

Reliable Rides For Business Travelers On The Go

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By Teresa Meek

Although Carrie Mantha's business often takes her to New York City, when she lands, she doesn't hail a shiny yellow taxicab. Instead, she taps her smartphone's ridesharing Uber app, and within minutes, an Uber driver shows up to take her to her destination.

"We use it constantly for meetings or to take a sample to a photo shoot or to pick someone up at the airport," Mantha says of the 11 employees in her custom eveningwear business.

Ridesharing services are changing the way travelers get around. Uber--along with competitors Lyft, Sidecar and Zipcar--uses GPS technology to alert an army of paid citizen drivers to passengers who need a ride. The trend is also going global, with BlaBlaCar in France and Wundercar in Germany.





Photo source: iStock

The premise is simple: If you want a ride, enter your location (and, in some cases, your destination) into the app. The app will show how close the nearest driver is and even display the driver's path as the car approaches. The app also provides the car model and name/rating of the driver. (All passengers are encouraged to rate their drivers, which the companies consider an incentive for good service.)

Fare deal

To make it even more seamless, fares are determined by the app at the beginning of the ride and are charged directly to your credit card. The apps also keep track of the details of your trip, such as where you went and how many miles you traveled.

In a great boon for travelers, the services don't charge extra for luggage. Most rides cost 10 percent to 30 percent less than a taxi, and the free apps are available both for Apple and Android devices.

The biggest appeal of the services isn't just about cost, customers say. Many businesses appreciate the simplified bookkeeping. "It's very easy for our recordkeeping and for reimbursing employees," Mantha says.

She's not alone in her enthusiasm. Passengers in 45 countries and 200 cities now use Uber, and there's still a sizeable market left for competitors. In just five years, Uber has gone from a startup to an \$18.2 billion company, according to the Wall Street Journal.

A transportation alternative

For diehards like Mantha, ridesharing continues to be a reliable option, especially when in a pinch. For example, when she arrived at the San Francisco airport 11 hours late because of a backup in New York, she missed joining colleagues in a carpool to an executive retreat. It was 10:30 p.m., and the retreat was 230 miles away. Car services weren't available until the following morning and were extraordinarily expensive, she says.

So she called Uber and took a shuttle to a hotel near the airport, where an Uber driver picked her up and drove for nearly five hours while she caught up on her sleep. If she had waited for a car service, she would have missed most of the retreat, and it would have cost three times as much.

Though growing in popularity, ridesharing services aren't in every city just yet, so travelers planning to use an app to get around should check availability in advance.

Teresa Meek is a Seattle-based freelance journalist, writer, and editor whose journalism has appeared in Newsday, the Miami Herald, the St. Petersburg Times, the Baltimore Sun, and other newspapers and magazines.



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