

Getting about in Germany

Germany has a well-developed public transport system, and Hessen has one of the best in the country. The local service is provided by three transport authorities: NVV, RMV and VRN. These companies are responsible for public transport in North, Central and South Hessen.

Tickets and passes

Before using public transport, you must always purchase a ticket or hold a valid pass (e.g. a daily, weekly, monthly or annual pass). You may be prosecuted if you fail to purchase a ticket or do not hold a valid pass. You can purchase tickets at several machines at train stations, and these can also often be used to buy daily, weekly, monthly and even annual passes. Daily, weekly, monthly and annual passes can usually be purchased at ticket offices, and sometimes even at selected machines and many kiosks. Nowadays, most tickets can also be booked online. You can find more detailed information on the Deutsche Bahn website and the websites of the transport authorities mentioned above.

Most communities use a kind of trust system for their public transport. This means you buy a ticket or pass before getting on the train, and you don't usually have to show your ticket at the start of your journey. Buses are an exception, whereby passengers boarding after 20:00 have to get on at the driver's end and show their ticket.

But beware! This is not an invitation to travel without a valid ticket (known as Schwarzfahren in Germany); it's a system based on trust. You may be prosecuted and heavily fined if you abuse this trust by failing to purchase a valid ticket. Ticket inspectors often go unnoticed in their everyday clothing, and they travel on trains and buses to catch passengers who have not purchased a ticket. They only start their inspections once the train or bus has started moving, so there is no way of avoiding them.

If you're caught travelling without a ticket, you'll be asked to immediately pay an increased fare, which tends to be 60 EUR. If you don't have enough money on you, you'll be given a piece of paper that states how and where you should pay the fine. If you fail to pay the fine within the given deadline, a warning letter will be sent to your

home. The fine will then be increased. The longer payment is delayed, the higher the fine will become. You may even be threatened with legal proceedings.

Rail travel

Germany is known for its efficient and extensive rail network (Deutsche Bahn). Lots of business travellers and holidaymakers confirm that travelling within Germany and to neighbouring countries is cheaper, quicker and more convenient by train than by plane.

Lots of people use the train. Main routes may get crowded. It's advisable to reserve a seat at peak times, especially for long-distance train journeys. Peak times include Friday afternoons, Sunday evenings, afternoons at the start and end of holidays, and often public holidays and the days before and after public holidays.

Deutsche Bahn (DB) has an outstanding website in multiple languages, where you can check schedules and ticket prices, purchase online tickets and mobile tickets, reserve a seat and do lots more.

DB travel centres (DB-Reisezentrum) offer personal advice on tickets and reservations right until departure, season tickets and DB monthly pass subscriptions, national and international schedules and pricing, local and long-distance transport, BahnCard offers, and additional services and deals for your personal train journey (e.g. baggage handling, parking at the station, hire cars, car sharing, travel insurance, hotels, etc.). Some travel agents in towns, small communities and smaller stations are licensed by DB to sell tickets and offer advice on how to use the trains and plan your journey.

Hessen also has a video travel centre in a pavilion located on the square in front of the train station in Neu-Isenburg. Opening times: Monday to Friday 07:30 – 17:30 (except public holidays), Sunday 07:30 – 12:30. You don't need any technical knowledge to buy your tickets here, and you can get information on offers from DB and other rail companies.

BahnCard

If you're planning to use the local or long-distance transport provided by Deutsche Bahn and many other travel authorities or the trains and buses operated by other travel companies, a BahnCard can get you up to 50% off DB flexible fares and 25% off long-distance saver fares within Germany. A BahnCard 100 lets you travel without a ticket all over Germany.

The BahnCard system operated by Deutsche Bahn might seem complicated and

confusing at first glance, but it's worth having a look at the various possibilities. According to your profile, you can make huge savings, especially on long-distance journeys. The BahnCard help desk on the DB website lets you work out whether a BahnCard would be worthwhile for you and, if so, which one would suit you best.

Taxis

Public transport is obviously not the only way to get around in Germany; taxis and cars are the most popular forms of private transport. Many newcomers will find the taxi fares to be considerably more expensive than in their home country, but do bear in mind that you'll usually be chauffeured around in a comfortable, older Mercedes. The standard basic charge for taxis is 2 EUR, and then every kilometre costs 1.60 EUR. You may also be charged for luggage.

Taxis can be found in front of all large train stations. They don't tend to stop in the middle of traffic on the street, but some occasionally do. It's much more effective to call for a taxi on your phone, as they usually arrive in five to ten minutes.

Driving in Germany

Many traffic regulations will be different to those in your home country, and so it's important to familiarise yourself with them and learn the road signs. One big difference is the German "give way to the right" rule: All vehicles coming from the right-hand side have right of way, unless there's a sign to indicate otherwise. Pay attention: All cars must stop as soon as a pedestrian steps onto a zebra crossing. Pay particular attention to cyclists in cycle lanes, especially when they want to turn right.

First impressions can be deceiving... you're not allowed to park wherever you like in Germany either. The parking rules are actually stricter than you initially might think. You're generally allowed to park on the kerb, unless there's a sign to indicate otherwise. Signs indicate whether parking or short-stay parking is permitted, whether you're allowed to park with two or four wheels on the pavement, and whether you have to display a parking disc behind the windscreen. One place you can get a parking disc is at petrol stations; you have to display your parking disc in signposted areas where parking is free but only permitted for a certain amount of time.

Speed cameras are widely used in Germany: There are permanently installed cameras that measure speed in towns and residential areas, and there are hidden speed traps that can be installed in mini buses or at the side of the road. If you're caught speeding in any way, you'll receive a speeding ticket by post within four to six weeks.

On the motorway

You're bound to have heard lots about the legendary German Autobahn... and you'll either be eager to finally have a go on this race track, or you'll be quite scared at the prospect of undertaking your first journey on a German motorway. Here are some words of warning before you drive on German motorways.

While there's no speed limit along many stretches of the motorway, there is on some – and you're legally obliged to keep to the speed limit. Bear in mind that you can lose your driving licence for one month or even longer if you're caught speeding at over 30 km/h above the speed limit. The authorities particularly crack down on speed around roadworks, and a temporary speed limit applies along many stretches of the motorway in certain situations, such as in bad weather (this is sometimes only 60 km/h).

If no speed limit is signposted, most cars drive at 120-160 km/h, while others are considerably quicker. However, transport experts recommend 130 km/h (70mph) as a safe travelling speed.

We don't really need to emphasise how dangerous the motorway is. It's particularly important to consider that the gap between you and a lorry or slow car in front of you can close a lot faster than usual at such high speeds, and cars can suddenly appear out of nowhere in your rear-view mirror.

One fundamental rule is that you can only overtake from the left. Once you have overtaken a car, you should merge back into the right lane. Many Germans do actually stick to this rule, as it ensures a smooth flow of traffic at high speed. However, some drivers are extremely aggressive and tailgate at high speed.

Even though it's illegal, flashing headlights or left indicators mean the car behind wants to overtake you. If that ever happens, move over to the right lane as quickly as possible. You should keep to the right lane anyway until you've gained enough experience on German motorways.

Links

[Deutsche Bahn](#)

[Public transport in Hessen \(in German\)](#)

[NVV - Nordhessischer VerkehrsVerbund \(in German\)](#)

[RMV - Rhein-Main-Verkehrsverbund](#)

[VRN - Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Neckar \(in German\)](#)

Downloads

Don't forget to move over and form an emergency lane in traffic jams.

[Emergency lane \(in German\) \(media/rettungsgasse_web_neu_0.pdf\)](#) (PDF 0.6MB)