

# Grüß dich! Hello!

WELCOME TO GERMANY, A COUNTRY FAMOUS FOR ITS FAIRYTALE CASTLES, ROMANTIC LANDSCAPES, COLORFUL FESTIVALS, COSMOPOLITAN CITIES, AND ESPECIALLY ITS BEER AND RICH FOODS.

## Germany's Enchanted Landscape

Germany rests in central Europe and stretches from the North and Baltic Seas to the Bavarian Alps.

The country is temperate and marine with cloudy and wet winters and summers. Occasionally a tropical wind blows over the country. With no particular rainy season, the most pleasant weather occurs from May through October.

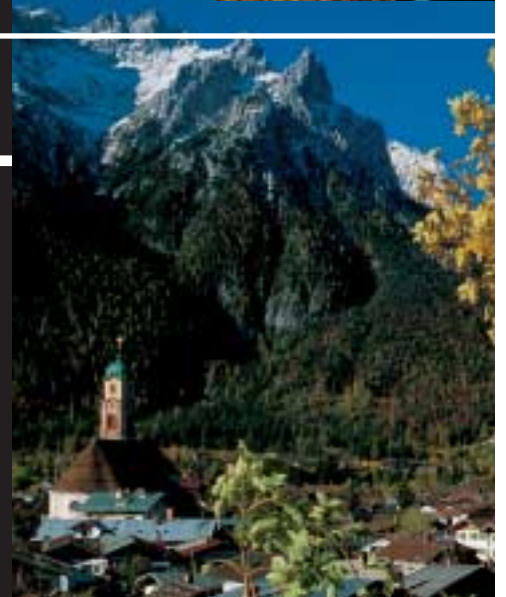
But to really get to know this country well, you'll need to do some exploring of the enchanted countryside. Germany is a land where history and culture come alive, whether you visit the grand museums and theaters of Berlin or the world-class 20th century Renaissance art in Frankfurt or the sunshine, sea and sand dunes off the northwestern coast of Germany in the Frisian Islands.

To get around you'll want to hop aboard one of the many German trains. There is typically a surcharge for the InterCity Express (ICE) trains, but it's worth it to explore the countryside.

A quick train ride to the Harz Mountains in Lower Saxony offers a year-round sports hotspot. Although it doesn't offer the extreme sports of the Alps, the area is highly popular for cycling and cross-country skiing.

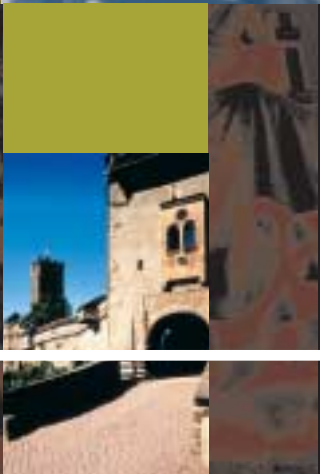
In the northern Harz Mountains lies the impressive ruins of Regenstein, a castle that was built under Frederick William, the Great Elector, and still attracts thousands of visitors today. During the 13th and 14th centuries, it was home to counts and represented the center of their landholdings in the area.

If you enjoy exploring castles, a trip to the Rhein Valley is a must. Feudal castles along this beautiful passageway seem to transform visitors back to the middle ages when the area was occupied by feudal lords and knights who established fortresses to protect their lands.



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Today, these castles still entertain visitors. Some are privately owned, some are owned by the German government and others have been set aside as youth hostels. While there, you might be fortunate enough to experience an ever-popular medieval party, replete with music, delectable food and theatric performances.

And if you've always wanted to live like a king or queen, you can purchase one of the few castles up for sale. For instance, the Schlemmin, built in the middle of the 19th century, and the Basedow Castle, a medieval castle originally built around 1552, are both on the market.

While travelling, it won't be long before you find yourself in the heart of one of Germany's hugely popular carnivals and festivals.

The largest is scheduled to take place in Munich from September 21 through October 6, 2002. If you happen upon it, you will find yourself amidst six million friends in the heart of Oktoberfest, or Wies'n as the locals call it. As the largest public festival in the world, Oktoberfest embodies much of Germany's pastime; drinking beer and eating pork sausages. In fact, each year nearly five million liters of beer and 200,000 pairs of pork sausages are consumed in "beer tents." And if you aren't already reeling, you can spin yourself silly on one of the festival's roller coasters or carousels.

Munich isn't the only German city that celebrates life with beer. In fact, beer is the national beverage with each region producing its own variety. The country boasts more than 1,200 breweries that offer 5,000 different kinds of beer on tap.

As a general rule, hearty pilsner and ale is served with most German meals. For some, it rounds out a meal of Matjes herrings with potatoes cooked in a bacon dip. For others, it's best with boiled sole, shrimp, lamb, potatoes or cabbage.

And as beer is traditionally served with the meal; a little schnapps, such as caraway brandy, is often served after a meal.

While travelling throughout the year, you'll discover that December is perhaps the country's most festive time.

If you see wreaths begin to appear on the first Sunday of Advent (approximately four weeks before Christmas), you'll know the season is upon you.

In early December, German women begin to make homemade gifts. Considerable amount of time is spent baking the country's ever-popular cookies and cakes. A few of the favorites include stollen, gingerbread and pfeffernuss.

December 21, also dubbed St. Thomas Day, is another fun day for most. However, if you are the last to wake up and, consequently, the last to arrive to work, you will be named "Thomas Donkey" for the day. And to reward you for your tardiness, you'll receive a cardboard donkey and be the butt of many jokes that day.

A popular Christmas pastime takes place on December 24th. German mothers trim the Christmas tree; top it with candy, nuts, angels, candles or lights, and place presents under it. Nearby, decorated plates with fruits, nuts, chocolates and biscuits are set out for each family member. Upon her signal, usually the ringing of a bell, everyone enters the room and the tree is lit.

And you better eat up on Christmas Eve because German tradition states that it is the one night of the year that if you go to bed full, you won't be haunted by demons during the night.

But no matter where or when you travel, you'll soon discover why Germany is such an enchanted landscape.



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