

SNAPSHOT GUIDES PRESENTS



Managing India

BY TINA SHAH



Snapshot Guides presents: Managing India

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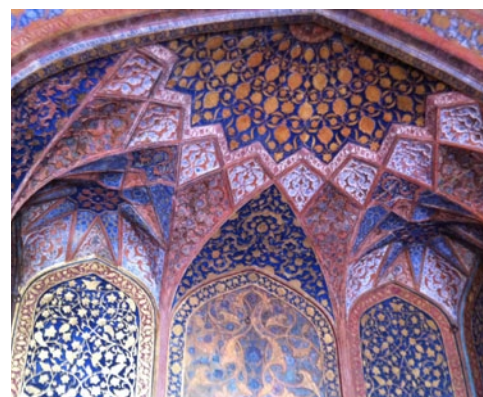
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Enjoy your adventures. Keep an open-mind. Go, on explorer!

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Introduction



India is many things. Beautiful yet chaotic. Peaceful yet gritty. At times, you get lost in India's breathtaking vastness. And at times, you get lost in the colorful hustle bustle of life. Everything is here in India, which is why you plan to explore.

While I am familiar with India (I was brought up by Indian parents in the US), it took me a while to figure out simple things when living and traveling extensively in India. This is the guide I wanted.

The following is a quick guide on how to manage yourself while in India. This is not a traditional travel guide with history and places to go and stay. I go where traditional travel books leave off. I target how you live and function in a new place so that you can enjoy your day to day. The guide is split up so you can take what you need. Use this guide as you wish- scan chapters, skip chapters, or bookmark sections so that the insights re more personal to you. 🌀

CHAPTER 1

Pre-trip: Before you go, anywhere!

Successful travel involves two things: getting all the stuff done before you travel so you don't have problems when you are abroad (pre-trip) and seamlessly living in a new place (day-to-day). This guide is split up into five sections. The first chapter, *Pre-trip: Before you go anywhere*, gives you a run-down of what wise travelers do before they head abroad. The second chapter, *Pre-trip for India*, gives you specifics on India. The third chapter, *At the Airport*, guides you through airports in India. The fourth chapter, *Day-to-Day: the Basics*, gets you through your first few hours in India. The fifth and final chapter, *Day to Day: Food, Transport, and Communications*, guides you through a longer stay in India.




The following chart gives you an overview of what to take care of before you travel anywhere. You can skip to Chapter 2 if you are a seasoned traveler; although, I still recommend you scan Chapter 1 so you do not miss any important preparation steps. I have traveled to 40 countries over my lifetime and sometimes I forget small things, particularly when I'm busy! For example, while heading to the soccer World Cup in South Africa, I learned that my passport did not have enough pages for the amount of stamps I needed. I missed an important match and was dead tired upon my arrival in Johannesburg. A refresher helps.

CHART 1: PRE-TRIP CHECKLIST
(in weeks prior to travel)



	8 WEEKS OUT	3 WEEKS OUT	2 WEEKS OUT
ACTIONS	Call doctor to get shots and medicine.	Check insurance coverage. Get travel insurance if you are not covered.	Get Visa if consulate is in your city.
	Get Visa through mail if consulate is not in your city.	Call bank and credit card companies about travel.	Pack. The lighter the better.
	Check passport expiration date.		Climate check.
	Finalize international airline ticket, lodging, places to visit.		

HEALTH

Action: Call your doctor to get shots and medicine

- Call your doctor before you travel because he will look up any specific vaccinations and medications you need. Your doctor will likely consult the World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/ith/en>. 
- Why do I have to go to the doctor so early? Vaccinations take time to work. Also, you start many travel medications before your trip. 
- What if I don't have much time left before I travel? Talk to your doctor to see how he can accommodate. 
- Write down your doctor's contact information in case you need to contact him while abroad. Give someone at home your doctor's information.

Action: Check your insurance coverage. Get travel insurance if you are not covered.

- Call your credit card companies. Credit cards have many perks that most people do not know about. One of these perks is that by having a credit card, you get some automatic travel insurance.
- Travel insurance is not too expensive and worth it if something goes wrong.
- Select insurance coverage with at least \$250,000 worth of evacuation insurance. SquareMouth.com  is a great travel insurance comparison engine to check out different plans and carriers.
- Make two photocopies of your insurance card. One for you if you lose your card and one for someone at home in case of an emergency. 



PASSPORT AND VISA

Action: Check your passport expiration date

- Make sure you have a valid passport and one page in your passport for each country stamp. (Multiple country stamps can go on one page but it depends on the authorities).
- If your passport has expired, renew it through the mail or an accepted passport facility (often post offices).


Action: Apply for visa by mail if there is not a consulate in your city. Get visa at the consulate if it is in your city.

- Visas allow you to enter a country. Some countries have them and others do not. Each visa has a *type* (tourist, business, etc.), a *term* (how long it lasts), *restrictions* (for certain countries), a *start date* (effective on date of issue or date of arrival), and an *end date*.

- Not all cities have country consulates so you might need to get your visa by mail.
- Make two photocopies of your passport and visa. One for you if you lose your passport and one for someone at home in case of an emergency. 
- Look up travel warnings issued by your home country's ministry of foreign affairs.
- Write down the addresses of your country's embassies  in the cities you will be traveling to. The consulate will be your savior if ever you lose your passport or something happens to you abroad.
- Get extra passport photos. Many countries require photos to get a mobile phone or on-the-spot visas.

FINANCE

Action: Call your bank and credit card company about travel.

- Your financial institutions might put a hold on your account if you do not inform them about your travel. Unlocking an account from abroad takes time and a lot of hassle. Spare yourself.
- If you want to buy things online while abroad (for example, regional airline tickets), talk to your credit card companies. Many countries have added an online security layer such as the “Verified by Visa” program that you can set up. This means when you buy something online while abroad, you not only have to put in your card details but also have to enter a separate password. This separate password is not the same password that you use to log into your online banking or credit card statements.
- Double check ATM and credit card charges for using them abroad. When asking about ATM fees, ask for all fees—there is a fee to use another bank ATM, a foreign transaction fee, etc. Credit cards usually charge a foreign transaction fee on top of the final bill.
- Write down the international toll free numbers for all your cards in case you need to call these companies while abroad. Many times the number is on the back of the card but if you  lose your card, you will need to have these toll free numbers handy.
- Find out the country codes for how to dial out from your home country to the visiting country and vice versa, <http://www.howtocallabroad.com/>

PACKING


Action: Pack for travel. The lighter the better.  Check weather.

The following chart is catch-all packing list. Determine what you need, what you will get abroad, and what you do not need.

CHART 2: CATCH ALL PACKING LIST

	BRING	BUY THERE	NO NEED
Official and Administrative Paperwork			
Passport and Visa			
Passport and Visa paper copy			
Extra passport photos			
Itineraries: air, hotel, car, tour, other			
Boarding pass (Keep international ticket stub)			
Ids, student card, money, ATM card, credit cards			
Insurance card/travel insurance, insurance card copy			
Emergency contact card*			
Current keys- house, car, other, etc			
Small writing pad/pen**			
Daypack to carry things			
Clothing			
Basic clothing			
Undergarments/socks			
Bedtime clothing			
Exercise clothing			
Business clothing			
Night out clothing			
Cold protection/ outerwear			
Swim			
Rain			
Footwear for clothing types			
Health			
Medicines- daily (birth control, etc)			
Medicine- travel specific from doctor			
Medicine- over counter/first aid (allergy, head, tummy)			
Vitamins			
Special foods			
Eye glasses			
Contact lenses equipment			
Sunscreen			
Sunglasses			
Hat			
Mosquito Repellant			

* Emergency Card Info includes:

- Your country
- Phone number and email of an emergency contact person (write the phone number from perspective of visiting country dialing out)
- Phone number and email of your doctor
- International ATM and credit card toll free number
- Consulate information of your home country in visiting country 

** It is useful to have locals write things down in your notebook that you do not understand.

CHART 2: CATCH ALL PACKING LIST *(cont'd)*

	BRING	BUY THERE	NO NEED
Electronics			
AC adapter (2 to charge multiple things)			
Phone/charger			
Extra phone if using other phone internationally			
Camera/charger			
Laptop/charger			
Music player/headphones/charger			
E-book reader/charger/ other reading/ journal			
Toiletries			
Babywipes			
Tissues			
Dental- toothbrush, paste, floss			
Hair- shampoo, conditioner, brush, ties			
Body- soap, deodorant, scent, moisterizer, lips, hand sanitizer			
Make-up/Nails			
Miscellaneous			
Small hand towel			
Hostel sheet/pillowcase			
Padlock			
Swiss army or multi tool (checked luggage)			
Things for special adventure activities, rock climbing, etc			

CHAPTER 2

Pre-trip for India





Health

Risks: typhoid and malaria. Take your pills as recommended.

- Typhoid pills or shot are usually taken before your trip.
- Malaria pills are usually taken before, during, and after your trip. There is a daily malaria pill (Malarone) and a weekly pill (Lariago- DS, chloroquine phosphate tablet). The weekly pill is cheaper and available at most pharmacies or “chemists” in India. Talk to your doctor about what’s best for your situation.

Passport and Visa

Online visa application: <https://indiavisa.travisaoutsourcing.com/get-a-visa>.

- **Types:** I assume you are getting a tourist visa. If someone is sponsoring you on another type of visa, check with him.
- **Term:** You can stay in India for 6-month increments. Once 6 months is up, you have to leave India and you cannot return for 2 months. Some countries, such as the US, are allowed a 1-year and a 10-year visa. Know the fine print. Buying a 1-year or a 10-year visa just saves you money on visa fees if you plan to take multiple trips to India over that period of time. As of June 2012, you can still only stay for 6-month increments with 2-month breaks in between. 
- **Can I extend my tourist visa while in India?** Not really. You might hear stories of people who get visa extensions while in India but the Indian consulate has cracked down on unnecessary extensions. At most, you might get a 2-week emergency extension. 
- **Restrictions:** Travellers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, some Eastern European, Central Asian, and African countries. 
- **Start:** Your 6-month period starts the day you receive your visa not the day you land in India.
- **Travel warnings:** The northern-most states of Jammu and Kashmir and the India-Pakistan border have had conflicts. Check real time travel warnings on your countries’ ministry of foreign affairs. 
- **Neighboring countries:** If you plan to visit neighboring countries, tell the Indian consulate.

while you are getting your India visa. They might put a special condition in your passport that allows you to travel to neighboring countries.

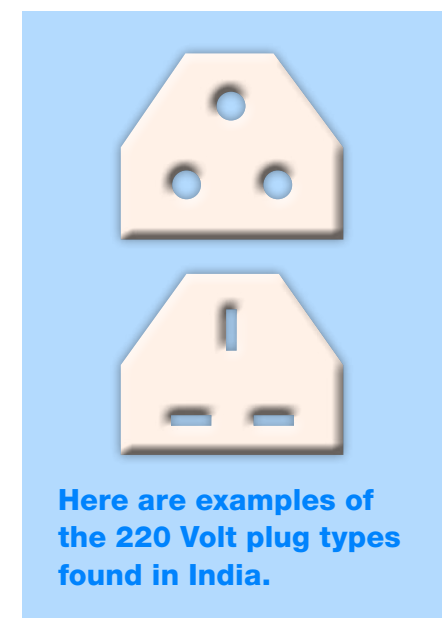
- **Nepal** needs a visa. You can get a single entry or 6-month multiple entry visa at the Nepalese embassy in your home country. You can get an on-the-spot visa in Nepal at the Katmandu airport if you pay in any major currency and provide a passport photo. Here's the visa form that you can complete in advance: <http://www.treks.com.np/visa/>. You can also buy a two-month single entry visa at the India/Nepal land border but you have to pay in US dollars (\$30) and have two passport photos. Bring adequate change.
- **Sri Lanka** requires an electronic travel authorization (ETA), which is a visa that you can obtain online. With the ETA, you can stay in Sri Lanka for up to 30 days. Have your passport photos ready www.travisa.com/SriLanka/Srilanka-eta.htm.
- **Pakistan** is difficult to enter via India and vice versa due to tense foreign relations. Two-month double entry visas to Pakistan are typically granted by the Pakistani embassy in your home country. If you try to get a Pakistani visa while in India, you will need a letter of recommendation from your home embassy and the necessary application and passport photos. Research your transit route if you are going from India to Pakistan or vice versa.
- **Bhutan**: India's Sikkim state is the closest you can get to Bhutan, the happiest country on Earth. www.kingdomofbhutan.com. Bhutan has an innovative way to measure national success- the gross national happiness index! Westerners can visit Bhutan but the visa is \$250 per day, and you need to go through a registered travel agent, www.tourism.gov.bt.
- **Inner Line Permits**: In addition to having an India visa, you need permits to enter particular border regions in India. You need an Inner Line Permit (ILP) to visit the northern Indian states such as Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim. ILPS are issued by regional Indian offices or through travel agents for a fee. The entry permit typically lasts for 15 days. You can get ILPs while in India, although it wouldn't hurt to ask the Indian consulate in your home country for an ILP if you plan in advance to travel to one of these states. This can save you time. (See *India map in Appendix*.)
- **Restricted Area Permits**: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram require Restricted Area Permits (RAP). RAPs are much harder to get than ILP's and have to be arranged through Foreigners' Regional Registration Offices (FRRO) in India. <http://www.immihelp.com/nri/foreigner-registration/foreigners-regional-registration-officers.html> (See *India map in Appendix*.)
- **Non-resident Indians**: If you are a non-resident Indian (your parents or grandparents have Indian blood), apply for an OCI or a PIO card. You don't ever have to have a India visa once you get your OCI/PIO card. Note: It takes several months to apply for and get your card. <http://www.immihelp.com/nri/pio-vs-oci.html>.

Finance

- India's currency is the Rupee. Check your conversation rate. <http://www.xe.com/ucc/>
- Rupee notes: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1000. One “lakh” is (10^5) or 100,000 rupees. One “crore” is (10^7) or 10,000,000 rupees.
- In the West, numbers are written in millions and in groups of three. But in India, numbers in groups of two on the basis of lakhs and crores. So, the number 1.5 million would be 1,500,000 in the US but 15,00,000 or “15 lakh” in India. 150 million or 150,000,000 would be 15,00,00,000 in the US or 15 “crore” in India.
- All of India is not setup to take debit/credit cards. Keep cash on you while traveling.
- How to dial home country from India. www.howtocallabroad.com/india
 - Example India to US (917) 555-2646
00 + 1 + US City Area code (917) + number (555-2646)
 - Example US to India mobile 9820402646
001 (US country code) + 91 (India country code) + India city Area code (98)
+ number (2040-2646)

Packing

- You are better off packing one big bag with less then 20kg (appx. 44 pounds) in it. This is because if you travel domestically around India, you are only allowed to check in one bag (max of 20 kg.) You should use a bigger bag because people go crazy shopping in India—harem pants, sarees, and sandals galore!
- Clothing at markets is not as costly in India as in the Western world. You can always buy clothing in India.
- It will help if you avoid culturally inappropriate clothing—tight-fitting clothes, revealing tops, etc. Women should consider wearing local kurtas (casual tops) or dupatas (lightweight wraps) if they don't want attention. Major cities and beach areas are more liberal.
- Toiletries are readily available at local chemists.
- India accepts power in 220 Volts, alternating at 50Hz. US and Canada needs a converter to convert 110 V to 220 V and a plug adapter to go from 2 flat pins to 2 round pins. Other countries in Europe just need the plug adapter. Having multiple converters/adapters is helpful if you want to plug more than one thing in at a time. http://www.travelproducts.com/electricity_guide.htm



CHAPTER 3

At the airport

You've landed in India. What now?

After gathering your luggage and clearing customs

- If authorities give you forms, fill them out and keep them on you. Keep your passport and your international airline ticket stub accessible. Do not be alarmed if more than one uniformed official asks for your forms or your ID.
- Hold on to your international airline ticket! This will allow you to bring more than the standard domestic baggage allowance, one bag at 20 kg (approx. 44 pounds), back home.
- If you travel within 24 hours of your international flight to India to another Indian city, you are allowed to bring more than 20 kg on the domestic flight. After the 24-hour period is over, you can only take 20 kg on domestic flights within India without paying extra baggage fees. It is not the smartest policy because any international traveler coming with more than 20kg into India will likely want to travel with ALL their luggage during the duration of their travel. (See *Packing* section in Chapter 2.)
- Use an ATM to get rupees. Get at least 5,000 rupees. Going forward, you might want to take large amounts of cash from ATMs to avoid paying recurring transaction fees. You can also exchange cash at the Travelex bureau but the commission fees are much higher than ATM charges.
- Arrange for a prepaid or metered taxi to your first destination if someone is not picking you up. Prepaid taxis are usually based in the airport. Ask an airport authority for help and avoid non-airport sponsored rides that tend to overcharge the customer.



AIRPORT TAXI SERVICE
Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai 400 099.

No. **212913** Date **17/11/14** Time **2:05 AM**
Passenger's Name **Henry**
Taxi No. **MH14 7868**
Driver's Name _____
MOL No. _____ Badge No. _____
Destination **SANTA CRUZ**
Taxi Fare: **Rs. 80**
Luggage Charges - For Bags :
Below 70 x 50 cms (nos.) @ Rs. 5/- each **Rs. 10**
Above 70 x 50 cms (nos.) @ Rs. 10/- each **Rs. 20**
Frige: T.V., A.C. @ Rs. 25/- each **Rs.**
Toll Charges **Rs.**
Service Charges **Rs. 10**
Signature _____ Total Amount **Rs. 220**

TAXI FARE & LUGGAGE CHARGES ARE PREPAID TO THE DRIVER. NO EXTRA CHARGES TO BE PAID TO THE DRIVER AT DESTINATION.

1. PASSENGERS SHOULD RETAIN THIS RECEIPT FOR REFERENCE.
2. In case of breakdown on the way driver will arrange another taxi for onward journey to next driver.

Addresses

While there are street names in India, Indians tend to navigate by landmarks. In fact, landmarks are written into official addresses. At the airport, ask someone at the travel desk what area your final destination is in and to write it down in the native language in case the driver gets confused.

When you are not at an airport, you can ask a hotel or hostel receptionists to write things down for you. A typical address would be structured like so (note that the landmark is in the official address)

274/104 Jitendra Building
12th Road
Near Ram Krishna Math—(landmark)
Khar West, Mumbai
400052

You would tell the taxi driver “Khar West” near “Ram Krishna Math.” Do not assume taxi drivers know where everything is. (See *Hindi phrase book in the Appendix*.)

Future airport trips if you take regional carriers


- To enter any Indian airport you need your ticket and passport. Come with your printed e-ticket. If you cannot find a printer, there is usually a desk outside the airport where they can print your itinerary. This itinerary print out only gets you into the airport. You still have to collect your boarding pass at your airline’s counter. It makes sense to come with a print out to save time.
- Each piece of carry on luggage needs an address tag. The address tag will be stamped after clearing security. Often times, the agents at the booking desk do not tell foreigners of this policy, and many foreigners have to go back through security because they don’t have an address tag on each carry-on bag—annoying.
- Security lines are separated for men, gents, and ladies.

CHAPTER 4


Day-to-Day: the Basics

ORIENTATION

Attitude


Understand that India is what you make of it. Instead of trying to figure out what India does not have, look for what it does have and what you have never seen or experienced before. 

Language

- There are hundreds of languages in India. The national language is Hindi, not Hindu, which is a religion.
- Many people in the cities speak English. The Indian style of English, derived from British English, has its own adaptations. Some common phrases: <http://tinasoul.posterous.com/funny-things-indian-people-say> 
- In South India, people are more likely to speak their native language and English over Hindi.
- You will run into people, small vendors and drivers mainly, that do not speak English. Speak clearly and slowly in English, and they will most likely understand the gist of what you are saying or find someone on the street that speaks English that can help. People have no qualms asking for help in India. For example, if a driver does not understand you or know where something is, he might well ask at least 3 people along the way.
- If you do not speak English, rely on clear nonverbal communications. You can also have the people at your hotel or hostel write things down for you in the native language so you can point to addresses and phrases.

Corruption/People

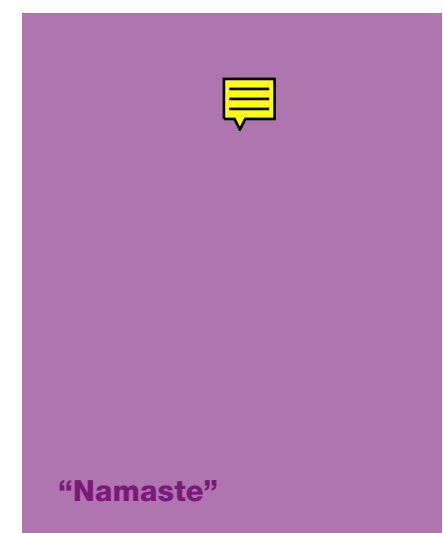
There are good and bad people in every country. For example, one thing I noticed in India is that people will go out of their way to make sure you get to the right place if you are lost. Two good stories: Once I left my wallet in a taxi. The taxi driver cut his shift each so that he could return my wallet. There are good samaritans everywhere, especially to people who are respectful.

Another time, my backpack went flying off my motorcycle. Someone picked it up and waited for me to return. Incidentally, he was the head of Coorg's (Karnataka state where coffee  grown) anti-corruption league. If I did not find him, he told me he would have gone to the police.

There are also not so good stories. Use your common sense. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it most likely is a scam. Do not trust people in markets that say things are real gold and silver. Gold and silver prices are high so you usually get these at proper jewelry shops. Some officials might ask for bribes, but I did not encounter this.

Noted

- Take your shoes off before you enter sacred places such as a temple or home.
- Temples require conservative clothing- no shorts or no sleeveless tops. Some temples require a specific wrap around your legs or over your head if it is a Sikh temple.
- Religions: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism
- Hands are washed often. The right hand is used for eating.
- Beef is not readily available due to Hindu practice. Pork is not readily available due to Muslim practice.
- Alcohol is permitted in all states except Gujarat. There are some dry days depending on public holidays. Despite the availability of marijuana (ganja), smoking weed is illegal.
- People often bow to elders to show their respect.
- Animals are given liberties. They are permitted to roam loose on the roads- cows, sheep, goats, etc. You will see this in the cities too.
- Namaste—people might greet you with clasped hands to say hello or as a gesture to thank you or to ask for your graciousness.
- The “headshake”—Indians do a tilted head bob from left to right to say yes. Sometimes it looks like “no” but it means yes or “I got it.”
- Indians generally work 6 days a week (Monday–Saturday).
- **Indians love** their “Bollywood” movies, music, regional foods, and cricket.



Poverty

Both rural and urban poverty in India is gripping and pervasive. Many organizations, companies, NGOs, and the government, are trying alleviate dire conditions but a lot has yet to be done.

If you want to do something for India's poverty, consider linking up with a local NGO or social entrepreneurship venture to volunteer your time or your funds. One organization I am familiar with that does great work is <http://www.dasra.org/>. There are many organizations that do good work.

Beggars

Tough. With so much poverty, you cannot help but want to help people. Many of the people asking are mothers with babies or small children. Once you give money to one child, others will swarm around you. Politely say no. They will keep after you. Stick to a firm no. If you stop responding, they will eventually move on.

Touts

Touts are people who sell trinkets or offer you their services when you don't want them—such as being a tour guide. Stick to a very firm no. Also, people might come up to you to “practice their English.” Stick to a very firm no.

Crowds

India will soon be the most populous country in the world. The population density, i.e. how packed people are into space, is very high. In cities, people are on top of each other. Thus, there is not a strong concept of personal space. People might bump in to you and cut you in line. Be clear that you are waiting in line to the people around you. Do not be surprised if you see many people packed into trains, busses, auto rickshaws, or cargo trucks.

Stares

People will stare at you. They may not be subtle. Don't let the staring get the best of you. People are just curious about you, particularly if you don't blend in with the native population. Women—if staring turns into unwanted discussions (e.g. “Do you have boyfriend?...”), the silent treatment is an effective counter. Some women prefer to say “yes,” regardless of their personal situation and move on.

Servants

Many upper and middle class people have servants. In cities such as Mumbai, people come from all over India to earn “city wages” and are willing to do these service jobs. It is common to have someone who comes to cook and someone to clean. Many people have drivers. Understand the labor dynamics and be kind to these helping hands.

Time

People joke about *Indian Standard Time*. When you are meeting locals, they are often 30–40 minutes late. However, when it comes to travel and tours, people are generally professional about being on time.

Power

Everything that needs electricity has a power switch. In the West, you plug something in and it automatically starts charging. In India, you plug something in and then turn on the master power switch next to the plug to get power. Master power switches reduce power wastage for things that don't constantly need power, such as the microwave.

Pollution

Some of the scenic parts of India are extremely clean and pristine, especially near the Himalayas. The air quality in these regions is pure and crisp. However, for the most part, India is not as well kept as many other developed countries. You will see trash on the streets of most cities. Air pollution stems from the many filter-less trucks and auto rickshaw as well as industrial activities. Many municipalities are taking on public greening efforts but there is a long way to go.

Questions I always ask where I am staying.

- Is there hot water 24 hours? This helps to set your expectations.
- Are there any upcoming public holidays? There are many holidays in India, which might influence your schedule.
- Where is the closest internet cafe in case my internet card does not work. (See *more about getting an internet card in Chapter 5.*)
- How much would a driver cost? It is more convenient to have a driver take you to many places if you are willing to pay more.
- Where is the nearest travel agency in case I want to book an excursion?
- Can I have a business card of the hotel in case I get lost?

THE TOILET DIFFERENCE

There are Western sit-down toilets and there are Eastern squat toilets. Most facilities offer Western toilets but you may run into an Eastern toilet, particularly if you go to someone's home. Don't freak out. Here's what to do:

An Eastern toilet is simply a toilet that isn't built above ground. It is a squatting toilet with no seat and has a proper flush. Before you get into whether this is a backward practice or not know that squatting has been around since the beginning of mankind. There is significant research that shows squatting toilets are more hygienic and that the squatting position allows the full release the body needs to stay clear. See my blog post: <http://bit.ly/159zusk>.



- **Why is the seat wet?** It's clean water from the bidet jet spray. A bidet is a small hose you use to clean your backside.
- **Why is the bathroom wet?** First, most home bathrooms double as a shower. Second, in public places the bathrooms are constantly being washed with buckets of soap and water.

How to use an Eastern toilet

Squat and finish your business. Use the bidet. If there is no bidet there is likely a faucet with a bucket and a cup inside the bucket. You are supposed to fill the bucket with water and use the cup (which has a spout so it pours easily) to stream water down your backside.

Toilet paper

While many toilets are equipped with toilet paper some toilets do not have toilet paper because Indians believe cleaning with water is cleaner than using toilet paper. Most toilets have a bidet. If you are not comfortable using a bidet, use your baby wipes or tissues. Just remember to dispose of the wipes in a trashcan and not down the flush. You don't want to mess up already sensitive sewage systems.

HOW DO I KEEP MYSELF CLEAN?

On the road sanitation

Public facilities are not up to Western standards. Here's what to do.

Ask for the nearest hotel and walk into the lobby like you own it. Many hotels have security guards but their job is solely to make sure you go through the metal detector. Most people will not question you and if they do, you can ask if you can use the toilet. If they hesitate, tell them you'll purchase something from the restaurant (bottle of water). There is a chain of coffee shops around India called Café Coffee Day (CCD). Ask for the nearest CCD to use their facilities. You will need to purchase something. Another coffee chain is Barista. Starbucks will soon enter the Indian market.

The shower and the geyser

There is one main difference between Western showers and Indian showers- you need to turn on the hot water tank, the geyser, every time you shower. The geyser switch is above the sink and has a red light. If you want hot water, first turn on the (geyser) and then run the water. When you are finished shut the geyser off and then shut the water tap.

In villages you might not have a shower but instead have buckets of cold and hot water that you mix to bathe yourself. The buckets of hot water will be heated on the stove because there is no hot water tank.

HELPFUL THINGS TO PACK IN YOUR DAYPACK

	Sunscreen
	Mosquito repellant
	Baby wipes/tissues for sanitation
	Hand sanitizer. No need to overuse. Most restaurants have hand wash stations.
	Wallet/Purse
	Cellphone
	Copies of your documents (e.g. passport, etc.). You will need your passport if you are exchanging money.
	A business card of the address where you are staying to show the driver if you are lost.
	Pen and small writing pad to take down names if you are having difficulty communicating.
	Camera
	Bottled mineral water (more on food and drink in Chapter 5)

CHAPTER 5

Day-to-Day: Food, Transport, and Communications

FOOD AND DRINK

Don't drink the water

Drink bottled water instead of the filtered water typically served at restaurants. The water in India is too mineral rich for most Westerners. Filtered water is not good enough because you do not know how often people change their filters. Make sure when you get a bottle of water that the seal is intact. There have been cases of water tampering—filling bottles up with filtered water and reselling them. If ever I was in a pinch while at someone's home, I'd ask the host to boil water for me and then cool it. Avoid any form of ice. Ice cubes. Shaved ice. Blended ice.

What do I drink if I get bored of bottled water?

- Fresh fruit juice if it's prepared made to order and served in a disposable cup
 - Indians like sweet things. Fresh fruit juice sometimes has a spoonful of sugar.
 - **How to order:** X juice, no ice, no sugar. Example: mosambi (sweet lime) juice, no ice, no sugar.
- Coconut water
 - You might be used to the bottled, pasteurized coconut water in the West but Indian coconuts are the real deal.
 - You can get a coconut or “narial” just for its water or a coconut with water AND flesh. You would say “pani or malai”. The literal translation is “water and flesh.” “Or” means “and” in Hindi. (See *Hindi guide in Appendix*.)
 - I loved eating coconut malai with the handcrafted spoon made from the shell of the coconut. (See *Hindi guide in Appendix*.)

- Fresh lime soda (lime juice mixed with seltzer). They will ask if you want it sweet (with sugar), salt, or mixed (sugar and salt).
- I do not drink soft drinks or “cold drinks.” But you can. Thumbs Up is India’s cola. Limca is India’s lemon lime drink. There are a lot of other fruit soda varieties—mango, guava, etc. Check to make sure the bottles are sealed.
- Tea or “chai” (black tea with spices in steamed milk)

Avoid fresh cold milk

You do not know the source of the milk. There have been a number of cases of milk tampering.

Eating

- Go to restaurants the locals are going to. If there are families dining with kids—even better. A diet of cooked meats and vegetables is the best to avoid getting sick.
- Restaurants typically have a non-AC and an AC hall. The AC dining room is more expensive.
- India has a weak supply chain to transport and deliver products that are cold—fresh milk, fruits and vegetables, meats, etc. A lot of this produce sits outside for a long time in hot weather. Be weary of buying produce that has been outside for a while.
- Avoid eating food that has been sitting out such as uncovered buffet food, street food, beach vendor food, etc.
- Avoid uncooked food, apart from fruits and vegetables that can be peeled. Avoid uncooked eggs, seafood, and shellfish.



Be clear and repeat your food allergies to wait staff. Nuts, milk, and wheat are common ingredients in Indian cuisine. Make sure you ask for no sugar if you are diabetic. Indians love to add sugar to things that don’t require it. Also, if you don’t want your food to be oily, say “less oil.”

Indian food is climate dependent. In the South, you’ll get lighter vegetarian meals served on banana leaves with rice as the main staple. In the north, you’ll get richer non-vegetarian food such as curries that keep heat in your body when it’s cold. Buttermilk or yogurt is served at the end of most meals to cool down any spicy food. The bacteria in yogurt also aids digestion. On the coast, you will get fresh seafood.

Indians are used to spicy food. If Indians tell you the food is not very spicy, it will be medium spiced. If they say no spice, the food will be mildly spiced. If you cannot eat rich or spicy foods, opt for meat or vegetable tikkas/kebabs (North Indian) or South Indian food—rice crepes called masala dosas that are filled with potato and vegetables and are served with a coconut sauce. To say not

spicy, say “no mirch” (no hot pepper). Check out my breakdown of North Indian food at <http://bit.ly/10RJnF9>.

Indian style Chinese food is very popular. Ajinomoto is MSG. If you do not want this, make sure you ask them not to use it.

If you want to take food **to go**, say “parcel.” Also, ask for plastic utensils if you need them. There is often a nominal container charge.

Indians typically eat with their right hand. It is okay to ask for utensils if you need them. Hand washing stations are readily available.

Street food inspector

India is known for its street food. You can avoid street food altogether or you can partake by following a few simple suggestions. I would not recommend street food for people with severe allergies.

- Know your dietary limits and ask questions. Even if the vendor does not speak English, someone will try to help. E.g. Does this have peanuts?
- As stated above, NO ICE
- Profile a place to see if a crowd of locals is going
- Observe how vendors are cleaning utensils and glasses, opt for disposable containers
- Juice should be pressed in front of you. No juice from jugs.
- Avoid pre-sliced fruits or vegetables, street meat, and street ice cream

What if I get sick?

Doctors are readily available if you feel ill. Ask the people you are staying with. Over the counter and natural medicines are available at any chemist. If you need to see a doctor, you can see a general practitioner or a homeopathic, alternative medicine doctor. Doctors usually work morning and evening hours with a long break in the afternoon.

Many people come to India for medical tourism—operations, dental work, and eye examinations because there are many quality doctors at cheaper fares. Make sure you check out the facilities before you commit to anything.

Gym

While you will find gyms in India, they are not very common. You will, however, always find yoga workshops or meditation groups nearby.



HOW DO I GET AROUND?

Traffic—There is a saying in Hindi that in India you must become friends with traffic. In cities, you cannot escape traffic. While certain states have world-class roads and highways, many places only have local roads. Cars and rickshaws try to create lanes where no lanes existed. Cows, camels, and herds of sheep also travel by road, and it is customary to let these animals pass by rather than push them off the roads.

Driving in India is difficult. Add an hour to travel time, particularly in cities, because of traffic. The mornings from (7–10 a.m.) into a city and evenings from (6–9 p.m.) out of the city are the most hectic. Indians generally work 6 days a week (Monday–Saturday).

Pedestrians—You will see most people walking on roads instead of the sidewalk. This is because the sidewalk infrastructure is not always in optimal condition. Always watch your step while walking to avoid tripping on uneven pavement. Also, be careful crossing streets. While there are some designated crosswalks or “zebra crossings,” most people jaywalk.

Horns—People really like to honk their horn. It’s alarming at first but you will soon get used to it.





Auto-Rickshaw (*abbreviated “auto” or “rick”*)—A three-wheeled scooter with no doors. The cheapest form of transit. Locals mainly use rickshaws. If you are traveling a short distance, you will likely have to take a rickshaw. Taxis only take passengers on longer journeys. To pay for a rickshaw ride, there is a meter attached to each rickshaw. Due to inflation, you do not pay the rate on the meter. Instead, there is an official card that each rickshaw driver has. He’ll match the meter rate to the card and tell you the exact price. If he quotes you a price without consulting the card, ask to see the card. He is obligated to show you.

Cycle rickshaw—A bicycle with passenger seating. Agree on a fare before you are taken somewhere.





Motorcycle or Scooter—I rode a Royal Enfield Bullet 350 from Southern India to Mumbai. You can go to a travel agency or mechanic to inquire about renting motorcycles or scooters (especially in Goa). Some people I met while traveling bought bikes and sold them when they went home. See the bike I rode: <http://bit.ly/ZmWK17>.

Taxi—Make sure the meter is working before you enter the taxi. Taxis do not have air conditioning unless you get a blue “cool cab,” which is more expensive. Regular taxis are usually black and look like old English cars. Lift the latch upward to open the door if you are inside a regular taxi. Taxi drivers also have a rate card that they use to charge you based on the meter reading.

Train—An adventure! Avoid using local trains during morning and evening peak hours because of the crowds. If you are a woman, buy a first class ladies car ticket. Trains get really crowded, and ladies do not get much personal space and might be pushed against other people, including men. Buy first class tickets in general. Buses can be as crowded as trains.

 **Regional trains** (*from city to city*)—decent if you get a first class AC car ticket. You get ample room and plenty of food. To book you can 1) ask a representative where you are staying, or 2) go to the train station or  post office in  advance. There  is a time where you could book train tickets online through yatra.com, makemytrip.com or cleartrip.com but Indian Railways is touch and go with accepting foreign credit cards and you need to have an Indian mobile number. Simple accommodations inside railway stations are available if booked three days before your departure.

Driver—In cities without many taxis, you can arrange for a daily driver. Drivers can be arranged through hotels or travel agencies.

Plane—There are a few regional carriers that you can book online, such as **IndiGo**, **Air India**, **Jet Airways**, **Kingfisher** (at the time of this writing Kingfisher was filing for bankruptcy), and **SpiceJet**. Refer to page  1 for adv  on traveling with  regional  carriers. There are also several travel booking sites such as kayak.in, expedia.in, yatra.com, and makemytrip.com that help you book airfare and lodging. I would use these sites to search for flights but do my final booking through the airline website because most Indian travel aggregator sites do not take foreign credit cards. I took every regional carrier in India, and I was most happy with **IndiGo** airlines because of its customer service.

MOBILE PHONE SETUP

Carriers—**Vodaphone**, **Tata**  **como**, **Airtel**, **Reliance**, **Idea**, **BSNL**, **MTS**, etc. I used Vodaphone without any problems. See the full carrier list: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mobile_network_operators_of_India.

Visit a local office to select a prepaid plan. You will need to attach a passport photo to your application to get a mobile phone. You do not need to be a local for a pre-paid plan. If you want a post-paid plan (a cheaper plan where you get a monthly bill), you need to come with a local to set it up. Since you do not have credit history in India, companies need a local to sign off on you.

If you plan to come and go to India, consider getting a number and paying a deposit to lock

your number so that you have the same number when you return to India.

Paying—If you have a prepaid phone, you are all set. If you have a post-paid phone, many phone carrier stores have an electronic kiosk where you can pay your bill. Ask an agent exactly where to go because there are many lines and you don't want to waste time standing in the wrong line. Paying online is only sometimes available. My typical phone bill was \$10 a month.

Note: Blackberries and their messaging service, BBM, are very popular in India. Your blackberry needs to be unlocked at a local electronics shop to work on the Indian network (unless your phone is a world phone).

INTERNET SETUP

Network card products—Tata Photon+, MTS Mblaze, Reliance Netconnect+, MTS Mblaze, BSNL EVDO, or Virgin Vlink. I used Reliance with mixed results. The network is extensive but the customer service did not please me. Next time I'd try Tata Photon+ or MTS Mblaze.

Network cards are USB drives that you can put into your computer to get internet access. The speeds will not be as fast as the Ethernet connections you have at your home or office but they can get pretty close. Visit a local internet carrier shop to find out about network coverage in Indian cities.

It is harder to get a network card than it is to get a mobile phone. You will need your passport photo plus a local sponsor to get a network 3G card. The local will also need to bring copies of his ID.

I set up a prepaid plan and paid about \$20 flat for the 3G network card and about \$20 monthly for unlimited data (amount you download and upload) at a decent speed. Plan costs are based on the amount of data, speed, and time period. The representatives will walk you through what plan will work best.

Note: If they give you a box with an account number, keep it. If something goes wrong, the only way to look you up in the system is by account number, not by name.

If you do not get an internet card, there are internet cafes in most major destinations. Pay attention to cafe hours. Many cafes and shops close in the afternoon from 1 to 3. A few cafes and hotels offer wireless internet but it is not standard. A site like [burrrp.com](http://mumbai.burrrp.com/) (<http://mumbai.burrrp.com/>) will help you search wireless cafes in major cities.

COMMERCE

Vibrant marketplaces—Commerce happens in all corners. Streets are bustling. You see everything: open air food stalls, juice vendors, coconut water vendors, vegetable and grain markets, souvenirs, clothing, etc. There do not seem to be strong zoning rules so anyone can set up a tarp and sell their goods.

Shop hours—Many shops open at 10 a.m., close for lunch from 1 to 3 p.m., and open back up from 3 p.m. till 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. Indians typically take a long lunch break. People often go home to their families for lunch.

Bargaining—Merchants price items expecting that you will bargain. It is a game. The merchant will ask you to name your price (often because you will state a higher price than expected) and then try to take you up from there. I always cut prices in half and work

from there. If you buy many items, you can ask for a bulk discount. Also, feel free to stay firm and walk away. There are so many vendors, and eventually you will find what you want at the price you want it. For many people, the ask price is lower than prices back home and thus not worth the effort of bargaining. It depends on who you are. While department stores are fixed price, most street shops are not fixed price even if they say they are fixed price.

Security at fancy places—Malls and department stores often have private security guards. Follow the rules and procedures.

Wallahs—Wallahs or 'valas' means, "associated with." A chai wallah is a guy that sells chai or tea. A subji walla is a guy that sells subji or vegetables, etc. There is a walla for every good and every service. Although decreasing as people attain higher levels of education, manual labor is still readily available in India. You will notice personal touches that you do not see elsewhere. Hand painted signs on trucks, etc.

In major cities like Mumbai, you can get most everything food, toiletries, etc. delivered.

Change—You typically get 500 and 1,000 rupee notes from the ATM. You will want to get change in denominations of 100, 50, 20, and 10 rupee notes at the bank because most vendors do not have adequate change. Before paying for something, ask a vendor if he has change. Rickshaw rides, for example, cost 20 to 50 rupees, on average.

Tipping—As you see fit. People will give *at most* 10% to waiters. Drivers are aware of Western tipping culture and might ask for a tip. While locals may occasionally tip drivers, it is not a standard practice. I tipped well (15% or more) when I was in India, especially to point out good service. At most hotels and high-end restaurants, a service charge is included. Check the bill to make sure.

VAT—a 12.5% tax is added to most food bills. Alcohol is heavily taxed, and some states, such as Gujarat, are dry states where no alcohol is served.





Conclusion



I am excited for your adventures in India! Thanks for letting me be your companion. Now that you have some understanding of India, you have much more room to explore and live it up.

In the interest of keeping this guide readable, I had to cut some of the information I presented. If you wish something were here or not here, feel free to let me know at tinapshah@gmail.com.

If you want more stripped down guides, **reach out**. I am considering writing a guide on food and on ancient beauty secrets.

Appendix

TERRITORY MAP OF INDIAN STATES





SHORT HINDI PHRASE BOOK

Translations in American English. Most of these words will help you with drivers.
See <http://wikitravel.org/en/Hindi#b>.

are Yes - Ha or Gee

No - Nahi

Good - Aaccha

Fine/ok - Teek

How are you - Aap kaise hai?

That's it - Bus (best way to tell a driver to stop)

Stay - Ruko

Today - Aaj

Tomorrow - Kaal

Why - Kya

Where - Kither or Kahan?

How much - Kitna?

Do you know - Malum Hai

I don't know - Nahi malum hai or patha nahi

Up - Oopur

Down - Neeche

Open - Khula

Close - Buund

In - Undur

Out - Bahar

Finished - Hogaiya

Before - Peeche

Ahead - Agay

Straight - Sidha

Near - Paas

Far - Duur

Left - Left

Right - Right

Street - Gully

That - Woe

That street - Woe gully

More/And - Aur

Here - Idhar

There - Udhar

Hot - Garam

Cold- Tanda

Water- Paani

Food- Khana

Tea - Chai

Spice - Mirch

Coconut - Narial