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## NOTES FROM A HAMBURG JOURNAL

Hamburg, Germany -

My notebook is open, laying next to a porcelain teapot as I stare out at the still cold lake from the comfort of the Alsterpavillon. Just below the huge glass windows of the city's main tearoom, perched perfectly between the giant Rathaus and the many marks shops that line the superexpensive Jungfernstieg, I can see the edge of the inner Lake as it laps up against the Pavillon, filled with Hamburgers, many with ugly little dogs the size of large rodents, curled in their laps or laying at their feet. Shopping for the wealthy of Hamburg, Germany's wealthiest city, is so taxing that the city has constructed a huge building designed solely to provide a cup of fine coffee, a tea service, and a wide variety of sweet cakes, to break the tedium of spending. It is a lovely building, occupying, perhaps, the single most desirable piece of real estate in the city.

Just below the windows, I can see the black-hulled Alsterdampfer, the flat-bottom boats that carry passengers to communities scattered along the perimeter of the outer Lake. I open up my journal, written essentially for you, and begin reading to myself:

\* \* \* \*

This is the city in Germany that has the most millionaires and the most convertibles. I am here on the first day after a long winter that the sun is shining, and throughout the city you can hear the whirr of efficient power convertible tops being lowered for the first time in months. The temperature is 44 degrees.

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This is the the city of Mendelssohn and Brahms, a city first destroyed by fire in 1842 and destroyed again by Allied bombing during the Second World War. Today, it is a shiny example of successful commerce and the power of the German Mark. H.G. Wells wrote that the German people "*are an orderly vain, deeply sentimental and rather insensitive people. They seem to feel at their best when they are singing in chorus, saluting or obeying orders*". Walking the streets of Hamburg today, I notice only that crowds of people wait, at a totally deserted intersection. for the crossing sign to light up with permission. I hear curses as I walk against the light.

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I think back of my friends who work for America's most successful fast food enterprise on the wooded campus just off Jorie Boulevard in Oak Brook. Do they realize the historical link between what they do and this German city?

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Hamburg was, and is, one of the world's major shipping capitals. The local seaman were meat and potatoes people, who as early as the late 1700's, would pound beef filets to form wedges they called "Hamburg steaks". In 1836, Delmonico's Restaurant in New York came out with the first ever printed menu in America. One of the most expensive items on the menu was a Hamburg Steak.

It wasn't until 1889 that the Hamburg, Germany "Steak" was changed when a local restaurant advertised "hamburger steaks" in the Walla Walla, Washington newspaper.

The derivation of our favorite culinary icon can be directly traced to the seaman's restaurants that lined the area near the Landungsbrücken, the huge waterfront that became the base, in the nineteenth century, for the largest shipping fleet on the high seas.

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Despite the German penchant for punctuality coupled with profit, the visitor is somewhat surprised at how often German commerce simply stops. Shops are open far fewer hours than in the states. In Hamburg, stores are closed for all but the first Saturday of the month, when they close at 2:00PM. The idea here, is that families will want to spend more time together and will, therefore, resent the intrusion of commerce.

\* \* \* \*

In this most affluent of German cities what is the preferred automobile? The best-selling car is the modest Volkswagen Golf. Young, up and coming business types prefer the BMW. Those who have already arrived prefer Mercedes. The Mercedes mystique is somewhat diminished, however, by the fact that all Hamburg taxis are cream-colored Mercedes, spotlessly maintained by their driver. Walking late at night along the ABC Strasse, I would see taxis parked alongside the rank being polished and buffed by their drivers while they waited in the cool evening air for fares.

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