General Information on Germany

Country and climate
The Federal Republic of Germany covers an area of 356,910 sq. km. The longest distance from north to south is 876 km, from west to east 640 km. Germany is divided into four regions with different topographical features: the North German Plain, the Central Upland Range, the terrace panorama of the Southwest and the Alps in the south.

Germany is situated in the temperate zone between the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern part of the European Continent. Sharp seasonal changes in temperature are rare. In winter the average temperature is around -6°C. In the warmest month of the year, in July, temperatures are between 20 and 28°C. About 40% of Germany consists of woods and forest. The Rhine, the Danube, and the Elbe are three major rivers in Germany but several other rivers flow through the different regions.

History
The country now known as Germany came into existence in 1871. Before this date this part of Europe consisted of a number of small, independent states that historically had been part of the Holy Roman Empire. From 1864–1870 the Prussian Chancellor Bismarck conducted a successful political and military campaign to create one country.

By 1914, the year that marks the beginning of the First World War (1914-1918), Germany had developed into a strong, modern industrial nation ruled by Kaiser Wilhelm II. After the war, in which Germany was defeated, the Kaiser abdicated and a democratic government, the Weimar Republic, was established.

The world-wide economic crisis, the high rate of inflation, and a declining economy contributed to Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. Along with his National Socialist party Hitler formed the Third Reich and began a course of military conquests which led to the Second World War (1941-1945). After Germany’s defeat by the Allied Powers (United States, England, France and the Soviet Union) the country was subdivided into occupied zones as a means to ensure Germany would not once again rise to a dominant military power. The Federal Republic of Germany was founded in the zones occupied by the United States, England and France. In the zone occupied by the Soviet Union (East Germany), the German Democratic Republic came into existence.

In the following years thousands of people, for political or economical reasons, fled the East and took up residence in West Germany. In order to stop this mass exodus the government in the GDR decided to close all borders to the west, thus making access to western countries impossible for residents of East Germany. In 1961 the Berlin Wall was built by the GDR government and Berlin became a divided city.

Until November 9, 1989 the Berlin wall was a symbol of the Cold War but on this day, because of increasing political pressure, protests and demonstrations within the East and also because of the changes in international Cold War politics which led to improved relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, the government of the GDR was forced to open its borders. The Berlin Wall, for the first time since its construction in 1961, was opened and soon after taken down completely.
A process of rapprochement soon began between the governments of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic which, on October 3, 1990, culminated in the reunification of Germany. The new government chose Berlin to become once again the capital city.

Following the restoration of German unity and the colossal political changes occurring in the wake of the collapse of the communist systems in the Eastern part of Europe, the Federal Republic and its partners faced and continue to face completely new challenges.

Population
With a population of nearly 81.8 million, Germany is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe. (about 227 people per sq. km.) At least a third of the population live in cities. It is estimated that about 7.2 million foreigners live in Germany. There is a large Turkish minority, an increasing number of immigrants from Eastern Europe, and political refugees from the Middle East, India, Africa, and Asia.

The German nation grew out of a number of German tribes. These have of course long since lost their original character, but their traditions and dialects live in their respective regions.

Language
Germany has a wealth of dialects. It is usually possible to determine a German’s native region from his or her dialects and pronunciation. Moreover, while the country was divided the two German States developed a different vocabulary. New words were coined which were not necessarily understood in the other part of the country. German is the native language of more than 100 million people. About one in ten books published throughout the world has been written in German. As regards translation into foreign languages, German is third after English and French, and more works have been translated into German than into any other language. English is taught at school and is widely spoken.

The Government
The government has a President who represents the country, a Chancellor who leads the government and a legislature with two houses. Currently Gerhard Schröder is Chancellor and Johannes Rau President.

Germany is a federal republic consisting of 16 states. Each state (Bundesland) is responsible for local affairs and for education.

The Law
The law in the Federal Republic of Germany is predominantly written law. Most of it is federal, comprising more than 4000 acts and statutory instruments. The states, too, pass laws, mainly on such matters as the police, local government, schools and universities as well as the press, radio and television.

Language
Germany is one of the major industrial countries. In terms of overall economic performance it is the third largest, and with regard to world trade it holds the second place. It is one of the seven leading western industrial countries. Since the war, the Federal Republic has developed a socially responsible market economy. The Basic Law, which guarantees private enterprise and private property, stipulates that these basic rights be exercised for
the public good. Under the motto „as little government as possible, as much government as necessary“ the state plays a mainly regulatory role in the market economy.

The reunification of Germany occurred in October 1990 but Germany still remains economically divided. While prices are now the same everywhere, incomes in the east are still lower than in the west.

Germany exports cars, steel, aluminium, tv’s and industrial equipment. Its currency is the EURO.

The six decades since the end of the Second World War have seen the growth of unprecedented prosperity in Germany. The social market economy has raised the country from destruction to one of the most powerful economies in the world with widespread influence.

The standard of living depends not only on income but also on prices. Consumer prices are therefore a major domestic issue. The Federal Republic has not been able to evade world-wide inflation entirely in recent years, however. Since mid-1990, heavy demand in connection with the country’s unification as well as steep increases in wages and taxes to finance the recovery of the economy in eastern Germany have accelerated prices with the result that inflation rate in 1992 was about four percent. The government and especially the Deutsche Bundesbank give high priority to monetary stability.

Religion

Christianity is the main religion. About 28.9 million people belong to the Protestant Church and approximately 28 million to the Catholic Church. For historical reasons the south and west are mainly Catholic, whereas the north and east are mainly Protestant. There is no state church in Germany. Their relationship with the state is often described as a partnership.

Transport and Communication

There is a well-developed public transportation system throughout Germany, as well as regular train service (Bundesbahn) to all countries in Europe. Most families own cars and the number of car-owners is increasing rapidly. There is no speed limit on the Autobahn, the major highway in Germany. But a speed limit is enforced on all streets and smaller motorways. Direct telephone dialling is possible for all national and internationals calls.

Health System

The average life expectancy has increased steadily over the past 40 years. It is currently 72 for men and 79 for women. This trend is chiefly the result of improvements in medical care.

There are about 260,000 doctors in Germany. Medically the Germans are among the best cared-for people in the world.

Nearly everyone has health insurance, whether as compulsory or voluntary members of the statutory health insurance system or through private insurance. All insured persons have a choice of doctors and dentists. The health insurance pays all medical costs. There are also maternity, family and home-nursing benefits.

Working hours

Working hours in business and industry are usually between eight a.m. and four p.m., Monday to Friday. The shops and stores open between eight and ten o’clock in the morning and close at eight in the evening. On
Saturdays closing time is at four p.m. in food stores, department stores in the cities close at six p.m. Local shops close at flexible hours.

**Holidays**

New Year’s Eve is celebrated with fireworks and parties. New Year’s Day, the 1st of January, is a holiday. Easter Sunday and Monday are celebrated with services and family parties. On May 1st - International Worker’s Day - political demonstrations usually take place. Several religious days, such as Whitsun and Ascension Day are holidays. October 3rd marks the reunification of Germany (1990) and is a holiday. Christmas festivities usually take place on December 24th, Christmas Eve. Christmas and the day after Christmas are usually celebrated with family and relatives.

**For Tourists**

There are no vaccinations required for an entry permit into Germany. Visitors to Germany are allowed to stay up to three months without a visa. Visitors from many countries outside Europe need a visa. Please refer to your German Embassy for exact information. Please note that for a stay of more than three months the visa has to be permitted by the police and therefore needs more time.

Tourists from many countries may need an adapter for electrical appliances (AC, 220V). When public transportation is used the ticket should be kept until the end of the trip. In busses and in the underground tickets have to be validated by the passengers.

Germany has a remarkable variety of beautiful towns and landscapes in a comparatively small area. In the north visitors are drawn by the North Sea and Baltic coasts and islands as well as by the sea climate. Tourists also flock to the lake land areas in Holstein and Mecklenburg, to the Central Uplands and the Alps for hiking, or to the many lakes scattered all over the country. Those looking for romantic scenery choose the valleys of the Rhine, Main, Mosel, Neckar, Danube, Elbe and Saale rivers.

**Food**

Germany has a very tasty cuisine. There are many regional varieties. Common dishes are potatoes, pasta, dumplings, sauces, vegetables and cake. For breakfast most Germans have rolls, jam, and coffee. A hot meal is served at noon and includes soup, a main dish and a dessert. In the evening bread with cheese or sliced sausage is served.

In a restaurant the tip is already included in the bill, but most people tip when they enjoyed their stay. The bill is brought to the table and is also expected to be paid at the table.

**Recreation**

Many Germans enjoy walking, bicycling or making excursions by car. Football is one of the most popular sports. Millions of people are members of football or fitness clubs. In winter skiing is very popular and the most popular ski areas are in Austria and Switzerland. Long holidays abroad, often in exotic countries, are not unusual for most Germans.
The Educational System in the Federal Republic of Germany
Survey

Continuing education

Trade and technical school  Evening grammar school / Kolleg  University / College

part-time vocational school  full-time vocational school  Fachoberschule  upper secondary classes in grammar school

Special school  Secondary general school  Intermediate school  Grammar school  Comprehensive school

Orientation stage (depending or not depending on school type)

Special school  Primary school

Special Kindergarten  (on a voluntary basis)

Age
Statutory Basis
The German Basic Law guarantees everyone the right to self-fulfilment and the right to freely choose his or her place of training as well as his or her occupation and profession. It thus follows that the goal of educational policy in Germany is to afford every individual the best possible opportunities to receive the kind of education that is commensurate with his or her abilities and interests. According to article 7 of the Basic Law, the entire school system is under the supervision of the state. On account of the country’s federal structure, that responsibility is shared by the federal and the state governments. Legislation and administration in the field of education predominantly fall within the purview of the states. This is true especially of the school system, higher education, adult education and continuing education. Common and comparable basic structures of the states’ school systems are ensured. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) has adopted supplementary accords providing for greater harmonisation of the school systems as well as recognition of certificates awarded by general education and vocational schools in all the federal states.

Compulsory Schooling
School attendance is compulsory from the ages of six to eighteen, i.e. for twelve years. In order to satisfy the compulsory schooling requirement, pupils must attend a full-time school for nine (in some states ten) years and thereafter either continue full-time schooling or attend a part-time vocational school (Berufsschule). Attendance in all public schools is free of charge. Educational materials, especially textbooks, are also frequently provided free of charge or on loan; when possession of such materials passes to the pupils, parents may be required to contribute to the costs on the basis of their income. The Basic Law requires that religious instruction be included in the curriculum, except in non-denominational schools. From the age of fourteen, pupils may drop the subject if they wish. The Basic Law also guarantees the right to establish and operate private schools. If these schools are alternatives to state schools, they are subject to state approval. Private alternative schools enrich the educational spectrum and receive financial support from the states.

The School System

Grundschule
At the age of six, children enter primary school (Grundschule). In general it lasts four years, in Berlin and Brandenburg six years. After primary school, pupils attend one of the other general education schools offering the first stage of secondary education. Irrespective of the type of school the pupil attends, the fifth and sixth school years constitute a phase of special encouragement, observation and orientation designed to facilitate choices concerning the pupil’s further education and field of emphasis. In most states this orientation phase takes place within the framework of the various types of schools; in some states, however, it is structured as a separate stage which is independent of the ordinary types of schools.

Hauptschule
After completing primary school, approximately one third of the children attend the secondary general school (Hauptschule). Young people who leave the secondary general school after the ninth or tenth grade usually enter a vocational training programme offered within the framework of the dual system and thus opens the door to many occupations in the craft trades and industry for which formal training is required. The secondary general school imparts a basic general education to its pupils. Its curriculum has been broadened and has become increasingly demanding: Today, for instance, nearly every pupil at a secondary general school receives instruction in one foreign language (generally English) and vocational orientation to ease the transition from school to working life.

Realschule
The intermediate school (Realschule) is positioned between the secondary general school and the grammar school (Gymnasium) and imparts a more comprehensive general education to its pupils. As a rule, it encompasses six years of schooling, grades five through ten, and leads to an intermediate school certificate qualifying the recipient to continue education at upper level schools or a vocationally oriented upper secondary school (Fachoberschule). The intermediate school certificate is a prerequisite for a middle-level career in business and industry or in public service. In 1993 about 40% of pupils earned an intermediate school certificate.

Gymnasium
The grammar school (Gymnasium), which is generally a nine-year secondary school (grades 5 through 13, 12 in some states), imparts a comprehensive general education to its pupils. In the upper stage of the grammar school, which encompasses grades eleven through twelve/thirteen, a course system has replaced the conventional classes. Although certain subjects or groups of subjects are still compulsory, the wide range of available courses gives pupils in the upper stage in the grammar school ample opportunity to individually structure their coursework to emphasise certain fields. Subjects are divided into three general categories: language, literature and art; the social sciences, and mathematics, science and technology. Each of these three categories must be represented among the courses taken by each pupil up to the end of upper secondary instruction, including the Abitur examination. The compulsory coursework includes religion and sports in addition to subjects from the three aforementioned categories. Upper secondary instruction at the grammar school concludes with the Abitur examination, the pupil is awarded the „certificate of general higher education entrance qualification“ (Zeugnis der allgemeinen Hochschulreife). This certificate entitles the recipient to study the subject of his/her choice at a university or equivalent institution.

As a matter of principle, the certificate of higher education entrance qualification or the certificate of Fachhochschule qualification (Fachhochschulreife) is required for admission to a course of study at a higher education institution. Due to the high number of applicants for the limited number of study places, however, nation-wide or local admissions restrictions are in effect for some courses of study.
**Gesamtschule**

Another type of school offering stage I secondary education is the comprehensive school (Gesamtschule) which as a rule provides instruction for pupils in grades five through twelve/thirteen. Most comprehensive schools have an upper secondary stage of their own which is structured along the lines of the upper stage of the grammar school.

In the new federal states there are other types of schools such as the „standard school“ (Regelschule) in Thuringia, the „middle school“ (Mittelschule) in Saxony and the „secondary school“ (Sekundarschule) in Saxony-Anhalt. These schools combine the curricula of the secondary general school and the intermediate school; beginning in grade seven, pupils receive instruction in classes or courses geared to the school-leaving certificates they intend to acquire. The certificates awarded by these schools at the end of grades 9 and 10 are earned under the same conditions as those awarded by the other types of schools offering stage I education and are mutually recognised by all states.

**Zweiter Bildungsweg**

Anyone who for any reason has missed out on educational opportunities earlier in his or her life can nevertheless earn a school-leaving certificate via the „secondary education route“. People who work during the day, for instance, can take coursework at an evening grammar school to prepare for the Abitur examination.

**Teachers**

For every type of school there are specially trained teachers. All must have completed a course of study at a higher education institution, but the content and duration of such courses vary. Courses of study for primary and secondary general school teachers usually last six semesters. Longer courses are required for intermediate school, grammar school, special school or vocational school teachers. Upon completion of their course of study, all prospective teachers must pass an initial state examination. This is followed by a period of practical training, which includes preparatory seminars and practice teaching in schools, and a second state examination.

**The School Year’s Organisation**

As Germany is a federation, the states’ school year dates differ. Usually the school year begins in August/September and ends in June/July. In between there are holidays in autumn, for Christmas, at Easter and in the summer. Reports are given twice: one in February and the other one before the summer holidays.