

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

February 26, 1997

The Pace Quickens

There is much to discuss this month: among other things, the new *Michelin Red Guides* are out, **Swissair** has made all its transatlantic flights nonsmoking and the city of Weimar ready for 1999, its year as Europe's "Cultural City."

Weimar

One of the most delightful aspects of 10-plus years in this business, has been getting to know underpublicized and undervisited great towns and cities. For obvious reasons, cities like Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Heidelberg, Lucerne and Salzburg are immensely popular and heavily visited. As a result, such places are often overwhelmed with tourists. For example, Salzburg in season is positively Disneylandesque. There are long lines to visit the major sights and the pedestrian-only Getreidegasse is a sea of humanity. Hotel rooms are expensive and hard to get.

But there is a second tier of wonderful destinations which are often just as interesting and charming as the famous, must-see stops. It's difficult to understand how towns like Bamberg, Regensburg and Graz aren't more popular with tourists. They have it all; great buildings, important history, enchanting old towns and good hotels and restaurants.

Right now, Weimar fits in this second category. I say 'right now' because given the publicity it is about to receive in connection with the 1999 festivities, Weimar could easily become a very hot destination. Though there are no awesome cathedrals or castles, it's now on my list of favorite German cities.

One reason for my enthusiasm
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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

WEIMAR

An historic town formerly in the DDR (East Germany), Weimar is beloved by Germans but not well-known to Westerners. It is, however, catching on. Gemütlichkeit's advice: see it now.

Of all the historic towns now emerging as the old East Germany becomes fully Westernized, probably the most important is Weimar, known and dismissed in the West for the last 40 years as the capital of the "old Weimar Republic."

That period of ineffectual government, marked by inflation so virulent that bushel baskets of deutsche marks were required to purchase a single postage stamp, led to National Socialism and Adolf Hitler.

But dismissing Weimar because of its connection with a failed government is like judging Michael Jordan's athletic ability based on his baseball playing days. Weimar, like Jordan, has so much more to offer. Sometimes called

the "Athens of Germany," it was never a spawning ground for extreme politics, but a cradle for great literature, music and ideas.

That this placid little town (58,000 pop.) played a major role in the development of German culture hit home at our first sight-seeing stop — the small chapel in the town's Alter Friedhof (old cemetery). As the only visitors on a rainy December morning, we descended alone to the Ducal Vault where the ornate sarcophagi of the royal family of the Grand Duchy of Saxe-Weimar play second fiddle to a pair of plain, polished wooden coffins. Sitting side by side, they are occupied by two of the most revered citizens in German history, Johann Wolfgang Goethe and

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Swissair Bans Transatlantic Smoking

Because of complaints from a growing number of nonsmoking customers, **Swissair** will no longer allow smoking on its transatlantic routes beginning March 30. This is in line with a smoking ban to be imposed on transatlantic routes by Swissair's three partners: **Delta Air Lines**, **Austrian Airlines** and **Sabena**.

Chances for a ban within Europe, however, are not so good. According to a survey of 1,000 business passengers, conducted by the International Air Transport Association, Europeans are the most "pro-smoking" among the world's business travellers, with nearly 25 percent opposing any further curbs.

Best guidebooks? It's Michelin Hands Down

Most of the *Michelin Red Guides* for 1997 are out and we are looking over our copies of the German and Switzerland versions (there is no Red Guide for Austria).

These hardbound books are the number one reference and trip-take-along guides for independent travelers to Europe. No single guidebook series approaches their scope and accuracy.

In addition to the country Red Guides, Europe's major cities, including Prague, Budapest and Vienna, which are located in countries for which there are no Red Guides, are included in *Michelin's Europe Red Guide*.

Though we often disagree with Michelin's ratings and are sometimes dumbfounded when certain hotels and/or restaurants are left out of the guides, they remain the essential reference. Not only are the Red Guides always in our suitcase, they are valuable year-round bookshelf references for trip planning and for settling dinner table arguments.

Through an ingenious system of symbols, the bright red 1997 guides rate thousand of restaurants and hotels in Germany and Switzerland. The format pro-

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asm is the people. I can't recall when we've been treated so well by everyone: hotel personnel, cab drivers (to and from the rail station), restaurant servers and the tourist office. The small-town, unpretentious warmth seemed so easy and genuine it reminded us of our first trips to Germany in the '70s.

Theory: Besides being able to turn right on a red light there may be one other positive leftover from the old DDR. As bad and repressive as the communist days were, families and personal relationships were paramount. Most East Germans never experienced the cynicism and hardening of the soul inherent to the process of chasing a deutschemark, climbing the corporate ladder and accumulating the trappings of capitalism. The result is self-esteem that was never undermined by a competitive society that defines the value of an individual in material terms. That, in turn, fosters relaxed, pleasing social skills.

(O.k., you're excused for nodding off during that, but now it's time to talk travel again.)

Editor's Notes on a Prague Visit

Hotel Savoy

Some say the Savoy, located on the hill in the Hradcany Castle district, is the best in town. The Intercontinental, however, is splashier and more centrally located.

Our room was spacious, well lit and finished with high quality materials. The cherrywood furniture and trim lent a luxurious touch.

Public rooms were of the Marriott/Red Lion genre and not so tasteful as the guestrooms. At check-in, guests are offered a glass of champagne or juice, compliments of the house.

Except for the below-average buffet break-


fasts, our meals were eaten elsewhere. We did, however, end each evening with a night-cap in the somewhat cheesy red plush bar and enjoyed the pianist who performed nightly at a white grand piano in the adjoining dining room. One night at 10:30 p.m. we tried to order dessert but were told the kitchen had closed. We reminded our waiter that closing time is 11 p.m. but to no avail.

However, as we recounted last month in our lost luggage saga, the hotel staff gets top marks for friendliness and service. Also appreciated were the spiffy, fairly-priced cabs the bellmen could summon on a moment's notice.

Within a short walk, are numerous restaurants tucked here and there in the many impressive buildings that comprise the Castle District. The downtown is quickly accessible via taxi, tram (stop in front of hotel) or on foot in about 25 minutes.

Overall, we liked this hotel very much and would happily return. Book it through the **Steigenberger** reservation service at 800-223-5652. Current winter special rate is \$199 per room.

Hotel Savoy, Keplerova Ul. 6, CZ-11800, tel. 02/2430 2430, fax 02/2430 2128.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 15/20 

Places to Eat

U Cisarú

This trying-to-be-fancy-but-not-making-it restaurant in the Castle District is decorated like the dining hall of a medieval castle. In the entry, two young women play ancient music on stringed instruments. At 9:30 p.m. we were the only diners. The cost for a three-course meal and two beers each was 971 Kc (\$34). The food was edible but there are many better restaurants in Prague.

U Cisarú, Loretanska 175, Prague 1, tel. 53 96 04.

Rating: QUALITY 5/20 VALUE 8/20

Golden Angel

Located on the north side of pedestrian-only Celetna between the Tyn Church and the Powder Tower. Pass through the smoky bar and into the high-ceilinged, dark-wood-trimmed dining room for inexpensive, authentic Czech dishes.

We tried what the English menu called "old Prague onion soup with toast;" chicken bouillon; a salad of grated cabbage and horseradish in a light vinegar dressing (each 30 Kc/\$1.05); a pair of short, pink Prague sausages served with thinly sliced onions and pimentos; and "baked toast" which turned out to be half a roll with a kind of "sloppy Joe" sauce and cheese melted over all. The latter was a little spicy and served with chopped red cabbage, corn, white cabbage and pimento with the same vinegar dressing.

I lost the receipt but we couldn't have spent more than \$20, including the Radegast beer which was attractively served in large mugs with handles and raised-leaf motif at the base.

Golden Angel, on Celetna near Powder Tower
Rating: QUALITY 8/20 VALUE 13/20

U Lorety

Another atmospheric restaurant in the Castle District. We started with an ample slab (70 grams) of excellent smoked salmon for 150 Kc. (\$5.25), then chose main courses of roast pork (170 Kc/\$6) and roast duck (230 Kc/\$8), both of which were served with a bread dumpling and sauerkraut.

These main courses were above average, except the dumplings were a little dry though good for soaking up the juices.

We each had a simple salad (50 Kc/\$1.75) which consisted of sliced head lettuce with lots of Roma tomatoes and a tasty dressing.

Our dessert was "Hradcany Flapjacks"

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Hotel Rating Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	People/Service	30%
Above Average	12 - 15	Location/Setting	15%
Average	8 - 11	Guestrooms	30%
Adequate	4 - 7	Public rooms	5%
Unacceptable	0 - 3	Facilities/Restaurant	20%

Value Rating	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Outstanding Value	17 - 20	Food	65%
Very Good Value	12 - 16	Service	20%
Average Value	9 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Below Average Value	5 - 8		
A Rip-Off	0 - 4		

Special Designation

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

WEIMAR

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Friedrich von Schiller. Weimar was the physical and creative headquarters for both.

The genius Goethe, who created *Faust* and directed the National Theater, is often referred to as the greatest German of them all and his pal Schiller — as in Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in the glorious choral movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony and the *William Tell* drama — is not far behind. Perhaps one way to judge their impact on Germany is by the literally thousands of Schiller *Strassen* and Goethe *Platzen* in towns all over the country.

Among Weimar's other famous citizens: the painter, Lucas Cranach the Elder; J.S. Bach and Franz Liszt, both of whom directed the local orchestra; Walter Gropius, who established the original Bauhaus, which altered forever the course of modern design and architecture; and the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Of course, there is a Cranachhaus, a Liszthaus, a Bachstube, a Schillerhaus, a Goethehaus and even a Goethe Gartenhaus in the town's lovely Ilm Park, all of which can be visited.

The Deutsches National Theater, adoption site of the constitution of the ill-fated Weimar Republic in 1919, was almost completely destroyed in World War II but today offers a schedule of music and drama whose frequency and quality are extraordinary for a town of this size.

Visitors can also take in a variety of palaces and museums or make the grim, five-mile pilgrimage to Buchenwald, one of the largest of Hitler's concentration camps.

Even if most Americans don't know much about Weimar, the Germans, of course, are in love with the town and fully aware of its historical significance. Soon after unification, the government began pouring millions of deutschemarks into making it

a showplace. The culmination of that will be 1999, a year in which Weimar has been designated Europe's Cultural Capital. It is by far the smallest city so named and follows such European metropolises as Madrid ('92), Lisbon ('94), Copenhagen ('96) and Stockholm ('98).

Even though Weimar might now be said to be a "work in progress," the cranes and scaffolding detract only a little from its peaceful charm.

Given the publicity push that will accompany the "Cultural Capital" hoorah, Weimar could become like Salzburg or Rothenburg ob der Tauber, where hundreds of buses each day dump their loads of tourists to have a look around.

The time to see Weimar is now; preferably in the off-season.

Places to Stay

We would be comfortable in any of the hotels reviewed here; but one is extraordinary and two others offer that special combination of warmth, comfort and price that earned them a "G" rating.

Wolff's Art Hotel & Restaurant

Stunning interior design — a 90s version of Bauhaus/Art Nouveau — and a fantastic collection of Polish and Czech poster art combine to make this new (1993) hotel a visual delight. Wolff's is the creation of an East German engineer, Dr. Christian Wolff, who acquired the property from the descendants of a Jewish family, most of whom died in nearby Buchenwald. As a memorial to the family, Dr. Wolff has erected on the grounds a tiled monolith that is a striking focal point of an outdoor conversation pit.

Two extraordinary guestrooms are numbers 13 and 14 at 260 DM (\$158). We give a slight nod to the former but both are huge with massive white wood beams, dormer windows, lofty ceilings and large, well-furnished separate sitting areas.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

European Cities of Culture
1990 - Glasgow
1991 - Dublin
1992 - Madrid
1993 - Antwerp
1994 - Lisbon
1995 - Luxembourg
1996 - Copenhagen
1997 - Thessalonika
1998 - Stockholm
1999 - Weimar

WEIMAR

Altitude: 208 meters, 682 feet

Population: 58,000

Tourist Information Weimar

Markt 10, D-99423 Weimar

Tel. 03643/2400-0

Fax 03643/61240

Event hotline 03643/2400-30

Location: Weimar is directly on the Eisenach-Dresden Autobahn 4 (E40) with a connection to the Autobahn 9 Berlin-Leipzig-Nürnberg. By train, Weimar is a stop on Frankfurt/Main-Leipzig InterCity line as well as on the Kassel-Erfurt-Chemnitz regional line

Map: ADAC #23

Guide Service: Those with more than a passing interest in Weimar's history might find that a guide hired through the tourist office is worth the money — particularly if two or more couples can share the cost. The charge for two hours is 120 DM (\$73). Ask for **Alexander Livitsky**, an erudite young man, who took us on a fascinating quick march through the town's main sites. After such an overview, you can return to the Goethehaus, Schillerhaus, museums, etc. and browse them at your leisure.

Pass for Sight/Transport: The WeimarCard costs 25 DM (\$15), is valid for 72 hours and provides admission to most of the major sights, unlimited use of public transportation (buses) and reduced prices (50%) on sight-seeing tours and theater events (10%) at the Deutsches National Theater.

Distance to:

City	KM	Miles
Berlin	300	186
Düsseldorf	400	248
Frankfurt/Main	300	186
Hamburg	500	310
Copenhagen	700	434
London	1000	620
Madrid	2000	1240
Munich	400	248
Prague	300	186
Rome	1500	930
Vienna	900	558

Key Attractions:

Sight	Hours	Closed	Cost
Goethehaus	9-5	Mon	6 DM
Goethe Gartenhaus	9-12, 1-5	Mon	6 DM
Schillerhaus	9-5	Tue	5 DM
Ducal Vault	9-1, 2-5	Tue	4 DM
Liszthaus	9-1, 2-5	Mon	4 DM
Tiefurt Palace	9-1, 2-5	Mon	6 DM
Anna Amalia Library	11-12:30	Sun	2 DM
Bauhaus Museum	10-6	Mon	4 DM
Belvedere Palace	10-6	Mon	4 DM

WEIMAR

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They are the best rooms we saw in Weimar.

Most rooms, like number 2, a light, airy corner double, have tiled floors (not to worry, there is radiant heating under all floors), tall ceilings and windows, the latest halogen lighting and spacious, sparkling, fully-tiled bathrooms.

The 35-room Wolff is actually four buildings located in a residential area about 10 minutes' walk from the center.

Beer enthusiasts should note that the hotel's restaurant is the only place in Weimar which serves Singer beer, made by a brewery "museum" in a nearby town.

Factoring in the Wolff's warm welcome with its extraordinary decor and amenities, we rank it Weimar's best hotel.

Daily Rates: Singles 150 DM (\$91), doubles 190 DM (\$115), suites 240 to 260 DM (\$145-\$158). Sauna, solarium, swimming pool, nonsmoking rooms.

Contact: Wolff's Art Hotel & Restaurant, Freiherr-vom-Stein-Allee 3a/b, D-99425 Weimar, tel. 5 40 60, fax 54 06 99.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 17/20 **C**

Christliches Hotel Amalienhof

Going from the stylish Wolff's to the down-home, 22-room, Amalienhof is not as big a step down as one might imagine. More traditional and old world, the Amalienhof is the Wolff's equal in warmth of welcome and not far behind in comfort.

There is no restaurant or elevator but our room, number 203, had a high ceiling, good furniture and good reading lights. There were two windows, a comfortable sofa, desk, table and two hard chairs. Overhead lighting was only adequate and the bathroom — a one person affair — had no toiletries, bar soap or washcloths. There was a dispenser of soft soap, however.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The basic buffet breakfast, in a small but pleasant room, was served by a friendly, efficient woman of about 60 who looked like the dean of women at the local university. While the selection was not vast, the items served, notably the cheese and diced fresh fruit dipped from a large bowl, were first rate.

Owned by the church (one presumes Lutheran), the Amalienhof is just steps from the center of town. Innkeepers Karin and Jochen Bretthauer are particularly helpful and friendly.

Daily Rates: Singles 125 to 150 DM (\$76-\$91), doubles 186 to 196 DM (\$113-\$119).

Contact: Christliches Hotel Amalienhof, Amalienstrasse 2, D-99423 Weimar, tel. 54 90, fax 54 91 10

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 14/20 **C**

Flamberg Hotel Elephant

This famous hotel on the town square has been remodeled since it was first reviewed in 1990 by *Gemütlichkeit's* Claudia Fischer and Roger Holliday. Then it was owned and operated by the state-run Inter-

Just Asking

Apparently, for \$100,000 one can overnight in the Lincoln bedroom in the Whitehouse. Considering Lincoln was probably the greatest American of the 19th century, that may be a fair price.

With that in mind, does the approximately \$218 it costs to reserve room number 128 in Weimar's Flamberg Hotel Elephant, where Adolf Hitler is said to have stayed when in Weimar, sound about right?

hotel organization and an unimpressed Fischer/Holliday gave it a "special DDR rating of two flickering stars."

But things have changed. Gone are the tiny black and white TVs and the wild assortment of unmatched towels. The Hotel Elephant, which Hitler visited many times, has returned to five-star, CNN-on-the-cable, glory.

It is interesting to compare its 1930s-style Art Nouveau decor with

the Wolff's contemporary version. The Elephant's guestrooms, though large and expensively furnished, are just a bit clunky. The furniture is heavy and bulky, the bathroom tile patterns and colors a bit strange and light fixtures that looked good in the days of the Weimar Republic aren't much to read by.

Public rooms, however, are extraordinary and worth a peek, even if you're not staying at the hotel. See the Franz Liszt bar, the Richard Wagner Saal, the library and the Anna Amalia restaurant (it was she, the Duchess of Saxe-Weimar, who hired the writer Christoph Martin Wieland to tutor her son, Karl August, who in turn convinced Goethe to come to Weimar where he stayed for 57 years).

This is an expensive, rather impersonal hotel, but full of history. Goethe and Schiller wined and dined here, as did the likes of J.S. Bach, Franz Liszt, Leo Tolstoy, Frans Grillparzer, Richard Wagner, Clara Schumann and, of course, the villain of the century, Mr. H. (Hitler spoke several times from the balcony off room number 128 at the front of the hotel, a suite in which he presumably was a guest.)

Daily Rates: Singles 200 to 260 DM (\$121-\$158), doubles 260 to 380 DM (\$158-\$230). Special weekend packages available. Some nonsmoking rooms.

Contact: Flamberg Hotel Elephant, Markt 19, D-99423 Weimar, tel. 80 20, fax 6 53 10

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 11/20

Pension Altenburg

A 15-minute walk across the Ilm and above the town, the Pension Altenburg is the best value in Weimar. Frau Marikka Hüttmann offers 12 simple but well-scrubbed rooms all with private bath, TV and telephone. Some on the first floor (our second floor) are under the eaves and have cozy dormer windows.

Number 8 is a large single that rents for 90 DM (\$55) and number 12, one of the more interesting dormer window rooms, has twin beds and


EDITOR'S CHOICE

goes for 130 DM (\$79). (Though her brochure lists room prices at 90 DM and 150 DM, Mrs. Hüttmann quoted us prices of 90 DM for singles and 130 DM for doubles.)

The house itself recently underwent a complete reconstruction and is on what looks to be an acre or two of land, thus there is plenty of free parking.

Daily Rates: Singles 90 DM (\$55), doubles 130 DM (\$79). Cable TV, no elevator.

Contact: Pension Altenburg, Tiefurter Allee 2a, D-99425 Weimar, tel. 03643/64980, fax 03643/400303.

Rating: QUALITY 10/20 VALUE 15/20 

Hotel Liszt

Most of the rooms of this temporarily decorated hotel, which is a five-minute stroll from the center, come with kitchen facilities. We assume the main clientele is longer-staying business travelers.

The location is right, it is clean and the rooms larger than average, but the Liszt has not a shred of old-world charm.

Daily Rates: Singles 95 to 105 DM (\$58-\$64), doubles 140 DM (\$85), apartments 170 to 210 DM (\$103-\$127). Underground parking.

Contact: Hotel Liszt, Lisztstrasse 1-3, D-99423 Weimar, tel. 5 40 80, fax 54 08 30.

Rating: QUALITY 8/20 VALUE 12/20

Places to Eat

Based on the three restaurants below, Weimar will not be recognized as a capital of gastronomy in 1999. But the food was straightforward, a few dishes were very good, the portions were massive and we ate every morsel.

Sommer's Weinstuben

Just around the corner from the Christliches Hotel Amalienhof. The small, dark dining room with plain wood tables, a big tile stove and old photographs, was pleasant enough until halfway through dinner when one of the under-30 diners asked for the music to be cranked up.

Like many cafes and restaurants in Weimar, the Sommer's clientele is largely students.

The food was so-so. The salad

greens were fresh and crunchy but the dressing watery. A skillet of fried potatoes, thin slices of pork, onion and garlic was hearty but too garlicky and too greasy.

The beer was good and the service friendly. Sommer's Weinstuben und Restaurant, Humboldtstrasse 2, D-99423, tel. 03643/65919.

Rating: QUALITY 7/20 VALUE 8/20

Gasthaus zum weissen Schwan

"The White Swan is ready to welcome you with open wings at any time." So wrote Goethe in a letter inviting a friend to Weimar. This charming inn next to Goethe's house has been beautifully restored since unification and is, as it has been for centuries, Weimar's favorite "local."

The *Stube*, where we were served, has the traditional wood floors, dark wooden tables and head-high dark wood paneling. Two interesting murals depicted rollicking parties.

Big plates of food range in price from about 18 to 28 DM (\$11-\$17). *Wildragout* (18.50 DM/\$11) was a rich stew of wild game including boar and venison. Chicken breast (22.50 DM/\$14) stuffed with ground boiled beef was too dry but a decent cream sauce saved it — barely. Salads of butter lettuce, tomatoes and a dill dressing were crisp and fresh.

Gasthaus zum weissen Schwan, Frauentorstr. 23, D-99423. tel. 03643/202521, fax 03643/202575.

Rating: QUALITY 11/20 VALUE 11/20


Residenz Café

The best food we found was at this smoky, sprawling, busy student hangout. *Schnitzel mit Petersilienkartoffeln* (19.50/\$12) was an excellent piece of veal, perfectly cooked. But the dozen or so small potatoes with it, having probably been boiled earlier in the day then microwaved, had a strange texture.

Thuringer Grillplatte (18.50 DM/\$11) was a giant mixed grill of various meats and sausages served with warm potato salad dotted with chunks of bacon. Vvvvveeeeery filling.

Good mixed salads were 4.50 DM (\$2.75) and the beer was the world's best, Budvar from the Czech Republic.

Don't mind the hopelessly confused decor which is probably left over from the communist days. Residenz Café, Grüner Markt 4, D-99423 Weimar, tel/fax 03643/59408.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20 VALUE 13/20 

MICHELIN RED GUIDES

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vides an incredible amount of information about each establishment.

In Switzerland, for example, the guide rates 1,211 hotels in more than 900 locations. The Germany guide lists more than 10,000 hotels and restaurants in about 8,000 cities, towns and villages. Listed under each city is the town's population, altitude, telephone area code, tourist office address plus phone and fax numbers, airport phone number, dates of local festivals, key tourist sights with map coordinate references, addresses and phone numbers of local golf courses, road distance to nearby towns and a lot more.

Provided for each establishment listed is all the basic information concerning price, phone, fax, address and the availability of such services as TV, air-conditioning, nonsmoking rooms, rooms for disabled guests, modems, swimming pools, exercise rooms and so on. The symbols highlight quiet, secluded hotels, especially pleasant hotels and hotels with special features such as good views, rustic interiors and/or extraordinary furnishings.

Also identified are good restaurants in several categories, the best-known of which are the expensive, starred establishments. The 1997 Switzerland guide, for example, lists 864 restaurants but only 77 of them get one or two stars. The big news this year is that famed **Girardet** in Crissier lost its three-star rating. Michelin now finds no Swiss restaurants worthy of three stars. Germany has two three-star restaurants, **Im Schiffchen** in Kaiserwerth near Düsseldorf and the **Schwarzwaldstube** of the **Hotel Traube Tonbach**

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MICHELIN RED GUIDES

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near Baiersbronn in the Black Forest.

To describe all the features offered is not possible here, but we will mention a few of the elements which make these books so helpful, especially for motorists.

- There are very good maps which facilitate driving in and around medium to large cities. Many of the hotels listed in the guides are spotted on the maps and thus much easier to find.

- The guides list hotels and restaurants in order of preference in their category.

- For each town there is a notation of the distance in kilometers to several nearby and/or important towns and cities. It is a simple matter to determine the exact driving distance from your location to whatever city in Germany you wish to travel. And since there is a distance table to most major European cities as well, one can easily calculate the distance and driving time to these cities also.

- There are, of course, restaurants with the famed Michelin stars (or rosettes). These are expensive but provide an outstanding dining experience.

However, there are three other symbols for noteworthy restaurants: In the Switzerland guide, restaurants below the star level, but offering "good food at moderate prices," are denoted by the words "Menu" or "Repas" or "Pasto" in red type. In the German guide, such restaurants are identified by the word "Menu" in red. German restaurants "serving a simple meal for less than 25 DM" (\$15), and Swiss restaurants serving a "dish of the day" under 20 Sfr. (\$14), have a new two coin symbol in the left margin of their listing. It has been our experience that these restaurants usually serve three courses for this price and that the food is good as well as inexpensive.

- The Switzerland guide uses a series of regional maps that help the reader locate the position of very small towns in relation to larger,


better known ones.

For example, you may not know where Ardon is. Its *Red Guide* listing, however, notes the town is 21 kilometers from Martigny. The word Martigny is in blue which tells the reader that Ardon is on the Martigny regional map. Turning to the Martigny listing the reader will quickly see that Ardon is on the Rhône river northeast of Martigny.

- One of Michelin's most clever and rewarding features involves several pages of maps of the country at the front of guide. Next to the names of the towns are symbols representing special hotels and restaurants which, in the main text of the guide, are:

1. Starred restaurants.
2. Restaurants with "good food at moderate prices."
3. "Very quiet or quiet, secluded hotels."
4. "Pleasant hotels."

From these maps one can then refer to the guide's main text to determine the address, phone number, price, facilities, etc. of these more highly recommended establishments. This system's beauty is that it allows a traveler passing through a region to pinpoint a nearby fine hotel or restaurant and be confident of a happy experience. In most cases there will be a choice of several such places within a short drive.

The *Michelin Red Guides*, used in conjunction with detailed maps — 1:200,000 (1cm = 2km) scale — and *Michelin Green Guides* for sights, are the auto traveler's most important tools. 

READERS' FORUM

Florhof Loses a Customer

Having recently returned from a five week stay in Switzerland, I thought you might be interested in some comments regarding hotels I visited.

In looking over previous issues of *Gemütlichkeit*, I noticed your high recommendation of the **Hotel Flo-**

rhof in Zürich saying that "the cordial, meticulous attention-to detail management style of Brigitte and Beat Schiesser puts the Florhof over the top." I beg to differ!!!! Incidentally, the Schiessers are NOT the owners but the managers.

In mid-September I called the Florhof from Los Angeles to reserve a room for mid-October. I had been a guest at the Florhof for 13 consecutive years while it was managed by the Schilter family but had not been back since the hotel was renovated and taken over by the new managers. It is now a member of the Romantik Hotel chain.

Upon my arrival no one was available to pick up my luggage at the train station (it had not arrived on the same train from Lugano as I did), a service previously offered. Nor was anyone available to take the luggage to the curb when I left. Also I was told by the front desk staff that the restaurant was closed due to remodeling of the kitchen. I had not been advised of this when I made the reservation and, frankly, was greatly upset to hear of this.

The double room (queen-size bed) was lovely in its decor and the bathroom modern. The rate for single occupancy was Sfr. 248 (\$171). Except for the girl at the front desk there was no evidence of the managers.

The next morning I spoke to Mrs. Schiesser and expressed my dismay at the lack of restaurant facilities since I am an elderly lady, traveling alone and was not about to go out to dinner at night by myself. It is for that reason that I always choose a hotel with a dining room. I told Mrs. Schiesser that had I been told of this at the time I made the reservation, I would have chosen a different hotel. Her most insensitive reply was "you can still go to another hotel." The next day she did not even bother to say "good morning" and most of the time the managers were not visible.

When I paid the bill there was a 10% deduction for "inconvenience and noise." Ear plugs had been placed in the room to alleviate the construction noise!

While the decor of the hotel is

certainly attractive, the friendliness, charm and warmth of the former managers is sadly lacking and I would no longer recommend the hotel to anyone. I wrote a letter of complaint both to the Swiss Tourist Office and to the Romantik Hotel chain and from the latter received a very courteous and apologetic reply plus two coupons of DM 100 each to use at any Romantik Hotel in the future.

In Lugano I spent one week at the **Hotel International au Lac** where I had a small but comfortable room with balcony facing the lake for Sfr 195 (\$118) including buffet breakfast and dinner. The meals were very good and varied, the service pleasant and efficient and the owner, Mr. Schmid, always available and interested in his guests. The front desk staff was most concerned when, due to a nasty cold, I stayed in bed one day and insisted on delivering a full meal to my room.

In a previous letter to you I spoke highly of the **Hotel Mozart** in Rorschach and once again my 10-day stay there was delightful. The staff is friendly and makes you feel welcome, the breakfast buffet is superb and there is a good selection of hot meals available in the cafe which is also frequented by the locals. I had a cheerful, large double room with modern bath, mini-bar and TV for Sfr. 110 (\$76).

Another sojourn was at the incomparable **Parkhotel Sonnenhof** in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, owned and managed by the Emil Real family. I don't recall ever having seen mention of it in your newsletter but it is one of the finest hotels of its kind in all of Europe. Small, intimate, elegant, luxurious and serving excellent food. Susie E. Kanuch, Van Nuys CA

Munich Airport Brewery

Do you have any recommendations for a hotel in the vicinity of the Munich airport? I can heartily recommend a place to eat and drink near the airport. This would be in Freising at the **Bayerische Staatsbrauerei Weihestephan**. This is the oldest continuously operating brewery in Germany, and serves some of the best beer around. It is a great place to spend your last night (or any other

night for that matter) in Germany, and also comforting to know you are only 10-15 minutes from the airport. Mike Elder, Topeka KS

*(Ed. Note: We've heard good things about the **Hotel Isar** (tel. 08161/8650, fax 08161/865555) in Freising. By the way, those whose eyes have been widened by the glorious interior of Munich's Church of St. John Nepomuk (aka Asamkirche) might be interested to know that Freising, one of Bavaria's oldest towns, also has a cathedral whose Baroque interior was done by the Asam brothers.)*

Meersburg Hotel

Congratulations on 10 years in business with *Gemütlichkeit!!!*

You have certainly given me great service on rental cars over the last 10 years, and lots of good tips of all kinds about traveling in the German speaking countries.

We got lucky when picking up the car in September in Friedrichshafen. We got a free upgrade to a new BMW 318i! The car drove great with good gas mileage. It was those \$65 fill-ups that get you. We drove 5,500 km through Switzerland, Italy, and Provence and turned the car in at Orly. Drop off charge was \$114, but we still saved about \$300 by picking up in Germany.

It worked great to land in Zürich and go downstairs and hop a train to Romanshorn, walk 50 meters with our bags to the ferry across the Bodensee to Friedrichshafen. My business partner and his wife met us and took us to the rental station. Otherwise, you need a taxi as it is about 3 miles.

A treat there is the **Zeppelin Museum**; really worth a stop. They have the passenger lounge and cabins with beds, etc., on display from the originals. They have announced they will launch a "new technology" airship in 1997!

We stayed for the second time at the **Hotel-Cafe Off** (tel. 7532/333, fax 7532/5805) in Meersburg a short drive away (17 km, I think). Great dinner, good service and a friendly staff. It is right on the shore of the Bodensee. Waterview rooms about \$100. Cliff Lindsey, Freeland WA

E U R O P E T R A V E L B R I E F S

Iceland Air Twofer

Iceland Air is offering two-for-one economy class fares to Europe this winter. Destinations include Luxembourg (\$485 or \$242.50 per person), Amsterdam (\$585 or \$292.50 p.p.), Copenhagen (\$637 or \$318.50 p.p.), Oslo (\$637 or \$318.50 p.p.), Stockholm (\$637 or \$318.50 p.p.) and Hamburg (\$595 or \$297.50 p.p.). All fares quoted are midweek from New York and Boston; weekend fares and fares from Baltimore-Washington International, Orlando and Ft. Lauderdale are slightly higher. Stopovers in Iceland up to three nights also available at no additional charge. Contact: 800-223-5500, ext. 4.

LTU Has Low Fares

LTU International Airways has "early booking" fares for travel to Germany this year. April and May fares are \$398 from New York; \$548 from Florida, San Francisco and Phoenix and \$598 from Los Angeles. June and mid-September fares are \$598 from New York, \$698 from Florida, San Francisco and Phoenix, and \$798 from Los Angeles. Mid-September through the end of October, the price is \$398 from New York; \$448 from Florida, San Francisco and Phoenix, and \$478 from Los Angeles. Taxes are not included and tickets are nonrefundable.

LTU flies to Düsseldorf and Frankfurt from nine U.S. cities, with connections to Hamburg and Munich. Contact: 800-888-0200.

New Lufthansa Web Site

Lufthansa now has a page on the Internet's World Wide Web especially for the U.S. market. Located at <http://www.lufthansa-usa.com>, it offers timetables, booking capabilities for international flights and special fare info. Another section has data on Lufthansa's fleet and under the heading "travel planning information" travelers can view airport maps as well as aircraft seating charts. Site visitors can also sign up to have the latest fare promotions automatically e-

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

(58 Kc/\$2.05); small spongy cakes served with blueberries and vanilla ice cream — a hard to beat combination.

The beer was the famous Pilsner Urquell and we finished the evening with slivovice (plum brandy) for 30 Kc (\$1.05).

This is another restaurant trying to offer sophisticated “fine dining” and falling short. Paper napkins designed to fool one into thinking they are linen are a dead giveaway. The plain food, however, was very good and our server most friendly. Places like this should forget the candelabra and the pretense and concentrate on what they do best; authentic, stick-to-the-ribs Czech food.

U Lorety, Loretanske nam. 8, CZ-11000 Prague 1, tel. 02/245 101 91
RATING: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 14/20

U Maxima

Among the four restaurants reviewed here, we the most authentic “old world” feeling — as well as the best food — was at this below-street-level, club-like bistro near the **Intercontinental Hotel** in the Jewish quarter.

Tables were covered with white linen, the floor was tile with oriental runners and the walls were decorated with an eclectic collection of old clocks, musical instruments and pictures.

Arriving mid-afternoon for a late lunch, we were relieved of our coats at the door, shown to a table and immediately asked to choose from a cart of aperitifs, followed by one containing cold salads. We declined both, ordered a Budvar and examined the menu.

Kulcejsda (29 Kc/\$1) was a potato cream soup topped with fluffy sour cream and dill. In it floated a softboiled egg. Quite unusual and one of the best soups I've ever had. Not so memorable but still very good was Liz's tomato soup (39 Kc/\$1.37) with carrots, broccoli, corn and potatoes.

We also shared a plate of crisp, not too greasy, *pommes frites* (30 Kc/\$1) and a decent

celery salad (50 Kc/\$1.75). Along with the usual beer and a dessert the bill came to 429 Kc (\$15).

We mark this as a place to return for dinner.

U Maxima, Bilkova 4/132

RATING: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

Other Thoughts

- Every restaurant we encountered offered a menu in English. Maybe we didn't get far enough off the beaten track.

- Don't worry about the brand of beer served. It's all great.

- Whenever we ordered Czech wine we were disappointed.

- Ivana Follova, a Prague designer of women's clothing, sells her creations at the **Art & Fashion Gallery**, Maiselova 21, tel/fax 02/231 9529. Liz bought a top quality all-wool, handmade cape with hood for \$200. Also, a small, hand-painted dish for \$10.

- For devotees of Art Nouveau/Secessionist architecture there are at least two Prague buildings not to be missed: the **Municipal House** (Obecní dum), where Celetna and Hybernska meet, and the **Grand Hotel Europa**, at Vaclavske namesti 25. Don't plan to stay in the hotel, but have lunch, dinner or afternoon tea in the dining room, which, more than any other room I have seen, speaks of Europe at the turn of the century. 

TRAVEL BRIEFS

Continued from page 7

mailed to them. Through March 31, site visitors can enter an on-line contest for a pair of round-trip tickets to Europe.

USAir Adds Germany Stops

Via a code sharing arrangement with **Deutsche BA**, USAir adds Hamburg and Cologne as new destinations on March 5. The connections will be made through Munich, where passengers from the Philadelphia to Munich USAir flights will transfer to Deutsche BA planes.

UAL Adds DC Flight

United Airlines will add a second daily nonstop flight between Dulles International and Frankfurt. The new service begins June 5.

New Swiss Museum Pass

The new **Swiss Museum Passport** provides entry to museums in towns large and small all over Switzerland for a fraction of the regular cost. The Passport is good at 75 museums, including Lausanne's **Olympic Museum**, Basel's **Kunstmuseum** (one of the world's oldest art galleries), Geneva's **International Red Cross Museum** and Zürich's **Swiss National Museum**. The Passport is sold at all participating museums and Swiss tourist offices. A one-month passport costs \$20 or, for a family of up to five, \$30. A one-year passport is \$75 for adults and \$62 for seniors, students and children. Contact Switzerland Tourism at 310-335-5987 in Los Angeles, 212-757-5944 in New York or 312-630-5840 in

Chicago

Swiss Skiing Cheaper?

Is it possible that Switzerland is a less expensive ski destination for an American than Colorado? For some, probably.

Ski Europe (tel. 800-333-5533) currently offers a seven-day tour package to Interlaken that includes round-trip airfare from New York, airport transfers, accommodations in the **Hotel Chalet Oberland**, breakfast and taxes for \$1,016 (supplements apply from other US gateways). There are no restrictions apart from holidays. **Swisspak** (tel. 800-688-7947) also has a seven-day Interlaken package, with side-trips, ranging from \$1,036 (three-star hotel) to \$1,876 (five-star). **Alphorn Ski Tours** (tel. 800-ALPHORN) offers a seven-night package in Zermatt, at the foot of the Matterhorn, for \$1,495. **Adventures On Skis** (tel. 800-628-9655) offers seven days in Crans-Montana starting at \$975. 

Switzerland vs Colorado

	<u>Vail</u>	<u>Interlaken</u>
# Lifts	26	49
Longest run	4.5 miles	9 miles
Total Cost	\$1,509	\$1,190

*Figures supplied by Switzerland Tourism. Cost are approximate and include airfare from New York (Newark), seven nights accommodations based on first class hotels, breakfast and dinner daily, travel from airport to resort and back, local taxes.

Which Swiss Ski Resort is Best For You?

<u>Priorities</u>	<u>Suggested Resorts</u>
Advanced skiing	Saas-Fee, Verbier, Zermatt
Intermediate skiing	Engelberg, Gstaad, Mürren, Crans-Montana
Beginner skiing	Arosa, Davos, Gstaad, Grindelwald
All aptitudes	Flims/Laax, Villars, Interlaken, Wengen, Verbier
Snowboarding	Davos, Laax
Largest ski areas	Davos/Klosters, Verbier
Family atmosphere	Arosa, Grindelwald, Leysin, Saas-Fee, Villars
Glamor	Gstaad, St. Moritz
Charm	Engelberg, Flims, Grindelwald, Gstaad, Klosters
Cosmopolitan atmosphere	Davos, Verbier, Zermatt
Cultural/sporting events	Arosa, St. Moritz
Shopping	Crans-Montana, St. Moritz
Cross-country skiing	Davos/Klosters, Gstaad, St. Moritz/Pontresina