



Courtesy and the French touch

According to a French circular of 1983, foreign drivers in need of help can rely on the police forces who have to provide special assistance to them.

Don't forget: French legislation applies to all drivers, even foreign ones!

Some major changes

In terms of Road safety policy, some major changes have occurred under the presidency of Jacques Chirac (former President of the French republic); with good results since the number of road death was divided by 2 since 2002.



The efficacy of the new policy aimed at controlling "road rage", a new idea in France, can be seen through the reinforcement of speed controls. Since 2003, a constantly increasing number of fixed speed cameras have been installed, as well as mobile ones.

The margin for going above the speed limit which was previously tolerated has disappeared and only a technical margin of 5 km/h for speed under 100 km/h and of 5 % above is now allowed.

French drivers have adapted to the new measures and average speed levels have decreased. Make sure you respect the speed limits, as foreign drivers in France are now over represented in the total number of motoring offences.

Which penalties ?

The law of the 12th June 2003 includes the principal of automated control penalties making it clear that the owners of foreign cars can be prosecuted.

Fines:

Small offences are subject to on-the-spot fines.
■ If the driver refuses to pay, a deposit (*consignation: is the sum paid by the car owner as a deposit before the final payment of the fine*) will be asked for. If the deposit is not paid, or in the case of a serious offense, the car will be towed away.

The driving licence will be kept in the following circumstances:

- The driving licence will be confiscated immediately for offences connected with alcohol, drug and speed.
- If the driver is living temporarily in France, and the duration of the suspension of the driving licence is less than that of his stay, the driving licence is kept by the *Préfecture* (main local administrative office) during the suspension. When the suspension expires the driving license is returned to the driver.
- If the driver is travelling through France, the driving licence is sent either to the organisation

which has issued the driving licence, or directly to the home of the driver.

Penalty points

- The offences are not endorsed on the licence of foreign drivers on holiday.
- Besides, foreign drivers who have been penalised for a previous road offence will be obliged, even in the absence of a new road offence, to pay immediately, the previous overdue fine if their vehicle is stopped, even in the event of a road check. If they do not pay, their vehicle will be taken to the car pound, at their expense.

Radar detectors are prohibited in vehicles (Fine : 1500€).

SIGNALISATION

Which side of the road to drive on and rights of way?

- Traffic drives on the right.
- Right of way is on the right (unless specified otherwise with a road sign) even when you are driving on a main road.

Advice for drivers who normally drive on the left:

Changing the side on which you drive is not easy because reflexes have a tendency to take over. Pay particular attention when:

- You arrive at and leave a roundabout. The traffic on the roundabout moves a contrary sense to the hands of a watch, that is to say anticlockwise. It is best to stay in the outside lane on the right.
- You are crossing a junction.
- You are taking the wheel again after a break.

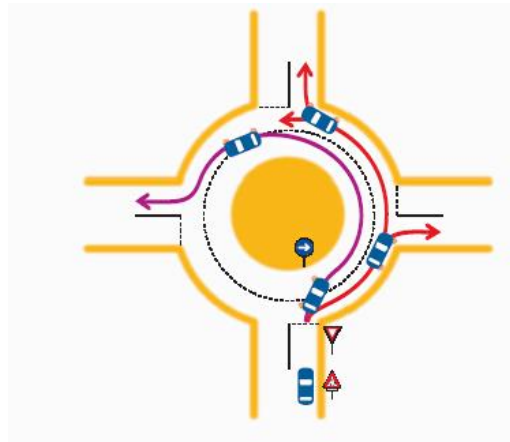
Roundabouts

The roundabout is a complex infrastructure because we have several traffic lanes with traffic moving round in a circle and with different entry points and exits. Because of its complexity, it needs to be approached with a particular care.

Roundabouts are always announced with the sign that tells you to turn right and often with the mention "*vous n'avez pas la priorité*" which means that drivers already on the roundabout have right of way (Cars go in an anti-clockwise direction).

Once on the roundabout, in the case where it has several lanes, you must preferably choose the lane on the far right. It is advised to go on the inside lane, near the central area, if you are planning to take the furthest exit on the left.

Otherwise it is better to stay in the lane on the right but there is not an obligation to do so. Make sure to signal your intentions and watch out for other vehicles when moving from one lane to another.



You may come across, in towns for example, some traditional roundabouts with no specific sign: you must proceed with extra care as they generally have a right of way to those coming from the right (the vehicle entering the roundabout has the priority).

Traffic lights:

Traffic lights are placed, generally, on the edge of the right side of the road. They operate in three stages:



- Green light: you may go on (if the way is clear).
- Amber light: you must stop unless you are so close to it that it might cause an accident.
- Red light: you must stop.

A flashing amber light is used as a danger warning or a broken traffic light replacement. You must take special care before you go on. If you come across a flashing amber light, in the absence of a priority sign, the rule to apply is the general one for priority (right of way on the right).



A flashing amber arrow allows you to go in the direction of the arrow despite the red light.

Road markings:



Blue ones indicate a motorway.



Green ones indicate a main town



White ones indicate main local towns.



During a peak season for traffic (holidays, week ends...) the main roads are very often jammed and alternative routes are proposed. They are called

Itinéraires bis.

Road marking (along the carriageway)

Overtaking or crossing a **broken white line** is permitted.

Crossing or driving on a **continuous white line** is strictly forbidden.

On some narrow and winding roads, you may come across a **broken line with very small spaces**: it is allowed to overtake slow moving vehicles only (i.e.: tractor).

Double white lines where the line nearest to you is broken: you may cross to overtake if you are on the side of the broken line.

Motorways

Most motorways are generally not free and not lit. The toll fee is required on the way out. It is based on the category of vehicle and the number of kilometres driven. It is possible to pay with Visa, Eurocard Mastercard or American Express. Both US and Canadian dollars, British pounds, Swiss francs, Yen and the three crowns (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) should be accepted in notes. The change will be given in Euros.



The barriers marked with a LIBER-T sign are reserved for the drivers who have a subscription and a pass (they don't need to stop and pay).

You should avoid going to these barriers as you will have to queue up again at a new till.

There are many service areas on every motorway where you will find a place to rest and a toilet. We would advise you to rest every two hours when driving for a long journey.

For more information: <http://www.autoroutes.fr>

Which road to take ? When is the best time to travel ?


Before setting off on a long journey it is safer to plan it in advance and to prepare the route. There are different ways to prepare your journey (route, timing, road toll, weather forecast ...):

■ With the Internet:

www.mappy.com ,
www.viamichelin.fr,
www.bisonfute.equipement.gouv.fr,
www.infotraffic.com or www.autoroutes.fr

■ With the radio: the station 107.7 FM has a special bulletin given in English every hour, specially during great holiday migration periods.

■ To check the weather: www.meteo.fr

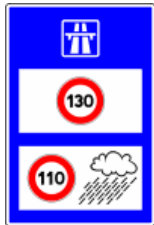
 It is better not to set a time of arrival to avoid stress. Don't forget that you are on a holiday. **Take your time !**

RULES

General **speed limits** applying to all roads (unless signs show otherwise):

Good weather conditions

- Built-up areas: 50 km/h (30 miles/h), but some zones have a 30 (18 m/h) or 70 km/h (40 m/h) limit which is indicated.
- Outside built-up areas: 90 km/h (55 miles/h)
- Urban motorways and dual carriage ways: 110 km/h (68 miles/h)
- Motorways: 130 km/h (80 miles/h)



Bad weather conditions

- Built-up areas: 50 km/h (30 miles/h)
- Outside built-up areas: 80 km/h (50 miles/h)
- Urban motorways and dual carriage ways: 100 km/h (62 miles/h)
- Motorways: 110 km/h (68 miles/h)

The case of the **Paris ring road** ("périphérique"): **70 km/h** (43 miles/h)

When visibility is under 50 meters (164 feet), the 50 km/h (30 miles/h) limit applies to all types of road (including motorways).

In any case, driving too fast for the road layout, difficult traffic conditions and foreseeable obstacles (i.e.: school, animals...) can be dangerous.

On the other hand, you cannot be abnormally slow.

Driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs

You must not drive with a blood alcohol level of more than **50 mg per 100 ml of blood** (or 0,5g/l) which is equivalent to a breath alcohol level of 0,25 mg per litre.

Young drivers and drivers of buses or coaches are limited to a blood alcohol level of **20 mg per 100 ml of blood** (or 0,2 g/l) which is equivalent to a breath alcohol level of 0,10 mg per litre.

When a driver is stopped, a simple breath test is generally used (*ballon*). Drivers who fail a roadside test will be required to give a blood sample or another breath sample will be taken for a further test with an electronic machine.

Driving under the influence of illegal drugs is strictly prohibited and severely punished. A blood sample or a saliva test can be required for the control.

As a general rule, the sanction for **refusing to submit to a test** can be as high as the one for driving under the influence of drug or alcohol.

Mobile phones

It is illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving. Since July 1th, hands-free sets have seen made illegal. The fine is 135€.

In case of accident, the police may investigate if use of the phone (even hands free ones) contributed to the accident, which might result in prosecution for careless or dangerous driving.

Safe driving requires concentration. Avoid doing several things at the same time while driving.

Seat belt

The law requires **all car occupants** to wear a seatbelt (if one is fitted in the car) both in front and back seats.

It is the legal responsibility of the driver to ensure that **passengers under the age of 18 years** are using a belt. The driver will be fined if a passenger under the age of 18 is not wearing a seat belt.

Children under the age of 10 years must travel in the rear of the car, unless the child is travelling in a rearward-facing baby carrier or if the car is not fitted with rear seats or when the rear seat is already carrying children under the age of 10 years. When a child is travelling in the front seat, the airbag must be deactivated.

Under the age of 10 years, a child must be restrained in a child seat suitable both for his age and weight (all child restraints must conform to a national or a European standard).

Helmet use

Although it is very much advised to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, it is not compulsory. But the law requires all motorcycle or moped riders, and their passengers, to wear a helmet.

Under the Geneva protocol of 1968, all foreigners, from the age of 14 years, are allowed to ride a moped in France if they are holding a licence for their vehicle in their country.

Compulsory equipment to carry in the car

- 1 reflective jacket at hand,
- 1 warning triangle in the car,
- 1 breathalyzer not used, but no fine punishes a possible breach of this provision.

There is no obligation to travel with a spare bulb kit. But we would advise getting a set before leaving as it will avoid your car being immobilised if a light bulb is defective,

Even when not compulsory, we would advise having a fire extinguisher, not out of date and less than 5 years old, a first aid kit and a torch.

Day time running lights must be used when visibility is seriously reduced.

Daytime running lights are **compulsory for motorbikes in any weather**. The measure also applies to mopeds.

What to do in the event of an accident ?

■ When someone is injured.

After making the place of the accident safe, call the number 112 (for all emergencies) from a fixed telephone or a mobile one. If you are on a motorway, you must use the free emergency call box available which is the only way to know



the exact location of the accident. If you can't get to a free emergency call box, you may use your mobile phone or another fixed one nearby to call the number 112.

■ When no one is injured.

It is not compulsory to call the police if there is only damage to the car.

In France, drivers involved in an accident can fill in an accident report known as *constat amiable* which will help to define the responsibilities of the drivers and therefore the processing of the appeal to the insurance companies. Although not compulsory, it is very much advised to use it as it has a value of proof. Do not forget to give the names of the witnesses (if there are any). In principal, if there is a disagreement, the boxes ticked by the drivers prevail over the drawing. If in doubt, it is better not to fill in the *constat amiable*. Instead you should take the name and address of the other driver with his registration number (it is advised to ask to see an official document like a passport or a driving licence).

Beware ! : When using a *constat amiable*, it is very important to pay special care to the information that is put in: it is not possible to modify it once it is signed as it will be taken as fraud.



Contra-flow cycle lane

In zones where 30 km/h is the rule, shared-use roads where 20 km/h is the rule, and in roads where there are specific road signs indicating this, cyclists can travel in both directions on one way streets, by taking the specific cycle tracks.



Zone 30



Share used roads

Turning right for cyclists at red lights



When road signs indicate this, cyclists can turn right even when there is a red light.

SPECIFIC RULES FOR PARIS

Ring road

Speed on the Paris ring road is limited to 80 km/h for all the vehicles. Speed has been lowered next to **70 km/h (43 miles/h)** in 2013.

Access to the ring road is strictly forbidden to pedestrians, cyclists and moped drivers.

Specific traffic rules

When traffic is organized in lanes, the driver must be in the right-hand lane before turning to the right, and in the left hand lane before turning to the left.

It is strictly forbidden for a driver or passenger to throw an object out of the vehicle onto the road.

When you leave a property (a building, a secondary road parallel to the main road, parking space or car-park) and turn into a road with traffic moving in both directions, it is forbidden to turn left. More generally, when you drive on a road with traffic moving in both directions, it is not possible to turn to the left; except at intersections.

Bus lanes are strictly reserved for public transport, taxis and, where indicated by road signs, cyclists.

Parking

Stopping temporarily and double parking are strictly forbidden, even for picking up or depositing passengers or loading or unloading goods.

It is forbidden to leave a vehicle for more than 24 hours in the same place, except in the case of a particular regulation.

Parking in Paris is very strictly controlled. This is why we advise you to take advantage of car-parks of the Vinci type, where one has to pay and which may be time-limited, in order to avoid unpleasant surprises like finding your car in the police pound.

Infos :

<http://www.paris.fr/english/english/p8118>
(French, English and Spanish versions)

VOCABULARY

ENGLISH

Hello
Goodbye
Excuse me / Sorry
Please
Thank you
Yes / No
Do you speak French / English?
Where is...?
I'm looking for...

Right
Left

road
motorway
street
no entry
traffic sign
petrol station
air pump
car park
tyre
map
traffic light
toll
pavement
pedestrian crossing
crossroad
direction
roundabout
to drive
driver
passenger
bicycle
Motorcycle
car
truck / lorry

FRENCH

Bonjour
Au-revoir
Excusez-moi
S'il vous plaît
Merci
Oui/non
Parlez-vous le français/l'anglais ?
Où est ... ?
Je cherche...

Droite
Gauche

Route
Autoroute
Rue
Sens interdit
Panneau de signalisation
Station essence
Station de gonflage
Parking
Pneu
Carte routière
Feu de signalisation
Péage
Trottoir
Passage piéton
Carrefour
Direction
Rond-point
Conduire
Conducteur
Passager
Vélo
Moto
Voiture
Camion