

Mumbai, India (HIStory World Tour)

Michael Jackson, handwritten note on hotel pillow, transcript, [“Condé Nast Traveller India” \(May 9, 2017\) \(archived\)](#)

India, all my life I have longed to see your face. I met you and your people and fell in love with you. Now my heart is filled with sorrow and despair for I have to leave, but I promise I shall return to love you and caress you again. Your kindness has overwhelmed me, your spiritual awareness has moved me, and your children have truly touched my heart. They are the face of God. I truly love and adore you India. Forever, continue to love, heal and educate the children, the future shines on them. You are my special love, India. Forever, may God always bless you.
Michael Jackson

[“Condé Nast Traveller India” \(May 9, 2017\) \(archived\)](#)

“Those were the days before Internet. I got a fax saying Michael Jackson would like to perform in India, and that he’d like us to organise the tour,” Viraf Sarkari, founder and CEO of Wizcraft International Entertainment, tells us about how it all began. “Obviously, we thought it was a prank.” Then, a few days later, came another fax with the same request. “We replied that we wouldn’t believe it till we heard it from Jackson himself.”

A few days later, Sarkari and his partner Andre Timmins were sitting in front of *the* Michael Jackson at a studio in Los Angeles. “We told him that if he cancelled we’d be finished.” But the King of Pop kept his word, and delivered one of the most iconic experiences in the history of Indian entertainment.

When Jackson arrived in Mumbai—freshly renamed from Bombay—on 30 October, 1996, the fan frenzy that greeted him at Sahar Airport was unprecedented. MTV India was just four days old then, but Jackson had been a star for nearly a decade. Over 5,000 fans had showed up for a glimpse of the pop-star. “People were screaming and shouting his name. It was sheer madness,” recalls journalist Neeta Kolhatkar, who was assigned by Aaj Tak to cover the event. Jackson stepped out of his private jet to a traditional Maharashtrian welcome. Bollywood actor Sonali Bendre, draped in a nine-yard saree, greeted him with an *aarti* and *teeka*. Outside the airport, a dhol and lejhim troupe was whipping up a frenzy. Jackson, dressed in his trademark red Napoleon jacket, hat and sun glasses, went from terminal right to the heart of this dance party. “My camera team and I cut through the crowd, and suddenly I found myself barely two feet from Jackson,” Kolhatkar says. “Celebrities usually hate journalists and crowds, but here he was, waving at me and dancing with the crowd.”

Jackson’s 30-car motorcade was meant to drive non-stop to The Oberoi hotel at Nariman Point. The person in charge had rehearsed by driving up and down at different times of the day over two weeks. But Jackson had other plans. He popped out of the sunroof of the Toyota—lent by Anil Ambani—at least twice to greet the crowds that had lined up the entire 15km route. At Dharavi, he even got off, and walked inside the colony to meet its residents. “It seemed like the entire city had turned up to welcome Jackson. From rickshawallahs to industrialists, his celebrity cut across all barriers,” Sarkari says.

At The Oberoi, special arrangements had been made for the star. At The Kohinoor Suite where he was staying, the dining table was removed to make room for extra mirrors. Because he had a

sweet tooth, chocolates were placed all over the suite—at the bedside table, sofa centre table, side tables—so that they were never out of reach. And the room temperature was kept very low—as he wanted it, confirms Sandeep Walia, who was the Butler Manager at the hotel in 1996.

Meanwhile, people were dying to get a glimpse of him. At the hotel, dancer Prabhu Deva, who has styled himself on Jackson, waited in the lobby all day, hoping for a chance meeting with his idol. Out on the street, hundreds of fans camped night and day. And across the city, people were pulling all possible strings to score tickets. “I discovered so many relatives in those two days,” Kolhatkar says. “Everyone wanted a piece of him. I knew businessmen who were offering bags of cash for a VIP pass at the concert. And yet, they couldn’t get in.”

It helped if you knew the right people. Wizcraft organised a meet-and-greet for a tight group of 50, where everyone from cricketing legends to industrialists to Bollywood stars queued up—literally—to shake hands with him.

On the night of the show, every single seat at the Andheri Sports Complex was sold out. Those who couldn’t get in jammed the streets outside. These were the days when noise control norms were still lax, and one could hear his music for miles. “People were going nuts—they were singing and dancing in the streets,” Kolhatkar recalls. Inside, Jackson did his thing: a dramatic entry from a rocket-like capsule, some tricolour waving to work up the crowd and a breathless performance of his greatest hits—it was everything you could ask for and then some. “It remains the best show I have ever seen,” Walia confirms.

Later that night, the singer returned to his suite, leaving a daze of fans in his wake. By 7am, the two Russian Anton cargo aircraft that brought in the equipment were back in the air. Michael Jackson’s first and only tour of India had been a success.

While the show remains a highlight, it is perhaps Jackson’s random acts of kindness that still linger. Like the pool party at The Oberoi that he hosted for kids from an orphanage. Or his impromptu invitation to the hotel’s staff to join him on the tour bus. Or the message that he left on the mirror in his suite, and the love note to India that he scribbled on a pillow, to be auctioned later for charity. At a time when artists demand a lot, here’s to those that gave back a lot more.

Chris Cadman, author. “Michael Jackson the Maestro”

Michael’s concert in Mumbai, India was the first and only time he performed in that country. He held a tea party at his hotel, the Oberoi Towers while in India, where he invited children from the local orphanages.

He later held a similar part in his hotel room for 50 children, where he provided hamburgers and cakes for them.