

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

March 26, 1999

Journal Rips Weimar Event

I begin with a rant. Perhaps you saw the March 12 *Wall Street Journal's* piece on Weimar. The writer, a person named Ed Ward, trashes Weimar in its role as European City of Culture for 1999.

He begins by telling readers the city's tourist information people were "rude and unhelpful" to him during an earlier visit when he was gathering background for a travel guidebook.

He then opines that the city, being one of the first to be administered by the Nazis and close to the Buchenwald concentration camp, has a "dodgy past." At one point he describes Weimar under communism as "flogging its illustrious past to tourists from West Germany in exchange for their hard currency, earning itself a reputation as a closed and unfriendly place in the process."

The article is full of digs and slights; some subtle, some not so subtle. He uses the words "creepy" and "eerie" to describe the town and the Cultural City displays.

But Mr. Ward's main criticisms of Weimar's handling of the Cultural City event are that it doesn't offer enough printed material in English, and that it is a German rather than international event with too much focus on three famous former residents: Schiller, Goethe, and Liszt.

Having spent three days in Weimar in 1997 researching our Weimar issue (February, 1997), I was first interested in Mr. Ward's comments about the tourist office. Our experience with them was totally different than his. Tourism employees we encountered were friendly and professional.

Taking the city to task for shining the spotlight on Liszt, Schiller and Goethe seems a very long critical reach. Weimar is not Berlin

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

HAMBURG

Our lead article this month on the delights of Hamburg begins a series on the sea-going cities of Northern Germany. Ahead are Bremen and Lübeck.

If your travels to Germany have never taken you out of Bavaria and the Rhine, take the next exit off the Romantic Road and venture farther north.

Stretching across the banks of the Elbe River on the cusp of the North Sea, the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg is a proud, industrious, and surprisingly elegant port town whose considerable charms remain something of a secret from North American leisure travelers.

That means that during the summer months, when sailboats are drifting across the lake and people are strolling under the trees to their favorite outdoor cafés, Hamburg is

refreshingly free of the tourist hordes overrunning most of the rest of Europe's great cities.

For centuries, Hamburg has served as a commercial gateway to northern Germany, and it is a fitting place to begin our exploration of Northern Germany and the cities of the Hanseatic League. In the next few issues, we will continue on to Bremen, Lübeck, and Schleswig-Holstein.

Hamburg is a merchant town, and its practical-minded people haven't seen much need to call attention to themselves by constructing splashy palaces or photogenic towers and monuments to put on their tourist brochures. Hamburg's greatest landmarks are its

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Cruising Down the River

Two factors, the opening of borders of formerly communist countries in Eastern Europe, and the completion of the new Main-Danube Canal, have triggered a huge increase in European river cruising during the 1990s.

Here are some things to ponder if you're considering a such a trip.

- Currently there are about 60 river boats sailing the Danube, Rhine, Rhône, Seine, Elbe and Volga rivers. A typical cruise is seven days, though shorter itineraries of three and four days are available.

- Boats are limited in size by the rivers on which they cruise. Thus most vessels are similar in size and amenities. A typical outside state

room (avoid inside cabins) is smaller than an ocean-going cruise ship, but has a large, tinted, one-way glass window, side-by-side twin beds, a writing desk and chair(s), perhaps a small couch near the window, a tiny closet and a cozy toilet with shower. On many boats the sleeping arrangements will consist of two "lower berths," one of which converts to a couch in the daytime and the other folds into the wall. A "large" stateroom on a five star cruiser, will be about 200 square feet; the smallest cabins are about 125 square feet.

Since the Danube's channels and locks are wider than most, the boats cruising it, such as KD Rhine's *Heinrich Heine* and Peter Deilmann's

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or New York, but a small town of about 60,000 people. It would be incredibly stupid if the city did *not* make this trio the centerpiece of its celebration. Whom should they highlight, Chinese and Swedes? Members of the 1850 Weimar Grange Co-op? Would Philadelphia downplay Benjamin Franklin? Would Florence de-emphasize Michelangelo?

Come on, Mr. Ward. Many historians consider writer-thinker-director-politician Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to be the greatest German of them all. Friedrich von Schiller is a revered poet whose most famous work, the *Ode to Joy*, is incorporated in Beethoven's great Choral Symphony, the 9th. (Given the immense popularity of that piece of music, it seems safe to say that Schiller's words are being heard by someone in the world every second of every day.) As for the pianist and composer Franz Liszt, his inclusion seems to refute the *Journal's* argument that the Cultural City focus is parochial. Liszt, who started a music school in Weimar that endures to this day, was Hungarian.

One expects a publication as respected as the *Wall Street Journal* to keep its pages free of personal reprisals such as Mr. Ward's. When he dismisses Weimar by saying it can be "explored in 30 minutes if one walks at a leisurely pace," the intent to discourage tourism (and thereby get even) is obvious. Of course, one cannot properly see Weimar's attractions — the Schiller House, the

Goethe House, the Liszt House, the Lucas Cranach House, the Stadtschloss, the Goethe and Schiller funerary monument, Ilm Park, etc. — in 10 times 30 minutes.

Unfortunately for *Journal* readers and the city of Weimar, Mr. Ward's story was payback time; an opportunity to use the power of his mighty employer to settle an old score.

Snowbound

Our clipping service sent us an interesting piece from the March 6, 1999, issue of the *Financial Times*. Its author, Kenneth McKenzie, a London attorney, recounted his family's experience being marooned for five days by the heavy snowfall during the recent series of disastrous avalanches in western Austria.

Mr. McKenzie, whose family had chosen fashionable Lech for a week's ski vacation, was critical of Lech cable TV and city officials. According to him, the magnitude of an approaching storm was kept somewhat of a secret. He says a very few were warned and were able to get out before the storm hit. His party, in fact, did not realize the town was cut off until, after two days of continuous snow, he "casually inquired at the hotel desk." "We learned more about the situation in our first hour back in England than in the previous week in Austria," he says.

The McKenzies had travel insurance which covered a portion — about \$48 per day per person — of the expenses incurred during their prolonged stay but their "carefully planned budget was shattered." They tried, though unsuccessfully, to

find cheaper accommodations.

One of their worries became food, especially when they began to notice increasingly bare supermarket shelves. Cable TV carried "assurances from the town Bürgermeister that Lech's supplies were guaranteed" but, according to Mr. McKenzie, items like eggs and orange juice soon disappeared from the hotel's breakfast buffet.

The McKenzie family — mom, dad, three children and one friend — finally escaped via helicopter. At a cost of about \$112 per person they were flown in 12 minutes to a nearby town not identified in the story. There — and this, again, is according to Mr. McKenzie's account — previously purchased bus tickets were not honored (the tickets were for travel from Lech, though the bus route passed through the unidentified town). In fact, at the culmination of a heated disagreement over the bus ticket issue, the manager of the bus line struck Mr. McKenzie, "hard, on the shoulder." The family took a taxi to the Zürich Airport for which they paid about \$300. Money for the unused bus tickets was not refunded.

Can you spell L-I-T-I-G-A-T-I-O-N?

Correction

Last month we erroneously reported that Maria von Trapp spent 30 years as missionary in New Guinea. According to subscriber Burton Johnson of East Berlin, Connecticut, who is a family friend, it was Maria's daughter who was the missionary. ❏

Coming Soon: gemut.com, the website for travelers to Germany, Austria and Switzerland

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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.

HAMBURG

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storied harbor and the Baroque church, affectionately known as the "Michel," honoring the city's patron saint. The city was, of course, totally rebuilt after being heavily damaged in World War II and its busy port and the rows of white mansions rising up along the riverbanks bear witness that the city continues to uphold its strong mercantile traditions.

Despite the hustle and bustle that comes with being a major piston in the German economic engine, downtown Hamburg is pleasant to explore on foot or by boat. A clean and efficient public transport system puts everything within easy reach. At the heart of the city nestles the Alster, a glittering lake set amid stately homes, elegant hotels, art galleries, parks, shops, and foreign consulates. Canals and arcaded waterways thread their way through the business district and *Altstadt*.

Definitely set aside some time to indulge in some of Europe's finest shopping in the exclusive boutiques along Jungfernstiegstrasse, Neuer Wall, and Mönckebergstrasse. **Alsterhaus** is the city's most famous department store. The more modest shopping districts offer better value as well as those essential maritime souvenirs like brass barometers and ships-in-a-bottle.

Culture abounds in the city's theaters, museums, and concert halls. Hamburg boasts one of the finest ballet companies in Europe, and midsummer visitors should not miss the **Ballet Festival** in July. In February, we caught the final performance of *Jenufa* by Leos Janacek in Hamburg's austere and somewhat acoustically-challenged opera house. Tickets to cultural events are available through ticket offices located throughout the city or at the St. Pauli Landungsbrücken Tourist Office, tel: +49/040/3005-1203.

For something a little different, consider a visit to the **Reeperbahn** in the **St. Pauli district**. Hamburg's notorious red light district offers a variety of less highbrow entertainment, including a multistory **Erotic**

Hamburg Info

Population: 1.7 million

Altitude: Sea level

Tourist Information:

Steinstrasse 7, 20095 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/300 51-0, fax 300-51 220. Web: www.hamburg-tourism.de. Email: info@hamburg-tourism.de.

Distance from:

Berlin	284 Km/178 miles
Frankfurt	488 Km/305 miles
Munich	787 Km/492 miles

Boat Tours:

- Hour-long harbor tours leave every half hour 9-6 from the Landungsbrücken, Piers 1,2,3, & 7.
- 50-min. trips around the Alster leave from the Jungfernstieg from 10-6 in summer; less frequently in winter.

Coming Events:

- 14th Hanse Marathon, 25 April
- Hamburg Cabaret Festival, 25 May to 20 June, Hamburger Kammerspiele
- Hamburg Ballet Festival, 27 June to 11 July, Hamburgische Staatsoper
- West Port, Germany's largest and most popular jazz festival, July
- Hamburg Film Festival, Up to 100 new films from all over Europe. Late Sept. to early Oct.

Internet Sites:

- www.hamburg.de
- www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/Hamburg/HH_homepage_english.html (Current listing of cultural events, city history, commerce, tours, and weather.)

Art Museum. These days you won't see many drunken seamen swaggering through the streets, but the district is still a lively nightlife scene. Beetles fans will doubtless recall that the Mod Squad got their first break here.

Architecture buffs will enjoy the restored 14th-century homes in Deichstrasse, the *Krameramtwohnungen* or **Shopkeepers' Guild Houses**, the ornate, neo-Renaissance **Rathaus** propped up on 4,000 piles to keep it from sinking into the marshy ground, and, of course, the brick and Baroque "Michel" (**St.**

Michaeliskirche). Also interesting is the massive and sculptural **Hauptbahnhof**.

Every Hamburg visit should include a boat tour of its Free Port and perhaps the most quintessentially Hamburg experience, the dock-

side, Sunday-morning **Altona Fischmarkt**. The selection of every kind of sea creature imaginable is second only to Tokyo's Tsukiji market. The market also features non-seafood-related wares like antiques and animals, live music and flea market junk. On Sunday and Tuesday mornings, farmers' markets offering the best local produce are held in Blankenese as well as under the tracks of the U-3 at the Eppendorferbaum Station.

One final attraction may be of interest to American visitors of German origin. Traditionally, Hamburg was the point of departure for thousands of Europeans headed for a new life in the United States, and records of all émigrés who departed from 1850 to 1914 can be found on microfilm at the **Historic Emigration Office**, P.O. Box 10 22 49, 20015 Hamburg, attn: Elizabeth Sroka. Cost is \$75 whether or not the search is successful.

Hotels

While hotel rooms are fairly easy to come by in Hamburg — there are some 26,000 guest beds in the city to accommodate roughly 2.4 million guests annually — inexpensive ones, unfortunately, are scarce.

Hotel Prem

This stately white house on the Alster was built in 1912 and maintains an intimate, romantic atmosphere in a central location near the main train station.

The Prem's lobby, done in marble floors with deep red walls, leads into a comfortable lounge that faces the lake. At the back of the building, the house restaurant, decorated in slate blue and peach tones and flooded with morning sunlight, stretches into a lush garden. The adjoining **Swiss Chalet** restaurant, with its pine walls and benches, copper pots, and upholstered chairs, offers fondues and other traditional Swiss dishes.

Don't be deceived by the Prem's stark white hallways, colored only by the occasional Chagall print. All 53 rooms are individually decorated in one of two distinct styles: antique or modern. Room Number 106 is lavish-

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ly adorned with deep-colored floral linens and white walls with Baroque era gold accents. An elegant veil floats over the queen bed. The bath is decorated in black marble and features both tub and shower.

By contrast, room Number 203, with teal carpet and king-sized bed, offers simpler, but still antique decor. A balcony presents a view of the lake; the bath is relatively small with a shower stall and brass fixtures.

For a more contemporary feel, request Number 204. This double is large enough to be billed as a junior suite, and with its garden view, is quieter than lakeside rooms.

Daily Rates: Singles 260 to 340 DM (\$145-\$190), doubles 290 to 395 DM (\$162-\$221).

Contact: An der Alster 8-10, D-20099 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/2417 28-8, fax 280 38 15. Toll-free reservations: 800-457-4000.

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 15/20

Hotel Bellevue

More reasonably-priced accommodations on the outer Alster can be found at the Bellevue. Its 93 rooms are divided between two adjacent buildings.

Room Number 14 in the original building is a spacious room with a high ceiling and features a spectacular view of the lake. Furnishings are a blend of Scandinavian and Asian designs.

In the neighboring, newer building, Room Number 341 features arched windows and a quieter atmosphere than the older building.

Daily Rates: Singles 175 to 215 DM (\$98-\$120), doubles 275 to 315 DM (\$154-\$176). Parking available.

Contact: An der Alster 14, D-20099 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/284-44-0, fax 284-44-222. Web: www.top-hotels.de/travelcharme

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel St. Raphael

Despite its affiliation with the American Best Western chain, the Raphael has managed to create a

distinctive atmosphere. Among its 128 rooms are more than 25 "designer" rooms, which have been individually decorated by contemporary German artists.

Another 20 "Raphael Royal" rooms are junior suites that come with extras like wine and sandwiches in the evening, the morning paper, and a shoe shining service. Non-smoking rooms are available. The top floor fitness center and proximity to the train station are two additional perks.

Daily Rates: Singles 179 to 239 DM (\$100-\$134), doubles 210 to 270 DM (\$117-\$151). Breakfast not included (19 DM/\$11 per person). Parking 10 DM (\$6) per day. Fitness center 8 DM (\$5) per person per day.

Contact: Adenauerallee 41, D-20097 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/248-200, fax 248-20-333. Email: info@straphael-hamburg.bestwestern.de. Web: www.bestwestern.com

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 17/20

Europäischer Hof

In an effort to add a distinctive feature to an otherwise ordinary hotel, Hamburg's largest private hotel recently added a seven-story leisure center that features — of all things — a 150-meter water slide, not to mention an indoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, sun terrace, squash courts, massages, and even a golf simulator. If you go, note the separate elevators for barefoot and shod guests.

Fitness aside, this establishment is unremarkable. Its large, plain lobby was filled with smoke when we arrived. Guestrooms are modern, but lacking in charm. Twenty non-smoking rooms are available.

Daily Rates: Singles 190 to 330 DM (\$106-\$184), doubles 250 to 380 DM (\$140-\$212).

Contact: Kirchenallee 45, D-20099 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/248-248, fax 248-24 799

Rating: QUALITY 8/20, VALUE 11/20

Hotel Louis C. Jacob

When it comes to Hamburg's top hotels, the Jacob is one to splurge on. It sits about five miles outside of the city center along the Elbchausee —

an eight kilometer, riverside avenue that connects the suburbs of Altona, Ottensen, Othmarschen, Nienstedten, and Blankenese.

In a most successful remodeling effort, the Jacob family has created a luxurious environment that reflects the hotel's 200-year tradition while fully embracing modern design concepts and amenities. Once a destination for the painter, Max Liebermann, the hotel now houses one of the largest private art galleries in northern Germany.

The Jacob was built in 1791 as a guesthouse and stayed in operation for five generations. It was first known as a restaurant with a few sleeping rooms. After major renovations, the hotel reopened in 1996 with 86 rooms, 26 of which face the river. Furnishings are mostly in modern Danish styles.

Our room, Number 206, is one of the best: a corner room facing the Elbe and the industrial Airbus plant across the way. We especially appreciated the polished hardwood floor, peaked ceiling, modern lighting, and fax/modem connections. The luxurious bath featured heated marble floors, a double sink, both shower stall and bathtub, and the all-essential towel warmer. Airtight, hardwood doors insured us a silent night's sleep.

A serious rival for first choice is Room Number 100, the Liebermann room, whose furnishings include several Liebermann originals.

The various culinary options at the hotel match its contemporary atmosphere. Breakfast is a notch above the usual fare, with eggs and other warm entrees accompanied by a wide variety of fresh fruits and breads. In the summertime, guests can take their morning meal outside on the Linden Terrace. From the elegant dining room, six sets of double French doors open to a patio directly above the Elbe. A famous Liebermann painting of the Lindenterrasse is on display at the Kunsthalle.

The main restaurant employs the number one sommelier in Germany and recently earned a Michelin star (review page 7). A trendy alternative

is the **Kleines Jacob**, a wine bistro with local specialties from 9 to 29 DM (\$5-\$16). Wines from several countries are offered. The food menu is adapted to the wine selections, which range from 6 to 420 DM (\$4-\$235). Caricature paintings of the former owners decorate the walls. Reservations are recommended.

The staff at this hotel was consistently friendly and helpful with everything from valet parking to navigating the city.

Daily Rates: Singles 330 to 490 DM (\$184-\$274), doubles 514 to 764 DM (\$287-\$427).

Contact: Elbchausee 401-403, D-22609 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/811 550, fax 822-55-444.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten Hamburg

For decades, glossy travel magazine polls consistently placed the Four Seasons — located on the western shore of the inner Alster, in the heart of Hamburg's prime retail and commercial district — at or near the top of the world's finest hotels. But in 1989, after 90 years of family management, during which the hotel survived the economic turmoil of two world wars, the founding Haerlin family was finally forced to sell. Under new, foreign ownership, however, the hotel slipped badly.

Now it has been sold again, this time to the Raffles International chain and a return to past glory seems possible. Over the past six months, management has installed new lighting, air-conditioning, sound systems, and renovated all 158 rooms. The result is a historic hotel that offers a remarkably efficient use of space in even the smallest rooms; walk-in closets are a standard feature, as are Internet access via speedy ISDN lines, pay TV, and in-room fax capabilities. The baths have all been remodeled, and for extra charm, each room has its own bath tub thermometer for finely adjusting the water temperature.

Many luxury hotels spend fortunes to create the sense of history and elegance that are authentic at this establishment. Three generations of antique furnishings have been

collected and displayed together over the years. A collection of 16th and 17th century Flemish-Gobelin tapestries adorn the walls of the main foyer, and Baroque wardrobes and Renaissance chests furnish the public areas.

Most importantly, the first-rate, personalized service is back. House-made truffles and homegrown flowers welcome guests when they arrive. And the 100-year-old guest card file remains. Personal preferences and aversions are duly noted for each guest. Every comment, criticism, and special request — from bedtime literature to shapes of pillows—is recorded and honored on every repeat visit.

If an overnight stay at the new Four Seasons won't fit in the budget, you might consider a lunch or dinner at its main restaurant, **The Haerlin**, to take in the view of the Alster and the fine cuisine prepared by its new chef (review page 7).

Daily Rates: Singles 413 to 533 DM (\$231-\$298), doubles 550 to 710 DM (\$307-\$397)

Contact: Neuer Jungfernstieg 9-14, D-20354 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/34 940, fax 34 942 602, email: vier-jahreszeiten@hvj.de

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 15/20

Kempinski Hotel Atlantic

Though the 90-year-old Atlantic is said to be among Hamburg's best, after two nights we concluded it doesn't compare in finesse to its rivals. It has the scale and superficial grandeur of a fine luxury hotel, but cannot match the sense of history that permeates the Vier Jahreszeiten or the delicate, contemporary air that defines the Jacob.

Our standard double was adequate but small for a grand hotel. Service was fine, but unremarkable; the fitness center was modest, and the swanky night lounge failed to excite.

Daily Rates: Singles 399 to 469 DM (\$223-\$262), doubles 478 to 500 DM (\$267-\$279). Breakfast not included.

Contact: An der Alster 72-79, 20099 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/28 88-0, Fax 24 71 29. Email: hotel@kempinski.atlantic.de. Toll-

free reservations: 800-426-3135.

Rating: Quality 12/20, Value 5/20

Hafen Hamburg

Moderately-priced hotels in Hamburg's *Zentrum* can be more than a little rough around the edges. This one, however, is not only genteel but a decent value.

Located on an elevated site directly above the Landungsbrücken, west of the *Altstadt*, the 239-room Hafen Hamburg has gracious Art Nouveau style public rooms and many guestrooms with fine views of the port and river.

Walk through the park to catch the elevated S-Bahn for the 10-minute ride downtown.

Daily Rates: Singles 165 to 190 DM (\$92-\$106), doubles 170 to 205 DM (\$95-\$115).

Contact: Seewartenstraße 9, D-20459, Hamburg, tel. +49/040 /31113-0, fax 311 13755

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 15/20

Restaurant Tasting Notes

Hamburg is fish heaven. The seafood is so fresh it practically leaps off the plate. In addition to the local catch, prime Breton lobster and Nordic salmon show up regularly on Hamburg menus. Regional cuisine is typified by dishes like *Aalsuppe* (a complex, savory, and somewhat sweet eel soup with vegetables, dumplings, and dried fruit), *Kieler Sprotten* (smoked Kiel sprats, a coastal fish that resembles herring), and *Bohnen, Birnen, und Speck* (green beans, pears, and bacon-flavored with savory). The food-loving ex-Chancellor Helmut Kohl does not consider a trip to Hamburg complete without *Labskaus*, a sailor's hash of corned beef fortified with pickled beets, a rolled-up herring, and a fried egg.

The small taverns crowding the harbor offer standard renditions of these dishes and the catch of the day, but for those who want to do the town in style and try the very best in traditional fare, we've checked out some of Hamburg's most venerable institutions for good cooking and good value.

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Fischereihafen

If we could have only one meal to savor the “real” Hamburg, we would leave the fashionable hotels behind and head for Fischereihafen in Altona. Widely regarded as the best seafood place in town, it turns out impeccably fresh regional specialties in a quiet, secluded corner of the port overlooking the Elbe.

Fischereihafen is Hamburg in miniature: conservative yet comfortable; understated elegance with a nautical flair. On our final evening in the city, we exchanged greetings with the lonely-looking doorman and swept up the stairs past tanks of lobsters and crabs. At the top, we were met by an enormous, terribly handsome dog who fixed us with a gravely polite stare but was too dignified to come any closer.

The small, paneled dining rooms hung with gleaming brass fixtures and pictures of old sailing ships balance traditional gentility with a light modern touch. Likewise, the service is old-fashioned without being stuffy. (To obtain a table by the window and a view of the harbor, you must call early and request one.) As we were seated, we spotted the lead tenor from the previous night’s opera performance sitting nearby with a companion.

The menu is practically a textbook of orthodox Hamburg cuisine, with a section of sushi and dim sum thrown in for good measure. Appetizers include smoked trout, oysters on the half shell, lobster, and caviar (16-35 DM/\$8-\$20, 56 DM/\$31 for the caviar), as well as that famous eel soup (13.50 DM/\$8). Main courses feature fish prepared every possible way, starting from 28 DM (\$16) on up to “Market Price.” We take it as a good sign that the menu changes to reflect the best of the day’s catch. The wine list, which features mostly German and French whites, and a good deal of champagne, is adequate but not particularly brilliant.

For a mere 65 DM (\$36) we ordered the “Regional-Menu” and got a

four-course tour of Hamburg. Every dish represented a landmark in the local culinary landscape. It began with salty bites of house-marinated chopped herring served on rounds of dense, fragrant black bread, followed by the celebrated *Labskaus*. The main course was a double feature pairing *Hamburger Pfannfisch* (haddock, Hamburg style) with the most exquisite piece of salmon we have ever encountered, draped in a delicate mustard-butter sauce. Wisely, the kitchen ignores the temptation to do too much to fish, letting its freshness and quality speak eloquently for itself. Dishes are formally presented, yet maintain a down-home quality.

Dessert was *Rote Grütze*, a velvety red berry compote with homemade vanilla bean ice cream and topped with custard cream. By now, our waiter Klaus was so enchanted by our having paid his hometown the compliment of polishing off every bite that he shook our hands and reminisced about sailing to America on a yacht 40 years ago. We nodded to the opera singer, lifted our glasses in a good-bye toast to the ships sailing out of the harbor below.

Dinner for two without drinks: 120 DM (\$67).

Contact: Fischereihafen Restaurant Hamburg, Gr. Elbstrasse 143, D-22767 Hamburg. tel. +49/040/38 18 16, fax 389-3021.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 14/20

Landhaus Scherrer

Landhaus Scherrer is the acknowledged grande dame of Hamburg restaurants. Well-heeled locals head to this prestigious address among the mansions in Hamburg’s wealthiest suburb to celebrate special occasions and entertain important guests. The question is, should food-loving travelers do the same?

Why, certainly ...as long they have the time and inclination to take the five-mile taxi ride from the city center — and cost is no object. The bad news is that Landhaus Scherrer is not conveniently located except to those lucky enough to be staying at the Jacob Hotel or heading back from a day in Blankenese. Also, a meal from the regular menu runs from 90-

170 DM (\$50-\$95) per person, not counting wine. A sumptuous *prix fixe* menu is available for 198 DM (\$111).

These serious drawbacks aside, Landhaus Scherrer does have a highly imaginative and talented chef and a well-stocked wine cellar to complement his innovative interpretations of traditional regional cuisine.

A snowstorm blasted us through the front door, but we were immediately thawed out by the warm welcome and gracious surroundings. We sipped a Kir Royale and took in the muted peaches-and-cream tones of the spacious, contemporary dining room with its Art Nouveau touches, particularly noting the barely clad female figures prancing across the plates.

The first course was the work of a culinary artist at play: a potato-skin “nest” cradling a potato-encrusted scallop “egg” in a curried lentil sauce, topped with fanciful curls of crisply fried salsify. This sophisticated dish announced its peasant roots by arriving on a rustic bed of straw, surrounded by a ring of newly-dug potatoes.

After such an opening, the mixed salad with lobster seemed downright ordinary. The dressing even tasted a little like a thinned-down Thousand Island.

Next came an impossibly tender morsel of grain-fed *poussin* (young chicken) married to a thick slice of fresh black truffle, a single baked spinach-cheese raviolo, and a few tablespoons of truffled barley risotto. This intricate medley was followed by a moist and flavorful *Steinbuttfilet* (turbot) dressed in a deceptively simple *beurre blanc*.

We opted for dessert rather than the suggested cheese platter — surely this was no time to hold back. Exotic tropical fruits came scattered like jewels around a strudel pouch of stewed plums and a scoop of red wine-mascarpone sorbet.

Throughout dinner, we enjoyed service that managed to hit that

delicate balance of being attentive but unobtrusive. There is a quiet camaraderie among the staff that gives Landhaus Scherrer the air of a family establishment for all its elegance.

Feast for two that would have fed four, not counting wine: 396 DM (\$221).

A less expensive, and not so elaborate, Landhaus Scherrer option is its bistro which serves fish and pasta dishes for 32-38 DM (\$18-\$21) as well as a three-course "business lunch" for 65 DM (\$36) in a casual, wood-paneled room.

Contact: Landhaus Scherrer, Elbchaussée 130, D-22763 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/8 80 13 25, fax 880 6260.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 12/20

Restaurant Louis C. Jacob

As if its exceptional amenities and lovely setting weren't enough, the Jacob Hotel is home to an up-and-coming restaurant offering a fresh, modern take on regional cuisine. The nouvelle French influence is also much in evidence in Chef Thomas Martin's luxurious cuisine. This should come as no surprise, considering the building has housed a French-style restaurant since its opening in 1791. Chef Martin's efforts are complemented by sommelier, Thomas Hendrick and their collaboration recently resulted in a coveted Michelin star. Last September, the restaurant was designated "Best of Award of Excellence" by *Wine Spectator*.

For the time being, however, the Jacob Hotel's restaurant remains a well-kept secret among visitors in the know. At present, dinners range from 65 to 100 DM (\$36-\$56), an absolute bargain by pricey Hamburg standards. Be warned, however, that recognition by the folks at Michelin is often accompanied by price increases.

We enjoyed lunch overlooking the famous *Lindenterrasse* that so inspired realist painter Max Liebermann (1847-1935). Dishes are neither wildly creative nor totally traditional in their conception, but the quality of the ingredients is impeccable and execution is solid. The truffled scal-

lops with their endive jackets and butter sauce went beautifully with relaxed conversation; salmon gently poached in Pernod and then a delicate filet of veal with sautéed spinach and gnocchi followed suit. We decided our diet was already long blown, so we said yes to the chocolate mousse cake and mocha ice cream.

As a final touch of finesse, tea came in individual teapots set over votive warmers, accompanied by a tiny hourglass to ensure proper steeping. And just in case we hadn't had enough dessert, silver tray of house-made petit fours appeared. Lovely dinner for two: 170 DM (\$95).

Contact: Hotel Louis C. Jacob, Elbchaussée 401, D-22609 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/82 25 50, fax 822 55 444.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 16/20

Restaurant Haerlin

There are four different restaurants under Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten's elegant roof, but Haerlin has been given the main burden of upholding the hotel's reputation for unparalleled excellence. For the most part, it succeeds admirably. The dining room is probably the most beautiful in the city, enveloping diners in the utmost luxury while treating them to a spectacular view of the Alster.

The wine list, which is thicker than the local phone book, is considered one of the top three in Germany. Its architect is a shy young Iranian, Rakhshn Zhouleh, who left his country to pursue his forbidden passion for wine. Mr. Zhouleh's list represents many rare, unusual and even improbable finds, including an Arizona wine. He started us off with champagne, 1990 Dom Perignon, which both the restaurant and the bar pour by the glass. He then proceeded to create a marvelous experience for us, and his sensitive suggestions demonstrated a thorough understanding of chef Michael Hoffman's cuisine.


The food itself was very good, leaving nothing to be desired except that little extra something which elevates the very good to the transcendent. We feasted on a tiny schnitzel of tender lamb filet, salmon prepared five different ways, a

lobster-filled potato croquette with a white bean sauce, and a perfect filet of broiled sea bass. Mercifully, dessert was a sparkling terrine of fresh oranges and prune ice cream. Dinner without wine is 100-150 DM (\$84), and there is a vegetarian menu for 95 DM (\$53) as well as an "Avantgarde" one for 175 DM (\$98). The three-course lunch set menu is a particularly good value at 62 DM (\$35).

Best of all, the service is beautiful, perfect in every way. We felt very much at home even in such unaccustomed luxury.

High style dinner for two: 298 DM (\$166).

Contact: Restaurant Haerlin, Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, Neuer Jungfernstieg 9, D-20354 Hamburg, tel. +49/040/3 49 46 41, fax 349 4602.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 12/20 

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five-star *MS Mozart*, are usually larger. This means bigger cabins and more amenities. The Heinrich Heine and the Mozart, for example, both have indoor swimming pools. Some boats offer such extras as solariums, saunas, elevators, fitness rooms and in-stateroom TVs and VCRs.

- River cruising is expensive. For a seven-day itinerary, expect to pay from \$1,300 to \$4,620 per person. A suite on the Mozart's 11-day cruise, from Constanta on the Black Sea to Passau in Germany, is a cool \$7,205 per person, including one-way air fare from Frankfurt to Constanta.

Cruise prices include all meals and entertainment. Cruise company guidelines recommend a tip of 5% of the total cost of the passage. Liquor and shore excursions, which on our last cruise ranged from \$10 to \$50 per person, are, of course, extra.

Fares are lowest during early spring and fall shoulder seasons. Weather at that time, of course, can be cold and rainy.

- Don't expect great food. Meals are served hotel banquet style — at a single seating — and in our experience the quality is also at about that

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CRUISING

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level. Breakfasts are better and typically served until 10am.

- The marketing target of most European river cruise companies is the USA, so expect to have plenty of folks from back home as ship mates.

Two Cruise Companies

KD River Cruises of Europe, the largest, oldest, and best known, offers an array of cruise itineraries on the Rhine, Mosel, Elbe, the Main-Danube Canal and the Danube.

The company is currently offering fare reductions of 10% for most of its May and October cruises. Fares range from \$885 to \$1,585. Here are some examples.

- Seven-night, May and October cruises between Basel and Amsterdam range from \$975 to \$1,305.

- Three-night, May-October cruises on the Rhine and Mosel between Strasbourg and Cologne are \$490 to \$610.

- Three-river cruises that take in the most romantic stretch of the Rhine as well as its tributaries, the Mosel and the Main, are \$325 to \$410 for three-day cruises and \$490 to \$610 for four-day sailings

- Reductions for cruises on the Elbe are \$160 in May and October.

- Eight-day cruises westbound on the Danube and Main-Danube canal between Budapest and Nürnberg in Germany are reduced in May and October to \$1,415 to \$2,115. The eastbound fare is \$1,270 to \$1,905. Eight-day cruises between Budapest and Regensburg have discounted prices in May of \$1,030 to \$1,360.

- Twenty-two KD itineraries include the Rhine, through Holland, Germany, France and Switzerland. KD's flagship, *Deutschland*, sails between the Swiss port of Basel and Amsterdam with four- and five-night itineraries in both directions. A new five-night cruise, starting in Amsterdam, makes stops at Cologne, Koblenz, Speyer and Strasbourg. *Deutschland* fares range from \$785 to \$1,980. Also operating between Basel

and Amsterdam is the 184-passenger *Britannia*, with three- and four-night cruises from \$520 to \$1,305, and the 142-passenger *Helvetia*, with four-country, seven-night cruises, and fares from \$870 to \$1,450.

Peter Deilmann EuropAmerica Cruises offers more than 180 European itineraries—none less than seven days—aboard five river boats. Its vessels, which tend to be a bit more luxurious than the KD fleet, include the five-star *Mozart* and four-star *Danube Princess* on the Danube; the four-star *Prussian Princess* on the Rhine, Mosel and Rhine-Main-Danube Canal; the four-star *Princesse de Provence* on the Rhine and Saone; the *Königstein* and the five-star *Dresden* on the Elbe.

Deilmann offers a wide variety of itineraries and prices ranging from \$795 per person for an inside cabin on a seven-day run aboard the *Danube Princess*, to \$7205 per person for a suite on an 11-day cruise on the *MV Mozart*.

- One intriguing Deilmann itinerary is between Potsdam and Prague, with stops in Magdeburg, Meissen and Dresden. Per person prices range from \$1,085 to \$3,085.

To book a river cruise, either find a travel agent who specializes in Europe or contact a cruise company directly: Peter Deilmann (800-348 8287, www.deilmarm-cruises.com) or KD River Cruises of Europe (800-346-6525, www.rivercruises.com). ☒

Europe Travel Briefs

■ **Cheap Airport Hotel:** Finally, affordable accommodations at the Frankfurt Airport. Just opened this month is the **Steigenberger Exprix Hotel Frankfurt**.

The no-frills hotel has 225 rooms equipped with cable TV, minibar, phone and in-house video. In addition there are 190 parking spaces and free shuttle service to terminals 1 and 2. The introductory price is 115 DM (\$64) single or double. Breakfast is extra at 24 DM (\$13) per person.

Contact: Steigenberger Exprix

Hotel Frankfurt—Airport CargoCity Süd, D-60549 Frankfurt am Main, tel. +49/69/69752418, fax 69752414.

■ **Swissair News:** The airline adds five times per week service between Miami and Zürich beginning September 15.

Starting January 1, 2000, Atlanta will be serviced by two daily Swissair MD11 flights to Zürich in addition to daily **Delta** 767 service.

On October 1, the code share **Austrian Air** service between Washington DC and Zürich will get Swissair equipment and crews.

Swissair's new A330 aircraft will come with adjustable headrest "wings" and footrests in economy class. These same amenities will be retrofitted and soon be available on the airline's MD11 aircraft.

■ **Europe Goes Dark:** On Wednesday, August 11, a total eclipse of the sun sweeps across the middle of Europe. The moon will block the sun and cast a running shadow 70 miles wide following the line: Land's End, England (11:10am British Summer Time) / Reims, France / Munich, Germany / Salzburg, Austria / Lake Balaton, Hungary / Varna, Bulgaria / Diyarbakir, Turkey (2:40pm local summer time).

The eclipse will cover this distance in 90 minutes (and move on across the Mideast and India). Assuming clear skies, the total eclipse will be visible to millions for a maximum of two minutes, 20 seconds; stars should be visible at the darkest moment. Even those not in the path of totality can experience a high degree of partial eclipse lasting two hours or more from all but the most northern points of Europe.

The center of the path of the eclipse passes just to the north of Stuttgart, Munich and Salzburg. Vienna, Graz and Budapest will be just at the edge of the path of totality. Places like Frankfurt, Prague, Zürich, Innsbruck, Berlin, and Dresden will see about a 90% eclipse.

See the NASA eclipse pages on the web at <http://umbra.nascom.nasa.gov/eclipse>. ☒