

Mobile app takes on India's cheating tuk-tuk drivers

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An auto rickshaw driver waits in a queue for his turn to get a refill with Compressed Natural Gas outside a gas station in New Delhi. An Indian company has developed a mobile phone application that allows consumers to calculate what fare they should pay for a journey -- rather than the often inflated amount demanded by drivers.

It could spell the end for cheating autorickshaw drivers in India, the scourge of commuters and foreign tourists alike.

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MindHelix Technologies, a software company based in the southern Indian state of Kerala, has launched its TukTuk Meter application that uses [Global Positioning System](#) (GPS) technology to calculate routes and their costs.

In India and other Asian countries, hiring an auto rickshaw or tuk-tuk for a short ride often leads to an exasperating argument over the price.

Meters are routinely tampered with to show higher rates per kilometre (mile) or are said to be broken, with foreign tourists in particular charged exorbitant prices at the end of their trip.

"Anyone with a GPS-enabled mobile phone can download the application for free and use it when they are travelling in public transport," said Kalidasan, chief of operations at Kochi-based MindHelix.

"No autorickshaw driver around the world can fleece you if have TukTuk Meter installed on your phone," added the mechanical engineering student, who uses only one name.

Kalidasan said the application can be used anywhere in India, even in remote areas, and only requires consumers to enter the starting fare used in their city.

The rate per kilometre is then calculated automatically, but the user can also change it manually.

"Users set the base rate that differs in every city, and the software will then provide the accurate fare and the distance travelled," Kalidasan told AFP.

Several Indian states conduct workshops for autorickshaw drivers to train them to be polite and honest in their dealings with clients, while police launch occasional crackdowns.

Delhi Chief Minister Shiela Dikshit has said she would like to ban the city's distinctive green and yellow tuk-tuks, but millions depend on them as a generally cheap form of transport in the congested city.

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