

SA's Uber 'safer than others'

By [Jan Borman](#)

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The operator of the low-cost Uber taxi service in Johannesburg and Durban says the company's vetting procedure for drivers is more rigorous than those of US and European cities, where there are calls to ban the service.



Uber is an app-based service available in more than 200 cities in 53 countries, and is gaining a foothold in Johannesburg and Durban. It started in 2009 in San Francisco and uses a smartphone app to receive ride requests, then sends these requests to its drivers.

Competitors claim that Uber is unregulated, and can therefore charge lower fees, which affects traditional metered taxis.

Driver background checks have become a topic of debate, especially after an Uber driver in New Delhi, India, sexually assaulted a passenger. It has been banned in Spain.

Alon Lits, the general manager of Uber in Johannesburg and Durban, said the South African service ensured that its drivers were qualified and had no criminal records. He said professional drivers' permits were not issued to drivers who had criminal records or had their licences revoked.

"We have partnered with a local firm that performs criminal background checks. They plug into the police criminal database and that is based on fingerprints."

The app served as an electronic auditor, he said. "You can see a picture of your driver, you get to see what car he is driving, and the number plates. You aren't getting into a random car."

South African actress Pearl Thusi tweeted this week that she had been in an accident using Uber Johannesburg. Lits said he was aware of the incident and Uber was in contact with Thusi "almost immediately" after the crash.

Source: *Sunday Times*

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