

Herzlich willkommen!

Welcome to Germany!



**AFS Interkulturelle  
Begegnungen e.V.**



## **Directory**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>GERMANY, WHAT A COUNTRY...</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>A BRIEF GERMAN HISTORY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>USEFUL TIPS, DATES, FACTS AND FIGURES:</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>"SPRICHEST DU DEUTSCH?"</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>YOU AND YOUR GERMAN AFS-FAMILY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>GERMAN CUISINE</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>SCHOOL – AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR EXCHANGE</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>YOUR YEAR WITH AFS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>AFS IS HERE FOR YOU</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>INSURANCES</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>TAKE CARE! - SAFETY-TIPS</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>THE AFS RULES</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>FINALLY...</b>	<b>31</b>

**ATTACHMENT: ARRIVAL INFORMATION**

# 1 Introduction

## **Herzlich willkommen! - Welcome!**

We at AFS Germany are eagerly looking forward to having you in our country and want to help you to make the most of your AFS experience! Your time with AFS can be a wonderful, enriching and interesting adventure. The focus of all AFS programs is intercultural learning – and if you keep an open mind, you will absorb a tremendous amount of new things in Germany. Your experience will truly be unique!

Right now, while you are still at home, it is absolutely the best time for you to prepare yourself for life abroad. Start reading about Germany and begin learning the language via the E-learning module. This booklet is meant to give you an introduction to Germany, the experience you will have and to the AFS program in our country.

## **Wir freuen uns sehr auf Dich! - We are looking forward to meeting you!**



## 2 Germany, what a country...

We are proud and excited that you have chosen to come to Germany for your AFS experience. So we would like to introduce our country to you:

Germany is located in the heart of Europe, surrounded by no less than 9 neighboring countries! The **size** of "Deutschland" is slightly smaller than Paraguay, Japan or Montana (a state in the USA). With almost 80 million inhabitants Germany has the largest **population** in Europe, after Russia.

If you are one of those lucky people who are used to living in a fairly mild or even warm and sunny **climate** (e.g. Central America), please be prepared when you come to Germany: It can be much colder, a lot windier and rainier than in your home country. Sometimes the cold winter nights (January/February) can even get as chilly as  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ ! So don't forget to pack a raincoat, some (woolen) sweaters, warm trousers, sturdy boots and other warm clothes. Otherwise you might catch a cold in the fall and winter and of course we don't want that to happen!

And once winter is gone, a mild (and sometimes rainy) spring is followed by a warm summer - the highs (mainly in July/August) can surpass  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The south of the country is usually where it gets hottest, while the sea in the north cools the climate, so it might not get as sweltering there. Our weather has many facets to offer, as has our country!



Germany has many different and charming **landscapes**: from flat farming country in the north, between the beaches of the Baltic- and the North Sea, to the rolling hills in the heart of the country (which are often heavily industrialized), to the magnificent mountain range, the Alps, located in the south.

The **standard of living** is very high in the western part of Germany and sometimes a bit lower in the eastern rural areas, due to the Cold War. However, there is ample supply of goods and food throughout the whole country. The standards of hygiene and cleanliness reflect those of a developed country.

The two major **religious affiliations** in Germany are Catholic and Protestant, although there are a few other, smaller churches, too. According to the AFS mission statement of tolerance and respect, our participants (host families and students) will respect any religion. A missionary attitude, however, is most certainly frowned upon and would not be accepted.

### **3 A brief German history**

There is no fixed date for an actual “onset” of German history. When the Romans came to this part of Europe at about the time Jesus Christ was born, they called the people who lived in these lands "Germani". The word "deutsch", which at that time only meant the language of the people who lived in central Europe, appeared first in the 9th century. For about one thousand more years, many small kingdoms covered the country, developing into more and more kingdoms through being split up by inheritance – a king having two (or more) sons and giving each a portion of his lands. All of those tiny kingdoms were united as "Deutschland" in 1871 under the leadership of the Prussian Kingdom by chancellor Bismarck, laying the foundation for the nation Germany is today.

1439	Johannes Gutenberg invents movable type printing press, allowing the mass production of printed books.
1483	Martin Luther is born. His theses will act as the foundation of the evangelical church.
1871	Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck forms the German Empire; King Wilhelm I is proclaimed emperor at Versailles (near Paris).
1914 - 1918	World War I; German forces are defeated, seizure of territories, colonies, payment of huge reparations to Allies (esp. France, UK) follows.
1933	Adolf Hitler appointed chancellor after his election victory.
1934	Hitler assumes title "Führer"; resulting in Nazi police state, murders millions of Jews and others over next decade.
1939	German invasion of Poland starts World War II (Sept. 1).
1945	Germany and much of Europe in ruins; Hitler commits suicide (April); surrender of the German "Reich" to Allies (May 8); occupation by US, USSR, UK, France.
1949	Germany divided into two parts: Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in US, UK, French sectors (May); German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in Soviet Zone (Oct.).
1961	East Germany erects fortified Berlin Wall (Aug.).
1989	Berlin Wall dismantled after peaceful and strong people's movement in East Germany.
1990	Germany reunified under West German constitution (Oct. 3); former East German territory admitted to Federal Republic as 5 new states; Helmut Kohl's coalition government wins first reunified elections.
1998	After 16 years of a conservative government under chancellor Kohl, the majority of German people vote for a new social-democratic and ecological government. New chancellor is Mr. Gerhard Schröder.

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- 2005      Chancellor Schröder initiated an unscheduled reelection and lost. Angela Merkel becomes Germany's first female chancellor.
- 2006      Germany hosts the FIFA world cup: inspired by their number one national sport, Germany celebrates the success of their national team and Germans proudly raise the German flag for the first time in many years.

## 4 Useful tips, dates, facts and figures:

### Currency

Euro

1 Euro = 100 Cent

1 Euro ~ 1,13 USD

### Electricity

220 volts (alternating current)

50 Hertz



### Tipping

In bars and restaurants, it is usual to give a tip of about 5-10% of the bill or - for lower amounts - to bring it up to a round figure. For instance, if you are being charged 2,90 Euro for a cup of coffee you might give 3 Euro to the waiter or waitress.

### Public holidays

New Year (January 1st), Good Friday and Easter Monday, Labor Day (May 1st), Ascension of Christ, Pentecost, The Day of German Unity (October 3rd), Christmas (December 25th and 26th).

Catholic communities (mostly in the southern part of Germany) have even more holidays: Epiphany (January 6th), Corpus Christi, Ascension of Mary (August 15th), All Saint's Day (November 1st).

### School holidays

There are different dates for school holidays in each federal state (Bundesland), to avoid the whole country heading to the beaches and mountains at the same time. Some dates are historically

Christmas:	about two weeks (December/January)
Winter:	a week or two in February (not in all states!)
Easter:	mostly two weeks in April (only one week in some federal states)
Pentecost:	a few days to two weeks (May/June)
Summer:	about six weeks between end of June and beginning of September
Fall:	about a week in October





## 5 "Sprichst Du Deutsch?"

... which means: "Do you speak German?" With our E-learning tool, you won't have to answer: "No, not a word". Get right at it and practice before you arrive, so you kick off into a great and successful year!

Language is **a crucial part of your AFS experience**. Start learning German or improving your language skills while still at home, either by class or by participating in an online course. It will pay off! We know that there are many exciting things around you right now, but now is also the time to **build the foundations for your successful year in Germany!** Arriving with a level or two (or four) of German lessons under your belt will make your start here so much smoother and easier (believe us, we speak from experience), so don't skimp on the practice!



There are some very good German language courses for free:

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/german/>
- <https://www.dw.com/en/learn-german/german-courses/s-2547>

Language is essential to make friends, to be integrated into your host family, your school and any other clubs or activities you might join. Showing your willingness to learn our language will be appreciated. If you already know some German, don't hesitate to practice it right from the beginning of your stay and, **please, don't be afraid to make mistakes** or not to get the accent right! The only thing that counts in the beginning is to be understood.

Bring a bilingual **dictionary** along to help you translate – a paper version or an app on your phone work just fine. You will attend a language course after your arrival in your host town. The cost will be covered by AFS Germany, taking into consideration your previous knowledge. Please ask your host family and your chapter for more information on the details. Also, **your license for the E-learning tool is valid for your whole year**, so we strongly recommend you make good use of it.

We also encourage you to earn a **German language certificate** during your stay in Germany. Additional information can be found as an attachment to this booklet.



## 6 You and your German AFS-Family

Everything starts with a **first "Hallo"** – and most likely a handshake or a hug. Both are customary ways of greeting one another in Germany – a handshake is more formal, while a hug is usually reserved for people who know as well as like each other.

You may shake hands when you meet and when you say goodbye. Sometimes you shake hands in order to say thank you. Of course, relatives and friends also **hug each other** occasionally. But apart from that you can't do anything wrong by shaking someone's hand when meeting. Among young people shaking hands is a little formal, but even there it is not considered strange.



Are you wondering **what to call your host parents**? We would suggest that you call your German parents what their German children call them. In most cases that will be "Mama", "Mutti", "Mutter", or "Mami" for the mother, and "Papa", "Vati", "Vater", or "Papi" for the father.

There are two ways of **addressing people** in German. "Du" is the familiar form used within families and with friends or people of your own age. "Sie" is formal and used by younger people towards

older people, between older people or just between people who don't know each other well. You should call all members of your family "Du" and the parents by the name that their children call them. This is the best way to become a part of your German family.

In comparison to other countries, Germans are very **direct** persons in conversations. Often, questions, offerings or requests are expressed in a very straight and direct way by saying what we mean. Please do not view this as impolite. If you are not sure how to interpret it, just ask your host family or a friend.

**Honesty** is valued very much in personal relationships. You may feel it is impolite to tell your host family that you don't like certain things or activities. In your culture it might be more polite to avoid saying "No", especially to parents and older persons. In Germany, people expect you to state your opinion **directly**, even if you refuse something. If your host family and friends have the impression you are hiding what you really think, they might be quite disappointed.

In Germany, relationships between parents and children are based on **mutual trust**. If your host parents feel you are **responsible**, you will be allowed to take many decisions yourself. Maybe you are not used to always telling your family exactly where you are going and what you are doing in order to avoid conflicts. German parents expect to be informed and consulted: in return you will enjoy a lot of freedom. But if your host family feels you are not telling them the **truth** about your activities, they might feel hurt and betrayed – this can lead to serious conflicts!

Germans also love **discussions**. They enjoy voicing their opinions and talking about them – which may seem like fighting to you. Your host family and friends will ask for your opinion, too, so feel free to say what you really think. You are not expected to agree with them, but please expect that others will question your way of seeing things, too. You might feel uncomfortable during these discussions, but always remember: you are talking about ideas and opinions, not about personal relationships. People may disagree with your opinion on a certain issue, but still like you very much **as a person**. Wishes and criticism are expressed openly and very directly in Germany. This is a sign of trust.

*Please remember:* When a family member asks you to change something you regularly do or expresses disapproval of what you did, they always **criticize** your **behavior**, they do not want to express that they dislike you personally! Instead, by frankly telling you their expectations and what bothers them, they want to improve their relationship with you.

In Germany, your family might show you **respect and esteem** by offering you space for yourself and by keeping a polite distance, above all at the beginning of your stay. This should not be interpreted as impoliteness, but just the opposite!

Certain **do's and don'ts** may be important to know, especially in the beginning of your stay, when you and your family don't know each other very well:

Ask before you use the **telephone (international calls and calls to mobile phones can be quite pricey) and internet** and don't stay on both for too long.

Do not use phone or internet too often to contact your parents or your friends. This will disrupt your integration, as every hour spent in front of the computer is **one hour not spent** with your host family and friends. If you have problems, questions or something troubles you, please do not hesitate to talk to your host family, contact person or AFS Germany. We are all here to help you!

**A word of warning:** file sharing of media such as music or films might be legal or not prosecuted in your country. It is very different in Germany, where **lawyers specialise in identifying and fining people who download or share media via P2P platforms**. Since you will be using your host family's internet and therefore their IP address, you should disable any software using such sources before your arrival. There have been several cases in the last years where students were caught using these softwares, resulting in fines of **500 Euros or more**. Do avoid this by steering clear of these platforms and keep to legal ones such as iTunes, Spotify or Musicload.

Talk to you host family about whether you should ask before you take food from the fridge; some food might be planned as an ingredient for a meal. Don't sit on furniture that was not originally intended for sitting on, unless everybody does. Ask your family how to deal with household **waste**. Many Germans separate their waste: paper, plastic, glass, organic waste etc. go in different waste bins. For example, an empty battery can not be discarded in a normal waste bin. **Water** in Germany is rather expensive and Germans are keen on saving water for ecological as well as economical reasons. Since Germany has a very mild climate, most people will take a maximum of a quick shower per day. Please ask your family how often and for how long it is ok to use the shower.

**Say "Danke"** to show your appreciation, say "Guten Morgen" in the morning after you get up and "Gute Nacht" when you go to bed.



Most Germans usually expect you to **show up to appointments** exactly at the time you agreed on. Germans are probably stricter and more punctual than people in other countries in this aspect. They often plan to arrive a few minutes early. If you do exceptionally run late it is appreciated and considered polite to inform the person waiting for you by text or call.

You may be invited to join friends for an activity and that's great! Do make sure, though, to tell your family with as much time as possible in advance. They might be making other plans, especially for the weekends, and will want to be informed with enough warning. Tell them where you are going, with whom and when you will be back. They are responsible for you as if you were their own child. **AFS expects its participants to respect the rules of AFS and their host families** (curfew, common meals etc.), even if you are over 18 years old.

Like German children normally do, you will help doing the **chores** as well. Whether you are a boy or a girl, all members of the family will be expected to help – the chores are not divided by gender. Please show your respect by tidying your own room, helping set the table, doing the dishes or mowing the lawn.

In some families, the mother will be in charge of the laundry, whereas in other families everybody will do their own laundry. Some exchange students don't feel comfortable putting their underwear in the common laundry. A great solution is to bring a washable mesh bag with a zipper – everything will stay in one place and you could hang it to dry yourself after it has been washed. These mesh bags can also be bought in local stores.

**Authority is usually shared between the parents**, so expect your host mother as well as your host father to tell you what you are expected to do. For some of you, especially if you grow up in a patriarchal society, this might at first be difficult to understand or to accept. Integrating concepts that differ from the ones you are familiar with is part of the challenge of being an AFSer. We trust that you keep an open mind for those cultural differences; that you are willing to see, listen, learn and adjust. And if there are habits, rules or anything else in your family that you don't understand, do not hesitate to ask! Explaining and **talking** are the best ways to avoid misunderstandings and bad feelings throughout your whole exchange year.

On average, German towns and cities are **not very big**. Many families live in rural areas and commute to the city for work. That means the majority of AFS students will be placed in villages with a population up to 5.000, some students will live in small cities, and only very few in medium (up to 100.000) or larger cities. Most German schools run until 2 pm only, they do not offer many extracurricular activities (see the section about schools below). However, there are many local sports clubs ("Verein"), music schools or other groups associated to church which you can join. Please **ask your host family** about the possible activities in town and try and find a group where you can take part. Sports, music and similar activities are a good way to **meet people and make friends**.

Families in Germany are as varied as in other countries. You may have younger or older hostbrothers and/or -sisters or none at all. Some hostparents are young, some are older or some families are single-parent hostfamilies. Same-sex couples with or without

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children may offer their home to you – in these cases we will ask you and your parents for consent before finalizing the placement.

Last but not least we would like to point out again that AFS host families all over the world host on a **voluntary basis**, they are not receiving any money for their **hospitality**. Please keep this in mind and appreciate what your families are doing for you!

## 7 German Cuisine



The day starts with a more or less rich **breakfast**: e.g. bread or rolls (our famous “Brötchen”) with Nutella (a favourite of a lot of our AFS students) honey, jam, cheese or ham. Also, Corn Flakes or “Müsli” (oats, nuts and seeds with milk) might be served. On Sundays, Germans often have a boiled or fried egg as well. Adults mostly drink coffee or tea. Young people often prefer milk, hot or cold chocolate or juice.

The big, warm meal of the day used to be served by the **Hausfrau** around noon in most German families, but that has changed, as nowadays, often both parents work. **Mittagessen** will mostly be a shared meal during the weekend, but expect to have lunch in school or to bring a sandwich these days. In most families, red meat, poultry or fish are regular features. Pasta also might be a favorite – the style of cooking will be very different from one family to another. Lunch is served on one plate, together with

vegetables, potatoes, pasta or rice.

On Sundays and sometimes during the week as well people love to have coffee and tea with cake in the afternoon around 3 and 4 pm. This is called **Kaffeetrinken** and is a cherished German tradition.

**Dinner** is usually served between 6 and 8 p.m. Few families have a warm meal in the evening. The traditional German dinner – **Abendbrot**, which translates as evening bread – is just that: it consists of slices of bread and cold cuts as well as cheese. There might also be a plate of cut vegetables or some gherkins. The bread can be smeared with butter and you are free to choose from the **Wurst** and **Käse** as a topping. Germany is famous for its hundreds of varieties of bread: there is soft white wheat bread, crusty or soft bread from a mixture of rye and wheat or spelt, and heavy and dense black bread. Some are packed and covered with sunflower or pumpkin seeds, or they contain nuts or spices like caraway. You will be surprised how many different styles of bread you will find your local bakery!

Depending on the family, the meals are served at regular hours and all family members take part in them. Since German families are scattered throughout the day this is a time to come together, reflect on the day and share time. Thus most families do not appreciate anybody eating on their own or before the regular meals (which does not mean that you have to go hungry, but talk to your host family about whether a quick snack is in order or if the meal will be ready in five minutes anyway). Normally the meals do not last very long - about 1/2 an hour or 3/4 of an hour, although a Sunday breakfast might last all morning.

In Germany **we eat with knife, fork and spoon**. As a general rule we keep both hands on the table and eat our food with the fork in the left hand, and the knife in the right hand simultaneously. If you are not familiar with this, you will learn that fast enough by

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watching. Some families say "Guten Appetit" before they start eating. If you don't like eating or drinking one of your host family's dishes, don't be afraid to tell your family about it in a polite way, but **try to give everything a chance** – some things might look strange, but taste rather good!.



## 8 City and Countryside

Most of our host families in Germany live in small towns or villages. These are often tightly knit communities in the countryside where they live a comfortable life. Schools and shops might not be right round the corner, but there will be infrastructure such as regular and reliable bus services as well as cycle ways as a means to get around. If you come from the city it may be that life in a small town is new to you and at first glance it might seem as if you don't have many opportunities to pursue your interests and hobbies. However, these communities always have clubs or societies that will help you meet new people and explore new interests. Generally, living in a smaller city or village gives you a chance to really experience the German way of life - and make close personal contacts.

Meeting people will mostly not happen by chance, it pays to plan ahead, research and prepare. Think about what interests you would like to pursue, talk to your host family and make plans together with them.

### The region

Your host family will be able to tell you what the town and the school have to offer. You may be able to meet other young people at school clubs, sports clubs, music schools, church youth groups, the Scouts and many other organizations. Check the website of your new school, look for "Arbeitsgemeinschaften" or "AG-Angebote" and see what your school can offer after class.



### Transport

Ask your host family which places you can reach by walking or riding a bike. If there are no regular buses or trains, you will need to discuss with them how you can attend activities in clubs or with friends. They will let you know how long they need to know in advance if they have to give you a ride. Maybe there are other people who can give you a ride sometimes. Your host parents will want to know about that, too, so please talk to them before you go anywhere.



### Young people

The best way to find new friends is to start at school – you will meet new people in your class and school clubs. If you make an effort to learn German quickly and get to know the students around you, they will include you in the plans they make for their free time. Please keep in mind that you can't expect to be asked all the time, you need to be active and talk to people after the first few weeks!

### **Limited opportunities?**

It is possible that you have interests and hobbies at home which you cannot continue in your new home. This is an opportunity for you: the opportunity to try new things. Sit down with your host family and work out what your town has to offer. What sports clubs are there? Do you want to sing in a choir or play in a music group? Would you like to learn dancing or join a church youth group? Or be a member of the Fire Brigade or take part in the Carnival Club? If you like to go shopping, ask your host family if they can plan a family trip to the next bigger city during the weekend. Maybe that is a good way of spending some time together.

### **It's up to you...**

Living in a small town has many rewards. You will be someone special and people will know you and know about you. It also means you will be very safe, because in these tightly knit communities people will look out for you. However, you can't always expect to be very spontaneous – if you want to meet people and do things, you will need to plan ahead, as does everybody else. Communication is the key, so talk to your host families, talk to your school friends. Make many contacts, meet new people – it is worth the effort!

## 9 School – an important part of your exchange

Like your German peers, you will attend school during your stay. This is the best way of getting involved with groups of young Germans, of learning about their everyday life, their



activities and their ups and downs. School is a **mandatory part of the AFS program** - even if you have finished the secondary school at home - and your visa depends on it. AFS Germany expects you to attend school on a regular daily basis. Please take school seriously.

In the majority of cases you will be enrolled in one of the following **three types of school**: either the GYMNASIUM (college prep school), the REALSCHULE (leading up to grade ten) or the GESAMTSCHULE (college prep courses as well). Usually AFS students will be **enrolled in grade 10 or 11**. As an exchange student you do not have the right (and AFS as an organization doesn't have it, either) to require an enrollment in a specific grade or to get credits from the host school. However, you will always receive certificates of attendance.

In Germany students usually go to school **Monday through Friday**. In some areas, however, they also have to go to school on Saturdays. Most classes are in the **morning** and only a few in the afternoon. Most students leave school at about one or two o'clock p.m. The **class size** varies between 20 to 30 students. Usually, the following mandatory classes are offered: German, English, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, History, Social Studies, Arts, Music, Geography, Physical Education. The relationship between **students** and their **teachers** is generally friendly and respectful in Germany, less authoritative than you might be used to. However, even if your teachers are very friendly, they will expect you to take care of your homework and to actively take part in class.

Often, there are only **a few social clubs or events** in German schools. German students tend to arrange their afternoons individually. As an exchange student you will have to identify your own afternoon activities outside your school. A good way might be to tag along with people from your school. You will most certainly not find activities already organized for you. Do keep this in mind when you plan what to bring with you: any music instrument or sports equipment will help you to make the most of your free time and meet new people!

We talked to a lot of our students at the orientation camps and one of the things that surprises them are the communal changing rooms and showers, for instance at Physical Education or in other sports clubs. Boys and girls have separate areas for change of clothes with mostly no cubicles. Restrooms will offer closed cabins, but the rest is fairly open space and in a matter of minutes everyone changes into their sports gear or back. Compared to your country this might feel a bit strange at first, but no German will give it a second thought.

Apart from normal school, many schools organize one **school trip** per year. As an exchange student you will most likely have the **option** to participate in these trips. You should be prepared to bring along sufficient funds (approximately 250 to 300 Euro) for this trip, since it will not be covered by AFS.

**Getting started** at a German school might not always seem easy. Learning the language and trying to follow what is going on is quite a task in the beginning. It might feel a bit daunting, but generations of AFSers before you have managed it - you can do it, too! Keep up your motivation and remember that this hard work will pay off. As you learn the language and build a network of friends and acquaintances you will become a part of your hosting community and school in a very short time. People around you will appreciate you for your interest and for trying to grasp as much as you can.

## 10 Your year with AFS

### Entering Germany - your first day



Upon your arrival at the **Frankfurt International Airport** you will be met and welcomed by AFS staff as well as volunteers. After you arrive through immigration and pick up your luggage, you will be either picked up by your host family at the airport or you will travel by train to your host family. Don't worry, you will not have to navigate the German train system on your own - throughout the train trip there will be AFS volunteers who will accompany

you and help you out if, for example, you have to change trains. At your final destination, your host family and representatives from the local AFS chapter will be there to welcome you. Don't be disappointed if your host family is not able to pick you up at the airport; sometimes the distance between their home and the airport is just too far. But do not worry: you will get a warm welcome once you arrive at the train station, and in the meantime you will be able to get to know other students from your region who will travel with you on your train!

When packing, keep in mind that your luggage can weigh no more than 20 kilos with an additional piece of hand luggage with a maximum of 8 kilos. You will have to be able to carry all of your luggage yourself. Every year, AFSers leaving Germany leave huge amounts of clothing behind due to the baggage weight limit at the airport. The best preparation for that is to arrive with some free space in your luggage.

### The "Survival"- meeting

Upon your arrival in your host community you will have a first, very short orientation, the so called "survival"-training by local volunteers. It is an orientation designed to familiarize you with local AFS volunteers, the AFS program and anything you might need to know in case of an emergency. You will meet the other AFSers in your chapter. This is a good opportunity to address any questions you might have just then and to find out whom to ask or contact if you have questions at a later point or if a bout of homesickness bothers you.

### A few weeks later: The Late-Orientation-Camp

Three weeks after your arrival in Germany, AFS will invite you to the Late-Orientation-Camp (LOC), where you will meet with other AFSers from many different countries who are hosted in the same region of Germany as you.

You will spend a weekend at the LOC, arriving on Friday and leaving on Sunday. AFS volunteers will give you further information about Germany - more details about history, political structure, family life, leisure activities, the school system and other useful things to know for your stay. They will also present and explain the AFS participation rules,

especially the travel rules, which you have to follow during your stay. You will be able to share your first experiences with other AFSers and you may ask the counselors for advice regarding any concerns, problems or questions.

### **Midterm-Camp**

A Midterm-Camp will take place about six to eight weeks after the LOC. You will be invited to this meeting with other AFSers from your hosting area in groups of about 10-14 students – often the same group you spent the LOC with. During this meeting you have the chance to talk to other AFSers about your experiences of the last two months. There is also the chance to get counseling, in case you need it. Do remember that it is always best to discuss upcoming issues in your host family or your chapter first.

### **Local Activities**

Throughout the year there will be local activities (for instance a Christmas party) offered by your local chapter. Perhaps you will have the opportunity to participate in local social activities like working with the elderly, or in an environmental project. In the end, this will all depend on the activities in your local chapter. You can even play a part in planning something, so talk to your local volunteers to see what they are up to!

### **The AFS Study Tour - the optional extra trip**

In spring, a variety of so called study tours will be organized by AFS Germany. Since these trips **are not part of the official program** but an **optional offer** to our hosted students, participants will have to pay a fee for this trip if they want to take part in it. You will be informed about the dates of the trip and the exact costs (between 190 and 485,- Euros, depending on the length and activities) well in advance. If you fancy taking part in one of those trips be sure to enlist early, since the spots are sought after.

### **End-Of-Stay / Evaluation**

About three to six weeks before your departure you will be invited for an evaluation meeting. This meeting will prepare you for the re-entry into your home country (and culture) and you can evaluate your AFS experience. It is the last camp you will spend together as a group before you return to your home country.

### **Departure**

At the end of your stay, just before your departure date, you will stay for one night in the Frankfurt area. This is due to the distance of some of your hosting communities from the airport (you remember that from the section on your arrival above). To make sure that none of you miss their planes we will ask you to arrive a day early. Another opportunity for heartfelt goodbyes to your fellow AFSers!



## 11 AFS is here for you

There may be times, especially during the first weeks, when you feel **homesick** and miss your friends, your favorite foods or the sunshine at home. Unfortunately, there is no universal cure for homesickness. One thing that usually does help, though, is to **talk** about it; with your host parents or host siblings, your AFS counselor or a friend at school.



There will be days where not leaving your room at all will seem like a good idea. It pays to overcome this urge and instead head out to find something to occupy your mind with. Your host family will gladly help you, so seek them out instead of staying on your own. Remember, as a member of your family your behavior will have an impact on all members. Locking yourself in your room might at times seem like a solution, but it will be hard to understand for your family. Nobody will blame you for being homesick. Everybody who has lived abroad for a while (e.g. your AFS counselor) understands your feelings and may be able to help you. The same goes for **any other problem** you can't solve alone or if you are unhappy: just **talk** about it – with your **host family or AFS counselor**.

You feel at home where you have made **friends**, don't you? Once you make close German friends, you will feel closer to home. But close friends don't come easily, and it may take a while to get to know them. Since Germans are a bit more reserved than people from other cultures, you can never go wrong with taking the first step to meet other students. Entering an existing social system can sometimes feel difficult or overwhelming. Taking small steps one at a time can help. Don't give up right away if you stumble upon a challenging situation; just give yourself - and them - some time to get to know each other.

If you have the feeling that your host family cannot help you with a specific problem, there is an AFS volunteer just for you in your area, in the local AFS chapter, who will give you a call or meet you on a regular basis. He or she is always willing to listen. Give them a call or meet them to tell them how you are!

Usually this **liaison contact** is about your age and has been a participant on the AFS program himself. In general, there are also adult volunteers in the chapter who are the liaisons for the host families. You will get to know your personal liaison as soon as you come to your host community. He or she is always the first representative of AFS to contact if you have any problems or just simple questions.

If you try repeatedly, but can't reach your liaison, you might want to contact **the local AFS chapter president** or **the regional AFS counselor**. All names and phone numbers and further specific details will be given to you upon arrival at your German AFS host chapter.

There is also another support system run by AFS volunteers called **QueerExchange**. They deal with all kinds of questions on the topics of sexual identity and orientation to support transgender, gay, lesbian, and bisexual exchange students. Students who identify as LGBT or just have a question on the topic can contact this group. Their website is in English [www.queerexchange.org](http://www.queerexchange.org) and in German [www.queertausch.de](http://www.queertausch.de).

Lastly, there is the **AFS Germany office in Hamburg**. After your arrival you will be informed about your personal hosting coordinator with her/his phone number and email address.

Office hours are generally Monday through Friday from around 8:30/9:00 a.m. to 5:00/5:30 p.m. The phone is open between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. After hours and on weekends, there is an answering machine in our office in Hamburg (Tel. 040/399 222-0) where you can leave your message at any time. We will usually answer your call on the next business day.

In case of an **emergency** outside of office hours you can contact the duty officer at +49/162/1051881. **Please be aware that this number is for emergencies only.** We are more than happy to help you out in emergencies, but please direct all other inquiries to the office.

## 12 Money makes the world go round



Things can be fairly **expensive** in Germany, so be prepared and spend your money carefully. Your host family takes care of your accommodation and food at their home. AFS covers all regular program activities costs (details see below). For your personal needs you will have to bring **pocket money** of about 70 to 100 Euro per month (currently about 80 to 110 US-Dollars). This is to cover personal expenses like stationary, birthday presents, cinema or theatre tickets, toiletries etc. The mentioned amount isn't enough to make the world go round very fast. You will have to be thrifty and probably have to get along with less than you're used to.

To get your pocket money, it is possible to open a **bank account** in Germany. After arriving in Germany, ask your host family to help you with this so you can forward your bank account information to your family at home. Sometimes the only local bank will not offer this service to you, in such cases other possibilities can be arranged after arriving in Germany.

To get an idea of the price level in Germany we will give you a list below. Keep in mind that this is an example - prices depend on the shops and cities where you are shopping:

- a Coke in a café: 2,50 €
- a meal in a restaurant: 5 - 12 €
- to see a film in the cinema: 7 € – 10 €
- to take the train e.g. for a distance of 100 km: 20 € (depends on the train you are using)
- to take the bus for a normal/short distance: 2€ - 3€
- a pair of shoes: 20 € - 100 €
- a book: 12 €
- a CD: 12 €

**Your family** hosts you on a voluntary basis and doesn't get any refunds for this from AFS. They open their homes and their hearts to you and thus might have to forego some extra luxuries because of you. Please bear this in mind when they ask you to pay for some smaller things (like toothpaste, shampoo or so). If you can get small **jobs** like mowing lawns, baby sitting or tutoring someone in your native language, you can, of course, take these jobs. They should not, however, interfere with family activities and school. You cannot take up any regular jobs (for instance at a supermarket) because you won't be able to get a work permit as an exchange student. And if you work without a permit, you risk being extradited by the German authorities.

If you don't have any, you should bring extra money to buy **winter clothes**. You will also need to bring some money to cover extra expenses, most importantly for the residence permit, which will cost between 20 and 110 Euro (22 - 125 US-\$). German legislation obliges you to apply for this residence permit, called "Aufenthaltserlaubnis", shortly - within the first week - after your arrival. If you need a **visa** to enter Germany it will generally

**expire three months after your arrival** and need to be extended or replaced by the residence permit.



#### **AFS pays for...**

⇒ AFS pays for **transportation** to and from school. AFS will also pay for **compulsory school books**, in the case that your school won't provide them for free. Books AFS has paid for have to be left in the local chapter when you return home, so future AFS students can use them as well.

⇒ AFS will pay for a **language course** in your host community. Your host family has the information about the maximum amount which you may request for this purpose (it may vary from year to year and depends also on your proficiency upon arrival). The **transportation to the course** is also paid by AFS.

⇒ Of course, AFS pays for the **transportation to and from your host families** at the beginning of your stay. It pays for travel, accommodation and food at the **national program activities** (LOC, Regional Weekend, Evaluation-Meeting and Departure). Local chapter activities will not be refunded by AFS.

## 13 Insurances

If you are involved in an **accident**, please get in touch with the German AFS office immediately. We have to know in order to inform your parents and the AFS office at your home country.

If you need to see a **doctor**, the bill should be sent directly to the AFS address in Hamburg. AFS will refund it. We do not reimburse routine vision care, routine dental care above 205 \$, care for preexisting conditions and vaccinations. You should bring extra money for these cases – and to be on the safe side, **have a check up** at your dentist and ophthalmologist before you leave home. For more details, see the participation agreement that you signed in your home country.

You are insured if you break things that don't belong to you by accident or by mistake. Contact the AFS office if such a case occurs. NOTE: This **personal liability insurance** does not cover damages which you cause on things that you **borrowed** from another person, e.g. from your host family, your friend or whoever.

⇒ **You are not insured by AFS against any loss or theft or if you damage borrowed or hired things.**

## 14 Take care! – Safety-Tips

It is unfortunate, but in almost every human society, we are confronted with criminality. Every one of us has instincts that allow us to avoid dangers and to practice safety. For example, you know where not to go, or you feel when a person may be dangerous (because of his appearance, behavior or way of talking). This instinct, which is sometimes unconscious or intuitive, is different from country to country.

Since Germany is a rather varied country, it is not possible to give a general set of the “common sense” rules for our country. All safety issues will be discussed with you and your fellow AFSers during the LOC. We recommend that you talk about the following questions with your host family, your AFS liaison, other AFS volunteers in your chapter or teachers at your host school:

### In and around the home

- ⇒ When should the doors be locked?
- ⇒ What is the right way to behave when a stranger comes to the door?
- ⇒ What should and shouldn't I do when I am at home alone?
- ⇒ Will I get my own key?
- ⇒ Who do I call and/or where do I go if I misplace my keys and/or arrive home unexpectedly to a locked house?
- ⇒ Where are emergency phone numbers listed? Which are the most important (e.g. 110 for police or 112 for the emergency hotline)?
- ⇒ What should I do in case of fire or accident? Does the family have a first aid kit and fire extinguisher?
- ⇒ What should I say to persons unknown to me when answering the phone? What information can I share?
- ⇒ Are there any appliances or mechanical contraptions at the home that might cause problems (e.g. gas stove)?



### Outside the home

Talk to your host family about any situation in which you feel uncertain or frightened. When you go out with friends, tell your host family where you are going, with whom, how you can be reached and at what time you will be back. If you go to another home, leave the address and phone number. Additionally, talk to your host family about the following:

- ⇒ Is it safe to walk around this neighborhood after dark?
- ⇒ Are there areas in my host community that are not safe for me, either at night or during the day?
- ⇒ How can I keep safe when I am out and about alone, especially at night?
- ⇒ Is it safe to use public transport (bus, underground, train) at all times of the day?



⇒ What should I do if I get lost or separated from my friends?

### **At school**

Ask your teacher, the principal or your counselor for safety issues at school. It's a pity, but even among students there are sometimes thieves. The best solution is to not offer any opportunity to them, so be sure to take good care of your money, documents and other personal things – it might be best to always keep them near you.

### **Uncomfortable social situations**

Especially during your first few weeks in Germany you might be unsure how to interpret and react to other people's behaviour. A "brother kiss" for example is very normal in certain countries; it might not be in yours. Generally speaking in Germany the form of reception and interaction depends a lot on the relationship you have with that person. The range varies from formal handshakes to hugs and kisses. Relationships in Germany depend mostly on **knowing and liking a person well enough** and **not so much on the status** that the person has compared to you. If you are in doubt or feel uncomfortable, discuss this openly with your AFS counselor, your host family or other AFS volunteers or staff members.

### **Rules and regulations in the public**

Here are some extracts from the German legislation for children and adolescents in the public:

- ⇒ Children under 16 years of age are not allowed to enter a restaurant or bar without a parent or other person of legal age that has parental responsibility.
- ⇒ Adolescents over 16 can visit restaurants up to 12 p.m. without a parent or person of legal age who has parental authority.
- ⇒ Children and adolescents may not consume alcoholic beverages or alcohol in public places. Beer, wine and similar drinks may be served to adolescents over 16 years of age.
- ⇒ Those under 16 years of age can only be served alcoholic drinks when they are in company of a parent or person of legal age who has parental authority.
- ⇒ Children and adolescents are not permitted to attend gambling halls.
- ⇒ It is prohibited for children under 18 years of age to smoke in public places.

### **Conclusion**

The best general advice which AFS Germany can give you is:

! Get to know the host culture well through questions, dialogue and discussions with the host family, peers and the local AFS-volunteers.



*Herzlich willkommen!*

*Welcome to Germany!*

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- ! Take concerns seriously that the host family or the school may have expressed and follow their advice.
- ! Don't ignore your instinct in any given situation and don't compromise your personal values and beliefs.

## 15 The AFS Rules

When you are in Germany, you are a natural subject to the German law. If you violate it, neither your family nor AFS nor your embassy can help you. Beyond the legislation and the given responsibility, AFS requires you to respect certain rules:

### First and most important of all, the "No-No's"

If you violate any of these rules you will be immediately excluded from the program and sent home.

- ⇒ **No driving** of any kind of motorized vehicle.
- ⇒ **No drugs.** Any kind of contact (import, ownership, passing on, etc.) is strictly forbidden. Attending a party where drugs are consumed is also considered contact!

### Travel rules - You may...

- ⇒ travel with your **host family** or adult siblings of your host family during holidays,
- ⇒ travel with your **school class** under the leadership of a teacher,
- ⇒ travel with **a sports team, choir, church group**, etc., during holidays, if you are participating in the usual activities of this group
- ⇒ visit friends of legal age or relatives alone during holidays, if they invite you and if your host family agrees. If you travel abroad your natural parents must agree to this trip as well (written agreement has to be obtained). **During the first 4 months of your stay, no individual trips will be allowed.**

### Travel rules - You will have to...

- ⇒ **notify** the AFS office in Hamburg **prior** to departure, and well in advance. You will need to provide the dates and the address where we can reach you during your trip. **Do NOT make any reservations and bookings** before you have received written approval from the AFS office.

### Travel rules - You are not allowed to...

- ⇒ travel by hitch-hiking
- ⇒ travel to your home country



- ⇒ travel during school time (exceptions are school trips)
- ⇒ travel by yourself without any adult chaperone

**Disregard of the participation rules can result in the exclusion from the program and an Early Return to your home country before the scheduled end of the program!**

**Please keep in mind:**

**All rules are valid for every single AFS participant, no matter what his/her age is or what he/she is individually allowed to do by his/her natural parents.**

The same applies to driving: Even participants who have a driver's license cannot drive during their stay on the AFS program in Germany.

It is vital that you adhere to these rules. They are set for your safety. Bear in mind that AFS and your host family are responsible for your safety and wellbeing at all times during your stay.

**Summary:**

Breaking of any of the following rules might be considered a reason for an early return:

- ⇒ Breaking German laws
- ⇒ Driving a motorized vehicle
- ⇒ Involvement with drugs
- ⇒ Failure to adhere to host family rules
- ⇒ Disregard of AFS rules
- ⇒ Persistent non-adjustment



The final decision to have a participant return early due to failure to adhere to the rules and terms of participation is made by AFS Germany.

We do of course hope that this will never be an issue for you and that you will enjoy your stay and your exchange year in Germany!

## 16 Finally...

That was a lot of information, right? We can understand if your head is spinning right now. We sure hope that this booklet will help you into a good start for your exchange year! New beginnings are seldom easy, but we are absolutely confident that you will not only be able to cope with "those strange German ways", but that you will learn to live with them, adopt some of them and have a great time over here!

We are looking forward to having you here and want you to know that we are always there for you. Keep in mind: even now, while you may be growing a little apprehensive about leaving home to go to a totally foreign country to live with total strangers, these very strangers, your German family, are thinking of you, looking forward to hosting you, making plans for you...

You will have a marvelous time!

**See you soon and welcome! – Bis bald und herzlich willkommen!**



## Attachment: Arrival Information

Hi there,

AFS GERMANY is very excited to begin a new hosting cycle and we hope you are also looking forward to starting this amazing experience with us!

We would like to share some information about your domestic travel with you, once you arrive in Germany at Frankfurt/Main Airport.



### What will happen immediately upon your arrival in GERMANY?

All students will be picked up at the airport by our staff and volunteers in **blue AFS T-Shirts**.

Attention! Due to security reasons our volunteers **cannot** enter the Baggage Claim or Security Area. Therefore you **will meet the AFS Germany volunteers right after Baggage Claim and Customs Control**.

You will then be informed about your detailed domestic arrangements, which could be as follows:

- ⇒ You will be able to take a train to your host family on the same day of your international arrival. You will always travel in groups and volunteers will always accompany the group.
- ⇒ You will be picked up at the airport by your host family right after your arrival.
- ⇒ You will take a bus to a Youth Hostel where you will spend the night, accompanied by our volunteers as well as other exchange students. On the next day, you will also continue your journey to your host family by train. You will travel in groups and volunteers will accompany the group.



Your host family has already been informed about your arrival point and pick-up time.

### Luggage and onward travel

Please, be aware that nearly **every student will continue his/ her journey by train**, unless you will be picked up by your host family directly after your arrival in Frankfurt.



All students should therefore be aware that they will be expected to **carry their own luggage**.

Our AFS staff and volunteers will be able to offer only minor assistance in transporting heavy bags.



*Herzlich willkommen!*

*Welcome to Germany!*

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The luggage weight is not limited on trains, **but** students need to carry all their belongings on their own. Some of you will have to change trains and therefore you sometimes need to change platforms (mostly there will be just stairs). Transit times will be too short if you have to run twice to get your entire luggage to the other platform!



### **What can you do in case of an emergency during travel?**

Carry our emergency number with you:

**+49 / 162 / 1051883 (24 hours during the arrival days)**

Please call this number in case of an emergency (unexpected delays, cancelled flights etc....)!

**or call:**

+49 / 40 / 399 222-0 (during office hours)

+49 / 162 / 1051881 (Duty officer outside office hours)

**AFS GERMANY, volunteers and host families are excited to  
welcome you!**