



# Focus on GERMANY

## School Program

*"Yes, the Germans probably are strict and always on time, like everybody says, but they are much more. They are nice, friendly and funny. And they have some remarkable characteristics, for example, their responsibility for nature and the environment.*

*Everyone here knows how to screen the garbage and save energy (actually, everyone tries to save everything here). I admire the German sense of orderliness, because where I come from, it doesn't work that way. I will try to teach that to the people at home, because it seems so sensible. One thing that shocked me was how many people use bikes here to get around. There are bicycles everywhere!"*

*Zuzana, participant from the Czech Republic, 2002/2003:*

*"I did many things for the first time here in Germany. I learned how to live with more responsibility, without being able to ask my natural parents for advice every time. I think I have grown a lot in this one year.*

*"All Germans think they are hectic. But really, they live very slowly and think long before they actually act. They have much time for themselves and their families. German time doesn't run, it moves in slow waves. Germans can take their time—maybe because there is so much room for everyone. I think that is wonderful."*

*Ron Liu, participant from China, 2001/2002:*

Germany's global impact is immense. Not only is it one of the world's leading economies, its culture has produced Beethoven, Dürer, Goethe, Luther, Marx—as well as the brothers Grimm. Its architecture encompasses mountainside castles, timbered Bavarian villages, Roman ruins, Gothic cathedrals and the most modern skyscrapers. Yet with so much cultural diversity, German citizens are almost uniformly mannerly and law-abiding (they will not even jaywalk), though they can be startlingly frank in expressing their opinions. Germans are active; one-third of them belong to a sports club devoted to cycling, hiking or skiing. And though the national diet is notorious for meat-and-potatoes heaviness, younger Germans are increasingly interested in international cuisines.

### **AFS & Your Experience**

AFS Germany was established in 1947. About 1,800 AFS volunteers in 85 chapters across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. AFS Germany works in close cooperation with federal and state ministries and municipal governments to facilitate the exchange experience. AFS Germany welcomes more than 500 AFSers from as many as 40 countries each year.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on

your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

## ***Landing in Germany***

When you arrive in Frankfurt, you and your fellow AFSers will collect your baggage, pass through customs and be met by AFS Germany staff and volunteers, who will take you by train to your host family and community.

### **Orientations**

Within days of your arrival, your local chapter will probably organize a Welcoming Meeting for you and your host family, where you meet the volunteers and other exchange students of your chapter.

A four-day regional Late Orientation Camp (LOC) will be held about three weeks after your arrival. You will meet with other AFSers from many countries who are hosted in the same part of Germany as you are. AFS volunteers will give you further information about Germany, more details about its history, political structure, family life, leisure activities, school system and other useful things to know for your stay.

You can share your first experiences with the others and ask counselors for advice regarding any concerns, problems or questions.

## ***Living in Germany***

### **Lifestyle and Family Living**

Germans are known for being industrious, thrifty, hardworking and orderly, and they appreciate punctuality and privacy. Most of them are actively engaged in their social life, community or school life. People are very interested to talk about politics, culture, environment or sports.

The average family is small, and family structures are diverse. Equality is valued not only in public life but at home too. You can be hosted in a very traditional family where the mother works at home and is responsible for the household or in a family where both parents work and the housework is equally divided. Generally in German families, mothers and fathers share authority. Children are expected to keep their parents informed of their whereabouts. If you plan something on your own, please inform your family as they may have planned activities together. You will do household chores side by side with your German host brothers or sisters, and boys are expected to help in the same way that girls are.

Germans usually shake hands when saying hello or goodbye. Kissing on the cheeks is not popular. Nevertheless, Germans are not as cold as they are said to be. Hugging among relatives and friends is very common.

Time and punctuality are valued, and most Germans will expect you to keep appointments exactly at the time you agreed on. People value honesty and obedience to rules and regulations. Though they may appear reserved at first, you will surely

discover warm hearts filled with real values of friendship and family. They are in love with traveling, discovering, exploring, thinking and innovation.

German host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Most AFSers are placed in small towns and rural areas.

### **Dress and Appearance**

German teens dress in a style similar to teenagers elsewhere; they wear jeans, T-shirts, sweaters and sportswear. In winter, warm clothing such as a heavy jacket, heavy sweaters, woolen tights or long underwear, thick socks, gloves, scarves and boots are appropriate. For special occasions, more formal dress is expected: for girls a dress or blouse and skirt or fancy pants; for boys a jacket, slacks and tie.

### **Diet and Meals**

German cooking is generally very good and often rich. In most families, red meat, poultry or fish are regular dishes served with potatoes, dumplings, noodles or rice and vegetables. Germans are very aware of healthy eating, and the number of vegetarians is steadily increasing especially among young people. Many restaurants offer varieties of vegetarian dishes. Still, traditional German cooking requires meat.

Breakfast is considered the most important meal of the day. It usually consists of cold cereal or muesli (nuts and seeds with milk), toast with honey or marmalade, or bread (often dark), cheese, meat or sausage. Adults generally drink coffee or tea; teenagers like milk, hot chocolate or juice. The main meal of the day is often served at noon. Dinner is served between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. and traditionally consists of sandwiches made with cheese, cold meat or sausage.

Germany is famous for its many types of bread, and cakes and coffee are sometimes served on Sunday afternoons. Meals are served at regular hours, and all family members are expected to take part in them. Snacking and raiding the refrigerator are not done.

### **School**

School generally runs from late August to late June. Classes begin at 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. and go to 1:00 or 2:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Some areas also have school on Saturday. There are two-week vacations at Christmas and Easter and a one-week vacation in the fall.

Most AFSers are placed in one of three types of school in Germany: *Realschule*--leading up to tenth grade, *Gymnasium*--college preparatory, and *Gesamtschule*--comprehensive school. AFSers are usually enrolled in grade ten or eleven. The relationship between students and teachers is usually quite good. Required courses include German, English, mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, history, social studies, art, music, geography, religion or philosophy and physical education. Courses call for independent, in-depth study and research. Fulfilling your course requirements will allow you to receive a certificate of attendance.

Lectures in class are interactive; students are expected to take part actively in the lesson by asking questions, commenting and discussing the topics. Students are also given an “oral grade” that is important for the overall grade.

Many schools organize one school trip during the year, and as an exchange student you will have an option to participate. You should bring sufficient funds (approximately €350) to cover the expense of this event.

### **Teen Life**

German society is cultural and social. Cities are proud of their theaters, orchestras, art academies, art collections, museums and libraries. Many festivals are organized during the year in towns, communities or villages. Germans like to gather together, talk and eat well.

Because there is no school in the afternoon, extracurricular activities are not commonly offered. You will be encouraged to do as the Germans do—develop your own activities. This means getting together with people from your school and organizing activities yourselves. For this reason, you should plan to bring with you any musical instrument, hobby or sports equipment that interests you. These will help you to make friends more easily.

Many Germans enjoy sports, hiking and bicycling, as well as watching TV and visiting friends. Soccer, taking walks and cultural events are particularly popular activities. Teenagers generally devote their time to academics during the week. On weekends, they like to get together in each others’ homes, go to cafés or to movies.

Bicycling is not only a sport but also a popular and convenient means of transport. Many young people ride bicycles to school or wherever want to go.

### **AFS Activities**

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Germany will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about both expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

Some local chapters will organize special events, activities and trips for your enjoyment, such as a Christmas party, or give you a chance to participate in local social activities. Halfway through your sojourn, you will have the opportunity to take part in a mid-stay orientation for two weeks. Participation is optional, and the cost is approximately €200. During this orientation, you will have a chance to reflect on the first half of your stay, discuss and share problems and find ways to solve them. Mid-stay will be related to some special topic, such as environmental issues, human rights or the reunification of East and West Germany. You will be living with a host family in a part of Germany that is different from the one in which you are actually placed (for example, in the East if you have been living in the West).

About three to six weeks before your return home, there is the End-of Stay orientation. The End-of-Stay is a time to reflect on your whole stay in Germany (what you learned, what experiences you gained) and to look toward the future (what problems might occur when you come back, what can you take from your hosting community to your home one).

### **Language**

In addition to books and language tapes from your national office, AFS Germany will strongly support your language study while in Germany as it is the most crucial part of your AFS experience. Your community and host family will have information about special funding for German language classes in your area. It is recommended that you start studying in advance for easier integration into your new home and school.

German language distinguishes between two types of addressing to someone. Informal *du*, is used with friends and family members. Informal *sie* is used on a professional level, with elderly people, or in daily contact with people you do not know.

### **Travel**

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Germany, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Germany. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

### **Spending Money**

The cost of living in Germany is high, so plan to bring sufficient spending money. AFS recommends that €1,500 in traveler's checks or credit card should be sufficient for a full academic year to cover your spending needs. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility.

### **Safety and Support**

Germany is very safe, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a German. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Germany may have additional rules.

### **Health Precautions**

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Germany (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

### **Documents**

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents. You will be required to obtain a residence permit upon arrival. AFS Germany will help you obtain this permit.

### **Program Prices**

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

## ***Country Information***

### **Geography and Climate**

Germany is located in the heart of Europe and is slightly smaller than Paraguay or Japan. It shares boundaries with nine other countries. There are four major geographical zones: the broad lowlands with lakes, marshland, the coastal chains of small islands, estuaries and dunes in the north; the central uplands including various small mountain ranges; the wide valley and gorge of the Rhine river in the southwest; and the forested mountains and German Alps of the south. Winters are cold, snowy and humid with temperatures falling to -15°C/5°F. Summers are warm and temperate with highs around 30°C / 88°F.

## **Population**

Germany has a population of 83 million. Berlin (with 3.5 million people) is the capital; however, many government agencies are still located in Bonn, the post WWII capital.

## **Language**

German is the language of Germany.

## **Government**

Germany is a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature comprised of the *Bundesrat* (upper chamber) and *Bundestag* (lower house). The *Bundestag* chooses the prime minister or chancellor.

## **Religion**

The two major religious affiliations are Protestant and Roman Catholic, but the country is mostly a secular society.

## ***Launching Your AFS Experience***

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key German words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Germany, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Germany and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Germany. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living life as a Germany. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Germany will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

German people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

## **Curiously German**

- ✦ Neanderthal man was named after the Neander Valley near Dusseldorf.
- ✦ The famous Nutcracker was created in the small villages of the Erzgebirge region in Germany by miners, who during the winter months carved Christmas presents and toys. A favorite toy was a soldier—the first Nutcracker.
- ✦ The printing press was invented in Germany by Johann Gutenberg (1398-1468).
- ✦ The first world's government social insurance policy was introduced by Otto von Bismarck in Germany in 1889.
- ✦ Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was born in Ulm, Germany. As one of the greatest scientific thinkers, Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1921.

## ***How to Apply***

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16 y to 18.6y	
Country data	Size	357,021 km <sup>2</sup> 137,849 mi <sup>2</sup>
	Population	83,251,851
	Official language	German
	Government	Federal republic
Currency	Euro, divided into 100 cents	
Useful website	<a href="http://www.deutschland.de">www.deutschland.de</a> <a href="http://www.germany-info.org">www.germany-info.org</a>	
AFS Germany website	<a href="http://www.afs.de/">http://www.afs.de/</a>	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>