

Since 1972
Xperitas
Nonprofit Immersion Travel

Germany Handbook



CULTURAL TIP

In Germany air conditioning is not as common as in the US. Don't be surprised if your hotel and host family doesn't have AC.

CLIMATE

- The climate in Germany is temperate. Dress in layers to adjust to the cooler evenings and warmer days. Spring can be very cool, and summer can get quite hot.
- If possible, check the weather before leaving for the day and bring along your raincoat or umbrella if there is a chance of rain.
- The Alps can be very cool. Pack an extra layer if heading up there for the day.

CLOTHING

- Reference the Germany Packing List for advice on what to bring. In Germany, teenagers and adults dress casually and are very well put-together.
- While staying with your host family, you should be fully dressed and ready for the day when coming down to breakfast. No pajamas at the breakfast table.
- If visiting a German school, leave your baseball cap and chewing gum at home!
- The most valuable item you will pack will be good walking shoes.
- Avoid sweatpants.

ELECTRICITY

- The electricity in Germany is 220-230 volts (compared to 110 volts in the United States).
- Most modern electronics (laptops, Apple products, phone, and camera chargers, etc.) only need to be used with a travel adapter. You will need a converter for other electronics such as hair dryers, straighteners, curlers, or razors.
- Electricity in Germany is much more expensive than in the United States. Please be conscious of how much electricity you are using, especially during the family stay.

MONEY

- Keep exchange rates and international processing fees in mind. Use a debit or credit card with a chip, if possible.
- Use ATMs located at large bank branches once in-country. Have 50€-100€ in cash before you travel.
- Contact your bank in advance. Alert them of your travels and ask for any tips about using your credit or debit card abroad.
- Use smaller bills in small shops and restaurants.
- You can also exchange money at Western Union (worse rates).
- It's best to pay in cash. Many smaller stores and restaurants in Germany do not accept credit cards.
- A backup, emergency card is a good idea in case one card is lost or stolen.

TIPPING

- Tipping in Germany is customary, but in much smaller quantities. At a restaurant, simply round up to the nearest euro. For example, if your bill is 7.50€, simply pay 8€.
- If you are traveling by coach bus, a tip for your bus driver is not included in the program price. We suggest tipping 1€-2€/student/day. You do not need to tip for direct airport transfers but do always help with loading and unloading luggage. A tip for local tour guides is not included in the program price. We suggest tipping 10€-20€ per guided tour.

CULTURAL TIPS

Be patient – while punctual people, the Germans pride themselves on living a slower lifestyle.

Free Wi-Fi isn't always available in public spaces such as coffee shops and restaurants. Wait to surf the internet until you return to your hotel or host family or be aware of your data rates.

Overall, keep an open-mind and try not to refer to stereotypes!

FOOD

- While staying at your hostels or hotels, breakfast is included daily. German breakfast is a great way to start a busy day of travel, so make sure to take full advantage of the spread!
- Travelers can find food for every budget. Most restaurants are comparable in price to the United States. If you are looking for something quick to eat without spending a fortune, try a Döner or Bratwurst stand. If you are in Berlin, a Currywurst is always a good bet!
- Keep hydrated! Germans may scoff at drinking tap water, but rest assured, it is safe to drink.
- At restaurants, tap water is usually not included. Try asking for Leitungswasser. If they won't give it to you, you may have to simply purchase bottled water.
- Mealtimes are similar to the United States, though lunch is usually the largest meal of the day with a lighter dinner.

CULTURAL TIP

Be ready to try new foods and always offer to help in the kitchen during your family stay.



Xperitas-Arranged Family Stay Experience®

- Your family is excited to meet you! The family stay is a great learning experience. Be sure to keep an open mind, do your best at practicing your German language skills, and have fun getting to know your family.
- Try to be proactive and engage with your host family, such as asking to help cook a meal, offering to go with them to the local market or grocery store, playing a game of cards (Spot-it or Phase 10 are good options), bringing a scrapbook of your family at home), asking to go explore a nearby park, etc. These simple actions can go a long way in breaking the ice, helping with the language barrier/facilitating conversation, and learning about the local culture.
- Try to disconnect during the family stay by not using your phone all the time, and embrace the time to connect with your host family. Disconnecting and truly being present for the experience will allow you to notice more about your surroundings and be more intentional in your observations. We encourage parents/guardians to allow space for their children to disconnect as well.
- If you have any questions or concerns while staying with your host family, please contact your group leader(s) as they can best assist you and work with the local Family Stay Coordinator and Xperitas as applicable.
- If you submitted your family stay applications by the deadline, you should receive your host family's information about 2 weeks prior to departure.
- Respond as soon as possible when your host family contacts you. Keep your social media profiles clean and try not to judge your host by their profiles – better to get to know your host family through talking to them.
- It is nice to bring your host family a gift from your home state and/or a scrapbook or photos to show them what life is like where you live.
- Leave a thank you note for your hosts at your house on the last day of the family stay.
- Electricity and gas are much more expensive in Germany than in the United States. Be conscious of how long your showers are and make sure to turn off the lights behind you.
- Leave a thank you note for your hosts at your house on the last day of the family stay.

In Country Transportation & Lodging

TRAIN

- If traveling by train, make sure to arrive at the train station at least 30-45 minutes prior to departure. Refer to the large Abfahrt signs (yellow) in the station to find your departure platform. You can also refer to the Deutsche Bahn app for up-to-date information on platform changes, delays, or cancellations.
- If you have seat reservations, refer to the coach locator signs on each platform. These list coach numbers and where each car will be when the train pulls into the station.
- Have your own map and make a plan with the teacher for where to meet in case you should get separated from the group.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- Be ready to disembark about 10 minutes before your stop and use multiple exits with larger groups. Trains do quick stops at smaller towns, so it is good to be ready.
- Germany has a robust public transport system and is the best way to get around in a large city. Ticket machines rarely take credit cards so make sure to have cash.
- It is more cost-effective to buy group tickets. Kleingruppen-Tageskarten in Berlin and München XXL in Munich.
- Make sure to validate each ticket at the validation machine (*Entwerter*).
- Ticketing is on an honor basis. You do not need to swipe in or out of the stations, but a ticket must always be purchased to ride. If a ticket checker asks to see your ticket, it must be presented and pre-validated. Fines start at 40€ and could be more.
 - The public transportation networks in bigger cities have apps for easier navigation via public transit through the cities.
 - Student hotel sleeping arrangements may involve sharing beds, as some hotels utilize a single large bed for their double rooms or two large beds for their triple/quadruple rooms. During the family stay, students may share a room with a host sibling (if applicable), but they will have their own bed.

Health & Safety

- Be sure to keep your passport (and other visas, green cards, or documentation), most of your money, and your credit cards in your money belt or neck pouch.
- If there is a safe in your hotel room, lock your valuables in there while you are out. If there is not a safe, hide money and valuables in your suitcase. Don't forget to check the hotel safe before checking out!
- Pickpocketing is common in large cities, and they are very good at what they do. Pay extra close attention to your belongings and be sure to keep your valuables close to you at all times, especially when in crowds of people or walking on the street.
- If you have a purse/bag, bring a cross-body purse/bag that zips shut. If you are carrying a backpack, be sure that valuables are not located in easily-accessible pockets. We also recommend wearing your backpack in front of you versus on your back as you may normally do.
- Always travel in groups of three or more.
- Do not travel with valuable items.
- Remember that the Xperitas emergency line is available 24/7, but please only call it when you are experiencing a true emergency.
- Review the travel and vaccine recommendations for travelers provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). See Current Health and Safety Updates for information about current world events and illnesses.
- Keep printed insurance card on you at all times.

Communication

- Check with your cell phone provider regarding any international fees. At least one leader needs to have an international phone plan in order to be in touch with Xperitas if needed.
- For students, we advise using WiFi. There is often WiFi (or a computer for public use) available in your hotel, but keep in mind that the connection is often weak. You can download messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, to communicate with people at home for free while connected to WiFi.
- Ask your leader(s) about their policy around technology use while on the program.
- A great way for the entire group to stay in communication with parents/guardians back home is via a blog, WhatsApp group chat, private Facebook group, or group email.
- During the family stay, you may or may not have access to internet. You will have the contact information of both the local Family Stay Coordinator, as well as your group leader(s). If you do have internet, please be mindful of the time spent on your phone and try to focus on engaging with your host family.

CULTURAL TIP

The Germans are socially engaged people and are open to political discussions. Don't feel offended if they start a conversation about a topic that you may otherwise avoid in the U.S. They are just curious!