



Things to Know When PCSing to Ramstein AB, Germany

First Things First:

1. Attending Base INTRO before making any major purchases could save you both time and money.
2. Ramstein Spouses Orientation (RSO) class...provides valuable information such how to pay German bills, use a VAT form, recycling, customs and courtesies, places to visit and much more. A representative from the 86th Medical Group delivers a presentation called "Medical Right" which includes information about the S.I.C.K. program that enables spouses to obtain free over the counter medication for ailments such as the common cold.

<http://www.86fss.com/KMC-AFS.html>

Childcare is available through the FCC using a "Childcare for PCS" voucher given by the A&FRC.

3. Keep in mind, PCS'ing to Ramstein comes with a lot of "up front" costs, ***so be sure to have 3-6 months of your base pay saved for security deposits and other registration fees that are required up front.***

POV's & Driving in Germany

1. Before shipping your POV, you should consider the following:

- a. **Body damage:** If your car has severe body damage it will not be allowed on the road.
- b. **Tires:** Tires must have a minimum of one millimeter (1 mm) depth over the entire tread and are required to be the sizes recommended by the manufacturer and do not stick out beyond the fender. In addition, DO NOT mix radial tires with non-radial tires.
- c. **Recommendation:** Pull-out radios, cassette decks, and CD players should be removed to reduce the chance of pilferage; your catalytic converter does not need to be removed; unleaded gas is available in Germany.
- d. **Tinted windows:** Tint is not authorized on the driver or passenger windows unless it is factory installed.

2. Maintenance on American vehicles

Owning an American-made vehicle overseas can be expensive; often stateside warranties are not honored. Bottom line: be prepared for unexpected costs and take this into consideration when deciding to ship your car overseas. **NOTE:** Car maintenance on *any* vehicle is expensive in Germany.

3. You may be asked to replace, repair, or clean an item in order to pass the inspection.

a. Top 10 reasons vehicles fail inspection:

1. The wrong First Aid kit
2. Front and driver door window tint
3. Chips and cracks in windshield
4. Brake inspection
5. Incorrect turn signals
6. Worn tires
7. Engine/Transmission/Power Steering fluid leaks
8. Vehicle height
9. Headlight alignment
10. Exhaust leaks/Noise level

- b. Keep in mind that even an old used car can cost a few thousand dollars, so plan accordingly in terms of how much money you have accessible when you first arrive.

Temporary Lodging

1. Make temporary lodging arrangements as far ahead of your arrival as possible -- there is no guarantee that you will be offered a Temporary Living Facility (TLF) on your assigned installation http://dodlodging.net/VT_Ramstein.htm. Due to the high volume of personnel in the area, the TL fills up quickly, particularly during high Permanent Change of Station (PCS) season. It is often likely that individuals and families may be required to stay off-base during these times. If this is the case be sure to use a VAT form for it will save you 19%.

2. Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA) is an entitlement to help defray the cost of lodging while seeking permanent housing. TLA is closely monitored and certain criteria must be met to continue to receive TLA.

- a. TLA is authorized for payment while member is "aggressively seeking housing."
- b. First 10 days, at least two house visits are expected.
- c. Following 10-day increments, at least five visits per increment.
- d. The housing office has authority to approve TLA for up to 30 days; up to 60 days requires approval from the 86th CES/CC.
- e. TLA extensions will not be allowed when listings are available within a service member's bedroom entitlement, OHA ceiling, etc. Note the bedroom entitlement is less than many people prefer and do not distinguish between apartments, duplexes, stand-alone houses, etc.
- f. Pet issues and school districts are not justification for TLA extensions beyond 30 days.
- g. One, two and three bedroom units are available. There are units with four bedrooms and higher, but are somewhat more difficult to find. Many landlords do not allow pets, so ask before making any commitments.
- h. German Realtor (Immobilien) services are not usually required; however, in some incidents with larger families that require houses with 4 or more bedrooms, you may need their services. Immobilien charge a finder's fee, usually one to two month's rent and reimbursement by the government is usually limited to one month. You must request prior authorization and be approved for reimbursement through Housing Management before signing a contract with an Immobilien.

FMO

1. The Furnishings Management Office (FMO) will provide large appliances (washer, dryer, and refrigerator) for the length of your tour. Many people end up storing furniture after they arrive or selling their excess as houses, apartments and rooms themselves are often smaller here than in the United States, so you may have more furniture than you need or have space for. If you can do without these items for three to five years, are you better off selling them now? A five-year-old television you store will not be worth as much when it is a ten-year-old television. Save yourself the hassle and the government some money (for storage expenses) by selling or donating your unneeded possessions before you move.
2. Another feature of German living quarters is the lack of closets. The FMO will issue wardrobes for your use. The number you are authorized depends on the size of your family. If you have a lot of clothes, you might consider purchasing portable wardrobes, under-bed chests, or similar storage units to augment the wardrobes.

Pre-arrival Housing Information

1. More than 85 percent of the military population lives off-base, so most newcomers should plan for this same scenario.
2. Unaccompanied Air Force E-4s with less than three years of service and below must report to Central Dormitory Management, Bldg. 2413, room 175 (ensure your sponsor is helping coordinate with dorms).
3. Those seeking on-base housing should be prepared to initially live off base, and may be on a waiting list for several months, up to two years.
4. Pets will greatly limit your range of choices for community housing in any bedroom category.
5. **NOTE:** Aggressive or potentially aggressive breeds of dogs are prohibited in housing and are defined as a Pit Bull (American Staffordshire Bull Terrier or English Staffordshire Bull Terrier), Rottweiler, Doberman Pinscher, Chow and wolf hybrids.
6. **OFF BASE:** Register yourself on the Automated Housing Referral Network -- <http://www.ahrn.com> -- using your military e-mail address to do an initial search of houses in the area.
7. If your sponsor is not available to drive you, housing has their own agents who can show you homes within their area, by appointment only. One, two and three bedroom homes are usually available; however, four and five bedroom homes are not as easy to find. German homes are different from U.S. homes; they do not include closets and may have two or more

apartments under one roof. There are many 4-5 bedroom homes, as well as many free-standing single family homes.

8. Listings referred by the housing office are backed by U.S. Air Forces in Europe Form 291a, the USAFE Housing Contract. The housing counselors will also mediate any disputes between you and your landlord providing the contract originates from this office.

9. Members are cautioned about using local "Immobilien" services (German rental agencies) only because their finder's fees may range from one to three months' rent. This is in addition to normal move-in costs. The costs for Immobilien service is usually at your own expense. If you seek reimbursement of Immobilien fees you must provide significant justification in writing to the housing director and receive prior approval before utilizing Immobilien services.

10. Utilities/Expenses: There are some charges that you may not have paid in the United States: snow removal, chimney sweep, sewage disposal, stairwell cleaning, garbage collection, stairwell and basement lighting, etc. These charges are common in Germany and they are not designed to take advantage of the American tenant. The landlord will usually add these charges, if they apply, to the special condition portion of the rental contract.

11. Referral agents can arrange to be present during the clearance inspection if problems are anticipated. Please make an appointment at least two weeks in advance.

12. A member will either receive his/her rent or his/her rent cap, whichever is the least. You will also receive a monthly Utility allowance that will help pay your utility costs. Another allowance you will receive is the move-in housing allowance (MIHA). This is a one-time allowance that is received when first renting a house on the economy. It is designed to defray the setup cost of moving into a house to include transformers, curtains or any other items needed to furnish your house.

13. <http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/> ****EXCELLENT calculators for allowances, budgeting for COLA, OHA, travel regulations...

Household goods

1. On-base and most off-base houses are not furnished.

2. Those PCSing are encouraged to take advantage of the non-temporary storage option since German houses/apartments may be smaller than stateside homes. Local storage facilities are limited and very expensive.

3. It is not recommended that you bring your washer, dryer, microwave, stove or refrigerator--If you need these items for your off-base home, the Furnishings Management

Office will loan these to you for the duration of your tour or as long as they are needed. There is no cost for these loans.

4. If you choose to mail items to yourself, you **MUST** visit your origin TMO/CPC and obtain a DD Form 2278 before mailing the items. In order to get reimbursed you must provide a DD Form 2278, DD Form 1351 and Personal Property Management sheet with three copies of your receipts which show the postage amount and the weight. Additionally, you need to bring three copies of your PSC orders to TMO in Bldg 2106 RM 212, Ramstein AB upon arrival (Tel DSN 480-2163/5509). You may be reimbursed for the postage up to the Government rate (insurance and registered mail are not a reimbursable cost), however, the weight of items mailed will count against your total weight entitlement.

5. Bring linens, blankets, and towels with you.

6. The Loan Locker at the Airman and Family Readiness Center offers many items to borrow for up to 60 days: cookware, dishes, utensils and some small appliances. The Furnishings Management Office (FMO) also has items to borrow while you wait for your household goods shipment to arrive and for the duration of your tour.

7. **Move.mil**- great website to help prepare for your upcoming move.

Housing 101

1. House Size

Some German houses and apartments have smaller rooms, hallways and staircases than what you are accustomed to stateside. You may have trouble fitting extremely large or heavy furniture into your new home. Be prepared to look harder to find a place big enough to accommodate your furniture. Generally, you should be able to use all the furniture your weight allowance permits you to bring.

2. Closet Space--A Hot Commodity

Most German houses don't have built-in closets or cabinets. FMO will loan two wardrobes per sponsor and one for each family member for the duration of your tour here. For some people, these "schranks" will not be enough. Expect that you will not have all of the storage you have in your stateside home--plan to bring shelving units with you and get creative.

3. Electricity

The electrical current in Germany is 220 volts and 50 cycles-per-second, while most American appliances operate on 110 volts and 60 cycles-per-second. You will need a voltage adapter or transformer to use your appliances with American voltage/plugs in German electrical outlets. Every electrical appliance should be marked with its required voltage or wattage to determine the appropriate size transformer to use. FMO will loan you two transformers for the duration of your tour.

4. Lamps

Lamps work well by using 220-volt light bulbs and an inexpensive electrical plug adapter. Some government housing units have both 110- and 220-volt outlets. Although 110-volt appliances can be operated with transformers, long-term use can shorten appliance life.

5. Small Appliances

Since the electrical current in Germany is 220-volts and 50-cycles-per-second, you must take into consideration a few things when determining if replacing your appliances with 220-volt appliances or using your 110-volt appliances with a transformer is a better option.

When using 110-volt appliances with heating elements, such as irons and toasters, the different hertz rating of the American product can affect heating capability. The same holds true for personal grooming items like hair dryers and curling irons. Other items are recommended to be left behind altogether, such as space heaters, as they are expensive to use and can be unsafe. 110-volt 60-cycle electrical clocks will not keep time properly (battery-operated clocks do work just fine, however). The timing function on devices such as microwaves, DVD players, etc. will also encounter problems keeping the time.

If an appliance is old and unreliable, or if you are ready to replace it anyway, consider disposing of it and buying a new one here. Some newer products have built-in converters. Used appliances are also available upon arrival; many departing personnel sell their German specification items before leaving.

6. Vacuums

Vacuum cleaners can operate using a transformer, but you will need to test the vacuum's polarity using a polarity tester to ensure you don't damage the motor. The same holds true for any appliance with a motor. You can purchase testers at the local exchange.

7. Microwaves

Personnel are encouraged to not bring microwaves to Germany. The Furnishings Management Office (FMO) will issue a microwave for your use during your tour. If you decide to bring a 110-volt microwave, it will work using a transformer but it will cook slower and the clock may not work correctly. When deciding to bring your 110-volt microwave, consider the age and quality of your microwave.

8. TVs, Stereos, Computers, Electronics

Many TVs, stereos, computers and other electronics are dual voltage. If an electronic is 110-volt a transformer can be used. Some base housing units have both 110-volt and 220-volt electrical outlets for ease of this situation.

The Armed Forces Network (AFN) TV is broadcast on the NTSC frequency--all US-specification TVs will receive this frequency. Some TVs are multi-system and can receive both AFN and German channels--these types of TVs are also available for purchase at the BX/PX. Paying for cable each month is an option to receive a wider variety of channels. If you have a turntable, it may need to be converted to 50 hertz to run at the proper speed. Not all turntables can be converted. Check this out with a local electrician before you leave the states.

Most personal computers are dual-voltage and only require an adaptor, but check with your computer's manufacturer to make sure. If your computer has a dual voltage switch, remember to completely unplug the computer before changing voltage otherwise you will burn out the computer power supply.

9. Telephones

Your home telephone purchased in the U.S. will work in Germany with an adaptor. However, you must get your phone approved by the German Telekom (Telephone) company. Certain cordless phones may not be approved if they run on unapproved frequencies.

10. Window Coverings

It is unlikely to find a place in Germany where your drapes fit the windows perfectly. German windows require drapes longer than average American curtains. If you do not want to alter your draperies to fit the windows in Germany you may want to keep them in storage. All government housing will have drapes, which hang on German-style ceiling rods. Many people still bring drapes, curtains and rods (or order these from the States). The Germans have beautiful sheers that you can buy in all price categories.

11. Flooring & Rugs

Almost all housing in Germany, both off-base and on, has tiled or wood flooring. Therefore, you may find you need to use rugs or other floor-coverings in your home. If you need to purchase rugs, it is important to note that many companies will NOT ship their large rugs to overseas or APO addresses. You are encouraged to bring your rugs with you or purchase them here. The BX/PX sells rugs, as do many furniture stores on the German (and surrounding countries') economies.

12. Outdoor Furniture

Many German houses and apartments have yards, patios, and balconies. Although these outdoor spaces are usually smaller than what we are accustomed to stateside--they are still perfect areas for using your outdoor furniture. Germans love to barbecue and frequently do so. Germans practice meticulous courtesy to protect everyone's rights and privacy. Heavy barbecue smoke in your neighbor's yard can be considered a gross intrusion. So, before you heat up the grill, consider how close you are to your neighbors and who your neighbors are. Barbequing on an apartment balcony is not permitted.

Utilities

1. Heating fuel, water and electricity are more expensive in Germany than stateside. Rent and utilities are paid in local currency, the Euro, which means costs vary based on the US dollar to Euro daily exchange rate.
2. German utilities usually bill differently than stateside utilities. You may pay every other month or even quarterly. In addition, bills will not fluctuate from month to month: you pay a flat amount each billing cycle.
3. **When you first move in, this flat rate is based on the usage of the prior tenant. After you have been in the quarters for a year, the rate is adjusted based on your average usage. At this time, if you haven't paid enough for the year, you receive a year-end settlement bill. These can be quite large, so if your utility bills are not equal to your utility allowance, you are strongly encouraged to save the difference and not get caught off guard at the end of the year. Obtain a separate account and set up an allotment for your BAH to be directly deposited into it. Then have your rent and utilities paid from this account (the ONLY way to do it in Germany- see below). Leave any remaining utility allowance in the account until your bill is reconciled during the year-end settlement. Use your utility allowance only for utilities until you are certain you have a surplus!**
4. You will not pay most bills at the utility company; you pay them through your bank or at a German post office (Deutsche Post). The Airman & Family Readiness Center can assist should you have questions.
5. Also, unlike the United States, there are additional services and costs associated with renting a home in Germany. Some of the items are: Snow removal, chimney sweep, sewage disposal, stairwell cleaning and stairwell and basement lighting.

6. Electricity

The electrical current in Germany is 220 volts and 50 cycles-per-second, while most American appliances operate on 110 volts and 60 cycles-per-second. You will need a voltage adapter or transformer to use your appliances with American voltage/plugs in German electrical outlets. Every electrical appliance should be marked with its required voltage or wattage to determine the appropriate size transformer to use. FMO will loan you two transformers for the duration of your tour.

7. Oil

- a. If you live in a house that uses heating oil, the oil is usually paid in a lump sum when the tank is filled. You should have money from your utility allowance set aside for this cost as

well. You should check with the landlord to determine if they will fill the oil tank prior to your move in or at least determine the tank's current level. You will be required to refill the tank to the agreed upon level when you terminate your quarters. Your landlord or the current tenant should be able to provide you with an estimate cost to fill the tank.

b. Oil is usually cheaper during the summer months so plan to fill your tank during that time. Also, you may be able to negotiate a cheaper price if you and your neighbors buy in bulk and have it delivered at the same time. Don't forget to check prices at several companies including AAFES prior to purchasing your heating oil.

8. Utility costs vary due to size and age of your home, number of occupants and personal habits. Average monthly:

Electricity Euro 100
Gas (Heat) Euro 200
Oil (Heat) Euro 200
Water Euro 40 per person

9. You should take advantage of the Value-added Tax (VAT) program in order to avoid the 19% local German tax.

10. **Utility Tax Avoidance Plan (UTAP)**

UTAP is a walk-in service that helps you reduce utility costs by providing tax relief for 19 percent electricity, 19 percent gas and seven percent water. A \$77.00 administrative fee is charged upon registration. The sponsor must register or provide a power of attorney. If you move after you've registered, you must update your account. Go through the Value Added Tax (VAT) office on base (located in Bldg. 2118).

Childcare, Schools and Family Programs

1. [Spouses' Inprocessing Checklist](#): Please click link to view checklist

2. [Child Care Programs on the Installation](#) : Please click link to view Commander's letter.

Due to the lack of off-base child care facilities, it is highly recommended you take action on child care issues before PCSing to Ramstein. Both Child Development Centers and School Age Care programs have waiting lists. We encourage you to place your child/children on the appropriate waiting list through your sponsor or by contacting the CDC as soon as you receive orders. Please click to link to view [Child Supervision Matix](#).

Pet Shipping Guidelines

1. Ensure you review the differences in the laws and general guidelines associated with pet keeping here.
2. "Dangerous dogs" may not be imported to Germany under any circumstances. Aggressive or potentially aggressive breeds of dogs are prohibited in housing and are defined as a Pit Bull (American Staffordshire Bull Terrier or English Staffordshire Bull Terrier), Rottweiler, Doberman Pinscher, Chow and wolf hybrids.
3. There are strict guidelines for leaving pets alone and general upkeep. In addition to the difference in laws and guidelines, shipping pets and finding a home to house them can be challenging tasks.
4. Abandoning your pet at any time during your stay in Germany is NOT an option. *Due to all these issues, many individuals often decide to leave "Fluffy" and "Fido" with family during their overseas tour.*
5. When you ship your pet, it will be at your own expense.
6. **AMC Space A:** You can now move more than two pets per family on a space available-basis only.
7. If you move at certain times of the year, especially during the summer, you may not be able to ship your pet at the same time.

Pet registration & guidelines

NOTE: Pets will greatly limit your range of choices for community housing in any bedroom category.

1. Animals are not allowed to run loose in Germany. Rabies is a problem in Germany; if you bring your pet, plan for it to live in the house and/or a fenced yard and be outside in a carrier or on a leash. You are liable for any damage your pet is responsible for (e.g., digging up your landlord's flowerbed, causing a car to hit a telephone pole while veering to miss the animal, etc.). Most insurance companies offer pet liability insurance at a nominal fee.
2. Dog Keeping Laws:
 - a. It is not allowed to permanently keep a dog in a box; only two hours per day at the most.

b. A dog has to have the following floor space available:

<u>Withers (height in cm)</u>	<u>Minimum Floor Space (in sqm)</u>
-------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Up to 50	6
Between 50 and 65	8
More than 65	10

*Half of that mandatory floor space has to be added for each additional dog kept in the same kennel.

c. Tie-stalls for dogs younger than 12 months are prohibited. If a dog is tie-stalled, it has to be at least 12 months old, completely healthy and not pregnant. The tie has to be:

(1.) able to slide freely, allowing the dog to move within a distance of at least six meters

(2.) long enough to grant the dog at least five meters room to the side

(3.) attached so that the dog may go into its dog house, lie down and turn around. The dog has to be able to move freely and without risk of injuries.

d. You may only use wide harnesses or collars that do not incise, tighten themselves or cause injuries. You may use only ties that are safe from twisting; the tie has to be made of light material and may not cause any injuries

e. If you keep a dog outdoors you have to ensure that the following is available for the dog:

(1.) A dog house made of thermally insulating material with thermally insulated floors that is not detrimental to the dog's health. It has to be set up so the dog will not hurt itself and can lie down in a dry spot. The dog house has to be big enough so the dog can turn around and lie comfortably and keep the shelter warm with its own body heat if there is no heating in the shelter.

(2.) Outside the doghouse: There must be a spot where the dog can lie down in the shade protected from weather.

f. At least two times per day, your dog has to have at least 2 hours of contact with its owner/care provider (e.g. play, walk, dog school).

g. In addition, 2 times per day for 1 hour, your dog has to have the chance to run freely, if it is kept in a kennel otherwise.

h. Barking has to be kept at a minimum. During quiet hours (2200 – 0600 hrs and 1300 – 1500 hrs) dog owners must ensure neighbors are not disturbed by barking, whining or howling. Outside these hours, dog owners must ensure dog noises do not last longer than 10 minutes in a row, respectively exceed 30 minutes cumulatively per day. If necessary, the dogs have to be kept inside the house in accordance with animal protection laws.

i. Pets are not allowed to run free. If they do so, the owner may be held liable for any bodily injuries or property damage that the pet may cause. German law imposes strict liability on the owner for damages, regardless of whether the pet is in the possession of the owner, lost, or abandoned. Therefore, it is recommended that pet owners obtain liability insurance, which is available from commercial insurance companies. Usually, personal liability insurance is obtained in conjunction with pet liability insurance, which will cost. Pet abandonment is not condoned in Germany. Service members caught neglecting or abandoning their pet will be disciplined.

Travel documents

1. You are also encouraged to obtain fee passports because the no-Fee passports WILL NOT allow entry into some European countries. To travel freely within Europe you and each family member should obtain a Tourist passport at your own expense.

a. No-fee passports are not to be used for leisure travel; they are for official travel only.

b. NOTE: We highly encourage parents to apply for a tourist and no-fee passport for their newborn, who must be command sponsored and enrolled in DEERS to apply for a no-fee passport. Also, both parents and the baby must be present during the appointment. The total cost will be \$205 for a birth certificate and a tourist passport.

c. The Department of State has implemented new fees effective July 13, 2010. Tourist Passport and other fees are as follows:

Tourist Passport Adult (Age 16 and older; first or replacement passport if lost or mutilated) \$135

Tourist Passport Adult (Renewal) \$110

Tourist Passport Minors (under age 16 and first passport renewal) \$105

Consular Report of Birth Abroad \$100

Additional Visa Pages \$82

Culture, customs & laws

1. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Airman-and-Family-Readiness-Center-Ramstein-AB/221064367936746>
2. Ramstein Yard Sales <http://www.ramsteinyardsales.com/> for a good way to locate items and services in the area
3. German American Committee Office (GACO) website:
 - English-speaking staff
 - Linguistic support
 - Newcomers' Orientation (integration and acclimation in German communities)
 - Assistance with change of status
 - Handling of administrative issues (e.g. assistance with German authorities, visa questions, etc.)
 - German-American cultural relations
 - Information on host nation policies and regulations (e.g. recycling, driving regulations, pet policies, etc.)
 - Assistance in locating special interest items
 - Hosting of special events throughout the year
 - Assistance for Germans and other nationalities with U.S.-related topics
 - Referral to German-American institutions and clubs
 - Facilitating/establishing official and family contacts
 - Availability of information brochures in English

Education

The Education Center, in collaboration with the Air Force Aid Society and the Airman & Family Readiness Center, provides tuition assistance for spouses of active duty Air Force enlisted members and officers who accompany their military spouses to overseas locations. The focus of the program is on degree completion or certificate programs providing increased occupational opportunities for spouses.

Jobs

WWW.USAJOBS.gov
www.afciviliancareers.com
www.nafjobs.org
www.aafes.com

1. The Airman and Family Readiness Center can assist in resume writing, interviewing techniques, and basic career guidance. Spouses that are currently employed with the Federal government have several options and can compete internally or be on Leave Without Pay and apply as an external candidate.
2. The Spouse Preference Fact Sheet located on the Ramstein Civilian Human Resource Flight's website contains details on how to externally apply for an Air Force position. Current Federally employed spouses should keep at hand a current resume, copy of current orders, recent SF50, licenses, transcripts, and any other credentials that will support their experience as these documents will be necessary to apply for Federal positions. You can also choose to create your resume by using USA Jobs resume builder and upload important documents to be retrieved at your convenience when applying for Federal positions.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are many volunteer opportunities in the Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC) area. Volunteering is a great way to gain experience, share a talent, fill a need, or just give back to the community. The American Red Cross and the Airman and Family Readiness Center (DSN 314-480-5100; Comm 011-49-6371-47-5100) can provide details on structured volunteer programs.