

15 things you need to know about driving in Hungary

Documents & things to carry

When you're hitting the road in Hungary, please always carry a full, valid driving license (UK, EU, EEA and various international licenses are acceptable). You should also carry your motor insurance certificate, rental paperwork for your hire car or V5 registration papers for your own vehicle. If you're taking your own car, these days you'll need a UK rather than GB sticker and headlamp converters if your headlamps can't be adjusted. And you're also required to carry spare external bulbs, a first-aid kit, fire extinguisher, warning triangle and reflective jacket.

Age restrictions

If you want to hire a car in Hungary, the minimum age is 21 but some car hire firms might apply a surcharge if you're under 25 – please check beforehand. Some car hire firms also require that you've held your license for a minimum of one year and you'll probably not be permitted to take the car outside Hungary without prior permission. Another good idea is to take out separate car hire excess insurance before you leave home – doesn't cost much in the scheme of things but it's an excellent protection for any unforeseen costs.

Seatbelts

It's mandatory for the driver and everyone inside the car to wear seatbelts – so no excuses. There are strict rules when it comes to child seatbelts/seat restraints too. Kids under 3 who measure less than 150cm should sit in a restraint that's appropriate for their size and children over 3 who measure over 150cm don't need a restraint, provided the car's own seatbelt fits them. Child safety in the vehicle is always the responsibility of the parents or the person renting the vehicle.

Car rental firms in Hungary

There are several excellent car rental firms operating in Hungary. These include Klass Wagen, Green Motion, Buchbinder Rent-a-Car, Alamo, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz and National. Klass Wagen is a hardworking local outfit which started with just 4 employees and seven vehicles but has gone from strength to strength due to its commitment to customer service. Meanwhile, Green Motion is a world-leading car rental brand in terms of low CO2 emissions, and Buchbinder has been providing car rental since 1990 and now operates in 165 cities and airports in Germany, Austria, and Slovakia, as well as Hungary. You're probably familiar with the global players on this list – safe to say each has its own benefits and maintains high standards worldwide.

Driving distances & toll roads

The drive south from Budapest to Szeged is 176km (approximately two hours), Szolnok to Debrecen is 129km (roughly one hour and 40 minutes, depending on traffic) and Gyor to Sopron is 96km (one hour and 20 minutes approximately). You also need to know about toll roads. All roads marked with an M require the payment of a toll and you need a sticker (or e-vignette) for all vehicles up to 3.5t, with a higher fee payable for 7 seaters. You can arrange your e-vignette online.

Speed limits

Speed limits in Hungary are 50km/h in built-up areas, 90km/h on open roads, 110km/h on main roads and 130km/h on motorways. Please pay attention to the signage carefully as the same road may have different limits for certain sections.



Right side of road & priority

Like elsewhere in mainland Europe, you should drive on the right side of the road in Hungary and overtake on the left. At crossroads without traffic controls, you should give priority to the right. When there are triangular road markings at the junction, you should give way to all other vehicles. And in general, in areas where there are no markings, vehicles coming from the right have priority.

Vehicle inspections

As a matter of course, you should perform some quick, standard checks to ensure that your car's roadworthy – especially before a longer road trip. So please check the brakes work, all the lights work, and the mirrors, windows and windscreen are clean. You should also check your tyre tread, engine oil, water level in radiator, brake fluid level, battery and windscreen wiper fluid level. It's not necessary to perform these checks every trip but it's good to monitor the state of your vehicle regularly.

Common road signs

Many of the most common road signs in Hungary will look familiar if you usually drive in the UK or elsewhere in Europe. For instance, the triangular warning signs with red borders indicating that the road narrows ahead, traffic jams should be expected, cattle crossing etc. Recommended speed signs have the relevant number in white placed on a blue square background. The parking sign is a white P on a blue square background and the signs for 'motorway begins' and 'motorway ends' look almost identical to their UK equivalents.

Parking

In Budapest and most other cities in Hungary, there is free parking in most of the main tourist areas – a real coup for visitors and authorities alike. Elsewhere, there's metered parking which you pay for between 8am and 6pm, and in some areas there's a charge 24/7. You'll see signage indicating where there's a charge and once you park you should grab a ticket immediately at the machine. Minimum parking time is 15 minutes and commonly the periods available are two and four hour limits. Meters only accept coins of payment via a local mobile provider. You'll also find private underground and multi-storey car parks which are secure and guarded.



Petrol stations and rest stops

You won't struggle to find petrol stations in Hungary – in cities, towns and on main road networks. Brands to look out for include OMV, MOL, Axion Hungary, Magan, Shell, Mobil and Lukoil. Many have modern facilities including shops and rest areas.

Smog restrictions

Certain types of vehicles can be restricted from entering Budapest and other cities when there's extreme smog. It's unlikely this will affect you, but best that you know.

Rail crossings

There are several rail crossings and tramways in Hungary, so please be careful as you approach them. The warning sign for trams is the vehicle itself in a red-bordered triangle, a white saltire with red borders is a rail crossing ahead with one railway and one with a chevron at the lower section warns of a rail crossing ahead with more than one railway.

Drink driving

The drink driving rule in Hungary is refreshingly simple – it's zero tolerance. So don't even let a glass of alcohol close to your lips if you plan on taking to the road. Perhaps more countries will follow suit and implement this type of strict policy – perhaps it would be easier for drivers to understand and reduce accidents overall.

Night driving & winter

You should use dipped headlights at all times on motorways in Hungary, and it's not legal to use full beams in built-up areas at night. Please also remember that winters can be extreme in Hungary, and you should use winter tyres or snow chains in these types of conditions.