

DEAR
SUBSCRIBER

The State of Europe Travel

This issue marks the start of *Gemütlichkeit's* 22nd year. Exactly one year ago this space, carrying the same pretentious title, predicted a blockbuster year of North American visitors to Europe and whined about a dollar that was worth only about .775 euro. The blockbuster year happened, but we didn't know how good we had it with the dollar. Twelve months later Europe is even more expensive. The greenback today is only worth .68 euro.

I have a feeling travel by North Americans to Europe will be down in 2008. It's early, and nobody has numbers to cite, but I'm hearing that in the first four weeks of the year, bookings for car rentals and rail passes are off substantially from a year ago. Our own volume of emails, web visitors at www.gemut.com, phone calls, and bookings are down about 20%. That's hardly a surprise. It stands to reason that when people see the value of their investments and homes shrink they are less likely to further reduce their net worth by taking big-ticket vacations. Couple that with the strength of the euro, pound, franc, zloty, crown, and other European currencies, and you have a recipe for a down year for European travel.

So what does that mean if you're considering a trip to Europe this year? Here's how I see it.

Airfares: Some elements of the new "Open Skies" agreement take effect at the end of March, and many airline analysts say the increased competition will mean lower fares. A drop in demand for seats—if that happens—will also lower fares. When their computers tell the airlines that flights aren't filling up, you can bet there will be sales.

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GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

BAMBERG

From architecture and beer to good food and antique shopping, this UNESCO World Heritage Site delights the senses.

For many travelers to Germany, Bamberg remains an undiscovered gem. Often billed as "the city of beer and Baroque," this UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Franconia region offers visitors much more—from medieval monasteries to world-class concerts, from art and antiques to fascinating museums and fine dining.

Situated on seven hills overlooking the Regnitz River, Bamberg is a treasure of architectural styles, with more than 2,000 historical buildings from Romanesque to Renaissance to Rococo. Rustic half-timbered houses nestle against substantial stone structures with gabled roofs topped

by tiles. Ornate window trimmings and carved wooden doors decorate old buildings painted in pastel colors. Statues of the Virgin Mary and a host of saints attest to the strong Catholic heritage of this city, which celebrated its 1,000th anniversary as a bishopric in 2007. Relatively untouched by the many wars fought in this region over the centuries, Bamberg is today one of the best-preserved cities in Europe.

With its steep hills and narrow, winding streets, Bamberg is best explored on foot. (Whether you are walking or driving, watch out for the many bicyclists.) Start at the massive four-spined **Kaiserdom** (imperial cathedral) atop the

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A Fine Red Guide for Austria

The good news is Michelin now publishes a Red Guide for Austria. The bad news is it isn't sold in the U.S. We found ours in a Berlin bookstore for 28 euros. Searching the web for a U.S. source has so far been futile. Amazon in the U.K. sells it online but I don't know whether they will ship to the U.S.

Michelin no longer calls these books "Red Guides." The new title is *Hotels & Restaurants*, as in *Österreich 2008 Hotels & Restaurants*. Whatever the moniker, it's a "must" for the independent traveler to Austria. If you can't get a European friend or relative to send you one, you can purchase the guide at most any bookstore when you first arrive in Europe. It will be worth the money.

The 2008 Austria book lists 2000 hotels and restaurants in about 600 cities and towns. As with the Red Guides for Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, and the other European countries for which Michelin publishes guides, all the great features are there:

- **Starred restaurants:** Michelin gives no Austrian restaurant three-stars, but seven restaurants get two, and 50 places rate a single rosette.

- **Bib Gourmand Restaurants:** The Austria guide designates nearly 150 of these "good food at moderate prices" establishments, where three-course meals can be had for less than

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Exchange rates as of 1/28/2008
1 euro = \$1.48
1 Swiss franc = \$0.92

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The question at this time of year is always, "when should I buy my air tickets to Europe?" Despite the "more competition" speculation and the prospect of lower demand, my answer is still the same: the earlier the better. The cheapest seats go quickly and any seats left empty by North Americans may well be filled by Europeans attracted to the U.S. by a weak dollar. As to the "Open Skies" talk, competition among airlines that fly transatlantic routes is already fierce. So, yes, you might save \$50 or \$100 by waiting for a spring sale, but past experience says such a strategy is more likely to cost you \$200 or \$300. Recently a subscriber inquired if he should buy Newark to Frankfurt tickets now at \$560 for September travel or wait for lower prices. I pointed out that \$200 of the \$560 is taxes and fees, making the each-way ticket price \$180. There's not much left for the airlines to cut. My advice is, if you know you're going, make the best deal you can now.

Car Rentals: Amazingly the cost for a one-week rental in Germany (4-doors, compact, air, \$234) is up less than six percent from a year ago. Meanwhile, the euro has risen about 14 percent and we've had a full year of inflation. Renting a car is a better deal than it was a year ago.

More and more cars come with free GPS, though the devices work only in the country in which the car

is rented. Diesel-powered cars offer the double advantage of cheaper fuel and higher mileage, but rental companies won't guarantee a specific type of engine.

Rail Passes: The basic, 15-consecutive-day, **Global Eurail Pass** has risen from \$635 to \$744, more than 17 percent in one year. If you buy the 15-day **Global Saver Pass** (two or more people traveling together) the price is \$630. But as Eurail adds more two, three, four, and five-country passes, the 20-country Global product becomes less practical. After all, other than under-30 backpackers, how many of us want to see more than five countries in one European vacation? Note that if you purchase a three, four, or five-country **Eurail Select Pass** (from \$400) by March 31 you get a free day of travel on the six, eight and 10-day versions. Rail passes are good for six months from the date of issue.

The **Germany Twin Pass**, at \$181 per person for four nonconsecutive days' travel, is still a good buy. The first-class version is \$246. You can add extra days to the second-class pass for around \$22 per person, and about \$29 first-class. For travelers with a big-city itinerary, Hamburg-Berlin-Dresden-Munich, for example, it's *the* way to go. All German passes are accepted on DB's fast and comfortable ICE trains.

Rail buffs will always return to Switzerland to experience the country's wondrous, integrated transport

system. The frequent trains mesh schedules with the lake steamers and busses, and they all seem to connect seamlessly with city transport as well as cable cars and funiculars. The eight-consecutive-day **Swiss Saver Pass** is \$240 second-class and \$370 first-class, up \$5 and \$18 respectively from '07. A great Swiss Pass advantage is that all kids under 16 travel free with an adult. (Read my post at <http://theeuropetraveler.com> about the advantages of a Swiss Pass over a Eurail Passes that include Switzerland).

In order to compete with regional, discount airlines, Europe's railroads continue to introduce new high-speed tracks and equipment—and low prices. You can order point-to-point tickets online at individual country rail websites such as Germany's www.bahn.de. You'll see a fair number of €29 fares on longer

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Using Gemütlichkeit

- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

Logging on to Our Website

Back issues in PDF format from January 1993, except for the most recent 10, are available free to subscribers only at 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: **gerb** Password: **7654**

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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

BAMBERG*Continued from page 1*

Domberg (Cathedral Hill). Consecrated in 1237, this masterpiece of Romanesque and early Gothic architecture contains the tombs of Emperor Henry II, his wife Kunigunde, and Pope Clement II, as well as a carved altarpiece by Veit Stoss and the emblematic "Bamberg Horseman" statue of a handsome young king on horseback (a stylized drawing of which is now the city's logo).

Flanking the spacious **Domplatz** (Cathedral Square) are several large Renaissance and Baroque buildings housing the city-and-regional **Historical Museum**, the **Prince-Bishop's Residence** and **State Painting Gallery**, and the **Diocesan Museum**, with its outstanding collection of old textiles. In nice weather, stroll over to the nearby **Rose Garden**, with superb views of the city, where blossoms on 4,500 rose bushes scent the summer air.

Wend your way down from the cathedral toward the river, stopping off for hot coffee and fresh pastries at a bakery, locally brewed beer at a cozy tavern, or Franconian wine at a sidewalk cafe. Then head for the **Altes Rathaus** (Old Town Hall), the most photographed building in Bamberg. Located in the middle of the left arm of the Regnitz River, the medieval stone building was later updated with Baroque and Rococo embellishments, including colorful exterior frescoes and a half-timbered extension jutting out from one side. Inside the Old Town Hall is an interesting museum of Baroque faience and porcelain.

Two pedestrian bridges span the river at this point. If you walk to the left without crossing the river, you'll have the best view of the picturesque "**Little Venice**" section where rows of fishermen's houses overlook the water from the other bank. Or continue across either bridge toward the **Maxplatz**, where an open-air market is held daily (except Sundays and holidays), selling produce from Bamberg's famous market gardens. The annual **Christmas**

Bamberg Basics**Population:** 70,000**Elevation:** 792 feet

Visitor information: Bamberg Tourism & Congress Service, Geyserswörthstrasse 3, D-96047 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-297-6410, fax 297-6222, touristinfo@bamberg.info, www.bamberg.info. Guided tours available in English.

Discounts: Bamberg Card (€8.50), good for 48 hours' travel on the city bus system, free entry to several city museums, and reduced prices for other exhibitions.

Driving distances to:

Nürnberg	61 km	38 miles
Frankfurt	212 km	132 miles
Munich	232 km	144 miles
Berlin	405 km	252 miles

Nearest airports: Nürnberg, Frankfurt

Rail service: About 30 minutes by train from Nürnberg, with several trains daily; 2 to 2-1/2 hours by train from Frankfurt; the ICE high-speed trains between Munich and Berlin also stop at Bamberg's station

Recommended English-language guidebooks: *Bamberg for Newcomers and Old Friends*, by Karin Dengler-Schreiber, 5th edition, 2006 (available at the tourist office and in local bookstores). *Bamberg and Franconia: Germany's Brewing Heartland*, by John Conen, 2003 (available at www.franconiabeerguide.com/shop.asp).

Market, with booths offering traditional German toys and foods, is also held in the Maxplatz from December 1-23.

You can easily spend 3 or 4 days visiting Bamberg's 15 museums, drinking your way along the **Bamberg Beer Trail**, or just wandering around the Old Town. From the beginning of Advent (around December 1) until Epiphany (January 6), you can also follow the special **Nativity Scene Route** to 35 sites around the city where elaborate Nativity scenes are on display. When Bamberg is covered with a blanket of snow, you'll feel like you're walking through a picture on an old German Christmas card.

Bamberg Beer

Many people come to Bamberg just to drink its beers. With 10 brew-

eries producing more than 50 kinds of beer, Bamberg is the center of the Franconian brewing industry, which boasts more breweries per square kilometer than any other region on the planet. Learn more about the history of local brews at the **Franconian Brewery Museum** located in the former brewery of a Benedictine monastery on the **Michelsberg** (Michael's Hill) high above the Old Town.

Bamberg's most famous beer is the dark, smoky *Rauchbier*, whose characteristic taste comes from malted (sprouted) barley grains smoke-dried over a beechwood fire at the beginning of the brewing process. Two breweries, Schlenkerla and Spezial, make this unusual type of beer, which can be drunk fresh from the wooden barrels at both breweries' taverns.

The Bamberg tourist office also offers a special **Bamberg Beer Trail** program. For €20 you receive an informative booklet (in English) for a self-guided tour around the city and its breweries, vouchers for five half-liters of beer at brewery taverns of your choice, a glass mug with emblems of the Bamberg breweries, several beer coasters, and a rucksack to tote them around in. The tourist office can also arranged guided brewery tours for individuals and groups, as well as a multi-course dinner where each of the dishes is cooked with a different type of Bamberg beer.

Shopping

Bamberg's cobblestone streets are not cluttered with tourist traps selling "local souvenirs" actually made in China. Instead, behind the handsome building facades you'll find a wide variety of upscale boutiques, authentic craft stores, high-quality confectioneries, and antique shops (for which the city is famous). Indulge in handmade chocolates at **Confiserie Storath** (St.-Martin-Strasse 18) or **Cafe am Dom** (Ringleinplatz 2). Choose a German carved wooden Nativity scene at **Magnus Klee** (Obstmarkt 2). Browse the collection of elegant

small shops in the historic **Mohren Haus** (Obere Brücke 14), not far from the Old Town Hall. And buy some of Bamberg's locally made lace at **Bamberger Spitze** (Obere Sandstrasse 6). Its attractive tablecloths, runners, bookmarks, and holiday decorations are lightweight gifts to bring back from your trip to this captivating city.

Bamberg Hotels

Each of these hotels is located in or near the center of Bamberg, making them convenient for exploring the city on foot. Reserve your hotel room in advance: Bamberg is a popular tourist destination, and the good hotels fill up quickly. If you travel by car, check in advance to see which hotels offer parking, and reserve a place when you book a room; do not assume that hotel parking will be available when you arrive. Several city parking garages near these hotels offer reasonable 24-hour daily rates.

Hotels are listed by price, from most expensive to least expensive, with breakfast included. All rooms have private toilets and bathtubs or showers, and most have telephone, television, and minibars. Check the hotels' websites for current rates, including special offers and bargain packages (for multi-night stays) at certain times of the year.

Residenzschloss Bamberg

A member of the Welcome Hotel group, this four-star property combines Old World ambience with ultramodern comfort. Located on the Regnitz River, just across a pedestrian bridge from Bamberg's sleek new Konzert-und-Kongresshalle (Concert and Convention Center), this is where many world-renowned musicians, singers, and actors stay when visiting the city.

The large, stately building dates from 1787, with a new addition constructed later in back. For nearly 200 years the original structure housed a hospital until it was turned into a luxury hotel in 1990. Its 184 spacious rooms are decorated in either modern or "romantic" (traditional)

style, with tile-and-marble bathrooms. Special "non-allergenic" rooms are available. Two elegant restaurants in the hotel serve a wide variety of well-prepared foods from abundant buffets to à la carte meals to fixed-price menus ranging from €14.50 to €68.

After a long day of sight-seeing, you can retreat to the hotel's authentic Baroque chapel, with its stained-glass windows and gilded altarpiece, for a few minutes of quiet contemplation or to hear the classical music concerts sometimes scheduled there.

Contact: Welcome Hotel Residenzschloss Bamberg, Untere Sandstrasse 32, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951/609-10, fax 6091-701, info@welcome-hotel-residenzschloss-bamberg.de, www.welcome-hotel-residenzschloss-bamberg.de

Daily Rates: Singles €132-154, doubles €169-192

Rating: QUALITY 18/20, VALUE 16/20

Bamberger Hof Bellevue

High ceilings and an elegant atmosphere characterize this restored four-story hotel built in 1896 and which features a bright, airy breakfast room with a large *Jugendstil* stained-glass window. Each of the 50 guestrooms is decorated in a different style, from classical to modern, European to Asian. (Number 402 is a very large room done up in Japanese decor). Some of the furniture is antique, including part of the proprietor's collection of Buddha statues. Original paintings and prints hang on the wall, and many of the rooms have comfortable divans and chairs, as well as tables and desks.

A rooftop terrace provides excellent views over the city. **Cafe Luitpold**, in the same building, is especially popular with Bambergers who come there for the special €6.50 breakfast/brunch served daily (except Sunday) from 9am to 2pm, offering a choice of Scandinavian, Italian, English, Mexican, or Greek menus, with unlimited coffee refills.

Contact: Hotel Bamberger Hof

Bellevue, Schönleinplatz 4, D-96407 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-985-50, fax 985-562, info@bambergerhof.de, www.bambergerhof.de

Daily Rates: Singles €115, doubles €145-165

Rating: Quality 16/20, Value 16/20

Weinhaus Messerschmitt

A longtime favorite of travelers to Bamberg, this pretty, pale-yellow hotel with blue-gray shutters and ornate window trimmings fits easily into the graceful architecture of the historic city. The same family has owned it since 1832. In 2006, the original 17-room hotel was completely renovated inside and expanded to include a new addition with 50 more rooms, an elevator, and air conditioning (only in the newer section).

Each room in the older part has its own decor. Number 33 is an attractive corner room, with plenty of light, decorated in German Biedermeier style. Number 37 is another charming double room with its own sitting area. Rooms in the new addition are bright and modern, yet cozy, with restful color schemes in light yellow and apricot. A copious breakfast buffet is served in the new, ultramodern dining room, and a fitness center and sauna are on the sixth floor.

A member of the Romantik-Hotel group, the four-star-rated Messerschmitt also has a very good restaurant located in the older part of the building (see Bamberg Restaurants, page 5).

Contact: Romantik-Hotel Messerschmitt, Lange Strasse 41, D-96047 Bamberg, tel. +49/951/297-800, fax 297-8029, Hotel-Messerschmitt@t-online.de, www.hotel-messerschmitt.de

Daily rates: Singles €85-95, doubles €130-195

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel-Restaurant St. Nepomuk

Located directly over the river, on the site of an old mill, the St. Nepomuk offers all the comforts of modern accommodations in the heart of the historic city. Construct-

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ed in 1983, with an annex added later, the hotel was completely renovated in 2007. Its 47 rooms are furnished mainly in stark-but-tasteful modern style, and most overlook the river. Number 122 has a picture-postcard view of Bamberg's iconic Old Town Hall. The St. Nepomuk Restaurant is considered one of the best in Bamberg [see Bamberg Restaurants, below].

Contact: Hotel St. Nepomuk, Obere Mühlbrücke 9, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-984-20, fax 984-2100, reservierung@hotel-nepomuk.de, www.hotel-nepomuk.de

Daily Rates: Singles €80-90, doubles €130-140

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 16/20

Hotel-Gasthof Wilde Rose

Occupying a 16th-century building that was also once a brewery, the 29-room Wilde Rose is a nice, middle-class, family-owned hotel that offers good value for the money. Although simply furnished, the rooms are cheerful, bright, and comfortable. To avoid street noise, ask for a room on the back. No elevator, but the friendly staff will help carry your luggage.

The Wilde Rose's rustic, wood-paneled restaurant is a favorite with locals (always a good recommendation), offering a wide variety of moderately-priced meals, with amply-portioned main dishes from €8 to €17.

Contact: Hotel Wilde Rose, Kesslerstrasse 7, D-96047 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-981-820, fax 220-71, info@hotel-wilde-rose.de, www.hotel-wilde-rose.de

Daily Rates: Singles €65-75, doubles €98

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 15/20

Barockhotel am Dom

This small (19-room), pretty hotel in a historic building dating from the Middle Ages is only a two-minute walk from Bamberg's Dom cathedral. Its carved wooden staircase leads to three floors of completely modernized rooms. The daily breakfast buffet is served in a cozy little room with a vaulted ceiling or outside on a small terrace in

good weather.

Contact: Barockhotel am Dom, Vorderer Bach 4, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-540-31, fax 540-21, info@barockhotel.de, www.barockhotel.de

Daily Rates: Singles €67, doubles €93

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

Altstadt-Hotel Weierich

The dark, somewhat cluttered lobby here is a deceptive introduction to the large, high-ceiling rooms on the two floors above. Three old houses were combined to make this 25-room hotel, whose accommodations vary in size, although most rooms are large with tall windows that let in plenty of light. Half are decorated in modern style, and the others are more traditional. Several rooms have beds for three people, and a large suite with kitchen sleeps six. Ask for a quiet room away from the street side. Bottled drinks (water, sodas, beer) are available for €1 from a cool case in the lobby.

The adjacent **Gasthof Weierich** is one of the oldest eating places in the city, with dark wood wainscoting, stained-glass windows, and carved wooden chairs—an appropriate atmosphere in which to sample well-prepared traditional Franconian foods and regional wines.

Contact: Hotel Weierich, Lugbank 5, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951/9170-0777, fax 9170-0887, info@hotel-weierich.de, www.hotel-weierich.de

Daily Rates: Singles €54, doubles €79

Rating: QUALITY 14/20, VALUE 16/20

Bamberg Restaurants

Schlenkerla

Several of Bamberg's brewery-restaurants offer good solid meals, at reasonable prices, to accompany the city's well-known beers. Not to be missed is the historic, centuries-old Schlenkerla, with its dark-wood interior and special smoke-flavored *Rauchbier*. Popular with locals and tourists alike, the Schlenkerla attracts cus-

tomers of all classes, from the mayor to university students, from visiting dignitaries to workmen in overalls.

Don't be bashful about sharing a table with other diners in any of the four eating areas, from the small room where the smoky beer is tapped from old-fashioned wooden barrels to the larger, vaulted-ceiling dining room in a former medieval Dominican monastery chapel. From August to October, in nice weather, you can also sit outside in the adjacent beer garden.

The simple menu is the same wherever you eat: hearty Franconian foods, some of them cooked with *Rauchbier*. Try the Bamberg-style Onion with Smoky Beer Sauce (€7.30), a big onion stuffed with ground pork and bacon, garnished with the restaurant's special beer sauce, and served with mashed or boiled potatoes. The caraway-spiced Franconian Pig's Knuckle is roasted until the skin is crackly-crisp, then served with a smoky beer sauce (€9.30). The chef also recently invented his own Schlenkerla sausage, made with a mixture of pork, beef,

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.

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spices, and *Rauchbier*, served with Franconian-style sweet cabbage and rye bread.

Lunch is the best time for a full meal here because the kitchen sometimes runs out of daily specials later in the afternoon. But stop in any time between 9:30am and 11:30pm for a glass (or more!) of the unique dark *Rauchbier* (€2.20 for a half-liter), along with an order of Schlenkerla Cheese (€4.90), a rich combination of Camembert, butter, onions, caraway, and paprika, to spread on slices of dark bread.

A kiosk in the restaurant also sells *Rauchbier*-related souvenirs, including beer coasters with the brewery logo, *Rauchbier* Schnapps (distilled liquor), dark chocolate truffles with a *Rauchbier*-cream filling, and bottles of the smoky beer to go.

Contact: Schlenkerla, Dominikanerstrasse 6, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-560-60, fax 540-19, www.schlenkerla.com. Proprietors: Family Trum.

Rating: QUALITY 13/20, VALUE 16/20

Klosterbräu

One of the oldest existing brewery in Bamberg, Klosterbräu dates from 1333. Several historic buildings on the premises have been combined to make an attractive brewery-restaurant serving a good selection of typical Franconian dishes to accompany freshly brewed dark- and pale-colored beers (€2.20- €2.90 for a half-liter). Full meals are offered from 11:30am to 2pm, and from 5pm to 11pm, but substantial sausage-cheese-and-bread platters (€3.10- €5.50) can be ordered throughout the day.

The daily menu features dishes such as roast pork with sauerkraut and dumplings (€7.10); Franconian sauerbraten (marinated, pot-roasted beef) with red cabbage and dumplings (€7.80); rumpsteak with dark beer sauce, fried potatoes, and salad (€12.50); and warm apple strudel with vanilla ice cream (€3.50).

Contact: Brauerei-Gastätte-Klosterbräu, Obere Mühlbrücke 1 – 3, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-522-65,

fax 500-274, mail@klosterbraeu.de, www.klosterbraeu.de. Proprietor: Anne-Rose Braun-Schröder.

Rating: QUALITY 12/20, VALUE 15/20

Mahrs-Bräu-Keller

Situated high on a hill above the city, this cozy beer tavern, with its large, pleasant beer garden, is a mecca for people who like to eat fine food in informal surroundings. Chef Burkhard Michel uses fresh seasonal ingredients from local producers to create a high-quality menu that changes daily.

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Michel has also designed a special Mahrs beer menu, each course made with a different beer and served with a glass of the same beer used in that particular dish. Starting with an aperitif made from Campari, Cinzano, and Mahrs Pils beer, the meal progresses from mixed green salad with wheat-beer dressing to beer soup with garlic croutons, catfish fricassee with smoky-beer sauce, stuffed pork loin with another kind of beer sauce, and batter-fried apple rings with malt-beer sabayon for dessert, followed by a glass of Mahrs Bierschnapps (liquor distilled from strong beer). Although the complete beer menu is available only for groups of 20 or more (€46 per person, reserve in advance), some of these dishes also appear on the daily menu. (Contact the restaurant to see if you can join a group that already has a reservation for the special beer dinner.)

For a lighter meal in the beer garden, order the excellent "K. und K. Bratwurst," two large sausages seasoned with garlic and caraway and served with sauerkraut (€7.20), or the Bamberger Bierkeller Pizza cooked outdoors in a wood-fired oven (€8.90). Beer prices range from €2.20 to €2.50 for a half-liter.

Open daily except Monday, beginning at 5pm; Sundays and holidays, open 11:30am to 2pm

Contact: Mahrs-Bräu-Keller, Oberer Stephansberg 36, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-534-86, fax 511-59, b.michel@mahrsbraeu-keller.de, www.mahrsbraeu-keller.de. Propri-

etor: Burkhard Michel.

Rating: QUALITY 16/20, VALUE 18/20

Restaurant St. Nepomuk

To taste some of the new trends in German cuisine prepared by a young chef with international experience, dine at this highly-rated restaurant. In the sleekly modern main dining room that juts over the river like the prow of a ship, you can indulge in chef Alexander Grüner's special Gourmet Menu (€49 for 4 courses, €58 for 5 courses) showcasing seasonal ingredients combined in innovative ways. The six-course Tasting Menu includes a palate cleanser of Franconian cherry sorbet with black currant sauce, between the fish and meat servings (€83 with wines to match each course, €68 without wines included).

On the regular menu, fish main dishes can also be ordered in smaller portions as entrees (€14-18). Start your meal with Maine-Lobster Bisque with Truffle Shavings (€10) and end with one of the restaurant's homemade ice cream or sorbet desserts (€6-9) or a selection of award-winning German raw milk cheeses (€9). The menu changes every four to six weeks, based on the season, and there is an extensive international wine list.

Contact: Restaurant St. Nepomuk, Obere Mühlbrücke 9, D-96049 Bamberg, tel. +49/951-984-20, fax 984-2100, reservierung@hotel-nepomuk.de, www.hotel-nepomuk.de. Proprietors: Family Grüner.

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 15/20

Weinhaus Messerschmitt

The restaurant at Hotel Messerschmitt has long been considered one of the best in Bamberg. Dine in the cozy traditional Hubertusstube, with dark wood paneling, wooden tables, and carved chairs; in the elegant main dining room, with white tablecloths and plush oriental rugs; or outdoors in the small, enclosed garden, with its gurgling fountain and flagstone floor.

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

Selections on the three-course Regional Menu (€28.50) include

cream of fennel soup, excellent stuffed pork filet, and Franconian Camembert-style goat cheese. A five-course Jahreszeiten-Menü (€52) features dishes made with seasonal ingredients. Franconian specialties on the regular menu include boneless duck in raspberry-honey sauce with red cabbage and dumplings (€18) and veal with shellfish sauce and artichokes (€22). Finish with a trilogy of house-made sorbets (€7.50) or the gratin of red currants with seasonal fruits (€8). The large wine list includes several high-quality regional Franconian white wines.

Contact: Romantik-Hotel Messerschmitt, Lange Strasse 41, D-96047 Bamberg, tel. +49/951/297-800, fax 297-8029, Hotel-Messerschmitt@t-online.de, www.hotel-messerschmitt.de

Rating: QUALITY 17/20, VALUE 16/20

AUSTRIA RED GUIDE

Continued from page 5

€30. These are Europe's best values in fine dining.

- **Bib Hotels:** This outstanding Red Guide feature identifies some 80 hotels it considers "good accommodation at moderate prices," under 90 euros for a double room. Our experience with Bib hotels has been almost universally positive.

- **"Red" Markings:** A further device Michelin uses to single out establishments that it regards as "particularly pleasant or restful" is to show the hotel and/or restaurant symbol in red.

- **Quiet and Very Quiet Hotels:** Quiet hotels are noted by a small rocking chair symbol. A red rocking chair marks those that are considered "very quiet" or secluded.

- **Locator Maps:** The power of the guide is embodied in a dozen pages of maps at the back of the book. They comprise the whole of Austria and are spotted with all the above-mentioned "best places" symbols. Crave a great meal? Check the maps to find the nearest starred or Bib Gourmand restaurant. Need a good but inexpensive hotel? Check the maps, there's probably a Bib hotel within a 30-

THE NEW BLOG: [HTTP://THEEUROPETRAVELER.COM](http://THEEUROPETRAVELER.COM)

TheEuropeTraveler.com is yet another *Gemütlichkeit* info source. There is a new post or news item almost every day at this site and comments are welcome. You can also sign up to receive each new post via email. That way it will just pop up in your in-box. The emphasis is on car rental, rail travel, hotels, and money issues. Here are just a few of the stories:

- Should I rent or lease a car in Europe?
- Rail pass vs. rental car: why the car may be better in '08.
- Soft demand for European travel could create deals in '08.
- Why your US\$100 bill may not be accepted by European banks.
- The myth of the full-size rental car in Europe.
- How to save big money on European hotel bookings.
- Just how expensive is Europe?
- Why you shouldn't book your European rental car in euros.

minute drive.

The highlighting of special places is just the beginning for this great resource. Here are some of its useful features:

- Town listings include contact info for the local tourist office including email address, driving distance to Vienna and selected cities in the region; major sight-seeing attractions including Michelin's star rating for each; contact info for nearby golf courses; population; altitude; number of ski lifts; postal codes; Michelin map coordinates, and more.
- On pages 60-67 is a list of wellness hotels alphabetized by city.
- The listing for larger cities includes a town map spotted with major sightseeing attractions and hotels.
- A red grape bunch symbol identifies restaurants with good wine lists.
- Glossary of Austrian cuisine. *Kren* is horseradish. *Heuriger* is new wine but *Huerige* is new potatoes.

- Get a free extra day on your Eurail Pass.
- Berlin hotels: the worst of deals - the best of deals.
- Rental car drivers beware: Visa CDW/theft insurance loophole could cost you \$\$\$.
- Ten costly mistakes made by European travelers.
- The most dangerous European countries for drivers.
- What a Swiss Pass does that the Eurail Pass does not.
- The problem with online European car rental brokers.
- A review of Virgin Atlantic's Upper Class.
- Pickpockets in Brussels: a first-hand experience.
- Driving in Europe: GPS vs. good maps.
- London's new St. Pancras Eurostar station: already too crowded?
- Amazingly bad food at a long-time Regensburg favorite.

- Chart of school holidays in each province.

- Map of winter resorts plus a list that includes phone numbers, altitude, number of lifts and other info.

- A chart with international phone dialing codes.

Here are a few items from the guide that caught our eye:

- In Vienna, the centrally-located, 16-room **Hotel Hollmann Beletage** (www.hollmann-beletae.at), a couple of blocks east of Stephansdom, gets Michelin's "red" (particularly pleasant) designation and, starting at €140 double, is priced well below similarly located hotels in its category.
- Vienna restaurants that merit Bib Gourmand status are **Vestibühl** (Dr. Karl Lueger-Ring 2, tel. 01/532 49 99, restaurant@vestibuel.at, www.vestibuel.at); **Mezzo** (Esteplatz 6, tel. 01/7155148, mezzo@mezzo.cc); **Fadinger** (Wipplingerstrasse 29, tel. 01/5334341, restaurant@fadinger.at, www.fadinger.at); **Artner** (Floragasse

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6, tel. 01/503 5033, restaurant@artner.co.at, www.artner.co.at); **Tempel** (Praterstr. 56, tel. 01/2140179, conny.veith@gourmettraeume.de, www.gourmettraeume.de/html/tempel_wien.html)

- Only three Salzburg hotels, all expensive, get “red.” **Sacher**, **Goldener Hirsch**, and **Schloss Mönchstein**. It is gratifying to see our longtime favorite in nearby Oberalm, **Schloss Haunsperg** (info@schlosshaunsperg.com, www.schlosshaunsperg.com), also take “red” honors.

- There are no Bib Gourmand restaurants in Salzburg, but in the suburbs are **Zum Eigenherr** in Gneis (Josef-von-Eichendorff-Strasse 5, tel. 0662/832319); the *Gemütlichkeit*-endorsed **Gasthof Auerhahn** in Itzling (0662/45 10 52, hotel@auerhahn-salzburg.at, www.auerhahn-salzburg.at), **Gasthof Schloss Aigen** in Aigen (tel. 0662/62 12 84, schloss-aigen@elsnet.at, www.schloss-aigen.at) and **Pomodoro** in Gnigl (Eichstr. 54, tel. 0662/640438).

- In Salzburg-Leopoldskron, about three miles southwest via Moosstrasse, **Hotel Blobergerhof** (Hammerauerstr. 4, tel. 0662/830227, office@blobergerhof.at, www.blobergerhof.at) gets a Bib rating which makes it a bargain with doubles starting at €65.

- An intriguing listing is for the one-star **Ikarus Restaurant** (Wilhelm-Spazier-Str. 7a, tel. 0662/21973786, ikarus@at.redbull.com) in Hanger 7 (near Salzburg Airport), a futuristic gleaming steel and glass structure which houses two bars, a restaurant, a museum, and a number of beautifully-restored vintage aircraft. It's all apparently owned by Red Bull.

- Those tired workhorse hotels in Salzburg's “old town,” such as **Weisse Taube**, **Elefant**, **Wolf**, and **Kasererbräu**, are ignored by Michelin.

- Want to travel inexpensively but in comfort? In the countryside, in Austria's southeast corner, are a dozen Bib Hotels with doubles starting


around €65 and 10 Bib Gourmand restaurants. If you want to splurge there are even a couple of one-star restaurants. It's an under-visited region that bears exploration.

- In the Stubai Valley, south of Innsbruck, are a number of expensive four and five-star resort hotels that catch no “red,” no rocking chairs, and no Bibs.

- Similarly bereft of “red” is Seefeld, though the seven-room **Hotel Alpengruss** (Andreas Höfer Str. 235, tel. 05212/2626, alpengruss@seefeld-in-tirol.net, gets Bib ratings both as a hotel and restaurant. Doubles range from €60 to €120.

- In Steyr, the popular **Romantik Hotel Minichmayer** doesn't even get a listing, but next time we're in town we'll try **Rahofer** (Stadtplatz 9, tel. 07252/54606), a Bib Gourmand restaurant.

- One of the most beautifully situated hotels in all the world, the **Grüner Baum** (tel. 06434/25160, urlaub@hoteldorf.com, www.hoteldorf.com), in the Kötschach Valley just outside Bad Gastein, gets red. Doubles range from €214 to € 366, with breakfast and dinner. Unfortunately the food wasn't so good on our last visit.

All these listings and ratings can be viewed at www.viamichelin.com; just be sure to click the Le Guide Michelin box as this site is also a booking engine for thousands of other hotels. 

DEAR SUBSCRIBER*Continued from page 2*

routes. For the most part, however, buying individual tickets for European rail travel is expensive.

Booking Hotels: Be assured that any dip in demand for hotel rooms will be met with deep discounts—at least in the chains such as Mercure, Novotel, Intercontinental, Marriott, and Sofitel. While these hotels are not the warm, *gemütlich*, family-owned places unique to Europe, \$65 to \$100 for a double room in a four-star hotel in a major European city is hard to pass up. You'll find many discounts from among the thousands of hotels

bookable at our website (www.gemu.com, we make a small commission), but sometimes the best big-city deals are at Priceline.com and Hotwire.com. Before you visit these websites, however, you should consult www.biddingfortravel.com to get an idea of the prices and hotels on offer. Remember, with Hotwire and Priceline, you don't know which hotel you're getting, only the price, the category (two to five-star), and a rough location (city center, airport, etc.).

In the countryside, even with the weak dollar, you'll still find acceptable, affordable accommodations in the €60 to €100 range for double rooms. Rely on Michelin's Bib Hotel ratings and/or contact local tourist offices for their hotel lists. The recommendations of a group of experienced, value-conscious Germany travelers, some of them *Gemütlichkeit* subscribers, are collected on the website, www.bensbaurenhof.com. In many instances there are pictures and descriptions. I recommend it.—RHB 

News/Deals**■ Free Classical Music in Berlin:**

The famed **Berlin Philharmonic** now offers free lunch concerts. The series, which takes place in the foyer of the celebrated Berlin Philharmonic Hall, was introduced last November and offers chamber music and lunch with free admission. Every Tuesday at 1pm through May 13, 2008, the public is invited to get to know the best music of Berlin in a 30 to 40-minute concert. Info: www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/home.

■ Free Admission to Berlin's most Popular Museums:

Thursday evening is the time to visit Berlin's top museums. For four hours before closing (at 10pm), all visitors are admitted free of charge to the permanent exhibitions of the **New National Gallery**, **Picture Gallery**, **Perгамon Museum**, **Old National Gallery**, **Museum for Photography / Helmut Newton Collection**, the **Egyptian Museum**, and the **Antiquity**. Info: www.smb.spk-berlin.de 