

9 Business Dinners

It is traditional in Germany to eat the main meal of the day at lunch-time, between 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM.



In contrast to a long, several-course meal, a German lunch usually consists of an appetizer (usually soup), a main course, and a dessert. When you are attending a business conference, both lunch and dinner are considered important components of the conference. Meals allow those attending to make personal contacts and to continue discussing business issues in a more casual atmosphere.

Ladies at the dinner table

Contrary to earlier traditions that frowned upon women speaking with the waiter, tasting the wine, or paying the bill, all of these things are normal in Germany today. It is not only acceptable for a woman to ask for the bill, but also to enter a restaurant first, and – if acting as hostess – to try the wine before it is served. However, this last situation will usually not come into question at business luncheons because, in most cases, only non-alcoholic beverages are served during the work day.

Alcoholic beverages

Nevertheless, the consumption of alcohol in Germany, even in the business environment, may be more common than you are used to in your country, and when others drink, you may feel pressured to drink as well. Again, you don't need to worry – modern etiquette suggests that it is acceptable to refuse a drink. In fact, you can even offer to order drinks for others and refrain from drinking alcohol yourself.

Leaving a tip

Formally, the rule states that 10-15% of the bill's total should be left as a tip if you were satisfied with the service you received. If you weren't satisfied, you can simply not leave a tip, and others will not frown upon you. You may, on the other hand, want to leave more than the standard 10-15% tip if the restaurant staff really went out of their way to accommodate your needs.

However, an informal German tipping rule comes into play if you are having an informal meal or just a beer or a coffee at a bar or in a café. In these cases, if you have been served by a waiter or waitress, you should ALWAYS round the bill up to the next Euro or half Euro. For example, if your bill is €11.50, you should pay at least €12.00 and not expect change, although it will be offered to you. In such a case, you would give the waiter €12.00 and reply, "Es ist schon in Ordnung." ("It's alright.")

Also, when leaving, it is polite to thank the staff or your waiter / waitress with, "Danke schön." ("Thank you.") This lets you express your appreciation in addition to the tip that you leave behind.

Specific Questions:

1. *When in Germany, should I conform my table manners to those of the Germans?*

For the most part, you do not have to make too much effort to mirror the Germans at the table. If you practice good table manners at home, they will suffice in Germany; it is not necessary to worry about how to hold your fork or where to place your napkin. But be careful – some behavior should be avoided. For example, in Southern Asia, it is normal to chew loudly when eating and to

belch after a good meal. If you were to do this in Germany, it could embarrass you as well as those sitting with you.

2. *What are a few table manners that I should keep in mind in Germany?*

- Before eating, wish everyone at the table "Guten Appetit." ("Enjoy your meal.")
- Only take as much food as you plan on eating. The Germans usually "clean their plates".
- When you or others are eating, keep your hands on the table, not under it.
- Sit up straight, close to the table.
- Don't prop your head up with your hands.
- Don't bend your head over your food when you are eating or "shovel" your food in your mouth.
- Don't begin eating until everyone at the table has been served.
- Don't begin drinking until everyone has something to drink and a toast has been made.
- Look others in the eye when toasting.
- Do not get up to leave when you have finished eating, but wait for the others; if you came to dinner with others, then leave with them also.
- Do not belch or chew with your mouth open.
- When you are finished eating, place your knife and fork together and rest them on your plate.

3. *Should a host pay the bill at the table with the guests present?*

No! It is much more polite to pay the bill at the bar in order to avoid misunderstandings or discussions about paying. This also allows the host to inconspicuously pay, look over the bill, leave a tip, and order an aperitif for everyone.

4. *Is it acceptable to ask for the house wine in a good restaurant?*

Yes! A good house wine is a good advertisement for a restaurant. Also, you can be sure that a wine from wine countries such as Germany, France, and Italy will never be of bad quality. When your budget doesn't allow an extremely expensive wine, ask the waiter to recommend a low cost, quality wine. By naming the amount that you are willing to spend, you show that you are confident in the situation and not embarrassed to ask.

5. *When I attend a social event, should I wait to take off my sport coat or jacket until I am asked to do so by the host?*

Yes! Good hosts and hostesses should react quickly when they notice that the room temperature is rising and offer to take your coat for you.

6. *Is it true that I should not lay my paper napkin in my plate when I am finished eating?*

Yes! In Germany it is customary to fold your napkin after eating and place it to the left side of your plate. The Germans have a very strict recycling system, and this helps ensure that the napkin ends up in the correct recycling bin. Cloth napkins should also be folded and laid to the left side of your plate, never in the plate!

This article is an excerpt from *Mind Your Manners – Tips for Business Professionals Visiting Germany* by Gretchen Schaupp and Joachim Graff, (DATAKONTEXT, ISBN: 978-3-89577-361-7).

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