

INTERNAL COMBUSTION

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THIS PANDEMIC HAS MADE DRIVING HOLIDAYS MORE POPULAR AS YOU CAN AVOID PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING, IN THE PRIVACY OF YOUR OWN VEHICLE

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This Covid pandemic has completely changed our lives and amongst several of its side effects is also 'Covid Confinement'. Many of us have never spent so much time indoors, and now that the deadly second wave of this cursed pandemic appears to be gradually receding, many people are busy planning a getaway. Over the last 15 to 20 years, driving holidays or road trips have become increasingly popular

in our country, but with the unwelcome appearance of Covid, their popularity has grown countless times. This is because driving out for a holiday in your own vehicle helps one avoid public transport like buses, trains and planes, where you are bound to come into contact with many people, which is the last thing you want to do in these pandemic times.

Along with Covid appropriate behaviour like social distancing, on a road trip you get the freedom to travel as and when you wish, in the privacy of your own vehicle. You don't have to go through the tedious exercise of making reservations and booking tickets. A "Driving Holiday" actually allows you to say goodbye to schedules and you have the freedom to stop when you want and where you want.

Given the prevailing circumstances, I think it's quite unlikely that international travel will happen anytime soon, so when the situation gets better there is bound to be a manifold increase in driving holidays and domestic tourism. And in my view it's very welcome because many of us have undergone tremendous stress and pain and need to start doing things that get us to smile again. Our tourism industry, particularly the hotels have also taken a big hit and they desperately need guests and business.

While Covid may have increased the popularity and practicality of road trips, it's always been my belief that a "Driving Holiday" is the best way to see our incredible country. A road trip holds a promise of adventure. Just around the next bend, over the next hill, past the next town is another discovery. Every path leads you to something different and just as you start thinking that you know India intimately, it springs a new surprise. A "Driving Holiday" not only allows you to see things seldom seen by ordinary tourists, but when the scenery is too spectacular to drive by, or when the desire to lie back and relax overcomes you, all you need to do is turn off the ignition.

While there may be nothing like getting into a car and going on a "Driving Holiday", especially in the current conditions, I strongly believe every road trip needs some pre-planning. The first and most important rule is to always drive safely. Not just within the limits of the law, but also within the capacities of the vehicle and the confines of your driving experience. Driving on Indian

roads requires special talents and skills. One should "Expect anything, and depend on nothing". You will find cars, trucks, tractors, two wheelers, people, animals and everything you can imagine and many that you can't, coming at you from every direction possible. Some will come head on at you on a one way road or on the wrong side of a divided highway. Others will overtake you from the left or suddenly pull out in front of you without any warning just as you are about to overtake.

You will see familiar road signs and road markings, some in the right place, some in the wrong. Some accurate and others misleading. Some being obeyed and most disregarded. The key to motoring happily through all this is 'patience'. Patience with the character that appears on the wrong side of the road on a blind bend. Patience with the 'lane cutter', driving a vehicle covered with battle scars. Patience with the driver who indicates left and turns right. Patience with the fellow who stops in the middle of the road without any warning, to chat with a friend, or simply because he feels like it. The examples are endless, but the solution is only one, 'patience'. And of course lots of care and caution.

It is also extremely important, to always be alert. Drive at a speed that will safely allow you to make sudden lane changes and brake to a halt in the shortest distance possible. Stop every few hours to take a break and if you are getting tired or distracted, find a place to rest. It is best to start early and do most of the driving in the day. Driving after dark is not at all advisable and is something you should try and avoid. Please also bear in mind that the pandemic has resulted in huge unemployment and a drastic reduction in income for many. In several parts of our country, especially the backward or tribal areas, people are desperate for money and could take the law in their own hands and get drawn to looting. From what I am hearing, there has been a marked rise in highway dacoities and given this, one has to be extra careful and vigilant while going on a driving holiday. Flashing of money or expensive phones, watches, jewelry, and so on, is obviously a big no-no, as is stopping in lonely or dimly lit places. Let's break free and drive out, but also let's be sensible and safe about it. Enjoy your driving holiday. And stay safe. 