

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

Bump in the Road

Grisly Tale of Signage Ignored

By Colleen Dumont
GLOBE STAFF

Husband (his name is omitted to spare him further ridicule): “How was I supposed to know that thing was there?”

Me: “Well, there was a big warning sign and a bunch of flashing red lights!”

Husband: “So why didn’t you tell me that?”

Me: “I don’t know.”

Fairy-tale castles and beer gardens. While I picked out the hotels and sights to visit on our summer vacation to Germany and Austria, my husband had racier plans in mind: renting a car and driving from Munich through the Alps to Innsbruck and Salzburg. And when in Germany, it only makes sense to rent a German-engineered vehicle. Imagine settling in behind the wheel of a special autobahn-equipped Mercedes and hitting the gas as you speed out onto the roadway, eager to break the 120-miles-per-hour mark (or 190 kilometers per hour, as the case may be). Or cruising through Bavaria on a twisty mountain pass in the fog with only the sound of distant cowbells to guide you along the adventurous stretch of road.

As we neared Salzburg, I breathed a sigh of relief. We were close to reaching our hotel, and the GPS guided us safely around a rotary when we pulled in behind a taxi as we made our approach to the city center.

The cab proceeded, and we followed slowly. Then — THUMP. The grill of the Mercedes flew off and a bright blue liquid trickled down the cobblestone street. Little did we know that this pedestrian-only zone was blocked by something that has now become a banned phrase in our household: the rising bollard.

A bollard is a steel post approximately three feet high and eight inches

in diameter. In some cities, pedestrian zones allow in certain vehicles. Taxis and buses, for example, have transponders that cause the bollard to recede into the ground while the vehicle passes. Needless to say, if you are unaware of this strange European traffic phenomenon and following a cab that is driving over a lowered bollard, it’s a shock to feel it rise up into the engine of your swanky Mercedes, puncturing the coolant tank and providing endless photo ops for the passersby.

The police arrived, and since the car could not be moved without a tow, I figured the best thing for me to do was round up the kids and the luggage and walk to our hotel.

OK, I bailed out. My husband accompanied the Mercedes to the local rental car yard, where he was met by a burly Austrian who muttered, “What did you do to my car?” Since we had rented the car in Germany, we were told we would have to return to Germany in order to pick up another. No thanks. Our family would be just fine taking the train back to Munich.

We tried, mostly successfully, to not let it ruin the rest of our vacation and stuck to less-risky modes of transportation in Salzburg. Fraulein Maria’s Bicycle Tours worked for us.

Thankfully, when you rent a high-end car, the insurance is mandatory. But since the rental agreement was lengthy and in German, we had no idea what we would be facing when it was time to settle with the rental company. After several weeks, the paperwork arrived, containing pages of itemized damage to the tune of \$15,000. We were responsible for 10 percent of the cost, and while that was no small amount, we were grateful to have escaped the bigger price tag.

Best of all, this bump in the road provided us the vacation tale of a lifetime.

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COLLEEN DUMONT/GLOBE STAFF



HERE

AN AUSTRIAN SLEIGH RIDE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE
Snuggle under warm blankets on a 12-passenger Austrian sleigh and let two Belgian draft horses pull you around New Hampshire’s Waterville Valley Resort. The 30-minute ride takes you past historical homes and along village roads on weekends and holidays throughout the winter season. The ride is free for children under 2 on a lap, \$12 for ages 2-12, and \$18 for 13 and older. Or reserve the 12-person sleigh for \$185, or a smaller one-horse sleigh for \$149 with two to four passengers. Rides depart from Town Square every half hour on Fridays, 4-8:30 p.m., Saturdays from 1-8:30 p.m., and Sundays 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Reservations are required, even at the last minute. 603-236-8175, www.waterville.com

LEARN TO COOK IN MAINE LUXURY
Foodies interested in an experiential culinary package should sign up for Maine Indulgence, offered by The Inn at English Meadows, a chic bed-and-breakfast in Kennebunk’s Lower Vil-

lage. This epicurean package blends the flavors of coastal Maine, a hands-on cooking event, and luxurious accommodations. It includes champagne, charcuterie, and cheese upon arrival, a night in one of the inn’s 11 recently renovated rooms, a private hands-on cooking class for two guests at 50 Local in downtown Kennebunk, dinner for two at The White Barn (said to be the only five-star restaurant north of New York), and a souvenir. Package rates start at \$1,132 for two people. 800-272-0698, www.englishmeadowsinn.com

THERE

TAKE A SCENIC TRAIN THROUGH THE SIERRA NEVADAS
Climb aboard the Reno Fun Train and Sierra Scenic Train between Feb. 6 and March 16 and enjoy a ride through the stunning Sierra Nevadas. The 15-car, 500-passenger excursion train runs between the San Francisco area and Reno. It operates as the Reno Fun Train (pictured) on weekends, drawing an over-21 crowd, and as the Sierra Scenic Train on weekdays, attract-

ing families and other travelers. The three-day round-trip adventure includes meals, a dance car, a piano lounge with live music, a smoking car with a cigar lounge, and an onboard gift shop. Themed trips include Soul Train, Mardi Gras, Rock ‘n’ Roll, St. Patrick’s Day with Beer Tasting, Fabulous ’50s, and a Motown Celebration with Martha Reeves. The Reno Fun Train operates Fridays to Sundays for \$250 per person, and the Sierra Scenic Train runs Tuesdays to Thursdays starting at \$240; neither rate includes the two-night hotel package. 800-783-0783, www.keyholidays.com

VANCOUVER FESTIVAL CELEBRATES CANADA’S FOOD AND DRINK
Visit Vancouver, British Columbia, this month and indulge in the decadent flavors (pictured at left) of this cosmopolitan city during the Dine Out Vancouver Festival, Jan. 16-Feb 1. This renowned 17-day festival includes more than 30 events, such as Street Food City, a lunchtime gathering of the city’s popular food carts; The Grape Debate, a wine-centric event at which industry experts verbally spar with facts and humor; Brunch Crawl, a se-

ries of tasting tours showcasing Vancouver’s brunch hot spots; and Dinner at the Birdcage, a drag show with dinner in a swanky cabaret space. More than 230 restaurants citywide will offer three-course, prix fixe menus for \$18, \$28, or \$38 throughout the festival, and more than 20 hotels will run special offers, with room rates as low as \$78. 604-682-2222, www.dineoutvancouver.com

EVERYWHERE

A TRAVEL PRODUCT FOR THE POTTY TRAINEE
To make potty training easier for travelers old and young, Kelly Smith, an innovative mom from North Carolina, created the Pack ‘n Potty, a seat designed for use in public restrooms. The super lightweight unisex potty seat offers a clean and stable seat for little kids to sit on. The cushioned seat slips out of its attached stuff sack and goes on any standard-size toilet. Protective antimicrobial and waterproof material drapes down over the back, sides and front of the toilet to keep little hands off soiled surfaces. The

Pack ‘n Potty has a wet-dry storage pocket for stashing wet clothes, for instance, or a supply of wipes, and it slips off the potty seat and is machine washable and dryer safe. The Pack ‘n Potty just hit the market; see Smith’s website, Tottigo. \$39.99. 888-816-9204, www.tottigo.com

A BRIEFCASE THAT DOES SOME FOOTWORK EN ROUTE
Carry your laptop and other important travel items in a briefcase that doubles as a massage tool. LEGGAGE, created by Reading-based entrepreneur Jin Kaur, carries like a shoulder bag and has room for a laptop up to 15.6 inches and other small travel items. What makes it stand out, however, is the triangular bump-out on one side that’s made of stiff polycarbonate material with ridges, and can be used to rest and massage your feet while sitting on an airplane or in a business meeting. The quirky-looking but practical bag weighs just 3.1 pounds and has an outside sleeve that can slip onto the retractable handle of your rolling suitcase for easy carrying. \$79.99. 781-640-4516, www.leggage.com
KARI BODNARCHUK

