

Rules of the road SA STYLE

South Africa has the longest road network of any country in Africa, and a car is an excellent mode of transport for exploring this beautiful land. However, there are some rules and regulations that foreigners need to follow when traversing the country's highways and byways.

Charleen Clarke reports.

The country's road infrastructure is mostly good, with national roads in reasonable condition. Potholes are common, however, on secondary roads, so drive with care. Current information on the conditions of roads can be obtained through the Automobile Association of South Africa.

The AA also provides invaluable guides for road users in the form of strip maps tailored for specific destinations, and information for tourists on accommodation and routes.

Many of the national roads between the major centres are toll roads. Check the toll fees before you leave, and make sure that you have either a credit card or cash to pay. It's not possible to use a credit card at a fuel station – you will need to use cash (many fuel stations do have ATMs). There are three types of fuel available, leaded, unleaded and 'dual fuel' that can be used in place of either. Petrol prices are fixed and controlled by the government, so don't waste your time shopping around.

Petrol/fuel stations are mostly open 24 hours and spread along all the major routes. They are not self-help, but are manned by attendants who can also check your vehicle's oil, water and tyre pressure if required. Gratuities for this service are at your own discretion. Many of these petrol stations have restaurants and clean restrooms – use them

to freshen-up on the long drives.

When travelling through South Africa's neighbouring countries, petrol-stations are more scarce, so be prepared. It's a good idea to take along a spare supply.

With a good map, visitors generally have little difficulty in finding their way around, it helps that all signposts are written in English. However, it is important to plan your journey carefully. If you're not used to driving long distances, rather break the journey, as fatigue is a major contributing factor in motor vehicle accidents. When asking for directions, you may be surprised to get the response, "turn left at the next robot...". Don't be alarmed – aliens have not landed in the country. A 'robot' is the South African term for traffic lights. ☹



Photo © Richard Strever

REMEMBER THE PAPERWORK

An International Driver's Permit carried in conjunction with your national driving licence is recommended and must be printed or authenticated in English. If your licence does not have a photograph on it, then you must also carry your passport with you so that you can be identified as the legal holder of the driving licence.

Please note that the car hire companies might have different regulations regarding the length of time that you need to have held a driving licence, so it is advisable to check with your hire car company about their requirements.

Always make sure documentation is carried with you at all times when driving – traffic officers will expect to see this documentation if they stop you for any reason.

IMPORTANT TIPS

While out on the road, bear the following in mind:

- In South Africa we drive on the left-hand side of the road, and our cars – rental cars included – are right-hand drive vehicles.
- Keep to the left and pass right
- All distances, speed limits (and speedometers) are in kilometres.
- There are strict drinking and driving laws – with a maximum allowable alcohol blood content of 0.05%. Translated, that means about one glass of wine for the average woman and perhaps 1.5 or two for the average or large man.
- Four-way-stops are commonly found at the quieter intersections – the first vehicle to arrive has priority. On roundabouts, give way to the right, although this is often overlooked and it is wise to proceed with caution.
- Wearing of seat belts is compulsory. All occupants of a vehicle are required to wear seatbelts whilst travelling, if you are caught without you will be subject to a fine.
- Using hand-held phones while driving is against the law – use a vehicle phone attachment or hands-free kit, if you want to speak on your mobile phone.
- The general speed limit on national highways, urban freeways and other major routes is 120km/h (75mph).
- On secondary (rural) roads it is 100km/h (60mph). In built-up areas it is usually 60km/h (35mph) unless otherwise indicated.

Source: *Arrive Alive*