

Are you ready to tour Europe?

US citizens residing in Germany, the “heart” of Europe, have many opportunities to visit other foreign countries and experience different cultures. In order to prevent complications or delays when entering these countries and to make your holiday as trouble-free as possible, the Ramstein Passport Office would like to provide a few facts and tips for you.

While many borders to neighboring countries are open with no checkpoints, each country has specific entry requirements and visitors must have the necessary travel documents on hand. We recommend referring to the Foreign Clearance Guide at <https://www.fcg.pentagon.mil/> to find out if a passport and possibly a visa are required before making any travel plans. Please note that this website can only be accessed from a government computer.

Travel documents for military personnel: Most military members move to Germany using their ID card and PCS orders. While that is sufficient to reside in Germany during their assignment, any military member planning to travel to other countries should apply for a tourist passport since many countries require one for entry. When on leisure travel, each military member should carry a military ID, PCS and leave orders as well as a tourist passport. The latter is only for those countries that do not recognize the military ID and PCS orders to verify overseas status.

Travel documents for civilians and all family members: Most US civilians on official orders and family members of civilian and military personnel will receive no-fee passports with a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) stamp prior to PCSing to Germany. This passport may only be used for authorized travel to Germany and for return to the United States. These members should acquire a tourist passport if they plan to visit other foreign countries and carry both no-fee and tourist passports when crossing the German border as verification of their SOFA status. When entering the country visiting for leisure travel, present the tourist passport. When re-entering Germany, present the no-fee passport with SOFA stamp. US civilians employed by the DoD and family members possessing only a tourist passport are authorized a SOFA certificate for their passport to show their affiliation with the military. This also authorizes them to reenter Germany while on leisure travel. Individuals using only a no-fee passport for leisure travel should be aware that they are traveling at their own risk and may be denied entry to a foreign country.

Travel Tips: Always check the validity of your passport(s) and renew them six months prior to the expiration date. Timely planning is especially important as regular processing times for tourist passports are between four to six weeks.

Most importantly, safeguard your passports at all times to prevent loss or theft, especially when visiting metropolitan areas such as Paris, London, Barcelona or Rome. If your passport is lost or stolen in a foreign country, contact the nearest US Embassy or Consulate immediately and apply for a replacement passport if needed. Be proactive and look up the nearest Embassy or Consulate address and contact information prior to your trip. It is also a good idea to keep a copy of the data/photo page of your passport with you separately while traveling in case of loss or theft.

Always be prepared for weather changes and carry extra clothes or rain gear. Bring a travel guide for the country you’re visiting to find out more about the local customs and tourist attractions. While many Europeans speak English, they all appreciate you talking to them in their language. Referring to a Book of Phrases containing frequently used expressions may help when trying to communicate in a foreign country; it may even help you avoid unwelcome surprises when ordering food from a foreign menu. For more information regarding leisure travels and tours, you may contact the Ramstein Tickets and Tours (RTT) Office at DSN 314-480-6330/6650 or Civ +49 6371-46360 or visit their web site at <http://www.rttravel.com/customerserv/index.htm>.

If you follow the above guidance, you should be ready to tour Europe and enjoy the many sights and local customs. If you have any additional questions regarding passports or SOFA, please contact the Ramstein Passport Office at 786fss.passports@us.af.mil. **Traveling around Europe is as easy as 1, 2, 3! 1. Check the Foreign Clearance Guide. 2. Bring all required documents any time you leave Germany. 3. Enjoy your trip!**