**“Getting ready for India”**

We look forward to welcoming you to India. Here is some pre-departure information to help you prepare for your trip. Incase you need any other information, please do reach out to us.

LANGUAGE

The region has a plethora of languages, which vary from state to state. English is widely spoken throughout the sub-continent.

**TIME**

GMT + 5 ½ hours throughout the year and all of India. Everything in India takes time - longer than in most places. So always give yourself extra time for whatever you may have to do - even it is just a visit to the Post Office or changing money. Indians joke about the concept of "Indian Stretchable Time" (IST). Certainly, if you're a super-punctual character, India can be frustrating, make allowances for this.

**VISA**

All non-residents require visas for India, which **must be obtained prior to departure.** Tourist visas are usually valid for 6 months from the date of issue. Passports must have at least 2 blank pages and be valid for 6 months after your return from India. In case you are travelling to neighbouring country and are coming back to India after that visit again, ensure that this is stated at the time of application and that you have double entry visas including to re-enter the country within the 2-month exclusion stipulation. Apply for a visa at [indianvisaonline.gov.in](https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/). Citizens from 150+ countries are eligible to apply in the [e-Visa online system](https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html).

**ARRIVAL**

All visitors are required to have a valid Indian Visa and to complete an arrival card, which is usually distributed during the flight. The completed card should be submitted with passport to the immigration officials on arrival.

Please clear immigration and pick up your bags from the carrousels. You will be met by our airport services team after you exit customs.

**CLIMATE**Being such a vast country, India has enormous variations in climate and so can be visited throughout the year depending on destination. Overall the climate has 3 major seasons:

The dry season is from early October until end of March, which is the premium time to travel. The months of December - January can be surprisingly chilly in Rajasthan and the central regions with temperatures dropping to 3C at night. Tamil Nadu on the south-east coast receives a different monsoon and most of its rainfall is during October – November.

The hot season lasts from April to June. During the hot season in the interior and some parts of the Western deserts temperatures rise to 40-45C. The hill stations of the Himalayas and the Western Ghats are particularly beautiful in April – mid June and October - November. Ladakh lying at an altitude of 3500 m and in the rain shadow of the Himalayas is best visited May – September.

The dominant Southwest monsoon is from July to September. The monsoons full force is felt in the North East of the Country and Western Ghats which should be avoided but in some regions, it can be pleasant with a unique light and fewer tourists.

**CLOTHING**

Generally, we recommend bringing light loose fitting cotton clothes for most of the country or for during the warmer months and pale colours tend to be cooler. Additionally, some form of layering will be required due to the range of temperatures which almost all areas of the country experience.

The North and central regions of India are from mid-November – mid-February a lot colder than imagined. Adequate warm clothing particularly for the evenings and early mornings should be bought. i.e. fleeces, sweaters, jackets, shawls, socks with shoes.

Comfortable walking shoes are required due to the uneven and stony surfaces and since shoes and socks must be removed for all visits to pagodas and temples, we recommend wearing sandals or other slip-on shoes which are easy to put on and take off.

When visiting temples or other religious monuments, visitors should be modestly dressed; it is very important that knees and shoulders are covered and ladies should not wear shorts or bra-less T-shirts.

In Widlife Parks, during game drives clothes should be in muted jungle shades of beige, brown and green. A wind proof jacket, a sweater and even a woolen hat may be required on early morning drives since the open vehicles can be rather chilly in the early morning and at dusk - even in the warmer months.

Formal style clothes i.e. jacket and tie are not required. A sarong with its multi uses is a very useful item to bring. Hats and sunglasses are strongly recommended.

Laundry facilities are widely available and quick. Due to the huge variations in climate, we are happy to assist with recommending appropriate clothing.

**CURRENCY**

Most recognised hotels offer foreign currency exchange; however, if staying in some of the very small heritage style hotels or homestays, you may not be able to change money.  Always carry sufficient Rupee cash when travelling to remote areas where you are unable to change money or use credit cards. Travellers can import up to USD 10,000 or equivalent in cash or travellers cheques without declaring it to customs.

ATM machines are common in all the major cities and cards must be compatible with the following; Amex, Cirrus, Maestro, MasterCard, Visa. As credit cards, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted, with American Express being a bit less so.

Please remember to keep your money exchange certificates as these will be required for reconverting Rupees back into your own currency. It is forbidden to import or export Indian Rupees.

Always keep small denomination notes as small change is always a problem. Torn notes are not accepted although the banks will change them. Watch out for some INR 500 notes which can look very similar to the INR 100 ones.

**DRIVING**

The first impression will be one of chaotic roads, incessant horn blowing, erratic driving and a complete disregard for any traffic rules. However, be reassured that although the rules may not be evident to most travellers, some do exist and your driver knows these. Our drivers are experienced and reliable and their vehicles are checked for compliance with safety standards. Worth bearing in mind is that average speeds tend to be low, around 50-60 kmh and the only general rule is ‘might is right’ with the one exception bearing that cows have absolute priority on roads.

Beware when opening car doors to avoid an accident with a cyclist or vehicle as traffic can come from both sides.

To make your journey more pleasant please do tell the driver if you wish to go faster or slower or stop for photographs, refreshments or a loo stop.

The driver’s accommodation and meals are taken care of for the duration of your tour.

**ELECTRICITY**

The electric current in India is 220 -240 volts, 50 hz with points for 110 volts available in many hotels. Indian uses round pin plugs and socket sizes vary and so you are advised to carry a multi -purpose adapter; one with a triple round pin plug would be most useful.

**ETIQUETTE**

Despite recent exposure to different cultures, India remains a conservative society steeped in tradition. Religion and family are at the core of Indian society closely followed by national pride.

Greet people with a verbal ‘namaste’ at the same time pressing the hands together at chest level. Indians generally are extremely hospitable people and helpful to foreigners. They will ask what we perceive to be personal questions about family, marital status and even earnings but it is not meant to cause offence. A sense of humour and polite firmness is more likely to achieve a successful outcome in a difficult situation. The universal head shake or wobble from side to side can mean yes, no, may be or I have no idea.

**FOOD AND DRINK**

Characteristic of many diverse regional dishes of India is the use of spices. Cuisines vary from the south’s ancient vegetarian and chill hot meals, to the heavy meaty traditions of the Mughal’s and the Punjabi tandoor, through to the Bengali fish curries and Euro –Indian fusion of the former colonies.  Rice accompanies every meal in the South whereas in the North bread or roti, in all its many forms (chapatti, poori, paratha, naan,) is the mainstay.  The whole of India relishes dahl (lentils) and its preparation ranges from the thin sambar of the south to the thick moong dahls of the north. In most regions beef is not served due to religious reasons and although Indian food is primarily vegetarian, chicken, lamb and goat, known as mutton since the British days are the most common meats. The huge variety of vegetables is either cooked dry or in a sauce and yoghurt served with meals often tempers the spices and aids digestion. The coastal states of Kerala, Goa and Orissa are famous for their fiery fish dishes.

Most internationally well-known spirits and imported wine are available in the deluxe hotels. Wines and spirits cost in hotels can attract duty, mark ups and local taxes of up to 400% so you are advised to check the price before ordering.

Indian wines are considered to be quite good. Locally manufactured beers, gins, vodka and dark rums are often drunk by visitors. There are a few national holidays on which alcohol may not be sold.

**HEALTH REQUIREMENTS**

No vaccinations are officially required for a visit to India. Travellers should check with their doctor or a travel immunization clinic regarding any questions.

Should you have transited a yellow fever area at least 10 days prior to arrival in India, an inoculation certificate is mandatory.

Tourists coming to India via parts of Africa and South America or any other yellow fever infected areas must have a yellow fever vaccination certificate. Bottled drinking water is easily available throughout your tour. If you are taking any specific medication, it is advisable for you to bring it along as locally available formulations may vary. However, world-class medical facilities are available. India is fully equipped and experienced to handle any situation if the need arises.

If you do catch a bug: Drink coconut water, & plenty of fluids, take re hydration sachet drinks if you have them, eat plain rice and drink coca cola as it is an amazingly good reviver. Should you wish to see a doctor, the hotel can arrange this. In the metro cities world class doctors and medical facilities are available.

**INSURANCE**

It is suggested that visitors consider short-term health and accident policies from your own insurance company prior to leaving home.  As medical evacuations can be extremely costly, we recommend that you take out a comprehensive insurance policy that will cover the costs of a medical evacuation and subsequent medical care.

**TELEPHONE AND INTERNET**

Calling anywhere in the world would be possible through your hotel or any public telephone booth, which are largely marked by STD/ISD signage. To make an international call from India, you would dial “00 + your country Code + area code + local number.” For using the mobile phone, local SIM can be purchased from any of the Indian telecom providers. Internet services can either be used on your mobile handset using the local SIM or use hotel Wifi, which is widely available in most hotels and cafes. Some more remote places will not have very reliable or fast access.

**RELIGION**

Four of the world’s major religions originated from India; Hinduism, Sikkism, Jainism and Buddhism. Hinduism with its three hundred and thirty million gods is practiced by around 80% of the population, Islam by 12%, Christianity 2.3%, Sikhism 2%, Buddhists 0.76% and small numbers practicing Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism.

**SECURITY**

India is generally a safe country where others are respected. However, some simple precautions with possessions lessen the chances of becoming a victim to petty theft. Carry your handbag or rucksack to the front of you, keeping an eye on it.

Always remember to keep luggage locked while travelling, whether it is stored in the hold of a car or bus, or during domestic flights and train journeys. Take care not to overexpose items of value, or leave them unattended at any time. Virtually all hotels have safe deposit box facilities for storage of valuables. If caught out inadvertently, avoid crowds or situations which look like they may develop into a riot. Many Indians are high tempered and easily express themselves in a loud outcry. For females travelling alone, India is pretty safe if the usual precautions are taken ie avoid eye contact with insalubrious men and do not wander alone in cities at night.

**SIGHTSEEING**
Despite the growth in tourism some facilities have not kept pace and one considerable inconvenience worth keeping in mind is the lack of decent toilets at virtually every site. Most sightseeing usually involves quite of lot of walking on uneven surfaces often including many steps up and downhill. Sites tend to be more crowded at weekends and many museums and some monuments are closed on Mondays. The Taj Mahal is closed on a Friday.

At Sacred places footwear has to be removed and you are advised to carry thick cotton socks in case the floor is hot. Wear modest clothing and no leatherwear can be worn in Hindu temples. Temples tend to close between 1300-1600 hrs when the deity is ‘at rest’.

Entrance fees to monuments will normally be included in the cost of your tour, but you will be required to pay locally for any camera or video camera fees.

India’s economic boom now allows a great number of local tourists to travel. You therefore are never alone at any site. Bear in mind, that Indians travel in groups, enjoy laughter and for many of them, it is the first time that they are ‘out’, hence are not yet well experienced travellers.

Taxi and auto-rickshaw fares keep changing, and therefore do not always conform to readings on meters. Insist on seeing the latest rate card (available with the driver) and pay accordingly. Insist on the taxi/auto meter being flagged down in your presence

**SHOPPING**

Most Shops are usually open from 10 – 11 am and many are open till 8 to 9 pm. India is a shopper’s paradise. Best buys include textiles, silverware, brassware, stoneware, handicrafts, artefacts, jewellery and herbal products  All gem and jewellery purchases should be made through an authorized dealer, who must issue an official receipt, which is required for export of such items.

Bargaining is essential for all souvenir shopping, if travellers are to obtain reasonable prices. Possible price reductions of up to 50% are not uncommon. It is considered rude however to bargain if not genuinely interested in buying.

Be particularly careful when purchasing antiques, jewellery, pashmina shawls and rugs checking they are genuinely what you are paying for. Antiques over 100 years old require permission to be exported which can be time consuming.

It is recommended that where-ever possible you take any purchases on the flight with you. Shipment of merchandise may be risky due to inordinate administrative delays and substitution of original goods. We cannot be held responsible for any purchases.

The selling or buying of ivory and Shatoosh amongst other items is forbidden.

If a tour guide suggests visiting a shop and you are not interested, decline politely but firmly. You are not obliged to visit any stores unless you feel comfortable to do so.

**TOUR GUIDES**Tour guides in India are free-lance with a Government controlled license. They are University educated and usually speak good English and other major languages. In less touristy areas, language guides may not be available. Escort guides can be arranged at a supplement. All our guides are well compensated with professional fees.

**TOILET**Public toilet facilities in India are few and far, and those that are there may not be clean or hygienic. Take every opportunity you can to use a clean toilet in places such as hotels and restaurants. Make this a habit wherever you.

**SMOKING RESTRICTIONS**

Domestic flights, trains, tour vehicles, certain parts of hotels and all public buildings and areas are now non-smoking. This includes train stations, airports, restaurants and public areas of hotels.

**TIPPING**Tipping is very common and expected, but there are no fixed rules for the amount of the tip. If someone is providing an extra service or favor for you, a tip would be expected and welcome. Tipping is completely at the discretion of the guest. Please do not feel obliged to tip for service levels you are not satisfied with. You should tip with the quantity that you feel comfortable with. There are no norms for tipping but the following may be useful as a guideline:

Tipping at the hotel for luggage delivery - US$ 2-3 per delivery / pick-up

Tipping for airport services representative - US$ 5-7 per assignment

In restaurants, a 10-12% is appreciated. More if you are happy with the services. Service charges are included in some but not all restaurants. There is a Service tax which is not a service charge. Please check your bill.

Tipping drivers and guides is discretionary and should only be given for ‘good service’. Below is an extremely approximate guideline and this should be adjusted taking various things into consideration, such as the sophistication of the guide, size of the group and duration of drive or tour. If the driver or guide was excellent, show them your appreciation with a larger tip. If you’re in a large group, pool your money together for one large tip:

* For the Driver in a private car – US$ 10 – 15 per day on multi-day trips
* For the Driver and helper (if on a bus) – US$ 14- 18 per day
* For the guide – US$ 6-8 per half-day assignment and US$ 8 – 15 per full day assignment.

Anyone offering a personal service such as masseur or a hairdresser would expect 10-20%

Tipping taxis or auto rickshaws is not necessary. Do not feel under any compulsion to tip, or tip more should you incur an expression of dismay.

Again, none of the team members serving you should be asking for a tipping or making an emotional story to garner one. Please report any such behavior to us immediately.

**ANIMALS**

Many Indian’s live off their domesticated animals and their treatment may be very different than what we are used to. Camels, elephants, cattle, monkeys and snakes are all subject to control by their owners. We strongly urge refrain from touching and getting to close to animals

**UNFAMILIAR BODY LANGUAGE**

The most common Indian gesture that can be misinterpreted is the ubiquitous “head-wobble.” In fact, there are two types of head-bob, and each carries its own meaning. The first is a kind of short side-to-side tilt of the head, and means “yes.” The second is longer, slower, and more undulating, and can be interpreted as “I see”, “maybe”, or even “uh-huh”. This type is worth learning, as it often works to ward off perspective hawkers and beggars. Hand gestures also carry various meanings. A quick twist of the wrist from palm-down to palm-up means “what do you want?”, “What are you doing?”, or “move along now.” A downward sweeping motion like somebody trying to fan fire means “stop, I want a ride”, or “I want to talk to you”. A good response to this one is the “uh-huh” head-bob described above.

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

Photography is not always possible, and at many places it is permitted only for a fee. There is usually a higher fee for using a video camera. It is prohibited to photograph places of military importance like airports, bridges and sensitive border regions. Certain temples may prohibit interior or exterior photography. Inside museums or when photographing art works, flash cameras are prohibited.

**SOME IMPORTANT FACTS ON INDIA**

India is possibly the most diverse nation on earth. Stretching 3214 km north to south from the icy peaks of the Himalayas to the warm waters of the Andaman Sea and 2933 km west to east from the parched deserts of Gujarat to the lush densely forested hills of Arunachal Pradesh, India offers an extraordinary variety of cultures, beliefs, history, landscapes, vegetation and wildlife. With a population of over a billion India for first time visitors can be a powerful assault on the senses. Consisting of 28 states and 7 Union territories whose population speak 22 languages and 800 dialects and practice 8 major differing religions, it is in reality a continent. One of the oldest civilizations on earth dating back to 2500 BC, India’s historical wealth is immense and virtually unrivalled.

India is a very personal experience, leaving no traveller unchanged. It is an amazing and contradictory place intensely rich in colour and vitality; where time has stood still for centuries in some regions and in others catapulted into the full force of the 21st century.

* **24 Hours Emergency Contact Number: (+91) 9911 266277**