

Driving in France – Things to remember

Text in square brackets [] are French words you will see or explanations of the French.



Bonne route !



Drive Safely!

Drive on the right hand side of the road.

(get your co-pilot, navigator or back seat driver to remind you - REGULARLY)











Take extra care when turning left (especially) and right also when starting off from parking.

Drive anti clockwise round roundabouts.

Roads signs

Generally follow the EU convention ...

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road/publications/trafficrules/reports/signs_signals/signs_signals_france_en.pdf

Warning	Prohibition Do NOT	Mandatory MUST do	Help	Tourist
				
				

Cédez le passage**Give way**

[Cédez is the same root as concede / yield]

**Stop****Stop****Sortie****Motorway Junction**

[literally 'going out' - exit]



There is no difference between a 'T-junction' and a 'Cross-Roads' sign they are both junctions.

You won't see a T junction sign in France.



There are 2 type of junction sign:-

one (in the form of a crucifix cross '+') shows you have priority - the vertical bar is thicker than the horizontal bar ...



the other (in the form of an 'X') shows all routes have equal priority and the two diagonal bars are of equal width ...



**It really means
'Priority on the right'.**
(see also 'priorité à droite' below)



No Entry - just like Britain



No Vehicles

Traffic lights

Flashing amber traffic lights means - proceed with caution [prudence]. You will often get a flashing amber light instead of a green light at road works or on junction overnight.

There is no amber phase on traffic lights going from Red to Green.

The traffic light (there is normally only one) is just near where you stop, there is normally no light on the far side of the junction that applies to you, unlike in Britain, where you may have 4. If you are close to the pole look for the miniature light at windscreen height, this is not for bikes or pedestrians it is for you.

A flashing filter (normally in white or orange) means you may proceed but you do not have the priority or a clear right, be careful.

There is no pedestrian only phase on traffic lights on France this means that when turning right or left at traffic lights the pedestrian light you

cross after turning may be green, pedestrians have priority, proceed with caution [prudence]. You need to look at the pedestrian indicators as well as you own.

Paris

Driving in Paris is no different to any other large city (London) the Parisian motorist expects you to know where you are going and is less tolerant of drivers who hesitate. They are not afraid to use their horns or other forms of gesticulation, ignore them and do not rise to the bait.

There tends to be a distinct lack of lane markings at major intersection within Paris (this allows as many cars to cram into a small a space as possible, at high speed and give a multitude of routes in and out) keep your cool. Classic sites are Etoile (Place Charles de Gaulle), Nation and Bastille.

If you need to change lanes in Paris (as all French motorist do constantly; signal and manoeuvre, the cars behind you will not be content if you dither and the cars into the lane to which you are changing won't either. They will let you in but you need to be quick and smart and move cleanly.

The 'Boulevard Périphérique' BP or 'Periph' ...

Boulevard Périphérique is a ring road ([French: périphérique](#)) around [Paris](#). It is a frequently congested stretch of 8-lane [dual carriageway](#), and is one of the busiest freeway/motorways in Europe, with traffic between 1.1 and 1.2 million vehicles per day in 2002.

Travelling speed on the road is limited to 80 km/h (50 mph). It does not feature a [hard shoulder](#), and gives priority to entering vehicles. It was built in the early 1970s on the empty space left abandoned after the destruction of the defense wall of Paris in the 1920s, and completed on [April 25, 1973](#). It is the generally-accepted boundary between the city proper (approx. 2 million inhabitants) and the suburbs (more than 9 million inhabitants), as it is situated along Paris's administrative limit (excluding the Paris heliport and the outlying woods of [Boulogne](#) and [Vincennes](#)).

Is a motorway standard ring road around the centre of Paris. Lead-ins and lead-outs may be short, junctions (sortie) may be close, very close to one another. Sortie have names on the BP called Portes [gates/doors], porte is often shortened to Pte or just P so Pte d'Italie is the Porte d'Italie (this is the porte you need to get to us, it leads you on to the motorway [autoroute] A6 (A6a or A6b) which goes to the Mediterranean, follow signs to Lyon from Paris). Using names as opposed to numbers is not a good idea, it give you no help to indicate direction, you need to learn the names of the exits you want and those adjacent.

The BP may have a varying number of lanes from 2 up to 8 in places, the right hand lane may abruptly divert away from the BP and you end up

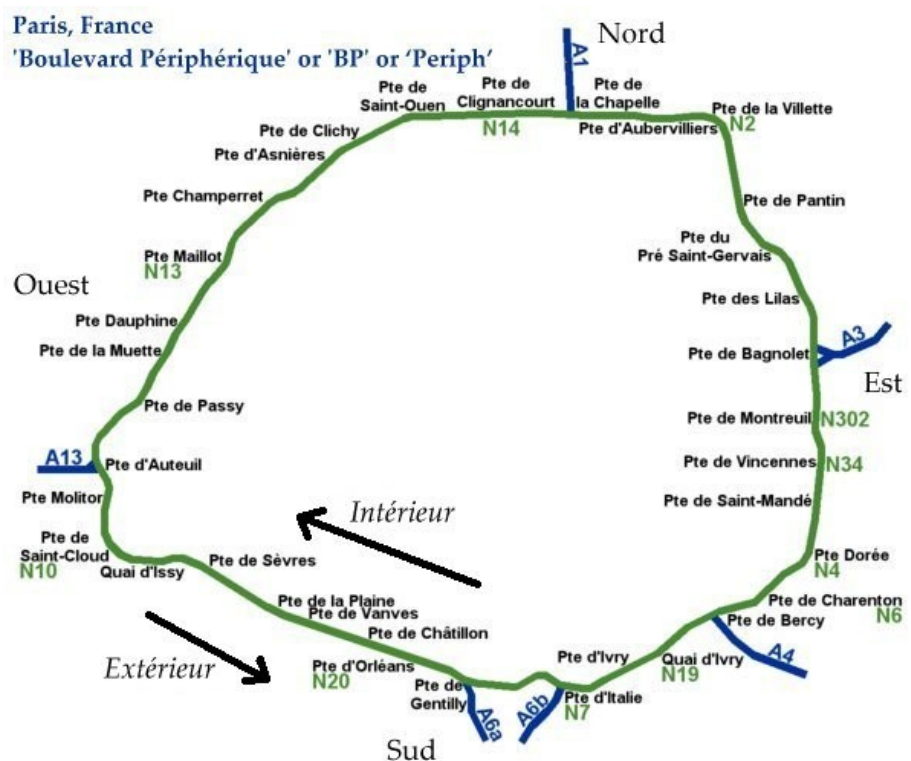
somewhere where you did not want too. Keep to the 2nd lane over is a good choice, but don't miss the sortie / porte you want. Looking for the A6a or A6b to get to us is a good example.

There is also an **unofficial unmarked** lane on the BP and all autoroutes entering or leaving Paris this is the lane between the far left lane (fast lane) and the next one to the right. Motorists in the far left lane keep hard to the left and motorists in the next lane over keep hard to the right. This leaves plenty of space for the plethora of high speed motorbikes who **'own'** this invisible lane. Do not try to delay them, neither they nor you nor your insurance company will appreciate it.

Leaving Paris on the autoroute it is not unknown for the police to encourage you to speed up even in excess of the speed limit (80kph / 50mph) to clear cars from the city centre, do as they indicate, put your foot down.

Signs over the BP will give times to the next or other sortie e.g. BP – Pte Vincennes - 17m – means it's 17 minutes to the Porte de Vincennes. Other terms you will see on these illuminated signs are:-
 'Fluide' – everything is flowing (this of course does not help much when you are actually stationary and observing the sign).
 'Bouchon' – Traffic Jam/Tail back [literally cork, as cork in a bottle]. Not much you can do about it if you don't know your way around.

BP is also divided into 'Interior' (the carriageway nearest the centre of Paris – Clockwise in M25 terms) and 'Exterior' (the carriageway nearest the suburbs – anti clockwise in M25 terms). Further more the BP is divided in quarters North, South, East and West. As you approach the BP from another road the road will split Est [East] or Ouest [West] (a bit like Westbound and Eastbound on the tube). You will need to know in advance which way you want. In the case of coming from Lille/Calais to ours you will need 'Est' and from us back to Lille/Calais you will also need 'Est'.



Priorité à droite (Traffic on the right has priority)...

A good and useful convention which has British drivers terrified. Some junctions have neither a Stop nor a Cedez (Give Way) signs, the convention at these is everyone proceed with caution [prudence] and give way to traffic coming from the right. This used to be the convention at roundabouts but has changed, there is normally a Cedez sign as you



approach a roundabout and a reminder to the French driver that they do not have priority (Vous n'avez pas la priorite – you do not have the right (of passage)). This is quite easy and sensible, the problem comes mostly in towns and villages when you think (assume) you have the priority (your road looks bigger). Side roads coming on to yours may have the right of way, the only clue is that you may have passed a crossroads sign 'X' type and

that there are no road markings (white lines) either solid or dashed where the side road joins yours, **you have to look ahead for this but they are all too easily obscured by other vehicles parked near or even on the corner of the junction.** This is all designed to keep traffic speed low in towns and villages and avoid queues on minor roads. It does however lead to knocks and dents and lots of near misses. (The French driver is not as proud of their car as the British or Italian and a few minor dents and scratches are no big deal). Don't bring your Lotus or your spit screen Morris Minor.

Rural roads ...

Verges ...

Verges tend to be wide flat and solid, no culverts (Norfolk Grups or hidden water cuts or drains). They are generally safe to drive on and use. Do not be surprised when driving down a country road to see the car approaching you keep to the centre of the road, not slow down, then take sudden evasive action a few metres from you before you safely pass each other.

Signage ...

The perhaps most confusing aspect of driving in France is the way the signs point on lesser roads, usually D (Departmental) or C (Communal) class roads. The signs are in the form of a single name on a pointed arm (black on white, see below) and do not necessarily point directly down (parallel to) the road concerned but tend to point vaguely to the middle of that road. They appear to be angled at 45° to the junction. It's OK when you get used to it but you can still easily get it wrong, so check the road you are on as soon as possible.

Signs also appear at multiple points on a junction they are not like a British country finger post which has all its arms on one post, the French version is likely to have many posts some even behind you that you cannot then read. The good bit is they are normally quite large and light up at night.

When you are really in the country there may be no finger posts at all but junctions are indicated by a white bollard with a red reflective band near the top, very useful in the dark for that odd country lane.



Top
Typical road sign. Highway number indicator on top. In this case **Autres Directions** means all traffic should proceed in this direction.



Right
Toutes direction means the same, all go this way - but

Speeding ...

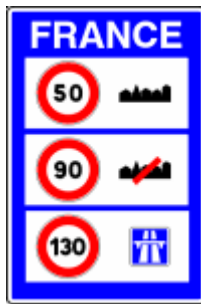
The village sign in France is also a 50kph speed restriction indication. Many villages now have 30 zone in the village centre.



You are expected to be down to 50 as you pass the sign there is NO tolerance. Very polite French policemen in a car, van or motor-bike [moto] will take 100€ of your by cash, cheque or bank card [carte bancaire / carte bleu]. They will take your licence details and you'll probably get 2 points.

Speed conversions ...

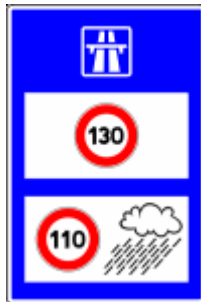
<u>kph</u>	<u>mph</u> (approx)	<u>mph</u> (exact)
130	80	80.78
110	70	68.35
90	55	55.92
80	50	49.71
50	30	31.07
30	20	18.64



Motorway : **130 kmh**, (80 mph)
if raining **110 kmh** (70 mph)

Dual carriageway : **110 kmh**, (70 mph)
if raining **100 kmh** (60 mph)

Open road : **90 kmh**, (55 mph)
if raining **80 kmh** (50 mph)

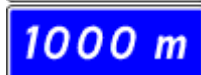


Town : **50 kmh** (30 mph)

Motorways [Autoroute] ...

These have the designation **A** for Autoroute in France and some also show the **E** European Highway designation as well (you don't see this in Britain). Autoroute signs like Motorways in Britain have blue background and white lettering.

Generally easy driving and well signed. Tolls [péage] are common.



There are 2 type of péage ...[pay-arge].

Fixed fee – you just stop and pay a fixed fee, normally a small amount.

Distance related – at the first peage you just collect a ticket from a machine and at the next péage or when you leave the autoroute you pay. Distances can be very long and the fee may seem high.

Typically on the A1 from Lille to Paris it's about 20€ and from Paris to Nevers on the A6 / A77 about 8€


(Oct 2007 prices). RN / N roads in France can be slow.

There are 3 methods of payment:-

Cash, cheque or card to a person in a booth.
follow the **X** green cross lane

Card (carte bancaire / carte bleu / CB) to a machine.
follow the **CB** (blue or white) lane

telepéage – pre pay or subscription automatic if you have subscribed.
follow the orange **t**

Réservé in this case means 'reserved for' or 'only'  or **CB**



Autoroutes are generously allocated with 'Aire' a resting place, they normally have a toilet, picnic area and some have a fitness circuit. All Aires have a name and this is on the Autoroute maps. An Aire may also be a 'Service Aire / Aire de service' in which case fuel, food and hotels may be available.



Emergency telephone are an orange box and are signed thus

Motorways merging or splitting do not have a sortie number and are signed thus



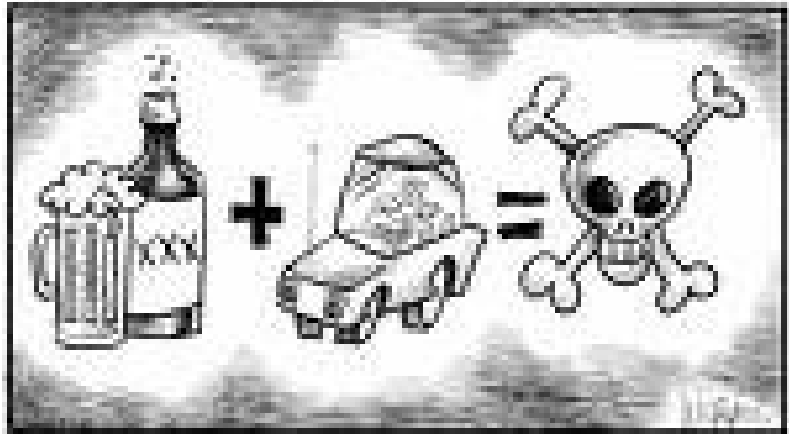
Trunk roads like in Britain are signed 'White on Green', other roads like Britain are signed 'Black on White'. The road your are on will have its designation shown white on red or black on yellow at the top of the sign

Driving in France.

Having said all this **driving in France is a pleasure**, there is not a lot of traffic on roads generally, cities being the exception. The French motorist is very much aware of what's going on around them and not just what's happening up front. They will and do nip in and out whereas a British motorist may well hang back.

There are of course exceptions, the Sunday driver, the late, the drunk !

Drive Safely!
Bonne route !



(fin)