

# Driving in the US

## International Driver's License vs California Driver's License

California does not recognize the international driver's license. In order to drive, you will need to have a valid driver's license from your home country (you will need the international driver's license as well if this is not in English) or a California's Driver's license. However, many police officers may not be aware that you are eligible to drive using your home country's license. To avoid any hassles, if you will be driving in California or plan to purchase a car, motorcycle, or any other motorized vehicle, we recommend that you get a California Driver's License. Many car insurance companies will provide coverage or offer you better rates only if you have one, and having car insurance is a legal requirement.

## How To Apply for the California Driver License

You will need to complete an application, pass a written test (not required if you have been issued a driving license in another US state), and pass a behind-the-wheel driving test. Visit the [Department of Motor Vehicles](#) (DMV) for the latest California Driver Handbook, forms, and instructions on how to apply for a California Driver License. We recommend reviewing the sections in the handbook on frequently asked questions and residency requirements. If you carefully study the California Driver's Handbook, you should be able to pass the written test.

After you pass the written test and get the driver permit, you must take the behind-the-wheel driving test within one year. You must [schedule an appointment](#) for the behind-the-wheel driving test. We recommend scheduling your appointment at the [Pomona DMV Office](#). An examiner will accompany you on a driving test, so you should be familiar with the car you are driving. You also must show proof that the car is properly registered and insured. You may wish to borrow a car from a friend or sign up with a local driving school for a fee. You may also rent a car for the test. After you pass the test, you will receive a temporary license, valid until your license arrives by mail within 1-3 months.

## Timing is Everything: Getting Your Driver's License

Follow these four simple tips to make for a faster and smoother process:

1. **Wait 10 days after you enter the United States.** The 10 day wait allows time for all the government databases to update with your arrival information. If you apply too early, your application will be delayed or denied. This applies to continuing students and scholars: please remember to wait 10 days from your *most recent entry* to the U.S.
2. **Check your immigration documents.** Check all your immigration documents to make sure your information is correct. If different information appears on different forms your application will be greatly delayed. If you find that the information on your electronic [I-94](#)

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[admission record](#) is different than on your passport, visa or I-20/DS-2019, please immediately contact us at [international@kgi.edu](mailto:international@kgi.edu) for assistance.

3. **Read. Practice. Review.** In addition to carefully studying the [California Driver Handbook](#), you can use the California DMV's [sample exams](#) to help you prepare for the written exam.
4. **Bring all your paperwork.** When you go to the DMV (we recommend the [Pomona DMV Office](#)) remember to take the following documents:
  1. I-20 or DS-2019
  2. Electronic I-94 record (downloadable at [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94))
  3. Passport and visa (if these are divided among multiple passports, make sure you take all with you)
  4. Two documents showing your proof of residency in California
  5. Social security card, if issued. If not issued, this is not required.

### Car Insurance & Registration

Car insurance is required to drive legally in the US. In addition, all vehicles must be registered with the California DMV. Make sure to carry proof of both in your car. If you are using a friend's car, make sure you know where the proof of insurance and registration is kept in the vehicle. If you purchase your own car, you can do a google search to find car insurance companies in the US, or get recommendations from friends. Make sure to carefully consider both the coverage you are purchasing, and not only the cost. Keep in mind that costs incurred for an accident can be quite high – be wary of very high out of pocket costs (deductibles). If purchasing from an out of state company, ensure the coverage is valid in California.

### The California State Identity Card

If you are not planning to drive, we recommend obtaining the California Identity Card. This is an easily recognizable form of identification used for cashing checks, proving your age, etc. Plan on making an appointment before going to the DMV. To do so, visit the [Department of Motor Vehicles](#) website.

### Parking on Campus

**Do not forget:** if you plan on driving to KGI or parking on any of the college campuses, you must register your vehicle and obtain a parking permit. Please click Campus Safety's [Parking Information](#) to get started.

## Traffic Stops: What To Do If You Get Pulled Over

Being stopped by a police officer for minor traffic offenses is a common occurrence. The methods for a police stop vary drastically by country, so we have provided these important tips for handling this situation if it happens to you. While no one enjoys this process, being calm and friendly and remaining mindful of these tips will help you get through it in the best way possible:

- Be safe. A police officer attempting to stop your car will pull up behind your car and flash lights. Calmly and safely pull to the right curb/side of road or into a parking lot. Make sure you use your turn signal – this not only communicates to the police officer that you are following directions but communicates your intentions to other drivers around you.
- DO NOT GET OUT OF YOUR VEHICLE. This will be taken as a sign of aggression in California and the police will react accordingly. Instead roll your window down, turn off your car, keep both hands on the steering wheel, and wait for the officer to approach you. If it's dark, turn on the dome light before placing your hands on the steering wheel.
- Communicate with the Officer. You will be asked for your driver's license, registration, and possibly for proof of insurance. It is a good idea to say something like "I have them in my glovebox. I'm going to get them out for you now" before *slowly* reaching for materials. This tells the officer *why* you will be reaching for an object in your car. Moving slowly helps the officer understand you do not intend to draw a weapon. Place your hands back on the steering wheel when finished.
- Remain polite and calm. Police officers are not evil or scary. They are just people who happen to have dangerous jobs. They will appreciate being spoken with in a polite manner. Follow any orders given and address the officer as "officer", "sir", or "ma'am" when speaking. You should *never* argue with an officer, no matter his/her temperament.
- Know your rights. You should not lie, but you do not have to admit fault. Answer questions briefly, but non-committedly. Officers will ask you pointed questions to try to build a report. They will use this in court in the case that you decide to fight any written ticket. It is ok to say "no" or "I'm not sure" to questions. A common question is "do you know how fast you were going?" Answering "no" to this question may make you appear careless. A better answer would be "I think I was going X miles an hour." This leaves room for the officer to contradict you without you admitting to fault. If an officer decides they need to arrest you, they must read you your rights (often referred to as Miranda rights). You have the right to remain silent at this point and should. If arrested, you will be taken to jail where you can ask to call a lawyer. **If arrested, please contact the KGI OISS immediately** as there may be some effects on your visa.

**REMEMBER:** An arrest for driving under the influence (DUI) will result in your visa being revoked!

**DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.**