

WHY ARE SHOPS IN GERMANY CLOSED ON SUNDAYS?

Making it a legal requirement for people to have a day off on Sundays meant people were guaranteed a day to relax at home and to avoid a 7-day work week. Because of this, the concept of a 'Ruhetag' (resting day) is held dear to many Germans.

Having a chilled Sunday is also pretty much unavoidable throughout the country; some of the only things you can actually do are eat in restaurants or cafes, go for bike ride, or visit a museum.

And if you're thinking that Germany seems a little behind the times in this world of 24-hour consumerism, you might be right.

For a long time, the country's shop opening hours were stuck in the 1950s; a law passed in 1956 stated that shops could only be open until 6:30pm on weekdays and until 2pm on Saturdays. The law also forbade shops from opening on Sundays.

These regulations were kept in place in West Germany with almost no amendments for 40 years and during this time they were the [most restrictive hours in Europe](#).

Meanwhile, East Germans actually had more flexibility to shop when it suited them.

Despite the smaller range of products available, they could enjoy later opening hours in the week and in many places could even shop on a Sunday. When the wall came down in 1989 though East Germans lost some of this freedom.

Then in 1996, the Bundestag started to relax some of the laws by allowing shops to open until later in the evening - 8pm on weekdays and 4pm on Saturdays - in the month leading up to Christmas.

In 2003 opening hours on Saturdays were extended to 8pm but the big change really came in 2006, when the issue of opening hours was placed in the hands of the state rather than being managed at the federal level.

Berlin leapt at the chance to give shoppers more freedom, and other states quickly followed suit.

Sundays continue to be a 'Ruhetag' throughout the country today; look out for the occasional miraculous day once every few months when shops are allowed to have special Sunday opening hours, usually because of a public holiday during the week.

Things have also slowly begun to change, as in recent years, small corner shops - known as 'Spätkaufstellen' or 'Spätis' - open late at night or on Sundays, have begun to emerge in cities across the Bundesrepublik.