### **Families**

A joint family in India is where the entire family all live together, which can include parents, wife, children and occasionally relatives. At the head of the family is a ‘Karta’, a senior male or female who makes economic and social decisions on behalf of the entire family, and other relations can be equal, of mutual respect or teasing in nature. Income goes into a common pool, which benefits all members. Nowadays, economic development and urbanisation have led to an increase in nuclear-like families than joint families.

Arranged marriage is still a strong tradition in India. This dates back to Vedic times in 1500–1100 BCE where suitable matches from around the kingdom would compete in competitions to win the hand of a royal bride.

Structurally, the Indian joint family includes three to four living generations, including grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews, all living together in the same household, utilizing a common kitchen and often spending from a common purse, contributed by all. Change in such family structure is slow, and loss of family units after the demise of elderly parents is counterbalanced by new members entering the family as children, and new members (wives) entering by matrimonial alliances, and their offsprings. The daughters of the family would leave following marriage.

### **Food**

One of our favourite customs and traditions in Indian culture is food! Every region in India has its own distinct cuisine with a signature dish or ingredient. It’s one of the best countries for vegetarian cuisine, which you’ll find predominantly in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Non-vegetarian options feature strongly in Bengali, Mughlai, North Indian and Punjabi cuisine, and Kerala in South India is famous for its delicious fish dishes.

You can always guarantee plenty of fresh ingredients, including wonderful herbs and spices used for flavour, aromas, to enhance colours and for healing properties.

Although many restaurants provide cutlery for tourists, it’s great to get involved with the Indian tradition of eating with your hands. As well as immersing yourself in Indian culture, your digestive system will thank you as it means you eat more slowly. Wash your hands thoroughly before and after, and use your right hand to eat.

### **Religion**

India is a land where people from different religions coexist harmoniously. 79.8% of the population worship Hinduism, 14.2% Islam, 2.3% Christianity, 1.7% Sikhism, 0.7% Buddhism and 0.4% Jainism.

The cow is a sacred animal in Hindu culture and is depicted in mythology as accompanying several gods such as Shiva on his bull Nandi, or Krishna, the cowherd god. The horns represent the gods, the four legs are ‘Vedas’ (ancient Hindu scriptures) and the udder is the four objectives of life – desire, material wealth, righteousness and salvation. Consuming beef or killing a cow is considered sinful, and it is illegal to slaughter a cow in several states.

Fasts (‘Vrats’ or ‘Upvas’) (puratassi) are a key part of Indian culture, as a means of giving thanks to Gods and Goddesses and of showing resolve and sincerity. It is thought that by going without the necessity of food you will cleanse yourself of sin. Fasts are observed through India on various days and on a range of religious occasions.

WHAT IS THE PURATTASI MASAM? 'Tirumala Shanivaralu' ( Shanivaralu in telugu language mean’s-saturday’s) is a Hindhu Festival celebrated in some parts of South India including [Andhra Pradesh](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andhra_Pradesh), [Karnataka](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karnataka), [Tamil Nadu](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu), [Kerala](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerala). Lord [Venkateswara](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venkateswara) Swamy will be worshiped during this festival. It is celebrated during the Tamil month of Purattasi, generally which falls in the months of September and October of Gregorian calendar. Puratasi Masam is of great importance as it is believed that Lord Venkateswara appeared on the earth in this month. Lord [Vishnu](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu)devotees consider this as the ideal month for thanking Lord Vishnu for preserving the Universe at the end of [Kali Yuga](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kali_Yuga). All the Saturdays of this month are treated as holy days and Devotees gather in large number at Lord Vishnu temples and special prayers are offered. Particularly the Odd Saturdays 1st, 3rd, 5th are of more importance. Tirumala Annual Navarathri [Brahmotsavam](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmotsavam) were also observed during this month where [Tirumala](https://href.li/?https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirumala) will be flooded with lakhs of devotees. Some people will take only vegetarian food during this month.

### **Temples**

Exploring Indian temples is a magical experience, but there are a few things to remember before you visit. Many of these sacred buildings were deliberately built at places rich in positive energy from the magnetic wave lines of the Earth. Most temples feature one main idol, which has a copper plate called the Garbhagriha or Moolasthan underneath that absorbs and resonates this underground energy. One of the customs and traditions in Indian culture is to have a bath or shower before entering a temple or at least wash your hands and feet to cleanse yourself of negative thoughts and evil influences.

Appropriate attire is really important, namely conservative clothing to indicate respect. Women should ideally wear a modest top and a calf or ankle-length skirt or trousers that will allow sitting comfortably cross-legged on the floor. Men should wear trousers and a shirt. Avoid wearing leather or animal skin of any kind, as this is offensive to practising Hindus.

You will also need to remove your footwear before entering places of worship to prevent any dirt from coming into a cleansed and sanctified environment. A top tip is to choose shoes that are easy to remove. If you’d prefer to keep your socks on, that’s fine: just make sure they are clean and free from holes!