

Michael Winkler

Recent cab trips

Michael Winkler is a Melbourne writer and frequent cab user. More examples of his work can be found at www.michaelwinkler.com.au

Melbourne. Driver: early thirties, Arabic. 'I had to leave Sydney. I loved Sydney but I had to leave. I had a university degree, I applied for job after job after job, but every time they looked at my application and saw my name and that I lived in Lakemba, the application went in the bin! Is it any better in Melbourne?' 'No. Not really.'

Melbourne. Driver: sixty-seven, fatigued. Born in Greece in the last year of the war. 'There was poverty. Some terrible things. The civil war, people calling other people communists. They weren't communist! They called them communist but they weren't!' He says John Howard has to go. 'I am the same age as him. I forget things, make mistakes. Same—him!'

Melbourne. Driver: late thirties, bearded. Studying Shari'ah. I mention *haraam*, Islamic concept of the forbidden, but my mispronunciation confuses matters as he explains haram, an Islamic holy site. Muslim kids at the local school often refer to things that are *haraam*, I say, and then he understands. 'Children—they like the punitive parts of the religion. They never talk about the beauty or the rapture.'

Adelaide. Driver: perhaps sixty, grey. Eastern European. 'Do you have children? I have a grandson. Eleven years old. His father, my son, killed himself. Can you think how that feels? Uh?' Driver weeps for remainder of the journey.

Alice Springs. Driver: thirtyish, red-faced. I enquire why there are no Aboriginal people employed in the shops or at the hotel where I stayed: 'It's because they don't want to work. You easterners and southerners fly in and fly out again. You don't know what they are like or what this place is like. But it's no use telling any of you that because you know it all before you even get here.'

Adelaide. Driver: early forties, reflective sunglasses. 'I am half Turkish and half everything else. I have been to almost every country. Greece is the most beautiful. I feel more at home there than anywhere. You go to Turkey now and it is full of Russian criminals. But do you know where the most beautiful women in the world are from? Jordan. Mate, bloody unbelievable!'

Perth. Driver: twenty-eight, Chinese. Has completed an engineering course but worked for some years as a chef and now as a cabbie. 'These are the jobs I need to do if I am going to get my residential points up. Next year I am bringing my parents out and we will decide what I will do—if I will stay in Australia or go back to China. I don't know what we will decide.'

Sydney. Driver: fiftyish, Anglo-Saxon, festooned with faded tattoos. First words, directed towards black cabdriver pulling out slowly in front of him: 'Get out of the way you fucking ...' The next word sounds like 'nignog' but I decide it might be 'ningnong'. 'Ningnong' would make my life easier. A minute later: 'None of them can fucking drive!' Remainder of journey is completed without further exchange.