

Fascination

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On the Road in India

India is a country of contrasts: past and present, boomtowns and tropical beaches, water buffaloes and biotech. It is a country on the move, and as the world's fastest-growing automobile market after China, it holds considerable promise for Porsche. Join us as we drive from Mumbai to Goa and catch a few fascinating glimpses of this many-faceted country—a country on the road to the future.



Cacophony, confusion, chaos. We're in Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay, the starting point of a trip along the west coast of the Indian subcontinent that will take us all the way to Goa. But right now, it looks like we may never make it out of the city at all. We've been inching our way down Mahatma Gandhi Road for the better part of an hour. Traffic lanes are impossible to make out, at least to an untrained foreigner's eyes. A precariously overloaded bus honks to our right, a van outfitted with a gleaming chrome cowcatcher demands the right of way, rattling motorcycle rickshaws push their way into even the smallest gap. Two men push a wooden cart across the intersection, apparently heedless of the chaotic onslaught of traffic. That they and the cart make it across unscathed is but one of India's many miracles.

We've just passed the Gateway of India, one of the city's best-known landmarks. The original monument was a smaller, plaster of Paris version of the current arch built in honor of the visit of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. The colossal, full-scale triumphal arch carved in yellow basalt was completed in 1924.

Bombay, which returned to its former name, Mumbai, in 1995, is a city of over thirteen million people. Located on a peninsula that juts into the Arabian Sea, it was a flourishing seaport and center of

On the road: The coastal route starts in Mumbai and ends in Goa



trade during the colonial era, profiting from the many cotton plantations located in the hinterland. With its ornate facades, arcades, and turrets, the city's main train station testifies to the city's great wealth. Named Victoria Terminus in honor of Queen Victoria but better known by the abbreviation VT, it was the largest structure in all of British India when it was completed in 1887 after almost ten years of construction. Now known as Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus or CST, it is one of India's busiest railway stations.

On the one hand, Mumbai is a modern city firmly rooted in the 21st century. The center of India's thriving entertainment industry, it is also the country's undisputed financial capital. Many of the buildings in the Bandra Kurla Complex—a new growth center built in the suburbs to prevent further concentration of offices and commercial activities in South Mumbai—are shining examples of postmodern architecture.

Mumbai is booming. The brand-new Atria shopping mall gleams and sparkles as brightly as any of its counterparts in North America. Luxury goods such as designer fashions, perfume, jewelry, and consumer electronics are every bit as expensive as they are in Europe. According to a front-page story in *The Hindustan Times*, prices for prime real estate are rising faster in India than almost anywhere else in the world. Quoting from the "Wealth Report 2007," the daily informed its readers that properties in top locations were selling for 40 to 50 percent more than just a year before; even in London's hot real estate market, the increase was only 30 percent.

But a closer look reveals that not all is as shiny and gleaming as it at first seems. Many of the shops in the Atria mall are vacant. Armed guards patrol outside the stock exchange and the Bank of India headquarters. A barber conducts his business on the sidewalk in the shade of a tree; small boys play cricket on an empty lot, barefoot amid clouds of reddish dust.

There are few countries where the gap between rich and poor is greater, the clash between old and new more startling. But India has also come a long way on the road to a better future. The success of its service and computer industries has given rise to a growing middle class. More and more citizens have attained a ▶

Center stage: The Cayenne has found its place in the hustle and bustle of Mumbai traffic



Keeping calm amidst the chaos: Motorcycle rickshaws still feature prominently in the Indian streetscape

degree of prosperity that, while modest by American or European standards, allows them to buy a car for the first time. True, the degree of motorization is still only about equal to the level reached in Germany in the 1950s. But in a country of 1.1 billion people, that adds up to a lot of cars.

No doubt about it: India is a country on the move. Highway 17, which runs for almost 650 kilometers (400 miles) along the coastal plain from Mumbai to Goa, was freshly paved just two years ago, and there's hardly a pothole anywhere to impede our progress. Nevertheless, we're grateful for the quality of the made-in-Weissach brakes as our Porsche propels us through the gently undulating landscape of the Concan coast—for there are plenty of cows, monkeys, and other traffic participants from the animal kingdom with little respect for cars, no matter what their make. The banyan trees lining the road, painted with red-and-white stripes, serve as guardrails. Signs by the side of the highway urge drivers to exercise discipline: "Control your nerves on curves." Driving down Highway 17, we see a rural India largely untouched by the economic boom. Interspersed among the fields are countless brickyards where bricks are made using methods that haven't changed in hundreds of years.

We stop by a turnoff in the road to take a break. A modest shack offers onions, eggs, and potatoes for sale. A big red pay phone is chained to the counter, covered in plastic to protect it against the ubiquitous dust. There is a rest area where truck drivers sit on ▶

Porsche India A Subcontinent for the Cayenne



The first Porsche in India was sold in April 2004. Currently there are about 500 Porsches in an area of about 3,290,000 square kilometers (1,270,000 square miles), 100 of which were sold in the past year. Porsche can already count a number of Bollywood stars among its customers. Unsurprisingly, given the not-always-ideal road conditions, the Cayenne is especially popular. The introduction of the Panamera is expected to increase demand even more; sales could triple in the next few years. Precision Cars India Private Limited, the official Porsche importer for India, is based in New Delhi. The office is now in the process of increasing its staff to 25 employees, who will coordinate all Porsche activities on the Indian subcontinent. Currently there are Porsche showrooms in Delhi and Mumbai.

wooden benches, drinking cola in the shade provided by a fig tree. A lot of love has gone into decorating their trucks: The wooden walls of the drivers' cabs are embellished with ornate carvings; in one, there is a painting of a Bengal tiger behind the driver's seat; another has a bumper sticker reading "Life is a sweet poison."

We resume our trip, and before we know it we are approaching Goa, the former Portuguese outpost that became known as a "hippie paradise" in the 1970s. Life in Goa was cheap: you could get a room for an entire month for 500 rupees—less than ten dollars. Young Westerners wishing to drop out of the rat race came here by the chartered planeload, lured by the low cost of living and Goa's legendary beaches, Baga and Calangute. For the most part, the police left them alone, and many stayed for years.

Some are still here today, though "there are only a few hippies left now," says tour guide Santosh Malkernek. Goa has changed a lot in the 26 years that Malkernek has been showing tourists around his native city. The once lovely tropical beaches have degenerated into sorry examples of the sleazier kind of mass tourism.



But there is still plenty to discover in Old Goa. In the days when it was the thriving hub of Portugal's empire in the East, it was a global economic center as bustling as Shanghai is today. Goa had several hundred thousand inhabitants in 1600, more than Lisbon itself, and supposedly was home to more churches than Rome. It boasts the finest examples of colonial architecture in India. Palaces and monuments such as the triumphal arch crowned with a statue of Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama testify to the city's former glory.

But for all the magic, walking through the streets of Old Goa is a slightly morbid experience. For Velha Goa is practically a ghost town—which is all the more odd considering that in other cities in India, there is hardly an uninhabited square foot to be found. A few rough-hewn shacks dot the promenade, offering soft drinks and french fries for tourists. A dozen churches and chapels in various states of disrepair surround a large park. A man herds water buffaloes past the snow-white facade of St. Cajetan, a replica of St. Peter's in Rome. The famous cathedral Sé has only one tower left; the other fell victim to a monsoon. Crooked bamboo scaffolding attests to tentative attempts to restore what was once the biggest church in the Eastern hemisphere.

Back in Mumbai, back to the more hectic pace of modern urban India. Our gaze wanders from Marine Drive over the bay to Malabar Hill. As dusk descends for a few brief moments, the cranes and half-finished buildings on the skyline disappear from view, and we are seemingly transported back in time. But the illusion does not last long: as soon as the lights in the skyscrapers go on, Mumbai assumes a face as modern as that of Manhattan. ◀

Consultant: Mukesh Varsani

**A country on the move:
India is on the road to the future**

