

# 5 Ways Uber Is Really Different From a Regular Taxi

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The smartphone app 'Uber' logo is displayed on a mobile phone next to a taxi in Barcelona, Spain. (DAVID RAMOS/GETTY IMAGES)

In some cities the ride-sharing app and Uber service is ubiquitous. In others, it's actually illegal. While Uber's owners and cab drivers wrangle over legality and liability, you, as a mere citizen who needs a ride to or from the airport in some strange city, simply want to know what the deal is. At its core, Uber is just an app that you download to your smartphone and use to get a nearby Uber driver to come pick you up. While some taxi services are getting on board with these newfangled apps, most for-rent cars still wait at the taxi stand or require you give the service dispatch center a call in advance. Uber doesn't do that. It's also worth noting that Uber drivers won't respond if you do that cool whistle thing New Yorkers do in movies to hail a cab.

## 5 Plan Ahead or Ride by the Seat of Your Pants



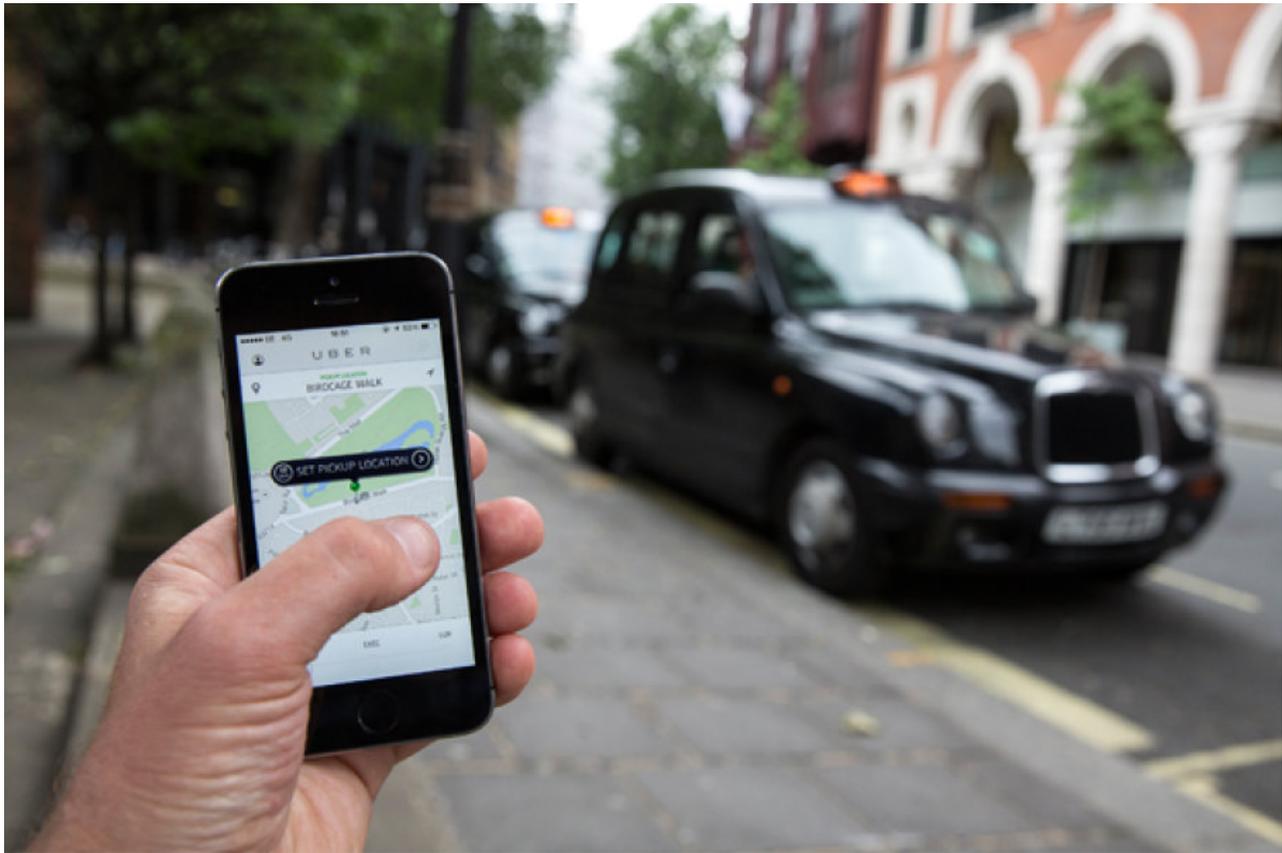
**The new smartphone taxi app 'Uber' shows how to select a pick up location in Barcelona, Spain. (DAVID RAMOS/GETTY IMAGES)**

Let's say you know you've got to be at the airport at 9 o'clock in the morning. The planners among us would call the airport while the coffee was brewing and ask for a cab to be sent over at, say, 8:15 a.m. The truly anal among us would call the night before. Those grasshoppers who trust the universe to provide for them would just stand at the curb at 8:30 a.m. and whistle real loud.

Uber doesn't really allow for any of that. You can only hitch an Uber ride via the service's app, and you cannot call ahead. You check the app a little before you want to leave and click on the next Uber driver who can get you there on time. No calling ahead, no whistling at the curb.

## 4 Judge and Be Judged

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**A smartphone displays the 'Uber' mobile application which allows users to hail private-hire cars from any location in London, England. (OLI SCARFF/GETTY IMAGES)**

Some taxi drivers are chatty, and some are stoic. Same goes for riders. But there's never any mistaking the taxi driver for your friend. Driver in front, passenger in back, and sometimes a scratched-up window between the two.

Not so with Uber. It's like being picked up by a friend you never knew you had. You can sit in the front seat. If you've got luggage, it may go next to the driver's kids' toys in the trunk. You will almost certainly be called on to make a little small talk as a passenger.

At the end of the ride, driver and passenger both will be prompted by the Uber app to rate each other. The idea is to crowd-source out the crazies, so try to put up your least psychopathic public persona while in the passenger seat.

### 3 Crazy Cool Medallions



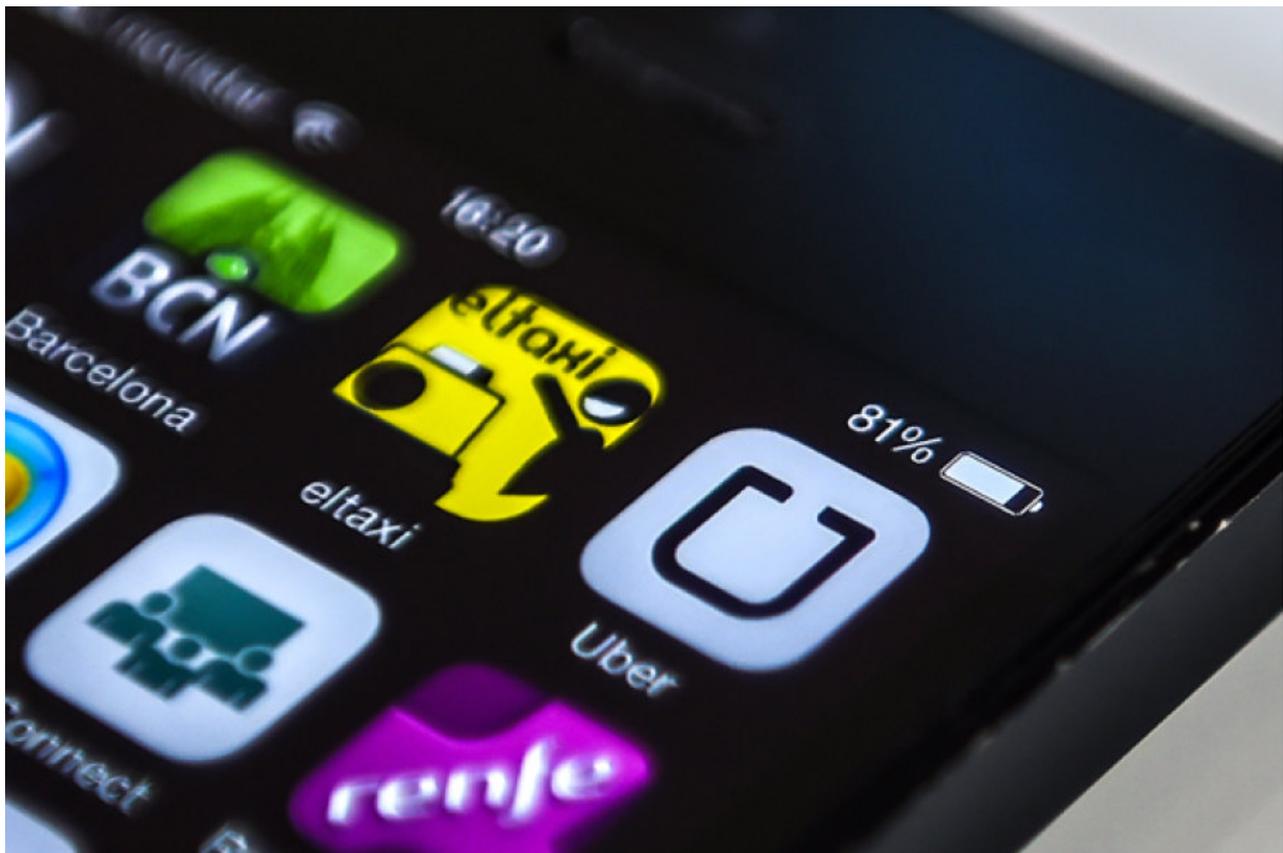
**Yellow cabs travel South on Broadway in Times Square in New York, New York. (RAYMOND BOYD/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES)**

Taxis are regulated within an inch of their bright yellow lives, with a big red-tape bow on top. There can be only so many cabs on the streets, and only so many drivers can operate them. Thus the precious medallions,

which can sell for as much as \$1 million in NYC, that proclaim to the world this car has been approved by a real governmental agency to pick people up and drive them around for a fee.

Uber is neither constrained nor bound to any such regulation. There's no training, though there are now background checks. Uber thinks of itself as an eBay-like tech company in that it merely connects buyers and sellers, but Uber cars obviously pick people up and drive them around in the real world, not the virtual one, just like cabs. This leaves some uncomfortable wiggle room in the liability area when accidents happen and there's no medallion to act as a shield.

## 2 We Know Where You Go

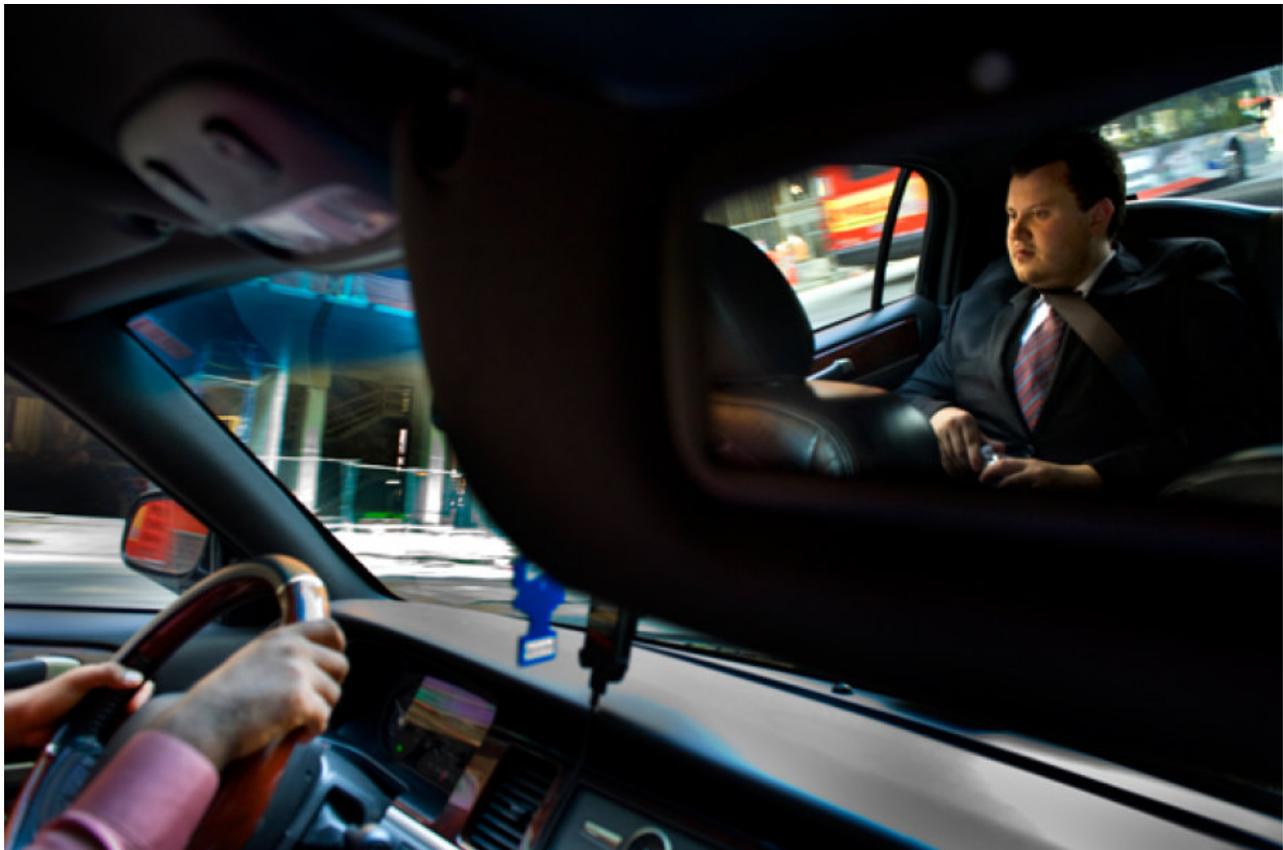


Logos of 'Uber,' a Barcelona taxi service and Barcelona City guide apps are seen on a smartphone display in Barcelona, Spain. (DAVID RAMOS/GETTY IMAGES)

visited on 10/7/2016

Uber uses GPS tracking for every ride its drivers give, so the system knows where you are at all times. You hop in and the driver punches the address into his phone for turn-by-turn directions and tracking. If your driver takes you down a dirt road and starts playing his "Dueling Banjos" Pandora station, don't worry. Uber knows where you are. Likewise, if your passenger gives you directions that lead to a dark, dead-end ally of the kind noir films are made of, Uber knows where you are. If you're in a cab, you better have the GPS in your own phone turned on if you want anyone to know where you are. If you're Julian Assange and trying to avoid capture by international police forces, you might want to avoid Uber altogether.

## 1 Paying for the Privilege



**Brendan Kownacki rides in the UBER Car that he beckoned via a smartphone app. He pays a little more for an Uber ride than he would for a cab, but he says it's worth it.** (LINDA DAVIDSON/THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES)

Uber is more expensive than a taxi. In fact, Uber will tell you that straight up. But since it's not paying for medallions or other regulatory fees, why pay more? According to Uber, passengers are getting "reliability, customer support ... style, and comfort." In most cases Uber cars arrive more quickly than taxis, saving time and frustration if not cold, hard cash. Style and comfort depend on the car and the refinement of your sensibilities.

Thanks to big data and the non-magic of algorithms, Uber knows when you want a car most, and it knows how much you're likely willing to pay for it. Uber uses surge pricing during rush hour, over holidays and in bad weather. The idea is to entice more Uber drivers to get out there and give rides, which means riders will be picked up more quickly. And, on the upside, your credit card is on file with Uber via the app. When the ride is over, you just hop out without that horrible haggle with the driver when you want to use a credit card. The driver's Uber app will tell the system what to charge you based on time and distance — just like a taxi, but a little more expensive.

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## Author's Note: 5 Ways Uber Is Really Different from a Taxi

Right smack in the middle of this assignment, I got a chance to try out Uber for myself. (Uber isn't offered in the city where I live because local regulations so far prohibit it.) I was travelling for work, so I used Uber to

get from the Detroit airport to my hotel. I got a new driver in a new-ish Toyota Camry. My luggage did indeed go in the trunk next to his kids' toys, which was oddly reassuring. How bad could a young dad be? I gave him the address of my hotel downtown, one of the largest in the city and also the world headquarters of GM. You know, the auto maker. In Detroit. My driver, like a lot of suburban dwellers across the land, didn't really go downtown much, so he didn't know where my hotel was. We took a couple of wrong turns. We circled a roundabout. Twice. But he was so nice, and we put our heads together to successfully drop me off at my hotel. I didn't ding him in my short starred review for being new on the Uber job, but I did mention his newness on the job. In the end, it was more pleasant than a cab and roughly the same price. I'd give it another go in another city. But I took a shuttle back to the airport when it was time to leave.

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