

## DEUTSCHER LEBENSTIL UND DEUTSCHE KULTUR (German Lifestyle and Culture)

### 7 things Germans do that make foreigners feel awkward

#### 4. Terrible service

If you're American, you probably find British restaurant service pretty dismal, but you clearly haven't visited a Berlin restaurant recently.

To tar all with the same brush would be unfair, but there are a whole host of restaurants to choose from if you'd rather feel like a naughty child than a paying customer.

The "customer is always right" rule just doesn't really apply here. You can't be in a rush in many German restaurants, as the waiter will often pay you zero attention - and expect them to argue back if they get your order wrong.

You won't believe the reactions you get when you ask for a glass of tap water. The Local has received a range of responses in Berlin from "We don't have any here" to "You can get some warm water from the bathroom".

#### 5. They waste no time in sending threatening, Kafkaesque letters

Don't panic if you get a letter from a German bureaucrat threatening the absolute worst. Germans love making everything official by what many foreigners may consider to be an outdated system - postal mail - and they love even more writing terrifying letters.

So if you miss part of a rental payment, don't be surprised when instead of a knock at your door or kind phone call, your German landlord decides to deal with the situation by sending a letter threatening immediate eviction without warning.

And if you're a bit behind on paying your German public broadcaster fee, they'll soon start threatening to seize your car - even if you don't in fact own one.

A simple phone call or - of course - letter explaining that you've already made the payment online will always diffuse the situation, perhaps much to your surprise after receiving such startling threats.

#### 6. They smoke indoors, but do everything else outdoors

This is another one that will affect people in Berlin most, but Germany's smoking ban is much more relaxed than most other western countries.

Germany still does not have a federal smoking law, so each of its 16 states have different rules about puffing in public. Apart from in Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Saarland, it is still possible to smoke in some restaurants, bars and clubs depending on the state regulations.

So for non-smoking Brits or Americans, the often very public smoking seems completely alien. After sitting in a smoke-filled bar you may well return home at night to find your clothes reek. These days, even France is less smokey than Germany.

Even on train station platforms, Germans are often happy to light up, and once they've had a couple of drinks, the underground stations can become smoking zones too. They just don't seem to take the ban as seriously as we do.

But it's equally strange to us that they also love being outside. Maybe it's their tolerance for colder weather, but even when it's freezing you'll see families at the playground and children running around in sub-zero temperatures.