

Ridesharing safety tips



Ridesharing is a growing trend among travelers from all walks of life. Some proponents of ridesharing support the concept because they feel it's an eco-friendly means of traveling, while others find it's a great way to save money. Still others employ third-party ridesharing services as a responsible, affordable way to travel when going out for a night on the town.

With a greater number of people sharing rides and interacting with strangers than ever before, safety while ridesharing is an issue to take seriously. While ridesharing trips often occur without incident, there have been some instances of violent altercations involving drivers and passengers. For example, in February 2016, a driver from Kalamazoo, Mich., while working for a popular ridesharing service, admitted to killing six people after going on a shooting rampage.

According to the Taxicab, Limousine and Paratransit Association, ridesharing companies use a background check service to confirm criminal convictions and to make sure drivers are legally able to drive. However, these services may not perform FBI fingerprinting checks conducted by law enforcement officials, whereas taxi drivers are subjected fingerprinting. So some ridesharing drivers who have committed crimes in the past but have never been caught may pass ridesharing background checks, but they might not pass tests that taxi companies would insist they submit to, such as fingerprinting tests.

While ridesharing, whether it entails

carpooling or using an established ridesharing service, can be convenient, passengers must take steps to ensure their own safety when sharing rides.

- Confirm insurance coverage. All drivers need to be insured in case of an accident. Passengers are well within their rights to request proof of current insurance before agreeing to carpool.
- Confirm vehicle maintenance and inspections. Private individuals and some smaller ridesharing services drive fewer hours per week than many taxi companies. That means personal vehicles may be in better shape than taxis. Drivers must maintain their vehicles and have them inspected according to local regulations. Passengers can ask to see service records and should only accept rides in vehicles that appear to be in good repair.

- Confirm the driver and car before traveling. Before accepting a ride from a ridesharing service, passengers should confirm that the driver, vehicle and license plate number matches the notification that has been sent through the service's app. Passengers also can track the progress of the car's arrival. All details should be verified before stepping into the ridesharing vehicle.
- Ride in the back seat. Many of the criminal incidents associated with ridesharing have involved passengers riding in the front seat next to the driver. Maintain a safe distance by riding in the back, which enables passengers to exit the vehicle more readily.

- Ride with a friend. Safety comes in numbers, so don't hesitate to share rides with friends or close colleagues if you are worried about riding alone.

- Avoid cash exchanges. Many ridesharing services automatically

charge rides to passengers' credit cards. Chip-in arrangements for other carpooling can be made via PayPal or other methods that do not involve cash. Avoid getting in a car with a driver who asks to be paid in cash.

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