

DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER

June 28, 1999

### Back to Basics

Earlier this month we returned from two weeks in you-know-where. For the first time in several years we decided to "wing it;" no reservations (except for the last three nights in Berlin) and no itinerary. In fact, we chose our first night's destination during the last hour of our San Francisco to Zürich Swissair flight.

Back in the '70s and mid-'80s, before there was a *Gemütlichkeit* and trips began to entail note-taking, appointments and checklists, this was standard operating procedure. We'd usually have some vague idea of what ground we wanted to cover, but only reserved hotels in the major cities, booking those no more than 24 hours in advance. When we found a town or a hotel we really liked we'd simply extend our visit a day or two.

This time, in Germany's Hunsrück region, we found a terrific little hotel hidden away in the countryside which we decided to use as a headquarters for automobile day-trips to the Mosel and Rhine valleys. What a luxurious feeling of freedom to be able to decide one evening at dinner to stay an extra night.

This trip made us realize all over again how liberating it is to travel without a schedule. It can be done by train, but it is the automobile that provides absolute freedom and flexibility. This time we did both.

You won't feel so free and flexible, however, if you plan on spending a lot of time in big cities. A Salzburg-Munich-Nürnberg itinerary, for example, is not very car friendly. In each city you have the difficulty of driving in and out of the town center and the expense and inconvenience of parking.

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## BREMEN

*Continuing our Northern Germany series, we find the "Free Hanseatic City of Bremen," Germany's oldest port, short on tourists but long on old-world charm.*

*"Come along with us. We're off to Bremen to become town musicians. Why die when you can find a better life somewhere else?"*

—The Bremen Town Musicians

Once upon a time, an aging donkey invited a dog, a cat, and a cock to go to Bremen to seek their fortunes as minstrels. Bremen has enjoyed over a thousand years of political and economic prominence as

By Nikki Goth Itoi  
& Lydia Itoi

one of the leading cities of the Hanseatic League and is Germany's oldest and second-largest port, but it was the fearless and noisy Bremen Town Musicians who truly put the city on the map.

Bremen marks the northernmost

end of the "Fairy-Tale Road," a 600 km/375 mile stretch beginning in Hanau, just east of Frankfurt, and running through country positively steeped in legend and lore. The Brothers Grimm collected their famous tales in these parts, including the story of how four desperate animals frightened away a band of robbers with their music. Depending on how you look at it, Bremen is either the end of the line or a new beginning.

Despite its former regional preeminence, in modern times Bremen has fallen behind its rival Hamburg in size and sophistication. While Hamburg is a large, international destination, a trip to Bremen feels somewhat out of the way.

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## Pedaling the Danube

Strauss's waltz notwithstanding, it's likely the silty Danube never flowed blue. But that doesn't stop the tens of thousands of cyclists who each season seek the serenity and romantic history of Austria's most popular bike path.

By Jim  
Johnson

For Americans making their first overseas bike tour, the

**Danube Bicycle Path** offers nearly carefree cycling and an ideal way to view the region. First, for the 200-mile downstream stretch from just over the border in Passau, Germany, to Vienna, it's literally downhill all the way, passing through picturesque towns and villages and across

lush farmland. Second, it's paved and almost traffic-free, following an old horsepath where teams of horses once struggled to tow barges upstream. Finally, in even the smallest villages, banners hang from hotels and restaurants: "Cyclists Welcome Here." Maps and guidebooks point out historic sites and repair stations; small inns are often equipped with tools and spare parts. Along the way, cyclist information centers stand waiting to help. It's a cyclist's paradise.

Even a leisurely pace allows riders to cover 20 to 30 miles a day with frequent stops to explore sights along the way. Each day the scenery changes — from deep

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One of the keys to this "free and easy" concept is to keep to the countryside. For this, the car is much better suited than the train. Pull into a small town in the afternoon and if you don't like what you see, or can't find a hotel to your liking, drive on to another town.

Using the *Michelin Green Guide*, we chose the Swiss town of Einsiedeln for our first night off the plane in Switzerland. We had rail passes and the trip from the airport is about 75 minutes with one change. The hotel we picked from the *Switzerland Michelin Red Guide*, however, had a new phone number and when we called to book a room we got a recording we couldn't quite decipher. We decided to go on to the town, anyway, and let the chips fall where they might. There were other hotels in Einsiedeln.

It all ended well. Arriving in the early evening at the rail station, we obtained the hotel's new phone number. They had a room and were, according to the woman who answered the phone, only four minutes' walk from the station. Four minutes maybe for Carl Lewis. For us, with luggage, in sticky 85-degree heat, it turned out to be more like 10 minutes — mostly uphill. But the hotel was fine and dinner that night extraordinary. You'll be hearing more about the **Hotel Linde**, its restaurant, and the town of Einsiedeln in a later issue.

(As train travelers, we would have at the very least been inconvenienced had the hotel not been open or been fully booked. Our options at that point — 7:30pm — would have been to find another hotel in the town or get back on the train.)

But this footloose style of travel is easier by car and two essential tools are needed: good maps and a reference for hotels.

Our hotel reference of choice is the *Michelin Red Guide*. *Frommer's* and *Fodor's* guides and their ilk simply don't cover the deep countryside. The *Karen Brown* books are reliable but most of the approximately 140 hotels listed in her Germany book can found in the *Michelin Red Guide for Germany* (look for the hotels whose symbols are in red), along with about 10,000 others. Use her book for Austria, a country for which there is no *Red Guide*.

Another useful book available only in Europe is *Der grosse Restaurant & Hotel Guide 1999*. At 1500-plus pages this guide rates approximately 5,000 establishments in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The text is in German but English-only travelers will still find it helpful. Using a system of symbols, it imparts the same type information as *Michelin's Red Guides* except it has the advantage of including Austria and you get all three countries in one volume. Another advantage over Michelin is that the distance to the nearest rail station is noted for each hotel and restaurant. Unfortunately, most of the listed restaurants are in the fancy-

expensive category. We paid 48 DM (\$25) for the book at **Hugendubl** in Berlin and saw it in other bookstores as well.

Another way to find a hotel is through the local tourist office. Make it the first stop when you arrive in town, explain the kind of accommodations you seek and in many cases they'll make the booking for you.

**The \$33 Vacation**

As you know, most of Germany, and large portions of Austria and Switzerland, are archipelagoes of villages and hamlets connected by complex networks of roads. You can get from here to there by a variety of routes. Don't even think of trying to navigate such roads with anything less than 1:200,000 scale maps. Michelin's series of 1:400,000 scale maps for Germany is good for an overview of the regions they cover, and are o.k. if you stay on the Autobahn and the major federal roads, but they simply don't have enough detail for back-roads travel.

The *ADAC Maxi-Atlas for Germany* is the ultimate map for this sort of travel. At first, because of its size (11.5 inches wide, 15.5 inches high and 3/4 inches thick) we were skeptical about hauling it to Europe and back. But it proved so useful and handy we will never again drive

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Take a sneak preview, if you like, of the website for travelers to Germany, Austria & Switzerland. You can even download a recent back issue.

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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.

## BREMEN

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Nightlife choices are rather limited, and after hours Bremen's winter streets can take on a forlorn look.

However, the town has a unique blend of old-world charm and contemporary art that could get lost in the hustle and bustle of big-city life. For travelers with an extra day or two, and a soft spot for fairy tale endings, Bremen's historic city center, numerous art galleries, museums, shops, and theaters are worth a look.

Raised as a diocese by Charlemagne in 787, Bremen is extremely proud of its maritime history and tradition of political independence. In fact, it was the first government to recognize and establish relations with the revolutionary United States. The central market square is covered with monuments to the twin ideals of trade and freedom. Chief of these is a 33-foot stone statue of the knight Roland, who has been staring down the archbishop and defending the city's independence since 1404. "The Roland," as we discovered, is the local Statue of Liberty and a favorite rendezvous spot.

A glance around the architectural hodgepodge of the *Marktplatz* reveals that for centuries the conservative merchants of Bremen have developed a surprising habit of erecting buildings and public art that are unconventional or sometimes downright controversial. However, voice any criticism of these landmarks at your own risk. Inevitably, initial objections to these aesthetic adventures turn into fiercely loyal popular support. More than anything, the people of Bremen understand the importance of civic pride.

The modern glass and steel **Parliament Building** designed by Vassili Luckhardt, which one skeptic called "one of the ugliest edifices to disgrace a German town," stands near the restored townhouses and the Flemish-inspired, 16th-century **Stadtwaage** (Weighing House). The well-preserved **Rathaus** is a secular temple that brings together government and commerce. The original building, dating from 1410, bor-

## Bremen Info

**Population:** 552,000

**Altitude:** 10 meters/33 feet

**Tourist Information:** Bremer Touristik Zentrale, Findorffstrasse 105, D-28215 Bremen, Email: btz@bremen-tourism.de, Internet: www.bremen-tourism.de

**Distance from:**

Berlin	390 km/244 miles
Frankfurt	437 km/273 miles
Hamburg	123 km/77 miles
Munich	758 km/474 miles

**Arriving by train:**

Fast ICE trains provide direct connections to most major German cities.

**Events:**

**Jekyll & Hyde:** Musical. Eight performances weekly through December 31.

**Fairy Tale Theater:** The Bremen Town Musicians, open-air stage performances on the Liebfrauenkirchhof Square, Sundays at noon and 1:30pm through October 4, 1999.

**Bremen Christmas Fair:** November 25 to December 23, 1999

### Museums and Tours

**Focke Museum:** Regional museum in the historic Riesenberg country house in a park setting. Original statues from the Rathaus, church furnishings, other aspects of Bremen's urban and cultural history on display. Features a preserved farmhouse, outstanding ceramic and glass collections, costumes, children's toys and portraits. (Schwachhauser Heerstrasse 240, 28213 Bremen. Open 10-6 Tues.-Sun., closed Mon., Admission 6 DM/\$3)

**Übersee-Museum:** (Overseas Museum) Natural history, ethnology, commercial history presented with dioramas, reconstructed houses, ships, and temples. (Bahnhofsplatz 13, Open 10-6, closed Mon., Admission 6 DM/\$3).

**Kunsthalle:** Privately-funded museum next to ruins of old city wall. Features large copperplate engravings collection, outstanding 19th and 20th c. French and German painting. (Am Wall 207, D-28195 Bremen. Open Tues. 10-9, Wed.-Sun. 10-5, closed Mon. Admission 8 DM/\$4)

**Beck's Brewery:** Two-hour tasting and tour of brewery and horse stables. Tues.-Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-3, in English at 1:30 or by prearrangement. (Visitor's Center at Beck's Brewery, Am Deich 18-19, D-28199 Bremen, tel. +49/0421/50 94 55 55, fax 50 94 40 60. Admission 5 DM/\$3.)

**Horse-drawn carriage tours:** Fahrspport Zentrum Nord, Bernhard Wendt, Osterholzer Dorfstrasse 83, D-28307 Bremen, tel. +49/0421/451308, fax 451381.

rowed elements of ecclesiastical Gothic architecture. A 17th-century renovation added a facade in the Weser Renaissance style that flourished in Bremen, and the sumptuous decorations demonstrate the wealth of the local merchants. On the corner of the west wing, we found a bronze sculpture by Gerhard Marcks commemorating the Bremen Town Musicians. This slim 1951 statue, at first vilified for being too minimalist, has become one of the most beloved symbols of the city. (Rathaus tours available January-March on Sat. and Sun. at 11:00 and noon. April-December: Mon.-Sat. at 11:00, noon, 3:00, 4:00. Admission 5 DM/\$3.)

The twin towers of **St. Petri-Dom** dominate the plaza, standing sentinel over the daily outdoor flower market. The massive cathedral was built in the 11th century from stones taken from the old city wall. For those with a taste for the macabre, it was discovered that bodies buried in the cloister have remained mysteriously preserved, and there are several medieval mummies on display in the "Lead Cellar" beneath the church. (Open Mon.-Fri. from 10am-5pm, Sat. 10-noon, Sun. 2-5pm, admission 2 DM/\$1.)

Continuing the tradition of pushing the architectural envelope, there is a narrow passageway of old coopers' houses behind the *Stadtwaage* called **Böttcherstrasse**. In the 1920s, local mogul Ludwig Roselius, who invented decaf coffee and gave the world Kaffee Hag and Sanka, bought the entire row and hired architects Alfred Runge and Eduard Scotland to turn it into a cultural center housing art galleries, a theater, and shops. The result was a fantasy in brick, combining traditional gabled row houses with modern '20s design. The row is topped off with an Art Nouveau-inspired bas relief by sculptor Bernhard Hoetger, as well as an arch of Meissen ceramic bells that chime at noon, 3pm, and 6pm — as long as there's no frost.

Our favorite district was the crooked lanes of **Schnoorviertel**, a former fishing village dating from the 15th century and Bremen's oldest neighborhood. The old cottages,



## BREMEN

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which are almost excessively quaint, have been beautifully restored as galleries, cafes, and shops. Don't miss the paper and battered tin treasures in the **Toy Museum** (Schnoor 24, 11-6, closed Sun. and whenever it gets crowded). We lingered in Bremen's premier tea shop, **Tee Handelskontor** (Schnoor, Wüstestätte 1), while the proprietor, Herr Hermann Mennecke, spent more than an hour sharing different teas with us. Our favorites were the unusual green teas infused with peaches and other fruits.

The Bremen Town Musicians had the right idea coming to town as minstrels, and the city's surprisingly rich cultural life still attracts a variety of artists and performers. During our February visit, the entire city was awash in red and black for the European premiere of the musical *Jekyll and Hyde*, which will have eight weekly performances through December 31, 1999.

In addition, the **Bremer Shakespeare Company** presents modern interpretations of the Bard, while the **Fairy-Tale Theater** tells the story of the city's most famous town minstrels in open-air performances on the Liebfrauenkirchhof Square on Sundays at noon and 1:30pm Bremen also hosts Germany's biggest annual music festival in late summer. (Information: Musikfest Bremen GmbH, Obernstrasse 62-66, 28195 Bremen. tel. +49/0421/17 0425, fax 180 98.)

Other events include the **Freimarkt** (Oct 16-31, 1999, and Oct. 14-29, 2000), which began in 1035 as the only time out-of-town traders were allowed to sell their wares in Bremen. The annual **Christmas Market** will be held Nov. 25-Dec. 23, 1999, and Nov. 30-Dec. 23, 2000.

### Excursions

**Bremerhaven:** Located 48 km/30 miles up the Weser, Bremerhaven was founded in 1827 to serve as a deep-water port for Bremen. It features a popular **National Maritime Museum** depicting the history of shipping and ships from prehistoric skin-covered boats to modern nucle-

ar submarines. Children will enjoy the nautical adventure playground and sailing remote control ships in the miniature port. (Hans-Scharoun-Platz 1, Bremerhaven. Open 10am-6pm, closed Mon. Admission 6 DM/\$3 adults, 3.50 DM/\$2 children and seniors.) American visitors of German ancestry may be interested in the multimedia presentation on the German emigration to America from Bremen between 1854-1907. (Tickets available in the branch office of **Bremerhaven Historical Museum**, An der Deichpromenade, Bremerhaven. Runs April-October, 10am-6pm. Admission 5 DM/\$3).

**Worpswede:** (24 km/15 miles north from Bremen) The bleak **Teufelsmoor** ("Devil's Moor") inspired a 19th-century artist colony that included modernist pioneer Paula Becker-Modersohn, poet Rainer Maria Rilke, and sculptor Bernhard Hoetger. Now the colony contains numerous galleries, artists' workshops, and exhibitions.

### Hotels

#### Hotel Buthman Garni

For simple but comfortable accommodations in Bremen, we would choose this old Bürger house on a quiet side street, conveniently located between the train station and the *Altstadt*. The Buthman family has run the inn for 40 years—and with only 10 rooms to maintain, the service seemed accordingly friendly and attentive. All rooms have a shower and WC, plus TV and phone. Our favorite was Room #5 on the top floor, with its high ceiling and warm yellow walls accented with white trim and linens.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 91 DM (\$48), doubles 140 DM (\$74)

**Contact:** Hotel Buthmann Garni, Lönningstrasse 29, 28195 Bremen, tel. +49/0421/326397, fax 3398816, Toll free reservations: 800-344-1212

**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 16/20

#### Hotel Bremer Haus

Just across the street from the Buthmann inn is the larger Hotel Bremer Haus, an establishment that claims to be the oldest hotel in town (100+ years). The cheery decor in

common areas includes many paintings and sketches of historic Bremen. Its 71 rooms are simply furnished and come with shower/WC, satellite TV, telephone, and minibar. Non-smoking rooms are available.

The **Restaurant Löning** adjoins a sunny garden terrace.

The staff seemed especially friendly and patient with guests, and as an added bonus, the hotel has entered the information age with an interactive kiosk in its lobby to help visitors find information such as weather conditions, trains, and hotels in other cities.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 135 to 155 DM (\$72-\$82), doubles 165 to 210 DM (\$88-\$112).

**Contact:** Hotel Bremer Haus, Lönningstrasse 16-20, D-28195 Bremen, Tel +49/0421/32940, fax 3294-411.

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

#### Tulip Inn

Much like the Bremer Haus in quality and value, the Tulip Inn, also known as the Schaper-Siedenburg, is a five story building decorated in bright blues and yellows with equally colorful modern murals depicted on the walls of its multistory atrium.

Located on the busy but central Bahnhof Strasse, the Tulip Inn is just a few minutes walk from downtown Bremen, as well as the *Altstadt* and Congress Center. Rooms include shower/WC, telephone, cable TV, and radio. Ask for a room on the inner side of the atrium for a quieter atmosphere.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 135 to 160 DM (\$72-\$85), doubles 160 to 185 DM (\$85-\$98)

**Contact:** Tulip Inn, Bahnhofstrasse 8, D-28195 Bremen, Tel +49/0421/30870, fax +8788. Email: hotel\_schaper\_siedenburg@t-online.de

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

#### Park Hotel Bremen

The Park Hotel is reputed to be the best that Bremen has to offer in accommodations. In fact, it is the only first class hotel in town, and it offers all of the amenities expected of a five star establishment. However, we concluded that in its attempt to

marry small town charm with a regal and luxurious atmosphere, the Park Hotel did not succeed. While pleasant enough, the hotel is far too ritzy for the mainstream visitor, but not quite up to par with others in its class, and therefore not worth the splurge.

That said, the Park does put on a stately appearance. A tree-lined drive leads guests along a lush lawn that protects the hotel from the busy streets of Bremen. The lobby is decorated elegantly in deep, rich colors; yet rooms are surprisingly plain, except for the marble fixtures in the bath. Our well-lighted room on the first floor (#117) featured new carpet and a high ceiling. Television (inconveniently placed at floor level) and hairdryers are standard. The service was attentive, pleasant, and thankfully understanding when we reported having lost a room key.

For recreation, the Park Hotel has a new fitness center and spa. In addition, many miles of dirt trails and paved pedestrian paths lead through the neighboring park, and it is a 15-minute walk to the *Marktplatz* and the rest of Bremen's central attractions.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 410 DM (\$218), doubles 510 to 610 DM (\$271-\$324)

**Contact:** Park Hotel Bremen, Im Bürgerpark, 28209 Bremen, tel +49/0421/34080, fax +49-421-3408-602

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20 VALUE 8/20

## Restaurants

### Bremen Ratskeller

Bremen's Ratskeller is one of the oldest German wine cellars and is famous for having the most extensive list, featuring over 600 types of German wine. To see the rarer wines, however, you must look as knowledgeable as you can and ask to see a special list. We were looking for a simple bite, so we ordered wines by the glass (9-16 DM/\$5-\$9) from the regular list. Do not expect to find beer on any of the lists — the sale of beer in the Ratskeller has been banned since 1408.

The tantalizing menu offers a wide selection of regional favorites using very fresh ingredients, but the

quality of the cooking was disappointing. The pork chop with roasted potatoes was unremarkable, while the much-touted Bremer *Kükenragout* (which should have been a delicate fricassee of baby chicken, calves' tongue, morels, sweetbreads, and asparagus in a creamy cognac sauce with crayfish tails) tasted as rich and elegant as a TV dinner.

The room itself has three naves, punctuated by the columns supporting the Rathaus. Large, ancient carved barrels decorate the brightly lit hall, and rough trestle tables under the arches invite communal drinking. Call ahead to reserve one of the cozy wooden booths that line the walls. We recommend stopping by the Ratskeller to sample the outstanding wine selection and enjoy the atmosphere before moving on to dinner elsewhere.

Dinner for two without drinks: 72 DM (\$38).

**Contact:** Bremen Ratskeller, Am Markt, D-28195 Bremen, tel. 04 21 / 321 676, fax 337 8121.

**Rating:** QUALITY 8/20 VALUE 10/20

### Schmidt's Wein & Sandwich Bar

This hip new sandwich and wine bar just opened in a former bank building between the Marktplatz and the Schnoor, an ideal spot to stop for a light lunch or late supper. Huge, humorous portraits of the "Earl of Sandwich" and his lady preside over a sunshine-yellow room decorated with framed cartoons. The bathrooms, located in the old bank vaults, are the most secure in town. Herr Schmidt, the flashy and genial young owner, is the scion of the family that runs the popular, more traditional, **Grashoff's Bistro**.

The menu reflects Mr. Schmidt's quirky sense of humor and international outlook, ranging from classic pastrami and panini to tapas, dim sum, and spaghetti. Some of the more outrageous sandwich combinations include curried chicken with pineapple and shrimp cocktail with dill sauce. There is an adequate selection of mainly French and German wines served by the glass, and the beer is Beck's, of course.

The hot chicken vegetable soup

was a terrific choice for a rainy February day, and the open-faced chicken curry sandwich was eccentric but hearty. The spaghetti alla Genovese came out wearing a generous coating of basil pesto and freshly grated Parmesan. Best of all, the bistro is open late and all entrees came in under 15 DM (\$8), with most sandwiches going for 8 or 9 DM (\$4-\$5). Lunch for two without drinks came to 25 DM (\$13).

**Contact:** Schmidt's Wein & Sandwich Bar, Katharinenstr. 2, 28195 Bremen, tel. +49/0421/337 80 70.

**Rating:** QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 17/20

### L'Orchidée

This peach-colored establishment is one of Bremen's top restaurants, having maintained its one-star Michelin rating many years. During our visit, however, the restaurant was surrounded by a sea of construction work, and it took some time to figure out how to reach the entrance. Once inside, however, we were warmly welcomed and ushered into a small dining room overlooking the train station and a large cineplex.

What L'Orchidée lacks in atmosphere, it makes up in fresh and imaginative cooking. We feasted on a set menu featuring tender tea-smoked duck, followed by lobster in aspic on a saffron custard timbale with sauteed artichokes. Next came a single, slightly overdone rabbit raviolo bathed in a frothy lemon-tarragon soup and garnished with tiny beads of carrot and kohlrabi. The highlight was a perfectly prepared turbot filet on a bed of spinach with zucchini quenelles, which barely left room for the loin of lamb with curried crumb crust, accompanied by a puree of potatoes and oil-cured olives. We ended the evening happily with a blood orange crème brulée with a confetti of pineapple and Israeli kumquats.

Our waiter, who doubled as sommelier, was helpful and informative, steering us toward some interesting wines. Most unusual was a sparkling wine made of a Riesling-Chardonnay blend. Service was formal and proper, except for the occasional friendly wink as the

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waiter explained the evening's specials. A royal feast for two without drinks came to 294 DM (\$156).

**Contact:** L'Orchidée in the Hotel zur Post, Bahnhofplatz 11, 28195 Bremen. tel. +49/04 21/3 05 98 88, fax 04 21/3059591. Closed Sun. and Mon.

**Rating:** QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 12/20 ☒

## DANUBE CYCLING

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valleys with craggy outcroppings topped with the ruins of ancient castles to the rolling vineyards of the Wachau region, dotted with medieval towns. Past the hills, the river widens and flat pastures spread to the horizons, as the trail meanders through farms and villages.

Most of the bike path parallels the riverbanks on paved remnants of the old horsepath. From time to time, the route crosses the river, over dams, locks and bridges and sometimes in small ferries that hold barely a dozen cyclists. At one landing, a sign instructs, "Shout across for service."

Along the way, sites of architectural, historic or cultural importance abound. In Engelhartzell, a Trappist monastery inspires visitors with its ornate rococo church. In Melk, the baroque **Benedictine Abbey** dominates the city. One building stretches the length of four football fields! Dürnstein offers a taste of the Middle Ages with its turreted walls, cobblestone main street and, looming over the town, the castle ruins where Richard the Lionhearted lay prisoner 800 years ago.

In Spitz, in the heart of the Wachau, one of Austria's wine-growing regions, bikers can become hikers and climb to the ruins of the Hinterhaus castle. Across the way,

vineyards are carved into hillside terraces on the *Tausendeimerberg* — the Mountain of a Thousand Buckets, so named because of its plentiful yield of wine grapes. A few miles downstream, in the village of Weisenkirchen, a small winery offers tastings in its 700-year-old cellar.

Not all stops are sites of beauty. A winding road above the Danube ends starkly at the Matthausen concentration camp. From 1938 until the Allied liberation seven years later, 110,000 prisoners died here. The memory of its terrors stands in tragic counterpoint to the landscape below.

At most towns along the way, cyclists can become passengers and

hear music resonating from hidden courtyards, perhaps a string quartet practicing.

Such sublime moments at journey's end allow cyclists to reflect on a worn wooden sign that had greeted them 150 miles upstream:

*If you look upon the Danube,  
Think of something dear to you,  
And hold it in your heart,  
Your wishes will come true.*

For most people, that means they'll be back.

### Lodging Along the Route

Habach/Schlögen  
**Hotel Donauschlinge Schlögen 2**, A-4083 Haibach a.d. Donau, tel. +43/07279/8212, fax 82 40 41, doubles 990 AS (\$75)

Grein  
**Hotel Goldenes Kreuz, Hotel am Stadtplatz**, A-4360 Grein, tel. +43/07268/316, fax 3168, doubles 920 AS (\$70)

Dürnstein  
**Romantikhotel Richard Löwenherz**, A-3601 Dürnstein, tel. +43/02711/222, fax +43-2711-22218, e-mail: loewenherz@duernstein.at, doubles 1,750 AS (\$133)

Melk  
**Hotel "Stadt Melk"**, Hauptplatz 1, A-3390 Melk, tel. 011-43-2752-2475, fax 011-43-2752-247519, doubles 980 AS (\$75)

Linz  
**Hotel Wolfinger**, Hauptplatz 19, A-4020 Linz, tel. 011-43-732-77 32 910, fax 011-43-732-77 32 91-55, e-

mail: wolfinger@austria-classic-hotels.at, doubles 2200 to 2800 AS (\$167-\$212)

Klosterneuburg  
**Hotel Schrannenhof**, Niedermarkt 17-19, A-3400 Klosterneuburg, tel. 011-43-2243-32072, fax 011-43-2243-32 07 213, e-mail: FVEIT@INS.AT, doubles 1180 AS (\$89)

Spitz  
**Hotel Wachauerhof**, Ottenschlager Strasse 30, A-3620 Spitz, tel. 011-43-

### Alone or With a Group?

Solo cycling appeals to many travelers, but most prefer organized tour packages, with guides, lodging, luggage transport, riverside repairs and meals. It's also an excellent opportunity to make new friends from other countries. Groups generally range from 10 to 15 guests. Although many U.S.-based companies offer bike tours, Austrian companies provide similar services at half the price. For even less, tour operators will arrange accommodations and shuttle luggage, giving cyclists more freedom but no support and less camaraderie and local knowledge. These Austrian-based groups also tend to be more multi-national than U.S.-based operations (but always with English as a primary language).

Expect to pay about \$900 for a one-week package. For luggage transport and lodging only, the charge will be about \$550. Contact (in English):

**Rad & Reisen**, Schulgasse 36, A-1180 Vienna, tel. +43/01/405 3873

**Kneissl Touristik**, Linzerstrasse 4-6, A-4650 Lambach, tel. +43/07245/2501

**Austria Rad Reisen**, Holzingerstrasse 546, A-4780 Schärding, tel. +43/07712/5511.

enjoy the view from steamships headed for Vienna. Many choose the final 25 miles — the least scenic — and disembark in downtown Vienna, where more than 300 miles of bike paths and bike-only lanes await the urban cyclist. (Bikes are also allowed on subways, and nearly 100 hotels offer storage and repair facilities.) Unlike bus-confined tourists, cyclists can explore Vienna's side alleys and absorb the sights, sounds and scents of the city. It's not uncommon to




2713-2254, fax 011-43-2713-2875,  
doubles 800 (\$61)

Wiessenkirchen

**Raffelsbergerhof**, A-3610 Weissen-  
kirchen, tel. 011-43-2715-2201, fax  
011-43-2715-220127, e-mail:  
raffelsberger@magnet.at, doubles  
1,500 (\$114)

Vienna

**Hotel-Pension Altstadt Vienna**,  
Kirchengasse 41, A-1070 Vienna, tel.  
011-43-1-526 33 990, fax 011-43-1-523  
49 01, e-mail: hotel@altstadt.at,  
doubles 1180 to 1980 (\$89-\$150) 

## READERS' FORUM

### **Bavarian Hotel**

We just returned from two weeks in Bavaria and the Tirol. Your January, 1998, *Bargain Bavaria* article led us to Bayrischzell and the **Gasthof zur Post** (Schulstr. 3, D-83735, tel. +49/08023/226, fax 775). Bayrischzell is a lovely village in one of the prettiest valleys we've seen...lots of walking and hiking trails. We highly recommend it. Although there are two or three other good looking hotels in town we decided on zur Post and found it comfortable and reasonably priced. We'll go back to Bayrischzell.

We also discovered the Kleinwalsertal, a tiny portion of Austria accessible only from Oberstdorf in Germany. Local currency is the D-mark. We've never seen mention of this valley in *Gemütlichkeit*; it is gorgeous and merits your attention.

After many years of travel in Europe we're still baffled by the tipping customs or lack thereof. Could you address this in a future issue? Many of the even very small hotels/inns have a "tip jar" at the reception desk or a tip line on the charge card slip. What is appropriate where meals and room are combined? What about room (with breakfast) only? Restaurant (dinner) only? Any suggestions would be appreciated.

RUSS AND POLLY BOLEY  
EVERGREEN CO

*(Ed. Note: Oberstdorf was featured in Gemütlichkeit, November, 1994, and the villages of the Kleinwalsertal were briefly mentioned, but this unique area deserves its own story.*

*Re tipping: we try to watch what locals do and our impression is the old rules still apply; for smaller transactions, round up to the nearest mark or franc. For a lunch that is, say, 37 marks we would pay 40 marks. In a better restaurant, where the service and food has been especially good, we might tip as much as 10%, but usually somewhat less.*

*Taxi drivers expect 15%.*

*If the owner or desk person in a hotel helps carry our three or four bags to the room, we do not tip. In hotels where a porter or handyman-type person is summoned to help with the bags — and that person carries all the bags — we tip the equivalent of \$3 to \$4. On occasion, when service has been extraordinary and we have stayed for more than just a night, we have tipped on our credit card when signing the final hotel bill. Occasionally, when paying by cash, we have placed money in an envelope, given it to the owner or manager and asked that it be passed on to the staff.*

*What do you do? We want to hear.)*

### **Bargain Near Munich Airport**

A great 'last night' *Zimmer* before flying out of Munich is the **Hotel Mayr-Wirt** in Erding (Haager Strasse 4, D-8058 Erding, tel. +49/08122/7094, fax 7098, 150 DM/\$81 per room per night with breakfast). It is only about five miles from the airport and a 10-minute drive to the airport's 'back door'.

In addition to the clean comfortable rooms, the family has a meat packing plant in the rear and a superb meat market in front. I just have to figure out how to get the goodies home to Illinois.

The restaurant is outstanding. A cozy Bavarian *Stube* with excellent food. We had a meat sampler platter for two and had to have help from three other guests to finish.

Around the corner, the town of Erding has many nice shops, a must for *mein Frau*. The U-Bahn to Munich is handy in Erding.

LEW GORDON  
ELGIN IL

### **Rest. Beograd Report**

Just received our most recent issue and read your request for feedback re: the **Restaurant Beograd** in Vienna. We dined there on May 21. We had a wonderful time and didn't notice anything that would cause us to have doubts about the proprietor, the help, or the patrons. I don't know whether we were early (we arrived at 6:30pm), whether it was the exterior remodeling, or whether it was the war, but we were the only people in the place. By the time we left around 9:30pm business had increased only slightly.

We had the Balkan appetizer plate (a *Gemütlichkeit* recommendation) and it was excellent, not sophisticated, but a nice variety of Balkan/Greek nibbles and well worth the price. The other dishes were also a good value. Soon after the start of dinner the violin and piano players appeared, and after the Viennese classics, they played some American/English songs, probably because we were the only customers at the time. Enjoyable food and a private concert; we had a thoroughly entertaining evening.

LOU AND LIZ KRAUSHAAR  
MILL VALLEY CA

### **Hotel South of Stuttgart**

A bit late for a note on our April 5-22 trip, but as the Dutch are fond of saying "a man is never late when he arrives".

We rented the car through *Gemütlichkeit* and Europcar - expected a BMW 316i, but one was not available when we arrived; however we were more than pleased with the Mercedes Benz EC220 CID upgrade.

We had planned to tour the old towns/villages staying a day or two in each, but after Heidelberg we stopped in Lichtenstein, about 50 kilometers south of Stuttgart.

We stumbled on to the **Forellenhof Rössele** (Familien Gumpper and Stoll, D-72805, Liechtenstein-Honau, tel. +49/07129/9297-0, fax 929750, www.gastro-tips.de Forellenhof Rössele, double room — new section — 139 DM/\$75, half-pension 26 DM/\$14) late in the afternoon and

*Continued on page 8...*

## READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 7

planned to stay a day or two; we stayed seven and enjoyed every minute. The food was excellent — trout a speciality — with a long and varied menu, plain and gourmet cuisine aplenty. Rooms are large with full baths, balconies, TVs, and a lift (new section - two years old), private parking, and a lovely setting with a view of 'tiny' Lichtenstein castle looking directly down on the Hof.

Final word, best hotel we stayed in (including the **Frankfurt Airport Sheraton**). Didn't find out about the new **Steigenberger** till we got home.

DORIS AND GROVER TOLLIVER

OCOQUAN VA ☒

## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 7

Germany's highways without it. In the past we relied on the individual *ADAC Karte* (1:150,000 scale) and the *Mairs' Die General Karte* (1:200,000 scale). Of the former, it takes 24 maps for the whole of Germany and a dozen of the Mairs maps to cover the entire country. If you don't know in advance where you're going, which ones do you take along on the trip? In the past we often ended up buying new maps along the way, thus duplicating what we already had at home. The *Maxi-Atlas*, on the other hand, covers the entire country at a heavy-on-the-detail 1:150,000 scale. At \$32.95 it is a terrific value. If you wait to buy the book in Germany, you'll even save a few dollars. I call it the "\$33 vacation" because, with the wealth of information provided, its special markings for interesting towns, and the scenic roads edged in green, it is a kind of travel guide in itself — one that can direct you over Germany's most beautiful backroads to pretty, historic towns that aren't even mentioned in guidebooks.

Using the *Maxi Atlas*, we explored some of the narrowest, more remote tracks in the former East Germany in the area between Bayreuth and Quedlinburg. In three days of driving we went through dozens, per-

haps hundreds of towns. We got lost (even with the *Maxi-Atlas*); saw farmers still using draught horses to pull wagons and farm implements, and came upon odd, decaying little villages that look as though it could be 50 years before they catch up to their counterparts in the west. We stopped to explore charming half-timbered, recently-resurrected walled towns unknown to most guidebooks. We saw little traffic and almost no tourists.

All the way, the *Maxi Atlas* was our lifeline. Wife/Navigator Liz used a large metal clip when she had to flip between two pages at once. She also marked our progress with a yellow highlighter pen to provide a record of our exact route.

Last month we said there is no travel experience quite like riding a European train. Still true, but there is also nothing quite like pattering down a quiet European country road wondering what's just over the hill or what we'll find in that little town just two kilometers up ahead. Until the time — not too long from now — when all cars are equipped with GPS (Global Positioning System), the *Maxi-Atlas for Germany* is a fantastic, liberating travel tool.

### Trip Notes:

- Public telephones in Switzerland no longer accept coins. Instead, get a phone card — available at rail stations and many stores — or, from certain locations, use a credit card.

- Second-class travel on German ICE trains is very much first-class. If only Amtrak could offer such quiet, comfortable, beautifully air-conditioned cars.

- Regional and local trains in Germany, however, are often not air-conditioned.

- Cologne needs (and is getting) a new rail station, but for now it's a mess; too many people, too little space.

- There is a car rental war in Germany. Via upgrade, you can now rent a Mercedes Benz C180 for about \$130 per week before taxes, the best price I've ever seen. The Opel Vectra, a similar sized car, is less than \$100 via upgrade. When pre-war pricing returns — about \$130 for the Vectra and \$260 for the Mercedes — keep in mind the Vectra is a *much* better deal.

I would not, in my wildest dreams, try to fit six or seven people in the 7-passenger vans for rent in Europe. Nor would I attempt 7, 8 or 9 person in a 9-passenger van.

- If possible, drive in and out of major cities on a Sunday or holiday, usually there's much less traffic.

- Duty-free shopping in the EU ends July 1. Ho hum.

- Not having been there for a few years, we made a two-hour stop in Nürnberg to take a fast walk around the *Zentrum*. It was a holiday and our old favorite, the **Bratwurst-Häusle**, was closed so we tried nearby **Bratwurst-Röslein**. It has a big main room with scrubbed-wood tabletops and servers dressed in *Trachtenmode*. (traditional dress) that are almost too-friendly. We wandered into a cozy, paneled side room and ordered the house speciality, six each of the marvelous, not-too-greasy, *Bratwurst* with terrific fresh horseradish and potato salad. Price: 9.8 DM (\$5.21). Half liters of smooth, delicious Tucher *Helles* cost 4.55 DM (\$2.42). For 22 DM (\$12) one can feast on pork shank, *Bratwurst*, duck, two kinds of *Kraut*, and two kinds of dumplings. *Bratwurst-Röslein* is hereby recommended. — RHB ☒

## Europe Travel Briefs

■ Register at **Northwest Airlines** web site ([www.nwa.com/travel/cyber/cyber\\_reg.html](http://www.nwa.com/travel/cyber/cyber_reg.html)) to receive special offers via email.

For example, a mid-June email offered an upgrade to business class for \$499 each way when purchasing a qualifying coach class fare. The offer was good on Northwest and **KLM** flights to Europe.

■ With business class fares to Europe ranging from about \$4,000 to \$7,000, depending on departure city and airline, **LTU International Airways**, which flies from several Florida cities and Los Angeles to Germany, offers a luxury fly-drive package that includes a roundtrip First Comfort (bus. class) ticket and an automatic BMW 7-series rental car for one week. The prices from Florida cities is \$1998 and it's \$2245 from L.A. Same price for two weeks but you get the Mercedes C180. ☒