

Renting a Car: 7 Steps

Are you planning a trip in the near future? Whether you're exploring your own province or state, traveling across the country or journeying abroad, renting a car can provide the freedom and flexibility you need.

Renting a car can be a fairly simple process, if you know what to expect. On the other hand, travelers who have never dealt with a car rental company may find the whole routine a little confusing. Be aware of what's involved in the task, and you can avoid unnecessary hassles and extra costs.

Renting a car should not be a problem if you are able to follow a few essential steps:

- * **Drive a Bargain** People are always on the lookout for discounts. Car rental companies expect their customers to ask for reduced rates, and more often than not, they're happy to oblige. Some offer "limited time" deals that are applicable on certain days of the week or during particular travel periods. If you are willing to travel on weekends or during the off-season, you can save a bundle while renting a car.
- * **Charge It** Renting a car may not be an option for those who don't own valid credit cards. Even if you have a pile of cash on the counter, many companies insist on a credit card before they will rent a car to you. There is a mandatory deposit that's required to rent a car, and this, too, must be put on the credit card. The car rental companies claim that this requirement protects them from possible losses or damage to the vehicle, but it makes the process practically impossible for anyone who lacks a credit card.
- * **Sign the Dotted Line** Be sure that you read all of the conditions, and receive a full explanation of all fees and extra charges, before you sign the agreement. This is to avoid any surprises or "extra charges" that you may be expected to pay when you return the vehicle. The travel mileage is a good example. Car rental companies impose limits on the mileage that you're able to use, and they will charge you per mile should you exceed the limit. These extra miles quickly add up to a hefty extra charge. Also, be sure to top up the gas tank before you return the car, as car rental agencies charge a premium rate for fuel refills.
- * **Compare Prices and Service** Today's marketplace is flooded with car rental companies; so don't be too quick to settle with any one agency. Take the time to research, and to compare products and services. Begin by searching the Internet for home pages of the major car rental companies. Consumer and travel sites are also good places to find the latest information and find the best deals. After finding the best vehicle and most affordable to suit your needs, you'll need to factor in other charges, such as insurance and taxes. If you hold a credit card and valid, current insurance, you're likely covered by these policies while driving a rented car. Just be sure that the rental company won't decline your current insurance arrangement.
- * **Rent Off-site** It is convenient to rent a car from within an airport property, but you must be prepared to pay a great deal more. Car rental agencies must pay a fee to operate from the airport, so their rates tend to be quite a bit higher. For a lower rate, opt to rent your vehicle from an agency located away from the airport.
- * **Read the Fine Print** Aside from the obvious fees and charges, read the agreement to uncover any additional limitations. For example, some car rental companies do not allow those renting their vehicles to drive in another country, state or province. Verify all of the inclusions and restrictions before you sign on the dotted line.
- * **Ask for Incentives** In addition to lower rates, renting a car can include other bonuses. For example, some companies offer free music downloads with every rental agreement. Check the individual websites for any incentive offers that are currently available.

Renting a car can be easy, if you know what to expect. Follow each of these steps and you should be able to enjoy a worry-free trip. You'll save time, and maybe a little money, in the process.