

# TAXIS & TUK-TUKS

South-East Asia is famed for its unusual modes of transport. The region offers adventurous taxi trips, curious bicycle rides and tours on three wheels. Strap yourself in and take a ride in the taxis and tuk-tuks of South-East Asia with Rosalyn Page.

## Taxis

Taxi rides in South-East Asia are an adventure; they are responsible for some of the most loved and hated travel experiences. Bangkok taxis in particular are a different breed. With broken speedos and no seatbelts, it sometimes takes nerves of steel to go the distance in a Bangkok taxi.

Taxis are always clustered around airports, bus stations and train terminals in most Asian cities and will usually take you on any ride, long or short. However, the drivers can sometimes be long to get you to your destination. Always carry a map and try to get directions written in the local language if you plan to travel away from tourist areas.

It's generally safer to take a taxi than other forms of transport in South-East Asia and if the meter works it's easy to work out the fares. On the downside, however, taxis are more expensive and, in gridlock, you'll pay for a slow sightseeing tour from the car window.

## Cyclo

The cyclo is a variation on a bicycle where the driver sits above, behind or to the side of the passengers. Cyclos are common

in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. These pedal-powered machines glide through the streets from early morning to early evening on the lookout for fares, though in the heat of the day you'll often find drivers asleep under a tree.

Cyclos were often overlooked in preference for faster petrol-powered vehicles such as motos and taxis. But the cyclo drivers now know the value of

the tourist dollar and have become local tour guides. For a small fee, you can hire a cyclo for a few hours, sit back and enjoy the highlights of the city.

Remember to hold onto your purse as motorcyclists can sometimes snatch bags.

## Moto

The moto, or motorcycle taxi, has usurped the cyclo for short trips to the market or across town. They are common all over the region as a cheap, accessible form of transport.

In Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma and Laos, motos are small, step-through motorcycles that can dart between traffic and carry small amounts of shopping. In Thailand, the motorcycles tend to be bigger and more powerful and can be used for longer trips, but safety is an issue. Most of the motorcycle taxis there are registered and drivers often supply a basic helmet. In other parts of the region, the drivers tend to be young and/or unemployed men who need to make a living. They'll always know the way to the popular tourist spots and large hotels. Many will wait outside a restaurant or market at an agreed price if you want a ride home.



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### KNOW WHERE TO GO?

It's fun discovering a new city and can be fun getting lost. But getting disoriented and not finding your destination can be annoying and distressing. Always take a map, ask the driver if he knows where he's going and try to get a local to write out the directions for you.

Moto drivers will usually want to take you on a tour to tourist spots for a small day or half-day hire fee. This is a cheap and easy way to see the sights and saves your legs in the heat.

### Tuk-tuks

Anyone who's been to Asia whether it be Bangkok or Colombo has probably come home with a story or two about the city's tuk-tuk drivers. These small, engine-powered, three-wheeled machines are a sight, sound and experience not to be forgotten. They're ubiquitous in major cities and are everywhere in tourist zones.

Getting around traffic-choked cities in Asia, can be fast and fun in a tuk-tuk. For short jaunts and shopping trips, tuk-tuks are ideal, but with no seatbelts and clouds of fumes, safety's an issue. It's important to hold on around corners and keep your eyes on your bags as theft is easy from these open vehicles.

Tuk-tuk drivers are usually fairly knowledgeable about local streets, but it's always good to have your own map and some idea of the direction you're heading in before you start out. The real beauty of the tuk-tuk is that you only need to pause on a street corner for a few seconds before you have one at your feet with the driver eagerly enquiring, "Where you go?".

## Travel Taxis and Tuk-tuks



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### KNOW HOW TO CATCH A LIFT?

Whether it's a short trip across town or a half-day tour to the tourist spots, it's important to barter for your ride. The drivers tend to add a bit to their initial price in the hope you agree to it while expecting you to talk them down. Be polite and have a bit of fun with it.

In Thai, the phrase for slow down is "cha, cha" and it's good to know for the taxis and tuk-tuks. Don't let the driver go beyond the speed you're comfortable with and learn the local words for slow down in case you've got a budding Brabham on your hands.

*Tell us your unusual holiday transport tale. Write to The Open Road, Level 23, 388 George St, Sydney 2000 or email [open.road@mynrma.com.au](mailto:open.road@mynrma.com.au).*