



Know the European Road Rules

Navigating the roads in Europe can be either an exhilarating experience or harrowing escape, based on where or when you choose to travel. As you begin exploring the motorways, you'll start accumulating your own "remember when" stories of memorable drives in Europe. One thing is certain; no matter what country you drive through or how far you go, you must understand the rules of the road to be a successful and safe European traveler.

Important Documents

The European Union (EU) is comprised of 27 sovereign states. Although most of the countries in the EU adopted an open border policy, some countries still ask to see documentation when you cross borders. It is your responsibility to ensure these documents are valid and on your person. Without these documents, you and your party could be forced to turn around at the border, receive fines or have your car impounded for illegally entering a country.

- **USAFEUR Driver's license**
- **Stateside Driver's license**
- **International Driving Permit** – *this document translates your US driver's license. You will need this to drive in EU countries other than your host country.*
- **Vehicle registration document** – *the original, not a copy*
- **Vehicle insurance certificate**
- **Passports** (*many countries check them at the border*)

Here is a current breakdown of general rules for driving around Europe and specific rules per country, as compiled by The Automobile Association Limited, 2012. Please note

the following conversions: one kilometer equals 0.6 miles (one mile equals 1.6 kilometers):

Cellphone use while driving – Be aware that all countries in the EU have banned talking on a cellphone while driving without a hands-free device. Fees vary and can be very steep, such as the Netherlands, where fines can be thousands of dollars or up to two weeks in jail. If you need to use the phone without a hands-free device, you must pull off of a roadway, park and shut off your vehicle.

Damaged Vehicles – Due to problems with hit-and-run crimes and other vandalism in the Czech Republic, border authorities must verify/certify any visible damage to a vehicle entering the country. If any damage occurs while visiting, a police report must be obtained at the scene. Autos with visible damage not recorded on entry will not be permitted to leave with evidence of a police report. Be sure to have your car verified on entry!

Driving while Impaired (Alcohol or Drugs) – Drinking and driving in Europe is not tolerated. For most EU countries, the legal blood alcohol level is 0.049 and under. Anything over that is considered a legal offense. Some countries in Europe, however, have either a zero rating, meaning no alcohol whatsoever should be in your bloodstream while you drive, or very low, such as below 0.02. Those include the Czech Republic, Norway, Sweden, Poland and Hungary. Great Britain's legal limit is slightly higher than average, with 0.08 or under the limit. In Greece, there is zero tolerance for motorcyclists.

Effective July 1, 2012, all vehicles in France including motorcycles must carry a

breathalyzer test while traveling in France or be fined €11 on the spot. The breathalyzer must be certified by French authorities, showing an "NF" number. It is recommended that vehicles carry two single-use breathalyzers in case one is used or damaged, then a spare can be produced. Also, law officials in many EU countries can detect drug use by a saliva test, and can demand a test be done on site.

Driver's License – 18 is legal age for driving. If the license does not contain a photo, drivers must also carry some other form of photo ID.

Driving Directions – In the U.K. (which includes Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales), you must drive on the left side of the road.

Fines – Always carry extra euro, because authorities may ask for driving offense fines to be paid on the spot. If you don't have enough euro (or the country's currency) or refuse to pay these fines at that time, you face higher fines and a later court date. Some countries in the U.K. will advise you dates to pay the fines and give you options of locations to pay.

GPS Navigation Systems with Speed Camera Detection – In most European countries, using a radar detector is illegal. Authorities are now focusing on GPS navigation systems that detect speed cameras. In France, GPS navigation systems with speed camera detection must have the "fixed speed camera (Points of Interest)" function deactivated or removed. Some GPS companies offer mapping without this function. Anyone caught with a speed

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camera detection device could face fines up to €1500 and confiscation of the GPS. French authorities plan to remove all road signs indicating the location of speed cameras and add approximately 400 new speed cameras to roadways. In Germany, some websites including www.theaa.com, state that GPS navigation systems with speed camera detection must have the "fixed speed camera PoI (Points of Interest)" function deactivated or removed as well. Should you be unable to deactivate this function the GPS system must not be carried. After attempting to verify with German police, they neither confirmed nor denied this claim. These devices are illegal in both Switzerland and Czech Republic as well. Therefore, beware if you use GPS speed camera detection as you travel.

Lights – Passing lights or dipped lights must be used in most countries when visibility is poor. Some countries like Switzerland require that you give a short blast of your horn when driving around blind curves in poor or dim visibility.

Motorcycles – Most countries require that drivers and passengers wear helmets and some sort of reflective vest or jacket. In France, effective January 1, 2013, all drivers and passengers of motorcycles over 125cc or motor tricycles over 15 KW/h must wear a minimum of 150 square cm (23 square inches) of reflective clothing or material on the upper body, between neck and chest. Fines are imposed for non-compliance.

Auto insurance – Most countries require that you carry third party compulsory, including trailers.

Passenger/Children in Cars – There are different regulations per country for child safety seats. It is best to research your host country's laws and those of the country you wish to travel to make sure your child is properly restrained, not just for the law, but also for their safety. ADAC and AA online have details for each country's safety seat laws.

Pedestrians – Always watch for pedestrians and cyclists. In many areas, they have right-of-way and may step or dart out in front of your car trusting you will stop – such as The Netherlands, Switzerland and Luxembourg.

Railroad Crossings – Do not cross a railroad crossing when it is not permitted, such as lights engaged or guards down. In Belgium, the majority are watched by cameras to detect those who do, with fines up to €2,750.

Safety Compulsory Equipment – Most European countries require that your auto and motorcycle carry an EC regulation warning triangle, reflective vest/jacket and first-aid kit. Greece, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and Norway require that you also carry a fire extinguisher. If you rent a vehicle, it is your responsibility to be sure the hired car carries these items as well. The AAFES Exchanges, Shoppettes and gas stations on the economy should carry these inexpensive items. In the U.K., do not use the warning triangle on roadways.

Seatbelts – All countries require seatbelts and fines vary. Check with our Road Guides for detailed lists of fines amounts.



Speed limits – Most European countries adhere to standard legal limits as listed in your USAFEUR license manual, or found in the *Stripes Road Guide*. If caught speeding, many countries demand on-the-spot payment, sometimes hefty amounts. No matter where you are, be sure the fines and offense match what the officer originally stated with what is on the ticket.

Tolls – Many European roadways are maintained by tolls, most of which you pay as you enter each different toll road within a country. Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic require that you purchase a pass in the form of windshield stickers before entering their country. You may buy those at gas stations near borders of neighboring countries, post offices and currency exchange offices for weekly, monthly or annual clearance. Steep fines can be imposed for non-display. Norway has city tolls, and drivers should pay for tolls at nearest Esso stations before entering Bergen, Oslo, Stavanger and Trondheim. In the U.K., congestion charges must be paid when driving or parking in central London on weekdays (Monday to Friday excluding public holidays) between 0700 and 1800 hours. Zones are marked with signs indicating a white letter "C" on a red background. Tolls are also payable when using certain motorway sections and bridges. For more information about U.K. congestion charges, check out www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/congestioncharging. ■

Now that you know the rules, you are ready to hit the road and explore your new continent. For more detailed information on fines, speed limits, safety seats and more, pick up a copy of the *Stripes Road Guide* for the U.K., Germany and Italy at the Exchange's Car Care Centers. Happy trails!

