

Your feet are tired and you're loaded down with tourist stuff you bought from the street stands. You look around the strange city and realize you are totally lost. So, you hail a taxi. That should be easy, except there are different ways to get a taxi in many cities. Do you whistle and hold up your hand to flag a cab? Do you yell out the word, "Taxi?" Or do you just stand there, loaded down with packages, and hope a cabbie will notice you?

Generally, cab prices will be offered in one of two ways: by meter or by fixed price. If by meter, make sure when you enter the cab, the meter is on zero or at the fixed start-up price of the equivalent of one or two U.S. dollars. If the meter is higher, it is because the cabbie has left it on from a previous passenger, hoping you won't notice.



The fixed price charge becomes a game, depending on how tough the local taxi competition is or how well you can bargain. If there are many empty cabs around, such as at an airport, ask for a price and then cut it to half. It may take some haggling, but don't pay the first price quote.

The best advice is to try not to look like a tourist. That's difficult if you don't speak the language, are wearing loud clothing and have a camera around your neck. Try to learn about taxi practices of a city before you get there, so you'll at least be prepared to avoid being totally gypped blind by the fares.

Another suggestion, usually hated by cabbies worldwide, is to find someone to share your cab. At the hotel or airport exits, be brave and ask other people there if they're going to the same location, and if they'll share the cab with you. Then, each of you saves 50% of the fare.

In Mexico City, most of the cabs are old Volkswagen bugs, and many are unlicensed. Unfortunately, there have been too many instances of tourists being robbed by rogue cabbies. It's best to have a cab called by your hotel. If you're on the street, especially at night, don't hail a taxi. Call your hotel desk to get a cab to wherever you are.

In London, where there are nearly 20,000 cabbies, especially if you're heading into the city from the airport, it's best to take the fast commuter train than a cab. However, if you do take a cab, give out a price you'll pay, say 25 pounds. At points in downtown London, the fare is fair, usually from two to five pounds.

New York, with 12,000 cabs in Manhattan (none when you really need one), hotels, restaurants,

museums and theaters are fairly close to each other. If you're in good physical shape, walking is often quicker than a cab ride. In-town rides cost from \$5 to \$20, while a cab to the airport could set you back from \$50 to \$100 one way. Before grabbing a Manhattan cab for a long ride, check with the bus and subway system, where you can get there faster and cheaper.

In Las Vegas, grabbing a cab anywhere along the Strip to go to another spot just a couple of miles away, will not only cost you from \$10 to \$25, but most of that long, long time will be spent locked in traffic. Hotels on the Strip look close together, unless you have to walk. There are on-and-off buses with fares from \$2, and a sexy-looking monorail that is virtually useless. For about \$5, you can zip along parallel to the Strip from downtown to the south end of the Strip. The trouble is that all the stops are at least three long blocks from the Strip itself.

Of course, when you're in Venice, you can take taxis, but tradition will encourage you to go by gondola. Before you jump in, ask the gondolier his price. A few words in Italian may help you, but the price will be somewhere between \$50 and \$75 for an hour. After dark, when the canal is more romantic, it could cost up to \$100. If you have up to four people with you, the price per person can be a bit cheaper. If you ask him to sing, you may as well just hand him your wallet.

Of course, you don't want to spend any more than necessary on cab rides. Therefore, whether in Paris, Tokyo, New Delhi, Rome, Beijing, San Francisco or Tel Aviv, be sure to know a bit of the language and the rules and regulations of taxi services.