

# Getting Started

With centuries of practice, Germany has come quite close to perfecting its tourism infrastructure. Backpackers, families and jetsetters will all find their needs and expectations met. Room and travel reservations are a good idea during peak season (summer and around holidays), but otherwise you can keep your advance planning to a minimum.

## WHEN TO GO

Any time is a good time to be somewhere in Germany, but when is the best time to visit pretty much depends on what type of holiday you envision. Most people arrive between May and September when roads are often clogged, lodging can be at a premium and you'll be jostling for space at major attractions. Still, summer is fabulous because skies are more likely to be sunny, much of life moves outdoors, beer gardens are in full swing, and festivals and outdoor events enliven cities and villages. Hiking, cycling, swimming and outdoor pursuits are popular during these months.

The shoulder seasons (from March to May and from October to early November) bring smaller crowds and often pleasant weather. In April and May, when wildflowers brighten meadows and fruit trees are in bloom, it can be mild and sunny. Indian summers that stretch well into autumn are not uncommon.

With the exception of winter sports, activities between November and early March are likely to focus more on culture and city life. In these months, skies are often gloomy and the mercury drops below freezing. On the plus side, there are fewer visitors and shorter queues (except in the winter resorts). Just pack the right clothes and keep in mind that there are only six to eight hours of daylight. In December the sun (if there is any) sets around 3.30pm.

The ski season usually starts in early to mid-December, moves into full swing after the New Year and closes down again with the onset of the snowmelt in March.

For related information, see p741 and p746.

## COSTS & MONEY

Germany is fairly inexpensive, although what you spend depends largely on what kind of traveller you are, what experiences you wish to have and, to a lesser extent, the season in which you're visiting. Staying in midrange hotels, enjoying two sit-down meals a day, using public transportation, spending some money on sightseeing, activities and going to bars or clubs will cost

See Climate Charts (p741) for more information.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Valid travel and health insurance (p746)
- Memorising at least a few basic words of German (p774)
- Hotel or camping reservations if travelling outside the cities in summer (p734)
- Nerves of steel for driving on the autobahns (p766)
- Towel and soap if staying in hostels, private rooms or cheap pensions
- A raincoat, rainproof shoes and/or umbrella for those days when the sun is a no-show
- A set of smart clothes and shoes for hitting big-city clubs, the opera or fancy restaurants
- This book and a curious mind

between €120 and €150 (per person, travelling as an adult couple). For mere survival, you'll need to budget from €40 to €70 per day, and this will have you sleeping in hostels or budget hotels, eating snack- and fast-food or preparing your own meals, and limiting your entertainment. You can stretch the euro further by taking advantage of various discounts; see p743 for some ideas. Of course, if you're a high roller, Germany has no shortage of luxury hotels, Michelin-starred restaurants and fancy bars to help you part with your money.

Comfortable midrange accommodation starts at about €80 for a double room with breakfast in the cities, and €60 in the countryside. Many hostels and hotels have special 'family' rooms with three or four beds, or they can supply sleeping cots for a small extra fee. In some places, children under a certain age pay nothing if staying in their parents' room without requiring extra bedding.

A two-course meal in an average restaurant costs between €20 and €30 per person, including a glass of beer or wine. Drinks prices (even nonalcoholic ones) can run surprisingly high, even in basic eateries. Eating out doesn't have to take a huge bite out of your budget, however, as long as you stick to cafés and casual restaurants where you'll get meals for under €10. If you're travelling with kids, ask about a special kids' menu or kids' dishes. Holiday flats with kitchens are ideal for trimming food costs. Generally, prices in supermarkets are a bit lower than in the UK, USA and Australia.

Museum admission ranges from €0.50 for small local history museums to €10 for international-calibre art museums, even more for blockbuster exhibits. Some sights and museums are free, or have admission-free days, and discounts are offered for children, teens, students and seniors. Tourist-gear discount cards (often called Welcome Cards, p743) offer free public transport and discounts on admissions, tours and the like and can be a good deal.

Car-hire costs vary; expect to pay around €45 a day for a medium-sized new car. Driving is the most comfortable and convenient mode of getting around the country, although in cities parking may be elusive and expensive. However, if there are three or more of you travelling together, it may be the most economical way of getting around. In cities, buying day or other passes for public transport is almost always cheaper than buying single tickets. If you're travelling by train, consider a rail pass (p770) or see if Deutsche Bahn is offering any special promotions.

## HOW MUCH?

Cup of coffee €1.50-2

One hour of parking (in a garage) €1-2

Cinema ticket €6-11

Pack of 17 cigarettes €3.30-4

Internet access €1-5

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

To get you in the mood for your trip, consider reading some of these titles written by travellers who have visited Germany before you:

*A Tramp Abroad* by Mark Twain is a literary classic that includes keen and witty observations about Germany garnered by the author during two visits in the 1880s. Twain's postscript 'The Awful German Language' is a hilarious read.

*Three Men on the Bummel* by Jerome K Jerome, the sequel to the even funnier *Three Men in a Boat*, is a classic comic tale that follows three English gentlemen on their cycling trip through the Black Forest in the 1890s.

*Deutschland: A Winter's Tale* by Heinrich Heine is a poetic travelogue about the author's journey from Paris to Hamburg. It also packs a satirical punch and strong criticism of Germany's mid-19th-century political landscape. It was censored immediately.

*Mr Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin* are by Christopher Isherwood, who lived in Berlin during the Weimar years and whose stories inspired the movie *Cabaret*. The books brilliantly and often entertainingly

## TOP 10S

### Must-See German Movies

Planning and dreaming about your trip to Germany is best done in a comfy living room with a bowl of popcorn in one hand and a remote in the other. Go for a classic or pick from among the great crop of recent made-in-Germany flicks. Look for brief reviews on p63.

- *Metropolis* (1927) Director: Fritz Lang
- *Das Boot* (1981) Director: Wolfgang Petersen
- *Der Himmel über Berlin* (Wings of Desire, 1987) Director: Wim Wenders
- *Lola Rennt* (Run Lola Run, 1998) Director: Tom Tykwer
- *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) Director: Wolfgang Becker
- *Die Fetten Jahre Sind Vorbei* (The Edukators, 2004) Director: Hans Weingartner
- *Gegen die Wand* (Head-On, 2004) Director: Fatih Akin
- *Der Untergang* (Downfall, 2004) Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel
- *Sophie Scholl – Die Letzten Tage* (Sophie Scholl – The Final Days, 2005) Director: Marc Rothemund
- *Das Leben der Anderen* (The Life of Others, 2006) Director: Florian von Donnermarck

### Top Reads

One of the best ways to learn about a country's culture and grasp a sense of a people is to immerse yourself in a good book. The following Top 10 – from classics to contemporary works – have won kudos and critical acclaim in Germany and abroad. See p61 for more details.

- *Simplicissimus* (The Adventures of a Simpleton, 1668) Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen
- *Der Prozess* (The Trial, 1925) Franz Kafka
- *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) Alfred Döblin
- *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (All Quiet on the Western Front, 1929) Erich Maria Remarque
- *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum, 1959) Günter Grass
- *Der Geteilte Himmel* (Divided Heaven, 1963) Christa Wolf
- *Die Ausgewanderten* (The Emigrants, 1997) WG Sebald
- *Russendisko* (Russian Disco, 2000) Wladimir Kaminer
- *Der Vorleser* (The Reader, 2002) Bernhard Schlink
- *Stasiland* (2004) Anna Funder

### Our Favourite Festivals & Events

As was amply demonstrated during the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Germans really know how to let their hair down, and there's almost always something interesting happening around the country. The following list is our Top 10, but for additional festivals and events see the various destination chapters and p744.

- Internationale Filmfestspiele (Berlin Film Festival, Berlin) February (p124)
- Cannstatter Volksfest (Stuttgart) September/October (p398)
- Carnival/Fasching (various regions) Cologne, (p555); Munich, (p308) February
- Frankfurt Book Fair (Frankfurt-am-Main) September-October (p518)
- Hamburger Dom (Hamburg) March (p664)
- Kieler Woche (Kiel) June (p681)
- Bach Festival (Leipzig) Around Ascension Day (p190)
- Love Parade (Berlin) July (p124)
- Munich Oktoberfest (Munich) September-October (p308)
- Rhine in Flames (five locations in Rhineland-Palatinate) May-September (p484)

chronicle the era's decadence and despair. For a different take on the same era, also try *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920–1933* by Joseph Roth, a dynamic and insightful chronicler. Finally there is *The Temple*, an autobiographical novel by one of Britain's most celebrated 20th-century poets, Stephen Spender. It is based on his travels to Germany in the late 1920s and his encounters with, among others, Isherwood.

*In a German Pension* by Katherine Mansfield is a collection of satirical short stories written after Mansfield's stay in Bavaria as a young woman. Her ability to inject meaning into vignettes makes it an especially worthwhile read.

*The Bells in Their Silence: Travels Through Germany* (2004) was written by Michael Gurra, an American literature professor who spent a year living and travelling around Germany in the early 1990s. This travelogue combines a literary tour of the country with impressionistic observations about daily life.

*From Berlin* is by Armando, a Dutch writer, artist and (since 1979) Berlin resident, who has turned his observations about the city and the people who lived through WWII into a collection of snappy vignettes – from humorous to touching to heart-wrenching.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Hunt down bargain air fares, book hotels, check on weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about the best places to visit (or avoid!) by surfing the electronic waves. Start with **LonelyPlanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)), where you'll find travel news, links to useful resources and the Thorn Tree bulletin board.

**CIA World Fact Book – Germany** ([www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gm.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gm.html)) Frequently updated data about geopolitical, demographic, economic and other aspects of Germany. You'll learn that Germans use 71 million mobile phones, that their median age is 42.6 years, that the country is slightly smaller than Montana and other fascinating nuggets.

**Deutsche Welle** ([www.dw-world.de](http://www.dw-world.de)) The online version of the German international broadcasting service has news and background information about Germany, on-demand audio and video feeds and newsletter sign-ups.

**Deutschland Online** ([www.magazine-deutschland.de](http://www.magazine-deutschland.de)) Online version of *Deutschland Magazine* with interesting features on culture, business and politics.

**Deutschland Portal** ([www.deutschland.de](http://www.deutschland.de)) The ultimate gateway to online information about Germany.

**Facts about Germany** ([www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de](http://www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de)) An excellent and comprehensive reference about all aspects of German society, including education, culture, media, foreign policy and the economy.

**German National Tourist Office** ([www.germany-tourism.de](http://www.germany-tourism.de)) Official site packed with information on all aspects of travel to and within Germany.

**Online German Course** ([www.deutsch-lernen.com](http://www.deutsch-lernen.com)) Free language lessons for absolute beginners and moderately advanced students.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### CITY DELIGHTS

#### Two Weeks / Berlin to Hamburg

Book-ended by two great cities, this route offers some of the best in culture, character and architecture the country has to offer. Kick off in **Berlin** (p89) with its top-notch museums, old and bold architecture and nice-to-naughty nightlife. From here head south to **Dresden** (p166), sitting proud and pretty in its baroque splendour on the Elbe River. Next stop is **Munich** (p286), where an evening in a beer garden is the perfect finish to a day of palace- and museum-hopping. Next up is the Romantic Road where medieval **Rothenburg ob der Tauber** (p332) is a veritable symphony of half-timbered houses. Cut west to historic **Heidelberg** (p403), idyllically serenaded by its ancient fortress, then north to **Worms** (p472) and **Mainz** (p467) with their fantastic Romanesque cathedrals. Follow the Rhine through the fairy-tale scenery of the Middle Rhine to cosmopolitan **Cologne** (p550) for a spin around Germany's grandest Gothic cathedral. Wrap up your trip in lovable **Bremen** (p641) and open-minded **Hamburg** (p653), which welcome you with maritime charm.



Prepare for a roller coaster of urban treasures on this 1700km journey that takes in progressive big-city beauties, medieval metropolises mired in history and elegant residential towns shaped by royal visions.

## THE GRAND CIRCLE

Four Weeks / Berlin to Berlin

Your epic Germany adventure launches with a few metro-intense days in **Berlin** (p89), followed by a spin around the royal splendours of Sanssouci Park and Palace in **Potsdam** (p147) before plunging south to **Dresden** (p166), a city that's literally risen from the ashes of WWII. Consider a quick detour to ruggedly romantic **Saxon Switzerland** (p180) with its fairy-tale rock formations, then hook west to **Weimar** (p258), the cradle of the German Enlightenment. Head south to picture-perfect **Bamberg** (p364), with its pristine Altstadt (old town) and excellent breweries, then compare its splendours to **Regensburg** (p378), one of Europe's best preserved medieval towns. After your big-city fix in **Munich** (p286) make the pilgrimage to the world's most famous palace, **Neuschwanstein** (p342), a sugary confection dreamed up by 'Mad' King Ludwig II of Bavaria. **Freiburg** (p439), your next stop, is a bustling university town and gateway to the southern **Black Forest** (p439).

Work your way north through cuckoo-clock country to historic **Heidelberg** (p403), idyllically snuggled into the steep Neckar Valley, and the castle-studded **Romantic Rhine** (p483) between Mainz and Koblenz. Then follow the sinewing **Moselle** (p495) to **Trier** (p496) to wander among the best-preserved Roman ruins north of the Alps. Heading east across the gentle Eifel mountain range, you'll arrive in **Cologne** (p550), whose glorious twin-towered cathedral can be spotted edging into the sky from afar. Swing by **Aachen** (p567), with its splendid Dom (cathedral) founded by Charlemagne, before heading up to **Hamburg** (p653), a bustling port city with a kicking nightlife and first-rate museums. Wind down your tour by catching the Hanseatic spirit in the cities of **Lübeck** (p683) and **Schwerin** (p704) before travelling back to Berlin.

Germany is a rich quilt of exciting cities, awe-inspiring scenery and spirit-lifting culture, as this grand, 1800km loop reveals. It can be 'done' in three weeks but more time lets you connect more deeply with this land and its feast of treats, treasures and temptations.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### MID-GERMAN MEANDERINGS

Two Weeks / Düsseldorf to Lutherstadt Wittenberg

Kick off your west-east corrida in bustling **Düsseldorf** (p540), a magnet for its art, shopping and rollicking earthy pubs. Those with a penchant for the offbeat will hit the mother lode on the Industrial Heritage Trail through the nearby **Ruhrgebiet** (p571). Quirky delights include former gas tanks filled with art (p579), blast furnaces turned into free-climbing zones (p579) and a colliery doubling as a concert venue (p573). East along the A44, stop in **Soest** (p585) and **Paderborn** (p587), both famous for their churches. Plunge into the world of fairy-tales in **Hamelin** (p603), the quaint, cobbled town of Pied Piper fame. Close by is restored **Hildesheim** (p614), celebrated for the huge bronze door gracing its cathedral. Continue on to charming **Goslar** (p231), which counts a 1000-year-old mine and an 11th-century palace among its considerable assets. It's also the gateway to the **Harz Mountains** (p229), whose natural splendours are perfect for a day or two in the slow lane. Don't leave without sampling the small-town beauty of **Wernigerode** (p238), famous for its colourfully painted medieval houses and as the terminus of the narrow-gauge Harzquerbahn railway to Nordhausen in Thuringia. Continue on to charming **Quedlinburg** (p243), a well-preserved symphony in half-timbered houses. Then make a beeline straight for **Dessau** (p211), a city that's synonymous with the Bauhaus school of architecture. Ramble around the lush gardens of **Wörlitz** (p215) before finishing up in the birthplace of the Reformation, **Lutherstadt Wittenberg** (p217).



This itinerary proves that 'lesser known' doesn't have to mean 'lesser'. Classic and quirky discoveries abound along this 600km-long belt cinched around Germany's surprising middle.

**BEST OF THE BALTIC****Two Weeks / Flensburg to Greifswald**

Though no stranger to domestic tourism, Germany's towns and resorts fringing the Baltic Sea rarely make it onto international travellers' itineraries – undeservedly so. The first stop, **Flensburg** (p693), easily reached by train or autobahn from Hamburg, is Germany's northernmost town and beckons with a handsome Altstadt. **Schleswig** (p690), a quick hop south, cradles a huge fjord and boasts the intriguing Viking Museum and art-filled Schloss Gottdorf. Next up is **Lübeck** (p683), a highlight on this route with its fairy-tale skyline, enchanting old town and delicious marzipan. East of here, Swedish-flavoured **Wismar** (p719) woos you with a postcard-pretty setting and a lovely step-gabled old town. En route to Rostock stop in **Bad Doberan** (p718), with its great red-brick minster, quirky Frank Zappa memorial and kid-friendly narrow-gauge train. Though aesthetically challenged, **Rostock** (p711) does have some interesting sights and serves as the region's nightlife hub. **Stralsund** (p722), by contrast, is more sedate but has a very attractive Altstadt and is also the gateway to **Rügen Island** (p727), which has tree-lined country roads, long sandy beaches and mysterious chalk cliffs. To truly traipse off the beaten path, head out to the remote **Darss-Zingst Peninsula** (p721), where nature puts on an especially handsome show. Conclude these meanderings in **Greifswald** (p725), an old university town close to beach-fringed **Usedom Island** (p726), a popular holiday island Germany shares with Poland.

**A ride along Germany's magical Baltic coast reveals eye candy at every bend of the road. Take your sweet time as you travel along this 500km route from Germany's border with Denmark to where it rubs shoulders with Poland.**

**TAILORED TRIPS****CASTLES & PALACES**

Until unification in 1871, Germany was a mosaic of fiefdoms whose overseers ruled from the comfort of their Schloss (palace) or *Burg* (castle). A sentimental favourite is **Wartburg** (p270) in Eisenach, where Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. Equally impressive is Saxony's **Festung Königstein** (p181) overlooking the Elbe and so big and formidable that nobody dared attack it. More refined are sublime **Schloss Sanssouci** (p148) and **Schloss Charlottenburg** (p114) in Berlin. Both are impressive residences of the Prussian Hohenzollern clan and are surrounded by their own park. The family's ancestral seat, **Burg Hohenzollern** (p426), is some 700km southwest near Tübingen. Looking medieval and mysterious, it's actually a 19th-century neo-Gothic confection, the original long ago destroyed. A similar fate befell **Schloss Heidelberg** (p403), although much of it survives as a romantic ruin. For more romance, visit the robber baron hang-outs along the Romantic Rhine, especially the rambling **Burg Rheinfels** (p490) and the pristine **Marksburg** (p488) which, like the fairy-tale **Burg Eltz** (p503) near the Moselle, has never been destroyed. Germany's most famous palace may be **Schloss Neuschwanstein** (p342), but the more playful **Schloss Linderhof** (p349) and **Schloss Herrenchiemsee** (p324) are even nicer. Another major Bavarian delight is the baroque **Würzburg Residenz** (p327), by star builder Balthasar Neumann.

**CATHEDRALS & CHURCHES**

Germany has a wealth of houses of worship, the most magnificent of which lift the spirit with their harmonious architecture and priceless treasures. Germany's best-known church is also its biggest, the Dom in **Cologne** (p551), whose twin spires dominate the city's distinctive skyline. Another exquisite Gothic cathedral is the **Münster** (minster) in **Freiburg** (p439), which has similarly awesome stained-glass windows. The title of 'world's tallest steeple' (reached by 786 steps!) belongs to the minster in **Ulm** (p427), while the Dom in **Berlin** (p108) claims to be Germany's largest Protestant cathedral. Older than all by several centuries is Charlemagne's octagonal palace chapel, now part of the Dom in **Aachen** (p568).

Fans of Romanesque architecture will hit the trifecta along the Rhine with the awe-inspiring cathedrals of **Mainz** (p467), **Worms** (p472) and **Speyer** (p474). In the deepest Black Forest, the Dom in **St Blasien** (p451) is a rare neoclassical gem lidded by the third-largest dome in Europe. Bavaria brims with baroque churches; the Asamkirche in **Munich** (p299) and the Wieskirche in **Steingaden** (p345) are both standouts. The landmark Frauenkirche in **Dresden** (p170), levelled during WWII, triumphantly reopened in 2005. Churches with amazing carved altars include the Jakobskirche in **Rothenburg ob der Tauber** (p332), the St Nikolaikirche in **Kalkar** (p549) and the Petrikerche in **Dortmund** (p577).



## WINE

If you're a wine aficionado, why not build an entire itinerary around your favourite libation? Anywhere within Germany's 13 growing regions you can tour estates, explore musty cellars stocked with vintage barrels and chin-wag with vintners during wine tastings. Or you could hike along vineyard trails, drink a toast to Bacchus in cosy wine taverns, then retire to your room on a wine estate.

Germany's most famous grape is the noble riesling. The best vintages hail from the tiny Rheingau area, with tourist-ridden **Rüdesheim** (p494) at its heart, and from the Middle Rhine region (between Koblenz and Bingen), where **Bacharach** (p491) is the most appealing of the many wine towns. Fans of red wines should head to the **Ahr Valley** (p480), best explored on a hike along the Rotweinwanderweg (Red Wine Hiking Trail). In southwestern Germany is the Baden region, whose **Kaiserstuhl** (p445) area produces exceptional late burgundies and pinot gris. In and around **Würzburg** (p327) is the Franken region, whose vintners make excellent dry and earthy wines bottled in curvy green flagons called *Bocksbeutel*. Germany's, and indeed Europe's, northernmost growing region is Saale-Unstrut, with **Freyburg** (p227) at its centre. Its famous Rotkäppchen (Little Red Riding Hood) sparkling wine was already popular in GDR times. Another eastern growing region – and the country's smallest – is the Sächsische Weinstrasse around **Meissen** (p182).



## WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Germany has around 30 places recognised by Unesco for their historical and cultural importance. Wander the warren of lanes of well-preserved medieval towns such as **Quedlinburg** (p243), **Goslar** (p231), **Bamberg** (p364), **Lübeck** (p683) and **Regensburg** (p378). Take in the lifestyles of the rich and powerful at the baroque palaces of Sanssouci in **Potsdam** (p147) and Augustusburg in **Brühl** (p561), or the medieval castles along the **Romantic Rhine** (p483). The bulging coffers of the Church financed the cathedrals of **Aachen** (p568), **Cologne** (p551), **Hildesheim** (p615) and **Speyer** (p474), the monasteries in **Reichenau Island** (p458) and **Lorsch** (p527), the prince-bishops' residence in **Würzburg** (p327) and the Wieskirche in **Steingaden** (p345). Sites honouring Protestant reformer Martin Luther include Wartburg castle in **Eisenach** (p270) and memorials in **Eisleben** (p224) and **Lutherstadt Wittenberg** (p217). **Weimar** (p258) drew a who's who of German thinkers in the 18th century and is also the birthplace of the Bauhaus.

Bauhaus buildings in **Dessau** (p212) are also on Unesco's list. Recent additions include the Museumsinsel in **Berlin** (p107) and the Elbe valley around **Dresden** (p174), while the well-preserved Roman ruins in **Trier** (p496) were among the first five sites to make the cut. For a change of pace visit Zollverein colliery in **Essen** (p573) and the Völklinger Hütte near **Saarbrücken** (p508), both considered outstanding 'cathedrals of industry'.



# Snapshot

'Who are we?' many Germans are asking themselves. 'Where to now?' Deep into the second decade of reunification, Germany has a pretty good idea. But its roads are strewn with challenges and contradictions. Germany is the world's third-largest economy, yet more than 4.5 million people languish on its dole queues. Germany, long considered an economic basket case with abysmally high wage and social welfare costs, was ranked Europe's most attractive business location in 2006 – and third in the world. At the same time, the top brass of a highly profitable local company threatens to pack its corporate bags for New Europe. The country is export champion of the world for the third successive year; its cities are bankrupt. Culturally, urban centres are exploding with creative energy as if reliving the wild 1920s. But ugly right-wing violence flared again on Germany's uneven social terrain, just as the football World Cup was about to begin under the motto *'Die Welt zu Gast bei Freunden'* (The World – A Guest Among Friends).

This is Germany today. Politically, Germans who lived through the Kohl and Schröder governments are hardened to political tedium. In late 2005 its voters saw no way out but to opt for arguably the highest form, a grand coalition between the two largest parties: the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD; Social Democratic Party) and the Christliche Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU; Christian Democratic Union) with its Bavarian offshoot, the Christliche Soziale Union (CSU; Christian Social Union). This tied the political knot on a de facto relationship existing for some years in an opposition-controlled upper house. But it also brought an unusual twist: Angela Merkel became Germany's first woman chancellor, and she also became the first eastern German to take on the job.

Unemployment, of course, remains high on the political agenda. Reforming the health and social security systems are tough hurdles, given Germany's ageing and declining population. The time is rapidly approaching for baby boomers to retire and devote themselves with gusto to patio barbecues, Toscana wine and French cheese. Someone has to pick up the bill, though, and new generations – those now entering the scorched earth left behind by the '68 generation after years of plenty – might just spit the dummy and stage a social revolution of their own one day.

For its fiscal problems, Germany is used to a flood of four-letter words from European partners. A hike in the consumption tax, if fully implemented in 2007, should allow Germany to meet EU obligations regarding its budget deficit for the first time in six years. But this might also throttle a domestic economy that steadfastly resists strong growth. In any case, it will lead to unpredictable price hikes.

On the environment front, laws to shut down the country's nuclear reactors by 2020 remain in force. And don't ditch those plastic bottles and tin cans – reforms to the refund system are now functioning, despite tooth-and-nail resistance by the retail industry. Ironically, it's the Green party's reforms from a seven-year taste of shared power that now look the most durable.

Germany is betting on continuity when it comes to proactively shaping its society. Laws passed in 2005 guaranteeing equal status for same-sex partnerships look rock solid these days, and the grand coalition enacted an antidiscrimination law that even went beyond EU obligations in areas of disability, age and sexual identity.

Can Germany be a 'normal' nation again? Yes, it would seem. During the football World Cup in 2006 Germans painted their faces in national colours,

## FAST FACTS

Area: 357,045 sq km  
 Population: 82.41 million  
 GDP: €2.24 trillion (2005)  
 Inflation: 2% (Apr 2006)  
 Unemployment: 10.8% (May 2006)  
 Land use: 53% farming, 29.8% forest, 6.7% built-up areas  
 Life expectancy: women 81.3 years, men 75.6 years  
 Most famous civil criminal: Fritz Haarmann (allegedly killed 26 people and drank their blood, 1925)  
 Fat factor: 47% overweight, 11% obese  
 Museums: 6000 (101 million visits)



draped their cars with the German flag and celebrated their country in a cheerful show of national spirit. This reflected a new confidence in Germany as a nation. And why not? New generations today live in what is arguably one of the world's best-functioning democracies – one, in fact, where past national shame is being offset by various commitments to nation building abroad.

In 2006, under the aegis of the UN, the Bundeswehr (German National Army) led the enforcement of Congo's free elections. Also in 2006, Germany took over the leadership of efforts to rebuild Afghanistan, while reaffirming its active role in Kosovo. Meanwhile, its relations with the US have warmed from the deep freeze of 2003 – when Germany didn't join the coalition that invaded Iraq. An overwhelming majority of Germans still stand behind this decision to go an independent course.

It's the soft areas – the social topography – that are raising the tough issues. Germany has 82 million different views on what's wrong with its education system. Hardened to receiving miserable scores in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) studies comparing standards worldwide, Germans saw salt rubbed into sensitive wounds in 2006 when a new PISA study showed their schools churned out second-generation migrant children without basic mathematics skills. The country of poets and thinkers was becoming a country of numerical illiterates.

Also concerning migrants, nothing sends the emotional temperature soaring in Germany like the integration issue. While riots like those engulfing French cities in 2005 were never likely to ignite Germany, this fact speaks more for the size and structure of German cities than for successful integration. In 2006 teachers at a school in Berlin's tough migrant district of Neukölln sent a plea to the city's senate requesting their school be closed down. The school was out of control. Overnight, the Rütli School, with its vast majority of Muslim pupils, unfairly became a symbol of twin horrors: poor integration and plummeting education standards.

With Muslims making up a high proportion of the country's migrant population, the Europe-wide debate on the so-called Muslim-Christian 'culture clash' issue is a lively one in Germany. The right of teachers to wear Muslim headdress in schools was confirmed by the constitutional court in 2004 in a test case, but many states have since amended laws to prevent this. A spate of so-called 'honour killings' of migrant women from forced marriages has also prompted heated discussion. Meanwhile, signs suggest that Germany still doesn't have a grip on right-wing Nazi violence in depressed rural regions, especially in parts of Brandenburg. A couple of high-profile assaults on migrant Germans in 2006 just before the football World Cup reopened this sensitive issue.

But right-wing – or any other winged – attempts to create conformity in Germany are doomed to glorious failure. The country is simply too diverse and culturally dynamic. In 2006 Unesco declared Berlin Europe's first City of Design. Berlin received this prestigious accolade for its fusion of design, architecture, art and culture, and it now joins Buenos Aires in the Unesco Creative Cities Network. But the cultural boom goes well beyond 'poor but sexy' Berlin – as its gay governing mayor likes to describe his city. German film is riding a new wave of popularity, while in eastern Germany the New Leipzig School of painting is showing the world that Germany, indeed, has not only caught up with its past, it is confidently breaking out into new and exciting directions.

# The Authors



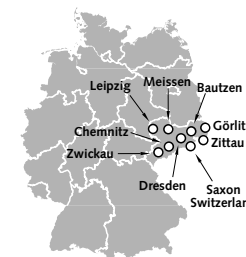
## ANDREA SCHULTE-PEEVERS

**Coordinating Author,  
Getting Started, Itineraries, Berlin,  
Brandenburg, Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Directory & Transport**

Andrea has logged countless miles travelling in nearly 60 countries on five continents and carries her dog-eared passport like a badge of honour. Born and raised in Germany and educated in London and at UCLA, she's built a career on writing about her native country for almost two decades. She's authored or contributed to about 30 Lonely Planet titles, including all five editions of this book as well as the city guide to Berlin. For this trip she decided to trade her house in Los Angeles for a teensy rooftop apartment in Berlin for six months of research and writing – and didn't regret a day of it.

### My Favourite Trip

In all my travels through Germany there remained one blank spot: Saxony. So naturally, I jumped at the chance of updating the chapter for this edition, and I wasn't going to be disappointed. Dresden (p166) was love at first sight, of course, but there were plenty of unexpected surprises too. Chemnitz (p194) charmed me with its can-do spirit, rejuvenated city centre and handsome Art Nouveau villas, while in Zwickau (p197) I spent hours exploring one of the best car museums anywhere. The medieval silhouette of Bautzen (p199) etched itself into my memory as much as the whimsical rock formations and unassailable Königstein fortress in Saxon Switzerland (p180). Leipzig struck me for its progressive art scene, intriguing GDR history museums and kicking nightlife. In Zittau (p203) I saw rare Lenten veils I'd never even heard of, while gorgeous Görlitz (p201), in its restored perfection, felt like the set of some period film. The wine in Meissen (p182) was so delicious, I took home a case. Come to think of it, I'm down to one bottle – time to go back.



### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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### JEREMY GRAY

#### Bavaria

Jeremy was born to English immigrants in the Bible-belt town of Shreveport, Louisiana, and went to university in Austin, Texas, where he tackled the devilish complexity of the German language. A scholarship landed him in Mainz, a perfect spot to deconstruct Brecht, cycle through vineyards and teach English grammar in nearby Rüsselsheim. Jeremy has a master's degree in International Relations (University of Canterbury) and is a former correspondent for news media in London, Amsterdam and Frankfurt am Main. He has travelled around North America and Europe for Lonely Planet, but Bavaria ranks high in the emotive landscapes department. Home is a renovated butter factory in Berlin.



### ANTHONY HAYWOOD

#### Snapshot, History, The Culture, Thuringia, Hesse, Harz Mountains

Anthony is a journalist with a background in literature and Russian language. But it's travel he enjoys most of all. His first visit to Germany was in the late 1980s, when he spent time in a house with German students just before the Berlin Wall fell. Soon he was back again – to see friends while travelling to Moscow which had just collapsed into postcoup chaos. Since those heady days he has divided his time between Frankfurt am Main and Göttingen, working in writing professions and – among very many other things for this edition of Germany – watching *The Big Lebowski* in a down-at-heel pub in Goethe's Weimar.



### SARAH JOHNSTONE

#### Environment, Food & Drink, Saxony-Anhalt, Lower Saxony, Bremen, Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Sarah covered a large northern swathe of the country, including the hundreds of kilometres of sandy beaches of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein, the flat heathland of Lower Saxony and vibrant city of Hamburg that many people don't immediately identify with Germany. A freelance journalist based in London, she's previously worked at Reuters and several travel magazines. After some dozen or so Lonely Planet guidebooks (you think she'd learn) she still hates author bios.



### DANIEL ROBINSON

#### Baden-Württemberg & Rhineland-Palatinate & Saarland

Daniel grew up in Northern California, Illinois and Israel. Based in Tel Aviv, he is active in groups promoting urban bike paths and Israeli-German dialogue. His travel writing, including Lonely Planet guides to France and Paris, has been published in nine languages. Daniel has an abiding interest in the minutiae of *Maultaschen* and is endlessly enchanted by the teeny-tiny trains – as seen from the heights of the Rheinhöhenweg trail – that slither along both banks of the Romantic Rhine. He prefers to indulge his weakness for apple strudel with vanilla ice cream on the shores of Lake Constance.

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