

A taste of normality as restaurants, churches reopen in Germany

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The waiters are wearing masks and there's no singing in Church, but some Germans got a taste of normal life at the weekend as restaurants and places of worship reopened after weeks of coronavirus restrictions.

In the northeastern state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, residents

took advantage of the sunny weather to flock to their favourite eateries and cafes for the first time since mid-March.

The state on the Baltic coast, which has Germany's lowest infection numbers, became the first in the country to reopen restaurants on Saturday.

For the hospitality sector, the restart hasn't come a moment too soon.

"Economically, it has been a disaster for us," said Thomas Hildebrand, manager of Cafe Prag in the state's picturesque capital of Schwerin.

Other states are set to follow with restaurants, cafes and hotels reopening across Germany in the coming days and weeks.

But dining experiences will be different in the age of the corona.

"Our employees must wear masks and our customers must respect social distancing," Hildebrand told AFP, his own mask hanging around his neck.

Staff are also following other hygiene rules "such as disinfecting tables, no common usage of certain utensils", he said.

"We're trying to put this in place, it's new for us. But we are happy to be able to reopen."

Chancellor Angela Merkel recently said Germany had passed the "first phase" of the pandemic, allowing for a gradual return to normal—even if a spike in cases since then has revived concern about the country's infection rate.

'Very moving'

Under Germany's federal system, each of its 16 states makes its own decisions on how to emerge from lockdown.

Most shops are already open again, and children are slowly returning to classrooms. Even Bundesliga football matches are set to resume.

Religious services are starting up again too. On Sunday, Berlin Cathedral held its first Mass since the lockdown.

"The service was like a fresh start, it was very moving," Susanne Romberg said on her way out of the imposing building.

But here too, the [coronavirus](#) made its presence felt.

Worshippers had to sign in upon arrival, greeted by a clerk behind a plexiglass screen.

They were asked to wear masks and disinfect their hands at the door.

On the pews, little notices reminded people to keep their distance.

In line with rules agreed by places of worship across Germany, there was no singing to prevent the spread of the virus through droplets from an infected person's mouth.

Despite the changes, Klaus Nitzsche, 66, said he had enjoyed the service.

"It was really nice to experience the service together again," he said.

The online Masses he had been following for the past two months "can't compare", he said.

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