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Home > Travel Writing > A Driver's Guide to Manila

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A Driver's Guide to Manila by [Roger Starkey](#)

Driving in Manila is not for the timid or faint of heart. The conglomeration of cars on the streets, where anarchy reigns supreme, more closely resembles the atoms in a heated molecule than typical urban congestion. Cars are facing all directions and coming from all angles as laws and courtesy are ignored like a piece of food caught between a priest's teeth at a potluck dinner.

Navigating the road between intersections doesn't pose an inordinately large problem. Minor annoyances do occasionally present themselves, such as the need to dodge pedestrians and street vendors, whom—due to the surreal lack of sidewalks—jockey with cars for space on the streets. These inconveniences are, however, easily conquered by use of your horn.

All Manila drivers have one hand on the horn at all times. The horn in the Philippines is not only used to provide a voice to the driver's outrage at other drivers, but also to provide a warning to all within earshot that a vehicle is approaching. A few short beeps of the horn every half-kilometer or so will keep your path clear of pedestrians and vendors.

The true test of one's driving skills in Manila is their ability to navigate an intersection. Traffic signals do exist in some parts of Manila but they are prizes awarded to only the busiest of intersections and, when present, appear to serve only as quiet suggestions to unhearing motorists. Attempt a stop at a red light and you will be rewarded with a chorus of horns from the people behind you, all anxious to continue regardless of what the traffic signal is suggesting.

A red traffic signal in Manila actually signifies that one should continue with caution until you have met the unmovable resistance of another vehicle. The phrase 'don't block the intersection' is either not understood, or completely ignored, by local drivers. The right-of-way is not something legislatively granted, but rather taken by force. If a green traffic signal indicates that it is your turn to enter an intersection, you must nudge your way forward, through the bumper-to-bumper traffic already in the intersection and at a perpendicular angle to you, until a crack of daylight appears between your bumper and that of an opposing vehicle. At this point, no time is to be spared in depressing the accelerator until you have reached the next lane where you will need to repeat the exercise.

If you are the one already in the intersection, be on the lookout for other nudgers but give ground reluctantly as defensive driving in Manila can extend even the shortest of errands into an hour-long excursion. This procedure is also to be employed at intersections that lack traffic signals. At these intersections, an octagonal, red sign with the word 'stop' on it is understood to mean 'yield' and you should proceed accordingly.

After you have successfully vanquished an intersection in Manila, feel free to hold your head high in pride for what you have accomplished. Don't hold it to high though, you might hit a street vendor.

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