



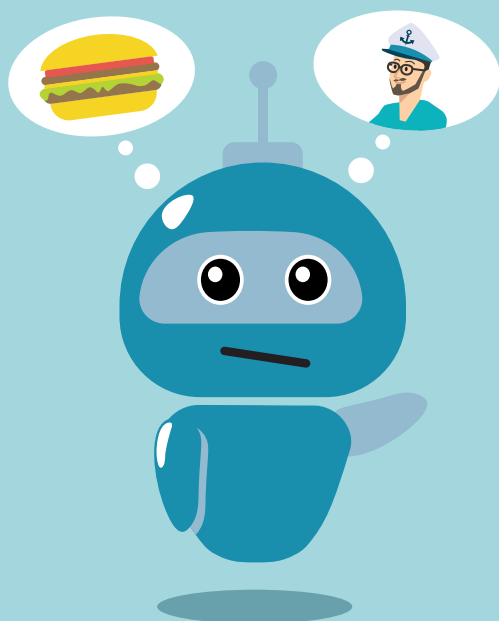
German places pronounced the English way

Bayreuth is the capital of Lebanon, if pronounced in the English way. I've written before about how to pronounce English place names correctly in order to be understood. This got me thinking about how badly many English speakers pronounce German place names. You might not catch that a business visitor had appointments in 'Acken' and 'Doozberg' (Aachen and Duisburg) or that a tourist visited 'Nyu-suonstine' (Neuschwanstein). Here follows a guide to the way Anglophones mangle place names in Germany and around Europe. You might even need to use these forms to be understood when speaking English!

by Garry Britton

Hamburgers and other burgers

Let's start with Hamburg. It doesn't help that a McDonald's hamburger sounds like '-berger'. Augsburg, Regensburg and Freiberg will all be treated with the same sound. Salzburg is even worse (Soltsberg), because of the analogy with the sound of 'salt'. Frankfurt and Erfurt are also given the same '-er' sound. Würzburg gets it twice! The true German 'ur' sound doesn't exist in English, so is rarely recognised. Imagine how Wurst is pronounced!



Sounds that don't exist in English prove difficult

Some of the longer vowels used in German don't exist in British English in exactly the same form. This means that you will hear Berlin, Dresden and Aachen with short vowels. As for consonants, the combination 'schl' is very unfamiliar to British (but not American) ears, so a town like Schleswig may sound like Sleswig. The German 'sht' sound is also not easy, so Stuttgart could be simplified in a similar way to an 's-t' sound. We could end up with a very anglicised version of Schleswig-Holstein! The 'ch' sound is only made by Scottish speakers, so may be replaced with a hard K sound for Munich and Zurich (and again, Aachen). Munich and Nuremberg are also pronounced by British speakers with a 'yu' sound at the start. A lot of Anglophones will know that places beginning with W are pronounced like English V, but you may still hear Weimar, Wolfsburg and Wiesbaden with an English W. As for Zwickau, a 'tsv' sound is almost impossible.



Some place names are officially recognised

Not only Munich, but also Cologne, Bavaria, the Danube, Lake Constance (Bodensee) and Vienna are given official English versions, in general making them easier to say. This is also the case for many Italian cities, which have both German and English versions: Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples – they are at least easily recognised.

Other European cities that get the English treatment

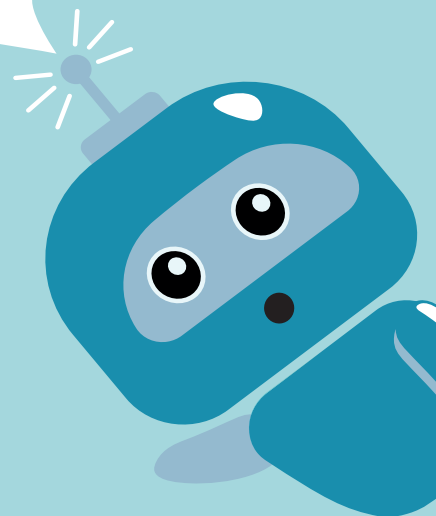
In France, Paris, Lyon, Nice and Alsace are just a little different from their German equivalents; Toulouse is often said with a weak initial vowel (written as ə). Lille is such an ‘unEnglish’ long vowel that it is usually made to rhyme with ‘eel’ – and then the French don’t understand it! Spanish places with ‘LL’ are interesting; in the case of Seville, the letter L is heard, but Mallorca and Marbella are pronounced in Spanish fashion as ‘Majorca’ and ‘Marbeja’.

- U as in Southern English ‘cut’ means that Brussels and Luxembourg take this short vowel sound.
- Copenhagen is given an ‘ay’ sound rather than the German long ‘a’.
- Athens has a proper ‘th’ sound, which is sometimes a challenge for German speakers. And the final ‘s’ is like a ‘z’.
- The ‘au’ of Warschau and Moskau becomes Warsaw and Moscow (so not totally consistent).

Tongue twisters can be long or short

So what’s the hardest German place name to get right? First prize may go to the southern Länder, with longer place names at least looking more challenging: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Villingen-Schwenningen or Neuschwanstein. But I’d still challenge most Brits to say Aachen and Wuppertal correctly. Mannheim would work.

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VOKABELTRAINING

eel

Aal

to mangle

hier: verstümmeln;
falsch aussprechen

tongue twisters
Zungenbrecher

