

INDIA AND TOURISM

*Text of the Speech delivered by Mr. S. K. Kooka, Commercial
Director, Air-India, at the 6th Convention of the Federation
of the Hotel & Restaurant Association of India, New Delhi,
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INDIA AND TOURISM

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Twelve months have passed and we are here again to review our past year's efforts and take stock of the situation as it faces us today. The tourist situation in our country which is a part and parcel of our lives and livelihood. We have a patient on our hands, who is near and dear to us — a patient whom we cherish. Unfortunately, the medicine needed to make this ailing soul a man of strength and wealth and vigour is not in our hands but in the hands of Government.

Tourism in this country is sick. Sick because it is neglected. Sick because it is not appreciated. Sick because it is not taken seriously, due to an apathy born of ignorance, obstinacy, and a refusal to see the light — the glorious light of progress, prosperity and international goodwill, direct and immediate descendants of Tourism. We are grateful to Government for eventually appointing a high-powered Ad Hoc Committee to enquire into the causes for the recent decline in tourism and to suggest measures for increasing tourist traffic by at least 20 per cent per year for the next three years. In 1961 our tourist earnings were about 3 per cent of our total exports. Italy and Australia have wiped out their trade deficits and have built up large reserves of foreign exchange through tourism.

JHA REPORT

The Ad Hoc or Jha Committee on Tourism has produced a summary of their conclusions and recommendations. Mr. Jha is a man with a fine mind—the sharpness of which has much in common with the produce of Mr. Gillette. He is a sophisticated human being—much travelled, with *savoir-faire* and a knowledge of the world that can only come with a job that brings him in contact with the finest minds of America, England, Europe and the rest of the world. Mr. Jha and his Committee have in their report mentioned the weaknesses, the glaring weaknesses and deficiencies that exist in our country today. They have taken note of the trouble spots, the sores on the fair face of India — where tourism is concerned. But gentlemen, acne cannot be cured with vanishing cream. The treatment

must have teeth in it. An infection that is deep rooted, chronic and inveterate calls for "action stations". It needs the warning wail of a siren, long drawn and insistent, if the powers are to be shaken from their lethargy and made to realise that our house is on fire and that tap water from a wash basin is no remedy.

The Jha report, however, is a leisurely, gentlemanly, Cook's tour of the pot-holes in our tourist map. Politely worded, with all the restraint and understatement of a BBC Commentator announcing Britain's weather for tomorrow. But gentlemen, this is no ordinary fog besetting our country. We all know that we are underdeveloped. We know that luxury is in short supply and items of luxury are chased by our people with the determination of a tree chasing a dog in the Sahara. But our dearth of foreign exchange, our dearth of a respectable automobile, our screaming need for clean and orderly airport terminals, the end of cattle-boat service on our trains and the chronic and constant shortage of hotel accommodation, the dirt, the filth, the squalor which hits the tourist between the eyes, these are not deficiencies that can be made good by mild utterances and polite dissertations as found on every page of this report.

The wording — "to cater to the tourist it is not necessary to provide luxury standards which may be beyond our resources!" Let's avoid the word 'luxury' for it makes no sense. What Tokyo, Hong-kong, Bangkok, Australia and Egypt provide today is what the average tourist expects and gets — in the shape of good hotel accommodation, good entertainment, good food, good automobiles and good roads. The tourist pays enough in India — he wants fair value for his money. What we provide him with is so pathetically short of required standards — let's not fool ourselves with the loose and misleading term — luxury. We've a long way to go before we can use that word.

The report states that the formalities a tourist has to comply with have to be made as simple as possible if he is to feel that he is a welcome visitor. And the next sentence states that cameras, radios and such articles must be re-exported and the time-consuming details declared on a special form termed a Re-export Certificate. I'd like to know how many countries subscribe to this precious document. The report goes on to say: "There should be no limit on the quantity of Indian goods which a tourist may take out with him". The very fact that this has to be spelled out — illustrates the nonsense that now goes on. We want to export everything we can lay our hands on. Then why this ban on export? The reason being that the Government is scared that Indian goods are not always paid for in foreign exchange. How earth-shaking is this dire problem and how earth-shaking the need for some commonsense.

PROHIBITION

We then come to the vexed question of prohibition. The report states that considerable inconvenience is caused to tourists, because the regulations vary from State to State. An elephantine understatement. There is the helpful suggestion that all-India liquor permits should be introduced quickly, and in Delhi for instance, hotels should have a room set apart where food and liquor should be served. This has been talked about so long that the rooms must have grown beards by now. In a prohibition State such as Bombay — the hotels have permit rooms, but today in this city of Delhi, a tourist can't have a drink in a bar — but he can buy bottles in a liquor-shop. Stupid — I shan't call this — it may sound rude, I leave it to you to find a better word.

May the Almighty give strength to Mr. Naik, the new Chief Minister of Maharashtra, who pledged that 3.5 per cent beer and toddy would be a free-for-all from April of this year. And the Devil take the miserable prophets of doom who balked him, to the joy and satisfaction of Bombay's million bootleggers.

AIRPORTS

Of our airports, the valiant report states "the terminal buildings need improvement". A cunning observation! Have you had the misfortune of visiting the gent's room at Santa Cruz Airport? Have you been a witness to the shambles each evening at Palam when an Air-India Boeing disgorges 130 passengers and their baggage into a terminal building designed for Dakota handling? Have you had the misfortune of using the new highway from Santa Cruz aerodrome to Bombay — where you have a guard of honour of men, women and children doing by the road side — what even a dog performs in seclusion? Nowhere in Asia have I seen the conditions that prevail on that new road from Santa Cruz to Bandra. And what must the tourist's reaction be when he sees the same indescribable hutment dwellings opposite Bombay's elite race-course! You don't need high-powered Committees to put such things right. The trouble is we're insensitive to squalor and dirt. I refuse to believe that the Government of Bombay have not got the money or the means to put an end to these hideous sights.

You might tell me I'm very ignorant about how much it costs to eradicate a slum area. My answer would be — Have **YOU** any idea of the cost of the Avro 748 Project? Do **YOU** expect any sane individual to believe that it is essential for our country to manufacture a twin-engined Jet aircraft to carry 45 passengers? Would **YOU** say this was Priority No. 1, with our slums, our food shortage, our people sleeping on pavements, our lack of hotels, our obsolete

air terminals and general poverty. And now it appears that IAC are forced to examine the possibility of using the Avro 748, because the country's stuck with a ten crore project to fabricate a passenger carrying jet in this country, when the total demand Air-Force-wise and IAC-wise for such an aircraft cannot be more than a couple o'dozen. In a democracy such as ours, it is our duty to ask questions. When we cease to do so, we may as well be dead.

Today and every day, our Managers in Perth, Sydney, Tokyo, Hongkong, Bangkok and Singapore report again and again that their passengers who transit Bombay en route to Europe and America, complain that the transit lounge facilities at Santa Cruz Airport are a disgrace to India. There is no duty free shop, no bar, no clean toilets, no hot and cold showers and attractive shops where a weary air traveller can relax and spend a profitable 45 minutes. That passenger swears he'll never transit India again, leave alone the desire to break flight on his next trip and see something of our country.

TRANSPORT

The Tourist Committee report devotes three paragraphs to road transport. The following is of interest "In order to maintain an efficient car transport service for tourists who want to do sightseeing in privacy, it would be necessary to import cars which should preferably be run by a Governmental agency, so as to ensure that the cars are used only by tourists on payment in foreign exchange.?" I trust this makes more sense to you than it does to me. Why, in the name of reason, should Government want to muscle in on tourist sightseeing? Steel plants, life insurance, the airlines, the Gas and Electric supply and the building of roads yes, but to contemplate the nationalization of sightseeing is a bit thick.

And this, ladies and gentlemen, brings me to the subject of the motor car situation in this country. The citizen of India and he who dwells in our land is lucky to have a magnificent choice in the selection of an automobile. Assuming that Shri Popatlal or Shri Smith is 30 years old, he can be the proud possessor of a Fiat 1100 at the age of 52. For, that gentlemen, is the gestation period of a Fiat as confirmed to me by the dealers in Bombay. The damage is as follows — Cost of car Rs. 8,000. Taxes, excise duties and other minor incidental charges in our socialistic pattern come to the negligible figure of Rs. 4,835, so a Fiat 1100 will cost the now ageing and artery-hardening customer a mere 12,835 for a car that isn't worth half that figure.

However, it is important to mention that if at the age of 30 Shri Popatlal or Shri Smith exhibits youthful impatience, he can always get immediate delivery of a Fiat in Bombay for Rs. 21,000.

This is not fiction, this is a fact. And if it's a Hindustan Ambassador, the price will be not a sausage more than Rs. 16,181 — and your vigil a mere 15 to 18 months, a Standard Herald Rs. 14,420 with a 2½ years wait and if you'll settle for a jeep, you can have one for 16,807 rupees. In England you can buy a magnificent brand new Landrover for Rs. 8,960, and the odds are you would get a 10 per cent rebate on this figure. Not being an affluent society, I suppose it is logical that the Indian should pay twice and three times as much for a motor car as the American, the Englishman, the German, the Italian and the Frenchman !

Air-India gave the Government a proposal whereby the hotels, the travel agents and the luxury taxi-owners could have any number of an excellent American car without an anna's loss of foreign exchange to our country. Brand new, and the latest models from America were offered to the Government for distribution to the tourist trade, but my friends, in the end, the car would have cost you Rs. 59,000. An Indian movie star would have trouble producing that kind of white money !

Particulars of a large brand new five-seater automobile:

Cost of car	Rs. 14,675.05
Import duty @150%	Rs. 22,018.57
Surcharge on Import duty @10%	Rs. 2,201.26
	<hr/>
	Rs. 38,894.88
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Excise duty @15% or Rs. 3,000 whichever is more	Rs. 5,833.33
Surcharge on Excise @3½%	Rs. 1,944.44
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	Rs. 46,672.65
Add cleaning and other incidental charges @5%	Rs. 2,333.33
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	Rs. 49,005.98
Add STC's service charges @10%	Rs. 4,899.99
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	Rs. 53,905.97
Sales tax @10%	Rs. 5,389.99
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	Rs. 59,295.96
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This sad arithmetic was contained in a letter I received from our Department of Tourism.

On the 3rd of January this year, our P.M. inaugurating the annual meeting of the Association of Indian Automobile Manufacturers regretted that cars being manufactured in India did not compare favourably with those made abroad. The P.M. also suggested that prices of cars be reduced and that this would result in greater demand for them. Excellent observations. But would that the P.M. was kindly shown the breakdown on what Government adds to the landed price of a car, and to the manufacturer's selling price of a local product.

A brief description would not be out of place of the three cars to which our destiny is shackled. The one has a face and appearance only a mother could love. The second's great advantage is that once you possess it — you don't have to get married — for you'll be wedded to a workshop. And the last is a toy, with two doors short of the requisite number — a very suitable vehicle for teen-agers restricting their motoring to billiard table surfaces which do not exist in our land. In this capital city of ours—in the Diplomatic Enclave — a stone's throw from the Ashoka Hotel — the road surfaces are a disgrace. Those responsible for the upkeep of our roads must obviously be the owners of motor car repair shops. Some years ago, Government set up a high-powered Committee to examine in great detail the manufacture of a people's car. After years of deliberation, talk and double talk, the project was still-born. I pray it's only a coincidence that that Committee was also headed by Mr. L. K. Jha.

MISGUIDED POLICY

There are in this country men of great stature and import, holding responsible positions in Government. Unfortunately for you and me, they are convinced that tourism is no industry. They're of the opinion that the tourist is bound to visit India—for are we not unique in this world — and if he does not choose to—he'll be the loser — not we!

These same misguided dignitaries are equally convinced that India is a spiritual shot in the arm for the worldly, materialistic visitor. And so, we're told, it does not behove us to erect luxury hotels (there goes that word again) to have comfortable motor cars not designed for midgets, to supply the weary traveller with a pleasant evening's entertainment and to give him the wherewithal to sip gently the contents of a bottle that has for centuries gladdened his heart and is a habit with him — just as it is with you and me. To indulge then in claptrap about the natives getting restless

if they see fine, new hotels, airconditioned shops and progress all round — is to dig a hole in the ground and hide in it — whilst the rest of the world goes by.

I am sorry to say there are too many people in authority in this country who refuse to learn, who wear blinkers when they go abroad and who do not profit, or profit their country by worshipping the bullock cart. They're responsible for our tourist earnings being a miserable 19 crores a year when they should be a hundred — a target which can be achieved if we in the tourist trade are given the tools to get on with the job.

It is strange that a Government so enlightened, so progressive and so generous where Air-India and its growth is concerned, should find it so difficult to emerge from the jungle of red tape and officialdom, where tourism is concerned.

Gentlemen, you in this room are the hoteliers of India. You carry a big responsibility. By and large you're doing an adequate job, but I appeal to you to do something about the out-stretched hand of your employees when the visitor leaves your precincts. The best time to check out of an Indian hotel is around 3.45 a. m. the tourist's finest hour. For then, he can cut his losses and reckon with just the two stalwarts who carry his baggage plus the night watchman. The proprietor, the General Manager and the Board of Directors are mercifully asleep then—and mind you, all this after you've been knocked cold for that extra 15 per cent on your bill as service charges. To make you realise how annoying and real this problem is, I'd like to quote from the Washington Post of January 5, 1964 — Over 400,000 Americans read this and it did you no good :

TIPPING BUSINESS

“Take the matter of hotel bills. You must figure on paying 25 per cent to 40 per cent more than the stated price of your room.

“On top of the basic cost, there will be a service charge of ten per cent to 15 per cent. You will notice sneaky little items mysteriously identified as ‘portage’ or ‘fuel’.

“To soften the blow, many hotels post signs asserting that tipping is not encouraged or, in some cases, not permitted. But you have about as much chance of getting out of your hotel with last year's capital gains intact as Ibrahim Lodi's infantry had against Babur's Mogul cavalry.

“The number and diversity of hotel employees anxious to relieve you of your funds is remarkable.

"The tipping business follows you into the streets and there are those who say that India's national symbol should be the outstretched palm, not Mohandas K. Gandhi's spinning wheel.

"Professional beggars, amateurs, guides, taxi drivers, night watchmen, temple keepers—the list of those lying in wait is endless and would bring a blush of shame to the cheek of the most hardened and avaricious French waiter.

"One appreciates, of course, the poverty of the people. But poverty does not necessarily turn a man into a wheedling nuisance.

"Nepal, India's little neighbour to the north, is a good example of this. The Nepalese are every bit as poor as the Indians but they are polite, helpful, and cheerful and would no more try to wheedle an unearned tip than they'd put parsley on yak butter.

"Then there is the question of getting in and out of India. The basic assumption is that you are a dangerous spy hustling heroin on the side or, more absurdly, that you've come half way around the world with the specific intention of selling your ten-year-old Brownie camera at a \$1 profit in New Delhi.

"Prohibition is another problem. The Indians are anxious to protect you from the evils of drink. The result is a maze of State laws that if you are intent on getting sloshed, will not prevent you, but will make it as difficult and unpleasant as possible.

"All this, is not to say that India is not worth a visit. It is. There is nothing quite like India's Taj Mahal, the rock-cut temples of Ellora and Ajanta, or the erotic sculptures of Khajuraho.

"You will find many fine, intelligent and helpful people among the Indians. The country is a friend of ours. It desperately needs foreign exchange. (India earns about \$55 million each year from the 75,000 Americans and Europeans who visit it annually).

"But the fact remains that the country is not doing much to make the most of its tourist attractions."

Ladies and gentlemen—these are not my words, they were written by Smith Hempstone of the Chicago Daily News after he visited India. And he is no friend of Katherine Mayo—he is a friend of India.

Transportation has an important impact on the visitor—for after all—he's a traveller and the major portion of his time he spends on the move. The motor cars he sees in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras are a sorry collection of mobile derelicts. The taxies of India must be the worst in the world. The service on our so-called de-luxe airconditioned trains a shambles, the lavatories on board a mess, and the food service appalling.

With the excellent bed linen we make in our land, it defeats one to find that coarse khadder is extensively used by the railways for bedsheets and pillow cases, and as for the towels, they're eminently suited for rubbing down elephants. The railways obviously have no house keeping section. The men who repair their diesel engines must be responsible for the interior decoration and the food. It is a depressing observation that when the British ruled this land, our railways offered excellent service in the form of accommodation, waiters in spotless white and good food and drink. Now Tour Promoters are at great pains to ensure that no visitor from abroad journeys by train if this can possibly be avoided.

HOTELS

Time and again the private sector are warned that if they do not exert themselves and build hotels, Government will step in and fill the gap. Now that's fair enough. Over two years ago tenders were issued by the Government of Bombay for the lease of a hotel site at Nariman Point. The highest tender was Rs. 950 per sq. yd. — for reasons unknown, no decision was taken and six months ago the entire tender process was reopened and the highest tender is now Rs. 2,650 per sq. yd. Comment is superfluous! At the same time, we must give credit where credit is due.

The visitor to Delhi is delighted with the ruins of this historical city. The Delhi Fort, the Purana Kila, the Lodi Gardens and the Kutab. He is also struck by some of our modern ruins for which certain gentlemen in this room must take all the credit. So when a tour group is escorted around the gold course—the guide in a loud voice announces — and to your right gentlemen is our latest monument—abandoned by the Moguls in a hurry — the Oberoi Kila — in a fine state of semi-preservation — to which the tourist remarks, Gee that sure is wonderful—how contemporary can a ruin look!

An American travel expert described India as a sleeping giant where tourism is concerned. There is evidence to prove that that giant will be asleep for another decade. We don't need a Committee to tell us what has to be done. If India is to prosper from tourism — we must stop talking, and stop setting up Committees. Government must name a man with the authority to bash heads—only then will there be action. There is in India a man, I shall not name him, but his choice of initials I cannot improve upon. With the dire need for Tourism reaching that target of 100 crores per year, would that he be given the task of setting tourism on its feet.

TOURIST CORPORATION

Tourism having come to a grinding standstill in our land—being authorised to a Ministry that handles such items as the making of runways and shipbuilding yards, there is much talk of a Corporation being formed — a Tourist Corporation of India. Now gentlemen, that was a progressive step and if that Corporation could get half the assistance and backing Air-India has had from our Government, things would improve overnight. Now, however, there is talk of the Tourist Corporation getting into the act of owning motor cars, building and operating hotels, selling travel tickets—in fact, in establishing itself as a rival to you, to the travel agents, to the private car companies—in fact to the tourist trade. The purpose of a Tourist Corporation was to promote the cause of tourism, to help us in our fight against militant customs regulations, visa headaches, the curse of prohibition, to secure the Government's assistance on securing land and building hotels. I do sincerely hope that by recommending the creation of a Tourist Corporation, you have not created a Frankenstein.

The people of India and our beautiful country are the best ambassadors we have. If we could reduce our political outposts by half and open the same number of tourist offices abroad, we'd reach that target of a 100 crores, and the odds are we'd have a greater number of friends and supporters than we have today.

We have no less than 127 Embassies, High Commissions, Legations and Consulates abroad, for which there appears to be no shortage of foreign exchange. And sad to say, you can count the number of our tourist offices on the fingers of two hands, the reason given being the shortage of funds! We need the tourist, for he is our prosperity, and he will not come to us unless we make our land and our regulations happy to receive him, and we carry out propaganda and publicity abroad from a large number of dedicated offices—manned by staff who do not wear cut-away coats and striped trousers.

But gentlemen, how long must we keep harping on the obvious. We don't need the Stanford Research Institute of California to tell us what we need to promote tourism. We know the answers, but if the Government want confirmation from an outside party, they now have it — wreathed as the report is with the desire to sugar coat the pill — to understate our weaknesses with great gentleness and consideration, so that no offence is given. If Government read between the lines, they should profit from the Stanford study on Tourism to India. It is significant that the report has not been reproduced in the newspapers.

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