

GERMANY CUSTOMS

Greetings:

The most common form of greeting is a handshake. A man waits for a woman to extend her hand before shaking it; in mixed company he shakes a woman's hand before a man's.

In groups, several people do not shake hands at once; crossing someone else's handshake is inappropriate.

Germans generally do not greet strangers on the street, although sincere smiles are appreciated.

The most common verbal greeting is *Guten Tag* (Good day). Some may use a simple *Hallo* (Hello). Southern Germans may use *Griß Gott* ("Greetings," or literally, "Greet God").

By tradition, only family members and close friends address each other by first name. Others use titles and surnames. However, this is changing among the younger generation.

Gestures:

Chewing gum in public is inappropriate. Talking with one's hands in the pockets is disrespectful.

Pointing the index finger to one's own head is an insult indicating the other person is crazy.

To wish luck, Germans "squeeze the thumb" instead of crossing fingers. That is, they fold the thumb in and close the fingers on it.

Holidays:

New Year's celebrations begin on *Sylvester* (31 Dec.) with midnight fireworks and parties, which are followed by a public holiday on 1 January. Labor union parades mark May Day (1 May).

Various religious holidays (Catholic and Protestant) are celebrated, such as Pentecost, Ascension, and All Saints' Day (1 Nov.). The German Unification Day is celebrated on 3 October.

At Christmas, people exchange gifts on Christmas Eve (*Heiliger Abend*); the family relaxes on Christmas Day. Germans enjoy visiting on 26 December, also a legal holiday.