
Please note that the "CasualLifeGermany" is written ~~#~~ in a casual manner!, just to glimpse through the modern society of Germany. If you're kinda conservative & too much fussy about the cultural values, I recommend not to go further. Thanks for your understanding. ok....here we go!*

Flirt :-)

Every Second Counts

After 30 seconds, it's all over. At least, according to one German behavioral scientist. His study says that after half a minute, a man and a woman know whether they fit together...or not. So, if you don't want to miss out on the action, you have to be quick, and creative. Cheap pick up lines like "Do you have any plans for tonight?" are definitely out. Eye contact and good manners will score more points. Kurt Tucholsky once said that flirting is holding hands via eye contact. Exaggerated macho posturing is uncalled for. 68 percent of the women surveyed said their hearts beat faster when a man helps them into their coat. Both women and men listed alcohol as the biggest flirt killer.

Overall, women in Germany are quite emancipated. Dinner bills are often split down the middle. It's not uncommon for a woman to pick up a man. Germans strive for perfection. That's evident when it comes to flirting. There are schools teaching how to take those first steps toward meeting someone new. A school in the Ruhr area offers an international flirting course (ah..we havnt heard it well before & to the worst case we dont even have such courses in university either). You can learn that you're better off trying to lure an Italian into your home with a butterfly collection than a stamp collection (not always). In Italy, unwanted attention is rewarded with something more poetic than a simple, "Bug off." Romans prefer the more poetic "Buy yourself a forest and get lost in it."

xtra tips'sssssh!: ~~#~~

(excerpts from article originally written by Mrs. Elena Beier, born in Germany; partly edited)

About 13.5 million of the 81.2 million people who live in Germany are single. In 1999, that was about 38 percent of all households. Of course all of these people aren't pitiful, ugly creatures who are yearning to finally be able to throw the wedding

bouquet into a cheering crowd of former fellow-sufferers. And all those male singles aren't longing for a serious relationship. There are other ways for them to get their shirts washed and ironed without throwing their anchor into the sea of matrimony. So, when you're single, it doesn't necessarily mean you're alone. Because being alone is not the goal of the Single life.

Single people flirt like mad. It happens everywhere, in the laundromat (a place with an above-average Single content), in the food section of the "Kauhof" department store (since Singles have a higher-than-average buying power) and even in traffic jams (where you can allegedly spot a single person by the "Flirt-Sticker" that has his or her mobile phone number on it). It's as uncomplicated as that, and it crackles with eroticism in Germany's discos, bars and even supermarkets, traffic jams and computer chatrooms. Especially if you believe the many so-called "flirting counselors." These characters pen help books and offer tips on the Internet, and when you read them, you might be astonished. "Don't whistle at your flirting target," they say, or "don't talk to the other person from behind," "Don't show them that you are desperately searching for a boy/girlfriend: they'll feel that intuitively and back off." Who would have thought...?

Hundreds of books with titles like "The A to Z of Flirting", "Flirt Irresistibly", "Flirt...but how?" are gathering dust on the store shelves. There are even flirting schools, where you finally find out what you never would have found out on your own, For example, "If you don't want it to turn out to be just a one night stand, better wait on the sex." Or, "Don't gush about your ex-boyfriend...the male ego is fragile." Do the readers also find these tips a little uninspiring, or are they themselves really so uninspired that they need these little pearls of wisdom?

In case you have no need for such "wisdom," let's take an "advanced" course and I'll talk a little about my own personal experience. Because I came from another cultural background, with a lot of mental baggage. My first piece of advice: don't take what you've heard about the war of the sexes in Germany so seriously. German women aren't the "ugly feminists" they're made out to be and they haven't emasculated the other half of the population, turning them into a bunch of frightened weaklings. And don't be under the illusion that your super-macho behavior, or that of a "New Age Sensitive Man" is going to make you more valuable on the German flirting market. You could well be misunderstood. Here in Germany these days, there's usually payment involved for these kinds of role-playing. Even women are doing it more and more.

In the first three seconds (3 seconds ???!! ...sooooo fast) of flirting, according to scientific studies, you usually know if the other person is interested or not. Then you attempt to turn your flirting into talking. Where did he grow up? Who are his parents? What is he studying? If instead you're the one who's talking, just remember this, at the end of it all you'll know just about as much now as you did before the whole thing started. And think: if in your own country you didn't like those boys who just had to see every football game, it probably won't be that different in Germany.

And put away those prejudices about splitting the bill in a café. If he wants to pay, insist on 50-50 only if you don't want to see him again. Because a woman's insistence on covering her part of the bill is usually interpreted as a strike out. The fact that you also earn money and aren't on the hunt for a sugar daddy can all be cleared up later, if the flirting develops into something more.

On the subject of more...watch out for the race-to-the-altar type...even if your flirting

target describes himself as "separated,": Marriage in Germany is a deadly serious affair (not even all couples are separated by death). A divorce is extremely lengthy and expensive. So, if more comes of this little flirt, keep those fingers away from anything gold or silver!

Now as a person reaches 30, he or she begins to think of marriage and children. No wonder, in a country with one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. There's even a new German word for it, something equivalent to "Mr. or Ms. Right Now." As a student, you should probably wait a while before engaging in the "serious part of life" and just enjoy your youth, freedom and of course, the flirting!.

As we, indians just've got a different chemistry funda on flirting (perhaps due to our bemusing, self-contradictory society implication & extravaganza cinematic view) we gotta make sure that we're not in wrong track. After all, its all about science of flirting. Nonthless, it doesn't guarentee the success. Sometimes your unique style works , who knows !. ah...cool I'm not expert anyway :-)

Gays & lesbians:

Statistical analysis indicates that not fewer than five percent of the population is gay or lesbian. Thanks to the tireless work of numerous organizations and clubs (hmm! I'm not gonna 2 enlist their clubs anyway :-)), as well as the not to be underestimated contribution of the gay lobby, the situation of gays and lesbians has improved significantly in the last decade. There is much more everyday acceptance and tolerance. Ten years ago a gay or lesbian couple walking in public hand in hand would have attracted negative attention, today it is hardly considered unusual. Strong gay communities have established themselves in every major German city, and are increasingly becoming an important economic group. In Cologne and Berlin, the two cities with the largest gay communities, the gay scene extends beyond the subculture, and many entertainment outlets, service industries, and real estate services cater mainly to gay customers.

More and more politicians and celebrities in Germany are openly admitting their homosexuality. To be gay or lesbians no longer to be marginalized. In afternoon television talk shows gay sex is discussed openly, and the daily soaps long ago introduced their quota of gay and lesbian characters. With many goals of emancipation already achieved, many gay people are more concerned with superficialities than with content. Film and television has helped to make the "Adonis type" image of the gay man the model of homosexual narcissistic manliness. The image of the beautiful, fashion conscious gay man continues to enjoy much currency.

The traditional Christopher Street Day (CSD) political events and parades in Berlin and Cologne on the first weekends of July continue to attract tens of thousands of participants and hundreds of thousands of spectators, and the carnival-like atmosphere increases each year. The biggest CSD parade takes place in Cologne. In 2000, organizers registered almost 700,000 visitors. Almost every German university has gay and lesbian representatives and political representatives, who - independently of the student organization AstA but with its financial support - defend the interests of gays and lesbian students and teaching staff, offer help and information for interested students, and maintain libraries and archives of gay and

lesbian culture.

Quark: Its got nothing to do with Ducks #

[by Donovan Gloy, born in South Africa, moved to Germany in 2001-just partly edited without changing the essence]

Germans, will foreigners ever understand them? As a foreigner, I most certainly have difficulties at times and this not only due to the language but more so, the culture . When they move from a place of residence, they take everything with them, from light fittings to the kitchen sink, quite literally!.

However, the lack of a kitchen has afforded me the opportunity to sample local cuisine and then some. Germany you see, is fortunately positioned between some of the world's gastronomic greats. There's France for wines, Belgium for chocolate and mussels, Holland for cheese and let's give Austria a hop, skip and a jump directly into the home of the pizza, Italy.

Germany also has a strong Turkish influence and where would we be without the infamous Turkish kebab? Most of the major cities have a Turkish district in which one can find everything related to the country. These are colourful slices of Turkey in Germany really, with fantastic corner cafés, delis and coffee shops owned by short moustached, dark-haired men with beer bellies who talk loudly and laugh even louder. The hospitable nature of this culture, makes it almost impossible to forgo an authentic Turkish meal in Germany.

Germans have always been a well travelled nation, introducing all sorts of cuisine into the country. One is spoilt for choice when looking for a slightly different eating experience as there are so many to choose from. Of course, if you're looking to dine purely German then all the stereo-types hold true...it's beer, bratwurst and jaw-breaking breads all the way.

Shopping for food is also an interesting experience as German's aren't a culture geared towards shopping malls. Instead, they prefer to go to the Käseladen for cheese and to the Metzgerei for coldmeats and sausages. Naturally, one also goes to the Bäckerei for breads and this is where it gets really interesting since the Germans for some unknown reason, have more types of breads than there are bicycles on its streets. Naturally, it takes foreigners an age to learn what each one is called and then to understand the differences between the various types of flours and seeds used.

This knowledge can neither be found in a book nor gleaned from the Internet and asking is just out of the question unless one has unlimited time available and a thorough grasp of the German language. Moreover, the loaves are allmightily heavy and one has to practice economy of shopping for fear of breaking an arm trying to get them home. Another very interesting point is they don't give you any bags to carry your stuff home in. Plastic bags can be purchased from the cashier in times of need but should be recycled. Instead, you either have a basket or a fabric bag that is used time and time again and is much kinder to the environment.

Eating and the lifestyle are, like the bread, a little heavy to say the least. More importantly, the hearty dining is also delicious. Jeans will become a burden to close and all those tarts and strudels will eventually take their toll on the slimmest of beings. Fear not however, in their quest for a healthy lifestyle and environment,

Germans tend to walk wherever possible or use a bicycle. This often leaves pedestrians nervous as riders whizz past them, one often sees them stepping over bicycles parked everywhere and which often litter the sidewalks.

Germany is not the place for anyone with an intolerance to dairy products either. The variety is astounding and one can spend an age in the dairy section of a supermarket alone. Yogurt in every colour, flavour and various fat content pile up in shopping baskets as do spreadable cheeses. My most remarkable find to date has to be what the Germans call Quark. No, it has nothing to do with ducks but is rather a type of spreadable white dairy substance. Neither a cheese nor a yogurt, its consistency lies somewhere in-between.

Any visitor to Germany will undoubtedly be impressed with the choice of restaurants and foodstuffs available. You got 2 c all kind of restaurants ranging from Indian to italian all around the city. Living in the country is most certainly a culinary pleasure. In heidelberg, for instance you

Celebrations

Season of Good Humor

"Germans go into the cellar to laugh," runs one malicious prejudice. But it's not true. Take the annual Rosenmontag - or Rose Monday - carnival celebrations in Cologne. Perfect strangers - dressed as the Pope, a penguin, or an airline pilot - embrace and kiss one another. In bars, partygoers sing along to songs with such deeply meaningful texts as: "The caravan is moving on, the sultan is thirsty." The city's bars make 40 percent of their annual turnover and their guests are grateful for each little rise in their blood-alcohol level. This time of year is generally known as the fifth season. More specifically, western Germans call it "Karneval", and southern Germans "Fastnacht" or "Fasching." It begins on the 11th of November - which is, of course, the eleventh month - at 11:11 am. Critics call it "organized fun" and flee the carnival zones for more sober - in every sense of the word - northern Germany. Berlin, for example.

The capital has its own organized mega-party - the Love Parade. Every summer, hundreds of thousands of young ravers take to the streets to celebrate the sounds of techno and the joys of love.

A celebration all Germans try to avoid is the family reunion, where a meeting with uncle Manfred or auntie Heidi is unavoidable. The "Partykeller," or basement party, which was a big hit in the '60s and '70s, is definitely no longer in - this is hardly a surprise as it involves being in a damp subterranean room with no natural light. These days, cellars are for storing your old record collection, the one you used to subject your friends to at basement parties. The modern version of the basement party is the balcony barbeque (the smaller the balcony, the better), or even the stairwell party.

Of course, Germans are particular about celebrating the victory of their favourite soccer team. Unfortunately, it's been some time since the national team gave them any reason to do this.

As far as birthdays are concerned, Germans like to "celebrate in" i.e. get the

festivities underway on the night before the occasion so everyone is feeling good when midnight strikes. In German universities there is an infamous tradition of freshmen or "first semester parties. And overall there is a general philosophy of crossing each party bridge when you come to it.

Carnival in Germany

Carnival is celebrated with greater dedication in parts of Germany than in any, other European country. In Germany, Mardi Gras is also referred to as the fifth and foolish season ('dienärrische Zeit'). It is a time of elaborate parades, masks, balls and election of Carnival king and queen and official madness. The exact time of celebration and the traditions vary from region to region but it generally takes place in early spring, seven weeks before Easter and in theory it starts on 11 November at 11.11a.m although little more than backstage planning takes place before New Year.

The festival itself is variously known as Karneval (Rhineland), Fassenacht (Mainz), Fasching (Bavaria) and Fastnacht or Fasnet (South West Germany), and the different names denote totally different forms of celebration. The chief towns' famous for their Carnival spectacles are Aachen, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Mainz, Munich and Münster, but even smaller localities put on their own celebrations, not to mention the many parties held in schools, youth clubs and places of work.

Getting around Germany

The Germans are extremely adept at getting people (and things) efficiently from Point A to Point B and it shows. Its world-class transportation system is one of the most admirable things about the country. The road, rail, and air systems are all extensive and well-maintained. Public transportation in cities is also remarkable. This site contains all the information you will need to take advantage of Germany's transportation networks.

DB

Germany has one of the world's best passenger rail systems. Indeed the convenience and punctuality of German public transport is admired around the world. There aren't many places that you can't get to with it, and the trip will be comfortable, economical, and punctual. Other than the automobile, rail is by far the most common means of intercity transport. An average of 350,000 people use the 32,000 daily trains of the Deutsche Bahn (GermanRail) system. These trains serve over 7,000 destinations using 38,000 km of welded track, 16,000 km of which are electrified. Work is ongoing to improve and additional 3,200 km of this for high-speed travel.

Car

Germans are known to be a car-loving nation and ofcourse they manufacture world class cars. Well, its not tough to guess whether they love wives/ hubbies better than their car. Germany boasts an excellent network of streets. However, almost all bigger cities suffer from a severe parking problem. Space is scarce and expensive. One way streets and traffic jams often take enjoyment out of the ride.

Public transport is excellent. Germany's rail network is comfortable, reliable and fast. The website offers loads of information on time tables, services and discounts. If you

can take the train don't bother using public busses.

All major cities feature impressive public transport systems. Tube, tram and busses assure reliable transportation. During the night, there often exists a network of night busses, a cheap alternative to taking a taxi. Many of Germany's cities encourage cyclists with designated bicycle lanes.

Heidelberg

As being *IndoHeidelberger*, I've got to say something more about heidelberg. For people all over the world, Heidelberg is the very image of romantic Germany. Heidelberg's popularity is based on 3 pillars: its location, castle and university. Situated in the valley of Neckar river, the beautiful old town with its sights and narrow, picturesque roads, is easily accessible on foot.

The river nectar and the sheer exuberance of the life led by the students of Germany's oldest and most tradition-bound university all combine to make the place quite irresistible to countless visitors. There are nice views of Heidelberg as a whole from the graceful Old Bridge (Alte Brücke). You walk through its gateway with twin towers topped by spiky helmets. If you have enough time, there are breathtaking views from the "philosopher's path"(Philosophenweg) on the other riverside, trod by many seeking inspiration from the incomparable panorama of city, river and castle.

The city's atmosphere is moulded by its university. A favourite among Germany's students it has always guaranteed a certain free spirit and been a home to great thinkers and an impressive number of Nobel laureates. Every fifth of heidelberg is a student(you would see this reflects in t?icky game of searching flats / paying terrible amount monthly). Lively main street is ideal for extended shopping: In the pedestrian area no cars or public transportation are allowed to disturb the experience.

The world famous castle is without doubt Heidelberg's highlight. A perfect view, numerous cultural activities and festivals attract the castle's countless visitors. However I wonder whether its far better than our Indian architectural systems, just think about our Red Fort, Konark, Taj, Mamallapuram, Khajuraho, thats just uncomparable. but, they simply worship this castle / old archies like anything.

Study Time - Party Time

One thing is for sure - German parties are better than their reputation. Of course, there are a lot of clichés about the German ability to party, most of them involve adjectives like "cold," "humorless" or "distant." But in fact Germans are perfectly capable of letting their hair down with the best of them. The German student party tourist, however, should arm him or herself with a few key pieces of information about Teutonic custom, if they want to have a really good time and avoid any unpleasant surprises. For starters, think capitalism! It is not at all unusual for German student party guests to be required to bring their own food and or drink. That's probably got

something to do with the German relationship to money. And while we're on the subject, here's another important tip: even if someone has personally invited you to their birthday party in a bar or a restaurant, make sure you have enough cash on hand to quench your thirst. That's the best way to avoid unpleasant and

embarrassing situations, because it's not unknown for a German birthday boy or girl to keep their hands firmly out of their pockets. But hey, at least they invited you - it's just like sport, taking part is what really counts!

Amateur Philosophers

How do you get to know people at parties? At this point I would like to contradict, although only partially, the widely accepted cliché that Germans are introverted and incommunicative. It's not true. They just have rules that SEEs (southeast Europeans) may find a little strange. It's not easy to determine who makes the first move, and who talks to whom first. Chatty types may be a dime a dozen in southern Europe but they're thin on the ground in Germany. So don't be afraid to take the initiative and talk to people because most Germans, although they're not so themselves, think the fiery southern temperament is great. Be advised, however, that the range of conversation topics is narrow. You will find that your fellow students are keen to talk about their work, their studies or philosophy. Not surprising really, since Germany is known as the Land of Poets and Thinkers.

German students often complain about the Unverbindlichkeit of their fellow students from southern or eastern Europe. They simply find it too one-dimensional or superficial when they talk about such things as clothes, nightlife, or entertainment in general. Of course the flip side of this state of affairs is that SEEs (see above explanation) often find the conversational topics at German parties a little too dry, a little too shall we say, metaphysical. And another thing, it can take some time for party small talk to move into the more personal sphere. And by the way, you can easily be misunderstood if you take too much interest in the opposite sex too soon. There's a definite risk of being written off as a - southern European - playboy type. And that's where the cliché strikes back, because even the politically correct, distanced Teutons have their prejudices and their own clichés about other countries.

In vino veritas

As the alcohol level rises, the inhibitions disappear - a rule that applies here, as everywhere. For the SEE (see explanation above), German partygoers appear to be pretty relaxed about their relationships. It would appear that alcohol-related "lapses" are treated with a high degree of tolerance. And there is one other major alcoholic benefit - many studentissimos abandon their pseudo-intellectual claptrap. Finally, there is no more talk of the "Land of Poets and Thinkers," and the Germans can get down to the serious business of contradicting all the clichés about themselves.

One such cliché is certainly never to be observed at parties - the punctuality myth. It's definitely uncool to turn up at a party on time. If you're smart, you'll let the others wait for you. And if you're a smoker, don't be offended if you ask for a cigarette and your German fellow smoker reaches into his pack, takes one out and hands it to you rather than offering you the pack. It's neither an insult nor a warning not to ask for another one. On the contrary!

But you'll have the most fun discovering all these things and experiencing all these situations for yourself. Especially when it's such a pleasant cultural phenomena as party going. So off you go... and have fun!

Sports & Fun

Never really Stress-Free

Former German chancellor Helmut Kohl once opened a political hornet's nest when he spoke of "Amusement Park Germany." He was simply making the point that Germans have lost their taste for hard work. The message didn't go down well in a country where four million people are unemployed. Still, there is some truth to Mr. Kohl's statement. At the beginning of the century, Germans worked hard and had some time off. Now, it seems, Germans work less and play more than ever.

This in a country where Martin Luther once spoke of the purifying importance of honest labour. Never in history have the Germans had so much free time on their hands. But that doesn't mean they spend their days lazing on the couch. Most find some meaningful way of using their leisure hours, which can lead to plenty of stress. When one gets bored with video games or surfing the internet, there is always the corner pub where people can meet to discuss their next vacation destinations.

Getting away from it all is the number one leisure time activity in Germany. Automobiles, sports and computers follow it closely. If there's time left over, some go to the fitness studio, to try and get rid of some of the evidence of an affluent society. It's as if the Olympic creed reads: Better looking; thinner; in better shape.

And of course, we can't leave out the classic sports club (The old joke goes: whenever two Germans meet, they form a club). Today there are clubs which follow every new trend from the US, from power-walking to jumping rope...or as we say in German, Seilchenspringen.

The German Language - A Baffling Case

"Why the f... can't the Tuwort come früher (earlier)?" Swearing of this kind is common among foreigners learning German. As common as the disastrous results of trying to use the German that they've just learned. "Können Sie mir bitte drei Brötchen verkaufen?" Perfectly normal German. Translated it means, "Could you please sell me three rolls?" But the answer of the baker is an unintelligible one: "Moana Sie Semmeln?" There are three ways of explaining this baffling situation: Either one is in the wrong country, the teachers have taught one the wrong language, or perhaps people don't speak German in Germany. Of course the Germans do speak German, but at times it's so smothered by local dialects that a foreigner has a hard time comprehending it. Hence the language sometimes sounds Swabian, sometimes Kölsch (the dialect spoken along the Rhine) and if you're unlucky sometimes Bavarian, in which case you won't know what just hit you. As if standard German wasn't complicated enough.

Even Native Speakers stumble

The genders (masculine, feminine and neutral) seem to follow a whimsical logic of their own. The woman (das Weib) has a neutral gender, while the thing (die Sache) is feminine. And why for heaven's sake does a brassiere have a masculine gender? These rules of grammar are definitely not easy to understand. But in this country of thinkers and poets, even a native speaker stumbles when it comes to deciding between writing capital or small letters or deliberating the finer points of grammar such as the conjunctive. The bitterly controversial German orthographic reform has only led to further muddles. Even placing commas has become a writer's nightmare

and the unrestrained tendency to nominalise, a fond speciality of the German language, results in monstrously long words such as "Betäubungsmittelverordnungänderungsgesetz". (No attempts at translating that one!) That's the German language for you – not always beautiful, but definitely exact.

Internet Language

But, the German language lives on and nonchalantly helps itself to words from the English one. What you get is "Denglisch", considered by many as modern and hip. "Coole Kids surfen durch das Internet", everyone understands that. After all the internet has fundamentally changed the language of Generation @ in Germany too. "Browser", "Provider", "Server", "Update" – language purists can wrinkle up their noses at that: Like most other languages, German absorbs Internet jargon as soon as it is coined. But sometimes the beautiful new world of technology also leads to strange language formulations: Instead of a mobile telephone, the Germans refer to it as a "Handy", though the word doesn't exist in the English language. But you can still live with that. Sometimes things can become much worse. Would you like a little sample? Here goes: Germany's most famous fashion designer, Jil Sander was said to have remarked recently: "Mein Leben ist eine giving-story. Für den Erfolg entscheidend war mein coordinated concept. Die audience hat das alles supported". Loosely translated: "My life is a giving-story. What was decisive for success was my coordinated concept. The audience supported all that." How horrific!

Problematic Pronouns: "Du" and "Sie"

[written by Klaus Dahmann on his native language]

It all began when we were 16. Life as a full-time teenager can be confusing at times, but the start of the 11th grade brought on yet another hurdle to our already baffling teenage lives: From then on, the teachers greeted us with the formal German you-form "Sie", as opposed to the informal "Du". From one day to the next, they had instantly turned us into adults, two years before we were officially destined to this privilege. From this day on, too, school classes were an amusing affair, with teachers varying constantly from "Du" to "Sie", or attempting to avoid the choice by adopting more elaborate, but rather awkward forms of address.

The German personal pronoun problem is a daily stumbling-block for Germans and foreigners alike. The rules may sound simple, but are not always as simple to apply: Under-18-year-olds can be addressed with "Du", but anyone who at least appears older, should be spoken to with "Sie". "Du" is the usual form of address among students, including elderly students, who are generally quick to offer fellow scholars a friendly "Du". The informal you-form is also used by friends, at the local sports club, at parties, in pubs and other locations frequented by young people.

The days when children said "Sie" to their grandparents and parents are thankfully over, but "Sie" is still a must when addressing shopkeepers or university professors. Whether or not the formal tone is dropped lies alone in the hands of the eldest and more distinguished of conversation partners.

Nevertheless, these "simple" rules still cause confusion in a country where the "Sie" and "Du"-rules belong to a child's elementary upbringing - and in a country, where the wrong address can, at times, be fatal: The case of a

zoo-keeper, who was fired because he had addressed his boss, the zoo-director, with "Du" too often, is still present in the minds of the German people.

However, many Germans still regard a formal address as a confirmation of their authority, and the issue is therefore not to be taken too lightly. Nevertheless, the whole "Du"/"Sie"-business is often seen as a rather irritating, and superfluous affair in modern Germany, and many Germans envy their Anglo-Saxon counterparts with their simple "you".

In politics, however, "Du" and "Sie" is still popular, especially as a way of expressing friendship - or distance - symbolically. Helmut Kohl and the former Russian President Boris Yeltsin for instance, adopted the "Du"-form, a step which Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and President Vladimir Putin have not attempted yet. However, Helmut Kohl was not only famous for his close friendship with colleagues around the world, but also for his mediocre English. Rumour has it that he once addressed Margaret Thatcher, the former British Minister, with the words: "You can say you to me".

"False Friends" in the German Language #

[Juri Rescheto, born in Russia, living in Germany since 1993]

German is a tough language! Everyone who has learned it knows that. There are so many difficulties: when writing, when reading and speaking, and oh, the grammar and vocabulary. Speaking of vocabulary, it is especially important!

Most people believe German is particularly difficult because of the many words that are just so different than their mother tongue. That is not exactly the truth – words that the most alien-sounding are learned the quickest. It just takes practice getting the tongue around them and getting used to the sound. Where other problems occur are with the internationalised words. They are words that look the same in different languages, like in Russian, my mother tongue, but they mean completely different things.

"Butterbrot ohne Butter" Bread and butter without butter

This internationalisation is a tricky and malicious thing. On first glance they seem clear and understandable, really "good friends" in the jungle of what is the German language. But when you look closely they prove to be "false friends" and they can make everyday life hell.

A Russian is sitting having his breakfast. The coffee machine is brewing, the Russian cuts himself a piece of bread and spreads on some jam without butter. He is looking forward to eating his "Butterbrot" (bread and butter) but where is the butter you might be asking. Yea, the Russian does not like butter, he eats his butter and bread without butter. The confusion comes from the Russian word "butjerbrod" which means a piece of bread with anything on it. Another one is the Russian word "kekse" meaning raisin bread which is completely different than the German word "Kekse" which means cookies.

More of the "false friends"

Ah, it is not so bad you might be thinking, you are not really awake at breakfast

anyway. But the day can get increasingly worse, understand? After breakfast you go to your wardrobe to put something appropriate on. Most men wear "Krawatten" (ties). It looks really serious. On the other hand, it is extremely un-serious when instead of saying Krawatte you say "Halstuch" (scarf in German) What, you have not heard the word before? Well, in Russian we say "galstuk" which means tie – looks similar doesn't it? It could get worse. In Germany you have to show your boss an "Attest" (Doctor's note) as to why you were away in the hospital for three days which is bad enough. Where things could go wrong is in Russia "atestat" means your school diploma, and I do not think that suffices to explain why you were sick.

"Imbiss am Büfett" Lunch at the buffet

Back to office talk. It is 12 hour and it is time to put something between the teeth. In Russia at lunch time, everyone goes to the "bufjet." At a Russian "bufjet" you get the typical cold buffet as well as warm soup and other warm dishes. The Russian word "bufjet" means in German "Imbissbude" an imbiss stand.

It is 17 hour, time to go grocery shopping. Here is where you have to be especially careful! When you as a Russian ask someone in Germany "In welchen "Gastronom" kann ich noch schnell reingehen?" (in which "Gastronom" can I still get into quickly) – you will get some pretty strange looks. It is important to know that "Gastronom" means 'man' in German. Russians who make this mistake are most likely thinking of the Russian word "gastronom" which means supermarket.

"Gute Nacht" Good night

And when you finally get home you are excited to see your family (Familie in German) and you think I cannot be fooled anymore with this language. Haa! The Russian word "familija" does not mean family but 'last name'. Phoey! There is nothing left but to say Gute Nacht and to have restless dreams about the complicated German language.

More than Beer and Bratwurst

Germans drink beer, (hectic!, they just drink beer, only beer). I still dont forget my colleagues strange & unbelievable look when I said I dont prefer beer. Well, they just broken a australians world record of largest beer consumers. Proper Germans are blond and have blue eyes. They live on sausages with sauerkraut. And their music does not go beyond Beethoven and Bach. Always good for a laugh when you try to find an answer for what is typically German. But what is typical, when you are talking about a country with a population of more than 80 million?

Is it typical, that Germans have a hard time being positive about themselves? You can't think of anything either? How about hospitality, generosity and a readiness to help. Punctuality perhaps and zeal. Whatever, in the past ten years, German society has changed. Influenced by many people of different nationalities who have come and now call Germany home. For instance, in a small town heidelberg, you would see turkish, arabians, africans and americans around. And as a result, many of the old cliches just don't work anymore.

Yet the tale of the "nasty German", who has such a problem with his image in the world, was one Boris Becker and Claudia Schiffer could not get around either. But if you come to Germany with an open mind, you're in for a surprise. You will find

Germans with dreadlocks. And Germans who like to eat kebabs, tandoor chicken. Germans who like to laugh and live it up. In many places the mentality of ordinary Germans is closer to those in neighbouring countries, than it is to Germans in other (Bundes)Länder. Modern Germany is far too diverse and complex to fit into a simple cliché. There is something new to discover that is "typical" everyday. And that is probably "typically German" as well.

Clothes Make the Man

The idiom that "clothes make the man" is just as valid in Germany as elsewhere. And even if Germans don't place as much importance in their dress as, for example, the French, they have managed to rid themselves of the reputation of driving in the sartorial slow lane. Jil Sander, Karl Lagerfeld, Joop and other fashion designers have certainly contributed to that.

What one wears and when often depends on the job. For instance, computer programmers or advertising copywriters display their creativity and spontaneity with jeans and colorful t-shirts. But if you're a banker, a tie with stripes in it is practically revolutionary. And by the way, only a very few people these days run around in traditional German dress, or Tracht. This is usually the preserve of the type of older Germans who favor folk music events. But even here, there are regional differences. For example, Bavaria's state premier often sports a pair of Lederhosen to demonstrate his proximity to the people, and the northern German politician Helmut Schmidt, a former German chancellor, was rarely seen without his Hamburg sea captain's hat.

All in all, nothing is impossible. If you're not sure what's acceptable you can check in the Knigge, Germany's standard work on good manners and good taste. There you can read: "Do not attract attention either through old-fashioned dress or modern foolishness."

Academic dress codes at German universities are extremely(?) relaxed. Brief cases, collars and ties are few and far between among today's law students. Since the days of punk, few professors are likely to get upset at the sight of blue or green hairstyles. The briefcase as a student status symbol has been replaced by the cellular phone (dubbed the handy). But be warned - most art students still react adversely to public handy use!. Hmmm...Its simply far diff' from our indian dress codes. German wear not only as they wish but also as we can't dare to imagine. Well, its no wonder indian newbie coming with formal wears for first few days to months until he get realised. Its all in the game.

bye

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• # those parts (italic portions) are originally written by the respective authors