

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

Affordable Germany

At times last month in Germany, it seemed the entire country was ensconced at an outdoor table under a wide umbrella. Hotels served *al fresco* breakfasts. Cafes, of course, put out tables, but so did a few bookstores, bakeries, and even service stations.

We jumped right on the bandwagon, picnicking at long tables in Berlin's Tiergarten and Munich's Englischer Garten. We lunched and supped on sidewalks and in courtyards, and wolfed down sandwiches at a stand-up table outside a bakery in the surprising little town of Weikersheim, on a lovely backroad west of Rothenburg ob der Tauber. We dined by the Starnbergersee in the still broiling sun at 8pm.

In the seaside town of Binz, on the Baltic island of Rügen, we passed one long summer evening at an outdoor café, serenaded by a couple of rather amazing Gypsy Kings sound-alikes. There were still pink slashes of color in the sky when finally we wandered back to our beach-front hotel at 11pm.

On another island, Sylt, off the western shores of Germany and Denmark, we were still sipping a final beverage in front the **Hotel Stadt Hamburg** at 2am—not that long after the light had gone.

About now you're thinking, "This sounds expensive: weak dollar, high gas prices, etc." But contrary to what the mainstream travel media have been saying, our per-day costs were similar to what they would have been had we been traveling in California or Florida.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

HEIDELBERG

Our Jim Johnson reports on many happy returns to one of Germany's most romantic and vibrant cities.

I left my heart in Heidelberg, the old song goes. Few places draw this writer back with such frequency and fervor as this lovely town on the Neckar—and always, there are new discoveries to behold.

By Jim
Johnson

Heidelberg has had a reputation as a "romantic" city since the early 1800s. Joseph von Eichendorff, the German Romantic poet who studied in Heidelberg in 1807, could be speaking today: "Heidelberg itself is a magnificent romantic city; there the spring entwines the houses and courtyards and everything ordinary with vines and flowers, and castles and forests tell a wonderful fairytale of times past."

The town's most memorable image—and, for tourists at least, one of its primary draws—is its castle, maintained as a ruin rather than as a restored piece of history. The sprawling citadel sets the mood for the city—not of a town lorded over by a fortress, but one that integrates the ancient and the medieval into daily life. Powerful elements take over when the sun turns the red sandstone aglow, or when spotlights each night create magic from stone. It's one of Germany's most commanding and enduring symbols of Romanticism.

That magic extends to the city's Old Town as well, where history

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Furka Steam Train

Looking for an adventurous, romantic, high-mountain train ride? Board the historic **Furka Cogwheel Steam Railroad** in central Switzerland. Connecting Realp (Uri Canton) to Gletsch (Valais Canton), the Furka Cogwheel Steam Railroad ascends the Furka Pass.

Once a part of the scenic Glacier Express route, the Furka Cogwheel opened as a historic railroad line in 1992. Rising more than 7,000 feet, the tracks in winter are buried under 40 feet of snow, making spring snow removal a serious challenge.

Trains are operated by volunteers and funded by ticket fares, stockholders, and a supporting association. The following journeys are recommended by **Stefan Gretener**, a traffic dispatcher with *Zentralbahn* railroad.

Journey #1

Depart Lucerne at 07:21; change trains in Göschenen; arrive Realp at 09:18; depart Realp at 09:50 by steam train; 20-minute stopover at Furka station; arrive Gletsch 11:50; depart Gletsch at 13:46 by postal bus; no stopover at Grimsel Pass; arrive Meiringen at 15:05. (July 22 to Oct. 2, Fri.–Sun., and daily, July 11 to Aug. 18)

Journey #2

Depart Lucerne at 11:21; change trains in Göschenen; arrive Realp at 13:18; depart Realp at 13:45 by steam train; 20-minute stopover at Furka station; arrive Gletsch at

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Exchange rates as of 07/28/05

1 euro = \$1.21

1 Swiss franc = \$0.78

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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You see, the likes of *Condé Nast* and *Travel & Leisure* think Europe consists only of Paris, London, Rome, Florence, the South of France, and Tuscany. And though there are good values to be had in these wonderful places, overall they are more expensive than Germany. I have seen touted as bargains, \$300 per-night rooms in three-star hotels in London and Rome. Instead of suggesting less expensive options in western Europe, such as Austria's Burgenland or Germany's Bavarian Forest, the travel press's current dollar-saving advice is to head east to Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, and Hungary. While these are worthy destinations, the majority of Europe-bound vacationers still prefer the more developed tourism infrastructure and better service found in the West.

Even Germany's major cities won't ravage the careful traveler's bank balance. Take Berlin, for example. There is a glut of hotel rooms in this surging city of cutting-edge art and architecture, and the most varied cuisine in Germany. As a result, prices have been driven down. Our favorite headquarters, the **Hotel Art Nouveau**, in the highly desirable Savignyplatz district, offers subscribers double rooms starting at €100. Even well known four- and five-star properties like **Hilton**, **Swissotel**, and **Intercontinental**, are rolling out bar-

gains ranging from €80 to €130 per night. And check the **Venere** booking engine at our website (www.gemut.com) to find a long list of Berlin hotels under €100.

We also found affordable—and good—food. **Swissotel's** swanky **Restaurant 44** offers a daily fixed-price lunch of €15 or €21 for two or three artfully prepared courses. Then there is **Rogacki**, the 77-year-old market with the stand-up counter, where some of Germany's freshest seafood is prepared virtually under your nose. Six oysters and an ample beaker of chilled white wine are €5.75. A plate of steaming mussels is €4.65.

You already know about the special "Gemütlichkeit-subscribers-only" €85 per night price at Munich's centrally-located **Hotel Acanthus**. We were there two nights. A dinner of *Cordon Bleu* and *Schnitzel 'Wiener Art'*, preceded by fresh mixed salads, and accompanied by three half-liters of *Hacker-Pschorr Helles* (guess who had two) at nearby, family-run **Der Tannenbaum**, set us back €27.

In the sleepy village of Niederstetten, between Rothenburg and Bad Mergentheim, the **Hotel Krone** charged €82 for a fine double room with breakfast, and one of the best dinners of the trip—salad, main course, dessert—was €44 for two persons, not including beverages.

A top-level dining experience at **Zimmermann's Lübecker Hanse**, on a narrow lane in Lübeck's *Altstadt*

cost €82 for two, including wine.

We spent our last night near the Frankfurt Airport in Langen at the **Hotel Dreieich** and paid €70 for a two-room suite. Dinner at adjoining **Restaurant Sortino's**, where pasta dishes start at €5.70 and main courses range from €12 to €17, was a pleasant surprise.

I know I've said this many times before, but it bears repeating; the number one resource for the independent auto traveler in Germany (it's even worth the money for rail travelers) is the *Michelin Red Guide*. For first-rate accommodations at under €100, rely on its Bib Hotels. For outstanding food at affordable prices, forget the starred restaurants and look for Michelin's Bib Gourmand symbol.

Despite the hullabaloo about travel in Europe being prohibitively expensive, Germany can be done *comfortably* for \$75 to \$100 per night (dou-

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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

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User Name: **gust** Password: **0728**

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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.

HEIDELBERG*Continued from page 1*

and tradition live on with reminders on every block and along each narrow alleyway. The hilly and wooded surroundings and the tranquil waters of the Neckar River, just 10 miles (18 km) short of the Rhine, draw in the power of nature to add even more life to the town.

The city's vibrant student life (about 20 percent of its 135,000 residents are students) generates a sense of whimsy and playfulness in the city's streets and in its citizens. Life is youthful in Heidelberg. Its age-old student pubs attract young people from four generations, as 90-year-olds sing along to old fraternity songs and local hymns.

The best time to visit Heidelberg is when the tourist throngs (about 3.5 million during the last year) are gone—or diminished—and the university is in session. The students bring a sense of vitality and tradition to a city that often seems a tad commercial.

Visitors who judge the city by its T-shirt and souvenir shops, are seeing it only at its most superficial level. Heidelberg is much more than the sum of its attractions; it's the overall atmosphere. Open your minds, put on your walking shoes and explore.

Getting started

Excellent signage guides visitors on a walking tour of the Old Town. The signs show not just maps but also explain—in German and English—the history and significance of the location.

The **Hauptstrasse** (Main Street), Germany's longest pedestrian street, leads to the **Old University**, popular with tourists more for its **Student Prison** (Augustinergasse 2) than for its architecture and history. From 1778 to 1914, minor transgressions—disturbing the peace, excessive drinking, rudeness to school officials—landed students in jail for a few days to several weeks, during which time students attended classes. Imprisonment, at least once, was seen as

Heidelberg Basics**Population:** 135,000**Elevation:** 1,430 feet (437.8 meters)

Tourist Information: Heidelberg Convention and Visitors Bureau, Ziegelhäuser Landstrasse 3, D-69120, Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/14 220, fax 14 22 22, e-mail info@cvb-heidelberg.de, Web www.cvb-heidelberg.de. Also, kiosk at Hauptbahnhof.

Nearest Airport: Frankfurt (53 miles/86 km; frequent rail and shuttle bus connections to Heidelberg)

Driving Distances:

Berlin	392 miles 627 km
Mannheim	13 miles 20 km
Cologne	156 miles 251 km
Munich	205 miles 332 km
Stuttgart	74 miles 120 km
Trier	123 miles 199 km

Rail Travel: Many long-distance trains stop in Heidelberg, and connections through Mannheim offer even more choices.

Best Bets: Heidelberg Card (www.heidelbergcard.de) offers discounts at shops, restaurants and tours; free or discounted admission to many attractions; and free public transportation within the city. From €14 per person for two days.

Heidelberg Magazine includes a planning guide with comprehensive information, €1

Guided Tours: Walking tours in English, April–Oct. on Fridays and Saturdays at 10:30am. (€7 adults, €5 seniors and students).

Bus Tours: In English and German, April–October, Thursdays and Fridays at 2:30pm, Saturdays at 10:30am and 2:30pm; from November–March on Saturdays at 2:30pm (€14 adults, €10 seniors and students).

Boat Rides: Boat rides include short excursions around Heidelberg and farther up the Neckar to the "Romantic Four:" Rhein-Neckar-Fahrgastschiffahrt, tel. +49/6221/201 81, fax +40/6221/202 11, www.rnf-schiffahrt.de. Or tour on the new solar-powered ship Neckar Sun: (www.HDSolarSchiff.com).

Major Events:

Heidelberg Castle Festival: Late June to early August

Castle illumination and fireworks: First Saturday in June, July, and September

Heidelberger Herbst (Fall Festival): September 24, 2005

Heidelberg Christmas Market: November 23 – December 22, 2005

a mark of honor. Student sketches, paintings, and graffiti offer a glimpse into their lives and humor.

At the other end of the Hauptstrasse is the **Market Square** and the Late Gothic **Church of the Holy Spirit**, built in the 15th and 16th centuries. Facing it is the **Zum Ritter Sankt Georg** (Knight St. George), with its vibrant Renaissance facade. It is one of few buildings to survive the 17th century and, except for the castle, may be Heidelberg's most magnificent structure.

Enter the *Jugendstil* (art nouveau) **University Library** and view one of the city's less-seen treasures, an extensive manuscript collection dating to the Middle Ages. Across the street is the 12th-century **St. Peter's Church**.

Escape the throngs and find compelling shops and less-visited restaurants on the many side streets, like the **Untere Gasse**, with its funky boutiques and bistros. Tourists don't seem to have found the **Weinstube Café Burkhardt** (27 Untere Gasse), with two small, quiet rooms and a peaceful inner courtyard. The fare is mildly exotic—vegetable risotto with pesto, couscous with lamb and vegetables, and chicken breast with carrot-ginger vegetables and basmati rice—and comes in at less than €10.

Head to the **Steingasse** for a concentrated collection of cafés and pubs like the **Brauhaus Vetter** (11 Steingasse), **Casa del Caffè** (8 Steingasse), and **Sylvia Bar** (13 Steingasse). Slip into the hidden courtyard behind Steingasse 9 with its half-timber gallery.

Funicular

After two years of renovations, the **Bergbahnen** (Funicular) reopened on March 23. The first stop is the castle—also reached on foot via several routes, including one with signs that alert walkers of the 133 steps that lie ahead. Painted numbers on the steps tell breathless climbers how many steps they've ascended.

While many visitors leave the funicular at the castle, much more lies ahead. Buy a roundtrip ticket to the top, the **Königstuhl**. Transfer at the next stop, the Molkenkur

station, to the historic and fully restored original 1907 wooden cars of the **Königstuhl Bahn**. The ride is a bit bumpier and the quarters a bit tighter, but this train has character as it pulls up grades ranging from 28 percent to 43 percent.

The view to the Neckar Valley stretches brilliantly, and the Castle and town take on almost toy-like qualities. Across the way, the trails of the **Philosophenweg** (Philosopher's Walk) zigzag across the southern slopes of the Michelsberg and Heiligenberg.

At the top station, signs announce that travelers are now 549.8 meters (1804 feet) above sea level. (The city itself is at 437.8 meters or 1,430 feet about sea level.)

Here, in the *Heidelberger Stadtwald*, the name "city forest" is an oxymoron, because there's nothing in this evergreen forest that hints of a city just below and out of sight. The only sounds are the cries of birds and the occasional tolling of bells carried on a perpetual wind.

To the castle

Return by rail just as far as the Molkenkur. Take the footpath and imagine yourself a 17th-century Swedish invader approaching the castle grounds from above. Through breaks in the forest, the castle ruins slowly take shape. Within the walls, the terraced gardens ramble like a stacked wedding cake gone creatively awry with stairs, tunnels, ramps, and pathways connecting them in a baroque game of hooks and ladders.

The upper terrace, to the far right facing the river, stretches as wide and long as three football fields. The southeast corner offers Heidelberg's best view of the *Altstadt* and river framed by the castle ruins.

The inner courtyards are worth the €3 (€1.50 seniors and students) admission and yield an even better view of nearly 400 years of construction (and destruction, thanks to the Thirty Years War and lightning) in styles from Gothic to High Renaissance. Entrance also includes visits to the **Great Vat** (the largest wine barrel in the world) and the **German Phar-**

macy Museum. For an additional €3.50 (€1.70 seniors and students), take a guided tour for an even better understanding of the castle's history as well as the significance of architectural styles both inside and outside. (It's a veritable stone textbook.) A less expensive and more independent option is to take an audio tour. Pick up a player and headset at primary entrances.

On your way down, resist a smile as you hear less enlightened visitors groan, "129, 130, 131..."

Across the river

More delights lie across the river. Head over the **Alte Brücke** (Old Bridge) from the *Altstadt* and follow signs to the **Philosophenweg**, a wooded path that winds up the hillside of the Michelsberg and the Heiligenberg above it. Walk through a stand of 19th-century villas to the quiet woods where Heidelberg's philosophers, poets, and scholars once walked, talked, and gained inspiration.

From the Old Bridge, take a 10-minute walk downstream to **Neuenheim** (you can also drive or take the #34 bus from the Hauptbahnhof). It's a once-medieval, sometimes-chic, always-charming quarter with abundant character and few tourists. Bistros, cafés, boutiques, and shops abound, including some of Heidelberg's more exclusive restaurants and stores. Neuenheim's market (on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 7am to 1pm) is bigger than the one in the *Altstadt* and more authentic. During off hours, kids play ball and older residents play chess in the shadow of the 12th-century tower of the **Market Church**.

Stop at the **Bar d'Aix en Provence** (Bergstrasse 1, tel. +49/6221/41 98 95), a cozy tapas bar with tasty nibbles like Spanish pistachios, plums wrapped in bacon, dried tomatoes and Catalan sausage, and green olives filled with anchovies, or a mixed cheese platter with baguette. In the equally intimate surroundings of **Le Coq Bistro and Restaurant** (Brückenstrasse 17, tel. +49/6221/411133), enjoy more substantial upscale fare like gnocchi filled with

mushroom cream, Argentinean steak in port wine sauce, and duck breast in orange sauce (reservations suggested on weekends).

Just past Neuenheim, **Handschuhsheim** is the oldest part of Heidelberg (dating from 765)—and a rustic surprise. Barely 10 minutes from the hectic downtown (take the #3 tram), this former village lies between sprawling vineyards and the wooded slopes of the Heiligenberg. Its tree-lined, cobblestoned streets lead past the **Tiefburg**, a moated castle built during the early Middle Ages, and the Romanesque **St. Vitus Church**, built in part during the 11th century over 8th-century ruins.

Don't miss its extensive 16th-century frescoes. If thirst or hunger intervene, stop at the relaxed **Gilberts Goldener Adler** (see Food section page 6) or, for more upscale fare, at the 300-year-old **Gasthof Lamm** (Pfarrgasse 3, +49/6221/479 30), where you have your choice of historic inner rooms or the outdoor beer garden and courtyard. Handschuhsheim is a hidden gem.

The Romantic Four

Upstream along the Neckar, the four significantly intact medieval towns of **Neckargemünd**, **Neckarsteinach**, **Eberbach**, and **Hirschhorn**—dubbed "The Romantic Four"—are well worth a day's exploration by boat, bike, train, or car. Each, in fact, is worth a stay.

In Neckargemünd, a 45-minute stroll around town reveals excellent examples of half-timber homes, especially in the narrow Klepper-gasse alley that trails along the remnants of the 14th-century town wall. Quiet dining at **Gasthaus zur weissen Rose** (Bahnhofstrasse 46, tel. +49/6233/23 10) features regional cuisine with a focus on fish. Part of Neckargemünd, the former fortress town of **Dilsberg** perches on a nearby hilltop at a bend in the Neckar. Much of the castle dates from the 12th century, and it's a step back in time to walk the narrow streets.

The 90 steps up the castle tower yield a commanding view across the

Neckar to the four castles of **Neckarsteinach**. Two of them are ruins and open for exploration. Climb the tower of the ivy-draped **Hinterburg Fortress**, and look down at a stone blueprint of the ruined foundation. Across the way, you can view Dilsberg from a different perspective.

Eberbach still has its original form with its four corner towers and extensive medieval center. Thanks to its long history as a spa town, it also has an excellent variety of fine shops, hotels and restaurants. The **Hotel Krone-Post** (tel. +49/6271/20 13) is almost worth a separate side trip with rustic elegance and creative cuisine.

In **Hirschhorn**, half-timber homes stand flush against and over the medieval town walls. Walk along the Hauptstrasse, where tiny alleys stray toward the Neckar. Pass through the town gate, built into the **Market Church**, and climb the winding Klostersgasse alley to the 15th-century monastery and, above it, the medieval **Hirschhorn Fortress**, now a hotel and restaurant.

LODGING

Hotel Hirschgasse

The Hirschgasse has been widely acclaimed by journalists and guests, and with good reason. At least 530 years old, it's one of Germany's most historic inns, and the 19th-century character of its public rooms continues to charm.

It was during the 19th century (and well into the 20th) that Heidelberg's fraternities held illegal (technically) sword duels here—as many as 1,000 per semester. Mark Twain described the events in *A Tramp Abroad* (something about dogs running off with ears), and frequent spectator Bismarck carved his initials in one of the tables in what is now the **Mensurstube** restaurant, a room dominated by dueling memorabilia. (The more formal and intimate **Le Gourmet** is in the next room).

Upstairs, 20 elegant Laura Ashley suites spoil guests with leather couches and love seats, plush carpeting and draperies. Each room has a name—and guests' names are written

in script at each door. There are vast bathrooms and living areas, and the furniture is personally selected by Allison Kraft, who runs the inn with her husband and second-generation owner, Ernst. Together, they have thought of every detail, and the service is impeccable.

Daily Rates: Singles €150–195, deluxe suites €195–245, salon suites €245–395. Breakfast €15.

Contact: Hotel Hirschgasse, Hirschgasse 3, Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/454 0, fax 454 11, e-mail info@hirschgasse.de, Web www.hirschgasse.de. Proprietors: Ernst and Allison Kraft.

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 15/20

Hotel am Schloss

As a rule, the top floor of a parking garage isn't prime hotel real estate, especially in historic town centers, but the Hotel am Schloss in Heidelberg, at the base station of the Funicular, is a notable exception. Once a guest steps off the elevator to the seventh floor, images of oil stains and parallel parking fade. With barely a dozen rooms, the hotel gives the feeling of a private, if not exclusive, club. The atmosphere is cordial, with an enthusiastic and eager service team.

Rooms are generous in size, clean, and modern. Ask for one overlooking the courtyard, where the view crosses a rooftop garden straight to the stark, red sandstone ruins of the Castle. Number 3 is a good bet, with ample space to work or spread out on a wall-length desk overlooking the castle.

Daily Rates: Singles €77–113, doubles €99–154

Contact: Hotel Am Schloss, Zwingerstrasse 20, D-69117 Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/14 17 0, fax 14 17 37.

Ratings QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 14/20

Gasthaus Hackteufel

The Hackteufel is perhaps better known for its superb restaurant and wine bar, but chef and owner Heinrich Scholl can claim equal success with his laid-back 12-room hotel. Number 12, a spacious attic room that *Gemütlichkeit* has praised in the past, has been surpassed by the new

Number 8, an apartment with separate living room, refrigerator, and expansive private terrace overlooking an inner courtyard—complete with chairs, table, and umbrella. Best news yet: it's priced as a normal double. If you're in this room, the Hackteufel's quality and value rating are 15/20.

The hotel is very near the colorful Steingasse and the *Alte Brücke*.

Contact: Gasthaus Hackteufel, Steingasse 7, D-69117 Heidelberg, tel +49/6221/90 53 80, fax 90 53 811, e-mail hotel@hackteufel.de, Web www.hackteufel.de. Proprietor: Heinrich Scholl

Daily Rates: Singles €70–90, doubles €105–145

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Hotel Goldener Hecht

In a city where most hotels top €100 for a double, the Goldener Hecht offers bright, spacious, and comfortable rooms from €72–93 in an ideal setting. It's a small, family-run hotel, and Eva Rothe greets guests almost as cheerfully as her terrier, Emma, who sometimes visits "guests she knows." From corner rooms Number 22 ("Goethe") and 12 ("Eichendorff"),

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

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.travelessentials.com Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10 percent 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 website, with train schedules throughout Europe, as well as 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
- www.historicgermany.com Website for an alliance of historic German cities
- www.thetravelinsider.info Info on electronic devices used by travelers — cell phones, computers, etc.

the view is straight to the Neckar and to the Old Bridge just 50 paces away. Sit at the table in the corner with a glass of red wine, and watch Heidelberg life pass by just below.

Contact: Hotel Goldener Hecht, Steingasse 2, D-69117 Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/16 60 25, fax 53 68 99, e-mail hotel.goldener.hecht@t-online.de, Web www.hotel-goldener-hecht.de. Proprietor: Eva Rothe

Daily rates: Singles €57–92, doubles €72–93. Breakfast €9.50.

Rating: QUALITY 11/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Holländer Hof

Just across a small square from the Goldener Hecht, with similar river views, the 1745 Holländer Hof is slightly more upscale, with a more modern, international atmosphere than its neighbor. Its 39 rooms, spread across four upper floors, are spacious, bright, and well-appointed. Number 235 faces a quiet rear courtyard and has a spacious front room. Number 121 looks to the river and street. Splurge (about €20–30 extra per night) to enjoy the fourth-floor (no elevator access) junior suite (Number 452) with views to three sides, including the Neckar, *Altstadt*, and castle. The bed is framed by ancient timbers.

Contact: Hotel Holländer Hof, Neckarstadt 66, D-69117 Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/60 50 0, fax 60 50 60, e-mail info@hollaenderhof.de, Web www.hollaender-hof.de

Daily rates: Singles €69–113, doubles €94–143, junior suite €124–165. Breakfast €11.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 13/20

Romantik-Hotel zum Ritter St. Georg

Originally built in 1592 as a Renaissance townhouse, the hotel's elaborate facade, gables, hewn stone, fluted columns, and ornately carved window blocks make it one of the most photographed buildings in Heidelberg. Its central location, service reputation, and historic setting make it a popular stop, although its many small rooms and high rates diminish the value.

Contact: Romantik-Hotel zum Ritter St. Georg, Hauptstrasse 178, D-69117

ASSAULT ON A FORTRESS

(Well, sort of...)

A post-World War II operation that for decades has been hushed-up can now be told thanks to the courageous investigative reporting of *Gemütlichkeit's* publisher — aided somewhat by a few glasses of wine. Here's what we have learned:

Shortly after the war ended in Europe, reacting to rumors of arms stockpiled by Nazis who had eluded capture, the Allied command scheduled a coordinated raid on buildings all over Europe that were suspected of hiding weapons. That is why, 60 years ago last spring, a small detachment of men, led by a U. S. Army artillery captain, found themselves waiting in the chilly hour before the German dawn to launch an assault on one of Europe's most famous landmarks, the great Castle at Heidelberg.

Ahead of them, spread over the side of the hill above the river and the old university town, lay the imposing fortress. At the pre-arranged moment, precisely scheduled to coincide with similar actions throughout the country, the young officer would lead the charge. When the time came, the Americans moved forward. The castle's garrison took one look at the cold-eyed invaders and ran the other way. The

fortress was taken without a shot. Mission accomplished. That the 'garrison' consisted of one frightened old man, the caretaker, is but a footnote to this historic military victory. Captain John Kenneth Bestor, son of a small-town Nebraska hardware store owner, would always be able to (in fact, does) tell how he led a successful assault on the great Castle at Heidelberg, one of the few times it has fallen to an invader in its 600-year history.

A few years ago, Captain Bestor finished a long and distinguished career as a senior partner with one of the midwest's largest law firms, the only company he ever worked for.

His tour of duty was not always as easy as it was the morning of the Heidelberg Castle caper. In late stages of the war, when American armies were pushing through Germany, he was an airborne artillery observer who flew over battle zones. His tiny plane was once forced to set down overnight in a field in "no man's land," ahead of the advancing Allied forces and at the rear of the fleeing Germans. He didn't sleep much that night.

Virtually every year in the period 1969 to 1998, Mr. Bestor traveled to Germany, and sometimes visited Heidelberg Castle.

He is, if I say so myself, one of the greats of the "greatest generation." —RHB

Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/13 50, fax 13 52 30, e-mail info@ritter-heidelberg.de, Web www.ritter-heidelberg.de.

Daily rates: Single €85–135, doubles €141–240.

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 11/20

FOOD

Gasthof zum Roten Ochsen

The Red Ox Inn is quintessential Heidelberg: a 300-year-old student pub that attracts as many locals, students, and former students (some *very* former) as visitors, especially when the university is in session. Sixth-generation innkeeper Philipp Spengel keeps his family's 165 years of tradition alive—from the 30 volumes of guest books since 1900 to the shelves of students' beer mugs used since 1850 to the assorted memorabilia covering the

EDITOR'S CHOICE

walls. Beyond excellent regional cuisine, the restaurant features piano music and sing-alongs that seem genuine—not forced or targeted at tourists.

Most entrée prices hover just over €10, with dishes like Swabian *Maultaschen* (like ravioli) with onions and bacon, venison ragout, sauerkraut platter with liver dumplings, pork *Schnitzel*, *Sauerbraten*, and boiled beef with horseradish and potatoes.

Contact: Zum Roten Ochsen, Hauptstrasse 217, D-69117 Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/209 77, fax 16 43 83, e-mail info@roterochsen.de, Web www.roterochsen.de

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 14/20

KulturBrauerei

Beer has been brewed for centuries in the buildings of the KulturBrauerei, and extensive renovation and con-

struction have yielded one of Heidelberg's newest and most popular dining and drinking spots. With high ceilings and long wooden tables, the main restaurant has the fun sense of a beer hall (tables are shared during busy periods), but the warmth of Old Heidelberg pervades. The beer garden is a courtyard oasis.

The focus here is on regional fare: pork shoulder with sauerkraut and boiled potatoes, *Sauerbraten* with *Spätzle* and red cabbage, ox tail with noodles and carrots, and mushrooms with herb cream and bread dumplings. Portions are huge but not matched by prices, which average around €12–13. Service is just about perfect. After dinner, move downstairs to the jazz club—or upstairs into the modern, 21-room hotel. Beer is brewed on premises, and visitors can get an overview of the brewing process on request.

Contact: KulturBrauerei Hotel and Brewery, Leyergasse 6, D-69117 Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/50 29 80, fax 50 29 879, e-mail kulturbrauerei.ag@t-online.de, Web www.heidelberger-kulturbrauerei.de


Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 15/20

Gilberts Goldener Adler

Located across the Neckar in the quiet district of Handschuhsheim, Gilberts Goldener Adler offers a peaceful retreat from city life. The interior is rustic and delightful, but in good weather head for the outside garden. The setting feels more like a far-off country village than one of Germany's most visited cities.

Food is fresh—the produce comes from local farms and some of the game is shot by the owner. The menu is limited. People come primarily to drink, relax, and enjoy simple specialties, such as *Spätzle* with onions, *Maultaschen* stuffed with arugula, and *Flammkuchen* (like thin pizza) topped with a choice of toppings, including cream cheese, bacon, and onions or spinach, cheese, and garlic.

Contact: Gilberts Goldener Adler, Handschuhsheimer Landstrasse 96, D-69121 Heidelberg, tel. +49/6221/41 38 88

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20 

FURKA RAILROAD

Continued from page 1

15:35; depart Gletsch at 15:46 by postal bus; no stopover at Grimsel Pass; arrive Meiringen at 17:05. (July 8 to Sept. 3, Fridays and Saturdays only)

Journey #3

Depart Lucerne at 07:21; change trains in Göschenen; arrive Realp at 09:18; depart Realp at 09:50 by steam train; 20-minute stopover at Furka station; arrive Gletsch at 11:50; depart Gletsch at 12:25 or 14:45 by postal bus; arrive Oberwald at 12:40 or 15:00; depart Oberwald at 13:12 or 15:12 by train; change in Göschenen and Arth-Goldau; arrive Lucerne at 15:38 or 17:38. (July 22 to October 2, Friday–Sunday, and daily, July 11 to August 18)

Journey #4

Departure in Meiringen at 11:00 by postal bus; no stopover on top of Grimsel Pass; arrive Gletsch at 12:19; depart Gletsch at 14:00 by steam train; 20-minute stopover at Furka station; arrive Realp at 15:45; departure in Realp at 16:32 by train; change trains in Göschenen; arrival in Lucerne at 18:38. (July 22 to October 2, Friday–Sunday, and daily, July 11 to August 18)

Journey #5

Departure in Meiringen at 11:00 by postal bus; no stopover on top of Grimsel Pass; arrive Gletsch at 12:19; depart Gletsch at 14:00 by steam train; 20-minute stopover at Furka station; arrival in Realp at 15:45; departure in Realp at 16:18 by train; change trains in Brig, Spiez and Interlaken Ost; arrival in Meiringen at 20:45. (July 22 to October 2, Friday–Sunday, and daily, July 11 to August 18)

Journey #6


Departure in Meiringen at 09:00 by postal bus; stopover of 30 minutes on top of Grimsel Pass; arrival in Gletsch at 10:44; departure from Gletsch at 11:00 by steam train; 20-minute stopover at Furka station;

arrival in Realp at 12:40; departure in Realp at 13:32 or 15:32 by train; change trains in Göschenen and Arth-Goldau; arrival in Lucerne at 15:38 or 17:38. (July 9 to September 4, Fridays and Saturdays only)

Check current timetables when planning your trip, as buses and the steam train may not run daily. The Swiss Pass is valid on postal busses, but on tourist lines like Grimsel Pass, a supplement of up to CHF 15 per person applies. The Swiss Pass is not valid on the Furka Cogwheel Steam Railroad.

Tickets can be purchased at the steam railroad stations in Realp and Gletsch. A one-way ticket is CHF 58.00 per person, CHF 93.00 per person roundtrip. Kids up to 16 years travel free of charge when accompanied by one parent.

Mr. Gretener strongly recommends a seat reservation on the postal bus over Grimsel Pass (tel. 0900 304 304, e-mail postautobeo@post.ch) and on the Furka Cogwheel Steam Railroad.

For more information visit www.furka-bergstrecke.ch. 

Travel Notes

■ **German Auto Tour.** If cars are your passion, or maybe you just feel the need to forge a closer bond to that fine piece of German engineering in your driveway, consider joining **Douglas deBoard** on a German Auto Tour (GAT). deBoard plans his tours around seasonal events, such as **Oktoberfest** and the **Frankfurt Auto Show**. A basic, five-day itinerary includes a VIP tour of the **Mercedes Benz** facilities in Untertürkheim and Sindelfingen. Sightseeing to the **Motor-Sport-Museum** in Sinsheim and the Black Forest is also included. Some travelers use the tour as a convenient excuse to drive their new car from the factory floor.

Tour group sizes range from 15 to 20 persons. The fee of \$2,950 includes all lodging, ground transportation, hotels, and tips. Separate two-day

extensions that include tours of the BMW and Porsche factories are available for \$950.

Contact: Tel. 800-443-4610, e-mail: info@germanautotours.com

■ **Online Resource for Swiss Restaurants:** For a complete directory of restaurants in Switzerland, check out www.resto.ch, a favorite online restaurant finder of the Swiss. Search by location, or use the color-coded map. Listings contain contact information, type of food, and number of Michelin stars.

■ **New Riviera Card:** The Vevey-Montreux region's new Riviera Card lets holders ride free on the local bus network and offers reductions of up to 50 percent on train excursions and entrance fees to museums and theme parks. The card is free to anyone who spends a night in one of the hotels, schools, or private clinics in the Vaud and Lavaux Riviera. Present the card at any information office of Vevey-Montreux Tourism for a free glass of wine (www.montreux-vevey.com). ☒

Readers' Forum

Hotel Pflug in Weinheim

Located in the "Badische Riviera," between Darmstadt and Heidelberg, **Hotel Pflug** in Weinheim (tel. +49/06201/90280, email: info@hotel-gold-ener-pflug.de, Web: www.hotel-gold-ener-pflug.de, prices range from €50 for a single to €80 for a 500 square-foot apartment) is run by the friendly Stark family. They have remodeled the old house extensively in recent years. Steep-narrow staircases might be a problem for some guests, (there is no lift, but the first floor should be ok). The Starks are third-generation owners, and this timbered house has many stories to tell.

With its vineyards and forest surroundings, Weinheim is especially colorful in autumn. Ask for a quiet room because the hotel is located at a busy marketplace, with restaurants on both sides. In August, there are Wine fests in the old town.

If the weather is nice, you can hardly get through the crowds sipping beer or wine at the market. Op-

posite the hotel is a church, and its bells might bother visitors who want to sleep in.

INGE LARREY

VIA E-MAIL ☒

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

ble), including cities, with *good* food under \$30 per person, per day. A glass of beer *vom Fass* (draught) costs about \$2.40 to \$3.50, and a quarter-liter of local wine ranges from \$3 to \$6, less for both beverages than we pay in restaurants here in Ashland.

Our rental car, a splendid, rock-solid, VW Golf was Autobahn-comfortable at 140 to 160 KPH. It never wavered even at 180 KPH, though sustaining such speed in even light traffic is beyond my comfort zone. The car came with an air-conditioner that easily handled the most sweltering days, a clever user-friendly radio/CD player, and a trunk that gobbled up two rolling suitcases, a fat hanging bag folded double, and two hefty satchels.

We paid just over \$32 per day for the 10-day rental and logged more than 1200 kilometers. It's the smallest car I've driven in Europe in several years and made me wonder why I ever thought I needed anything larger.

There are, of course, some pocket-book-draining items. A large bottle of mineral water in an upscale restaurant will cost from €5 to €8; we found *Bleifrei* (unleaded fuel) from €1.20 to €1.26 per liter (about \$5.50-\$5.70 per gallon), and, interestingly enough, public toilets have become an expense item. At most rail stations, and an increasing number of Autobahn stops, you'll have to insert correct change—typically half or one euro—into a coin-operated gate to access the *Damen* and *Herren*. Places without mechanically-controlled entry, including some large restaurants, often place coin-collecting attendants at WC entrances. If you're out and about—and drinking your eight glasses of water a day—it adds up.

In the months ahead we'll report in detail on Sylt, Rügen, Berlin, and Munich, as well the country hideaways we visited. — RHB ☒

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 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 below 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@fhoteils.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, Pettenkoflerstr. 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@t-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

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

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

Zürich

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

Hotel Arlette, Stampfenbachstrasse 26, Switzerland CH-8001, tel. +41/01/25 20 032, fax 25 20 932, email: hotel.arlette@bluwin.ch

Frankfurt Airport

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

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

Hotel Dreieich, Frankfurter Str. 49, Langen, D-63225, tel. +49/06103/91 50, fax 52 030. email: hotel-dreieich@gmx.de

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 ☒