

# HÄ, WAS?!



THE ADVENTURES  
OF JOHANNA - AN  
INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENT LIVING  
IN FREIBURG

**5 THINGS THAT WILL  
SURPRISE YOU WHILE  
LIVING IN GERMANY**

# 1 Don't Expect to Make a New 'Friend' in 30 Minutes

We have a VERY different concept of friendship in the states than what you might see or experience here in Germany. Back home, you can easily meet someone with a cool vibe, have an awesome conversation, and then proceed to introduce said person to a friend as a "new friend" 30 minutes later. It's partially a way to say you connected well with a person that you would definitely hang out with in the future.

People in the Midwest just generally like to get to know one another and aren't hesitant to strike up a conversation with strangers! And from my experience, this small-talk is what opens the doors to connect with others. Sometimes it even creates the opportunity to start a deeper connection or lasting friendship (you never know!) Personally, I love it when people are open and curious about one another, even if it's just a small interaction. It doesn't have to be deep and long-lived in order to make your day.

Someone once explained it this way: In the states, it's really easy to get to become an acquaintance or friend, but very difficult to become a GOOD friend. In Germany, it's difficult to become an acquaintance or friend, but then once you're there, you become a friend for LIFE!

So, give Germans some time to warm up to you and don't take their quietness as disinterest. Most of all: stay open and curious even if your curiosity doesn't get reciprocated back all the time! Be true to yourself, and don't hesitate to keep reaching out to people even if they don't respond to you in the way you're used to! They might be harder to win over, but they're they'll be there for you in the long-run!

Or even when someone asks "hey, how are you doing?!" they genuinely want to know! When Germans say.. well, practically anything, just assume it's coming from a place of honesty! Again, there are pros and cons to being this direct as well! If you're coming from a culture where politeness triumphs honesty, it might be a little hard to get used to this cultural difference. Being a Midwesterner AND a Mexican is like a double whammy because we're ALWAYS thinking about the feelings of the other person involved in the interaction. Sometimes you have the instance in the states where someone says "lets hang out" and that phrase just keeps getting repeated without actually hanging out. I feel like when someone says it here, there's more honesty behind those words as well as the initiative to make it happen.



## *When Germans say "Lets Hang Out" They Actually Mean it!*

The other nice thing is this: you don't have to guess how someone is feeling! You're not constantly reading between the lines and trying to understand what the "secret meaning" is behind their words. I wasn't used to this type of interaction at first, and some of the directness took me surprise and I misinterpreted it for being rude/angry/upset at me.. The list goes on and on! Now things have changed and I really admire the ability to be direct rather than having to waste days wondering if what the other person said was actually what they were thinking or feeling.

# There's Always Something to Improve!

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This was another crazy one for me too since things already seem so good as they are! Now, hear me out. There's massive amount of consciousness in Germany- for the environment, the food you eat, humanitarian issues, etc. Basic needs are always met and the mass majority of people don't struggle with things like putting food on the table. Shoot, you can even get paid to go to school! Even if living conditions seem great, Germans are always thinking 5 steps forward about what could make it better. This is TOTALLY necessary when you're running a country, I get it! It's one of the many reasons this society runs as well as it does!

The willingness to grow and being open-minded is truly fantastic. But I think it's also important to take a moment every now and again to appreciate the present moment and all of the needs that ARE met. For people who come from countries which these basic needs aren't met- which are the majority of the countries in the world, I think- it can feel a little strange and even a little bit "complain-y". So if you hear someone going off about something small, don't worry about it! Germans are just doing their thing and trying to make the world a better and more efficient place.

# 4 Germans will Actually Wait at the Stoplight

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EVEN WHEN THERE'S NO ONE AROUND! When I visited Freiburg for the first time, I had just been traveling around Asia for 6 months. The last leg of the trip was India, where traffic is almost magical in the way cars, cows, rickshaws, bikes, and once even an ELEPHANT shared the street, yet no one got ran over.

Once I was waiting so long to cross, **a local woman took me by the hand and started walking right through the battle ground (aka: the street).**

On the contrary, there have been times I have been walking around after midnight in Freiburg and there are still people who will wait at the stoplight with no car or person around. It's actually pretty endearing! They even have a little saying for waiting at the light, which is "Bei Rot musst du stehn, bei Grün darfst du gehn" which means, you must stay at red, you are allowed to go on green. If you don't do it, there will be little Oma's who will remind you to wait it out!

# The Most Well-Behaved Children

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I don't know what's so charming about this, but I think parenting styles say a lot about a culture. I was sitting in a café one day, working on some things on my laptop and people-watching. I couldn't help but be amazed at a little scene

I was watching. A mother had met up with a friend of hers, deep into conversation- But she wasn't alone! Her young daughter was with her too, and she couldn't have been older than 4 years old. The little girl didn't wander too far off from the mother, and each time she got more than 20 steps away, she looked back at her mother and would proceed to walk back to her. She didn't yell she didn't scream, she didn't ask for attention. The little girl was an absolute angel. Honestly, this is just goes to show how lovely the parenting is. I have never seen German parents yell at their children in public before (something I see VERY VERY often back home) and I think it just shows the amount of understanding, compassion, and responsibility they take when they decide to have kids. Germans are truly lovely people and it really shows in the way by the way they treat even their youngest members of society!