



INTRODUCTION TO INDIA

From the moment you set foot in India, the traditional 'Namaste' gesture - two hands joined together in welcome, will greet you. And this greeting encapsulates the warmth, hospitality and culture that make a journey to India so memorable. India is a land of fantasy, vibrant colours and history. The complex cultures of this 5000-year old civilization fires the imagination. Endless variety is the leitmotif of India. With its ancient customs that peacefully co-exist with ultra-modern technology, it is a true melting-pot of people, languages, religions and cultures. And the fascinating diversity continues through dramatic deserts and palm-fringed beaches, verdant valleys, magnificent mountains, wild jungles, intricately planned Mughal gardens, fairytale palaces and soaring skyscrapers, quaint bazaars and opulent malls: all of which illustrate the elements of surprise in the vast Indian canvas.

India is home to 27 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

North India - Northern India is definitely a 'jewel' in India's crown. This entire region offers visitors the scenic and cultural wealth they would not find in a single region anywhere else in the world. From verdant forests and valleys to majestic mountains, deserts to royal cities, palaces, parks, ancient monuments, temples...North India is a traveler's dream destination. The journey begins in the capital city of Delhi and continues to the south-east, the setting for the renowned Taj Mahal. Westwards stretches the vast deserts of Rajasthan and its vibrant and rich princely heritage. Here famous Jaipur, Udaipur and Jodhpur draw the visitor. Eastwards lies the temples of Khajuraho and the holy city of Varanasi.

South India - Mumbai and Chennai form the gateways to a traveler's exploration of South India. They open up a more tropical India, slower, more relaxed and more exotic. From the garden city of Bangalore (the country's IT capital), to historic Mysore-the home of Tipu Sultan. From picturesque Kerala, famous worldwide for its exotic Ayurvedic massages and spas, to the quaint hill stations of Ooty, and Kochi, the oldest European settlement in India and the starting point for the tranquil backwaters of Kerala's canals and rivers - South India is a wonderful melting pot of beautiful architecture, temples, beaches, wellness therapies, amazing ancient martial arts, dances and a variety of mouth-watering cuisines.

HIGHLIGHTS

FORTS & PALACES - RAJASTHAN & GUJARAT

India's princes may have long passed into history but their cultural and historic legacy lives on and on. Ancient palaces, forts and temples showcase an astonishing blend of Hindu, Jain and Islamic traditions which shaped everything from modest country estates to magnificent royal residences. Although princely states were scattered across India, Rajasthan is widely thought of as the real home of the traditional Maharajas and their exotic homes.

TAJ MAHAL

The Taj Mahal, built completely from flawless marble, inset with precious stones and jewels, with its incredible lacy white grandeur and loveliness is perhaps the most perfect architectural monument in the world. Emperor Shahjahan built this famous, incomparable Mughal monument in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal and it is considered the most extravagant monument ever built for love. The Taj Mahal is breathtaking from any angle, at any time of the day and in any season.

NATIONAL PARKS

North India offers the most fabulous wildlife parks, sanctuaries and reserves. Visitors will find themselves awestruck when they visit Sariska, Corbett, Ranthambore, Kanha, Bandhavgarh and discover nature's grandeur. If you are a nature lover then Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary in the North East cannot be missed, especially with its promise of sightings of the one horned rhino. Travellers can catch a glimpse of herds of wild elephants as they bathe in the Periyar Lake and explore the natural beauty of the rain forest.

PALACE ON WHEELS

Befittingly named, the Palace on Wheels, re-built in 1995, is reminiscent of the personal railway coaches of the former rulers of Gujarat and Rajputana, the Viceroy of British India, and the Nizam of Hyderabad. Each of its 14 coaches is named after a former Rajput state and is decorated in colors most reminiscent of that state. Large picture windows provide superb viewing of the passing landscape. The Palace on Wheels is richly decorated and well appointed. The train has a beautiful lounge car with a well equipped bar and library. Two restaurants, the Maharajah and Maharani, serve excellent Indian and international cuisine.

PUSHKAR FAIR

Pushkar, a quiet, secluded desert town for 51 weeks a year, becomes, for just a few days, an absolutely incredible and authentic extravaganza, drawing people from around the globe. It is also quite possibly the largest camel and cattle-trading fair in the world. Camels are painted, adorned, beautified and raced to attract the best buyers. Hindu devotees throng the ghats around Pushkar Lake in order to bathe, cleanse their sins, and attain a place in heaven. From the Maharajah Tents, your home for two nights, you can hear the music and sounds of the festival. Early risers might like to walk in the morning light to see the gypsy inhabitants waking up and preparing breakfast around the campfires. The Pushkar festival is celebrated according to the lunar calendar, and though it does not fall on the same date each year, it is in the month of November.

THE HIMALAYAS

For centuries these majestic mountains have challenged the spirit of man, inspired awe and symbolised the heights of achievement. Any visit to North India would be incomplete without experiencing the mighty Himalayas. From the quaint hill station of Shimla, the virgin pine forests, the surging rivers - there are many places which bring the mountain range and its foothills to life. Breathtaking views, exhilarating walks, spa holidays, the choice is endless.

TEMPLES & BEACHES

South India boasts some of the most remarkable temple architecture in India and with a living tradition of music and dance, it is culturally very rich. Here are some of India's greatest cultural treasures, including the distinctive southern temples at Madurai, Thanjavur and Mamallapuram. Travellers are drawn by the attractive palm-lined beaches in Goa and Kerala with their golden sands and azure waters.

BACKWATERS

The Kerala backwaters beckon the visitor to catch a glimpse of Kerala village life, while festivals are marked by great elephant marches, snake boat races and colorful Kathakali dances.

AYURVEDA

Ayurveda (science of life/health) is the ancient Hindu system of medicine - a naturalistic system depending on holistic diagnosis of the body's humours (wind, mucus, gall and blood) to achieve a harmonious balance. Ayurvedic massage using aromatic and medicinal oils to tone up the nervous system has been practiced in Kerala for centuries.

HILL STATIONS

Reminiscent of colonial influences, South India's hill stations offer quaint, restful getaways. Kodaikanal, Coonoor, Munnar and the more popular Ooty enjoy the best of a low latitude, high altitude climate and are cool through the year.

BEST TIME TO GO: OCTOBER TO MARCH

India is the seventh largest country in the world and the geographical conditions in one part of the country differ significantly from the other. Broadly, the best time to visit India is during its winter season, from October to March. The weather is very pleasant in most parts of the country during this period.

A major attraction for visitors is India's colorful fairs and festivals, most of which take place during this period. The popular ones being the Hindu festivals like Dussehra and Diwali in Oct / Nov. The Pushkar fair in Rajasthan also in November is the biggest cattle fair and attracts a lot of visitors from around the globe. The festival of colors, Holi in March is best celebrated in Jaipur or Jodhpur.

Summer is at its peak in India from April to June when most of India experiences very high temperatures. But this is also the time to escape into one of the many picturesque hill stations in the country. In some of these cool retreats, adventure sports such as trekking, paragliding and angling are also held. As summer is considered the lean season for tourism, most services are available at attractive prices.

Monsoons arrive some time in late June bringing plenty of rain to the Indian sub-continent. The rainy season in India normally lasts till September. However, the south eastern region of the country receives most rainfall between mid-October and December-end. Some areas of India like Ladakh, the highest desert in the world, and neighboring areas of Himachal Pradesh remain dry which open up trekking opportunities for visitors.

INFORMATION ABOUT VACCINATIONS TO INDIA

Before coming to India you will need to go through a course of vaccinations. Here is a list of vaccinations that may be needed but please consult you doctor 2-3 months before you plan to travel.

- Rabies - a course of 3 vaccinations given at least 1 month before travel.
- Malaria Prophylaxis - recommended by your doctor or Travel Clinic (Usually a combination of tablets, repellent and mosquito net)
- Hepatitis A - as recommended by your doctor or Travel Clinic
- Hepatitis B and Diphtheria - recommended for long term visitors
- Typhoid - as recommended by your doctor or Travel Clinic
- Tetanus - Should be up to date
- Polio - as recommended by your doctor or Travel Clinic
- Meningitis - as recommended by your doctor or Travel Clinic
- Encephalitis - as recommended by your doctor or Travel Clinic

If you are traveling for long periods in rural areas it might be wise to also have rabies vaccination, but this is not necessary if you are going on a normal package holiday.

You do not need yellow fever vaccination unless you travel through an area where this occurs on your way to India.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Entry - AIR: All major metropolitan cities - New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Calcutta have direct international air connections. Domestic airlines operate between most Indian cities.

Visa & Immigrations - All visitors, except those from Nepal and Bhutan, must have valid passports stamped with current visas. There is no provision for Visa on arrival in India. Visitors must register with the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office within 14 days of arrival. Your hotel will take care of this service upon check-in. In any case, contact the nearest Indian embassy or consulate in your home country before making your travel plans.

All Indian consular offices around the world issue visas. Business travellers should apply for a multiple-entry business visa, which is valid for one year. Special visas are also issued for trekking, botanical expeditions, and sports and journalism related activities. Visitors may move freely throughout the country, except to restricted or prohibited areas.

Customs - Visitors possessing more than US\$ 10,000 (or the equivalent in travellers' cheques or bank notes) must fill in a currency declaration form. Visitors may bring in up to 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars, and one litre of alcohol, duty-free. Non-sporting firearms and narcotics are prohibited, as are gold bullion or coins (except by Indian nationals returning from working abroad, who may bring in a maximum of 5 kilograms).

The penalties for violations are heavy. If you plan to bring any expensive electronics / cameras, ask for a re-export permit from customs officials when you arrive. The permit will be written into the back of your passport, and unless you can present the item to Customs while leaving, duty will be levied.

India restricts the export of antiques, including foreign-made artifacts and items more than 100 years old. The Archaeological Survey of India is the authority that determines whether items are restricted. Visitors may not bring in or take out of India anything made from endangered animal species.

Currency - The units of Indian currency are the Rupee and Paisa (100 Paisa equal 1 Rupee). Paper money is in denominations of Rupees 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000. Coins are in denominations of Rupees 1, 2 and 5.

Visitors may not bring in or take out any Indian currency, except in the form of travellers' cheques. Do not use unauthorized moneychangers for exchanging foreign currency. You run the risk of receiving forged rupees, or being cheated.

Exchanging facilities are generally available at airports and authorized moneychangers usually display the rates of exchange. Credit cards are widely accepted in major hotels, restaurants and shops.

Tipping - Many travellers view tipping as a difficult subject, though this need not be the case. The first thing to remember is that tipping is not compulsory, nor are there any fixed amounts. The

bottom line in determining whether and how much to tip is to ask yourself how much the individual did to make your travel more enjoyable.

Climate - India has three major seasons: winter, summer and the monsoon. The winter months (October to March) are pleasant in most of India, with bright sunny days and cool nights. In the northern plains however, the minimum temperature at times drops steeply.

The Himalayas and its foothills receive snowfall, sometimes till early April. In most parts of western, southern and eastern India, December and January are pleasantly cool but never really chilly.

During the summer months (April-August), northern India is fairly hot, with daytime temperatures around 45 °C. Most hill resorts, like Shimla, Mussourie and Nainital - the summer capitals during the days of the colonial Raj - are busy with Indian tourists beating the heat of their hometowns.

The southwest monsoon usually hits the southern tip of India in early June, and tracks north over the next two months. Most of India receives its major share of rainfall between June and September, the south-eastern areas, in addition, get the north-east monsoon rains between mid-October and the end of December.

Dress - Light and loose, easily laundered clothing is best for the south, and the northern plains, especially from April to September. You will need warmer clothes, including woollens, for the north during winter. Warm clothing is a must in the hill stations all year round.

India does not have a very formal dress code, though some hotels and clubs could insist on a minimum of formality in their dining rooms - long trousers and a conventional shirt usually suffice. When touring, avoid revealing tops, short skirts and all but the baggiest shorts.

Drink - We advise that you drink only sealed bottled mineral water and drinks.

Language - English is widely spoken throughout India; however the official language is Hindi. Staff at airline, railway, telecommunication counters and offices is usually fluent in English. Most direction signs usually have an English version too. Books like Words in Indian English by S. Muthiah can help visitors interpret local additions to vocabulary and grammar.

Indian Standard Time - 5 hours and 30 minutes ahead of GMT.

Electricity - 220 V. It is advisable to carry a universal adaptor.



Weather information - The temperatures and rainfall shown in the table below are indicative and based on past weather trends.

NORTH INDIA

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temp °C	21	24	31	36	41	39	36	34	34	34	29	23
Temp F	70	75	88	97	106	102	97	93	93	93	84	73
Rain(mm)	23	18	13	8	13	74	180	173	117	10	3	10

SOUTH INDIA

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temp °C	29	31	33	35	38	38	36	35	34	32	29	29
Temp F	84	88	91	95	101	101	97	95	93	90	84	84
Rain(mm)	36	10	8	15	25	48	91	117	119	305	356	140