

German Driving Licence Guide

New Licence + Conversion | Full Process + 2026 Prices

For Expats in Germany | 2026 Prices (ADAC/TUV sources)

EUR 0

EU/EEA swap cost

EUR 3.5K+

Min. full licence

EUR 6K

Max. full licence

Free

This guide

PATH A - Conversion

You already hold a foreign licence

- EU/EEA: direct swap, no tests
- Recognised countries: theory only
- Non-recognised: full process

PATH B - New Licence

Starting from zero in Germany

- No prior licence held anywhere
- Full Fahrschule process required
- Theory + practical + first aid + vision

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Prices updated 2026 (ADAC): Full licence now EUR 3,500-6,000. Costs rose 5.8% in 2024 alone.

1

Which Path Applies to You?

Read this first — determines your entire process and cost

- EU or EEA licence holder (UK, French, German, Polish, etc.) **[EUR 35-50]**
-> Direct swap only — no theory or practical test required. Fastest and cheapest. Cost: admin fees only.
- Licence from a RECOGNISED non-EU country (Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Switzerland, New Zealand, South Africa and select others)
-> Check the KBA bilateral list at kba.de. Skip practical exam but **MUST** pass theory exam. Fahrschule registration still required.
- Pakistani, Kuwaiti, Indian, Egyptian, or most other non-EU licences
-> Full conversion process: theory AND practical exam mandatory. Your existing licence earns **NO** exemptions, though experienced drivers need fewer hours.
- You have never held a driving licence anywhere
-> Same full process. Theory, practical, first aid, vision test, Fahrschule registration. Expect 40-60+ lessons from scratch.
- Your foreign licence must be officially translated **[EUR 30-60]**
-> Required for all non-German, non-EU licences. Use a sworn (beeidigter) translator or ADAC.
- German law requires Fahrschule registration for all non-EU applicants
-> You cannot book and sit exams privately. Fahrschule registration is a legal prerequisite.

Important — Kuwait, Pakistan, UAE licences: full process applies

If you grew up driving in Kuwait or Pakistan your licence grants zero exam exemptions in Germany. Full process: theory lessons, theory exam, practical lessons, practical exam. Experienced drivers typically need 15-25 lessons instead of 40-60 for a complete beginner.

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Documents Required — All Applicants

Gather these before visiting the Strassenverkehrsamt or Fahrschule

- Valid passport or German Personalausweis — original only
-> Must be currently valid. Bring the original — not a photocopy.
- Current residence registration (Anmeldebestätigung / Meldebescheinigung)
-> From your Einwohnermeldeamt. Request fresh copy if older than 3 months.
- Biometric passport photo — 35x45mm, white background, recent **[EUR 10-15]**
-> Usually 1 photo required. Confirm with your local Strassenverkehrsamt.
- Valid residence permit (Aufenthaltstitel) — if non-EU national
-> Must be current and valid.
- Original foreign driving licence + certified German translation **[EUR 30-60]**
-> Use a sworn (beeidigter) translator or ADAC. Your original may be retained.

- Sehtest certificate — vision test (min. 0.7 each eye) **[EUR 6-15]**
-> At a licensed optician. 5-minute test. Certificate valid 2 years.
- Erste-Hilfe-Kurs certificate — 9-hour first aid course **[EUR 22-50]**
-> DRK, Johanniter, ADAC, or Fahrschule. Usually one Saturday. Valid indefinitely.
- Completed Antrag auf Erteilung einer Fahrerlaubnis form
-> From the Strassenverkehrsamt website. Fill in German.

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EU/EEA Licence — Direct Swap (Path A)

No test required. Admin process only. Fastest and cheapest.

- Confirm your EU/EEA licence category is valid
-> All standard categories (B, A, C, D) can be swapped. If expired, usually still swappable within 6 months.
- Book appointment at Strassenverkehrsamt — do not walk in
-> Online booking required. Wait times: Kaiserslautern 2-4 weeks, Berlin/Frankfurt up to 8 weeks.
- Submit documents + surrender original foreign licence **[EUR 35-50]**
-> Your original EU licence is surrendered and returned to the issuing country.
- Receive interim paper licence (vorläufiger Fuhrerschein) same day
-> Valid immediately for driving. Keep it with you at all times.
- Receive permanent plastic licence by post within 3-5 weeks
-> Mailed to your registered address. Check for errors immediately.
- UK licence: still accepted for direct swap post-Brexit
-> Confirm with your local office as some cities apply stricter rules.

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Recognised Country — Theory Exam Only (Path A+)

Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Switzerland + others. No practical exam.

- Verify your country is on the current KBA bilateral agreement list
-> Check kba.de. Recognised countries include Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland.
- Register with a Fahrschule to access the theory exam system **[EUR 50-150]**
-> Still required for theory exam registration. Shop around.
- Study and pass the official Theorieprüfung **[EUR 25 + surcharge]**
-> 96 questions. Max 10 errors general, max 2 class-specific. Available in English, Turkish, Arabic.
- Fahrschule surcharge for theory exam registration **[EUR 60-137]**
-> Separate from the TUV/DEKRA exam fee. Covers organising and accompanying you.
- Submit all documents to Strassenverkehrsamt after passing **[EUR 35-50]**
-> Theory pass cert + foreign licence + translation + vision test + first aid + application form.
- Receive German licence — no practical exam required
-> Processing 2-4 weeks. Your foreign licence is retained.

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Full Process — Theory (Grundbetrag + Lessons + Exam)

For non-recognised country licences and new applicants

- Register with a Fahrschule — Grundbetrag covers theory + admin **[EUR 350-600]**
-> Grundbetrag range: EUR 350-600. Compare at least 3 schools before committing.
- Attend minimum 12-14 theory double-lessons (each 90 min) **[Included in Grundbetrag]**
-> Each covers road rules, hazard recognition, vehicle knowledge. Included in Grundbetrag.
- Study at home using iFahrschule or Fahren Lernen app **[EUR 0-30]**
-> Free or low-cost apps. Updated April 2025 with new question formats. Practice until 85%+ pass rate.
- Pay Fahrschule surcharge for theory exam registration **[EUR 60-137]**
-> Separate from TUV/DEKRA fee. Covers organising and accompanying you to the exam.
- Sit the official Theorieprüfung at TUV or DEKRA **[EUR 25]**
-> Computer-based, 30 questions, 45 min. Available in German, English, Turkish, Arabic.
- Important: 49% fail rate in 2025 — prepare seriously
-> New question formats introduced April 2025. Use updated materials only.
Do NOT use outdated study apps or old question sets from before April 2025.
- Theory certificate valid 12 months — start practical lessons within 6 months
-> If you do not pass practical within 12 months of theory pass, you must retake theory.

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Full Process — Practical Lessons and Exam

The largest cost variable — depends entirely on your skill and experience

- Book practical Fahrstunden (45 min each) with your Fahrschule **[EUR 60-95/lesson]**
-> Cost per lesson: EUR 60-95 in most cities, EUR 70-95 in Frankfurt, Berlin, Munich.
- Complete 12 mandatory Sonderfahrten (special drives) — legally required **[EUR 720-1,140 total]**
-> 5x Überlandfahrt (rural), 4x Autobahnfahrt (motorway), 3x Nachtfahrt (night). EUR 60-95 each.
- Experienced drivers: expect 15-25 lessons. Complete beginners: 40-60+
-> Tell your instructor your experience honestly after lesson 3 for a realistic estimate.
- Fahrschule surcharge for practical exam registration **[EUR 160-290]**
-> Covers organising, accompanying, and vehicle for the exam. Separate from TUV/DEKRA fee.
- Official practical exam fee at TUV or DEKRA **[EUR 130]**
-> Fixed fee. Combined with surcharge: total practical exam cost EUR 290-420.
- Exam: 45 minutes on real roads with TUV/DEKRA examiner in back seat
-> Routes cover urban, motorway, and parking. Instructor may sit in front but cannot speak.
- If you fail — each retry costs EUR 290-420 total
-> TUV fee EUR 130 + surcharge EUR 160-290 + additional practice lessons before retry.
Approximately 1 in 3 fail the practical exam first time. Do not rush into the exam.

Tip — Choose an expat-friendly Fahrschule

Ask specifically: 'Ich habe X Jahre Fahrerfahrung im Ausland — wie viele Stunden schätzen Sie nach Stunde 3?' A good instructor gives an honest estimate after lesson 3, not a fixed 30-lesson package. Kaiserslautern and smaller RLP cities have cheaper per-lesson rates than Frankfurt or Mannheim.

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First Aid Course and Vision Test

Mandatory for ALL applicants regardless of path — do these early

- Book and complete the Erste-Hilfe-Kurs — 9 hours, usually one Saturday **[EUR 22-50]**
-> DRK (cheapest), Johanniter, Malteser, ADAC, or Fahrschule. Certificate valid indefinitely.
- DRK (Deutsches Rotes Kreuz) is typically the cheapest provider
-> Search 'DRK Erste Hilfe Kurs' + your city. Book early — courses fill up quickly.
- English-language first aid courses available in major cities
-> Ask when booking. Frankfurt, Munich, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart often have English-language options.
- Sehtest (vision test) at any licensed optician — 5 minutes **[EUR 6-15]**
-> Min. visual acuity: 0.7 each eye. Some Fielmann branches offer it for EUR 6 or free.
- Wear your glasses or contact lenses to the vision test
-> If you need correction, your licence carries code 01. Driving without glasses is a violation.
- Sehtest certificate must not be older than 2 years
-> Do the test as part of the process — not years in advance.

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Applying at the Strassenverkehrsamt (Fuhrerscheinstelle)

Final official step — submit everything and receive your German licence

- Book an appointment online — do not walk in
-> Use the city Bürgerservice portal. Wait times: Kaiserslautern 1-3 weeks, Frankfurt/Berlin up to 8 weeks.
- Bring the complete document set from Step 2
-> One missing document = rejected appointment and a new wait. Check the list the evening before.
- Pay the Bearbeitungsgebühr (processing fee) **[EUR 35-50]**
-> Payment by EC card or cash at the office. Amount varies by city and licence category.
- For conversions: surrender your original foreign licence
-> Non-EU licences kept by the authority. EU licences returned to issuing country. Cannot keep original.
- Receive interim paper licence (vorläufiger Fuhrerschein) same day
-> This is your valid driving licence until the plastic card arrives. Keep it when driving.
- Check the plastic card immediately when it arrives
-> Verify name, DOB, and categories. Report errors to Strassenverkehrsamt within 10 days.

Full Cost Breakdown — 2026 Updated Prices (ADAC Data)

All costs EUR. Significant regional variation — Kaiserslautern/small cities cheaper than Frankfurt/Munich.

Cost Item	EU/EEA Swap	Recognised Country	Full Process (non-EU)
Fahrschule Grundbetrag	Not needed	EUR 50-150	EUR 350-600
Theory exam (TUV/DEKRA)	Not needed	EUR 25	EUR 25
Fahrschule theory surcharge	Not needed	EUR 60-137	EUR 60-137
Practical lessons (avg 18)	Not needed	Not needed	EUR 1,080-1,710
12 mandatory Sonderfahrten	Not needed	Not needed	EUR 720-1,140
Practical exam (TUV/DEKRA)	Not needed	Not needed	EUR 130
Fahrschule practical surcharge	Not needed	Not needed	EUR 160-290
First aid (Erste-Hilfe)	EUR 22-50	EUR 22-50	EUR 22-50
Vision test (Sehtest)	EUR 6-15	EUR 6-15	EUR 6-15
Licence translation	EUR 0-60	EUR 30-60	EUR 30-60
Strassenverkehrsamt fee	EUR 35-50	EUR 35-50	EUR 35-50
ESTIMATED TOTAL	EUR 65-175	EUR 230-500	EUR 2,600-4,200
ADAC 2026 range (full process)	N/A	N/A	EUR 3,500-6,000

* ADAC 2026 range includes failed retries, extended lesson requirements, and higher city prices.

Typical Timeline by Path

From starting the process to holding your German driving licence.

Stage	EU/EEA Swap	Recognised Country	Full Process
Documents + vision + first aid	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks	1-2 weeks
Fahrschule + theory lessons	N/A	4-8 weeks	6-14 weeks
Theory exam	N/A	1 day	1 day
Practical lessons	N/A	N/A	6-16 weeks
Practical exam	N/A	N/A	1 day
Strassenverkehrsamt appointment	1-3 weeks	1-3 weeks	1-3 weeks
Plastic card delivery by post	3-5 weeks	3-5 weeks	3-5 weeks
TOTAL ESTIMATE	5-10 weeks	3-4 months	5-9 months

How to Keep Costs Down

Tip	Potential saving
Use DRK or Johanniter for first aid — cheapest certified providers	Save EUR 15-25
Study theory intensively at home before paid lessons — need fewer classes	Save EUR 60-200
Get vision test at Fielmann — often EUR 6 or free vs EUR 15 elsewhere	Save EUR 5-10
Choose a Fahrschule in Kaiserslautern vs Frankfurt — 20-30% cheaper rates	Save EUR 300-700
Ask for Probestunde (trial lesson) before committing to any school	Avoid bad schools
Tell instructor your experience upfront — honest assessment after lesson 3	Avoid 10+ extra lessons
Book theory exam only when scoring 85%+ in practice tests consistently	Avoid EUR 185+ retry cost
Avoid fixed 'all-inclusive' packages if you are already an experienced driver	Save EUR 200-500

Key Numbers to Remember — 2026

EUR 3,500-6,000	ADAC 2026 total range for a full new licence (Class B)
EUR 2,600-4,200	Realistic range if you pass first time with 18 practical lessons
EUR 350-600	Grundbetrag (Fahrschule base fee covering theory + admin)
EUR 60-95	Per 45-min practical lesson (2026 updated rate)
EUR 60-95	Per 45-min Sonderfahrt (same rate as normal lesson)
EUR 290-420	Total practical exam cost (TUV EUR 130 + Fahrschule surcharge)
EUR 25 + EUR 60-137	Theory exam: TUV fee + Fahrschule surcharge
49%	Theory exam first-attempt failure rate 2025 (TUV-Verband)
12	Mandatory Sonderfahrten: 5x Überlandfahrt + 4x Autobahn + 3x Nacht
12 months	Theory pass certificate validity — practical exam must be within this

Confused about which path applies to you?

Book a 30-minute call with Zohaib — he will confirm your path, review your documents, and recommend a Fahrschule. Saves weeks of confusion and potentially hundreds of euros in unnecessary lessons. Starting at EUR 49.

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