

# Sunday LIFESTYLE Travel

## 'Here sit. Japanese?'

### —my six days in Munich

By Manny Gonzalez  
Contributor

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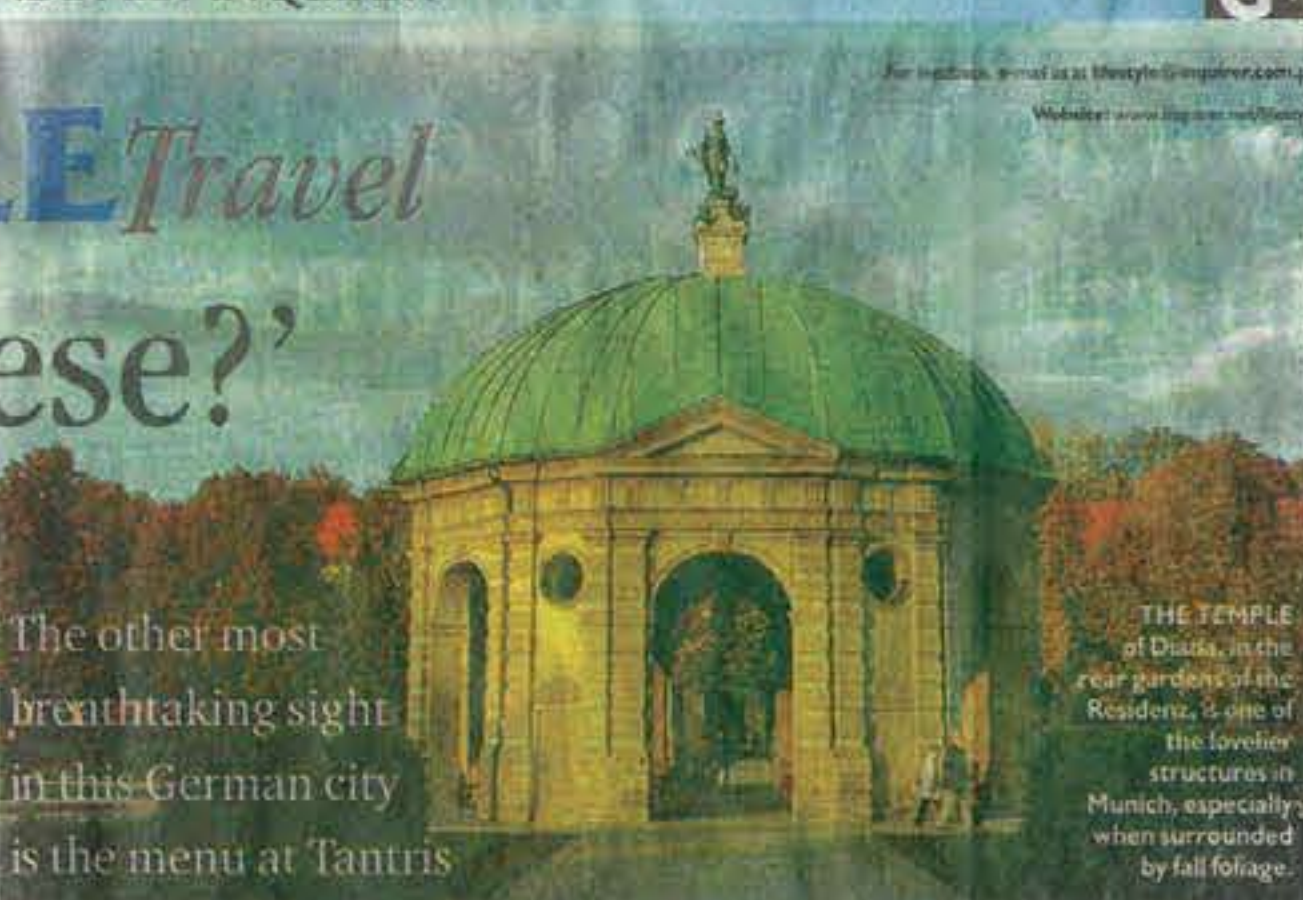
restaurants in Manila. Apparently this is because German men like to pee together a lot.

The second thing you notice in Munich is a rather muscular, often unsmiling female blocking your exit from the men's room. This forces you to rapidly search your pockets for a 50-cent coin. If you don't have one,

HERE/G3

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2009

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G3

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From page G1

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Munich is a moderately interesting city. Founded by monks in the 12th century, it grew into the seat of power of the Wittelsbach family, which ruled Bavaria for some 800 years. Some Wittelsbachs became Electors of Bavaria and a few even became Holy Roman emperors—the head honcho of Germany, even if he was called Holy and Roman, and was neither.

The Wittelsbach family residence is in the heart of the city and is called the Residenz (res-ih-DENTS). But the Residenz is not what it used to be. If you take the audio guide, which is free with admission, in almost every other room you hear the somber comment "but the original furniture was destroyed," followed by a meaningful pause, and then "when Munich was bombed at the end of the Second War." Thus squarely putting the blame on the Americans.

#### Beerhouses

Of course, when in Munich you are supposed to dine at a *brauhaus* (BROY-hows). In the 1920s, Hitler and his pals once staged a sit-in in a Munich beerhouse, but accounts differ on whether that was because they were really trying to topple the Weimar government or because none of them had change for the men's room. This particular *brauhaus* is gone.

The most famous of the beerhouses today is the Hofbrauhaus, and Augustiner Bräu is a close second. The idea is to sit down at a big table with strangers, eat a giant plate of food, which is totally not what you thought you were ordering, and drink three liters of beer.

Since my svelte musculature does not permit the raising of one-liter mug, I generally ordered a child's portion (half a liter) of the weakest kind of beer, called "white" beer—"Ein klein weissbier, bitte."

I can sense that already you are impressed with my command of German. Before going to Munich I bought a handy-dandy phrase book and read it cover to cover. Facing my first German waiter, I was thus able to intone with great confidence "Für ein person, bitte" (feer ine per-ZONE, bit-teh).

To which the waiter answered: "Here sit. Japanese?"

But actually, most Germans (not that Bavarians really consider themselves Germans) are happy to play along with you. So, often enough, my "Guten Tag" got me a happy 30-second welcome speech, ending with "Trinke?" to which the answer is "Ein klein Weissbier, bitte." Useful phrase, this.

#### Dish names

The menus in Munich were something else. Despite frequent phrase-book consultations, at first all the dish names looked Greek to me.

Germans string words together with gay abandon. *Junghirschbraten* is, for example, a faun (young deer), roasted. Well why don't they say so? However, after some decoding, I soon learned all I needed to know to survive Munich restaurants, especially *brauhaus*s.

Wurst (Repeat after me: VERST) is a sausage of some sort. It is usually appended to other words that mean "blood" or "fermented sheep's intestines," but every now and then you will get lucky and get a foot-long hot dog by accident.

Next is sauerkraut, which is exactly what an American would think it is, sour (pickled) cabbage. With every dish, you will either get sauerkraut or *pommes frites* (POM-frit, the German pronunciation of French fries).

Last and most important for a Filipino is *schweinbraten* (SHWINE-eh-BRAT-en). Roast pork with skin. Ummm. I don't



HERE'S Neuschwanstein. Sorry, this is the chicken's-eye view. To get the really great angle everyone recognizes, you need to climb the Alps. I didn't.



DINNER at Tantris. Observe my courageous smile despite breathtaking menu prices (with Leo "Hot-rod" Reznicek and Lia Feraren Reznicek).

know how many pigs a day Augustiner Bräu accounts for, but every 10 seconds I saw a succulent serving of pig pass by (they seated me by the kitchen), so it's pretty popular. And it is not bad. Better than crispy *pata*, though not as good as a properly made Cebu *lechon*.

#### By bicycle

The way to see Munich is on a bicycle. Its center is fairly small for such a well-known city, and you can pretty much walk throughout your stay, but a bike is nice. A jovial American tour-guide can lead you around for four hours, pointing out the major monuments, or you can pedal by yourself.

Next time I will pedal by myself. My guide was Hawaiian, had a broken hand from a Segway accident during Oktoberfest, and immediately told me "My mother is half-Filipino," to which I answered: "Isn't everybody's?" At least in Hawaii.

The problem with a bike tour is that you ride single-file and then when you stop, you get a five-minute talk. In two minutes.

There are a number of breathtaking sights in Munich, though the most breathtaking is not actually in Munich but about an hour away. It's called Neuschwanstein (noy-SHWAN-stine), and if you don't actually recognize the name you have nonetheless surely seen pictures of it—a castle with soaring turrets, cradled by the Alps (usually snow-covered). It could pass for a "Harry Potter" set.

This castle was built by the second-to-last king of Bavaria, Ludwig II. Ludwig bankrupted the government building grand palaces. This was before the days of BMW and Audi, so although

being King of Bavaria sounds grand, there was not always much to tax.

Anyway, Ludwig was really popular with the Bavarians, and thus got away with many things, such as looting the treasury. And promoting opera. And being gay. At least, he got away with it for a while. One fine day when he was 40, after he had been deposed as king, he drowned. At night. With his personal doctor. In three feet of water.

#### Three beats

The other most breathtaking sight in Munich is the menu at Tantris. (And later the check.)

Tantris is Munich's top restaurant, with one Michelin rosette and a score of 19/20 in Gault et Millaut. In gratitude to my local hosts for taking me to Neu—okay, Ludwig's castle—feeding me a delicious fried duck, and then saving me from the attentions of a drunk patron who insisted he had seen me on TV somewhere and wanted to get to know me better, I promised them a meal and expansively said "at Munich's most expensive restaurant."

They did not take my statement with a grain of salt as expected, but gleefully stipulated they wanted dinner at said Tantris.

When I opened the menu, my heart skipped a beat. Make that two or three beats (more than for my last crush). Soup was 20 euros. That's P1,500. Appetizers were clustered around 40 euros (P3,000). Main courses ran 50 euros. Dessert was a comparative bargain at around 15.

But I took it like a man. Not only did I smile happily as we went through three courses, I

also ordered a bottle of Tropolong Mondot 1995 from the impressive wine list, which even had several Le Pins, and Petrus vintages going way back (the '61 was about 8,000 euros per bottle).

But we had a fine time, and I was in the company of easily the most beautiful woman in the room.

Too bad she is my niece. And married to a Bavarian. (But he's okay. When he saw the menu, he, too, blanched, and quickly emphasized that soup would be a fine appetizer, thus saving me 20 euros. Unlike his wife, my niece, who cheerfully ordered the most expensive items on the menu, for after all, what are uncles for?)

#### One good hotel

In Munich, by the way, there is really only one good hotel to stay in. It is right in the heart of the city, a brief walk from all the big beerhouses, churches, shopping, even the bike rental. However, I will not tell you its name, or next time I come back it will be overrun with Filipinos and they would have raised the price. And, anyway, its buffet breakfast costs 34 euros if you want eggs.

Which is why, at some point in time, no matter how determined you are, sooner or later, you will cave in and look for a McDonald's.

Let me save you the trouble. In the downtown area there is a very nice one on Im Tal (the most central street in the city). A sausage-egg McMuffin with coffee will set you back only 2.40. That's only P180, and I guarantee you that is the cheapest breakfast you will find in Munich, other than by scouring Marienplatz (muh-REE-en-platz, the town plaza) for chestnuts dropped by tourists.

But there's bad news if you need water at McDonald's. It will cost you one whole euro—475. The sort-of-good news is that it's mineral water with bubbles.

Regrettably, though I stayed six days, something was missing in Munich.

That something was a young lady, code-named Heidi. Heidi is not German, and Heidi is not her name. But she is an art student, was described as "blonde and rather attractive," and was intended to guide me around the Pinakothek art museums (there are four) and then maybe get seduced. By me.

Heidi was a friend of a friend of a friend of someone my hosts knew. But Heidi was missing in Munich. It was not to be, *cher*. I mean, *liebling*. *Schätzli*?

So for the rest of my life, when I think of this trip, I will think of the urinals, the *schweinbraten*, and missing-in-Munich Heidi. And the cost of saddle of lamb at Tantris.

The author is the founder of Plantation Bay Resort & Spa.

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# MISSING IN MUNICH

*Travelogue/Humor by Manny Gonzalez, founder of Plantation Bay Resort & Spa*

The first thing you notice in Munich is how many urinals there are – usually twice as many, or three times as many, as you would expect compared with restaurants in Manila. Apparently this is because German men like to pee together a lot.

The second thing you notice in Munich is a (usually) rather muscular, and (always) unsmiling female blocking your exit from the Men's Room. This forces you to rapidly search your pockets for a 50-cent coin, which if you don't have, better run like hell, and don't plan on coming back again, no matter how many beers your bladder is holding.

Munich is a moderately-interesting city. Founded by monks in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, it grew into the seat of power of the Wittelsbach family, which ruled Bavaria for 800 years or thereabouts. Some Wittelsbachs became Electors of Bavaria and a few even became Holy Roman Emperors. Electors got together every now and then to elect the next Holy Roman Emperor, who was the head honcho of Germany even if he was called Holy and Roman, and was neither.

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Of course, when in Munich you are supposed to dine at a *braühaus* (BROY-hows; see the two dots over the u? That means, forget the a-u, and pronounce it like oy). In the 1920s Hitler and his pals once staged a sit-in at a Munich beerhouse, but accounts differ on whether that was because they were really trying to topple the Weimar government, or because none of them had change for the Men's Room. Anyway, this particular *braühaus* is gone.

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(In France, when you try to speak French, no matter how well you said something, the person you are talking to will, more than likely, pretend not to understand or will answer you in English to show that his English is better than your French. Even if it isn’t.

*J’ai appris mon Français a Paris, pendant deux années devant le tele.* Nonetheless, a waiter near the Louvre recently tried to see what I would do when he said “Pouilly? Vous voulez un *Pouilly* (POO-yee) (sneer, this being a white wine) avec l’entrêcote (a steak)?”, to which I answered “J’ai bien dit Brouilly (BROO-yee), espece de chien (bigger sneer, you mongrel-face)”. The French respect that sort of thing, and I got not only an excellent steak with out-of-sight pommes frites, but also the Beaujolais from Brouilly that I had wanted, and it was superb.)

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There are a number of breathtaking sights in Munich, though the most breathtaking is not actually in Munich but about an hour away (if a crazy Bavarian is driving you, doing 130 kph on a country lane posted at 80.) It's called Neuschwanstein (noy-SHWAN-stine), and if you don't actually recognize the name you have nonetheless surely seen pictures of it – a castle with soaring turrets, cradled by the Alps (usually snow-covered). It could pass for a Harry Potter set.

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When I opened the menu, my heart skipped a beat. Make that two or three beats (more than for my last crush). Soup was Twenty Euros. That's ₱ 1500. Appetizers were clustered around €40 (₱ 3000). Compared with the appetizers, main courses sounded downright cheap at €50 and up.

But I took it like a man. Not only did I smile happily as we went through three courses, I also ordered a bottle of Troplong Mondot 1995 from the impressive wine list which even had several Le Pins, and Petrus vintages going way back (the '61 was about €8000 per bottle). But we had a fine time, and I was in the company of easily the most beautiful woman in the room.

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Heidi was a friend of a friend of a friend of someone my hosts knew. If you stop to think about it, in a world where most people are within six degrees of separation, Heidi (at five degrees from my hosts and six from me) was pretty darn remote. Nonetheless, my niece's husband made a manly effort for half a day to track Heidi down, if only to quiet his wife, who has been worried about me ever since the last time I got dumped.

But Heidi was Missing in Munich. It was not to be, Cherie. I mean, *liebbling*. Schatzi?

So for the rest of my life, when I think of this trip, I will think of the urinals, the *schweinebraten*, and Missing-in-Munich Heidi. And the cost of saddle of lamb at Tantris.



*The Bavarian countryside, with the breathtaking Neuschwanstein castle to the back of whoever took the picture.*



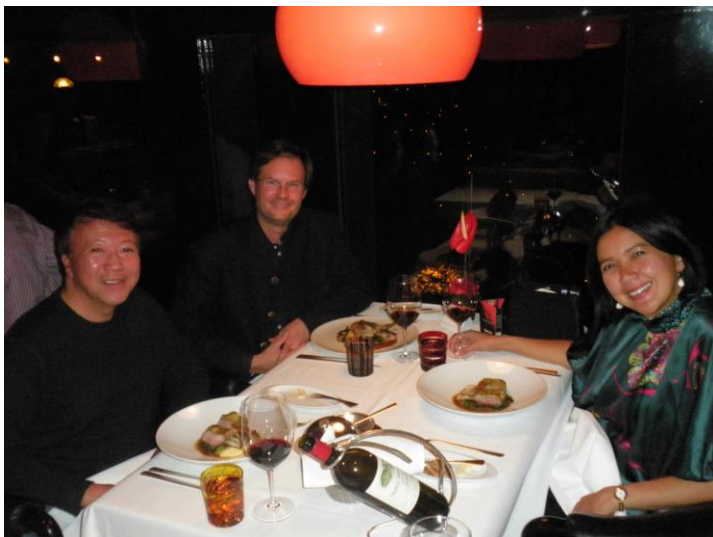
*Okay, here's Neuschwanstein. Sorry, this is the chicken's-eye view. To get the really great angle everyone recognizes, you need to climb the Alps. I didn't.*



*All the Asian tourists were taking pictures of this deli in Viktualienmarkt, the wet market. So I did, too. Almost everything you see is a wurst of some kind – fermented sheep's intestine wurst, congealed calf's-blood wurst, and so forth.*



*The Temple of Diana, in the rear gardens of the Residenz, is one of the lovelier structures in Munich, especially when surrounded by fall foliage.*



*Dinner at Tantris. Observe my courageous smile despite breathtaking menu prices. (With Leo "Hot-rod" Reznicek and Lia Feraren Reznicek.)*