

# Winter tires



*Within Europe, in Iceland  
and Norway*



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Help and advice  
for consumers  
in Europe



European Consumer Centres Network

# INTRODUCTION

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In some European countries winter tires are mandatory for cars. In others they are not mandatory or only under special conditions.

Therefore, it should be helpful, before going on holidays, to have a closer look at the corresponding regulations.

The 30 European Consumer Centers answered the following questions concerning winter tires in Europe, Iceland and Norway:

- Are winter tires mandatory or not?
- Are there special areas where winter tires are mandatory?
- Are there special caution signs where winter tires are required?
- Are studded tires allowed?
- Are snow chains allowed?

# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE LEGALLY MANDATORY

## Estonia

Winter tires are mandatory in Estonia from 1st December to 1st March. With exceptional road- and weather conditions it is allowed to use studded tires from 15th October to 31st March. Winter tires without studs (all-season tires) are allowed to use all year around.

## Finland

In Finland winter tires are mandatory from 1st December by the end of February. Studded tires may be used from 1st November until the first Monday after Easter. The tread depth has to be at least 3 mm. These regulations also apply to cars which have been registered abroad.

However, on from 1.6.2020 there will be a new traffic law. It states that winter tires have to be used from November to March but only if weather so requires. This doesn't mean that winter tires are not mandatory.

## Latvia

Tires which are suitable for the winter season are mandatory between 1st December and 1st March for all cars and buses. Consumers can use winter tires or universal tires or summer tires. According to the law the tread depth should not be less than 4 mm to be considered suitable for the winter period. Studded tires are allowed between 1st October and 1st May. One car must not have tread and tread unattended tyres at the same time. In order to improve the safety of the vehicle on the road, passenger cars with a full mass of up to 3,500 kg in each axle and cars with a full mass above 3,500 kg in front axle must be fitted with identical tires (the manufacturer and tread pattern must be identical).

## Lithuania

Tires which are suitable for the winter season are mandatory between 10th November and 1st April. Consumers can use winter tires or universal tires. Studded tires are not allowed from 10th April to 1st November. According to Lithuanian rules the tread depth should be not less than 3 mm to be

considered suitable tire for winter season.

Motorbikes, mopeds, ATV, can use summer tires from 1st March to 30th November, but only if the road is without snow or ice. From 1st December to 1st March winter tires are mandatory also for motorbikes, mopeds, ATV.

## Slovenia

Winter tires are mandatory between 15th November and 15th March. If such tires are mounted, they must be installed on all four wheels. A minimum tread depth of 3 mm is recommended. Alternatively, consumers can use summer tires with snow chains on front wheels.

## Sweden

Between 1st December and 31st March it is mandatory to have winter tires or equal equipment. During the mandatory period the tread depth must be at least 3 mm. These rules also apply to foreign cars traveling through Sweden.

Any trailer attached to a vehicle needs to follow the rules regarding winter tires.

If the vehicle has studded tires then so must the trailer. If the vehicle uses friction tires it's o. k. to use friction tires or studded tires.

In Sweden studded tires are allowed between 1st October and 15th April or if winter road conditions apply or are expected.

As from 1st January 2013, heavy trucks, heavy buses and private cars class II (campers) with a total weight of more than 3.5 metric tons, are to have winter tires or equivalent equipment on the vehicle's driven wheels when there are wintry conditions on the roads during the period from 1st December to 31st w. The depth of the tire tread of all tires on heavy vehicles is to be at least 5 millimeters during wintry road conditions. This requirement does not apply to attached trailers.

For more information (in English) check out the [Swedish Transport Agency website](#) where you can find e. g. the definition of winter road, the definition if winter tires, rules regarding lorries and trucks etc.

# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE LEGALLY MANDATORY

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## Croatia

Winter tires and additional winter equipment are mandatory **between 15th November of the current year and 15th April of the following year.**

The mandatory use of winter equipment refers to all types of motor vehicles regardless weather and road conditions, except for vehicles of Croatian Armed Forces.

As to obligatory winter equipment during that period, vehicles with a maximum mass up to 3.5 t must contain as follows:

- 4 winter tires (M + S) or
- 4 summer tires with a minimum tread depth of 4 mm and snow chains in car trunk.

Obligatory winter equipment for buses contains the following:

- snow chains on drive wheels
- winter tires (M + S) on drive wheels.

Buses and trucks, which, for technical reasons, cannot be equipped with snow chains on drive wheels, must have winter tires (M + S) on drive wheels.

In the case of non-compliance with the mandatory rules during the winter season, drivers will be fined in the amount of 700 kuna (approx. 106 €).

## Bulgaria

Tires which are suitable for the winter season are mandatory **between 15th November and 1st March.** Consumers can alternatively use winter tires or universal tires or even summer tires. According to the law the tread depth should be not less than 4 mm to be considered suitable for winter season.

Studded tires are not allowed as they could cause damage to the pavement.

The use of snow chains is permitted only if the weather conditions require so.

This regulation applies also to vehicles with foreign registration plates. In the case of non-compliance with the mandatory rules, drivers will be fined to the amount of 50 leva (approx. 25 €).



# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY IF WEATHER CONDITIONS SO REQUIRE

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## Germany

The German regulation doesn't show a minimum temperature or a determined period when vehicles shall be fitted with winter tires. Drivers must adapt the tires to the weather conditions. Winter tires are mandatory in case of black ice, packed snow, slush, glaze and slippery frost.

Winter tires must have at least 1.6 mm tread depth. They have to be installed on all 4 wheels of the car. For motorbikes winter tires are not mandatory.

Winter tires manufactured after 31st December 2017 must carry the alpine symbol (mountain with snowflake). M + S (Mud and Snow) tires manufactured prior to 31st December 2017 are allowed to be used until 30th September 2024. After this date only tires carrying the alpine symbol are allowed. All-year-round-tires carrying the alpine symbol are considered as winter tires and are allowed to be used. All-year-round-tires carrying the M + S symbol are allowed to be used as winter tires until 30th September 2024 if they have been produced prior to 31st December 2017.

If you are in breach of the law, not only the owner but also the driver will be fined. The fine for the driver is from 60 up to 120 € and 1 point in the German driving ability register FAER, depending on the type of the offence. The fine for the owner is 75 € and 1 point in the registry. If you do not use appropriate

tires: You might encounter problems with your insurance company in case of an accident caused by a third person or by yourself.

Snow chains are allowed if they do not damage the road surface. Studded tires are not allowed.

## Austria

In Austria from 1st November to 15th April, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if weather conditions so require. These tires must be fitted on all wheels when roads are covered in snow or ice. The tires must bear one of the usual marks as M+S, M.S. or M&S and have a minimum tread depth of 4 mm for radial tires (most common tires) and a minimum tread depth of 5 mm for cross-ply tires. Alternatively, vehicles with summer tires must have chains, see below. This regulation is only valid for private cars and goods vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes.

It is the driver's legal responsibility to carry the required winter equipment; therefore, it is essential to check that it is included in any hire car. This regulation applies to vehicles registered in Austria as well as those registered abroad.

Studded tires may be used only from 1st October to 31st May, though special local regulations may extend this period. These regulations also apply to temporarily imported vehicles.

# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY IF WEATHER CONDITIONS SO REQUIRE

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Studded tires may be used only on vehicles with steel radial tires, of a maximum total authorized weight not exceeding 3,500 kg and a maximum axle weight not exceeding 1,800 kg. They must be fitted on all wheels. If the towing vehicle has studded tires, the trailer must be fitted with studded tires on all wheels. The tire's steel pins must not stick out more than 2 mm beyond the tire's tread and must settle tightly in the tire in order to avoid damage of the road surface and of other vehicles.

Vehicles fitted with studded tires are subject to special speed limits (80 km/h outside built-up areas, 100 km/h on motorways), and must display at the rear the approved «studded tires» sign. This sign is available from the automobile clubs, petrol stations, etc.

The use of snow chains instead of winter tires is permitted if the road is continually or almost always under snow or ice. In extreme conditions the authorities can require cars to be fitted with snow chains on the driving wheels. All-wheel drive vehicles must be fitted with snow chains on at least two driving wheels of the same axle. The international road sign is used. The maximum speed recommended is 40 km/h. You can find more information on <https://www.bmvit.gv.at/en/verkehr/roads/safety/tyres.html>

## Luxembourg

As of 1st October 2012 winter tires for cars are mandatory in winter conditions (black ice, packed snow, slush, ice sheets or frost). With the exception of parked vehicles on public roads, these rules apply to all drivers. Further information: <https://guichet.public.lu/en/actualites/2018/10/31-pneus-hiver.html>

## Norway

It is not as such obligatory to drive with winter tires in Norway, but you must always adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. One can therefore consider that it is in fact (more or less) mandatory to drive with winter tires during the winter season in Norway.

From 1st November (or 15th October in the north of Norway), drivers are allowed to drive with studded tires. And this is highly recommended. Studded tires are allowed until the first Sunday after Easter Sunday. In the north of Norway they are allowed by 1st of May. In the municipal Oslo, Trondheim and Bergen, all drivers with studded tires must pay environmental fees within the municipal boundaries.

For heavy vehicles (more than 3,500 kg) winter tires are mandatory in the period from 15th November to 31st March. This does not apply to motorhomes with a maximum authorised mass between 3,500 kg and 7,500 kg.

# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY IF WEATHER CONDITIONS SO REQUIRE

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## Romania

In Romania winter tires are mandatory on roads covered with snow, ice or black ice. These tires must be fitted on all wheels. The tires must bear the mark M+S or M&S. Winter tires must have at least 1.6 mm tread depth on minimum two thirds of the tread width.

Studded tires are allowed, but they must be approved (homologated), on public roads covered with snow, ice or black ice.

## Slovakia

If weather conditions so require, when roads are covered with a coherent layer of snow, ice or frost, winter tires are mandatory for vehicles ( $m < 3.5$  tons).

Winter tires are legally mandatory for trucks ( $m \geq 3.5$  tons) and busses (at least one of the driving axle has to be fitted with winter tires) from 15th November to 31st March and if weather conditions so require.

## Czech Republic

From 1st November to 31st March, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if there is a consistent layer of snow, ice or icing on the road or if with regard to weather conditions it can be assumed that such layer can occur on the road while driving. Studded tires are not allowed. The tread depth to be considered as a winter tire is min. 4 mm; for vehicles weighing more than 3,500 kg the tread depth is 6 mm.

# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY ONLY IF THERE IS A SPECIFIC ROAD SIGN

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## Spain

Generally, winter tires are not mandatory in Spain. Winter tires or snow chains are mandatory only in case of a specific public authority order or a specific road sign (in the mountains areas). Studded tires are allowed. Studded tires is considered as winter tires.

## Italy

Winter tires are generally not mandatory in Italy. But if there is a specific road sign (decided by a special decree) showing the text: «obligo di pneumatici invernali o catene a bordo», the vehicle has to be equipped with snow chains or winter tires during the period shown on the road sign (usually from 15th November to 15th April). Exception: In the Aoasta-Valley winter tires are mandatory from 15th October to 15th April. Further information: <https://www.autostrade.it/en/la-nostra-rete/operazioni-invernali>

## France

Winter tires or snow chains are not mandatory in general. Snow chains are only mandatory if there is a special sign showing a white tire with snow chains on blue ground.

If winter tires are allowed, too, you will find under the sign an additional text: «pneus neige admis» or «pneus hiver admis» («snow tires admitted»).

Since the signs can be installed at short term, depending on the weather conditions, it should be helpful to ask the Préfectures prior to travelling whether winter tires or snow chains are mandatory.



# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE NOT MANDATORY

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## Belgium

In Belgium, winter tires are not mandatory. However, under wintry conditions they are recommended. A minimum profile depth of 4 mm is recommended. The use of snow chains is only allowed if the road surface is not damaged. The road must therefore be covered with snow or ice.

## Cyprus

No winter tires mandatory.

## Greece

No winter tires mandatory.

## Hungary

In certain areas (highlighted with signs) the use of snow chains can be mandatory at least on the drive axle. The use of studded tires on public roads is prohibited.

## Malta

No winter tires mandatory.

## Portugal

No winter tires mandatory. Snow chains are not mandatory excepting when required by a specific traffic signal.

## Ireland

Winter tires are not mandatory in Ireland. Studded tires are not illegal. However, studded tires should only be used in Ireland on compacted snow or ice. If a person is found using the tires on asphalt they can be prosecuted for causing damage to the road surface, which is prohibited under the Irish Road Traffic Regulations.

## Denmark

Winter tires are not mandatory. Studded tires are allowed from 1st November to 15th April. If such tires are mounted, they must be installed on all four wheels.

## Netherlands

In the Netherlands winter tires for cars are not mandatory. But nevertheless, Dutch consumers purchase winter tires as they spend often their winter holidays in France, Germany or Austria. Therefore, they have to comply to the regulations of these countries. The ANWB Royal Dutch Touring Club (branch organization) informs the consumers on their website which rules are applicable. The use of studded tires and snow chains is not allowed in the Netherlands, because it damages the pavement.

## Iceland

Winter tires are not strictly mandatory in Iceland for any period. However there is a general clause in Icelandic law that driver is responsible for driving on tires that are appropriate and fit the circumstances. Tires must have at least 3 mm thread depth over the winter period (1<sup>st</sup> of November to 14<sup>th</sup> of April). Studded tires are allowed part of the year but there has been some discussion in the last few years about forbidding or limiting their use in the city / the Southwest area, both to limit damage to roads and therefore costs, and the environmental and health impact of the airborne particles.

Snow chains are forbidden in conditions where they can cause damage to roads.

## Poland

Winter tires are not required by law but it is highly recommended to use winter tires or universal tires during winter period due to the severe winters. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that a failure to

# COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE NOT MANDATORY

change to winter tires may sometimes be classified by the insurer as a gross negligence and make it difficult to receive compensation in case of accident.

Generally chains are permitted. In certain designated places chains are mandatory. Places where chains are mandatory, precede signs which warn drivers that snow chains are necessary. They may be used only in case of ice or snow covering the roads. The use of snow chains requires sign C-18 (circular blue background with the wheel, «dressed» in the chain). This order is dismissed with the sign C-19 (similar to the sign C-18 with a warrant, except that it is crossed with the red line). It is required to use snow chains on at least two wheels of motor vehicles.

Studded tires are strictly forbidden in Poland. They may be used only during the winter sports events like rallies and races.

## United Kingdom

Winter tires are not mandatory, but are permitted. Snow chains are allowed, as are studded tires. Snow socks are also permitted. Further guidelines are below, as outlined in a recent independent audit commissioned by the UK government. The subject of suitable tyres for vehicles in severe winter weather has been raised by the UK media and the public in response to problems experienced on the roads. The audit, in December 2010, called The Resilience of England's Transport Systems said that tyres should not be used if they could in any way damage the surface of the road. The audit gave four options for vehicles to change their tyres in winter conditions:

**Winter tires.** These operate best at temperatures below 7° C and wear may be higher than standard tires if used in warmer conditions. They are made of a softer rubber compound which retains its flexibility in cold weather, and the tread pattern is also optimised. This may include having more “biting” edges to give better grip and wider gaps to help performance in snow.

It may be important to remember to inform your insurance company you have switched from summer to winter tires - and back again when spring arrives.

Some insurers may try to charge an additional fee for the swap, but most now don't so long as the winter tires are the right size and speed rating for the vehicle. If your insurer does try to charge, demand clarification and a breakdown of the cost.

**Studded tires.** These are for use in extreme conditions such as thick snow and deep ice. They should be removed when conditions improve as they are likely to damage the road if in direct contact.

**Snow chains.** These can be used if snow or ice is encountered during a journey provided they are removed when conditions improve since, as with studded tires, they are likely to damage the road.

**Snow socks.** A textile fabric is placed around the tire to improve grip on snow and ice. They tend to be easier to fit than snow chains but may not be as effective in all conditions. They are also less likely to damage the road, but should still be removed when conditions improve as they will wear rapidly and will not perform as well in normal conditions.

Any decision for a motorist to change their tires will depend upon driving conditions and types of journeys undertaken, so motorists who expect to drive in areas where conditions are persistently cold or where snow and ice is present for long periods may find it helpful to change their tyres in the winter.

The Department for Transport advises that it does not believe there is a strong case for legislation requiring winter tires to be fitted, but consumers can still choose to fit them. Their view is that typically motorists in England will find that that the standard tires fitted to their vehicle have a tread pattern and tire compound that ensures good performance in a wide range of conditions and they can be used throughout the year. Issues such as the costs of purchasing, storing and changing tires at set times each year would need to be balanced against the possible benefits, and that many vehicles in the south of the country would only experience the necessary conditions to gain from these tires on a few occasions each year.

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