

Coming up in Manesar: Wheels of Evolution

The first-of-its-kind museum in Gurgaon's neighbourhood will be showcasing the history of transportation in the country since 18th century

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Gurgaon neighbourhood is all set to get the country's first ever transport museum. Come this November and Manesar will be home to Heritage Transport Museum that will showcase the evolution of transportation in India with its extensive collection of both personal and public transport mediums, some even dating back to the 18th century.

Being built by Heritage Transportation Trust (HTT) founded by hotelier Tarun Thakral, the museum will come up on 6.5 acres of land near Manesar (Bilaspur Taoru Road, off NH 8). The location is 75 minutes south of Delhi.

Sharing the idea behind the initiative, Tarun Thakral said, "I have been collecting vintage cars for years now. There came a time when the collection grew out of my control as I could not maintain it. During my foreign trips I realized that every country has a transport museum but India even after being such a big country doesn't have any. We do have museums like the Rail Museum focusing only on Railways, the Airforce Museum that focuses on the aircrafts and the like but there is no comprehensive transport museum. That is when I decided to open a transport museum."

He added, "Moreover, transportation gets you emotionally connected. We all cherish the memory of the first Maruti or the Ambassador car that our father or grandfather

bought. And whatever number of times we may travel by air but every time an airplane takes off in the sky our eyes go up. With this transport museum we want to convey how transportation has changed our society and how close we have become. Today we can think of going to London in the morning and coming back in the evening but it wasn't the same earlier when the team boast use to run. Transportation continues to evolve and develop and we are all apart of it be it a child, a person on the road or a senior most person in a company."

The museum building is coming up at a cost of ₹12-13 crore of which ₹6 crore has been accorded as a grant by the Ministry of Culture. For the balance amount, the trust is trying to get community people and corporate involved for donations and sponsorships. There are multiple opportunities, available for amounts above ₹25 lakh, for sponsorship of exhibition galleries, exhibits, art work, conference rooms, wall spaces among others.

Earlier scheduled to have opened by March 2011, the project, Mr Thakral said, got delayed due to rains and hurdles alike. Mr Thakral says that all permission for the museum have been taken. "I had this agricultural piece of land in Manesar. We have taken all necessary permission to change the land use for opening a the museum."

Of the 6.5 acres of land, 3.01 acres is dedicated to the museum, which is designed by Gurgaon based Jyoti Rath & Associates and the house will exhibit galleries, restaurant souvenir shops, auditorium, conference rooms / meeting rooms and library and reference centre. "The additional 3.4 acres of land is allocated next to the museum for museum related activities. We would be offering rides in old carriages to anybody who pays for it. This way the visitor would not only see the things but also experience it. Also, it would generate a part of our revenues. We also plan to offer hot air balloon rides and getting things in place for it," informed Mr Thakral.

While the museum would use replicas to trace the ancient history of transport, it has an impressive collection of historic and modern transportation means, says Vikas Harish, the curator of the museum. Its present collection includes vintage carriages/carts/rickshaws/palanquin/victo-

rias, children's tricycles and pedal cars, vintage aircraft, vintage rail saloon, old lithographs/engravings on various modes of transportation used in India, old original photographs, post cards on modes of transportation, old rare books on transport history, license copies, old automobile spare parts in original boxes among many such other memorabilia.

The strength of the museum lies in its design that would be visual and interactive. All information would be provided through traditional text panels with an introductory short film sequence inserted into each space. "We have close to 35-40 plasma screens all over the place. Each section would have a short film that would run on a loop in a dedicated space. For example we would have old videos of people traveling in palanquin when the palanquin is displayed. Such videos which have been shot in India are being sourced from various parts of the world," said Mr Thakral.

Ticket for adults (both for a foreigner and an Indian) will cost ₹200 and ₹100 for children. The child will get a complementary souvenir such as a photograph in front of a vehicle. The museum, fully handicapped friendly, will also have a 3D mini auditorium which will talk about transportation.

"We are expecting 100 visitors per day. Our target visitors include school children and residents from Delhi, Gurgaon and adjoining areas like Rewari, Bhiwadi among others, engineering college and other college students, associates of auto manufacturing and component manufacturing companies, foreign and Indian tourists enroute from Delhi to Jaipur, weekend families looking for a destination, film companies, advertising agencies, among others," said Mr Thakral.

Adds Mr Thakral, "In the ever increasing urban spaces, with the satellite townships, there is a paucity of museums and museum like spaces that could provide a platform for family groups. Gurgaon is getting populated by the day and the only place most young parents can think of taking their kids to on weekends is the malls. There are parks but you really cant use them as weather conditions do not allow it and then you have all kinds of hooligans around. We are promoting this museum as a day destination where kids just do not come, see and go but also try to explore their own inner creative self."

Elaborating on the revenue model Thakral said, "We will have conference rooms on the second floor which would be an ideal venue for corporate houses to host meetings in a unique ambience. Manesar and Gurgaon are full of auto component companies that keep having small or even big conferences. We have already spoken to a few and they are very keen to organize their conference in the museum. In any case they spend money in having it in other hotels, so they might as well do it in the museum where they can get to see the museum as well."

Other sources of revenue include cafeteria that would provide refreshments and meals to the visitors, memberships, constantly changing smaller exhibits, nations of artefacts by fellow enthusiasts, display of cars and motorcycles by fellow enthusiasts, various structured weekend programmes for children, seminars, workshops on restoration and preservation.

To make sure that the museum is always evolving and repeat visitors have something new to view, the museum will have an on-going exhibition which would display collection of visitor collectors from all over the country for a period of three months in addition to that already on display in the exhibition galleries. The moving collection will be housed to accommodate over 25 exhibits. Also, the trust plans to tie up with transport museums around the world like the London transport museum to bring their display here and vice versa at some time of the year. This way the visitor will have something new to see every three months.

Calling the museum a great idea, Mr Madan Mohan, the founder and director of Gurgaon based restaurant 21 Gun Salute and an avid collector of vintage cars himself, said, "With this museum more number of people would be able to see the collections of vintage collectors which otherwise are just experienced and seen by close friends and relatives. This is the best way to give our next generation the heritage we have collected over the years."

To be maintained at a cost of ₹59,29,000 per year, the museum will be taken care by 51 employees. Dedicated team of professionals will manage the museum, including full time curator will manage museum exhibits on a regular basis.

