



The fishing holiday specialists

Useful Information about Motoring in France

Introduction

France is by far the most popular destination for British motorists. Not only is it our closest and most convenient neighbour, it also has a vast range of natural and cultural attractions. Within a day's drive from Calais, visitors can be wine tasting in Bordeaux, exploring the coast of Brittany, skiing in the French Alps or lazing on the beach in Nice.

The relaxation of customs restrictions has been a major incentive to cross the channel. Some people head no further than the nearest hypermarket where they pick up cheap wine and cigarettes. But even a day trip can be combined with a taste of French culture by visiting nearby attractions such as the seaside resort of Le Touquet or picturesque old town of Montreuil.

Motorists heading from crowded southeast England will discover that French roads are lightly trafficked and enjoyable to drive on. There's a comprehensive and well-maintained network of *autoroutes* (*motorways*). With a 130kph (80mph) maximum speed limit they permit swift progress to be made. Most of them are toll roads, which can add an extra cost to long journeys. Look out also for holiday weekends and during August, when the roads out of Paris throng with holiday makers leaving the city. Jams are common on the autoroutes heading south.

If you have the time, leave the autoroutes behind and follow the *Bison Futé* (*crafty bison*) or Bis routes. These follow more picturesque roads but can still allow respectable progress to be made along tree-lined avenues typical of rural France. A handy map can be obtained from tourist offices and some service stations. It includes a traffic calendar giving details of when and where to expect holiday hold-ups.

Documents

Driving Licence:- The French police can ask any motorist for his driving licence. Failure to produce this immediately will incur a fine, followed by a further much heavier fine if it is not presented at a police station within five days.

Passport:- Everyone, whether French or foreign, must carry identity papers, i.e. a passport, at all times as the police are empowered to check a person's identity at any time.

Insurance:- Inform your Insurance Company of the dates you will be away and pay any additional premium required. You should obtain a European Accident Statement which is required to record details of any accident that you may be involved in with your Motor vehicle. Ensure you have adequate breakdown insurance for the period you will be away.

Wine and driving

Wine is available with meals in French motorway service areas – a fact that surprises a lot of visitors. But don't forget that the drink drive limit in France is lower than it is in the UK. The best advice is the same everywhere; don't drink and drive.

Roundabouts

British drivers used to get lots of trouble negotiating Continental roundabouts. The problem was that here at home, traffic entering the roundabout must give way to traffic already on the roundabout. In France and several other European countries, the opposite rule always used to apply: traffic on the roundabout had to stop and give way to traffic entering it.

Thankfully the rule on most Continental roundabouts has now been switched to the British system. In France this is indicated by a sign on the approach to the roundabout which says *Vous n'avez pas la priorité* (you do not have right of way) or *Cédez le passage* (give way). But beware that there are still a few roundabouts, mainly in rural areas, where the old rule still applies. So give way to traffic entering the roundabout if there is no sign expressly saying otherwise. The advice must be, be very careful when approaching all roundabouts.

Traffic lights

Traffic lights serve much the same function wherever you drive – but there are some variations you need to watch out for.

Firstly you need to be much more observant to make sure you don't overlook traffic lights. In the UK we are used to lights being situated at a certain position and height beside the road. It's easy to miss traffic lights completely when they are smaller, a different shape and hanging from wire slung across the road.

When you come to a halt at the stop line you may find that overhead traffic lights can no longer be seen no matter how far you crane your head. To get round the problem, there's usually a set of smaller lights set into the post, on your right, at head height.

In France the traffic light sequence does not pass from red to red and amber before turning green. Instead the light switches straight from red to green without warning.

At other times you may encounter a continuously flashing amber light. This means you can proceed if the road is clear, but you must give way to other vehicles or pedestrians. Sometimes you will have a green filter light, but still have to give way.

Facts and Figures - France

Speed limits	Urban	Open road	Motorway
Car	50kph	90kph	110-130kph
Wet weather	50kph	80kph	100-110kph
Towing(up to 3.5t)	50kph	90kph	110-130kph
Minimum Speed Limit	80kph		
Traffic regulations			
Essential equipment	Warning triangle, spare light bulbs		
Minimum driving age	18yrs		
Drink-drive limit	50mg alcohol per 100ml blood		
Child in front seat	Minimum 10yrs (except babies up to 9mths in a rear- facing child seat)		
Seat belts	Compulsory in front and rear seats		
Motorcyclists	Must wear a crash helmet and use headlamp at all times		
Emergency telephone numbers			
Police	17		
Fire	18		
Ambulance	15		

Useful phrases	
<i>Allumez vos lanterns</i>	Switch on headlight
<i>Attention travaux</i>	Roadworks ahead
<i>Bouchon</i>	Traffic Jam
<i>Chaussée déformée</i>	Poor road surface
<i>Déviation</i>	Diversion
<i>Gravillons</i>	Loose chippings
<i>Parking payant</i>	Charge for parking
<i>Péage</i>	Road toll
<i>Ralentissez</i>	Slow down
<i>Rappel</i>	Restriction (such as Speed limit) continues
<i>Route barrée</i>	Road closed
<i>Sens interdit</i>	No entry
<i>Stationnement interdit</i>	No parking

Conversion Table Kilometres to Miles

km/h	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130
mph	13	18	25	31	37	44	50	56	62	68	74	81

Route Nationale (RN) changing to D Roads (Departmental Roads)

The French are in the process of converting RN roads to D roads throughout France. SatNav's may be out of date with the latest updated information on which roads have been changed.

Pedestrian crossings

In Britain we have the habit of stopping at Zebra crossings to let pedestrians walk across. Try this in many other countries and you're likely to take a following driver completely by surprise, resulting in a screech of brakes and if you're unlucky, a car ploughing into the back of yours. Do show courtesy to pedestrians but for safety's sake always check your rear view mirror before braking.

Give way to the right

The motoring law most likely to catch us our driving in France is *priorité à droite* (give way to the right). Unless there are signs to the contrary cars entering from the right have right of way, even if they are joining a main road from a side street. This means a lot of caution is needed at unmarked junctions in towns. The *priorité à droite* rule is overridden on main roads marked with the *passage protégé* sign, a yellow diamond.

Traffic laws-Speed limits

Speed limits in towns and villages start (50kmph) with the place name sign and end with the place name sign crossed out – don't be expected to be always given any other warning.

Safe & Legal

When travelling on the continent ensure you comply with European motoring requirements by carrying the following essential items of accident, emergency and breakdown equipment.

Headlamp Beam Adaptors

Failure to adapt your headlamps at any time, day or night, will render your vehicle unfit for use on the road and could invalidate your motor insurance. It is now advisory in France to have dipped headlights on outside built up areas at all times

GB Plate

A GB plate must be displayed on the rear of your vehicle, caravan or trailer.

Warning Triangles

Drivers must be able to give advance warning of a hazard on the road. Hazard warning lights alone are NOT always sufficient. (Note: two warning triangles are required for Spain)

Spare Bulb Kits

Drivers must be in a position to replace any blown exterior light

Fire Extinguisher & First Aid Kit

The European Good Samaritan Law requires every driver to stop and provide assistance in the event of an accident.

Reflective Vest

As from 1st July 2008, cars in France must carry a *gilet de sécurité* / bright, yellow vest with 2 reflective stripes and a *triangle de pré-signalisation* / a reflective red warning triangle. These are to be used if you have an accident or must pull off the road for break downs and other emergencies. Note: The vest must be in the cab portion of the car, that is, where the drivers and passengers are, and not in the boot.

The police will be performing random checks to verify that you have these obligatory items. If you're caught without them after 1st October, you risk a fine of 90 to 135 euros.

Petrol & Diesel Prices

Petrol, diesel and LPG are much cheaper in France. Petrol is about 5% cheaper in Calais. Diesel (GAZOLE) remains the most attractive purchase being in the region of 30% cheaper than in the UK. Buying on the Autoroutes is more expensive in the region of 15% more than a hypermarket.

The best savings can be found at the Supermarkets such as Auchan, Carrefour, although the smaller players offer savings on fuel prices that are worth having.

LPG (GPL) is more popular in Europe than in the UK. Known as GPL in France is cheaper and more widely available in France. Please note that out of hours petrol stations only accept French Credit Cards. This may change with the introduction of 'Chip & Pin' Credit Cards in the UK.

Public holidays in France

The following days are public holidays ("jours fériés") in France, when all or most shops tend to be shut.

January 1st; Easter Monday (though not Good Friday except in Alsace), May 1st, May 8th VE Day), 9th, 20; July 14th (Bastille Day); August 15th, November 1st, 11th (Armistice Day); Dec 25th. Some of the dates may alter year to year.