



Understand Germany

GERMANY TODAY..... 716

Germany has weathered the recent economic storm better than most and continues to take a leading role in environmental issues.

HISTORY 718

From Germanic tribes and the Holy Roman Empire to fairy-tale kings and modern horrors, we chart 2000 years of trials and triumphs.

THE GERMAN PEOPLE 737

More than two decades after reunification, Germany has become one of Europe's most multicultural nations.

FOOD & DRINK 741

Famed for the almighty sausage, black forest gateau and some of the best beer in the world, local gastronomic delights are hard to beat.

LITERATURE, THEATRE & FILM 747

Dating back to the time of Charlemagne, Germany has produced world-class arts' talents, from Nobel Prize winners to Hollywood stars.

MUSIC 751

Germany punches above its weight, with a rich legacy of globally renowned composers and influential popular music.

VISUAL ARTS 754

A proliferation of art museums shows just how much Germans love their art – be it medieval masterpieces or modern wonders.

ARCHITECTURE 758

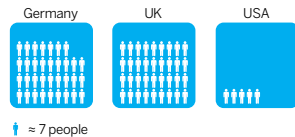
Princely palaces, soaring cathedrals and contemporary marvels have made this country an architectural wonderland.

LANDSCAPES & WILDLIFE..... 761

Blessed with glacier-licked Alps, coursing rivers, pretty vineyards and beach-fringed coastlines, the German countryside is a haven for outdoor pursuits.



population per sq km



Germany Today

Europe's Economic Engine

Germany seems to have weathered the recent financial crisis better than most industrial nations, in large part because it now bears the fruits of decade-old key reforms, especially the liberalisation of its labour laws. The German government launched a slew of proactive measures, such as allowing companies to put workers on shorter shifts without loss of pay and stimulating the economy by providing incentives for Germans to scrap older cars and buy new ones.

The importance of Germany's stable economy has grown in the past few years, as the debt-driven crisis in the Eurozone has spread from Greece to threaten all of southern Europe. Germany is seen to have a key position in propping up the euro, the collapse of which could plunge economies across the globe back into recession. So far, so good.

The European Commission reported 0.5% growth in the German economy for the first quarter of 2012, while the Eurozone as a whole stagnated. Manufacturing orders and exports, especially to hungry markets in South American, Asia and Eastern Europe, were up, helped along by a weak euro. At the same time, the unemployment rate dropped to 6%, the property market was on the upswing and consumer confidence was high.

Environmental Leadership

With a Green Party active in politics since the 1980s, Germany has long played a leading role in environmental and climate protection and is considered a pioneer in the development of renewable energies. In 2000, the *Bundestag* (parliament) passed the *Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz* (Renewable Energies Act), which provides subsidies and incentives to companies engaged in producing renewable energy. In 2011, about 20% of total energy production came from alternative sources. One solar cell in five

- » Area: 357,672 sq km
- » Population: 81.3 million
- » GDP: €3.14 trillion
- » Inflation: 2%
- » Unemployment: 6%
- » Life expectancy: women 82.5 years, men 77.33 years

Dos & Don'ts

- » Do say 'Guten Tag' (hello) when entering a business
- » Do state your last name at the start of a phone call
- » Don't be late for meetings and dinners
- » Don't assume you can pay by credit card
- » Do bag your own groceries in supermarkets
- » Do bring a small gift when invited for dinner

Top Reads

- Grimms' Fairy Tales** (Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm; 1812) The classic!
- The Rise & Fall of the Third Reich** (William Shirer; 1960) Seminal account
- Berlin Alexanderplatz** (Alfred Döblin; 1929) Berlin in the 1920s