

Destination Germany

A Pocket Guide for International Students



DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst
German Academic Exchange Service



“Studying in Germany – simply tempting.”

Merushka Peterson from South Africa studies nutritional science at the Martin Luther University in Halle.

The photo was taken in Germany's oldest chocolate factory, the Halloren Schokoladenfabrik in Halle.

www.study-in.de

Study in
Germany



Land of Ideas

Destination Germany
A Pocket Guide
for International
Students

5th Edition

DAAD

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German Academic Exchange Service

Publisher DAAD

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I think it's great you want to study in Germany. Thousands of young people around the world decide to study in Germany every year. Right now about 12 percent of all students at German universities are foreigners. That's more than 240,000! So there's really no reason to worry – you are not alone.

You probably have a lot of questions and this brochure will help you answer them. Inside you'll find a wide range of information about life in Germany.

Speaking of advice, here's something that might help you. I recently made a few video clips with some friends of mine. In each one I answer questions that foreign students frequently have. If you're interested, you can watch them at www.study-in.de/student-life.

But for now, I hope you enjoy reading this brochure. I wish you a good start in Germany!

Max

A photograph of three young adults standing in front of a stone wall. On the left is a man with a large afro, wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt and jeans, with his hand on his hip. In the middle is a man with short brown hair, wearing a blue polo shirt, with his arm around the man's shoulder. On the right is a woman with blonde hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt and dark pants. All three are smiling.


We want to help you!

»» **Hi, my name is Michael.**

I'm from the United States. I've been studying in Germany for two years now. When I first got here, I had only planned on staying for six months. But I liked it so much here ... well, I hope you end up feeling the same way.

»» **Hello, my name's Julia.**

I come from a small town in northern Germany. I decided to attend university in the south – a big step for me. And that's why I can imagine how you might feel out of place during your first few weeks in Germany. I'll tell you what helped me back then.



»» **And I'm Max.**

I'm pretty far along in a master's degree programme, in fact, I've almost finished my last semester. But I clearly remember how I felt when I began. Everything was new and strange. I was happy there was someone around who I could always turn to for help. That's why I'm here today to help you with your questions.

»» **Hi, I'm Łukasz.**

I come from Poland. I've been studying in Germany for six months and everything's going just fine. In the beginning you have to take care of some formalities, but that all worked out well for me. I'll tell you how.

»» **Hello, my name is Taorang.**

I came to Germany from China about eighteen months ago. I was pretty nervous when I boarded the plane. But getting started was easier than I had expected. I'd be happy to give you some advice.

What is the DAAD?

The DAAD is a joint organisation of German universities and student bodies. Its task is to promote academic cooperation around the world, especially by supporting the exchange of students and researchers.

You can find many other helpful hints, advice and links on our websites www.daad.de and www.study-in.de. We also encourage you to view our online videos on www.study-in.de/student-life. On www.daad.de/blog foreign students report on their experiences in Germany.

And please don't hesitate to contact us at the DAAD headquarters in Bonn or any of our branch offices and information centres around the world (www.daad.de/offices). There you'll find many brochures with more detailed information, for example, "Studying in Germany – A Practical Guide for International Students".

Studying in Germany

Planning and preparation



Michael:

I found it very helpful to have a timeline so I could prepare for my stay in Germany. After all, there's a lot to think about. That's why it's good to know

exactly what you have to do and when. I made a timeline and hung it up in my room. It helped me keep on top of things and I have never forgotten anything important.

In the following you will find useful information about studying in Germany. For more detailed information, please refer to our brochure “Studying in Germany. A Practical Guide for International Students”, available free of charge at all DAAD offices (for addresses, visit www.daad.de/offices).

Timeline

► About one year before you travel to Germany

- Start gathering information about study opportunities in Germany
- Find out whether you meet the requirements for admission to university in Germany
 - Is your secondary school-leaving certificate sufficient?
 - Do you have to pass a language test?
- Find out how you can finance your study visit

► Six months before you arrive in Germany

- Decide on a degree programme and university
- Contact the International Office at the university of your choice

► Four to five months before you begin your studies

- Submit your application for university admission (please note the application deadlines)

► When you receive notification of university admission

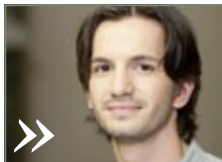
- Apply for a room now, if you would like to live in a student hall of residence
- Submit your visa application now, should you require one
- Get confirmation of health insurance coverage, if your policy is recognised in Germany

► One to two weeks before you arrive in Germany

- Make sure you have all the necessary documents
- Arrange accommodation for your first nights in Germany
- Make appointments by e-mail to see flats or rooms to let

► Your trip to Germany!

Types of universities, academic programmes and degrees



Lukasz:

I remember quite well how I planned my study visit in Germany. The first thing I wondered was how I would ever find the right degree programme.

There are so many universities and places to study in Germany. The possibilities are overwhelming. Then I asked a DAAD lecturer at my university for advice. Together we quickly found a good solution.

Types of universities

There are three types of universities in Germany:

- **Universities** with scientifically-oriented programmes
- **Universities of applied sciences** (*Fachhochschulen*) with practically-oriented programmes
- **Colleges of art, film and music** with artistic / design-oriented programmes.

More than two-thirds of Germany's 1.9 million students are enrolled at a university.

Most universities in Germany are publicly funded. In addition to these, there are more than 90 private universities, most of which are universities of applied sciences. The quality of instruction at public and private universities is comparably high. An overwhelming

» Michael:

When I began planning my stay in Germany, I wanted to study in a big city – like Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne or Munich. But then I ended up in a smaller city. Today I'm glad I made that decision. Life is much more relaxed here and definitely much cheaper. I got settled and started meeting people very quickly.

majority of students choose to enrol at public university in Germany. Only four percent attend private universities which tend to charge high tuition fees.

Fourteen thousand degree programmes are offered at 371 nationally accredited universities (110 universities, 206 universities of applied sciences, 55 colleges of art and music) in more than 150 towns and cities in Germany (see map on p. 184).

Degree programmes

German universities offer degree programmes in all shapes and sizes. For instance, you can

- begin studying at a university after graduating from secondary school, or
- participate in an exchange programme offered by your home university to gain foreign experience for one or two semesters, or
- enter a master's or doctoral degree programme after completing your undergraduate studies.

There are also more than 900 international bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes in Germany. These structured degree programmes are generally taught in English and provide students with intensive academic advising.

More information:

► www.daad.de/international-programmes

Choosing a degree programme is not only a matter of deciding what subject you would like to study, but also which degree you wish to attain. You can pursue the following degrees in Germany:

■ **Bachelor's degree** (BA, BSc, BEng, etc.)

First academic degree

6 to 8-semester basic course of study

■ **Master's degree** (MA, MSc, MEng, etc.)

Second academic degree

2 to 4-semester advanced course of study

■ **State examination**

State-conferred degree to students of law, medicine, dentistry, pharmaceuticals and teacher certification programmes

■ **Doctoral degree**

Post-graduate degree to students who have completed their master's degree or state examinations

Approx. 4 to 10-semester programme with research work (dissertation), concludes with doctorate

►► Taorang:

Get some advice! There are people in your home country who can help you plan your study visit in Germany.

In my case, I started collecting information at an education fair in China.



Need help making a decision?

The following contacts and organisations are able to answer all your questions about studying in Germany:

- DAAD information centres (ICs) and DAAD branch offices (www.daad.de/offices)
- DAAD-affiliated instructors and lecturers at universities around the world
- Goethe Institutes
- German embassies and consulates

More information:

► www.study-in.de/events

Upcoming education fairs around the world

Admission requirements



Taorang:

Unfortunately, my school-leaving certificate from China didn't fulfil the requirements for university admission in Germany. And my German wasn't

good enough either. So I enrolled in a foundation course (Studienkolleg) for one year in Germany, then I took the Feststellungsprüfung – and passed! That allowed me to apply to a real degree programme. The courses at the Studienkolleg were great. I learned a lot and made my first friends in Germany there.

Secondary school-leaving certificate

Those who wish to study at a German university require a certificate called a *Hochschulzugangsberechtigung*. This is a school-leaving certificate which qualifies a student for university admission.

Not all secondary school-leaving certificates qualify students for university study in Germany. As a rule, students who have received their school-leaving certificate in an EU country, Liechtenstein, Iceland, Norway or Switzerland, or at a German School abroad, need not take an additional examination to study in Germany. Different rules apply for artistic disciplines. To gain admission to an art / design programme, candidates usually have to pass an aptitude test and / or submit samples of their work for evaluation.

To find out whether your secondary school-leaving certificate meets German university admission requirements, visit

- ▶ www.daad.de/admission
- ▶ www.anabin.de

The university you apply to is solely responsible for deciding whether you can enrol. Therefore, ask the International Office at the university of your choice about the specific admission requirements before you apply. If your school-leaving certificate is insufficient, you will have to take a qualification assessment examination in Germany called a *Feststellungsprüfung*. You can prepare for this exam by participating in a *Studienkolleg* (foundation course), offered by universities throughout Germany. These university foundation courses usually run for two semesters. One part of the examination assesses the student's language skills. However, to even take part in a foundation course, students require a basic understanding of German.

More information:

- ▶ www.daad.de/zulassung
- ▶ www.studienkollegs.de

Language skills

Most degree programmes in Germany are taught in German. The exception to the rule are the international degree programmes,

»» Julia:

Apart from your certificates and grades, if you're still wondering whether you're ready to study in Germany, you can simply test yourself with the TestAS – a test for foreign students. If you're interested, visit their website at www.testas.de.

» Łukasz:

My Polish school-leaving certificate was recognised in Germany – which meant I only had to take a language test, the TestDaF, in Poland. The results were okay and that allowed me to enrol at university. A friend of mine got into an international degree programme in Germany. He didn't have to take a German test, rather an English test.

most of which are taught in English (www.daad.de/international-programmes).

Those who wish to enrol in a German-language degree programme usually have to provide proof of German proficiency. You can meet this requirement by passing one of two language examinations – the “German Language Test for the Admission of Foreign Study Applicants” (DSH) or the “TestDaF” (www.testdaf.de).

You need not take a German language test if:

- you have received an *Abitur* from a German-language secondary school, or
- you have obtained the Minor or Major German Language Certificate or passed the Central Advanced Language Test of the Goethe-Institut or the German Language Diploma (Level II) from the German Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

Some universities do not require applicants to prove their German skills if they only intend to study there for one or two semesters.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 3: “How much German do I need in Germany?”





Costs and financing



Michael:

*“And what is it going to cost us?”
That’s the first thing my parents
asked me when I told them I wanted
to study in Germany. They were*

*relieved that I picked a university that didn’t charge tuition
fees. And for the most part, life here is not as expensive as
they had feared.*

When you study in Germany, you can expect the following costs:

- Tuition fees (if applicable)
- Semester contribution
- Health insurance
- Living expenses (accommodation, food, clothing, books, copies, telephone, etc.)

Tuition fees

The German university system is mainly subsidised by the federal government. The publicly-funded universities charge students relatively low tuition fees of around 500 euros per semester, if at all. Each of the 16 German states may decide whether to charge tuition fees, and if so, what amount. Several German states are currently debating whether to introduce or abolish tuition fees at their universities. To learn more about the current situation concerning

Which states charge tuition fees?



tuition fees, visit www.studis-online.de/StudInfo/Gebuehren/tuition_fees.php.

Private universities charge significantly higher tuition fees than public institutions (up to 20,000 euros per academic year).

Expenses – From Application to Enrolment

Lukasz had to pay the following application and enrolment fees in Germany:

copies and translations	30 €
application processing fee	30 €
semester contribution (including a semester ticket)	230 €
tuition fees	500 €
Total	790 €

Semester contribution

All students in Germany are required to pay what is called a *Semesterbeitrag* (semester contribution). This helps finance a number of student services, including the dining halls, student halls of residence, university sports facilities and administration.

The semester contribution frequently includes a semester ticket. This ticket allows students to use all modes of public transportation in and around the city free of charge for six months. The cost of the semester contribution varies from university to university, but usually ranges from 200 to 250 euros per semester.

Health insurance

All students must have health insurance coverage. If your health insurance policy from home is not recognised in Germany (see pp. 82–83) you will have to get insurance here. Insurance coverage is available to students for about 50 euros per month.

Monthly expenses

Lukasz pays the following expenses every month:

a room in a flat-share (including cost of utilities)	265 €
food	160 €
clothing	50 €
photocopies, office supplies and books	35 €
health insurance, doctor's fees and medicine	60 €
telephone, internet, television and radio	35 €
recreation, culture and sports	65 €
Total	670 €

Plus the semester contribution and tuition fees twice a year.

Cost of living

Compared to most of Europe, the cost of living in Germany is not very expensive. For example, the cost of food, accommodation, clothing, cultural activities, etc., is equivalent to the EU average. It's difficult to predict exactly how much money you will need in Germany. Generally speaking, life in smaller towns costs less than life in large metropolitan cities. Most students in Germany have an average of 800 euros per month at their disposal.

Proof of financial resources

All international students must verify they have about 8,000 euros at their disposal for one year. There are several forms of proof of financial resources that you may submit, such as your parents'

» Max:

*It's very important you have enough money to finance your stay in Germany before you arrive. To be allowed to study in Germany, you must prove that you have sufficient financial resources. The German authorities will ask to see a *Finanzierungsnachweis* (proof of financial resources) when you apply for an entry visa, or at the latest, when you apply for a residence permit.*

income statement or proof of assets, a security payment in a blocked account, a bank guarantee, a scholarship or a guarantee issued by someone you know who lives in Germany. The German embassy in your home country can tell you which types of proof it recognises.

Please Note: Proof of financial resources is extremely important. Without it, you won't be allowed to study in Germany!

Scholarships

Many institutions offer scholarships to international students. The DAAD scholarship database is the easiest way to look into funding opportunities (www.funding-guide.de).

European students are eligible for other funding programmes, such as ERASMUS and the "Free Mover Scholarship Programme" (FMS) (www.eu.daad.de).

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 1: "How much does it cost to study in Germany?" and

Film 2: "How much does it cost to live in Germany?"

Applications



Julia:

There are several ways to apply for admission to a German university. The correct way for you depends on what subject you want to study and

where you come from. For most subjects, you can submit your application directly to the International Office, or the Registrar's Office, or through uni-assist. I suggest enquiring at the International Office about how to apply for admission to your degree programme.

There are two types of subjects at German universities:

- Subjects, for which **admission is centrally restricted** (*numerus clausus* or *NC*), because there are more applicants than available places at the university. These currently include Medicine, Pharmaceuticals, Veterinary Medicine and Dentistry.
- Subjects, for which admission is **unrestricted or only locally restricted** (university-imposed *numerus clausus*).

Subjects with a centrally restricted admissions policy

A nationally imposed *numerus clausus* applies to subjects for which there are far more applicants than available places at German universities. Candidates must meet special admission requirements to gain admission to degree programmes in these subjects.

» Taorang:

When you apply, you have to submit lots of forms, certified copies and even translations. You should start collecting these documents in advance so you don't get stressed out later.

Depending on your country of origin and type of university entrance qualification, you must submit your application to one of two possible processing centres.

The Foundation for University Admissions (*Stiftung für Hochschulzulassung*, **www.hochschulstart.de**) processes applications from candidates who either:

- come from an EU member country, Liechtenstein, Iceland or Norway, or
- have received university entrance qualification in Germany or at a German School abroad.

All other candidates should submit their applications directly to the university of their choice or to uni-assist.

What is uni-assist?

uni-assist supports international students who apply for admission to university in Germany. uni-assist checks whether your application is complete and informs you in advance if something is missing. If all requirements are met, uni-assist forwards your application to the universities of your choice. The advantage of using uni-assist is that you can apply to several universities at one time by submitting just one application.

More information:

► **www.uni-assist.de**

All other subjects

For subjects with no admissions restriction, international applicants should submit their applications to either:

- the International Office or Registrar's Office at the university, or
- uni-assist.

Application materials

You can get an application form from the university of your choice, uni-assist, the DAAD website or **www.hochschulstart.de**.

Please Note: Your application will only be processed if all the necessary documents are included and the processing fees have been paid!

Processing fees

uni-assist: Depending on your country of origin, up to 55 euros for one or the first of several applications

Universities: Applicants may be charged processing fees depending on the university

Foundation for University Admissions: No processing fees

Certified copies

Certified copies are copies of original documents whose authenticity has been certified by a German authority. German diplomatic missions abroad, for example, can authenticate your copies.

Submission deadlines

The deadline for submitting applications is usually several months before the next semester begins:

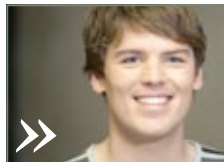
- Degree programmes beginning in the winter semester:
end of May to 15 July
- Degree programmes beginning in the summer semester:
beginning of December to 15 January

Submission deadlines may vary at some universities. Therefore, be sure to ask about the exact dates in advance.

Please Note: Your application will not be processed if you submit it too late!



Visas and residence permits



Max:

You may need a visa for Germany depending on where you come from and how long you wish to stay in Germany. Ask about visa requirements

at the German embassy or consulate in your home country. They will help you with any questions you have about visa applications.

Visa or no visa?

The most important regulations at a glance:

- Citizens of an EU member country, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland only require a valid personal identification card to enter Germany
- Citizens from other countries require a visa if they wish to remain in Germany longer than 90 days
- Citizens from Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the United States may obtain a visa **after arriving in Germany**
- Citizens from all other countries must apply for a visa **before travelling to Germany**

Special conditions apply if your stay does not exceed 90 days. In such cases, citizens from the following countries may enter Germany without a visa: Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil,

Brunei, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Macau, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Seychelles, Singapore, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela.

More information:

► www.diplo.de/visa

Types of visas

The visa you need primarily depends on whether you have already received your notification of admission from a German university.

- If you have not yet been admitted to a university or university foundation programme (*Studienkolleg*), you should apply for a **study applicant visa** (*Visum zum Zweck der Studienbewerbung*).
- If you have been admitted to a university or university foundation programme, you should apply for a **student visa** (*Visum für den Aufenthalt zu Studienzwecken*). Student visas are generally valid for three months, after which time you will have to apply for a residence permit at the Alien Registration Office in your city of residence in Germany (see pp. 63–64).

Please Note: Do **not** enter the country as a tourist! Tourist visas cannot be automatically converted to study applicant visas or student visas. If you enter with a tourist visa, you will have to return to your home country and re-apply for a student visa!

Documents for visa application

When you apply for a visa, you will have to provide the authorities with a number of additional documents, for example:

- Proof of health insurance coverage (see pp. 82–84)
- Proof of financial resources (see pp. 25–26)
- Certificates of prior academic achievement, i.e. transcripts (if applicable)
- Certificate of German language knowledge or letter confirming planned participation in a language course in Germany
- Notification of admission from your German university (if applicable)
- University entrance qualification which is recognised in Germany (if applicable)
- Health certificate (required in some countries)

Max:

The German embassy or consulate can tell you exactly which documents you will need for your visa application.

Academic structures and requirements



Julia:

Every university and every subject is a little different – and so are the degree programmes. But they still have much in common – and

knowing this can give you some initial orientation. One thing is for sure – once you're in Germany, you'll quickly figure out everything.

Institutes, seminars – schools, faculties

Every course of study is supervised by an institute or seminar at the university. Depending on the university, the institute or seminar may be located on one or more floors of the main building or could be housed in a separate building. This is where you will find the teaching staff in your course of study (professors, research assistants, etc.). The institutes often have their own subject-specific libraries, as well.

Every subject has a departmental committee (*Fachschaft*) comprised of students who represent the interests of all the students in their department (see p. 71).

Larger universities often bundle several disciplines into schools or faculties. For example, you might find the German Studies department in the “Faculty of Philosophy” or Dentistry in the “School of Medicine”.

ROMANISCHES SEMINAR
- BIBLIOTHEK -



Also keep in mind that very few German universities have centralised campuses with facilities all in one place. In Germany, university buildings are dispersed throughout the city.

Two semesters per year

The academic year at German universities is divided into two semesters called the summer and winter semesters (also called spring and autumn semesters at some universities).

A semester consists of two parts:

- the lecture period, during which all courses are held, and
- the non-lecture period (the semester breaks).

The beginning of the lecture period depends on the type of university you attend.

- Universities:
 - Summer semester (SS) – April to September
 - Winter semester (WS) – October to March
- Universities of applied sciences:
 - Summer semester – March to August
 - Winter semester – September to February

Important: There are some degree programmes that only begin in the winter semester.

Course timetable

University students in Germany rarely receive a fixed course timetable. There is a certain amount of flexibility in most degree programmes which allows students to select courses that personally interest them.

» Taorang:

When I first began studying in Germany, I was completely overwhelmed. I had to plan my course timetable myself. That was really stressful. I didn't know which courses or even how many I should choose. But luckily the students in the departmental committee helped me out. Now I think it's great that I can choose for myself what I want to learn.

So-called “study regulations” describe the content of each degree programme and the academic achievement required for a degree. The study regulations are usually posted on the homepage of each department or institute.

Study regulations only stipulate the general framework of the degree programme. For example, it specifies which modules (see p. 39) students must complete. Within a module, however, students may choose from several courses which focus on various topics.

You can find out which courses are offered by which professors in the annotated course programme, called the *Kommentiertes Vorlesungsverzeichnis* (KVV). The KVV is usually posted on your institute's webpage.

With the study regulations for your degree programme and the KVV, you will be able to plan your own course timetable. If you need help, your departmental committee will be happy to assist you. Universities also offer a number of introductory and orientation events for new students, mentor programmes and much more to help you get started (see pp. 65–73).

Once you've chosen the courses for your timetable, you generally have to register for them. Course registration can usually be done online.

Modules and credit points

The bachelor's and master's degree programmes are made up of various modules. Modules are academic units comprised of several thematically related courses. Modules can take up to two semesters to complete and comprise six to ten hours of instruction a week.

Students receive credit points for every module they complete. In order to receive an academic degree, students must receive a certain amount of points. Depending on the study regulations, students require 180 to 240 credit points for a bachelor's degree and 60 to 120 credit points for a master's degree.

Credit points are a measure of academic achievement. One credit point is equivalent to 30 hours of work. These points are awarded according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Thanks to ECTS credit points, universities can more easily recognise academic achievement across national boundaries.

Max:

If your home university does not recognise credit points, you can have your professor or lecturer certify that you attended the course and successfully completed all the academic work.

Ask in advance whether your home university will allow ECTS credit points to count toward your degree.

Courses

There are several types of academic courses at German universities. Their relevance depends on your degree programme and university.

The most important types of courses are lectures, seminars / courses, tutorials / practical sessions, revision courses and colloquiums.

- **Lectures** (*Vorlesungen*) are given by a professor on a particular topic
- **Seminars** (*Seminare*) and **courses** (*Kurse*) allow students to study and discuss topics in detail together and with their professors
- **Tutorials** (*Tutorien*) and **practical sessions** (*Übungen*) allow students to review topics discussed in a lecture or seminar in more detail
- **Revision courses** (*Repetitorien*) provide a revision of past academic work to help students prepare for an examination, for example
- **Colloquiums** (*Kolloquien*) are a discussion forum for students who are almost finished with their degree programme

Some degree programmes also offer working or learning groups where students can revise the material discussed in class and prepare for examinations.

»» Taorang:

Terms like “Module”, “Vorlesungen”, “Referate”, “Fachschaft” and “Seminar” were all new to me in the beginning. If you’re already familiar with them, getting started at the university is much easier. I think students in Germany are more independent. For me, it took some time getting used to. There’s help everywhere – all you have to do is ask for it.





Some universities offer additional online teaching modules. These modules supplement the other courses in the degree programmes.

Types of examinations

In some cases, credit points are awarded if students attend class on a regular basis. But usually students have to fulfil additional requirements for their credit points. There is a wide variety of course requirements, which include:

- Class minutes (written summary of the results of the past lesson)
- Written examinations
- In-class presentations on a particular subject
- Term papers on a particular subject
- Oral examinations

Checklist: What can I do from home?



Michael:

I have no idea how people used to plan their study visits abroad in the old days without internet! Now you can take care of so many things from home

by writing a few e-mails. I did so much research on the internet that, when I arrived, I was almost better acquainted with “my” new city than a lot of Germans.

Accommodation

Where will I live? (see pp. 74–81)

- Apply for a room in a student hall of residence
- Answer flat adverts and arrange appointments to view possible flats via e-mail
- Organise accommodation for your first nights in Germany (with help from the International Office)

Advising

Where can I get help quickly? (see pp. 65–73)

- Ask at the International Office at the university whether there are introductory or orientation events and/or mentor programmes available
- Contact other students in Germany via **www.studivz.net/daad** or **www.facebook.com/Study.in.Germany**

General orientation

Where is what?

- Find out how to get from the airport or train station to your accommodation
- Find out where the International Office is, what the office hours are and how to get there

Checklist: What should I pack?



Taorang:

As I was packing for my trip to Germany, I was extremely worried I'd forget something. Then I met with the DAAD lecturer at my university in China and together we made a checklist. That helped a lot. And don't worry, as long as you have your personal documents, you can buy everything else in Germany.

Personal documents

- Passport, valid for the entire duration of your stay in Germany (or personal identification card for students from the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland)
- Visa (if applicable, see pp. 32–33)
- Notification of admission or confirmation of application from your German university
- Proof of financial resources (see pp. 25–26)
- Originals with translations and certified copies (see p. 29):
- Secondary school-leaving certificate
- University diplomas (if applicable)
- Language test certificates (if applicable)
- Confirmation of health insurance coverage if recognised in Germany (see p. 82)

- Vaccination card (if applicable)
- International driving licence or certified translation of your national driving licence
- Other travel documents (plane ticket, etc.)

Other useful items

- Prescription medicine
- Credit card or traveller's cheques
- Some cash in euros for your arrival
- Passport photos
- Telephone number and address of the International Office
- Address of your accommodation
- Electrical adapter (if necessary – line voltage in Germany is 220 V)



Student life in Germany

Tour of Germany



Michael:

I've been fascinated with Germany ever since I was five. I remember learning that the automobile was invented in Germany. For me, it's an exciting

country – with so many inventions and Nobel Prize winners. But I would have never guessed that Germany was such a beautiful country. I only discovered that once I came here.

Germany lies at the centre of Europe. Its population is the largest in the European Union with approximately 82 million inhabitants. It shares a border with nine neighbours: Denmark to the north, the Netherlands and Belgium to the northwest, France and Luxembourg to the west, Austria and Switzerland to the south, and the Czech Republic and Poland to the east.

Germany is one of the European Union's founding members and works to promote closer integration among the countries of Europe.

Landscapes and cities

The landscapes of Germany are diverse and beautiful. On the North and Baltic Seas, there are island chains with long sand dune beaches, swaths of heath and moorland. In the low mountains of central Germany – a region praised for its beauty by the English and German Romanticists – medieval castles are situated along forested valleys. And in the south, the Alps with their sparkling lakes rise above the lowlands. This is where the *Zugspitze*, the highest peak in Germany, towers at almost 3,000 metres above sea level.

Almost half of Germany's inhabitants live in more than 80 cities with populations over 100,000. The largest German cities are Berlin (3.4 million), Hamburg (1.8 million) and Munich (1.3 million).

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Thirty-three landmarks and historic locations in Germany have been distinguished as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These include:

- The cathedrals in Aachen, Cologne, Speyer and Trier
- Roman-period buildings, e.g. the limes
- Historic city centres, e.g. Bamberg, Lübeck, Regensburg, Stralsund and Wismar
- Castles and parks, e.g. Brühl, Dessau, Potsdam and Würzburg
- Former industrial complexes, e.g. the Zeche Zollverein in Essen and the Völklingen Ironworks
- The Bauhaus sites in Weimar and Dessau, the Luther memorial sites in Eisleben and Wittenberg, and the classical Weimar of Goethe and Schiller
- Entire landscapes, e.g. the Upper Middle Rhine Valley and the Wadden Sea along the North Sea

For a complete list of UNESCO sites in Germany see www.unesco.de/welterbe-deutschland.html



Metropolitan cities are not the only places worth visiting. Regardless of size, university towns throughout Germany possess a rich history which is often reflected in their architecture. Historic

city centres and ancient city walls date back to the Middle Ages. Many towns have well-preserved half-timbered houses and long boulevards lined with spacious villas built during the Gründerzeit, the 19th-century period of German industrial expansion.

No matter where you end up studying, you will find an abundance of cultural highlights in your town – exhibitions, concerts, festivals, performances, trade fairs, sporting events, etc. (see pp. 122–132).

City portraits

The German cities where most international students choose to live and study are presented in detail at www.study-in.de/towns.

Politics

The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was founded in 1949 as a parliamentary democracy. Its constitution guarantees basic rights to all people, such as freedom of religion, freedom of expression and equality before the law (see p. 164). Following the reunification of East Germany (GDR) and West Germany (FRG) in October 1990, Berlin became the capital.

Germany is comprised of 16 states (see map on p. 184). Each state has its own political sphere of jurisdiction, for example, in matters of culture and education.

Germany's educational system is decentralised. All 16 states have their own university regulations and guidelines. The universities themselves are largely independent which explains why study regulations vary so often. Consequently, students should always ask about the specific study regulations at their university.

Economic strength

Germany's economy is the largest in Europe and the fourth largest in the world. In 2009 German companies exported goods valued at approximately 800 billion euros.

Germany's main exports are electro-technology, mechatronics, heavy machinery, automobiles, environmental technology, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. Consumers around the world regard the label "Made in Germany" as a seal of quality. Germany is home to many trusted and renowned market leaders, such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Audi, Bayer, Siemens, ThyssenKrupp and many others.

In the same way Germany fosters trade relations with partners around the world, German companies also work hard to promote international exchange of qualified professionals.

Innovation and creativity

Innovative ideas have strongly shaped Germany's past and will surely continue to do so in the future. Germany has produced a long list of revolutionary inventions, such as the automobile, the airbag, X-ray technology, Aspirin, the computer, the chip card and the MP3 data compression format.

Science and research have a long tradition in Germany and are still highly valued today. The oldest German university was founded in Heidelberg in 1386.

The list of German Nobel Prize recipients is quite impressive. There are almost 70 German laureates in the natural sciences and medicine alone. They include Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, Robert Koch, Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard and Harald zur Hausen.



And Germany isn't called the "land of poets and thinkers" for nothing. In addition to such illustrious figures as Kant, Hegel, Adorno, Goethe, Heine, Brecht, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, many contemporary German designers, artists, actors, musicians and athletes are famous around the world.

Cosmopolitan

Millions of immigrants have chosen to settle in Germany since the 1960s. Today Germany is home to 6.7 million people of immigrant descent, approximately 8.2 percent of the total population. Most of them have come from Turkey, Italy and Poland. People from all nations, cultures and religions live together in peaceful coexistence. Germany is a tolerant and cosmopolitan country.

Land of Ideas

"Germany – Land of Ideas" is a programme initiated by the federal government that promotes the creative and innovative advancements by German institutions in the fields of science, business, art and culture. Visit the Land of Ideas at www.land-of-ideas.org.

More information:

► www.facts-about-germany.de

Günter Grass

Famous Germans

Anne-Sophie Mutter

Tokio Hotel

Heidi Klum

Georg Baselitz

Roland Emmerich

Timo Boll

Karl Lagerfeld

Steffi Graf

Pope Benedikt XVI

Jürgen Habermas

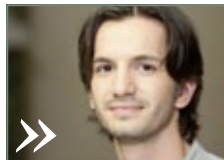
Diane Kruger

Franz Beckenbauer

Wolfgang Petersen

Michael Schumacher

First bureaucratic steps



Łukasz:

Whew, paperwork has always stressed me out. And then German bureaucracy! In Poland Germans are known for being exact. That's

why I wasn't looking forward to those first bureaucratic steps in Germany. But then one of the staff at the International Office told me exactly when and what I had to do and which documents I needed to take along. That made everything easy. Actually I was surprised at how friendly the German authorities were.

After you arrive in Germany, there are several important things you have to take care of. The International Office can tell you exactly what to do. The most important tasks are:

- Find accommodation
- Get health insurance (if necessary)
- Enrol at university (matriculate)
- Register at your institute or seminar
- Register at the Resident Registration Office
- Apply for a residence permit (if necessary)

It could save you time and effort if you dealt with these tasks in a certain order. For example, it would be ideal if you found accommodation in Germany **before** you arrived. If that's not possible, the first item on your to-do list is to find a place to stay (see pp. 74–81).

It's important to have a permanent address in Germany for all the tasks that follow.

It is also important to clarify your health insurance situation (see pp. 82–84). Without confirmation of health insurance coverage, you won't be able to enrol at university.

Enrolment

Before you can begin studying, you first have to enrol. This procedure is called enrolment or “matriculation”. Once you're officially enrolled, you are allowed to attend courses at university, take examinations and obtain an academic degree. You have to be enrolled to gain access to all the facilities at the university, such as the library, computer rooms, etc.

Students usually have to enrol in person at the Office of Student Affairs (*Studentensekretariat*) at the university.

International students may only enrol if they have received notification of admission from their German university. All accepted applicants receive a letter from the university confirming admission. The letter also includes information concerning the enrolment period.

Please Note: The enrolment period is often quite short!

You will need to provide a number of documents to enrol. The staff at the International Office and the Office of Student Affairs can tell you exactly what you need to bring along. The documents you definitely need include:

- Personal identification card or passport
- Notification of admission
- University entrance qualification (i.e. secondary school-leaving certificate): original or certified copy with a certified translation in German (see p. 29)
- Several passport photos



- Confirmation of health insurance coverage by a public health insurance provider in Germany, or proof that your health insurance policy from your country of origin is recognised in Germany (see pp. 82–84)
- Certificate confirming that you have passed the “German Language Test for the Admission of Foreign Study Applicants” (DSH) or the “TestDaF” (if applicable, see p. 19)

Once you have enrolled, you will receive written confirmation of enrolment which also serves as your provisional student ID. With this confirmation of enrolment, you can now apply for a residence permit with the Alien Registration Office (see pp. 63–64).

You will also receive an electronic transfer slip with which you must pay the semester contribution and possible tuition fees. As soon as the university has received your payment, it will send you your official student ID card by post.

For information about how to open a bank account, see pp. 90–92.

Along with the student ID card, every newly enrolled student receives an account on the university server, e-mail address and password. You will need this information to take advantage of your university’s internet services, such as the electronic course prospectus, online registration for courses and exams, downloadable course material provided by your instructors, and much more.

Student ID card

Every student at university is issued a student ID card which allows the holder to use the library, dining hall, computer rooms, sports facilities, etc.

You can frequently use your student ID as a ticket for public transportation in the university town (see pp. 170–171). Because students receive special discounts, card holders are eligible for concessions at cultural events, swimming pools, museums and trade fairs.

Please Note: Enrolment at German universities is only valid for one semester. For every additional semester, students are required to re-register and pay the semester contribution. The re-registration period for the upcoming semester is always at the end of the current semester. Whoever misses the deadline must pay additional administrative fees, and in the worst case, may be removed from the register altogether. The exact dates for re-registration are posted on the university's website. You can also obtain the dates from your International Office.

Registering at your institute or seminar

As soon as you are enrolled, you should register with your institute or seminar, which is responsible for your subject. Those who study more than one subject may have to register at several institutes.

Students can register at the administrative office at their institute or seminar. Sometimes the institute issues students another ID card, for which they need a passport photo. With this identity card, students may use the facilities reserved for members of the institute, for example, the specialist library.

Registering at the Resident Registration Office

As soon as you have found accommodation, you should register with the local Resident Registration Office. In larger cities you can find it at the Municipal Office in the area of the city where you live. The staff at the International Office can give you the address.

To register with the Resident Registration Office, you will need your:

- Passport (and visa, if you have one) or your personal identification card
- Tenancy agreement (if you have one) or confirmation of residence from your landlord

After filling out the registration form, you will be issued a print-out confirming that you have registered. Citizens from EU member countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland automatically receive a residence permit at the Resident Registration Office. In some cases, they may ask to see proof of financial resources (see pp. 25–26) and confirmation of health insurance coverage (see pp. 82–84).

»» Max:

Make sure you don't lose your confirmation of registration. Everyone who moves to another city in Germany must notify the Resident Registration Office of their change of address within one week. And that goes for everyone – foreigners and Germans alike.

Applying for a residence permit at the Alien Registration Office

All international students who are NOT citizens of an EU member country or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland have to register with the Alien Registration Office after registering with the Resident Registration Office. The International Office can give you the address.

In order to live in Germany legally, you require a residence permit issued by the Alien Registration Office. The permit is not free, however. Depending on how long you intend to stay, the application fee costs between 50 and 60 euros.

To apply for a residence permit, you will need the following documents:

- Confirmation of registration from the Resident Registration Office (see pp. 62–63)
- Confirmation of health insurance coverage (see pp. 82–84)
- Confirmation of enrolment from your German university, or your student ID card (see pp. 59–61)
- Proof of financial resources (if applicable, see pp. 25–26)
- Passport (and visa, if you have one) (see pp. 32–34)
- Health certificate (if required)

If your documents are in order, you will receive a residence permit valid for a maximum of two years, which can be extended if necessary.

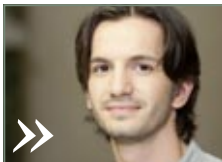
More information:

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 8: “German bureaucracy – a nightmare?” and

Film 10: “What, where and how at the university?”

Help and advisers on location



Lukasz:

During my first few days in Germany, I had the feeling my head was full of question marks. Then I suddenly realised I wasn't the only one with questions. I was surrounded by new students who didn't know how university life worked either.

New students arrive at university every semester – from Germany and abroad. They all have questions. Nobody comes to university for the first time knowing exactly what to do.

That's why there are contact partners and advising services everywhere. There are centres and offices at every university where students can go to ask questions or receive help with problems.

International Office – *Akademisches Auslandsamt*

The most important contact for international students is the International Office, also called the *Akademisches Auslandsamt* (AAA) or *Internationales Büro* at some universities.

Every German university has such an office for international affairs. In addition to promoting international university relations, the staff at the International Office help students plan their study visit in Germany and support foreign students already studying at their German university.

The International Office can give you all the information you require for your first days in Germany. For example, they can assist you with those initial bureaucratic steps like enrolment (see pp. 59–61) and finding accommodation (see pp. 74–81).

Furthermore, the International Office organises an orientation event for new foreign students. This event includes information about planning one's studies. The invitation to the orientation event is usually included in the package along with the notification of admission to the university.

You can find the address and office hours of the International Office on your university's website.

Mentor programmes

A number of German universities have launched "mentor programmes" which pair up new international students with more experienced German students. The mentors accompany their foreign guests to register with the German authorities, deal with practical problems of daily life and answer questions about studying at university. Mentors frequently contact their partners even before they arrive in Germany.

Ask at the International Office whether your university has a mentor programme.

Taorang:

I was especially nervous about my first days in Germany. But actually it wasn't so bad. My university has a mentor programme for foreign students. My mentor, Anja, picked me up at the airport and accompanied me to my important appointments in the first days. It was great.





Studentenwerk

Another important contact is your university's *Studentenwerk*. The *Studentenwerk* organisation provides a number of services and assistance to students at German universities. They take care of matters of student social life, allocate rooms in student halls of residence and operate the university dining halls.

The *Studentenwerk* provides special support to international students, as well. At many universities, the *Studentenwerk* offers special service packages to foreign students to help them get settled in faster.

The number and types of services depend on the university you attend, but generally include:

- A room in a student hall of residence (see p.75)
- Social fee and free semester ticket (see p. 24)
- Cultural events and excursions
- Meal coupons for the dining hall
- Assistance with registering with a public or private health insurance provider (see pp. 82–84)

At some universities, the *Studentenwerk* offers sport and language courses and rents out bicycles, computers, crockery and bedding. They can also arrange to have international students picked up from the airport on arrival.

Depending on the services it provides, the package can cost between 159 and 358 euros per month. Foreign students may receive the package for one or two semesters at most. Currently 39 out of 58 German *Studentenwerk* organisations offer service packages. There are only a limited number of service packages available. If you're interested in one, contact the *Studentenwerk* at your university in Germany as soon as possible.

More information:

- ▶ www.international-students.de

Student council

Like in other countries around the world, every German university has a group of elected students who represent the interests of the student body. Depending on the university, the student council is called AStA, UStA or StuRa.

The student council ensures that the university offers a diverse selection of athletic, cultural and recreational programmes. It offers counselling in all matters of student life, such as finding accommodation or jobs. Sometimes it organises car-sharing opportunities for students travelling to other cities.

Julia:

When you contact the International Office or the Studentenwerk, you'll be dealing with university employees. Although they're extremely competent and helpful, you might also want to get additional advice from your fellow students. I suggest meeting the members of your student council, departmental committee and university groups. They can give you great advice about studying and daily life. They often organise orientation events for new students too.

The student council at some universities offers German courses to international students and helps arrange language partnerships (see p. 109). Whenever you need help with anything related to university life, it's always a good idea to pay a visit to your student council!

» Michael:

There were times when I didn't quite understand what they were telling me. For instance, when I was at the departmental committee, they explained how to draw up a timetable. I thought I had figured it out. But when I got home, I realised I still had lots of questions. I was a little embarrassed to go back and ask again. But I went anyway. In fact, I was there five times. Those guys were so nice. They didn't think it was embarrassing or stupid at all.

Departmental committees

The departmental committee (*Fachschaft*) is a group of students who study a particular subject. They represent the interests and express the wishes of their fellow students to the faculty and administration. The departmental committee can answer all questions concerning the specific degree programme and helps new students gain orientation at the university and in student life.

At the beginning of the semester, the departmental committee usually organises information events for new students. Here you can learn how to plan your degree programme, create a course timetable, and much more. Professors and lecturers who work in the department often come to these meetings to introduce themselves. Not only are these meetings informative, but also ideal for getting to know new students who are also in your degree programme.

International university groups

There are student-run university groups at many universities which cater to the needs of foreign students.

In addition to providing orientation for new arrivals, they organise parties, excursions and pub evenings – even more opportunities to meet other students.

Faculty advisers

There is a faculty member in every department who offers academic advising to students. You can go to your faculty adviser with questions regarding the requirements of your degree programme, recognition of academic achievement, etc.

There is also an ERASMUS representative for each department, responsible for matters concerning the department's ERASMUS partnerships. If you are an ERASMUS student, do not hesitate to contact your ERASMUS representative if you have problems or questions.

And last but not least, professors, lecturers, and teaching assistants hold office hours to answer concrete questions concerning courses. Every university instructor holds office hours just for this

Max:

In the beginning I didn't know how to approach my professors and teaching assistants. But there's a very simple rule for this. If you have a quick question, you can send your professor an e-mail or talk with him or her after the lesson. If your question is more involved, it's best to arrange a special meeting or sign up for an appointment during office hours.

purpose once a week. If you wish to speak with your instructor, be sure to make an appointment, either by e-mail or by adding your name on the list attached to the office door.

Schwarzes Brett

Your Monday morning lecture has been moved to a different room or your professor's office hours have been cancelled next week – this kind of information is usually posted at your institute or seminar on the main notice board, called the *Schwarzes Brett*. You can also find this information online on your institute's website.

It's important to remember that students at German universities are expected to demonstrate a certain amount of self-reliance. Students must realise that they themselves are responsible for their learning process. In other words, although there are many places where students can receive help and advice, universities expect their students to make an effort to obtain information and ask questions if something is unclear.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 9: "Who can help me at the university?"

Accommodation



Taorang:

I live in a student hall of residence. It's nice there. We all share the kitchen – so there's always someone around to hang out with. I really enjoy that because I

don't like being alone. I got my room here as part of the service package from the Studentenwerk. So that made it pretty easy.

In contrast to other countries, students at German universities do not automatically receive rooms on campus. In fact, German universities rarely have traditional campuses. In most cases, student accommodation is not located on the university grounds.

This means that students have to find accommodation by themselves. In some university towns, finding an affordable place to live is not always easy. That's why it's best to start looking for accommodation as soon as possible. It would be ideal if you could find your accommodation even before you arrive in Germany.

The biggest share of a student's monthly budget goes towards paying the rent. However, rental prices vary greatly and can range from 220 to 345 euros per month depending on the university town. Rental prices in metropolitan cities like Hamburg, Munich, Cologne or Frankfurt am Main are higher than the average.

There are basically two types of accommodation for students – a room in a student hall of residence or private accommodation.

Monthly expenditure for rent and utilities (average)

Room in a student hall of residence	220 €
Room in a flat-share	265 €
One-person flat	340 €

Source: Deutsches Studentenwerk, 19th Social Survey

Student halls of residence

There are several student halls of residence in every university town. These are usually located throughout the city. The *Studentenwerk* organisation provides more than 180,000 rooms in student halls of residence every year.

Each hall of residence is unique in terms of location, size and furnishings. This also applies to the rooms which include singles, doubles and even small apartments.

Rooms in student halls of residence are the most economical forms of accommodation. Because they're so popular among students, it's a good idea to apply for one well in advance.

There's a very good chance your university's *Studentwerk* will allocate you a room if you submit your application early. It's best to apply for a room as soon as you receive notification of admission from your university. At some universities the International Office is responsible for allocating rooms at student halls of residence to foreign students.

» Taorang:

I was very happy that I knew where I was going to live before I came to Germany. I had known my new address for a long time, and so when I got to my student hall of residence, I found a letter from my best friend already waiting for me.

Private accommodation

Like elsewhere in the world, the price and quality of private accommodation can vary enormously. In Germany you will find everything from empty rooms to fully furnished flats on the market.

You can rent a room, for example in a flat-share. A flat-share (*Wohngemeinschaft*, or WG) is a living arrangement in which several people share the cost of living together in one flat. Each person has his or her own bedroom, but shares the kitchen, bathroom, possibly a living room and sometimes the cost of telephone and internet (see pp. 113–116). Flat-shares are very popular among students.

Looking for rooms on the private market

Landlords usually like to meet their future tenants before signing the contract. In other words, you probably won't be able to rent a private room until you arrive in Germany and show up in person. Nevertheless, you can start looking for a room or flat from your home country.

Listings of free rooms and flats can be found in a variety of places. The International Office is one of the best places to start looking. The staff there can provide you with useful advice for your accommodation search – to help you scout for possibilities from your home country and later, once you've arrived in your German



university town. They often keep a list of addresses of landlords who let rooms and flats to international students.

The *Studentenwerk* and the student council are also helpful contacts for flat hunters. They frequently organise accommodation finding services for students, i.e. they collect addresses of free accommodation.

There are usually large notice boards near the student dining halls where students can seek and advertise places to live. Similar notice boards can also be found in the institutes and seminars.

Lukasz:

I live in a flat-share. My room is small, but my flatmates are super. I share the flat with three others – two women, a German and a Turk, and a German man. We all get along quite well. Of course, we have our disagreements at times – like when someone forgets to go shopping, or doesn't clean the bathroom or listens to music all night long. That's obvious. But for me, living in a flat-share is the best way to get to know people and practice speaking German.

Local newspapers also print flat advertisements once or twice a week, usually on Wednesdays and Saturdays. If they have a website, you can also view these adverts online. City magazines and student newspapers also publish flat advertisements.

When you read the flat advertisements, you will come across several frequently used abbreviations. Here is a short key to help you decipher them.

Abbreviations used in flat advertisements

2-Zi.-Whg	two-room flat
2 ZKDB	two rooms, kitchen, hall, bathroom
K	deposit
+ NK	plus additional charges (costs for heating, electricity, gas, water and rubbish disposal)
NR	non-smoker
WB	income support certificate required (official document certifying a tenant's financial hardship)

You can find more advertisements for rooms and flats at the *Mitwohonzentrale* (flat-sharing agency) or other accommodation services on the internet, such as:

- ▶ www.mitwohonzentrale.de
- ▶ www.homecompany.de

» Julia:

If you hear somebody mention the word “cold” when referring to the price of a room or flat, it doesn’t mean you have to freeze.

For example, “200 euros cold” means that the rent is 200 euros a month not including the cost of heating.

Some online accommodation services specialise in rooms for students, e.g.:

- ▶ www.studenten-wg.de
- ▶ www.studenten-wohnung.de
- ▶ www.easywg.de
- ▶ www.wg-gesucht.de

These sites also allow flat seekers to post their own flat-wanted advertisements free of charge.

»» **Lukasz:**

It usually works like this – you look through the adverts and when you find one that interests you, you contact the landlord by e-mail or phone. You arrange an appointment to view the room or flat. Usually the landlord wants to know how long you intend to stay in Germany. And if you both agree to the arrangement, then the landlord gives you a rental agreement which you both have to sign. The Studentenwerk or International Office can tell you what you have to pay attention to before signing your rental agreement.

And the first nights?

If you don't have any luck finding accommodation in Germany before you arrive, then you'll need a place to stay for your first nights here. The International Office can help you with this as well.

At some universities, the *Studentenwerk* and student organisations offer international students temporary housing for their first nights in Germany. If this is not the case, then you always have the option of staying at a hotel, guest house (*Pension*) or a youth

hostel. The tourist information office in your university town can arrange a room for you at a local hotel or guest house. And, of course, you can also reserve a room for yourself online.

A youth hostel is usually less expensive than taking a room at a hotel or guest house. However, to stay at a youth hostel, you have to be a member in a national association of the International Youth Hostel Federation. If you're not already, you can become a member (for a small fee) at any youth hostel in Germany.

More information:

- ▶ www.jugendherberge.de
- ▶ www.germany-tourism.de

Medical treatment

**Max:**

As mentioned earlier, no German university will take you if you don't have proof of health insurance.

That's why it's important you take care of this before you get here. You will need to show proof of coverage in order to enrol. Your health insurance provider in your home country or the International Office can help you further.

Anyone who wishes to study in Germany must have health insurance. It's possible that your health insurance policy at home will also cover costs of medical treatment in Germany. This is the case for public health insurance providers in the EU member states, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Norway and Switzerland. These are the countries with which Germany has signed a social security agreement. Those who hold a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) are covered by their health insurance provider in Germany.

Foreign private health insurance policies are occasionally recognised in Germany as well. If you are privately insured, ask your provider whether you'll also be covered in Germany. If your private health insurance policy is recognised, you will need confirmation of health insurance coverage to enrol at university (see pp. 59–61). For your information, if you are privately insured when you begin

studying in Germany, you may not seek coverage with a public German health insurance provider for the entire duration of your studies.

Insuring yourself in Germany

If your insurance policy from home is not recognised here, you will have to insure yourself in Germany. The public health insurance providers are generally the least expensive and offer students especially affordable policies. Students pay the lowest monthly rate of about 50 euros per month at present.

However, this rate is not available to those who have studied longer than 14 semesters or are older than 30 years. In such cases, students are usually required to pay a higher rate for health insurance.

There are a number of public health insurance providers in Germany which offer coverage to international students. Ask the International Office about which provider you should choose.

Public health insurance companies usually operate branch offices near the university which helps simplify the application process.

Max:

It seems impossible – you can only enrol if you have health insurance. But you can only get health insurance at a student discount if you've enrolled. So what do you do first? Go to a health insurance provider in Germany and register with them. When you show them your notification of admission, they will issue you a temporary policy at the special student rate. Once you've enrolled, go back to the insurance company and show them your confirmation of enrolment (or send them a copy by post) in order to get your permanent policy.

» Taorang:

At first I thought health insurance paid for everything. But that's not exactly the case. The first time I went to the doctor, I had to pay a fee – 10 euros. Then I had to pay an additional 5 euros for my prescription at the pharmacy. But that was it. In Germany there's definitely no need to worry that you won't be able to afford a doctor, medicine or hospital care.

At the doctor

Medical treatment in Germany is very good. With its dense network of well-trained doctors, the German health care system is considered one of the best in the world. If you happen to need medical treatment, there's probably no better place to receive it than in Germany.

In order to be treated, publicly insured patients must pay a consultation fee, called a *Praxisgebühr*, once a calendar quarter. After paying the 10-euro fee, the doctor's office issues the patient a receipt as proof of payment. Be sure to take care of this receipt in case future doctor visits are necessary in that quarter.

If you have a toothache, you go to the dentist. If you have other problems or pains, it's best to go to a general practitioner (GP), called a *Hausarzt*.

A GP can assess whether an illness or injury ought to be treated by a specialist, in which case he or she writes a referral. With this referral slip in hand, the patient can go to a specialist and need not pay the consultation fee again.

If the doctor writes a prescription for medication, the patient has to go to a pharmacy to obtain it (see pp.87–88). Usually patients are required to pay an additional 5 to 10 euros for prescription medication



– a “surcharge for medication” – and the health insurance will pay the rest. This only applies to medication prescribed by the doctor. All other medication has to be paid in full by the patient.

You can find a listing of all the GPs, dentists and medical specialists in your local Yellow Pages (the telephone book with branch listings, see www.gelbeseiten.de).

Doctors hold office hours at various times. Many offices are closed on Wednesday afternoons. It's best to call before you visit and make an appointment. In urgent cases, you can go directly to the doctor's office without an appointment. However, you might have to wait a while before the doctor can see you.

Emergencies

You can go to the hospital if you require urgent medical assistance in the middle of the night or at the weekend. If you are unable to get there yourself, you can dial the free-phone emergency number 112 and request an ambulance.

If it's not terribly urgent, but you cannot wait until the doctor's office opens, you can take advantage of the *Ärztlicher Notdienst* (Medical Emergency Service). This is a GP who is on call to handle emergencies after normal office hours. You can find the addresses and telephone numbers of the on-call GP in your local daily newspaper under the section *Ärztlicher Notdienst*. If you call your GP after office hours, you may receive a voice message instructing you about the on-call GP and a pharmacy nearby where you can find a pharmacist on duty (see p. 88). There are also dentists on call for dental emergencies.

There is also a 10-euro fee per quarter for emergency treatment. If you require hospitalisation, you only have to pay 10 euros per day for a maximum of 28 days per year. Your health insurance will take care of the rest.

When you're travelling on the *Autobahn* (motorway), keep an eye out for orange emergency telephones boxes at the roadside. You can use these to call for help if you have an accident or breakdown. To reach the nearest emergency telephone, follow the arrows on the kilometre markers or the black and white street posts.

Medication

You can only purchase medication in Germany at pharmacies. There are two categories of medication – over-the-counter and prescription medicine. You can only receive prescription medicine if your doctor has written a prescription for it.

The Medical Preparations Act in Germany is quite strict. Medication sold over the counter in some countries may require a prescription from a doctor in Germany. Furthermore, some countries may allow the sale of certain medication which might not be approved for use in Germany.



Michael:

I was suffering from migraines during my first weeks in Germany. So I went to a supermarket to buy some headache tablets – and couldn't find any! When I asked where they were, the lady looked at me in surprise and said "At the pharmacy – where else?"

Most pharmacies in Germany are open Mondays to Fridays from 8:30 am to 6:30 pm, and frequently on Saturday mornings as well. Pharmacies are closed on Sundays.

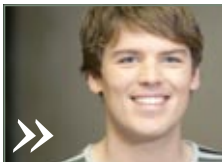
There are pharmacies in every city which offer emergency service after business hours and at weekends. You can find the addresses

in your local newspaper in the section *Apothekennotdienst* (Pharmacy Emergency Service) and at every pharmacy. You can also obtain this information online at **www.aponet.de/notdienst** and **www.apotheken.de/notdienste**.

More information:

- ▶ **www.daad.de/health**
- ▶ **www.study-in.de/health**

Money and banking



Max:

You should definitely open a bank account in Germany. It's the most practical way to pay for things, like your semester contribution or your rent.

If you have a German bank account, you can withdraw money for free. It's definitely worth it. Most banks offer free current accounts to students. Just ask your International Office for more information.

Germans pay in euros – the common currency used by 17 European countries at present. You can find out what the current exchange rate is by visiting www.xe.com, for example, which features an online exchange rate calculator.

One euro is equivalent to 100 cents. You can pay in the following denominations:

In coins: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, 1 and 2 euros

In notes: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros

Some smaller-sized shops and petrol stations might not accept large banknotes (200- or 500-euro notes). And at some stores the cashier might ask to see official identification (e.g. passport or personal identification card) if you choose to pay with very large notes.

Exchanging money and cashing in traveller's cheques

You can exchange your foreign currency for euros at currency exchange offices. These are usually located at airports and near railway stations.

You can also change money at banks and savings banks. Although some may not exchange foreign currency into euros in cash, they do offer this service to their customers, i.e. for those who have an account at the bank.

You can usually cash in traveller's cheques at most banks, savings banks and currency exchange offices in Germany.

There are numerous cash machines located throughout cities all over Germany. At any time or day of the week, you can withdraw money from a cash machine with your credit card or debit card.

Julia:

Don't be surprised if all your coins look different – every country in the euro zone is allowed to design the reverse side of its coins. That's why the backs look different!

Opening a bank account

If you're planning on staying longer than a couple of weeks in Germany, you should open a current account here. They are usually free of charge for students. And the formalities involved are not too complicated.

There are far more advantages than disadvantages to having an account here. For example, you can withdraw money free of charge from cash machines in Germany. You can set up a standing order

for regular payments, for example your rent, which ensures that the money is transferred automatically and on time every month. For your health insurance, telephone bills and electric bills you

can take advantage of direct debiting which allows the supplier to deduct the correct amount from your current account directly. This is also possible when you purchase items online.

Please Note: Many German funding organisations do not transfer scholarship money to foreign accounts! And those who wish to take a part-time job definitely require a current account in Germany.

You will find numerous bank branches in cities throughout Germany. There are also a number of online banks which offer the entire range of services via the internet – from setting up the account to all necessary transactions.

The International Office can help you select a bank which offers especially attractive conditions to students. Doing some internet research can also be helpful.

Bank hours

Banks in Germany are generally open Mondays to Fridays from 9 am to 4 pm and are closed on weekends and public holidays (see p. 120).

» Max:

You can save yourself a lot of trouble if you ask the bank in advance which documents you should bring with you to open an account. I recently accompanied a friend of mine to the bank when she wanted to open an account. You can see the video at www.study-in.de/student-life Film 2: "How much does it cost to live in Germany?".

You can view a checklist concerning opening a bank account at www.study-in.de/money. It includes the most important questions you should ask when opening an account.

You will require the following documents to open a current account:

- Passport or personal identification card
- Student ID or confirmation of enrolment or notification of admission from your university
- Confirmation of registration from the Resident Registration Office or Alien Registration Office

The bank employee will also help you.

Bank transactions – such as transfers and setting up standing orders – can be done online, or at specially marked bank machines in the bank or over the counter.

» Michael:

My father told me that when he was in Germany years ago, he was amazed at how many people paid cash at stores and restaurants. Well that certainly has changed! Nowadays almost every larger store and restaurant accepts the EC card – a bank debit card – but many only accept them for purchases over a certain amount, like 15 euros. On the other hand, credit cards are hardly ever used for daily purchases.

EC cards and credit cards

Once you've opened a current account, you will be issued a debit card (EC card) with which you can withdraw money from cash machines and print out your bank statements yourself.

Bank für Sozialleistungen
Geldautomat



You can use EC cards (also called *Girokarten*) to pay at shops and restaurants. Either the shop or restaurant will ask you to authorise payment with a PIN (personal identification number) or sign the receipt.

All commonly used credit cards, i.e. MasterCard, Visa and American Express, are accepted in Germany. With a credit card, you can also withdraw money from cash machines, but credit card companies usually charge high fees for this service. If you already have a credit card and wish to use it for an extended period of time in Germany, you should notify your bank or credit card company in advance.

More information:

- ▶ www.study-in.de/money
- ▶ www.daad.de/bank

»» Julia:

An American friend of mine had her card frozen because she hadn't told her bank that she was going to Germany. When the transactions from Germany showed up on her account statement, the bank assumed that the card had been stolen. Whenever I use my credit card in a foreign country, they charge me extra fees for every transaction. So if you have a credit card, you ought to ask in advance how high the fees would be if you used it in Germany.

Internships

**Michael:**

During my semester break, I completed a four-week internship at a German company. I learned more there than I ever imagined. And it was so much fun

to get involved in the practical side after all that theory at university. I didn't earn very much for the internship, but I did make a few good contacts. And maybe next summer, I can get a real job there for a few weeks.

Many students in Germany take advantage of internships to gain professional experience and establish contacts during their education.

A large number of degree programmes include mandatory internships. They are supervised by university professors or lecturers. For some degree programmes, applicants have to complete an internship before they can gain admission.

An internship can last a couple of weeks to several months. Interns generally receive little or no pay for their training.

Finding an internship

You can complete an internship at a company or institution.

If you would like to complete an internship in Germany, you can obtain more information from the following:

- The Internship Office or Career Centre at your university
- The International Office
- International student organisations

There are three major international student organisations which specialise in helping students find internships:

- AIESEC: World's largest international organisation for students in economics and business administration – **www.aiesec.de**
- ELSA: European Law Students' Association – **www.elsa-germany.org**
- IAESTE: International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (for students in engineering, natural sciences, agriculture and forestry) – **www.iaeste.de**

Internships are also offered at internship exchanges on the internet. You can find an overview of internship exchanges at **www.jobsuche-leichtgemacht.de/beste-praktikumsboersen.html**.

Student job exchanges on the internet frequently list internships, as well (see p. 100).

Of course, you can also send a blind application to the company or institution of your choice.



Legal provisions

Legally speaking, internships are considered regular employment – even if they are unpaid.

Depending on one's country of origin, international students are only allowed to work in Germany for a certain length of time and only under specific conditions.

For students, to whom the “90-day rule” applies (see p. 101), each day of an internship is subtracted from their 90-day credit. Those who want to complete an internship but have already worked the full 90 days in one year must apply for permission at the Alien Registration Office or Federal Employment Agency.

There is, however, an exception to this rule. It does not apply if the study regulations require the student to complete an internship. Mandatory internships require no prior permission and are not counted toward the 90-day employment credit allotted to students.

Jobs



Julia:

A lot of my friends at the university have part-time jobs. They do many different things. I give private instruction to school kids. My friend Ruth works as a dog sitter. Peter delivers medication for a pharmacy. Susanne works at the cafeteria. Felix maintains the website for a small company. For most jobs, though, you need pretty good German skills.

Many students in Germany work part-time during their studies to earn extra money and gain some experience on the labour market.

Please Note: A part-time job can supplement your budget, but it certainly won't finance all of your living expenses.

University jobs are a good way to earn money and gain academic experience. So-called "Hiwis" (pronounced HEE-VEES) are students who assist professors at their institute or seminar. "Hiwis" are student aids or academic assistants. Tutorial positions are frequently offered in many departments as well. Tutors help other students revise the material taught in lectures or seminars. Student jobs are also available at other university facilities – such as libraries, dining halls and cafeterias.

There are many job opportunities outside the university. A favourite among students is waiting tables at cafés or pubs. Other students assist guests at trade fairs, work as delivery drivers or cycle couriers,

clean buildings, babysit, deliver newspapers, work at copy shops, offices, supermarkets, moving companies, etc.

The amount you can earn from a part-time job depends on the job and the city where you live. Students generally earn between 5 and 10 euros an hour for most part-time jobs.

Job search

If you're interested in a job at the university, you should ask about jobs as a student aid or academic assistant at the administrative office of your institute, or speak with your professors.

One of the first places you should go is the job-finding service. This special service for students is offered at many universities by the *Studentenwerk* in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency. You can find the address of the local branch of the Federal Employment Agency at **www.arbeitsagentur.de**.

Many job openings are advertised on the notice boards at the university, in libraries, supermarkets, etc.

Job advertisements are also placed in regional daily newspapers. They are published on Wednesdays and more extensively on Saturdays. You can also view these listings online via the newspapers' websites.

There are also a number of job exchanges on the internet. Several of these are specialised in student jobs. Here are a few examples:

- ▶ **www.berufsstart.stepstone.de**
- ▶ **www.jobmensa.de**
- ▶ **www.studentjob.de**
- ▶ **www.studentenjobs24.de**
- ▶ **www.unicum.de**

Legal provisions

There are explicit legal provisions regarding how much students may work. These regulations vary according to one's country of origin.

Group 1

Students from Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and the United Kingdom are permitted to work as much as they would like without prior permission. They are subject to the same rules which apply to German students. However, students should not work longer than 20 hours per week. Otherwise they are required to pay into the social security system. After April 2011 students from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia will join this group.

Group 2

Students from Bulgaria and Romania are subject to the same rules that apply to Group 3 until 2014. After 2014 they will also join Group 1.

Group 3

Students from all other countries are only permitted to work 90 full days or 180 half days per year. Those who wish to work longer require permission from the Federal Employment Agency and the Alien Registration Office. Obtaining permission depends on the labour market in one's place of residence. The chance of receiving permission is less in regions with higher unemployment. Students in Group 3 may work longer than 90 days as a student aid or academic assistant. However, the Alien Registration Office must be notified in such cases nonetheless. Students in Group 3 are generally not permitted to work as self-employed workers or freelancers. Participants of language or foundation courses, who are not yet officially enrolled at university, may only take a

» Max:

It's difficult to find a part-time job that fits into your course timetable. After all, the reason you came to Germany was to study. A lot of jobs are only temporary which means you have to regularly look for new ones. To find a job, my advice is to take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way – use the job-finding services for students, check the help-wanted ads on the Schwarzes Brett, the job ads in the daily newspapers and online job exchanges, and – sometimes very helpful – network. Tell everyone you know that you're looking for a job. Maybe somebody knows someone else who can help.

part-time job with prior permission from the Alien Registration Office and the Federal Employment Agency – and only during semester breaks.

Please Note: The labour laws pertaining to international students are very restrictive. Those who break them risk being expelled from the country.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 5: "How do I find a job?"

► www.daad.de/job

► www.daad.de/deutschland/download

Information on the Statutory Frameworks applicable to the Pursuit of Gainful Employment by Foreign Students, Academics and Scientists

► www.international-students.de

During your studies > Jobbing

Language



Michael:

It's actually quite practical – lots of people in Germany can speak English very well. That doesn't mean you can talk to just anyone in English, but you'll generally find somebody who can help you. Nonetheless, I'm very happy that I can speak German. It's a nice feeling to be able to understand and speak the language of my host country.

German at university and in daily life

The language level you need to qualify for admission to university depends on your degree programme and the university itself (see pp. 18–19).

Students usually require no German language skills if they enrol in English-language degree programmes. However, to gain admission to such programmes, students need very good English skills. As for German-language degree programmes, students usually require better language proficiency – especially speaking and writing skills – for the humanities than for scientific subjects.

In any case, your language level must be sufficient to understand lectures and participate in discussions in seminars. You have to be able to understand scientific texts. You should also be able to discuss scientific topics in an appropriate manner and explain and analyse them in written form.

But it's not all about studying. Even if you hardly need German at university – like students in English-language degree programmes – it's definitely worth learning the language of your host country. To feel at home in a foreign country, you need strong language skills. Knowing German can help you get settled into daily life faster, participate more intensively in German life and make friends much easier.

Dialects

Residents of the Rhineland speak differently than those in Bavaria. People in Berlin speak differently than people in Hamburg. Even villages in the same region sometimes have a different pronunciation and intonation.

As a rule, courses at German universities are held in *Hochdeutsch* (High German). But even there, you might come across professors or fellow students who speak a dialect. Many people consciously cultivate their dialects because they are proud of the region where they grew up.

» Taorang:

In the beginning I had a hard time understanding people in Germany. Although my German teacher in China was German, there was a lot I didn't understand at first. Even simple words that had never been a problem before. Then Anja, my student mentor during my first days here, told me there were many dialects in Germany. That's why German sounds a little different everywhere. Luckily, I got over the initial shock quickly. I just tried to understand as much as possible. And with each passing day, I understood a little more.



Indeed most people make an honest effort to speak *Hochdeutsch* to foreigners. However, there are many native speakers who are simply unaware that their German sounds different than the German on the CDs in the language books. There's no reason to panic – you will quickly become familiar with the German spoken in your region.

You have nothing to be ashamed of if you don't understand something right away or can't make yourself understood on the first attempt.

Language courses

There are many ways of learning or improving your German in Germany.

Universities offer language courses parallel to their degree programmes. Students are frequently charged an additional fee to participate in such courses.

There are numerous summer courses at universities throughout Germany which can help students improve their language skills for university study. They usually take place between June and September and offer German language courses at various levels. Students are required to pay a participation fee for summer courses as well.

Online language courses

Online language courses are a good alternative to conventional courses. Those offered by DUO (www.deutsch-uni.com), for example, prepare students especially for studying in Germany at various language levels. There you will also find special language courses tailored to specific subjects.

For more information on summer courses, visit **www.summer-schools.de**.

Many German language courses are offered outside the university, for example, at the Goethe-Institut and private language schools. Fees are charged for these courses.

» **Michael:**

When I first arrived, I was taken aback at how fast people spoke. Then I realised that when I speak English, people who know English really well sometimes don't understand me either. People keep telling me – "Hey, Michael, could you speak a little slower?" Since then, I feel better about myself. If I don't get something at first, it doesn't necessarily mean that my German is really bad. It's just that some people speak really fast. Now I'm not embarrassed anymore to ask, "Könnten Sie das bitte langsam wiederholen?"

A good place to look for German courses and language schools is the database operated by the German as a Foreign Language Association FaDaF (**www.fadaf.de/de/daf_angebote/sprachkursangebote**).



Language partnerships

Taking a conventional language course is not the only way to learn German. Participating in a language partnership is an excellent and inexpensive alternative.

In a language partnership, two people get together who want to learn the other's native language. They meet on a regular basis and practice speaking one language for a while, and then the other.

At some universities, the International Office, international student organisations or the student council keep a list of names of people who are interested in starting language partnerships.

Max:

If you want to improve your German, a language partnership is a good method. For instance, I meet with a Czech girl once a week – she practices her German with me, and then I practice Czech with her. It's so much more fun than a course. I found my language partner myself. It was easy – I hung an advert on the notice board at my institute, in the dining hall and at the library.

Testing your language level

The levels of language courses in Germany follow the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. There are six levels of proficiency – from basic user (A1) to proficient user (C2).

If you wish to assess how good your language ability is, you can test it yourself. The Goethe-Institut offers a short, free test on its website **www.goethe.de/einstufungstest**. After completing the test, the assessment recommends which course is right for you.

If you wish to obtain a more accurate assessment and prove your ability with a certificate, you can take the online test OnDaF (www.ondaf.de) for a fee. This test can also tell you whether your language ability is sufficient for passing the TestDaF.

More information:

- ▶ www.learn-german.net
- ▶ www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 3: "How much German do I need in Germany?"

Are you up for a fast course on the important words and sentences in German?

- ▶ www.study-in.de/student-life

Film 4: "German for beginners"

Mobiles, telephone, internet, post



Michael:

It's pretty easy to keep in touch with my family and friends back home. We text and e-mail each other. We chat online or Skype, or just phone.

The only thing that complicates communication, though, is the time difference.

Global telecommunication has rapidly advanced in recent years. At the same time, the cost of telephone and internet usage has decreased significantly. Therefore, it's not a problem to stay in contact with friends and family from home anymore.

Mobiles

Almost every student in Germany has a mobile phone (*Handy*). Some use their mobiles from home instead of getting a landline.

In most cases, international students are well advised to purchase a mobile phone card from a German provider. Keeping in contact with friends and acquaintances in Germany is easier and more economical that way. If you use a foreign mobile phone card in Germany, you will have to pay much higher rates for texting and making calls.

It's easy to receive your own German mobile number. But there are several things you should pay attention to. There are basically two choices – either you can sign up for a mobile phone contract or you can purchase a prepaid card.

With a contract you agree to become a customer for a certain period of time – usually 24 months. You pay a monthly base fee for your mobile service. In return, the provider supplies you with a new, high-quality mobile at no charge or for a small fee. And if you wish to prolong the contract, you're allowed to choose a new mobile to replace your old model. If you decide to sign a mobile phone contract, make sure you understand the conditions and rates – and don't forget to read the fine print. It doesn't hurt to ask about special rates for students either.

Max:

Finding out which provider offers the best mobile, telephone and internet service can be a science in itself. Unfortunately, I can't tell you whether it's better to get a contract or a prepaid mobile. The competition is so stiff that there are new offers almost every day. On one hand, it means that phoning is becoming less and less expensive. But on the other hand, it can be hard finding the best offer among so many.

You can purchase a prepaid card with or without a mobile. The advantage of prepaid cards is that you have no contractual obligations and have much more flexibility. With prepaid cards, you buy a certain amount of credit which is debited every time you phone or text someone. When your card is empty, you can purchase more credit – either via the internet or by purchasing a card from a supermarket, drugstore or kiosk.

The following websites can help you compare the various offers currently on the market:

- ▶ www.handytarife.de
- ▶ prepaid-vergleich-online.de

In addition to contacting your student council for advice, it can be helpful to ask other foreign students who make international calls.

Landlines

If you don't want to rely solely on your mobile, you can also get a landline at home. Similar to mobiles, home telephone service is offered by numerous phone companies at various prices. In contrast, when you get a landline you have no choice but to sign a contract with the phone company.

Nowadays most landlines come with an internet connection. And fixed rates are becoming the norm. This means you pay the same amount every month no matter how long you call other landlines in Germany or surf the web. However, international calls are usually not included in this standard fixed rate. There are special offers which include calls to specific foreign countries at a slightly higher fixed rate.

You should definitely compare prices and offers. It might also be worth asking whether students are eligible for a special rate. The following websites can help you:

- ▶ www.clever-telefonieren.de
- ▶ www.telefontarifrechner.de
- ▶ www.online-tarife.de

In addition, a very simple way to save money on international calls is to use call-by-call numbers. These are dialling codes which allow you to take advantage of especially inexpensive providers even when you have a telephone contract with another company. Before

making a call, you simply choose the least expensive provider and dial its code. However, not every telephone company recognises call-by-call numbers. Before registering for a landline, ask the telephone company whether call-by-call is possible.

To compare the least expensive call-by-call offers currently available, visit any of the following websites:

- ▶ www.billiger-telefonieren.de
- ▶ www.tariftip.de
- ▶ www.teltarif.de

Finding a telephone number

You can look up a landline or mobile phone number in Germany on the internet at www.telefonbuch.de.

If you don't have your own telephone, you can use public telephones or go to telephone cafés. However, public telephones are getting harder to find in Germany. You can still

find coin-operated phones in Germany, and at airports, telephones are available which accept credit cards. Using a public telephone can be expensive and calls should be kept short, if possible.

To make longer calls or international calls, we recommend going to a telephone café. There are a number of telephone cafés in every German city. There you can buy phone cards or take advantage of special rates when making international calls.

Internet

Most student halls of residence and flat-shares have internet connection. If you have a PC or laptop, you can easily log on to the internet from your room via cable or WLAN.

If your room does not have an internet connection, you have two options. Either you can register for an internet connection or get mobile internet access by purchasing a UMTS stick.



In most cases, you need a landline for a standing internet connection. Therefore, select the best bargain that includes internet access and sign a contract with a telephone company (see p. 113). You can compare the best offers by visiting the websites listed above.

The advantage of mobile internet access via a UMTS stick is that you need not sign a contract with a particular provider. Not only do you get immediate internet access, but you can also log on wherever you are in Germany from your laptop. The disadvantage is that mobile internet service is quite expensive compared to a standing internet connection.

However, students in Germany can get by just fine without their own internet connection. For example, you could go to one of the many internet cafés in your university town. For a small fee, you can surf the web, chat and send e-mails. Or you can use the computers at the university.

»» Julia:

I don't have my own internet connection. But I don't mind. I'm at the university most of the time anyway. From there I can log on to the internet from my laptop or use one of the university computers.

There are many ways to gain free internet access at German universities. Students at some universities log on to the internet from their laptops via campus-wide WLAN coverage. All students receive their personal login data when they enrol.

And if you don't have your own laptop, don't worry. All universities provide computer workstations for students to use.

Post

In addition to these electronic modes of communication, the good old-fashioned postal delivery still exists in Germany. Deutsche Post is Germany's largest postal delivery company and sends letters and parcels from Germany to every corner of the world.

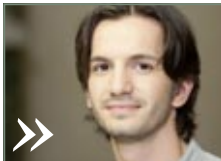
You can take your letters and parcels to any post office, designated by a black postal horn on a yellow background. You can also drop your post into the yellow letter boxes situated at frequented areas throughout town. There is a timetable attached to every letter box, stating when the next pickup is scheduled. You can send small and large parcels from specially designated "parcel stations" (*Packstationen*). Incoming parcels can also be sent to a parcel station where you can pick them up.

You can ask about postal fees for letters and parcels directly at the counter in the post office or online at **www.portokalkulator.de**. The price depends on the size and weight of the item and the country of destination. Letters (up to 20 g) in Germany cost 55 cents and postcards cost 45 cents. You can purchase stamps at the post office, at the stamp vending machines outside, and on the internet at **www.deutschepost.de**.

More information:

► **www.study-in.de/mobile-internet**

Festivals and public holidays



Lukasz:

I always imagined Germans as being hard-working – and maybe a little boring. I never guessed they liked to party so much. If it's not a public

holiday, then it's a birthday party, midsummer night's dance party, football championship celebration, or whatever! And if there's no reason to have a party, they'll find one!

Germans like to celebrate. That's why there are festivals and public holidays all year round.

They begin with the New Year's festivities. On New Year's Eve, friends usually get together at parties which have been planned months in advance. No matter how you celebrate New Year's Eve – eating a nice meal with friends or having a party – Germans set off fireworks on the streets at midnight to greet the New Year.

Many public holidays in Germany have a religious (Christian) tradition. Of course, even non-believers like to celebrate them.

The most important holiday of the year is Christmas when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. In fact, Christmas is so important in Germany, that Germans have two Christmas Days (25 and 26 December)! On Christmas Eve (24 December), German families gather together, eat dinner and exchange presents around a decorated Christmas tree.

Friends frequently exchange presents at Christmas time too – even if they don't get to see each other at Christmas. Christmas is arguably the one public holiday of the year, for which people prepare the longest. Supermarkets and shops begin selling chocolate Santas and Christmas biscuits at the beginning of autumn. And during the four weeks before Christmas – called Advent – everything revolves around Christmas. For example, Germans display Advent wreaths and Advent calendars to shorten the wait until Christmas Eve. Many people bake their own biscuits or make Christmas ornaments, go Christmas shopping and send each other Christmas cards.

Christmas markets are set up in most cities during the Advent season. There you can buy gifts and drink delicious, hot *Glühwein* (mulled wine).

The second most important public holiday of the year is Easter, at which time Christians mark the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like Christmas, this public holiday is strongly anchored in family life – but with a little less extravagance. In many families, Easter is mostly a holiday for children. Parents and grandparents hide Easter eggs and chocolate Easter bunnies in the garden or around the house for the children – and the children have a great time finding them.

In addition to these traditional, family-oriented public holidays, there are also celebrations shared by people of the same age – for example, birthdays and the evening of May 1st when dance parties are held in towns and cities everywhere.

Public holidays

There are a number of public holidays that are observed throughout Germany. Most businesses, agencies and public authorities, schools and universities are closed on these days – like on Sundays. Some of these public holidays are observed on a certain day every year and others vary.

- New Year's Day (1 January)
- Good Friday (Friday before Easter)
- Easter Monday (following the first full-moon in spring)
- May Day (1 May)
- Ascension of Jesus (on a Thursday in May or June, forty days after Easter)
- Whitsun (about 50 days after Easter)
- German Unity Day (3 October)
- 1st and 2nd Christmas Day (25 and 26 December)

There are also several holidays observed in only some German states. These include:

- Epiphany (6 January)
- Corpus Christi (on a Thursday in May or June)
- Ascension of Mary (15 August)
- Reformation Day (31 October)
- All Saints' Day (1 November)
- Day of Prayer and Repentance (on a Wednesday in November)

To find out which public holidays are observed in which German state, visit www.feiertage.net or www.derferienkalender.de.

Regional holidays

Every region in Germany has its own festivals. For example, in the wine producing regions like the Pfalz, Rhinegau, Baden and Mosel, numerous wine festivals are held from May to October every year.

» Michael:

My friends in the States keep asking whether I've been to the Oktoberfest yet. I still haven't made it there, but I've celebrated Carnival twice already. That was really awesome!

In other regions – especially in Bavaria and Franconia – beer festivals are highly popular. The most famous beer festival in the world is the *Oktoberfest* in Munich.

Many towns and cities hold fairs and festivals which feature parades of people wearing traditional costumes, theatre performances, historic arts and crafts markets, medieval tournaments, concerts and much more.

Carnival is a very special festival celebrated in many regions of Germany. Depending on the region, it may also be called *Fasching* or *Fastnacht*. People celebrate Carnival in February or March every year.

During the course of several days, the world goes crazy between the cities of Mainz and Düsseldorf in the Rhineland. People dress up in costumes and party in the streets and pubs. Many towns and villages hold their own parades during Carnival with brightly decorated floats, music and dance groups.

In southwest Germany, people celebrate *Fastnacht* in the old Alemannic tradition. Frightening characters wearing wooden masks and fantastic costumes roam through the towns and villages and make a terrible ruckus to drive away winter.

Recreation



Michael:

Since the moment I set foot in Germany, I don't think I've ever been bored. Of course, I've got a lot of course work to do for the university. In the evening,

I usually go jogging with a neighbour from my dormitory. I sing with the university choir on Wednesday evenings and on the weekend, I often go to the movies or a concert.

In both small and large towns, you'll find plenty of recreational activities where you live – film, literature, art, music, sports, theatre, etc. Upcoming events are regularly advertised in the daily newspaper, city magazines and, of course, in the event calendar on your city's website.

Universities also organise diverse event programmes for their students. To learn more, ask your student council or check for event announcements on the university notice board.

Film

Many students enjoy watching new films at their local cinemas. Practically every German city has large cinemas operated by major cinema chains, such as Cinestar, CinemaxX, UCI Kinowelt, Kinopolis or Cineplex. These multiplexes have several auditoriums and very large screens where the latest blockbusters are shown. There

are also smaller art-house cinemas which feature older or independent films.

German audiences are used to watching foreign language films dubbed in German. However, some multiplexes and art-house cinemas show films in their original version. If you check the programme in your daily newspaper or on the internet, you might notice the abbreviation “OV” or “OF” following the film title. This means the film is shown in its “original version”. The abbreviation “OmU” (*Original mit Untertiteln*) signifies that the film is not dubbed, but is shown with German subtitles.

In the summertime, people enjoy going to outdoor or open-air film showings. It can be lots of fun watching a film on top of a car park, in the city park or in a castle courtyard on a warm summer evening.

If you'd like to meet a German or international film star, you should travel to Berlin in February. That's where everybody who is anybody in the film business gathers to attend the Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival). There are other exciting film festivals in Germany, the most famous of which being the International Short Film Days in Oberhausen and the Hof International Film Festival.

Ticket prices

Art-house cinemas: 3 to 5 euros

Multiplex cinemas: 5 to 9 euros

Many cinemas offer special concessions on certain days of the week, called “Movie Days”.

Literature

Literature has always played an important role in Germany. German and internationally renowned writers go on tour to book stores, antiquarian bookshops and libraries. They read from their newest works, speak with fans and sign books.

Many pubs have small stages where poetry slams take place. At these events, amateur and professional poets have the chance to “perform” their poems to a live audience.

The lit.COLOGNE is a major international literature festival which takes place in Cologne every spring (www.litcologne.de). And every summer, Europe’s largest poetry festival takes place in Berlin (www.literaturwerkstatt.org).

Germany is also a book-lover’s paradise with two major book trade fairs – in Leipzig in March (www.leipzigermesse.de) and Frankfurt am Main in October (www.buchmesse.de). Publishing houses showcase their newest products at the book fairs, which include lecture series, discussions and public readings.

Sports

There are a vast number of sports in Germany. No matter what sport you’re interested in, you’ll be able to find it here.

Every university offers sports training courses in many disciplines, e.g. gymnastics, jogging, fencing, karate, volleyball, sailing, football, etc. A majority of the courses are free. Visit your university’s website to view the current sports training programme.

Inexpensive courses are offered by adult education centres (*Volks-hochschulen* or VHS) in every larger-sized town and city. Another option is to join a sport club in your town. By paying a small monthly fee, you can join sport courses and train with a team – and experience what it’s like to play in a German sports club. In addition,





there are a large number of fitness studios in every city which offer special deals to students.

If you enjoy skiing or snowboarding, then the Alps are a great place to go. But there are also good skiing conditions in the Bavarian Forest, the Harz Mountains, the Black Forest, and the Thuringian Forest. You can rent your own skis, snowboard and shoes at the ski lodges. And for those who want to hit the slopes all year round, there are numerous indoor ski facilities throughout Germany.

Water sports are also quite popular. There are numerous rowing and canoeing clubs. Most cities operate outdoor and indoor public swimming facilities, and in some cities, you can have fun at “water resorts” with water slides, wave machines and saunas. On hot days, Germans cool off at open-air public swimming pools, in lakes and at the sea.

There is an enormous range of spectator sports in Germany, as well. For example, you can join thousands of football fans on their pilgrimage to the national football league (*Bundesliga*) games every weekend.

Football isn't the only professional sport that gets people's adrenaline pumping. Formula 1 fans travel to the two famous race tracks in Germany – the Hockenheimring and the Nürburgring. Others go to basketball, handball and ice hockey national league games,

»» **Torang:**

Don't be surprised if you suddenly find yourself on a train with hundreds of chanting football fans wearing colourful scarves. The last time the German national football team played, my professor interrupted his own lecture to ask what the score was. Amazing!

attend table tennis tournaments, cheer on the runners in city marathons or travel to Oberstdorf and Garmisch-Partenkirchen to see the Four Hill Ski Jumping Tournament.

Theatre, opera, musicals

In contrast to other countries, theatre is not centred in one particular city or region of Germany. Plays are produced everywhere from major cities like Berlin to small towns like Passau. The reason for this dates back to the 18th and 19th century when Germany was little more than a loose collection of principalities. Every prince and lord wanted to build his own royal theatre.

Today there are over 800 state, municipal and independent theatres in Germany. These include numerous opera houses, dance theatre companies, touring groups, improvisation theatres, puppet theatres and musical theatres. Their programmes feature a wide array of modern productions of the classics and world premieres.

One can find opera houses in most larger-sized cities. In addition, the number of new musical theatres in Germany has kept pace with the growing number of musical fans. The best-known musicals are shown in Hamburg, Cologne, Berlin, Bochum, Stuttgart and Essen.

Germany is home to a host of small-scaled productions that require less space, money and artistic personnel, such as political satire, comedy, chansons, puppet shows, pantomime and magic shows.

A vibrant amateur theatre scene exists in many cities and universities. If you are interested in participating, look for announcements for castings in your local city magazine or on the university notice board.

Music

If you live in a large university town, you could probably attend a concert every day of the week if you wanted to – in small and large concert halls, in pubs and bars, in churches and even at the market-place. The selection of musical genres is enormous – everything from house to blues, jazz to hip-hop, heavy metal to classical and pop to soul. And if you keep your eyes open, you'll find concerts which charge no admission fees.

If you like to sing, then Germany is the perfect place for you. There are over 65,000 choirs in Germany, many of which are church choirs which specialise in spiritual music. But there are also a variety of other choirs and singing groups – university choirs, chamber choirs, jazz and pop groups, barber-shop quartets, etc. – and all of them are constantly looking for new talent.

Festivals

A countless number of festivals are held in Germany every year, including theatre, opera, chamber music, jazz, pop and rock festivals. Many open-air festivals are held during the summer.

Museums and galleries

There are museums of every size and kind in Germany – art museums, science and technology museums, archaeological museums and so on. There are also smaller museums based on specific themes, e.g., Beethoven, Brecht, wine, musical instruments, dolls, potato dumplings, beer coasters, etc. For an overview of German museums, visit www.deutsche-museen.de.

Every large city in Germany organises a *Museumsnacht* (long museum night) once a year. This is a perfect and inexpensive opportunity for you to become acquainted with the variety of museums in your city. Shuttle buses transport visitors to and from the museums,

all of which are open until late into the night and feature special cultural programmes.

If you are interested in modern art, you can tour the art galleries in larger-sized cities or take a trip to Kassel. That's where the documenta, the world's largest exhibition of contemporary art, takes place every five years for 100 days in the summer. The next documenta will take place in 2012.

Meeting people

All of these recreational activities provide opportunities to meet people.

You can also meet people and make friends at pubs, cafés, bars and clubs (see pp. 133–134).

Some departmental committees and student groups organise an event called a *Stammtisch*, an informal get-together at a pub or café on a regular basis. A *Stammtisch* is a good place to get to know your fellow students or make plans to do something together at a later date.

Julia:

It's not so hard to meet people at university. Most students, even Germans, feel just as insecure as you do in the beginning. They're usually happy if you make the first move and strike up a conversation – for example while you're waiting to speak with your professor or queuing at the dining hall.

At every university, students with similar interests and hobbies form their own groups. In addition to bands, orchestras, theatre and sports groups, you will find a wide variety of student societies

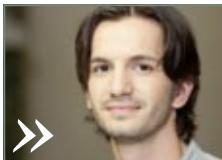


and political groups. By joining such a group, you will have more opportunities to meet people. Contact your student council for a list of student societies at your university.

Many students are members of religious congregations in their university towns. These groups not only focus on issues of faith, but also organise excursions, parties, discussions and many other events for their members. You can find their contact info on your university's website.

And finally, many international student organisations hold events which allow foreign students to meet and share experiences with one another.

Going out



Lukasz:

I enjoy going out. There are several really nice pubs here. And I've already got my own Stammkneipe (local pub).

It's right around the corner from where I live. I go there about three times a week. And now I know almost everyone who goes there – especially the guys who also like playing table football. It's cool that you don't have to set a date or anything. There's always someone around you can talk to or play some football with.

Students in Germany like going out – and do so frequently. Many enjoy spending an evening together at one of their favourite local pubs in their university town. In addition to restaurants and bistros which serve meals, there are countless establishments where you “only” get something to drink – cafés, pubs, bars, clubs and, in the summer, beer gardens and beach bars.

You can grab breakfast, eat a slice of cake and drink cold and hot beverages at cafés. You can choose from a large selection of coffee beverages, such as espresso, cappuccino, latte macchiato and café au lait – not to mention hot chocolate and tea. Like most countries in the world, Germany also has its share of coffee shop franchises. If you happen to be a tea lover, we recommend going to a tea shop which exclusively serves tea and baked goodies.

» Michael:

Going to a club to dance and meet people is fine, but if you're interested in a good, inexpensive alternative, just go to the next university party. At every university, parties are always being organised by the student council, departmental committees and university groups during each semester.

Most pubs open around 6 or 7 pm every evening, and close at 1 am. Some bars and clubs are open even longer – all night, in fact – if they have a special permit.

Paying the bill

People pay their bills at cafés, pubs and bars in cash. Sometimes people pay as soon as they receive their drinks or wait until the meal is over and pay the entire bill at the end of the evening.

In contrast to other countries, when you go out in a group in Germany, each person usually pays for him or herself. Although there's only one bill, each person pays exactly what he or she has ordered which means the waiter has to calculate each person's bill individually.

» Lukasz:

At first I had no idea what the waitress meant when she asked me "Do you want a coaster?" Then she explained that she writes down which drinks each person orders on their beer coaster. When you're ready to leave, you pay for your coaster.



» Taorang:

“Zusammen oder getrennt?” – meaning “Together or separate?” That’s the question waiters always ask when we want to pay. Paying separately can sometimes take a while. When I go out with my Chinese friends, one of us always pays the total bill.

The bill at restaurants, cafés and pubs always includes VAT and service charges. Nevertheless, wherever orders are brought to one’s table, customers are expected to pay a small tip. For tips in Germany, the rule of thumb is about 5 to 10 % of the total.

Speaking of tips, people do not leave the tip on the table, but pay it directly to the waiter. If you wish to give a tip, there are two ways to do so. Either you pay the total plus tip exactly and say *“Stimmt so”* – meaning “keep the change”. Or, if you only have large notes, you can tell the waiter the amount you would like to pay (tip included), and he or she will give you change back.

Impolite!

With regard to smoking, the situation in Germany has changed dramatically in recent years. The rights of non-smokers are better protected nowadays.

Smoking in public buildings – if allowed at all – is restricted to specially designated areas. Smoking is no longer permitted in public transportation like buses and trains. The same applies to restaurants and bars, although separate rooms for smokers are frequently available. Smoking is still allowed outdoors, like in beer gardens, beach bars and in front of cafés.

It is considered extremely impolite to smoke at the table while people are (still) eating. Furthermore, when a smoker is invited to someone's home, they should always ask if it's all right to smoke in their flat.

Germans take punctuality seriously. It's considered impolite to keep someone waiting for more than five minutes. If you foresee that you'll be late for an appointment or date, you should call ahead or send a text message if you can. This is especially true if you've arranged to meet someone at a certain place, such as a pub. However, if you've been invited to someone's home, it's better not to come too early. Arriving five or ten minutes late is exactly right.

» Michael:

In the beginning I constantly mixed up "du" and "Sie". But it's actually quite easy. You say "du" to students and people your age. You can also use "du" at bars and pubs. But you should definitely use the "Sie" form for people who are clearly older than you. It's sometimes better to be over-polite than impolite.

Invitations

Students in Germany love going out as much as they enjoy inviting friends over to their flat-share or student hall of residence. An invitation might come on a certain occasion. For example, people in Germany like celebrating their birthday at home with family and friends.

However, Germans don't always need a special occasion to invite each other over. It's normal to invite friends for breakfast, tea or coffee, dinner or an evening of games or television.



Of course, that doesn't mean the door is always open to every flat-share and apartment. If you would like to visit someone at home, it's always better to call ahead and ask if it's OK to drop by.

Students frequently invite each other over to cook and eat meals together. Usually they make plans in advance as to who will bring and prepare what – such as ingredients for a salad or an appetizer.

Game evenings are also quite popular. People get together and play board games, such as Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, Taboo, The Settlers of Catan, and card games as well. Playing games in a foreign language can be a challenge, but in addition to improving your German, it's a fun way of spending an evening with friends.

» **Julia:**

A friend of mine from South America told me that she still doesn't know how to greet people, like at a party. Shake hands or not? A hug or rather a kiss on the cheek? Frankly, I think most Germans aren't sure either. There are people who hug everyone they know. Others only embrace their best friends. I think a handshake is sometimes too formal. But some people think it's cool. I think the most important thing is to respond in a friendly manner when someone says hello to you. The rest doesn't matter so much.

Watching TV with friends can also be a lot of fun. In Germany people watch their favourite comedy series or crime shows together. Or they watch football games.

If going to the cinema is too expensive or you'd rather see an older film, you can also meet with friends and watch a DVD together.

» **Michael:**

In Germany, movies on TV are always dubbed. It can be strange to hear your favourite actor speak in a totally different voice – but for learning German, it's not bad.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/dos-donts

Weather and clothing



Taorang:

The subject of weather is always on people's minds in Germany. At the bakery or on the bus – everyone talks about the weather, or rather complains about it. I have no idea why. I think the weather in Germany is quite pleasant. It rarely gets very hot or very cold.

Germany has a temperate climate, which means – when viewed over the course of a whole year – it's not very hot nor very cold, nor very dry nor very wet. Extreme temperatures and weather conditions are an exception. The moderate temperatures are due largely to the effects of the Gulf Stream.

Four seasons

There are four clearly distinct seasons of the year. In spring (March to May), the trees turn green and everything blooms. The summer months (June to August) are warm with temperatures frequently higher than 20 degrees Celsius. In autumn (September to November) the leaves turn bright orange and yellow and the weather gets windier. In winter (December to February) the temperature frequently falls below freezing (0 degrees Celsius).

The weather in northern Germany is strongly influenced by the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The maritime climate causes

temperatures to fluctuate less between winter and summer than in southern Germany. The more continental conditions cause much more snow to fall than at the coast.

Radiators and air-conditioners

Practically all flats and public buildings are fitted with radiators in Germany. The tenants in apartment buildings can simply regulate the temperature themselves.

Most flats are not equipped with air-conditioners or ceiling fans. This is mostly due to the fact that there are only several weeks of very hot weather every year.

Michael:

Coming from the U.S., I was surprised that there were hardly any air conditioners in Germany! In the winter, the rooms at the university, in restaurants, cinemas and so on are kept at comfortable temperature with radiators. But in the summer, very few buildings are air-conditioned – people usually open the windows. I haven't seen an apartment yet which has an air-conditioner.

Clothing

Because the climate in Germany is so temperate, there is no need to take special clothing with you. In the winter, you should have a warm jacket or coat, hat, gloves and sturdy shoes. In the summer, loose clothing and a light jacket is all you will need.

There is no dress code at German universities or for recreational activities. Students wear whatever they like. Some like to dress

»» Michael:

In Germany people say that there's no such thing as bad weather – just bad clothing. This means that if you wear a water-proof jacket and good shoes and carry an umbrella, taking a walk in the rain can also be fun.

stylishly, others like more comfortable clothing. Each person can decide for themselves what they'd like to wear to their courses.

Germans often regard clothing as an expression of their personality. Wearing bright colours or showing lots of skin has much to do with one's character. However, it would be wrong and inappropriate to judge a person's moral qualities by the way they dress.



Eating and drinking

**Michael:**

“You want to go to Germany!?”, a friend from home asked me. “But they only eat weird sausages and sauerkraut.

Go to Italy or France instead.” Apart from the fact that I didn’t come to Germany to eat, but to study, he was totally wrong! The food in Germany is super. You can find everything here your heart desires. And even the food at the student dining hall is pretty good.

Internationally, German cuisine doesn’t have the best reputation. People associate German food with hearty, heavy meals like pickled or salted pork, sauerbraten, sausage, sauerkraut and green cabbage.

Of course, there are many traditional German restaurants which serve these “time-honoured” meals and other regional specialities. But one rarely finds them on the menus at the dining hall, student pubs or in flat-shares.

International cuisine

In recent decades German cuisine has become lighter and increasingly international. Germany's top chefs are among the best in the world, nine of whom are three-star chefs. Twenty-three restaurants in Germany have received one of the highly coveted Michelin stars.

In larger German cities there are restaurants that serve dishes from countries around the world. You will find a wide variety of ethnic cuisine here – Chinese, Greek, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Moroccan, Mexican, Persian, Russian, Turkish, Thai, Vietnamese – from fancy restaurants to cheap snack bars and take away.

Julia:

I always buy fruit and vegetables at the weekly market. It's near my flat on the big marketplace in the middle of the city. They always sell fresh produce from the region. I also enjoy strolling past the market stalls and discovering which fruits and vegetables are coming into season. And by the way, one vegetable is only in season for 10 weeks every year, from mid April to the end of June – asparagus! It comes in white and green varieties. You have to try it!

The selection of international foods sold at supermarkets continues to grow at a fast pace. If you'd like to prepare your favourite meal from your home country, you'll find almost everything you need at Asian, Italian, Russian and Turkish markets and other speciality shops.

» Julia:

In early September every year, Germans drink something they call “Federweißer” – a very young wine that tastes more like grape juice which has just begun to ferment. It’s only available until the end of October. People traditionally drink Federweißer with a piece of Zwiebelkuchen (onion tart). Delicious!

Beer and wine

Germany is famous for its beer. More than 1,300 breweries – from gigantic, global corporations to neighbourhood micro-breweries – produce over 5,000 different types of beer.

Beer is brewed in accordance with the 500-year-old German Purity Law – known throughout the world as having the highest standard of quality. There are many beer-mix beverages and non-alcoholic beers available as well. You can try them out at bars, restaurants – or best of all – in a beer garden.

While beer is brewed everywhere in Germany, wine is only produced in the southern and middle regions of the country. The northernmost wine producing region in Europe is the Saale-Unstrut region in Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. Other well-known wine producing regions include Baden-Württemberg, Franconia, Rhineland and the Pfalz.



Meals

Germans enjoy eating! The main meals of the day are breakfast, lunch and dinner.

For breakfast, Germans usually eat rolls and slices of bread topped with sliced meats, cheese, jam, honey or chocolate spread, normally Nutella. Some people also like muesli, hard-boiled eggs or scrambled eggs and bacon.

»» Max:

For me, the best thing about summer in Germany is barbecuing. Yesterday, for example, I met up with three friends. Each of us brought something to eat and drink. And then we spent the whole evening eating and drinking, and played some football. We cooked sausages, steak and corn on the cob. I'd barbecue again tonight if someone's up for it!

Traditionally, lunch was the only warm meal of the day. And for dinner, people ate *Abendbrot*, sliced bread with sliced meat and cheese, and occasionally a side salad. Nowadays more and more people in Germany eat a warm meal for dinner.

Having coffee and cake in the afternoon is a popular tradition in Germany. If a family invites you over for "coffee", you can also look forward to a piece of cake, either homemade or from the local bakery.

Dining hall and cafeteria

Hungry students can get meals on campus, either at the cafeteria or the student dining hall (*Mensa*).

You can meet with friends at the cafeteria for a cup of coffee and a snack while you wait for your next lecture.

For larger meals, you should go to the student dining hall where they serve a wide variety of inexpensive dishes. For example, at lunch-time the dining hall offers a selection of meals which include a vegetarian dish and salads. Some dining halls also serve special meals for Muslims and members of other religious denominations. Many dining halls offer a warm meal in the evening as well.

Taorang:

The Chinese have a completely different way of cooking than the Germans. They spend a lot of time chopping up and preparing the ingredients. The actually cooking, though, goes very quickly. For Germans, the preparation is fast – it's the cooking that takes forever! The good thing is that while you're waiting for the food to finish cooking, you can pass the time with a cup of tea or a game of cards.

The dining hall usually posts the menu for the upcoming week on the internet. You can find it on your university's website.

The prices vary depending on the dining hall and the meal. Generally speaking, a full lunch with an appetizer, main course and dessert costs around three euros.

Cooking for yourself

Despite the enormous variety of meals and food offered by restaurants and snacks bars, and despite the tempting dishes served by the dining hall, many students enjoy cooking for themselves.

Cooking has become quite a trend in recent years. Along with countless television cooking shows, there is a large variety of cookery books and magazines available in stores.

Baking is also very popular in Germany. Families get together on Sunday afternoons for coffee and homemade cake. Sometimes they make waffles or muffins. And in the weeks before Christmas (see pp. 118–119), many students bake biscuits with friends.

German bread

If you asked Germans living abroad what they missed most from home, they would probably answer “German bread”. By this, they mean the variety of baked goods which are available in Germany. More than 300 kinds of bread and 1,200 types of pastries, rolls and pretzels are sold in German bakeries.



Shopping



Taorang:

At first I was worried that I wouldn't have enough money. A lot of things are more expensive in Germany than in China. But if you keep your eyes open and shop around, you can find bargains everywhere and save a lot of money.

Students rarely have so much money that they can afford everything they want – that goes for both German and international students. Many try to earn extra money with part-time jobs (see pp. 99–102) and save as much as possible when they go shopping.

You can save money by buying groceries at the large discount supermarket chains, such as Aldi, Lidl and Netto. You should also check for weekly specials and compare prices carefully. In this way, you can save a few euros here and there.

You can find additional bargains offered by supermarkets, chemist's, department stores, and do-it-yourself stores on the internet at **www.kaufda.de**.





Saving with your student ID card

Your student ID card can save you money as well. By showing your student ID at the theatre, cinema, swimming pool or museum, you can receive a concession rate on tickets. Public transport companies also offer reduced fares to students. Students pay less for newspaper subscriptions, computer software, mobile phone contracts (see pp. 111–113) and bank accounts (see pp. 90–92).

If you're planning to travel outside of Germany, an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) can save you money on airline and railway tickets, admission fees to museums and theatres, and much more. You can purchase an ISIC for 12 euros from your student council or at a travel agency in your university town (www.isic.de).

Store hours

Store hours vary from place to place. Shops located in the centre are usually open from 10 am to 8 pm on weekdays and on Saturdays until 4 pm, or 6 pm or 8 pm depending on where you live. Supermarkets are generally open longer, in some cases from 7 am to 10 pm.

Almost all stores are closed on Sundays and public holidays (see p. 120). In larger cities, however, some markets and kiosks are open on Sundays where you can buy basic necessities. If everything is closed, then the petrol station could be your saving grace. You'll also find a number of bakeries that sell fresh bread, croissants, rolls, etc. on Sunday mornings.

Environmental protection



Taorang:

My German teacher always said, "Germans take the environment seriously". I didn't quite realise how much until I came to Germany.

A German friend of mine told me that home owners aren't even allowed to cut down a tree in their own garden without permission from the city. Crazy, isn't it?

According to the most recent study published by the German Federal Environment Agency, Germans continue to be environmentally conscious. Ninety-one percent of the population consider it very important to protect the environment.

People in Germany are concerned about the effects of climate change. As a result, many feel it is important to save energy and recycle as many reusable materials as possible. They make an effort to cycle instead of drive. They purchase electrical appliances and cars which consume less energy and fuel. They install solar panels on the roofs of their houses. They try to save water and generate less waste.

Recycling

In Germany, household waste is separated before it enters the dustbin. In other words, you don't toss all types of waste into one bin. Every apartment building has several waste bins in different colours which designate the type of waste they hold. The colour coding depends on the city and region.

These waste bins are regularly emptied by the municipal rubbish collection. You can refer to your city's rubbish or waste removal calendar to find out which bin is emptied on which day. You can usually download the calendar from your city's website as well. It will tell you where the waste collection containers are located in the city.

The following types of rubbish are usually separated in Germany:

- Glass
- Paper
- Biodegradables (= organic waste, such as fruit rinds and vegetable peels, coffee grounds, egg shells, leftovers, etc.)
- Packaging (e.g. plastic bags, Tetrapak, tins)
- Residual waste
- Hazardous waste (e.g. chemicals, batteries, small electrical appliances, energy-saving light bulbs)

Michael:

During my first weeks here I got into trouble with the other students on my floor, because I didn't understand how seriously Germans take their trash. I just threw everything away in the big trash can – and wondered why they kept pulling out my old magazines, plastic bags and tin cans. Then one evening they gave me an introduction to German waste separation. Pretty complicated.





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Glass should be deposited into the glass recycling containers located throughout the city. The same applies for paper and cardboard, though you will often find paper bins inside apartment buildings, as well. There are also special containers for hazardous waste.

For many people, deciding how to separate packaging is the most complicated task of all. The *Gelbe Tonne* (Yellow Bin) is where you should deposit packaging made of metal or plastic or combinations thereof, for instance, beverage cartons, tins, shampoo bottles, tooth-paste tubes, etc.

Larger supermarkets provide special waste bins for “outer packaging”, i.e. the packaging around a packaged product, like frozen pizza cartons. Businesses in Germany are required by law to take back extra packaging left by the consumer.

Deposit on bottles and cans

To prevent waste and promote recycling of reusable materials, consumers in Germany pay a small deposit on most beverage bottles and cans. The deposit is refunded when they bring the empty containers back to the supermarket.

In addition to the more environmentally friendly reusable bottles, the deposit system also applies to disposable bottles and cans.

Stores charge an 8- or 15-cent deposit on reusable bottles depending on their type and size. A 25-cent deposit is charged on all disposable bottles and cans. Therefore, it's worth your while to cash in your empty bottles and cans the next time you go to the supermarket.

Saving energy

In recent decades Germany has invested heavily into efforts to research and develop renewable energy technologies, such as wind and solar power.

On an individual level, Germans try to save energy at home – and not only because of the rising price of electricity and gas. They turn the heating down when they ventilate their apartments and switch off electronic devices when they're not being used.

Organic and environmentally friendly products

Many Germans base their purchasing decisions on the environmental impact of the products, their carbon footprint and whether they've been traded fairly on the market. These concerns apply to food, household appliances, stationery, clothing, shoes, etc.

Foods which carry the German organic seal (**www.bio-siegel.de**) and the EU organic logo (**www.organic-farming.eu**) are very popular. Practically every supermarket chain now offers a wide assortment of organic products. German cities have also seen a large increase in organic supermarkets which sell environmentally friendly and sustainable products.

Concern for the environment is not limited to food, however. Environmental standards play a large role in the purchasing decisions of many other products, such as household goods, stationery, toys, athletic equipment and electronic devices. The "Blue Angel" logo helps consumers choose products that are especially environmentally friendly (**www.blauer-engel.de**).

Equal rights and tolerance

**Michael:**

There are eight students from three different continents who live on my floor at the dormitory. Six different countries and four religions. We share one kitchen – and that's where you can see how different we all are. Who cooks and eats what and when. Who would rather be left alone and who likes company. Who likes to share his things and who doesn't. It's important to respect one another and be tolerant – otherwise you couldn't live in such close quarters with one another.

Germany is a democratic country. It is proud of its constitution which protects the human dignity of its citizens and guarantees equal rights for all.

People from all around the world live together in Germany – many nationalities from every possible region and culture. Peaceful co-existence is only possible with tolerance.

German constitution, Basic Law, Article 3

- (1) All persons shall be equal before the law.
- (2) Men and women have equal rights. [...]
- (3) No person shall be favoured or disfavoured because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith, or religious or political opinions. No person shall be disfavoured because of disability.

Cultural differences

Everyone who travels abroad for the first time experiences some degree of “culture shock”. Many cultural differences may strike you as charming, others less so. You might notice that people in Germany think, dress and interact differently than they do “back home”. As a foreign visitor, you have more to gain by trying to understand and accept these differences as unique to German culture.

Misunderstandings do happen. If you are “shocked” by someone’s words or actions, you might be experiencing culture shock. At moments like these, it’s better to ask the person directly why they’re acting that way. Not only could this resolve the misunderstanding, but also teach you something about German mentality.

Safety

**Taorang:**

Here in Germany they say the police are your friends and servants. And it's really true. Just last week I got lost, so I approached a policeman. In my best German, I asked him the way, and he took the time to show me how to get there. He was so friendly.

Compared to most countries in the world, Germany is a safe country. There is no reason to be overly worried about criminality. People move about freely through German country villages or large cities, day or night, without taking special safety precautions.

Of course, Germany also has its share of crime. Therefore, you should not take any unnecessary risks – like walking alone through dark streets or in the woods at night time.

Police can help

German police are trustworthy and provide reliable assistance. The police patrol German cities on foot, by bike, motorcycle and car.

You can call the police free of charge from any telephone in Germany by dialling 110. You can also dial this number when you need help – not only in dire emergencies. The police themselves recommend that people don't hesitate to call, because it's better to be safe than sorry.

If you're confronted with a dangerous or frightening situation, or you've lost your wallet, or you discover that someone has stolen your bicycle – calling the police is the right course of action!

Other contact partners

The police are not the only ones who can assist foreign students in emergencies. Almost every country in the world maintains an embassy or consulates in Germany. If you run into problems, you can personally contact an official representative from your home country.

In addition, do not hesitate to contact the staff at the International Office with questions regarding personal safety or any related problems.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/safety

Mobility and travel



Lukasz:

What I really like about living in Germany? You can get almost anywhere without a car. I can't afford to have my own car, but

I love travelling. That's why I'm glad there are so many ways of getting around Germany.

The transportation system in Germany is closely interwoven. There are many ways to travel from place to place in cities and throughout the country. This makes it easy to take weekend trips to other cities, the countryside, the mountains or the sea, or even venture across the border and visit other countries in Europe.

Cycling

Cycling is a popular activity in Germany – and especially among students. Not only is it good exercise and inexpensive, but it protects the environment and is extremely practical for getting around town. You'll find that taking a bike is often the fastest way to reach your destination – you don't have to worry about finding a parking space, getting stuck in traffic or waiting for the next bus.

In every city there are specially marked paths reserved for cyclists, called *Radwege*. There are numerous bicycle stands at public areas where you can park and lock your bike up. For Germans, bicycles are

not only a means of transportation. Many people enjoy taking weekend cycling tours together with family and friends into the countryside.

» Michael:

Where I come from, hardly anyone rides a bike. And those who do are like professional cyclists training for the next Tour de France or something. You can imagine my surprise when I first came to Germany and discovered that almost everyone rides bikes. Bicycles aren't used as fitness equipment here, but rather as a means of transportation. And you can get into trouble if you don't watch out for bikers. In my first days here, I kept hearing bicycle bells behind me just because I was walking on the bike path ... Anyway, now I've got my own bike – and I love it. I'm much more flexible and independent this way. And when it's not raining, riding a bike is so much fun.

Taxis

Taxis are relatively expensive in Germany. Taxi companies charge between 1.50 and 2 euros per kilometre. They frequently charge a minimum fare of 2 to 3 euros, which the passenger has to pay no matter how short the journey is.

This is why students rarely take taxis, and if they do, then in groups. If you and your friends agree to share the price of the fare, then a taxi might be an option – especially if you've missed the night bus or the last tram.

Taxis wait at taxi stands in cities. You can also order one to pick you up at a certain location. The telephone numbers of taxi companies are listed in the phone book (**www.telefonbuch.de**) and the Yellow Pages (**www.gelbe-seiten.de**).



Buses and local railway

Residents in larger German cities use the bus and railway systems to get around town. There are different types of railway systems in Germany: the underground trains (*U-Bahn*), the suburban railway (*S-Bahn*) and trams (*Straßenbahn*).

Info sheets, listing bus stops and tram stops, are available at public utility and transport companies, the railway station and the tourist information office.

Timetables are posted at all bus stops and railway stations. Buses, trams and trains usually run more frequently during the week than on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays (see p. 120).

»» Julia:

If you want to take your bike onto a train or bus, you might have to pay extra – even if you have a semester ticket. And if friends come to visit you and don't have a semester ticket, you should ask about special rates. It's usually more economical to buy a day ticket or weekend ticket than single tickets. There are also concessions for groups.

Timetables and route maps are also available online from your public utility website. You can access their page via a link from your city's website.

You must buy a ticket before boarding most modes of public transportation. On buses, you can usually pay the fare directly to the driver. For *U-Bahn* and *S-Bahn*, ticket machines are generally located on the platform.

There are also ticket machines at tram stops and railway stations. Sometimes the machines for local public transport only accept cash (and occasionally only coins). But there are many machines which also accept debit or credit cards.

You can also purchase tickets for local public transport from selected kiosks and newspaper stands. If you see the logo of the public transport company in the kiosk window, chances are that they sell tickets there.

You often have to endorse your ticket before boarding or at the start of your journey. To do this, insert your ticket into the small ticket stamping machine located on the platform or near the doors of the bus or tram.

If you have a semester ticket (see p. 24), you need not buy another ticket. However, if a conductor asks to see your semester ticket, you have to show identification, such as a passport or personal identification card.

If there is no semester ticket at your university, public transport companies usually offer students especially low rates.



Railway

The railway is ideal for travelling longer distances. The Deutsche Bahn is the primary provider of long-distance passenger transport in Germany.

Travelling by rail is fast and comfortable. The Intercity Express trains (ICE) can travel up to 330 kilometres per hour. Tickets for ICE, Intercity (IC) and Eurocity (EC) trains usually cost more than for the slower Interregio-Express (IRE), Regionalexpress (RE), Regionalbahn (RB) trains and regional trams.

Railway travel in Germany is not cheap, especially when you spontaneously decide to take a trip somewhere. You can save money by purchasing your ticket far in advance. You can buy tickets at the counter in the railway station, at ticket machines or on the internet (www.bahn.de). Tickets are often less expensive if you book them online.

For those who travel by rail more frequently, it might be a good idea to invest in a *BahnCard 25* or *BahnCard 50*. This card automatically reduces the price of your ticket by either 25 or 50 percent. The *Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket* (Good Weekend Ticket) is a group ticket where up to five people can travel on a Saturday or Sunday using local public transport (i.e. S-Bahn, RB, IRE, RE and many local transport systems) for the whole day for only 37 euros.

Please Note: Credit cards are usually the only accepted form of payment if you wish to buy train and aeroplane tickets online!

Fare evasion

Evading or dodging the fare (*Schwarzfahren*) means using public transport without a valid ticket. Whoever is caught fare dodging in Germany is fined a minimum of 40 euros. Those who are caught more than once may face criminal charges as well.

Airlines

Air travel has become much cheaper in recent years. A wide range of so-called “budget airlines” service numerous airports in Germany. For a list of German airports, visit **www.german-airports.de**.

Budget airlines fly to cities throughout Europe. You can find great bargains if you're flexible and book well in advance. You can purchase tickets either online or at a travel agency. A number of websites offer especially good deals on airline tickets, for example:

- ▶ **www.billigflieger.de**
- ▶ **www.billig-flieger-vergleich.de**

Many airlines offer students special deals and low rates for long-distance flights.

Car-pooling

Many students love car-pooling. The idea is very simple. A driver offers space in his or her car to other passengers who happen to be going the same way. All the passengers share the cost of petrol.

Not only is car-pooling economical, but also environmentally friendly. And it's a great way to meet people.

»» Max:

*There are lots of ways to travel, aren't there? If you need help deciding which mode of transportation you should use when touring through Germany and Europe, check out the website **www.verkehrsmittelvergleich.de**. It gives you a good overview. Well then, “Gute Reise!”*

You can find car-pooling offers online at:

- ▶ www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de
- ▶ www.mitfahrzentrale.de

The student council at many universities have a special notice board, called a *Mitfahrerbrett*, where people can offer or look for car-pools.

Driving a car in Germany

Having a car at one's disposal is a luxury for most students. If you would like to drive a car in Germany, you need a valid driving licence. For more information, contact your local driving licence registration office or the German Automobile Club website (ADAC) see www.adac.de > "Info, Test & Rat" > "Recht & Rat" > "Führerschein" > "Ausländische Führerscheine".

Please Note: If you are caught driving without a license, you will be heavily fined!

For those who don't want to buy a car, but would like to drive every so often, car-sharing might be a good alternative. Car-sharing companies have a fleet of cars, parked at various locations in a city.

If you drive a car, you should refrain from drinking alcohol. The legal blood alcohol content limit in Germany is 0.5 mg/ml. Drivers under the age of 21 are not allowed to drink any alcohol. Your licence can be immediately revoked if your blood alcohol content exceeds the legal limit.

Germany is the only country in Europe which has no set speed limit for the *Autobahn* (motorway). Although 130 km/h is the "recommended" speed limit, motorists are allowed to drive as fast as they wish if there are no signs prohibiting it. This only applies, however, to certain sections of the *Autobahn*. In all other cases, motorists must observe the speed limits. Those who break the speed limit risk being fined and even having their license revoked.



If you have an accident, you should always contact the police by calling the free-phone number 110. If you are involved in an accident or are a witness to one, you must stay at the scene of the accident until the police arrive.

Inexpensive lodging

If you travel through Germany, you will need a place to stay. You can find affordable lodging at guest houses and youth hostels (see p. 81).

However, if you are interested in a free, no-frills alternative, then you should look into hospitality networks. These are global networks devoted to international exchange. On their websites, you can find a free place to sleep (in other words, a couch), which in some cases, includes a personal city tour by your host or hostess.

In this way, you can benefit from the hospitality of others without being obliged to put up guests yourself. The offers are available to all members of the network. Normally all you have to do to become a member is to register online.

The largest hospitality network is www.couchsurfing.org.

More information:

► www.germany-tourism.de

» Michael:

I became a "couch surfer" a few months ago – and I'm thrilled. I've met so many nice people and saved a lot of money. There's no other way I could have afforded seeing so many cities in Germany.

A young man with brown hair and a friendly smile is looking towards the camera. He is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and has a grey strap over his shoulder. He is holding an open newspaper. In the background, there is a newspaper kiosk with a sign that has the letter 'D' on it. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting like a street or market.

» **Max:**

I always find it interesting to hear what kind of image foreigners have of Germans. There are so many clichés. Lots of them are rather absurd. Others, I'd say, yes, maybe Germans used to be like that. But there are only a few that somehow resemble Germans. Anyway, I think it's great you're coming to Germany – then you can get your own impression of what Germans are like.

Typical German?

Germans drink beer.

» **Lukasz:**

Yes, it's true, a lot of men and women like drinking beer here. However, it's not very much different in Poland. The variety of beers is enormous – Maibock, Kölsch, Alt, wheat beer, black beer, etc. But if you don't like beer or don't drink alcohol, you have plenty of alternatives.

Germans eat sausage all the time

» **Julia:**

That's complete nonsense. Many of my friends are vegetarians, and they certainly don't go hungry here. Once in a while I eat a curried sausage with chips. Yummy! But I also like eating pasta, curries, casseroles and salads. And when I make myself a slice of bread, I usually put cheese or ham on top.

Germans are punctual.

»» Taorang:

Yes and no. A friend and I arranged to get together, and when I showed up 15 minutes late, she was a little annoyed with me. She's always on time and can't stand waiting for people. But not all Germans are like that. A German friend of mine always comes at least 10 minutes late. For him it's totally normal. It would never occur to him to apologise for it. He always says, "I'm just a scatterbrain". A nice scatterbrain, if you ask me.

Germans are hard-working.

»» Lukasz:

I don't know if that's always the case. When I look at the other students in my seminars, the Germans are not necessarily the hardest workers. But we have a German girl in our flat-share who's always revising and spending most of her time at the computer or in the library. When she works, she works 100 percent. But then again, I know a lot of other people who don't need much persuading to take a coffee break.

Germans are not very sociable.**»» Michael:**

A friend of mine from Brazil found it hard to make friends in Germany. Now I understand what she meant. The people are very nice, but not overly emotional. And they keep very private details to themselves – at least until they know you better.

But friendship means a lot. Germans often make clear distinctions between friends and acquaintances. You can become an acquaintance quickly. But to become a real friend takes more time and trust. Once you've become someone's friend, it's very special. I can totally depend on my German friends.

Germans are serious and have no sense of humour.**»» Taorang:**

Hmm. Well, as for me and my German friends, we're always laughing together. Sometimes we find different things funny. For example, a joke might crack me up that Germans don't think is very funny at all. Even if people look serious, you shouldn't hesitate to approach them. When I smile in a friendly way at someone, they generally smile back.

Germans love football.

»» Michael:

Oh yes, the World Cup was proof of that. There were millions of football fans everywhere. People gathered on the marketplace to watch the football live at a “public viewing”. The whole city centre was packed when the German national team were playing. And after they won a match, people drove their cars through town, waving flags and honking their horns all night long. Of course, there are a few people who have no interest in football whatsoever. A German friend of mine always rolls his eyes when someone starts talking about football.

Germans adore their cars.

»» Taorang:

Hmm, that depends. Of all the students I know, only two have cars. And they're pretty old and aren't especially in good condition. On the other hand, I recently saw a man flip out when a cyclist lightly scraped his car with his handlebars. It only made a tiny scratch. I think the guy really loved his car and probably treats it to a car wash every Saturday.

Germans don't know how to party.**»» Łukasz:**

I definitely disagree. There are so many parties at university – there's always something going on. I sometimes can't decide which one to go to. Of course, there are party poopers here too, but no more than in other countries, I suppose.

Germans love their bureaucracy.**»» Michael:**

I know a lot of Germans who complain at how bureaucracy makes life more complicated. Or they get upset that many things have to be done in a certain way or that the authorities refuse to make any exceptions. In Germany, rules are rules – and they apply to everyone. That makes a lot of things clearer. There are no secrets or tricks you have to know. You can depend on the rules. I think that's the reason why most things work well in Germany.

