

Did You Know?

- The printing press was invented in Germany.
- There are very few drinking fountains in Germany because most people prefer sparkling water to tap water. In Germany, sparkling water is called “classic water.”
- Volkswagen, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, and Audi are all types of cars that originated in Germany.
- To wish for good luck, Germans don’t cross their fingers; they *drücken die daumen* (press the thumb) by folding a thumb in and closing their fingers on it.
- On many German highways there is no speed limit, so people can drive as fast as they want.
- When entering or leaving an elevator, Germans say hello or good-bye to the other riders even if they do not talk to them during the ride.
- German adults like to garden. Even if they live in an apartment, they might rent or own a small garden plot in or near the city. Many even carefully tend small, beautiful gardens on top of graves at the cemetery.
- Some of the world’s greatest composers—Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Mendelssohn, Handel, and Schumann—came from Germany.
- Gummy bears originally came from Germany.
- The capital city of Berlin is famous for its two sides being divided for many years by the Berlin Wall, which separated the democratic west from the communist east.
- Germany is known for its many wildlife parks and zoological gardens. There are hundreds operating across the country.
- The English language is said to have partially originated from northwest Germany and two tribes called the Saxons and the Angles, hence the name Anglo-Saxon. This is why German and English share many words, including *hamburger*, *pretzel*, *waltz*, *kindergarten*, and *poltergeist*.

Flag

The flag of Germany was last officially adopted in 1949. The colors originate from the uniform colors of the volunteer student corps, the *Preussisches Freikorps von Lützow*, who fought bravely against Napoleon in the 1813 Battle of Nations.



National Image

The black eagle was on Germany’s official coat of arms from 1871 to 1933 and again after 1950. Eagles of various types were symbols for German rulers of the Holy Roman Empire.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 137,847

Area (sq. km.): 357,022

Germany is about the same size as Japan or the state of Montana. Most people live in cities, but there are also many small towns in mountains or farming areas. The north tends to be flat, the center hilly, and the south mountainous. Forests, wide rivers, and green valleys help make Germany a favorite tourist spot. The Danube, Elbe, and Rhine rivers are all important waterways that flow through the country and make it possible to transport goods from one place to another. The Zugspitze is part of the Alps mountain range in the south and is the tallest mountain in Germany, reaching a height of 9,718 feet (2,962 m). The waters of the North and Baltic seas wash the nation's northern coastline.

Winters are snowy in the south and rainy farther north; summers are warm. Many Germans enjoy the pleasant weather of spring and fall.



Population

Population: 80,996,685

Germany has the largest population in Europe. Most are ethnic German. But after World War II, a large number of immigrants called *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) moved to Germany from such places as Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, and Poland in search of work and new opportunities. Although East and West Germany were united in 1990 to form one country, many Germans still refer to each other as *Ossies* and *Wessies* (German slang for “easterners” and “westerners”). The majority of Germans live in cities in western Germany, with more than three million making their home in the capital city of Berlin, close to two million in Hamburg, and over one million in Munich. The east is still a poorer region than the west, with fewer opportunities.



Language

Germans speak German, but with different *dialects* (ways of pronouncing or speaking) or accents, such as Bavarian or Saxon, so someone from northern Germany may find it hard to understand someone from southern Germany. But all children learn *High German* (a standard form of German used to communicate in business and education) in school, even though they may speak differently at home and among friends. Most Germans also take English as their first foreign language in school. When writing, Germans capitalize all nouns, even in the middle of a sentence.

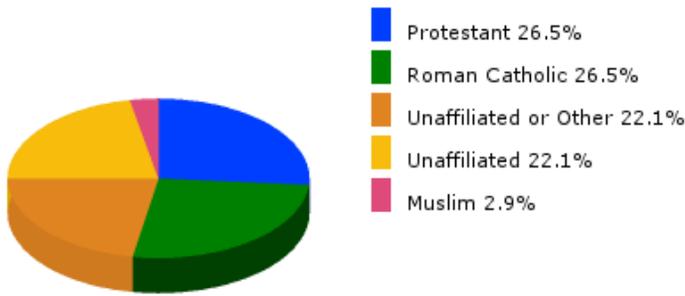


Can You Say It in German?

Hello	<i>Guten Tag</i>	(GOO-tun TAHCK)
Good-bye	<i>Auf Wiedersehen</i>	(OWF VEE-dir-zain)
Please	<i>Bitte</i>	(BIT-tuh)
Thank you	<i>Danke</i>	(DAH-kuh)
Yes	<i>Ja</i>	(yah)

No *Nein* (nine)

Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.*

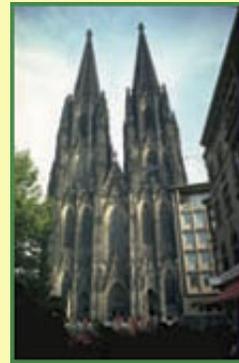
Most Germans are Christian. About a third of them are Roman Catholic, while another third belong to various Protestant churches (mostly Lutheran). When Germans register themselves, they must state their religion. If they are Catholic or Protestant, they must pay a church tax, which is 10 percent of their monthly salary. Historically, entire towns and regions belonged to one faith, according to the local ruler's choice. So even today, Catholics live mostly in the south and west and Protestants in the north and east. Nearly 4 percent of the population is Muslim, and about 28 percent belong to other churches or to no church.

History

Time Line

500 BC		
500 BC	Germanic tribes begin to inhabit northern Europe	
AD 100		
AD 100	Germanic peoples begin to migrate and conquer Roman territories	
500s–1200s	Various small German kingdoms frequently fight for territory	
800	Emperor Charlemagne, the Frankish ruler of France and Germany, is crowned Roman emperor by Pope Leo III	
843	The Frankish Empire breaks up, and Germany emerges as a separate realm	
962	German king Otto I is crowned Roman emperor after gaining control of northern Italy; the beginning of what becomes known as the Holy Roman Empire centers on Germany	

1200s–1800s The Holy Roman Empire spreads across Europe



1517 German monk Martin Luther writes the *Ninety-Five Theses*, challenging the traditional practices of the Catholic Church and leading to the official Protestant split from the Catholic Church

1800

1815 The German Confederation is formed with 39 states

1871 Prussian king Wilhelm I rules, and Germany grows powerful

1888 Germany begins expanding its colonies and building up its navy to compete with Great Britain

1900

1914–18 Germany fights and is defeated in World War I



1918 Germany becomes a *republic* (government in which the power rests with the people and the head of state is not a monarch)

1919 The Treaty of Versailles results in Germany losing land and colonies to its European neighbors; unemployment skyrockets

1929 The global depression causes mass unemployment in Germany

1933 Adolf Hitler comes to power after his Nazi Party wins elections

1934 Hitler proclaims the Third *Reich* (realm or empire)

1936 Germany hosts the Summer Olympics in Berlin, the first Olympic Games to be televised live

1938 *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), an attack on Jews, their businesses, and their synagogues, leaves the streets littered with broken glass; thousands of buildings are destroyed, and thousands of Jews are arrested and sent to concentration camps

1939 Nazi Germany invades Poland, starting World War II

1945 Germany loses the war with millions of people dead as victims of the Holocaust

1948	Germany is divided into a democratic West and a communist East	
1961	East German leaders build the Berlin Wall to keep citizens from leaving	
1989	The Berlin Wall is torn down, and East Germans celebrate their freedom	
1990	West and East Germany become one country again on 3 October	
1991	Parliament names Berlin the new capital	
1994	Russian and Allied troops finally leave Berlin	
2000		
2002	The <i>euro</i> replaces the <i>Deutsche Mark</i> as the country's currency	
2005	Angela Merkel is elected the first female chancellor in Germany and the first leader from the former East Germany	
2006	Germany hosts the soccer World Cup	
2008	Germany is hit hard by the global financial crisis; the government takes steps to help rescue the country's banking system	
2011	Germany becomes a leader during the global financial crisis, bailing out failing European economies in Greece and Spain	

2014 Germany celebrates the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which separated West Germany from communist East Germany during the Cold War; German chancellor Angela Merkel and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev speak at the celebrations in Berlin

PRESENT

Germanic Tribes

Thousands of years ago, early tribes lived in what is now Germany, inhabiting the region around the lower Danube River. Little is known about these early peoples, but the Romans and Greeks referred to this territory as Germania. Tribes such as the Teutons, the Cherusci, and the Cimbri fought the Roman Empire when it attempted to conquer the area in the second century BC. Over the years, the Roman army drafted fierce Germanic soldiers into its ranks, and missionaries spread Christianity throughout the various tribes. The Germanic languages were adopted by many countries as medieval Europe began to develop.



The Reformation

At the beginning of the 16th century, Martin Luther, a German monk, began to speak out against some of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Although at first he hoped to improve the church, his disagreements became more serious and he ended up leaving it. Luther published his *Ninety-Five Theses*, challenging the traditions of the Catholic Church, in 1517. He later translated the Bible into German so that regular people and not just priests could read it. The efforts of Luther and others led to the rise of *Protestantism*, a major branch of Christianity. Conflict between Protestants and Catholics led to the Thirty Years War. The war lasted from 1618 to 1648. The brunt of the fighting took place in Germany, and it took the region several generations to recover from the devastation.



German Empire

A series of wars in the 1860s united different German states into one empire. Germany soon became a strong nation under the leadership of Prussian leader Otto von Bismarck. Later, it fought alongside the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in World War I, which was called the Great War. In 1917, the United States joined Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and Japan in fighting against Germany and its allies.



In 1918, Germany was defeated. It had to accept blame for starting the conflict and pay large sums of money to France, England, and other countries. Germany also had to give up land to its neighbors. The German army was reduced to 100,000 men, and it was not allowed to have an air force. This was a massive blow to the German economy and set the stage for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party, as the German people felt angry and like they were being punished for the mistakes of their government.

World War II

After World War I, Germany was very poor. Germans began to listen to a man who promised to restore national pride and make Germany a great empire again. That man was Adolf Hitler. Through his Nationalist Socialist Party (members were called Nazis), Hitler gained control of the government in 1933. In 1939, he led Germany into World War II. The war spread to nearly every continent, and millions of people died. Hitler's government also killed millions of people it didn't like, especially Jews. By the time the war ended in 1945, much of Germany had been destroyed. Today, this period in history is an embarrassment to many Germans, and they will not discuss this part of the past or the name of Adolf Hitler.



A Nation Divided

After the war, some nations kept armies in Germany to help keep the peace. The Soviet Union controlled the eastern part of the country. The western side was run by the United States, England, and France. Eventually, Germany was divided into two separate countries. The United States helped West Germany recover and rebuild its cities. Before long, West Germany's economy was prospering again. But East Germany remained under Soviet rule. To keep its people from moving to West Germany, where there was greater freedom and better living conditions, the East German government closed the border between the countries.



Germany's former capital, Berlin, was also split after the war into an eastern and western side. The East German government built a wall between the two sides of the city. Those who tried to cross over to West Berlin were shot. In Berlin today, you can still see the remains of the wall and even buy a piece of it or have your picture taken at Checkpoint Charlie, the old crossing point between East and West.

Reunification

In 1989, the Soviet government became weak. This allowed countries under Soviet control to break free. East Germany tore down the Berlin Wall and its border fences. Both sides joined together again as one country. The much richer West spent billions of dollars to help rebuild the East, where the economy had not fully recovered from World War II and had suffered from years of communist control. Since then, the standard of living in the East has improved. The German government has focused on improving roads and public transportation, rebuilding industry, and retraining workers. While there is still more work to be done, Germany has become the largest economic power in Europe.



Lifestyle

Games and Sports

If you lived in Germany, soccer would probably be your favorite sport. German kids often have a favorite professional team and watch World Cup matches on television. They participate in sports such as track and field, volleyball, basketball, handball, and swimming at school, but school teams are not common. Instead, kids go to after-school clubs to play soccer, play tennis, or participate in other sports. Depending on where they live, kids might also ski or hike. At home, they have video games and computers, as well as cards and board games.



Holidays

The Christmas holidays are the most popular time of the year in Germany. Festive outdoor markets in large cities are open during this holiday season, beginning on 25 November, and buildings and homes are decorated with white lights. On the first day of December, Advent begins, and children start counting down on their Advent calendars, receiving a small gift or candy each day until Christmas. On 6 December, Germans celebrate *Nikolaustag* (St. Nicholas' birthday). The night before, children put their clean shoes outside their doors and wake up in the morning to find their shoes filled with nuts, chocolate, and candy. Families put up a *Weihnachtsbaum* (Christmas tree) and decorate it with candles and glass balls. Christmas Eve is called *Heiliger Abend* (meaning "holy evening"), which is the night children receive their Christmas presents. Families eat a traditional *Heiliger Abend* meal of fish and potato salad. Christmas Day is a day for family. A traditional Christmas dinner includes a grilled goose and almond or gingerbread cookies for dessert. The day after Christmas is for visiting others. Fireworks light up the sky on New Year's Eve.



On Easter Sunday, children wake up to search the house or yard for little gifts their parents have hidden. The gifts are often chocolate bunnies and other treats that are said to have been left by the *Osterhase* (Easter Bunny). In fact, this tradition originated in Germany. The evening before Easter Sunday, Germans build huge bonfires all across the country. They celebrate with fireworks and eat hardboiled eggs painted in a variety of colors. Germany's main national holiday is 3 October, the Day of German Unity.

Food

Germans eat a lot of pork, chicken, and beef. German kids like fast food, but they also eat more traditional German foods such as sausage, noodles, and potatoes. Every region of Germany has its own special type of *wurst* (sausage), often served with mustard in a hard roll. Bread is also an important part of the German diet. Bakeries offer a wide variety of different breads, rolls, pastries, and pretzels.



While some German children eat cereal for breakfast, it's more common to have bread and butter with jam, honey, or chocolate spread. Along with their breakfast, kids like to have a glass of cold chocolate milk. The main meal is usually eaten at lunch. Kids are served hot food at school, and parents usually eat at work. Then, in the evenings, they have *abendbrot* (dinner), which consists of bread, sandwiches, and cold cuts. Many Germans shop for groceries several times a week because they prefer to have very fresh food for cooking. Ethnic food (especially Italian, Greek, Chinese, and Turkish) and fast food are popular in Germany.

Schools

Adult Literacy: 99%

Children must start school by age six. After four years of *grundschule* (elementary) school, students have three options. They can enter *Gymnasium* (like high school) to prepare for college, or they can go to *Hauptschule* or *Realschule* to prepare for jobs in industry or business. Nearly every job, from car mechanic to waiter to factory worker, has a school or program designed for it. A person can't get a job without going through the right program. School is usually completed by age 19, but *Gymnasium* students must pass a difficult test to get into college. Students complete their *ausbildung* (apprenticeship) between ages 21 and 23.



Life as a Kid

German kids usually have only one brother or sister, or they live alone with their parents. Both parents often work, and young kids stay in day care or with grandparents. After school, kids do their homework and hang out with their friends. Older children are expected to help with chores at home, such as cleaning their rooms or setting the table for dinner. In large cities, most families live in apartments because houses are very expensive. Houses in the countryside are usually bigger and have more space. Families in the countryside often have more children than families in cities.



Society

Government

Capital: Berlin

Head of State: Pres. Joachim Gauck

Head of Government: Chancellor Angela Merkel

Germany is a *federal republic* (government in which the power rests with the people and the leader is not a monarch) with 16 *Länder* (states). The leader of the government is called the *chancellor*. There is also a president, but he or she doesn't have much political power. The president is a representative of the German people, both nationally and internationally. Germany's *legislature* (lawmaking body) has two houses: the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council), with 69 members, and the *Bundestag* (Federal Assembly), with 630 members. The voting age is 18. Voter turnout is usually high.

Money and Economy

Currency: Euro

Germany has one of the strongest economies in the world. Germans make cars, steel, cement, aluminum, tools, appliances, and electronics. Many Germans also work in service industries, such as tourism and banking. Important crops include potatoes, wheat, barley, and sugar beets. For many years, the German currency was the *Deutsche Mark*. But it now has been replaced with the *euro*, a single currency used throughout much of Europe.



Getting Around

Most families have cars, but they don't always drive them because of Germany's excellent public transportation system. Also, the price of gas is very high. Trains and buses can usually take people where they need to go. Large cities have streetcars and subways. Whenever possible, people ride bikes to shop for groceries, run errands, or simply have fun. Most towns have an open shopping area where no cars are allowed to drive or park. Germans cannot drive a car until age 18, and driving schools are difficult and expensive.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Fairy Tale Castles

For hundreds of years, Germans lived in small, separate *principalities*, which were like states, governed by a king, prince, or other nobleman. These rulers built castles or fortresses for themselves, usually on hills or high riverbanks. Many of these buildings still stand in Germany. Some are used as museums or hotels; some are in ruins. One of the most famous of these is Schloss Neuschwanstein, above the village of Hohenschwangau, in Bavaria. Ordered to be built by Ludwig II of Bavaria, the castle was meant to be his own private retreat. After his death, it was opened to the public, and more than one million visitors flock to the castle every year. Neuschwanstein was also the inspiration for Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle.



Learn More

Contact the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 4645 Reservoir Road NW, Washington, DC 20007; phone (202) 298-4000; web site www.germany.info; or the German National Tourist Office, phone (212) 661-7200; web site www.germany.travel.

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