

LEGAL ISSUES: FOUR COMMON TRANSGRESSIONS THAT SEE EXPATS GETTING INTO TROUBLE WITH THE LAW IN SINGAPORE

16 September, 2015 4 Min Read

In recent times, it's not been unusual to see the misdemeanours of errant expats splashed across Facebook – or Stomp – for the world to ogle over and make judgement on. But what are the common transgressions that see expats facing the music with the law in Singapore? We asked the team at [Gloria Civetta Law](#) to explain four seemingly petty actions that can escalate into real headaches.

Offence: Reckless Driving

Situation: It's morning rush hour and traffic is slow on the PIE. You take a call from the office, and hear that your first meeting has started. Out of nowhere, a car cuts into your lane abruptly. You honk, and swerve across quickly to catch a glimpse of the driver. Not so fast: two Road Traffic Act offences may have been committed here.

Sentence: Firstly, answering a call, text, or email on your phone while driving attracts a fine of up to \$2,000, or imprisonment of up to 12 months. Secondly, taking part in a mini "race" may constitute reckless driving. Depending on the circumstances, this could attract a fine of up to \$3,000, an imprisonment term of up to 12 months, or both.

Suggestion: Drive safely and with consideration, avoiding the road rage temptation.

Offence: Outrage of Modesty

Situation: You're out for a post-work drink. You make small talk with a stranger. Not bad; you've made a new friend. More drinks are ordered. You think twice, knowing you have to be up early tomorrow, but she invites you for a dance. What could go wrong? Later, someone approaches you and alleges that you molested your dance partner. You now potentially face a criminal charge for being too friendly.

Sentence: This is a classic case of expats being conned into an out-of-court financial settlement. However, prosecution is possible even when you're *not* being deliberately conned by a fraudster, as these examples demonstrate:

- For touching the hand of and hugging his passenger, a cabby was sentenced to eight weeks' imprisonment.
- Touching the side of a stranger's breast on the bus? Ten weeks.
- An unremorseful man was sentenced to two years' imprisonment plus nine strokes of the cane for squeezing the breast of a stranger.

Suggestion: Avoid getting drunk, and be careful of friendly physical contact with strangers.

Offence: Affray

Situation: Affray simply means disturbing the public peace by fighting. For chasing and choking a cabby while drunk, a Norwegian expat was sentenced to 10 weeks' jail. The sentence was light because he was going through tough times and had acted completely out of character. An Australian expat who punched a female jazz singer at a club was fined \$3,000. For wrestling with and fracturing the middle finger of a cabby in a bout of road rage, a man was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment.

Sentence: Fines of up to \$5,000 and/or prison terms of up to one year are possible. If either party sustains injury, the attacker may be charged with voluntarily causing hurt or grievous hurt, which may attract a fine of up to \$5,000, a prison term of up to 15 years, or sentences that include a jail term, a fine and caning.

Suggestion: Keep a cool head.

Offence: Disorderly Behaviour

1. A Malaysian man was sentenced to a week in jail for pushing through a police line and speaking aggressively to officers while trying to enter a soccer match at Jalan Besar Stadium.
2. For gesticulating with his hands and shouting loudly, a legal service officer was fined \$1,000.
3. A man was fined \$4,000 for using abusive language towards a public servant.

Suggestion: Mind your P's and Q's.

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This story first appeared in Expat Living's August 2015 issue.

Source: <http://www.expatliving.sg/legal-issues-four-common-transgressions-that-see-expats-getting-into-trouble-with-the-law-in-singapore/>