

Germany

Location

Germany is located in Europe and has an area of 137, 828 square miles. It measures about 520 miles north to south and is between the latitudes of 47 and 55 degrees north. The middle of the country measures from east to west about 385 miles and its longitude extends from 6 to 15 degrees west.

Germany borders Denmark on the extreme north of the Jutland Peninsula, while the Baltic Sea sits on the east side and the North Sea on the west side of the peninsula. Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg border Germany to the west along with France to the Southwest. Switzerland and Austria share the entire southern border. To the southeast is the Czech Republic, while Poland shares the eastern border by way of the Neisse River.

Geography

In the south, Germany is part of the outermost ranges of the Alps. It then stretches across the plane of the northern edge of the Alps. The center of the country is the Central German Uplands, which extend from the Massif Central of France in the west into Czechoslovakia and Poland in the east.

Germany is a landscape covered with variety. It boasts a mixture of forested black mountains, intermediate plateaus with scarped edges, and lowland basins. The North German Plain forms part of the greater North European Plain in the Lowlands. Marshes, mud flats, and the islands of the North and Baltic seas surround it. Germany has altitudes ranging from a maximum elevation of 9,718 feet in the [Zugspitze](#) of the Bavarian Alps to a minimum of sea level in the north.

Climate

Germany's weather is moderate, neither too hot nor too cold. Berlin has an average July temperature of between 59-75 degrees Fahrenheit with above average rainfall. However, rainfall does vary according to region. The North German Plain has the lowest average rainfall of 20-29 inches

annually while rainfall in the Central German Uplands is 28-59 inches. The Alpine regions often experience rainfall up to and exceeding 78 inches. Berlin is also famous for its bracing air called the Berliner Luft. This mountain wind that can show up during any season causes an immediate change in temperature along with very warm conditions and a cloudless sky. Summers are usually hot and dry while snowfall begins around November and January temperatures often drop below freezing.

History

There was once an internal partition that divided Germany into two nations for more than 40 years, called the Berlin Wall. This line of demarcation was based on a decision made at the Yalta Conference in 1945. This heavily guarded concrete wall topped with barbed wire separated the Soviet zones of Germany from those that occupied by western allies at that time. This boundary remained in place until the fall of the East German communist government in 1989. After the events of 1989-90, Berlin was restored as the capital of a united Germany. It was voted to move the government seat from Bonn to Berlin in 1991.

Important Dates

Important dates on Germany's calendar are January 1 – New Year's Day, January 6 – Epiphany (certain areas), Good Friday, Easter Sunday/Easter Monday, May 1 – Labor Day, Ascension Day (May), Whit Sunday/Whit Monday (May), June 18 – Corpus Christi (certain areas), August 15 – Maria Himmelfahrt (certain areas), October 3 – Day of German Unity, November 1 – All Saints' Day (certain areas), Day of Prayer and Repentance (November), and December 25/26 – Christmas.

Some important events of Germany's history include the establishment of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, along with the Yalta Conference and Germany's defeat during World War I in 1945. Additionally, the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic in 1949, the beginning of Germany's involvement with NATO in 1955, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 are some other important events.

Population

The German population numbered more than 79 million at the time of Unification. This made it the most populous country of Europe excluding the U.S.S.R. The population density is 574 persons per square mile.

Germany has one of the world's lowest birth rates at about 11 per 1,000 of the population. The life expectancy has increased, but deaths outnumber births each year causing a negative growth rate of - 4 per 1,000.

Currency

The official currency of Germany is the Deutschmark (DM). DM1 is equal to 100 pfennig while coins are 1, 2, 5, 10, and 50 pfennigs and 1, 2, and 5 DM. Bills are in the amounts of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000 DM. 1 U. S. dollar is currently equal to DM 2.08 while DM 1 is equal to 56 cents. Additionally, DM 1 is equivalent to 0.32 British pounds, 0.51 Euros, and 3.35 French francs.

Education

Schooling in Germany is free and compulsory for children 6 to 18 years of age. Control of education is the sovereign prerogative of the states, but as a whole the country strives for uniformity among the states. Some of the books and study materials are free, and financial assistance and other forms of support are available in cases of hardship.

Preschooling can begin as early as three years of age. All children attend "basic school" from age 6 to 10. Somewhat less than half continue elementary schooling in a junior secondary schooling called the "main school" until about 15 years of age. At this time they are assigned to

a vocational school that they attend part time in conjunction with an apprenticeship where they will learn a skill or trade useful in the employment market.

Somewhat less than one-third of the school age population receive a commercial education from “intermediate school.” After completion, they receive a certificate that allows them to move on to “technical school.” Completion here is a prerequisite for careers in the middle levels of business, administration, and civil service.

About one-fourth of all children are chosen to study at “senior secondary school” for grade levels 5-13. This prepares them to receive the “certificate of maturity” which is a prerequisite for matriculation at a German university.

Language

The official language of Germany is Hochdeutsch with many regional dialects spoken. Some necessary terms for tourists are: yes – *ja*, no – *nein*, Help! – *Zu Hilfe!*, Where is the bank? – *Wo ist die Bank?*, Where are the police? – *Wo sind as Polizeirevier?*, and How much is... - *Wieviel kostet...*

Religion

The people of, including the remnants of German communities in Eastern Europe, are split between Protestant and Roman Catholic religions. Their divisions are based primarily on ethnic origins, dialectal divisions, and political and cultural heritage.

Agriculture

Germany has a dramatic divergence of agricultural development. West Germany is essentially comprised of small family farms. In the 1980s only about 5 percent of holdings had more than 124 acres, although they accounted for 23 percent of the agricultural area. The larger

farms are mainly concentrated in Schleswig-Holstein and eastern Lower Saxony, with smaller groupings in Westphalia, the lowland west of Cologne, and southern Bavaria. Land high in fertility is mainly used for the production of wheat, barley, corn, and sugar beets. The poorer soils are typically used for growing rye, oats, potatoes, and fodder beets. Dairy farming is widespread in all areas where small farms predominate.

Trade

Germany's principal trading partners are Switzerland, Austria, Scandinavia, the United States, and Japan. Export trade with the countries of Eastern Europe has declined because of their shortages of hard currency. Germany's major exports include machinery of all kinds, motor vehicles, electrical and electronic equipment, and chemicals, as well as some wine and food products. Imports are similar to the exports but in addition include raw materials and semi-finished products for industry.

Food

Some popular items on the German menu are *Kaffee und Kuchen*, coffee and rich cake loaded with whipped cream, which is a very popular afternoon snack. Beer is also a staple of the German diet and is found in a number of varieties. The typical breakfast for an average German includes bread with cheese, jam, and/or meat but may also include items such as boiled egg, granola, and yogurt. The main meal of the day is lunch and may consist of Schnitzel (usually pork), roasted potatoes, and salad. Dinner is a lighter meal that consists of bread and a large variety of meats and cheeses. Desserts are almost always dishes that are fruit or cream based.

Landmarks

There are numerous sites to visit and tour while in Germany. Berliner Dom is a Protestant cathedral in eastern Berlin built at the turn of the century by Julius Carl Raschdorff. It houses the tombs of the Hohenzollerns and the Imperial Staircase. The Rathaus in Bremen is a Gothic-style town hall with a Renaissance façade. It boasts a Ratskellar that proudly serves only German wine. The ornamental Herrenhaosen gardens of Hannover are the finest in Germany and contain a fountain with Europe's highest shooting jet. The squares in Aachen are filled with outdoor cafes and statue fountains. One of the most popular fountains is created with bronze dolls. One of the most visited places along the Mosel River is Cochem. This city's beautiful country setting is crowned by a castle overlooking the river. There are many more sites to see in Germany, too many to list. Germans are often known to comment that they can go anywhere in their own country and always see something new and interesting that they hadn't seen before.

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