



## **Inaugural Address**

delivered at the

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by

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Prime Minister of India

at

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I am very happy to be with you today at this important travel and tourism meet. All of us in India are pleased that the PATA Annual Conference has come back to India after a gap of 24 years. I heartily welcome all the delegates to this conference and also the dignitaries who have joined this occasion today.

In the past half century, especially in the past few decades, the economic profile of the Asia Pacific region has changed dramatically. Leaving the dark days of colonial rule behind, the countries of the region are engaged in rewriting their own destinies — as independent, self-confident, and steadily progressing nations. Many of them have become shining success stories, powerhouses of trade and technology, industry and innovation. I was in Singapore last week and was heartened to know that it is today richer, in terms of per capita income, than its former colonial master.

If the Asia Pacific region's socio-economic status has changed, so also has its profile in tourism. The region is today dotted with innumerable centers of tourist attraction, which draw large numbers of tourists from around the world. Almost every country is promoting



its traditional centers of attraction, and also adding many new ones. Indeed, tourism has become a powerful driver of economic growth for several countries in the region — both those that are already prosperous and those that are not yet so.

If Singapore is an example of the former, then Cambodia, the other country that I visited last week, is a telling example of the latter. I was pleasantly surprised to know that the tourist inflow in Cambodia, mainly to experience the wonder of the Angkor temples, has soared from a mere fifty thousand a year to nearly five hundred thousand in just five years.

I am sure the region boasts of many such telling examples. And they cover almost every conceivable type of tourism — from monument tourism to mountain tourism; from culture tourism to conference tourism; from beach tourism to business tourism; and from tourism for the senses to tourism for the soul.

No doubt, the governments of the respective countries have done much to bring about this change, through innovative policies and supportive infrastructure facilities. Nevertheless, if any one trans-national

organization can be credited for the phenomenal growth of the travel and tourism industry in the region, it has to be the Pacific Asia Travel Association.

Ever since its first conference in Hawaii in 1952, when calm and peace descended after the devastation of the Second World War, PATA has played a pioneering and visionary role in bringing together nations of the Asia Pacific. It was, I am told, also the first organization in the tourism sector to recognize the benefits of private-public partnership for promotion and marketing of travel destinations in the region.

Through its impressive record of devoted leadership and outstanding voluntarism, PATA, in the last half century, has also accomplished more than any other travel organization in educating the tourists, as well as in improving the tourist destinations — environmentally, socially, and culturally. As we all know, the United Nations has declared the year 2002 as the International Year of Eco-Tourism and Mountains. I heartily applaud PATA for this concern for sustainable and eco-friendly tourism, which has to be at the very core of all our activities in promoting tourism. This responsibility can be handled only by



creating a well-regulated, and often self-regulated, partnership between the government, private sector players in the infrastructure and hospitality business, mass media, voluntary organizations, and, last but not the least, tourists themselves.

Distinguished delegates, India is now all geared up to reach its true potential in tourism. We fully recognize that the Asia Pacific region is extremely important for us if this potential is to be fully tapped. We offer both the ancient and the modern. We are investing large sums for expanding and modernizing our infrastructure in airports and airlines, railways, national highways, hotels and transport, development of tourism circuits, preservation and maintenance of monuments, human resource development, information technology and all things related to tourism. It is our endeavor to ensure that our visitors have the best and the most pleasant time when they visit any part of India.

Of course, we have many things to learn from our more successful friends. Just as each of the forty-odd countries represented in this conference can benefit from sharing knowledge and experience.

As your Association enters the second half-century of its existence, it is now faced with different challenges. Some of these challenges are not specific to tourism alone; they are common to all sectors of the economy. Indeed, these concern the very security and well being of our societies.

I am referring here mainly to the problem of terrorism and extremism. It has today emerged as a global menace. No continent, and no country, is entirely free from its reach, or the reach of its negative effects. This was evident from the impact of the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11 on the United States. In particular, the travel and tourism industry, including the civil aviation industry, was badly hit. We in India, being victims of terrorism for close to two decades, know all too well how it has adversely affected tourism in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere.

Therefore, the time has come for the entire tourism fraternity in the world to intensify its campaign against terrorism and extremism. I have said before — and it bears reiteration today — that all of us should know why terrorism has hit tourism the most. Just as terrorism is a foe of tourism, tourism, in the



broadest sweep of its effects, is an antidote to terrorism and extremism.

Whereas terrorism feeds on intolerance and arrogance, tourism breeds tolerance and empathy. Terrorism has no respect for human life. In contrast, tourism teaches us to savor and to celebrate all that is beautiful in nature and in human life. Terrorism seeks to erect walls of hatred between faiths and communities. Tourism breaks such barriers. Terrorism detests pluralism, whereas tourism pays tribute to it.

In a world that is becoming smaller and more inter-dependent with each passing year, tourism is encouraging all of us to develop an international outlook, even as it makes us proud of the natural and cultural heritage of our own individual countries. As far as India is concerned, ours is the land of Gautam Buddha, Bhagwan Mahavira, Guru Nanak Dev, Mahatma Gandhi, and many other apostles of peace. We firmly believe that promotion of peace, friendship, goodwill, and understanding among nations and among different religious and ethnic communities has to be the overriding objective of tourism in the new century. This, I am told, is also the central message

of the World Tourism Organization. I hope that your conference will transmit this message powerfully throughout our region and the world.

On this occasion, let me express another concern which, I am sure, is shared by many of you. I urge travel and tourism operators not to look at their business purely from a narrow angle of short-term commercial benefit. Excessive commercialism, especially when it takes place in the absence of effective regulatory mechanisms, can lead to negative consequences. Environmental degradation and erosion of traditional social values can make the growth of tourism unsustainable, much like the story of how greed led to the killing of the goose that laid golden eggs. In our own country, we have examples of some tourism centers that have visibly suffered due to unplanned and unaesthetic growth.

Your conference, therefore, should catalyze a process of learning from each other's best practices in the Asia Pacific region. How can we encourage responsible and active participation of the local people in planning and implementing tourism promotion schemes? How can we promote better municipal governance



especially in and around tourism centers? How can we check vandalism and promote responsible tourism? On these and other such questions, there is an immense lot that our countries can learn from each other.

There is a good concept that is rapidly gaining currency these days. It is: How to develop and market Joint Tourism Circuits. For example, even though Singapore has a thriving tourism industry, Prime Minister Goh told me that he would like India and Singapore to design joint tourism packages and promote them jointly so that at least a section of international tourists who come to one country can be enticed to experience different types of attractions in the other country. One can also think of a regional Buddhist Circuit that will link India's own Buddhist Circuit with countries in South-East and Far-East Asia. There is also scope for developing a regional Ramayana Circuit and a package that links the centers of Sufi spiritualism in India, West Asia, Central Asia, and South-East Asia.

There is an added reason for joint promotion of tourism within the region. As all of us know, more

and more Asians are becoming rich and are joining the ranks of international tourists. It should be our endeavor to facilitate, for example, more Chinese and Malaysians to come to India and more Indians to travel to Cambodia and Vietnam. I am told that nearly two hundred thousand Indian tourists go to Bangkok each year. If at least five to ten percent of them can be persuaded to go the nearby Angkor temples at a marginal incremental cost, they would be wonderstruck at the age-old cultural links that bind India and Indo-China.

In this context, it is necessary to recognize that promoting tourism within the Asia-Pacific region through a cooperative effort is not a zero-sum game. We will all gain if more tourists, especially our own tourists, start visiting each other's countries. Above all, it benefits tourists themselves since they can get to see and experience more by spending less.

For countries like India, it also brings an additional benefit. Employment generation is one of the primary goals of our economic policies. And tourism, as all of us know, has a high potential to create business and employment opportunities at different levels of education and skills.



Ladies and Gentlemen, before I conclude, I would like to wish you all a wonderful and memorable stay in India. In a sense, you too are tourists who have come here for the purpose of the conference. And we welcome you with the same courtesy that is shown to all guests in the Indian tradition and which is encapsulated in the Sanskrit maxim: *Atithi Devo Bhava* – When a guest comes, think that a god has come.

I thank PATA for choosing New Delhi as the venue and I do hope that you will come back to India sooner than in the past.

I wish your conference all success.

Thank you.