



## Automobile and Driving Information

**DISCLAIMER:** The information below relating to French legal requirements is provided for general information only and may not be totally accurate in a particular case. Questions involving interpretations of specific provisions or application to a specific case should be addressed to French government officials at your local *préfecture*. The Embassy will not intervene with French Authorities on behalf of American citizens seeking to obtain a French driver's license or exchange a U.S. driver's license.

If you are a temporary visitor to France (less than 90 days,) you may drive with a valid U.S. driver's license. In addition to having your U.S. driver's license, visitors are strongly advised to carry an International Driving permit, or attach a French translation to their U.S. driver's license.

If you are a resident of France (holder of a *carte de séjour* or *carte de residence*,) you may drive in France with a valid U.S. driver's license for a **one-year recognition period**, beginning on the date of validity of the first *carte de séjour*. After this one year period you may no longer drive with a U.S. license and must pass both the French written and road examinations. (**Exceptions:** persons with a U.S. license issued by one of the 14 states with reciprocity agreements (see below) and students who are allowed to use their driver's license for the duration of their studies **may** in most cases exchange their licenses. **However, you must refer to the *préfecture* or *sous-préfecture* in your area for instructions and regulations since each case is specific.**)

In addition to having your U.S. driver's license, residents are also required to attach a French translation done by a sworn translator (*traducteur expert-juré*) or an International Driver's license. **Students** are allowed to use their drivers' licenses for the duration of their studies.

### **Exchange procedure:**

You **may** exchange your U.S. license from the 14 states below during your first year of legal residence in France (from the first date of validity of your first French residence card to one year after the issuance date). **Persons with valid U.S. driver's licenses, issued prior to their first entry into France as a resident, from the states of Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Virginia, may** 'exchange' their state licenses for French permits. This is because these 14 states offer a reciprocal privilege of exchange for French citizens holding French permits in the United

States. **We strongly encourage you to begin the exchange process as soon as possible after receiving your French residence permit *carte de séjour* or *carte de resident*.** If you do not exchange the U.S. license within the specific time limit you will be required to take both the French written and road examinations

### **Obtaining a French Driver's License:**

Please note that in most cases you will relinquish your U.S. driver's license when you choose the option of exchanging it for a French license. If you cannot prove that you have held a U.S. driver's license for at least three years, you will be issued a probationary permit to drive in France (*permis probatoire*). If you would like to keep your U.S. license you will have to pass both the written and road tests in France. A French license may be exchanged for a U.S. license if the original U.S. license was obtained in one of the 14 states mentioned below.

If you have a driver's license from one of these 14 states: **Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Virginia** you may apply for the French driver's license (*permis de conduire*) in your city of residence at least three months before the expiration of your first year of residency to allow sufficient time for the required formalities. Go to the Prefecture de Police to make the application for the exchange. If residing in Paris, apply in person at the Prefecture de Police (ground floor,) 7 Boulevard du Palais, 75004 Paris - Métro: Cité, Tel: 01-53-71-53-71 (ask for the *service des permis de conduire*.) Hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

All applicants for exchange must furnish the following documents (before the end of the first year of residence, **otherwise the driver is no longer insured and may not continue to drive in France**):

1. Form to request the driver's license (available at the Préfecture)
2. The U.S. Driver's license with sworn translation in French. (For married women, if maiden name or married name does not appear on the driver's license, a statement or official document showing both names is required.) Some *préfectures* may also require a "notarized translation" done in the form of a sworn affidavit. This may be made at the consular section of the Embassy by appointment only for a \$30 fee, or the euro equivalent; each additional seal provided at the same time in connection with the same transaction will cost \$20, or the euro equivalent. For information on notarial and authentication services at the U.S. Consulate in Paris please refer to: [http://france.usembassy.gov/usc\\_notarial.html](http://france.usembassy.gov/usc_notarial.html)
3. Proof of current address: Statement of domicile or electricity bill or rent receipt;
4. *Carte de sejour* with photocopy of both sides;
5. Two (2) French passport size photographs;

6. This service may be free of charge in certain areas. Please check with your local préfecture.

**If you do not have a driver's license from one of the 14 states with reciprocity agreements: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Virginia...**

If you do not have a driver's license from one of the 14 states with reciprocity agreements, you must take the written and driving portions of the French licensing examination before you have resided in France for one year. **If you continue to drive with your U.S. license after one year of French residency, then the driver is no longer insured.** Once the file is approved by the Prefecture, there is a one month required waiting period before the candidate is eligible to sit for the written test. Once the written test is passed, there is another required waiting period of two weeks before the candidate is permitted to take the driving test. Taking into account the waiting periods, the application process should be started well before the end of the first year of residence.

The French license that you will obtain is a restricted license (*permis probatoire*) based on 6 points, and valid for three years. A regular license has 12 points. Points may be deducted as a result of infractions of the French driving code during the three year probationary period. If all the points are subtracted during this time, then the license will be revoked. After the initial three-year period, in which you have maintained a good driving record, you will receive a regular license that has 12 points.

Although there is no required number of lesson hours, the driving exam must be completed with a dual command car. As a consequence, you will have to go through a driving school. Special sessions are organized for people who do not speak French well. In order to make the written test easier for non-French speakers, you may request to be assisted by a translator, who may be a friend or relative. If your level of French is good, you may also ask the prefecture if you can pass the **written portion** of the exam without going to a driving school. Ask about passing the test as a *candidat libre*.

### **Driving school**

The Embassy assumes no responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the listed persons or agencies. The firm below has at least one English-speaking instructor, although fluency may vary. For other English language speaking schools, please contact the prefecture de police.

**Fehrenbach Driving School**, 53 Blvd Henri-Sellier, 92150 Suresnes Tel: 01 45 06 31 17

## **Replacing Expired, Lost or Stolen U.S. Driver's Licenses:**

**The Embassy is not authorized to replace expired, lost and stolen U.S. driver's licenses. Only the Department of Motor Vehicles in the driver's home state can perform that service.**

If you had your driver's license stolen in France, report it immediately to the *commissariat* (*police station*) having jurisdiction over the area where the theft occurred. The *commissariat* will issue a *Recepissé de Déclaration de Perte ou de Vol de Pièces d'Identité* ("Acknowledgement of Declaration of Theft of Identity Documents".)

No report will be made for lost driver's licenses.

This *recepissé* will generally substitute for a driver's license for a few weeks, but replacements may only be obtained at the DMV in the state where the license was originally issued. The *recepissé* is good for this purpose only in France. If your state requires a sworn affidavit or a notarized application for a replacement license, the Embassy's American Citizen Services can notarize the application.

**Notarial and authentication services** are currently open in Paris by appointment only, except on [French and American holidays](#).

**For further information, please refer to the Embassy's website at:**  
[http://france.usembassy.gov/usc\\_notarial.html](http://france.usembassy.gov/usc_notarial.html). **Office hours are subject to change.**

## **International Driver's License:**

The American Automobile Association (AAA) issues International driver's licenses in the United States. You will have to request an application "APPLICATION FOR INTERNATIONAL DRIVING PERMIT or INTER-AMERICAN DRIVING PERMIT" from the

American Automobile Association,  
1000 A A A Drive  
Heathrow FL 32746-5063

or from your local AAA office (please check their website (<http://www.aaa.com>) for state-by-state recommendations.) Return the completed application to the appropriate state address, or to the address in Florida provided above, with a photocopy of your valid U.S. driver's license, two passport-size (2 x 2 inches or 5 x 5 cm.) photographs and a check (U.S. banks only) or International money order for \$10.00 payable to the AAA. The International driver's license issued by the AAA is valid for one year.

The American Automobile Touring Alliance offers permits through the National Automobile Club. Call (650) 294-7000 (M-F, 8:30-5:00 Pacific Time) or access their website at (<http://www.nationalautoclub.com>). This international permit is valid for only one year from the date of issue, and must be accompanied by a valid U.S. Driver's license.

An International driver's license is valid only for use by U.S. citizens who are here temporarily (less than 90 days.) The International Driving Permit is translated into the nine official languages of the United Nations, including French and English and serves as a translation to be used in conjunction with the visitor's valid driver's license. It can be useful in emergencies such as traffic violations or auto accidents, particularly when a foreign language is involved.

### **Car Insurance and Registration**

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An unlimited third party liability insurance policy is compulsory for all automobiles driven in France. Whether the owner accompanies the automobile or not, the vehicle must be insured. As proof of insurance, the owner must present an international motor insurance card (yellow if the policy is purchased in France, green otherwise) showing that the vehicle is insured in France. Please see the list of English-speaking insurance companies in Paris.

### **Documentation for motor vehicles:**

General Information: Foreign-registered automobiles entering France by road or ferry are not normally documented by French Customs at the point of entry. Vehicles shipped to France are treated differently. The shipping company is issued a *déclaration d'admission* by French Customs at the seaport which is delivered to the owner with the car.

The French Customs Office decides if U.S. license plates can be used in France or if French plates (*plaques d'immatriculation*) are required. In general, cars imported for less than three months can keep their U.S. plates; those brought in for more than three months need French plates. After having cleared their vehicles through a French port of entry, Americans who plan to reside temporarily or permanently in France should consult the local Customs Office to establish the status of their vehicles. In Paris, the address is: French Customs Office (*Bureau du dédouanement*),

1 Boulevard Ney, 75018 Paris; Tel: 01 53 35 92 00.

In addition to license plates, imported automobiles should have a nationality *plate (plaque de nationalité)* mounted near the rear license plate. These plates (usually an adhesive plastic disk) can be purchased at most auto accessory stores. An American using U.S. license plates should mount a "USA" disk.

Once an imported vehicle has been processed through the French Customs Office, one must document the vehicle with special license plates, or, if necessary, register it (obtain a *certificat d'immatriculation*, often referred to as *carte grise*) and get French license plates. Information on this service is available at the local prefecture. The French website for the Automobile Club <http://www.automobile-club.org> may provide you with more information.

### **Tourists:**

Foreign tourists may bring a car or motorcycle into France duty-free, and operate their vehicles with foreign license plates and a nationality disk. No other documentation is required as long as the vehicle is exported within three months. Americans who buy a car in France for tourist use and export without paying the French sales tax (T.V.A.) will be authorized temporary "TT" license plates by the French Customs Office for a period of six months only.

### **Temporary Residents:**

Temporary residents (holders of *cartes de séjour temporaire*) are exempted from payment of customs duties on cars they import if they can show that they will stay in France less than one year and that they have a permanent residence outside of France. An incoming resident must have owned the vehicle at least six months before coming to France, and have resided outside of France for at least one year.

### **Long-Term Residents:**

Americans residing in France (holders of three-year *carte de séjour de résident ordinaire* and the ten-year *carte de séjour de résident privilégié*) are not entitled to customs exemptions on imported motor vehicles. They must pay customs duties, register the vehicle, and equip it with French license plates. It must also be shown that the vehicle has been registered and all taxes and duties paid in the country from which the vehicle is being imported. In addition, the owner of a car accorded duty-free status must give assurances that the vehicle will not be sold or used by someone else in France for at least one year from the date of authorization of duty-free status. Some categories of foreigners may be granted duty-free entry of cars for more than a year. All questions of exemptions (*franchise douanière*) and extensions of exemptions should be referred to the French Customs Office in French at (<http://www.douane.gouv.fr>); French customs office in English at: (<http://www.info-france-usa.org>).

**Sales and transfers of ownership:**

The sale of a car imported duty-free must be processed at the French Customs Office. Both the buyer and the seller must execute a title transfer request (*demande de transfert*.) The seller must also complete a bill of sale (*certificat de vente*). Foreigners must present their passports, as well as all ownership documents.

A vehicle in temporary, duty-free status in France can be sold to another non-resident without payment of customs duties and taxes if the car is exported from France before expiration of the duty-free period. Only one such duty-free transfer can be made for any single vehicle. Customs duties and taxes must be paid by the seller to the French Customs Office on any car sold to a resident of France. The seller must give the customs certificate (*certificat de dédouanement*) to the buyer as proof that customs duties have been paid on the vehicle.

After obtaining approval from the Customs Office, a foreign buyer must register the car at the Prefecture of Police or at the automobile club of their choice (see above.) The registration of the vehicle should be processed as quickly as possible (within two weeks) after the Customs Office formalities are completed. An American planning to sell a duty-free vehicle should inform the Paris or local Customs Office of their intentions and confirm that the circumstances of the sale pose no customs problems.

**French specifications:**

To use a car imported from the U.S. to France for more than 6 months, you need approval from the 'Service des Mines' of the Prefecture. For Paris, please contact the Prefecture de Police, Service des Mines; Tel: 01 53 71 33 69

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*American Citizen Services*  
*4, avenue Gabriel*  
*75382 Paris Cedex 08*  
*France*  
*Telephone: 01 43 12 22 22*  
*Website: <http://france.usembassy.gov>*  
*E-mail: citizeninfo@state.gov J*

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