

Speaker 1:

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK Travel Planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips, and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation.

Speaker 1:

Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

Tracy:

Hi, and welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Are you planning a trip to the UK and considering driving for part of your vacation? Perhaps you listened to our previous podcast about driving the north coast 500 in Scotland and now dream of taking a road trip of your own around the UK. However, are you feeling stressed or nervous at the thought of driving in an unfamiliar environment and on the opposite side of the road from what you are used to?

Tracy:

We know this is a huge source of anxiety for many considering driving in the UK and is often raised in emails and in our UK Travel Planning Facebook community. Well, this is the podcast episode for you. Today I'm joined by John Cortese, founder of Tripiamo, which aims to help North Americans understand how to get around safely, no matter where in the world you are, including what you need to know to stay safe if you're planning to drive in the UK.

Tracy:

After listening to this podcast, you'll know how Tripiamo's guides can prepare you for your trip and help allay your fears and stresses about driving in the UK. So John, it's great to have you on the UK Travel Planning Podcast today. Would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself and also about Tripiamo and what made you start the company?

John:

Yeah. Well, firstly, Tracy, thank you so much for having me here. It's really a pleasure to be here. So my name's John Cortese. I started Tripiamo, which really is a business that I started really to help people adventure safely and travel confidently no matter where they are in the world.

John:

So what we do is we create virtual online guides to teach people how to drive in a foreign country and how to get around with other transit modes like motorbikes, bicycles, and public transit, but really giving you a simplified and quality

understanding of the differences in getting around in another country, and really what you need to know to stay safe before you arrive, whether it's for vacation or if you're visiting family, studying or for business. But our guides come in with kind of a few things and they come with them to ensure that you're confident and know what you need to know before you hit the road.

John:

So as a part of the Tripiamo, we provide first a series of short micro videos that cover topics from unique road rules to driving etiquette, to explanation of road signs and speeding restrictions and how and where to park, rental car tips, and everything else you can imagine you might need to know.

John:

But what really makes us unique is that we provide an actual 360 degree experience that actually allows you to experience what it's like to drive or getting around, or get around in another country before you actually get there. So this way you know, really, exactly what to expect or how to maneuver, whether you're getting on a bike in the city of Edinburgh, if you're driving on the English countryside or just even walking across the streets of London.

John:

So we also then provide a set of handy materials and top tips while you're on the go. But really all of this is backed by our team's extensive travel experiences, our research with reliable sources, such as looking and reading in the details of every driving manual in each country, interviewing locals, expats, visitors, and everything they've experienced in between. So we really, our goal here with Tripiamo is to make sure that you can get around like a local, no matter where you are in the world.

Tracy:

I mean, that's absolutely perfect. I know in our Facebook group, and often by email, I do get a lot of questions and concerns and worries raised, particularly about driving on the left in the UK, because obviously it's opposite side to North America. So while it's not so much of a worry, I guess, when Americans set into mainland Europe, because the majority of mainland Europe do drive on the right-hand side. I have to think there, myself. But obviously there are places like [inaudible 00:04:30] Island, Cyprus and Malta also drive on the left, as well as there are, as I say, 72 countries around the world that actually drive on the left. So, it's with considering that.

Tracy:

It's a stress for people. And quite often, there'll be a [discount 00:04:46], "I'm not going to drive. I won't drive in the UK because it really worries me." So I know when we're talking before, you've talked about the different modes of transport that your guides cover. So I know driving is something particularly that our listeners may want to know a little bit more in detail about how you will help them and how you will relieve their stress and worries and anxieties that they have through if they access the guides through Tripiamo.

John:

That's really a great question. And when you boil it down, travelers really are concerned about just negative outcomes of driving wherever, whether it's on the opposite side of the road, whether it's still on the same side, it's just knowing what to do when you get to that particular country and the things that are different.

John:

But to talk about that opposite side of the road driving, I also want to address this point by talking a little bit about just driving internationally in general, because there are several things to think about when you're driving in any international country, and it should be good. You should be able to. Most people that do it get along fine and they're completely fine, but there are certain concerns that people have such as personal or family injury. I know that getting around is generally deemed safe, but road related accidents can be a leading cause of issues for Americans and others traveling internationally.

John:

People are concerned about tickets. Foreigners can get tickets and then just any vehicle rental damage, but really a lot of these things can be addressed with just understanding the basics of what's going on. And I'm going to get to that in a second. But, as it particularly relates to driving on the opposite side of the road, what Tripiamo has is a few things to really help.

John:

So first, we provide those micro videos like I mentioned, and we cover really all of the main situations and topics travelers used to driving on the opposite side of the road get confused by while they're driving across the UK. So we'll give you an understanding of what to expect from every aspect of your journey, from something as simple as picking up your car at the rental agency and what's different there, getting in the car, knowing what general functionality is placed and where it is, such as the steering wheel being on the right hand side of the car, or where is the gas pedal? Where's the acceleration? To what are the different driving situations that you may be confused by that as we've interviewed dozens and dozens of people of what's different, and making sure that we cover those things.

Tracy:

So just to kind of joke there, I know one of the biggest issues, and also even for Australians go into the UK to drive and the same with Americans, is that we drive in Australia, we drive automatics more than a stick shift. And I know that in North America is the same. I used to live in Canada and again, had an automatic, but in the UK that is still, it costs you more to rent an automatic to start off with, but actually it's more unusual.

Tracy:

So to actually get an automatic will cost you more and you do have to get in and get that rental quite early on because there is-

John:

Correct.

Tracy:

... a higher demand, especially from people from Australia and North America who want, prefer to have an automatic rather than the stick shift.

John:

Absolutely. And that's also our recommendation as well. Although, if you have experience driving stick, please, by all means, go ahead if you feel comfortable, but especially if you're not even used to those roads and the road signs in the UK, but let alone driving on the opposite side, you want to make sure that you're paying attention to what's in front of you, not necessarily looking at your GPS or also thinking about how you should be driving a stick shift.

John:

So I do want to address Tracy, just a couple of other things too about your question around what Tripiamo does to help calm you, because we know that a lot of those things can be mitigated just with that practice. In addition to those micro videos, we give you, actually, like I said, real life, 360 driving footage with instructional guidance for all of the different situations you may encounter while you're in the UK, such as going through roundabouts, small roundabouts, multi-lane roundabouts. That's something that really concerns people.

John:

Driving in rural areas, urban, suburban areas, on highways, really going through any types of intersections that are not even roundabouts, but just let's say multi-lane intersections. That's something that's very challenging for people that are driving on the opposite side of the road, but travelers are much more prepared for their excursions when they're using our guides.

John:

But I want to use an analogy here too, just to kind of give you an idea. So let's say you're in a calculus math class and maybe you're in high school and you're about to take your midterm or final, and you've never opened the calculus text book. That's what it could be like driving internationally. And even saying this, you probably have the knowledge and the prerequisites to take that calculus class because you've completed your algebra class, your geometry class and you know the basics of math, just like you got your license in your home country.

John:

But if you don't know the principles of calculus or driving in that particular country, if you haven't looked at the textbook or done some examples, you could be going into that test blind. And sometimes when you can go in that test blind, something can go wrong. But again, what we're providing is that simplified guide so that you don't have to necessarily read the textbook, but you can get it in a really short time, be confident and make sure that driving or cycling or getting around in general isn't a worry you have to think about while you're traveling abroad.

Tracy:

No, that's great. And so I know we talked about things like roundabout and speeding, tolls, you cover rules and parking, because parking is an issue, I know. And I've said it quite often to people, expect in the UK that you'll have to pay for parking. And I know you cover things like congestion zones and I always recommend people not to drive in London anyway. So hopefully you wouldn't be having to deal with that if you were going to be visiting London. And obviously things like fuel stations and the different types of petrol.

Tracy:

I've actually had friends who've traveled to the UK before and had a rental car and it was a diesel and they put petrol in a diesel car and I've heard of that happening before as well. It's-

John:

[crosstalk 00:11:07].

Tracy:

... just being conscious of those things. And I think when you're on holiday, while you get into that holiday mode and then sometimes those things you forget, you forget actually, I'm back into ... oh, I'll just put the petrol in the car. Oh, oops, I've put the wrong sort in. And that's a very expensive mistake that you can make.

Tracy:

So it's those sorts of things that your tutorial videos cover as well, which I think is really helpful. And again, something for our listeners to get the guides and prepare themselves before they actually go to the UK, so that they have that ... equipped with that knowledge to reduce their stress levels and raising those levels of awareness. And I know, I can think about when I moved to France in 1989. So it's a long time ago now, and actually was driving. Obviously, I used to drive on the left and then was driving on the right.

Tracy:

And so the one time I actually did have an accident because I looked the wrong way. Basic mistake, first day in the car, first day in the car, looked the wrong way. So luckily it wasn't a serious accident. It was just a bit of a side impact, but it was enough to shake me up for a while. Oh. So something like this would've been

fantastic. So I guess I'm going to ask about, at the moment your guides cover the UK, but are they going to cover other places? Because I think that also might be of interest.

John:

Yes. And that's a great question. We are expanding as we speak into several other countries, particularly for now in Western Europe and we hope to have most of those ready before the summer travel season starts. So, be on the lookout.

Tracy:

That's brilliant. That's great that you're going to offer ... have a bit more, going to offer from the UK out, because I know some people will travel to the UK, spend a bit of time in the UK, perhaps maybe get the train over to France and then go and want to hire a car in France or start off in France. And doing a road trip in Europe, it's exciting. But again, if you're actually going to spend some time staying in France or Italy and you're going to drive, then you go to the UK, again, you're going to still have that same issue that you're going to be on the other side of the road.

Tracy:

But also even in places, France and Italy have different ... they're going to have different rules and regulations to what you're used to. And I had that one ... because I lived in Canada, sounds like I've lived everywhere, but I lived in Canada and I'd been living in France, actually moved to Canada.

Tracy:

And then from a rural setting in France to a big ... I moved to Toronto. So then getting used to the different rules in Canada was something that was all brand new to me. Something like this would've been amazing, would've been absolutely fantastic. Would certainly have helped me, made me feel less stressed and far more prepared about driving when I went.

Tracy:

So I think that's brilliant. Obviously I'm going to put links in the show notes to Tripiamo. So anybody listening can be able to go over to your website and they can purchase some of your guides. So would you like to just say once they've purchased this, how long do they have access to the guide? Is it downloadable? How do they access them?

John:

Yeah, so we created it pretty simple. Basically, you go on our website, you purchase a guide and they're available for a full year. You log into our Tripiamo portal where you're going to be able to access, whether you're at the airport and you're in your home before where you arrive. If you're at the hotel even, in that country, you can access all of the guides. And then we also provide kind of a downloadable PDF too that you can bring as just in case reference. Let's say you're driving and you're like,

"What does that road sign mean? And I don't really remember from the videos." You can have that for reference too. But available on desktop, phone, tablet, anything you name, as long as you got internet connection.

Tracy:

Perfect. That sounds excellent. And I know there's a money-back guarantee as well-

John:

Correct.

Tracy:

... that you've got with that. [crosstalk 00:14:46].

John:

Absolutely.

Tracy:

So, that's fantastic. I'm sure people won't need it because you're really offering a fantastic product. There's definitely a need for this because as I say, it's a common question that we get asked in our Facebook group and emails quite often is that stress and anxiety. And how do we prepare to drive in the UK? Because at the moment we're just, we want to do it and we really want to do a road trip, but we're just a bit nervous about what are we going to encounter? We've heard about all these roundabouts. We're going to be on a different side of the road than we're used to. So it's kind of all those questions. And as you say, when you first pick up your hired car is actually remembering which side of the car you get into if you're going to be driving it. It's those kind of basics as well.

John:

Or even if you're getting into a taxi too, even if you're not driving. Knowing which side, if you're going in the front of the car.

Tracy:

Yeah. And I know you talk about with modes of transport as well is walking and given advice about if you are walking around London. Actually, somebody commented the other day that's in London about the fact that they've got signs on the pavement before you cross the road to remind you which way to look, because that is such a common problem. If you're used to driving on a different side, you will look the opposite direction. And it's just instinct. You don't even think about it. You will just do that because that's what you used to. So there's those reminders about making sure that you're really aware of where you are and getting around, whether it's walking or whether you're going to take a motorbike or a bicycle, or you're going to hire a car.

John:

And on that point, Tracy, that I'd like to say too, just about the walking, this is one of those pieces of advice I give anyone that's going to the UK. Look, even if there are signs on the street that say, look left, look right, I always say look both ways before you get into the street, because so many people are used to just kind of even taking a step into the street and looking and don't realize they're looking the wrong way.

John:

And not all intersections in the UK, or mostly in the tourist areas in Central London and other areas, you're going to see look left and right. But not all intersections will have it. So that's why you-

Tracy:

[crosstalk 00:16:52].

John:

... also have to really say before you get into the street, I really recommend that.

Tracy:

Absolutely. And I know in the 1970s, we did the green cross code when I was at school and it was, you look left, you look right, you look left again. That was what drilled into us. That was you look left, you look right and then you look left again before you even consider. And you do that before you, as you say, step out into the road. And you can use it at the crossings as well. I would suggest that you do use the crossings and not jaywalking. Certainly not jaywalking.

Tracy:

And also in places like London as well, you've got to be conscious of the fact that there's motorbikes, there's buses, there's bicycles, very fast bicycles sometimes that can go very, very fast past you. And if you don't have your wits about you, you could get and knocked over. There's a lot to think about, isn't there?

John:

[crosstalk 00:17:39].

Tracy:

You're looking at everything, you're enjoying it, but you also have to be conscious of those things.

John:

But on that point too, Tracy, I would say there's definitely a lot to look at, but it's also, it's very much just like driving anywhere or walking anywhere. You have to be ready, but it's just knowing those differences and just making sure you understand them so that you're prepared and ready to go. And then you're going to have the time of your life, hopefully.

Tracy:

There's always one question I ask at the end to our guests on the UK Travel Planning Podcast, John. So you're no exception. You're going to get asked today that question. What is your number one tip for anyone visiting the UK for the first time?

John:

Oh. Well, I think the looking before you get into the street would be my number one for anyone, regardless of which motor transit you're taking and however you're going to enjoy your trip. But since this is really kind of a focus right now on driving, I think I'm going to give one particularly around driving.

John:

So this is for especially folks that are used to driving on the opposite side of the road from what is in the UK. When it comes to two-way intersections, whether it's single ... it's a two-way intersection you're approaching, whether you're coming from a one-way or a two-way, make sure you take large right-hand turns and short left-hand turns. It's going to be kind of hard to understand, but actually when you're there, you're going to be like, "Oh, that makes a lot of sense." Just on that note for the Americans out there. No concept of right on red. Can't do that in the UK.

Tracy:

Ah, yes.

John:

And a lot of that's because you're making large right-hand turns. So just keep that in mind. But that would be my one piece of advice at a high level for those driving in the UK.

Tracy:

That's a good point. That caught me out in Canada, I have to tell you, the red light thing. That was the first thing I learned, I think. That's brilliant, John. So thanks so much for coming on today. As I said, I'll put links in the show notes to Tripiamo so people can pop over there and buy your products, because they're excellent. Guides are really worth it. Definitely for anybody planning to pop over the UK and do ... while driving or visiting London. As I say, covered quite a few different ways of getting around. So, that's brilliant. So thanks very much for being a guest on the show.

John:

Oh, thank you, Tracy.

Tracy:

Thanks again to John for being today's guest on the podcast. You can find links to Tripiamo in today's show notes at [uktravelplanet.com/episode12](http://uktravelplanet.com/episode12). We have other podcast episodes, which you may enjoy too, including episode 11, which looks at the

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various ways to get around the UK, and episode three, which is an introduction to UK train travel.

Tracy:

If you've enjoyed today's episode, please leave us a review and subscribe on your favorite podcast app. You can support our work with the top tip your guide button, which is located on the our UK Travel Planning website. All that leaves me to say is thank you for listening, bye for now, and happy UK travel planning.