






THE MASTER DRIVERS GUIDE TO DRIVING IN GERMANY

Driving in Germany can be a pleasure as the roads are generally in excellent condition and the drivers are well-trained and cooperative – just as long as you follow the rules. Here you will find a complete digest of those rules as well as information on renting a car in Germany, general information on the highway network, a special section on the Autobahn and a comprehensive collection of traffic signs and signals. However you are reminded this is meant as a guide only and you are responsible in law to ensure you understand and adhere to the rules of the road.

	<u>Section 1: Renting a Car and Driving Basics</u> Rental cars, fuel, breakdowns, maps, and an overview of the road system
	<u>Section 2: The Autobahn</u> An in-depth look at the world's most renown highway system
	<u>Section 3: Rules of the Road</u> An overview of German traffic laws
	<u>Section 4: Traffic Signs & Signals</u> A comprehensive guide to German road signs, signals, and markings
	<u>Section 5: Driving & Parking in Town</u> Tips for driving in towns & cities and the low-down on parking

Section 1: Renting a Car and Driving Basics

Fahrvergnügen is a German word that means "the pleasure of driving" and it must've been coined to describe driving in Germany. The country has an extensive, well-maintained road network, signposting is excellent and the cars are among the best on the planet. While taking the train will get you most places, sometimes a car may be your preferred (or necessary) means of transport. Here you'll find an overview of basics for driving and renting in Germany.

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Rental cars

Renting a car in Germany entails about the same as it does in the UK. Most of the major car rental agencies are represented in Germany including Avis, Hertz, Budget, Alamo, Sixt, and Europcar. Rental cars are

available at all airports and many major rail stations and other city locations, although you'll often pay more for the convenience of the latter.

To rent a vehicle, you will need your driver's license and passport or other form of photographic ID. I would recommend using a major credit card for the rental as most automatically cover your insurance deductible in the event of an accident or other mishap. However, be sure to check with your credit card company to verify that it does offer this coverage and what you must do to qualify for this (usually, this means waiving the Collision Damage Waiver [CDW] option on the rental contract.)

Most rental cars generally come equipped with a *manual* transmission (the word "standard" really applies here). If you want (or need) an automatic, make sure you specify this when you book; it will probably cost extra though. If you really want luxury, you may also want to inquire about renting a high-end German sports car or sedan, most rental agencies keep ample numbers of these available for those tourists with the desire and corresponding budget.

Most car rental agencies will allow one-way rentals within Germany (pick-up the car in one city and return it at another) for no extra fee. If you want to do this, make sure that this is the case before you rent. Most rentals also allow unlimited kilometres. If you plan to travel outside of Germany, make sure that this is noted on the contract and that the vehicle is properly documented for international travel. Chances are most agencies will permit travel to other western European countries, but probably not anywhere east of Germany (except Austria).

Things to check before you leave the rental lot

Every rental vehicle should have a green insurance certificate ("Green Card"), it is important that you have this before you drive off. If you are stopped by the police, travel to a different country, or have an accident, you will need to produce this document. Make sure that the vehicle has all of the required emergency equipment (warning triangle, first aid kit, spare tire, Hi Vis Vest and jack) along with a parking disc. Also, verify what type of fuel the vehicle uses as many German cars use diesel, which helpfully is the same word in German. Before venturing out on the road, make sure you know where all the buttons, knobs, and controls are even take a little test drive around the lot to get a feel for the car. This will allow you to make any necessary discoveries or adjustments before you get out into the foreign driving environment where you will need to concentrate.

Fuel

Gasoline (*Benzin*) and diesel (*Diesel*) are readily available throughout Germany. Most small towns have at least one station, and there are 24-hour stations located at intervals along the Autobahn and major highways. The major brands are Aral, BP, Elf, Esso, Fina, Total, and Shell and the pumps in Germany work basically the same as in the UK. Most stations are now self-service (*Selbstbedienung*, or *SB-Tanken*) like in the UK, also unleaded fuel (*bleifrei*) is now the norm.



Autobahn filling station

Breakdowns

Germany has several of major automobile/ motorists clubs. The biggest is the ADAC (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil Club*, General German Auto Club), also there is the AvD (*Automobilclub von Deutschland*, Auto Club of Germany) and ACE; all offer the usual array of motorist services. Of most interest to the tourist is the roadside breakdown service (*Straßenwacht, Pannenhilfe*) operated by all clubs, which offers assistance to both members and non-members. Basic help from these "yellow angels" is free, but you will have to pay for parts or towing. To summon help, use the nearest emergency telephone, located at 2 km intervals along the Autobahn (see the ["Emergencies" section of the Autobahn page](#)) and 5-7 km intervals along Federal Highways. Arrows on the roadside posts will direct you to the nearest one. Where emergency telephones are not provided, call 0180/2222222 from a phone booth or mobile phone.



Yellow ADAC vehicle
(photo by Frank C. Müller)

Maps

German maps are often excellent in quality; the best maps are from Hallwag and the ADAC auto club. The RV Verlag Euro-City series of city and metro maps are also excellent (each map seems to be almost the same size as the city itself!). Michelin also publishes a competent collection of regional and city maps but even the free maps available from tourist offices tend to be more than adequate in scope and detail.

Roads

With around 636,000 km of roads Germany has the world's second largest road system, over 221,000 km of this total being trunk roads and highways, providing access to even the most remote corners of the country. These roads carry a huge and growing volume of traffic for example in 1990, there were over 54 million registered vehicles, up from 36 million in 1980 and 17 million in 1970. In addition, Germany serves as the crossroads of Europe funneling much of the continent's east-west and north-south traffic.


You will find that the roads in Germany are generally well-engineered and maintained; rarely will you find a pothole, and snow removal is almost instantaneous. One note about the road system: most of the roads in the former East Germany have now been rebuilt or upgraded from their previously dilapidated condition. Unfortunately, the expense of doing this has resulted in delays in maintenance and expansion of roads in the west. Still, the overall quality of the road system is excellent.




Typical rural road

Germany has a hierarchical road system ranging from unpaved forest paths to the world-renown Autobahn. Here is a brief description of the road types in Germany:

- **Forest/ Country Lanes (*Waldweg, Feldweg*)** – Paved and unpaved one-lane roads. These are in generally good repair. Forest lanes are usually restricted with access controlled by a barrier.
- **City Streets (*Straße*)** – All town and city streets are paved, sometimes with cobblestones. Generally in good repair. Frequently narrow with tight corners, but usually with enough room for two cars to pass. Usually named (although signs may be hard to find at times) and with variable traffic.
- **Community Link Roads (*Gemeindeverbindungsstraße*)** – Two lane roads connecting villages and smaller towns. Usually well-maintained with light traffic.
- **County Roads (*Kreisstraße*)** – Two lane roads connecting small and medium-sized towns. These roads have official numbers which start with a "K" or possibly the county code and sometimes these numbers may appear on guide signs or maps. Universally well-maintained with light to moderate traffic.
- **State Roads (*Landstraße or Staatsstraße*)** – Very similar to County roads and usually connect larger towns. Again, these roads have official numbers (usually four digits) starting with an "L" or "St", but these numbers do not usually appear on signs. Universally well-maintained with moderate to heavy traffic.
- **Federal roads (*Bundesstraße*)** – Somewhat larger and usually significantly busier than State and

County roads. The routes are numbered with "B" numbers (e.g. B35) and marked with  signs. These roads are usually two lanes but frequently, especially in metropolitan areas, these roads are upgraded to 4 or 6 lane expressways (*Kraftfahrstraße, Schnellstraße*), or so-called

"Autobahn-similar" (*Autobahnähnlich*) roads, marked with  signs. Federal roads connect large towns and cities and tourist areas. Usually equipped with emergency phones at 5-10 km intervals. Universally well-maintained with generally heavy traffic.

- **Motorways (*Autobahn*)** – See the dedicated [Autobahn page](#).

- **European Highways (*Europastraße*)** – European Highways are marked with the  sign. These aren't separate roads, but rather are co designated with other highways, usually Autobahns. The European Highway System with routes designated with an "E", provides for continuous numbering between countries, regardless of domestic route numbers. For example, near Saarbrücken, the German A6 crosses into France and becomes France's A32. However, both roads carry the E50 designation making it easy for international travellers to follow the route.

Germany has over 80 theme highways for tourists. The most well-known is the Romantic Road (*Romantische Straße*), a 180-mile route through small, picturesque Bavarian villages from Würzburg to the foothills of the Alps at Füssen. Other popular routes are the Castle Road (*Burgenstraße*) from Heidelberg to Nürnberg and the Fairy Tale Road (*Märchenstraße*) from Frankfurt to Hannover. Guided bus tours are

available along these routes, but the best way to see them is by driving yourself. The routes are well marked and information is available at every town along the way. If you do choose to travel one of these routes, do so outside of the prime tourist seasons to avoid the crowds and get the best hotel and restaurant rates.

Section 2: The Autobahn

Virtually all of the world's serious drivers have heard of it and longed to take their shot at conquering it. German cars are known for their precise engineering and craftsmanship; the Autobahn completes the driving equation.

Some people are disappointed the first time they drive on the Autobahn. They come with visions of a twenty-lane superhighway where cars are barely a blur as they whiz by. In reality, the Autobahn looks like a typical motorway or dual carriageway and despite rumours to the contrary, not everyone is hurtling along at the speed of sound. The stories of speed anarchy are only half correct as many sections of Autobahn do in fact have speed limits. Still the roads are superbly designed, built and maintained, even now in the east where the German government had to undo 40 years of Communist "maintenance". Amenities are numerous, and drivers are well-trained and cooperative.



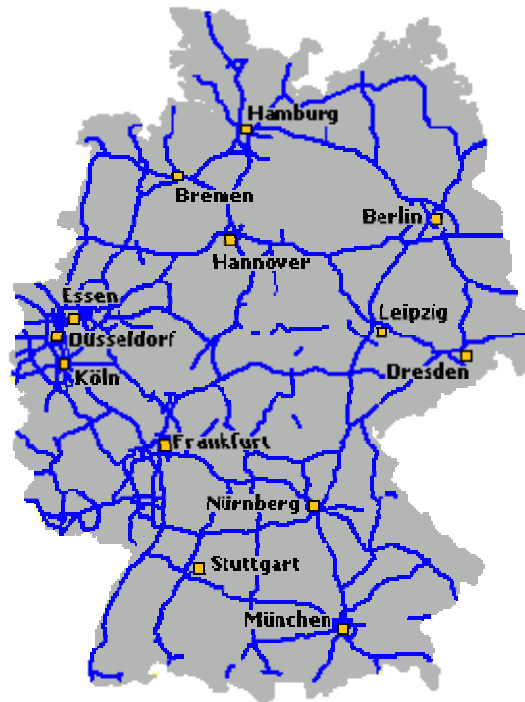
The Autobahn from the driver's view

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History

What is widely regarded as the world's first motorway was built in Berlin between 1913 and 1921. The 19 km long AVUS ("*Automobil-Verkehrs- und Übungsstraße*") in south-western Berlin was an experimental highway that was (and occasionally still is) used for racing. It featured two 8 meter lanes separated by a 9 meter wide median. Italy built several expressways in the 1920s and Germany followed with its first "auto-only roads" opening in 1929 between Düsseldorf and Opladen and in 1932 between Cologne and Bonn. More routes were planned in the early '30s and Adolf Hitler, seeing the propaganda benefits of a high-speed road system (as well as the immediate military and employment value), started a program to build two north-south and east-west links. The first of these *Reichsautobahnen* opened on May 19th, 1935 between Frankfurt and Darmstadt. At the end of World War II the Autobahn network totalled 2,128 km. Construction on new sections finally started again in 1953, with 144 km added between 1953 and 1958, bringing the total to 2,272 km. Starting in 1959, the Federal Republic began Autobahn expansion in earnest by embarking on a series of four-year plans that expanded the *Bundesautobahnen* system to 3,076 km by 1964. Major additions continued during the next two decades and the system reached 4,110 km in 1970, 5,258 km in 1973, 6,207 km in 1976, 7,029 km in 1979, and 8,080 km in 1984. A new series of five-year plans, with the goal of putting an Autobahn entrance within 10 km of any point in Germany, had expanded the net to over 8,800 km by 1990. The reunification of Germany in 1990, however, put those plans on hold as the federal government focused on absorbing and upgrading the Autobahns it inherited from East Germany. The incorporation of those eastern Autobahns put the total Autobahn network at almost 11,000 km in 1992. Additions to the unified network increased the total to 11,712 km in 2001 and 12,044 km in 2004. This makes the Autobahn network the world's third largest superhighway system after the United States and China.



Map of current Autobahn network

The first Autobahns, like their Italian counterparts, featured limited-access and grade-separated crossings, but no medians. The first *Reichsautobahnen* did have narrow medians but lacked shoulders, and ramps and waysides had cobblestone surfaces. When Germany was reunified in 1989, the Autobahns of East Germany were in virtually the same condition as they were in 1945, exhibiting the aforementioned qualities as well as inadequate signing, infrequent (and often non-functional) emergency telephones located in the centre median, and service areas consisting of a dilapidated roadhouse next to a wayside. Newer West German Autobahns had for many years featured 3.75 meter wide lanes, shoulders, landscaped medians with crash barriers, frequent roadside emergency telephones, and ample, well-adorned service areas. After reunification, the German government expedited upgrading of the old East German Autobahns in a series of "German Unity Transport Projects". By the middle of 2004, the program was over two-thirds completed, with about 850 km upgraded or newly-built Autobahn.

Design



Typical section of Autobahn

The general rule for design is to provide for unimpeded, high-speed traffic flow. Unimproved older segments aside, most Autobahns feature the following design elements:

- Two, three, or occasionally four lanes per direction. Lanes on rural sections are generally 3.75 meters wide except the left lane of newer three lane segments where it's 3.5 meters wide. On urban sections, all lanes are 3.5 meters wide.
- A landscaped "green" median 3.5 or 4 meters wide (3 meters in urban areas). A double-sided guardrail runs down the middle. Blinders are often used on curves. Some newer sections have concrete barriers instead of green medians.
- Emergency hard shoulders and long acceleration and deceleration lanes.
- Half cloverleaf junctions at exits and full cloverleaf's or directional junctions at Autobahn crossings. Junctions are generally well-spaced, sometimes exceeding 30 km between.
- Inclines of 4% or less. Climbing lanes are provided on most steep grades.
- Gentle and well-banked curves.
- Freeze-resistant concrete or bituminous surface.
- Roadbed and surface measuring about 68 cm (27 inches) in thickness.

In addition, Autobahns also feature the following amenities:

- Reflector guide posts at 50 meter intervals.
- Frequent parking areas, often equipped with toilet facilities.
- Extensive and ample service areas featuring filling stations, restaurants, and hotels.
- Automated traffic and weather monitoring and electronic signs providing dynamic speed limits and/or advance warning of congestion, accidents, construction, and fog.
- Emergency telephones at 2 km intervals.
- Pre-signed detour routes to facilitate emergency closures.
- Standardized signage.
- Wildlife protection fencing, crossover tunnels and "green bridges".

Maintenance is superb. Crews inspect every square meter of the system periodically using vehicles with high-tech road scanning equipment. When a fissure or other defect is found, the entire road section is replaced. Signs, barriers, and other features are also well maintained.

Urban Autobahns

Generally speaking, the mainline Autobahn routes avoid the metropolitan cores. Instead, spur routes provide Autobahn access into and within the cities. These spurs are usually built as "urban Autobahns" (*Stadtautobahn*). Design features of urban Autobahns include six or eight lane elevated or depressed roadways with frequent and more closely-spaced diamond interchanges. The standard rural signage standards are suspended in favour of more appropriate closely-spaced overhead signs. There are sometimes no emergency phones or roadside reflector posts. Tunnels, overpasses, and sound barriers are more frequent and night time illumination is often provided.

Tunnels and Bridges

To help maintain safe grades, the Autobahn system is well-endowed with tunnels and bridges. So-called "valley bridges" (*Talbrücke*) are often over 500 meters high and sometimes over 1 kilometre long. The Autobahn system now has over 65 tunnels, both through mountains as well as in urban areas. As a result of the tunnel disasters elsewhere in Europe during the past few years, extra emphasis has been placed on tunnel safety. All Autobahn tunnels have extensive safety systems including 24-hour video monitoring, motorist information radio and signs, frequent refuge rooms with emergency telephones and fire extinguishers, emergency lighting and exits and smoke ventilation systems.



Autobahn tunnel (left) and valley bridge (right)

Autobahn Traffic Regulations

To safely facilitate heavy, high-speed traffic, special laws apply when driving on the Autobahn:

- Bicycles, mopeds, and pedestrians are specifically prohibited from using the Autobahn, as are any other vehicles with a maximum speed rating of less than 60 km/h (36 mph).
- *Passing on the right is strictly prohibited!* Slower vehicles must move to the right to allow faster traffic to pass, and drivers should stay in the right lane except to pass. When overtaking, you must do so as quickly as possible; it's in your best interest to do so lest you become a hood ornament on that Porsche that was just a speck in your mirror a second ago and now is close enough for you to see the look of disdain on the driver's face. You are, however, allowed to pass on the right in heavy traffic when vehicles have started queuing, but only at a slow speed.
- Stopping, parking, U-turns, and reversing are strictly *verboten*, including on hard shoulders and exit ramps.
- Entering and exiting is permitted only at marked junctions.
- Traffic entering the Autobahn must give way to traffic already on the Autobahn.
- During traffic jams, motorists in the left lane are required to move as far to the left as possible and those in the adjacent centre or right lane must move as far to the right in their lane as possible, thus creating a gap between the lanes for emergency vehicles to pass through.

- If you have a breakdown or accident, if possible you must move to the hard shoulder and place a warning triangle 200 meters behind the scene (if safe to do so!). You must report the incident to the authorities using the nearest emergency phone (*see below*).
- *Is illegal to run out of fuel on the Autobahn?* Technically yes, whilst there is no law specifically against this, it is illegal to stop unnecessarily on the Autobahn so this law is applied to people who run out of fuel as such an occurrence is deemed to be preventable.
- There are no tolls for passenger vehicles to use the Autobahn. However, trucks over 12T now must pay a per-kilometre fee which is collected electronically.

In addition to the official laws, most drivers follow the following customs:

- Motorists at the rear of a traffic jam usually switch on their hazard lights to warn approaching traffic of the slowdown.
- Many drivers flash their high beams or switch on their left turn signal to politely (or not) request that you vacate the left lane to let them pass. There are conflicting opinions about whether this is legal or not and why, but there are reports that drivers have been cited for doing this. While there is no specific law regarding this, it appears that such actions can be construed to violate Germany's coercion laws, so do so at your own risk.



Four-lane Autobahn section

Speed limits

Despite the widespread belief of complete freedom from speed limits, plenty of speed restrictions can be found on the Autobahns. Many sections do indeed have permanent or dynamic speed limits ranging from 80 to 130 km/h (50-80 mph), particularly those with dangerous curves, in urban areas, near major interchanges, or with unusually constant heavy traffic. In construction zones, the limit may be as low as 60 km/h (37 mph). In addition, some sections now feature night time and wet-weather speed restrictions and trucks are always regulated (*see table below*). Still, about two-thirds of the Autobahn network has no permanent speed limit for cars and motorcycles, although there is always an advisory limit of 130 km/h (81 mph). If however you exceed the advisory limit and are involved in an accident, you could be responsible for some of the damage costs even if you are not at fault.



"End of all restrictions" sign, indicating the end of all speed limit reductions and passing restrictions

Some vehicles may be exempted from the 80 km/h limit above. A decal resembling a speed limit sign displayed on the back of a vehicle indicates that it is exempt from the general limit and may travel the speed indicated on the label, usually 100 km/h.

Over 3,200 km of Autobahn now feature dynamic speed limits which are adjusted to respond to traffic, weather, and road conditions. These speed limits and conditions are indicated using a rather elaborate system of electronic signs (*see below*).

Accident rates

Despite the high speeds, the accident, injury and death rates on the Autobahn are relatively low. The Autobahn carries about a third of all Germany's traffic, but injury accidents on the Autobahn account for only 6% of such accidents nationwide and less than 12% of all traffic fatalities were the result of Autobahn crashes (2004).

Traffic

Because of Germany's location in central Europe, traffic on the Autobahn is generally quite heavy. In 2004, motorists logged a staggering 218.9 billion kilometres on the Autobahn, averaging almost 50,000 vehicles per day on any given segment. As a result, traffic jams (*Stau*) occur frequently on the Autobahn, especially on Fridays, Sundays, holidays, and anytime after an accident or during bad weather or construction. Regional traffic reports, with a variety of names including *Verkehrsmeldungen*, *Verkehrsdienst*, *Verkehrsfunk*, and *Stauschau*, are excellent and are provided on most radio stations. If you are driving around the main British Forces areas in Northern Germany you can get regular traffic reports on BFBS Radio 1. If you are outside BFBS coverage then Germany is divided into several traffic reporting regions



(*Verkehrsrundfunkbereich*); signs along the road indicate the local radio stations carrying the traffic reports for the region you are in; you will need to have a working knowledge of German to understand them, though.

In addition to radio traffic reports, many sections of Autobahn are equipped with traffic monitoring systems and electronic signs to warn of downstream incidents or congestion and to reduce the speed of traffic as it approaches the jam. On sections without electronic signs, the Autobahn police (*Autobahnpolizei*) do an excellent job of warning of unexpected jams via portable signs, signs mounted on police cars parked along the shoulder, or on banners draped from overpasses. Traffic information is also available from several other resources including the websites of radio and TV stations, auto clubs, and government agencies, and increasingly through on-board telematics systems.



Typical weekend and holiday Autobahn traffic

Traffic reports use one of several terms to describe varying levels of congestion: "*Stau*" usually means a colossal traffic jam where you'll probably get to know the people in the cars around you, "*stockender Verkehr*" indicates the only slightly more tolerable stacking or slow-and-go type traffic, while "*dichter Verkehr*" or "*zähfließender Verkehr*" denotes the hardly-noteworthy heavy or sluggish but moving traffic.

As a stopgap measure to help improve traffic flow, traffic is now being permitted to use the emergency shoulder as a traffic lane during congested periods along some sections of Autobahn. Lane control signals,



signs, or other cars doing so indicate when this is permissible.



Congested Autobahn with shoulder open to traffic

Construction & Closures

Autobahn maintenance and improvements don't escape the German penchant for obsessiveness. As a result, construction zones (*Baustelle*) are frequent and widespread. The standard protocol for large projects is a contraflow system where the lanes for both directions are narrowed and crammed onto one side of the



Autobahn so that the other side can be worked on in its entirety. Such situations are well-marked with signs and speed limits are usually reduced greatly in these areas.

In the event that a segment of Autobahn must be closed due to an accident or other emergency, pre-posted



provisional detours are ready to guide traffic around the closure. As you exit, look for the U-numbered detour sign on the exit ramp, this denotes the detour route for that exit. Follow the same numbered route over the secondary roads and you'll eventually arrive at the next downstream entrance ramp. If that entrance is also closed, just follow the next sequential detour number to reach the next entrance after that.

However, there is one small gotcha – odd numbers continue in one direction, even numbers in the opposite direction. So if you're following an odd numbered route, be sure to follow the next sequential *odd* number (and, obviously the same goes for even-numbered routes.) These routes also come in quite handy if your patience runs-out and you want to get around a *Stau*.



Autobahn construction area.
Note the yellow road markings, these supersede all regular markings in work zones.

Service areas

The Autobahn has an extensive system of service areas (*Rasthof*, *Raststätte*) generally spaced between 40 and 60 kilometres apart. These usually feature a filling station (*Tankstelle*), restaurant or snack bar, convenience store, telephones and restrooms. Many also feature hotels, showers, playgrounds, conference rooms, and chapels. There are over 700 service areas in operation and they're open 24 hours a day. A brochure with maps and charts showing the network of service areas and the facilities available at each can be obtained at any service area and is also available on the web; in addition BFG fuel maps are available from BFG Fuel Coupon Offices.



Autobahn service area

Signs announcing the approach of a service area give the name of the service area, the distance to it, and one or more pictograms indicating the services available there:



Fuel



Restaurant



Snack bar



Hotel



Service area approach sign
The white sign at the bottom indicates the distance to the next service area.

Smaller parking areas, many equipped with restrooms (WC), are even more abundant along the Autobahn. These are marked with signs like the one below.



Approach sign for parking area w/ WC

The past couple of decades have seen the proliferation of service facilities (mainly filling stations and fast-food restaurants) just off Autobahn exit ramps. Especially increasing in popularity are truck stops (*Autohof*). These generally offer facilities comparable to the service areas, but usually at considerably lower prices. Most are now marked by special signs on the Autobahn like the one below.



Autohof announcement sign

Signs & Markings

Signage on the Autobahn is excellent. All direction signs on the Autobahn as well as those giving directions to the Autobahn are white on blue. Signage before junctions is standard in both form and placement.

Overhead signs are being used increasingly more frequently. These signs generally take on the forms shown in the various pictures below. Note that the route number shields are typically located at the bottom of the signs rather than at the top. Drivers should also be aware that unlike the UK, directions on the Autobahn (as well as other roads) are not given using the cardinal directions (North, South, East, West), but rather by destination cities. Therefore you are advised to know what the major cities are along your route before you start out. The most important cities start appearing on signs hundreds of kilometres away. One other peculiarity is that when several cities are listed, the farthest city is generally listed first or on top; in the UK, it's usually the opposite. In addition, the last place listed is usually the name of the next exit. Finally, you may come across names that include a one or two letter abbreviation (e.g. "S-Degerloch" or "HH-Zentrum"); these correspond to the official license plate registration city abbreviations and indicate an exit for a district or other destination in that city. Therefore "S-Degerloch" would be the exit for "Stuttgart-Degerloch" while "HH-Zentrum" denotes "Hamburg-Zentrum", or "Hamburg City Centre".



Advance guide signs for Autobahn crossing



Typical overhead advance guide sign for exit



Exit signs at Autobahn crossing






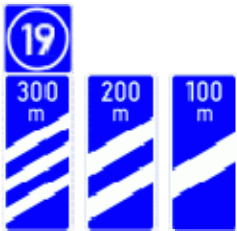





Overhead "butterfly" exit signs

Autobahns bear a one, two, or three digit number with an "A" prefix (e.g. A8); however, the "A" is not shown on signs. The one and two digit numbers indicate mainline routes; three digit routes are spurs. Route numbers are assigned by region (e.g. the area around Munich is region 9, so most Autobahns in that area start with 9) and even-numbered routes generally run east-west while odd-numbered routes north-south. Route numbers for spurs and connectors usually start with the parent number followed by an additional digit or two to make three digits total (e.g. the A831 branches off of the A8; the A241 branches off of the A24.) Route markers are an oblong white and blue hexagon:



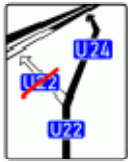
Here are the main signs you will encounter:

	<p>Autobahn entrance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks entrance ramps to the Autobahn and indicates the start of Autobahn traffic regulations • This symbol is also used on signs giving directions to the Autobahn
	<p>Initial junction approach sign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placed 1000 meters before exits; 2000 meters before Autobahn crossings • Shows the junction number and name • The symbol indicates the type of junction: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Exit</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Crossing</p> </div> </div>
	<p>Advance directional sign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placed 500 meters before exits; 1000 meters and 500 meters before Autobahn crossings • Shows a schematic of the junction and gives additional destinations and route numbers
	<p>Junction countdown markers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placed 300 meters (3 stripes), 200 meters (2 stripes), and 100 meters (1 stripe) before the exit • Junction number appears atop the 300 meter marker
	<p>Exit sign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located at exit point • Occasionally placed in the median • When placed overhead, may be repeated several times above the exit lane
	<p>Exit sign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks the exit ramp
	<p>Junction number</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shown on the initial junction approach sign and on the first countdown marker • Junctions are numbered sequentially

Provisional detour

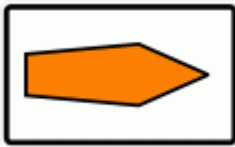


- Marks a pre-posted detour route for use in the event that the Autobahn must be closed
- Follow the same-numbered route to return to the next Autobahn entrance
- Can also be used to bypass Autobahn congestion
- Odd numbers go in one direction, even numbers in the opposite direction



Provisional detour schematic

- Used to direct Autobahn traffic to the next sequential provisional detour route when traffic cannot return to the Autobahn at the next entrance



Alternate route

- Indicates a recommended alternate route on the Autobahn system for specific vehicles or destinations in order to avoid congestion
- Type of vehicle or destination will be shown in conjunction with this sign



Distance Sign

- Placed after every entrance
- Lists distances to major cities along the route
- Distances to other nearby major cities accessible from an intersecting Autobahn are listed at the bottom with the respective route number



End of Autobahn Sign

- Located on exit ramps from the Autobahn and indicates the end of Autobahn traffic regulations
- Also used to warn that the Autobahn ends ahead



Examples of diagram signs for complex interchanges

Road surface markings on the Autobahn are fairly obvious. You can see examples of several of these in the picture below and on other pictures on this page:

- **Solid white line:** Marks the left edge of the road or, on the right side, marks the inside of the shoulder or the right edge of the road. Also used sometimes between traffic lanes to indicate that changing lanes is not allowed.
- **Long, thin broken white lines:** Separate traffic lanes.
- **Short, thick broken white lines:** Separate a deceleration (exit) lane or acceleration (entrance) lane from the main traffic lanes.
- **Yellow markings:** Used in construction zones and supersede all regular white markings.

See the [Signs and Signals page](#) for complete information on German road signs and markings.



Typical lane markings

Dynamic signs



Autobahn electronic signs showing 100 km/h speed limit and construction ahead

While you will find some electronic signs that just show plain text messages (similar to those in use in the UK), most of the systems in use display facsimiles of official traffic signs. These allow authorities to use the standard pictogram signs to warn of downstream conditions or to implement dynamic regulations. A common use is the temporary implementation or reduction of speed limits to respond to traffic, road, or weather conditions. Occasionally, these speed limits are set per lane. It is important to obey the speed limits indicated by these signs and you will find that the limits shown are generally very appropriate for the

prevailing traffic or weather conditions. It should be noted that the speed limits and other regulations shown are indeed enforceable, and many areas are also equipped with photo radar that is integrated with the system (and thus is aware of the current speed limit). The signs can also indicate lane closures using the standard international lane control symbols. Below are examples of these electronic signs.



Danger



Congestion



Road work



Slippery road



Watch for ice or snow



Speed limit



No passing for vehicles over 3.5t



End of speed limit



End of no passing for vehicles over 3.5t



End of all restrictions



Lane open



Lane closed ahead
Merge in the direction indicated



Lane closed
You may not drive in this lane

In addition to the symbols above, the following word messages are used, usually in conjunction with the "danger" sign:

- **UNFALL** (*accident*)
- **NEBEL** (*fog*)
- **STAU** (*congestion*)

In addition to marking lanes closed by accidents or construction, lane control signals are used in some areas to close lanes to help reduce congestion at interchanges. For instance, if there is significantly heavier traffic merging from Autobahn 1 onto Autobahn 2, the right lane on Autobahn 2 will be closed to provide an unobstructed lane for the heavier traffic to merge into.

When different speed limits are shown on a single gantry, the limit shown applies to the lane under the sign. In the example below, the speed limit in the left lane would be 120 km/h, 100 km/h in the centre lane, and 80 km/h in the right lane.





Electronic signs showing left lane closed ahead and 100km speed limit in open lanes

Over 1,700 km of Autobahn are part of dynamic alternate route systems. These systems employ changeable guide signs which, when activated, display recommended alternate route guidance to help drivers avoid congestion. Some areas employ "substitutive routing" where the destinations shown on the standard blue guide signs are changed using mechanical panels to re-route traffic onto different routes. In other areas, "additive routing" is utilized. In this case, the regular blue guide signs are static, but additional white signs with changeable panels and the big orange "alternate route" arrow symbol are used. The arrow points in the recommended direction to follow along with the destination city, route number, or vehicle types (e.g. trucks) that the suggested alternate route applies to. For instance, in the picture below, traffic headed to Deggendorf and the Munich airport is being advised to exit in 1200 meters and follow the A99 and A92. Once you are on one of these alternate routes, continue to follow alternate route arrow signs until you have reached your destination or have returned to the original route. Note that many times much of the alternate route is marked by permanent static signs, but a dynamic sign is used at the initial "decision point".



Changeable sign showing recommended alternate route

Emergencies

In the event of an accident, breakdown, or other emergency along the Autobahn, you are never more than a kilometre away from help. Emergency telephones (*Notrufsäule*) are located at 2 km intervals along the sides of the road. The direction to the nearest phone is indicated by small arrows atop the roadside reflector posts. In long tunnels, emergency phones are located in safe rooms every 100-200 meters.



Autobahn emergency phone



Roadside post with arrow pointing direction to nearest emergency phone

The emergency phone system was privatized several years ago. All calls go to a central call centre in Hamburg. In the event of an accident, dispatchers there will immediately connect the caller to the nearest police or emergency services office. For breakdowns, the dispatcher will obtain the information necessary to send the appropriate service. This may include the "Yellow Angels" of the ADAC or AvD auto club, a tow truck, or an insurance, dealership, or rental car repair service. Roadside assistance is free, but you'll likely have to pay for parts. If you need to be towed, there is no charge to remove the vehicle from the Autobahn, but you will have to pay for towing beyond that. If you're driving a rental car, all services should be covered by the rental agency.

There are now two varieties of emergency phones in use. On the older phones, you will find a cover with a handle. Lift the cover all the way and wait for a dispatcher to answer. The newer phones don't have a cover; instead, they have an external speaker/microphone area with two buttons that you can press to connect you to the appropriate dispatcher. There is a yellow button with a wrench symbol for reporting a breakdown and a red button with a red cross to report an accident. Press the appropriate button and wait for a reply. In most cases, the location of the phone is transmitted automatically when your call is connected. If not, you will need to give the dispatcher the kilometre location of the phone as indicated on a label on the inside of the cover or near the speaker and your direction of travel. For an accident, report the number of vehicles involved and any injuries. For a breakdown, be prepared to report the vehicle's license number, make and model, colour, and your auto club, insurance company, or rental agency. An English-speaking dispatcher is usually available.

After calling, return to your vehicle or the accident scene and wait for help. For breakdowns, someone will arrive shortly to assist you. In the event of an accident, a cavalry of emergency aid will descend on you. Police, fire service, ambulances and emergency doctors all respond to Autobahn crashes. A medical evacuation helicopter is also always on standby.



Old-style emergency phone



New-style emergency phone

Section 3: Rules of the Road

Below is a comprehensive overview of German road traffic rules based on my interpretation of the current *Straßenverkehrs-Ordnung* (StVO) distributed by the Federal Transport Ministry.

In this section:

- [Licensing](#)
- [General Laws and Enforcement](#)
- [Right-of-Way](#)
- [Speed Limits](#)
- [Drinking & Driving](#)
- [Parking Regulations](#)
- [Urban Traffic Regulations](#)
- [Traffic Calming Zones](#)
- [Autobahn Traffic Regulations](#)
- [Additional Prohibitions](#)
- [Accidents](#)

 *The most important section for newcomers is the right-of-way discussion.*

Licensing

If you are visiting or posted to Germany you will not be classed as establishing residency, therefore if you hold a driver's license from an EU country it is valid in Germany for as long as you are there. If your licence not issued by an EU country then you will normally only have a six month limit after which you should apply for an EU pattern licence. In addition to your driving licence if you are a serving member of the Armed Forces, a member of the civil component or a dependant and posted to Germany you must also hold a BFG Driving Permit (BFG 57). This permit does not replace your driving licence but is a requirement to prove you have knowledge of the local traffic regulations and can only be obtained after passing a European Highway Code Test (the Matrix Test) – full details can be found in SOBAG 4310 or from your local BFG Licensing Office.

The minimum age to drive a car in Germany is 18, however due to an agreement between the Federal Government and NATO forces, British Forces personnel, members of the civil component and their dependants holding a full UK driving licence can drive at 17.

General Laws and Enforcement

Traffic drives on the right and passes on the left. Seatbelts must be worn by drivers and all passengers. Children under 12 years old or shorter than 1.5 meters must use an approved child seat. You must leave your doors unlocked while driving to facilitate rescue in an accident. Drivers must have a minimum of third party liability insurance. Vehicles must carry a warning triangle (*Warndreieck*) and a StVO compliant highway first aid kit (*Pkw-Verbandkasten*) and a Hi-Vis Vest which must be accessible from the drivers seat. Germany does not require a fire extinguisher (*Feuerlöscher*), but you are recommended to carry one anyway. You must place the warning triangle 100 meters behind your vehicle if it is disabled (200 meters on the Autobahn). It is illegal to drive with your side or parking lights only and you must use your headlights at night and during inclement weather. Motorcyclists must ride with helmets and headlights on at all times.

The German Civil Police (GCP) are allowed to collect fines (*Verwarnungsgeld*) for most traffic offences on the spot. If you don't have enough cash on hand, your vehicle may be impounded (at additional cost). Do


not worry if you are requested to pay a spot fine as the GCP are very professional and corruption is very rare and you will be given a receipt for the payment.


Beware of speed and enforcement cameras. Automatic cameras are stationed to catch speeders, red-light violators and tailgaters. Sometimes an obscure sign will warn you of the existence of such a camera, however these are not mandatory and it's usually too late by then. You'll sometimes spot temporary cameras setup along the side of the Autobahn or on an overpass watching for tailgaters or speeders. Tickets are mailed to the registered owner of the vehicle within a few weeks (even if you have a BFG registration!!). Sometimes the GCP will travel along in unmarked cars or vans with front and rear mounted cameras looking for violations. If you get busted, you'll likely be signalled to pull over by a "lollypop" traffic paddle (a white disk with red bull's-eye on a short stick) being held out of the window and perhaps a flashing sign on the back of the vehicle reading "*Polizei-- bitte folgen*" ("police-- please follow".)


Right-of-Way


Germany uses a hierarchical system to determine right-of-way (*Vorfahrt*, *Vorrang*) at junctions. The following list shows this hierarchy:

- **Police Officer:** A police officer directing traffic overrides all other traffic controls. Many officers use obvious motions to direct traffic. However, if an officer is not motioning and has both shoulders facing you (often with arms outstretched), you must wait. This applies to traffic behind him as well as in front of him. If he has just one shoulder facing you, you have the right-of-way. If he has one hand in the air, he is preparing to change the traffic flow (equivalent to a yellow light) and all traffic must stop. Police and crossing guards may also use a traffic paddle ("lollypop") – this is equivalent to a stop sign.
- **Traffic Signals:** Traffic signals are the next highest right-of-way control. Traffic signals are discussed in detail on the [Signs, Signals, and Markings](#) page.
- **Signs:** Signs are the most common right-of-way control. Germany uses a system of "priority roads"


(*Vorfahrtstraßen*) to assign right-of-way. Priority roads are marked with the  sign. Traffic on a priority road has the right-of-way ("priority") over other traffic at all junctions along the way.

Intersecting roads will have a give way or stop sign. The give way sign  indicates that you must give way to traffic on the priority road, but you don't have to stop if the way is clear. The stop

sign  indicates that you must first come to a complete stop and then proceed when the way is clear. Often, priority roads make turns at intersections in towns. These turns are indicated by

 schematic signs showing the direction of the turn (on the sign you are approaching from the bottom). Traffic proceeding in the direction of the thick line has the right-of-way. Traffic leaving the priority road must yield to other traffic continuing along the priority road but still has the right-of-way over traffic on the other streets. By the way, if you are following a priority road that turns, you still

must use your indicators. Priority roads are cancelled by the  sign or by a give way or stop

sign. On roads that are not priority roads, right-of-way may be granted by the  sign. This sign indicates that you have the right-of-way only at the next junction only. The signs above are also usually posted at junctions controlled by traffic light signals. The traffic light signal takes precedence over the signs unless the signal is not operating; then the signs govern traffic priority.

- **Default Right-of-Way Scheme:** If there is no policeman, no signal, or no sign indicating the right-of-way, then the following default scheme is used:
 - **Public road has priority:** Traffic on public highways has priority over private drives, forest and farm paths, and dirt roads.

- **Right has right-of-way:** When two public roads cross at an uncontrolled junction, then right-of-way is always given to traffic approaching from the right. *This includes "T" junctions!* In the UK, traffic on the through street of a "T" usually has the right-of-way. In Germany you must give way to the right, even if you are on the through road. This also includes the rare situation where a main road and small side street crosses at an uncontrolled junction.
- **Heavy traffic rules:** Whenever traffic is heavily congested, normal right-of-way rules go out the window and the "zipper rule" (*Reißverschluß*) goes into effect. This means that cars feed one at a time alternating from each direction, regardless of who has the posted right-of-way. The "zipper rule" also applies when one lane ends and merges into another. Each vehicle in the through lane must allow one vehicle from the truncated lane to merge in. Do not enter a junction if traffic is backed-up on the other side of the junction, even if you have a green light.

Other Right-of-Way Rules

In situations of otherwise equal right-of-way, vehicles going straight have priority, followed by right turns; left turns go last. Traffic entering a roundabout technically has the right-of-way unless the entrance is marked



with a sign (which it usually is). Emergency vehicles with a flashing blue light and siren sounding always have the right-of-way (of course); you must pull-over to the right-hand side of the road when one approaches. You should give way to trams at junctions. Don't pass a stopped tram if it is discharging passengers directly onto the street; you may continue on when the doors have closed. Buses leaving a



















marked bus stop have the right-of-way. On narrow road sections, the



oncoming traffic, and the sign means you must give way to oncoming traffic (Tip: the red arrow must give way). On narrow mountainous roads, traffic going uphill has the right-of-way. On roads where passing is difficult or not allowed, slower traffic is required to pull over when possible to allow faster traffic to go by (lay-by's are sometimes provided for this purpose.) Pedestrians always have the right-of-way when on a marked crossing. Vehicles entering an Autobahn or expressway must give way to other traffic already on the Autobahn or expressway.

Speed Limits


In Germany, there is a set of general or "default" speed limits (*Geschwindigkeitbeschränkung*). These are the limits you must obey in the absence of signs:

				
 Within urban areas				
 Outside urban areas				
 Autobahns & Expressways				









Some vehicles may be exempt from the 80 km/h Autobahn speed limit. These vehicles display a decal resembling a speed limit sign indicating the speed they're permitted to travel, normally 100km/h.

Signs, of course, supersede the default limits.



This type of Zone sign indicates the speed limit for an entire neighbourhood. The 30 speed limit remains in effect on all streets within the zone until you pass a  sign.

Here are a few points about speed limit signs to be aware of:

- Although the speed limit cancellation sign  will only show the last posted speed limit, it actually cancels all previous posted limits and indicates a return to the default speed limit for the road you are on. For example: You're travelling down a rural road at the default speed limit of 100 km/h when you come to a  sign. Therefore, you slow down to 80. A kilometre or so later, you come to a  sign, so you slow down to 60. After a while, you pass a  sign. What speed do you return to? The answer is the default speed limit of 100 km/h. The  sign cancels all previous posted speed limits, not just the 60 km/h limit.
- Whenever a speed limit sign is mounted beneath a warning sign, the speed limit only applies until you pass the hazard indicated on the warning sign. For instance, if you come to a  sign with a  sign below it, the 60 km/h speed limit is in effect only until you pass the traffic signals, after which you can then return to the default speed limit if no other speed limit signs are posted.
- The  sign indicates the end of all previous posted speed limits and the end of any no passing zones. However, the default speed limit still applies.

Other Speed Limits

- When fog reduces visibility to less than 50 meters, the maximum speed you may drive is 50 km/h.
- When a bus is stopped at a bus stop on the highway with its hazard lights flashing, traffic in both directions may only pass at a speed of 7 km/h or less.
- Whenever a child or an elderly or handicapped person is near the road, drivers are required to remove their foot from the accelerator and be prepared to stop. German courts have upheld that the driver is ultimately responsible for preventing accidents in these situations no matter the actions of the other person.




Drinking & Driving

The penalties for driving under the influence in Germany are harsh. Severe penalties are assessed to first time offenders, usually including the suspension of your license. Penalties for drunk driving now start with a blood alcohol limit as low as 0.03. With the high alcohol content of German social beverages, it doesn't take long to hit the limit. Moreover, if you have an accident, the courts may determine whether alcohol was a factor even if your blood alcohol content is below the limit. The best advice is this: if you drink AT ALL, **don't drive!** Don't forget that driving under the influence of drugs (prescription or recreational) is also illegal.

Parking Regulations


In Germany, you are considered "parked" if you leave your vehicle or if you stop/ stand for longer than 3 minutes, unless you are actively boarding or discharging passengers or loading or unloading cargo.




You may not park:


- Within 5 meters on either side of a junction.
- In front of driveway entrances or exits or on the opposite side of the street if the roadway is too narrow to allow vehicles to enter or exit the driveway
- If parking will obstruct the use of marked parking places
- Within 15 meters on either side of a bus or tram stop marked with a  sign
- Within 50 meters on either side of a  sign when outside of urban areas or within 5 meters when inside an urban area
- On a priority road outside of urban areas
- In front of a drop curb or wheelchair ramp
- Adjacent to a traffic island or median
- On the street side of another parked vehicle ("double parked")
- In rural areas where the edge of the carriageway has a solid white line, you may not park to the left of the line (on the carriageway)
- Anywhere there is a  no parking sign

You may not stop or stand (on the side of the road):

- On narrow roads or in blind spots
- Near sharp bends
- On or within 5 meters approaching a pedestrian crossing
- On railway crossings or tracks
- In or adjacent to turn lanes (those marked with arrows on the road surface)
- In front of and approaching a fire station driveway
- Within a traffic circle or roundabout

- At a taxi stand marked with a  sign
- On the Autobahn

- Within 10 meters in front of , , or  signs, or traffic signals, if parking would obstruct the view of the sign or signal


- Anywhere there is a  sign

Except where prohibited (see above), on-street parking is generally permitted. When you park, there must be a gap of at least 3 meters between your vehicle and the middle of the street or the nearest lane line. In many places, you may park partially or entirely on the pavement to fulfil this requirement. Look for signs permitting this (or other vehicles doing so) before you do it. If you do, make sure there is sufficient room for pedestrians on the sidewalk. Vehicles over 2.8t may not park on the pavement.


You must park on the right side of the street unless:

- You are on a one-way street and parking on the left would leave sufficient room for vehicles to pass.
- There are rails along the right side.

You may not park, stop, or stand in a traffic lane if there is a shoulder or parking lane.


When parking on a street at night, you must use your parking lights unless you are parked near an all-night street light. Street lights that do not remain on for the entire night are marked by a white and red band  around the lamppost.




The  sign indicates where parking is permitted on streets or gives directions to an off-street parking facility. When used to mark on-street parking, it is usually accompanied by additional signs indicating when parking is permitted, who is permitted to park, or that the use of a parking permit, voucher, or disc is required. For more information on finding parking in cities and using parking facilities, see the [Driving & Parking in German Cities](#) page.

Parking Control Zones



The  sign indicates the entrance to an area or neighbourhood where there is a general parking restriction. Supplemental signs will indicate what that restriction is, such as parking restricted to residents or certain permit holders or a requirement to use a parking voucher or disc. All streets in the area are included




in this restriction until the  sign is reached.


Parking Violations

Parking fines vary but are typically around €40; if you are obstructing traffic or a driveway, your vehicle will, almost surely become the temporary property of the police. In such an event, call the police to settle the situation.

Urban Traffic Regulations



This type of sign  marks the entrance to an urban area. Upon passing this sign, several special traffic regulations go into effect:

- Speed limit: 50 km/h
- You may not honk your horn except when necessary to avoid a collision.
- Parking is prohibited within 5 meters of a railroad crossing.
- You must ensure that your vehicle can be seen when parked at night. This may require the use of parking lights if street lighting is inadequate or does not remain on all night. Such lights are marked by a red & white band  around the lamppost.



This sign indicates that you are leaving the built-up area and its associated traffic regulations. The following general regulations apply:

- Speed limit: 100 km/h for light vehicles – Unless signs show otherwise.
- Parking is prohibited on priority roads.
- Parking is prohibited within 50 meters of a railroad crossing.
- Disabled vehicles must be marked with a warning triangle.

Traffic Calming Zones

Traffic calming zones (*Verkehrsberuhigtezone*) are usually implemented on small residential streets. The



start of a traffic calming zone is marked by the sign and the  sign marks the end of such a zone. Within traffic calming zones, the following rules apply:

- Traffic must maintain the lowest possible speed – no more than 7 km/h.
- Pedestrians may use the entire street; children are permitted to play in the street.
- Motorists may not endanger or hinder pedestrians; when necessary motorists must wait.
- Pedestrians may not unnecessarily hinder traffic.
- Parking is not permitted outside of marked spaces except for boarding/ discharging and loading/ unloading.
- When leaving the zone, you must give way to all other traffic.

Additional Prohibitions

- Use of mobile phones is prohibited while your vehicle is in operation. The only time you are permitted to use a mobile phone is if you are parked and the engine is turned-off. You may use a hands-free mobile phone when driving if it does not impede your hearing (i.e. one earphone only).
- Vehicles with a gross permitted weight of 7.5 tons or more (with several exceptions) are prohibited from all public roads on Sundays and public holidays from 00:00 to 22:00.
- Emissions Zones are in operation in most large urban areas. These rules apply to both visitors and residents. You will be issued with a free Emissions Zone sticker for your car when you carry out your initial BFG registration.
- Motorists are prohibited from unnecessarily revving their motors or slamming their car doors excessively. It is also illegal to drive back and forth unnecessarily (i.e. "cruising") in towns.

Accidents

If the unfortunate should happen and you should be involved in an accident here's a list of what you should do:

- **Stop immediately.** This also applies if you are not directly involved in the accident but are a witness.
- If anyone is injured, call for an ambulance and the police (from a phone booth or mobile phone dial 112), on Autobahns or other major highways, use the nearest emergency telephone (the direction to which is marked by arrows atop the black and white posts along the roadside). You are required by

law to give first aid to any injured persons. Remember the super-duper first aid kit you're supposed to carry? This is where it comes in handy (Germans, by the way, are required to take a first aid class to obtain a driver's license). Do not move anybody that is injured unless it is absolutely necessary. If there is a fire or spilled fuel, get everyone involved away from the vehicles and call the fire department.

- If nobody is injured, and the vehicles can be moved safely, you should mark the location of each vehicle, and then move them out of traffic. You can mark the locations by drawing a diagram of the site and vehicles, taking photographs or using "traffic chalk" to mark the physical locations of the vehicles on the road before you move them. Most German automotive first aid kits have a stick of traffic chalk (it looks like a big yellow or white crayon.) Secure the accident site using a warning triangle placed 100 meters behind the scene (200 meters on the Autobahn).
- Exchange information with the other drivers including your driver's license, passport, insurance green card and if applicable vehicle rental information. You should also call the police to the scene (if you haven't already) and have them take a report (dial 112 or use an emergency phone). This ensures that all the proper legal requirements are satisfied and helps protect you from future problems.
- If you damage an unoccupied vehicle, German law requires you to wait at the scene for at least 30 minutes for the owner to return. If the owner does not return, you must then report the accident to the police in person. It is probably best to call the police to the scene rather than go to a police station; in addition in a Garrison area you could also call the local RMP duty room for assistance, you might even want to do this immediately instead of waiting for the owner to return.
- Once the police have cleared you, you can leave the scene. If you are driving a rental car, you should contact the rental agency immediately to report the incident. They will give you instructions on what to do next and will dispatch a tow truck if necessary.

Section 4: Traffic Signs & Signals

Below is a comprehensive guide of German traffic signs, signals and markings. This guide is designed for both the short-term visitor wanting to learn German traffic signs in preparation for taking the Euro Matrix Test as well as for someone who is studying to get a German or BFG military driver's permit (BFG 57). This topic is divided into 3 sub sections:

- **Signs**
 - **Vehicle class symbols**
 - **Supplemental signs**
 - **Warning signs**
 - **Railway crossing signs**
 - **Right-of-way signs**
 - **Speed limit signs**
 - **Regulatory signs**
 - **Parking signs**
 - **Service signs**
 - **Information and guide signs**
 - **Miscellaneous signs**
 - **Additional sign symbols**
 - **Additional sign information**

- [Sign vocabulary](#)
- [Signals](#)
- [Road markings](#)

Signs

Germany has a comprehensive and uniform traffic sign system. All signs have standard shapes and colours and use easy-to-understand international pictograms and symbols. The sign system was overhauled in the early '90s to more closely conform with European standards.
















Below, you will find a complete guide of German traffic signs with their official meaning and additional notes. These signs are from the official German traffic code (StVO) and include all updates through 2008.

Officially, German traffic signs are divided into three major categories: warning signs, regulation signs, and guide signs. However, I have divided the sign collection into several additional categories and I've placed each sign where it most logically belongs regardless of its official designation.




In the StVO, each sign is assigned an official number. This number is used on traffic tickets and accident reports when a sign is involved in the incident.













Vehicle Class Symbols

Traffic signs in Germany employ a set of standard symbols to indicate the type or class of vehicle being referred to on the sign. Some of the symbols are inclusive in that they encompass several lesser classes as well. The following table outlines these symbols and their meanings:

Symbol	Description	Other lesser included classes
	Motor vehicles Includes <i>all</i> multi-axle motorized vehicles	      
	Passenger vehicles Includes all cars and light trucks	 
	Vehicles over 3.5t Includes all vehicles with a permitted gross weight over 3.5 tonnes, their trailers, and any other vehicle that does not qualify as a passenger vehicle; it specifically does not include buses	
	Motorcycles Includes motorcycles, motorcycles with sidecars, and mopeds	

The following are the remaining vehicle class symbols:

		
Mopeds/ Mofas/ Mokicks	Bicycles	Buses

			
Passenger vehicles with trailers	Vehicles over 3.5t with trailers	Slow moving vehicles Includes tractors and other vehicles that cannot exceed 25 km/h	Motor homes
			
Cattle/animals	Riders	Pedestrians	Tracked military vehicles
			
Streetcars	Rail vehicles	Vehicles with marked hazardous cargo	Vehicles carrying more than 3000 liters of water-pollutants

Supplemental Signs

The German sign system uses a fair amount of "supplemental signs" (*Zusatzschild*). These are black and white rectangular or square signs mounted below a parent sign and are used to modify or give additional information, such as exemptions, restrictions, or more specific details, regarding the condition shown on the parent sign. Supplemental signs use symbols wherever possible, but most supplemental signs use words. To help you decipher these signs, a complete vocabulary list is provided at the end of the signs section.

Because of the large number of supplemental signs, not all of them are shown on this page. Instead, I've included the most frequent ones in their most common usage, especially the ones that use symbols.

The most common use for supplemental signs is for distances. There are two such signs-- the distance *to* the parent sign's condition, and the *duration* of the condition:



Distance to the condition shown on the parent sign



Duration (length) of the condition shown on the parent sign

Here are some examples to better illustrate the difference between the two types of distance signs:



Traffic signals
200 meters ahead



Rough road next
800 meters



Autobahn ends
2 kilometres ahead



No passing next
1 kilometre

Warning Signs

This section contains signs that give advance warning of hazards on or near the road. The standard shape for warning signs in Germany as in UK is a red triangle.



General danger

This sign marks an area where extra caution should be used. It is rarely used by itself; instead, a supplemental sign is usually mounted beneath this sign with information on a specific hazard for which no individual sign exists. Some examples of the more common combinations are below.



Accident hazard

Marks an area where a high number of accidents have occurred



Frog crossing

The road ahead is used by migrating frogs



Tree overhang

Drivers of trucks and other high-profile vehicles should beware of low trees



Winter sports along road

Watch out for people and be aware that the road may not be salted or gritted



Soft shoulder

Avoid driving on the shoulder



Soft shoulder for heavy vehicles



Rough road edge

There is a rough drop-off along the edge of the road



Sliding danger

Used to warn of a downhill section with strong side winds that may cause a vehicle pulling a trailer to lose control



Bend (left)



Bend (right)



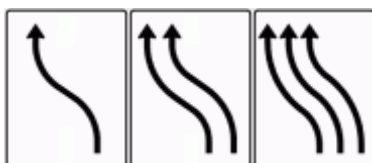
Double Bend

First bend is to the left



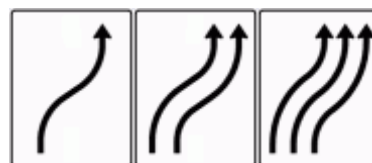
Double Bend

First bend is to the right



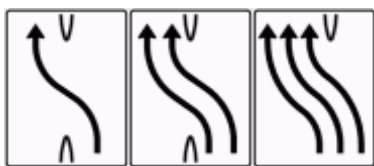
Lane shift (left)

All lanes shift to the left



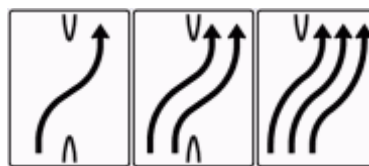
Lane shift (right)

All lanes shift to the right



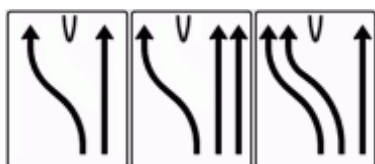
Lane crossover (left)

All lanes cross over the median to the left



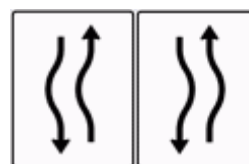
Lane crossover (right)

All lanes cross over the median to the right



Lane split

Left lane(s) crosses over to left side of median;
right lane(s) remains on right side of median



Road shift

Traffic is shifted briefly to the left/right, then back again.



Steep upgrade

The degree of the ascent
is shown



Steep downgrade

The degree of the decent
is shown; prepare to
downshift



Falling rocks

Watch out for rocks on
the road and do not stop
or park



Strong cross wind

Prepare to adjust steering
as necessary and avoid
passing



Rough road



Beware of ice/snow

The road or bridge ahead
freezes easily
(applicable during Winter months)



Slippery when wet or dirty

Avoid sudden braking,
accelerating, or steering



Loose gravel

Avoid sudden braking,
accelerating, or steering



Road work

Watch for workers,
machinery, dirt, or mud
on the roadway



Traffic signals ahead

Be prepared to stop



Quay/riverbank

There is an unguarded
quay, riverbank, or
landing ahead or
alongside the road



Drawbridge

Be prepared to stop



Pedestrians

Marks a general area where pedestrians may be on or near the road



Pedestrian crossing ahead



Pedestrian crossing

Marks a crosswalk and indicates that pedestrians have the right-of-way



Watch for children

Posted near schools and playgrounds; reduce speed and be prepared to stop quickly



Crossing guards

Marks a crosswalk where school crossing guards may direct traffic



Wild animal crossing

Be prepared to stop or swerve suddenly; use low-beam headlights



Domestic animal crossing

Watch for animals and mud on the road



Low-flying aircraft

Be prepared for sudden noise and, at night, for the glare of landing lights



Congestion hazard

Marks an area where congestion frequently occurs; be prepared to slow down or stop



Bicycle crossing



Buses

Watch for buses entering, leaving, or crossing the road



Two-way traffic

Generally posted where oncoming traffic is unexpected, such as when coming from a one-way street to a two-way street



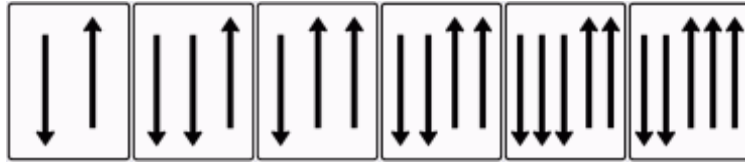
Road narrows



Road narrows (left side)

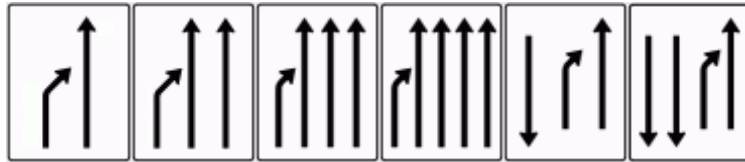


Road narrows (right side)

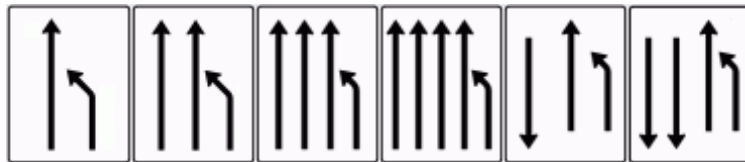


Two-way traffic

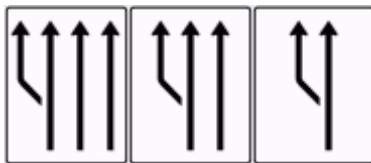
The number of lanes in each direction is shown



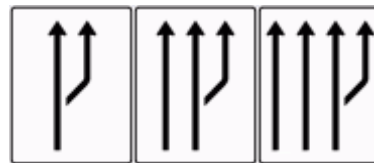
Left lane ends



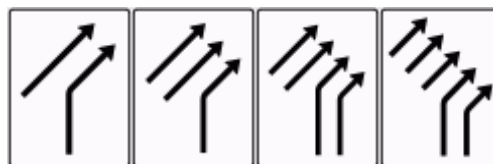
Right lane ends



Lane added (left)



Lane added (right)



Lanes added to another roadway

The lanes from your roadway are added to another roadway; you will not have to merge

Railway Crossing Signs

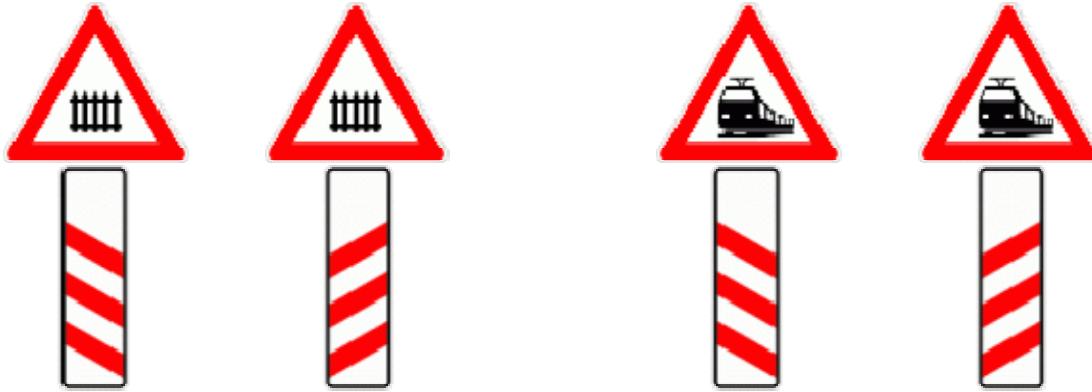
This section shows all signs related to railway level crossings.



Railway crossing with barriers ahead



Unguarded railway crossing ahead However, there may be crossing signals.



Railway crossing approx. 240 meters ahead

These countdown markers are located on the left and right sides of the road respectively and indicate that the crossing is about 240 meters ahead; a different distance may be shown on the marker if applicable

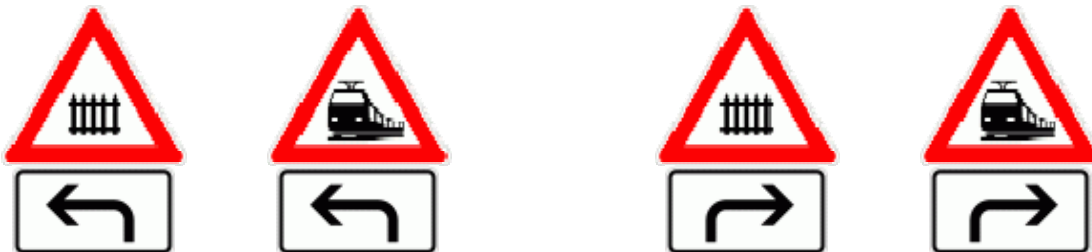


Approx. 160 meters to railway crossing

A different distance may be shown on the sign if applicable

Approx. 80 meters to railway crossing

A different distance may be shown on the sign if applicable



Railway crossing on crossroad (left)

Railway crossing on crossroad (right)



Railway crossing (St. Andrew's cross)

Posted at the crossing; you must stop here if a train is approaching

Electrified railway crossing

This railroad crossing has electrical wires overhead; high profile vehicles should exercise caution



Railway crossing signal

This is now the standard railroad crossing signal in Germany; yellow indicates a train is approaching--stop if possible; red means you must stop and remain stopped until the signal turns off



Railway crossing flasher

This is the old standard railroad crossing signal in western Germany; you must stop when the red signal flashes



Railway crossing flasher

This is the old standard railroad crossing signal in East Germany; you must stop when the red signal flashes

Priority/ Right-of-Way Signs

This section shows signs related to rights-of-way.



Priority road

You have the right-of-way at all junctions on this road until cancelled by a "Give Way", "Stop", or "End of Priority Road" sign; outside of urban areas, parking is prohibited on this road



End of priority road

You must give way at all subsequent junctions



Priority

You have the right-of-way at the next junction only



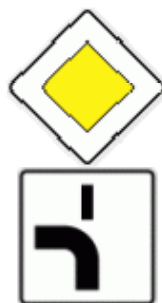
Give Way

You must give way to traffic on the intersecting road



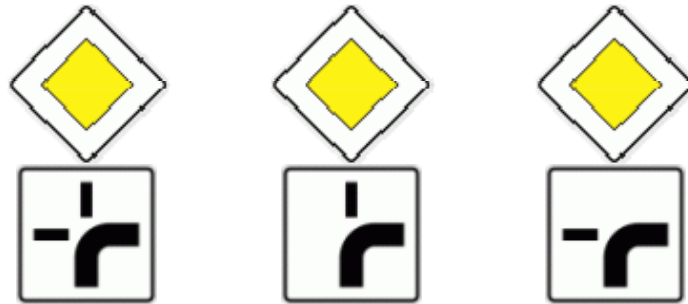
Stop

You must come to a complete stop and give way to traffic on the intersecting road



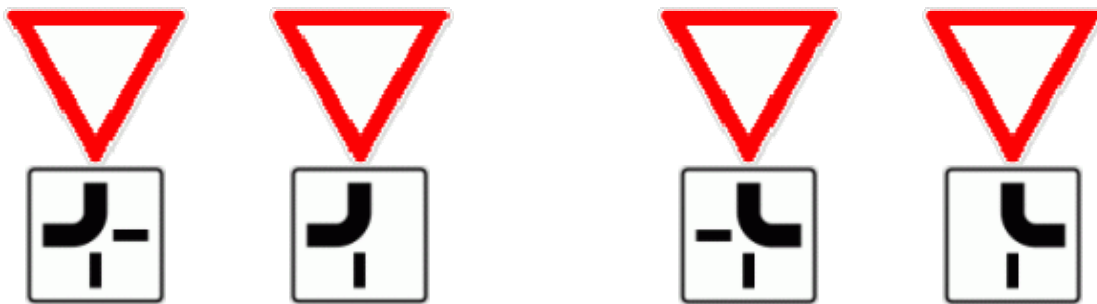
Priority Road Turns (left)

Priority road (wide black line) turns left in the junction; narrow lines show the other streets joining this junction



Priority Road Turns (right)

Priority road (wide black line) turns left in the junction; narrow lines show the other streets joining this junction

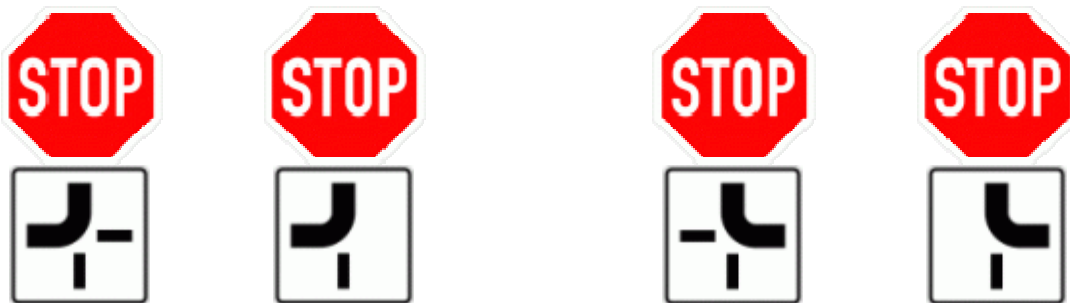


Give Way to Priority Road

The priority road (wide black line) turns in the junction; you must give way to traffic following or leaving the priority road coming from the left or approaching from straight ahead

Give Way to Priority Road

The priority road (wide black line) turns in the junction; you must give way to traffic following or leaving the priority road coming from the right or approaching from straight ahead



Stop and Give Way to Priority road

The same rules as "give way to priority road" above apply, but you must come to a complete stop first

Stop and Give Way to Priority road

The same rules as "give way to priority road" above apply, but you must come to a complete stop first



Give Way to Roundabout

Traffic in the roundabout has right-of-way



Give Way and Watch for Bicycles

You must give way to all intersecting traffic, including traffic on the bicycle path



Stop Ahead

There is a stop sign 100 meters ahead



Unmarked Junction Ahead

The next junction is uncontrolled; give way to traffic approaching from the right



Priority Over Oncoming Traffic

You have the right-of-way over oncoming traffic along the narrow one lane road ahead



Give Way to Oncoming Traffic

You must give way to oncoming traffic along the narrow one lane road ahead

Speed Limit Signs

Below are the various signs related to speed limits.



Maximum speed limit

Shown in kilometres per hour (km/h)



Speed limit zone

This sign is posted at the entrances to a neighbourhood where the speed limit shown applies to all streets in the neighbourhood until the "End of speed limit zone" sign is reached



Conditional speed limit

The speed limit shown is only in effect when the road is wet



Minimum speed limit

Shown in km/h; you must travel at this speed or faster unless road, weather, or traffic conditions make it necessary to drive slower



Advisory speed limit

Shown in km/h; indicates the recommended speed limit for good road, weather, and traffic conditions



End of speed limit
The general speed limit now applies



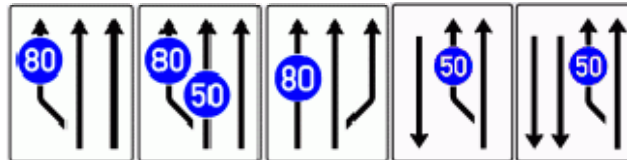
End of speed limit zone



End of minimum speed limit

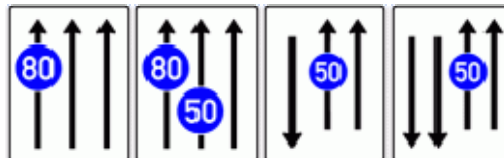


End of recommended speed limit



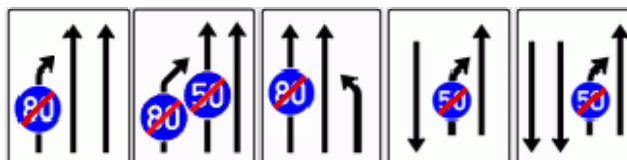
Minimum speed limit by lane

A new lane is added ahead and the minimum speed limit(s) shown applies to the indicated lane(s)



Minimum speed limit by lane

The minimum speed limit(s) shown apply to the indicated lane(s)



End of minimum speed limit by lane

These signs also typically indicate a lane ending

Regulatory signs

This section contains various signs that provide regulation. In Germany, as in UK the standard shape for most regulatory signs is a circle. A red circle indicates something is prohibited, while a blue disc indicates something is required.



No Overtaking

You may not overtake other vehicles except bicycles, mopeds and motorcycles



No Overtaking for vehicles over 3.5t

Vehicles with a permitted gross weight over 3.5 tonnes are not allowed to overtake any other vehicle except bicycles, mopeds, and motorcycles



No Overtaking

Passing of tractors and other designated slow-moving vehicles is permitted



No Overtaking

The no passing restriction applies only to vehicles with a permitted gross weight over 3.5 tonnes, buses and any vehicle pulling a trailer



No Overtaking

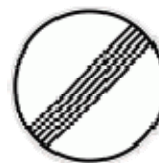
The no passing restriction is in effect only between 8:30am and 6:00pm and applies only to vehicles with a permitted gross weight over 3.5 tonnes, buses and any vehicle pulling a trailer



End of No Overtaking Zone



End of No Overtaking Zone for vehicles over 3.5t



End of all Restrictions

This sign cancels all previous speed limit and passing restrictions; however, the general speed limit applies



Road Closed

All vehicles are prohibited; a supplemental sign indicating often accompanies this sign



Motor Vehicles Prohibited

Applies to all motor vehicles except motorcycles and mopeds



Vehicles Over 3.5t Prohibited



Vehicles Over 7.5t Prohibited



Bicycles Prohibited



Mopeds Prohibited



Motorcycles and Mopeds Prohibited



Multiple Prohibition

All motor vehicles, including motorcycles and mopeds are prohibited



Horses Prohibited



Pedestrians Prohibited



Vertical Clearance

Vehicles, inc loads, higher than the indicated height are prohibited



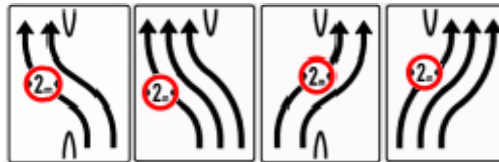
Horizontal Clearance

Vehicles, inc loads, wider than the indicated width are prohibited



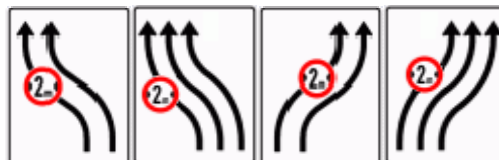
Length Restriction

Vehicles, inc loads, longer than the indicated length are prohibited



Lane crossover with width restriction

All lanes cross over the median and the width restriction shown is in effect for the indicated lane(s)



Lane shift with width restriction

All lanes shift and the width restriction shown is in effect for the indicated lane(s)



Weight limit

Vehicles with an actual weight exceeding the indicated limit are prohibited



Axle weight limit

Vehicles exceeding the indicated weight on any axle are prohibited



Minimum following distance

Vehicles with a permitted gross weight exceeding 3.5 tonnes are required to maintain the indicated minimum following distance



Hazardous cargo prohibited

Vehicles transporting marked hazardous materials are prohibited



Water polluting cargo prohibited

Vehicles transporting more than 3000 liters of water-pollutants are prohibited



Emergency traffic restriction due to air pollution

Only vehicles displaying a valid emissions inspection sticker are permitted
(shown only when applicable)

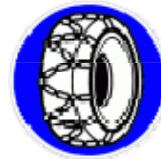


Air pollution Emissions Zone

Only vehicles displaying one of the indicated coloured emissions inspection stickers are permitted



End of Emissions Zone



Snow chains A speed limit of 50 km/h applies
(shown only when applicable)



Do not enter



One way street

Traffic on this street must travel in the direction of the arrow



One way street

Bicycles are exempted and may travel in either direction



One way street

The street you are on is one way



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must turn left



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must turn right



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must turn either left or right



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must continue straight ahead (i.e. no turns)



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must continue straight ahead or turn left (i.e. no right turn)



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must continue straight ahead or turn right (i.e. no left turn)



No U-turn



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must turn left here



Mandatory direction of travel

All traffic must turn right here



Pass by on left

All traffic must pass the obstacle on the left side (i.e. keep left)



Pass by on right

All traffic must pass the obstacle on the right side (i.e. keep right)



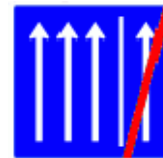
Shoulder open to traffic

The right-hand shoulder of this roadway can be used as a traffic lane; this is generally done only during periods of congestion to provide additional capacity



Shoulder lane ends

If you are in the shoulder traffic lane, you must merge to the left immediately



End of shoulder lane

Do not drive on the shoulder past this point



Pedestrian path

Pedestrians only



Pedestrian zone

Marks the entrance to an area reserved for pedestrians; all adjacent streets are included until the "End of pedestrian zone" sign is reached



End of pedestrian zone



Bicycle path
Bicycles only



Bicycle path
Mopeds also allowed



End of bicycle path



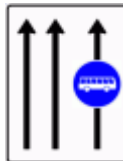
Shared Pedestrian & Bicycle path
Pedestrians and bicycles only; both can use the entire pathway



Split Pedestrian & Bicycle Path
Pedestrians and bicycles only; pedestrians and cyclists must keep to the side of the path indicated by the sign



Bus lane
All other vehicles prohibited



Bus lane
This sign shows which lane reserved for buses



Bridle path
Horses only



Traffic calming zone
Marks the beginning of an area where traffic calming rules apply



End of traffic calming zone



Tunnel
Posted at the entrance to a tunnel and indicates that low-beam headlights must be turned-on, that U-turns are prohibited, and that accidents or breakdowns must be moved to a designated emergency wayside



Emergency wayside
Marks a roadside bay inside a tunnel for stopping in case of an emergency or breakdown; all other use is prohibited



Autobahn entrance
Posted on Autobahn entrance ramps and indicates that Autobahn traffic regulations begin



Expressway entrance
Motor vehicles only



End of Autobahn
Located on Autobahn exit ramps and indicates that Autobahn traffic regulations end; may also be used to warn that the Autobahn ends ahead



End of expressway

Parking signs



No stopping
Stopping or standing on the roadway is prohibited



No parking
Prohibits stopping on the roadway for more than 3 minutes except for passenger boarding/discharging and loading/unloading



Parking control zone
Posted at entrances to a neighbourhood where a general parking restriction applies to all streets in the area until the "End of Parking Control Zone" sign is reached; a supplemental sign will indicate the exact restriction such as requiring the use of a parking disc, voucher, or permit



End of parking control zone



No stopping (end)
This sign marks the end of a no stopping area



No stopping
Stopping or standing on the roadway is prohibited in either direction from this sign



No stopping (start)
This sign marks the beginning of a no stopping area



No parking (end)
This sign marks the end of a no parking area



No parking
Parking on the roadway is prohibited in either direction from this sign



No parking (start)
This sign marks the beginning of a no parking area



No stopping on shoulder



No parking on shoulder



Taxi stand

This area is reserved for taxis only - other vehicles may not stop here; the supplemental sign indicates the number of taxis allowed to wait here



Parking area

Marks an area where parking is permitted; also used to give directions to parking areas



Parking garage



Indexed parking facility

Marks or gives directions to a numbered parking facility (e.g. parking lot #8)



Restricted parking

You must use a parking disc to park here and you may only park for the length of time indicated



Restricted parking

You may park here only if you have an official handicapped permit



Special parking

Parking for vehicles with trailers allowed; vehicles may remain parked for longer than 14 days



Special parking

Parking for travel trailers allowed; vehicles may remain parked for longer than 14 days



Parking area (end)

This sign marks the end of a parking area



Parking area (start)

This sign marks the start of a parking area



Directions to parking



Hiker's parking

Indicates an area where you may park and hike a circuit trail



Park & ride

Indicates a facility where you may park your vehicle and transfer to public transportation



Parking on pavement allowed

This sign indicates that parallel parking half on the pavement and half in the street is permitted on the right or left side of the street respectively



Parking on pavement allowed

This sign indicates that parallel parking completely on the pavement is permitted on the right or left side of the street respectively



Parking on pavement allowed

This sign indicates that perpendicular parking half on the pavement and half in the street is permitted on the right or left side of the street respectively



Parking on pavement allowed

This sign indicates that perpendicular parking completely on the pavement is permitted on the right or left side of the street respectively

Service signs

Below are signs that are used to give directions to motorist services on or near the road. These signs are especially used along the Autobahn. Service signs are a symbol in a white field on a blue square or rectangle.



Filling station



***Filling station w/
unleaded petrol***

This sign is now obsolete as all stations have unleaded fuel, but it may still appear on older signs



***Filling station w/
liquefied petroleum gas
(LPG)***



***Filling station w/
compressed natural
gas (CNG)***



Restaurant



Snack bar



Hotel



Auto repair shop



Telephone



Emergency telephone



Rest rooms/toilette



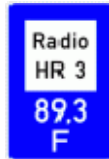
First aid station



Police station



Tourist information



Traffic information radio

This sign shows the name and frequency of a radio station giving local traffic information; the letter at the bottom indicates the traffic reporting region that the station covers



Campground

Information and guide signs



Entering urban area

Posted at the entrance to a built-up area and indicates that the 50 km/h speed limit and other urban traffic regulations begins



Leaving urban area

This is usually the backside of the "Entering urban area sign" and indicates the end of urban traffic regulations and the return to the 100 km/h rural speed limit; the top section shows the distance to the next town



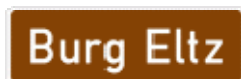
Leaving urban area

Same as the sign to the left except that the white top section indicates that the next town is in the same municipality as the one you are leaving

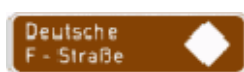


Place name

Marks small towns that do not require the "Entering urban area" sign; this sign is also used occasionally to mark other places of interest



Tourist destination
Used to give directions to tourist attractions



Tourist route
Marks one of the several designated tourist roads



Scenic area
Denotes a scenic or tourist area along or near the Autobahn



River name
Shows the name of the river the road is crossing



Federal Highway route number



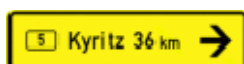
Autobahn route number



European route number



Federal Highway direction marker
Shows the direction and distance to major destinations; posted at the crossroads



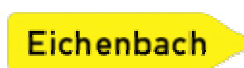
Federal Highway direction marker
Alternate form of the sign to the left



Secondary road direction marker
Shows the direction and distance to major destinations; posted at the crossroads



Secondary road direction marker
Alternate form of the sign to the left



Secondary road direction marker
Shows the direction to minor destinations



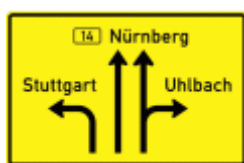
Local direction marker
Shows the direction to an important local destination



Direction to Autobahn
Shows the direction to a nearby Autobahn



Advance direction sign
Gives advance notice of directions at the upcoming intersection



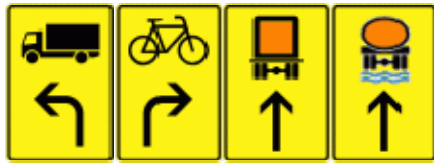
Advance direction sign
Gives advance notice of directions and the lane configuration at the upcoming intersection



Consolidated direction sign
Shows route information for all directions from the intersection

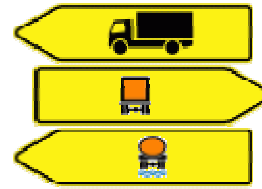


Autobahn entrance direction sign
Shows route information for Autobahn entrance ramps ahead



Routing for designated vehicles

Vehicle types shown on the sign must follow the route as indicated



Routing for designated vehicles

Vehicle types shown on the sign turn here



Autobahn interchange initial approach sign

Placed 1000 meters before Autobahn exits and 2000 meters before Autobahn crossings and shows the type, number, and name of the interchange; the symbol denotes the type of interchange:



Exit



Crossing



Autobahn interchange advance directional sign

Located 500 meters before Autobahn exits and at both 1000 meters and 500 meters before Autobahn crossings; shows a schematic of the interchange and lists additional destinations



Autobahn interchange number



Autobahn interchange countdown markers

Located at 300 meters (three stripes), 200 meters (two stripes), and 100 meters (one stripe) before the interchange; the interchange number sign is typically mounted above the 300 meter marker



Autobahn exit

This sign is placed just prior to the exit; it is sometimes placed in the centre median



Expressway exit



Expressway exit

Shows an exit for local destinations



Exit

Marks an exit ramp from the Autobahn or expressway



Truck stop

This sign indicates that there is an off-Autobahn truck stop at the indicated exit with fuel, food, and other services; pictograms indicating the available services often accompany this sign



Autobahn distance board

Placed after most entrances and lists the distance to major cities along the route; distances to major destinations via intersecting Autobahns are listed at the bottom with the corresponding route number



Detour approach
Indicates that a detour/diversion is about to start; often with a supplemental sign indicating the distance to the start of the detour



Detour direction sign



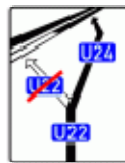
Numbered detour route
Used where there are multiple detour routes in effect; follow the same-numbered route



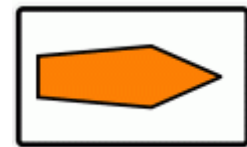
End of detour



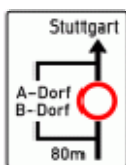
Provisional detour
These signs mark pre-posted detour routes for use in the event that an Autobahn must be closed or as an optional route to bypass congestion; follow the same-numbered route to return to the next Autobahn entrance



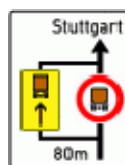
Provisional detour schematic
Used to direct Autobahn traffic to the next sequential provisional detour route when traffic cannot return to the Autobahn at the next entrance



Alternate route
Indicates a recommended alternate route on the Autobahn system for specific vehicles or destinations in order to avoid congestion



Detour route schematic
Indicates that the road ahead is closed and graphically shows the detour route (e.g. turn left in 80 meters and follow the road to B-Dorf and A-Dorf)



Routing schematic for designated vehicles
Indicates that the specified vehicle type is prohibited ahead and indicates that there's a posted detour route (e.g. no hazardous vehicles ahead, so follow the posted route 80 meters ahead on the left)



Complicated traffic route
Shows special routing required to go in the direction indicated (e.g. there's no left turn ahead, so follow the route shown instead)



Dead end street



Dead end street
Children are allowed to play in the street



Water protection area
Posted in environmentally sensitive areas; reminds drivers of vehicles carrying water-hazardous cargo to be extra careful



Bus or streetcar stop

Parking or stopping within 15 meters of this sign is prohibited; do not pass streetcars stopped on the street to board or discharge passengers; yield to vehicles leaving the stop



School bus stop

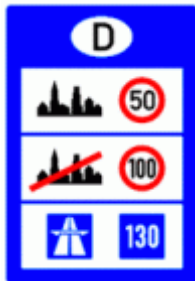
Watch for children during the times indicated



Pedestrian underpass



Pedestrian bridge



National speed limits information

Posted at international borders and informs drivers of the general speed limits



Customs post



Toll road

Motorists using this road must pay a toll



Toll road

Vehicles over 3.5 tonnes must pay a toll to use this road

Goethestraße

Goethestraße

Street name signs

These signs may be mounted on a pole or on the sides of a building



Streetlight does not stay on all night

Posted or painted on lamp posts that turn off during the night; if you park near this street lamp at night, you must leave your parking lights on; the time that the light turns off may be marked in the red area

Miscellaneous signs



Reflector guide posts

Posted every 50 meters along the roadside, left and right sides respectively



Reflector guide posts

Posted on the roadside at an intersection



Obstruction marker

This sign is posted on the edge of an object in or adjacent to the roadway, left and right sides respectively



Obstruction marker

This sign is posted on the edge of an object in or adjacent to the roadway which you may pass on either side



Curve markers

The chevrons point in the direction to travel



Parking hazard

Mounted on the back of vehicles and trailers that may slow or stop on roadways (i.e. maintenance vehicles)

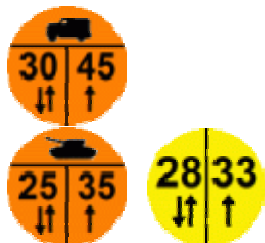


Mobile lane closure board

Used in construction areas to temporarily close lanes; pass by on the side indicated

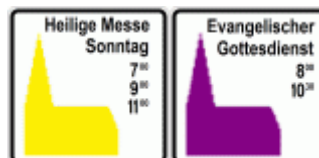


Barricade



NATO military bridge classification signs

Posted near bridges and viaducts and indicates the safe load-carrying capacity of the bridge for military vehicles



Church services

Posted near the entrances to towns and lists scheduled Sunday church services; the gold church denotes Catholic Masses; the purple church denotes Protestant services



Construction project information

These signs are posted at the beginning of major construction zones and give information about the project



Airport



Train station



Car train



Truck train



Ferry or harbour



Hospital



Roadside chapel



Industrial district



Sports park



Stadium



*Handicapped-accessible
rest room/toilette*

Additional sign information

In the past decade or so, electronic sign systems have been installed on Autobahns and expressways. These signs are capable of displaying facsimiles of official traffic signs and carry the same authority as their static counterparts. Common signs include speed limits and congestion warnings. When mounted overhead, these signs have added flexibility as they can be used to assign speed limits to specific lanes or to display lane control information. See the "Electronic signs" section on the [Autobahn page](#) for more details and examples.

In cities and towns, you will frequently come across convex mirrors mounted on high posts or on the sides of buildings next to the road. These mirrors are provided to help drivers see around tight corners where the visibility is blocked by a building or other obstacle.

Sign vocabulary

Words are sometimes used on traffic signs, especially on supplemental signs. Here is a rather complete list of vocabulary used on German traffic signs.

Abblendlicht - dipped (low-beam) headlights

Abstand halten - maintain following distance

Achtung! - Attention!

Allee - avenue

An geraden Tagen - on "even" days
(i.e. Tue., Thur.)

An ungeraden Tagen - on "odd" days
(i.e. Mon., Wed., Fri.)

an Sonn- und Feiertagen - on Sundays and
holidays

Anfang - start, begin

Anlieger frei - residents and local traffic allowed

Anlieger bis Baustelle frei - residents and local
traffic allowed as far as construction site

Anlieger oder Parken frei - residents, local traffic
and parking allowed

Anwohner frei - residents allowed

Mi - Wednesday

mit Ausweis Nr. - with permit number

mit Parkausweis Nr. - with parking permit number

mit Parkschein - with parking voucher

Mo - Monday

Mofas - mopeds

Nebel - fog

Nebenstrecke - secondary route

Nothalt - emergency stopping area

Notruf - emergency telephone

nur - only

Ölspur - watch for oil on lane

P + M - carpool parking

auch - also
auf dem Seitenstreifen - on the shoulder
Ausfahrt - exit
Ausfahrt freihalten - keep driveway exit clear
Autobahn - freeway, superhighway
Autobahndreieck - Autobahn "triangle"
(i.e. "T"-crossing)
Autobahnkreuz - Autobahn crossing
Autogas - liquefied propane gas
Autohof - truck stop

Bahnhof - railway station
Baustellen ausfahrt - construction site exit
Baustellenfahrzeuge frei - construction vehicles allowed
Behelfsausfahrt - auxiliary exit
bei Nässe - during wet conditions
bei Rot hier halten - stop here on red
besetzt - full (e.g. parking lots)
Betriebs- und Versorgungsdienst frei - service and maintenance vehicles allowed
Bewohner frei - residents allowed
bis Baustelle frei - allowed as far as construction site

Di - Tuesday
Do - Thursday
Durchgangsverkehr - through traffic
dürfen überholt werden - are allowed to be passed

Einbahnstraße - one way street
Einfahrt - entrance
Einfahrt freihalten - keep driveway entrance clear
einorden - get into lane, merge
Einsatzfahrzeuge frei - operations vehicles allowed
Ende - end

Fährbenutzer frei - ferry users allowed
Fahrrad - bicycle
Fahrradstraße - bicycle path
Fahrschule - driving school (*marked on vehicles operated by student drivers*)
Feuergasse - fire lane
Flughafen - airport
Forstwirtschaftlicher Verkehr frei - forestry vehicles allowed
Fr - Friday
frei - exempt, allowed (e.g. "Anlieger frei" = "Residents allowed"); also means "available" (i.e. parking spaces)
freihalten - keep clear
Frostschäden - frost/freeze damage
Fußgänger - pedestrian

Gasse - alley, lane
gebührenpflichtig - toll/fee required
Gefahr - danger
gesperrt - closed, blocked (e.g. "Straße gesperrt" = "road closed")
Glatteis - "black ice"
grüne Welle bei 60 km/h - all green signals ("green

P + R - park & ride
Parkausweis - parking permit
Parken in gekennzeichneten Flächen 2 Std. - parking in marked spaces for 2 hours
Parken in gekennzeichneten Flächen erlaubt - parking in marked spaces allowed
Parken Sa und So erlaubt - parking permitted on Saturday and Sunday
Parkhaus - parking garage (above ground)
Parkplatz - parking place, lot
Parkscheibe - parking disc
Parkschein - parking voucher
Parkscheinautomat - parking voucher dispensing machine
Parkuhr - parking meter
Pkw. - passenger vehicle (car)
Polizei - police

Radfahrer absteigen - bicyclists dismount
Radweg - bicycle trail
Rasthaus - service area
Rasthof - service area
Raststätte - service area
Rauch - smoke
Reißverschluss erst in 200 m - "zipper" merge begins in 200 meters
Richtung - direction of travel
Rollsplitt - loose gravel/chippings

Sa - Saturday
Sackgasse - dead end, cul-de-sac
Schleudergefahr - skidding danger
Schnellstraße - expressway
Schule - school
Schulbus - school bus
Schülerlotse - school crossing guard
So - Sunday
Sperrgebiet - restricted area
Sperrung - closure
Spur - traffic lane
Spurrillen - lane grooves
Spurrinnen - lane grooves
Stadtmitte - downtown/city centre
Stau - congestion/traffic jam
Straße - street
Straßenbahn - streetcar
Std. - hours (*abbr. for "Stunden"*) (e.g. "2 Std." = "2 hours")
Straßenschäden - road damaged
Streugut - road sand/salt
Stunde - hour

Tankstelle - filling station
Tiefgarage - underground parking garage
Tollwut - rabies (*used on signs to warn of a rabies outbreak area*)

überholen - overtake, pass
Umleitung - detour/diversion
Unfall - accident

wave") at 60 km/h

h - o'clock (e.g. "8-16 h" = "8am - 4pm")

Hafengebiet; Schienenfahrzeuge haben Vorrang -
harbour area; rail vehicles have right-of-way

Haltbruch - wayside/stopping area

Haltestelle - bus/tram stop

hier gilt die StVO - official traffic laws are in effect
here (*used on private parking lots*)

Industriegebiet; Schienenfahrzeuge haben

Vorrang - industrial area; rail vehicles have right-of-
way

kein/keine - no (e.g. "Keine Mofas" = "no mopeds")

keine Wendemöglichkeit - no place to turn around
(i.e. on dead-end street)

Kfz. - motor vehicle

Krankenfahrzeuge frei - ambulances allowed

Kreuzung - intersection

Kreuzung freihalten - keep intersection clear

Landwirtschaftlicher Verkehr frei - agricultural
vehicles allowed

Land- und forstwirtschaftlicher Verkehr frei -
agricultural and forestry vehicles only

Licht! - turn on your headlights (*when entering a
tunnel*)

Licht? - turn off your headlights (*when coming out of
a tunnel*)

Licht ausschalten - turn off headlights

Licht einschalten - turn on headlights

Lieferverkehr frei - delivery vehicles allowed

Linienverkehr frei - scheduled transit vehicles
allowed

Lkw. - truck

verboden - prohibited

Verkehr - traffic

Verkehrshelfer - school crossing guard

verschmutzte Fahrbahn - dirt/mud on road

Verkehrsführung geändert - traffic pattern has been
changed

Vorfahrt - right-of-way/priority

Vorfahrt geändert - right-of-way has been changed

Vorfahrtstraße - priority road

Vorrang - right-of-way/priority

Vorsicht - caution

Wasserschutzgebiet - water protection area

Weg - way, lane

Werktags - workdays

Wildtollwut - rabies (*used on signs to warn of a
rabies outbreak area*)


Zentrum - downtown/city centre

Zufahrt bis 25 frei - access permitted as far as 25
(house number or other location)

SIGNALS

Traffic signals in Germany are generally the same as those found in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

Signals generally operate the same as most other places, but there are a few idiosyncrasies. Below are illustrations and descriptions of various signals and related signs that you will come across in Germany.

Items marked with  are especially important for new BFG personnel and visitors.



Typical German traffic signals

Some locations have partial signals consisting of just the red and yellow lamps as shown in **Figure 1** (right). These function just like regular traffic signals minus the green phase. So, when the green light would normally be on, there is instead no signal. If you come upon one of these signals showing yellow or red, obey it like you would any traffic signal. Otherwise, ignore the signal and obey any other signs or signals, or in the absence of such, use the default right-of-way rules. These types of signals are usually located at railway crossings.



Figure 1

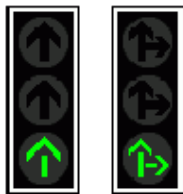


Figure 2

Junctions in Germany often have signals controlling each permitted direction of travel, such as the examples in **Figure 2** (left). If a signal at an intersection has an arrow for the direction you want to travel, you must obey it. If you don't see a signal with an arrow for the direction you want to go, then travelling that direction may not be permitted; be sure to look for signs. A full green signal without any arrows usually means you may travel straight ahead or make a right or left turn unless otherwise prohibited by signs.

In the case of left turns, the signal shown in **Figure 3** (right) indicates a protected left turn.



Figure 3

⚠ When the right-of-way for left turns changes from permitted to protected (or vice-versa), a different style of signal is used. In this case, the left turn signal is located across the junction on the left corner. There are two varieties in use: a green-yellow combination, or a single green signal. The combination signal consists of a flashing yellow arrow (**Figure 4**) or a solid green arrow (**Figure 5**). The yellow flashing arrow shown in Figure 4 indicates a left turn is permitted but not protected-- use caution and give way to oncoming traffic. When the green arrow is on, as shown in Figure 5, then the turn is protected. In some cases, there is only the single green arrow signal (i.e. no flashing yellow arrow.) Just as in the other cases, the green arrow indicates a protected left turn. If the arrow is off, then obey the signals for through traffic and give way to oncoming traffic when turning left.



Figure 4



Figure 5

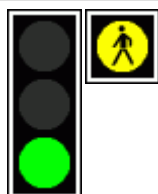


Figure 6

Always watch for and yield to pedestrians and cyclists when turning left or right. Sometimes there will be a flashing yellow signal like the one shown in **Figure 6** (left) adjacent to the other signals warning you that pedestrians crossing the intersecting street also have a green light.

⚠ Right turns on red are not universally permitted in Germany. However, such a turn is permitted at junctions with the green arrow sign shown in **Figure 7** (right) but only after coming to a complete stop and yielding to all other traffic and pedestrians. This is the only traffic law retained from the former East Germany and thus is still somewhat rarely found in western Germany, although it is now being implemented more in many areas.

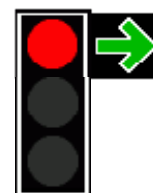


Figure 7

Many junctions have special right turn signals. These two-section signals consist of green and yellow arrows and are used to allow traffic to make a free right turn while the signal for through traffic is red. So, if you encountered the signals in **Figure 8** (below) and you wanted to turn right, you could do so without having to stop. The cycles for these can vary depending on the phasing for the signals at the intersection; the two

most common cycles are shown in **Figure 9**. When the right turn signal is dark, you must obey the signals for through traffic.

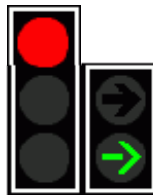


Figure 8

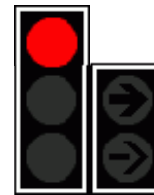


Figure 9

⚠ A flashing yellow signal or a traffic signal that is completely dark indicates that the intersection is currently not being controlled by the signals. Most traffic signals in Germany are switched off at night and sometimes on weekends as well. Also, some pedestrian crossing signals turn themselves off after a period of inactivity. To provide for traffic control in this situation, nearly all traffic signals also have right-of-way signs installed nearby, usually near the rightmost signal face. Motorists must obey the signs when the signal is off or flashing. Therefore, if you encountered **Figure 10** (below), you would have to give way. If you encountered **Figure 11**, you would have the right-of-way. The signs also provide regulation in the rare event of signal malfunction. Where used, a flashing yellow almost always indicates that you must yield or stop. However, you may have to stop or yield even if there is no flashing yellow - watch for the signs. When the signals are off and you are required to stop, you do not need to stop at the stop line or sign; instead, you should stop at a location where you can safely see the traffic on the intersecting street.

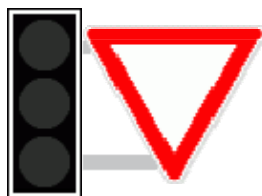


Figure 10

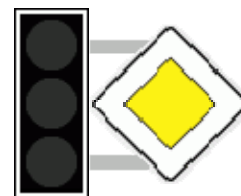


Figure 11

⚠ When the traffic signals are in operation, the signal takes precedence over the sign. Therefore, if you encountered **Figure 12** (below), you would have to stop. In **Figure 13**, you could proceed without stopping.

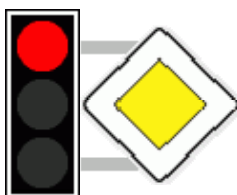


Figure 12



Figure 13

Lane control signals are used in areas where reversible lanes are used, or in areas where lanes may need to be closed periodically. They are also used in conjunction with the electronic sign systems found on the Autobahn and urban expressways to close lanes after accidents and during road work. They are the same standard arrow and X symbols used in many other countries:



Lane open



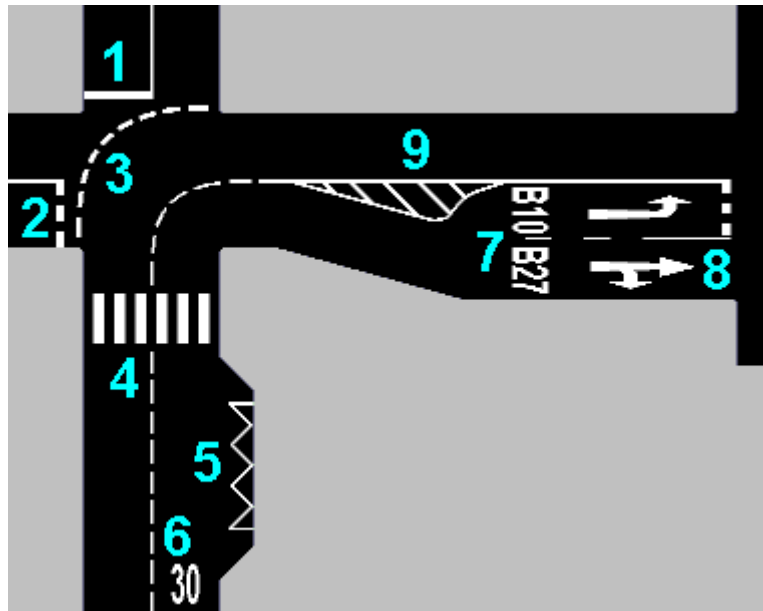
Lane closed ahead
Merge in the direction indicated



Lane closed
You may not drive in this lane

ROAD MARKINGS

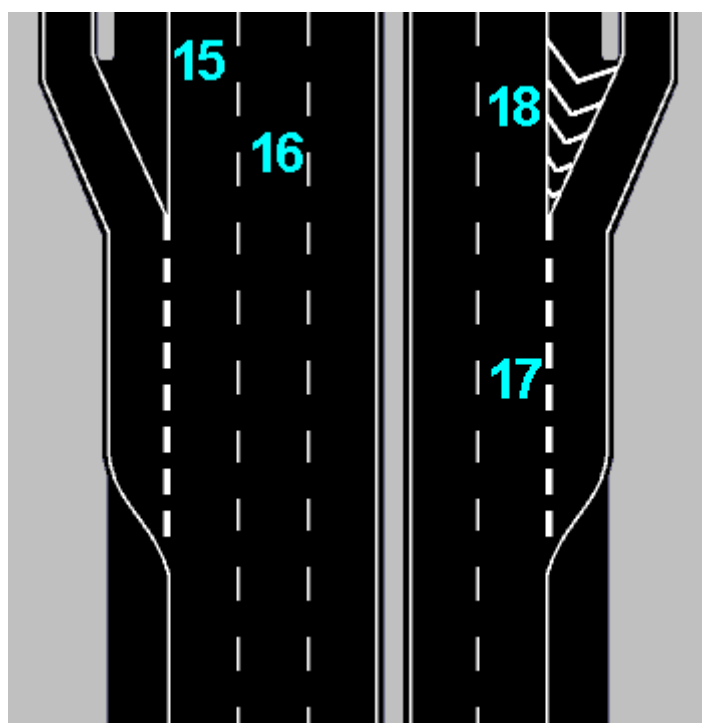
Road pavement markings in Germany are generally similar to those in the UK. However, unlike the UK, all regular road markings in Germany are white, including those indicating no parking zones. Yellow road markings are used in construction areas and supersede the regular white markings. Below are diagrams and descriptions of most of the road markings you will encounter in Germany. The light blue numbers on the diagrams correspond to the explanations.



1	Stop line You must stop behind the thick solid line across your lane.
2	Wait line A thick broken line across your lane is the equivalent to a give way sign (and is often used in conjunction with it.).
3	Priority road A broken line passing through an intersection along the edge of one of the roadways indicates the path of the priority road.
4	Pedestrian crossing Zebra-striped markings across the roadway mark a pedestrian crossing. You must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians on the crossing.
5	No stopping/ parking zone Zigzag lines next to the curb mark a specific area (often near a bus stop or driveway) where you may not stop or park.
6	Numbers Numbers on the road in your lane usually indicate the speed limit. Often used during sudden drops in the speed limit for safety reasons.
7	Letters and numbers A combination of letters and numbers on the road usually indicate route numbers. These are frequently used at complicated intersections to guide motorists into the correct lane. For instance, a marking such as "B27" indicates that the lane you are in follows the B27 highway.
8	Intersection arrows Arrows on the pavement in your lane indicate which turns are allowed from your lane.
9	Restricted zone You may not drive in an area with diagonal lines.



10	No overtaking in one direction You may overtake only if you have a broken line on your side; you may not cross a solid line on your side to overtake as in UK.
11	No overtaking You may not cross the solid centre line to pass.
12	Merge arrow An arrow slanting toward the right in the centre of the roadway warns passing traffic to merge to the right as a no overtaking zone is approaching.
13	Lane separation line Short broken lines between opposing traffic lanes indicate that the overtaking zone is ending.
14	Lane separation line Long broken lines between opposing traffic lanes indicate overtaking is allowed (unless prohibited by a sign). This marking is also used to separate traffic lanes travelling in the same direction.



15	Edge marking A solid line along the side of the roadway marks the edge of the roadway or separates the travel lanes from the shoulder. In rural areas you may not park or stop to the left of this line.
16	Lane separators Long broken lines separate traffic lanes travelling in the same direction.
17	Acceleration /deceleration lane Short, thick broken white lines separate a deceleration (exit) lane or acceleration (entrance) lane from the main traffic lanes.
18	Restricted zone You may not drive in an area with diagonal lines.

On streets not signed as one-way, here are the default lane assignments based on the number of marked lanes on the street:

- **2 lanes:** The left lane is for oncoming traffic; the right lane is for traffic moving in your direction.
- **3 lanes:** The centre lane is reserved for left turns only. You may not overtake. The far left lane is for oncoming traffic; the far right lane is for traffic moving in your direction.
- **4 lanes:** The left two lanes are for oncoming traffic; the right two lanes are for traffic moving in your direction. These are usually separated by a single or double solid white line. Even if separated by a broken white line, you may not cross the centre line to overtake.
- **5 lanes:** Same as 4 lanes except that centre lane is for left turns only. (Very rare.)

Odd lane arrangements are usually marked fairly obviously, either on the road surface or by signs.

Section 5: Driving & Parking in Town



German towns and cities, like most major European and world cities are old and congested. Driving in these cities is generally more of a hassle than a necessity, especially with the excellent public transportation available. Still, there may be times when you want or need a car in town, or just got lost leaving the airport and ended-up in downtown Berlin, so here are some things to know and keep in mind regarding driving and parking in German cities.


The central parts of most German towns and cities feature a lovely system of narrow, disjointed, one-way streets lined and clogged with cars. You may find yourself feeling like a rat trapped in a maze. A recent study determined that the average German spends 65 hours a year stuck in traffic or waiting at traffic lights. After the war, many German cities rebuilt their downtown districts and designed them to make navigation a little easier. If you're used to driving in urban areas, you should manage fine in most German cities.



Berlin residential street

Of course, the best advice is to get a good city map, study it, or program your 'Sat Nav' and make sure you know where you're going before you head out. Another piece of advice I would offer is this: park your car somewhere convenient and use public transportation to reach your final destination. This may save you a considerable amount of time, money, and cursing. You'll find many German cities have outlying Park + Ride locations for this purpose.

Pay attention to signs and signals. Look closely for  and  signs-- miss one of these and you might become the new hood ornament on a delivery truck. Traffic signals are usually easy to see, but sometimes right-of-way signs may be difficult to spot. Also, look closely for parking or no parking signs before you park on the street to make sure that you may legally park there. Especially watch for the many hidden driveways marked with obscure "*Ausfahrt freihalten!*" ("do not block the exit") signs or you may return to find that the police have performed their magic and made your car disappear. Some money will have to disappear from your wallet to make the car reappear.

Another sign to watch for is the  sign. This sign marks a bus lane. You'll find these along some major boulevards in the larger cities. You may use this lane only if you're turning right, and you must not enter the lane until just before you make your turn. Taxis are often allowed to use this lane as well.

Keep a sharp eye out for unmarked intersections, especially in residential areas, and give way to traffic approaching from the right.

German motorists are rather "trigger-happy" when it comes to green lights. Many drivers are already entering the intersection when the signal turns green, so be prepared to go or expect some cranky honking from the guy behind you just mere microseconds after the green comes on – don't be an "Amber gambler!"



Typical town road

To avoid the one-way maze, use larger two-way avenues and boulevards to get as close to your destination as possible, then use the one-ways as needed to finish the job. Houses are often numbered up one side of the street, and then back down the other. When more houses were built along the same street, they repeated the process. So on the four corners at one intersection, you could have house numbers 20, 21, 40, and 110. In addition, streets can change names anywhere along its length. For interest, *Strasse* or *Straße*

is "street" and *Weg* is "lane". However, *Allee* is not "alley", but rather "boulevard" or "avenue"; *gasse* is "alley".

Congestion in German cities is no better or worse than other European and world cities. Rush hours are generally 7.00-9.00 and 16.00-18.00 on weekdays. In some of the trendy nightlife districts, you may find yourself staring at brake lights until well after 23.00. Popular shopping areas will usually be congested and parking particularly hard to come by on Saturdays.

Definitely be on the watch for pedestrians. They always have the right-of-way in zebra-marked crosswalks, but oftentimes they'll dart-out between cars and other locations. In residential areas, be on the lookout for children playing near streets-- you're required by law to pass by them at the slowest speed possible without stalling your vehicle.


Basically, driving in cities in Germany involves the same skill, patience, and humour as driving in cities in the UK and elsewhere. Use common sense and pay attention and you should do fine.

Parking

Your biggest problem may not be navigating cities, but finding someplace to (legally) park your vehicle reasonably close to your destination. In most German cities, you'll have a good selection of parking facilities. There is the ubiquitous on-street parking as well as off-street parking lots (*Parkplatz*), above-ground garages (*Parkhaus*), and underground garages (*Tiefgarage*). Most large cities have extensive parking facilities, and parking maps are usually available from the tourist information offices. Unfortunately, there are often not enough spaces to go around, and you may have to drive around a little while before you find a place, all the while feeling like the losing player of a round of musical chairs. Costs for parking in Germany can be a little on the pricey side.

On-street parking

Parking on the street is the most common means of parking in Germany. Unless specifically prohibited by a sign or general regulation, on-street parking is usually permitted everywhere (see the [parking section of the](#)

[road rules page](#) for laws regarding on-street parking). The  sign along the street specifically indicates where such parking is permitted, although when used it is usually accompanied by additional signs indicating when parking is permitted, who is permitted to park, or requiring the use of a parking permit, voucher, or disc. Here are some examples:



Parking only with a parking disc
You may only park for the length of time indicated (e.g. 2 hours).



Parking requires purchase of a parking voucher (Parkschein)



Parking only for residents with indicated permit number

There are many more signs related to parking on the [German traffic signs page \(page 2\)](#) as well as [additional vocabulary](#) used on signs.

As noted above, on-street may require you to use a parking voucher, parking disc, or parking meter. Here are directions on the use of each:

- **Parking vouchers (*Parkschein*) ("Pay & display"):** The sign "*mit Parkschein*" requires you to purchase a parking voucher before leaving your vehicle. These are obtained from a nearby machine (*Parkscheinautomat*) - look for signs marking the location of these. The operation of these machines varies but is along the lines you would encounter in UK; some of them will give you instructions in English-- press the button marked with a British flag if there is one. Generally, you'll want to locate the parking rates (*Parkgebühr*) on the front of the machine. Determine how much time you'll need, and then deposit the corresponding amount. The display will indicate how many minutes the amount

you've inserted will buy. Return to your vehicle and place the voucher on the dashboard where it may be easily seen from the outside. You must return to your vehicle before the expiration time shown on the voucher. If the nearest voucher machine is out of order, you should use another one in the same area; you will usually find another one across the street, at the other end of the block, or around the corner. If you cannot locate another machine, use a parking disc instead (see below); you can then stay up to the maximum length of time shown on the machine. Some areas only require you to use a parking voucher during certain times; check the signs or schedule on the machine. Oftentimes, the machines will turn off when parking vouchers are not required, but push the buttons to be sure it's not just taking a nap.




Parking voucher machine (left) and parking disc (right)

- **Parking discs (*Parkscheibe*):** A parking disc is a blue cardboard or plastic card with an adjustable time dial. You can obtain these for free or nominal cost from most petrol stations, newsstands, tobacco shops, and police stations. Rental cars should already have them (if yours doesn't, get one from the agent before leaving with the car.) Signs indicating that you must use a parking disc will also indicate the length of time you can park. Turn the dial so that the arrow points to the time of your *arrival*, rounded-up to the next half hour. For example, if you arrive at 10:40, set the disc for 11:00. Then place the disc on your dashboard. You must return to your vehicle within the indicated time period. So, for instance, if you arrived at 10:40 and the signs said that you could park for 2 hours with a parking disc, you would set your disc for 11:00 and you would have to return to your vehicle by 13:00 (1:00pm). As with many things in Germany, this mostly works on the honour system, but spot checks are conducted. Many areas only require you to use a parking disc during certain times; be sure to check the signs. Outside of those times, you can usually park as long as you want, but double-check for other signs showing some other restriction.
- **Parking meters (*Parkuhr*):** Parking meters are not very common in Germany and rapidly becoming even less. If you do stumble upon one, you'll see that they work just like their UK counterparts: deposit your money and return to your vehicle before the time expires. In the event of a defective meter, you must use a parking disc. You may then park up to the maximum time normally permitted at that location (i.e. the maximum time shown on the meter.)

Violations

Parking fines vary but typically are up to €35 and if you are obstructing traffic or a driveway, your vehicle will almost surely be towed, and quite quickly. In such an event, call the police to settle the situation.

Car Parks and Garages

As well as indicating where parking is permitted on the street, the  sign also gives directions to off-



street parking facilities. Directions to off street or covered parking areas are usually indicated by signs. In many larger cities and towns, there are electronic signs indicating which of these are available (*Frei*) or full (*Besetzt*), or showing the number of available spaces. Parking facilities are often numbered to assist you in finding them (e.g. lot P1, garage P2, etc.)



Parking availability sign

Very few lots allow you to park for free. The ones that do usually require you to use a parking disc (see above). While some lots use parking vouchers, most use an automated centralized self-pay system as often seen in UK. When entering the parking lot, you obtain a time-stamped ticket from the entry gate. Park your vehicle and take this ticket with you. When you are ready to leave, but before you actually return to your vehicle, find a parking payment machine (*Kassenautomat*). These are usually located near pedestrian entrances. Insert the ticket you received from the entry gate into the slot on the machine and the amount due will be displayed. Pay the amount shown and the machine will return your ticket or dispense a new one. If you also want a receipt, push the button marked "*Quittung*" immediately thereafter. Then, return to your vehicle and exit the lot/garage. At the exit gate, insert the ticket into the machine there and the barrier will open. You generally have 15 minutes to reach the exit gate from the time you pay. Most lots and garages are open 24 hours; however, some are not open overnight. If you're going to be out late, make sure that the lot or garage you use will still be open when you return!



Typical parking payment machine

Public Transport in Towns and Cities

German cities have remarkable public transportation systems, transport mode options increase considerably as the place you're in gets bigger. Public transportation is so good you should never need or want a car to get around most cities. Overall, Germany probably has more urban public transportation systems, especially rail systems, than just about any other country in the world.

Types of service

Bus

Nearly every town and many rural areas have scheduled local bus service. In some cases, this service is operated by German Rail (*Bahnbus*). In larger places, lines crisscross the city. Where local rail service is offered, buses supplement or compliment those services. In the biggest cities, there may be several different bus systems in operation. In Berlin, you'll even find double-decker buses. Service intervals vary widely depending on the size of the location. Many large cities also offer night bus service.



Articulated bus in Münster
(Photo by Rüdiger Wölk)

Straßenbahn/Trambahn (streetcar/tram)

Most medium and large cities have a streetcar system, sometimes fairly extensive. In some areas, streetcar lines run underground in the central city area. Trams are prevalent in many eastern German cities. Most systems have been modernized with sleek new rolling stock, and many newer systems carry the *Trambahn* moniker. Service is fairly frequent, usually 20-30 minutes during off-peak periods.



Leipzig streetcar

Stadtbahn (light rail)

Some cities, most notably Stuttgart, Hanover, Cologne, and cities in the Ruhr region, have relatively new light rail systems. Generally, these systems function very much like a U-Bahn system (underground - see below) with wide-gauge tracks, longer trains, and high platforms. In fact, most Stadtbahn systems are marked with the standard "U" sign like the underground. However, while the Stadtbahn usually runs in extensive tunnel networks within the central city areas, it runs mostly over ground outside of the central city. When running above ground, the Stadtbahn runs almost entirely in exclusive rights-of-way making them faster than streetcars. Service is frequent, usually 10-20 minutes during off-peak periods.



Stuttgart Stadtbahn

U-Bahn (Untergrundbahn, subway/underground)

A few of Germany's largest cities have a full-fledged underground rail system. For the most part, these systems are located underground, but may run on elevated tracks or at ground level, especially in outlying areas. These systems generally serve the central city and immediately adjacent suburbs. Service is frequent, usually 5-15 minutes during off-peak periods.



Berlin U-Bahn

S-Bahn (Schnellbahn, suburban commuter rail)

The largest metropolitan areas (Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt-Mainz-Wiesbaden, Stuttgart, Cologne-Düsseldorf-Ruhr District, Nuremberg, Dresden, Leipzig-Halle, Mannheim-Heidelberg-Karlsruhe, Magdeburg, and Rostock) have a brilliant commuter train system called the S-Bahn. These are express trains connecting the central city to the farthest-flung suburbs. These routes primarily run above ground except in the central city, where they often run underground. Service is fairly frequent, usually 20-30 minutes during off-peak periods. Besides providing suburban service, the S-Bahn also makes several stops in the central city area as well. These stops are generally further apart than those on the U-Bahn or Stadtbahn and therefore makes the S-Bahn a good option for longer central city journeys. Unlike the other systems above, which are operated by local governments or franchises, S-Bahn systems are all operated by German Rail.



Frankfurt S-Bahn

Other modes of urban public transport you may come across include:

- **Zahnradbahn** (cog railway/funicular)
- **Seilbahn** (cable railway)
- **Schwebbahn** (suspended railway): Ride the famous one in Wuppertal if you get a chance- it's over 100 years old!
- **H-Bahn/Hochbahn** (elevated train)

Some foreign visitors confuse the S-Bahn and U-Bahn. It's easy for English speakers to separate these: U = Underground, S = Suburban.

Also, don't confuse S-Bahn with *Straßenbahn* or *Stadtbahn*– these are quite different!

Note that the service times indicated above are for weekdays. Service on weekends may be substantially reduced, especially on Sundays and holidays. Schedules are always posted at stops and stations.

Most transit systems use the central rail station (*Hauptbahnhof*) as a major hub. This makes it easy to get from the station to your hotel and vice versa.

Maps

The transit maps for the largest cities are quite complex, oftentimes resembling some kind of electrical wiring diagram. However, once you study them for a few minutes, they are pretty easy to understand and you will find they are similar to the London Underground map and the diagrams found on modern British trains. Most cities use colour-coded schematic plans to make the system easier to decipher. They can be obtained for free from tourist offices and are usually included in guidebooks. You'll find them posted at most bus and streetcar stops and subway stations often sport life-sized versions along the platforms. Street maps of the surrounding neighbourhood are also usually posted in rail stations, making it easy to find your way from the station to your destination.



Stuttgart rail system map

Signs

In the name of German *Ordnung*, stops and stations throughout Germany are marked by standard signs, so no matter where you go, you'll know what to look for:



Bus or streetcar stop



Stadtbahn station



U-Bahn station



S-Bahn station

Tickets & fares

In each city or metropolitan area, all of the transit networks operate under a single regional transport cooperative (*Verkehrsverbund*) with coordinated fares and tickets. One ticket (*Fahrkarte*, *Fahrschein*, or *Fahrausweis*) is good for all modes of transport and is valid for transfers to other trains or buses needed to complete your journey. The specific rules vary depending on the city, but you are usually allowed one complete trip in one continuous direction along the most direct route to your destination for a set length of time, usually two hours or so.

Fares on German transport networks are based on a zone system. The transport regions are divided into tariff zones (*Tarifzonen*) and you pay based on the number of zones you cross. Oftentimes, there is a central cluster of zones (*Innenraum*) covering the inner city. Typically, all tickets purchased in this cluster have the same price for journeys ending anywhere else in the cluster, even if it crosses a tariff zone. Fares generally range from €1-4; higher for longer distances.

For buses, you can purchase your ticket from the driver. Simply state your final destination and he will tell you how much the fare is. Pay him and he will give you your ticket. In most German cities, the driver can make change, but it's probably a good idea to have enough change on-hand to pay the exact fare. If there is a ticket machine at the stop, you will have to purchase your ticket from the machine rather than the bus driver (see below).



Typical ticket machine (left) and *Entwerter* (right)

Ticket machines

For rail systems, you will need to purchase your ticket before you board. Tickets are available from automated ticket machines (labelled *Fahrkarten*, *Fahrscheine*, or *Fahrausweise*). The exact operation of these machines varies from city to city, but they all function basically the same, and many have instructions in English. Usually, you find your destination (*Fahrziel*) either on a map or chart and note its zone number and push the corresponding button on the machine-- usually a combination of zone number and either adult (*Erwachsene*) or child (*Kind*). Then pay the amount shown on the display and take your ticket and any change. Depending on the city, you may then be required to validate your ticket just before you use it-- look for the words "*Entwerten*" or "*Entwerter*" and an arrow on the ticket (see example below). If your ticket requires validation, find a small box with a slot on the front, usually marked *Entwerter* (see photo above). These are located at the entrances to subway and rail stations and on-board buses and trams. Insert your ticket in the slot as indicated by the arrows. The date, time, and location will be stamped on the face of the ticket.



Berlin subway ticket

Most cities also have special multi-tickets (*Mehrfahrtenkarte* or *Streifenkarte*). You purchase one ticket that is valid for several uses (usually 3-10), often at a slightly reduced price from the corresponding number of

individual fares. The ticket has several numbered sections that correspond to each use. To use the ticket, you need to validate it before or as you begin each journey by inserting the next sequentially numbered section into the validating machine. Once validated, it basically works like an individual ticket with regards to use. On most systems, you can use a single multi-ticket for several people travelling together-- just validate one section of the ticket for each person (i.e. if you want to use it for two people, validate two sections of the ticket.) There are also 24-hour passes (*Tageskarte*). These are good for all modes of transit for an entire day. Some systems also sell a group day ticket which allows several people to use one 24-hour pass, or passes that also include admission to museums and attractions. Finally, many cities have special tickets for short-distance journeys (up to three or four stops). These tickets (*Kurzstreckekarte*) cost considerably less than a full zone ticket.

Note that most systems will allow you take your dog or bike on board trains and buses, but you may have to buy a ticket for them, most likely the children's fare or equivalent, and you may not be allowed to do it during rush hours.

Once you have your ticket (and validated it if required), you may board the train or bus. Keep your ticket with you for the duration of your journey. German transit operates on the honour system. Periodically, though, inspectors will walk-through the trains checking tickets. When they approach (asking "*Fahrkarten, bitte*"), hand them both your ticket and passport or other identification. Those without tickets are publicly humiliated, a torture which only ends when you cough-up the fine, usually €30-50 collected on the spot. Keep in mind that they've heard all the excuses (and being a foreigner is no excuse), so it's in your best interest to just pay up and go on with your life.

Safety

Public transit in Germany is remarkably safe, even at night, but it's always wise to be aware of your surroundings. Safeguard any valuables that you may be carrying and beware of pickpockets. At night, you should ride in the car nearest the operator. Emergency telephones (*Notrufsäule*) are located in every station and on board most trains, and police make frequent patrols, especially in areas where an increase in crime is noted. Several cities also have special call boxes where you may arrange for taxi service before leaving the station.

Taxis

Using a taxi in Germany is basically the same as in most other places. All German taxis are cream-colored with a black and yellow taxi sign on the roof. In the birthplace of the luxury saloon, it should be no surprise that the bulk of the taxi fleet is comprised of sleek and plush Mercedes and Audis.



Typical German taxi

Hiring a taxi

The best way to hire a taxi is to find one at a taxi stand. You will find these at train stations, airports, large hotels, and other major activity centres (shopping areas, parks, etc.) Usually, there will be several taxis waiting at these locations. You should take the first taxi in line, but you can pick any of them waiting at the stand, especially if you need a minivan and the first cab in line is a sedan. If there are no taxis waiting, look around for a "taxi-phone" (*Taxiruf*). These phones will connect you to the central taxi dispatch office, which will then send a cab to your location. These taxi phones also usually have an emergency call function as well-- make sure you push the correct button if applicable.

You can also order a taxi by phone. Every city has a taxi hotline-- look in the phone book under "*Taxi-Zentrale*". They will send a taxi to your location. Theoretically, you can hail a cab on the street, but most of the time one of the above options will be faster.

If you don't speak German, the best way to tell the driver where to take you is to write the address on a slip of paper and hand it to the driver when you get in. You can read the fare on the meter when it's time to pay.

Fares

All taxis in Germany are metered and fares are regulated. Rates vary by city, but generally there is a €2-3 "drop charge" or basic fee, then a rate of €1-2 per kilometre. Time spent waiting in traffic is also charged at a rate of €0.25-0.50 per minute. For trips over 50 km, the fare is usually negotiated in advance. One fare applies to all passengers (i.e. there is no additional charge for additional passengers). To tip the driver, round the fare up to the nearest Euro or two if you receive extra or exceptional service.

Service

Taxi drivers are generally very friendly, helpful, honest, and knowledgeable about their city. If you ever experience bad service, note the vehicle's number located in the rear window and report the experience to the Taxi-Zentrale.