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Driving in Germany and Europe

Before your HHT and prior to daily driving in Germany, it is highly recommended that you peruse these websites, <http://www.gettingaroundgermany.info/>, <http://www.bugeurope.com/transport/drivede.html>, or [www.alltravelgermany.com/Germany/Car Rental/Driving Tips.htm](http://www.alltravelgermany.com/Germany/Car_Rental/Driving_Tips.htm) for some basic rules and signage. **Right-of-way and the signage for it, in particular, is different from North America and you will need to understand the differences before driving here.**

Once you arrive, you will need to arrange for a written driving test and licensing through the Licensing Clerk, Canadian Forces Support Unit Europe. The written test will need to be done by you and any other licenced drivers in the house.

Their positional email address is P-SFK.76ELICENSING@forces.gc.ca / Tel 011 49 2451 717123 (Canada) +49 2451 717 123 (Europe). Of note, you can obtain a study package and write the driving test prior to arriving in Germany. Contact the GK Transport Section for information.

Automobile Insurance. You will want to get the standard automobile insurance that you are accustomed to; however, premiums are higher than at home. To obtain a reduction in premiums, you will need to provide a letter (or letters) from your previous insurance companies attesting to at least one year of accident-free driving to get the minimum deduction and ten (10) years to get the maximum deduction. Letters must have original signatures since photocopies will NOT be accepted. Some companies, such as MIRASCON, give a substantial NATO discount.

Many of us have dealt with and had great service from Culpeck Insurance – Agent: Astrid Rombey. She can assist you with all of the above types of insurance.

Her email – ar@culpeck.com

Office email – gk@culpeck.com

Equipment

As in Canada, drivers in Germany must be in possession of a valid driver's license and vehicles must be registered and insured. Within a vehicle, the following items are mandatory:

- Proof of insurance;
- Vehicle registration;
- First-Aid Kit – Verify the expiry date occasionally as they are only good for a couple of years. Kit must also include 2 x N95 Covid masks;
- Warning triangle; and
- Safety vest(s) – By law it is required to have a minimum of one safety vest in your vehicle but you really need to have a safety vest for each seatbelt. When exiting a vehicle due to an accident or other mishap, individuals are required by law to dawn a safety vest, which is why you need more than one in the vehicle.



TÜV Emissions Sticker

All vehicles that will be driven in Germany, particularly in any large city, require a TÜV emissions sticker. After you have completed your vehicle inspection and received your registration, plates, etc. you can either order the sticker online from <https://www.umwelt-plakette.de/nc/en/store.html> or you can purchase at a TÜV or other inspection centre for less money.



Registration Renewal

Depending on the age of your vehicle, you may be required to complete another safety inspection to keep your registration current. It will be listed on your vehicle registration fuel card when the next safety inspection is due. The stickers on your license plate would reflect the month and year of expiry. Additionally, a reminder will be sent to you prior to that date. A brand new vehicle does not require a safety inspection for 3 years. A vehicle less than 5 years old requires an inspection every 2 years. A vehicle over 5 years old requires an inspection every year. If the inspection is done at a German TÜV facility, then the inspection is good for 2 years.

ARAL Fuel Cards

The Licensing Office in Neiderheid will issue an ARAL card for each vehicle in the household. Make sure to be familiar with which ARAL stations accept the card. Most do but there are a few exceptions and you will not be reimbursed if you accidentally use one of these stations.

www.aral-fuelcard.com/stationfinder

Accidents

If you are involved in an accident you must:

- Remain at the scene and render First Aid if required. Also, take the necessary precautionary measures to avoid fire (e.g. turn off engine)
- Warn other motorists of the accident by placing a warning triangle 100m from the rear of your vehicle, where it can be seen clearly by approaching traffic, and activate the hazard lights. Remember to dawn your safety vest prior to doing this.
- Provide your insurance details to the involved parties. This means waiting for a reasonable time if they are not, for some reason, at the scene of the accident (e.g. collision with a parked vehicle). If after waiting for a reasonable amount of time, you still cannot identify the owner of the property you damaged, you must report the accident to the police ASAP, but no later than 24 hours after the incident.
- Ensure you obtain the involved parties' insurance details, together with vehicle registration information and, if applicable, the names and addresses of any witnesses. If there is only minor damage to the vehicles - and the drivers agree - the police need not be called. Drivers, however, should exchange insurance details. However, if you are in doubt, request the presence of police. It is quite common for police to be called to an accident scene.
- If safe to do so, it is recommended to photograph the scene of the accident. Note that it is illegal in Germany to take the photo of another individual person without their permission.
- Inform the local Canadian chain of command.

Do not admit liability as doing so could adversely affect your third party liability insurance coverage. If you pay an "on the spot" fine, this could be construed as you are partially admitting blame for the accident. You have the option to refuse to pay for the "on the spot" fine. Let local police know if you are subject to Canadian military jurisdiction. If you subsequently receive correspondence from police or other official authorities, do not disregard it. If in doubt, check with your legal office. Your insurance company may not cover any claims if you have consumed alcohol, even if you are still within the legal limit, and you will likely be held personally liable for all claims.

Booster seats

Children under the age of twelve with a height below 150cm are required to use a car seat with a seatbelt when in a vehicle. Therefore, if your child is over 12 years of age but still under 150cm, they are not required by law to use a car seat. The same principle applies to those who are over 150cm tall but less than 12 years of age.



Insurance and Breakdown Service

ADAC coverage, similar to CAA, provides a breakdown service whether on the road or at home. You can call them at 0180 222 2222 if you are involved in an accident. Many vehicle insurance companies also provide basic break-down coverage with their policies – check with your insurance agent.

Driving in Other Nearby Countries

Lights should be on while driving through Austria. A vignette sticker is required when driving on any Austrian autobahn. These can be purchased at most gas stations near the Austrian border or online if you have a couple of weeks notice.

The Czech Republic also requires a vignette to be purchased, which can be done online, right up to the last minute.

There are no road tolls in Germany. In France and Italy you will pay to use most main highways. In Switzerland you will have to pay a one-time fee (good from Jan -Dec). It is cheaper to pay with Swiss currency at the Swiss border.

Some years ago, there was an effort in France to legislate that everyone must have a breathalyzer test kit in their car. This did not come into force so kits are unnecessary. Normal items, such as those required in Germany (safety kit, fluorescent vests), are required.



Parking (Parkscheibe)

When parking in local lots (Blue P) that display a time limit, but have no ticket machines, you are required to display a blue plastic parking disc (Parkscheibe) in your window. You set it for the time that you arrived. Normally issued during in-routine, at the Licensing Office, you can also buy these discs at fuel stations, hardware stores and tourist information centres. In some areas, you will see a large blue sign with a white 'P' which means you may park in the designated area for free for the set amount of time on the sign i.e.; 2std (2 hours). Set the parking display disc to your arrival time to the nearest half hour and display it on your dashboard.



Parking Garages

The Parkleitsystem is a parking guidance system using a series of signs around the central area of a city. These blue-and-white signs indicate the occupancy of various nearby parking garages. Next to the name of the parking garage is the word frei (spots available) or besetzt (full). In underground car parks, you have to take a ticket to enter. Keep the ticket with you and pay at the machine when you are leaving. Retrieve the ticket from the payment machine and insert into the machine at the exit barrier.

Day-to-day driving in Germany and Europe

Speed cameras are frequent and usually difficult to notice as they are in a dark green box, often located in zones where speeds change. You may get a flash, followed by a fine in the mail from GK. Some of these cameras are always in the same spot, while others are mobile and may be set up in a location for days or even just a few hours.

It is illegal to wash a vehicle on a public street; this can be done on private property in some areas. In addition, do not wash it on a Sunday due to cultural restrictions. Car washes are available locally, Monday to Saturday.

International Driver's License

When traveling outside of Germany, some countries do not accept the Canadian Forces Europe driver's license (Spain, Austria and Greece, to name a few). You must have an international driver's license. The JSEC Community Office can help you find a location that issues them, if you did not bring one from Canada or it is expired.

Tires/ Snow tires

Most Europeans use both summer and winter tires. Make sure to buy the appropriate speed rating for driving on German roads. Many vendors will accept VAT forms so ask around the HQ for those that do. Roads can be treacherous in winter, so it is recommended to use winter tires. You could be liable for a fine and insurance coverage could be problematic if there is an accident and you do not have winter tires. Snow tires should be installed on your car by the end of October and removed at the end of April. Winter chains are required in some areas during bad weather (e.g. in the Alps). You can purchase chains for your car from a local hardware or auto store and you need to know the size of your tire.

Bicycling

Bicycling in Germany is a wonderful activity, especially as there are many, many paved paths, dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians. Germans love to bicycle for health and leisure activities but also as a primary means of transportation to work or school. According to this website, here are some important considerations for bicycling in Germany

(<https://www.simplegermany.com/cycling-rules-in-germany/>):

According to the [German Bicycle Association \(ADFC\)](#), your bike should have these items:

- a white front light and a red backlight that are approved by the *Straßenverkehrs-Zulassungs-Ordnung (StVZO)*. Make sure to search for the StVZO approval when searching for lights in a physical or online shop.
- a white reflector in the front and a red reflector in the back (which can be integrated with the light)
- functioning front and back-wheel brakes
- a bell
- reflector stripes around the tire or two orange reflectors on the spokes per wheel
- two yellow reflectors on each pedal
- the lights and reflectors don't have to be mounted on the bike during the daytime if they are removable.

1. Don't Drink And Drive

Cycling is not a safe alternative to a car if you want to head home after a night out of drinking alcohol. Since you are actively taking part in road traffic you are bound by strict fines and could

lose your automobile licence when causing an accident or being stopped with alcohol in your blood.

Two legal alcohol limits are relevant:

- up to 0,3 per mille: Biking is legally ok as long as you ride your bike without suspicious behavior and no accident occurs.
- from 1,6 per mille: Biking in such a state is considered a criminal offense with harsh consequences such as a fine of one net salary, [2 Flensburg points](#), and a medical-psychological evaluation (MPU). Should you not pass the MPU, your driver's license will be revoked forever, and you can even be forbidden from riding a bicycle again.

A blood alcohol level in between those two limits can also result in fines, Flensburg points, and a temporary revocation of your driver's license, depending on the circumstance. So make sure to push your bike home or take a taxi after having had more than one drink so as not to create danger for yourself and others.

2. Know Where To Ride Your Bike

Cyclists in Germany need to use certain lanes and refrain from riding on others:

Use Dedicated Bike Lanes - Whenever available, cycle on the dedicated bike lanes. Round blue signs with a white bicycle indicate mandatory cycling paths. They might be on the sidewalk or on the street. If you share a path with pedestrians, you need to respect and give way to them.

Cyclists **must** use these:



Cycle paths/
mandatory
cycle lanes



Shared paths
for pedestrians
and cyclists



Cycle paths
next to a
pavement

Source: [German Road Safety](#)

Never Cycle On The Sidewalk

Unless there is a dedicated bike lane on the sidewalk, you are not allowed to cycle on the sidewalk as an adult and you must cycle on the road with the traffic. You must always cycle on the right side of the road.

If you are cycling with your kids in Germany, make sure to also follow these rules for children:

- until the age of 8 **must use the sidewalk**.
- between 8 and 10 years old can choose whether to cycle on the sidewalk or road.
- above the age of 10 must use the road when there is no sidewalk available

Never Cycle In Pedestrian Areas

In city centers in Germany, you usually find larger pedestrian areas (*Fußgänger-Zone*). You are not allowed to cycle through them; instead, you need to get off your bike and push it through this area.



Road sign for a pedestrian zone in Germany

Only if you see the below white road sign with a bike and the word 'frei' on it are you allowed to cycle through this area.



Road sign that allows access for cyclists. 'Frei' means 'allowed'.

Source: [German Road Safety](#)

Never Cycle On the Autobahn Or Countryside Highways

The Autobahn and motorways are only for motorized **vehicles that can drive faster than 60 km/h**. Don't ever enter one of those highways with your bicycle, as you will put yourself and others in danger.

You can identify these roads by these road signs:



Vehicles
only road



Motorway

German road signs indicate car access only.

Source: [German Road Safety](#)

Never Cycle Against The Traffic Direction

You should always cycle with the flow of the traffic. There are two exceptions when you are allowed to go against the traffic:

There is only one cycle path for both directions.





Road sign indicating cycling against the traffic of a one-way street is allowed.

Note: big difference between Canada and Germany here for signalling while on a bicycle

Use a Hand Signal Before Making a Turn

Whenever you want to make a right or left turn while cycling, you must indicate your planned turn beforehand. You do so by stretching your right arm and hand out to the right for turning right or **your left arm to the left for turning left.**