



Car Hire

Whether you're hiring a car while on holiday or need a vehicle while you're at home, there are a few things you should be aware of before booking to make sure you get not only the best deal, but also the vehicle that's right for you...



Book in advance

The further ahead you can book your car hire the less expensive it is likely to be. Not only this, but booking in advance lets you choose from a much wider selection of vehicles. With the impact of the recession, car suppliers have been struggling to obtain funding from the banks, so many fleets are not as large as they previously were, meaning certain popular destinations are struggling to guarantee availability at peak times. So, if you're planning your summer holiday, don't leave your car hire until the last minute – book early.

Beware of 'on request' or 'booking pending'

When suppliers are faced with high demand, your booking may go 'on request', also known as 'booking pending', which means you have to wait up to 48 hours to find out whether the supplier can confirm availability and process your booking. Hopefully your supplier will be able to confirm your booking and your booking voucher will be issued. However, if your request is denied then you will be left without a car and will have to approach a different car hire company – another reason to book your car hire in advance.

Make sure you're covered

If you hire a car in the UK, Europe, South Africa, New Zealand or Australia, then you will be covered for Third Party Liability and Theft and Collision Damage Waiver, but destinations outside of these areas generally do not include insurance.

Even if you do have some level of insurance, it may be worth taking out a more thorough policy with a third party insurer so that you are covered for all eventualities. For example, Refundable Excess allows you to claim back any excess you may be charged should you damage the vehicle. Also, if your plans are set to change, it may be worthwhile taking out Excess Waiver Protection, as if you then cancel you will only have to pay a small fee of (approximately £4 - £7) and will be refunded the remaining rental cost.

Beware of age restrictions

Most car hire companies require drivers to be 21 to hire a car, but in some cases it can even be 25. Drivers are also required to have held their licences for at least a year.

Collecting the car

In order to collect the car you will need to provide a print out of your booking voucher, your full driving licence and a credit card in the lead driver's name. Photocopies of your driving licence will not suffice, it must be the original document or else you will be refused the rental. When you get the keys to your hire car, take a moment to check that the petrol tank is full (if that was in the agreement) and that there are no dents or scratches before driving away. If you do find any damage to the vehicle, make sure you report it to a company representative and that it is officially recorded, so that you do not risk being charged for the repair.

In smaller locations, certain car hire companies may not be open on Sundays or late nights/early mornings and if this is when you would like to pick up your car, there may be an additional charge to cover an out of hours collection. If the company cannot staff the office for an out of hours collection you may be unable to pick your car up until the next day. Always double check the opening hours for your car hire provider before booking, especially if you are travelling outside of large cities.

Dropping off the car

It's important you return the car by your specified time or else you face being charged a late payment fee. You should also make sure that you are aware of the car hire supplier's policy for petrol – the general rule is for cars to be returned with a full tank. While some companies may state that there is no penalty for returning the car with a partially empty tank, often you will be charged for the supplier to fuel the car and this charge tends to be higher than what it would cost you to fill up yourself, so try and allow time to find a petrol station close to the drop off point.

Don't forget the extras

The most common extra when hiring a car is an additional driver, which can be included in the price, but tends to have a cost attached to it that has to be paid for on collection (approximately £4-7 a day). To include an extra driver on the policy, that driver must be present at the collection and must also have their full driving licence with them – again, this must be the original document. If you only want someone to be an additional driver for part of the trip this still has to be added on at the supplier's office, so unless it is convenient to return to the supplier during your rental, it may be easier to add all drivers at collection.

Other extras worth thinking about include sat nav, child seats and snow chains. With most suppliers, these can all be requested at the time of booking and arranging these at this stage will save you a significant amount in comparison to the higher costs charged at collection. Another

advantage to pre-booking extras is guaranteeing availability, as snow chains, in particular, may be difficult to get hold of during peak seasons. If you're planning to drop a car off at a different location from where you picked it up, then beware that you may face one way rental charges, which can sometimes be up to several hundreds of pounds. The reason for this is that suppliers have to foot the cost of returning the vehicle to where it belongs. Not all car hire companies charge for one way rentals, but as the costs can be so high, it is always worth checking beforehand.

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Generally speaking, larger suppliers are less likely to charge one way rental charges as moving their fleets around doesn't cause the same sort of problems as it would to a small company, but there are no guarantees with this, so you should always double check with the supplier.

Foreign driving laws

Driving a different car takes a bit of getting used to, but driving in a foreign country as well makes things that little but more challenging. Try and familiarise yourself with the rules and regulations of the country you will be driving in and make sure you know what documentation you need with you in case you are stopped by the police – your full driving licence and evidence of car rental agreement are advised in all countries. You should also check the drink driving laws for your destination, as while the legal blood/alcohol levels are more lenient than the UK (0.8mg) in some countries, they are also stricter in others, Spain and France being two such examples.
