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Victoria Livinski

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Victoria Livinski
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“In the Know in Germany: The indispensable Guide to Working and Living in Germany”
by Jennifer Phillips

This guide has a lot of good information needed for a successful transitioning to Germany life. The book starts out with presenting the map of Germany, its economic and demographic statistics (fairly up-to-date), discussing its geography and climate, and even current events and issues. I liked the approach that the author took to talk about the history of Germany – she used a time table and emphasized the most important years. I liked this approach because it goes well with the purpose of the book – to inform briefly and as efficiently as possible, not to bore with long paragraphs about the historical events.

The author also included basic information about Germany’s political-legal systems and religion. All the major holidays, festivals, and specific traditions are discussed in detail. The author also mentions the protocol for what to do and what not to do during those holidays, because traditions can be different in Germany than in United States even if it is the same holiday or celebration. The book also has a few sections on the education system of Germany and the education philosophy, concentrating on what the German students are taught in schools and why.

The next section of the book deals with the German culture. Different topics pertaining to Germany culture are discussed and then compared to the American ones. Those topics include: the notion of time, rigidity versus the flexibility of cultures, direct versus indirect communication, group dynamics, individualism and collectivism, status and hierarchy, relationships, and reasoning. At the end of each section the book provides

a paragraph called “German-American Interaction,” which talks about a specific topic from the ones above but also gives advices on how to use that certain cultural aspect successfully when interacting with a German.

Aside from telling the reader about Germany, the author also advices the reader on how to make a smooth transition to adapting to the new environment. That information could work for anybody moving anywhere, not necessarily to Germany. The author mentions the several stages of cultural adjustment: the enchantment (or the honeymoon), the disenchantment, retreat, and adjustment. Furthermore, the author talks about the impact that the move will have not only on the reader, but also on the reader’s family (if he/she has any) and it gives specific advices on how to better deal with the arising complications. Then, the author discusses some coping skills and lists a few keys to a successful adjustment. This book impressed me with this section, because it breaks down this keys to a successful adjustments to several groups depending who the reader is. The author gives separate advices to families, teens, global nomads or the third culture kids, singles, homosexuals, women, and people of different races.

The next section talks about getting around Germany. The author provides comprehensive information on what type of transportation the Germans use and what are the road rules; on finding a living place and getting the necessary paperwork in order to get the residence permit to live in Germany; what to do when one needs to bring their belongings or vehicle or even the pet to Germany. The author also lists the protocol of behavior with the neighbors, in a supermarket, some common knowledge rules that a foreigner might not know (such as that one cannot wash his/her car on the street). The book also talks about financial matters: how to handle the money in Germany, what kind

of accounts one can open there, how to pay one's bills, how the credit and cash are used (so much different than in United States). There is also a section in which the author gives some tips on socializing, dating and friendship etiquettes, gifts, communication, dining and tipping etiquettes.

The next part of the books describes the business environment, structure of German business and how it functions. The author talks about a typical company structure and compartmentalization, the shorter weekly hours of Germans (37-hour work week), the unions which are so powerful in Germany, office etiquette and relationships, women in business, meetings protocols, and tips on how to properly use the business cards.

Finally, the last section of the book includes up-to-date contact information of German embassies and consulates, automobile and transportation agencies, schools, and travel agencies. There is also a section with helpful German phrases and a CD to help the reader pronounce the words and phrases in German.

How This Book Helped Me in Germany

There were many key points that I am thankful I read in the book about Germany and Germans. They helped me adapt to the German culture easier. For example, the book talks about how Germans tend to be very direct in their communication. And I was able to observe that throughout my stay in Germany when interacting with my host family, buddies, and professors. My host family was very direct, they would ask blunt questions and would discuss very controversial topics over dinner. The professors at the Fachhochschule were very strict and direct when giving feedback to our and their students.

What I also noticed is that while the Americans tend to start giving feedback with positive remarks and then moving on to constructive criticism, the Germans do it the other way around – starting with criticism and maybe even not mentioning any of the positive aspects of one's work. The book talked about that so I did not think that the Germans are doing that because they are rude, but because that is just how they are doing things there.

Another thing that the book talked about was the issues of sexuality in Germany and throughout Europe. I was constantly amazed at the sexually explicit advertisements posted in the public view. But the book explained that Europeans are more open about topics of sexuality than the Americans are. The author also made a parallel that I liked, she said that a big difference between the European and American societies is that the Americans have less sex and more violence on TV and the Europeans the other way around. So I guess that the Europeans are not very comfortable seeing as much violence on TV as we are not comfortable seeing so much nudity on their advertisements in Europe.

The book also talked about how important the quality of products is for Germans. When we went to visit the Deutsche Telecom Company, the presenter spent a lot of time, more than I would have expected, on detailing the type of services they offer and exactly how they need to improve it. That ties back to the commitment of Germans to a quality product and I was glad that I could observe that during the presentation. The way the food is prepared in Germany is another way of seeing this aspect of German culture. The cakes from a chocolate café were prepared as works of art, with detailed layers and carefully selected ingredients.

Another thing that the book warned me about was that Germans don't make friends easily. What we call a "friend" does not have the same meaning for Germans as it has for us. Germans have very few real friends and they take their time making some. I noticed that in the youth hostel in St. Goar, when the German girls seemed very quiet and reserved and never talked about anything personal. On the contrary, the Swedish students, talked to us about anything, personal or not, and were eager to befriend us.

Flippo, Hyde. When in Germany, Do As the Germans Do; The Clued-In Guide to German Life, Language, and Culture. McGraw-Hill, Chicago: 2002.

This book is a good reference for anyone planning on spending any time in German Europe. It is split up into twenty sections including education, media and transportation; just to name a few. Each section contains approximately three to seven articles on the respective topics of discussion. At the very beginning of the book there is a quiz which tests you on the bulk of the book. It also provides the answers to the quiz in the back. The quiz is divided into ten parts which basically cover the majority of the sections in the book. Some of the topics discussed in this book are very helpful while others are completely random. All in all, it is a well-mixed base of knowledge that gives you a good introduction to the German culture.

When in Germany, Do As the Germans Do introduces a lot of helpful pointers about dealing with the Germans. Flippo uses culture and history to explain the German way of life. He tells us in this book about all the 'strange' German attitudes and traditions. He covers all the main travel subjects such as entertainment, food and drink, language, and transportation. He also talks about other topics not often found in the common travel book; such as business and economy, education, health and fitness, house and home, and science and technology.

In this book, the author discusses the basic dos and don'ts of traveling in a foreign country. He tells us that while in Germany, do not wait to be seated when you enter a restaurant. In Germany, it is customary to seat yourself, and within a few minutes the

waiter will be over to take your drink orders. Everywhere we went in Germany we were always standing awkwardly at the front of a restaurant wondering whether we should seat ourselves. Then usually a waiter or waitress would walk by and tell us to find a seat and they would be over momentarily.

This book also explains that Germans don't drink tap water. While it may seem perfectly normal to us, in Germany they will look at you with disgust. This would explain why the waiter in Cologne refused to bring me a glass of water. I usually drink a lot of water on a daily basis and it was difficult for me in Germany because I could never find any regular, flat water without gas. Stephanie explained my request to the waiter and she told me that it would just be tap water, this was fine with me. A few minutes later, one of the German buddies explained to me that they didn't have any water. I didn't understand since just a moment before it seemed as though we were in agreement that he would bring me tap water. I should have read this section on water before arriving in Germany.

One section I found particularly interesting was the section entitled "Killer Drafts and *Kreislaufstörung*: Germans and Their Favorite Ailments." This section made it sound like a lot of Germans are hypochondriacs and most everything is blamed on a draft. "Germans and some other Europeans consider even the slightest breeze from an open window to be fatal!" It explains that *Kreislaufstörung* is "an amazing collection of circulatory ailments that can range from a headache to a heart attack." It goes on to explain that "it is difficult to find an illness that a German wouldn't classify as a *Kreislaufstörung*." It says that this is the primary reason that led to the country's spa tradition. Most Germans visit a spa at least once a year for they "feel it is their right and

duty.” In Germany, spas are also covered in health insurance and they are often recommended and prescribed by doctors.

In particular, I noticed one characteristic of German culture mentioned in this book that I experienced first-hand throughout my stay in Germany. Hyde Flippo states that:

German doors and locks are an indication of the German obsession with privacy...In homes and offices, doors are numerous and more likely to be closed than open. An open door policy is a rarity in Germany. (pg. 72.)

I noticed this within the first few hours of my stay with my host family in Rheinbach, and our experiences to come continued to confirm this. I thought this was quite interesting because, while I don't generally consider myself an American, my habits and experiences from the past are very different.

Other helpful pointers I found in this book were mostly about social issues and attitudes in German culture. I learned that Germans tend to be anti-elitist. Educational backgrounds are more important to them than the large class distinctions in other Western countries. The book also points out Germany's huge minority population, which we discussed in detail in all of our lectures. The author also brings up disabilities in Germany. Around the 1970's movements for fighting against discrimination began and soon after most of the world started providing accommodations. Germany, however, has been reluctant to change despite the persuasion and recommendations from other countries. “Only recently did the German railway Deutsche Bahn move to provide wheelchair access in its trains.” (pg. 104.)

Above I have included only a few examples of topics discussed and explained in the book When in Germany, Do As the Germans Do. I found most of this book to be very interesting. There were parts, however, which I found a little boring and hard to get into. The way the book is set up though, in different sections and in short articles, it is a very quick-read. I would suggest reading the whole book because although some areas may not interest you, the articles are brief and provide a good cultural understanding of the German way of life. Because of the variety of topics discussed in this book, I would recommend it to anyone who plans on spending a little extra time submersed in the culture. While the book is very enlightening and should be read by everyone traveling in Germany, it covers more than just the basic travel information.

Tomalin, Barry. Culture Smart! Germany: A Quick Guide to Customs & Etiquette.
Graphic

Arts Center Publishing Company, Portland: 2003.

This book by Barry Tomalin is divided into nine chapters varying from land and people, to making friends, to the Germans at home. Each chapter is also split up into more specific topics. I found this book very useful for it is pocket size and easy to carry around. It can also be used a reference book, skipping the sections that may not apply to you. I think, however, that this book provides a great all-around insight into the life and culture of Germany and each section is just as useful and interesting as the next.

Tomalin starts with a map of Germany and an introduction, followed by a useful chart of key facts. It ends with an appendix of simple vocabulary as well as a list of further reading. One aspect of this book that I liked in particular were the shaded boxes or 'bubbles'. These were areas throughout the book in which the author goes above and beyond to provide us with extra commentary, explanations, or suggestions. A few examples include one in which Barry Tomalin explains that removing a jacket in a business meeting in Germany can be seen as a sign that work is over, it usually shows a more relaxed attitude. Never "be the first to remove your jacket."

Another shaded area that I found useful is entitled "Some German Gestures." Here he explains the German tradition of rapping their knuckles on the table at the end of a lecture or presentation, instead of the common American applause. This is one thing we noticed almost immediately upon entering Germany. Another tradition that he explained that I had not heard of was that "the German equivalent to crossing fingers to wish for luck is to press your thumbs." A German may show you a fist with the thumb inside and say "I'll press my thumbs for you." This is a simple gesture to wish you good luck.

In the "Family Occasions" section of the "Customs and Traditions" chapter, I learned that in Germany, it is customary for you to bring a cake into the office to celebrate your birthday with everyone. They will not surprise you with a cake like we would do in the United States. This was also discussed in an article in the other book, When in Germany, Do As the Germans Do. It is also considered bad luck to present an early gift, before someone's birthday.

Many topics discussed in the “Values & Attitudes” chapter reflect a lot of the German cultural characteristics that we had been learning. Order, clarity, straightforwardness, as well as thoroughness are common German characteristics. To the Germans, overtime shows personal inefficiency and reliability is also an important aspect of work ethic. One aspect discussed that I found interesting is that a German will gladly go out of their way to explain to you the rules and expectations. Tomalin says, “They’ve learned the system. They adhere to it. They see no reason why you shouldn’t do so too. And they’re prepared to take the responsibility for showing you.” (pg. 41.)

Boundaries are important in Germany and they do not like to confuse work and play. The book explains that a possible reason for the German importance of boundaries and barriers may be that throughout time, because of Germany’s location, its history and politics has never been very stable. Therefore, it was important for them “to create their own internal sense of security.” (pg. 49.) Apparently the German work ethic dates back to the Protestant Reformation:

According to this way of thinking, work is good in itself,
and one’s attitude to it and the disciplined way one goes
about it is character-forming and purifying. (pg. 46.)

One last aspect in this book that I’d like to point out was in the conclusion paragraph of the section on communication. The author described ‘an experienced observer of European culture’ who once said, “If you see something that surprises you, angers you, or that you find completely ridiculous, you may be in the presence of a cultural characteristic.” I found this quote to be very profound and to precisely describe our European experiences this summer. In addition, I was extremely impressed with the

way Tomalin ended the book. His last words made an impact which basically sums up my aspirations in life. Barry Tomalin says it all:

A lot of cultural-awareness building consists of not allowing unfamiliar attitudes to throw you. Observing, hearing, feeling, and then talking, is the way to build and enjoy good relations with the people of this culturally rich and dynamic country. (pg. 163.)

Overall, I really enjoyed this book. It was very informative and I felt that it gave an accurate depiction of German life and culture. The author's writing style is very easy to read and often humorous. He provides short real-life stories to make the reading more interesting, understandable and easy to relate to. I would give this book five stars and recommend it to anyone wanting to travel to any German country as well as those simply interested in learning about other countries and cultures. I also found this book very helpful in explaining the Germans and their attitudes as I encountered certain characteristics throughout our stay in Germany.