

Germany (Deutschland)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 81 million (Second most-populous European nation)

Area: Slightly smaller than Montana

Capital: Berlin (3.3 million)

Languages: German (official), Turkish (spoken by 2.4% of the population)

EDUCATION

The responsibility for the German education system lies primarily with the states (Länder). Optional Kindergarten is provided for all children between two and six years of age, after which school attendance is compulsory. German secondary education includes five types of school: the Gymnasium is designed to prepare pupils for university education; Realschule has a broader range of emphasis for intermediate pupils; the Hauptschule prepares pupils for vocational education; the Gesamtschule, with an entitlement curriculum open to all; and Förderschulen/Sonderschulen, for special educational needs. At every type of school, pupils study one foreign language (in most cases English) for at least five years. A typical German school day lasts from 8:00am to 1:00pm. The literacy rate for age 15 and over is 99%. The pupil / teacher ratio at the primary level is 13/1. 10.5% of total government expenditure is set aside for education.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel visiting a German kindergarten

Roman commander Julius Caesar referred to the unconquered area east of the Rhine as Germania, distinguishing it from Gaul (France). Martin Luther, seminal figure in the reformation movement of the 16th century, provided a German translation of the Bible decisive for the German language's evolution to Modern Standard. Disparate Germanic principalities did not unite until 1871, when the King of Prussia became Kaiser (emperor) of Germany. German is the most widely spoken first language in the European Union. Germany is known for innovation, particularly in automotive, chemical and machine tooling industries, information technology, biotechnology, and nanotechnology.

GEOGRAPHY

Located in Central Europe, Germany borders the Baltic Sea and the North Sea and lies between the Netherlands and Poland, south of Denmark.

RELIGION

Roman Catholic 28.9%, Protestant 27.1%, Muslim 3.7%, unaffiliated or other 28.3%. According to a 2005 Eurobarometer poll, 47% of German citizens believed that "there is a God," 25% believed that "there is some sort of spirit or life force," while another 25% did not "believe there is any sort of spirit, god, or life force."

ETHNICITY

German 91.5%, Turkish 2.4%, other 6.1% (made up largely of Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish). Because of its relatively strong economy and Schengen Zone membership, Germany is home to the third-highest number of international migrants worldwide.

FAMILY & CUSTOMS

As in many other Western countries, family life has undergone many changes. An estimated 30 percent of married German couples never become parents, while those who do have only one or two children. Thus, German birth rates are below replacement levels, meaning an increasing financial burden for younger generations to support the aging population. More Germans are living together before or instead of marrying, with the number of marriages in decline. More than one-third of all babies in Germany are born out of wedlock. During the last decades of the 20th century, gender roles have shifted, with more than 70 percent of women now working outside the home. The average German's day begins with a small breakfast of fresh coffee or tea and a white Brotchen roll. Children generally take a sandwich to school. Lunch, the largest meal of the day, consists of a meat dish with potatoes or dumplings, gravy and cooked vegetables. Dinner, a much lighter meal, may be soup and cold cuts or a sausage sandwich, with a beer or tea. Pork, sausage, cabbage, beets, turnips and potato are German staples. Popular German holidays include Easter, International Workers' Day, German Unification Day, Christmas, and New Year's Eve.



Germany and its Relationship to Europe

Europe's strongest economic and industrial power, Germany is the most populous European country outside Russia. Because of its economy and size, Germany is a key member of the continent's economic, political, and defense organizations. Germany is a magnet for foreign workers—some 7.3 million immigrants live here. Disparate Germanic principalities did not come together until 1871, under the newly appointed German Kaiser. In the 1880s, Chancellor of Germany Otto von Bismarck introduced old age pensions, accident insurance, medical care, and unemployment insurance that formed the basis of the modern European welfare state. Defeat in World War I cost Germany its empire and left the nation staggering under heavy reparations. Inflation and unemployment hounded the democratic, but shaky, Weimar Republic. By 1933 a demoralized population had turned to Adolf Hitler. Under Hitler, Germany re-armed and invaded neighboring countries, triggering the Second World War, which killed 55 million people and devastated much of Europe. When Germany surrendered in 1945, it lost eastern lands, like Prussia and Silesia, to the Soviet Union and Poland. The Allies divided the rest of the country, and its capital, Berlin, into four occupation zones. In 1949 the American, French, and British zones formed the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), and the Soviet Union established the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). The Berlin Wall went up in 1961 to stop East Germans from fleeing west, although millions of ethnic Germans fled from Communist areas into West Germany, which experienced rapid economic expansion, and became the dominant economy in Western Europe. West Germany was re-armed in the 1950s under the auspices of NATO, but without access to nuclear weapons. The Franco-German friendship became the basis for the political integration of Western Europe in the European Union. Rejoining two populations after 45 years of separation has been difficult. The economy in eastern Germany remains weak—unemployment is twice as high, which forces skilled people to go west for jobs. A bright spot in the east is Berlin as the construction boom continues in Germany's capital and largest city; tourists come to see the innovative architecture, including the Reichstag building with its new glass dome. Germany is famous for its cultural contributions in the fields of music and philosophy. As birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms and Richard Wagner, among others, Germany's gift to European classical music is important. In thought and word, Germany's huge heritage includes the works of Luther, Goethe, Schiller, Nietzsche, Kant, Brecht and Thomas Mann.



The Bundestag, Germany's Parliament, in Berlin

GERMANS IN THE USA

German Americans are the largest ancestry group in the U.S., made up of roughly 50 million people. As early as the 1670s, German immigrants arrived in the Colonies, mainly settling in New York and Pennsylvania. German immigration continued on a large scale in the 19th and 20th centuries because of the promise of land, religious freedom, economic opportunities and/or a fresh start. Today, we see the influence of German culture in popular foods such as hot dogs and pretzels, holiday traditions with the Easter Bunny and Christmas trees, Richard Wagner's "Here Comes the Bride," children's fairytales and the American public education system.



The current German flag was adopted on May 9, 1949. Though the colors used to correspond to the uniform colors of German volunteers who fought in the Napoleonic Wars, today they represent the unification of Germany.



German-Americans at the 2013 Steuben parade in NYC

GERMANY AND THE EURO

Since German Unification in 1990, Germany has expended considerable funds to bring Eastern productivity and wages up to Western standards. In January 1999, this culminated in Germany's transition, along with 10 other member states, to the common European exchange currency, the euro. The euro banknotes and coins were introduced in Germany on January 1, 2002, after a transitional period of three years when the euro only existed as 'book money.' Today, Germany is one of 18 countries which have adopted the euro as its currency and make up the Eurozone.

FAMOUS GERMANS

A few famous Germans include: Anne Frank, Marlene Dietrich, Heidi Klum, Diane Kruger, Wim Wenders and Levi Straus. Many more famous Americans have roots in Germany including Dr. Seuss (born Theodor Seuss Geisel), Kurt Vonnegut, Roger Ebert, Ben Affleck, Jessica Biel, Sandra Bullock, Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Cruise and Kevin Costner.

GERMAN WORDS

Hi.....Hallo
 Bye.....auf Wiedersehen
 Good morning.....Guten morgen
 Yes.....Ja
 No.....Nein
 Please/You're welcome....Bitte, bitte schön
 Thank you.....Danke schön
 How are you?.....Wie gehts?
 I do not understand....Ich verstehe nicht
 Do you understand?.....Verstehen Sie?
 What is your name?....Was ist Ihr Name?
 My name is.....Ich heiße..
 Where are you from?....Wo kommst du her?
 I am from..... Ich bin aus..

USEFUL LINKS

- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gm.html>
- <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/germany-guide/>
- http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/germany/index_en.htm
- http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/archivestory.php/aid/1628/German_innovation.html
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