

For many British drivers the gateway to Europe is France. French road signs do not always correspond to those found in the UK so it is important to know their meaning. Here are some of the most commonly found signs:

Are you prepared for driving abroad?

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR A SAFE TRIP



Road signs you might see in France



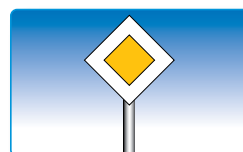
WHERE: Approach to a roundabout
MEANING: You must give way (or 'cedez le passage'). If you do not see this sign, you have the right of way and traffic on the roundabout must give way to you.



WHERE: In a town/village or approaching a hazard
MEANING: Indicates the speed in km/hr on that specific stretch of road. Speed limits may change. 'Rappel' means 'reminder'.



WHERE: Entering a town or village
MEANING: The sign, showing the name of the town/village, is the start of the 50km/hr speed limit, unless otherwise stated.



WHERE: Main roads
MEANING: You have the right of way and any vehicles joining your road from the right must give way to you. If you do not see this sign on a main road or you see the sign with a black line diagonally crossing it, you must give way to traffic on your right.



WHERE: Leaving a town or village
MEANING: The sign, with the name of the town/village crossed diagonally with a red line, indicates the end of the speed limit. Some towns/villages run into each other. Another sign above this with the name of the next town means the 50km/hr speed limit still applies.

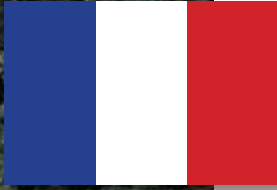


WHERE: Pedestrian crossing
MEANING: Pedestrians have the right of way over vehicles once on the crossing. These crossings may be indicated by a separate sign in blue. You should treat the crossing as you would in the UK.

Driving regulations and customs are often different on the continent so follow the advice below to help steer clear of trouble:

- Drive on the right-hand side of the road – this applies across continental Europe.
- Drive cautiously and expect the unexpected – the local driving style may be different to that of the UK.
- Don't drive when you're tired and take regular breaks – at least 15 minutes every two hours.
- Speed limits are often higher than in the UK so cars may approach faster than you are used to.
- Always wear a seatbelt and make sure other passengers do too – even when it's hot!
- Don't drink and drive – the legal blood-alcohol limit may be lower than in the UK.
- Holiday luggage may make your vehicle heavier than usual so allow more time and distance for braking.
- You should have a GB sticker clearly visible on the back of your car if your number plate doesn't include this information.
- It is now compulsory in many countries in Europe, including France, for all vehicles to carry a reflective jacket and at least one warning triangle for use in case of a breakdown.
- Radar detectors are illegal in many countries in Europe including France and Spain, whether in use or not. If you are caught with one you could be fined.
- Plan your route before you start driving.
- If you're involved in an accident, contact your insurer immediately and take photographs of damage to your vehicle.

Some tips on driving...



...in France

- The French police strictly enforce speeding restrictions and if you exceed speed limits you will face heavy on-the-spot fines, often payable only by the exact amount in cash.
- If you break French driving laws you can also have your UK driving licence confiscated by French Police. This could lead to your vehicle being temporarily impounded if no alternative driver with a valid licence is available .
- A single continuous white line is equivalent to a double white line in the UK and means 'do not overtake.'
- There are two speed limits for motorways and dual carriageways: the lower one should be obeyed in wet weather – and always by drivers who have held a licence for less than two years.



...in Spain

- It is a legal requirement for motorists in Spain to carry two red warning triangles. These are to be placed in front of and behind the vehicle in the event of an accident or breakdown.
- Drivers must have a spare pair of spectacles (if needed for driving), a spare wheel and a full set of spare bulbs plus the tools to change them.
- Drivers should be on the look-out for thieves who target foreign-registered and hire cars, especially those towing caravans. If you decide to stop to check the condition of your vehicle, you should be extremely wary of anyone offering help.



...in Belgium

- You should take great care to obey the 'priority to the right' rule . In many instances drivers must give priority to vehicles joining a road from the right, even if they have stopped at a road junction or stopped for pedestrians or cyclists.
- Fines have increased dramatically – for example, the penalty for exceeding the speed limit by 40km/hr can be up to €2,750. If you are unable to pay an on-the-spot fine your vehicle may be impounded.



...in Italy

- You must use dipped headlights during the day while travelling on motorways and major roads outside cities .
- You should wear a reflective safety jacket if you are standing with, inspecting or repairing your vehicle on a public highway.



...in The Netherlands

- Be extra vigilant for trams; they have priority over other traffic and are well-known to exercise that right. If a tram or a bus stops in the middle of the road to allow passengers on and off, you must stop.
- Be particularly careful when using roundabouts – on some you have the right of way when on the roundabout, but on others the right of way must be given to vehicles entering.