

# Finding a flat and moving to a new place

Finding a flat or house will probably be your main concern when moving to Hessen. Newcomers have a lot of – sometimes worrying – questions: Will I be able to maintain or improve my living standards? What can I afford? Which neighbourhood suits my personal needs? Answers must be found quickly. If you're well informed and have a bit of luck, there's nothing to stop you finding a flat. You might have to make compromises, but you definitely won't have to make any sacrifices.

Before you start looking for a place to live, you should firstly be clear on your budget. Statistically, around six out of ten Germans rent – and even more in urban centres. Rental prices vary according to the neighbourhood and the building's age, condition and market value. Flats/houses located in more convenient areas (e.g. near public transport, shopping centres and schools) are more expensive to rent.

German flats are generally leased without furniture. Most flats are leased without a stove, lights, wardrobes, dishwasher and washing machine. Tenants are responsible for all their furnishings. Kitchen fittings can sometimes be purchased from the previous tenants. Some landlords have adapted to the needs of international tenants by offering flats and houses with kitchen facilities and other fittings, but this is then included in the rent.

If you're only going to be in Hessen for a limited amount of time, it might be worth renting a furnished flat. These flats may not come cheap, but it usually pays off to spend a bit more on a furnished apartment – and you're often then only charged a fixed amount for heating and water – than spending money on furniture and other items for an unfurnished flat.

A distinction is made between Kaltmiete (where heating bills, maintenance costs and other service charges are calculated separately) and Warmmiete (where all additional costs are included in the rent). All tenants purchase their electricity directly from a local provider. Although these costs are calculated according to your individual consumption, you should ask your landlord how much the previous tenants paid to get a better idea of your estimated monthly outgoings. Rental price increases are restricted by law, but instalments for additional services can be increased at any time, e.g. if the city decides

to increase its water price. Additional costs are billed in equal instalments throughout the year (i.e. heating bills stay the same in summer and winter, for instance), and they're adjusted by the landlord to match your consumption levels.

## **Rental agreements**

Regardless of whether you rent a flat or a house, you'll always have to sign a rental agreement. This is usually a contract recommended by the Haus & Grund owner protection association. Rental agreements should contain the following:

- Name of the landlord and tenant
- Rented property (address; number of square metres; additional services, e.g. fitted kitchen, garages, etc.)
- Rental price
- A clause on rental price increases (if applicable)
- Start of the rental agreement
- Services, listed individually
- Number of tenants
- Additional arrangements (in the event of contractual breaches, sub-letting conditions, etc.)
- Landlord's bank details
- Condition of the rented property when the tenant moves in (renovated/unrenovated)
- Items included in the rental price
- Landlord's permission to keep pets
- Deposit (normally three months' rent)
- Details on how the deposit should be paid

Please note that most rental agreements contain a clause which states the flat has to be renovated when you move out. Make sure your contract specifically states the required renovation work.

Rental agreements are usually concluded for an indefinite period and can be terminated with a notice period of three months. However, as there are also exceptions and German tenancy law is quite complicated, signing a rental agreement can turn out to be very costly if you are unsure of your rights and obligations. Therefore, we recommend that you ask your company or a legal professional to check the contract before signing. You can also get in touch with one of the region's many tenant protection associations to receive legal advice and representation. The membership fee of around 50-70 EUR includes insurance for legal expenses. Please note that you have to be a member of a

tenants' association for three months before you can receive legal protection.

## **Looking for a flat**

There are many ways to find a suitable place to live. Make a list of your priorities and desirable plus points. You might want to do without a guest room, for example, but definitely not without a garden. It'll be easier for you to make decisions if you know what compromises you're willing to take.

Make sure you dress appropriately for house viewings: Lots of people respond to advertisements for affordable housing, meaning landlords can choose their tenants.

Don't be offended if you're asked to prove your financial situation (e.g. with a copy of your employment contract and payslips from the past three months). This is very common.

If you're fortunate enough to be able to hire a relocation agency, this will make your search easier. Relocation agencies have expert knowledge of the real estate market and can save you unnecessary toing and froing between estate agents by shortlisting properties and taking care of contract negotiations. The range of available services and prices varies.

The best way to find a flat is on one of Germany's numerous housing websites. This can really make your decision easier, because most online ads include photos of the rooms, the building from the outside, the view and the surrounding area. This also saves time spent viewing flats whose description clearly does not match the accompanying pictures.

Regardless of whether you look for flats in a newspaper or online, most properties are provided by estate agents, and they tend to charge tenants commission (two months' rent plus 19% VAT). Some ads contain the word *provisionsfrei*, which means the estate agent will not charge commission. It's worth responding quickly to this kind of advertisement. Make sure you check the address and description of a property before viewing it: Apartments are often advertised by several estate agents at the same time.

### **Tip**

If you're looking for tenancy law advice, please get in touch with:

Deutscher Mieterbund

Landesverband Hessen e.V.

Adelheidstraße 70, 65185 Wiesbaden

Tel: +49 (0) 0611 – 4114050

[Deutscher Mieterbund Landesverband Hessen e.V.](#)