

5 things to do before driving away in a rental car.



Whether you're getting a rental car to explore a vacation destination (fun!) because yours is in the shop (not so fun), take the time to plan ahead.

When it comes to a rental car, these five simple steps can save you money, time and trouble:

1. **Research your insurance coverage.** You can buy insurance from the rental car company, but guess what? You may not need it. Most comprehensive auto insurance policies will cover a rental car as well. Check with your agent to see if yours does, and if "loss of use" is covered, too. This is the amount of revenue the rental company loses while a damaged rental vehicle is in the shop being repaired.
2. **Check for discounts.** Many frequent flyer programs, travel organizations, age-related associations (like AARP) and other membership groups offer rental car discounts as a perk. Check the websites of the major rental car companies as well.
3. **Get an emergency number at the service counter.** Ask the representative what number you should call if the rental car breaks down or you lose the keys. Write it down and keep it in the glovebox or enter it into your phone's contact list.
4. **Inspect your rental car thoroughly.** You will be held responsible for any new damage to the vehicle when you return it, so go over it carefully before you leave the lot. Start the car and make sure lights, heat/AC, wipers, power windows, and other features work properly. Check the tires to see that they are well inflated, including the spare, and be certain there is a jack and lug wrench in the trunk. If you find any damage, mention it to the rental attendant. Then use your smartphone to take photos or video of all sides of the vehicle. When you return the vehicle, if there is no attendant present to inspect it, take pictures again – this will protect you in any dispute about the car's condition.
5. **Familiarize yourself with the vehicle.** Don't wait until you're on the road to discover you don't know how to turn on the air conditioning or windshield wipers. Fumbling with unfamiliar

controls while trying to drive can lead to an accident. Also be aware that a rental vehicle may accelerate and brake differently than the car you're used to.

Taking the time for these precautions can make all the difference in your rental car experience. Remember, you just want to rent a car – not borrow trouble.