

## Cultural Comparisons: Daily Life in the USA vs. Germany • Part 5: House and Home • Miscellaneous

In the chart below you'll find a simplified comparison of various customs and everyday culture in the United States and Germany (*Deutschland*). For more, see [www.german-way.com](http://www.german-way.com) and the links below.

| 1. HOUSE and HOME (Page 1 of 4)  |  |
|--|--|
| USA  | GERMANY  |
| Americans generally keep doors <b>open</b> except when they want privacy (bathroom, bedroom, etc.). Offices also often have an open plan (cubicles) and an "open-door" policy.   | Germans generally keep doors <b>closed</b> at all times. Although there are exceptions, offices also usually have separate rooms and a "closed-door" policy (knock before entering).   |
| American houses and apartments are designed with a lot of <b>open space</b> and few doors. The kitchen, for example, may not be closed off from the dining area. Americans prefer an open floorplan and may be uncomfortable with too much compartmentalization. | German houses and apartments are designed with <b>separate rooms</b> for almost everything, sometimes even separate rooms for the toilet and the bath/shower. Germans prefer compartmentalization and are often uncomfortable with too much open interior space. |
| In some US households, street shoes are taken off in the entry area and exchanged for house slippers, but walking around at home barefooted or in socks is common.   | In most German households, street shoes are taken off in the entry area and exchanged for house slippers. Walking around barefooted or in socks at home is generally not acceptable. Spare house slippers are often available for visitors.                      |
| American houses and apartments are sold with a kitchen that contains most of the common kitchen fixtures and appliances.   | German houses and apartments are usually sold with a bare kitchen. Usually, the purchaser must buy and install a kitchen, including the kitchen sink!  |
| Refrigerators tend to be large. Frozen food is very common.  | Refrigerators tend to be small. Frozen food is less common.  |
| American houses and apartments are sold with most lighting fixtures already installed.   | German houses and apartments are often sold with no lighting fixtures installed. The new owners get to select (and buy) their own.   |
| American houses and apartments have built-in closets and storage space.  | German houses and apartments usually have no built-in closets or storage space. Closet cabinets (furniture) are used instead.  |
| A clothes washer and dryer are common in American houses and apartments.   | A clothes dryer is far less common in German houses and apartments.  |
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| <b>2. HOUSE and HOME (Page 2 of 4)</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| <b>USA</b>   | <b>GERMANY</b>  |
| American doors usually have round door knobs.  | German doors have a door handle ( <i>die Türklinke</i> ) rather than a round door knob.   |
| Window screens are standard. Window shutters are rare or only decorative.  | Window screens are very rare. Window shutters (the metal roll-down kind) are standard.  |
| Modern windows are insulated and usually only slide open vertically or horizontally.   | Modern windows are insulated and often have a 2-way function: Tilt inward or open completely (like a door).   |
| In the US and Canada the floors of a building are counted differently than in Europe and much of the world. In North America the ground floor is considered the first floor. | In Germany, Europe and much of the world, the first floor of a building is the first floor above the ground. A US second floor is the first floor in Germany and Europe. In a German elevator or staircase, the ground floor is called <i>das Erdgeschoss</i> ( <b>EG</b> ), <i>das Parterre</i> ( <b>P</b> ) or "0". |

| <b>3. MISCELLANEOUS • ALLGEMEINES</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>USA</b>   | <b>GERMANY</b>  |
| Drinking fountains are everywhere. Drinking tap water is very common, even in restaurants. | Drinking fountains are rare. Drinking tap water is frowned on, even though it is safe to drink.   |
| Ice cold drinks and ice cubes or crushed ice in drinks are common.                         | Ice cold drinks and ice cubes or crushed ice in drinks are avoided and considered unhealthy.  |
| Public restrooms rarely have attendants and are almost always free.                        | Public restrooms often have an attendant (usually a lady, even in the men's room) who expects a tip for keeping it clean. Except at airports, pay toilets are the rule. |
| Dogs are not allowed in restaurants.   | Dogs are allowed in restaurants, lying under or next to the table.  |
| Dogs are not always well-trained or well-behaved (barking, aggressive, jumping on people). | Dogs are almost always well-trained and well-behaved. They remain calm and quiet on public transit and in other public places.  |
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## Cultural Comparisons: Daily Life in the USA vs. Germany • Part 5: Miscellaneous (continued)

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| <b>3. MISCELLANEOUS (Continued)</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>USA</b>  | <b>GERMANY</b>  |
| A typical hearty ham-and-eggs American breakfast is not typical in Germany.   | A typical German breakfast is a continental breakfast, often with cereal and/or a soft-boiled egg.  |
| A gesture involving your middle finger is considered offensive.   | In addition to the “bird,” tapping the middle of your forehead with your index finger is an insult to a person’s intelligence, and is subject to a fine (usually while driving).  |
| <b>Business • <i>Wirtschaft</i></b>   |   |
| In business dealings, Americans want to get to the point quickly and get the essential information needed, and then come to a quick decision.                                   | In business dealings, Germans want to gather as much information as possible and like to take their time making important decisions.  |
| Once a decision has been made, Americans may see the need to change it later.   | Once a decision has been made, Germans are very reluctant to change it later.   |
| Americans generally consider risk-taking a positive characteristic, a sign of initiative.   | Germans generally consider risk-taking a negative characteristic, a sign of recklessness.   |
| <b>Entertainment • <i>Unterhaltung</i></b>  |   |
| In the US, dubbed movies are rare and generally considered inferior. Subtitled (“art house”) films are not very popular.  | In Germany and Austria, Hollywood and other non-German movies (and TV series) are always dubbed in German. In larger German cities, some Hollywood and other films are shown in the original version – without subtitles. |
| Commercial TV dominates the television landscape in the US, and ads constantly interrupt programs. Public TV (PBS) depends on a mix of government funding and viewer donations. | Germans with a TV set (or radio) must pay a fee to finance the public broadcast networks (BBC model). The German private broadcasters show as many commercials as in the US.  |
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| <b>3. MISCELLANEOUS (Entertainment, continued)</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| <b>USA</b>   | <b>GERMANY</b>  |
| Although many TV viewers have cable or satellite, most Americans view free TV over the air.  | About 95% of Germans view TV via cable or satellite, rather than over the air.  |
| Since June 2009, the US has been using the digital ATSC standard for standard (SD) and high-definition (HD) TV. HDTV is available over the air and via cable and satellite. A normal US or Canadian TV set won't work in Germany or anywhere in Europe.  | Beginning in Berlin in 2003, Germany has phased in the digital DVB-T (digital PAL) standard for over-the-air SD TV. (HDTV is only available via cable or satellite.) Analog TV is still available on cable or satellite (until 2012). A normal German TV set won't work in North America. |
| <p><b>More about these topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>House and Home:</b> <a href="http://www.german-way.com/house.html">www.german-way.com/house.html</a></li> <li>• <b>Dogs:</b> <a href="http://www.german-way.com/dogs.html">www.german-way.com/dogs.html</a></li> <li>• <b>Business:</b> <a href="http://www.german-way.com/biz.html">www.german-way.com/biz.html</a></li> <li>• <b>Entertainment (movies):</b> <a href="http://www.german-way.com/cinema.html">www.german-way.com/cinema.html</a></li> <li>• <b>Entertainment (TV):</b> <a href="http://www.german-way.com/german-television.html">www.german-way.com/german-television.html</a></li> </ul> |   |