

WAS ESSEN DIE DEUTSCHEN?

Like much of Europe, Germany is a collection of regions and each region has its own dialect along with its own regional food specialties. Because of this, there are often different and unfamiliar names for foods on many restaurant menus. It is not uncommon for northern Germans to not know what some of the southern delicacies are and vice versa. This is widely understood, so if something on the menu is not translated into English, or is completely unfamiliar to you, don't be afraid to ask for an explanation. Some of the best items on the menu are the local specialties and you won't want to miss out simply because of a regional dialect issue.

FOOD AND DRINK

Brot und Wurst

In der Not ißt man die Wurst auch ohne Brot!

(SPRICHWORT)

In an emergency one even eats sausage without bread!

(PROVERB)

The two vital staples of the German diet are bread (*Brot*) and sausage (*Wurst*). Often served up together to create *ein heißes Würstchen*, the Germanic equivalent of a hot dog, these are the two dietary ingredients most associated with German cooking, *deutsche Küche*. Only the beverage known as "liquid bread"—beer (*Bier*)—can even come close in importance; sauerkraut is a distant fourth. Despite the more recent invasion of American fast food, Italian pizza, Turkish *Dörner Kebap*, and other "foreign" comestibles, the Germanic version of McDonald's has long been the *Würstelbude*, *Würstchenstand*, or *Wurstmaxe* (sausage stand). A *Currywurst* (diced *bratwurst* with ketchup and curry powder)

Related Web links: brot.de—Deutsches Brot provides photos of 25 kinds of German bread (G), hueber.de/lerner/daf-beitraegel/currywurst.asp—shows a survey of the popular dish known as *Currywurst* (G)

Essen und Trinken hält Leib und Seele zusammen.

(deutsches Sprichwort)

Food and drink hold the body and soul together.

could be called the German national favorite.

The fact that there are more than 200 kinds of bread and 1,500 sausage varieties illustrates the importance of these elements in the diet of people in the German-speaking world. Bread, in many shapes and colors, is ever present in shops and restaurants and on dining tables. The *Bäckerei* ("bakery") has always been the one big exception to Germany's strict laws concerning opening hours (*Ladenschluss*), with bakeries allowed to open much earlier than regular shops and stores in order to provide the Germans, Austrians, and Swiss with their fresh daily bread. They buy their *Brot* in the form of rolls (*Brötchen*, *Semmeln*) or in a wide variety of loaves known by so many names that it would be impossible to list most of them here. A few of the more common terms are *Weissbrot* (white bread), *Schwarzbrot* (dark bread), *Bauernbrot* (coarse rye bread), *Roggenbrot* (rye bread), and *Salzstangel* (salted rolls).

Wurst Expressions and Sayings

Alles hat ein Ende, nur die Wurst hat zwei.

Everything has an end; only the sausage has two.

Das ist mir Wurst.

It's all the same to me.

Es geht um die Wurst.

It's time to fish or cut bait.

kleines Würstchen

small-time operator, small-fry

Wurstblatt

a rag (in reference to a newspaper)

Wurstmaxe

sausage stand, vendor (derives from a Berlin vendor who called himself "*Akademischer Wurstmaxe*")

wurstig

indifferent, trifling, unimportant

Wurst wider Wurst

tit for tat

Phallic Obsessions

Despite being a meat and potatoes kind of folk, the Germans do have one curious love affair with a vegetable. That vegetable of choice is *Spargel*, or asparagus. The German version tends to be whiter, and have a bit more girth to it, than our slimmed-down, green version. *Spargel* season runs from the middle of April until the end of June, and the Germans go crazy over it. There are *Spargelfests*, *Spargel* contests and, in some places, they even crown a *Spargelkönigin*, or Asparagus Queen, complete with tiara. *Spargel* is usually served with a Hollandaise cream sauce, but during *Spargel* season, you can get *Spargel* soup, *Spargelpizza*, *Spargel* casserole and, yes, even *Spargel* cake. *Spargel* is usually a fairly bland vegetable, but for some reason, Germans have a passion for this phallic veggie and, with their usual enthusiasm, Germans have raised a common vegetable to superstar status.