

WO KANN MAN SPEISEN UND GETRÄNKE KAUFEN?
(Where can you buy food?)

supermarket: der Supermarkt, die Supermärkte

CUSTOMERS UNWELCOME

I've said this before, and at the (high) risk of making myself unpopular with my German friends, I'll say it again: service in Germany is not always as pleasant as it should be, and it can be downright nasty. This applies particularly to supermarkets and department stores, where the sales personnel often give the impression they are doing the customer a favor. It is not uncommon that a customer has great trouble interrupting the conversation of two salespeople standing around chatting to each other. If you are treated badly, don't assume that you are being discriminated against as a foreigner—Germans are subjected to the same offhand manner. One reason good service is not a high priority is the lack of competition; almost all supermarkets and department stores, whatever name they carry, belong to one of very few mammoth chains which have divvied up the country. So although some customers still complain—most have given up—they continue to shop in the same place. Small, family-run mini-markets (called *Tante Emma Läden*—Aunt Emma shops) tend to be a lot friendlier—but they are correspondingly more expensive.

On the subject of supermarket service, or the lack thereof: for the convenience of the staff, and to remind the customer of his/her place, supermarket shelves are invariably loaded at peak shopping hours, which creates serious traffic jams in the very narrow aisles. It is always the customer who is expected to circumnavigate the obstruction. Traffic jams are also caused by two customers trying to pass each other, since aisles are not always wide enough for two shopping carts, but to be fair, this last has more to do with limited space in Germany than with intentional nastiness. And on the subject of shopping carts: these are usually chained together and can be released only by the insertion of a one-mark coin (refundable). Should you not have one handy, too bad—the check-out personnel will make you wait until a till is opened before grudgingly giving you the necessary change. When you've chosen your purchases and have waited for ages in one of the few open check-out lines, you'll discover that there are no check-out helpers to load your goodies into bags. This is something you have to learn to do yourself as speedily as possible, to avoid being hassled by the people waiting in line behind you. Moreover, there are no free paper sacks, only plastic bags that have to be purchased and are getting more expensive by the day. Supposedly, the idea is not so much to make money, but to encourage customers to bring along their own reusable carriers.

Supermarkets are as popular as elsewhere in Europe and the USA, but small local shops continue to exist and have actually become popular again in recent years.

A Supermarkt often has a name with . . . markt, e.g. Aldi-Markt, Edeka-Markt. Inside you'll see many reminders to use an Einkaufswagen or Einkaufskorb.

Supermarkets

German supermarkets operate pretty much the same as those elsewhere, except that the products are named differently and the weights are metric. Meat is cut differently, and this, we're afraid, is something that you can only learn by trying what is offered here.

Even in the largest supermarkets there will be no "bagger" to pack your groceries and carry them out to your car. Wages are just too high in Germany for such "luxury," so you'll have to be your own bagger. In many places you can use the same cart with which you took the merchandise to the cashier to transport them to the parking lot. Generally plastic — not brown paper — bags are available but as a result of rising oil prices they often cost a bit extra (usually ten Pfennigs).

The Supermarkt is becoming the housewife's first and sometimes only choice of food shop. It is convenient, spacious, and cheap — especially if shoppers follow the posters in the window showing bargain buys. Special offers change weekly, sometimes even daily. Supermarkets are often chain stores such as Spar or Edeka, but one of the best supermarkets in Germany is the familiar CO-OP with its blue insignia.