

**The Urbanist:**



# Uber Around the World

*Riots, support groups, and psychic-energy vampires.*

IN THE PAST YEAR, Uber—now available in over 300 cities—has become as ubiquitous an American export as McDonald's. There are fewer and fewer places where you can't summon a driver with your thumb and watch on your phone as he or she weaves through twisty-turny cobblestoned streets or speeds down a freeway to reach you. In formerly taxi-starved neighborhoods, Uber's made going out at night a lot safer. It's also created jobs and ostensibly cut down on drunk driving. But as with most disruptions, there've been some less savory side effects: Pretty much everywhere Uber's landed, taxi drivers have immediately felt the pain of diminished business (this has led to protests and occasionally violent clashes). Meanwhile, the Uber drivers have their own worries: In New York, their rates were unceremoniously dropped 15 percent in January. Questions of vetting have also come up, particularly in the wake of a driver's killing spree in Michigan (though, as the company pointed out, he'd had no prior criminal record). With Uber seemingly everywhere, we decided to take our own extended ride, checking in on a new UberMoto motorcycle service in Bangkok and homespun competitors like Southeast Asia's Grab—and getting some driver recommendations for Mexico City tacos. Something McDonald's can't provide.

## **“Working for Uber commands respect.”**

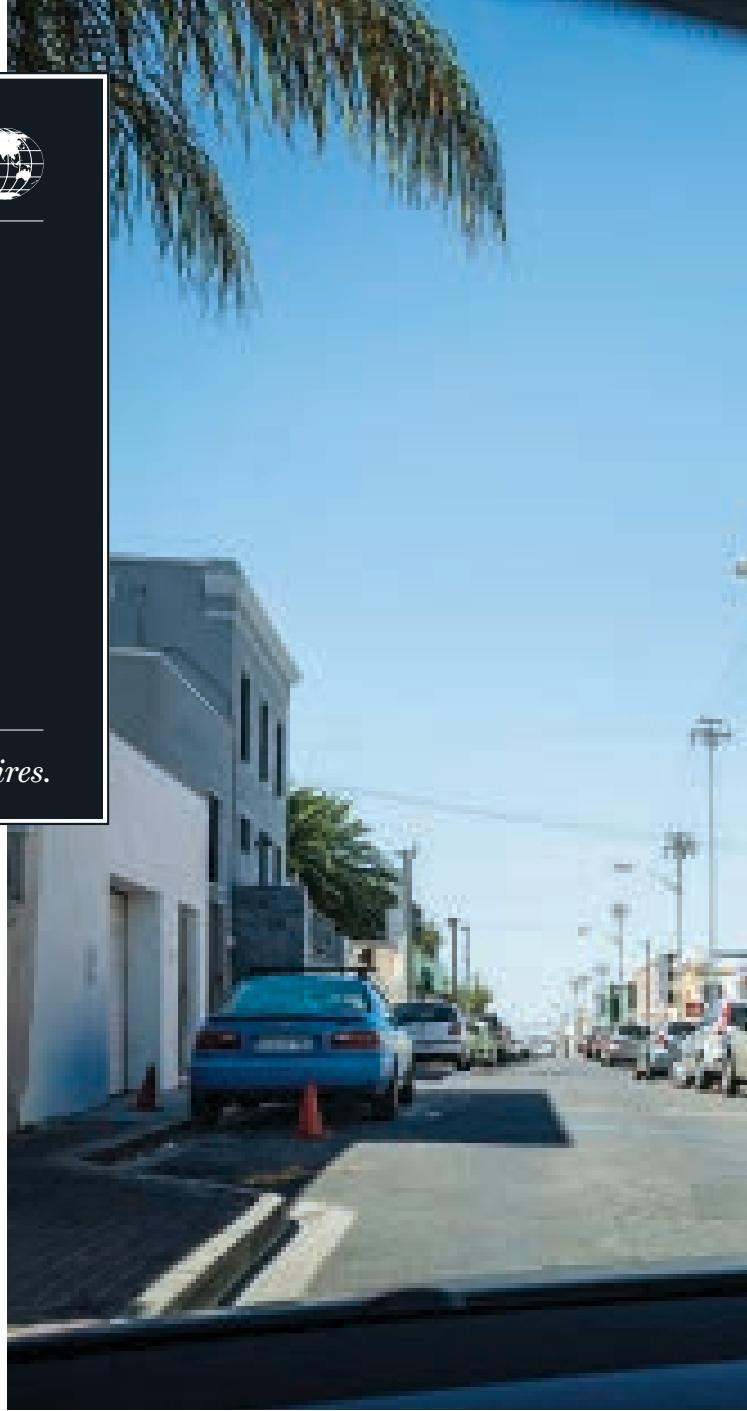
*Just not among college kids.*

“Taxi drivers in Mumbai are not treated with as much respect. Until the end of 2014, Uber was only accepting credit cards; our customers were from elite backgrounds and treated us well. But because of government regulations, Uber started accepting cash. After this, people from all walks began to take it. One group of college kids got into my car and demanded an aux wire. I said I didn't have one. They began to abuse



me in Hindi, saying, “This fuck says he doesn't even have an aux cable. I stopped the car and asked them to get off and mind their language.”

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADAM CRUFT



*Driving through  
Bo-Kaap in Cape Town.*



#### SHAIKH'S LIGHTNING ROUND

**Favorite Mumbai celebrity:**

*Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar. "Not only is he a legend, but he's supposed to be really nice."*

**Non-touristy tourist suggestion:**

*"Everyone goes to Powai Lake, but there's a dargah [Islamic shrine] just behind it. You get a stunning view of the Western Ghats. It feels like you're in Kashmir."*

**Favorite neighborhood:**

*"Worli—it's very peaceful, with trees all around and no honking cars."*

**Favorite restaurant:**

*Bademiya, "for the chicken roll."*

## A Female Driver's First Month on the Road in Cape Town

*She's one of the growing number of women behind the wheel there.*

"I didn't tell anyone in my family when I started; I figured they'd try to talk me out of it. Uber's trying to recruit women drivers—there were three in my training session of about 20 people. A lot of the people I'll pick up want to know if



I feel safe, and I tell them that I do. Mostly because I'm part of this WhatsApp group made up of about 90 drivers. I feel like I'm not

alone and there are people out there if I ever need anything—the response is faster than reaching out to Uber. The other day people wrote in telling us that cars were being impounded at the J&B Met horse races in Kenilworth. One time, someone wrote in about getting locked in his trunk by a group of people who went for a joyride. And one person warned us about being contacted by a person going between Kalk Bay and Stellenbosch, and that it could be drug-related. Without the group I might not be as cautious. It's almost like a family within a family."

# Uber Around the World

*"My wife and I are loving Tenpin in Port Melbourne for Southeast Asian food with amazing views over the ocean—which is a rarity here. The larb will blow your head off."* —Lee Wilson, *Uber Melbourne*



A January 2016 anti-Uber protest at Porte Maillot in Paris.

## Amid the Violence, a Paris Taxi Driver Defects to Uber

*And to the south of France.*

"WHEN MY COLLEAGUES in Paris heard I was going to work for Uber, they couldn't believe it. They kept saying, 'Where is your heart? How can you abandon us?' There was all that violence during the UberPop [a lower-cost option, now banned in France, that employs nonprofessional drivers] protests over the summer, and I was starting to see my days as a taxi driver coming to an end. I didn't think I could stay in Paris and drive for Uber—I didn't want my friends to be my direct competition. So I headed south. Besides, think about it: How would you rather spend your day? Stuck in traffic on the Périphérique for hours, or driving along the coast between Monaco and Marseille? I go where the demand is. If my family and I want to take a vacation, I just take my car and my phone."

—Mohamed Karfa

### KARFA'S LIGHTNING ROUND

**Car:** Mercedes C-Class.

**Football team:** Olympique de Marseille.

**Hobbies:** "I'm a bit of a papa poule, and I like to walk by the sea with my children."

**Favorite restaurant:** "La Frégate in Cannes. You can get dinner there anytime between eight and midnight, which is important when you drive. The mussels are excellent."

**Non-touristy tourist suggestion:** "Visit le Lac de Saint-Cassien. A magnificent lake. So beautiful."  
**What he'd change about France:** "The tolls."

## But the Taxi Tensions Run High on the Coast Too

*According to a Marseille-based Uber driver.*

"SOME COLLEAGUES HAVE had their tires slashed. Others were assaulted. There is constant intimidation. Yesterday, I heard Uber drivers were having trouble at the airport. I know enough to stay away. The airport taxis are a special case; they pay so much for their licenses, so they're more quick to react with violence. You have to be smart: Don't go near the taxi stations, and if you see a taxi, never cut them off or look at them the wrong way. When I first started driving, I went to Cannes during the film festival, and one morning I was driving into the city and saw a group of taxis at an intersection blocking the road. They figured out I was with Uber, forced me to pull over, and a few taxis surrounded my car so I couldn't move. They said they weren't going to let me go unless I agreed to leave Cannes. Did I go straight back to Marseille? I didn't. There were still people requesting rides. You have to remember, this is like a war: a war between the past and the future, and this war isn't going to end soon. Too many people have too much invested; too many people are ready to fight."

—Frédéric Lesne

## The Backseat Versus the Barber Chair

*The subtle differences, according to two Uber drivers who cut hair on the side.*

### IN MELBOURNE

"My barber customers and my Uber customers are exactly the same—except that I pick up a fair amount of sex workers. There'll often be a lot of sniffing going on in the back, and then I have to vacuum the backseat when they get out. Also, with my passengers, we'll talk more about traffic: Plans to build the East West Link—a controversial freeway—are falling through, and traffic in the past six months has become terrible."

—LEE WILSON

### IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

"Barber clients tend to open up easier. But the type of guy that I am—mind you, I'm also a motivational speaker—when I talk to my passengers, they almost always loosen up at some point during the ride. I've only had about three or four people not want to talk. I've driven a few people who have actually broken down and cried to me—like the man whose wife had died earlier that day—which doesn't happen at the barbershop."

—DANNY LYONS

### THE LYFT OF JAKARTA IS GRAB.

**MANY DRIVERS TOGGLE BETWEEN IT AND UBER.**

"I'll focus a full week on Uber, and then a full week on GrabCar. GrabCar lets customers use cash, so you're getting more regular people—even kids use it. My GrabCar customers are more likely to talk. Uber customers just stare at their phones."

—SUTRISMAN



## How to Talk Football With a London Uber Driver

"When I came into this industry, I was mainly working the City [financial district] circuit. I picked up these guys who worked in PR, and, you have to understand, PR people are always winning, dining, and entertaining clients, so when I pick them up they're normally off their heads on charlie

[cocaine] and pissed [drunk]. In this particular instance, one of the guys was being aggressive. I'm from the East End, Cockney, so I'm a West Ham man, but on that evening I was wearing an Argentinian football shirt, which really stoked him up. 'You're English! How can you wear that!' he was saying. I asked him if it was a Falklands thing. He said, 'You're damn right!' Anyway, I just explained it was a West Ham thing; Carlos Tevez [an ex-West Ham player] is Argentinian. We sat outside his house—I turned my Uber app off so I'm not charging him anything—and had a good old chat for half an hour. At the end he shook my hand and said, 'Maybe I have been a bit blinkered.' When I left him, he sent me a text saying, y'know, big love and all that."

—Zu M.

# Uber Around the World

"Norms on La Cienega is great for breakfast at 3 a.m. Or dinner anytime."  
—Brian H., Uber L.A.



UberMoto early adopters.

## Introducing UberMoto in Bangkok

*On February 24, Uber launched its first-ever motorcycle-taxi service in the Thai capital. (Helmet included.)*

"MY UNCLE IS A MOTCY—a regular motorcycle-taxi driver—and I used to drive in his place whenever he couldn't work. Motcy drivers wear numbered orange vests and can only pick up in particular areas. I'm an emcee and a country singer and mostly work at night, so I thought, *Why not make money during the day while I'm running errands?* So far, I've picked up six people. I had a passenger that was going to a restaurant I like in Silom, and after having a quick chat, I found out it's the owner's daughter. You never know who you'll meet! I'm a lot more cautious when I have a female passenger because they sit sidesaddle, so I have to be aware of that while maneuvering in and out of traffic. I don't talk much during these rides because it's hard to hear, and there's also too much dust and pollution. I've had cats run out in the street and I've been bitten by stray dogs a bunch of times. Once I saw a really big snake on the road." —Netmongcolchai "Woody" Sriwara

*How much an Uber ride costs from the airport to the center of town in ...*

MARSEILLE .....	\$44
JAKARTA .....	\$7
CAPE TOWN .....	\$13
LONDON (HEATHROW).....	\$57
LOS ANGELES .....	\$37
MEXICO CITY .....	\$9
BANGKOK .....	\$17
MELBOURNE .....	\$96
WASHINGTON, D.C. (DULLES).....	\$52
MUMBAI .....	\$7

## The Three Types of Angelenos You'll Meet in the Backseat

*L.A. Uber driver Brian H. assesses his passengers.*



### CRAZY LA CIENEGA GIRLS

"My busiest time is when the bars start shutting down, anywhere from 1:30 to 3 a.m. I just picked up four inebriated girls at a bar-restaurant on La Cienega. One asked if she could have my aux cord.

**On the way through the Valley, one of the girls was like, 'I gotta pee.'** They see a KFC and say to go there. When they come back, one of the girls, her hand is all bloody. She slipped in water, pulled the sink off the wall, it cracked and sliced her hand. So I pull out the napkins; I got stashes everywhere."



### CHEAP EXECs

"UberX drivers are basically working at Walmart wages now. I've hammered at [Uber] to add tipping into the app. But for now, **I keep a sign in my car that says 'tips,'** so people can tip in cash if they want. You'd think I would've gotten one from this guy I picked up in the Hollywood Hills. It was supposed to be an UberPool, but he said he needed to be at the Century Plaza hotel by 1 p.m., so could I get rid of the other person we were supposed to pick up? So I canceled the second trip. I even got him to the hotel early. He spent the entire trip on the phone talking about some million-dollar film deal. But no tip."



### PSYCHIC-ENERGY VAMPIRES

"I get bored easily. So the best part of the job is that it's never the same. Different people. Driving different places. Most people I drive are friendly, but I find that some sap my energy. I call them psychic-energy vampires. **They don't even know they're doing it, but I'll be driving them and I start to fall asleep.** And then when they get to where they're going and they get out ... all of a sudden, I'm okay."

## THE MEXICO CITY TACOS THESE TWO DRIVERS WOULD GO OUT OF THEIR WAY FOR.

"The barbacoa, only available on weekends, from the meat vendor in the Mercado de Medellín in Roma."

—CARLOS ISRAEL QUINTANO SALINAS

"The birria tacos at the stand near the Juanacatlán Metro station—right on the corner."

—RUBÉN MONTOYO ORTEGA

## Hug Your Driver

If you don't want him to get caught by the police in Montreal, where Uber is considered illegal.

1. "Stop the car a little before or beyond the address, to **check if it's a trap.** If I drive past the address, it gives me the chance to spot the cops hiding out."
2. "Never let your phone be visible and **reduce its brightness** to as low as possible."
3. "Put the **passenger in the front seat.** If they sit in the back and the police notice it, then the problems begin."
4. "Avoid taxi stands, and street corners next to taxi stands. **The downtown, the Old Port, and the airport are the most monitored areas** and therefore also the most dangerous."
5. "Behave like the passenger is a friend. I am not embarrassed to **hug a customer** if necessary."

—ISSAM O.