

TOURIST ADVISORY BOARD'S FIRST MEETING

The first meeting of the Tourist Advisory Board was held this morning in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Minister for Commerce and Industry, Mr. J.M. Jumabhoy, welcomed the members and thanked them for accepting his invitation to serve on the Board (the speech follows).

After the Minister's speech, the Committee elected Mr. Donald Erskine-Crum as Chairman and Mr. P.P. Ohrie as Vice-Chairman. The Board subsequently discussed Government's proposal to appoint a Director of Tourism and suggested means of further strengthening the Board in order to make its work the more effective. A small committee has been set up to make proposals on the members and functions of the working sub-committees of the Board. These will be considered at a further meeting next week.

After the meeting, the Chairman said the creation of this Advisory Board was a very welcome step which would go far to put Singapore on the world map of tourism.

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The Minister for Commerce and Industry, Mr. J.M. Jumabhoy said:-

I must first of all thank you for having accepted my invitation to serve on the Tourist Advisory Committee. I am sure that your individual knowledge of tourist promotion - your contacts with tourists and your knowledge arising out of these contacts - will be of great help in the deliberations of this Committee.

This is the first time in the history of Singapore that a concerted and organised effort has been made to promote tourism and to attract tourists to Singapore. In the past the tourist trade was taken rather passively. We have watched passively tourists visiting countries in this region but we have done nothing to attract tourists to Singapore.

The formation of this Committee is the first step taken towards setting up an aggressive, well planned machinery to attract tourists to Singapore. I hope that from now on there will be positive action to promote tourism and attract tourists to Singapore. Positive action should be the key note of all our efforts in this direction - positive action well thought out, planned and calculated and not action motivated by flights of fancy.

As you are aware, there is an increasing number of tourists from overseas, especially U.S.A., who are visiting the Pacific region every year and we must direct our efforts to getting a fair share of these tourists into Singapore. Many of you know that the Singapore Government is a full member of the Pacific Area Travel Association and also a member of I.U.C.T.O. You also know that the Pacific Area Travel Association Conference in 1959 will be held in Singapore, and therefore it is an added responsibility on us to have the promotion of tourism well under way by then. Mr. Bullard Secretary of this Committee will be attending the PATA Executive & Regional Commission for the Pacific & East Asia Conference in Tokyo at the end of this month.

The first sign of interest shown by the Singapore Government in tourist trade was when a meeting of all those who were interested in attracting tourists and who benefited by the tourist trade, was convened in 1955. I was in the Chair and I could then see that opinion was very much split as to whether Government or private interests should take the lead in promoting the tourist trade. A compromise was suggested by me that Government and the trade should go in as equal partners and bear the cost equally. That compromise was not accepted - there were many who thought that Government should bear the financial responsibility alone. A Working Party set up by this meeting, later recommended that the private interests should set up a Tourist Board to cooperate with Government but Government should bear all the costs.

Nothing therefore materialised in the interim period until I felt that something should be done by Government to take the lead in setting up some machinery in this direction. An expert was called from New Zealand and he submitted his recommendations in December last. His recommendations though good, were, I considered not sufficiently far reaching to tackle the problem effectively.

Though it is against all principles for Government to help those who do not want to help themselves, Government still decided to take the initiative in promoting tourism in the hope that private interests, when they saw the benefits accruing out of this promotion machinery, would rally round and shoulder their share of responsibility and financial burden.

As you know from the statement which I made in the Legislative Assembly in June, Government decided as a first step to recruit an expert from overseas to be the Director of Tourism to head a tourist section in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and also Government decided to seek approval from the Legislative Assembly, when the Director of Tourism had started his work, for a sum estimated to be in the region of \$300,000 for expenditure on promotion of tourism in the first year.

This Advisory Committee has been set up for me and the Director of Tourism, when appointed, to consult whenever we feel the need to have advice and guidance, and any advice which this committee gives will receive my careful consideration before I make decisions. Similarly any advice that the Committee should wish to give on its own instance, on subjects which are not referred to it, will also receive my careful consideration. Though I hope it will not occur, there may be times - and I hope there may not be many such occasions - when my decisions may not be in accord with the advice given to me by the Committee, but I am sure you will concede that since public money is involved I cannot tie myself down entirely to the Committee or its wishes. I hope that normally the advice given by the Committee will be acceptable.

That brings us to the next stage. It is Government's strong hope and desire that once the programme of tourist promotion is under way, private interests will come in and gradually take over the direction of promotion work, and also the financial burden. I am hoping that members of this Committee will sponsor the formation and be the nucleus of a tourist association in which every business organisation, big or small, catering for tourists, will be a member. Once such an association is formed, it would be possible for it to raise considerable funds from membership subscriptions. I would suggest a sliding scale depending on the type and size

of business ..... 3/-

of business so that maximum response can be got from all sections catering for tourism. If the subscriptions are too high, big firms will join but small shops may not be able to afford to join such an association. A sliding scale subscription will encourage everyone who caters for tourists to become a member.

It may also be possible for this Association to raise additional funds by selling advertising space in publications and guide books which the Association may wish to issue and possibly the Association may wish to issue and possibly the Association may even wish to request for advertising rights at the airport and the Port Passenger Terminal in the Harbour Board.

When this Association is formed, it could come in as a partner with Government, shouldering progressively a greater portion of the work of direction of tourism and the financial burden. In the last stage it could take the whole of tourist promotion work upon itself.

It must be made clear therefore that it is Government's intention only to initiate action in order to get the machinery in motion and then progressively to hand over the entire field to the trade. It is my intention to set up a Tourist Advisory Board as soon as a strong Tourist Association is formed and running well, and to give this Association progressively greater representation on the Tourist Board which may be set up later.

With this purpose in view I have chosen this Committee very carefully. Each of you has been chosen because you represent a certain segment of the tourist trade. There are represented here travel agencies, entertainment, business, hotels, shipping, air transportation and businesses and shops catering for tourists. It is my fond hope that the latter will assist this Committee in getting all the shops and business interests catering for tourists into the Association which I hope all of you will sponsor. Therefore one of your main functions will be to promote the formation and foster the growth of a strong Tourist Association. The other main function will be to advise the Director of Tourism and me on such matters as are considered necessary either when I consider it necessary or when you consider it necessary.

Such advice could also take the form of planning out what should be done to attract tourists to Singapore. Perhaps certain facilities and attractions should be provided and it will be your duty to advise as to how these should be provided in order to attract tourists to Singapore.

As in every case, there are sceptics who, in this instance, ask what has Singapore got to offer. They forget that Singapore is on the crossroad of South East Asia. The geographical position that has made us into an entrepot trading centre can also help us to be an entrepot tourist centre, where we could receive tourists and send them to areas in the surrounding region. In other words, Singapore can be the springboard of tourism in this region. Singapore is the meeting place of Chinese, Malaysian, Indian and Western cultures. Tourists who come here can see all the varying cultures here. It is possible that we may not have the same attractions as one can see in Hawaii or in Paris but

but other attractions could be provided in forms that are considered reasonable. Let us therefore ignore the wailings of these sceptics who believe that Singapore has nothing to offer. Go ahead with your positive planning - even aggressive planning, if need be.

I wish the Committee good luck and trust that concerted effort by Government and the trade will encourage a larger number of tourists to come to this place annually.

AUGUST 16, 1957.

(Time issued 1800 hours).