

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · SAN FRANCISCO

How to Get a Driver's License in San Francisco: 2026 Guide

For San Francisco newcomers, green card and visa holders, and drivers arriving with a foreign license: California's DMV process, tests and fees.

SHORT ANSWER

Once you establish California residency, you can drive on your previous license for only 10 days (California Vehicle Code section 12505), far shorter than Texas's 90-day window. The knowledge test is offered in English, Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Farsi, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese and American Sign Language; Turkish is not one of them. California has no license-exchange agreement with any country, so a Turkish license does not convert directly. The San Francisco DMV office is at 1377 Fell Street. The license fee is \$46.

Before you start

- **The deadline is short: 10 days.** California Vehicle Code section 12505 lets a new resident drive on an out-of-state license for at most 10 days after establishing residency. Do not confuse this with Texas's 90-day window.
- **No exchange agreement with Türkiye, or with any country.** A Turkish license does not convert to a California one. You apply as a first-time applicant: knowledge test, vision test, and a road test if required.
- **The knowledge test is not offered in Turkish.** DMV's official sample knowledge test page lists only English, Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Farsi, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese and American Sign Language. Ignore test-prep sites that claim California offers 30 to 40 languages, Turkish included.
- **Visitors are different.** If you have not established California residency, for example as a tourist or short-term visitor, you may drive on a valid foreign license. The 10-day clock starts the moment you become a resident.
- **REAL ID costs the same as a standard license.** Since May 7, 2025, domestic flights and entry to federal buildings require a REAL ID or a passport. There is no extra fee for REAL ID.

Step by step

- 1 **Book a DMV appointment.** The San Francisco office is at 1377 Fell Street. You can book and see other offices through DMV's office locator.
- 2 **Gather your documents.** Proof of identity and lawful presence, your Social Security number, and two documents showing your California address.
- 3 **Complete the application and pay the fee.** \$46.

- 4 **Take the vision test.**
- 5 **Take the knowledge test.** Traffic laws and signs, in English, Spanish or one of DMV's other listed languages.
- 6 **Take the road test if required,** in an insured, registered vehicle.

Fees (2026)

ITEM	FEE
Driver's license (original or renewal)	\$46
ID card	\$40
Reduced-fee ID card	\$11
Replacement or information change	\$37
Driving retest fee	\$9
Commercial license (Class A/B, original)	\$100

Card payments carry a service fee of roughly 1.95% to 2.1% depending on the channel. Cash is accepted in person only.

Standard license, REAL ID, or AB 60?

- **REAL ID:** valid for domestic flights and federal buildings, same fee as a standard license. You need proof of identity (for example a passport), your SSN, and two documents showing your California address.
- **Standard license:** available if you can prove lawful presence in the U.S., but it alone is not enough for domestic flights or federal buildings.
- **AB 60 license:** for people who cannot prove lawful presence but can prove identity and California residency. It is not REAL ID compliant and cannot be used as federal ID. You may be able to upgrade to a REAL ID if your status changes.

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

- The 10-day window is very tight. Book your DMV appointment the moment you establish residency.
- An International Driving Permit does not replace a California license; it only helps as an English translation, though rental car companies may ask for one.
- If a form asks about your citizenship or immigration status, answer truthfully; a false statement can have serious consequences.

The San Francisco DMV office

OFFICE	ADDRESS · HOURS
San Francisco DMV	1377 Fell Street, San Francisco, CA 94117 · Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Wednesday 9 a.m.-5 p.m., closed weekends

The office handles licensing, testing, title transfers, registration, plates and replacement documents, and has a self-service kiosk. Appointment availability changes over time. With only 10 days to work with, check the official page and scheduler as soon as your documents are ready rather than counting on a walk-in.

Office page: dmv.ca.gov, [San Francisco office](#) · locator and appointments: [dmv.ca.gov office locator](#).

Driving on a Turkish license

- **Visitors:** you may drive on a valid Turkish license as long as you have not established California residency (California Vehicle Code section 12502).
- **New residents:** get a California license within 10 days of establishing residency. There is no test exemption.
- **Renting a car:** rental companies may ask for an International Driving Permit.

Common mistakes

- Confusing the 10-day window with Texas's 90 days and applying too late.
- Assuming the knowledge test is offered in Turkish and showing up unprepared.
- Assuming a Turkish license can be exchanged without testing.
- Not knowing the REAL ID versus standard license difference before trying to board a domestic flight.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN SAN FRANCISCO

Have a question about your immigration status?

Attorney Asim Clinch serves clients in San Francisco and the surrounding area, in Turkish and English. Free evaluation: clinchlaw.com/free-evaluation · +1 866-491-7669

Office: 321 N Central Expy, Ste 206, McKinney, TX 75070

Attorney responsible for this guide: Asim Clinch, Esq., Clinch Law Firm P.C. Attorney Asim Clinch is a member of the Missouri Bar (No. 76084) and practices U.S. federal immigration law.

Attorney advertising. This guide is general information only. It is not legal advice and is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney. Information compiled from official sources as of September 28, 2026; fees and procedures change, so check the official site before you act. Reading this guide does not create an attorney-client relationship. The choice of a lawyer is an important decision and should not be based solely upon advertisements. Latest version: clinchlaw.com/city-guides/san-francisco-immigration-attorney