



INDIA

COUNTRY GUIDE



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PURPOSE OF THE COUNTRY GUIDE

In this document you will find a plethora of information that will be useful during your journey to India. The information listed in this guide includes cultural guidelines, communication tips and tricks, health and safety recommendations, and so much more! Please note that all information specific to your trip, such as inclusions and exclusions, staff contact numbers, flight recommendations, etc. is listed in your Online Trip Portal. For any questions unanswered by either the country guide or the online portal, please don't hesitate to reach out to an Elevate Destinations staff member. We hope that this document proves to be helpful and that you are getting excited for your journey to India!

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Passport

Travelers to India should ensure that the validity of their passports extends at least 6 months beyond the end of their intended stay, and should have at least 2 blank (unstamped) visa pages in their passport to enter the country. The last 2 amendment pages are unacceptable for visas and immigration stamps. Note that you will need to renew your passport if you are out of visa pages, as the State Department no longer provides additional pages. If you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible. We recommend travelers scan a copy of your passport and email it to yourself. This way you always have a copy if something happens to it while traveling.

Visa

Citizens from the United States and most other countries need a tourist visa to enter India. We recommend applying for the e-tourist visa. Click [here](#) to apply. There are currently three e-visa options available for the e-tourist visa; a 30-day visa, a one-year visa, and a five-year visa, all of which are free. **When your e-visa application is approved, you will receive an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) form that you need to print and bring with you.** The length of the ETA corresponds with the length of your visa. For example, if you apply for the e-visa for 30 days, you'll receive an ETA that's valid for 30 days from the date of issue. Travelers must arrive in country while your ETA is still valid to get your passport stamped. Once your passport is stamped by immigration officials, your visa is valid from your date of arrival.

India E-Visa Application Tip

When applying for your e-visa, you will be asked about the purpose of your travel to India. When asked why you're visiting India, you can write "Tourism" or "Visiting a local school." If you would like assistance drafting language for your visa application, please do not hesitate to reach out to Elevate Destinations.

For assistance with the online visa application, please contact the visa helpline at indian-evisa@gov.in or +91 11 4300666. This is an international phone number so you can call on Skype or if you have international plan on your phone.

If you would like to acquire your visa for India with a visa-processing center, Elevate Destinations recommends [A1 Passport and Visa](#) in Washington DC. For questions regarding the visa application, you can reach A1 Passport directly at (202) 639-1500.

Medical Insurance

Elevate Destinations requires travelers to purchase medical insurance that covers Covid-related medical expenses and costs associated with quarantine while in India. Proof of your medical insurance is required to participate in this program.

Below are two insurance brokers that Elevate Destinations recommends:

- [Yonder Travel Insurance](#)
Email: hello@insureyonder.com
Phone Number: 855-358-6433 (M-F 8:30-5:00 CT)
- [Trawick International](#)
Email: info@trawickinternational.com
Phone number: (888) 301-9289 anytime.

Guests may acquire travel insurance through Yonder Travel Insurance, Trawick International, or any other travel insurance company of their choosing. Elevate Destinations recommends that travelers evaluate the insurance options available for their needs, and inquire with providers about insurance that will cover them for all Covid-related expenses including quarantine costs while in India.

Covid Protocols

Covid Vaccination: Elevate Destinations requires that all travelers are fully vaccinated and up to date on any doses of the Covid-19 vaccine they are legally eligible for. This means many travelers will need a booster.

Entry Requirements and Updates: As Covid is continually evolving, please check your Online Trip Portal for the most up to date information regarding entry requirements and health and safety precautions.

Immunizations

Prior to travel, Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that you look into recommended immunizations for your time in India. Given that we are not a licensed Health Care provider, we cannot advise travelers on which immunizations they may need. We recommend that all travelers do the following:

- a) Consult with a travel clinic or your personal physician regarding immunizations and other precautions you may need to take in order to participate in this journey. You will need to do this well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations require time to take effect, and you may need to allow time between a series of shots.
- b) Visit the [CDC Website for India](#) to view recommended vaccines and medicines, travel health notices for the region, and other tips for staying healthy and safe.

Other Health Considerations

This will be an amazing journey, but as with all travel, a spirit of adventure and a degree of flexibility will enhance your enjoyment of this program.

Travel in India can be physically demanding. You must be able to enter and exit a wide variety of vehicles including jeeps and vans. Dust and other air impurities may be present in heavy concentrations, and colds, nasal congestion and sore throat may occur. Due to India's size, air travel is often scheduled to reduce travel times, and some extended road journeys may be required.

We recommend a medium level of physical agility, as some of the drives may have sections of unpaved, or bumpy roads. For the most satisfying experience, and in fairness to your fellow travelers, please note that this trip requires the following:

- Ability to walk at least one mile without difficulty
- Ability to spend extended periods of time on your feet
- Ability to climb sets of stairs without assistance
- Ability to keep pace with an active group of travelers and to be on time for all scheduled activities
- Ability to ride comfortably in a vehicle on unpaved, bumpy roads for extended periods of time

Safety Recommendations

Your guide will give you current briefings on safety while in-country, but here are some basic ground rules for safety while traveling:

- Keep all valuables in the hotel safe.
- Avoid flashing money. Be mindful of your belongings at all time. Keep bags in front of you in crowds, and on your lap when at restaurants.
- Pay attention: avoid walking around with your smartphone in hand.
- Be vigilant when crossing roads.

- Stick with the group.
- Always make sure that others know of your whereabouts and movements.
- Avoid street protests or large gatherings.
- Do not wear expensive or sentimentally valuable jewelry while traveling.
- Let your guide know if you have any safety concerns.

Communications

The country code for India is +91. To call numbers in India from the U.S. dial 011 + 91 + area code + seven-digit local number

Wifi: At most accommodation providers you will visit in India, wifi will be available. Speed, bandwidth, and availability will likely be less reliable than you are used to. Oftentimes, connection is stronger in the lobby of hotels than in individual rooms.

International Calls: If you are in India and trying to reach a number in the US, dial 011 before dialing the country code and local number.

Staying connected: Here are the most common methods for making local/international calls:

1. **Smart Phone apps:** Apps such as Skype, WhatsApp, and Viber (when Wifi is available). We recommend that travelers download and create a [WhatsApp](#) account prior to their travel.
2. **Getting an international calling package:** Setting up international coverage from your cell phone provider for the duration of your trip is often the simplest option and the best to avoid roaming charges.
3. **Use a local phone / SIM card:** SIM cards are recommended for international travelers as for making calls within India as international calls can get expensive. Please be aware of any requirements your phone has in order to accept the local SIM cards (i.e. size of SIM card, jailbroken, etc). Please let your guide know if you would like assistance purchasing a local phone. To purchase a local SIM card, you will need to provide a copy of your passport.
4. **Call from hotel or internet café:** Please be advised that some hotels impose a surcharge that can be more than double the cost of international calls. Be sure to check the hotel policy before placing an international call from a hotel.

Smart Traveler Tip!

We recommend that all travelers from the U.S. sign-up for the [State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)! This is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in case of an emergency. Enrolling in this program has enormous benefits in case of an emergency while abroad:

- You will receive information from the U.S. Embassy about safety conditions in India
- Enrolling lets the U.S. Embassy in India know that you are there and helps them contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family-related.

Essential Travel Documents

In case of emergency, it is advisable to make photocopies of your important documents and leave a few copies in your luggage, your money belt, and with relatives or friends at home. Also email a scanned copy to yourself or take a screenshot or photo of the document and save it in an “Important Travel Documents” folder in your photo app on your phone.

These are the documents you should have printed and with you during your travel:

- A photocopy of your passport
- Covid Vaccination Card; both the original, a photocopy and a digital copy, which can be obtained through ClearApp (click [here](#)) on your mobile phone
- International flight itinerary or e-tickets
- Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) Form
- Address and phone numbers of the hotels where you are staying
- Emergency Contact List - provided by Elevate Destinations
- Travel insurance policy details and 24-hour emergency number
- Details of relatives/friends and your primary care physician to be contacted in an emergency
- Bank and credit card details, camera serial numbers etc.

Money

The local currency in India is the Indian Rupee (INR - ₹), divided into 100 Paise. The Indian Rupee comes in the following denominations:

Banknotes: ₹5, ₹10, ₹20, ₹50, ₹100, ₹200, ₹500 and ₹2,000

Coins: 10 paise, 20 paise, 25 paise, 50 paise, ₹1, ₹2 and ₹5

Smart Traveler Tip!

Be sure to notify your bank and credit card companies of your travel plans, in case they view your activity as fraudulent and put a block on your card.

For extra personal costs and shopping, bringing USD \$30-\$50 per day is a good rule of thumb.

The small amount of local currency you may need during your stay in India can be obtained at authorized facilities (such as ATMS, hotels and banks).

Cash & Exchanging Money: India is a primarily cash economy, so you will need to have cash in the local currency throughout your journey. Local currency is recommended for most places, especially smaller stores and markets. Ask for smaller bills when getting cash or change as some smaller vendors may not carry change for bigger bills.

If you exchange money, do so only at authorized outlets such as banks and hotels, and exchange only what you think you will spend in-country. Reconversion on departure may be difficult. Coins cannot be reconverted. To see what the current exchange rate is, check online at <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>.

We recommend bringing \$200 - \$300 in USD cash in case of emergency and for personal spending. If you bring USD, your bills should be:

- **New** (printed in the last 5 years)
- **In pristine condition** (no rips, tears, smudges, markings, creases, etc)

Banks, and ATMs are available in most major cities, and your guide can generally help with withdrawing cash throughout your trip. There is usually a small fee per transaction on top of what your own bank charges for withdrawing cash at an ATM.

*Note: ATMs in India require a four-digit pin not beginning in zero.

*Note: You will need your passport to exchange money at a bank or Bureau.

Credit Cards: Credit cards (mainly Visa and MasterCard) are accepted in larger establishments and hotels. Cash is more appropriate everywhere else. Most merchants will typically charge an additional fee for a credit card transaction.

ATM/Debit Cards: You can use your debit card to withdraw money from ATMs.

Note: ATMs in remote areas can be finicky, and may not work on a given hour or day. We recommend traveling with 2 or 3 crisp \$100 bills you can exchange in the case ATMs are not working.

Smart Traveler Tip!

Consider downloading a conversion app for things like currency, temperature, time, and distance while traveling. Here are some apps that we like:

Units - Free Unit Converter, Convert Units for Free, Converter+, GlobeConvert

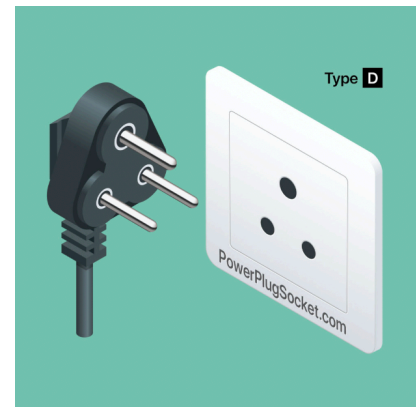
IN-COUNTRY INFO

Time

India follows GMT + 5:30. Therefore, time in the locations of your visit will be 9.5 hours ahead of East Coast time, and 12.5 hours ahead of West Coast time.

Electricity

India uses a standard of 230V, 65Hz, and plug D. The following images show the type of plugs, sockets, and adapters you can use while traveling in India. To keep your electronics up and running, we suggest purchasing a universal plug.



Water & Food Safety

Tap water is not safe to drink in India. We strongly recommend travelers drink only bottled water and pack a reusable water bottle to fill up with clean drinking water. We also recommend that in India, travelers brush their teeth with bottled water. Do not use ice unless you know it was made from bottled water. Clean drinking water and soft drinks will be supplied at all meals and water will be available in the van. Be wary of fruits and vegetables that may have been washed in tap water.

Similarly, we recommend travelers eat foods that have been cooked well. Fresh vegetables and fruits bear the risk of having been washed in contaminated water. Fruits you can peel are usually safe (e.g. bananas).

Toilet Paper

We recommend carrying toilet paper or tissues with you as some bathrooms, especially in more remote areas or restaurants, may not have any. Please also remember that in remote parts of the country, you may be encouraged to throw the toilet paper into the bin provided and not into the toilet itself, as this can cause problems with the delicate sewage system.

Waste Disposal

Keep in mind that other parts of the world, waste disposal systems are not as advanced as you might be used to. Oftentimes, landfills are adjacent to conservation land or trash is burned. Recycling is often

unavailable. To minimize your impact on the country you are visiting, please consider the following guidelines:

- Leave no trace — everything that you bring with you should go home with you.
- If you plan on shopping, make sure that you have extra room in your luggage or an extra bag to check on your way home (don't dump items to make room!)
- Avoid packing with plastic baggies and instead purchase reusable packing cubes, cloth bags, and reusable toiletry bags
- Bring a reusable water bottle that you can refill
- Remove packaging or tags of any newly purchased items before you go

Local Cuisine & Drink

Indian food is incredibly regional, diverse and is famously spicy (not always spicy-hot). Throughout the country, most people eat their meals with rice and use their fingers to eat. Condiments and pickles, ranging from sweet to sour to hot, accompany most dishes, and dairy products, such as yoghurt, butter and soft cheese are common. Indian cuisine is rich in vegetarian options and has many traditional (very rich and sweet) desserts.

Fish, goat, mutton (goat meat) and chicken are commonly eaten across social strata; the only exception is beef, which if ever, is restricted to Muslim communities. The kebab roll is a delicious Kolkata invention. A pungent mustard sauce called Kasundi is a popular dipping sauce. A host of gourds, roots and tubers, leafy greens, succulent stalks, lemons and limes, green and purple eggplants, red onions, plantain, broad beans, okra, banana tree stems and flowers, green jackfruit and red pumpkins are to be found in the food.

Weather Conditions

The weather in India varies dramatically between regions and seasons. Northern India tends to be cooler, central India is generally hot and dry, and southern India boasts a more tropical climate. The three main seasons are winter, summer, and the monsoon season, which vary with each region.

The winter season in India is from November - February, after the monsoon season. Winter weather is fairly moderate with temperatures ranging from highs between 75°F and 85°F and lows between 55°F and 65°F, typically cooling down in the evenings. Post-monsoon season is around October - December and is a period of time when the rains are retreating. During these few months, temperatures can range from 83°F to 93°F, depending on the region.

Summer, also known as pre-monsoon season, in India is from March - May. The weather during these months is described as hot and dry. Temperatures start to increase in March after winter. Temperatures can range from a high of 106°F to a low of 84°F. During the weeks leading up to monsoon season, which is from June to October, the air can often be quite humid.

The monsoon season in India is from July until September / October. It varies depending on the region. In the northwestern part of the country, monsoon season is typically shorter whereas in

southeast coast of India, the rains can continue throughout the end of the year. The weather during this time vary by region, but is typically hot and humid.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Experiencing different cultures is one of the joys of traveling. Please take note of the information below to better understand and respect these cultural differences in India.

- In India, people tend to dress more conservatively than in western cultures. Please note that sleeveless or low-cut shirts and short shorts or skirts for women can be inappropriate, especially in more rural settings.
- When visiting religious monuments or other historical sites in India, it is recommended to dress modestly and may be asked to cover your legs and shoulders. Visitors entering a temple or religious site may be asked to take his or her shoes off and may be provided with socks / slippers and a robe to cover up with.
- In India, local people are likely to have strong feelings about religious topics and political events - which they may or may not feel comfortable sharing with visitors. The same can be true for your guides. Be cognizant and sensitive of this.
- Open displays of anger and displeasure are bad manners in many Asian countries. Please respect local customs by remaining patient and polite, even when circumstances are trying.
- Indians are known to be hospitable and friendly people. Yet in a country with a population over one billion, the concept of personal space is not always respected or understood. What westerners may perceive to be overcrowded and unsafe gatherings may simply be a usual day-to-day experience given India's population density.
- Shopping: Silk textiles, gold and silver jewelry, precious stones, brassware and pottery are among the best and most typical souvenirs of India. Delhi is India's "merchandise mart" with many stores catering to visitors around Connaught Place. Government-sponsored and large department stores operate on a fixed-price basis, but everywhere else, bargaining is customary. Vendors at open markets and bazaars often mark up their prices with the expectation that their customers will barter with them.

Language

In India, the official language is Hindi. Each state, however, has its own official language as well: 14 in all. English is widely spoken all over the country.

Although many of the locals you will be interacting with will speak English, it's always considerate and may be helpful to learn a few phrases in Hindi. Below are some examples to get you started:

<i>English</i>	<i>Hindi</i>
Hello	Namaste
How are you? (informal)	Kya haal hai? / Kaise ho? / Sab theek?

I'm fine	Mai theek hoon
Nice to meet you	Aap se milkar kushi hui
My name is ____.	Meraa naam ____ hain.
What is your name?	Aapka naam kya hai?
Good morning / afternoon /evening	Shubh prabhaat / Namaskaar / Susandhya
See you later	Baad mein milate hain
Goodbye	Alvida namaste
Sorry	Maaf kijiye / Maaf kareein
Thank you	Dhanyavad / Shukriya
Welcome or you're welcome	Aapaka svaagat hai
Please	Kripaya
Yes	Haan ji
No	Nahi
I don't understand	Much samajh nahi aaya
Excuse me	Suniye
Where are the restrooms?	Shauchalay kahan hai?
Have a good journey!	Aapakee yaatra mangalamay ho

Photography

India is a beautiful destination, and you will want to take lots of pictures. When photographing people, always ask permission first - this is a sign of respect. You can do this with gestures or ask your guide to translate. The only exception to this is when you are photographing a public scene with a lot of people in it, aiming at no one in particular. There are some places where photography is prohibited, and these areas are usually marked. If you are uncertain about whether or not photography is permitted, your guide will be there to advise you.

If you are interested in learning how to engage in ethical photography during your travels, check out our blog post, [“Nine questions to help decolonize your photography”](#).

Human Trafficking in Travel

Elevate Destinations has signed *the Code of conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism* and expects all of its partners to refuse involvement, both direct and indirect, in the

commercial sexual exploitation of children. A “child” is defined as a person younger than 18 years of age, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We encourage our travelers and suppliers to report the sexual exploitation of children. Information, even the smallest amount, can represent the missing piece of an ongoing investigation by law enforcement. If you are uncomfortable with leaving your name and contact information, you can report anonymously to law enforcement or NGOs. Report a concern [using this form](#); alternatively, you can email protect@ecpat.net to report sexual exploitation of children.

Read about Elevate’s values & vision, our [sustainability commitment](#), our programs that give back, and more on our website at www.elevatedestinations.com. Our team members are always excited to share more on this topic. We acknowledge that to maintain truly sustainable travel products takes ongoing commitment. We continue to monitor our programs on the ground in order to improve them, and welcome your thoughts, feedback, and encouragement!

Responsible Travel Tips

Elevate Destinations takes pride in its leadership in the field of responsible travel. We take care in selecting our local partners that share our environmental and social values and are avid supporters of locals working in the tourism industry as they are both the most impacted and impactful players at the local level. All of your ground costs on this trip are carbon offset using [SouthPole Flight’s Carbon Calculator](#), and we encourage you to offset your international flights as well.

Here are a few tips that can help enrich your experience as a responsible traveler:

- **Keep an open mind:** Try to observe local customs and respect traditional cultures and people.
- **Language:** Learn a few basic greetings and “thank you” in the local language.
- **Local economy:** Support locally owned businesses, restaurants, and other services. Shop from local artisans to promote traditional crafts and encourage contemporary arts.
- **Pay a fair price:** Bargaining is acceptable on this trip and a great way to engage with locals. Try to have fun and not be overly aggressive in bargaining for souvenirs
- **Respect:** It is important to acknowledge the privacy and dignity of others and ask before photographing or filming people. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes or private land, and take heed of local customs (i.e. remove shoes, hats, cover hair with shawl, etc). Please ask your guide if you are unsure; they are there to support your introduction to the culture!
- **Community and environment:** Contribute to organizations that support traditional cultures and protect the natural environment. Keep to designated trails, and do not disturb plants and animals or their natural habitats.
- **Animal products:** Avoid purchasing crafts, clothing, furniture or other products that are derived from members of protected or endangered animal species.

- **Properly dispose of trash:** Avoid using plastic bags and try to minimize the use of other disposables. When traveling in areas away from cities, make sure to take out what you take in. Try using a reusable water bottle and treating your own drinking water when possible – check out what our friends at [Travelers Against Plastic](#) are doing!
- **Don't feel pressured to give away money or material items:** You will likely encounter instances of poverty and people asking for donations. We try to discourage giving away money or items as it can actually accentuate an unequal relationship between visitors and locals. Additionally, children that receive money, gifts, and sweets from you are encouraged to stick around for more, rather than to be in school. As difficult as it can be to turn down direct requests, sometimes giving your friendship and respect to locals can be the best gift of all. If you want to help, consider giving to a trustworthy charity, non-profit, or local school.
- **Tip your housekeeping staff:** Many of the the staff cleaning hotel rooms are on the bottom of the economic pyramid. Please consider leaving a tip before you checkout. The equivalent of \$2 dollars a day is appropriate. This is an easy way to ensure some of your money reaches the hands that need it the most.

Smart Traveler Tip!

In travel, especially in remote parts of the world, things happen. Expect the unexpected! Keep an open mind, be flexible, and enjoy the moment. Sometimes the best memories come out of the unplanned.