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New York Cabbies: Gotta Love 'Em, Gotta Hate 'Em

OCTOBER 13, 2010 BY ADMIN LEAVE A COMMENT

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Meghna Lamore

So I recently had an opportunity to visit New York City, where I had lived for the better part of a decade before the wonders of Toronto seduced me. It never ceases to amaze me how, while time marches on, certain things about New York never seem to change.



Take cabs, for instance. All New Yorkers have a love-hate relationship with their cabbies, and I am certainly no exception. We, all of us, have cursed at a cabbie appearing out of nowhere as we try to cross the street in the middle of a blizzard - yes, New York *does* get blizzards from time to time - horns and radio blaring with equal determination. The odd New Yorker who drives in the city generally cannot get from point A to point B without cussing out the dozen cabs who have cut him or her off, often all within the same 3-block stretch.

At the same time, which New Yorker or tourist hasn't, at one point or another, blessed the sheer omnipresence of the yellow cab? I distinctly remember one very, very very early morning, around 3:30am (for someone who doesn't stir until her dog leaps atop her cozy duvet at 9am, that's excruciatingly painful a time of night), I dragged myself out of bed, did my last-minute packing and waited by my window for the airport shuttle van to show up. Now, usually this service is alarmingly reliable, often arriving at your doorstep well before the agreed-upon time, but this one instance, it never arrived. Unwilling to miss my transatlantic flight, I dragged my single suitcase and strolley down four flights of stairs (how I managed that without cracking one of them open I'll never know), all the while dialing the phone numbers of various gypsy cab and limo companies with an extra hand. No, really. Did I mention I've no idea how I managed to get to the curb without breaking anything?

Well anyway, none of the fifteen places I called could send me a car in time (yes, I was already running late) for a price I was willing to pay. Quite desperate, I actually managed to see a cab out of the corner of my eye on the otherwise deserted street. Since the driver couldn't very well pretend not to see the half-crazed pint-sized woman dancing at the corner, I got my reasonably-priced fare to the airport! And yes, I did make my flight.

During my latest visit there, my friends and were partying down in the East Village, and of course, come 4am (and our shutting down the bar), none of us had the least inclination to spend an hour waiting for the subway. Enter... the ubiquitous New York City cab! I have to say, I thought we'd have to walk several blocks to find one, but no, like wolves sensing a bewildered lamb, a trio of yellow cabs snaked down Avenue C to screech to a stop at our tipsy feet the moment we stumbled to the curb from the little bar. A cash-only bar.

Fortunately, NYC cabs have long been taking credit cards (although you do have to get strict with them every now and then), so that wasn't an issue. Though the outlandish total on the little credit card slip did rather intrigue me the morning after... but I've been known to be a little... erm... overly generous with my tips. Especially when the Indian cab drivers chat me up in my native language....!!!

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