

German Stereotypes: The Dirndl, Humor and German Efficiency | Meet the Germans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MalNR0FHU9k> transcript:
<https://dontveter.com/ec/germans1.pdf>

What generalizations do the rest of the world have about Germany?

I've picked out five German stereotypes.

How much truth is in them and where did they come from?

But first of all, which ones annoy Germans the most?

A lot of people think we are all running around in lederhosen.

And Oktoberfest, dirndl and lederhosen, that's a cliché.

That the German language sounds so aggressive.

That Germans have no sense of humor.

Every country has its own humor so that's nonsense.

A bit pedantic and boring.

That's now how we are.

Romanticized images of Germany often include a woman dressed like this.

This is a dirndl and the male equivalent is lederhosen, literally, leather trousers.

These types of folk clothing are very specifically linked to the southern state of Bavaria and neighboring Austria.

You might come across people wearing them day to day in Bavaria but it's most common on special occasions and during festivals like Oktoberfest.

The dirndl is just one example of folk costume in Germany.

The most traditional dress known as tracht started out as work clothes for peasants.

Various aspects of traditional idealized German culture including tracht were later used in Nazi propaganda.

The dirndl even got a bit of a makeover under the Nazi regime, a lower neckline, a slightly shorter skirt and a tighter waist.

The designs seen today vary from very traditional to very modern and apparently the position of the apron's bow can indicate relationship status.

For example, tied on the right means married or engaged and on the left means single.

This stereotypical image of a German also tends to include a beer in the hand, usually in one of these enormous glasses.

In fact, the glass is another element of Bavarian culture that has somehow come to dominate the image of Germans abroad.

Germany actually has an impressive range of glassware, sometimes with a specific glass to go with a specific type of beer, like this coach glass from Cologne.

Of course not all Germans like beer but it is an important part of the culture overall with different beers also connected to regional identities.

Traditional brews, which follow the rules of the beer purity law, still dominate, but the country has seen a boom in craft varieties too.

And the popularity of non-alcoholic beer shows that the German's taste for beer is more than just a thirst for alcohol.

Cheers to that!

So goes the German saying which means that punctuality in Germany means arriving five minutes early.

Well, whoever decided this forgot to tell the trains.

It's practically a national sport here to moan about train delays and after four years of commuting I'm well and truly on board, so to speak.

But a lot of German people do pride themselves on being on time and punctuality is a characteristic you see again and again attributed to the Germans.

So where did this punctual reputation come from?

Let's talk to a time expert.

The Prussians were very successful in setting both man and machine to the clock.

Protestant ethics – hard work, obedience and the virtue of punctuality also had a lot to do with it.

Do Germans in general, have a good relationship with time?

The question is, “What is good?”

In Germany, the word “time” is often connected to an obligation.

Time is something I can organize, save, get under control.

I must manage my time.

That brings us on to the next stereotype: German efficiency which gets a big thumbs down from me.

A dictionary definition of efficient is “working or operating quickly and effectively in an organized way.”

Okay, so the Germans might have the organization part down, but speed and effectiveness not so much.

Did you know it took 632 years to finish building the Cologne cathedral?

A more modern case study that brought global visions of German efficiency crashing down was the new BER airport in Berlin, a project plagued with problems from the get-go.

It finally opened in 2020, billions of euros over budget and 10 years behind schedule just in time for the coronavirus to hit, bringing most air traffic to a standstill.

Interestingly, it often seems that the German's love of precision and planning actually gets in their way.

If Germany ever wants to live up to its efficient reputation, it's going to have to break up with bureaucracy.

What Mark Twain apparently said, “A German joke is no laughing matter”.

Bit harsh, Mark.

Personally I know plenty of funny Germans and I think most people appreciate good comedy, right?

However what is sometimes missing from the comedic toolbox here is the ability to take things a little less seriously and have a good old laugh at yourself.

But don't take my word for it, let's talk to someone who knows a lot about the German relationship with humor.

Gail Tufts is a comedian from the United States who's been in Germany for more than 30 years.

This country is the size of Texas but, it is incredibly regional and not just with accents but also with what they eat, what they drink and when they laugh.

The people who have come from the Rhineland, they're, they're, ready to laugh, they're ready to have a good time.

They're the party people of this country.

And then the Berliners have seen everything because it is the cultural capital of this country, so they'll all sit back and say, well tell me about it.

And the North Germans are are incredibly dry, but really smart.

And in the south there's a warm-heartedness in Stuttgart, for example.

Talk about food and you can do a 20-minute monologue about bread.

They will be rolling in the aisles.

So where does the no sense of humor come from?

You have to kind of go back to the Second World War.

In those glorious golden 20s [after the war] where there was so much entertainment, so much theater, a lot of the Germans that were involved in that were Jewish and they were either exterminated and murdered or they fled to the States.

And, after the war of course, things weren't that funny because where does comedy come from?

It comes from my experience, my storytelling and I think there was an entire generation where it was very difficult to find the humor in anything.

Although, once the 50s and 60s started there were some great, great German comedians, Loriot for example.

In the 90s and the 2000s all of a sudden comedy clubs started popping up and mixed shows where there would be four different comedians a night and now you've got a comedian for every taste.

Germans do have a sense of humor and thankfully it's thriving because in these times we all need a sense of humor.

I'd love to know how many of these things are part of your image of Germany and which stereotypes from your country get on your nerves the most.

Leave us a comment.