



HILLS BALFOUR

Source: Sunday Times {Travel}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Sunday 17, October 2010
Page: 20,21
Area: 239 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 1066240 Weekly
BRAD info: page rate £60,690.00, scc rate £144.00
Phone: 020 7782 5000
Keyword: www.insurance4carhire.com



THE WORST CAR-RENTAL RIP-OFFS — AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Rod Liddle isn't the only one complaining. According to the UK European Consumer Centre (UKECC), complaints about car-hire rip-offs were up by 30% in the first five months of this year, with agencies in Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain named as the worst offenders.

Last year, the consumer safety body EuroTest carried out covert inspections of 60 car-rental agencies in Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain Croatia and Turkey. The worst car on offer was a Nissan Micra rented from Europcar on the Greek island of Santorini. The report cites "numerous serious defects, such as two distorted rims on the front axle, a badly damaged tyre side wall and a missing wheel nut on the rear right tyre. Together with poor service across the board, last place was the only ranking possible for this agency".

It's not only your personal safety that's at risk — your wallet could also be seriously hurt. Dents and scratches mysteriously appear after cars have been returned, full fuel tanks are suddenly found to be half empty and hidden insurance charges appear on credit card bills. Here are real people's stories of the rental agencies' favourite tricks — and the best strategies for avoiding them.

The excess rip-off: with Europcar, you will pay an excess of €900 for collision damage and €1,700 for theft; similarly with Avis and Hertz. So the smart thing is to reduce that risk to zero by purchasing extra insurance, right? We looked at the cost of renting a hatchback for a week from Pisa airport. The car rental cost £147 with Europcar and £164 with Avis. Adding the extra insurance — £21 and £16.68 per day respectively — brought

the prices to £294 and £280 respectively.

Solution: get your excess cover from a third-party provider such as Insurance4carhire.com. An annual policy for Europe costs £49 and reduces your excess liability to zero.

The full/empty con: you pay for a full tank of fuel on collection and return the car empty, in a ploy that pays the renter twice: first, you're paying hugely inflated fuel costs, and second, hardly anyone ever returns the car empty. Goldcar, a Spanish rental outfit, is said to be one of the worst offenders. Mike Brinsley was charged £101 for a tank of fuel that he says would have cost £39 at the nearest petrol station. **Solution:** insist on returning the car with a full tank.

The top-up trick: you return the car with a full tank, but the rental company charges you for a top-up. You swear the tank was full. It says otherwise, and simply takes your money.

Solution: when Dave Matthews received a £48 fuel charge from Avis, he sent back a digital photo showing both the fuel gauge and the GPS unit, thus confirming both a full tank and his exact location in the car park at the rental depot. He has since got his money back.

The mystery scratch scam: according to UKECC, post-hire damage charges are our main source of complaint. When Gavin Stanfield returned his Europcar rental, the office was closed, so, as agreed, he posted the keys in the key safe deposit box. Two days later, Europcar told him that the car had been damaged over the weekend by someone reversing it into a concrete bollard. "They charged my credit card £260, which I never got back," he said. **Solution:** when collecting the

car, you should carry out a fingertip examination before signing the paperwork. If the car is in a gloomy spot, making it hard to inspect, insist it is moved into better light. When returning the car, avoid unattended drop-offs at all costs. Even comprehensive, time-stamped photography won't help, as rental terms and conditions state: "You remain responsible for the vehicle until it has been inspected by us."

Chris Haslam



Would you buy an insurance waiver from this chicken?

