Dear Subscriber

Traveling with Kids

You've decided you want to take the kids or grandkids to Europe. Though they seem keen on the idea, somehow they lose interest about 10 minutes into your tales of wonderful little street cafes and those photos of cathedrals and castles you're so proud of. You reason, however, that when they see Europe for themselves they'll fall in love with it just as you have.

In your zeal to introduce them to Europe, you don't want to bore them, and it dawns on you that the hills of Tuscany, the canals of Venice, the steep Mosel vineyards, and the old world charm of Vienna just might not capture their hearts the way they do yours. That the kids might still be a decade or two from appreciating Europe in the same way you do. That maybe they're not quite ready for culture, cuisine, medieval history, great art and architecture. That they're still into rides and make-believe. Zoos and theme parks, and places like that all-time, sure-fire winner for every kid that ever lived, Disneyland.

With a palm-to-forehead slap you suddenly realize the place for you and the kiddies is, drum roll, Switzerland, Europe's most Disneyland-like country: clean as a whistle, gorgeous, organized and calm, with all those rides; trains, boats, and cable cars (and, like DL, expensive places to eat). Come to think of it, Switzerland is the real Disneyland—and more. Whatever trains Disneyland has can't match the splendid little Rätischebahn of eastern Switzerland, the panorama cars of the Montreux-Oberland Bernois Railway climbing among the real Alps, or the Glacier Express. Though it's pretty cool, that Mississippi paddle boat that glides around a few acres of Anaheim can't compete with the real steam-powered passenger boats that ply the vast lakes of Switzerland. Think Disneyland rides are exciting? Try the cable car that goes up to Les Diableret Glacier.

And, by the way, isn't the most Continued on page 2...

GEMüTLICHKEIT

The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria & Switzerland

LECH IN SUMMER

f there's a special heaven for skiers it's probably modeled after Austria's Arlberg region, specifically Lech's corner of it. The 120 miles of trails that crisscross the mountains around Lech and neighboring Zurs represent some of the world's finest skiing. Some say—given the short lift lines, state of the art lifts which connect virtually the whole of the Arlberg, a profusion of excellent lodging, and commendable lack of commercialization—the best.

Even if you're a non-skier, stay with us here because if Lech is heavenly during ski season, it's at least Valhalla in the summer. The dramatic mountain backdrop is still there, the valley turns from white to green, flowers line every window and balcony, and there's plenty to do outdoors, even if it's just soaking up some sun or taking a long walk beside the river. In fact, Lech is so gorgeous

it won the 2004 *Entente Florale* "most beautiful village in Europe" award.

The town's zoning laws, you see, do not look favorably on development, and the result is a complete absence of the huge condos and sprawling hotels found in many European ski resorts. Groups and tour buses are simply not a part of the Lech tourism scene. In fact, nearly all the hotels are family operated in that special *gemütlich* style of Austrian country hotels.

Few tourists and breathtaking scenery makes the village an especially attractive destination in summer for the independent traveler, especially those who arrive by car as the railway station is in Langen, 17 kilometers away.

With its young, affluent ski crowd, Lech is a social lion in winter, with many good restaurants and bars, and

Continued on page 3...

Swiss Mountain Drive

his route starts in Switzerland's eastern-most canton, the Grisons (Graubünden in German), and follows the Albula Pass Road (7,585 ft.) to the village of Alvaneu Bad and then, if you wish, on to Tiefencastle south of Chur.

Zernez and the Hotel Bettini

Zernez, a mountain village in the Swiss canton of Grisons, is filled with square, white stucco buildings and feels like Italy. The town has only a handful of hotels and we checked into one of them, the little **Hotel Bettini**. In its comfortable dining room, we discovered that Zernez also *tastes* like Italy. Our meal began with a terrific mushroom risotto, a hefty first course. Smoked meat was tossed into the pasta carbonara instead of bacon, and was excellent. We should have stopped there, because the portions were huge and we simply ran out of gas about a

quarter of the way into a massive platter of gnocchi. The bill for two, including beer, local wine and enough food for four came to about \$80).

Our room, Number 29, was small but clean, comfortable and quiet and we paid about \$135 for a double.

A 30-minute walk around town will take in most of what there is to see in Zernez. Go up the little hill to the church and cemetery for a good view of the town and surrounding countryside.

The hotel currently offers three-night packages for about €255 with dinner.

Contact/Prices: Sport Hotel Bettini, CH-7530 Zernez; tel. 082/81135, fax

Continued on page 9...

Exchange rates as of 4/10/2010 1 euro = \$1.36 1 Swiss franc = \$0.94 1 gallon diesel, Germany=\$5.80

www.gemut.com April 2010

DEAR SUBSCRIBERContinued from page 1

prominent Disneyland landmark some sort of reproduction of a European mountain? Yeah, it's called the Matterhorn and the real one is in Switzerland.

So take 'em to Switzerland. Get a Swiss Pass (kids under 16 travel free with parents/grandparents and it includes entry to most of the country's best museums), which is good for unlimited rides on all those great trains and boats.

Instead of a hotel, consider a vacation rental. It's much less expensive than a hotel and you save more by cooking a few meals at "home." If you travel by rail—which I strongly recommend—you'll want to be near the middle of the country and close to a rail hub, such as Bern, Interlaken or perhaps Lucerne.

Untours (www.untours.com)

has good value packages that include transatlantic air, rail and totally reliable accommodations. Another trustworthy renter of vacation apartments is Drawbridge to Europe (www.drawbridgetoeurope.com). Then there's the Swiss company, Reka (www.reka.ch), that specializes in Switzerland family vacations. Their database of accommodations includes some 3,000 vacation flats, mobile homes, and family hotels. Their holiday villages include extensive play areas, pools, baby equipment rentals, and free child care. (If you book through Reka, a small portion of your payment will go toward the company's holiday assistance program which provides vacations for low income families, single

parents, and disabled persons.)

To help plan your trip to Switzerland with the kids/grandkids, here are 32 child-friendly Swiss attractions: (Note that for space purposes we've used shortened URLs. If you're reading our email version, just click on them. Regular mail readers will have to type them into their browsers; please note they are case sensitive.)

Ritom Funicular Airolo

Ride the world's steepest funicular to a moonscape walking/hiking area. The Ritom is not a cog wheel, it rides on tracks and is pulled by a cable.

Info: http://is.gd/bkObd

The Old Gostelli Farm Astano

Rides in horse-drawn carriages either around the farm or into the countryside.

Info: http://is.gd/bkxNi

Roman Museum

Avenches

Interesting Roman ruins—public baths and an 8,000-seat amphitheatre—on the site of the former capital of Helvetii, a city of 20,000. A museum in a stone tower displays items found during excavation, including a golden bust of emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Info: Open year round, http://is.gd/bkGeo

Basel Zoo Basel

On 24 acres of parkland, and with more than 600 different species, this is one of Europe's finest zoos. A list is posted each day at the entrance telling which baby animals can be seen that day.

Info: Open year round, 8am - 5:30pm, Adults CHF 14, Kids CHF 5, www.zoobasel.ch

Guten-Park

Bern

Funicluar to the top of Bern's mountain, miniature railway, playground, kids cars circuit, picnics. At the train station take Tram No. 9 to stop *Gurtenbahn*.

Info: http://is.gd/bkwZu

Salt Mines

Bex

Ride a small train deep into the mine's tunnels and underground rooms. Guided tours only (about one hour). Bring jackets.

Info: Open daily, 9:45am - 3:45pm, April thru October, Adults CHF 19, kids CHF 12, www.mines.ch/en

Signal de Bougy: Pre Vert Park Bougy-Villars

Walking paths, wonderful views,

Continued on page 10...

Using Gemütlichkeit

- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	<u>Scale</u>	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 Criteri	<u>a</u>	Value Rating	Scale
Hotel Rating Criteri People/Service	a 30%	Value Rating Outstanding Value	Scale 17 - 20
		•	
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
People/Service Location/Setting	30% 15%	Outstanding Value Very Good Value	17 - 20 12 - 16

LECH IN SUMMER Continued from page 1

rock-out nightlife. But in summer the pace slows and rates plummet. Though some hotels close, you won't have a problem finding a room—at rates far lower than in winter.

Since winter guests outnumber summer ones by a better than five to one ratio, hotels and tourism infrastructure go the extra mile to attract visitors in summer. For example, every overnight visitor is given the "Active Inclusive Summer Card," a pass that provides free use of all cable cars, chair lifts, tennis and squash courts, the local shuttle bus, as well as escorted walks for all skill levels and free entrance to open-air concerts. Also free to cardholders are all-day hikes to mountain peaks, wood-carving courses, river raft outings, the local forest swimming pool, and guided tours of the local folk museum. Parents have the option of free child care by qualified professionals who keep the kids busy with a variety of daily activities.

Around and above Lech, a web of more than 150 miles of marked walking/hiking trails winds through forests and summer meadows, alongside rushing streams, and, of course, into the hills and mountains. You may see Chamois and Ibex. The trails are interconnected and accessed by cable cars, lifts, and the local hiking bus, all free with the Active Inclusive Card.

There are a ton of activities besides hiking. Provided you can do it on an artificial fly without a barbed hook, you can catch up to three trout in the Lech river; Lech's huge "Forest Pool" has a water slide that will keep kids amused for hours; a new tennis center opened this winter; there's a three-hole golf "course" with driving range; bikes can be rented at the local Sportalp; or, if you have a car, you might take a day to visit Bavaria's Royal Castles or Swarovski Crystal World in Innsbruck, both about a 90-minute drive.

A Word About Lech Skiing

Longtime subscriber **Richard Davidson**, president of Ski Europe probably knows as much about Austrian ski resorts as anyone on either side of the Atlantic. A few years ago he told *Gemütlichkeit* that,

LECH BASICS

Visitor information: Lech Tourist Office, 6764 Lech, tel. +43/5583/2161-0, fax 3155, info@lech-zuers.at, www.lech-zuers.at.

Austrian National Tourist Office Travel Information Center, P.O. Box 1142, New York NY 10108-1142, tel. 212-944-6880, info@oewnyc.com, www.experienceaustria.com

Driving distances to Lech:

Berlin	772 km/483 miles
Bregenz	93 km/58 miles
Frankfurt	512 km/320 miles
Geneva	479 km/299 miles
Innsbruck	117 km/73 miles
Munich	189 km/118 miles
Salzburg	301 km/188 miles
Vienna	593 km/371 miles
Zürich	197 km/123 miles

Nearest airport: Zürich's Kloten airport is the most convenient to Lech am Arlberg. From the airport it's a three- to four-hour train ride to Langen im Arlberg, which is 17 kilometers from Lech. The fare is about \$55 second-class. For schedules, see http://rail.ch

The 20-minute taxi ride to Lech from Langen costs €9-11 per person (43-5583-2501-0; www.taxi-lech.at)

Winter rail deal: Austrian rail offers roundtrip rail to Lech from entry points within Austria, transfer to a hotel, and a six day lift pass.

Bus: On weekends the Arlberg Express (43-5582-226; www.arlbergshuttle.com), operates a bus from Zurich airport to Arlberg resorts. The fare is about \$60 one-way or about \$100 roundtrip; half price for kids under 12.

Automobile Travelers: The road between Lech and Warth is closed in winter, so do not plan to arrive via the Lechtal or Bregenzerwald.

Due to very heavy traffic in winter, auto visitors are warned to avoid Feldkirch-Lech and Imst-Lech road segments, especially on Saturdays.

Motorway stickers, sometimes referred to as "vignettes," are required on Austria's Autobahns. A 10-day sticker costs €7.9, two months is €22.9

though Lech is very popular with the European *cognoscente*, its charms are virtually unknown to Americans. His website (www.ski-europe.com) calls it the "most glamorous and expensive" resort in Austria. Though Princess Di used to ski there, Davidson says it doesn't attract "old money" as does St. Mortiz and he notes there are no "grand" hotels. He also says that skiers will find cheaper accommodations in nearby St. Anton and Stuben and from there access Lech's slopes via bus.

Ski-Europe.com lists these bullet points about Lech:

- Picturesque Alpine village
- Very expensive, credit cards not always accepted
- Some antiquated lifts
- Fair-sized, intermediate slope network
- Blue (intermediate) runs back to village are rather steep
- Few tough slopes
- Lively après-ski scene

If you're neither hiker nor skier, and are looking to visit Europe's historic monuments and sights, perhaps do some shopping, Lech may not be for you. But for the traveler who just wants to slow the pace in an incredibly beautiful part of the world, a few warm summer days in the Arlberg will do the trick.

Three Lech Hotels

Gasthof Post

This surely is one of Europe's finest country hotels. Through the arched door of the somewhat plain, weathered shingle façade on the village's main street, one enters a Fabergé egg interior of carved-wood rusticity and Austrian country elegance. Everywhere Oriental rugs, rich wood paneling, and highly polished antiques catch the eye. Dirndls and Loden coats are the uniform of the day and not just for the staff.

Hovering above the stunning main salon – the Hubertushalle – is an octagonal skylight cut into the center of the wood paneled ceiling. With the room's fireplace crackling away, there is no better place in Lech to take tea on a winter afternoon.

Guest rooms are more of the same;

traditional, atmospheric, luxurious, fivestar.

There is an indoor pool, a lovely garden for summer relaxing, various dining venues and even a small boutique.

Part of the Relais et Châteaux Hotel marketing group, the 40-room Post has been in the Moosbrugger family since 1937 and a family member is likely to be on hand to greet you at check-in.

The Mercedes Benzes and BMWs parked out front tell the story of the Post's clientele: well-fixed Europeans, mostly Swiss, Germans and Austrians.

Contact: Gasthof Post, Dorf 11, Lech am Arlberg, A-6764, tel. +43 5583 22 060, fax: 22 06 23, <u>info@postlech.com</u>, <u>www.postlech.com</u>

Daily Summer Rates: €130-170 per person. Halfboard €30 per day. **Rating:** QUALITY 19/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Rote Wand

Jut two miles away in the village of Zug is a different style of hotel, the Rote Wand. When it opened 21 years ago, its elements of modern design, combined with traditional Alpine architecture, shocked and enraged some of the local

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.
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- www.myswitzerland.com Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority
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- www.austria.info/us Austria's national tourist authority
- www.historicgermany.com Website for an alliance of historic German cities
- <u>www.thetravelinsider.info</u> Info on electronics for travelers cell phones, computers, etc.

populace. Many visitors, however, found its emphasis on natural light and openness exciting and refreshing. There are few solid walls in the common areas and beds in guestrooms are situated toward the view rather than to walls or closets. The design subtly incorporates materials, textures and colors that have been used for centuries in Arlberg building construction. For example, suspended in an open space that divides two public rooms are small windows of the style found in thousands of the region's homes; a quiet reminder of the past, the old windows floating in the modern space.

The hotel is the result of collaboration between the likeable young owner, Joschi Walch, and an architect friend from school days. Their goal was to bring the outdoors indoors.

Often overlooked in any discussion of the Rote Wand is the fact that it rates four stars and offers services appropriate to that status. There is a sparkling indoor pool, an elevator with windows, a full-service health spa, sauna, massage, beauty salon, and an indoor putting green.

The airy guestrooms come in two categories, Gallerie and Rote Wand. Several of the former are on two levels with sitting area and TV downstairs, sleeping area above, and fine views up the valley to the Rote Wand mountain. Number 34 is in this category as is Number 14, which also has a wonderful open terrace. All rooms have two flat-screen TVs with headphones for private listening. A seven-night "Summer in the Mountains" package in a Rote Wand room is €794 per person and includes three meals with wine, afternoon snack, and a list of services that includes daytime child care for kids over three. The same package in the larger Gallerie rooms is an additional €75 per person. Shorter packages with similar amenities are also available.

All rooms have well-lighted bathrooms with ultra modern fixtures and a separate toilet room.

Contact: A-6764 Lech-Zug am Arlberg, tel. +43/05583/34350, fax 343540, gasthof@rotewand.com, www.rotewand.com

Daily Summer Rates: €126-144 per person, including all meals.
Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Haldenhof

As well located as any hotel in town (just a few meters from one of the major lifts), the Haldenhof also has the advantage of being a bargain, especially in summer when per person rates range from €30 to 62 with breakfast, add €20 for half board.

Guestrooms are very agreeable and most have good views. Number 16 is a small suite with a separate sitting room and sloping bedroom ceiling. A low window affords a view from the bed. In summer it rents for from €58-62 per person, double occupancy. At night, with the windows open, comes the restful sound of the river Lech as it rushes by.

The hotel's management is now in the hands of Michael and Claudia Schwärzler. Michael's parents, Isolde and Hubert, founded Haldenhof in 1969. Into the '90s, Isolde operated the hotel while Hubert headed the Lech Tourist Office, traveling the world to promote the resort.

On some evenings before dinner the Schwärzlers host guests for a getacquainted glass of wine, a hallmark of hospitable Austrian country hotels.

The Haldenhof has more the feel of a comfortable private residence than a hotel and both public and guestrooms are unmistakably old world; full of antiques, traditional *objet d' art*, and hunting trophies.

Contact: Tannbert 347, A-6764 Lech im Arlberg, tel. +43/05583/2444 0, fax 2444 21, reservation@haldenhof.at, www.haldenhof.at

Daily Summer Rates: €50-82 per person, including breakfast and dinner.
Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

Summer Packages

In winter, Lech is one of Europe's most exclusive and expensive ski resorts. Though rates drop considerably during the summer months, the prospective visitor might consider one of the many package deals offered by hotels and the local tourist office.

For three nights in July the four-star Hotel **Tannbergerhof** offers a double room with breakfast and dinner for €564 (www.tannbergerhof.com).

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2 months	\$1719	\$1461	\$1118
3 months	\$2120	\$1809	\$1382
EURAIL FLEXIPASS	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
	1st Cl.	1st Cl.	2nd Cl.
10 days in 2 months	\$893	\$758	\$583
15 days in 2 months	\$1173	\$999	\$763
EURAIL SELECTPASS			
3 adjoining countries	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
5 dajoning countries	1st Cl.	1st Cl.	2nd Cl.
5 days in 2 months	\$479	\$407	\$312
6 days in 2 months	\$529	\$451	\$346
8 days in 2 months	\$628	\$536	\$407
10 days in 2 months	\$727	\$615	\$470
4 adjoining countries	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
	1st Cl.	1st Cl.	2nd Cl.
5 days in 2 months	\$536	\$453	\$348
6 days in 2 months	\$586	\$500	\$381
8 days in 2 months	\$684	\$582	\$444
10 days in 2 months	\$782	\$663	\$506
5 adjoining countries	1 Adult	Saver*	Youth
	1st Cl.	1st Cl.	2nd Cl.
5 days in 2 months	\$591	\$501	\$384
6 days in 2 months	\$641	\$544	\$415
8 days in 2 months	\$740	\$627	\$479
10 days in 2 months	\$835	\$708	\$541
15 days in 2 months	\$1059	\$901	\$689
AUSTRIAN RAILPASS			
	1st Cl 2nd	CI Child 1st	Child 2nd
3 days in 1 month	\$201 \$14		\$71
Avg Extra Rail Day (5 max.)	\$28 \$1	9 \$14	\$10

	peall Kall P
ī	AUSTRIA-CZECH PASS
	Adult Saver* Youth 1st Cl 1st Cl 2nd Cl 4 days in 2 months \$243 \$207 \$158 Avg Extra Rail Day (6 max.) \$33 \$28 \$21
	CZECH-GERMANY PASS 1 Adult Saver* Youth
	5 days in 2 months \$377 \$310 \$310 \$266 \$266 6 days in 2 months \$419 \$344 \$344 \$296 \$296 8 days in 2 months \$491 \$408 \$408 \$352 \$352 10 days in 2 months \$566 \$471 \$471 \$410 \$410
n	EUROPEAN EAST PASS Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia 5 days in 1 month \$299 (1Cl) \$209 (2Cl) Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.) \$36 \$28
	FRANCE RAIL PASS Adults Senior Youth
	1st Cl 2nd Cl 1st Cl 1st Cl 2nd Cl 3 days in 1 month \$293 \$250 \$268 \$217 \$186 Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.) \$45 \$37 \$40 \$33 \$28
	FRANCE SAVER PASS 2 Adults*
	1st Cl 2nd Cl 3 days in 1 month \$249 \$215 Avg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.) \$39 \$31
	FRANCE-ITALY PASS 1 Adult Saver* Youth
	1st Cl 2nd Cl 1st Cl 2nd Cl 1st Cl 2nd Cl<
	FRANCE-SWITZERLAND PASS 1 Adult Saver* Youth
	4 days in 2 months 1st Cl. 1st Cl. 2nd Cl. 4 vg. Extra Rail Day (6 max.) \$ 42 \$ 35 \$ 29
	GERMAN RAILPASS 1 Adult Youth Twin Pass*
	3 days in 1 month \$364 \$277 \$222 \$280 \$204 Avg. Extra Rail Day (6) \$45 30 \$17 \$31 \$23
	AUSTRIA-GERMANY PASS
	1 Adult Saver* Youth
	GERMANY-BENELUX PASS 1 Adult Saver* Youth

١	GERMANY-FRA	NCE P	ASS				
				dult	Sav		Youth
				2nd Cl		2nd Cl	
	4 days in 2 montl		\$430	\$388	\$388	\$350	\$301
	5 days in 2 montl		\$475	\$428	\$428	\$386	\$333
	6 days in 2 montl		\$520	\$468	\$468	\$418	\$366
	8 days in 2 mont		\$611	\$550	\$550	\$479	\$428
	10 days in 2 mon	ths	\$701	\$632	\$632	\$550	\$496
	GERMANY-SWI	TZERL					
				Adult	Sav		Youth
				st Cl.	1st		2nd C
	5 days in 2 montl			\$452	\$38		\$318
	6 days in 2 montl	ns		\$498	\$42		\$350
	8 days in 2 montl	ns		\$589	\$50		\$414
	10 days in 2 mon	ths		\$681	\$58	32	\$479
	ITALY RAIL PAS	S					
				dult		ver*	Youth
				2nd Cl		2nd Cl	
	3 days in 2 montl		\$244			\$169	
	Avg Extra Rail Da	У	\$30	\$24	\$25	\$20	\$19
	AUSTRIA-SWIT	ZERLA					
				Adults	Sav		Youth
				1st Cl	1st		2nd (
	4 days in 2 montl			\$366	\$31		\$257
	Avg. Extra Rail Da	ay (6 m	ax.)	\$ 41	\$3	5	\$28
	SWISS SAVERPA	SS & S	WISS P	ASS			
			dult		ver*		outh
		1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
		Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	
	4 consec. days	\$399	\$266	\$340	\$226	\$299	
	8 consec. days	\$576	\$384	\$490	\$328	\$432	
	15 consec. days	\$697	\$465	\$593	\$395	\$523	
	22 consec. days	\$805	\$536	\$685	\$457	\$604	
	1 month	\$885	\$590	\$753	\$503	\$664	\$443
	SWISS SAVER FL						
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	3 -1	_	Class	Class		lass	Class
	3 days in 1 mont		\$326	\$217		383 463	\$255
	4 days in 1 mont		\$395 \$457	\$263			\$309 \$358
	5 days in 1 mont		\$519	\$305 \$347		536 609	\$407
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	SWISS CARD						
	1 month - 1 roun				(1-CI) \$	187 (2-0	CI)
	plus 50% discour	nt on ra	il ticket	:S			
	SWISS TRANSFE	RTICK	ΈT				
	1 month - 1 roun	d trip		\$196 ((1-CI) \$	130 (2-0	CI)
		-					
	(*Prices per person						
	times. **Junior & Yo						
	Where senior fares						
	half the adult fare i	ncludino	1 Savern	ass tares e	YCANT S	witzerlai	nd whe

half the adult fare including Saverpass fares except Switzerland where kids under 16 are free with a parent.)

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\$305

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The three-star **Hotel Lech** and **Pension Chesa Rosa** offer two-night packages for two with breakfast starting at €238. (A6764 Lech am Arlberg, PO Box 6764, Austria, tel. +43/5583/22890, hotel.lech@lech.at, www.hotel-lech.eu)

When booking hotels in the Lech region pay close attention to cancellation policies. Many charge a substantial penalty if you back out within 90 days of your check-in date.

Dining Out in Lech

No doubt in response to its affluent and often famous winter clientele, over the past 20 years Lech has gained in reputation as a food destination. Among its 60 or so restaurants, most of which are in hotels, are four that have been awarded Michelin stars:

- KochArt in Zurs is famous for a mushroom cake—multiple layers of thin crepes alternating with a rich filling, and scallops with black truffles. Chef Otto Koch's reputation extends far beyond this tiny Austrian resort. (Haus 82, tel. +43/05583/22710, alpinrosezuers@robinson.de, www.robinson-austria.at).
- Griggeler Stuba in Oberlech's Burg Vital Hotel. Chef Thorsten Probst, Austria's 2008 Chef of the Year, uses only the finest, freshest ingredients; mostly light and organic. He specializes in herbs from nearby forests and meadows to flavor his creations. (tel. +43/05583/3140, office@burgvitalhotel.at, www.burgvitalhotel.at).
- Brunnenhof in Hotel Brunnenhof. Rated 16/20 by Gault Millau, with two red toques signifying contemporary dishes (tel. +43/05583/2349, info@brunnenhof.com, www.brunnenhof.com)
- Post Stuben Gasthof Post. Anything less than a Michelin star would be an underachievement for Lech's signature hotel. Chef Michael Spirk gets praise for his *Seeteufel* (devilfish) medallions with pumpkin puree and almond tortellini, as well as his *Tafelspitz* with creamed spinach. "Modern" Austrian cuisine. (Dorf 11, tel. +43/05583/220 60, info@postlech.com, www.postlech.com)

Expect to pay \$75 to \$250 per person, for dinner without beverages, at these

starred restaurants.

Other choices:

- Fux (fooks) is trendy, pricey and known for its steak house and Asian fusion cuisine, but there are lots of dissenters online. Most complaints are about haughty service and overpriced wine and food. (Omesberg 6764; 43-5583-2992; www.fux-mi.net).
- Bodenalpe in a tiny, weathered house on the edge of town on the road to Warth, serves familiar Austrian specialties in a rustic setting. The menu is short but the prices, €25 to €28 for main dishes, are much higher than on an earlier visit. (tel. +43/664/240 0389, p.jocheum@aon.at, www.bodenalpe-lech.com).
- Hûs Nr. 8. For Austrian staples such as *Wienerschnitzel* and boiled beef, try the Walch family's 300-year-old farmhouse. Despite the food's simplicity, expect to pay €50 for dinner with wine. (+43/5583/3322, www.hus8.at)

SWISS DRIVE Continued from page 1

8561510, <u>info@hotel-bettini.ch</u>, <u>www.hotel-bettini.ch</u>. Prices CHF 75-85, add CHF 30 for half board.

The Drive Over the Albula Pass

Next morning we headed south on red road 27 (you'll need a map of the region scaled at 1:200,000, available at most service stations) for the drive over the Albula Pass. If you have a late morning start you may wish to purchase supplies to picnic at a small lake along the way.

The road follows the Inn river as it flows back toward Zernez and its ultimate confluence with the Danube in Passau, Germany. Pass an arched railroad bridge and then, about nine kilometers later, a turnoff to Switzerland's only National Park, a 70 square-mile nature preserve. You, however, want the sharp right turn, just before La Punt, onto the yellow road (marked Albulastrasse on some maps) toward the pass and Tiefencastel. The turn is about 22 kilometers from Zernez.

At this point set your odometer to zero. Cross some railroad tracks and begin the ascent. In a few hundred yards



a sign indicates whether the pass is open. Between November and June you will normally find it closed.

The road rises quickly in a series of turns. It is narrow, barely paved, and in some places there are no guard rails or markings. Watch for cows. At 2.3 kilometers is a turnout spot for picture taking. At 3.5 kilometers you will reach the tree line and can begin looking to the right for the Piz Kesch (3418 meters).

Soon the road flattens and runs through a high valley among the mountains. The terrain is quite spectacular. The summit is not a single high point followed by an immediate descent, but a flat, straight stretch of barren meadow. At 9.1 kilometers is the **Berggasthaus Albula Hospiz** (2315 meters) where the postal buses stop and a spare but tidy double room costs CHF 95. Now begins the trip down. (Remember, uphill traffic has the right of way.) The landscape changes, this side is very rocky and the first trees one sees seem to grow right out of stone.

At 13.7 kilometers is a waterfall and stream running toward a clear, green lake, Palpuogna, which is formed by a small dam and spillway. At 15.1 kilometers is a place to park if you wish to picnic on the lake shore or walk the path around it. For picnickers, there are benches and places to barbecue. Head to the right, along the bank away from the road. In about five minutes you will be able to see the waterfall as it plunges hundreds of feet down the mountain.

The walk around the lake is easy and takes about 30 minutes including stops for pictures. You must, however, have good shoes and no fear of cattle. The path, though flat, is rocky and goes through muddy fields populated by cows. Having completed the circumnavigation of Palpuogna, you can either walk up to the road to your car or, provided there is no water flowing over it, cross

the spillway.

Back in the car, the village of Preda is at 15.7 kilometers. The road is better on this side, with less loose gravel. Below Preda are more switchback turns. At this point you will see several attractive, arched railway bridges constructed of stone. At 21.3 kilometers is a small reservoir of green water.

Along the Albula Pass road are frequent signs which indicate the availability of telephones. We assume they are there in the event of a surprise early or late season storm.

At 22.5 kilometers, the road runs through a meadow and comes to the town of Bergün. On the right is an attractive stone church steeple. The way through town is narrow, cobbled and bordered with Engadine-style houses with oriel windows. Just before reaching a second steeple, this one a painted onion-dome, turn right and cross the river toward Tiefencastel. Bergün is an interesting town and you may wish to stop for lunch if you didn't picnic at the lake. The old **Kurhaus Bergün** has been recently restored.

Beyond Bergün, about 25 kilometers into the drive, the road is built around a sheer rock face. Here you must be very watchful at sharp corners. The uphill lane — coming toward you — is next to the wall and, as a result, drivers seems to favor the middle of the road.

At 34.6 kilometers you reach Alvaneu Bad and complete the drive. The entire drive from Zernez is about 54 kilometers

KIDS IN EUROPE Continued from page 1

18-hole golf course, areas for football, beach volleyball, and a mini-Formula One track.

Info: Open year round, http://is.gd/bkxru

Ballenberg Outdoor Museum Brienz

Huge open-air museum that cannot possibly be seen in just one day. The collection of about 60 farmhouses, barns and mills, all fully operational, complete with crafts-workers and original tools, comprises one of Switzerland's must-see attractions.

Info: Open daily, mid April-end October, 10am-5pm, Adults CHF 20, kids CHF 10, www.ballenberg.ch/en/welcome

La Maison Cailler/Cailler-Nestle Factory Broc-Gruyere

This is one of Europe's most popular chocolate tours. Find out all about chocolate; where it comes from and how it becomes candy. The new Maison Caillier opened this month.

Info: Open daily, 9:30am-4pm, Rue Jules Belelt 7, http://is.gd/bky7U

San Grato Botanical Park Carona

About 25 minutes from Lugano. Has a restaurant and children's playground plus the region's largest collection of azaleas, rhododendrons and conifers.

Info: Open all year, admission free, http://is.gd/bkGlh

Zeppelin Museum

Friedrichshafen, Germany

This museum is in Germany, but it's a nice ferry ride across the Bodensee from Switzerland. Main focus is on a reconstruction of the Hindenburg, portions of the Graf Zepplin, and items salvaged from the Hindenburg disaster at Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Info: Open year round, 10am-5 pm, closed Mondays, Adults €7.50, Kids €3, www.zeppelin-museum.de

Forestland Geneva

Geneva

Outdoor activities like climbing trees, crossing monkey bridges plus inflatable games for younger children.

Info: Open daily, 10am-6:30pm, Adults CHF 18, kids CHF 11.5, http://is.gd/bkAmx

Museum of Games

La Tour-de-Peilz

This museum, in a small 13th century castle on the banks of Lac Léman, between Vevey and Montreux, is devoted to discovering other cultures and understanding history through games, with an emphasis on board games and numbers.

Info: rue du Château 11, 1814 Tourde-Peilz, adults CHF 8, kids CHF 4, http://is.gd/bkHlZ

Chemin de Fer-Musee Blonay-Chamby Lausanne

Home to one of the best collections of historic meter gauge railway stock, mainly of Swiss manufacture. The highlight is rides on real steam trains: Blonay to Chamby, and Vevey-Blonay-Chamby. Fares range from CHF 9 to 27, kids 6-16 half fare. See website below for timetables.

Info: http://is.gd/bkPCE

Olympic Museum Lausanne

Elegantly presented exhibits in a spectacular building overlooking Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). Videos of historic events in Olympic history and more than 85,000 items of memorablia, from Jesse Owens running shoes from the '36 Berlin games to a collection of Olympic torches. A treat for any kid or adult who's ever

watched the games, Winter or Summer.

Info: 1 Quai d'Ouchy, 9am -6pm, adults CHF 15, kids CHF 10, www.olympic.org

Aqua Parc Le Bouveret

A water park with over a kilometer of water slides. Hot tubs and beaches.

Info: Route de la Plage, open daily year round 10am-10pm, adults CHF 46, kids CHF 38, www.aquaparc.ch/en

Musee D'Horlogerie Du Locle Le Locle

Collections of watches from the earliest made, to today's fanciest, most expensive and complex.

Info: Open year round, Tuesday-Sunday, 10am-5pm, adults CHF 8, dids CHF 4, www.mhl-monts.ch/?lang=en

Sherlock Holmes Museum Lucens

Founded by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's son, Adrian, in 1965. Holmes' and Dr. Watson's living room has been reproduced from descriptions in Conan Doyle's books. Hundreds of authentic artifacts that belonged to the author are displayed.

Info: Case postale 221 B, open Sat.-Sun, 2pm - 5pm, adults CHF 5, kids CHF 4, http://is.gd/bkHNe

Les Diableret Cable Car

Les Diableret

One of Switzerland's most spectacular cable car trips is from Col du Pillon to the glacier at Les Diableret. Great views of the Jungfrau, Mont Blanc, even the Matterhorn. Not for those who fear heights. The cable car station at Col du Pillon was designed by Mario Botta.

Info: With a Swiss rail pass the fare is CHF 39 for adults, kids 9-16 are half off and under 9 free, <u>www.glacier3000.ch</u>

Transportation MuseumLucerne

One of the great museums of its kind in the world. Locomotives, airplanes, lake steamers, a TV studio, spaceships, a planetarium, even an Imax theater. Lots of opportunity for hands-on experiences. Don't miss the 20-minute panorama movie tour of Switzerland.

Info: Open daily 10am-5pm daily, year round, adults CHF 27, kids CHF 14, http://is.gd/bm0Q1

Heidi Village Maienfeld

Author Johanna Spyri's "Heidihaus," plus petting zoo and post office where mail gets the Heididorf (Heidi village) cancellation mark.

Info: Open March 15-November 15, 10am-5pm, Adults CHF 7, kids CHF 3, http://is.gd/bkDDd

Swissminiatur Melide

An open-air museum with a 3,560 meter long railway and 120 scale models of well-known Swiss buildings and monuments. Included in the display are 1,500 different plants and 15,000 flowers.

Info: Mid-March to Mid-November, Tues-Fri, 9am-6pm, adults CHF 11.70, kids CHF 8.30, <u>www.swissminiatur.ch</u>

Frog Museum

Münchenstein

Nearly 14,000 frogs—ceramic, wood, glass, leather, silver, fashioned as frog coffee cups, mugs, shoes, candles, etc.

Info: Grabenackerstrasse 8, open 1st Sunday of each month, 2pm-5pm, http://is.gd/bkOlk

Rhone Glacier Grotto

Near Furkapass

Each year a tunnel is drilled 100

meters into the ice and a grotto carved. Since it's part of the glacier, the grotto moves downstream about 10 cm per day. Dress warmly.

Info: Open 8am-6pm, Adults 3.50, http://is.gd/bkJ6X

Automata

Neuchâtel

Highly-detailed, amazing miniature robots built in 1769-1780. They consist of three figures: a woman 30 inches tall with tiny fingers articulated in great detail who breathes (the chest moves in and out) and plays a piano; and a pair of 24-inch child figures, one actually draws various objects and the other writes with a pen on paper. See them in action the first Sunday of each month, otherwise there's a short video.

Info: 1 Esplanade Leopold Robert, http://is.gd/bkCHL

Aquasplash Renens

Renens/Lausanne

Water park with toboggan slides. **Info:** Open daily, 9:30am-7pm, adults CHF 9, kids CHF 5, http://is.gd/create.php

Teddyland

Schynige Platte

Huge collection of teddy bears, some of which are old and valuable. Reachable only by rail.

Info: Open daily, free admission with train ticket to Schynige Platte, http://is.gd/bkCTQ

Zoo de Servion

Servion

Specializes in preserving endangered species. See Tinka, the Siberian tiger.

Info: Open daily year round, 9am-6pm, adults CHF 10, kids CHF 5, http://is.gd/bkB6B

Underground Lake

St. Leonard near Sion

A 40-minute boat ride on one of Europe's largest underground lakes.

Info: Open mid-March to October, 9am-5pm, adults CHF 6, kids CHF 4, http://is.gd/bkCft

Swiss Camera Museum

Vevey

Lots of cameras/photos. Hands-on workshop helps kids understand basic

photography

Info: Address: Grand Place, open year round, 11am-5:30pm except Monday, adults CHF 8, kids 16 and under free, http://is.gd/bkAHP

Zürich Zoo Zürich

More than 300 species. Direct contact with animals is possible in the kids area, "Zoolino." Each day there are special programs such as feeding animals and zoo keeper seminars.

Info: Open Year round, 9am-6pm (5pm winter), Adults CHF 22, kids CHF 11, http://is.gd/bkBWQ

Holiday Park Finder

A website listing Swiss holiday parks.

Info: http://is.gd/bkAVF

READERS' FORUM

Hotel Hornburg, Rothenburg

After 15 years of staying at the **Hotel Hornburg Garni** (tel. +49/09861/8480, fax 5570, <u>info@hotel-hornburg.de</u>, <u>www.hotel-hornburg.de</u>) the welcome was as wonderful as always and the entire stay a joy. The Hornburg is a true *gemütlichkeit* experience. This is *not* a place for someone who wants a spa, room service, a bar, a fitness room, etc.

This is a true German experience. Martin and Gabi are exceptional hosts. The hotel, formerly a private villa, is situated just outside the wall, with wonderful views of the historic ramparts and only a five-minute walk to the town center. The rooms are tastefully decorated and each has its own en suite bath. The breakfast is typically German with endless excellent coffee/tea and an assortment of meats and cheeses and the world's best rolls. Martin manages to make perfect soft-boiled eggs every time. Fresh fruit, yogurt, cereals, juice and a variety of jams and honey round out the menu.

But the true value of the Hotel Hornburg is the personalities of Gabi and Martin. They welcome you as friends and cannot do enough to make your stay as pleasant as possible. They know Rothenburg intimately and will steer you in whatever direction your

www.gemut.com

taste requires, be it a fancy restaurant or just plain good, local cuisine (ask about "the potato place"!) And when you are foot-weary and in need of a respite, help yourself to a beer or a small bottle of wine from one of their two honor bars. Need to keep in touch with those at home? The Hornburg offers a complimentary computer located in a second floor library alcove with free internet access.

Yes, Rothenburg is "touristy" but stay after the tour buses leave and you have the town to yourself.

VIRGINIA KIEHN BLAIRSTOWN, NJ

Zürich, Basel, Strasbourg

Just before Thanksgiving, my wife and I decided that our last European trip—to Salzburg during pre-Christmas 2006—has been too long ago, so we threw our bank balance to the wind and decided to spend a modest week in three new destinations for us: Zurich, Basel, and Strasbourg, the latter being touted as the Christmas Capital of Europe. Having spent most of our 30 years of travel devoted to the Advent/Christmas season in Germany and Austria, we wanted to see this for ourselves.

What we found in Strasbourg was indeed overwhelming. No fewer than six Christkindlmarkts scattered around the town center, and an atmosphere of crowds that we have only witnessed at the local agricultural fair, or perhaps Oktoberfest in Munich. We were literally among hordes of thousands on the middle weekend vying for the ability to see everything, and as we had made hotel reservations at the perfectly central **Hotel** Cathedrale (www.hotel-cathedrale.fr) in November, we were warned correctly that we would need to make restaurant reservations weeks or months in advance if we wanted to eat something besides McD's or Denny's.

Having a poor knowledge of French, and despite the typical Gallic coolness toward *l'Americaine* without such knowledge, I took some sadistic pleasure in our being ushered right to tables reserved weeks in advance while real French folks were turned away at the door. I don't know why, but this made me smile no end!

Yes, Strasbourg is beautiful and

the town fathers have done a great job creating their Christmas capital: but it just isn't the same as in "our" countries. There is little coziness to these markets, and the extreme crush of visitors makes them a bit difficult to savor.

By contrast, the Christmas market near Barfüsserplatz in Basel where we completed our visit was what these markets should be: visitor friendly with excellent merchandise, Gluhwein, and gemütlichkeit. And what a treat it was to have stayed in Basel for the first time at a truly cozy hotel, a converted jail/police station known as the Hotel Brasserie au Violon (www.au-violon.com). Although we chose one of the bigger rooms in the police station rather than the jail, and still a bit cozy, this was good value for Switzerland at CHF 202/night. And being near the charming Spalenberg section of the old town is a real plus. Among our memories: a very cold mile or so walk along the Rhine to our restaurant for dinner one evening, the Gasthof der Goldenen Sternen (www.sternen-basel.ch). This walk went from Rheinsprung, past the Münster and through the pretty St. Alban neighborhood of historic houses. The bracing air and starry evening were the kind of thing we love about "our" countries during the Christmas season.

Likewise, Zürich was most pleasant at this time as well, with some similarities to Basel in the old town. There we stayed at your recommended Florhof (www.florhof.ch) and we loved it in every way. A bit more expensive than we are accustomed to budget in our travels, I have no regrets in having done so at this most gemütlich of establishments, and I am very happy I didn't try to stay elsewhere, tempted by price reductions in the chains, on this first time visit to this city.

We now will be looking for ideas for additional visits to Switzerland, despite being neither hikers nor skiers.

It just goes to show that just when you think 30 years of travels have exhausted the possibilities of something new, fresh and stimulating, think again.

ROB HUMBERSTON LONGMEADOW, MA

(Got a recommendation or an especially pleasant or unfortunate experience to share? Email bob@gemut.com.)

We Recommend

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

Berlin

Hotel Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, tel. +49/030/327 7440, info@hotelartnouveau.de, www.hotelartnouveau.de Hotel Domus, Uhlandstrasse 49, Germany D-10719, tel. +49/030/882041, fax 882 0410, info@hotel-domus-berlin.de

Hotel Bristol, Schauplatzgasse 10, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 0101, fax 311 9479, email reception@bristolbern.ch
Hotel Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3000, tel. +41/031/329 9595, fax 329 95 96, hotelkreuz@swissonline.ch

Lucerne

Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, mail@wilden-mann.ch Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel: +41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, info@cascada.ch

Munich

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

Hotel Acanthus, An Der Hauptfeuerwache 14, D-80331 München, tel. +49/089 / 23 18 80, e-mail: acanthus@t-online.de Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24, fax 550 3856, office@kraft-hotel.com

Rothenburg ob der Tauber

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

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

Salzburg & Environs

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

Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, Austria A-5020 tel. +43/0662/843 728, fax 843 728 8, struber@sbg.at Hotel Jedermann, Rupertgasse 25, Austria A-5020, tel. +43/0662/873241-0, jedermann@salzburginfo.or.at

Vienna

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

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

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

Zürich

Hotel Florhof, Florhofgasse 4, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. 41/01/261 4470, fax 261 4611, info@florhof.ch
Hotel Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932, hotel.arlette@bluwin.ch

Frankfurt Airport

Steigenberger Esprix Hotel Frankfurt Airport, Cargo City Süd, D-60549, tel. +49/069/69 70 99, fax 69 70 94 44, frankfurt@esprix-hotels.de

Hotel Birkenhof, von-Eiff-Str 37, Hanau-Steinheim, D-63456, tel. +49/06181/648 80, fax 64 88 39, info@HotelBirkenhof. de, www.hotelbirkenhof.de (25-minuted from airport) Hotel Dreieich, Frankfurter Str. 49, Langen , D-63225, tel. +49/06103/91 50, fax 52 030. hotel-dreieich@mx.de

Munich Airport

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

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

Zürich Airport

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

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