4-liter glass, and oenophiles can inquire about wine-tasting in the owner’s cellar.


Contact: See Hotel Blaue Traube, page five

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 15/20

Gasthaus zum Lamm Wangen

The Lamm is the kind of welcoming, centrally-located, wood-paneled Gasthaus where locals go to eat well-prepared traditional Schwabian dishes in an atmosphere of cozy camaraderie. The Allgäu cheese soup warms on a cold day (€4), and the *Brotzeit* platters, including sausage salads and fried Camembert cheese, are good “light” meals that go well with wine or beer. Many main meat dishes (€10.50-15) are served with housemade *Spätzle* on the side, and a single portion of the delicious *Käsespätzle* is so large that it’s a challenge for one person. Family-owned and operated, with a friendly staff.

Contact: Gasthaus zum Lamm, Bindstrasse 60, 88239 Wangen im Allgäu, tel. +49/7522-6675, fax 3507, christberger-lamm@t-online.de, www.lamm-wangen.de

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 12/20 

WERNIGERODE

Continued from page 1

hall. Let’s call it fairy-tale Gothic, the kind of Old World *Rathaus* you’d imagine as a *Hansel and Gretel* or *Little Red Riding Hood* backdrop. Dating from 1544, this bell-towered wonder is fronted by a matched pair of bay-windowed, flower-boxed pinnacles that narrow to pointy spires resembling witches’ hats. Look closely to discover dragon-head rain spouts at sharp-angled roof edges. Wooden images of medieval guild merchants poke their noses out from beneath the eaves.

Tear yourself away, because there’s more to see within compact, walkable, in-town dimensions. Focus on **Breite Strasse**, lined with tilting housefronts. Inscriptions and symbols carved onto crossbeams keep evil spirits out and good fortune in—a regional superstition. A sculpted horse’s head marks the **Krell’sche Schmiede** blacksmith’s shop, at #95 since 1678. Erected four years earlier, the residence at #72 shouts for attention with its complete top-to-bottom splurge of Baroque ornamentation. To take a *Kaffee* break, you’ll have no trouble spotting Breite Strasse #4’s colorfully painted, cutely decorated, **Café Wien**, opened in 1583. Choose weather-dependent indoor or street-side table service; think about treating yourself to a thick slice of *Baumkuchen* layer cake.

Cross a few narrow streets to reach 13 Oberfarrkirchhof: the extra-big 15th-century **Gadenstedthaus**, sporting a peaked-roof balcony. Then, for contrast, turn to nearby Kochstrasse, where Wernigerode’s tiniest dwelling contains merely eight square meters of living space, entered by a 1.7-meter mini-front door. Visitors seeking “collectibles” take note: the town has become well-known for its workshops producing creatively designed porcelain items and artisan glassware.

So what could more fittingly complete this evocative scene than a hill-top castle? Sure enough, neo-Gothic **Schloss Wernigerode**, Count Otto zu Stolberg’s legacy, covers the Agnesberg heights, looming above east-side treetops. The triple-turreted, period-furnished behemoth—on 10th-century foundations, dramatically floodlighted at night—includes a museum that backtracks through feudal Harz history (€4.50 admittance).

Departing from the dinky little Westerntor *Bahnhof*, the steam-powered **HSB Harzquerbahn** travels on narrow-gauge tracks for day trips into the Hochharz National Park’s undulating landscape. The train chugs through tunnels and provides glimpses of waterfalls, gorges, lime-

stone caves, granite escarpments and Bode Valley woodland glens dappled with white anemone blossoms (blink twice and you’re deep inside *Little Red Riding Hood*’s enchanted forest!).

Although the century-old rail line extends all the way south to Nordhausen for a three-hour excursion, its most-traveled branch amounts to 17 km/10.5 miles. Destination, from Wernigerode via Drei Annen Hohne: the **Brocken**, unmissable at 1,142-meter/3,747 ft.—high-enough altitude for use as a former Big Brother listening post and radio-transmitting promontory, encircled by electrified barbed wire, lookout perches and other such GDR-maintained “protective measures.” Off-limits throughout the Cold War years, mountain-summit access was resumed in 1992. Pertinent displays, artifacts and Harz natural-history dioramas fill Brockenhaus museum galleries, open daily year-round (www.brockenhaus.de).

A different kind of spookiness pervades the place during annual April 30th/May 1st **Walpurgisnacht**, as conceived by Goethe in an episode of *Faust*. That’s the evening when a fog-bound Brocken plateau becomes the Hexentanzplatz—illuminated by bonfires to reveal present-day, make-believe witches absorbed in pagan revels, with broomsticks ready for takeoff.

Contacts: Wernigerode Tourismus GmbH, Marktplatz 10, 38855 Wernigerode, tel +49/03943/553/7835, fax 553/7899, email: info@wernigerode-tourismus.de, Web:

www.wernigerode-tourismus.de.

Harz Mountains Tourist Board, Markstrasse 45, 38640 Goslar, tel 5321/340/40, fax 340/466,

www.harzinfo.de.

Harzquerbahn railroad history,

route, timetables: log onto

www.hsb-wr.de

Four-Star Standouts

A pair of wood-framed *Fachwerk* beauties are ideally situated on the market square, with straight-ahead views of Wernigerode’s irresistible

Rathaus. Jörg Wieland's family runs the 49-room, spotlessly clean **Weisser Hirsch**, built 1539-44, nicely outfitted with sauna, restaurant and *gemütlich* outdoor café (serving locally brewed Hasseröder pils beer), plus an underground parking garage. Singles €79-95, doubles €115-149.

Contact: Hotel Weisser Hirsch, Marktplatz 5, 38855, Wernigerode, tel +49/03943/324/345, fax 331/29, info@hotel-weisser-hirsch.de, www.hotel-weisser-hirsch.de.

A bit more upscale and dressy, the 116-room **Gothisches Haus** is imbued with a 15th-century pedigree, features the gourmet-caliber Bohlenstube restaurant as well as an historic *Weinkeller* and welcomes guests to deluxe spa facilities. Singles from €89, doubles from €118.

Contact: Hotel Gothisches Haus, Am Marktplatz, 38855 Wernigerode, tel +49/03943/3750, fax 3755/37, gothisches-haus@travelcharme.com, www.travelcharme.de.

Overnighting in the National Park


Across from the railroad station in Drei Annen Hohne, the three-star, 40-room **Der Kräuterhof** features a big-windowed, painted-ceilinged dining room, also sauna, solarium and direct access to hiking trails. Singles €47, doubles from €75.

Contact: Der Kräuterhof, 38875 Drei Annen Hohne 104, tel +49/0394/55/840, fax 841/99, rezeption@hotelkraeuterhof.de, www.hotelkraeuterhof.de.

Food in Wernigerode

Ample choices despite the town's relatively small size. Best for Harz culinary specialties and woodsy atmospherics: **Hexen-Kessel**, Breite Strasse 15, tel +49/03943/634/314. Also **Schlieper's**, Burgstrasse 7, tel +49/03943/632/179, and **Altweineröder Kartoffelhaus**, Marktstrasse 14, tel +49/03943/949/290.

In addition to the foregoing, several *Kaffeehaus* establishments are appealing. An outdoor table at **Dieker**, Marktplatz 6-8, treats patrons to picture-perfect views of the Rathaus. Charming, too: **Louisen-Café**, Breite

Strasse 92, and **Kummelsches Haus**, Breite Strasse 72. 

Readers' Forum

Flights, Accommodations

Last fall I flew **Lufthansa** from San Francisco to Munich and from Frankfurt back to San Francisco on **United**, all in business class. The Lufthansa flight was very nice, good food, good service, and the new ergonomic seats in the intermediate couch position are actually better for sleeping than in the "lie flat" position.

The United return flight, however, was on an older plane with older business seats, but not too uncomfortable since, in accord with "The Jet Lag Diet," I do not sleep westbound. Service was nothing to rave about, the food pedestrian at best, and the entertainment limited to very bland child-friendly movies and a few video clips.

As you have observed, business travel was absolutely dead. Only a handful of travelers occupied the Star Alliance lounges in Munich and Frankfurt midweek, midday.

Priceline.com was a good choice for a Munich hotel. On two-days notice I booked the **Munich Marriott** (North) for \$65. It is a four-star hotel and the room, bath, linens, etc. were all of high quality. The location is almost perfect, particularly if driving, since it is only a block off the Petuelring, close to the Nürnberg-Munich Autobahn, near BMW Welt, and about two blocks or so from the U-Bahn. On-street parking is possible, avoiding the €24 a day parking fee typical in Munich hotels. Munich itself is still booming and full of travelers and locals crowding Marienplatz and the better restaurants.

We rented a very nice two bedroom condo in Lierna, (Italy/Lake Como) just south of Varenna for four days for about €120 a day from Stephanie.Weidlich@labreva.com. The condo was "Tulipino".

Otherwise we found very nice accommodations through the local tourist bureaus in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Schenna (above Meran), Kitzbühl and St. Ulrich.

Very nice three-star luxury suites with breakfast and five-course dinners were €60 to 100 per person, but these accommodations would beat any US five-star location any time. For pre-planning, the tourist offices in any of these places will send you a catalog that displays all their hotels, apartments and B&B's with web sites and phone numbers for each. At the economy end, we rented a few vacation apartments for about €60-70 a day. Several of the hotels now offer room with breakfast but include in the price a buffet in the afternoon that would suffice for dinner for light eaters.

All in all this is a great time to travel to Europe.

DONOVAN LEYDEN
VIA EMAIL

VAT Refund Problems

We returned from three weeks in Germany and Austria with of course many wonderful purchases. This was the first time in all our years of traveling that I asked for duty free paperwork.

Imagine our surprise when we got to the airport to turn in our "Duty Free" receipts to find out that we needed to present our purchases (which were already in our checked suitcases) in order to get our tax money back.

What a rip off! Nobody told us it wasn't enough to have the paperwork and receipts but that we actually needed to show the purchases.

Another thing that could have put a damper on our trip was when we went through customs in Detroit. The customs officer asked what candy we were bringing into the country "Kinderreggs?" On this particular trip I didn't purchase any but have on many other occasions and nobody ever questioned me.

When I asked why he asked I was told "they are illegal and I'd have to confiscate them."

Maybe you could put the word out to other travelers.

DEBBY RIPLINGER
GAINESVILLE, VA 