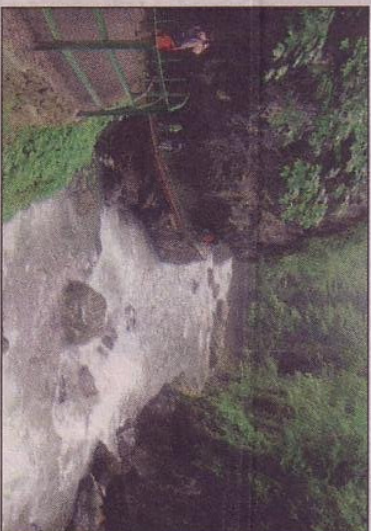
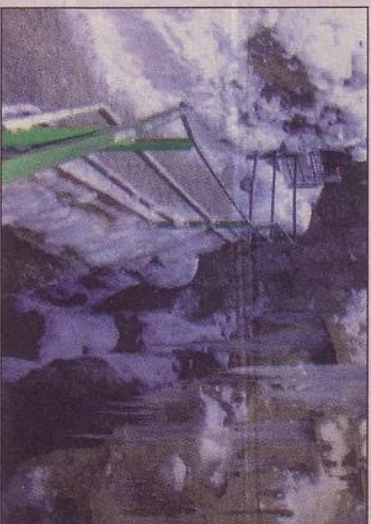




Breakfast address at Haubers Alpenresort includes a fantastic view



Breihschlamm gorge is popular with walkers in the summer



The gorge takes on a completely different look in winter



The cable car to the Nebelhorn, which is often shrouded in fog

Bavaria has plenty to attract visitors in summer and winter

—By Paul Naylor—

When holidaymakers pack their bags for a European vacation, France, Spain and Italy tend to be the obvious destinations of choice.

Germany, which is so often overlooked, offers a very different experience to many of its neighbouring countries – including one of the world's most impressive airports. I flew into Munich from Birmingham International and couldn't help but be impressed by the huge scale of the operation.

From here, it was a two-and-a-half-hour transfer by coach to the Alpine region of Oberstdorf, in the south west region of Bavaria known as Allgäu. This pretty town lies on the border of Austria and is dwarfed by the impressive snow-capped mountain ranges that surround it.

Staying at the Parkhotel Frank – a long established, family-run, five star hotel – was well positioned to explore some of the area's attractions.

From the hotel lobby, it takes just 10 minutes to get to Breihschlamm gorge. Carved from limestone, fast-flowing water crashes noisily through the deep and narrow channel, with waterfalls aplenty and overhanging rock faces that have survived many horrendous floods. Our guide said the gorge

takes on a magical look in winter, when much of the cascading water is transformed into frosty stalactites. With well-maintained paths, walkers of all standards should comfortably negotiate the gorge. Emerging at the top, you find yourself in Austria. A fantastically dramatic way to cross the border.

Back in Oberstdorf, there was time to enjoy some relaxation at the impressive hotel before an evening meal in one of the town's excellent restaurants, Konglitches Jagdhaus.

A visit to the region would be incomplete without tackling the sometimes difficult terrain of the Nebelhorn, and indeed that is what I did the following day. A 15-20 minute journey in a three-stage cable car ride takes visitors 2,224 metres up to the top of the mountain.

Walking – and slipping – from the summit to the Nebelhorn Hofatsblick station at 1,932m, isn't always easy – especially when you consider many of these trails become popular ski runs in winter months. Snow is still in evidence in the summer at such high altitude, and during my visit in June, there was an abundance of the crisp white stuff. Frequent patches of scree can make matters treacherous and appropriate care should be taken.

Although I could not vouch for it myself, apparently from the top there is a breathtaking view of around 400 mountain peaks – in clear visibility. Nebel translates as fog and I can testify that this mountain does indeed frequently become shrouded in a thick blanket at higher levels, but as we descended through the fog and mist our destination appeared – like a soggy mirage.

Drying out at the station restaurant it was time for a traditional Alpine lunch of pretzels, white sausages, mustard and beer. Completely soaked from the trek, it was a welcome treat – made all the better by a trio of Bavarian musicians clothed in equally traditional lederhosen. I was amused when a local indicated to me to ignore the custom of 'dissecting' the sausage, instead, chomping on it in a more undignified manner.

Back to the bus, and 45 minutes later I find myself in another town – Oberstaufen. Staying at Haubers Alpenresort, this was to be – for some of my fellow travellers – the more relaxing part of the stay. The hotel specialises in golf and spa treatments, or wellness as it is often referred to. The spectacular view is thrown in for free.

The hotel offers a variety of spa treatments and I was booked in for one of the "house specials". I was asked to at-

tend the treatment room wearing only a gown and slippers, nothing else. Why had I not chosen a round of golf? Sheepishly, I arrived for the appointment and following an initial sense of awkwardness, I have to admit that the all over massage was – eventually – relaxing. Sensing my nervousness, the masseuse praised my "bravery" and offered me a celebratory drink when safely back in the reception area, back in my gown and slippers.

Bizarre

What initially appeared to be a bottle of beer was, in fact, a grass-based drink – poured into a glass. It looked ghastly. Oh well, down the hatch. With another pat on the back I was offered a chance to relax in a room with the most bizarre beds. It was what can best be described as crates containing hay, grown and harvested at the hotel, complete with hessian pillows – they were designed to soothe the mind. Perhaps not the best idea for people with hay fever.

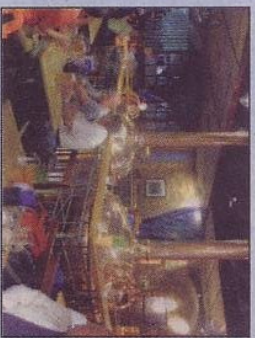
Other interesting ideas for visitors to Oberstaufen include the Thalkirchdorf cheese making school, where something looking and tasting like fetta can be produced by the "Alpsee". Provided with

ing my cheese maker's certificate. I sat in the restaurant at the Dorfhaus for a meal of Kasspatzen – a typical Allgäu dish of cheese and pasta.

And what better way to round off a day than with an evening in town at a Bavarian beer festival. Markfest, brimming with the region's charm, appeared to have enticed every single townsman onto the streets.

Many of the residents dressed for the occasion, steins of beer flowing into the small hours. Lederhosen clad men linked arms and sang along to live musicians. And what is it with the lederhosen? I asked our 20-something tour guide about how he felt wearing his shorts and shirt combo in public. He replied in a quiet, dignified tone: "I feel very proud". Fair enough. Something we could all learn from.

Well worth making a brau ha ha about . . .



Modern facilities at Munich Airport not only serve thousands of tourists and business folk each day, but also operate as a thriving social hub for locals looking for a quality retail experience and wide variety of restaurants.

And on the subject of food and drink, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to pop into the airport's own brewery – the Airbrau. Here, meals and snacks are served with a very special brew which is concocted in large copper tanks. The tanks sit proudly among the diners, with a pungent smell of hops hanging in the air. I sampled a frothy glass of the heady brew which was well accompanied by a large pretzel and coarse cheese spread – a must for visitors to Munich Airport.

Fact box

Paul Naylor travelled with Luthansa. See www.luthansa.com. He stayed at Parkhotel Frank in Oberstdorf (www.parkhotel-frank.de/en/) and in Oberstaufen Haubers Alpenresort. Visit eurobookings.com for more information. For more about the area's attractions, visit www.germany-tourism.co.uk