Driving in Europe post-Brexit...

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Awaiting a ferry from Dover to Calais; whatever vehicle you intend to take, the rules have now changed... Photo copyright Kim Henson.

Dave Moss is your guide to what's now required when driving on the other side of the Channel...

Britain's departure from the EU has prompted a flurry of information and advice from the Department for Transport, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the DVLA on rule changes affecting Britons driving in Europe from January 1st 2021.

Here we round up some important changes affecting British drivers and vehicles intending to use European roads in coming months, with links to more detailed information if required.

The information below applies to private cars and their drivers. If you need to drive a bus, coach, or commercial vehicle in Europe after January 1st, specific guidance relating to the requirements for these vehicle classes can be found on these links:

lorry and goods vehicle drivers bus and coach drivers

Driving licences

In general, when driving in Europe from January 1st onwards, as a minimum you will need to carry your UK driving licence with you. However European nations are introducing their own rules on the continued validity of British driving licences. More information on specific requirements as of January 1st is below, but drivers not intending to depart for Europe until some time later in 2021 are advised to check the exact situation for both transit and destination countries well before their intended departure date.

International driving permits

If you have a plastic card-type driving licence, you will not need an international driving permit (IDP) to drive in the EU, Switzerland, Liechtenstein or Iceland. However if you still have a paper licence, or a licence issued in Gibraltar, Guernsey, Jersey, or the Isle of Man, it is possible you might need an IDP to drive in some EU countries and in Norway If you are a visitor to Ireland, you will not need an IDP to drive there as long as you have a UK licence.

More details on IDP requirements are here: Check if you need an IDP.

International driving permits can be obtained over the counter at most Post Offices. They currently cost £5.50, and can be issued to residents of Great Britain and Northern Ireland who are over 18, and already hold a full UK driving licence.

More details on obtaining an IDP at a Post Office are here:

get an IDP over the counter at the Post Office.

Driving licence exchange

If you live and drive in any EU country, or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, you will need to exchange your UK driving licence for a local one. The arrangements, requirements to take a local driving test, and time limits allowed for these procedures differ greatly between countries. The DfT and DVLA are urging UK licence holders living in European countries to check the situation as soon as possible to ensure that a licence valid in the country in which you reside is always held.

Vehicle, caravan and trailer insurance

A ‘green card’ can be issued by vehicle insurance providers to prove that motor insurance cover is held when driving abroad. The official Government recommendation is to carry a green card for any vehicle you’re driving in the EU (including Ireland), and Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Serbia and Andorra.

If you have fleet or multi-vehicle insurance, it may be necessary to obtain multiple green cards – so that the one carried identifies and covers the individual vehicle being driven.

If you are towing any type of trailer, be aware that separate trailer insurance is required in some countries, where you will need two green cards, one for the towing vehicle, and one for the trailer. Check the exact situation in the country/countries you intend to visit before leaving the UK.

If your vehicle insurance policy is due for renewal during a trip abroad – even if it is renewed automatically – this means you will have two policies covering the duration of your trip, and that necessitates two green cards – one associated with each policy.

A physical, printed copy of the relevant green card must be carried when driving abroad. Electronic versions are not acceptable. If you need to request a physical copy of a green card, contact your vehicle insurance provider at least 6 weeks before travelling. If these documents are made available online by your insurer, green cards can be downloaded and printed at home. They no longer need to be printed on green paper.

Green cards must be shown if you are involved in an accident aboard. They may also be required at police checks, and at the border when entering or moving between EU/EEA countries. Whether a green card needs to be produced depends on the border authorities of each country.

There is more advice about the insurance requirements for driving aboard here:

vehicle insurance.

Vehicle registration documents

If you're taking your vehicle to the EU for less than 12 months, the advice is to carry one of the following documents:

- The vehicle's V5C form, sometimes known as the vehicle log book
- If the vehicle is not owned by you – a company car or short term hire vehicle perhaps – a form VE103 should be carried, which confirms that you're allowed to use a hired or leased vehicle abroad.

Trailer registration

It is necessary to register some commercial and non-commercial trailers before towing them to or through most EU and EEA countries.

Find out more here: trailer registration.

GB stickers and number plates

To drive in Europe, you must display a “GB” sticker clearly on the rear of your vehicle if your number plate has any of the following:

- a Euro symbol;
- a national flag of England, Scotland or Wales;
- numbers and letters only, with no flag or identifier.

If you’re driving in Spain, Cyprus or Malta, you must display a GB sticker no matter what is on your number plate.

You do not need a GB sticker if your number plate carries the GB identifier on its own or with the Union flag.

You do not need to display a GB sticker to drive in Ireland.

More about the ins and outs of GB sticker requirements can be found here: GB sticker