

GLOBAL NEWS



YALE UNIVERSITY ASKS: IS TAXI TIPPING SUBJECT TO RACISM?

Should tipping be outlawed? That's one suggestion made in a Yale Law Journal study, which claims there is racial discrimination in taxicab tipping. The study found that black cab drivers were tipped about a third less than their white counterparts and, perhaps even more surprisingly, that black passengers also participated in this discrimination against black drivers.

The study included data on more than 1,000 taxi trips, with New Haven, Connecticut being the area where the sample was taken. All the trips were taken via radio dispatch or from a cab rank. No street hails were used. Some of the findings included white drivers being tipped 61% more than black drivers and 64% more than other non-white drivers in the sample. Black and Latino passengers also demonstrated biased tipping in favour of white drivers. Black passengers tipped white drivers 48% more than black drivers, while white passengers tipped white drivers 49% more than black drivers. Latino passengers had the most desperate tipping, giving white drivers a 146% higher tip than black drivers. A previous study had found that Latinos tended to identify more with whites than blacks.

Taxi Globe asked two black London taxi drivers whether they felt their tips were lower than their fellow white drivers and both said no. So it does seem to be an American problem...

TAXI SHORTAGE IN BOOM CITY OF DUBAI

Dubai produces around 240,000 barrels a day of oil that together with fuel production has been the mainstay of their economy. London drivers should now take a deep breath as we also report that fuel sells on the forecourts at around 90p per gallon!

However, Dubai has little in the way of public transport and in particular a shortage of taxis. This has emerged as the latest threat to the long-term sustainability of the booming Gulf Arab state. Business executives and tourists - of whom six million visit Dubai each year - are increasingly complaining about the time spent standing in searing temperatures and competing with others for the odd passing taxi. The situation has got so bad that some are talking about not returning because of the traffic nightmare.

One Indian chartered accountant who travelled the world said that Dubai was the worst city for taxis that he had even been to and that it got worse each time he came, with the average wait being around one hour. He too threatened that if Dubai did not sort the problem out, he would not be coming back.

Another problem is Dubai's bumper-to-bumper traffic. According to Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority, traffic congestion is costing the city's economy around 4.6 billion dirhams (US\$1.25 billion) a year in lost man-hours. But Dubai has more taxis per person than most other major global cities and pro rata to London, has around double the number available per person! The problem has more to do with the Dubai's lack of public transport, soaring temperatures that can reach as high as 50 degrees Celsius in the summer months and the cheap price of fuel that makes it worth driving yourself anywhere, which then adds to the already horrendous traffic. People just don't want to stop driving themselves around.

"So far, Dubai doesn't have any public transport system worth mentioning," said Eckart Woertz, chief economist at the Gulf Research Centre in Dubai. "The way it is, traffic is a serious disadvantage for Dubai as a place to do business."

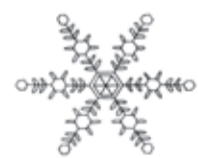
Abdul Aziz Malik, CEO of Dubai Taxi, one of the major taxi operators in the city, said that a new government investment and Metro service would go some way to easing the shortage of cabs. However, analysts question whether any improvements will be enough to solve Dubai's traffic problems, given the climate and other factors.

Blair Hagkull, regional managing director for real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle, said even when the metro opened, it would still be difficult to get motorists to give up their cars. "The metro will not be a panacea," he said frighteningly, "it will be the catalyst..."

CUBA LEGALISES MINICABS

In a surprise announcement from Havana, Cuban leader Raul Castro said he would lift the ban on what he referred to as "private taxis" - a move that legitimise thousands of unlicensed cabs on the communist island. Strangely, his brother and former long-time leader of the communist island, Fidel Castro, was for many years a vocal critic of the unlicensed cabs, whilst Raul has made the private taxi initiative the latest in a series of Cuban economic reforms.

Cuban Transportation Ministry officials have not yet decided on the number of licenses they will allow to the minicabs, but the suggestion is that most will be allowed to become legal.



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