

The continental life: IAM RoadSmart's tips for motoring abroad

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it's been estimated that around 1.5 million UK drivers¹ plan to take a trip across the Channel with their car for the first time this summer.



Getting behind the wheel for the first time overseas can be a daunting experience. Fortunately, IAM RoadSmart is here to help you get through the hard parts and make your trip one to remember ... for the right reasons!

Being on the opposite side of the road (and car) as well as different rules and regulations means there's a lot to contend with. Make sure you are familiar with these safe motoring tips from IAM RoadSmart's Head of Driving and Riding Standards, Richard Gladman, before you set off.

1. Be prepared

Before setting off on your journey it's important to check that your vehicle is prepped and ready for the adventure ahead. Carrying out POWDERY checks on your vehicle is key to staying safe on the road so remember to check your Petrol, Oil, Water, Damage, Electrics, Rubber and You.

Driving laws vary widely across Europe, even between neighbouring countries. For example in France the motorway speed limit is reduced from 130kph (80mph) to 110kph (68mph) when the road is wet, and there's no speed limit on some parts of Germany's motorway network. Remember your speedometer will be reading in mph; if you give this as an excuse, a continental police officer will have heard before and will not be forgiving.

Before you leave it's important that you've checked what paperwork you need (passport, driving licence, National Insurance number, overseas insurance, V5C certificate, and European breakdown cover documents).

It's important to remember that a hi-viz bib for all occupants is mandatory in most European countries and must be carried in the car, not the boot. A warning triangle is also required by most countries, and a bail bond is recommended when travelling in Spain. Ensure you have up-to-date information and the correct kit for your vehicle.

It is not necessary to obtain an international driving permit or display GB stickers if your vehicle's number plates include the GB Euro symbol, although that may change in 2021.

If your destination is a French city you may well need a vignette for the CRIT'Air scheme. Do your research and purchase it before you travel.

2. Gen up on skills

Refresh skills you gained while preparing for your advanced test to make travelling easier. All that observation, anticipation, planning, positioning and systematic decision making will

help you cope with unfamiliar situations. Don't be shy to remind the family that you need to concentrate at roundabouts and junctions to get it right.

3. Right move

It sounds obvious, but you will likely be driving or riding on the right, and there will be different road customs. You may already have a way of reminding yourself to be on the right when you start off or turn out of shopping place on a quiet road, that could be adding a note on your steering wheel. If you must overtake another vehicle, take extra care as it's not easy in a left-hand drive car and will be safer when you reach a stretch of dual carriageway.

4. Respect the locals

It's important to drive or ride carefully and cautiously and increase your observation. If you're exploring the area for the scenery, remember tourist destinations also have local road-users going about their day-to-day lives. They need you to let them past, so pay attention to your driving and riding as well as the sight-seeing. Remember, other tourists will be distracted by the scenery too.

5. Collisions

If you are unfortunate enough to find yourself involved in a collision, it's important you contact your insurer immediately and call the police. Collect the other driver's full details and the names and contact details of any witnesses at the scene. It's always a good idea to take photographs of the damage to your vehicle – it could come in handy if you are required to provide evidence. Make sure before you travel that your recovery service extends to Europe and how they would bring you vehicle back to the UK in the event of a crash.

Richard said: "Driving holidays in Europe can be enjoyable for the entire family, while allowing you to get off the beaten track. Make sure you plan extra breaks into the journey as the concentration required when driving in an unfamiliar environment may bring on fatigue. If you are indulging in a glass or two of wine in the evenings make sure you plan your onward journey the following day to take this into account."