Castles dot the landscape all along the Rhine, from its headwaters high in the Swiss Alps to its mouth at the Dutch port of Rotterdam. When people speak of castles on the Rhine, however, it’s a safe bet they’re talking about one fairly short stretch of the river, the Middle Rhine. This is where Wagner set the Ring of the Nibelung—It’s where waterborne raiders set up their headquarters in the mid-13th century, it proceeded through several expansions and proved its strength through numerous battles and sieges. Finally, around 1795, its inhabitants surrendered without a fight to the French revolutionary troops. Having conquered the castle bloodlessly, the French blew the place to ruin. Much of the stone was carted off for building elsewhere, but a lot of the old structure remained. Restoration began in 1937 and has continued to the present on the ancient fortress, which now houses a hotel and restaurant. The castle also offers plenty of opportunities for gliding off the cliffs is popular. To arrange a short cruise on an excursion boat, you simply need to show up and pay a small charge. Of course, there’s world-class off-road hiking and numerous local pubs, not to mention Rhineland wine tasting at various vineyards.

Koblenz

Germany’s

Castles, vineyards and a heart-stopping trip to Green Hell

One route to the Rhine and its castles from the Koblenz-Winningen airport takes you northeast along the Moselle River (spelled Mosel in German and pronounced with the accent on the first syllable) to Koblenz, where you turn south, cross a bridge and follow signs for highway B-9. This involves making only one road change, but it can seem confusing as you wend your way through the city on the lookout for the signs that will keep you on B-9. A quicker and more direct way is to go to the Auto- bahn A-61, which isn’t far from the airport. Head south on A-61 to the Beppard exit, which leads past farms, orchards and vineyards to the Rhine and its castles.

With the exception of the Pfalzgrafenwein castle, which sits on the island of Falkenau in the middle of the river, most of the castles are perched on the hills above and offer commanding vistas. Several of them have been converted into hotels that exude a medieval ambiance. You might wonder where the castles’ original inhabitants got the wherewithal to build so many grand structures in such a compact geographical area and why they’re so close to the river. The short answer is that they were robber barons who were able to exact tolls from the merchant ship traffic. Their ways of controlling that traffic in- cluded heavy chains across the river, which were pulled up to block passage and lowered out of the way only when the high fees had been collected. Today, the region’s money comes mostly from wine and tourism.

One castle with a colorfully violent history is Burg Rheinfels, which is situated above the town of Sankt Goar. What you see today is only the partially restored ruins of a castle that was burned to the ground in the late 16th century by French troops. A small siren songs and where Siegfried, Germany’s version of King Arthur, led his knights into mortal combat.

Most of the castles are perched on hills above the river and offer commanding vistas. Several have been converted into hotels that exude a medieval ambiance.

Story and photography by Don Douglas

Cruising on the Rhine

Quintessence (A-): Traffic can be rather bumpy at times on roads on either side of the river. When you get up to the ground of the castles overlooking the river, however, it can be quite serene. The pace along the Moselle near the Koblenz-Winningen airport tends to be a little more laid back than in the more heavily visited destinations along the Rhine.

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for hiking and exploring the grounds and is the site of historical reenactments.

Sankt Goar, at the river’s edge below the castle, is home to many shops and a great beer stein collection.

Another castle hotel we especially enjoyed is Auf Schönburg (the “Beautiful Castle”), which once belonged to Emperor Friedrich I and dates from the early 12th century. Over the years, it went through the usual process of expansion in peacetime and destruction in wartime. In 1689, the forces of French king Louis XIV pretty well demolished it. In the late 19th century, an American named T.I. Oakley Rhinelander purchased the castle, which lay in ruins. Rhinelander resumed the process of restoration. Its location is above the town of Oberwesel, which now owns it.

Today, one section of the castle houses a summer camp for underprivileged children while another serves as a hotel and restaurant. A little over €200 (about $240) will get you an authentically decorated medieval-looking suite with a four-poster bed and a spectacular view of the Rhine.

Across and down the river from the Schönburg and Rheinfels, you’ll find two castles that are often referred to as the “enemy brothers”–Sterrenberg and Liebenstein. Various stories explain how the two siblings came to hate each other; one popular version has it that while one of the brothers went off to fight in the Crusades, the other remained behind and took up with his brother’s girlfriend. Today, you can ponder such tales while dining and lodging at the castles and exploring the

Flagstaff Kohletz-Winningen (EDRK) is at an elevation of 640 feet on a plateau above the Moselle River, directly above the small town of Winningen. “Except for the occasional visitor from Denmark or Switzerland, we don’t get many corporate jets here,” said Hannelore Kaindle, the air traffic controller in charge of the tower when we arrived. “We used to get race drivers on their way to Nürburgring, like Mika Hakkinen from Finland and David Coulthard from Scotland. Then they moved up to jets that are too big to land here.” In June 2005 the runway was extended from 3,819 to 3,949 feet. However, to use the full length requires opening gates, which block the roadway leading into the airport. So you need to phone ahead. Phone ahead, too, for hangar space at Kohletz, which is available on a rather limited basis.

The airport maintains several apartments, which are located between the tower and the hangars. These might prove useful in a pinch or if your party includes crew members who need to stay near the airplane.

For more about the airport, visit www.flagstaff-kohletz-winningen.de, send an e-mail to flagstaff_kowi@t-online.de or call +49 (0) 2606 822. From inside Germany, phone 02606 822. You can find information and Web links for other airports in Germany and Austria at www.airports.de. – D.D.
**Jet Aviation Reports Demand for “Road Show” Service**

Jet Aviation’s U.S. charter division has reported increased demand for its IPO Road Show program, which it launched last year. According to the company, 12 major financial-services firms are among clients of the division, which provides customized charter for multi-city itineraries, 24-hour flight-following reports, charter for multicity itineraries, and those who refer a friend.

**Flight Options’ JetCard Gets a Makeover**

Flight Options has replaced its JetPass card with JetCard Ultimate Travel. The new product gives cardholders access to light, mid-size and large-cabin aircraft with a deposit of $100,000 (aircraft surcharge included, required hours only). Flight Options claims its program is the only one of its type to offer a fully refundable deposit and to allow for access to Cabo San Lucas, Bermuda, Mexico and “virtually all” of the Caribbean without any fees.

**Sentient Jet Goes Global**

Sentient Jet has announced plans to offer a fully refundable flight card for prospective partners, such as airports and destination clubs. The company will also work together to provide jet solutions for prospective partners, such as airports and destination clubs.

**Strategic Partner Propels**

Piaggio Aero Industries is preparing to launch a new jet program, now that Mubadala Development, a government-owned Abu Dhabi investment company, has purchased a 35-percent stake in the Italian aircraft manufacturer. Piaggio, which has struggled to meet demand for its twin-turboprop Avanti II, had said it would not proceed with new aircraft development without securing another strategic partner. Now the company is considering two possible designs, said Piaggio director Albert Glass, both of which are about the same size as the Avanti II. The program isn’t likely to be officially launched before early 2007.

**A White-knuckle Ride**

Among the most interesting things to visit in a day in Koblenz is the 65-minute drive in the opposite direction from the Rhineland castles. It is west-central Germany’s famous old race track, Nürburgring-Nordschleife, which is also known as “Green Hell”—a name inspired by its treacherously tight blind curves. Of course, auto racing is a popular spectator sport, but why be a spectator when you can get out on the track? For €175 ($232), up to three passengers can take a lap around the Nürburgring with an experienced racing driver in a 10-cylinder BMW M5. This is a white-knuckle ride, not a leisurely tour, but great fun for those who are ready for it.

For even white knuckles, you can try driving the course yourself, dodging the mountain bikes and motorcycles. The catch is that it’s there for Europeans to do it in their own cars. It’s a safe bet that the rental agencies would frown on using one of their vehicles for laps around Nürburgring, but where there’s a will there’s a way, as they say, and if you’ve always wanted to drive a track at racing speeds, you can probably find your way into a vehicle. Just remember that this program was designed to satisfy those Germans for whom driving the autobahns without speed limits isn’t excruciating enough. If that doesn’t sound like you, maybe you’d be happier with a leisurely afternoon tour-bus cruise on the Rhine, followed by dinner in a castle.

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**Continued on page 32**

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**Getaways**

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**What it is:** Koblenz is one of Germany’s most beautiful vacation destinations, where your lodging might be an ancient castle with panoramic views of the river below, served by a nearby airport with facilities for business jets.

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**For More Information**

**Hotels with restaurants:**

- Aulitzsch, 55440 Oberwesel, +49 (0) 6742/808491; e-mail: info@thomas-hoereth.de.
- Alte Mühle, hotel-burg-liebenstein@rhinecastles.com. www.castle-liebenstein.com; e-mail: info@thomsen-liebenstein.de.
- Burg Gutenfels, Mühlental 17, 56330 Kobern-Gondorf an der Mosel, +49 (0) 2607 6474; e-mail: info@burg-gutenfels.de.
- Gondorf an der Mosel, +49 (0) 2607 6474; e-mail: info@burg-gutenfels.de.
- Deutsches Burgmuseum Konstanz, +49 (0) 7531/62190; e-mail: info@burgmuseum-konstanz.de.

**Cruises:**

- Köln-Düsseldorfer Deutsche Rhein- schifffahrt AG, Frankfurt, 60547, Cologne, +49 (0) 221 2088 318; www.k-d.com/englisch/; e-mail: info@k-d.com.
- Golf: Kelkheim-Golfclub, Im Tal der Lerchen, 64134 Bad Kissingen, +49 (0) 6773 308; e-mail: kdgolf@hotel-schoenburg.com.
- Aulitzsch, 55440 Oberwesel, +49 (0) 6742/808491; e-mail: info@thomas-hoereth.de.

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