

STAY SAFE ON CRETE'S ROADS

Most **road signs** are dual language, Greek and English. **STOP** signs are in English only so Greek drivers don't understand them.

On the National Highway the white line on the right marks the **emergency lane**. It is not a driving lane but it is convention to use it to allow other vehicles to overtake. Failure to do this will annoy faster drivers who will then overtake dangerously. **Don't** use the emergency lane on a right hand bend where your forward view is reduced as there may be something parked or someone walking.

Double white lines mark the centre of the road. When overtaking try to keep part of your vehicle to the right of the lines.

On the National Highway use of the **left indicator** tells drivers coming towards you, "I'm overtaking; move over."

If you are pulling into the roadside to stop **use the hazard lights**. If you use a single indicator other drivers will assume you intend to turn even if the next junction is a kilometre ahead.

Cross **Red traffic lights** as fast as possible as there's probably some idiot crossing on the other road on green. If you must stop on red and head the queue watch the **green man** for pedestrians and move off the instant it goes red. If you are in a queue and the lead driver fails to start **before green** sound the horn.

Take care when crossing on **green lights** (see above).

If a driver ahead of you **stops to chat** with someone coming from the opposite direction wait patiently.

On no account sound the horn.

Seat belts are compulsory - generally used to hold drunk drivers upright.

Erecting **No Overtaking** signs was the decision of a humorist. Cretan drivers consider overtaking mandatory, especially on bends.

Flashing headlights usually means one of two things; "Stay where you are, I'm coming through" or "There's a speed trap ahead".

If you encounter a **flock of sheep** drive slowly, close to the side of the road and you should get through. Take great care and, if in doubt, stop. Injuring a pedestrian might cause some anger but damage a sheep and you may get shot.

Crash helmets are mandatory for riders of mopeds, scooters and motorcycles. In summer they are usually worn as elbow protectors as it's too hot if worn on the head.

On **narrow roads** don't drive too close to the side as there could be sheep, goats or pedestrians just round the next bend. Be especially careful at night as people often wear high visibility black clothing.

Take care at **hairpin bends** as big vehicles often need to approach on the wrong side of the road. Most trucks have loud horns but drivers don't always use them. Take a bend too fast and you could be nose to nose with a petrol tanker or ready-mix lorry. They are *much* bigger than you.

The above may seem tongue-in-cheek but there's a serious message behind every point. (For example, using the emergency lane to allow overtaking is expected; people do jump lights.) Many Cretan drivers (and foreigners who have lived in Crete for some time) take appalling risks, overtaking on bends, tailgating at speed, ignoring road signs and speed limits and so on. Expect the unexpected, drive defensively and you'll have few, if any, problems. Driving in Crete really isn't as bad as it may seem.

"Expect the unexpected" is probably good advice anywhere in the world. There are crazy drivers everywhere but Crete seems to have more than its fair share - both Greek and foreign - despite the heavy penalties for traffic offences.

Be aware that visitors are not exempt.

- There are police speed checks, usually on the National Highway. (Flashing headlights is a warning).
- Fines are imposed for not wearing crash helmets or seat belts (but rarely in rural areas).
- People do run red lights and fail to observe 'Stop' signs.
- Drivers do cross solid double lines to overtake, even approaching bends.
- Moving into the emergency lane to allow overtaking is customary. Do exercise caution near bends as there may be obstructions.

- You will be hooted at if you delay at a green traffic light.
- There may be a flock of sheep round the next bend especially on rural roads and occasionally on the National Highway. The sheep and goat tracks were there long before the roads and motor vehicles. Close to the side of the road is the best place to proceed. If in doubt, stop.
- Some pedestrians do wear all black clothing at night.
- Listen for loud horns when approaching hairpin bends on narrow roads.
- Motorbikes and scooters ignore all traffic rules and are often unlit at night

Happy (and safe) motoring.