

## Transportation in Germany

Germany has an excellent system of **mass transportation**, including modern airports; an extensive railway network; subways and bus systems in and among cities, towns, and villages; and a system of freeways (*Autobahn*) similar to U.S. interstate highways the use of which is still free of charge in Germany for automobiles. In spite of modern technology, however, Germans still enjoy their tradition of walking long distances or simply strolling (*spazieren gehen*) or jogging (*joggen*) in the countryside or along rivers and lakes. Germans love to ride bicycles (*Fahrrad fahren*). The number of bikers in Germany is much larger than in the United States. Bicycle paths are found across the country and special bicycle lanes and traffic lights for bikers are found in most German cities.

Germans also love their **cars**. Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Volkswagen are world renowned automobile manufacturers. But compared to Americans, many Germans rather drive small cars because parking space in cities is rare and gas is more expensive than in the United States. To qualify for a driver's licence, the applicant must be at least 18 years old, attend a driver's school, and pass a written and behind-the-wheel test. The licence (*Führerschein*) costs approximately € 750 and is good for a lifetime. On the *Autobahn*, there is a suggested speed limit of 130 kilometers per hour (approximately 80 miles per hour), but many people drive much faster. Most of the service stations (*Tankstelle*) are found in the outskirts of the cities or on the *Autobahn*. To figure out the cost of gas, you must not only convert liters into gallons but also euros into dollars. Just as in the U.S., the cost per liter, number of liters taken and the total amount are indicated on the gas pump.

Of course, there are other means of transportation. If you are in a hurry, you should look for a taxi. Mercedes cars or other automobiles of equal quality are frequently used as cabs. German cab drivers take pride in buying good, dependable cars that will last for many years.

In many German cities, **the streetcar** (*Straßenbahn*) and the **city bus** are the most important mode of local public transportation. For the streetcar, you must buy your ticket in advance because there is no conductor on the streetcar itself. Most stops have free standing ticket machines marked *Fahrscheine*,

where tickets may be purchased. Many cities are phasing out streetcars today. Instead city buses have been introduced. Bus tickets can also be bought in advance or from the busdriver. Streetcars and buses will stop where there are signs with the letter *H* which stands for *Haltestelle*. Major cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Cologne have **subways** (*U-Bahnen*) and **city trains** (*S-Bahnen*). You can find these by locating signs at the entrance marked with a big U or S. The *S-Bahn* is an elevated city train and the *U-Bahn* runs underground. An exception is Hamburg where it must temporarily run overland due to the harbour.

Many Germans ride the comfortable trains of the **Deutsche Bahn** (*German Railroad*). The trains are efficient, fast and punctual, especially if they belong to the **InterCityExpress** program.

If you enjoy traveling by water, **boats** of various kinds are available. Cruises on the Rhine River are very popular during the spring and summer months. Tourists as well as Germans enjoy the beautiful landscape of the Rhine River valley with its countless ancient castles which overview the river from the hills. In case you are driving along the Rhine River and need to get to the other side, you could take one of the ferry boats (*Fähren*) which cross the river at numerous points.

Another way to travel is **by air**. Within short distances, helicopters (*Hubschrauber*) let you view the area from above. The most international means of transportation linking countries and continents is the airplane (*Flugzeug*). Between 300 and 400 people can travel in a jumbo jet and fly from New York to Frankfurt in about seven hours. After a lot of small budget airlines were established in the past few years, the airplane is increasingly used for national flights or flights within Europe. These airlines offer flights at extremely low prices so that people can fly according to special offers, for example from Cologne to Berlin for €19, 95.