

TIPS FOR LIVING IN GERMANY

Provided by ACS German Volunteer

Groceries

Groceries are much cheaper on the economy – discounters like Aldi and Lidl have fresh, local produce and very good quality meat and other food. Get freshly made bread and rolls from the small bakeries like Werner's. There are some superstores comparable to Walmart, for example "real". Remember to bring your own bag, most places charge for plastic bags or have banned them altogether. It is preferable to pay small amounts by cash, many shops do not accept credit cards below 10 Euro (especially smaller places – the fees are too high for them). So make sure you always have cash and coins with you for small expenses or public toilets. Most places are closed on Sundays, it is a day of rest in Germany.

VAT-form

Use your VAT-form to save a lot of money! Especially bigger stores (with furniture, electronics, bicycles, cars, etc.) tend to accept them.

Traffic

There are some differences in traffic rules, get acquainted with them. For example, never turn right on red! Leaving your car running while parking is not only frowned upon, but prohibited. When there are no signs on a crossroad, the rule is "right before left" – the car to the right of you has right of way. The roads and parking spaces in general are narrower than in the States, but mostly very well maintained. Speeding tickets are not as expensive as in the States, but watch out for hidden cameras along the road on the Autobahn and in the city.

On the bright side, there are many parts of the Autobahn without a speed limit – look for a speed sign with a crossed out number. Speaking of Autobahn, keep as much to the right as possible, unless you are overtaking someone. No overtaking from the right!

Living off-base

Apartments, especially in bigger cities, tend to be smaller than in the States and can be very different from each other (from historical old buildings to newly build apartments, mostly with hard floors for an easier maintenance). Remember to pay attention to the house rules, the Germans are very fussy about them, especially when it comes to recycling, cleaning the stairwell or quiet times, so no drilling and moving furniture on Sundays and some hours during the work day.

Travel

Germany is in the middle of Europe, make sure to travel a lot! Go by plane, bicycle, car, or the long-distance trains ("Regionalbahn" or the faster "ICE"). Look for group discounts for train tickets to save a lot. Enjoy the beautiful mountains, forests and castles throughout the country. Most cities have a good infrastructure for bikes with bicycle-only lanes on the pedestrian walk. Local mass transit is very well developed and used more than in the States, make sure to use them if you have a drink or two. Many cities are over 2000 years old with old buildings and a rich history. Christmas markets are very popular, but also other street festivals and fairs are held all year long in many small towns and bigger cities (one word: Oktoberfest!).