

SUSTAINABILITY INTRODUCTION: PART 2

Homestay in Berlin

A homestay has been arranged for you with the Graf family. A homestay is a unique opportunity to experience daily life in Berlin. During your explorations, you will discover how residents of Berlin are meeting sustainability goals through small changes in consumer habits.

The Graf family lives in the *Graefe-Kiez* neighborhood of [Kreuzberg](#), a borough of Berlin. This neighborhood is especially popular among young families because it is near parks, playgrounds, shops, and restaurants.

The Graf family has a three-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a walk-up apartment. Mr. Graf is an engineer with a large company in Berlin. Mrs. Graf teaches English at an international school in Berlin. Their daughter, Anna, is 12 years old, and their son, Luca, is 14 years old. Both Anna and Luca play football or, as it's called in the United States, soccer.

Luca has an interest in technology and is attending ninth grade at a [Realschule](#). His school will conclude after tenth grade next year. Students attending a *Realschule* have three options, which are designed to prepare them for the workforce instead of university. The first option is to complete two years of high school and take a graduation exam before directly entering the workforce. The second option is to start an *Ausbildung* (vocational training) to earn an income as an apprentice, splitting time between theoretical learning and on-the-job practical training. The third option is to finish an *Ausbildung* and then go to a university to study applied sciences, called a [Fachhochschule](#).

Anna has plans to attend a university after graduation and is enrolled in a [Gymnasium](#). A *Gymnasium* provides college preparatory education. Anna is considering majoring in engineering, but she is also interested in political science.

During your homestay, you will explore sustainability through zero-waste grocery shopping, urban gardening, and household [recycling](#) in Berlin.

Saturday Morning of Your Homestay

“Morgen,” Mr. Graf says as he places a white cloth bag of rolls and two travel mugs of coffee on the kitchen table. Turning to you, he asks, “Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, thank you,” you reply as you help Anna, Luca, and Mrs. Graf set the table.

Breakfast includes slices of cheese, deli meat, butter, jam, hard-boiled eggs, and orange juice. The aroma of freshly baked rolls wafts through the room. Your stomach growls.

“Someone is hungry,” Mrs. Graf says, offering you a glass of orange juice. “We have a busy day ahead of us. This morning we need to go to OU for groceries and to the *Prinzessinnengarten* this afternoon.”

“My soccer team is practicing at *Günter-König-Sportplatz* this morning,” Anna said.

“Anna and I can walk to practice. That way you can bike to OU,” Mr. Graf added.

“We can meet back here and go to *Prinzessinnengarten* together.” Luca suggested.

“Good idea. We could have lunch at the *Prinzessinnengarten*, volunteer to help in the garden, and pick up a few things for dinner tonight,” Mrs. Graf added.

“What is OU?” you ask.

Mrs. Graff explained, “OU stands for [*Original Unverpackt*](#). *Unverpackt* means unwrapped. I think you’ll need to see it for yourself. It’s not a typical grocery store.”

“OU doesn’t open until 11:00. It’s only a 1.5-kilometer ride along *Graefestraße* to *Wiener Straße*. We have time to ride by the *Spielplatz Zickenplatz*, a playground, and take a look around the neighborhood,” Luca added.

In the United States, time is referenced by numbers 1 through 12 with a.m. (antemeridian) for times before noon and p.m. (postmeridian) for times after noon. Germany uses what American sometimes refer to as “military time,” but is just like selecting the “24-hour format” on your smartphone’s time settings. Its system is 00 for midnight and 23 corresponding to 11 p.m. This is something you will need to become familiar with during your stay.

With breakfast over, everyone pitches in to clean up. “What do I do with the bag the rolls were in?” you ask.

Anna answers, “Turn it inside out over the compost bin and shake out the crumbs. We’ll wash it and reuse it when we go to the bakery.”

“Why do you need to take a cloth bag with you to the bakery?” you ask.

“When we bring our own bag, we don’t have to pay a 10 cents fee for a bag from the bakery. The cloth bag is also reusable, so that keeps plastic bags out of the trash,” Luca explained.

“You pay for bags here?” You are a bit surprised. “I’ve heard you have to pay for plastic bags in some states in the USA like Hawaii and New York.”

“Yes, we do, too. Did you notice the coffee cups are reusable? If we bring our own mugs, we save a little bit of money while keeping trash out of the landfill,” Mr. Graf added.

“When we go to OU, we will be taking bags and containers with us,” Mrs. Graf says as she starts organizing containers and reusable tote bags. “Nothing at OU is in plastic or excess packaging.” Seeing the skeptical look on your face, she continues, “You’ll see when we get there. The only prepackaged foods are in recyclable or reusable glass containers. We pay a deposit for the containers. We return the empty containers for a refund. These are then recycled or reused.”

“The food is fresh and mostly from local sources. Some things are more expensive because they are organic. But, because we are not paying for packaging and we only buy what we need, it averages out. Buying only the amount we will use also cuts down on food waste from spoilage. Throwing away food is throwing money away,” Mrs. Graf continued. “Does that make sense? Buying food that is not prepackaged is also good for the environment because it saves resources.”

“What are we having for dinner?” Luca asks.

Mr. Graf answers, “We will be having a barbecue in the courtyard with a few neighbors who have children your age. I’m thinking maybe our family could bring sausages, potato salad, and garlic bread. We’ll see what’s in season at the *Prinzessinnengarten*, too.”

“Blueberries! I hope they have blueberries at the garden,” Anna says with a big smile.

Smiling back at Anna, Mr. Graf says, “Come on, Anna, get ready. We need to get going soon.”

Turning to you, he continues, “The sausage is made of pork from [Feldheim](#), only an hour away from Berlin. Your tour group will be going there Monday to see the renewable energy program.”

Mrs. Graf adds, “The butcher shop where we buy meat sources products from local farms. This is good for the pocketbook because it saves on transportation costs. It’s good for the environment, too, because there are lower carbon dioxide emissions compared to transporting food over a longer distance.”

“In case you do not eat pork, we will also bring some veggies, cheese, or tofu.” Mrs. Graf adds, “I think Mrs. Yildiz said she would bring chicken from the [halal](#) butcher shop too.”

“It will be quite a buffet tonight. The neighbors joining us are from Turkey and China,” Mr. Graf says. “You will see some Middle Eastern, Turkish, and Asian food shops on your bike ride to OU.”

With the breakfast dishes loaded into the dishwasher and the kitchen cleaned, Mr. Graf and Anna leave for soccer practice. You, Luca, and Mrs. Graf prepare for a bike ride that will take you to *Original Unverpackt*.

Explore

Identify actions the Graf family has taken to live more sustainably, citing evidence given in the story.

Add the examples of sustainability actions to your [Chart of Berlin’s Sustainability Goals](#).

Compare and contrast actions taken by the Graf family with actions taken by your family.

List any questions you have.