



Stunning vistas, wide open roads... Surely driving in Oz should be a breeze? Expat **Vicky Gray** discovers otherwise...



Image: XXXXXXXXXXXXX

On the face of it, driving in Australia is very much the same as driving in England, only omitting the unwritten ‘courtesy law’. It’s not so much a case of recklessness that afflicts the Aussies, or even road rage – after all, they are famed for being laid-back. It’s more a case of lacking etiquette. The British turn-taking scenario of: “After you...” “No really, you go first...” “Oh, but I insist!” is not the done thing in Oz. However, once you leave your manners behind and embrace your newfound ‘anti-social attitude’, everything seems to flow perfectly.

There are, however, a couple of little points of which you should be aware. Flashing your headlights at other drivers, at T-junctions for instance, no longer indicates that the other car should go first; here, it’s generally a warning to oncoming cars that they are about to approach a police speed-check point.

To be honest, I’m grateful that I no longer have to abide by this light-flashing etiquette, as I was forever injecting a jet of washing solution onto my windscreen and ending up peering through the resulting bubbles, wipers frantically whisking away – when all I had intended was to be kind and let someone to go before me.

My first venture onto an Aussie highway had me dribbling with fear. While the rulebook might state:

## Driving me crazy!

‘stick to the left lane unless overtaking’, I was too terrified to whizz past the vehicle in front, as I was following a ‘Ute’ liberally festooned with flapping canvas and ominous-looking sharp, pointy metal objects that threatened to break free at any moment, crashing straight through my windscreen.

Then, within seconds, the whole of my rear-view mirror was being hogged by a vast 100-tonne Kenworth truck loitering a mere six inches from my tailgate. Definitely not your typical laid-back Aussie!

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When it comes to driving Down Under, it is essential to get your UK licence changed to an Aussie one within three months, or you could be classed as ‘driving without a licence’, leaving you open to prosecution. Luckily, since March 2006, the government rules for us Brits have been relaxed, and migrants no longer have to take the theory test. All you need to do now

**Above** Make sure that you get your UK licence changed to an Aussie one within three months of arriving there

is pop into your local Transport Office and produce your UK licence, fill in the relevant forms, pay the fee and make sure you can read the last line on the eyesight chart!

However, on my arrival in May 2006, I still thought the theory test was mandatory, and apparently the new rule hadn’t filtered down to the employees of Queensland Transport either, as they readily accepted the cash for my many attempts at the multiple choice test – which I consistently failed!

Back on the streets, if you intend to turn either left or right when the traffic lights have turned green, the crucial thing is to watch out for pedestrians... as they also have a little green man telling them to go forth – it’s safe to cross!

Frankly, I have never encountered a more dangerous sequence of turn-taking, and it took many a shaken fist at poor unsuspecting children before I realised that it was they who had right of way, and not me, (even though I believed I was following the most obvious of road rules).

All in all, the good news is that once I accepted the new ways and read my *Highway Code* book, driving in Australia was no longer petrifying, but a pleasure. 🇺🇸