In most of the EU countries winter tires for cars are not mandatory, but there are exceptions...
Before going on holidays, it could be useful to get an overview of the situation in each European country, in Iceland and Norway. 23 ECCs answered the following questions:

- are winter tires mandatory or not?
- if not are there special areas (or caution signs on the road) where you need winter tires (e.g. in the Austrian mountains)?
- are studded tires allowed?

### Countries where the winter tires are legally mandatory

**Estonia**

Winter tires are mandatory from December 1st to March 1st. Studded tires are allowed from October 15th to May 1st. As an exception, studded tires are allowed from October 1st until April 1st. It depends on the winter road and weather conditions.

**Finland**

Winter tires are required by law from the beginning of December to the end of February. Studded tires are allowed during this period. This law also applies to cars which have been registered abroad.

**Romania**

The winter tires are not yet mandatory, but starting 2011 they will be from 01.11 to 31.03. The tires have to respect the standards laid down in the Directive 92/23/CE.

**Slovenia**

From 15.11. to 15.3. and beyond these dates, during winter weather conditions (e.g. during snowfalls, black ice, etc.) private cars and vehicles up to 3.5 t must have winter equipment as follows:
- winter tires on all four wheels or
- summer tires on all four wheels + snow chains in car boot

In both cases, the minimum tire tread depth must be 3 mm. Vehicles over 3.5 t must have winter tires at least on the driving wheels or summer tires on all four wheels + snow chains in car boot.

Exception: at the seaside region sufficient winter equipment are summer tires with the minimum tire tread depth 3 mm (no need to have chains in car boot). But during winter weather conditions (e.g. during snowfalls, black ice, etc.) snow chains have to be mounted on drive wheels. This regulation applies also to vehicles with foreign registration plates but only during winter weather conditions.
Sweden

Between December 1st and March 31st it is mandatory to have winter tires or equal equipment. During the mandatory period the tread depth must be at least 3mm. These rules also apply to foreign cars traveling through Sweden.

Any trailer attached to a vehicle needs to follow the rules regarding winter tires.

If the vehicle has studded tires then so must the trailer. If the vehicle uses friction tires it’s ok to use friction tires or studded tires.

In Sweden studded tires is allowed between October 1st and April 15th or if winter road conditions apply or is expected.

Heavy vehicles are not required to use winter tires but should have at least 5mm tread depth. There are some exceptions e.g. when driving or being towed for repair.

For more information (in English) check out the Swedish Transport Agency website where you can find e.g. the definition of winder road, the definition if winter tires, rules regarding lorries and trucks etc.

- Countries where the winter tires are mandatory if weather conditions so require

Austria

Winter tires

In Austria from 1st November to 15 April, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if weather conditions so require. These tires must be fitted on all wheels when roads are covered in snow or ice.

The tires must bear the mark M+S or M&S and have a minimum tread of 4 mm. Alternately, vehicles with summer tires must have chains, see below.

It is the driver’s legal responsibility to carry the required winter equipment; therefore, it is essential to check that it is included in any hire car. This regulation applies to vehicles registered in Austria as well as those registered abroad.

Spiked tires

Spiked tires may be used only from 1st October to 31 May, though special local regulations may extend this period. These regulations also apply to temporarily imported vehicles.

Spiked tires may be used only on vehicles with steel radial tires, of a maximum total authorized weight not exceeding 3,500 kg and a maximum axle weight not exceeding 1,800 kg. They must be fitted on all wheels. If the towing vehicle has spiked tires, the trailer must be fitted with spiked tires on all wheels.

Vehicles fitted with spiked tires are subject to special speed limits (80 km/h outside built-up areas, 100 km/h on motorways), and must display at the rear the approved “spiked tires” sign. This sign is available from the automobile clubs, petrol stations, etc.

Snow chains

The use of snow chains is permitted. In extreme conditions the authorities can require cars to be fitted with snow chains on the driving wheels. All-wheel drive vehicles must be fitted with snow chains on at least two driving wheels of the same axle. The international road sign is used. The maximum speed recommended is 40 km/h.
You can find more information (in German) on www.winterreifen-pflicht.at

**Germany**

Drivers must adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. The German regulation has been precised in November 2010. In case of snow, black ice or hoarfrost, winter tires (or all-year-round tires with the mark M+S) are now mandatory.

Winter tires or all-year-round tires are required on all four wheels. For the 2 tires-vehicle (trailers and motorbikes for example), winter tires (or all-year-round tires with the mark M+S) are also mandatory. Winter tires should have at least 1.6 mm tread depth.

On the contrary, summer tires are allowed if weather conditions are milder than normally and shall stay like this during the day.

In opposition to rumors which are spread – especially on the web – this regulation doesn’t state neither a minimal temperature, nor a determined period to indicate when the vehicles shall be fitted with winter tires.

The German authorities want to avoid risks due to an equipment of vehicles inappropriate to winter weather conditions, which hinder/impede the road traffic and can cause accidents. If you are in breach of the law, drivers can be fined (from 40 up to 80 €: it depends on the type of the offence. For instance: 80€ if causing disruption) and/or the vehicle immobilized. In case of an accident (caused by a third person or by your fault) during winter time, the consumer might encounter problems with his insurance in case he did not use appropriate tires.

**Latvia**

Within the period from 1st December to 1st March all vehicles shall be fitted with tires, which are suitable for driving in winter conditions. Within the period from 1st May to 1st October it is forbidden to use vehicles with studded tires.

**Luxembourg**

As of October 1st 2012 winter tires for cars are obligatory in Luxembourg in the case of snow and ice on the road.

**Norway**

It is not as such obligatory to drive with winter tires in Norway, but you must always adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. One can therefore consider that it is in fact (more or less) mandatory to drive with winter tires during the winter in Norway.

From November 1st, (or October 15th in the north of Norway), drivers are allowed to drive with studded tires without being fined. On the contrary drivers have the duty to remove studded tires from the first Monday after the second Easter day.

**Slovakia**

Winter tires are not mandatory, but vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if weather conditions so require - when the roads are covered with snow, ice or hoarfrost.
Countries where the winter tires are mandatory only if there is a specific road sign

France

Winter tires are generally not mandatory but if there is a specific road sign (decided by a special decree), they are mandatory.

Czech Republic

From 1st November to 31st March, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if there is a specific road sign. Studded tires are not allowed. The tread depth to be considered a winter tire is 4mm.

Spain

Generally, winter tires are not mandatory in Spain. It is mandatory only when there is a specific public authority order or a specific road sign (in the mountains areas). Studded tires are allowed. This kind of tires is considered as winter tires.

Countries where the winter tires are not mandatory

Belgium, Cyprus, Ireland, Hungary, Malta

Winter tires are not mandatory.

Denmark

Studded tires are allowed from 1 November to 15 April.

Iceland

Winter tires are not strictly mandatory in Iceland for any period. The regulation states that you should have snow chains or other winter equipment like deep tread tires with or without studs when there is ice or snow on the road. If the winter is mild, some in the Southwest area could get away with using summer tires all year but deep tread all-year-round tires are most popular in Iceland.

Studs are allowed part of the year but there has been some discussion in the last few years about forbidding or limiting their use in the city/the Southwest area, both to limit damage to roads and therefore costs, and the environmental and health impact of the airborne particles.

Various regulations on size, shape, weight, distribution and applied force of studs on vehicles under and over 3500 kg. Snow chains are forbidden in conditions where they can cause damage to roads.

Lithuania

Winter tires are not mandatory, but between 10th November - 1st April summer tires cannot be used. Consumers can use universal tires. Studded tires are not allowed between 10th April-1st November.
**Netherlands**

In the Netherlands winter tires for cars are not mandatory. The Netherlands do buy the winter tires because many Dutch people will go on winter holiday in France, Germany and Austria. Therefore they have to apply the rules of those countries and buy themselves winter tires. The ANWB road patrol (branch organization) informs the consumer on their website which rules apply for what country concerning the winter tires.

The use of the studded tires are not discussed in the Netherlands, and therefore not forbidden nor allowed. The Netherlands just do not have a use for studded tires, somewhere else than on a racetrack of course.

**Poland**

Winter tires are not required by law but it is highly recommended to use winter tires during winter period due to the severe winters.

Nevertheless in some mountainous areas signs warn drivers that snow chains are necessary. These may only be used in case there is ice or snow covering the roads.

The use of snow chains requires sign C-18 (circular blue background with the wheel, "dressed" in the chain). This order is dismissed with the sign C-19 (similar to the sign C-18 with a warrant, except that it is crossed with the red line). It is required to use snow chains on at least two drive wheels of motor vehicles.

The studded tires are strictly forbidden in Poland. They may be used only during the winter sports events like rallies and races.

**United Kingdom**

Winter tires are not mandatory, but are permitted. Snow chains are allowed, as are studded tyres. Snow socks are also permitted. Further guidelines are below, as outlined in a recent independent audit commissioned by the UK government.

The subject of suitable tyres for vehicles in severe winter weather has been raised by the UK media and the public in response to problems experienced on the roads. The audit, in December 2010, called The Resilience of England’s Transport Systems said that tyres should not be used if they could in any way damage the surface of the road. The audit gave four options for vehicles to change their tyres in winter conditions:

- Winter tyres. These operate best at temperatures below 7°C and wear may be higher than standard tyres if used in warmer conditions. They are made of a softer rubber compound which retains its flexibility in cold weather, and the tread pattern is also optimised. This may include having more “biting” edges to give better grip and wider gaps to help performance in snow.

- Studded tires.

These are for use in extreme conditions such as thick snow and deep ice. They should be removed when conditions improve as they are likely to damage the road if in direct contact.
● Snow chains. These can be used if snow or ice is encountered during a journey provided they are removed when conditions improve since, as with studded tyres, they are likely to damage the road.

● Snow socks. A textile fabric is placed around the tyre to improve grip on snow and ice. They tend to be easier to fit than snow chains but may not be as effective in all conditions. They are also less likely to damage the road, but should still be removed when conditions improve as they will wear rapidly and will not perform as well in normal conditions.

Any decision for a motorist to change their tyres will depend upon driving conditions and types of journeys undertaken, so motorists who expect to drive in areas where conditions are persistently cold or where snow and ice is present for long periods may find it helpful to change their tyres in the winter.

The Department for Transport advises that it does not believe there is a strong case for legislation requiring winter tires to be fitted, but consumers can still choose to fit them. Their view is that typically motorists in England will find that the standard tires fitted to their vehicle have a tread pattern and tire compound that ensures good performance in a wide range of conditions and they can be used throughout the year. Issues such as the costs of purchasing, storing and changing tires at set times each year would need to be balanced against the possible benefits, and that many vehicles in the south of the country would only experience the necessary conditions to gain from these tires on a few occasions each year.

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