

[Asia](#) > [South Asia](#) > [India](#)

India

India ([Hindi](#): भारत or *Bhārat*), the largest country in [South Asia](#), has many of the world's highest mountains, most populated cities, and longest rivers. As one of the great civilisations of the ancient world, India's heritage and culture is a rich amalgam of the past and present. This vast country, the most populous in the world, offers the traveller a view of fascinating religions and ethnography, a smorgasbord of languages, diverse food, and architectural masterpieces that were built millennia ago and remain intact today. As the nation opens up to a globalised world, India still has a depth of history and intensity of culture that awe and fascinate the many who visit there.

Regions

India is administratively divided into 28 states and 8 union territories. The states are broadly demarcated on linguistic lines. They vary in size; the larger ones are bigger and more diverse than some countries of [Europe](#). The union territories are usually much smaller than the states—sometimes they are just one city—and they have much less autonomy. India has two island chains off the mainland – the [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#) in the Bay of Bengal and the [Lakshadweep](#) in the Arabian Sea.

The states and union territories are grouped by convention into the following regions:

Himalayan North ([Jammu and Kashmir](#), [Ladakh](#), [Himachal Pradesh](#), [Uttarakhand](#))

Mountainous and beautiful, a tourist destination for the adventurous and the spiritual. This region contains some of India's most visited hill stations and religious places.

The Plains ([Bihar](#), [Chandigarh](#), [Delhi](#), [Haryana](#), [Madhya Pradesh](#), [Punjab](#), [Uttar Pradesh](#))

The plains, India's breadbasket, are watered by the holy rivers Ganges and Yamuna and their tributaries. The region also features the country's capital, [Delhi](#), [Agra](#) of Taj Mahal fame and the holy cities of [Mathura](#), [Prayagraj](#), [Varanasi](#) and [Bodh Gaya](#). Many of the events that shaped India's history took place in this region.

Western India ([Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu](#), [Goa](#), [Gujarat](#), [Maharashtra](#), [Rajasthan](#))

Home to the vast Thar Desert; the colourful palaces, forts and cities of Rajasthan; the country's most vibrant and biggest city, [Mumbai](#); the mesmerising rock-cut caves of Ajanta and Ellora in Maharashtra; pristine forests; the wonderful beaches of Goa; the Asiatic lions of Gujarat in Gir jungles; and the rapidly developing cities of [Ahmedabad](#), [Surat](#), [Jaipur](#) and [Pune](#).

Southern India ([Andaman and Nicobar](#), [Andhra Pradesh](#), [Karnataka](#), [Kerala](#), [Lakshadweep](#), [Pondicherry](#), [Tamil Nadu](#), [Telangana](#))

Features famous and historical temples, tropical forests, backwaters, beaches, hill stations, and three big cities of [Bangalore](#), [Chennai](#), [Hyderabad](#) and other smaller cities. The city of [Mysore](#) is world-renowned for its palaces, especially the Mysore Palace. The

island groups of Andaman and Nicobar (on the east) and Lakshadweep on the west, included in this region for convenience, are far from the mainland and have their unique characteristics.

Eastern India (Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Sikkim, West Bengal)

Economically less developed, but culturally rich and perhaps the most welcoming to outsiders. Features Kolkata, once the capital of British India, and the temple cities of Puri, Bhubaneswar and Konark. The region stretches from the mountains to the coast, resulting in fascinating variations in climate. It is also the mineral storehouse of India, having the country's largest and richest mines.

North-Eastern India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura)

Insular and relatively virgin, this is the country's tribal corner, with lush, beautiful landscapes, endemic flora and fauna of the Indo-Malayan group and famed tea gardens. Consists of seven states popularly known as the "Seven Sisters". The world's oldest polo ground, the world's only floating national park, the world's only women-run market and the world's tallest topiary plant can be seen in Manipur. The state of Meghalaya is depicted as the "Scotland of India" because of its mesmerising environment.

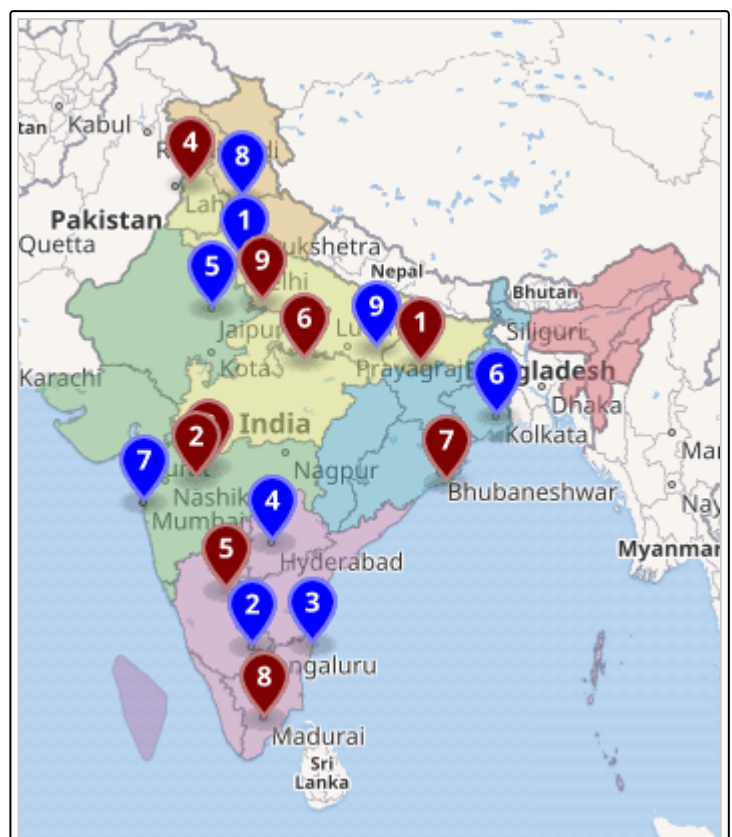
Cities

These are some of India's most notable cities. Other cities can be found under their specific regions.

- **1 Delhi** — the capital of India and the heart of Northern India
- **2 Bangalore** (*Bengaluru*) — the beautiful garden city, once the sleepy home of pensioners, now transformed into an IT hub for high-technology companies and sprouting pubs.



Map of India's regions and states — [switch to interactive map](#)



Map of India's regions and states — [switch to static map](#)

- **3 Chennai** (*Madras*) — the main port in Southern India, cultural centre, automobile capital of India
- **4 Hyderabad** — known for pearl and diamond trading, and for the classic Indian rice dish biryani, now with major manufacturing and financial institutions
- **5 Jaipur** — the Pink City, a major exhibit of the Hindu Rajput culture of medieval Northern India
- **6 Kolkata** (*Calcutta*) — the cultural capital of India, known as the City of Joy, and home to numerous colonial buildings
- **7 Mumbai** (*Bombay*) — the largest city and the financial capital of India, the city that never sleeps, home of "Bollywood", the Hindi film industry
- **8 Shimla** — capital of Himachal Pradesh, perched high on the Himalayas, more than 2 km above sea level
- **9 Varanasi** (*Banaras*) — considered the most sacred Hindu city, on the banks of the Ganges, one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world

Other destinations

India has many outstanding landmarks and areas of outstanding beauty. Here are some of the most notable.

- **1 Bodh Gaya** — the main temple complex, which includes the Mahabodhi temple, is the place where the Buddha Sakyamuni attained enlightenment
- **2 Ellora** and **3 Ajanta** ^w — spectacular rock-cut cave monasteries and temples, holy place for the Buddhists, Jains and Hindus
- **4 Golden Temple** ^w — Sikh holy site in Amritsar
- **5 Hampi** — the awesome ruins of the empire of Vijayanagara
- **6 Khajuraho** — temple complexes famed for their erotic sculptures
- **7 Konark** — Sun Temple, a unique example of Kalingan architecture, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site
- **8 Meenakshi Temple** ^w — a spectacular Hindu temple in Madurai
- **9 Taj Mahal** — the incomparable marble tomb in Agra, one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World

See also:

- **Forts and palaces of India**
- **Indian national parks and wildlife sanctuaries**
- **Indian zoos and botanical gardens**
- **Natural wonders of India**
- **Sacred sites of the Indian subcontinent** ^w
- **Hill stations in India** ^w
- **UNESCO World Heritage List (India)**

Understand

One thing that foreign visitors need to know is that India is, in many ways, heterogeneous. If they experience one set of behaviours from the locals in one part of the country, it does not mean that the same behaviour is common in another area. To give a very simple example, a taxi driver in Mumbai will

without saying a word drop their meter flag and return the exact change, while in Delhi you have to tell the driver to use the meter and hope you get your change, and in other areas taxi drivers don't even have meters and have fixed the rates for even short distances, and you just pay the amount demanded; if you do get an honest driver, consider yourself lucky. India shows extreme variation in most things, and one needs patience and luck to find the best. Never assume you know everything about any aspect of India; be prepared to see completely new things every day.

Indian civilisation has been hugely influential throughout history, and many of the cultures of Southeast Asia exhibit strong Indian influences. Some Indian influences have also seeped into the cultures of East Asia through the spread of Buddhism.

History

See also: South Asian history


Humans are thought to have first migrated into the Indian subcontinent around 70,000 BCE, and there are some archaeological sites for Stone Age India. One important one is at Mehrgarh (Pakistan), with the oldest known evidence of agriculture in the subcontinent, around 7000 BCE.

The **Indus Valley Civilisation** (3300-1300 BCE) was one of the world's first Bronze Age civilisations and very advanced for its time. At its peak (2600-1900 BCE), it covered most of what is now Pakistan, plus some of northern India and eastern Afghanistan. The two biggest archaeological sites, both in Pakistan, are Mohenjo-daro and Harappa.

Some time after 2000 BCE, the **Aryans**, herdsmen from somewhere to the northwest, migrated into the region. At about the same time, related groups invaded Greece (Hellenic Greeks displacing Minoans), Anatolia or Turkey (the Hittites), Persia and other areas. It is believed that all these tribes spoke related languages and many modern languages, including most of those spoken in northern India, Europe and some in Central Asia, are descended from them. Linguists classify them all in the Indo-European language family.

The **Vedic Period** is dated to roughly 1500-500 BCE. This was the period when the **Vedas**, the oldest and holiest books of **Hinduism**, were compiled. They were in an Indo-Aryan language, Vedic Sanskrit. Although few details and archaeological findings are available for this period, many rituals of Hinduism took shape during that period.

The Vedic civilisation influences India to this day through the dharmic religions. Present-day Hinduism traces its roots to the Vedas, but is also heavily influenced by literature that came afterwards, ranging from the **Upanishads** and **Puranas** to the great epics — **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata**. By tradition,

	
Capital	New Delhi
Currency	Indian rupee (INR)
Population	1.3 billion (2020)
Electricity	230 volt / 50 hertz (Europlug, AC power plugs and sockets: British and related types, BS 546)
Country code	+91
Time zone	Indian Standard Time, Asia/Kolkata
Emergencies	112, 100 (police force), 101 (fire department), 102 (emergency medical services), 108 (emergency)
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Hindu pilgrims bathing in the Ganges at Varanasi

these texts are claimed to only expand and distil the knowledge that is already present in the Vedas.

A section of the Mahabharata called the **Bhagavad Gita** is among the most widely read works. The Gita is said to be a concise summary of the four Vedas of Hinduism. Kaal (Kshar Brahm) is said to have described the knowledge of the Gita in 700 verses of 18 chapters after entering Krishna's body. It is a dialogue, just before a great battle at Kurukshetra between the hero Arjuna and the God Krishna, who serves as his charioteer. Today, Kurukshetra is a destination for both pilgrimage and tourism.

In the 1st millennium BCE, various schools of philosophical thought developed, enriching Hinduism greatly. Most of them claimed to derive from the Vedas. However, some of these schools, two of which were **Buddhism** and **Jainism**, questioned the authority of the Vedas, and they are now recognised as separate religions.

Many great empires arose between 500 BCE and 590 CE. Notable among them were the **Mauryas** and the **Guptas**, both with their capital in the city of Pataliputra, now called Patna. The Gupta Empire (3rd century CE to 590 CE) is often called the **Golden Age of India**. Further west, the Gandharan civilisation (an independent kingdom, later part of the Maurya Empire) ruled much of what are now Pakistan and Afghanistan. Their city Taxila was a great centre of Buddhist and other learning.

Over time, there was a gradual decline of Buddhism and Jainism. The practice of Buddhism, in particular, disappeared from India's heartland, though Buddha himself was incorporated into the Hindu pantheon. Jainism continues to be practised by a significant minority who are ambivalent about whether they consider themselves Hindus or not. Hinduism itself went through major changes. Vedic deities such as Indra and Agni became less important while Puranic deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, their various Avatars and family members gained prominence.

Islamic incursions started in the 8th century. Gradually, the raiders started staying as rulers, and soon much of North India was ruled by Muslims. The most important Muslim rulers were the Mughal Empire that at its peak covered almost the entire subcontinent (save the southern and northeastern extremities), while the major Hindu force that survived in the North were the **Rajputs**. The bravery of the Rajputs in resisting an invasion of their land is legendary and celebrated in ballads all over the forts of Rajasthan. Prominent among the Rajputs was **Maha Rana Pratap**, the ruler of Chittorgarh, who spent years in exile fighting **Akbar**, the third of the Mughals. Eventually, however, the Rajputs were subdued.

Some Mughal armies had a high proportion of Rajput officers, although some Rajput rebellions still occurred during the reign of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. This period of North India produced the monumental gems of Rajasthan and the Taj Mahal. Hindi and Urdu also took root in medieval North India. During the Islamic period, there were Hindus who converted to Islam, often forcibly, or to avoid the Jizya tax, as told by Muslim chroniclers. Today, around 15% of India's population follows Islam.

Sikhism, another major religion, was established in Punjab during the Mughal period. Relations between Sikhism and the Mughals varied over time. The **Golden Temple** at Amritsar was built and recognised all over the world as Sikhism's foremost pilgrimage centre. By the time of its tenth Guru however, **Guru Gobind Singh**, relations were hostile, primarily due to the antagonism of **Aurangzeb**, the most



Jama Masjid, Delhi



intolerant, brutal and bigoted of the Mughals. Conflict between the Sikhs and the Mughals was one of the causes for the eventual decline of the Mughal Empire. Another reason was the rise of the **Maratha Empire** in Maharashtra, which was started by **Shivaji** and carried on by the **Peshwas**. The Marathas established a short-lived confederacy that was almost as large as the Mughal Empire. Marathas lost their command over India after the third battle of Panipat, which in turn paved the way for British colonialism. Twelve military forts from the Maratha period, mainly in the western part of Maharashtra, have been designated by UNESCO as the world heritage site Maratha Military Landscapes of India.

South India followed a different trajectory, being less affected by Islamic rule. The period from 500 to 1600 CE is called the classical period and was dominated by great South Indian kingdoms. The most prominent empires included the **Chalukyas**, **Rashtrakutas** and **Vijayanagara** who ruled from present day Karnataka and the **Pallavas**, **Cheras**, **Pandyas** and **Cholas** who ruled from present day Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Among them, the Cholas, who ruled from various capital cities including Thanjavur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram, are widely recognised to be the most powerful of the South Indian kingdoms, with their territory stretching as far north as Pataliputra and their influence spreading as far east as Sumatra, western Borneo and southern Vietnam at the height of their power. Some of the grandest Hindu and Jain monuments that exist in India were built during this time in South and East India.



Shore Temple (c. 700 CE),
Mamallapuram

Northeast India was also fairly isolated from the rest of the country until the colonial period. The largest and longest kingdom to rule over the Northeast were the **Ningthouja dynasty (33–1891 AD)** of Manipur, followed by the **Ahoms** who, from the 13th to 19th centuries, successfully defended Assam and neighbouring regions from Mughal expansion.

European traders started visiting India beginning in the late 16th century. Prominent among these were the British, Dutch, French and Portuguese. The British East India Company made Calcutta their headquarters in 1772. They also established subsidiary cities like Bombay and Madras. Calcutta later went on to become 'the second city of the empire after London'. By the 19th century, the British had, one way or the other, assumed political control of virtually all of India, though the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French too had their enclaves along the coast. The British would send Indian labourers, policemen and soldiers all over the Empire, resulting in the establishment of Indian diaspora communities, the most notable ones in Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Fiji, South Africa, Mauritius, Kenya, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom itself.

There was an uprising by Indian rulers in 1857, which was suppressed, but which prompted the British government to take over from the Company and make India a part of the empire. This period of rule by the crown, 1858–1947, was called the British Raj. It was a period in which some Indians converted to Christianity, though forcible conversions ended in British India after 1859, and Queen Victoria's proclamation promised to respect the religious faiths of Indians.

Non-violent resistance to British colonialism led by **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi** led to independence on 15 August 1947. However, independence was simultaneously granted to the secular Hindu-majority state of India and the smaller Muslim-majority state of Pakistan, and the orgy of Hindu-

Muslim bloodletting that followed **Partition** led to the deaths of at least half a million and the migration of 12–14 million people.

India achieved self-sufficiency in food grains by the 1970s, ensuring that the large-scale famines that had been common are now history. However, these policies also led to shortages, slow growth and large-scale corruption. After a balance-of-payments crisis in 1991, the country adopted free-market reforms, which have continued at a steady pace ever since, fueling strong growth. The IT, Business Process Outsourcing and other industries have been the drivers for the growth, while manufacturing and agriculture, which have not experienced reforms, are lagging. About 60% of Indians live on agriculture and around 36% remain in poverty.

Relations with Pakistan have been frosty. The two countries have fought four wars, three of them over the status of Kashmir. The third war between the two countries in 1971 resulted in East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh. India continues to experience occasional terrorist attacks, many of which are widely believed to originate in Pakistan and be ordered or assisted by its military-intelligence complex.

China and India went to war in 1962 over a Himalayan border dispute. Current relations are largely peaceful but tense. There are no land crossings allowed between the two countries, though one border crossing between Sikkim and Tibet was re-opened in 2006 for trade. Security concerns over Pakistan and China prompted India to test **nuclear weapons** twice (including the 1974 tests described as "peaceful explosions"). India wants to be accepted as a legitimate nuclear power and is campaigning for a permanent Security Council seat.

India is proud of its democratic record. Constitutional government and democratic freedoms have been safeguarded for most of its time as an independent country.

Current concerns in India include corruption, poverty, overpopulation, pollution and forms of environmental degradation, ongoing border disputes with Pakistan and China, cross-border terrorism, and ethnic, political and religious strife, which occurs from time to time. India's current obsession, at least among the educated elite, is over whether India will be able to overtake China in economic growth and be an economic and military superpower. Today, many Indians regard their country to be the voice and leader of the entire Global South in international politics.

Politics

India is a parliamentary republic and democracy modelled on the British Westminster system. The president, indirectly elected, is the head of state, but this position, while not entirely ceremonial, has limited powers. The prime minister runs the government with a cabinet of ministers, and in practice wields the most authority in government. The parliament is bicameral. The Lok Sabha (House of the People), the lower house, is directly elected by universal adult franchise, while the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), or the upper house, is indirectly elected. The Lok Sabha is the more powerful of the two, primarily because a majority in the Lok Sabha is required to form a government and pass budgets, and the prime minister, by convention, is always a member of the Lok Sabha.

India is also a federation, divided into states and union territories. Each of these has its own legislature, with a government run by a chief minister and a cabinet. Each state or union territory is divided into multiple districts, which are in turn divided into multiple smaller divisions, depending on the state or union territory in question.

There are two types of local government in India: the **urban local bodies** (ULBs) for cities and towns, and the **panchayati raj** (literally the "rule of five officials") for the remaining countryside. The urban local bodies include municipalities, municipal corporations, cantonments, nagar/town panchayats, notified area councils etc. The panchayati raj is divided into three levels or tiers: **gram panchayats** for individual villages, **panchayat samitis** for groups of villages, and **zila panchayats** (or zila parishads) for districts.

India has a vast number of political parties. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is the current ruling party and other political parties part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) the government, and the centre-left Indian National Congress (INC, simply known as "Congress") is the main opposition party, which is part of a larger opposition bloc made up of many political parties called the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

India has a strong and independent judiciary and a free press.

Street demonstrations, protests and agitations occur, as they do in any democracy. There are also occasional low levels of political violence, in which a visitor has an extremely small chance of getting caught.

Time zone

Indian Standard Time (IST) is 5 hours and 30 minutes ahead of Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC+5.5). Daylight Saving Time is not observed in India.

Geography

India covers an area of 3,287,263 square kilometres (1,269,219 sq mi), making it the world's seventh-largest country, the third-largest country in Asia (if you count Russia), and the largest country in South Asia. India is three times smaller than the United States, half the size of Australia, and nearly 11,000 times larger than Asia's smallest country, the Maldives.

Mountains, jungles, deserts and beaches, India has it all. It is bounded to the north and northeast by the **snow-capped Himalayas**, the tallest mountain range in the world. In addition to protecting the country from invaders, they also feed the perennial rivers **Ganga** (Ganges), **Yamuna** (Jamuna) and **Sindhu** (Indus) on whose plains India's civilization flourished. Though most of the Sindhu is in Pakistan now, three of its tributaries flow through Punjab. The Ganga has two tributaries, of which the **Bhagirathi-Hooghly** runs over India and is the lifeline of West Bengal. Both tributaries eventually meet at the Bay of Bengal, forming both the largest river delta and the largest mangrove forest in the world.



The Rashtrapati Bhavan (literally the "President House") in New Delhi



Loktak lake, the world's only floating lake.

The other Himalayan river, the **Brahmaputra**, flows through the northeast, mostly through Assam, where it is known by different names. The **Manipur River**, originating in Manipur, joins the Chindwin-Irrawaddy River System of Myanmar.

South of Punjab lies the **Aravalli** range, which cuts Rajasthan into two. The western half of Rajasthan is occupied by the **Thar** desert. The **Vindhyas** cut across Central India, particularly through Madhya Pradesh and signify the start of the **Deccan** plateau, which covers almost the whole of the southern peninsula.

The Deccan plateau is bounded by the **Western Ghats** range (which is called **Sahyadri** in Maharashtra) to the west and the **Eastern Ghats** to the east. The plateau is more arid than the plains, as the rivers that feed the area, such as the **Narmada**, **Godavari** and the **Kaveri**, run dry during the summer. Towards the northeast of the Deccan plateau is what used to be a thickly forested area that covers the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, the eastern edge of Maharashtra and the northern tip of Andhra Pradesh. This area is still forested, poverty stricken and populated by tribal people. This forest acted as a barrier to the invasion of South India.

The **world's only floating lake** is Loktak Lake in the central bowl like plain of Manipur. It is remarkably known for its unique circular floating biomasses (Manipuri: Phumdi).

India has a long **coastline**. The west coast borders the **Arabian Sea** and the east coast the **Bay of Bengal**, both parts of the Indian Ocean.

Climate

In India, it rains only during a specific time of the year. The season as well as the phenomenon that causes it is called the **monsoon**. There are two of them, the **Southwest** and the **Northeast**, both named after the directions the winds come from. The Southwest monsoon is the more important one, as it causes rains over most parts of the country, and is the crucial variable that decides how the crops will do. It lasts from June to September. The Southwest monsoon hits the west coast the most, as crossing the Western Ghats and reaching the rest of India is an uphill task for the winds. The western coastline is therefore much **greener** than the interior. The Northeast monsoon hits the east coast between October and February, mostly in the form of occasional **cyclones** that cause much devastation every year. The only region that gets rains from both monsoons is North-Eastern India, which consequently experiences the **highest rainfall in the world**.

India experiences at least three seasons a year, **Summer**, **Rainy Season** (or "Monsoon") and **Winter**, though in the **tropical South** calling the 25°C (77°F) weather "Winter" would be stretching the concept. The North experiences some extremes of heat in Summer and cold in Winter, but except in



Lakshadweep Islands



Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir



the Himalayan regions, snow is almost unheard of. November to January is the winter season and April and May are the hot months when everyone eagerly awaits the rains. There is also a brief spring in February and March, especially in North India.

Opinions are divided on whether any part of India experiences an **Autumn**, but the ancients had certainly identified such a season among the **six seasons** (or *ritus* - *Vasanta* - Spring, *Greeshma* - Summer, *Varsha* - Rainy, *Sharat* - Autumn, *Hemanta* - "Mild Winter"/"late autumn", *Sheet* - Winter) they had divided the year into.

Culture

India's rich and multi-layered cultures are dominated by religious and spiritual themes. While it is a mistake to assume that there is a single unified Indian culture, there are certainly unifying themes that link the various cultures. India's cultural heritage is expressed through its myriad of languages in which much great literature and poetry has been written. It can be seen in its music, both in its classical (Carnatic and Hindustani) forms and in modern Bollywood music. India also has a vast tradition of classical and folk dances. Art and theatre flourish amongst the bustling cities of the country, against the backdrop of the ever-expanding western influences.

Indians greatly value their family system. Typically, an Indian family encompasses what would be called the extended family in the West. It is routine for Indians to live as part of the paternal family unit throughout their lives, i.e. sons live together with their parents all their lives, and daughters live with their parents till they get married. The relationship is mutually self-supporting. Parents may support their children for longer than is common in the West, brothers and sisters may support each other, and sons are expected to take care of their parents in their old age. "Living with parents" does not carry the same stigma as it does in parts of the West. Naturally, the arrangements are not perfect and there are strains and breakups, especially by the time the third generation grows up. Also, it has now become common for children to move away from the parental house for education and employment. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the extended family is still seen as the norm and an ideal to aspire to, and Indians continue to care about their family's honour, achievements and failures even while they are not living together.

Culture shock

Many visitors expecting maharajas and fabulous palaces are shocked when their first impressions are dominated by poverty instead. Prepare for the following:

- **Attention** – Some people will unabashedly stare at foreign tourists, who can also be magnets for persistent touts and beggars. People may shove their mobile phone in your face and take pictures; just turn your head. Beggars, especially malnourished children and the badly deformed, can be particularly disturbing.
- **Crowds** – Many of India's streets, markets and bazaars are jam-packed with people, vehicles and at certain times, animals, and streets tend to be narrow. If you ever travel the cheapest class in buses or trains, these will also get packed a lot, which might be exhausting.
- **Dogs** – Stray dogs can be found everywhere in India. Their behaviour can be anything from lying around not caring about people or aggressively barking at them. Sometimes they roam the streets in packs. Either way, it is best to stay away from them, even if they seem friendly. There are no countrywide rabies vaccination programs for dogs in India and you never know their health status.

Despite the weakening of the caste system (which has officially been outlawed by the Indian government), India remains a fairly stratified society. Indians care more about a person's background and position in society than is the norm in the individualist West. This attitude, when combined with the legacy of colonial rule, results in some rather interesting, if unfortunate consequences. People with white skin are placed high on the societal totem pole, and they may find that Indians are obsequious towards them to the point of embarrassment. People with dark skin, however, may find that they are discriminated against. If it is any consolation, Indians display similar prejudices based on skin colour and ethnicity among themselves and not just towards foreigners. See more in the [#Stay Safe](#) and [#Respect](#) sections.

There is also a community known as the Siddis, who are believed to be descended from East African slaves brought to India by the Arab Slave Trade, and mainly found in remote rural villages. Although they speak Indian instead of African languages these days, they still retain many African customs including African dance and music. Although they are Indian citizens, due to a lack of awareness from the general Indian population of their existence, they continue to face much discrimination, and are often presumed to be illegal immigrants from Africa. British colonisation also gave rise to a mixed-raced population known as the Anglo-Indians, and while most of them migrated to Western countries following independence, pockets of these communities remain in India's major cities.

Holidays and festivals

There are three national holidays: **Republic Day** (26 January), **Independence Day** (15 August), and **Gandhi's Birthday**, generally called **Gandhi Jayanti** (2 October) which follow the Western calendar and occur on the same day every year. Hindu religious festivals, because they follow the lunisolar calendar, occur on different days every year, but around the same time of the year every time. The major religious festivals of Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism are also celebrated. Central government offices are closed for holidays around 17 days a year for these festivals and observances. The significance of these festivals differs across different regions of India. State government offices will have a different holiday schedule based on which festivals are important in that state. Generally, the day on which the state was formed will also be a holiday in that state.

Some of the major Indian festivals are:

- **Diwali** (Deepavali), Oct-Nov — The festival of lights, celebrates the return of the Hindu God Rama to the capital of his kingdom, [Ayodhya](#) after an exile of 14 years and victory of justice over injustice when Narakasura was killed by Satyabhama with the help of Krishna. Probably the most lavish festival in the country, reminiscent of Christmas in Europe or

- **Filth** – Dirt, refuse and insects abound in the cities. The roadside can sometimes be a urinal. Roads are also often dusty because the asphalt is missing in some parts, so if travelling by bus, be quick in closing the window if it is the right time.
- **Noise** – Drivers lean on horns, radios and TVs blare Bollywood tracks, and even temples, mosques and churches use loudspeakers to spread their message. The function of using the horn while driving is to make yourself noticed to the other drivers or to pedestrians — Indians will often enter the road without looking right or left, they will just expect someone to sound the horn if there is danger.
- **Pollution** – Most North Indian cities—especially New Delhi—suffer badly. Exhaust combined with dust can make the drier seasons a nightmare for asthma sufferers.

Most visitors quickly get inured to these things that are pitfalls of urbanisation and start seeing the good sides too, but take it easy on your first few days and schedule some time to get away from it all.

Thanksgiving in the US. Houses are decorated, there is glitter everywhere, and if you wander the streets on Diwali night, there will be firecrackers going off everywhere including sometimes under your feet.

- **Ugadhi**, [sometimes also called 'Yugadhi' and various other names] is one of the main festivals, which is mainly celebrated as the 1st day of the Hindu Calendar New Year. Which is one of the main festivals and is quite widely followed in South India.

- **Durga Puja / Navaratri / Dussehra**, Sep-Oct — A nine-day festival culminating in the holy day of Dussehra, when locals worship the deity Durga. Workers are given sweets, cash bonuses, gifts and new clothes. It is also a new year for businesspeople when they are supposed to start new account books. In some places like West Bengal and Odisha, Durga Puja is *the* most important festival. In the north *Dussehra* celebrations take place and the slaying of Ravana by Lord Rama is ceremonially reenacted as *Ram Lila*. In Gujarat and South India, it is celebrated as Navaratri where the festival is celebrated by dancing to devotional songs and religious observances like fasts extended for nine nights.

- **Holi**, in March — The festival of colour is a major festival celebrated mainly in North, East and Western India. On the first day, people go to temples and light bonfires, but on the second, it's a water fight combined with **showers of coloured powder**. This is not a spectator sport: as a visible foreigner, you're a magnet for attention, so you'll either have to barricade yourself inside, or put on your most disposable clothes and join the fray. Alcohol and *bhang* (cannabis) are often involved and crowds can get rowdy as the evening wears on.

- **Ganesh Chaturthi**, is celebrated all over India. Ganesh Chaturthi is the festival of Lord Ganesha. Ganesh Chaturthi is most enjoyed in Maharashtra. It is the best time to visit cities like Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur.
- **Christmas** and **New Year's Day** are public holidays across the country and Bank Holidays as well. Christmas is a major festival in the regions of Kerala and Goa.
- **Eid-al-Fitr**, **Eid-al-Adha**, **Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi**, **Yawm-e-Aashoor** and **Ramadan** are widely celebrated and observed as public holidays across the country.



Diwali lighting



Durga Puja



Dagdusheth Halwai Ganesha Idol during Ganesh Chaturthi 2013

Apart from these, each state has its major national festival like **Onam** in Kerala, **Makar Sankranti** and **Ugadi** in Andhra Pradesh, **Utarayan** in Gujarat, **Pongal** in Tamil Nadu, **Baisakhi** for Punjab, Bihu for Assam, **Rathayatra** (car festival for Lord Jagannath) in Odisha, **Nuakhai** for Western Odisha. India is a diverse nation, and festivals are a significant part of life for the locals, they provide holidays for about a week.

Religious holidays occur on different days each year because the Hindu and Islamic festivals are based on their respective calendars and not on the Gregorian calendar. Most of them are celebrated only locally, so check the state or city you are visiting for information on whether there will be closures. Different regions might give somewhat different names to the same festival. To cater to varying religious practices, offices have a list of **optional holidays** (called **restricted holidays** by the government) from which employees are allowed to pick two, in addition to the list of fixed holidays. This may mean thin attendance and delayed service even when the office is officially open.

Read

- *An Era of Darkness* by Shashi Tharoor. Thought provoking account of how the British Raj impoverished the country and caused humanitarian crises.
- *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie's allegory about Independence. It was awarded the "Booker of Bookers" Prize and the best all-time prize winners to celebrate the Booker Prize 25th and 40th anniversary. It was also adapted into a film by Indo-Canadian film director Deepa Mehta (2012).
- *The India they saw : foreign accounts*, by Meenakshi Jain (2011). A compilation of intriguing travel tales and excerpts from travelogues by travellers, writers, pilgrims and missionaries.
- *A Goddess in the Stones: Travels in India* by Norman Lewis (Cape 1991; US: Holt 1992), In "Goddess in the Stones", influential journalist and author Norman Lewis undertakes a journey of 2500 miles in search of the old India.
- *India: A History*, John Keay; "A superb one-volume history of a land that defies reduction into simple narrative ... Without peer among general studies, a history that is intelligent, incisive, and eminently readable." (ISBN 0802137970)
- *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, V.S. Naipaul; "With this book he may well have written his own enduring monument, in prose at once stirring and intensely personal, distinguished both by style and critical acumen" (ISBN 0670837024)
- *In Spite of the Gods*, Edward Luce; an exceptionally insightful and readable book on the unlikely rise of modern India. (ISBN 0316729817)
- *No Full Stops In India*, Mark Tully; "India's Westernised elite, cut off from local traditions, want to write a full stop in a land where there are no full stops. From that striking insight, Mark Tully has woven a superb series of stories that explore everything from communal conflict in Ahmedabad to communism in Kolkata, from the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad (probably the biggest religious festival in the world) to the televising of a Hindu epic." (ISBN 0140104801)

Kashmir dispute

India and Pakistan have a bitter dispute over Kashmir; each government claims territory that is under the control of the other. They have fought wars over this three times since independence in 1947. China also claims portions of Kashmir and fought two wars with India over the dispute in 1962 and 1967.

Wikivoyage, however, deals *only* with the current situation on the ground; our maps show and our text describes that without taking sides on the disputes. If you can go there with a Pakistani visa today then we treat it as being in Pakistan, and if you need an Indian visa, we treat it as being in India. This is the most important distinction for travellers.

Visitors should exercise considerable caution in these areas. Both governments consider them highly sensitive, keep large military forces along the border, and restrict travel to border areas.

- *Mother Pious Lady*, Santosh Desai; An excellent account of middle-class beliefs and customs from the pre-liberalisation era till date. For anyone who wants to understand the culture of present India, this is a must-read where the author cuts through the chaos and confusion letting you see things more clearly. (ISBN 9788172238643)
- *Indian journals, March 1962-May 1963: Notebooks, diary, blank pages, writings*. Ginsberg, A. (1970). San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books. Travel diary written by the famous beat poet Allen Ginsberg.
- *Lion: A Long Way Home*, a book by Saroo Brierley.
- *Spiritual India handbook: A guide to temples, holy sites festivals and traditions* by Stephen Knapp (2013). Useful for the pilgrim who wants to get the most out of his or her spiritual adventure and experience in India.

See also the Wikivoyage article [On the trail of Kipling's Kim](#).

Tourist information

- [Incredible India \(https://www.incredibleindia.org\)](https://www.incredibleindia.org) tourism website

Talk

At the federal level, the official languages of India are **Hindi** and **English**. Most Indians are multilingual, with many being proficient in more than one language.

Other languages that are official to some degree (often at state level) are **Assamese**, **Bengali**, **Bodo**, **Dogri**, **Gujarati**, **Kannada**, **Kashmiri**, **Konkani**, **Maithili**, **Malayalam**, **Manipuri** (also known as Meitei), **Marathi**, **Nepali**, **Odia** (also known as Oriya), **Punjabi**, **Sanskrit**, **Santhali**, **Sindhi**, **Tamil**, **Telugu** and **Urdu**. There are also hundreds of less prominent languages like **Tulu**, **Bhojpuri** and **Ladakhi**.



A trilingual sign in Meitei, Hindi, and English in [Manipur](#)

Hindi is spoken by 40–50% of the population and serves as the "lingua franca" of Northern India. However, its use at the national level is sometimes a point of contention due to India's linguistic diversity. Very little Hindi is generally spoken in Southern and North-Eastern India. There are also over 120 Hindi dialects in India. One of them is Haryanvi, which is a common dialect around Haryana and the Delhi area.

English is spoken in urban areas, and is the main language in higher education and business. It serves as the de facto lingua franca of the country. Indian English is generally based on British English, but has also acquired a uniquely Indian flavour. Perhaps the most common jibe about the dialect is its use of "improper" grammar, which can sound strange to English speakers from other countries. Indian English is often spoken with a strong accent, which varies depending on the speaker's native language, and incorporates several words from the local languages that are not used in other English dialects, which can make it tricky for non-native English speakers from elsewhere to understand. Learning the basics of Hindi and/or the local language is useful when travelling to rural areas, as English proficiency is limited there.

Some features of Indian English:

- The most commonly used tag question is "*isn't it*", which can be used to indicate a genuine question (e.g. *He is from Tamil Nadu, isn't it?*), sarcasm, bewilderment, and so on.
- Nouns are commonly pluralised (e.g. *A room full of furnitures, stuffs for eating* as opposed to *A room full of furniture or stuff for eating*)
- Verbs conjugate differently (e.g. *I knowed about it* or *I buyed it* as opposed to *I knew about it* or *I bought it*)
- Colloquialisms, slang words and idioms, some of which may be perceived as rude or impolite by non-Indians, are common (e.g. *Hello, what you want?* as opposed to *Hello, what do you want?*)
- Prepositions and articles are often dropped or combined strangely (e.g. *I want computer* as opposed to *I want a computer*)
- The use of some vocabulary and expressions not used with the same meaning elsewhere (e.g. *vote bank*, which means a group of people that supports a particular political party)

English-language TV shows and movies are common, and the number of English TV channels outnumber the number of Indian-language TV channels. Some shows may be dubbed in another language depending on where you are. Cable TV channels often have an option to select from multiple audio languages.

Sanskrit is the language in which much of ancient Indian literature and religious texts are written. Today Sanskrit survives primarily as a liturgical language; few if any people speak Sanskrit as a native language, but quite a few scholars or lay-persons know it or are learning it. Many modern Indian languages are descended from Sanskrit, and even those unrelated to Sanskrit have been strongly influenced by it.

While most north Indian languages, including Hindi, are descended from Sanskrit, the main languages of the south – Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam – originate from a different ancestral language and are called the Dravidian languages. Ironically, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam are far more Sanskritic than Hindi due to the relative absence of Islamic rule in those regions. In North Eastern India, Manipuri or Meitei is a language of the Sino-Tibetan family, related to Chinese, Burmese and Tibetan, making it distinct from other Indian languages.

However, you are better off picking up as many words as you can of the local language of the place you are going to – people are proud of their state's (or region's) culture and language and will appreciate it if an outsider makes an attempt to communicate in it. Code-switching between English and the local language is common among the urban youth, although most educated people would speak standard English (British) when talking to foreigners.

Many Indian languages lack a word for please, just like the Scandinavian languages. Instead, verbs have many forms denoting levels of politeness and formality. As there is no such distinction in English, Indians may also seem commanding to a westerner. You may hear phrases like *come here* which may sound commanding to Anglophones from Western cultures, but this is not intended to be rude.

Non-verbal communication is also important. Much has been made of the confusing Indian head nod for yes and no, but the only important thing to understand is that Indians have **different nods for yes, ok and no**.

- If they are nodding their head **up and down**, they mean **yes** or **I agree**, as in a standard nod.
- If they are shaking their head in a **tilting motion** from right to left and back, they mean **I understand** or **I get what you said**.

- If they shake their head sideways (left to right to left), they mean **no**.
- There are differences in the way these signs are used in northern and southern India. The back to forth is yes and a vigorous left-right shift is no in northern India, though the latter may be construed for yes in southern states like Tamil Nadu. Look for verbal cues that accompany these sounds (like 'aaan' for yes) in southern India to get the correct meaning.

Get in



Visa restrictions:

Certain states in India require permits to visit. Citizens and former citizens of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, China (including Hong Kong and Macau), and Myanmar are usually not eligible for them unless they have special permission from the Home Ministry.

- A Restricted Area Permit (RAP) is required to enter parts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and parts of Sikkim. Citizens and former citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan are required to get a RAP to visit any part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- A Protected Area Permit (PAP) is required to enter Arunachal Pradesh, and parts of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Rajasthan, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand.
- An Inner Line Permit (ILP) is required to enter Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, or Nagaland if you are a citizen of India. Most foreigners can visit without the permit but must register with the local police on arrival. In addition, an ILP is required for all visitors to Sikkim regardless of citizenship, but foreigners can usually get one at the border.

If you are planning to visit any of these areas, you should request the relevant permit when applying for your Indian visa, and it will be added to your visa if approved. This however is not possible with the easily obtainable ETA/e-Visa, but just with regular visas.



Visa restrictions:

All existing valid visas (except for long-term visas and diplomatic and official visas) issued by India to Pakistani nationals stand revoked with effect from 27 April 2025. Medical visas issued to Pakistani nationals will be valid only till 29 April 2025. All Pakistani nationals who are in India must leave India before the expiry of visas

(Information last updated May 2025)

Entry requirements

Visa

India's once notoriously convoluted visa system has been drastically simplified with the introduction of the **e-visa**, which is now available to citizens of 166 countries including all the usual suspects, and is covered in detail below. Notable exceptions include the following:

Holders of an Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) document are permitted to stay in India indefinitely and have the same rights as any Indian citizen, enjoying the prices of Indian citizen at tourist attractions. However, they must apply for permits to visit certain areas in India, cannot buy agricultural land and cannot vote in any election. The OCI certificate is not under any circumstances a proof of Indian citizenship, and the country that you are a passport holder of is still able to offer consular assistance.

Citizens of **Nepal** and **Bhutan** may enter and live in India indefinitely without a visa.

Citizens of **Maldives** may stay up to 90 days without a visa.

Citizens of **Japan, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates** are eligible for visas on arrival and may stay for up to 60 days.

Citizens (current or former) of **Afghanistan, North Korea** and **Iran** require a minimum of 4 weeks waiting time for their visa.

A **business visa** may be required if you intend to do anything work related in India (OCIs are exempt from a business visa). The ETA does permit "casual business visits" and will be easier to obtain. If you do need a business visa, then be prepared to provide a great deal of documentation about your company in your home country as well as the company you are visiting in India. This will include (but may not be limited to) an invitation letter from the company that you are visiting as well as business registration documents and possibly tax returns and other sensitive documents. It may be worth applying for a short-term visa (such as 6 months) since the criteria may be less in your case.

A special 10-year visa is available to nationals of certain countries, including U.S. citizens (US\$100).

Regular visa applications for U.S. citizens (for travellers not eligible for ETA) begin at **VFS Global** (<https://services.vfsglobal.com/usa/en/ind/>) before being submitted to a visa application centre either by FedEx or in person.

It is always good to ask for a **multiple-entry** visa even if you are not planning to use it—they cost the same, are handed out pretty liberally and come in handy if you decide last minute to dip into one of the neighbouring countries.

Regular visas can be applied for through the **Government of India website** (<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/index.html>).

Pakistani citizens



Visa restrictions:

All existing valid visas (except for long-term visas and diplomatic and official visas) issued by India to Pakistani nationals stand revoked with effect from 27 April 2025. Medical visas issued to Pakistani nationals will be valid only till 29 April 2025. All Pakistani nationals who are in India must leave India before the expiry of visas

(Information last updated May 2025)

Pakistani dual citizens are not permitted to enter India on their other passport.

If you have renounced your Pakistani citizenship, you are eligible to apply for an Indian tourist visa, but you must submit the original copy of your certificate of renunciation when applying for your visa, and you will be limited to only a single-entry 3-month visa.

ETA / e-Visa



Visa restrictions:

If you, or any of your parents or grandparents has ever been a citizen or permanent resident of Pakistan, you are not eligible for the ETA, and must apply for a visa in person at an Indian diplomatic mission.

(Information last updated Mar 2020)

An *Electronic Travel Authorization* (ETA) aka e-Visa is the easiest way to obtain a visa for India. It can only be applied for and granted online, i.e. completion of all your details, upload of a recent photo (JPG, a good quality selfie is fine) and a passport copy (PDF, max. 300kB), as well as payment of the (non-refundable) processing fee (see below) can only be done online via the dedicated **Government of India ETA website** (<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>). Most ETA can be applied for 4–120 days before arrival, just the **30 days e-Tourist Visa** is limited to 4–30 days before arrival. Payment can be done by credit/debit card (+2.5% bank fee) via SBIPay (State Bank of India) or Axis Bank—the latter seems more reliable, or by PayPal (+3.5% bank fee). In case of any payment failure, wait for some hours to not send the amount twice. After successful payment the ETA application process starts. It can take up to 72 hr until decision, even though in many cases it just takes 24 hr.

The ETA is only available to the citizens of the countries listed under "**Processing fees**" below—166 different countries all together. It cannot be obtained at or used for land or rail border crossings into India—leaving by land or rail is possible though (see below). Entry and exit with a new passport is allowed if you carry along your old passport on which the original ETA was issued.

Note, there are also commercial websites that offer the same ETAs and e-Visas, for an additional fee of US\$35–80. They promise to re-check and validate your application before submitting it, to make sure it is really granted. But this service is usually not worth the money and they don't usually give any success guarantees. The above-mentioned Government of India ETA website is straight forward enough to complete the application successfully—save your money and only go through the official website!

The following types of ETA are available:

■ e-Tourist Visa:

- 30 days – double entry, valid from the first entry
- 1 or 5 years – multiple entry, valid from the date of ETA grant, max. 90 days at once, max. 180 days per calendar year

- **e-Business Visa** – 1 year, multiple entry, valid from the date of ETA grant, max. 180 days at once
- **e-Conference Visa** – single entry, valid 30 days from the first entry
- **e-Medical Visa** – triple entry, valid 60 days from the first entry
- **e-Medical Attendant Visa** – triple entry, valid 60 days from the first entry, max. 2 attendants per patient

Entry points into India on an ETA are the following 29 airports or 5 seaports only:

- Airports – Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Bagdogra (Siliguri), Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Calicut, Chennai, Chandigarh, Cochin, Coimbatore, Delhi, Gaya, Goa, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kannur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Madurai, Mangalore, Mumbai, Nagpur, Port Blair, Pune, Tiruchirapalli (Trichy), Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), Varanasi, Visakhapatnam
- Seaports – Chennai, Cochin, Goa, Mangalore, Mumbai

Exit points to leave India on an ETA can be any of the latter entry ports, plus also the following ports and border crossings (aka Integrated Check Points (ICPs)):

- Airports – Patna, Srinagar, Surat, Tirupati, Vijaiwada
- Seaports – Alang, Bedi Bunder, Bhavnagar, Calicut, Cuddalore, Kakinada, Kandla, Kolkata, Mandvi, Nagapattinum, Nhava Sheva, Paradeep, Porbandar, Port Blair, Tuticorin, Vishakapatnam, Vizhinjam, Agati and Minicoy Island Lakshdweep UT, Vallarpadam, Mundra, Krishnapatnam, Dhubri, Pandu, Nagaon, Karimganj, Kattupalli
- Land ICPs – Attari Road, Akhaura, Banbasa, Changrabandha, Dalu, Dawki, Dhalaighat, Gauriphanta, Ghojadanga, Haridaspur, Hili, Jaigaon, Jogbani, Kailashahar, Karimgang, Khowal, Lalgolaghat, Mahadipur, Mankachar, Moreh, Muhurighat, Radhikapur, Ragna, Ranigunj, Raxaul, Rupaidiha, Sabroom, Sonouli, Srimantapur, Sutarkandi, Phulbari, Kawarpuchia, Zorinpuri, Zokhawthar
- Rail ICPs – Attari, Chitpur, Gede (rail and road), Haridaspur, Munabao

The declared entry and exit points on the ETA application are non-binding.

Processing fees (and eligibility) for e-Tourist Visa (https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/images/Etourist_fee_final.pdf) as well as all other e-Visa (https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/images/eTV_revised_fee_final.pdf) are as follows (as of 2023):

e-Tourist Visa

Fee	30 days (Apr-Jun)	30 days (Jul-Mar)	1 year	5 years	Country
US\$	0	0	0	0	Argentina, Cook Islands, Fiji, Jamaica, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Myanmar, Nauru, Niue Island, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Vanuatu
US\$	10	25	25	25	Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka
US\$	10	25	40	80	Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Angola, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Armenia, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Canada, Cayman Island, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, East Timor, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Montserrat, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger Republic, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Vatican City (Holy See), Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia, Zimbabwe

e-Business Visa

Fee (US\$)	Country
0	Angola, Argentina, Benin, Burundi, Cambodia, Comoros, Cook Islands, Djibouti, East Timor, Eritrea, Fiji, Gambia, Guinea, Jamaica, Kiribati, Laos, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nauru, Niger Republic, Niue Island, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Samoa, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Tanzania, Tonga, Tuvalu, Uganda, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Zambia
25	Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka
80	Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Armenia, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Canada, Cayman Island, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Montserrat, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vatican City (Holy See), Venezuela, Vietnam, Zimbabwe
100	Russia, United Kingdom, Ukraine, United States of America

e-Conference Visa, e-Medical Visa, e-Medical Attendant Visa

Fee (US\$)	Country
0	Argentina, Cook Islands, Fiji, Jamaica, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Myanmar, Nauru, Niue Island, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Vanuatu
25	Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka
80	Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Angola, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Armenia, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Canada, Cayman Island, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, East Timor, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Montserrat, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger Republic, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vatican City (Holy See), Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia, Zimbabwe
100	Benin, Mozambique, United Kingdom, Russia, Ukraine, United States of America

The ETA replaced the former limited **visa-on-arrival** scheme—there are no longer any visa-on-arrival facilities in India.

Other information

There are other categories for specialised purposes. The **missionary visa** is mandatory for anyone who is visiting India "primarily to take part in religious activities". This rule is meant to combat religious conversion, particularly of Hindus to Christianity. There have been cases where preachers have been deported for addressing religious congregations while on a tourist visa. You need not be worried if you are just on a religious tour of churches in India.

If you are on a Student, Employment, Research or Missionary visa, you **need to register** within 14 days of arrival with the **Foreigners Regional Registration Office** (<https://mea.gov.in/foreigners-registration.htm>) where you will be staying. If the place you are staying at doesn't have one, you need to register at the local police station. All visitors who intend to stay **more than 180 days** also need to be registered.

Overstaying a visa is to be avoided at all costs as you will be prevented from leaving the country until you have paid a hefty fine and presented a large amount of paperwork to either the local immigration office or police station. This process is quite likely to involve some bizarre bureaucratic requirements. In the worst case, the Indian Government can also take legal action for exceptionally long overstays including prison term for 5 years.

Penalties for overstaying (https://indianfro.gov.in/frro/Financial_Penalty.pdf) an Indian visa:

- For Overstays or non-registration for up to 90 days, penalty is US\$300.
- For Overstays from 91 days to 2 years, penalty is US\$400.
- For Overstays more than 2 years, penalty is US\$500.

Penalties for overstay in India may differ for persons belonging to minority communities from nearby countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan:

- For Overstays or non-registration for up to 90 days, penalty is ₹100
- For Overstays from 91 days to 2 years, penalty is ₹200
- For Overstays more than 2 years, penalty is ₹500

Customs and immigration

Citizens of Yellow Fever affected countries or travellers arriving from any of these countries must carry a **Yellow Fever Vaccination Card** at the time of arrival in India, otherwise they may be quarantined for 6 days.

Clearing customs can be a bit of a hassle, though it has improved vastly over the last decade. In general, avoid the touts who will offer to ease your baggage through customs. There are various rules regarding duty-free allowances — there are differing rules for Indian citizens, foreign "tourists", citizens of Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan, non-citizens of Indian origin and people moving to India. Use the website of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (<https://www.cbic.gov.in/>) for information about what you can bring in. Foreign tourists other than Nepalis, Bhutanese and Pakistanis and those entering through Nepal, Bhutan or Pakistan, are entitled to bring in their "used personal effects and travel souvenirs" and ₹4,000 worth of articles for "gifts". If you are an Indian citizen or are of Indian origin, you are entitled to ₹25,000 worth of articles (provided you aren't entering through Nepal, Bhutan or Pakistan). The other rules are on the web site. If you are bringing any new packaged items, it is a good idea to carry the

invoices for them to show their value. You are also allowed to bring in 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250 g of tobacco and 1L (2L for Indians) of alcohol duty-free. If you do not have anything to declare, you can go through the **green channel** clearly marked at various airports and generally you will not be harassed.

Importing and exporting Indian rupees is **strictly forbidden** for foreigners, and limited to ₹25,000 for Indian citizens. Details can be found in the official statement of the Reserve Bank of India (<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/notification/PDFs/CR3105F871DDFD343407BA1BC640B96AFB21A.PDF>). There are currency exchange counters at international airports where you are required to change all your excess Indian rupees to foreign currency before leaving.

By plane

The major points of entry are Mumbai (**BOM**^{IATA}) and Delhi (**DEL**^{IATA}). There are also international flights to Bangalore (**BLR**^{IATA}), Kolkata (**CCU**^{IATA}), Hyderabad (**HYD**^{IATA}), Chennai (**MAA**^{IATA}) and other cities. The airports at these cities are either new or undergoing development. The Hyderabad airport is rated as one of the top five airports in the 10-15 million passenger category. There are many nonstop, direct and connecting choices to these cities from Europe, North America, Middle East, Africa and Australia.



Indira Gandhi International Airport serves Delhi and is one of the most important entry points to India.

Secondary points of entry include Goa and the Malabar coast. There are many connections from the Middle East to Malabar coast cities such as Kochi, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram. Most of the major Middle Eastern carriers offer one-stop connections to the coast from their Gulf hubs. Goa is a favourite European tourist destination and thus is connected by many European charter operators like Condor, Edelweiss and Thomson Airways.

The Indian airlines that operate international flights include

- **Air India** (<https://www.airindia.com/>), India's flag carrier owned by the Tata Group and is a member of the Star Alliance. It is undergoing a major transformation by the Tata Group.
- **IndiGo** (<https://www.goindigo.in>), A low cost airline that serves more than 40 international airports.
- **SpiceJet** (<https://www.spicejet.com/>), A low cost airline that serves 13 international destinations
- **Akasa Air** (<http://www.akasaair.com/>), A low cost airline that serves 5 international destinations. It is the most on-time airline in the Indian airline industry.



An Air India Boeing 777

These airlines offer daily flights to major hubs around the world. You must carry a printed air ticket in order to take many domestic flights. Most Indian airlines have a very unfriendly policy towards upgrading weight allowance and changing dates of flights, and so if you feel that you may need to change anything regarding your flight, it is best to check the company's policy before making a booking.

From the United States, United Airlines (<https://www.united.com>) offers non-stop daily service from Newark to Delhi and Mumbai; Air India offers daily non-stop service to Delhi from New York–JFK, Newark, Washington–Dulles, San Francisco and Chicago O'Hare and to Mumbai from Newark (and soon JFK). Various European airlines offer connecting service through their European hubs from most major U.S. cities and various Asian airlines offer connecting service from West Coast cities through their Asian hubs.

Entries from Europe and North America are possible using many European airlines such as Lufthansa (<https://www.lufthansa.com>), Finnair (<https://www.finnair.com>), British Airways (<https://www.britishairways.com>), KLM (<https://www.klm.com>), Air France (<https://www.airfrance.com>) and Virgin Atlantic (<https://www.virginatlantic.com>). For long-term visitors (3–12 months), Swiss Airlines (<https://www.swiss.com>) often have good deals from Switzerland with connecting flights from major European and some American cities as well.



IndiGo is a popular low-cost carrier

To save on ticket prices, consider connecting via Gulf countries, with Air Arabia (<https://www.airarabia.com>) (Sharjah-based low cost carrier with some connections to Europe), Etihad (<https://www.etihadairways.com>) (especially if you need a one-way ticket or are going back to Europe from another Asian country) via Abu Dhabi, Emirates (<https://www.emirates.com>) via Dubai or Qatar Airways (<https://www.qatarairways.com>) via Doha. These airlines are also the easiest way to come from the Gulf countries, along with Indian carriers, Air India, Air India Express, Indigo and SpiceJet. In 2023, one-way prices between the Gulf countries and India were US\$70–110, and one-way prices between Europe (London, Rome, Istanbul, Tel Aviv) and the Gulf countries were €50–120, even just 1–2 weeks before flights—Abu Dhabi has cheap accommodation from €10–15.

From East Asia and Australia, Singapore (which is served by Air India, its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express (<https://www.airindiaexpress.in>), Singapore Airlines (<https://www.singaporeair.com>) and its low-cost subsidiary Scoot (<https://www.flyscoot.com>)) has excellent connections with flights to all the major cities and many smaller ones. As for the cheap way from Southeast Asia, Malaysian low-cost carrier AirAsia (<https://www.airasia.com>) is often the best choice (if booked well in advance, one-way ticket price is normally below US\$100, sometimes being less than US\$50, they have connections from China, Australia and most South-east Asian countries). They fly from Kuala Lumpur into New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Kochi and Tiruchirapalli. If you're going from Thailand, Air India Express flies from Chennai and Kolkata to Bangkok. Air India and Thai Airways (<https://www.thaiairways.com/en/index.page>) fly from there to a range of Indian cities as well. IndiGo, an Indian low-cost-carrier, also offers attractive fares to Singapore and Bangkok.

As of March 2025, the Indian government has banned all direct flights between India and China (except Hong Kong). You must connect via Hong Kong or a Southeast Asian hub such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur or Singapore.

Be sure to hold on to your boarding pass, as it will be checked on arrival in India.

Some Indian airports, like Delhi, offer wifi access with a passport scan, and offer short-term tourist SIM cards, but the majority offer no wifi or SIM card options.

Also read on check-in below, for procedures when leaving India again.

By boat

The only scheduled international passenger ship to India is the KPVS (<https://www.kpvs.in/>) ferry service from Kankesanthurai in Jaffna, Sri Lanka to Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu. It runs every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday from Nagapattinam at 7 am and it reaches Kankesanthurai by 11 am. The return service from Kankesanthurai is at 2 pm, and it reaches Nagapattinam by 5 pm. A one way trip costs Rs6500 and includes one piece of luggage up to 50 kg. For booking call or WhatsApp (preferred) +919789879971. You will need a paper visa sticker or a *previously used* e-visa to enter India via this route: newly issued e-visas are not accepted.

India has several international ports. Mumbai, Goa and Chennai are the main ones handling passenger traffic, while the rest mainly handle cargo. However, due to the profusion of cheap flights, there no longer appear to be any scheduled ferry services from India to the Middle East. The southern island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep islands is now a permitted entry point.

Some cruise lines that travel to India include Indian Oceans Eden II and Grand Voyage Seychelles-Dubai.

By train

From Nepal, trains run between Khajuri in Dhanusa district of Nepal and Jainagar in Bihar, operated by Nepal Railways. Neither is of much interest for travellers and there are no onward connections into Nepal, so most travellers opt for the bus or plane instead.

Train services from Bangladesh were suspended for 42 years, but the *Maitree Express* started running again between Dhaka and Kolkata in April 2008. The service is biweekly: A Bangladeshi train leaves Dhaka every Saturday, returning on Sunday, while an Indian train leaves Kolkata on Saturdays and returns the next day. Besides, there are *Bandhan Express* (Khulna–Kolkata) and *Mitali Express* (Dhaka–New Jalpaiguri) services between the two countries.

You can see what trains are available between stations at the following sites: <http://www.indianrail.gov.in>. However, for booking of rail tickets through the internet you should use the Government of India's website (<https://www.india.gov.in/>). For booking through this site, you have to register (which is free) and you need a credit/debit card. You can also take the services of many travel agents that charge a nominal service fee for booking train tickets.

By land

Nepal

From Nepal buses cross the border daily, usually with connections to Delhi, Lucknow, Patna, Siliguri and Varanasi. However, it's cheaper and more reliable to take one bus to the border crossing and another from there on. The border crossings are (India/Nepal side) Sunauli/Bhairawa for Varanasi, Raxaul/Birganj for Patna, Kolkata, Kakarbhitta for Siliguri and Darjeeling, and Mahendrenagar-Banbassa for Delhi.


Buses depart Kathmandu Kakarbhitta in Nepal (close to Siliguri) (10 hours) from 3-6PM.

There's a direct Kathmandu deluxe bus service to Siliguri on alternate days, and NBSTC service Tu Th Sa depart ₹1,500 for the 11-hour journey and also a Kathmandu to Dhaka deluxe service that halts in Siliguri.

Bhutan

The Royal Bhutanese Government runs a service to/from Phuentsholing. These buses depart from Kolkata's Esplanade Bus Terminus at 7PM on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday and from the Phuentsholing Bhutan Post office at 3PM on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The journey takes around 18 hours and costs ₹300.



Flag lowering ceremony at the Wagah  border crossing

There is frequent service between Siliguri and Phuentsholing. Buses depart for Phuentsholing at 7:30AM and 1:30PM every day from opposite Golden Plaza on Burdwan Road (behind Air View More). Tickets are sold at a counter near the bus. There are more frequent Indian buses to the border town of Jaigaon from Siliguri Bus Station on Hill Cart Road.

People who are not citizens of Bhutan or India are required to get their passport stamped at the Indian immigration office, which is located next to the cinema hall (there is a fork in the road when entering the town – marked by a statue – immigration is a short way up the road on the left) before entering and after exiting Bhutan. **Your passport will not be stamped at the border**, which is customary elsewhere. Indians can get a permit to visit Thimphu or other parts of Bhutan by submitting proof of identities, such as an election card or passport, at the Bhutanese immigration office.

Myanmar

Entering from Myanmar is apparently possible at Moreh/Tamu—see Myanmar article for more details. Regarding Indo-Myanmar connection, Manipur is the most advanced and the only developed route inside India, to pass to and from between the two nations.

Pakistan

You cannot enter through Wagah/Attari land border crossing. It is now shut to all travellers passing through this way, because of security concerns by India.

Bangladesh

Haridaspur–Benapole crossing

From Bangladesh there are a number of land entry points to India. The most common way is the regular air-conditioned and comfortable bus services from Dhaka to Kolkata via Haridaspur–Benapole border post near Bangaon.

Private bus companies Shohagh (<http://www.shohagh.com/group/>), Green Line (<http://www.greenlineparibahan.com/>), Shyamoli (<http://shyamolibusservice.com/>) and others operate daily bus services on this route. Government organisations like West Bengal Transport Corporation (WBTC) and Bangladesh

Road Transport Corporation (<http://www.brtc.gov.bd/>) (BRTC) operate buses from Kolkata every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 5:30AM and 8:30AM, and 12:30PM while from Dhaka they leave on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7AM and 7:30AM. The normal journey time is around 12 hours with a one-way fare of ₹400-450 or Tk600-800, roughly US\$8–10. If you're only headed to Haridaspur the fare is ₹86 (2½ hours). Several travel agencies around this area also sell tickets for these buses, but at very inflated prices. At the border, it's best to change money on the Indian side, but count it carefully and double-check the maths on their calculator. On the Bangladesh side there are some bus stands just behind the border, or you can catch a flat-bed cycle-rickshaw for 5 Bangladeshi takas for the 2-km trip to the bus stand for onward travel, or you can walk, but expect the hopeful rickshaw-wallahs to follow you at least half way.

The Indian side is fairly normal as far as land border crossings are concerned. Your passport will change hands several times, and should finally result in a stamp, which doesn't take too long. The Bangladeshi side, however, is another story. Staff seem to have been hired an hour before you arrive - try not to laugh when they ask which visa in your passport is the Bangladesh one. On either side you may be asked for baksheesh by the passport stamper or a boy who grabs your passport and shuttles it between the various officials or the many men who offer to fill your forms in for you. This is not normal for an Indian border crossing, and is entirely avoidable - present your passport yourself, and say 'no' firmly if asked for a bribe. If you're on one of the A/C direct buses then the bus company collects all passenger's passports before the border and facilitates the stamping.

The process is better than it once was. The Bangladesh side is simpler than the Indian side where you wind your way through a complex building to get the various stamps. On the Bangladesh side, you will enter one office, be asked to sit while your passport is examined and stamped.

While leaving Bangladesh by road, you have to pay a departure tax of Tk300. If you are travelling by one of the direct buses, the bus company will usually collect the amount from you and pay it for you. If you are travelling independently, pay it at the little branch of Sonali Bank next to the immigration office. It seems to be open as long as the border crossing is open.

If you arrived by air to Bangladesh, make sure that you have a "change of port" certificate which allows you to leave by land, otherwise you will find yourself being turned back at the border. Change of port certificates are available from the visa office in Dhaka and take about 4 hours to produce. Sometimes you might need to insist here that the office really does provide these certificates and demand that you need one.

Other crossings

Another daily bus service by 'Shyamoli' and others under the BRTC label from Dhaka connects Siliguri, but the buses in this route do not cross the Changrabanda/Burimari or Burungamari border post. Rather, passengers reaching the border have to clear customs, walk a few hundred yards to cross the border and board the awaiting connecting buses on the other end for the final destination. Ticket for Dhaka-Siliguri-Dhaka route costs BDT 1,600, roughly US\$20–25 depending on conversion rates. Tickets are purchased either in Dhaka or in Siliguri.

There is also a regular bus service between Dhaka and Agartala, capital of Tripura. Two BRTC buses daily from Dhaka and the Tripura Road Transport Corporation (<https://tsu.trp.nic.in/transport/>) plying its vehicles six days a week with a round fare costing US\$10 connect the two cities. There is only one halt at

Ashuganj in Bangladesh during the journey.

Other entry points from Bangladesh are Hili, Chilahati/Haldibari, Banglaband border posts for entry to West Bengal; Tamabil border post for a route to Shillong in Meghalaya, and some others with lesser known routes to north-eastern Indian regions.

China

The Nathu La pass in Sikkim, which borders Tibet in China is the only border crossing between India and China. This border is not open to tourists; only local traders are allowed to cross. Special permits are required to visit the pass from either side, and foreigners are not permitted to visit the Indian side of the border.

Get around

India is **big** and there are lots of interesting ways to travel around it, most of which could not very well be described as efficient or punctual. Allow considerable buffer time for any journey with a fixed deadline (e.g. your flight back), and try to remember that getting there should be half the fun.

Travelling to much of the North-East (with the notable exception of Assam), the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Sikkim and parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand will require obtaining a **Protected Area Permit** (PAP) or **Inner Line Permit** (ILP) — see below. For foreigners on a regular visa, the easiest way to get these permits would be to request for one when applying for your Indian visa, and it will be added to your visa — not possible with ETA/e-Visa. Otherwise, you will need to hunt down a local Ministry of Home Affairs office (aka DC Magistrate Office) and grapple with bureaucracy. Also, local travel agents can obtain these permits for you, but it might be contingent on booking a tour with them. Indian citizens can apply for these permits online.

By plane

India's large size and uncertain roads make **flying** a viable option, especially as prices have tumbled in the last few years. Even India's offshore islands and remote mountain states are served by flights. Due to the aviation boom over the last few years, airports have not been able to keep up with the air traffic. Most Indian airports continue to function with one runway and a handful of boarding gates. Check-in and security queues can be quite long, especially in Delhi and Mumbai. India has built two new international airports in Hyderabad and Bangalore, which are modern and well-equipped. Delhi airport's newly constructed Terminal 3 is the 8th largest terminal in the world.

In northern India, particularly Delhi, **heavy winter fog** can wreak havoc on schedules, especially during Christmas Season and January, leading to massive delays across the country. Flights to small airports up in the mountains, especially to Leh in Ladakh (which is reachable only by plane for most of the year), are erratic at the best of times.

Airlines

At one time, domestic flights were the monopoly of the government-owned Indian Airlines, but things have changed dramatically and now there are quite a few competitors, often offering excellent value. These are the operators in India.

- **Air India (<https://www.airindia.com/>):** The flag carrier owned by Tata Group. Air India has a wide network in the country and provides excellent regional connectivity. It is a member of the Star Alliance. Vistara has now merged with Air India completely.
- **Air India Express (<https://www.airindiaexpress.in/>):** Low-cost subsidiary of Air India carrier which flies mainly on trunk routes and to international destinations in the Gulf and Southeastern Asia. AIX Connect has now merged with Air India completely.
- **IndiGo (<https://www.goindigo.in/>):** A low-cost airline, connecting 88 cities throughout the country. They fly a young fleet of Airbus A320s and ATR regional aircraft.
- **SpiceJet (<https://www.spicejet.com/>):** A third low-cost airline, serves around 34 domestic destinations.
- **Akasa Air (<https://www.akasaair.com/>):** A low cost airline serving 20 domestic destinations with a fleet of Boeing 737 Max aircraft. It is the most on-time airline in the Indian airline industry.
- **Alliance Air (<https://www.allianceair.in/>):** India's state-owned airline that flies small aircraft to obscure places
- **Star Air (<http://www.starair.in/>):** A low-cost regional commuter airline owned by the Sanjay Godhawat Group which serves 23 destinations with a fleet of Embraer E175 and Embraer ER145 LR aircraft.
- **Fly91 (<https://fly91.in/>):** A low- cost regional airline based in Goa, serving 8 destinations with a fleet of ATR-72 aircraft, connecting towns and cities.
- **flybig (<https://flybig.in/>):** A regional airline flying to 24 destinations across north and north-west India with a fleet of DHC-6-400 Twin Otter aircraft
- **IndiaOne Air (<https://indiaoneair.com/>):** A regional airline based in Ahmedabad with a hub in Bhubaneshwar flying to 9 destinations with a fleet of 208B Grand Caravan X connecting tier-2 and tier-3 cities.



Map of airports in India

Fares

Prices are relatively low and stable, since destinations are often served by several airlines. It doesn't hurt though to check prices a few times on different days during the week.

You will hear a lot about air tickets at ₹500, but those are promotional rates for limited seats which are sold out within seconds. In some other cases, the advertised fare may not include charges such as passenger service fees, air fuel surcharge and taxes which will be added subsequently. Nonetheless, you

do get good rates from budget airlines. Tickets for small cities will cost more than those for the metros, because of the spotty coverage noted above. Indian ticket pricing has not attained the bewildering complexity that the Americans and European have achieved, but they are moving there. You don't have to worry about higher prices on weekends, lower prices for round-trips, lower prices for travel *around* weekends.

There are two complications for non-Indians trying to buy plane tickets:

1. Many airlines have **higher fares for foreigners (non-OCI holders)** than for Indians (OCI holders included). Foreigners ("non-residents") will be charged in US dollars, whereas Indians will be charged in rupees. In practice, you can simply pretend to be Indian when booking online as the check-in desk will rarely if ever care, but you are still running a small risk if you do this. When possible it's best to patronise those airlines that do not follow this practice.
2. Many online booking sites and some of the low-cost carriers **might reject non-Indian credit cards**. Read the small print before you start booking, or book directly with the airline or through a bricks-and-mortar travel agency instead.

Check-in

Checking in at Indian airports tends to be slow, involving lots of queues and multiple security checks. A few pointers to smooth your way:

- Arrive **at least two hours before departure** if travelling from the major airports. (For domestic flights from minor airports, 60 or 90 minutes before is fine.) The new rule dictates that check-in closes 45 minutes before departure time and the boarding gate closes 25 minutes before departure. Though the original boarding might take longer, this rule is now being strictly implemented widely to avoid delays in flight departures.
- While in the past, airports only allowed passengers to enter the airport a few hours before their flight, this rule has been relaxed and you can often stay overnight in the airport in case you have an early morning flight
- **Bring a print-out of your ticket or a soft copy of your ticket** and a **government-issued ID** (available for domestic and required for international flights- ignore if using digiyatra) or else you are not allowed to enter the airport. They are checked and matched compulsorily at the airport entry gate by security guards. If you possess neither a printout or a soft copy, you can get a copy at the airline offices just outside the airport entry gate. Some airlines have started to charge for this privilege.
- Some airports have **Digiyatra** available (available only for domestic flights from select destinations), which verifies passenger identities at various checkpoints, such as check-in, security, and boarding gates, without the need for physical documents. Specific queues when entering the airport, check-ins and security have been set up in 15 airports (Delhi T1 and T3, Kolkata, Jaipur, Mumbai all terminals, Hyderabad, Varanasi, Lucknow, Pune, Vijayawada, Bengaluru, Guwahati, Kochi) for passengers who have registered through the Digi Yatra app. To register for digiyatra, you need an *Aadhaar card*.
- Most older airports and many Tier-2 and Tier-3 city airports require that you screen your checked bags before check-in, usually at a stand near the entrance. In high-security airports like Jammu, Srinagar or anywhere in the Northeast, even carry-on baggage needs to be



Check-in at Tiruchirappalli International Airport



screened. All carry on baggage will be screened by an X-ray scanner and at the discretion of the security personnel, physically too.

- **Once inside the check-in hall, you cannot leave the airport again unless your flight is delayed or cancelled.** Make sure to have completed all your "business" before entering the airport. Also, in case you arrive many hours before the flight to be on the safe side, be sure to know how to keep yourself busy once inside the airport.
- **Pick up a tag for every item of your carry-on baggage and attach it to it.** The staff at the security checkpoint will stamp your boarding pass as well as the tags of your carry-on baggage. Do not put your boarding pass on the X-ray belt, bring it with you when you go through the metal detector. Make sure you received all these stamps before leaving the security check area. Without a stamped boarding pass you will not be allowed to board the plane. You will not be allowed to take any items onboard without a stamped tag attached.

Don't hesitate to ask someone if you are unsure about anything. Most staff in airports are very helpful to passengers usually understanding English and will take pains to ensure you catch your flight. There are separate queues for passengers travelling light (without check-in baggage) and these queues are usually less crowded. Different airlines have different standards for what they allow as cabin baggage, so check with your airline's website on the side of caution, especially if you are travelling by a low-cost airline. Usually, the allowed free baggage limit is 15 kg on most airlines.

By train

See also: [Rail travel in India](#)

India boasts one of the biggest rail networks in the world, and the rail system is very efficient, if rarely on schedule. Travelling on Indian Railways allows you to discover the landscape and beauty of India, and is generally more economical than flying domestically. With classes ranging from luxurious to regular, it's the best way to get to know the country and its people. Most train passengers will be curious about you and happy to pass the time with a chat. While taking an overnight sleeper train will save the money you would otherwise spend on a hotel, your sleep may not be as comfortable as some routes are known for being overcrowded.



Vande Bharat Express, the fastest Indian Railways train in service

Commuter trains

It is recommended to avoid 'local trains' as they are often overcrowded, platforms on the stations are also often overcrowded. If travelling on a local train, be wary of your surroundings as there may be pickpockets in stations and trains.

However, metro and light rail services are relatively safe and well policed, with CCTV cameras on trains and stations, and well-trained staff.

Regular trains

Trains come in many varieties. Rajdhani, Shatabdi and Vande Bharat trains are the most luxurious and fastest trains of the Indian Railways. They are completely air-conditioned and have breakfast, lunch, evening tea and dinner included in your ticket price. The food is served at your seat during travel. Vande

Bharat Express, the second fastest Indian train in service, is equipped with onboard Wi-Fi, infotainment, reading lights and electric outlets.

Garib Rath (literally the "chariot of the poor") is a good option for those who want to use good facilities at low cost.

Luxury trains

There are 5 trains offering 12 signature journeys between major tourist destinations in India. By far the most popular of the five are the **Palace on Wheels** (<https://www.palaceonwheels.in/>) and the **Maharajas' Express** (<https://www.the-maharajas.com/>). They offer a wonderful way to experience the sights in India without having to worry about the hassles of travel and accommodation. Journeys on board these trains are all inclusive of accommodation, dining, sightseeing, transportation and porter charges. Each of these luxury trains is equipped with amenities such as live television, individual climate control, restaurant, bar, lounges and cabins with electronic safe and attached bathrooms. The downside is that they are extremely expensive, and would make even business class airtickets look cheap.

Classes

India has seven classes of train travel to choose from. Not all classes are available on all trains: for example, Chair Cars are usually found only on short-distance daytime trains, while sleeper classes are only found on overnight journeys.

Full information about these classes is [here](#).

Train fare

The average fare for a **200 km distance** for different classes is given below (as of 2015):

- First Class AC: ₹1,200
- Two Tier AC: ₹617
- Three Tier AC: ₹430
- AC Chair Car: ₹203
- Sleeper Class: ₹120
- Second class seat in Express train: ₹70
- Second class seat in Passenger train: ₹30

Ticketing

Trains tend to fill up early. Tickets can be reserved up to 4 months in advance. School summer vacation time — mid-April to mid-June — is peak season for the railways, which means that you may need to book well in advance. Other festival days, long weekends or holidays may see a similar rush.

Tickets can be booked from the [railway website](http://www.irctc.co.in/) (<http://www.irctc.co.in/>). Tickets are also available from counters at most railway stations. Details of facility available for tourists from abroad are available at [IRCTC website](https://contents.irctc.co.in/en/ForeignTouristQuotaBooking.pdf) (<https://contents.irctc.co.in/en/ForeignTouristQuotaBooking.pdf>) and [Indian Railway Website](http://www.indianrail.gov.in/enquiry/StaticPages/StaticEnquiry.jsp?locale=en&StaticPage=inter) (<http://www.indianrail.gov.in/enquiry/StaticPages/StaticEnquiry.jsp?locale=en&StaticPage=inter>

[national_Tourist.html](#)). Other authorized ticketing agencies provide a much better user experience, though however you want to book, you will need an IRCTC account. If you have issues paying when booking via IRCTC, try some of these other sites like [confirmkt](https://www.confirmkt.com/) (<https://www.confirmkt.com/>) and [IndianTrain](http://www.indiantrain.in/) (<http://www.indiantrain.in/>).

One day before the departure date of a train at 10AM, the **Tatkal** quota seats become available. Tatkal accounts for about 10% of the total number of seats. This allows tourists who like to plan a trip as they go to book seats closer to the day of departure, for an extra fee. It is sometimes difficult to book Tatkal tickets online because of the excess amount of traffic on Indian railway website. The E-wallet facility enables users to keep money on Indian railway website for faster booking of tickets. This facility reduces the time of ticket booking because users skip the payment gateway processing time. You can pay using your debit cards, credit cards, or internet banking.



Sandwiches at the kitchen coach

Meals

Most long-distance night trains have a **pantry car** and if you are in the sleeper or air-con classes, you can buy meals on board the train. The pantry staff will visit your seat to take your order. However, most pantry car meals aren't really good in quality or taste. Bring enough food for the journey including delays. You can purchase drinks, packaged snacks or biscuits from the pantry staff who circulate from one coach to another.

At most stations, hawkers selling tea, peanuts, and snack food and complete meals will go up and down the train. You can also get down on the station platform to look for food, but make sure you know the stoppage timing of the train at that station. In the most luxurious 'Rajdhani' & 'Shatabdi' trains, meals are included in your ticket price and served at your seat during travel. There are no dining cars in the Indian Railways except in select luxury trains and in [Deccan Queen](#) - a daily train which runs between Mumbai and Pune.

By taxi or ride-hailing

There was a time when the metered taxi was unheard of outside India's largest cities, and when it could be found, getting one that would take you to your destination and charge you the right rate was a rare event. This situation has undergone a drastic change for the better in the past few years, with many online companies offering taxi services. The two largest players are **Ola Cabs** (<http://www.olacabs.com>) and **Uber** (<https://www.uber.com/in/en/>), which operate in all major Indian cities and have ranks at major airports. There are also local companies offering ride-hailing services within their cities. Both pickup and dropoff points can be entered in English, minimising hassle.



A line of Ola cabs parked near [Bhubaneswar](#) railway station, 2019

Besides, companies like **Rapido** offer two-wheeler motorcycle rides if you're comfortable with such vehicles, and motorcycles are useful to navigate the more congested areas.

Fares are affordable by Western standards, with most city rides under ₹200, although surge pricing can be expensive. However, the very cheapest categories (UberX and Ola Micro/Mini, respectively) often have tiny, run-down cars, so paying the small premium for the next class up (Uber Comfort and Ola Prime) may be worth it.

If ride-hailing isn't an option, central locations of big cities like airports or stations have pre-paid taxi services managed by local traffic police officials. However, beware of touts who claim to be running pre-paid taxis. Always collect the receipt from the counter first. The receipt has two parts: one part is for your reference, and the other part you will need to hand to the taxi driver only after you reach your desired destination. The taxi driver will receive their payment by submitting or producing this other part to the pre-paid taxi counter. The taxi driver may not know how to get to your destination, and will not tell you this beforehand. This may result in the taxi stopping at various points during the journey as the driver gets out to ask for directions. Insist on being taken to your original destination, and not a substitute offered by the driver (e.g. a different hotel).

Regular metered taxis are also common and can usually be hailed on the street. While they're supposed to use the meter, tales of "broken" meters and hapless fleeced tourists are common, so try to have an idea of the fare before you set off.

By bus

While you cannot take a cross-country bus journey across India, buses are the second most-popular way of travelling across states and the only cheap way of reaching many places not on the main rail network, such as Dharamsala, Leh, Srinagar, or Gangtok.

For short distances, just wait at the road that obviously goes into your direction. Unless you are in the middle of nowhere, there are many buses plying along Indian roads. If in doubt, just ask someone local.

Every state has its own **public bus** service, usually named "X Road Transport Corporation" (XRTC), "X State Transport Corporation" (XSTC) or "X Transport Corporation" (XTC) which primarily connects intrastate routes, but will also have services to neighbouring states. There are usually multiple classes of buses. The **ordinary** buses (called differently in

Farewell to the King

Once upon a time, virtually all Indian taxis were trusty Hindustan Ambassadors, a locally manufactured copy of the 1950s-vintage Morris Oxford, but these days the King of Indian Roads is a critically endangered species.



Kolkata's iconic yellow Ambassador taxi that ruled the city till 2025



Ordinary-class Himachal Road Transport Co bus in Dharamsala

different states, e.g. "service bus") are extremely crowded with even standing room rarely available (unless you're among the first on board) as reservations are not possible and they tend to stop at too many places. On the upside, they're *very* cheap.

Many public transport companies have their own website to find the schedule and prices, but also to book tickets. If searching for connections, the website will sometimes not accept smaller villages along the way and you have to select or search for the next larger town or city, just in case your search is unsuccessful.

Private buses may or may not be available in the area you are travelling to, and even if they are, the quality could vary a lot. Be warned that many of the private buses, especially long-distance lines, play music and/or videos at ear-splitting volume. Even with earplugs it can be nerve-wracking. Restrooms are available in large bus stations but are crowded. The bus industry is **extremely fragmented** and there are few operators who offer services in more than 2 or 3 neighbouring states. Travel agents usually *only* offer seats on private buses. **Flixbus** operates in India. As of April 2024 they offer rides in the north and north-west of India and intend to serve the whole country.

Prices between public and private buses do not differ much. The advantage of public buses is that you will get a proper ticket indicating the origin and destination of your journey. Private buses will only give you a paper ticket with a price written on it by the conductor. For buses serving smaller villages there might not even be any ticket at all for private buses — if the other Indian passengers also don't get a ticket, then that's just the way. In general, you can expect to pay as little as ₹1/km in the plains (Punjab) and ₹2-2.30/km in more mountainous areas (Himachal Pradesh) with public and private buses. After a short while you will figure out what is the going local rate. Anything way beyond that rate, especially in private buses, is an indication that the conductor is trying to rip you off. Stand your ground and don't give in, potentially demand your money back and leave the bus.

In addition to ordinary public and private buses, there are **luxury** or **express** buses available, often called "Volvo" buses, and most have air-conditioning these days. These better class "express" or "luxury" buses have assured seating (book in advance), and have limited stops, making them well worth the slight extra expense. But even these better-class buses rarely have toilets and make occasional snack and toilet breaks.

Regardless of the class of travel, all buses have to contend with the poor state of Indian highways and the havoc of Indian traffic which usually makes them slower, less comfortable and less safe than trains. Night buses are particularly hazardous, and for long-distance travel it is wise to opt for sleeper train services instead.

For major private (Volvo) bus connections, schedules, prices and tickets, try one of the following websites:

- redBus (<https://www.redbus.in>)
- zingbus (<https://www.zingbus.com>)
- Paytm (<https://tickets.paytm.com/bus/>)
- MakeMyTrip (<https://www.makemytrip.com>)

By car

Main article: [Driving in India](#)

Our itinerary article [Grand Trunk Road](#) describes one of India's major roads, running east–west through the Ganges valley and west across northern Pakistan to [Kabul](#).

Regular license plates in India are white. Yellow license plates indicate a permit for doing business with that car. Green license plates indicate an electric car. This can be tourism, transport or just office stuff. On all plates the licensing state is indicated by the first two letters, e.g. *HP* for Himachal Pradesh, or *PB* for Punjab. This rule doesn't apply to cars with the Bharat Series license plates, where the first two numbers indicate the year of registration.

Driving on your own

In India driving is on the **left** of the road — at least most of the time. You can drive in India if you have a local licence or an International Driving Permit, but unless you are accustomed to driving on extremely chaotic streets, you probably will not want to. In the past decade, the Central government has embarked on an ambitious project to upgrade the highways and the conditions of Indian roads has vastly improved, with smooth **Expressways** all across the country. **National Highways** are also good, with four to eight laned roads. However, improving the quality of the roads does not improve the way in which people drive and it is very dangerous to drive on the roads in India as people drive as they like without regard to any rules (rules do exist but are not enforced properly).

Hiring driver with car

It's quite easy and common to rent a car with a driver in India. If you travel in summer, it is recommended to take a car with air-conditioning.

Sometimes you will need to haggle to get a reasonable price, especially for a several days tour. Otherwise, rates for taxis are quoted in rupees per kilometre, and you will have to pay for both ways even if you are going only one way. The driver's salary is so low that it adds little to the cost of renting the car. The driver will find their own accommodation and food wherever you are travelling, although it is customary to give him some money to buy some food when you stop somewhere to eat. Rates vary by size and quality of the car.



View from a car in India

There are numerous advantages to having a car and driver.

- A good local driver is the safest means of car travel.
- You can keep your bags and shopping goods with you securely wherever you go.
- The driver will often have some knowledge of local tourist destinations. However, be aware that the driver will try to make some money on the side and drive you to some shops of relatives, just to get a cut. So, do not trust him too much. Inquire information and then decide what to do for yourself.
- The car is at your disposal. You don't need to spend any time finding further transport, or haggling over price.

It is rare to find a driver that speaks more than a few words of English. As a result, misunderstandings are common. Keep sentences short. Use the present tense. Use single words and hand gestures to convey meaning. Also, when haggling about the price make sure the driver fully understands the final price and

that it is for the whole tour and not per day or per passenger — potentially write down the price, date of payment and "all included" on a piece of paper and get his signature to be on the safe side. Some drivers will exploit your innocence and pretend that the agreement was different.

Make sure you can trust your driver before you leave your goods with him — potentially getting a photo of his ID and definitely a photo of his licence plate. Also, memorise your driver's face and write down his phone number (verify!). If he shows any suspicious behaviour, make sure you keep your bags with you. In any case, it is generally always a good idea to have all your valuables with you.

Your driver may in some cases act as a tout, offering to take you to businesses from which he gets a sort of commission. This isn't necessarily a bad thing – the driver may help you find just what you're looking for, and add to his income at the same time. On the other hand, always evaluate for yourself whether you are being sold on a higher-cost or poorer quality product than you want. Avoid touts on the road posing as guides that your driver may stop for because he gets a commission from them; supporting them only promotes this unpleasant practice. The driver might *ask* for a tip at the end of the trip. Pay him some amount (₹500/day is generally sufficient) and don't let him guilt-trip you into paying too much.

Touts at tourist areas will also try to mislead you into getting into the wrong car when you leave; if you fall for this you will certainly be ripped off, your car may be stolen and you may be sexually assaulted.

Be wary of reckless driving when renting a car with a driver. Do not be afraid to tell the driver that you have time to see around and that you are not in a hurry. Make sure also that your driver gets enough rest time and time to eat. In general, as you visit restaurants, the driver may eat at the same time (either separately at the same restaurant or at some other nearby place). They may be willing to work non-stop for you as you are the "boss", but your life depends on their ability to concentrate, so ensure that your driving demands are reasonable; for example, if you decide to carry your own food with you on the road, be sure to offer your driver time to get a lunch himself.

By motorcycle

Some people argue that **the best way to experience India is on a motorbike**. Riding a motorbike and travelling across India you get a closer look and feel of India along with all the smells and sounds. However, this story seems to be mostly popular among the new emerging Indian middle class, who ply popular Indian travel destinations with their bikes, like Ladakh. For Westerners it is important to note the state of Indian roads and the chaotic traffic, which has already been mentioned under #By car.



Royal Enfield motorcycle



There are many companies which organise package tours or tailor-made tours for enthusiastic bikers and the adventurous, or a safer motorbike experience of India. They will take care of luggage and maintenance of the bike.

Another choice, popular with people who like taking risks, is to **buy a motorcycle**. Not for the faint of heart or inexperienced rider. India boasts the highest motor vehicle accident rate in the world.

The Royal Enfield is a popular (some would say, the only) choice for its classic looks and macho mystique. This is despite its high petrol consumption, 25 km/litre to 30 km/litre, supposed low reliability (it is "classic" 1940s engineering after all and requires regular service adjustment; you can find an Enfield mechanic with decades of experience in every town in India, who will perform miracles at about ₹100 an hour labour cost), and claimed difficulty to handle (it is quite heavy and the seat can be high for some). You don't want to be riding roads at 4,000-5,000 m in Ladakh and suddenly the bike breaking down — here it will be quite difficult to find a mechanic.

Alternatively, one can opt for a smaller yet quicker, more fuel efficient and more versatile bikes like "Hero", "Bajaj" or "Honda". They can range from 100 cc to the newly launched 220 cc bikes. The smaller variants (100–125 cc) can give you a mileage exceeding 50 km/litre on the road, while giving less power if one is opting to drive with pillion on the highways. The bigger variants (150–220 cc) are more powerful and one can get a feel of the power especially on highways — the mileage is lesser for these bikes anywhere between 35 km/litre to 45 km/litre.

Preferably tourists should go for second hand bikes rather than purchasing new ones. The smaller 100 cc variants can be purchased for anywhere between ₹15,000–25,000 depending on the year of make and condition of vehicle. The bigger ones can be brought from ₹30,000 onwards. But some people have even travelled the country on a scooter. Note that there might be restrictions in place on crossing from one state to the other—not all license plates may be allowed in all states.

By thumb

Hitchhiking in India, especially in remote regions, is very easy due to the enormous number of cargo trucks and local traffic on every highway and road. Most drivers do not speak English or any other international language; however, most have a very keen sense of where the cities and villages are along the road. It is rare for any of them to expect payment.

Hitchhiking in cities, highways and crowded places is safe, but refrain from hitchhiking on deserted places, less populated areas, forest roads, etc. However, this rule really also depends on the region. Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh can generally be considered to be safe for hitch-hiking. However, in Bihar, one of the poorest states of India, it is probably not a good idea. Also, it is better to stick to day time travel.

When hitchhiking it is important to understand the system of vehicle licence plates in India. There are yellow (commercial) and white (private) ones. White ones are generally always safe for hitch-hiking for free, because these are local people in their own car.

For yellow licence plates, it depends, regular cars, vans, mini-buses and Jeeps will mostly always be taxis, and it doesn't make sense to hail them. However, pickup trucks, cargo trucks, and anything that looks like made for transporting goods, is safe to hail. They shouldn't demand any money, but if so, just tell them that they are no taxis but cargo vehicles.

By rickshaw

The auto-rickshaw, usually abbreviated and referred to as **auto** and sometimes as **rickshaw**, is the most common means of hired transport in India. They are very handy for short-distance travel in cities, especially since they can weave their way through small alleys to bypass larger cars stuck in travel jams,

but are not very suitable for long distances. Most are green and yellow, due to the new CNG gas laws, and some may be yellow and black in colour, with one wheel in the front and two in the back, with a leather or soft plastic top.

The **E-Rickshaw**, is electric and often also now an increasingly common means of hired transport in India, being eco-friendly and very cheap. They serve the same purpose as autos, but travel at a lower speed than autos, and are not allowed on some roads. The E-Rickshaw can fit as many as 6 people in 1 vehicle, with some safety features.



A typical Indian autorickshaw,
Andaman Islands

The **cycle rickshaw** is where a cycle rider pedals you to your destination. They can often be quite expensive. Since it is a person pedalling, they are very slow, and are not recommended for travel.

When getting a rickshaw, you can either negotiate the fare or go by the meter. In almost all cases it is better to use the meter—a negotiated fare means that you are being charged a higher than normal rate. A metered fare starts around ₹13 (different for different areas), and includes the first 1 to 2 kilometres of travel. **Never** get in an auto-rickshaw or E-rickshaw without either the meter being turned on, or the fare negotiated in advance. In nearly all cases the driver will ask an exorbitant sum (for Indian standards) from you later. A normal fare would be ₹11-12 for the first km and ₹7-8 per km after that. In most cities, auto-rickshaw drivers are provided with a rate card that elaborately describes the fares on per kilometre basis. A careful tourist must verify the meter reading against the rate card before making a payment. Auto-rickshaws and E-rickshaws carry either digital or analog meters wherein the analog meters may have been tampered with. It may be a better option to go for a negotiated fare when the auto-rickshaw or E-rickshaw has an analogue meter.

Ideally, you should talk with a local to find out what the fare for any estimated route will be. Higher rates may apply at night, and for special destinations such as airports. Finally, factor in that rickshaw drivers may have to pay bribes to join the queue for customers at premium locations such as expensive hotels. The bribe will be factored in the fare.

Make sure that the driver knows where they are going. Many rickshaw drivers will claim to know the destination without really having any clue as to where it is. If you know something about the location, quiz them on it to screen out the liars. If you do not know much about the location, make them tell you in no uncertain terms that they know where it is. This is because after they get lost and drive all over the place, they will often demand extra payment for their own mistake. You can then tell them that they lied to you, and wasted your time, so they should be happy to get the agreed-upon fee.

By boat

India is known for its multitude of rivers and there are numerous boats and ferries to cross certain rivers. However, boat transport is less important for many budget travellers since they will cross most rivers with bridges anyway. That said, boats are still necessary to access certain islands, like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Lakshadweep Islands, Mumbai's Elephanta Island and West Bengal's Sagar Island.

You may also take a luxurious river cruise to visit the cities and towns along Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers. Known as **Ganga Vilas** (literally 'Ganga Luxury'), the cruise runs from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh to Dibrugarh in Assam, with stops at Patna, Farakka, Jangipur, Murshidabad, Ambika Kalna, Chandannagar, Kolkata and Dhaka. The river cruise also provides amazing views of the Sundarbans.

Addresses

If you need to get anywhere, call in advance and ask for detailed directions. Bear in mind that street signs in India tend to be rare or nonexistent outside the cities. Postal addresses will often carry landmark details "Opp. Prithvi theatre" or "Behind Maruti Showroom" or "near temple / church / mosque / bank branch / police station / school" to ease the search. Unlike the western system of address, the Indian system uses plot number or house number, street, road followed by landmark and the location pin code instead of street name and block number. Finding a place will usually involve some searching, but you will always find someone around the area willing to guide you. Unlike many other countries, Indians ask passers-by, nearby shopkeepers or cops for guidance on street addresses. So you may do the same, people would be happy to help. Using Google Maps with GPS works well most of the time in major cities but at times may not be accurate due to incorrect spelling of road or incorrect positioning on map.

Inner Line permit

Inner Line Permit is an official travel document issued by the Government of India to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected/restricted area for a limited period. It is obligatory for Indian citizens from outside those states to obtain a permit for entering into the protected state. The document is an effort by the Government to regulate movement to certain areas near the international border of India. This is a security measure and it is applicable for the following states:

- Arunachal Pradesh — permits are issued by the Secretary of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The permits are required for entering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh through any of the check gates across the inter-state border with Assam or Nagaland. Permits are obtained at Arunachal Bhavan in all major cities. Permits are given to specific districts and therefore plan the itinerary before applying for district entry permits. Checkpoints at every district border only allow locals and permit holders.
- Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland — permits are issued by the respective state governments to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into the state for a limited period to avoid uncontrollable influx. Most foreign tourists do not require the permit, but must register with the police within 24 hours of arrival; your hotel will usually handle this for you but check to be sure. Citizens and former citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan need special approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs to visit.
- Sikkim — a permit required for the 'Nathu La' Pass which was an important passage of the silk route in medieval era and now a part of the border between India and China. Foreigners are not eligible for the permits. Only Indian citizens are allowed to visit the pass. Further permits for high altitude regions like 'Lachung-Lachen' along with a high altitude lake called 'Gurudongmar Lake' can be obtained from Gangtok directly. Foreigners may be allowed. Another point known as 'Zero Point' also requires permits.
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands — non-Indians need a Restricted Area Permit to visit the islands, but these are now issued on arrival at the Port Blair airport; if you plan to arrive by sea, you'll need to arrange your permit before arrival, either in Chennai or when applying for your Indian visa. Indian nationals do not require a permit to visit the Andamans, but permits are required to visit Nicobar Islands and other tribal areas, and are rarely given.

See

To see all the places worth visiting in India, even a 6-month visit is arguably inadequate. There are more tourist destinations in India than can be mentioned in a full-length book, let alone a summary. Almost every state in India has over ten major tourist destinations and there are cities which can barely be tasted in a full week. Many Indian states by themselves are bigger and more populous than most of the countries in the world, and there are 28 states and 8 Union Territories in India, including two island chains outside the Mainland.

That said, below are some highlights.

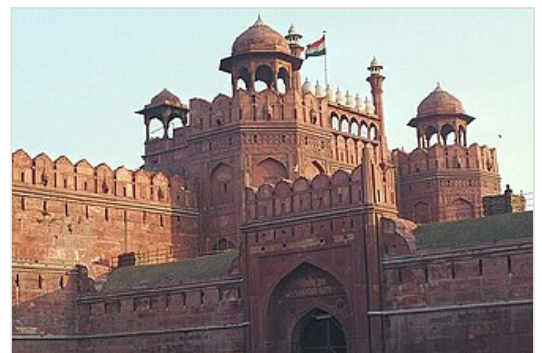
Historical monuments and forts

Probably the most famous single attraction in India is the **Taj Mahal**, which is widely recognised as the jewel of Islamic art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage.

The **Qutb Minar** and the impressive **Red Fort** are the two most prominent historical monuments in Delhi.

Jaipur, the capital of the western state of Rajasthan, is incredibly rich in forts and palaces, including the tremendous **Amber Fort**, beautiful **Jal Mahal** (Water Palace) and unique **Hawa Mahal**.

Nalanda in Bihar has the remains of a university of Buddhism that was established in 450 CE.



Red Fort, Delhi



For a rather different and more modern kind of historical monument, the **Gandhi Ashram** in Ahmedabad, founded by the Mahatma himself, is a repository of all things Gandhi.

Houses of worship

No visit to India would be complete without a trip to some of the country's fantastic temples. All regions of the country are replete with temples. The city of Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir, has so many temples that it's called the "**City of Temples**" and is a major draw for Hindu pilgrims. Bishnupur in West Bengal is home to famous **terracotta temples**. The **Sri Venkateswara Temple** in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, is dedicated to Vishnu and is also a major draw for pilgrims. The **Tantric temple complexes of Khajuraho** in Madhya Pradesh are much beloved for their thousand-year-old sacred erotic wall carvings, considered by some art historians to be the pinnacle of erotic art. The **Meenakshi Amman Temple** in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, is a centre of worship of Parvati, the consort of Shiva. The city of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu known for its grand Chola-era temples.

Hinduism is not the only religion represented among the great temples of India. The world headquarters of the Sikh religion are in the **Golden Temple** in Amritsar, Punjab. Leh and environs, in the union territory of Ladakh, are one of a number of areas that have **splendid Buddhist temples or monasteries**.

The **Ranakpur Temple** in the small Rajasthani town of Ranakpur is an impressive and historic Jain temple.

India's second-largest religion in adherents after Hinduism is Islam, and many parts of India were ruled by Muslim dynasties for hundreds of years, so it's not surprising that India is also home to many magnificent mosques. Some of them, like the mosque in the Taj, are part of historical monuments. One impressive mosque that's very much in use to this day is the lovely 17th-century **Jama Masjid** in Old Delhi. Hyderabad in the south has several historical mosques, including **Charminar Masjid** and **Mecca Masjid**.

There are also notable churches in various Indian cities.

Geographical

India is a very geographically varied country. In the north of the country, one can see the **Himalayas**, the Earth's highest mountain range. There are hilly areas in many non-Himalayan states, too. In India, **hill stations** — towns in the cooler areas in foothills or high valleys surrounded by mountains, which were favored by rajahs, then the British and now Indian tourists in the hot summer months — are considered sights and experiences in themselves. The largest of them is Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital, Srinagar, but Darjeeling, in view of Mount Kangchenjunga in northern West Bengal, is very famous for its tea. Other famous hill stations include Shimla, Ooty and Gangtok, and there are many others — most states have some.



Munshi Ghat along the Ganges in Varanasi

India is also a country of numerous rivers. Several of them are traditionally considered holy, but especially the **Ganges**, locally known as Ganga, which brings life to the Indian Plains, India's breadbasket, and is not just an impressive body of water but a centre of ritual ablutions, prayer and cremation. There are several holy cities along the river that have many temples, but they are often less places of pilgrimage to specific temples than holy cities whose temples have grown because of the ghats (steps leading down to the holy river) and most interesting to visit for the overall experience of observing or partaking in the way of life and death along the river. Foremost among these holy cities is Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, where some 5,000-year-old rituals are still practised; other cities worth visiting to experience the Ganges include Rishikesh and Haridwar, much further upstream.

India also has a long coastline. The **beaches** of Goa, also an interesting former Portuguese colony and the Andaman Islands are among the most appreciated by domestic and foreign visitors.

Finally, India has a vast desert, the **Thar Desert** in Rajasthan. Several Rajasthani cities including Jaisalmer are good bases for camel safaris.

Wildlife

See also: Wildlife in South and Southeast Asia, Indian national parks and wildlife sanctuaries

India is famous for its wildlife, including the Bengal tigers, Asiatic lions and elephants.

- Keibul Lamjao National Park in Manipur is the world's only floating national park, floating on the mirror like Loktak lake, where the world's only dancing deer species, Brow antlered deer (Manipuri: Sangai) is found. Another one, the Sirohi National Park is the world's only habitat for the world's only terrestrial lily, the Shirui Lily (*Lilium macklineae*), which can't be grown in any part of the earth except in the Shirui NP in Manipur, despite innumerable serious experiments of numerous scientists.
- Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh and Ranthambhore National Park in Rajasthan are the most likely places for you to spot an Indian tiger in the wild, though you will still have to have some luck and persistence.
- Gir Forest National Park in Gujarat is dedicated to the preservation of Asiatic lions.
- The Sundarbans, on the border with Bangladesh is the largest mangrove forest and delta in the world, home to the famous Royal Bengal tigers and estuarine crocodiles but also fascinating as an overall ecosystem.
- Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh is one of the places that may have inspired Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.
- Kaziranga National Park in Assam is home to the world's largest population of one-horned rhinoceros.

Do

Fairs and festivals

Goa Fair (carnival). February heralds the carnival at Goa. For three days and nights the streets come alive with colour. Held in mid February the week-long event is a time for lively processions, floats, the strumming of guitars, graceful dances and of non-stop festivity. One of the more famous of Indian carnivals, the Goa Festival is a complete sell out in terms of tourism capacities.

Surajkund Mela (1–15 February). As spring glides in, full of warmth and vibrancy, leaving the grey winter behind, Surajkund adorns itself with colourful traditional crafts of India. Craftsmen from all over the country assemble at Surajkund during the first fortnight of February to participate in the annual celebration that is the Surajkund Crafts Mela.

Holi. The Spring Festival of India, Holi is a festival of colours. Celebrated in March or April, according to the Hindu calendar, it was meant to welcome spring and win the blessings of Gods for good harvests and fertility of the land. As with all Hindu festivals, there are many interesting legends attached to Holi, the most popular being that of Prince Prahlad, who was a devout follower of Lord Vishnu. It is the second most important festival of India after Diwali. Holi in India is a festival of fun and frolic and has been associated with the immortal love of Krishna and Radha. The exuberance and the festivity of the season are remarkable.



Holi bonfire in Udaipur

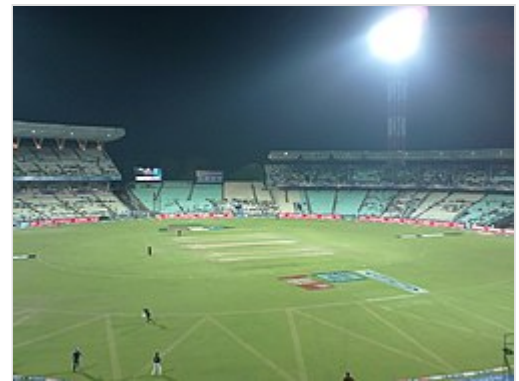


Diwali. The festival of lights, Diwali, illuminates the darkness of the New Year's moon, and is said to strengthen close friendships and knowledge with a self-realisation. Diwali is celebrated on a nation-wide scale on Amavasya – the 15th day of the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Ashwin (Oct/Nov) every year. It symbolises that age-old culture of India which teaches to vanquish ignorance that subdues humanity and to drive away darkness that engulfs the light of knowledge. The festival of lights still today projects the rich and glorious past of India.

Pushkar Mela. Every November the sleepy little township of Pushkar in Rajasthan comes alive in a riot of colours and a frenzied burst of activity during the Pushkar Fair. Few fairs in the world can match the liveliness of Pushkar. It includes the world's largest camel fair, but is much more than that.

Sports

- **Cricket** — India is a cricket-obsessed country and cricket is in the blood of most Indians. India plays an important role in world cricket and has been world champion twice in the ICC Cricket World Cup, in 1983 beating the mighty West Indies in the final, and Sri Lanka in 2011. India also emerged triumphant in the inaugural ICC T20 World Cup in 2007 held in South Africa beating arch-rival Pakistan in a nail-biting final, as well as in the ICC T20 World Cup in 2024 held in the USA and the West Indies beating South Africa in thrilling final, winning all their matches. The popularity of cricket in India is second to no other game, so seeing children playing cricket in parks and alleys with rubber balls and makeshift wickets is very common. Until 2008, Indian cricket was all about the national team playing against other countries in one-day matches or epic five-day Test marathons, but the advent of the Indian Premier League (<http://www.iplt20.com/>) (IPL) has, for better or worse, brought fast-paced, commercialised "Twenty20" cricket to the fore, complete with cheerleaders and massive salaries. Mumbai Indians vs Chennai Super Kings is so far the most viewed match and its atmosphere in Chepauk is the second best behind Royal Challengers Bengaluru atmosphere. The Ranji Trophy is the premier Indian five day tournament with over 20 teams competing. India also has state T20 leagues but are not that popular. In international matches, while Australia typically poses the strongest challenge to Indian supremacy, the most intense rivalry by far is with neighbouring Pakistan, and matches between the two sides are often a very charged affair. Don't miss out on those matches. About half-a dozen Indian stadiums have a capacity of over 45,000 and watching a cricket match can be quite an experience. The Narendra Modi Stadium has the most capacity with 136,000 seats. The Eden Gardens in central Kolkata is India's most iconic cricket stadium with 66,349 seating capacity and is the oldest cricket stadium in the Indian subcontinent, established in 1865, and is comparable to the stadiums of Lords' in London and the MCG in Melbourne. The atmosphere of most matches is electrifying. *Nearly all* international matches have sellout crowds, and it is quite normal for fans to bribe officials and make their way in. So book early, because for IPL matches played and India playing in India gets sold out within seconds. Grab a water bottle as well and prepare for the brilliant atmosphere in any stadium. Starting ticket prices are quite cheap; they can be as low as ₹250–300. India and Pakistan are all-time arch rivals, and cricket matches between the two nations attract up to a billion TV viewers, including many people who are otherwise not cricket fans. Watch all the action from dazzling sixes to stunning wickets to heated conversations.



A cricket match at the Eden Gardens, [Kolkata](#)

- **Football** (soccer) — You can come across young boys playing with a football on any open space that is available, as with cricket. Club football is very popular, especially among youth and you will find people getting into heated arguments in public places over their favourite teams. Many people also support national teams other than India, but it usually depends on the nationality of their favourite players. Also, many large restaurants and bars offer a view of important European club matches and the World Cup matches. The most famous and electrifying rivalry is the *Kolkata Derby* between Mohun Bagan Athletic Club (established 1889) and East Bengal Football club (established 1920) held at Salt Lake Stadium (the second-largest non-auto racing stadium in the world) in eastern Kolkata, the football capital of India and a tremendously football crazy city. This rivalry is widely regarded to be the oldest and most intense football rivalry in Asia.
- **Hockey** (field hockey) – The national game of India, hockey retains a prominent position in the hearts of many Indians, despite the craze for cricket and football. Although the viewership has dwindled significantly (as compared to the golden era before cricket came to the fore in the mid-1980s), it hasn't vanished completely. It still has a significant fan base, especially in North India, some eastern parts like Jharkhand, Odisha and the Northeastern states. The introduction of the Premier Hockey League has helped restore its popularity. Speakers of U.S./Canadian English should also note that 'hockey' refers to field hockey, not ice hockey.
- **Polo** — Polo's origins can be traced to origins in Manipur state around 3100 BC, when it was played as Sagol Kangjei. It was adopted by the Europeans during the 19th century and spread around the globe. The polo ground in Imphal is the world's oldest.
- **Kabaddi** — A sport unique to the Indian subcontinent, it is a contact team sport that involves attempting to tag out your opponents' player before returning to your own half.

Learn

There are many things to learn that interest foreigners all over India, but there are a few destinations that have become particularly well known for certain things:

- **Yoga** is popular in Haridwar, Rishikesh and Mysore.
- **Ayurveda** is popular in Kerala. The region also boasts of many dance and dramatic forms.
- **Hindi** in Delhi and Varanasi.
- **Classical musical instruments** in not only the ancient city of Varanasi but many parts of India, especially in Southern States, where they form the most integral part of Core Classics.
- **Classical vocal music** and **classical dance forms** in Tamil Nadu or Manipur or Karnataka.
- **Sanskrit** at 'Samskrita Bharati' in areas of Udupi, Bangalore and Delhi.
- **Buddhism** in Dharamsala and Bir in Himachal Pradesh as well as in Bodh Gaya in Bihar.
- **Cooking** classes are also popular. The most well-known exported type of Indian food are the cuisines such as Idly, Dosa, Biryani, Dals etc. and regional cuisines such as Thali, South Indian, and Punjabi, as the Sikhs have been the most successful in spreading Indian restaurants throughout the western world. However, styles vary a lot throughout the country, so if you have the time and appetite it's worth checking out courses in a variety of areas such as Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal.

There are many universities imparting education but at the helm are **Indian Institutes of Technology** (IITs) for technical undergraduates, **Indian Institutes of Management** (IIMs) for management postgraduates and **National Law Universities/Schools** (NLUs) which are world class institutes. Most of the ambitious students who want to get a good high level education strive to get into these institutes through the fiendishly difficult admission processes, both due to nature of test and the prevailing

competition. Admissions to the top 7 IITs - Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Roorkee and Guwahati - are so competitive that it is harder for an Indian student to get into one of them than it is for an American student to get into an Ivy League college, or a British student to get into Oxbridge. The 6 top IIMs (Including the 4 oldest - Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bangalore and Lucknow plus newly established Indore and Kozhikode) together select only about 1,200 students from 350,000 students who appear for CAT exam. But still students have a great desire to get into these institutes. These institutes also offer degrees to foreign students.

Apart from undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral courses, there are many training and diploma-level institutes and polytechnics that cater to the growing demand for skill-based and vocational education. Besides conventional educational institutes, foreigners might also be interested to study with Pandits to learn Hindi and Sanskrit in genuine settings as well as with Mullahs to study Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. They might also like to live with famed Ustads to study traditional Indian music. Whether people are interested in philosophy or religion, cuisine or dance, India will have the right opportunity for them.

Work

Foreigners need a work permit to be employed in India. A work permit is granted if an application is made to the local Indian embassy along with proof of potential employment and supporting documents. There are many expatriates working in India, mostly for multinational companies. India has always had an expatriate community of reasonable size, and there are many avenues for finding employment, including popular job-hunting websites.

Citizens of Nepal and Bhutan can live and work freely in India, and do not require work permits.

There are many volunteer opportunities around the country including teaching. India has a reasonable presence of foreign Christian missionaries, who for the most part form the non-local religious workers, since the other major religions of the world either grew out of India or have had a long-term presence.

A living can be made in the traveller scenes by providing some kind of service such as baking Western cakes, tattooing or massage.

Previously, an AIDS test result was required as part of the work visa application process. It is highly recommended that applicants obtain test results in their home country beforehand if possible.

Buy

Money

The currency in India is the Indian **rupee** (sign: ₹; code: **INR**) (रुपया — *rupaya* in Hindi and similarly named in most Indian languages, but *ṭaka* in Maithili, *ṭākā* in Bengali and *ṭakā* in Assamese). The rupee is subdivided into 100 paise (singular: paisa). "5 rupees 50 paise" would normally be written as "₹5.50". The new rupee symbol ₹ was introduced in July 2010 to bring the rupee's symbol in line with other

Exchange rates for Indian rupees

As of Aug 2025:

- US\$1 ≈ ₹88
- €1 ≈ ₹102
- UK£1 ≈ ₹118

major currencies. Previously, "Rs" was used (or "Re" for the singular rupee). It is very likely you will continue to see the previous nomenclature in your Indian travels, especially with smaller businesses and street vendors, as well as prices written like 500/- (with a slash and hyphen at the end).

Indian banknotes or bills come in denominations of ₹1 (rare), ₹5 (green, printing discontinued), ₹10 (orange and violet/chocolate brown), ₹20 (reddish-orange/greenish yellow), ₹50 (violet/fluorescent blue), ₹100 (greenish blue/lavender), ₹200 (bright yellow) and ₹500 (stone grey). There are two versions of ₹10, ₹20, ₹50 and ₹100 banknotes due to the introduction of a new series of the currency by the government in 2016 following the demonetisation. A magenta ₹2000 banknote exists and remains legal tender, but was withdrawn from circulation in 2023.

The coins in circulation are 50p (rare), ₹1, ₹2, ₹5, ₹10 (yellow ring with steel center) and ₹20 (steel ring with yellowish gold center). Coins are useful for buying tea (₹5), for bus fares (₹2 to ₹10), and for giving exact change for an auto-rickshaw.

Indians commonly use **lakh** and **crore** for 100,000 and 10,000,000 respectively. Though these terms come from Sanskrit, they have been adopted so deeply into Indian English that most people are not aware that they are non-existent in other English dialects. You may also find non-standard, although standard in India, placement of commas while writing numerals. One crore rupees would be written as ₹1,00,00,000, so first time you place a comma after three numerals, then after every two numerals. This format may puzzle you till you start thinking in terms of lakhs and crores, after which it will seem natural.

- AU\$1 ≈ ₹57
- CA\$1 ≈ ₹64
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ ₹59
- Swiss Fr.1 ≈ ₹107
- Chinese ¥1 ≈ ₹12
- SG\$1 ≈ ₹68
- South African R1 ≈ ₹5
- SR1 ≈ ₹23

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from XE.com (<https://www.xe.com/currency/inr-indian-rupee>)

The money that was

On November 8, 2016, the old yellow ₹500 and red ₹1000 banknotes were demonetised (made invalid) at very short notice in a ham-fisted attempt to fight corruption. The new ₹500 note is grey, and there is no ₹1000 note at all. If you have any of the old notes lying around, they are no longer legal tender and they are impossible to exchange. **Don't accept these** if somebody tries to palm any off to you:



Number	Western format	Indian format (In English)	Indian format (In Hindi)
100	Hundred	Hundred	Sau
1000	Thousand	Thousand	Hazār
1,00,000	Hundred Thousand	One Lakh	Ek Lākh
10,00,000	Million	Ten Lakhs	Das Lākh
1,00,00,000	Ten Million	One Crore	Ek Karor

Change

It is always good to have a number of small bills on hand, as merchants and food stalls are notoriously short on change and cash in general, even if your food was ₹250. Giving a ₹500 note, and they often will be stuck. It is best to ask before whether they have change. This is due to most small shops accepting cashless payment, or just to have as little money in the shops as possible, for safety.

The best way to get small change is with bus conductors or other official places, they will readily accept large notes. Also, it seems fruit and vegetable vendors have change.

In general, it is best to keep smaller bills (₹10-50) and larger bills separate. Then, it will not be obvious how much money you have.

Some shops don't accept bills and coins of very low denominations like ₹1 and ₹5 bills, and 50p, ₹1 and ₹2 coins, despite being legal tenders. So, it is best to change these for larger denominations commonly used instead of arguing with shopkeepers.

Also, do not accept any bills that are ripped, taped or look in any way unacceptable. Generally, vendors, etc. will readily give you a better note. But some might struggle to find any cash at all, as mentioned before. Stand your ground, otherwise next time you try to spend such a note it will be your problem and Indians are very selective.

UPI (Unified Payment Interface)

In India, you can now pay on phone using UPI. Using your UPI enabled mobile app, you scan a QR Code from your vendor, type in a set amount of money and the money can send. Foreigners can now make UPI payments as well.

ATMs

Most ATMs will pay out a maximum of ₹10,000 per transaction. Notes are often ₹500 only, so you will have to choose a multiple of this for withdrawals. State Bank of India (SBI) is the biggest bank in India and has the most ATMs. ICICI bank has the second largest network of ATMs and accepts most of the international cards at a nominal charge. International banks like Citibank, HSBC, Barclays, Deutsche Bank, ABN Amro and Standard Chartered have a significant presence in major Indian cities.

Either way, it is always worthwhile to have bank cards or credit cards from at least two different providers to ensure that you have a backup available in case one card is suspended by your bank or simply does not work at a particular ATM.

Decline any offer of dynamic currency conversion (DCC), unless you cannot, or you can verify that the conversion is indeed in your favour – it rarely is. It is often off the market rate by 7% or more, whereas your bank's rate is typically only off 1–3%. While your bank may also charge a fixed fee for its conversion, the exchange rate dominates in typical withdrawals.

The ATMs of the State Bank of India (SBI), Punjab National Bank (PNB), Canara, Union, HDFC, Baroda, Central, IDBI, DCB and HSBC banks may not charge a withdrawal fee (listed in order from most to fewest branches). The fee charged can vary depending on your card type, where your bank is and sometimes even the specific ATM you're using. Check fees when using an ATM you haven't used before, or the same ATM with a different card. If one of these ATMs is not nearby then check this table to help find a favourable alternative:

Fees and limits (as of Nov 2024)

Bank	Fee	Transaction limit	DCC
Bank of Baroda	None	₹10000	
Central Bank	None	₹10000	
Canara Bank	₹0-200	₹10000	
DCB Bank	None	₹10000	
HDFC Bank	₹0-200	₹10000	
HSBC Bank	None	₹10000	
IDBI Bank	None	₹10000	
Punjab National Bank (PNB)	₹0-150	₹10000	
State Bank of India (SBI)	₹0-250	₹10000	8% declinable
Union Bank of India	None	₹10000	
Citibank	₹200	₹10000	
ICICI Bank	₹200	₹10000	
IndusInd Bank	₹200	₹10000	
Kotak Mahindra Bank	₹200	₹10000	
Federal Bank	₹238	₹10000	
Axis Bank	₹300	₹10000	
Standard Chartered	₹335	₹10000	

Credit cards and mobile payments

In many cities and towns, credit cards are accepted at retail chain stores and other restaurants and stores. Small businesses and family-run stores almost never accept credit cards, so it is useful to keep a moderate amount of cash on hand.

Mobile payment apps including PhonePe, Paytm, and Google Pay use the UPI BHIM standard and are increasingly popular across India, these apps require Indian phone numbers and bank accounts but there are several apps that provide UPI for tourists and visitors, including Mony, Cheq and Namaspay. Apple

Pay is not supported in India. You will have to scan a QR code and then money will be transferred to the recipient. UPI apps for tourists work with the QR codes. Most UPI apps can be downloaded from the app stores before travelling, but they require in-person identification before working. Most UPI for tourists apps provide scheduling a meeting at hotel via whatsapp or meeting at their offices.

Many shops, even the tiniest food shed, will accept cashless payment. This is also the reason why they are notoriously short in cash.

Money exchange

You can change foreign currencies into rupees at any one of the numerous foreign exchange conversion units including banks.

The Indian rupee is officially not convertible; foreigners are **not allowed** to bring Indian rupees into or out of India, while Indian citizens are restricted to carrying **up to ₹25,000** when exiting or entering India. Rates for exchanging rupees overseas are often poor, although places with large Indian populations (e.g. Dubai, Singapore) can give decent rates.



Rajasthani fabric for sale, Jodhpur

Costs

Costs in India can vary widely from region to region, and even in the same city, depending on the quality of service or product, brand, etc. But usually, India is **very inexpensive** for Western travellers.

Budget travellers

Budget travel around India is surprisingly easy, with the savvy backpacker being able to get by on as little as US\$10 per day—but allow US\$15–25 for any extra comfort (beer, rickshaws, etc.). It is generally cheaper than South East Asia with a night in a hotel costing as little as ₹200–800—though there will be probably no AC at the lower end. Hostel beds start at ₹150, and generally are ₹300–500. Beach huts in the cheaper places of Goa can cost around ₹800 per night. A meal can be bought from a street trader for as little as ₹30, Samosas and alike go for ₹10–20 per piece, though in a restaurant expect to pay around ₹100–200 for a meal. Overnight buses and trains can cost anywhere from ₹600–1,000 dependent on distance and locations, though an uncomfortable government bus (benches only) may be half of that. Regular bus transport will cost approximately ₹2/km—if you pay considerably more, something is off. Short-distance bus routes of 3–4 hr are seldomly more than ₹200.

Otherwise, just exploring places on foot saves a lot of money. Also, many sights are for free and just hanging out at a temple and reading a book is as cheap as it can get.

A simple day in Rishikesh or Amritsar could look like this:

- Accommodation: ₹0–200 (Temple vs. Hostel)
- Food: ₹350 (2 full meals, fruits)
- Chai, water, soft drink: ₹100
- Transport: ₹100–200

- **Total:** ₹400–800 for one person

Mid-range to splurge travellers

Add traveling by taxi, staying in 3+-star hotels, and dinning in classy locations, and your daily bill will quickly go up to US\$50–100 (per person). A decent room is ₹2,000–5,000 in a good hotel offering PayTV, AC, and sometimes refrigerator. Food will cost at least ₹400 for a decent meal, but the sky is the limit. A taxi or rickshaw may cost ₹20–30/km. There are radio taxis that are available at ₹20–25/km in key Indian cities which have GPS navigation, AC and accept debit/credit cards for payments. So, the total for one day would be about as below:

- Hotel: US\$30–60 per room for a good place per day
- Food: US\$15 for a good meal per day
- Travel: US\$20 taxi and bus together
- **Total:** US\$90 for a couple, or US\$60 for one person alone

Discriminatory pricing

Foreign visitors will quickly encounter the **special foreigners' rates** that they are charged in some places in India. This applies to many tourist attractions, such as museums and historical sites. The difference in pricing is because the Indian government subsidises entry fees for local people, to make these attractions more affordable for taxpayers. While this may seem discriminatory, it is practised in most developing countries in Asia and Africa and helps make these attractions more accessible to local people.

Some tourist attractions that are run by the Archaeological Survey of India have different rates for Indians and foreigners. These rates are prominently posted at the entrance and ticketing booths. The rates for foreigners may be as many as five to ten times those for Indians. Likewise, if you are reserving a hotel room or an airline ticket over the internet, you may find that paying in euros or US dollars costs significantly more. You can get an Indian friend to book in rupees and in most cases, no one will question you at the time of check in.

People who have an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card (see Get In) are exempt from this pricing enjoying the same fare as Indian citizens when visiting tourist attractions.

Tipping

In India there has traditionally been little or no tipping, and today tipping is unusual outside of fancier restaurants where up to 10% is appropriate. The fancier restaurants may also levy a service charge of up to 15% apart from government taxes. Some restaurants have also started placing jars at the cashier for people to drop in some change if they feel so, but this is a rather rare phenomenon. Most clubs in India have a complete ban on its members from tipping. Usually no service industry except the food services industry expects a tip. In India, it is unlawful for taxi or rickshaw drivers to charge anything above the meter.

Shopping

In India, you are **expected to negotiate the price** with street hawkers but not in department stores and the like. If not, you risk overpaying many times, which can be okay if you think that it is cheaper than at home. In most of the big cities and even smaller towns retail chain stores are popping up where the shopping experience is essentially identical to similar stores in the West. There are also some government-run stores like the **Cottage Emporium** in New Delhi, where you can sample wares from all across the country in air-conditioned comfort. Although you will pay a little more at these stores, you can be sure that what you are getting is not a cheap knockoff. The harder you bargain, the more you save money. A few tries later, you will realise that it is fun.



At the main bazaar in Delhi

Often, the more time you spend in a shop, the better deals you will get. It is worth spending time getting to know the owner, asking questions, and getting him to show you other products (if you are interested). Once the owner feels that they will make a sufficient profit from you, they will often give you additional goods at a rate close to cost, rather than the common "foreigner rate". You will get better prices and service by buying many items in one store than by bargaining in multiple stores individually. If you see local people buying in a store, you should be able to find out the real Indian prices. Ask someone around you quietly, "How much would you pay for this?"

Also, very often you will meet a "friend" in the street inviting you to visit their family's shop. That almost always means that you pay twice as much as when you had been in the shop without your newly found friend.

Baksheesh was originally a Persian word for charity, but it has spread to many languages including most of those in India. Depending on context, its English translation might be any of donation, gift, tip, bribe, alms or commission. Having Indians you deal with want baksheesh is a fairly common phenomenon. While this is sometimes a problem, doing it can ease certain problems and clear some hurdles. Baksheesh is also the term used by beggars when they want money from you and may refer to tips given those who provide you a service.

Packaged goods show the **Maximum Retail Price (MRP)** on the package. This includes taxes. Retailers are not supposed to charge more than this. Though this rule is adhered to at most places, at tourist destinations or remote places, you may be charged more. This is especially true for cold drinks like Coke or Pepsi, where a bottle (300 ml) costs around ₹33-35 when the actual price is ₹30. Also, keep in mind that a surprising number of things do not come in packaged form. Do check for the authenticity of the MRP, as shopkeepers may put up their own sticker to charge more from you.

What to look for/buy

- **Wood Carvings** – India produces a striking variety of carved wood products that can be bought at very low prices. Examples include decorative wooden plates, bowls, artwork, furniture and miscellaneous items that will surprise you. Check the regulations of your home country before attempting to import wooden items.

- **Clothing** – It depends on the state/region you are visiting. Most of the states have their speciality to offer. For example, go for silk sarees if you are visiting Varanasi; Block prints if you are in Jaipur.
- **Paintings** – Paintings come on a wide variety of media, such as cotton, silk, or with frame included. Gemstone paintings incorporate semi-precious stone dust, so they have a glittering appearance to them.
- **Marble and stone carvings** – Common carved items include elephants, Hindu gods/goddesses. Compare several of the same kind. If they look too similar bargain hard as they are probably machine made.
- **Jewellery** – Beautiful necklaces, bracelets and other jewellery are very inexpensive in India.
- **Pillow covers, bedsets** – Striking and rich designs are common for pillows and bed covers.
- **Carpets** – India has a long history of carpet production and makes many today for both domestic and export markets.

Designer brands like Louis Vuitton, Prada, Gucci, Zara, A & F, all are available in upmarket stores in malls especially in the larger cities.

Eat

See also: South Asian cuisine

Indian cuisine takes its place among the great cuisines of the world. There is a good chance that you have tasted "Indian food" in your country, especially if you are a traveller from the West. But what India has exported abroad is just one part of its extraordinary range of culinary diversity.

Indian food can be spicy: Potent fresh green chillies or red chilli powder will bring tears to the eyes of the uninitiated, and can be found in unexpected places like sweet cornflakes (a snack, not breakfast) or even candies. The degree of spiciness varies widely throughout the country: Andhra food is famously fiery, while Gujarati cuisine is quite mild in taste with the exception of Surti food (from Surat).

To enjoy the local food, start slowly. Don't try everything at once. After a few weeks, you can get accustomed to spicy food. If you would like to order your dish not spicy, simply say so. Most visitors are tempted to try at least some of the spicy concoctions, and most discover that the sting is worth the trouble. Remember, too, that while "spicy" is a convenient short-hand for "chilli-laden", the spiciness of food in India doesn't always mean lots of chilli: Indian cuisines often use a multitude of different spices and other aromatic ingredients in highly creative and flavourful ways, like ginger and garlic.

Cuisine

Cuisine in India varies greatly from region to region.

North Indian

Northern India is a wheat-growing area, so you have **Indian breads** (known as *roti*), including *chapatti* (unleavened bread), *paratha* (pan-fried layered roti), *naan* (cooked in a clay *tandoor* oven), *puri* (deep-fried and puffed up bread) and many more. A typical meal consists of one or more gravy dishes along with rotis, to be eaten by breaking off a piece of roti, dipping it in the gravy and eating them together. Most of the Hindi heartland of India survives on roti, rice, and **lentils** (*dal*), which are prepared in several

different ways and made spicy to taste. Served on the side, you will usually find spiced yogurt (*raita*) and either fresh chutney or a tiny piece of exceedingly pungent pickle (*achar*) — very much an acquired taste for most visitors. Try mixing it with curry, not eating it plain.

A variety of regional cuisines can be found throughout the North. *Tandoori* chicken, prepared in a clay oven called a *tandoor*, is probably the best-known North Indian dish, innovated by a Punjabi immigrant from present-day Pakistan during the Partition. For a taste of traditional Punjabi folk cooking, try *dal makhani* (stewed black lentils and kidney beans in a buttery gravy), or *sarson da saag*, a yummy gravy dish made with stewed mustard greens, served with *makke di roti* (flatbread made from maize). There are also the hearty textures and robust flavours of Rajasthani food, the meat-heavy Kashmiri dishes from the valley of Kashmir, or the mild yet ingratiating Himalayan (*pahari*) cuisine found in the higher reaches. North India also has a variety of snacks like *samosa* (vegetables encased in thin pastry of a triangular shape) and *kachori* (either vegetable or pulses encased in thin pastry). There is also a vast constellation of sweet desserts like *jalebi* (deep-fried pretzel with sugar syrup- shaped like a spiral), *rasmalai* (balls of curds soaked in condensed milk) and *halwa*. Dry fruits and nuts like almonds, cashews and pistachios are used a lot, often in the desserts, but sometimes also in the main meal.



Chuni roti



Authentic Mughal-style cooking, the royal cuisine of the Mughal Empire, can still be found and savoured in some parts of India, most notably the old Mughal cities of Delhi, Agra and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, and Hyderabad in Telangana. It is a refined blend of Persian, Turkic and Subcontinent cooking, and makes heavy use of meat and spices. The names of some Mughal dishes bear the prefix of *shahi* as a sign of its prestige and royal status from a bygone era. Famous Mughal specialties include *biryani* (layered meat and rice casserole), *pulao* (rice cooked in a meat or vegetable broth), *kebab* (grilled meat), *kofta* (balls of mincemeat), *korma*, *rumali roti* (flatbread whirled into paper-thin consistency) and *shahi tukray* (saffron and cardamom-scented bread pudding).

Thali is a general meal dish often including dal, vegetables, raita, rice, roti. Dal, vegetables and sometimes raita can often be had several times, 4 rotis are generally included (₹10 for additional). They go for ₹100-150.

South Indian

See also: [Southern India#Eat](#)

In Southern India, the food is mostly **rice-based**. A typical meal includes *sambhar* (a thick vegetable and lentil chowder) with rice, *rasam* (a thin, peppery soup), or *avial* (mixed vegetables) with rice, traditionally served on a banana leaf as a plate. Seasoning in South India differs from northern regions by its ubiquitous use of mustard seeds, curry leaves, pulses, fenugreek seeds, and a variety of souring agents such as tamarind and kokum. There are regional variations too — the coastal regions make greater use of coconut and fish. In the



A typically south Indian banana leaf meal



State of Kerala, it is common to use grated coconut in everything and coconut oil for cooking. The South also has some great breakfast dishes like *idli* (a steamed cake of lentils and rice), *dosa*, a thin, crispy pancake often stuffed with spiced potatoes to make *masala dosa*, *vada*, a savoury Indian donut, and *uttapam*, a fried pancake made from a rice and lentil batter with onions and other vegetables mixed in. All of these can be eaten with *dahi*, plain yogurt, and **chutney**, a condiment that can be made from practically anything. Try the ever popular masala dosa, which originated from Udupi in Karnataka, in one of the old restaurants of Bangalore. Seafood is very popular in Kerala and the Mangalorean coast of Karnataka. Chettinad and Hyderabad cuisines use meat heavily, and are a lot spicier. Coffee tends to be the preferred drink to tea in South India.

Others

In Western India, you will find some great cuisine groups. Gujarati cuisine is somewhat similar to Rajasthani cooking with the heavy use of dairy products, but differs in that it is predominantly vegetarian, and often sweetened with jaggery or sugar. Gujaratis make some of the best snack items such as the **Dhokla** and the **Muthia**. Mumbai is famous for its chaat, as well as the food of the small but visible Irani and Parsi communities concentrated in and around the city. The adjacent states of Maharashtra and Goa are renowned for their seafood, often simply grilled, fried or poached in coconut milk. A notable feature of Goan cooking is that pork and vinegar is used, a rare sight in the rest of India. Vindaloo originated in Goa and is traditionally cooked with pork. Despite its apparent popularity in Indian restaurants abroad, it is not common in India itself.

The food in Eastern India makes heavy use of rice and fish due to the vast river channels and ocean coastline in the region. Bengali cooking is known for its complexity of flavour and bittersweet balance. Mustard oil is often used in cooking and adds a pungent, slightly sweet flavour and intense heat. Bengalis prefer freshwater fish, in particular the iconic hilsa or *ilish*: it can be smoked, fried, steamed, baked in young plantain leaves, cooked with curd, aubergine and cumin seeds. It is said that *ilish* can be prepared in more than 50 ways. Typical Bengali dishes include *mācher jhāl*, a brothy fish stew which means "fish in sauce", and *shorshe ilish* (cooked in a gravy made from mustard seed paste). Eastern India is also famous for its desserts and sweets. Rasgulla is a famous variant of the better-known gulab jamun, a spherical morsel made from cow's milk and soaked in a clear sugar syrup. It's excellent if consumed fresh or within a day after it is made. *Sandesh* is another excellent milk-based sweet, best described as the dry equivalent of ras malai.



A traditional Odia kitchen

A lot of food has also filtered in from other countries. **Indian Chinese** (or *Chindian*) is far and away the most common adaptation. Most Chinese would barely recognise the stuff, but dishes like "veg manchurian" (deep-fried vegetable balls in a chilli-soy-ginger sauce) and "chilli chicken" are very much a part of the Indian cultural landscape and worth a try. The British left fish and chips and some fusion dishes like mulligatawny soup, while Tibetan and Nepali food, especially *momo* dumplings, are not uncommon in northern India.

Pizza and pasta have entered India in a big way, and the chains such as Pizza Hut and Domino's have Indianised the pizza and introduced adaptations like paneer-tikka pizza. There is an Indian chain called Smokin Joe's, based in Mumbai, which has mixed Thai curry with pizzas. However, often ready-made sauces with lots of additives and spices are used. Also, the cheese is sometimes of questionable type (some feta-style type) in normal restaurants. So, you are better off asking exactly what ingredients they use, if you don't want to be surprised negatively.

It is, of course, impossible to do full justice to the range and diversity of Indian food in this brief section. Not only does every region of India have a distinctive cuisine, but you will also find that even within a region, castes and ethnic communities have different styles of cooking and often have their signature recipes, which you will probably not find in restaurants. The adventurous traveller is advised to wangle invitations to homes, try various bylanes of the city and look for food in unlikely places like temples and Gurudwaras in search of culinary nirvana.

Fruits

While a wide variety of fruits are native to India, including the *chikoo* and the *jackfruit*, nothing is closer to an Indian's heart than a juicy ripe mango. Hundreds of varieties are found across most of its regions. In fact, India is the largest producer, growing more than half the world's output. **Mangoes** are in season at the hottest part of the year, usually between May and July, and range from small (as big as a fist) to some as big as a small cantaloupe. They can be consumed in their ripe, unripe and also a baby form (the last 2 predominantly in pickles). The best mango (the "King of Mangoes", as Indians call it) is the "Alphonso" or Haapoos (in Marathi), in season in April and May along the western coast of Maharashtra. Buy it from a good fruit shop in Mumbai or Mahatma Phule market (formerly Crawford market) in South Mumbai. Dushheri Mangoes are also popular in North India. Other fruits widely available (depending on the season) are **bananas, oranges, papayas, guavas, lychees, apples, pineapples, pomegranates, apricots, melons, coconuts, grapes, plums, peaches and berries**. European fruits like apples and pears can be dull and unjuicy, because they are not perfectly adjusted to the local environment and sometimes suffer from mildew. Papayas are often harvested when they still green, because the fruit vendor will of course not want to be in the situation where he has to sell them all at once. Instead they get ripe each separately after a while. However, this is of course not good for the taste, and it can be hard to find a good and sweet papaya. In general, also note the remarks on fruits and vegetables under [#Stay healthy](#). But your best bet are probably bananas and mangos.

Vegetarian

Visiting vegetarians will discover a culinary treasure that is found nowhere else in the world. Owing to a large number of strictly vegetarian Hindu Brahmins and Jains, Indian cuisine has evolved an astonishingly rich menu that uses no meat or eggs. Jains in particular practise a strict form of vegetarianism based on the principles of non-violence and peaceful co-operative co-existence. Jains do not consume root vegetables such as potatoes, garlic, onions, carrots, radishes, cassava, sweet potatoes and turnips, as the plant needs to be killed prior to its end of normal life cycle, in the process of accessing these. At least half the menus of most

Know your vegetarians



Most Indians who practise vegetarianism do so for religious or cultural reasons — though cultural taboos have their roots in ethical concerns. Indians' dietary restrictions

restaurants are devoted to vegetarian dishes, and by law all packaged food products in India are tagged with a green dot (vegetarian) or red dot (non-veg). Veganism however is not a well-understood concept in India, and vegans may face a tougher time: milk products like cheese (*paneer*), yogurt (*dahi*) and clarified butter (*ghee*) are used extensively (in particular, ghee can be hard to spot as it can be mixed into curries before they are served), and honey is also commonly used as a sweetener. Milk in India is generally *not* pasteurised, and must be boiled before consumption.

Even non-vegetarians will soon note that due to the Hindu taboo, **beef** is generally not served (except in the Muslim, Christian and Parsi communities, Goa, Kerala and the North-Eastern states), and **pork** is also uncommon due to the Muslim population. Chicken and mutton are thus by far the most common meats used, although "buff" (water buffalo) is occasionally served in backpacker establishments. Seafood is of course ubiquitous in the coastal regions of India, and a few regional cuisines do use duck, venison and other game meats in traditional dishes.

Kosher and halal

Halal meat is easy to find among the Muslim minorities in India (and mostly cannot be found elsewhere in the country). Outside areas with a noticeable Muslim community, halal-certified restaurants are scarce.

Kosher food is largely unknown, and *certified* kosher establishments are also extremely limited. While contacting Chabad India (<https://www.chabadindia.org/>) a few days in advance is an option, it is not the most convenient option unlike most other Asian countries.

Surprising to many, while *explicitly* certified options remain extremely limited, food compliant with these diets is easy to find anywhere in India unlike most other Asian countries outside the Middle East. As many non-vegetarians in the country abjure mixing meat and dairy, and because most milk is from cows or buffalos, nearly all dairy in India is actually both halal and kosher although not certified accordingly. Your best bet at finding halal/kosher food is purely vegetarian restaurants, which avoid cross-contamination and can be found nearly everywhere across the country even in coastal areas. However, restaurants in India that also serve meat are almost *never* halal/kosher.

come in all shapes and sizes and the two symbols (see right) do not capture the full range. The green dot means pure vegetarian. red triangle means non-vegetarian, including only eggs (as in a fruit-egg cake). Here is a quick guide:

- **Veganism** is practically unknown in many parts of India, because milk and honey are enthusiastically consumed by virtually everyone. But some restaurants in major cities, such as Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore increasingly cater for vegans. Foods like tofu, soy chunks (branded Nutrela) and soy milk are readily available in major cities, as well as some minor ones.
- Eggs are considered non-vegetarian by most, though you may encounter people who are otherwise vegetarian eating eggs. These people are often referred to as **eggetarians**. That said, there are a number of foods that are vegan by default in India, including standard restaurant dishes such as aloo gobi, channa masala, various types of dal, dosas, and the vast majority of Indo-Chinese dishes.
- Dishes made with dairy products are usually denoted as such (referencing their use of butter or ghee, in particular). Most restaurants will accommodate dietary restrictions and it is advisable to ask if a dish contains milk, butter, cream, yogurt or ghee. Virtually all Indian desserts, however, are non-vegan, with the exception of jalebi, an orange-coloured fried dough commonly found in western and northern India.
- The strictest vegetarians are some **Jains and some**

Etiquette

In India eating with your hand (instead of cutlery like forks and spoons) is very common. There's one basic rule of etiquette to observe, particularly in non-urban India: **Use only your right hand.** The left hand is reserved for unhygienic uses. Don't stick either hand into communal serving dishes. Instead, use the spatula with your left hand to serve yourself and then dig in.

For all types of breads, the basic technique is to hold down the item with your forefinger and use your middle-finger and thumb to tear off pieces. The pieces can then be dipped in sauce, curry or used to pick up bits before you stuff them in your mouth. Rice is more challenging, but the basic idea is to use four fingers to mix the rice in curry and pack a little ball, before you pop it in your mouth by pushing it with your thumb.

Most of the restaurants do provide cutlery and it's pretty safe to use them instead of your hand.

Eating by hand is frowned on in some "classier" places. If you are provided with cutlery and nobody else around you seems to be doing it, then take the hint.

Restaurants

Indian restaurants run the gamut from roadside shacks (*dhabas*) to classy five-star places where the experience is comparable to places anywhere in the world. Away from the big cities and tourist haunts, mid-level restaurants are scarce, and food choices will be limited to the local cuisine, Punjabi/Mughlai, "Chinese"/"Indo-Chinese" and occasionally South Indian.

The credit for popularising Punjabi cuisine all over the country goes to the *dhabas* that line India's highways. Their patrons are usually the truckers, who happen to be overwhelmingly Punjabi. The authentic dhaba serves up simple yet tasty seasonal dishes like roti and dal with onions. Hygiene can be an issue in many dhabas, so if one's not up to your standards try another. In rural areas, dhabas are usually the only option.

In Southern India, a "hotel" is a local restaurant serving South Indian food, usually prepared meals or a *thali* or *plate meal* — a full plate of food that usually includes a kind of bread and/or rice and an assortment of meat or vegetarian dishes.

Brahmin sects. They not only abjure all kinds of meat and eggs, they also refuse to eat onions, potatoes or anything grown under the soil.

- Even meat-eating Hindus often follow special diets during religious days or during **fasts**. Hindu fasts do not involve giving up all food, just eating a restricted diet, some take only fruits.
- A very small group of Indians are, or used to be **pescatarians**, i.e. they count fish as vegetarian. Among these are Bengali and Konkani Brahmins. Such people are increasingly rare as most have taken to meat-eating.

Menus in English... well, almost

Menus in Indian restaurants are usually written in English, but using Hindi names. Here is a quick decoder key that goes a long way for understanding common dishes like *aloo gobi* and *muttar paneer*.

- *aloo* or *aalu* — potato
- *baigan* or *baingan* — eggplant/aubergine
- *bhindi* — okra
- *chana* — chickpeas
- *dal* — lentils
- *gobi* — cauliflower (or other cabbage)
- *machli* — fish
- *makkhan* — butter
- *matar* — green peas
- *mirch* — chilli pepper
- *murgh* or *murg* — chicken

Although you may be often be handed an extensive menu, most dishes are served only during specific hours, if at all.

- *palak* or *saag* — spinach (or other greens)
- *paneer* — Indian cottage cheese
- *subzi* — vegetable

Drink

One of the sweetest and safest beverages you can get is young coconut water (*nariyal paani*). You can almost always find it in any beach or other tourist destinations in the south. In summer (Mar-Jul), you can get fresh sugarcane juice in many places and even a lot of fresh fruit juice varieties.

India is famous for its Alphonso variety of mangoes, generally regarded as the King of Mangoes among connoisseurs. *Frooti*, in its famous tetra-pack, is the most popular processed drink, followed by *Maaza* (bottled by Coca-Cola) or *Slice* (bottled by PepsiCo), both of which contain about 15% Alphonso mango pulp. Both cost about ₹30-50 for a 600 ml bottle.

As for bottled water, make sure that the cap's seal has not been broken; otherwise, it is a tell-tale sign of tampering or that unscrupulous vendors reuse old bottles and fill them with tap water, which is generally unsafe for foreign tourists to drink without prior boiling. Bottled water brands like *Aquafina* (by PepsiCo) and *Kinley* (by Coca-Cola) are widely available. Local brands like *Bisleri*, *Himalayan*, *Bailley*, *Evian*, *Aquafina*, *Patanjali*, *Tata* and *Nestle* are reputed brands as well. Taste may vary due to the individual brands' mineral contents. In semi-urban or rural areas, it may be appropriate to ask for boiled water as well.

Tea

One can get tea (*chai* in most North Indian languages) of one variety or the other everywhere in India. The most common method of preparing *chai* is by brewing tea leaves, milk, and sugar altogether in a pot and keeping it hot until it's all sold. It is sweet and uniquely refreshing once you get the taste for it.

Masala chai will have, added to the above mix, spices such as cardamom, ginger or cinnamon etc. For some people, that takes some getting used to.



Making chai

While masala chai is popular in Northern and Central India, people in Eastern and North-Eastern India (West Bengal and Assam) generally consume tea without spices, the English way. This is also the part of India where most tea is grown.

Coffee

In South India, **filter coffee**, rather than tea, is the standard beverage. This is different to Western filter coffee due to the use of frothed and boiled milk, finely ground coffee powder, and a traditional Indian filter.

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol can either be frowned upon or openly accepted, depending on the region and religion of the area within which you are drinking. For example, Goa, Punjab and Pondicherry tend to be more free-wheeling (and have low taxes on alcohol), while a few southern areas like Chennai are less tolerant of alcohol, and may even charge excessive taxes on it. Some states such as Gujarat and Bihar are legally "dry" states and alcohol cannot be bought openly there, although there is a substantial bootlegging industry. Bootleg alcohol is unregulated and could kill you or make you sick, and you could also be in legal trouble if you are caught while drunk in a dry state.



Kingfisher beer

Favourite Indian tipples include beer and rum. Nowadays beer sold is mostly Tuborg, at around ₹180 for a large bottle of 750 mL in the liquor store. **Old Monk** is a popular rum brand. Prices vary by state, especially for hard liquor, but you can expect to pay anywhere between ₹500-₹800 for a 750 mL bottle of Old Monk. Mumbai tends to be the most expensive, due to local taxes, which can be three-times as much as Meghalaya.

Indian wines, long a bit of a joke, have improved remarkably and there's a booming wine industry in the hills of Maharashtra. The good stuff is not particularly cheap (expect to pay around ₹500 a bottle) and selections are mostly limited to white wines, but look out for labels by **Chateau Indage** or **Sula** (<https://sulavineyards.com/>).

Illegal moonshine, called *tharra* when made from sugar cane and *toddy* when made from coconuts, is widely available in some states. It's cheap and strong, but **very dangerous** as it may contain toxic methanol. Quality control is nonexistent, and best avoided entirely. In the former Portuguese colony of Goa you can obtain an extremely pungent liquor called *fenny* or *feni*, typically made from cashew fruits or coconuts.

As of April 2017 it is illegal to sell alcohol within 500 m of a highway. This is controversial as it has hit restaurants, bars and hotels hard. If your hotel does not have alcoholic drinks, this may well be the reason.

Drinking & driving

Driving under the influence of alcohol is considered as a serious offence in India. In the event of an accident the law deals with drink-drive offenders with severity. The punishment is a fine and/or imprisonment for up to 6 months. The driving license is suspended for at least six months.



Wine barrels at Sula Vineyards

Cannabis

Cannabis in its many forms, especially *ganja* (weed) and *charas* (hash), is widely available throughout India, but are all **illegal** in the vast majority of the country. The law states that simple possession may mean fines or years in prison, depending on the quantity possessed.

However, in some states (notably Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Odisha) the one legal and socially accepted way to consume cannabis is as ***bhanga***, a low-grade preparation sold at government-licensed shops that is not only smoked, but also made into cookies, chocolate and the infamous *bhanga lassi*, a herb-laced version of the normally innocuous yogurt drink. *Bhang lassi* is usually available at varying strengths, so use caution if opting for the stronger versions. It's also occasionally sold as "special lassi", but is usually easily spotted by the ₹30-50 price tag (several times higher than the non-special kinds). Remember that the effects of "Bhang" are slow and heighten when consumed with something sweet. Also, first-time users may want to wait a while before consuming too much in an effort to judge their tolerance.



Government-authorized *bhanga* shop, [Jaisalmer](#)

Sleep

Make sure to bring your passport and visa/OCI wherever you go, as most hotels will not rent out rooms without a valid passport and visa/OCI. Two important factors to keep in mind when choosing a place to stay are safety and cleanliness. Malaria and Dengue fever is present in most areas of India. One way to combat malaria and dengue fever is to choose lodgings with air conditioning and sealed windows. An insect-repellent spray containing DEET will also help, or consider Permethrin-treated fabrics.

Many **hotels** listed on western booking websites (Booking.com etc.) are also set at the "tourist price"; try local booking sites like Goibibo (<https://www.goibibo.com/>), redBus (<https://www.redbus.in/>) or MakeMyTrip (<https://www.makemytrip.com/>), as these have much better coverage of local hotels and in rural areas. Alternatively, you can also use Google Maps in combination with WhatsApp to inquire the price beforehand. Booking.com will only really work in very touristy places like Dharamsala, Manali, Goa, Pushkar, etc. If you are sure that there are more than enough places around where you are heading, just walking around and asking for the price can be sufficient. But note, overcharging of foreigners is widespread and you will have to bargain hard. Some cities like Chandigarh have weird regulations for foreigners and walking around inquiring the price with hotels might be frustrating, since many will not accept foreigners. Also, making a reservation through Booking.com in Chandigarh can leave you with an unpleasant surprise, namely the receptionist telling you that they don't accept foreigners, which can be fatal late at night. So, it is always best to check the ratings and reviews of the place you intend to stay in.

Accommodation choices vary widely depending on budget and location. Cheap travellers' hotels are available for around ₹300-500. Rooms at guest-houses with a double bed (and often a bathroom) can be found in many tourist places for around ₹1,000 — this seems to be the going rate for most budget accommodations in more frequented places nowadays. Bed and breakfast service providers are coming up offering standard services that can be expected from B&Bs outside India. The basics include: air-conditioner or fan, free food, and free Wi-Fi.

Hostels are available for as little as ₹200. They generally have a very high standard; clean beds, nice common rooms, etc., since most are new and oriented towards Western style. Most hostels have their own restaurant, and it is their way to make extra money from their guests — they might even be surprised and show it to you if you don't dine with them. Be aware that most people travelling in India nowadays are

Indians and they will mostly always outnumber foreigners in hostels and dorms. This can be a problem, because the Indian society is one where publicly the individual comes first, with often no consideration for the needs of their fellow human being. This can lead to situations in dorms where Indian guests call their family or friends in the middle of the night, wake up loudly at 6AM, consume high-odour food in their beds, watch videos on their mobiles without headphones, but also just consider the dorm a social place where they speak loudly with their friends until late. Of course, there is always the option to kindly ask them for some consideration and to be more respectful of the other people in the room. But you can ask yourself, how long before that really gets onto your nerves. So, hostels are not an obvious budget friendly choice for Westerners in India anymore.

If you intend to stay longer in one place, there are often places specialised on tourist that offer long term rent for around ₹10,000 per month, including kitchen and bathroom.

Most Indian train stations have rooms or dormitories, just ask the railway officials or reserve it online on the railway website — reserving is highly recommended. If you just show up, the only option left might be the AC waiting room for ₹10/hr. Rooms and dorms are cheap (around ₹800 and ₹300 respectively), relatively well maintained (the beds, sheets, not the showers) and secure. There are also the added bonus of not being accosted by the rickshaw mafia, getting the bags off quickly and, for the adventurous, high likelihood to jump on a cheap public bus back to the train station. Keep in mind you must have an arrival or departure train ticket from the station where you intend to sleep, and there could be a limit on how many nights you may stay.

Midrange options are plentiful in the larger cities and expanding fast into second-tier cities as well, and prices vary from ₹1,000-4,000 per night. Local, unbranded hotels can be found in any city, but quality varies widely.

If the wallet allows it, you can try staying like royalty in a maharaja's palace in places like Udaipur or modern five-star hotels which are now found pretty much all over the country. The top-end of Indian luxury rests with hotel chains like Oberoi (<http://www.oberoihotels.com/>), Taj (<http://www.tajhotels.com/>), and The Leela (https://www.theleela.com/en_us/). The usual international chains also run major 5-star hotels in most Indian metropolises, but due to India's economic boom availability is tight and prices can be crazy — it's not uncommon to be quoted over US\$300/night for what would in other countries be a distinctly ordinary business hotel going for a third of the price. Also beware that some jurisdictions including Delhi and Bangalore charge stiff luxury taxes on the *rack rate* of the room, which can lead to nasty surprises at check-out time.



Hotel Taj Mahal, one of the most famous landmarks of Mumbai

One way of meeting interesting Indian travellers is by staying at an Dak bungalow. Also, called travellers' bungalows or inspection bungalows, they were built by the British to accommodate travelling officials and are now used by the Central and state governments for the same purpose. They exist in many towns and some rural locations. Most will take tourists at a moderate fee if they have room. They are clean, comfortable and usually in good locations, but plain with ceiling fans rather than air conditioning, shower but no bath. Typically the staff includes a pensioned-off soldier as night watchman and perhaps another as gardener; often the gardens are lovely. Sometimes there may be a cook; his or her services will be free but

you should buy ingredients. A similar accommodation are the **PWD Tourist Rest Houses**, they can also be found in many towns and cities, are mostly for people from the "public workers department" but also accept tourists if not completely booked.

Stay safe

In addition to the issues handled here, some regions have specific severe security concerns. See the **warnings in region articles** relevant to you.

As a rule India is quite safe for foreigners, apart from instances of petty crime and theft common to any developing country, as long as certain basic precautions and common sense are observed (i.e. women should be cautious travelling alone at night).



A holy cow in Pushkar



While hospitality is important in India, it is not common to see people **offering to share food** or cookies while they eat. Some such offers are genuine and some are not. If you are travelling by train and you are offered food by a family group, it is usually safe to take a bite. But if you are offered something by a group of men or even a couple, you should decline, even if they also eat of it, as the part offered might be laced with sedatives. You can politely say no with a smile; those who offer food genuinely won't take it personally.

Don't trust strangers offering assistance or services. Be particularly wary of frauds at tourist attractions such as the temples of Kanchipuram, where they prey on those unfamiliar with local customs. If a priest or guide offers to treat you to a religious ceremony, find out what it will cost you first, and do not allow yourself to be pressured into making "donations" of thousands of rupees — simply walk away if you feel uncomfortable. However, don't get *too* paranoid: foreigners on the train, or Indian families who want to take your picture on *their own* camera, for example, are often just genuinely curious.

Same-sex intercourse was decriminalised by a court ruling in 2018. There is a vibrant gay nightlife in metropolitan areas and a few openly gay celebrities. There are movements to legalise same-sex marriage. On the other hand, heterosexual Indian men often walk hand-in-hand in the streets, don't take this as a sign of anything but friendship.

Travellers of African heritage may encounter prejudices from the police and the general public about being drug dealers. This reaction stems from the fact that more often than not, foreign drug peddlers in India are of Nigerian nationality. Indians find it hard to differentiate between Nigerians and other Africans, others of African descent or even their own Siddi community (Indians of sub-Saharan African descent), so anybody who looks African may be targeted. If that includes you, you may want to keep passports handy at all times, avoid going to areas notorious for illegal activities and maintain contact with respective embassies and, if possible, with other support groups that can vouch for you.

The cow is considered to be a holy animal in Hinduism, and in many Indian states, it is **illegal** to consume or possess beef or buffalo meat. Non-Hindus suspected of slaughtering cattle or eating beef are also known to have been lynched by fundamentalist Hindu mobs. Prominent exceptions to this taboo are the state of Kerala and the north-eastern parts of the country, where the meat of water buffaloes is widely consumed, but beef remains rare.

You should check with your embassy or ask for local advice before heading to the Himalayan areas, especially Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and North-Eastern India. These areas have had serious law-and-order problems for a long time. The same applies while travelling to what used to be a thickly forested area in East-Central India, which covers the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, the eastern edge of Maharashtra and the northern tip of Telangana. The problems affects certain areas in these states; other destinations there may be perfectly safe.

India Syndrome

See also: Culture shock

Some people coming to India for the first time suddenly feel their lives shifting and start believing in reincarnation and other wonderful ideas available throughout India. This is called *The India Syndrome* (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/jan/13/india-syndrome-lost-in-the-valley-of-death-harley-ustad>). While certain teachings in Indian culture can of course be new and overwhelming, the immediate acceptance of them and following of their principles can be cause for concern. No holy person has ever been enlightened within a few weeks without proper pre-work or pre-existing experiences.

Be careful with self-proclaimed *sādhus* that wander from temple to temple looking for food and money. While in the past most were authentic holy men, nowadays for many it is just a way to beg. Don't wander off into the woods with such "holy" men just because you suddenly believe in a new reality, especially if you are on your own. They can be dangerous, especially if drugs are involved. And sometimes even the police cannot "touch" them, even in cases of murder. There have been some high-profile disappearances of Westerners in India in connection with *sādhus*.

If you want to explore your newly discovered view of the world and the universe, a better option is through official schools (like Sanskrit, Ayurveda, etc.), meditation and yoga centres, or in a group setting where you trust the other people.

On the opposite side, there are also travellers that get overwhelmed by India so much that they will start showing signs of panic or paranoia. Indian culture is so ruthless that people can find themselves in situations where they feel the whole world is against them, or they feel they cannot trust anyone any more. Or even worse, they suddenly become superstitious and believe in all sorts of negative things happening to them due to some arbitrary reasons. At worst, scammer, touts and thieves will try to exploit this situations of yours.

These psychological reactions are mostly a threat to younger travellers, those who haven't seen much of the world, and those who don't have their feet planted firmly on the ground. Also the involvement of weed or other drugs, which are popular in certain tourist regions of India, can lead to these issue.

For both sides of these problems it is always good to:

- let your friends and family regularly know where you are,
- call home from time to time to stay in touch with reality,
- don't travel on your own, but find a travel buddy or group to go with (not a local scammer though),
- avoid the Indian hassle from time to time, there are many comfortable oases in India where Indian problems seem far far away,

- don't be a first-time weed smoker in India, especially not with people you just met, this is not the right setting to have a first and pleasant trip in,
- in the event of a crisis, seek the help of an uninvolved fellow (Western) traveller, which often has more connection to you than any Indian will ever have.

Touts

Touts are ubiquitous, as in many developing countries, and you should assume that anyone 'proactively' trying to help you has a hidden agenda to part you from your money. However, in areas hardly or not at all visited by tourists, it is not at all uncommon for people to go out of their way to 'proactively' help you when you approach, without expecting anything in return. During your travels in India, you will be deluged with touts trying to get you to buy something or patronise particular establishments.

There are a myriad of common scams, which range from telling you your hotel has gone out of business (of course, they'll know of one that's open with vacancies), to giving wrong directions to a government rail ticket booking office (the directions will be to their friend's tour office), to trying to get you to take diamonds back to your home country (the diamonds are worthless crystal), to 'poor students' giving you sightseeing for hours and then with pity make you buy school books for them (tremendously overpriced from a bookstore with whom they are affiliated). There will also be more obvious touts who 'know a very good place for dinner' or want to sell you a chess set on the street.

Faced with such an assault, it's very easy to get into a siege mentality where all of India is against you and out to squeeze you dry. This mentality may affect any true appreciation of the country. Dealing with touts is simple: assume anyone offering surprising information (such as "your hotel is shut down") is a tout. Never be afraid to get a second or third answer to a question. To get rid of touts:

- Completely ignore them and go about your business until they go away. This may take quite a while, but patience is key to managing India.
- Tell them "no", very firmly, and repeatedly.

It is also beneficial to have a firm Indian friend whom you can trust. If they show you around, they will act to help you ward off such touts.

Theft and scams

Unfortunately, **theft** is quite common in places visited by tourists, but violent thefts hardly ever occur. More likely a thief will pickpocket or break into your room. Take precautions to firmly lock the door while indoors, and be on guard while outside.

Many first-time travellers to India find themselves falling victim to scams and touts. Be on guard for anybody trying to help you by giving you unsolicited directions or travel advice. Do not blindly rely on the advice of taxi and auto drivers. If this is your first time to India, do not openly admit it, as this will make you more vulnerable to touts. Carry your cash, passport and cards in a secure money belt, with only enough cash for a few hours at a time in your wallet or other accessible place.



A beggar in Kolkata



While travelling in public transport, do not accept any food or drink from any local fellow passenger even if they are very friendly or polite. There have been instances in which very friendly fellow passengers offered food or drinks including tea or coffee that contained substances that put the victim to sleep whilst all their possessions, including even their clothing, were stolen.

Some people handling your cash will try to **shortchange you or rip you off**. In Delhi particularly, this is a universal rule adhered to by all who handle westerners' cash. This does not exclude official ticket sellers at tourist sites, employees at prepaid taxi stands, or merchants in all but the most upscale businesses. Count your cash before handing it over, and ensure receiving the correct change.

Overseas visitors are often magnets for beggars, frauds and touts. Beggars will often go as far as touching you and following you, tugging on your sleeve. It does little good to get angry or to say "No" loudly. The best response is to look unconcerned and ignore the behaviour. The more attention you pay to a beggar or a tout, positive or negative, the longer they will follow you hoping for a donation. Begging is criminalised in cities such as Mumbai and Delhi. It is however common in many cities, and in pilgrim cities, there are sadhus who live an ascetic lifestyle of the seeker that requires them to adopt bhiksha-charya (begging vows) only for sustaining the body.

It is advisable or better to agree on the fare before getting inside an auto or a taxi. This avoids any further unpleasant fare-related arguments. If you can take the advice of a local friend or someone manning your hotel's front desk to know how much it should cost to travel between two destinations, you will be a smart traveller.

Driving

As a former British colony, India drives on the **left** side of the road.

Driving in India can be dangerous. Irresponsible driving habits, insufficient highway infrastructure development, wandering livestock and other hazards make travelling on the country's roads a sometimes nerve-wracking undertaking.

More than 150,000 people died on Indian roads in 2019, the highest figure in the world, and that's despite having only 44 cars per 1,000 people. The first encounter with a typical Indian highway will no doubt feature a traffic mix of lumbering trucks, speeding maniacs, blithely wandering cows and suicidal pedestrians, all weaving across a narrow, potholed strip of tarmac. To minimise your risk of becoming a grim statistic, use trains instead of buses, use government bus services instead of private ones (which are more likely to force their drivers into inhuman shifts), use taxis instead of auto-rickshaws, avoid travelling at night, and don't hesitate to change taxis or cars if you feel your driver is unsafe.

Of significant concern is that much of the road network is significantly underdeveloped. Most roads are very poorly built and they are full of rubble, large cracks and potholes. Most road signs are not very reliable in the country, and in most cases provide drivers with confusing or inaccurate information. If you



A car crash in Kolkata



are in doubt, ask the locals, normally they are very helpful and willingly provide people with appropriate guidance to a location. Of course, the quality of information and willingness to provide it varies, especially in the larger cities.

Female travellers

The sad truth is that female travellers in India, particularly those travelling solo, are often subjected to sexual harassment or worse. Women should avoid travelling to India alone if at all possible, but if you really have to, be on your guard, avoid making friendly gestures towards men that could be misinterpreted, and be particularly cautious in larger cities (esp. Delhi) at night.



Night-time in Indore



- White and East Asian females may receive some extra attention, usually in the form of stares, from the locals, and many might even want to take photographs with you. In most cases, these people are from rural areas, and have had little to no contact with foreigners, but some may harass you. If so, don't be afraid to create a scene and don't feel the need to be polite.
- Try to avoid being overly friendly and appreciative to Indian men; it could get them to think you are romantically interested in them. If a man and a woman are seen together or talk to each other quite often, locals may assume that there's something going on between the man and the woman. Make it clear that you are friends or acquaintances; that will usually ward people off.
- Outside of the larger cities, it is unusual for people of the opposite sex to touch each other. Even couples (married or otherwise) refrain from public displays of affection. Therefore, it is advised that you do not shake hands with a person of the opposite sex unless the other person extends their hand first. The greeting by a Hindu is to bring their palms together in front of their chest, or simply saying **namaste** or **namaskar** or **namaskaram** in most Indic languages (Indo-Aryan and Dravidian) and **khurumjari** in Manipuri (Meitei). Both forms are equally polite and correct if a little formal. Almost all people (even if they don't know English) do understand a "hi" or a "Hello". In most parts of northern India and cities, it is quite acceptable to offer a "hello" or "good day" followed by a handshake, regardless of gender.
- Outside of trendy places or high society, women generally do not smoke. In some rural or tribal areas women do smoke, but discreetly.
- Places such as discos and dance clubs are less conservative areas. Should you want to visit such places, leave your possessions in your hotel safe, and only carry as much change as you think you would require; it is easy to lose your wallet or passport in these places.
- Women should **dress conservatively** and **avoid revealing or tight-fitting clothing** such as tank tops and miniskirts as they can attract unwanted attention.
- People are generally modestly clothed even at the beaches. Bikinis are acceptable at tourist-oriented beaches, but not at those primarily visited by locals. Wearing one beyond the beach is inappropriate no matter where you are. There are a few beaches where women (mostly foreigners) sunbathe topless, but make sure that it is safe and accepted before you do so.
- It's not so safe to walk in isolated places if you are a solo female. Women should also avoid going out alone at night, and be cautious when taking a taxi or auto-rickshaw. There have been some rapes of foreign women and highly publicised rapes of Indian women, some of whom have been murdered, and a large number of rapes go unreported. The willingness to report rape has increased after several incidents received widespread media attention and

triggered widespread public protest. The Indian government has also reformed its penal code in relation to crimes of rape and sexual assault.

- Avoid staying at cheaper hotels unless you are travelling with a trusted male companion; hotel staff have been known to sexually harass female guests.
- In local and suburban trains, there are usually cars reserved for women and designated as such on their front. In Delhi Metro trains, it is the first compartment.
- In most buses (private and public) a few seats at the front or at one side of the bus are reserved for women. Usually, these seats will be occupied by men and, very often, they vacate the place when a female stands near gesturing her intention to sit there. In many parts of the country, women will not share a seat with a man other than her spouse. If you sit near a man, he may stand up from the seat and give his seat also to you; this is a sign of respect, *not* rudeness.
- Street parties for holidays are usually filled with crowds of inebriated men. During festivals such as Holi, New Year's Eve, and even Christmas Eve, women can be subjected to groping and sexually aggressive behaviour from a certain section hiding in these crowds. In such an event, scream or make a scene pointing your finger at the person. People will come to your help. If possible, avoid attending these festivities alone, and go in a group.
- So-called Eve teasing is a common term used in Indian English to refer to anything from unwanted verbal advances to physical sexual assault. Anything overt should be treated in a firm manner and if needed, ask the local populace (women in particular) to try and get the message across. Avoid confrontation if at all possible. Sticking to such an area is not recommended. It's not disrespectful for a woman to tell a man eager to talk to her that she doesn't want to talk: so if a man's behaviour makes you uncomfortable, say so firmly. If he doesn't seem to get the hint, just quietly excuse yourself.
- Befriending Indian women can be a wonderful experience for female visitors, although you might have to initiate conversation. An easy topic to get things going is to talk about clothes or food.
- Dressing in traditional Indian clothes, such as *salwaar kameez* (comfortable) or *saree* (more formal and difficult to wear) will often garner Western women more respect in the eyes of locals. The idea is to portray yourself as a normal person, instead of a distanced tourist. Easy clothing is to wear a kurta paired up with jeans or a salwar. They are very comfortable and most of the women do the same.
- Body searches (such as at the airport) by officers of the opposite sex are not allowed in India. Airport security is sex segregated.

Police and other emergency services

- Like other federal countries, law enforcement is dealt with by various agencies in India:
 - General policing is responsible for the states and union territories, under various state and union territory police forces.
 - Large cities like Mumbai, Kolkata or Bangalore may also have their own police departments, often operating independently from state police forces.
 - The Central government also maintain federal law-enforcement agencies responsible for specific duties, such as railway policing (Railway Protection Force- RPF), transport security (Highway police) and border patrol.



Police officers in Varanasi



- Unfortunately, corruption and inefficiency are present in all Indian police forces, and the quality of the police force varies by officer. For emergencies, throughout most of India, you can dial **100** for police assistance. Try to speak the words slowly so that the police officer on phone does not have a problem in comprehending your foreign English accent. For non-emergency crimes, go down to the police station to report them, and insist on getting a receipt of your complaint.
- You should insist the police to make a **first information report** (FIR) and receive a copy of it if you are reporting any serious crimes, as it is a legal requirement for them to do so. The police will only start the investigation after the FIR is made.
- The emergency contact numbers for most of India are: 100 (Police), 101 (Fire and rescue), and 102 (Emergency medical service). Dialling to neighbouring major hospitals may also work in case of medical emergencies. In Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and several other cities throughout India, you can dial **108** for all emergencies.

Terrorism

The India-Pakistan conflict, simmering for decades, has manifested in terrorist attacks on India's main cities: since 2007, there have been bombings in Delhi, Mumbai and other big cities. The targets have varied widely, but attacks have usually been aimed at locals rather than visitors. The exception was in 2008, when a shooting spree targeted and killed many foreigners along with Indians, in Mumbai's posh hotels and railway station, etc. All the terrorists involved in this were from Pakistan and were killed in action except one who was captured alive and later hanged. There is little you can do to avoid such random attacks, but keep an eye on the national news and any travel advisories from your embassy.

Outdoor adventures

There are many companies in India offering various outdoor activities like paragliding, white water rafting, ballooning, and trekking. For example, the road between Manali and Kullu has dozens of white water and paragliding operators.

Be aware though that it is sometimes questionable on how these companies and operators, especially their staff, obtained their licences to offer these activities. Especially the number of companies offering these kinds of activities is an indication, that it seems to be not that hard to start such a business. But for things like tandem paragliding, which can potentially be lethal, it is probably a bad idea to have to rely on someone that got his licence under questionable circumstances. And even if he did a course with an official body, the standards in India are still comparably lower than Western ones.

So, it is very important that you verify the company you go with fully, search for ratings and reviews, verify their licences, and only if you fully trust them to go with them.

Stay healthy

Going to India, you have to adapt to a different climate and food. However, with precautions the chance and severity of any illness can be minimised. Don't stress yourself too much at the beginning of your journey to allow your body to acclimatise to the country. For example, take a day of rest upon arrival, at least on your first visit. Many travellers get ill for wanting to do too much in too little time. Be careful with spicy food if you're not used to it.

Five quick tips for avoiding the Delhi belly:

- **Go vegetarian** – At least for the first week or two. Meat spoils quickly.
- **Avoid raw leafy vegetables** – They are hard to clean properly.
- **Avoid ice and unbottled water** – Both the water in it and the way it's transported are suspect. Try to use only commercially available sealed bottled water.
- **Wash hands before eating** – Always use soap or hand sanitiser, otherwise the dirt of India's streets will find its way onto your *chapatis* and into your mouth. In addition, keep nails cut short and clean. That of course will not prevent a food vendor touching your food, so think twice which kind of meal you decide for. In any case, you can always watch how food is prepared. Indians mostly never use soap, plain water seems to be their "magic cure".
- **Prefer metal dishes and cups** – Stainless steel is more germ-resistant than plastic. So, any restaurant with stainless cutlery, dishes, cups and water container is safer than one with plastic cups and water container, or one-time use dishes.

Toilets can be found for free in most temples, just in case it is urgent.

Litter can be a problem in some cities in India. Many efforts have been made in the 21st century to clean up the country but there is still a long way to go because most people use the many waterways as garbage dumps. It would be unwise to swim in most of the rivers and downright senseless in a lake.

If you have **asthma**, carry enough medication as dust, pollen or pollution may cause trouble.

If you venture to forests in India, you may encounter **venomous snakes**. If bitten, try to note the markings of the snake so that the snake can be identified and the correct antidote given. In any event, immediately seek medical care.

Air quality

Air pollution is a huge problem in India, particularly in the northern plains during the winter (November to January), when farmers burning fields, coal and dung fires for heating and lack of rain and wind combine to blanket the Gangetic Plains in toxic murk. Delhi has ranked the most polluted capital in the world every year since 2018, with an *average* AQI of nearly 100. In addition to being a health hazard, flights are often delayed or cancelled when visibility drops to near-zero.

Avoid travel in the North at this time of year if you can. If you have no choice, wearing an N95 mask and minimizing time spent outdoors can help.

Many cities and villages in India, not particularly in any region, have sanitation and pollution issues. You might find people dumping and burning garbage in the open. Check the air quality of a city before venturing.

Drinking water

Tap water is normally not safe for drinking. However, some establishments (for example many temples) have water filters/purifiers installed, in which case the water should be safe to drink from them. Otherwise, the water in the mountains is generally clean, just ask your accommodation staff. Packed drinking water (popularly called "mineral water" throughout India) is a good choice. Bisleri, Kinley, Aquafina and Health Plus are popular and safe brands. But if the seal has been tampered with, or if the bottle seems crushed, it could be tap water being illegally sold. So always make sure that seal is intact before buying. In Indian Railway stations, a low-priced mineral water brand of Indian Railways is generally available, known as "Rail Neer".

For most foreigners, tap water in India is not even safe for brushing your teeth, and you should stick to bottled mineral water even for that.

Fruits, vegetables and food

Everything that can be peeled such as apples and bananas, as well as packaged snacks, are always a safe option. Wash any fruit with uncontaminated water and soap before eating it, even if you peel it — while peeling, touching the skin could still deliver bacteria onto the inner fruit. Also avoid cold food from shelves (samosa, sweets, etc.) that is directly touched prepared and handed out. Most Indians don't use soap, and simply water seems to be their magic cure. In general, the regulation of the use of pesticides is very lax in India, because farmers have a high standing in Indian society — they are often the mean for political campaigns. So, the underlying quality of fruits and vegetables is doubtful, even if locals claim them to be "green" — they often don't understand the meaning of "green".

With some fruits, you will even notice a weird side taste, like tangerines. It is often doubtful where and how they were grown — it might have been next to a large landfill, and you wouldn't know. Also, you may notice the dirtiness of Indian bodies of waters and rivers — this is the very same water that is used to water fruit and vegetable plants in the Indian plains. Fruits and vegetables from more hilly or mountainous regions are probably safe from that latter problem. While Indian food is often freshly prepared with fresh fruits and fresh vegetable, it doesn't mean it is automatically healthy (due to the latter reasons). Also, restaurants often use ready-made sauces and ingredients containing questionable additives and preservatives — not to mention that standard tomato sauce will barely ever contain much tomato, but carrot pulp instead. So, while in the past, Indian food was probably one of the best in the world, commercialisation in the food industry and lax regulation in the agricultural industry have done their parts in making it a doubtful adventure and one should be cautious.

Diarrhoea and dehydration

See also: [Travellers' diarrhea](#), [Dehydration](#)

Diarrhoea and dehydration are common, and can have many different causes. Dehydration brings along **dizziness and concentration issue**, sometimes muscle and joint pain. Dehydration doesn't just mean a lack of water, but also a lack of necessary minerals the body needs to function. It can be caused by a too one-sided diet, the wrong drinking water or even exhaustive hiking and travelling. Filtered and purified water (e.g. from temples) often has the disadvantage of also the necessary minerals being filtered out. So, best bring a standard first-aid kit, plus extra over-the-counter medicine for diarrhoea and stomach upset. A rehydration kit can also be helpful, rehydration solution is widely available at pharmacies for about ₹25 per pack for 1L of water. In case it is not available, remember the salt/sugar/water ratio for oral rehydration: 1 tsp salt, 8 tsp sugar, for 1L of water — however this will still lack some other minerals, so the rehydration packs from the pharmacy are best. Also, in case you are consuming local drinking water from the tap (in mountain areas) or in restaurants, if your body shows signs of dehydration, it is better to get the *Bisleri* water bottles from the shop with the green bandage — they have minerals added. Also other brands have added minerals. Indians often have resistance to native bacteria and parasites that visitors do not have. If you have had serious diarrhoea for more than a day or two, it is best to visit a private hospital. Parasites such as *Giardia* are a common cause of diarrhoea, and may not get better without treatment. Instead of drinking water while having diarrhoea, some people trust in Coke as a quick treatment. And in some cases it seems to prevent further fluid loss in small amounts.

Vaccinations and tropical diseases

No **vaccinations** are required for entry to India, except for yellow fever if you are coming from an infected area such as Africa. However, Hepatitis (both A and B, depending on your individual circumstances), meningitis and typhoid shots are recommended, as is a booster shot for tetanus.

Malaria is endemic throughout India. CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/regionalmalaria/indianrg.htm>) states that risk exists in all areas, including the cities of Delhi and Mumbai, and at altitudes of less than 2,000 m in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim; however, the risk of infection is considered low in Delhi and the Plains. Get expert advice on malaria preventatives, and take adequate precautions to prevent mosquito bites. Use a mosquito repellent when going outside (particularly during the evenings) and also when sleeping in trains and hotels without air conditioning. A local mosquito repellent used by Indians is Odomos which is available over-the-counter at most medical stores. Note, Malaria symptoms can be very similar to a flu or cold, however if you don't have any fever but still feel dizzy and have muscle and joint pain, it could also just be a case of dehydration — see above.



An ambulance in India

Stray dogs

It is very important to stay away from the many stray dogs and cats in India, as India has the highest rate of **rabies** in the world. If you are bitten, it is extremely urgent to get to a hospital in a major urban area capable of dealing with rabies. You can get treatment at any major hospital. It is very important to get the rabies vaccine within 24 hr of any contact with animals, including contact with saliva or blood. Rabies vaccines only work if the full course is given **prior** to symptoms. The disease is almost invariably fatal otherwise.

Healthcare

The level of medical care in India varies wildly.

Public hospitals tend to be unsanitary, overcrowded, understaffed and underequipped. Private hospitals, on the other hand, are usually of an excellent standard and among the best in the world, making India a popular destination for medical tourism. Large corporate hospital chains like Fortis, Max, Apollo and similar places are your best bet for emergency medical care in larger cities, and they have better hygiene and generally well-trained doctors, some from UK and US institutions. The downside is that they are generally much more expensive than public hospitals, though still reasonably priced by Western standards. Many private hospitals accept international health insurance; check with the hospital before you go. Virtually all Indian doctors speak English fluently and are highly qualified.

For smaller ailments, private medical practices are common throughout the country and are readily more accessible than hospitals. Hotels can also arrange a doctor to come visit, at a price of course. For travel vaccinations, visit the International Society for Travel Medicine (<http://www.istm.org>) to find travel health clinics.

Respect

Etiquette

- Indians, by and large, are **neutral communicators**. Although Indians try to be respectful and courteous in social situations, words are often taken at face value. It's important to be explicitly clear and upfront about what you intend to say as euphemisms, idiomatic language, and the like may be misunderstood.
- Direct **personal questions** (based on your personal life, salary, education, and lifestyle) are commonly asked. To Indians, it's not considered impolite, but rather it's a way to get to know someone fully. In some cases, you may find others giving you advice on whatever it is you're doing, either warranted or unwarranted. Don't feel annoyed or irritated by this as Indians don't intend to patronise or pull you down in any way. If you feel the question was too personal, simply give an indirect answer and move along.
- Indians **respect their elders** and it would be seen as rude to directly challenge a statement said by someone older than you. You should always try to address people you don't know as 'ma'am' or 'sir', especially if they're older than you, and always act in a mature, sensible fashion around them.
- **Family values** are highly revered by many Indians, and most Indians still live with their extended families, with three to four generations living under the same roof. Passing unwarranted comments about someone's family life won't win you friends or praise.
- Indian women generally **dress conservatively**, although in metropolitan cities more liberal attire can be seen. Women may attract unwanted attention from men depending on how they're dressed.
- Whereas Indian men can be really eager to talk to foreigners, **many Indian women avoid interacting with men outside their own families**. If you are a man and approach an Indian woman even for an innocuous purpose like asking for directions, you are usually putting her on the defensive, especially if she is dressed traditionally. It is best to ask a man if one is available (there usually will be), or be extra respectful if you really need to ask a woman. However, in Ladakh, the relation between sexes is much more equal and nobody will bat an eyelid if you ask a woman for directions.
- It is better to avoid going out **on the roads alone**, especially in remote places or lanes and by-lanes without many people at night. Keeping some company is always advisable.
- Indians will consider themselves obliged to go out of the way to fulfil a **guest's request** and will insist very strongly that it is no inconvenience to do so, even if it is not true. This of course means that there is a reciprocal obligation on you as a guest to take extra care not to be a burden.

Kissing in India

India can trace kissing back thousands of years in its literature. Indeed, the well-known *Kama Sutra* has an entire chapter devoted to kissing. However, in most cultures of the Subcontinent, public kissing has traditionally been discouraged. Visitors have been surprised to get into serious trouble for kissing in public, regardless of the nature of their relationship or marriage or their nationality. Opposition to public kissing is not a universal opinion in India; many Indians find kissing acceptable, but because of those who don't, it is best to avoid kissing (even on cheeks) in public while you are there. None of this applies to parents and children kissing each other, though; that's universally acceptable in India.

- Most Indians are not aware that the term "**Negro**" is considered offensive in some other parts of the world, and they may use it with no intent to offend. Also, some Indians will come up with topics like Hitler, Aryans and other weird stuff — while half of the time this is uneducated and innocent interest, the other half of the time they will know exactly what they are talking about and it is best not to engage on such topics or to make your position very clear.
- Note **dietary restrictions** when inviting Indian friends for a meal. Pork is forbidden to Muslims, while beef is forbidden to Hindus. Although in some states, like Kerala, beef is consumed liberally by Christians and Muslims. Also about 30% of Indians are vegetarian, including all Jains. In some places, people are pescatarians. So, It is better to ask people what they don't eat beforehand.
- It is customary to put up a token friendly argument with your host or any other member of the group **when paying bills** at restaurant or while making purchases. The etiquette for this is somewhat complicated.
 - In a business lunch or dinner, it is usually clear upfront who is supposed to pay, and there is no need to fight. But if you are someone's personal guest and they take you out to a restaurant, you should offer to pay anyway, and you should insist a lot. Sometimes these fights get a little funny, with each side trying to snatch the bill away from the other, all the time laughing politely. If you don't have experience in these things, chances are, you will lose the chance the first time, but in that case, make sure that you pay the next time. (and try to make sure that there is a next time.) Unless the bill amount is very large do not offer to share it, and only as a second resort after they have refused to let you pay it all.
 - The same rule applies when you are making a purchase. If you are purchasing something for yourself, your hosts might still offer to pay for it if the amount is not very high, and sometimes, even if it is. In this situation, unless the amount is very low, you should never lose the fight. (If the amount is ridiculously low, say less than ₹10, then don't insult your hosts by putting up a fight.) Even if by chance you lose the fight to pay the shopkeeper, it is customary to practically thrust (in a nice way, of course) the money into your host's hands.
 - These rules do not apply if the host has made it clear beforehand that it is his or her treat, especially for some specific occasion.

Religious etiquette

As India has great diversity, people follow different religions, the largest being of course Hinduism.

- **Take off your shoes** when visiting a temple, mosque, or someone's home.
- Christians are a minority in India, but going to church and following your faith are always appreciated. There are different denominations and they differ in their practices.
- It is disrespectful to touch people or things with your feet. If done accidentally, you will find that Indians will make a quick gesture of apology that involves touching the offended person with the right hand, and then moving the hand to the chest and to the eyes. It is a good idea to emulate that.
- The head is considered to be the holiest part of the body, **so avoid touching people on the head**,

Naming conventions

- Most Indians follow the naming convention of a given name followed by a family name.
- **Tamil** names, however are an exception to this rule. Tamil names generally follow the convention of given name + father's name, or father's initial + given name. Therefore, someone called Ramasamy Govindasamy would have Ramasamy as his given name, with Govindasamy being his father's name. Alternatively, he might be known as G. Ramasamy. Due to the patronymic nature of the last names, first names are always used when addressing individuals, so the above

including young children, as this is very offensive to Hindus.

- **The left hand** is considered unclean in both Hinduism and Islam. Be sure to handle sacred objects and perform religious rituals using only your right hand.
- **Books and written materials are treated with respect**, as they are treated as concrete/physical forms of the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Saraswati. Hindus typically avoid stepping on them.
- **Anything associated with wealth is treated with respect** as it is treated as a concrete/physical form of the Hindu goddess of wealth, Lakshmi.
- **The swastika** is a common and quite ancient symbol in India. It is also fairly common for Indian parents to name their daughters "Swastika". There is no connection of this symbol to the Nazis. Jewish people have lived in India for thousands of years and have never faced any significant antisemitism. Drawing parallels between the Swastika and Nazism will not be appreciated and is considered cultural appropriation.

Many Indians have liberal, open-minded attitudes towards religion, although there are some who have rigid, radical viewpoints, and fundamentalist Hinduism has seen growing support in the 21st century. It's not considered impolite to discuss your religious convictions with someone; for the most part, many Indians are open about talking about it. This said, **do not impose** your religious beliefs upon someone. Anything hinting at **proselytisation** will not be appreciated.

person would be addressed as Mr Ramasamy.

- **Meitei** names are also exception to the general rules of naming in India. Meitei names generally follow the convention of family name + given name + name of the respective "salai". Salai means clan and it is different from family. There are 7 salais in Meitei ethnicity (Manipuri ethnicity). Each salai has many families within it. So, salai is just like a group or aggregation of many families. For instance, a person named "Albert" belongs to the "Oinam" family of the "Khuman" salai. Then, his name will be like this: "Oinam Albert Khuman". In Meitei nomenclature, father's names are not used.
- Most **Telugu** names (other than those of Muslims) are family name (surname) first, like Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese names.
- The foolproof method, therefore, is to *ask* how the person would like to be addressed.

- Contrary to popular belief, India is **not a vegetarian nation**. However, vegetarians are a very large minority in India, comprising 20-30% of the population, and many northern and western states are majority vegetarian. Jains, a staunchly vegetarian religious group, are approximately 1% of the population. That said, some ardently religious groups and people often try to demonise non-vegetarianism. Many of the more well-aware Indians feel it is a part of a concerted attempt to codify a monolithic idea of Indian culture and do not like it. These vegetarian sentiments are more common in Northern India, but in other places, such as Southern India and North-Eastern India, people tend to be more liberal and less sensitive towards other beliefs, and don't really mind as much. If visiting someone's house, it's always wise to ask if the person is a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian. **Do not impose your food preferences upon anyone**; it is frowned upon.
- **Atheism is not taboo** in India. This said, you should be careful when discussing religion with those who have rigid, radical viewpoints; some atheists in India have been attacked by radical groups for openly criticising religion.

Politics

- Indians, in general, are ardently political, and politics is a very popular conversational subject amongst many Indians, including the older generation. Many Indians have a breadth

of political opinions, including that of their own country; often they express frustration with the government. As always, it is better to listen than to express firm opinions.

- The **Kashmir conflict** is a highly emotional subject that can very quickly elicit strong reactions from Indian people. The Indian view is that the whole of Kashmir, including Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, the two regions of Kashmir under Pakistani control, *legally belongs* to India.
- India is made up of 28 states and 8 union territories. Some people in some provinces (Punjab, Kashmir, Nagaland, and Assam) are sympathetic to full autonomy or **secession from India**. Whilst nowhere near as sensitive or divisive as in other parts of the world, try not to bring up such subjects.
- Attempting to compliment or say anything that could be perceived as positive about **Pakistan** can evoke a strong response from some Indians. Referring to someone as a "Pakistani" is often used as an insult in India.
- Try to avoid being overly enthusiastic about China. India's diplomatic relationship with China is tense and **anti-China sentiments** are common among the population. The **1962 Sino-Indian War** and **2020 Galwan Valley Clash** are still very much open wounds the Indian national consciousness. Some **Chinese products** are illegal to possess in India and the mere sight of Chinese products can evoke a strong response from some Indians.
- Tread carefully when discussing the history of **Mughal rule**. Many Hindu nationalists consider the Mughals to be foreign occupiers akin to the British.
- The **partition of India** is a sensitive issue. A few may convey bitterness against the British Empire, and some who lived through the horrors of the partition may let this reflect on their view of people from the United Kingdom. Former British prime minister Winston Churchill is widely regarded as a villain in India due to the Bengal famine in 1943. Nevertheless, the two countries enjoy a positive relationship, and Indians are the largest immigrant group in the UK. Rishi Sunak, who is of Indian descent, even became prime minister of the UK.

Other things to watch out for

- Indians tend to have a strong sense of **national pride**, in part due to the success enjoyed by the Indian diaspora abroad. If you have Indian roots, even if you were born and raised overseas, be careful with divulging your opinions on the country and the culture: some may expect you to follow Indian norms and nuances, and won't take kindly to negative feedback. It is common for Indians to express a deep sense of pride in the success of their fellow countrymen on the world stage, such as Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, Google CEO Sundar Pichai and World Bank President Ajay Banga.
- Families tend to be close-knit. Tread very carefully **if you have Indian roots**, even if you were born and raised overseas, or if you are in an intimate relationship with an Indian person: You're often expected to align your views with your or their family, and not doing so would result in you being shunned. Living with extended family (i.e. including grandparents and first cousins) is still the norm in India.
- Attitudes towards the LGBT community have been changing since the 2000s. In 2018, homosexuality (which was once punishable by life imprisonment) was decriminalised, and since then there have been strong political movements in favour of LGBT rights. While this may seem impressive, **many Indians still have conservative opinions on homosexuality** and do not fully understand it. Try not to reveal your sexuality in public as you may invite unwanted comments or stares.
- Reputation is a key aspect of Indian culture, and like in much of Asia "saving face" is a major value in Indian culture. To be polite you should avoid pointing out other people's mistakes or voicing disagreement with someone in public. Doing so can cause a severe blow to another person's reputation, and so to avoid doing so and causing embarrassment,

ignore small mistakes. If you must point out someone else's mistake do so in a private setting, and as politely as applicable to the situation.

- **Business cards** should be given and received using only your **right hand**. As the left hand is considered unclean, handling someone's business card with the left hand is very disrespectful.

Connect

By phone

The country code for India is **+91**.

In India, area codes are called **STD codes** (Subscriber Trunk Dialing - national long distance) and international dialing is called **ISD** (International Subscriber Dialing - international long distance).

Local phone numbers can be anywhere from 5-8 digits long. But when the STD code is included, all landline phone numbers in India are 10 digits long. Mobile phone numbers are always 10 digits long and usually start with '9', '8', '7' or '6'. The following table explains how to dial:

Calling from	Price	Syntax	Example
Same STD code	Local	<i>number</i>	12345678
Mobile phone	Local	<i>STD code of the town you are in number</i>	011-12345678
Mobile phone	STD to mobile phone	<i>number</i>	012345678
Different STD code	STD	0 -area code-number	022-12345678
Overseas	ISD	+91 -area code-number	+91-22-12345678

Toll-free numbers start with **1-800**, but are usually *operator-dependent*: you can't call a BSNL/MTNL toll-free number from an Airtel landline, and vice versa. Often, the numbers may not work from your cellular phone. Other National Numbers that start with **18xx** or **19xx** may attract special charges.

To dial outside the country from India, prefix the country code with 00, e.g. a US number will be dialed as 00-1-555-555-5555. Calling the Canada/UK/US over the normal telephone line will cost you about ₹7.20 per minute. Calls to other countries, particularly to the Middle East, can be more expensive.

Payphones, called **public call offices** or **PCOs** are now increasingly rare with the ubiquitous availability of mobile phones. Where they exist, they are usually staffed, and you dial yourself but pay to the attendant after the call is over. Metering is done per pulse and a service charge of ₹2 is added to the bill. Larger cities also have Western-style unmanned public phones, which are usually red in colour and accept one rupee coins.

Mobile

Airtel (<https://www.airtel.in/>), **Vodafone Idea** (<https://www.myvi.in/>), **Reliance Jio** (<https://www.jio.com/>) and **BSNL** (<https://www.bsnl.co.in/>)-**MTNL** are mobile service providers in India. All of these provide services to the whole of India. Since providers are state-specific, you need to activate roaming, so

you can stay connected with the same provider if being in a different state than from where you got the SIM card. No extra costs apply for this kind of roaming within India.

As restrictions on internet use increase in India, many mobile stores refuse to sell SIM cards to foreigners (or anyone without local ID)—though you may find an Indian resident or hotel employee willing to buy one under their name if suitably motivated (i.e. rupees). Also, Jio mobile store owners seem to be sufficiently motivated to sell you a SIM and an initial package for a 20% surcharge if you look reliable enough. To get a SIM card alone as a foreigner, you are recommended to visit the telecom operator's exclusive store.

To make calls, send text, or use data, you will always require a (monthly) package or validity plan. Packages start at ₹239 for 28 days, e.g. Jio with 1.5GB/day data, unlimited calls, and 100 SMS. With Airtel the same package was around ₹450. All operators provide unlimited domestic phone calls with their packages.

Calling overseas can cost quite a bit and will depend on the location you are calling to. In contrast, the other way round (calling to India from elsewhere) is cheap.

You can buy a keypad mobile for ₹500, and touch mobiles retail from ₹4,000.

Mobile internet

It is very cheap, especially with the proliferation of low-cost operator Reliance Jio, which has forced the mainstream operators such as Airtel and Vodafone Idea to follow suit. Prices for packages including mobile internet are mentioned above. You can use 4G and 4G VoLTE services everywhere. 4G (LTE and VoLTE) networks cover 98% of the population of India and 5G networks in India now cover 52% of the population. 3G is available only in some remote locations and in most locations 3G or below is unavailable. If you use the train, you may occasionally find pocket regions where the internet drops to 2G or goes away completely.

Messaging

WhatsApp is the main messaging gateway. SMS is only used for things like OTPs (One Time Passwords, for WiFi) or contract information.

By internet

- **Wi-Fi hotspots** in India are, for the most part, limited. All airports and railway stations do offer free high speed Wi-Fi. Delhi, Bangalore, Pune and Mumbai are the only cities with decent Wi-Fi coverage. Many free Wi-Fi services will require entering a One time password (OTP) sent to an Indian cell phone number and are usually operated by Airtel or Jio.
- **Internet cafes** are common and they charge as little as ₹10-20/hr. Many will ask for your passport or ID. Beware of using your credit cards online as there have been many cases of credit cards thefts using *keyloggers*.
- **Public libraries** have PCs with broadband for public use. Most libraries require a membership but government-operated libraries only require a quick registration with the verification of your ID.

Internet censorship in India is considered “selective”. There are occasional random, inexplicable and arbitrary attempts by the government to block some sites it considers as carrying hateful propaganda, but enforcement is spotty and the decisions are often forgotten after a few months of being made. The sites which are blocked by the courts remain strictly blocked and are different from the vague blocks by the government. For travelers, the most important sites that are blocked are popular Chinese services like TikTok and WeChat, as well as games such as PUBG. Also, major Pakistani websites, accounts and channels have been blocked on social media, and on the internet. However, you may use a VPN to access other servers.

By mail

Addressing mail with a properly-formatted address will expedite its journey with government-owned India Post (<http://www.indiapost.gov.in/VAS/Pages/IndiaPosthome.aspx>).

The PIN code (postal index number) is important, and you can look up PIN codes and correct address formats on India Post's website. A 6-digit PIN code identifies the post office of a district; a 4-digit Post box number (recommended but optional) may narrow this to one business or an individual building. Addresses should be written in three to four lines with the name of recipient, house number and suite or apartment or building number, street name, city or town, state name, PIN code, e.g.:

United Nations House
55/73 Lodhi Estate
New Delhi, Delhi-110003



A post office in Varanasi

First class mail travels by air within India. International first class mail has a maximum limit of 20 kg. Prices vary from country to country. A full list related to the pricing can be found in India Post's website (<https://www.indiapost.gov.in/MBE/pages/content/international-air-parcels.aspx>). All locations with a PIN code are considered domestic. Military mail is operated by the Army Postal Service through its APOs and FPOs. The rate for domestic post is ₹15/50 g.

Private international courier companies like FedEx, DHL and UPS also operate through all major cities.

Cope

For immediate emergency assistance, you can call **112**.

The Ministry of Tourism has a 24-hour helpline for tourists in need. You can call the helpline number at **1800-11-1363** or just **1363**.

Consular assistance

All major cities have international consular assistance which include high commissions, embassies and consulates. More information can be found in respective city articles. Here are links to consular assistance in some cities:

- Delhi
- Mumbai
- Kolkata
- Chennai

Television

India has a variety of local Indian news channels in English such as Doordarshan (<https://www.doordarshan.gov.in/>) India's state broadcasting network owned by the Indian government; India Today (<https://www.indiatoday.in/>); NDTV 24x7 (<https://www.ndtv.com/>); CNN-News18 (<http://www.news18.com/>); Republic TV (<http://www.republicworld.com/>); Times Now (<http://www.timesnownews.com/>); Mirror Now (<https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now>); NewsX (<https://www.newsx.com/>); WION (<http://wionews.com/>).

There are also foreign news channels available such as BBC (World Service), CNN (International South Asia), France 24; Russia Today; ABC Australia; Bloomberg Television; CNA; Al Jazeera English; Deutsche Welle; NHK (World); Push TV.

There are also many Hindi news channels, as well as regional news channels in their respective local languages.

Sport can be viewed live on DD Sport, Eurosport, Sony Sport Network, Sports18 and Star Sports.

There are also many Hindi, English and Regional movies and series channels, children's and music channels (English, Hindi and regional), lifestyle and teleshopping available on TV networks using cable or satellite

These channels can be found on TV using networks such as TataPlay, Airtel and Jio.

Netflix India, ZEE5 and Prime Video is available for streaming in India.

Newspapers

Local Indian English newspapers can be handy and reliable sources for day-to-day updates about the country. India has a number of English newspapers and magazines. Some of the major newspapers are *Business Standard*, *Daily News and Analysis*, *Deccan Herald*, *The Hindu*, *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times of India*, *The Tribune* and many more. Some popular magazines are *Filmfare*, *Down to Earth*, *India Today*, *Forbes India* and *Vogue*.

There are also local regional newspapers which are either often in English or the local regional language.

Radio

- **AIR FM Rainbow** offers hourly news broadcasts at **102.6MHZ**.
- **AIR FM Gold** offers hourly news broadcasts at **100.1MHZ**
- **Radio One** offers modern and retro song broadcasts at **94.3MHZ**.
- **Red FM** offers public talks and entertainment at **93.5MHZ**

There are also many regional radios on their respective frequencies.

