

Road Safety Advice for Tourists

by Geoff Horne, ACRS

Where do you look for road safety advice if you are planning to drive a vehicle while you are overseas? Most of the tourist publications have some general road safety advice, but to get more specific advice, especially about road rules, it's not a bad idea to contact the road authorities in the countries you plan to visit. In the UK you can buy a copy of the 'Highway Code' at most newsagents. An alternative source of information is the Internet, where there is both official and unofficial advice for tourists.

If you are using a search engine on the Internet, quite a useful entry is 'Driving in...' followed by the country you are planning to visit. The last issue of this Journal had an article by Raphael Grzebieta on his observations of road safety in China. So perhaps that is a good example to start with.

http://wikitravel.org/en/Driving_in_China points out that foreigners cannot drive in China without a Chinese driving licence, which is probably a very good thing, judging from other comments. The writer points out that it is probably best to hire a car with driver, as obtaining a licence is often very complicated. He then goes on to describe some of the problems: "Chinese traffic does seem to have rules. They generally manage to avoid accidents. However, the rules are quite different from those in other countries. To a foreigner, traffic looks chaotic and many drivers appear insane or suicidal. Do not assume that Chinese drivers will follow any rule you know. The concept of right-of-way does not apply, or at least is very different here. Cars do not stop for pedestrians, only swerve around them or honk at them to clear the way. Motorcycles and bicycles often do the same on sidewalks. Wide white bars, which a naive visitor might take for pedestrian crosswalks, are sometimes painted on roads. These have absolutely no effect on car or motorcycle traffic.

Making a left turn in front of oncoming vehicles is quite normal. Those vehicles will not stop. They will just swerve around you, even if this means going across the centre line and forcing whatever is behind you to swerve around them. As near as this befuddled foreigner can tell, the only general rule is 'Keep moving no matter what'. Cutting people off, swerving into the oncoming lane, driving on the shoulder, or the wrong way down a divided highway, are all fine as long as they keep you moving in the right general direction." Well, China visitors, plenty to think about there!

What about North America? Well, it seems to be a good place to go if you like driving. This is what someone called 'Simon' on (www.deletetheweb.com/simon/archives/000072.html) had to say about it: "I must say that driving here has been surprisingly pleasant. Other drivers are much less aggressive than in Europe. Where you would need to hurry up and get out of the way on a British road, people seem content to wait. Even

when I forget the right-turn-on-red rule people seem unbothered by it. People even slow down to let you change lanes, which is unheard of on a European motorway". That's all very encouraging. The main problem for Aussie visitors will be remembering to keep to the right. The Oregon Coast Visitors Association see their road safety advice as being in their own interests – they want visitors to survive so that they can return for another holiday! "We want our visitors making safe, round trips to and from Oregon's Central Coast. This is an admittedly self-serving message. We want travellers to see our winter storms, visit our many indoor attractions, stay overnight at our lodging properties, enjoy our restaurants and shops and make return visits. We want you coming back, AGAIN."

Some government organisation websites are openly critical of road safety conditions in other countries. This piece is in the Consular Information Sheet on France from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Washington: "Roads in France are generally comparable to those in the United States, but traffic engineering and driving habits pose special dangers. Usually, lane markings and sign placements are not as clear as in the United States. Drivers should be prepared to make last-minute manoeuvres, as most French drivers do. [What does that mean, I wonder?] The French typically drive more aggressively and faster than Americans and tend to exceed posted speed limits." That is being pretty frank and indicates some scary experiences by American drivers in France.

Here is some advice on driving in Hawai'i sourced from www.instanthawaii.com/cgi-bin/hawaii?Tips. "Safety in Hawai'i involves both safety in the environment (e.g., falling into lava) and safety on the road (a lot of nutty drivers out there). Until recently (a few years ago) Hawai'i did not require drivers' training for new drivers. Sure, you had to take the test, but there was no official training that was required. Couple that with the fact that the island is made up of people as well as visitors from a huge diverse world-wide area - each with their own driving habits, and you have an interesting driving experience."

"Island driving habits may be a little surprising to some. In places where it is marked 'slow traffic keep to right' you will see just about everyone going slow in the left lane. Often road signs are ignored - people will go slow on fast roads and fast on slow roads. Also, in the towns and cities, local drivers often give pedestrians the right-of-way, so be careful not to rear end the car in front of you. There is very little road rage in Hawai'i - you just go with the flow. However, on some highways it is customary for slow traffic to move into the shoulder (if space allows) to let people behind them go around. Generally a wave to the slower vehicle shows them your appreciation, as you pass them."

Maybe Hawai'i is not so bad after all, if they care about pedestrians, there's little road rage and slow drivers make way for those who want to pass. A report from the Dominican Republic is not so encouraging, however. According to

www.igougo.com, "As a whole, the Dominican population are very reckless, aggressive drivers. Alcohol consumption's also a large part of local culture; so assume that Driving While Intoxicated is, too! Practice ultra-defensive driving skills at all times keeping well below "guessable" speed limits and avoid needing to drive anywhere in Santo Domingo." Well, you have been warned! But would it be any safer walking in Santo Domingo if there are so many drunk drivers on the loose?

According to <http://driving.drive-alive.co.uk/driving-in-spain.htm>, there are encouraging road safety developments in Italy, Austria and Spain, where tourists are advised that it is a good idea to carry a 'Visibility Vest' in the car. If you break down without one and walk beside a motorway, you'll be breaking the law. Note, the vest must be "in the car" and not in the boot, and there should be one vest for each passenger as well.

Many Australians stop-over in Dubai on the way to Europe. There is some very frank advice for tourists in Dubai's own tourist guide 'Discover Dubai': "Whilst roads are excellent, the driving habits of some of the people using them leave a lot to be desired. This can be expected when there are so many people from different countries and hugely diverse cultures and driving experiences on the roads at the same time. Without wishing to sound like a scaremonger, it seems that certain drivers learned their skills from a couple of hours in front of a Play Station game.... If you intend driving out of Dubai to more remote areas, take care of camels wandering on to the road." Other tips include: "Always remember that indicators are considered a fashion accessory. Don't expect anyone to give you a clue of what they intend to do. If someone in front of you is driving erratically it will almost certainly be due to the fact that they are reading map directions, sending a text message and balancing an infant on their lap all at the same time. Don't worry you'll get used to it!"

Thinking of going to Africa for a holiday? Probably not a good idea to drive yourself, unless you are very adventurous. However, here are a few tips, from www.africaguide.com/traveltips/driving.htm: "Try to avoid driving at night as it can be very dangerous in Africa. Roads are often poorly lit, not in good condition and some other drivers have a tendency to drive without their lights on. In many countries, and particularly in rural areas, roads are often poorly maintained and it's not unusual to come across large domestic animals such as sheep and cattle ...there can be few police in remote areas - drunk drivers are not uncommon and be very watchful for drunk pedestrians". I had a friend who knocked down and killed a drunk pedestrian at night during his first week in South Africa. So that last warning should be taken very seriously.

Now we come to Russia. The US Consular Service gives the following advice: "Severe weather and lack of routine maintenance make road conditions throughout Russia highly variable. Drivers should exercise extreme caution to avoid accidents, which are common place in Russia." Judging from some private accounts of motoring in Russia, that is advice

visitors would do well to heed. This comment came from <http://www.drivers.com/article/156/>: "Consider, for example, the painted line down the center of the road; in Russia one only rarely encounters it. And without that outward symbol of restraint, drivers often pass freely across the center quite regardless of oncoming traffic, blind corners or other annoyances." However, he continues, "This is not to say that all drivers in Russia are undisciplined or dangerous. In fact, the vast majority attempt to preserve life and limb by obeying the rules of the road. But those law-abiding citizens must contend with others who doubtless consider "The Road Warrior" a driving instruction film rather than a futuristic fantasy." Perhaps that explains this anecdote in http://dreamers1.com/russia/Practicalities/Russia_Mongolia_Practicalities.htm "Take care driving in Russia. Russian drivers can be aggressive; they can and do take risks. We pulled out to overtake a Lada only to find that another vehicle then overtook us. We did not feel comfortable at all with three vehicles on a two-lane highway and a truck coming in the opposite direction." I can understand the feeling.

Another safety problem for Australian drivers in Russia would probably be understanding the road signs, unless one was very well versed in the language. This is definitely a problem in Japan, where <http://www.yokota.af.mil/PCS/Driving/> warns that "Driving in Japan is quite complicated and expensive. Those who cannot read the language will have trouble understanding road signs." At least the Japanese drive on the same side of the road as we do, which always helps.

Finally, what do other nations think about driving in Australia? Most seem pretty happy about it. This from www.bugaustralia.com/transport/drive.html: "Driving in Australia is easy. Traffic drives on the left and roads are generally well-maintained, but motorways are usually restricted to the approaches to major cities and heavily travelled routes such as Melbourne-Sydney and Sunshine Coast-Brisbane-Gold Coast. There are some very long and boring stretches of road in Australia [Don't we know it!] and fatigue is a big killer - make plenty of rest stops, drink plenty of coffee or cola and share the driving with someone else." That is sound advice that the motoring authorities here often remind us of. Here are some useful tips on outback driving: "Watch out for road trains if you're driving in the outback. These 50-metre-long semi-trailers can't stop as quickly as a regular car so keep out of their way and make sure that you allow plenty of room to overtake one. Also be alert if you're driving in the countryside around dusk - kangaroos are active at this time and are unpredictable - often jumping into the path of an oncoming vehicle." Here is a private American view: "There is not the infrastructure to make cross country motoring the effortless wonder Americans enjoy. Particularly frustrating is the lack of city freeways. To transit most major cities, you must drive in stop-and-go traffic on two lane roads." Yes, we know all about that! I'm not sure I agree with all of the following comment, however: "Australian drivers are reasonably skilled,

though timid. I've learned to almost never give anyone a break in traffic, since they won't take it!" Where did he see those timid drivers, I wonder?

Finally, here is some home-brewed Aussie advice to visitors of the back-packer variety, who do more walking than driving, provided by *Cheap Accommodation Australia - Australian Sunrise Lodge*: "Probably most people have heard of dangerous and scary things one might come across when travelling in Australia...There are highly publicised dangers like: crocodiles, sharks, deadly "Sea Wasp" box jellyfish, venomous snakes and the deadly "Sydney Funnel-Web spider". To put things in perspective, cheap Sydney accommodation visitors should consider the following government statistics:

Accidental causes of fatality in Australia for the ten years 1984–1994: Spider bite 4; crocodile attack 8; shark attack 11; snake bite 28; and hornet, bee, wasp 31. The total of all these: 82, compared to PEDESTRIAN ACCIDENTS 4,973. So you can see that the most important time for cheap accommodation Australia visitors to take care is simply when crossing the road."

Memorials for Road Crash Victims

by Colin Grigg

Cold statistics for traffic deaths are alarming enough. But for each extended family involved, the impact is more than statistics. It is a period of stressful grief. This grief is expressed in many different ways. There is a growing international tradition to place memorials at the very site where death occurred. Other people express grief in other ways.

At the conference "Senses of Place" held on 6-8 April, 2006, at the University of Tasmania, Dr Jennifer Clark, a former Harkness Fellow and current member of the School of Classics, History and Religion at University of New England, was an invited speaker. She has a special interest in roadside memorials and convened the initial International Symposium on Roadside Memorials in 2004. She manages the online discussion group, "Memorial Culture Network".

The paper was based on extensive field studies of hundreds of roadside memorials in Britain, Europe, Australia and New Zealand and collaborative work in the U.S.A. The construction of place in the presentation combined visual images, text from the memorials, with an analytical commentary.

The paper, which she presented, examined the ways in which memorials for the victims of road trauma transform the roadside from 'passing-through' space into specially marked and claimed place. Memorial makers assume authority to identify, individualise, separate, protect and sacredly observe 'spots' by the roadside especially dedicated to ordinary individuals.

In this process values not normally associated with road travel or the roadside are given to these created places. For example, particular mention can be made of the way in which roadside memorials serve a spiritual function and can act to mark a change in direction from the earthly journey to the heavenly one. This spot then acts as an ongoing focus for a whole range of eclectic mourning rituals that the public and government authorities are forced to respect. The roadside memorial marks the place where the dead can be sensed and where communication with them can take place. Here is something much more than a physical space - it is a created place with protocols that cover the metaphysical as well.

The illustrated Power-Point presentation particularly focussed on the process of transformation. It examined issues related to ownership of the place, control of the memorial act and the defence of the right to memorialise in public. It examined the life of the place and attitudes to it, understandings of it and interactions with it. The roadside memorial marks out performance space. The roadside memorial phenomenon challenges the functional purpose of roadsides and highlights the importance of recognising the site of tragic and unexpected death. In so doing, roadside memorials alter the physical appearance of the roadside and create debate within the community about places and purpose. In particular, they stimulate debate about public versus private space; the suitability of memorialisation and protecting the sensibilities of those who see it; hierarchies of feeling; and the role of subliminal communication emanating from these newly created places of significance. Areas of argument and dispute can be highlighted as separate and sometimes competing voices.

