

Welcome to India

Language & Culture

India's national language is Hindi but English is classified as an associate official language and is widely used. Eighteen other official languages are recognised for official administrative use, but the number of living languages in India has been estimated to be as high as 400.

A pluralist, multilingual and multicultural society, Indians are largely tolerant and peaceful. Religious practices of various faiths are an integral part of everyday life in society. Education is highly regarded and traditional Indian family values are highly respected and considered sacred. Around 82 per cent of the population in India is Hindu but there is also a large population of Muslims. Other religious minority groups include Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists. Cows are considered sacred in India and are never killed or eaten by Hindus.

Health

Travellers are advised to always drink and clean their teeth with bottled water. Only eat fruit that can be peeled and ensure you wash it well in bottled water before eating. In restaurants insist that they bring a sealed bottle to your table and avoid ice. Take extra care with hygiene and make sure you wash your hands before and after eating, especially after handling money.

Carry a kit of the basic emergency medicines you might need for diarrhoea, fever, etc. plus mosquito repellent, band aids and an antiseptic ointment. We recommend you see your doctor for advice about local health conditions and vaccinations.

Local Currency

You are not allowed to bring Indian currency into the country, or take it with you when you leave. The rupee (Rs) is divided into 100 paise (p). The paise comes in coin denominations of 5, 10, 20, 25 and 50. There are also rupee coins in denominations of one, two and five. Rupee notes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000.

In cities you can change most major foreign currencies and brands of travellers cheque - but you'll widen your options if you stick to USD or Pounds Sterling and either Thomas Cook or American Express travellers cheques. Most big cities have ATMs which accept Visa, MasterCard and American Express and the network is ever expanding.

Climate & Clothing

Travel as light as possible. Clothing and laundry are both quite inexpensive. Women should avoid wearing tank tops or short skirts and shorts. The best outfit, especially during the hot summers, is a T-shirt worn with loose cotton trousers. Winter can be cool at night in the desert regions.

Dress codes for religious places can include covering your head, being barefoot, or in some temples they do not permit any leather articles at all on their premises. Ask, so that you don't unwittingly give offence. The dry summer heat can drain you completely, so drink lots of fluids, especially water. The sun is strong. Remember to use sunscreen on exposed parts of the body and wear sunglasses.

Shopping

Try to shop in government handicraft shops where prices are fixed and the quality is certified. If that is not an option, check the prices at a few shops before making a choice. Bargaining is standard in most places and is enjoyed by all but you must get used to the fact that you will probably be charged more than the locals. If possible, take a local along when you go shopping.



Electricity

The voltage in India is 240V 50Hz. Travellers with shavers/hair dryers and other appliances should carry a plug adaptor kit.

Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend comprehensive travel insurance against loss of deposit through cancellation, cancellation charges, baggage loss and medical expenses. Check with your travel agent for information.

Customs Allowance

Duty-free regulations apply for India – One litre of alcohol and 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco. You are allowed to bring in expensive items, such as video cameras and laptop computers; they may be entered on a 'Tourist Baggage Re-export' form to ensure you take them out with you when you go.

The export of any object more than 100 years old is prohibited, making the required export clearance certificate difficult to obtain. The Indian Wildlife Protection Act bans any form of wildlife trade. Please do not buy any products that further endanger threatened species and habitats - doing so can result in heavy fines and even imprisonment.