

The third edition of the ECC – Malta Newsletter for 2022 will be focused on your rights when renting a vehicle abroad. One can find tips about what consumers should be aware of throughout the booking and during the rental period. We will provide you with a success story relating to a typical car rental complaint. This edition also introduces you to a new section on recent consumer news from the European Commission.



Travelling by Car

Travelling in another Member State of the European Union using a vehicle is considered one of the most practical and convenient ways. Several European companies offer vehicle rental services, so it is essential to check what the quoted price includes before booking with a particular company. As consumers, we should not rely on the price, but we should carefully consider the terms and conditions of the rental company.

As a network, we receive a substantial number of car rental complaints. Complaints range from overpayments of damages, insurance, contraventions, and fuel bills. Remember that when you enter into an agreement with a vehicle rental, this agreement is not covered by the 14-day withdrawal period, also known as the cooling-off period, whereby you can withdraw from the contract without any obligation. Therefore, it is essential to read the terms and conditions carefully before booking the vehicle with the rental company, as you do not have the automatic right to cancel the contract and request a refund.

Some consumers may ask whether they shall book from a platform that offers a better price than the actual vehicle rental company. There is nothing wrong with booking from a platform, but you should know that there are differences. Remember that

if you purchased the vehicle insurance from a platform, you must still leave a pre-authorized amount for the excess if any damage to the vehicle occurs, usually around €1200 - €2500.

The amount is indicated in the company's terms and conditions and depends on the type of vehicle you are going to choose. The terms and conditions also include the price list in case of any damage to the vehicle. In case of a damaged headlight, you will be charged according to the prices found on the terms and conditions. Some companies also add the loss of use and administration fee. Once you agree with the rental company about the amount to be paid for the damage, you will be given the difference if the

damage does not exceed the pre-authorized amount.

Make sure you have enough money on your credit card equivalent to the pre-authorized amount. Furthermore, although the pre-authorized amount appears on your credit card account, you will not be able to use it until the company releases the pre-authorized amount. If you have not damaged the vehicle, the company will usually release the pre-authorized amount within forty-eight hours after returning the vehicle.



Initial Stage

Before renting a vehicle in another Member State, check if your driving license is valid. If you plan to cross the border and travel by car to other countries, you need to inform the rental company in advance. Not all vehicle rental companies accept that you cross the border to visit other countries. Furthermore, be sure you have all the necessary vehicle documentation; you are covered by insurance, and you know the traffic rules because a lack of knowledge can never be used as an excuse for violating a regulation.

It is essential to read the terms and conditions carefully, including all the necessary details during the lease period. Remember that the price quoted online is usually the basic one and does not include additional costs such as fuel service charges, airport charges, other drivers, or young drivers' surcharges (usually under the age of twenty-five).

Most companies offer an **additional insurance policy**. If you are interested in acquiring this policy, the company should provide a detailed description of everything covered before signing the contract. Usually, when purchasing this policy, the rental company will pre-authorise only a small amount from your credit card, generally around €200, in case of traffic contraventions such as speeding or if you do not adhere to the fuel policy. Usually, there are three fuel policies:

- **Collect full – return empty**
No refund will be provided for unused fuel, even if the whole tank was paid upfront.
- **Collect full – return full**
This is the most chosen policy. You must refuel the vehicle with the correct fuel type before returning it. If you do not comply, the rental company will also charge you for the refuelling and an administrative fee.
- **Pay for used fuel policy**
Consumers will have to pay for the fuel used. Remember that fuel prices are usually higher than if you fill-up the vehicle at a fuel station.

Vehicle Collection

Ensure the vehicle is in good condition before leaving the premises, which is usually a reserved area in the airport car park. Check the vehicle carefully along with the employee of the rental company. If the car has a defect such as a dent or minor scratch, draw the employee's attention and ensure that the damage has been marked on the diagram or checklist provided by the same company. Do not leave the post before the employee signs on the diagram or checklist.

It is essential that when driving, you have the necessary equipment to change a tyre, including the mandatory signs if the vehicle accidentally stops. Furthermore, if you are going to a place where it is likely to snow, ensure that the car is equipped with chains.

If you are involved in a traffic accident, even if you think you are not at fault, write down all the details of the people involved in the accident. If there is an argument about responsibility, notify the police. In any situation, such as a vehicle breaks down, always inform the rental car company and follow their instructions. Under no circumstances should you repair the vehicle without their consent.

Possibly return the vehicle during the company office's opening hours so its employee can inspect the vehicle and record any damage. The condition you returned the vehicle should be registered on the checklist provided at the beginning of the lease. Ensure that the rental company's employee re-signs this document.

Where this is not possible because you have returned the vehicle outside office hours, take photos of the vehicle as confirmation that you have returned it in the same condition provided and that you left the vehicle parked in the designated area indicated by the rental company.



Success Story

A consumer rented a car from a car rental company while on holiday in Vienna, Austria. The consumer stated that he returned the car undamaged. However, after a few weeks upon returning the vehicle, the consumer was charged for alleged damages to the rented car. The trader provided photos of the alleged damages consisting of a small scratch in the lower part of the front bumper. The charge amounted to more than €900. The consumer contacted us and stated that he did not damage



the car and that the scratch was not visible when inspecting the vehicle since the scratch was in the lower part of the bumper. The consumer felt that the fee of repairing the scratch was exorbitant. After receiving all necessary documents from the consumer, we immediately shared her complaint with our ECC Austria colleagues. ECC Austria contacted the trader; through the mediation process, the trader acknowledged that the consumer was right and issued her a full refund.

News: Universal charger for all

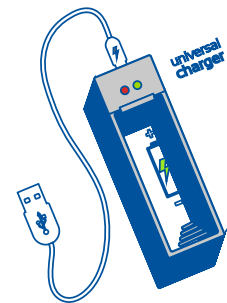
Last month, the EU Member States and the European Parliament reached an agreement to use a standard charger for all our devices. This new rule will not only reduce the hassle for consumers but will also reduce the 51,000 tons of e-waste per year.

Under the new rules, as of 2024, consumers will no longer need a different charging device and cable every time they purchase a new device. Consumers can use one single charger for all their small and medium-sized portable electronic devices. Mobile phones, tablets, digital cameras, handheld videogame consoles, headphones, headsets, portable speakers, e-readers, keyboards, mice, portable navigation systems, and earbuds will have to be equipped with a USB-C charging port. By 2026, laptops will have to be adapted to the same rule.

Don't worry! This Directive also harmonised the charging speed for all devices that support fast charging, allowing users to charge their devices at the same speed with any compatible charger. These new rules will let consumers decide whether to purchase a new device with or without the charger, which helps

European consumers save up to 250 million euros per year on unnecessary chargers.

Moreover, producers will be obliged to provide all the relevant information about the charging performance, making it easier for consumers to see if their existing chargers meet their new device's requirements or help them select a compatible charger.



TikTok to abide by EU rules to better protect consumers

Have you ever wondered what your children are exposed to on social media, including TikTok? Now you will have the possibility to report any irregularities with content found on TikTok.

Recently, TikTok has committed to aligning its practices with the EU advertising and consumer protection rules, namely the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, the Consumer Rights Directive and the Unfair contract terms Directive. This decision was taken after the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) found that TikTok failed to protect children from hidden advertising and inappropriate content. TikTok is committing itself to seize all practices breaching consumer rules.

TikTok has made the following commitments:

- Users will be able to report advertisements that could trick children.
- Prohibit the promotion of inappropriate products and services.
- Users will have to toggle a switch when publishing brand-related keywords.
- Where a user has more than 10000 followers, their videos will be

reviewed against TikTok's branded content policy and community guidelines to ensure that the content is appropriate.

- Paid advertisements will be identified with a new label.
- Users will be able to report undisclosed branded content, and new rules for hashtags and labels will be implemented.

Follow the link to read more: <https://eccnetmalta.gov.mt/Press-Releases/>



European Consumer Centre Malta

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