

BERLIN INTRODUCES BED TAX FOR DOGS



Dog owners who travel to Berlin with their pets will be required to pay a city tax from now on. This is according to the financial administration in Berlin regarding the controversial introduction of a bed tax. An explanation was given by Kathrin Bierwirth, a speaker for financial senator Ulrich Nußbaum: "The charge for travelling dogs is already being counted towards the overnight tax by hotel managers, because it can be defined as an immediate hotel service. Hotels typically charge a fee for dogs, which is why the city tax will be introduced."

But there will be exceptions. "A blind person travelling with a service dog does not qualify as a lifestyle choice that would put an additional strain on hotel personnel. Therefore, the overnight tax does not apply to this situation," said the financial administration. Guard dogs are exempt from the tax as well. "A guard dog will be exempt, if the owner requires the dog to travel with him for occupational reasons."

While hotel owners find it difficult to understand the reason for the new fee (since not a single person has paid the bed tax for a dog yet), the legal battle continues. Since January, hotel owners are required to pay 50% of their profits in the form of a bed tax. Exempt from this tax are business and school trips. The German Hotel and Catering Association (DEHOGA) has already filed a lawsuit in an attempt to end the bed tax.

"The honest one is the dumb one."

The federal city-state of Berlin introduced the city tax late last year. It came into effect in January, only excluding business travelers. The financial senator hopes to gain an additional 25 million euros annually in revenues. Apparently, this money is intended for the improvement of the "tourist infrastructure". The Berlin House of Representatives agreed on the tax months later than planned, yet did not move the implementation date. Now all the open questions have to be answered on the go.

The "Westin Grand" hotel is representing all other hotels in the lawsuit. "Our guests are irritated, because it doesn't make any sense. Guests are wondering why they have to pay an additional fee, while their neighbor does not," said Westin Grand speaker Andrea Bishara. Marion Schön, speaker of the "Waldorf Astoria" hotel in Berlin, adds: "The Waldorf Astoria Berlin sets aside time to educate guests about the current situation." Ilona Matania, director of the "Ibis" hotel, believes that international guests in particular are confused: "Foreign guests seem very surprised to see the bed tax in Berlin, since some other cities in Germany have already implemented this system." All hotels complain about an increased bureaucratic effort.

All hotels and hostels received their first notice of tax assessment in the beginning of February. DEHOGA has suggested that all institutions enter an objection. Every hotel is required to do this individually every month, until a legal decision has been made. Only hotels that object on a monthly basis will receive refunds, should the tax be successfully appealed. DEHOGA believes that their chances are good.

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