



In Tokyo, London or Monte Carlo, an always-handy car allows senior travelers to see more, get off the tourist track and explore everything at their own pace. On the other hand, renting a car can also bring a lot of hassles and unexpected costs. Here are some tips to help make your international car rental go more smoothly:

Book in the US with a US agency: Hertz, Budget and Avis operate throughout the world. Working with established agencies in the US gives more consumer protection. Pay with a credit card, so you have recourse if there's a problem. You may also find rates are lower when booking in advance in the US, compared to those in some other parts of the world.

Get an International Driving Permit (IDP): It isn't a driver's license, but a document that translates into many languages and confirms its validity. You can get one at your auto club or other U.S. organizations authorized to issue them. The cost is about \$10.

Consider other options: In some cities, such as Amsterdam, there isn't much room on the ancient streets for cars and parking is scarce. Many cities have excellent and inexpensive public transport systems. In non-developed countries, the roads can be trouble, as can the local police and laws. It may be better to hire a recommended driver or use authorized taxis and limos.

Consider the extra insurance: In some countries, you'll encounter the car rental practice of insisting you buy extra insurance. Even though you're fully covered by your American policy, it may be wise to pay for local coverages.

Document all: Confirm car rental reservations before leaving home, and be sure to bring printed copies to prevent problems and overcharging. Inspect the car carefully prior to leaving the lot, and note to the clerk any damage, no matter how minor. When returning the car, photo outside and inside, to avoid a surprise extra charge on your credit card.

Costs: Verify all charges when making the reservation. In many countries gas is more expensive than in the U.S., so be sure to budget correctly.

Parking: Laws, rules and customs can vary from country to country and city to city. Ask questions and do research to see how parking works at your destination. When in doubt, find a pay-for lot to avoid the risk of ticketing, towing or booting when parking on the street.