

## Car Rental Drawbacks

We've all seen the signs: "Rent two days, get one free". "Economy cars, just 19.95 per day". "Free upgrade to luxury sedan with a subcompact rental".

Car rental companies have lots of ways to lure customers to their specific agencies. Of course, there are great deals available through legitimate offers. But there are also scams out there, and you've got to know how to be on the lookout. More often than not, you won't even know that you've been scammed until you return the car and are presented with a lengthy bill of "hidden charges". This can happen despite your diligence in checking everything out before you even left the car rental lot.

Here are some pointers to help you avoid this problem in the future:

\* Don't pay for someone else's mistake.

One of the biggest mistakes that renters commit, is paying for damages caused by other drivers. When you return the car, the agent will check every square inch for dings and scratches, and you will be expected to pay for the repairs should there be damages present. That's why you must insist on having a walk-around inspection done of the car, before you leave the lot. Have the agent check the interior and the exterior, and make note of any pre-existing damage. Even check the roof rack. When the inspection has been completed, ask the representative to sign his or her name to the rental agreement using a full signature rather than simply initials. This will serve as proof that they have thoroughly inspected the car and certified that it is in perfect running condition. It will also establish the fact that you will not be held responsible for any existing damages when you return the car to the lot. This is the only way to be protected from paying inflated repair charges for damages caused by another driver.

\* Be insured against accidents.

Most car rental firms will provide collision and damage waivers in order to protect your financial interests in case of any accident or misfortune involving your rental car. If you decide to turn down this additional coverage, be absolutely certain that your own car insurance, or your credit card company, covers such damages. If you are involved in an accident with your rented car, there are imperative measures you should take to minimize any loss. Always get the license number and the name of the other driver involved in the accident. Get a police report at the accident scene, and note the date, time and location where the accident occurred. Your insurance agent has probably provided you some form to keep on hand in case of an accident. Take photographs of everything in the accident scene, including other drivers involved, for proof and documentation. Make sure that you inform the car rental company as soon as possible. Rental cars that are involved in an accident require an extended period of time to be returned to the rental firm's garage. The process involves accident reports and documentation, so anticipate a lengthy car rental return.

\* Be on the lookout for a lockout.

If you lose your car rental keys or lock them inside the car, you may need to be a little creative. Try to find a way to access the keys without calling the car rental firm, as they may charge a substantial fee for providing you with a new set of keys. If you're a car club member, call on your accredited car club to do the honor of helping you retrieve your lost keys.

\* Watch out for stolen moments.

The biggest catastrophe you can face while on vacation is the theft of your rental car. Be careful where you park the car, taking into consideration the area that you're visiting. Park in a secure lot whenever possible, and make note of where you park the car. A stolen rental car can lead to a nightmare of legal issues.

Renting a car can be a good deal; but if you're not careful, it can also be a great deal of trouble. Know the facts and take measures to protect your rental agreement.