

Aspects of the culture in the Federal Republic of Germany

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Every country, nation, region and people has **characteristics that distinguish** it from others. These characteristics can be called “culture.” They refer, among others, to the history and life styles of the nation, traditions, art, architecture, educational system, fashion, family celebrations and leisure time activities etc. Culture is dynamic; it changes. Due to modern technology, great distances are bridged by instantaneous communication. Often, countries acquire cultural aspects of other countries with which they are in contact. Therefore, it is very difficult to assign “typical” characteristics or ways of behaving to a particular culture, since this can lead to stereotyping and prejudice. This is also the case with the culture of the Federal Republic of Germany, especially regarding its position in the center of Europe.

The culture of the Federal Republic of Germany is **multi-faceted**. The foreign visitor will immediately recognize, among other things, the characteristic architecture and many well-known attractions. Half-timbered houses, castles, palaces, and churches for example all belong to this group. Fascinating for the visitor are the costumes and the traditions associated with them. The entire world knows the Bavarian costume which is traditionally worn for such events as the Oktoberfest in Munich. Though this represents only one aspect of culture in one region, it is not at all representative of other German regions.

Each German region has its own traditions and expressions. This is clear in the **language**, since a citizen from Schleswig in the North speaks a totally different dialect from an inhabitant of Württemberg which is located in the South. This illustrates how difficult it is to describe a “typical” German culture.

Germany is often called the **“Land of Poets and Thinkers”**. Poets, writers and philosophers from all regions have contributed to this reputation. Particularly well-known are the poets Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Eichendorff, Kleist, Kafka, Mann and Hesse and the philosophers Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Jaspers and Heidegger. Today there are also many contemporary poets and writers

whose work is internationally known – Günter Grass, Siegfried Lenz, Gabriele Wohmann, Heinrich Böll and Christa Wolf, to name only a few.

Art and music play an important role in German society. The scores of museums and art galleries, exhibitions and concerts in all the states of Germany demonstrate this characteristic. In every sizable German city there are various collections which give a glance into the culture of Germany, past and present. Each state supports several theaters, and often a famous orchestra as well. Plays, operas and operettas, classical as well as contemporary dance-theatre, ballets and concerts are regularly performed.

The cultural diversity of Germany is particularly evident in the area of **leisure-time activities**. Many people participate in societies and clubs (“Verein”). There are societies for music, preservation and care of traditions, collecting, gardening, and breeding animals and there are clubs for activities such as soccer, rowing or tennis – to name only a few.

Festivals and holidays give insights into special traditions and customs, which may vary from region to region. Christmas and Easter are celebrated in similar ways throughout Germany. There are festivals as well as other religious holidays, however, that are more important in different regions as, for example the pre-lenten “Karneval,” which is celebrated mainly in North Rhine-Westphalia and in Rhineland-Palatinate; or the autumnal wine-festivals following the wine harvest which are celebrated in the wine-growing districts of Saarland, North-Rhine Palatinate, Bavaria and Baden-Wurttemberg,

As a modern **industrial nation**, Germany is a partner with many foreign companies that have branch offices in Germany. In addition, many citizens from other countries work in Germany. In the framework of European unity, Germany has been opening its borders more and more. All this openness is not without its effect on German culture. The trade and financial center of Frankfurt for example has changed architecturally as a result of international influence. Numerous high-rise buildings have resulted in its being called “Mainhattan” because its skyline resem-

bles New York City (the Main is the river on which Frankfurt is located). A further example is food. Many restaurants featuring foreign specialities have been established, and it is increasingly difficult to find “typical” German food.

The culture in a country usually develops without the government directing it. Where the **government** does have a direct influence it occurs at the state level. Although every German state has a Cultural Ministry and although the responsibility of the federal government for the schools, universities, theaters, and museums is limited, one could say that the culture of a country in general usually develops independently without the government directing it.