

## Taking to the Road: Driving in a Foreign Country

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Having recently been on three separate road trips, covering seven different foreign countries, it's certainly been a learning curve for us. Up until this year, we'd very much been the type of people to head somewhere on a plane. We might, or might not, hire a rental car, so we certainly had experience of driving in another country, but nowhere near as much as we've had this year!

Taking your own car with you means that you do need to do a lot more checks than if you're picking up a rental car. Having said that, it's still a good idea to know what should be in a car for you to drive legally in the country you're visiting, so that you can check that your rental vehicle does have everything it should.

Early on in our research for our various visits to continental Europe, we discovered that a variety of things were required in our car, which we didn't generally need to carry at home. These included high visibility jackets that actually have to be within reach of the people in the car, so it's no good putting them in the trunk of your car. Ours were prominent in our seatbacks, so they could easily be seen. A first aid kit, fire extinguisher, and spare set of bulbs were amongst the other items we had to purchase for our excursions abroad.

There were also some other interesting rules that we learned about, including the requirement to carry a second pair of glasses, if you wear prescription glasses, while driving in both France and Spain. As I'm short sighted, that was something useful for me to know, although I do tend to drive in my contact lenses, with a spare pair of glasses for back-up.

We also had to put light diverters on our headlights, as we would be driving on the different side of the road in continental Europe. Sadly, very few other countries, apart from the UK, seem to realize that the correct side of the road to drive on is of course the left-hand side, with many others, including America, opting for the right side. If you will be driving on a different side of the road to the one you're used to, that's something else that takes some getting used to!

Something else you need to think about if taking your own car abroad is whether you need to carry your documents with you. In the UK, it's not obligatory to carry registration or insurance documents with you, as you have a few days grace to present them at a police station if the

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worst happens and you are involved in an accident. In many other countries however, you are expected to carry them with you. It's also a good idea to contact your insurance company to tell them that you're planning to go to another country, as you may need additional insurance to do this. We had to pay a little extra for foreign coverage, but it was well worth it for the peace of mind it gave us.

Before heading to another country, it's also worth learning a bit about road signs, as they may differ from what you're used to at home. They may even be in a different language. We've encountered signs in French, German, Spanish, Dutch, and Flemish during our travels, but fortunately have been able to just about understand most of them. However, this was the main reason that we didn't even contemplate renting a car when we went to Japan, as our trusty guidebooks told us that most of the signs were in Japanese characters and so it proved to be. Not something I want to try and fathom out!

Of course, speed limits can differ from one country to another. At least both America and the UK both use miles per hour to define their speed limits. No such luck in the rest of Europe, which is measured in kilometres per hour. Thank goodness our car at least had the readings for speed in both miles and kilometres, as that made things a lot easier for us!

There are other cultural differences, with some countries allowing certain turns on red. Whatever you do, don't try this in the UK, as any turn on a red traffic signal is against the law! Equally in Europe, you'll find roundabouts everywhere, whereas they're nowhere near as common in the States.

If you're intending to drive in another country, it's worth checking if you need an international driving license. For us to drive in Europe or the States, we only have to show our British driving licenses, but venture further afield and that may be a consideration.

It's also worth doing some reading up about the roads in the country you're visiting. It may sound like a silly thing to say, but what's the driving actually like there? If you go to Germany, there's no speed limit on the autobahns (freeways) and it's not unusual to see cars streaking down the outside lane, driving well in excess of 100 miles an hour. That can be a frightening prospect if you're not prepared.

Equally, you might not want to try tussling with Parisian drivers in the rush hour. We've seen how they drive on our many visits to the city and there's no way we'd want to do that. Equally, having seen the way they park in Italy, often making it almost impossible for people to get out of

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spaces, that's not necessarily somewhere I'd be keen to have a car either!

Something that will be invaluable to any driving you do in another country is a satellite navigation system. We're lucky enough to have one that works throughout the world and that's saved us a lot of money, as rental car companies do tend to charge through the roof for the privilege of a navigational device in your rental car. It's something worth bearing in mind and, if you plan on doing a lot of traveling abroad, it can be well worth investing in a system that will guide you wherever you go.

Road tripping in another country can be a huge amount of fun and one of the beauties is that you can carry whatever you like with you. No more luggage fees on flights to worry about! It does just take a little bit more preparation before you head out from home to ensure that you're fully prepared for your adventure.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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