

Wedding customs

Here's a selection of customs that are common in Germany:

Throwing rice

After the wedding ceremony, the guests throw rice. According to folklore this is supposed to symbolise fertility. It's best only to practice this custom outside of the church or registry office – otherwise you could run into problems with the cleaners!

Throwing the bride's bouquet

The bride throws her bouquet in amongst the surrounding, unmarried women. Whoever catches the bouquet is likely to be the next to marry. Proof of this, however, does not exist!

The bridesmaids

Bridesmaids are girls, who are still unmarried, who accompany the bride into the church. They are supposed to divert from the bride any evil spirits trying to harm her. In order to do this, the bridesmaids have to wear clothes that are very similar to the bride's.

Flower children

Scattering fresh flowers or petals is an old pagan custom. The flowers' scent was supposed to attract fertility goddesses to endow plentiful offspring on the married couple.

Tying cans to the car

Empty tin cans are tied with string to the couple's car. The noise made as they're dragged along lets everyone know that it's newly weds driving by.

Old, new, borrowed and blue

A bride is supposed to have four things with her on her wedding day: Something old, e.g. an old piece of family jewellery, which stands for her life as a single woman; something new, e.g. her wedding ring, which signifies her life ahead as a married woman; something borrowed, e.g. a borrowed necklace, which is supposed to serve as a mark of friendship; and something blue, e.g. a garter, as a symbol of fidelity.

Abducting the bride

At the wedding reception, a good friend abducts the bride and takes her off to a nearby pub. The two are accompanied on the abduction by a number of the wedding guests. When after some searching the groom arrives, some effort is required from him to free his

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wife. He may, for example, have to promise to fulfil three wishes from the bride (to do the washing up or vacuuming for four weeks, etc.), have to tell his favourite joke or have to sing a song.

Veil dancing

The veil dance takes place at midnight. During the dance, the veil is stolen from the bride and torn into lots of pieces to be given to the bridesmaids and her other female friends. The idea is that symbolically they also get something of the rich blessing that the bridal couple have received that day.

Being carried over the threshold

When the young bride tries to enter her new home, there will be evil spirits lurking not only outside the door, but also under the threshold. According to old superstitions, they begrudge her her happiness. The groom therefore protects her by carrying her over the threshold. She thus avoids coming into contact with the dark forces.

Paying with pennies for wedding day shoes

As people used to be very poor, they had to make every penny go a long way when it came to paying for the bride's trousseau. Girls therefore used to save from their early years for the money they would need in the future household. If a bride paid for her wedding day shoes with pennies, then this was a guarantee for her future husband that she would be a frugal, loyal and steadfast wife.

Where does the ex-girlfriend live?

The route from the newly weds' home to where the groom's old girlfriend lives is marked out on the road. This may, for example, be done with chalk or sawdust.

The 'Polterabend'

Before the wedding, the soon-to-be husband and wife invite their friends round so that they can take their leave of unmarried society. The name 'Polterabend' (Polter Evening) comes from the German 'Poltern', meaning 'to clatter', as that evening the friends smash a lot of china. This is supposed to bring luck and drive away evil spirits.

Stag night

The groom says goodbye to bachelor life. Generally, the groom's friends are only too happy to organise this evening!