

Culture:

India's culture is among the world's oldest; civilization in India began about 4,500 years ago. Many sources describe it as "Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara" — the first and the supreme culture in the world, according to the [All World Gayatri Pariwar](#) (AWGP) organization.

Western societies did not always see the culture of India very favorably, according to Christina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London. Early anthropologists once considered culture as an evolutionary process, and "every aspect of human development was seen as driven by evolution," she told Live Science. "In this view, societies outside of Europe or North America, or societies that did not follow the European or Western way of life, were considered primitive and culturally inferior. Essentially this included all the colonized countries and people, such as African countries, India, and the Far East."

However, Indians made significant advances in architecture ([Taj Mahal](#)), mathematics ([the invention of zero](#)) and medicine ([Ayurveda](#)). Today, India is a very diverse country, with more than 1.2 billion people, according to the [CIA World Factbook](#), making it the second most populous nation after China. Different regions have their own distinct cultures. Language, religion, food and the arts are just some of the various aspects of Indian culture.

"Unity in diversity" - these are not just words, but something that are highly applicable to a country like India that is incredibly rich in culture and heritage. A few quotations or statements cannot describe the pedestal that India holds on to the world map because of its colourful and unique culture. From the times of Mauryas, Cholas and Mughals to the period of British Empire, India has always been famous for its traditions and hospitality. The warmth in the relations and euphoria in celebrations make the country stand out distinctively in the global fraternity. The country's liveliness and generosity attract a number of tourists to its vibrant culture which is an amalgamation of religions, festivals, food, art, crafts, dance, music and many other subtle things. Everything, from the culture and values to customs, rituals and traditions, is 'special' in this 'Land of Gods'.

Religion & Beliefs

- **Hindu** 79.8%, **Muslim** 14.2%, **Christian** 2.3%, Sikh 1.7%, other and unspecified 2% (2011 est.)
- India has the second largest Muslim population in the world
- Religious practises are an integral part of daily life
- From the Hindu culture arose three other major religions: **Buddhism**, **Jainism** and **Sikhism**.
- Hinduism has long established roots in India dating from 2000-1500 B.C.E
- In Hinduism there is no single founder, specific theological system, or central religious structure
- Vedas and Upanishads are the holy books of Hinduism
- Hinduism teaches meditation, yoga and ascetic practices to cultivate self-discipline and unity
- The cow is considered a sacred animal

Major Celebrations/Secular Celebrations

- 26th January (Republic Day)
- 15th August (Independence Day)
- 2nd October (Gandhi Jayanti; Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday)
- Diwali – October/November
- Holi – March, to celebrate Spring

The Family

- Family values are highly respected throughout India and are fundamental in daily life
- The structure of the family is patriarchal; a woman must obey her father, her husband, her son.
- Arranged marriages are commonplace
- The urban middle class population of India have begun to move away from arranged marriages
- Families often live with three or four generations in the same household
- Traditionally sons inherit and daughters receive a dowry
- Child care is provided by the female family members

Social Stratification

- India has one of the world's oldest caste systems
- The caste structure divides people into four main groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras
- Brahmins, the teachers and intellectuals - Brahma's head. Kshatriyas, the warriors and rulers – Brahma's arms. Vaishyas, the traders - Brahma's thighs, and finally, Shudras, the menial workers - Brahma's feet
- There can be as many as thirty castes within one village
- Intermarrying between castes was forbidden but in urban areas is now more common
- Your caste is set by birth

Gender Roles

- Mothers, grandmothers and older siblings care for infants
- Patriarchal families are the norm
- Women are considered to hold secondary positions within the home and workplace
- 82.14% of males and 65.46% of females are literate (2011 census)
- Women often receive little schooling
- Divorce and inheritance laws are male dominated

Socialisation

- Until the child is two, the mother or grandmother is primary caregiver
- Once the child is two, older sisters are the primary caregivers
- Sons are generally given better opportunities and receive a superior education
- Gender specific roles are encouraged within the family unit and in wider society

Economy

- The Indian economy is one of the fastest growing in the world
- Indian labour force is estimated at 509.3 million
- 60% are employed in agriculture or related industries
- India has established Special Economic Zones to encourage and support business
- India's long-term growth is considered moderately positive due to a young population and corresponding low dependency ratio, healthy savings and investment rates
- GDP 7.6% (2016 Est.)

Food

- Food in India is often served on a 'thali' – a tray or plate that can hold several dishes
- 'Curry' is a European term to describe the spicy dishes found in India
- In some parts of India meals are eaten with rice (chawal), in others, flat breads (roti) are preferred
- Food is infused with spices such as cumin, turmeric, black pepper, cardamom, cloves and coriander
- Most Hindus avoid eating beef

Arts, Humanities & Popular Culture

- The Indian culture has absorbed and amalgamated many different customs and ideas throughout its long history which has led to a rich tradition and folk culture
- The most popular musical instrument in India is the sitar, an instrument similar to a guitar
- India is well regarded for its rugs, craft, metalwork, bronzes, stone carving, pottery, woodwork, and jewellery.
- Traditional sports include camel racing and cock fighting
- Folk dances are regional and often celebrated during festivals
- 'Bollywood' is the informal name given to the popular Mumbai-based film industry
- Bollywood has the largest output in the world in terms of number of films produced and, possibly, number of tickets sold.