

DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER

### Online Offers Not All Good

"With all the free travel information on the Internet, why should I pay *Gemütlichkeit*?" Here's one reason:

Last month, a promotional e-mail from a tourist authority funded jointly by the Alpine countries—Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and France—contained the following item:

*The charming mountain hotel Forsthaus Graseck—which boasts its own cable car—offers double rooms from €52 to 86 per person/per night, single rooms from €29 to 56. Very reasonably priced apartments are also available.*

*Forsthaus Graseck's three-night "Mountain and Wellness" package includes a gondola excursion to Mt. Eckbauer. Price for three nights: €259 per person. The hiking tour contained in the package is followed by a health spa treatment and massage, as well as body-wrapping with fango or hay: [www.forsthaus-graseck.de](http://www.forsthaus-graseck.de); [info@forsthaus-graseck.de](mailto:info@forsthaus-graseck.de); [www.cometogermany.com](http://www.cometogermany.com).*

The Forsthaus Graseck is well-known to this writer. We first went there in 1979, after seeing it's red roof-peak symbol in the '79 *Michelin Red Guide for Germany*. The hotel is very remote, reached only by the two persons-plus-luggage cable car that rises out of a tiny enclave at the end of an unpaved road, not far from the old Olympic ski stadium. We loaded our luggage into the cramped cable car and ascended to the hotel's *Bergbahn* station part way up the mountain. Dangling hundreds of feet above the rugged Partnach gorge, while brushing

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## KOBLENZ

*On the strip of land where the Rhine and Mosel rivers meet, surprising Koblenz is at the very heart of Germany's best-known wine regions.*

**K**oblenz reveals itself at many levels. At first look some might dismiss it as an undistinguished, small, modern city. But don't rush away. Although it was more than 85 percent destroyed in November 1944, this is a town of surprising history, charm, and architectural treasures. The museums alone could keep some visitors captivated for a week. And Koblenz is a perfect base for exploring not only the Rhine and Mosel Rivers that border the city, but also lesser known rural regions like the Westerwald, Hunsrück, and Eiffel.

Koblenz is a case study in the dilemma faced by many German cities after the war: how to rebuild.

Many structures retained their old façades but were otherwise rebuilt from the ground up. For a compelling example, visit the **Jesuitenkirche**, which retains its 17th-century giant rosette window and portal but was entirely rebuilt inside—in boldly modern form—with relics from its lengthy history.

Some buildings have been painstakingly restored. But even today's most skilled artisans sometimes can't match their predecessors. Stand at the center of the so-called "**Four Corners**" in the pedestrian zone. Four ornate 17th-century oriel windows stand over each corner. Three were rebuilt in the 1950s fol-

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### Along Austria's Romantikstrasse...

## Kremsmünster

**W**ith the two richest men in America, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, buying euros, one would have to be a cockeyed optimist to envision a stronger dollar anytime soon.

Thus we must continue the search for regions, cities, hotels, and restaurants where our puny dollars have more purchasing power. Places with lower prices are usually not on the beaten tourist track; often because they simply aren't appealing to tourists or because they lack tourism infrastructure; but once in a while they just haven't been discovered.

A village that falls in that category is the lovely little town of Seeg, near Füssen in Bavaria, and the **Pension Heim**, both of which we report on in the March issue.

This month, we recommend the

thriving little town of Kremsmünster, on Austria's Romantikstrasse, and the **Hotel Schlair**. (Like most "romantic" and "wine" roads, this one was probably dreamed up by marketing people. Nonetheless, as it avoids the Autobahn between Salzburg and Vienna, it winds through some of Austria's prettiest countryside, visiting such towns as St. Wolfgang, Bad Ischl, Gmunden, Steyr, Grein, Melk, Dürnstein, Krems, and Klosterneuburg.)

Just six kilometers off the Autobahn, Kremsmünster is about a third of the way to Vienna from Salzburg—or about half way between Munich and Vienna—and

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**Exchange rates as of 03/27/05**

**1 euro = \$1.29**

**1 Swiss franc = \$0.83**

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

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rocky outcrops in a rickety, swinging capsule about the size of an elevator in a very small hotel, is not a ride for the acrophobic.

The Forsthaus turned out to be an almost fairy-tale Bavarian mountain chalet. A shaggy St. Bernard patrolled the reception area, an open fire warmed a cozy *Stube*, and the guestrooms, each with balcony, faced the dominating view of the magnificently craggy Wetterstein range.

The hotel had a connection with the Olympics and in its stairwells hung signed photos of Germany's leading skiers and famous frequent guests, such as international Olympic czar, Avery Brundage — the man who decided the 1972 Munich Olympics would continue after 11 members of the Israeli team were murdered by Palestinian terrorists. The moderately-priced hotel's upscale clientele were no doubt attracted, as we were, by the idyllic location.

Year after year, we went back. The view and the location remained stellar. The hotel did not. Soon it lost its "red" designation in Michelin (awarded to particularly "pleasant or restful" hotels), and in a few years it disappeared from the guide altogether. On a return visit in the early '90s we noted that little if anything had been done to the guestrooms and public areas. The mattresses had become lumpy, and the cigarette burns

and water stains on the coffee tables were in exactly the same places they had been 10 years before. Something was obviously wrong.

Last December, curious about the state of a hotel that held so many wonderful memories for us, and harboring hopes of a resurrection, we rode the cable car once more. The upper *Bergbahn* station is now in such a state of disrepair that one becomes uneasy about the condition of the cars and cables one's very life depends on.

In 10 seconds we knew there had been no resurrection. The hotel's exterior was shabby. Inside it was quiet, dirty, and, sad to say, unchanged. We settled in the *Stube* for an afternoon cup of tea and a snack. Even this simple fare was sub-par and served in an offhand manner. The slanting afternoon sun revealed layers of dust and dirt on floors and surfaces. I have no doubt the chairs, tables, and reception area furnishings are relics from 1979, without any attempt during that 25-year period to paint, refinish, or upholster.

On the stone walkway, 10 feet from the hotel's entrance, sat a pile of dog droppings. We watched two employees walk past the mess without a glance. The dress and demeanor of the employees we observed during our 30-minute visit were not consistent with what *Gemütlichkeit* considers minimum standards. For a moment, we thought about asking to see a couple of guestrooms but decided we

had seen enough. Our old favorite, the Forsthaus Graseck, is a sad, dreary, decaying mess.

The point of this story is that the Internet has no filter. In the avalanche of offers that appear every day in my in-box, junk often looks just as good as quality. That, of course, is why you rely on *Gemütlichkeit*. As one of our renewal letters says, "Our recommendations and cautions are based on what we have *personally* seen, heard, tasted, sniffed, and touched." Though we cannot, of course, filter the Internet, you can trust our information.

The foregoing raises a question: Does the Alpine tourist authority apply some threshold standard to the properties and offers it promotes? In my experience, even though they represents the commercial interests of their members (mostly hotels), the German, Swiss,

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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 [www.gemut.com](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: **marc** Password: **2468**

Vol. 19, No. 3  
April 2005

**GEMÜTLICHKEIT**

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

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*Gemütlichkeit* (ISSN 10431756) is published 10 times each year by UpCountry Publishing, 288 Ridge Road, Ashland OR 97520. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 541/488-8462, fax: 541/488-8468, e-mail [travel@gemut.com](mailto:travel@gemut.com). Web site: [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com). Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 10 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy.

**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
 Gemütlichkeit, 288 Ridge Road., Ashland OR 97520

**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.

## KOBLENZ

Continued from page 1

lowing detailed designs. Line for line, they probably match the precise plans and specifications of the originals. But the fourth oriel, in its original form, projects so much more life and vibrancy.

Many structures were demolished and replaced by fully modern construction. It's easy to see how the haste and economy of the 1950s translated into somewhat straightforward, efficient, and unimaginative structures. But buildings from the 1960s and 1970s reveal the more modern tastes of the times. A few eyebrows were raised—but perhaps no more so than the Baroque architecture that replaced many Gothic and Romanesque buildings after the French destroyed two-thirds of the city in 1688. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, *Jugendstil* (art nouveau) architecture must have caused a stir as well. At Firmungstrasse 11, look up to see the giant head of the Greek goddess Hygieia.

### Old-town charm

This is not to say that Koblenz is devoid of old architecture or old-town charm. Quite the opposite is true, especially in the *Altstadt*, that corner of the city bordered on the north by the Mosel and by the Rhine on the east. Here, it is a town of narrow alleys and vibrant plazas.

Perhaps the most calming and scenic walk, and one that gives a sense of the old-town's breadth, is along the Mosel and Rhine promenades. Start with a stroll across the **Balduin Bridge**, first built across the Mosel in 1337. The view back to the *Altstadt* gives a good perspective, with the turrets of the **Old Castle** and the two steeples of **St. Florin's Church**.

Parts of this walk are a reminder that the effects of war linger: vacant lots and stark walls of buildings quickly repaired. This lasts barely the length of a football field, however, and soon the Rhine and Mosel flow together at the so-called "**German Corner**." It's here that a giant copper statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I on horseback was erected in 1897, close to the spot where the

## Koblenz Basics

**Population:** 108,000

**Elevation:** 597 feet (182 meters)

**Tourist Office:** Koblenz Touristik, Bahnhofplatz 17, 56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/31304, fax +49/261/1004388, e-mail [info-hbf@touristik-koblenz.de](mailto:info-hbf@touristik-koblenz.de), Web [www.koblenz.de](http://www.koblenz.de)

### Driving Distances:

Berlin	378 miles	609 km
Hamburg	325 miles	525 km
Heidelberg	112 miles	180 km
Mainz	69 miles	111 km
Munich	316 miles	509 km
Paris	336 miles	541 km
Trier	78 miles	126 km

**Nearest Airports:** Frankfurt and Cologne/Bonn Airports lie nearly equidistant from Koblenz, about 65 miles (100 km) away.

**Rail Service:** Koblenz lies on major north-south and east-west rail lines with excellent and frequent rail service.

Order of German Knights had its headquarters as early as 1216. The statue was destroyed by bombs in 1944. From 1953, the bare pedestal was known as the "Memorial to German Unity." In 1993, after reunification, the statue was replaced with a copy. Today, flags of all German states wave proudly over the two rivers.

Watch the waters of the Mosel enter and mix with the Rhine; it's entrancing. The backdrop of the **Ehrenbreitstein** across the Rhine doesn't hurt either. From this mighty fortress, looming 388 feet (118 meters) above the Rhine, visitors gain an instant sense of Koblenz's symbolic strength and historic significance.

### Fortified city

To visit the fortress, travel by passenger ferry from near the German Corner to the base of the citadel, and take a small cable car to the top. For those who prefer more conventional transportation, it's about 20 minutes by car or 30 minutes by bus. The Prussians built Ehrenbreitstein in the early 19th century as a line of defense against the French. With three other nearby fortresses (destroyed by treaty after World War I), Koblenz contained the largest fortifi-

cations in Europe after Gibraltar. Tours in English are by appointment only (tel. and fax +49/261/9742440), but English-language pamphlets are available, and most of the facility is open for exploration.

The view from the fortress points out the strategic significance of the city. More than 2,000 years ago, Romans built their first fortress in a town they called *Confluentes*, Latin for confluence, or "where rivers flow together." They controlled traffic and commerce on both rivers, and for much of two millennia the city was part of an intermittent tug-of-war, starting with the Romans and Franks, continuing between the Prussians and the French, and with occupying nations following both world wars. As they have for centuries, riverboats and barges cast their wakes toward the riverbanks.

### German myths

The two rivers play a major role in the German myths. The Rhine symbolizes strength and pride, while the Mosel is more nurturing. Indeed, just a short stroll upstream along the **Rhine Promenade**, sculpted figures of "Father Rhine and Mother Mosel" lie caressing and affectionate on a bed of grapes. Behind them in stately counterpoint stands the sprawling neoclassical **Elector's Palace**, built in the late 1700s (closed to the public).

One of the Rhine's most scenic promenades starts here, just outside the *Altstadt*, and continues about two miles (three kilometers) upstream. Energetic walkers can enjoy the **Empress Augusta Park's** extensive flower gardens, commissioned by the Prussians. At her monument, walk to the street, enjoy a view of the early 20th-century villas, and take a short bus ride back to town.

Less energetic visitors—or those who are simply hungry or thirsty—may wish to break instead at the **Wine Village**, built for the 1925 German Wine Exhibition and consisting of half-timber buildings from Germany's major wine regions. Inside, the view is to the relaxing Rhine. Outside is a trellised courtyard.

On the return to the *Altstadt*, stop at the **Görresplatz** and study the

**Koblenz History Column**, a towering statue built in 1992 to mark the city's 2000-year anniversary. The 10 layers depict key scenes from the past including the first Roman settlement, seat of the empire of Charlemagne, Crusades, Thirty Years War, French Revolution, Prussian period, destruction in 1944, and, from the storm clouds of war, a revived city looking to the future. It's a brilliantly graphic visual display that gives a historic perspective to the city and, to a great extent, the evolving nation. A marker gives detailed descriptions in English and German.

Continue to the "**Plan**," or main square, once and still an important meeting place. Here, the jousting and hangings of the past have yielded to more amiable social activities and the focus is now on food and wine.

Stairs lead from the Plan through a small gate to the **Liebfrauenkirche** (Church of Our Beloved Lady), one of the oldest sites of Christian worship along the Rhine. As early as the 5th century, Christians worshipped in a church on this site. Today, the church stands as a stone tutorial with brilliant examples of architectural styles from the late Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque periods. The main basilica was built in the 12th and 13th centuries.

From the nearby **Münzplatz** (Mint Square), site of an early Roman fort, pass by the tacky bars and tattoo parlors to find the hidden **Kunst-Gässchen** (Little Art Alley) at Münzplatz 6-8, which snakes through a line of cubby-holed studios. Persist to the end and be rewarded with the **Ceramics Studio Erdreich**, where owner/artist Michael Borowieck displays and explains his avant garde and often R-rated work. The alleyway offers an excellent opportunity to view medieval construction, as many of the walls have been left open to reveal the weave of wood, plaster and straw.

From this high point in the *Altstadt*, narrow alleys wind to the Mosel making for eager exploration. The 13th-century **Old Castle** starts a row of architectural treasures: the 16th-century **Lay Jurists Building**, the 15th-century **Old Merchants & Dance**

**House**, and **St. Florin's Church**, constructed between the 12th and 14th centuries. Don't walk by too quickly. Over the entrance of the Old Merchants & Dance House is the "Eye Roller," constructed beneath the tower clock in 1724 to commemorate the execution here of a legendary robber baron. Instead of chiming bells, the eyes in the carved face roll.

Walk parallel down the Mosel toward the Rhine, and **St. Castor Basilica** comes into view. The Romanesque church was consecrated in 836, and most of the impressive structure dates from the 12th century. Behind it, stroll along the gravel paths of the peaceful **Blumenhof** (Courtyard of Flowers) under a canopy of trees and high shrubs. Behind the ivy walls, time feels little changed through the centuries.

### **Cafés galore**

Although Koblenz lacks a university in its downtown area, the city maintains a youthful vibrancy through its lively café and bistro scene—morning, noon and night. It's a city that likes to have fun, and the most fun is along the Firmungstrasse in the pedestrian zone.

**Café Einstein** (Firmungstrasse 30) is one of the hot new restaurants and bars with as much emphasis on eclectic ambience as on food. A broad seating area surrounds a circular bar, and tall windows fold back so that chairs and tables sprawl into the plaza. It's worth a stop whether for coffee, a drink or more, especially when there's live piano music—both jazz and classical. Or just look around at the paintings of namesake Albert riding a bike, playing a violin, sticking out his tongue, or in more formal poses.

Einstein faces its more sedate but still pleasantly quirky partner, **Da Vinci** (Firmungstrasse 32b), which offers Mediterranean cuisine in a classically beautiful setting. Floors are cherry, walls a sumptuous green, and the restaurant features paintings and sculptures in Renaissance style but by modern Italian artists. Other Italian artisans were brought in to work on the gilding and scrollwork.

The spacious, multi-story **Grand**

**Café** (Firmungstrasse 2) offers an eclectic mixture of styles and atmospheres: Viennese-style café (in art deco design), cocktail bar, basement dance floor (for events like salsa nights and jazz concerts) and cigar lounge. The grand-scale interior is wide open with mezzanines—an excellent example of modern flair mixing with traditional styles. Lunches are popular with three-course specials from less than €8.

To get a taste of the local art scene, try **Café Miljö** (Gemüsegrasse 8), one of Koblenz's many "art bars." The outstanding work from local artists changes often, and it's worth a stop for wine, coffee or a full meal. Breakfast is served until 5pm.

There's been a heavy Italian influence in Koblenz since the 1930s, and one sign is the proliferation of ice cream shops and cafés. The best of the bunch is **Eiscafé am Jesuitenplatz** (Firmungstr. 34), started in 1934 by Nonno Vincenzo Brustolon, whom the Jesuitenplatz reminded of his favorite Italian "piazzas." Try the spaghetti (ice cream, not pasta) with fresh fruits and berries, liqueurs or caramelized walnuts.

### **Lodging**

#### **Hotel Haus Morjan**

The Hotel Haus Morjan, overlooking the Rhine promenade, is worth an overnight if only for the stunning views from its flower-decked balconies. Imagine waking to the sun rising over the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress and the Rhine. Or relaxing at "home" in the evening, while the last steamship casts off its lines barely 100 feet away and couples stroll along the moonlit promenade. Although the hotel itself is modern, it stands adjacent to the *Altstadt* and in a line of cafés, restaurants and *Weinstuben* that lend plenty of Old World charm. All 33 rooms are spacious, bright, and clean. Ask for a third-floor room with balcony (the fourth floor offers better views but no balconies).

**Contact:** Hotel Haus Morjan, Konrad-Adenauer-Ufer, D-56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/361/304290, fax

3042956, e-mail [info@hotel-haus-morjan.de](mailto:info@hotel-haus-morjan.de), Web [www.hotel-morjan.de](http://www.hotel-morjan.de).

**Daily Rates:** Singles from €57-72, doubles from €87-113.

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

### City-Hotel Kurfürst Balduin

If budget is a priority, the prices are great at the City-Hotel Kurfürst Balduin. The rooms are clean, quiet, well-outfitted and modern, if not spacious, and the location is great: immediately across the street from the pedestrian zone, one block from the Mosel and on a direct bus line to the train station. But the ambiance is bare-basics, a nondescript conference hotel.

**Contact:** City-Hotel Kurfürst Balduin, Hohenfelderstrasse 12, D-56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/13 32-0, fax 13 32-100, e-mail [info@cityhotel-koblenz.de](mailto:info@cityhotel-koblenz.de), Web [www.cityhotel-koblenz.de](http://www.cityhotel-koblenz.de).

**Daily Rates:** Singles €44, doubles €62. Breakfast €8.

**Rating:** QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 14/20

### Lorenz Hotel

The new (2004) Lorenz Hotel is just plain cool. Individually designed rooms are chic but not overdone, and modern but not sterile. Comfort is key. The black-and-white color scheme draws warmth from the hardwood floors and wooden furniture. There's no elevator, and steps wind up a tower-like staircase to three levels of rooms. Number 10 on the top floor is huge with three broad windows with a view on one side to the colorful Jesuitenplatz, and on the other to the Jesuitengasse, a narrow alley that opens to the Rathaus. The café-restaurant-bar of the same name is on the ground floor.

**Contact:** Lorenz Hotel, Jesuitenplatz 1-3, 56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/13336/0, fax 9143412, e-mail [info@lorenz-koblenz.de](mailto:info@lorenz-koblenz.de), Web [www.lorenz-koblenz.de](http://www.lorenz-koblenz.de)

**Daily Rates:** Singles €75-85, doubles €102-117

**Ratings:** QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

### Hotel Contel

The Hotel Contel seems designed with the words "eclectic" and "whimsy" in mind. Murals cover the

outside walls of the main building in Hundertwasser style: a solid-color scene of earth, heaven, sky, sun and stars with metal figures "climbing" toward the roof. Guests use a wooden bridge to cross duck ponds, where sculptures poke through reeds. Inside, it's a labyrinth of surprises: In the bar, the seats are saddles and chandeliers are traffic lights. Classical statues stand under hanging mario-nettes, knights' armor next to carousel horses. Artwork and antiques from the past two centuries fill every possible nook. The initial overwhelming effect transforms quickly to a sense of fun that some people shared their love of whimsy and detail to create this unusual space. As expected, the 185 guest rooms are individually designed, and all were full during a recent visit. Many have kitchenettes. Waterbeds are available upon request. It's about 20 minutes on foot or five by car to the *Altstadt*.

**Contact:** Hotel Contel, Pastor-Klein-Strasse 19, 56073 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/40650, fax 4065188, e-mail [hotel@contel-koblenz.de](mailto:hotel@contel-koblenz.de), Web [www.contel-koblenz.de](http://www.contel-koblenz.de)

**Daily Rates:** Singles and doubles €71-91. Breakfast €10.

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

### Food

Small wine restaurants are extremely popular in Koblenz and most serve regional dishes like *Sauerbraten* with potato dumplings, potato pancakes served with bacon or smoked salmon and "heaven and earth," a concoction of blood sausage and liverwurst fried with slices of potato, apples, cabbage and onions. Not surprisingly, wine plays an important role in many dishes.

### Weinhaus Hubertus

The Weinhaus Hubertus is one of the oldest wine restaurants in town. Built in 1689 and damaged only slightly during the war, the half-timber building feels its age right down to the antique furniture, parquet floors and medieval hunting scenes lacquered on the walls. It's cozy and comfortable, with sincere and friendly service, a place where it's easy to spend an entire evening. The local

clientele, mostly frequent and long-time guests, is equally cordial. Menu favorites include venison goulash in wine sauce with potato dumplings and red cabbage, jellied pork with remoulade sauce, herring salad with apples and cucumbers, boiled beef with horseradish and creamed cabbage (excellent) and lighter salad, cheese and sausage plates. Most entrées fall between €9-12. On any given evening, 40 German wines are offered by the glass and more than 70 by the bottle.

**Contact:** Weinhaus Hubertus, Florinsmarkt 6, 56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/3 11 77, fax 100 4919.

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

### Winner Weinstuben

For a wine-centered evening, the Winner Weinstuben is a Koblenz best bet. "Winner" refers to the village of Winingen, just a short distance upstream on the Mosel, where the restaurant's partner vineyard is located. The Weingut Rüdiger-Kröber provides many of the restaurant's wines, including less common Mosel reds. A range of Germany's highest-quality wines (*Qualitätswein mit Prädikat*) is available at various levels (based on sugar content): *Kabinett*,

### Key Websites for the Traveler

- [www.gemut.com](http://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](http://www.viamichelin.com) The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants, plus great interactive trip planning tools
- [www.travelgearnow.com](http://www.travelgearnow.com) Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10 percent off for subscribers
- [www.webflyer.com](http://www.webflyer.com) Informative frequent-flyer forums make this a must for air travelers
- [bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en](http://bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en) German rail website, with train schedules throughout Europe, as well as Germany
- [www.sbb.ch/index\\_e.htm](http://www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm) Swiss and European rail schedules
- [www.ski-europe.com](http://www.ski-europe.com) Top Web resource for skiers with much data on Alpine resorts
- [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com) Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority
- [www.germany-tourism.de](http://www.germany-tourism.de) Germany's national tourist authority
- [www.austria.info/us](http://www.austria.info/us) Austria's national tourist authority
- [www.historicgermany.com](http://www.historicgermany.com) Website for an alliance of historic German cities

*Spätlese, Auslese, Beerenauslese, Trockenbeerenauslese* and *Eiswein*—the rare wine made from grapes harvested after a freeze. While full bottles can cost €100 or more and are hard to find, guests can try samplers of .05 liters (€5.90 for a 1993 *Eiswein*, for example).

The food is typical vintner's fare of cold dishes—sausages, cheese platters, smoked trout, pork in aspic—and crepe-like *flammkuchen* served sweet with cinnamon and sugar or savory with blood sausage and onions. A couple can dine for less than €15.

The restaurant is open for dinner only, the perfect time to sit by a window or at one of the outdoor trestle tables and watch the setting sun reflect its changing colors on Ehrenbreitstein Fortress.

**Contact:** Winninger Weinstuben, Rheinzollstrasse 2, D-56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/38707, Web [www.winninger-weinstuben.de](http://www.winninger-weinstuben.de)

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

### Lorenz Café Restaurant

Lorenz Café Restaurant typifies the more modern Koblenz gastronomy scene with its upbeat, hip design and imaginative international cuisine. The

trendy architecture blends well with the old styles: Floor-to-ceiling glass fills Romanesque archways and opens in warm weather to extend seating onto the Jesuitenplatz beneath the façade of the town hall. It's great for a light lunch or longer dinner, and breakfast (a choice of French, American, Italian or American) is extremely popular and served to 6pm.

A recent dinner began with lentil soup with coriander and grilled shrimp (€5), the perfect prelude to spinach ricotta gnocchi with grilled duck breast in orange tarragon sauce (€6.50). Save room for dessert.

**Contact:** Café Restaurant, Jesuitenplatz 1-3, 56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/13 336 0, fax 9 143 412, e-mail [info@lorenz-koblenz.de](mailto:info@lorenz-koblenz.de), Web [www.lorenz-koblenz.de](http://www.lorenz-koblenz.de)

**Ratings:** QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 16/20

### Alt Koblenz

In front of the Alt Koblenz, a blackboard tempts passersby with a list of regional and Italian dishes: potato soup with sausage or fish, chicken roulade stuffed with sheep's cheese, tomatoes and rosemary, pork hock with cabbage, baked goat

cheese with huckleberries, lamb ragout with red wine, and a variety of pizza and pasta selections. Entrées range from €9-13 with plenty of lower-priced options like cheese, sausage and salad plates. A bit pricier are imported steaks such as Chateaubriand. Seniors and children can also order half portions.

An extensive variety of regional wines is available by the glass or bottle. Each year, owners Marianne and Joe Wilbert choose one wine for their house, and the "My Way" from Weingut Michael Dorsch was fruity and sharp. Tasters start at €1 for 0.1 liters.

The setting is a relaxed tavern, slightly busy upstairs, and quiet but somewhat remote in the 18th-century wine cellar. If the weather's good, sit outside on the Plan, one of Koblenz's many airy squares. Service was often distracted but always friendly: "I forgot to give you a napkin? Then let me give you two."

**Contact:** Alt Koblenz, Am Plan 13, D-56068 Koblenz, tel. +49/261/16 06 56, fax 261/30 98 82, e-mail [marianne.wilbert@gmx.de](mailto:marianne.wilbert@gmx.de), Web [www.alt-koblenz.com](http://www.alt-koblenz.com).

**Rating:** QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 14/20 

## KREMSMÜNSTER

*Continued from page 1*

offers some surprisingly worthwhile sights, by far the most impressive of which is a massive Benedictine abbey.

The town is not only a logical overnight stop on the way to Vienna, but it also works as a base from which to explore the region. Auto daytrips are convenient to Steyr, Linz, Salzburg, Austria's Lake District, the wine country of the beautiful Wachau Valley, and charming Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic.

Rail service is mostly via Linz, with Salzburg about two-hours away and Vienna around two hours and 45 minutes. Linz is only 40 minutes, but Munich, at three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half hours distant, is not in the daytrip category—at least by rail.

While not endowed with the quaint charm of a Rothenburg or a Gruyères, Kremsmünster has the

reality of a living, breathing, small European town, and that has a certain charm of its own. At its center are a number of interesting buildings, a small network of winding lanes, and the usual shops for a city its size. All, however, take a back seat to the Benedictine monastery, hovering over the town like a great citadel.

The **Abbey of Kremsmünster**, founded in 777, is not some preserved relic, but hums with the commerce and activity of wine-making, a renowned grammar school, a restaurant, shops, a Baroque library of some 140,000 volumes, and an art collection whose masterpiece is the Tassilo Chalice, an extraordinary example of goldsmithing from the 8th century.

The Monastery's 18th-century observatory, or **Mathematical Tower**, which serves as a natural history museum and research center, stands eight stories high and is said to be Europe's first "skyscraper." The Ab-

bey's most intriguing space is a courtyard with five stone ponds divided by arcades and wrought iron screens. Antlers from royal hunting lodges line the enclosing walls and the focal point of each shallow pool is a piece of water-spouting sculpture. During a visit in early December, the ponds were thick with fat, ugly carp, brought there a few weeks before Christmas to be held and fed a diet that will rid them of the clay taste they acquire when feeding in the wild. In the traditional Austrian Christmas meal, carp is served breaded, fried and in soup.

Locals like to refer to **Kremsegg Castle** as "half way between Mozart and Strauss," in other words between the music cities of Salzburg and Vienna. Its chief attraction is **Musica Kremsmünster**, a museum noted for its enormous collection of brass musical instruments, including a trumpet used by Louis Armstrong. Other rooms are devoted to Franz Schubert,

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER***Continued from page 2*

and Austrian national tourist organizations require members to meet defined standards. Possibly the standard for promotion via the Web should be higher than for mere membership.

My hope is that the person who wrote the e-mail that I and thousands of others received has never visited the Forsthaus Graseck, and the touting of this substandard hotel is an anomaly. The fact that such a hotel is being promoted on the Web is not news. That it is being offered by a reputable European tourist agency, however, raises troubling credibility issues. *Caveat emptor* and depend on *Gemütlichkeit*. —RHB

**KREMSMÜNSTER***Continued from page 6*

who often visited the Monastery. Displayed are autographed scores plus other memorabilia. The master's work can be heard in the Schubert Listening Room.

An excursion not to be missed in the weeks prior to Christmas is to the nearby pilgrimage hamlet of **Christkindl**, where you'll find a lovely little church and a busy post office. It is here that Austrian children send their Christmas letters, and all are answered by the Christkindl post office. You may wish to mail a card from here as the stamps and postmark are somewhat prized. There is also a wonderfully intricate, 'Rube Goldberg'-style, mechanical Nativity scene. Completed just before the war, it is the work of a single local hobbyist who took some 40 years to build it—in his living room.

**Hotel Schlair**

In evaluating hotels, *Gemütlichkeit* is partial to family-run places, where the owners are welcoming, available, and eager to assist their guests. Though the Schlair's physical assets—guest and public rooms—are more than satisfactory, it is the duo of owners-managers, Maria and Erik Kux-Schlair that moves this hotel into the "special" category. The couple demonstrates the natural

**EDITOR'S CHOICE****TRAVEL QUICKIES**

■ **The Future of Swiss Airlines:** Deutsche Lufthansa AG and Swiss International Airlines Ltd. have announced plans to merge services. As a result, the 80-aircraft Swiss fleet will be integrated into Lufthansa's fleet of 377 planes. Expected benefits for travelers include more destinations, better connections, joint frequent-flyer programs, and mutual lounge access. Combined flight schedules should be available by October, with a full integration by 2007.

■ **Architecture in Berlin:** Berlin Tourism Marketing has proclaimed 2005 "The Year of Architecture," with themed walking tours of the city's classic and contemporary structures. Look for the brochure, "Architecture in Berlin," (€1.50) in the tourist information centers at Europa Platz, Alexander Platz, or Brandenburg Gate. Contact [www.berlin-tourist-information.com](http://www.berlin-tourist-information.com) for guided tour information.

■ **National Garden Show:** Germany's bi-annual **Bundesgartenschau** (BUGA) takes place April 29 to October 9 on the grounds of Munich's former airport in Rhiem. This year's

event, called "Change in Perspective," was designed to show how gardens and urban development can promote a change in socio-economic and environmental thinking. Contact [www.buga2005.de](http://www.buga2005.de).

■ **New Rules for Flight Delays:** You could be entitled to considerable financial compensation next time your flight is delayed in Europe. As of February, new European Commission rules require airlines that cancel flights with less than two week's notice to pay passengers a refund, plus an additional €250 to 600, depending on the length of the flight. The rules also require meals, phone calls, accommodations, and transportation in certain situations.

■ **Direct Flights to Germany:** Several carriers are introducing new, direct flights to Germany this spring: **Lufthansa:** Washington, DC / Munich, May 2. **LTU:** New York to Düsseldorf, May 2. **Delta:** JFK to Berlin, May 3. **United:** Chicago to Munich, June 7. **Continental:** Newark to Hamburg, June 9, and Newark to Berlin, July 2. For more info: 800-521-6722.

warmth and unflagging enthusiasm so characteristic of the best small hoteliers.

Passing through Schlair's reception area early one evening last December, Maria grabbed a couple of American guests and took them to a nearby *Weihnachtspüinsch* booth where, for an hour they stood at a high table in the cold, drinking hot red wine, and being introduced to friendly locals. This informal, warm-hearted style puts guests at ease and sets the tone at Schlair.

The hotel consists of an attractive, well-maintained Baroque-style main building in the village center and a guesthouse, Zur Alten Mühle (the Old Mill), a few blocks away, literally in the shadow of the Abbey. Built in the 13th century, the guesthouse is the town's oldest structure and contains a handful of vacation apartments that can accommodate from two to six persons. They range in

price from €48 to 62 per night for stays of six nights or longer. Done in a traditional style with wood trimmed furniture, herringbone hardwood floors, the accommodations come with satellite TV and direct dial phone. The small kitchens are suitably equipped for light meals.

The main building's public rooms feature vaulted ceilings, tiled floors, heavy wood beams, an inviting salon with oversize leather furniture, a cozy bar with blazing hearth, and wireless Internet access.

Sharing the building is the Schlair family bakery, a center of village social life for nearly 200 years. Hotel guests have the good fortune to be served breakfast here, where the wondrous pastries affirm Austria's reputation for baked goods.

The hotel's "business" rooms have been remodeled in a bright, modern style with recessed lighting and such amenities as cable TV with English

channels and high-speed Internet connections. At €84 double, including breakfast, they are an excellent value.

The value-minded traveler seeking solid accommodations and hospitality in an engaging, well-located town will find all in Kremsmünster and its hotel Schlair.

**Daily Rates:** Singles €50-59. Doubles €72-84. Apartments €48-62, plus cleaning fee. Optional breakfast for apartment guests, €7.5 per person.

**Contact:** Hotel Schlair-Gästehaus "Zur Alten Mühle", A-4550 Kremsmünster, Franz-Hönig-Str. 16, tel. +43/7583/5258, e-mail [schlair@hotelschlair.at](mailto:schlair@hotelschlair.at), Web [www.hotelschlair.at](http://www.hotelschlair.at)

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 17/20

### Kremsmünster Info

**Schloss Kremsegg**, Kremsegger Strasse 59, A-4550 Kremsmünster, tel. +43/7583/52 470, e-mail [info@schloss-kremsegg.at](mailto:info@schloss-kremsegg.at), Web [www.schloss-kremsegg.at/museum](http://www.schloss-kremsegg.at/museum)

**Benediktinerstift Kremsmünster**, Burgfried 1, A-4550 Kremsmünster, tel. +43/7583/5275-151, e-mail [stift@kremsmuenster.at](mailto:stift@kremsmuenster.at), Web [www.stift-kremsmuenster.at](http://www.stift-kremsmuenster.at)

**Christkindl** website: [www.pfarre-christkindl.at](http://www.pfarre-christkindl.at)



## Readers' Forum

### Southwest Germany Trip

Wanted to share with you a few notes on our recent "Fasnet" trip to southwest Germany: We took your advice and started the trip with the **Hotel Rebenhof** by Baden-Baden. Beautiful, bright, large room with balcony overlooking the vineyards. Mr. Ziegler remembered you by name. The food was outstanding, even if the dining room was a little formal in its starkness.

Over a snowy Black Forest Highway with lunch in Rottweil to Meersburg. Had the experience of being the only guests our first night in **Seehotel Off** as they opened up after a month vacation. Great location—right on the Bodensee at the end of the street. They offer certified Feng-Shui rooms. We enjoyed the compact lake-view room very much. The second night when a few other guest showed up we had a fine "Felchen" (explained as Bodensee

## Glacier Express

Switzerland is a country celebrated for its trains, and its most famous rail route is the Glacier Express between St. Mortiz and Zermatt. "Express" may be not be quite the right word, since the train averages less than 19 mph over its mountainous, 7.5 hour, 291-bridge, roller-coaster route. Trains runs year-round.

First-class cars feature high, wide, panoramic windows, and trains sometimes make full circles as they spiral up the precipitous slopes. Wine glasses even have a tilted base to keep from spilling on the steep gradients. Lunch in the Edwardian dining car is popular and, at CHF 26 to 38 without beverages, not inexpensive.

As many as five daily trains each way in summer are officially tagged with the "Glacier Express" title, and they attract about 250,000 riders annually. For those who plan to be in that number, here are a few suggestions:

- **Tickets:** You can buy a one-way, second-class ticket for \$102 (first-class is \$164), plus a mandatory charge for a seat reservation of up to \$18, but a better deal is either the **Swiss Saverpass**, good for four consecutive days of unlimited, second-class travel throughout the country for \$145, or the **Swiss Saver Flexipass** for \$141, which offers unlimited travel on any three days in a one-month period. Saver passes re-

quire two or more persons traveling together. Additional travel days are available. The first-class versions of these two passes are \$221 and \$213, respectively. Swiss Passes are accepted for travel on the Glacier Express—but a seat reservation (\$18) is required.

- **First or Second Class:** Air-conditioned, panorama viewing cars are first-class only. Regular first-class cars and second-class cars are not air-conditioned, though windows can be opened. Seating in panorama cars and second-class cars is club-style, pairs facing, with a small table between. Regular first-class configuration is two seats facing on one side of the aisle and pairs facing on the opposite side.

- **An Alternative:** The route of the Glacier Express—St. Moritz/Davos-Chur-Disentis-Andermatt-Brig-Zermatt, or the reverse—is served by other trains that require no seat reservation and will not be nearly as full.

- **Lunch on Board:** Reserve well in advance of travel through Catering Company Elvetino in Chur, tel. +41/81/252 1425, fax 250 0151, e-mail [sales.chur@elvetino.ch](mailto:sales.chur@elvetino.ch).

- **The Final Word:** The best source of information about the Glacier Express is found at [www.glacierexpress.ch](http://www.glacierexpress.ch), or by calling +41/27/927 7777 in Brig, or +41/812/886 100 in Chur.

- **Purchase Tickets, Rail Passes in the U.S.:** 800-521-6722, press option 3.

trout) dinner. We learned the Off family are fourth-generation hoteliers.

We enjoyed the pre-Lenten carnival experience very much and returned for the fourth time to Bad Waldsee in Oberschwaben for the traditional Schwäbisch-Alemannisch costumes, masks, parades, music, and fun. We've always stayed at the **Grüner Baum**, directly on the Rathaus Platz, which is always a center of activity. Small, family-run with ideas on being trendy. Wish they would just leave it as it is!

On a previous trip, I had watched a TV interview with the owner of **Hotel Victoria** in Bad Mergentheim. Being a dedicated "foodie," I made reservations based on the hotel's ded-

ication to locally grown food products, etc. We enjoyed a wonderful meal with all the bells and whistles—about €65 each—definitely the "splurge dinner" of the trip. I would describe the hotel as one of the old grand hotels in a spa town—rooms with double doors from the hallway, a lobby like a library, and excellent but unobtrusive service.

In short, a very comfortable two weeks. All hotels booked via e-mail, with research based on *Gemütlichkeit* newsletters, *Michelin* and *Aral* guides, as well as local tourist office mailings. Thanks for your always interesting newsletter and personal observations.

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