



# Driving in Australia

*With more than 350,000km of paved roads criss-crossing the country, Australia is an infinitely fascinating road movie come to life.*

## Driving Fast Facts

- **Right or left?** Drive on the left
- **Legal driving age** 18
- **Top speed limit** 110km/h
- **Signature car** Holden Commodore

## DRIVING LICENCE & DOCUMENTS

To drive in Australia you'll need to hold a current driving licence issued in English from your home country. If the licence isn't in English, you'll also need to carry an International Driving Permit, issued in your home country.

## INSURANCE

**Third-party insurance** With the exception of NSW and Queensland, third-party personal-injury insurance is included in the vehicle registration cost, ensuring that every registered vehicle carries at least minimum insurance (if registering your own car in NSW or Queensland, you'll need to arrange this privately). We recommend extending that minimum to at least third-party property insurance – minor collisions can be amazingly expensive.

**Rental vehicles** When it comes to hire cars, understand your liability in the event of an accident. Rather than risk paying out thousands of dollars, consider taking out comprehensive car insurance or paying an additional daily amount to the rental company for excess reduction (this reduces the excess payable in the event of an accident from between \$2000 and \$5000 to a few hundred dollars).

**Exclusions** Be aware that if travelling on dirt roads, you usually will not be covered by insurance unless you have a 4WD (read the fine print). Also, many companies' insurance won't cover the cost of damage to glass (including the windscreen) or tyres.

## HIRING A CAR

Larger car-rental companies have drop-offs in major cities and towns. Most companies require drivers to be over the age of 21, though in some cases it's 18 and in others 25.

Suggestions to assist in the process:

- Read the contract from cover to cover.
- Some companies may require a signed credit-card slip as a bond, others may actually charge your credit card; if this is the case, find out when you'll get a refund.
- Ask if unlimited kilometres are included and, if not, what the extra charge per kilometre is.

## Road Trip Websites

**Australian Bureau of Meteorology** ([www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)) Weather information.

**Department of Planning, Transport & Infrastructure** (☎1300 361 033; [www.transport.sa.gov.au](http://www.transport.sa.gov.au)) SA road conditions.

**Green Vehicle Guide** ([www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au](http://www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au)) Rates Australian vehicles based on greenhouse and air-pollution emissions.

**Live Traffic NSW** (☎1300 131 122; [www.livetraffic.com](http://www.livetraffic.com)) NSW road conditions.

**Main Roads Western Australia** (☎13 81 38; [www.mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au)) WA road conditions.

**Motorcycle Council of NSW** (☎1300 679 622; [www.mccofnsw.org.au](http://www.mccofnsw.org.au)) One of many such organisations around Australia.

**Road Report** (☎1800 246 199; [www.roadreport.nt.gov.au](http://www.roadreport.nt.gov.au)) NT road conditions.

**Traffic & Travel Information** (☎13 19 40; [www.transport.sa.gov.au](http://www.transport.sa.gov.au)) Queensland road conditions.

➡ Find out what excess you'll have to pay if you have a prang, and if it can be lowered by an extra charge per day (this option will usually be offered to you whether you ask or not). Check if your personal travel insurance covers you for vehicle accidents and excess.

➡ Check for exclusions (hitting a kangaroo, damage on unsealed roads etc) and whether you're covered on unavoidable unsealed roads (eg accessing camp sites). Some companies also exclude parts of the car from cover, such as the underbelly, tyres and windscreen.

➡ At pick-up inspect the vehicle for any damage. Make a note of anything on the contract before you sign.

➡ Ask about breakdown and accident procedures.

➡ If you can, return the vehicle during business hours and insist on an inspection in your presence.

The usual big international companies operate in Australia (Avis, Budget, Europcar, Hertz, Thrifty). The following websites offer last-minute discounts and the opportunity to compare rates between the big operators:

➡ [www.carhire.com.au](http://www.carhire.com.au)

➡ [www.drivenow.com.au](http://www.drivenow.com.au)

➡ [www.webjet.com.au](http://www.webjet.com.au)

## MAPS

Good-quality road and topographical maps are plentiful and readily available around Australia. State motoring organisations are a dependable source of road maps, including road atlases with comprehensive coverage of road networks.

Hema's *Australia Road Atlas* is a good general road atlas covering the entire country, and it also offers a range of smaller fold-out maps on specific destinations.

## ROADS & CONDITIONS

Australia's roads are generally in excellent condition, but never discount the possibility of potholes, especially in rural areas that receive heavy truck traffic.

### Overtaking Lanes

If you've spent any time in Europe, you'll be underwhelmed by Australia's dearth of dual carriageway roads. Apart from the Hume Fwy connecting Sydney and Melbourne (the inland route, not the coast road), most motorways are restricted to a 100km (or less) radius around major cities. Although there are regular overtaking lanes on many roads and traffic flows generally maintain a reasonable speed, there are times when you'll become frustrated as you wait to pass a slow caravan, truck or old man in a hat out for a Sunday drive. The only sensible response in such circumstances is patience.