

Some helpful hints for visiting a German family

First of all, we hope that you'll enjoy your visit and this article is just intended to guide you a little. If you have lived in Germany for a while already, some information here might seem quite obvious by now. If not, this advice could be helpful and maybe even surprising!

When you receive an invitation from a host family, you should try and answer as soon as possible. If the date is not convenient for you, feel free to say so and arrange an alternate date or time.

Once a date and time has been arranged and you have agreed to visit, don't miss it. The family waiting for you would be very disappointed if you do not arrive, as in Germany one keeps appointments that have been agreed to. If you get sick or something urgent comes up which results in you needing to cancel, you should inform your hosts as soon as possible.

Plan your arrival carefully so that you manage to get there punctually; your hosts would be expecting you to arrive within 15 minutes of the agreed upon time. It's also common practice to bring a small gift for the family you're visiting: a bunch of flowers, a pot plant, a souvenir from your home country, or, if they have children, sweets. You do not, however, need to spend a lot of money on this, nor do you need to bring a gift for each member of the family. It really just a small gift of appreciation.

When you have arrived, your hosts want you to feel comfortable and at home; relax and join the family. You can also offer to help with something if you see a need.

During the meal, you may help yourself to food and ask for something if you cannot reach it. If you're hungry or thirsty and are offered more, take up the offer, Germans are direct!

Your host will also be interested in learning about you, your family and your country. You are welcome to tell them about these things, even if you are not asked directly. Perhaps you could also take some pictures with you to show them. Tell them about the habits and norms in your country and the difference you find here in Germany. Feel free to ask them questions about Germany or why things are done in a certain way here.

You probably know that there are two words for 'you' in German: Sie and Du. If you speak German, it is best to use Sie until your host suggests that you use Du. It is also a good idea to tell them how to address you, whether to use your first name or your family name.

If your hosts invite you to join them at church on a Sunday, you can of course join them. There you will have the opportunity to meet people and learn about your hosts' congregation and about the Christian faith. If you would prefer not to go, you are also allowed to decline the offer.

Your hosts would appreciate it if you stay in contact with them after your visit. You could, for example, write a postcard or email and thank them again for their hospitality.

A genuine friendship that lasts years could develop out of such a visit, and we wish you a wonderful time with your host family! If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us.

In behalf of the Hospitality Program Team,

Hans-Markus Haizmann, Universitätsstr. 30-32, 35037 Marburg, gfp (at) smd (dot) org