



Driving in snow country

Much of Australia experiences mild winters, but if you're heading for snow country you can expect extreme weather and unfamiliar driving conditions. The key to a safe trip is good preparation.

Preparing your car

Make sure your vehicle is in tip-top condition before you head off. Ask your mechanic to check:

- tyres
- battery(s)
- brakes
- cooling system
- engine
- windscreen wipers
- electrical system (particularly the alternator, which charges the battery)
- heater and demister.

Icy conditions can freeze some engine coolants, causing serious damage to vehicle components. Not only could this lead to expensive vehicle recovery and repair, but could also leave you stranded in the snow.

Find out if your car needs a special coolant or anti-freeze. If you're adding anti-freeze to the cooling system, it's important to follow the instructions.

Pack a safety kit

Useful items to carry include:

- torch
- blanket(s)
- tow rope
- spade
- wheel chocks

- plastic scraper for removing ice from the windscreen
- drinking water
- waterproof blanket or groundsheet
- first-aid kit.

Driving in alpine areas

It's a long way to the snowfields, so take plenty of breaks along the way and share the driving.

In heavy snow, keep an eye out for bright orange snow poles, which show the road alignment. If you can't see the poles or the edge of the road due to poor visibility, pull over in a safe place, turn on your hazard lights and wait for the weather to clear.

Take heed of wildlife warning signs. Collisions with animals are common in snow country, particularly around dawn and dusk.

Be aware of heavy vehicles, which will be clearing snow and maintaining roads. It's important to remember that trucks have larger blind spots than cars. They also need plenty of room to merge and overtake, and longer distances to accelerate and stop.

Drive according to the conditions

- Slow down when driving in fog, snow and ice.
- Keep your headlights on so you can be seen easily.
- If your vehicle has fog lights, use them in low visibility.
- Approach corners slowly and avoid sudden braking, which could result in skidding on snow and ice.

- If you're in a skid, ease off on the accelerator and try not to brake too heavily.
- In slippery conditions, accelerate gradually to prevent wheel spin.
- Maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front.
- Never overtake on a hill, or at a bend or intersection.

Arriving at a parking area

Park only in marked parking areas, so your vehicle isn't buried under a snow drift or damaged by snow-clearing vehicles.

If you're leaving your vehicle in a parking area for a significant amount of time, lift the wipers off the windscreen or put plastic bags over them so they don't stick to the glass.

Cables and brake linings can freeze, so don't apply a manual (cable-operated) handbrake if you're parked on a flat surface. Instead, leave the car in gear, chock the wheels and turn the front wheels away from the road slope.

Leaving a parking area

Before driving from a car park, use a plastic scraper to clear ice from the windscreen, windows and mirrors – windscreen wipers don't work on ice.

Lukewarm water will also clear ice however be careful not to use hot water as it can crack the glass.

Check the exhaust is clear of snow or debris before starting the engine. Let the engine warm up for a few minutes while you demist the windows using the car's heater and fan.

Snow chains

Snow chains fitted to your car's tyres provide traction in slippery snow and ice conditions.

All two-wheel-drive vehicles – and SUVs without constant all-wheel-drive – entering Kosciuszko National Park in NSW between the June and October long weekends must carry snow chains and fit them as directed. Although four-wheel-drive and all-wheel-drive vehicles don't require chains by law, it's recommended they're carried, and fitted when driving in snow.

In Victorian alpine resorts, all vehicles must carry diamond-pattern snow chains during the snow season.



Fitting chains

- Make sure you know how to fit chains before you arrive in the snow.
- You only need to fit chains to the drive wheels.
- Follow roadside signs that say chains must be fitted.
- Limit your speed to 40km/h when driving with chains.
- Even if chains aren't required on the way to the parking area, fit them when you arrive. Conditions can change quickly and it's easier to fit chains when the weather is fine.
- Fines may apply if you're not carrying or using chains when required by law.

Fuel

Normal diesel fuel turns to gel at about -6°C, which could make your vehicle hard to start. Either allow room in the fuel tank to fill up with specially-blended Alpine Diesel, available near the snowfields, or add an alpine additive.

Dual fuel vehicles (LPG/petrol) should switch to petrol before entering snow country.

Insurance

Check that your vehicle insurance covers you in alpine areas.

We're here to help

Call our Road Safety team on 8202 4517, or visit our website raa.com.au/roadsafety