

Is Life Better in Germany or the United States?

Reflections from a German-American Perspective

By Ralf G. Bahr

Throughout my business career, I traveled frequently between Germany and the United States, often spending extended periods in Germany for business and family matters.

Since 1969, I have crossed the Atlantic more than 360 times. Over the years, one question has come up again and again in conversations with friends and colleagues: **Is life better in Germany or in the United States?**

For many in the German-American community, this question goes far beyond a simple comparison of countries. It touches on identity, opportunity, belonging, and the personal choices that shape a lifetime.

A Decision Shaped by Opportunity

More than four decades ago, I made a deliberate decision to leave Germany and move to the United States. The motivation was clear: opportunity.

Like many immigrants, I was drawn to the chance to grow professionally, take risks, and build something of my own. Over time, that decision led to a career, a family, and eventually U.S. citizenship. At the time, Germany did not permit dual citizenship, making the transition a defining moment, one that required me to embrace a new national identity while still honoring my German roots.

Living Between Two Cultures

The United States became the center of my life, but Germany never ceased to be part of who I am. My children, born in Germany, grew up bilingual and culturally connected to both countries. Later, they worked for German companies in the United States, reflecting a transatlantic continuity familiar to many German-American families.

During my years in New York City, I met many German professionals on temporary assignments. A recurring observation emerged: after several years in the United States, returning to Germany can be unexpectedly challenging. Life abroad reshapes perspectives, habits, and expectations in ways that are not easily reversed.

What Remains Enduring About Germany

Germany continues to hold a deep and lasting appeal; its culture, food, sense of Gemütlichkeit, and social structure offer familiarity and stability. At the same time, each country has its own advantages. What feels grounding at one stage of life may feel limiting at another. The comparison is rarely absolute, and always personal.

A German-American Conclusion

For those who have lived between Germany and the United States, the question is not which life is “better,” but how each experience shapes who we become. Germany often provides roots, history, culture, and identity. The United States offers space, opportunity, reinvention, and possibility. Both countries shape lives in profound and lasting ways.

Closing Reflection

In the end, it is not a matter of choosing one country over the other. It is about understanding how both have shaped your life and who you have become as a result. I have come to realize that I did not leave Germany behind, nor did I simply “arrive” in America. Instead, I carry both within me. Germany gave me my foundation, my values, discipline, and sense of identity. The United States gave me the freedom to grow, take risks, and build a life defined by opportunity.

After more than half a century spent between these two worlds, I no longer ask where life is better. I ask what each place has taught me. And perhaps that is the true privilege of a German-American life: not having to choose between two countries but having the perspective, and the gratitude, to belong to both, in different ways.

I did not leave one life behind to start another; I learned to carry both. What shaped me and what challenged me are not separate stories but one continuous journey. And for that, I remain grateful.

In the end, it is not a matter of choosing one over the other. It is about understanding how both have shaped your journey, and appreciating the perspective that only a life between two worlds can offer.

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