



Driving in New South Wales (NSW)

Quick road rules for overseas visitors

Welcome to New South Wales



In the year ending September 2025, New South Wales welcomed a record 126.3 million visitors, including domestic and international travellers.

(Destination NSW, 2025)

✎ If you plan to drive in NSW, it's important to understand the local road rules.

This guide provides information to help visitors drive safely, along with popular driving and road-trip tips.

Please note that this guide gives general advice only, and road users must always follow official NSW road rules.

The NSW Government also provides the Road User Handbook in multiple languages on their website, making it easier for overseas visitors to understand the rules.

You can find out more [here](#).

Can you drive in NSW with an overseas licence?

If you are visiting NSW temporarily, you may drive using your current overseas driver's licence if:

- It is valid, and
- It is written in English, or you carry an English translation or an International Driving Permit (IDP)

You can also drive in NSW on an overseas learner's or provisional licence, but you must follow strict conditions.

QUICK TIP

Overseas drivers can use their valid licence for up to 6 months in NSW. Apply for an NSW licence before this period ends. After 6 months, you cannot drive without an NSW licence. Always carry your licence and, if needed, your translation or International Driving Permit (IDP).

Drive on the left

In NSW (and all of Australia), you must:

- Drive on the left side of the road.
- Overtake on the right, when safe.

QUICK TIP

Always stay in the left lane except when overtaking, and return to the left as soon as it is safe. Driving on the right-hand side is illegal if you are not overtaking.

Speed limits

- Always follow the posted speed limit signs
- Speed limits vary by road and area (urban, highway, school zones).
- The speed limit is the maximum allowed. If necessary, drive slower due to weather, traffic, or poor visibility.
- Driving faster than the speed limit is illegal and can result in fines and demerit points.
- School zones have lower speed limits during specific times of day to protect children.

QUICK TIP

Always follow the posted speed limits. Speed limits are strictly enforced in NSW, and speed cameras operate throughout the state. Fines and penalties apply for exceeding the limit, especially in school zones.

Mobile phone rules

Using a mobile phone while driving is very restricted:

- You must not hold or use your phone while driving (including texting, social media, or filming).
- If using a phone for navigation, it must be securely mounted in a cradle.
- Learner and provisional drivers must not use a phone at all while driving.
- Fixed and mobile phone cameras operate throughout NSW to enforce these rules.

Distractions increase crash risk. Keep your eyes on the road.

QUICK TIP

Plan ahead! Enter your route in your maps app before driving and download the map for offline use, so you can focus on the road and still navigate if you lose mobile signal.

Seatbelts are mandatory

- All passengers must wear a seatbelt in both front and back seats.
- The driver is responsible for ensuring that all passengers wear their seat belts correctly.
- Seatbelt detection cameras operate in NSW to enforce compliance with seatbelt laws.
- Not wearing a seatbelt can result in fines and demerit points
- Children must use approved child restraints suitable for their age and size - [NSW child car seat rules](#).

QUICK TIP

Always check that everyone in the car is properly belted before driving.

Car horn rules

- You may only use your horn to warn others of danger.
- It is illegal to use your horn to express anger or impatience.
- Short, controlled use is expected. Not long or repeated honking.

Roundabouts, intersections & U-turns

Give Way & Roundabouts

- On approaching a roundabout, you must slow down or stop and give way to all vehicles already on the roundabout.
- Always obey the "Give Way" and "Stop" signs at intersections.

Turning & Pedestrians

- When turning, watch carefully for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users. You must give way to pedestrians crossing the road you are turning into.

U-Turn Rules in NSW

- U-turns are allowed only where there is no "No U-Turn" sign, or where a "U-Turn Permitted".
- You must **not** make a U-turn:
 - At an intersection with traffic lights, unless a "U-turn" permitted sign is displayed
 - Across single or double unbroken dividing lines
 - On motorways and freeways
- When making a U-turn, you **must**:
 - Have a clear view of approaching traffic
 - Give way to all vehicles and pedestrians
 - Indicate before you start the turn

Road Line Markings

The Australian Road Rules outline a national standard that must be met, but states and territories can add to them, which is why some road rules differ across Australia; however, line markings and their meanings are the same nationally.

Line marking		What it means
	Broken white centre line	You may cross to overtake if the road ahead is clear and it is safe to do so.
	Single unbroken white line	Do not cross to overtake. You may cross to enter or leave a property, or to pass a cyclist if safe.
	Double unbroken white lines	Never cross to overtake. You may cross to enter or leave a road by the shortest route.
	Broken line on your side, unbroken on the other	You may overtake if safe. If the unbroken line is on your side, you must not cross.
	Edge lines	Mark the edge of the road. You may cross briefly to overtake a cyclist, avoid an obstruction, or turn.
	Yellow kerb lines	Indicate stopping and parking restrictions. An unbroken yellow kerb line means no stopping at any time.
	Painted islands	Do not drive on areas surrounded by double lines. You may drive on painted islands surrounded by single lines for up to 50m to enter or exit a lane.

Pedestrians & cyclists

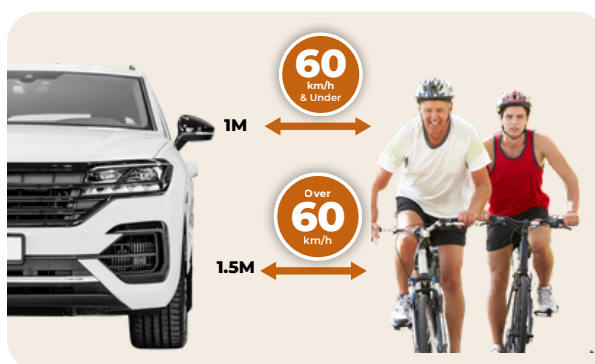
Pedestrians

As a driver, you **must** give way to pedestrians:

- In shared zones.
- At pedestrian and children's crossings.
- When turning at intersections.
- When doing a U-turn.
- When entering or leaving a driveway.

Cyclists

- Cyclists are legally allowed on most roads, usually on the left-hand side, and may use bike lanes where provide.
- When passing a cyclist, you must leave at least 1 m of space on roads ≤ 60 km/h, and 1.5 m on roads > 60 km/h.
- Always check for cyclists before opening doors, turning, or changing lanes.



QUICK TIP

Treat pedestrians and cyclists with care. Crashes can cause serious injury.

Drink & drug driving

NSW has strict laws about alcohol and drugs, with different class licence holders having different Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) limits:

- Full licence: Max BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration) 0.05%.
- Learner/provisional licences: Zero alcohol (0.00%).

QUICK TIP

Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs is always illegal, including medications that affect your ability to drive. If you plan to drink, do not drive.

Safe following distance

- Leave at least a 3-second gap between your car and the vehicle in front.
- In rain, fog, or poor visibility, increase this to 4–5 seconds.
- Large trucks and buses need even more space.

This distance gives you time to brake safely if traffic stops suddenly.

Parking & toll roads

Parking

- In Australia, you must park in the same direction as the traffic travels.
- Always check all parking signs carefully:
 - Where you can park
 - How long you can stay
 - Whether parking is allowed or restricted
 - If it's free or paid
- Many areas use ticket machines or mobile apps to pay for parking.
- Parking fines are common and can be expensive if rules are ignored.
- Do **not** park:
 - In bus zones
 - In disabled spaces without a permit
 - Near fire hydrants
 - Across driveways

Toll Roads

- NSW has cashless toll roads (no booths).
- Payment is made using:
 - A toll tag (linked to your vehicle), or
 - A temporary visitor pass purchased online
- Cameras record your number plate and automatically charge the toll.
- If you use a toll road without paying, extra fees may apply.

Emergency vehicles

If an emergency vehicle (police, ambulance, fire truck) approaches with flashing lights or sirens:

- Move out of the way or stop safely to let it pass.
- When passing stationary emergency or roadside assistance vehicles with flashing lights, slow down to 40 km/h and give space if possible.

Overnight stops

Overnight in your car? Only stay in designated rest areas or campgrounds. Sleeping on streets, highways, or in non-designated areas is illegal and can result in fines.

QUICK TIP

Always plan ahead for a safe overnight stop.

Driving on Gravel & Unsealed Roads

Not all roads in Australia are sealed with asphalt. Gravel and unsealed roads, surfaced with loose stones, dirt, or clay, are common in regional and outback areas and are frequently encountered when travelling between rural towns, accessing national parks, or exploring areas away from major highways.

These surfaces present unique risks: loose gravel reduces grip and makes braking harder, corrugations (washboard rippling) can cause loss of steering control, and dust from other vehicles can dramatically reduce visibility.

To reduce your risk:

- Slow down. Treat the speed limit as a maximum, not a target.
- Never brake suddenly. Ease off gently to avoid skidding.
- Increase your following distance to see through dust.
- Turn headlights on at all times to stay visible.
- Check tyre tread and ensure your spare is inflated before heading out.
- Tell someone your route and ETA. Mobile coverage may be limited.

Road Trains

A road train is a truck towing two or more trailers. They can stretch up to 53.5 metres and weigh over 100 tonnes when fully loaded, making them one of the largest vehicles on Australian roads. They are essential to moving freight across the vast distances of regional and outback Australia.

In town

- Road trains are restricted to specific routes in urban areas. If you encounter one, give them plenty of space. Their size means wide turning arcs and large blind spots along both sides, directly in front, and up to 10 metres behind.

On regional roads

- Before overtaking, ensure you have at least 1.5–2 km of clear road ahead. At 100 km/h, passing a full-length road train takes longer than most drivers expect. Do not attempt to overtake if you are towing a caravan or trailer, and brace for a strong wind rush as you pass.
- Once past, do not cut back in front until the entire road train is visible in your rear-view mirror. A fully loaded road train travelling at 100 km/h can take over 250 metres to stop, nearly three football fields, so the space you leave matters.

If a road train overtakes you

- Hold your speed and keep left. When it has fully passed, flash your headlights once to signal it is safe to move back in.

Driving in remote or rural areas

- Towns and fuel stations can be far apart. Always plan fuel stops in advance.
- Drive carefully in rural and remote areas, especially at dawn and dusk. Animals such as kangaroos can cross the road unexpectedly. Watch for wildlife.
- Roads may be narrow, unsealed, or unlit at night.
- The weather can change quickly, including heavy rain and flooding.
- Carry water, food, and basic emergency supplies.

Flooded Roads

Floodwater on a road is any water that has risen above the normal road surface due to heavy rain, overflowing rivers, or storm surge. It may look like a shallow puddle or a slow-moving stream, but appearances are deceptive. Water moving at just 3.6 km/h (2.2 mph) is enough to knock an adult off their feet. At just 15 cm (6 inches), a vehicle can lose traction. At 30 cm (12 inches), most cars will float and be swept away. The depth and speed of floodwater are almost impossible to judge from inside a vehicle, and the road surface beneath may be damaged or completely washed away.

The rule is simple: if it's flooded, forget it.

- Never drive through floodwater regardless of how shallow it looks.
- Turn around and find an alternative route, or wait until the road is declared safe.
- If your vehicle stalls in floodwater, get out immediately and move to higher ground.
- Check live road closures before travelling in flood-prone areas: victraffic.vic.gov.au.

Road signs guide

Warning Signs (Yellow or Red)

- Show hazards such as curves, animals, crossings, or slippery roads.
- Mean: slow down and prepare.

Regulatory Signs (Red, White, Black)

- Show rules you must obey.
- Examples: STOP, GIVE WAY, speed limits, no U-turn
- Ignoring these can result in fines.

Information Signs (Blue or Green)

- Show directions, services, parking, hospitals, fuel.
- Help drivers navigate and plan stops.

Roadwork Signs

- Usually orange.
- Show temporary speed limits and changed road conditions.
- Must be obeyed even if workers are not visible.

Learn more about road signs in the [Road User Handbook](#).

Driving tips

- Distances can be longer than expected. Allow extra time and enjoy your trip.
- Weather can change fast: flash flooding along coasts, snow in the high country.
- Use **Driver Reviver Stops** to stay alert.
- Carry essentials: water, snacks, a first aid kit, and a mobile charger.
- Plan your route carefully, including petrol stations, mechanical services, and medical services.
- In case of a casualty or medical emergency, **call 000**.
- Areas with no signal:
 - Inform someone of your route and expected arrival time before you leave, if possible
 - Carry a paper map or a GPS device that works offline
 - Keep extra water, food, and blankets in case you are stranded
- Take regular breaks: every 2 hours or 200 km is recommended. Stretch, rest, and rotate drivers if possible.
- Drive to the conditions: slow down on wet, windy, or icy roads, and be extra cautious on winding mountain routes.

QUICK TIP

Driver Reviver Stops are highway rest areas designed to help drivers stay alert on long trips. They offer free tea, coffee, and water, a safe place to stretch, and road safety information.

How people drive in Australia

- Driving is generally calm and rule-focused.
- Speed limits are taken seriously and heavily enforced.

Drivers expect:

- Use of indicators (turn signals).
- Obeying signs and lane markings.
- Politely merging and giving way.
- Aggressive driving and the use of a loud horn are not socially accepted.
- Long-distance driving is common, so fatigue management is important. There are always rest areas along the highways, so plan your breaks ahead of time.

Popular drives & road trip tips

New South Wales has a bit of everything for every type of traveller. You'll find beautiful beaches, coastal walks, waterfalls, rainforests, and mountains for hiking. In winter (June to August), the Snowy Mountains get snow for skiing and snowboarding. From May to September, you can go whale watching along the coast.

Most of the beaches have a surf club, designed to look after the local beach, and most also have a café or restaurant where you can grab a meal. For food and drink lovers, NSW is home to wineries, distilleries, and craft breweries, many of which offer tastings and scenic surroundings. There are also charming towns, national parks, and plenty of different landscapes to explore.

NSW is full of iconic drives, great scenery, and fun stops along the way. Next, you'll find a simple guide to distances, travel times, and recommended stops.

Fun stops & landmarks

Landmark / Stop	Location	Notes
Byron Bay	Eastern NSW coast	Easternmost point of mainland Australia, lighthouse, coastal walks
The Big Banana	Coffs Harbour	Photo op, café, small amusement park
The Big Merino	Goulburn	Giant sheep celebrating wool industry
The Big Prawn	Ballina	Quirky stop, snack break
Blue Mountains Lookouts	Blue Mountains	Echo Point, Govetts Leap, Wentworth Falls
Hunter Valley	Hunter Valley	Wineries, scenic drives, local produce
Port Stephens	Mid-North Coast	Sand dunes, dolphin cruises, beaches
Kiama Blowhole	Kiama	Spectacular water display at high tide
Snowy Mountains	Southern NSW	Scenic drives, hiking, snow even in summer
Jenolan Caves	Near Blue Mountains	Limestone caves, family-friendly
Lake George Lookout	Between Canberra & Sydney	Quick photo stop, scenic stretch

Popular road trip

Route	Distance	Approx. drive time	Recommended stops & tips
Sydney → Gold Coast	~850 km	9–10 hrs	Driver Reviver stops, Big Banana (Coffs Harbour), Big Prawn (Ballina). Plan for weather & petrol
Sydney → Melbourne	~880 km	9–10 hrs	Rest areas, Big Merino (Goulburn), scenic detours: Yass & Gundagai
Sydney → Canberra	~290 km	3–3.5 hrs	Bungendore, Lake George, Driver Reviver stops
Sydney → Byron Bay	~770 km	8–9 hrs	Byron Bay lighthouse & walks, Big Banana, Port Macquarie
Sydney → Blue Mountains	~60 km	1–1.5 hrs	Echo Point, Govetts Leap, Wentworth Falls, Jenolan Caves
Sydney → Hunter Valley	~250 km	3–3.5 hrs	Wineries, scenic lookouts
Sydney → Snowy Mountains	~500 km	6–7 hrs	Cooma, Thredbo, Jindabyne, check snow/weather

Vehicle Checks

Before setting off, especially on a long trip or in regional areas, run through these basic checks. Most take less than a minute each. If any check reveals a problem, address it before you travel — not on the road.

Check	What to look for	If something's wrong
Tyre tread	The grooves on each tyre. If the tread is worn down to 1.5mm or below, the tyre must be replaced before driving. For wet weather safety, aim for at least 3mm.	Visit a tyre shop or mechanic. Do not drive on worn tyres, especially in wet conditions.
Tyre pressure	The recommended pressure is on a sticker inside the driver's door frame or in the owner's manual. Check pressure when tyres are cold, before driving, or after less than 2km. Hot tyres will give a false reading.	Most Australian service stations (petrol stations) have a free tyre pressure and air refill station. Top up there.
Brakes	Press the brake pedal firmly while stationary. It should feel solid, not spongy or soft. Then do a slow-speed stop at around 10–15 km/h and listen for grinding or pulling to one side.	Take the vehicle to a mechanic before continuing your trip.
Lights	All headlights, brake lights, indicators, and reversing lights are working	Replace the globe yourself (available at most auto shops) or visit a mechanic.
Fluids	Make sure engine oil, coolant, brake fluid, and windscreen washer fluid are between the minimum and maximum marks.	Top up at a service station or auto shop. If oil or coolant is consistently low, see a mechanic.
Wipers	The wiper blades clear the windscreen cleanly without streaking or chattering.	Replacement wiper blades. Available at most service stations and auto shops.
Windscreen	Check for chips or cracks. A small chip can spread across the entire windscreen on a hot day or on corrugated roads.	Get chips repaired at a windscreen repair shop. It can be done while you wait.
Spare tyre & jack	The spare tyre is inflated and the jack and wheel brace are accessible.	Inflate at a service station, or replace if the tyre is damaged.
Battery	If the car has been slow to start, or the battery is more than 3–4 years old, get it checked.	Most mechanics and auto shops (such as Repco or Supercheap Auto) will test your battery for free.

On the road? Share the adventure!

Scan the QR code, follow us on Instagram, and share your travel snaps using **#RSARoadTrip**.

We'd love to see and share your favourite stops, scenic views, and safe driving moments from across Australia.



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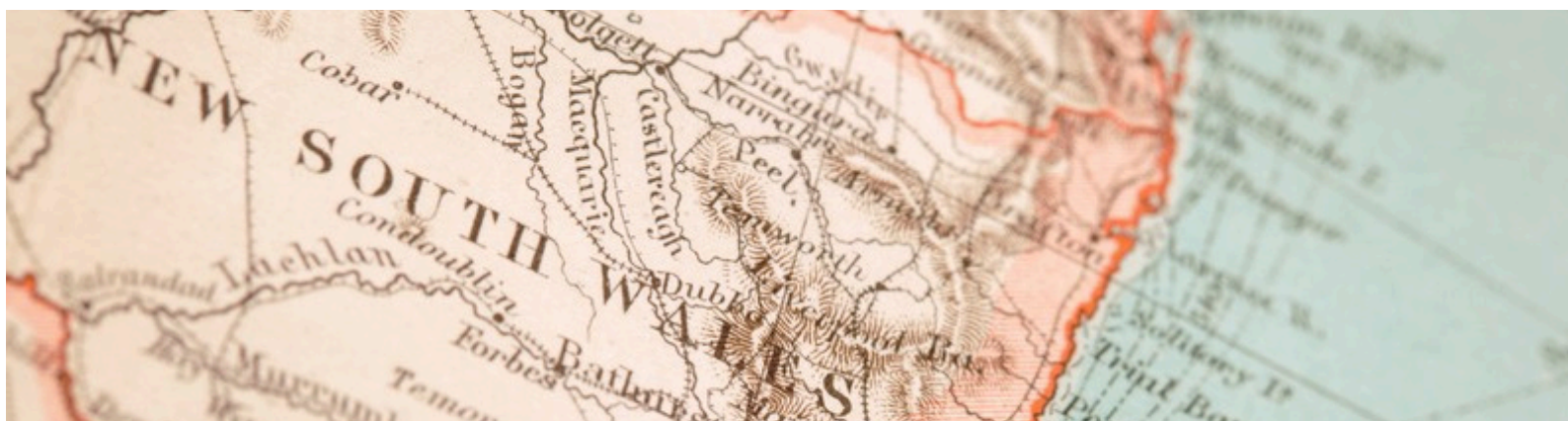
Disclaimer

This eBook has been prepared by Road Sense Australia (RSA), a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting road safety awareness and providing practical guidance for drivers across Australia. RSA offers resources, courses, and information to help all road users stay safe and informed.

This guide provides general road rules information for overseas visitors driving in New South Wales (NSW). The information in this guide is based on publicly available resources, including the NSW Government's Road User Handbook, and is intended as a quick reference only. It does not replace the official NSW road rules or driver licensing requirements.

Road laws and regulations may change over time and vary by location, licence type, and individual circumstances.

Drivers are responsible for ensuring they understand and follow the current road rules that apply in NSW.



References

This guide is based on the following NSW Government sources:

- [Transport for NSW - Road User Handbook – English](#)
- [Visiting or driving in NSW with an overseas licence](#)
- [Road safety and rules – NSW Government](#)
- [Laws and regulations - Australian road rules](#)



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