

DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER

April 29, 1998

### Trip Highlights

We returned just a few days ago from a trip that took us to Pontresina, Locarno and Lausanne in Switzerland; the village of Aying just outside Munich (see story elsewhere this page) Vienna and, at the end, Zürich.

For those under the mistaken impression that we travel only by automobile, our last four trips have been almost entirely by rail.

You'll get a more complete run-down of our discoveries and what we liked and didn't like in subsequent issues, but here are a few quick impressions:

- Italy's much ballyhooed new fast train, the **Cisalpino** (pronounced cheese-alpino), which we rode from Domodossola in Italy to Lausanne (a segment covered by the **Swisspass**), was a bit of a let down. The ride is smooth but the coaches' windows are way too small and there is a permanent table between each set of four facing chairs and the sets of two facing chairs. You must deal with the legs of these tables each time you get in or out of your seat. And, though we didn't measure, leg room seemed a little cramped compared to cars of the Swiss, German and Austrian railways. Still, it was a good ride; quite comfortable and scenic.

When rounding a curve, Cisalpino coaches bank like an airplane but the ride on SBB trains and on the German fast trains is at least as smooth.

- In Munich's Hauptbahnhof, just outside the **Deutsche Bahn (DB)** reservations and information office, is a computerized train info box. English is one of its languages and once you get the hang of the wheel and button which take the place of a computer mouse, you can, by entering origination and destination cities and countries, get a printout of a

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## STRASBOURG

*Yes, it's in France but it has a Germanic history, a unique cuisine and viticulture, charm by the barrel and is just across the Rhine from Germany.*

**F**or many American tourists, the majority perhaps, Strasbourg is just one more afternoon stop on a Rhine River cruise. Cologne. Koblenz. Rudesheim, Strasbourg. Basel. And home.

A sort of seen it. Done it. Wham.

By Claudia Fischer & Roger Holliday  
Bang. And  
danke schön.  
Bus around  
a few sights. Stare at another cathedral. Feed the swans. Nose around the old town. Buy some postcards. And some pretty pretzels. Then back to the cruise ship for the nightly knees-up (party). And a few steins of beer...or a *Viertel* or two of *weiss Wein*.

Well, that may be perfectly in *Ordnung* for some cruisers and 'coach potatoes' who prefer their touring passive, their entertainment fierce, and who notch their camera straps with places visited and dollars expended.

But for the more discerning and adventuresome (like *Gemütlichkeit* readers) who also take their pleasure in the hunt for, and discovery of, new and intriguing destinations, the border city of Strasbourg is more than just an afternoon *Haltestelle* on the way to some place else. It's a three-night sleep-over at the very least. And four stars in practically every category. Architecture.

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## The Brauereigasthof at Aying

**T**wice in the past two years we had been unsuccessful in securing on short notice a reservation at the Brauereigasthof Aying. Located in the quiet village of Aying, 29 kilometers (18 miles) southeast of Munich, the vine-covered, two story stone building that houses a 28-room hotel and restaurant has become an increasingly popular destination for beer lovers from all over the world, including lots of Americans.

The third attempt at a booking, however, was the charm. We phoned from Lausanne and were quoted a rate of 250 DM (\$139) for a double room for the following night. We would train to Zürich, change for Munich and once there board the S-Bahn line #1 (direction Kreuzstrasse and about 45 minutes from the

Hauptbahnhof). The hotel said to call on arrival in Aying and we would be picked up.

All went well. The S-Bahn lines, which reach deep into the countryside from the heart of the city, are part of Munich's marvelous public transit system and our Europass was good for the fare. Arriving at Aying station, which is simply a platform with a phone booth nearby, we were in a slight fix because we had no marks or pfennigs to make the necessary call. The restaurant across the road, however, volunteered their phone and within a few minutes we were met by a young woman who said she was driving the cook's car.

The hotel is owned by the brewery and located just across street from it. Brewery tours are possible

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desired itinerary. Very handy.

Arriving at the station about 11am via the Munich S-Bahn from Aying, we had no idea when the next train was to Vienna. This little machine, however, quickly outlined an itinerary. The next train to Salzburg was in about 25 minutes and there, after a 15-minute stopover, we could catch a train to Vienna.

- Swiss trains are tremendous but I must say I like the practice onboard German trains of distributing little leaflets which detail the route and stops along the way. Also welcome are the notes on connections and other info such as services available on that train.

- The new thing now in swank hotels is no check-in counter. We first saw this a few years ago at **Albergo Giardino** in Ascona. You sit in comfortable chairs at a desk and are poured a glass of champagne or a juice or mineral water while filling out the paperwork.

- Though you'll hear more in later issues, here are a few recommendations from our just-completed trip:

✓ For an inexpensive, exotic evening try **Beograd** (Mühlgasse 15/Schikanederg 7, tel. +43/1/587-4444), an atmospheric Vienna restaurant featuring Balkan food and Gypsy/Viennese music. It's the best place we've found since the Cafe Budva closed a few years ago. Reserve a table

for 8pm and expect to pay less than \$20 per person.

✓ The **Hotel Arlette** (Stampfenbachstrasse 26, CH-8001 Zürich, tel. +41/01/252 0032, fax 252 0923) is a good value near the Zürich railway station. Double rooms on weekends are a reasonable-for-Zürich 175 Sfr. (\$117).

✓ A top value/top hotel in Pontresina is the former **Atlas** now reborn as the **Hotel Saratz** (CH-7504 Pontresina, tel. +41/081/939 4000, fax 839 4040). Great food, too. Doubles from about \$125 to \$225.

✓ **Villa Pauliska** (Via Orselina 6, CH-6600 Locarno-Muralto, tel. +41/091/743 0541) offers more quality and charm for the money than anything else we saw in Locarno. Clean, airy double rooms with wonderful high windows and ceilings and good bathrooms go for from 130 to 150 Sfr. (\$87-\$100). Outstanding restaurant, too, with creative, five-course, fixed-price menus at about \$35. One drawback; no breakfast, only coffee. It isn't that breakfast isn't included, it's simply not offered.

- Europeans must prefer rough, not-very-absorbent toilet paper and bathroom tissues. Even at the best hotels, such as the great **Beau Rivage Palace** in Lausanne, these items are a very fine grade of sandpaper.

- While we're at it, I might just as well have a say on showers. Whether there is scientific evidence on the subject, I don't know, but empirically I know one gets cleaner, faster and uses less water than in a bath. How-

ever, in the countries we cover, rooms with showers are considered less desirable than those with just a tub. Hotel operators say most Europeans prefer a tub, Japanese guests *must* have a tub and Brits simply won't rent a room without one. With five-star joints you usually get both but most of the time, most of us shower lovers have to make do with a tub with a hand-held sprayer. The trick is to get the majority of the water on you and not on the bathroom's walls, floors, ceilings and mirrors. In this, I have had but limited success.

- And, finally, a domestic airline tale. Thursday, April 9: a 45-minute morning rain squall near the San Francisco Airport brings **United Airlines'** San Francisco to Los Angeles shuttle service almost to a halt. Flight delays are as long as five hours; the terminal is jammed to overflowing; temperatures are at sauna levels; most of the trickle of information supplied by United ground personnel turns out to be wrong. An 11:30am flight that should have gotten us to L.A. in plenty of time for our 3pm Swissair flight is first announced as delayed 30 minutes, then 45 minutes, then two hours, then there is a 'mechanical' and so on. We stand in three standby lines for nearly three hours and finally wind up on a flight — not the one we booked — that gets us to L.A. at 4pm. We are lucky. Our Swissair flight has been delayed for 90 minutes and we make it just as the door is being closed. A little tip: **Southwest** does it way, way better.



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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

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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.

## STRASBOURG

Continued from page 1

Music. History. Culture. Gastronomy. You name it.

At this point, some may be wondering why a publication patently dedicated to the Teutonic rather than the Francophonic, should be focusing on a city that was, when last you looked, still firmly rooted on the French side of the Rhine. It's *Strasbourg* not *Strasburg*, sunshine!

True. But it would also be correct to observe that over the last several hundred years, Strasbourg has bounced bodily back and forth between two Courts. French in 1697. German in 1871. French again following WW1. German in 1940. And 'finalement', French in 1944.

With such a political pedigree, it's hardly surprising that it has ended up with a bit of a split personality. A bilingual flavor. A duet of sauerkraut and *pâté de foie gras*, perhaps.

Generally we tend to eschew these 'neither-here-nor-there' border towns, preferring our destinations black and white, not culturally, politically or linguistically blurred. But Strasbourg is one glorious exception that works. And its duality, bi-cultural atmosphere or whatever, ends up as one of its most endearing features.

Another plus is that Strasbourg, along with the region of Alsace-Lorraine of which it is the principal city, is still very much out of the tourism mainstream, and is promoted, even by the French travel authorities themselves, as their country's "best kept secret".

A quick look at the map (mit magnifying glass, please) might explain why.

For Alsace-Lorraine, as you will see, is tiny. A narrow, all but forgotten, *Ribchen* of land squashed between the mighty Vosges Mountains and the Rhine — just 125 miles north to south and 30 miles across — and bordering not only France and Germany, but Switzerland and Luxembourg as well.

## Strasbourg Info

**Population:** 252,338

**Distance from major cities:**

Basel	137 km	(86 miles)
Frankfurt	218 km	(136 miles)
Stuttgart	148 km	(93 miles)
Paris	490 km	(306 miles)

**Direct rail connections:** Trains regularly travel between Strasbourg and Basel/Stuttgart/Paris.

**Currency:** At press time \$1 = about 6 French Francs (FF)

**Strasbourg Tourist Office:** 17 de la place de Cathedrale. tel. +33/88/52 28 28, fax 52 28 29

**French Government Tourist Office in the U.S.** New York: 444 Madison Ave., NYC 10022, email-pubinfor@fgtousa.org. Chicago: 676 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, IL 60611 email-chicago@fgtousa.org. Los Angeles: 9454 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills CA 90212-2420

**France On Call:** Tourist information at 900-990-0040 (50¢ per minute) Web site: <http://www.francetourism.com>.

**Available in English for a nominal charge:**

*Strolling in Strasbourg-From The Middle Ages to 1900, The Architecture of The City in Five Itineraries* — self guided walking tours.

**Food Markets:**

Saturday — Place du Vieux Marché aux Poissons

Wed./Fri. — Place Broglie and Quai Turckheim

This centrality, however, along with a traditional role as international trading post, (Strasbourg's original Roman name *Strateburgum*, means "the town where roads and trading routes meet"), may go a long way in explaining why this city, along with Brussels and Luxembourg, was chosen in the late forties as host to both the Council of Europe and to the European Parliament.

It turned out to be a most fortuitous choice for the Strasbourgeois. Because now, during the one week in four when Parliament is in session, thousands of deep-pocketed, expense account Eurocrats (plus armies of retainers), descend on Strasbourg, swelling the city's coffers, financing Euro-palaces and positively impacting every aspect of Strasbourg's infrastructure, from its cultural amenities and transportation system, to its hotels and restaurants.

Cynics, and we would be among

them, might also dare to surmise that Strasbourg was chosen for this plumb Euro-host position not just for its strategic location or easy access — but also because there are few places in Europe, let alone the world, where one can eat so well and in such splendid surroundings.

It's often been said that in France you eat well. In Germany you eat a lot. And in Strasbourg you eat both well and a lot.

All totally true and frequently reported on by gourmet and gourmand alike. We too will report on this, but a bit later. Because in our view, Strasbourg is more than simply the sum of its exquisite food and drink, comfy hotels or smooth transportation matrix.

It's a feast of another kind. A perfect blend of sophisticated Euro-city and small provincial town: simple to understand and to get around; an easy-on-the-eye-and-ear combination of the old and the new. Narrow cobbled lanes and half-timbered houses with river views and awesome monuments are interspersed with spacious squares and shopping boulevards. Medieval alongside Marks and Spencer. The grand and the *gemütlich*. All circumscribed by a leisurely swan-filled Rhine tributary, the river Ill. And dominated by one of France's most majestic masterpieces — the 13th century Cathedral of Notre Dame.

With one of the tallest spires in all of Christendom — 460 feet from toe to tip — and built by the very craftsmen who worked on Notre Dame in Paris and Chartres, this "pinkish red angel hovers over the city" (poet, Paul Claudel), and is visible from practically anywhere.

There's a simply spectacular rose window, masterminded by cathedral builder, Erwin of Steinbach, and an astronomical clock that's been ticking on since 1465 with angels that tip over an hour glass, a cock that crows thrice and 12 Apostles who parade before Christ. See it all happen at 12:30pm daily.

Also not to be missed is a pulpit carved in 1485 by aptly named Hans

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## STRASBOURG

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Hammer who manages to transform stone into a teasingly intricate pattern of lace and light.

For those physically active, deep-lunged types, there's a grand climb up the 330 steps to the top of the tower — something Goethe did every day of his student life to try to overcome his acrophobia.

The view from up there, according to Victor Hugo who obviously had enough breath left to write about it, is simply stunning.

"Strasbourg lays at your feet, the old city of dented triangular roof tops and gable windows, interrupted by towers and churches... I would go from one turret to another, admiring one by one, the view of France, Switzerland and Germany via one ray of sunshine."

Back on the ground, the view's not bad either and the livin' is easy.

From the central cathedral square, looking just as it did in the 14th century — give or take the odd souvenir shop — it's just a short walk down narrow pedestrian streets to all the major sights: to a confusion of canals, locks, covered bridges, artisans stores and outdoor cafes that make up the delightful La Petite France—the original leather tanning district; to the River Ill itself, for a meandering boat ride around the city; or to any number of pretty squares and shopping boulevards graced by colored-awned restaurants and cafes and named after the city's favorite sons, such as Gutenberg who perfected the printing press here, or that home-grown Napoleonic hero, General Kleber.

With a student population of over 33,000, and the regular arrival of all those parliamentarians, Strasbourg has, of necessity, quite a cultural and social agenda, including its own Philharmonic Orchestra that performs October through June. There's an International music festival in June, jazz in July, as well as regular theater and opera productions.

City nightlife, we are told, picks

up from September to May when the university is in session with lots of the Kronenbourg swilling going on in pubs and cafes around the cathedral.

For the more cerebral, the Museum of Beaux Arts has a grand collection of the masters from Boticelli and Rubens to El Greco and Goya. Modernism is nicely represented in the Museum d'Art Moderne where Gauguin, Picasso, Chagall, Klee and Rodin all live happily together.

But man cannot live by paint alone. A full 19 markets come to various corners of Strasbourg each week to service the gastronomic needs of the locals as well as the hundreds of restaurants and *Winstubs* (wine taverns) that power this city.

Much of the food and drink that appears at these markets — they run generally between 7 am and 1pm — comes from surrounding fields and vineyards.

To the north are vast fields of asparagus and onions. To the south it's strictly *pays de chou*, cabbage country. While due west is the start of the famous Wine Road that meanders gently for 75 miles down the length of Alsace producing such world renowned wines as Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Tokay.

But whether you're stopping in Strasbourg — and you should — or are planning to visit the rest of Alsace, be sure to equip yourself with the most comprehensive book on the subject. *Alsace, The Complete Guide* by Vivienne Menkes-Ivry (Simon & Schuster), available at bookstores, is by far the best way to discover for yourself France's "best-kept secret."

### Hotels

The range of accommodations in Strasbourg is vast and varied as befits a city that prides itself on hospitality. But after visiting several popular hotels in the central city, we discovered an interesting anomaly. It appeared that many of them, though located in ancient edifices, were decorated and furnished in an aggressively modern manner. Hoteliers fortunate enough to be located in

historic properties usually take full advantage of the situation and follow the theme right down to the tea towels. Not the Strasbourgeois.

Perhaps in this very forward looking Euro-city, it's more challenging to find creative ways to blend old and new rather than remaining obsessed-and-repressed by the past. It's also possible that sleek, modern pieces fit more easily into the odd nooks and crannies that plague old buildings.

### Hotel Baumann

A perfect example of this approach is the Hotel Baumann located in Maison Kammerzell. One of the most photographed buildings in France, the half-timbered Kammerzell not only sits sublimely in the shadow of Cathédrale Notre-Dame but has a wood exterior positively dripping with rich and detailed carvings. The original building appeared in 1467 but it wasn't until 1589 that the prosperous cheesemaker, Martin Braun, came on the scene and added the three overhanging stories that now distinguish the building.

The ground floor houses the hotel lobby and one of Strasbourg's best known restaurants. Not surprisingly, the atmosphere is very much in keeping with the exterior, complete with vaulted ceilings, bottle glass window panes, elegant drawings and big bouquets of fresh flowers. Upstairs, however, is another matter. The nine guest rooms have all the modern amenities, including minibars and double sinks, but the decidedly high-tech beds and dressers and chairs are artfully arranged amongst the ancient beams and struts. An interesting effect to say the least.

The Baumann is a fine hotel with a professional staff, great food, and a location that simply cannot be surpassed. The one downside, perhaps, is that with only nine rooms it may be difficult to make a reservation.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 420-630FF (\$72-101), doubles 580-630 (\$93-101). Petit déjeuner (breakfast) 55FF (\$8.87)

**Contact:** Hotel Baumann at Maison Kammerzell, 16 place de la Cathédrale, Strasbourg, tel. 03 88 32

42 14, fax 03 88 23 03 92. 9 rooms. Lift. Proprietor: Guy-Pierre Baumann  
**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 18/20

### Romantik Hotel Beaucour

Part of the same hospitality group as Baumann/Kammerzell and awarded the special red "pleasant hotel" designation from Michelin. In a prime location just across the river from the Cathedral, Beaucour is fashioned from five 18th-century houses. Half-timber construction, red-tiled roofs and geranium-filled window boxes provide a cheerful Alsatian ambience. A stone archway leads to a plant-filled courtyard and the lobby entrance at the far end.

Each of the 49 rooms is individually decorated in one of two distinct styles: design-rooms with modern furniture, bright color combinations and subtle country touches; Alsatian-rooms are more traditional with wood beams, regional tiles and fabrics but still with a 90s edge. All are very attractive with high quality reproduction artwork and prints. Every room is airconditioned and equipped with a Jacuzzi in addition to the usual TV, minibar, etc. A beautiful hotel with a friendly staff but in our view a bit too pretentious.

**Daily Rates:** Singles with shower 380-550FF (\$61-88), singles with bath 680FF (\$109), doubles with bath 780 (\$125), suite 950FF (\$153). Petit déjeuner (breakfast) 65FF (\$10.48).

**Contact:** Hotel Beaucour, 5 rue des Bouchers, Strasbourg, tel. +33 88 76

72 00, fax 88 76 72 60. 49 rooms all with bath/shower/WC. Elevator. Two rooms are handicapped accessible. Proprietor: Guy-Pierre Baumann

**Rating:** QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 14/20

### Hotel Dragon

Our place of refuge for three

nexed to the 17th-century home of the Dragon family, the hotel today consists of two parts separated by the lobby. Our room was on the smaller side and reached by a slightly tricky winding staircase. Rooms on the other side do have elevator service, though.

Number 16 is a good-sized corner room looking over a quiet street — if you stretch the cathedral spires can be viewed in the distance. The color scheme, if that's an appropriate term, is white accented by various shades of gray and creates an atmosphere that's serene and restful, if not exactly cheerful. The decor, including the artwork, is actively modern but extremely functional. The full bathroom-gray and white, of course-is up-to-date and best of all, is supplied with very large, very thick white bath towels. Further examination showed our room to be similar in style and decor to the other thirty.

The continental breakfast, which is not included in the room cost, features orange juice, a basket of top quality bread, butter, jam and little packets of cheese or meat spread. It's fairly typical in France for breakfast to be an extra charge but in reality one does pay for breakfast even

when it's included in the room cost. This way at least you have a choice as to whether you want it or not.

If the guest rooms at the Dragon are fairly unremarkable, the rest of the place more than makes up for it. While studying the prints and vari-

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## Notes on Things Alsatian

**Language:** Strasbourg is in France so it stands to reason the people who live there and in the Alsace-Lorraine region all speak French. Right? Wrong. As a city just one bridge away from the border, German is almost as common as French.

The linguistic issue is somewhat further confused by the addition of a series of local dialects that come under the generic heading of "Alsacien". With a resurgence of regional pride, these Germanic-sounding dialects are no longer out of fashion. In fact, they've recently assumed such cultural importance that new plays and songs are being written in the dialects.

We are not suggesting you rush out and learn Alsacien...but the locals might appreciate your recognizing that their distinctive dialect is not German.

**World Cup Warning:** Come June, France will be up to its muddy ankles in World Cup soccer...arguably the world's most important sporting event. And as it only comes round every four years, the fans are already reaching a fever pitch of partiality and fanaticism.

The French themselves will be cheering loudly and lustily for their own national team, nicknamed "les Bleues".

As the games are being held at venues all over France, we recommend you check in advance to make sure your visit does not coincide with one of these international matches.

Alternatively, you could visit Alsace-Lorraine. No World Cup games are being played there, and the tourist authorities are currently touring France in a bus touting the region as a "soccer free zone" under the banner "Go—Cordon-Bleues"!

**Storks:** You'll find masses of stork memorabilia in Strasbourg stores...but no sign of the actual birds themselves.

Sad to say, these elegant and gregarious birds—with their legendary (but mythical) reputation in human obstetrics—are having a hard time surviving in the very region that incorporates them in so many legends and folk stories.

Hunting and natural predators in their African migration homes, plus the draining of Rhine marshes, have taken an enormous toll on Europe's stork population and they are now close to extinction.

A major "save the stork" campaign was launched just in time, and through a program that includes artificial incubation, hand rearing and wing clipping, the reduction has been temporarily halted. Only 50 pairs are known to exist in the region.

Storks build their messy nests atop roofs, steeples and obelisks and are also helped by the local population who attach metal cartwheel structures to tall buildings for their housing convenience.

Winters in Africa. Summers in Strasbourg. Next time round, we're coming as storks.

nights in Strasbourg is well located just south of the River Ill and equidistant between the Petit France and the cathedral. The Dragon is a total opposite of the other hotels, takes modernism to a new extreme...and is nothing if not funky! Originally a number of private apartments an-

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ous pieces of sculpture as well as the unusual lighting fixtures and lamps in the public rooms and lobby, we slowly began to perceive a theme. Chairs! Paintings of chairs, photographs of chairs, sculpted chairs, big chairs, little chairs, real chairs and toys chairs, all clever and innovative and endlessly fascinating. And all brought together by Pierre Iannarelli, the Dragon's engaging proprietor.

Never have we been so well attended by a hotel owner. Not a hint of gush or schmooze but a genuine interest in our well-being led to a series of unbeatable restaurant recommendations. Every evening he sent us in a different direction and each morning at breakfast he'd grill us about what we'd had to eat the night before. We learned to come prepared! On our last night Pierre opened a lovely bottle of Pinot Noir and we sat together in the tiny garden in front of the hotel, sipping and talking. Pierre, perhaps best described as a sprite in pointed hat and rumped (gray) sweater, is a former public works engineer from Paris who opened the Dragon in 1987. But don't wait too long to visit him. His retirement dream is to run a small hotel in the south of France.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 430-615 FF (\$69-99), doubles 485-655FF (\$78-105), apartment for 3 people 795-895 (\$128-144). Petit déjeuner (continental breakfast) 58FF (\$9.35).

**Contact:** Hotel du Dragon, 2 rue de L'Ecarlate at 12 rue du Dragon, Strasbourg, tel. 03 88 35 79 80, fax 03 88 25 78 95. 32 rooms. Lift on one side. Proprietor: Pierre Iannarelli

**Rating:** QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

### Hotel de l'Europe

Those not intrigued by contemporary decor would do well to stay at Hotel de l'Europe located in the heart of the picturesque Petit France section of the city. First impressions are always important and the dramatic 1/50 scale model of the Cathedral certainly sets the tone here as does the restaurant bar beyond. A massive 15th-century carved wood

staircase leads to the first floor guest rooms which have just been remodeled. Number 124 is a chambre deluxe with a Jacuzzi and exposed beams separating the sitting and sleeping areas. Number 116 is a large, two-room suite with a double Jacuzzi and heated towel bars.

The second floor rooms, although not as recently remodeled, are equally as charming. Number 241 is a corner room utilizing original beams and bricks. Two big windows overlook the street and pretty fabrics complete the pleasing mood.

An elaborate breakfast buffet is included in the price of the rooms. This is a hotel that exemplifies the best of Strasbourg hospitality.

**Daily Rates:** Singles with shower 416-441FF (\$67-71), singles with bath 556 (\$90), doubles with shower 462-522FF (\$75-84), doubles with bath 582-652FF (\$94-105), suites 982FF (\$158). Breakfast included.

**Contact:** Hotel de L'Europe, 34-80 rue du Fosse des Tanneurs, Strasbourg, tel 03 88 32 17 88, fax 03 88 75 65 45. 60 rooms. Lift. Some A/C. Proprietor: P. Diebold

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

### Eating in Strasbourg

As previously noted, we ate well in Strasbourg. Right from the beginning. On the first day while on a walking tour of the city, we headed for the cathedral and behind it came upon Place du Marché Gayot, a tiny square lined with so many little outdoor cafés that it was hard to tell where one stopped and another began.

Under the giant umbrella of one we enjoyed a *salade nicoise* and grilled *chèvre* (goat cheese) with walnuts, each for 52FF (\$8.38).

Entertainment was even provided. As we finished eating, rain began to come down in buckets drenching anyone not directly under cover. Hardly putting down a fork or wine glass, the assembled adroitly raised their own umbrellas and amidst a good deal of laughter and high spirits continued their meals. These are either extremely good natured

people or it rains so often they're used to it.

From this point on, however, we were in the good hands of Pierre, proprietor of the Hotel Dragon. And, while bad meals are rare everywhere in France, and especially in Strasbourg, we were glad to avail ourselves of his obvious expertise and passion for all things edible.

### La Petite Ecurie

The first night it was La Petite Ecurie, charming with an unstudied bistro atmosphere, clearly a neighborhood favorite. Red and white checked curtains, simple white tablecloths and flowers on each table with seating for perhaps 50 set the tone for a relaxing evening. Though by 9pm the place was full, it would be a mistake to come too early. Part of the fun is watching the action and listening into conversations. We sat beside two German secretaries over the border for the freer Gallic atmosphere and the creative cuisine.

The meal started with xxxx crudité (grated carrots and turnips, sliced cucumber and tomatoes on lettuce and a boiled egg) served on a large dinner plate and accompanied by bread for 45FF (\$7.25)-easily enough to be a complete vegetarian meal. *Salade miste* (mixed salad) with *cervelat* (spicy sausage) and gruyère cheese was also ample at 50FF (\$8.06).

Main courses-which are called entrées in France, the source of some confusion- include *gigot d'agneau* (leg of lamb) with green beans and five-star fried xxxx potatoes cost 78FF (\$12.58) and *magret de canard* (breast of duck) 85FF (\$13.70).

A list of six wine specials were available by the glass or bottle which ranged in price from 72-95FF (\$11.61-\$15.32). We chose a liter of Touraine at 95FF (\$16).

La Petite Ecurie, 8 rue de l'Ecurie, Strasbourg, tel. 88 23 06 22

**Rating:** QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

### Au Pont Corbeau

Another night we tried Au Pont Corbeau, a cozy restaurant/*Winstub* with a distinctly German flavor. Lots



of warm wood on both walls and ceilings, wooden chairs with heart cutouts and the like. The menu and wine card list a number of specials which change daily.

First courses include *salade de haricots verts aux lardons* (pencil thin green beans with light vinaigrette and thick, smoky bacon) for 42FF (\$6.77) and *tarte a l'oignon*, a local speciality reminiscent of quiche for 35FF (\$5.65). Among the entrées on the menu that day were *confit de porc choucroute* (sliced pork and sauerkraut) delicately simmered with juniper berries, a mini-version of another local favorite at 78FF (\$12.58) and for 85FF (\$14) *filet mignon* with mustard sauce, served rare as ordered with excellent *pommes frites*. Alsatian wines featured were Riesling and Pinot Blanc at 95-150FF (\$15.32-\$24.20).

Au Pont Corbeau, 21 Quai Saint Nicolas, Strasbourg, tel. 03 88 35 60 68

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

#### Restaurant Zum Sternstebele

The final evening took us to the Rue de Tonneliers, a wonderful pedestrian street lined with restaurants featuring everything from crepes to Indian cuisine. Our destination restaurant, the Zum Sternstebele, is of Alsatian/German persuasion. We sat outside enjoying the lovely weather and listening to an enthusiastic oom-pah band that set up shop in a pocket park across the way.

The meal began with *jambon de parme crudités* (country ham and mixed fresh vegetables) 49FF(\$7.90) and *pâté en croûte crudités* (paté in pastry with fresh vegetables on the side, a revered local delicacy) 65FF (\$10.48). We continued with an outstanding *l'escalope de saumon au citron et poivre vert* (salmon filet with lemon and green peppercorns) for 68FF(\$10.96) and *le filet de cabillaud meunière* (sautéed cod topped with lemon and parsley) for 69FF (\$11.12). All delicious and a fitting way to end our stay in Strasbourg.

Restaurant Zum Sternstebele, 17 Rue Tonneliers, Strasbourg, tel 88 21 01 01

**Rating:** QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20 ☒

## Food & Wine

Home to more Michelin-starred restaurants than any other region, tiny Alsace has a reputation for fine food far out of proportion to its size. Americans, however, seem to know little about it.

The region's history of invasion, occupation and dual nationality, has influenced its cuisine. From the combination of German raw materials and French culinary know-how emerges the best of both worlds.

### Popular Dishes

- *Choucroute* — formally known as *choucroute garnie a l'alsacienne*. The classic presentation consists of sauerkraut simmered with onions and smoked bacon, piled high on a platter and surrounded by a substantial array of sausages and pork chops, ham hocks and blood pudding. Not a dish for the faint of heart — or vegetarians.

- *Foie Gras* — Goose liver. For centuries Strasbourg has rivaled Toulouse as the *foie gras* capital of France. Served in many formats, one of the most famous is *pâté de foie gras en croûte* (pate baked in a crust).

- *Flammeküche* or *tarte flambée*. Regional speciality often described as an Alsatian pizza. A round of thin dough topped with a mixture of cream, cheese, bacon and onions.

- *Coq au Riesling* — chicken cooked in Riesling wine with mushrooms and cream.

- *Bäckeoffe* — a traditional stew of various braised meats, onions and potatoes in white wine.

- Munster Cheese —strong flavor with a brick-red rind. Delicious with Gewürztraminer wine.

### Wine

Alsace is blessed with four 'noble' grape varieties.

- Riesling—a rich and versatile white wine. Enjoyed as an aperitif or with meals.

- Gewürztraminer—complex, assertive and spicy. Excellent with pâté or Munster cheese.

- Tokay—robust and unrelated to the Hungarian version of the same name.

- Muscat—aromatic aperitif

### Fermes-Auberges

Farm-inns are hostels, exclusive to Alsace, that serve local dishes to hungry travelers in a family setting. A good chance to experience a taste of Alsace life along with typical rustic food. Inquire at local tourist offices for a list of those approved by the Association des Fermes-Auberges du Haut-Rhin. Members display a sign showing a set table topped with a steaming soup tureen. Be sure to book ahead to avoid disappointment.

## BRAUEREIGASTHOF AYING

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but must be arranged in advance.

The hotel's reception area is small and unimpressive. From it a door leads to the restaurant, a corridor wanders away in another direction and there is a stairwell to the first floor, no lift. We carried our own bags up.

Our room, #14, though pictured in the hotel's brochure, is showing some wear. The room is simply furnished. The bed has night tables and at one end of the room a solitary and not very comfortable couch folds out as an extra bed. There are no end or coffee tables. On a minibar sits a small TV set which receives only local channels. The room's few bits of unfinished wood furniture bear the dings and marks of several years of use.

The forest green carpet needs replacing and the couch and bed spread are a drab green and burgundy plaid. Two windows look out to the street fronting the hotel.

On the plus side of the ledger, there is a walk-in closet and in the tiled bathroom the toilet is separated from sink and tub/shower by a sliding door.

But we came mainly for the dinner (the hotel's kitchen gets the Michelin red "Menu" for "good food at moderate prices) and the fresh beer and there we can be more encouraging.

The cozy, low ceilinged dining room is very attractive and appears to have been recently redone. Naturally, it features plenty wood beams and light wood furnishings. There are wide, orangish floor tiles, blue tablecloths, candles and fresh flowers — daffodils and yellow tulips the night we were there — at each table, and a big, hooded fireplace near the entrance. The large tables are well-spaced and the low-voltage halogen light fixtures are recessed in the paneled ceiling.

First, of course, we ordered a *Helles*, the light brew that fuels Bavaria. Aying calls theirs *Jahrhundert*, in recognition of the brewery's

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## BRAUEREIGASTHOF AYING

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centenary in 1978. With the beer we divided an appetizer of *Carpaccio* (razor thin slices of raw beef) with oil, capers and shavings of fresh horseradish which made for an extraordinary dish rather than just a good one. Also scattered over the plate were tiny squares of crunchy, pickled pumpkin which added yet another dimension of unusual taste.

*Geschnetzeltes* (chopped veal in a cream sauce) with slices of mushrooms and bits of red bell pepper came up a little bland. The *Rösti* served with it was thin and oily, more like a potato pancake; good, but the Swiss variety is much better.

*Zweibelrostbraten* at Brauereigasthof Aying is a thin but juicy piece of beef the size of a New York or ribeye steak and comes heaped with thin slices of deep fried onions. The latter were a bit oily but the meat was tender and not overdone. Accompanying cheese *Spätzle* sprinkled with a few of the onions was outstanding.

Mixed salads were the usual shredded portions of carrots, celery root, cucumbers, and two or three varieties of fresh greens in a nice oil and vinegar dressing.

Though not on menu, a couple of *Kugels* of vanilla ice cream with a boat of hot *Schokolade* was cheerfully provided with two spoons.

Service was friendly but a little inattentive. Dinner for two including four beers was 107.50 DM (\$59).

After dinner, we crossed the street to **Liebhard's**, another operation of the Aying brewery, where we sampled mild wheat beer and pilsner. At 10pm the big open room was full of locals. We found no fault with either of the beers.

Next morning, after a good breakfast from a decently-stocked buffet, the young woman on duty volunteered to take us back to the "station" where we caught a train to the Munich Hauptbahnhof.

While the Brauereigasthof Aying has some charm, as a hotel it seems overpriced. The somewhat off-hand

welcome was friendly but with no more warmth than at a busy airport hotel: your-room-is-up-the-stairs-here's-the-key-let-us-know-if-you-need-anything. It is the brewery connection that no doubt keeps the prices high; similar rooms in most ordinary German towns of this size would rent for half the price.

The restaurant, however, serves good food and beer at reasonable prices.

**Contact:** Brauereigasthof Hotel Aying, Zornedinger Strasse 2, D-85653 Aying, tel. +49/08095/705, fax 2053. Proprietor: Franz Inselkammer.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 160 to 200 DM (\$89-\$111), doubles 250 to 300 DM (\$139-\$167).

**Hotel Rating:** Quality 9/20, Value 7/20

**Rest. Rating:** Quality 14/20, Value 15/20

(Ed. Note: There is a guide detailing 43 of these German brewery hotels.

Contact: Geschäftsstelle "Private Brauereigasthöfe," Hauptstrasse 19, D-96117 Memmendorf, tel. +49/0951/944330, fax 9443 366.)

## READERS' FORUM

### Gemütlichkeit Changed?

I'll be brutally frank! I felt in the beginning that you found *gemütlichkeit* in out-of-the-way places and B & Bs (pensions). Recently, your recommended places are more country hotels with steep (compared to previous) prices and better than average dining fare.

Both you and your clientele's writings tend toward reporting ("this is where I stayed and ate and what it cost") rather than researching (here is where you should go for good value and atmosphere). Sort of sounds like you are on a continuous holiday at our expense and your part of the deal is to report on what you spent our subscription money on.

For this interested traveler who is not rich or on paid expenses, that is no longer good enough.

NAME WITHHELD  
ROCKWALL TX

(Ed. Note: From a subscriber of eight

years, this letter gives us some distress. However, we can't agree that *Gemütlichkeit* no longer seeks out-of-way places or that reports mostly on expensive country hotels.

True, our January issue carried a story on five-star Austrian country hotels. However, the lead article that same month, entitled "Bargain Bavaria," listed 15 hotels in 13 very much out-of-the-way Bavarian villages. The average double room price for those hotels was under \$80.

Last month, our main story was on *Mayrhofen*, which we also consider to be off the beaten-track. Our Editor's Choice hotel there charges less than \$50 for a double room.

In the past year we have featured *Tübingen*, *Weimar*, *Sion*, the tiny mountain village of *Evolène*, *Ljubljana* in Slovenia, *Appenzell* and Southern *Bohemia* in the Czech Republic. Not exactly household tourism names.

Other story topics in the last year include moderately-priced hotels in *Zürich*; a dozen less well-known destinations—complete with moderately-price hotel and restaurant recommendations—in Germany, Austria and Switzerland and our glowing review of a country hotel in *Reutte*, Austria, which charges about \$62 for its best room, a small corner suite.

We agree that *gemütlichkeit* is not often found in expensive, five-star hotels, but the highest levels of excellence and luxury often are. The **Beau Rivage Palace** at \$270 per night and up is a completely different travel experience than the **Pension Heim** in *Seeg* (near *Füssen*) at \$80 per night. We appreciate and see value in both and will continue to seek out accommodations that range from simple pensions to the grandest hotels—and, of course, those in between.

As to a lack of research, we wish the reader had been with us as we tramped half a day through snowbanks earlier this month on the Saturday before Easter in out-of-the-way *Pontresina* to visit inexpensive vacation rental apartments.

And finally, our revenue is 90% subscriptions. Postage, printing, insurance, office supplies, office equipment, telephone calls and, of course, travel expenses, are all business expenses. And, yes, we do sometimes report on what we ate, where we stayed and what we spent on these business trips. ☐