Driving in Connecticut

Connecticut permits a student or visitor to operate a motor vehicle in Connecticut for a period of up to one year with their home country license. If the license is in a language other than English or Spanish, the license must be accompanied by an International Driver’s Permit (IDP) [1], which serves as an English translation of the international license. An IDP is not considered a valid license, and must accompany a valid international driver’s license from the home country. The IDP permits can only be obtained in the country which issued the actual license so you will want to make arrangements for the IDP before you leave your home. Out-of-country licenses are not acceptable as a form of identification.

Driver's License

When Can I Apply?

You cannot apply for a Connecticut driver's license prior to the start date noted on your visa document (e.g. Form I-20 or DS 2019) or before you check in with OISS. You will also need to have your printed I-94 record [2]. If you have completed your studies and are currently authorized for F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT), or J-1 Academic Training (AT), you may only apply for a CT driver's license during the approved period of OPT or AT, not before it begins. Applicants with a status that expires in less than 12 months may have an issue applying for the license. This is at the discretion of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) [3].

Apply for a Social Security Number

A SSN is required for the CT driver's license application. SSN application instructions can be found on the OISS website [4]. If you are not eligible for a U.S. Social Security Number (SSN) you will need to go to the Social Security Office (150 Court Street, 4th Floor [5]) and obtain a letter from them stating you are not eligible to receive a SSN. You must present this letter to the DMV when you apply for your CT driver's license.

Citizens of Canada, Germany or France

Citizens of Canada, Germany, and France with valid driver's licenses may transfer their home country driving license to a CT license using the same procedures for an out-of-state license. [6]

Review the CT DMV website [3].

The DMV website provides the most up-to-date information on what is required to apply for a driver's license (and other processes, such as car registration). You should go to the DMV well prepared, carrying all items that are listed/required. The DMV office closest to campus is in Hamden CT.

Matching Name and Date of Birth

Make sure your name and date of birth match on ALL documents.

Failure to have matching information may create a significant delay in the processing of your application.

Before the DMV will allow an international applicant to complete the application process, they are required to run a check through government databases. Government delays in entering point of entry information for international visitors can impact this process, from as quick as a few hours to as long as 30 days.

Dependents

Accompanying dependents who wish to apply for a CT driver's license must comply with all of the requirements as
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noted on the DMV website [6]. In addition, it is strongly recommended that the primary status holder accompany the dependent to the DMV with their own documents.

Need Additional Help?
If you run into a particular situation where you feel you have provided all requested documentation and are still not able to get a license, contact OISS.

Buying A Car
If you purchase a car in Connecticut, you are required to register the car with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). You must have a CT driver's license or a CT state ID card in order to register your car.

Many used cars for sale privately can be found through bulletin board notices posted around campus, on search websites such as AutoList [7], on classified websites such as Craigslist [8], and using other online services. Other resources include local publications such as The New Haven Register [9]. Car dealerships will also sell used cars and new ones.

Cost analysis can be done online through Kelly's Blue Book [10] and Edmunds [11]. Private Party Value is what you can expect to pay if you buy from an individual. Suggested Retail is the price you would pay if you purchase from a car dealer.

Check any used car thoroughly before you buy. Always test drive the vehicle and take it to a professional mechanic for a pre-purchase check. Carfax [12] is an online vehicle history check that can provide useful pre-purchase information as well.

Maintenance
Finding a good mechanic is a must for a car owner. For major repairs, you should always shop around. In addition to the listings here, you can ask for recommendations from your friends and colleagues. If you are a member of AAA [13] (American Automobile Association), you can get a list of AAA approved garages. There are also car dealers and national chains, such as Firestone [14], Meineke [15] and Midas [16] where you can get car care services; watch for specials and coupons. National chains sometimes offer deals on routine repairs such as mufflers and brakes.

Registration
Valid insurance is required in order to register a vehicle.

Shop around and compare prices. It may be helpful to have a copy of your driving record from home.

Dealership Car Sales
If you purchase a new or used car through an authorized dealer, they will walk you through the steps to register the car.

Private Car Sales
If you purchase the car through a private individual, refer to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) [17] for how to register your car.

Registration and Insurance cards
Always keep the registration and insurance papers in the car, and make a copy of each to keep in a safe place at home.

Safe Driving

Familiarize yourself with Connecticut State traffic laws before heading out in your car. Rules are largely the same throughout the U.S., but there are laws that vary from state to state. The CT driver's manual can be found on the CT DMV website. Here are a few basics:

- Each driver of the vehicle must have an acceptable valid driver’s license.
- The driver and all front seat passengers are required by law to wear seat belts. Back seat passengers aged 4-16 are required to wear seat belts.
- Speed limits in the U.S. are strictly enforced. If you are caught and ticketed for speeding, you will be required to pay a very large fine.
- Handheld cell phones cannot legally be used while driving. Ask for a “hands free” device from your cell phone provider if you need to drive and use your phone.
- Drivers must yield the right-of-way at all times to pedestrians who are in a marked or unmarked crosswalk.
- “Right on Red”: Turning right at a red light is permitted in Connecticut only after you have stopped completely to make sure it is safe to proceed. In the city of New Haven, however, many intersections will have signs that indicate “NO TURN ON RED.”
- Infants and children must use approved child restraint seats in all vehicles until they are over six years of age AND 60 pounds. After children outgrow their car seat, they must ride in a booster seat using a lap and shoulder belt. The law also now requires that infants remain rear-facing until they are 1 year of age AND 20 pounds!
- Headlights must be turned on whenever the windshield wipers are in use — rain or snow, night or day.
- You must stop for a school bus that is stopped with its red lights flashing whether it is on your side of the road, the opposite side of the road, or at an intersection you are approaching.
- Do not leave children unattended in a parked car. This is a serious crime.

Information about Traffic Violations [18]

Parking

Parking is limited in New Haven and on or near the Yale campus. Be sure to inquire about parking options when apartment hunting and consider the cost of monthly parking if you plan to drive to campus every day. Detailed information about parking in New Haven, including downloadable maps, can be found at INFOnNewHaven [19]. Other options for parking include:

- There are a number of private garages and lots in Downtown New Haven that offer daily or monthly rates.
- You can pay for meters with coins, pre-purchased parking vouchers, Parkmobile [22] or the New Haven City Card [23].

Parking on City Streets

Be aware of the following when parking on New Haven city streets:

- Read signs carefully. Limitations vary in terms of length of stay, time of day, day of the week, etc, and you will be ticketed for violations.
- Heed parking bans, snow emergencies and street cleaning schedules or you will be ticketed and towed, even with a valid permit. Signs announcing bans will be posted on trees and poles along the street with as little as 12 hours notice.
- If you get a parking ticket, pay promptly or additional fines will be added.
Towing

If you believe your car was towed, call the New Haven Police Department at (203) 946-6316. The police will tell you if it was towed and why, as well as if you owe money for tickets or taxes. Ticketed and towed vehicles incur a $77 tow fee payable to the tow company. After the first 24 hours, storage charges are $20 per day for the first 5 days, and $24 per day thereafter. For more information, click here [24].

Broken Meter

If a parking meter is broken, New Haven City ordinance requires you to pay with a parking voucher [25] or move your car to another space. To report a malfunctioning meter, call (203) 946-8081 with the meter number, street name and type of problem encountered.

Information about Parking Violations [18]

Source URL: https://oiss.yale.edu/life-at-yale/practical-matters/transportation/driving-in-connecticut

Links:
[5] https://www.google.com/maps/search/150+Court+Street,+New+Haven,+CT/@41.306375,-72.923427,15z
[10] https://www.kbb.com/
[12] https://www.carfax.com/car-research
[16] https://www.midas.com/
[18] https://oiss.yale.edu/taxes-legal/traffic-and-parking-violations
[21] https://your.yale.edu/community/getting-around-yale/parking
[23] https://www.newhavenct.gov/gov/depts/vital_stats/elm_city_resident_card.htm