Taxi

Taking a taxi can be the fastest and most convenient way of travelling from a station to your accommodation, or for taking you home safely at night. If you share a cab with other people, it is not always more expensive than other types of public transport.

Getting a London Taxi

Licensed taxi

A taxi is a car which has been designed for the purpose of carrying paying passengers. If the local government regulates the service it is known as a licensed taxi. This type of taxi may be more expensive, but could be safer and more reliable than a minicab (see below). A licensed taxi can be found at a taxi rank or can be called while on the road by raising your hand towards the driver (this is known as hailing a taxi). The taxi will not stop if it is busy (the light on top of the taxi will be off), or if there is no safe place to stop. Taxis cannot stop on roads with red lines painted on the edge. Most taxis are licensed to carry a maximum of 4 or 5 people.

In London a licensed taxi is known as a black cab (it is not always painted black). These taxis should be safe, and the drivers know London roads well, but they can be expensive. Two of the largest licensed cab operating companies are Computer Cab (http://www.computercab.co.uk) and Radio Taxis (http://www.radiotaxis.co.uk).

You can find out if there is a licensed taxi rank at a train or underground station at: http://www.traintaxi.co.uk.

Minicab A minicab (a type of private hire vehicle) is not always regulated. It may appear like an ordinary unmarked car, and will not have a meter inside. Most minicab companies are safe and reliable, but you should be careful. A minicab must be booked in advance (it is not allowed to pick up customers directly from the road). You can order a minicab by telephone, or from outside the company's office.

You can find a list of local companies from Yellow Pages, which is available online at http://www.yell.com (under the category "taxis and private hire vehicles"), or from UpMyStreet at http://www.upmystreet.com (enter your postcode or town).

You can find a taxi/minicab using UpMyStreet: http://www.upmystreet.com. Select Find My Nearest … , enter a postcode or town name, select Find by category and choose Travel & tourism then Taxis & minicabs. The nearest ones will be listed first.

Alternatively, you can telephone the National Cabline: 0800 123 444, or you can use the directory of taxis and minicab numbers in the UK at: http://www.cabnumbers.com (this CabNumbers service is also accessible using SMS or WAP on a mobile phone). It is better to book in advance if you want to take a minicab at busy times (for example, after 11pm (when many pubs start closing), or on an evening in December when there are many Christmas parties) or at unusual times (for example, early in the morning), or if you want to travel a long distance (for example, to an airport).

A licensing scheme for minicabs has been introduced in London. For your safety, you are recommended to use licensed companies (the minicab should have a yellow licensing disc on its windscreen). You can check if a minicab company is licensed using this search tool: http://www.tfl.gov.uk/pco/findataxi/privaHire.asp.

If you text home to 60835 you will receive the telephone numbers of two licensed minicab companies near to where you are. For the cost and other details about this text message service, see: http://www.tfl.gov.uk/pco/findataxi/TextService.asp.

If someone comes up to you and asks if you want a cab, do not accept. These drivers may not have insurance, so you may not be covered if there is an accident. Occasionally people are robbed or attacked by people who pretend to be cab drivers, so always be careful, especially if you are a woman travelling by yourself.

Using a London Taxi

Starting your journey

Tell the taxi driver exactly where you want to go. To avoid making a mistake, you may want to write down the address and give this to the driver (some places may sound similar, but are far apart). Make sure this is clear, perhaps by telling the driver the name of another place that is near where you want to go. For example, you might say, "Please take me to the Royal Opera House on Floral Street, near Covent Garden tube station".

According to UK law (and for your own protection) you should always wear a seatbelt.

Paying

For a licensed cab, the cost is shown on a meter. If two numbers are shown (as in the picture), these are added together to calculate the total charge. A guide to fares is shown on the Public Carriage Office website: http://www.tfl.gov.uk/pco/taxi_fares.shtml. The cost is more expensive after 10pm and during weekends. The taxi driver will tell you the total charge at the end of the journey. It is usual to add about 10% as a tip.

For example, if the total cost is 5 pounds 50 the taxi driver might say "That will be 5 pounds 50, please". You might reply by giving the driver a 10 pound note and saying "Could I have 4 pounds change, please?" (it is more polite to give a tip indirectly in this way). It is usual to pay by cash. Drivers may not carry much change, so you should try to give the exact money if you can, and avoid using large notes (50 pound notes may not be accepted).

If it is late and you feel unsafe, you may ask the taxi driver to wait until you have gone inside before driving off.

In a minicab there is no meter. To avoid any possible arguments, you should agree the cost of the journey before travelling (normally the company has a standard charge for each destination).

Taxi Access for the Disabled

All black cabs in London can take wheelchairs and should provide a ramp. However, some drivers refuse to take out the ramp or say that they cannot do this for some reason. Of the other two-thirds, about half complained about being asked to use the ramp, and the other half took it out willingly and were polite.

As well as black cabs, many other taxi and private hire companies also have vehicles which can take wheelchairs: contact the company directly to get more details.