

LIFE IN GERMANY

EDUCATION:

- Germany has one of the world's highest levels of education and it also has some of the world's most famous universities.
- Germany's Two Track Vocational Training System:

Germany has a two-track vocational training system which is quite special, internationally speaking. On completing school, some 60% of young people in Germany move on to learn one of the 350 officially recognized vocations included in the Two-Track System. This entry into professional life differs from vocational training based only in colleges which are customary in many other countries. The practical part of the course takes place on 3 or 4 days of the week in a company; the other 1 or 2 days are spent with specialist theoretical instruction in a vocational school. The courses take 2-3 years. This combination of theory and practical work guarantees that the craftsmen and skilled workers have prime qualifications. Vocational training is likewise a launch-pad for a career that can, via advanced training, lead to participants becoming master craftsmen and women. This two-track system means that the proportion of young people without a profession or a traineeship in Germany is comparatively low, and is only 1.8 percent of those aged 15-19 years-old.

- Participation in the German school system is compulsory. Home-schooling is practiced by some but the government has publicly prosecuted this practice.

ECONOMY:

- Germany has one of the strongest economies in the world.
- Germany is the largest and most important market in the European Union (EU).
- In 2004, Germany's gross domestic product (GDP) totaled 2.16 trillion Euros.
- Germany is the biggest exporter of goods worldwide, and as such is considered to be the "export world champion". The thrust behind this foreign trade is first and foremost industry, which accounts for some 84 percent (2004) of total exports, making it more of a global player than almost any other country.
- Germany's main economic/industrial regions and cities are:
 - ❖ The Ruhr Region – Formerly, this region was characterized by heavy industry. It is now developing into a hub for high-tech and service providers.
 - ❖ The Munich and Stuttgart conurbations – Producers of high-tech, automobiles.
 - ❖ Frankfurt/Main – Germany's financial center.
 - ❖ Cologne, Hamburg - Port, Airbus construction, and media.
- In comparison with other countries, the living standard in Germany is extremely high.

POLITICS:

- The government is considered a federal parliamentary representative democratic republic and the head of the government is called the Chancellor.
- Federal legislative power is vested in both the government and the two chambers of parliament, *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*. While the *Bundestag* is elected in direct election the *Bundesrat* represents the governments of the 16 German States.
- The two major parties are the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party. Two other smaller parties are the liberal Free Democratic Party and the Green Party.
- Germany's set of laws is called the *Grundgesetz*, literally Basic Law. It is akin to the American Constitution. Changes in the *Grundgesetz* require a majority of two thirds of the parliament.
 - ❖ The political system is laid out in the 1949 constitutional document under approval of the Allied forces which wanted to assure among other restrictions that Germany's military forces are restricted exclusively to defense and that a dictatorship could not reoccur.
- Germany plays a leading role in the European Union, having the strongest economy and one of the largest populations out of all European Union nations.
- Germany has been close allies with the United States since the end of World War II. Economic and cultural ties are the main reasons for a strong unity between the two countries.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Because of its central situation in Europe, the volume of traffic, especially goods transit, in Germany is very high.
- High speed vehicular traffic has a long tradition in Germany with many inventions:
 - ❖ The first highway system was invented in Germany. In Germany, their highways are called the Autobahn.
 - ❖ The world's first automobile was developed and built by Carl Benz.
- Germany possesses one of the densest road systems in the world.
- There is no speed limit on the German Autobahns.
- Another way to travel is by the German rail system which is extensive throughout the country and connects to others European countries.
- Frankfurt's International Airport is ranked as one of the world's top ten airports, and is the third busiest in Europe alongside London's Heathrow and Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport.