



# A guide to driving in SWITZERLAND

## VISITOR INFORMATION AT A GLANCE

- Switzerland has a population of 7.8 million, with 5.2 million registered vehicles, of which 3.9 million are passenger cars and estate cars.
- There are four official languages: German, French, Italian, Romansh
- Switzerland shares its borders with Germany, France, Austria, Italy and Lichtenstein.
- Apart from the country being 70% mountains, Switzerland has more than 1,500 lakes, and it is said that you are never more than 10 miles from a lake anywhere in the country.
- At present a total of 1,763.6 motorway kilometres are in operation. According to current plans, when the network is completed it will comprise of 1,893.5 kms.
- The Swiss motorway network has a very high proportion of tunnels with 220 tunnels currently in operation totalling 200 kms in length.
- The international vehicle ID code is 'CH'



This document was last revised on

5 April 2011

*Please see next page for comprehensive information on specific road rules and TISPOL's advice on safer driving.*

**TISPOL** ■■■■  
European Traffic Police Network

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## Driving facts

The minimum age for driving motor vehicles is as follows:

- 18 years for motor vehicles. This age also applies to motorcycles with a maximum motor power output of 25 kW and a power to weight ratio of not more than 0.16 kW/kg, and to motorcycles up to 125cc and a power output of maximum 11 kW.
- 16 years for motorbikes (up to 50cc with externally supplied ignition or a rated output or power of maximum 4 kW).
- 14 years for mopeds (up to 50 cc and a maximum speed of 30 km/h).

## Drink-drive limit:

- The general blood alcohol content limit is 0.5 grams/litre (g/l).
- Drivers detected with levels of between 0.5 g/l and 0.79 g/l alcohol will (depending on their previous driving history) either receive an official warning or will have their driving licence withdrawn for at least one month.
- Drivers registering above the level of 0.8 g/l will automatically have their licence withdrawn for at least 3 months.
- Professional drivers of passenger vehicles (e.g. pilots and coach drivers) are prohibited from drinking alcohol whilst working, and must not consume alcohol during the six hour period prior to starting their working shift.

## Motorway Speed limits

- General limit is 120 km/h
- 100 km/h for buses (except articulated buses) and camper vans weighing more than 3.5 tonnes
- 80 km/h for trucks (more than 3.5 tonnes) and also for trucks towing a trailer

## Enforcement

- In Switzerland, every uniformed police officer also carries out traffic surveillance.
- Violations against the regulations of the road traffic law are enforced by the police forces of the 26 cantons.
- Officers are authorised to issue on-the-spot fines from a catalogue of specific offences and pre-determined levels of fines.

## Recent legislation changes

- 2008: improvement to the training of driving instructors.
- 2005: implementation of 0.5 g/l blood alcohol content limit, random breath testing, and a zero-tolerance policy for driving under the influence of drugs. Also the introduction of driving licence withdrawals within the framework of the 'cascade system' where penalties are considered in relation to the number and severity of previous violations.

## Annual road deaths

- Number of road deaths in 2009: 349
- Number of road deaths in 2008: 357
- Number of road deaths in 2007: 384
- Number of road deaths in 2006: 370
- Number of road deaths in 2005: 409

## Motorcycles

- The safety of most road users has improved since the year 2000 with the exception of motorcyclists.
- Apart from in 2005, the number of fatalities or serious injuries to motorcyclists in recent years followed a trend of increasing.
- The increase in numbers from 2000 to 2007 was 26%, with an exceptionally high increase of 8% in 2007.

## Pedestrians

- During the last two years the safety of pedestrians on Switzerland's roads has worsened. The total number of pedestrians killed or injured declined overall between 2000 and 2005.
- However, fatalities increased by 4% in 2006 and 8% in 2007, and are now at the levels previously seen in 2002-2003.

## Trucks

- In 2007, the volume of heavy goods traffic passing through the Swiss Alps increased for the first time in three years, with a total of 1.26 million heavy goods vehicles using the four main routes.
- The record volume of 1.4 million HGVs was recorded in 2000.
- It is prohibited to drive a truck between the night hours of 10 pm and 5 am and also on Sundays.



## Unusual law

- Cycling in Switzerland requires the purchase of a yearly cycle insurance vignette, valid from January to May of the following year. For a nominal amount, the purchase of the vignette indicates payment of the road tax and third party liability insurance.
- Foreign cyclists also need to purchase the permit.

## Language advice

German, French, Italian and Romansh are the official languages of Switzerland, so there is not room to publish phrases in all four languages!

## Emergency contacts

In an emergency, call 117.  
Visit the Swiss Police website:  
[www.swisspolice.ch](http://www.swisspolice.ch)



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## Useful regulations and advice

**What documents must I be able to produce if requested by the police?**

Driving licence and vehicle registration document.

**Do I need to carry a reflective jacket in my car? If so, how many?**

No.

**Do I need to carry spare bulbs for the lights on my vehicle? If so, for which lights?**

No.

**Do I need to carry spare spectacles if I wear them for driving? Do others in the vehicle with me also need to carry spare spectacles if they wear them for driving?**

Drivers driving without spectacles will not be allowed to continue the journey after a police control. They will be reported to court.

**Do I need to carry a fire extinguisher?**

All heavy motor vehicles registered in Switzerland (e. g. lorries, buses) have to carry one or more fire extinguishers with a total contents of at least 6 kg. Foreign vehicles need fire extinguishers only if they are obligatory in their vehicle registration country or according to international regulation, for example, vehicles for hazard transport.

**Any other requirements I should be aware of regarding the equipment or paperwork I need for a journey in or through your country?**

On national roads, a road tax for motor vehicles and trailers weighing up to 3.5 tonnes is obligatory. The corresponding motorway tax sticker (vignette) charge is CHF 40.

## Winter driving

**What items are required or recommended for journeys made in winter?**

Snow tyres are recommended. For certain roads, snow chains are obligatory.

## Passengers

**Is there a minimum age or height for a passenger to ride in the front seat?**

No, but children under 12 years and under 150 cm, must be secured on all seats by a children's retaining device, ie. a child seat (according to ECE regulation 44).

**What specific regulations are in place for carrying babies and children?**

The children's retaining device as mentioned above must be in accordance with the weight of the baby or the child.

**Do you have any specific rules regarding the carriage of dogs and other pets?**

The driver must make sure, by using a cage or a grid, that the dog does not disturb him or her while driving.

## Breakdown and collision advice

**Please give brief advice on what I should do if my vehicle breaks down, on the motorway and on other roads.**

If possible, move the car to the side of the road. Otherwise the breakdown triangle has to be placed by the car. The number of the breakdown service is 140.

**Please give clear advice on what I am required to do if I am involved in a collision.**

When an accident with a motor vehicle or bicycle occurs, all those concerned must stop immediately. They must, if necessary, regulate the traffic. Until the police arrive, only change the position of the casualties for their own safety or to facilitate traffic. The original position must be marked on the road.

**In what circumstances must I call the police after a collision?**

If there is an injury or possible internal injuries, all those involved must give assistance immediately. Persons not involved must help as much as can be rea-

sonably expected. The persons involved, primarily the driver, must call the police. The police emergency telephone number is 117. It is not necessary to call the police if there are only superficial scratches or bruises. It is not sufficient if the person responsible for the damage gives his or her name and address to the casualty. If a casualty or person suffering material damage wishes to call the police, although there is no obligation to do so, those involved must remain at the scene of the accident in order to help establish the facts, until they are dismissed by the police.

## Local knowledge

**Are there dangers to road users from wildlife? If so, in which parts of your country?**

Yes, especially in forests. There might be a "wild animals" sign in these places.

This sign warns of the danger of wild animals on the carriageway. Slow down, particularly at dawn and dusk. If deer appear in the headlights, brake immediately, dip headlights, and use the horn. Any accident involving wild animals must be reported to the police or gamekeeper.

**Which roads do you suggest should be avoided by visitors (because they are very busy at certain times, or they have a high collision rate)?**

Roads around cities, particularly Geneva and Zurich, are always busy at peak times.

## And finally ...

"Switzerland is a country full of geographical und linguistical contrasts. Its three main geographical regions are the Jura, Plateau and the Alps. The geography means that the climate varies greatly from one region to another. Depending on the area and the time of year, Switzerland experiences conditions reminiscent both of Siberia and of the Mediterranean.

If you are making a winter journey, do pay close attention to weather forecasts and ensure that both you and your vehicle are properly equipped to deal with snowy and icy conditions. There are areas where the carrying of winter equipment (snow tyres and chains) is obligatory during winter months.

Expect usual volumes of heavy traffic in the city rush hours, but equally, be prepared to wait a few minutes out of town if a farmer is crossing the street with a herd of cattle! Enjoy a relaxing tour through a marvellous country."



Roland Aellen,  
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