



Alexander von Humboldt  
Stiftung/Foundation

# Practical Hints for Your Stay in Germany

---

## **Table of contents**

1. Foreword
2. Preparations at home
3. The first few days in Germany
4. Finding accommodation
5. Kindergarten and school
6. Health insurance and medical care
7. Public transport
8. Your car
9. Post and telephone
10. Hotels and restaurants
11. Culture and leisure
12. Shopping
13. Contact with the Germans
14. Appendix

### **1. Foreword**

Many of you have frequently visited other countries, either as scholars or as tourists. Some of you have spent lengthy periods abroad. But, for many of you, your forthcoming stay in Germany will be your first experience of another country and of a foreign culture.

However, you will all be confronted with new and unaccustomed situations during the first few days. Many things are unfamiliar, not only the language. The simplest of needs, such as making a telephone call or taking a bus, can be complicated procedures. You don't know your way around yet but there are important matters to attend to, examples being finding accommodation and dealing with bureaucratic formalities.

This brochure is intended to help you find your way around, not only in the first few days but also throughout the rest of your stay. However, in some situations, good advice will not be enough. You will also need imagination and patience, humour and tolerance. But please don't be discouraged! We hope you will swiftly succeed in adjusting and settling in and that you will soon feel at home in both your new place of residence and your new research centre. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have "insoluble" problems.

Bonn-Bad Godesberg, October 2002

## 2. Preparations at home

Obviously, you cannot think of everything in advance. But you will find it easier to deal with difficulties later if you make some preparations before leaving home.

These include studying our brochures "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows" and "Practical Hints for your Stay in Germany" very carefully. These contain a wealth of useful advice and answers. Many research fellows before you have made preparations for a similar stay and the Humboldt Foundation has drawn on their experience in compiling this brochure.

### 2.1 Important papers and documents

You need the following documents before entering Germany (*please also see Chapter III. 1 and 2 of the brochure "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows" containing the currently valid regulations*):

- a passport or equivalent identity document valid for the whole duration of your stay in Germany;
- a visa for you and family members accompanying you. You should apply for visas as soon as possible – in contrast to documents for you yourself, which are often issued quickly, there may be delays in the issue of residence permits for accompanying family members. Some countries (e.g. member-countries of the EU and the USA) are exempt from this requirement;
- confirmation from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation that you have been awarded a research fellowship;
- several passport-size photographs for the various documents you will require during your stay;
- birth certificate(s), marriage certificate, if applicable, with German translation if possible;
- officially-certified copies of your doctoral degree, and of insurance documents with German or English translations, if possible;
- if appropriate, confirmation from your health insurance that you are also covered in Germany (Please remember that, in order to get a residence permit, you have to have valid health insurance cover for yourself and your family **from the first day** you arrive in Germany. If your health insurance at home is not valid abroad you will have to take out a health insurance policy **before you travel** which is valid in Germany for the entire duration of your stay!);
- if applicable, a statement detailing particular or previous diseases (possibly recent X-ray photographs) and medication currently needed;
  - your vaccination certificate, if possible, an international one.
  -

To avoid difficulties communicating with German physicians and problems involving health insurance, you should undergo any necessary prophylactic check-ups and have special medication prescribed in your home country prior to your departure.

If you intend to drive a car during your stay in Germany (*cf. Chapter 8*), you should bring the following documents with you:

- an international driving licence or foreign national driving licence;
- an international "green" insurance card confirming third-party insurance coverage in Germany (if you plan to bring your car to Germany);

- a no-claims certificate from your automobile insurance company. (This will qualify you for a rebate if you intend to take out third-party car insurance in Germany.)

## **2.2 Linguistic proficiency**

Language is the key to a country's culture. And even if communication in English is no problem at research institutes, the stay in Germany is not all work but also everyday life and leisure. After their stay is over, nearly all research fellows emphasize that knowledge of German contributes significantly to integrating, especially the family, into everyday life and making the stay a richer experience. It is very helpful to get a basic knowledge of German before the stay and at least grapple with the fundamentals of the language (script, grammar, etc.).

Research fellows and their spouses accompanying them with little previous knowledge of German, can either attend an intensive language course prior to the research visit or evening language courses during the first half of their fellowship, sponsored by the Humboldt Foundation. Details can be found in the brochure "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows". Research fellows are strongly recommended to participate in intensive courses as experience shows that they can spend more time practising the language and, on top of this, get to know other people in the same situation to whom they can talk about initial difficulties and turn to for mutual support if problems occur.

If the level of the course does not accord with your knowledge of the language do not hesitate to try and change courses immediately. At the beginning of teaching it is not usually a problem to change to a different level, whereas it can be difficult to catch up with another group once a certain teaching unit has come to an end. In scientific subjects, in particular, knowledge of specialized German vocabulary can facilitate communication with technicians, laboratory staff, and assistants. Thus, at the beginning of the stay at the host institute it might be helpful to attend seminars and lectures in German or to get together with a German colleague in order to learn this special vocabulary.

## **2.3 Contacts with hosts**

In preparing research work, it is important to establish contact with your academic host in advance in order to

- clarify any special conditions pertaining to the research project (e. g. permission to carry out experiments on animals, regulations governing medical practice etc.);
- obtain information about premises and equipment, e.g. whether there is a PC or a laptop available;
- establish whether it is necessary to provide specimens or equipment and clarify import and export regulations.

You should also seek your host's assistance in finding accommodation. If he is unable to help, he or his assistants will at least be able to provide important addresses, Internet pages, and general information on your host town.

## 2.4 Work permits for spouses

Many spouses accompanying guest-researchers want to work during their stay in Germany. Those intending to engage in regular employment need a work permit (exceptions: nationals from countries of the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway). Spouses of research fellows who wish to take up employment must inform the German consulate of this prior to departure for Germany and apply for the respective residence permit (indicating "employment permitted"). The actual work permit must be applied for at the Employment Office. The procedure is time-consuming (processing of the application alone takes several weeks) and not always successful. In view of the tense labour situation in Germany, it may be difficult to find a vacancy.

Spouses of former research fellows therefore recommend you to think about how to make good use of your stay in Germany before you leave home. It may be possible to enrol in university courses as guest students or to attend courses on various subjects at adult education centres "Volkshochschulen" (VHS). If you have children, it is advisable to include the times they are absent at kindergarten or school in your planning. As day-care is not yet something you can take for granted in Germany and as in some towns there is a shortage of places especially for (pre-)kindergarten-children, you should deal with the question of child-care as early as possible (*cf. Chapter 5*).

## 2.5 Additional information

All electrical connections in Germany cater for 220–240-Volt/50-Hz a/c mains and European standard plugs. You may require adapters and transformers for electrical equipment you bring with you.

**Important:** if you declare any equipment you import into Germany, you must ensure that you export it again at the end of your stay.

It is also advisable to obtain information on your host university (e.g. from the Foreign Students' Advisory Office) or host institute and on your place of residence in Germany (e.g. from the Tourist Office, *cf. Chapter 2*). Most universities and towns have a website on the Internet.

Prior preparation is also essential for solving the main problem with which you will be confronted on your arrival in Germany: finding accommodation. Your host institute, the university's Foreign Students' Advisory Office, or the corresponding office at other research institutions may be able to help you in this. The sooner you apply for (the limited) accommodation at university guest-houses, the better your chance of success (*cf. Chapter 4*).

### Some important pieces of advice:

- As soon as you have been awarded the research fellowship start making arrangements for somewhere to live **while you are still at home**: in some places there are very few guest-houses and halls of residence and it can be quite difficult to find your way around the German housing market!
- Together with the award documents are forms which can be sent to the Foreign Students' Advisory Office or the academic host to help with the search for accommodation.
  - Should you not have managed to find anywhere to live before the fellowship begins we **strongly** recommend you to take heed of the advice of many former

research fellows and to travel alone, not bringing your family with you until you have found suitable accommodation.

Research fellows who have not returned to permanent positions at home found it important to maintain a contact at home who could help respond quickly to job opportunities arising there.

## **2.6 Humboldt Clubs**

Further questions relating to your stay in Germany can also be clarified in discussions with former research fellows or by establishing contacts with Humboldt Clubs. A list including contacts and addresses of Humboldt Clubs is contained in the award documents. You may also obtain additional information through the German embassies and consulates, the Goethe Institutes, and DAAD offices or lecturers working at your university.

## **2.7 Tax regulations**

Research fellows of the Humboldt Foundation are exempt from taxation under Article 3, No. 44 of the German Income Tax Law. You should inquire about tax regulations in your home country in order to take this into consideration in future tax declarations.

During your stay in Germany, you are not liable for Social Insurance contributions. You should find out what consequences your stay abroad may have later in regard to insurance cover in your home country.

As an institution granting fellowships, the Humboldt Foundation is not an "employer." This must be borne in mind, among other things, in regard to certificates you may have to submit to employers and insurance companies at home.

## **3. The first few days in Germany**

In any foreign country, the language and usually also the environment, the mentality, and perhaps also the climate are different from what you are used to.

The weather in Germany is often changeable. You have to expect cold and rain even in summer. It is advisable to bring some warm clothing with you if you have it.

As a welcoming gesture to Germany the Humboldt Foundation sends you a German dictionary (Duden) and a travel guide. Despite this, we recommend you to bring an additional dictionary and perhaps a phrasebook in your own language or one you know well. It is probably also a good idea to include a travel or cultural guide produced in your own country as they often contain a lot of practical advice on the weather, everyday life, regulations, and other topics of interest for your stay.

### **3.1 Cash**

You will need money the moment you arrive. You can bring any amount of German or foreign currency into Germany – but remember to check on your own country's foreign exchange regulations. Currency exchange offices are open at airports and main railway stations in the evening and at weekends. Once here, you can change large-denomination Euro notes acquired in your home country into coinage or you can cash traveller's cheques. You need cash to make telephone calls, deposit luggage, pay taxis, or buy bus tickets. Banks are open from Monday to Friday from approx. 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Afternoon opening hours differ but, in most cases, banks remain open longer on Thursdays until approx. 6 p.m. You can also change money at many larger post offices.

For research fellows from Europe: since January 2002 Eurocheques are no longer accepted everywhere as the guaranteed cover of DM 400 is no longer valid. Do not accept any Eurocheques yourself.

Since January 1, 2002, the **Euro (EUR, €)** is the only means of payment in Germany (*cf. appendix*). The previous currency (D-Mark and Pfennig) can no longer be used as a means of payment.

### **3.2 The first fellowship**

Your first monthly fellowship grant will be ready for payment to you at the beginning of the first month of sponsorship at the cashier's office of your host university or host institute (opening times: 8.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon only). If you have enrolled for a language course, you will receive your pocket money at the institute.

### **3.3 Left-luggage depository**

You can deposit your luggage in lockers at railway stations or airports. For this, you will need coins, although in some places EC-cards or credit cards are now accepted.

### **3.4 Overnight stay**

If you need a hotel room for the first night, apply to "Tourist Information," "Information", or the "Verkehrsamt" (Tourist Office) both located in or near main railway stations and airports. Information counters at railway stations or airports are indicated by "i".

These can also provide street maps. Small maps are usually free of charge but, for a lengthy stay, it is worth buying a detailed street map with a full street index. This is essential, especially if you have to look for accommodation. The Tourist Office will also give you a leaflet showing the main places of interest in the city and surrounding area.

### **3.5 Contacts with language or host institutes**

If you attend an intensive language course before taking up research work, you will go first to the Goethe Institute or another language institute at which the Humboldt Foundation has arranged a course for you. Otherwise you will probably first contact your academic host. Many initial problems and questions can be solved best if you seek the advice of fellow students at language institutes or your new colleagues at host institutes. Many Germans show some reserve initially but you will often meet with helpfulness if you take the initiative.

As a better and swifter means of introducing yourself at the host institute, former research fellows advise you to bring sufficient documentary material (e.g. slides, transparencies etc.) from your home country or institute, enabling you to give a presentation or lecture preferably in the initial period of your stay in Germany. If your academic host does not ask you to give a lecture, you could offer this as a way of introducing yourself to colleagues.

### **3.6 Necessary Formalities**

In the first few days, you will have little time for desk or laboratory work. Plenty of unavoidable formalities will command your attention. You will make the acquaintance of public servants, long questionnaires, clerical staff, the various opening times of public offices

etc., and you will doubtless ask yourself quite often – actually many Germans do as well – why things are so complicated and must be done so thoroughly. If you are not sure of your German ask someone at your host institute or language institute to accompany you to the various authorities as not all staff at public offices have sufficient knowledge of English.

You are obliged to register with public authorities in the first week after your arrival. Offices and agencies have varying opening times, particularly in the afternoons. Before going there, you should obtain exact information about opening hours.

### **3.7 Registration**

The following formalities must be dealt with during the first few days (*cf.* "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows," Chapter III. 6):

- Reporting to the Residents' Registration Office. Please keep in mind that registration regulations in Germany require not only registration at your new place of residence but also notice of departure from your previous address (this is important when you have to change addresses and at the end of the stay). The Residents' Registration Office is located at the municipal or local administration (Town or City Hall). Normally, it is open in the mornings and only on one afternoon, usually Thursday.
- Reporting to the Aliens' Registration Office. Research fellows are required to report to the Aliens' Registration Office at their new place of residence immediately after entering Germany. (The address can be obtained from the municipal or local authority.) This also applies to research fellows who may initially enter Germany without a visa. The Aliens' Registration Office will issue residence permits. As a research fellow you are exempt from payment of fees for these services, but this does not necessarily apply to your spouse and children. When reporting to the Aliens' Registration Office you must reckon with long waiting periods and overworked staff. **Proof of health insurance** cover is essential!
- Furthermore, research fellows may be required, on registration, to submit a health certificate issued by a physician in Germany. You must inquire in each specific case whether foreign health certificates are recognized. Have the medical examination carried out only if expressly required to do so. Public Health Offices in many German towns carry out this medical examination for a relatively low charge. Some federal states require an HIV test.
- Opening a current account at a bank or at the Post Bank. At some banks (including the Post Bank) you have to present your registration from the Residents' Registration Office and your residence permit in order to open an account. It is recommended to authorize your health insurance company to debit monthly payments from your account directly for the entire duration of your stay (*cf.* Chapter 6).
- Registration of your children at kindergarten or school, if applicable (*cf.* Chapter 5).
- Informing the Humboldt Foundation as soon as possible of your arrival, your private address, and bank account for further fellowship payments.

### **3.8 Humboldt identity card**

You should take your Humboldt identity card with you when reporting to offices and public authorities. This is not absolutely necessary but nevertheless often useful. Should your card get lost you can get a new one from the AvH.

### **3.9 Foreign Students' Advisory Office**

The Foundation also recommends you to go to the university's Foreign Students' Advisory Office or to the office responsible for foreign guests at your host institute. (A list of addresses

is contained in the award documents.) Those who have not yet established contact from their home countries, should not fail to ask these offices for assistance in finding accommodation. However, you should bear in mind that you are more likely to find accommodation quickly if you pursue all possible avenues (*cf. Chapter 4*). This includes using contacts provided by your host institute but, above all, your own initiative.

### **3.10 Opening a current account**

Banks and the Post Bank offer almost identical services, although the fees vary considerably. A private current account at the Post Bank is often less expensive than accounts at other banks. But, in general, banks give you more assistance in effecting payments. There are Post Bank counters at all post offices and you can withdraw money from your account at any post office on production of your identity document. Non-cash payments (remittances, credit notes etc.) are effected at the Post Bank by letter via its branches, to which the completed and signed forms are sent in special Post Bank envelopes. Many banks now provide online banking via the Internet. At many banks you can choose between several current accounts with various facilities (e.g. online banking, interest, credit card at no charge, etc.) but the fees also differ. You should seek personal advice on this.

You need your passport or comparable identity document to open a current account.

With a current account you can

- withdraw money from your bank using an EC-card. About three weeks after opening an account, you will receive an EC-card enabling you to withdraw money at cash dispensers, too, using a personal identification number. This is normally free of charge at your own bank's cash dispensers, but a fee of several EUR may be charged for withdrawing money from other banks' dispensers ;
- transfer money to other bank accounts for payment of bills, using transfer forms;
- have payments which recur regularly and are for a fixed amount (e.g. your rent) paid by banker's order ("Dauerauftrag");
- have regular payments (even of variable amounts, e.g. telephone bills and health insurance contributions) effected by direct debit ("Einzugsermächtigung"). The respective direct debit forms ("Lastschrifteneinzug") are often attached to the first bill.

Following the currency change Eurocheques have become invalid as the previously guaranteed cover of DM 400 no longer applies. Thus banks are not required to accept Eurocheques anymore.

To avoid misunderstandings: apart from the normal EC-card, still sometimes known as a cheque-card, there is also a Eurocard/Mastercard: this is a credit card connected to the Master Charge System and valid world-wide. You can also use the credit card to withdraw money from cash dispensers but this can involve a high processing charge. The most common credit cards in Germany are Eurocard/Mastercard and Visa. However, card-payment in German shops usually uses EC-cards; credit cards are not accepted everywhere. Unfortunately, some banks make difficulties about issuing credit cards for limited stays in Germany. It may thus be advantageous to open an account abroad through your bank at home.

### 3.11 Passbook

You can save money on a savings account, for which a passbook ("Sparbuch") is made out. You will accumulate interest on the amounts paid into this account. With a normal passbook (subject to a statutory withdrawal period of three months) you can withdraw EUR 2000 within a calendar month without prior notice. The Post Bank also offers a savings book service.

### 3.12 Insurances and Fees

Just like in other countries, insurance cover is a topic which has to be taken seriously in Germany, too, in order to be sure of being financially secure in an emergency. It is recommendable to make contact with all the necessary insurance companies before arriving in Germany so that all queries can be dealt with in good time.

The first priority is **health insurance**: medication, consulting doctors, and stays in hospital are extremely expensive in Germany. In order to ensure you will be refunded for any medical treatment required all research fellows and their families must have health insurance for the entire duration of their stay in Germany. Without proof of adequate insurance cover residence permits will usually not be issued. There are considerable differences between private health insurance companies in Germany regarding the costs and what they offer, so it is worthwhile to compare several offers very carefully and to make sure that what is offered is what you actually need (*cf. Chapter 6, as well as the brochure "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows", Chapter III.11*).

In Germany everyone is liable for any damage done to a third party. It is, therefore, more than advisable to take out a **(family) third-party insurance** for the entire duration of the stay (parents are liable for their children); this protects you against claims resulting from damage caused unintentionally. Standard third-party insurance policies are not very expensive and the conditions are usually similar.

In addition, it may be a good idea to take out a **legal expenses policy**; this kind of insurance covers the cost of a lawyer, for example, if you have to go to court. According to individual needs, policies are often only taken out for specific areas (tenancy matters, cars etc., *cf. also Chapter 4.6 and 8.12*).

Anyone who owns their own radio or television must register them and pay **Charges for the Public Radio and Television Programme** to the **GEZ** (Centre for Collecting Charges). Forms for registering and cancelling registration are available at banks. Most new flats and houses now have a cable connexion, but it cannot be taken for granted, nor can you be sure of reception via a satellite dish. Charges for cable are usually included in the utility payments accompanying the rent and stated in the tenancy agreement.

## 4. Finding accommodation

In their final reports, guest-researchers almost unanimously state that the main problem confronting them at the beginning of their stay in Germany was how to find adequate and inexpensive accommodation.

It has been shown time and time again that the chances of being successful when searching for somewhere to live are much better if you are not under time pressure. We therefore **strongly** recommend you to start looking for accommodation as soon as possible and definitely **before the beginning of your stay** in Germany and, if applicable, only to send for your family when you have found a suitable apartment. If alone, you can easily live for a short time in a hotel or guest-house or perhaps with friends or acquaintances.

If you attend an intensive language course prior to commencement of your research work, you should begin to make inquiries about the housing situation from the place where your language institute is located at the latest. Language institutes will provide accommodation for both you and your spouse provided your spouse actually attends the language course. However, institutes are not equipped to accommodate couples with children.

Supply and demand, particularly in cities with a large population of students, vary considerably in the course of the year. At the beginning of a term, i.e. in March/April or September/October, there is always a big demand for accommodation.

Finding accommodation requires a lot of individual initiative. Foreign Students' Advisory Offices or institutions responsible for foreign guests at other research establishments and host institutes may be able to help you. However, they cannot perform miracles and you should not expect them to shoulder all the responsibility.

Housing in Germany is in short supply and, at least in the big cities, very expensive (current example: Munich). This applies, in particular, to the type of accommodation required by research fellows: furnished or at least partly-furnished apartments rented at short notice and for relatively short periods. Nor is it easy to find apartments for larger families at reasonable rents. You should take into account that up to 40% of your monthly fellowship payment (including all allowances) will go toward renting accommodation.

#### **4.1 Looking for accommodation**

How do you find accommodation?

- You can apply for an apartment at a university guest-house through the Foreign Students' Advisory Office. (You will find a list of guest-houses in the grant documents.) Unfortunately, not all university locations have guest-houses or halls of residence. Apartments in guest-houses are in great demand. You will have a better chance the earlier you make your application (there are waiting periods of up to one year). In Bonn, the Humboldt Foundation has two guest-houses for research fellows. However, the capacity of these guest-houses is not sufficient to accommodate all fellows. Student halls of residence are not usually intended for use by post-doc guest researchers.
- The Foreign Students' Advisory Offices or the offices responsible for foreign guests at other research institutions also arrange housing with private landlords. The Humboldt Foundation asks research fellows who have been satisfied with their accommodation during their stay in Germany to pass on addresses, with their landlords' consent, to the Foreign Students' Advisory Offices before leaving Germany.
- It may be useful to establish contact with other research fellows in the host town who may be able to help you find accommodation. After your arrival in Germany, the Humboldt Foundation will give you a list of the names and addresses of research fellows in your host town or close to your language institute.
- You can look for accommodation in local newspapers. In daily papers, usually Wednesday or weekend editions, you can find offers of accommodation. You could also place

an advertisement yourself. Newspaper advertisements and other housing information can often be found on the Internet homepages of the respective town or in regional newspapers.

– There are notice boards ("Schwarze Bretter") in universities and many research institutions, usually to be found in canteens and other busy locations. They are accessible to all students and employees and cover a wide variety of needs. However, most advertisements are for single rooms in shared accommodation ("Wohngemeinschaften", *cf. below*).

– There are free papers published on a regular basis in most university towns. They largely contain small-ads by young people seeking to sell or buy objects or offers of accommodation. Please ask German colleagues at your institute where to obtain these papers.

– Agencies arranging shared accommodation ("Mitwohnzentralen") are to be found in many university towns (*cf. local telephone directory*). These agencies concentrate on finding furnished rooms in "Wohngemeinschaften" (*cf. below*) and furnished apartments for limited periods of between one month and one year. They charge a fee for their services (approx. 15% of the monthly rent including heating and utility charges specified in the lease). There are commercial accommodation-sharing agents who have formed an association operating throughout Europe. If you are not sure about the trustworthiness of an agency, check with colleagues or with the Foreign Students' Advisory Office.

– Estate agencies are the most expensive method as agents' fees can be as high as two months' rent – hardly a worthwhile investment for a short stay. Only use agents affiliated to a professional association ("Ring Deutscher Makler", RDM).

Research fellows coming to Germany alone may be able to live in a "Wohngemeinschaft" or "WG" (an apartment or house shared with other people) or take lodgings ("Untermiete"), i.e. one or two furnished rooms. This means sharing kitchen and bathroom. This may be an attractive solution, but is certainly not to everyone's liking. For offers (and your own advertisements) it is best to use notice boards ("Schwarze Bretter"), free newspapers for "WGs", or advertisement sections of newspapers ("Untermiete" and "WGs").

"House-swapping" is not a common method of finding accommodation in Germany. When leaving on foreign assignments, however, academic research assistants and university lecturers in particular often vacate their accommodation and offer it furnished for limited periods. You would have to be really lucky to get one but it doesn't cost anything to ask at the Foreign Students' Advisory Office.

If you have difficulty communicating during your search and do not know anyone on the spot – not all landlords or agents speak English – ask a colleague at your host institute to help you deciphering or possibly formulating advertisements, interpreting, going through the tenancy agreement with you, and possibly accompanying you to view or take or hand over accommodation to be sure you avoid misunderstandings. You will find that some people will be pleased to help if you let them in on the problem. You should, none the less, be prepared to have to master some of the difficulties yourself.

Housing in Germany is either let unfurnished, partly furnished, or fully furnished. Unfurnished accommodation really is "unfurnished", i.e. without lamps, curtains, or any kitchen equipment. A furnished kitchen, for example, is usually mentioned separately in advertisements. We would recommend partly or fully furnished apartments, although they unfortunately are rare. Missing furniture can be bought easily second-hand (*cf. Chapter 12*).

Of course, there are many other important criteria for choosing accommodation. How far is it from the host institute? Are there good public transport facilities? How far away is the kindergarten or the school? What shopping facilities are available in the vicinity? How

obliging are the landlord and the neighbours? In a big city in Germany it is often more pleasant to live on the outskirts or even out in the country, or in smaller towns in the surrounding area, rather than in the centre, particularly if you have children, even if it means more time spent on travelling. In smaller towns it is normally easier to establish contact with other occupants and neighbours because the atmosphere is more informal and people know each other. If you live in a university guest-house together with other foreigners, you will find it more difficult to establish contact with the local people. It is also less expensive to live on the edge of or outside a town than in the centre, but you should consider the higher travel costs.

#### **4.2 Housing Advertisements**

If you study the small-ads in local newspapers, you will often find them hard to follow: e.g. "4 ZKB , ZH, teilmöbl., 650 + NK, 2MM Kaut., Chiffre XYZ", which is roughly translated as: four-room apartment with kitchen and bathroom to let, central heating, partly furnished, monthly rent EUR 650 plus utility charges, deposit: 2 months' rent, offers to Box No. XYZ. For assistance in understanding the small-ads, please ask your colleagues at your host institute; they might be used to the abbreviations because of personal experience.

Utility charges are costs payable monthly to the lessor in addition to the basic rent ("Kaltmiete") for heating, water, waste disposal, etc. The costs included in the utility charges are laid down individually in the lease.

By the way, accommodation listed under "Apartments" consists of only one room.

If a Box No. is indicated, you have to write to the newspaper under the Box No. given. But most small-ads give a telephone number. You should call as early as possible (from 7.30 a.m. on, unless stated otherwise) and make a viewing appointment. Landlords sometimes collect offers, then make joint appointments with applicants.

#### **4.3 Your own small-ad**

If you wish to look for housing by placing a small-ad in the newspaper, you must indicate clearly that you are a young research scholar holding a doctorate and sponsored by the Humboldt Foundation in Germany. This will certainly increase your chances because, to some Germans, background, status, and title are still very important.

#### **4.4 Real estate agents**

The words "Immobilien" or "RDM" (Ring Deutscher Makler) in an advertisement signify that it has been placed by a real estate agent. This means you must pay a fee on conclusion of the lease. If you wish to avoid this, keep to the private small-ads. But real estate agents often have the most attractive accommodation, one of the reasons for this being that landlords have no time to look for tenants or do not want to be bothered with organizational problems.

Using a real estate agent is a relatively sure way of finding accommodation, but is also the most expensive. The agent's fee is a maximum of two months' basic rent excluding utility charges. (Do not accept a higher fee!) Never pay a fee before the lease has been signed – not even a handling fee ("Bearbeitungsgebühr"). Do not sign anything before the conditions have been properly negotiated and you are sure that you have understood them.

#### **4.5 Deposits**

Landlords will often ask for a deposit equivalent to between one and three months' rent (basic rent) plus 16% VAT. This is to cover any damage the tenant may cause to property. The deposit will be repaid, together with interest, after deduction of any amount needed for repair or renovation on termination of the lease. Specific provisions on this should be contained in the lease (*cf. below*). The deposit should not be paid to the landlord directly but into a joint savings book. In this way, you can prevent the landlord from keeping the money without your agreement and you will earn the interest. Your bank will give you detailed information.

#### **4.6 Lease**

An apartment is held to be rented by you as soon as both you and the landlord have signed the lease. Your signature legally binds you to the terms of lease. Before signing, it is therefore essential to read the document through very carefully, even though it is usually rather long and difficult to read. In particular, the lease covers the amount of rent and utility costs payable, the period of notice to be given for terminating the lease, payment for any necessary repairs, responsibility for redecoration costs when moving out (*cf. also Chapter 4.6*), the length of the lease and the terms for rent increase.

Furthermore, the lease may contain additional agreements (e.g. use of the garden, car parking facilities etc.). Check with the landlord before moving in whether you are allowed to keep domestic animals.

The lease also contains general rules for residents which, among other things, stipulate that before 7 a.m., between 1 and 3 p.m. and after 10 p.m. all unnecessary noise must be avoided. They also stipulate how often jointly-used facilities (staircase, entrance area, basement) have to be cleaned by you.

If you do not understand parts of the lease or if you feel that unusual conditions are being imposed, you must ask your German colleagues for assistance and advice.

It may be worthwhile joining the local Tenants' Association (*cf. telephone directory under "Mieterverein"*) in order to get immediate advice and professional support. Here you will also find information brochures on tenancy agreements. Otherwise, you can turn to the German Tenants' Federation ("Deutscher Mieterbund", DMB) to which local associations are affiliated. The address is Aachener Strasse 313, 50931 Köln, Tel. 0221/94077-0, Fax: 0221/94077-22, E-mail: [info@mieterbund.de](mailto:info@mieterbund.de), Internet: [www.mieterbund.de](http://www.mieterbund.de). Usually, after being a member of a tenants' association for a few weeks, you are covered by a legal expenses insurance policy against future problems pertaining to rental matters.

Please bear in mind that, no matter whether you live in a university guest-house or a privately-rented apartment, an extension of your research fellowship may collide with leasing arrangements previously made. You should therefore inform the landlord in good time if you are considering an extension.

Normally, the period of notice is three months. Any different conditions must be stipulated in the lease or separately in writing.

#### **4.7 Moving in and out**

Before you move into rented accommodation, you should make an appointment with the landlord to go over the apartment with him or her and inspect it for any defects (scratches, stains, wear and tear, damage etc.). All this should be put down in writing, even if damage appears very slight. Otherwise you may find you will be charged for the repairs or your deposit will not be repaid to you in full when you move out, assuming that the damage was caused by you. The list of defects and damage must be signed by the landlord and kept by you.

When you move out the same kind of appointment should be made with the landlord or manager of the property to check on defects and damage once again. The tenancy agreement stipulates whether, and to what extent, redecoration work (so-called "Schönheitsarbeiten") has to be done by the tenant when he or she moves out. If the accommodation is in a noticeably worse condition than at the start of the tenancy the landlord may retain the deposit paid by the tenant in part or in full. Otherwise, you should prepare a written document of the transfer stating that the apartment has been transferred without defects or damage and that the deposit should be repaid in full.

On principle, it is advisable to have a German colleague or acquaintance with you during the transfer who knows the procedure and can check that there are no linguistic misunderstandings.

### **5. Kindergarten and school**

In recent years, about 40% of research fellows have come to Germany with their children. Many, particularly from neighbouring European countries, only come for a few weeks or months, often during school holidays in their home countries. However, many stay in Germany for the whole duration of the research fellowship. A place in a kindergarten or the right school must therefore be found within easy reach of the new place of residence at the beginning of their stay.

#### **5.1 Kindergarten**

Attendance at kindergarten is voluntary in Germany. Only children over the age of three are admitted. Kindergartens are run either by local authorities, the Protestant or Catholic church, or by associations or privately-initiated groups.

In recent years, the number of kindergarten places available has improved considerably but there are shortages in some municipal districts. However, the situation is problematic in that children must be enrolled at kindergartens and the places allocated as early as the spring of the respective kindergarten year (beginning, depending on the region, in August/September). Some kindergartens still have long waiting lists so enrol your child or children at the earliest possible opportunity and find out about the local situation – possibly through the academic host. Many kindergartens also admit children during the year, providing there are vacancies, so you may be able to enrol your child at a later date.

Normally, children attend kindergarten between 8 a.m. and 12 noon, and/or from 2 to 5 p.m. Lunch is usually not provided. In some kindergartens, children are divided into age groups, enabling some pre-schooling to be offered to five and six year-old children on several days per week. A monthly fee of EUR 80-100 is charged for kindergarten attendance. In many kindergartens, fees are income-related. Fees charged for kindergartens run by private organizations tend to be considerably higher (currently approx. EUR 150-200).

Furthermore, there are a few kindergartens which are open all day for children aged from three years to school age (particularly in the new federal states) or day-care facilities which cater for children between about 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. and provide lunch. But the number of places is very limited and having children there is more expensive.

Nurseries provide day-care services for children between one and three years of age. Demand by far exceeds supply, so many youth welfare offices allocate vacancies on the basis of urgency.

Information on kindergartens and other care centres for children and young people in your vicinity can be obtained from the local youth welfare offices run by municipal or local authorities. They often also provide you with a brochure containing addresses and telephone numbers.

## **5.2 Other child facilities**

Nannies, who usually look after several children in their own homes during the day, care for young children on a flexible time-basis. If interested, you should ask the youth welfare office about the nearest child-minding agency, or look for nanny services offered in weekend regional newspapers.

The best way of finding short-term baby-sitters, mostly in the afternoons or evenings, is to read the ads on notice boards in supermarkets or kindergartens, or to place your own ads. Schoolgirls very often offer their services. Your neighbours may also have teenage children willing to baby-sit. The German Association for the Protection of Children (cf. telephone directory under "Deutscher Kinderschutzbund," Internet: [www.kinderschutzbund.de](http://www.kinderschutzbund.de)) can also recommend baby-sitters near your home.

Particularly in guest-houses, mothers or fathers of small children often help each other out by taking turns at supervising several children on an hourly basis.

## **5.3 Schools**

It is often difficult for foreign visitors to find the right schools for their children. German parents have the same problem because in Germany, the federal states are responsible for education, so there are considerable differences in the school systems and curricula from one federal state to another. The school year begins after the summer holidays, any time from July to September, depending on the federal state.

All German and foreign children in Germany must attend school from the ages of six to fifteen. First, they are enrolled at the "Grundschule" (classes one to four). After this – or after a two-year transition period ("Förderstufe" or "Orientierungsstufe") – pupils go on to one of the following secondary schools:

- "Hauptschule", culminating in a general school-leaving certificate (up to class nine or ten, depending on the federal state);
- "Realschule", culminating in an intermediate certificate of education at the end of class 10;
- "Gymnasium", culminating in a senior high school leaving certificate ("Abitur" – university entrance qualification) at the end of class 12 or 13, depending on the federal state;
- "Gesamtschule" (not in all federal states), a comprehensive school for children from class 5 onward. Some comprehensive schools combine various types of school (*cf. above*) under one roof and there are some where children attend various courses, depending on their achievement levels, without prior commitment.

Attendance at state-run schools in Germany is free of charge. There are very few fee-paying private or international schools, most of them expensive. In big towns and cities, some elementary or primary schools have special classes for foreign children, where, in addition to normal tuition, they concentrate on learning German so that they can be fully integrated into general schooling later. Some cities (e.g. Berlin, Bonn, Frankfurt, Munich) have international schools with all lessons in English or French.

Education authorities (the address and telephone number are obtainable through the municipal or local administration) issue a brochure containing details of local schools. However, a final decision can only be made after a personal visit to the school and discussions with teaching staff.

#### **5.4 Teaching**

At virtually all German schools classes are only held in the mornings, usually between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. In the lower junior classes the time spent at school is usually much shorter, on certain days only an hour or two, and more irregular. In higher classes at senior high schools pupils can select their main subjects themselves and attend courses. Some lessons, e.g. physical education, are held in the afternoons. Pupils are expected to use afternoons to do homework for the following day, but the amount of time required varies considerably. Lunch is only offered at the relatively few existing dayschools.

Pre- and after-school care centres affiliated to schools look after children during specific hours prior to and after school, for example from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. These facilities include lunch, supervision of homework and allow time for play. Costs for this category of day centre amount to approx. EUR 80–120. Owing to the limited number of places available at day centres, admission during the school year is frequently problematic. The chances are better if children are enrolled early, before the school-year begins. Some elementary or junior schools now offer child care for the whole morning. At senior high schools students are generally left to themselves during free periods.

It is not always easy to organize a daily routine, particularly if you have one child at kindergarten and another at school. Taking children to kindergarten or school and picking them up, shopping and doing other tasks – this is one circle many mothers or fathers have to square every day because there are few facilities in Germany providing good all-day care for children. This problem especially affects families in which both parents go out to work. It has prompted many research fellows in their final reports to express the opinion that Germany is a "country for (working) men", in which for several years the mothers of small children have little or no chance to pursue an occupation of their own.

However, almost all research fellows say it has been beneficial to bring their children to Germany. In most cases children quickly feel at home in their new surroundings and establish contact with new friends, learning German better than their parents within a short period of time. Furthermore, children help adults to integrate and make contact with other people.

## **6. Health insurance and medical care**

### **6.1 Medical insurance**

Research fellows of the Humboldt Foundation must make their own arrangements for health insurance for themselves and their families. You should first find out whether your insurance at home will also cover doctor's and hospital fees during your stay in Germany. If not, or if insurance coverage is not sufficient, you will have to take out an additional insurance (*cf. "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows," Chapter III. 11*).

Insurance benefits are limited in regard to illness incurred prior to the commencement of insurance (pre-insurance illnesses) or in the case of pregnancy. **Pregnancy commencing during a research visit is normally not covered.** To have these expenses reimbursed the relevant benefits must be laid down **in advance** in a supplementary contract. Furthermore, health insurance companies will not necessarily refund the cost of prophylactic medical check-ups.

Both the premiums charged and the benefits provided by private health insurance companies may differ drastically, so that what initially appears to be the cheaper option is not always the best choice. Thus, please examine the terms of your insurance policy in detail so as to avoid difficulties later.

### **6.2 Doctors**

If you, or members of your family, have to consult a doctor during your stay in Germany you should ask acquaintances for advice. In addition to general practitioners (so-called "Hausärzte"), there are specialists, e.g. eye specialists, ear, nose and throat specialists, paediatricians etc. You can find a list of doctors, classified according to their field of specialization in the commercial directory "Gelbe Seiten" (yellow pages) of your host town. However, it is often advisable to go to a general practitioner first so that after a general examination, you can be referred to a specialist. This allows you to profit from the network amongst the local medical community. Sometimes local pharmacies will recommend general practitioners.

Doctors prefer you to telephone and make an appointment. In acute cases or emergencies the doctor will see you immediately or make an appointment for the same day. Otherwise you may have to wait several days or even weeks, especially if you want to consult a dentist or specialist. Even if you do have an appointment, you will find you probably have to spend quite some time in the doctor's waiting room. Normal surgery hours and appointment times can differ considerably but usually fall within standard business hours (usually every morning but not every afternoon). Very few surgeries are open on Saturdays, while on Sundays you have to use emergency services. During holiday times most doctors have a locum in the vicinity to cover for them in their absence.

### **6.3 Doctor's fees**

If you have taken out one of the private health insurance policies, offered to research fellows (*cf. award documents*), you have to pay the doctor's fees and the costs for medication yourself first, then submit the invoices to your insurance company for refunding. Please take note of the terms of the insurance policy regarding the reimbursement of costs, e.g. for dental treatment, medical check-ups etc., or maximum rates for doctors' fees. Many insurance companies include a percentage excess clause ("Selbstbehalt") in the policy, which means that for each case of illness part of the doctor's bill must be paid by patients themselves.

### **6.4 Emergency service**

If you need a doctor in an emergency at night, at weekends, or on public holidays, the emergency medical service will help. You can look this up in the local newspaper under the heading "Ärztlicher Notdienst" or "Ärztlicher Bereitschaftsdienst," which gives the names of doctors and dentists on duty, or you can telephone any doctor in the neighbourhood. Doctors usually have an automatic answering service giving details of consulting hours and addresses and numbers of doctors on call. If you urgently need medication, the pharmacy emergency service "Apotheken-Notdienst" in local newspapers gives the addresses of the pharmacies open outside normal hours. Or you simply go to the nearest pharmacy ("Apotheke") where you will find a notice at the door or in the window indicating pharmacies on call. Extra fees are charged for night and weekend service.

### **6.5 Emergency call**

In case of accidents or emergencies which seem to require immediate hospital attention (and only then), call the **emergency number 110 or 112** for a doctor on emergency call. These numbers can be dialled free of charge from any public call box.

### **6.6 Hospital**

On admission to hospital, advance payment of a certain sum is often required. This is offset later by your health insurance company. The private health insurance policies offered to research fellows only cover hospital costs for "general nursing care" but not for optional services (choice of doctors, two-bed room etc.). Stays in hospital in Germany can be very expensive. You should obtain detailed advice from your insurance company on the necessary formalities and refundable costs. In the event of serious illness requiring a lengthy stay in hospital, you should consider whether it would be more advisable to opt for treatment in your home country.

## **7. Public transport**

Germany has a well developed, though relatively expensive public transport network. Over greater distances, it is most common to travel on the German Railways ("Deutsche Bahn"). In towns and cities, suburban trains, buses, trams, the underground, and taxis are the usual means of transportation.

Unless you bring your own car with you, you should consider whether it is worth incurring the rather high costs involved in buying a car in Germany, particularly if you come alone. You may find it more reasonable to use public transport on trips undertaken during your stay in this country. For shorter distances, a bicycle can be an ideal alternative. Cycling is becoming increasingly popular in Germany and some cities have good cycle-path networks.

## 7.1 German Rail

You can reach all main cities and almost all medium-sized towns by train. On long-distance travel, the Intercity Express (ICE) is the fastest and most comfortable. Intercity (IC) and Eurocity (EC) trains link about 100 towns and cities in Germany, most of them running every hour. Medium distances are covered by Interregio trains (IR, with connections to ICE, IC, and EC routes), most of which run every two hours. All trains have first and second-class facilities and separate smoking and no-smoking compartments. Long-distance trains sometimes also have restaurants. A special surcharge is payable on ICEs, ICs, and ECs. Locally, there are City Express, Regional Express, and Regional trains (SE, RE, RB, *cf. below*).

There are numerous possibilities for travelling by train at reduced fares. If you buy a Railcard ("BahnCard") for currently EUR 60 (second class), you only pay 75% of the fare for each ticket (excluding IC and EC surcharges) for a period of one year. You are strongly recommended to buy a Railcard as the Humboldt Foundation will only cover 75% of rail fares within Germany when travel grants and refunds are calculated (*cf. "Guidelines and Information for Research Fellows," Chapter I.2.4*). The Railcard has the additional advantage that it can be combined with Visa to function as a credit-card, if desired. There are also Railcards for spouses, children, and other family members (enquire about prices). Holders of a Railcard may benefit from some additional services. Railcards must be produced when tickets are inspected. By booking early further costs (more than 50%) can be saved. However, there is only a certain quota reserved for booking early and it does not include all trains. Thus, it is advisable to arrange tickets well in advance. More money can be saved, for example, with the "Mitfahrerrabatte" (a rebate for accompanying travellers). All these special tariffs do, however, require you to use the train you have booked ("Zugbindung"). You are allowed to exchange tickets bought at the special tariff until the day **before** traveling but you have to pay a fee. The various rebates, including the Railcard, will be off-set cumulatively. Information on these new savings can be found on the homepage of the Deutsche Bahn on the internet under **www.bahn.de**.

Information desks and ticket offices at railway stations or travel agencies provide advice and details of train connections. You can also obtain information from railway stations by telephone (numbers are listed in the directory under "Deutsche Bahn"). As the new price tariffs are only valid from December 15, 2002, however, the Deutsche Bahn staff may not have a lot of experience with the tariffs mentioned above or with any questions or problems related to them. Please be understanding if you do not always receive the best advice. Rail information with complete time-tables and fares can also be found on the internet under [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de). Additionally, you can book online using a credit-card; the print-out of the reservation takes the place of a ticket ("Zugbindung" pertains as a reservation is necessary). Apart from this, the brochures called "Städteverbindungen", obtainable at railway stations, are useful for planning. There are leaflets containing timetables for local transport, too. When checking out train connections, bear in mind that many trains do not run on every day of the week.

Should you get on a train without a ticket, please contact the ticket collector immediately, otherwise you could be taken for a "fare dodger." If you purchase a ticket on the train you may not be able to use the special tariffs. On top of this, the surcharges for fast trains (IR, IC/EC, ICE etc.) are usually more expensive than at ticket offices.

## 7.2 Reservations

It is advisable to make reservations (for a fee of currently EUR 2.60) for extended rail travel, or if you travel at weekends, on public holidays, or during the main holiday season because at

these times it is usually difficult to find seats. Faster trains are often overcrowded at normal times, too. For overnight journeys you can reserve a couchette or a place in a sleeping car for an extra charge. Some special tariffs require you to make a reservation because you have to use the train you have booked ("Zugbindung").

Reservations can also be made under [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de) one day before the trip at the latest. An internet-reservation costs EUR 2.60, too, and can only be paid for by credit card.

### **7.3 Luggage**

Left-luggage counters no longer exist at railway stations. You can have large items of luggage such as baby carriages, bicycles, skiing gear etc. collected at your home and transported to an agreed address as courier luggage. To this end, you need a courier luggage ticket obtainable at offices selling rail tickets. These will also provide precise information about transport conditions. Courier luggage services are also offered for travel abroad. The second possibility is to buy a Post Luggage Set (for normal luggage of up to 20 kg) at the railway station and to mail the luggage at the nearest post office as a parcel. It will be delivered to the given address by parcel mail. If you travel with valuable luggage, you should consider taking out a baggage insurance.

### **7.4 Air travel**

Within Germany, air services are used chiefly by businessmen. Although flying times between cities are short, it is often not possible to save much time because of frequent delays before take off and landing and additional time spent travelling between airports and cities. Flying is relatively expensive, but there are special offers by airlines on some routes which you should inquire about (e.g. Lufthansa Tours "Fly and Save"). Main railway stations operate bus or underground/suburban train shuttles to the nearest airport. Please only take "notebooks" on flights as hand luggage and do not leave your luggage unattended at airports.

### **7.5 Local transport**

Local transport systems, buses, trams, and the underground are usually efficient. In larger towns and cities they may be expensive, but are the most rapid means of transport during daytime. In city traffic it is often not advisable to use your car: traffic jams are frequent and finding a parking space can be time-consuming. You must expect high parking fees near town or city centres. During morning and evening peak traffic times inner-city and suburban public transport operate on a shuttle basis. But problems arise in the late evening. Public transport is very much reduced after eight in the evening, and, from midnight to the early hours of the morning, runs either hourly or not at all. Intervals are also longer at weekends and on public holidays.

### **7.6 Tickets**

The sale of tickets for buses, trams, and the underground varies from one town to another. Almost everywhere, tickets are available from ticket machines. Important: in many towns or cities ticket machines can only be operated by coins. Normally, tickets can also be obtained from bus drivers. Multiple-journey tickets, so-called strip-tickets ("Streifenkarten"), obliging you to cancel a certain number of strips per journey, are cheaper. They can also be obtained from ticket machines or at kiosks or in newspaper shops displaying the logo of the local public transport service, or at ticket offices operated by public transport services mainly in city centres. Normally, you "punch" your ticket in a time-stamp/ticket-cancelling machine

("Entwerter") at bus stops or on board buses or trams . Nearly everywhere fares have been introduced by zone; when you travel by tram, bus, or on the underground the fare increases the further you travel, i.e. the more zones you cross.

If you travel the same route every day, e.g. from your place of residence to your institute, it is less expensive to buy a weekly or monthly (season) ticket. They can also be bought at public transport ticket offices. Furthermore, many transport services offer 24-hour, several-day, group, or even cheap excursion tickets ("Ausflugskarten") for families to travel at weekends or on public holidays or to special destinations. You should never travel without a valid ticket. There are heavy fines for "fare dodgers."

Departure times are on display at every stop. You can also buy a timetable, giving all bus and tram times, from public transport ticket offices.

### **7.7 Taxis**

Taxis are relatively expensive in Germany and are generally used only in exceptional cases, e.g. if there is no other means of transport to take you home at night or if you have heavy luggage. You can order a taxi by telephone or you will find one at a taxi rank. It is not customary in Germany to flag down taxis in the street. In addition to the basic fare (currently approx. EUR 2), taxi users are charged a fixed amount for each kilometre (currently EUR 1–2, depending on the town). The driver's meter ("Taxameter"), which is installed in all taxis, will show what you have to pay at the end of the trip. Generally, you are expected to tip the driver.

### **7.8 Car passenger service**

Most university towns and big cities have private car transport agencies ("Mitfahrzentralen") offering seats on longer journeys. Simply call an agency and inquire about offers on a particular day and route. A commission is charged by the agency and the driver usually makes a charge depending on the distance and number of passengers (fuel money). This mode of travel is not to everyone's taste, but for those travelling alone it is inexpensive and may even result in some interesting contacts. You can register as a driver at these agencies, too.

## **8. Your car**

A private car guarantees a maximum of freedom and flexibility in spite of hopelessly overcrowded streets and the notorious traffic jams on the motorways during rush hours, at weekends, and during the holiday season.

Many research fellows bring their cars with them or buy cars in Germany. For stays of up to six months, this causes practically no problems as regards the validity of your driving licence or, if you drive a car registered abroad, car documents and German registration regulations, motor vehicle tax, and third-party insurance.

However, many research fellows stay longer. In this case, they must surmount time-consuming and expensive bureaucratic hurdles to comply with the regulations governing driving licences, car registration, motor vehicle tax and insurance. The final reports of

research fellows contain many a tale of woe about this. So you should consider whether you really need a car in Germany very carefully.

### **8.1 Driving licence**

You may only drive a car in Germany if you have a fully valid driving licence ("learners' licences" or "provisional" licences are not accepted). Valid driving licences comprise:

- (valid) driving licences issued in a foreign country, accompanied by an official German translation;
- international driving licences;
- driving licences issued in a member-country of the European Union (not requiring a German translation);
- driving licences (not requiring a German translation) issued in the following countries: Andorra, Cyprus, Hongkong, Hungary, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, San Marino, Senegal, and Switzerland;
- German driving licences.

A German translation of a foreign driving licence can be provided by German diplomatic missions abroad, an automobile club in research fellows' home countries, or by an automobile club in Germany, e.g. the ADAC.

Foreign driving licences and international driving licences are valid for **six months** from your date of entry into Germany, unless the time limit has already expired. An international licence is only valid if your foreign driving licence is also valid in your home country.

Exception: as of July 1996 driving licences issued in European Union (EU) member-countries as well as Norway, Liechtenstein, or Iceland no longer have to be exchanged for a German driving licence, as long as their period of validity has not expired. Therefore it can be advisable for non-EU citizens to legalize their driving licence in an EU country.

In other cases the following rules apply: six months after your arrival in Germany – to the day! – you must be in possession of a German driving licence. Apply for a German license as soon as possible (at least three months before the six-month time limit is due to expire). You will otherwise be breaking German law if you drive without a valid license. The fee for transferring to a German license is currently between EUR 35 and 45. The application should be submitted to the "Führerscheinstelle" (licensing department) of the "Ordnungsamt" (municipal affairs office) in your town or municipality. German licenses are issued for some countries without a driving test being taken or when the theoretical part has been completed successfully. Nationals of other countries have to take the whole test (including the practical part). Please make enquiries well in advance which regulations apply to you or your home country. Should you spend a longer period of time in Germany before the AvH-fellowship begins: the basis for calculating the six-month period is the entire duration of the stay in Germany.

The formalities vary from one federal state to another. As a rule, the following documents must accompany your application:

- your passport or identity card;

- your original foreign national driving licence including a German translation; a German translation can be dispensed with in certain cases (*cf. above*); an international driving licence is not sufficient;
- confirmation of registration with the Residents' Registration Office;
- a recent passport-size photograph;
- a declaration by the applicant that the foreign driving licence is still valid.

In addition to this, a police certificate of good conduct and an eye test may also be required. An official eye test can be carried out, for example, by an optician for a fee of about EUR 6. When the German driving licence is issued, the foreign driving licence is normally retained and sent back to the appropriate authority in the country of issue.

If your driving licence was issued in a country other than those mentioned above, your application must include, in addition to the above documents, an eye test certificate and proof that you have attended a course on "emergency aid at the scene of an accident." Information on this can be obtained from driving schools. You will then be admitted to the theoretical and practical driving test during which you must be accompanied by a driving instructor. The driving instructor must have convinced him- or herself of your driving abilities beforehand. The procedure involves considerable time and expense. Some driving schools offer theoretical driving tests in English or other languages but this is rare and usually more expensive.

## **8.2 Bringing your own car**

You can bring your own car into Germany free of customs duties if you have lived abroad for at least one year and used the car abroad for at least six months and if it is used for personal needs only and re-exported later.

For stays of less than one year, an international or foreign car registration certificate (with a German translation) is sufficient.

## **8.3 Registration of your car**

If your stay in Germany is not only temporary – a stay of more than one year will certainly be considered as "not temporary" – your car must be registered at the Motor Vehicle Registration Office ("Kraftfahrzeug-Zulassungsstelle") at your place of residence in Germany. You can obtain the address and telephone number from the municipal or local authority.

Prior to registration, the Technical Control Board ("Technischer Überwachungsverein", TÜV) must check whether your type of car is basically eligible for licensing in Germany. Furthermore, your car will be tested for defects impairing its safety (so-called main test). The annual special exhaust emission test ("Abgasuntersuchung", ASU) is also carried out by the Technical Control Board. If the car fails the test, you must have the defects rectified and then return to the Technical Control Board. When approved, you are issued with the TÜV certificate required for registration.

If a friend does this for you, he will need an authorization, signed by you, and your passport or identity card.

You must present the following documents to the registration office:

- your passport or identity card;

- confirmation of registration with the Residents' Registration Office;
- a cover-note from a German insurance company (*cf.* "Car insurance");
- depending on the country of origin, two customs clearance certificates (it is easiest to obtain these when crossing the frontier, otherwise go to the customs office at your place of residence in Germany);
- a statement from the Federal Motor Vehicle Office ("Kraftfahrzeugbundesamt") that no German car ownership certificate has been issued for the car;
- the TÜV (Technical Control Board) certificate;
- the car registration documents from your own country and the car's number plates.

At the registration office you complete an application for allocation of a German number and issue of a car ownership certificate. There may be problems if the car papers issued in your country differ considerably from those valid in Germany. If no difficulties arise, you will be given a registration number and a certificate to be taken to a nearby workshop to have authorized number plates made. With the number plates, you return to the registration office to collect your German car documents (including the car registration certificate). The registration office will affix badges to your number plates certifying that the car has been properly registered and indicating the dates when the next main test by the Technical Control Board (in two years' time) and the special exhaust emission test (ASU) are due.

Fees are payable at both the Technical Control Board and the registration office. In addition, you must buy the number plates.

#### **8.4 Motor vehicle tax**

A foreign-registered car is not subject to taxation provided the driver is a foreign national residing in Germany for less than one year, and that the car has been imported and is used for personal needs.

Otherwise you must pay motor vehicle tax. This is due only when the tax office requests payment. The amount depends on the cubic capacity of the car and on whether it contains a low level of harmful substances (e.g. a proper catalytic converter). The tax is payable for a year in advance. In the event of premature departure from Germany, any amounts paid in excess will be refunded.

#### **8.5 Car insurance**

For a stay of up to one year you are not required to take out a German car insurance policy if you possess an international "green insurance certificate" or if your car has a registration number from one of the following countries: EU member-countries, The Czech Republic, Greenland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Slovakia, Switzerland, the Vatican. In the event of a claim, the international insurance certificate facilitates processing.

For stays exceeding one year, i.e. when your car must be registered in Germany or if you buy a car here, you must take out a third-party insurance policy with an insurance company in Germany. If appropriate, you should submit a no-claims certificate from your own insurance company at home. Depending on the no-claims duration, premiums can be reduced considerably (by up to 65% of the normal rate). If you cause an accident, you will lose some or all of these benefits. Insurance rates also depend on type of car and place of residence (the respective region's accident risk).

You can also take out additional car insurance against theft, fire, storm, hail, and damage caused by wild animals. You can negotiate a percentage excess at differing amounts (e.g.

EUR 150), i.e. the insurance company only covers damage exceeding the respective limit. The higher the percentage excess, the lower the premium. An expensive fully-comprehensive insurance covering all damage is only worth concluding if you have a new car.

Research fellows may apply for "Group B" ("Tarifgruppe B") offering more favourable insurance rates. The insurance company will give you an application form to fill in and send to the Humboldt Foundation for attestation.

The insurance company will give you a cover-note (official copy) when the insurance is taken out. You need this when registering your car.

## **8.6 Buying a car**

If you buy a car, either new or second-hand, from a dealer in this country it will be registered for you. New cars only have to be tested by the Technical Control Board three years after the date of registration. Used cars bought from dealers bear a TÜV badge valid for two years. If you buy a second-hand car privately, you must register it yourself immediately. Check when the next main TÜV test is due because it can be expensive to repair defects discovered at the test. Many research fellows have been disappointed after buying second-hand cars. We strongly recommend you to obtain expert advice before making a purchase.

The following documents must be presented to the Motor Vehicle Registration Office:

- your passport or identity card;
- confirmation of registration with the Residents' Registration Office;
- a cover-note from a German insurance company (*cf.* "Car insurance");
- the car ownership certificate and registration certificate. You obtain both of these documents from the previous owner when you buy the car.

As an alternative to the purchase of a car, particularly if you intend to use it only occasionally, you can rent a car – provided you have a valid driving licence – from companies such as Sixt, Avis, Hertz, or ADAC. Prices vary depending on the size of the car and duration of the lease (there are special offers on public holidays). In general, a fully comprehensive insurance on the basis of low-percentage excess is included. Car sharing is not common practice in Germany.

## **8.7 Export registration number**

If you wish to take a car bought in Germany abroad, you can apply for export registration plates instead of the German ones at your local Road Traffic Office (Motor Vehicle Registration Office of the Municipal Administration). In this case, you have to take out international insurance, which is relatively expensive, and apply for international registration. Your application must include the same documents as for regular registration. Cars with export registration plates are exempt from motor vehicle tax.

Export registration plates are intended for export only; they should be applied for shortly before the end of your stay and not for periods exceeding three months.

## **8.8 Selling or taking your car abroad**

If you wish to sell your car or take it abroad you must inform the Motor Vehicle Registration Office and your third-party insurance company in good time. When exporting a car bought in Germany to your home country you may have to complete an "export declaration" and submit it to the Customs Office depending on the value of the car. You can obtain these forms from the Customs Office or from the car dealer when you buy the car. More detailed information is provided by the Customs Office (to be found in the telephone directory under "Zolldienststellen").

## **8.9 Driving a car in Germany**

The road network and the condition of roads in Germany are often the subject of praise. The way the Germans drive is both praised and criticized. Research fellows have observed very considerate and polite conduct in some cases, while others expressed a rather negative opinion and complained about rigid observance of rules and self-righteous behaviour in road traffic. It is also difficult to get used to the fact that there is no speed limit on the motorways and drivers often travel at speeds of 180 km/h and more when traffic conditions allow. In other words, you must reckon on cars travelling at vastly-differing speeds, and, those accustomed to driving on the left, must, of course, get used to driving on the right.

Traffic regulations and road signs in Germany are, for the most part, similar to those in other countries. However, there are certain differences about which you should try to inform yourself prior to your arrival in Germany. Automobile clubs in foreign countries maintain close contact with automobile clubs in Germany and also provide information on driving in Germany.

The patrol cars of the automobile clubs, which mainly patrol the motorways, help drivers in distress. They can be called from emergency telephones on the motorways.

## **8.10 Speed limits**

Maximum speeds are usually indicated by road signs in Germany. For example, near pedestrian precincts in town or city centres and in residential areas there is an increasing number of traffic zones allowing a maximum speed of 30 km/h. On motorways there are ever more speed restrictions (usually 100 or 120 km/h) where there is construction work or in areas of heavy traffic.

Basically, the following is applicable:

- maximum speed within built-up areas (indicated by yellow signs): **50 km/h.**
- maximum speed on secondary roads outside built-up areas: **100 km/h.**
- recommended maximum speed on motorways: **130 km/h.**

## **8.11 Drinking and driving**

Driving under the influence of alcohol is subject to severe penalties in Germany – you may even lose your licence. You are liable to prosecution and must expect a fine if your blood-alcohol level exceeds 0.5 mill. If it exceeds 0.8 mill., you will lose your licence for several months with immediate effect. If you are stopped for a traffic offence, e.g. driving too fast or going through a red traffic light, 0.3 mill. is a sufficient level for you to lose your licence. If you are involved in an accident, a blood-alcohol level of 0.3 mill. will automatically render you at least partly to blame since you are regarded as suffering impaired fitness to drive. This will give your third-party automobile insurance company the right to refuse payment. We advise you not to drive a car if you are in any doubt.

**Note:** beer (0.4 l), wine (0.2 l) or high-proof alcohol (4 cl) is sufficient to cause your blood-alcohol level to exceed 0.3 mill.!

## **8.12 Accidents**

If you have an accident, you must remain at the scene until police arrive. Leaving the scene of an accident (hit-and-run driving) carries heavy penalties.

You must insist that accident details be recorded by police. Never sign an acknowledgement that you are to blame. Report the accident immediately to your insurance company. Your third-party automobile insurance company will not pay damages caused by you unless it has been recorded by the police. An accident is considered to have happened even if you only slightly damage another vehicle. Many insurance companies offer an additional legal expenses insurance policy to cover disputes following accidents (*cf. Chapter 3.12*).

## **9. Post and telephone**

### **9.1 Post**

Since privatization, the German Post Office only operates letter and parcel delivery services. Every district of a town and every village has postal facilities. Opening times may vary but are between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. at main post offices. Small branches usually close at lunch-time. Main post offices in larger towns often provide services at night, at weekends, and on public holidays. At post offices, as well as mailing letters and parcels, buying stamps or picking up parcels, you can also make telephone calls and buy telephone cards. All post offices have a Post Bank counter (*cf. Chapter 3.10 f*).

Letters to destinations within Germany generally reach recipients within one to two workdays. Air mail is advisable for overseas. Letters sent as registered mail are only handed over to recipients against a signature. You can obtain information on current rates at the counters or from a small brochure obtainable at any post office.

Standard letters up to 20 g and post cards within German currently cost EUR 0.56 and EUR 0.51 respectively. Postage abroad is considerably more expensive (standard airmail letters up to 20 g, EUR 1.53). DM-stamps are no longer valid; however, those issued in both currencies will retain their validity permanently. By contrast with bank notes and coins, however, stamps in Europe continue to be a national matter. Thus, in Germany you can only use German Euro-stamps.

### **9.2 Telephone**

In Germany the telephone network is currently operated by "Deutsche Telekom." However, larger towns are increasingly offering their own local network, which may be cheaper, so it is worth making a comparison. You can dial connections within Germany from any call box, post office, or private line. Almost all foreign countries can be direct-dialled. Most public call boxes now take magnetic cards. Telekom cards can be bought at the "T-centres" of "Deutsche Telekom", post offices, and many stationery shops for EUR 5, 10, or 15. Pre-paid cards are also offered by other providers which you can use to make calls from call boxes by entering a PIN. On top of this, there are now public call boxes which take credit cards. Telekom pay-phones, which are becoming increasingly rare, take a minimum of EUR 0.10. In addition to the Telekom call boxes, there is a small number of alternative public pay-phones charging less per unit. In Germany, too, mobile phones (usually referred to as "Handys") have become

extremely popular especially amongst younger people and in business. There are huge differences in prices and services with regard to the mobile network, purchase price, pre-paid or monthly charges, and, possibly, minimum charges, free-call, special tariffs etc. Go into shops and get advice on your own personal "telephone-profile".

Rates for calls vary considerably, depending on time of day and distance. Calls are much cheaper between 6 p.m. and 9 a.m. (and all day at weekends and on public holidays observed throughout Germany) than normal daytime rates. There is a further rebate on calls between 9 p.m. and early morning. This applies, in particular, to long-distance calls. With international calls, reduced rates are charged for some countries at certain times of day. Please note that connections via mobile networks use different and, usually, higher tariffs.

Private subscribers can use telephone companies offering less expensive services than Telekom via certain dialling codes (Call by Call) – o.tel.o, Viag Intercom, 01051 Telekom etc.; differences in rates can be considerable, particularly for calls abroad. You can obtain up-to-date information on this on the Internet under **www.teltarif.de**. As the various telephone companies' rates change continuously, it is worth keeping up to date on the latest developments.

Telephone books have not been available at most post offices since the privatization of "Deutsche Telekom." If you do not have a telephone directory for your region, you will have to call Directory Enquiries to find out about telephone numbers in Germany (118-33, 118-37, English-language service) and abroad (118-34). You will find all persons listed in the telephone book on the Internet under **www.t-online.de**, where you can also obtain a list of all registered E-mail addresses.

Commercial directories, "Gelbe Seiten", (yellow pages) contain the whole range of numbers from doctors' surgeries and pharmacies, via shops and restaurants, to tradesmen (Internet: [www.t-online.de](http://www.t-online.de)). All service numbers starting with 0130 can be dialled free of charge. You should make careful note of two important telephone numbers: **110 for police** emergency calls and **112 for fire and ambulance** emergency services.

If you have a telephone at your accommodation you will receive a local telephone book and commercial directory free of charge. New editions are published annually.

When moving into new accommodation, it is advisable to take over your predecessor's telephone. This is possible within three months of the previous tenant's departure and currently costs about EUR 25. A new analogue telephone connection can be installed within one week and costs roughly twice as much. ISDN or similar connections are considerably more expensive than analogue ones. This applies to the basic monthly charge, too. You can apply for installation or disconnection of a telephone at Telekom shops (T-centres) in all towns and cities (cf. first pages in the telephone directory and entries under Deutsche Telekom). You can also apply for detailed lists of your calls to be sent to you free of charge with your monthly bill. These bills include the charges for other telephone companies, though these are not necessarily compiled on a monthly basis.

## **10. Hotels and restaurants**

### **10.1 Hotels**

When visiting a town you do not know it is best to ask tourist information offices about overnight accommodation at hotels and guest-houses. These are located at airports, main railway stations, and in town or city centres. Most of them provide brochures listing accommodation, prices, and standards, and recommending restaurants. Restaurants are also listed in the commercial telephone directory.

Do not expect too much luxury from the average hotel room. Often basic rooms do not have a shower, telephone, or radio and not even the ubiquitous little bar of soap. But prices are still generally astonishingly high, varying considerably depending on the size of the town. The price of overnight accommodation, which must be displayed in the room, should include breakfast. If you use the telephone in your room the hotel will charge you a higher price per unit (about EUR 0.20–0.30). For longer telephone calls it may be worth using the nearest public pay-phone.

If you use a hotel porter to take luggage to your room, give him a tip and if you spend several days at a hotel, tip the chambermaid, too (several EUROS ). When checking out you must vacate your room in the morning (between 10 a.m. and 12 noon).

When planning excursions and trips, you should consult a travel guide containing recommended accommodation and restaurants. You will find a variety of such guides in bookshops.

### **10.2 Restaurants**

As in other countries, restaurants in Germany differ considerably in regard to quality, price, comfort, service, atmosphere etc. Restaurants with foreign cuisine are often less expensive than those offering traditional German food. Especially popular and usually cheaper are, for example, Chinese, Italian, and Greek restaurants; French and Japanese cuisine, on the other hand, tends to belong in the upper price bracket – as does good quality German food, by the way. The choice varies enormously from area to area and place to place and is partly determined by the immigration culture of the last few decades.

Generally, you choose your own table or the manager or waiter will escort you to a table. If there are no tables free, you can join customers already seated after checking whether places are occupied.

Menus give the prices of food and beverages, including Value Added Tax and service charges. If not, the menu must state this. It is customary to give a small tip to the waiter by rounding up the bill to the full EUR amount or, if the bill is high, by adding a couple of Euros. If the restaurant owner serves you himself, no tip is given. In general, 7% is recommended as a tip for these services but this varies widely. By the way, it is rare for German restaurants to serve either bread or water with a meal. These must be ordered separately and paid for.

## **11. Culture and leisure**

In Germany, even small towns have their own theatres, orchestras, and museums and you will find a rich and varied cultural programme almost everywhere. In big cities, opportunities to see interesting artists or exhibitions, theatre or film abound to such an extent that you will often find it hard to choose.

You can find out about entertainment by consulting local newspapers, tourist information offices – which issue programmes for the coming weeks and months – theatre, opera and concert programmes, or from billboards. Almost every town has its own cultural or municipal magazine containing the programmes of municipal theatres, concert halls, and cinemas and giving information on the art and music scene. You can also consult the town's Internet pages.

Particularly in university towns, free brochures are available recommending various events or cinema programmes and including small-ads placed mostly by students seeking or selling almost anything. Your German colleagues will tell you about these brochures and where to find them.

You will soon find out about interesting leisure activities, but here is some general advice:

You can enrol for courses in almost all fields at adult education centres ("Volkshochschulen", VHS): e.g. you can take additional German language courses. Fees are relatively low. You can obtain a schedule either at these centres or at bookshops.

You should take out a subscription to a national and/or local newspaper if you want to improve your German and keep your-self informed. Regional newspapers also inform you of cultural activities.

If you are passionately interested in theatre or music, take out a subscription ticket in the autumn when the new season starts. This is cheaper than buying individual tickets and guarantees you a seat.

Most towns offer guided tours; trips to neighbouring towns or nearby places of interest are organized by travel companies.

You can read or borrow many daily newspapers and magazines and a wide variety of books at public lending libraries ("Stadtbibliotheken").

News and information programmes are broadcast on television and radio. In their final reports, however, many research fellows have noted that, unfortunately, almost all foreign films shown on German television are "dubbed" in German.

You should certainly attend the various public festivities such as carnival in winter, street parties in summer, or beer and wine festivals in the autumn. Germans love festivities and you will find that they are often more sociable and relaxed there than they are normally.

Typical of Germany are the many "Kneipen" (pubs) of different styles and atmospheres; almost all Germans have their "local" ("Stammkneipe") where they meet friends. Big cities have pubs running exhibitions, theatrical and musical performances, and cabaret. Many activities are arranged there by the "non-established" cultural scene, well out of the way of the

big art and cultural institutions. Insiders among your German friends will tell you the best addresses for this. In the summer, beer gardens and wine taverns, where you can sit outside long into the evening, are extremely popular.

The Germans are also fond of walking and hiking: big cities and surrounding areas have plenty of facilities for outings and walks. Exploring the environment by bicycle or on inline-skates has also become popular.

## **12. Shopping**

### **12.1 Groceries etc.**

You will soon find the shops you need for everyday purchases such as groceries, household articles, stationery, newspapers etc. in your neighbourhood. The big supermarkets are often cheaper ("Aldi", "Lidl", "Hit", "Real" etc.) but not always centrally located. You may need a car for major purchases or big shopping expeditions.

All grocery shops have weekly special offers. Some shops distribute information leaflets on special offers to local residents. It is worth keeping an eye open for them, since the prices of some articles are considerably reduced for limited periods. Many of the larger department stores or grocery shops have notice boards ("Schwarze Bretter") containing useful hints or offers by customers.

Almost all towns have free advertising papers ("Anzeigenblätter") containing local business advertisements. They include small-ad and housing sections.

Turkish and Greek specialities have long been on offer in Germany. In many towns shops have gradually established themselves offering special groceries and ingredients from distant countries and cultures. Asia-markets from China, Korea, and Thailand are particularly common but Indian and African groceries, for example, can also be found. These shops are not usually contained in the advertisements but you can easily find them in the "Gelbe Seiten" (yellow pages) under "Lebensmittel" (groceries).

### **12.2 Other shopping facilities**

A very wide range of goods is available for purchase in Germany, as you will discover by strolling in the town centre. Since prices and quality vary considerably from one shop to another, it is advisable to compare carefully. Department stores where you find everything, like "Karstadt", "Hertie", "Kaufhof", etc., are not necessarily cheaper than shops specializing in certain articles and giving better individual advice to customers. There are also discount stores with prices as much as 20% lower than in shops offering more style and personnel.

Bargains can be found at summer and winter sales (in July and January), offering goods from the outgoing season at considerably reduced prices. But these goods may be of inferior quality, produced especially for the end-of-season sales.

You may also find it less expensive to buy from a mail order catalogue. But never buy anything from a door-to-door salesman and never sign a sales contract at the door. This also applies to subscriptions to magazines, which are rarely genuine.

EC-cards are accepted in almost all shops. Credit cards are not as common in Germany as in many other countries. The money card is envisaged for smaller amounts but has not yet been generally accepted because special machines are required to use it.

You can exchange most goods – with the exception of special offers – within a week if the goods have not been used and if you can produce a receipt. You should be entitled to have your money refunded if not satisfied. You may, however, be offered a voucher to be exchanged for goods ("Gutschein") instead of cash. It is advisable to enquire prior to making a purchase about conditions of sale and exchange terms.

With major purchases, such as electrical appliances, you can return faulty goods up to several months after the date of purchase. Nowadays, the guarantee is often valid for 2 years. The terms of the guarantee are specified on a guarantee card supplied with the article. The guarantee must show the date of purchase and the stamp of the shop in order to be valid. There are firms who insist you bring the original packaging when goods are returned to the shop or exchanged.

Please always keep the sales receipt for possible claims for reimbursement or exchange.

When contemplating major purchases you can contact the nearest consumer advice bureau ("Verbraucherberatung") – available in all larger towns, (cf. telephone directory). These centres can also help with other problems, such as claims for reimbursement, insurance, tradesmen's work standards etc. A fee is charged for advice. The Consumer Goods Testing Foundation ("Stiftung Warentest") is a non-profit institution which conducts objective quality tests and compares prices. It issues a magazine, "test", containing test reports and offering an order service for previously published test reports on specific products. (More detailed information can be obtained from a current issue.)

### **12.3 "Second-hand"**

You can buy second-hand goods at very reasonable prices. You can save a lot on household and kitchen appliances needed only for your stay in Germany. Bargains can be found in the local newspapers and advertising papers. Some shops specialize in second-hand equipment which they advertise in these papers. *Second-hand* baby articles are relatively easy to obtain.

### **12.4 Opening and closing hours**

Businesses in Germany must strictly observe the regulations of the Shop Closing Hours Act. Shops close at 8 p.m. at the latest, some already at 6.30 p.m. On Saturdays, shops close for the

weekend between 12 noon and 1 p.m., in town centres normally at between 2 and 4 p.m. In town centres, shops remain open until 6 p.m. on Saturdays during the four weeks before Christmas.

### **12.5 Recycling**

The Germans are becoming increasingly aware of environmental problems. Every town and municipality has skips, containers, and other disposal facilities for glass, wastepaper, tin, hazardous waste (e.g. used batteries, defective neon tubes), and bulky refuse (mostly on request). You can obtain a brochure from municipal or local authorities with information on local waste disposal.

Some beverages come in **reusable glass bottles** sold with repayable deposits. These are marked accordingly. Non-returnable glass bottles should be disposed of in municipal bottle-banks.

**Wastepaper** is collected in a bin (mostly blue) outside your home and emptied once a month or tied in bundles and picked up from the roadside. In some areas, wastepaper containers are provided at certain locations.

**Packaging** not consisting of paper, glass, or tin is collected almost everywhere in so-called "yellow bags" (obtainable from the municipal or local authority) and picked up on a regular basis. Some houses have (yellow) bins. "Yellow bags" are intended for the disposal of caps, cans, peelings, aluminium foil; foil, bottles, plastic beakers, foam rubber cardboard drinks containers, and vacuum packs made of composite materials. These packaging materials are marked with the so-called "green dot" symbol.

In many areas, **organic (bio-degradable) waste** can be collected in a special bin (mostly the green "bio bin") placed outside your home and emptied regularly.

What remains after sorting domestic refuse and cannot be recycled is "residual waste" for which your landlord provides a (usually black) bin. Charges for collecting this waste are included in utility payments. Since disposal charges have increased considerably recently, the size of bins has been reduced in many areas, so that it becomes a necessity to sort waste.

### **12.6 Launderettes**

Germany does not have as many self-service laundries or launderettes as many other countries. They are also quite expensive. A 5 kg wash currently costs about EUR 2.50, not including washing-powder (roughly EUR 0.30) and dryer (about EUR 0.50 for 10 minutes). You should ensure that your rented accommodation is equipped with a private or communal washing machine.

### **12.7 Export**

If you wish to export articles bought in Germany to your home country at the end of your stay, you should inform yourself at customs offices about export regulations and formalities. This is particularly important in regard to computers and computer components.

### **12.8 Refund of Value Added Tax**

When exporting goods bought in Germany to their home countries foreign nationals may, under certain circumstances, apply for reimbursement of Value Added Tax (VAT, "Mehrwertsteuer") paid at the time of purchase. However, this regulation is applicable only to foreign nationals not resident in Germany. Since research fellows are usually registered as residents in Germany for a limited period, they are not entitled to refunds of Value Added Tax.

### **13. Contact with the Germans**

It does not take long to notice typical characteristics of daily life and customs in Germany. As elsewhere, many of these characteristics are gradually disappearing as a result of social mobility and increasing travel opportunities. This applies to young people in particular and, of course, to the scholars with whom you will be dealing for most of the time.

#### **13.1 Titles and forms of address**

Proverbial German formality has changed considerably over the years. This is particularly true of the formal "Sie" and intimate "du" form of address and to the use of formal titles. When addressing strangers (officially over 15 years of age), you should use "Sie" and the person's surname. Germans often use this form of address throughout their lives, even if in daily contact with each other. Particularly the older and middle-aged generations find it difficult to switch to "du" and need a suitable occasion on which, according to tradition, the senior or older person offers "du" to his or her junior. This is often sealed with a little ceremony, "Brüderschaft trinken" (drinking to newly-established "brotherhood").

The younger generation (up to about 30 years of age) is more relaxed. Young people often say "du" to each other and use first names from the first meeting. It is best to wait and see how people approach you, then take the cue.

Certain rules also govern the use of academic titles. If you have an academic title, do not use it when addressing people. At academic institutes and similar establishments where many people have academic titles, they are usually dropped.

"Herr" and "Frau" are now used as the correct form of address in connection with surnames. Contrary to previous practice, girls and young women are rarely addressed as "Fräulein" nowadays; this is usually found inappropriate.

You will immediately notice another common characteristic – Germans invariably shake hands when saying "hello" or "goodbye." But this has become rare among younger people in a relaxed environment. Bowing is not customary in Germany; a kiss on the cheek is relatively rare and usually restricted to the younger generation.

#### **13.2 Dress**

Dress is a matter of fashion these days. Rules of dress no longer exist in most spheres of life. But the formal male suit, shirt, and tie are still regarded as the "proper" way to dress in business life. At universities and other research institutes, everyday outfit is usually rather informal; however, this varies depending on scientific discipline and geographic region within Germany. People are still often judged by what they wear, especially on official occasions and in professional life. So dress should not be too casual on such occasions nor, for example, if you are invited to evening functions, concerts, the theatre, or lectures.

### **13.3 Invitations**

Many Germans are very reserved when it comes to private contacts. So don't be offended if you have to wait a while before receiving an invitation to visit your new German acquaintances at home. You will most probably be invited to a restaurant dinner or some social event with them first.

Generally, you will be treated courteously and helpfully, if in a somewhat reserved manner. Your colleagues may not be sure themselves whether you are interested in doing things with them and, thus, hesitate to ask. You can expedite the process of "slowly getting to know each other" by taking the initiative and inviting them to you or suggesting doing something together. Many Germans will be grateful for this, accept gladly, and return your invitation. Once the initial difficulties of getting acquainted have been overcome, genuine and lasting friendship can develop.

It is not customary to "drop in" on German acquaintances without an invitation. With closer friends, judge for yourself whether they welcome spontaneous visits. It is always better to let them know in advance that you are coming.

Punctuality is appreciated by most Germans. If you arrive a few minutes late on a social visit, you will be doing exactly the right thing. Germans usually eat lunch about 1 o'clock and their evening meal between 7 and 8. If your hosts are cooking themselves it is especially important to arrive punctually. But at big parties with lots of guests punctuality is not an issue. It is not a faux pas to ask your host or other guests what the form is.

It is usual to take along a small gift, more of a gesture of appreciation, such as chocolates, a bottle of wine, or flowers. If you wish to give flowers, you should take an uneven number and remove the paper before handing them to your hostess. (In this connection you should take note of some social rules: red roses signify a "declaration of love," for example, and yellow carnations are given at funeral services. But these rules are gradually dying out. Your host will certainly be pleased if you thank him briefly the following day, either in person or by telephone.

At table, things are no longer so formal as they used to be. But there are certain rules for official occasions which you ought to know. It is customary for the hostess to start eating first. The host gives a signal for you to drink by raising his glass and toasting his guests ("Zum Wohl") and perhaps saying a few words of welcome; glasses are clinked on this occasion.

At informal parties where the guests help themselves to the cold or warm buffet, or if young people invite each other, there are no special rules of conduct apart from those observed everywhere.

Coffee-and-cake sessions are typically German. Invitations to coffee are generally extended for 3 or 4 p.m. Guests are usually offered home-baked cakes and pastries.

People often just get together in a café in the afternoons or in a restaurant in town in the evenings. Usually each person pays their own bill.

At Christmas, you should not expect to be invited to Germans' homes, because it is regarded as a traditional "family occasion", only embracing the immediate family.

Normally, rules of conduct in Germany are not taken too seriously. In other words, you should not be afraid of making a fool of yourself or offending your host!

### **13.4 The "typical German"**

What is the "typical German" like? The best way of finding out is to ask former research fellows who, in their final reports, often describe and comment on their impressions. The Humboldt Foundation has evaluated thousands of these reports and last published the results in a 1994 study entitled "All's well – but is it really?" This study revealed the following opinions: "typically German" are orderliness, efficiency, discipline, obedience to rules and regulations but also friendliness, openness, helpfulness, and interest in guests. Particular mention is also made of politeness, reliability, a sense of responsibility and duty, including to the environment, and preservation of traditional values. Other "typically German" qualities are said to be reserve, coolness, difficulty in making friends, and a lack of spontaneity. Arrogance, hostility to children and foreigners, egoism, Euro-centrism and a marked inclination to material values are also listed.

Typical characteristics should apply to a nation as a whole, but are often the result of experience of individuals. You will find that Germans may, indeed, possess the above characteristics, but that the individual character traits of the new colleagues, friends, and acquaintances you make during your stay in Germany, will have a more lasting effect on your picture of "the Germans" than the general impressions made by people as a whole.

However, in spite of the diversity of individual characters, there are distinct cultural and – more particularly – linguistic differences (dialects) in the individual federal states. Depending on the region, people are said to have very special peculiarities and modes of behaviour. Indeed, much of this is based on prejudice but some of it is confirmed now and again.

It is best to trust your own judgement and not be put off by other people's generalizations.

## **14. Appendix**

### **14.1 Public holidays**

Most public holidays in Germany are of religious origin. Some are only celebrated by the Catholic Church and others only by the Protestant Church. So some are only celebrated in federal states with a predominantly Catholic population or only in federal states in which the majority of the population is Protestant.

**The following public holidays are observed throughout the Federal Republic of Germany:**

New Year's Day      January 1

Good Friday    Friday before Easter

(end of March/beginning of April)

Easter Sunday and Monday    end of March/beginning of April

Labour Day May 1  
 Ascension Day Thursday ten days before Whit Sunday  
 Whit Sunday and Monday in June  
 Day of German Unity October 3  
 Christmas Eve December 24 (from noon onward)  
 Christmas Day December 25  
 Boxing Day December 26  
 New Year's Eve December 31 (from noon onward)

**The following public holidays are only observed in some federal states:**

Epiphany January 6  
 Monday before Lent seven weeks before Easter Monday  
 (February/March)  
 Shrove Tuesday the Tuesday before Lent:  
 the Monday and Tuesday are the highlight  
 of the carnival season, which is widely  
 celebrated in some Catholic areas  
 such as Cologne and Mainz  
 Corpus Christi the second Thursday after Whitsun (June)  
 Assumption Day August 15  
 Reformation Day October 31  
 All Saints Day November 1  
 Day of Prayer and Repentance the third Wednesday in November

**14.2 Weights and measures**

The weights and measures system in Germany is based on the metric system, with the metre as the standard measurement of length and the kilogramme of weight.

*Linear measure:*

1 kilometre (km) = 1,000 metres (m)  
 1 metre (m) = 100 centimetres (cm)  
 1 centimetre = 10 millimetres (mm)

*Volume:*

1 litre (l) = 1,000 cubic centimetres (ccm)

*Weight:*

1 kilogramme (kg) = 1,000 grammes (g)  
 1 pound (Pfd) = 500 grammes  
 1 hundredweight = 100 pounds ("Zentner")

**14.3 Temperature**

The temperature is measured in Centigrade (°C); freezing-point is 0°C (32° Fahrenheit) and boiling-point (of water) 100°C (212° Fahrenheit).

Conversion:  $T_F = 9/5 \cdot T_C + 32$  or  $T_C = 5/9 \cdot (T_F - 32)$

**14.4 Currency**

Since January 1, 2002 the D-Mark has been replaced by the **EURO**

(1 EUR = 1.95583 DM) and is now the only valid currency in Germany; a EUR is made up of 100 Cents. The banknotes in circulation are in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, and 500 EUR, the coins comprise 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50 Cents as well as 1, and 2 EUR.

The prices for goods and services are still sometimes shown in DM as well as EUR to help the population with the conversion.



