

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

December 26, 2000

Free Back Issues & Other Biz

This issue, the 168th since we began publishing in January of 1987, marks the end of our 14th year. A good time to announce a couple of changes.

The first regards our website; www.gemut.com, where the Members' Library pages contain the text versions of issues back to January, 1993. We are pleased to announce that subscribers from now on will be able to access all back issues — except for the most recent 12 — at no charge. Each month on page two of *Gemütlichkeit* we will print a username and password which will enable you to get into the Members' Library where you are free to open these back issues and print them or download them to your own computer.

We have been wrestling with a price increase. Postage is any newsletter's number one expense and in the last 14 years those rates have increased more than 50%. Yet the renewal price to existing subscribers has never gone up. Other eight-

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

STYRIAN ESCAPE

The Styrian countryside, in Austria's "green province" is known for its unspoiled nature, scenic roads, and good food. This month we sample a little of each.

Mariazell

When the Pope John Paul II traveled to Austria in 1983, he visited only two places: Vienna and Mariazell. While everyone knows Austria's capital city, not many have heard about this little town in the Styrian mountains. So, what does the pope know that others don't?

By Douglas Linton — Actually, Mariazell has been a magnet for travelers since the 14th century, when it gained a reputation as a pilgrimage site, an inspirational function that it still serves today.

Founded in 1157 by Monk Magnus of the Benedictine order of St. Lambrecht, Mariazell was originally

just a wooden hut sheltering a small limewood statue of the Virgin Mary and Child. Legend says that on his way to building this hut in the middle of nowhere, Magnus came upon a large rock blocking his path through the narrow mountain pass. He prayed to Virgin Mary and suddenly the rock split open, enabling him to continue. When he arrived at what is now Mariazell, he built his hut and began to minister to shepherds in the region. The years went on and the little hut somehow grew to a full-fledged pilgrimage site, attracting even the region's royalty, among them, King Louis I of Hungary and Margrave Henry of Moravia.

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Accommodations

Reports on recent hotel experiences by the Gemütlichkeit staff

Historische Schlossmühle Horbruch, Germany

The Hunsrück is rich farm country in rolling upland between the Mosel and Nahe rivers. Its many prosperous villages are interconnected by an almost bewildering network of narrow roads that wind smoothly through dark forests, well-tended fields and narrow valleys.



With the aid of a good map and a little perseverance, the auto traveler in search of quiet accommodations of superior quality will be rewarded about half a mile past the tiny town of Horbruch, some 10 miles east of Bernkastel Kues on the Mosel river. There, nestled in a hidden glen

among streams, ponds and lush vegetation is the Historische Schlossmühle.

More mill than castle, the early 19th-century stone building looks like something from the French countryside rather than the heart of Germany. Maybe that's why it appealed to Napoleon. The building was first constructed several miles away on the Nahe and in 1804, along with several other noble properties, was confiscated by the French emperor. A few years later a local architect bought the mill, dismantled it and transported it stone-by-stone to the current location where it was rebuilt.

Somewhere along the way it became a hotel and restaurant; the

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page, monthly travel newsletters have almost doubled in price in that same period of time; *La Belle France* now at \$87 and *Hideaway Reports* at \$99, are examples. The *Italian Traveler* kept its price at \$55 but folded after some 10 years in the business.

But enough of the publisher's whining. We're not going anywhere and we've decided not to increase prices for 2001. What we *are* going to do, however, is go from 12 to 11 issues each year. As a current subscriber this affects you almost not at all. We'll simply extend your subscription enough months to enable you to get every issue you paid for. For example, if your subscription expires with the January, 2002, issue, you'll be extended through February, 2002. The move enables us to reduce costs and thereby not increase the subscription price. Beginning with subscriptions expiring in February 2001 all renewals will be on an 11-issue-per-year basis. If you wish to renew for 12, 24 or 36 months, you can do so until February 1 by calling 800-521-6722.

Free Updates via Email

Because we only publish monthly, some travel deals come and go before we get a chance to tell you about them. We have therefore started to compile a list of email addresses to which we are sending periodic updates on hotel, auto rental and airfare deals. It's a new

free service. If you want to be on that list, please email us to that effect at bob@gemut.com.

10% Discount on Travel Gear

The retail luggage and travel store, **Travel Essentials**, offers subscribers a 10% discount on all merchandise. In addition, your purchases are shipped from Oregon where there is no sales tax. Price travel merchandise locally—luggage, guidebooks and travel gear—and then visit www.travelgear.com.

Wrapping up 2000

In past years the December issue was almost entirely devoted to a year-end review. Many of you felt that was an unnecessary rehash and so last year we cut back on those kinds of stories. This time around we're going to limit our look back on the year to a few of the "bests" from the year 2000.

Best New* Hotels

(* "New" meaning not previously reviewed by us)

- **Le Vieux Manoir au Lac, \$\$\$\$**, (Jan.), Murten, Switzerland, Rue de Lausanne, CH-3280 Murten, tel. +41/026/678 61 61, fax 678 61 62, email: vieuxmanoir@bluewin.ch, web:www.vieuxmanoir.ch, proprietors: Elisabeth and Erich Thomas
- **Hotel Croix d'Or & Poste, \$\$**, (Mar.), Münster, Switzerland, CH-3985 Münster VS, tel. +41/027/974-1515, fax 9741516, Simon and Ruth Aellig-Bumann
- **Hotel Gut Schmelmerhof, \$\$**, (July), Rettenbach, Germany, Retten-

bach 24, D-94379 St. Englmar, tel. +49/09965/1890, fax 189140, email hotel@gut-schmelmerhof.de

- **Hotel Beau Rivage, \$\$\$**, (Aug.), Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 1 Esplanade du Mont-Blanc, CH-2001 Neuchâtel, tel. +41/032/723 1515, fax 723 1616, email reception@beau-rivage-hotel.ch, web www.beau-rivage-hotel.ch.

- **Historische Schlossmühle, \$\$**, Horbruch, Germany (see page 1.)

Best Value Hotels

- **Gasthof Schorn, \$**, (Feb.), St. Leonhard, Austria, St. Leonhardstrasse 1, A-5083 St. Leonhard-Grödig, tel. +43/06246/72334, fax 72334-40, proprietor: Familie Ziegler
- **Hotel Alpenblick, \$\$**, (Mar.) Ernen, Switzerland, CH-3995 Ernen, tel. 41/027/9711537, fax 9714374, email: alpenblickernen@dplanet.ch, proprietor: Fam. Imboden

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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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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.

STYRIA

Continued from page 1

The Basilica

Louis I made a pilgrimage to Mariazell after a vision of Mary helped him defeat a Turkish army twice the size of his own. Henry of Moravia had a more personal problem—gout. In a dream he was visited by the Bohemian King Wenceslaus of Christmas song fame. The Good King told Henry he would be cured if he asked Mary for help. If she did then Henry was to promise to make a pilgrimage to Mariazell and build a church in her honor. Henry's gout was cured and, as promised, he departed for Mariazell. Unfortunately, he forgot to bring a map and got lost. Ever the Good King, Wenceslaus appeared again and showed him the way. Once in Mariazell, he donated money and plans for a basilica.

With the good word and gratitude of the Hungarian and Czech nobles, the reputation of Mariazell spread over the Danube region. Even today, one hears visitors speaking almost as much Hungarian, Polish, Czech or Slovak, as German. Some of the side chapels inside the church are especially revered by the former lands of Imperial Austria.

The most famous of these is the Laudislav chapel, not because of the saint, but because it once held the grave of Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty, a resolute anti-Nazi and anti-communist. The cardinal was the primate of Hungary from 1945 to 1975. He had the distinction of being imprisoned by the both the Nazis and the Communists, but was finally released during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, after which he fled abroad. He lived in exile until his death in 1975 when, according to his wishes, he was buried here in this chapel, awaiting the day when "the red star of Moscow" no longer flew over his own country. In 1991, Mindszenty's body was transferred to its final resting place in the cathedral in Esztergom, Hungary.

The focal and spiritual center of the basilica remains the small lime-

Driving to Mariazell

Visitors these days can still take the old pilgrimage routes on foot, though it takes a few days. Most modern pilgrims arrive by car, on a scenic, two-hour drive from Vienna. Better still, the trip can be stretched into a relaxed weekend or two-day trip, taking advantage of this lovely part Austria.

As with many good drives, there is as much to see and do en route, as there is at the destination. The centuries old pilgrimage route has been embellished with a number of religious sites and churches that make the drive a pleasure.

Leave Vienna on the A1 and drive to St. Pölten, the capital of Lower Austria. From there take the south exit and drive highway 20 to **Lilienfeld**, where a lovely 13th-century **Benedictine abbey** is set in a small valley along the meandering Traisen River. The abbey was founded by the Badenburgs, the royal predecessors to the Habsburgs. Especially attractive is the abbey's church, with its serene Gothic columns and plain white walls providing a muted frame for large, ornate altars made of gilded black marble.

To this point the scenery is not particularly interesting, but after Lilienfeld the countryside, and its history, starts to reveal itself. Here, the traveler begins to see some of the religious shrines that have cropped up. They range from simple columns with stone lanterns on top to small churches and chapels. The first is on the edge of Lilienfeld; a hill with ornate statuary detailing the stations of the cross. Just past Turnitz is a small **18th-century baroque chapel** near a sheltered relief carving and a monument with

wood statue of the Virgin Mary and Child that Monk Magnus brought almost a millennium ago. This modest icon is dressed in ornate clothing for all but two days in the year and is housed in an elaborate gold and silver chapel donated by Empress Maria Theresa, thanking Mary for blessing her and her husband with



seven fountains. The area is quite scenic: wooded slopes along the river valley rise up and begin to cradle the road before suddenly inclining steeply up to the town of Annaberg.

Perched on a mountain pass, **Annaberg** gets its name from its 13th century **copper-domed church** dedicated to the mother of Mary. The interior should be seen, especially the gilded Gothic altar, carved in the 17th century. Also, there is a lovely view of the other side of the pass looking out to the 1893 meter-high **Ötscher**, the largest peak in the area.

After leaving Annaberg, the road continues through a number of small villages. The next pilgrim church is in **Joachimsberg**, to the left just off Highway 20. You will cross a small stream (you can sometimes see enormous trout sleeping in the clear water under the bridge) and up a steep narrow road to the top of a little hill. Here the tiny **wood-shingled church** sits amidst a cluster of small houses and across from a horse riding school. The church is not much more than an enclosed apse with a pointy spire but it has an attractive Baroque altar.

The village road will continue through town and back to the main road. The next stop is **Josephsberg**, with a church of similar size to the previous town, and then Sankt Sebastian, the final spot before Mariazell.

16 children (thereby making possible a vast number of wedding alliances).

The basilica itself is an attractive and somewhat eclectic building, with two onion-domed baroque towers respectfully flanking a commanding Gothic spire. Market stalls

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STYRIA

Continued from page 3

ring the exterior gates, hawking religious and tourist items—worthy descendants of their centuries-old predecessors.

Other Attractions

Besides the basilica, Mariazell is famous for its gingerbread, mead and an assortment of *Schnapps*. When the bees aren't making honey for the mead or gingerbread, they also make wax for candles and religious relief sculptures. The best-known company is Pirker, whose products can be purchased all over town, though the best place is their store in the Mariazellerhof on Grazer Strasse.

Pirker also has an attractive turn-of-the-19th-century coffeehouse, which serves good food (from light snacks to large *Schnitzels*) and desserts. Original offerings include the beer mixed with mead. You can also watch—and smell—the gingerbread being made in the glass walled kitchen. It comes in an incredible assortment: cookies, cakes, heart-shaped, dipped in chocolate, frosted — the list could go on and on.

Accommodations

Hotel Goldenes Kreuz

Pilgrims and wayfaring strangers have a number of hotels to choose from, but friendly service and an historical atmosphere make this one of our two top choices in Mariazell.

Daily Rates: Singles 500-750 ATS (\$32-\$49), doubles 800-1300 ATS (\$52-\$85).

Contact Scherfler Family, Turnau 34, tel +43/03882/2309, fax 230966, email Scherfler@line.com

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 13/20

Brauhaus Mariazell

Gemütlichkeit's first visit to the cozy **Brauhaus Mariazell** (formerly Zum Alten Brauhaus) — located just off the town square, no more than a couple of hundred yards from the church — was in 1986. Then we paid \$39 for our double room with bath and \$11 each for an excellent dinner of *Jägerrostbraten* (pan-fried beef), soup and dessert. The place is a

better bargain now than it was 14 years ago.

There are just three rooms but all have the necessary conveniences. The best of them is the “brewmaster’s room” which rents for from 410 to 550 ATS (\$27-\$36) per person. The Girrer’s offer a weekend package for this room which includes all meals, a tour of the little brewery and all the beer you can drink for 1985 ATS (\$129) per person.

The simple restaurant which specializes in hearty Styrian dishes attracts many locals and the made-on-the-premises beer is very good. Little English is spoken, but the Girrer family couldn't be more accommodating.

Daily Rates: Singles 410 to 550 ATS (\$27-\$36), doubles 820 to 1100 (\$54-\$72) per person

Contact: Brauhaus Mariazell, Wienerstraße 5, A-8630 Mariazell, tel. +43/03882/2523, fax 2523 8.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Sustenance

In addition to the **Brauhaus Mariazell**, a good place to eat is the **Golden Löwe** (Wienerstrasse 1). The **Goldene Krone** (Grazer Strasse 1) also has a good reputation for authentic Styrian cuisine. Recommended dishes include anything with pumpkin or the *Wurzelfleisch* — boiled pork with root vegetables and topped with shredded horseradish. For pastries and coffee, try **Mariazellerhof** (Grazer Strasse 10).

Turnau

As charming and historic as it is, there are a several good reasons for continuing your trip, as I did, beyond Mariazell to the small town of Turnau, about 22 miles south on highway 20. First, there is **Wirtshaus Steirereck**, a country restaurant considered the best in Styria and a bargain to boot. Another reason might be to spend the night in one of several farmhouses that are part of a program called **Urlaub ins Bauerhof**, an association of Austrian farmhouse hotels. And, of course, there is the dramatic scenery along the way.

After Mariazell, highway 20 winds through a pleasant river valley before starting up a short climb and then cresting over the dramatic slopes of the Hochschwab mountain. Then it switches steeply downward until finally alighting on the Seegraben river valley, 200 meters below.

Wirtshaus Steirereck

Turnau is on a “yellow road” just east of highway 20 and Steirereck is located on a pretty wooded hill outside of town, in a village called Pogusch, though I didn't see any other buildings except the restaurant and a neighboring farmhouse. The restaurant itself is quite a sight: a cluster of traditional farm buildings joined together and surrounded by a rustic breakfast shed and a welter of barns housing chickens, goats, cows, and pigs.

However, the most distinctive characteristic of the Wirtshaus is hyper-reality. This is no rural restaurant hidden in a simple farmhouse. Instead, it is an ersatz farmhouse masking an energetic and slightly over-the-top gourmet restaurant. In many ways, it reminded of a Thomas Hart Benton painting: exaggerated rural elements that are part farmhouse and part art.

Its success can be measured even from the parking lot; a sea of BMWs and Mercedes from all corners of Austria. An entranceway poster promotes the most dramatic way to arrive — in a rented helicopter from Bad Vöslau near Vienna.

Wirtshaus Steirereck was opened by the Reitbauers, the same family that owns Vienna's much-acclaimed **Restairamt Steirereck**. The country operation is more of a family affair, where the owners are seen organizing tables and seating guests. Another pleasant difference is that prices are half what one pays in Vienna, where a four-course menu is 980 ATS (\$64) vs. 480 ATS (\$31) here.

One of the first things a visitor notices is that the Wirtshaus seems to scatter its wine cellar throughout the dining rooms. Bottles line tables in every nook and cranny, and guests are encouraged to wander around

and pick their own. The extensive selection encompasses the world, providing an interesting diversion whether or not you are waiting for your table. There is also a selection of eight open wines, four reds and four whites, served by the glass, and a small pamphlet listing an abundant selection of schnapps, complete with ratings.

For a starter, I chose the pumpkin ravioli with sautéed goose liver (148 ATS); pureed pumpkin drizzled over large, butterfly pasta as opposed to stuffed inside, with seared, slightly dry, goose liver arranged throughout. As one of the restaurant's signature dishes, it was a little disappointing, good but not great.

A main course of rolled venison steaks in a reduction sauce laced with *Sanddorn* berries and a separate serving of gnocci (188 ATS), however, was very good, especially the tender, succulent inner part of the roll, which contrasted well with the mildly sour berries.

Dessert consisted of roasted pears filled with caramel sauce, spiked with a vanilla bean and served with a dollop of elderberry sorbet (78 ATS/\$5).

A second meal the following day, eaten at the spacious glass-covered bar, which provides a food-lovers vantage point from which one can see all of the creations coming from the kitchen, and even glimpses of the kitchen itself, was much more successful. Goose soup, served with a slice of crisp toast spread with pate and perched on three pear cubes, was a fine beginning. A main course of oxen steak with red and black peppercorns and caramelized onions on a bed of sliced pumpkin was elevated by the slightly sweet and utterly delicious reduction sauce.

Those not in the mood for a big dessert might instead choose a cappuccino which, according to the extremely talky menu, is made from the finest dark-roasted Arabica beans from India, Brazil and Indonesia.

Our bottom line on Steirereck is that it offers a charmingly relaxed food-lover's atmosphere, excellent

prices and food that is a little better than we first thought.

Wirtshaus Steirereck, Pogusch 21, on the road to St. Lorenzen, tel +43/03863/2000, fax 515151, email pogusch@steirereck.at, open Thur.-Sun. 9 am-midnight.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

Accommodations

Pension Kirchleit'n

This charming rural hotel is located on a little slope below a church. It consists of a cluster of small bungalows next to an attractive timbered building lined with balconies and sprays of geraniums. The best rooms are Number 2 and Number 12. The first is compact and traditional, shaped by the slope of the roof, and complete with a small balcony and kitchenette. Number 12 is referred to as the "romantic room," with a wooden canopied bed, sleek furnishings and modern luxuries such as a whirlpool bath and CD player.

Daily Rates: Singles 295-325 ATS (\$19-\$21), doubles 590-650 ATS (\$38-\$42) with breakfast; the romantic room is 1300 ATS (\$85) for two.

Contact: Pension Kirchleit'n, Knapp Family, Turnau 34, tel +43/03863/2234, fax +43/03863/2001, email pens.kirchlietn_knapp@lion.cc

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Pichler-Hof

Located at the end of the quiet road that passes through the pastoral, prosaically-named valley of Thal (which means "valley" in German), this farmhouse offers two "romantic rooms" similar to those at the pension listed above, although the furnishings here were made by the owner's son, who is a carpenter.

Regular rooms are also nice, with balconies, parquet floors and sparkling baths — more like a three or four-star hotel than a rural farmhouse. There is also a barn full of animals, wonderful views (especially from the romantic rooms), a small museum of farm implements, and a playground for children. Book in advance as the 11 rooms are generally filled on weekends.

Daily Rates: Single 230-300 ATS, double 460-600 ATS with breakfast; the romantic room is 1000 ATS for two.

Contact: Pichler-Hof, Margarete and Willibald Rechberger, Thal 22, tel/fax +43/03863/2394.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

Huber-Bauer

A good alternative if the Pichler-Hof is full.

Daily Rates: Single 220-300 ATS, 440-600 double ATS with breakfast.


Contact: Johann and Silvia Illmaier, Thal 11, tel/fax +43/03863/2392

Rating: Quality 12/20, Value 14/20

For information on other farmhouse accommodations, contact: *Urlaub am Bauerhof*, Hamerlinggasse 3, A-8010 Graz, tel +43/0316/8050-291, fax +43/0316/8050-30, email uab@lk-stmk.at, Web: www.tiscover.com/steiermark-bauernhofurlab.

Notes on Turnau

- With the opening of the restaurant, and the subsequent deluge of wealthy visitors, the town has gone to great lengths to give its well-heeled guests something to do while not eating. One popular activity is the Bründlweg, a circular 3.5 hour hiking trail that passes farmhouses selling home-made natural products such as schnapps, apple juice, and meats. Turnau also has a pretty church, on a hill overlooking town.

- Travelers from Turnau heading north on Highway 20 toward Mariazell may want to stop at the Dullwitz Seethal, a valley in the Hochswab, near Seewiesen. I had not felt like hiking with the ostentatious on the Bründlweg and had heard that this was a nice hiking valley at the foot of the range. The rocky peaks were lovely, especially after such a pleasurable meal. The trail is long enough to hike for a full day, but is rewarding enough from the beginning, so you can walk just as long as you want to. 

www.gemut.com

A website for travelers to Germanic Europe

HÜNSRUCK HOTEL

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present owners, Anne and Rüdiger Liller, took it over in 1973.

The hotel's 18 rooms, named for animals and birds, are all of different size and decor. With separate sitting areas, most could be put in the "junior" suite category and all are liberally endowed — one might even say cluttered — with antique furnishings, old books and *objet d'art*. Bathrooms, for the most part, are modern, well lit and spacious.

This is not a resort hotel, there is no pool, spa or exercise room, so about the only daytime activities are country walks, or reading in the garden or perhaps in the library by the fire.

Most guests will want to while away their days with drives along the Mosel and Rhine rivers or in exploring nearby such nearby attractions as Idar-Oberstein (about 20 miles), a city known for gems and precious stones and the old Roman town of Trier (about 38 miles away).

Evenings, however, are best spent dining at one of the several tables that are charmingly scattered over three levels of the house's main room.

The dining area's stone floors are strewn with oriental carpets and tables on the top two levels offer views of the mill wheel. There are heavy beams, whitewashed walls hung with cheery folk art, and mill gears for decoration. Covering the heavy wood tables are white cloths and country plaid napkins. On each is a small bucket of fresh flowers. The silverware is Christofle of France and at each table is an enchanting children's book written by Alex Liller, the owner's son, and illustrated by the woman whose art is displayed throughout the hotel.

As delightful as the decor is, the food is even better. On both nights of our stay we were first served three kinds of homemade bread with two spreads, one a light quenelle and the other made from pan drippings. All dishes were prepared with fresh, high-quality ingredients. Among the

best of them were gravlax with an unusual honey-mustard-dill sauce; calves liver dumplings on a bed of asparagus with an asparagus cream sauce; *Dinkelnudeln*, (noodles made from wheat whose grains do not thresh free of the chaff; known in the US as spelt); and best of all, a marvelous breast of corn-fed chicken with potatoes in mustard sauce.

Breakfasts were in a pleasant, sunny room and served both mornings by chef-owner Rüdiger Liller. It was June and there were luscious strawberries and melon.

On arrival — no reservation, just dropped in — only the son, Alex, was around. He offered a choice of rooms from which we chose Bussard and paid 220 DM (\$101).

This is the kind of place we love to find and tell you about: out of the way yet with easy, quick access to sights; beautiful, natural grounds; cozy, atmospheric public and guest rooms; great food; pleasant family ownership; and not too expensive. In fact our notes from that visit contain this enthusiastic challenge to readers: "Spend a night at the HSM, order the corn-fed breast of chicken, and if you don't think this single experience is worth the subscription price we'll give you your money back including the cost of the chicken dish."

The two-day stay, including both dinners and breakfasts, but excluding beverages, cost 650 DM (\$298); in our view a bargain for accommodations and food of this quality.

The Michelin Red Guide lists this hotel under the town of Morbach, but if you're driving highway 50 southeast from Bernkastel Kues, you'll turn left (northeast) at E42. From there follow the signs to Horbruch, veering off to the right on to a smaller road just past Hochscheid. The hotel is just outside of town.

Daily Rates: Singles from 150 DM (\$69), doubles 190 to 285 DM (\$88-\$132), suite 320 DM (\$148)

Contact: Historische Schlossmühle, D-55483 Horbruch, tel. + 49/06543/40 41, fax 31 78, email: info@historische-schlossmuehle.de.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Readers' Forum

East Germany Recommendations

My wife and I recently returned from a two-week excursion through the eastern regions of Germany. Especially enchanting were the areas in the Zittauer Gebirge along the Polish/Czech border, and the Erzgebirge, further to the west along the Czech border.

We stayed in the **Hotel Riedel** in Zittau (double room 86 DM/\$40, +49/03583/6860, fax 68 61 00). It was very clean and comfortable, with a helpful staff and delicious breakfast buffet included in the price. From Zittau, you can easily take day-trips to the towns and sites in this region. Görlitz, with its medieval town center, is well worth visiting and everyone we met was extremely friendly and helpful.

An experience worth undertaking while in Zittau, is riding the Bimmelbahn which is run by the Sächsisch-Oberlausitzer Eisenbahngesellschaft mbH. It consisted of several old steam locomotives with wooden rail cars built in the late 1800s. The trains depart from Zittau and run through the Zittauer Gebirge to the Kurorts of Jonsdorf and Oybin on a published schedule, with an all day ticket costing only 12 DM (\$6). Those who are familiar with large scale LGB model trains, would easily recognize the restored, full-scale locomotives and passenger cars that were used.

Another charming corner of Sachsen is the Erzgebirge, located about an hour south of Dresden. One interesting attraction is the little village of Seiffen, where the hand-made wooden Christmas ornaments, Raucher Männer and Knusknacker figures are manufactured. The intricate lathing process from which various shapes and figures are cut can be viewed first-hand.

A very convenient location in this area from which to branch out, is Ansprung, a little town located just south of Olbernhau. We found a room at the **Pension Schalling** (50 DM/\$23 per person with breakfast, tel. +49/037363/4009). The rooms

were as nice as any hotel we stayed in during our trip. In addition the pension has an eating room and little kitchen for use by guests who wish to do their own cooking. Herr and Frau Schalling were extremely gracious hosts and their pride in ensuring guests were comfortable was evident in the meticulously clean facility and scrumptious breakfast served each morning. During our stay, they encouraged us to attend the local German Reunification celebration that was held at a nearby horse ranch.

The Schallings are planning an expansion to their current facility to increase the number of available rooms, and hope to soon be listed on the Internet.

STEVE & MARY ANNE MEDAGLIA
WOODBRIDGE VA

Munich Hotel

May I tell you about a great little hotel where we have just spent a week in Munich for the Christmas markets? **Hotel Acanthus** (An der Hauptfeuerwache 14, D- 80331 München, tel. 011/089 / 23 18 80, fax 2 60 73 64) is just one block east of the Sendlinger Tor station and therefore within easy walking distance of the Marienplatz, the Victualienmarkt, the train station, etc.

We first found it in Karen Brown's book and looked up their website and made our reservations directly with the hotel. Our double rooms (there were 4 couples of us) came to 195 DM/day which at the present exchange rate is about \$90/day. A huge breakfast buffet is included in this price. The rooms are larger than average, have nice bathrooms with tub and shower with a shower curtain!

Their email address is acanthus@t-online.de. The website has all their information as well as pictures of the rooms:

www.acanthushotel.de

All eight of us thoroughly enjoyed our stay there. I don't think they need any publicity, but your readers might like to know about it.

CHARLOTTE SPRAWLS
DECATUR GA

Austria's Achensee

Peg and I have driven by Achensee (Austria's largest lake within her borders) several times. We thought, how beautiful; this clear lake meshing with the mountains. So on our last trip we stayed there one night to "scout" the area for future stays. We are now planning the next trip that will include a longer stay.

Achensee is a winter and summer resort with off seasons between the peak seasons. A lake cruise boat covers the entire 14 miles of shoreline with six port calls in two hours.

It is approximately 90 minutes south of Munich and about 45 minutes to an hour northeast of Innsbruck — turn north at Jenbach. From Jenbach a steam locomotive train is available to the shore of Achensee. Accessible also by car.

There are several villages with lodgings on the lake. We selected **Einwaller Hotel** (3 -star) in Pertisau (A-6213 Pertisau Tirol, tel. +43/05243/5366, fax 6246, email: einwaller@tirol.netwing.at). The Einwaller is outstanding and right on the lake. We had a fully equipped apartment with balcony overlooking the lake, breakfast and four course dinner for AS 1200 (about \$78) — off season. The Achensee web page — www.achensee.at — is very detailed and easy to search for accommodations from farms to five-star hotels.

It is necessary to maximize your computer screen to find the English version button top right.

ERSKINE HAVENS
HENDERSONVILLE TN

Hotel Petrisberg Correction

September's *Dear Subscriber* column quotes rates for a number of hotel room accommodations at this time of favorable exchange rates.

You state that "the top double room at the **Hotel Petrisberg** is 150 DM." I recently corresponded with Mr. Pantenburg there regarding the booking of three double rooms for next year. He confirmed same at 175 DM per room and enclosed a rate sheet, effective June 1, 1999, indicating the price of a double room ranging from 160 to 190 DM.

You may wish to amend this in a later issue or be kind enough to let me know if subscribers are, indeed, eligible for the lower rate.

H. MARTIN EMS
SAN FRANCISCO CA

Inside Travel

■ Brandenburg Gate out for the season

Don't expect to get your picture taken in front of Berlin's Brandenburg Gate this year. The famed symbol of the country's unity is undergoing a 16-month, \$4.39 million laser cleanup. During the restoration the monument will be draped with a full-scale image of itself.

This is not the first time the gate has gone into hiding. In 1990-91 the gate was scaffolded during an unsuccessful attempt to clean it using traditional chemical methods. During 1961-1989 the Brandenburg Gate remained in view but in "no-man's land" inaccessible from either East or West Berlin.

■ Three hotels under one roof

Zürich's trendy West End is fast becoming the city's "in" district.

Recently opened there is a 457-room, three-hotel complex under one roof. The hotels are **Etaphotel** (1-star), **Ibis** (2-star) and **Novotel**

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Key Websites for the Traveler to Germany, Austria & Switzerland

- www.gemut.com Gateway site for travelers to Germanic Europe, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, traveler feedback, free travel advice and past issues (\$4 per month fee for access to 8 years of back issues).
- www.michelin-travel.com The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- www.mapblast.com Map and automobile trip planning. Locates routes and distances.
- bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm Swiss and European rail schedules.
- www.switzerlandtourism.com Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- www.germany-tourism.de Germany's national tourist authority.
- www.anto.com Austria's national tourist authority.

INSIDE TRAVEL

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(3-star). Access to downtown Zürich is by tram (Escher Wyss Platz station; 15 minutes to the lake) and by train (Hardbrücke station; two minutes to the main station).

The hotels offer hourly shuttle service to and from Zürich Airport and the main train station. Room prices are Sfr 79 Sfr. (\$ 47) in the Etaphotel, 119 Sfr. (\$ 72) for the Ibis, and 199 Sfr. (\$ 119) in the Novotel.

■ Swiss scenic train upgrades

By spring 2001, some of Switzerland's most famous trains will have renovated cars, better connections and extended services. Changes include:

- Service period of **William Tell** has been extended into the fall.
- Panoramic cars have been added to the **Bernina Express**
- On the **Golden Pass** route, cars have been refurbished, connections are more convenient and departures have been increased to five daily.

■ New Swiss Rail Pass perk

Holders of the various Swiss Rail Passes now get a 25% discount off entry tickets to the **Olympic Museum** in Lausanne.

■ Now see cheese made in Engelberg

This mountain resort town in the very center of Switzerland, has just opened a demonstration dairy in an historic cloister.

■ New mountaintop restaurant

Mario Botta, the famed Swiss architect, is building a mountaintop restaurant on the summit of **Col du Pillon** (5,000 feet) near Les Diablerets. It's due to open in spring 2001. See www.glacier3000.ch.

■ Swissair bolsters coach service

The airline is making changes to its economy class service to "meet life-style and culinary expectations of its international passengers." Improvements include a bottle of fresh water in each seat pocket, amenity kits with eye-shades, and appetizer service to accompany drinks. Meal service will include fresh salad, bread and butter, a hot meal, and

separate coffee and desert service. On longer flights, movie snacks are available in the galley.

For families traveling through the Zürich Airport, Swissair provides a supervised playroom, dedicated play areas near the gates, a special check-in counter for families, special rooms with changing table for privacy, and facilities for warming baby food.

■ Family hotels in Tirol

Austria's Tirol region has 114 holiday areas which offer special children's programs, and 19 hotels are officially designated "family hotels," where trained personnel supervise children's activities free of charge five days a week.

Among the kid-friendly amenities are safety-approved playgrounds set in fields or woods, wading pools, and a full program of activities for children. Indoors, the hotels are also well equipped for young guests. There are playrooms with toys and games, special meals and cutlery, and no-smoking areas in dining rooms. A pediatrician is always on-call and designated "baby hotels" provide baby monitoring systems, as well as a kitchen where parents can warm bottles. Children under three stay in their parents' room free of charge.

The Tirolean tourism board, Tirol Werbung, offers a catalog of all hotels which meet the family hotel standards. Contact: Tirol Info, Maria-Theresien-Straße 55, A-6010 Innsbruck, tel. +43/0512/7272, fax 7272-7, e-mail: tirol.info@tis.co.at or visit www.tis.co.at/tirol. 

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

• **Grandhotel Giessbach, \$\$\$**, (June), Brienz, Switzerland, Ch-3855 Brienz, tel. +41/033/952 2525, fax 952 2530, email grandhotel@giessbach.ch, web www.giessbach.ch

• **Hotel Schloss Wilhelminen-berg, \$**, (July), Vienna, Austria, Savoyenstrasse 2, A-1160 Vienna, tel. +43/01/485 85030, fax +43/01/485 4876

• **Hotel Alpes et Lac, \$\$**, (Aug.), Neuchâtel, Switzerland, Place de la Gare 2, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, tel. +49/032/723 19 19, fax 723 19 20, email: hotel@alpesetlac.ch

• **Hotel Aramis, \$**, (Sept), Vienna, Austria, Döblinger Hauptstrasse 55, tel. +43/1/3698673, fax 3692480, web: www.albertina-hotels.at

• **Hotel Schloss Ort, \$\$**, (Oct.), Passau, Germany, Am Dreiflusseck, tel. +49/0851/340 72, fax 318 17

• **Hotel Terminus, \$\$**, (Nov.), Samedan, Switzerland, CH-7503 Samedan, tel. +41/081/852 5336, fax 852-44-52, Family Morell-Kapeller

Best Restaurants

• **Le Vieux Manoir au Lac, \$\$\$\$**, (Jan.), Murten, Switzerland, (See above for address, phone, etc.)

• **Die Ecke, \$\$**, (Feb.), Augsburg, Germany, Elias-Holl-Platz 2, tel. +49/0821/510 600

• **Restaurant-Pension Drei Tannen, \$**, (Mar.), Niederwald, Switzerland, CH-3981 Niederwald, tel./fax +41/027/9711173. Proprietor: Fam. H. Wirthner-Volken

• **Osteria Citta Vecchia, \$\$**, (Apr.), Munich, Germany, Hackenstr. 6-8, D-80331 Munich, tel. +49/089/23259885, fax 23259886

• **Prasna Basta, \$**, (June), Bratislava, Slovakia, Zamocnicka 11, tel. +421/07/54 43 49 57

• **Villa Aurora, \$\$**, (July), Vienna, Austria, Wilhelminenstrasse 237, tel. +43/01/489 33 33

• **La Maison des Halles, \$\$**, (Aug.), Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 4 Rue du Trésor, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, tel. 724 3141

• **Hacklberger Bräustüberl, \$**, (Oct.), Passau, Germany, Bräuhausplatz 7, tel. +49/0851/583 82, fax 75 22 13

• **Historische Schlossmühle, \$\$**, Horbruch, Germany (see page 1.) — RHB
\$\$\$\$=very expensive; \$\$\$=expensive; \$\$=moderate; \$=inexpensive.

www.gemut.com

A website for travelers to Germanic Europe