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Before you rent a car for the first time, try to make an accurate assessment of what your needs are. Consider whether you're traveling alone or with other passengers. Decide how much storage space your going to need. Do you need a compact car, a luxury vehicle, an SUV or truck? Take into account where you will be traveling and your budget for travel expenses.

After youâ€™ve got a short list of your car rental needs, start shopping the different rental companies in your area (or the area youâ€™ll be traveling in). It's very simple these days to look up these companies on the Internet. All of them have websites, and most even do locally based advertising via Google Adwords.

Pick the company that seems to have the best combination of price, terms and service. Remember the old adage, â€œyou get what you pay forâ€• holds true in this industry as well as any other. If one company is considerably cheaper than the others, theyâ€™re probably going to have problems in other areas. Itâ€™s hard to go wrong, however picking one of the large well-known chains. If the businesses in your area arenâ€™t any of the well known national firms, a quick call to the Better Business Bureau wouldnâ€™t hurt.

If budget is your primary concern, look for a corporation like Rent a Wreck. Theyâ€™ve been around a long time and provide very good rates on used cars.

When you make your rental reservations, you will need to have a valid, unrestricted license. Youâ€™ll also need insurance, either your own or you may buy a policy issued at the car rental establishment. Be sure to check with your insurance company to see if your insurance covers a rental. If it does, donâ€™t buy it through the rental agency. Thereâ€™s no need to pay for it twice. You will also be required have a credit card for a deposit.

In some countries, you may need an international driver's license.

Once you have determined what you need in the way of transportation, chosen a prospective car rental company, and gathered the information and documents you need, you are ready to book your car.

You can walk in most car rental companies and rent one on the spot, but there are advantages to booking the vehicle in advance. Making advance reservations can save you time, money and lots of headaches. Often, there are packages and special offers that will save you a bundle by planning ahead. Ultimately, you save time and reduce anxiety because you know you have it all arranged and are confident that the car rental you want is available, reserved for you. Nothing is worse than scrambling at the last minute trying to get transportation when none is available.

You can make reservations by visiting the rental location in person, by phone or online. Many people, including this author, prefer to shop online to be able to look over prices and specials at leisure. Many reduced rates are only available through an online reservation.

Arrange to arrive to pick up your rental car with time to spare. There are often unexpected delays that could cause you to miss a flight, appointment or cause undue aggravation. Avoiding these with a little planning will make a trip flow much more smoothly.

Before driving away, thoroughly check the contract, review the charges, and inspect the vehicle. If

there is any damage inside or out on the rental car, make sure that the employee duly notes it on the contract and signs off on them. If anything is missed at this stage, youâ€™ll be charged for it when you return the car.

Make sure you have the appropriate contact numbers in case of emergency or other concerns with your rental car. You never know when a breakdown might occur. If youâ€™re in a strange town this can turn into a minor disaster without knowing whom to call.

Finally, be sure you are comfortable with the rental terms, deadlines and restrictions before you head off to your destination.

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