

**THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO
NOT REINVENTING THE WHEEL [or]
WHAT IT TOOK FOREVER FOR US TO FIGURE OUT**



**THINGS
I WISH I KNEW**

Third Edition



THINGS I WISH I KNEW

Moving to Europe often involves getting used to different ways of doing things.

This book was originally compiled by SOCEUR spouses, in the hope that you will never have to say, as so many of us have,

“Gosh, I wish I’d known that!”

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Compiled by the spouses of SOCEUR

Designed by Kirsten Carlson

2014 Updates made by

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe & Africa Family Readiness Officer

and

Motivated Marine Corps Spouses

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Willkommen in Deutschland!

It's good to know a few phrases in German. The following phrases will help you get started.

ENGLISH	GERMAN
Welcome	Willkommen
Hello	Hallo, Guten Tag
How are you?	Wie gehts?
I'm fine, thanks. And you?	Mir geht es gut, danke, und
What's your name?	Wie heißen Sie?
My name is ...	Ich heiße ...
Good morning	Guten Morgen
Good afternoon	Guten Tag
Good evening	Guten Abend
Good night	Gute Nacht
Goodbye	Auf Wiedersehen, Tschüss, Ciao, Bis bald, Bis später
Cheers/Good health	Prost!
Have a nice day	Schönen Tag noch!
Do you speak English?	Sprechen Sie Englisch?
Excuse me	Entschuldigung!
Thank you	Danke, Danke schön, Vielen
You're Welcome	Bitte, Bitte schön
Where is the toilet?	Wo ist die Toilette?

Everything about cars.....

DRIVING

1. Speed limits are 30 or 50 km per hour in cities and towns and 100 km on the highway unless otherwise marked; there is no speed limit on the Autobahn, except where marked (but a top speed of 130 km is recommended by the German authorities).
2. To convert kilometers to miles; drop the 0 and multiply by 6, e.g. 40 km equals 4x6 or roughly 24 miles.
3. Before pulling into the left lane to pass, check the rear view mirror very carefully as far back as you can see. Cars traveling at 160-180 km per hour approach suddenly, so when passing, do so quickly and then quickly return to the right lane. Some impatient drivers flash their headlights, use their blinker, and tailgate to pressure slower cars ahead into moving out of the way. These practices have been outlawed recently, and it is best to ignore this behavior if it is directed at you. (Within the city a driver may flash his lights at you as a signal that you may turn into the street or turn left across his lane of traffic, but do so with caution.)
4. Stay out of the left lane on the Autobahn unless you are passing; in Germany, the left lane is for passing only.
5. You can be fined for running out of gas on the Autobahn. Stop at the nearest Esso and fill up prior to entering the autobahn.
6. For those who ride bikes – if you do not have lights on your bike and they are not on half an hour after sunset, you will incur a 20 Euro fine. If you do not use the designated bike paths you will get a 35 Euro fine or if you ride your bike in a pedestrian zone, you will get a 30 Euro fine. If you ride your bike in the wrong direction of traffic you will get a 35 Euro fine.
7. In all European countries, if you get caught with more than 0.058 alcohol level – you can be charged with a DUI. In Germany, your license will be suspended for 90 days for BAC of .050 to .079. For a higher BAC, your license can be suspended indefinitely and pay a fine of up to 4500 euros.



TRAFFIC

1. Occasional frustration is a part of the driving experience; however, do not express your anger by “flipping the bird”, following too closely or flashing your high beams at someone – you can be ticketed for doing so, and the fines are very high.
2. “Stau” is one of the first German words you should learn. It means traffic jam.
3. Tune in to your radio for regular traffic reports (both AFN and local radio stations have them) and avoid the stau if possible. If you travel often with children, it’s a good idea to pack a snack bag and games to keep stored in the car for long stau’s.
4. Traffic cameras are very common in Germany, and not all of them are stationary. Some are mobile, and are moved place-to-place. You may or may not see the flash if you are photographed speeding, but you will get the ticket in the mail. Your fine must be paid in Euros, by wire transfer, which can be done at any bank, on or off-post. Slow down if you see the cars ahead of you slowing; it usually means a traffic camera, an accident or a stau.



CARSEATS

1. Your child will likely need a booster or car seat here until 12 years of age. If your child is under 12 and shorter than 150 centimeters (about 59 inches), he or she must be in a car seat or booster seat. If they are under 12 and 150 centimeters or taller, they must use a seat belt; no booster seats are allowed. If they are 12 or older, regardless of height, they must use a seat belt (no boosters).

2. The use of seat belts is mandatory both in the front and back seats. If your seat belts are not fastened and you are stopped, you can be fined 30 Euros, in case of an accident, you run the danger of invalidating your insurance. Children under the age of 12 are not permitted to ride in the front seat of the car and using a children's safety seat is mandatory for each child in the car. This could also cost you a fine of 30 Euros.

PARKING

1. When parking in a pay German parking lot or garage, you must take your ticket to a "Kasse" (Pay Here) machine (usually somewhere in the lot or at the entrance to the garage) and pay for parking before you try to drive out of the lot. If a store or restaurant validates parking (and this may not be full validation, only partial), you must get your ticket stamped, and still bring it to the Kasse to be stamped before you go to your car. The gate will not accept your ticket and open unless you have already paid or had the validation stamp scanned in the machine.

2. The blue parking disc that you receive for showing how long you have been parked in a parking space is not only for use in town. You are required to use it for many on-base parking areas as well, to include the Post Office and Commissary on Patch. When in doubt, put it out! If one forgets to use their "parking time" placard, the fines can be as much as 30 Euros – depending on how long over the time you are.

3. On-street parking usually requires payment as well. Look for the "Parkscheinlosen", a nearby metal box

mounted on a pole where you can purchase your ticket. You must buy a ticket (good only for a certain amount of time; stated on both the machine and ticket) and place it in the window of your vehicle before you go to dine, shop, etc. If you don't have one, or if it expires, you can be ticketed.

4. "Frei" in a parking garage does not mean free of charge, it means there are spaces available.



MORE TIPS

1. Owning a GPS is invaluable in Europe. You can buy one in the States before you PCS (it may be less expensive) and purchase the European map disks, if they are not included. Depending on the brand you choose, you may also be able to download maps online.

2. Talking on your cell phone while driving will get you a fine. You can be fined even if the car is stopped, but the engine is running. If you need to take or make a call, pull off the road and turn off your engine.



3. Always carry your stateside and USAREUR licenses, insurance card, and vehicle registration in your car at all times.

4. Ship your car EARLY and rent a vehicle in the States so that your vehicle is already here when you arrive. Renting a car is expensive (and you'll get a tin can) in Germany, plus the military does not reimburse you for this added expense.

5. If you purchase a used car here, especially from another military family who is PCS'ing, remember that many of these cars have German

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“specs” (specifications). If you are not sure, ask. Good indicators: speedometer in kilometers, gas gauge in liters. These cars cannot be taken back to the US without a conversion (usually expensive). If the car has US “specs”, you can take it back to the States.

6. Having roadside assistance while living in Europe is strongly encouraged. ADAC is the only roadside assistance plan in Europe. ADAC offers towing and breakdown/road service in almost any EU country and are authorized to assist on U.S. Installations.

7. You must keep your local address, not your CMR, in your car. It must be printed on an official document. If you live on-post you can ask ADAC to mail you your membership cards to your on-post German address. If you live on the economy, you can use any piece of mail that has your German address on it. You will need your official German address if you ever need to obtain a rental car through ADAC. They have an office in Breuningerland in Sindelfingen, and can also be found on the web at www.adac.de.

Around the house...

Just as with any military move, make sure you have an accurate list, photos or videos of your household goods, and receipts and appraisals for your valuables. Appraisals are important for full replacement value for damaged items, especially those you have had for some time; prices may have gone up significantly since you purchased them.

1. Many of the crew members who will be working your household goods delivery do not speak English (or German). There should be at least one crew member who does speak English, but he or she cannot be everywhere at once. To help facilitate getting everything to the right room, make a list of all the rooms in your new house, and assign a corresponding number to each. Tape a piece of paper with the right numbers on the door or doorframe of each room. As your goods come off of the truck, use a thick marker to mark each box with the correct room number (this is also a great job for your kids, if they are old enough). All your stuff will almost certainly make it to the right room!

2. You will have to decide for yourself what works best for your family when it comes to your 110V appliances and items such as grills and Christmas lights. Renovated on-post housing units do have 110 outlets in the kitchens and bathrooms, but off-post housing does not. Also, certain 110 appliances, when used with a transformer, either use more power than you may want to pay for, or will not work correctly (microwaves, for example) because of cycle differences. In some cases, buying German appliances can be more cost-effective in the long run.

3. Check the SCSC Thrift Shop on Patch Barracks before buying new German appliances or transformers; many people who are PCS'ing will consign or donate their German appliances before they leave, and you may find what you need at a very good price.

4. Whether living on-base or in town, you can plug your 110v lamps into 220v outlets without using a transformer. You will need only a plug adapter and European light bulbs (do not try to use American bulbs – they will blow up). If you use transformers, turn them off when not in use, as they pull a lot of power.

5. Stuttgart on-post housing has 110 voltage, so it is okay to bring your small American appliances and vacuum cleaners. Some, like the expensive stand mixers and other appliances that cycle (alarm clocks), may have trouble, but most work just fine.

6. Most German houses do not have air conditioning (nor does on-post housing). While most of the year here is fairly temperate, it does get hot for some weeks in the summer. Window A/C units and fans from the States will use a lot of electricity with a transformer (off-post) and window A/C units of any type are not allowed in on-post housing. German standing fans are your best bet, and fairly inexpensive to acquire. Check the SCSC Thrift Shop on Patch, or even near the housing dumpsters (many people just put them out for the taking when they PCS).

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7. If you live out in town, you can purchase heating oil through the Customer Service Desk at the Panzer Main Exchange. AAFES has a contract with a local company; the price does change daily. If you choose to use the program, fill out a form at the Customer Service Desk, pay for your oil and schedule your delivery. A 5% AAFES surcharge applies. You can also simply check the price and use it as a basis for comparison off-post.
8. US digital alarm clocks that are plug-in and not battery-operated will not keep correct time here, as the cycles are different. Advice: Purchase your alarm clock on the local economy.
9. Most German windows do not use curtain rods such as are common in the US (this is true for most on-post housing as well). Also, the walls in most German houses, as well as in on-post housing, are a cement type rather than dry wall construction. If you want to put up curtain rods, you may need permission from your landlord, as you will likely have to drill holes and use screw anchors to put them up. Doors and windows in homes on the economy generally do not have screens. They can be purchased at the PX Garden Center or local hardware store such as OBI.
10. Also for those of you who live on the economy: periodically get a signed "review" of your home from your landlord. When you PCS, a record of review will make it easier for you to get your deposit back, in the case of any dispute with your landlord as to the condition of your premises.
11. Please note that in writing money amounts, Europeans use a comma where we use a period and a period where we use a comma. For example, \$35.00 is €35,00. \$35,000 is €35.000. You do not want to make this mistake when paying your bills.
12. If you live on the economy, you may want to consider joining the German Renter's Club. For an annual fee, you are entitled to their lawyers' assistance with landlord/tenant disputes, and they can answer questions regarding your rights and responsibilities. Contact Mieterverein Sindelfingen, Untere Vorstadt 17, 71063 Sindelfingen. Tel: 0703-187-9544 or 0703-187-9661. Hours are Tuesday through Friday from 8:00am to Noon, and Thursday from 2-6pm.
13. Renter's vocabulary: your rent is the Miete; you are the Mieter, and your landlord is the Vermieter. Kaltmiete is your basic rent without additional charges. Warmmiete is the rent plus additional charges. Nebenkosten, or additional charges, could include a parking space, trash, insurance, etc. Be sure to check exactly what is included.
14. If you live on the economy and request them, the Housing Office will provide you with an American fridge/freezer (larger than the German ones) and a washer and dryer. You will receive either a German or an American washer/dryer, depending on the water exchange and venting capabilities in your home. The German washer heats the water inside, rather than piping in hot water. The German dryer is a condenser machine that pulls the water out rather than heating your clothes dry. Be careful to clean your lint filter and empty your water reservoir after each use or the dryer will stop working.

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15. The water in this area is quite hard, and calcium deposits build up very quickly. You should use an additive in your dishwasher along with your dishwasher soap tabs. "Somat" is the popular brand, and can be found in the commissary as well as locally. You can also add Calgon to your laundry to soften the water and prevent dark fabrics from fading.

16. Germany has fairly strict rules regarding what you can and can't do in your house or apartment. For example, you may not wash cars in front of your house on Sundays or holidays (or at all, in some areas). You may not mow your lawn, weed-whack or engage in any other loud activities on Sundays or holidays, or during posted "quiet hours". There also may be regulations as to whether and where you can install a satellite dish, and for storing items in and around your house such as bicycles, gas grills or mowers.

17. Depending on the town where you live, there may be regulations for on-street parking for residents and guests. You may need to apply for a resident parking pass (Anwohnerausweis) at the Rathaus. You will need to show proof of residency, such as your rental agreement or a utility bill, and your auto registration. Be sure the proof of residency is in German and contains your name and residence address.

ON POST – ACCOMPANIED PERSONNEL HOUSING (APH)

1. If housing is available and offered within 60 days of checking in, Certificate of Non-Availability will not be issued regardless of rank. On post housing is mandatory for E-4 and below. Most on post family housing is multi-family and is built to the 4th floor with apartments located on each side of the stairwell or wrapped around the stairwell in the case of 5 bedroom apartments. These buildings do not have elevator service. Single family homes are for key and essential personnel in grades O-6/CSM and above. There is no garage parking for on base stairwell housing. Storage units are very small.

2. Yard maintenance and beautification is a responsibility of the residents within 50 feet of the building. Cutting of grass, snow removal, tree and bush trimmings are performed by a contractor.

3. All on post APH housing has 110 voltage outlets; however, due to the electrical cycle differences, your appliances will run on a slower speed. There are also 220 voltage plugs in the house and it may be more cost effective to purchase those small items such as hair dryers, coffee makers, alarm clocks, etc.....at your local stores.

4. It is recommended not to bring BIG furniture; to include fitness and sporting equipment, due to space limitations. King size beds may not fit in all units. It is also recommended not to bring major appliances; those will be provided to you for the duration of your stay. Loaner furniture for every room can be provided up to 90 days while awaiting your household goods.

5. There are built in clothing closets in each unit but they are very small. Pantries and linen storage units are also built in.

6. All windows have mini-blinds. There are curtain tracks that are ceiling mounted. Your curtains may require adjustments to match the European standard.

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7. Each unit comes equipped with a refrigerator, washer and dryer, stove and dishwasher. No unit has a garbage disposal – not legal in Germany. Air conditioners are not provided and most times not needed in Germany due to the milder climate, however; one may purchase a floor unit locally.
8. There are grill pads provided for stairwell occupants. You may bring your charcoal/gas grill with you along with your patio furniture. It will need to remain outdoors year-round; wise to bring covering for those pieces.
9. Each stairwell unit has a building coordinator and that person will set up a schedule of when each occupant will be responsible for stairwell cleaning. Dumpsters are provided near each housing unit.

ON POST – UNACCOMPANIED PERSONNEL HOUSING (UPH)

Once you receive your orders for Stuttgart; they should be emailed to the Housing office in order to determine your eligibility for where you will reside.

Email address is: hsg.stuttgart@eur.army.mil

1. None of the units; Barracks or Single Soldier Housing (SEQ/BOQ) are equipped with 110 voltage outlets.
2. Each unit is fully furnished and is equipped with a central laundry facility.
3. Most of the information listed in the AFH section applies to the UPH section with minor exceptions. If you have questions, email the address mentioned above.

OFF POST HOUSING

German housing cannot be compared to American housing standards. Units are usually much smaller in size with less or no amenities that we take for granted (such as walk-in closets, light fixtures and in some cases there are no pre-installed kitchens).

1. When military personnel live off post, you could be authorized several types of allowances: Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) for rent, OHA for utilities, one-time payment for Miscellaneous Move in Housing Allowances (MIHA), and a MIHA Redecoration Fee. You will be briefed on those allowances in your housing in-brief.
2. For civilians you can receive Living Quarters Allowance for your rent and utilities; but that should all be coordinated with your Civilian Personnel Office representative.
3. A military person can't make money off of OHA like Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) in the states. Here you get only your rent/utilities covered. OHA calculator is at: <http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/ohaCalc.cfm>. The code for Stuttgart is DE055. Use the drop down menu for grade and dependent status.
4. You will utilize the program sponsored by the Department of Defense, Army Housing Referral Network (AHRN) to locate off post housing either for sale or for rent: <http://www.ahrn.com/>.
5. One may have to pay a yearly fee to have your heating system inspected along with the chimney sweep cleaning and possible window cleaning. Those are costs that could come out of pocket.

6. You could also be required to pay for repairs that cost less than 200 Euros per year. You could be expected to take turns at cleaning the common stairwell, entrance, and outside areas or be expected to pay for someone to do those chores.
7. There are two types of rent in Germany: cold (Kaltmiete) rent – that's the base rent, and warm (Warmmiete) rent – that's rent plus utilities. Utilities included could be water, sewage, gas, taxes, heat, oil or trash. Parking may be an additional cost. Beware, many off post housing is still heated with oil which is very expensive in Germany and your utilities allowance may not cover the entire cost.
8. Some off post multi-storied apartment buildings do not have elevators nor garages. Some apartments do have underground garage parking.
9. You may not let your car idle longer than one minute, even in the winter.
10. If one rents a single family home or duplex/row house, they will be expected to remove snow/ice and salt the sidewalks and driveways. It is advisable to get "renters insurance" once your residence contract is finalized. In Germany, if someone slips and falls and is injured, you could be held liable.
11. Many off post housing units have smaller kitchens than US standards. This could help in your decision on how much kitchenware you bring. Many newly built homes and apartments are larger in size – larger bedrooms, larger kitchens, and are built with an open style concept.
12. Most homes have "rolladens" which is a form of blinds that covers your windows from the outside. These help your home maintain coolness and warmth. For the inside, you can install curtains/drapes.
13. Wardrobes are issued based on size of family. Most German housing does not have any type of built in closets and you may have to purchase locally if you do not have enough.

General Information:

1. Recycling in Germany is mandatory. Plan on buying different trash cans for paper, plastic, and normal trash. Off post living will provide you with a green trash can for bio-degradable items, blue one for paper and a black one for normal trash. Glass and plastic bottles is usually brought back to the store where purchased. Large items can be put outside the apartments on announced schedules. There are large recycling facilities off post for anyone to take large items.
2. In many cases, on or off post, you will find that you don't have enough outlets to plug in your appliances. One can obtain a remote controlled 220v power strip that will make it easier to turn off your electrical appliances when not in use.
3. Should you bring your 110 volt appliances that are not dual voltage, you will have to purchase a transformer. This does not guarantee it will run on the correct speed because of the cycle differences. A transformer eats up a lot of electricity.

4. Some of your appliances can work with an adapter plug if it is dual voltage. They can be plugged directly into the wall.
5. Should you bring over items with the hopes that it will fit into your home and find that it does not, there are limited off-post storage units in various sizes for a monthly fee.
6. Whether you live on-post or off-post, opening your windows for at least 15 minutes a day will help reduce mold and mildew issues.
7. A good tip is to avoid bringing any LARGE furniture and appliances, regardless of where you live.

Online Resources

Always look at the Stuttgart community Web-site <http://www.stuttgart.army.mil> for updates in your Relocation Assistance Program – Arrival section.

Get a sneak preview on what you can obtain once you get online at Stuttgart's Yard Sales at <http://stuttgart.bookoo.com>.

Communication: computers, phones & mail

CELL PHONES

1. Calls to a cell phone from a landline can be extremely expensive. Also, if you have teens who like to call and text frequently, they may be better off with a cell phone that uses a limited Euro card. If you do choose to have a contract, for yourself only or for multiple family members, read the fine print carefully to make sure that the fees are what you consider reasonable. There may be a requirement for auto-debit bill payment.
2. Most "smart" phones and iPhones have apps that allow customers to have a U.S phone number that will allow for texting and calling long distance that are free of charge. You will use data service, so make sure you know how much you're getting per month. If you use a wireless router at home or are in the vicinity of wi-fi, you can use the wi-fi signal instead of your data service. Two popular and easy to use apps are "Pinger" and "Whatsapp". "Skype" is also a good option to use for video chatting. "Skype" also offers a phone number, but there is a set monthly fee involved.
3. As difficult as it may sound, cell phone service may be best kept until arrival in Stuttgart, just make sure your CONUS service provider offers a decent international plan. Most carriers will suspend your service if you are in a contract away from the U.S. They may request a copy of your orders and a small fee could be charged. It may be worthwhile to pay the fee to break the contract rather than suspending the service and paying a monthly fee.

COMPUTERS

1. Computers are available for anyone's use at the USO in Building 2915 on Panzer Kaserne and at the library on Patch Barracks. The USO will print the first five pages free; there is a cost of 10 cents per page thereafter.
2. The library charges a small fee for printing as well. The USO also has a public use fax machine; the first five pages are again free, and there is a \$1.00 per page charge for additional pages.
3. If your computer is dual voltage, you can plug it into both 220v and 110v; the latter requires a plug adapter for 220v sockets. You will likely have to flip a switch (from 110v to 220v) on your computer before you turn it on. Do NOT forget to check this before powering up; otherwise, you can instantly fry your computer.

LAND LINES

When moving in to either on- or off-post housing, try to get the previous tenant's phone number to pass on to your phone company; your phone hook-up will go much faster.

A Vonage phone for use during your time here can be very cost effective. It must be registered to a US address (think family member or friend). You are issued a US phone # which people in the States can dial as they would any stateside number. It costs approximately \$30.00 a month to call back and forth to the US, and for an additional \$6.00 a month you can call most of Europe. Please note that you do need high-speed Internet to use this service (it hooks up through your computer). Also note that if you have a lot of problems with your computer service where you live, Vonage may not work for you.

Unlike in the States, in Germany you are charged for each and every call you make, whether it is to your next-door neighbor, another state or another country. Your home phone is "Festnetz" in German.

Here is a brief rundown of how the German billing system works for those of you who have TKS, Telekom or another German telephone/internet provider: when you receive a bill, you have two weeks from the date on the bill to pay in full. Should you not pay within that time frame, they will issue a Past Due Notice; you will have six days to pay. If you have not paid after a total of 20 days from the date on the bill, the company will automatically cut off your service until the bill is paid; service is restored but at the discretion and scheduling of the company.

USPS

If you have to mail a letter to a German address (a bill, or a ticket, for example), you do not have to go downtown to get a German stamp. As long as your return address is your CMR, with box number and APO, you can get a regular US first class stamp and mail it at an APO or in a US mailbox on any base.

Post Offices: location, days and hours of normal operations.

- Kelley Barracks, Bldg. 3312, Wed. and Fri., 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Panzer Kaserne, Bldg. 2915, Mon. and Wed., 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Patch Barracks, Bldg. 2325, Tue. and Thu., 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Robinson Barracks, Bldg. 169, Tue. and Thu, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Mail rooms - CMRs

- Kelley Barracks, CMR 423/489, Bldg. 3312, Mon.-Fri, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. and 3:30 - 6 p.m.
- Panzer Kaserne, CMR 445, Bldg. 2953, Mon.-Fri, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. and 3:30 - 6 p.m.
- Patch Barracks, CMR 480, Bldg. 2325, Mon.-Fri., 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. and 3:30 - 6 p.m.
- Robinson Barracks, CMR 447, Bldg.196, Mon. to Fri., 2:30 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Shipping to and from the States can be expensive and time consuming. Christmas packages nearly always need to be mailed a week or two before Thanksgiving. The Post Office publishes a “Mail By” guide every year with the dates by which packages must be mailed to get to the US for Christmas. Also, consider shipping time when ordering gifts that you want to have here before the holidays. For gifts to Stateside family and friends, consider ordering online and shipping directly to the recipient; it could save you time and money.

\$\$ Shopping \$\$

1. If you go to a German grocery, the Exchange, commissary or other store that uses shopping carts, you must put a 1 Euro or a U.S. quarter coin in the handle to unlock the cart for use. You get the coin back when you return the cart and lock it in with the rest.
2. Always carry Euros! Germany is essentially a cash economy. Many German grocery stores, smaller stores, bars and restaurants do not take credit cards. You must pay in Euros or with a German EC (Electronic Cash) card, which you receive only if you open an account with a German bank. You may also apply for a “Girocard” at Service Credit Union that is the same as using the German EC. There is a small fee for the card, but worth it when you are shopping on the economy, Visa or MasterCard is not accepted, and you’re not near an ATM to take out Euro.
3. Grocery stores and some retail stores do not offer free shopping bags. Invest in a few good bags to keep in your car.
4. Most towns have at least a weekly open-air market from spring until fall; some are year-round. Fresh vegetables, flowers, meat, cheese, wine and other local specialties are only some of what is available. See the end of this section for a list of markets.
5. Keep a VAT (Value Added Tax) form in your glove box, even if you are not intending to go shopping that day. It will save you the 19% tax, and you never know when you might find that great piece you’ve been looking for! For more information about the VAT program, go to <http://stuttgart.armymwr.com/europe/stuttgart/programs/vat>

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6. You may use any German bank Geldautomat (ATM/ "green machine") that takes your ATM card to get Euros. Exchange rates are not created equal; German banks typically offer an exchange rate that is slightly better than what you get at an American bank. If you are making a big purchase or if you pay your monthly bills in Euros, using the green machines may save you some money.
7. European bedding is sized differently than bedding in the U.S. You may want to bring extra pillows and linens for all your beds, especially if you have a preference as to brand, thread count, etc. The selection at most PX's is limited, and you may or may not be able to order what you want online.
8. Do not throw plastic or glass bottles away (sodas, juices, yogurts, beer bottles, etc) as you can turn many of them in to grocery stores (look for the automated machines) to get money back to spend in the store! Some people will even look through American dumpsters and collect returnable bottles (look for the word PFAND on the label). Pfand = cash for you! Most stores automated machines will kick out a voucher you can use when you make your purchases and take that amount off your purchases. Instant savings!
9. Typical store hours in Germany are not like those in the States. For anyone used to the 24/7 American shopping ideal, this may come as a shock. Stores are usually open from 8:00 or 9:00 am, and close at 6:00 pm. Many smaller stores close for lunch, and on Saturday, many close between 2:00 and 4:00 pm. Stores are not open on Sunday.
10. You may want to visit your Uniform Shop stateside before coming to Germany. AAFES Clothing Sales has a very limited selection of items for services other than Army. The store also does not do special orders; you must do them yourself, by phone or online, and should factor in shipping time. You may also want to stock up if your Uniform Shop/Clothing Sales store is available somewhere you are TDY/TAD. The Marine Corps Ball is a great event to attend so make uniform preparations sooner than later.
11. Online shopping can be a great way to get things that are hard to find and/or expensive in Europe; however, check shipping and handling costs before you order. Also, make sure the company ships to APO addresses before filling your "cart"; most do, but there are some that don't. There are also shipping restrictions such as lithium batteries.
12. Shopping for sport shoes, socks, shin guards or other sports equipment your child needs may be limited at the Exchange. The local stores have a selection of sports items, and you may find inexpensive soccer and other sports shoes if you shop around. You also may want to consider ordering online if there is a specific brand or size you need. Whatever you decide to do, we suggest that you do not wait until the last minute to purchase your child's sports supplies.
13. The Exchange has a limited supply and selection of Halloween costumes. Check on the Internet and order as early as September. You can also pick up costumes in the local stores during Fasching season in February (German equivalent to Carnival or Mardi Gras).
14. If your child has his or her heart set on a particular themed birthday party, the supplies may not be available here. This is another thing you may want to order online, and early.
15. There is a Flohmarkt, or flea market, every Saturday morning at the Karlsplatz in downtown Stuttgart. You can take the train to the Stuttgart Hauptbahnhof, then walk up through the pedestrian zone.

16. Food and drink in Germany can differ from the US/UK and other countries. Here are a few miscellaneous points to consider:

- Smaller restaurants sometimes don't have much for vegetarians.
- Groups of diners will usually receive their orders individually when the food is ready, rather than all together.
- In a bar, beer will be served at your table and you usually pay the waiter/waitress when you leave (or when they leave).
- Mineral water is usually carbonated ("mit Kohlensäure") and still water ("ohne Kohlensäure/stilles Wasser") usually has to be specified.
- If you ask for tea (the drink) you'll probably get fruit tea. Ask for "schwarzen Tee" (black tea) for normal tea but have a backup plan as smaller cafes may not have any.
- "Milch" (milk) for drinks is usually condensed/evaporated milk. Ask for "frische Milch" for normal milk.
- Many fruit juices are packed with multi-vitamins, giving them a cloudy/opaque appearance and a somewhat silty texture.
- If you ask for coffee, it will usually come with milk already in it. Ask for "schwarzen Kaffee" for black coffee.
- Grocery stores can often be found in the basement level of department stores.

Transportation: Local Travel

Transportation: Trains, Buses & Cabs (local travel)

1. Do not try to use public transportation without a ticket. The ticket checkers are hard to spot, and it will cost you an immediate fine. Remember that all tickets need to be punched before you ride, both going and returning. Look for the orange boxes near the escalators or on the platform.
2. When purchasing a ticket for the U-Bahn or S-Bahn from the automatic ticket machines, look for the little country flags on the screen before you start and press the button next to the British flag. The screens will display in English
3. On the U-Bahn and the buses, stamping machines are available inside the cars, while on the S-Bahn they are located at the entrances of the stations and there is no possibility to stamp once you are on the train. (If you do forget to stamp your ticket in the S-Bahn, either get out at the next station, stamp and wait for the following train, or write the current time and location on the stamping field with a non-erasable pencil – this will also be accepted by the inspectors most of the time.)
4. It is legal to bring your dog or cat on German trains, but make sure that your pet doesn't get nervous in crowds. The trains are generally very full during morning and evening rush hours.

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5. The website for the German train system (within and outside of Germany) is www.dbahn.de. The one for the Stuttgart regional train and bus is www.vvs.de. Both have English pages, and you can book tickets online or check schedules.

6. Taxi cabs can be an inexpensive way to travel when traveling in groups.

- If you need a taxi to pick you up or drop you off at Kelley Barracks, Patch Barracks, Robinson Barracks or Stuttgart Army Airfield, call **Neckar Taxi** : 0711- 8888-8888
- If you want a taxi to pick you up/drop you off to or from Patch Barracks or Panzer Kaserne, call **Taxi Zentrale Boeblingen**: 07031-19410

7. When calling either company tell them:

- You need a taxi driver “WITH A U.S. INSTALLATION PASS” (Make this clear several times; this is critical. This is the “keyword”; if the driver does not have a pass, he will not be allowed on post.)
- Specify your pick-up point (Just saying Patch is not enough – clearly indicate Patch Barracks, Kelley Barracks, etc, and give a building number.)
- Give them your full name
- Give them your phone number (Cell phone preferred)
- Specify the time of pick-up (Preferably in advance, especially if you need to go or come from the airport)
- Specify number of passengers (**see note)
- Specify Destination

** NOTE: If you are traveling to the airport, report the total number of luggage, or if you have a child stroller - this will determine the vehicle size. If you have infants, you will need to bring your own child’s car “carrier” safety seat.

Administrative notes - All taxis (100%) will be searched upon arrival at the installation Access Control Point (ACP) at any installation, even with US ID cardholders as passengers. - Taxi drivers without installation passes CAN NOT be signed in to any USAG Stuttgart installation.

**PLEASE PAY YOUR TAXI DRIVER IN EURO’S – THEY DO NOT TAKE DOLLARS OR CREDIT CARDS

Travel and Fun Things To Do

1. If you're looking for local or seasonal events that will take you out and about, then the Community Relations webpage, <http://www.stuttgart.army.mil/PAO/Comrel.html> is a good place to start.

On this web-site you will find information regarding annual festivals, traditional foods and activities. In addition, you'll find links to nature events and activities in the Baden-Württemberg region, Stuttgart and a listing of markets. You will also find a 14 page bucket list of "must see" places, compiled by local Stuttgart service members and civilians.

2. On the web site "BUZZ OFF BASE" you can look at upcoming festivals, events, entertainment, and travel advice located off base in your area. Much of the information and advice is provided by military stationed in the area. <http://www.buzzoffbase.com/>

3. For German news in English, search for web-sites such as The Local, <http://www.thelocal.de/> and Spiegel International, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/>

4. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas in Germany without the Weihnachtsmarkt or Christkindlmarkt (Christmas Markets). The ultimate website is <http://www.weihnachtsmarkt.german-christmas.com/>

Now that you know where to find everything, how do you get there?

Airfare can be really cheap if you know what you're looking for. The following information is provided as tips and suggestions from thrift travelers. This information is not an endorsement for business.

Ryanair - <http://www.ryanair.com/site/EN/>

German Wings- <http://www.germanwings.com/index.en.shtml>

Tui Fly- <http://www.tuifly.com/de/index.html>

Lufthansa- <http://www.lufthansa.com/>

Space A Travel – Ramstein is Europe's biggest cargo and passenger hub for the USAF

<http://www.globemaster.de/links/Government/Space-A/Facilities/AFD-060328-001.pdf>

What to look out for when booking travel?

Extra hidden costs

Credit card fee

Transportation

Location of Hubs / Parking

Luggage prices

Cattle Call / Get the Priority Boarding Pass

Length of Trip / Age which children are charged adult price

Accommodations

Europe has some amazing and unique places to stay during your travels. The following links are suggestions for making the most of your time, money and travel experience.

Armed Forces Vacation Club, <http://www.afvclub.com/>

B&B, <http://www.bedandbreakfast.com/europe.html>

Hotels, <http://www.ratestogo.com/> , <http://www.europeanhoteldirectory.com/> , or <http://en.venere.com/?ref=38007>

Stay on a working Farm in Germany (bauernhof or bauernhofe),

Nice website with Links- <http://www.bensbauernhof.com/farms.html>

Castles - www.german-castles.biz

World By Websites, <http://www.worldby.com/>

More Great Web Sites:

Trip Advisor- <http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g4-Europe-Vacations.html>

Virtual Tourist- <http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/TravelGuide-Europe.html>

Rick Steves- <http://www.ricksteves.com/>

Frommers- <http://www.frommers.com/>

Lonely Planet- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>

Holiday Watch Dog- <http://www.holidaywatchdog.com/>

What to look out for?

Extra hidden costs

Credit card fee

Available parking

Parking rates

City taxes

Cheaper to pre-pay for breakfast during reservation

Age which children are charged adult price

Number of Beds. For example: the room may accommodate four people but there are only two twin beds and one pull out sofa

Pets in Germany

Dogs are generally welcomed everywhere in Germany, to include most hotels, stores, restaurants and bars (you cannot, however, take a dog into a German grocery store). It is always best to call in advance if you are not sure of the policy.

Pet passports are not difficult to obtain, and are a must if you intend to take your pet to European Union countries other than Germany. You can get the passports through any German veterinary office. The passport is not valid, however, for taking your pet back to the United States; guidelines for stateside travel can be obtained from the Vet Clinic on Panzer Kaserne.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS WHEN BRINGING PETS TO AND FROM STUTTGART

Below are some key points you should know before you plan your trip and if you follow this information, then bringing in your pet will be a much smoother transition.

1. Summer months are always difficult months for traveling with pets. The current embargo dates are usually enforced from May through September but that can always change depending on location and weather. Today you may get a flight out with your pet, but it could change due to weather and aircraft limitations. The pet owner is responsible for always following up with the airlines.
2. One must always follow ALL the rules from your stateside or military installation veterinarian for transporting your pet.

Direct Flights into Stuttgart

1. There are two U.S.-flag carriers that fly directly into Stuttgart; United Airlines from Newark, New Jersey and Delta Airlines from Atlanta, Georgia.
2. Delta Airlines DOES NOT allow pets to fly in the cargo hold for flights into Stuttgart. Passengers in Economy section can bring small dogs or cats with them as long as the pet can fit under the seat. Delta has a limit of two pets total for the flight; thus it is imperative that you make your reservation as soon as possible. No other types of pets are allowed.
3. United Airlines DOES ALLOW pets to fly into Stuttgart for military personnel on PCS orders. See their website for further information: <http://www.united.com/web/en-US/content/travel/animals/default.aspx>.
4. Should you fly into Stuttgart with a pet; German Customs authorities will determine if a veterinarian is needed to examine your pet. The veterinarian is not on site and has to be called in. There will be charge of approximately 100 Euros for that service and payment must be made in cash. Expect a three to five hour wait for the veterinarian to arrive; even longer waits on weekends.

****Pets are not allowed to fly out of Stuttgart back to Newark-CONUS****

Flying into other Airports

If you are flying into another airport (e.g.: Frankfurt, Paris, Amsterdam) with a pet; these airports have veterinarians on duty. Again, there will be charge for the pet examination.

THINGS I WISH I KNEW

During summer months, some pets will not be allowed to be checked in as “luggage” if the climate is in excess of 85 degrees Fahrenheit (temperature restriction is at the discretion of the airline). Every airline has different rules – make sure you check into that before departure.

Patriot Express and Space-A Flights into Ramstein AFB

1. The Patriot Express is a DOD chartered air travel that transitions between Baltimore/Washington International Airport (BWI) and Ramstein Air Base. It is the preferred method, and your first option, of travel for US military and government civilians, inbound or outbound and is open to incoming military personnel, their family members and DOD civilians.
2. Benefits to using them are that you not only have a higher luggage weight allowance but you save on pet travel costs. There is a two pet per family limit.
3. Only PCS status passengers may request pet shipment. Pets cannot be shipped by personnel in a leave or TDY/TAD status. Sponsor(s)/ dependent(s) must accompany the pet to the final destination. Pets are defined as dogs and cats only. The maximum weight (kennel and pet) cannot exceed 150lbs. Waivers will not be issued for weight or type of pets.
4. Further info can be found at: <http://www.ramstein.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=5029>

Pet Embargo—Most airlines have a pet embargo of 15 May to 15 September unless on PCS orders. Again, make sure you check with the appropriate airline for further details and restrictions.

Planning Ahead

If you are unable to get your pet out of Stuttgart, SATO can book your flight out of Frankfurt or Munchen in order to facilitate pet travel for your personal move. Contact Ms. Bebbler at SATO to get better clarification at DSN 430-2106/2107 or Civ: 0711-680- 2106/2107. You may also want to consider other pet shipping companies such as Air Animal, Pet Air Carrier, UShip, International Pet Movers any many other choices.

Always keep in mind that this information is always subject to change. Constantly check with the airlines, your sponsor and veterinarian prior to arranging your travel to or from Stuttgart. Get all the necessary advice on preparing your pet for shipment.

Everything is possible and the team in Stuttgart is here to help.

Check out these other links that could also provide you with more information or ask your sponsor.

<http://www.chppmeur.healthcare.hqusareur.army.mil/sites/vet/phcd-ne/stuttgart.aspx>

THINGS I WISH I KNEW

THINGS I WISH I KNEW