



### Information

**Language:** German

**Capital:** Berlin

**Population:** 82,314,900

**Currency:** Euro (?)

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Current rating: 4.2/5 (154 votes)

**Your rating:**

**Hitchability:** Excellent Good Average Bad Almost impossible

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Sigurdas thumbing towards Nürnberg, 2003.

**Germany** is a member state of the European Union as well as the Schengen Agreement. It is a great country for hitchhiking, both on motorways (via on-ramps, service stations, more seldom - parking lots) and local roads. Germans are a little bit suspicious, but nice if you get to know them. Thumbing makes it easier for them to say "no", because they do not even have to look at you. Those who will stop are often people who hitchhiked themselves when they were younger. Many of them have families, jobs and fast cars now. Because of the absence of speed limits on most motorways it's a good country to hitchhike long distances in short time.

## Road types

To hitchhike efficiently in Germany it is good to know the three different kinds of roads between cities and towns. By descending speed these are:

- motorways or expressways called *Autobahn* with no speed limit
- federal roads called *Bundesstraße*
- country roads called *Landstraße*

Their use in hitchhiking is different and explained below.

## Autobahn

For more information, see the article [Autobahn](#).



A traffic sign indicating Autobahn A7

The autobahns in Germany are the fastest links between cities. Their numbers consist of an **A** and the number of the highway. On traffic signs the *A* is not mentioned but they can be distinguished by the blue color of the sign.

The lack of a general speed limit is something most Germans are proud of demonstrating to you and what makes them the best choice for longer distances. Subsequently walking and hitchhiking is illegal on the autobahn and the emergency lane.

As a general rule, you should always stick to the Autobahn as long as possible and try to change between major autobahns seldomly, even if this means some detours. As soon as you are on the Autobahn and travel between service stations, you are hitching fast and reliable. For more information about this kind of hitchhiking, see the article on [petrol station hitchhiking](#).

As trucks do not travel faster than 90 km/h you might want first try to get a ride hitching a personal car before asking truck drivers. Trucks are great for a night-ride; however, there are restrictions, like in France, of when trucks are allowed on an autobahn. In Germany most trucks aren't allowed on motorways on Sundays or public holidays before 22:00. As most truck drivers stop earlier truck traffic already gets less on Saturday afternoons.

If you travel a specific autobahn, have a look at the [autobahn](#) page where you can find very specific information and hints about hitchhiking on German motorway ramps, etc. - for example, the route [Amsterdam?Berlin](#) along the [A2](#) and [A30](#).

### Getting onto the autobahn



The on-ramp sign of an autobahn

To get onto the autobahn either hitch a ride from a city, thumb at the on-ramp **before** the sign or go to a service station by public transportation and walk there. A good possibility is to look for a street with traffic lights that leads to an autobahn. Wait for the red light, then knock at the windows (do not forget to smile!) and ask for a ride. If you look neither like a homeless nor like a drug dealer, they will be happy to help you.

## Service stations and rest areas

You have various possibilities for being dropped off along the autobahn to look for your next ride. As petrol station hitchhiking is faster, try to avoid being dropped at on-ramps where you have to thumb. On the autobahn, it is preferable to be dropped off at a service station instead of a rest area as rest areas have much less cars stopping.



Autobahn traffic sign of an Autohof

The *Raststätte* is the usual choice for hitchhiking because most cars tend to refuel there. Make sure your *Raststätte* has not just a restaurant but also a petrol station because more people stop there and they leave quicker. Most *Raststätten* are on both sides of the autobahn and there is often a bridge or tunnel nearby to cross. Therefore you might consider hitchhiking to a *Raststätte* in the opposite direction first to get onto the highway quicker. At the entrance of the petrol station shop there are usually map stands that show the surrounding area and other service stations in Germany.

With a few exceptions all service stations can be entered by foot from the side and feature an unlocked door in the fence or wall.

The off-autobahn *Autohof* is a local fuel station that is marked on traffic signs on the autobahn. Food and fuel is cheaper there but most car drivers don't bother and thus mostly trucks stop there. This means that they are okay on weekdays but have to be avoided on Saturday evenings and Sundays at all cost. Another disadvantage for continuing on the autobahn is that local traffic also stops at the *Autohof*.

## Federal *Bundesstraße* roads



A traffic sign indicating Bundesstraße B42

The federal *Bundesstraße* roads are indicated by yellow signs and carry numbers like *B6* or *B49*. Like in the case of the autobahn the *B* is not written on traffic signs, but federal roads can be distinguished by the yellow color of the sign. As they are smaller and carry more local traffic they should only be used to get from and to the autobahn, though there are a few exceptions to the rule.

Their general speed limit is 100 km/h and they usually have no emergency lane so they are difficult to thumb. To get a ride either try petrol stations or choose a place where have a lot of space to see you and stop or where they are going slower, e.g. town exits. Police might consider it illegal to thumb in sites where cars cannot stop without putting the traffic in danger.

## Smaller federal *Landstraße* roads

These roads are not numbered on traffic signs and usually connect minor towns. As most of them have lower speed limits thumbing is likely to work. As they might not have a lot of traffic coming through they should only be used for getting from and to your final destination.

## Legal stuff

Hitchhiking in general is legal in Germany. It is only forbidden to hitchhike on the Autobahn itself, meaning you standing on the autobahn or its emergency lane. You are perfectly fine stopping at service stations and asking the people but keep in mind that service stations are private property / leases. It occasionally happened that owners try to get rid of hitchhikers at "their" service station. If that happens, just move to the parking space and hitchhike there. If you want to start hitching at the on-ramps, make sure you stand before the rectangular blue sign indicating the start of the autobahn.

Just like other people, police may or may not be friendly towards hitchhikers. It is said that police controls are more frequent in the southern states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. As a foreigner you have to carry your passport at all times; a national ID card is sufficient if you are from another EU country. If you are being checked, be friendly, show it to them and they will leave you alone.

## Crossing the border

Germany has signed the Schengen Agreement which means that borders with other Schengen countries are open. Since 2009, all neighbouring countries are Schengen members as well, so there are no fixed border controls anymore. At times, there are mobile checks by the police or customs, especially in border regions or on the autobahn.

At the Swiss border, there are still custom controls, but that will probably only affect you if you are on a truck.

## License plates

There are between one and three letters on a license plate which show the city or region where the car is registered. For example, look for license plates starting with **B** if you're hitching to Berlin. Have a look at the articles on Wikipedia for more information: German car number plates (in English) and Liste der Kfz-Kennzeichen in Deutschland (in German).

## Maps



Tiziano hitching from Berlin to Munich

Recommended maps for Germany are listed in [this article](#). You can easily hitch through Germany with just a map that has all service stations along the Autobahn on it. There are maps at many service stations in a little free booklet which are quite misleading, they do **not** contain all service stations, just the ones belonging to one of the big companies running them. For more information look here: [tank.rast.de](http://tank.rast.de). For a good map to print out and bring with you that has all the service stations on it have a look here: [Rastekarte](#). This is the same one you will find at the service stations as big overview maps, more often than not those can be nicked very easily as well.

## Food and drink

Drinking tap water is safe all over the country. You can usually get inexpensive but good food at Italian and Turkish takeaways, the latter ones have *Döner* or *Kebab* written on them. Typical German fast food shops are marked with *Imbiss* signs and sell cheap sausages and French fries. Keep in mind that most shops including some supermarkets close at 20:00 and on Sundays, although many supermarkets might be open until 22:00 during weekdays. Petrol stations, 24-h shops and kiosks have a very limited food choice and are more expensive. As a free alternative you can try dumpster diving. More information on this can be found in the [trashwiki article on Germany](#).

In nearly every town there are alternative centres where people cook for everybody. The price for a warm dish is between zero and 2 Euro. Have a look at the [list here](#). (German)

## Eating on the Autobahn

Try to avoid eating on autobahn [service stations](#) if you want to save money and if have a good taste of food. These restaurants are notoriously expensive and the food quality is quite low. If you're lucky you can find thrown away [Sanifair vouchers](#) of the toilet system. You get a cumulative 0.50 euro rebate for them in the shop.

## Getting Clothes

In Germany there are shops where you can bring unused clothes in a good state and/or take new clothes home. It does not cost anything. A list of these shops is available [here](#). (German)

## Hygiene

Most toilets on the service stations are maintained by [Sanifair](#) and are clean. You get a 0.50 euro coupon as part of the 0.70 euro service fee, which you can redeem when buying things at the petrol station shop or in the restaurant. [Pathofdhamma](#) suggest to seize the moment and jump the barrier if there are no people or cameras around. The turnstyle is only blocked for the inwards direction. With some luck and smooth moves, you can sneak in. Turn it towards you, walk one step; turn it again, walk another step: you are in!

There are showers in most *Raststätte* and *Autohof* service stations on and near the autobahn. Prices are between 2 euro and 5 euro.

## Telephone and Internet

### Telephone



Public surf terminal with telephone



### Different kinds of phone booths

Phone booths that accept coins are still available all over Germany. The older ones are yellow, the newer ones are mostly glass and display a pink T. They are more expensive than using a prepaid card for your cell phone. A nice feature is that you can send SMS, faxes and e-mails even with the oldest types. Input is a bit cumbersome, however.

A cheaper option is to buy a German prepaid SIM card. They are readily available from mobile shops like *e-plus*, *Vodafone* and *T-mobile*. A lot of supermarket chains like *Aldi*, *Netto* and *Lidl* also have their own brands that use the network of the bigger providers. Check beforehand how to register the SIM card. Sometimes the seller wants to see an ID. If you prefer not to give out your real data you might for example buy a SIM card at *Aldi*, which you can register via Internet with fake data.

If you want to make calls abroad there are some stores offering international phone booths in bigger cities. They are usually located in migration areas and often include an internet cafe.

## Internet

### Without laptop or smartphone

There are still some Internet cafes in the bigger cities. Rates are around 2 euro per hour.

In most cities you will find pay per use surf terminals like in the image to the right. They offer internet and telephone services.

### By laptop or smartphone

There are almost no unsecured Wifis in Germany because people might be made responsible for illegal actions done through their internet access.

Most German prepaid cards also have a data option if you own a smartphone or a surfstick for your laptop, which also can be bought for about 30 euro. It's often better to buy a single day flatrate for two to five euros instead of using the data tariff. Details depend on your provider.

## Germany

Some *Burger King* restaurants offer free Wifi without any registration. At *McDonalds* you get free Wifi for one hour per day without consuming anything. Sometimes the restaurants are located on service stations, you can look them up [here](#). Enter a location in the search mask and make sure to check the option *WLAN*, the German abbreviation for Wifi. Once there, connect, type in any address and you will be asked for a valid German mobile number, through which you will receive your access code. Take care: in both cases the connection is not encrypted so anything you send in clear text, e.g. when using a browser or e-mail tool without SSL, can be easily recorded by others nearby.

## Language

Despite German being the major language, (with over 95% of the population speaking it as a first language [1]) you will find that many Germans speak English or French as a second language. Other common languages in the country are Turkish, Russian and Arabic.

## Learning to speak German

The basic hitchhiker needs can be satisfied by a look at the phrasebook [here](#).

When asking your drivers for help it pays off to know that the German word *Straße* for street contains the weird letter *ß* which looks a bit like a B. If you pronounce it like an *s* Germans will understand you. Contrary to popular belief the diacritics on *Ä, ä, Ö, ö, Ü* and *ü* are not metal umlauts and thus they do affect pronunciation. If in doubt try to pronounce the word as if the diacritics didn't exist. For instance, if you pronounce the city *Würzburg* as *Wurzburg* you will probably be understood.

## Other possibilities of transportation

Other cheap possibilities include [carpooling](#) and special offers of the German railways [Deutsche Bahn](#).

## Carpooling

[mitfahrgelegenheit.de](#) and [mitfahrzentrale.de](#) are popular commercial websites for carpooling. However, since they started charging a certain percentage for each ride they mediate, there are new pages starting to be used more and more. Some of them are: [bessermithfahren.de](#); [blablacar.de](#).

## Railways

The country has an expensive railway network. As an alternative to the standard fare, you may also check offers and sales, for example regional or seasonal tickets. [2] See also [Deutsche Bahn](#).

## Practical links

- [Hitchhiking spots in Germany](#), in German, on a GFDL wiki
- [Overview of autobahns in Germany](#)

### German highways

Major highways: [A1](#) | [A2](#) | [A3](#) | [A4](#) | [A5](#) | [A6](#) | [A7](#) | [A8](#) | [A9](#)

By laptop or smartphone

## Germany

Minor highways: [A10](#) | [A11](#) | [A12](#) | [A13](#) | [A14](#) | [A15](#) | [A17](#) | [A19](#) | [A20](#) | [A21](#) | [A23](#) | [A24](#) | [A25](#) | [A26](#) | [A27](#) | [A28](#) | [A29](#) | [A30](#) | [A31](#) | [A33](#) | [A37](#) | [A38](#) | [A39](#) | [A40](#) | [A42](#) | [A43](#) | [A44](#) | [A45](#) | [A46](#) | [A48](#) | [A49](#) | [A52](#) | [A57](#) | [A59](#) | [A60](#) | [A61](#) | [A62](#) | [A63](#) | [A64](#) | [A65](#) | [A66](#) | [A67](#) | [A70](#) | [A71](#) | [A72](#) | [A73](#) | [A81](#) | [A92](#) | [A93](#) | [A94](#) | [A95](#) | [A96](#) | [A98](#) | [A99](#)

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If you search cities with less than 100.000 inhabitants, have a look at the separate *Federal State* articles. You find them at the bottom of this page.



Federal States of **Germany**

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