

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Remembering the Wall

On November 9 it will be 15 years. Wherever you happen to be, perhaps you will remember to quietly raise a glass to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Capitalism ain't perfect but it does seem to work better for more people than what went on behind that ugly barricade.

It was only at my wife's insistence that we first visited Berlin in 1980. My mental picture of it in those days, formed by mid and late '40s newsreels, was a bombed out pile of rocks being picked at by old women wearing bandanas. I was more into rolling green hills and craggy alps. But, as Liz pointed out, every third German we met on our frequent trips asked the same question, "have you seen Berlin?"

Thus it was that we found ourselves one warm summer day at the Rupholdstein checkpoint in a rented Opel Kadette.

If you will recall, in 1980 West Berlin was an enclave of freedom surrounded by communist East Germany. Driving there from West Germany involved about a four-hour drive through hostile territory. We approached our entry as a visit to an enemy camp from which we might never return. There were a long list of don'ts and a much shorter list of do's: don't exceed the posted speed limit, no matter how slow it is; don't leave the main highway; don't stop; do take food and water and start with a full tank of gas. With these cautions and tales of border harassment firmly in mind, our attitude was smile, keep a low profile, smile,

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

THE SWISS CAPITAL

Why Bern? For starters how about miles of arcaded streets crisscrossing a 900-year old-town; plenty of good hotels and restaurants; and fast, frequent rail service to the rest of the country?

Back in January of 2002, in one of the major oversights of *Gemütlichkeit's* 18-year history, we failed to include Bern in our "10 essential" Switzerland destinations (see at www.gemut.com). It probably should be in the top five.

Let us not name names — one hesitates to demean others to make a point — but Bern has more authentic old-world charm than most of the country's more visited, and much better-known towns. Its carefully-preserved, architecturally-unique *Altstadt*, packed shore-to-shore on the peninsula formed by a U-turn in the river Aare, is only part of the picture. This is the seat of government, the

nation's capital, a status conferring on Bern a sophistication that distinguishes it in a rather crowded category — European towns with interesting old buildings.

With a population of 130,000, it is neither village nor metropolis, though it offers many of the advantages of both. It is large enough to support world-class museums and orchestras, while at the same time retaining a small town atmosphere. Every Tuesday and Saturday, for example, is market day. On those mornings the old town is packed with farmers and vendors hawking a variety of foods and other goods. Its university and approximately 80

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Backroads Driving: The Best Maps

Those who try to drive the backroads of Germany, Austria and Switzerland without sufficiently detailed maps will find it a frustrating experience. On larger scale maps — 1:750,000 is a common size and means that one centimeter on the map equals 7.5 kilometers of actual distance — some roads and villages simply aren't shown. A Germany map of the entire country, such as the 1:750,000 **Michelin #718**, is suitable for finding your bearings and getting a feel of where cities and regions are in relation to each other, but not for backroads touring.

For that we recommend a scale of 1:200,000 (one centimeter equals two kilometers) or, better yet, 1:150,000.

One of Europe's major map makers, Mairs Geographischer Verlag, has long published its 1:200,000 scale

Die General Karte series. The detail of these maps becomes apparent when one realizes that for many years covering the whole of Germany required 34 separate maps, 26 for the old West Germany and 8 for East Germany.

Now, however, that series has been revised; the scale is still 1:200,000 but there are only 12 maps for all of Germany. Obviously, since the scale is the same, there are physical differences in the new product. The backside of the old maps contained information (in German) about some of the cities and sights covered by that map. In the new series maps are printed on both

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Exchange rates as of 10/4/04
1 euro = \$1.227
1 Swiss franc = \$0.79

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be pleasant, smile, get through it.

We discovered smiles don't work for every occasion.

After surrendering our passports through the car window at the first border station, we rolled ever so slowly to the next where we would wait for them to be returned and where a young soldier sat behind an open window, his head at our eye level, only a couple of feet from mine. This, we hoped, was the person who would return our passports with a friendly wave and send us on our way. Not exactly. We nodded a "Guten tag" and smiled. He did neither. In fact, he fixed me with a stare so unblinking and malevolently aggressive that it was as if he'd called me a capitalist pig. His 20-year-old, third-world eyes bore into my 42-year-old head attached to a body softened and pampered by life in the West.

At first I thought something was wrong, perhaps my chin had begun to sprout a second nose or maybe I was being mistaken for an escaped ax murderer. The stare went on for several minutes, the soldier never moved or blinked. It was unnerving.

A calculated tactic like this creates a dilemma for its target: after the first nervous smiles and nods fail, what does one do? I did what I suspect most poor, flustered non-German-speaking tourists do, I turned my back on the stare-down and said something brilliant like, "So Liz, do

you think we'll be able to find soccer shirts for the kids at Ka De We?" Her calm response was something on the order of, "I haven't the faintest idea but if you'll turn around the nice man will give us back our passports and we can get the hell out of here."

In retrospect, I have thought of 40 or 50 better ways to handle what we now know was a form of amusement performed at the expense of fat-cat American tourists. The responses I most favor now, all involve being fluent enough in German to break the ice with something like, "Lighten up man, I'm bringing steroids for the swim team." *Gemütlichkeit* would have then become the first travel newsletter published from a Gulag.

But soon we crept out of the checkpoint. The road was rutted and bumpy. Cars kept their spacing and went precisely the posted speed. The Mercedes that had whipped by us on the West German side at 120 MPH not long ago, was now timid as a kitten and dared not pass that two-cylinder East German popcorn popper ahead. The law was everywhere. Still in the border control area, maintaining a low speed — and as low a profile as we knew how — we passed a policeman who eyed us with interest, then ambled over to his car, reached inside, pulled out a walkie-talkie and spoke into it. The mind reeled. *Is it my imagination or is he talking about us? No way, we're minding our own business, we're friendly, we're low profile, we smile.* But there was no mistaking it; he had looked directly

at our car — at me really — then walked to his car and immediately said something to someone.

Our answer was over the next hill. Lolling against the fender of yet another police car was a potbellied East German cop. He carefully watched the slow-moving line of cars, all scrupulously moving less than the 30 km (19 mph) speed limit. As we came closer, the cop heaved away from the fender and positioned himself in the center of the road. *This can't be happening!*

But it was. With the merest movement of one hand, he signaled us to the side of the road. As he approached the car I rolled down the window and tried, unsuccessfully, to flash my best what-seems-to-be-the-trouble-officer smile.

The cop spoke several sentences in German. I understood not one word.

Liz said, "He wants to see the passports." Trying to control my

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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: **erbn** Password: **0103**

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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.

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foreign embassies and consulates insure a demand for the full spectrum of hotels and restaurants, upscale shops and a wide choice of cultural venues.

Another advantage is the city's vast and busy rail station, located virtually in the town center. An amazing 46 trains per day, starting at 3:50am with the last departure at 10:47pm — and that's just one route, the approximately 90-minute run to the Zürich Airport. Geneva Airport, about two hours via rail, is served by some two dozen daily trains. Bern's rail hub location makes it an excellent headquarters from which to explore the western half of the country. Try, for example, the 40-minute ride to the farming village of Langnau in the Emmental. Walk the town, perhaps visit the *Heimatmuseum* (local craft museum), then lunch at the **Hotel Hirschen**, one of the best kitchens in the region.

In the box at right are one-way rail travel times to some leading destinations. Frequency of departure ranges from every few minutes to about an hour, depending on time of day and city.

For us, Bern's principal attraction is it's almost perfectly-preserved, historic old-town. Miles of arcaded streets and shops invite a slow exploration on foot — even in wet weather when the covered promenades keep pedestrians mostly dry. Along the way are ancient fountains and turreted old houses with oriel windows.

The principal east-west street keeps changing its name as it extends east. Starting out as Bubenberplatz, it then becomes Spitalgasse, then Marktgasse, then Kramgasse and finally Gerechtigkeitsgasse. Then just before crossing the Nydeggbücke, it becomes Nydegasse. The farther one gets toward the end of the peninsula and the bend in the river, the more exclusive the shops. A couple of interesting ones are **Heimatwerke** at Kramgasse 61 and **Kunsthanderkanderegg**, Kramgasse 4.

After you've done the Markt-

Bern Basics**Population:** 130,000**Elevation:** 542 meters/1778 feet

Tourist Info: Bern Tourist Office, Laupenstr. 20, CH 3001 Bern, tel. +41/31/328 1228, fax 328 1299, Hotelline +41/31/328 1210, email info-res@bernetourism.ch, web www.bernetourism.ch

Old Town Tours: Daily at 11am and 2:30pm. Duration: 90 minutes. Cost: CH 15, adults; children under 17, CH 7.5

City Packages: Include two, three or four nights hotel with breakfast, public transport, city tour, vouchers for museums and sights, and documentation on the city and environs. Purchase through Bern Tourism (see above). Per person prices vary based on length of stay and category of hotel chosen, but three nights in a three-star hotel is CH 213 in winter and CH 273 in summer.

House of Parliament: Free tours Mon-Sat. 9am, 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm; access to galleries during parliamentary sessions, tel. 322 85 22. Passport ID required.

Museum of Fine Arts: World's largest Paul Klee collection. Collection of 14th to 16th century Italian art and Swiss art from 15th century to present (Duccio, Fra Angelico, Picasso, Chagall, Kandinsky). New Paul Klee museum to open next summer.

Swiss Rifle Museum: Firearms since 1817.

Museum of Natural History: Europe's largest diorama; mammals and birds presented in natural habitat. The original Barry, the famous Saint Bernard dog.

Einstein House: At Kramgasse 49; the apartment where, in 1905, Einstein developed the principles of his theory of relativity. Open Tues-Fri. 1-5pm, Sat. 12-4pm

Swiss Alpine Museum: Exhibits include alpine topographical models, multivision, audiovisual stations, alpine data, etc.

Museum of Communication: Huge stamp collection. History of post and telecommunications.

Bern: Daytrip Central

Many popular destinations are within easy rail distance of the capital. Here are a few in the about-two-hours-or-less range.

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Fastest Rail Time</i>
Thun	20 min
Fribourg	21 min
Biel	27 min
Neuchâtel	38 min
Langnau	40 min
Solothurn	43 min
Interlaken	55 min
Basel	67 min
Lausanne	67 min
Lucerne	81 min
Geneva	103 min
Grindelwald	103 min
Wengen	108 min
Gstaad	112 min
Schaffhausen	123 min

gasse, Kramgasse, Gerechtigkeitsgasse, etc., and find yourself at the end of the peninsula, do a 180-degree left turn and double back on one of Bern's most interesting little byways, Postgasse. It carries less foot traffic and is home to a number of interesting shops. See the purses at **Momo Haller** (#46 Postgasse), the sculptures at **Bildhauerwerkstatt** (#58), minimalist furniture at **Zona** (#60) and a fine kitchen store, **Küchenladen** (#53). Grab a bite at **Restaurant Café Postgasse** (#48), then drop by **Anti-quatäten** (#50).

For reasons not fully understood by this writer, Bern's best-known attraction is a few scruffy bears, the animal after which the city is named. They are kept in a pit just across the river at the end of the old town.

We recommend you give the bears only a passing glance on your way up the bluff above the river across the Nydegg Bridge to **Alt-estramdepot** (Grosser Muristalden 6). Here you can sip beer made on the premises while enjoying a substantial lunch and terrific views of the old town. Before or after, duck into the free multimedia "**Bern Show**," a worthwhile 20 minutes of history centered around an animated model of the city.

Topping a substantial list of Bern museums is the **Kunstmuseum**, which houses the world's largest Paul Klee collection. There are also works by Picasso, Monet, Cézanne, Manet, Cranach, Chagall and other notables. See also the **Einstein Apartment** at 49 Kramgasse and the spectacular "Last Judgement," a tableau of 234 statues above the main entrance to the **Münster**.

Parking is a big problem in the center of Bern. One used to be able, on weekends, to find a spot in front of the Parliament House; it was the city's only on-street parking. In the post-9/11 world, however, unattended vehicles are not allowed near important buildings. Public parking lots will set you back about \$25 per day and space is limited.

Lodging

Bern's two five-star hotels, the

Bellevue Palace and the **Schweizerhof**, are priced from about \$275 for a double room. The former, near the Parliament House, is the choice of high government officials and diplomats. Over the years we have heard criticism of the Schweizerhof for its noisy location directly across the street from the rail station.

Judged solely on European charm, from among the hotels reviewed below one would choose the **Innere Enge** or the elegant little **Belle Epoque**, near Bern's most interesting shops. But there is a location problem with each. The Innere Enge is a bit inconvenient for rail travelers, and while the Belle Epoque is in the heart of the old town, it is not within walking distance of the rail station if you have luggage, and auto travelers will pay about \$25 a day to park in a public garage.

The two-star **Nydeck** is our lone budget choice.

Considering location, value, and comfort it's difficult to pass up one of the mid-priced hotels near the rail station such as the **Bristol**, **Kreuz** or **Savoy**.

You are almost certain to save money by visiting Bern on a weekend, as nearly all hotels offer special rates then. Note that of the hotels

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.

listed below, only the **Bristol**, **Kreuz** and **Nydeck** include breakfast in their prices.

Hotel Innere Enge

Located on a bluff above the city, about a 30-minute walk or 10-minute bus ride from the old town, the Innere Enge has some of the advantages of a country hotel — views, free parking, attractive grounds — while still maintaining an easy connection to the city center. It also offers a strong combination of hospitality, charm, guestroom comfort and value. At 60% of the price, not only are its rooms equal to Bern's five-star offerings, but free parking means a further saving for auto travelers.

A cozy fireplace and a top-flight staff warmly receive arriving guests in a spacious reception area. Beyond it is the 1890s-style restaurant/bar whose high, curving windows overlook the city below. On clear days, the Alps, including the Jungfrau and Eiger peaks, are visible. Outside is an inviting garden terrace.

From the gorgeous front door with its jazz trumpet logo in stained glass, to the intimate basement jazz club with state-of-the-art sound and lighting, Innere Enge is devoted to this unique American art form. But rest easy, the hotel is physically and audibly removed from stylish Marian's Jazz Club and nary a decibel registers in the guestrooms. (Unfortunately, we have been disappointed by our two visits to Marian's; the music just hasn't measured up and, despite modern ventilation, smokers often spoil the air in the low-ceilinged room.)

Public and guest rooms throughout are liberally sprinkled with jazz memorabilia: here a framed original letter from Louis Armstrong, there a Dizzy Gillespie hologram.

Guestrooms have some of the most interesting pieces: Room Number one, the Clark Terry junior suite (trumpeter and teacher of Miles Davis), contains a letter from Louis Armstrong in which he urges the reader to "lose weight the Satchmo way" and maintains a "laxative once a week is very nice."

We most liked the Milt Hinton room, Number 32, with its huge expanse of windows and cathedral ceiling with exposed wood beams.

Number 20, the hotel's smallest and least expensive room has a "French bed" (double bed in the U.S.), but nonetheless is very comfortable. It rents for CH 260 double and CH 220 single

All rooms have upgraded furnishings, bed linen and well-lit, in some cases luxurious, bathrooms.

The Jazz Club offers shows nightly except Monday. In addition, there are Sunday concerts from 10:30am to 1:30pm and on Saturday from 4:30 to 6:30pm.

Daily Rates: Singles CH 220 to 360, doubles 260 to 280, jr. suites CH 300 to 420. Breakfast is CH 20 per person. **Contact:** Innere Enge, Engestrasse 54, CH-3012, tel. +41/31/3096111, fax 3096112, email info@zghotels.ch, web www.zghotels.ch.

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 11/20

Belle Epoque

Guests of this little hotel near some of Bern's most interesting shops and cafés, are beneficiaries of the magnificent turn-of-the-century art and antiques accumulated by the hotel's owners, Marina and Dr. Phillippe D. Ledermann-Puigventós. Their collection of *Jugendstil* (a.k.a. Art Nouveau or Secessionist), a style of art and architecture, popular in the "Belle Epoque" — late 19th century — is said to be one of the most extensive in the world. Only a small portion of the collection is at the hotel and some of the pieces we had seen on previous visits — such as the Toulouse Lautrec poster in the bar — are no longer in evidence.

The 16 guestrooms, some designated non-smoking, are a bit small but nicely furnished and equipped with modern bathrooms with complementary cosmetics.

Those who remain unmoved by Art Nouveau will enjoy the Belle Epoque's personal service and intimate atmosphere. Devotees of the style who choose to stay elsewhere should stop by for a refreshment in the Toulouse Lautrec bar.

This hotel still has loads of charm but since our first visit six years ago the prices have increased substantially and breakfast is no longer included in the rates.

Daily Rates: Singles CH 195 to 245, doubles CH 280 to 340, jr. suites CH 340 to 590. Breakfast is CH 19 to 29 person.

Contact: Belle Epoque-Garni, Gerechtigkeitsgasse 18, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 43 36, fax 311 39 36, email info@belle-epoque.ch, web www.belle-epoque.ch

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 10/20

Hotel Bristol

It's a Best Western but don't let that deter you for a second. A recent, extensive make-over has lifted this centrally-located old warrior to a higher level. Stylish new furnishings, fixtures and surfaces in each of the better-than-average size guestrooms have the Bristol looking ready for a full-color spread in a slick travel magazine.

Admittedly, this is still a corporately-owned hotel that caters to business clients and groups, but the mood has gone from stodgy to chic. As a result, it fully deserves its four-star ranking and in that category is a heck of a value to boot.

The Bristol is two blocks from the House of Parliament and even closer to the rail station. It has a Laundromat, wireless Internet, and free loaner bicycles for guests.

Daily Rates: Singles CH 190 to 210, doubles CH 245 to 300

Contact: Hotel Bristol, Schauplatzgasse 10, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 0101, fax 311 9479, email reception@bristolbern.ch, web www.bristolbern.ch

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Savoy

The Savoy's best feature is its location only about 50 yards along a mostly-covered walkway to the escalator that leads to the underground beneath the main rail station. The comfortable but undistinguished guest rooms are spacious and have the necessary amenities. There is also wireless Internet access but be advised the required Swisscom card operates a bit different than you

might think. For about \$15, we purchased a two-hour card from the hotel that we assumed would work like a phone card — use 10 of the 120 minutes, shut down and you've still got 110 minutes left. Not so; once your laptop logs on to the net, the clock starts ticking and you've got the next two hours to do your business. You can't check your email for 15 minutes, log off, then come back a few hours later and expect to have time remaining.

Daily Rates: Singles CH 185 to 205, doubles CH 230 to 250. Breakfast is CH 20 per person.

Contact: Hotel Savoy, Neuengasse 26, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 4405, fax 312 1978, email info@zghotels.ch, web www.zghotels.ch

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 10/20

Hotel Kreuz

Guestrooms at the three-star Kreuz are a bit smaller than at the Bristol and Savoy. Also near the rail station (343 steps according to the hotel's brochure), this is another serviceable, straightforward, well-run hotel catering to business travelers.

Renovated rooms are priced slightly higher but worth it.

Daily Rates: Singles CH 120 to 145, doubles, CH 170 to 210

Contact: Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 11 62, fax 311 37 47, email info@hotelkreuz-bern.ch, web www.hotelkreuz-bern.ch

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 11/20

Hotel Nydeck

This two-star inn, located up one to three flights of stairs over a bar at the tip of the old-town, recently remodeled its guestrooms. The result is bright, airy spaces with hardwood floors, spare but comfortable furnishings, and some nice views. The change has created the best hotel room values we saw in Bern.

Number 20 is a nice corner double with a neighborhood view and CNN.

Check-in at the Junkere bar at street level and be prepared for a flight or two of steep stairs.

Daily Rates: Singles CH 95 to 110, doubles CH 140 to 160

Contact: Hotel Nydeck, Gere-

chtigkeitsgasse 1, CH 3011, tel. +41/31/311 8686, fax 312 2054, email info@hotelnideck.ch, web www.hotelnideck.ch

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 15/20

Food

Lorenzini

In the shadow of Parliament, one floor above its immensely popular coffee house/bar, Lorenzini is not only our first choice in Bern but one of Switzerland's best moderately-priced restaurants. Outstanding food, a lively atmosphere, and competent, friendly service have made this Italian-style bistro a favorite of lawmakers and diplomats. The clientele and trappings are upscale for sure, but with a welcoming, unpretentious informality. Jeans-wearing U.S. tourists being given equal deference to silver-haired men in \$5,000 suits and \$10,000 watches strains credibility but perhaps management is just clever enough to create such a fiction — either way we tourists seem to pass through in happy ignorance.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

On a recent visit we stopped by in the early afternoon to reserve a table for dinner. Arriving at 8pm we were given a table in the front room, even though the restaurant was full. What followed was the best meal of a three-week European trip. One wonders how much better, if at all, an incredibly savory Osso Buco Milanese (CH 39) and Risotto Funghi (CH 18), a main dish of slow-cooked rice with porcini mushrooms, would be in Florence or Milan. A side of perfectly cooked spinach was CH 8 and of course there were the usual mixed salads (CH 8.5) and a couple of simple desserts featuring ice cream (CH 7 - 9). Without beverages we paid CH 90 (\$71).

Lorenzini has the special energy, style and solid cuisine that is common to all great bistros from Shanghai to San Francisco to New York to, well, Bern. Don't miss it.

Contact: Lorenzini, Theaterplatz 5, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/318 5067, email margaretha.schober@lorenzini.ch, web www.lorenzini.ch

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 16/20

Zimmermania

Deep in the heart of old Bern, family-owned Zimmermania serves traditional French dishes and does its best to look like a small Parisian brasserie. Wait staff wears full-length white aprons, the menu is in French and most of the wine poured is from France.

The physical layout is two narrow, side-by-side rooms both lined lengthwise with banquettes. Floors are hardwood, lighting is bright and tablecloths are white with paper napkins. The daily specials are lettered on large mirrors. After a hospitable welcome one can expect to be shown to a small table with limited elbow room and then served dishes featuring large portions and rich sauces.

At lunch, a three-course "business menu" costs CH 39.50 and a simpler, two-course vegetarian menu is CH 18.5. On the a la carte dinner menu, familiar Swiss dishes are joined by standard-issue Paris brasserie fare that ranges from beefsteak *Tartare* at CH 32.5 to filet of beef with wild mushrooms and a classic Burgundian reduction sauce for CH 46. One commendable Swiss choice was *Emince de foie de veau aux herbettes, Rösti* (CH 37), thin slices of tender calves liver floating in a butter and sage sauce and served with that Swiss staple; shredded potatoes fried crisp and golden. More in the Gallic mode was a small, whole, rosemary-flavored roast chicken with French fries and a lemon butter sauce that cost CH 39. A starter of mixed greens tossed with thick, smoky chunks of ham, hard-boiled egg slices and tomato, coated with a creamy, mustardy, vinaigrette dressing, was served with good, crusty bread and cost CH 9.5.

At the end comes a cheese cart and a variety of dessert choices in the CH 8.5 to CH 15.5 range. A nice selection of reasonably-priced wines by the glass starts at CH 6.2 per deciliter (about 3.5 oz.).

Though Zimmermania breaks no new ground, it serves well-prepared dishes of first-rate ingredients.

Contact: Restaurant Zimmermania, Brunngasse 19, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 1542, fax 312 2822, email

info@zimmermania.ch, web www.zimmermania.ch

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 10/20

Frohsinn

Hefty ceiling beams, rough plaster walls, red tiled floor, shaded table lamps, and bright Tibetan prints all contribute to this old-town restaurant's intimate appeal.

Showing up without reservations we are seated in what is probably the restaurant's least desirable table in an odd little corner with a good view only of server traffic to and from the kitchen. The place is packed and our order will be prepared after everyone else's — our problem, not the restaurant's.

Lousy table or not, our waiter is most attentive and most of the food turns out to be worth the wait. Chopped, sauteed calves liver (CH 35) with *Rösti* is near perfect and not far behind are Crevettes (CH 38) (butterflied prawns in a cream sauce) with "Kreole" rice. The almost paper-thin liver slices are wonderfully light and the *Rösti* is very much up to scratch. A rather expensive (CH 14.5) salad, however, with watery dressing and featuring a much too salty Roquefort cheese, struck a sour note.

The menu is primarily traditional Swiss favorites and for most main courses one can choose a smaller, less expensive portion.

Without beverages, we paid CH 96 or about \$76.

Restaurant Frohsinn, Müstergasse 54, CH-3001 Bern, tel. +41/031/311 3768,

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 10/20

THE BEST MAPS

Continued from page 1

sides on paper that is tougher and a bit heavier. New also is a stiff, laminated cover. The downside of these new, more durable maps is that they are about twice as thick, some three-quarters of an inch wider, and more than twice as heavy (5.5 ounces vs. 2.3 oz.) as the old ones. However, you'll carry fewer maps to see the same territory. For example, the southern half of Germany — from Frankfurt south — is incorporated in

four maps instead of 12.

A small frustration with the old *Die General Karte* was the lack of a city index. In the new series, a small booklet that fits nicely into a pocket inside the map cover not only contains an index, it has city maps and a list of suggested hotels and restaurants.

The map legend — in four languages including English — remains a valuable feature. Via a series of symbols the maps identify such features as towns worth a journey, towns worth a detour and towns simply worth seeing; picturesque towns; landscapes worth a journey, worth a detour and worth seeing; routes with beautiful, panoramic scenery; car trains; car ferries; hiking routes; footpaths; national parks; nature preserves; roads closed in winter; tourist routes such as wine roads; railway lines; rack railways and funiculars; parking areas with and without WC; road gradients and mountain passes with their height in meters; distance markings and much more. Of course the various road categories from motorway (Autobahn) to minor road are indicated and facilities such as hotels, gas stations, and restaurants are marked where available at Autobahn stops.

An alternative to individual maps is the 1:150,000 *Deutschland Maxiatalas* published by **Falk**. It is a virtual replica of the better-known *Maxiatalas* distributed by **ADAC**, the German Auto Club, except the Falk version has a section containing some two dozen city maps. These atlases, of course, cover the entire country with somewhat more detail even than *Die General Karte*. Both are about 12 by 15 inches, half an inch thick, spiral-bound, and weigh a little over 3 pounds.

For Switzerland, there are three 1:200,000 Michelin maps, #551, #552 and #552. Our recommendation for Austria is the seven 1:200,000 maps of **Freytag & Berndt**.

All the maps mentioned above are available at a 20% discount from www.travelgearnow.com or by calling 800-521-6722, press option 4.

Europe Travel Briefs

■ German Rail Fares Rise:

Citing increased energy prices, **Deutsche Bahn**, the German railroad, will raise fares overall by an average 3.1 percent as of Dec. 12 for long-distance passenger travel. Second-class ticket fares will increase by 3.4 percent for trips between 150 kilometers (93 miles) and 400 kilometers and by 4.2 percent for travel longer than 400 kilometers.

Prices for distances of less than 150 kilometers or exceeding 750 kilometers will remain the same. First-class fares, which have been 50% greater than second-class, will become 55% higher. No doubt these increases will be reflected in the prices for 2005 rail passes marketed in the U.S.

■ Low Lufthansa Winter Fares:

Considering the quality and service of the airline, **Lufthansa's** winter fares are very tempting. From gateways offering nonstop service, they range from \$335 (not including tax) for New York departures to \$445 from the West Coast. Bookings must be made by November 15. Call 800-521-6722 for a specific quote or visit www.gemut.com/AirQuotes.asp.

■ Hot Deal on Swiss Biz Class:

Business class travelers should investigate **Swiss International Airlines** winter fares for departures November 1 through April 30, returning as late as May 30. Sample fares, with tax, to selected European cities from its U.S. gateways include: New York \$2036, Boston \$1851, Chicago \$1999, Los Angeles \$2149, and Miami \$1908. Booking required at least 50 days before departure. Call 800-521-6722.

■ High Praise for Lucerne Festival:

Devotees of classical music should make plans now for next August and September's **Lucerne Festival**. Writing in the *Toronto Star*, William Littler calls it the "greatest orchestral showcase in all of Europe" and says the concert hall of the spectacular, lakeside Culture and Convention Centre "must surely be one of the finest concert halls built anywhere in recent decades."

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Swiss Walk: The Gelmersee

The Gelmersee is formed by a large dam above the road that runs southeast between Meiringen and the Grimsel Pass. The area was recently opened to tourists.

To reach it one can drive or take the postal bus from Meiringen toward Grimsel, passing through Innertkirchen and Guttannen and stopping at Handegg. From the **Handegg Hotel**, walk across the road, passing through the small parking lot and then across the river. It's about a three-

minute walk to your left before you come to the Gelmerbahn station.

This single car on rails is pulled by a cable and in summer runs daily from 9am to 5:45pm. The tracks were built in 1926 to transport construction workers and later power station workers up to the dam site.

The roundtrip is CH 25 (no Swiss Pass). There is a conductor to sell the tickets and secure you with a crossbar into deeply canted seats. (At this point, a few acrophobes may decide to go return to the hotel and wait for the next bus back to Meiringen.) At 106% gradient (47 degrees), this is an extraordinarily steep railway. The ride takes nine minutes each way and is spectacular. At the top is a wondrous sight; a deep blue-green lake surrounded on three sides by towering mountains. A few paces away are the yellow directional signs.

My friend, a veteran Swiss traveler and walker, and I chose the round the lake trip, said to take an hour and 20 minutes. Perhaps you can do it in that time if you are a track star and never stop to look. We decided to forget the time and soak up the scenery. The day was partly cloudy, and this added to the realism of being in almost another world. We headed off to our right and shortly reached the dam which one can cross via a path over its top, or by walking down past the

front of it to the other side. We chose the latter, where we saw several deer lounging always just out of our reach.

The hike took a little over three hours with a picnic stop. The way is not flat, but overall not steep either. The senior man in our group of two did it in Birkenstock sandals, but I would recommend some nice boots. There are some narrows but there are also cables attached to the walls along these. All of the streams are easily fordable except for one,

where my companion shed his Birnies and did a barefoot trek.

There are waterfalls, sculpted cliff walls, and many tall peaks. It is easy, looking at the cliffs, to see where

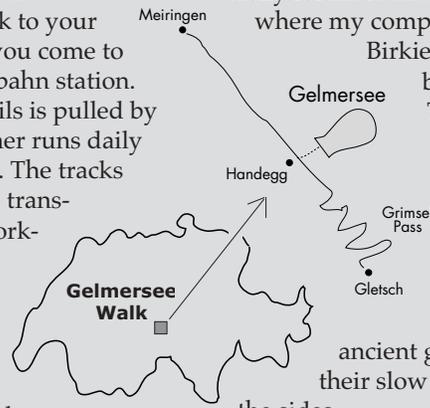
ancient glaciers did their slow work to polish the sides.

After a lunch stop (take a picnic because unlike most Swiss hikes, this one is devoid of food stops) the clouds moved up and over the dam at what was now the far end of the lake. We walked onward into a cloudy mist that stopped just short of being a light rain. Along the way, we saw four German men on their way upward to an alpine hut, and a family of four walkers. Other than that, we had the place to ourselves. Although this is less than a mile above sea level, there are no trees, so views are abundant.

We reached the upper railway station, called to the lower station, and in a few minutes were at the roadside again. Signs say that a minimum of four persons is needed for a trip and eight is the maximum, but the two of us alone had no problem.

Vance Roy is an American neurosurgeon who 25 years ago retired to Sachseln, a charming town on Lake Sarnen south of Lucerne.

By Vance Roy



This year's festival featured the Cleveland Orchestra under Franz Welser Möst, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam under Mariss Jansons and Philip Herreweghe, the Staatskapelle Berlin under Daniel Barenboim, the Bavarian Radio Orchestra under Mariss Jansons and the Vienna Philharmonic under Valery Gergiev.

Watch www.lucernefestival.ch for announcement of the 2005 and ticketing ordering details.

Best Airport Gets Better:

Zürich Airport's **Airside Center**, a new area of stores and VIP spaces, opened in September. In addition to the usual tax-free and duty-free outlets, Airside Center is divided into three zones:

- The upscale World Travelers Zone features Armani, Bvlgari, Hugo Boss and Hermès along with Swiss brands Navyboot, Caviar House, Grieder Les Boutiques, Pearl Bar and others.

- The Holiday and Leisure Zone is given over to more mundane merchandise; CD's and DVDs, trendy jewelry, sunglasses, toys, gifts and, of course, Swatch timepieces.

- Best of Switzerland caters to homeward-bound tourists and features Chopard, Davidoff, Heimatwerk, La Prairie, Sprüngli, Türler and other well-known sellers of Swiss souvenirs. Some 20 different chocolate products are sold in this area.

- Swiss Airlines new Allegra lounge provides refreshment areas, showers and work stations and is open to all Swiss Airlines passengers. Separate lounges are available for first and business-class passengers.

German Hotel Prices Ease:

Though the number of visitors from the U.S. fell for the second straight year, the German Hotel Association reports that bookings in the country's 38,000 hotels and motels were up by 5.5 % in the first half of 2004. Room rates, however, dropped by 0.5%.

Hottest New Destination?:

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, in the northeast, has seen overnight hotel stays by non-Germans triple since 1992.

DRIVING TO BERLIN

Continued from page 1

shaking hand, I gave them up along with the just-obtained transit visas. He examined all while walking a slow half-circle around the car.

The needle on my imagination tachometer was well into the red zone. *Will they let us make a phone call? Do they immediately separate husbands and wives.* Back on my side of the car, the policeman resumed in German; long sentences, whole paragraphs. I turned again to Liz who this time was no help. "Spreche nicht Deutsch," I tried to say, but who knows how it came out.

We could only shrug and shake our heads. I figured if he spoke any English he would have used it by then.

Finally, exasperated and possibly angry, he reached through the window toward my head. But the hand bypassed my left ear and grasped the shoulder harness hanging by the door post. He gave the strap two hard jerks and the dawn came up like thunder out of Magdeburg. I had forgotten to refasten my seat belt leaving the checkpoint.

The rest was easy. The cop wanted 10 West German marks and he wanted them immediately. He was careful to give us a receipt, I buckled up and we were on our way.

Between 1980 and '89 we made that drive numerous times, and since then have visited Berlin frequently, but the city has never looked better to us than the first time we entered it at the end of that first drive.

Gemütlichkeit Goes to 10 Issues

Note this issue is marked October/November. The next, which will be delivered sometime in December, will be for December/January. Then in February we will resume the once-a-month schedule until next year at this time.

This means a reduction from 11 to 10 issues per year. Of course, you paid for 11 issues (or 22 or 33, depending of the length of your renewal) and that's what you will receive. Your subscription account will be appropriately extended.

The change reduces our costs and thus allows us to postpone a price increase to existing subscribers.

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@snafu.de

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

Bern

Hotel Bristol, Schauplatzgasse 10, CH-3011, tel. +41/31/311 0101, fax 311 9479, email: reception@bristolbern.ch

Hotel Kreuz, Zeughausgasse 41, CH-3000, tel. +41/031/329 9595, fax 329 95 96, email: hotelkrenz@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@hotels.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 Acanthus, An Der Hauptfeuerwache 14, D- 80331 München, tel. +49/089 / 23 18 80, fax: 2 60 73 64, e-mail: acanthus@online.de

Hotel Kraft, Schillerstr. 49, tel. +49/089/594823-24, fax 550 3856, email: office@kraft-hotel.com

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@rkhotel.bestwestern.com

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

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

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