

How to find a job in Germany

Trying to find work at the moment is not that easy in Germany with the nation's economy battling to recover from three years of stagnation. In her regular Expatica column, Cultural Clues, Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich offers some advice to would-be job seekers in America on landing a job in Germany.

Devon wrote:

I am a 19-year-old male attending a community college in the States and speak very little German. I have no 'skill' - that is, a degree or such that would make it easier to get a higher paying job.

In the US, it is possible to find a waitering job or the like to make the rent and feed oneself.

Is that so in Germany as well?

What can I do? Where would be a good place to research how I could move to Germany and find a job that does not require a degree but still pays enough to comfortably live and have time for leisure?

Or is a degree in Germany an absolute must? I would be very grateful if you get me started in the right direction. I hear you are good at such questions.

Ian wrote:

I am thinking of moving to Bavaria. I have been taking German for one-and-a-half years at the Goethe Institute.

Is it easier to find employment in a larger city like Munich or maybe in a smaller one like Garmisch-Partenkirchen?

Dear job seekers

Germany is known for its highly skilled labour market. People have degrees for everything —and some subjects are most intriguing. I have stumbled upon degrees such as a state-recognised model train salesperson and the somewhat baffling “Diplom Puppenspieler” (puppeteer’s diploma).

Even a salesperson will have followed an “Ausbildung” (training) for two years in order to work in a department store. This does not include a smiling course.

Tiping culture

Most waiters in the US (correct me if I am wrong) are like entrepreneurs. You might get a base salary of a few dollars max — but you need to earn your bread and butter on the basis of tips, 15 to 20 percent.

A fully-fledged waiter in Germany has an “Ausbildung” — they are on the official payroll of the restaurant owner and do not depend on money made from tips. The “Trinkgeld” (tip) is the marmalade on top of the bread and butter. It may run up to 10 percent.

This is on a voluntary basis — not “a felt must” as in the States. German waiters receive an adequate pay and have their social security taken care of through contributions for health insurance, sick pay and the state pension system.

Part-time jobs

But there are opportunities for “Aushilfe-Kellner” (help-out waiters). These are popular income sources for students and others seeking an extra job to make ends meet.

Employment without a special qualification has a low remuneration, and many jobs have fallen into the so-called secondary labour market — working “on the black” and not paying taxes or social insurance.

To counter this, a new EUR 400 job initiative has been introduced in which the tax take is reduced to keep people on the straight and narrow. On offer can be anything from office cleaning to city express courier on a bike to gardening or junior office clerk.

Of course, the larger urban areas will have more industries and service providers that deal with international clients. These jobs can be at call centres, airlines, hotels or with conference organisers. It makes an easier start for the not-so-fluent German speakers.

Whether it is big metropolis small town, it depends on the local economy — and that happens to be in a sad state regardless of where you look in Germany. But the open-minded and the flexible have always found a way to reach their goal.

Here are a few tips:

- Rather than seeking full employment look for temporary job openings
- Alternatively, offer your skills on an extended trial basis
- Or do project-related work, but be assertive and creative
- Be willing to accept a position that does not reflect your past experiences — at least you will be compensated by getting your German language skills up to speed

Other possible sources of work are:

- Temp agencies (Personal Service Agenturen aka Zeitarbeit), such as Manpower, Randstad or Adecco are well represented throughout Germany.
- The American German business club: www.agbc.de for networking
- Do not forget to post a message on the Expatica forum or look at Expatica Jobs (www.expatica.com/jobs)
- Another source of jobs is www.Overseasjobs.com

But a word of warning: be careful about your legal status, in particular your residence and work permits.

Only European Union citizens are allowed to work in the EU without a work permit, although they still need a residence permit. Check the application procedures by contacting the German consulate offices or visit the site of the German foreign Office (www.auswaertiges-amt.de) or Expatica’s Relocation channel.

Consider this contribution as just another stone in the complex mosaic of looking for a job abroad.

Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich is managing partner of CONSULTus. Her website is WWW.Consultus.net. She reserves the right to decide which questions she considers relevant for her column. She will, however, not answer any questions dealing with tax or legal matters.