



# PROGRAM COUNTRY: GERMANY



*STS – more than 50 years of experience in student exchange programs all over the world*



Germany is a beautiful, diverse and very interesting country situated in northern Europe, bordered by Denmark in the north, Poland, and the Czech Republic in the east, Austria and Switzerland in the south and Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg in the west. The landscape of Germany varies greatly from rather flat areas and beaches (North Sea, Baltic Sea) to high mountains like the Alps.

## COUNTRY INFORMATION

**Area:** 357,021 square kilometers

**Population:** 82,3 million

**Capital:** Berlin

**Language:** German

**National holiday:** October, 3rd

Germany has about 82 million inhabitants. It is the largest country in the EU in terms of population. Germany is a modern, cosmopolitan country. Its society is shaped by a plurality of life styles and a true ethno-cultural diversity. Forms of coexistence have become more varied, and the scope individuals enjoy has become greater. Traditional gender roles have been dispensed with. Despite the social changes, the family remains the most important social reference unit.

Each of the 16 German federal states has its own fascinating landscapes, tourist attractions and culinary delights. There is, for example, Bavaria, the “beer state” with its “Oktoberfest”, Neuschwanstein Castle and the magnificent Alpine scenery that attract more foreign tourists than any other federal state. With more than 2000 lakes, numerous waterways and lush green in between, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania looks particularly attractive. Together with its 350-kilometer-long Baltic coastline, this North-eastern state is the major venue for water sports enthusiasts in the whole of Central Europe.

Germany has a large number of cities: Cologne, with its Gothic cathedral; Bonn, the Federal Republic’s first capital city; Düsseldorf, the fashion-conscious state capital. Berlin, which is a federal state on its own, is Germany’s capital. Until 1990 Berlin was divided into a western and eastern part by a wall that can still be visited at some places.

Germany has a lot to offer, such as great cuisine, sports, relaxing nature, festivals, cultural celebrations, holiday resorts, design, fashion, inspiring architecture, art as well as many other spare time activities for teenagers. In other words, Germany does not only offer clichés as “lederhosen” and “sauerkraut”.

Germany shares the same basic features of its political system with most members of the European Union (EU). Its system of government is one of parliamentary democracy. In other words, government policy is determined by the head of government and the ministers, and not by the head of state.

Daimler, Siemens, Porsche, Lufthansa, SAP. In the international arena German companies have an excellent reputation. They represent “Made in Germany”, known as a seal of quality all over the world. They represent innovation, quality and cutting-edge technology. Yet the world’s third largest economy does not consist solely of global players, but also of numerous world market leaders who are actually small and medium-sized enterprises, the powerhouse of the German economy.

Several international influences have made their mark on German cuisine. Of course you can still enjoy heavy regional cuisine, the hearty characteristics of the different landscapes such as roasted pork with dumplings from Bavaria or ribs and “sauerkraut” from Hesse. But Germans have become far more varied and health-conscious. This new trend towards healthy eating has led to increased sales of organic food. Organic supermarkets are opening up in large cities all over the country, offering a blend of what is becoming increasingly important to Germans, enjoyment and responsibility, lifestyle and a clear conscience.

## SCHOOL LIFE

Good initial opportunities for everyone are a key prerequisite for education and achievement. German schooling is based on nine years of compulsory education for all children. Attendance of all government schools is free of charge. However there is a growing number of private, tuition-based schools in Germany as well. Once children are aged six, they generally attend primary school for four years, before going on to a variety of secondary schools: Hauptschule, Realschule, Gesamtschule, Gymnasium. The stand-



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ards and the balance between practical and theoretical subjects vary between the different types of secondary schools, and so does the number of school years. Gymnasium provides in-depth education and most exchange students attend this type of school. Pupils graduate from Gymnasium after the 12th grade, receiving a high school certificate necessary for studying at university.

School in Germany is from Monday till Friday. There are two school semesters. The 1st semester starts in summer and ends in January, the second semester runs from January till June or July, sometimes August since every federal state has its own vacation times. There is usually two weeks of holiday in the autumn, two weeks in the winter and two weeks in the spring. The main holiday is during the summer, and lasts for about six weeks.

Exchange students will attend a public Gymnasium and are placed in grade 10, 11, or 12. Every Gymnasium decides which grade the exchange student will attend. Students usually have to take compulsory classes such as maths, German, English, social science, natural science and physical education. In addition students can choose, among other subjects like music, arts, computer science etc, depending on what the school offers. In German schools students have the opportunity to learn English, French, Spanish and Latin.

There is a large number of exchange organisations in Germany that want to place students. Public schools do not receive any money for enrolling exchange students; they welcome foreign students just for the cultural interest and international experience. If the student has a special request, he or she should contact the STS office or the area representative. Special requests might be possible, but STS can not guarantee this.

School transportation varies. Many students can ride their bikes to school if they live close or some can even walk. If it is too far, students will use public transportation or go by school bus which they need to pay for themselves.

Students are strongly urged to become involved in extra-curricular activities outside of school such as sports, clubs, social events, art, music, or drama, as long as these activities do not interfere with their academic progress. In Germany these activities are outside of the school arena.

## HOST FAMILY LIFE

Spending time together is very important to German families. Since Germany is densely populated, so entertainment and other activities are always nearby. German infrastructure is well developed and makes traveling easy. Historical sights, top-quality concerts, art exhibitions, theater performances as well as numerous major international sport events, not to mention street festivals and atmospheric Christmas markets are just a few of the attractions that can be visited. The Germans love to celebrate, and never miss an opportunity to do so. Many festivals such as Munich's renowned "Oktoberfest", Christopher Street Day in Cologne, the Carnival

of the Cultures in Berlin, "Fastnacht" in Mainz and Carnival in Cologne have long become an international synonym for high spirits and a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Like in many European countries there is no typical family structure in Germany anymore. Nowadays both parents work and the traditional family exist alongside single parents or so-called "patchwork families". In their everyday life, people are busy with work and school during the day, and most families have dinner together.

In Germany, around two-thirds of the population profess to be of the Christian faith. Nevertheless most of the Germans do not attend religious services regularly.

Spare time activities are very popular in Germany and soccer is certainly the biggest sport. Other popular sports are gymnastics, tennis, shooting, athletics and handball. More than 40% of all Germans regularly do a sport, and sport is one of their preferred hobbies.

Since the Germans love being active they are always busy doing something. They love traveling and enjoy visiting places in their own country as well as further away. That makes it even more important for an exchange student to try to take the initiative, being open and ready to "be part of what's happening". The student should help out in the host family's home and join the family for family activities. In addition to family life, it is important that the student builds his or her own social life and finds own hobbies. Most German teenagers are taught to be independent and participate in making decisions from an early age.

## PROGRAM EXTRAS

### European Tour

In the end of June, STS Head Office offers an amazing three-week bus tour around Europe. You get to visit 10 countries together with students from all over the world. The price includes accommodation, half board, sightseeing, most entrances and activities, Disneyland in Paris etc. Please see separate sheet for more detailed information regarding this tour.



*All information is subject to change.*

