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DRIVING IN FRANCE 2018

Please note that the information on this page is meant only as a guide and is not necessarily current. Make sure you have up-to-date information before you start driving in France. The minimum legal driving age is 18.

What You'll Need

A National Driving Licence, Original Registration Document (V5), Motor Vehicle Insurance, Front & Rear Seatbelts, GB Sticker (Unless one is incorporated into your number plate), Warning Triangle, Reflective Jackets (One for each person in the car), Headlamp Adjustment, 2 Breathalyser Kits, Daytime Running Lights - Motorcycles, Spare Bulbs and Fuses, First Aid Kit (Recommended), Fire Extinguisher (Recommended).

When driving in France you are required by law to carry the following items:

Reflective jackets (one for each occupant). If you breakdown or are involved in an accident you will need to get out of the vehicle and stand at the roadside or on the hard-shoulder if on a motorway. French law states that people standing outside the vehicle especially on motorways must be wearing "Hi Visibility" clothing such as a vest that fits over your clothing or a high viz jacket. Every person in your car must have a Hi-Viz jacket. These need to be carried inside the car not the boot so you can put them on before you get out.

Warning triangle (compulsory in every vehicle with 4 wheels or more)

Headlamp beam deflectors (depending on your car, you will either need deflector stickers or have to adjust the beam manually)

Breathalysers/alcohol test (as of January 2013 the French government

announced that the introduction of an €11 fine for not carrying one has been postponed indefinitely, however, law still states that drivers of motor vehicles and motorcyclist must have an alcotest ready for use in their vehicle even though no penalty will be imposed if they cannot present one during a police road check). Breathalysers

You will notice on the list below that breathalysers do not carry a fine, even though they are a legal requirement. They have a use by date, they are not reliable and will not work if exposed to extreme temperatures, say for example leaving them in a hot car on a summers day or a cold one in winter. The decision is yours, you are technically breaking the law by not having them but the offence carries no fine or endorsement.

A GB sticker (or 'euro' registration plates featuring the GB initials). If your car is towing a caravan, trailer, boat etc then it should have a GB sticker on it as well. If you have a new style EU Number plate with the GB and the Euro flag on it then for the most part that "should" be OK. Though if you read the French regulations very carefully you will see that those are not actually the correct size stipulated as they are not big enough.

Spare bulbs - by law you're also mandated to carry a spare bulb kit for your vehicle, as the French police deem it necessary to replace it there and then on the grounds of safety.

If you wear spectacles you are required to take a spare pair in the car with you when driving in France.

On-the-spot fines can and will be imposed if the following items are NOT found in your car if you are stopped by the Police or Gendarmes. They are as follows:

- Hi-Viz jackets €135
- Warning Triangle €135
- Headlamp beam deflectors €90
- GB sticker €90
- Spare bulbs €80
- Breathalysers/alcohol test No fine as of 2017

French 'clean air' stickers (Crit'Air vignettes)

Paris has introduced a Low Emission Zone which this means that although diesel and petrol lorries and buses made before 1997 have already been banned in Paris, also from July 2016, petrol and diesel cars registered before 1997 will also be banned from 8am to 8pm on weekdays. By 2020, only vehicles made in or after 2011 will be allowed.

You now need a Crit'Air sticker displayed on your car when travelling to certain cities. It costs £3.60 and drivers face an on-the-spot fine of almost £120 if they don't have one. The French clean air stickers - called Crit'Air vignettes -

are part of a six-category sticker system that applies to all motor vehicles in certain areas to identify what emissions they produce. They were introduced in late 2016.

Motorcyclists and their passengers must also wear safety helmets.

Paragraph 6.16 of ECE regulation 22-04 states that helmets should feature reflective elements. However EU and EEA approved helmets without reflective elements are also acceptable, but only if they have been validated by the French authorities. If in doubt, foreign motorcycle riders are strongly recommended to use reflective stickers on their helmets.

Documents you'll need:

When driving in France the following documents should be carried:

- A full, valid driving licence
- Proof of insurance (third party or above)
- Proof of ID (Passport)
- Registration document (V5C Certificate)
- M.O.T. (If your car is over 3 years old)

If you are driving a vehicle or riding a motorcycle in France please take note of the latest regulations:

For people that have less than three years of experience, the alcohol limit is 0.2 grams per litre. For experienced drivers and motorcyclists (more than three years' experience) the limit is 0.5 grams per litre. Both are lower than the UK limit of 0.8 grams per litre.

As of March 2017, it is illegal to drive a car in France using headphones or earphones. The offence is liable to a €90 on-the-spot fine. All drivers and riders have been prohibited from wearing headsets and headphones whilst driving, be it for music purposes or for phone calls. However, this does exclude motorcycle helmets that have integrated systems.

As of January 2016, motorcyclists are required to have reflective jackets to be worn in the event of a breakdown or an emergency.

Seatbelts and Car Seats

The wearing of front and rear seatbelts is compulsory when fitted. One thing to be thankful for is that you now have the "ace" card to play if your children are arguing over who gets to ride up front. It is illegal for under 10's to be in the front seat. Children under 10 must be in the back seat and must use a proper restraint system appropriate to their weight, which means a child seat if they are between 9 to 15kg. Over this weight they can use a seat belt with a booster seat. The driver of the vehicle is responsible for ensuring that all passengers under 18 are wearing a seat belt or appropriate restraint.

Traffic lights

The three-colour system conforms to the provisions of the Convention on Road Signs and Signals (red light on top). There is no amber light after the red light. Flashing amber light indicates: caution, slow down, proceed but give way to vehicles coming from the right. Flashing red light indicates: "no entry". It may also indicate a level crossing, exit used by fire engines, etc. Yellow arrow at the same time as a red light indicates: motorists may proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow, provided they give way to vehicles travelling in the flow of traffic which they are entering and to pedestrians.

Speed limits

Speed regulations start at the town name sign and end on leaving the town. Speed limits are weather dependent. Heavy on-the-spot fines apply when breaking the speed limits. If you are over by 25km/h you can lose your licence and your vehicle can be confiscated if you are over the limit by 50 km/h. Here is a quick rundown of the speed limit changes in the 4 main zones, going from fine to difficult conditions in kilometres and miles:

- a. Urban areas: 50 km/h\31mi/h – 50km/h\31mi/h
- b. Rural areas: 90km/h\55mi/h – 80km/h\49mi/h
- c. Dual carriageways: 110 km/h\68mi/h – 100 km/h\62mi/h
- d. Autoroute: 130 km/h\80mi/h – 110 km/h\68mi/h

Fuel types

Petrol is more expensive on the motorway, so make scheduled stops at large hypermarkets as they have lower fuel prices. Look out for the following at the pumps:

- a. Petrol = Essence (super / super 97). Increasingly harder to find these days.
- b. Unleaded Petrol = Sans Plomb (98 & 95)
- c. Diesel = Gazole ou Gasoil

Speed cameras

The first average speed cameras, known in French as radars tronçon, have been present on French roads and motorways for some time. These cameras, calculate the average speed of a vehicle driving between two points. Contrary to a sometimes-heard myth, toll tickets are not knowingly used to compute a car's average speed between two points.

The old signs that used to warn drivers of an upcoming speed camera are being removed. Many of those that have gone have been replaced by automatic speed detectors, which flash up the speed of each approaching car on a luminous panel. If you see a luminous panel flashing up, say 101 then 99, then 97 as you approach it while decelerating, that is your speed. So drop

down to below the speed limit, as there is most probably - though not always - a speed camera coming up. Some speed detectors just flash up your speed in white lights, others in green or red lights depending on whether you are within or above the speed limit. Some show a smiley below the speed - grumpy if you're above the limit, smiling if you're within the limit!

Speed traps, from fixed cameras to police hand held detectors, are very common in France. It is illegal to use or possess a radar detector. French laws prohibiting drivers from carrying devices capable of detecting speed cameras have been extended to include devices able to warn or inform of the location of speed cameras e.g. satnav or GPS systems capable of showing speed camera sites as a point of interest (POI). Drivers using radar detectors (speed camera detectors) are liable for a fine of 1500 Euros and 6 points off their license. This applies to specific radar warning devices, such as the Coyote, which must have their software updated to remain legal. With regard to TomToms and other GPS systems, which have speed camera locations programmed in to their software, the situation is confusing. These are not officially "radar detectors", but manufacturers are obliged to make new software available, and most have done so. TomToms and other GPS systems are technically in breach of the law if they still have radars listed in their Points of Interest software; and even if it is not clear how roadside police can stop and check for offending software, rather than hardware, drivers are warned to err on the side of precaution and download the latest map software for France. This is advisable anyway, since older software is not up to date with regard to new routes, new speed restrictions, and other changes. For both existing radar warning devices and GPS devices, current radar information is being replaced with warnings to announce "danger zones", many of which will be areas with speed cameras. New radars are being set up all the time, so any unofficial maps that may be available on the Internet are unlikely to be complete, and in any case cannot include the mobile radar cars or the movable stationary speed cameras, of which there are currently about 1000. So the best rule - not to say the most sensible one - is "Do not drive over the speed limit".

Drinking and Driving

In France, the alcohol limit is 0.05mg/ml which is lower than the UK and many other countries. It is advisable not to drink and drive at all because if you are caught over the limit, the penalties are severe. From 1 July 2012, every driver of a motorised land vehicle, excluding mopeds, must possess a digital breathalyser or an unused (and immediately available) breathalyser kit that conforms to NF standards. This rule equally applies to vehicles registered outside France. Only vehicles fitted with breathalyser interlocks are excluded.

Mobile phones

It is illegal to use a mobile phone behind the wheel, regardless of whether it is operated with a hands free kit. On-the-spot fines of up to €135 could be issued.

Priorité a droite

An old rule called priorité a droite is currently being phased out of the country, but for your own safety, it is best to be aware of it. At some junctions, you must give way to those approaching from the right, even if you are on a major road and they are on a minor. The rule is usually indicated as you enter or leave an area. In rural areas, junctions are indicated by white posts with red bands either side of the junction, but this is not an indication of who has priority so be extremely careful. A black line across a yellow triangle or a black cross withing a red triangle means you DO NOT have priority.

Breakdown or Accident

It is highly recommended that you have adequate Breakdown cover that will ensure repatriation of the vehicle in the event of problem or immobilisation. Third party insurance cover is a legal requirement but note that it does not cover any costs incurred by you as a result of an accident. Make sure your policy is fully comprehensive and that you have your Certificate of Motor Insurance before you drive in France. If your car is immobilised on or partly on the road due to a breakdown or an accident, you must set up your red warning triangle at a suitable distance behind the vehicle, to alert approaching traffic to the hazard. All cars driving in France must carry a red warning triangle, available from any motoring store, and also a yellow fluorescent jacket for each person travelling. If you are involved in any accident involving two or more vehicles while driving in France, you will be asked to fill in a "constat amiable" (an amiable declaration) by the driver of a French car involved. This is standard practice. If possible, call your insurance company at once on your mobile phone. They may put you in touch with a local French representative. If you are involved in an accident involving any sort of injury - even if it is not your fault - you MUST remain until the police arrive.

As French motorways are privately managed, you are not allowed to request your own assistance company to attend to you if you break down. If you break down you should use the orange emergency telephones which are situated every 2km along main roads and motorways to call the police or the official breakdown service operating in that area. Alternatively, if no orange telephone is available motorists should call the emergency services be dialling 112.

Charges for assistance on a motorway are fixed by the Government and are reviewed and revised each year. For the most part the Government-appointed towing service that tows you from the motorway do allow the RAC to pay them directly, however it is at the towing company's discretion. If you are an RAC customer and are asked to pay, please keep your receipt in order to be refunded by the RAC's European customer care team.

The cost for recovery, correct as of 1 April 2017, is:

€123.90 for vehicles 1.8 tonnes or under or €185.85 between the hours of 18:00 and 08:00, weekends and bank holidays

€153.21 for vehicles 3.5t or under or €229.82 between the hours of 18:00 and 08:00, weekends and bank holidays

For vehicles over 3.5t, the cost is at the towing service's discretion.

Emergency Telephone Numbers

Call 15: this is the national emergency number for medical aid. It will get you the SAMU service, with an ambulance (Service d'Aide Médical d'Urgence - or Medical Emergency Aid Service). Be prepared to indicate exactly where you are located, and the circumstances of the incident.

Call 18: this is the general emergency number, like 999 in the UK, which will get you connected to the most appropriate service.

Call 112: this is the standard European emergency number. Though be careful, if you are near a land border, for instance in Alsace, a call to 112 from a mobile phone may get directed to the emergency services in the neighbouring country.