

# Travel & Tourism



"ON the left hand side of the aircraft you will see the highest mountain in the world, Mt Everest." Evocative words from a Chinese air hostess begins the fulfillment of a childhood dream — going to Shangri-la. But, like Puff the Magic Dragon when his playmate Jacky Paper grew up, dreams have to adapt to reality. Visiting Tibet today is like the proverbial Curate's Egg, only good in parts.

The plus side starts with the spectacular vista flying in from Kathmandu. With the plane at the normally respectable altitude of 9,000 metres, the impossible white Himalayan summits, especially Mt Everest at 8848 metres, seem only a hand-stretch away. With over fifty 7,000 metre peaks to choose from, the visual impact skimming along the great range is far greater than flying across the Alps. As if that were not enough, the remaining hour-long flight into Lhasa crosses a lunar landscape whose desert-like buff and pink colour shades interlaced with the turquoise beginnings of some of the sub-continent's major rivers is truly awe-inspiring. Though breath-taking, the scenery remains some of the bleakest one is ever likely to see in an inhabited country.

The 100 km drive from the show-piece airport reinforces the sense of difference and strangeness. The quality of light in the rarefied cold air. The aridness. The virtual absence of trees. Squat box-type farm houses corralled behind low grey mud brick walls with five-coloured Buddhist prayer pennants fluttering from every chimney turret, are the only signs of life dotting an otherwise desolate valley. The occasional yak-hide coracle being paddled across the river comes

## "Tibet: The World's Roof Top"

by Robin Davies

straight out of a history book. Each image indelibly framed by bare beige mountains hilling a horizon topped by a cloud-free sky of cobalt blue.

Like Athens and its Acropolis, Lhasa is dominated by the 1,000 room 17th century Potala Palace; the home of the Dalai Lamas. Although the present incarnation fled to India in 1959 to escape Chinese rule, the strikingly sheer white and brown facade remains a potent national symbol. In the near distance lameries hug steep slopes their steps a thoroughfare for burgundy-robed monks and women in thick padded clothes twirling prayer wheels that endlessly repeat their silent refrain — aum mani padme hum!

An explanatory leaflet read on the spot adds meaning to the well-known six syllables. Aum means the last word to be spoken after which there is only silence. Mani padme are Sanskrit words meaning jewel in the lotus while Hum is a mystic term of defiance to deter demons. Like saying "so, there!" at the end of a declaration.

Jokhang temple, Lhasa's religious centre, with its banks of prayer wheels, numerous chapels full of depictions of Buddhist deities and child-scaring demons, all yellow-lit by melted butter lamps, is the place to see prostrating worshippers, monks and lamas — a term for monks that have attained a particularly high spiritual attainment. However, except for the Tibetan enclave around Barkhor Square, where vendors from tiny stalls deftly marry religiosity

with aggressive selling of knick-knacks, the rest of the city is bland and of limited interest. Lhasa's soul has been lost to Chinese urban functionalism.

Though travel outside the city is primitive and hard, it is eminently worthwhile for the views and the chance of seeing vestiges of old Tibetan

life. The crystalline clarity of each day is an added bonus. It seems to etch every scenic vista along the valley floor with a 3-dimensional focus. Yaks, Tibet's long-haired oxen appear particularly black against pale brown fields; as one speedily appreciates, green is an unfamiliar colour. Clusters of wall-enclosed simple white-washed

houses with the main entrance topped by yak skull and horns catch the passing eye. Groups of sturdy people with faces like waxed mahogany stare at the rare appearance of traffic as one bounces past. Occasional four-sided nomad tents made from yak hair can be seen on the distant tableland. Most of the dusty way, the blue-green

river that flows into India to become the mighty Brahmaputra meanders past immense sandbars. A photographic break in the desolate background.

One of the main monasteries, Gander, reached after a bone-shaking drive up a dirt road that corkscrews to the site at 4,800 metres, is like entering a time warp. Despite the evident wanton destruction by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, it still conveys an idea of a unique culture with its staunch belief in cause and effect. Seeing the ruins in such an isolated spot makes Tibetans' belief in the existence of wrathful deities and phantoms seem less fanciful.

The downside of the trip is the inescapable mountain sickness — like having a monumental hangover without the benefits of the preceding binge. However hardy a traveller, adjusting to the high altitude can prove exhausting or worse. Probably why oxygen is made available at the Holiday Inn. In addition to coping with ultra-thin air — Lhasa is at 3,600 metres. Basic facilities outside the main hotel are basic and not helped by the lack of heating anywhere; outside Lhasa they become primitive in the extreme. Local Tibetan cookies, particularly tsampa (tea flavoured with yak butter and salt), is off-putting as is the depressing thought that Tibetans and their culture now exist as a sort of human zoo preserved for tourists to China's new model Autonomous Zone.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of green clad Chinese soldiers, visiting such an isolated country remains immensely rewarding, not just for the extraordinary scenery but also to have confirmed one's faith in Tibet's human resilience.



Tibetan countryside.

At last the great day came — the day on which we had planned to go to Cox's Bazar by Car. As the day drew near, my excitement increased to a great degree and I got busy in packing my clothes in my small suitcase. I got up very early in the morning although I used to get up late.

Early in the morning, my father got the car ready. We had our breakfast. I could hardly eat due to excitement. We all stepped in — my two brothers, sister and my parents. My brother took the wheels. He pulled the starter and the car sprang to life, ready for the long journey from Comilla to Cox's Bazar.

The morning was bright and it promised a sunny day. But after an hour, little patches of clouds gathered over sky and spread all over. Suddenly, it started raining and my brother slowed the speed of the car. I peeped through the window of the car and was thrilled to see the green fields of paddy and jute as far as the eye could go. This was my first experience of driving through the country side. Some fields on both of the road were under water and I was amazed to see some children rowing a small boat in the paddy field. My brother explained to me that the field had enough water to permit the boat to move. At about noon, we halted opposite a tea-stall by the road side. The rain had ceased. We got hot cups of tea from the stall and ate some sandwiches which we brought with us. After our wayside snack we started again. The road was narrow and at some places it had heavy traffic. Heavy loaded trucks passed us. Every time a truck came dashing towards us, I felt it would crash against our little car, but my brother managed it well and we had no accident. We were all in high spirits. The car sped past green fields, straggling hamlets, fields under water, crossing several bridges, small and big, till at last we approached the built up area of Chittagong. Here the traffic was heavy, town buses and rickshaws crowded over the roads and lots of people swarmed all over.

"Here comes Chittagong" shouted my brother. "You know Chittagong has an interesting history," said my father. "Yes I know," my brother wanted to show his knowledge and added, "In the Seventeenth Century, it was burnt by the Portuguese, but they were driven away by the Moghal Governor of Bengal; Shaista Khan. Importance of Chittagong has again increased after freedom." ("It has grown with the extension of our trade and commerce.)

Chittagong is the fountain of prosperity to East Pakistan. "It is also a port town. Many navigable ship can cast anchor in Chittagong docks," my mother added.

We stopped at a hotel and stayed there for the night. We took meal in the hotel. The town is like any other town in East Pakistan. Quaid-e-Azam spoke of the town as Gateway of Pakistan.

After meal, my brothers and I went up the Fairy Hill on which stands the Chittagong Collectorate and District Judge's Court. We stood there and saw at a distance the nice meandering river, Karnafully, going down to meet the sea at Patenga. The

boats and steamers looked so small. The beautiful bungalows on hill-tops increased the beauty of the town. The trains appeared to be so many small toys. We appreciated the scene. The sun made the surface of the sea aglow with a red light.

Next day we started for our destination — Cox's Bazar. The road was narrow but fine. It twisted and turned through thick forest. It climbed up small hills, covered with thick foliage and tall trees. Suddenly, at one point we found the road blocked. A big crowd was standing in the middle of the

road and we had to stop. "What was the matter?" we enquired, we were told that a wild Buffalo has been trapped and it was going to be slaughtered ceremoniously, as it is done every year in this part of the hill-tract. We climbed down from the car. There under the tree lay, all tied up with strong ropes a buffalo of immense size, snorting furiously and struggling to get up. His eyes were blood-shot and horns pointed and curved like a dagger. We were told that in that part of the hill, there were large number of wild buffaloes and every year the villagers managed to trap one or two. They

were sacrificed on the Tomb of a local saint and the meat distributed to all the villagers. We learnt that last year a wild buffalo was caught but somehow freed himself from the ropes and while escaping goaded a man to death.

At last from a mile, as we approached Cox's Bazar, we could hear the sound of the sea waves, beating against the shores. But we could not see the sea till we took a turn in the road, suddenly a magnificent view burst upon our eyes. There was the sea, waves upon waves, piling upon each other. We shouted and clapped. I had never

seen a sea before.

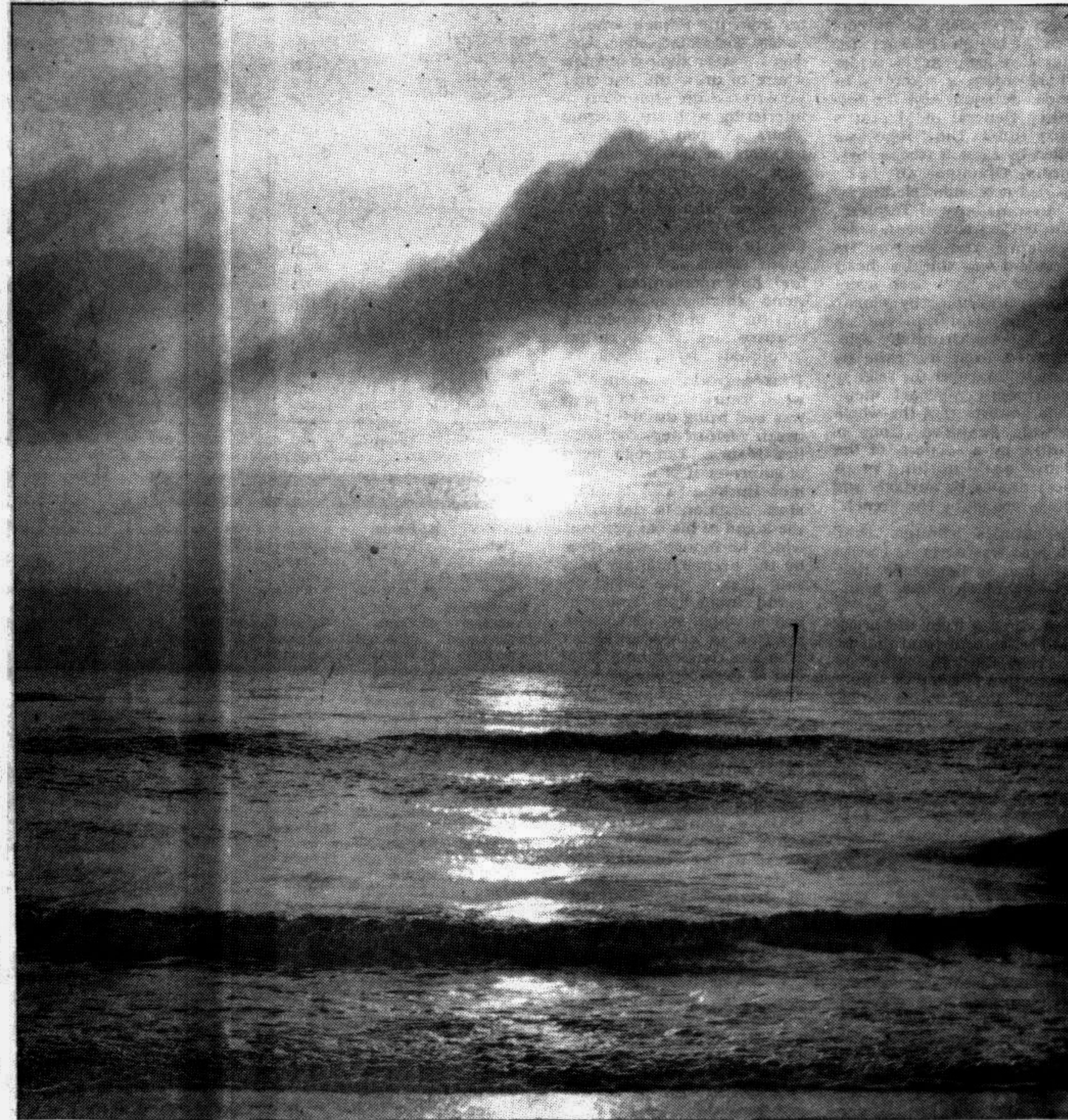
We went straight to a hotel and fixed up 2 rooms for us to stay. It was getting dark and so we were not allowed to go to see the sea in darkness. But from the room of our hotel we could hear the roar of the mighty sea, swelled by the incessant rains, angry waves followed each other and dashed over the sandy beach. There was a rhythm in the sound. We listened to the music of the waves from the room and could hardly sleep due to excitement.

I was the first to wake up in the morning. It was almost dark. I peeped through the window and could see in the far off horizon, a red glow. The dawn was breaking. I woke my brothers. They all got up and we quickly dashed out of the room, barefooted towards the sea beach. It was close by. We all ran on the sands. They were cool soft and I had a strange feeling when we stood close to the water. The dawn was breaking and there was enough light and we could see stretched before our eyes the wide sea. How wonderful it looked! The waves came mounting one after the other, as if chasing each other and dashed against the beach. We were wet up to the knee, the waves receded and we stood on dry ground. Every time, the waves came rushing towards us we clapped and waited with suspended breath, till they spread all over the sands. We saw some big trees floating over the bosom of the sea. My brother told me that they were uprooted by the flood and swept off to the sea. Large number of such trees are hauled up by the people and later sold as timber to merchants.

We could never get tired of playing with the waves, but our parents called us to the hotel to have bath and meal. I had an idea that we would bathe in the sea and I said so, but my parents did not agree to send us to bathe in the sea.

In the afternoon we walked miles on the seashore. It was all sand, soft and plain. In our walk we collected seashells. They were of various shapes and sizes and some of them were beautifully designed and coloured. Who did that? It must be a great artist who designed and painted these small shells. We brought a large collection of these shells and now they adorn our drawing room.

After staying a couple of days, we returned to Dhaka. We had a smooth drive. The memory of the sea is fresh in our mind and at times, I can hear the rhythmic sound of the sea-waves. The sea is majestic and so is the creator.



The golden sun shimmering on the sea water as it goes below the horizon.

— Source: Degonto

## Travel Briefs

**New ideas work:** A core group of Atlanta employees in a joint union management partnership have scored a milestone in heavy maintenance. They completed a DC-9 heavy maintenance check in just under 10 days — less than half the average.

The secret to the test period is a joint union-management focus on new work processes and procedures — developed through the building for the future programme. — Northwest Airlines

**Northwest Trade Show:** The Northwest 'In the Know '96' trade show is ready to roll. The event is being held at the Mall of America exhibition hall on Nov. 8 and 9.

The show will feature more than 600 booths staffed by representatives from ground operations, in-flight services cargo etc. — Northwest Airlines

**China grants KLM navigation rights:** China has granted navigation rights to KLM to traverse Chinese airspace for services to Hong Kong. The new route flies via Kazakhstan, north of the Himalayas, and across China. This will mean cutting distance, flying time and costs for KLM flights to Hong Kong. — Northwest Airlines

**Biman loses traffic right:** The Bangladesh Biman, whose Dhaka-New York flights used to touch at the Dutch capital lost its traffic rights in Amsterdam in a row of over-handling of KLM flights in Dhaka airport.

In a letter on October 28, the Netherlands Civil Aviation authority informed Biman of its decision of scraping the traffic right of Biman's flight en route to New York. — BD Shipping Times

**BA runs more flights:** The British Airways (BA), eyeing vast market potentials in South Asian countries, has resumed its service at the end of October to Sri Lanka, with flights twice a week from London Gatwick to Colombo, via Abu Dhabi.

Next summer, BA will boost its flights to India to 16 a week. — BD Shipping Times

**Congestion at Aricha:** Sudden rush of loaded trucks, inadequate number of ferries and fall in the water level of the Padma-Jamuna have led to a serious traffic congestion at Aricha ferry ghat.

The congestion also caused by the recent strike disrupted the road communication between the capital and 36 northern & southern districts. — BD Shipping Times

**Singapore flies jumbo Boeings:** Singapore Airlines will become the world's largest operator of the Boeing 747-400, the most advanced version of the renowned "jumbo" jet, when it takes delivery of its 34th, B747-400.

SIA has branded the passenger and freighter versions of its B747-400s the MEGATOP 747 and MEGAACK. — BD Shipping Times

**Dhaka gives transit rights to Nepal:** Bangladesh has given transit rights to landlocked Nepal to use the south-eastern Chittagong port for onward shipment of imported goods to the Himalayan Kingdom. India has also allowed such goods to be transited through its land routes. — BD Shipping Times

**Airline News:** Royal Jordanian has opened a new composite repair shop at its Queen Alia International Airport engineering and maintenance base.

A maintenance base for Macau Airport has been planned to open by MASC-Ogden Aviation Services. — Asian Aviation

## Northwest readies to accept 1st of 15 new Boeing 757s

NORTHWEST will take delivery in November of the first of 15 new Boeing 757s. It will be the first new aircraft to enter Northwest's fleet since two A-320s in May 1993.

The 757 has many attributes to love. According to Boeing literature, the plane can climb faster and higher than any other single-aisle twinjet. It's known for its fuel efficiency. And it can be used at airports limited by runway length, high altitude, hot weather and weight restrictions.

Northwest uses the 757 on short, medium and long-range flights. For example, from Detroit to Chicago (235 miles), Minneapolis/St. Paul to Toronto (679 miles), and Memphis to San Francisco (1,807 miles).

The 15 new 757s, which will be delivered through July 1996, will be added to routes throughout the system. They will be added to Northwest's current 757 subfleet of 33, ultimately bringing the total to 48.

Technical operations will incorporate close to \$ 2 million worth of modifications on the new aircraft. Engineering has developed 42 projects and supporting aircraft documentation in support of this effort. The projects include installation of the Hughes-Avicom Video Entertainment Systems in the ceiling above the aisle, emergency equipment, interior partition, a passenger boarding music system, and miscellaneous placards and hardware.

"Getting new airplanes has caused a shift in activity in that they require a significant amount of advanced preparation to ensure a smooth entry into service," said Loren Morris, manager-757 fleet. "Many departments and people are involved in this process, and I am confident that we will be successful in this effort."

### A close-up look

The new 757s will look a little different than the 757 aircraft currently in the sys-

tem. The interior side panels are white instead of brown. The seats are the slimline model like those used in the newly remodeled DC9-2000s. The first class closet has been relocated further forward. All of the interior changes have allowed Northwest to increase the seating capacity by 10.

### Benefits to Northwest

In addition to providing more seating space, the new aircraft will also offer some benefits to the technical operations area.

The aircraft also have some added features from an engineering standpoint.

The 15 new deliveries also will incorporate new, more reliable products not currently installed on Northwest's existing 757 fleet. Examples include an Allied Signal Flight Data Acquisition System (FDAMS), Allied Signal ARINC 900 series navigation, and communication systems previously certified on the Boeing 777, a JAMCO Laboratory Smoke Detection System, and an improved Fuel Quantity Indication System (FQIS) manufactured by Simmonds Precision.

The changes in the new Boeing 757s are significant enough so that the airline has given the new fleet its own designator code. The code will allow the airline to more easily track the fleet for comparison purposes.

"Everyone I come in contact with is looking forward to the arrival of new airplanes," said Morris. "The new 757s offer the promise of performing even better than the present 757 fleet, which is among the best of all the subfleets Northwest operates."

Source — Passages