



## Germans and the Environment

Many Germans are obsessed with recycling, never feeling like they are doing enough to keep the environment clean. The need for identifying and preserving the environment in Germany is almost sacrosanct as a huge appreciation for nature exists in this culture. German rivers, even those in industrial areas, are teeming with life as a result of this. Even in recent years, German government has issued various laws that make sure all residents maintain certain standards; standards extremely high in comparison to most developed countries. Manufacturing and business opportunities are sometimes severely hampered from these regulations – but as long as nature is preserved, the German soul is appeased.

In 1991, Klaus Topfer, Germany's Minister of the Environment, declared waste a useful resource. This is why every Monday morning, citizens such as Anja and Bernard Freitag wake up bright and early, make their morning cups of coffee, and carry out four separate bags of trash to distribute into four separate recycling bins – one for paper, one for compost, one for plastic and metals, and one for glass. Even some residents in the neighborhood separate the glass into three separate bins designated as clear, green, or amber.



German elementary schools have a subject called “Sachunterricht,” which literally means “things-class.” Here the children learn the guiding principles about nature and human society, so that they can understand the world around them. Many German children, from an early age, learn the names of all kinds of animal and plant life, including the names of trees, leaves, seeds, and bark. They learn about garbage, air pollution, and how to recycle water and paper. They even learn how to make paper out of wood! What makes Germans have such a conscientious attitude when it comes to identifying and preserving nature? Maybe it stems from the history and mythological heritage of the area. For centuries, the European ethnic groups struggled for land and territory, pushing the domain for territories back and forth. It is still quite visible today by the oddly shaped borders of countries and cities. Limited natural resources (forests,

rivers, and agricultural land) were important for survival, and the European people groups realized this very early on. With the rise of romanticism and nationalistic sentiments, German nature became a symbol of national identity. An inborn sense of and need for order within the German culture interplayed with those sentiments to form today’s vehement stand Germans have towards environmental issues. It even reaches deep within the government. With five competitive political parties in Germany today, the Green Party (Germany’s environmental party) won 8.1% of the votes during the elections of 2005 and has been part of the parliament

### Nancy Ruth Speaks at FIGT Conference



Nancy Ruth, Senior Interculturalist and Trainer for Cultural Awareness International, will report on her current research regarding Third Culture Kids' added value in the workplace at the "Families in Global Transition Annual Conference," in Houston, Texas. March 6-8, 2008, Omni Houston Hotel. For more information, click on the photo above.

for almost twenty-five years.

Interestingly, even most Germans are not aware of the connection with their mythological heritage and their environment. Folktales from various civilizations around the globe, including the Celts, the Germans, and the native peoples of America, include stories of how the creation of people stemmed from nature; that is, how humans developed from the surrounding plants, trees, and animals. Many times animistic thoughts paired up with these beliefs, so that certain plants, rivers, and animals are distributed with a soul or spirit. The connection that these people groups have with their surrounding nature seems to be deeper than for the people groups who have moved to or invaded territory only a few hundred years ago. Hence, Germans may possess an intuitive oath to preserve their environment for generations to come so that these connections to nature remain.



Consequently, in order to establish a connection with Germans, one may want to begin understanding their relationship with the environment and their need to keep things in order. They can sound very factual and rational whenever they talk about such topics, but for many of them it is a deeply felt emotion, and preserving the environment is one of their most highly prioritized values. If you are planning to relocate to Germany, you will immediately notice the German care for their environment. You may overhear a German father playing a game with his children where they must name three birds that start with a certain letter of the alphabet - from A to Z! You may read a newspaper article entailing the reasons why a German corporation is forbidden to continue their construction plans because it would endanger a snail as small as the head of a needle. But one thing is for certain: You'll have to register with the local council in order to get four different garbage bins.

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