

German Banking -- Manage Your Financial Security

German banking is the ideal way to stay in control of your finances. Just like anywhere in the world, banking is how you keep tabs on your money and keep it safe.

If you are going to stay in Germany for any length of time, and will need to pay your rent or other bills, opening a bank account is the way to go. It's easy to maintain an account and doesn't cost much either (sometimes for free).

You'll need to call the bank where you intend to do business for an appointment. Then when you leave home to start your adventure in opening an account, you will need to be sure to take your passport with you. Of course, you'll also have to have some cash for an initial deposit. You should also have proof of your address.

If you don't have cash, that's okay. Transferring money from another bank in another country may take a bit longer, but it will still be done.

When you enter the bank, watch for the signs so you know what window to go to. For a money exchange, look for *Geldwechsel*, for the cashier's window or a teller, look for *Kasse*, and for the checking or savings account, the sign will read *Girokonto* or *Sparkonto*.

You may want to start your German banking experience with a checking account or *Girokonto*. With this type of account, you can make deposits or withdrawals anytime you like. It's the best account to have if paying bills or when you need fast cash.

A *Sparbuch* or savings account is the way to go if you want to earn interest on your money and put it aside for a time. Depending on the amount you want to withdraw, you may need to give prior notice (possibly up to three months) beforehand without losing interest. The rule is usually that you may only withdraw up to €2000 in a month without notice.

Before beginning your German banking with one bank, shop around a bit. Sometimes banks will reduce their costs or lessen rules in order to attract more customers. Be wise in checking out a number of different options.

You often will have to transfer money from one account to another, and there are three ways to do this. You can fill out a form and do a regular transfer (called a *Überweisung*), you can set up a *Dauerauftrag* or a standing order when you have a set amount to transfer each month, or you can do a direct debit or *Lastschrift* when an amount needs to be paid each month of a varying sum.

The cost to maintain an account should be investigated with each individual bank, when you are setting up your German banking accounts. Most banks charge a monthly fee, but others are free. You'll find a one-time fee for some transactions. If you are a student or are on a fixed income, you

will often get a free account.

A great perk to almost any bank account is, of course, the bank card you get. Your bank will almost certainly issue you a card, called an EuroCheque card, also known commonly as an EC-Karte or simply EC card. This is where you can use a card at Automatic Teller Machines to withdraw money from your account.

The EC cards can also be used as a debit card. These are usually accepted in more locations than even normal credit cards. When you use these cards at your own bank, or in a bank within the society, it's usually free of charge. If you use them at another bank within Germany or in other countries, it will carry a charge.

You'll find that you will also be able to use credit cards in Automatic Tellers, which makes it simple to get some cash advances no matter where you are. If you like convenience, you got it! ;-)

There are many German banks you can do business with. The largest are Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, Dresdner Bank, DZ Bank, Landesbank Baden-Württemberg (LBBW), KfW Bankengruppe, HVB Group, BayernLB, WestLB and Eurohypo.

Like anywhere in the world, German banking is a smart way to protect your money yet have access to funds when you need them. Open a bank account and be confident you have the control you need over your finances.