

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Air Ticket Buying Strategy

If you have been waiting for a fare war to buy airline tickets to Europe this summer, you may have been left at the gate. The time to buy was in February, March and April. Many assumed after 9/11 that a reeling airline industry would be begging for customers and very low ticket prices would follow. It hasn't happened that way. Though air travel across the Atlantic is down this year, the price of tickets is higher and likely to stay that way, at least into mid-October. After that, some \$450 to \$550 fares will return.

The main reason is the lack of capacity. There just aren't as many seats as last year. Counterbalancing a fairly strong demand from leisure travelers is the economy and 9/11. Both of which have thinned the ranks of business fliers who buy expensive first-class, business, and, because they often travel on short notice, full-fare economy tickets. Until demand from this more profitable market segment improves, airlines are reluctant to spend money to add flights.

A question we are frequently asked is "when do I purchase tickets?" Is it best to buy early when prices are low or wait until the airlines can't fill their seats and slash fares. Frankly, in 16 years we've never been able to satisfactorily resolve that dilemma. But now our travel department's experience in

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

CESKY KRUMLOV

In the early 90s, following the demise of communism, we began to hear from readers who had ventured the short drive from Germany or Austria into the Czech Republic to visit a walled town they sometimes compared to a pre-restoration Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

Our own visits in '96 and 2000 confirmed the reports. We found a medieval treasure just awakening from 50 years of neglect; a crumbling, immensely appealing city nearly encircled by the famed Moldau river, with a great castle looking down on ancient red-roofed buildings interlaced by a maze of twisting cobbled lanes.

But compared to the slick, Disneyland-style perfection of a Rothenburg, Cesky Krumlov was, and still is, a rough-around-the-edges country bumpkin.

Though much has now been restored, many buildings remain in a state of charming disrepair. The uneven cobbles

are not so easy to tread and many tourist shops still have a somewhat endearing, lemonade-stand amateurishness.

And only in the past few years has the tourist infrastructure, mainly hotels and restaurants, approached western European standards. With that, it seemed time for a more complete review of Krumlov than our brief reports in earlier issues. In April we assigned our Vienna-based correspondent, Doug Linton, to give us the following update.

A friend had long sung the praises of this lovely renaissance town in South Bohemia. "And don't worry about reserving a room," he added. "Practically every house is a pension, so you won't have any problems finding a place to stay." I arrived at Krumlov on a balmy June day a few years ago to

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Hidden Treasures...

Leukerbad

Up around the Furka Pass, at the foot of the Rhône Glacier, is where the river named Rhône begins its southwesterly trip to the eastern end of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). Think of the Rhône and its valley between Brig and Martigny as a spine with wiggly ribs

By Bob Bestor
extending from it on both sides. The "ribs" are intersecting valleys accessed by dead-end roads that snake up into the Alps. In these higher valleys are found some of Switzerland's best-known resorts: Zermatt, Saas Fee, Crans Montana, Verbier. Others, like Evolène, Zinal and the Lötschental, are not so well-known — at least by Americans.

In the lesser-known category is Leukerbad, population 1,700, a modest resort enclosed on three sides by the spectacular Gemmiwand, a sheer

rock wall that looms some 3,000 feet above it. From the town center, a cable car rises to the Gemmipass at nearly 8,000 feet, where walkers pick their way over a flat, rocky moonscape and picnic by an Alpine lake.

Leukerbad's main attraction for Europeans is the heated thermal waters which flow from the ground at 51 C (124 F) into dozens of public and private baths and pools. The town's public bathing facilities are impressive and extensive and many hotels have spa facilities.

But for most Americans, Leukerbad in summer is a place for taking it slow; poking around the village, lounging by a hotel pool, or perhaps riding up one of the cable cars for an easy mountain hike. Given its end-of-road location, about 30 minutes by

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER
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marketing consolidator air tickets over the past two years has taught us a few things about when and how to purchase an airline ticket to Europe.

Though our crystal ball is still cloudy, we have additional knowledge and experience that will make our "best guess" even better. Not only do we monitor the prices of four of the country's largest ticket consolidators, we keep an eye on airline websites and online ticket sellers such as **Travelocity**, **Orbitz** and **Expedia**.

So here is our up-to-date transatlantic-airline-ticket-buying-guide. It presupposes, of course, that you are looking for the best price. But even if choice of airline or schedule is more important than price, most of these strategies will help.

• **The three main rules for purchasing transatlantic airline tickets for summer travel:** Buy early. Buy early. Buy early. Over the last three years, and especially during the spring of 2002, those who purchased tickets in the January-March period got a better price than those who waited. And, for the most part, the earlier the better. There were occasional sales in April and May but they were so brief, so restrictive and so isolated to certain markets and destinations that only the most watchful and flexible buyers were able to take advantage of them.

Prices for summer travel marched

steadily upward from February to June. Many who turned up their noses at an \$800 July fare in February wound up three months later paying \$100 to \$400 more for the same flight.

• **Be flexible regarding travel dates:** Though it's not always possible, try to have a broad range of dates on which you can travel. There may be only a dozen cheap tickets on the flight you want but if you can fly any day within a 10-day period your chances of getting one of those cheap tickets increases by a factor of 10. Traveling on a weekend day, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, in most cases will raise your ticket price by about \$25 — \$50 if you fly both directions on those days.

• **Be flexible regarding destination:** On the continent, fares to Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt are usually the least expensive. Munich isn't far behind. Expect slightly higher fares to places like Prague, Vienna, Rome, and Milan.

• **Be flexible regarding departure city:** If you live in a town served by a small airport but are within two or three hours' drive of a major airport, compare prices from both. It may pay you to do a one-way car rental (try National) from your home to the larger airport (and another one-way rental upon return) or perhaps leave your car with a friend in the larger city. Also, those who live in certain sections of the eastern U.S. can choose from several airports.

• **Be prepared to spend time on the project.** Searching a dozen or so

airline and travel websites for a variety of departure/arrival dates and cities can take hours and days. Especially if your Internet connection is via a dial-up 56K modem. And sitting on hold to get quotes from three or four airlines is another time eater.

You can turn it over to a travel agent in which case you may be charged a service fee. Airlines no longer pay commissions and consolidators usually offer "net" fares which means the agent mark up the price or add a service fee.

Here's our three-step guide to finding the lowest fares:

• **Step #1. Register at airline websites.** Most airlines send out periodic emails of special fares available online. **American Airlines**, for example, fires off a weekly email of low fare offerings. In many cases you'll also find a place on an airline's website where special deals are offered.

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Using Gemütlichkeit

- 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".

Logging on to Gemütlichkeit's Website

Except for the most recent 12, back issues in text format from January 1993 are available free to subscribers only at <http://www.gemut.com> (click on "For Members Only"). To access the issues enter the user name and password published in this space each month. The June codes are:

User Name: **cskv** Password: **7654**

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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	Hotel 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.

CESKY KRUMLOV*Continued from page 1*

find my friend was right. Krumlov is located on a hilly, oxbow bend of the Vltava (Moldau) river. The flat inner part of the bow is tightly filled with decorative burgher and artisan townhouses dating from the 16th-century, while the high, rocky outer part is lined with a dominating complex of castles topped, like a fairy tale, with a colorful tower. It is easy to see why the city had been selected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

My friend was also right that practically every house is a pension. The only problem was they were all booked. I scurried from burgher house to artisan dwelling, knocking at every door, but all were full. Banished from the city, we ended up spending the night in an empty, superficially lavish hotel in Hluboka. Despite the rejection, Krumlov was so beautiful that I vowed to come again.

That day came a few weeks ago and this time everything went smoothly. The weather was perfect and I had a place to stay. But the town has changed since my initial, brief visit.

First, accommodations have certainly improved. Previously, Krumlov had only two good hotels — the **Ruze** and the **Dvorak** — and a lot of poorly-furnished pensions housed in attractive historical buildings. Today, the owners of the Ruze have opened a third good hotel on the market square, called the **Old Inn**. But even better news is that the quality of the small pensions has improved, while the prices have stayed relatively low, making Krumlov an excellent bargain.

Second, a few factors have conspired to decrease the number of tourists visiting Krumlov. Miroslav Votrel, who with his father runs the **Hotel Na Louzi**, says most tourists come from neighboring Austria and Germany. Since much of the bus tour set has already seen the city, the number of visitors from those two countries has dropped. In addition, the Czech koruna has strengthened against the euro, making the city a little more expensive for European

Cesky Krumlov Basics**Population:** 14,500**Elevation:** 550 meters / 1804 feet

Tourist Information: Cesky Krumlov Info Center, náměstí Svornosti 2, 381 01, Cesky Krumlov, tel. +420/337/704622, fax 337-704623, email infocentrum@ckrf.ckrumlov.cz

Driving Distances to Cesky Krumlov:

Prague	171 km	106 miles
Frankfurt	639 km	397 miles
Munich	361 km	224 miles
Salzburg	208 km	129 miles
Passau	123 km	76 miles
Regensburg	319 km	198 miles
Linz	74 km	46 miles

Rail links: Rail travel to Cesky Krumlov from Germany and Austria is possible but not very practical. The 73-kilometer trip from Linz takes over four hours and two train changes. From Regensburg it's nearly eight hours and four changes. The journey down from Prague is 4:24 with one 36-minute change in Ceske Budejovice.

visitors. A greater factor, however, is the recent tension between the Czech Republic and its two neighbors over issues such as the soon to be opened Temelin nuclear reactor located north of Ceske Budejovice, and demands for an annulment of the Benes decree, the executive order that allowed for the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia after the war.

What this all means for independent travelers, is that annoying bus crowds are smaller, the high season is shorter (making May and September less crowded and more enjoyable), and the small pensions are working harder to please and attract clientele. Still, if you are planning to visit the city on a summer weekend, be sure to book a room in advance. Otherwise you might miss something memorable: such as a lovely evening's dinner on the terrace of a restaurant overlooking the cool, tree-shaded Vltava river, while the sky turns pink, purple and dark blue as the sun sinks behind Krumlov castle perched high overhead.

Accommodations**Hotel Ruze**

Located in the former 16th-century Jesuit monastery, the Ruze is the city's most luxurious and expensive hotel. Its 70-rooms play a bit heavily on the 16th-century theme, giving it the atmosphere of an upscale Renaissance festival. The staff dresses up as

maids and peasants, suits of armor and tapestries fill the lobby and lounge, and neo-renaissance décor, such as turned-wood armchairs and benches covered in deep burgundy fabrics, grace the public rooms. While pleasing to the eye, these renaissance chairs and benches are not particularly comfortable. Rooms offer a continuation on this theme, especially the large suites, which have heavy beamed ceilings and dark wood floors. The standard rooms are less gloomy, with bright yellow and blue fabrics adding a touch of color. Both have fairly new baths with good fixtures and the suites even have wood-paneled toilets.

Even if you are not a hotel guest, the Ruze's large, lovely terrace is worth visiting for the view. Tables in the restaurant are set with interesting wrought-iron tableware and hand-blown wineglasses. The hotel offers a full range of exercise facilities, meeting rooms and a pool. Perched on a rise at the end of town, the Ruze has a nice view over a quiet, tree-shaded section of the river, but any journey into town will end with a steep walk home.

Daily Rates: Singles 2300 to 4300 CZK (\$69-\$130), doubles 3200-6000 CZK (\$96-\$181).

Contact: Hotel Ruze, Horni 154, tel +420/337/772 100, fax +420/337/713 146, email: info@hoelruze.cz, web: www.hotelruze.cz

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

The Old Inn

Under the same management as the Ruze, the Old Inn shares the renaissance décor and outfits of its sibling, but has a more likeable atmosphere, possibly due to its central location on the main square and slightly smaller scale — only 50 rooms. The lobby looks about the same as its sister, although the staff tends to be friendlier than at the Ruze.

The standard rooms are more rustic with unvarnished wardrobes and headboards set on low pile carpets. Anyone who has ever wanted to spend the night in a room decorated with pink fabrics, pink Persian rugs, and gilded white Louis-the-something furniture can fulfill this dream by booking one of the suites.

Hallways are large and spacious, giving the unintended impression of a Holiday Inn.

The Old Inn has an attractive restaurant on the main square and a menu featuring well-priced Bohemian favorites.

Daily Rates: Single 1400-3000 CZK (\$42-\$90), doubles 2000-4000 CZK (\$60-\$121)

Contact: The Old Inn, Namesti Svornosti, tel +420/337/772 500, Fax +420/337/772 550, email: info@hoteloldinn.cz, web: www.hoteloldinn.cz

Rating: Quality 12/20, Value 14/20

Hotel Dvorak

Of the three headline hotels, this is the most likeable, mainly because of its boutique feel and picturesque riverside location under the castle.

The lobby has an early 90s luxury feel with red granite floors, upholstered chairs in burgundy leather, dark wood paneling, brass accents and gleaming halogen lights.

The staff is very friendly, though both the lobby and the small bar seem always empty, even when the hotel is full.

The comfortable accommodations settle down to light green and white, with thick carpets, floral drapes, crystal wall lamps and chandeliers, and attractive, slightly rustic wood furniture. Baths are gleaming white tile with good-sized tubs, towel warmers and hairdryers.

Standard doubles look to the city, deluxe rooms have views of the river, and suites occupy the corners.

Daily Rates: Singles 2200-3400 CZK (\$66-\$103), doubles 2800-4300 CZK (\$84-\$130), suites 3400-7800 CZK (\$103-\$235)

Contact: Hotel Dvorak, Radnicní 101, tel +420/337/711 020, fax +420/337/711 024, email dvorak@ckmbox.vol.cz web: www.ckrumlov.cz/uk/mesto/rp-phv/i_dvorak.htm

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Hotel Na Louzi

Though it calls itself a hotel, Na Louzi is more like a homey, welcoming, family-run pension. This charming hostelry is located in a fres-

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

coed, baroque building a short walk from the **Egon Schiele Museum**.

As is common with many buildings in Krumlov, a restaurant occupies the downstairs, while the pension takes the floors above. What is uncommon is the good taste that has gone into the decor. All guestrooms are furnished with attractive early 20th-century antiques, so not only the building's facade, but every guestroom radiates an authentic feeling of "old Krumlov." Each has its own name and personality. *Agnes* is the most requested because of its Holz baroque furniture. Three new loft rooms have just opened bringing the total number of guestrooms to 11. They have beam ceilings, wooden floors, antique tiles, and old wood-and-wrought-iron doors collected from farmhouses around southern Bohemia. *Katerina*, a two-level maisonette, and *Matej*, one of the most spacious are preferable.

Overall, rooms are a bit small and none really has a view of the river or castle, but these negatives are firmly outweighed by the owners' warm welcome and the hotel's sense of authenticity.

Daily Rates: Doubles 1200 CZK (\$36), triples and quad rooms 1500-2000 CZK (\$45-\$60)

Contact: Hotel Na Louzi, Kájovská 66, tel +420/337/711 280, fax +420/337/711 280, email: hotel@nalouzi.cz, web: www.nalouzi.cz

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Pension Dum U Václava

Located near the castle, this pension benefits from the exacting eye of its owner, Dagmar Vondrovicová. The spacious rooms are attractively decorated with four-poster beds, wood beam ceilings, satin upholstered chairs, polished wood floors and tasteful color schemes, such as pearl blue and pale salmon. Even more surprising are the large, opulent baths with dual sinks and corner tubs.

For now, U Václava only has three rooms, but four slightly smaller loft rooms will be added by the end of the summer.

Breakfast is served in an elegant barrel-vaulted dining room with a small fireplace and view to the neigh-

bor's garden. Ms. Vondrovicová plans to add a terrace and begin serving lunch and dinner next year. Although Dum U Václava does not allow children, it offers solid accommodations at great value.

Daily Rates: Doubles 2400 CZK (\$73)

Contact: Dum U Václava, Nové Mesto, tel/fax +420/337/715 094, email: uvaclava@quick.cz, web: www.uvaclava.com

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Pension Barbakán

A bit further out than the Hotel Ruze, these attractive lodgings are in a complex of little baroque houses perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Moldau.

A long hallway leads back to the cheerful reception and lounge/breakfast room. The receptionist is friendly and helpful, though more fluent in German than in English (not an uncommon trait in the city).

Recently renovated, the Barbakán sports a vibrant green and mustard color scheme and tasteful contemporary furnishings. Deluxe rooms are large with views over the river and large, modern baths, while standards are a bit smaller and have showers only. One quite attractive standard room has a sloping ceiling and a view of the river. Ask for the antique rooms, as these are the nicest.

Like the Ruze, this pension's location means that every excursion will end with a steep (but manageable) walk home.

Daily Rates: Singles 800-1600 CZK (\$24-\$48), doubles 1450-1550 CZK (\$44-\$47)

Contact: Pension Barbakán, Horní 26, tel/fax +420/337/717 017, email barbakan@ck.ipex.cz

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Pension Ve Vezi

Located in a four-story gothic tower, Pension Ve Vezi has to be the city's most picturesque pension. The inside is both attractively furnished and well-maintained. The only drawback is the tower's location on the edge of town near the Eggenberger Brewery, with a view of its parking lot. While the brewery is an attractive 19th-century brick building, the park-

ing lot is...well, a parking lot.

Daily Rates: Double room 1200 CZK (\$36), room with four beds 1800 CZK (\$54)

Contact: Pension Ve Vezi, Pivovaska 28, tel/fax +420/337/711 742, email: info@reality-kolar.cz

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 15/20

Pension Na Ostrove

The attraction of these simple accommodations is their location on a small island in the river under the tower — a picturesque sight indeed. As the building is narrow, your room may have windows on both sides so you can sleep with the stereophonic warbling of the small canal one side and the river on the other.

Na Ostrove's drawbacks, however, are evident. The lobby, which doubles as a restaurant, smells pervasively of cooking oil, an odor that occupies the hallways during the day. The rooms are large, but poorly furnished with clunky, threadbare communist-era furniture. Breakfast, served on a small terrace over the canal, consisted of muddy instant coffee, dry toast, and strange looking ham. The three staffers I met were pleasant, but spoke only the barest essentials of English or German. The only thing going for Na Ostrove is its location, but I would return on the strength of that alone.

Daily Rates: Singles 600 CZK (\$18), doubles 1200 CZK (\$36).

Contact: Pension Na Ostrove, Na Ostrove 171, tel +420/337/711 326

Rating: QUALITY 5/20, VALUE 12/20

Sustenance

Restaurant Na Louzi

This attractively simple restaurant — popular with Czechs and foreigners alike — serves admirable examples of Czech comfort food.

The setting is an ancient wood paneled room with brass coat hooks and a collection of old enamel signs advertising long-forgotten products.

Most dishes include roast meats (pork, duck and rabbit) served with two types of dumplings (potato and bread) and two types of sauerkraut (red and white) for around 115-139 CZK (\$3.50-\$4.19). The meat was

tender without being greasy, the dumplings spongy but not rubbery, and the sauerkraut flavorful instead of bland. In other words: top quality Czech food. The potato pancakes were good, but avoid the oily garlic soup and the house specialties with names like Rosenberg Court (133 CZK/\$4), as they seemed to be a mishmash of leftovers spruced up with grated cheese. The fried cheese with salad is a local favorite at 66 CZK (\$2). And, of course, the beer on tap was all Czech and all good.

Restaurant Na Louzi, Kájovská 66, tel +420/337/711 280, fax +420/337/711 280, email: hotel@nalouzi.cz, web: www.nalouzi.cz, open daily, 10am-11pm.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 13/20

U Dwan Maryí

The Two Marys gets its name from a pair of frescos of the Virgin Mother on the street side of this old artisan house. I was attracted by a row of wooden tables and benches set out on a short, green lawn along the river — a wonderful spot to end the day. It was soon apparent I had stumbled upon a theme restaurant, but one so genuine in its enthusiasm and matter-of-fact in presentation, it seemed more than just a gimmick.

The theme is old Bohemian — really old. On the menu are essays on what Southern Bohemians have eaten (millet) since the first centuries of the last millennium. The dishes listed consist mainly of, well, millet. I am anything but a grain-eating vegetarian, but after several meat-heavy Czech meals, something different was called for. The menu essays were so interesting I not only chose a main course of baked millet casserole with mushrooms (78 CZK/\$2.35), but ordered a dessert of millet gruel sweetened with raisins, honey and saffron.

The lively menu also revealed that the medieval elite ate pickled herring for breakfast and that buckwheat raises the "sexual function."

Though not very erotic, my casserole was light and flaky and came with tangy yogurt, sides of fresh sauerkraut and a salad. Other dishes include potato pancakes with cabbage (48 CZK/\$1.45) and barley cas-

serole (74 CZK/\$2.23), which, like the millet, can be ordered with a dry chicken leg for 50 CZK (\$1.51) extra, though I don't recommend it. Besides the gruel, which was good but not for everyone (66 CZK/\$2), desserts include quark dumplings with fruit (72 CZK/\$2.17) and a bowl of wild berry compote with whipped cream (72 CZK/\$2.17).

U Dwan Maryí, Parkán, tel +420/337/5228, open daily, 10am-11pm.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20

Rybárské Obcerstvení

This simple, riverside restaurant serves delicious carp, trout, eel, pike-perch and other fish cooked a variety of ways but all at a bargain price of around 75-95 CZK (\$2.25-\$2.86), plus 20 CZK (60 cents) more for a side dish of potatoes.

An ordinary-sized Russian woman at the next table liked the food so much she had servings of both fried eel and fried trout. Besides good food, the restaurant also has friendly service and a few pike heads mounted on the wall.

Rybárské Obcerstvení, Na Ostrove 86, tel +420/337/712532, fax +420/337/712580.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

HIDDEN TREASURES

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car from the Rhône, Leukerbad is not a headquarters from which to make daytrips.

The town is accessible by car and most SBB fast trains stop at Leuk-Susten where a bus winds the last 30 minutes up to the resort.

Accommodations & Food

One of our most memorable hotel stays was three nights in Leukerbad's **Les Sources des Alpes**, a swank 26-room hideaway with spa facilities and a top-of-the-line restaurant.

Your first day at Les Sources might begin with a sunny, alfresco breakfast that will include fresh-squeezed orange juice and coffee brewed to order at your table in a Melior pot. Next could be a walk to the village to purchase supplies for a picnic luncheon. Assuming you left

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Taking the Cure at Leukerbad

To many on this side of the Atlantic — certainly including this writer — “taking the waters” is a mysterious, almost occult, European ritual. How, the unsophisticated American mind wonders, can procedures that all seem to involve one’s body being pushed, pulled or pounded by streams of air, water or by a person with incredibly strong hands who pretends not to understand cries of pain in English, heal anything?

Such strange rites surely have their roots in medieval dungeons. “Therapies” like *Bain hydroélectrique*, *Bain ou sulfureux* and *Interferator* sound suspiciously as if they might be used to obtain the truth. More sinister yet is *Drainage lymphatique manuel complet*.

A few years ago, at the Hotel Les Sources des Alpes in Leukerbad, we took the opportunity to find out under the most ideal of circumstances.

My therapist — Mr. T., as I came privately to refer to him — ushered me to a small, tiled room where I would undergo *Bain bouillonnant* (*Sprudelbad*, in German). Doffing my fluffy, hotel-supplied terrycloth robe, but still wearing swimming trunks, I climbed into a tub of warm, murky water, there to lie suspended in the contoured vessel, my limbs arranged just so. My head rested on a rubber pillow at the edge of the tub. Mr. T. positioned himself at its end, facing me. Grinning, he began to manipulate the various dials, switches and valves. Soon the tub began to vibrate and emit a series of noises that at once reminded me of a steam train leaving the station and the Blue Angels flying at Mach I. The first sensation was of air or water — perhaps both — slowly at first, but with gathering force, directed at the bottoms of my feet. The pressure next found my ankles and worked its way along the contour of my body. It ended with a rather satisfying stream that traveled the length of my back. Once this rotation of feet, ankles, kidneys, elbows, etc., was completed (in about 30 seconds) it began again. This went on for

about 20 minutes. Strangely, the surface of the water was virtually undisturbed. Quite an unusual and agreeable experience, but not one I imagine that has appreciably extended my life. Twenty minutes of *Sprudelbad* set me back about \$25.

Mr. T. was a robust, 60ish man with a bushy grey mustache who spoke no English and little German. We communicated in grunts. During my “tare-a-pees” he must have grunted “Gute?” every three or four minutes. Whether it was a machine pummeling me, his hands fine tuning my ribcage, or jets of water and air attempting to bore through my body, his question was always the same: “Gute?” In my limited German I var-

“He demonstrated steel rod fingers with which I am certain he can rearrange internal organs without the necessity of surgery.”

ied my replies among “Ja, Gute,” “Sehr Gute,” “Wunderbar” and “Schöne.” Occasionally, I was even telling the truth.

A less enjoyable procedure employs a forbidding looking apparatus which the “interrogatee” faces while seated. Each leg from the knee down is placed into separate metal containers on the floor, and each arm into identical vessels about the size of roasting pans. These are affixed to a machine bristling with knobs and various digital counters, two of which were to rivet my attention over the next 10 minutes. The idea, apparently, is to increase circulation in the joints by directing alternating streams of warm and cold water into the four pans. My cycle was one minute of warm followed by seven seconds of cold. That’s Alpine cold. It is a process that cannot possibly be designed to relax. Yes, at first it felt great, but that precious minute of warm water soon ticks away and the seven agonizing seconds of cold must be en-

dured yet again.

A digital indicator which displayed the temperature of the water quickly commanded my full attention. My running thought commentary went something like this: “34, 35, 36, (Celsius), ah good, nice and warm but I could stand it a little hotter, oops, 30, 27, 20, 10, 7. Lord, that’s cold.”

After one or two cycles, like Pavlov’s dogs, I began to anticipate the changes (o.k., o.k., so it took me a while to get the correlation between the numbers and the pain). But they never came close to breaking me. *Fuss-und Armwechselbad* was about \$20.

Liz, my wife, reported less salubrious results. One of her therapies was a CO² bath. She sat in a tub of the murky but health-giving waters draped with towels so only her head was visible. No noise, no rush of air or water, just a few bubbles occasionally rising from the warm liquid.

She also was favored with *Douche de Vichy ou d’Evian* — a \$28 number — which consisted of a massage while being sprayed with either Vichy or Evian mineral water. An acquired taste, perhaps.

There were other adventures. A fancy battery charger kneaded my back with little black suction cups, and Mr. T. did it further damage during a massage that demonstrated steel rod fingers with which I am certain he can rearrange internal organs without the necessity of surgery.

The best part of our “cure,” however, was its epilogue. Swathed in robes and bath slippers, we padded the few steps to the warm, sparkling little outdoor pool, with its fabulous view of the sheer rock wall looming over the city. There we luxuriated for 20 or 30 minutes. When we emerged from the water a pool attendant met us with large, heated bath towels.

Wrapped in these and our robes, we sank exhausted onto chaises and capped our therapy with a cold beer. —RHB

HIDDEN TREASURES*Continued from page 5*

the hotel properly attired for a few hours in the mountains, the day's next event is a short stroll to the **Gemmi Cableway** station for a ride to the high country (22 Sfr./\$14 RT). As the gondola slides past that fearsome vertical rock face you'll notice the ant-like figures of fitter, braver souls making their way to the top (or descending) via a path carved from the rock. They are not climbers but walkers, and what they are doing appears dangerous only in the sense there are many places where the narrow trail skirts the very edge of the precipice.

At the top is a network of paths. One leads gently downhill to Sunnbuel, above Kandersteg, from which the Kander Valley can be reached via cable car. From Kandersteg, a return to Leukerbad is possible by rail and bus. Most, however, will probably want to find a spot by the Daubensee for a picnic and return via the Gemmi Cableway.

Back at the hotel you're just in time for your spa treatment and massage reservation. Afterwards, a bit weary from the high altitude and from being manipulated by strong hands and powerful jets of water at widely varying temperatures, you shuffle on shaky legs to Les Sources' inviting outdoor pool.

Tossing aside your thick terry-cloth robe, you slip into the warm water and paddle about while watching a late afternoon thunderstorm gather above the massive Gemmiwand. With a nap and a magnificent dinner still to be crossed off the day's checklist, you gratefully contemplate the twists and turns of life that delivered you to this place at this time.

Just when the sky looks its blackest you climb out of the pool and into a big, thick towel the pool attendant takes from a stainless steel warmer. It is now officially nap time and through the open French doors that lead to your room's balcony, you hear the first drops of rain just as your head hits the pillow.

Dinner is in the hotel's elegant **Restaurant La Malvoisie**. After start-

ing with a refreshing melon soup, you turn your attention to the main event; a Bresse chicken. It comes in stages. First, the breast is carved and served with a buttery truffle sauce. The legs and wings are returned to the kitchen for additional cooking and brought back a few minutes later with little skillet of sauteed wild mushrooms and a side dish of perfectly steamed spinach that began its day in the hotel's garden in Sion.

Your waiter has suggested a bottle of Capannelle rosse, a Merlot from the Italian house of R. Rossetti. The wine is delicious but expensive — about \$50. No matter, tonight is a special occasion.

After a light dessert of house-made sorbets selected from containers off a cart brought to the table, you try unsuccessfully to ignore the restaurant's parting gift, a small plate of intensely-flavored chocolates.

The day nearly done, you follow the sound of live piano music across the lobby to the wood paneled bar. There you sink onto a comfortable couch or chair and enjoy the final beverage of the evening, perhaps a finger of single malt whiskey or a glass of vintage port. Now it's really nap time.

As you have by now discerned, Les Sources des Alpes is expensive. But there are dozens — hundreds if you add in a long list of vacation rentals — of less expensive accommodations in Leukerbad.

The modern **Hotel Astoria**, for example, is not far from the center and double rooms range from 150 to 190 Sfr. (\$96-\$122). The more rustic, chalet-style **Walliserhof** has doubles starting at 136. Sfr. (\$87).

On a hillside near the edge of town, the **Appartementhaus Alfa** offers one-and-a-half and two-room flats starting at 301 Sfr. (\$193) to 501 Sfr. (\$332) per week.

The spic 'n span **Appartementhaus Europe** has larger apartments with spacious south-facing balconies and sleeping accommodations for up to five persons. Depending on the season, weekly rates range from 594 to 734 Sfr. (\$381-\$471).


Leukerbad Hotel/Restaurant Data

Hotel Les Sources des Alpes, CH-3954 Leukerbad, Tuftstrasse 17, tel. +41/027/472 20 00, fax 472 20 01, email: sda.leukerbad@freesurf.ch. Singles 290 - 530 Sfr. (\$186-\$340), doubles 470-710 Sfr. (\$301-\$455)

Hotel Astoria, CH-3954 Leukerbad, tel. +41/027/470 14 15, fax 470 22 18, email: astoria@leukerbad.ch. Singles 85 - 105 Sfr. (\$54-\$67), doubles 150-190 Sfr. (\$96-\$122)

Hotel Walliserhof, tel. +41/027/472 79 60, fax 472 79 65, email: oretan@walliserhof.ch. Singles 87 - 97 Sfr. (\$56-\$62), doubles 164 -184 Sfr. (\$105-\$118)

Appartementhaus Europe, Robert Lambrigger - Klibenstrasse 2, CH-3954 Leukerbad, tel. +41/027/470 14 60, fax 470 14 65, email: europa@rhone.ch. Weekly rentals from 385 Sfr. (\$247)

Appartementhaus ALFA, Fam. Roten-Loretan, CH-3954 Leukerbad, tel. +41/027/472 74 70, fax 472 74 75, email arthur.roten@bluewin.ch. Weekly rentals from 301 Sfr. (\$193) 

Readers' Forum**Correction on Hummel Founder**

You may want to correct your May edition ("Coburg") comment that Rödental was the birthplace of Berta Hummel, the remarkable artist who, as Sister Maria Innocentia (thus M.I. Hummel) created the artwork Goebel uses for its prized figurines.

As you said, Rödental — near Coburg — is the home of the Goebel factory and a highly-enjoyable destination for visitors, but "Sister Hummel" was born in the market village of Massing, east of Munich, where her family still operates a **Hummel Museum**. This is also a great destination for travelers. A third Hummel site worth a visit is the convent at Siessen, near Salgua — south of Stuttgart — where Sister worked, lived and died. She is buried on the grounds of the convent.

FRED HOFFMAN
ROCHESTER HILLS MI

Train Reservations: Another View

I would like to thank you for the detailed explanation of rail travel in your April 2002 issue. I feel obliged, however, to respond to your comments on rail reservations as I think it essential your readers be aware of recent changes in rail travel.

Since 2001, European railroads have been yield-managing trains like **Eurostar** and **Thalys**, where advance reservations entitle travelers to low-end fares which, by and large, will

not be available on a walk-up basis. They have also begun to distinguish between full-fare ticket holders and pass holders (which they view as discounted tickets) on trains such as the ICE, TGV and Eurostar Italia. Each train has allotments for pass-holders and it is totally possible that they will not be accommodated on a walk-up basis — thus another reason to reserve in advance.

Finally, though traditionally trains have been rarely full, that has changed dramatically since 9/11. Heightened security in European airports has driven passengers increasingly to the railroads who are experiencing a load factor level never before seen.

JIM PRCHLIK
PACIFIC AREA SALES MANAGER
RAIL EUROPE GROUP

Rocks of Ages in Evolène

I read with interest your recent "Hidden Treasures" article featuring the hamlet of Evolène. I concur that it is truly a lovely village and as close to traveling back in time as is possible in much-touristed Switzerland.

However, you left out a most interesting feature of visiting this hamlet. This is the drive up from Sion and the opportunity to view the remarkable geologic formations known as "capstones;" unique "balancing" rocks formed during the ice age when glaciers left granite boulders suspended precipitously atop softer limestone columns. They are worth the trip up the valley themselves, but with Evolène as a destination it makes for a truly unique travel experience.

DAVID WOMACK
GREENVILLE NC

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

You may have to check regularly, however. Try, for example, the ticket auctions on the websites of Lufthansa and LTU.

• Step #2. Survey the Market.

Before you know whether or not a price is good, you must compare it. Start with the big online ticket sellers Orbitz, Travelocity and Expedia. They'll give you a good idea of the market. One of them may even have

the lowest price. Next, visit airline websites to check prices. Look carefully for links to special deals, which sometimes are not prominently displayed.

• **Step #3. Purchase the Ticket.** By now you know the lay of the land. It's almost time to make your purchase, but first you need to check consolidator fares (*Gemütlichkeit*, 800-521-6722). Usually, but not always, they'll be lower than what you've seen so far. At this point, most shoppers have enough information to make the purchase. Always pay by credit card and, since most tickets have stiff cancellation penalties, trip cancellation insurance is recommended.

However, for those who don't care about mileage awards, which airline they fly, or what time of day they travel, there are two other low-cost options, both online — **Priceline.com** and **Hotwire.com**.

With Priceline, you enter departure and arrival cities, a credit card number, and then set your own price. If your bid is accepted there is no going back, no refund or cancellation. After your credit card is accepted you are given the airline and the flight itinerary. If your bid is turned down you can try again but you'll have to change your trip parameters. Hotwire works a little differently; it gives you the price up-front and if it's acceptable you provide a credit card. Like Priceline, there is no mileage credit and you don't know the airline or which flights you'll be on until they have your money.

Experts seem to agree Priceline is usually the least expensive way to purchase an airline ticket.

Websites for Transatlantic Air Tickets

- Expedia: www.expedia.com
- Hotwire: www.hotwire.com
- Orbitz: www.orbitz.com
- Priceline: www.priceline.com
- Travelocity: www.travelocity.com
- Air Canada: www.aircanada.com
- American Airlines: www.aa.com
- Continental Airlines: www.continental.com
- Delta Airlines: www.delta.com
- LTU: www.ltu.com
- Lufthansa: www.lufthansa.com
- Northwest Airlines: www.nwa.com
- Swiss Airlines: www.swiss.com
- United Airlines: www.ual.com
- USAir: www.usair.com

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is a new *Gemütlichkeit* feature intended for quick reference. We'd like to know if you find it useful. Additional hotels and links to websites of these hotels can be found in the Archives section of our website at www.gemut.com. The required subscriber user name and password for access this month can be found on page 2 herein. The hotels are arranged in price order, higher to lower.

Berlin

Hotel Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40, email hotelartnouveau@snafu.de

Hotel Domus, Uhländstrasse 49, Germany D-10719, tel. +49/030/882041, fax 882 0410, email: info@hotel-domus-berlin.de

Bern

Hotel Innere Enge, Engestrasse 54, CH-3012, tel. +41/031/309 6111, fax 309 6112, email: info@zghotels.ch

Hotel Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3000, tel. +41/031/329 9595, fax 329 95 96, email: hotelkreuz@swissonline.ch

Lausanne

Hostellerie du Débarcadère, 7 chemin du Cret, Saint Sulpice, CH-102, tel. +41/021/691 5747, fax 691 5079, email: debarcadere@swissonline.ch (not in town)

Hotel Agora, Av. du Rond-Point 9, CH-1006, Tel. +41/021/617 1211, fax 616 2605, email: agora@fhotels.ch

Lucerne

Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, email: mail@wilden-mann.ch

Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel: +41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, Email: info@cascada.ch

Munich

Hotel Asam, Josephspitalstrasse 3, tel. +49/089/230 9700, fax 230 970 97, email: info@hotel-asam.de.

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24 fax 5503856, email kraft.hotel@t-online.de

Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Reichs-Küchenmeister, Kirchplatz 8, Rothenburg o.d. Tauber, Germany D-91541, tel. +49/09861/97 00, fax 97 04 09, email: hotel@reichskuechenmeister.com

Salzburg

Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, Austria A-5020 tel. +43/0662/843 728, fax 843 728 8, email: struber@sbg.at

Hotel Jedermann, Rupertgasse 25, Austria A-5020, tel. +43/0662/873241-0, fax 873241-9, email: jedermann@salzburginfo.or.at

Vienna

Hotel Römischer Kaiser, Annagasse 16, A-1010, tel +43/01/512 77 51 0, fax 512 77 51 13, email: info@rkhotel.bestwestern.com

Altstadt Vienna, Kirchengasse 41, tel. +43/01/526 3399-0, fax 523 4901, email: hotel@altstadt.at, web: www.altstadt.at

Pension Aviano, Marco-D'Aviano-Gasse 1, tel. +43/01/512 8330, fax 512 8330 6, email: aviano@pertschy.com

Zürich

Hotel Florhof, Florhofgasse 4, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. 41/01/261 4470, fax 261 4611, email: info@florhof.ch

Hotel Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932

Frankfurt Airport

Steigenberger Esprit Hotel Frankfurt Airport, CargoCity Süd, D-60549, tel. +49/069/69 70 99, fax 69 70 94 44, email: frankfurt@esprit-hotels.de

Hotel Birkenhof, von-Eiff-Str 37, Hanau-Steinheim, D-63456, tel. +49/06181/648 80, fax 64 88 39, email: info@HotelBirkenhof.de (25-minute drive from airport)

Hotel Dreieich, Frankfurter Str. 49, Langen, D-63225, tel. +49/06103/91 50, fax 52 030 (15-minute drive from airport)

Munich Airport

Kempinski Hotel Airport, Terminalstrasse/Mitte 20, D-85356 Munich, tel. +49/089/9782-0, fax 97822610, info@kempinski-airport.de

Hotel Hoyacker Hof, Freisinger Landstrasse 9a, D-85748 Garching b. München, tel. +49/089/326 9900, fax 320 7243, email: info@hoyackerhof.de

Zürich Airport

Mövenpick Zürich Airport, Walter-Mittelholzerstrasse 8, CH-8152 Glattbrugg, tel. +41/01/808 88 88, fax 808 88 77, email: hotel@movenpick-zurich-airport.ch

Hotel Fly Away, Marktgasse 19, Zürich-Kloten, Switzerland CH-8302, tel. +41/01/804 4455, fax 804 44 50, email: reservation@hotel-flyaway.ch