

Dear Subscriber

Booking the Right Hotels

A question on a reader survey once asked which elements of a European vacation were of greatest concern; sightseeing, destinations, restaurants, ground transport, entertainment, language issues, lodging, etc. By a wide margin, responders were most interested in where they slept. Rightly so, perhaps. We spend more time in hotels than gawking at sights, eating, or getting from place to place. A couple of bad hotel experiences can ruin a trip. The way to avoid them is to know—as much as possible—what you are getting into. Hotel brochures and websites can be misleading. Ideally, of course, one would like to personally inspect a hotel before committing to stay. That's possible when traveling in the countryside without reservations, but often it's not and for the most part we must rely on sources other than our own eyeballs.

Price being a vital consideration, it is not comforting to know that the rate for a specific hotel room can vary widely, depending on how and where it is booked. The classic example is the four-star Zürich hotel whose rack rate is CHF 450 but which can sometimes be booked for \$79 via a Priceline bid. Though that's an extreme example, these days many hotels allow their published rates to be heavily discounted by online travel agencies. To disguise that practice, hotels are moving away from a published rate structure toward a case by case quoting system which allows demand to drive prices.

So how does one go about getting a good hotel at a good price?

Roll the dice: For hotels in large European cities, one should consider the “opaque” online sellers, Priceline.com and Hotwire.com. The major chains such as **Marriott**, **Hilton** and **Intercontinental** abhor empty rooms and are thus often willing to drasti-

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria & Switzerland

INNSBRUCK

Innsbruck's North American name recognition comes mainly from its TV exposure during the 1964 and 1976 Winter Olympics. These days the historic town's spruced-up attractions offer enough to keep the visitor occupied for at least a couple of days

Capital of the Austrian state of Tyrol, Innsbruck is located in the Inn river valley, from which it gets its name: “bridge over the Inn”—Innsbruck. Archeological finds have turned up traces of settlements on this strategic spot from the Stone Age to the Roman era. For centuries the town has been a major way station on the important transportation, communication, and trade routes between northern and southern Europe, deriving much of its wealth during the Middle Ages from transit tolls and customs fees collected at this key geographic point.

Pottery Villages of Alsace

The French region of Alsace, just across the Rhine River from Germany's Baden-Württemberg region, is a favorite day-trip destination for travelers from Germany. Strasbourg, the Alsatian capital and a major cultural center, is located only a couple of miles from the French-German border. But Alsace has many other attractions, too, from its picturesque 106-mile Wine Route along the western foothills of the Vosges Mountains [see the June 2010 issue of *Gemütlichkeit*], to the charming villages of half-timbered houses that dot the Rhine Plain in the east.

Two of those villages are especially well known for their handmade pottery: **Soufflenheim** and **Betschdorf**, both of which are located just a few

Heavily bombed during World War II, Innsbruck has rebuilt its handsome Gothic-arcaded city center and turned the once heavily-trafficked streets into a pleasant pedestrian zone. It's fun to wander the cobblestone lanes of the *Altstadt* admiring the ornately painted-and-stuccoed Baroque buildings. At the T-intersection of the old town's two main streets, the **Golden Roof** building is Innsbruck's most famous landmark, a favorite rendezvous spot for both locals and tourists (www.goldenes-dachl.at). The tall, narrow building, constructed in honor of Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519), features an intricately carved balcony with a roof covered in 2,657 gold-plated shingles that glimmer in the sunlight. Streets in the area are crammed with souvenir shops, but on the back streets you'll

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miles north of Strasbourg, near the Forest of Haguenau and the Rhine River border. Archeological digs in the area have uncovered pottery dating from the Bronze Age. During the 19th century, 30 towns in the region had potteries, but today only Soufflenheim and Betschdorf still carry on the craft of shaping, decorating, and baking ceramics by hand.

Although they're located only seven miles apart, the character of these two villages and the pottery they produce are very different. In both towns, pottery workshops and small stores cluster along the main

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Exchange rates as of 5/15/12

1 euro = \$1.27

Swiss franc = \$1.06

1 gal. diesel, Germany = \$6.85

DEAR SUBSCRIBER*Continued from page 1*

cally reduce rates as long as their rooms are sold via the opaque sellers' hush-hush marketing model. Though you won't know what hotel you'll get until you've made a non-refundable booking, you can specify location and quality level. It is a fairly safe assumption that a four-star hotel in Vienna, Munich, Zürich, Berlin, etc. will not be a dump. Before making a Priceline bid, get a sense of what you might have to pay at Biddingfortravel.com. Though there's no bidding at Howire, your hotel's name is not revealed until a non-refundable booking has been made.

Michelin Red Guides for Hotels & Restaurants: These wonderfully useful books are especially valuable at identifying good, moderately priced hotels—especially in the countryside. Pay particular attention to the blue "Bib Hotel" icon of the Michelin Man's head on a pillow. In this way Michelin identifies the cream of the crop of inexpensive hotels. Other establishments with special qualities of charm, comfort, service and welcome are noted in red and can be relied upon for their quality without respect to category—from small, family-run inns to five-star luxury.

Tourist Offices: For those who relish the flexibility of traveling without reservations, small-town tourist offices are a reliable source of same-day hotel bookings. Visit the tourist office as soon as you arrive in town and they can make recommendations based on your needs and price category. Often

they can make a booking or arrange for you to inspect two or three hotels before making a final decision.

Gemut.com: Based on reliability, rates, hotel inventory, and ease of booking, we chose to affiliate with Holland-based Booking.com. They pay us a very small commission for bookings made via our website. In eight years of this alliance we have yet to receive a single customer complaint. The process is simple: go to Gemut.com. At the upper left corner of the main page enter your destination city and dates, then click "Search." Browse the hotels offered and book when ready. Each hotel is presented with multiple photos, comprehensive information on available services and location, as well as user ratings. The database offers 1,361 hotels in Paris, 1,595 in Rome, 856 in Berlin, 473 in Vienna and tens of thousands of others spread over virtually every other European city. Competitive prices? Here are two examples: For a three-night Berlin stay starting June 1, the user is given 652 available choices. The splendid, five-star **Ritz Carlton** is \$260 per night. The price at the hotel's website is €205 (\$261). The *Gemütlichkeit*-recommended **Domus** can be booked for \$77 per night, non-refundable. The quote at the Domus website is €63.47 (\$84).

When it comes to the countryside, many hotel booking websites offer scant choice. Search Orbitz.com for a hotel in charming, off-the-beaten-track Steyr, Austria, and you come up empty. Gemut.com/Booking.com, however, offers 35 choices. One of them is our recommended **Gasthof Pöchhacker**.

The three-night price is \$279. At Pöchhacker's own website the price is €216 or about \$285.

In addition to online hotel booking at our website, the visitor can access hundreds of hotel reviews published in *Gemütlichkeit* over the years. Some prices may not be current, but most of the evaluations still stand.

Final thoughts: Choose hotels using a combination of *Gemütlichkeit*, Gemut.com, *Michelin Red Guides*, the recommendations of trusted friends, and perhaps websites such as TripAdvisor. Be wary of web forums, however, as your idea of a good hotel may be at wide variance from the polyglot demographic of a website that includes all nationalities and pocketbooks.

When it's time to book specific hotels, price-check your sources: Gemut.com, Priceline, Hotwire, other online travel sellers, and the hotel itself. Reserve with a credit card—never cash—and know the hotel's cancellation policy. —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".

Back Issues Website

Many back issues are available free to subscribers at www.gemut.com. To access the issues, enter the password published in this space each month. Go to <http://www.gemut.com/csub.html>

Password: **pott**

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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

INNSBRUCK

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still find the "normal" shops where Innsbruckers shop daily. And even jaded tourists will enjoy visiting the shop called "**Christmas & Easter in Innsbruck**" (Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse 30), jam-packed with thousands of real eggs hand-painted as ornaments for Christmas, Easter, and other holidays.

Just outside the compact *Altstadt*, beyond where the city's medieval walls once stood, the wide, fashionable **Maria-Theresien-Strasse** is Innsbruck's main shopping street, leading past trendy cafes, galleries, boutiques, and a glitzy mall to the monumental **Triumphal Arch**. Erected in 1765, it commemorates both the marriage of Leopold II, son of the Habsburg Empress Maria-Theresa, and the death of her husband, Emperor Francis I, shortly after the wedding festivities in Innsbruck.

To delve deeper into Innsbruck's history, visit the local museums that make it Austria's most important museum city outside of Vienna. Start with the commemorative **Tomb of Maximilian I** at the **Hofkirche** (Court Church) in the heart of the *Altstadt*—even though Max's remains are not actually buried there (www.hofkirche.at). A recently-opened multi-media presentation prepares visitors by cleverly portraying Maximilian in the context of his times, then leads the viewer, literally and figuratively, into the church to see the sarcophagus itself. The largest imperial cenotaph in the world, the elaborately carved marble tomb is surrounded by 28 larger-than-life-size bronze statues of Maximilian's family members. Each is an individual work of art. Impressive.

Within the same complex of imperial buildings, the **Museum of Tyrolean Folk Art** (www.tiroler-volkskunstmuseum.at) displays fascinating exhibits of wood-paneled farmhouse interiors, handmade furniture and other local crafts, traditional costumes, religious folk art, and Alpine Nativity scenes. Hikers and climbers will enjoy the **Museum of the Alpine Club** (<http://www.alpenverein.at/leiden>)

Innsbruck Basics

Population: 135,000

Elevation: 575 meters (1886 feet)

Visitor information: Innsbruck Tourismus, Burggraben 3, A-6020 Innsbruck, tel. +43/(0)512-5985-0148, fax +43/(0)512-5985-0107, office@innsbruck.info www.innsbruck.info.

Driving distances:

Bolzano	119 km/74 mi
Munich	166 km/103 mi
Zürich	278 km/173 mi
Vienna	478 km/297 mi

Nearest airports:

Innsbruck, 5 km/3 mi; Munich, 203 km/126 mi; Zürich, 292 km/181 mi

Rail connections: The main station, **Hauptbahnhof** is located at **Südtiroler Platz** and offers direct service to Salzburg in about two hours, Munich in less than three hours, Zürich in 3.5 hours, and Venice, in approximately six hours.

Public transportation: An excellent network of trams and buses. A ticket valid for 24 hours within Innsbruck is €4.30. www.ivb.at

[schaft/](#)). Also open are 25 rooms of the **Imperial Palace** itself (www.hofburg-innsbruck.at) and the nearby **Imperial Garden** (www.bundesgaerten.at), as well as the 18th-century baroque **Cathedral of St. James**.

Innsbruck offers many other museums to suit a variety of interests: the **Bell Museum**, at the **Grassmayr Bell Foundry**, a 400-year-old family business where visitors learn about the entire process of bell-casting (www.grassmayr.at); the impressive **Tyrolean Provincial Museum Ferdinandeum**, with its extensive collections pertaining to the archeology, history, art, music, and natural sciences of the region; and the **Museum at the Zeughaus**, once the weapons arsenal of Emperor Maximilian I and now a museum of Tyrol's cultural history (www.tiroler-landesmuseen.at).

Explore beyond the city, too, because Innsbruck has many worthwhile sights outside the center, not the least of which are the dramatic mountains that surround it. Definitely buy a one-, two-, or three-day **Innsbruck Card**

for free rides on all public transportation. It also includes one round-trip on any of the cable cars, funiculars, or ski lifts in the region; free travel on the Sightseer Bus and on public transport to nearby towns; and free entry to all museums and other tourist attractions, including the popular **Swarovski Crystal Worlds** (kristallwelten.swarovski.com/Content.Node/homepage.php) in Wattens, 15 kilometers (9 miles) from Innsbruck, Austria's second most-visited museum after the **Schönbrunn Palace** in Vienna (www.innsbruck.info/en/experience/innsbruck-card.html).

Use your Innsbruck Card to take a bus to the new, ultra-modern **Tyrolean Panorama Museum**, a massive 360° painted-and-three-dimensional depiction of an important battle just outside of Innsbruck in 1809, and an *homage* to the Tyrolean rebellion leader, Andreas Hofer (www.tiroler-landesmuseen.at/html.php/de/das_tiropanorama). Farther along the same road by bus, visit **Schloss Ambras**, with its armory, painted halls, and unique "Chamber of Arts and Curiosities" (www.khm.at/ambras).

Take the new **Nordketten funicular and cable car system** from the Congress Hall in the city center up to the highest station at **Hafelekarspitze-Seegrube**, 2,256 meters (nearly 7,500 feet) above sea level for spectacular views over the city and surrounding Alps (www.nordkette.com). Along the way, stop at the **Alpine Zoo**, Europe's highest, with 150 species of animals from across the Alpine region (www.alpenzoo.at).

Innsbruck is a summer and winter sports paradise, with many opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, bobsledding, tobogganing, and cross-country and downhill skiing. Every day from June until October, the **Innsbruck Mountain Hiking Program** offers free guided hikes led by experienced mountain guides, including special sunrise hikes and lantern-lit walks with music (www.innsbruck.info).

Restaurants

All that activity is bound to make one hungry. As a major tourist center, Innsbruck has plenty of restaurants

catering to the *Schnitzel*-pizza-and-beer crowd. But Innsbruck cuisine offers much more than that. Two of the town's finer new restaurants, with cuisine to match their modern decor, are **Lichtblick** (Maria-Theresien-Strasse 18, www.restaurant-lichtblick.at), on the seventh floor of the chic Rathausgalerie shopping center, with great views over the city; and **Das Schindler** (Maria-Theresien-Strasse 31, www.dasschindler.at), known for its especially good breakfasts. Many visitors like the combination of Old World ambience and traditional Tyrolean cuisine at the **Restaurant Goldener Adler**, in the hotel of the same name (Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse 6, www.goldeneradler.com).

Eat surprising well on a budget at **Meraner Mittagstisch** (Maria-Theresien-Strasse 5, first floor), which serves a large, well-prepared, all-you-can-eat buffet lunch from 11am to 2pm for only €7.90. Or head over to Innsbruck's nearby **Markthalle**, (Herzog-Siegmond-Ufer 1, www.markthalle-innsbruck.at/index.php), an indoor market hall with small shops and food stalls selling meats, cheeses,

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 gemut2010.
- maps.google.com Amazing map resource. 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.
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- www.ski-europe.com Top Web resource for skiers with much info 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.

fish, fruits, vegetables, olives, organic breads, pastries, coffee, wine, and beer. Eat there or purchase food for a picnic along the river or in the shady Imperial Garden. The Markthalle is also the best place to buy the regional specialty, *Tiroler Speck*, ham cured in salt, then cold-smoked over wood and aged for several months. The prices at the Markthalle are considerably lower than those at *Altstadt* specialty shops.

Finally, treat yourself to coffee and dessert in the *Altstadt* at **Cafe-Konditorei Munding**. Tyrol's oldest coffee-and-pastry shop, dating from 1803, Munding serves a splendid array of traditional and modern Austrian sweets (Kiebachgasse 16, www.munding.at). Or stop off at **Confiserie Arko** for luscious, handmade chocolate and marzipan confections (Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse 33).

Hotels

Befitting a tourist center, Innsbruck and the region have plenty of places to stay. To be in the thick of things, choose one of the hotels in the *Altstadt*. Prices are higher there, of course, and if the hotel doesn't have guest parking, your only option is a city garage outside the pedestrian area. (In any event, you'll want to buy an Innsbruck Card and take public transportation. In the oldest part of the inner city, walking is the best, and sometimes the only, way to get around.)

Goldener Adler

Innsbruck's historic hotel, in the oldest part of the city, has been welcoming overnight visitors since 1390. The list of famous guests is formidable, starting with Emperor Maximilian I himself, and including what seems like all the royalty of Europe, plus the likes of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Niccolo Paganini, Maria Augusta Trapp, John Glenn, Jean Paul Sartre, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The nicely furnished rooms are not only numbered; each is named for a notable former hotel guest, often one who occupied that very room. ("Mozart slept here and so did I.")

This four-star, family-run hotel is a member of the Best Western hotel group. Parking is at the public

Altstadt-Garage nearby, for the special hotel rate of €10.90 per day. A nice place to stay, located in the heart of the city with a friendly, helpful staff.

Daily Rates: Singles €85-125, doubles for €126-168, deluxe doubles €168-240, and junior suites for €208-280

Contact: **Hotel-Restaurant Goldener Adler**, Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse 6, A-6020 Innsbruck, tel. +43/(0)512-5711-110, fax +43/(0)512-5844-09, office@goldeneradler.com, www.goldeneradler.com.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

Romantik Schwarzer Adler

Base on our experience and reader reports, this longtime Innsbruck institution cannot be counted among stars of the often kitschy, sometimes elegant, but usually reliable Romantik Hotel brand. Despite its recent renovation and ideal location near the *Altstadt*, we cannot work up much enthusiasm for the hotel or its restaurant. The welcome was gracious enough on our last stay, and our room serviceable, but maintenance was spotty and an over-salted, over-spiced dinner in the cozy, wood-paneled dining room was a big disappointment. Another bummer: no WiFi in guest rooms.

In somewhat of a head scratcher, the final *Michelin Red Guide for Austria* (2008) bestowed 'Red' on the Adler.

Daily Rates: Singles €110-159, doubles €150-211, suites €250-415

Contact: **Romantik Hotel Schwarzer Adler**, Kaiserjägerstrasse 2, A-6020 Innsbruck, tel.+43/(0)512- 58 71 09, info@deradler.com, www.deradler.com.

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 8/20

Weisses Kreuz

This simple, spic and span, family-run hotel in the center of the old town is Innsbruck's best bargain. Street-side rooms can be noisy but otherwise this is a winner in its category.

Daily Rates: Singles €64-78, doubles €102-135.

Contact: **Weisses Kreuz**, Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse 31, A-6020 Innsbruck, tel.+43/(0)512 59479-0, hotel@weisseskreuz.at, www.weisseskreuz.at

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20 ■

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NISSAN SUV	\$509	\$73
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VW GOLF WAGON	\$427	\$61
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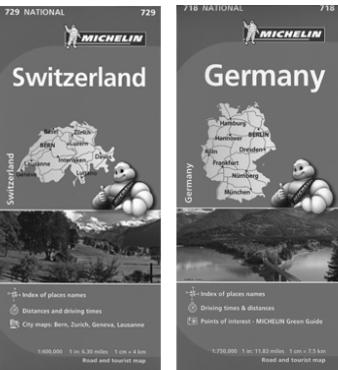
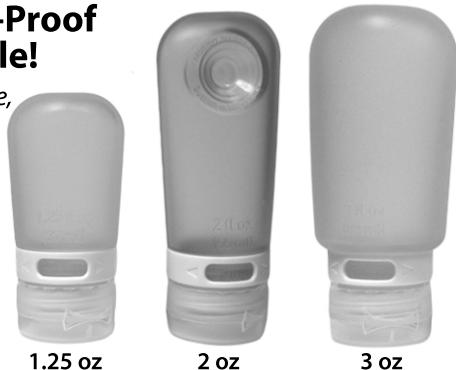


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1 month	\$1191	\$1014	\$776
2 months	\$1680	\$1429	\$1094
3 months	\$2073	\$1763	\$1349

EURAIL FLEXIPASS

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10 days in 2 months	\$885	\$753	\$576
15 days in 2 months	\$1161	\$988	\$756

EURAIL SELECTPASS

	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
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5 days in 2 months	\$475	\$404	\$310
6 days in 2 months	\$524	\$447	\$342
8 days in 2 months	\$620	\$527	\$404
10 days in 2 months	\$718	\$611	\$468
	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
	1st Cl.	1st Cl.	2nd Cl.
4 adjoining countries	\$531	\$452	\$347
5 days in 2 months	\$580	\$494	\$378
6 days in 2 months	\$651	\$575	\$440
8 days in 2 months	\$772	\$657	\$503
	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
	1st Cl.	1st Cl.	2nd Cl.
5 adjoining countries	\$585	\$498	\$381
6 days in 2 months	\$634	\$539	\$414
8 days in 2 months	\$731	\$622	\$476
10 days in 2 months	\$824	\$701	\$537
15 days in 2 months	\$1045	\$889	\$681

AUSTRIAN RAILPASS

	1st Cl	2nd Cl	Child 1st	Child 2nd	2nd
3 days in 1 month	\$236	\$166	\$120	\$85	
Avg Extra Rail Day (5 max.)	\$27	\$19	\$14	\$9	

AUSTRIA-CZECH PASS

	Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 1st Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
4 days in 2 months	\$264	\$225	\$173
Avg Extra Rail Day (6 max.)	\$36	\$30	\$23

CZECH-GERMANY PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 2nd Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
5 days in 2 months	\$415	\$342	\$293
6 days in 2 months	\$463	\$380	\$324
8 days in 2 months	\$537	\$447	\$388
10 days in 2 months	\$618	\$517	\$450

EUROPEAN EAST PASS

Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia	\$315 (1Cl)	\$217 (2Cl)
Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.)	\$38	\$32

FRANCE RAIL PASS

	Adults 1st Cl	Senior 2nd Cl	Youth 1st Cl	1st Cl 2nd Cl
3 days in 1 month	\$291	\$235	\$254	\$209
Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.)	\$43	\$37	\$37	\$27

FRANCE SAVER PASS

	2 Adults*	
	1st Cl	2nd Cl
3 days in 1 month	\$248	\$202
Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.)	\$37	\$31

FRANCE-ITALY PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 2nd Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
4 days in 2 months	\$401	\$343	\$293
5 days in 2 months	\$447	\$382	\$324
6 days in 2 months	\$493	\$420	\$356
7 days in 2 months	\$540	\$461	\$393
8 days in 2 months	\$590	\$501	\$426
9 days in 2 months	\$634	\$539	\$458
10 days in 2 months	\$680	\$578	\$491

FRANCE-SWITZERLAND PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl.	Saver* 1st Cl.	Youth 2nd Cl.
4 days in 2 months	\$426	\$363	\$301
Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.)	\$46	\$40	\$33

GERMAN RAILPASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl.	Youth 2nd Cl.	Twin Pass* 2nd Cl.
3 days in 1 month	\$344	\$263	\$210
Avg. Extra Rail Day (7)	\$42	\$28	\$15

AUSTRIA-GERMANY PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 2nd Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
5 days in 2 months	\$424	\$366	\$366
6 days in 2 months	\$467	\$399	\$399
8 days in 2 months	\$556	\$475	\$475
10 days in 2 months	\$648	\$551	\$551

GERMANY-BENELUX PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 2nd Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
5 days in 1 month	\$445	\$336	\$336
Avg. Extra Rail Day (5 max.)	\$46	\$35	\$27

GERMANY-FRANCE PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 2nd Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
4 days in 2 months	\$429	\$388	\$388
5 days in 2 months	\$475	\$428	\$428
6 days in 2 months	\$520	\$469	\$469
8 days in 2 months	\$609	\$550	\$478
10 days in 2 months	\$699	\$631	\$550

GERMANY-SWITZERLAND PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl.	Saver* 1st Cl.	Youth 2nd Cl.
5 days in 2 months	\$453	\$386	\$318
6 days in 2 months	\$499	\$424	\$351
8 days in 2 months	\$588	\$504	\$415
10 days in 2 months	\$680	\$582	\$478

ITALY RAIL PASS

	1 Adult 1st Cl	Saver* 2nd Cl	Youth 2nd Cl
3 days in 2 months	\$279	\$228	\$186
Avg Extra Rail Day	\$33	\$27	\$22

AUSTRIA-SWITZERLAND PASS

	Adults 1st Class	Saver* 1st Class	Youth 2nd Class
4 days in 2 months	\$404	\$344	\$284
Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.)	\$44	\$38	\$31

SWISS SAVERPASS & SWISS PASS

	1 Adult 1st Class	Saver* 2nd Class	Youth 2nd Class
4 consec. days	\$493	\$308	\$262
8 consec. days	\$711	\$445	\$604
15 consec. days	\$862	\$538	\$458
22 consec. days	\$993	\$620	\$744
1 month	\$1093	\$683	\$821

SWISS SAVER FLEXIPASS & SWISS FLEXIPASS

	2 or more Adults*	1 Adult 1st Class	2nd Class
3 days in 1 month	\$399	\$251	\$470
4 days in 1 month	\$486	\$303	\$570
5 days in 1 month	\$561	\$351	\$659
6 days in 1 month	\$637	\$398	\$751

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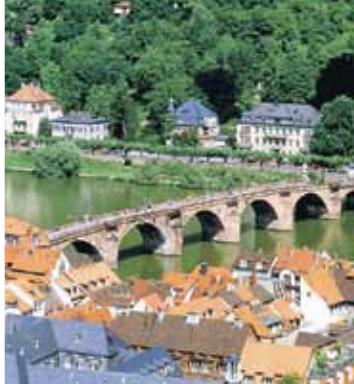
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ALSACE POTTERY VILLAGES

Continued from page 1

street, but there the similarity ends. Soufflenheim (population 5,000) is a plain-looking place of simple, mostly one-story houses, whereas Betschdorf (population 4,000) boasts many handsome, two-story, 18th-century *Fachwerk* (half-timbered) houses, some of them topped with storks' nests. Soufflenheim's potters make traditional rustic earthenware decorated in a variety of colors. Betschdorf's artisans produce classic blue-and-gray stoneware, as well as purely "art pieces." You can easily spend a day in each town, watching the potters at work, wandering through their showrooms, and maxing out your credit card. (Yes, today's French potters do take credit cards.)

Soufflenheim's pottery tradition dates back at least a 1,000 years. The ceramics industry prospered here particularly during the 19th century, reaching its height in 1837 with 55 pottery workshops registered in the village. By 1870, the pottery industry employed one out of every five residents. Back then, the local artisans made pots for household use, roof tiles, and large ceramic heating stoves covered with glazed tiles. But two world wars, the Great Depression, and other economic factors all contributed to the industry's decline during the first half of the 20th century. The revival of Soufflenheim's pottery production began around 1960, the result of a resurgence of consumer interest in handmade culinary utensils and decorative items, as well as increased tourism to this picturesque part of France. Today, nearly two dozen potters craft their wares in Soufflenheim, selling them to restaurants and shops throughout Alsace and directly to tourists.

Traditionally, potteries were family enterprises, presided over by the father or grandfather who made the pots by hand, assisted by his children and apprentices who helped with the preparation of the clay, mixed the glazes, cut wood for heating the kiln, and loaded the pots into the kiln for firing (baking the pottery). Usually it was the women who painted the de-

signs with a *barolet*, a small, handheld ceramic paint pot with a goose quill attached to guide the glaze onto the pottery. The designs were mainly floral motifs, but also included folk-art roosters, chickens, storks, geese, fish, and rabbits, as well as customized pieces with people's names or popular sayings inscribed. You can still watch this process of pottery decorating at many of the workshops in Soufflenheim.

Exhibits of Soufflenheim pottery at the **Musée Alsacien** in Strasbourg and the **Musée Alsacien** in Hagenau show that culinary ceramics made 200 years ago were similar in shape and decoration to those produced today: round and oval covered casseroles, roasting pans for ducks and geese, oval gratin pans, small terrines for goose livers and large ones for soups, as well as beer mugs, milk jugs, serving bowls, and platters. This kind of pottery is still used for baking and serving many Alsatian specialties, such as *Baeckeoffe*, a stick-to-your-ribs meat-and potatoes-casserole, and *choucroute garnie*, a dish of seasoned sauerkraut topped with sausages, salt pork, and potatoes.

The different kinds of traditional Alsatian cake molds are especially popular, many of them made for specific religious or secular holidays. Most common is the fluted *Kugelhopf* pan, shaped like a Turk's turban, for the rich, yeast-raised cake baked for Sundays and other special occasions. Other cake forms include hearts for Good Friday, Mother's Day, and betrothals; three-dimensional lamb molds for Easter; crayfish, symbolizing fertility and prosperity, for weddings; a swaddled baby, for baptisms; a bunch of grapes for harvest-time; a star for Christmas; a *fleur-de-lys* (French royal lily) for the Feast of Three Kings on January 6 and French national holidays; and fish-shaped molds for various celebrations, including New Year and April 1. Ornately painted versions of these molds are also hung on kitchen walls as decorations.

When fired in a kiln, the local Soufflenheim clay produces pottery of a natural yellow-beige color. Sometimes the pots are dipped in glazes of dark brown, deep blue, or forest green,

before being decorated by hand. The pottery is then covered with a white overglaze that becomes clear when the pots are fired. Some of the younger generation of potters are now experimenting with more contemporary colors and decorations, such as lighter shades of blue, brown, and green—even pink—ornamented with frillier, more detailed floral designs, in hope of tapping a wider market for their wares.

Just up the road, the pottery village of **Betschdorf** is famous for its distinctive blue-and-gray stoneware that looks completely different from the rustic earthenware of Soufflenheim. Earthenware, fired at a lower temperature and more porous, is suitable for baking and serving foods, whereas stoneware, fired at a higher temperature, is hard and impervious to liquids. Stoneware has a long history of being used for holding water, wine, beer, cider, schnapps, vinegar, and food products like pickles and sauerkraut, because the liquids can't seep into the high-fired clay. These kinds of durable pots also keep their contents cool, which helps to preserve their contents.

Although potters had been making softer earthenware in the Betschdorf area since ancient times, the stoneware industry there dates only from the early 18th century when potters from the Westerwald region of Germany (near Koblenz) migrated to Alsace. Potters from other western parts of the German lands soon followed. Although many of them moved to the Baden region of Germany during the French Revolution, the stoneware industry in Betschdorf was revived and expanded in the 19th century, with Betschdorf boasting 60 potteries employing 400 people in 1865.

As in Soufflenheim, the local pottery industry was affected by wars, economic factors, and consumer tastes. In the 19th century, traditional functional wares for food dominated the local production, but these were slowly superseded in the 20th century by finer and more richly decorated "art pottery." Today, only about a dozen potteries remain in Betschdorf, but most of the pieces they produce are of

very high quality.

The clay is first shaped by hand, then the pottery pieces are set on trays to dry. Next the colored decoration is hand-painted onto the pots, which are allowed to dry thoroughly again. The salt-glazing technique occurs when the pottery is baked in the kiln. After a high temperature (usually more than 2,000° F.) has been reached, salt granules are thrown into the kiln, where the salt vaporizes in the heat and bonds with the quartz in the clay. The resulting glaze that forms on each pot is very hard, almost like glass, with a glossy finish and sometimes a slightly pocked texture similar to an orange peel.

Most of this stoneware has an overall natural gray color, from the kind of clay used in making it. Cobalt, which produces a dark blue hue, has long been the most popular color for decorating traditional gray stoneware pottery. In addition to the now-fashionable "art pottery," craftsmen in Betschdorf continue to make stoneware in the traditional shapes ornamented with dark blue, although a few now also use green and blue glazes together on some pieces. Today many stoneware pieces are purchased purely as ornamental pottery for homes and restaurants, but stoneware wine pitchers, beer mugs, cider jugs, flower vases, and other kinds of salt-glazed pots are still popular as functional items.

Learn more about the history of stoneware pottery in Betschdorf by visiting the local **Musée de la Poterie**, a small but very informative museum with a collection of pottery from the Middle Ages to the present, a reconstructed pottery workshop, and a film about the stages of stoneware production. A good self-guided audio tour in French, German, or English explains the origins, development, and technique of this craft. Visiting the museum before seeing the local workshops and stores will provide a much greater appreciation of the pottery being produced. (**Musée de la Poterie, 2 rue de Kuhlendorf, 67660 Betschdorf, tel/fax : +33 (0)3 88 54 48 0, musee.betschdorf@orange.fr, www.betschdorf.com/41-musee-de-la-poterie.html** ; open from mid-April to the end of September, Tuesday through Saturday 10am-12pm and 1-6pm, Sunday 2-6pm, admission €3.50.)

la-poterie.html ; open from mid-April to the end of September, Tuesday through Saturday 10am-12pm and 1-6pm, Sunday 2-6pm, admission €3.50.)

Both Soufflenheim and Betschdorf host pottery festivals every other year on the first Sunday in September. Soufflenheim's festival is held in odd-numbered years and Betschdorf's in even-numbered years. The programs include open houses at the workshops, outdoor stands selling handmade wares from local and international potters, food stalls featuring Alsatian regional specialties, and folk music groups with dancers in traditional costumes. Betschdorf also has a pottery market on the first weekend in July, in odd-numbered years.

And when you finally tire of looking at all that pretty handmade pottery, drive to nearby **Hunspach** (about four miles from Betschdorf) whose assemblage of historic half-timbered houses rates it as one of the most beautiful villages in France (www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org/en/hunspach).

Note: Most pottery stores are open Monday through Saturday, but some close on Mondays. Many also shut from noon to 2pm for lunch. Some are open on Sunday afternoons, but the best time to visit these villages is Tuesday through Saturday, when all the workshops and pottery stores are open for business.

Where to Stay, Where to Eat

Neither of the pottery villages is known for its hotel accommodations or restaurants, but there are many good places nearby. A favorite is the **Auberge du Cheval Blanc** in the village of **Lembach**, a few miles northwest of Betschdorf. This family-run inn, a former postal relay station dating from 1740, also houses a Michelin-starred restaurant.

Over the years, the Cheval Blanc has been renovated to high-quality modern standards without losing its charm. Choose from rooms decorated in a contemporary or traditional style, with all the amenities and friendly staff you'd expect in a fine French

country inn. (**Auberge du Cheval Blanc, 4 rue de Wissembourg, 67510 Lembach, France, tel. +33(0)3-88-94-41-86, fax 88-94-20-74, info@au-cheval-blanc.fr, www.au-cheval-blanc.fr.**)

After a morning of pottery shopping in **Soufflenheim**, one might enjoy lunch at **Restaurant Au Boeuf**, located in a handsome old half-timbered house on Soufflenheim's main street (at 48 Grand Rue), near many of the pottery workshops. The restaurant specializes in beef dishes and traditional Alsatian foods, with several prix-fixe multi-course menus ranging from €21-37. For a lighter meal, just order an appetizer or a *tarte flambée* (sort of an Alsatian pizza), a dessert, and a glass of good Alsatian wine or beer. Alsatian food portions tend to be large. (**Restaurant Au Boeuf, www.boeuf-soufflenheim.com.**)

Other recommended restaurants and hotels in the area include the Michelin-starred **Restaurant Le Cygne** (www.aucygne.fr/en), the **Hôtel Le Moulin** (www.hotellemoulin.com/lhotel), and the more modestly priced **Restaurant Le Soufflet** (www.lesoufflet.free.fr), all in the village of **Gundershoffen**; the **Hotel-Restaurant L'Ecrevisse** in **Brumath** (www.hostellerie-ecrevisse.com); the **Hotel-Restaurant Au Boeuf Rouge** in **Niederschaeffolsheim** (www.boeuf-rouge.com/); and **Hotel-Restaurant Cheval Blanc** in **Niedersteinbach** (www.hotel-cheval-blanc.fr).

Alsace is well known for the quality of its hotels, country inns, and restaurants. A quick source for hotel listings (many with restaurants, too) near Soufflenheim is www.map-france.com/Soufflenheim-67620/hotel-Soufflenheim.html. For hotel listings near Betschdorf, see www.map-france.com/Betschdorf-67660/hotel-Betschdorf.html

Tourist Information:

Soufflenheim: Office de Tourisme, 20b Grand Rue, 67620 Soufflenheim, tel. +33(0)3-88-86-74-90, fax 88-86-60-69, infos@ot-soufflenheim.fr, www.ot-soufflenheim.fr (closed on Sundays and holidays).

Continued on page 12...

AUSTRIA ROUNDUP

Wine Country Weekend

Little-known to American tourists is Austria's Burgenland province. About an hour south of Vienna by car, it is a region of vineyards, tiny villages immersed in the wine trade, rooftop storks' nests, and an amazing shallow lake, the **Neusiedlersee**. In recent years Burgenland has become recognized as the source of some of the world's greatest dessert wines. Mostly, however, the populace is fueled by the drier, lighter, much cheaper — but nonetheless delicious — stuff poured in the region's hundreds of *Heurigen* (wine taverns).

Of the handful of travel writers who have found their way there, Burgenland has reminded a few of the Tuscan countryside. Physically, that may be a fair comparison, but it ignores one overwhelming difference: while a tsunami of tourists flows steadily to Tuscany, Burgenland has yet to be discovered.

The region's focal point is the reed-ringed Neusiedlersee, straddling the Austrian-Hungarian border, and home to more than 300 bird species. Though it occupies an area of about 122 square miles, at no point is it over six feet deep. More than 100 times in the last approximately 20,000 years the lake has completely dried up, the last time less than 150 years ago. This extraordinary body of water and its surroundings are a national park. Bike paths wind through wetlands and pastures along the eastern shore near the Hungarian border. The cyclist will want to pause at two wine villages Podersdorf and Illmitz, on that side of the lake. Near the south end of the lake, a ferry crosses to the west shore where the towns of Mörbisch and Rust are of interest.

South of the lake, is the open-air **Weinmuseum Moschendorf** featuring operating wineries, a cooperage, a dairy, and a blacksmith shop. Visitors can taste many wines, including *Blaufränkisch*, a good red in a region known for its whites.

Wine Country Drives

An obvious wine country drive is to circle the lake. Make sure, however, that your rented automobile is allowed into Hungary, otherwise, you'll have to double back at the border. Head north from Rust toward Donnerskirchen and choose a route that includes the villages of Purbach (see restaurants below), Breitenbrunn, Winder, Jois, Neusiedl, Podersdorf, Illmitz, Apetlon, Pamhagen, Wallern, Todten, Andau, and Frauenkirchen. At Apetlon is the wine shop (55 Wasserzeile) of the Kracher family, a producer of one of the world's finest dessert wines. The village of Andau is famous for helping Hungarians escape the Russian military when it squashed their revolution in 1956.

Another wine drive is just west of the south end of the lake. From Rust head southwest to Drassburg on highway 212 via Siegendorf. Go left on highway 224 toward Schattendorf, very near the Hungarian border. The highway loops around the Drassburg Forest, passes through Loipersbach and on to Rohrbach and Marz. This is Burgenland's *Rotwein Strasse*. Find your way back to Rust via Mattersdorf, Zemendorf, and St. Margarethen.

A unique way to see the countryside is via a three-hour draisine (bicycle trolley) tour. These pedal-powered vehicles, some large enough to accommodate families, travel on unused railroad tracks over a mostly-flat route from Hortischon-Nechenmarkt to Oberpullendorf on even numbered days and the opposite direction on other days. The route is 23-kilometers through forests, meadows, vineyards, and villages, with interesting stops along the way — a wine museum in Nechenmarkt, composer-pianist Franz Liszt's birthplace in Raiding, and a construction museum in Neutal. Return to your starting point via public transport. <http://www.burgenland.info/en/themen/sport/draisinentour>

Burgenland Overnights

Gemütlichkeit's preferred headquarters in Rust, a town directly on

the lake, is the top-end hotel **Moo-slechner's Bürgerhaus**, an 11-room boutique hotel in an ancient (1537) building with an enclosed courtyard and an upscale restaurant. Double rooms €198-275. Contact: Haupstr. 1, A-7071, tel. +43/02685/502, office@hotelbuergerhaus-rust.at, www.hotelbuergerhaus-rust.at/

The 110-room **Seehotel Rust** is a rambling but not very intimate resort-style hotel on the lake. Though its waterside rooms are pleasant, the hotel is a bit over-priced. Double rooms are €100-197. Contact Am Seekanal 2-4, tel. +43(0)2685/3810, reservierung@seehotelrust.at, www.seehotelrust.at/

Rust's best hotel value is **Am Rathausplatz** in the center of town. Its busy restaurant, popular with locals, serves pizza and a few simple Austrian specialities. Doubles in the €100 range. Contact: Rauthausplatz 7, A-7071, tel. 443/02685/6202, am-rathausplatz@ms.at.

Burgenland Cuisine

For the region's best food — perhaps world-class food — head 20 minutes north of Rust to the village of Purbach where Slovenian Max Stiegl at **Gut Purbach** is getting gushy reviews and attracting a steady stream of Viennese foodies. Naturally his ingredients are from local farms, fields, and forests. There's a gated courtyard for good weather dining. Expect to pay about €75 per person. Contact: Hauptgasse 64, Purbach, gutpurbach@aon.at, www.gutpurbach.at

Somewhat less celebrated — but less expensive — are the brothers Wolfgang and Thomas Schwarz at **Restaurant Kloster am Spitz**, also in Purbach. One can dine simply here on a half-chicken and a mixed salad for €13.5, while those seeking a more complete taste experience can choose the six-course menu at €55. Waldsiedlung 2, A-7083 Purbach am Neusiedlersee, tel. +434/02683/5519, www.klosteramspitz.at. ■

ALSACE POTTERY VILLAGES Continued from page 10

Betschdorf: Office de Tourisme, 1 rue des Francs, 67660 Betschdorf, tel +33(0)3-88-54-44-92, <http://www.pays-betschdorf-hatten.com> (email through their website).

Other useful websites: www.betschdorf.com, www.tourisme-alsace.com.

Driving directions from Germany: Take Autobahn 5 to the Baden-Baden exit and follow the signs on Highway 500 toward Iffezheim. After crossing the Rhine and entering France, this road becomes the D-4 and intersects the A-35. Go north on the A-35 for one exit to Betschdorf, or south one exit to Soufflenheim. Road D-344 connects the two towns.

Recommended map: *Michelin #315: Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, Territoire de Belfort*

A Traveler's Notebook

Vienna Remembers Gustav Klimt

One of the most “posteriorized” of painters is Gustav Klimt. *Der Kuss* (The Kiss), his most widely-known work, depicts the intimate embrace of a woman and man draped in Art Nouveau-style garments. One of his painting sold a few years ago for over \$90-million.

This year Vienna celebrates Klimt’s 150th birthday with numerous exhibitions at multiple venues.

- Through Sept. 16 the **Wien Museum** will display 400 of his drawings and other objects of interest including his painting smock, his death mask, and Egon Schiele’s drawing of the dead Klimt.

- More drawings are at the **Albertina** through June 17.

- Starting late summer at **Villa Klimt** in the Hietzing neighborhood, visitors can see the artist’s studio.

- At **Volkskundemuseum** are textile designs of Emilie Flöge, Klimt’s lifelong partner, who operated a Vienna fashion salon.

- *Der Kuss* and other major Klimt works can be seen in the **Austrian Gallery** of the **Belvedere Palace**.

The Five Commandments of Currency Exchange

1. Use a debit or ATM card in Europe to obtain cash from ATM machines;
2. Don’t use your credit card for cash advances;
3. Use a Capitol One credit card which charges no foreign transaction fees;
4. Forget travelers’ checks, they are hard to cash in Europe. Even if you get them in a foreign denomination the exchange rate is likely to be unfavorable; and,
5. Do not purchase foreign currency from your bank or anywhere else without comparing the exchange rate to the rates found at www.xe.com.

Germany Visitors Up in 2011

Though Germany set a new record last year in overnight visitors, the number of U.S. visitors was down 2.3-percent. This after an 11.1-percent increase in U.S. visitors in 2010 after a miserable 2009. According to the German National Tourist Board, hotel prices in Germany are “below similar properties elsewhere in Europe.”

New Germany Smartphone App

There’s a new smartphone/tablet app coming from the German National Tourist Board that will list the country’s 100 “must see” attractions. The basis for the list is an online survey taken in 26 languages during the period February 2-March 15. The app will be available this summer and will work on Apple and Android devices.

Glitch in Berlin Airport Opening

Europe’s first new major airport in 15 years was set to start moving people on June 3. The opening of the new \$3.3 billion Berlin Brandenburg Airport, however, has been set back to “after the summer holidays.” The delay is because tests haven’t been completed on a system that removes smoke in the event of fire. The opening had already been pushed back from 2011.

When ready, Brandenburg will replace the much closer-in Tegel Airport, as well as the regional Schönefeld Airport. A train shuttle will run frequently from the new airport to the Berlin Hauptbahnhof. The trip

will take 30-minutes and cost €3. One hopes this will mean more nonstops to Berlin from more U.S. cities. For those who still prefer to headquartered in the western area of Berlin, near the Kurfürstendamm, it appears Brandenburg will be less convenient.

UNESCO Loves Switzerland

UNESCO’s World Heritage list is sort of like a Betty Crocker seal of approval for tourist attractions. Our guess UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is even more reliable than Betty was. Here are some Swiss destinations and attractions that rate UNESCO approval.

- **The old city of Bern:** Our favorite Swiss *Altstadt*

- **The vineyard terraces of Lavaux:** Behind the Lauterbrunnen Valley-Jungfrau Region, Switzerland’s most gorgeous vistas involve these vineyards above Lac Léman, near Montreux.

- **St Gallen Abbey district:** This textile industry town is a bit off the main tourist track but the breathtaking Cathedral and Library – plus the Textile Museum – are must-see.

- **Rhaetian Railway, Albula/Bernina:** The Albula route from Chur to St. Moritz, over the curving Landwasser Viaduct, aboard the signature red, Rhaetian cars, is one of the world’s most scenic train rides.

- **Castles of Bellinzona:** Castelgrande, Montebello and Sasso Corbaro in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino.

Breathalyzers for France Drivers

Starting July 1, drivers in France will be required to have not just one, but two breathalyzers in the car in order to test the driver’s blood-alcohol level. Cars rented in France will come equipped with the devices, but if you rent in another country you’re on your own. Two breathalyzers are needed because if the first is used the driver still must have an unused one in the car when stopped by the police. It has been reported that the devices will be available for sale at entry points into France. If caught without a breathalyzer the fine is about \$17. The penalty for driving with a blood-alcohol level exceeding 80 mg is about \$5,000 plus possible imprisonment.