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By the time you're reading this, we'll have finished ticking off the checklist and headed for warmer Malaysia. It's always such an odd experience - of time speeding up as the days race away, and yet some sort of suspended animation as you start feeling 'neither here nor there'.

It's an odd autumn too: the first colour started showing in the trees quite early, but then - hiatus! Green persisting everywhere. Suddenly, Herbst's handbrake is off and the colour is starting to ripple across the hills. The *shilf* tops are all fluffy and making like toetoe - and yes, we think the storks really have flown.

Nebel (high fog that blocks the sun, or low mist that shrouds the trees) comes and goes. For us around Bodensee it can last all day - but when it goes the autumn sun is the more brilliant. The other day I watched an orange leaf rock to earth, cradled on still air, and it was simply luminous in the light.

The sense of seasonality is much more present here. Just as the seasons are themselves stronger, so are the traditions associated with them. *Blutwurst* for instance. If you're unfamiliar with these, they're pig blood sausages - traditionally paired with *leberwurst* - a liver sausage. People who like to eat them together speak of "heaven and hell" - the white wurst and the dark red one. They come into the butchers' shops at the start of October - although in Austria it seems to be about a week earlier, perhaps because of a different calendar, or perhaps to catch the Swiss customers who can't wait! Of course once the timing was related to the autumn killing and processing of meat for winter. But now - well, it's tradition.

And for us - an(other) excuse for a party! Everyone knows that Mani really needs to get his ration of *blutwurst* before we leave, so it becomes a shared responsibility to make sure that happens. The *Blutwurstfest* involves *Rösti* (at least two varieties to allow for personal preferences), stewed apple slices (*boskoop* from brother Hans' trees), the aforenamed sausages themselves of course, and plum pie - the *zwetschgen* trees around Altenrhein have not been prolific this year, but the plums were acquired.

My delight was that (typically!) we were only half-way through this meal, when the conversation turned to the next one. The merits of different ways of cooking tripe, and which butchers sell it now ... Mani is planning a *Kuttelnfest* before we go, for the members of the gang who love tripe. I may be elsewhere.

Food aside, there are many other seasonal preoccupations. One **must** of course change the décor items and table settings - autumn-themed serviettes are de rigour. I tried to rebel and put out the spring-themed asparagus and herb pattern the other day, but I'm so well-acculturated that I couldn't do it and they went back in the drawer.

Then there's preparing the garden for winter. Here, that means severe pruning, emptying the pots and window-boxes, and putting plants into cellars to

over-winter. Everything is stripped back to bare essentials. Our *Diplodena* has gone to the garden-centre for its annual holiday; it's a splendid specimen that has flowered enthusiastically for four full summers, so it's worth the expense. I have yet to pull down the scarlet runners - I reckon there's another feed there. These beans don't seem to be known and grown much here - but they will be now, since friends



Preparing for winter –
Brother Hans's Büscheli

and neighbours have been so impressed with ours they've taken seedpods for next season.

For one of our two *holunder* (elder) trees, severe pruning meant complete removal. We'd enjoyed its flowers and shade and fruit .. but we decided we'd enjoy more sun and space even more. What a job! We'd planted it ten years ago, a sapling from the forest with a thumb-width stem. Now it measured 300mm through, and with a root system to match. The chainsaw dealt with the above-ground bit, which trotted off to neighbours' barbecue stocks, but for the roots, it was hacking and chopping until they were low enough to be turfed over. Roman and Werner turned out to take their turn with axe and mattock - more stories of heroic friendship to share!

Before we turned to all this seasonal preparation, we'd taken a jaunt to Croatia - "we" being Roman and Margrit and Rösli. Ah the joy of swimming in the sea. I've decided the sea - looking at it, swimming in it, smelling and tasting it - is one of the things I miss most. Lakes are lovely, but they can't match the movement and energy of the oceans. There and back was through Südtirol and the stunning landscape of the Dolomites. We had perfect travelling weather, and came back over the passes - they were snowed shut the next weekend.

This was also the Croatian holiday that we discovered Istrian truffles. According to the Lonely Planet Guide this peninsula next to Italy apparently only discovered that it was well-blessed with truffles after an Italian soldier made a connection in his mind between the topography and vegetation of there with truffle-rich home - and oh joy he was right. Even better, we were staying near Labin, a lovely old hilltop city with a restaurant the LPG recommended. Truffle tagliatelli for around 10 Euros... we went back a second time.

And now... off to Malaysia. I've always loved the street-food there, so who knows what treats are in store. I'll let you know next time.