

GPS GoCar Rentals - A Look Under the Hood

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At Viator we're constantly searching for new ways to experience destinations like a traveler, not just a tourist. Which is why we are pleased to offer the ground breaking, cutting edge, and profoundly yellow GPS-guided Storytelling GoCars for city touring over on the Viator website.

Huh? What's that? What in the world are we talking about???

GoCar GPS car rentals san francisco

GPS GoCars in San Francisco

Let's start at the beginning. Once upon time a man named Nathan Withrington (along with his business partner Alasdair Clements) had a vision. What if visitors to a city could drive around in miniature cars with the latest GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) technology, with an audio tour that was "smart" like a local? Their idea was to allow visitors to leave their guidebooks behind and instead discover a city with clever talking cars that navigate and narrate as you drive. An on-board computer and a GPS-system do the thinking so travelers can sit back and explore the destination from a completely personalized perspective.

Fast-forward to 2004, and Nathan and Alasdair offer the first-ever GoCar GPS car rentals in San Francisco and San Diego. Since then their idea has really taken off. If you live on San Francisco or San Diego, you've probably seen these bright-yellow minicars navigating the streets, going places that most tourists never go.

We recently caught up with Nathan and asked him a few question about tourism, GPS technology and the growing popularity of GPS GoCars.

GPS GoCars: Interview with Nathan Withrington

Viator: So Nathan, what exactly is a GoCar?

Nathan: The GoCar is a new concept in tourism. We were the first company in the world that, through GPS technology, empowered sightseers to take themselves on a guided tour. Our little cars have a personality and are you tour guide. As you drive, they navigate like a traditional GPS, but that is not all. They will crack jokes with you, recommend restaurants and tell you the stories that bring the city to life. As you drive, the car give you options of places to go

and things to see. The more options you take, the longer your tour. So for the first time in history, they can not only take themselves on a guided tour, they can choose when they leave, how long they go for, where they go, when to stop and the language the tour is given in.

Viator: I live in San Francisco, and I've been seeing more of these GPS-enabled cars on the streets. It sounds like your idea has really caught hold and taken off.

Nathan: It all started a few weeks after we opened our doors for business. The San Francisco Chronicle wrote a full-page article on us and put it on the front page of their technology section. Before you know it, Time magazine nominated us for "one of the most amazing inventions of the year." From that point the press has just not stopped, from Today show, Travel Channel, BBC, New York Times, USA Today.. and it just keeps coming.

Viator: OK, be straight with me here. Are GoCars safe? Has anybody ever driven one into the bay?

Nathan: Occasionally, some people are intimidated by the vehicle's small size and the fact that they are driving on city streets. The vehicles are registered as mopeds but the fact that you have three wheels, not two, makes them much more stable. Thankfully to date, with over 65,000 happy customers, we have not had any serious incidents. We take safety very seriously and make sure everyone that drives a GoCar is given a thorough safety briefing on how to operate the vehicle. With regards to driving one in to the bay, you never know, maybe we will come out with an amphibious GoCar one day!

Viator: Do you need a special license? Special training?

Nathan: All you need is a standard drivers license. The vehicles are operated 100% with hand controls very similar to a bicycle. They are fully automatic, so there is no clutch or gears to worry about. After the safety briefing, most people take to it like a duck to water. The GPS will keep people off the busy streets for the most part and will even warn you when you are entering areas where you need to be cautious.

Viator: I've heard the GoCar audio tours as people drive by my house. Do you offer custom voices? Can I select John Wayne to give me a tour of SF?

GoCar GPS car rentals san francisco 2
Yes, that really is Conan O'Brien
next to a GPS GoCar in San Francisco

Nathan: We do offer custom themes. My favorite is the "MisterSF tour," written and narrated by Mister San Francisco (of MisterSF.com) himself. This is a great tour for people that think they already know San Francisco. It does not take you to the obvious places like the Golden Gate Bridge and Lombard St, but rather it shows you the more notorious side of San Francisco, such as where a serial killer lived, where notorious murders happened and buildings that were destroyed in the 1989 earthquake.

Viator: Who's the most famous person who's rented a GoCar?

Nathan: You would be surprised at how many we have had. Just last week we had Carrie Fisher (Princess Leia, A Year of Wishful Drinking). We've also had the lead singer of Iron Maiden (Bruce Dickenson) rent one while he was here for OZ fest, Conan O'Brien and Tim Matheson to name a few. The most amazing person that rented from us may not be the most famous but I think it has to be Antonio "Tintín" Vizintín. If you don't recognize his name, you have most likely heard his story as it was told in the 1993 movie Alive where the Uruguay rugby teams aircraft crashed in the Andes mountains. They were presumed dead but, some of them had actually survived and were forced to survive for 72 days without supplies by eating their expired team mates. Meeting someone with that amount of courage was just amazing.

Viator: Has anybody ever stolen a GoCar? Is it even possible to steal one?

Nathan: The great thing about the GoCar is that it is not exactly an inconspicuous vehicle! And it also has GPS tracking. We did have one incident where a couple stopped to have lunch and when they came out the car had gone. They called us to tell us the car had been stolen. All it took was one call to the police to say, "Yellow GoCar with the number 11 on it," and 10 minutes later the car was recovered, given back to the customers and they were on their way!

Viator: OK, last question: What's the fastest you've ever driven a GoCar?

Nathan: The fastest I've ever driven a GoCar? Well, firstly I need to say the cars are only designed to

do 30 to 35mph. Having said that, being an engineer, I did modify one of the cars for my personal use to go faster. Much faster. I put an engine three times the size of a regular GoCar engine in it, and that particular GoCar would go over 60mph... for my personal enjoyment only.

Check it out for yourself. Rent a GPS GoCar in San Francisco or San Diego the next time you're visiting. Or if you live in one of these cities, take your next out-of-town guests on a GPS GoCar tour.

-Scott McNeely

<http://travelblog.viator.com/>