

Beck Haus, Signau, The Emmental

"Going to Ground" in the Emmental

In the 1973 movie, *Day of the Jackal*, the sophisticated assassin with an eye for the finer things drives to Paris to kill Charles de Gaulle. On his way through France he stops for a night at a gorgeous little country hotel where he rents a fine room, dines in style, and meets a beautiful woman.

By Bob Bestor The scenes involving this posh hideaway provided U.S. moviegoers a glimpse of a romantic but, for most, unfamiliar style of auto travel. After all, in 1973, the choice by default for the U.S. motorist who had to overnight on the road was a motel and a truck stop meal. (Unfortunately, except for scattered bed & breakfast accommodations, motels and chain restaurants are still virtually our only choice.)

But 25 years have passed since the Jackal's errant shot and millions of us are now veterans of independent European auto vacations. We realize that ending a day's travel in a hotel which, at breakfast, we didn't even know existed, is one of the great joys of traveling in Europe. It's even better when the discovered hotel has a good kitchen, a wine cellar and is a bargain to boot.

Continued on page 2...

Gemütlichkeit is Moving

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

LAKESIDE LINDAU

Whether you call it Lake Constance or, as the Germans do, the Bodensee, the lake's most charming harbor is the Bavarian town of Lindau.

Perhaps there should be a warning sign at all the entrances guarding the island town of Lindau on Lake Constance: "Beware All Ye Who Enter Here In Foul Weather"!

For Lindau, like so many other lakeside resorts can be a cold and depressing place when the barometer heads south.

We've done Lucerne, Locarno, and Lugano in both good and bad weather. All are superb when the sun shines but pretty awful in the rain. Lindau in vile weather is no exception. Lake resorts we have concluded are not the place to be in intemperate weather and a micro-*Insel* the size of Lindau, population

25,000, with somewhat limited inside attractions or shop-ops, is a definite no no in the wet wet.

(Tip: Watch the local weather forecasts very carefully before heading for any lake resorts.)

Seaside towns, however, don't seem to affect us that way at all. In fact there's something romantic about slashing rain and crashing waves, about soggy seagulls and soggy sailors, when you're down beside the seashore.

It was with this in mind that we recently approached Lindau for a second look, all memories of our first rain-tainted visit having been well and truly washed away by time and tide.

Continued on page 3...

READERS' FORUM

City Parking Woes

You folks at *Gemütlichkeit* often sing the praises of traveling by car, especially on the back roads, and I generally agree. But, after returning from a car-based trip to Germany, the Czech Republic and Austria, I would like to offer a note of caution. *If you are visiting European cities, do not drive. Take the train; if you are visiting countryside and cities, stay in the suburbs, leave the car there and take the commuter train.*

We rented an Opel Vectra at the Frankfurt airport. The rental process itself was exemplary but each time we drove into a city, complications beset us.

Finding the parking lot for Würzburg's **Residenz** was a snap;

figuring out how to get out was not. It was our first experience with the automated parking lots which predominate in the cities. If the lot is large enough, we learned, there was a manned — or womanned — cashier's office where you could pay with some ease. Otherwise, you had better have change. The size of the Residenz's parking lot did not justify a human presence so, in a way, it was a good first lesson. I will relate the steps for readers who may first approach this adventure as ignorantly as I.

1. Stop at the gate and push the button for a ticket. The machine will hand you a ticket with a magnetic credit card strip on its back. Do not lose that ticket. If robbed, offer your

Continued on page 7...

DEAR SUBSCRIBER
Continued from page 1

Country lodgings come in all price categories. The Jackal, for example, would have risked his cover for dinner and a bed at **L'Ermitage** in Vuflens-Le-Château (CH-1134, tel. 41/021/802 2191, fax 802 2240, see *Gemütlichkeit*, April 1995) near Morges on Lake Geneva. He would, of course, pay upwards of \$150 for the meal (not including wine) and another \$200-plus for one the hotel's nine charming guest chambers. L'Ermitage is definitely his kind of place.

Hotel Hirschen
Langnau

EDITOR'S CHOICE

But a more secure hideout — and a far less pricey one — would be one we came across 10 years ago in Switzerland's Emmental, that pastoral valley of cheese-makers and massive farm houses that lies between Bern and Lucerne.

Leaving Lucerne by car one Saturday afternoon we headed for the countryside with the vague notion of ending in Bern for the night. In the farm village of Langnau we stopped for a refreshment at a likely looking hotel built in the Bernese Country House style. It was the **Hirschen** and after a look at one or two guestrooms we decided to stay the night.

The Swiss Hotel Association

defines a *Landgasthof* or Country Inn as a hotel/restaurant "typical of the area with good cuisine, comfortable accommodation and adequate parking facilities. It is characterized by high quality and personal attention to the guests." The Hirschen is one of these.

Rail Connections

Langnau - Bern

There are dozens of trains running daily in each direction between Langnau and Bern. The trip can be as short as 29 minutes. Trains run as late as midnight, making it a simple matter to have dinner in Bern and return to your hotel in Langnau for a good night's sleep.

Langnau - Lucerne

During commute hours, trains run about every half hour. During the rest of the day the interval is about once an hour. The trip can take as little as 47 minutes.

Signau - Bern

More than two dozens trains run daily in each direction. Travel time is usually slightly more than 30 minutes.

Signau - Lucerne

About 18 trains per day in each direction. Depending on the train, the journey takes from an hour to an hour and a half.

Our dinner there, after which owner-chef Walter Birkhäuser opened bottle after bottle of Swiss wine and shared with us the secret of making *Rösti* (set the potatoes in a window sill for few days after boiling, and fry them in lard), remains

one of our most unforgettable travel experiences (*Gemütlichkeit*, January 1988). On that first visit, Herr Birkhäuser and his wife Marla didn't know about the travel newsletter *Gemütlichkeit*, they just liked Americans, particularly those who showed a little interest in wine and Swiss country cooking.

Earlier this year, after noticing the Birkhäuser name had been replaced on Switzerland Tourism's listing as proprietors of the hotel, we returned to the Hirschen to reassess the situation.

Except for the cafe/breakfast room, which has been revamped, the hotel is the same; rustic, cozy, immaculate.

The Hirschen traces its lineage to the mid-17th century when it was a popular tavern. The location, in the center of Langnau, in the heart of the Emmental, has made it a meeting point ever since. Today it is an ideal headquarters for auto travelers who wish to explore the Emmental's maze of backroads and many farm villages. And, being but a short walk from the rail station, it is equally convenient for train travelers.

Our assigned room, Number 21, is typical of the house, with simple pine furniture, adequate closet space, a comfortable bed, TV, and a serviceable bathroom.

Continued on page 6...

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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria		Value Rating	Scale
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

Special Designation

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

LINDAU

Continued from page 1

This time, thank heaven, the Gods were firmly on our side. Brilliant sunshine and pleasant temperatures greeted our train, allowing us to see Lindau in the only way it should ever be seen. Sublime. Sunny. Lively. And postcard pretty.

There are actually three methods of approaching the island.

- By ferry: easily the most romantic. With the view from the lake of Lindau's harbor and promenade stamped "simply exquisite".

- By train: the most convenient. Lindau has direct rail connections with major Eurocities like Basel, Stuttgart, Prague and Vienna...and the Bahnhof is right at the foot of the main street, a short hop away from most of the waterfront hotels.

- By car: the least efficient. Because Old Lindau, for all practical purposes, is one big *Fussgänger* zone where cars are not welcome and best left on the mainland. A causeway makes the island/mainland connection.

For first timers, however, the *only* way to arrive in Lindau is graciously...by water. Not only does one get the finest fish-eye view of the lake's prettiest and most dramatic harbor, as the ferry glides between the sculpted Bavarian Lion and the New Lighthouse, but the three-hour crossing from Constance, stopping at Meersburg, Mainau and Friedrichshafen, lets one properly experience and understand the importance of this idyllic stretch of water.

As Europe's third-largest lake — 14 kms (9 miles) across the 65 kms (41 miles) long — Lake Constance is not just a haven for *Wasserfreunden* and holiday-makers of every stripe and sail. It also gives the space-deprived Germans (not to mention the Austrians and the Swiss who share the shoreline), their own distinctly 'green and pleasant' Mediterranean-style playground.

Add some of those fabulous Alpine vistas, hilly surrounds with forests, meadows and orchards in

Lindau Info

Tourist Information:

Ludwigstrasse 68, Lindau D-88131, tel. +49/08382/26-00-30, fax 260026. Winter hours M-F 9-12, 2-5, Summer Mon.-Sat. 9-1, 2-7.

Population: 24,500

Altitude: 395 meters / 1296 feet

Distances from:

Basel	206 km / 129 miles
Bregenz	10 km / 6.25 miles
Munich	180 km / 113 miles

Rail Connections: Direct rail connections: Regular rail service on Basel-Singen-Lindau line and Lindau, Buchloe-Munich with frequent connections in all directions.

Also:

- Lindau is served by five to seven ferries per day, according to the season.
- Guidebook available in English for a nominal charge from the tourist office: *Little Guide of Lindau on Lake Constance*.
- Guided walking tours in English depart daily from the tourist office, in season.

abundance, and countless picturesque resorts hugging the lake, and it's quite easy to understand the Germans' affection for the pristine lake they call the Bodensee...and Lindau, its most precious jewel.

But popularity has its downsides. And the tiny island can be all hustle and bustle on a summery weekend when the daytrippers, the resorters and the locals collide.

It was like that the afternoon we arrived. The waterfront promenade was thick with strollers enjoying the harbor action and the stunning backdrop of snow covered mountains. Every seat at every table of every outdoor cafe was also taken. *Besetzt. Voll.* For Germans take their afternoon 'kaffee und kuchen' breaks very seriously.

The best way to escape the crowds — the strollers and the munchers — is to leave the harbor 'til later in the day when most of the

visitors have gone home and take instead a leisurely two-hour stroll around the rest of this medieval island — 9th century or thereabouts — replete with narrow lanes and half timbered houses, old town squares, ancient churches and some very impressive and grand villas.

For Lindau in the middle ages was a prosperous, bustling trading post with lots of cross-lake traffic and trade. There were big warehouses on the water's edge filled with all manner of merchandise, and town squares filled with gabled villas and mansions built by rich merchants.

With the advent of the railway in the 1850's, all this cross-lake business came to an abrupt halt. The trains brought tourists instead of traders. Waterfront warehouses became hotels. The merchants cleared out for more profitable climes. And the island became a holiday haven.

Remnants of that cross-lake trade must still be operating, apparently, because we spent a good 20 minutes at a wine store waiting while a gentleman from Switzerland, newly-arrived by yacht, picked up an enormous order of wines and liqueurs that he was spiriting quietly back across the pond.

The best little pocket guide to Lindau we found comes from the tourist office across from the train station. A bit rough in the translation department, it still does a good job of covering the town's key sights, some 25 of them, as well as providing souvenir pictures, a town map and a short history of the island.

It will tell you, for example, that the eye-popping, step-gabled building just behind the harbor in the Reichplatz is the **Altes Rathaus**, vintage 1422. And that the walls are covered with paintings of coats of arms of all the towns on Lake Constance. Inside, the Town Hall doubles as the city's library and can be visited.

Further up the street stands another important remnant of earlier times, the **Haus zum Cavazzan**, built in the 1700s. With a splendidly frescoed facade and massive mansard

Continued on page 4...

LINDAU

Continued from page 3

roof, it is considered the finest patrician residence on Lake Constance. It houses a local history museum and there's also a fantastic collection of antique musical instruments from music boxes to barrel organs.

The oldest church in town is **St. Peters**, circa 1000, reputed to be the oldest building on the entire lake, with rare frescoes from Hans Holbein the Elder, and, currently, a rather interesting war memorial.

Two other churches stand side by side in the Market Place. Protestant **St. Stephen's** first built in 1180, later reconstructed in Baroque style and the 12th century **Catholic Collegiate Church**, rebuilt in the Baroque style after the great city fire of 1728. Both have impressive interiors.

Between them stands an ancient linden tree after which Lindau was named. But of all the sights in the Altstadt, it is perhaps the **Maximilianstrasse** that best evokes the spirit of Lindau past. Lined with beautifully restored half-timbered guild houses, it is easy to think that you're slap dab back in the middle ages.

This is where the slaughter house once stood. And the meat market. And where the town bakers made their breads, and sold them off stone slabs. The coats of arms of all these medieval butchers, bakers and candlestickmakers are painted on the building facades adding further splashes of color to the already handsome architecture.

Of course, Lindau is not all waterfront and medieval history. There's a modern casino that opens daily at three. Coats and ties, please. There is a twice-yearly art auction, staged by a local artist, and countless other opportunities to indulge in both cultural and sporting activities like attending the famous Bregenz Operatic and Music Festival which takes place just across the lake from mid-July to mid-August.

Or, for the more athletically inclined, take the #7 bus to the suburb of Hoyren and walk up Mt. Hoyrenberg for some extraordinary

views across the lake to the alps.

There are also bikes to be rented from the train station for \$8 a day. And paddleboats from a dock next to Lindau's rail bridge.

Best of all, Lindau makes a wonderful base from which to explore the region by both rail and water. Excursions into Austria and Switzerland are a snap and even tiny Liechtenstein is easy to get to via a combination of train and bus. Ferry rides on the lake (see box, page 5) offer lots of possibilities: quaint villages, grand botanical gardens and lovely scenery.

Hotels

For almost any viewpoint Seepromenade is 'the' place to be, lodgingly speaking. The stunning vista past the ancient Mangturm and out into the enclosed harbor, guarded majestically by a larger-than-life Bavarian Lion and the 19th-century New Lighthouse, moves across the lake to the snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps. On nice days, the umbrella tables come out, strollers make their way back and forth along the front and every lakeside bench is filled with people soaking up the sun and scenery. Lined up in a very nice row along the Promenade where the vast warehouses once stood, are the premier hotels of Lindau.

Starting at the most conveniently located train station in Europe and continuing east along Seepromenade, are the Hotels Bayerischer Hof, Seegarten and Reutemann, in that order. Owned and managed by the Spaeth family, the three establishments descend in price from most expensive on down, although the distinctions blur.

All three share an outdoor pool and wellness-center and have full service restaurants and facilities for the handicapped. They are within easy walking distance of both the train station and the ferry dock.

Hotel Bayerischer Hof

Directly across from the station is the Hotel Bayerischer Hof, flagship of the trio, with a Michelin four roof-peak rating. Also the largest and the most formal, the Bayerischer has 104

rooms and several suites. Not surprisingly, those with lake views cost more. The typical Euro decor, which all of these hotels share, is streamlined but never sparse with lots of white paint and natural wood. Room Number 334, at 440 DM (\$268), is very large and has a full view of the lake and harbor. Peach and yellow are very pretty as the accent colors and there is a seating area with a couch and upholstered chairs plus a fully-tiled bathroom.

Overlooking the train station, which in fact is not an unpleasant aspect at all, Number 341 is also large enough to accommodate a seating area as well as a huge armoire. The nightly rate is 295 DM (\$180).

All bathrooms in the Bayerischer Hof have tubs, showers and heated towel bars.

Daily Rates: Singles 200 to 260 DM (\$122-\$159), doubles 265 to 530 DM (\$162-\$323), suites 750-790 DM (\$457-\$482). Full breakfast buffet included.

Contact: Hotel Bayerischer Hof, Seepromenade, D-88131 Lindau-Insel, tel. +49/08382/9150, fax 915591. Closed December-March.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 14/20

Seegarten/Reutemann

The Hotels Seegarten and Reutemann, with a total of 64 rooms, are in two separate buildings sharing a front desk and other facilities. And frankly, it's difficult to tell just which hotel you're in at any given point. And it doesn't seem to matter in any significant way.

In general, the common lobby is a bit more casual than next door but still very attractive with lots of polished wood and fresh flowers.

Room Number 410 Seegarten has a full view of the lake and swimming pool and is large enough for a seating area at one end with a small couch and chairs and costs 285 DM (\$174) a night.

A more impressive choice, however, is Number 216 in the supposedly less expensive Reutemann. Also with that to die-for view, this very large corner room with three big windows is 350 DM (\$213). To us it makes infinite sense to opt for one of

EDITOR'S CHOICE

the best rooms (such as Number 216) in either the Reutemann or the Seegarten instead of a middle-of-the-road, but considerably more expensive, one in the Bayerischer Hof.

Daily Rates: Singles 130 to 180 DM (\$79-\$110), doubles with shower 200 to 270 DM (\$122-\$165), doubles with bathtub 260 to 370 DM (\$159-\$226).

Contact: Hotel Reutemann/Seegarten, Seepromenade, D-88131 Lindau-Insel, tel. +49/08382/9150, fax 915591. Open all year.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel Helvetia

Just beyond the Big Three, but still on the promenade, is the Helvetia.

Somewhat smaller, with just 50 rooms and certainly more relaxed, it has been done up in a Mediterranean theme, apparently in deference to the resort-like ambience and mild climate of the region. The overall effect is decidedly, well, funky. Greek inspired motifs adorn the public rooms while guestrooms are abloom with flowery prints, ruffles and great big fabric bows tying back the draperies.

We suspect that the clientele tends to be a little younger here.

Daily Rates: Singles 80 to 175 DM (\$49-\$107), doubles 160-290 DM (\$98-\$177). Facilities for the handicapped.

Contact: Hotel Helvetia, Seepromenade, D-88131 Lindau-Insel, tel. +49/08382/91 30, fax 40 04. Closed: November through February.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Lindauer Hof

Another well-located option is the Lindauer Hof, on the promenade but set back slightly behind a small grassy triangle. A touch of the Med surfaces in the decor here as well which is surprising considering the obviously Germanic heritage of owner/managers, Gert and Karin Wimpissinger.

You can eat on the first floor (second) enclosed terrace overlooking the harbor, or outside under the shade of an ancient wisteria vine.

Daily Rates: Singles 130 to 149 DM (\$79-\$91), singles with lake view 175 DM (\$107), doubles 255 DM (\$155),

Excursion to Mainau

Once, far back in the annals of European history, it must have been quite the 'thing' to buy tiny islands and turn them into private pleasure gardens. Isola Bella in Italy's Lake Maggiore comes to mind, as do the Garinish Island Gardens of southwest Ireland.

But while others may excel in flamboyance and creative exuberance, Insel Mainau in the Uberlingersee of Lake Constance rates on top as a legitimate, working botanical garden with a first rate collection of exotic species tucked in amidst the pansies and the petunias.

The 45 hectare island is a virtual blooming machine during the warmer months beginning with vast sweeps of spring bulbs along walking paths that look straight across the lake to the Swiss Alps. The rhododendrons and azaleas take over next with over 280 varieties planted on a 10,000 sq. ft. slope. Roses come in every variety: standards in the Italian Rose Garden complete with fountain and pergola, 800 varieties of wild roses, and shrub roses on the winding Rose Walk. Add a mere 200 types of fuchsias, 200,000 dahlias of every description, and countless thousands of annuals propagated on the premises and you get the idea. It's a vegetative riot.

Some of the plants — certain of the fuchsias and climbing roses and rhododendrons, in particular — are more than 100 years-old. A remarkable collection of trees in the Arboretum first took root when the present count's great grandfather, the Grand Duke Frederick of Baden, gave in to his passion for rare plants and began what was to become a landmark for the whole area.

Open daily. March 13-October 25 7am-8pm. October 26-March 12 9am-5pm Admission 17 DM (\$10.50) Mainau Information Center, Mainau GmbH, D-78465 Mainau, tel. +49/07531/303-0, 303-248, www.mainau.de

Getting there: Weisse Flotte Bodensee passenger ferries make the trip between Lindau and Mainau 5-7 times daily (depending on the season) with stops at Wasserburg, Friedrichshafen and Meersburg during the three-hour journey. Return either by ferry or a 90-minute scenic train ride along the north side of the lake.

Round trip from Lindau to Konstanz 37 DM/\$23 (50% discount with Eurailpass). **Tip:** There are restaurants and snack bars on the island but it makes more sense to eat on the ferry and have more time for the flowers. An excellent bowl of *Goulaschsuppe* (goulash soup) costs 4.80 DM (\$2.92), *Bockwurst und Kartoffelsalat* (sausage and potato salad) is 9.40 DM (\$5.73). ☒

doubles with lake view 285 to 345 DM (\$174-\$210). Breakfast buffet included.

Contact: Hotel Lindauer Hof, Seepromenade, D-88131 Lindau-Insel, tel. +49/08382/40 64, fax 42 03. Open all year.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Places to Eat

Restaurant Ratsstuben

Restaurants abound in Lindau, of course. We found the Ratsstuben simply furnished in an unimaginative style only vaguely reminiscent of a *Stube*. The service was a bit tight-lipped as well and the food while acceptable, was not outstanding.

We did, however have our first

serving of *Felchenfilet* (whitefish) from the lake which is the local speciality. *Felchenfilet gedünstet mit Dillsahnesauce, Butter Reis und Salat* (whitefish with dill cream sauce, buttered rice and salad) cost 22 DM (\$13.41) and was very good.

Restaurant Ratsstuben, Ludwigstrasse 7, 88131 Lindau-Insel, tel + fax +49/08382-66 26.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 11/20

Restaurant-Weinstube Frey

Another version of whitefish at the Restaurant-Weinstube Frey near the Altes Rathaus was even better.

This 16th-century wine tavern is on the first (second) floor overlooking the town's main pedestrian

Continued on page 6...

LINDAU

Continued from page 5

shopping street. The three attractive rooms are wood paneled from top to bottom and lined with cushioned benches. There's a ceramic stove in one corner and leaded glass windows are an interesting combination of stained and etched glass.

Very atmospheric. Very friendly. And very good food. But plan on a long and leisurely evening — meals here are meant to be savored.

As a starter the Lindauer *Fischsuppe mit Knoblauchtoast* (fish soup with garlic toast) for 8.80 DM (\$5.36) was tomato based with vegetables, several kinds of fish and a piquant flavor of allspice and pepper. *Bodenseefelchenfilet gebacken in Riesling-Weinteig mit bunter salatteller* (whitefish cooked in wine with mixed salad plate), costing 26 DM (\$16), was breaded and baked.

The salad was enormous and very fresh. It was all delicious.

A medium-dry bottle of 1996 Nonnenheimer Sonnenbichl Müller-Thurgau was a perfect choice at 28 DM (\$17). There's also a good selection of local wines available, a 1997 Spätburgunder Rotwein Trocken is particularly recommended.

Restaurant-Weinstube Frey, Maximilianstrasse 15, 88131 Lindau-Insel, tel 0 83 82-52 78, fax 0 83 82-47-18. No credit cards.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 17/20

Alte Post

The Alte Post Restaurant has tables outside under an expanse of plane trees. Inside the atmosphere is pleasant with colorful linens and small bouquets of fresh flowers on each table

The menu features the usual items found on almost every menu in Germany but with a few twists. *Schweinsteak Mexicaine* (pork steak, Mexican style) at 17.50 DM (\$11), for example. A tasty *Maultaschen Vegetarisch*, (16 DM/\$10), best described as the German version of ravioli, consisted of two large pasta pillows, stuffed with spinach, topped with lots of sauteed onions and served

with a better than average salad plate.

It was impossible to assess service as a sudden downpour just after placing our order resulted in a mad dash inside and general chaos from which there was no recovery.

Restaurant Alte Post, Fischergasse 3, 88131 Lindau-Insel, tel 0 83 82-9 34 60, fax 0 83 82-93 46 46.

RATING: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 13/20

EMMENTAL

Continued from page 2

The hotel's major attraction, though, is its restaurant, which is arranged in three separate but contiguous dining areas and is done entirely — ceilings, walls, beams, dividers — in a golden-hued wood. The well-spaced tables and booths have white cloths, fresh flowers and low lamps. The effect is one of comfort and graciousness but not formality; women in slacks and men in open collar shirts will not feel out of place.

Under Herr Birkhäuser, the restaurant developed somewhat of a local reputation which seems to have been maintained under the new chef, Urs Weyermann, and is reflected in the prices. Main courses range from about 24 to 38 Sfr. (\$18-\$29), but the portions are massive; expect a second serving.

As before, we dined well; this time on *Rehfiletschnitzel*, four tender filets of venison topped with banana and sliced grapes, and on *Geflügelbrusten*, a boned, roasted breast and leg of chicken. With it came the Hirschen's still-marvelous *Rösti* and sauteed snow peas and carrots. The venison was accompanied by Spätzle and a scattering of winter vegetables including Brussels sprouts and beets.

Many European restaurants which take themselves seriously serve a small "gift of the house" to begin the meal. In this case it was a dollop of salmon tartar on a tiny, crisp waffle.

We are fans of that Germanic staple, the *Gemischter Salat* (mixed salad). The Hirschen's version is an especially good one with leafy greens, julienned carrots, celery root,

beets, and sliced cucumbers, tossed in a creamy, mustardy dressing, and topped with croutons and grated hard boiled egg.

A surprise of our 1987 visit was finding a modest 18-room hotel sitting atop a vaulted, underground wine cellar of several thousand bottles from all over the world. Fortunately, the cellar had been restocked since our first visit when we had seriously depleted it. Remembering Herr Birkhäuser's fierce advocacy of Swiss wines we chose La Cretta (36 Sfr./\$27), a Pinot Noir from the Valais and were not disappointed.

With dessert, but not including beverages, dinner for two was 76 Sfr. (\$57).

In the course of the evening, we became aware of a lively table in a separate, almost semiprivate part of the dining room. This animated party of six tasted several wines, toasted each other from time to time, and were obviously enjoying themselves.

Near the end of the meal, we asked the waiter what had become the hotel's former owner.

"Herr Birkhäuser?," he replied. "Why, he's right over there," indicating the table we had noted. So, while we had been discussing the whereabouts of Walter Birkhäuser, we had been looking at his broad back for an hour and a half.

Following our 1987 visit, we had written a glowing report on the Hirschen, which maybe is why the Birkhäusers remembered us after so many years. We discovered they still own the hotel but no longer manage it, having retired in 1993 from that life of long days and short nights. It was good to see them hale and hearty.

We would be hard pressed to name more than a handful of country hotels in its price category that match the Hirschen's cuisine, comfort and charm. In the 10 years since our last review, it hasn't lost a step.

Daily Rates: Singles 80 to 95 Sfr. (\$59-\$70), doubles 130 to 160 Sfr. (\$96-\$119)

Contact: Hotel Hirschen, Dorfstrasse 17, CH-3550, +41/034/402 1517, fax 402 5623. Proprietors: Hedy and Urs Weyermann, Urs Messerli.

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

Rest. Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 12/20 

If the Jackal really wanted to disappear for a few days, he could do worse than the peaceful Emmental. This is a region that feels very much off the beaten track but isn't; it can be accessed in minutes by train (see box, page 2) or by car from Bern or Lucerne.

The main attractions, outside of the super little cheese factory at Affoltern, are farming villages, incredibly green hills, hurrying little streams, broad pastures, and dark forests — an early-to-bed, early-to-rise kind of place. In a word, country. Visitors will want to bring walking shoes and something to read.

Beck Haus

If someone on the lam, such as the Jackal, wanted to "go to ground," as the Brits say, we've got just the place. (It's also recommended to law-abiding citizens such as yourself.)

In the tiny hamlet of Signau — about 5 km (3 miles) southwest of Langnau — is the Beck House (see sketch, page 1), built in 1788 and owned by the Johnny-come-lately Beck family since 1951.

For 420 Sfr. (\$315) per week you can rent their flat on the first floor (our second). It has a kitchen, sitting room, two bedrooms (a third is possible), a wide balcony overlooking the garden, and 210 years of atmosphere.

The rail station is a 200-meter walk and there is a restaurant across the street.

The Beck's are a very welcoming older couple who speak little or no English, so we suggest booking through the tourist office (see right).

You'll probably have the most

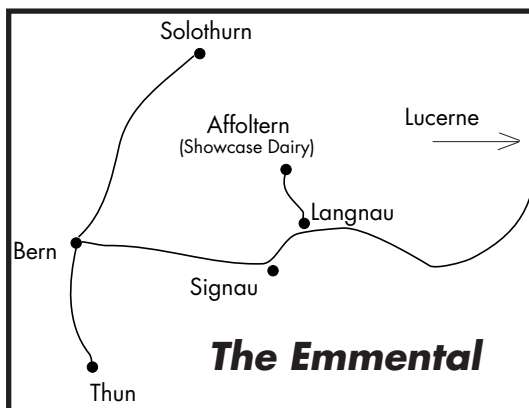
relaxing week of your life — provided Interpol doesn't catch up with you.

Beck Haus, Dorfstrasse 45, CH-3534 Signau, tel. +4/034/497 1344. Recommended.

Emmental Odds & Ends

The **Emmentaler Schaukäseri** (Emmental Show Dairy) is the best of its kind we've found in Switzerland. Emmental cheese is made here all day, every day. Visitors are received from 8:30am to 6:30pm, 365 days a year. While watching the cheese being made, they can don headphones that describe the process in several languages, including English.

Also on the property is a herdsman's cottage with an Alpine dairy dating from 1741, a bakery and sweet shop, a handicraft store, and, of course, a restaurant and cheese shop.



Emmentaler Schaukäseri, CH-3416 Affoltern i.E., tel. +41/034/435 1611, fax 435 0151.

Farm Vacations

Contact Pro Emmental (address below) to book a two-night farm weekend. The price of 107 Sfr. (\$80) per adult and 54 Sfr. (\$41) per child (kids under 4 are free) includes two nights' accommodations, breakfast, and dinner one night with the host family. Pro Emmental cautions that host farm families speak only German.

Emmental Tourist Office: Pro Emmental, CH-3550 Langnau im Emmental, tel. +41/034/402 4252, fax 402 5667 

READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 1

passport first. Crossing borders without papers, especially within the European Union, is far easier than exiting these parking lots without this card.

2. Before leaving the parking lot, find the payment area, be it man or machine. If machine, examine the machine carefully to see what denominations of money it will accept. The machine may or may not be multilingual — the human lot attendants usually are not — but invariably the coins and bills are also pictured. Don't return without an ample supply of the coins or bills which it will accept — and they rarely accept bills. Use your bills to buy cheap postcards at the nearest gift shop to be sure you have enough change.

3. When ready to leave, go to the machine and insert your ticket magnetic strip up. The amount you owe should light up at eye level and you will be invited to insert coins/bills until the number becomes zero. Then, the machine returns your ticket.

4. Grasp the ticket securely in your hand — it represents freedom — and return to your car. At the barred exit, you will be invited to insert the ticket. Do so; again, magnetic strip up.

The machine should then accept the ticket and the gate should then lift up, freeing you to enter the mad city traffic.

The reader will probably conclude that if any one of these steps fails you will have a disaster. This conclusion is correct. For example, one morning when leaving Bamberg — a place I did not want to leave in the first place, although the hotel (not a *Gemütlichkeit* recommendation) was disappointing — I found that I had inserted the ticket into the pay-machine the wrong way. At least, that is what it told me, in German and in English. Then, it told me this again. And again. And again.

Continued on page 8...

READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 7

Of course, there are only four different ways of inserting a ticket.

After a dozen tries, I decided that I, although an *Auslander*, was not at fault this time. I looked around. There was no way out and there was no human to plead with. I walked around the lot, searching for ways to drive out without paying (you know, by jumping the curb or driving over the sidewalk). The efficient Germans must have expected this, for there was no other way out.

As luck would have it, this parking lot was a half block from the Concert Hall and, although there was no concert at 8am, I did see a man loading a bass drum into the back of a station wagon. I ran over and asked him for help, explaining my plight. We mulled the problem over together without success until he asked, in English, if I was an American. So was he, or at least was twenty years ago. He suggested bypassing the pay-machine and taking the unprocessed ticket directly to the gate. That usually works for him. When it did not work for me, he referred me to someone in the Concert Hall — security, apparently — who required 13 DM (\$8) to encode or decode the ticket after I solemnly swore to him that I had parked overnight only. Whatever incantation he intoned over the ticket, it worked and the gate lifted for me.

That day we drove into Karlov Vary, whose underground lot, hallelujah, had human attendants. Anticipating that his patrons would not know Czech numbers, the cashier had written various combinations of numbers on a card and pointed as needed. However, I found that the "parking lot shuffle" must be a relatively new dance, because, while conversing in sign language with the cashier, I observed several Germans futilely trying to pay at the gate as they tried to leave. They were typical for that day, since, on my way to the car, I was asked by two other Germans whether they had to pay before returning to their cars.

The next stop, Prague, posed a

different hazard — the local police. Although assured by the hotel that we could park next to the building so long as we had a hotel sticker and, although the sticker was prominently displayed, the police immobilized the car with a primitive, but effective, "boot." The hotel, the *Sidi*, was very apologetic and accommodating, but asked if I could just leave the car there until the day we were leaving, because "we can call the police and pay the fine, but they'll just put the shoe back on your car in 12 hours."

This was my third visit to Prague. My first was not long after the 1968 Russian invasion. (Picture, if you can, an empty Charles Bridge, a deserted Old Town Square, no entry to St. Vitus's Cathedral, or any of the other churches, no gift shops, no street musicians, and ghastly, inedible food.) I found that one thing had not changed in Prague from the corrupt, repressive Communist days — the police. In the old days, it was said that the Czech police traveled in groups of three: one to interrogate the arrestee, one to write down the answers, and the third to keep an eye on the two intellectuals. They still travel in threes, but now it is to watch each other so that everyone gets his fair share of the bribe, which is what it took to have the boot removed.

When Hotel *Sidi* called to have me un-booted, a bullnecked unshaven young thug in blue showed up, named his price (5,000 crowns/\$174) and radioed for the boot-remover. (Note, as I did, that I was not directed to some central parking authority to pay a fine and return with a receipt.) His call was overheard by two of his colleagues who arrived to watch him and the car until the boot-remover arrived and freed us. I did not wait around to see how the loot was divided.

Nothing else so melodramatic occurred during the rest of our trip, but *invariably* parking the car in a city, *any city*, was dicey, even when I found a legal spot on the street. There is, as you often point out, no substitute for seeing the countryside in a car, but fly or train into the city and rent one there. When you're ready to see the bright lights of

München or Wien, find a *hotel garni* or *pension* near the commuter rail line and leave the car there. Enjoy the city's vibrance without any car-induced hassles.

CHRISTOPHER KELLEHER, BEDFORD NH

Hotel Near Stuttgart

While traveling near Stuttgart we encountered a small hotel which proved to be very satisfactory in all respects. The room was very comfortable and quiet; the staff was very friendly; breakfast was delicious; and the food in the restaurant was outstanding.

The **Hotel-Restaurant Kirchner** (Leonberger Strasse 14-16, D-71229 Leonberg-Eltingen, tel. +49/07152/6063-0, fax 60 63-60) is located in the southeast Stuttgart suburb of Leonberg, just off the A8 Autobahn. It is run by Thomas Figge (*Geschäftsführer*). Mr. Figge spent a few years in the U.S. and speaks very good English. We intended to spend only one night in the Stuttgart area (primarily to visit the Porsche and Daimler-Benz museums), but we were so pleased with our accommodations that we eventually spent three nights there.

DANIEL E. CORDRAY, PEORIA IL

International Driving License

I have been driving to Austria for more than 30 years. During this period I have been stopped by the police for various checks and even a speeding violation.

Recently I was stopped within 500 meters of the Hungarian border in a routine traffic check. The officer wanted to see my car registration papers and my driver's license.

After I produced my Wisconsin license he indicated that I needed an International Driver's License. He advised me that since I had none I had to pay a fine of 500 Austrian schillings (\$40). I protested but he said it was the law. We talked a bit and finally he told me that the old fine had been AS 100 (\$8) but was increased on January 1, 1998.

You might remind *Gemütlichkeit* readers that carrying an International Driver's License may be worth the \$10 investment.

ED RAETHER, WAUKESHA WI 