

## GERMAN

### Background

It is not easy to describe the average German since there are cultural differences between the people from different parts of the country e.g. Prussians, Franks, Frisians, Palatians, Westphalians, Bavarians, Swabians. Many of the 'typical' characteristics are likely to refer to the older generation, since the younger generation is being influenced by the changes brought about by foreign immigrants and the influx of ethnic Germans from Eastern European countries.

Historically, there has never been a homogenous German nation. In the 1400s there were numerous groups of small kingdoms, chiefdoms and townships. Germans took pride in their territorial origins more than in their 'Germanness'. This trait still persists today. Perhaps also because of recent history, some Germans have mixed feelings about being German.

### Some Typical Characteristics

*Thoroughness.* They tend towards perfectionism and enjoy formal rules and regulations. The clearer the rules and regulations the better. Their systematic approach to life can be seen on every level whether it is hobbies or environmental issues. Whatever they do, they seek to do thoroughly and with perfection, an 'all or nothing' attitude.

*People of Principle.* The average German is guided by principles and tends to stress the issue rather than the person. They hold strong opinions and convictions, and thus may not always be teachable. They can be hard, straight-forward, blunt and undiplomatic in discussions. They want matters discussed openly and frankly, with clarity and honesty. They do not enjoy talking in circles, prefer to get straight to the point and are willing to make sacrifices in issues that really matter. They have a strong sense of justice.

*Diligent and hard working.* Germans generally are diligent and reliable. They work conscientiously, in an orderly manner with commitment to the task at hand. This hard-working attitude may give way to being fussy and particular in the way a task is carried out. They may not be flexible.

*Ambitious.* Many Germans are ambitious, enjoy taking on responsibility and want to be successful. They not only want to make progress themselves but want to see things around them progressing. They are efficiency-oriented, not only in regard to work, but also in regard to people. Often it is more important for them what a person does than who he is. The average German finds his identity in what he achieves rather than in who he is. He looks for praise and correction in his job performance.

*Respect for Authority.* Rules are to be kept and authority is highly respected. Thus Germans tend to obey their leaders, but may at the same time be somewhat critical. They are loyal and reliable, keep their promises and expects others to do the same.

*Serious-minded.* Germans tend to take themselves very seriously and find it hard to laugh at themselves. They are apt to be rational, matter-of-fact and want to be taken seriously by others. Deep conversations and exchange of opinions are important. They appreciate a logical presentation of the facts in any discussion. Although they generally dislike a display of emotions they can be romantic and philosophical at times. Germans are disciplined and expect the same of others.

**What Germans like:**

Germans enjoy their privacy, and home is seen as 'sacred space'. Homes are protected from the outsider by a variety of barriers: fences, walls, hedges, gates, blinds, shutters and screening to prevent visual or auditory intrusion. Even when abroad, they like their home to be clean and comfortable. They enjoy plenty of good food, home-baked bread and strong coffee. At Christmas time the home will be typically decorated with candles and advent wreaths, and often ringing with fine classical music.

**What Germans dislike:**

Germans do not appreciate superficiality, wasting time, disorder or inefficiency. They do not like spontaneity, unplanned events or unrestrained display of feelings.

**Relating Well to Germans**

For anyone wishing to relate well with a German fellow-worker, it would be good to accept him the way he is, take him seriously, talk things over with him openly even on small matters, ask his opinion, respect his space and privacy, ask for his help, spend time with him and find out common interests.