

# DRIVING IN FRANCE



**Steve Rothwell** was about to embark on a road trip to France in his 2013 Honda CR-V petrol. It has been some years since he last drove in France, so he updates himself on the laws and changes since his last trip.

It has been a number of years since I last took a trip in my motor across the channel and drove on the other side of the road. As I was about to embark on a short visit to Disneyland Paris with the family, I decided to check that things were still as they were when I last drove over there in 2012. I found that there had been several changes with a few more due to be brought in shortly.

The need to carry a hi-vis jacket for each occupant of the vehicle was still required, but the requirement to carry a breathalyser is no longer applicable.

The other change since my last visit

is that the old GB sticker and logo on numberplates are now not compliant. The stickers and/or the numberplate logo should represent a UK insignia.

But the biggest change since I last ventured to the French shores is that France now has low emissions zones, and vehicles now need a sticker (Crit'Air Vignette) showing compliance to enter these zones. Failure to do so will incur a penalty of up to 135 Euros.

The good news is that the sticker is easily available and can be purchased for around €4.80 prior to the journey from the French website which does have an

English language option so translation will not be required. The website is <https://www.certificat-air.gouv.fr/> and once the form is filled out, the sticker showing the level of air pollutant from your vehicle will be dispatched by post arriving within a few days – mine took just over a week.

Whilst the sticker is only required in certain areas of France, if you are arriving via the ferry or the tunnel, there is a very good chance that you will be entering one of the zones on your journey. Do use the website address I have listed as searching online may



The UK sticker is now required to be displayed on the back of your vehicle, and the old GB sticker is not valid.



The UK stickers need to be placed on the numberplates to cover the old EURO emblem which should no longer be displayed on the numberplates.

# Preparation for a road trip to France



The Crit'Air Vignette sticker should be displayed on the lower right-hand corner of your windscreen.

lead you to one of the unofficial sites that charge a fee for the service, pushing the price up considerably.

Another change I encountered was that now when booking the ferry, API (advanced passenger information) was needed, and just like when booking flights the passport number and details of the passengers travelling must be filled in.

Depending on your travel date you may also need to consider ETIAS which is due to come in sometime during early summer 2025. This will be similar to the ESTA system used for travellers to the USA, the ETIAS is applicable for stays up to 90 days in any 180-day period, so should easily cover any holiday arrangements.

This will come in six months after the introduction of EES (Entry/Exit System). Which is the first step of modernising and controlling the EU borders.

More details at the official website <https://travel-europe.europa.eu/>

I would again warn against finding the application site via a search engine, as there are companies that will act as a go between and charge a hefty fee to do so, going direct will be the cheapest and safest option.

It is also worth noting that if you are travelling on a non-UK passport you will need an ETA (Electronic Travel Authorisation) to travel to or transit through the UK. Details on this can be found at the <https://www.gov.uk> site.

## Once in France

So, you have ticked the boxes and entered France with your vehicle, having remembered to check that your insurance will cover you, what else do you need?

You are required to carry your vehicle documents including the insurance document, MOT and the V5. As well as these you will also require a hi-vis jacket for every occupant of the vehicle, a warning triangle, spare bulb kit and you will need to have the UK stickers as

mentioned earlier. The warning triangle and hi-vis jackets do need to be readily accessible and so not tucked under the boot floor. If you are stopped, you will be asked to show these, and they need to be to hand. If you wear glasses for driving it is also compulsory to carry a spare pair.

Any GB or EU markings on the numberplates will need to be covered with the stickers now available showing the UK symbol.

One point that, although not applicable to me, may be of interest to others, is that electric car charging points in France are more easily found. A good friend recently undertook a journey through France in an EV and was delighted at the ease of finding the charging stations – and that they all worked.

So, you have safely arrived in France you have the required documentation and the necessary equipment and set off on the road. The first thing you need to be aware of besides the fact that the French drive anti-clockwise around roundabouts is that there are quite a few other variations in traffic regulations. If you encounter rain, the speed limit will alter. The maximum limit of 130km/h will reduce to 110km/h – and in poor visibility the limit will reduce further to 50km/h. During normal visibility when on the motorway there is also a minimum speed limit of 80km/h for vehicles travelling in the outside lane.

If you are using a sat-nav to navigate around the French roads, you should also be aware that French law prohibits drivers from using devices that are capable of detecting speed cameras or that will warn drivers of their location. Penalties for this are severe and instant fines of up to €1500 can be issued along with confiscation of the device and vehicle. This includes GPS-based systems which can display fixed speed camera locations as points of interest. If you have this type of system, the camera



This road sign does not indicate that your vehicle may burst into flames. It's just confirming you should not carry explosives in this area.



Headlamp deflectors are needed for the vast majority of vehicles, although some such as those with LED headlights can be adjusted to drive on the right side of the road without the need for blanking stickers. A reflective jackets, a bulb kit and a warning triangle are compulsory, and these should be accessible if needed, so not hidden under the boot floor space. I also carry a fire extinguisher.

notification should be disabled.

French police do have the power and do exercise the power to impose instant fines for motoring offences.

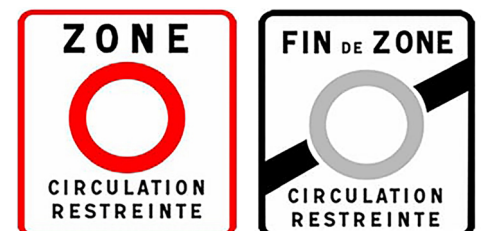
## Road signs

The shape and colour of French road signs can give you a good idea of what to expect, and many of the road signs will be either self-explanatory or will look very much like those we are all used to.

Triangular signs which have a red border and a white background are warnings – and the symbol shown in the centre will give the reason. Yellow triangular signs with a red border are temporary warnings, so these may alert of situations that are not long-term, such as flood.

Circular signs may have a white border and a blue background, or a red border and a white background – these are regulatory signs that inform you of the laws and obligations governing that section of road – for example, showing no left turn, no overtaking or weight restrictions.

Square signs which normally have a white border, and a blue background give information such as parking, bus stop, or other area relevant details.



This one indicates the start and the end of a restricted zone, in which the Crit'Air Vignette sticker needs to be displayed to prevent a fine being applied.

# Preparation for a road trip to France

As in the UK, signs giving road details are colour-coded and so blue signs indicate motorway, green signs main A-roads and yellow signs are showing a temporary route such as a detour and white signs show the local road information.

If you see the wording '**Cédez le passage**' on a road sign, this means you need to give way. The phrase '**allumez vos feux**' is another important phrase to look out for as this is instructing you to turn on your lights. You will be entering an area where driving lights are mandatory at all times of the day. When you see the sign '**fin d'allumage des feux**' this marks the end of the mandatory lights zone. This information will be displayed on a blue circle with a white edge.

Other important words on the road are '**Gauche**' = Left and '**Droite**' = Right.

'**Route barre**' indicates that the road is closed, and '**chaussée déformée**' that the road is in bad condition.

'**Toutes Directions**' seen on road signs indicates all directions. The word '**Rappel**' under a speed limit sign is simply to remind you that you're still in that speed area.

Traffic lights are much the same as in the UK except you may see a flashing amber light. This indicates caution, slow down or proceed but give way to vehicles coming from the right, and a flashing red light indicates no entry. It may also indicate a level crossing or exit used by emergency vehicles.

If a red light is accompanied by a yellow arrow, you may proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow, provided you give way to vehicles travelling in that direction, as well as to pedestrians.

Children below the age of 10 are not allowed to travel in the front seats of vehicles without using a special child restraint. There are exceptions if there is

## TABLE OF SPEED LIMITS

SPEED	MOTORWAY	DUAL CARRIAGEWAY	MAIN ROADS	BUILT UP AREAS
Normal conditions	130km/h	110km/h	80km/h	50km/h
Rain or snow	110km/h	100km/h	70km/h	50km/h
Low visibility less than 50M	50km/h	50km/h	50km/h	50km/h

no rear seat, or if the rear seat is already occupied with children under 10 or there are no seat belts. The French police are authorised to impose and collect on the spot fines of up to €750 from drivers who violate traffic regulations, and in some cases, the vehicle can also be confiscated.

## Alcohol limit in France

The maximum legal level of alcohol in the blood for drivers of private vehicles in France is lower than the 0.08% blood alcohol content in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It's 0.05%, which is the same as Scotland.

The police do have the power to carry out random breath tests, and no reason needs to be given. The test is also compulsory after an accident that has caused injury or if a serious motoring

offence has been committed. If you are a new driver (three years of under) the drink drive limit is 0.02%.

## Fuel

When you go to refill at a French fuel station you will see Sans Plomb 95 and Sans Plomb 98 – the standard and higher rated octane petrol. SP95-E10 (Sans Plomb 95 Octane + 10% Ethanol) is widely available, and like our E10 Unleaded is not suitable for older vehicles.

Diesel is marked Gazole – there is also diesel fuel which contains 8% biodiesel. This 'B8' isn't suitable for use in all cars, and you should check with your vehicle manufacturer before using it.

## If you breakdown

The majority of French motorways are managed privately, and, on these roads, it is against the law to call for your own assistance company to aid you if you are in trouble. If you do breakdown on a motorway or main road, you should look for the orange emergency telephones which are situated every 2km. You should call the police or an official breakdown service using these phone.

If there is not an orange telephone available, you can dial 112 on your own phone to contact the emergency services, who should then be able to assist you.



**If you need driving glasses you must carry a spare pair in the vehicle, just in case there is a problem with those you are wearing.**

**The Eurotunnel LeShuttle opened in 1994 and is still a popular choice to cross the English Channel into France due to its 35 minute travel time.**

