



Travelling in France

General info:

Population: 65.6m

Area: 543,965 sq. Km

Currency: Euro (100 cents) - EUR (€)

Top 10 popular attractions: Disneyland Paris

Notre-Dame Cathedral

Forest of Fontainebleau

St Ouen flea market

Rouen Armada

Sacré-Cœur Basilica

Versailles Park

Rosary Basilica

Louvre Museum

Eiffel Tower

Are you covered?

Don't forget to buy your RAC European Breakdown cover & Travel Insurance before you leave. Call RAC European Breakdown Sales on: 0800 015 6000. Call RAC Travel Insurance on: 0870 333 2784

Useful Numbers:

Emergency Services: 112 (SMS 114)

RAC Breakdown Europe: 00 33 472 43 52 44

Useful Links:

- <http://www.rac.co.uk/breakdown-cover/european-breakdown-cover/>
- <http://www.rac.co.uk/insurance/travel-insurance/>
- <http://www.racshop.co.uk/driving-in-europe.html>

The Essentials:

Driving licence:

Visitors riding or driving in France must have reached the minimum age required to drive/ride a vehicle of equivalent category even if they are qualified to drive at a lower age in their country of residence. You must be 18 or over to drive a private vehicle.

Driving licences issued in EU and EEA countries are accepted.

International driving permits are recognised but not required.

Important documents:

Vehicles from the UK may be imported into France for up to 6 months in any period of 12 months. When driving in France the following documents should be carried:

- Full, valid driving licence* (with paper counterpart)
- Proof of Insurance (third party or above)
- Proof of ID (Passport)
- Proof of ownership (V5C Certificate)

**International Driving Permits are recognised but not compulsory*

While driving in France you are required by law to carry the following items. Hefty on-the-spot fines can be issued for failing to carry specific items:

- Reflective jackets (must be kept inside the vehicle, within reach)
- Warning triangle (compulsory in every vehicle with 4 wheels or more)
- Headlamp beam deflectors (Depending on your car, you will either need deflector stickers or have to adjust the beam manually)
- Breathalysers/alcohol test (As of January 2013 the French government announced that the introduction of an €11 fine has been postponed indefinitely)
- Motorcyclists (Safety helmets are compulsory for drivers and passengers of mopeds and motorcycles. Helmets must have reflective elements as per paragraph 6.16 of ECE regulation 22-04.)

Source: All information in this document is sourced from the AIT (Alliance Internationale de Tourisme) & the FIA (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) and, to the best of the RAC's knowledge, is correct at the time of publication (August 2013).

Rules of the road & regulations:

Rules of the road:

- **Overtaking & passing**

As a general rule, drive on the right, overtake on the left. However, where traffic is in lanes, vehicles may overtake on the right of other vehicles in slower moving lanes.

On steep gradients, vehicles travelling downhill must give way to vehicles travelling uphill.

Overtaking trams in motion is normally permitted on the right only; it is permitted on the left in one way streets, if there is not enough space on the right.

- **Priority**

At intersections, the driver of a vehicle must give way to vehicles approaching from their right, unless otherwise indicated.

Road users must give way to police and fire brigade vehicles and ambulances.

- **Warning of approach**

The horn may only be used in order to give necessary warning to other road users.

Between sunset and sunrise, warning must be given by flashing passing lights. The horn may be used only in cases of absolute necessity.

In all built-up areas, use of the horn is prohibited except in cases of immediate danger.

The use of multi-tone horns, sirens and whistles is prohibited.

Towing:

It is prohibited to tow a motor vehicle except in the case of a breakdown or an accident and if the distance to be travelled is short. This practice is totally prohibited on motorways where the assistance of a recovery vehicle must be sought.

It is forbidden to carry people in a moving caravan.

Snow chains:

Snow chains must be fitted to vehicles using snow covered roads in compliance with the relevant road sign. Fines can be imposed for non-compliance. Vehicles fitted with chains must not exceed 50km/h.

Snow tyres M+S are recommended on roads covered with ice or snow. The minimum tread depth is 3.5mm.

Seat belts:

It is compulsory for the driver and all passengers of private vehicles to wear seat belts, where available. The driver of the vehicle is responsible for ensuring that all passengers under 18 are wearing a seat belt or appropriate restraint.

Travelling with children:

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

Children under the age of 10 are not allowed to travel on the front seats of vehicles without using a special child restraint, unless there is no rear seat in the vehicle, or the rear seat is already occupied with children under 10, or there are no seat belts.

Unlike the UK the use of child car seats is not determined on height but on weight. Under French law, children up to the age of 10 must travel in an approved child seat or restraint.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Group 0: < 10 kg | Rear-facing child seat placed either at the front passenger seat or at the back seat (if placed at the front, the airbag must be switched off). Babies can also travel in a carry cot (this can be placed at the rear seat only). |
|------------------|---|

| | |
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| Group 0+: < 13 kg | Child restraints in this category are slightly bigger versions of those in Group 0. They must be installed under the same conditions as those in Group 0. |
| Group 1: 9 - 18 kg | Child seat with a harness or a protection tray. |
| Group 2: 15 - 25 kg | Booster seat or cushion with an adult seatbelt. |
| Group 3: 22 - 36 kg | Booster seat or cushion with an adult seatbelt |

Speed limits:

The following national speed limits apply:

| | Motorways | Urban motorway or dual carriageway with a central reservation | Other roads | Built up areas |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---|-------------|----------------|
| Normal traffic conditions | 130 km/h | 110 km/h | 90 km/h | 50 km/h |
| Rain or other precipitation | 110 km/h | 100 km/h | 80 km/h | 50 km/h |
| Visibility less than 50 m | 50 km/h | 50 km/h | 50 km/h | 50 km/h |

Holders of EU driving licences exceeding the speed limit by more than 40 km/h will have their licences confiscated on the spot by the police.

French law prohibits drivers from devices capable of detecting speed cameras and warning drivers of their location. Penalties can include fines of up to €1,500 and confiscation of the device and vehicle.

Penalties:

- ### On-the-spot fines

Visiting motorists should be warned that some French police authorities are authorised to impose and collect fines on the spot up to 375 EUR from drivers who violate traffic regulations.

If the offence committed is not likely to entail the suspension of the driving licence or a prison sentence, the motorist can pay a reduced fine within the next 3 days. If you would like to contest the fine, you must apply for a court hearing within 30 days.

If the offence committed is serious and likely to entail a heavy fine and the suspension of the driving licence or a prison sentence, a motorist who is not resident in France and has no employment there must deposit a guarantee. The police may hold his vehicle until payment is made. This payment can be in Euros, by cheque drawn on a French bank or by travellers' cheques.

- ### Minimum and maximum fines

Standard fines are classified into 4 categories according to the gravity of the offence. They can be reduced if payment is made within 15 days (in the case of postal payments, 3 days if paid in person) or increased if payment is not made within 45 days.

- ### Confiscation of vehicles

In some cases, instead of, or in addition to, a fine or prison sentence, the vehicle can be confiscated. The main offences for which it can be applied are:

- exceeding the speed limit by over 40 km/h
 - repeated offence of driving under the influence of alcohol (0.40 mg per litre of breath)
 - hit and run
 - refusal to stop when requested
 - driving without licence
 - driving a vehicle with a licence of a category which does not cover that vehicle
 - driving without insurance

In such a case, the vehicle becomes the property of the French government.

Parking:

- **Parking Regulations**

Stopping and parking are permitted on the right-hand side only of roads with two lanes of traffic; in one-way streets, stopping and parking are permitted on both sides if the street is wide enough.

Restrictions and limitations are indicated by road signs or by yellow lines on the kerb. A continuous yellow line indicates that stopping and parking are prohibited. A broken yellow line indicates that parking is prohibited.

- **Paid Parking**

Road signs indicate the areas where parking is restricted and must be paid for, either at parking meters or automatic machines which issue tickets indicating the length of parking time which has been paid for.

Some machines take debit/credit cards "stationnement à la carte".

- **Enforcement of parking regulations**

Vehicles which are parked contrary to the regulations may be towed away and impounded, whether they are residents' cars or vehicles registered abroad. The owner is liable for the cost of impounding and for every 24 hours the vehicle is kept.

In Paris and some other large towns, illegally parked vehicles are immobilised by wheel clamps, even if the vehicles are registered abroad. The driver must go to the local police station and pay a fine for dangerous parking or for causing an obstruction, as well as a fine to have the vehicle released.

- **Disabled parking access**

Parking discs for 'blue zone' parking areas can be obtained from police stations, tourist offices and some shops.

Traffic lights:

- **Traffic lights**

The three-colour system conforms to the provisions of the Convention on Road Signs and Signals (red light on top). There is no amber light after the red light.

Flashing amber light indicates: caution, slow down, proceed but give way to vehicles coming from the right.

Flashing red light indicates: "no entry". It may also indicate a level crossing, exit used by fire engines, etc.

Yellow arrow at the same time as a red light indicates: motorists may proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow, provided they give way to vehicles travelling in the flow of traffic which they are entering and to pedestrians.

Drink/drug driving:

- **Legal limit**

The maximum legal level of alcohol in the blood is 0.05% except for bus and coach drivers who must have no more than 0.02% of alcohol in the blood.

- **Alcohol**

The police are empowered to carry out random breath tests. A test is compulsory after an accident which has caused injury or when a driver has committed a serious motoring offence.

- **Drugs**

A driver involved in an accident, or who has committed a traffic offence such as speeding, not wearing a seatbelt or a helmet, must take a drugs test.

The police use saliva or urine tests to detect drivers under the influence of drugs. If positive, a blood test follows.

Roads & fuel

Tolls are levied on most French motorways.

Tolls can be paid in cash or with the following cards: Eurocard, Mastercard, and Visa. (Debit cards Maestro and Electron are not accepted)

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Service areas

Lay-by: parking area

Resting area: with toilets, drinking water, picnic area and playground

Service area: open 24 hours a day with petrol station, restaurants and shops

Availability of fuel

Unleaded petrol, diesel oil and lubricating oil are readily available throughout France.

The fuel SP95-E10, which contains up to 10% of ethanol and 90% of unleaded 95 petrol, is available. This fuel can be used in 60% of petrol-driven cars, especially in recent models.

- **Price of fuel (April 2014)**

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|--|---------------------|
| Unleaded petrol (95 octane) | 1.512 EUR per litre |
| Unleaded E10 petrol (95 octane) | 1.501 EUR per litre |
| Unleaded petrol (98 octane) | 1.567 EUR per litre |
| Diesel | 1.306 EUR per litre |
| LPG | 0.862 EUR per litre |

- **Means of payment**

Credit cards are generally accepted at petrol stations.

- **Automatic petrol pumps**

There are now many automatic petrol pumps operated by credit or debit cards. However cards issued abroad are not always accepted by these petrol pumps.

Emergencies

Orange emergency telephones are situated every 2 km along main roads and motorways to enable motorists needing assistance to call the police or the official breakdown service operating in that area. Motorists cannot request assistance from their own assistance company if they break down on a motorway.

Charges for assistance on a motorway are fixed by the Government.

What RAC can do for you

RAC offers great value, flexible RAC European breakdown (<http://www.rac.co.uk/breakdown-cover/european-breakdown-cover/>) cover tailored to meet your needs. We also offer comprehensive travel insurance (<http://www.rac.co.uk/insurance/travel-insurance/>), including cover for medical expenses, baggage, personal money and belongings *. Whilst away, use our Route Planner (<http://www.rac.co.uk/route-planner/>) for all your driving directions.

RAC can cover you against vehicle break down in Europe, with options available to suit your travelling requirements.

RAC European breakdown cover Basic and Comprehensive cover provides you with a wide range of benefits.

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