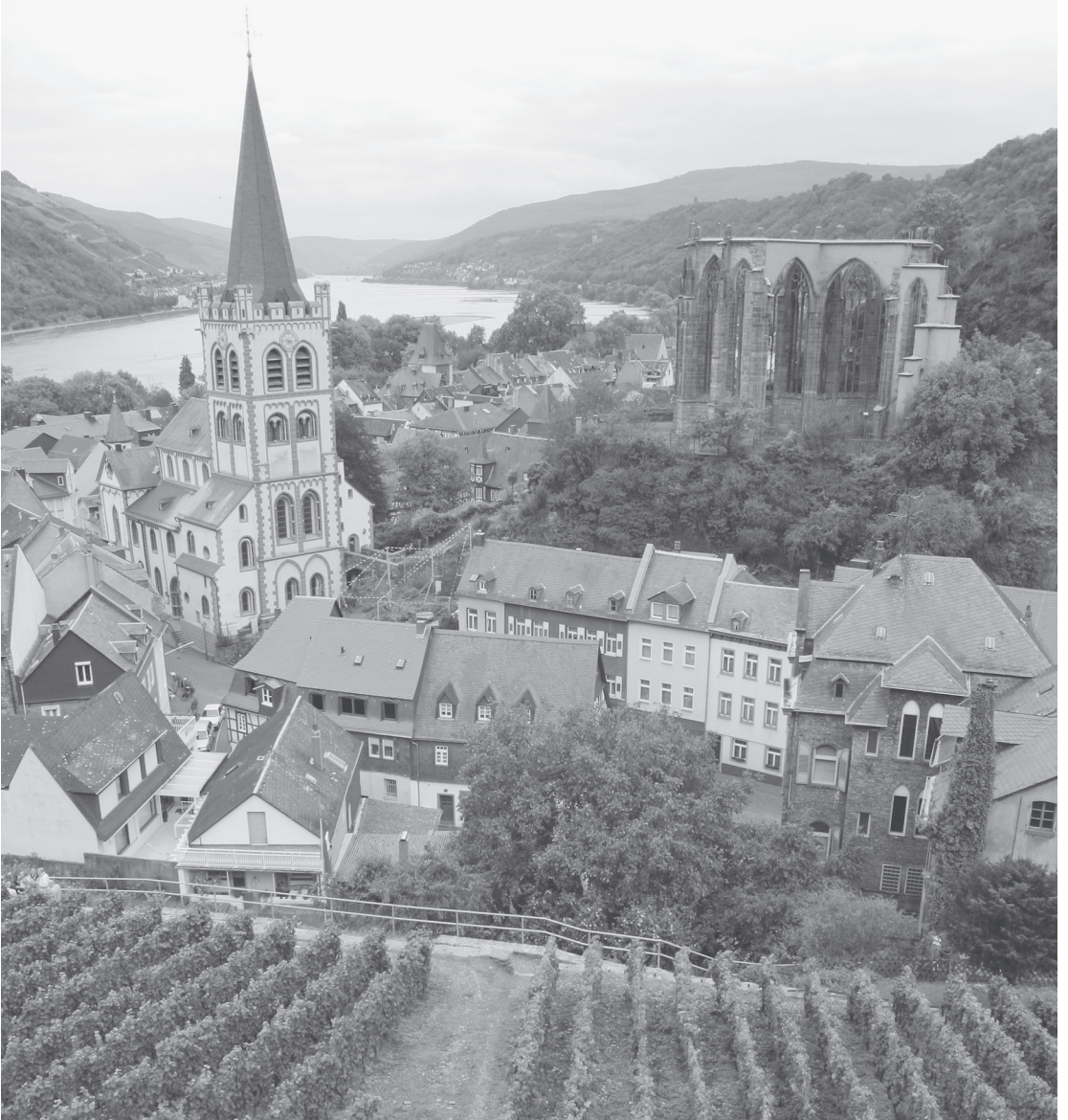




GERMANY



GERMANY

(Deutschland)

Deutschland is energetic, efficient, and organized. It is Europe's muscle man—both economically and wherever people line up (Germans have a reputation for pushing ahead). Its bustling cities hold 85 percent of its people, and average earnings are among the highest on earth. Ninety-seven percent of the workers get one-month paid vacations, and, during the other 11 months, they create a gross national product that's about one-third of the United States' and growing. Germany has risen from the ashes of World War II to become the world's fifth-largest industrial power, ranking fourth in steel output and nuclear power and third in automobile production. Germany shines culturally, beating out all but two countries in the production of books, Nobel laureates, and professors.

Germany is young by European standards. In 1850, there were 35 independent countries in what is now Germany. In medieval times, there were 350, each with its own weights, measures, coinage, king, and lotto. "Germany" was finally united in 1871 by Otto von Bismarck. Over the next century, it lost two World Wars and was split down the middle during the Cold War.

While its East–West division lasted about 40 years, historically Germany has been divided between north and south. While northern Germany was barbarian, is Protestant, and assaults life aggressively, southern Germany was Roman, is Catholic, and enjoys a more relaxed tempo of life. The American image of Germany is beer-and-pretzel Bavaria (probably because that was "our" sector after the war). This historic north–south division is less pronounced these days, as Germany becomes a more mobile society. The big chore facing Germany today

How Big, How Many, How Much

- 138,000 square miles (half the size of Texas)
- 82 million people (four times that of Texas)
- 1 euro (€) = about \$1.20

Germany



is integrating the wilted economy of what was East Germany into the powerhouse economy of the West. This monumental task has given the West higher taxes (and second thoughts).

Most Germans in larger towns and the tourist trade speak at least some English. Still, you'll get more smiles by using the German pleasantries. In smaller, nontouristy towns, German is the norm. German—like English, Dutch, Swedish, and Norwegian—is a Germanic language, making it easier on most American ears than Romance languages (such as French and Italian). The most important phrases: “Hello” is *guten Tag* (GOO-tehn tahg), “please” is *bitte* (BIT-teh), and “thank you” is *danke*

(DAHNG-keh). For more, see the “Survival Phrases” near the end of this book (excerpted from *Rick Steves' German Phrase Book*).

For most visitors, the rich pastries, wine, and beer provide the fondest memories of Germanic cuisine. The wine (85 percent white) is



particularly good from the Mosel and Rhine areas. Germany is also a big beer country. The average German, who drinks 40 gallons of beer a year, knows that *dunkles* is dark, *belles* is light, *Flaschenbier* is bottled, and *vom Fass* is on tap. *Pils* is barley-based, *Weize* is wheat-based, and *Malzbier* is the malt beer that children learn with. *Radler* is half beer and half lemon-lime soda. As for treats, gummi bears are local gumdrops, with a cult following (beware of imitations—you must see the word *Gummi*), and Nutella is a chocolate-hazelnut spread that may change your life.

Germany's tourist route today—Rhine, Romantic Road, Bavaria—was yesterday's trade route, connecting its most prosperous medieval cities. Your best first glance at Germany is the Rhine River Valley. We've featured this romantic region in this book, along with two convenient, interesting big cities nearby: Köln, which is directly on the Rhine train line, and Frankfurt, connected by its airport to most anywhere in the world.

ACCESSIBILITY IN GERMANY

Even though the Rhine Valley is hilly and often inaccessible, Germany generally has good access. The western half of the country, bombed during World War II, has been rebuilt into more modern styles that often meet good accessibility standards. Bigger cities such as Frankfurt and Köln are relatively flat and offer decent access.

Under the slogan “Tourism Without Barriers,” Germany is offering a wide range of travel packages that include barrier-free accommodation, activities, and services. Germany even celebrated the “Year of the Disabled” in 2003. In German, a wheelchair is called a *Rollstuhl* (roll-shtool).

The **German National Tourist Office** can help you plan your trip (www.cometogermany.com). Contact the nearest office: in New York (122 E. 42nd St. #2000, New York, NY 10168, tel. 800-651-7010 or

212/661-7200, fax 212/661-7174, gntonyc@d-z-t.com), in Illinois (P.O. Box 59594, Chicago, IL 60659, tel. 773/539-6303, fax 773/539-6378, gntoch@aol.com), or in California (501 Santa Monica Blvd. #607, Santa Monica, CA 90401, tel. 310/394-2580, fax 310/260-2923, info@gntolax.com).

Transportation

Facilities at German airports and train stations are usually good. Throughout the German transportation system, symbols provide guidance for those who do not speak the language. In most big cities, subways have at least some accessible stations and trains—ask for a map with access marked.

The **German Rail Company** (Deutsche Bahn) offers free assistance for passengers with limited mobility. You can contact the all-Germany Mobility Service Office (MobilitatsServiceZentrale) at least one day before your trip (Mon–Fri 8:00–20:00, Sat 8:00–14:00, closed Sun, tel. 0180-551-2512). They’ll arrange for assistance—such as ramps and lifts—at major train stations along your route (but may not be able to provide assistance at smaller, unmanned stations). On the Web site, you’ll find more information about this service, including an online request form you can fill out for a specific journey: www.bahn.de, click on “Internat .Guests,” then “Handicapped.”

Organizations

The **Federal Association for the Disabled** (Bundesverband Selbsthilfe Körperbehinderter) can answer basic questions on access (Altkrautheimer Strasse 20, Krautheim, tel. 06294/42810, fax 06294/428-179, www.bsk-ev.org).

Bifos helps people with disabilities find resources to assist them during a stay in Germany. They also rent accessible vans (Jordanstrasse 5, Kassel, tel. 0561/728-8540, fax 0561/728-8529, www.bifos.org, bifos@t-online.de).

The **National Tourism Coordination Agency for All** (Nationale Koordinationstelle Tourismus für Alle, a.k.a. “NatKo”) runs tours for the disabled (tel. 06131/250-410, fax 06131/214-848, www.natko.de).