

Dealing with New Delhi Post Office

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The strange feeling of financial shock for sending one small document via DHL Delhi, had e rushing for New Delhi's Post. It was hidden away on the second floor of a building opposite the Relax hotel in Paharganj. A strange place for a post office, I was sure there was one away from the tourist mecca of Delhi.

Thankfully was only a short queue at one of the three little hatches. I waited patiently and listened as a male postal worker flirted openly with a young blond tourist getting stamps for her postcards. Aside from the flirting, it did not take too long. Up next a French Hippie girl with a parcel.

The man obviously did not like dark hair. He looked at he parcel in distaste, "Madam, you cannot be sending a package without a container."

The girl frowned. "But it is not okay like this?"

"Unacceptable."

"So ... what should I do?"

"Madam, you must be getting a container for your packages before you can be sending it."

The girl went into hippie mode. "And how much is this box?"

The man behind the counter was quite patient. "Well it could be costing you 90 Rupees, but it depen...."

"It is too much!" retorted the French girl, "I will not be paying this kind of prices. I shall find a box myself."

With this she turned and left.

I approached the man, box in hand. "I hope this box is strong enough?" I asked giving it a hard knock.

The man eyed me, and I had a feeling he knew I had listened in on the last conversation. "Yes sir, it is a very fine box. But you need to have it wrapped in materials before sending."

An argument here would not be good. I nodded and then thought ahead a little, predicting another possible outcome. I opened the lid. "Here, you will need to inspect the contents before they are sealed up."

The man stared at me for a second before the corner of his mouth went up in a gentle smile. He wobbled his head as gave the boxes contents a poke around.

I headed back down to the street in search of a man to stitch up my parcel in material. The French girl was there, looking angry. Apparently a man was trying to direct her to a parcel wrapper who could also provide a box. I interjected and said I wanted to have mine just wrapped. We walked two stores down to a clean shaven little old man sitting behind a large black singer sewing machine.

The French girl asked about the box.

The old man produced a nice looking generic shoe box that fix her plastic bag of contents nicely. The cost including wrapping was 50 Rupees. The girl freaked out again saying it was outrageous.

"How much for the wrapping of this?" I asked over her shoulder.

The sewing man looked up at me, "Twenty."

"Done, let's do it now."

He took my parcel as the French girl stormed off mumbling about the cost of a box.

I looked on and was impressed with the care and precision the old man took in measuring out a piece of white cloth. And then the care he took in sewing up my parcel. It was worth the cost of just watching him alone. I had him then repair a small hole in my shirt. He refused to give me a price on the shirt repair.

"What ever you think it is worth."

I handed him over 100 Rupees for everything.

I returned to the same little hatch at the post office just as an old English lady was leaving with a cluster of forms and a confused look on her face. The man was gone and in his place was a rather large lady.

"You are intending to send this?" She said staring at my now neatly wrapped package.

I nodded.

"You will be needing to have its contents opened for inspection," she said wobbling her head at my parcel.

They were all sadistic pricks I figured. "Already done," I said with a forced smile as I leaned past here ample frame into the office. "There that man," I said pointing at the first man I dealt with. "He inspected it already, I just want to pay now."

She waggled her head. Paused. And then produced four forms for me to fill out. They must have a strange fetish to take enjoyment in all this. I filled the forms out and waited. 20 minutes later another man came to the hatch and signalled me through to the inner office.

Inside it was neat, apart from a large heap of parcels under one of the desks. I grew discouraged that all this was quite fruitless if that's where the parcel was going, and no further.

I had my forms inspected, and was then asked to rewrite the address on the parcel in a big black marker that was handed to me. From there the original man appeared and began typing in the address the parcel was destined for on his quite new looking computer. The only problem was that there was only room enough for the first address line, and the country of destination. No more address could be entered. Hence the big pile of parcels were probably returns.

"No problems sir, do not be worrying," he reassured me.

"You are sending by air mail okay," the second man said in more of a statement tone than questioning.

I asked the cost and time frame of sea mail. And, in fairness they did make the effort to take another 10 minutes in rummaging through several ledgers to find out.

"Five hundred rupees," frowned the first man after tapping digits into a calculator.

"And how long to get there?" I enquired curiously.

They both stared at each other. The first man wagged his head, "three months, maybe five."

"But it will get there? Yes?" I frowned back.

He frowned a little back at me, then smiled, then wagged.

"I will go with air mail then!" I wagged back.

They both wagged in satisfaction and fifteen minutes, minus eighth hundred rupees later I was issued a receipt as I watched my parcel being tossed into the giant pile under the desk.

Outside the main office I saw that the French hippie girl was back at the hatch with a rather beaten up cloth sewn parcel. I left just in time to hear the first man tell her that it needed to be opened up for inspection. Followed by much French profanity.