

Thoughts on Konstanz, Germany

Well, it's been a long time since I've been on a trip to a different place. Things are going to pick up soon, however, as I'm having a recruiting trip to Washington DC in late June (which should be an experience on its own), a trip to Shanghai/Beijing China in later June, and a trip to Singapore in September. Well, anyway, this one was interesting.

The reason for the trip was to give a presentation at the International Federation of Air Line Dispatchers Association (IFALDA). Basically, that is the international conglomeration of unions of folks who run the airlines on a day to day basis. The easiest way to describe their job is that they run the biggest train set in the world. Every morning at 5 am they get things started according to "the plan", which is what you bought a ticketed based on...the schedule. Immediately, bad things happen...crews are late, someone has an allergic reaction to peanuts and there is a diversion, equipment failures, and crew problems. So, throughout the day they try to keep the operation running with as few cancellations and delays as possible. Around 7pm at night, they frantically try to move airplanes and crews to position them for the next day's plan. Interesting, high stress job. My job is to tell them how Boeing is going to change the system to make their life easier.

I decided to roll the dice and let Boeing travel make the arrangements for this trip. That was exciting. Basically, I had to take a flight from Seattle to Dallas, Dallas to Zurich, Switzerland, and then take a train to Konstanz (about 1.5 hours). Actually, everything worked out pretty good. We got off late from Dallas because the tug (to tow the airplane) wouldn't start. The flight to Zurich was on a 777 and it was quite nice; I actually got a little sleep. Upon arrival in Zurich I was able to find the train station (it was in the airport) with little trouble. I had to switch trains but that was not much trouble. The Swiss trains are known for their trouble-free operation. Because the trains are electric, they don't make them run in "valleys" (like in England); therefore I could see a lot of scenery. It was magnificent. One thinks of Europe as being pretty crowded, but there was mostly forests and farmland. The farmhouses were old architecture and kept my attention the whole time. We went through a lot of small towns, none that were very big. I would recommend that area for an extended visit.

There was no real customs check in Switzerland, but they had a couple of German Border Police at the Konstanz train station. I was the only one with any baggage and they asked me what I had in the bags...my answer of "clothes" seemed to work okay. My hotel was a mere 100 meters from the train station. It was a Hotel Mecure (which I have stayed at before in France) and so I had low expectations. Good move. The room is smaller than our bathroom at home. To put things in perspective, there was no room in the bathroom for my little bathroom ditty bag...none. I didn't know that 16 inch shower bases were made, but they are in Germany. Not only that, the shower curtain ended about 3 inches from the base and so there was quite a mess after a shower. Now imagine showering in a 16 inch shower. If you soap anything, something hits a faucet control, and those things are sensitive. Oh well.

The city itself is fantastic. As you can imagine, it is on the south-west border between Switzerland and Germany. It is also a harbor on the biggest (I think) lake (Lake Constance) in Europe. I can see out over the harbor from my room and you can't see the other side of the water. The Rhine flows through the center of town and feeds the lake. The town itself has been occupied since Celtic times (as a fishing village) and received its name under Roman rule. The old city has the streets shut off to traffic and there is some excellent architecture...something from every period. Unfortunately, this is primarily a tourist town for Germans and so there is little English translation. But the sights were excellent and the people extremely friendly and helpful.

I gave my presentation to the Flight Dispatchers and they responded well. I booked out immediately as I wanted to spend the night in a little better hotel. I caught the train to Zurich and the weather was a little bit better. You could see the Alps in the distance and they were quite beautiful. They remind me a little bit of the Grand Tetons. I spent the night in the Zurich Hilton (which did have a proper shower). I even saw one of my acquaintances in the Hilton Bar, Hans-

Peter Sauberli (Swiss Air). After an early night, had an uneventful flight from Zurich to Dallas-Fortworth, where I connected to a flight to Columbus, Ohio to meet up w/ Janice and Becky to attend the graduation of a friend's daughter. Everything went well.
Dave