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Features Article

Quality of the Driving Lessons

DRIVING has become an essential requirement in today's hectic world. Whether it is for business or personal use, knowing how to drive and having a license is important. This often involves seeking the services of a driving school.

Today, hiring the services of driving schools is quite easy as there are many driving schools offering services at competitive rates. Fees for driving lessons depend on the needs of the learner and the duration of lessons. Fees can range from \$400 to \$700 for training the learners till they secure a driving license or on an hourly rate of \$30 to \$40 per hour.

Driving schools are expected to teach learners to drive safely and responsibly. Teaching the skills needed to pass the driving test, should not be the only objective of driving schools. The principal goal is to produce "safer" drivers. The quality of the driving school is critical in reducing reckless driving and accidents on our roads.

Unfortunately, there are some driving schools that charge high fees that do not match the knowledge, skills and techniques of driving a learner needs to know. These schools are more focused on making money within a short span of time instead of ensuring that they produce safe and responsible drivers. The Council has been receiving complaints against some driving schools. The common complaints include late arrival of the instructor where clients have to wait long hours; borrowing the client's mobile phone to make calls; rude or unwarranted behaviour of the instructors; playing loud music during driving lessons; and simply rushing through the lessons.

Being caught up with a rude and unprofessional driving instructor can be a nightmare, especially for those sitting behind the wheels for the very first time.

Case Study

Ana engaged the services of a driving school, paying \$300 upfront for the driving lessons and \$20 for her learner's permit.

Her driving instructor gave Ana a 30-minute theory lesson the very next day and 6 slots of 45-minute driving lessons were planned for the next 2 weeks.

However, out of the 6 slots that were planned for, the instructor cancelled 5 slots without notice. The instructor kept asking Ana for her mobile phone to send text messages during the lessons.

Having paid for the services, Ana questioned the professionalism and the quality of the services that she received. Frustrated with the continuous abrupt cancellations, she demanded a refund of her deposit but the instructor refused. The road code manual provided by Land Transport Authority (LTA) to Ana was taken away by the instructor.

Disheartened with what happened, Ana lodged a complaint with the Council. With the assistance from LTA, the driving school returned the road code manual 50% refund to Ana. The instructor was also given a written warning by LTA.

When it comes to driving schools, the consumer has the right to select trustworthy and competent driving schools. Here are some tips:

- Shop around for driving schools which are certified by LTA;
- Negotiate the driving fee based on what you already know;
- Clarify the time, place for pick-up and number of days your lessons will be conducted;
- Seek clarification on the hourly rate. That is whether the lessons will be for 60min or 45min;
- Find out how the payment arrangement will be? (for e.g. whether you will be paying deposit before lessons and remaining amount after getting your license which is the normal practice.)
- Ensure driving schools are conducting 10 hours theory lessons in the classroom and not in the vehicles;
- Do not wait until problems get bigger. If you are not satisfied with the services, promptly inform the school or instructor.

It is the consumers' responsibility to report bad driving school to LTA or the Consumer Council if the driving school is operating without a Driving Instructor Permit or qualified instructors or acting unprofessionally when delivering services.

A bad driving school will do more harm than good and allowing such schools to operate is a safety risk.