



Through a lake district, anchors aweigh

By Diane Daniel, Globe Correspondent / October 14, 2007

WHO: Reinhard, 63, and Happy Goethert, 61, and their son, Karl, 20.

WHERE: Germany

WHEN: 10 days in July

WHY: Along with visiting friends and family (Reinhard was born in Germany), they rented a houseboat for three days and nights in the Mecklenburg Lake District north of Berlin (and formerly in East Germany).

THREE-DAY TOUR: With an online search, Happy found Kuhnle Tours, which would rent a houseboat for only a few days. „I liked their little tugboat-looking boat,” Happy said. The Goetherts planned to stay on or near Lake Müritz, the largest lake in the district.

NOT SO LITTLE: „When you see this barge-looking thing close up, it's big,” said Reinhard, who had never captained a boat. „You get an orientation and after an hour of them talking, someone makes you back up and park a couple times. He says, ‚Do you feel confident?’ You say, ‚Yeah, of course.’ When he left, we said, ‚What are we going to do now?’ „

SLOW START: It was late afternoon, so they didn't want to go far. „But we didn't want to lose face by staying in the harbor overnight,” Happy said. They reached the harbor in Rechlin in 30 minutes. The rental vessel is „a marked boat,” Reinhard discovered. „All these people come to the harbor and wave and show you to where to park - away from everyone.” Sleeping aboard the boat was comfortable. „It doesn't rock, and the water was quiet,” Happy said.

STIFF WIND: The next day was overcast and windy. „There were whitecaps here and there, but it felt very steady,” said Happy, who described the boat's speed as „a putt-putt.” They stopped for lunch in Waren, where a lakeside castle sits near the sheltered harbor of the town. „There were six or eight docks, which were very full, and we didn't like that. Karl was steering, and the wind kept pushing us into things.”

CHANNEL SURFING: After visiting Waren, they had to navigate through two channels to reach a smaller lake. „It was so tight you could talk to people on the shore,” Reinhard said. „We had to pass a tour boat going through on the other side,” he said. They stayed at the harbor on Lake Jabelscher at a place „like a summer village for workers now that there is free-market labor. There's a soccer festival, pony riding, and camping. It was like a mini-city.”

CUTTING EDGE: On the way back they stopped in the historic village of Roebel. „We'd seen they were having a summer festival, and they're known for their harbor and their summer houses,” Happy said. The harbor was crowded, but they spotted an opening. „We putt-putted over, but we forgot that our boat was tall, and there was a tree,” she said. „We clipped off a few limbs, and everyone looked at us very sourly. We were just pruning the summer houses.”

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