

17 In Case of Emergency: Information for Visitors to Germany

Health and security

Germany is known for being one of the safest countries in the European Union, and while you could possibly find yourself on some of Earth's safest terrain in Germany's smaller towns and villages, traveling in larger cities can be dangerous. The most serious threat for visitors or tourists are pickpockets, who are known for frequenting crowded places like airports, train stations, busy train wagons or buses, and tourist attractions. For this reason, it is best to leave valuable items and documents in a hotel safe.



Medical emergencies

You should obtain medical insurance that is valid in Germany before leaving your home country; otherwise, you will be charged for doctor or hospital visits abroad. For less serious illnesses, you can seek advice in one of Germany's many pharmacies (Apotheke).

Pharmacies (Apotheke)

German pharmacies are abundant, even in smaller towns, and are easy to find. Just look for a red stylized "A" or the word "Apotheke" (www.apotheken.de). Pharmacies are usually open from 8 AM – 6 PM and are generally closed evenings, Saturday afternoons, Sundays and holidays. Each of them, typically, has a list on the door of pharmacies in the area that remain open to handle emergencies. Most pharmacists can offer advice on minor illnesses and recommend over-the-counter remedies. Be aware, however, that all medicines (even aspirin) are behind the counter, and must be asked for, even if you do not need a prescription to purchase them.

It is also a good idea to bring any prescription drugs from your home country with you for the duration of your stay abroad. While you will probably be able to find equivalent drugs in Germany, you will need a doctor's prescription, which will not be free of charge. Prescription drugs cannot be sent legally through the postal service if you are planning on having them sent from home.

Doctors

Finding a doctor in Germany can be an intimidating process because of the language difference, but it should not be. You can refer to the yellow pages (Gelbe Seiten: www.gelbeseiten.de) or a local telephone book (www.dasoertliche.de) in which doctors are listed by their specialization. For a general physician look under "Allgemeinmedizin", or, simply ask a colleague or friend; the best references are often by word of mouth. Other good sources of medical care are university clinics, which can usually be found in major cities or university towns. These clinics are staffed by highly skilled doctors who often speak English.

Making an appointment

When making a doctor's appointment by telephone or in person, the person you will speak to is the *Arzthelferin* or doctors assistant. She may not speak English, but do not worry, you will not be asked many questions, you simply need to set up a day and a time for an appointment.

Some helpful phrases for an appointment are:

"Ich möchte einen Termin machen."
"I would like to make an appointment."

"Es ist dringend. Haben Sie keinen früheren Termin?"
"It is urgent. Don't you have an earlier appointment?"

"Wo befindet sich Ihre Praxis?"
"Where is your practice located?"

Urgent situations

If you have an urgent medical situation during evenings, weekends or holidays you can always find an available doctor who will provide after hours medical assistance.

You can find an "on call" emergency physician by:

- Calling a general physician listed in the telephone book. If he or she is not available, you will most likely hear a recorded message with the telephone number of an emergency doctor.
- In large hotels medical care is usually provided on the premises. If not, ask the receptionist to contact a doctor for you.
- Calling the "Ärztlichen Notdienst" (19222 in all of Germany) for the name of a doctor in your area, see also:
www.aerztlichepraxis.de/Bereitschaft and
www.aerzte-notdienst.de.
- Going directly to the hospital or emergency room.
- Taking yourself or the patient to the nearest hospital or out-patient clinic. Throughout Germany, the number 112 will be answered by an operator who is an experienced member of a rescue team. This is also the number you can call in case of a fire or when an ambulance is needed.
- Checking a local newspaper. Look through a local newspaper for the heading "Notdienst Kalender" ("Emergency Calendar") to find an emergency doctor in your area.

Seconds matter in an emergency:

How to correctly report an accident.

In an emergency, a few seconds can be a matter of life and death. When calling for help, you need to concentrate on relaying essentials without forgetting important facts.

When reporting an accident in German, keep the 5-W's in mind:

- Wo geschah es?
(Where did the accident happen?)
- Was geschah?
(What happened?)
- Wie viele Personen sind verletzt?
(Who and how many people are injured?)
- Welche Art von Verletzung oder Erkrankung, soweit äußerlich erkennbar?
(Which injuries or ailments are recognizable?)
- Warten auf Rückfragen und durchgeben der Rückrufnummer.
(Wait for questions and give a number at which you can be reached.)

By going through this list you can be sure that all important information has been correctly taken down by the emergency rescue team.

Car accidents and other emergencies

Police

The German police can be identified by their predominantly green and beige uniforms, and green and white (or silver) signs and automobiles. Motorized police units, known as the "Vekehrspolizei" (traffic police), look after safety on the streets, roads and motorways, and can be identified by their white hats. Uniformed policemen patrolling city streets have a hat that is the same color as their uniform. Those policemen who are responsible for criminal offences, known as the "Kriminalpolizei" (criminal police), are usually dressed in plain clothes, and show their identification only when necessary. Many of the German police personnel speak English and are approachable and easy

to find in busy areas like airports and train stations. The number 110 can be used to contact the police throughout Germany.

Car accidents

If you or someone else has an accident or a serious breakdown on the German motorway, you can use one of the special orange telephones that are set every 2 kilometers along the shoulder of the road. These telephones contact an operator who will inform the appropriate emergency services. The emergency numbers 110 and 112 can be accessed by every telephone, including mobile phones, free of charge.

German automobile clubs

If you are staying in Germany for a longer period of time, membership in a German automobile club has several advantages. The largest automobile club in Germany is the ADAC (Allgemeine Deutsche Automobil-Club: www.adac.de). This organization offers information in English, sells insurance, publishes detailed maps and provides emergency roadside assistance. Most cities have an ADAC office. In addition, the ADAC has partnership agreements with some foreign automobile clubs, including AAA in the United States (www.AAA.com).

Lost and stolen property

Thefts and burglaries must be reported immediately to the criminal police (www.polizei.de). If an insurance claim is to be made, a certificate must be obtained to show that the stolen property has been reported.

If you have lost a valuable item, try contacting the city's "Fundgrube" (Lost and Found). These exist in every German city and are often in the city hall or "Rathaus". See www.fundbuero24.de.

The German Railway has its own lost property office known as the "Fundbüro der Deutschen Bahn AG". The same applies for most airports.

List of Emergency Numbers

Emergency or Illness

- Fire Department and Ambulance: ☎ 112
- Police: ☎ 110
- Emergency Doctor/ Ambulance: ☎ 19222
- Airborne Rescue
(Deutsche Rettungsflugwacht): ☎ (0711) 70 10 70
- Emergency Poison Hotline: ☎ (0761) 192 40
- Fundbüro der Deutschen Bahn AG
(German Railroad Lost and Found): ☎ (01805) 99 05 99
- Zentrales Fundbüro Berlin
(Central Lost and Found of Berlin): ☎ (030) 69 95

Lost Credit Cards

- Central number for all bank cards (EC), credit cards and cellular phones (with a German contract): ☎ 116116
(toll free within Germany); from abroad: ☎ 0049/116116
- American Express: ☎ (069) 97 97 10 00
- Diner's Club: ☎ (05921) 86 12 34
- Euro-MasterCard: ☎ (069) 79 33 19 10
- VISA: ☎ (0800) 81 49 100

German Automobile Clubs offering roadside assistance

- ADAC (Allg. Deutsche Automobile Club): ☎ (089) 76760
- AvD (Automobilclub von Deutschland): ☎ (069) 66060

Useful Telephone Numbers

- Directory enquiries, national numbers: ☎ 11842 or 11833
- Directory enquiries, international numbers: ☎ 11834

Embassies

Embassies and consulates can provide a number of useful services for their citizens while they are traveling or living abroad.

If your passport is lost or stolen, officials in a consulate can issue you a replacement. The consulate will also renew passports, help you obtain legal advice, hire a translator if necessary, and assist you in contacting your family. If you think that your passport has been stolen, report it to the local police and obtain a police declaration. It is recommended that you make a copy of your passport and other important papers and keep them in a safe place to expedite replacement of lost or stolen documents.

Should you lose all of your money and other financial resources, consular officers can help you contact a bank, employer, or family member and arrange for them to send you funds. In extreme circumstances, they may be able to arrange for financial loans to finance the purchase of a ticket home.

A list of foreign embassies in Germany and of German representatives abroad can be found at www.auswaertiges-amt.de.

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