

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Trip Tales

Since returning from Europe just before Christmas, I've been sifting through impressions and notes, trying to separate what's important to tell you from what's not. Some of the minor things, such as the comforting warmth of Glühwein on a chilly night at a Bonn Christmas market, or a stormy Sunday afternoon walk along Lac Léman, will stick in my mind for a while, but are useless to readers. Though none of what I have to say plows new ground, now that the dust has settled there are a couple of impressions and experiences that rise above the rest. The final item is admittedly self-serving, but I think you'll find it useful and interesting.

• **A rail travel advantage we take for granted.** In an era in which airports are synonymous with stress, European rail stations are, in comparison, islands of tranquility. Americans who have never ridden a train in Europe may be unaware that not only is there no security process in boarding 99% of European trains, there is no requirement to show a pass, ticket or passport to anyone until the train is underway. If you've just passed through a few airports on your way to Europe it seems amazing that you simply walk into the terminal, find the track your train departs from, board the train, stow your luggage and sit down. As the bandit in the movie, *Treasure of Sierra Madre*, might have put it, we "doan gotta show no stinkin' passes to nobody." Wonder how long it will last?

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

THE BODENSEE

A.k.a. Lake Constance, a.k.a. The Swabian Sea, the vast Bodensee embraces Bavarian, Swabian, Swiss and Austrian cultures. This month we report on the German region.

A traveler arriving by rail in Konstanz often finds the experience disorienting. Banana and palm trees surround the train station. The azure waters of the Bodensee (known to the English-speaking world as "Lake Constance")

reach to the horizon, its shores ringed by green hills and snowy mountains. A day that may have started with frost in the Black Forest, is now one of teenagers in shorts with swim trunks rolled in towels. Welcome to the German Riviera.

Germany accounts for 173 kilometers of the Bodensee's 273-km shoreline (Switzerland covers 72 km and Austria 28 km). It's the largest lake in Germany — 69 km or 43 miles at its

longest point and 14 km/9 miles at its widest. An average water temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit helps keep the climate temperate, if not downright balmy.

Residents are only half joking when they refer to Konstanz as "the Metropolis of the Bodensee." Yes, the town has only 78,000 residents, but it's surprisingly diverse, thanks in great part to the university established there in 1965. There's an active club scene with a special love for jazz and blues and a taste for local wines. Outdoor cafés stay open late, and streets stay lively under the summer moon.

(Konstanz's active jazz and art cultures often converge at ExxTRA, a

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Base Camp Montreux

Let's get past the negative stuff right away. Montreux, on Lac Léman, has very little old-world charm. In the last decades of the 20th century a number of unfortunate buildings were allowed to be erected near the water, notably sever-

al high-rise hotels. The main street, Grand Rue, which traverses the town along the lake, is a procession of garish signs and undistinguished shops. In the city's upper reaches, the *Vieux Ville* (old town) where the steep hillside vineyards begin, is a collection of interesting older houses, but offers little in the way of shops, restaurants or hotels to attract visitors.

On the plus side of the Montreux ledger, however, its location combines surprisingly good weather with some of the world's most gorgeous scenery and easy access to a long list of desir-

able destinations. Shimmering beneath an ever-changing sky and back-dropped by the hulking *Alpes De Savoie* on the French side, the lake is an endless fascination. Every window in town seems pointed in its direction. If yours isn't, you can still walk, jog or cycle the garden-like promenade which — except for a mile or so between Clarens and La Tour-de-Peilz — runs along the lake from Vevey on the west to Villeneuve on the south.

The climate in this corner of the lake is said to be the mildest on the north side of the Alps and last December it lived up to its reputation, mostly dry with temperatures in the low 50s.

High rises and tacky commercialism notwithstanding, our few days in

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Exchange rates as of 1/26/04

1 euro = \$1.25

1 Swiss franc = \$.80

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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• **Those marvelous Swiss trains.**

Every time I'm in Switzerland I fall more in love with the "Swiss Travel System." Yes, rail travel in the rest of Europe is clean, efficient, and on-time, but the Swiss experience is at another level. It seems as though there's a train or bus leaving every few minutes to precisely where you want to go. Sure, if your destination is off the beaten track you may have to change trains, and then perhaps end up on a bus, but with the often perfectly-timed connections it's almost seems as if that next bus or train is waiting just for you. You board and off you go. And it's not crowded — at least in first class. Over a week of virtually daily train travel in Switzerland, except for a commuter to the suburbs of Zürich, I don't think we were ever in a car more than half full.

Epiphany is an overused word these days but I guess I had one on a train from Bern to Montreux. I'm a veteran of years of Swiss rail travel, but for some reason that December day, sitting absolutely comfortable and at ease while watching green pastures and snowy mountains slide past my window, it came home to me just how easy, efficient, and relaxed is the whole process of public transport in Switzerland. About 15 minutes before the scheduled departure we had rolled our suitcases the 50 yards or so from our hotel to the escalator that drops one level to the complex of shops and passageways that comprises

the underground beneath the Bern railway station. (Even though the business-oriented **Savoy Hotel** is close to the rail station, we were still in the center of Bern's wonderful old town.) As we passed through the terminal, there was even time to buy a *Herald-Tribune* and a couple of sandwiches. Once aboard, we had four facing seats all to ourselves for the peaceful, hour-plus trip to Lausanne where we changed for Montreux. The ride was almost liquid as we seemed to float through the countryside. I submit that in this world there is not a more agreeable way of getting quickly from place to place.

I know you know all this, and I have known it for years, but for some reason getting around in Switzerland this year was a particular joy. If you haven't done it, you should

• **How a phone number can put you in control at the car rental counter.**

Scene: **Avis** Car Rental Office, Budapesterstrasse 41, Berlin, December 5, 2003, 10am.

"Sorry, Mr. Bestor, but we don't have a reservation for you."

"But here's my **Auto Europe** voucher."

"Sorry, Mr. Bestor, but we don't have your reservation."

"Let's call Auto Europe on their toll-free number."

It's 4am in Portland, Maine, but AE's help line operates 24/7 and someone tells the Avis person how to find my reservation in the computer.

Problem solved — partly.

My booking calls for a midsize car with a free, guaranteed upgrade to a full-size car.

"All right, sir, here's the key to your car, it's an Opel Astra Caravan."

"Ummm, is that a full-size car as called for in the booking?"

"Sir, this is the only car we have available. We didn't have your reservation and you weren't on the manifest today. Every other car we have is already promised."

"May I please use your phone to call Auto Europe?"

"Of course, sir."

The AE guy tells me the Astra Caravan sounds like a station wagon and asks to speak to the Avis counter person. The conversation is brief but suddenly a manager type emerges from a back office and there's rapid conversation in German. After a few minutes, Julia, my Avis reservationist, turns to me and says,

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Using Gemütlichkeit

- 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

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

User Name: **ekal** Password: **6272**

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POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
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HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria		Value Rating	Scale
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

Special Designation

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

BODENSEE

Continued from page 1

combination of café, gallery, club and wine bar. Prices are low and the setting laid-back. In the upstairs gallery modern art hangs on ancient walls. ExxTRA, Hussanstrasse 28, D-78426 Konstanz, tel +49/7531/23394.)

Despite all the activity and culture, it's a town of relaxation. A walk along the promenade drops blood pressure by 30 points. At sunrise, against an Alpine silhouette, fishermen steer their flat-bottomed boats toward favorite spots. Soon, sails rise as yachts play chicken with ferries and steamships. At dusk, the mountains fade to black as lights come on around the lake.

Once a wealthy trading stop, Konstanz is full of history and architecture. War and fire have left the town untouched, and its medieval character persists. Narrow, crooked alleys transport visitors quickly into the Middle Ages. The Old Town is still dominated by the Romanesque-Gothic basilica church, **Minster of Our Lady**, with remnants from its 11th-century construction. In the Upper Market, liars once had their tongues nailed to the pillory and had to pull themselves free — hence the term “speaking with a forked tongue.” Across the moat from the priests' quarters, nuns lived in a district still called “Paradise.” Many buildings (like Kanzleistrasse 15) have arcades with spy holes, where residents could look secretly at passersby. At Rosgartenstrasse 4, the rococo carving of a creature — half-fish, half-rabbit — celebrates the “lake rabbits,” as residents were known. Behind Tulengasse 1, an attached “one-holer” once emptied to the alley. Rains and frequent floods kept the streets “clean.”

Many buildings hide spacious courtyards. Respect privacy but explore when appropriate. Treasures are to be found.

Island Hopping

Konstanz makes a great base for day trips to the nearby islands of Mainau and Reichenau.

Mainau, the so-called “Isle of Flowers,” is even more tropical than Konstanz. Many travelers find the

Bodensee Basics

Elevation: 1335 feet (407 meters)

Tourist Offices: Tourist-Information Konstanz, Bahnhofplatz 13, D-78462 Konstanz am Bodensee, tel +49/7531/133030, fax +133060, email info@ti.konstanz.de, web www.konstanz.de/tourismus

Tourism Meersburg, Kirchstrasse 4, D-88709 Meersburg, tel +49/1805/633772, fax 4311 20, email info@meersburg.de, web www.meersburg.de

Tourism Lindau, Ludwigstrasse 68, D-88103 Lindau, tel +49/8382/2600/30, fax 49/8382/2600/26, email info@lindau-tourismus.de, web www.lindau-tourismus.de.

Driving Distances - Konstanz:

Frankfurt	345 km/214 miles
Munich	230 km/143 miles
Stuttgart	170 km/105 miles
Zürich	75 km/47 miles

Rail: Konstanz is on a regional train route with changes in Singen, along the Zürich-Stuttgart line. Lindau is a stop on the Zürich-Munich line and is also on the regional Innsbruck-Ulm route.

Air: Zürich (75 km/47 miles) and Stuttgart (170 km/105 miles) are the nearest airports.

110-acre island artificial and manicured, but others are enthralled by its carefully cultivated arboretums and gardens with rare and exotic plants, its fountains and the Butterfly House. It's all the property and passion of Count and Countess Bernadotte, who live on the island in a baroque castle.

The €11 entrance is half-price after 4pm and free after 7pm. Although the property closes at 8pm, a one-hour walk through the grounds will suffice for many. (Most tour buses leave by then as well.) To stretch the hours, make reservations and dine at the castle's **Swedish Tavern**, open until 10pm (tel. +49/7531/303/156, fax 167, email: bankett@mainau.de). The island is about 20 minutes by bus or boat from Konstanz. A causeway leads to onsite parking.

If Mainau is contrived and beautiful, Reichenau is authentic, untouched and raw. It's a rural landscape of farms and villages that feels stuck in time (the entire island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Three monasteries date to the 9th century, and the island's three villages have intact medieval towers to warn against marauders. Seventeenth-century buildings are considered “new.”

A 2 km causeway leads from the mainland past a nature sanctuary filled with flowering meadows, cat-tail marshes, and thousands of migrating birds. Boats arrive frequently from Konstanz. The Island Bus #35, which covers the villages and key sights, offers day-long, on and off privileges for €3.50.

Medieval Meersburg

Meersburg is the walled medieval village you dream about, with the added bonus that it's on a lake. The older, upper town clutches a bluff over the lake, and has the medieval Old Castle as well as the “new” castle, a 17th-century Baroque delight. The sunny, Mediterranean lower town, with palm trees and lakeside promenade is a place of relaxation, shopping and culinary delights.

Upper and lower towns are connected by a steep road and footpaths that lead under the castle drawbridge past many half-timber homes. Each turn reveals a new set of paths, alleys, passageways and plazas. In the evening, life moves to the lower town.

From Konstanz, Meersburg is a 20-minute bus ride (#1) to the ferry station outside of town, connecting there to the 30-minute boat ride.

Landing in Lindau

With the Alps on one side and castles and villages on the other, the 3.5-hour, storybook boat ride from Konstanz to Lindau passes quickly.

Prosperity came early to Lindau, thanks to its position on a medieval trade route. The island town is still decidedly upscale with Baroque buildings, gabled burghers' houses, half-timbered houses, and onion-dome churches. Today's affluence takes the form of galleries and studios — and a mostly underground casino.

The island's circumference is just 3.5 km (2 miles) and walks along its promenades feature ancient fortifications, a 13th-century lighthouse, turquoise waters, blue skies, and, of course, the Alps.

Despite a concentration of historic sights, the town does not overpower. Its size and self-containment make it easy for mind and senses to digest.

Getting Around

Perhaps the best way to explore the Bodensee, is to arrive by train and travel between towns by ship. Auto travel disadvantages are heavy traffic and minimal parking. In a car one is also acutely aware of the urban sprawl that has hit even this mostly rural region. But from the water it's all far away and one can remain in denial that much longer. Ship travel offers a sense of adventure and romance. Waves and wind can kick up a fury, and fog can sock in with surprising speed. Plus there's a certain excitement about disembarking, suitcase in hand, in a new location.

Five lines run 34 boats among the cities of the three countries. Fares are reasonable: as low as €4 from Konstanz to Meersburg to €9.80 from Konstanz to Lindau. German Rail Passes offer a 50% discount on ships operated by **Bodensee Schiffsbetriebe** and the Eurailpass discounts various Austrian and Swiss boats.

The **Bodensee Erlebniskarte** — a discount card — offers free passage on all Lake Constance boats, admission to Mainau, various cable cars and lifts in Austria and Switzerland and all bus lines, as well as free or reduced entrance fees at many attractions. It's available at tourist offices for €47 for three days or €60 for seven days.

Key Websites for the Traveler

- www.gemut.com Gateway site for travelers to Germanic Europe, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, traveler feedback, travel tips and past issues (free access to back issues for subscribers; see log-on info on page 2).
- www.viamichelin.com The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- www.travelgearnow.com Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10% off for subscribers.
- www.webflyer.com Informative frequent flyer forums make this a must for air travelers.
- bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm Swiss and European rail schedules.
- www.ski-europe.com Top web resource for skiers with much data on Alpine resorts.
- www.myswitzerland.com Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- www.germany-tourism.de Germany's national tourist authority.
- www.austria.info/us Austria's national tourist authority.
- <http://www.hhog.de> Website for an alliance of historic German cities.

Hotel-Restaurant Petershof

The Hotel-Petershof is modern but with character, 31 spacious rooms spread over four floors. It's across the Rhine from the Old Town, not in the greatest neighborhood and not impressive from the outside. But the staff attitude, room quality, and great prices make it a strong value. Each room has a CD player and a VCR with some 200 free videos (many in English).

Contact: Hotel-Restaurant Petershof, St. Gebhard-Strasse 14, D-78467 Konstanz, tel +49 7531 993399, fax 993398, email hotel@petershof.de, web www.petershof.de. Hosts: The Wäschle Family.

Daily Rates: Singles €68-76, doubles €111, garage parking €5.50

Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 16/20

Hotel Villa Barleben am See

Just a short drive across "Lake Rhine" from the Old Town, this 19th-century former summer residence has been converted to a seven-room hotel. Set amid *Jugendstil* villas, it retains a stately, Victorian appearance and the feel of a private home, with rooms that summon memories of July visits to a wealthy aunt. Amid parquet floors, antiques, cozy nooks, and old steamer trunks, guests receive a high level of personal attention. The best rooms face south to the lake (some have small balconies). Relax on the covered terrace, in the sprawling private gardens, or take a walk along the promenade.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Contact: Hotel Villa Barleben am See, Seestrasse 15, D-78464 Konstanz, tel +49 07531 942 330, fax +49 7531 669 73, web www.hotel-barleben.de

Daily Rates: Singles €95-115, doubles €135-155

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 17/20

Steigenberger Inselhotel

Guests arrive at the five-star Steigenberger Inselhotel (Island Hotel) by crossing a small bridge to a private island where the hotel has stood for nearly 900 years. Past the foyer lies a glassed-in hotel courtyard, once the cloister of a 13th-century Dominican monastery. The monastery church still exists, albeit as a function

room, and the original Gothic frescoes are among the oldest in Europe. Count Zeppelin was born here. A fine double is Number 322 with two windows and a lakefront balcony.

Contact: Steigenberger Inselhotel, Auf der Insel 1, D-78462 Konstanz, tel +49 07531 125 444, fax 125 250, email konstanz@steigenberger.de, web www.konstanz.steigenberger.de

Daily Rates: Singles €107-169, doubles €179-251, suites €189-363

Rating: QUALITY 17/20 VALUE 15/20

Hotel-Restaurant Volapük

Located high above the Mainau, a short distance from town amid hill-top farmlands, the Volapük is an excellent choice for auto travelers who want easy access to sights around the city. From Room 41, the hotel's largest, guests can look across the lake to Meersburg. Rooms are plain but neat, with the usual amenities. For trivia buffs, Volapük is an artificial language — a precursor to Esperanto — invented in the 19th century by a local pastor.

Contact: Hotel Restaurant Volapük, Im Loh 14, D-78465 Konstanz-Litzelstetten, tel +49/7531/94400, fax 44981, email info@volapuek.de, web www.volapuek.de.

Daily Rates: Singles €57-90, doubles €82-108

Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 15/20

Landhotel Fischerhaus

This charming country estate has a private beach directly on the Bodensee. There is also an herb garden, orchard, a small pond with lily pads and a brook lined with reeds and willows. It's a tranquil escape. The main building with rustic restaurant (hotel guests only) is a half-timber house more than 300 years old, while most guest lodging and facilities are in more modern structures. Guest rooms are spacious, and warmly decorated, some with terrace or balcony with lake view.

Contact: Landhotel Fischerhaus, D-88690 Uhltingen-Muehlhofen, Ortsteil Seefeldten, tel +49 07556 8563, fax 6063, email birkenmayer@fischerhaus-seefeldten.de, web www.fischerhaus-seefeldten.de.

Daily Rates: Singles €110-150, dou-

bles €164-240, suites €210-250. Prices include breakfast and dinner.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 14/20

Hotel Zum Bären

Meersburg history doesn't stop at Zum Bären's door. It follows guests across the 1605 Renaissance portal (look for the five carved angels), through the richly furnished lobby and even to their rooms. For a few extra euros per night, guests can choose rooms with antique furniture. For a few more, they get a corner room with an oriel window. The building dates from the 13th century and current family ownership is from 1851. Request private bath.

Contact: Hotel Zum Bären, Markt-
platz 11, D-88709 Meersburg, tel +49/
7532/432244, fax 43220, email
GasthofzumBaeren@t-online.de, web
www.meersburg.de/baeren

Daily Rates: Singles €46, doubles,
€86-102

Rating: QUALITY 13/20 VALUE 15/20

Lindauer Hof

The default destination for many Lindau-bound Americans is the luxurious and top-notch **Bayerischer Hof**, which charges as much as €289 for a room with lake view. Fight convention and head to the Lindauer Hof, a charming family-owned hotel set in a former 17th-century granary. Though you'll drop a star (from five to four), you'll save as much as 50%. On the other hand, if you want to spend some money, ask for Number 404, a large, L-shaped room with an upstairs living room and view to the Mangturm (tower), the harbor and across to the lake to the Austrian and Swiss Alps. Even the bathroom has a throne with a view. Room 402 is another spacious top-floor room with a large terrace via French doors, and a view to the harbor and mountains.

Contact: Lindauer Hof, Seepromenade, D-88131 Lindau im Bodensee, tel +49/8382/4064, fax 24203, email info@lindauer-hof.de, web www.lindauer-hof.de.

Daily Rates: Singles €72-85, doubles
€135-189

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 15/20

Hotel Goldenes Lamm

When the Hotel Goldenes Lamm opened during the Middle Ages, it

was at the western end of the island. Thanks to centuries of island expansion, it is now more central but still doesn't lack for views. Number 28, a large room with sitting and writing areas, looks over the 14th-century Thieves' Tower. Number 37's view is of St. Peter's Church (11th-century, frescoes by Hans Holbein the Elder). It's a simple but more than adequate historic hotel with room rates about 40% less than those on the waterfront. Request private bath.

Contact: Hotel Goldenes Lamm, Paradiesplatz/Schaafgasse 3, 88131 Lindau, tel +49/8382/5732, fax 6254

Daily Rates: Singles €41-51, doubles
€72-102. Breakfast is €8

Rating: QUALITY 12/20 VALUE 14/20

Food

Bodensee restaurants take advantage of fresh, local resources, especially lake fish — whitefish, perch, pike, trout, char and eel — served with vegetables grown on Reichenau or other nearby farms. Fruit often comes from nearby orchards and local vineyards produce "Weissherbst," a delicate rosé more gold than pink.

Most of the German Bodensee falls within Baden-Württemberg (Lindau is Bavarian), and regional cuisine, such as *Spätzle* and *Maultaschen* (like ravioli) from Swabia, and venison, wild boar and pork from Baden, are popular.

Weinstube Zum Guten Hirten

A variety of local wines, coupled with inexpensive but eclectic cuisine, make this restaurant worth a stop. Try Hirten Skewer with venison, pork, lamb and a tomato-pepperoncini salsa, or perhaps the Baden sausage salad. The interior's medieval architecture is interesting but a table outdoors avoids the canned music. Most entrées are less than €10.

Contact: Weinstube Zum Guten Hirten, Zollernstrasse 8, D-78462 Konstanz, tel. +49/7531/27344

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 14/20

Restaurant Löwen

If it grows on Reichenau, it's probably on the menu at the Löwen, a small island café that serves only fresh, local vegetables in a variety of salads, dumplings, pizzas, noodles,

IS YOUR FREQUENT FLYER PROGRAM RIGHT FOR YOU?

You're stacking up miles in a frequent flyer program, the question is will you be able to use those miles when it's time to go to Europe? Over the past few months, several FF programs have instituted changes that have made mileage redemption more difficult for leisure travelers and those who fly less frequently.

Here's how **Matthew Bennett**, editor of *First Class Flyer* newsletter evaluates your 2004 prospects with the major U.S. frequent flyer programs.

- **American:** Solid program, allows upgrades on the lowest fares; stay with it, especially if you have elite status.

- **Continental:** Seriously consider bailing out. Worst program for upgrades on international routes.

- **Delta:** Great for full-fare paying business travelers — free upgrades are plentiful — but not so good for leisure travelers. Bennett suggests the latter look for alternatives.

- **Northwest:** Stay put but alert. So far the only major change for 2004 is the increase to 15,000 miles each way for domestic upgrades. NW is the trailblazer for heavily discounted leisure Business Class fares to Europe.

- **United:** Because of bankruptcy UAL is working hard to keep every customer. Don't jump ship yet.

- **US Airways:** Great program for the occasional traveler to Europe. Though Europe upgrades are 60,000 miles roundtrip with the lowest fares, highest in the industry, members can upgrade for 20,000 miles on Y and B fares. It is often possible to pay less than \$1,000 for a RT Europe B fare and then be upgraded to biz class for the 20,000 miles. Bennett compares that with Delta's upgradeable fares at \$1500+, which require 50,000 miles.

(*First Class Flyer*, tel. 888-980-9922, www.firstclassflyer.com, \$197 annually for 12 monthly issues)

Spätzle dishes, stir-frys and “health plates.” But it’s not vegetarian and these dishes also come with meats, cheeses and sausages. The setting is modern and the welcome cheerful. Entrées range from €8-12.

Contact: Restaurant Löwen, Pirminstrasse 144, D-78479 Reichenau, tel. +49/7534/229, web www.loeweninsel-reichenau.de

Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 14/20

Georg’s Fischerhütte

Fish doesn’t get any fresher than at Georg’s Fischerhütte, a local favorite in the ancient shadow of Reichenau’s Saints Peter and Paul Church. Georg Böhler fishes each morning, and he and wife Iris prepare the catch for eager appetites throughout the lunch hour (but no later). Place your order, take a number, sit at an outdoor table, and await a generous portion of fried fish (with French fries and salad) for less than €10. The variety and serving hours depend on the day’s catch. The setting, at the most remote end of the rural island, is sublime.

Contact: Georg’s Fischerhütte, Fischerergasse 5, D-78479 Reichenau, 49/7534/7169

Rating: QUALITY 14/20 VALUE 15/20

Stromeyer Restaurant & Bar

Outside, the Stromeyer looks like what is was, an old factory. But inside the 19th-century structure has been painstakingly restored in 1920s style, a delightful integration of *Jugendstil* (art nouveau) and industrial chic. Teardrop lamps and an old factory clock suspend from the ceiling over hardwood and marble floors. Chairs are original bistro seats from the 20s and 30s.

Be sure to sit under the vaulted windows. Cushioned benches run the length of the waterfront wall with a view to the Rhine as it flows from Lake Constance. Swans roll over the wakes as boats parade by.

The lunch buffet features dishes such as pork roast with bread dumplings, trout in rémoulade sauce, chicken livers in Madeira sauce, and saltimbocca with gnocchi — as well as rows of pastas, salads and desserts. Not bad for €8.50. There are seasonal entrées from €7 for spaghetti

carbonara to €23 for young venison with wild mushrooms.

Taxi fare is about €6 from downtown.

Contact: Stromeyer Restaurant and Bar, Bleicherstrasse 8, D-78946 Konstanz, tel +49/07531/8920790, fax 8920799, email die-bleiche@freenet.de, web www.die-bleiche.de

Rating: QUALITY 15/20 VALUE 16/20

Restaurant Storikenescht

The Stork’s Nest is “a bit of Alsace in Constance” and the decor of this intimate and relaxed bistro features a growing collection of storks in various poses. Specialties like *Flammenkuchen* — that delectable cross between a crepe and a pancake — are popular with various combinations of cheese, bacon and onions. *Bibeleskäs*—a kind of cottage cheese with herbs and pan-fried potatoes — is surprisingly tasty, as is *la choucroute aux poisons*, a boiled sauerkraut-and-fish concoction that tastes better than it sounds. More familiar dishes are goose liver with Port wine jelly, *quiche Lorraine* and *coq au Riesling* with dumplings. French and Alsatian wines and regional beers round out the meal. (Save room for the *crème brûlée*.)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Service at the family-run restaurant is warm and cordial, with a French/German linguistic mix: “Bitte schön, monsieur. Merci!” Main dishes are in the €7-12 range.

Contact: Restaurant Storikenescht, Doebelstrasse 3, D-78946 Konstanz, tel +49/7531/919047

Rating: QUALITY 16/20 VALUE 16/20

Weinstube zum Bengel

The Weinstube zum Bengel lies in Meersburg’s lower town between the waterfront and the quiet “main street” (actually, it’s the only street). The best seats are on the outside terrace with a view to the upper town. It’s extremely friendly and informal.

Fish lovers should order the “Carina” platter, an array of salmon, trout and other local species. Lighter appetites will enjoy the “supper board” with bread, cheese and meat, or perhaps the sausage salad.

Service is fast, if needed, but it’s

best to linger in the evening. As the sun sets and lights beam across the castle, servers light candles on each table. It’s time to celebrate with “Bodensee Sekt,” the local sparkling wine.

Dinner will be €10-12, tops.

Contact: Weinstube zum Bengel, Unterstadtstrasse 30, D-88709 Meersburg, tel +49 07532 6060, fax 7785.

Rating: QUALITY: 14/20, VALUE 15/20

MONTREUX

Continued from page 1

Montreux were the most relaxing of a long trip. We headquartered in a one-bedroom apartment with a lake view and used our Swiss Saver Passes for daytime excursions. Trains, buses and our Buster Browns were the modes of travel, but in warmer months, when passenger boats are operating, the same Swiss Pass will take you all over the lake.

The great economic advantage of an apartment, of course, is the availability of a kitchen. However, since this was the “vacation” portion of our trip we decided not to cook, even breakfast. Unfortunately, Montreux has less than its share of inexpensive restaurants serving traditional Swiss food (we’re in Switzerland so in this case ‘inexpensive’ is a relative term which most of us find more accurate with the prefix “in” removed). The only one that fit the ‘traditional Swiss’ category was **Restaurant Le Museum** (Rue de la Gare 40, tel. 963 16 62, www.montreux.ch/museum/) in a 13th century monastery in the old town. It is a fondue, raclette, meat and potatoes sort of place with red and white checked tablecloths, dark wood and vaulted arches.

Bavaria Restaurant Brasserie (Av. du Casino 27, tel. 963-2545), in the center, near the Casino, pours German beer, Swiss wines, and serves overpriced but only passable food. Servers are friendly but the ambience is a bit seedy. With a beer apiece (CH 5.5), a half-liter of house Pinot Noir (CH 22), mixed salads (CH 8), simple desserts, and main dishes that averaged just over CH 30 (\$24), we dropped \$100 on a marginal dinner.

We found better, but pricier food at the stylish **Le Brasserie** (Grand Rue

100, tel. 962-1212, www.montreux-palace.com) in the **Montreux Palace Hotel**, the city's loveliest building, a Belle Epoque masterpiece whose windows are shaded by dozens of bright yellow awnings. Unfortunately, our dining experience was marred by offhand, disinterested and disorganized service. We won't bore you with the details other than to note that salads we had ordered sat in full view on a serving counter for 20 minutes before being delivered to our table. The main courses were another 20 minutes and the restaurant was less than half full. A fine piece of grilled Dover sole was a pricey CH 54 and three better-than-average lamb chops cost CH 39. With two small beers, a half-liter of local wine, the tardy salads, and three shared scoops of ice cream, we escaped for CH 161, or about \$128. When the bill was signed we quietly left — invisible as ever — without so much as an *Au-revoir, Bonsoir*, wave or nod in our direction from anyone.

A heavy downpour on a dreary Sunday night, the capture that very day of Saddam Hussein, and the fact that it was the last night of vacation, were all factors in the decision to walk across the street from our apartment for dinner in the **Royal Plaza Hotel's** elegant, expensive, **La Croisette**. The room is directly on the lake — as opposed to Le Brasserie, which looks on to the busy Grand Rue — the food is better, and a pair of underdressed Yanks were welcomed and treated like royalty. Though the prices were about the same at Le Brasserie, the gracious, enthusiastic service lifted our mood. Thus inspired, we loosened the purse strings and upgraded to something more noble than our customary house red and, to close out the evening, considerably lightened La Croisette's enticing cheese cart. The dish of the night was scallops served over a sauce subtly spiced with Spanish pimentos (CH 43/\$34).

Four courses, all accompanied with wine, came in at CH 207 (\$164) for two persons but it was the best meal of the trip. (Tip: if you want to save money staying in an apartment, don't get one across the street from the best restaurant in town.)

Each morning for *le petit déjeuner* (breakfast), we walked 10 minutes to **Babette's Sandwich Shop** on Grand Rue, where, for CH 12 per person one gets a buttery, flaky croissant, coffee, butter, jam, and fresh orange juice.

Though situated at the western edge of Montreux, our apartment was only a 15-minute walk from the train station, which made daytime rail excursions easy and convenient. Vevey and Villeneuve, on either side of Montreux, are more frequently served by the buses that stopped only a few steps from our front door.

The Montreux visitor in possession of a Swiss Rail Pass has a vast range of daytrip options. Trains headed northwest along the lake toward Lausanne, and in the opposite direction to the Valais, depart at least every half hour.

The famed narrow-gauge **Crystal Panoramic Express** of the MOB (Montreux–Oberland-Bernois), reservation required, runs every couple of hours east to Château d'Oex, Gstaad and Zweisimmen. More frequent service is available in this direction if one doesn't care about the panorama cars. An even narrower gauge line winds its way through the hills northeast via Glion to the **Rochers-de-Naye** summit (Swiss Pass free to Caux and 25% discount from there on).

The new **Chocolat Train** runs from Montreux to Broc and the Nestle chocolate factory. Riders can choose between a restored 1915 Pullman car or a modern panoramic coach. A stop along the way is at charming Gruyères for a visit to the cheese factory. The train honors Swiss Passes and Eurail passes but there is a mandatory \$22 seat reservation.

Here is a sampling of recommended daytrip destinations via rail from Montreux with the approximate fastest one-way travel times.

Geneva	63 minutes
Château d'Oex	60 minutes
Gstaad	79 minutes
Fribourg	71 minutes
Sion	33 minutes
Martigny	27 minutes
Lausanne	21 minutes
Gruyères	70 minutes
Zermatt	143 minutes


Deal Watch: Discounts for the value conscious travel shopper

■ **Luggage, travel books, maps, travel gear & clothing.** A standing discount of 10% is available to subscribers from **Travel Essentials** (www.travelgearnow.com, tel. orders 800-521-6722, option 4). To obtain the discount use the code 'gemut2004'. There are a couple of little twists to this deal that make it even better, especially if you live in a sales tax state. Your merchandise is shipped from Oregon, a no sales tax state, and so you pay none, no matter where you live. In addition, orders over \$100 ship free.

For example, let's say you're a California resident and purchase a \$199 **Eagle Creek** 22-inch expandable suitcase from **Magellan** in Santa Barbara, the nation's biggest seller of travel merchandise. You pay \$199 plus 7.25% sales tax plus \$12.95 shipping for a total of \$226.38. Order from Travel Essentials, however, and your cost for the same bag is \$179.10, a saving of just over \$47.

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Now you may think I got the MBZ because *Gemütlichkeit* books a cars with Auto Europe. Absolutely not. I was just another customer to be stonewalled. No, the secret of my success is that I was aware of the Auto Europe, 24/7, toll-free-from-Europe-help-line and was willing to use it. As the largest U.S. booker of rental cars in Europe — more than Avis, more than Hertz, more than National — and, since Auto Europe accounts for so much of these companies' European business, AE has powerful leverage with them. That guy on the late shift in Portland, Maine, (who also knew me as just another customer) had the names of key Avis managers and vice presidents and probably dropped a few names in order get me my upgrade. If my booking had been directly with Avis, with no Auto Europe to turn to, I'm dead certain I would have left that morning driving an Opel instead of a Mercedes-Benz.

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MONTREUX

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Of the many possible rail excursions, don't miss taking half a day to visit Martigny and the **Pierre Gianadda Fondation** (Rue du Forum, tel. +41/027/722 3978, fax 722 5285, email: info@gianadda.ch, web: www.gianadda.ch, entry fee: CH 14). The train ride is about 30 minutes and then another 20 minutes flat walking (or faster by city bus) to the Gianadda complex, a combination archaeological site, museum, park and concert venue. Martigny lies in the path of

Roman legions who traversed the Alps via the St. Bernard route and Gianadda is the site of a ruined Roman temple and amphitheater.

The ground floor of the main building features rotating exhibitions of great artists, including Van Gogh, Picasso, Chagall, Degas, and Miró. Displayed until May 23 are the works of Swiss painter, Albert Anker. At mezzanine level is an impressive collection of Roman coins, utensils, jewelry, and pieces of bronze statuary, all of which has been unearthed on or near the Gianadda site. In an underground room is a permanent collection of paintings and drawings and another room houses an extraordinary automobile museum with cars from 1897 to about 1930. An outdoor sculpture garden has works by Rodin, Calder, Henry Moore and other notables (see photos at www.gemut.com — click on the suitcase). A quarter mile away, near the rail tracks, sits a small Roman amphitheater discovered only in 1973 and not fully uncovered until 1987.

Vevey, best reached by bus or on foot, has more old world charm than Montreux and is worth a day of your time, though the Nestle-sponsored **Alimentarium** (museum of nutrition) is probably more interesting to kids than adults. Other Vevey attractions include **Mont-Pèlerin**, the **Jenisch Museum** — mostly Swiss artists — and the **Swiss Museum of Cameras**.

Other excursion possibilities are almost limitless: Gruyères for its **cheese factory and castle**; Geneva's old town and the marvelous **Red Cross Museum**; Sion and its **fortresses**; Lausanne's **Olympic Museum**; Gstaad and Château d'Oex for country charm; Zermatt and the **Matterhorn**; and medieval Fribourg. Of course, we haven't even mentioned Switzerland's top tourist attraction: Montreux's very own **Chillon Castle**.

The apartment in which we stayed has been sold and is no longer available, but weekly vacation rental prices on this part of the lake start at around \$500. For a list, contact Montreux-Vevey Tourisme, Rue du Theatre 5, CH-1820 Montreux, tel. +41/021/962 84 84, fax 962 84 86, web www.montreux-vevey.com, email info@mvtourism.ch.

We Recommend

This listing of good value, mid-priced hotels in popular destination cities is intended for fast reference. Additional hotels and links to hotel websites hotels is in the **Archives & Hotel Database** sections 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@snaufu.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 Exquisit, Pettenkofenstr. 3, tel. +49/089/ 551 99 0, fax 551 99 499, email: info@hotel-exquisit.com

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24, fax 550 3856, 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@rhotel.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 Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932, email: hotel.arlette@bliwin.ch

Frankfurt Airport

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