

Germany

Situated in the heart of Europe, Germany has often been the battleground for armed or intellectual conflict on which clashing interests of a religious, national or economic nature have been carried out, particularly between the East and West. Symbolic of this is perhaps the forty-five year division of Germany into two different political states.

Germany has not only been the scene of political turmoil, it has also been a centre of intellectual and artistic development, producing some of the most famous philosophers and musicians in our Western heritage.

Modern German society still shows many traces of its rich cultural and intellectual history. Discussion about all possible topics is an important and popular activity. In school, many courses are based on class discussion. Some topics are dealt with at a rather abstract level, requiring a mature attitude towards learning on the part of the students. Theatres and concert halls subsidised by the state provide a highly varied program of traditional and modern works, and are well attended.

Reading is also a popular pastime; every tenth book published in the whole world is in German. Bookshops and public libraries provide reading materials for every taste, from easy entertainment to highly intellectual and scientific studies.

Balancing off the intellectual aspects of German society is the understanding and appreciation of the natural environment, especially of the German forests.

Aside from that, a foreigner coming to Germany will find that the family still plays an important role in the German way of life, as do beer, "die Gemutlichkeit." Sports (in particular football/soccer) and, as a rather new development, tennis. Not to forget the questionable freedom to cruise on the Autobahn at virtually any speed. In Short, Germany will certainly be a stimulating experience for the intellectually curious and all those with a spirit of adventure.



Olympic Park

Munich



City
of Frankfurt

Geography: Located in Central Europe with an area of 375,000 km² (138,000 sq mi). This is about the same size as the U.S. state of Montana, or a bit larger than Paraguay. There are four geographical zones: the wide lowlands in the north, the central and eastern uplands, the wide valley and gorge of the Rhine River in the south and west, and the mountains and plateaus of the south.

Climate: The climate is temperate, between the mild oceanic climate of Western Europe and the continental climate of Eastern Europe. Humidity and precipitation can be rather high, depending on the region.

Economy: Germany is one of the top five industrial states in the world. Germany is a large producer of cars (Mercedes, BMW, Volkswagen, Porsche), steel, aluminium, high technology and other electrical products. Germany's agriculture is also quite productive.

The German mark (DM) enjoys a strong position among the world's currencies. More than a hundred billion DM had to be spent to rebuild East Germany and to relocate the capital from Bonn to Berlin after 1989.

Language: The official language is High German. However, many dialects are also spoken, e.g., Bavarian and Saxon, reflecting regional traditions. In the native tongue:

German

Guten Tag.....	Hello
Guten Morgen.....	Good morning
Guten Abend.....	Good evening
Es freut mich.....	I am happy to meet you
Bitte.....	Please
Danke (sehr).....	Thank you (very much)
Auf Wiedersehen.....	Goodbye
Ich verstehe nicht.....	I don't understand
Sprechen sie Englisch?.....	Do you speak English?
Ja/Nein.....	Yes/No

Education: Students in the Federal republic of Germany begin school at the age of six, though they go to preschool before that age. Elementary school, which all students attend, goes from first through fourth or sixth grade. At that point, students and their parents must make a choice as to the type of education that students will have at the secondary level.

Secondary education continues in one of three institutions:

Hauptschule is loosely connected with the vocational training system in Germany. It prepares students for a variety of technical careers and goes to grade 9.

Realschule follows a general program and prepares students for non-professional careers. It goes to grade 10 with subjects taught at a more advanced level.

Gymnasium prepares students for entrance into the German university system. It goes to grade 13. Different programs are emphasised in different Gymnasien: foreign languages, math and science, or the classics. East and West German school sometimes differ to some extent.



Heidelberg

Germany's university city





Rich heritage

Literature and arts

Meals: Breakfast is typically continental with rolls, marmalade, and coffee. The main meal is served at lunchtime and consists of soup, a main dish, and dessert. Supper usually consists of sandwiches, unless the family decides to eat out. Germans love a wide assortment of sausages, cold cuts, and cheeses. Potatoes, noodles, dumplings, beans, cakes, and pastries are also popular.

Recreation: Most Germans enjoy nature, spending weekends and Holidays hiking throughout the countryside and elsewhere in Europe. Touring in cars and cycling are enjoyed everywhere. Ninety-seven percent of all German workers receive at least a four week paid vacation. Austria and Italy are favourite destinations.

The most popular sport is Fußball (soccer/football); nearly four million Germans belong to football clubs. Gymnastics, rifting, tennis, track and field, and skiing also have broad appeal. However, there is no team sport competition in schools or universities.

YFU Germany: The Deutsches Youth for Understanding Komitee e.V. (YFU-Germany) was officially founded in 1957. It has a membership organisation with more than 3,000 former YFU participants (returnees) as members.

The Komitee is organised into 16 regional groups and has a central office in Hamburg. Volunteers in each of these regions are responsible for the selection and orientation of the German students going abroad as well as the selection of host families and counselling students.

Family Life: The average German family has 2.7 members, the third smallest average in the world. A family with more than three children is considered large. The emphasis on order, discipline, responsibility, and achievement is still reflected to a certain degree in family affairs, but not as much as people in other countries sometimes believe.

Germans are considered to be well educated, well informed and inquisitive. Most will appreciate intelligent conversation with stimulating ideas and insights, but they may typically receive them critically. Vigorous discussions with a free exchange of ideas and points of view based on facts and logical analysis are considered to be important elements of social life. Because of their rich heritage in music, literature and arts, many Germans will like the company of others with a strong classical education.

Most Germans live in apartment houses, although single family dwellings are not rare. Still, because land is so expensive, one house is often shared by members of the extended family. Apartments are usually built for families with two or less children. Germans take pride in and very good care their homes.



Soccer

Most popular sport

YFU Host Families: While Host families for the incoming students are recruited by YFU volunteers as early as February of each year, placement of students in the individual host families in most cases does not take place until much later. Year-long students from the U.S.A. and from Australia are not placed until well into their four-week orientation and language courses. At that point, the courses are visited by a member of the YFU placement team, and based on an interview with each student and with the orientation and language course teachers, the final placement decision is made.

YFU Activities: Upon arrival in Germany, year students take part in a four-week orientation and language course in different parts of Germany which concentrates on German grammar, culture, cultural differences, and contemporary German issues. In the spring, all students are invited to participate in a seven-day seminar in Berlin or another centre of specialised cultural interest which deals with issues of German and European history and politics.

