

# Culture Wise **GERMANY**

The Essential Guide to Culture,  
Customs & Business Etiquette

Pamela Wilson





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& Business Etiquette

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Survival Books Limited

26 York Street, London W1U 6PZ, United Kingdom

 +44 (0)20-7788 7644,  +44 (0)870-762 3212

 [info@survivalbooks.net](mailto:info@survivalbooks.net)

 [www.survivalbooks.net](http://www.survivalbooks.net)

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## THE AUTHOR

After obtaining a Master's degree in Art History, American-born, Pamela Wilson, worked as an archaeologist in Egypt and Waldgirmes, Germany, where she helped excavate an Augustan era Roman military camp. Moving on to Munich, she became an English teacher and the pedagogical supervisor for a language school. Pamela has written a monthly travel guide about Munich and Bavaria, and researched and edited a travel safety guide for travellers to Germany. She is also the editor of *Living and Working in Germany* (Survival Books).

Pamela met her future husband at the unlikely location of the Oktoberfest and they now have a son. After living for over ten years in Germany and surviving the various stages of culture shock, Pamela is well-qualified to share her knowledge on the subject with readers.

## What readers & reviewers have said about Survival Books:

‘If you need to find out how France works then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.’

### **Living France**

‘It’s everything you always wanted to ask but didn’t for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.’

### **Swiss News**

‘Rarely has a ‘survival guide’ contained such useful advice – This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters – In a word, if you’re planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.’

### **American Citizens Abroad**

‘Let’s say it at once. David Hampshire’s Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l’Hexagone – It is Hampshire’s meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. – He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. – This book is absolutely indispensable.’

### **The Riviera Reporter**

‘A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.’

### **Reader**

‘In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.’

### **The Recorder**

‘The ultimate reference book. Every subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms. An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process.’

### **American Club of Zurich**

‘The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don’t go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!’

**Reader**

‘When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading ‘Read Me First’, or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying ‘IMPORTANT - follow the instructions carefully’. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. – It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. – Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.

**Living France**

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

**The Times**

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

**France in Print**

A concise, thorough account of the Do’s and DON’T’s for a foreigner in Switzerland – Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

**American Citizens Abroad**

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

**Reader**

‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first!’

**Everything Spain**

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

**ICI (Switzerland) AG**



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Neuschwanstein Castle, Bavaria

# INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to Germany or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in ***Culture Wise Germany*** invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few weeks or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and Germany is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the German way of doing things; whether it's sharing a few *Pils* and a game of *Knobeln* with your workmates at a local *Kneipe*, enjoying a *Bundesliga* match with your neighbours on a Sunday, or having a hearty dinner of *Wildbret* and *MehlkloÙe* with some friends.

Germany is a land where many things are done differently: where the *Bundesbahnen* have no speed restrictions (which can be very disconcerting if you're used to driving sedately); where people drink beer made from wheat with fruit syrup and eat ham, cheese and *Wurst* for breakfast; and where the first stanza of the national song (*Lied der Deutschen*) is *verboten*.

***Culture Wise Germany*** is essential reading for anyone planning to visit Germany, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance your understanding of Germany and the German people. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water. It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life in Germany – as it really is – and not necessarily as the tourist brochures would have you believe.

A period spent in Germany is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in Germany and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

*Viel Glück!* (good luck!)

*Pamela Wilson*

February 2009



vines alongside the River Mosel

# 1.

## A CHANGE OF CULTURE

**W**ith almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad have never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. But, although globalisation means the world has ‘shrunk’, every country is still a world of its own with a unique culture.

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson  
(Scottish writer)

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause, as non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture – for example your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic situation, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change and bring balance and meaning to your life is the principal indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

### GERMANY IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently you’ll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly foreign (despite the cosy familiarity that may be engendered by cinema, television and books).

**However long you live in Germany and however assiduous your study of German, as an adult learner you’re unlikely ever to completely lose your foreign accent or be mistaken for a native speaker. This is something you should come to terms with sooner rather than later.**



Germany is popularly perceived by the British as an easy expatriate option because it's practically 'next door' and so cannot possibly be that different from the UK. The fact that tens of thousands of Britons have made Germany their home suggests that settling there must be a straightforward process. Americans often make similar assumptions. They, and people from other countries, are often surprised and even shocked at how different Germany is from home – and from what they expected – and some survive only a year or two before returning home, disillusioned and disappointed.

Before you try to get to grips with German culture, however, you first need to adapt to a totally new environment and new challenges, which may include a new job, a new home and a new physical environment, which can be overwhelming. For example, you shouldn't underestimate the effects that the climate and weather can have on you, as Germany's often

dreary and drizzly weather may affect your mood and cause 'winter depression' (also known as 'seasonal affective disorder' or SAD), caused by a lack of sunshine. There isn't much distinction between the seasons as it rains a lot all year round and it's a challenge to know when to put away your winter wardrobe because, because as soon as you do the weather is bound to change for the worse.

Those who move to a new job or attempt to start a business in Germany may encounter a (very) steep learning curve – indeed, even finding a job can be a struggle. The chances are that you've left a job in your home country where you held a senior position, were extremely competent and knew all your colleagues. In Germany, you may be virtually a trainee (especially if your German isn't fluent) and not know any of your colleagues. The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Even if you move to a part of Germany with a well-established expatriate community, such as Berlin, Munich or Hamburg, things that you're used to and took for granted in your home country may not be available, e.g. certain kinds of food, opportunities to engage in your favourite hobby or sport, and books and television programmes in your language. The lack of 'home comforts' can wear you down. You'll also have to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you had a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives you could rely on for help and support. In Germany, there's no such network, which can leave you feeling lost.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in Germany and what you'll be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are it will enhance your enjoyment and may save you a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you're planning a business trip or intend to spend an extended period in Germany, perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently, **it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

**'If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.'**

James A. Michener (writer)

## CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country or even moving to a new environment in their home country (where the culture and in some cases language may vary considerably by region or social class). Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working or studying abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress code. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a fish out of water.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse – the thousand and one clues to accepted behaviour in everyday situations: when to shake hands and what to say when you meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use a cash machine or the telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and when to take statements seriously and when not to. These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired in the course of our life and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak and our beliefs. Our peace of mind and social efficiency depends on these cues, most of which are unconsciously recognised.

The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological – although you can experience physical pain from culture shock – and are caused by





the sense of alienation you feel when you're bombarded on a daily basis by cultural challenges in an environment where there are few, if any, familiar references. However, there are also physical symptoms including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headaches) and more serious psychosomatic illnesses brought on by depression. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

### Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The names of these may vary, as may the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. The first stage is commonly known as the 'honeymoon' stage and usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks after arrival (although it can last longer, particularly if you're insulated from the pressures of 'normal' life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when a newcomer finds everything an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of culture shock (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see box).
2. The second (rejection or distress) stage is usually completely

### Top 10 Expatriate Gripes about Germany & Germans:

1. Bureaucracy
2. Customer 'service'
3. Brusque manners
4. High taxes
5. 'Can't-do' attitude
6. Short shop opening hours
7. Aggressive drivers
8. Lack of adequate childcare facilities and all-day schools
9. Conformity
10. Resistance to change

opposite to the first and is essentially a negative stage, a period of crisis, as the initial excitement and holiday feeling wears off and you start to cope with the realities of daily life – a life that is nothing like anything you've previously experienced.

This can happen after only a few weeks. The distress stage is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion brought on by a change of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish is a recognised symptom. You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television programmes and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home

and socialising with expatriates who speak your language.

You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered. Some expats in Germany exhibit a 'we and they' mentality, in which 'we' (the foreigners) are constantly trying to educate 'them' (the Germans) about the 'right' way to do things – an endeavour which almost always results in disappointment.

3. The third stage is often known as the 'flight' stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape) and is usually the one that lasts the longest and is the most difficult to cope with. During this period you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people. You may experience difficulties such as not being understood and feelings of discontent, impatience, frustration, sadness and incompetence. These feelings are inevitable when you're trying to adapt to a new culture that's very different from that of your home country, and they're exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country and focus exclusively on the negative aspects.

You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country. Other people will sense this and, in many cases, either respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you. There



may be problems with the language, your house, job or children's school, transportation ... even simple tasks like shopping may be fraught with problems, and the fact that the local people are largely indifferent to these only makes matter worse. They may try to help but they just don't understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

Relinquishing your old customs and adopting those of your new country is difficult and takes time. During this process there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction. The period of readjustment can last six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and a few who never get over the 'flight' stage and are forced to return home.

4. The fourth (recovery or autonomy) stage is where you begin to integrate and adjust to the new

culture and accept the customs of the country as simply another way of living. **The environment doesn't change – what changes is your attitude towards it.** You become more competent with the language and you also feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country and can move around without feeling anxiety.

You still have problems with some of the social cues and you don't understand everything people say (particularly colloquialisms and idioms). Nevertheless, you've largely adjusted to the new culture and are starting to feel more familiar with the country and your place in it – more at home – and you begin to realise that it has its good as well as bad points.

5. The fifth stage is termed 'reverse culture shock' and occurs when you return home. You may find that many things have changed (you'll also have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you've been away for a long time and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and his circumstances, and everyone has his own way of reacting to them, with the result that some stages may

last longer and are more difficult to cope with than others, while others are shorter and easier to overcome.

### Top 10 Things Expatriates Like about Germany:

1. Slower pace of life
2. More annual leave and public holidays
3. Quality healthcare
4. Inexpensive beer and wine
5. Good motorways
6. Environmental friendliness
7. Strong local communities
8. Good trains
9. Bicycle friendliness
10. Clean cities and parks

### Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably by the following – some of which can be done even before you leave home:

- **Positive attitude** – The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is a positive attitude towards Germany (whether you're visiting or planning to live there) – if you don't look forward to a holiday or relocation you should question why you're doing it. There's no greater guarantee for unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your negative prejudices with you. It's

important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you understand why they behave as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that they will be equally puzzled by yours.

**'Travellers never think that THEY are the foreigners.'**

Mason Cooley (American writer)

- **Research** – Discover as much as possible about Germany before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it might otherwise. Reading about Germany and its culture before you leave home will help you familiarise yourself with the local customs and language, and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. You'll be aware of many of the differences between your home country and Germany and be better prepared to deal with them.

This will help you avoid being upset by real or imaginary cultural slights and also reduce the chance

of your inadvertently offending the locals. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope with it. This book will go a long way towards enlightening you. For further details, there are literally hundreds of publications about Germany as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see **Appendices B and C**). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in Germany who can answer questions and provide useful advice.

There are also 'notice boards' and 'forums' on many websites where you can post messages or questions.

- **Visit Germany first** – If you're planning to live or work in Germany for a number of years, or even permanently, it's important to visit the country to see whether you think you'd enjoy living there and be able to cope with the culture





before making the leap. Before you go, try to find people who have visited Germany and talk to them about it. Some companies organise briefings for families before departure. Rent a property before buying a home and don't burn your bridges until you're certain that you've made the right decision.

- **Learn German** – Along with adopting a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will probably be your most powerful weapon in combating culture shock and the key to enjoying your time in Germany.

The ability to speak German isn't just a useful tool (allowing you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc.) but the passport to understanding Germany and its culture. If you can speak the language, even at a low level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened beyond the limited expatriate circle. Obviously not everyone is a linguist and learning a language can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance

virtually anyone can learn enough of another language to participate in the local way of life. Certainly the effort will pay off, and expatriates who manage to overcome the language barrier find their experience in Germany much richer and more rewarding than those who don't.

The Germans realise that their language is complex and are always honoured by a foreigner's attempts to use it. If you make an effort at communicating with the local people in their own language, you'll also find them far more receptive to you and your needs.

**'I don't hold with abroad and think that foreigners speak English when our backs are turned.'**

Quentin Crisp (English writer, actor & raconteur)

- **Be proactive** – Make an effort to get involved in your new culture and go out of your way to make friends. Join in the activities of

the local people, which could be a religious holiday, local festival or social activity. There are often local clubs where you can play sport or keep fit, draw and paint, learn to cook regional dishes, make handicrafts, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet people and make new friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club, perhaps because the language barrier is too great, you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the most popular destinations. Look upon a period spent in Germany as an opportunity to redefine your life objectives and acquire new perspectives. Culture shock can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.

- **Talk to other expatriates** – Although they may deny it, all expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing. Even if they cannot provide you with advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone and that the effects of culture shock lessen with time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates, as this will alienate you from the local people and make it much harder to integrate. Don't rely on social contact with your compatriots to carry you through, because it won't.
- **Keep in touch with home** – Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email

and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.

- **Be happy** – Don't rely on others to make you happy; otherwise you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are certain things in life which only you can change.

Every day we are surrounded by things over which we have little or no control but moaning about them only makes us unhappier. So be your own best friend and nurture your capacity for happiness.

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened and its negative and depressing consequences reduced.

## FAMILIES IN GERMANY

Family life may be completely different in Germany from what you're used to, and although you may not adopt the ways of a German family, you'll have to adapt to certain unfamiliar conditions. For example, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be much more luxurious or significantly smaller) and the climate may be dramatically different from that of your home country. The stress of adapting to a new environment can strain family relationships – especially if they were under tension before you moved to

Germany. If possible, you should prepare yourself for as many aspects of the new situation as you can and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

**'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked for ever in the scar tissue of your mind.'**

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

In a situation where one spouse is working (usually the husband) and the other not, it's generally the latter (and any children) who is more affected by the change of culture. The husband has his work to occupy him and his activities may not differ much from what he had been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in a totally new environment, which differs considerably from what she is used to. She will find herself alone more often, as there will be no close relatives or friends on hand. However, if you're

aware that this situation may arise, you can take action to reduce its effects. Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, as the success of a family relocation depends largely on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should always be raised and if possible answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult your situation may appear at the beginning, it helps to bear in mind that it's by no means unique and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.

## A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad have been highlighted only in order to help you prepare for and adjust to your new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making new friends anywhere, even in your home country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble



and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in Germany or any other country. Treat Germany and its people with respect and they will reciprocate.

The majority of people living in a foreign land would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent abroad is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager. We trust that this book

will help you avoid some of the pitfalls of life abroad and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

**‘Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.’**

Mark Twain (American writer)



Heidelberg, Baden-Württemberg





## 2. WHO ARE THE GERMANS?

**T**he clichéd image of Germans among foreigners who have never visited Germany is of stoic and militaristic Teutonic people going about their lives with humourless efficiency, only occasionally letting their hair down, such as by donning lederhosen and swinging beer steins to polka music during Fasching or at the Oktoberfest. Like all such stereotypical images, this scarcely does justice to the people.

In fact, the Germans themselves are keen to distance themselves from it, as well as from the stigma of Nazism, and to reinvent their national identity – something they’ve had to do numerous times throughout their history. Few other countries can boast of having recovered from economic ruin (after the Second World War) and the division of their country (until 1990) within such a short time. Although they have many hurdles left to overcome, the Germans have proved themselves ready to face major challenges, to open themselves to change and accept globalisation.

As the Germans rebuild their country and its economic and political importance in Europe, they’re also rebuilding their trust in themselves, their values and their way of life. But what are their values? How do they see themselves and others? To shed some light on the real Germans (and dispel some of the myths), this chapter provides information about Germany’s history and demographics, and its people’s preoccupations, humour, attitudes to foreigners and cultural icons.

‘The history of the world is also the sum of what might have been avoided.’

Konrad Adenauer (West Germany’s first chancellor)

### A POTTED HISTORY

In order to gain an insight into the German people it’s necessary to know something of their complex past. Germany was so named by the Roman historian Tacitus, but the nation state of Germany has existed only since 1871, and in its present form only since 1990. For much of its history, Germany has known discord and chaos, with frequent border changes and the dispersion of power among small principalities rather than a stable, centralised government – the antithesis, in fact, of the principal German *Sehnsucht* (longing): for order. The remnants of this patchwork of German kingdoms and states can be seen in the names and borders of the modern states (*Länder* – see **Geography** in Chapter 10 and the map in **Appendix F**).