A little history of what Germans drink and why

A drink is more than just a drink - it’s also culture, history and tradition. So why do Germans pick wine over beer? And how come beer used to be healthier than water? DW dips its straw into Germany's favorite beverages.

When you walk into a German bar or restaurant, you'll usually find an abundance of beverage choices. Beer, wine, hot drinks, cold drinks... whatever you fancy.

Rewind a few thousand years and the story was quite different. There was just water. It wasn't until around 10,000 BC that people created the first man-made drink: beer. Since that time, the low-alcoholic beverage has become a global success story. Also from a medical point of view, beer was important back in the days when hygiene was a constant issue. Hildegard of Bingen, a famous Benedictine abbess from the 11th century and an expert on illness and remedies, had one piece of advice in store: "Drink beer!"
The local brew
Adults as well as children dutifully followed her guidance. Up until the 20th century, water was often contaminated and not safe to drink, so across Europe beer was a good choice to stay healthy. Even more so, in the 19th century, factory owners encouraged their hard-working staff in mines and steel plants to drink beer. The drink was rich in calories, and it was also seen as an alternative to the schnapps that the men would otherwise often overindulge in.

Once upon a time, beer was one of the healthiest drinks you could get your hands on

A true wine lover
In the 16th century, church reformer Martin Luther, however, was more in favor of wine. "Beer is man-made, but wine comes from God," the former monk declared.
Wine-adoring Germans even crown an annual "wine queen"

While many monasteries brewed beer, plenty of them also grew wine. Many of Germany's oldest and best wine regions date back to monks pioneering the work. The first to bring the sweet nectar to Germany, though, were the Romans who brought the relevant skills across the Alps to make their stay in cold, barbaric Germania somewhat more agreeable.

Also in the Middle Ages, wine proved to be very popular. Only the well-off could afford good wine though; the majority could only get their hands on cheap stuff, sometimes even mixed with vinegar. This in fact might be the reason why even today people drink less wine than beer - "only" 20 liters a year on average. But maybe that's a good thing as scientists recently found out that the alcohol in wine is actually more harmful to the brain that that in beer.

Source: