

Some Cultural Differences

Leaving your knife and fork at odd angles on the plate means you're not finished - you'd like to eat some more. If you're finished, lay both knife and fork together across the plate diagonally from the bottom right corner.

In the U.S. it's polite to leave one hand in your lap while you eat. In Germany it's just the opposite - leave both hands on the edge of the table all the time. Apparently it comes from the time in history when one wanted to make sure your guest didn't have a dagger in his hand. ☺

If possible, try not to leave any food on your plate. Germany, as a country, was hungry during and after WW II, and as a culture, they're a lot more careful about this than Americans.

It is, however, definitely acceptable to say "no, thank you" at any time, whether to a second helping or a glass of wine, etc. If you have one glass of wine and would prefer to keep it at that, try to drink slowly and leave a little in the glass, so the host doesn't automatically refill.

Some families pray at the end of the meal as well as the beginning, so try to wait at the table until there's some sort of common "end" to the meal.

Bathrooms (called toilets in Germany) always have locks on the doors, which are expected to be used when the room is occupied. As a result, there's no need to knock before entering. Just try the door - if it's locked, the room is occupied. The corollary is true - if you're in there, be sure and lock the door.

Related: the bathtub or shower and the toilet are often in different rooms. So if you need to use the "restroom," ask for the toilet, not the bath. That's perfectly normal and not at all impolite.

Also: the brush you will find next to the toilet is there to be used by each individual. In the U.S. someone comes later and cleans, but here it's being a good guest to clean up after yourself, if that's necessary.

Most Germans tend to be more direct and to-the-point than a typical American. They're not intending to attack - they just express an honest opinion in a direct way. What may sound like an argument to American ears can honestly be a healthy discussion in this culture.

Trash is sorted very rigorously, so try to avoid putting clean paper, plastic packaging or any kind of food in the trash at host family homes. Gas stations are good options for any of that. Almost all plastic bottles can be returned for deposit, so we'll collect and return those as a team - ice cream money!

Some Helpful German Words and Phrases

Hello (during the morning)

Hello (during the day)

Hello (during the evening)

Goodnight

Goodbye

God's blessings

Thank You

please AND you're welcome

bathroom (with the toilet)

Gentlemen - Ladies

bathroom (with the tub)

shower

What time

to get up (from bed in the morning) aufstehen

breakfast

It tasted very good,
but

I'm full now.

Where is . . . ?

right - left

straight ahead

I'm sorry

I speak only a little German.

Would you like . . . ?

a "free" church

a "state" church

a state church fellowship

to pray

wastebasket

Enjoy your meal.

Thanks, you too!

Guten Morgen

Guten Tag

Guten Abend

Gute Nacht

Auf Wiedersehen

Tschüss

Gottes Segen

Danke, Vielen Dank, Herzlichen Dank

bitte

Toilette, WC

Herren - Damen

das Bad

die Dusche

Um wieviel Uhr?

aufstehen

Frühstück

Es hat sehr gut geschmeckt,
aber

ich bin jetzt satt.

Wo ist . . . ?

rechts - links

gerade aus

Es tut mir leid.

Ich spreche nur wenig deutsch.

Möchten Sie . . . ?

Gemeinde

Kirche

Gemeinschaft

beten

der Mülleimer

Guten Appetit

Danke, gleichfalls.