

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

August 27, 2000

**Rental Car Problems/Solutions**

You should know the full extent of the bad news about car rentals in Germany. It is no longer the cheapest European country in which to rent. Here's a sampling of one-week rates, including value added tax, for a standard transmission, midsize car in several European countries:

<b>Belgium</b>	<b>\$149</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>\$189</b>
<b>Holland</b>	<b>\$191</b>
<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>\$191</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>\$220</b>
<b>Austria</b>	<b>\$286</b>
<b>Italy</b>	<b>\$375</b>

These prices were available at 800-521-6722 at press time and do not include airport fees which are 11% to 13% of the total rental, except for France and Holland where airport pickups are between \$20 and \$30. In Germany, **Avis** and **Europcar**, had been placing a 100 DM (\$47) limit on the airport fee but that cap was removed in July.

In addition, Germany, like several countries before it, has introduced a 2 DM (\$1) per day "road" tax.

Besides the huge jump in prices, this year the car rental companies have some other surprises in store for us. There have been overbookings and too many U.S. renters are

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## NEUCHÂTEL

*At the foot of the Jura Mountains, among lakes and vineyards, the French-speaking canton of Neuchâtel is the center of Swiss watchmaking.*

It's easy to figure why most places catch on with American tourists. Varying mixtures of charm, scenery, great buildings and history — Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Bavaria, Salzburg, Vienna, Lucerne, and Zermatt being cases in point — usually seem to do the trick.

Usually, but not always. Take Neuchâtel. Why it doesn't make the tourist destination "A" list — or least the "B+" list — is difficult to understand.

It seems to meet the criteria: a beautiful city among vineyards, facing the Alps at the foot of the Jura, and on the shore of the largest lake entirely within Switzerland. A 12<sup>th</sup>

century castle and collegiate church dominate its well-preserved stone buildings, while along the lake are flowering quays, green parks, promenades, marinas and fine hotels.

The city is remarkable for its extensive pedestrian areas and traffic on its surface streets has been reduced by rerouting three intersecting main roads through underground tunnels, a 15-year undertaking. Rock excavated from the project was used to line the waterfront.

Neuchâtel is a university town and known for the quality of its spoken French, reputedly the best

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## A Backroads Drive

*Here's a scenic alternative when driving to Heidelberg from the Frankfurt Airport.*


A drive from the Frankfurt Airport to Heidelberg via the castle strewn *Bergstrasse*. Essential to this drive is **ADAC Karte #9** or a comparable map scaled at least 1:200,000.

From the Frankfurt Airport, head south on Autobahn (A5) toward Heidelberg.

Just past the Darmstadter Kreuz take the exit to Eberstadt. At the southern edge of that city you'll join the *Bergstrasse*, federal highway #3. However, at the very beginning of this drive the you'll want to find the *Alte Bergstrasse*, a yellow road which runs parallel of highway #3 to the east and goes through Mal-

chen, Seeheim/Jugenheim and Alsbach. The main highway, #3, misses these villages and you rejoin it at Zwingenberg.

The *Bergstrasse* runs at the foot of the Odenwald mountains. **Schloss Heiligenberg** at Seeheim/Jugenheim is one of several castles along the way. Some are open and some are in ruins. The best to visit are **Auerbach Castle**, above the town of Auerbach, and **Wachenburg** above Weinheim.

Of the villages, Heppenheim seems the most interesting. Also at Auerbach is the **Fürstenlager National Park**. About 53 kilometers (33 miles) south of Eberstadt the road runs into Heidelberg and crosses the Neckar. 

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not getting the category of vehicle they reserved. I'm not talking about getting a BMW instead of Mercedes or a Vectra instead of a Passat, I'm talking about getting a compact Opel Astra instead of the full size Mercedes C180. Based on our experience, you have about a one in 50 chance of getting a car that's in a lower category than reserved.

What to do?

• **Begin to consider alternatives to airport pickup.** In Zürich, for example, where the airport charge is 12% (\$48 if your rental costs \$400) you can take the train to the main rail station. The fare is 6.2 Sfr. (\$3.70) and the trip takes 11 to 13 minutes. From there you can get a taxi for about \$10 to \$15 to one of the downtown rental offices. (Why not pick up the car at the rail station? Because you'll pay the same "premium station" 12% charge.) The ride from Frankfurt Airport to the main rail station is even shorter. From the Munich Airport to downtown takes about 40 minutes by rail.

• **Know how to do battle at the rental car counter.** Those who book cars through the *Gemütlichkeit* car rental service, are given a phone number that is toll-free from Europe. It is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week by Auto Europe, our car rental partner. This is the number to call if there is a problem when picking up a car. In virtually every case, the issue will be resolved to the

renter's satisfaction.

• **Get on a train.** Compared to rental cars, rail passes look much more attractive financially than they did a year ago when auto rental rates were lower.

If you are staying within Germany, **German Rail's** twin pass at \$474 for six days first-class travel (\$327 second class) within a one month period for two persons, beats a two-week rental of a midsize car, or even a compact. Figuring fuel and parking, you are likely to spend more than \$600 on a midsize for 14 days. The total expenditure for a compact will be \$50 to \$100 less. With the rail pass you only get six actual travel days — they don't have to be consecutive — but that's usually enough for a two-week trip. If not, get a seven-day (\$522 first class, \$360 second class) or an eight-day pass (\$570 first class, \$393 second class).

If you're staying entirely within Austria, and sticking mostly to major towns like Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Graz, the decision is a slam-dunk. Buy the **Austrian Rail-pass** for \$152 for three days first class travel (\$104 second-class). Add extra days for \$22 first-class and \$16 second-class. Travel has to be completed within a 15-day period.

The **Europass** will take you to four other countries — Switzerland, France, Spain and Italy. For an additional fee you can add Austria and other countries. Two persons will pay \$628 for the six-day, five country **Europass**, \$732 if they add

Austria. The **Europass** is for first-class travel only.

### Can We Trust UAL?

Since they got rid of most of their experienced, capable, long-term employees a few years ago, **United** has become my least favorite airline. It offers the only service from Southern Oregon to California, where we go to catch most international flights as well as flights to the east. With that monopoly and their foot firmly on throats of Southern Oregonians, the company sets fares that extract as much as possible from local travelers. Right now the 14-day advance purchase price is \$188 RT for the 50-minute flight to San Francisco and \$270 for the two-hour run to L.A. But look out if you have to travel on short notice. The L.A. flight jumps to \$609 and to San Francisco it's \$404.

It is with this mind set that I view the company's disastrous summer of canceled flights and bad publicity.

Perhaps, like me, you assume that United customers who have paid for tickets on canceled flights eventually get to their destinations after a little inconvenience — in some cases,

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### Notes for Readers

- Foreign currency prices are converted to U.S. dollars at the exchange rate in effect at the time of publication.
- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

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## GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
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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.

## NEUCHÂTEL

Continued from page 1

anywhere. Its university attracts many students from outside Switzerland and contributes to the cultural life of the city.

Getting to and from Neuchâtel is easy. There are superb rail connections to other Swiss cities and two direct daily TGV trains reach Paris in only four hours. Other fast trains leave hourly for major Swiss cities.

The town is only a few kilometers from the Swiss motorway which connects to Bern, Zürich and Basel to the east; Lausanne and Geneva in the west; and south to the Alps and the Valais. Efficient transportation within the city is provided by electric trolley buses and a very comfortable light rail line which runs along the shore.

Neuchâtel should not be missed if only for the marvelous **Jaquet-Droz Automaton**, highly detailed miniature robots built in 1769-1780. You can see them in operation on the first Sunday of each month at the **Museum of Art and History**. If you're not in town on that day, the exhibit offers a video in English that is worth the one franc cost.

The robots consist of three figures: a woman 30 inches tall with tiny fingers articulated in great detail. She breathes (the chest moves in and out) and plays music on a wind piano. Of the two 24-inch child figures, one actually draws various objects and the other writes with a pen on paper. The Jaquet-Droz father and son team who created the figures unfortunately lived in the wrong time. Today they would no doubt be Silicon Valley billionaires.

The other must-see museum in the region is the **International Museum of Horology** in nearby La Chaux-de-Fonds. It contains more than 4,000 time measuring instruments, watches and clocks.

As populous as Neuchâtel, but not as charming, La Chaux-de-Fonds is in a valley of the Jura and cannot match Neuchâtel's scenic site. Its streets are laid out in a grid, Ameri-

## Neuchâtel Basics

**Population:** 40,000

**Altitude:** 1,518 feet

**Distance From:**

Bern	45 km / 28 miles
Basel	139 km / 86 miles
Geneva	76 km / 28 miles
La Chaux-de-Fonds	20 km / 13 miles
Munich	475 km / 295 miles
Paris	661 km / 411 miles
Zürich	165 km / 103 miles

**Tourist Information:** Tourisme Neuchâtelois-Littoral, Hôtel des Postes, CH-2001 Neuchâtel, tel. +41 / 032 / 889 6890, fax 889 6296, email [tourisme.neuchâtelois@ne.ch](mailto:tourisme.neuchâtelois@ne.ch), web: [www.etatne.ch](http://www.etatne.ch).

**Events:** The high point of the year is the last weekend of September, the three-day **Fete des Vendanges** (wine harvest festival).

**Things to Do:**

- **Boat Trips.** Lake Neuchâtel, the largest lake wholly in Switzerland, is connected by navigable canals to the lakes of Biemme and Murten. A wide variety of crossings and cruises operate during the summer, many with snack and dining facilities. Details at the Port or Tourisme Neuchâtelois-Littoral, Hôtel des Postes.

- **The Jaquet-Droz Automaton.** Museum of Art and History, 1 Quai Leopold-Robert, Neuchâtel. Performances the first Sunday of the month at 2pm, 3pm and 4pm. Admission 7 Sfr. (\$4). (Attendance is limited to 30 persons, get there early.)

- **Guided Castle Tours.** The **Chateau and Collegiate Church of Neuchâtel** form one of the most important groups of historic buildings in Switzerland. Tours: April 1st through September, on the hour, Monday to Friday 10am through 4pm Sundays and holidays 2-5pm. Admission free.

- **Au Gor du Vauseyon.** Beautiful natural area in the heart of town, with gorges, waterfalls and ruins of 16th century mills. Trails and bridges link with paths leading to the town of Valangin. Take No.1 bus from Place Pury, direction Cormondreche.

- **Wine Museum at Chateau de Boudry.** Tracing the history of wine-making from ancestral practices to the most modern techniques. The Chateau is the birthplace of Jean-Paul Marat, the 18<sup>th</sup> century author. Thursday through Sunday 2-5pm.

### La Chaux-de-Fonds

**Population:** 40,000

**Altitude:** 3,888 feet

**Tourist Information:** Tourisme Neuchâtelois, Espacité 1, Place Le Corbusier, CH-2302, La Chaux-de-Fonds, tel. +41 / 032 / 919 6895, fax 919 6297

### Museums

- **Musee International d'Horologie** (International Clockwork Museum), 33 rue des Musees, La Chaux-de-Fonds. Open daily, except Mondays 10-12am and 2-5pm Admission 7 Sfr. (\$4).

- **Musee des Beaux-Arts.** 29, rue des Musees. Open daily, except Mondays 10-12am and 2-5pm. Admission 4 Sfr. (\$2).

### Architectural Interest

- **Le Corbusier House** (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret). 38, rue de la Serre, La Chaux-de-Fonds.

- **Villa Schwob.** (Turkish Villa). 167 rue du Doubs, La Chaux-de-Fonds.

### Other

- **Animal Park and Vivarium,** Bois-du-Petit-Chateau, La Chaux-de-Fonds. 

## NEUCHÂTEL

*Continued from page 3*

can-style and a majority of the town's workers are employed by the watchmaking industry.

In addition to the Horology Museum, La Chaux-de-Fonds is the birthplace of auto-maker, Louis Chevrolet, and one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most influential architects, Charles Edouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier. You can see several of his early buildings here.

The hourly train service between the two cities takes about 35 minutes. Auto travelers can get there in about 20 minutes via the main road but should take the Vue Des Alpes Road, stopping at the viewpoint in good weather for a glorious Alpine panorama that includes many great peaks including the Jungfrau and Mont Blanc.

Oddly enough, though this area is the center of Swiss watchmaking, — **Omega**, **Rolex**, **Audemars-Piguet**, **Longines**, and **Bulgari** are located in the region — you will not be able to see any watches actually being made. There are many museums devoted to timekeeping devices, but no factory tours.

Walkers will want to visit **Metaires**, rustic country houses that serve, on old wooden tables, such dishes as fondue and ham with mushrooms, and where meat hangs curing on hooks. They are open only in summer.

The region offers no downhill skiing, but plenty of cross country, some of it at night.

Neuchâtel and environs are deserving of your attention. The tourist office (see box page three for contact info) offers three-night packages that include hotel accommodations, breakfasts and dinners, and such activities as lake cruises, funicular rides, museum admission, industrial tours and wine tastings. Per person prices range from 199 Sfr. (\$116) for the simplest accommodations to 669 Sfr. (\$391) in the five-star Beau Rivage.

## Accommodations

### Beau Rivage

It doesn't quite measure up to other Swiss five-star properties we've reviewed, such as the Beau Rivage in Lausanne or Interlaken's Grand Hotel Victoria Jungfrau, but it's the best in town and a fine hotel.

Directly on the lake, the hotel's 70 guestrooms are in a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century apartment building. Though a glass screen to enclose the old walls has been added on the lakeside ground floor, the structure retains the exterior of the older building.

Our room, Number 416, had mountain and lakeshore views that were somewhat limited by small windows set high in the walls (a result of the necessity of preserving the building's exterior).

There was a real queensize bed, an excellent Nokia TV with CNN and CNBC, and a large executive-style table/desk. Ceiling moulding and baseboard of the same highly polished, dark wood that trimmed the furniture, lent an elegant touch. Other pleasant amenities included turndown service, air-conditioning, and an outstanding bathroom with separate walk-in marble shower with a heavy glass door, a separate tub, a separate toilet room (with phone) and piped in sound from the TV/radio.

Though a good buffet breakfast was slightly marred by canned, tinny orange juice, lunch in the dining room overlooking the lake and featuring a delicious duck leg cassoulet (36 Sfr./\$21), was a pleasant surprise.

Though the Beau Rivage is less formal and doesn't yet have that old Europe money feel of the country's best five-star properties, it is very comfortable and costs a good bit less than those more cultivated digs. In fact, the weekend special which offers double rooms as low as 210 Sfr. (\$123), is one of the better deals we've seen recently.

**Capsule Review:** Best in town, above average value. Good restaurant and superb location.

**Daily Rates:** Weekend special top floor 210-260 Sfr. (\$123-\$152)), singles 290-350 Sfr. (\$170-\$205), doubles 350-410 Sfr. (\$205-\$240), suites 450 -1000 Sfr. (\$263-\$585)

**Contact:** Hotel Beau Rivage, 1 Esplanade du Mont-Blanc, CH-2001 Neuchâtel, tel. +41/032/723 1515, fax 723 1616, email [reception@beau-rivage-hotel.ch](mailto:reception@beau-rivage-hotel.ch), web [www.beau-rivage-hotel.ch](http://www.beau-rivage-hotel.ch).

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

### Hotel Alpes et Lac

For some reason, Swiss hotel's with Chinese restaurants do not inspire confidence. Thus we approached the Alpes et Lac a bit uneasily. Any worries we might have had, however, left us as soon as we had seen a few of the hotel's 30 guestrooms, all recently renovated (1997). They are full of light and air and enough comforts to satisfy even the most demanding guest.

For train travelers, the hotel is in the "pole position," right across the street from the rail station on a commanding hillside location overlooking the lake and the old town below. Twenty-four of the hotel's rooms have that view from the high, wide windows of this 128-year-old stone building.

**Capsule Review:** Straight forward, mid-priced, conveniently located accommodations. Excellent value.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 98-120 Sfr. (\$57-\$70), doubles 148-170 Sfr. (\$87-\$99)

**Contact:** Hotel Alpes et Lac, Place de la Gare 2, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, tel. +49/032/723 19 19, fax 723 19 20, email: [hotel@alpesetlac.ch](mailto:hotel@alpesetlac.ch)

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

## Hotels in the Environs

### Grand Hotel Les Endroits

With a space-age facade that is all glass and angles, to Internet access from all 42 guestrooms, this ultra-modern hotel located just above La Chaux-de-Fonds on the edge of the forest, is definitely 21<sup>st</sup> century ready.

There is much to recommend Les Endroits: 24-hour room service, an attractive Jacuzzi and fitness room, free parking, and cross-country skiing within walking distance.

There are even two guestrooms with facilities for the disabled.

**Capsule Review:** Spotless, upscale, ultramodern hotel in a country setting within walking distance of La-Chaux-de-Fonds' center. Special weekend rates.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 123 to 153 Sfr., (\$72-\$89), doubles 193 to 233 Sfr. (\$113-\$136)

**Contact:** Grand Hôtel Les Endroits, Blvd. des Endroits 94-96, CH-2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds, tel. + 41/032/9 250 250, fax 9 250 350

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

#### Auberge L'Aubier

L'Aubier means "natural place" which, of course, is the theme here. Guestrooms are sparsely furnished and decorated; natural materials, no plastic, thank you. Beds sit low to the floor and reading lights are little halogen bulbs on the end of 18-inch flexible tubes. Hallway floors are covered in a heavy, hemp-like material. The main problem is it all seems a bit tattered and worn.

The upscale village store portion of this establishment sells organically grown meats, cereals, dairy, produce and vegetables, as well as toys, candles, teas, cheeses, wines, toiletries, shoes, sweaters and so on.

The hotel is located in Montézillon, a wide spot in the road in the hills about 10 kilometers straight west of Neuchâtel.

**Capsule Review:** Unusual hotel/restaurant/store featuring things organic. Rooms very spare. Not for us but some may like.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 105 to 125 Sfr. (\$61-\$73), doubles 125-185 Sfr (\$73-\$108)

**Contact:** Auberge de L'Aubier, CH-2205 Montézillon, tel. +41/032/730 30 10, fax 730 30 16

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

#### Chaumont et Golf

The name is a bit deceiving because the nearest golf course is 10 minutes by car; other hotels are closer.

Super views of the lake and the alps are balanced by a murderous

late afternoon sun which in warm weather bakes this glass-fronted, non-air-conditioned hotel.

Location is in the countryside, above Neuchâtel, next to an observation tower\* and near the upper Neuchâtel- Chaumont funicular station.

Be sure your room has a lake view, since it is this hotel's lone virtue.

(\*one Sfr. for a great view, but not for those nervous about heights)

**Capsule Review:** Huge, impersonal, charmless business hotel that, despite its name, is not on a golf course. Not what we're looking for.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 110 to 240 Sfr. (\$64-\$140), doubles 160 to 340 Sfr (\$94-\$199)

**Contact:** Hôtel Chaumont et Golf, Chemin du Grand-Hôtel 1, CH-2067 Chaumont, tel. +41/032/754 21 75, fax 753 27 22, email: Hotel-Chaumont@bluewin.ch

**Rating:** QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 7/20

#### Hotel du Chasseur

In the village of Enges, about 11 kilometers northeast of Neuchâtel. There's a lot to like here: three cozy, comfortable little rooms with private bath (and three without); a homey restaurant; and friendly management.

See the review under "Sustenance" for our thoughts on the restaurant.

**Capsule Review:** A small country hotel with above average charm and food (though our meal had a strange ending). Good value.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 60 to 80 Sfr. (\$35-\$47), doubles 100 to 140 Sfr (\$58-\$82)

**Contact:** Hotel du Chasseur, CH-2073 Enges, tel. +41/032/757 18 03, fax 757 17 98

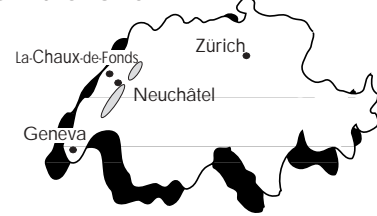
**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

#### Sustenance

##### La Maison des Halles

In our quest for good food served in informal surroundings, the ground floor brasserie of this Neuchâtel tradition is a great find. Those who want tonier surroundings —

#### Switzerland



and a bigger check — will go up one flight to des Halles' first floor restaurant.

But the brasserie was just the right atmosphere for us: a big room with high ceilings supported by huge stone pillars, lofty arched windows, a floor of tile pavers, and tables set with pink and white cloths and candles.

An opener of three fresh oysters from the French coast and a glass of house white wine, all for 10 Sfr. (\$6), was a perfect and not-too-expensive start.

Half a broiled lobster was very good, and the sauce, a blend of fish stock, lemon and cream, was exquisite. The rice soaked it up beautifully.

A crisp *Wiener Schnitzel* came with a good mixed salad of beets, carrots, cucumber, red cabbage, corn and greens.

Desserts, though hardly revolutionary, were of fresh, top-notch ingredients. The thick hot chocolate to pour over the Coupe Denmark's house-made vanilla ice cream was served in a separate boat. *Crepes au baies des boiset glace* was a scoop of vanilla ice cream with a pair of airy, cooked-to-order crepes, liberally sprinkled with fresh blackberries, currants, raspberries and powdered sugar.

The entire dinner, including a bottle of local Pinot Noir, the oysters and white wine, the main courses and the desserts with a glass of port, cost 134 Sfr. (\$78).

Though meat dishes are served, the emphasis here is on fish and shellfish (a lone diner at the next table carefully nested the empty shells as he methodically worked his way through a huge bowl of mussels) and service is efficient and

## NEUCHÂTEL

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friendly.

**Capsule Review:** For outstanding bistro food served to people wearing blue jeans, this is the place.

La Maison des Halles, 4 Rue du Trésor, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, tel. 724 3141

### Hotel du Marché

Next to des Halles on Neuchâtel's main square is this prototype of the seedy, Gallic restaurant. A radio blares Jacques Brel, Elvis and Marvin Gaye, and the whiskey-voiced patroness sits at a corner table doing paperwork, a cigarette hanging from her lips.

Service is amiable but a bit sloppy: the dirty rag on our waiter's serving tray could be left in the kitchen and the tablecloth should have been changed two days before.

Food, too, was a bit spotty. A "gift of the house" of headcheese with tomato wedges and greens was fine, but a brown sauce served over sweetbreads (30 Sfr./\$18) was watery. With the veal came an odd arrangement; wide noodles in the plate's center and fanned out from them alternating slices of grilled avocado and pink grapefruit slices.

Confit of duck (34 Sfr./\$20) was o.k. but much inferior to the duck leg served to us the day before at virtually the same price in the refined surroundings of the Hotel Beau Rivage.

If du Marché excels at anything — other than its back street atmosphere — it is desserts. Two slices of very dense chocolate terrine (8 Sfr./\$5) sat astride a great *crème anglaise* and a rich raspberry sauce. House-made ice cream made with Armagnac was drizzled with a delicious honey sauce and scattered with tiny brandy-soaked orange peel slices.

With aperitifs and another bottle of local pinot noir (25 Sfr./\$15) the dinner for two came to 120 Sfr. (\$70).

**Capsule Review:** Good people watching but a little too earthy and not good value when compared to

des Halles.

Hotel du Marché, Place des Halles 4, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, tel. 245800

### Hotel du Chasseur

Hearing of the hotel's reputation for fowl and game, we drove into the hills one evening from Neuchâtel to see for ourselves.

We had called for a reservation and were greeted with great warmth and given a *banquette* in the cozy *Stube* where fringed, yellow lampshades hang low over the tables. A salad of fresh greens was sprinkled with tart currants, smoked wild pork bits, tiny croutons and tossed in piquant, creamy dressing.

The wild game menu included pheasant, partridge, wild pig and two kinds of venison.

Filet of pheasant (26.5 Sfr./\$16) served in pan juices with red cabbage, baked apple, chestnuts and a dense cranberry sauce, offered interesting flavors. The juicy bird was just untamed enough to be a foil to the tartness of the apple and cranberry. A side of *Spätzle* nicely mopped up the juices.

Medallions of young venison (35 Sfr./\$21) were tender, though a little dry, and shared the plate with an odd assortment of canned fruit, including peaches, pineapple, maraschino cherry and a poached pear. More appealing were three Brussels sprouts and *Spätzle*. There was a second serving of all this.

It was not high cuisine but the flavors were intriguing and with the meal we drank a decent half bottle of Pinot Noir de Cressier (19 Sfr./\$11).

At this point, our server, whom we believe to have been the owner, disappeared. We were interested in a little dessert but no one looked at us for 25 minutes. Suddenly, he reappeared, apologized for the delay, removed our plates and without an offering of coffee or dessert, again vanished. Apparently, there was a banquet upstairs and he was wanted elsewhere. After 20 minutes more, we flagged down one of the young servers to whom we had been invisible and asked for the bill. He first

had trouble locating it and when he did, he placed it on the cash register and went about other business while we waited.

After another 20 minutes he stopped to tell us, in French, that he either did not know how to use the register or didn't have the authority to finalize our bill. At that point we arose, figured the amount of our bill from the menu and tried to hand the money to the young man on our way out. This caused a panic. "You cannot, it's impossible," he sputtered, this time in English. Ah, but it was. A more in-charge looking person, realizing that we were bent on leaving, came running from the kitchen and took our money. We left without an apology after waiting more than an hour from the finish of the main course. Including beverages, we paid 126.50 Sfr. (\$74) for this strange dining experience.

**Capsule Review:** Decent country cuisine served in pleasant surroundings. We will assume our trouble was an aberration.

Hotel du Chasseur, CH-2073 Enges, tel. +41/032/757 18 03, fax 757 17 98

## Europe Travel Briefs

■ In a program similar to the Eurailpass, Europe by Air now offers a "FlightPass" with unlimited air travel in 27 European countries.

The price for 15 days travel is \$699 and \$899 for 21 days. Advance reservations are accepted and changes can be made without charge. There are no blackout dates and travel can start and end anywhere in Europe.

Before purchasing these passes, however, you are advised to make certain Europe by Air's participating airlines offer flights between the cities on their proposed itinerary. For example, even though Vienna and Munich are part of the pass, there may be no service between that — or any other — specific city pair; or, the trip may require a circuitous routing.

**Contact:** 888-387-2479, Web: [www.europebyair.com](http://www.europebyair.com)

■ **Austria Airlines has announced its program for reasonably priced travel within Europe.**

North American purchasers of transatlantic tickets on Austrian Airlines are eligible to purchase its **Visit Europe** program which allows from three to six travel segments involving more than 100 European cities. The price for the minimum three Visit Europe coupons is \$299. The six-coupon price is \$539. Travel is on Austrian Airlines, **Tyrolean Air** and **Lauda Air** and all travel earns frequent flyer mileage in either Austrian Air's Miles and More program or United Airline's Mileage Plus program. Contact: 800-843-0002, Web: [www.austrianair.com](http://www.austrianair.com).

■ **"Vienna on Us" provides a free luxury overnight stop in Vienna for Austrian Airlines Grand Class (business class) passengers.**

The deal applies to destinations beyond Vienna served by Austrian Airlines and includes private limousine service round-trip from the Vienna Airport to one of these hotels: **ANA Grand, Hotel Bristol, Vienna Hilton, Hotel Imperial, the Intercontinental, or SAS Palais.** Dinner and buffet breakfast are included.

The price for such pampering comes high. The roundtrip Chicago-Vienna-Berlin Grand Class fare in October is a hefty \$6694. Contact: 800-843-0002, Web: [www.austrianair.com](http://www.austrianair.com).

■ **Berlin's new Jewish Museum, which will focus on 2000 years of German-Jewish history, opens September 2001.**

In the meantime, however, the building's enormously popular tours will be suspended while the permanent exhibits are constructed. Since the building was completed about two years ago, in what can only be viewed a phenomena of tourism, some 20,000 visitors a month have trooped through the empty building designed by American architect Daniel Libeskind.

A closing date for the empty building tours is not yet known, but it

is likely that some parts will remain open even during exhibit construction, the Garden of Exiles and the Holocaust Tower, for example.

For now, English language tours are conducted daily at 1:30pm and 3pm. The price is 8 DM (\$4) or 5 DM (\$2.50 for seniors and students. On Thursday evenings between 6pm and 8pm, the building can be visited for 2 DM (\$1), though there are no tours at that time.

Advance reservations for tours are required. Phone +49/030/ 283 97 444, fax 282 61 83 or email [info@jemberlin.de](mailto:info@jemberlin.de).


■ **Germany's biggest party, Oktoberfest, begins its annual two-week run on Saturday, September 16.**

Most of the major activities take place at the beginning of the festival. The first day there is a small parade featuring the brewery owners in full costume and in the evening a program of music and dance put on by a cast of 600. On Sunday, the big parade features 7,000 participants in regional garb and is followed by an open-air concert. Reservations for the beer tents can be made through the 14 individual breweries. For a list, contact Munich Tourism at [www.munich-tourist.de](http://www.munich-tourist.de) or phone 212-661-7200.

■ **There is a radio station in the Heidelberg main rail station.**

Südwest Rundfunk (SWR3) broadcasts live from this location Monday through Saturday. You can see the announcer in his glass booth, or it is even possible to enter the studio for a closer look. *From The International Railway Traveler, Belknap Bldg., 1810 Sils Ave. #306B, Louisville KY 40205, tel. 502-454-0277, web: [irtsociety.com](http://irtsociety.com). Subscriptions are \$65 per year, 12 issues.*

■ **Gemütlichkeit subscribers can now get free travel bulletins via the Internet.**

Send your email address to [kurt@gemut.com](mailto:kurt@gemut.com) to receive periodic updates on cheap air fares, car rental deals and other items of interest to the Germany, Austria, Switzerland traveler. 

## READERS' FORUM

### **Big Comeback**

Not only has **Gasthaus Zur Blume**, (Schnellinger Strasse 56, D-77716 Haslach im Kinzigtal, tel. +49/07832/01250, fax 912599) been restored from the fire, Familie Moser now has an Internet page ([www.zur-blume.de](http://www.zur-blume.de)). This is one of my favorite Inns of Europe. While the building was completely rebuilt, the mustard yellow paint was retained — oh well, tradition is important.

ERSKINE HAVENS  
VIA EMAIL

(Ed. Note: This Black Forest inn offers double rooms at about 100 DM (\$46) per night.)

### **Rothenburg Gem**

We have just completed our umpteenth trip to Europe and have again used your newsletter for guidance. We used hotels you recommended and ate at many places you have rated — with no disappointments.

Several years ago you rated the **Hotel Garni Hornburg** (tel. +49/09861/8480, fax 5570) in Rothenburg. We usually fly into Frankfurt and make this our first stop. A couple of days here really puts you in the German frame of mind.

This was our fourth stay with Martin and Gabriele Wetzel. You can find no better hosts. They make you feel at home in their home. Martin has been doing a lot of updating in many of the rooms and plans to redo the lobby this winter. He has just signed a new 10-year lease on the building. Therefore, the discreet traveler will be assured of having a great place to stay for 10 more years. On our first visit to Rothenburg, the Wetzels recommended a small restaurant inside the wall, the **Silver Candle**. If you want true German food, great service, reasonable prices and a place full of Germans with few tourists, if any, this is the place to go.

The **Lisl Hotel** (tel. +49/08362/8870, fax 81107) in Hohenschwangau

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## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

considerable inconvenience. Is that not a sacred commitment the airline makes, to get us where we're going — eventually? We give them our money long before we want to travel and they agree to carry us on the prearranged date. Isn't that the way it's supposed to work, or am I missing something? It has always been my impression that even if the weather is bad or equipment breaks, the airline has a responsibility to get passengers to their destinations.

Apparently, however, I have been misinformed. Consider the Columbus, Ohio, couple who have been *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers for 14 years and go to Europe once or twice a year. In June they spent a full day and evening at Chicago's O'Hare Airport trying to get on a UAL flight to Frankfurt. They are United frequent flyers and had reserved (and paid) months before. After being told a variety of stories regarding weather and mechanical difficulties they finally had to give up. The airline simply couldn't keep its end of the bargain. Their flight was canceled and all other flights were full. Since it late in the evening when they gave up the ghost, they couldn't even get their checked luggage returned to them and had to go back to Columbus without it. Their high-priced Passion Play tickets, rendered impossible to use by United's failure, will now be kept as very expensive souvenirs. Their luggage arrived back in Columbus the next day. Naturally, they had to go to the airport to pick it up.

Early in August, they tried again with fresh reservations. This time, after actually loading and taxiing — twice — their scheduled United flight from Columbus to Washington D.C. was canceled. Again they had no choice but to return home and unpack their suitcases.

If you think this is an isolated incident, log on to the frequent flyer forum at [www.webflyer.com/forum/Forum50/HTML/002577.html](http://www.webflyer.com/forum/Forum50/HTML/002577.html). There, travelers who fly more than 100,000 miles a year on United tell many a tale of woe, including weath-

er cancellations that seem to ground only United planes.

If you ask the opinion of this writer, United demonstrates questionable ethics when it accepts thousands of reservations it surely knows it cannot fulfill.

### Advice Needed

Here's a turn of the tables. At the end of October, Liz and I are headed to China on a short, first trip to that country. We're trying to do it as independently as possible and are starting in Beijing. We'd welcome any tips or advice and would appreciate hearing from any "old China hands." Call 800-521-6722 or email [bob@gemut.com](mailto:bob@gemut.com). — rhb ☒

## READERS' FORUM

Continued from page 7

was first-class as always although a true tourist haven.

Too many of your suggestions were used on this trip to list them all. We drove over 2000 km and had our copies of *Gemütlichkeit* with us at all times. Thanks for many good recommendations.

WALTER SCHELLHASE  
KERRVILLE TX

### Bonn Restaurant

My husband and I recently returned from a trip to Germany and Austria, and wanted to make you aware of a wonderful restaurant, the **Bistro im Kaiser Karl Hotel** (Vorgebirgsstrasse 50, D-53119, Bonn, Germany, tel. +49/0228 /696967).

This was our first trip to Germany. My interest in music, particularly that of Ludwig van Beethoven, landed us in his birthplace, Bonn. We enjoyed a friendly reception, good service, and comfortable accommodations at the **Kaiser Karl Hotel**, which is a few doors down from the bistro, but separately owned and managed.

My husband and I are both vegetarians and with my limited knowledge of German language, finding meatless meals was a bit of a challenge. Fortunately, we arrived in Germany in time to experience *Spargel Zeit*, when an abundance of freshly harvested green and white asparagus floods the markets and restaurants.

Walking past the bistro, we decided to check out the menu, and found in addition to the regular dinner offerings a special all-asparagus menu. . .our reservations were set.

The Bistro is owned and run by Philippa and Markus Schnitzler. We were graciously greeted by Frau Schnitzler, and after a brief friendly conversation (partially in German, partially in English — Frau Schnitzler speaks both fluently), we were treated to a vegetarian appetizer which Herr Schnitzler prepared especially for us: a delicate, perfectly seasoned tomato crème soup. Entrées, wine and dessert were equally delectable, beautifully presented with excellent, courteous service. The interior of the bistro is stunning — an authentic Parisian bistro that was literally dismantled in France, shipped in pieces to Germany, and reconstructed in its new home on the corner of Vorgebirgsstrasse. Needless to say, we will add the outstanding meal, first-rate service, and warm treatment experienced at the Bistro to all the good memories of our first-ever German holiday.

SUSAN O'KANE  
STAMFORD CT ☒

### Key Websites for the Traveler to Germany, Austria & Switzerland

- [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com) Gateway site for travelers to Germany, Austria and Switzerland, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, traveler feedback, free travel advice and past issues (\$4 per month fee to access almost 8 years of back issues).
- [www.mapblast.com](http://www.mapblast.com) Map and automobile trip planning. Locates routes and distances.
- [bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en](http://bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en) German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- [www.rail.ch](http://www.rail.ch) Swiss and European rail schedules.
- [www.switzerlandtourism.com](http://www.switzerlandtourism.com) Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- [www.germany-tourism.de](http://www.germany-tourism.de) Germany's national tourist authority.
- [www.anto.com](http://www.anto.com) Webstie of Austria's national tourist authority.