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Pets in Rental Apartments — Rights, Taxes, and Obligations

Dogs or cats in rental apartments: what's allowed, Hundesteuer costs, and which insurance is mandatory.

Deutsche Begriffe: Haustiere | Hundesteuer | Hundehaftpflicht | Mietrecht | Tierhaltung

Am I allowed to keep pets in a rental apartment?

Keeping pets in rental apartments is a frequent source of disputes. **The basic rule according to BGH ruling** (Bundesgerichtshof, Az. VIII ZR 168/12): A **general ban** on all pets in the rental contract is **invalid**. However, there are important distinctions:

Small pets — always permitted

You may keep **small pets without the landlord's permission**:

• Hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits

• Fish, turtles

• Budgies, canaries

The landlord **cannot prohibit** small pets — regardless of what the rental contract states.

Dogs and cats — case-by-case decision

For **dogs and cats**, the landlord must decide on a **case-by-case basis**:

• He cannot **blanket prohibit** but also does not have to blanket permit them.

• Relevant factors: apartment size, dog breed, number of animals, noise, disturbance to neighbors.

• **Tip:** Ask your landlord **in writing** before acquiring a pet. Written permission protects you.

Exotic animals and listed dogs

• **Poisonous animals** (snakes, spiders) and **fighting dogs** (defined differently depending on the state) the landlord may generally **prohibit**.

• For **listed dogs** (e.g., Pitbull, Staffordshire Terrier), many states impose **keeping requirements**: competency certificate, temperament test, leash requirement, muzzle requirement.

Hundesteuer — municipal obligation

Anyone who owns a dog must register it with the **municipal office** and pay the **Hundesteuer** (dog tax):

City (example)	1st dog	2nd dog	Listed dog
Hamburg	90 €	90 €	600 €
Berlin	120 €	120 €	180 €
Munich	100 €	100 €	800 €
Cologne	156 €	156 €	672 €

• Dog tax is an **annual fee**.

• Registration deadline: typically **2 weeks** after acquisition.

• Failure to register is an **administrative offense** (fine up to 10,000 €).

• **Cats** are tax-free in most cities (exception: some rural municipalities).

Hundehaftpflichtversicherung — liability insurance

Canine liability insurance is **legally required** in many states:

• **Mandatory** in: Berlin, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia.

• In other states: mandatory only for listed dogs.

• Cost: from approximately **50–80 € per year**.

• **Recommendation:** Get it even if not mandatory! A dog bite can cost **damages** of 10,000 € or more.

Veterinary costs

Expect regular veterinary expenses:

• **Vaccinations** (annually): 50–80 € (dog), 30–50 € (cat).

• **Neutering/spaying:** 200–600 € (dog), 80–150 € (cat).

• **Emergency treatment:** 200–2,000 € (depending on procedure).

• **Tip: Pet health insurance** (from about 20–40 €/month for dogs) can be worthwhile for expensive breeds.

Obligations as a pet owner

• **Leash requirement** in many city centers and parks (varies by city).

• **Remove dog waste** — fine for violation: **35–150 €**.

• **Respect quiet hours** — constant barking can lead to complaints and in the worst case to lease termination.

• **Dog liability insurance** and **Hundesteuer** — both mandatory!

• **Microchip requirement** — mandatory in many states, required for EU travel (EU pet passport).