

HOW TO DRIVE ON THE GERMAN AUTOBAHN

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DRIVING RULES AND ETIQUETTE

Entering the Autobahn

- ◆ On-ramps are very short and may be shared with off-ramps. In construction zones, on-ramps may be even shorter than usual, or end at stop signs
- ◆ Accelerate quickly and merge at highway speed when clear



Autobahn Entrance

Speed Limits

- ◆ Much of the Autobahn has no maximum speed limit. In these areas, the suggested maximum is 130 km/h (80 mi/h)



Speed Limit

- ◆ There is no minimum speed limit, but impeding the flow of traffic is prohibited. Match your speed to others in your lane



End Speed Limit

- ◆ In construction or urban zones, the speed limit may be reduced to 80 km/h (50 mi/h) or less

- ◆ Reduced speed limits are posted without warning
- ◆ Signs indicate when speed restrictions are over



No Speed Limit

- ◆ Overhead electronic signs will show changing speed limits based on road, traffic or weather conditions at the time

- ◆ A different speed limit may apply to each lane
- ◆ Follow the posted limits, as photo radar is common

Passing and Changing Lanes

- ◆ Drive in the right-most lane when not passing
- ◆ It is not acceptable to flash your headlights to indicate that you want to pass, or to make rude hand gestures at other drivers for any reason
- ◆ Pass on the left only. It is illegal to pass on the right, except in stop-and-go traffic
- ◆ Always signal lane changes
- ◆ Check your mirrors and blind spots very carefully for cars and motorbikes approaching from behind at very high speed
- ◆ Change lanes smoothly and then pass quickly
- ◆ Move to the right as soon as passing is complete so you do not obstruct others coming up behind you
- ◆ Lanes in construction zones are narrower than usual



No Passing

Navigating

- ◆ A vehicle GPS system giving audible directions is preferred
- ◆ Paper Autobahn maps are available
- ◆ Paper road maps often lack the desired Autobahn detail
- ◆ Assign a passenger as navigator if using paper maps

Distracted Driving

- ◆ Due to the speeds involved, the consequences of distracted driving (e.g., using phone, eating, reading map) can be severe
- ◆ Keep both hands on the wheel and stay alert at all times

Traffic Congestion

- ◆ Traffic jams ("Stau") are announced on the radio
- ◆ The average traffic jam is 2 km (1.2 mi) long, but jams can easily exceed 20 km (12 mi) in length
- ◆ Exiting and taking alternate routes is usually slower
- ◆ The risk of congestion is greatest on weekends and holidays
- ◆ Trucks are prohibited on Sundays to reduce traffic



Congestion Ahead



Drive on Shoulder

- ◆ You may drive on the shoulder in construction zones or during congestion, where signs permit
- ◆ Signs may indicate the length of construction zones
- ◆ Maintain a safe distance to vehicles ahead of you
- ◆ Make room for rescue vehicles by pulling to the curb side of your lane, creating a lane in the middle ("Rettungsgasse"). If there are three lanes, cars in the middle and right lanes move right, so the rescue lane develops between the left and middle lanes
- ◆ Emergency detours follow numbered signs marked "U". Follow the same number to the next on-ramp



Detour Route



Distance to Exit

Exiting the Autobahn

- ◆ Look for horizontal signs marked "Ausfahrt" (Exit)
- ◆ Vertical signs with diagonal white lines provide a countdown to the off-ramp in 100 m (yd) intervals
- ◆ Off-ramps are very short and may be shared with on-ramps
- ◆ Signal early and decelerate only in the exit lane

SERVICES AND SUPPLIES

Fuel

- ◆ Gasoline and diesel are available at service centres
- ◆ Pumps are usually self serve and payment is not automated—pay cashier inside after pumping
- ◆ You can pay with cash or major credit cards
- ◆ Fuel is more expensive than in North America
- ◆ Service centres may be marked "Raststätte" or "Autohof"



Gas Station

Food and Lodging

- ◆ Service centres usually have at least a cafeteria-style restaurant
- ◆ Some centres offer convenience stores, pay phones, playgrounds and hotels



Restaurant



Hotel

Washrooms

- ◆ A fee of around €1 applies for washroom use, but upon payment a store or restaurant credit is issued worth around €0.70
- ◆ Have exact change available



Washrooms

Parking Areas

- ◆ Marked by blue signs with the white letter "P"
- ◆ Usually no services available unless indicated
- ◆ Parking areas with washrooms include the letters "WC" on the sign. These washrooms may be free



Parking Area

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT OR BREAKDOWN

- ◆ Pull off the roadway, onto the right shoulder if possible
- ◆ Put on the orange safety vest supplied with your rental car
- ◆ Protect the scene from approaching traffic
- ◆ Place the car's warning triangle 200 m (yds) behind you
- ◆ Treat any injuries. By law, all cars must carry first aid kits
- ◆ To report an accident or breakdown, use the roadside emergency telephones (orange posts marked "SOS") located at 2 km (1.5 mi) intervals, or dial 0800 6683 663 on your mobile phone



Emergency Phone

AUTOBAHN TOLLS

- ◆ Passenger vehicles do not need to pay a toll ("Maut")
- ◆ No windshield toll sticker ("Vignette") is required



Toll Road Sign

OTHER KEY GERMAN WORDS

- ◆ "Personen auf der Fahrbahn" - Persons on the road
- ◆ "Gegenstände auf der Fahrbahn" - Objects on the road
- ◆ "Falsch" - Wrong way
- ◆ "Falschfahrer" - Person driving the wrong way
- ◆ "Unfall" - Accident
- ◆ "Nebel" - Fog
- ◆ "Baustelle" - Construction zone
- ◆ "Autobahn Kirche" - Expressway church

While this guide is intended specifically for the German Autobahn, much of it will apply to expressways in other European countries. Sign images from Wikipedia Commons