

Driving licences

You may only drive a car in Germany if you have a fully valid driving licence. Condition for the validity is that the licence has been legally obtained and is still valid in the country of its origin. Drivers must be at least 18 years of age.

A – EU & EEA Drivers

If you hold a valid EU driving licence or a licence from the EEA countries Iceland, Norway or Liechtenstein, your licence is automatically valid in Germany. A translation is not required

B – Drivers from other countries

For all drivers from non-EU countries different rules apply depending on which country issued your original licence.

Rule number one applies to all: Act quickly! If not, you might have to take the complete exam again.

For the first six months after taking up residence in Germany you are allowed to drive using your national licence. From day 186 after having come to Germany, you enter the “semi-validity” zone.

From that point your national licence is regarded as invalid and if you are caught driving; you will have to pay a heavy fine for driving without a valid licence.

For transfer purposes your national licence is still valid though. That means: If you have already lived in Germany for more than six months, you can still have your licence converted but might need to take a theoretical test.

The “semi-validity” zone ends after having been resident in Germany for more than three years. Then your national licence has completely lost its validity for the German authorities and you will have to go through the complete process as if you have never held a licence.

Before the transfer, your original licence needs to be translated into German by a certified translator. You can either try to find a translator in the Yellow Pages (Gelbe Seiten) or go to your local ADAC branch.

Exempt from this obligation are licences issued in: Andorra, Hong Kong, Monaco, New Zealand, San Marino, Switzerland and Senegal.

So, how can you get a German driving licence, i.e. have your national licence converted into a German one? That depends on where you are from.

I – Non-EEA Europe, Canada, the US (part 1)

If your licence was issued in one of the following US-states, Canadian provinces or countries, you can convert your licence to a German one without having to take any tests; it just requires some paperwork.

I.1. US States – Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Puerto Rico.

I.2. All Canadian Provinces

I.3. Non-EEA-Europe – Andorra, Croatia, Guernsey, Hungary, Isle of Man, Japan, Jersey, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, South Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

In order to apply for the transfer of your licence, you need to go to your local traffic office (Straßenverkehrsamt/Führerscheinstelle) with the following documents:

- Passport
- Passport style photo
- Driving licence
- Translation of your driving licence (don't forget it must have an official stamp!)
- Confirmation of residency in Germany (Anmeldebestätigung)

Take photocopies of all your documents with you. You usually need some wherever you go here in Germany.

II – US-States (part 2)

If your licence was issued in one of the following States, you will have to take a written test

Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Idaho, Mississippi ([not sure about it – found contradictory information, the ADAC says, theoretical test required](#)), Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon and Tennessee.

III – US- States (part 3) & other countries

If your licence was issued in any other US-State or any other country, you are required to take both the written and the practical exam.

Recommendation to all non-EU-nationals:

As you have seen, this matter is not an easy one. Many agreements have been made, modified and then re-modified again. In order to be on the safe side, please inquire as soon as possible, which of all those rules apply to you.

The ADAC has a complete list of all countries, including the exact types of driving licences that are accepted here in Germany. There are local branches in most medium-sized towns and you do not have to be a member to get a translation done.

Naturally they should also give you all this information for free at the traffic office and you will probably get it (even in English) if you live in a bigger city. In smaller towns though it might take some time until all information has finally been retrieved.

If you do not speak German or feel that your German is not good enough to deal with such matters, ask somebody who does to accompany you.

C – Taking the test

I – Written test

If you must take the written test, you will have to learn a lot about traffic laws, signs, rules and regulations and the like. The exam papers will be in German, other languages (including English) are available on request.

In order to prepare for the test you should contact a local driving school (Fahrschule). Tell them that all you need is some preparation for the theoretical test. If they tell you that you have to do a complete course, just leave and look for another (better informed) driving school.

II. – Practical test

For the practical test you also have to contact a driving school and you will probably have to take some driving lessons. Here again the same applies as for the written test – you do NOT need to take a full course.

As you have seen, this can be quite a tricky matter so please do not delay getting everything done in the first 185 days ([I love this number ;-\)](#) of your residence here in Germany.

Being late will not immediately cost you your driving licence but it might cost you a lot of time and money.

This article is about car driver's licences only. For all other vehicles, please inquire directly at your local *Strassenverkehrsamt* (traffic office) as rules vary not only according to the issuing country but also to the driver's age! Special rules also apply to all drivers who have held their licence for less than two years before coming to Germany.