



STAMMTISCH

by Pierre Hurter

One of the joys of traveling is that you begin to suspect that things at home are not really as bad as they may seem. We just got back from three weeks in Vienna and Switzerland, well Ober Rifferswil to be exact. Shortly before we left I was struck by an article about a 290-pound diner who claimed that the White Castle Burger chain had violated the civil rights of its supersized clientele by not following through on promises to make its booths bigger to accommodate their rotund bellies.

You read an article like that and you wonder if there is any hope left for America, but more on that latter. Fast forward to the airport, SFO to be exact. The limo had glided into our driveway 15 minutes before the appointed hour as they always do. We piled our bags, both of them, along with our matching rucksacks, which we were to carry onboard, into the trunk. The rucksacks were full of the things you need to survive a modern coach flight, inflatable neck pillow, eyeshades, toothbrush, reading material, etc. We were on our way to a vacation in the old country, Austria and Switzerland. Three weeks of enjoying the sites, the food and just taking it easy.

I find something unsettling about the whole airport experience. They're vast, cavernous, one minute they are eerily quite, no one seems to be around, all of the counters are closed, no one at the information booth, the next minute the place is overrun by

polyglot hordes pushing or pulling their wheeled assault vehicles, plowing a path of mayhem as they stream through the airport like ants on a rampage. Some of them even seem to know where they are going, though occasionally knots of them will form mid stream as they attempt to decipher the arrivals and departure boards flashing overhead. It's like watching salmon swimming up stream to spawn; I'm always on the lookout for the Grizzlies.



Aside from the security production where hordes of people are herded along like cows to their slaughter, sagging socks and pants around their ankles, desperately looking for the belt they last saw in one of the anonymous grey bins trundling down the conveyor belt there is one thing I really dislike about airports ... that feeling you get when you realize that the baggage carousel has disgorged all of the bags that it is going to and yours was not among them.

After unfolding ourselves from our seats on arrival in Zurich, we wandered the airport and had a mlange, coffee and cream, while watching the planes come and go and waiting for our flight to Vienna. I wanted to pick up a Rolex or two, but Gerda persuaded me to wait, something about the Swiss Franc being strong, the Euro weak against the dollar and the fact that I couldn't really afford one, let alone two regardless of the currency in question.

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Reefer's Rap 2011

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
<p>08 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 14 - Paris International Dive Show - salondelaplongee.com 19 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location 22 - Boot Show - Dusseldorf - boot.de 28 - Baltimore Washington Dive Show - divechronicles.com</p>	<p>16 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location 18 - Our World Underwater 41 - ourworldunderwater.com 18 - Golden Dolphin - Moscow 25 - Texas Dive Show - divechronicles.com/texas</p>	<p>05 - Great Lake Shipwreck Festival - Ann Harbor 09 - SF Ocean Film Festival - oceanfilmfest.org 16 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location 18 - Ohio Scuba Fest - scubafest.org 19 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 25 - Beneath the Sea - New Jersey beneaththesea.org 26 - London International Dive Show</p>
APRIL	MAY	JUNE
<p>01 - Abalone Opener - Fort Ross - CenCal 08 - Dive & Travel - Tacoma - diveandtravelexpo.com 08 - Bay Area Dive Show - San Jose - www.divechronicles.com 16 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 20 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location 16-18 - Ocean Fest - Fort Lauderdale www.oceanfest.com</p>	<p>14 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 18 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location 21-23 - Dive & Travel Expo - Tacoma - www.diveandtravelexpo.com</p>	<p>04 - Scuba Show - Long Beach - scubashow.com 11 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 15 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location TBD - Abalone Closer</p>
JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
<p>01 - Malaysia International Dive Expo 16 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 20 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location</p>	<p>TBD - Abalone Opener 14-16 - Channel Islands - Jim Vallario - 415.566.0784</p>	<p>24 - Colorado Dive Show - Denver - divechronicles.com 17 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 21 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location</p>
OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
<p>15 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 19 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location 22 - UK Dive Show - Birmingham - diveshows.uk.com</p>	<p>02 - The DEMA Show - Orlando - www.demashow.com 12 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 16 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location TBD - Abalone Closer</p>	<p>10 - Sanctuary Dive Boat - K Dock - 07:30 21 - Movable Feast - Check our Yahoo Site for Location</p>

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After a short hop we started our first night in Vienna without luggage, but enjoying a *Jause*, a sort of Viennese snack, at our Pension. I had the blood sausage, served cold with mustard, freshly grated horseradish, whipped cream (*Schlagobers*), it is Vienna after all, some fresh bread and a carafe of Roter Veltliner. Gerda decided on a sampling of air-cured meats sliced paper-thin. A good way to end the day, we'd worry about the luggage later, who really needs it anyway?

Nothing like a good night sleep followed up by a breakfast of strong coffee, a three-minute egg and a buffet of luncheon meats to take the edge off the jet lag. For those looking for a healthier alternative there was the "Bio" breakfast, muesli, yogurt and fresh fruit. Afterwards we took a walk in the woods. The Wienerwald covers an area of approximately 250,000 acres and embraces Vienna to the West. It's a great place to go when you want to escape the bustle of the city and enjoy a quieter interlude. Vienna has a population around 1.7 million, about 25% of the Austrian population lives there, small compared to New York, but certainly bigger than San Francisco. After our postprandial wander we returned to find our bags sitting in our room waiting for us.

Highlights of our visit to Vienna included tabloid articles hinting that Arnold Schwarzenegger might be returning to Austria to enter politics. Apparently the rest of the world is as desperate for something new in the political theater as we are. The other thing we have in common with European politics, at least in Austria and Switzerland is that most of their problems are apparently caused by the uncontrolled influx of foreigners. Yep, those illegals are everywhere and they are taking jobs away from the locals, including apparently local criminals.

The other thing I am glad to report on is that the days when Europeans can make fun of American's for being fat are over. We have reached parity in this area. I guess you can only eat all those *Schnitzel*, *Roesti*, *Fondue* and *Geschnetzelt*s for so long before it starts to stick to your ribs.

Aside from folks in Europe having the same issues as the White Castle patron, you can't help but notice that the infrastructure here seems to work. It's clean, tidy and on time. Now in Austria you can reasonably blame that on the leftists, socialists, Trotskyites, etc., but in Switzerland it gets a bit more complicated. Here you have a

conservative country, women didn't get to vote in Appenzell until 1990. The majority of males serve in the military, which aside from a small group of professionals is an all-conscript army. While you're actively serving, typically from 20 to 34, you keep your issued gear including personal weapons at home. Still, despite being anti-foreigner, pro military and having one of the lower tax rates in Europe, unemployment is low, there are few homeless and people don't worry about health care and retirement, at least not the way they do here. Maybe it's because people have high expectations of the government. They willingly pay their taxes, but they expect a high level of service in return.

So travels behind us, it's time to get on with the day to day. Looking forward to go diving soon; missed out on the October Sanctuary dive as both of us had nasty colds a souvenir of our trip, at least it was free. Next month maybe something about the *SS Gairsoppa*, sunk off the coast of Ireland in 1941 on its way from India with a cargo of 200 tons of silver. Or the *Nautilus*, captained by George Hubert Wilkens, pilot, spy and adventurer. In the meantime, keep diving.

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ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO REEF DIVERS (SFRD):

The *Reef Diver Times* is the official newsletter of the San Francisco Reef Divers, a not for profit community organization dedicated to safe sport diving and the preservation of our ocean resources. Membership is \$25 annually, dues payable to "SFRD". The General Meeting is held the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Location is announced one week prior to the meeting. Please check our yahoo site for details <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sfreefdivers/> We meet at 7:00pm for socializing, drinks, food and club business. For more information, visit <http://www.sfreefdivers.org/>.

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