

*HARRY POTTER PLACES*  
UK Travel Supplementum

# Car Rental & Driving Tips



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# *Harry Potter Places*

## Potterite UK Travel Supplementum

### Car Rental & Driving Tips

Driving in Great Britain is far less stressful for Potterites who become familiar with UK road rules and UK driving differences *before* heading out on holiday, and those who rent a car in which they can be completely comfortable while **driving on the left side of the road**.

Below we've listed some of the best UK-related car rental and driving tip resources available on the Internet. Following the Internet resources section you'll find **Extra Tips** for Potterites renting a car and driving in the UK—tips derived from the personal experiences of *Harry Potter Places* authors and contributors.

**Each of the Internet resource links provided are a quick read**, and we strongly recommend that you visit *each* of them. Although you'll encounter some repetition while working your way through all the links, repeated points usually are those that *warrant* extra attention. Preparing to tackle **UK Roundabouts**, for instance, deserves as many articles and explanations as you can find and read!

For Potterites divinely inspired to skip around, we've bulleted particularly important **section headings** from each resource (in bold print), as well as providing a few quotes.

## Internet Resources for UK Car Rental Tips

### Money-Saving Tips for Car Rentals

By Reid Bramblett.

Money-saving tips are Bramblett's specialty.

[http://www.reidsguides.com/t\\_au/t\\_au\\_rentals.html](http://www.reidsguides.com/t_au/t_au_rentals.html)

- **CDW can be worth it.**  
"If your regular auto insurance doesn't cover rentals abroad (check), you might want to buy the collision damage waiver, or CDW. This [coverage] basically allows you to total the car and not be held liable. Your credit card may cover the CDW if you use it to pay for the rental, so always check with your [credit card] company."
- "Always gas it up to the brim before returning it."

### Behind the European Wheel

By Rick Steves.

Although this webpage contains generic *European* car rental and driving tips, most are equally important to car rental and driving in the UK. Steves' GPS device suggestions are particularly astute.

[http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/carrental\\_tips.htm](http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/carrental_tips.htm)

- **Before you drive off, get to know your car**
- "When you pick up your rental car, be sure you know what kind of gas (and what color pumps) you need to use — this is often printed on or near the gas cap — and have [car rental personnel] show you how to open the gas cap."
- **Big Brother is Watching** [Cameras are *everywhere* in the UK—in cities, towns and villages, as well as on the Motorway. Even though driving a rental car, you'll still be held accountable.]
- "Gas [petrol] prices are listed by the liter (about a quart, four to a gallon)."
- **GPS Devices**

## Internet Resources for UK Driving Tips

### Driving Regulations in Britain

★ A must-read article found on VisitBritain.com.

<http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Transport/Getting-around-Britain/Driving-regulations-in-Britain.htm>

- “It’s illegal to use a mobile phone when driving. If you need to make a call, find a safe place to stop first.”
- “Seat belts must be worn by the driver and front seat passenger. Where rear seat belts have been fitted, they must also be worn.”

### US Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs’ Website

All US citizens intending to drive in the UK should read the Traffic Safety tips posted on this page.

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1052.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1052.html#traffic_safety)

- “It is illegal to operate a motor vehicle in the UK while you are using a hand-held cell phone or similar device, including a Personal Data Assistant (PDA) that incorporates a cell phone. Hands-free phones may be used. [**This point is out-dated!**] Use of cell phones and hand-held communication devices while driving can lead to a substantial fine, and in the event of an accident, could result in a jail sentence.”
- “Emergency call boxes (orange telephone booths with ‘SOS’ printed on them) may be found at half-mile intervals along the motorway. White and blue poles placed every 100 yards along the motorway point in the direction of the nearest call box. Emergency call boxes dial directly to a motorway center. **It is best to use these phones rather than a personal cell phone, because motorway center personnel will immediately know the location of a call received from an emergency call box.**”
- “Travelers intending to rent cars in the United Kingdom should make sure they are adequately insured. U.S. auto insurance is not always valid outside the United States, and travelers may wish to purchase supplemental insurance, which is generally available from most major rental agents.”

### United Kingdom: Driving Tips for Visitors

An excellent TripAdvisor article.

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g186216-c9626/United-Kingdom:Driving.Tips.For.Visitors.html>

- **Speed Limits**
- **Right on Red? Never! Left on Red? Nope!**
- **Roundabouts**

### Top 10 UK and Ireland Driving Tips

An excellent About.com article by Ferne Arfin.

<http://gouk.about.com/od/tripplanning/tp/leftdrive.htm>

- **Ask for an Automatic**
- **Watch out for U-turners**
- **Mind the Hedgerows**
- **Look out for Zebras**

### Go Left, Young Man: Driving in Great Britain and Ireland

By Rick Steves.

<http://www.ricksteves.com/tms/article.cfm?id=180&extras=false>

- “If you want to get a little slack on the roads, drop by a gas station or auto shop and buy a green “P” (probationary driver with license) sign to put in your car window.”

**CD Miller very much wishes she’d known about this tip before!**

“On my first UK trip I actually considered finding some cardboard and making a sign to stick in the rear window of my rental car saying, ‘Sorry! Silly Yank driving!’ Although I’m much better at UK driving

than I used to be, I will most certainly be buying a green 'P' sign to post in the rear window of my *next* UK rental car."

### Driving in Great Britain

Part of the *England, Scotland, Wales—A Travel Guide* website, by J.C. Nash, this article is particularly helpful for understanding **UK road etiquette**. Yes, there are rules for polite behavior while driving in Great Britain!

<http://my.core.com/~jcnash/driving02.html>

- 'Oops! Sorry' Hand Signal of Apology
- Cheers and Thanks! [Hand Signal]
- The Etiquette of Wing Mirrors
- The Etiquette of Car Horns
- You're on a Candid Camera

### A Few More Webpages Offering Roundabout Information

Driving in Great Britain

<http://www.netcomuk.co.uk/~mdownes/drive.html>

Cambridge Driving School: How to Drive on Roundabouts

<http://www.cambridgedrivingschool.net/how-to-drive-on-roundabouts.html>

Europe up Close: Tips for Driving in Britain

<http://www.europeupclose.com/article/tips-for-driving-in-britain/>

### How to Drive on Single Track Roads in the Lochcarron area of Wester Ross, Scottish Highlands

\* This webpage is—by far—the **best resource** for learning the rules of navigating a **Single-Track Road** *anywhere* in the UK. Three cheers for Scotland's **Lochcarron & District Business Association!** All Potterites should read this webpage, in its entirety.

<http://www.lochcarron.org.uk/driving.htm>

## Extra UK Car Rental Tips

### Rent an Automatic Transmission Car, Even Though it's More Expensive!

The vast majority of cars in the UK have manual transmissions—aka standard transmissions, those with a **clutch** foot pedal and a **stick** for manual **shifting**.

Potterites who have never *driven a stick* should never rent a manual transmission car in the UK.

Potterites accustomed to operating a manual transmission should also avoid renting a UK car with a stick shift, if you live in a country where you *drive on the right*. **While your right hand may be accustomed to shifting, your left hand is not.**

Try it. Take a friend and a manual transmission car to a large, empty parking lot, such as a major shopping mall or high school after hours. (Some high schools have a Driver's Ed area in their lots.) Have your friend drive the car while *you* do the shifting—with your left hand, while sitting in the passenger seat. It's awful.

**The extra expense of renting an automatic transmission car in the UK is well worth it.** Having to drive on the left side of the road is stressful enough. Shifting with a hand that's never shifted before, significantly increases that stress. No one should have to suffer so much tension while on holiday.

**If you feel strongly about saving money by renting a car with a stick, practice, practice, practice before you leave home!** The foot pedals in UK cars are configured the same as in countries where you drive on the right: clutch on the left, brake in the middle, accelerator on the right. So, your feet will be happy. All you need do is train your left hand to shift.

Again, have a friend drive you around an empty parking lot while you do the shifting from the passenger seat. The more often you're able to practice, the less stressful your UK driving experience will be.

### Smaller is Smarter

You need to have enough room to be comfortable while motoring, as well as being able to stow luggage for everyone in your party. But, smaller cars are far easier to maneuver along narrow UK roads—far easier to park, especially in the tiny spaces offered by parking garages. Additionally, petrol is *exceedingly* expensive. A gallon of gas that costs \$2.25 in the US will commonly cost you \$6.99 in the UK! The smaller the car, the better gas mileage you'll get.

### GPS Devices are Lifesavers in the UK!

Once upon a time, driving visitors had to rely on small-print, paper maps (or MapQuest-like printouts) for finding their way from one UK point to another. Especially because so many UK street signs are difficult to locate—or *nonexistent*—this can be a nightmare! **Now that GPS devices are so readily available, you MUST have one.** A GPS unit will *significantly* alleviate the stress of navigating the UK. Still, as Rick Steves aptly notes, *also* having a paper map is helpful in some situations.

[http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/carrental\\_tips.htm](http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/carrental_tips.htm)

**From least-to-most expensive, here are options for enjoying a GPS device during your holiday:**

- Use the portable unit you already own. Buy and upload a UK maps package before you leave. Beware of **regional** map packages that don't have detailed street-by-street maps for all UK cities.
- Purchase a GPS for use at home, buy and upload a detailed UK maps package before you leave. In 2008, the fee for renting a GPS from the UK car rental company was *more* than what it would have cost to buy one in the US.
- Steves suggests renting a GPS unit in the US to bring with you. Unfortunately, he doesn't identify trustworthy sources for US GPS unit rental. Google! Then, be sure to investigate the cost of renting the GPS for **longer than you'll have the car** (the duration of your holiday), *vs* renting a GPS unit from the car rental company, *vs* buying one to bring with you.
- Check with the company that helps you find the best rental car deal (see below). They may offer discounted GPS devices available for hire in the UK.
- **If none of the above options fit your needs, rent a GPS unit from the car rental company.** Be sure to confirm that your reserved unit is *guaranteed* to be available when you pick up the car. Print and pack the guarantee they send you so that you'll have it with you at the rental desk.

**[Please Note:** Our concern about reserved GPS units being *unavailable* when you arrive to pick up your car (because all of the company's available units are still in use) is based on horrible experiences that occurred two or three years ago, and may be **out-dated fears**. Given today's degree of improved technology, UK rental cars may commonly have *built-in* GPS units now. We aren't sure. But, it doesn't hurt to be prepared!]

**Search for the Best Car Rental Deals and Book in Advance**

Booking in advance, from your home country, is *always* cheaper than booking after you reach the UK.

**Do your research online, then call the company to book.** Having a live agent assisting you will ensure that you understand all available options, and obtain all the extras you want—like a GPS unit.

**Tara Bellers recently discovered Carhire3000:**

<http://www.carhire3000.com/>

"Basically Carehire is like Priceline. The chap I talked to said that they look through all the different vendors to find the best deal. The best deal I found on my own for a 5-day rental of an automatic was £390. Carhire found me a 5-day automatic rental for only £192—including unlimited mileage and taxes!"

Reid Bramblett's **Money-Saving Tips for Car Rentals** provides a list of other companies that employ similar meta-search engine programs so that they can find the best rental car deals for your needs.

[http://www.reidsguides.com/t\\_au/t\\_au\\_rentals.html](http://www.reidsguides.com/t_au/t_au_rentals.html)

**Rental Car Insurance—Gotta Have It!**

**Murphy's Law** is older and far more powerful than **Harry Potter Magic**. If you don't have an insurance policy to cover damage that occurs while driving in the UK, you *will* suffer rental car damage. If you *do* have rental car damage insurance, absolutely nothing will happen to the car you rent—usually. But, if damage *does* happen, you're covered.

**Phone your credit card company** (companies) and ask whether UK rental car insurance is offered when you use the card to book your car. If it *is* offered by your credit card, you're insured!

However, be aware that: if an accident occurs, any damage done to your vehicle—or someone else's—will probably be charged to your credit card until the insurance claim is settled. This is a rather expensive fact, but it's a *temporary* expense. After the claim is settled, your account will be reimbursed—less the deductible. Thus, your credit card's rental car insurance is probably the cheapest and best policy to use.

**Phone your personal automobile insurer** and ask whether they offer coverage for rental car driving in the UK. Such coverage is rarely part of a normal insurance policy. But, if a **temporary rider** is available, it may be cheaper than any other source of UK rental car insurance. Note the policy's cost, and check other options before purchasing a temporary rider from your personal auto insurer.

If UK rental car insurance isn't available through your credit card or personal auto insurance, you should strongly consider purchasing a **collision damage waiver (CDW)** policy from the rental-car-booking service you use, or the company you rent your car from.

**If you book with Carhire3000 (or any other rental-car-booking service), buy their CDW policy.** This policy will almost always be less expensive than the one offered by the company from which you rent your car.

If none of the above options proves less expensive than the CDW policy offered by the car rental company from which you'll be renting your car, **buy *that* policy.** Yes, Murphy's Law dictates that you won't need it if you buy it. But, if you don't buy it, you're sure to regret not having it. The most reassuring thing about having a CDW policy is the ability to walk away from the damaged car without any expense or hassle after the accident paperwork is filled out.

## **About the Credit Card You Use to Book Your Car**

**Be sure to bring it with you!**

While many may consider this tip to be common knowledge, we include it here for Potterites who've not traveled extensively. **The card that booked the car must be used to actually rent the car.**

If you used more than one credit card to book various aspects of your travels (such as your airfare or hotels), be sure to **bring *each* card you used with you.**

**Call your credit card company and ask about the daily credit limit.**

Because people so rarely make a several-hundred-dollar purchase with their credit card on a single day, many are unaware that they *have* a daily credit limit. If your card does have a daily limit, ensure that your limit will not be exceeded when the **full car rental cost**—in addition to a **collision security deposit**—is put on it. Most card companies will agree to increase your daily credit limit during the time you are traveling abroad.

## UK Rental Car Checklist

These steps are so important, we've created a checklist you can print and pack—or load on your smart phone.

<http://HarryPotterPlaces.com/tips/RentalCarCheckList.pdf>

- Take Photos.** Before you put your bags in the boot, snap pix of the front, back, and both sides of your rental car, including the roof. Even though you're insured, every CDW policy has a *deductible* of some sort—cash that will be picked from your pocket if a claim occurs. The only way to prevent having to pay a deductible for rental car damage that was there *before* you left the lot is to be armed with photos demonstrating damage that already existed.
  
- Petrol Points.** Have car rental personnel specify what **kind of petrol** (gas) the car takes—unleaded or diesel—and what **color pumps** you need to use. Have them show you where the **gas-cap-release** is, and be sure you know **which side the gas cap is on**.
  
- Check the GPS Device.** If you brought one with you, fire it up. Does it show the rental car location accurately? Input the coordinates of your first destination. Is it working? If it isn't, you'll need to rent one from the car rental agency.
 

When renting a GPS from the car rental agency, do not leave the lot before ensuring that the agency's unit is working properly and **you know how to use it**.
  
- Test Drive All the Car's Operational Features.**

Before letting the car rental employee leave you, get inside the car and play with all the functions. Yes, the employee may become impatient. But they'll get over it.

  - Do the headlights come on automatically with the engine?  
If not, how do you put them on?
  - How do you switch the headlights to high-beam?
  - Seat settings:** How do you make the seats go back and forth? Up and down?  
Is there a lumbar spine support?  
**\*Adjust the driver's seat to the most comfortable driving position *before* proceeding to the next check list item.**
  - Adjust the rear-view mirror.
  - Learn how to operate the side mirrors and adjust them.
  - Run the front and rear windshield wipers and sprayers.
  - Run the heater or air conditioner.
  - Turn on the radio.

## Extra UK Driving Tips: Parking

### Where Street Parking is Available in the UK, Cars are Allowed to Park Facing *Either* Direction

Observe where and how the natives have parked, and follow their example. Don't be surprised when parked cars have reduced the road to a single lane.

### Do Not Park *Anywhere* Along Single Track Roads!

Small roadside clearings or wide access gates found along single track (single lane) roads are *not* intended for parking. They are there to facilitate opposing-vehicle-passing, or for turning around.

### Avoid Parking on the Side of *Any* Country Road in the UK

Vehicles parked in remote locations are tempting targets for thieves. It is best to park only in recognized car parks.



### Wherever You Park, Secure Your Stuff!

- **Items of any value or importance** that cannot be taken with you should be **locked out of sight** in the boot (trunk).
- **Keep all luggage items locked in the boot.**  
A suitcase seen on the back seat is far too tempting a target.
- **Tarry for the Toot.** Get in the habit of pressing the **door lock button** on your rental car's key fob until you hear the confirming **horn-honk** before leaving your parked car.

## UK Public Car Parks

Most UK car parks have closed circuit TV cameras recording the license plate numbers of vehicles that enter, and the amount of time they are parked. Failure to follow the rules of any public car park can result in very expensive **fin**es, especially if you exceed the expiry time on a **Pay and Display** ticket. Since you're driving a rental car and the fines are *mailed* to offenders, it may take several weeks for them to reach you. But, the fines **will** find you in the end!

Below are three of several **UK Car Parks FAQ** found on the **National Car Parks Ltd** website.

<http://www.ncp.co.uk/help-centre/faq/common-questions/>

### What is a "Pay and Display" Car Park?

"In a 'Pay and Display' car park you park your car [and walk to the lot's payment machine. There you estimate] approximately how long you intend to stay and put the correct change into the machine. The ticket from the machine should then be displayed in your car while you are parked."

Obviously, it's better to overestimate the time you'll be parked than to underestimate it.

**\*Please Note:** Different **Pay and Display** car parks specify different **locations for payment ticket posting**—passenger-side front dash ... driver’s-side front dash ... in a window on the side of the car. Be attentive to where you should post your ticket before leaving the payment machine.

**Tara Bellers Warns:**

“This is a REALLY important point. I once used a Pay and Display machine in Bath. I looked at other cars around me and thought they had put the ticket on the dash, so that’s what I did. Upon my return from shopping, I had a Parking Citation under the windshield wiper, stating that I didn’t properly display my ticket (it was supposed to have been attached to the passenger-side window). I went to the police department (which was very near where I was parked) to show them my valid payment ticket and try to get the fine waived. But, the police department doesn’t handle parking citations—a separate company does that. The Police asked me if it was a rental car. I replied that it was, and they said not to worry about it, because they wouldn’t be able to trace it back to me anyway. **THEY WERE WRONG.** A month after my return to the US, I received a Parking Citation charge on the credit card I used to rent my UK car for £80 (approximately \$120 at the time!). UGH!”

**What is a "Pay on Exit" Car Park?**

“In a ‘Pay on Exit’ car park you take a ticket on entry and then park your car as normal. When you are ready, return to your vehicle and drive up to the exit barrier. Insert your ticket into the machine at the barrier, the cost of your parking will be displayed and you can then make payment with your credit/debit card.”

The Pay on Exit car parks that take cash, often do not give change. Always be armed with plenty of UK coins.

**What is a "Pay at Pay Station" Car Park?**

“In [a ‘Pay at Pay Station car park’] you get a ticket on entry. When you return to the car park take the ticket to the pay station and put it into the machine so that it can work out the cost of your stay, make payment and take the [payment receipt] ticket out of the machine. [Do not tarry in the car park after paying and obtaining a payment receipt. It’s timed!] Drive up to the exit barrier and insert your ticket. The barrier will then be raised and you can leave the car park.”

You’ll encounter this kind of car park when visiting **Durham Cathedral: HPP Book Four—NEWTs: Northeastern Wizarding Treks, Site #45.**

## Extra UK Driving Tips: Single Track Roads

Below is the **Single-Track Road** rules link provided in the Internet Resource section at the beginning of this Supplementum. If you didn't visit this link before, go there now.

### How to Drive on Single Track Roads in the Lochcarron area of Wester Ross, Scottish Highlands

★ This webpage is—by far—the **best resource** for learning the rules of navigating a **Single-Track Road** *anywhere* in the UK. Three cheers for Scotland's **Lochcarron & District Business Association!** All Potterites should read this webpage, in its entirety.

<http://www.lochcarron.org.uk/driving.htm>

In the event that this link may some day become inactive, we've saved the page's content to a PDF and posted it as a HPP Supplementum. Should you have difficulty accessing the Lochcarron Single Track Roads Internet link—or should you wish to save this information to your smart phone—go to: <http://www.harrypotterplaces.com/tips/LochcarronSingleTrackRoadWebpage.pdf>

## Extra UK Vehicle Terminology

While some of the terms below are included in the *HPP* UK Terminology Supplementum, what follows is a more comprehensive list of automobile-related UK terms and their US translations.

### Common UK Automobile-Related Terms

**Bonnet = Hood**

**Boot = Trunk**

**Car Hire = Car Rental**

**Central Reservation = A Median:** a physical barrier (wood or metal), or raised section of paved or unpaved ground, separating one or more lanes of opposing directions of travel.

**Gallon (UK) =** About 1.2 US gallons

**Glove Box [archaic: Cubby Hole] = Glove Compartment:** The compartment within a car's dashboard, on the passenger side, where small stuff can be stored.

**Handbrake = Parking Brake**

**Lay-By =** A small, widened area periodically encountered on Single-Track Roads, offered for the purpose of allowing one of two opposing vehicles to pull over so that the other can pass—generally only large enough to accommodate one vehicle.

**Liter = About a Quart:** four liters to a US gallon.

**Lorry = Truck**

**Manual Gearbox; aka Stick Shift=** A car with manual transmission.

**Number Plate = License Plate**

**Pavement = Sidewalk**

**Petrol = Gasoline**

**Petrol Station = Gas Station**

**Windscreen = Windshield**

**Zebra Crossing = Pedestrian Crosswalk:** a section of road with white stripes painted on it (sometimes also marked by striped poles), where you must stop and remain stopped until any pedestrians therein have finished crossing and safely reached the opposite sidewalk.

### Common UK Roadway Terms

**Dual Carriageway = Divided Highway:** two carriageways (roads) containing traffic traveling in opposite directions, **separated by a median** (a **central reservation**).

**Motorway = Interstate or Freeway:** a major highway consisting of two or more carriageways **separated by a central reservation**, each carriageway composed of **three or more lanes**.

**Single Carriageway = Undivided Highway:** a road with carriageways containing traffic traveling in opposite directions *without a median between them*, regardless of the number of lanes on either side.

**Single-Track Road = Single-Lane Road:** one lane shared by motorists traveling in both directions, with small widened areas (**Lay-Bys**) periodically offered as places where one vehicle can pull over to allow the other to pass, or where any vehicle can turn around.