

Getting Ready to Ski: Check Your Winter Tires and Legal Requirements



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Check tire condition before driving

- Winter tire regulations vary by country
- Snowflake symbol required in Germany and France

Hanover, Germany, January 28, 2025. For many winter sports enthusiasts, the holidays are just around the corner. Before hitting the road, drivers should check the performance and suitability of their tires, as well as the winter tire regulations for their route.

When inspecting tires, travelers should first check the tread depth. A tread depth gauge can be used for this purpose. The legal minimum tread depth for passenger tires is 1.6 millimeters. However, some countries have stricter regulations for winter tires. Especially before long trips, the tire pressure should be adjusted according to the manufacturer's instructions in the owner's manual or on a sticker in the door frame or on the gas cap. Underinflation increases stopping distance, decreases steering precision, increases fuel consumption and increases tire wear. Tires should also be inspected for cracks, cuts, dents or foreign objects. Such damage can result in a flat tire. Finally, all valve caps should be in place and tightened to prevent the ingress of dirt and moisture.

Traffic regulations: Winter tire requirements vary from country to country

In Germany there is a situation-dependent obligation to fit winter tires. This means that winter tires are required in winter road conditions such as black ice, slippery snow, slush, ice or frost. As of October 2024, all winter and all-season tires in Germany must be marked with the snowflake symbol. Tires with the M+S symbol are no longer considered adequate for winter road conditions.

In France, the snowflake symbol is also required on winter tires since fall of 2024. In many departments, especially in mountainous regions, winter tires are mandatory until the end of March. Depending on the weather conditions, Winter tires may also be required on other roads. The minimum tread depth for winter tires in France is 3.5 millimeters.

As in Germany, tires are mandatory in Austria in winter road conditions. Winter tires with the M+S symbol are sufficient, but a minimum tread depth of four millimeters is required. In Switzerland, there is no general requirement for winter tires. However, obstructions or accidents caused by unsuitable tires can result in significant fines. When traveling in Switzerland, winter tires are strongly recommended to ensure vehicle control.

In Italy, each region has its own regulations. Some regions, such as South Tyrol, require winter tires from November to April, regardless of weather conditions. It is important to check the specific regulations for each region before traveling to stay safe on the road and avoid possible fines.

[Source Winter tire regulations: ADAC: : “ Winterreifen- und Schneeketten-Pflicht in 20 europäischen Ländern“, 10-23-2024]

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