

# Choosing a Limousine Service for Your Specific Needs

## The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

This article informs the reader about how various limousine companies are operated, why doing your homework about the best limousine service doesn't always pay off, and how you can get the most for your money when booking a limousine or deciding on a service provider for your company.

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The definition of a limousine is any vehicle that is immaculately maintained and used to transport people who make reservations. Although many people imagine a limousine as a long stretched vehicle, this is not always the case. Some limousines are simply sedans or SUVs. Some of those sedans or SUVs are stretched minutely (perhaps 6 inches) to offer more roomy accommodations to the passengers in the back.

When thinking about limousines, most people have visions of wealth, celebrity, and leisure. While these are all a part of the limousine industry, the limousine industry is an integral part of business, the economy, and the social infrastructure around the world. However, not all limousine companies are created or operated the same. While they all have their place in the market, each one is suited for very different needs.

A basic understanding of how the limousine industry is structured is important to begin understanding how to best choose a company for your specific needs. There are three basic types of limousine services. Below we will begin to explore what these are.

1. The Weekend Warrior - One car, one driver. These entrepreneurs often have another job during the week and use their limousine for extra income in their downtime.
2. The Small Mom & Pop - A few cars, a few part-time drivers.
3. The Full Service Limousine Company - Anywhere from 4 limousines and up. These companies employ anywhere from 3 to 50 employees or more. They each can handle a decent amount of work, and *farm out* runs that they cannot accommodate to other limousine companies.
4. The Mega Limousine Company - There are approximately only 100 companies in the US that fit this bill. These companies have fleets of cars anywhere from 50 up to over 2000.
5. Limousine Broker - Limousine brokers are basically any company that *farms out* trips for their clients. Essentially operating like a travel agent, they book trips with companies around the globe. While all limousine companies do this to an extent, some companies you would believe to be limousine businesses with their own fleet of cars actually have no cars. These type of companies include some large limo companies that get a large amount of their revenue from brokering limousines.

To begin to mix and match these particular services with the reasons people use limousines, we should next explore why people use limousines. While it may seem almost a waste of time to

go into this topic, it is important for the average person, because the type of runs that limousine companies perform are not always as apparent as they may seem.

1. Special events - Special events such as birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, or other celebrations often bring people to search for limousine service.
2. Pleasure - An evening out for dinner, a night out to the clubs, or a party to attend?
3. Business - Many companies use limousines as an efficient way to get their CEOs, account executives, or special guests to their destinations. Since reservations are generally made in advance, and the drivers are so familiar with the areas, no time is wasted, and the chauffeur takes on the responsibility of ensuring that the schedule set by the booker is kept by estimating drive times and communicating with the passenger to ensure he or she knows the time it will take to get to the next destination.
4. Road Shows - A road show is when a presentation has to be made by a doctor, pharmaceutical rep, or other sales rep. This is done usually because the trip is about 7 hours or less, but there are flight infrequencies between the pick up and destination.
5. Airport Transfers - This is simply a pick up at a destination going to the airport for a flight or vice versa.
6. Transfers - This is any pickup and drop off between two destinations that does not involve the airport.
7. Funerals - Many families choose to use a limousine at a funeral. The reasons are varied, but may include wanting the family to stay together or wanting safer transportation allowing the family to grieve.

As you can see, no one can definitely say they will never set foot in a limousine. The uses are as varied as the people they carry. But what does all this mean to the consumer, the business client, the celebrity, or the corporation looking for car service for their VIPs? It means that your understanding of what your getting in a limousine service can impact the experience you have with the limousine service you choose.

Several years ago, before I began driving, I took AMTRAK from Portland to Seattle to catch a plane. Since the station was a good distance from the airport and the cab and limousine rates were comparable, I called a limousine company. I verified that I would receive a late model, black Lincoln Town Car. Their beautiful Website and pristine cars on their fleet page had me feeling good. Reservation being made, I forgot about it until the day of the service. Stepping off the train, I was greeted by a brown stretched funeral car that had been rear-ended. When I called to complain, the same man who was happy to have my credit card information when booking the trip hung up on me. The experience left a bad taste in my mouth. So that being said, here is the top 10 list to look out for when shopping for a limousine service for your needs.

1. **Never rely on a Website alone to decide on a limo company.** Many companies do not have the resources to take decent photographs of their fleets. Instead, many use stock photographs of vehicles that are similar to theirs. Similar here is the key word. Stock photographs are generally of the vehicle in new condition. The peeling paint and blotchy bondo repair will not be apparent. If at all possible, visit the company and ask to see their fleet.
2. **Using a central booker, whether a limousine company or a limousine broker, expect to pay almost double outside their coverage area.** Limousine companies spend a lot of time

developing relationships with other companies throughout the world. In that sense, they can book your runs for you anywhere in the world. Convenient, yes. If money is not a primary issue, as in the case of major corporations, the time saving of being able to fax over all of your trips to one central booker is invaluable. However, the rates will almost double. The affiliates will give the booker a discount to help with their profit margin, but in many cases this is only \$5 to \$15 per hour. So while an airport transfer in your area may cost \$75, out of town will be closer to \$140 or more.

3. **Prom was great when you were 18. Do you want your chauffeur to wear a bowtie and tuxedo when you're 40 and going to a business meeting with clients?** Many smaller limousine companies have not established a dress code for their chauffeurs. Tweed pants, palm tree ties, leisure suits, and t-shirts have all been seen standing by a limo. Ask your potential transportation provider about a dress code. Understated elegance is paramount. A simple black suit with a standard tie and minimal jewelry is ideal for all situations. But if you want the bowtie, more power to you.
4. **Know how you will be billed.** Every limousine company has their own policies on how to bill the client. Some have a flat rate and bill for stops, some have 2 hour minimums for any trips not involving an airport, some have prom season minimums of 8 hours on the weekends, etc. Know all these stipulations upfront. If you will be out for 5 hours at one location and have a specific time you will be leaving, you can save an hour on your trip by booking two separate trips with the 2 hour minimum.
5. **The complimentary upgrade policy.** Sometimes when companies are overbooked, they will complimentary upgrade the vehicle you are given. Let the company know what is acceptable. Grandma might feel a little silly getting out of the stretched H2 Hummer at the airport with her one piece of carry-on luggage. The pharmaceutical rep might lose a potential client when the stretched Lincoln Town car pulls up to meeting to take him back to the airport (God knows he's overcharging if the company is sending a stretch)! Sometimes the complimentary upgrade is a Godsend, sometimes it is a curse.
6. **Is the limousine company being a ho?** A ho is a company that plows their cash by farming out. It is essential to do sometimes, but if a company has such a small fleet that they must constantly ho their work, you are bound to get sent to the bottom of the barrel in the limousine industry a few times, especially during busy seasons. Even if they do check out all their affiliates, sometimes even they must scrape the bottom. In this case, all your hard research has been wasted when you get someone you've never even heard of. This is why business clients are encouraged to use more established companies with larger fleets of vehicles.
7. **Get referrals.** Ask people who they've used for weddings, funerals, evenings out, birthday parties, anniversaries. Most people have at least had an experience with a limousine company. Referrals are the best way to know you will receive the highest quality of service.
8. **When booking a car, be sure to give complete addresses and double check them.** If an address you give is in a new subdivision, try, if you can to give an approximate location. Many of these new addresses have not been updated on maps and can sometimes be near impossible to find unless the driver is very experienced and knows how to use resources available to him. Also, if it is a business, include the business name in addition to the address.
9. **If you find a driver you like, do not hesitate to request them next time.** Getting a new driver each time you use a service is like getting a new service each time. Vehicles and standards can be set, but the personality of each driver is so unique that when you find one that fits you, keep

him or her. Building a rapport over time will make each subsequent trip that much more pleasant. The driver can become familiar with their client and anticipate your needs.

10. **Although a minimal gratuity is included in most limousine service bills, extra gratuity is always appreciated.** Because of the nature of the limousine industry, drivers are often not paid for downtime between trips, cleaning the cars after their trip, replacing used stemware, drivetime to the pickup, waiting on late planes, or arriving early to the office to prep the vehicles. A lot of work goes into prepping and cleaning that drivers are not actually paid for. Tipping ensures that you will always receive the best service, cleanest vehicles and the most pleasant chauffeurs.

Hopefully this gives you a reasonable understanding of how the limousine industry operates and why not every limousine company is created equal. A little research and understanding can go a long way to ensure you always receive what you expect.

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