

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Fancy Restaurants

I must be regressing. Twenty-five years ago, when I couldn't afford them, I yearned to dine in restaurants rated three-stars by Michelin. Now I could not care less. That goes for most two-star and many one-star establishments as well.

Actually it isn't regression, it's just that I now have a better idea of what's important and what's not. And what's not is \$75-plus bottles of wine, \$35 main courses and dinner tabs for two that add up to more than about \$150 — no matter how artfully the food is arranged on the plate, no matter how correct and pseudo-friendly the service, or how old the wine. For me, the point of diminishing returns kick in somewhere around these prices, which of course won't get you through the first course in a three-star.

This has been coming on for some time. My first food epiphany took place a few years ago in **Restaurant La Terrasse** at one of my favorite hotels, the **Victoria Jungfrau** in Interlaken. Having just read some food magazine hype about the scarcity and preciousness of white truffles from Italy, and how billionaires make pilgrimages to Italy in private jets just to eat them, I ordered up a first course of risotto sprinkled with them — risotto being rice, a dietary staple of billions of the planet's poorest people. It was a night when La Terrasse apparently didn't have its "A" team in the

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

INTERNATIONAL GENEVA

Headquarters for the United Nations in Europe, the Red Cross and several other international organizations, French-speaking Geneva is cosmopolitan — and pricey.

A quiet breakfast on a summer morning in an elegant Geneva hotel. At one table a dapper, 60-something captain of industry wears a business suit that cost the equivalent of an around-the-world airline ticket. Opposite him a scruffy teenager with multiple body piercings and rainbow-colored hair wears jeans frayed *à la mode du jour*. Surprisingly, they speak to each other in warm tones punctuated by an occasional laugh. The scene is a perfect metaphor for Geneva, a city of contrasts and tolerance.

Stand in the heart of downtown, and you can feel the electricity of one of the world's most cosmopolitan, international cities. Head five min-

utes in almost any direction and you can relax in rolling vineyards or on the expansive waters of Lake Geneva. One minute, it's an international city with 208 banks, 65 watch manufacturers and an alphabet soup of United Nations agencies (Geneva's the U.N.'s European HQ); the next minute it's small-town Switzerland with a population of barely 180,000.

About 70 % of visitors are there on business and their presence means a strong tourism infrastructure for all visitors, including 125 hotels (14 of them five-star), more than 1,100 restaurants, and shops to strain every credit card limit. And the town's compactness means more charm and convenience for tourists,

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Inside Travel

■ **Berlin Double Rooms for \$70**

There is about to be a new, very affordable Berlin hotel that will feature a special discount rate for *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers. In January, Christin and Gerd Schlenzka, owners and operators of the highly-recommended **Hotel Art Nouveau** on Leibnizstrasse in the Savigny Platz district, will launch **Art Hotel am See** on the lake formed by the Havel river in Berlin's Kladow district.

The hotel has a very quiet, almost country setting overlooking a small lake harbor. Frequent public transportation will take guests to the *Zentrum* in about 20 minutes. Most of the spacious, comfortable guestrooms have water views.

Over the past five years, many *Gemütlichkeit* readers have enjoyed the Schlenzka's warm welcome and personalized service at the Art Nouveau.

The special subscriber rates, available through the end of May 2003, are E60 (\$59) single and E70 (\$69) for double rooms. These prices bring a Berlin visit within the budget range of even the most fiscally-careful traveler. Contact: Christin and Gerd Schlenzka, tel +49/030/27 74 40, fax 4440, email: info@arthotelamsee.de.

■ **Hotel Near Lugano**

Subscriber Madlyn Murphy of Alameda, California, recommends **Hotel Stella d'Italia** (Piazza Roma, 1 - S. Mamete, 22010 - Valsolda (CO), tel. +39/0344 68139, fax 68729, email: info@stelladitalia.com) over the border into Italy, but just eight kilometers from Lugano. Double rooms are priced from E111 (\$109).

■ **Innsbruck Hotel @ 50% Off**

Hotel Batzenhäusl (tel. +43/0512/386180, fax 386180, email: hotel@batzenhaeusl.at) in Igls, above

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DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

kitchen. We were served a small boat of gluey, over-salted rice scattered with a few shreds of the coveted tuber. The price was about \$40 and they charged an additional 20% to split it two ways. The taste of the truffles was overwhelmed by the salt and the strong flavors of the risotto. Even at \$8 it would have been a failure.

(That dish is often put into perspective as the outrageous rip-off it was at places like the food bar at **Rogacki** in Berlin, where everything is utterly fresh, cooked before your eyes, and a lunch of three fresh oysters, shrimp sauteed in herbed butter, incredible roast potatoes *mit Speck* (smoked ham/bacon), salad, baguette and a generous glass of white wine is under \$15.)

My new-found disdain for high-end restaurants is not limited to those awarded Michelin stars; La Terrasse, for example, gets none. In fact, if you're determined to dine fancy, Michelin starred places are the best. And while those stars denote good food, the crossed spoon and fork symbol used by Michelin is a better guide to what you're in store for in terms of atmosphere, décor, style and luxury in general. Five crossed spoons and forks is the maximum awarded. Anything above two means table linens, multiple wine glasses, a sometimes confusing array of silverware, and formal service with all that that implies. Attire is dresses for women, coats for men or even dark suits and ties. I'm not saying out-

standing food isn't possible in such surroundings, just that you will pay for such atmosphere. Be particularly wary of restaurants which get no stars but are given four or five crossed spoons and forks. They are expensive and very formal but the food isn't good enough to rate a star. We have had many disappointing dinners in such places. There are few travel experiences more dispiriting than a three-hour meal of multiple, ordinary courses and condescending waiters, followed by an astronomical bill. Throw in a cigar at the next table and you wonder what happened to the joys of travel in Europe.

One silly custom that seems to be gathering momentum in Europe is the ceremonious bestowal of the main dish. In what I call the "ta da" presentation, a line of waiters, each carrying a plate covered with a silver dome, parades through the dining room — sometimes to musical accompaniment (I kid you not). Upon arrival at the table the plates are laid in front of the diners and the silver domes, on a count, are simultaneously whisked away to reveal the carefully arranged food — "ta da". Pre- tense, pure and simple.

Another tradition I could do without is the way wine is handled at posh restaurants. In my view, wine should be opened by the waiter, tasted by the buyer, and then the full bottle left on the table to be shared, like salt and pepper, according to the desires of the diners. Instead, wine bottles are opened, tasted and then, without regard for who wants a little

and who wants a lot, poured by the waiter. In worst cases the remains of the bottle are set on a separate table, out of reach of those who are paying for it. Table conversation gets going, the waiter, whose mission is to empty the bottle so you'll order another, suddenly swoops in and before you realize what's happening he's poured the rest of the wine, whether those at the table want it or not. Aunt Minnie may have intended to nurse a few ounces the entire meal but suddenly she's on her second glass. So now, much sooner than you planned, it's time to order more wine.

Granted, many *Grand luxe* restaurants serve outstanding food, often in beautiful rooms. But too often it is no better, and sometimes not as good as, simpler, cheaper places. What's important to me is what's on the plate, not the unnecessary trappings, stiff service, pretentious presentations

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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 our 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 new codes are:

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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.

GENEVA*Continued from page 1*

who can make the trip from one end of downtown to the other without breaking a sweat.

Nearly 40 % of residents — representing 183 nationalities — are from outside Switzerland. Of the remaining Swiss, about a third are descendants of refugees who fled to Geneva in the 17th century to escape religious persecution. Everyone seems to have learned to get along.

Virtually encircled by France, Geneva is the most French of Swiss cities. Each day, 30,000 French citizens commute to work in Geneva.

And you just have to love a city with five chocolate factories and where residents consume an average of 25 pounds (11 kilograms) annually — nearly three times the U.S. level.

The town straddles the Rhône as it pours into Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). The left bank (facing upstream away from the lake) is the older part of the city, protected by a fortress and fortifications. The right bank is where hotels sprang up when protection was no longer needed. From there, you can look across the lake to the Old Town and mountains (including Mont Blanc when the weather cooperates).

Even a few hours in Geneva demonstrates it's one of Europe's most walkable cities. Starting at the Rhône, follow the promenade along the right bank and the lake, past excursion boats and the **Paquis Bath**, a downtown swimming area perfect for a picnic. If you'd like, you can borrow a bike — just leave a deposit. Stop along the way at a food stand and watch street performers. Or dodge packs of in-line skaters. Soon, you'll come to the **Botanical Gardens** — one of the city's many parks. Then cross the lake in a *mouette* — literally "seagull" — a water taxi that ferries passengers along the waterfront, weaving among tacking sailboats.

Completing your walk along the left bank, you'll pass two city landmarks: the **Jet d'Eau**—the 140-meter (459-foot) geyser-like fountain that pummels the sky with 416 liters (110 gallons) of water per second — and

Geneva Basics**Population:** 177,000 (canton 480,000)**Elevation:** 373 meters / 1,224 feet**Tourist Information:**

Geneva Tourism, rue du Mont-Blanc 18, CH-1201 Geneva, tel.: +41 022 909 70 00, fax: +41 021 909 70 11, email: info@geneva-tourism.ch, web: <http://www.geneva-tourism.ch/>

Driving Distances:

Basel	249 km	154 miles
Bern	155 km	97 miles
Frankfurt	679 km	429 miles
Lausanne	60 km	37 miles
Lugano	357 km	223 miles
Munich	585 km	363 miles
Vienna	1126 km	700 miles
Zürich	276 km	172 miles

Fastest Rail Times:

Bern	1 hour, 43 minutes
Interlaken	2 hours, 44 minutes
Lausanne	32 minutes
Zürich	2 hours, 56 minutes

the **English Garden** with its flower watch, an operating clock with hands and dial made of living flowers. You can extend your walk along causeways connecting a string of islands in the Rhône.

Another recommended stroll is through the Old Town along 16th- and 17th-century streets, past **St. Peter's Cathedral** (and the exciting yet often missed archaeological site under it), the **Town Hall**, the **Arsenal** and **Bastion Park**, typical of green spaces converted from former fortresses and moats. Audio-guided tours to 26 points of interest are available at the tourist office (rue du Mont-Blanc 18), two blocks from the main station. There's no cost for the 2-hour tour, but you must leave a CHF 50 (\$34.35) deposit.

Just a short tram ride from the center is Carouge, once a small village and now within the city limits. Designed in 1754 by a Turinese architect, its unique Mediterranean flavor makes for great walking. The streets, laid out in the 17th-century, run off a central park, creating a checkerboard arrangement of blocks. Each block is made up of gabled, two-story row-houses with wooden galleries that open in the rear to gardens. Carouge is filled with boutiques, food shops, bakeries, bistros and cafés (**L'Insomnia** is a current hot spot). Once home to many craftsmen, Carouge continues the tradition with

shops owned by artisans who design, create or repair hats, handbags, furniture, clothing and, at **Les Allumés**, lamps made from household items like colanders, clasps, spoons and tea strainers. Trams run every 7-10 minutes from the main station on line 13, direction Palettes.

(Public transit in Geneva is superb, and its "tariff community" covers the complete canton and includes buses, trams, boats and trains. Tickets range from one zone for CHF 1.80 / \$1.25 to an all-zone day-pass for CHF 12 / \$8.25).

If you're not a walker, take an excursion boat either up the Rhône or along the shores of Lake Geneva past villas and lakeside communities, or head out to the vineyards in nearby Satigny. Swiss Rail trains operate hourly from the main train station to the Satigny station, where they connect with a "W" bus which runs a loop through vast vineyards, petite villages, past moss-covered walls and medieval chateaux.

Accommodations**Hotel Beau-Rivage**

The Beau-Rivage is Geneva's oldest five-star hotel and the only one still in private hands. Since its construction in 1865, it has passed through four generations of the Mayer family and continues to welcome kings and queens, emperors and empresses, presidents and the occasional film star.

The entrance is palatial, with marble columns and floors, plush furniture and a six-story atrium with fountain. Diffused light filters through the translucent roof.

The expansive hotel has just 93 spacious guest rooms. Standard rooms look out to the sides and back of the hotel and are furnished quite comfortably. Superior rooms overlook the lake and Alps and are individually furnished, many of them with family heirlooms and period furnishings. Deluxe rooms, also with lake view, feature English fabrics and, in many cases, Louis XV and Louis XVI style furniture.

Number 420 is a deluxe double with triple bay windows looking

straight out to the *Jet d'Eau*. The walls have decorative plaster scrollwork. In another deluxe double, Number 415, the furniture is 18th century, the carpet is rimmed by a marble floor and the bathroom is large. Number 118, a junior suite, is a good choice for business travelers, with separate entrances to the bedroom and work area. Among the standard rooms, Numbers 110 and 210 are somewhat larger than the others with particularly spacious bathrooms.

Contact: Hotel Beau-Rivage, 13 Quai du Mont-Blanc, CH-1201 Geneva, tel. +41/022/716 6825, fax 716 6065, email: reservations@beau-rivage.ch, web: www.beau-rivage.ch.

Daily Rates: Standard rooms single or double CHF 395-570 (\$272-392), superior rooms CHF 660-1,240 (\$454-852.), deluxe rooms and junior suites CHF 830-1,495 (\$571-1,028), suites CHF 2,750-7,195 (\$1,890-4,946). Breakfast buffet is CHF 37 (\$25.45); continental breakfast CHF 27 (\$18.55).

Rating: QUALITY 18/20 VALUE 17/20

Hôtel Bel'Espérance

This modest hotel smack dab in the heart of Geneva's Old Town isn't for everyone. There's no concierge, no room service, no mints on the pillow, no plush furniture, no Jacuzzi. The rooms are smallish but the prices are super, and guests don't sacrifice cleanliness, cordial management or amenities like private bathrooms, phones and satellite television. And, unlike most hotels which are across the river on the right bank, this one is on the more charming left.

Editor's
CHOICE

Bel'Espérance and its 1920s building are still owned and managed by the Salvation Army, which ran a women's residence here until eight years ago. When it moved, however, the guestrooms underwent complete renovation. Some walls came down to create one larger room from two smaller ones, fresh carpet was laid, and a benefactor donated an extensive collection of 19th-century Louis-Phillippe furniture, which wards off any remnant institutional feeling in the hotel's public spaces.

The quiet, friendly setting also attracts out-of-town educators, visiting artists and musicians. In the

evening, guests relax in the parlor or, in good weather, on the rooftop terrace, where there are views of the cathedral, the *Jet d'eau* and the Jura.

All rooms on the fourth floor have balconies, and — with two rooms and two balconies — Number 403 is an excellent value. Number 407 is a large single. If a balcony isn't important, Number 310 is a comfortable L-shaped double. Another plus for travelers: laundry and ironing rooms as well as a shared kitchen, complete with a refrigerator with separate lock-boxes for each room.

Contact: Hôtel Bel'Espérance, Rue de la Vallée 1, CH-1204 Geneva, tel. +41/022/818 3737, fax 818 3773. Email: belesp@swi.salvationarmy.org, web: www.hotel-bel-espérance.ch.

Daily Rates: Single CHF 95-115 (\$65-79), double CHF 140-150 (\$96-103), studio CHF 180 (\$124) for two, suite CHF 200 (\$137)

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 15/20

Romantik Hotel Domaine de Châteauevieux

Barely 15 minutes from downtown, the Domaine de Châteauevieux lies atop the rolling hills of Geneva's wine country. With a 500-year history, this former manor house is now a delightful country inn, recently renovated and full of rustic charm and elegance. Entry is via an old gatehouse, where workers once lived during the grape harvest. Inside is a huge wine-press, draped with flowers. Flowerboxes are at every window.

The inn's 17 guestrooms are spacious with both modern comforts and antique furnishings. Like grapes, hotel guests need plenty of sunlight, and the spaces are bright and cheerful. Number 34 is a large double with shower, bath, two sinks and a Jacuzzi and much of the original bricks and beams are exposed. The view is to the Rhône. Number 32 looks to the vineyards and mountains. Owners Philippe and Bettina Chevrier live on the premises (their room's the one with the swinging cat door).

The hotel couldn't be closer to the vineyards: take a few steps across the terrace and you're there — and only minutes from an extensive system of hiking trails.

Guests with cars should have no problem. Others will need to take a taxi (expensive) or a train (recommended) from the main station for the 20-minute ride to Satigny. With advance notice, the hotel offers free transfers to and from the Satigny station.

Contact: Hotel Domaine de Châteauevieux, Peney-Dessus, CH-1242 Satigny/Genf, tel. +41/022/753 1511, fax 753 1924, email: chateauevieux@romantikhotels.com, web: www.romantikhotels.com/satigny.

Daily rates: Single CHF 175-335 (\$120-230), double CHF 195-385 (\$134-265). Free parking.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 17/20

Hotel Edelweiss Manotel

Completely refurbished in 2000 at a cost of CHF 12 million, the Edelweiss comes surprisingly close to recreating the look and feel of an authentic Swiss chalet — or at least our perception of a Swiss chalet. Pine covers almost every surface, much of it painted with flowers or hand-cut with roses and hearts. To complete the picture, the Edelweiss staff wear traditional garb.

Guestrooms have the same rustic, Alpine feel, with plank-wood walls and matching furniture and closets. Spread over seven floors — the 5th and 7th are designated nonsmoking — the hotel's 42 rooms are comfortable, modern and clean, if not spacious. They are also air-conditioned, a relative rarity. Only the top two floors have views, and Number 721 (or Number 621 for smokers), often used as a triple, is larger than most. Two big windows look out to the top of the *Jet d'Eau*.

Edelweiss is in a primarily residential district just a few minutes by foot from the train station and lake.

Contact: Edelweiss, Place de la Navigation 2, CH-1201 Geneva, tel. +41/022/544 5151, fax 544 5199, email edelweiss@manotel.com, web: www.manotel.com.

Daily Rates: Single CHF 215-246 (\$148-169), doubles CHF 263-300 (\$181-206). Weekend rates from CHF 163 (\$112) single, CHF 200 (\$137) double.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 14/20

Sustenance

Geneva presents plenty of dining options and tough decisions. Given its international citizenry (consisting in part of workers from 195 diplomatic missions and 95 consulates) and many business visitors, it's no surprise Geneva has a diversity of places to eat, including more than 100 Asian restaurants (the **Celeste Empire** on Tour-Maitresse is the oldest and among the best, for cuisine if not setting). There's no problem finding good places to eat — Geneva has seven Michelin-starred restaurants; Zürich none — the challenge is finding affordable ones.

Your best bet for that is the Paquis district, a short walk from the main railway station or the lake promenade. The choice of cuisines is wide and eclectic, and the prices among the lowest in town. Within three blocks are Thai, Indochinese, North African, Spanish, Italian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Philippine and Mexican restaurants. Note that the Paquis district is a little rough around the edges, and restaurants are interspersed with billiard parlors, bars (one, **Art's Café**, felt straight from 1950s Greenwich Village), laundromats, antique book stores, the occasional sex shop and ladies of the night in tight skirts and high heels.

Restaurant les Armures

Located in a historic building in the heart of Geneva's most historic district, the Restaurant les Armures lives up to its fine reputation and to the recommendations of several residents. Built nearly 450 years ago (and with a cellar dating back another 350 years), the building looks its age (in a good way); inside, the rooms have stone walls, plank ceilings supported by thick beams, and a variety of decorations like huge cowbells and sections of old wine barrels. If the weather allows, opt to dine outside up against the walls of the Old Armory. History's in the air.

A starter of barley soup was rich and creamy with a pleasant earthy taste. Breast of duck in raspberry vinegar sauce won the nod over lamb cutlets with thyme and chopped veal in cream sauce. The duck was tender

Editor's Choice

and moist, and the sauce lightly sweet and tart. Based on reports from the next table, the Chinese fondue (chunks of pork) and cheese fondue with mushrooms are also superb. Lighter fare includes raclette, that delightful Swiss specialty of melted cheese served with boiled potatoes and tiny gherkins; *salade niçoise*; and platters of air-dried meat, cold ham, and cheeses. Entrées come with fresh vegetables and *Rösti* that puts hash-browns to shame.

Most entrées fall in the CHF 25-35 (\$17.20-24.05) range. Pasta, salad, pizza and fondue items come in around CHF 20 (\$13.75).

Contact: Restaurant les Armures, 1 rue du Puits-Saint-Pierre, CH-1204 Geneva, tel.: +41 022 310 3442, fax: 818 7113, email: armures@span.ch, web: www.hotel-les-armures.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 17/20

Edelweiss

The sign out front describes the evening's entertainment as "Spectacle Folklorique" and one assumes Swiss folklore. Yes, the musicians play the alphorn and accordion and even yodel, but the repertoire also includes "O Sole Mio," some Nashville favorites, hula music and Elvis. The performers seemed to be Russian.

Actually, the food isn't bad. Edelweiss offers several fondues (including chocolate for dessert) and familiar dishes like raclette, pork stew with polenta, and lake fish poached in local wine. But the prices — CHF 40 (\$27.50) for beef fondue and CHF 6.50 (\$4.45) for a half-liter of Evian — are way to high, even by Swiss standards.

Service was horrible, in part because the servers had to slalom around a conga-line of would-be hula dancers and other obstacles. They also were often occupied in taking photos for enthusiastic guests. After nearly 40 minutes waiting for my server to come anywhere close, I put some money on the table and left. Good thing, since one dancing guest started doing a striptease to the beat of cowbells.

Contact: Edelweiss, Place de la Navigation 2, CH-1201 Geneva, tel.: +41 022 731 3658, fax: +41 022 758 8533.

Rating: QUALITY 9/20 VALUE 5/20

Brasserie Lipp

The original Brasserie Lipp opened in Paris in 1880 and soon became one of the city's most popular watering holes, a status it retains to this day. In the 20s Hemingway enjoyed its Alsatian specialties and art deco trappings. About a dozen years ago, Lipp clones appeared in Zürich and Geneva. Since the original restaurant's website proclaims "No Franchises" we assume these newer stores are part of the Paris operation.

The Geneva version is in a trendy shopping arcade next to the opera house and, in the style of the Paris version, features mirrored walls, waiters in long white aprons, and portraits of 19th-century actors, authors and playwrights.

Arriving customers are traditionally greeted with a small *Amuse Bouche* (gift of the house); in this case small sections of bread laden with mozzarella and tomato.

A fine starter was mesclun salad served in a pastry shell, topped with sliced chicken and drizzled with a fruity, creamy dressing. (Shrimp salad with smoked salmon and melon soup with fresh mint were other tempting options.) A main course of roast duck with strawberry vinaigrette, was presented beautifully with fresh green beans wrapped in bacon, grilled potatoes and a carrot-and-zucchini mix. For dessert, the apple tart beat out the crème caramel. Entrees are priced around CHF 25-27 (\$17.20-18.55).

The Brasserie is more relaxed and less expensive than the adjacent Restaurant Lipp.

Contact: Brasserie Lipp, rue de la Confédération 8, CH-1204 Geneva, tel. +41/022/311 1011, fax 312 0104

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 15/20

Café des Négociants

Opened in 2001 in the Carouge district, Café des Négociants is one of Geneva's hottest dining spots. The food is superb and reasonably priced, the service attentive and friendly, and the 18th-century space light and cheery. The restaurant is both casual and chic with fun touches like bottled water from Nor-

Editor's Choice

way served in a designer cylinder, and polygonal plates that are individual works of art.

While the menu changes daily, choices last August included rabbit terrine with pistachios, smoked salmon with avocado and grilled pine nuts, carpaccio of blue fin tuna with olives, and beef in mustard sauce. Desserts included panna cotta with lemon zest and grapefruit syrup, apricot roll with house-made peach sorbet, and tartare of fresh fruits served with browned coconut.

Entrées average about CHF 21 (\$14), desserts around CHF 11 (\$8).

Contact: Café des Négociants, Rue de la Filature 29, CH-1227 Carouge, tel. +41/022/300 3130, fax 300 3105

Ratings: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 15/20

Crêperie Vautier

The menu here features 40 varieties of crêpes. Dinner crêpes include, among others, combinations of mushrooms, ham, cheese, spinach, tomatoes, salmon and onions, while dessert crêpes feature chocolate, oranges, honey and bananas. With only 10 tables, the restaurant is cozy. Owners and staff are friendly and enthusiastic. Prices are reasonable, in the CHF 6-17.50 (\$4.15-12.00) range.

Contact: Crêperie Vautier, 37-39 rue Vautier, CH-1227 Carouge, tel +41/022/343 6314

Readers' Forum

Add Rhine Hotels

I thoroughly enjoyed your article on the romantic Rhein as my wife and I have several times wandered along that stretch of the river. I'd like to add a couple of suggestions regarding places to stay:

In 1999 we stayed in Koblenz at the **Hotel Kleiner Riesen**, (Kaiseren-Augusta Anlage 18, D-56008, Koblenz, tel: +49/0261/320 77, fax 1607-25). This is a small 3-star hotel, quite pleasant and well situated right on the Rhein within about 30 meters of the KD line pier at Koblenz. We easily watched the river steamers dock from our second floor window and there is a small KD ticket office next to the hotel. The hotel is about 6 blocks or so from the Koblenz *Bahnhof* on a direct line and, therefore, is an

easy walk to rail connections along the Rhein, to Trier, Cochem, the walk to Burg Eltz (highly recommended), the Lahn valley and Limburg (outstanding destination), etc. The path along the Rhein goes right past the hotel and it is a very pleasant walk up to the **Weindorf** (unfortunately, we had a rather disappointing meal there), the Deutsches Eck, and old Koblenz.

In 1975 we stayed at **Burg Reichenstein**, (D-55413 Trechtshausen, tel. +49/06721/6117, fax 93 70 77, email: info@burg-reichenstein.de) a few kilometers downstream from Bingen. There is a lot of information regarding this very interesting castle hotel/restaurant on several websites. The hotel's site (www.burg-reichenstein.de) gives all the basic info regarding the hotel, castle museum, restaurants, etc. and a site put together by someone named Tim Vogel (www.caltim.com/reichenstein/) includes a lot of history and descriptive material based on his stay there in 1993. His site is in English. Both have nice pictures of the castle and facilities.

The ownership has changed hands, I believe, since 1975 but the operation seems much as I remember it. Our young children had a wonderful time exploring the castle and grounds and climbing to the watchtower that looks down on the river. This castle is just downstream from another castle, I think it is known as Burg Reichenstein, that is better known and tends to be seen in publicity photos, but Burg Reichenstein is an outstanding site and the hotel and restaurant in the former stables was very good.

Trechtshausen has a small *Bahnhof* (500 meters uphill to the hotel) with some service on the local trains that run between Koblenz and Bingen but I think the nearest KD stop is at Bingen. It is, of course, right on the highway on the left bank.

If you get a chance to check these locations out when you are next in the Rhein valley I think you will find that they merit mention in "*Gemütlichkeit*".

MARTIN VITZ
VIA EMAIL

Germany Recommendations

A big thank you to your staff in assisting us with our Germany vacation plans. We stayed in several hotels recommended by *Gemütlichkeit*.

Trier at the **Petrisberg** (Sickingenstr. 11, tel. +49/0651/4640, fax 46450), a great place. We were treated royally by the manager and staff and felt like we were truly guests. What a view of the city from our room.

Meersburg on the Bodensee at the **zum Bären** (Marktplatz 11, tel +49/07532/43220, fax 432244, email gasthofzumbaeren@t-online.de) which was a great location. Loved the creaky stairs and the rooms with windows overlooking the street and just up from the square.

Garmisch-Partenkirchen at the **Gasthof Fraundorfer** (Ludwigstr. 24, tel. +49/8821/9270, fax 92799, email fraundorfer@gaponline.de) was super with its location on Ludwigstrasse and fun activities in the dining room. Our room had a great view of the Zugspitze and overlooked Ludwigstrasse. We ventured out to Ludwig's castles from here.

Bamberg (our favorite city) at the **Wilde Rose** (Kesslerstrasse 7, tel. +49/951/981820, fax 22071, email info@hotel-wilde-rose.de) which we really liked because of its location in the center of the old city. Bamberg is a wonderful city where very little damage was inflicted by the bombings of WWII. Its old Cathedral, great old town and market square just beckoned us to stay longer.

Other places of interest were:

On the Rhine at Oberwesel a few miles from Bacharach at the **Weinhotel Guttschänke Sennerhof** (D-55430 Oberwesel-Engehöll am Rhein, Rieslingstr. 1, tel. +49/06744/215, fax 1687, email: sennerhof@rheinhotel.com), owned by the Pertsch family. A great little hotel with nice rooms, clean and fresh. Very friendly English speaking young family members. We ate small meals in the evening there on the terrace. Our cost was E45 (\$44) per night with breakfast and parking. We stayed here again after picking up friends in Frankfurt for the last

half of our tour. We even had our laundry done for around E10 (\$10).

On the East shore we found a room in Assmannshausen a few miles from the very touristy Rudesheim in a very nice **Hotel Unter den Linden** (Rheinallee 1, tel. +49/06722/2288, fax 47201, email unter-de-linden@gmx.de). We took a large room overlooking the Rhine for a cost of E90 (\$88) per night. There are less expensive rooms from E70 (\$69). We took the last room available and are very happy we did so. Great view and a super room. Large, with couch, chairs and balcony with two doors opening on to it. A young family own and operate this great spot. Price included breakfast and parking.

Eschwege in the Harz Mountain area. Wonderful little town with great downtown area of half timbered buildings. Our hotel, **Zur Struth** (Struthstr. 7a, tel. +49/05651/922813, fax 2788) was the best value in our trip. A nonsmoking mini-suite for E70 (\$69) clean with a good restaurant that seemed very popular with locals.

Another great value was in Starnberg where we stayed to access Munich without driving there and to see some of the sights in that area. Access to Munich was about 20 minutes by train. We stayed in **Pension Happach** (Achheimstr. 2, tel. +49/08151/12537, fax 739712), very nice and a great value at E60 (\$59), not a hotel more like an apartment and just a couple of blocks to the *Bahnhof* and lake. The owners typically rent these rooms for a week at a time to business people who come to Starnberg for classes.

Our last night in Germany was in Moerfelden-Walldorf just 24 km South of Frankfurt. We stayed in the **Airport Domizil-Hotel** (Nordendstr. 4a, tel. +49/06105/9570, fax 957222, email airp.dom.hotel@t-online.de) in the Walldorf side of the community. The price was E93 (\$91) without breakfast or parking, we think this was a weekend rate. Breakfast was E11 (\$11) and parking E7 (\$7). We parked on the street about 30 feet from the hotel and saved the E7.

The hotel was ok, clean and rather sterile but the best thing was access to the airport. We drove from the hotel

around the edge of the airport on the *Flughafen Ring* to the rental car return in about 15 minutes and then the elevator to Terminal 1 for our flight. No traffic and an easy to follow map and signs to the airport. The hotel also has a bus they take people back and forth to the airport. Very convenient. It may be an American-owned facility. A number of U. S. government employees were staying there for various reasons.

JOHN & NORMA CROMWELL
VIA EMAIL

Emailing from Europe

You might want to mention that readers who use a local Internet Service Provider can get their email from any Internet connection. Just log onto <http://www.mail2web.com> and enter your email address and password to get your mail. Internet-direct interfaces are much more cumbersome than your own email software with your regular connection, but at least you can check for urgent messages, delete the junk, and send replies. I did that recently without any problems from Internet cafes in the UK and France.

You might also want to warn American visitors about the keyboards in European Internet cafes. My messages from France, with the French keyboard, looked like they might have been in code.

ED PERKINS
VIA EMAIL

(Editor's Note: Nationally syndicated travel columnist Ed Perkins is a fellow resident of Ashland, Oregon, and founder and former editor/publisher of Consumer Reports Travel Newsletter.) ☒

INSIDE TRAVEL

Continued from page 1

Innsbruck, is a favorite of Mrs. W.D. Carson of El Paso TX. Doubles range from E88 (\$86) to E156 (\$153) but Mrs. Carson reports that she gets a 50% discount by virtue of membership in the **ITC50 International Travel Club** (www.itc50online.com).

■ Vienna Pkg with Air for \$499

Austrian Airlines is selling "Vienna: Love is in the Air" packages starting \$999 per couple. Travel is for the period Jan. 15-Feb. 25 and includes roundtrip air for two, three nights' at

the four-star **Hotel Penta Renaissance** and the option to purchase tickets to one of four events in Vienna's Ball Season. Contact: 800-790-4682

■ Getting Connected in Europe

In the last issue we described in some detail our difficulty in getting on the Internet using a laptop computer from European hotel rooms. Those who plan to take a crack at it should refer to the **World Wide Phone Guide** at <http://kropla.com/phones.htm>.

■ Grindelwald Hotel/Ski Pkg

Grindelwald's newly-renovated, family-run **Hotel Belvedere** (CH-3818 Grindelwald, tel. +41/033/8545454, fax 8535323, email: belvedere@grindelwald.ch, web: www.belvederegrindelwald.com) has special weekly packages during the ski season that start at \$829 per person including buffet breakfast, six-course dinners, and a six-day ski pass. The hotel offers skiers free transport to the uphill departure stations for two hours each morning and afternoon.

Nonskiers may want to try the world's longest toboggan ride, a 10-mile run from the Faulhorn at 8,500 feet to the village at 3,400 feet. ☒

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

and high prices usually found in upscale European restaurants.

Here are four places where, during the course of a long meal, or when presented with a massive bill at the end, we wished we had opted for that cozy *Gastehaus* down the road. Meals at these restaurants ranged from o.k. to very good, but the value just wasn't there.

- La Terrasse, Interlaken
- Brenner's Park, Baden-Baden
- Dolder Grand, Zürich
- Le Club, Bürgenstock
- La Table du Palace, Lausanne Palace Hotel
- Schloss Dürnstein, Dürnstein Austria
- Deuring-Schlössle, Bregenz, Austria.

Deluxe restaurants with service in the grand style have almost disappeared in the U.S. but they remain a presence in Europe because Europeans want them; they are a part of the culture. —RHB ☒

VAT Refunds at the German Airports

This story was submitted by Dr. Timothy Boehm of Little Rock AR, a frequent traveler to Europe and longtime Gemütlichkeit subscriber. Readers should be aware that VAT paid for non-merchandise purchases such as hotels, meals, car rentals, etc. is not refundable.

Over the past 16 years, we have attempted to get *Mehrwertsteuer* (Value-Added Tax) refunds at European airports at least 30 times and have found the procedure at Frankfurt especially difficult. There is a definite economic incentive, since the VAT is typically 16% of your purchases. On the other hand, there is no incentive for German authorities to make the process easy since, if you are successful, they lose money.

The basic procedure is the store where you make the purchase provides the tax-free status paperwork and you show the merchandise and paperwork to the Export Certification authorities at the airport. Once the paperwork is officially stamped, you can either get the tax refund in cash at one of the counters after you pass through security and passport control or, in the case of some of the experienced merchants (e.g. Kathe Wohlfart), mail the paperwork back to the storekeeper and have your credit card credited. The latter procedure avoids a significant commission charged by the in-airport tax-free shopping centers.

Now the fun and potential complications begin. At Frankfurt airport there are two Export Certification desks, one for checked baggage (on the lower level inside baggage claim in the old Terminal 1) and a separate one for carry-on baggage usually located in a hard-to-find location around or past passport control. In terminal 1 you will have to carry your checked bags downstairs after checking them in with the airline, find the Export Certification office in Baggage Claim after explaining to someone why you are taking baggage into Baggage Claim, ring a bell to arouse a clerk, maybe wait in line, and maybe have your bags searched before your paperwork from the merchant is stamped. For carry-on baggage, you

must find a different Export Certification desk, ring a bell, hope someone behind the door heard you, display your merchandise and have your paperwork stamped. Quite often the initial desk to which you are referred won't be open and you end up asking someone who refers you to another desk in a distant part of the airport which may or may not be open.

My advice is to view the entire process of getting a VAT refund as a potentially rewarding challenge. Check your paperwork from the merchant; complete addresses, passport numbers etc. before you get to the airport; give yourself plenty of time; understand that there are different procedures for checked and carry-on baggage; be patient and pleasant; and be pleasantly surprised if you are able to complete the process and successfully get your reward. You will get more money back if the paperwork is mailed directly back to the merchant, rather than presented to the Tax-Free shopping counter past security in the airport or mail it aback to European Tax-free shopping.

Stuttgart, if anything, is more difficult than Frankfurt. We flew Delta and the VAT process requires going to another terminal. The Delta agent called it a "hit and miss" process. We finally found the right office obscurely behind a newsstand and simply labeled Zoll. We had to complete three different forms and then go back through security to make stops at the *Reisebank* and at the *Bundespost* to mail a form to a retailer.

In Stuttgart, I suggest the following: 1.) bring envelopes for mailing; 2.) copy all paperwork; 3.) keep tax-free purchases in a carry-on; and 4) allow plenty of time, especially since the Zoll office is not continually staffed.

(Editor's Note: Our own experience at the Munich airport was easier. Once we found the counter for the carry-on luggage, there was a just a short wait to get the paperwork stamped. Then to another line, to wait again. When it was our turn, we went into a glass-enclosed room where we presented paperwork, showed the merchandise and received our refund.)

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is intended for fast 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 is on page 2 herein. 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, Umlandstrasse 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 & Environs

Schloss Haunsperg, A-5411 Oberalm bei Hallein, Hammerstrasse 32, tel. +43/06245/80662, fax 85680, email: info@schlosshaunsperg.com

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@rkhote.bestwestern

Allstadt Vienna, Kirchengasse 41, tel. +43/01/526 3399-0, fax 523 4901, email: hotel@allstadt.at, web: www.allstadt.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 Alette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932

Frankfurt Airport

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