

OPEN LETTER TO FRANCISCO 'MICKKY' PACHECO (Tourism Minister)

DO YOU WANT TOURISM TO FLOURISH OR NOT?

What is your job? I understand it to be to promote tourism in Goa. Can I say that, if that is indeed your job, you are not making a particularly good job of it. The best way to increase Tourism (or any business) is to satisfy your existing customers, and then look out for new ones as well. Most business achieve organic growth by word of mouth recommendation. Many tourists who have been coming to Goa for a number of years, helping to build Goa into a tourist hot spot, are leaving in their droves vowing to never come back. You should remember that if 1 person likes something he is likely to tell 10 people about it. On the other side if that person doesn't like something he is likely to tell 100 people about it.

Facts

According to the British Government over 775,000 Brits visit India each year. Now if we assume that everyone of those spends at least Rs1 Lakh (I would suggest it is at least twice that figure) that equates to a minimum of Rs7,750 Crore of Foreign money being injected into the Indian economy each year. Figures quoted in the press suggest that for Goa the British tourists numbers are down by 30% this year and the number will be down to 40,000 (arriving by charter). This number ignore the increasing number arriving by scheduled airlines and it has been estimated that the split scheduled / charter is now close to 50/50. This means that there are still 80,000 Brits arriving each year which is some 10% of the tourists visiting India. Of these I conservatively estimate 5,000 stay for three months or more. To spell it out for you, that is 75,000 who spend at least Rs1 Lakh each and 5,000 who spend at least Rs4 lakh each. That equates to Rs950 Crore being injected into the Goan economy by the British people.

Just about everyone in Goa benefits financially from the Tourism industry directly or indirectly. It is easy to pick out those who benefit directly - the taxi and rickshaw drivers, hotel and apartment owners, restaurateurs, bar keepers, shack owners, shop keepers, street sellers, jewellers etc.etc. Also directly benefitting from the tourist trade are suppliers to the grocery shops, restaurants & hotels. We could also include the cleaners, gardeners, waiters, tailors etc. Then howabout the painters, plumbers, electricians, furniture makers and suppliers etc.

The VISA restrictions put in place this year will affect a large majority of the long stayers as well as a sizeable amount of the short term visitors.

Long Termers

Contrary to comments attributed to you, the majority of long stayers are not scroungers and do not rely on the state whether in the UK and especially not in India. We are (were) happy bringing our money here and spending that hard earned money on food, drinks, accommodation, transportation, clothing etc. The majority of us are not racist, and are polite and integrate into Goa and make friends with Goan people. Of course there are exceptions, but I am talking about the majority. Many of these people have been coming for years on long term 'X' visas and simply want to escape the "cold" weather back in the UK and relax in a friendly and hospitable place and make their home here. Many have residency in India (or are entitled to it), some have invested in homes here.

- Why have the Goan government been refusing to register some of these peoples deeds when they are "Resident in India"? For those who have registered their deeds and Agreements of Sale, why are they still being harrassed despite having followed all the rules?
- Why are 'X' visas no longer being issued to these people, when they relied on this Visa when deciding to invest their money in this state, and need this visa to be able to enjoy their legally owned properties?
- Why is this ridiculous two month rule being applied, when someone who say wants to stay for 3~4 months or longer in India, needs to go back to the UK e.g for a family emergency, for Christmas to be with family?
- Why are Visas valid from the date of issuance rather than date or intended date of arrival?

Short Termers

Currently the Brits who wish to come to India for 2~3 weeks have to pay an extortionate amount of money for a 6 month visa (approx £60 (Rs4,500) including Agency fees, postage). This is supposed to be a multiple entry visa. For a family of 4 coming over this is adding this is adding £200 (Rs15,000) tom the cost of their two week holiday. Therefore to make the most of this expenditure many frequently come 2 or 3 times a season. The two month restriction is hitting these people as well.

We all have a choice, the world is a big place and many countries issue visas on arrival. Some countries go out of their way to accommodate the large number of Brits (amongst others) who want to bring over their money and enjoy a warmer climate and easier way of life away from the stress of the UK. Malaysia and Thailand are just two examples who offer a settlement visa whereby provided you can prove your financial

stability they offer long term visas which are extendable. You and the Government of India are driving these people away and in the interim driving away the short term visitor as well.

And Finally.....

Most of the people who come to Goa, fall in love with the beaches, the sunshine, the warmth of the people and go home and tell people about it. This is the reason so many Brits have decided to try and make a life here, because the love(d) it. Many of those people are now disillusioned by the obstacles being put in their way and will not come back. They love(d) the place despite the corruption in every pillar of public service, despite the attempted rip-offs and overcharging, despite the rubbish and the many flaws in Goan society. They were happy to make a contribution to the economy and see the enrichment of the state. Last season many restaurants closed early in April because of lack of trade. This season the shacks were not operational until mid/late December. Within the space of a year you have reduced your season by half. Those people who came out in April will not return at that time of year. This season those people who came out in October/ November/ December did not go back with good memories and are unlikely to return at that time again. Your season next year may well be January to March

Burying your head in the sand.....

Two weeks ago, a report was in the press whereby hoteliers were complaining that despite slashing prices by up to 50%, business was still down. "However, tourism department officials claim that the season is good and the number of tourists visiting Goa is much more than those who visited last season. "Our figures collected from each registered hotel shows that the number of tourists who visited Goa is much more than last year," added Lyndon Monteiro, vice-chairman, Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC)."

Do you ever go out to meet the hoteliers, apartment owners and speak to your customers i.e tourists to see the problems they face?

Do you want tourists in Goa or not?

Simple question, if the answer is no - then that is what you will achieve by carrying on with the present situation. If the answer is yes, then let's see some action from Goa to petition the Government of India to reverse these ridiculous visa restrictions, and some action from the Goan government to stick to Indian law, issue Residency Permits, Register Deeds, and stop the harassment those of us who have legally bought properties

I would be glad to meet up with you to discuss this in a civilised fashion. I would like to think that a small number of affected Brits could join us together with some hoteliers as well. Your choice, I am just trying to help you do your job and so that you can see the situation for yourself . The editor has my contact details