

WO KANN MAN SPEISEN KAUFEN?

Will supermarkets in Germany ever embrace self-checkouts?

Many grocery shoppers from around the world might be surprised to learn that Germany, a pioneering nation in many areas of retail, is something of a backwater when it comes to self-checkouts. That is slowly changing.



Paying for your groceries at a German supermarket can be bewildering and occasionally bizarre for those with experience of doing their shopping in other countries.

A slow-moving, 10 person-deep queue for a single cash register is not uncommon. And if the surge is ever deemed sufficiently large for that magical moment when a second cash register is opened, don't expect your place in the original queue to have any bearing on where you will end up in the new queue.

That's because many shoppers will typically just swoop straight to the top of the new queue if they happen to see it opening first. For newcomers to the "system," it can seem pretty rude.

And the one thing you can almost certainly be sure of is that there won't be a self-checkout machine (SCO) in sight. [Despite being a supermarket superpower](#), Germany has been very slow compared with other European countries in terms of its adoption of the technology.

SCOs are points of sale where customers scan their own products and pay themselves, without the need for a human cashier. As of late 2019, there were 117,000 SCOs in Europe according to RBR London, a consultancy. Less than 3,000 of these were in Germany. Considering that Germany has by far the biggest population and one of the highest density of supermarkets in Europe, the number is very low.

Checking things out carefully

In the UK, self-checkouts account for one out of every six points of sale in the grocery sector as a whole, with an even higher ratio in major supermarkets. So what could account for this Teutonic technological timidity?

It's not as if the Germans are not thinking about it. In classic German style, there is even a dedicated research institute devoted to the study of SCOs in the country. Run by the EHI Retail Institute, it's called the 'Self-Checkout Initiative.'

Its aim is to "provide comprehensive information about stationary self-checkout systems and mobile self-scanning solutions in order to optimize knowledge and motivation in retail and to increase the usage rate in the industry," according to a statement on its website.

Its project leader, Frank Horst, sees two main reasons for Germany's slower uptake of the technology. [The big one is Germans' historical obsession with using cash](#) instead of cards.