

Be careful on snowy roads

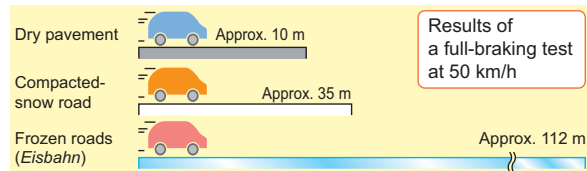
In Hokkaido, there are many winter activities, such as skiing, snowboarding and enjoying hot springs. Since the baggage required for these activities tends to be big, this is when rental cars can be very convenient. Winter roads, however, require advanced driving skills. Remember this basic knowledge to avoid serious trouble.



During the winter season, rental cars are always equipped with snow tires (for use on winter roads).

Slippery

Compacted-snow roads are roads on which snow has fallen and then been pressed down and compacted by the movement of vehicles. Icy roads (*Eisbahn*) are those that are covered with thin ice formed by the refreezing of snow that fell and then melted on the roads, and these are especially slippery. Winter roads are very dangerous, because once a car skids, it is hard to control it.



(Extracted from the Web site by the Hokkaido Government's Department of Environment and Lifestyle, Safe Living Environment Promotion Division)



Don't be tricked by black icy roads (*Eisbahn*)

Black *Eisbahn* is the worst type of icy roads. The road is covered with refrozen melted snow after rain. They look a little like wet roads, however, they are the slipperiest roads. Be very careful on black shiny roads in winter!

It's impossible to see

Strong snowstorms can obstruct your view forward and snow being blown up from the road may also lead to low visibility. In addition, your range of vision may be reduced suddenly due to powdery snow blown up by oncoming trucks. Drivers just have to slow down in such situations.



Getting stuck

If you drive into deep snow, you may not be able to get your car out. As far as is possible, find cleared roads or drive along wheel tracks left by other cars.



Things you must not do

"Sudden braking," "Sudden acceleration," "Abrupt steering"
Your wheels will lock up (continue to slide without your tires moving) if you brake suddenly and your car get out of control so avoid this.



Quick Tip

Rental car users who intend to drive on winter roads for the first time should ask for a car equipped with ABS* when they make their reservation.

*ABS : This Anti-lock Brake System allows drivers to maintain steering control and avoid an accident even under heavy braking. However, it can also present disadvantages including increased braking distance on slippery surfaces, such as on ice, or smooth roads. ABS should not be solely relied upon .



Quick Tip

Are brakes broken?

Drivers, who use ABS (Anti-lock Brake System) for the first time, may be surprised with how they function. When wheels lock (continue to slide without your tires moving) on frozen roads, a loud sound can be heard at the moment of braking. This is the noise caused by the actuation of the device to control the brakes automatically. Drivers need not ease up on the brakes in a hurry.



Three key points to driving in winter

Drive slowly

The basic point is not to increase your speed. Driving slowly will give you time to avoid danger should the need arise.



Keep a safe distance between cars.

Keeping a safe distance between you and the car ahead gives you enough time to react and cope with emergency situations.



Understand the traffic conditions ahead

Many winter traffic accidents are caused by a delay in drivers understanding traffic conditions ahead. Pay attention to the brake lamps of the front two cars as well as traffic conditions ahead.



Learn how to use the engine to brake

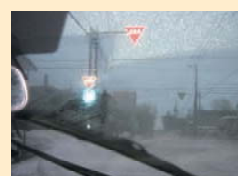
Cars accelerate automatically on down grades. In such cases, drivers should use not brakes but the engine to brake to control the speed. Using the engine to control speed is achieved by utilizing the power of the gears and changing the mode of the automatic transmission from D (drive) to S (or 3 or 2 according to models). Be sure to change the gear slowly while slowing the car down.



Tips about winter driving

Memo

- 1 Windshield wipers are frozen and they don't work**
 Wet wipers will get stuck to the windshield when frozen. You can avoid this by lifting the wiper arms off the windshield and leaving them like that overnight.
- 2 It is bright on sunny days**
 It is very dazzling when the sun reflects off the snow in winter. It is a good idea to carry sunglasses to combat the glare.
- 3 Clumps of snow come crashing down onto the car roof**
 Before driving be sure to remove any snow that has accumulated on the car roof. Otherwise clumps of snow may slide down the windshield without warning while driving and may block your view.
- 4 How slippery is it?**
 If you test your brakes while driving at a low speed and where you know it is safe to do so, you will learn how slippery the road is that day. Don't ever do this when there are cars in front of or behind you.
- 5 Melted snow from the car in front is showering your car**
 There are times when melted snow off the car in front or splashed up by oncoming vehicles covers your windshield and reduces visibility. Be sure to maintain a sufficient amount of windshield washer fluid in your car at all times. A winter formula that provides anti-freeze protection can be purchased at auto supply shops and home centers.
- 6 Everywhere is white and I cannot tell where the road is**
 In blizzard conditions, you cannot see what is ahead. Blowing snow caused by strong winds may reduce visibility. Drifting snow blown up by oncoming trucks will also obstruct your view for a moment. In these situations, remember to reduce your speed and drive slowly.



Stay home when the weather is bad

In winter, weather conditions can change suddenly in some areas. Also, some areas do not have reception for cell phones. If you are stranded in one of these places you will be unable to call for help and will freeze in the extreme cold. It could take hours before the rescue party arrives and your life will be at risk. If bad weather is forecast therefore, do not go out even if this means you have to change your plans.

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