

Driving Abroad
Report



Every year around two million British motorists take to their cars for driving trips to neighbouring European Union (EU) countries. Now experts are predicting a boom in driving abroad, as people take to driving in a bid to reduce their air travel carbon footprints and avoid the mounting problems associated with air travel.

This emerging trend also means that breakdown cover has never been more important. However RAC research has shown that many drivers don't check their breakdown cover before travelling and, unknowingly, do not enjoy the same level of cover when they're driving abroad and may need it most.

This guide provides comprehensive advice about what type of cover you need when driving abroad, why you need it and what you need to do in the event of an accident or breakdown. It also highlights differences in rules and regulations in the countries Britons drive most frequently. RAC's aim is to help provide British motorists with all the information they need for a trouble-free trip while driving abroad.



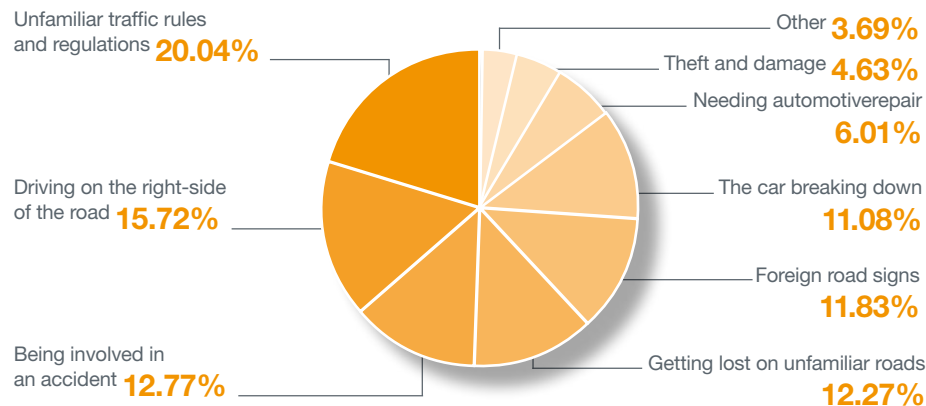
Attitudes to driving abroad

Research by RAC has found that 76% of British motorists feel nervous about driving abroad and it's easy to understand why. Brits driving in the EU not only have to contend with unfamiliar rules and regulations, language and cultural barriers, they also face the challenge of driving on the opposite side of the road and adapting their driving behaviour accordingly.

Their main concerns include driving on the other side of the road, unfamiliar traffic rules and regulations and being involved in an accident.

The research also reveals that 21% of British motorists have driven on the wrong side of the road while driving in the EU and 33% of British motorists admit that they usually look the wrong way when approaching a junction on the continent.

British motorists are afraid of driving in some countries more than others, with Italy topping the list, followed by Spain and Poland. Foreign motorists whose driving skills they most rate are Sweden, Norway and Switzerland.



Getting the right cover

Research from RAC reveals that every year hundreds of thousands of British motorists who drive abroad fail to check their breakdown cover to ensure that it extends to driving in the EU.



It's important for people planning to drive abroad to understand that while they may enjoy fully comprehensive breakdown cover in the UK, their cover abroad may be restricted to the minimum required for that country. This means that unless they contact their breakdown service provider to upgrade prior to their trip, drivers may be left stranded in the event of a breakdown.

For greater protection and peace of mind, RAC offers European Breakdown Protection cover which includes:

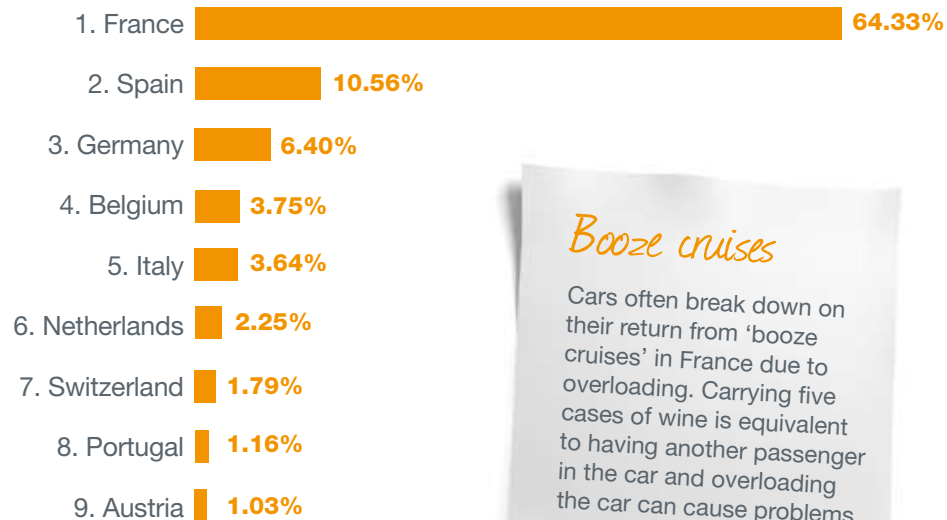
- Arranging for cars to be fixed at the roadside or towed to the nearest garage in 47 European countries (except on continental motorways)
- English-speaking Incident Managers available 24-hours a day
- Arranging for the driver and up to seven passengers and your vehicle to be repatriated to the UK if needed
- An extensive network of local service providers across Europe to get you back on the road as fast as possible

Did you know?

In most EU countries it's compulsory to carry a warning triangle in the car, and in Germany it's also compulsory to carry a first aid kit

The cost of breakdowns abroad

The countries you are most likely to breakdown in according to RAC data:



Booze cruises

Cars often break down on their return from 'booze cruises' in France due to overloading. Carrying five cases of wine is equivalent to having another passenger in the car and overloading the car can cause problems such as damage to the suspension, the clutch burning out and punctures or uneven wear on tyres.

Advice on driving abroad

The following is an overview of some of the biggest differences British motorists are likely to encounter in the five most popular countries.

France

- In built-up areas the rule is to give priority to traffic coming from the right (la priorité à droite), unless a yellow diamond indicates you have priority
- Most motorways operate a toll system, so make sure you keep Euros handy at all times
- Headlamp converters are compulsory for British cars
- From October 2008 it will be compulsory to carry a warning triangle and reflective jacket in all vehicles

Did you know?

In Switzerland pedestrians normally have the right of way and will expect your vehicle to stop for them

Germany

- On the spot fines can be issued for most driving offences, even running out of fuel on the autobahn
- It is obligatory to report all incidents to the police at the time it occurs, even a minor bump

Italy

- Horns are widely used to warn other vehicles of your approach, although they are officially banned in built-up areas

Spain

- The law on using indicators on motorways is strictly enforced and you will risk being fined for not indicating before overtaking
- If you wear glasses you must carry a spare pair in the car when driving
- It is compulsory to carry a spare set of lamp bulbs for your car in Spain

Belgium

- It is highly recommended to carry a fire extinguisher in the car, as it is compulsory for Belgian cars

Accidents & Recoveries

Every year tens of thousands of British motorists breakdown and require roadside assistance whilst driving in Europe, and two thirds (64%) of breakdowns requiring roadside assistance occur in France, according to RAC.

Being involved in an accident and the fear of being stranded at the roadside are two big concerns for motorists driving abroad. In fact, RAC research shows that motorists are more afraid of the car breaking down than getting lost or suffering theft and damage to their vehicles. The research revealed that 48% of drivers would not know how to get help if their vehicle were to break down abroad.

The more prepared you are, the better equipped you will be to handle the situation. Here are few simple steps to follow in the event of a breakdown or accident.



My car has been involved in an accident

Obtain the other driver's full details together with the names and contact details of any witnesses. Complete the European Accident Statement (constat amiable).



Important document: the European Accident Statement
It's highly recommended to obtain a copy of the European Accident Statement (EAS), the English translation of the constat amiable which is a legal document and widely used across continental Europe in the event of an accident – your insurer can provide you with a copy. It is designed to enable drivers involved in an accident to exchange facts while events are fresh in mind, helping to settle claims quickly. One copy should be retained by yourself and one by the other driver. If you are not happy that the completed EAS accurately reflects the circumstances of the accident, do not sign it as it can be legally binding!



Call the police - it is the law in most countries that the police must attend any accident involving a foreign vehicle



Call your insurer - immediately to report the incident and make sure you have all the necessary details of the claim to hand

I am able to drive my vehicle ✓

✗ **I do not have** comprehensive insurance
The police will arrange for you to be taken to a local garage, where you will have to make your own arrangements for repair

✗ **I'm unable to drive my vehicle** ✗

I have comprehensive insurance
Your insurer will dispatch a rescue recovery patrolman who will take your car to a local garage for repair ✓

You will need to make arrangements for your car to be repaired, negotiate the costs and sort out your onward journey

If repairs to your vehicle cannot be completed during your trip you will be given use of a hire car, overnight accommodation and/or onward travel

If your car cannot be repaired in time for your return home some insurers will pay for the repatriation of your vehicle, so check your policy

If your vehicle can be driven and it is acceptable to wait until your return to the UK to have your car repaired.

Driving abroad checklist

There are a number of things you can do before you plan to drive abroad to ensure that you're prepared for any eventuality. Here are some top tips to ensure you set off safely and legally for a trouble-free journey.

Driving abroad - before you go

- Familiarise yourself with the driving laws of the country you are visiting - including local speed limits and which side of the road they drive on!
- Check with your insurance company that you're fully covered to drive abroad including breakdown recovery and any medical expenses resulting from an accident
- Check whether you need a Green Card for the country you're visiting - this provides minimum insurance
- Check whether you need an International Driving Permit
- Service your vehicle before leaving the UK
- Check you can comply with the vehicle requirements of the countries you'll visit

- Your UK motor insurance certificate, Green Card (if issued)
- Breakdown policy and contact numbers
- Travel insurance documents
- Emergency helpline numbers

Whilst you're away:

- Drive defensively 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 on long journeys
- Always wear a seat belt and make sure other passengers do too
- Don't drink and drive - the alcohol limit may be lower than in the UK and in some countries there is zero tolerance for drink driving
- Don't use your mobile whilst driving
- Don't overload your vehicle and ensure you can see out of the back window
- If you're involved in an accident, contact your insurer immediately and take photographs of damage to your vehicle

Don't go without taking:

- A spare set of car keys
- Fire extinguisher, first aid kit, tool kit, spare bulbs
- A warning triangle
- Your registration document, driving licence and passport- check if you'll need an International Driving Permit

Driving your own car

- You should have a GB sticker clearly visible on the back of your car if your number plate doesn't include this information. You'll also need headlamp converters if you're driving on the right-hand side of the road.

- Always wear a helmet and protective clothing, whether you're the driver or a passenger
- Ensure your insurance includes third party cover

Bus and Coaches

- If you have concerns over the safety of the vehicle don't get on and inform the tour rep or organiser. You should always wear a seatbelt if one is available and avoid travelling in overcrowded vehicles.

Source: www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Hiring a vehicle

- Hire from a reputable company - the cheapest deal may not always be the best!
- Insurance cover is often limited to the legal minimum of the country or state you hire in. You could be held personally responsible for any claim for injury or damage over this limit
- Ask your tour operator or insurer if they can provide top-up insurance to increase your cover. This may be cheaper than buying it abroad

Motorbikes

- Make sure your travel insurance covers you before you decide to drive or be a passenger on a motorbike - check the exclusions carefully
- Travelling by motorcycle, scooter or moped is significantly more dangerous than by car - if you're not accustomed to riding a motorcycle you should not attempt to ride one for the first time abroad on unfamiliar roads
- If you do decide to hire a motorcycle or scooter, make sure you use a reputable hire company - check that they are licensed to hire bikes to tourists

Drinking and driving

In Great Britain a driver's level of alcohol in the blood can be a maximum of 0.08 per cent. Whereas in countries such as Spain, France and Finland a driver is penalised if their level is 0.05 per cent or more and in Sweden it's as low as 0.02 per cent.

Helpful websites

www.gettingaroundgermany.home.att.net

www.rac.co.uk

www.autoroutes.fr

www.autostrade.it

www.autopistas.com

The RAC are not responsible for the content of external websites



About RAC

With around seven million members, RAC is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organizations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's roadside assistance, windscreen repair and replacement, learning to drive, vehicle inspections and checks, legal and financial services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information - RAC is able to meet motorists' needs. RAC incorporates BSM, RAC Auto Windscreens, RAC Direct Insurance and HPI.

RAC is committed to providing the very highest levels of service to its members and has been ranked first for customer service by J.D. Power and Associates' UK Roadside Assistance Study for the past two years.

Aviva bought RAC in May 2005. The acquisition brings together RAC's powerful brand and customer base with the expertise and leading position in motor insurance of Norwich Union Insurance (part of Aviva). Norwich Union is the UK's largest insurer, insuring one in seven motor vehicles and with a market share of around 15 per cent.

RAC's news releases and a selection of images are available from the internet press centre at www.racnews.co.uk



This information is correct at time of going to press and you should check with the FOC before setting off (www.fco.gov.uk/travel)