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Driver's License Information for US Citizens in Germany

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Driver's License Information

Livia Fischer

Manager, Government Relations

Charlottenstr. 42

10117 Berlin

E lfischer@amcham.de

Katrin Utzinger

Manager, Business Services

Börsenplatz 7-11

60313 Frankfurt/M

E kutzinger@amcham.de

www.amcham.de

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Introduction

As a US citizen, there are a few things that must be taken into consideration if you want to drive in Germany. The requirements depend on how long you will be staying in Germany. This brochure provides you with an overview of the procedures.

Please note: Driver's licenses must be valid for a minimum of six months after entering Germany. US driver's licenses that have been issued or renewed after the holders' original entry into Germany will not be accepted by German authorities for conversion, regardless of state of issue.

The German Government makes this exemption to close the loophole of US license holders applying for a license in a state with a reciprocity agreement for the sole purpose of converting it to a German driver's license. To ensure you do not have this problem, make sure your license is valid for a minimum of six months after your planned entry and, if necessary, renew your license before you travel to Germany.

1. Is my US Driver's License valid in Germany?

If you are in Germany for less than six months (e.g. as a tourist), you do not need to register to legally drive in Germany. However, if you live in Germany as a registered resident, you are required to obtain a German driver's license within a six-month period beginning with the date of your residency registration in order to legally drive in Germany.

1.1 Living in Germany between 6 and 12 months

US driver's license holders planning to stay in Germany for less than one year can avoid obtaining a German driver's license and continue driving using their US license. To do this, you must go to your local driver's registration office (Führerscheinstelle) prior to expiration of the six-month period after registration and notify that office that you want to continue to drive with your US license until departure.

You will usually need:

- an official translation of your US driver's license (to avoid possible problems regarding the "official status" of a translation, it is easier to use the German ADAC's translation service for a small fee)
- proof that you will leave Germany before a year has passed (proof of your intent to leave Germany can take the form of a return ticket to the US, a work contract with an expiration date before a year, etc.)

1.2 Living in Germany longer than one year

If you register to live in Germany and want to legally drive six months after registration, you must obtain a German driver's license.

Please note: US-Driver's licenses must be valid for a minimum of six months after entering Germany. US driver's licences that have been issued or renewed after the holders' original entry into Germany will not be accepted by German authorities for conversion, regardless of state of issue.

The German Government makes this exemption to close the loophole of US license holders applying for a license in a state with a reciprocity agreement for the sole purpose of converting it to a German driver's license. To ensure you do not have this problem, make sure your license is valid for a minimum of six months after your planned entry and, if necessary, renew your license before you travel to Germany.

2. Acquiring a German Driver's License

2.1 Reciprocity Agreements by State

The German government, in conjunction with the German Länder, has concluded reciprocity agreements with a number of US states. Depending on the kind of agreement, holders of a US driver's license from these states can be exempted from the practical test (behind-the-wheel) or both the practical and theoretical (written) tests for obtaining a German driver's license.

The US states which have concluded full or partial reciprocity agreements are listed below.

US State	Practical Test	Written Test
Alabama	exempt	exempt
Arizona	exempt	exempt
Arkansas	exempt	exempt
Colorado	exempt	exempt
Connecticut	exempt	

Delaware	exempt	exempt
Florida	exempt	
Idaho	exempt	exempt
Illinois	exempt	exempt
Indiana	exempt	
Iowa	exempt	exempt
Kansas	exempt	exempt
Kentucky	exempt	exempt
Louisiana	exempt	exempt
Maryland	exempt	exempt
Massachusetts	exempt	exempt
Michigan	exempt	exempt
Minnesota	exempt	
Mississippi	exempt	
Missouri	exempt	
Nebraska	exempt	
New Mexico	exempt	exempt
North Carolina	exempt	
Ohio	exempt	exempt
Oklahoma	exempt	exempt
Oregon	exempt	
Pennsylvania	exempt	exempt
Puerto Rico	exempt	exempt
South Carolina	exempt	exempt
South Dakota	exempt	exempt

Tennessee	exempt	
Texas	exempt	exempt
Utah	exempt	exempt
Virginia	exempt	exempt
Washington DC	exempt	
Washington State	exempt	exempt
West Virginia	exempt	exempt
Wisconsin	exempt	exempt
Wyoming	exempt	exempt

2.2 Process to Acquire a German Driver's License (for US states with reciprocity agreement)

It is suggested that all applicants for a German driver's license first submit an application directly to the driver's license office (Führerscheinstelle) of their local municipality (Stadtverwaltung).

A few weeks after an application has been submitted, a notification will be sent to the applicant detailing the next steps in obtaining the driver's license. Because these local offices are often not aware which US states have agreements with Germany, the application can take some time to process. Applicants who wish to avoid making multiple trips to the Führerscheinstelle are best advised to take all of the documents with them (even if applicants are not always asked to have all of the documents listed below).

Documents to take to the local driver's registration office (Führerscheinstelle) usually include:

- an official identification document (passport);
- residency registration certificate (Meldebestätigung /Aufenthaltsgenehmigung) from registration office (Einwohnermeldeamt);
- original and copy of foreign driver's license;
- certified translation of driver's license (i.e. from ADAC drivers' association for a small fee; AmCham Germany and the US Embassy also provide a list of certified translators);

- a statement by the applicant that the license is still valid (not always required);
- one (biometric) passport photo (35mm x 45mm);
- if only partial reciprocity agreement exists: form "Fahrschulantrag 'Umschreibung'" (proof of registration at driving school; required in some German states only).

A fee will be charged and must usually be paid with cash.

License holders from states with partial reciprocity (those exempt from the practical test) should also approach their local Stadtverwaltung (Führerscheinstelle) to submit an application for a German license and to be registered for the written test. The test can be taken in English, costs approximately EUR 40,00 and includes a separate test of German license-related vocabulary.

You will need to have held your residence and license in that state for at least 185 days. Please visit the German Federal Ministry of Justice to review this law:

http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/fev_2010/_29.html

2.3 Process to Acquire a German Driver's License (for US states without reciprocity agreement)

If you come from a state for which no reciprocity agreement exists, you must take both the practical and theoretical tests. However, no driving lessons are required in advance. There are only four exceptions: If you live in the states of Hamburg, Hesse, Saxony-Anhalt, or Schleswig-Holstein, you are exempt from both tests if you meet certain conditions (cf. 2.4).

Documents to take to the local driver's registration office (Führerscheinstelle) usually include:

- those documents mentioned in the previous question including the form "Umschreibung";
- documentation of a recent eye test (which can be obtained at almost any optician);
- proof of completion of a first-aid course ("Sofortmaßnahmen am Unfallort"), e.g. from the local Red Cross chapter (Rotes Kreuz).

2.4 Simplified Procedures in Four German States

The four German states of Hamburg, Hesse, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein have departed from the principle of reciprocity and have introduced new regulations, permitting an unbureaucratic conversion of US driver's licenses.

American citizens, regardless of which US state they are from, can now apply for the automatic conversion of their US driver's license into a German driver's license if they meet certain conditions. Applicants are exempt from having to take any theoretical test and practical exam.

Please note that these simplified procedures are primarily directed at US investors in Germany. Applications are reviewed case by case. Applications by private individuals may not be granted by the responsible administration.

‣ **Hamburg (Entry into force: February 2003)**

Requirements: Applicants must

- live and work in the state of Hamburg for a limited period (not defined);
- have held their license for at least five years;
- not have a negative driving record (6 months driving in Germany without accident, no more than 7 points in the Central Register of Traffic Offenders (Verkehrszentralregister));
- have driven in the US in areas with traffic conditions comparable to those in Germany.

‣ **Hesse (Entry into force: June 2005)**

Requirements: Applicants must

- live in the state of Hesse;
- work at an American company or have their own business in Hesse;
- have held their license for at least five years;
- not be registered with points at the Central Register of Traffic Offenders (Verkehrszentralregister) in Flensburg for having seriously violated any traffic rule (such as having passed a red light);
- not have caused any accident in Germany.

‣ **Saxony-Anhalt (Entry into force: September 2005)**

Requirements: Applicants must

- live in the state of Saxony-Anhalt;
- work or have their own business in Saxony-Anhalt;
- have held their license for at least five years;
- not be registered with points at the Central Register of Traffic Offenders (Verkehrszentralregister) in Flensburg for having seriously violated any traffic rule (such as having passed a red light);
- not have caused any accident in Germany.

The regulation in Saxony-Anhalt equally applies to spouses and partners living in the same household, even if they do not work in Saxony-Anhalt, as long as they meet the remaining conditions.

› **Schleswig-Holstein (Entry into force: January 2006)**

Requirements: Applicants must

- live in the state of Schleswig-Holstein;
- work at an American company or have their own business in Schleswig-Holstein;
- have held their license for at least five years;
- not have previously failed any practical driving exam in Germany;
- not be registered with points at the Central Register of Traffic Offenders (Verkehrszentralregister) in Flensburg for having seriously violated any traffic rule (such as having passed a red light);
- not have caused any accident in Germany.

In all other German states, a US driver's license can only be converted into a German driver's license without a practical and/or theoretical exam if a reciprocity agreement between Germany and the issuing US state exists (see above).

3. German Driving School (Fahrschule)

If you are required to take either the written or both the written and practical test, you will eventually have to go to a driving school (Fahrschule). Often, applicants are even asked at the Führerscheinstelle to name which driving school they plan to attend.

In Germany, only a driving school can grant an applicant admission to take the final driver's license tests. This is different than in the United States, and there are no exceptions of which AmCham Germany is aware. For this reason, it is helpful to contact a driving school prior to going to the Führerscheinstelle.

Driving schools often recommend that applicants take a number of driving lessons before the official test in order to become acquainted with German driving rules. Total costs (without lessons) may average as much as EUR 500,00. This varies from school to school and it is best to shop around.

4. AmCham Germany's Position on Reciprocity Agreements

AmCham Germany continuously campaigns for additional US driver's license reciprocity agreements. First, we are encouraging US states without an agreement to initiate the process. Second, we are seeking the German government's assistance in finding a temporary solution until all US states have established reciprocity agreements.

The fact that a great number of American personnel working in Germany must obtain a German license by taking practical and/or written tests after being allowed to drive in Germany for up to six months seriously harms Germany's attractiveness as a great place to work and invest.

Not only would a temporary solution and, eventually, the conclusion of further reciprocity agreements improve Germany's reputation, these steps would assist German and American companies, operating in Germany, in recruiting the American personnel they need (researchers, computer programmers, etc).

5. About AmCham Germany

The American Chamber of Commerce in Germany e.V. (AmCham Germany) is a private, nonprofit business organization representing the interests of American and German companies engaged in transatlantic business in all economic sectors. AmCham Germany acts as the voice of American companies in Germany, which generate more than 650,000 jobs and over €130 billion in investments. In addition, AmCham Germany offers a range of services that connect companies worldwide and identify opportunities in the international market.

AmCham Germany was founded in 1903. Today, with nearly 3,000 members, AmCham Germany is the largest bilateral business association in Europe and has close contact to a global network of more than 110 AmChams. The organization's official domicile is in Berlin, where it maintains an office near the German Parliament (Bundestag). The executive office is located in Frankfurt am Main. Twelve regional committees offering various networking opportunities and services to members form the basis of AmCham Germany's regional representation.

For more information about AmCham Germany and its services, visit our website:
<http://www.amcham.de/services/overview/>



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The American Chamber of Commerce in Germany strives to enhance global economic and trade relations built on a strong foundation of American and German partnership. We actively promote our members' interests through business, policy and the AmCham global network. AmCham Germany enables cross-cultural understanding, cooperation and new investment through our commitment to transparent dialogue, unrestricted trade and a competitive and open business climate.

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