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HOUSTON

Country Reports

March 16-20

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Germany Country Report

TRAVEL TIPS and FACTS

US State Dept Travel Advisory

The U.S. Department of State currently recommends exercising normal precautions when traveling to Germany. Travelers should check the official website for updates on travel advisories, safety information, local laws, and special circumstances.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html>

Passport/Visa Requirements

U.S. citizens must have a valid passport to enter Germany. Germany is part of the Schengen Area, and U.S. citizens may enter for tourism or business purposes for up to **90 days within a 180-day period without a visa.**

US Embassy/Consulate

+49 30 8305-0

U.S. Embassy Berlin

Clayallee 170, 14195 Berlin, Germany

<https://de.usembassy.gov/>

Telephone Code

49

Local Emergency Phone

Ambulance: 112



Fire: 112

Police: 110

Vaccinations

See World Health Organization recommendations: <http://www.who.int/>

Currency (Code)

Euro (EUR)

Exchange rate: Approximately **1 United States Dollar = 0.90–0.95 EUR** (rates fluctuate).

Electricity / Voltage / Plug Types

230 V / 50 Hz / plug types: C, F

Major Languages

German (official); English widely spoken, especially in cities and business environments.

Major Religions

Christianity (Protestant and Roman Catholic), Islam, Judaism, non-religious populations.

Time Difference

Central European Time (CET) – **UTC+1**

Central European Summer Time (CEST) – **UTC+2** during daylight saving time

Germany is **7 hours ahead of Houston, Texas** during standard time.

Potable Water

Yes. Tap water in Germany is safe to drink and of high quality.



International Driving Permit

Recommended. U.S. drivers may use their U.S. license for short stays but an **International Driving Permit (IDP)** is advised.

Road Driving Side

Right

Tourist Destinations

Brandenburg Gate (Berlin); Neuschwanstein Castle (Bavaria); Cologne Cathedral; Black Forest; Rhine Valley castles; Berlin Wall Memorial; Heidelberg Old Town; Munich Marienplatz; Hamburg harbor; Zugspitze (Germany's highest peak)

Major Sports

Football (soccer), handball, basketball, ice hockey, motorsports, cycling

Tipping Guidelines

Tipping is customary but modest. In restaurants, rounding up the bill or leaving **5–10%** is typical. Tips are usually given directly to the server when paying.

Souvenirs

Beer steins, cuckoo clocks, Christmas ornaments, traditional Bavarian clothing (dirndl or lederhosen), German chocolate, nutcrackers, Christmas market crafts, local wines and beers.

PROTOCOL AND ETIQUETTE AT-A-GLANCE

The People

Germany is a highly developed democratic society that values **efficiency, punctuality, privacy, and direct communication**. Germans often separate professional and personal



life and appreciate organization, planning, and clear expectations. Education, technical expertise, and reliability are highly respected.

Meetings and Greetings

A **firm handshake** with direct eye contact is the standard greeting in both social and business settings. Handshakes are used when greeting and departing.

Titles are important in professional settings. Address people using **Herr (Mr.) or Frau (Ms.) followed by the surname**. Professional titles such as **Dr. or Professor** should always be used if applicable.

First names are typically reserved for colleagues or friends after a relationship is established.

Business Cards

Business cards are commonly exchanged during introductions or meetings. Present your card clearly and respectfully. While the exchange is less formal than in some Asian cultures, it is still professional to review the card briefly before putting it away.

Cards are often printed in **English on one side and German on the other**.

Corporate Culture

German business culture emphasizes **structure, precision, and planning**. Meetings are usually well-organized and follow a set agenda.

Punctuality is extremely important. Arriving even a few minutes late may be viewed negatively.

Decisions are often made based on detailed analysis and expertise. Discussions can be thorough and fact-focused.

Business attire is generally conservative. Men typically wear suits and ties, while women wear professional business attire.



Body Language

Maintain direct eye contact during conversations, which conveys honesty and confidence.

Personal space is important, and excessive physical contact such as touching during conversation is uncommon.

Gestures should be minimal and controlled. Standing or sitting upright conveys professionalism.

Communication Style

German communication tends to be **direct, clear, and factual**. People may express disagreement openly, which is considered constructive rather than rude.

Conversations in business settings are often focused on substance rather than small talk. Clarity, honesty, and accuracy are valued.

Humor may be used but is typically reserved for informal situations.

Taboos and Helpful Tips

Avoid overly personal questions when meeting someone for the first time.

Respect privacy and personal boundaries.

Do not assume familiarity by using first names unless invited to do so.

Follow rules and procedures carefully—Germany places strong cultural importance on **order and regulations**.



IN-DEPTH PROTOCOL REPORT

Greetings, Titles, and Forms of Address

Greetings in Germany usually consist of a **firm handshake accompanied by direct eye contact**. A verbal greeting such as “*Guten Tag*” (Good day) or “*Hallo*” may accompany the handshake.

Titles are highly respected. Individuals with academic or professional titles expect them to be used in formal situations. For example:

Herr Dr. Schmidt or Frau Professor Müller.

When speaking German, the formal “**Sie**” form is used until invited to switch to the informal “**du.**”

Conversation Topics

Safe and common conversation topics include:

- Travel and tourism
- Culture, music, and art
- Sports, particularly football (soccer)
- Technology and innovation
- Food and regional traditions

Sensitive topics may include:

- World War II history (approach respectfully)
- Immigration or political issues



- Personal income or finances

Body Language Taboos

Avoid excessive gestures or loud speaking in public spaces.

Pointing with your index finger is acceptable but should not be done aggressively.

Maintain respectful distance in conversations and avoid prolonged physical contact.

Communication

Communication in Germany emphasizes **clarity, logic, and precision**.

People generally say what they mean directly rather than using indirect language.

Well-prepared presentations supported by data and evidence are valued in business settings.

Interrupting others during conversation is considered rude.

Negotiating

Negotiations in Germany are often **methodical and detail-oriented**.

Expect thorough discussions of facts, technical details, and contractual terms.

Agreements tend to be carefully documented, and contracts are taken seriously.

Building trust and credibility through expertise and reliability is important.



Entertaining and Dining Etiquette

- Business meals are common and may take place at restaurants.
- Wait until the host begins eating before you start.
- Keep both hands visible above the table (wrists resting on the table edge is common).
- Say “**Guten Appetit**” before beginning the meal.
- The host usually initiates a toast by saying “**Prost**” (cheers).
- Maintain eye contact during toasts.
- Tipping of **5–10%** is standard and given directly when paying.

Home invitations are considered friendly gestures and may follow established business relationships.

General Etiquette

- Punctuality is extremely important. Arrive on time or a few minutes early.
- Dress neatly and conservatively in professional settings.
- Follow rules and procedures, including traffic and public regulations.
- Recycling and environmental responsibility are taken seriously.
- Quiet behavior is expected on public transportation and in residential areas.

Gift Giving Etiquette

- Gift giving in business settings is modest and not always expected.



- If giving a gift, choose something small and thoughtful such as local specialties or quality items from your region.
- Avoid overly expensive gifts, which may be seen as inappropriate.
- Gifts are usually opened when received.

Common appropriate gifts include:

- Regional products from your home state
- High-quality chocolates
- Books or cultural items

Taboos to Avoid in Germany

- Avoid arriving late to meetings or appointments.
- Do not address someone by their first name without permission.
- Avoid exaggerated friendliness in professional settings.
- Do not jaywalk—crossing against a red pedestrian signal is frowned upon.
- Avoid discussing Nazi symbolism or making jokes about World War II.



Netherlands Country Report

TRAVEL TIPS and FACTS

US State Dept Travel Advisory

The U.S. Department of State recommends exercising normal precautions when traveling to the Netherlands. Travelers should check the official website for updates on safety information and travel advisories.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html>

Passport/Visa Requirements

U.S. citizens must have a valid passport. The Netherlands is part of the **Schengen Area**, allowing stays of **up to 90 days within a 180-day period without a visa** for tourism or business.

US Embassy/Consulate

+31 70 310 2209

U.S. Embassy The Hague

John Adams Park 1

2244 BZ Wassenaar, Netherlands

<https://nl.usembassy.gov/>

Telephone Code

31

Local Emergency Phone

Ambulance: 112

Fire: 112

Police: 112

Vaccinations

See World Health Organization recommendations: <http://www.who.int/>



Currency (Code)

Euro (EUR)

Exchange rate: Approximately **1 United States Dollar = 0.90–0.95 EUR** (rates fluctuate).

Electricity / Voltage / Plug Types

230 V / 50 Hz / plug types: C, F

Major Languages

Dutch (official); English widely spoken throughout the country.

Major Religions

Historically Protestant and Catholic; today a large portion of the population identifies as non-religious.

Time Difference

Central European Time (CET) – **UTC+1**

Central European Summer Time (CEST) – **UTC+2**

The Netherlands is typically **7 hours ahead of Houston, Texas.**

Potable Water

Yes. Tap water is safe and high quality.

International Driving Permit

Recommended but not always required for short stays.

Road Driving Side

Right

Tourist Destinations

Amsterdam canals; Rijksmuseum; Anne Frank House; Keukenhof Gardens; Zaanse Schans windmills; Rotterdam architecture; The Hague government district; Utrecht historic center; Kinderdijk windmills; Delft old town

Major Sports

Football (soccer), cycling, field hockey, speed skating, sailing



Tipping Guidelines

Service charges are usually included. Tipping **5–10%** or rounding up the bill is appreciated but not required.

Souvenirs

Delftware ceramics, Dutch cheese, stroopwafels, tulip bulbs, wooden clogs, gin (jenever), windmill souvenirs.

PROTOCOL AND ETIQUETTE AT-A-GLANCE

The People

Dutch society values **egalitarianism, openness, and practicality**. The Netherlands is known for its progressive outlook, strong international trade culture, and emphasis on work-life balance.

Directness, honesty, and efficiency are highly valued.

Meetings and Greetings

A **firm handshake and direct eye contact** are standard greetings.

First names are often used relatively quickly in professional settings, reflecting the country's **informal and egalitarian culture**.

Business Cards

Business cards are commonly exchanged but without elaborate ceremony.



Cards printed in English are widely acceptable.

Corporate Culture

Dutch business culture is **collaborative and consensus-driven**. Decision-making may involve group discussion and input from multiple stakeholders.

Punctuality is expected, and meetings typically start on time.

Business attire is professional but often slightly less formal than in some European countries.

Body Language

Maintain eye contact and an open posture when speaking.

Excessive gestures or overly dramatic body language may be viewed as unnecessary.

Personal space is respected.

Communication Style

Dutch communication is famously **direct and transparent**. People often express opinions clearly and expect others to do the same.

Directness is not considered rude but rather a sign of honesty and efficiency.

Taboos and Helpful Tips

Avoid exaggeration or overly promotional language.



Respect the culture of consensus and collaborative decision-making.

Be prepared for open debate and differing viewpoints.

IN-DEPTH PROTOCOL REPORT

Greetings, Titles, and Forms of Address

A firm handshake with direct eye contact is the standard greeting.

First names are commonly used even in business contexts, though titles may be used initially in formal settings.

Conversation Topics

Safe conversation topics include:

- Cycling and outdoor activities
- International trade and innovation
- Art and culture
- Travel and European affairs
- Sustainability and climate initiatives

Sensitive topics may include:

- Personal income
- Immigration debates
- Criticism of social policies



Body Language Taboos

Avoid interrupting others during discussions.

Maintain respectful personal space.

Do not appear overly aggressive or confrontational in debates.

Communication

Communication is typically **clear, concise, and candid**.

Meetings often include open discussion where everyone is encouraged to contribute.

Logical arguments supported by facts are valued.

Negotiating

Dutch negotiations emphasize **practical solutions and consensus**.

Expect transparent discussions and detailed questioning.

Once an agreement is reached, it is expected to be honored.

Entertaining and Dining Etiquette

- Business meals are usually informal and efficient.
- Lunch meetings are common.
- Splitting the bill is acceptable in social settings.
- Tipping is modest and typically involves rounding up the bill.



General Etiquette

- Punctuality is important.
- Be clear and straightforward in discussions.
- Respect the Netherlands' strong cycling culture—bike lanes are strictly observed.
- Sustainability and environmental awareness are valued.

Gift Giving Etiquette

- Gifts are not usually expected in business settings.
- If offered, gifts should be modest and practical.
- Local specialties from your home region are appropriate.

Taboos to Avoid in the Netherlands

- Avoid exaggerated formality.
- Do not interrupt consensus-building discussions.
- Avoid overly aggressive sales tactics.
- Respect cycling lanes and pedestrian rules.



Portugal Country Report

TRAVEL TIPS and FACTS

US State Dept Travel Advisory

The U.S. Department of State currently recommends exercising normal precautions when traveling to Portugal. Travelers should consult the official website for updates on travel advisories, safety information, local laws, and special circumstances.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html>

Passport/Visa Requirements

U.S. citizens must have a valid passport to enter Portugal. Portugal is part of the **Schengen Area**, allowing U.S. citizens to stay **up to 90 days within a 180-day period without a visa** for tourism or business.

US Embassy/Consulate

+351 21 727 3300

U.S. Embassy Lisbon

Av. das Forças Armadas

1600-081 Lisbon, Portugal

<https://pt.usembassy.gov/>

Telephone Code

351

Local Emergency Phone

Ambulance: 112

Fire: 112

Police: 112

Vaccinations

See World Health Organization recommendations: <http://www.who.int/>



Currency (Code)

Euro (EUR)

Exchange rate: Approximately **1 United States Dollar = 0.90–0.95 EUR** (rates fluctuate).

Electricity / Voltage / Plug Types

230 V / 50 Hz / plug types: C, F

Major Languages

Portuguese (official); English widely spoken in tourism and business areas.

Major Religions

Roman Catholic majority, with smaller Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, and non-religious communities.

Time Difference

Western European Time (WET) – **UTC+0**

Western European Summer Time (WEST) – **UTC+1** during daylight saving time

Portugal is typically **6 hours ahead of Houston, Texas.**

Potable Water

Yes. Tap water is safe to drink throughout Portugal.

International Driving Permit

Recommended for visitors renting cars.

Road Driving Side

Right

Tourist Destinations

Lisbon historic districts; Belém Tower; Jerónimos Monastery; Sintra palaces; Porto Ribeira district; Douro Valley vineyards; Algarve coastline; Madeira Island; Azores volcanic islands; Coimbra University

Major Sports

Football (soccer), futsal, surfing, cycling, athletics



Tipping Guidelines

Tipping is appreciated but not mandatory. **5–10%** is common in restaurants if service is good. Rounding up taxi fares is also typical.

Souvenirs

Port wine, cork products, Portuguese ceramics (azulejos), olive oil, traditional embroidery, canned seafood, hand-painted tiles, pastel de nata sweets.

PROTOCOL AND ETIQUETTE AT-A-GLANCE

The People

Portugal is known for its **warm hospitality, strong family values, and respect for tradition**. Portuguese society combines historic traditions with a modern European outlook. Politeness, personal relationships, and courtesy are important in both social and professional environments.

Meetings and Greetings

Greetings typically involve a **handshake with eye contact and a smile**. Among acquaintances, light cheek kisses may be common socially, though handshakes are standard in business settings.

Use titles such as **Senhor (Mr.) or Senhora (Ms.) followed by the surname**. Professional titles such as **Dr. (Doutor/Doutora)** are commonly used and respected.

Business Cards

Business cards are exchanged during introductions. Present your card clearly and review the other person's card before putting it away.



Cards printed in **Portuguese and English** are helpful for business meetings.

Corporate Culture

Portuguese business culture values **personal relationships and trust**. Initial meetings often include small talk before moving into business discussions.

Hierarchy may influence decision-making, and senior leaders typically have final authority.

Business attire is generally formal. Men typically wear suits, and women wear professional attire.

Body Language

Maintain polite eye contact during conversations.

Personal space tends to be slightly closer than in Northern European countries, but respectful distance is still expected.

Expressive gestures are more common than in some other European cultures.

Communication Style

Communication in Portugal can be **polite and somewhat indirect**, especially when addressing sensitive issues.

Maintaining harmony and avoiding confrontation is valued. Criticism may be communicated diplomatically rather than directly.

Taboos and Helpful Tips

Avoid being overly blunt or confrontational.

Respect cultural traditions and historic pride.



Demonstrating patience and friendliness will help build strong relationships.

IN-DEPTH PROTOCOL REPORT

Greetings, Titles, and Forms of Address

A handshake is the standard greeting in professional settings. A friendly smile and eye contact are expected.

Use **Senhor or Senhora followed by the surname** unless invited to use first names. Academic and professional titles are commonly used and appreciated.

Conversation Topics

Common and safe topics include:

- Portuguese food and wine
- Football (soccer), especially national teams and clubs
- Travel and tourism
- Portuguese culture and history
- The Atlantic coast and surfing

Sensitive topics may include:

- Domestic politics
- Economic issues
- Colonial history



Body Language Taboos

Avoid loud or aggressive gestures during conversations.

Public displays of anger or confrontation may be viewed negatively.

Respect personal space when speaking with someone you do not know well.

Communication

Portuguese communication tends to be **relationship-oriented**. Establishing rapport before discussing business is common.

Tone and politeness matter. Diplomatic phrasing is preferred when expressing disagreement.

Negotiating

Negotiations often emphasize **relationship-building and trust**.

Decision-making can take time and may involve consultation with senior leadership.

Demonstrating patience and professionalism is important.

Entertaining and Dining Etiquette

- Business meals are common and often occur at lunch.
- Wait for the host to begin eating before starting your meal.
- Keep your hands visible above the table.
- Tipping of **5-10%** is appreciated but not obligatory.
- If invited to someone's home, bring a small gift such as wine, flowers, or sweets.



General Etiquette

- Arrive on time, though slight flexibility is common in social situations.
- Dress professionally for business meetings.
- Politeness and courteous behavior are highly valued.
- Showing interest in Portuguese culture and traditions is appreciated.

Gift Giving Etiquette

- Small gifts are appropriate when visiting someone's home or after successful negotiations.
- Local products from your home region are appreciated.
- Gifts are usually opened upon receipt.

Taboos to Avoid in Portugal

- Avoid criticizing Portuguese traditions or culture.
- Do not assume Spain and Portugal are culturally identical.
- Avoid discussing personal finances.
- Avoid overly aggressive negotiation tactics.