

# Travel Outlook

## France's Strasbourg has German flavor

There is only one thing better than to be in Strasbourg and that is to be in Strasbourg when the spargel is in season.

Strasbourg, contrary to popular belief, is located in France... not in Germany. It is easy to understand why some people are confused since the city seems to have more of a German flavour than French. As a matter of fact, one reporter accompanying the U.S. president on a visit to this city on the Rhine referred to Strasbourg as the city where the sauerkraut has a French accent.

And the spargel? That is the German name for asparagus and here, in early May, the vegetable is as revered as are the wines from the nearby Alsace region.

In this area the gastronomy is as important as life itself. And when the spargel, plump and white, is taken from the ground and sent to the hundreds of kitchens in the area, it is transformed into dishes that not only whet the appetite but also send you back for more.

Guy-Pierre Baumann is one of the premier chefs of France. In addition to his successful restaurant in Paris, he also owns and operates the Maison Kammerzell, located across the square from the Cathedral in Strasbourg. The restaurant was built in 1427, 65 years before Christopher Columbus and his rag-tag crew set foot in the Bahamas.

In the Maison Kammerzell, Deirdre enjoyed a rack of lamb that defied description while I tucked-in to an asparagus dish featuring two sauces. Later I talked with Chef Baumann and asked why he had moved the bulk of his operation from Paris to Strasbourg.

His answer was typical of those I received from many others who had relocated there. Strasbourg seemed to offer everything Paris did without the rudeness and pressure so associated with the City of Lights.

Strasbourg is a unique European city. Originally founded by the Romans in 12 B.C., it soon became the crossroads of Eur-

ope. A flourishing trading centre, it changed hands several times from French to German and vice versa until General Leclerc and his troops liberated it from the Nazis in 1944.

Now, in addition to its prominence as the capital of the Alsace region of France, Strasbourg is also the seat of the Council of Europe and will be, quite literally, the capital of the new Europe of 1992.

Much of the beauty of Strasbourg is found in La Petite France, the old town section of the city. Isolated from the mainland by the River Ill and its locks and canals, here is where the Cathedral stands, built of pink sandstone, with its 142-metre spire. Cruises along the canals and river relive its history with narration in several languages. A chilling touch is added when passing the medieval prison for women with its cold, stone walls. Tourists almost gasp when the guide explains that this barbaric edifice was in use as recently as the last decade.

Strasbourg is also a city of people. Unlike their Parisian counterparts, the natives of Strasbourg want to make their visitors feel at home. Visit a "winstub", a small and very informal restaurant where you

will share a long table many other diners. Don't worry about the language barrier. If German or French is difficult for you, you can still get by with hand gestures and a smile.

And if I have convinced you that Strasbourg is for you, try to plan your visit in May. That's when the spargel is available everywhere.

# You have to act fast if your luggage gets lost



Vince Egan Travel

You may think that you are strong enough to face all the inevitable stresses of modern-day travel, but wait till the airline loses your checked baggage.

There you are in the baggage-claim area at the airport. All your fellow-passengers have picked up their luggage and left, while you stand empty-handed. That's high anxiety like Mother used to make.

When you tell the airline representative the bad news, he or she will either give you a form to fill out (if so, do it then and there) or, more likely, will ask questions and enter a report of the loss into the airline's computer system.

In addition to a detailed description of the luggage, and your ticket coupon or boarding pass (which, of course, you retained just in case), you might be asked for a list of the contents of the lost luggage. You will either congratulate yourself on having had the foresight to make a list when you packed - or you will certainly make a resolution to do so in the future.

### EMERGENCY CASH

From recent personal experience, it seems unlikely that you will be offered anything except sympathy. So, if you are away from home, ask for \$50 emergency compensation, for the purchase of toilet necessities and the like.

The airline ought to issue that payment immediately, but it may stall until you return with receipts for your emergency purchases. As for the story that the carrier is required to pay you a certain daily allowance until it finds your property, that's a myth.

What you will get, however, are lots of empty assurances, mostly to the effect that lost bags are eventually found in whatever propor-

tion of situations that the airline representative may dream up - nine out of 10, or 99 out of 100, or 99.9 per cent. (I heard all of those and more.)

After three days - or four, again depending upon the person you speak to - the buck is passed from the local station of the airline to its central baggage department.

That department, you will be assured, has a computer system that will surely find your luggage. If it doesn't, however, then the industry-wide computer system is sure to come up with it. Sure.

### CLAIM FORM

In the meantime, the airline will mail you a Passenger Property Claims form, which must be notarized (at your expense).

"Failure to correctly list contents (could) void your claim," the red-ink heading warns. The airline evidently expects you to know - in the case of every article you packed - its serial or model number, the name and address of the store at which it was purchased, the month and year of purchase and the original cost.

Also: The weight of your missing luggage, how many minutes before departure time the baggage was checked in and details of any previous loss of luggage on any airline.

If the luggage never turns up and your claim is allowed, maximum pay-outs is \$1,250.

Figures compiled by the International Civil Aviation Organization show that for every 140 airline passengers, the luggage of one will be mishandled. Most of those do turn up (the one that prompted this column did so 15 days after it had disappeared), but some never do.

### BE PREPARED

What can you do to protect yourself against the inconvenience (or worse) of losing your luggage?

Pack essentials and high-value items in your carry-on bags - medicine, toilet kits, shaver, jewelry and so on. If you are flying to a wedding or other dress-up function, the proper clothing is clearly essential - so carry it in a garment bag and board the airplane as early as possible, because on-board space for such bags fills up quickly.

One experienced couple always takes two suitcases, each case packed with half of each spouse's clothing. It's highly unlikely that both suitcases would go astray.

Attach two name-tags (not one) to your luggage. Inside the lid, stick on a label with your name and home address. Put a copy of your travel itinerary and destination address inside as well.

If you can manage to pack everything you require into one or two carry-on bags, you may not only avoid the stress that accompanies the loss of luggage, but also be among the first passengers to clear out of the airport on arrival. Many airline crews, except at peak travel periods, tend not to enforce strictly the regulations concerning the size and amount of hand-luggage a passenger may bring aboard - the more the passenger carries, the less work for the airline's baggage handlers.

Footnote: When the Sheraton Washington Hotel did a one-day survey of business travellers checking out, it counted 140 garment bags, 148 soft-sided suitcases and only 51 hard-sided suitcases.

—Thomson News Service

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