

Rent a Car Checklist

By Lauren Meir

Before You Rent a Car

- Make an agenda** For how long will you be renting a car? What size vehicle do you need? Consider the cost of parking and gas. If you are traveling in a big city, look into public transportation options, and you may be able to cut your rental time in half.
- Shop around for deals online** ;Compare rates of the most well known ;rental services. You should call at least three different places that have a solid reputation and good customer reviews.
- Are you traveling and renting a car from the airport?** ;You may be able to book your flight and car rental for cheap, as part of a package deal **online** This can be a convenient option, as you can return the car to the airport on your last day. Beware, though, as some companies charge additional airport fees.
- Talk to your credit card company** Some credit cards offer discounts for car rentals.
- Call your insurance agent to verify what coverage you have for car rentals** Get advice on any supplemental insurance - if ;any - you may need.
- Contact your road service provider to see if they cover rental car service calls** Some services will get you discounts as well. If you are a AAA cardholder, for example, you may be entitled to a discount on the rental vehicle.
- Make a reservation** Call to reserve your vehicle only after researching your options and making the necessary calls. Reservations should always be free, so you can cancel if something comes up.

Bring/Have with You

- Driver's license and any other necessary I D., ;such as a passport
- Insurance card, as well as contact info for insurance agency
- Reservation confirmation info

To Ask At the Car Rental Counter

- Has the car you're renting completed its pre-rental maintenance check? If the clerk can't answer, be suspicious
- What to do if the car breaks down? Get the necessary contact information.
- What is covered under the rental insurance?
- What happens if the car is stolen?
- Is there a spare key in case the key is lost?
- When and where do you return the car? Some agencies allow you to return the rental to a different location from where you picked it up Other facilities will let you drop off the car even if the office is closed.

- Does the tank have to be full upon return? Some companies request a full tank, while others simply ask that you return with at least a half tank or at the same fuel level upon renting.
- At the Car**
 - Walk and check** Look carefully at all sides of the exterior, to ensure that there's no ;obvious damage. ;Know that you can be held responsible for undocumented ;damage once you leave the rental car lot.
 - ...Make sure the license plates are valid.
 - ...Check the tires for inflation, good tread, and even tread wear ;Uneven tread wear could indicate a ;suspension or alignment problem. ;If tread wear looks markedly uneven, you should ask for another vehicle.
 - Read the odometer** Does the car have over 25,000 miles on it? If so, you should be more thorough with your inspection, as older cars tend to have more wear and tear.
 - ...Ensure all vehicle lights work properly This includes headlights, turn signals, interior and dashboard lights.
 - ...Test the windshield wipers and washer This may seem like a small detail, but it's one of the biggest consumer complaints as well as a safety issue.
 - Locate the Owner's Manual in the glove box** You will need this if there's a feature you don't know how to work, or if you need to perform any ;maintenance ;tasks yourself.
 - ...Check the trunk for a spare tire and tools for changing a flat You should see a jack and a lug wrench. ;Test the tire to ensure it's inflated. Refer to the owner's manual to see if your rental requires any other tools for tire-changing, such as a socket or other items.
 - Open the hood to check the fluids** Make sure there's enough washer fluid, antifreeze and oil.
 - Ensure the car is comfortable and you can operate brakes, accelerator, and steering wheel without any difficulty** Familiarize yourself with the dashboard and any additional controls.
 - Drive the car around the parking lot first** If there are any problems with the way the car drives, it's best to assess this beforehand.
- On the Road and In the Car**
 - You might want to bring a mini-toolkit with you, in case of roadside emergencies
 - Paper towels or wipes in case you want to check/change your oil or fluid levels
 - A small flashlight
 - Ensure ;you have all documents with you: ;Driver's license, ;vehicle registration, ;insurance info, ;contact numbers for roadside service and ;contact info for the rental agency
 - If you don't have a GPS, map out your route before you get behind the wheel.