Welcome package

First steps in Hamburg

Welcome to Hamburg!

It's great that you have decided to move to Hamburg!

On the following pages you will find helpful tips and information for your first steps in Hamburg, which can make your arrival easier - from necessary visits to the authorities to information on learning German or finding accommodation.

If you have further questions or need additional information, you can contact the **Hamburg Welcome Center (HWC).**

At the HWC, immigrants and people interested in immigration can find advice and support.

Our services for employees as well as our opening hours and contact details can be found on our website.

HAMBURG WELCOME CENTER
Hamburg Welcome Center, Süderstraße 32b, 20097 Hamburg
www.welcome.hamburg.com
www.facebook.com/hamburgwelcomecenter
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Welcome package

First steps in Hamburg

YOUR FIRST STEPS IN HAMBURG

You will find some basic information in our welcome package. If you want to go directly to the topic in the document, click on the link (with page reference). For many topics there is also a link to further information on our website.

Search for suitable accommodation:
How do I proceed with my **apartment search** (from page 3)?
More information on the topic

After moving: **Register your residence** (page 14) within two weeks.
How do I book an appointment? You can book an appointment online.
The tax identification number will be sent by mail after registration.

Immigrants from third countries require a **residence permit**.
How can I apply for a residence permit (page 15)?

Language skills make it easier to settle. In Hamburg, you have a wide range of opportunities to **learn German.**

Here you will find **telephone numbers for medical emergencies** and information that may be useful to you in the event of illness (page 16).

You can find more information on these and other topics on the following websites:

- We show you different ways how to search for a job.
- Some foreign professional qualifications must first be recognized in Germany.
- If you want to live and work in Germany for a longer period of time, you need a bank account.
- If you live in Germany, you are required to have health insurance.
- You will receive your social security number as soon as you have health insurance.
- Choose a childcare facility or school for your children and apply for child benefit.
- If you would like to use your foreign driving license in Germany, you should find out about the most important German regulations for holders of foreign driving licenses from the EU or EEA and the most important German regulations for holder of foreign driving licenses from a third country.
- Read our suggestions here on how you can spend your free time in Hamburg.

If you need advice on any of the topics mentioned above, feel free to contact the Hamburg Welcome Center.

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How to find an apartment

Housing guide

Finding an apartment in Hamburg can be a major challenge, as the housing market is tight: there are many people looking for an apartment and affordable housing is limited. That's why it's important to be patient and prepare well for your apartment search.

This guide is meant to help you get the most important information and tips on finding accommodation in Hamburg - so you know what to look out for and how you can improve your chances.

Renting for shorter periods: If you are looking for temporary accommodation in Hamburg, short-term accommodation ("Wohnen auf Zeit") could be a good option for you.

Helpful tips on finding and renting furnished temporary accommodation as well as portals and agencies that offer such apartments can be found on the website of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg **(only available in German).**

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Step 3: The Rent

Step 4: The Application

Step 5: The apartment viewing

Beware: dubious offers

And finally: wait

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Step 1: Preparation

Before you start looking for an apartment, first think about what kind of apartment you are looking for. The following questions will help:

Size and costs

- How many people (and pets) will move with you into the new apartment?
- What is the minimum size of the apartment (rooms/square meter)?
- What is the maximum rent the apartment can cost (plus additional monthly costs)?

If you **receive benefits from the Jobcenter or the Office for Migration (Amt für Migration)** you should find out what costs the respective office currently considers appropriate before you start looking for accommodation. You can find the current rent limits for gross cold rents according to the number of people in the household here (in German).

Location

- Where (in Hamburg and the surrounding area) do you want to live? You can find an overview of all Hamburg districts and neighborhoods here.
- How close to your workplace should the apartment be? Don't forget: Hamburg has a very good and very reliable public transport system. This means that it is quite fast and easy to get to distant places in Hamburg using the bus or train.

Other criteria

- Do you have a pet that you want to move into the apartment with you? In certain cases, you must obtain the landlord's consent.
- Does the apartment need a parking space for a car?
- Or would you like a bathtub or a balcony?
- Perhaps you can also imagine moving into a shared flat (WG)?

A shared flat (WG) is an apartment shared by several people who are not a family and are not in a partnership. Each person in the apartment has their own room. Common rooms such as the bathroom, kitchen and possibly the living room are shared.

But keep in mind: The more conditions you put for the new apartment, the more complicated it will be to find one. So, keep an open mind and be prepared to make compromises.

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Government support

There are public support services that make it easier for low-income households and people in exceptional life situations to access affordable housing:

Housing entitlement certificate ('Wohnberechtigungsschein'/WBS)

The WBS allows people with a **low income** to move into a comparatively cheaper social housing.
In order to obtain a WBS, your income must not exceed the specified income limits. You also need a secure residence status. Further information can be found on the Hamburg Service website.

Urgency certificate ('Dringlichkeitsschein'):

If you urgently need accommodation due to a **particular emergency**, such as the threat of homelessness or serious health or family reasons, you can apply for an urgency certificate.

The requirement for the issuance of an urgency certificate is proof of an emergency situation for which you are not responsible. In addition, you must have been registered with your main residence in Hamburg for at least three years.

If you wish to apply for an urgency certificate, please contact the district office responsible for your area directly. You can find out which one this is at the bottom of the Hamburg Service website.

Urgency confirmation ('Dringlichkeitsbestätigung')

If you are currently homeless or are living in **public accommodation** (for example in a camp or hotel), you can obtain an urgency confirmation under certain conditions. This is intended to help you integrate into an apartment of your own.

The local **housing emergency office** in the district where you are staying is responsible for issuing the confirmation. If you are homeless and do not have a registered address in Hamburg, please contact the housing emergency office Hamburg-Mitte.

A leaflet with the contact details of all local housing emergency offices can be found at the bottom of this website. The leaflets are available in various languages.

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How to find an apartment

Step 2: Start the search

Once you know what kind of apartment you would like to live in and what is important to you in an apartment, you can start your search.

There are several ways to find an apartment:

Option 1: The Internet

Various websites and apps for finding an apartment can offer a first insight into how much a suitable apartment will cost you. Many private landlords also offer their apartments online. You can often apply directly online.
It is also worth looking for accommodation on social media. There are many groups there where people are looking for and offering apartments or shared apartments.

Option 2: Cooperatives

There are several housing cooperatives ('Genossenschaften') that own and rent out apartments. These housing cooperatives often work with a waiting list. You can contact them and ask for a spot on the waiting list. In many cases, this can be done through their website.

You can find an overview of housing cooperatives in Hamburg here. Finding an apartment through a cooperative usually takes longer than with other landlords. However, cooperative apartments are often cheaper.

You must register (usually online) with each housing association in which you are interested. This registration is non-binding and free of charge. All you have to do is indicate in which districts and on what terms you are looking for an apartment and the cooperative will send you non-binding offers if they have any available apartments.

Information on renting an apartment from a housing cooperative:

- You must become a member of the cooperative.
- To do this, you must buy cooperative shares.
- The amount of shares usually depends on the size of the apartment.
- The cooperative shares bear interest and are usually refunded when the member leaves.

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Option 3: Real estate agents

You can hire a person to search for and advertise apartments for you. These people are called real estate agents. You have to pay an estate agent a commission for a successful search. Usually, most people look for accommodation themselves due to the high costs of estate agents.

As a general rule applies: Whoever places the order with the estate agent also pays the fees incurred in the end.

You can find real estate agents in Hamburg on this website.

Option 4: Newspapers

Sounds outdated - but can be a real lucky find. Older people in particular still use newspaper ads to offer and look for apartments. So it's worth taking a look at the ads, especially in the major Hamburg newspapers or even posting an ad yourself.

Further information on finding an apartment can be found on the Hamburg Welcome Center website. There we have also compiled an overview of common abbreviations in apartment advertisements and their meaning.

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How to find an apartment

Step 3: The rent and additional costs

Cold and warm rent

The price stated in an apartment advertisement is not always the price you will have to pay each month. Pay attention to the terms **"Kaltmiete" (cold rent = basis rent)** and **"Warmmiete" (warm rent)**.

The cold rent only includes the price you have to pay per square meter. Service charges are **not included** here.

Service charges are therefore costs that are incurred in addition to the cold rent.

These include, for example:

- water and sewage costs
- street cleaning and garbage collection
- elevator
- house cleaning and pest control
- garden maintenance
- lighting

The **warm rent** includes the basic rent and a (large) part of the additional costs. The price of the warm rent can therefore tell you better how much you will actually end up paying for the apartment. Therefore, always ask for the warm rent and also which additional costs are not included in the warm rent. Sometimes water is billed separately, for example directly to a supplier. In these cases, the water costs are not included in the warm rent.

Tip: Ask how much the previous tenant had to pay for utilities and how many people lived in the apartment. If only one person lived in the apartment before and you move in with 2 or more people, you should expect the water costs, for example, to increase.

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How to find an apartment

Additional monthly costs

There are other costs that are usually never included in the warm rent, but still have to be paid for each month. Plan for these as well.

These can be:

Electricity costs

Electricity is not included in the rent. You must register the electricity yourself with a supplier. It is a good idea to compare offers and prices from different providers to find the right tariff for you.

Broadcasting fees

Every household has to pay broadcasting fees. If you live alone in an apartment, you have to pay the same amount as a family with 2 children. If you move into a shared flat, the costs are shared by all people living in the flat. Broadcasting fees are about 18 Euros per month and have to be paid even if you don't watch public broadcasting stations or don't own a TV or radio. In certain cases, you can be exempted from paying the contribution or receive a reduction. To do so, you must submit an application.

Further information can be found on the ARD ZDF Deutschlandradio contribution service website (in German only).

Internet and telephone

If you want to have a landline connection or W-LAN in your home most of the time you will have to pay extra money. Sometimes, however, an Internet connection is already included in the rent. Consult the landlord.

Further information on contracts that you must and can conclude in addition to the tenancy agreement can be found on the Handbook Germany website.

Additional one-time costs

Security deposit

The rent security deposit is paid by the tenant to the landlord at the beginning of the tenancy and is intended to protect the landlord against damage caused by the tenant. The deposit is paid only once and it may not be higher than three net cold rents. When moving out, the tenant gets the deposit back in full, unless there are still outstanding debts to the landlord or damage to the apartment.

Optional: "Ablöse" (Transfer)

In a transfer agreement, you as the new tenant undertake to take over certain furniture, furnishings or fixtures from the previous tenant in return for payment of an agreed amount (transfer fee).

Important: The transfer fee must not unreasonably exceed the value of the furniture sold. A transfer agreement can be useful for all parties. The previous tenant receives a fair price for fixtures and fittings that he or she can no longer use and saves having to remove them. As the tenant, you in turn receive the property at a fair price.

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How to find an apartment

Step 4: The Application

Once a suitable apartment has been found, it's time to apply. When applying for an apartment, you usually need a few documents, which it is best to collect at the start of your search. It is best to add these to your application to increase your chances of an apartment viewing. However, you should always bring a printed copy of these documents with you directly to the apartment viewing.

The following documents are often requested from you:

Tenant self-disclosure (Mieterselbstauskunft)

The tenant self-disclosure is a form that you fill out as a potential tenant to provide landlords with information about your financial and personal situation. The self-disclosure helps landlords to assess your solvency and reliability.

Schufa information

Landlords often ask for this proof to see whether you have paid bills reliably in the past or whether you have debts. You can apply for a "Schufa-Auskunft" (Schufa report) directly on the SCHUFA website. You can find more information on the Schufa credit report on the Handbook Germany website.

Proof of salary or monthly income

Every landlord wants to make sure that you can afford the apartment and will be able to pay the rent every month. Therefore, you should prove how much money you get every month. You can verify this by sending a copy of your pay slip, your notice of government benefits or your current bank statement (Kontoauszug).

Rent payment confirmation

A rent payment confirmation is a document issued by your former landlord confirming that you have paid your rent reliably and punctually in the past. Although not all landlords expect you to have this document, it can help to prove your reliability as a tenant and increase your chances of getting the apartment.

Proof of a guarantee ("Bürgschaft")

Since every landlord wants to get his rent regularly, the proof of a guarantor is helpful. A guarantor (Bürge) is a person who guarantees that you will pay your rent. In the event that you are unable to pay your rent, your guarantor has to pay it for you.

Once you have sent your application for the apartment, you will have to wait. The landlord will look into your application and hopefully contact you.

But keep in mind: Many people are looking for an apartment in Hamburg. Very often there are a lot of applications for an apartment. You might have to wait a few days or weeks for a reply and sometimes there are so many applicants that the landlord cannot reply to every person.

We therefore recommend that you always **apply for several apartments at the same time**.

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Step 5: The apartment viewing (Wohnungsbesichtigung)

Once the landlord has contacted you and suggested a viewing appointment, you are one step closer to finding your new apartment. Now you have the chance to introduce yourself to your potential landlord.

Important tips for the viewing:

- Arrive on time for the apartment viewing (you should be there at least 10 minutes in advance).
- Wear the right outfit. The first impressions counts.
- Be friendly and polite.
- If you do not yet speak enough German, you should be accompanied by someone who can translate.
- Do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is still unclear to you.

Answer questions from the landlord truthfully:

If you don't answer certain questions truthfully, you could face dismissal. These include questions about:

- Marital status
- children
- pets

However, there are questions that are not allowed and therefore do not need to be answered (truthfully).

These include questions regarding:

- Religion, ethnic origin or nationality
- membership of political parties, trade unions or associations
- political or sexual orientation
- pregnancy or family planning
- whether you smoke
- criminal record

Pay attention to the condition of the house and the apartment during your viewing:

- Is the hallway clean?
- Does the elevator work?
- How does the apartment smell (damp, like mold)?
- Is there a built-in kitchen? Is it part of the rental contract or do you have to pay for the takeover?

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At the end of the apartment viewing there is usually an application form that you must fill out if you are still interested in the apartment. You must complete this form and send it to the landlord promptly in order to have a chance of getting the apartment.

Here you often have to state your profession, your salary and also your contact details (again).
If you need someone to translate, please note this on the application form and provide the contact details of this person. Then attach the printed documents that you have already sent with your application. This way, the landlord or landlady has all the information and documents together.

Beware: dubious offers

It happens that dubious or fraudulent people try to take your money using dubious or scamming methods. In addition to daily newspapers, classified ad markets or advertising journals, they often also use Internet portals.

Below is a list of signs that you can use to recognize a dubious offer:

I. The housing provider doesn't disclose his/her identity

You don't know the identity of the housing provider or he/she uses a false identity. He/she lives allegedly abroad and you only have email contact with him/her. They often use bad grammar in their emails.

II. No possibility of an apartment viewing

The housing provider tells you that he/she is overseas. An apartment viewing with him/her or with an estate agent is not possible. You have to transfer him/her money so he/she will send you the key for the accommodation in return.

Please note: Reliable housing providers don't demand advance payments such as a payment for keys, an advance rent or the payment of a deposit before the actual conclusion of the rental agreement.

III. Extremely low rental price

The housing provider offers a luxurious accommodation for an extremely favorable rent? This is usually too good to be true. In this case you should compare the price per square meter of this accommodation with the average price per square meter in this area.

IV. The accommodation is not available anymore

The accommodation is not available anymore, but in the office of the housing provider you are offered a list with insider tips and lots of available accommodations. A prerequisite is to pay 150 – 200 € for this list. You should not respond to these offers: Such providers do not offer apartments and the lists are usually worthless.

As a general rule, reputable providers do not demand payment in advance for any services!

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And finally: Wait

Once you have submitted your contact information on the application form, it is again time to wait. The landlord will usually contact you with an acceptance or rejection.

Don't worry if you don't get an apartment right away. Many people are looking for an apartment in Hamburg. For most people it is not easy and it can often take some time to find an apartment.
So don't give up. You will surely manage to find a suitable apartment.

Have you been offered the apartment?

When you have your rental contract in your hands: Congratulations! But you should read it carefully. You can find out more about this topic and what else you need to know on the Handbook Germany website.

If you are accepted for an apartment and **receive benefits from the Jobcenter or the Office for Migration** it is important for you to make an appointment with the responsible office **before** signing the contract. There has to be checked whether your rental apartment meets the adequacy limits (in German) and the office needs to give its approval beforehand. Please send the documents to the person responsible in advance.

You must register your new place of residence with the authorities. You can find more information here.

After the move, provide your new address to all offices where your address is registered (e.g. immigration office, health insurance company, tax office, bank, insurance companies, telephone provider, etc.). To make sure that your mail continues to reach you, you can have letters that were sent to your old address sent to your new address for a fee by forwarding order ("Nachsendeauftrag").

Housing allowance (Wohngeld)

If you do not receive any benefits, you can check whether you are entitled to housing allowance.
A prerequisite for receiving housing benefit is that you cover your living expenses and part of the rent from your own income. General information on housing benefit and how to apply can be found on the website of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg in various languages.

Good to know: Tenants in Hamburg can obtain general information on housing and renting via the **tenant hotline** (Mietertelefon). However, it does not provide legal advice on individual cases.

The consultation hours and contact details can be found on the website of the Tenants' Association Hamburg.

We wish you every success in your search for a new home!

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Registration

Residence registration

If you move into a new main residence in Hamburg, you must register in person at one of the locations of Hamburg Service vor Ort – Einwohnerangelegenheiten ('Residents' Affairs) within two weeks of moving in.

Registering your place of residence is an important step, as it gives you access to public and private services and is a prerequisite for most administrative processes.

You can register your place of residence at any location. Simply book an appointment online. Alternatively, you can make an appointment by calling **+49 40 115**.

The following **documents**, among others, are required for registration:

- completed and signed registration form
- completed and signed confirmation of accommodation provider

Further information on requirements, necessary documents and forms can be found on the Hamburg Service website:

- Report a move to Hamburg from abroad
- Report a move to Hamburg from another federal state
- Report a move within Hamburg

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Applying for a residence permit

Applying for a residence permit

People who immigrate from third countries (outside the EU, EEA and Switzerland) require a residence permit.

If you want to apply for a residence permit in Hamburg or extend your existing permit, you can proceed as follows:

Submit an application

Please note that you must have registered your place of residence in Hamburg in order to apply for a residence permit.

You can submit your application to the Hamburg Welcome Center or the local Hamburg Service offices for foreigners' affairs. Use the online service Residence Permit Hamburg for this.

Here you can submit the application and your documents in compliance with data protection regulations. You can also find out which immigration office is responsible for you.

Book an appointment

You should then be able to book your appointment. If this function is not available, the immigration office will notify you of your appointment.

If the **Hamburg Welcome Center** is responsible for your application, you can make an appointment after using the online service by calling +49 40 428 39-5500.

The service portal is available for all other inquiries. Here you can submit additional documents, make a notification, change or add a regulation in the residence permit or ask a general question.

Further information

Information on residence permits, checklists and the necessary application forms can be found on the website of the Hamburg Welcome Center.

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Emergency numbers and what to do in the event of illness

Emergency numbers

- Medical emergency service: **112**
- Fire department: **112**
- Police: **110**
- Poison emergency hotline: **+49 551 / 19240**

- Medical on-call service (for non-life-threatening cases): **116 117**
- Dental emergency service: **+49 1805 / 05 05 18**
- Pharmacy emergency hotline: **+49 800 00 22833**

Assistance and advice

- Children's and teens' hotline (“Nummer gegen Kummer”): **116 111**
- Parents' hotline (“Nummer gegen Kummer”): **+49 800 1110550**
- Get your credit and debit cards blocked: **116 116**

If you need acute or long-term counseling, support or therapy due to psychological issues, you can find contact points in Hamburg and nationwide hotlines on our website.

Searching for doctors and hospitals

Online search tools (available in German only):

The usual search criteria here are: Subject area (”Fachgebiet”), location/district (”Stadtteil”) and language requirements (”Fremdsprache”).

- Online-search-function of the Hamburg Association of Statutory Health Insurances (Kassenärztliche Vereinigung Hamburg)
- Online search-function of the Medical Association Hamburg (Ärztekammer Hamburg)
- Online search function of the Dentists Association Hamburg (Zahnärztekammer Hamburg)
- Hospital Guide Hamburg (Krankenhausportal)

Advice for patients

The free patients’ hotline **+49 40 / 20 22 99 222** offers support and advice on medical issues and finding a doctor.

You can find further information on medication and information on how to obtain care in the event of illness or an emergency in this multilingual guide from the Federal Ministry of Health.

Date: July 2025

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