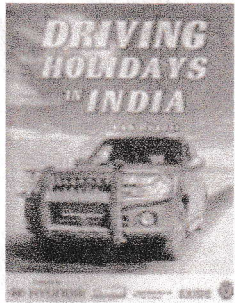


Great Drives

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Friday, 26 January 2007



BOOK REVIEW

Title: **Driving Holidays in India**

Author: **Bob Rupani**

Publisher: Rupani Media

Price: Rs. 495

Here's a book that'll warm the cockles of driving enthusiasts. A comprehensive list of routes coupled with detailed maps and first hand information makes this a good buy. This should surely be one of the first of its kind in India. For a country as diverse and fascinating as India, it has taken a long time coming. The book opens with a one of the most fascinating drives along the eastern coastline - Bhubaneswar to Vishakhapatnam via Konark, Puri and that serene lake called Chilika. From here on the book is hard to put down on two counts. Firstly, the author takes us through some memorable circuits. Barring the Northeast and troubled belts of Kashmir, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, he covers the rest to a nicety. From historic settings to forested stretches, from high mountain passes to sunny coastlines, **Bob Rupani's effort is truly a labour of love.** And secondly, there's meticulous attention to detail. Well designed maps give you a good overview of the region, breakdown of distances (eg. Bhubaneswar to Puri via Konark 98 km, driving time 2.5 hrs) gives prospective travelers an idea of time required to cover a stretch within a larger route. Accommodation details with email, telephone numbers will go a long way in serving the logistical needs.

The author is at his best in the better part of the book. For example in the Indore-Mandu-Sanchi-Pachmarhi-Kanha-Bandhagarh-Jabalpur route, **Rupani successfully transports the reader to the locale** - the mesmerizing beauty of the Satpura Mountains while driving to Panchmari...recreating the tragic romance of Rani Roopmati and Baz Bahadur while passing through Mandu...You feel the surroundings, the legends in his description. The visual support in the book is illustrative rather than brilliantly composed with great lighting. But having said that, they successfully capture the colour, life and terrain of the respective regions! **The printing quality is good, and the format handy, easy-to-pack!**

The book is dotted with **valuable tips and insights**. For example he has a word of caution in Agra-Gwalior-Shivpuri-Orcha-Khajuraho route. "At Dholpur cross the River Chambal and enter the badlands of Central India. Even today, dacoit gangs are active in this area and they still loot and disappear into the astonishing maze of ravines, hills and valleys. Given this, there is a lot of police presence with heavily barricaded police stations lining the highway. There is no doubting the fact that this is a dangerous place, but at the same time it must be said that raids are not as frequent as they are made out to be and traveling during the day is relatively safe. In any case, one should always be careful and not stop in any deserted area." Then he goes on to talk about the gun trade in the bazaars of Shivpuri. **It is at once fascinating and bone chilling.**

Delightful observations, insightful quotes by the likes of Bill Clinton on the Taj ("The world is divided between those who have seen the Taj and those who have not.") and interesting tid-bits are peppered throughout book. Let me sign off with one such gem

"Expect anything, and depend on nothing" while on the Indian roads. And Bob, in the next edition include a caption for the lead picture on each route; it'll enhance armchair traveler's experience.