

GERMANY

A Cultural Guide to Germany





Empa

Materials Science and Technology

GERMANY

*That which glitters
is born for the moment;
the genuine remains intact
for future days.*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

These booklets contain the relevant information on intercultural diversity in everyday business life - short, concise and compact. The practical booklets support mutual understanding and provide a basis for open exchange. Thanks to their targeted selections of topics, their tips and handy format, they are a helpful companion in everyday business life.

We emphasise the importance to provide you with up-to-date information. Despite in-depth research, small errors however might be found. Please note that these brochures might reproduce stereotypes and we do acknowledge, that every individual is unique in its own way.

Feel free to share with us your experiences or suggestions for improvement. Thank you!



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Cochem at the river Mosel, Rhineland-Palatinate



Introduction Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany, established in 1949, is at the heart of central Europe, extending from the Alps to the North and the East Sea. In 1945, after the German capitulation from World War II, Germany was divided into two separate states: a democratic western part, the "Federal Republic", and a socialist eastern part named "German Democratic Republic". Reunification took place in 1990, however evidence of those times of separation can still be found in many areas of professional or personal life.

The development into an industrialised country began mid 19th century, with the construction of railways, the iron and steel industry being the main boosters of the industrialization. After World War II Germany experienced a rapid economic rise to becoming the leading industrial country in Europe.

In terms of population and economic output, Germany is by far the largest national economy in Europe. It is a modern, open-minded and cosmopolitan country and ranks as the world's second largest exporter, with an export value of close to 1 trillion dollars, corresponding to more than one-third of the national output. Germany's economic power is based on a strong industrial foundation. Particularly the automotive, machinery, electrical and chemical industries enjoy an excellent reputation worldwide.

The north of Germany, also called "the gateway to the world", is dominated by sea freights and international trading activities. Hamburg is the largest seaport in Germany and, besides Rotterdam and Antwerpen, the third largest in Europe. Recently, wind parks already established and more planned in the North Sea are becoming a new industrial source. The technology and innovation driven sectors are located primarily in the south, whereas Germany's eastern part has some individual "lighthouses" in high-tech activities such as bio-, computer-, and nano-technology.

Germany is relatively poor in raw materials apart from coal and agriculture. The main raw materials imported are oil and gas, metals and comestibles. The backbone of Germany's industry is the so called "Mittelstand", the small and medium-sized companies, with its powerful combination of solid handwork by highly skilled employees, innovation, efficiency and attention to detail and precision.

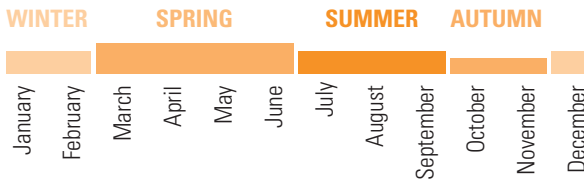
Germany is one of the main driving forces of the European integration. With its economic and financial capacity it is the anchor of the European Union (EU) as well as of the European Monetary Union (EMU). The EMU consists of 19 countries – of totally 27 EU members – which use the Euro as their common currency.



Facts and Figures

Germany is located in Central Europe and has common borders with nine countries. It has around 357,000 sq km, divided into 16 federal states with highly different areas and economic potentials. The highest point in Germany, the peak of “Zugspitze”, near the Austrian border, is 2,962 meters high.

Climate



Time Zone

Central European Time (CET)

Population

Germany has a population of 83,1 Mio (data from 2021). With 233 inhabitants per sq km it is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe.

23 % (2017) of the German population have an immigrant background, from which the largest ethnic group of non-German origin are Turkish. A particularly large proportion of the Turkish immigrants live in Berlin.

Language

The official language is high-German, which is ranked among the top ten languages of the world. However, the Germans speak a variety of regional dialects. Most of the younger German people understand and speak English. In large and internationally-oriented German companies the main language is English.

Religions

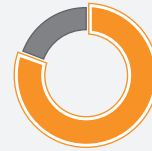
The population is split up almost evenly between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The majority of the Roman Catholics lives in the southern and western part of the country, the Protestants predominate in the eastern and northern part. Other religious communities, measured by the proportion of the total population, make up a smaller part.

POPULATION



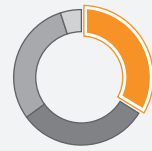
- 0-14 years (13%)
- 15-24 years (10%)
- 25-65 years (55%)
- 65+ years (22%)

ETHNICS



- German origin (77%)
- Immigrant background (23%)

RELIGIONS



- Roman-Catholic (27%)
- Protestant (25%)
- Other (Islamic, Jewish, buddhist faith) (10%)
- No affiliations (38%)

(statistical analysis of 2019 & 2020)



Goethe and Schiller memorial in Weimar, Thuringia

Important Values

Germany is characterized by its broad diversity. It is reflected not only in different landscapes (mountains in the south, wide plains toward the north, lake lands toward the east and coastal regions in the north) and characteristics of the people, but also in the prosperity and the economic performance. As a rule of thumb: the further south and west the better off are the regions, the opposite is true for the northern and eastern parts.

The Germans are proud of their outstanding masters in literature, philosophy and music of which the most respected names are: the philosophers Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx, the authors Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Thomas Mann and Günter Grass, as well as the composers Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert.

Quality, punctuality, strong-willed

The German people place high value on an optimal end result. In order to meet the agreed specifications, they put a strong emphasis on precision and detail work. So it is likely that proposals rely heavily on factual information.

In general, the German people see time as a short and precious resource, as well as vital for efficiency – time is money! Clearly defined procedures, constant punctuality and the meeting of deadlines are essential values.

Once fixed, targets will be enforced even if external resistance arises.

In order to meet the agreed specifications, Germans put a strong emphasis on precision and detail work.

Reliability, credibility, loyalty

Most Germans believe that a contract is a lawful agreement and irrefutable, even though the circumstances have changed.

Honest and straightforward communication as well as a polite and self-confident appearance are beneficial attributes to earn credibility.

Loyalty is an important value. However, it has undergone a change and is losing importance. The individual's focus is more and more set on their own welfare.

People often feel very connected to their home regions and their families.



*Humboldt University
of Berlin*

Germany's current international reputation as a country of science, engineering and innovation has been established in the past two centuries by names such as Alexander von Humboldt, Albert Einstein, Max Planck and Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen. Their genius and researcher urge are still influencing the level of awareness of many "Tüftler" and owners in German mid- and small-sized companies.

*The work flow
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and regulations.*

Thoroughness, discipline, order

The German people like a systematic approach to their business processes. The work flow as well as the working-environment are clearly structured, detail-oriented and based on rules and regulations.

The downside of this German accuracy and precision is the sprawling bureaucracy and the comprehensive rules and regulations of the public administration. For instance, even ordinary people are unlikely to be able to complete the tax form without help of a specialist.

Performance Orientation

The German people tend to be constantly the "best of the class". They seek for competition and are hardly ever satisfied with their achievements. Their strong goal orientation, persistence and assertiveness can lead to getting too little attention for interpersonal matters.

Hierarchy and Power Distance

Large companies as well as the civil service have a fairly rigid hierarchical structure (up to 8 levels). However, great efforts have been made in recent years to flatten the structure.

The relationship and communication style between managers and employees is very formal; even people who have worked together for years use the polite 'Sie' form of address.

The small to medium sized German businesses maintain a patriarchal and charismatic leadership and show a rather high flexibility, especially by fast identification and implementation of customer requirements. A customer focus may appear to be lacking in some service industries.

In traditional companies, outside information might not be freely shared among units of the same organisation. It is restricted to the upper ranks of a company.

Avoiding uncertainty

The rather strong precautionary attitude of the Germans has its roots in the 20th century, where two generations experienced the trauma of losing all of their assets. The first time during hyperinflation (1920s) and the second time due to currency reform after World War II (1948).

The German people like their life to be structured, well organized and secure. They rely on rules and institutional procedures to reduce stress and anxiety when facing ambiguity and uncertainty. This logical and linear approach reduces the possibility of making a mistake, but leaves less room for creative exploration.

The German people like their life to be structured, well organized and secure.



Oktoberfest in Munich, from late September until the first weekend in October



Mask parade at the historical carnival in Freiburg

Traditions

Germany, the nation of poets and thinkers, belongs to the major book nations with its 94,000 issued books per year.

Carnival (also called: the fifth season) is celebrated in February with gaiety and exuberant joy of life. Men, women and children dress in nostalgic fashion and take part in colourful parades. This tradition is mostly glorified in Rhineland and the south of Germany.

The “Oktoberfest” is the largest folk festival in Munich and it is known far beyond its borders. Its atmosphere is exuberant and cheerful, people are singing, swaying and drinking beer.

Germany is not only famous for its “Sauerkraut” but also for the incredible variety of sausages. Also popular are pig’s trotters, salt herring and fried meatballs.

Political and Social System

Due to its historical experiences in the 1930s and 1940s, Germany's state structure is characterized by a clear power distribution across different state levels. As a result, the states are strongly aligned to the federal government, yet each of the 16 German federal states has its own government and parliament with extensive powers.

The political system is based on a parliamentary democracy. The parliament is the centre of the political power and consists of two chambers: the "Deutscher Bundestag" ("common house") – that elects the government and is elected by the people every four years – and the "Bundesrat" ("upper house") that represents the governments of the federal states and has a say, together with the "Bundestag", in the legislation of the federal state. At the helm of the government is the "Bundeskanzler*in" (chancellor) who has a policy guidelines' authority for the government. The "Bundespräsident*in" as head of state, however, only has representative functions.

Another feature, showing the German desire for a system of "checks and balances", is the extensive participation of German employees in private companies. This participation takes place on two levels: firstly in the supervisory board of bigger companies – where the employees and the employers are equally represented, however, with the casting vote of the employers – and secondly in the shape of the "Betriebsrat". These workers' councils are elected by the employees, have in general close ties to the independent trade unions and have a say in most operational issues.

Germany is amongst the European countries which have a particularly developed welfare state. As a consequence of the relatively generous public alimentation of the social securities, the tax and levies burden is high.

Each of the 16 German federal states has its own government and parliament with extensive powers.



Social Behavior

Non-verbal communication

The German people like to respect a social distance zone, this means approx. 1 metre with a business contact and a personal distance of approx. ½ meter while interaction with good friends.

Never talk about...

... the recent history: "Third Reich", war or holocaust, unless your German counterpart brings up this topic. Be cautious, when talking about politics, religion or football, these subjects are taken very seriously. Jokes about football are to be avoided as this is a big passion across all social levels in Germany.

In general, people rather don't talk about their salaries or personal issues.

Trust and relationships

The German people appreciate reliable and respectful behaviour. Commitments and agreements must be respected and shall not be put into question once an agreement is reached. This behaviour would be perceived as unserious. They would expect the business partnership to work without having first to establish a personal trust relationship as well as an open and honest appearance.

The German people may be perceived as polite and sometimes as a little distant. It takes some time to build up a personal relationship, particularly in the business world, where the hierarchical structures are respected. They may place a high value on their private sphere and draw a clear line between business and pleasure.

Business Meetings

The meeting usually starts on time. An agenda is sent out in advance. The meetings are conducted context oriented and the time frame is to be observed.

Business is taken seriously and meetings tend to be formal, but this does not mean that people are humourless.

Commitments and agreements must be respected and shall not be put into question once an agreement is reached.

The Germans prefer a straight to the point communication and expect the same from their counterpart.

Business Greetings

Formalities are still respected. In general, the lower ranked greets the higher ranked person. If no one is there to introduce you, do it yourself by addressing your academic title and family name. Use your first name only when invited to do so.

Modern German society has become less class-oriented, nevertheless, an academic title can increase standing and authority and is commonly used as a form of address in combination with a person's surname.

To greet someone shake hands (firm handshake) while making eye contact. Direct eye contact is often interpreted as a sign of being trustworthy. A reasonable strong handshake shows self-confidence, friendliness, strength and willpower.

Business negotiation

Sequences are: Short small talk – introduction of the participants – presentation and arguments – summary of the arguments – agree on new appointment date – new arguments and rapprochement to compromise – if not successful, seek negotiation on next higher hierarchy level.

It is important to address the expectations directly, in a concrete way, clearly and honestly. A clear outline of the service package, including benefits and prices, is essential. The Germans prefer a straight to the point communication and expect the same from their counterpart. They listen to precise, concise, convincing and substantive contents.

The audiences may ask detailed and technical questions and they may not wait until the presentation is finished, so prepare to be interrupted.

Be aware, not only written agreements but also verbal commitments are considered as binding, although circumstances have changed.

Do's:

- + Topics for small talk: Ask people about the differences between north/south and east/west and where their origin is.*
- + Pay attention to punctuality and respect agreements.*
- + Be prepared to answer detailed questions.*
- + Keep in mind: Germans prefer a more structured and detail oriented approach.*
- + Say what you mean and mean what you say.*
- + Appreciate the cultural achievements of the country.*
- + Prepare to exchange plenty of business cards (include any title above bachelor).*
- + Greet your interlocutor with the academic title (e.g. Doctor, Professor) and surname.*
- + Phone is set on silent during lunch or meeting.*
- + Ensure you have adequate personal hygiene and wear appropriate clothing.*

Don'ts:

- Avoid touching and keep gestures restrained.*
- Chewing loudly when eating and belching after a good meal could embarrass you as well as those sitting with you.*
- Never enter a meeting unprepared, with messy documents or without valid arguments.*
- Addressing people by their first name, unless it is offered, is perceived as rude.*
- Refrain from very loud conversations, ordinary and discriminatory jokes.*

The German people approach conflict with a direct communication and they get to the point in a most efficient way.

The negotiator will appreciate, if you ask critical questions so long as you demonstrate a desire to reach a common understanding.

Decision making process

The German people think analytically, act according to a structured process and like to make quick and consensus oriented decisions, if permitted by the organization structures. Nevertheless, a decision-making process can be slowed down while ideas and opinions of e.g. team members, in- or outside experts are collected.

In a decision-making process the main focus is set on the purpose and the aim. Personal feelings are given less consideration here.

Problem or conflict solving process

The German people approach conflicts with a direct communication and they get to the point in the most efficient way. This behaviour is perceived as respectful rather than rude, unless somebody is being attacked personally. Sometimes, however, individuals can get stuck in one positions as their ego gets easily involved.

Individuals are expected to participate in a debate, explain their views, justify them and contribute to the solution. Usually both sides – employee and employer – make an effort to work together in a spirit of mutual trust. In challenging situations the institutionalized workers' councils may interact in favour of the employees.

A successful and motivated team spirit can be reached by setting clear goals in respect of strength and weaknesses as well as assigned roles, responsibilities and hierarchy.

Virtual Communication

As mentioned before, efficiency (time is money) is a vital asset in the Germans' business world. Conference calls and so called

Gifts

It is not necessary to give expensive gifts. An appropriate item of recipients' hobby or private interests (if known) or associated with the job might be appreciated.

Examples:

- + *Wine/Spirits*
- + *Chocolates*
- + *Flowers (no lilies or chrysanthemums as they are used at funerals)*

live meetings are on the daily agenda in international exposed companies, nonetheless, personal contacts are in general the key to success.

A constant presence and quick response on e-mail or the phone is expected. Keep the communication style by e-mail and web: simple and short – no small-talk. Use bullet points to summarize, highlight information or list options that you are proposing.

Business Dinners

A German business lunch or dinner usually starts with an aperitif and thereafter it consists of an appetizer, a main course (mostly with meat), a dessert and most of the time alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, spirits). Nevertheless, nobody will be forced to drink alcohol.

Modern etiquette suggests that it is acceptable to refuse a drink or even to order the desired beverage. Business lunch starts in general at 12 am and dinners at about 7pm. Before and during

lunchtime people may say to each other “Mahlzeit” (meal time) instead of “Guten Appetit” (enjoy your meal).

Dress Code

It depends on the corporate culture, business and location. In the banking, corporate financial and pharma-industry the business clothes tend to be rather conservative: trendy (depending on the localities) dark, blue or grey suits, tie, solid- and light-coloured shirt and well-polished shoes. In other industry or sectors such

Basics of German table manners

The German people use cutlery (e.g. knife, fork and spoon) to eat their meal. Eating with hands is rather an exception and tolerated for fast food. The guests are expected to be on time; this means not too early and not later than 15 minutes after the proposed time.

- 1** *Before beginning to eat, the host may propose a toast “prost” or “zum Wohl” (“good health”) and wishes everyone at the table “Guten Appetit” (“Enjoy your meal”). Return the toast!*
- 2** *Wait until everyone at the table has been served.*
- 3** *Keep the wrists on and the elbows off the table and sit up straight, close to the table.*
- 4** *Keep both fork (left hand) and knife (right hand) in your hand while eating. Don't put knife or fork down except to drink or pick up bread. The knife is also used to help discreetly guide food onto your fork.*

as telecommunication/IT, marketing/media and engineering, the dress code is more casual, people may wear jeans with a smart jacket or blazer at work. Nonetheless, it is smart to dress up for a business visit.

Women wear also suits and other smart clothes for work.

- 5 *Don't bend your head too close over your food when you are eating or "shovel" it into your mouth.*
- 6 *Take as much food in your plate as you plan on eating. Cut off a bite size piece and eat it before you cut off another piece.*
- 7 *Indicate you have finished eating by laying your knife and fork side by side on your plate pointing to the centre, with the handles on the lower right rim (five o'clock position). Fold your napkin (paper or cloth) and place it to the left side of your plate – never in the plate!*
- 8 *When you have finished eating, wait for the others (with whom you arrived) to leave.*
- 9 *Punctuality will be expected.*



Practical Knowledge

Daily life

The public transportation network in larger cities is well developed and efficient. The transportation to small cities or rural areas, however, might lack good connections.

Shopping / Dinner

The large cities, tourist areas and generally in the food trade have the longest opening hours, however, the latest closing is in general at 8pm. On Sunday and public holidays shops are closed, except in train and gas stations.

Survival tips

Be aware, the travel speed on most of the highways is rather high, due to no speed restriction.

Don't be afraid to ask local people for help, in order to find the right path.

Useful Expressions

<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>
<i>Germany</i>	<i>Deutschland</i>
<i>Hello!</i>	<i>Guten Tag!</i>
<i>Thank you!</i>	<i>Danke!</i>
<i>Goodbye!</i>	<i>Auf Wiedersehen / Tschüss!</i>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>Ja</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>Nein</i>
<i>Cheers!</i>	<i>Prost / zum Wohl!</i>
<i>What is your name?</i>	<i>Wie ist Ihr/Dein Name?</i>
<i>My name is ...</i>	<i>Mein Name ist ...</i>
<i>Where can I find ...?</i>	<i>Wo finde ich ...?</i>
<i>I'm hungry/thirsty</i>	<i>Ich bin hungrig / durstig</i>

Other resources

Germany portal

www.deutschland.de (English version)

Online Marketplace

www.riccardo.de

Travel and transportation

www.bahn.de

Chamber of commerce

www.ihk.de

Networking

www.xing.de

iphone apps

- Language translation
- Germany

News Papers

www.world-newspaper.com

www.faz.net

www.sueddeutsche.de

www.ftd.de

www.thelocal.de

www.spiegel.de/international

www.tagesschau.de/newsinenglish

www.dw-world.de

Empa – The Place where Innovation Starts

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