

NACHTBAHN

Will You Belong in Germany?

A self-reflection guide before
you study, work or move to Germany.

Because
the right place
changes
everything.





Before Departure

*"Some journeys begin long
before the train leaves the
station."*



Before Departure

There is a question I have seen countless times.

“Do you think Germany is right for me?”

Sometimes it comes from students preparing their applications.

Sometimes from young professionals looking for a new beginning.

Sometimes from people who simply feel stuck and wonder whether life might be different somewhere else.

At first, it seems like a practical question.

People want to know about universities, jobs, salaries, visas, housing, or language requirements.

But after spending time in Germany, talking to people who moved here, and becoming one of them myself, I realized that the question is rarely about Germany alone.

Behind it are other questions.

Will I be happy there?

Will I fit in?

Will I feel less lost?

Will moving change my life?

And perhaps the most difficult question of all:
Am I looking for Germany, or am I looking for something else?
This ebook was not written to convince you to move to
Germany.

It was also not written to discourage you.

Germany is neither paradise nor disappointment. For some
people, it becomes a place where they thrive. For others, it
becomes a lesson, a chapter, or simply a stop along the way.

The purpose of this small book is much simpler.

To help you pause.

To reflect.

To ask questions that are often overlooked in the excitement of
planning a new life abroad.

Because choosing a country is never only about choosing a
country.

It is also about choosing a lifestyle, a culture, a pace of life, and
sometimes even a new version of yourself.

So before you apply, before you pack, before you book a one-
way ticket, I invite you to take a seat for a moment.

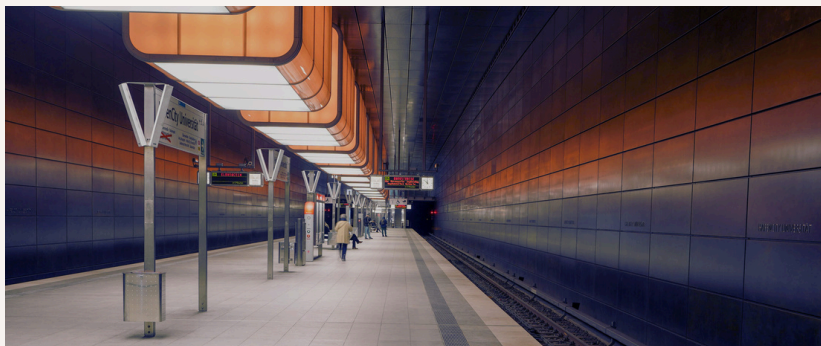
Think of this ebook as a short train ride.

Not towards Germany.

But towards a better understanding of yourself.

Welcome aboard.

— Kathie, from Nachtbahn





Nachtbahn • Stop 1
Why Germany?



Why Germany?

There are easier places to dream about.

Places with warmer weather, simpler languages, or more familiar cultures.

And yet, for some reason, Germany keeps appearing in the stories of people who want a different future.

Perhaps it appeared in yours too.

Maybe it started with a university brochure.

A YouTube video.

A friend who moved abroad.

A language class.

A job opportunity.

Or perhaps there was no clear beginning at all.

Just a quiet feeling that life might be different somewhere else.

When people talk about moving to Germany, they often talk about practical things.

Tuition fees.

Career opportunities.

Healthcare.

Public transport.

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But practical reasons are rarely the whole story.
Because moving to another country is not only a logistical decision.
It is an emotional one.
Behind every application form is a person hoping for something.
Sometimes they hope for freedom.
Sometimes for stability.
Sometimes for adventure.
Sometimes for a second chance.
And sometimes they simply hope that a new place will help them
become the person they want to be.
Germany often becomes a symbol of these hopes.
Not because it is perfect.
Not because it guarantees success.
But because it represents something.
A fresh start.
A different pace of life.
A society that seems more predictable than the one they know.
A place where effort feels more closely connected to opportunity.
For some, Germany represents independence.
For others, security.
For others still, the possibility of becoming someone new.
The interesting thing is that two people can move to the same
country for completely different reasons.
One is looking for opportunity.
The other is looking for peace.
One is chasing a career.
The other is running away from disappointment.
One wants a better future.
The other wants a different present.
This is why the question "Why Germany?" is often more
complicated than it first appears.

Because sometimes the answer has very little to do with Germany itself.

Sometimes Germany is simply the name we give to a deeper desire.

Before we continue, take a moment to think about your own answer.

When you imagine Germany, what are you really imagining?

A country?

An opportunity?

A new version of yourself?

Or simply a life that feels different from the one you have now?

Write down the first three reasons that came to your mind.

1.....

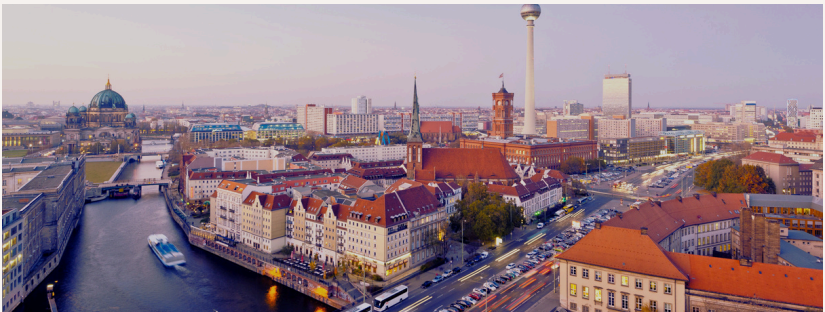
2.....

3.....

Now ask yourself:

Which of these reasons is practical?

Which of these reasons is emotional?





Nachtbahn • Stop 2

The Germany You
Imagine



The Germany You Imagine

"Every country exists twice: once in reality, and once in our imagination."

Long before we arrive in a country, we begin creating a version of it in our minds.

Germany is no exception.

For many people, Germany first appears through a screen.

A TikTok video showing a clean city centre.

A YouTube vlog about studying abroad.

An Instagram post from someone travelling across Europe.

A success story on LinkedIn.

A language-learning channel.

A photograph of a Christmas market glowing beneath winter lights.

Without realizing it, we begin to imagine what Germany must be like.

In that imagined Germany, trains are always on time.

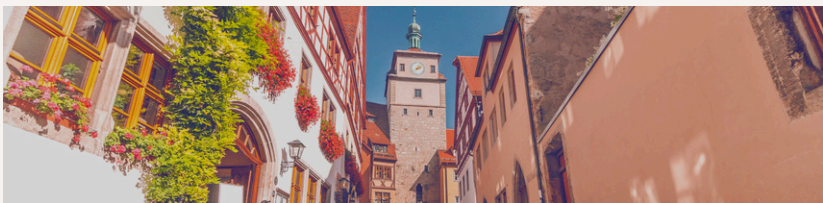
Universities are filled with opportunity.

The streets are clean.

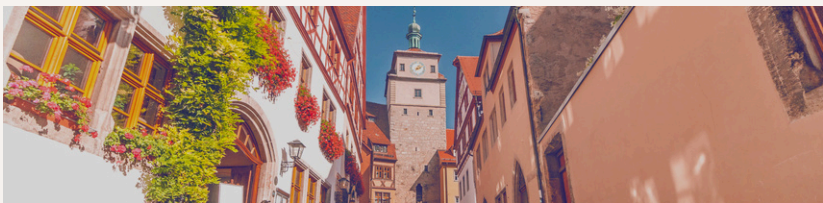
The salaries are high.

The future feels predictable.

Life seems organized.
Everything appears to work.
And perhaps, somewhere within that picture, there is also a
version of ourselves.
A future self.
A happier self.
A more successful self.
A self that finally has everything figured out.
The interesting thing about imagination is that it is not built from
facts alone.
It is built from stories.
And the stories we hear are often incomplete.
When people share their lives online, they naturally show
moments worth sharing.
A graduation photo.
A new apartment.
A first job offer.
A train journey through the Alps.
A weekend trip to another country.
A snowy Christmas.
A successful beginning.
These moments are real.
But they are still moments.
What we rarely see are the hours between them.
The paperwork.
The uncertainty.
The homesickness.
The language mistakes.



The days when everything feels unfamiliar.
The evenings when nobody calls.
Not because people are hiding the truth.
But because ordinary life is rarely as visible as extraordinary moments.
As a result, many of us arrive in Germany carrying an invisible expectation.
We expect Germany to feel a certain way.
We expect ourselves to feel a certain way.
And when reality turns out to be different, it can be confusing.
Not because Germany has changed.
But because the Germany we imagined never truly existed.
There is another reason why our imagined Germany can be so powerful.
Sometimes Germany is not just a country.
Sometimes it becomes a symbol.
For one person, Germany represents freedom.
For another, security.
For another, independence.
For another, a second chance.
Two people can move to the same city and be searching for completely different things.
One hopes to build a career.
Another hopes to rebuild a life.
One is looking for opportunity.
Another is looking for peace.
One wants to discover the world.
Another simply wants to discover themselves.



The country remains the same.

The dream changes.

And that is why no two people ever arrive in the same Germany.

Each of us arrives carrying our own expectations, fears, hopes, and stories.

Perhaps the most important thing is not whether those expectations are right or wrong.

It is simply being aware that they exist.

Because before we meet the Germany that exists, we must first acknowledge the Germany we imagine.

Now ask yourself:

When you think about Germany, what is the first image that comes to mind?

What part of that image comes from your own experience?

And what part comes from stories you have heard from others?





Nachtbahn • Stop 3

The Germany That
Exists



The Germany That Exists

"A country is not a postcard. It is a place where ordinary life happens."

Eventually, there comes a moment when the imagined Germany begins to fade.

Not all at once.

Not dramatically.

Just little by little.

The first winter arrives.

The first piece of paperwork.

The first misunderstanding.

The first moment of homesickness.

The first Sunday when every shop is closed and the city feels strangely quiet.

And suddenly, Germany stops being an idea.

It becomes a place.

This is not a bad thing.

In fact, it may be the beginning of seeing the country more clearly.

The Germany that exists is neither the paradise described by some nor the nightmare described by others.

It is simply a country.

A place where people work, study, complain, celebrate, worry about the future, and wait for delayed trains just like everyone else.

The difference is that Germany often feels less dramatic than many people expect.

Life here tends to move at a quieter pace.

Not necessarily slower.

Just quieter.

There is less pressure to constantly appear busy.

Less pressure to always be available.

Less pressure to turn every moment into content.

For some people, this feels refreshing.

For others, it feels lonely.

One of the first surprises many newcomers encounter is how ordinary Germany can be.

The country that seemed extraordinary from thousands of kilometers away often reveals itself through very ordinary moments.

A bicycle ride to the supermarket.

A walk along the river after work.

A conversation at a bakery.

A delayed regional train.

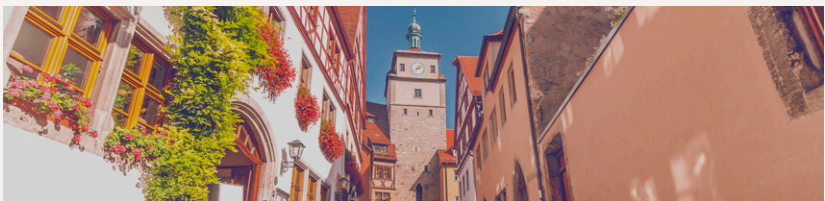
A quiet apartment on a Sunday afternoon.

Life is rarely made of highlights.

Most of it happens in between.

And perhaps that is where Germany reveals itself best.

Not in castles.



Not in Christmas markets.

Not in social media videos.

But in everyday routines.

Another surprise is that Germany rarely tries to impress you.

Many places in the world are designed to attract attention.

Germany often seems indifferent to whether you are impressed or not.

The bureaucracy does not care.

The weather certainly does not care.

Even many cities reveal themselves slowly.

Munich is not Berlin.

Berlin is not Hamburg.

Hamburg is not Cologne.

And none of them represent the entire country.

Germany is less like a single story and more like a collection of different chapters.

Sometimes people arrive expecting instant belonging.

But belonging usually takes time.

Friendships take time.

Language takes time.

Understanding cultural norms takes time.

Building a life takes time.

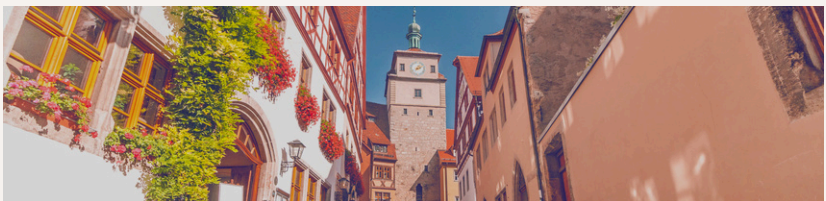
There are moments when Germany feels welcoming.

There are moments when it feels distant.

Sometimes both happen in the same week.

The reality is that moving abroad does not remove uncertainty.

It simply changes its shape.



You still have difficult days.

You still make mistakes.

You still question your decisions.

The difference is that you are doing all of these things in a place that is still becoming familiar.

And yet, something interesting often happens.

The Germany that exists may be less exciting than the Germany we imagined.

But it is also more real.

More complex.

More human.

And perhaps, in the long run, more meaningful.

Because eventually, the goal is not to fall in love with an idea of Germany.

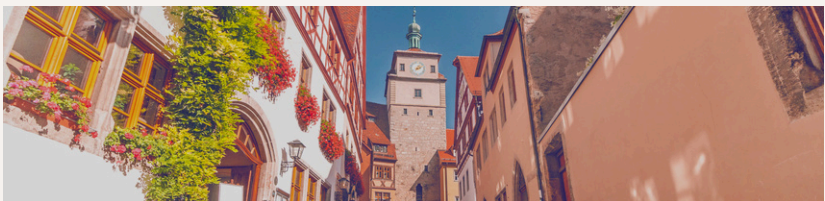
The goal is to learn whether you can build a life within the Germany that actually exists.

Now ask yourself:

Think about a place you once imagined differently from reality.

Were you disappointed because the place changed?

Or because your expectations did?





Nachtbahn • Stop 4
What Germany Gives



What Germany Gives

"Every country gives something. The question is whether it is what you are looking for."

After a while, something begins to change.

Not necessarily in your circumstances.

But in the way you see yourself.

Many people arrive in Germany expecting the country to change their lives.

Sometimes it does.

But often, the more interesting change happens within the person.

Germany does not hand out happiness.

It does not guarantee success.

It does not solve loneliness.

Yet for many people, it offers something equally valuable.

Space.

Space to think.

Space to make decisions.

Space to become more independent.

Space to build a life according to your own choices.

For someone who grew up surrounded by expectations, this freedom can feel unfamiliar at first.

There is nobody checking whether you have eaten.

Nobody reminding you to bring a jacket.

Nobody organizing your schedule.

Nobody solving your problems before they become your responsibility.

This can feel frightening.

It can also feel liberating.

Germany gives many people their first experience of complete ownership over their own lives.

Another thing Germany often gives is perspective.

Living abroad has a strange way of changing how we see both the place we came from and the place we now live.

Things that once felt normal suddenly feel unusual.

Things that once felt important become less important.

And things we barely noticed before begin to matter more.

Distance can become a teacher.

Many people leave home hoping to discover another country.

Instead, they discover parts of themselves.

The things they miss.

The things they value.

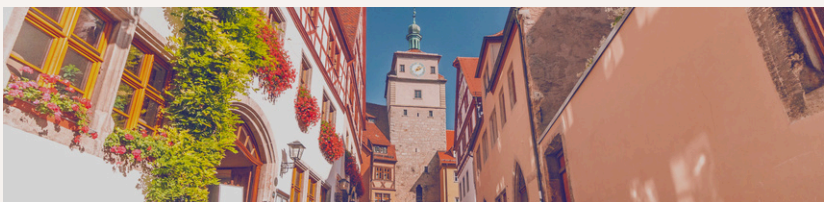
The things they no longer want.

The things they never appreciated until they were gone.

Germany also offers something that is increasingly rare in many parts of the world:

predictability.

Not perfection.



Predictability.

The train may be late.

The paperwork may be frustrating.

The weather may be disappointing.

But there is often a sense that systems exist, rules matter, and expectations are relatively clear.

For some people, this creates a feeling of security.

A feeling that life is not entirely random.

For others, it creates a sense of trust.

Not trust that everything will go well.

But trust that effort usually matters.

That planning has value.

That the future can be built step by step.

Of course, none of these things belong exclusively to Germany.

But they are among the reasons why many people decide to stay.

Not because life suddenly becomes easy.

But because they discover that the country offers something they did not realize they needed.

Perhaps that is the most surprising gift of all.

The thing Germany gives you may not be the thing that brought you here.

You may arrive looking for opportunity and find confidence.

You may arrive looking for adventure and find stability.

You may arrive looking for a career and find a community.

Or you may arrive looking for Germany and find yourself.

Because every journey changes us.

And sometimes the most meaningful gifts are the ones we never planned to receive.

Now ask yourself:

What do you hope Germany will give you?

And what if the answer turns out to be something completely different?



Nachtbahn • Stop 5
What Germany Takes



What Germany Takes

"Every new life asks for something in return."

There is a question that rarely appears in application forms.

A question that is often forgotten in the excitement of planning a new life abroad.

What are you willing to give up?

When people talk about moving to Germany, they usually focus on what they hope to gain.

A degree.

A career.

Financial stability.

Independence.

A new beginning.

These are important things.

But every gain comes with a cost.

Not necessarily a financial one.

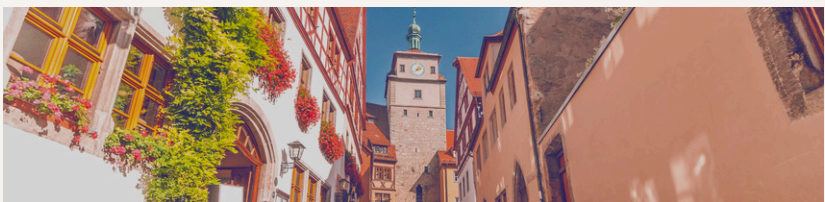
A human one.

One of the first things many people discover is that distance changes relationships.

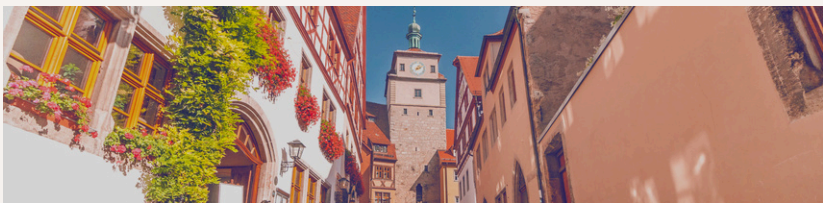
Not because people stop caring.

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But because daily life no longer happens together.
Birthdays become video calls.
Family dinners become photographs sent through messaging apps.
Important moments happen while you are somewhere else.
A wedding.
A funeral.
A celebration.
A difficult day.
Sometimes the hardest part of living abroad is realizing that life continues in both places at the same time.
Your new life is growing.
Your old life is changing.
And you cannot fully be present in both.
Germany also asks for patience.
Things take time.
Learning a language takes time.
Building friendships takes time.
Understanding cultural expectations takes time.
Finding your place takes time.
In a world that celebrates speed, this can feel frustrating.
There are moments when progress seems invisible.
Months when your German feels stuck.
Weeks when everything still feels unfamiliar.
Days when you wonder whether you are moving forward at all.
And yet, much of life abroad is built exactly this way.
Slowly.
Quietly.



One small step at a time.
Another thing Germany often takes is certainty.
Back home, many things are familiar.
You know how systems work.
You know what people mean.
You know what is expected.
Even simple tasks require less effort.
Abroad, uncertainty becomes part of everyday life.
You ask questions more often.
You make mistakes more often.
You feel unsure more often.
At times, this can be exhausting.
At other times, it becomes a source of growth.
Because every moment of uncertainty is also an invitation to
learn something new.
Perhaps the most surprising thing Germany takes is the version
of yourself that existed before you arrived.
Living abroad changes people.
Not dramatically.
Not overnight.
But gradually.
The person who arrives is rarely the same person who leaves
several years later.
Some beliefs disappear.
Some priorities shift.
Some dreams change shape.
Certain parts of your old identity become less important.



New parts emerge.

And although this transformation can be beautiful, it is not always comfortable.

Growth rarely is.

This does not mean moving to Germany requires sacrifice for the sake of suffering.

Quite the opposite.

The things we give up often create space for something else.

Distance creates perspective.

Uncertainty creates resilience.

Responsibility creates confidence.

Change creates possibility.

But it is important to be honest about the exchange.

Because Germany is not a magical place that gives without asking for anything in return.

No country is.

Every meaningful journey costs something.

The question is whether what you gain is worth what you leave behind.

And only you can answer that.

Now ask yourself:

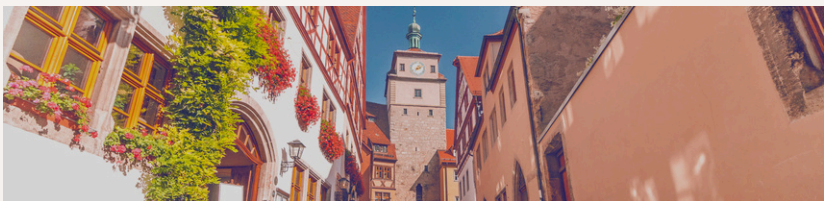
If you moved to Germany tomorrow, what would be the hardest thing to leave behind?

A place?

A person?

A language?

Or a version of yourself?





Nachtbahn • Stop 6
Who Thrives Here?



Who Thrives Here?

"Perhaps the question is not whether Germany is right for you, but whether you are willing to grow into the life it asks of you."

By this point, you may have noticed something.

Germany is not a country that rewards everyone in the same way. The same place that feels liberating to one person may feel restrictive to another.

The same culture that feels comforting to one person may feel distant to someone else.

This is not because one person is right and the other is wrong. It is simply because people are different.

Whenever someone asks whether Germany is a good place to live, the answer often depends less on Germany and more on the person asking.

Over time, however, certain patterns begin to appear.

Not rules.

Not guarantees.

Just observations.

Many people who thrive here share a particular relationship with uncertainty.

They do not necessarily enjoy uncertainty.

Very few people do.

But they are willing to move forward before having all the answers.

They understand that building a life abroad is often an experiment rather than a carefully controlled plan.

Another quality that seems helpful is patience.

Germany is a country that reveals itself slowly.

Friendships often develop gradually.

Trust develops gradually.

Belonging develops gradually.

People who expect instant results often become frustrated.

People who accept that meaningful things take time tend to suffer less.

Curiosity also matters.

Life abroad constantly places us in situations we do not fully understand.

Different customs.

Different social norms.

Different expectations.

Curiosity transforms these moments from obstacles into opportunities.

Instead of asking, "Why do they do things this way?"

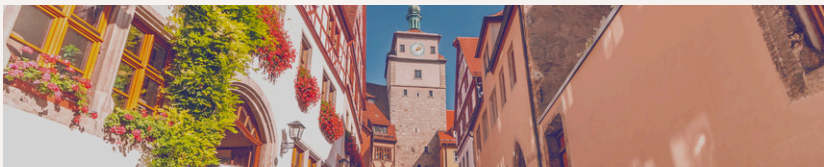
Curiosity asks,

"What can I learn from this?"

Perhaps the most important quality of all is independence.

Not independence in the sense of doing everything alone.

But independence in the sense of taking responsibility for your own life.



Living abroad often means solving problems nobody else can solve for you.

Making decisions without familiar support systems.

Creating routines from scratch.

Building a sense of home where none existed before.

Germany tends to reward people who are willing to take ownership of that process.

Yet there is another quality that is rarely mentioned.

Flexibility.

Many people arrive carrying a detailed vision of how life should unfold.

The perfect degree.

The perfect job.

The perfect city.

The perfect timeline.

Reality rarely follows the script.

Sometimes opportunities appear where we least expect them.

Sometimes plans change.

Sometimes disappointment leads us somewhere better.

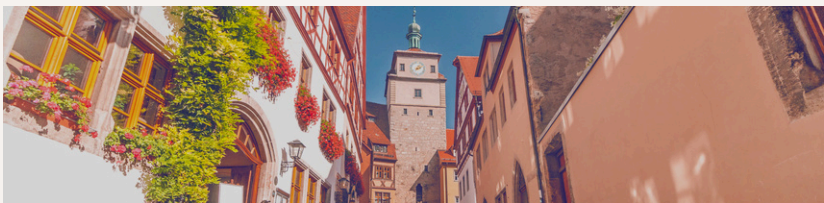
The people who thrive are not necessarily the ones whose plans work perfectly.

They are often the ones who learn how to adapt when those plans do not.

None of this means you must already be patient, independent, curious, and adaptable.

Most people are not.

In fact, many people develop these qualities precisely because they move abroad.



The journey itself becomes the teacher.

Perhaps that is what makes the question of belonging so complicated.

You do not arrive as the finished version of yourself.

You arrive as someone still becoming.

And the person who eventually feels at home in Germany may not be the same person who first dreamed of coming here.

Now ask yourself:

Which of these qualities feels most natural to you?

Patience.

Curiosity.

Independence.

Adaptability.

And which one might Germany ask you to develop?





Nachtbahn • Stop 7

Will You Belong in
Germany?



Will You Belong in Germany?

"Perhaps belonging is not something we find. Perhaps it is something we build."

If you have come this far, you may have noticed that this book has avoided giving a simple answer.

There is no checklist.

No score.

No final verdict waiting at the end.

No formula capable of predicting whether Germany will become home.

And perhaps that is exactly the point.

Because belonging has always been more complicated than compatibility.

Germany is not a product.

Not a university ranking.

Not a collection of statistics.

It is a place.

And like all places, it will feel different to every person who arrives.

Some people come to Germany and immediately feel at home.

Others need years.

Some never do.

Some arrive expecting to stay forever, only to eventually leave.

Others arrive planning to stay briefly and find themselves building an entire life here.

There is no correct path.

Only different journeys.

By now, you have explored the Germany you imagined.

The Germany that exists.

The things Germany gives.

The things it takes.

The qualities that often help people thrive here.

But perhaps the most important discovery has little to do with Germany itself.

Perhaps the most important discovery is understanding what matters to you.

What kind of life do you want?

What are you willing to sacrifice?

What are you unwilling to sacrifice?

What makes you feel alive?

What makes you feel at peace?

These questions remain important regardless of where you live.

Germany cannot answer them for you.

Neither can any other country.

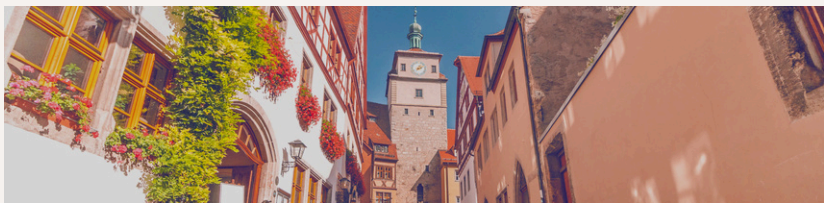
A new place can create opportunities.

It can challenge you.

It can change you.

But it cannot replace the work of understanding yourself.

And yet, there is something beautiful about beginning anyway.



About stepping onto a train without knowing exactly where the journey will lead.

About choosing curiosity over certainty.

About allowing yourself to become someone you have not met yet.

Perhaps Germany will become your home.

Perhaps it will become a chapter.

Perhaps it will become a detour that leads somewhere unexpected.

All of these outcomes are valid.

The goal was never to guarantee an ending.

The goal was simply to help you ask better questions before the journey begins.

So before you close this book, take a moment.

Look back at the answers you wrote.

The reasons that brought you here.

The expectations you carry.

The things you hope to gain.

The things you fear losing.

Then ask yourself one final question.

Not whether Germany is right for you.

But whether the life you imagine is worth exploring.

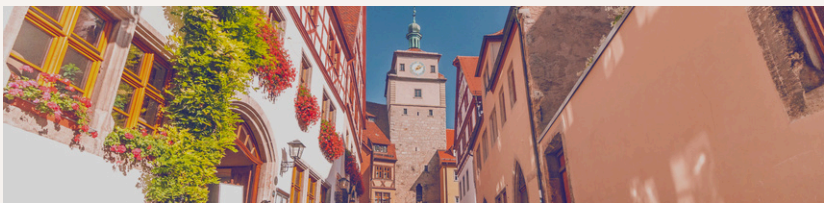
If the answer is yes, then perhaps that is enough for now.

The rest of the journey can wait until morning.

Now ask yourself:

What kind of life are you hoping to build?

And if Germany is not the destination,
what if it is simply part of the journey?





Until The Next Stop

Thank you for spending part of
your journey with Nachtbahn!

Think of this book as a conversation with
someone you trust about moving to
Germany.

Not advice.

Not answers.

Just a few thoughts, questions, and
observations from along the way.

Whatever comes next, we hope your
journey brings you closer to the life you
are looking for.

If you have thoughts, questions, or
feedback, we would love to hear from you.

– Kathie, from Nachtbahn

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