



How to Get a Driver's License: An Overview for International Residents

When moving to a new country, having a driver's license from the destination country can certainly ease a lot of stress when trying to fill out other paperwork and necessary documents. However, for an international resident, a driver's license may not be so easy to attain, can be confusing, and might require a lot of steps. We want to help take away some of the stress of obtaining a driver's license by offering a guide with tips to consider during the process.

This guide is not designed to get your driver's license for you, but it does provide insight and helpful considerations around getting a driver's license and maneuvering through South Carolina's Department of Motor Vehicles. See the South Carolina DMV's [guide for international residents](#) who are still not a U.S. citizen, which goes into further detail of the checklist items.

Identifying DMV Locations

Important Steps –

- Identify which [DMV locations](#) are able to service international residents. You can search locations that serve international residents. As of 08/2018, these two Charleston area DMVs serve international residents:
 - Ladson:
 - 135 Wimberly Drive
Ladson, SC 29456
(843) 572-7854
 - Charleston-Leeds Avenue:
 - 3790 Leeds Avenue
North Charleston, SC 29405
(843) 740-1658

Questions and Tips to Consider –

- The Department of Motor Vehicle locations can get extremely busy. Allow for an hour or two when visiting the DMV and if going upon the location's morning opening, be sure to arrive 30-40 minutes early.

Deciding Which Type of ID is Needed

Important Steps –

- Choose whether you want to get a [REAL ID](#) or a paper ID.

Questions and Tips to Consider –

- Two proofs of address are required to obtain a REAL ID and can be extremely difficult for international residents who have just obtained a work permit (check the SC DMV guide for acceptable proofs of address). Have you thought about adding your name along with your partner's to bills, bank accounts, car leasing, etc. to make this easier?
- Only 1 proof of address is required for a paper ID but you may not use this form of identification to board airplanes or enter federal facilities.

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Checklist Items

Important Steps –

- Gather required checklist items before your visit to the DMV:
 - Proof of SC address must show your name and current SC address of residence
 - Proof of identity, date and place of birth
 - Proof of social security number
 - Proof of authorized length of stay in the United States
 - Legal documents supporting name change(s)
 - Automobile liability insurance information

Questions and Tips to Consider –

- Make sure all the checklist items are original documents.
- If you do not have a social security card, you may present a non-work authorized status from the Social Security Administration.
- For proof of authorized length of stay in the US, check your visa status and provide the appropriate document for that visa status such as a letter of employment or Form I-20 (documents listed on SC DMV guide)
- Automobile insurance is required in the US. Have you made sure that your car insurance company is licensed to do business in South Carolina?

Taking the Test(s)

Important Steps –

- You may be required to take a written test, theory test, and driving test (or any of the combination) depending on your home country.

Questions and Tips to Consider –

- Some immigrants moving to the US with their home country driver's license are excluded from taking certain tests. Make sure you are aware of every test you are required to take.
- Spend some time practicing the written and theory [tests](#) online. For immigrants coming from countries whose driving lanes are opposite of the US, this may be beneficial and reduce confusion.

GET INVOLVED

The Global Fluency Initiative is an activation of the Charleston Metro FDI Plan and the One Region Global Competitiveness Strategy. It is led and implemented by a volunteer Action Team committed to continuing to grow the metro's global fluency. **For more information, contact:**

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