

Useful Information for Apartment Hunting

This information has been compiled to the best of our knowledge and is intended as a guide for your orientation. You can find more information on housing on our website:

www.th-koeln.de/accommodation

What documents should I prepare?

- Request a Schufa¹ credit report or provide an alternative proof of financial security (e.g. blocked account).
- Create an application portfolio (CV, cover letter, proof/explanation of financial security).
- Cover letter to landlord/landlady: Briefly introduce yourself: Who are you? Where are you from? What is the reason for your stay in Germany?
- For shared flats: Write a more personal introduction of yourself. Write about your personality, hobbies, and interests. Refer to information that may already be mentioned in the advertisement.

What kind of information will be requested from me?

- In Germany, it is common to fill out a self-disclosure form when viewing an apartment. This typically includes your personal data as well as information about your professional and financial situation. The legal basis for data protection should always be indicated, namely Art. 6 para.1 lit. f GDPR.
- A scan of your passport can be requested by your landlord/landlady at a later stage, but should not normally be requested from you on first contact.
- Name, date of birth, current address, etc. are usually the most important pieces of information required by landlords/landladies to prepare a rental contract. Your bank details are normally not included in the contract; instead, you will receive the bank details of your landlord/landlady, to whom you should transfer the monthly rent.

Exception: The Kölner Studierendenwerk (and possibly some commercial providers or private dormitories) request your bank details because they collect your monthly rent by direct debit.

What types of advance payments are common?

- It is common to pay a security deposit and the first month's rent after signing the contract but before moving in. The deposit can amount to 1-3 months' basic rent.
- The previous tenant may ask you to purchase furniture or parts of the kitchen, etc. You discuss this with the previous tenant and usually transfer the agreed amount before moving in. You can also have a purchase agreement issued for this.
- It is not common to pay a fee just for viewing an apartment. Viewing fees are usually a scam.

¹ A private service provider commonly used in the housing market to provide landlords/landladies with information about a tenant's financial situation, such as whether there are existing debts.

Is the rent for this type of apartment realistic?

- A room in a shared flat (WG) in Cologne costs on average: €400 – €600
- A single apartment/studio in Cologne costs on average: €600 – €900
- Apartments in Germany are generally unfurnished, so furnished apartments should be more expensive.
- A furnished apartment offered by a commercial provider is generally more expensive than one offered by a person renting privately.
- The closer the apartment is to the city center, the more expensive it will be.
- Parking spaces are limited in larger cities and usually subject to fees. If a parking space is included with the apartment, it is usually noted in the listing with an additional fee.
- Apartments in Germany typically do not have air conditioning. If an apartment includes air conditioning, it is generally considered a luxury feature, which should also be reflected in the rental price.

Attention: Fraud Cases

Unfortunately, fraud cases are common in the housing market. Fraudsters often try to target students who are in urgent need of accommodation. Even if you are looking for accommodation urgently, please take your time to think carefully before signing or paying anything. Check the offer carefully and, if in doubt, seek a second opinion from another person.

Please note:

- An offer that seems "too good to be true" is often not genuine! So, check: Is the rent reasonable for the location and amenities?
- Do the pictures look like a real apartment or more like images from an IKEA catalog?
- "I am the landlord, but I am currently living abroad and therefore cannot show the apartment..." is a common indication of fraud nowadays.
- Just because a landlord/landlady sends you a scanned copy of a passport doesn't mean it is genuine; scans of passports are available all over the internet!
- Apartment listings in English (unless they are bilingual) should raise a red flag: Why would a landlord/landlady in Germany publish an offer only in English?
- A landlord/landlady will not lower the rent of an apartment just to "help" you.
- If you are searching from abroad and want to rent from a private landlord/landlady, try to arrange a video call with that person to verify their existence. If you are offered a recorded video tour, try to spot signs indicating that the apartment is not in Germany, such as the presence of air conditioning, for example.
- Rental agreements usually run for a longer period, usually years, if they are unlimited, so monthly termination options are usually only available for vacation rentals (e.g. AirBnB). A notice period must be specified in the rental agreement, which is usually 3 months. Or a room is offered for interim rent. In this case, the rental agreement is automatically limited, for example to one or three months.

Word Explanations

- Vermieter*in: *landlord/landlady*: usually the owner of the apartment
- Vormieter*in: *previous tenant*: the person who lived in the apartment/room before you/currently lives there
- Mieter*in: *tenant*: the person who rents the room (i.e. you ☺)
- Kaltmiete: *basic rent* without additional costs/service charges
- Warmmiete: *warm rent*: Rent including ancilliary costs (e.g. hot water/heating/service charges)
- Zwischenmiete: *interim rent*: the person renting the room wants to come back after a certain time.
- möbliert/unmöbliert: *furnished/unfurnished*
- befristet/unbefristet: *temporary/permanent*: end of tenancy is already fixed/end of tenancy is open
- Kautio/Mietkaution: *deposit/rental deposit*: The amount of money you must deposit as security when renting an apartment. Usually between 1-3 months' basic rent.

Typical Abbreviations

- WG: shared flat
- 2 ZKB: Two-room apartment with kitchen (K=Kitchen) and bathroom (B=Bathroom)
- Z./Zi: Room
- NK: Nebenkosten: Ancilliary costs
- Mbl./möbl.: furnished/with furniture
- Du: shower
- Blk: balcony
- EG: Ground floor
- OG: Upper floor
- DG: Attic floor
- Sout.: Basement (below the ground floor, often with only small windows)

Additional useful links

- <https://www.wohnungsboerse.net/mietspiegel-Koeln/5333> (average rent prices in Cologne)
- www.meineschufa.de (Credit check)
- <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/living-in-germany/housing-mobility/housing-registration> (General Information on accommodation in Germany)
- <https://www.verbraucherzentrale.de/wissen/vertraege-reklamation/abzocke/fakewohnungen-im-internet-so-erkennen-sie-gefaelschte-immobilienanzeigen-27576> (How to spot fraud)
- <https://www.asta.th-koeln.de/beratung-und-service/mietrecht/> (Legal Counselling TH Köln)