

law to take customers to their destination by the shortest route possible. If they do not do so, they can be reported to the police. Though of course, tourists may not be aware even when they are being taken by a longer route!

While black cabs in London can be a mixed bag, and they can sometimes be less than polite (for example, if your instructions aren't crystal clear, or heaven forbid, you actually try to help them out by suggesting a route which may not be the best one), there are many nice ones out there. And I have never been in one that complains about a relatively short distance, since they are making a relatively high profit anyway (i.e. it's good economic sense for them, even if not for you!) By contrast, my family had a rather different experience in Paris some time ago.

After arriving, we were dropped off at the wrong hotel (due to there being two hotels of the same name in the same area). We were carrying seven suitcases with display items for the exhibition we had come to attend (my mother's fair trade craft business, Aranya, was participating in a trade fair in the French capital). To add to our woes, it began to rain! After we had managed to determine that our hotel was a 10 minute walk away, we were still left with the problem of how to drag seven suitcases there. With some reluctance, we decided that it would be simpler just to take another cab in there.

Alas, the cutthroat, maladjusted psychopath we found masquerading as an apparently normal person driving a taxicab, had other ideas. First, in a tone which left little doubt that he considered us morons, he informed us that the other hotel was relatively nearby. Yes, we reassured him, we knew that, but we had seven rather heavy suitcases with us. I offered him an amount well over the standard fare, to compensate him for the relatively short duration of the trip. I should add at this point, that we had no choice but to take this cab (although I was beginning to have a bad feeling about him), because the taxi queue system would not allow us to hire one of the taxis standing in line behind him (this is what happens when you end up in a country where rules are actually enforced i.e. it's not always a good thing!). My bad feeling was reinforced when, after we had loaded the cab, he sud-

denly decided to increase the fare by another 70%!! At this point, we flatly refused, so with very bad grace he reverted to the earlier deal.

But it wasn't over yet. As we neared our hotel, he suddenly started swearing at me for being an idiot, for wasting his time etc. He even shouted at my mother, which was the point at which I lost my temper and shouted back at him in my rather basic French (though I suspect my tone may have made my meaning fairly obvious!). I am still left puzzled by an attitude that responds to being paid a lot of

money to drive a short distance, by firstly, demanding even more money, and then abusing you on top of it! Maybe he was just having a bad day. He certainly made sure that the rest of us had one...

I'm happy to say that this experience was an exception, rather than a typical one. In fact, one of my most positive experiences was in another foreign country, in South Korea. And there the consequences of having a nasty cab driver would have been rather worse! I had arrived to attend a conference, armed primarily with a piece of paper with a completely unpronounceable address on it (at least each time that I pronounced it, the people around me looked completely confused). After waiting at the appointed pickup point for some time, I gave up waiting for the conference organisers, and decided to take a cab. How far could it be, after all?

My friendly taxi driver spoke virtually no English, but somehow managed to communicate to me that the conference venue was some distance away. I surrendered myself to fate (having little other option), but have to confess to a twinge of concern as we left the outskirts of Seoul city. At this point, I couldn't help thinking, nobody had any idea where I was. I need not have worried. Although my driver was not himself completely

sure where the agricultural academy was, he kept smiling. And to cut a long story short, after a 45 minute drive through the rather pretty countryside - and numerous encounters with helpful locals who assured us that we were heading in the right direction (and were very excited to encounter the first Bengali!) - we did indeed arrive at the conference venue! By some miracle, the ride did not completely break the bank, and I retain fond memories of that particular taxi ride...

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