

## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

### Now On Deck: Year 23

First, sincere thanks to those who wrote or emailed regarding last month's *Dear Subscriber* column in which I eulogized my late uncle, John Bestor, a towering figure in my life without whom there would be no *Gemütlichkeit*.

As we get set to begin our 23<sup>rd</sup> year of publication, may I express our sincere gratitude to each of you for your subscription, with special acknowledgment to those who have been with us year after year after year; some, amazingly, since our launch in 1987.

Speaking of year 23, there isn't much about it yet in the media but bookings for travel to Europe for '09 are way down. We're hearing it from tour operators, rental car suppliers, rail pass sellers, vacation rental property reps, hotels, and airlines. Moving a European vacation lower on one's list of 2009 priorities is an understandable reaction to what's been happening in the last several months; most of us have seen substantial erosion in our retirement savings and the value of our homes.

Now, having said that...deep breath...2009 may be the best opportunity for European travel in the last six years. Lack of demand for overseas travel, much cheaper oil, and a stronger dollar is bound to drive prices lower. In fact, it's already happening.

- Last summer, the price for a compact car for a week in Germany was \$255 with tax. Today it's \$232.

- In July, a gallon of diesel in Germany cost €5.52 or, at the prevailing exchange rate, about \$8.77. Today it's about €3.79/\$5 per gallon. If your rental car gets 35 miles per gallon, and you drive 1,500 miles in the course of a two-week vacation, your cost vs. last July is \$161 less.

*Continued on page 2...*

# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

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

## GREAT TRIPS, GREAT TIMES

*In observance of Gemütlichkeit's 22nd anniversary, our four principal contributors recall their most memorable trips, favorite hotels, restaurants and sights*

### Some Favorite Things

Though the discerning reader over the past 22 years can probably come pretty close to figuring out what I like most about Germany,

by Bob Bestor Austria and Switzerland, I've never provided an actual list of personal favorites. So, while Nikki, Tom, and Sharon have written about their memorable experiences for this retrospective issue, I'm taking the easy way and offering, to steal a phrase, "a few of my favorite things" about travel in our three countries. These are the towns, sights, restaurants, hotels, and activities that are never far out of mind; the memory-makers, the places I want to return to over and over

*Continued on page 3...*

### Memorable Road Moments

I was a curious foreign exchange student the first time I set foot in Europe—one who was more than ready to take four years of by Nikki Goth Itoi classroom German language study to a real life setting. The year was 1992. The Berlin Wall had come down just a few years prior. Several of the Balkan nations were at war. And Bill Clinton was running for president. My destination was the Universität Graz, where I would take classes with ordinary Austrian students. But first, a month-long stay in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, where I was to receive further language instruction at the Goethe Institute.

*Continued on page 5...*

### European Memory Lane

In travel as in life itself, being in the right place at the right time can leave you with lasting memories.

by Tom Bross That's my cue to backtrack a couple of decades—to Leipzig during a turbulent, historic time: early October, 1989. In a café called Bachstüb'l (so-called because views out the window include a statue of Johann Sebastian Bach, standing alongside St. Thomas's Church, where he organized his famous boys' choir 286 years ago), a young couple spotted this seldom-seen American guy (me!). Striking up a conversation, they casually asked if I'd be going to this evening's "really big demonstration." Where? "Over on Karl-Marx-Platz, of course"

*Continued on page 6...*

### Rothenburg Tale

Those lucky enough to travel a lot—for work or for play—sometimes become jaded about certain by Sharon Hudgins travel destinations, especially places that have been "discovered" and overrun by visitors: "It's too *touristy*, once was enough," they say. "I've been there several times. There's nothing left to see." Or, the tiresome "been there, done that." (One of the most self-limiting phrases in modern American parlance, in my humble opinion.)

We frequent travelers too easily fall prey to such world-weary attitudes. Or is it just a kind of cultur-

*Continued on page 7...*

**Exchange rates as of 12/15/08**  
**1 euro = \$1.36**  
**1 Swiss franc = \$0.88**

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

*Continued from page 1*

- Oil at \$45 dollars per barrel instead of \$120 to \$145 can't help but lower transatlantic airfares. Jet fuel that was \$4.27 per gallon in July averaged \$1.89 in November. Though we haven't yet seen enough movement in the massive fuel surcharges imposed by airlines throughout most of 2008, given the intense competitive nature of the industry, it's bound to happen.

- Everyday my email inbox is the recipient of yet another cruise company announcing yet another pay-now-get-a-discount deal.

- The steep drop in business travel has resulted in a glut of empty rooms in four and five-star hotels. That unused inventory is routinely marketed through so-called "opaque" booking sites such as Priceline.com and Hotwire.com (opaque because, until you've made a credit card commitment, you don't know the name of the hotel, only the category and general location.) Biddingfortravel.com reports successful Priceline bids resulting in double rooms at Marriott, Mövenpick, Crown Plaza, and Intercontinental hotels in major German cities for from \$60 to \$110. (Tip: hotels seldom make unused inventory available to "opaque" sellers far in advance, so it's best to wait to bid until a couple of weeks or even few days prior to a planned stay.)

Finally, fewer tourists makes for a better travel experience; you might even have an empty seat next to you over the Atlantic. And—forgive me if I've mentioned this before—the number of opportunities one gets for a European vacation is finite.

\*\*\*\*

Last month we asked readers of our free email newsletter to take our European travel survey. About 1,000 of them did so. You may be interested in the results:

**Respondents' age:** 90 percent were over 45 years-old, and 55.4 percent were 61 or older.

**Evaluate the likelihood of your traveling to Europe within the next 12 months:** Amazingly 42.5 percent said they will "definitely travel to Europe within the next 12 months." Another 18.5 percent said they will "probably" go, and 17.2 percent gave the possibility of travel a 50-50 chance. Only 6.5 percent said they were "definitely not going."

**Factors influencing the decision to travel to Europe:** Personal financial health seems to be the main factor, as 50 percent of respondents rated it either a major consideration or the most important consideration. Another 41 percent called it "somewhat" or "fairly important" in the decision process.

Only 2.7 percent of respondents said the value of the dollar was the most important element in the travel decision, and 20.2 percent said it was

a major consideration. Another 60.7 percent said the value of the dollar was "somewhat important," or "fairly important."

Airline fares were next in importance. Only 9.4 percent said they were "not a consideration," while nearly 36 percent called them either a "major consideration" or the "most important element in the decision process." Another 55 percent called them "somewhat" or "fairly" important.

Time away from work or family, the hassle of travel, and jetlag, do not seem to play a great part in the go/no-go decision, though one in five respondents said time away from work was "fairly important," a "major consideration," or the "most important element" in deciding.

**The main reason I go to Europe:** An overwhelming 83.6 percent travel to "vacation, relax and enjoy." "Visit family" was cited by 12.1 per-

*Continued on page 8...*

**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](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: **vna** Password: **1482**

Vol. 22, No. 10  
Dec. 08/Jan. 09

**GEMÜTLICHKEIT**

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

**Publishers:** Robert H. & Elizabeth S. Bestor  
**Executive Editor:** Nikki Goth Itoi  
**Contributors:** Tom Bross

**Consulting Editor:** Sharon Hudgins  
**Online Services:** Thomas P. Bestor  
Kurt Steffans

**Subscriber Travel Services:** Andy Bestor, Laura Riedel

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

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

**HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY**

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		

Hotel Rating Criteria	Value Rating	Scale
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value 17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value 12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value 9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value 5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off 0 - 4

**BOB BESTOR***Continued from page 1*

again. I hope you will indulge me, as some of them we've covered before—several times:

(Price code: I=inexpensive, M=Moderate, E=Expensive)

**Hotels Germany****Art Nouveau, Berlin**

([www.hotelartnouveau.de](http://www.hotelartnouveau.de), tel. +49/30 32 77 440). An international clientele, superb location in one of the city's most interesting neighborhoods; spacious, comfortable rooms; and, most of all, caring, knowledgeable management, make this my favorite family-run, big-city hotel of all-time. (M)

**Anker, Marktheidenfeld**

([www.hotel-anker.de](http://www.hotel-anker.de), tel. +49/9391 6 00 40) About 45 minutes by car from the Frankfurt Airport, thus ideal for a first night. Solid, comfortable accommodations, a cut below luxury. The Deppisch family's warm welcome is old-school. (M)

**Neu-Meran, Bad Reichenhall-Nonn** ([www.hotel-neu-meran.de/](http://www.hotel-neu-meran.de/), tel. +49/8651 40 78) Hidden in the forest above Bad Reichenhall. Family-owned, with great "old world" charm. They don't seem to make 'em like this anymore. (M)

**Hotel Petrisberg, Trier**

([www.hotel-petrisberg.de](http://www.hotel-petrisberg.de), tel. +49/651 4 640) Legendary hospitality in a gorgeous setting. (I-M)

**Wreecher Hof, Putbus-Wreechen** on the Isle of Rügen. ([www.wreecher-hof.de](http://www.wreecher-hof.de), tel. +49/38301 850) Top-flight accommodations at an amazing price. Beautiful, quiet setting and location. (M-E)

**Restaurants Germany**

**Gasthof Fraundorfer, Garmisch-Partenkirchen** ([www.gasthof-fraundorfer.de](http://www.gasthof-fraundorfer.de), tel. +49/8821 92 70) While guestrooms are not special (time for some refurbishing), the hotel is inexpensive and Bavarian-country to its core. But what *is* special, and draws me back again and again, is dinner and the music in the kitschy *Stube*. If I had but one night to spend in Germany, it might be here. (I)

**Rogacki, Berlin** ([rogacki.de](http://rogacki.de), tel. +49/30 343 8250) Can a stand-up lunch counter haunt one's dreams? This one does mine. Unbelievably low-priced, fresh, fresh, fresh seafood prepared before your eyes. Great people watching. (I)

**Hotel Krone, Niederstetten** ([www.hotelgasthofkrone.de](http://www.hotelgasthofkrone.de), tel. +49/79 32 8990) Really good food served almost entirely to locals in a tiny, off-the-beaten-track village 50km south of Würzburg. (I-M)

**Zimmermann's Lübecker Hanse, Lübeck** ([www.luebecker-hanse.de](http://www.luebecker-hanse.de), tel. +49/451 780 54) A tad upscale but a couple will eat and drink well here for around \$100. (M)

**Söl'ring Hof, Sylt-Rantum** ([www.dorint.com/en/hotel-sylt-westerland](http://www.dorint.com/en/hotel-sylt-westerland), tel. +49 4651 8500) I can't figure why Michelin withholds a third-star. Our best restaurant meal in 10 years. Bring many euros. (E)

**German towns I'm anxious to get back to:** Berlin, Bamberg, Freiburg, Quedlinburg, Coburg, Hamburg, Schwabisch Hall, Weimar

**Miscellaneous Germany**

ICE trains; the food floor of Berlin's KaDeWe department store and its Budvar/Pilsner Urquell (Czech beer) concession; sausages at Nürnberg's Bratwursthäusle; driving back roads: beaches on the islands of Rügen and Sylt; Wieskirche; Munich's Asamkirche; the Carriage Museum, grounds, and Botanical Gardens at Munich's Nymphenburg Palace; the Mosel; Schloss Herrenchiemsee; the village of Seeg near Füssen; Coburg's Veste; the churches at Zwiefalten and Ottoberen; Schloss Hohenzollern; Wehlener Sonnenuhr (wine); Augustiner (beer).

**Austria Hotels**

**Schloss Haunspurg, Oberalm bei Hallein** ([www.schlosshaunspurg.com](http://www.schlosshaunspurg.com), tel. +43/6245 80 662) An absolutely unique hotel experience. Unmatched "Old World" hospitality. Words fail. The amazing von Gernerths whisper retirement so see this place soon. (M)

**Altstadt, Vienna**

([www.altstadt.at](http://www.altstadt.at), tel. +43/1 522 66 66) Though this place has moved a bit upscale, in the context of Vienna hotels it's still good value. I like the neighborhood, the modern décor, and especially owner Otto Wiesenthal and his capable staff. (M-E)

**Kaiserin Elisabeth, Vienna**

([www.kaiserinelisabeth.at](http://www.kaiserinelisabeth.at), tel. +43/1 51 526) For many years our *Wien* headquarters. More than I like to pay, but best possible location, spacious rooms, and you know you're in Vienna. I recall when, for days at a time, we were able to park the rental car on the street 50 feet from the hotel's front door. Those days are long gone. (M-E)

**Mader, Steyr** ([www.mader.at](http://www.mader.at), tel. +43/7252 53 358) Comfortable, friendly hotel right on the main square of one of Austria's underrated towns. (M)

**Gasthof Schorn, St. Leonhard-Grödig near Salzburg** ([www.gasthofschorn.at/en](http://www.gasthofschorn.at/en), tel. +43/6246 72 334) I've gotten a couple of tough emails (though many more in praise) about this place and its proximity to a noisy highway. That may be a problem when the weather is hot and windows must be opened, but 90-percent of the time I see it as a great value. Love the restaurant. (I)

**Austria Restaurants**

**Hotel Der Bär, Ellmau** ([www.hotelbaer.com/de](http://www.hotelbaer.com/de), tel. +43/5358 2395) Good food served in gleaming wood-paneled/ceilinged dining room, with great views of mountains and meadow. (M)

**Gasthof Ubl, Vienna (Pressgasse 26, tel + 43 1587 6437)** Just found this place last year. Dark wood paneling, genuine *Alt Wien* ambiance. Best value meal of the last several years. Few tourists. Worth a journey. (I)

**Gasthof Auerhahn, Salzburg.** ([www.auerhahn-salzburg.at](http://www.auerhahn-salzburg.at), tel. +43/662 45 10 52) In our entry hall hangs a watercolor purchased off the restaurant's wall 10 years ago for about \$50. It is the work of a local doctor who displayed the product of his hobby there. Food? Michelin

gives Auerhahn a red *Karte*. Need I say more? (M)

#### Rusterhof, Rust

([www.mooslechners.at](http://www.mooslechners.at), tel. +43 2685 60 793) Wonderful little restaurant and hotel (four very nice rooms) right on the town square. This is wine country (especially dessert wine) and the Rusterhof has a long list of the local product. (M)

**Gasthof Steinerwert**, Zell am See ([www.gastlichkeit.com](http://www.gastlichkeit.com), tel. +43/6542 72 502) Superb down-home Austrian country cooking. Familiar dishes, expertly prepared with the freshest ingredients. (I)

**Austrian towns I'm anxious to get back to:** Vienna, Graz, Steyr, Hallstatt, Rust, Bad Ausee, Maria Zell, Kremsmünster, Lech

#### Miscellaneous Austria

Almost everything in Vienna but especially Kaisergruft, Dorotheum, Flohmarkt, Prater, Secession building, Schatzkammer in the Hofberg, Hundertwasser Haus, Kunst-HausWien, Zentralfriedhof (graves of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Strauss, et al), *Die Fledermaus* at the

#### 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.travel essentials.com](http://www.travel essentials.com) Guidebooks, maps, travel accessories, luggage, all at 10 percent off for subscribers. Use discount code gemut2009.
- [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 electronics for travelers — cell phones, computers, etc.

Volksoper, and breakfast at Café Schwarzenberg; the Grossglockner; the Wachau; Burgenland and Neusiedlersee; the Südsteirische Weinstrasse; Reidel wine glass factory in Kufstein; Archbishop Wolf Dietrich's Salzburg tomb; mountain train ride from Badgastein to Villach; horseradish soup at Hotel Erzherzog Johann in Graz; Gösser beer.

#### Switzerland Hotels

**Hotel Beau-Rivage Palace**, Lausanne ([www.beau-rivage-palace.ch](http://www.beau-rivage-palace.ch), tel. +41/21 613 33 33). If I had one night to spend in one hotel in all the world...(E)

**Grand Hotel Victoria Jungfrau**, Interlaken ([www.victoria-jungfrau.ch](http://www.victoria-jungfrau.ch), tel. +41/33 828 28 28) If the Beau-Rivage was fully booked...(E)

**Chalet du Lac**, Iseltwald ([www.dulac-iseltwald.ch](http://www.dulac-iseltwald.ch), tel. +41/33 845 84 58) Killer location in a quiet village on Brienzensee. Very good seafood restaurant. The view of the little harbor from a balcony room on the front of the hotel is quite special. (M)

**Waldhotel Doldenhorn**, Kandersteg. ([www.doldenhorn-ruedihus.ch](http://www.doldenhorn-ruedihus.ch), tel. +41/33 675 81 81) A wonderful, family-owned mountain hideaway that's unfortunately gotten expensive. Room 205 looks across the valley to a thin, silvery ribbon of water as it falls hundreds of feet along a sheer rock wall to the valley floor. Heaven. (E)

**Hotel Hirschen**, Langnau. ([www.hirschen-langnau.ch](http://www.hirschen-langnau.ch), tel. +41 34 402 1517) Rustic country hotel in the Emmental with an excellent kitchen. Outstanding value. (M)

#### Switzerland Restaurants

**Stazione "da Agnese," Intragna.** ([www.daagnese.ch](http://www.daagnese.ch), tel. +41/91 796 1212 ) Creative cuisine at a decent price near Locarno. These are NOT dishes from *Grosmuetti's* country kitchen. Ten lovely guestrooms as well. (M-E)

**Forni**, Airolo. ([www.forni.ch/](http://www.forni.ch/), tel. +41/918 691 270) A way off the beaten track place that's "in my head." Intensely-flavored wild

mushroom bits in filo pastry, the all-time best venison, and more. The hotel is also a keeper; inexpensive and across from the train station. (M)

#### Zeughauskeller, Zürich

([www.zeughauskeller.ch](http://www.zeughauskeller.ch), tel. +41 44 211 2690) Yeah, I know it's in all the guidebooks but it's always full of locals, from billionaires to working stiffs. Swiss country favorites prepared with the finest ingredients. (I-M)

#### Lorenzini, Bern

([www.lorenzini.ch](http://www.lorenzini.ch), tel. +41/31 318 5067) I love Italian and this place has never let us down. A lasting image is of a fat, white truffle being grated over a plate of glistening tagliatelle. (M)


**L'Ermitage**, Vufflens-Le-Château ([www.ravet.ch](http://www.ravet.ch), tel. +41/21 804 68 68) One of the great dining experiences of my life, though it's been a few years and M. Ravet now has one star instead of two. The hotel property and surrounding countryside (very close Audrey Hepburn's home in Tolochenaz) are gorgeous. For affluent foodies who want a special weekend, this is my top recommendation. (E)

**Swiss towns I'm anxious to get back to:** Mürren, Bern, Lausanne, Montreux, Locarno, Appenzell, Basel, Zürich, Pontresina, Iseltwald, Neuchâtel, Sion, Morges, Château-d'Oex, Kandersteg

#### Miscellaneous Switzerland:

Close-up views of the Eiger and Jungfrau from almost any place in Mürren; Swiss trains and lake boats; the helicopter ride to Les Diableret glacier (about 11,000 feet), the snow-cat ride from the chopper to the mountain restaurant, lunch and way too much wine in the mountain restaurant, the cable car ride down from the glacier; Lausanne's Olympic Museum; the Lauterbrunnen Valley; the view from vineyards above Vevey across Lac Léman to the Savoie Alps in France; the calves liver at the Bahnhof Restaurant in Saanen; watching, from the swimming pool of Hotel Les Sources des Alpes, a late-afternoon thunderstorm form above the great rock face that looms over Leukerbad.

**Best answer to a tourist's question:** After explaining that the heavy main cable from which his car hangs hundreds of feet up the mountain side is replaced every 18 months, the Swiss cable car operator was asked, "What do you do with the old cables?" With a wink, he quickly replied, "We sell them to the Italians."

I've left out *so much*. 

### NIKKI GOTH ITOI

Continued from page 1

Fortunately, the "study" part of study abroad consumed only three days out of every week, leaving the rest for excursions to surrounding towns and neighboring countries. In six months of budget travel, I toured a smattering of major cities and rural villages, from Heidelberg and Munich to Budapest and the Bodensee. There was Christmas in the Alps, New Year's in Nice, and nightlife in Maribor (Slovenia).

Since those heady days, I've returned to Europe again and again, for business and for pleasure. Living overseas in my twenties kindled a lifetime of wanderlust that I try to indulge at every opportunity. I've experienced Michelin-starred dining in Barcelona, 24-hours of daylight in Helsinki, and café culture in Paris. But these European hotspots are not the places that I remember most vividly. For me, it's off-the-beaten-track destinations in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland that have made the most lasting impressions.

#### Oh, the people you'll meet

When I think back on nearly two decades of travel throughout these Germanic countries, it is the people I remember most: the elderly *hausfrau* who grudgingly rented me a room in Rothenburg, and the man who sold produce from a stand on my way to class; the Ahr Valley vintners who generously shared their wines with my mother and me; the brother of my sister-in-law's butcher, whom we looked up in Hamburg; the pilot who took my husband parasailing over the Zillertal, and the Japanese ski instructor who asked him for help translating Japanese to German;

the friendly tour guide in Trier who led us through Roman ruins; the professor who tried to teach me about Kafka.

Aside from these fond memories, a handful of towns, accommodations, meals, and activities stand apart from the rest. Here are a few of my all-time favorite Europe travel moments:

#### Riding mountain bikes to the snowy top of Septimerpass

My husband and I do not have good karma when it comes to mountain biking. We are notorious for getting lost, running out of food and water, and choosing terrain that is generally unsuitable for bikes. The Septimerpass, southwest of St. Moritz, was no exception. It started out as a gentle climb, but quickly became an impossibly steep grade. And then we reached the snow. It was early May, and though temperatures were pleasantly warm on the valley floor, it was decidedly winter-like at elevation. We toughed it out, slipping and sliding and carrying our bikes in places, until we reached the summit, where a family of frogs were busy sunning themselves in a puddle of melting snow—a most unusual sight to see. We finished the day by reliving the ride over a gourmet dinner of freshly caught *forelle* at **Restaurant Grischuna** (7457 Bivio-CH, tel. +41/081 659 1212, [grischuna\\_bivio@bluewin.ch](mailto:grischuna_bivio@bluewin.ch), [www.grischuna-bivio.ch](http://www.grischuna-bivio.ch)) in Bivio, and then it was early to bed in our comfortable room at the friendly **Hotel Solaria** (Strada del Guiglia 43, CH-7457 Bivio, tel. +41/081 684 5107, [solaria@hotelsolariabivio.ch](mailto:solaria@hotelsolariabivio.ch), [www.hotelsolariabivio.ch](http://www.hotelsolariabivio.ch)).

#### Tasting Germany's finest red wines in the Ahr Valley

My mother had never been out of the country (unless you count Canada) when I invited her to accompany me on a trip to the Ahr Valley. I had heard that Germany makes red wines and wanted to find out how they compared to their better known—and more widely available—counterparts in France and

California. The Spätburgunders, Portugiesers, and Dornfelders that we tasted certainly pleased the palate.

But even more memorable was our lunch in the neighboring spa town of Bad Neuenahr, at **Restaurant Idille** (Am Johannisberg 101, D-53474 Bad Neuenahr, tel +49-2641-28429). Perched high on a hill, this tiny restaurant had spectacular views and a seasonal, French-inspired menu that featured fresh local ingredients. We began sipping a flowery Sekt made from elder blossoms, moved on to the roasted chicken breast, and finished with a decadent chocolate mousse.

Our home base for the trip was the grand **Hotel Lochmühle** (Ahrrotweinstrasse/Bundesstrasse 62, [Route B267] 53508 Mayschoss, tel. +49 2643-8080, [hotel-lochmuehle@t-online.de](mailto:hotel-lochmuehle@t-online.de), [www.hotel-lochmuehle.de](http://www.hotel-lochmuehle.de)), set along the riverbank and surrounded by vineyards.

#### Slopeside dining on an Austrian ski tour

Skiing is a different sport in Austria. In the U.S., our purpose-built resorts are expensive and with few exceptions, far removed from real local communities. But in Austria, downhill skiing is an everyday activity that appeals to all ages, from toddlers to seniors. Just about every alpine town has its own gondola, cable car, chair lift, or rope tow, which means the locals can take a few runs before work or after school. This flexibility sets the tone for a relaxed and festive atmosphere on the slopes. Mountaintop ice bars serve tall steins of Gösser beer for the après ski crowd, and it is perfectly acceptable to take a few runs, quit early for lunch, and soak up some of that high-altitude sunshine. Lunching on brats and beer became a daily ritual as we roamed from Mayrhofen and Saalbach in the Alps to Lienz in the Dolomites, searching for fresh powder.

#### Soaring over the Zillertal

When a friendly Mayrhofen tourist office liaison invited me to try paragliding and explained that it would involve running off the side

of a cliff, high above the Zillertal, I nominated my husband for the job. He would be attached to a sail and an instructor, but the valley floor was a long way down. He rode the cable car up to the summit, while I waited in a field below, watching dozens of brightly colored sails spinning round and round as they drifted lower and lower. When at last my paraglider landed, he reported that the aerial views had been superb, he just wished he'd had some Dramamine.

That night, we celebrated his safe return with a hearty dinner in a 400-year-old farmhouse, the **Wirtshaus zum Griena** (Mayrhofen, Dorf Haus 768, tel +43 5285/62 778). We ordered *Blutwuchtreaschtl*, blood sausage and diced potatoes pan fried and then baked in a heavy iron skillet until the top is crusty, and *Kaasschpazlang*, sinfully rich noodles baked with cheese and topped with bread crumbs. Our only regret was that we had not thought to arrive by horse-drawn sleigh.

### Wandering through Roman ruins in Trier

On a tour of the Mosel River, a stopover in Trier revealed an unexpected attraction: Roman ruins in Germany—lots of them. We walked through the Porta Nigra, Basilika, and Imperial Baths, and attended a performance in the amphitheatre. But even more impressive than the walking tour were the accommodations at **Klosterschenke** (Klosterstr. 10, D-54293 Trier-Pfalzel, tel. +49/0651/6089), an 800 year-old monastery that was converted into a guest house in the early 1800s.

*Nikki Goth Itoi is a travel writer living in Davis, California. She wrote her first story for Gemütlichkeit in 1998 and has contributed numerous features in the years since, covering topics such as German wines, Austrian ski resorts, and outdoor adventure in Switzerland. Nikki is also the author of the Moon Baja, Moon Cabo, and Moon Hudson River Valley guidebooks.*

## TOM BROSS

Continued from page 1

And so we headed toward increasing levels of crowd clamor emanating from the Saxon trade-fair city's vast main square (re-named Augustusplatz post-reunification), flanked on opposite sides by the opera house and Gewandhaus concert hall. Suddenly, a cup containing a flickering candle was thrust into my hand as we plunged into that night's episode of local citizenry mass protesting against socialist-GDR bureaucratic control—everyone shouting and chanting, some waving *Wir Sind das Volk!* banners demanding “we-the-people” civil liberties. Others hoisted placards lampooning hard-line, Leipzig-born GDR boss Walter Ulbricht. Nearly 70,000 of us jammed the place, with hundreds more surging in from ring roads wrapped around the *Innenstadt*.

My impressions of Leipzig and all of Germany—plus Austria, Switzerland and the “New Europe”—have always hinged on those kinds of close, in-your-face encounters with major events and achievements. Not every experience can match the intensity and immediacy of October's “Leipzig Miracle” from 20 years ago, an escalation of public outbursts that led directly to the collapse of socialist East Germany's government.

### Dresden, Lucerne, Budapest, Berlin

Nevertheless, also unforgettable: Admiring Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (in Dresden's **Gallery of the Old Masters**); walking across Lucerne's colorfully painted **Kapellbrücke** (a timber-roofed 14<sup>th</sup>-century old-timer spanning the River Reuss, destroyed by fire in 1993 but carefully restored since); communing with Mozart and Mahler during a Vienna Philharmonic concert in the gilded Musikverein; watching fireworks explode above Budapest's Danube Bend (climaxing Hungarian National Day).

No European capital outdoes sprawling, buzzing Berlin when it comes to past-present contrasts. Such as: tracing the zigzagging, curving outline of the former Wall, which divided inner-city districts with 96 miles/155 km. of concrete-slab barriers. Now they're gone—except for random memorialized leftovers—but chronicled in Kreuzberg's **Haus am Checkpoint Charlie** (Friedrichstrasse 43-45) and Wedding's **Berliner Mauer Documentation Center** (Bernauer Strasse 111).

Thanks to an afternoon of bicycle-pedaling from-to hip, edgy Prenzlauer-Berg, I learned more than ever before about the Wall and its watchtower and border-crossing infrastructure, with in-between *Todesstreifen* death strips transformed into greenbelts and playgrounds. Contact Berlin on Bike for a self-rental (€10) or guided (€17) jaunt ([www.berlinonbike.de](http://www.berlinonbike.de)).

### Lodging/Dining Favorites

**In Leipzig:** True to its Goethe-inspired fame, **Auerbachs Keller** usually gets crowded, so opt instead for another old-timer, dating from 1841: *gemütlich* **Zil's Tunnel** (Barfussgässchen 9, tel. +49/0341/960/2078), my choice for no-frills Leipziger cooking. From Augustusplatz, swing over to **Park Hotel** (Richard-Wagner-Strasse 7, 04109 Leipzig, tel. +49/0341/985/20, [www.parkhotelleipzig.de](http://www.parkhotelleipzig.de)), a 1913 *Jugendstil* beauty, completely transformed in 1996 from its earlier existence as the stodgy GDR-era Stadt Leipzig.

**In Dresden:** Closeness to the rebuilt Frauenkirche, Rococo décor and Meissen tableware make **Grand Café Coselpalais** (An der Frauenkirche 12, tel. 49/0351/496/2424), desirable for fine dining, indoors or out on the sandstone forecourt. For overnighting, settle into the stylishly intimate, 30-room **Bülow Residenz** (Rähnitzgasse 19, tel. +49/0351/800/30, [www.Buelow-Residenz.de](http://www.Buelow-Residenz.de)), easily reachable over on the Neustadt side of the Elbe.

**In Vienna:** On an *Innere Stadt* side street, **Figlmüller** (Wollzeile 5, tel. +43/01/512/6177) has been the city's veritable *Wiener Schnitzel* epicenter since opening in 1905. Bare tables and plain benches contrast with tuxedo-outfitted wait staff hoisting the super-size breaded-veal cutlets. Several squeezed-together blocks from St. Stephen's cathedral, **Hollman Beletage** (Köllnerhofgasse 6, tel. +43/01/961/1960, [www.hollmann-beletage.at](http://www.hollmann-beletage.at)) excels as a 16-room designer hotel with its low-slung contemporary furnishings and a leafy courtyard.

**In Lucerne:** Choose traditional Swiss specialties or fresh-caught lakefish at **Zunftthaus zu Pfistern** (Kornmarkt 4, tel. +41/041/410/3650), a balconied ex-guild hall (circa-1341) topped with heavy oak ceiling beams. Centrally situated for lakefront and riverside access, 100-room **Hotel Schiller** Pilatusstrasse 15, tel. +41/041/226/8787, [www.schiller-luzern.de](http://www.schiller-luzern.de)) features cozy nooks and 19<sup>th</sup>-century details.

**In Budapest:** Zesty national gastronomy blends smoothly with locally-brewed Dreher beer, served on the lamplit terrace at **Premier** (Andrássy út.101, tel. +36/342/1768), on a boulevard so historically auspicious that it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site. On the Buda side of the Danube, where Hungary's Royal Castle commands a lofty hilltop, the sleekly modern, 27-room **Hotel Victoria** (Bem Rakpart 11, tel. +36/457/8080; [www.victoria.hu](http://www.victoria.hu)) is ideally sited and big-windowed for river views and Pest skyline panoramas.

**In Berlin:** Some folks can't shake off their misty "Ostalgia" feelings. But we all know that grim, secretive behind-the-Wall East Berlin no longer exists, as evidenced by the central Mitte district's trendy restaurant scene. Minimalist décor and bold menu selections make **Zoe** (Rochstrasse 1, tel. +49/030/240/456/35) fit right in. It's not far from Alexanderplatz. **Aigner** (Französische Strasse 25, tel. +49/030/751/1850) another favorite, faces the Gendarmenmarkt's splendid architectural

ensemble. Midway between Potsdamer Platz and lively Friedrichstrasse, 392-room **NH Berlin-Mitte** (Leipziger Strasse 106-111, tel. +49/030/203/760, [www.nh-hotels.com](http://www.nh-hotels.com)) has first-class stature. .

*As a frequent contributor to magazines, newspapers, newsletters and guidebooks, Boston-based Tom Bross has been writing about (and photographing) German, Austrian and Swiss destinations and events since the early '70s. A 1953 journalism graduate of Marquette University, he proudly claims first-generation "roots" in the Offenburg area of southwesterly Baden-Württemberg.* ☒

## SHARON HUDGINS

Continued from page 1

al snobbery, a sense of superiority that causes us to erect a barrier between ourselves and the possibility of experiencing an old, familiar place in new and unexpected ways?

Having lived in Germany for 15 years and traveled extensively throughout the country, I do have my own preferences for particular cities, towns, regions, and foods. And I've always tried to avoid the tourist crowds whenever possible. So my first trip to Rothenburg-obder-Tauber—more than three decades ago—convinced me that seeing Rothenburg once was enough.

It seems like every visitor to Germany eventually goes to Rothenburg, the little medieval walled town that travel writers always tout as "charming" and "picturesque." And it felt like all the tourists in Germany had decided to show up in Rothenburg on the same sweltering summer day I was there.

The town was surrounded by tour buses. All the auto parking lots were full. Crowds were streaming through the old stone gates into the city. Hordes of sweaty tourists were stuffed into the small souvenir shops, pushing through the narrow streets, and occupying all the seats in the beer gardens and sidewalk cafes. It took a long stretch of my imagination to find anything charming or picturesque about Rothenburg.

Bored, frustrated, and soaked in sweat myself, I left after a couple of hours, vowing not to return.

Fast forward to a few years later, when my husband and I were driving across Germany en route to a new job, in a big station wagon loaded to the top with all our worldly goods. An unexpected snowstorm forced us to stop overnight in Rothenburg, hundreds of kilometers from our destination. Since it was the night before New Year's Eve, we were surprised to find a comfortable room still available at a modest *Gasthaus* near the main square. The town was quiet, with only a few locals out shopping for the coming holiday feast. There was even a safe place to park our car with all our precious possessions.

After a night of heavy snowfall, the view from our bedroom window the next morning looked like a scene on an old-fashioned Christmas card. Okay, I admit it was "charming" and "picturesque"—enough that we decided to stay another day and explore "romantic Rothenburg."

By dinner time that evening, the frigid weather had made us ravenous. But every restaurant we entered was already booked up for New Year's Eve. Finally we found the only place in town that had one table left—a rather fancy restaurant in the Baumeisterhaus, a historic stone building dating from 1596. Still wearing our traveling clothes—wool sweaters, corduroy jeans, and heavy hiking boots—we joined the elegantly attired Germans who had come there to celebrate Sylvesterabend (St. Silvester's Eve, as they call New Year's Eve).

The meal was superb, the wine one of our favorites, and the band enthusiastic. As we joined the happy Germans taking a turn around the dance floor, no one seemed to mind that we weren't dressed for the festive occasion.

We left the restaurant in high spirits late that night, treading on newly fallen snow behind three characters in medieval costumes, one of them carrying an old lantern.

As we followed them down a winding cobblestone lane, with no one else in sight and the only light an eerie glow from the lantern, we felt like we'd slipped through a time warp straight back into the Middle Ages. Romantic Rothenburg indeed!

Just before midnight, we wended our way back to the town's main square, where dozens of people had gathered to watch a spectacular fireworks display at the stroke of twelve. For the next half hour the majestic old buildings around the square were lit up by the flash of firecrackers, the glare of Roman candles, and the brilliance of pyrotechnic starbursts in the cold, clear sky.

By the time the fireworks finished we were frozen to the bone, ready to crawl into bed under warm eiderdowns and drift into sweet sleep. But when we returned to our little *Gasthaus* a noisy party was in full swing in the *Stube* (main room), where a group of locals danced to German folk tunes played by a fiddler and accordionist.

We tried to sneak up the back stairs without being noticed, but the innkeeper caught us and insisted we join the fun. He passed out free glasses of *Gluhwein* (hot spiced wine) and slices of *Speckkuchen* (bacon tart) to all of his guests. The *Stube* was cozy, the music was lilting, and the other revelers beckoned us to come in. It was an offer we couldn't refuse.

That unforgettable New Year's Eve found us singing and dancing in Rothenburg until three in the morning, celebrating the holiday spontaneously—with good food and good drink, in the company of friendly strangers, in the warmth of an old *Gasthaus* that had been there for centuries.

Did I change my opinion of Rothenburg? You bet. Do I now think twice (or thrice, or more) about attitudes formed by first impressions? Yes, indeed. Lesson learned. And what a wonderful way to learn it.

*Sharon Hudgins is an award-winning author of four books and more than*

*600 food, travel, and cultural articles published around the world. She is the food columnist for German Life magazine and a lecturer on tours sponsored by National Geographic and Lindblad Expeditions.*

## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 1

cent of respondents and "business/study" drew 4.3 percent.

**Preferred style of travel:** Not surprisingly, 95.1 percent chose "independent travel, I rent a car and/or travel by rail." Only 3.3 percent travel on package tours with a group, and 1.6 percent prefer river cruising.

**When traveling independently, which of these methods—rail, automobile, car—do you prefer in getting from city to city?:** Automobile drew 64 percent of respondents, rail 32.9 percent and air 3.2 percent.

**Where do you stay when in Europe?:** Top brand name hotels are used "sometimes" by 45.2 percent, "never" by 43.8 percent, "usually" by 9.9 percent, and "always" by a mere 1.1 percent.

Smaller, family-owned hotels are "usually" frequented by 54.6 percent, "sometimes" by 33.5 percent, "always" by 8.5 percent, and "never" by 3.3 percent. (*Editor's note: this last result is perhaps the most puzzling of the survey in that more than three out of every 100 never experience what I consider the essence of European travel, small, family-operated hotels.*)

Bed & Breakfast in private homes are used "sometimes" by 44.1 percent; "never" by 34.5 percent, "usually" by 19.2 percent, and "always" by 2.2 percent.

Vacation rentals are "never" the choice of 48.4 percent, "sometimes" by 35.3 percent, "usually" by 12.9 percent, and "always" by 3.4 percent.

Hostels are "sometimes," "usually," or "always" the choice of only 10 percent of respondents, and nearly 50 percent stay with family or friends "sometimes," "usually," or "always."

I was also somewhat surprised at the response to the question, **When booking European travel I make the majority of my reservations for air, ground transport, and accommodations, 1.) via the internet; 2.) with a real live person usually by phone.** Only 18.2 percent chose "live person," the rest, 81.8 percent, say they use the internet for bookings.

The question regarding a **preferred airline for transatlantic travel** listed 16 airline choices and also invited comments. Lufthansa was the clear winner, chosen by 38.6 percent of respondents. Next came Delta at 11.3 percent. The other 14 airlines divided the remaining 50.1 percent of responses.

More interesting, however, were the comments. Air Berlin (formerly LTU) should have been one of our listed choices but was not. It received by far the most "write-in" remarks. Here are a few others:

- *We're stuck with American because of mileage from credit cards*
- *I don't know the difference, I have only flown Delta*
- *Any major airline that gets me where I need to go and won't leave me stranded.*
- *Cheap Sky Team alliance flight so I can get double miles (Delta gold Medallion)*
- *Delta because they fly direct to Berlin from JFK*
- *They all wash out in the end; I choose on route, times and price*
- *Don't much care; whatever is cheapest*
- *Any airline but one based in the U.S.!!!*
- *They are all bad compared to a few years ago. There is far less leg room in coach.*
- *Private Lear Jet or any with a king-sized bed*
- *Cost more important than carrier*
- *None of the above. Whoever will take my frequent flyer miles*
- *Mrs. Ferguson's Storm Door and Airline Co.*

Happy travels in 2009, see you next month—RHB