

German Culture

Researched by:

Elizabeth Hall

Jason Tebbets

Susan Windley

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I. Description of Culture

A. Demographics

- In 1990, 8.9% of Maine's population claimed German heritage
- An average of 7,000 Germans have entered the United States annually since 1981
- 57 million Americans, 23% of the United States population, claim full or partial German ancestry, 4% were born in Germany
- In the early 1900's, most Germans settled in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Missouri
- Today the highest percentage of German Americans live in Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota
- Ethnicity in Germany - German (91.5%), Turkish (2.4%), and other (6.1%) [mostly Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish]

B. Brief History

- Germany remained a loose association of territories until the formation of the German Reich in 1871
- Germany lost WWI (1914-1918) and was forced to give some of its land to France and Poland
- Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in 1933
- During Hitler's reign of power the Jewish population, gypsies, homosexuals, and political prisoners were forced into concentration camps and death camps
- Hitler started WWII (1939-1945) in September of 1939 by invading Poland as part of his plan to conquer all of Europe
- In 1945, Germany surrendered and was split into two parts, the west was democratic and allied with the United States, France, and England, while the east became Communist and linked with the Soviet Union
- Construction of the Berlin Wall, separating East and West Berlin, and the border, separating East and West Germany, started in 1961
- In 1989, the wall that separated the democratic and Communist halves of Berlin was torn down
- On October 3, 1990, Germany was re-unified into one country

C. Foods

- Germans eat meat (veal, pork, and sausage), potatoes, cheese, pastries, and chocolate and drink beer
- Enjoy freshly cooked foods, made from scratch
- Buy foods fresh at markets
- Germans rarely eat out at restaurants

D. Dress

- Traditional dress for men is called *Lederhosen* and consists of leather shorts, suspenders, and high socks, traditional dress for women consists of *dirndl* dresses
- Business dress is conservative - men wear dark suits, solid colors, ties, and white shirts and women wear dark suits and white blouses
- German citizens adhere to standards of *Bürgerlichkeit*, a civic morality code, which requires a certain neatness and formality in everyday life

E. Language/Communication

- German is the major language, but regional dialects vary greatly
- Article 5 of the Basic Law guarantees freedom of speech, press, and the public's right to generally accessible information
- 99% of Germans are literate
- According to German business etiquette, chewing gum while talking is considered rude
- Germans like to use the telephone. While important business decisions are made in person, many follow up with phone calls or faxes.
- In Germany people are addressed by their full, correct title no matter how long the name may seem to be. Do not use first name until there is an established friendship.
- It is customary for Germans to shake hands when greeting and parting
- Germans do not appreciate the use of the American hand wave
- Maintain direct eye contact when eye contact is made with you
- When being introduced to a woman, wait to see if she extends her hand
- In a business context, Germans do not appreciate humor
- Germans require approximately 6 inches more personal space than Americans do
- Germans are very private people

F. Holidays

- Popular German folk festivals (featuring a mix of folk songs and classical music) include Oktoberfest, Germanfest, and Strassenfest
- German-American Day was instituted on October 6, 1983, to celebrate the tricentennial of German immigration to America and the contributions of Germans and German-Americans
- Official German holidays include All Saint's Day, Day of Repentance and Prayer, Christmas, and Easter
- Many of the German holidays occurring throughout the year are named after Saints

G. Religion

- 2/3 of the German population consider themselves Christians (the northern part of Germany is mostly Protestant, the south is mostly Catholic), the remaining 1/3 are agnostic, Jewish, or Muslim
- There is no connection between church and state
- Germans who are members of a church support that church directly through their taxes
- The *Grundgesetz* (German basic laws) guarantees freedom of faith, freedom of religion, and declares that no one can be discriminated against due to one's faith or religious opinions.

II. Family/Relationships & Roles

- Traditionally the father is the head of household, and the mother assumes responsibility for the family
- Today, women and men are considered equals
- Marriage is very important culturally; 89% of 21 million co-habiting couples are married
- Almost half of Germans live in a traditional family consisting of a married couple and children
- 75% of young women and 66% of young men (below the age of 25) say they need a family to be happy. Having a family and a career are their most important life goals
- To ensure that men have an opportunity to become involved in raising their children, when a child is born, mothers and fathers are given up to 3 years of "parent time", during which the state pays an allowance based on parents' income for 2 years
- Couples are increasingly sharing domestic chores and child care
- When entering a building the man enters first then steps back allowing the woman to follow
- Equal rights for men and women have been integrated into political agendas
- Unmarried and same sex couples are afforded the same legal rights as married couples
- In Germany, the elderly are well taken care of; children and grandchildren are financially responsible for their care

III. Concept of Work/Play/Time

- The average German work week lasts 36.7 hours
- Germans are given at least 3-6 weeks of paid vacation time a year
- 46.6% of the workforce is made up of women
- Career opportunities for women are available without obstacles
- On average, the take home pay for women is considerably less than for men
- Germans are meticulous in their thought process, details are examined thoroughly
- Germans do not like surprises. Even in a business transaction, a change that would improve the outcome is unwelcome.

- Class membership is determined in part by education and individual ability and partly by family history
- Government provides free and mandatory school education from ages 6 - 14, children then have the option of participating in either secondary education or vocational training until age 18
- Music influences many cultural pastimes
- Germans enjoy healthy outdoor hobbies such as soccer, skiing, and hiking
- Punctuality is expected; being late is an insult. Time is well respected, and schedules and agendas are rigidly followed

IV. Health & Wellness

- Germans are very aware of their health and health care issues
- Germany provides nearly universal health care for everyone and allows choice of physicians
- The very poor are covered by state financed welfare programs
- Over 90% of the German population receives health care from the country's statutory health care insurance program. Membership in this program is mandatory for individuals under a certain income bracket
- Germans have a strong belief in naturopathic medicine and holistic healing. These alternative methods are subsidized by health insurance.
- There are over 290 health spas across the country
- In 1997, Germany had 1 doctor for every 290 citizens
- The German health care system is a combination of a national health care system and a market system
- Main causes of death in Germany are cardiovascular disease and cancer
- Germans are the leaders in development of Western biomedicine and national health insurance

V. Challenges to Health Care

- Lack of understanding of the American health care system
- Differences in language and communication styles
- Health care and insurance in the United States is not as accessible as the health care and insurance in Germany
- Typically United States employers do not provide paternity leave or the extended maternity leave that German employers do
- The United States government does not afford the same rights to same sex and unmarried couples as it does to married couples

VI. Suggestions for Health Care Providers

- Health care providers should address patients by their full, correct title no matter how long the name may seem to be. Do not use the patient's first name until there is an established relationship.
- When being introduced to a woman, wait to see if she extends her hand
- Health care professionals should try to maintain direct eye contact when eye contact is made by the patient

- Health care facilities can offer a translator to patients who may require one
- Health care facilities can offer education on differences between U.S. and German health care systems
- Health care providers should be aware that Germans require 6 inches more personal space than Americans do
- Communication is important, providers should follow up a visit with a phone call
- Health care providers should be punctual, as being late is considered an insult

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Personal Communication:

Jessica Heath, German Teacher, Mt. Ararat Middle School

Andrea Gimpel-Blanchard, German citizen living in the United States