

THE ETA GUIDE  
TO **DRIVING IN...**

**FRANCE**



**ETA**

[www.eta.co.uk](http://www.eta.co.uk)

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For many of the five million British motorists taking their car to France this year, the Gallic driving holiday is an annual event. However, with recent changes to French law it pays for even the most experienced driver to brush up on the rules to avoid pitfalls. Whether you are a veteran of continental motoring or setting out on your first trip, this guide is packed with information, advice and checklists to refer to before and during your drive through France.

We wish you a safe and enjoyable journey.

Best wishes

Andrew Davis

*Managing Director*

# About the ETA



The Environmental Transport Association was established in 1990 as an alternative breakdown cover provider for the environmentally considerate motorist.

Where we differ from the household name providers is in our operations. Rather than adding a fleet of trucks to our already congested roads, we handpick only the best local garages and mechanics around Britain and the rest of Europe and send them to your assistance wherever you break down. We believe it's more efficient, environmentally friendly and helps supports local communities and economies, too.

Furthermore, we offset the carbon emissions of every recovery truck sent out to assist our customers, reducing the impact that each breakdown has on our environment. And for every policy we sell, we make a donation to our charity, **The ETA Trust**, which campaigns for a safer and more sustainable transport future.

Find out more about who we are and what we do at [www.eta.co.uk](http://www.eta.co.uk).

# Before you set off



## Documents to take with you

- ✓ Driving licence with paper counterpart if applicable
- ✓ Vehicle registration document (V5) or 'carte grise'
- ✓ Motor insurance certificate
- ✓ Passport
- ✓ Breakdown cover details
- ✓ Travel insurance details - [get an instant quote here](#)

## Items to take with you

- ✓ Fluorescent safety vests
- ✓ Breathalysers (optional)
- ✓ Warning triangles
- ✓ Spare bulbs
- ✓ GB sticker
- ✓ Snow chains (if applicable)

## Carte grise

The ‘certificate d’immatriculation’ (or ‘carte grise’ informally) is the French equivalent to the British V5 logbook, detailing your vehicle’s registration information. You may be asked by the police to show them your ‘carte grise’, so make sure that you have the original V5 logbook to hand.

## Fluorescent safety vests

A reflective, high-visibility safety vest for each passenger must be carried at all times, stored within easy reach inside the vehicle, and worn in the event of a breakdown or road traffic collision.

## Breathalysers

Disposable breathalyser kits for drivers are required by French law, but there is no fine for not having a breathalyser in your car. In January 2013, the French government postponed the fine for not having an unused breathalyser with you (which was to have been €11) indefinitely. In other words, you are supposed to take one but there is no fine imposed for not having one. French police breathalyse drivers routinely, so if you’re stopped, expect to be breathalysed.

# All vehicles must carry two red or orange warning triangles



## Warning triangles

All vehicles must carry two red or orange warning triangles, which should be placed 50 and 150 metres behind your vehicle in the event of a breakdown or road traffic collision.

## Spare bulbs

Although it's not a legal requirement to carry spare bulbs, you can be fined €80 for not being able to replace one if you are stopped. You can pick up a set for around £10, so it's really not worth risking it.

## Breakdown cover

It's not a legal requirement, however breaking down abroad without adequate breakdown cover in place can cost you thousands. The ETA offer both short-term and annual European breakdown cover that provides roadside assistance, recovery, vehicle hire, accommodation for you and your passengers and even repatriation back to Britain if required. You can arrange cover in minutes by calling **0333 000 1234** or visiting [www.eta.co.uk](http://www.eta.co.uk).

## Children

It is illegal in France for children under the age of 10 to ride in the front of a vehicle. They must be seated in the back using a seat belt, with a booster seat if necessary, or using a child seat if they weigh less than 15kg.

If you have young children and are hiring a car abroad, consider bringing your own child seat. It might seem like a hassle, but the seats provided by the car hire company get a lot of use (and abuse) and to make matters worse, if it is a model you are unfamiliar with you may find the local staff unhelpful – they often refuse to help fit the seats themselves.






# A Great Britain sticker on the back of your car is compulsory wherever you are driving in the rest of Europe

## GB sticker

A Great Britain sticker on the back of your car is compulsory wherever you are driving in the rest of Europe, unless you have number plates that include the GB euro-symbol. Without either of these you could receive an on-the-spot fine.

## Tyre pressure and oil

It is always good practice to check your tyre pressure and oil level before setting off on any long journey. Most garages in Britain charge a few pence for air, whereas most garages in France will provide this service for free.



# Most French motorways feature toll stations which accept cash, Visa or Mastercard payments

## Toll roads

You will find toll stations on most French motorways which accept cash, Visa or Mastercard payments.

Maestro and Electron debit cards are not accepted. To save time when passing through French toll stations, you can register for the Liber-t automatic toll payment system through Sanef, the French motorway operator.

You will be sent a small electronic transponder (typically within 1-2 business days) to attach to your windscreen, which will identify your vehicle at the toll station and bill you automatically the following month. You can register at [www.saneftolling.co.uk](http://www.saneftolling.co.uk).

A map of France's toll roads can be found on [page 29](#).

## Vehicle emissions sticker

All cars travelling in the cities of Paris, Lyon or Grenoble are required to carry anti-pollution stickers which indicate the age and cleanliness of the vehicle. This law was introduced in France in early 2017 and also applies to foreign vehicles. You can apply for a sticker through the French Air Quality Certification Service online at [www.certificat-air.gouv.fr](http://www.certificat-air.gouv.fr). Be sure to apply in good time as the stickers can take around 30 days to arrive. They only cost a few pounds and will save you the risk of being hit with an on-the-spot fine of €68.

## Hiring a car

If you plan on hiring a car in France, you'll need to apply to the DVLA for a check code, which will allow the car hire agency to view your driving license information. Codes are valid for 21 days, and you can apply online at [www.gov.uk/view-driving-license](http://www.gov.uk/view-driving-license). It is possible to arrange this when you arrive, but getting it sorted before will save time and effort.

## Motorcycles

Motorcyclists and scooter riders are also required to carry a fluorescent high visibility jacket while riding in France. There is a fine of €11 if you are spot checked by the police and don't have one, but this rises to €135 if you break down or are involved in a road traffic collision. Reflective stickers for helmets are mandatory, and must be attached in four places on the front, back and one on each side, with a minimum combined surface area of 18cm<sup>2</sup>. Though rarely enforced, the fine for not having adequate reflective stickers can be up to €135. Motorcyclists must also wear gloves when riding (see below), and use dipped headlights during the day and night.

## Motorcycle gloves

It is against the law in France to ride any motorcycle or scooter as driver or passenger without wearing European Conformity (CE) certified gloves.

Approved gloves will have a label mentioning European directive 89/686 / EEC. Most bikers wouldn't set off on a tour without a pair of gloves, however this recently imposed law may catch out those doing a quick ride from the campsite to the beach or local shop.

# On the road



## Drive on the right

Most people are aware of this fundamental requirement, which can be easy to forget when approaching a roundabout or pulling onto a quiet road.

## Lights

You'll need to adjust your car's headlamps to suit driving on the right as failure to do so will dazzle oncoming drivers and could land you with a fine. Headlamp beam converter kits are widely available but Halogen or Xenon headlamps may need adjustment by your dealer. In poor daytime visibility, you must use dipped headlights, and the French government recommends that all vehicles use dipped headlights at all times.

## Seat belts

The driver of the vehicle is legally responsible for ensuring that all passengers under the age of 18 are wearing a seat belt.

## Road signs

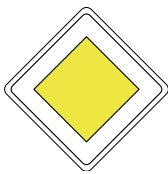
For the most part, French road signs are self-explanatory, however it's worth familiarising yourself with signs that indicate priority as this can be a challenging aspect of driving in France.



Crossroads ahead:  
you have priority



Crossroads ahead:  
priority to the right



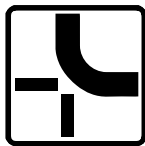
You have priority on  
this road



Give way at the  
intersection



Priority road ends



The road turning  
has priority



# Traffic lights go directly from red to green – there is no flashing amber light

## Traffic lights

Traffic lights go directly from red to green – there is no flashing amber light. Amber means stop, and you should only pass through an amber if you are unable to stop safely. In heavy traffic, you can only pass through a green light if you are certain of being able to clear the junction before the light turns back to red.

## Cyclists

The French highway code states that in poor visibility, cyclists must wear fluorescent high-visibility jackets and use front and rear lights. Children under 12 must wear a helmet whilst riding or sitting on the back of a bicycle, or their parent or guardian could be fined up to €135. It is also illegal to ride a bicycle while using headphones. Cyclists are expected to comply with all priority rules and use marked cycle lanes where present.

## Roundabouts

Approaching a roundabout whilst driving on the other side of the road can be intimidating at first, but after negotiating a few you will become more confident.

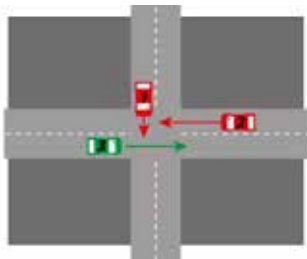
Traffic which is already on the roundabout normally has priority, however you will find that some roundabouts give priority to vehicles which are entering the roundabout.

Similarly, there are some junctions where joining traffic is given priority over traffic already on the road. This rule is known as la priorité à droite, and is explained below.

## Priority to the right

La priorité à droite or 'priority to the right' is a right-of-way system in France whereby traffic joining from the right at intersections is given priority.

Look out for triangular signs with a red border and a black 'x', as these will indicate that you must give way to traffic approaching from the right.





## Overtaking

Overtaking is common practice in France, and is often carried out somewhat less conservatively than in Britain. On motorways, you must continue to indicate left during your entire overtaking manoeuvre, and on single carriageway roads you must indicate right when returning to your lane. Overtaking on the inside, or 'undertaking', is prohibited in France except when waiting to turn left, or if vehicles in the left lane are queuing.

## Parking

On roads with two lanes of traffic, stopping and parking is only permitted on the right-hand side. On one way streets, parking is permitted on both sides provided that the road is wide enough. A continuous yellow line indicates that stopping and parking is prohibited, while a broken yellow line indicates that parking is prohibited. If your car is parked without a ticket in a payable zone it may be towed away and impounded, and you'll be charged for every 24 hours the vehicle is kept at the depot. Clamping is also common practice in Paris and larger towns. If you're clamped, you'll have to pay a fine at the nearest police station.

## Fuelling up

A variety of fuels are readily available in France, the most common being Sans Plomb (unleaded) and Super (leaded). Diesel is often labelled 'Gasoil'. Large supermarkets such as Carrefour normally offer the best prices, so it's a good idea to fill up at these when you do your shopping, as rural petrol stations can be few and far between, and their opening hours variable. Many petrol stations require you to pay by card at the pump, so be sure to let your bank know that you will be travelling abroad before you set off.

### Typical petrol prices (as of summer 2017):

| Fuel               | Price                |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Unleaded 98 octane | 1.47 Euros per litre |
| Unleaded 95 octane | 1.44 Euros per litre |
| Diesel             | 1.22 Euros per litre |

## Horns

You are not permitted to use your horn in built-up areas, unless it is necessary in avoiding a road traffic collision. The horn should be used to make other road users aware of your presence, not your frustration.

## Caravans and trailers

If the combined weight of your vehicle and caravan or trailer is over 3.5 tons, you must drive at reduced speed limits of 80km/h or 50mph on single carriageway roads, and 90 km/h on dual carriageways or motorways. You will also be required to display 80 and 90 speed limit stickers on the rear of your caravan or trailer, with the 80 sticker applied in the bottom left corner and the 90 sticker placed on top or to the right. Failure to do this can result in a fine of up to €100. If you are towing a caravan you must also use extending mirrors.

## Snow chains

In areas at risk of snow, signs will dictate that snow chains must be fitted to tyres and used at times when the road surface is covered by snow. If the snow thins you may be tempted to leave them on, but don't, as you risk damaging your vehicle and the road surface. Failure to use snow chains when required can result in heavy fines, and any road traffic collision which occurs on a road where chains are mandatory will immediately be considered your fault if they have not been fitted.

# Collisions and breaking down



If you break down or are involved in a road traffic collision in France, follow these steps:

## Protect

Pull over to a safe location and turn your hazard lights on, your ignition off and apply the handbrake. Ensure all passengers are wearing their fluorescent safety vests before carefully getting out of the vehicle. If on a motorway, exit the vehicle from the right-hand side only. Erect your warning triangles about 50 and 100 metres behind your vehicle.

## Alert

If a collision has occurred, call the emergency services by dialling 112 or by using an emergency phone at the side of the motorway. Emergency phones are often the best option as they allow the operator to immediately read your location. Be prepared to give the operator as much information as you can about the nature of the collision, the number of vehicles involved and if anybody has been injured.

## Rescue

In the case of a road traffic collision, stay in a safe place and wait calmly for the emergency services to arrive. Do not attempt to move an injured person, but make sure that they are kept warm as shock can make people feel cold.

If you have only broken down, you can call your breakdown recovery provider's European call-out number. For those with ETA breakdown cover this is **0044 1206 771 714**.

If you have broken down on a motorway, you will need to use the emergency phones at the side of the road to call out the recovery service operated by the French police, as nobody else is permitted to attend broken down vehicles on this type of road. You may be charged a fee to be recovered from the motorway, but if you have **breakdown cover with the ETA**, these costs are recoverable.

If you can safely make it off the motorway without assistance, this may speed up your recovery and help you reach your preferred destination more quickly.

## Emergency numbers

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>112</b>                         | As in Britain, this is the Pan-European general emergency number. It is free of charge from your mobile phone, and you can ask to be connected to an English-speaking operator. |
| <b>114</b><br>(hearing assistance) |   |
| <b>15</b>                          | Medical emergency/accident/ambulance (SAMU)   |
| <b>17</b>                          | Police or Gendarmerie   |
| <b>18</b>                          | Fire brigade  |
| <b>115</b>                         | Emergency shelter   |
| <b>196</b>                         | Sea and lake rescue   |
| <b>0044 1206 771 714</b>           | ETA European breakdown call-out number  |

# Laws



## Speed cameras

Each year, an estimated half a million British drivers are flashed by speed cameras whilst driving through France. Up until recently, police would not collect these fines, however new laws came into effect in 2017 which allow French police to access British motorists' details from the DVLA, ending years of effective impunity for speeding foreign drivers. French police remain ever vigilant on the roads and will impose on-the-spot fines if they catch you speeding.

| If you exceed the speed limit by                   | Standard fine is | Maximum fine is |
|--|------------------|-----------------|
| Less than 20 km/h (12 mp/h) outside built-up areas | €68              | €450            |
| Less than 20 km/h (12 mp/h) in a built-up area     | €135             | €750            |
| Less than 30 km/h (19 mp/h)                        | €135             | €750            |
| Less than 40 km/h (25 mp/h)                        | €135             | €750            |
| Less than 50 km/h (31 mp/h)                        | €135             | €750            |
| More than 50 km/h (31 mp/h)                        | n/a              | €1,500          |
| More than 50 km/h (31 mp/h) (repeat offence)       | n/a              | €3,750          |

If you are caught doing more than 50 km/h above the speed limit, expect to have your car impounded.

## Speed limits

The speed limits in France are largely the same as those in Britain and most other European countries.

|  | Motorways        | Urban motorway<br>or dual<br>carriageway<br>with a central<br>reservation | Open<br>roads   | Built up<br>areas |
|--|------------------|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Normal traffic conditions  | 130km/h<br>80mph | 110km/h<br>70mph  | 80km/h<br>50mph | 50km/h<br>30mph   |
| Rain or other precipitation.   | 110km/h<br>70mph | 100km/h<br>60mph  | 80km/h<br>50mph | 50km/h<br>30mph   |
| Visibility less than 50m   | 50km/h<br>30mph  | 50km/h<br>30mph   | 50km/h<br>30mph | 50km/h<br>30mph   |
| If your license is less than two years old                             | 110km/h<br>70mph | 100km/h<br>60mph  | 80km/h<br>50mph | 50km/h<br>30mph   |
| If you tow a trailer or caravan with a combined weight over 3.5 tonnes | 110km/h<br>70mph | 100km/h<br>60mph  | 80km/h<br>50mph | 50km/h<br>30mph   |



Speed limit signs are circular with a red border:



Changes in speed limits when entering or exiting a town are often indicated using signs that display the name of the town and either a red border (entry) or a red diagonal line (exit).

**D 906**

**COURPIÈRE**

**D 28**

**CHAMPEIX**

## Mobile phones

France has strict laws about the use of mobile phones whilst driving. As well as handsets, you must not use earphones or headsets for phone calls or listening to audio devices. Handsfree systems which connect to the car speaker system and do not require an ear bud or headphones are permitted, as are Bluetooth or integrated systems in a motorcycle helmet.

## Insurance

As in Britain, you must have a minimum of third-party insurance cover when driving in France, but don't assume that your car insurance covers your trip abroad – most policies include basic third party cover for driving in the rest of Europe but the only way to be certain of your level of cover is to read your policy or contact your provider.

## Sat-navs

If your sat-nav can tell you the location of speed cameras, switch off this feature or leave it at home. This is an offence in France and can cost you six points on your license and a €1,500 fine.

## Radar detectors

A radar detector is a device sometimes used by motorists to check whether their speed is being monitored by a radar gun. Some sat-navs are also equipped with this feature. If yours is, switch it off because they are illegal in France, and police come down heavily on people caught using them.

# Other useful information



## Words and phrases

| French                      | English                                   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Arrêt                       | Stop                                      |
| Ralentir                    | Slow down                                 |
| Sortie                      | Exit                                      |
| Cédez le passage            | Give priority to the other road           |
| Un accident                 | Accident                                  |
| Ne pas doubler              | Do not overtake                           |
| Le sens unique              | One way                                   |
| La priorité à droite        | Priority to the right                     |
| Passage piétons             | Pedestrian crossing                       |
| Péage                       | Toll road                                 |
| Ralentir travaux            | Slow down, road works ahead               |
| Fin de chantier             | End of works/site/roadworks               |
| Vous n'avez pas la priorité | You don't have priority and must give way |
| Voie unique                 | One lane road                             |
| La bande d'arrêt d'urgence  | Emergency lane/hard shoulder              |
| Allumez vos feux            | Turn on your lights                       |
| Serrez à droite             | Keep to the right                         |
| Suivre                      | Follow                                    |
| Fermé                       | Closed                                    |

## Paris low emission zone

From 15 January 2017, a low emission zone is enforced in central Paris. All vehicles driving within the orbital road (known as the Boulevard périphérique) will need to register and pay for an air quality certificate (certificat qualité de l'air) appropriate to their vehicle, or face fines of €68 and upwards for not complying. Information is available at [www.certificat-air.gouv.fr](http://www.certificat-air.gouv.fr).

## Paris - ban on older vehicles

Any car registered before 1 January 1997 is banned from driving in Paris between 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday. The ban was introduced in July 2016 in a bid to tackle air pollution. Classic cars registered thirty years ago or more are exempt from this rule.

## Stay hydrated

Studies have shown that the effect of dehydration can be equivalent to drinking and driving – a problem exacerbated by long motorway journeys in a hot country. Stay hydrated and have at least a glass of water for every hour you are driving. Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink, and stop as often as you need to.

# Map of French toll roads



All information in this guide is correct as of June 2017.

If you believe any information to be incorrect or out of date please email [marketing@eta.co.uk](mailto:marketing@eta.co.uk).

## What our customers say...

"As my car is fourteen years old, I found this company a breath of fresh air, as a lot of other companies do not insure cars over ten years old"

Our customers love us



"Most reasonable price for an old but reliable car going abroad"

"Super clear helpful advice, and an ethical supplier!"

"Once again, the best value single-trip breakdown cover"

"Simple, straightforward and easy to organise single-trip European breakdown cover for my motorcycle. First class service and I can highly recommend"

## Get an **instant quote**

at [www.eta.co.uk](http://www.eta.co.uk) or call 0333 000 1234



## Ethical travel insurance from the ETA

- ✓ £10m cover for medical emergencies
- ✓ £5,000 cancellation cover from the moment you book
- ✓ £3,500 cover for baggage and personal effects
- ✓ Every policy we sell supports the **ETA Trust**

Get an **instant quote**  
at [www.eta.co.uk](http://www.eta.co.uk) or call **0333 000 1234**



# Your Journey Our World



## Travel Insurance

Comprehensive cover for trips in Britain, Europe and worldwide



## Cycle Insurance

Fully-comprehensive cover for you and your bicycle

# CO<sub>2</sub>

## Carbon Offsets

Offset your carbon footprint by investing in carbon-reducing projects around the world



## Breakdown Cover

Award-winning breakdown cover with carbon emissions from every recovery offset

Every policy we sell helps support the work of the  
ETA Trust - our charity campaigning for a safer  
and more sustainable transport future

Find out more at [www.eta.co.uk/trust](http://www.eta.co.uk/trust)