

## Kaffee- und Teegesellschaften (Coffee and Tea Parties)

Walking around a German town, one cannot help but notice a bakery, café or *Konditorei* around virtually every corner. In the bakeries one finds dozens of different types of freshly baked breads and rolls, while the *Konditoreien* offer a marvelous selection of cakes, tortes and chocolates. Often there is a café attached to the *Konditorei* and the perplexed American tourist notices that the menu is limited to cakes and drinks and maybe the occasional *belegtes Brötchen* (open faced bread roll). After a while, it becomes clear that baked goods and especially cakes occupy a significant place in German culinary tradition.

While cake in America is mostly served as dessert, in Germany it is the basis of a special meal that serves a distinct function in social interactions. Traditional German mealtimes are the morning *Frühstück*, when people usually eat light breads or rolls with butter and jam; the midday *Mittagessen*, when a big, warm meal is served; and the later *Abendessen*, when people eat a light meal of bread with cheese and cold cuts.

Add to that *Kaffeetrinken*. In the mid-afternoon, many Germans will have a cup of coffee or tea with a piece of cake. This is often the preferred time for socializing. Even a casual visitor will be offered some cake and coffee. On Sunday afternoons, extended families gather and friends are often invited for a more formal *Sonntagskaffee*. For this, the table is nicely set and a variety of cakes and cream-tortes are served with coffee or tea. If guests are invited to stay into the evening, a light supper (bread rolls with cold cuts, a soup or salad) might be served, but usually not a major warm meal.

On other occasions, people will meet for *Kaffee* in a café. Cafés range from a little corner café to very elegant ones. In fact, famous cafés are landmarks in many major cities in the German-speaking countries, for example: Café Kranzler in Berlin and Café Sacher in Vienna. Here you can find groups of well-dressed people in the mid-afternoon, sitting over a cup of coffee and a piece of *Apfelstrudel* with whipped cream.

If cake is served only at coffee-time, what do Germans eat for dessert? Desserts are frequently served after the warm meal, *Mittagessen*. They include puddings and mousses, ice cream and fresh and cooked fruit.

Germans who immigrated to the United States brought their coffee-and-cake tradition with them. The importance of it is reflected in the German-American cookbooks. Not only do the cookbooks include an abundance of recipes for cakes, cookies, tortes and homemade chocolates, but also special chapters on “Kaffee- und Teegesellschaften.” In these chapters the German-immigrant *Hausfrau* is advised on how to properly entertain at a coffee or tea party, how to set the table, what cakes to serve on what occasion, how to decorate the room, etc.