

One big Barktoberfest: Dog culture in Germany



By Michael Barmish

It might be an understatement to say that Germans love their beer, and even more of an understatement to say they love their dogs. But when you put a dog and a beer together, it evokes a particular image that is familiar to many Americans. After all, what's more traditional than getting together with good friends over a beer and a couple of dogs? Except in Germany, that dog may not be the "wurst."

A dog walked into a bar

One recent evening, I met a friend at the [Scotch and Sofa](#) in Prenzlauer Berg, a once bohemian, now gentrified, upscale neighborhood in the former East Berlin. I walked in and my friend was already seated at the bar next to his beautiful dog. Well, not at the bar as in on a stool, but rather at his feet, although they are cool German dogs have limits. The dog was leashed but was in no way restricted from moving about the place. The bartender had even placed a dog dish with water by the stool. Hey, what's a bar if you don't have a drink — even for dogs?

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This was no dive bar, either. A neighborhood establishment for years, it had the air of a cozy old-world-style bar. A few times, my friend's dog walked around, casually greeting other guests and sometimes getting in their way. But unlike in the USA, where that would be greeted by eye rolls and shakes of the head, patrons just stopped and lovingly petted him and, when the path cleared, moved on.

Yes, in Germany, it truly is a dog's life. Die Hunde here enjoy a greater status than perhaps any other country on the map. Dogs are welcome members of society and are invited into just about any establishment, with the primary exceptions being restaurants with an open kitchen, grocery stores, and butcher shops, one can only wonder why.

A dog's place in German society

One can't help but marvel at how well-behaved our four-legged friends are in Germany. Walk the streets of Berlin, for example, and many dogs will be off-leash, albeit not legally. There never seems to be any danger of pooches running away or into traffic although. They may run several feet ahead of their owners, but when they reach the crosswalk, it's a joy to watch them stop, sit, and wait patiently for its owner to catch up. It seems more the norm rather than the rarity to see joggers in the many Berlin parks with their dogs trotting at their side.



That's not to say every German dog is perfectly behaved. Every so often one dog will spot another and get into a shouting match. But mostly, it's a sniff or two, an *auf Wiedersehen*, and then back to business as usual.

But why are dogs like this? Well, German society is known for order and structure. Germans are much more reserved than Americans, so it stands to reason their pets will follow the same pattern. In fact, some might think that German dogs are about as friendly to strangers as Germans themselves, which is to say, not very much. You won't find many face-licking, tail-wagging dogs in Germany. Not necessarily a bad thing. It's just that Americans, and their pups, are more open to welcoming strangers.

Germany's "no-kill" policy

Dogs are a very important part of daily life and, as such, are treated with respect as any family member would. As a result, you won't find many strays and animal shelters are never overrun. Having your dog spayed or neutered is a requirement, as is having pups microchipped.

In fact, there is an annual dog tax levied to owners called a [Hundesteuer](#), with a discounted rate for dogs adopted from a shelter. This allows Germany to maintain its no-kill policy. Additionally, some German states have passed legislation requiring dog owners to pass a written exam, called a [Hundeführerschein](#). The exam ensures dog owners know the basics of proper dog ownership. Likewise, the dog must pass a basic behavior test, usually at a veterinarian's office.

This policy has been enacted due to a purported rise of dog biting incidents, making many Germans unhappy about yet another tax and more bureaucracy. As is the general par for the course in Germany, people complain, then shrug, then pay. There is no question however that any tax levied goes to its intended purpose. Animal shelters in Germany are more than places for

pets in need of homes. You'll find veterinary services, a pet lost and found, and at some shelters there are pet cemeteries.

Berlin's main animal shelter, [Tierheim Berlin](#), is one of the largest in Europe, an area of roughly 40 acres. The futuristic-looking shelter, which was used as the setting for the [government complex](#) in the film "Aeon Flux" starring Charlize Theron, houses many types of animals including five dog kenneling quarters in a beautiful park-like setting. There's even an old-age treatment center for elderly animals. Remember when you stayed at all those hostels traveling through Europe? You wish you had it this nice. In fact, you just might wish you had the German dog's life.

Cesar is bringing his [Cesar Millan LIVE](#) tour back to Germany, Switzerland, and Hungary right now! His last German tour sold out, so be sure to get your tickets [now!](#)

Next time, Michael drops in on German pet stores to get the scoop how dogs are taken care of there. Meanwhile, let us know how dog-friendly your town is in the comments below.

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