



# Guide to Living in Germany

Chào mừng 202020 Bem-  
 vindo Welcome 202020 Bienvenido  
 202020 Willkommen Selamat datang  
 202020 Bienvenido Welcome 202020  
 202020 Bienvenuto Bem-  
 Willkommen Bienvenido Chào mừng  
 Selamat datang Bienvenuto datang  
 Welcome 202020 Bienvenuto Bem-vindo  
 Chào mừng Bienvenido Willkommen 202020  
 202020 Welcome Bienvenuto 202020  
 Bem-vindo 202020 Selamat datang Bienvenido  
 Willkommen Chào mừng Bienvenuto  
 Welcome 202020 Bienvenuto  
 Bienvenido 202020 Willkommen Selamat  
 202020 Bienvenuto Welcome datang  
 202020 Chào mừng  
 Bem-vindo Selamat Bienvenido  
 Willkommen datang 202020  
 202020 Bienvenuto  
 Chào mừng Bienvenido  
 Welcome Bem-  
 vindo Willkommen

*Make it in Germany*

## Content

Housing .....	3
Schools and child care .....	5
Healthcare .....	7
Insurance .....	9
Safe and secure .....	11
Integration courses .....	13
Money and banking .....	15
Mobility .....	17
Shopping .....	19
Internet, Phones and TV .....	21
Active Citizenship & Communities .....	23
Enjoying your free time .....	26
International Media .....	28
Contacts .....	29



## HOUSING

Germany offers a wide range of high-quality rental housing. Many Germans prefer to rent rather than to buy a home. In this section we explain how to find a place to live in Germany and what you need to keep in mind, both before and after moving in.

### Your first accommodation

There are a variety of options for your first few weeks in Germany, before you have found permanent housing: A hotel room costs an average of about 90 euros per night. You can expect to pay roughly 500 to 1,200 euros per month for a temporary, furnished two- or three-room flat, depending on its location. Youth hostels usually charge between 20 and 30 euros per night. There is also the option of using online portals to rent a room from a German family, which has the added benefit of helping you make contact to local residents.

### The next step: To buy or to rent?

In contrast to many other countries, most Germans rent their homes - for good reason: There is an abundance of high-quality rental housing in every location and price range, from small flats to villas with gardens. These rental properties are often in excellent condition and equivalent to owner-occupied dwellings in terms of quality. In addition, renters are protected by law against excessive increases in rent, and landlords are not allowed to terminate a lease without cause.

### Looking for housing

Whether you want to rent or buy: Information about available housing can be found in the advertising section of the newspapers and on real estate websites, which is where most flats and houses are listed today. Housing supply and demand depend to a large degree on the respective region. In rural areas, renters or buyers tend to have their pick of what is available, but in larger cities owners can usually choose from multiple offers. Finding housing can be time-consuming, particularly

in the metropolitan areas surrounding Munich and Frankfurt. In those areas it may be wise to consult a real estate agent. Under German law, realtors are not permitted to charge more than three months' rent for their services.

As in other countries, the cost of a rental unit varies greatly by region. Rent and ancillary costs such as heating, water and gas will cost you about 14 euros per square metre in large cities. The average cost in small towns and rural areas is about eight euros per square metre.

### Lease

German lease agreements must be concluded in writing. In most cases, the lease specifies the rent amount exclusive of heating. There is usually an additional charge for ancillary costs, which is paid to the landlord each month along with the base rent. What is considered an ancillary cost may vary from one lease to another. Electricity, gas and water are often included, but not always. Before signing a lease, it is therefore important to ask the landlord what the ancillary costs include and what other charges you may incur.

### A successful move-in

**Registering with the power and water utilities.** If your landlord does not take care of electricity, water or gas, you will have to make your own arrangements with a provider. Your landlord will probably be able to give you contact information for your regional provider.

**Arranging for telephone, Internet and (cable) television service.** Germany has a variety of telecommunications service

providers. It pays to compare them, and online portals can be helpful. Many providers offer discounted packages that include both telephone and Internet service. There are also options tailored to mobile use, for example using UMTS technology (3G). A tip: Since it may take several weeks for your telephone and Internet to be connected, it is a good idea to contact a provider before you move in, if possible.

**Fees for television and radio.** In Germany, fees are charged for radio, television and Internet use. If you use these media, you are required to register with the German licensing office, called *Gebühreneinzugszentrale* or GEZ. This can be done either online or using the registration forms that are available at most post offices and banks.

**Put your name on your mailbox and doorbell (if your landlord has not already done so).** Your mail will not be delivered unless your name is on your mailbox. There is no need to register with the post office.

**Change of address order.** Don't forget to have your mail forwarded from your home country to your new home. And if you go away for an extended period, you can ask the German post office to forward your mail, even abroad.

## Registering with the local authorities

Anyone who lives in Germany is required to register with the local authorities. You should do this no later than one week after moving in. To do so, you need a valid identity document. If you are renting, you may need to give the name of your landlord. The address of the responsible registry office can be found on the website of your new city.

## Getting off to a good start

To make sure that you feel at home in your flat and your neighbourhood, we have compiled a few helpful hints:

**Introduce yourself.** When you have settled in a bit, introduce yourself to your neighbours - this is not required, of course, but it is a way of getting to know people quickly and lets you know who your neighbours are.

**Quiet hours.** In general, noise is prohibited between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. so that everyone can get a good night's sleep. This means keeping music at a low volume and avoiding things like running your washing machine during those hours.

**Pets.** Under the law, you are allowed to keep small animals that are normally in cages, aquariums or terrariums. In the case of larger animals, such as dogs and cats, you need to obtain advance permission from your landlord. Whether a pet is large or small: If you want to get along with your landlord, make sure to give advance notice of any pet you want to bring into your home.

**Cleaning responsibilities.** Almost every German state has agreements specifying which tenant is responsible for cleaning the hallway or the walkway in front of the building. But don't worry - what may seem to be an annoying chore can quickly turn into a weekly opportunity to chat with your neighbours!

**Tap water** in Germany is carefully inspected, so it is normally perfectly suitable for drinking and cooking. In old buildings with old pipes, however, you should have the water tested.

**Separating waste.** Did you know? We Germans are the undisputed world champions in separating waste materials. With our blue, yellow, green and black containers, we collect, separate and sort our waste materials for recycling, which benefits the environment.



## SCHOOLS AND CHILD CARE

Learning, having fun and spending time with peers - your children are in good hands in Germany's preschools and schools. In this section we offer information about child care options and schools, how much they cost and how you can find good providers.

### **Nursery schools: For children from birth to age three**

A nursery school is a place where your children under the age of three can play with children of the same age, under the supervision of trained early childhood educators who help your children learn through play. Age-appropriate meals, naps and outdoor play are all part of these programmes. Most of them are flexible about drop-off and pick-up times. Nursery schools are run by private and public agencies as well as churches. Prices vary considerably and in part depend on the parents' income. Availability differs greatly by region.

### **Preschools: For children aged three to six**

The German word for preschool is Kindergarten - perhaps you are familiar with it, since it is also used in English. In Germany, preschools are for children between the ages of three and six. More and more, preschools are focusing on satisfying the curiosity of these young children, in addition to providing plenty of opportunity for active play. Simple experiments and play-based instruction teach them about nature and technology as they hone their thinking and language skills. The preschool day usually begins in the morning and ends either at noon or in the afternoon, depending on the specific facility. Preschools are run by cities, churches, associations and other private entities. As with nursery schools, prices vary widely. Some preschools charge no fees at all, while others may cost several hundred euros per year, depending on the parents' income and the region.

### **In-home daycare providers: For children of any age**

In-home daycare providers take care of your child in their home while you go to work. In most cases they care for additional children as well, so your child is guaranteed to have contact with peers. Nannies are also an option in Germany. In contrast to in-home daycare providers, nannies come to your home to care for your child. In-home daycare providers and nannies are not required to be trained early childhood educators. However, they need to be certified by the youth welfare office, and most of them have a great deal of experience with children. For a 20-hour week, in-home daycare providers charge an average of 300 to 600 euros per month.

### **How to find the right child care**

**Step 1 – Starting your search:** Start with the Internet: Local government websites usually provide a good overview. There are also online portals by and for families, where you can look for options in your area and exchange tips with other parents.

**Step 2 – Making your selection:** Visit some of the facilities. You can meet with the teachers, in-home daycare providers or nannies, and in many cases your child will have the opportunity to get to know the facility and become accustomed to its daily routine. Or ask your new neighbours, friends or colleagues if they can recommend a particular facility.

**Step 3 – Registering your child:** When you have found the right facility, you can register your child. Since many nursery schools and preschools have deadlines and waiting lists, it is a good idea to contact several providers as soon as possible and have your name put on the list.

## Germany's school system

If your children are at least six years old, they are required to go to school, since attendance is compulsory in Germany. A large majority of German schools are run by the state; there is no charge for your children to attend. In addition, of course, there are private and international schools, which charge fees.

The individual states are responsible for education policy. This means that the school system will vary somewhat, depending on the region where you and your family are living. Children do not always learn the same subject matter in every state, and textbooks may differ as well. Individual states also have different types of schools. Basically, however, the German school system is structured as follows:

- ▶ **Primary school:** Normally, six-year-olds begin their school careers with primary school, which includes first through fourth grades. It is only in Berlin and Brandenburg that primary school extends through sixth grade. At the end of primary school, you and your child's teachers will decide where your child will enter fifth grade, depending on your child's performance. The most common types of secondary schools are:
  - ▶ Hauptschule (non-academic secondary school for grades five through nine or ten)
  - ▶ Realschule (mid-level secondary school for grades five through ten)
  - ▶ Gymnasium (academic secondary school for grades five through twelve/thirteen)
- ▶ **Hauptschule and Realschule:** Young people who have successfully completed the Hauptschule or Realschule are eligible for vocational training or can transfer to a Gymnasium.
- ▶ **Gymnasium:** At the end of the 12th or 13th grade, students receive a diploma upon passing the Abitur examination. This entitles them to study at a university. However, they may also choose to undergo vocational training and enter the job market directly.

## How to recognise a good school

As a rule you are free to decide which school in your city your child is to attend. So it is a good idea to take a look at a few schools. One sign of a good school is that it not only provides high-quality instruction, but also offers extracurricular activities such as theatre, sports, language and music clubs, and school trips. A good school also encourages parent involvement. In addition to finding out whether the school has room for your child, you should also ask about extracurricular options.

If your children are not yet fluent in German, make sure that the school offers German classes, usually referred to as „German as a foreign language.“ Here the teachers will make sure that your child understands classroom instruction and will be able to keep up.



## HEALTH

Obviously, we don't want you to be sick. But if you or your family need a physician, you will find that help is available quickly and at a reasonable cost. Germany has a dense network of hospitals, physicians and pharmacies. Thanks to compulsory health insurance, treatments are affordable.

### Health insurance

As an employee, you definitely have health insurance – either under the statutory health insurance system or as a member of a private health insurance. If you become ill, health insurance covers the cost of medical treatment. The statutory health insurance system includes the following benefits:

- ▶ outpatient medical treatment, for example in a physician's office
- ▶ dental care
- ▶ medication, remedies and medical devices
- ▶ inpatient medical treatment, for example in a hospital
- ▶ medically necessary rehabilitation
- ▶ services during pregnancy and childbirth

If your spouse is not employed, he or she may be covered under your statutory health insurance policy at no extra charge to you. The same holds true for your children.

Moreover, your health insurance policy automatically includes long-term care insurance. Your long-term care insurance is activated if, for example, you need nursing care because of a serious illness that prevents you from caring for yourself.

### What is a health insurance card?

As soon as you become a member of a statutory health insurance, you will receive an electronic health insurance card documenting your membership. The card includes a photo and an electronic record of your name, date of birth, address, policy number and insurance status. It must be submitted whenever

you see your physician so that your health insurance can be billed for treatment. Your health insurance card is valid in all 27 EU countries as well as in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. This means that if you become ill in one of these countries while on holiday or a business trip, your health insurance card gives you access to medical treatment there. Before travelling abroad, it is a good idea to contact your health insurance to find out what to do in an emergency.

### Visiting your physician

In Germany, you may choose your own physician. In most cases your first visit is to your general practitioner. If necessary, he or she will refer you to a specialist or arrange for you to be admitted to a hospital. To find the right physician, consult the following:

- ▶ the website of your town or city
- ▶ the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Weisse Liste (White List)
- ▶ Unabhängige Patientenberatung (Independent Advice for Patients)
- ▶ the website of your state's Kassenärztliche Vereinigung (Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians, KV)
- ▶ the telephone book under "Physicians" or the telephone book website
- ▶ The website of the British embassy provides an overview of physicians in various regions in Germany (<https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-berlin#our-services>)

When you have found a physician, call his or her office and make an appointment; this avoids a long wait. In urgent cases, however, you can walk in without an appointment.

### What if you need a physician after hours?

You need medical care, but your physician's office is closed? In that case, dial 116 117 for an on-call physician; the number is valid throughout Germany. The call is free from land lines and mobile phones, and is available to all patients with statutory or private health insurance. In case of an emergency – a life-threatening situation – you should instead dial the emergency number 112.

### The cost of an office visit

As a patient covered by statutory health insurance, you will have almost no out-of-pocket expenses. Rather than billing you, your physician will submit a bill directly to your health insurance.

### Medications

Medications are available only in pharmacies, which display a large red sign with the letter A (for Apotheke). There are two ways to obtain medications. The first is through your physician: The physician writes a prescription, which you take to the pharmacy, where you receive your medication. Prescription medications cost you a co-payment only; the rest is covered by your health insurance. The second way is to go directly to the pharmacy, where you can find over-the-counter medications (not requiring a prescription). In this case you must pay the full amount.

### If you are admitted to hospital

Germany has public hospitals, private clinics and charitable hospitals run by church relief organisations; many larger cities have university hospitals as well. As a rule, your general practitioner will arrange to have you admitted to hospital; only in an emergency should you go there directly. Your health insurance will normally cover the costs of your hospital stay. Since hospitalisation can be very expensive, however, it is a good idea to determine in advance whether all of your treatment costs are covered.

### What to do in case of emergency?

In case of emergency, you have two alternatives:

1. In life-threatening or other serious situations, or if you are uncertain, dial 112, which connects you with the emergency medical service. The number is valid throughout Germany. An ambulance will arrive within 15 minutes. The emergency number is toll-free.

2. If the situation is not quite as serious, you can go directly to a hospital A&E department. A&E departments are open day and night.

At the weekend, on holidays or during the night, on-call help is available from a hospital, physician or pharmacy in your area. Many newspapers publish daily listings of the physicians and pharmacies that are on call.

### Vaccinations and preventative care

Of course, it's much better not to get sick. Vaccinations and health screenings can prevent many illnesses. Vaccinations are not required in Germany, but some are recommended; health insurance covers their cost. Information about recommended vaccinations is available from the Federal Centre for Health Education or your physician.

A vaccination record shows the diseases against which you have been vaccinated. Various screenings are also available, some of them required by law. For infants and children, there are the U1 to U9 screenings, which help to identify developmental disorders and illnesses at an early stage so that they can be treated. There are numerous screenings for adults as well, for skin cancer and dental problems, for example. Statutory health insurances often offer a bonus if you are regularly screened.



## INSURANCE

Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict adverse events and accidents. However, there are many ways of protecting yourself against their consequences. In the following section, we describe the most important kinds of insurance and explain how to obtain such insurance.

### Social security

If you have a job that requires social security contributions, you are insured under the social security system, which covers the major risks in life: illness, unemployment, accidents and the need for long-term care.

### Liability insurance

Accidents can happen in the blink of an eye – your child kicks a ball through your neighbour’s window, or you break a vase while visiting a friend. In Germany, you are liable in such cases. In other words, you need to pay for the damage. To prevent this from happening, a liability insurance can be useful. Many Germans regard liability insurance as the most useful and important of the optional types of insurance. In the event of a claim, private liability insurance covers the cost of damages up to a specified amount. It also covers your spouse and children. Liability insurance is available starting at less than 100 euros per year.

### Motor vehicle insurance

▶ **Motor vehicle liability insurance:** If you own a car or motorcycle, you are required to have motor vehicle liability insurance. You are not allowed to register your vehicle without it. This insurance pays for personal injury, material damage and property loss if you cause an accident or injure someone while driving your car. The cost of the insurance – the insurance premium – may vary widely. It depends on such factors as the type of vehicle (car or motorcycle), its age and the number of years you have been driving without an accident.

▶ **Comprehensive insurance:** Motor vehicle liability insurance covers damages to the opposing party. You may also take out a comprehensive insurance policy to cover your own vehicle. A distinction is made between Teilkasko (comprehensive insurance) and Vollkasko (comprehensive insurance plus collision coverage). Teilkasko insurance generally pays for the following damage to your vehicle:

- ▶ theft or robbery
- ▶ fire or explosion
- ▶ storms, hail, lightning, flooding
- ▶ collisions with certain animals (such as deer)
- ▶ broken glass
- ▶ short-circuit damage to cables

Vollkasko insurance also covers any damage resulting from an accident – even if you were at fault – as well as damage from vandalism. This is particularly advisable if your vehicle is new, since the cost of damage would be especially high.

Among other things, the cost of comprehensive insurance depends on your deductible, which is the amount you are required to pay out of pocket. For Teilkasko insurance, it is generally about 150 euros; for Vollkasko insurance between 300 and 500 euros.

▶ **Car breakdown insurance:** With a car breakdown insurance policy, the provider covers the costs if you need a rental car or to have your car towed because of a breakdown or accident. In many cases it also covers the cost of transporting an injured or ill person. You can purchase car breakdown insurance from motor vehicle insurance companies and automobile clubs.

## Household insurance

This insurance covers the contents of your house or flat. For example, it pays if your furniture or clothing is stolen or damaged by fire, storm or water. The cost depends on the size of your home, among other things. It is particularly worthwhile if you keep valuable items in your home.

## Accident insurance

You are a member of the statutory accident insurance through your employer. This means that you are covered in the event of an accident in the workplace or on your way to work. However, most accidents happen when you are not at work, and this is where private accident insurance can help. While medical treatment is covered by statutory health insurance, private accident insurance can help mitigate financial consequences. Most importantly, private accident insurance covers you if you become disabled as a result of an accident and are no longer able to work. The insurance company pays disability benefits. You can purchase coverage for types of rehabilitation that are not paid for by statutory health insurance.

## Retirement benefits

Germany's statutory pension insurance is the most important and strongest component of our old-age security system. To maintain your existing standard of living, however, it is advisable to have an additional retirement plan. Since 2002, the government has subsidised such supplementary pensions. The principle is both simple and effective: If you supplement your statutory pension, whether privately or at your workplace, the government will help – by providing subsidies and tax and contribution exemptions.

## How to purchase an insurance policy

To insure yourself against risk, you should purchase an insurance policy. The policy stipulates the following:

- ▶ Who or what is being insured?
- ▶ What is the insured event? In other words, in what case will the insurance company pay?
- ▶ What is the maximum amount that will be paid (amount of insurance)?

Before purchasing a policy, make sure to do plenty of research. Talk to your friends and colleagues. You can also consult a professional insurance consultant, but if you do so, make sure that the consultant provides impartial advice. Insurance consultants at the consumer protection agency can offer further information.

When you have chosen an insurance company, make an appointment for a personal meeting, where you can talk about the details of the policy. It is a good idea to “sleep on it” before signing a contract. If you are not entirely fluent in German, ask a friend or colleague to go with you to the meeting.

## The most important insurance terms

- ▶ **Pflichtversicherung (Compulsory insurance):** Insurance required by law. If you have a car, this includes motor vehicle liability insurance.
- ▶ **Selbstbeteiligung/Selbstbehalt (Deductible):** This is the amount that you are required to pay out of pocket if an insured event occurs. It may be a fixed amount or a percentage.
- ▶ **Versicherer (Insurance provider):** The company from which you purchase your insurance policy.
- ▶ **Versicherungsnehmer (Policyholder):** The individual who purchases a policy from the insurance company, normally you or a member of your family.
- ▶ **Versicherungsfall (Insured event):** The event that triggers payment from your insurance company (for example a car accident in the case of comprehensive motor vehicle insurance or illness in the case of health insurance).
- ▶ **Versicherungsprämie / Versicherungsbeitrag (Insurance premium or insurance contribution):** The one-time or regular amount that you pay to your insurance company. The insurance policy determines the amount and when it is to be paid.
- ▶ **Versicherungsleistung (Insurance benefit):** The benefit you receive from the insurance company if the insured event occurs. This may be a monetary amount or a replacement in kind. The latter term means that the damaged item is replaced, for example: A broken window is replaced with a new one. The maximum insurance benefit is defined in the insurance policy.



## SAFE AND SECURE

Germany is recognised as one of the most peaceful countries in the world. Germany has largely been untouched by serious natural disasters. And our political system is stable. It's no wonder that surveys show that people who move to Germany tend to be happy here.

### One of the most peaceful countries

Germany is one of the most peaceful countries in the world, according to the 2011 Global Peace Index. In this study, conducted by international peace experts, Germany ranked 15th among 153 countries, higher than such countries as the France, Italy or the Netherlands. Germany receives top marks for political stability and respect for human and civil rights. Germany's people, too, think highly of their home country: 90 percent are very or quite happy here. These were the findings of the "Integration Barometer", a survey of German citizens conducted in 2010. The survey also showed that people with foreign roots have a particularly favorable view of Germany. Of that group, 95 percent report that they are happy in Germany.

### Emergency telephone numbers

There are good reasons why people in Germany feel so safe and secure. A number of institutions are in place to protect our society against criminality, terrorism and other threats. But if you should need help, you can reach the most important emergency services under the following telephone numbers:

- ▶ **Police:** Emergency number 110
- ▶ **Fire department:** Emergency number 112
- ▶ **Emergency rescue service/Ambulance:** Emergency number 112

### Political and legal order

Since its founding, the Federal Republic of Germany has been a very politically stable country. The government is divided into the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The purpose of this structure is to prevent a concentration or abuse of political power. Moreover, it guarantees a high degree of legal certainty. In other words, you can rely on Germany's laws and respect for the law, and on its administrative structures and judicial system.

### Germany and its partners

Germany is a secure country, both internally and in its dealings with the rest of the world. Through its many alliances, partnerships and memberships in organisations, Germany maintains a friendly relationship with many countries and works with them to promote peace, democracy and respect for human rights. Germany is a member of the European Union, the United Nations and NATO, as well as the G8 and G20, among others.

### German authorities

Do you want to register with the local registry office? Are you interested in extending your residence permit? Whatever your concern, you can normally be confident that your request will be handled properly. And help in finding the right office is sure to be available – for example by dialing 115 for assistance in German (this number is subject to a fee). Experts will answer your questions about everything from registering your new address to obtaining a driver's licence or visa. In addition, you can use the office finder ([www.behoerdenfinder.de/](http://www.behoerdenfinder.de/)) to find out which office is responsible for your specific concern.

## Environmental disasters

So far, the environment has been treating Germany well: It has been spared strong earthquakes, severe tornadoes and devastating floods (except for e.g. the 1962 storm surges in Hamburg and the Elbe floods in 2002, for example), and this is reflected in its ranking in the World Risk Report. This study assesses a country's risk of suffering from natural hazards or climate change. Of the 173 countries in the study, Germany is among the 20 safest. And just in case something should happen, we can rely on a very well prepared disaster management system.



## INTEGRATION COURSES

In integration courses you will not only learn German or improve your German; you and other newcomers will learn about Germany and its citizens, traditions, history and much more. In addition, you'll be able to make new friends while attending integration courses.

### What is an integration course?

Integration courses consist of a language and an orientation component. They cover everyday topics such as the workplace, shopping, television and radio, and childrearing. Participants learn about dealing with administrative offices, writing emails and letters, and interviewing for a job. You will also learn more about Germany as a country, from a number of perspectives: culture and politics, how people live and interact in Germany, and the values on which German society is based. The language course usually consists of 600 hours of instruction, the orientation course takes 60 hours. There are special courses for women, parents, young adults up to the age of 27 and other groups. At the end of each course, all participants take a final examination, free of charge.

### Who can participate in an integration course?

Integration courses are intended for anyone who has recently arrived in Germany and whose German language skills are not yet adequate for dealing with the demands of everyday life. Whether you may take an integration course or, in some cases, are required to do so, depends on your country of origin and your level of fluency. The most important guidelines are these:

As a **citizen of the EU**, you are welcome to participate in an integration course if you want to learn German or improve your German, provided that a place is available. You are not required to do so.

**Non-EU citizens** are also allowed to take these courses. If your German is not yet particularly good, you may, under some circumstances, be required to take a course. Are you

employed and unable to take a full- or part-time course? You may be excused from participating. Upon issuing your residence permit, the foreigners' registration office will let you know whether you are allowed or required to take an integration course. Special rules apply to **ethnic German immigrants and to German citizens**.

The website of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees ([www.bamf.de](http://www.bamf.de)) contains an overview of the relevant rules.

Note that you are normally required to pay only 1.20 euros per hour of instruction – the remainder is covered by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

### How to find an integration course

- ▶ As a **non-EU citizen**, go to your local foreigners' registration office, which will issue you a certificate allowing [Berechtigungsschein] you to participate in an integration course.
- ▶ **EU citizens** should contact the to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees to apply for a place in an integration course.
- ▶ The next step is to find a course provider [Kurstraeger]. The foreigners' registration office or the migration advisory centre will help you. You can also search using WebGIS, the online information system of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. (<http://webgis.bamf.de>)
- ▶ When you have found a provider in your area, make contact either in person or by telephone. The provider will help you to select an appropriate integration course and let you know when it is scheduled to begin.

## Benefits for you

Regular instruction from well-trained teachers will help you become fluent in German quickly, and you will soon feel comfortable in your new surroundings. Taking the final examination offers additional advantages: after passing the test, you will be issued an “Integration Course Certificate”. This allows you to claim naturalisation after you have lived in Germany for seven years, rather than the usual eight.

Another advantage: If you pass the final examination within two years of being accepted into the course, half of the course fee will be refunded to you.

## Where else to learn German

In addition to integration courses, other courses are available as well:

- ▶ **„Deutsch für den Beruf“ (German for the workplace).** This course is for people whose German needs improvement and who are either looking for a job or interested in further training in their current jobs. In addition to providing typical language instruction, the course may help you practice your interviewing skills or learn more about a specific subject that is relevant to your job. There is also a practical component that offers insight into working life through internships and visits to businesses. These courses are tailored to your degree of fluency and specialised skills. Detailed information about this course can be found [here](#).
- ▶ **Courses for your children** are available as well, as German classes are offered for people of every age. Some classes are tailored to the interests and language skills of children and young people. This is important: When young children begin learning German immediately, it is easier for them to adapt to their new environment, make new friends and start to feel at home in Germany.

In some cases employers provide language coaches or contribute to the cost of a language course – just ask your boss or supervisor.



## MONEY AND BANKING

Anyone who intends to stay in Germany in the longer term will need a bank account – for example to rent a flat or for depositing wages. The next section describes how to open an account and how to transfer money – for example to your home country.

### How to open an account

To open a bank account in Germany, you need the following:

- ▶ your passport
- ▶ your certificate of residency
- ▶ a pay statement from your employer (depending on the account type)
- ▶ for some banks: your work permit

With these documents you can apply for a current account and an EC card with the bank of your choice. Current accounts with some banks do not allow overdrafts; in other words, they do not permit you to borrow money through your account. Some banks also require that a minimum amount be deposited each month. Make sure to clarify both of these questions before opening an account.

### It pays to compare

Banks may differ dramatically in the fees they charge – for managing your account or for each transfer of money, for example. Some banks may waive fees if you deposit a certain amount every month, such as your wages. So it pays to compare when choosing a bank.

### Online banking

An online account is an alternative to a current account. These accounts can be opened on the Internet or by mail, and they can also be used online. They are offered by a number of direct banks – banks that do not have their own physical branches. An online account serves the same purposes as

a German current account, and also has a German account number and routing code. Transfers from and to foreign countries can be made through online accounts.

To open an online account with a direct bank, you need to document your identity using the “Postident” procedure through the German post office. The bank will provide you with the necessary documents. Take them to a post office, show your identification and ask a post office employee to confirm your identity and send the documents to the bank.

### Bank cards

With a personal identification number (PIN), you can use your EC card to withdraw money from a cash machine 24 hours a day. After you open your account, your bank will send you your PIN by mail. No fees are charged for withdrawing money from your own bank’s cash machines. A withdrawal fee is charged if you use the machines of other banks – usually one percent, but no more than five euros per transaction.

You can also use your EC card for payment at most shops and petrol stations. However, it is always wise to carry some cash. Cash is still used in Germany – restaurants and shops usually expect you to pay smaller amounts in cash.

### Transferring money in Germany

Within Germany, it takes only a few working days to transfer money from your account to someone else’s. You can do this using your bank’s money transfer form or through online banking, which is usually even faster. It is a good idea to keep a receipt for each transfer.

## Transferring money abroad

It takes longer to transfer money from Germany to another country. However, you can transfer money to your home country quickly and securely using the following methods:

- ▶ **SWIFT:** With SWIFT wire transfers, the money is normally in the recipient's account within 24 hours. Fees vary from one bank to another. Information about this procedure is available at your bank.
  
- ▶ **Money transfer services:** A number of service providers can transfer your money quickly to another country. Take the amount you want to transfer, in cash, to an office of the transfer agency (Western Union is often located at a post office) and specify the office in the destination country where the recipient will pick up the money. The recipient will need to show identification. The entire process usually takes only a few minutes; however, it costs seven to ten percent of the amount transferred.
  
- ▶ **Cashier's checks:** Cashier's checks should be sent only by registered mail, since there is no way to stop payment if the check is stolen.



## MOBILITY

Germany is well known throughout the world as a country of cars. But you can easily travel by plane, bus, train or bicycle as well, thanks to our well-developed network of airports, roads, railways and bike paths. The next section explains how to travel in Germany and abroad using your preferred means of transport.

### Is your driving licence valid in Germany?

- ▶ **Citizens of the EU, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland:** Hop in and go, it's that simple. Your driving licence is valid in Germany, just as it is in your home country. There is no need to have it converted to a German licence.
- ▶ **Citizens of other countries:** You can drive for six months with your existing driving licence, starting with the day you register your residence in Germany. At the end of that period, you will need a German licence. Whether or not you will have to take a test depends on the country where you obtained your driving licence.

### Registering and testing your car

All cars in Germany need to be registered, and you can do this at the nearest car registration office. You will need your vehicle title (proof that the car belongs to you) and your motor vehicle insurance policy.

If you are bringing a car with you from another country, find out from the car registration office what additional documents are required.

After they are registered, all cars in Germany need to pass a general inspection. This means that a mechanic must confirm that your car is safe and meets the official emission standards. A vehicle inspection sticker will then be affixed to your car's number plate. The general inspection can be performed by an authorised workshop near you, for example. Inspections need to be repeated at regular intervals. There is a charge for both the general inspection and for registering your vehicle.

### Driving in Germany

Cars drive on the right-hand side of the road in Germany. The speed limit in cities is generally 50 kilometres per hour, 30 in some areas. The limit is usually 100 kilometres per hour on country roads. Unless signalled otherwise, there is no general speed limit on motorways, but a limit of 130 kilometres per hour is recommended. However, there are special limits on certain portions of the motorways, particularly on dangerous or heavily travelled sections.

You must always have your driving licence and vehicle registration with you while driving, since you may need to show them to the police if you are stopped.

### Riding a bicycle

Germany has a dense network of bike paths. Remember that you are subject to the same rules and penalties when biking as when driving a car. It is therefore important to make sure that your bicycle is in proper condition (especially its lights) and to comply with the rules of the road when riding your bike.

### Travelling by bus or train

Public transport is a convenient option for travel in and between cities. The public system includes buses, trams and the underground, as well as the trains run by German Railways and its competitors.

- ▶ **Buses, trams and the underground:** Within easy reach of your home, you will find a stop where a bus, tram or underground departs several times an hour during the day, in large cities every few minutes. Tickets can be purchased from

a machine at the stop, from the driver or at a sales outlet of the transport association that operates the buses or trams. If you use public transport regularly, it is a good idea to purchase a weekly, monthly or annual ticket. The longer the ticket's validity, the lower the price for each trip.

Prices are lower for children. Certain groups, such as students or the disabled, receive a discount upon showing their identification. Many transport associations have special offers for senior citizens.

- ▶ **Travelling by train:** Trains are a good option when travelling to other cities in Germany or abroad. German Railways, formerly a state-owned enterprise, is the primary provider. It owns all of Germany's rail network and leases certain routes to regional competitors. Train tickets can be purchased at a ticket counter, from a German Railways machine at the train station or on the German Railways website. Trains are a comfortable and rapid means of transport in Germany; on some segments long-distance trains reach speeds of up to 300 kilometres per hour.
- ▶ **International bus lines:** Buses are another good option for travel from Germany to other parts of Europe. International bus lines stops in every large city, at least at the main train station.

## **Another possibility is air travel**

If you need to travel quickly from one part of Germany to another, or to another country, a plane is a good alternative to a train or car. Depending on the distance, national and international flights may be available for less than 100 euros if you book far enough in advance.



## SHOPPING

Germany's shops have just about everything you could possibly wish for – from fresh, locally grown vegetables on street markets to low-price home furnishings, right through to luxury articles that are „made in Germany“. Here, we tell you about shop opening times and what you need to know about paying.

### Shopping facilities

German towns and cities offer a great choice of shopping facilities:

- ▶ **Shops:** For your everyday needs, you'll find supermarkets and small shops, such as baker's and butcher's, in residential areas. To buy fashion clothes, household goods and electrical equipment, many Germans travel to the town centres, where there is plenty of choice of shops, especially in the main shopping streets.

In contrast, large furniture stores, electrical goods stores and shopping centres are often located just outside the town or city, but have large car parks and good bus or train connections. You can find supermarkets for food and all the important, everyday goods both in town and outside urban centres.

- ▶ **Street markets:** In Germany, you can buy fresh foodstuffs such as fruit, vegetables or meat not just in shops, but at markets too. You can find out when and where in the town these markets take place by asking at the town hall.
- ▶ **Online shopping:** Buying online is becoming increasingly popular in Germany. More than half of Internet users order goods or services over the Internet. If you order this way and receive goods that you don't like or which are damaged, that's no problem. With online shops in Germany, you are entitled to return the goods within 14 days without having to provide any justification. For your own security, always read the legal notice of online shops you are not familiar with.

### Buying second-hand

When you first move to Germany especially, you might find flea markets a good place to shop. At these markets, private individuals and professionals sell second-hand goods at low prices – from crockery to hi-fi systems to bikes. It's also worthwhile taking a look at the classified ads in daily newspapers, special advertiser newspapers and on Internet auction sites. Here, private sellers offer just about everything you will need on your arrival in Germany. Whether you're buying at flea markets or through classified ads, don't hesitate to bargain, as this is one of the few opportunities you will have in Germany to do so. In most cases, sellers are willing to reduce the price a little.

### Opening times

The larger shops – especially those in town and city centres – are usually open from Monday to Friday from 10am to 8pm. Many supermarkets do not close before 10pm or midnight. Smaller shops outside towns are open from Monday to Friday, usually until 6pm, and on Saturdays until 2pm or 4pm. The legislation governing shop closing times differs from state to state. However, even outside these opening times, you can still go shopping in Germany – shops in railway stations, as well as fuel stations and very small shops called „kiosks“ sell basic foodstuffs and beverages, some around the clock – and even on Sundays and public holidays.

In addition to this, many towns and cities have „verkaufsoffene Sonntage“ – Sunday opening – up to four times a year. On these days, the shops are open exceptionally and besides strolling round the shops the customers can also enjoy live music and arts and crafts in the town centres.

## Paying

In most shops, you can pay using cash, or direct debit or credit cards. However, many smaller shops only accept cash, while others will accept direct debit cards only from a certain amount. If you buy online, you can either pay by bank transfer or by cash-on-delivery. Cash-on-delivery means that you pay the money directly to the postman or woman, or courier service, when the goods are delivered. Incidentally, unless you are buying large objects such as furniture or electrical equipment, or second-hand goods, you do not barter over the price. The price on the label is the price you pay. However, under certain circumstances, for larger acquisitions you might be able to bargain for free delivery or a small price reduction.

## Value-added tax

On most things that you buy in Germany, the State levies 19 percent of value-added tax. For certain products, for example food staples such as milk or bread, or books, newspapers, flowers and art objects, a reduced VAT rate of 7 percent applies. When you shop, there is no need to pay any attention to the VAT rates, as the tax is already included in the prices charged in shops and restaurants.

## Consumer protection and product quality

German companies place great value on product quality and are furthermore required to respect consumer protection legislation. Toxic or carcinogenic ingredients are prohibited in certain products. Particular attention is paid to hazardous substances in toys, tattooing inks and cosmetics in this respect. Companies are therefore obliged to check that their goods are free from harmful substances and generally meet all other quality standards. You can find out more on the Web site of the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Production. ([http://www.bmelv.de/EN/ConsumerProtection/consumer-protection\\_node.html](http://www.bmelv.de/EN/ConsumerProtection/consumer-protection_node.html))

In addition to this, the EU has defined a strategy for greater food safety. This ensures that the strict quality standards are applied not only to foods produced within the EU, but also to imported foods.

More and more people in Germany are consciously turning to organic products – foods produced by ecofriendly agriculture. If you pay particular attention to healthy eating and high-quality products, you can let yourself be guided by the Bio-Siegel logo on products. The Bio-Siegel logo is proof that the goods are produced by ecofriendly means and that animal welfare is taken into account. You can find organic products in organic food shops and supermarkets.



## INTERNET, PHONES AND TV

Wherever in the world your family and friends live, they're just a phone call or an e-mail away. To make sure that all goes smoothly, we'd like to provide you here with a few tips on the best ways to get access to Internet and phone services in Germany.

### Internet

Most Germans surf the Web using DSL. This kind of broadband connection lets you download music and films fast, and you can even video chat with your family or friends all over the world without any problem. Video chatting over the Internet is becoming increasingly popular in Germany and is usually free of charge. Fast DSL connections are now available in all large towns and cities in Germany. The rates of the numerous private service providers depend, among other things, on the duration of the contract. With long-term contracts, the DSL modem that you need to access the Internet is usually included in the price. When you sign a contract, you usually get an Internet package deal with a WLAN option. This means that you can surf 24 hours a day without any extra cost. Many Internet service providers also offer contracts that include a DSL Internet and phone package.

### Mobile Internet

In cities and conurbations in Germany, you can surf the Internet while out and about – via your laptop or mobile phone. This is possible thanks to UMTS technology, although reception and speeds differ according to your provider and where you are. The best thing is to check which companies in your region offer good reception before signing. If you want to surf the Internet on your laptop on the fly, you will need an Internet dongle, called a „Surfstick“ in Germany, which you plug into the USB socket on your computer. This „Surfstick“ often comes free of charge when you sign a contract. Otherwise, you can buy them in electrical goods stores.

### Phoning

In Germany, you have a large number of landline phone operators to choose from. Nowadays, many Germans go for package deals which encompass a landline phone service and Internet access. Most of these package deals charge a flat rate for phone calls. That means that for a monthly rate, you can call other landline phones in Germany for as long as you like.

For phone calls abroad, you have a choice of solutions. One cheap option is to phone over the Internet. If you want to use the normal landline phone instead, you can take advantage of the services of specialised phone operators. These companies offer widely varying rates for numerous countries around the world. This is why it can be worthwhile first of all hunting round on the Internet to see which of them offers the best rates for the country you want to call. You can find these providers by typing in search terms such as „callthrough“, „call-by-call“ und „abroad“. You then dial their special dialling code followed by the number you wish to ring. However, only certain phone operators will allow you to use this option. A third option is to pay a flat rate as offered by some large phone companies. This allows you to make unlimited phone calls to a particular country of your choice for a fixed monthly rate.

If you should ever experience problems with your contract, you can always get help from the consumer centres. The people there will be glad to help you.

You can buy a landline phone in electrical goods stores or from private individuals over the Internet, for example. However, simple phones are also available in large supermarkets. Before purchasing a phone, check what kind of a phone line you have. This is because if you have an ISDN line, you will need an ISDN phone.

## Mobile phones

There are two types of mobile phone subscription: prepaid or contract, the latter type often having a fixed term. For prepaid services, you just buy a mobile phone and a prepaid card. You can buy cards in electrical goods stores, drugstores or at fuel stations, for example. With the card, you put credit on your mobile phone which you subsequently use up. If you prefer a contract, you can take one out in a mobile phone shop or on the Web pages of mobile network operators. Pay attention to the following details: how long does the contract run for? How much is charged for a mobile phone? What is the monthly charge and what do you get for it? Providers who only offer contracts online often have cheaper offers. However, you also have to remember that you will get less service. Note: if you do not have a German identity card, you will usually need your registration certificate to be able to sign a mobile phone contract.

If you don't want to pay a basic subscription fee for your contract, choose a postpaid contract. This works like prepaid; the only difference is that you get a bill at the end of the month for the phone calls you made during the previous month.

## TV

There are different ways of receiving TV programmes in Germany. However, whichever way you opt for, you must pay the TV and radio licensing fees to the Broadcasting fee service center. From January 1, 2013, each household, regardless of how many people live there, will pay a monthly charge of around 17.98 euros.

You can receive TV in Germany in the following ways:

▶ **Aerial:** This way lets you view many German and some foreign programmes free of charge. To do this, you will need a special indoor aerial or a roof aerial. Your landlord or landlady will be able to tell you whether your house has a roof aerial. Besides the aerial, you will also need a DVB-T decoder which you can buy in an electrical goods store. Admittedly, the variety of programmes available and the quality of re-

ception via an aerial differ from town to town. This is why you are best advised first of all to ask your work colleagues about their experience.

- ▶ **Cable:** There is a very extensive cable network in Germany. However, first of all ask your landlord or landlady if your house has cable access. For cable TV, you usually pay a standing or connection charge as well as a monthly subscription fee. Cable TV gives you access to more German and international programmes than aerial services. Moreover, for an additional charge you can sometimes receive other foreign channels.
- ▶ **Satellite:** To receive satellite TV, you will need a satellite antenna and a satellite receiver. The satellite antenna has to be mounted on the roof or façade of the house – to do this, you will need your landlord's or landlady's permission. There is no monthly charge for satellite reception.
- ▶ **Internet:** In Germany, you can view well over 100 TV channels over the Internet. However, to really enjoy it you need a fast Internet connection.



## ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP & COMMUNITIES

Some 23 million German citizens are involved in work for their fellow men and women and for society as a whole. Perhaps you would like to get involved too. Besides the feeling of doing something worthwhile, you also have the chance of developing your networks or even finding new friends.

### Active citizenship in Germany

Do you want to get actively involved in environmental or social work? Or would you like to have contact with people from your home country or of the same religion as you? You'll find a wide range of possibilities in Germany. The „Engagiert in Deutschland“ Web page in German provides a good initial overview. [<http://www.engagiert-in-deutschland.de/toro/resource/html#!entity.2178>]

You are free to decide what voluntary work you want to do, as under German legislation everyone is free to choose which legal association, party or religious community they wish to join. However, you may be expected to pay a membership fee. You can ask the organisation you wish to join for details. Of course, you can also found a club or another kind of organisation yourself.

One thing is certain: it will do nothing but good. Because your commitment means not only exercising social responsibility and helping others, it is also a way of achieving personal development. You can let your potential and creativity unfold, meet other people, get to know local or internationally operating bodies and improve your language skills. So why not play a day-to-day role in this and help to shape your environment by giving something of yourself!

### Active citizenship as a parent

Many schools and day care centres in Germany depend on the active involvement of the parents. You regularly get to meet the teaching and educational staff as well as other parents at parents' evening. As well as this, you can also join a parents' group. By maintaining a constant dialogue

with teachers or educators, you will be able to take an active role in the day-to-day life of your child at school or at the kindergarten (Kita). Moreover, you will be kept informed about his or her education and school work or get counselling, as well as being able to contribute your own ideas. You can find out exactly what you can do by asking the teachers or other parents. Also, you can find a list of parents' associations on the German-language Web site „Planet Beruf“. [<http://www.planet-beruf.de/Links.1824.0.html>]

### Involvement in intercultural work

Virtually all towns and cities have places where peoples of different cultures and immigrant organisations can meet. Here, people of different origins, cultures, religions, ages and nationalities come together. Besides their involvement in social issues, these associations usually offer a multitude of different intercultural activities – cultural festivals, leisure activities, sports, and grants for basic and advanced education. But the principal aim is to foster cultural exchange and mutual respect. Many towns and cities have an office for multicultural/intercultural affairs, or for integration, an integration officer and a council of religions. Here, committed individuals work towards ensuring that different cultures and religions in Germany live together in harmony. Perhaps you would like to do voluntary work with one of these organisations, or share your culture and traditions with others too.

### Networking with people from your home country

For many immigrants, it is important to maintain their cultural and religious roots or to teach their children and descendants something about the traditions, language or religion of their

country of origin. This is why it is important to build contacts with fellow countrymen and women who are living in Germany. Try looking on the Internet or in the phone directory to see whether there is a community or association near to you which does something that interests you. In Germany there are countless communities and associations which cater to the different cultural, linguistic and religious needs of people from all over the world. These often function as counselling and networking centres and can help you, especially during the early days of your stay, with useful tips and their experience of all aspects of life in Germany.

Do you already feel at home in Germany? In that case, you can share your treasure trove of experience and your knowledge with others and help them to settle down in Germany. Below are a few contacts for finding out about intercultural associations and migrant organisations near to you:

- ▶ **Local integration officers:** You'll find a list of these contacts on the German-language Web page of the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration (<http://www.bundesauslaenderbeauftragte.de/auslaenderbeauftragte-bundeslaender.html>).
- ▶ A list of **Commissioners for Aliens, Migrations and Integration** is available here: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/StatischeSeiten/Breg/IB/ib-auslaenderbeiraete-migrationsraete-integrationsraete.html>
- ▶ A list of **national and inter-regional migrant organisations** is available in a government brochure starting on page 88: ([http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/\\_Anlagen/IB/2012-04-25-migrantenorganisationen-in-deutschland.pdf?\\_blob=publicationFile&v=3](http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/IB/2012-04-25-migrantenorganisationen-in-deutschland.pdf?_blob=publicationFile&v=3))

## Active citizenship for your home country

If you want to do something to help your home country, again Germany is a good place for doing so and offers a variety of possibilities:

- ▶ **Joining an association/donating money:** Do you want to help fund an actual issue or project in your home country? In Germany, you could collect donations, join an association or even found a new association yourself.
- ▶ **Exchanges:** You might even get a chance to put the contacts and experience you have acquired in Germany to good use: perhaps your new company is interested in setting up a permanent exchange with your former school or university as a means of fostering potential new recruits. Otherwise, you might have the opportunity of finding new markets for your employer in your home country, or of putting your knowledge and experience at the service of development in your home country in a domain where there is a particular need.
- ▶ **Helping the family:** For many people who move to Germany, it is important to support their family back home with goods, or financially by transferring cash to them. The figures of the World Bank provide cogent proof of this. They show that in 2010, private individuals transferred a total of just under 16 million US dollars from Germany to foreign countries. The fees charged for this kind of transfer vary widely depending on the service provider and the type of transfer. This is why the independent [www.geldtransFAIR.de](http://www.geldtransFAIR.de) (German) offers a cost-free comparison of providers and methods for transferring money abroad, so that you can find the best one for you.

## Building bridges – active citizenship for development

Many people with a migrant background work in all kinds of ways to help development in their countries of origin or other regions. This way, they can act as key bridge-builders between the two worlds, because people who know different cultures, languages and regional contexts have a wealth of potential which can lend great impetus to mutual understanding, cooperation and development. The German government runs a number of initiatives and programmes to support them in this:

- ▶ The „Engagement-global.de“ (German) platform provides information about the different ways you can get involved in development work.
- ▶ The **Centre for International Immigration and Development (CIM)** can help you with various programmes:
  - ▶ The „**Migranten als Brückenbauer**“ („Migrants as Bridge-builders“) programme: this funds not-for-profit projects by migrant organisations working in Germany which are working to improve living conditions in their countries of origin.  
(<http://www.cimonline.de/de/2110.asp>)
  - ▶ The „**Returning Experts Programme**“ will help if you wish to return to your country of origin.  
(<http://www.zav-reintegration.de/en>)

## **Active citizenship at work**

Companies too provide plenty of opportunities for getting involved and for inputting your ideas, culture, or experience of other countries. For example, you can join the staff representative body, one of your company's internal networks or a work group which counts particularly on international know-how. By getting involved, you are not only demonstrating an interest in your new employer; it is also a quick way of getting to know colleagues from other sections of your company. You will overcome your initial difficulties with the German language and also pick up valuable tips about your new locality.

Incidentally, more than 1,200 companies, public bodies, associations and charities in Germany have already signed the “Diversity Charter”, committing themselves to fostering a tolerant, pluralistic corporate culture. You can find a list of these committed employers here: <http://www.charta-der-vielfalt.de/de/unterzeichner/unterzeichner-der-charta-der-vielfalt.html>.



## ENJOYING YOUR FREE TIME

For many people in Germany, it is important to achieve a balance between work and leisure. Take advantage of your free time too to enjoy the vast choice of activities. Sports, culture or excursions – we'd like to introduce you to some of the leisure activities that are available in Germany.

### Outdoor activities

For many people in Germany, free time is necessarily spent outdoors – whatever the time of year. This is why there is never any lack of things to do. Of course, people in Germany love long, sunny summer days. That's when nature-lovers really get their money's worth – days on the beach in the North Sea and Baltic coastal regions, cycling and boating in the countryside of northern and eastern Germany with its meadows and rivers or rambles through the idyllic mountain scenery of the Alps are what many families choose to do with their free time at that time of year. Besides these activities, numerous lakes and open-air swimming pools, summer toboggan runs and rope courses also attract plenty of people on hot summer days.

In the winter, most people head to regions where there's plenty of snow. That's the skiing and snowboard season in the south of Germany and the regions with low mountains. However, even right outside your own front door, frozen lakes and snow-covered slopes offer great opportunities for ice-skating and sledging enthusiasts. Cold is no problem with a drink of hot tea, mulled wine, non-alcoholic punch or grog (a hot drink with rum). You'll find the right equipment as well as warm, waterproof clothing in any large sports store.

### Sport

There are bound to be sports activities to do somewhere near you too. Every large town has its own sports club. Most of these offer all kinds of ball sports, light athletics and other kinds of courses, such as keep-fit, martial arts, dancing or water sports. Just ask at your local town hall or find out what activities are available near you on the Internet.

Another alternative to sports clubs is sport at work. Many companies organise sports activities for their employees outside working hours, such as running, football and keep-fit, as well as health-focused activities such as back-strengthening exercises. You can find out details from your Human Resources department or from other colleagues.

### Culture

Make the most of Germany's exciting art and culture scene. Museums, concerts, plays, comedy shows, festivals and local festivities are on all year round, featuring well-known artists or exciting new faces. Germany has something for everyone, from classical concerts to Carnival customs. You can find out what's on near you from the tourist information office or on the Web site of your town.

### Cinemas

The German cinemas attract millions of visitors every year. Most cinema films are screened in German. Nevertheless, many cinemas hold screenings of foreign films in their original language. But German cinema culture is also worth discovering: in 2011, a total of 212 German-made films and international co-productions were shown in cinemas. More and more German cinema-goers are enjoying the possibility of viewing films in 3D. Today, virtually every large town has a 3D cinema. A German cinema film usually lasts an hour and a half, and a visit to the cinemas costs an average 7.70 euros.

## **Adventure time for children**

There are also plenty of great possibilities for leisure activities with your children in Germany. The most popular places for families with young children are the playgrounds which every residential area has and which are usually run by the local councils. Collect your children, spades and buckets together, and with the sandpits, climbing frames, slides, see-saws and swings time your children will find that time flies by incredibly fast.

A day trip to one of Germany's many amusement parks is bound to strike a chord with your children too. Besides outdoor adventure parks, there are also wildlife parks and zoos or aquariums with all possible kinds of sea creatures. Your children can also learn about life on the farm with pigs, cows and cereal farming on one of the numerous adventure farms which are found all over Germany. And in bad weather, a visit to a museum might save the day. With their films and children's programmes, modern museums have something to interest even children.



## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Even if you are far from your home country, you don't have to do without newspapers, TV and films in your own language. In Germany you can enjoy more than 2,500 foreign-language media. Here, we show you how you can receive them or buy them.

### TV and films

You can receive all international channels via satellite. Many of them are unencrypted, which means that they are free of charge; however, for some you will require a subscription.

Another alternative is IPTV – that is, receiving television via an Internet connection. IPTV is available from most large telecommunications operators in combination with a fast DSL Internet connection. Mostly English-language programmes are included in the price. You can pay extra to receive channels in other languages.

If you want to view a film in your native language, you can also visit a cinema. Many cinemas hold screenings of foreign films in their original language.

In addition to this, you can find videos with free access on the Internet. You also have the possibility of renting films online.

### Newspapers

In Germany, around 5,000 shops stock international newspapers. You'll find a large selection of foreign daily newspapers at airports and railway stations especially. Altogether, you have a choice of 150 foreign-language newspapers, most of them in English.

### Radio

As with foreign TV channels, you can also receive a variety of foreign radio stations by satellite. A very broad variety of German radio stations also broadcast in foreign languages. Both public and private stations offer radio programmes in English, Russian, French and Turkish, as well as other languages.

## CONTACTS – WORKING IN GERMANY

If you have questions on **visa regulations** please contact the German missions. You can find the addresses of German missions abroad on our world map: [www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/making-it/germany-local/](http://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/making-it/germany-local/).

If you have questions on **looking for a job** in Germany or **suggestions to improve the “Welcome to Germany portal”**, you may use this contact form. [www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/contact/](http://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/contact/)

▶ **Federal Ministry for Families, the Elderly, Women and Youth**

On its Web site, the Ministry provides information about child care, children’s and young people’s rights and German youth policy. [German]  
<http://www.bmfsfj.de/>

▶ **Federal Ministry of Health**

The Federal Ministry of Health provides answers to questions about the German health and health insurance system. [German, English]  
<http://www.bmg.bund.de/>

▶ **Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Development**

What are the rules governing road traffic in Germany? Answers provided on the Web site of the Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Development. [German, English]  
<http://www.bmvbs.de>

▶ **Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)**

One of the missions of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is to help immigrants get settled in Germany, and on its Web site it provides tips about finding accommodation, the health system, German courses, child care and much more. [German, English, Russian, Turkish]  
<http://www.bamf.de/>

▶ **Just Landed**

Just Landed provides support for people as they move to Germany – for example, tips on subjects such as opening a bank account, going to the doctor’s and finding accommodation. [German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch, Polish]  
<http://www.justlanded.com/deutsch/Deutschland/Finanzen>

▶ **German Tenants’ Federation (Deutscher Mieterbund)**

The German Tenants Federation represents the interests of tenants. On its Web site, the federation provides information about heating and electricity costs. [German]  
<http://www.mieterbund.de>

▶ **Eduserver**

Eduserver provides users with information about child day care centres, the school system and continuing education for adults. [German, English]  
<http://www.bildungsserver.de/>

▶ **Familien-Wegweiser – a portal that points the way**

Qualified professionals can search for child care offers on this online portal of the Federal Ministry for Families, the Elderly, Women and Youth. [German]  
<http://www.familien-wegweiser.de/>

▶ **Weißer Liste medical directory**

This online directory lets you search the Web for GPs, specialist doctors and dentists, as well as for hospitals and nursing homes. On it, you’ll also find checklists for preparing for your visit to the doctor’s. The Weiße Liste (“White List”) directory is a project of the Bertelsmann Foundation. [German, Russian, Turkish]  
<https://arzt.weisse-liste.de/>

▶ **National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Funds (GKV)**

Information about the German health and health insurance system [German]  
<http://www.gkv-spitzenverband.de>

▶ **Active citizenship in Germany**

On the “Engagiert in Deutschland” Web site, users can search for opportunities to do voluntary work in Germany. The “Engagiert in Deutschland” initiative is funded by the Federal Ministry for Families, the Elderly, Women and Youth. [German]  
<http://www.engagiert-in-deutschland.de>

▶ **German National Tourist Board**

This Web site provides tips for recreation – from rambling paths and parks to concerts. [German, English]  
<http://www.germany.travel>

## IMPRINT

**The Welcome to Germany portal of the Qualified Professionals Initiative is the responsibility of:**

Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy  
Public Relations  
Dr. Christine Kahlen  
Scharnhorststr. 34-37  
10115 Berlin, Germany  
Telefax: +49 (0)30 - 18 615-5208  
Internet: [www.bmwi.de](http://www.bmwi.de)

### **Text**

Cologne Institute for Economic Research  
Research Unit Human Capital and Innovation

### **Editorial and Design**

Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln Medien GmbH