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"Experience" travel column
Valerie and Wayne Graczyk

CAB DRIVERS AND TRAVEL

This is a little off topic as traveling goes but I believe it is one that is worth mentioning. The impetus for writing this topic was that some friends went to Prague on their own recently. They had a wonderful trip but did experience a very harrowing cab drive from the train station to their hotel. They were taken on a very long ride in which they at times feared for their safety, When they did reach their hotel they were charged double. It was very upsetting to say the least.

Most travelers have their own stories about cab drivers or other public transportation vehicles on trips. As American travelers we tend to be trusting. You need to be aware of safety issues for not only yourselves but also for those you are traveling with. To illustrate this point, most airports have signs posted prominently warning people not to accept a ride in a cab from any person that approaches you. Go to a standard taxi stand for your cab.

In my early days of traveling, I often found myself anxious if I was alone in a cab with only the driver. As a single woman, I felt vulnerable. As I traveled, I have found that one of the best things you can do to relieve anxiety is to strike up a conversation with the driver. As a result I have learned that most cab drivers are very hard working and conscientious. I ask questions like, "How long they have been driving cab?", or "Where are you from?" It seems that most drivers are from a country different than the country we're in so I love to ask them what is something they like most about the U.S. (or the country we're in) followed by asking if they like their job (most do not). The positive is this makes the ride seem much shorter and the conversation reduces my own apprehension. As I have traveled more, and using this approach, I can honestly say that most cab drivers have been truly helpful.

The story I mentioned at the beginning stuck with me and I began to think of times I had to rely on cab drivers. Here are a few of my favorite situations both positive and not so.

Years back, I was attending a National Conference in New York. This was a one of my first trips alone as a young professional. The cab driver was from a different country and he began to ask me questions about where I was from and he asked me why I had come to NY. I said "for a Business Conference". He then asked me if I was married and if I had children. I answered, "Yes, I have a wonderful husband who is home taking care of our two daughters." To my shock he abruptly said, "If you were my wife I would beat you!" Needless to say I was stunned and of course the rest of the ride we rode in silence.

A more positive story was when Wayne and I attended a business conference in San Francisco. We got into the cab and I began talking to the driver, who was from a different country. It was during our

Presidential elections. I asked him what he thought about our election process here in the U.S. I will never forget what he said. "In my country the day after an election there is blood in the streets. Here in the great U. S. there is no violence. You accept the vote and get on with life". WOW!!!

Another story was when I led a group to Mexico City. To prepare for the trip I read Rick Steve's travel book and made note of his caution about taking only cabs that were registered and to take down the cab number before getting into the cab. One morning as we were touring we visited the great Cathedral in the middle of the city. On the other side of the block was a museum our guide wanted the group to visit. One of our travelers was walking with a cane and I knew it would take him a long time to walk to the museum. So I hailed a cab off the street, and he and his wife got in and there is room for two more. My two sisters decided to join them. About 10 minutes later our group arrived at the entrance of the museum. Imagine my shock when my four people were not there. Well the guide and I both began to look for them and couldn't find them. Panic began to set in. Neither of us knew the cab company's name nor could we describe the color of the cab, even though I had just read Rick Steve's notes. Every worried thought that a person can think of at such a moment flashed through my mind. The guide did find them in a coffee shop across the street. They had arrived so quickly they decided to wait for us in a little shop and enjoy a rich cup of Espresso. I was so grateful they were safe. I also made a mental note to make note of taxi colors, name and number of cab in the future.

In my first time to Houston, a colleague and I decided we had to see the Astrodome. We hired a cab and off we went. At that time it was a tourist attraction, one not to be missed. After the tour we came out and could not find a cab. The Astrodome was in an industrial area so there were no cabs to be hailed or seen. With no cabs around we decided to take the bus. As we stood at the bus stop we realized we were in an area we that was less than desirable. It was a very long wait and both of us were feeling a bit vulnerable. Just then a woman came up and joined us, introduced herself, and explained she was from Latin America and was visiting a friend in Houston so she was touring herself. We joined her for the rest of our tour day had a great day together. We also made a note that in the future we will be sure to know where to catch a cab for a return trip, before we are dropped off in an area not familiar to us.

When you become a world traveler you enter a world outside of your comfort zone and need to rely on strangers and your instincts. What I have found over the years is while not every experience is wonderful, I do return with some great stories and new friends.

And yes our group no matter what country we arrive in will be met by a representative who speaks the native language and sees us all safely to our bus. It is our start to finish commitment to making travel stress free for the traveler.

As I write this we are off to see the Queen so our July travel column will cover our May trip to England. I am sure our travelers and I will return with stories to share. Which reminds me, there are still a few openings for our trip to the French Riviera and Paris this September. We have joined with the Windhover Center for the Arts for this trip of a lifetime. Check out this trip and read our past travel columns on our web site at www.somedaytravel.com

Valerie Graczyk-Someday Travel

