

DEAR  
SUBSCRIBER

### Strange Advice From The Guru

In the Navy, we called it "bum dope," bad information (if the term in those long-ago days had a drug connotation, it was lost on me). As we close out the 19th year of publishing *Gemütlichkeit*, there is a considerable amount of bum dope being passed out about travel.

For example, companies and merchants who benefit financially from the procedure, tell visitors to Europe that it's advisable to pay hotel and restaurant bills in dollars (the process is called Dynamic Currency Conversion, DCC). That way, they explain, you'll know the exact amount in dollars that will appear on your credit card bill. Indeed you will, but you'll also pay up to 5 percent for the "service." Bum dope.

Sometimes curious advice comes from surprising sources. In a recent newspaper column, our nation's guru on travel to Europe, Rick Steves, says the "free spirit, without much planning, no real itinerary" will return home with a "backpack full of complaints about how expensive and stressful it all was." On the other hand, he says, the traveler with a "detailed day-to-day plan" will come home with "rich stories of spontaneous European adventures."

This is a bit of a head-scratcher. Isn't this the same Rick Steves who 20 years ago preached the gospel of moving about Europe as mood dictated with a rail pass, a backpack, and one or two of his guidebooks?

Steves says that with his guidebook research and TV filming commitments, he has "one of the most tightly-wound itineraries of any traveler."

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## ISLAND OF SYLT

*Germany's version of the Hamptons on the North Sea attracts an elite clientele and is a perfect place to escape fellow American tourists.*

**W**hen it comes to destinations, many travelers have to fight the urge to return time after time to the tried-and-true. It's a safe but dull strategy, and readers unable to break out of the not-so-vicious southern Bavaria/Black Forest cycle will never know the many unique charms of the island of Sylt, Deutschland's version of the Hamptons.

This flat, sliver of an island in the North Sea lies as much off Denmark's coast as Germany's and attracts up-market Germans like no other domestic destination. One of its dozen villages, Kampen (pop. 650), seems at first an unassuming collection of cottages scattered among meandering lanes, until you notice the discreet Bvlgari, Prada, and Louis Vuitton signs and a local whispers

that this is Germany's most coveted and expensive residential real estate.

Visitors arrive via long, double-decked car trains (€42 per car each way), over vast tide flats on the seven-mile Hindenburg embankment, or by car ferry (€37) from Denmark.

This is not the Germany of cuckoo clocks and dirndls, forests and rolling farmland, sauerkraut and *Rostbraten*; it is Nordfriesland, a place of thatched roofs, fresh sea air, weather-beaten Monterey-style pines, heather-covered dunes, and fresh seafood.

A largely elite clientele of both old and new rich come to stroll and loiter on beaches pounded by the North Atlantic, whack their Titleists around the Scottish links-style golf course, and

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## Five Great Austrian Train Rides

**I**n Austria, the tracks and trains still go almost anywhere you want. And whether you choose to travel entirely by rail or just want to take a break from driving, there are great rides aplenty. After all, would you rather concentrate on a twisting mountain road clogged with traffic, or stand at an open window and watch the scenery roll past?

If you haven't been off the main lines between major cities, here's a surprise: Local trains on secondary lines let you open the windows and enjoy travel at a more leisurely pace. You also get to interact far more with the locals than if you were encased in your own automobile.

Austria's rail lines offer scenery ranging from rugged mountains to peaceful lakes and rolling hills along the Danube—all within easy reach of major cultural centers, such as Vienna and Salzburg.

The five route recommendations below are based on scenery, historic significance, and accessibility from the major cities. If you have limited time, give priority to the routes at the top of the list—or those closest to the city where you plan to spend the most time.

**1. Semmering Line:** Among the first mountain railways in the world, the Semmering Line—approximately the middle third of the route between Vienna and Graz—was a spectacular achievement for its time. Almost up until the introduction of the Euro, the Semmering Line and its designer were the featured motif on the 20 Schilling bill, Austria's most common currency denomination.

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**Exchange rates as of 12/04/05**

**1 euro = \$1.17**

**1 Swiss franc = \$0.76**

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No doubt that is the case. But we've traveled in Europe both ways, with an hour-by-hour itinerary, and simply making it up as we went along. For us, winging it is by far the more relaxing and rewarding.

Stevies says careful planning gives him "the luxury of two hours of absolutely relaxed, focused-on-the-moment spontaneity." At *Gemütlichkeit*, we're looking for two weeks of spontaneity. The mature vacation traveler to Europe doesn't achieve that with a spreadsheet that accounts for every 15-minute segment of the trip. Where is the spontaneity if you can't spend an extra day in a town that has unexpectedly charmed you? Where is it if you can't, on the spur of the moment, decide to stay overnight at the intriguing little country hotel you discovered when you stopped there for lunch? Where is it when you have to drive like a bat out of hell to get to your scheduled hotel on time because you became immersed in exploring a castle, a museum, or an interesting town. Sorry, Rick, but rigid schedules are stress inducers and spontaneity killers.

I'm the first to admit that planning a trip is one of the joys of travel. It's fun to get out the maps and guidebooks, surf the Net, and create an overall plan. By all means, make reservations in cities where they are necessary (not as many as you might think), but leave a few days open.

As I've said before in this space, more than once have we arrived in

Europe with no reservations and no plans—only a car rental voucher and appropriate *Michelin Green* and *Red* guides.

Admittedly, many travelers are not wired that way. Still, I would urge everyone to at least leave a few days open for in-Europe decision-making.

One must, of course, be properly prepared—not itinerary-ized—to successfully travel in footloose fashion. That preparation involves being able, each day in Europe, to answer three basic questions: Where do I sleep? What do I see? How do I get where I'm going?

Where they lay their heads each night is for many travelers the most critical travel issue. To successfully "wing it," one has to be able to find suitable accommodations on short notice. The *Michelin Red Guides*, with their depth of coverage and variety of useful tools, is always our first line of defense. Though there is no printed guide for Austria, Michelin rates that country's hotel on its [ViaMichelin.com](http://ViaMichelin.com) Web site. Tourist offices are another reliable source. Even small towns have them and most are well-equipped to help visitors find a wide range of same-day overnight accommodations. A mobile phone, of course, vastly simplifies hotel searches.

As to what to see, the best references for European sights, history, and culture are found in Michelin's *Green Guide* series which encompasses more than 40 books, and covers most countries and major cities. Leading towns and sights are starred according to importance, and there are suggested walking and driving tours with descriptions and ratings of the

sights along the way, maps of the most important cities, and a few pictures.

Traveling without an itinerary is tailor-made for the auto traveler. Successfully getting around Europe's backroads requires the right maps (yeah, I know, those GPS devices are amazing technology, but good maps are still indispensable). A scale of 1:200,000 (1 cm=2 km) or 1:150,000 (1 cm=1.5 km) is best. That map of Germany you got free from AAA or the tourist office is OK for an overall perspective but will be useless on backroads.

I'm convinced the advice Steves gives in his books, on his Web site, and in his PBS programs is solid. He's shown millions how to "do" Europe responsibly and without taking out a second mortgage. But this time he's forgotten what it was like to travel for fun instead of business.

If you want a tightly-wound itinerary, try a Globus Tour—or maybe one of the 300-plus tours that Steves' company operates.—RHB

**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: **newyr** Password: **0759**

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**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
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**HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY**

Rating Scale	Scale	Food	65%
Excellent	16 - 20	Service	20%
Above Average	12 - 15	Atmosphere	15%
Average	8 - 11		
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

**Restaurant Criteria**

**Special Designation**

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

## ISLAND OF SYLT

Continued from page 1

explore an island that is essentially a 24-mile-long sand spit, virtually every inch of which is accessible by bike or on foot via flat, mostly-paved trails. Adventure travel, it is not.

The quality in accommodations and cuisine that awaits Sylt visitors is remarkable. In all of Germany, there is no greater concentration of stars, toques, and other various guidebook symbols that signify excellence. Michelin gives its "Red" designation to nine hotels and awards its coveted stars for culinary achievement to four restaurants, and its red Bib Gourmand (good food at moderate prices) to three others.

Prominent German families come to their favorite Sylt hotels year after year, expecting the same room or suite, the same table in the dining room, and the same newspaper at breakfast. Harald Hentzschel, the personable owner of the elegant **Stadt Hamburg**, for decades an old-guard favorite, confesses to maintaining a meticulous, generations-old file on regular guests that catalogs likes and dislikes, from chamber maids and waiters to food and drink to preferred bed linens.

On Sylt's west side are miles of imposing, pure sand Atlantic beaches. Summer is the time to rent a *Strandkorb*, the ubiquitous, bonnet-like two-person wicker beach chairs that can be quickly turned to protect occupants from wind and sun. They are a Sylt export, selling outside of Germany for \$2,500 to \$10,000. Bathing here, even in August, will probably appeal only to the hardiest. Winter, on the other hand, is a time to bundle up and stare down the great storms that roll in off the Atlantic.

Capricious weather patterns are part of Sylt's charm. Some years ago, we wore sweaters and jackets throughout an August visit. Thatched-roof beach houses, positioned to provide the narrowest exposure to the prevailing east-west winds, are often surrounded by a protective berm of sand and heather that gives testimony to the frequent gales. Interestingly, most of the native reed stalks used to thatch the island's roofs grow in what are now conservation areas and thus must be imported from places such as Turkey and Hungary. Required by

## Sylt Basics

**Population:** 1,200

**Elevation:** Sea Level

**Tourist Information:** Sylt Marketing GMBH, Stephanstr. 6, D-25980, Westerland, tel. +49/04651/82020, fax 8202 22, [www.sylt.de](http://www.sylt.de)

**Wattensee (Tidal Flats) Tour:** Begins most days at 12:30pm from the Vogelkoje bus stop. Ask for tours led by Manfred Sturm. Cost €3.50 per person.

**Sylt Photos:** Sylt's extraordinary sea and landscapes are beautifully captured on film by Harald Hentzschel, owner of Hotel Stadt Hamburg. View them at [www.sylt-lichtbilder.de/start\\_eng.html](http://www.sylt-lichtbilder.de/start_eng.html)

**Getting There:** Via frequent car train between Niebüll and Westerland. Cost is €42 per car, no reservations. Also by ferry between List and the Danish island of Rømø. Fare is €37, reservations recommended. Tel. 0180/310 30 30, [info@syltfaehre.de](mailto:info@syltfaehre.de). Book online at [www.sylt-faehre.de](http://www.sylt-faehre.de).

**English-Speaking Guide:** Contact Sylke Marie Nielsen, tel. +49/04651/22221, [sylke47@aol.com](mailto:sylke47@aol.com).

## Affordable Sylt Accommodations

Though the hotels reviewed in this issue range from moderate to very expensive, the *Sylt Gastgeber 2005*, a thick booklet listing accommodations on the island, available from Sylt Marketing (see box above), offers dozens of *privatzimmer* with breakfast and apartments at much lower prices.

For example, **Haus Friede** ([www.hausfriede-sylt.de](http://www.hausfriede-sylt.de)) is a quaint, Friesian-style house near the center of Westerland, divided into four apartments of varying sizes that rent for €40 to €70 per night, depending on the apartment and the season. There is a three-night minimum and a €31 cleaning charge.

*Privatzimmer* with breakfast range from €20 to €75 per night. In List, Germany's most northerly town, Harry Mansen ([www.karin-lorenzen.de](http://www.karin-lorenzen.de)) offers a pleasant double room for €42 per night and a 400-square-foot apartment with kitchen, bedroom, and bright sitting for €50 per night.

The Web site, [www.gastgeber-sylt.de](http://www.gastgeber-sylt.de), though in German, will be useful to the traveler seeking a vacation rental.

building codes of several island villages, including Kampen, the reed roofs are expensive and only last 15 to 20 years.

A main feature of the calmer east side of the island is its Waddensee, where low tides expose thousands of acres of what appears to be a gray expanse of mud, but is, in fact, a fascinating ecosystem.

For a mere €3.50 per person one can sign on to a two-hour guided Waddensee tour. One overcast morning last July, we left our shoes and socks next to a tuft of sea grass behind a low sand dune, and with about a dozen others, set out barefoot onto the tidal flats. Leading the all-German-except-us group was Herr Manfred Sturm, a shovel-packing, ruddy-faced, 65-ish Sylt marine biologist, who has been showing visitors the wonders of the Waddensee for more than 40 years.

Ultimately, he would take us about a quarter of a mile from the shore (because things happen quickly when the tide returns, walking unsupervised on the Waddensee is not recommended). Despite being unable to understand much of Herr Sturm's presentation, it was an absorbing two hours. His practiced eye caught subtle signals of what was beneath the surface, and his quick shovel unearthed an amazing variety of mud dwellers: not only clams, mussels, and crabs, but also giant black worms and near-microscopic beings, including a star-shaped, button-size creature that slithered across our palms.

The *piece d' resistance*, however, was the second mussel. The first, Herr Sturm had eased open with a pocket knife and, fully aware of the "Oooo, how gross" facial expressions of his audience, brought the shell to his lips and let its contents slide down his throat. After plucking a second from a shovel full of mud, he rinsed it in a shallow tide pool, popped the shell, and offered it around. With no immediate takers, his gaze swung to the *Amerikanischer* and a canny smile spread across his face. It was an offer that could not be refused. For his country, the *Amerikanischer* ate the mussel (not bad at all) and smiled back.

In addition to their sense of humor, Frisians are good-hearted. A few months after 9/11, the citizenry invited 50 New York City firefighters and their families to Sylt, picking up the tab for air, hotel,

meals, and sightseeing.

Most of the island's visitors are Germans from the north, especially Hamburg. Americans are seldom seen. Travelers who seek traditional European culture won't find it here. Still, there are things to see. The **Altfriesisches Haus**, once the home of a whaling captain, preserves Frisian lifestyle as it was in 1740. **Alte Landvogtei**, the Old Governor's Residence, dates to 1649 and is one of the island's oldest buildings. An odd attraction is the bird traps, **Vogelkogen**, which in the 18th and 19th centuries were used to lure tens of thousands of wild ducks to the island. They were killed and exported to the mainland. The practice ended more than 100 years ago, but you can still visit the traps.

Of perhaps greater interest is **Whisystrasse**, the nickname given to Strönwai in Kampen, a road lined with bars and clubs that in summer attract the beautiful people and their flashy cars.

For most readers, however, the rewards of Sylt will be long walks and bicycle rides, quiet country lanes, the extraordinary beauty of its landscape, first-rate accommodations, and fine food.

Though American visitors will find Sylt more expensive than most German destinations, it is not as financially exclusive as perhaps we have made it sound. There are many affordable places to eat, such as the great seafood restaurant **Gosch**. (See "Affordable Sylt Accommodations," page 3, for some inexpensive bed-and-breakfast options, vacation rental apartments, and ways of finding other accommodations.)

On the other hand, if you're looking to splurge a bit in a place the Germans themselves regard as special, you'll probably find a few days in Sylt a unique Germany vacation experience.

### Lodging

Travelers who want the very best face a difficult decision when it comes to choosing a Sylt headquarters. We can't think of another destination in Germany that offers as many truly outstanding hotels. Other than location and style, there is little to choose from among the Stadt Hamburg, **Söl'ring**, **Benen Diken Hof**, **Fährhaus**, and **Landhaus Stricker**. Physically, the **Golf- & Landhaus Kampen** belongs in this

group, but we got a cool reception from management. You may not, however. Though we have minor reservations about a few hotels reviewed here, we recommend them all.

### Hotel Stadt Hamburg

The chest-high hedge that separates the dazzling white facade of the Hotel Stadt Hamburg (HSH) from the street is so evenly clipped that some passersby touch it to see if it's real. It's that kind of place, where things are done exactly so and have been for decades. And owner Harald Hentzschel, born on the premises, probably about 45 years ago, is on hand every day to see that they continue to be done that way.

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Take breakfast, for example. In the past 20 years, virtually every hotel in Germany has come to the conclusion that it is easier and cheaper to offer a buffet rather than a "served" breakfast. But cheaper and easier isn't often part of the decision-making process at HSH. Guests select from an extensive menu and one of several grown men in suits is likely to take the order. There are silver coffee pots, masses of fresh flowers artfully arranged by Frau Moni Hentzschel, and a platoon of uniformed servers. Even though the overall look of public and guestrooms, with their emphasis on floral wallpaper and period furnishings, is more English country house than German seaside resort, from service to décor, this is old-school German hostelry.

Guestrooms are bright and spacious with high ceilings and windows, flowing draperies, polished dark wood tables, and overstuffed chairs and couches. Especially attractive are those in the newer wing of the house. All are equipped with plenty of closet space and large, nicely-appointed and well-lit bathrooms. While you dine, your room will be straightened, the drapes closed, and bedcovers turned down.

The hotel's latest additions are a gleaming wellness/beauty spa with an indoor swimming pool under a massive skylight, and a cozy bistro restaurant serving less formal meals than the stylish main dining room.

In foul weather, the best place to be is borrowed deep into a fat chair by a blazing fire in the immensely inviting library/den. In summer, however, you'll

want to grab a table behind that meticulously trimmed hedge and watch the comings and goings along Westerland's main pedestrian-only walkway.

Though the Stadt Hamburg does not seek the cutting edge as does its flashy competition, all things considered, it remains Sylt's number one hotel.

**Contact:** Hotel Stadt Hamburg, Strandstrasse 2, 25980 Westerland/Sylt, tel. +49/4651/8580, fax 858/220, [hsh-sylt@t-online.de](mailto:hsh-sylt@t-online.de), [www.hotelstadthamburg.com](http://www.hotelstadthamburg.com). Proprietors: Harald and Moni Hentzschel

**Daily Rates:** Singles €82–240, doubles €130–300

**Rating:** QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 14/20

### Söl'ring Hof Sylt

This exclusive 15-room hideaway is housed in a classic Frisian-style thatched-roof building perched on a low dune overlooking the beach and North Sea. A year ago, the Söl'ring was just another player in the fierce competition for moneyed Sylt visitors. In 2005, however, it emerged from the pack when its already-celebrated chef, Johannes King, was awarded a second Michelin star.

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The corporate will to create a special holiday experience for an elite clientele is palpable around this Dorint/Sofitel hotel chain showpiece. A vintage Rolls Royce with uniformed driver ferries guests to and from various island destinations and there are a pair of sleek, \$100K-plus Audi A8 automobiles for guests to share—with suite occupants having first dibs. Of course, each guest has his or her own wicker beach chair, and the stylishly-modern guestrooms are equipped with Bang & Olufsen stereo systems, and hardwire and wireless high-speed Internet connections; some even have binoculars, and three rooms have a fireplace.

The extraordinary restaurant (see "Food," page 6), beachside location, first-rate facilities, and high staff-to-guest ratio combine to make the Söl'ring a destination in itself.

The hotel is closed to the public November–April, but the entire property can be booked during the period for company or family events.

**Contact:** Söl'ring Hof Sylt, Am Strandwall 1, 25980 Rantum/Sylt, tel. +49/4651/836 200, fax 836 2020, [info](http://info).

[GWTRAT@dorint.com](mailto:GWTRAT@dorint.com), [www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com).

**Daily Rates:** Singles €265–395, doubles €295–495

**Rating:** QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 13/20

### Hotel Restaurant Fährhaus

One rather spectacular architectural element and a location overlooking the quaint harbor of Munkmarsch set the Fährhaus apart. Though the old, two-story ferry terminal keeps much of its *fin de siècle* character, a stunning three-story glass atrium, topped by an all-glass and steel Palladium arch dropped into its center, brings light to corridors and spaces that were once closed-in and dark.

Décor blends modern, country, and nautical styles, employing top-grade materials and furnishings. There are 20 elegantly appointed suites and doubles, most with water views. In each is a Bose sound system, satellite TV with VCR, and high-speed Internet connection.

Guests can choose **Restaurant Fährhaus**, which rates a single Michelin star, or the more relaxed **Käpt'n Selmer Stube**. The Fährhaus is luxury at a good price.

**Contact:** Hotel und Restaurant Fährhaus, Heefwai 1, 25980 Sylt-Ost/Munkmarsch, tel. +49/4651/939 70, fax 939 710, [info@faehrhaus-sylt.de](mailto:info@faehrhaus-sylt.de), [www.faehrhaus-sylt.de](http://www.faehrhaus-sylt.de).

**Daily Rates:** Singles €165–195, double €220–260

**Rating:** QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

### Hotel Benen-Diken-Hof

The first *Gemütlichkeit* story on this hotel appeared in the October 1987 issue. Our rating system was different then, but it received the highest possible ranking: three stars and a dollar sign for good value. More than 18 years later, the Benen-Diken-Hof is still a wonderful hotel, but not the quiet, country charmer of earlier times. It now has 10 more guestrooms; a small, state-of-the-art conference facility; and shining new spa and beauty facilities.

The 40 guestrooms are beautifully maintained and the hotel is located in Keitum, the island's most interesting village. Breakfast is still served until 1pm.

**Contact:** Hotel Benen-Diken-Hof, Süderstarsse 3-5, 25980 Keitum/Sylt, tel. +49/4651/938 30, fax 938 3183,

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[info@benen-diken-hof.de](mailto:info@benen-diken-hof.de), [www.benen-diken-hof.de](http://www.benen-diken-hof.de). Proprietors: Anja and Claas-Erik Johannsen

**Daily Rates:** Singles €126–221, doubles €175–263

**Rating:** QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

### Landhaus Stricker

Here is another top-flight Sylt hotel that combines luxurious accommodations with fine dining. Four restaurants on the island rate Michelin stars, and the Landhaus Stricker's **Bodendorf's** is one of them.

There is little to criticize the Stricker, other than its location near the rail line joining Westerland with the German mainland.

**Contact:** Landhaus Stricker, Boy-Nielsen-Strasse 10, 25980 Sylt/Tinum, tel. +49/465188/990, fax 8899/499, [info@landhaus-stricker.de](mailto:info@landhaus-stricker.de), [www.landhaus-stricker.de](http://www.landhaus-stricker.de). Proprietors: Eike & Rudi Göhler

**Daily Rates:** Singles €130–180, doubles €190–220

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

### Golf- & Landhaus Kampen

This chic, intimate little hotel occupies a picturesque thatched-roof building in Kampen, a village that locals like to compare to Beverly Hills. Why the word "golf" is in the hotel's name is somewhat mysterious because there is no connection to the nearby golf course, other than proximity.

Though guestrooms, public spaces, and other facilities are of the highest quality, management seems indifferent to the idea of American guests.

**Contact:** Golf- & Landhaus Kampen, Braderuper Weg 12, 25999 Kampen/Sylt, tel. +49/4651/469 10, fax 469 111, [info@landhaus-kampen.de](mailto:info@landhaus-kampen.de), [www.landhaus-kampen.de](http://www.landhaus-kampen.de). Proprietor: Thomas Wilhelm, Manager

**Daily Rates:** Doubles €160–270

**Rating:** Unable to Objectively Rate

### Morsum Kliff

The first building one sees when the car train from the mainland approaches Sylt is this hulking Frisian edifice, which sits alone in moor-like country on the eastern-most side of the island.

As the top hired-hand for many years at the island's top hotel, the

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Stadt Hamburg, Morsum Kliff's affable owner, Rudolf Schwenn, knows the business. His rustic outpost has a Scandinavian flair and an appealing laid-back informality.

The restaurant gets a Bib Gourmand ("good food at moderate prices") designation from Michelin. In summer, the outdoor cafe attracts hikers and bicyclists on their way through the heather-covered land to the Morsum Cliffs and the sea.

**Contact:** Morsum Kliff, Nösistig 13, 25980 Morsum Sylt-Ost, tel. +49/4651/836 320, fax 836 3236, [info@hotel-morsum-kliff.de](mailto:info@hotel-morsum-kliff.de), [www.hotel-morsum-kliff.de](http://www.hotel-morsum-kliff.de). Proprietors: Renee Kreis and Rudolf Schwenn

**Daily Rates:** Singles €126–230, doubles €156–235

**Rating:** QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 13/20

### Kamps Hotel, Gallery & Café

Before she shows you to your room, Cornelia Kamp may have to dust the flour off her hands. For whatever her talents as a hotelier, they are far exceeded by her baking skills. (Eat just one fresh-from-the-oven blueberry tart with housemade blueberry ice cream and you'll agree.)

On a wooded sliver of property by

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### 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.travelessentials.com](http://www.travelessentials.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
- [www.thetravelinsider.info](http://www.thetravelinsider.info) Info on electronic de-

a quiet country lane in Keitum, this is a bakery/café/gallery with a few rooms to rent.

The sleeping accommodations are also highly recommended. Apartment Number Two, for example, on ground level, consists of a bedroom and sitting room/kitchen with French doors opening to a private terrace. Furnishings are simple but of good quality and well maintained. Over the bed is an impressive photograph of the dunes. The marble-tiled bathroom has a walk-in shower with a heavy glass door. All accommodations have necessary amenities, including TV and high-speed Internet.

With the word “gallery” in the name of the business, it’s not a surprise that her guestrooms display some quality art.

Kamps has the charm, family ownership, and authenticity to easily qualify as an “Editor’s Choice.” And even if you don’t rent one of the four double rooms or three apartments, be sure to stop by for one her amazing pastries.

**Contact:** Kamps Hotel & Café, Gurtstich 41, 25980 Keitum/Sylt-Ost, tel. +49/4651/983 90, fax 983 923, [urlaub@kamps-sylt.de](mailto:urlaub@kamps-sylt.de), [www.kamps-sylt.de](http://www.kamps-sylt.de). Proprietor: Cornelia Kamp

**Daily Rates:** Doubles €80–140, apartments €100–185

**Rating:** QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

### Alte Strandvogtei

Our interest in this hotel was piqued by its “red” Michelin designation, but what Michelin saw we apparently missed. Alte Strandvogtei is a pleasant enough place with a decidedly homey atmosphere, but guestrooms are a bit small and it all seemed a bit tired.

**Contact:** Alte Strandvogtei, Merret-Lassen-Wai 6, 25980 /Rantum/Sylt. tel. +49/4651/922 50, fax 291 57, [info@alte-strandvogtei.de](mailto:info@alte-strandvogtei.de), [www.atlestrandvogtei.de](http://www.atlestrandvogtei.de).

**Daily Rates:** Singles €90–150, doubles €150–195

**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

### Food

#### Gosch

When we first encountered this restaurant 18 years ago, it was a tiny seafood shack with stand-up tables in the Sylt hamlet of List, Germany’s most northern village. Since then, it has become a mega-busi-

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ness with outlets in many major cities, including the Frankfurt and Munich airports. Though most of these mainland locations are franchised, Sylt’s Gosch restaurants are said to remain under the control of the founder.

Whoever is cooking, the Westerland version of Gosch is a veritable seafood factory, rolling out fresh lobsters, oysters, clams, mussels, and an endless variety of fish to thousands of patrons each day.

By any measure, this is fast food, but fresh, delicious, and inexpensive. Specials range from €10 to about €15, and the recipes are simple and straightforward. Most dishes come with roasted potatoes or rice pilaf. Grilled salmon steak is €10, as is an order of fresh mussels. Scampi grilled on a skewer is €13.50. Don’t leave Sylt without at least one meal at Gosch, either here or at the List location.

**Contact:** Gosch Fisch Bistro, Friedrichstr. 15b, D-25980, Westerland, tel. +49/04651/23745, fax 4651/29328

**Rating:** QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 16/20

#### Bistro Stadt Hamburg

On a warm summer evening, the only sensible option was to reserve one of the Bistro’s half dozen or so tables behind the hotel’s white picket fence and low hedge. Here, one can dine at ease while watching the passing parade on Westerland’s main street. If weather doesn’t permit, the bright little taproom is a cozy, pleasant alternative.

A straightforward meal for two of small, fresh salads (€5.50), crisp Wiener Schnitzel (€17.50), strips of chicken breast wrapped around a sage-flavored bread crumb stuffing in an orange reduction sauce, and dessert was €57, without beverages. The ingredients were fresh and the service pleasant.

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

#### Restaurant Stadt Hamburg

The culinary goings-on in Stadt Hamburg’s elegant dining room are of a more serious nature. Here, one experiences the hushed reverence and gleaming table settings of traditional high-end German dining. The flowers are fresh daily and the service proper. It is not stiff, however, and, while the restaurant is still a step or two from returning to its former Michelin star status, the food

was well above average.

Main dishes are in the €25–30 range. A pan-roasted veal tenderloin bathed in a rich, brown sauce that hinted at Marsala wine was €28. Tender, flavorful chops (€29) from the loin of a locally-raised lamb were perfectly-cooked to a ruddy medium rare.

Though much of the fish served in Sylt is said to come from the Mediterranean, the Stadt Hamburg is adamant about serving nothing but local Atlantic seafood. A small appetizer of lobster medallions (€12) in a light butter and lemon sauce had a fresh taste and the right, characteristically rubbery consistency.

Our four courses, including dessert, cost €108, without beverages. Fortunately, the wine list offers some reasonably-priced selections from open bottles including an Elena Walch (Italian) Merlot for €10.5 for 2/10ths of a liter (just under eight ounces). Of equal interest was a refreshing Austrian Grüner Veltliner for €10.

**Contact:** Hotel Stadt Hamburg, Strandstrasse 2, 25980 Westerland/Sylt, tel. +49/4651/8580, fax 8582 20, [hsh-sylt@t-online.de](http://hsh-sylt@t-online.de), [www.hotel-stadthamburg.com](http://www.hotel-stadthamburg.com). Proprietors: Harald and Moni Hentzschel

**Rating:** QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 11/20

#### Söl’ring Hof Sylt

The stars designating fine restaurants, which Michelin so freely passes out in France, are hard to come by in Germany. Such was never more apparent than during a Söl’ring dinner that came as near to perfection as any in this writer’s experience. Johannes King’s busy, two-star kitchen sends forth plate after plate of inventive, intriguing, and delicious food. In fact, it is difficult to find fault anywhere in the Söl’ring experience: welcome, service, atmosphere, wine offerings, or presentation. It causes one to wonder what he must do to merit that third star.

Perhaps the setting is too plain for Michelin. Two brightly-lit, adjoining dining rooms with dark plank floors, pale yellow walls, and cream-colored ceilings with recessed halogen lights are inviting and comfortable but hardly opulent. Simple, but solid chairs attend a handful of well-spaced tables. A few

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gently-arched French doors open to a terrace overlooking sand and sea and let in the light a summer evening. The room nearest the open kitchen is our pick as it affords a view of the sometimes frenetic process of preparing and serving, in a relatively short period of time, a series of extraordinary, complicated dishes for 40 or 50 people who await them with the highest of expectations.

Those fortunate enough to find themselves dining at Söl'ring, should care deeply about truly fine cuisine and be willing to pay for it. The five-course *Desgustations-Menü*—supplemented by the occasional small surprise from the kitchen—is €115. Suggested wines by the glass for each course are in the €7–€14 range. A four-course seafood menu is €98, and one featuring products from the island is €88.

*A-la-carte* dining is also possible. Six Sylt oysters are €18, a grilled lobster claw with a piquant, tomato sauce over couscous is €34, and venison filet *à la Rössini*, topped with silky goose liver and an earthy truffle-based sauce, costs €42. Entrecôte of Australian Wagyu beef (like Kobe beef) for two is €52 per person.

Space does not permit a description of our long evening of superb dining, but among the most notable in a series of taste explosions included: three pink veal slices in a parsley butter sauce over bite-size onion-stuffed ravioli, all scattered with lightly sautéed *pfefferlingen* (mushrooms); a perfect, shell-less lobster claw glistening in butter; a lamb dish with four different cuts of meat including a chop with a silver handle attached to the bone; corn and ginger ice cream; and, at the start of the meal, a kitchen “surprise” of a dozen tiny pastry cones with various fillings of cheeses, chopped olives, bits of sauced fish and vegetables, all exquisitely taste intensive.

Dinner at Söl'ring is one of the two best meals we've enjoyed in the 19-year history of *Gemütlichkeit*. (The other is **L'Ermitage at Vufflen-Le-Château**. See [www.gemut.com/Page.asp?ID=380](http://www.gemut.com/Page.asp?ID=380) for our review.) A couple can easily spend \$250-plus on dinner—without beverages.

**Contact:** Söl'ring Hof Sylt, Am Strandwall 1, 25980 Rantum/Sylt, tel. +49/4651/836 200, fax 836 2020, [info.gwtrat@dorint.com](mailto:info.gwtrat@dorint.com), [www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com).

**Rating:** QUALITY 19/20, VALUE N/A ■

## AUSTRIAN TRAIN RIDES

*Continued from page 1*

The double-track line twists and turns over old multi-tier stone viaducts (reinforced for modern trains). The Vienna side of the line is more scenic, and if you're doing an out-and-back trip from Vienna's *Südbahnhof* (South Station), make the town of Semmering your turnaround point. From there, trains enter twin tunnels and begin heading downhill again on the other side.

Vienna-Semmering (Fahrplan 500/600) takes just under two hours on a semi-fast train. Be aware that not all trains stop at Semmering.

For a worthwhile outing, get off at Semmering and take a local train two stops (6 km) back to Breitenstein. The station is located high above the town. Hike down on a twisting path through the woods and then about 1 km due-west for a view of one of the spectacular viaducts and its frequent trains.

**2. The Wachau:** The north shore of the Danube between Melk and St. Valentin is closely paralleled by a non-electrified secondary line (Fahrplan 811 and 133), operated mostly with self-propelled diesel railcars. (A few steam excursions run this route in the summer.) The line features a string of charming small towns that are located only a kilometer or two apart, many with castles and easy access to the Danube. Spitz and Krein-Bad Kreuzen are popular destinations, with restaurants overlooking the Danube.

Trains on the route are slow, and most don't cover the entire distance. Krems to St. Valentin takes about three hours on the fastest trains. But this is not a route for speed. Many stations rent bicycles—with discounts to rail ticket holders—which can be returned either at the same station or another station.

Getting to Krems from Vienna via several available routes takes about an hour and a half. Just before St. Valentin on the west end of the route, the line crosses the Danube and connects with the Vienna-Salzburg main line (Fahrplan 100), where you can take a fast train back to Vienna in just over an hour and a half. The line is also easily accessible from the Salzburg side via St. Valentin.

**3. All-Austrian route between Salzburg and Innsbruck:** Fast trains between the two cities take a shortcut through a corner of Germany. The all-Austrian route via Zell am See (Fahrplan 200 and 201) is slower but far more scenic, following twisting mountain rivers most of the way. It can be done as a day trip from either city. Ride the slow route in the morning (the trip between cities will take slightly more than three hours and may require changes of trains, but with good connections). Spend the afternoon in the destination city, then return on the fast route through Germany on an express train, with dinner in the dining car (Fahrplan 300; about two hours).

**4. Vorarlberg Line:** This is the climb from Innsbruck toward the Arlberg Pass and Switzerland beyond. Innsbruck-St. Anton (just before the Arlberg Tunnel) is an easy out-and-back day trip, taking only an hour each way on the faster trains (Fahrplan 400). Views are best on the north side in either direction.

Going farther to either Bludenz (1.5 hrs each way) or Feldkirch (2 hrs) is also worthwhile for additional views of the mountains and for exploring the two towns. Bludenz is renowned for its chocolate; Feldkirch, the last major stop before entering Liechtenstein and then Switzerland, features a small castle overlooking its town center. (Damage to this line from the late 2005 flood catastrophe that struck western Austria should be repaired by year end, with normal traffic restored in early 2006.)

**5. Salzkammergutbahn:** The slow, single-track north-south line between Stainach-Irdning and Attnang-Puchheim (Fahrplan 170) twists between spectacular mountains and lakes. Fastest trains cover the route in about two hours, but many of the towns, such as Hallstadt, are worth a stopover. Faster trains run approximately every two hours. (For five more Austria rail routes, visit [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com).)

### Salzburg as a base

Given its central location and cultural attractions, Salzburg makes a convenient base for exploring much of Austria's rail network. Consider staying at the **Hotel Bayerischer Hof** (four-star rating). Slightly more than one block from the main station, the hotel is quiet, and has an excellent restaurant open year-round. (Prices vary by season, ask

for discounts on longer stays.) Contact: Kaiserschützemstr. 1, A-5020, Salzburg, [austria.info@bayrischerhof.com](mailto:austria.info@bayrischerhof.com); [www.bayrischerhof.com](http://www.bayrischerhof.com).

The hotel's restaurant features Austrian, Italian, and Indian specialties. (Several members of the restaurant staff are from India but speak both excellent German and English.) The atmosphere is comfortable, as there are only 32 rooms. Other amenities include cable TV with CNN in rooms. Internet access computer is available in the lobby.

For more information on train travel in Austria, visit the Austrian Tourist Office at [www.austria.info](http://www.austria.info), or pick up a copy of George H. Drury's book, *The Railfan Guide to Austria* (\$17.95 plus shipping and taxes). If you purchase the book directly from Drury via his Web site ([www.georgedury.com](http://www.georgedury.com)), he'll include updated sheets with information from the latest of his yearly trips to Austria.

*Ernest H. Robl is a North Carolina-based writer and photographer, who has long specialized in travel and transportation, particularly railroads. Born in Vienna, he returns often, mostly to ride Austria's railroads. Visit his Web site at [www.robl.w1.com](http://www.robl.w1.com).* ■

## Readers' Forum

### Personal Touch

I have traveled extensively in Europe and stayed in many fine hotels. However, on a recent trip to Germany, I stayed at a hotel that deserves special recognition: **Residenz Heinz Winkler** in Aschau (tel. +49 / 08052 / 1799, [info@Residenz-Heinz-Winkler.de](mailto:info@Residenz-Heinz-Winkler.de), [www.residenz-heinz-winkler.de](http://www.residenz-heinz-winkler.de)) near King Ludwig II's Herrenchiemsee Palace. Heinz Winkler, the owner, oversees the kitchen, but then takes times to greet the diners as well. He is up early in the morning supervising all aspects of his very fine establishment. There is nothing that takes the place of a dedicated owner/manager, and here is a good example of that successful concept.

PAUL BROYHILL  
VIA E-MAIL

### North Germany Artist Colony

On our September vacation, we returned to a favorite area in northern Germany, Ostseebad Ahrenshoop. This small artist colony is situated on a small strip of land between the Ostsee and the Saaler Bodden.

## Winter Country Hopping: On Skis

By Daniela Gugliotta, SkiEurope

People often ask how they can ski several different countries during a short visit to Europe. Since many alpine resorts impose week-long minimum stays, the easiest way may be to ski from one country to another during a single ski day.

The opportunity to ski over the top of the mountain between villages in one valley and an other is unique to Europe. Even though several of these multicountry expeditions go outside the Schengen control zone, there are usually no on-slope border-crossing formalities. (Nevertheless, as everywhere in Europe, it's wise to keep your passport handy.) Here are a few of the possibilities:

**Ischgl (Austria) to Samnaun (Switzerland):** Ischgl is located near the end of the Paznaun valley, about 90 minutes' drive from Innsbruck. Ischgl does not attract many Americans, except the snowboarding cognoscente for which it has a magic allure and an aggressive apres ski. The 200 km of ski runs in the cross-border ski area are predominantly intermediate level.

The village of Samnaun is Switzerland's only tax-free zone, a paradise for the same type of merchandise found in airport boutiques. Most skiers settle for buying a bottle which they aim to "smuggle" back to Austria, only to be disappointed by the absence, or disinterest, of any border guard. As you head back from Samnaun, you will ride the world's first two-story cable car. Visit [www.samnaun.ch](http://www.samnaun.ch).

**Zermatt (Switzerland) to Cervinia (Italy):** In skiing from Zermatt to Cervinia, the journey is a greater reward than the destination. After arriving mid-mountain,

the trip entails riding the breathtaking cable car from Trockner Steg to Klein Matterhorn. You emerge at the entrance of a tunnel, where a short walk leads to the year-round glacier ski area. Before beginning your descent, you can take an elevator to a sightseeing platform—at 12,736 feet, the highest in Europe—with a 360-degree panorama of the highest peaks in the Alps, or descend 50 feet below the surface to see the glacier structure. The runs down to Cervinia (and back) are intermediate. Once in Cervinia, it's a tradition to eat pizza or pasta and drink some fine Chianti. For more information, visit [www.zermatt.ch](http://www.zermatt.ch) and [www.cervinia.it](http://www.cervinia.it).

**Champéry (Switzerland) to Morzine (France):** The Portes des Soleils is the largest interlinked multinational ski area encompassing 2 countries, 14 resorts, 200 lifts, 650 km slopes, and 300 runs. Although many of the resort villages are in France (Morzine, Avoriaz, Les Gets), we prefer the Swiss base of Champéry. In contrast to the somewhat soulless, purpose-built centers, Champéry is picture-postcard-pretty. Although it's hard to tell when you've left one country and entered another, skiers will enjoy the planned exploration circuits, which vary in difficulty and follow interesting, historic routes. Visit [www.portesdusoleil.com](http://www.portesdusoleil.com).

In addition to skiing from resort to resort between countries, there are ski passes that include multiple resorts in different countries, such as the Garmisch Happy Ski Card (Germany and Austria). Another option is to stay near Landeck and ski areas in three countries: Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. For more multicountry ski itineraries or to book a trip, contact SkiEurope at [www.skieurope.com](http://www.skieurope.com). ■

There are many places to stay here, but we have always enjoyed the hospitality and service at the **Hotel Namenlos & Haus Fischerwiege** (tel. +49 / 038220 / 60 60, [info@hotel-namenlos.de](mailto:info@hotel-namenlos.de), [www.hotel-namenlos.de](http://www.hotel-namenlos.de)), run by the Fischer family.

Our week's stay in Haus Fischerwiege was wonderful, from excellent food in their restaurant, to bicycling to the many small harbors along the lake, through the nearby National Forest area, to relaxing on the nearby beaches (within walking distance), to

just unwinding and taking advantage of the excellent pool and spa amenities at Haus Fischerwiege. This was our third visit there, and we were not disappointed. The area is visited mostly by Germans, and there are not too many Americans, but with a little knowledge of the German language, we communicated without any problems. It would be nice to see an article on this area of Germany.

OLGA AND JOE THUMAN  
VIA E-MAIL

(Ed. Note: Coming soon is our story on the Isle of Rügen in the Baltic.) ■