



Driving in Europe

Thousands of us motorists load the car each summer and off we go on our European holiday looking forward to a nice restful break in the sunshine. Unfortunately, some of us won't get that nice restful break this year because without a bit of forethought and the correct preparation your holiday could easily turn into your worst nightmare!

We don't want that to happen to any of our newsletter readers so have given you some information on the items you must take with you and some additional suggestions you may find useful.

Let's deal with the important items before moving on to the optional extras. The first eleven items on the lists are "must haves" as failure to carry them can either result in you losing money via an on-the-spot fine or at the very least cause you an enormous amount of grief if you suffer a breakdown or worse get involved in an accident.

- Passport
- Driving Licence
- Insurance Documents
- Vehicle Registration Documents and M.O.T. Certificate if required
- Letter of authorisation if vehicle not registered to you (company car).
- Breathalysers (two)
- Spare Bulbs and Fuses Kit (You don't need to get a replacement for each and every bulb and fuse but a standard spare bulb kit for your vehicle will cover all you'll ever likely to need).
- GB Sticker for the car (and any caravan or trailer)
- Hi Viz Vest or Hi Viz Jacket (one for each occupant of the car, not just the driver, and not stored in the boot. The idea is if you have to get out of the car on the hard shoulder for any reason you have to be *wearing* a Hi Viz jacket or vest)
- Warning Triangle
- Headlamp Converters
- First-aid kit.

Driving licence changes which affect car hire in the UK and abroad

Motorists hiring a car abroad may now have to produce a special temporary code as evidence of their convictions.

As a result of the abolition of the paper counterpart to the UK driving licence, all evidence of driving endorsements and convictions will be held online only. You will need to log on to the DVLA website, and obtain a code which you may be asked for when you go to hire a car, either in the UK or abroad. Remember the code is only valid for 21 days before a new code needs to be obtained.



General Packing Tips Warning

Try to make sure all heavy or hard luggage is packed in the boot or securely strapped in place, only soft items should be carried within the passenger compartment. Remember if you have to brake really suddenly in an emergency stop situation, then items of luggage are likely to become very dangerous projectiles aiming for the back of your head.

Luggage can cause serious problems if it is reducing your ability to use the rear view mirror. Make sure nothing is packed high enough to reduce visibility to the sides or rear of the vehicle.

Talking about possible injury a first aid kit is a useful thing to have with you. The soft pouch ones are probably better as it enables you to store additional items of your own in them such as; Aspirin, ibuprofen, Anti-bacterial gel for hand washing without water, antiseptic ointment, insect repellent, sun block, ointment for insect bites, antihistamine, anti-diarrhoea medication, and so on.

What If the Worst should happen!

Get in touch with your insurance company before you go and ask a few things. Firstly "Am I covered?" Secondly do they have a local French phone number you should call in the event of you having an accident or you have your car stolen while in France?

European breakdown cover is certainly worth looking into as it can be very expensive to use local recovery services. If you are already a member of the AA, RAC, Green Flag or similar in the UK then ring them and ask if you are covered while on holiday in France. You may be able to get the cover added for a small additional fee. If you are covered for European breakdown or you take it out especially for the trip then make sure you take the phone number with you.

Emergency Number: The emergency number when abroad is 112

Optional Extras

Use a packing checklist as it stops you from getting in a panic at the last minute, and can be very useful if you lose or have anything stolen on the trip. If you have medicines and any other important items make sure they are at the top of the case or preferably in a small hand luggage size bag in the car with you rather than at the bottom of a suitcase in the boot or trailer.

Take a cushion for the passengers to use if they want a nap. Another big consideration on a long drive is "entertaining" the passengers. This obviously will vary based on age but books, electronic games, colouring books, etc. A box of tissues and wipes is always an important thing to have in the car especially with younger passengers. Having a child's favourite cuddly toy or a blanket can often help keep them more at ease.

Planning your route before you leave can save a lot of worry and arguments along the way so have your Sat Nav, maps and car chargers for any electrical items you'll need in the car.

It will be a good idea to take some food and drinks with you as service station food in France may be expensive, always make sure you carry water in the car as dehydration can be a problem on long journeys.



Car checks

Make sure you check the oil, engine coolant and water in the windscreen washer bottle and don't forget to check windscreen wipers. If your vehicle has power steering fluid and brake fluid levels that you can easily check then it would be wise to do so. Give the windows and lights a good clean before you go as eye strain can be very tiring and cause headaches.

One thing that you really must do is carefully check you tyres before you go. Make sure they are all at the correct tyre pressure (check when tyres are cold) especially as you will have a fully loaded car. You will find tyre pressures in the handbook or there will be a sticker on the driver's or passenger's door or fuel flap that will have all the information you need, and don't forget the spare!

Headlamp beams for UK cars will be pointing the wrong way in France that's why it is illegal to drive without the headlamp beam deflectors.

Give a spare set of car keys to one of the (responsible) passengers to keep them just in case (it's a long way home for the spare keys, if the ones you have with you are locked in the boot!).

Maps

Try and travel with the latest Maps available for the area you are traveling in. If you have an iPhone or Android phone try the Navfree Apps available that has maps for 50 countries. Ensure to download the latest maps whilst you are in the UK so you don't get hit with excessive data roaming charges whilst abroad.

Finally

Try and remember you're on holiday, try and make the trip a fun part of the holiday rather than a chore that has to be endured. Pack the essentials and as little else as you can and plan things to do on the long journey, if you have kids travelling make sure there is lots to keep them busy and plan a few little surprises along the way.

Have a great trip!

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