

## LOCATION

**Country:** Germany

**Town:** Oberammergau, Bavaria, lies in a valley extension of the Ammer (approx. 20 km north of Garmisch-Partenkirchen) and is surrounded by the foothills of the Ammergau Alps. Oberammergau is a municipality in the district of Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Bavaria, Germany.

**Other info to consider:**

- Family (non-dependents) can visit and stay 90 days **without a visa** (Schengen Area).
- Oberammergau is an international tourism destination in the Alps known for the Passion Play held every 10 years since the 1600s'.

## POPULATION

**Size:** 5,474 (as of 2018)

**Ethnicity:** Mostly German.

**Religion:** The majority religion in Germany is Christianity, with two-thirds of the population adhering to Protestantism and one-third to Roman Catholicism. Germany is the second most popular country in the world for immigrants. Also, home to a large number of Syrian refugees (estimated 700,000).

## LANGUAGE(S)

**Official language:** German

**Prevalence of French or English speaking:** English as a second language.

- Most establishments will have an English-speaking employee. However, English is not spoken freely and commonly. Limited to no French.

## COST OF LIVING

**Exchange rate to consider:** Euro

- Groceries and restaurants are typically cheaper in Germany than in Canada.
- The cost of food in Oberammergau is more expensive than Germany's average.
- Clothing and furniture are often more expensive.
- Gas is more expensive; however, Aral fuel cards allow members and their dependents to purchase gas tax-free from Aral stations.

## QUALITY OF LIFE

**Climate and potential for severe weather, natural disasters:**

- Oberammergau enjoys four beautiful seasons, with temperatures averaging from 20 to 30 degrees Celsius in the summer to -5 degrees Celsius in the winter. The actual temperature can be much higher and lower at times.

**Laws and culture:**

- Germans are traditional and pride themselves on being organized, professional, and having a good work/life balance. Germans enforce laws (for example - a ticket on the spot for jay-walking). Germans are known to be rule followers and do not take kindly to those who don't adhere to rules and social norms.
- Customer service can be lacking.
- The drinking age for beer and wine in Germany is 14 with parents present, and 16 without parents. The drinking age is 18 for all other alcohol (i.e. spirits). Alcohol is sold in grocery stores; public alcohol consumption is allowed. Smoking is much more common in Germany than in Canada (in general and in public places).
- Cigarettes are available in vending machines on street corners.
- Germans LOVE their dogs and they are welcome everywhere (restaurants, some stores, bars, festivals, and malls) if behaved properly. However, if a dog is aggressive or disruptive, it will not be welcome to enter businesses.
- You must be at least 18 years old to drive a vehicle in Germany. An International Driving Permit is recommended. You should apply for one before leaving Canada.

- Penalties for drinking and driving are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is 0.05%. Convicted offenders can expect heavy fines, and your driver's licence may be confiscated immediately.

#### **Safety and security:**

- Violent crime is rare but does occur.
- Exercise normal security precautions and be particularly vigilant if attending events with large crowds.
- Petty crime (pickpocketing and purse snatching) occurs in major cities, train stations, airports and Christmas markets.
- Pickpockets often work in teams and target people on trains and at railway stations and airports. Their methods include distracting a victim who is boarding or exiting a train or surrounding a victim in line-ups or at check-in counters.
- Individuals have been harassed or attacked for reasons of race or foreign-looking appearance.
- Ensure that personal belongings, including passports and other travel documents, are secure at all times.
- There is a threat of terrorism in Europe. Terrorists have carried out attacks in several European cities. In Germany, previous incidents have resulted in injury and death. They include random violent assaults in public areas and a truck driven into crowds at a Christmas market in Berlin. Further attacks in Europe are likely.
- Demonstrations may occur. Even peaceful demonstrations can turn violent at any time. They can also lead to traffic and public transportation disruptions.

#### **Level of isolation:**

- French-speaking spouses may feel very isolated if they don't speak English at all.
- Social activities often revolve around drinking and hiking or skiing. Inactive or sober spouses may feel isolated.
- There are five Canadian families in this location.

## **HOUSING**

- Pets might not be accepted.
- Your HHT will likely be stressful. Oberammergau has a very low vacancy rate, and rents are high. Due to the large US military population, some German property owners are used to renting to English-speaking/military, while others will actively avoid military/English-speaking tenants due to previous negative experiences.
- Not uncommon for emails to potential property owners to go unanswered when setting up HHT, they prefer phone contact.
- Housing within the city will be smaller attached homes, apartments, and condominiums. For larger detached homes with a yard, you'll need to look further out, which will increase commuting time to (both school and work). Families with children will need to consider schools when choosing a home. The balance between a reasonable commute (school and work) and the size of the home will need to be carefully weighed.
- When the Passion Play is being held, finding temporary housing in the area will likely be impossible.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

**Are there employment opportunities for spouses?** Due to tax and legal implications, spousal employment in Germany is not a realistic option.

- There are very limited employment opportunities available through CFMWS, so families should be prepared to be a single-income family for the duration of the posting.
- There are many opportunities on the American base, but you must be a US Citizen or hold a Green Card.

**Op tempo:** The op tempo will vary greatly depending on the position. TD is possible.

## **HEALTH CARE**

**Access:** The German healthcare system is fast and effective.

- English services are widely available, but French is very limited.
- The CFSU(E) Canadian Medical Clinic in Geilenkirchen (700 km) is responsible for the healthcare of all Canadian military members in Europe and can be accessed.
- All bills associated with the care of dependents are the member's personal responsibility and are to be claimed through PSHCP.
- There is always a pharmacy open 24 hours within the area; it may be in Murnau or another nearby town.

#### **Special needs:**

- Depending on the language required (English/French), area of specialization and the degree of support needed, but very limited.

- It may be a wait before finding an appropriate match and at times may not be possible based on the availability of English/French providers or resources.
- It is highly advised that the family consult with Medical Screening Officer in Canada and/or the Canadian Element to ensure that the required services are readily available in either English or French before accepting a posting.

#### **Consideration for pregnancy/birthing:**

- Members and their dependents will be referred to a local doctor (English-speaking) to monitor them throughout their pregnancy.

#### **Dental:**

- Dental care can be accessed in town. You are required to pay upfront, and you can then claim your expenses.

## **SCHOOLING**

- Schooling is typically through the German Public German school system for Kindergarten.
- Munich International School is a co-educational, international, English language-learning environment for students aged 4-18. (72 km – 1 hour on the bus)
- The school has internationally recognized academic standards enabling students to transfer smoothly to other international or national schools and to be admitted to outstanding colleges and universities worldwide.
- The U.S. Army School (DODEA) is located in Garmisch in the Bavarian Alps. An elementary and middle school serves students in grades kindergarten through eight.
- Most Canadian children attend the American school, but parental opinions can be mixed, as it is a very small school with less than 80 students. The school does provide bussing but it is from only three locations and that may change every year.
- If you are considering a German school, contact the NATO School Parent Student Association (NSPSA) secretary. Most parents using the German school option have shared that children can expect a 3-6 months difficult transition learning the language. However, they also say they are very happy with the environment and the ease of picking up and dropping off their children.
- There are no French schools in the area and French tutoring for Francophone children attending school is not consistently available.

#### **Curriculum vs. Canadian curriculum:**

- The curriculum varies depending on the choice of school.
- Canadian history or geography is not available.
- The DoDea schools teach a high-quality American curriculum. The International School teaches a blended curriculum, which depends on the school.

#### **Resources for special needs children:**

- Access to special needs services depends on the choice of school, language required (English/French), area of specialization and the degree of support needed, it may be very limited.
- Consult with CEM and the school before making any commitments.

## **CHILDCARE**

- Local German childcare is available.
- Eligibility for German childcare is based on geographical location, and families must live within the same designated area as the childcare provider.
- Families can visit their local town hall to find out what childcare providers are open to them.
- When choosing local childcare there is no guarantee that staff will speak English or French.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

- Airports: Innsbruck (INN) 45 km, Munich (MUC) 100km, Salzburg (SZG) 150 km, Stuttgart (STR) 185 km, and Zurich (ZRH) 190 km.
- Germany has excellent trains and bus services.
- As bicycles are a common form of transportation, bike paths and lanes are common, and bicycles are treated as a vehicle when driving on roads.
- Driving in the Bavarian mountains can be a source of stress for some spouses.

## **RESOURCES AND AMENITIES**

Is there a **Military Family Services** centre available in that location?

- No, but remote services are available under MFS(E) Niederheid, Germany.

#### Psychosocial/mental health resources:

- Not at the post, and the MFS(E) SW is for dependents only. The CAF SW/Mental Health Team for members and families is located in Geilenkirchen, Germany. The chaplain is located in Belgium.

#### Communications (e.g. quality of Internet connection):

- Good, depending on the provider and location.
- High-speed internet is not consistently available.
- Hook-up can take up to six weeks and scheduling appointments is difficult for non-German speakers.
- German house construction makes getting Wi-Fi in all parts of the house difficult, so boosters are necessary.

### ACTIVITIES

#### Access to sports or other leisure activities:

- The NATO Recreation Centre (NRC) is a hub of community activity and the staff has a wealth of knowledge to provide you during your posting. The fitness facilities and gym are available 24/7.
- The NATO School Oberammergau (NSO) hosts regular social events that are very well attended and serve as important gatherings for families to network.

Availability of playgrounds: Yes

### RESTRICTIONS TO CONSIDER

#### Are common-law relationships recognized?

- Yes, a registered partnership offers many of the same rights as marriage except in the areas of taxation and adoption.

#### Are same-sex couples recognized?

- Yes, Germany does not recognize same-sex marriages as marriage, but it does recognize it as a registered partnership.

#### Medications that are illegal in the country:

- Cannabis is illegal in Germany.
- While not illegal, medications that would be available over the counter in Canada (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, cough syrup, etc.) must be obtained from a pharmacist in Germany.
- Stores will typically only carry vitamins and not any medication.
- Canadian over-the-counter medication can be obtained from the CFSU(E) Canadian Pharmacy at Selfkant Kaserne(CFSU(E)) in Niederheid, Germany.

#### Other considerations:

- Pharmacy has most needed medications. Sometimes language might be an issue.
- Unlike in Canada, prescriptions are only renewed one month at a time.
- Difficult finding distilled water for CPAP machines.
- Banned dog breeds: American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and English Bull Terrier.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- European Commission Country Reports (2022)  
[https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-reports\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-reports_en)
- Canadian Travel Advisories  
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>
- CIA World Factbooks (One pager from the US)  
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/germany>
- Living Abroad (from Gov.UK)  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-germany>
- Consumer Price Index (CPI)  
<https://data.imf.org/?sk=4FFB52B2-3653-409A-B471-D47B46D904B5>

### For more comprehensive information, please feel free to reach out to the resources below

- MFS(E) Social Worker Andrea Liss: [liss.andrea@cfmws.com](mailto:liss.andrea@cfmws.com)
- CAF Social Worker: [GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca](mailto:GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca)
- MFS(E) Niederheid: + 49 (0) 2451 717 500, [MFSE.Selfkant-Kaserne@cfmws.com](mailto:MFSE.Selfkant-Kaserne@cfmws.com)
- MFS(E) Regional Office: +49 (0) 2451 717 173, [MFS.Europe@cfmws.com](mailto:MFS.Europe@cfmws.com)