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MEET THE GERMANS

After a travel hiatus of over a year, some of us are finally back on the road, visiting friends and family or making up for lost opportunities to see domestic or foreign destinations. Many organizations have reorganized past canceled tours to various places such as European Christmas markets and the rescheduled Oberammergau Passion Play. I have traveled extensively between the US and Germany as well as other European countries for over 60 years and learned that international travel experiences may be greatly enhanced with a rudimentary knowledge about cultural differences among us.

Some years ago, my wife and I hosted several German college students who participated in one-year exchange programs sponsored by our respective governments; we hosted four of the students for extended periods (one for the entire year) and many others for their first week in this country. After arriving and before traveling to their final hosts, all participated in a short seminar designed to acquaint them with our customs — they were provided with two lists of 50 items each: one noting points regarding what we think of Germans, the other, what they think of us. As someone who has and still straddles both societies, I have realized that it is important to understand these differences in values and experiences between the two national groups in order to ensure that our interactions are mostly positive.

Meet the Germans is a short three-hour workshop designed for travelers to Germany. It stresses that in order to understand others, we first need to understand ourselves. We will review what others think of us and discuss German personality and behavioral traits to assist in creating win-win situations in our interpersonal relations. We will review what to expect when dining, shopping, driving, etc., provide information on how to ensure that our electronics will work overseas and discuss a list of resources for additional information. The workshop will conclude with a Q&A, addressing any special interest issues not already covered.

Wolf Koch arrived in this country from a small town on the Rhine River 60+ years ago; a decade later, he was back in Germany for five years as an officer in the US Air Force and a partner in a small German engineering firm; he has been back on business trips and family visits almost annually. While in the Air Force, he had more than 150 subordinates, many of whom were away from home for the first time and needed much counseling about living overseas. Almost 50 years ago, while in Germany, Wolf participated in the early development of Personality Inventories which led to the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator still in use today. He has used this tool since in team building, corporate training and teaching. Starting in 1991, he became an annual participant and occasional facilitator at the Amoco Management Institute, learning and teaching interpersonal skills necessary for success within a multinational corporation. He managed international engineering projects in Germany and conducted post-installation audits on large international projects during a detour into corporate strategic planning. For the last 25 years, he has been consulting for the petroleum industry on various strategic efforts, including providing counsel to clients in various European countries. Dr. Koch holds Ph.D. and bachelor degrees in chemical engineering and a master's degree in biomedical engineering, was a professor of engineering and taught Engineering Economics, Project Evaluation and Management as part of academic and industrial programs for over 40 years.