

**B**LACK taxi-cabs in London are famous. Indeed, they have an almost iconic status - not least for knowing the quickest way to get passengers almost anywhere. Miniature versions of the cabs are often sold in souvenir shops, and of course the real thing is to be seen everywhere in London (particularly around the trendy shopping districts of central London, where they can rely on being flagged down by well-heeled passengers, weighed down by their purchases). They say you can climb into any black cab on the street, announce your desired destination and sit back comfortable in the knowledge that the driver will get you there without bothering you with further questions, or asking you for directions (unlike their minicab counterparts, who are cheaper, but are looked down upon by black cab drivers). I have to say, in my limited experience, this is true!

Of course, that might partly be because most of the minicab drivers are foreigners, and are still figuring out their way around. More importantly, almost anyone can be a minicab driver, and some of them seem to be distinctly intellectually challenged. As in the case of the driver I heard being berated over the radio system, because he had driven off without realising that his customer was no longer in the cab! This only came to light because the customer had immediately rung the cab service, to complain that her bag and umbrella were still in the cab, as she had not been able to remove them before the driver drove away (clearly not realising that his passenger had left him)...

New York taxis are also famous, because many of the yellow cab drivers (presumably the black cab equivalent - though London cabbies will argue that there is no black cab in equivalent anywhere in the world!) are foreigners. In fact a huge number of them are reportedly Bangladeshi. I have one Bangladeshi friend who spent four years in New

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# Tales from the Taxi Trade

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York, and met several cabbies who were from Bangladesh. In fact, they were so pleased to meet her, and to speak Bangla with her, that they refused to let her pay for the ride! Sadly, that has never happened to me in New York (or anywhere else, for that matter)...

A common problem with taxis is that they can sometimes (if the driver is unscrupulous), literally take customers for a ride, by choosing the most circuitous (and therefore, expensive) route possible. This is a particularly common phenomenon when a cabbie is aware that he has a tourist at his mercy! I was impressed to hear that in Melbourne, in Australia, cab drivers are required by