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

Speed Limits

- Much of the Autobahn has no maximum speed limit. In these areas, the suggested maximum is 130 km/h (80 mi/h)
- There is no minimum speed limit, but impeding the flow of traffic is prohibited. Match your speed to others in your lane
- It is illegal to stop, park, make a U-turn or back up In construction or urban zones, the speed limit



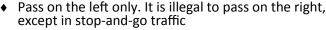
may be reduced to 80 km/h (50 mi/h) or less Reduced speed limits are posted without warning

- Signs indicate when speed restrictions are over
- Overhead electronic signs will show changing speed limits based on road, traffic or weather conditions at the time
- No Speed Limit → 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



- 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

Navigating

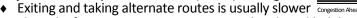
- A vehicle GPS system giving audible directions is preferred
- Paper Autobahn maps are available
- Paper road maps often lack the desired Autobahn detail
- Assign a passenger as navigator if using paper maps

Distracted Driving

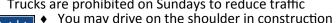
- Due to the speeds involved, the consequences of distracted driving (e.g., using phone, eating, reading map) can be severe
- Keep both hands on the wheel and stay alert at all times

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









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



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"

Food and Lodging





Service centres usually have at least a cafeteria-style restaurant

Some centres offer convenience stores, pay phones, playgrounds and hotels

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

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



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



AUTOBAHN TOLLS

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



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 © 2015 AdventureProof