

REAL ID Extended to May 7, 2025

The Department of Homeland Security extended the REAL ID deadline to May 7, 2025. The REAL ID Act established minimum security standards for state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards and prohibits Federal agencies from accepting for official purposes licenses and identification cards from states that do not meet these standards. Beginning May 7, 2025, every state and territory resident will need to present a REAL ID compliant license/ID, or another acceptable form of ID for boarding commercial aircraft, accessing Federal facilities and entering nuclear plants. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) considers a current passport or military ID acceptable identification for boarding an aircraft. For more information on New York's REAL ID-compliant license, visit dmv.ny.gov.

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Avoid muscle soreness while traveling

Ergonomic travel tips could help alleviate the pain

Your back is aching. Your legs are numb. It's a recurring problem after hours traveling by plane or motor vehicle. Getting to our destination keeps us focused and able to go that extra mile.

It doesn't have to be so difficult. There is a way to plan for a pain-free travel experience by making small changes that can have a positive impact in how you feel once you reach your destination. The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) has suggestions.

"Prolonged sitting causes a build-up of pressure in the blood vessels in your lower legs, which causes **soreness**" said Scott Bautch, D.C., president of the ACA Council on Occupational Health. "Simple moves, such as stretching or contracting and relaxing your muscles, can increase blood flow.

"Treat travel like an athletic event. Warm up before getting into a car or on the plane and cool down once you reach your destination. For example, taking a short, brisk walk to stretch your hamstring and calf muscles before and after a long trip can help prevent problems."

Consider these additional tips for healthier travels:

Travel by car

Sit as close to the steering wheel as



PAINFUL TRIP – Flying on an airplane can lead to cramping of the muscles. It's wise to learn ways to avoid this from happening. *Image: EdNurg. Adobe Stock.*

comfortably possible. Do a series of muscle stretches when driving that include counting to 10 while opening your toes. Count to five while tightening your calf muscles. Follow with your thigh muscles, then gluteal muscles. Roll your shoulders forward and back, and always make sure to put safety first by keeping your hands

on the steering wheel and eyes on the road.

Keep from gripping the steering wheel. Alternate tightening and loosening your grip to improve hand circulation and decrease muscle fatigue in the arms, wrists and hands.

It also helps to take breaks to move and stretch your body to refresh your-

self. Never underestimate the potential consequences of fatigue.

Travel by airplane

Stand up straight and feel the normal "S" curve of your spine. Using rolled-up pillows or blankets to maintain that curve when you sit in your seat will prevent back pain.

When purchasing new luggage, look for sturdy, light pieces with wheels and a handle. Check all bags heavier than 5-10% of your body weight. Overhead lifting of any significant amount of weight should be avoided to reduce the risk of pain in the lower back or neck. If you use a backpack, make sure it has two **padded** and **adjustable shoulder** straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder does not allow weight to be distributed evenly, which could cause muscle strain.

Do not force objects with an awkward motion by using your legs, feet or arms when pushing belongings under the seat in front of you. This could cause muscle strain or spasms in the upper thighs and lower-back muscles.

Vary your positions while seated to improve circulation and avoid leg cramps. On longer trips, walk for a few minutes every hour to minimize the risk of cramps.

AmaWaterways expanding offerings in '25

Travelers have options to take 14-night trips throughout Europe

River cruising's popularity has grown immensely during the past decade. More travelers are finding the intimate ships, wading through calm waters through many of the world's finest locations, create a peaceful environment.

AmaWaterways is one of the leading river cruise lines worldwide and it's making itself more delectable to travelers interested in an extended stay. It recently announced a new combination of cruises in Europe that will debut in 2025.

The "Grand" series of 14-night itineraries include *Grand Seine & Bordeaux*, *Grand Seine & Rhone* and *Grand Rhine & Dutch Canals*. By combining two popular seven-night sailings into one convenient itinerary, these journeys invite travelers to immerse themselves in a European adventure that offers more time to explore diverse landscapes, historic cities and charming villages.

"As the demand for more extensive travel experiences continues to rise, we are thrilled to unveil three new 14-night itineraries set to debut in 2025," said Kristin Karst, co-founder and executive vice president of AmaWaterways. "The new *Grand* series offer combination cruising complete with complimentary transfers between ships and the choice of up to 40 included excursions, making it even more convenient for our guests to fully immerse themselves in the history, culture and culinary delights of France, Germany and the Netherlands."

Highlights of the *Grand* itineraries include:

Grand Seine & Bordeaux – The 14-night cruise takes travelers through four legendary



RIVER DANCE – Spend two weeks on the rivers of Europe aboard a luxurious AmaWaterways ship, as the cruise line recently unveiled a series of 14-day journeys. Image: AmaWaterways.

waterways in France, including the Seine, Garonne and Dordogne rivers, as well as the Gironde Estuary. Serving as a combination cruise of two of AmaWaterways' well-loved itineraries – *Paris & Normandy* aboard *AmaLyra* and *Taste of Bordeaux* aboard *AmaDolce* – this 14-night cruise with train transfer between Paris and Bordeaux is ideal for history enthusiasts and wine connoisseurs alike, offering the chance to savor the region's finest vintages, visit historic castles and immerse in the colorful countryside's rich culture.

- 15 departures from March through October 2025

Grand Seine & Rhone – The 14-night trip explores the treasures of the Seine and Rhône rivers in France, combining the best of AmaWaterways' *Paris & Normandy* aboard *AmaLyra* and *Essence of Burgundy & Provence* aboard *AmaCello*. Guests will enjoy visiting world-famous monasteries, admiring Normandy's stunning coastline, exploring French châteaux's and immersing themselves into France's enchanting blend of history, nature and gastronomy.

Convenient train connections are included to ensure seamless transfer from Paris to Dijon.

- 11 Departures Sailing from March through November 2025

Grand Rhine & Dutch Canals – Sailing from Amsterdam to Basel aboard *AmaStella*, the 14-night journey is a delightful combination of AmaWaterways' popular *Best of Holland & Belgium*, *Enchanting Rhine* and *Captivating Rhine* itineraries. This enchanting voyage is perfect for those seeking to immerse themselves in the fairytale castles and storybook villages along the Rhine, as well as explore the wonders of Holland and Belgium.

- 9 Departures Sailing from July through December 2025

Other curated 14-night voyages include the *Grand Danube* sailing between Vilshofen, Germany and Giurgiu, Romania and *Magnificent Europe* sailing between Amsterdam, Netherlands and Budapest, Hungary.

Each journey can be combined with pre- or post-cruise land packages and promise an immersion into the rich history, culture and culinary delights of Europe, all while indulging in the exceptional comfort, service and culinary excellence for which AmaWaterways is renowned. Guests enjoy a choice of guided excursions, hiking and biking tours and exclusive events allowing them to fully engage in each city's traditions, complemented by generous leisure time for relaxation.

Visit your local AAA branch office to speak with a travel advisor to learn more about AmaWaterways river cruises.

Mercedes keeping things up to date

Over-the-air updates blessing to automaker's drivers

Mercedes-Benz isn't standing pat when it comes to updating information. It's rolling an extensive package of new entertainment and navigation features over the air to more than 700,000 vehicles.

New features began rolling out on select models with the second generation of MBUX in September. Customers are informed of the MBUX Entertainment Update (2.4) via Update Wizard on their MBUX display or on the Mercedes me connect app.

"Our in-house developed Mercedes-Benz software enables great in-car entertainment, immersive Dolby Atmos audio, video streaming and enhanced navigation experiences," said Magnus Ostberg, chief software developer at Mercedes-Benz AG. "Equipped with our pioneering MBUX infotainment system, our vehicles meet the rapidly changing desires of our customers worldwide through regular over-the-air feature updates."

Dolby Atmos added more space, clarity and depth to music. Listeners will enjoy music that matches the artist's original vision, whether it's hearing the layers of instruments move around you, catching the subtle breath a singer takes between lyrics or feeling melodies wash over you.

In-car entertainment also becomes more enjoyable with the addition of the YouTube Web app on select model-year



AIRING IT OUT – Over-the-air updates bring new navigation offerings to Mercedes-Benz drivers. *Image: NewsPress USA.*

2024 vehicles.

Mercedes-Benz introduced NewsFlash with Hey Mercedes in eight countries and five languages in 2022 and it soon will be available in the U.S. The updated version allows customers to listen to newscasts on general news, business, finance, sports, culture and other topics. Customers can configure their favorite channels in the Mercedes me app before using the MBUX Voice Assistant via the command "Hey Mercedes, play

the news."

In-cabin sound for the front-passenger display is another new feature. The audio from the dynamic content viewed on the front-passenger display no longer requires headphones and can be played on the in-cabin sound system. Customers also can select their own Personal Decorative Image via the Mercedes me connect app.

Cars with the first generation of MBUX will benefit from additional

navigational content from Place Details, provided by Google. This feature – which is available for second-generation MBUX – adds detailed information about more than 200 million businesses and other locations worldwide, including business hours, photos, ratings and reviews. As this update is performed on the server, it is automatically available to customers.

Available U.S. features:

- Dolby Atmos supported by Apple Music: S-Class, EQE and EQS models equipped with Burmester® Sound System and activated Entertainment Package Plus.
- YouTube Web App: 2024 S-Class, EQE, EQS models equipped with activated Entertainment Package Plus.
- NewsFlash: **Markets:** Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, UK (**USA**-coming soon).
- In-cabin sound for front passenger display: EQE and EQS models equipped with MBUX Hyperscreen.
- Personal Decorative Image: EQE and EQS models equipped with MBUX Hyperscreen and active Mercedes me connect app.
- Place Details, provided by Google: NTG6 vehicles equipped with Mercedes-Benz Navigation. (Feature already active on NTG7 vehicles equipped with Mercedes-Benz Navigation).