TAXI APPS IN GOA: A BUMPY ROAD AHEAD FOR CABBIES AND CUSTOMERS

The tension between tradition and technology in Goa's transport sector is palpable. On one hand, tourists and the digital nomads who call this State home now, demand convenience and affordability. On the other, taxi drivers feel squeezed by rising costs, unkept government promises, and an erosion of the informal system that once worked well for them. **ANIL KUMAR MISHRA** attempts to dissect this decades' old dilemma that looks increasingly unsolvable

Goa has long held its place as one of the most sought-after travel destinations, not just in India but around the world. Its sun-kissed beaches, vibrant culture, and suse-gaad vibe continue to attract millions of tourists year after year. But while Goa may still be seen as paradise to many, for those trying to get around, it's fast becoming a logistical nightmare.

A recurring sore point for visitors is the challenge of finding reliable, affordable taxis. Complaints have become commonplace, and social media is littered with stories of visitors struggling to find cabs or being quoted exorbitant fares. A recent viral video highlighting the issue sparked widespread debate and reignited scrutiny into Goa's transport system.

While two app-based taxi services — GoaMiles and the Goa Taxi App — are currently operational in the state, neither offers the seamless, user-friendly experience that travellers have come to expect from big players like Uber and Ola. The absence of large aggregators has left a gap that government-backed initiatives have attempted to fill — with mixed results.

Two apps, one problem

GoaMiles was launched on August 6, 2018, by the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), intended as an efficient and affordable option that also empowered local taxi drivers. Yet, not all drivers were willing to register with GoaMiles. In response, the state government launched a second digital platform — the Goa Taxi App — aimed at including operators who had refused to sign up with the first.

At the launch, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had acknowledged the frustrations of tourists, admitting it was unfair that a taxi ride from the airport could cost more than the airfare to Goa itself. "It is unfair that airfare is less than the taxi fare," Sawant said. Despite these acknowledgments, ground realities haven't shifted dramatically, and new reports of altercations — sometimes involving tourists, sometimes drivers working for app services — continue to surface.

The issue has snowballed into a larger threat to Goa's tourism-dependent economy. Stakeholders have begun to see the broken taxi system not just as an inconvenience, but as a deterrent to travellers and a risk to the industry's reputation.

Government's push for tech-based solutions

Recognising the need to improve infrastructure and streamline tourism services, especially in the wake of mining's collapse in the state, the government has shifted its attention squarely onto tourism in the 2025-26 budget. Chief Minister Sawant announced a revenue surplus budget with several incentives, including tax benefits for those setting up starred hotels in rural areas and full SGST reimbursement for large-scale tourism-related investments.

Director of Tourism Kedar Naik, in a statement to **O Heraldo**, addressed the persistent taxi issues directly. "The Department of Tourism acknowledges the concerns regarding high fares and inconveniences related to taxi services in Goa. Seamless and affordable transportation plays a crucial role in enhancing the visitor experience, and we are actively working towards solutions that benefit both tourists and local taxi operators."

He added that the department is working with stakeholders — including GoaMiles, the Goa Taxi App, and Blue Cab — to provide "reliable, transparent, and fairly priced transport options." Importantly, the government is now exploring a unified digital platform that brings together all aggregators and traditional operators to standardise fares, improve accessibility, and ensure safety.

"This initiative will streamline operations, ensure fare standardisation, and provide tourists with easy access to verified taxi services through their smartphones," Naik said. "We appreciate the feedback from tourists and stakeholders and assure them that Goa's tourism sector is continuously evolving to provide world-class services while preserving its unique charm."

Dissenting voices: Traditional taxi operators push back

Not everyone is convinced by the government's plans. Former Chief Minister Churchill Alemao believes app-based taxis should be strictly regulated. "They should drop the passengers near the hotel and leave the place immediately," he said. "Only taxis run by the hotels should be allowed to operate from the hotel premises."

Sudip Tamankar, General Secretary of the All Goa Private Bus Owners Association, echoed these sentiments with a harsher tone. "Who will travel in taxis?" he asked rhetorically. "There's an attempt to push app-based taxis for commissions. Officials only care about their cut — not about the taxi operators."

According to some operators, taxi fares are unfairly compared to airfares. "The Chief Minister says taxi fares are more than flight fares. But a flight fare is for one passenger — a taxi can take six to eight people. And the fare is based on distance, not per head," said a driver who requested anonymity.

Others say comparisons with metropolitan areas are flawed. "Goa cannot be compared to cities like Mumbai or Delhi. Here, we often don't get passengers for return trips. How are we supposed to survive on one-way fares?" said another operator.

Many local drivers feel vilified despite having supported Goa's tourism growth for decades. "It's because of us that tourists could move around. Now we are being blamed for harming the sector," said a driver. Another added, "We were told to install digital meters as per High Court orders, and promised reimbursement — but we still haven't received anything. Meanwhile, fuel, road tax, insurance — everything is going up."

There's also concern about the inconsistent application of technology. "In foreign countries, taxis come with built-in speed governors and panic buttons. Here, we're asked to install them separately at our own cost," he said.

Some operators argue that if a single, state-fixed fare structure were introduced, they'd be happy to join app-based platforms. "We're not against technology. But there should be uniformity. Right now, apps charge as per their whims. Let the government decide the rate with stakeholders and apply it across Goa. Then let the customers choose."

Transport Minister: Most cabbies want the app

Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho has said it is high time taxi operators embraced technology. "They can use any app they want — even build their own. The government will fund it. What we need is data for planning. We've spoken to operators, and most want an app. Only a small section is resisting change."

He also criticised the lack of compliance. "We gave digital meters as per court orders, but they're not being used. Then the government gets blamed for inaction."

TTAG, industry push for regulation and tech

The Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) has long advocated for regulated, app-based taxi services across the state. President Jack Sukhija stated bluntly: "Goa absolutely needs the option of app-based technology. It should be available everywhere — not just airports or a few hotspots."

At the Goa Tourism Board meeting earlier this year, stakeholders demanded stricter enforcement of standardised taxi fares at key entry points like airports, rail stations, and cruise terminals. They also pushed for immediate adoption of digital platforms and the formation of a joint monitoring committee to prevent exploitation of tourists.

"We're real Goans — we don't harass tourists"

Sunil Naik, President of the North and South Goa Taxi Operators' Association, offered a different perspective. "Goa isn't like other states. We don't have metros here. And in rural areas like Valpoi or Colvale, even getting mobile range is a problem — forget booking via app. Even at Mopa airport, there are network issues."

He added that many drivers are senior citizens unfamiliar with smartphone technology. "Some drivers are over 60. They don't know how to use these apps."

He also raised the issue of migrant drivers, alleging that many of the negative incidents reported in the media involve outsiders. "We are real Goans. We never harass tourists. For us, they are our guests. If we treat them well, they'll recommend Goa — that's how we get more business."

The tension between tradition and technology in Goa's transport sector is palpable. On one hand, tourists demand convenience, affordability, and transparency. On the other, local drivers feel squeezed by rising costs, unkept government promises, and an erosion of the informal system that once worked well for them.

But with tourism becoming ever more critical to the state's economy, a middle ground must be found — one where tourists feel safe and welcome, and where local taxi operators are not left behind in the name of progress.

> They should use technology while operating taxis. Technology means having any app you want. They can have their own app if they want. The government will fund it. We need data. It is very important for future planning. Assistant Transport Directors (ATDs) have met taxi operators and the feedback they have received is that most of them want to have an app. There is only a small section of them who do not want it
> **— Mauvin Godinho,** *Transport Minister*

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> **— Kedar Naik,** *Tourism Director*

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QUOTEROOM

> App-based taxis should not be allowed to pick up passengers from hotels and should operate only on designated roads. When hotels were built in my constituency, I made it clear that taxis should be driven by local youth. Only hotel-run taxis should be allowed to operate from hotels
> **—Churchill Alemao,** *former CM*

> The question is, who will travel in taxis? There is an attempt to force app-based taxis onto the State as some people are eying the commission on that. They do not care about taxi operators. Officials are only interested in getting commissions. But one should realise that app-based taxis will not be successful in Goa
> **— Sudip Tamankar,** *General Secretary, All Goa Private Bus Owners Association*

> App should be for booking taxis, not for deciding the rates. The rates should be decided by the government based on the suggestions made by the stakeholders and it should be equal for all. The government should hold meetings with the associations of the taxi operators and decide the rate which will be applicable for the entire State
> **Taxi driver**

> The government wants to adopt foreign technology in the state but if technology is being brought then why there is no facilities like in foreign countries. In foreign countries vehicles have inbuilt devices like VLTD, speed governors or panic buttons but here we have to install them separately, which costs us extra
> **Taxi owner**