Cultural Atlas

German Culture

Cultural Atlas

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Statistical Overview

Germany

Population

80,159,662
[July 2020 est.]

Language

Deutsch (German) [official]

Religion

- No Religion (37.8%)
- Roman Catholic Christianity (27.7%)
- Protestant Christianity (25.5%)
- Islam (5.1%)
- Orthodox Christianity (1.6%)
- Other Christianity (1.1%)
- Other (0.9%)

[CIA World Factbook, 2018]

Ethnicity

- German (81.3%)
- Turkish (3.4%)
- Polish (2.3%)
- Arab (1.8%)
- Russian (1.5%)
- Other (9.7%)

[Federal Statistical Office, 2017]

Cultural Dimensions

- Power Distance 35
- Individualism 67
- Masculinity 66
- Uncertainty Avoidance 65
- Long Term Orientation 83
- Indulgence 40

Australians with German Ancestry

982,226
[Census, 2016]

See the end of this document for more information on this statistical overview.

Statistical Overview

Germans in Australia

Population

102,595
[Census, 2016]
This figure refers to the number of Australian residents that were born in Germany.

Median Age

65 [Census, 2016]

Gender

- Males (47.1%)
- Females (52.9%)

[Census, 2016]

Religion

- No Religion (32.4%)
- Catholic Christianity (26.3%)
- Lutheran Christianity (14.7%)
- Anglican Christianity (5.4%)
- Other Religion (14.1%)
- Not Stated (5.6%)

[Census, 2016]

Ancestry

- German (67.9%)
- Polish (7.3%)
- English (4.8%)
- Ukrainian (2.5%)
- Other (17.5%)

[Census, 2016]

Language Spoken at Home

- English (53.8%)
- German (38.6%)
- Polish (1.4%)
- Other (5.3%)

Of those who speak a language other than English at home, 96.8% speak English fluently.
[Census, 2016]

Diaspora

- New South Wales (28.8%)
- Victoria (25.6%)
- Queensland (19.9%)
- South Australia (10.7%)
- (Other 15.0%)

[Census, 2016]

Arrival to Australia

- Prior to 2007 (82.3%)
- 2007 - 2011 (7.4%)
- 2012 - 2016 (7.0%)

[Census, 2016]

Core Concepts

- Pragmatism
- Honesty
- Privacy
- Critical thinking
- Organisation
- Pacifism

Germany (officially the Federal Republic of Germany) is a central western European country with the second biggest population in the region.[1] It was split into 'East Germany' and 'West Germany' until 1990 when the two states reunified to form a greater continuation of West Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany). The German people have remained stoic through the massive changes of the last century, adapting to the evolving social climate of the country as needed. One can attribute much of Germany's recent prosperity to its mastery of organisation and critical thinking (*kritisches Denken*). These qualities have arguably helped the society reconcile the impacts of the World Wars and the Cold War. Germans have been distinguished as particularly pragmatic (*pragmatische*) and honest (*ehrliche*) people. However, generalisations of the standard German character have their limits when one takes into account the strong regional differences of the country and the different experiences individuals have had in the East compared to the West. Regional identities usually affect people's socio-cultural understandings. However, most Germans have strong moral sensitivity based on lessons of the past that have taught them to understand and respect these differences.

Language

The official language of Germany is '*Deutsch*' (German). Most Germans are taught '*Standarddeutsch*' (standard German) in school, also known as '*Hochdeutsch*' (high German). However, there are varying regional accents and dialects across the country. For example, those in many areas of northern Germany speak a West Germanic variation known as '*Plattdütsch*' (low German). The pronunciation and features of this dialect have similarities with the language spoken in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the Germanic dialect of the southern border, '*Bayrisch*' (Bavarian), is similar to the Austrian Germanic dialect. Despite some differences in phrases and meanings, Germans from all regions can usually understand one another.

[1] Following Russia, which is transcontinental and largely located in Asia.

Core Concepts

Regional Diversity and Local Patriotism

A foreigner's visualisation of the 'typical German' often conjures images of beer, lederhosen, Oktoberfest and bratwurst. However, these are actually cultural emblems particular to one state (or principality) in the south of the country (Bavaria). Such cultural characteristics differ between regions and cities within Germany, visible in the way traditional heritage, foods, architecture and celebrations vary across the country. Germans may also talk of social distinctions based on stereotyped personality traits attached to each region. For example, Germans often describe people from the southwest as stingy. Meanwhile, Rhinelanders in the west are generally thought to have a more laid back attitude.

Accents, social attitudes, religious affiliations, traditions and practices also vary between those living in the cities and those living in rural areas. For example, some of Germany's metropolises are renowned for their alternative lifestyles and tolerant social attitudes. They tend to attract more unconventional Germans, as well as migrants. Meanwhile, rural townships generally receive less internal migration and follow more conventional lifestyles in accord with their tradition. The capital of Berlin is particularly noticeable for being a cultural outlier within the country. This unique hub differs significantly from the areas surrounding it.

Germans are generally very proud of their regional identities. It is quite normal for people to show more patriotism and loyalty to their local area than their nation. Each of the cities and states of Germany have their own emblems. There are over 50 coats of arms for urban and rural districts within the state of North Rhine-Westphalia alone. It is often more common to see regional flags and coats of arms in public than the national flag.

Social Distinctions Between the East and West

Some of the most pronounced social distinctions are noticeable between the western two-thirds of Germany, and the other eastern third. From the end of World War II until 1990, the nation was divided as two separate countries under different systems of rule. West Germany was administrated under a capitalist system as the *Federal Republic of Germany (FRG/BRD)*, whilst East Germany was occupied under Soviet Communist rule as the *German Democratic Republic (GDR/DDR)*. West Germany became more cosmopolitan and industrialised, aligned with Western Europe and North America. Meanwhile, East Germany was ruled under a strict socialist ideology.

The two states reunified in 1990 to create a larger version of West Germany (FRG). As modern-day Germany has been unified for less than 30 years, the dividing line of the inner German border that once separated the East from the West is still visible in the geography of some

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places, and the remaining communist architecture often shows which towns were in the former GDR. Temporary separation has also entrenched language differences that are subtly noticeable in the different names used to describe single objects. For example, the word for plastic is '*Plastik*' in the West and '*Plaste*' in the East.

There is also a faint cultural division noticeable in the social differences between the East and West. For example, the Eastern population is markedly less religious, older on average and is less multicultural.[2] Social attitudes regarding political ideals can differ significantly depending on whether one lived in East or West Germany. For example, some people's experience under communism has influenced them to be strongly opposed to leftist world views.

The economic disparity between the East and West is also still quite obvious and pronounced. It is perhaps one of the differences spoken about most frequently, as West German states pay a financial support tax to East Germany. East Germany suffered more material hardship over the course of its Soviet rule. After the reunification of Germany, most of the young and skilled East Germans migrated to the prosperous West. This continued to drain the East's economy, which remains slightly weaker today. The East has a higher unemployment rate and less disposable income on average per person.[3] Some Germans may express resentment about this disparity and the measures to amend it. The differences between East and West Germany often lead people to draw certain social conclusions about one another.

Social Hierarchies

Germans tend to differentiate one another on the basis of their social ranking. People generally pay more respect to those with expertise, evidence of a higher education and experience. One usually finds that the social hierarchy structures authority around these qualities. Germans may also reflect on a person's accent, region of origin and occupation to make conclusions about their social status and circumstances. However, class barriers were largely broken down after World War II. Most Germans had to rebuild their lives from scratch after losing most of their possessions or being displaced. Therefore, the class system is not deeply stratified; most Germans share the benefits of the strong middle class and receive a comprehensive, classical education.

As in every society, there are those who do not have as much privilege; a proportion of the population is unemployed (or underemployed). Recent refugee and immigration arrivals from

[2] Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014
[3] Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014

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the Middle East and North Africa also tend to find themselves in lower-paying occupations. Nevertheless, the dominant German attitude tends to aspire towards ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunity regardless of their social background. According to Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Germany has a low power distance score, indicating that there is an expectation of equality among society (regardless of whether this is the case).

Privacy and Socio-Relational Boundaries

Privacy is highly valued in Germany. People tend not to divulge a lot of personal information about themselves or discuss their political and social views when first meeting strangers. Some people may also prefer not to invite acquaintances to their homes on a regular basis, unless they have a close relationship. To foreigners, this can make Germans come across as distant. However, one can understand why privacy is so important when considering how it has been invaded by governments in the past. For example, those living in Germany during the Cold War were subjects of one of the most expansive and repressive secret citizen surveillance networks in human history (the *Staatssicherheit* or *Stasi*). As such, some people are sensitive to sharing their personal information and take precautions to protect their privacy to the degree they feel personally comfortable with.

Personal privacy is also important to maintain the socio-relational boundaries between people's professional and personal lives. Germans tend to compartmentalise leisure and work time, distinguishing their relationships with people into one of these spheres. The social boundaries in this sense are quite strong. People generally keep a certain social distance from those they work with. For example, if talking about something personal in a colleague's life, one may hear a German say "*Das geht mich nichts an*" (That's not my business). Individuals are expected to downplay any personal friendships they have with colleagues whilst in the office to detach their emotions from business. It can take some time for people to break through this social perimeter of privacy and the formality of the professional realm. This may give foreigners the impression that Germans are quite aloof. However, these boundaries dissipate among friends.

Germans are renowned for being very honest people, sometimes to the point of being bluntly critical of others' actions. This assertiveness combined with their reserved approach to strangers can produce a misjudgement of them as having a standoffish public demeanor. Nevertheless, Germans usually become very open and personal once they find a common denominator with someone. From a German viewpoint, reserving warmth and friendly energy for those who are truly important to them gives their relationships greater integrity and value. Personal friendships are deeply prized. The time and sincerity involved in building such relationships can make them

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particularly durable and loyal.

Organisation and Directness

Germans are known for being industrious, orderly and punctual. The German expression "*Ordnung muss sein*" ("there must be order") reflects the cultural preference for organisation and methodical planning. Indeed, it also explains the preference for having one's socio-relational boundaries clearly defined. People generally like to understand the context to interactions and what is required of them in certain scenarios. Germans generally arrange to meet one another by clarifying exactly when and where they will be meeting, for how long and what they will be doing. Things are rarely left to chance. Matters that proceed without a scheduled plan are likely to be directed by a relevant rule, regulation or social norm. This aspect of the culture is not so different from many industrialised cultures wherein people lead busy lives. However, it has produced a cliché of the typical German as highly efficient and matter-of-fact. This is likely due to the fact that such organisation is coupled with a very direct approach. In task-oriented cultures such as Germany, people do not always feel the necessity to build personal relationships in order to achieve a joint goal (see more information in *Business Culture*). While they are still courteous, they generally do not linger on small talk. Germans tend to be exceptionally honest and straight-to-the-point.

Demographic Changes

Germany classifies its citizens between ethnic Germans (meaning people with two parents of mostly or full German ancestry) and those of a migrant background (*Migrationshintergrund*). According to the Federal Statistical Office, the portion of the population with a migrant background has peaked for the fifth time in recent years. The 2016 microcensus reported that 22.5% of the country's residents, or more than 18.6 million people, were of immigrant or partially immigrant descent.[4] However, it must be noted that ethnic German repatriates are included in this figure. Most *Migrationshintergrund* people reside in the western states of Germany and Berlin. The eastern portion of Germany has fewer foreigners relative to the total population.

Germany has generally embraced its identity as a multicultural (*Multi-Kulti*) country. The nation has undergone some very big population shifts in the past 30 years. Since the fall of the Berlin

[4] Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017

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Wall and the end of the Cold War, roughly 3 million ethnic Germans have returned from former Soviet countries. The country has also received big influxes of non-German migrants and refugees, particularly from Eastern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Indeed, Germany is the second biggest migration destination in the world.[5] The country has been a key flashpoint in Europe's migrant crisis, receiving over a million asylum seekers since 2015. Such migration has been putting social and political stress on the country. The country is struggling to balance its national interests with international obligations. Ultimately, one cannot assume a German's position on this matter or the current shifts occurring throughout Europe.

Past Experiences and Current Attitudes

In the past few decades, Germany has become recognised as an outward-looking nation, seeking to keep Europe united and help other countries and people in need. Indeed, Germany has transformed itself into a largely peaceful, forward-thinking and productive member of the global community of nations. However, the country may never be completely free of the spectre of its roles in the World Wars. It has undertaken a long process to overcome the guilt of its past. The word '*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*' describes this struggle to come to terms with the country's negative history. Many Germans continue to be acutely aware that foreign perceptions of them take into account their country's history. However, the ethos of German character has changed considerably from what it was during the early 20th century.

A strong focus on the value of critical thinking (*kritisches Denken*) and tolerance has been formulated and ingrained into most Germans following the tragedy of World War II. From a young age, people are taught about the consequences of the population's past mistakes and the deadly side of nationalism that fuelled the Third Reich. They are encouraged to view everything with the lessons of the past in mind and assess the consequences of certain situations, as well as their responsibility to respond to them. As such, the population has developed quite strong pacifist ideals in reaction to their history. Many older Germans that have lived through the Cold War are also particularly aware of the importance of democratic freedoms. Most people regard situations with a strong moral sensitivity in light of the country's past.

As a result of this cultural attitude, there tends to be a cultural resistance to showing too much national pride. Many people feel sceptical or uncomfortable with patriotism, unable to detach it from the devastating effects of nationalism. Soccer tournaments often provide a safe environment

[5] United Nations Population Division, 2015

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that is dissociated from political and military contexts where Germans can display their patriotism proudly. However, people generally tend to be quite modest about their country's capabilities. Repeated surveys by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center have found that Germany is one of the least patriotic countries in the world.[6]

Nevertheless, this aspect of the culture is arguably undergoing change. Some among the younger generation of Germans tend to be slightly more outgoing and less reluctant as they do not feel the taboo of the past is as relevant to them. Many Germans are also looking at the future direction their country should take, and saying that they need to move away from compensating for the past and start looking at their own domestic interests again. Meanwhile, the East German population is showing stronger nationalistic inclinations as many people who lived under Soviet rule are searching to reclaim their cultural traditions and pride in their identity.

[6] Smith & Seokho, 2006

Greetings

- Greetings generally differ in formality depending on whether a German knows the other person well or not.
- The most common greeting is a handshake with direct eye contact.
- Men usually greet women first and wait for them to extend their hand.
- Close friends may hug to greet and younger people may kiss one another on the cheek.
- "*Guten Tag*" (Good day) or "*Hallo*" (Hello) are the most common verbal greetings used in Germany. In the South, some people may say "*Grüß Gott*" (literally translating as 'Greet God').
- In formal situations, one should address another person with their title and last name, "*Herr*" (Mr.) for men and "*Frau*" (Mrs.) for women. It is polite to continue to use formal titles until the person invites you to move on to a first-name basis.

Religion

Germany is a very secular country and religion tends to be regarded as quite a private matter. Nevertheless, the majority of the population identifies as religious, with Christianity being the traditional and dominant faith. It is estimated that 37.8% of the population identified themselves as not religious, 27.7% identified as Roman Catholic Christians and 25.5% identified as Protestant Christians.[7] The remaining 9% of the population identified with some other religion, including other variations of Christianity. Islam is the biggest non-Christian minority faith in Germany (5.1% of the population). This demographic has grown with migration from Muslim majority countries such as Turkey and Bosnia. Despite the majority of Germans indicating that they follow a religious affiliation, the number of those practising is much lower. In a study by the Pew Research Center, only 21% of Germans reported that religion was very important to their lives.[8]

Religion in Germany

Germany was the birthplace of Martin Luther, who initiated the Protestant Reformation movements of the 16th century in resistance to the creed of the Catholic Church. His movement eventually led to a political divide between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. This was mediated by a territorial distribution of religious practice. Starting in the mid-16th century, entire towns and municipalities followed the faith of their local ruler's preference (either Catholic or Protestant). This geographical division of faith is still visible in the religious affiliations of Germans today. The south and west of the country is generally Catholic, whilst most Protestants live in the north and east. One can usually still infer the traditional faith of each German town and city by looking at the religious architecture.

On the other hand, the majority of the non-religious population live in East Germany. This is largely because the region was under communist occupation as the DDR (German Democratic Republic) from 1945 to 1990. During this era, belief or membership in a religious organisation was considered to be incompatible with loyalty to the Communist Party. As such, the regime actively suppressed and surveilled church activity. For many East Germans, their church remained a place of sanctuary and played a crucial role in providing an independent voice. However, between 1950 and 1989, the religious population was estimated to have shrunk from 98% to 31%.[9]

[7] CIA World Factbook, 2018
[8] Pew Research Center, 2011
[9] Granata, 1999

Family

Family is fundamentally important to most Germans. People often identify its main source of value being the unique personal relationship one has with each family member and the support they receive from one another. For many Germans, the family home provides a place where an individual's eccentricity can be fully revealed. Parents and relatives are expected to help foster a person's aspirations to help them reach their full potential. However, Germans are also generally encouraged to be self-reliant throughout childhood so that they are prepared to be independent as adults. Most children move out of their parents' home when they go to university or as soon as they are in a financial position to do so.

Most German households are quite small, consisting of the nuclear family alone (mother, father and their children). The extended family generally lives separately. This family form (with children living at home being under 18 years of age) continues to be the most common family structure. However, many different living situations and family forms are gaining popularity in Germany as traditional ideas about family structures are challenged. It is now becoming common for couples to choose not to have children or for parents of children to decide not to get married and remain in de facto relationships. Furthermore, there is growing acceptance for families incorporating LGBTQI+ relationships. Many people are also choosing to live alone, particularly in Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen and Saxony.

Gender Roles

The man is the traditional head of the family; however, this hierarchy has evolved. Gender does not dictate a person's role or duty to the family as it used to. Women enjoy equal rights and the opportunity to choose their form of contribution to the household dynamic. They also generally share the decision-making power in the household. The average age for women to give birth is 29.4 years old as many are choosing to establish themselves professionally in their 20s before starting a family. However, once children are born, a German mother is statistically more likely to stay at home and forfeit her career than a German father. Families in East Germany tend to use child care facilities much more than those in the West. This practice began during the communist era, when women were required to be employed full-time. This preference has prevailed, with more women in the West choosing to be stay-at-home mothers than those in the East.

[10] CIA World Factbook, 2015

Family

Dating and Marriage

Dating practices in Germany are similar to those throughout the English-speaking West. During high school, teenagers will begin to socialise with peers from school or those living in the same neighbourhood. Some couples may meet through social activities at their local sports club or church.

Couples usually live together for months or years before they get married. Some may choose not to marry and remain de facto couples. Most Germans marry for the first time in their late 20s. Marriages are legally established through a civil ceremony at the registry office. Religious ceremonies are optional. Traditionally, a man would ask a woman's father for permission to marry her. Though this is no longer necessary, many Germans continue to do so out of respect.

Naming

- Germany uses similar naming conventions to Anglo-Australians. Most Germans have two personal names (one that is a first name and one as a middle name) and a family name (e.g. *Maria Anna SCHAFER*).
- Surnames are passed down to subsequent generations through the father's lineage.
- Women often adopt their husband's surname in marriage but sometimes choose to keep their maiden name.
- The most common surnames include *MÜLLER, SCHMIDT, SCHMITZ, SCHNEIDER, FISCHER, WEBER, MEYER, MAYER, MEIER* and *WAGNER*.
- German first and middle names are generally gender-specific and left to the parents' personal choice. Traditionally, children were named after grandparents, but this practice is fading.
- The most common and traditional German names are biblical, such as *Johann/Hans* (*John*), *Georg/Jörg* (*George*), *Jakob* (*Jacob*), *Anna, Maria* and *Christina*. Other popular names have Germanic origins, such as *Friedrich* and *Ludwig*.
- Germans have recently begun choosing more English and international names. For example, of those born in 2015, the following six names were most popular: *Mia, Emma* and *Hannah* for girls; *Ben*, *Jonas* and *Leon* for boys.

Dates of Significance

The following days are public holidays or dates of significance in Germany:

- New Year's Day – *Neujahrstag* (1st of January)
- Day of Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism (27th of January)
- Valentine's Day – *Valentinstag* (14th of February)
- Rose Monday/Shrove Monday – *Rosenmontag* (Monday before Ash Wednesday)
- Carnival – *Fastnacht/Fasching/Fasenach* (Day after Rose Monday)
- Ash Wednesday/End of Carnival – *Aschermittwoch*/End of Karneval (Varies each year)
- Walpurgis Night (30th of April)
- May Day/Labour Day – *Tag der Arbeit* (1st of May)
- Father's Day – *Vatertag/Männertag* (Varies of year)
- Mother's Day – *Muttertag* (Varies of year)
- German Unity Day – *Tag der Deutschen Einheit* (3rd of October)
- Remembrance Day – *Volkstrauertag* (Two Sundays before the 1st Advent)
- New Year's Eve – *Sylvester/Silvester* (31st of December)
- 2nd Advent (2nd Sunday in December)
- 3rd Advent (3rd Sunday in December)
- 4th Advent (4th Sunday in December)
- Christmas Eve – *Heiliger Abend/Heiligabend* (24th of December)
- Christmas Day – *Weihnachtstag* (25th of December)
- St. Stephen's Day/Boxing Day – *Zweiter Weihnachtstag* (26th of December)

The following dates are Christian holidays or observances in Germany:

- Epiphany – *Heilige Drei Könige* (6th of January)
- Easter – *Ostern* (Varies each year)
  - Maundy Thursday/Holy Thursday - *Gründonnerstag*
  - Good Friday – *Karfreitag*
  - Easter Sunday – *Ostersonntag*
  - Easter Monday – *Ostermontag*
- Ascension – *Christi Himmelfahrt* (Varies each year)
- Pentecost – *Pfingsten* (*Pfingstsonntag*) (Varies each year)
- Whit Monday – *Pfingsten* (*Pfingstmontag*) (Varies each year)
- Corpus Christi – *Fronleichnam* (Varies each year)
- Assumption of Mary – *Maria Himmelfahrt* (Varies each year)
- Harvest Festival – *Erntedankfest* (1st Sunday in October)

Dates of Significance

- Reformation Day – *Reformationstag* (31st of October)
- All Saints Day – *Allerheiligen* (1st of November)
- All Souls' Day – *Allerseelen* (2nd of November)
- St. Martin's Day (11th of November)
- Immaculate Conception – *Maria Empfängnis* (2nd Saturday before the 2nd Advent)
- Sunday of the Dead –*Totensonntag* (Sunday before the 1st Advent)
- 1st Advent (1st Sunday in December)
- St. Nicholas Day – *Nikolaus* (6th of December)
- 2nd Advent (2nd Sunday in December)
- 3rd Advent (3rd Sunday in December)
- 4th Advent (4th Sunday in December)
- Christmas Eve – *Heiliger Abend/Heiligabend* (24th of December)
- Christmas Day – *Weihnachtstag* (25th of December)
- St. Stephen's Day/Boxing Day – *Zweiter Weihnachtstag* (26th of December)

Etiquette

Direct Manners

Be aware that Germans are direct communicators and can interpret gestures literally, even when they are made as a token of politeness. For example, if a German asks if you want food and you respond 'no' to avoid appearing greedy, they may accept your first answer and not ask again. This can put some foreigners in difficult positions when their refusal or protest of an offer is taken at face value. As such, it is best to give straightforward honest answers rather than being indirect out of modesty or shyness.

In relation to this direct communication pattern, do not press a German on a matter if they have already given you their response. For instance, if you have offered them a beverage and they decline, do not insist further that they have one. Though this may seem generous on your behalf, this can make them feel awkward and pressured.

Basic Etiquette

- It is rude to chew gum or keep one's hands in one's pockets whilst talking with someone.
- Cross your legs by putting one knee over the other.
- It is impolite to rest your feet on furniture.
- Tight punctuality (*Pünktlichkeit*) is expected in most professional and social situations.
- Recycle or reuse materials and minimize waste whenever possible.
- Knock before entering a room if someone has shut the door. Germans are often happy to receive people even if their doors are shut, but one should enter respecting their privacy.
- It is common for Germans to share tables with strangers in public places, asking *"Ist dieser Platz noch frei?"* (Is this seat free?).
- Dress neatly and suitably for the occasion. Very casual clothing, such as singlets and thongs, are not usually appropriate to wear in public.
- Do not cross the road on foot while the lights are red. 'Jaywalking' is frowned upon in Germany.

Visiting

- It is sometimes preferred to socialise in public group activities rather than in people's homes. Hence, Germans generally do not invite people to visit their house on a regular basis unless they are very close.
- Organise your visit in advance. Germans rarely visit each other without making plans to do so.
- Be punctual on arrival. Tardiness of around 10 to 15 minutes can be forgiven.

Etiquette

- It is a nice gesture to bring flowers, wine or sweets when visiting a German home.
- Hosts usually serve refreshments and a platter of food, even if the visit is only going to be short.
- Do not enter into other rooms of the house unless the host invites you to. Guests are expected to respect the homeowner's privacy.
- Visits to one's house during the daytime are usually short, between one to two hours long. However, they are usually more prolonged in the afternoon. This is considered '*Kaffeeklatsch*' time when refreshments are served as an afternoon tea.

Eating

- Only start eating once the host has said that it is time to begin. The German term for this is "*Guten Appetit*".
- Germans rarely drink tap water with their meals. They prefer mineral water, a soft drink, juice, beer or wine. Sometimes these beverages are cheaper than still water.
- If an alcoholic beverage is served, wait until the host makes a toast before drinking. A common toast is "*Prost*" (Cheers). It is important to look people in the eye as you toast.
- People generally serve themselves from plates of food that are passed around the table.
- Traditionally, Germans cut fish, potatoes and other similar foods with the side of their fork instead of the knife as this indicated that the food was tender and properly cooked. However, not many people follow this rule of etiquette anymore.
- Do not rest your elbows on the table and always keep your hands in view above the table.
- If you are still hungry after the first serving of food, it is not rude to ask for a second serving. Germans are generally very hospitable, offering refills of drinks and food, but guests are also expected to speak up if they want something.
- It is the best practice to eat everything on your plate as this shows that you enjoyed the meal and that the host provided enough food. Leaving food on your plate is considered wasteful.

Gift Giving

- Germans usually open gifts upon receiving them.
- If gifting flowers, the bouquet should count to an odd number. They should be unwrapped before giving them to the recipient.
- Red roses have romantic connotations, while carnations, lilies and chrysanthemums are given at funerals.

Etiquette

- Avoid giving personal items such as toiletries unless you are close friends and know the person will appreciate the item.

Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Try to get straight to the point at hand. Germans generally do not need much small talk to warm up the conversation. They often appreciate it when others are direct.
- Provide sincere answers to serious questions, and avoid introducing humour to lighten a stern conversation.
- When making plans with your German counterparts, make sure to give all relevant details to ensure clarity.
- Expect a German to be open and honest when they disagree with you. They are generally courteous, but are unlikely to deliver their opinion in an indirect way through ambiguous hints and understatements.
- Try not to take personal offence if a German informs you of a mistake you made. They would generally expect you to do the same for them in order to help each other improve and grow as an individual in all aspects of life.
- Ask a German's permission before taking a picture or video of them.
- Exercise discretion when discussing the arrival and settlement of refugees and migrants in Germany, and be aware that you may not be able to presume somebody's position or education on the matter. Avoid making comparisons with Australia's migration as it occurs under a different context and scale. See 'Demographic Shifts' under *Core Concepts* for more on this.
- Approach conversations about the World Wars and the Cold War sensitively. Most Germans are open to discussing their history. However, some may prefer not to revisit the past, while others may simply be tired of speaking about it.

Do's and Don'ts

Don'ts

- Avoid shouting across rooms or drawing attention to yourself in public. Unruly behaviour may be viewed as a lack of self-control.
- Do not press a German to revise their decision on a matter if they have already given you their response. For example, insisting that they do something after they have already politely declined can be seen as intrusive, even if it is coming from a good place (e.g. asking them to accompany you somewhere or help themselves to more food).
- Avoid cancelling on a German at the last minute or being late. If you anticipate delays, give your German counterpart a fair warning of your tardiness.
- Avoid clouding what you mean out of modesty or shyness. Germans prefer straightforward honest answers to questions. Directness and clarity is highly valued.
- Do not talk about the actions of the Germans in the World Wars as if your German counterpart was there. For example, avoid saying "*You Germans did this...*" as if they need to claim personal responsibility. Your German counterpart was likely born after these events and had no part in them.
- Never compare a German to Hitler or the Nazis of World War II or express anti-Semitic sentiments (even jokingly). There is a strong policy against Nazi symbolism and hate speech.
- Do not refer to the era of the Third Reich as "Nazi Germany". That is not what it was called.

Communication

Verbal

- **Direct Communication:** German communication styles are quite direct and functionally purposed. People generally speak honestly, clearly and explicitly to arrive straight to the point. Criticism may be delivered vaguely in order to remain polite and avoid offence, but a German's intention and meaning is usually clear and apparent through their precise word choice. This communication style can cause Germans to interpret others' words literally. It can also give some foreigners the impression that they are quite brash or blunt. However, it is simply their way of ensuring clear communication.
- **Small Talk:** As German communication is quite functionally purposed, people tend to spend less time warming up conversation with small talk. It is not considered rude to jump straight to the point of a meeting or conversation. Germans are usually open to indulging in idle chit-chat when they notice their counterpart wants to talk lightly; however, they are unlikely to initiate it.
- **Honesty:** While it is important to be polite and discreet when delivering difficult news, it is also very important to be honest with Germans. They generally speak openly about what is important to them. Avoid being evasive when you are asked sensitive questions. Exercise discretion and be honest; indirect behaviour is likely to be interpreted literally.
- **Humour:** Germans often laugh about the irony of situations, wordplay and innuendos. However, many of these jokes lose their hilarity when translated into English. Furthermore, as Germans are quite direct communicators, they may take jokes literally – for example, missing the sarcasm in the speaker's tone. This has seen the German people be stereotyped as humourless and serious. Be careful when making self-deprecating jokes as they are less common in Germany. If the German you're speaking with is not familiar with such humour, it can easily be misinterpreted as a real lack of self-confidence. The same can be said of jokes that talk about another person's failing as the punchline.
- **Silence:** Germans tend to speak once they have something of significance to say and have already refined their opinion. As such, they do not always have the compulsion to fill the silence.

Communication

Non-Verbal

- **Personal Space:** Germans usually keep about an arm's length distance between one another when talking, and sometimes a little extra between men and women depending on how well they know each other. Standing too close to someone can be seen as an invasion of their privacy.
- **Physical Contact:** People tend not to touch one another very much during communication unless they are close friends. Touching someone on the shoulder or arm to emphasise a point is generally acceptable, but can otherwise be seen as a sexual advance. Women tend to be more physically affectionate with each other than men. It is polite to apologise if you accidentally bump into someone or make unwanted physical contact by saying "*Entschuldigung*" (Excuse me) in Germany.
- **Eye Contact:** Direct eye contact is expected, especially when speaking about a serious matter. It conveys sincerity and approachability. Avoiding eye contact may be seen as an indication of dishonesty or a lack of confidence. It is appropriate to break eye contact now and again as holding it for prolonged periods can make people uncomfortable. When talking to a group, be sure to make equal eye contact with all people present.
- **Gestures:** Touching your index finger to your thumb in a circle to demonstrate 'Okay' or 'Good' can be misunderstood. Instead of crossing the index finger and middle finger to indicate hoping for something or "Good Luck", Germans squeeze the tip of their thumb between those two fingers (*Daumendrücken*). Letting one's thumb protrude too far from between the fingers can be an obscene gesture, so only the tip should be visible.
- **Pointing:** Most Germans use their index finger to point, but some may use their little/pinkie finger.
- **Expression:** Some Germans may have quite a serious exterior upon first meeting people, reserving smiles for friends. Once they are familiar with someone, they generally become very animated.

Other Considerations

- Sunday is a day of rest in Germany. Most shops close and people tend not to do hard work.
- German children are usually given a comprehensive sexual education from a young age. As such, society tends to be quite honest and open about sex and sexuality. The appropriateness of conversations around these topics clearly varies depending on the social context, and people's opinions cannot be presumed.
- Some Germans may be quite relaxed about nudity. There is a tradition of '*Freikörperkultur*' (FKK) or 'free body culture' in Northern Germany and in the East particularly.
- Many Germans consider themselves '*Weltmeister*' (world champions) at taking vacations. Indeed, when travelling elsewhere in the world, one is likely to bump into a German. Schools are closed for a total of 13 weeks every year, and employees get at least 24 days of paid leave each year.
- In Germany, regular immersion in nature is thought to be good for your '*Seele*' (soul). Many Germans like to '*Wandern*' (go hiking) to enjoy the environment.
- Cigarette smoking is a common habit in Germany. People are still allowed to smoke in many public places, even on the property of some schools. Until relatively recently people were still allowed to smoke in all restaurants and bars. Today, to do so, it needs to be labelled "*Raucherbar*" (smoker bar). The late ban on smoking in Germany is partly due to the fact that the Nazi's outlawed smoking during their time in power. Therefore, the German government has been hesitant to copy Nazi policy.

Business Culture

Meetings

- Germans take punctuality seriously. If you are running late, call in advance to let your German counterpart know.
- People enter a meeting in order of importance, the highest ranking person arriving first and so on. The same goes for introductions.
- If you are not hosting the meeting, wait to be directed where to sit.
- A small amount of social conversation may begin the meeting, but expect a German to get down to business very quickly.
- Initially, meetings will likely be formal with the primary purpose of determining familiarity and trustworthiness. They will be less concerned with getting to know you personally and more interested in your credentials, but formality tends to relax as negotiations progress.
- Meetings have strict agendas, both in regard to time frame and the goal of the meeting.
- All parties are expected to participate in discussion an equal amount.
- Expect discussion to be well thought-out. Germans are unlikely to air ideas that are not fully formed and instead tend to speak their mind once they have already refined their opinion.
- Much time is spent on a comprehensive explanation of all components of an agreement. This can seem fastidious, but this is to ensure thorough understanding on all ends.
- Although Germans are good listeners, you may find that they are not easily persuaded.
- Once final decisions are agreed upon, they are written into documents that explain each plan of action in detail.
- Knocking on the table with one's knuckles at the end of a meeting signals approval of an agreement and the conclusion of the meeting.

Plan and Target Orientated

Germans generally aim to find the most efficient way of achieving the finest quality outcome. They take great care to plan methodically and thus spend much time deliberating and scrutinising all factors of a decision. In business, they ensure the transparency of all courses of action so that it can be analysed and controlled in accordance with protocol. If you make any understatements or innuendos regarding such matters, expect them to ask you for clarification. Furthermore, once the final and best decision has been reached, they will show very little flexibility. From then on, it is generally expected that the plan agreed upon be adhered to with precision and consistency.

Business Culture

Task Oriented Over Relationship Oriented

Business relationships are often kept formal as many Germans do not always feel the necessity to build personal relationships before doing business. They will be more interested in your experience, credentials and the longevity of your company. Depending on the industry, business is seen as strictly professional with no association to one's personal life.

As a part of this business-only mindset, Germans may find excessively polite language and customs to be unnecessary and obstructive to whatever task is at hand. Whereas in other cultures, people may build rapport before easing into asking the controversial questions, Germans expect to be asked the most difficult and pressing questions first. This is not because they are rude. While they are still courteous, they often arrive straight to their point without euphemism. In the same way, a German will most likely openly disagree with you and point out your errors instead of speaking ambiguously for reasons of diplomacy and politeness. From their standpoint, softening one's words convolutes both meaning and the process of negotiation. Despite this strictly business approach, Germans are open to cultivating business friendships – especially in the long term. They enjoy building rapport as long as it doesn't complicate business.

Considerations

- Germans commonly see themselves as critical thinkers, constantly asking questions and seeking new perspectives to guide their decision-making. They can be flexible and will speak out to suggest a new idea if they believe there's a better way.
- You may find that a German company has a well-founded confidence in their own way of doing things. This can come across as them being overly sure of themselves. Avoid interpreting this as meaning that they are closed-off to new ideas.
- Workplaces in Germany are hierarchical based on experience and position. Although they respect those in authority, they dislike control or leadership that is solely based on status as opposed to expertise.
- Germans display a great amount of respect for those with education and experience, and will seek to know how your position relates to theirs.
- Expect a German to closely adhere to any regulations or rules that relate to the task. They may be hesitant to do work with those who show a tendency to cut corners.
- When doing business, Germans may develop new binding protocols during negotiations to avoid uncertainty and inconsistency, as well as to assure your reliability.
- When negotiating, written communication is used to record discussions and uphold

Business Culture

agreements.

- Displays of passionate emotion, exaggerations or promises that sound too good to be true are likely to make Germans hesitant or suspicious of doing business with you.
- On the Corruption Perception Index (2016), Germany ranks 10th out of 176 countries, receiving a score of 81 (on a scale from 0 to 100). This perception suggests that the country's public sector has a relatively low level of corruption.

Germans in Australia

Germans were among the first European settlers to arrive in Australia following colonisation as founding pioneers. Around 10,000 migrated during the gold rush in the 1850s. However, in the first half of the 20th century, Germans living in Australia became the subject of social isolation, suspicion and persecution surrounding the World Wars. In turn, their population shrank by tens of thousands of people. During this time, many German cultural establishments closed and families often had to Anglicise their names in order to hide their German heritage. As a result of this persecution, much of the early German impact on the Australian social landscape has been completely erased.

The second and biggest influx of German migration occurred in the postwar period. Many people who migrated were ethnic Germans that had been displaced by the war, arriving under assisted migration programs. During this time, German schools, churches and cultural institutions were able to re-emerge. German migration continued steadily for the rest of the century, but the community is now shrinking due to the aging population, return migration and lack of new arrivals. Today, much German migration is temporary and does not lead to permanent residency. For example, it is a popular choice among German youth to live and work in Australia on a working holiday visa for a year. The current German preference for permanent relocation is elsewhere in Europe rather than Australia.

The German population in Australia is generally very well educated; 95.7% of the German-born population speaks English fluently and almost 70% have some form of higher education qualification, compared to 55% of the total Australian population. The majority of first-generation German migrants in Australia are well established and have been permanent residents for decades. Over 50% of the Germany-born population arrived prior to 1971 and more than 80% arrived before 2001. As such, it is an elderly migrant population, with the median age being 62. Almost 40% of the German-born population is 65 years or older, whilst only 6.4% is under 25 years of age. The German-Australian population has played a central role in establishing a strong Lutheran community in Australia.

It is important to note that those Germans who have been settled and acculturated to Australia for decades may have a different understanding of Germany's cultural climate than those born and living in Germany today. For example, some Germans living in Australia may not have had much exposure to the new social climate of Germany since the Cold War ended and East and West Germany reunited. While Germans are no longer routinely persecuted in Australia, some report being socially isolated on the basis of their national reputation.

Glossary

Anti-semitism

Hostility towards or discrimination against Jews as a religious or ethnic group.

Related Terms:
anti-semitic, anti-semite

Colonisation

Colonisation is the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.

Related Terms:
colonisers, colonialism, colonial

Source:
Oxford Dictionary

Corruption Perception Index

Based on expert opinion, the Corruption Perceptions Index measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption worldwide.

A score of 0/100 indicates a highly corrupt public sector whilst a high score closer to 100 suggests the country's public sector is cleaner, but not perfect. A mid range score perceives that the public sector fares well, but corruption among public institutions and employees is still common. A country's ranking is based on how their score fares relative to the 176 countries also measured.

Related Terms:
CPI

Source:
Transparency International

Democratic

Something that is democratic is based on the idea that everyone should have equal rights and should be involved in making important decisions.

Source:
Collins Dictionary

Direct communication

Direct communication involves explicit communication patterns that do not rely on the surrounding context to give meaning. The message is not encoded in understatements, body language or speech style, rather the entire meaning is apparent through the precise words chosen by the speaker. Direct communication is often used in low context cultures where

Glossary

people's position or intentions are not easily distinguishable by their appearance or status (for example, Germany, Canada, the USA and Australia).

Related Terms:
direct communicators, direct communicator

Source:
James W. Neuliep

Ethinicity

An ethnicity or ethnic group is a population group whose members identify with each other on the basis of common nationality or shared cultural traditions. They are commonly formed or defined in terms of shared genealogy, whether actual or presumed by geography. Typically, if people believe they descend from a particular group, and they want to be associated with that group, then they are in fact members of that group.

Ethnicity connotes shared cultural traits and a shared group history. Some ethnic groups also share linguistic or religious traits, while others share a common group history but not a common language or religion. Ethnic groups distinguish themselves differently from one time period to another. They typically seek to define themselves but also are defined by the stereotypes of dominant groups.

Related Terms:
ethinic, ethnic group, ethnicities

Source:
Diffen

Hierarchy

A system in which members of an organisation or society are ranked according to relative status or authority. For example, they may be ranked by their age, experience, wealth or education.

Related Terms:
hierarchies

Source:
Oxford Dictionary

LGBTQI+

This acronym stands for those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning or intersex. More recently an 'A' has been added to the acronym to accommodate for those identifying as asexual. The plus (+) seeks to ensure that all identities of gender and sexuality will always be included in the community. This can also include straight, cisgender allies of the LGBTQI+ community.

Source:
LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary

Glossary

Multicultural

Multicultural refers to a society that contains several cultural or ethnic groups. People live alongside one another, but each cultural group does not necessarily have engaging interactions with each other. For example, in a multicultural neighbourhood people may frequent ethnic grocery stores and restaurants without really interacting with their neighbours from other countries.

Related Terms:
multiculturalism

Source:
Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

Nuclear family

The nuclear family consists of a couple and their immediate children. It is considered the basic social unit of society in many cultures.

Related Terms:
immediate family

Pacifism

The belief that war and violence are unjustifiable and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means.

Related Terms:
pacifist

Source:
Oxford Dictionary

Politeness

The act of putting constraints on interactions to build rapport, establish understanding and show sensitivity to feeling or face.

Source:
James W. Neuliep

Power distance

The degree to which the lowest member of society accept that the power is distributed unequally. Cultures with a high power distance are more resigned to authority and have pronounced social stratifications.

Source:
Geert Hofstede

Glossary

Secular

Something that is secular is not connected with religious or spiritual matters. For example, a government that is secular is not influenced or bound by religious rule.

Related Terms:
secularly

Source:
Oxford Dictionary

Stingy

[Australia slang] To be ungenerous; or reluctant to part with cash or food when expected to.

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Where do we get our statistics?

The figure of the total population of each country is drawn from the global estimates listed in the CIA World Factbook, unless otherwise stated. Statistics describing the country's linguistic, religious and ethnic demographics are based on its most recent national census. However, if these statistics are out-dated, unavailable, unreliable, or the country's statistical department does not formally gather information on the categories listed, the Cultural Atlas substitutes the most recent global estimates cited in the CIA World Factbook.

All other statistical information on the demographics of the migrant population in Australia is based on the 2016 Australian Housing and Population Census. This was retrieved from the Department of Home Affairs' Community Information Summaries.