

Germany's treasures

Students learning German anywhere in Germany will find themselves able to experience a variety of different cultural traditions. BETHAN NORRIS reports.

German is the language that is spoken by the majority [of people] in the European Union,' says Florian Meierhofer, Director of BWS Germanlingua in Munich. 'It is the 'biggest' language in Europe - all Europeans should learn it as a second or at least a third language,' he asserts.

For students of German, there are only a few countries in which to learn the language where it is spoken and, according to Bernhard Freidl, from Horizonte Institut für Sprache, Kommunikation und Kultur in Regensburg, 'for those who want to [learn German, it has to be Germany'. He continues, 'For those who want to have a nice holiday [and spend] some weeks in Germany, there is great culture, people and landscape [as well as] a moderate climate.'

Germany is made up of a patchwork of previously semi-independent principalities, which were joined together in a nation state in 1871 under the control of Prussia. Even today, the

the legacy of those individual states lives on in the people of Germany, who have a strong sense of local identity. This means that visitors to the country can experience diverse cultural as well as geographical variations as they travel around.

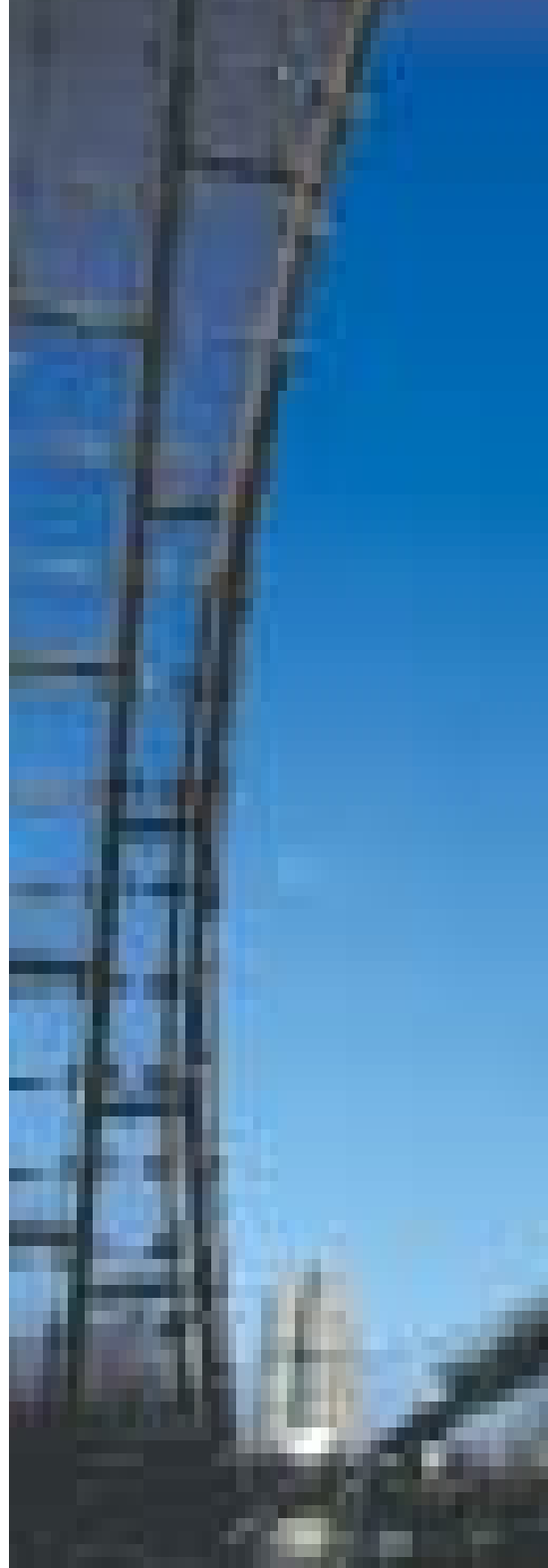
Meierhofer believes that part of Germany's attraction for overseas students lies in its geographical diversity. 'Germany is a very varied country which offers everything from the seaside to mountains, including all types of leisure facilities,' he says. 'Munich itself is one of the most beautiful cities in the world [and] you can do mountain climbing, skiing and surfing [nearby].'

Munich is the capital of Bavaria and it is here that visitors can take part in some of the traditional activities associated with Germany. Students studying at BWS Germanlingua, which is situated in the centre of Munich, enjoy '[visiting] museums, excursions to Bavarian castles, excursions to Bavarian lakes, dancing and [visiting] beer gardens', according to

Meierhofer. He adds, 'We have very hot and



Opera House in Stuttgart
As well as a lively nightlife scene, Stuttgart has over 40 theatres, and a beautiful Opera House, where opera and ballet performances regularly attract audiences of over 1,000 people



sunny summers for lots of activities outside. Beer gardens are a very useful institution for that reason.'

Beer lovers, in particular, will find plenty to interest them in Munich as the city produces many varieties of beer. The six largest breweries produce 558 million litres

Agent viewpoint



'It is well known [throughout the world] that Germany is the economic and political centre of Europe, and the quality of its higher education

[institutions] and education achievements [have a] good reputation in the world. Its achievements, in arts, architecture, sport, etc, are also well known throughout the world. I tell [students] that in Germany they will live and study in a well-ordered environment. Although they may

encounter some trouble they can get help from teachers, classmates or other friends there. Generally, if you treat people sincerely, then the people will also treat you well. [Students] like to participate in all forms of tours [to places of interest around the country], which can broaden their horizons and make them used to the local customs and culture there.'

Shirley Yuen, Nanjing Normal University Study Abroad Service Center, China



'I send 80 to 90 people to Europe each year and 85 per cent of them go to Germany to study German. Lots of Japanese like to take German at university. We have positive experiences of Germany - safety, friendliness to foreign visitors, plenty of culture in the many museums, operas and concerts, and a beautiful landscape. There are lots of attractions in Germany, but above all, for foreign students, it is most interesting to experience the



Germany is a country of variety and contrasts, with a wide range of attractions, such as the 290-metre Olympiaturm (left), which towers above the impressive Olympia stadium in Munich, and the spectacular City Hall in Hanover (above)

one of the many beer tents to drink large quantities of beer, sing songs and eat traditional German sausages.



of beer annually and run their own beer halls in the city where visitors can try a *Mass* [litre mug] of beer. Students who are staying in the city during October can attend the annual *Oktoberfest*, where tourists and locals join together in

The German population as a whole has a strong tradition of partying and enjoying itself - evident in the many annual festivals held throughout Germany - and all of the country's major towns and cities offer a lively and varied nightlife.

Henning Preuss, from Tandem Language School in Hamburg, says of the city, 'Hamburg doesn't close down at night. There are many theatres and cinemas, and the club scene is big here - there's live music every-

where as well as dance halls and discos for all tastes.'

Freidl points out that the medieval city of Regensburg is a university town with 20,000 students, which ensures that language students studying at the school there have plenty to do in the evenings. 'Regensburg has, after Berlin, the highest number of pubs per capita in Germany, so you can imagine what is going on in the city centre in the evenings,' he says.

For students wanting to make the most of their free time during the day, Regensburg provides numerous opportunities to explore the different historical periods which have left their mark on the architecture of this city. Roman and medieval buildings can be seen throughout the city and the *Altes Rathaus* (old town hall), which was the seat of the Reichstag for 150 years, bears witness to the changing architectural styles through progressive extensions from medieval to baroque times.

Students wanting to discover Germany's more rural areas often do not have to travel far. 'Donaueschingen is located right at the source of the River Danube,' says Cornelia Jumpertz-Schwab from Institut Matura.

different mentality of the populations of their homeland and Germany. The students are, on the whole, extremely satisfied with their progress in German, amazed by the cities and nature [as well as the] good friendships they make with their fellow students and host families.

Fumie Noguchi, Euro Forum, Japan

'[German] is the fourth [language my clients want to learn] after Spanish, French and Italian. [I tell my



students to expect] a high level of teaching and a helpful and friendly environment in which to study. [Our students enjoy] excursions to local towns and the countryside [as well as] museums. [Students] generally report to us that they had a highly professional and enjoyable course and extremely friendly host families.'

Kath Bateman, Caledonia Languages Abroad, UK

'There is a bike path leading from here all the way to Vienna. It is only 35 kilometres from Switzerland with the castle and the famous Rhinefalls. The school is located in a big park which is the starting point for hiking tours, bicycle tours and other trips to the Black Forest.'

Many schools in Germany arrange trips and excursions to ensure that their students get to see the local points of historical and cultural interest. Ulrich Schmidt, Manager of Friedländer School in Berlin, says that the

school offers a number of full- and half-day trips to places in Berlin and beyond.

'[We organise trips to] the classical centre of Berlin, including the Humboldt University and the so-called isle of museums with the Pergamon Museum, the roots of Berlin in the Middle Ages, parts of the Berlin wall, the new Jewish museum and Potsdamer Platz - the [modern] centre of Berlin,' he says.

The school also organises visits to the Love Parade, which is an annual festival held in Berlin promoting love, peace and tolerance. Students can watch the colourful procession of brightly decorated floats before joining the rally in Siegestsäule with 150 DJs providing the music.

Students studying at Kapito school in Münster are encouraged to explore the different cultures of the students studying at the school as well as those of the surrounding area. 'We have an international evening,' says Hansgerd

Schumacher at the school.

'Students have to cook something special from their own country and bring it in for the other students. We also arrange a city tour in Münster and day trips to Bremen, which is a two-hour drive away, at the weekend.'

Located on the North sea, Bremen is, after Hamburg, the most important seaport in Germany and the importance of the sea to the local inhabitants can be seen in many of the attractions of the city. In Böttcherstrasse,

which is a recreation of a medieval alley, students can listen to the Glockenspiel which plays a tune every hour while an adjacent panel swivels to reveal depictions of famous seagoing explorers.

Because of Germany's regional diversity, visitors studying anywhere in the country are likely to be introduced to different local food specialities. Christine Heber, from the Anglo German Institut in Stuttgart, says, 'Since Stuttgart is the country town of Swabia, there are a lot of different Swabian food specialities to be tried, such as *Maultaschen* (pasta filled with spinach and meat) and *Kässpätzle* (noodles with cheese).'

Students studying at

BWS Germanlingua are taught how to make *Apfelstrudel* (a pastry and apple dessert) as part of their German language lessons, while in Hamburg, Preuss encourages his students to take advantage of the many culinary delicacies on offer in the city.

'A hamburger is not a



Frankfurt-am-Main
Frankfurt's small old city or *Altstadt* is full of charming half-timbered houses and cobbled streets, which were reconstructed after the city suffered severe damage in the Second World War

traditional Hamburg dish although you will find it here too,' he says. 'But [students should] try the traditional *Aalsuppe* (eel soup) and *Labskaus* (stew made with meat, potatoes and herring), or have a Bismarck herring at the fish market on early Sunday morning after partying the Saturday away.'

In Stuttgart, students can also get to know another local produce, as

Heber points out. 'Stuttgart and its surroundings is a wine growing area, with some of the country's best wine,' she says. From 18 August to 8 September, students can also join wine connoisseurs and novices from around the world who attend the *Stuttgarter Weindorf* (wine village) to sample the fruits of the summer. This is the largest wine festival in Germany and more than 350 wines from the surrounding area of Baden-Württemberg are sold in decorated *weinlauben* (roofed stalls) on the Marktplatz and Schillerplatz around the old castle.

Getting to know the local people is an important part of any language learning trip and students studying at Tandem Language School are encouraged to take part in a scheme to improve their German while also making local friends. 'All students staying for three weeks or longer are entitled to get in touch with someone who studies their mother tongue,' says Pruess. '[The scheme] not only serves as a learning goal but very often the two partners become friends.'

Institut Matura in Donaueschingen also encourages language students to make the most of opportunities to get to know local people. 'We organise informal meetings with local Germans who take foreign language classes at our school,' says Jumpertz-Schwab.

Wherever students decide to study in Germany, they can be assured of having a socially and culturally rich experience all year round. As Heber explains, 'There are different social and cultural events depending on the time of year. In spring and autumn there is the huge local beer fest on Stuttgart's Cannstatter Wasen [while] at Christmas one can stroll across lots of different traditional Christmas markets.'



Neuschwanstein Castle
Bavaria's 'mad monarch', Ludwig II, built Neuschwanstein castle in the late 19th century. Its fantastic medley of architectural styles was the inspiration behind Walt Disney's Fantasyland castle