

GLOBAL NEWS



HONG KONG TAXI DRIVERS IN CUT PRICE WAR

It isn't just London taxi drivers who are suffering thanks to the effects of the American named credit crunch; our equivalent in Hong Kong are also suffering, with drivers complaining about fellow drivers cutting prices in order to steal passengers. Passengers phoning up HK radio circuits have been playing them off against other circuits by claiming their proposed journey has been priced at a lower price by someone else. Business is so bad that the chances are a cut-price fare will then be offered. The result has been that non-radio drivers have to offer discounts as well.

"If I don't give them a discount, they'll walk off," one HK cab driver told Taxi Globe's Far East reporter. "There are some passengers who will ask every driver in the taxi line in order to seek the lowest fare." Hong Kong taxi law forbids taxi drivers actively offering discounts, however, it is not illegal to ask for a discounted fare and in order to get more passengers, some drivers end up obliging and offering heavy discounts for a ride. The HK driver continued: "Some drivers are giving up to 40% discount to passengers. How can we survive doing that? Who will be the first to undercut that to 50%?"

A Hong Kong government spokesman told Taxi Globe: "The problem is not serious. We received just 14 complaints last year from drivers and seven for the first quarter of this year." Those drivers who play by the rules claim they are losing many long-distance passengers who would usually constitute a large part of their income. They are hoping that the government can be more stringent in cracking down on these illegal transactions.

But giving discounts to passengers is just one of the problems caused by some taxi drivers. Another is selecting their passengers. It has become quite common for drivers to gather several passengers going to the same area and charge them at a fixed rate each. In London, Paddington does it successfully, but in HK it is a practice not tolerated by drivers who claim that this process is cutting down on the number of people who want taxis.

The HK authorities have promised to monitor the situation closely.

THIRTY PERCENT NEW ZEALAND CABBIES CAN'T SPEAK ENGLISH!

Following deregulation many years ago, New Zealand's taxi industry has seen unhampered growth – but of the wrong kind with more and more rogue drivers moving in. Now transport officials in Auckland want the industry regulated again - almost 20 years after that dereg.

New proposals aim to stamp out the "systematically poor service" with an increase to the small, dedicated team whose job is just to police taxis. Officials told Taxi Globe that the number of taxis far outweighs demand and causes regular traffic hazards. The problem also is found in Wellington,

Dunedin, Hamilton, Rotorua and Manukau. In addition, a third of New Zealand's cab drivers cannot speak English and do not know where they are going, according to a survey.

Commissioned by the Auckland City Council, the survey concludes that there is a mandate for change after criticism of the taxi industry. Taxi drivers were thrown into the spotlight after a New Zealand MP got into a dispute with a Somalian taxi driver in Wellington. The MP walked off without paying his fare after the driver was unable to understand what he was saying. The driver claimed that he wasn't given clear instructions. The MP later paid the fare and apologised to the driver.

However, the MP gained much sympathy with his action and one in four people questioned in the Auckland survey said the service had deteriorated over the past few years. A NZ Police spokesperson told Taxi Globe that the situation had got progressively worse: "It is at the stage where something has to be done," he said. "Over the past 3 months, officers have issued 200 prosecution notices to taxi drivers. Around 90% were for not displaying necessary ID, incorrect parking, driving offences, ownership offences and incorrect signage. Drivers not speaking English were also becoming more prevalent."

When Ireland deregulated 6 years ago, Taxi Globe warned what would follow. New Zealand's experience has just confirmed our worst fears about what almost always follows...

OH WHAT A GAY DAY IN THE UK...!

Three gay men were thrown out of a Norfolk taxi after a quick kiss led to a torrent of abuse from the driver. Passenger Jim Load said that he had felt "intimidated, embarrassed and ashamed" following the incident with the driver and claimed they were discriminated against because of their sexuality. He added: "We were all having a laugh and a giggle and just as we got to the first drop-off, my two friends had a little kiss - it was just a peck! But the driver kept shouting and saying he did not care what we did so long as it wasn't in his cab! He then told us to get out. It was awful. He shouted at us in the street! I asked him for a receipt but he refused that as well."

The owner of the cab firm said that his driver had been upset by the kiss and that the men had gone too far. He said that the driver had politely asked the kissing couple to stop after they had been "slopping all over one another."

"It was just a little peck," reiterated Mr Load. "Who said homophobia was dead...!"

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