

Wo ist die Toilette?

## Public Restrooms Die Toilette

In German, it is not necessary to use circumlocutions when asking where to find a restroom. One simply asks, **Wo ist die Toilette, bitte?** or **Wo sind die Toiletten?**

One would NOT ask for the **Badezimmer**, since that is probably not what we are thinking of when we are asking for a public restroom. In German, a **Badezimmer** is a room with facilities to bathe, shower, or wash. A German **Badezimmer** generally contains a sink, toilet, shower, and/or bathtub.

In some public buildings, at trade fairs, and at rest stops on the **Autobahn**, there are often restroom attendants (**Toilettenmänner** and **Toilettenfrauen**) who oversee the facilities. It is customary to leave them a small tip.

In German, a toilet is a **Toilette**. A **Badezimmer** is a bathroom. Never ask, "**Wo ist das Badezimmer?**" ("Where is the bathroom?") unless you intend to take a bath. If you want to use the facilities, just ask, "**Wo ist die Toilette, bitte?**" Euphemisms like "restroom" are not required. Public restrooms are labeled "**WC**" (water closet) or "**00**." Ask for "**das WC**" (vay-say) or "**die Toilette**" (dee TOY-leta). "**Das Klo**" is another, less-refined, expression for the "john." Another term not used much any more, but still seen or heard once in a while is the "**Abort**"—roughly: the "away-place" (**ab/Ort**). Two of the first German words you should learn are **Damen** and **Herren** for "ladies" and "gentlemen"—sometimes indicated simply by a "D" or an "H."

Public restrooms all over the world are rarely models of good hygiene, and German ones tend to be as unpredictable as those in the States. One advantage not usually found in the U.S. is restroom attendants. Many public restrooms in Germany are maintained by male or female attendants. It can be a bit disconcerting for an American man standing at the urinal to have a German **Putzfrau** (cleaning lady) casually walk behind him, but it happens all the time and the restroom is usually nice and clean.

Attendants often have a dish sitting on a small table at the exit, suggesting that a small tip (**Trinkgeld**) would be appreciated. Leave a few 10-pfennig coins if you appreciate the cleanliness. (It's also a good way to get rid of the inevitable accumulation of coins.) The normal tip is about 50 pfennigs, and sometimes there is a sign in German listing the charges for the various "services"—using the urinal or the toilet, washing up with hot water, etc. There may be a mandatory charge to use some public restrooms in German-speaking countries. Often toilet stalls have a coin-operated lock that needs to be "fed" before you can gain access. Public restrooms in big-city train stations can be problem areas because of drug addicts and thieves.

### Paying to Go

Public restrooms in Germany are a bit of an oddity. Whether in a train station, a beer hall or a park facility, the use of the restroom or WC is not without cost. Some more modern facilities charge a Euro or two just to get through the turnstiles, while others don't have any barriers. But that doesn't mean it's free. Almost without exception, these facilities are tended to by little, old ladies who leave out a small plate where patrons can leave their payment. Customary payment is usually 50 cents to a Euro and is a great way to unload that small change that tends to accumulate in your pockets. If you are a man, and you are relieving yourself, it can be somewhat unsettling that these bathroom attendants or Klofrau (Klo is the German slang for "john"), are walking around behind you cleaning the floors or even the urinal next to you! Don't be alarmed, this is par for the course and completely normal in Germany. It may seem odd to pay for the privilege of going, but it's a small price to pay.