

Norway: Driving

Vehicle preparation: Before you go, if your car is nearing time for a service, get it done early. Check your lights, tyre tread depth (including the spare), oil and coolant levels and fill the screen wash bottle; increase the screen wash concentration to cope with dead insects on your windscreen. Make sure you have a jack and wheel brace and a spare set of keys. Fire extinguisher, first aid and spare bulb kits are recommended — you can be a long way from any assistance. Fix your GB sticker on the back if you don't already have one; if you don't have a headlamp beam deflection switch, get the deflectors and check how they fit — fit them while waiting to embark as you leave the UK. A lockable roof box is more secure than a roof rack and is aerodynamically efficient, reducing fuel costs. Don't overfill your fuel tank immediately before embarking on a car ferry as a rough crossing may cause fuel leakage. While there, if you use gravel roads, check tyre pressures and look for damage daily.

Insurance & Documents: Third party insurance is compulsory, but fully comprehensive is essential as repair costs are very expensive – apply for a green card and European Accident Statement form from your insurer well in advance. Check that you are covered for scheduled car ferry services. When driving, you must always carry your insurance and car registration (or lease or hire) documents, MOT certificate and your UK driving licence (both photo card and paper part) but check that the photo card hasn't expired or isn't about to - it's valid only for 10 years unlike the former non-photo licence which was normally valid until age 70. Not producing them at the time of asking by a police officer is an offence. If you still have a non-photo driving licence, upgrade well before you go. Make photocopies in case of loss or theft; leave one at home, keep one in the car (not the originals) and one in your luggage. Minimum driving age is 17 and you must have held a full driving licence for at least 1 year.

Road Maps (*veikart*): Capellens publishes a wire-bound large scale atlas of the whole country with town centre street maps (£35) and also five regional folding maps at 1:335 000 or 1:400 000 (£10.95 each), available in book shops. Hallwag and Michelin maps are less detailed. Buy before you travel from Stanfords, 12 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LH (T: 0207 836 1321 or 0207 434 4744) <<http://www.stanfords.co.uk>> or, generally cheaper, from The Map Shop, 15 High Street, Upton-on-Severn, WR8 0HJ (T: 01684 593 146, fax: 01684 594 559) <<http://www.themapshop.co.uk>>. They also have 1:50 000 topographical maps. A route planning map of main roads can be ordered free from Innovation Norway <<http://www.visitnorway.com>>.

Online route planners are at <<http://kart.gulesider.no>>, <<http://www.viamichelin.co.uk>> and <<http://visveg.vegvesen.no>>.

Fuel: Self service (*selvbetjening*) unleaded petrol (*blyfri bensin*) 95 octane (kr13.20/litre), premium 98 octane and diesel (kr11.40/litre) are available everywhere but LPG availability is very limited. Prices are June 2009 averages and vary with location. If you use diesel, ensure you recognise the difference between diesel and petrol pumps; don't rely on pump colour. You can fit your car with a FuelSure device that stops you inserting a petrol nozzle. Few petrol stations accept credit cards; expect to pay cash. Some fuel stations have only card-operated pumps (*kort*) that accept Norwegian debit cards, not UK debit cards or cash. Major brands are Esso, Hydro Texaco, Shell, Statoil. In the mountains and remote areas, the distance between petrol stations can be very great and they may be open only during the working day. Don't wait until your tank is nearly empty; fill up whenever you can.

Road System: There are 92 946 km of public roads, 72 033 km paved (including 664 km of motorway) and 20 913 km unpaved (2007). Because of the terrain, most main roads follow valleys; those that cross mountain passes are steep with hairpin bends – engage low gear on long descents to avoid your brakes overheating and fading; check your temperature gauge on long ascents. Be prepared for buses and trucks to swing round tight bends on the

wrong side of the road.

On many roads it is difficult to overtake and your visibility is restricted in a right-hand drive car when driving on the right — be patient. Long distance journeys will take very much longer than you expect. In coastal areas cut by deep fjords, scheduled car ferries add to journey times and cost; some are very busy in summer with long queues - arrive early. Over 530 tunnels cut journey times by going straight through mountains instead of round them and there are also undersea tunnels to major islands and under some fjords; only 40 have fume extraction fans so most are unsuitable for cyclists and motorcyclists. The E16 Lærdal-Aurland tunnel is 24.5km, the world's 10th longest road tunnel. Until the 1970s, roads between towns were mostly narrow gravel (*grus*) roads with dips and bends winding through the rocky terrain, but oil revenues have been used to improve the road system enormously and main roads are now well-maintained straight wide tarmac roads.

Roads are numbered, prefixed with E for trunk roads; main roads prefixed with Rv (*riksvei*) have 1 or 2 digits (equivalent to UK A roads) or 3 digits (equivalent to B roads). Road numbers change often – don't rely on the map! Road signs show distances in kilometres. Major routes have lay-bys with picnic tables and toilets; overnight stays are not permitted. In city and town centres, there may be pedestrian streets (*gågate*); many old narrow streets are one way (*enveiskjøring*).

Scenic roads are being designated as National Tourist Routes with frequent picnic lay-bys, viewpoints and information boards. Currently six are complete; by 2015, there will be 18, totalling 1850km. <<http://www.turistveg.no/index.asp?lang=eng>>

Tolls (*bompenger*): Cities and some large towns have entry tolls during the working day (2010: kr 10 - 15, Monday to Friday, 06.00 - 18.00); Bergen (kr 15) and Oslo (kr 26) entry tolls operate 24 hours, except Sundays and holidays. Elsewhere, tolls on tunnels and bridges (kr 28 - 200) and some major roads (kr 15 - 40) pay for improvements; once the capital expenditure has been recovered, many tolls are removed. The Oslofjord tunnel toll (kr 55) is cheaper than the petrol used to drive all the way round the fjord. Road signs give advance warning of charges; there are coin-operated barriers or traffic lights. On major roads, there are lanes signed 'Mynt/Coin' in yellow for exact change dropped into a basket funnel, *Manuell* in grey for a manned booth giving change and *Abonnement* in blue, always on the left, for vehicles with prepaid electronic tags. Most roads now have a non-stop lane signed AutoPASS or '*Ikke stopp/Do not stop*' in blue, using both prepaid tags and number plate recognition; advance signs show a camera and radio wave. Some roads are AutoPASS only and tolls must be paid at specially signed nearby petrol stations within 3 days. If you fail to pay you will be invoiced at your home address by Euro Parking Collection plc, the UK agent.

AutoPASS tag/camera system (T: 02 012) <<http://www.autopass.no/Visitors>> where you can download the current list of toll roads and charges and register your Visa or MasterCard credit card for automatic payment.

Some non-through roads in rural areas have an honesty box toll system to help pay for their upkeep. Many are still gravel – adapt your steering and braking as if driving on snow; on slopes, keep away from the edge of these roads as they may be unstable (*svake kanter*).

Traffic Information: Road signs display the frequency of the local radio transmitter for traffic news, usually NRK's P1. Along major routes in mountain areas and in road tunnels, reception is enhanced by repeater transmitters. The Road Information Centre (*Vegmeldingssentralen*) (T: 22 65 40 40 in Oslo or 175 or 815 48 991 elsewhere) <<http://www.175.no>> and <<http://www.vegvesen.no>> give 24-hour information on road conditions throughout the country, including roadworks and snow.

Driving Regulations: This is not a complete list. Further details on driving in Norway can be obtained from your UK motoring organisation or the Norwegian Public Roads Administration <<http://www.vegvesen.no/en/Home>>. Police can issue on-the-spot fines (with no sympathy for foreign drivers) and confiscate licences for serious offences.

Foreign-registered vehicles must display a GB (or other country) sticker on the back and also

on trailers and caravans.

All vehicles must use dipped headlights when moving; as in all Scandinavian countries, engine on = lights on. If you see a stationary vehicle with its lights on, you know it could move out. Headlights must be adjusted to dip to the right by using clip-on deflectors or a stick-on kit to prevent glare to oncoming vehicles; some cars have a switch to do this automatically. When parking at night on a road without street lights, you must leave parking lights on.

Driving is on the right hand side of the road. It's easy to forget when starting out each day on a road with no traffic to provide a visual clue or after stopping for a meal or fuel; you then pull out on the wrong side of the road. If you have passengers, get them to remind you every time you start the engine — children can be very good at this.

On roads which are not marked with a priority sign (yellow diamond), drivers must give way to traffic coming from the right. This applies particularly in towns where there may be 'End of priority' signs or roads have no give way signs; other vehicles may emerge from what appears to be a side road. You must also give way to pedestrians already on or about to use a pedestrian crossing or disembarking from/embarking on a tram. You must stop before, not on, a pedestrian crossing.

Vehicles must give free passage to emergency vehicles with a flashing blue light and to trams and trains, stopping if necessary. You must not obstruct pedestrian processions, funeral processions, military or civil defence convoys.

When overtaken by another vehicle, you must facilitate the overtaking vehicle, moving to the right if possible and slowing if necessary.

Use of seat belts is compulsory; children under 4 must have their own safety seat (penalty kr 750). Child seats are available with car rentals; book in advance.

For motorcyclists, helmets are compulsory.

It is an offence for drivers to smoke in built-up areas and to use a handheld mobile phone while driving.

Tyre tread depth must be a minimum of 1.6 millimetre on summer tyres and a minimum of 3 millimetres on winter tyres.

You must carry at least one high visibility vest/jacket and a red warning triangle to warn others in case of breakdown or accident. This must be placed at least 150m from the vehicle. Carrying a fire extinguisher is highly recommended and compulsory for heavy vehicles.

On narrow roads with a passing place (signed *møteplass* or white M on blue background), you must give way to oncoming traffic if the passing space is on your (right) side.

Off road driving is not permitted.

Maximum permitted vehicle width is 2.55m.

Speed Limits (*fartsgrenser*): 80km/h (50mph) on the open road and 90km/h (56mph) or 100km/h (62mph) on some motorways; the limit for vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross and for towing caravans and trailers is 80km/h or 60km/h for caravans/trailers without brakes. In towns and villages it's 50km/h (31mph) or 30km/h (18mph) in residential areas. Speed humps and ramps are not always signed. Speed cameras (*automatisk trafikk kontroll*) are small; when you see them, it's too late! ... and if you drive too fast, you'll miss the scenery. Fines for exceeding the speed limit are high, and the car registration number will be traced back to the UK.

Drink & Driving: Don't – penalties are severe. The maximum permitted blood alcohol level of 0.02% (0.2ml/litre) is much lower than the UK. Over 0.05% will incur a substantial fine; over 0.08% results in an automatic 21-day prison sentence and licence confiscation. If you have a drink in the evening, you will still be over the limit the next morning.

Road Signs: Many are similar to the UK's triangular, circular and rectangular signs but some are different. You may see the following:

<i>All stans forbudt</i>	No stopping	<i>Løs grus</i>	Loose gravel
<i>Ikke møte</i>	No overtaking	<i>Omkjøring</i>	Diversion
<i>Kjør sakte</i>	Slow down	<i>Veiarbeide</i>	Roadworks

Caravans/Trailers: Wide or long vehicles and caravans are prohibited on some mountain roads and many others are not recommended; a map showing these roads is available from Vegdirektoratet, Postboks 8142 Dep, N-0033 Oslo (T: 22 07 35 00).

You must use extended mirrors when towing a caravan; they must be folded back or removed when not towing. There are regulations specifying maximum vehicle/trailer length and width.

Parking (*parkering*): Cities and large towns have short stay on-street parking meters (*P Mot avgift*) — yellow 1h maximum, grey 2h, blue 3h — and long stay car parks with ticket machines which are usually cheaper; signs display times that charges are in force, typically the working day (with Saturday times in parentheses). Meters and car parks are patrolled and fines imposed for staying longer than the paid period. In cities, it's cheaper to park outside the central area and walk in, or park at the outskirts and use public transport. In some areas, parking is reserved for residents with permits (*P sone*). In small towns and villages, parking is usually free but there may be time restrictions. No vehicle, including a motorcycle, may be parked on, or partly on, a pavement, footpath or cycle track or less than 20m from the sign for a bus, tram or taxi stop, or in a passing place on a narrow road.

Driving Conditions & Hazards: Most drivers do not exceed the speed limit and tailgating is rare. Because the sun is low in the sky for much of the day, reflections from light lenses make it difficult to see when brake lights come on – stay back. Traffic is mostly light except near cities and on major trunk roads, eg E6 Sweden-Oslo-Trondheim, E16 Oslo-Bergen and E18 Sweden-Oslo-Kristiansand. Avoid the Friday afternoon rush from cities to the countryside. Drivers are more impatient the closer you get to Oslo.

Most cycles are fitted with a horizontal reflector arm that juts out into the carriageway to ensure that vehicles overtake giving a wide berth.

In rural areas, watch out for sheep, goats, reindeer and other animals crossing the road or even an elk standing in the road, especially in the north. Stop and wait for it to move away — it's bigger than you and can cause considerable damage to your car.

Road Safety: In 2007 there were 242 road deaths in Norway, ie 5.0 road deaths per 100 000 people (5.5 in the UK). In terms of deaths per 10 000 vehicles, Norway has one of the world's best safety records. Both serious injuries at about 1000 per year and minor injuries at 10 000 are at the lowest levels ever.

Winter Driving: Taking your own car or hiring in winter is not recommended unless you are experienced in driving on snow and ice — take a training course on a skid pan. The Trucker's Guide from <<http://www.vegvesen.no/donnadiesel>> contains good advice on winter and mountain driving for all drivers, as well as lists of all ferry crossings and main roads closed in winter.

Because of heavy winter snowfalls, many mountain roads close (October - December) and reopen in spring or early summer (May - June); major highways are kept open throughout the year, eg E6 Oslo-Kirkenes and E16 Oslo-Bergen. Some rural roads close overnight or whenever heavy falls make them dangerous. Stranded vehicles that block roads may be impounded against payment of costs incurred in clearing the road.

During the winter, winter tyres with or without studs (*piggdekk*) are compulsory; special tread all-year tyres can also be used. Studded tyres are not allowed from the first Monday after Easter up to 31 October; in Nordland, Troms and Finnmark, the prohibited period is 1 May to 15 October. If studded tyres are fitted to a car weighing under 3.5 tonnes, they must be fitted to all four wheels. Vehicles with a total weight of 3.5 tonnes or more, must carry snow chains (*kjetting*) that match the vehicle's tyre size if ice or snow is expected on the road. A flat layby for fitting/removing chains is provided before and after difficult road sections. ABS braking systems must be switched off when using chains and the maximum safe speed is reduced. Winter tyres and snow chains can be hired at reasonable prices — don't accept worn chains or any with a broken link; ask for a demonstration of fitting them. An alternative to snow chains is Autosock, textile wheel socks developed in Norway, that are far easier to put on than chains; they are cheaper and grip is better than

winter tyres, ABS can remain switched on and the maximum safe speed is greater than with chains; but chains are better for hill starts. They are approved by most car manufacturers and legal in many countries including Norway, but not yet in the UK.

There is a move away from studded tyres as they cause airborne asphalt particles and the grip is only slightly better than unstudded winter tyres. If studs are used, you must pay a daily kr 30 air pollution charge in Bergen, Oslo and Trondheim city centres. You can buy a daily sticker from vending machines at some petrol stations, car parks or on approach roads or order a weekly or seasonal sticker valid in all three cities.

Bergen: <www.bergen.kommune.no/piggfritt>

Oslo: <<http://www.samferdselsetaten.oslo.kommune.no/piggdekkgebyr/english/>>

Trondheim: <<http://www.trondheim.kommune.no/content.ap?thisId=1117616970>>

Snowchains Europroducts (T: 01732 884 408) <<http://www.snowchains.co.uk>>

Autosock (T: 01539 621 884) <<http://www.autosock.co.uk>>.

Accidents: Do not move any casualty unable to walk. You must phone the police if anyone is injured or if there is significant damage; it's best to phone even if there are no injuries or only minor damage. Switch on hazard lights (if working), put on your high-visibility jacket and place your warning triangle at least 50m back on the same side of the road to warn other drivers. Do not leave the scene and do not move vehicles before the police arrive; take photographs if you have a camera. Try to ensure that witnesses do not leave before they can be interviewed by the police. Do not admit blame (this is required by your insurance policy); complete the European Accident Statement form in as much detail as possible and ensure that you obtain the other driver's name, address, registration number and insurance company.

All accidents involving animals must be reported to the Road & Traffic Information Service (T: 175).

Inform your insurer or its Norwegian agent within 24 hours. If you or anyone in your party is injured, get a written statement of injuries and any treatment given by a doctor to submit to the insurer.

Breakdown & Assistance: Nearly 5% of UK drivers need assistance while abroad and recovery services (*redningstjeneste*) are expensive; extend your UK breakdown policy to cover the Norway visit or take out insurance with one of the UK specialists. These provide a freephone number to call out the Norwegian breakdown recovery organisations Falken or Viking, additional accommodation expenses, a hire car during repair and vehicle recovery to the UK if necessary. AA and RAC members have a reciprocal breakdown recovery arrangement with NAF, the Norwegian equivalent. Ask at one of your car manufacturer's UK showrooms for a list of agents in Norway so you know where to find spare parts if needed. Car service/repair garages are usually separate from filling stations.

Norges Automobilforbund (NAF), Østensjøveien 14, Postboks 6682, Etterstad, NO-0609 Oslo (T: 92 60 85 05 or 085 05, emergency service: 810 00 505, fax: 22 33 13 72)

<<http://www.naf.no/en>> <medlemsservice@naf.no>

Falken Redningskorps (T: 33 13 80 80 or 815 68 888; emergencies 02 222)

<<http://www.falck.no/en/home>> <kundeservice@falck.no>

Viking Redningstjeneste, (T: 22 08 60 00; emergencies 06000)

<<http://www.vikingredning.no/English.aspx>> <marked@vikingredning.no>

Norwegian Motorcycle Union, NMCU Sekretariatet, Postboks 351, NO-1502 Moss (T: 69 20 46 46, fax: 69 20 46 40) <<http://www.nmcu.org/english>> <nmcu@nmcu.org>

Books: *Motoring in Norway*, by Erling Welle-Strand (Nortrabooks 2004 ISBN 978 829 010 383 0) £19.99, gives information on tourist sites accessible when touring by road.