

Press release

[redacted]

BRITONS DRIVING INTO TROUBLE ABROAD

- With tourists three times more likely to be involved in road accidents than locals, Foreign Office launches 'Steer Clear of Trouble on Foreign Roads' campaign -

Two thirds of Brits who have driven abroad have run into problems, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) research reveals today. With studies showing that tourists are three times more likely to be involved in a road accident than local drivers,* an FCO survey has shown that when driving abroad, nearly a third (31%) have driven on the wrong side of the road and more than one in 10 have driven the wrong way round a roundabout.

As the FCO launches a new campaign to encourage British drivers to stay safe on foreign roads, figures show that road death rates in many popular holiday destinations are significantly higher than in the UK, with alcohol often being a contributing factor. For example, you are almost twice as likely to die on the road in Spain than in the UK, almost three times as likely in Greece and more than twice as likely in the USA.†

With eight million of us driving while on holiday abroad each year,‡ the FCO's research shows that many set off totally unprepared. Less than half (41%) of those who take their own car remember to take their driving license and car registration documents and only a third carry details of their breakdown policy. Only 37% of people check the local driving laws of their destination before leaving the UK and nearly eight out of 10 (78%) people do not carry telephone numbers for local emergency services, breakdown services and the local British Consulate.

Not preparing properly before a foreign road trip puts drivers at greater risk, with almost a fifth (18%) of British drivers having had a near miss when abroad. Even getting lost – admitted by 44% – can lead to more serious issues, such as running out of petrol and breaking down, making dangerous driving decisions, or even unwittingly driving into a dangerous area. Crime can also be an issue, with a very unlucky few losing all of their valuables following a theft or 'motorway mugging'.

* Behrens RH and Steffen R, 2008. Travel Medicine in Cook GC and Zumla ed. *Manson's Tropical Diseases*

† Department for Transport - Road Casualties Great Britain: 2006 - Annual Report

‡ Association of British Insurers

FCO consular staff abroad deal with a range of driving-related incidents. [redacted] in Lille, France, said: “Around half of the hospitalisations and deaths we dealt with last year were related to road accidents. The majority of Brits driving from the UK to the continent drive through Northern France and many of the accidents we deal with are caused by driver fatigue, drink-driving, speeding and driving on the wrong side of the road. We have also been called to assist in cases where drivers have run into trouble as a result of not being familiar with local driving laws. I would urge those planning to drive abroad this summer to prepare carefully before leaving the UK. Reading the country-specific FCO travel advice is a good starting point.”

Motoring expert and television presenter, [redacted], is backing the FCO’s advice. He said: “No matter how experienced a driver you are in the UK, it is important to expect the unexpected when driving abroad. It’s bad enough that in most other countries they drive on the wrong side of the road, they’ve got some pretty strange laws too! For example, in Denmark you have to check under the car for children before starting the engine! The best way to avoid being caught out is to research your destination – make sure you familiarise yourselves with the local driving laws as if you are stopped by the police it is not an excuse to say that you were not aware of them.”

And it is not just drivers who are affected by the difference between British roads and those abroad. Over half (54%) of holiday-makers have experienced problems as a pedestrian, with over a third (36%) having been annoyed or scared by the attitude of drivers on foreign roads. Those travelling by bus or coach reported safety concerns – 20% said that they had been on coaches that they thought were unsafe and 14% had felt that their driver was unqualified or unfit to drive.

Tips and advice on driving and road safety abroad can be found on the FCO’s website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel. Travel advice by country, which includes specific information on road travel and safety, can also be found on the website, or from the Travel Advice line – [redacted].

[redacted]

Notes to editors

All unreferenced statistics come from a survey of 2012 UK adults aged 16+ undertaken on behalf of the FCO by Tickbox in May 2008

ROAD SAFETY TIPS FROM THE FCO

Please note, the advice below is not comprehensive. Driving rules differ between countries so the FCO recommends that you also visit the country-specific information at www.fco.gov.uk/travel for the most up to date advice for your destination.

CARS

Before you go

- Familiarise yourself with the driving laws of your holiday destination, including the local speed limits and which side of the road to drive on! You will be subject to these laws when driving abroad and if you are stopped by the police it is not an excuse to say that you were unaware of them. The FCO's country-specific travel advice gives specific information on driving – www.fco.gov.uk/travel
- Consult your insurance company to check that you are fully covered to drive abroad and for any medical expenses that could result from an accident
- Even if you have extended your car insurance to cover driving abroad, you may not be covered for breakdown. You should buy a separate breakdown policy with your holiday insurance or from your motor insurer
- Some countries require you to have a Green Card, which provides the minimum insurance necessary in that country. Check whether your holiday destination requires you to have one
- Check whether your holiday destination requires you to obtain an International Driving Permit
- Service your car before leaving the UK and check that it complies with the vehicle requirements of the countries you will visit
- Plan your route thoroughly before you leave and make sure you have maps of your journey
- Pack an emergency kit for your car including basic first aid equipment

When you're away

- You should carry your registration documents, driving licence, passport, insurance documents, breakdown policy and a Green Card if required at all times when driving
- Make sure you have all relevant emergency helpline numbers on you, including emergency services, breakdown assistance and insurance company
- If you are involved in an accident you should contact your insurer immediately and take photographs of any damage to your vehicle
- Drive defensively – expect the unexpected
- Do not drive when you are tired and take regular breaks at service stations or designated stopping points while you are on the road
- Always wear a seatbelt and ensure that all passengers wear theirs too
- Do not drink and drive. Be aware that the alcohol limit may be lower abroad than in the UK and in some countries there is zero tolerance for drink driving
- Never use your mobile phone while driving
- Do not overload your vehicle and ensure that you can see out of the back window
- Be aware that the local style of driving may be different to that in the UK. Always give the car in front of you plenty of room

If you are driving your own vehicle

- You should have a clearly visible GB sticker on the back of your car if your number plate does not include this information
- You should use a set of headlamp converters when driving on the right-hand side of the road
- You should carry a warning triangle, fire extinguisher, first aid kit, tool kit and spare bulbs in the boot of your car

If you are driving a hire vehicle

- Only hire a vehicle from a reputable hire company, the cheapest deal will not always be the best
- The insurance provided by the hire company can often be limited to the legal minimum level of the country you hire in. In order to ensure you are fully covered you should purchase top-up insurance from your tour operator or insurer

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 are 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
- Always wear a helmet and protective clothing, whether you are the driver or a passenger
- There should never be more than two people on a bike
- Never ride the bike when you have been drinking alcohol
- Quad bikes should also be approached with caution. If you do hire quad bikes you should check that your travel insurance covers you for their use. Only hire them from a reputable company and find out whether it is legal to ride them on the public road
- Ensure your insurance includes third party cover

PEDESTRIANS

- When crossing the road, remember that traffic may come from the opposite direction to that you expect
- When walking around at night, wear light coloured clothing so that you are clearly visible to drivers
- Do not assume that drivers will stop at zebra crossings
- Be aware that jay-walking is illegal in many countries – always cross at designated points
- When walking along the roadside it is better to face the oncoming traffic – this way you will be able to see vehicles approaching you

BUS AND COACHES

- If you have concerns over the safety of the vehicle do not get on and inform the tour rep or organiser
- Wear a seatbelt if one is available
- Avoid travelling in overcrowded vehicles

A view from FCO staff on the ground:

Peru –

[redacted] at the British Embassy, said: “Road accidents, particularly bus crashes, are common here and consular services assist in a number of cases of hospitalisation and death of Britons. In order to combat this we recently launched a campaign in Peru to raise awareness among British nationals of the importance of wearing a seatbelt. We produced stickers and posters in both Spanish and English and, working with national bus companies, NGOs, Peruvian institutions and other local partners we distributed these to tourists via bus terminals, on buses and in other strategic tourist spots.”

Oman –

[redacted], said: “Although Oman has a zero tolerance policy towards drink driving, the majority of cases of road accidents where we are asked to assist involve alcohol. Here, if you have any alcohol in your bloodstream and are involved in an accident you will be held responsible by the

police even if the other driver was technically at fault. If arrested for such an offence, you will serve a sentence of up to a week before your case is even referred to court. Brits visiting Oman should also be aware that laws and customs are very different here to those in the UK. Finger pointing could be interpreted as an 'abuse of dignity' and can be reported to the police, sometimes resulting in costly fines."

Mexico –

[redacted] at the British Embassy, said: "In one case we assisted with recently, a British national was involved in a road accident in his hire car. Because the accident was as a result of his drink driving, his insurance company would not cover the damage to the car and he had to pay \$13,000 US dollars. We have also had a case recently where a British man was involved in an extremely serious car crash and was paralysed from the neck down. The situation was made even more distressing for him because he did not have travel insurance."

Uruguay –

[redacted], at the British Embassy, said: "The most important thing to remember when driving abroad is that the style of driving may be very different to that in the UK- so you should expect the unexpected. Road laws can be very different too. For example, here in Uruguay headlights must be on at all times, even during the day. Before your journey, check the FCO's travel advice -either online or by calling the Travel Advice line."

Lithuania –

[redacted], said: "Lithuania has one of the highest rate of road fatalities in the EU - about four times higher than in the UK – and we see an increasing number of hospitalisations of British visitors as a result of road accidents every year. When driving abroad, remember that local driving habits may not be the same as at home. Extra care must be taken at all times when driving in Lithuania, but particularly when driving in winter conditions and at night."

Cyprus –

[redacted], said: "We see a high number of deaths and hospitalisations among British nationals following road accidents. This is partly due to the poor driving conditions locally, but is also because Brits do not take the same safety precautions when driving abroad as they do at home, for example not wearing seatbelts and drink-driving."

Uganda –

[redacted], said: "Uganda's roads are extremely unsafe and we assist with a number of cases resulting from road accidents every year. There is one particular busy stretch of road used by many tourists where one person dies in a traffic accident on average every three days. As part of a larger campaign involving many of the biggest companies in Uganda we have produced a number of leaflets aimed at raising awareness of road safety issues among tourists, particularly young independent travellers. We distribute the leaflets at backpacker hostels and campsites and in the arrivals hall of the airport. . The leaflets draw attention to the dangers of using motorcycle and minibus taxis and offer practical tips on how to reduce the risks"

Romania –

[redacted], said: "It is important for Brits driving abroad to remember that they are subject to the same laws as the locals. It is not an excuse to say you weren't aware of the speed limit if you get stopped so you should familiarise yourself with the local driving laws before travelling. A good starting point is checking the FCO's travel advice by country which includes specific information on road safety."

Florida –

[redacted]], said: "Road accidents can happen for the most basic of reasons - we see a high number of crashes that have happened because a Brit is driving on the wrong side of the road or has looked the wrong way when pulling out of a junction. When driving abroad, remain alert at all times and drive defensively. You are likely to be driving in an area that you are unfamiliar with - try to plan your route at the beginning of each day so that you are less likely to be taken by surprise when on the road. Also, some people drink on the flight and then hire a car as soon as they get to their destination while the alcohol is still in their bloodstream, which they clearly shouldn't do."