

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

A Word About Hotels

In a discussion of what kind of travel information should be provided by guidebooks and other print sources, a man whose opinion I value—he operates the website www.europeforvisitors.com—questioned whether, in the Internet era, readers need guidebooks, magazines, and newsletters that devote significant space to hotels. In other words, he suggested, people should find their hotels on the Web.

I can't agree. Twenty years of reader polls and contact with subscribers has convinced us that you care very much about where you will sleep when in Europe. You consider decisions regarding hotels among the most important of the entire trip-planning process. Customers of our itinerary-planning service seem more concerned about hotels than they are about museums and castles. That's why we devote so much of our coverage to hotels.

While the Internet is a great place to get hotel information, separating the wheat from the chaff is another matter. The Web has no filter. That makes it important to know who's providing the information and why. Most of the top results in a Google search for, say, "Munich hotels" are booking engines whose mission is to achieve a commission, not to ensure you'll have a great hotel experience.

User-driven sites like Tripadvisor.com also score high in Google search results, but there's no way to screen out favorable posts made by a hotel's owners, employees, and friends. These sites live off Google ads and kickbacks from online booking engines. A couple of years ago, I booked a hotel in Paris, in part because it got good user reviews at Tripadvisor.com. Our room turned out to be a stuffy cave

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

ADELBODEN

Our report on the sparkling water and luxurious spa treatments in an up-and-coming resort at the end of Switzerland's Engstligen Valley.

Tucked away at the end of the Engstligen Valley, less than 50 kilometers southwest of Interlaken, the charming ski resort of Adelboden is transforming itself into a summer playground. With an accent on a natural abundance of crystal clear alpine water, its network of mountain trails now includes hikes along rushing streams and towering waterfalls, and through deep gorges of polished rock. The best part: returning to the village later in the day to rejuvenate tired limbs in your hotel spa.

Several of the resort's hotels—even in the three-star category (see *Hotels*, below)—have recently up-

graded their infrastructure by adding saunas, whirlpools, and steam baths. High windows enclose many of the spas, offering enchanting views of the surrounding peaks. Soak your aching muscles while watching the never-ending play of light and shadow as clouds wrap around vertical faces and strong breezes whisk them along the mountain tops.

Local authorities are now making plans to become a leading alpine resort. By 2010, they intend to open a public spa and health center. Recently, *Gemütlichkeit* was granted a sneak preview of the project. The Alpenbad Adelboden will boast a "water elevator" connecting sec-

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Fall Wine Festivals

As summer winds to a close and temperatures begin to cool, German wineries spring into action with a busy harvest season. It begins in mid-September for early ripening grapes like Müller-Thurgau and lasts through year-end with the ice wine harvest. One of the best ways to experience the flavors of the season is to add a local wine festival to your itinerary.

Germany's wine industry is divided into 13 regions, which grow nearly 100 grape varieties and host hundreds of festivals each year. "It's impossible to visit a wine growing area from May to October and experience a weekend without a wine festival during that time," says UI-

rike Balm, director of export marketing in the U.S. and Canada for the German Wine Institute.

You might narrow the search according to a favorite varietal, such as Riesling or Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir), or by focusing on a region you want to visit. Here are some of the most popular events to consider:

Ahr: The Ahr Valley's Mayschösser Wine week takes place at the end of September.

Baden: The oldest wine fair in Baden dates from 1872. Today, some 70 producers show their wines at the wine market in Müllheim.

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Exchange rates as of 08/31/2006
1 euro = \$1.28
1 Swiss franc = \$0.81

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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with barely enough room for its lumpy double bed.

I'll grant you that individual hotel websites with plenty of photos are a boon to mankind, but pretty pictures tell only part of the story. For example, those online beauty shots don't focus on worn furniture, stained carpets, or crumbling tile grout, and totally fail to address one vitally important but seldom discussed element of hotel room habitability: smell.

Last month, we vacationed on the Oregon coast with another couple. Not sure how far we'd get on our first day, we didn't start thinking about a place to stay until about 4pm. The hotel we chose sight-unseen looked good in a magazine ad, had a positive guidebook write-up, was right on the ocean, and offered water views from every cabin. But our selection "process" turned out to be a losing roll of the dice. Threadbare rooms not refurbished since Eisenhower, we could live with. Impossible to ignore, however, was the odor exhaled by ancient carpeting, cloth-covered furniture, and window coverings that harbored a decades-old stew of spills, sweat, and cookery smells. (For same-day hotels while on the road in Europe, we rely on Michelin's Red Guide series. Unfortunately, there is no comparable source for the Oregon coast.)

If you're booking European hotels prior to a trip, however, there are reliable tools, including the Internet, which, if used properly, will greatly reduce your chance of winding up in a crummy, smelly, overheated hotel room.

• **Gemütlichkeit &**

www.gemut.com: Though we are unable to stay in all the properties we report on, unlike a lot of guidebooks, we personally inspect everything we rate. In the last 20 years, I've toured nearly 1,000 hotels, including multiple guestrooms in each plus breakfast rooms, conference rooms, fitness facilities, kitchens, wine cellars, etc. Though I try to reserve judgment until I've seen everything, I have a good idea of whether or not I like a hotel in the first 30 seconds I'm under its roof. All the senses except taste immediately collaborate to register a first-impression that seldom changes.

Once in a while a hotel that gives me a good feel upon entry will disappoint on closer inspection, but it almost never happens the other way around. The final evaluation and rating, however, is given only after careful consideration. My wife, Liz, who has toured 99 percent of the hotels with me, sees things I don't. After we've gone through several properties at a destination, we'll compare notes and make final the ratings decisions. We have two inviolable prerequisites: All hotels have to be clean and smell good. Things

like frayed rugs, worn furniture, cheap bed linens, and flimsy towels—though certainly not positives—aren't necessarily disqualifiers, but dirty hotels or ones with unpleasant odors don't make the cut.

We're attracted by bright, airy rooms with plenty of "volume:" high ceilings, hardwood floors with area rugs, and large windows that can be opened. Stuffy, overheated rooms are a major turnoff, as is poor lighting for the bedtime reader. When it comes to bathrooms, bigger is better, good lighting is vital, and it's nice if there's an openable window. We prefer hard shower enclosures to curtains, and there has to be enough counter space for toiletries. Good quality Kleenex-style tissues are almost essential. A separate room for the toilet is much appreciated. In addition to bathroom mirrors, there needs to be a mirror — preferably full length — somewhere in the bed-

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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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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.

ADELBODEN

Continued from page 1

tions that include a “thunderstorm pool” and a “water bar.” A new four-star hotel will be part of the CHF 44 million structure. It is surprising that it took the town so long to tap into the idea, since it has long sold its own mineral water. Except for tourism, the bottling plant is Adelboden’s biggest employer.

The town will redesign its central square as part of a plan to increase the village’s appeal—provided the spa project gets final approval sometime next year. Whether the main street will become a pedestrian-only zone remains to be seen. It seems a shame if that does not occur, as only traffic keeps the center from being one of the most attractive of its kind in the Swiss Alps. To achieve this seemingly simple goal, however, a bypass road will have to be built to connect the hotels and shops at the southern end of town with the rest of the village.

Overall, Adelboden retains its authenticity. The architecture is pure alpine: wooden chalets, whether built a century or three centuries ago, still dominate the low, gabled skyline; a few of them are hotels. The town center’s small, ancient church is picture postcard perfect. Enter through a low arch, pausing to note the plaque bolted to the wall. The arch was donated by interned American airmen and escaped British Commonwealth prisoners of war. According to the plaque, they “spent many pleasant months in Adelboden” between 1943 and 1945.

For whatever reason, after the war, praise for this alpine gem never reached the ears of American travelers. The resort has been the domain of Swiss, Germans, Dutch, and some English tourists. Most are independent travelers, as few tour groups find the village.

Excursions

Engstligen Falls: The Engstligen Falls lives up to its three-star (“worth a special journey”) Miche-

Adelboden Basics

Population: 3,600

Elevation: 1,350m (4,400 ft.)

Tourist Information: Adelboden Tourist Office: tel. +41/33/673 80 80, fax 673 80 92, info@adelboden.ch, www.adelboden.ch

Nearest Airport: Zürich

Driving distances:

Berlin	1026 km / 641 miles
Geneva	226 km / 141 miles
Frankfurt	490 km / 306 miles
Interlaken	47 km / 29 miles
Milan	342 km / 214 miles
Munich	482 km / 301 miles
Paris	656 km / 410 miles
Salzburg	601 km / 376 miles
Vienna	893 km / 558 miles
Zürich	174 km / 109 miles

Rail Travel: Trains depart from the Zürich Aiprot at 39 or 43 minutes past the hour, and the trip takes approximately 2hrs 45mins. Some require a change in Bern; others go directly to Frutigen, where all passengers for Adelboden must transfer to a bus for the final leg of the journey. The fastest trains from Geneva airport depart one minute past the hour. Those choosing this route must change in Bern. Geneva Airport to Adelboden takes around 3hrs 25mins.

Events: Herdsmen’s Audit: In early June each year, cattle owners gather in the village center to wheel and deal over the rights to summer grazing pastures on the mountain slopes. This is accompanied by a traditional farmers’ market and followed a few weeks later by the annual driving of the herds up the steep mountain trail that runs beside the Engstligen Falls.

Classical Concerts: There are chamber music performances every summer in the main church and a variety of open-air concerts in the village center.

lin rating. You can admire this 600 meter-high (1,800 ft.) cascade from almost any point in the village or anywhere in this part of the valley, but it is also worthwhile to experience it up close. As in many parts of the Alps, there are trails where one least expects them. Alpine farmers and ancient traders cut a mule path into the side of the near vertical cliff that runs parallel to the waterfall. It is maintained today for the summer herding of cattle from the valley floor to the high alpine pastures on the plateau above. Hikers can make the arduous but rewarding journey from the bottom up, or purchase a

ticket for the short gondola ride to the top (CHF 20 roundtrip or CHF 14.50 one way, half-price with the Swiss Pass), and then walk down. Food and beverages are available at the two upper restaurants, where a number of more strenuous high-alpine trails begin. The walk up takes around 1.5 hours. Expect a little less time for the descent, but be warned, the steepness of the path takes its toll on knees.

Choleren Gorge

The hike through this gorge is another one of Adelboden’s newly marked water trails. Take the local bus in the direction of Auserschwand to the end of the line, and follow the signs for the 15- to 20-minute walk to the entrance of the gorge. Tourism authorities have just completed the installation of a series of metal walkways through the 100-meter-long, deep-cut ravine. A little farther down stream is the Pochtenkessel, a swirling caldron where two rushing mountain rivers meet.

Other hikes

Needless to say, mountain hiking opportunities abound, including a number of interpretive theme trails. The paths are well marked. Ask at the tourist office or your hotel for a route that suits your interests and level of fitness.

It is often advisable to take a bus or cable car to the trailhead, and if you are planning to do a number of walks, you may consider purchasing a hiking pass at the tourist office or cable car station. It is valid on all lifts and local buses and costs, for example, CHF 33 for one day (CHF 25 with Swiss Pass) or CHF 79 for three days (CHF 59 with Swiss Pass).

Adelboden Hotels

There are a large variety of accommodations throughout the valley and higher up on the slopes, but is the village center. Adelboden may not be as lively as some of the bigger alpine resorts, but almost always something is going on. A central headquarters also means you can choose from a good selection of restaurants and cafes, all of which are

within a five- or ten-minute walk from your hotel.

Sporthotel Adler

Located smack dab in the center of town, this overgrown chalet wins accolades for getting most things right, from the friendly reception to the cozy, comfortable rooms and generous breakfasts. Guestrooms, most of which are carpeted, have been refurbished over the past decade and have good-sized balconies. North-facing rooms afford views of the valley below and mountains above, and are furnished with sofas and tables. The rooms opposite look out over the attractive village rooftops and main street.

Guests can help themselves to tea, broth, pie, and fruit available free of charge in the bright, inviting lounge. Director Lothar Lorettan organizes special events, such as guided walks on Tuesdays or excursions to a mountain farm on Thursday mornings where guests are treated to a traditional alpine breakfast. These extras are included in the room price.

The hotel is equipped with a recreational area complete with a billiard table, table tennis, and darts. But the main attraction is the newly upgraded spa and pool. Whether you are splashing in the pool or treating yourself to a massage, the spectacular views through floor-to-ceiling windows are balm for the soul. Non-hotel guests pay CHF 12 for access to the pool and spa.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 105-135, doubles CHF 170-230

Contact: Dorfstr. 19, CH-3715, tel. +41/33/673 41 41, fax 673 42 39, info@adleradelboden.ch, www.adleradelboden.ch

Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 17/20

Hotel Waldhaus-Huldi

The American ski team stays here when the World Cup circuit makes its stop in Adelboden.

Four generations of the Gygax family have run the hotel complex

since it was founded in 1914. Located at the southwest end of the village, the hotel consists of two very different buildings connected by an underground passage. Rooms in the Waldhaus are rather nondescript, but those in the Huldi are warmer, with most of the furnishings made from local stone pine. Some of the bathrooms tend to be a bit small.

Waldhaus-Huldi gives the impression of a dog-eared but clean establishment. Exceptional views, particularly of the Engstligen Falls and Wildstrubel peak, do a lot to make up for any shortcomings. The same can be said of the wonderfully large and sumptuous garden dining terrace—a green oasis hidden from the street.

In keeping with trends, the Gygax family has invested its money in a new spa, which opened last year. Though not as large as the Adler's, it still has a sauna, steam bath, and a pleasant sitting area with reclining chairs behind a large window that offers unsurpassed mountain views.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 79-177, doubles CHF 158-354

Contact: Dorfstr. 77, CH-3715, tel. +41/33/673 15 31, fax 673 28 43, info@waldhaushuldi.ch, www.waldhaushuldi.ch

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 14/20

Parkhotel Bellevue & Spa

If the Sporthotel Adler is a three-star establishment with four-star service and amenities, then we can easily add a star to what is without a doubt Adelboden's best hotel. The Richard family has operated the Bellevue since 1926 (built in 1901), all the while keeping up with the evolving demands of its clientele.

The family completed a bold renovation in June this year, adding an urban-chic lounge and dining room, and refitting 12 of the hotel's 53 guestrooms in an ultra-modern, minimalist style. Realizing, however, that many guests still want more traditional accom-

modations in the classic "grand hotel" mold, several rooms and suites with elegant cherry-wood furnishings have been left untouched, as has the Fidelio dining room. Guests who seek simple alpine living, yet don't wish to forgo luxury, can stay in the Shepherd's Room, which is all wood, from walls to gabled ceiling, and, for an extra touch of authenticity, includes a ceramic tiled stove.

The spa takes advantage of the hotel's superior location above the village center. Housed in an annex completed in 2001 and surrounded by lush gardens, it allows bathers to soak up stunning views from the indoor/outdoor saltwater pool, which is fed by the resort's mineral water springs. There is also a bio-sauna, Roman thermal baths, solarium, and seemingly every other 21st century *de rigueur* treatment or therapy.

Non-hotel guests pay CHF 20 for entrance to the saltwater pool (10am-3pm) and are granted admission on Friday evenings (6pm-9pm) to the indoor pool, saltwater pool, sauna, and Roman thermals for CHF 35.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 180-285, doubles CHF 360-570

Contact: CH-3715, tel. +41/33/673 80 00, fax 673 80 01, info@parkhotel-bellevue.ch, www.parkhotel-bellevue.ch

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 14/20

Hotel Bären

Nothing remains of the original 16th century building where the Hotel Bären stands today. The current structure was built in 1934, and the hotel retains its pretty façade from this period. The interior was last upgraded in 1991. The 14 rooms are pine-panelled and comfortable, but bathrooms will soon need renovation if the Bären is to maintain its standards. Furniture in the Grandmother's Parlor is painted to look quaint and rustic, but the room's best feature is its big corner balcony. Located directly on the main road, rooms are less

soundproof than those of the Sporthotel Adler across the street.

The hotel has a small but popular dining terrace on the central square, a prime people-watching location. Wine aficionados should try the hotel's Gewürztraminer, made from the grapes from its own Rhône Valley vineyard.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 75-85, doubles CHF 140-200

Contact: Dorfstr. 22, CH-3715,, tel. +41/33/673 21 51, fax 673 21 90, hotel@baeren-adelboden.ch, www.baeren-adelboden.ch

Rating: QUALITY 10/20, VALUE 11/20

Hotel Bristol

One feels at home and welcome upon entering the Bristol's exquisitely furnished lobby. Hidden away behind the church, the Bristol is a better though pricier alternative to the Bären, enjoys a quieter location than the Adler, and is more centrally located than the Waldhaus-Huldi.

Tastefully appointed guestrooms are fair-sized and bright with wall-to-wall carpeting. For a room with a view, ask to be on the upper floor. A small spa area (sauna, shower, steam bath) is in a separate building accessed via a covered staircase.

Many of the hotel's one- or two-week packages, which include half-board and other extras, are cheaper than the normal room price for seven nights, but this requires dining in the Bristol's restaurant, not one of Adelboden's most popular, due to mainly to its location off the main drag.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 85-135, doubles CHF 160-320 (week packages from CHF 735)

Contact: Family Johner, tel. +41/33/673 14 81, fax 673 16 50, bristol@bluewin.ch, www.bristol-adelboden.ch

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 12/20

Bernerhof

Frankly, the Bernerhof doesn't seem like an alpine resort hotel. Al-

though it is difficult to find anything unpleasant about the place, it lacks the small touches and that all-important holiday ambience.

Rooms are fairly spacious, and those on the third floor have been recently renovated. None have balconies. The older rooms with high ceilings have a hint of grandeur but are somewhat musty. If properly restored, they would ooze with Old World charm. The Bernerhof has a two-person sauna and a spacious lounge for guests only.

Daily Rates: Singles CHF 63-66, doubles CHF 126-132

Contact: Dorfstr. 6, CH-3715, tel. +41/33/673 14 31, fax 673 41 10, info@bernerhof-adelboden.ch, www.bernerhof-adelboden.ch

Rating: QUALITY 9/20, VALUE 11/20

Adelboden Restaurants

Parkhotel Bellevue & Spa

At least once during an Adelboden stay, it is well worth spoiling yourself in the Bellevue's spa, and afterwards reserving a table for two in one of the hotel's dining rooms—even if you are not a hotel guest.

The Fidelio is the classic, more formal of the two dining rooms, while the Belle Vue is the slick, modern section. If you forego the trendy bistros of Zürich or Basel, you can make up for it by booking a table in here, where the accent is on green and brown textiles and clean lines. You can also dine on the patio, but at 1,300 meters above sea level, summer evenings in Adelboden can be quite chilly.

We chose a table in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows in the Belle Vue, and the alpine panorama was a feast for the eyes.

A flight of delicious appetizers—tomato mousse, goat-cheese melt, and thin strips of tangy dried tomato—warmed up the taste buds and got things off to a colorful start. From there we moved to main courses of filet of veal in a

truffle sauce and sea bass on a succulent bed of marinated peppers and topped with a bouillabaisse-style sauce. The chef is renowned for seafood, especially his white-fish and perch creations.

For weight-watchers, there is a calorie-reduced *Minceur* menu.

Four-course dinners are CHF 58, or CHF 10 less without a starter.

Contact: Family Richard, tel. +41/33/673 80 00, fax 673 80 01, info@parkhotel-bellevue.ch, www.parkhotel-bellevue.ch

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 12/20

Sporthotel Adler Restaurant

A step down in price from the Bellevue, the Adler's restaurant is a popular Adelboden gathering spot. We lunched on its pleasant patio, close enough to the main street to draw a lot of walk-in traffic, but sufficiently secluded to avoid being disturbed by passing cars.

We began by sharing a large,

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.travel essentials.com Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10 percent off for subscribers. Use discount code gemut2006.
- 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.

fresh salad (CHF 9.50) of lamb's lettuce, corn, mushrooms, and black and green olives, all sprinkled with pine nuts in an olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing. A patio favorite is the cook-it-yourself "hot stone." The choice is filet of horse meat (CHF 36), beef or veal (CHF 42), and we picked the latter. Dipping the chunks of veal into the warm tartar and basil sauces was enjoyable, but like fondue (also on the Adler menu), this kind of meal once during a Swiss visit is enough.

Contact: Family Loretan, tel. +41/33/673 41 41, fax 673 42 39, info@adleradelboden.ch, www.adleradelboden.ch
Rating: QUALITY 15/20, VALUE 13/20

Café Haueter

The best option for a quick lunch is this café just beyond the tourist office. Don't be misled by window display of cakes and other sweets, the Haueter also makes a variety of salads (CHF 9.50-14.50) and sandwiches. The pasta salad, for instance, comes with ham, Gruyère cheese, grilled peppers, and olives. Go all out and order a fresh, mixed juice or glass of syrup, a true Swiss specialty that is normally provided free of charge for children. The Haueter sells adult syrup blends made by a small producer in Bern. Elderberry is very popular and the "elf" is a unique mixture of fennel, aniseed, and lemon grass.

If you want to pack your own lunch, buy a loaf of the Haueter's rich braided bread called *Züpf*e (pronounced Tsep-fa). Unless you are invited into someone's home on a Sunday morning, the Haueter version of this traditional Swiss staple is as close as you are going to get to understanding why it has been a favorite for generations.

Contact: Gerhard & Yvonne Haueter, tel. +41/33/673 12 34, fax 673 49 34

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20 ☒

Readers' Forum

Zürich's Hotel Adler

My husband and I have stayed (both together and separately) at the Hotel Adler five times in the last two and one half years, and have found it to be the best value in Zürich. While there are Americans at breakfast, I would say that a lot of young locals eat there at dinner, and there is a feeling of bonhomie as a result.

We used to stay at the very wonderful **Florhof**, but it has become much too costly for us of late.

We also stayed once at the **Hotel Du Theatre**, which was very likeable, but pricier than the Adler, and our room was just as small, though there is the advantage that one can walk from the train station unless you have a lot of luggage. (I think our taxi driver was actually a little embarrassed by the extremely short haul.)

There is also a private airport bus—I think it's about \$15 per person—which will take you to, or pick you up from, all of the central city hotels. I think its current name is the Blue Bus.

We have never visited Prague, but recently had an experience which your readers may find interesting. There was an American comedy, *Last Holiday*, which was filmed in Karlovy Vary at the **Grand Hotel Pupp**, a famous old spa hotel. After seeing the movie last January, I looked at the website for the hotel and found that its rates for a week of spa treatments were very reasonable, so a friend and I talked about going there for the cure instead of to Switzerland. When I looked back at the site in July, prices had about doubled. Maybe the whole country has "gone Hollywood."

CAROL O'DONOVAN

VIA E-MAIL ☒

WINE FESTIVALS

Continued from page 1

Pfalz: The **Wurstmarkt** in the Bad Dürkheim is one of the best-known wine festivals in Germany.

Mittelrhein: The medieval setting in Bacharach makes for an enchanting culinary night in the Mittelrhein region.

Mosel: Along the Mosel River, the wine festival in Trittenheim includes a parade. Remember to bring a glass along to be filled by the people parading.

Rheinhessen: The **Johannisfest** in Mainz and Ingelheim is a popular red wine festival.

In addition to these annual events, there are countless small-scale festivals in towns across the wine-growing regions of Germany. (For a complete list of wine festivals go to www.deutscheweine.de.) These charming events may consist of only a few wineries opening bottles for tasting at a few streetside tables and some food from local restaurants, to glittering productions that feature candlelit vineyards, top-rated chefs, and live entertainment. At any level, there's no better way for visitors to rub shoulders with local residents and enjoy the best of regional food and wine.

During the **Maikammer Wine-marathon**, local producers share still wines, sparkling wines, and brandies around the clock, with an accompanying program that includes musical entertainment. Tickets cost €14,50.

Most wine festivals serve food that compliments the wine, but there are some that take the concept of pairing wine with food to new heights. The **Rheingau Gourmet Festival**, for example, brings top wine producers and famous chefs together for two weeks of gluttony in March. Similarly, along the Mosel, the **Wine and Gourmet Festival** presents wine and culture from Trier and the surrounding region. The event includes gala evenings, winery tours, wine presentations, and more than 100 related events for an entire month beginning in mid-April.

In most cases, there's no need to plan ahead, other than to choose the festival you want to attend. And few events require an en-

trance fee. For more information, contact the German Wine Information Bureau at tel. 212/994-7523, info@germanwineusa.com, or www.germanwineusa.org.


Guided Wine Tours

For a more intensive experience with German wines, consider a guided tour with the German Wine Academy. Six-day programs begin in Frankfurt am Main each spring and fall, featuring wine and food pairings, plus excursions to vineyards along the Mosel and Rhein rivers. You'll taste everything from crisp dry wines to sweet dessert wines and hearty country food to gourmet cuisine, meeting local winemakers along the way.

The academy has run these tours since 1974. The program begins on a Sunday evening with a reception and dinner to get acquainted and concludes after breakfast the following Saturday. The week includes an introductory workshop on German wine, with a comparative tasting of wines of different regions, grape varieties and styles, followed by numerous tasting opportunities and lectures on topics such as grape breeding and quality control.

Most itineraries include a river cruise, a comparative blind tasting of sparkling wines, and a food-and-wine workshop, with time for shopping and visits to historical sights en route.

At the end of the week, you'll test your knowledge in a blind tasting and return home with a certificate of merit for having completed the German Wine Academy Program. The cost is €1,250 per person (single room supplement €150), including hotel accommodations, transportation during the academy tour, all meals, tastings, entrance fees, study materials, lectures, visits and excursions.

Contact Sabine Stock at the academy for more information: tel. 49/6131/282 942, fax 282 950, sabine.stock@dwi-dwf.de. 

WINE FESTIVAL CALENDAR

October 27-29

Weinforum Rheinhessen

Features more than 150 gold-medal winners (wines and sparkling wines) as well as top-quality Rheinhessen Silvaner and Selection Rheinhessen wines in the antique maritime museum.

Cost: €22,50

Contact: tel. +49/67/31 95 107 40, fax 31 95 107 499,

info@rheinhausenwein.de

November 4-12

Glorreiche Rheingau Tage

The Assoc. of German Prädikat Wine Estates (VDP) and Charta Wine Estates celebrate Rheingau wine and culture with special events at estates throughout the region.

Contact: tel. +49/61/23 67 68 12, fax: 23 67 68 13,

vdp-rheingau@t-online.de

November 10-12

Forum Vini München

International wine fair with a wide offering of German wines with entertainment

Cost: €15,00

Contact: tel. 49/89/27 29 48 20,

info@forum-vini.de

November 18-19:

Weinmesse Hannover

This wine fair takes place in the house of the Kestnergesellschaft, featuring high-quality German wine growers from all regions

Cost: €12,00

Contact: tel. +49/30/26 34 00 40, fax 26 34 00 44,

cbaum@baum-weinmarketing.de

November 18-19

Leistungsschau Landesprämierung Wein Und Sekt

Presentation of gold-medal winners (wines and sparkling wines) from 40 producers in the Kongresszentrum

Cost: €16,00

Contact: tel. +49/71/34 80 91,

fax: 34 89 17, wvwue@gmx.de

DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 5

room. Rooms with no place to sit other than straight-back chairs are ok for one night but will never score high with us: The ideal chamber has at least one soft chair with an ottoman and a small couch with coffee table. Fresh flowers, no matter how simple, are always welcome, as is a radio and wireless Internet access. Of little importance are minibars, heated towel racks, pants pressers, shoeshine cloths, and bottles and tubes of free toiletries.

As demonstrated by our Oregon coast experience, choosing hotels is a form of Russian roulette. Here are some additional resources to help find your way through the blizzard of hotel information and minimize the chances of booking a bad hotel.

- **Michelin Red Guides:** Though I am skeptical of their claim, Michelin says every property it lists is visited annually by one of its inspectors. Whether or not that is true, the guides are a highly reliable way to find good hotels and restaurants in Europe, and worth the space they'll occupy in your suitcase. Pay particular attention in the listings to "Bib" hotels ("good accommodations at moderate prices"), hotels with the rocking chair symbol ("quiet or quiet, secluded hotels"), and hotels whose symbol is printed in red ("particularly pleasant or restful"). Read more about Michelin's Red Guides at www.gemut.com/content/view/47/136/.

- **Hotel Websites:** By all means, if you're considering a hotel you found in *Gemütlichkeit* or Michelin, take a look at its website. Most offer photos of guestrooms, public rooms, and exteriors. You can also request rate quotes via e-mail or, in some cases, get an instant online quote. The Hotel Reviews database at www.gemut.com has links to several hundred individual hotel websites.

- **Other Guidebooks:** To create or update a guidebook of several hundred pages, some of the best-known publishers pay a ridiculously tiny fee to a single freelance writer

— and include no travel expenses. If it's an annual revision, the writer may never leave the U.S., but instead rely on tourist office handouts and the Internet. With the exception of Rick Steves and Karen Brown, we do not recommend using traditional guidebooks to choose hotels.

• **Other Websites:** Sites like Tripadvisor.com, where anyone can weigh in with an opinion, are interesting but should be taken with a grain of salt. Even if one assumes all posted reviews are legitimate, tastes differ. What a thirty-something Aussie backpacker considers acceptable or even luxurious may not meet your minimum standards. The same goes for online forums at websites such as Ricksteves.com, Frommers.com, and Fodors.com.

Hotel booking sites such as Venere.com and Bookings.org are a perfectly safe and reliable way to reserve hotel rooms. Just be certain you fully understand their cancellation policies, and make sure you can't get a better price by booking directly with the hotel.

A wonderfully useful website to the European traveler is Viamichelin.com. Here, for free, you'll find most of the same hotel information listed in the printed Red Guide series. Be aware, however, that the site has two hotel lists. Under the heading "The Michelin Guides" are the ones in the Red Guide series. Those under the general heading "Hotels" on the site's main page are simply part of a hotel booking service.

In summary, our best advice is to choose European hotels by relying on trusted sources such as *Gemütlichkeit* and Michelin, then consulting the Web to find out more about the hotels you are considering. —RHB ☒

Read These Stories at Gemut.com

- Ten Favorite Train Trips
- Swiss Hiking Checklist
- Credit Cards & Car Rental Insurance
- The Beloved Gasthof Fraundorfer
- Ten Strategies to Spend Less in Europe
- Driving the Autobahn
- Zermatt: Hotels & Restaurants
- Styria's Wine Roads
- Ahr Valley Reds
- Oktoberfest Tips
- Car Rental Know-How
- Ordering Wine in Europe

News/Deals

Swiss Rail/Hotel Packages

Rail Europe currently offers four-night **Best of Lake Geneva and Matterhorn** packages. The self-tour begins with rail transport from any Swiss airport or border station to Geneva, then follows with three full days of sightseeing. It offers a choice of Lausanne or Montreux on day two; Zermatt, Saas Fee, Leukerbad or Crans-Montna on day three, and a mountain resort of choice on day four. The tour ends on day five with rail transfer to any Swiss airport or border station. Prices begin at \$455 per person and include three-star hotel accommodations and a second-class Swiss Rail Pass. Add first-class rail for \$53 per person, and four-star hotels for \$100. Additional days are \$86 to \$112, depending on the hotel classification. For info, call 800-521-6722, press option 3.

Davos Deal for Families

Through October 21, the Swiss mountain resort of Davos offers family-friendly **Kid & Co.** packages. Two children under 16 stay free in a separate room when accompanied by two adults. Choose from among 17 hotels or holiday apartments. Prices start at \$226 for two rooms for two nights, including breakfast and other amenities. Visit www.davos.ch and click Packages.

Salzburg, Vienna Audio Tours

iJourneys sells downloadable audio walking tours of Vienna and Salzburg at www.ijourneys.com. Play them back through an MP3 player as you walk through the cities or relax at home. The 99-minute Vienna audio tour starts and ends at St. Stephan's Square. The Salzburg audio runs 89 minutes, begins at the entrance to Mirabell Palace, and finishes at Alter Markt. Price for each is \$14.95; download them at www.ijourneys.com. ☒

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 **Hotel Review** sections at www.gemut.com. Hotels are arranged in price order, higher to lower.

Berlin

Hotel Art Nouveau, Leibnizstr. 59, tel. +49/030/327 7440, fax 327 744 40, info@hotelartnouveau.de, www.hotelartnouveau.de

Hotel Domus, Uhlandstrasse 49, Germany D-10719, tel. +49/030/882041, fax 882 0410, 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, hotelkrenz@swissonline.ch

Lucerne

Hotel Wilden Mann, Bahnhofstrasse 30, CH-6000 Luzern, tel. +41/041/2101666, fax 2101629, mail@wilden-mann.ch

Hotel Cascada, Bundesplatz 18, CH-6003 Lucerne, tel. +41/041/226 80 88, fax 226 80 00, info@cascada.ch

Munich

Hotel Exquisit, Pettenkofenstr. 3, tel. +49/089/ 551 99 0, fax 551 99 499, 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, 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, hotel@reichskuechenmeister.com

Hotel Hornburg, Hornburgweg 28, D-91541, tel. +049/09861/ 8480, fax 5570, hotelhornburg@t-online.de, www.hotelhornburg.de

Salzburg & Environs

Schloss Haunsperg, A-5411 Oberalm bei Hallein, Hammerstrasse 32, tel. +43/06245/80662, fax 85680, info@schlosshaunsperg.com

Hotel Struber, Nonntaler Hauptstrasse 35, Austria A-5020 tel.

+43/0662/843 728, fax 843 728 8, struber@sbg.at

Hotel Jedermann, Rupertgasse 25, Austria A-5020, tel. +43/0662/ 873241-0, fax 873241-9, jedermann@salzburginfo.or.at

Vienna

Hotel Römischer Kaiser, Annagasse 16, A-1010, tel +43/01/512 77 51 0, fax 512 77 51 13, info@rkhotel.bestwestern

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

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

Zürich

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

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

Frankfurt Airport

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

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

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

Munich Airport

Daniel's Hotel, Hauptstrasse 11, Halbergmoos-Goldach, D-85399, tel. +49/0811/55120, fax 551213, info@hotel-daniels.de, www.hotel-daniels.de

Hotel Hoyacker Hof, Freisinger Landstrasse 9a, D-85748 Garching b. München, tel. +49/089/326 9900, fax 320 7243, info@hoyackerhof.de

Zürich Airport

Mövenpick Zürich Airport, Walter-Mittelholzerstrasse 8, CH-8152 Glattpfurg, tel. +41/01/808 88 88, fax 808 88 77, hotel@movenpick-zurich-airport.ch

Hotel Fly Away, Marktstrasse 19, Zürich-Kloten, CH-8302, tel. +41/01/804 4455, fax 804 44 50, reservation@hotel-flyaway.ch