

WAS ESSEN DIE DEUTSCHEN?

You just ordered cow's udder

A guide to the great variety of German food terms helps you navigate the culinary linguistic landscape.

It's your first trip to Berlin, and you're sitting in a cozy *Kneipe* (pub) that serves traditional regional dishes, along with good Berliner beer. Looking quickly at the menu, you order **Berliner Schnitzer**, thinking that it's surely the Berlin version of **Wiener Schnitzel** (Vienna-style breaded veal cutlets). But instead, you're served a big plate of breaded-and-pan-fried slices of cow's udder.

You've just fallen into the trap that catches many foreign visitors to German-speaking parts of Europe. It's easy to assume that people who speak the same language also have the same words for common food ingredients and the dishes made from them. But the variety of local, regional, and even national terms for the same food can be confusing to travelers in the Germanic lands of Central Europe. From Austria in the east to Alsace in the west, from Schleswig-Holstein in northernmost Germany to Switzerland's southern

border with Italy, you'll encounter different official languages as well as numerous regional and local dialects, which make a big difference when you're ordering something to eat in a restaurant or shopping for food in an open-air market.

A quick linguistics lesson: The "official" language of Germany, taught in schools and used in legal documents, is Hochdeutsch (High German, or standard German). But dialects abound—from Plattdeutsch (lowland German) in northern regions, to Sächsisch in eastern Germany, Rheinisch along parts of the Rhine River region, Pfälzisch in the Pfalz land, Schwäbisch in southwestern Germany, Bayerisch in Bavaria, and dozens more. Then there's Österreichisches Hochdeutsch (Austrian High German, or standard Austrian German) in that country (along with regional dialects, too); Elsässisch in the Alsace region of France; and Schweizerdeutsch (Swiss German) in that



ONE OF SEVERAL DICTIONARIES OF GERMAN REGIONAL FOOD TERMS

German Food Terms

country, where every different administrative district seems to have its own dialect, too.

To complicate the linguistic landscape even further, northern German has some Danish and Scandinavian language influences; Plattdeutsch has many words that sound like English; eastern Germany and Austria have words borrowed from Slavic languages; western parts of Germany have French linguistic influences; and the Swiss have appropriated many terms from their French and Italian neighbors.