



Welcome to Germany!

To dear athletes/attendees of the 8th World Dwarf Games 2023,

My name is Becks. I am an Australian who has been living in Cologne, Germany since 2019. I am part of the WDG2023 Organisation Committee, and my roles include Social Media Manager, translator, as well as other support roles.

I understand that many of you have had questions about travelling to Germany, so I have put together a comprehensive guide of Germany and German culture to help you before you fly over here for the WDG2023. This document covers everything from a “need-to-know” to a “interesting-to-know” basis, explaining important and fun facts you should take into consideration before coming to Germany. The document is quite long, so if you do not wish to read the entire thing, I recommend that you just read the first section titled “Need To Know”.

Disclaimer: The contents of this document come from my own personal observations and lived experiences, and may, therefore, be quite subjective, and will also include some personal notes.

Also, keep your eyes peeled in the following weeks on the Instagram page [@officialwdg2023](#) for some handy tips on the German language to help you get around while you're here! We look forward to welcoming you to Cologne and sharing this amazing experience with you in this beautiful country.

Yours sincerely,
Becks.





Need to Know

ACCESSIBILITY

Cologne is not the most accessible city (you will actually find this throughout many parts of Germany). There are many old cobblestone streets and narrow alleyways in the older parts of the city. Many restaurants have a step or two at the entrance, and their toilets are often underground that are only accessible via a staircase. However, some things/places that are accessible include: public transport including stations and stops, and some public toilets (e.g. toilets at Cologne Central Station have lowered sinks). The good news is that the German Sport University has a very accessible campus, with only a few minor exceptions, such as the showers.

BIKE LANES

Bike lanes are a strip of red lane that usually run parallel to the main road on the pavement/sidewalk. Treat all bike lanes like main roads: look left and right before crossing it, and never just stay standing on it - you will get yelled at very angrily.

CASH

Many places do not accept card payments and will only take cash, so don't forget to always have some cash with you. More prominent places, such as supermarkets or chain brands, will accept card. Some places may say that they only accept an "EC Card" which is a German/European debit card - international debit cards will not work. Some may say that they accept credit cards, but that includes both debit and credit cards, such as Visa and Mastercard, and even Apple Pay. The German Sport University prefers to accept card payments.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS IN GERMANY

112 - Ambulance & Fire

110 - Police





PFAND

If a recyclable can or bottle has this sign, you pay an extra deposit on the bottle (anywhere from 8c-25c) that you can claim back later. This is called “Pfand”. For example, a can of Coke may cost 2.00€, but if it has this label (which it usually should), you will pay 2.25€ in total at the cash register. There are Pfand machines in most supermarkets, where you return your cans/bottles in the machine, and receive a coupon receipt in return. You then take this receipt to the cashier at the cash register who will give you the money back in cash.

Note: You may sometimes see people walking around the city with huge bags of empty cans/bottles, rummaging around bins to collect more cans/bottles.

Personal Note: I don't actually do Pfand because the machines are so high up and I could never be bothered to make the effort. I either give them to my housemate or a friend who does it for me, or I stand them up on the ground by a bin, so that people can easily take and collect them for themselves. This might be a good tip for those of you who may not want to return the bottles yourselves!

PHARMACY VS. DRUGSTORE

If you need medicine/medication, you go to an “Apotheke” (pronounced ‘ah-po-teh-kuh’). These places strictly sell medicine and prescription medication. Although they offer quite a range of things over-the-counter that you would normally need a prescription for, I still recommend bringing your own medication that you are used to for such a short period of time.

Note: If you are looking for a typical drugstore that sells anything from vitamins to toiletries to makeup, you can go to big brand drugstores like “dm” or “Rossmann”.

PUBLIC TOILETS

There are not many public toilets in Cologne, so it would be wise to remember where some are located while you travel around the city. Public toilets are called “WC” (pronounced ‘veh-tzeh’) which is short for the old English word “Water Closet”. You will have to pay anywhere between

50c - 1€ to use public toilets (incl. in some big restaurants), however in return, you will get very clean and well-maintained facilities.

Personal Note: I used to hate the idea of having to pay for toilets, but I don't actually mind paying a small service fee if it means clean facilities every time. I always try to have a few coins on me in case I need to use them.



PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Throughout all of Germany, there are no ticket barriers at train stations or on buses/trams - you just hop on/off. This does not mean public transport is free. There is an honour-system kept by the people where you buy a paper or online ticket and hop onboard, and ticket controllers often come onboard to check your tickets.

Personal Note: The people of Germany honour this system by always buying a ticket even if they may not get checked. So please also honour this system wherever you travel in Germany.

All athletes and attendees registered at the WDG2023 will receive a travel ticket that will cover all three modes of public transport within Cologne only. If you travel from and outside of Cologne, you will need to buy a separate ticket. This applies especially for IC/ICE trains, where a separate ticket is always necessary, even for stops within Cologne. I recommend two apps to buy tickets online: “DB Navigator” or “Trainline”.

Note: You have to press the button to open the door (I missed several stops in my first few days in Germany because I didn’t know to do this). In Cologne specifically, since the pandemic, doors in trams and buses have mostly become automatic, but not the trains.

SUNDAYS

Sundays are considered quiet days (“Ruhetag”) and everything is generally quieter, slower and more laid back. All shops and stores are closed every Sunday everywhere. If you need anything for Sunday, you will have to buy it in advance - everything is closed. Many restaurants and cafes have started to be open for service on Sundays, but it will differ from place-to-place.

SUPERMARKETS

Bring your own bags when you go grocery shopping, or you can pay for paper or biodegradable bags at the cash register. You have to bag/pack your own bags at check-out.

Personal Note: The Germans are really fast at this - good luck keeping up!





Good to Know

DRINKING WATER

Although the tap water is very clean and very safe to drink, they will never serve you tap water at restaurants or cafes (only bottled water) and look upon you distastefully if you ask for tap water. Also, fizzy/sparkling water is just as common as still water, so when you order water, make sure you ask for the one that you want e.g. if you do not specify that you want still water, you might get sparkling water (at no extra charge, of course).

REGIONAL GROUP TRAVEL TICKETS

If planning to travel around regional areas in Germany in small groups, you can buy a group discount day ticket that covers up to 5 people on regional trains (S-Bahn, RB, IRE, RE trains - not IC/ICE trains). It's called a Quer-Durchs-Land-Ticket, and you can find more detailed information about it here <https://www.bahn.com/en/offers/regional/day-ticket-for-germany>.

OBEY PEDESTRIAN LAWS

When a pedestrian crossing light is red, Germans will (mostly) not cross the road, even if there are no cars. This is your decision to make, but be warned that the older omas and opas may yell at you for not obeying the rules.

Personal Note: If there really are no cars, I admit that I often jaywalk because I'm so used to it as I originally come from a big city. However, if there are children watching and waiting too, I will also wait - Germans have a good ethic in being good models for young children.

QUIET IN GENERAL

Germany is quite quiet in general, and they don't really look so fondly upon the obnoxiously loud. They often associate "foreigners" to "obnoxiously loud" because that is often the case. This doesn't count for parties and barbecues where they love to blast music from their portable speakers.





RESTAURANT RESERVATIONS



It is common (and recommended) to make reservations for restaurants, even for just two people on a random Tuesday night. Everyone makes reservations, so don't be surprised if you can't get a table when you rock up without a reservation.

SHOES

For those who enjoy and/or plan to wear high heels or stilettos: don't. Not only are the cobblestone roads and streets impossible (and dangerous) to navigate through in heels, it's just really not common to wear them in Germany (maybe even all of Europe). I recommend flats, sandals, boots or just normal runners/joggers.

WiFi + INTERNET

If you are in search of WiFi, you have to ask for "WLAN" (pronounced 'vee-lahn') and not WiFi. It's also important to note that Germany is pretty behind in terms of what they offer for internet package deals, so it might be wise to check what your provider at home offers in terms of roaming deals/packages, as you will definitely need internet while using Google Maps to navigate your way around the city/country. If you are looking to buy a SIM card, you can easily purchase one at the supermarket and get it activated straight away.





Interesting to Know

ALCOHOL

Alcohol in Germany is very cheap, easily accessible (e.g. in supermarkets & convenience stores) and people are allowed to drink mostly everywhere out in the open in public (e.g. at parks, on the street). The legal drinking age for beer is 16 years old, and 18 years for harder spirits/liquors.

Personal Note: They actually hardly ask for ID, but it's always smart to have it on hand, of course.

FAST FOOD

Although there are a couple of US fast food chains in Germany, such as McDonald's, Burger King and Five Guys, they have a very bad rap in Germany, and aren't very popular. If you want to experience proper German fast food culture, then head to Döner Kebap shops, Currywurst stalls, or even the bakeries.

GERMAN HISTORY

I don't believe any of you would dare to do such things, however I thought it would still be sensible to bring it up, just so that we're all on the same page. The topic of Germany's past is definitely not taboo, but it would be wise to tread the topic with sensitivity if the topic comes up. The Germans have accepted their devastating past and educate their future generations very well on these topics. However, as it is something that they are definitely not proud of, not many may be open to talking about it, and they will certainly not laugh at any jokes about it either.

Note: It is definitely illegal to do the "Heil Hitler" and you may even get arrested for doing it.

Personal Note: On the topic of the WDG2023 being held in Germany, I've already heard several people make seemingly light jokes (as well as blatantly ignorant jokes) about the Germans and their history. So please please don't embarrass yourselves, us, or them like that.





STARING AND PHOTO-TAKING

Germany has a strong privacy policy within the country and amongst the people, so you will hardly come across people who will take photos/videos of you (except for the 1-2 weirdos that you get in every country). However, their staring game is strong, especially amongst the elderly generation. But be rest assured that they stare at literally everyone, and it's not just you.

STUMBLING STONES

On that topic, you may come across a “Stolperstein” or a “Stumbling stone/block” on the cobblestone streets. These are concrete cubes made of brass that shine like gold, that are inscribed with the name and life dates of Holocaust victims who lived or worked at these addresses. Google “Stolperstein” to see what it looks like!

Personal Note: I thought this was such a beautiful tribute that Germany made to honour the lives of these people, and a very thoughtful way to show their remembrance about the past.

TELLING THE TIME

They use 24-hour time in Germany, so it would be wise to brush up on your 24-hr time knowledge before you get here. More importantly, if a German tells you, “Half ten,” they mean 9:30, as in half-to-ten, and not 10:30/half-past-ten.

WRITING NUMBERS

If for any reason a German has to write down numbers for you, this tip will come in handy. The way they write their number 1 and 7 can be very confusing. Their written 1 looks like a 7 or an upside-down V, and their 7 has a strike through the middle to help differentiate.

