

# Germany by Coach

A stagecoach from 1860, five wonderful horses, and Andreas Nemitz at the reins driving us through the forests of Thüringen from Weimar to Meiningen along Germany's "Klassiker Road."



Photo by Remmlinger

by Michael Boel

For years, my wife, Heidi, and I had fantasized about a taking a trip with Andreas Nemitz and his coaches. Finally, during our annual Christmas party, our friends Gail and Chuck Ellmann from the Gayla Driving Center in Georgetown, Kentucky, gave us the push! Let's do it; let's go!

We consulted Coaching in Bavaria's program and selected a five-day tour through the green heart of Germany in Thüringen, where we would be taking a stagecoach route that

would pass through largely unspoiled countryside, with rolling hills and forests. This is also the part of Germany where Heidi was born and from where she left with her parents when she was only 11 years old, in order to avoid living under Russian occupation after World War II.

During the next few months, we planned the details of our trip, looking at maps and websites of the hotels where we would stay overnight. We printed out train schedules, even the platform numbers from where we would leave. There is

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nothing better than the weeks prior to such a special journey. We even talked about certain types of food we wanted to be sure to have. At the top of this list: fresh white asparagus, which would be in season and is so delicious.

**The actual stagecoach trip** would start in Weimar, but we had decided to fly into Frankfurt and meet the Ellmanns in Mainz, the wonderful city along the Rhine. We began our mornings in Mainz by having a delicious breakfast while sitting on the terrace of our hotel under awnings, watching the traffic of ships and boats going upriver toward Switzerland, or downriver toward Holland on this famous waterway.

There was so much to do and see in and around Mainz. Each year in early June, Mainz hosts an event called "Art in the City." Two artists from each of Mainz's international sister cities meet under colorful tents right in front of the old theater and the statue of Mainz's most famous son, Johann Gutenberg. Here, they either paint or sculpt and then, after three days, submit their work to a jury. Louisville, Kentucky, as one of the sister cities of Mainz, had sponsored two artists representing the U.S.

Of course, we took a one-day boat trip on the Rhine, going into the heart of the wine country at Rudesheim and by cable car up the mountain, where we looked over manicured fields and acres of vineyards. The weather was exceptional, and we all were in the best of moods. Chuck and Gail Ellmann had invited a family friend, Rosalinde, a young student from Hawaii, to join them as their guest. It was nice to have a young person in our group, especially as it was Rosalinde's first visit to Germany and the Rhine.

Finally we were off to Weimar by train, riding in beautifully appointed coaches at speeds up to 300 kilometer per hour.

After World War I, the city of Weimar was for some years the seat of the German government. Granted, those were not the best of times. But Weimar and the state of Thüringen have always had a passion for poets, playwrights, and composers. During feudal times, the archduke in Weimar encouraged the famous German poet Johann-Wolfgang von Goethe, who was born in Frankfurt but then lived and worked in Weimar for almost 50 years. It was no wonder that the town was filled with tourists and that the picture and spirit of Goethe followed us on our sightseeing trip in and around Weimar.

For this first night of our Coaching in Bavaria trip, Mr. Nemitz had booked us into the five-star Hotel Elephant, which for more than 300 years has been host to visitors from all parts of Europe. The hotel is located right at the market square, across from the gothic city hall. Like other hotels we would visit during the next few days, there was an old hand-painted porcelain sign at the entrance that read, *Offizielle Postkutschen Haltestelle* (official stagecoach stop).

There were tables and chairs outside the hotel where we had a glass of beer the evening before our departure. We watched people coming and going into the hotel, wondering who might be another passenger for the next day's stagecoach trip. We knew that Mr. Nemitz had booked a total of ten passengers. We were five, but who were the others?

We spotted a lady wearing a scarf with horse motifs and a typical horse-lady's straw hat. "There is one," I said, "let's go and ask." I was right; we had found two of our companions. One lady came from Omaha, Nebraska, and the other from Reutlingen in Germany.



Nigel Whiting sounding the post horn while driving alongside the river Werra.

Photo courtesy of Michael and Heidi Boel

As we sat outside, we had a very pleasant surprise. I spotted a familiar-looking lady with blond hair and, sure enough, it was one of Heidi's cousins, a former music teacher, born in Weimar but now living about an hour's drive away near Erfurt. We had prepared a day-by-day schedule of our trip, showing the lunch stops and hotels on the way, and sent this to our family and friends. On this evening, Heidi's cousin was anxious to hear all about the trip we were to begin the next morning.

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**Michael Boel** and his wife, Heidi, live in Louisville, Kentucky.



A German couple decided to not only travel in the spirit of the 19th century, but to dress the part as well.

Photo by Remmlinger

**The first day (June 7, 2007):** At 6:00 a.m., I was the first hotel guest up for breakfast, and enjoying the sunny morning while reading the newspaper. Later in the morning, we were looking around the hotel lobby, still searching for the rest of our fellow passengers. Then the elevator door opened and a couple appeared, dressed in the finest 19th-century attire, the lady in a beautiful dress with a type of petticoat, the gentleman in a long black coat and a stovepipe hat. When we asked, we found out that they were part of our group and wanted to dress in the style of the era of the stagecoach. They came from the region of Germany's Lake Constance.

By this time, a lot of hotel guests had come out to the front of the hotel, as had the manager, the chef, and the receptionist with her camera, all awaiting the arrival of our coach. At exactly 10 minutes before 10:00 a.m., we heard the post horn being sounded and then the sound of the wheels on the cobblestones, and here she came.

Five white horses, beautifully groomed; the finest of harnesses; Andreas Nemitz and his coachman in historic livery on top of the magnificent mail coach, which was painted yellow, with destination signs proclaiming, "Weimar – Meiningen"!

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It was a sight to remember—one that took us back a couple of centuries, as it must have been when the daily stage-coach arrived. People gathered around the coach and the horses, taking pictures. Because Mr. Nemitz had to stay on his seat, holding the reins and watching his team, the coachman, Nigel, greeted everyone and gave seat assignments. We had by now also met the last of the passengers, a distinguished gentleman from Italy.

Everyone climbed on board: three rows of three passengers each. I stayed on the ground, having opted to go with the baggage-carrying Land Rover and its Irish driver, Finbarr Magill.

So off they went, with the post horn blowing and a happy group of passengers laughing and waving. The first stop would be for lunch at a way station that was barely on the map. When Finbarr and I finally found it, we were glad to have arrived before the coach, which took side roads through the forests of pine, fir, beech, and oaks and past fields of wildflowers among the pastures.

The owners of the garden restaurant had arranged tables and chairs for everyone under umbrellas, where we had a hearty lunch. During the long lunch break, the horses got baths and hay and water.

Then came the afternoon trip to the first overnight station: Gross - Kochberg, a 15th-century castle.

Again we found ourselves in the footsteps of Goethe, as it was here that he courted the lady of the manor, Charlotte v. Stein, who owned the castle.

Finbarr had all the bags in the right rooms when the coach arrived, the post horn having been heard far in advance. The hotel's owner, Mrs. Hoffmann, stood with trays of glasses of champagne for everyone. As if that wasn't enough of a welcome, after dinner she got out her keyboard and an international song-book, and we all sat until dark, singing and enjoying the atmosphere. Andreas Nemitz can not only handle a coach with five-in-hand, he can also sing and entertain in his baritone voice.

**The second day (June 8, 2007):** In the morning, after we enjoyed a hearty breakfast at the castle, the coach arrived to pick up its passengers. The first stop that day was a small brewery, operated by the same family for 180 years in the small 600-year-old village of Singen. When Finbarr and I

arrived in the Land Rover, we met the current owners: sister and brother and their widowed mother, who is in her 70s but still very much involved in the business. Yes, she said, we brew only once a week on Thursdays, the equivalent of about 8,000 bottles a week, which they sell mostly in kegs in the surrounding towns. They had prepared outdoor benches and tables for the coach passengers, and the charcoal grill was hot for the Thüringen-style bratwurst (marinated in beer overnight), which we ate with, you guessed it, homemade Singen beer.

After the coach arrived, the horses were given their baths, water, and hay, and the coach itself took up all the space there was on the narrow road. The trucks behind simply had to wait; coaches and horses come first!

After the horses and passengers had their break and the all-important "WCs" were used, it was off on the second leg of the day's trip to the hunting lodge of Gabelbach, near Ilmenau.

To get there, the last stretch was uphill, with about a 15-



The coach passengers and the horses take a breather in the forest.

Photo courtesy of Michael and Heidi Boel

percent grade. I suggested sending Finbarr with the Land Rover to the bottom of the hill, after unloading the bags, so that the passengers could be taken by car to the lodge and the horses would have less weight to pull. Mr. Nemitz agreed, and that is what was done. However, photographers were waiting at the lodge, so the coach stopped just prior to the hotel, everyone got on, and the five-in-hand stagecoach made its grand entrance with the post horn blowing.

The hotel guests stood in front and at their windows to take pictures, and the couple in period dress had to pose over and over again. There was another surprise awaiting us: a close friend of Heidi's from her early school days had made



An example of the typical half-timbered houses that can be found throughout Thüringen.

Photo by Remmlinger

the trip to Gabelbach and there was lots of hugging and smiles.

That night we had dinner by candlelight, with the finest of food, wine, and elegant service. Also, the horses had that night a five-star stable and got their well-earned rest.

**The third day (June 9, 2007):** This morning, we had beautiful sunshine again as the coach took off for the next stop, the *Stutenhaus*, meaning the mares' house. The *Stutenhaus* is an ensemble of stables, where for years the local farmers would bring their mares to foal and where the young ones would stay during the summer. The area features lush

pastures and rolling hills where the young horses would live with their mothers for their first six months. Today, there is also a hotel and a restaurant known for its fine food.

As my Irish friend and I arrived, we saw the water pails waiting for the horses, and we also asked the head waiter to advise the kitchen to reserve at least five pounds of the delicious white asparagus for our group. Because the restaurant is high up, we could see our coach arriving and making its way up the hill. The post horn told all the other guests that something special was on its way. Some guests said that they had read in the newspaper that Andreas Nemitz's stagecoach would be coming and that they had decided to come and

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bring their grandchildren to see it.

In the shade of huge trees, the horses got their baths and were cared for during the lunch break. Anyone who works for Andreas Nemitz knows that it is the horses first; only then do he and his employees get a break.

At about 2:00 p.m., the journey continued, this time mainly downhill to the historic town of Schleusingen. In 1500, the duke who presided over the area founded a high school, which was a novelty at that time because most teaching was done by monks and private tutors.

In the shadow of the castle was a huge cobblestone market square, and our hotel for the night, the Golden Lion, was right across from city hall. Here, too, the stagecoach sign at the entrance indicated that this was an official way station. The owner of the hotel was also the chef, and for our dinner he had prepared roasts of lamb with lots of vegetables, all of which was served “family style” on a long table set for us.

## The fourth day (June 10, 2007):

It was Sunday, and bells were ringing throught the town, calling churchgoers to the beautiful cathedral next to the castle. By about 10:30 a.m., the post horn called the passengers and they were off, driving this day mostly on small roads alongside the river Werra. The meeting point for lunch was the monastery Vessra, built around 1340 and since turned into an open-air museum. On this particular day, Vessra had a medieval festival with lots of activities and things to see, eat, and buy.

During the two hours we were there, we encountered the only rain of the entire trip. After that, it cooled down pleasantly for what was the last leg of the last day!

The last afternoon took the stagecoach farther alongside the river Werra, always on roads where no motorcar traffic was allowed. They drove alongside trout ponds, fields of wildflowers, and lush pastures filled with cows.

Finbarr and I had gone ahead with the Land Rover and the luggage to our last hotel, the Sächsischer Hof (Saxony Court) in the town of Meiningen, former residence of the archduke of Henneberg. Heidi had often told me how her parents used to stay overnight at this hotel after attending a performance at the famous Meiningen Theater. Mind you, that was before the last war, during good times. The theater

is still there, as is the hotel across the street, the Henneberger Haus, where Heidi’s grandfather stayed when in town. So much history; so many memories.

We waited for some time and saw that the staff from the hotel had already prepared the champagne for the final reception. There was the call of the post horn, and our coach came, with the beautiful horses trotting and the sound of wheels on cobblestones. They had brought their passengers safely to the final destination without the slightest incident.

Then it was champagne and pictures of the whole group with Mr. Nemitz and his crew in front of the yellow stagecoach and five white horses. As at all the previous stops, we drew a large crowd, with everyone asking about the trip. Mr. Nemitz handed out quite a few brochures and had to answer



Lunch at a garden restaurant in the forest. Mr. Nemitz, Nigel, and the passengers take a break while the horses take a nap.

Photo courtesy of Michael and Heidi Boel

many questions before taking the coach and his horses to their overnight stables.

In the meantime, we were being told that tonight would be a very special farewell candlelight dinner and to be ready by 7:00 p.m.

The hotel has a tradition of fine cuisine and, in fact, the chef has published quite a few books with his specialties. And so it was: the table was set with the finest of linen and silverware. The hotel had printed just for our group menus describing all of the courses; it was all so very festive. It must be said that during these five days we had become very well acquainted with all of the passengers; Mr. Nemitz; his copilot, Nigel Whiting, who is from England but has lived in Germany for almost 25 years; and the groom, Finbarr. It



A last look at the view from the top of Mr. Nemitz's wonderful old stagecoach.

Photo by Remmlinger

could not have been more harmonious, which is a blessing when traveling for so many days together and in close quarters. But then, all of them were “horsy” people, and that certainly made a difference!

Now we were sitting in this beautiful restaurant, the service was impeccable and the food delicious. Andreas Nemitz and his crew joined us and we had the pleasure of listening to Mr. Nemitz and his accounts of how stagecoach travel used to be in Germany, and also in England, which had the most extensive network of stagecoach routes in Europe with no fewer than 5,000 daily departures out of greater London alone. But that is a story for another day.

**The fifth day (June 11, 2007):** It was the last morning,

and I was the first one up for breakfast, sitting on the terrace in front of the hotel and reading the morning paper. Enjoying the extensive breakfast buffets in all of the hotels we stayed in was a special treat. The buns were warm and fresh, and the cold selections ranged from Norwegian smoked salmon to French cheeses. There were fruits, juices, and piping hot coffee or tea.

So we came to the end of our coaching trip through the forests of Thüringen, and it was time to say goodbye.

What can I say after such a wonderful adventure? One thing comes to mind: “Thanks to such wonderful horses and the ladies who love them! They both give us so much joy we would not want to be without them.”

Thanks for the memories! 🍷