



European environmental zones

Hundreds of European cities have vehicle entry regulations. Entry can depend on vehicle emission, payment, vehicle types and many others. To avoid costly fines and delays when travelling abroad with your vehicle, read our guide for further information re: the official badges required to drive in specific cities across Europe.

European environmental zones

Traffic is one of the main pollution sources in towns and cities and Low Emission Zones are one of the key ways cities can reduce emissions from road traffic to improve air pollution. Usually this means that vehicles with higher emissions cannot enter the area. In some low emission zones the more polluting vehicles have to pay more if they enter the low emission zone.

Before you travel into a low emission zone, you first need to find out if your vehicle is affected.

First you will need to find out the [emissions standards of your vehicle](#), then check if this emissions standard is allowed into the zone you intend driving in. Vehicle emissions are classified in Europe by the "Euro standards".

Most LEZs operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Belgium

Antwerp and Brussels each have a low emission zone (LEZ).

- **Antwerp:** To find out if you have to pay for your car to enter the LEZ, take the test on the [Antwerp city website](#). If your car passes but has a UK number plate, you'll still need to register for free no later than 24 hours after entering the LEZ, again using the [Antwerp city website](#).

If your car doesn't pass the test, you can buy an [LEZ day pass online](#), which you can do on the day – these cost €35 (about £30) and allow you to enter the LEZ until 6am the following day. You're limited to eight per year per vehicle. If your car fails the test and you enter the LEZ without buying a pass you could be fined.

- **Brussels:** If your car has a UK number plate you'll need to register in advance on the [Brussels region website](#) before entering the LEZ. To check if you'll have to pay, refer to the tables on the [Brussels region website](#) – you'll need your vehicle registration certificate (aka logbook or V5C) handy if you don't know your emissions standard.

If your car meets the criteria for entering the LEZ for free, registering is all you'll have to do. But if you have to pay, you can buy a day pass after registering. These cost €35 (about £30), and you're limited to eight per year per vehicle. If you enter the LEZ without registering your car, or in a car that doesn't meet the free-entry criteria and doesn't have a day pass, you could be fined € 150 (about £130).

Registration and day passes for Antwerp and Brussels are not interchangeable. Registration and day passes are only available online – you're not required to display a sticker or any other physical proof in either city as checking is done by number plate.

France

Emission rules

A number of French cities now have low emission schemes, and more are being added all the time. Cities affected include:

- **Chambery** – emergency scheme, access only restricted if pollution reaches a particular level
- **Grenoble** – permanent scheme, only applies to commercial vehicles
- **Lille** – emergency scheme, access only restricted if pollution reaches a particular level
- **Lyon** – emergency scheme, access only restricted if pollution reaches a particular level
- **Marseille** – emergency scheme, access only restricted if pollution reaches a particular level
- **Paris** – permanent scheme, applies daytime on weekdays
- **Strasbourg** – emergency scheme, access only restricted if pollution reaches a particular level
- **Toulouse** – emergency scheme, access only restricted if pollution reaches a particular level

If you want to drive in a restricted area, whether there's a permanent or emergency scheme, you'll need to display an air quality certificate sticker, known as a Crit'Air vignette, on your windscreen. If you don't you could be hit with an on-the-spot fine of €68 – about £60.

There are six different types of sticker – the type you get will depend on the emissions standard your car meets, and will dictate where you can drive. Once you've got a sticker you can drive in any city's restricted area and it's valid for the lifetime of your car.

Stickers cost €4.21 (about £3.75) including postage from the official [French environment ministry website](#). It's worth digging out your vehicle registration certificate/logbook before you get started if you're not familiar with your car's emission standard. While the website says stickers should arrive within 10 days of application, in reality it can take up to six weeks, so take that into account when planning your trip.

Germany

Emission rules

There are low emission zones in most major German cities, including Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich and Stuttgart.

Drivers are legally required to display an emissions sticker known as an 'Umweltplakette' to enter these zones. There are three colours of sticker – green, yellow and red – with the colour denoting a car's emission standard and therefore whether it can enter a particular zone. Most cities only allow cars with green stickers to enter. If you enter a low emission zone without a sticker, you could be fined £70+.

The cheapest way to buy one is from the [official Berlin city website](#) (though stickers are valid in all LEZs across Germany). They cost €6 (about £5.35) including postage – allow 14 days for delivery. They only need to be replaced if they're damaged or you re-register your car. While you can also buy stickers from the vehicle licensing authority, vehicle inspection centres and some garages, be aware that the price isn't fixed by the German government, so some places sell them for more than twice the price.

Italy

Emission rules

Most major towns and cities in Italy have low emission zones, especially in the north. There are restrictions on where you can drive in Rome, Milan, Turin, Florence, Bologna and many more cities.

In most cases, you can't drive into cities during the day on weekdays, although in some, cars are barred on Sundays too. Penalties for entering at a restricted time range from €70 (about £60) to a very steep €450 – circa £400.

For the vast majority of zones, permits to enter them when restrictions are in place aren't available to visitors, though some cities do allow you to enter if you're staying at a hotel within a low emission zone. Information in English is difficult to come by, so check with your hotel before travelling if that's the case and your Italian is limited.

The exception is Milan, where a congestion charge is payable, much like in London, if you want to enter the historical centre, otherwise known as area C.

Netherlands

Emission rules

Rotterdam and Utrecht have low emission zones (LEZs). But you don't need to order an emissions sticker in advance – all that matters is the date of your car's first registration, which you can find on your vehicle registration certificate (which you may know as your logbook or V5C).

- **Rotterdam:** If you have a petrol car, you can enter the LEZ without paying, provided it was first registered after 1 July 1992. If you've a diesel, you can enter without paying if it was first registered after 1 January 2001. If you have an older car and want to enter the LEZ, you can apply for a one-day exemption. These cost €25.90 (£23), last 24 hours and are only available via the [official Rotterdam website](#). Enter with an older car and no exemption, and you risk a fine of €95 (£82).
- **Utrecht:** Have a diesel car? You can enter the LEZ if it was first registered after 1 January 2001. You risk being fined €90 (£85) if you enter with an older diesel car. There aren't currently any entry requirements for petrol cars.

Portugal

Emission rules

Lisbon is the only city in Portugal to have a low emission zone (LEZ) – and it's actually two zones. You can drive in zone 1 provided your car, whether petrol or diesel, complies with Euro 2 emission standards, which generally means cars manufactured since January 1996. You can drive in zone 2 as long as your (petrol or diesel) car meets Euro 1 emission standards – those manufactured since January 1992.

There's not a lot of information about the zones available in English, but this [Lisbon city council leaflet](#) gives you an idea of where they are.



Spain

Emission rules

Spain doesn't have any permanent low emissions zones or schemes at present, but Madrid and Barcelona sometimes put temporary restricted zones in place if air pollution reaches a high level.

- In **Barcelona**, this means petrol cars manufactured before 2000 and diesel cars manufactured before 2006 aren't allowed in the restricted zone. See the [Barcelona city council website](#) for more info.
- In **Madrid**, this can mean speed and parking restrictions, and the banning of 50% of vehicles on alternating days depending on their number plates. See the [Madrid city council website](#) (in Spanish – translate into English using Google Translate or similar) for more info.