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Culture Shock in Germany — Rules That Surprise Foreigners

Ruhezeiten, Mülltrennung, punctuality, Sonntagsruhe and cash — what newcomers need to know.

Deutsche Begriffe: Ruhezeiten | Mülltrennung | Pünktlichkeit | Sonntagsruhe | Bargeld

Pünktlichkeit — A German Virtue

In Germany, punctuality is **extremely important**. Being late is considered rude:

• For doctor's appointments, government offices, and job interviews: arrive **5 minutes early**

• For private invitations: be on time exactly (not too early, not too late!)

• Always notify in advance if you'll be late **via message**

Ruhezeiten — Legally Regulated

Germany has strict quiet hours:

Time Period	Rule
22:00–6:00	Night quiet hours — no loud noise
Sunday & public holidays	All-day quiet — no drilling, loud music, lawn mowing
13:00–15:00	Midday quiet hours (in many house rules)

Violations can lead to **warnings** from your landlord. Repeated violations are grounds for termination.

Sonntagsruhe — Almost Everything Closed

On Sundays, **supermarkets, shops, and home improvement stores are closed**. Only open are:

• Gas stations (snacks, beverages, emergency purchases)

• Bakeries (often only in the morning)

• Restaurants and cafés

• Kiosks at train stations

Tip: Saturday is the most important shopping day.

Mülltrennung — Mandatory

Germany sorts waste very thoroughly. Using the wrong bin can **cause problems with neighbors and your landlord**:

• **Yellow bag/bin** — packaging (plastic, cans, Tetrapak)

• **Biotonne (brown)** — food scraps, garden waste

• **Paper bin (blue)** — paper, cardboard, newspapers

• **Residual waste (black/gray)** — everything that doesn't belong in other bins

• **Glass containers** — sorted by color (white, green, brown)

Bargeld — Always Carry Cash

Germany is one of the **most cash-intensive countries** in Europe:

• Many bakeries, kiosks, and small shops accept **cash only**

• Card payment from around 5–10 € (often only EC card, no credit card)

• Best to always carry **20–50 € cash**

Other Peculiarities

• **Opening windows** (short burst ventilation instead of continuous) — important to prevent mold

• **Removing shoes** in apartments — not everywhere, but common

• **Returning deposits** — bottles and cans have 8 ct or 25 ct deposits

• **Checking your mailbox** — important mail from authorities, watch deadlines!