

# Directory

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## ACCOMMODATION

India has a range of accommodation to suit all budgets, from grungy backpacker hotels with concrete floors and cold showers to the former palaces of maharajas (princely rulers or kings). Most towns have something for all budgets, but rates vary widely around the country, and popular tourist centres see a significant price hike during the tourist season.

Accommodation listings in this book are arranged in price order – scroll through the

listings to find places that meet your budget and accommodation preferences.

Hotel tariffs vary widely across India – see individual chapters to gauge accommodation costs in the areas you intend visiting. Tariffs in this book are based on high-season rates and don't include taxes unless otherwise indicated. If the rates are seasonal, this will be indicated. Note that hotels in resort towns can triple their rates in season – advance bookings are often essential at these times.

Prices for accommodation vary widely as you travel around the country, so it is hard to pinpoint exact accommodation costs, but most hotels fall somewhere within the following ranges: in budget establishments, single rooms range from Rs 100 to 400, and doubles from Rs 200 to 600; midrange single rooms range from Rs 300 and 1300, and double rooms from Rs 450 to 1800; top-end singles and doubles start from around Rs 1900 and go up to US\$150 or more.

Room quality can vary within hotels so try to inspect a few rooms first. Avoid carpeted rooms at cheaper hotels unless you like the smell of mouldy socks. For the low-down on hotel bathrooms, see the p1127. Sound pollution can be a pain (especially in urban centres); pack good-quality earplugs and request a room that doesn't face onto a busy road.

Credit cards are accepted at most top-end hotels and some midrange places; budget hotels require cash. Most hotels ask for a deposit at check in – ask for a receipt and be wary of any request to sign a blank impression of your credit card. If the hotel insists, go to the nearest ATM and pay cash. Verify the check-out time when you check in – some hotels have a fixed check-out time (usually 10am or noon), while others give you 24-hour check out. Reservations by phone without a deposit are usually fine, but call to confirm your booking the day before you arrive.

Be aware that in tourist hot spots (eg Rajasthan, Varanasi), hotels often 'borrow' the name of a thriving competitor to confuse travellers, paying commissions to taxi and rickshaw drivers who bring them unsuspecting customers. Make sure that you know the *exact* name of your preferred hotel, and confirm

## PRACTICALITIES

- Electricity is 230V to 240V, 50 Hz AC, and sockets are the three-round-pin variety (two-pin sockets are also found). Blackouts are common, particularly during the monsoon.
- Officially India is metric. Terms you're likely to hear are: lakhs (one lakh = 100,000) and crores (one crore = 10 million).
- Major English-language dailies include the *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Pioneer*, *Asian Age*, *Hindu*, *Statesman*, *Telegraph* and *Economic Times*. Regional English-language and local-vernacular publications are found nationwide.
- Incisive current-affairs reports are printed in *Frontline*, *India Today*, the *Week*, *Sunday* and *Outlook*. For India-related travel articles, get *Outlook Traveller*.
- The national (government) TV broadcaster is Doordarshan. More people watch satellite and cable TV; English-language channels include BBC, CNN, Star Movies, HBO and MTV. TV programme (and radio) details appear in most major English-language dailies.
- Government-controlled All India Radio (AIR) nationally transmits local and international news. There are also private channels broadcasting news, music, current affairs, talkback and more.

that you have been taken to the right hotel before you pay the driver (p1133).

## Accommodation Options

As well as conventional hotels, there are some charming guesthouses in traditional village homes and numerous colonial properties displaying faded British Raj charm. Standout options in this book are indicated by **our pick**.

## BUDGET & MIDRANGE HOTELS

Most budget and midrange hotels are modern concrete blocks. Shared bathrooms are usually only found at the cheapest hotels; most places offer rooms with private bathrooms of varying standards, though dripping taps and leaky sinks are common. Most rooms have ceiling fans, and better rooms have electric mosquito killers or window nets, though cheaper rooms may not have windows. Bringing your own sheets (or a sleeping-bag liner) is a sound policy – some cheap places have sheets with more holes and stains than a string vest at an oyster-eating contest. Away from tourist areas, cheaper hotels may not take foreigners because they don't have foreigner-registration forms.

Midrange hotels usually offer comforts such as carpets and TVs, usually with dozens of channels of Bollywood movies as well as an English-language movie channel and international news. Some places offer noisy 'air-coolers' that cool air by blowing it over cold water. They're better than nothing, but no challenge to real air-conditioning.

Not all cheap hotels are characterless. Every so often you stumble across a budget or mid-range gem – an old house from the colonial era or the fading wing of a maharaja's palace. In remote mountain areas, the cheapest hotels are often traditional wood or stone houses, with more character and charm than many expensive places.

Note that some cheaper hotels lock their doors at night. Members of staff normally sleep in the lobby but waking them up can be a challenge. Let the hotel know in advance if you are arriving or coming back to your room late in the evening.

## CAMPING

There are few official camping sites in India, but campers can usually find hotels with gardens where they can camp for a nominal fee and use the bathroom facilities. Wild camping is often the only accommodation option on trekking routes. In mountain areas, you'll also find summer-only tented camps, with accommodation in semipermanent 'Swiss tents' with attached bathrooms.

## BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com). You'll find the insider lowdown on the best places to stay, and reviews are thorough and independent.

**DORMITORY ACCOMMODATION**

Many hotels have cheap dormitories, though these are often mixed and may be full of drunken drivers – not ideal conditions for single women. Better dorms are found at the handful of hostels run by the YMCA, YWCA and the Salvation Army, and HI-associate hostels. Tourist bungalows run by state governments and railway retiring rooms also offer cheap dorm beds.

**GOVERNMENT ACCOMMODATION & TOURIST BUNGALOWS**

The Indian government maintains a network of guesthouses for travelling officials and public workers, known variously as rest houses, dak bungalows, circuit houses, PWD (Public Works Department) bungalows and forest rest houses. These places may accept travellers if no government employees need the rooms, but permission is sometimes required from local officials and you'll have to find the *chowkidar* (attendant) to open the doors.

'Tourist bungalows' are run by state governments – rooms tend to be cheap and clean, and service tends to be friendly but somewhat inefficient. Some state governments also run chains of more expensive hotels, including some fabulous heritage properties. Details are normally available through the state tourism office.

**HOMESTAYS & ACCOMMODATION FOR PAYING GUESTS**

Staying with a local family is increasingly popular in India. There are guesthouses in cities as well as county areas, and the owners often provide blisteringly authentic home-cooked meals. Standards range from mud-and-stone huts with hole-in-the-floor toilets to comfortable middle-class homes. Contact the local tourist office for lists of families involved in homestay schemes, or see the entries in the regional chapters.

There are homestays all over India. Options in this book include Khajuraho (p679) in Madhya Pradesh; Mysore (p899) in Karnataka; Zanskar and Ladakh (p374) in Jammu and Kashmir; and Allepey (Alappuzha; p985), Kochi (Cochin; p1007), Kollam (Quilon; p979), Kottiyam (p985), Munnar (p1000) and Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary (p998) in Kerala.

**RAILWAY RETIRING ROOMS**

Most large train stations have basic rooms for travellers in possession of an ongoing train

ticket or Indrail Pass. Some are awful, others are surprisingly pleasant, but all are noisy from the sound of passengers and trains. Nevertheless, they're useful for early-morning train departures and there is usually a choice of dormitories or private rooms (24-hour checkout).

**RESORTS**

There are growing numbers of beach resorts in Goa and Kerala offering standard resort facilities, including swimming pools, water sports and organised nightlife. 'Resorts' in the mountains are normally just comfortable upmarket hotels, sometimes with adventure activities and cottages for accommodation.

**TEMPLES & PILGRIMS' REST HOUSES**

Accommodation is available at some ashrams (spiritual communities or retreats), gurdwaras (Sikh temples) and *dharamsalas* (pilgrims' guesthouses) for a donation, but these places are mainly there for genuine pilgrims so please exercise judgment about the appropriateness of staying. Always abide by any local protocols on smoking, drinking and making noise.

**TOP-END & HERITAGE HOTELS**

India has plenty of top-end hotels, from five-star chain hotels to colonial-era palaces that don't even have a classification system (if they did, it would have to be five tiger-skin rugs). Rooms and catering are usually excellent; service can be variable. Many heritage hotels make a special feature of their faded Raj atmosphere, though the museum-like atmosphere appeals to some travellers more than others. Most top-end hotels have rupee rates for Indian guests and separate US dollar rates for foreigners (including Non-Resident Indians, or NRIs). Officially, you are supposed to pay the dollar

**CARBON-MONOXIDE POISONING**

Some mountain areas rely on charcoal burners for warmth, but these should be avoided due to the risk of fatal carbon-monoxide poisoning. The thick, mattresslike blankets used in mountain areas are amazingly warm once you get beneath the covers. If you're still cold, improvise a hot-water bottle by filling your drinking water with boiled water and covering it with a sock (in the morning, the water can be drunk because it's been purified).

## KNOW YOUR BATHROOM

Top-end and midrange hotels in India generally have sit-down toilets with toilet paper supplied. In cheaper hotels, and in places off the tourist trail, squat toilets are the norm and toilet paper is rarely provided. Squat toilets are variously described as 'Indian-style', 'Indian' or 'floor' toilets, while the sit-down variety may be called 'Western' or 'commode' toilets. In a few places, you'll find the curious 'hybrid toilet', a sit-down toilet with footpads on the edge of the bowl.

Terminology for hotel bathrooms varies across India. 'Attached bath', 'private bath' or 'with bath' means that the room has its own ensuite bathroom. 'Common bath', 'no bathroom' or 'shared bath' means communal bathroom facilities down the hall.

Not all rooms have hot water. 'Running', '24-hour' or 'constant' water means that hot water is available around the clock (not always the case in reality). 'Bucket' hot water is only available in buckets (sometimes for free, sometimes for a charge).

Many places use small, wall-mounted electric geysers (water heaters) that need to be switched on an hour before use. Even in rooms with a hot shower, it makes sense to fill the provided bucket with hot water in case the shower suddenly runs cold.

Hotels that advertise 'room with shower' may be misleading you. Sometimes the shower is just a pipe sticking out of the wall. Some hotels surreptitiously disconnect showers to cut costs, while showers at other places render a mere trickle of water.

In this book, hotel rooms have their own private bathroom unless otherwise indicated.

rates in foreign currency or by credit card, but many places will accept rupees adding up to the dollar rate.

The Government of India tourism website, **Incredible India** ([www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org)), has a useful list of palaces, forts and castles that accept paying guests – click on the Royal Retreats heading and browse through the list.

## Costs

While it's hard to give an overview of prices, the cheapest rooms usually have shared bathrooms. Rooms with private bathrooms cost around twice as much, and you often get a TV. If there is no running hot water, buckets of hot water can be delivered to your room, either free or for a nominal charge. Pay twice as much again and you'll get air-conditioning (AC). Blackouts are common – midrange and top-end places usually have generators, but check first before paying extra for TV and hot water.

In winter, hotels in the mountain provide gas or electric heaters, or wood for the open fire, for an additional fee. Be careful of charcoal burning fires; see Carbon-Monoxide Poisoning, opposite.

## SEASONAL VARIATIONS

Hotels in popular tourist hang-outs crank up their prices in the high season, which usually coincides with the best weather for the area's various sights and activities – normally summertime in the mountains (June to October),

and the period before and after the monsoon in the plains (April to June and September to October). In areas popular with foreign tourists, there's an additional peak period over Christmas and New Year. At other times, these hotels offer significant discounts. It's always worth trying your luck and asking for a discount if the hotel seems quiet.

Many temple towns have additional peak seasons around major festivals and pilgrimages. During the Durga Puja festival in October, Bengalis flock to the mountains in their tens of thousands. See the Festivals in... box texts for details of other festivals. For any major festival, make your accommodation arrangements well in advance. Room rates in this book were generally collected outside the peak season, but the regional chapters have details on seasonal rates for individual areas.

## TAXES & SERVICE CHARGES

State governments slap a variety of taxes on hotel accommodation, and these are added to the cost of your room, except at the cheapest hotels. Taxes vary from state to state and are detailed in the regional chapters. Many up-market hotels also levy an additional 'service charge' (usually around 10%). Rates quoted in this book's regional chapters exclude taxes unless otherwise indicated.

Many hotels raise their room tariffs annually – be prepared for a slight increase on the rates we've provided.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Official business hours are from 9.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, but many offices open later and close earlier. Government offices may also open on certain Saturdays (usually the first, second and fourth of the month). Most offices have an official lunch hour from around 1pm. Shops generally open around 10am and stay open until 6pm or later; some close on Sunday. Note that curfews apply in some areas, notably Kashmir and the north-east. Airline offices generally keep to standard business hours Monday to Saturday.

Banks are open from 10am to 2pm on weekdays (till 4pm in some areas), and from 10am to noon (or 1pm) on Saturday. Exact branch hours vary from town to town so check locally. Foreign-exchange offices open longer seven days per week.

Main post offices are open from 10am to 5pm on weekdays, and till noon on Saturday. Some larger post offices have a full day on Saturday and a half-day on Sunday.

Restaurant opening hours vary regionally – you can rely on most places to be open from around 8am to 10pm. Exceptions are noted in the regional chapters.

## CHILDREN

India is far more accepting of children than most Western nations, but extra caution is required as the normal risks are amplified in these hot and crowded conditions. Pay close attention to hygiene and be *very* vigilant around traffic. Also keep children away from monkeys and local dogs, which carry all sorts of diseases. See Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*, and the travelling with children section of Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree forum** (<http://thornree.lonelyplanet.com>) for more advice.

## Practicalities

### ACCOMMODATION

Many hotels have 'family rooms' and almost all will provide an extra bed for a small additional charge, though cots are rare. Upmarket hotels may offer baby-sitting facilities and/or kids' activity programmes – inquire in advance. Upmarket hotels also have cable TV with English-language children's channels (cheaper hotels only have cartoons in Hindi).

### DISCOUNTS

On Indian trains, children under four travel free and children aged five to 12 pay half-

price. Most airlines charge 10% of the adult fare for infants and 50% for under-12s.

Many tourist attractions charge a reduced entry fee for children under 12 (or children aged under 15 in some states).

## FOOD & DRINK

Children are welcome in most restaurants, but only upmarket places and fast-food chains have highchairs and children's menus. Across India, nappy-changing facilities are usually restricted to the (often cramped) restaurant toilet. Getting children to eat unfamiliar food is another challenge, though Western fast food is widely available and snack food such as pakoras (deep-fried battered vegetables), dosas (paper-thin lentil-flour pancakes) and finger chips (seasoned potato chips) goes down fairly easily. As long as it is peeled or washed in purified water, fruit can offset the unhealthiness of lots of fried food. Bottled water, cartons of fruit juice and bottles of soft drink are usually safe to drink. Some children also warm to sweet milky chai (tea).

## HEALTH

Avoiding stomach upsets is a daily battle – washing hands with soap or rubbing alcohol is your first line of defence (see p1186 for more advice). If your child takes special medication, bring along an adequate stock. Note that rabid animals also pose a risk. Check with a doctor before departure about the correctly recommended jabs and drug courses for children in India.

## TRANSPORT

Any long-distance road travel should include plenty of food and toilet stops, particularly on rough roads. Travel sickness is another problem. Children may be expected to give their seat to adults, meaning long journeys with the children on your lap. Note that child seats – or indeed any kind of seat belts – are extremely rare.

Trains are usually the most comfortable mode of travel, especially for long trips. Internal air travel can save time and tempers.

## TRAVEL WITH INFANTS

Standard baby products such as nappies (diapers) and milk powder are available in most large cities and tourist centres. If you've got a fussy baby, consider bringing powdered milk or baby food from home. Also bring along

high-factor sunscreen, a snug-fitting wide-brimmed hat and a washable changing mat for covering dirty surfaces. Breast-feeding in public is generally not condoned by Indian society.

### Sights & Activities

Allow a few days at the start of your trip for your child to acclimatise to India's explosion of sights, smells, tastes and sounds before beginning any trips around the country. Some destinations are better for children than others – Delhi (p127) has a number of child-friendly museums and the atmospheric Red Fort sound-and-light show.

There are more good museums in Bengaluru (Bangalore; p886), Chennai (Madras; p1033), Kolkata (Calcutta; p502) and Mumbai (Bombay; p781), some of which have child-friendly interpretive displays. Old-fashioned planetariums are found in Chennai (p1035), Guwahati (p598), Hyderabad (p943) and Kolkata (p493).

Theme parks and water parks are taking off in a big way in India – head to Ahmedabad (p722), Bengaluru (p894), Kanyakumari (p1087) and Nainital (p475).

Children will also enjoy spotting India's exotic beasts – some of the country's zoos are depressing but there are better-than-average zoos in (or near) Darjeeling (p536), Mumbai (p779), Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum; p965), Bengaluru (p894) and Lucknow (p416). Wildlife safaris, particularly those offering elephant rides, are also worth considering (see p91).

Beaches make great family outings. The best are found in Kerala, Goa, Karnataka and Gujarat. Goa, in particular, is very well set up for beach water sports. Skiing is possible in Himachal Pradesh (p292 and p317), Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal; p470) and Kashmir (p360).

Hill stations offer peaceful forest picnics, cooler weather and family-friendly activities such as paddle boating and pony rides. Top spots include Ooty (Udhagamandalam; p1098), Mussoorie (p450), Kodaikanal (p1089), Mt Abu (p229), Shimla (p282), Nainital (p474) and Darjeeling (p530).

India's bounty of festivals may also capture your child's imagination, although some will be spooked by the crowds. For festival details see p1136, and the Festivals in... boxed texts at the start of regional chapters.

## CLIMATE CHARTS

India is so vast that climatic conditions in the far north have little relation to those of the extreme south. Generally speaking, the country has a three-season year – the hot, the wet and the cool. See p1130 for climate charts.

## COURSES

You can learn all sorts of new skills in India, from yoga and meditation to Indian cooking and Hindi. To find out about local courses, inquire at tourist offices, ask fellow travellers, and browse local newspapers and notice boards. See p90 for courses in adventure sports and holistic activities, and p115 for cooking courses.

## Arts & Crafts

Interesting arts and crafts courses:

**Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh** The NGO SAATHI offers courses in Bastar tribal arts near Jagdalpur (p713).

**Rajasthan** Jaipur (p172), Jhunjhunu (p189) and Udaipur (p222) have painting courses; Jaipur also has pottery classes.

## Languages

Language courses need time to give lasting benefits – some courses ask for a minimum time commitment. The following places offer courses:

**Delhi** Basic Hindi classes at Delhi's Central Hindi Directorate (p138).

**Himachal Pradesh** Long and short courses in Tibetan in McLeod Ganj (p325).

**Kerala** Short courses in Malayalam, Hindi and Sanskrit at Vijnana Kala Vedi Cultural Centre (p987) near Kottayam.

**Mumbai** Beginners' courses in Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (p781).

**Tamil Nadu** Hindi and Tamil courses in Chennai (p1036).

**Uttar Pradesh** Hindi courses at the Bhasha Bharati Language Institute (p432) in Varanasi.

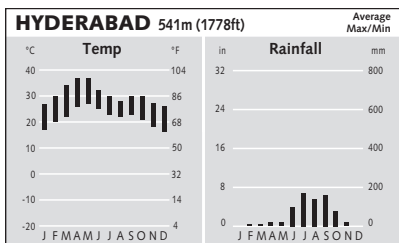
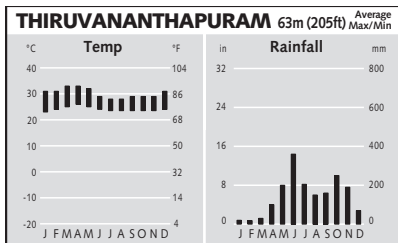
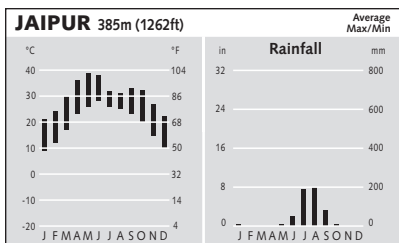
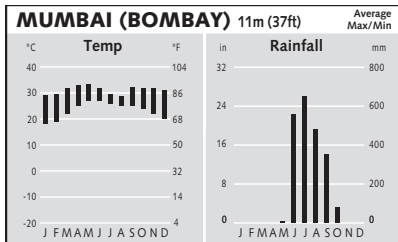
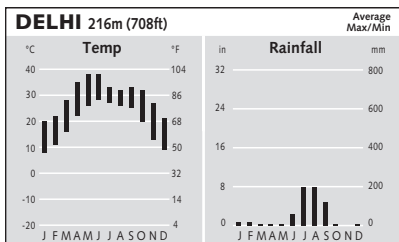
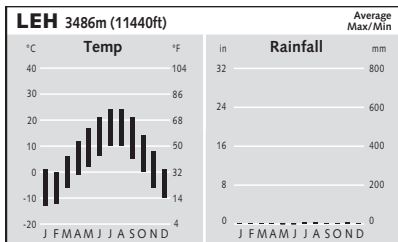
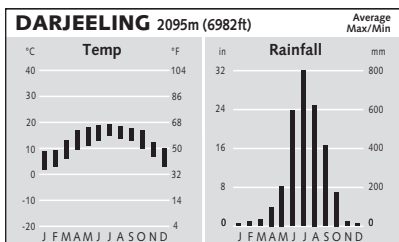
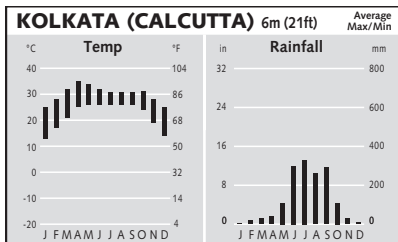
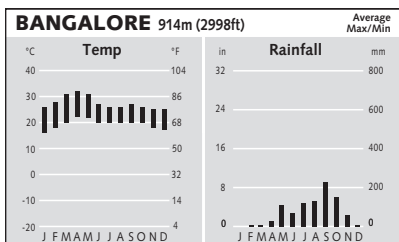
**Uttarakhand** Hindi courses at schools in Mussoorie (p451).

**West Bengal** Three- to nine-month Tibetan language courses in Darjeeling (p538) from March to December.

## Martial Arts

Courses are available in the traditional Kerala martial art of *kalarippayat* – a form of sword and shield fighting incorporating elements of Ayurveda and *marma* (the precursor to Chinese acupressure massage).

Major centres include the Vijnana Kala Vedi Cultural Centre (p987) in Kottayam and the CVN Kalari Sangham centre (p966) in Trivandrum.



## Music & Performing Arts

Indian music follows different rules to Western music, so allow several weeks to get any benefit from music courses. Most centres provide instruments, but invest in your own if you mean to continue to play at home; see p1146 for information about shops selling musical instruments.

**Goa** Courses in classical Indian singing and tabla in Arambol (p867).



**Gujarat** Classical Indian dance classes in Ahmedabad (p723).

**Himachal Pradesh** Various courses in Indian classical music in McLeod Ganj (p324) and Bhagsu (p329).

**Karnataka** Classical Indian dance classes at Nrityagram (p894) in Hessaraghatta, and tabla (pair of drums) classes at Shruthi Musical Works (p899) in Mysore.

**Kerala** Courses in *kathakali* (traditional Kerala dance opera) and *kootiattam* (traditional Sanskrit drama) in Trivandrum (p966), and dance centres near Thrissur (p1017) and Kottayam (p987).

**Kolkata** Aurobindo Bhawan (p502) offers classical Indian dance classes.

**Rajasthan** Tabla, flute, singing and Kathak (Indian classical dance) courses in Pushkar (p193), Jaipur (p172), Udaipur (p222) and Jodhpur (p237).

**Tamil Nadu** Courses in *bharathanatyam* (dance), singing and various musical instruments in Puducherry (Pondicherry; p1060); Kalakshetra Arts Village (p1040) in Chennai offers courses in classical Tamil dance and music.

**Uttar Pradesh** Sitar (stringed instrument), tabla and classical dance classes in Varanasi (p432).

**Uttarakhand** Classical dance and musical instrument classes in Rishikesh (p463).

## Yoga & Holistic Courses

India has thousands of yoga centres offering courses and daily classes as well as courses in Ayurveda, meditation and other therapies. See p100 for more information.

## CUSTOMS

Visitors are allowed to bring 1L each of wine and spirits and 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco into India duty free. Officials may ask tourists to enter expensive items such as video cameras and laptop computers on a 'Tourist Baggage Re-export' form to ensure they are taken out of India when you depart. There are no duty-free allowances when entering India from Nepal.

Technically you're supposed to declare any amount of cash or travellers cheques over US\$10,000 on arrival, and rupees should not be taken out of India. However, this is rarely policed. There are additional restrictions on the export of antiques and products made from animals; see p1147.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

India has an unenviable reputation for crime and scams, but most problems can be avoided with a bit of common sense and

an appropriate amount of caution. Scams change as dodgy characters try to stay ahead of the game, so chat with other travellers and tourism officials to stay abreast of the latest hazards. Also see the India branch of Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree forum** (<http://thorn.tree.lonelyplanet.com>), where travellers often post warnings about problems they've encountered on the road.

Women travellers should also read the advice on p1160.

## Contaminated Food & Drink

In past years, some private medical clinics have provided patients with more treatment than necessary to procure larger payments from travel insurance companies – get a second opinion if possible. In the late 1990s, several travellers were killed in a dangerous food scam in Agra and Varanasi after being fed food spiked with bacteria by restaurants linked to dodgy clinics. This scam has thankfully been quashed, but there's always the chance it could reappear.

Most bottled water is legit, but always ensure the lid seal is intact and check that the bottom of the bottle hasn't been tampered with. Crush plastic bottles after use to prevent them being misused later, or better still, bring along water-purification tablets or a filtration system to avoid adding to India's plastic-waste mountain.

## Drugs

Marijuana and other 'recreational' drugs are widely available in India, and highly illegal. A few towns allow the legal sale of bhang (marijuana) for religious reasons, but elsewhere, courts treat possession of cannabis as severely as possession of heroin.

If you do choose to take drugs, use your common sense. Be aware that the police target foreign drug users in bribe scams. Bhang is frequently administered in food and drinks that can be incredibly potent, leaving intoxicated travellers vulnerable to robbery or accidents.

In the Kullu region of Himachal Pradesh, dozens of travellers have disappeared or been murdered in the hills, with suspicion falling on local drug gangs; see Warning – Fatal Vacations, p303. Don't assume strangers are harmless because they share your interest in drugs.

For more information, see p1140.



## Festivals

The sheer mass of humanity at India's festivals provides an incredible spectacle, but every year pilgrims are crushed or trampled to death on temple processions and train platforms. Be extra careful around large crowds at these times, and travel on conventional trains rather than special pilgrim services.

Care is also needed during the Holi festival (p1137). Foreigners get doused with water and coloured dye like everyone else, and a few people have been scarred by dodgy chemicals. Consider buying a cheap set of throwaway clothes specifically for this festival. There's also a tradition of guzzling alcohol and bhang at many festivals, and female travellers have been groped by spaced-out blokes. It's wise to seek a companion before venturing onto the streets at festival time.

## Noise

Shouting, traffic noise, leaky plumbing and loud music can all add up to a waking nightmare for light sleepers. Bring earplugs and request rooms that face away from busy roads. Earplugs are also useful on public transport to avoid being deafened by noisy engines and tape players. During the tourist season, Indian holidaymakers travel in large groups and knock randomly on hotel room doors looking for members of their party – lock your door if you don't want people to walk in uninvited!

## Rebel Violence

Like many countries, India has a number of armed groups fighting for increased political representation. These groups employ the same tried and tested techniques of terrorist groups everywhere – assassinations and bomb attacks on government infrastructure, public transport, religious centres, tourist resorts and markets. Most attacks are linked to small shifts in the political situation, which visitors may not be aware of as they travel around the country.

Most of the time, India is no more dangerous than anywhere else, but certain areas are particularly prone to insurgent violence – specifically Kashmir, the northeast states and Bihar. India has also been hit by a number of random bomb attacks on major cities, linked to the situation in Kashmir and global Islamic fundamentalism.

International terrorism is as much of a risk in Europe or America, so this is no reason not to travel to India, but it makes sense to

check the local security situation carefully before travelling to high-risk areas. People involved in tourism rarely admit the dangers, while embassies often exaggerate the risks – the best sources of information are international charities and local news sources. Useful resources are listed in the chapters for Kashmir (p352), the northeast states (p595) and Bihar (p551), but you can find additional information by searching for keywords such as 'Kashmir' (or Bihar, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland etc) and 'violence' on Google.

## Scams

India is notorious for scams designed to separate travellers from their money, often with the promise of a chance to get rich quick. Don't be fooled – any deal that sounds too good to be true invariably is.

Be highly suspicious of claims that you can purchase goods cheaply in India and sell them easily at a profit elsewhere. Precious stones and carpets are favourites for this con. Operators who practise such schemes are deceptively friendly and after buttering you up with invitations to their home, free meals etc, they begin pouring out sob stories about not being able to obtain an export licence. And therein lies the opportunity for you to 'get rich quick' – by carrying or mailing the goods home and selling them to the trader's overseas representatives at a profit. Many can provide forged testimonials from other travellers. Without exception, the goods are worth a fraction of what you paid and the 'representatives' never materialise. See p177 for more details.

It also pays to be cautious when sending goods home. Shops have been known to swap high-value items for junk when posting goods to home addresses. If you have any doubts, send the package yourself from the post office. Be very careful when paying for souvenirs with a credit card. Government shops are usually legitimate; private souvenir shops have a reputation for secretly running off extra copies of the credit-card imprint slip, which will be used for phoney transactions after you have left the shop. Insist that the trader carries out any credit-card transaction on the counter in front of you. Alternatively, take out cash from an ATM and avoid the risk.

While it's only a minority of traders who are involved in dishonest schemes, many souvenir vendors are involved in the commission racket (opposite).

## Swimming

Beaches can have dangerous rips and currents and there are drowning deaths each year. Always check locally before swimming anywhere in the sea and be careful of currents when swimming in any rivers, including the sacred Ganges River at Rishikesh.

## Transport Scams

Many private travel agencies make extra money by scamming travellers for tours and travel tickets. Make sure you are clear what is included in the price of any tour (get this in writing) to avoid charges for hidden 'extras' later on.

Be cautious of anyone offering tours to Kashmir in Delhi and other traveller centres. Some travel agents exploit travellers' safety concerns to make extra cash from tours that you can do just as easily (and safely) on public transport. Always check the security situation before you travel and make your own tour arrangements after you arrive to cut out these dodgy middlemen.

Tours to Srinagar's houseboats from Delhi should definitely be avoided. Some travellers have reported virtually being held prisoner and charged hundreds of dollars for unwanted extras (see p357).

When buying a bus, train or plane ticket anywhere other than the registered office of the transport company, make certain you are getting the ticket class you paid for. It is not uncommon for travellers to book a deluxe bus or AC train berth and arrive to find a bog-standard ordinary bus or a less comfortable sleeper seat.

## Theft & Druggings

Theft is a risk in India, as it is anywhere else. On buses and trains, keep luggage securely locked (minipadlocks and chains are available at most train stations) and lock your bags to the metal baggage racks or the wire loops found under seats; padlocking your bags to the roof racks on buses is also a sensible policy.

Thieves tend to target popular tourist train routes, such as Delhi to Agra. Be extra alert just before the train departs; thieves often take advantage of the confusion and crowds. Airports are another place to exercise caution; after a long flight you're unlikely to be at your most alert.

Occasionally, tourists (especially those travelling solo) are drugged and robbed dur-

ing train or bus journeys; a friendly stranger strikes up conversation, offers you a spiked drink (to send you to sleep), then makes off with everything you have. Politely decline drinks or food offered by strangers – stomach upsets are a convenient excuse.

Unfortunately some travellers make their money go further by helping themselves to other peoples – take care in dormitories. For lost credit cards, immediately call the international lost/stolen number; for lost/stolen travellers cheques, contact the Amex or Thomas Cook office in Delhi (p125).

A good travel-insurance policy is essential (see p1139); keep the emergency contact details handy and familiarise yourself with the claims procedure. Keep photocopies of your passport, including the visa page, separately from your passport (these are also useful for obtaining permits), as well as a copy of your airline ticket. You could also email scans to yourself.

The safest place for your money and your passport is next to your skin, either in a money belt or a secure pouch under your shirt. If you carry your money in a wallet, keep it in your front trouser pocket, never the back pocket (the 'pickpocket's friend'). Bum bags are often targeted by thieves as they are usually full of goodies.

It is usually wise to peel off at least US\$100 and store it away separately from your main stash; however, keep your main stash and other valuables on your person. Also, separate big notes from small bills so you don't publicly display large wads of cash when paying for services or checking into hotels.

In dodgy-looking hotels, put your money belt under your pillow when you sleep, and *never* leave your valuable documents and travellers cheques in your hotel room when you go out (even under your mattress). Better hotels will have a safe for valuables, and the YMCA and other hostels normally provide a locker where you can use your own padlock. For peace of mind, you may also want to use your own padlock in hotels where doors are locked with a padlock (common in cheaper hotels). If you cannot lock your hotel room securely from the inside at night, stay somewhere else.

## Touts & Commission Agents

With so many businesses dependent on tourism, competition is cut-throat. Many hotels and shops drum up extra business by paying commission to local fixers who bring tourists

through the doors. These places tend to be unpopular for a reason – prices will invariably be raised (by as much as 50%!) to pay the fixer's commission. To get around this, ask taxis or rickshaws to drop you at a landmark rather than your real destination, so you can walk in alone and pay the normal price.

Train and bus stations are often swarming with touts – if anyone asks if this your first trip to India, say you've been here several times, as this is usually a ruse to gauge your vulnerability. You'll often hear stories about the hotels that refuse to pay commissions being 'full', 'under renovation' or 'closed'. Check things out yourself. Be very sceptical of phrases like 'my brother's shop' and 'special deal at my friend's place'.

On the flip side, touts can be beneficial if you arrive in a town without a hotel reservation when some big festival is on, or during the peak season – they'll know which places have beds.

## Trekking

Trekking off the beaten track always carries risks and India is poorly set up for independent trekkers. We strongly recommend hiring local guides and porters or joining an organised trek before heading off into potentially dangerous terrain; see p97 for more information.

## DISCOUNTS

### Seniors

Indian Airlines and Sahara Airlines offer 50% discounts on domestic air travel for foreign travellers aged 65 or over; Jet Airways offers 25% off. However, promotional fares and tickets on budget airlines are often cheaper than discounted full fares. Ask travel agents about discounts on other air carriers. If you're over 60, you're entitled to a 30% discount on the cost of train travel. Bring your passport as proof of age.

### Student & Youth Travel

Student cards are of limited use nowadays as most concessions are based on age. Hostels run by the Indian Youth Hostels Association are part of the HI network; an HI card sometimes entitles you to discount rates. YMCA/YWCA members also receive discounts on accommodation.

Foreigners aged 30 or under receive a 25% discount on domestic air tickets. Again, this applies to full-price tickets, so standard fares for

budget airlines may be cheaper still. Students studying in India get 50% off train fares.

## EMBASSIES & HIGH COMMISSIONS

### Indian Embassies & High Commissions

The following represent just some of India's missions worldwide – see [www.meaindia.nic.in](http://www.meaindia.nic.in) (click on the 'Missions and Posts Abroad' link) for more listings, including consulates.

**Australia** (☎ 02-6273 3999; [www.hcindia-au.org](http://www.hcindia-au.org)); 3-5 Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

**Bangladesh** (☎ 02-9889339; <http://199.236.117.161>); House 2, Rd 142, Gulshan I, Dhaka)

**Bhutan** (☎ 02-322162; [www.eoithimphu.org](http://www.eoithimphu.org)); India House Estate, Thimphu)

**Canada** (☎ 613-744 3751; [www.hciottawa.ca](http://www.hciottawa.ca)); 10 Springfield Rd, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 1C9)

**France** (☎ 01-40 50 70 70; [www.amb-inde.fr](http://www.amb-inde.fr)); 15 Rue Alfred Dehodencq, 75016 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-257950; [www.indianembassy.de](http://www.indianembassy.de)); Tiergartenstrasse 17, 10785 Berlin)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-497 0843; [www.indianembassy.ie](http://www.indianembassy.ie)); 6 Leeson Park, Dublin 6)

**Israel** (☎ 03-5291999; [www.indembassy.co.il](http://www.indembassy.co.il)); 140 Hayarkon St, Tel Aviv 61033)

**Italy** (☎ 06-4884642; [www.indianembassy.it](http://www.indianembassy.it)); Via XX Settembre 5, 00187 Rome)

**Japan** (☎ 03-3262 2391; [www.embassyofindiajapan.org](http://www.embassyofindiajapan.org)); 2-2-11 Kudan Minami, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 1020074)

**Myanmar** (Burma; ☎ 01-240633; [www.indiaembassy.net.mm](http://www.indiaembassy.net.mm)); 545-547 Merchant St, Yangon)

**Nepal** (☎ 014-410900; [www.south-asia.com/embassy-india](http://www.south-asia.com/embassy-india)); 336 Kapurdhara Marg, Kathmandu)

**Netherlands** (☎ 070-346 9771; [www.indianembassy.nl](http://www.indianembassy.nl)); Buitenrustweg-2, 2517 KD, The Hague)

**New Zealand** (☎ 04-473 6390; [www.hicomind.org.nz](http://www.hicomind.org.nz)); 180 Molesworth St, Wellington)

**Pakistan** (☎ 0512-206950; G5, Diplomatic Enclave, Islamabad)

**Sri Lanka** (☎ 012-421605; [www.hicolombo.org](http://www.hicolombo.org)); 36-38 Galle Rd, Colombo 3)

**Thailand** (☎ 0-2258 0300; [www.embassyofindia-bangkok.org](http://www.embassyofindia-bangkok.org)); 46 Soi Prasarnmitr, Soi 23, Sukhumvit Rd, Bangkok 10110)

**UK** (☎ 020-7836 8484; [www.hcilondon.net](http://www.hcilondon.net)); India House, Aldwych, London WC2B 4NA)

**USA** (☎ 202-939 7000; [www.indianembassy.org](http://www.indianembassy.org)); 2107 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008)

### Embassies & High Commissions in India

Most foreign diplomatic missions are based in Delhi, but several nations operate consulates in Kolkata and other large cities. Most missions operate from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, with a lunch break between 1pm and 2pm.

To find contact details for missions of other countries in Delhi, see the local phone directory or pick up the free *Delhi Diary* magazine in Delhi.

**Australia** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-41399900; www.ausgovindia.com; 1/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri);

Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 6669 2000; fax 6669 2005; 36 Maker Chambers VI, 220 Nariman Point)

**Bangladesh** Delhi (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-24121389; www.bhcdelhi.org; EP39 Dr Radakrishnan Marg, Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (Map p500; ☎ 22475208; 9 Circus Ave; ☎ apply 9.15am-11am Mon-Fri)

**Bhutan** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26889230; Chandragupta Marg, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**Canada** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-41782000; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/new-delhi; 7/8 Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 67494444; mmbai@international.gc.ca; 6th fl, Fort House, 221 Dr DN Rd)

**France** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24196100; www.france-in-india.org; 2/50E Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 66694000; www.consulfrance-bombay.org; 7th fl, Hoechst House, Nariman Point)

**Germany** Chennai (Map pp1030-1; ☎ 44-2430 1600; www.chennai.diplo.de; 9 Boat Club Rd, RA Puram); Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26871837; www.new-delhi.diplo.de; 6/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 22832422; fax 22025493; 10th fl, Hoechst House, Nariman Point; ☎ 9am-12pm Mon-Fri)

**Ireland** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24626741; www.ireland.inindia.com; 230 Jor Bagh, Delhi)

**Israel** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-30414500; delhi.mfa.gov.il; 3 Aurangzeb Rd); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 22822822; info@mumbai.mfa.gov.il)

**Italy** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26114355; www.ambnewdelhi.esteri.it; 50E Chandragupta Marg, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 23804071; www.italianconsulatemumbai.com; 'Kanchanjunga', 1st fl, 72 G Deshmukh Marg)

**Japan** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26876564; www.in.emb-japan.go.jp; 50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**Malaysia** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26111291; www.kln.gov.my/perwakilan/newdelhi; 50M Satya Marg, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**Maldives** Chennai (Map p1034; ☎ 44-28535111; Royal Textile Mills, 855 Anna Salai); Delhi (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-41435701; www.maldiveshighcom.co.in; B2 Anand Niketan)

**Myanmar** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24678822; 3/50F Nyaya Marg); Kolkata (Map pp488-9; ☎ 22178273; 4th fl, Block D, White House, 119 Park St; ☎ apply 10am-noon, collect 2-4pm)

**Nepal** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-23327361; Barakhamba Rd); Kolkata (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24561224; 1 National Library Ave, Alipore; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

**Netherlands** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24197600; www.holland-in-india.org; 6/50F Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**New Zealand** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-26883170; www.nzembassy.com; 50N Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**Pakistan** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24676004; 2/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**Singapore** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-41019801; www.mfa.gov.sg/newdelhi; N88 Panchsheel Park, Delhi)

**South Africa** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-26149411; www.sahc-india.com; B18 Vasant Marg, Vasant Vihar, Delhi)

**Sri Lanka** Chennai (Map pp1030-1; ☎ 44-24987896; www.slmfa.gov.lk; 196 TTK Rd, Alwarpet); Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-23010201; www.slmfa.gov.lk; 27 Kautilya Marg, Chanakyapuri)

**Switzerland** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26878372; www.eda.admin.ch; Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

**Thailand** Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-26118104; www.thaiemb.org.in; 56N Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24407836; 188 Mandeville Gardens, Gariahat; ☎ apply 9am-noon, collect 1-5pm)

**UK** Chennai (Map pp1030-1; ☎ 44-42192151; 20 Anderson Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4pm); Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24192100; www.ukinindia.com; Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 66502222; Maker Chambers IV, 2nd fl, 222 Jammalal Bajaj Rd, Nariman Point; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri)

**USA** Chennai (Map pp1030-1; ☎ 44-2857 4242; http://chennai.usconsulate.gov; Gemini Circle, 220 Anna Salai); Delhi (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24198000; http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov; Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (Map pp768-9; ☎ 23633611; Lincoln House, 78 Bhulabhai Desai Rd)

## YOUR OWN EMBASSY

It's important to realise what your own embassy – the embassy of the country of which you are a citizen – can and can't do to help you if you get into trouble.

Generally speaking, it won't be much help in emergencies if the trouble you're in is remotely your own fault. Remember that you are bound by the laws of India. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

In genuine emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted. Do not expect hand-outs. New passports can be issued, but a loan for travel home and is exceedingly unlikely – the embassy would expect you to have insurance.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

India officially follows the European Gregorian calendar but most holidays and festivals follow the Indian or Tibetan lunar calendars, tied to the cycle of the moon, or the Islamic calendar, which shifts forward 11 days each year (12 days in leap years). As a result, the exact dates of festivals change from year to year.

The India-wide holidays and festivals listed here are arranged according to the Indian lunar calendar, starting in Chaitra (March or April). Contact local tourist offices for exact dates or check the web – <http://festivals.loveindia.com> and [www.festivalsindia.in](http://www.festivalsindia.in) have extensive listings, or you can visit the regional websites for the state governments, listed on <http://india.gov.in/knowindia/distripts.php>.

The 'wedding season' falls in the cooler period from November to March. During this period you're likely to see at least one wedding procession on the street, with the groom dressed in finery on the back of a horse, and a brass band carrying electric lights on modified hats.

The following represent major national festivals; for details of regional festivals, see the Festivals in... boxed texts at the beginning of regional chapters.

### Chaitra (March/April)

**Mahavir Jayanti** Jain festival commemorating the birth of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism.

**Ramanavami** Hindus celebrate the birth of Rama with processions, music and feasting, and readings and enactments of scenes from the Ramayana.

**Easter** Christian holiday marking the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Eid-Milad-un-Nabi** Islamic festival celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohammed; it falls on 20 March 2008, 9 March 2009 and 26 February 2010.

### Vaisakha (April/May)

**Buddha Jayanti** Celebrating Buddha's birth, enlightenment and attainment of nirvana (final release from the cycle of existence); it can fall in May, April or early June.

### Jyaistha (May/June)

Only regional festivals fall in this period; see the regional chapters for details.

### Asadha (June/July)

**Rath Yatra** (Car Festival) Effigies of Lord Jagannath (Vishnu as lord of the world) are hauled through cities on man-powered chariots, most famously in Puri (p645) in Orissa.

### Sravana (July/August)

**Naag Panchami** Hindu festival dedicated to Ananta, the serpent upon whose coils Vishnu rested between universes.

## KUMBH MELA

Held four times every 12 years at locations that hopscotch around the plains, the Kumbh Mela is the largest religious congregation on earth. This vast celebration attracts tens of millions of Hindu pilgrims, including mendicant Nagas (naked spiritual men) from militant Hindu monastic orders. The Kumbh Mela doesn't belong to any particular caste or creed – devotees from all branches of Hinduism come together to experience the electrifying sensation of mass belief and to take a ceremonial dip in the sacred Ganges, Shipra or Godavari rivers. Teams of astrologers gather every Kumbh to pinpoint the most auspicious moment for the mass bathing to begin.

The origins of the festival go back to the battle for supremacy between good and evil. In the Hindu creation myths, the gods and demons fought a great battle for a *kumbh* (pitcher) containing the nectar of immortality. Vishnu got hold of the container and spirited it away, but in flight four drops spilt on the earth – at Allahabad, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. Kumbh Mela celebrations are held every 12 years in all of these four cities; effectively there's a Kumbh Mela every four years in one city. Allahabad hosts the even larger Maha (Great) Kumbh Mela, with even bigger crowds.

The last Maha Kumbh Mela took place in Allahabad in 2001, attracting around 100 million celebrants – equivalent to a third of the population of America or 30 times the number of people who attend the annual haj (pilgrimage to Mecca). Controlling these multitudes takes thousands of officials, and vast tent cities are erected to provide accommodation and meals for the devotees. The Kumbh is invariably an international media circus, with news agencies from around the globe competing for the best shot of the naked Nagas leading the charge into the river.

The schedule for Kumbh Melas can be bewildering because of the overlapping cycles, but the next Kumbh Mela is at Haridwar in 2010. You can find dates and general information on the website [www.kumbhamela.net](http://www.kumbhamela.net).

Snakes are venerated as totems against monsoon flooding and other evils.

**Raksha Bandhan** (Narial Purnima) On the full moon, girls fix amulets known as *rakhis* to the wrists of brothers and male friends to protect them in the coming year. Brothers reciprocate with gifts. Some people also worship the Vedic sea god Varuna.

### **Bhadra (August/September)**

**Independence Day** This public holiday (15 August) marks the anniversary of India's Independence in 1947. Celebrations are a countrywide outpouring of patriotic sentiment.

**Drukpa Teshi** A Buddhist festival celebrating the first teaching given by Siddhartha Gautama.

**Ganesh Chaturthi** Hindus celebrate the birth of the elephant-headed god, Ganesh, with verve, particularly in Mumbai. Clay idols of Ganesh are paraded through the streets before being ceremonially immersed in rivers, tanks (reservoirs) or the sea.

**Janmastami** The anniversary of Krishna's birth is celebrated with wild abandon, particularly in Krishna's birthplace Mathura.

**Shravan Purnima** On this day of fasting, high-caste Hindus replace the sacred thread looped over their left shoulder.

**Pateti** Parsis celebrate the Zoroastrian new year at this time, particularly in Mumbai.

**Ramadan** (Ramazan) Thirty days of dawn-to-dusk fasting mark the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed; fast starts on 1 September 2008, 22 August 2009 and 11 August 2010.

### **Asvina (September/October)**

**Navratri** (Festival of Nine Nights) This Hindu festival leading up to Dussehra celebrates the goddess Durga in all her incarnations. Special dances are held, and the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati also get special praise. Festivities are particularly vibrant in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

**Dussehra (Durga Puja)** A Vaishnavite festival, celebrating the victory of the Hindu god Rama over the demon-king Ravana and the triumph of good over evil. Dussehra is big in Kullu (p303) and Mysore (p897), where effigies of Ravana and his cohorts are ritually burned.

**Durga Puja** Also symbolising the triumph of good over evil, Durga Puja commemorates the victory of the goddess Durga over buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura. Celebrations take place on the same dates as Dussehra, particularly in Bengal (p521), where thousands of images of the goddess are displayed then ritually immersed in rivers, tanks and the sea.

**Gandhi Jayanti** This public holiday is a solemn celebration of Mohandas Gandhi's birth on 2 October, with prayer meetings at Gandhi's cremation site in Delhi.

**Eid al-Fitr** Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan with three days of festivities, starting 30 days after the start of the fast.

### **Kartika (October/November)**

**Diwali** (Deepavaali) On the 15th day of Kartika, Hindus celebrate the 'festival of lights' for five days, giving gifts, lighting fireworks, and burning butter and oil lamps to lead Rama home from exile.

**Govardhana Puja** A Vaishnavite Hindu festival celebrating the lifting of Govardhan Hill by Krishna; it's celebrated by Krishna devotees around India.

### **Aghan (November/December)**

**Nanak Jayanti** The birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, is celebrated with prayer readings and processions.

**Eid al-Adha** Muslims commemorate Ibrahim's readiness sacrifice his son to God; the festival falls on 20 December 2007, 8 December 2008, 27 November, 2009 and 16 November 2010.

### **Pausa (December/January)**

**Christmas Day** Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on 25 December.

**Losar** Tibetan New Year – celebrated by Tantric Buddhists all over India, particularly in Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Ladakh and Zaskar. Exact dates vary from region to region.

### **Magha (January/February)**

**Republic Day** This public holiday, celebrated on 26 January, commemorates the founding of the Republic of India in 1950; the most spectacular celebrations are held in Delhi, which holds a huge military parade along Rajpath and the Beating of the Retreat ceremony three days later.

**Pongal** A four-day Tamil festival marking the end of the harvest season. Families in the south prepare pots of *pongal* (a mixture of rice, sugar, dhal and milk), symbolic of prosperity and abundance, then feed them to decorated and adorned cattle.

**Vasant Panchami** Honouring Saraswati, the goddess of learning, Hindus dress in yellow and place books, musical instruments and other educational objects in front of idols of the goddess to receive her blessing.

### **Phalgun (February/March)**

**Holi** One of the most exuberant festivals in North India; Hindus celebrate the beginning of spring by throwing coloured water and *gula* (powder) at anyone within range. On the night before Holi, bonfires are built to symbolise the destruction of the evil demon Holika.

**Muharram** Shi'ia Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam; the festival starts on 10 January 2008, 29 December 2009 and 18 December 2010.

**Shivaratri** This day of Hindu fasting recalls the *tandava* (cosmic dance) of Lord Shiva. Temple processions are followed by the chanting of mantras and anointing of linga (phallic images of Shiva).



## FOOD

Nowhere in the world makes such an inspired use of spices as India. To get a taste of what's on offer, check out p104 and the Eating sections of the regional chapters. As well as sampling restaurants, look out for all the wonderful street stalls, snack joints, market vendors, takeaway counters and sweet shops that make eating on the move in India such a pleasure. Places to eat are generally open from early morning (or lunchtime) to late at night; see p1128 and the Eating sections for more information.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Technically, homosexual relations for men are illegal in India and the penalties for transgression can theoretically be up to life imprisonment. There's no law against lesbian sexual relations. Ironically, private homosexuality is quite common because of the strict separation of unmarried men and women in Indian society, but talking openly about this is taboo.

Foreigners are unlikely to be targeted by India's homosexuality laws, but Indian gays have been campaigning against this legislation for years. The campaign to repeal 'Section 377' has attracted some high profile supporters, including Amartya Sen and Vikram Seth.

There are low-key gay scenes in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chandigarh, but India is a conservative society and physical contact and public displays of affection are generally frowned on for heterosexual couples as well as gay and lesbian couples. In fact, men holding hands is far more common than heterosexual couples holding hands, though this is generally a sign of friendship rather than sexual orientation.

See p60 for more information.

## Publications & Websites

The Mumbai publication *Bombay Dost* is a gay-and-lesbian magazine available from 105A Veena-Beena Shopping Centre, Bandra West, Mumbai, and from bookshops in more progressive Indian cities.

For further information about India's gay scene, point your web browser towards **Indian Dost** ([www.indiandost.com/gay.php](http://www.indiandost.com/gay.php)), **Gay Bombay** ([www.gaybombay.org](http://www.gaybombay.org)), **Humrahi** ([www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/7258](http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/7258)) and **Humsafar** ([www.humsafar.org](http://www.humsafar.org)).

## Support Groups

Several organisations in Bengaluru offer support to the gay-and-lesbian community. A weekly support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people is run by **Good As You** ([☎ 080-22230959](http://080-22230959); [www.sawnet.org/orgns/good\\_as\\_you.html](http://www.sawnet.org/orgns/good_as_you.html); Bengaluru).

The NGO **Swabhava** ([☎ 080-22230959](http://080-22230959); [http://swabhava\\_trust.tripod.com](http://swabhava_trust.tripod.com); 54 Nanjappa Rd, Shanthinagar, Bengaluru 560027) works directly with issues affecting lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals through research, documentation, advocacy and training programmes. Volunteers are welcome.

**Sangama** ([☎ 080-22868680](http://080-22868680); [www.sangamaonline.org](http://www.sangamaonline.org); Flat 13, Royal Park Apartments, 34 Park Rd, Tasker Town, Bengaluru 560051) deals with crisis intervention and provides a community outreach service for gay and bisexual men and women, transgenders and *hijras* (transvestites and eunuchs).

In Kolkata the **Counsel Club** ([☎ 033-23598130](http://033-23598130); [counselclub93@hotmail.com](mailto:counselclub93@hotmail.com); c/o Ranjan, Post Bag No 794, Kolkata 700017) provides support for gays, lesbians and bisexuals, and arranges monthly meetings; contact the organisation for details. The associated **Palm Avenue Integration Society** ([pawan30@yahoo.com](mailto:pawan30@yahoo.com); c/o Pawan, Post Bag No 10237, Kolkata) offers health advice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender individuals. There's also a library service; opening times and directions are by request.

In Chennai, **Sahodaran** ([☎ 044-8252869](http://044-8252869); [www.sahodaran.faiithweb.com](http://www.sahodaran.faiithweb.com); 127 Sterling Rd, Nungambakkam, Chennai), a support group for gay men, holds social-group meetings weekly (in English); contact the office for details.

## HOLIDAYS

In India there are officially three national public holidays: Republic Day (26 January), Independence Day (15 August) and Gandhi Jayanti (2 October). Every state celebrates its own official holidays, which cover bank holidays for government workers as well as major religious festivals – usually Diwali, Dussehra and Holi (Hindu), Nanak Jayanti (Sikh), Eid al-Fitr (Muslim), Mahavir Jayanti (Jain), Buddha Jayanti (Buddhist) and Easter and Christmas (Christian). For more on religious festivals, see p1136.

Most businesses (offices, shops etc) and tourist sites close on public holidays, but transport is usually unaffected as many locals travel for religious celebrations. Make trans-



port and hotel reservations well in advance if you intend visiting during major festivals.

## INSURANCE

Every traveller should take out travel insurance – if you can't afford it, you definitely can't afford the consequences if something does go wrong. Make sure that your policy covers theft of property and medical treatment, as well as air evacuation. Be aware that some policies place restrictions on potentially dangerous activities such as scuba diving, skiing, motorcycling, trekking, paragliding and climbing. When hiring a motorcycle in India, make sure the rental policy includes at least third-party insurance; see p1175.

There are hundreds of different policies so read the small print carefully and make sure your activities are covered. In some areas, trekking agents will only accept customers who have cover for emergency helicopter evacuation. Some policies pay doctors and hospitals directly; others expect you to pay upfront and claim the money back later (keep all documentation for your claim). It is crucial to get a police report in India if you've had anything stolen; insurance companies may refuse to reimburse you without one. Also see p1181.

Worldwide coverage for travellers from over 44 countries is available online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).

## INTERNET ACCESS


Internet cafés are widespread in India and connections are usually quite fast, except in more remote areas. Bandwidth load tend to be lowest in the morning and early afternoon. Internet charges vary regionally, but most places charge between Rs 10 and 60 per hour, usually with a 15-minute minimum.

It's a good idea to write and save your messages in a text application before pasting them into your browser – power cuts are common and all too often your hard-crafted email can vanish into the ether. Be wary of sending sensitive financial information from internet cafés; some places use keystroke-capturing technology to steal passwords and read emails. Using online banking on any nonsecure system is generally a bad idea.

If you're travelling with a laptop most internet cafés can supply you with internet access over a LAN Ethernet cable, or you can join an international roaming service with an Indian dial-up number, or take out an account with

a local Internet Service Provider (ISP). Major ISPs in India include **Sify** ([www.sify.com/products](http://www.sify.com/products)), **BSNL** ([www.bsnl.co.in](http://www.bsnl.co.in)) and **VSNL/Tata Indicom** ([www.vsnl.in](http://www.vsnl.in)). Make sure your modem is compatible with the telephone and dial-up system in India (an external global modem may be necessary).

Another useful investment in India is a fuse-protected universal AC adaptor to protect your circuit board from power surges. Plug adaptors are widely available throughout India, but bring spare plug fuses from home. Wi-fi access is available in many luxury hotels and some coffees hops in modernised cities, but security is a consideration – never send credit-card details or other personal data over a wireless connection. For more information on travelling with a portable computer see [www.teleadapt.com](http://www.teleadapt.com).

In this book, hotels offering internet access to guests are marked by . See also p27 for useful web resources about India.

## LAUNDRY

Most hotels offer a same- or next-day laundry service, and private laundries are plentiful in tourist areas. Most employ the services of dhobi-wallahs – washermen and women who will diligently bash your wet clothes against rocks and scrubbing boards, returning them spotlessly clean and ironed, but maybe missing a few buttons. If you don't think your gear will stand up to the treatment, wash them yourself or give them to a drycleaner. Washing powder can be bought cheaply virtually everywhere.

Most laundries and hotels charge per item (you'll be required to submit a list with your dirty clothes) or by dry weight. Hand clothes in before 9am if you want them back the same day. It can take longer to dry clothes during the humid monsoon. Note that many hotels ban washing clothes in their rooms.

## LEGAL MATTERS

If you're in a sticky legal situation, immediately contact your embassy (p1134). However, be aware that all your embassy may be able to do is monitor your treatment in custody and arrange a lawyer. In the Indian justice system, the burden of proof is on the accused and long stays in prison before trial are common.

You should carry your passport at all times; police are entitled to ask your for identification in all sorts of situations. Corruption is rife

**Beware Bhang Lassis!**

Although it's rarely printed in menus, many restaurants in tourist centres will clandestinely whip up a bhang lassi, a yoghurt and iced-water beverage laced with cannabis. Commonly dubbed 'special lassi', this often potent concoction can cause a drawn-out high that verges on delirium and lasts for many hours. Many travellers have been badly hurt in accidents or been robbed of all their possessions after drinking this risky brew.

so the less you have to do with local police the better (unless getting a written police report for your insurance company in the event of theft).

If you are asked for a bribe, the prevailing wisdom is to pay it, as the alternative can be a trumped-up prosecution. The problem is knowing how much to pay – it's better not to put yourself in a situation where you might be asked for a bribe.

**Drugs**

India is famous – or notorious – for recreational drugs such as marijuana and hashish, and many travellers visit India specifically for this reason. Possession of any illegal drug is treated as a serious criminal offence. If convicted, the *minimum* sentence is 10 years, with no chance of remission or parole.

Cases can take several years to appear before a court, while the accused waits in prison, and there's usually a hefty monetary fine on top of any custodial sentence. The police have been getting particularly tough on foreigners who use drugs, so you should take this risk very seriously.

Note that travellers are frequently targeted in sting operations (usually for bribes) in Manali and other backpacker centres. Marijuana grows wild throughout India, but picking and smoking it is still an offence, except in towns where bhang is legally sold for religious rituals.

**Antisocial Behaviour**

Like many Western countries, India has started clamping down on antisocial behaviour. Smoking in public is now illegal in Delhi, Shimla, Gangtok and all of Kerala, and a number of cities have also banned

spitting and littering. The punishment for breaking these rules is a stiff (for locals) fine of at least Rs 100. This is variably enforced, but the police do have the power, so heed the street signs.

So far, restaurants are exempt from the smoking ban, but smoking is banned on the Delhi Metro and many other forms of public transport, and the penalties for breaking the ban are enforced. There are plans to eventually make the whole country smoke free, though this is highly unpopular with locals.

**MAPS**

Maps available inside India are fairly poor and some locally printed maps contain deliberate errors to confuse would-be invaders. Better map series include TTK Discover India, covering states and cities; **Nest & Wings** ([www.nestwings.com](http://www.nestwings.com)) for maps and guidebooks; and **Eicher** ([maps.eicherworld.com](http://maps.eicherworld.com)) for street atlases and city maps. The Kolkata-based **Survey of India** ([www.surveyofindia.gov.in](http://www.surveyofindia.gov.in)) also publishes decent city, state and country maps, but some titles are restricted for security reasons. **Nelles** ([www.nelles-verlag.de](http://www.nelles-verlag.de)) also produces good maps covering various regions of India. All of these maps are available at good bookshops, or you can buy them online from Delhi's **India Map Store** ([www.indiamapstore.com](http://www.indiamapstore.com)).

Throughout India, state-government tourist offices stock local maps, which are often dated and lacking in essential detail, but are good enough for general orientation.

**MONEY**

The Indian rupee (Rs) is divided into 100 paise (p), but paise coins are increasingly rare. Coins come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 25 and 50 paise, and Rs 1, 2 and 5; notes come in Rs 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 (this last bill can be hard to change outside banks). The Indian rupee is linked to a basket of currencies and its value is generally stable; see the inside front cover of this book for exchange rates.

ATMs linked to international networks are common in most towns and cities in India. However, carry cash or travellers cheques as backup in case the power goes down, the ATM is out of order, or you lose or break your plastic.

Remember, you must present your passport whenever you change currency or travellers cheques. Commission for foreign exchange is becoming increasingly rare; if it is charged,

the fee is nominal. For information about costs, see p24.

See p1133 for tips on keeping your money safe during your trip.

## ATMs

Modern 24-hour ATMs are found in most large towns and cities, though the ATM may not be in the same place as the bank branch. The most commonly accepted cards are Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus. Banks in India that reliably accept foreign cards include Citibank, HDFC, ICICI, UTI, HSBC, the Punjab National Bank and the State Bank of India. Away from major towns, always carry cash or travellers cheques as backup.

Bank impose higher charges on international transactions, but this may be cancelled out by the favourable exchange rates between banks. Reduce charges by making larger transactions less often. Always check in advance whether your card can access banking networks in India and ask for details of charges.

Note that several travellers have reported ATMs snatching back money if you don't remove it within around 30 seconds. Conversely, other machines can take more than 30 seconds to actually release cash, so don't panic if the money doesn't appear instantaneously.

The ATMs listed in this book's regional chapters accept foreign cards (but not necessarily all types of cards). Always keep the emergency lost-and-stolen numbers for your credit cards in a safe place, separate from your cards, and report any loss or theft immediately.

## Black Market

Black-market moneychangers do exist in India, but legal moneychangers are so common that there's no reason to use them, except to change small amounts of cash at land border crossings. As a rule, if someone comes up to you in the street and offers to change money, you're probably being set up for a scam.

## Cash

Major currencies such as US dollars, UK pounds and euros are easy to change throughout India, though some bank branches insist on travellers cheques only. A few banks also accept Australian, New Zealand and Canadian dollars, and Swiss francs. Private moneychangers accept a wider range of currencies, but Pakistani, Nepali and Bangladeshi cur-

rency can be harder to change away from the border. When travelling off the beaten track, always carry a decent stock of rupees.

Whenever changing money, check every note. Banks staple bills together into bricks, which puts a lot of wear on tear on the currency. Do not accept any filthy, ripped or disintegrating notes, as these may not be accepted as payment. If you get lumbered with such notes, change them to new bills at branches of the Reserve Bank of India in major cities.

Nobody in India ever seems to have change, so it's a good idea to maintain a stock of smaller currency. Try to stockpile Rs 10, 20 and 50 notes; change bigger bills into these denominations every time you change money.

Officially, you cannot take rupees out India, but this is laxly enforced. However, you can change any leftover rupees back into foreign currency, most easily at the airport (some banks have a Rs 1000 minimum). Note that some airport banks will only change a minimum of Rs 1000. You may require encashment certificates (below) or a credit-card receipt, and you may also have to show your passport and airline ticket.

## Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted at growing numbers of shops, upmarket restaurants, and midrange and top-end hotels, and you can also use them to pay for flights and train tickets. Cash advances on major credit cards are also possible at some banks without ATMs. However, be wary of scams; see p1132. MasterCard and Visa are the most widely accepted cards; for details about whether you can access home accounts in India, inquire at your bank before leaving.

## Encashment Certificates

By law, all foreign currency must be changed at official moneychangers or banks. For every foreign exchange transaction, you will receive an encashment certificate, which will allow you to re-exchange rupees into foreign currency when departing India (see above). You'll need to have encashment certificates totalling the amount of rupees you intend changing back to foreign currency. Printed receipts from ATMs may also be accepted as evidence of an international transaction at some banks. Keep a few rupees handy until you fly – airport services are disproportionately expensive.

Traditionally, money-exchange receipts have also been required when paying for tourist-quota train tickets in rupees, but this requirement has recently been relaxed.

### International Transfers

If you run out of money, someone at home can wire you money via moneychangers affiliated with **Moneygram** ([www.moneygram.com](http://www.moneygram.com)) or **Western Union** ([www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com)).

You'll need to call someone at home to transfer the money, and a hefty fee is added to the transaction. To collect cash, bring your passport, and the name and reference number of the person who sent the funds.

### Moneychangers

Private moneychangers are usually open for longer hours than banks, and they are found almost everywhere (many also double as internet cafés and travel agents). Compare rates with those at the bank, and check you are given the correct amount. In a scrape, some upmarket hotels may also change money, usually at well below the bank rate.

### Tippling, Baksheesh & Bargaining

In tourist restaurants or hotels, a service fee is usually already added to your bill and tipping is optional. Elsewhere, a tip is appreciated. Hotel bellboys expect around Rs 20 to carry bags, and hotel staff expect similar gratuities for services above and beyond the call of duty. It's not mandatory to tip taxi or rickshaw drivers, but it's good to tip drivers who are honest about the fare.

Baksheesh can be defined as a 'tip', and it covers everything from alms for beggars to unjustified demands for money for pointing out that the temple you are looking for is across the street. Beggars attach themselves to new arrivals in many Indian cities – whether you give or not is up to you, but try to treat people compassionately and consider what you might do if the positions were reversed.

Many Indians implore tourists not to hand out sweets, pens or money to children, as it encourages them to beg. This is often selfish giving – designed to make the traveller feel good rather than producing any positive benefit for the child. To make a lasting difference, donate to a school or charitable organisation (see p1155).

Apart from at fixed-price shops, bargaining is the norm; see the Art of Haggling, p1148.

### Travellers Cheques

All major brands are accepted in India, but some banks may only accept cheques from Amex and Thomas Cook. Pounds sterling and US dollars are the safest currencies, especially in smaller towns. Charges for changing travellers cheques vary from place to place and bank to bank.

Always keep an emergency cash stash in case you lose your travellers cheques, and keep a record of the cheques' serial numbers separate from your cheques, along with the proof-of-purchase slips, encashment vouchers and photocopied passport details. If you lose your cheques, contact the Amex or Thomas Cook office in Delhi (see p125).

To replace lost travellers cheques, you need the proof-of-purchase slip and the numbers of the missing cheques (some places require a photocopy of the police report and a passport photo). If you don't have the numbers of your missing cheques, Amex (or whichever company has issued them) will contact the place where you bought them.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

For useful tips and techniques on travel photography, read Lonely Planet's travel photography guides, including *Travel Photography*, *Landscape Travel Photography* and *People Travel Photography*.

#### Digital

Memory cards for digital camera are available from photographic shops in most large cities, and increasingly from shops in small places too. However, the quality of memory cards is variable – some do not carry the advertised amount of data. Expect to pay upwards of Rs 1000/1600 for a 512MB/1GB card. To be safe, regularly back up your memory card to CD; internet cafés offer this service for Rs 50 to 100 per disk. Some photographic shops make prints from digital photographs for roughly the standard print-and-processing charge.

#### Print & Slide

Colour-print film-processing facilities are readily available in most cities. Film is relatively cheap and the quality is usually good, but you'll only find colour-slide film in the major cities and tourist traps. On average, developing costs around Rs 6 per 10cm by 15cm print, plus Rs 15 to 20 for processing. Passport

photos are available from photo shops for around Rs 100 (10 to 12 shots).

Always check the use-by date on local film and slide stock. Make sure you get a sealed packet and that you're not handed a roll that's been sitting in a glass cabinet in the sunshine for the last few months. Be wary of buying film from street hawkers – unscrupulous characters have been known to load old/damaged film into new-looking canisters. It's best to only buy film from reputable stores – and preferably film that's been refrigerated.

### Restrictions

India is touchy about anyone taking photographs of military installations – this can include train stations, bridges, airports, military installations and sensitive border regions. Photography from the air is officially prohibited, though airlines rarely enforce this. On flights to strategically important destinations, cameras may be banned from the cabin (or you may need to remove the batteries).

Many places of worship – such as monasteries, temples and mosques – also prohibit photography. Respect these proscriptions and always ask when in doubt as taking photographs of forbidden images can cause serious offence. See p58 for the etiquette of photographing people.

### POST

India has the biggest postal network on earth, with over 155,618 post offices. Mail and poste restante services are generally good, although the speed of delivery will depend on the efficiency of any given office. Airmail is faster and more reliable than sea mail, although it's best to use courier services (such as DHL) to send and receive items of value; expect to pay around Rs 2700 per kilo to Europe, Australia or the USA. Private couriers are cheaper, but goods are often repacked into large packages to cut costs and things sometimes go missing.

### Receiving Mail

To receive mail in India, ask senders to address letters to you with your surname in capital letters and underlined, followed by poste restante, GPO (main post office), and the city or town in question. Many 'lost' letters are simply misfiled under given/first names, so check under both your names and ask senders to provide a return address in case you don't collect your mail. Letters sent via

poste restante are generally held for around one month before being returned. To claim mail, you'll need to show your passport. It's best to have any parcels sent to you by registered post.

### Sending Mail

Posting aerogrammes/postcards to anywhere overseas costs Rs 8.50/8 and airmail letters cost from Rs 15 (1 to 20 grams). For postcards, stick on the stamps *before* actually writing on them, as post offices can give you as many as four stamps per card. Sending a letter by registered post adds Rs 15 to the stamp cost.

Posting parcels is quite straightforward; prices vary depending on weight and you have a choice of airmail (delivery in one to three weeks), sea mail (two to four months), or Surface Air-Lifted (SAL) – a curious hybrid where parcels travel by both air and sea (one month). Parcels must be packed up in white linen and the seams sealed with wax. Local tailors offer this service, or there may be a parcel service at the post office. Carry a permanent marker to write on the parcel any information requested by the desk. The post office can provide the necessary customs declaration forms and these must be stitched or pasted to the parcel. If the contents are a gift under the value of Rs 1000, you won't have to pay duty at the delivery end. Never try to send drugs by post – the police will track the package to your door and bust you when you open it.

Parcel post has a maximum of 20kg to 30kg depending on the destination, and charges vary depending on whether you go by air or sea. As an indication, a 1kg parcel costs the following prices (in rupees):

Destination	Airmail	SAL	Sea mail
<b>Australia</b>	570	535	450
<b>Europe</b>	645	525	500
<b>USA</b>	645	595	480

It is sometimes cheaper to send packages under 2kg in weight as registered letters (packed the same way as parcels). You also have the option of the EMS (express mail service; delivery within three days) for around 30% more than the normal airmail price.

Books or printed matter can go by inexpensive book post (maximum 5kg), but the package must be wrapped with a hole that reveals the contents for inspection by

customs – tailors are experienced in creating this in such a way that nothing falls out. Overseas rates depend on the weight, not the country – a 1kg book-post parcel costs just Rs 260 to any international destination. The website for **India Post** ([www.indiapost.gov.in](http://www.indiapost.gov.in)) has an online calculator for other international postal tariffs.

Be cautious with places that offer to mail things to your home address after you have bought them. Government emporiums are usually fine, but in most other places it pays to do the posting yourself.

## SHOPPING

India is an Aladdin's cave of delights for shoppers, with shops and markets dripping with precious metals, gemstones, silks, pearls, carpets and statues of Indian gods. The hard part is carting it all home!

Every region has its own special crafts, usually showcased in state emporiums and cottage industries' cooperatives. These shops normally charge very fair fixed prices; everywhere else, you'll have to bargain (see the *Art of Haggling*, p1148). Opening hours for shops vary.

Be very cautious when buying items that include delivery to your country of residence, and be wary of being led to shops by touts (see p1133). Exporting antiques is prohibited (p1147).

Only a small proportion of the money brought to India by tourism reaches people in rural areas. You can make a greater contribution by shopping at community cooperatives, set up to protect and promote traditional cottage industries, and to provide education, training and a sustainable livelihood for rural families. Many of these projects focus on refugees, low-caste women, the disabled and other socially disadvantaged groups. Prices are usually fixed and a share of the money goes directly into social projects like schools, healthcare and training. Shopping at the national network of Khadi & Village Industries emporiums will also contribute to rural communities.

### Bronze Figures, Pottery, Stone Carving & Terracotta

In southern India and parts of the Himalaya, small images of deities are created by the age-old lost-wax process. A wax figure is made, a mould is formed around it, and the wax

is melted and poured out and replaced with molten metal; the mould is then broken open to reveal the figure inside. Figures of Shiva as dancing Nataraja are the most popular items, but you can also find images of Buddha and numerous deities from the Hindu pantheon.

The West Bengalese also employ the lost-wax process to make Dokra tribal bell sculptures, while the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh produces interesting human and animal figures. In Buddhist areas, you can find very striking bronze statues of Buddha and the Tantric gods, finished off with finely polished and painted faces.

In Mamallapuram (p1050) in Tamil Nadu, craftsmen using local granite and soapstone have revived the ancient artistry of the Pallava sculptors; souvenirs range from tiny stone elephants to enormous deity statues weighing half a tonne. Tamil Nadu is also known for the bronze ware from Thanjavur (p1071) and Trichy (Tiruchirappalli).

Kolkata and Bihar produce attractive terracotta work, ranging from vases and decorative flowerpots to terracotta images of deities and children's toys.

Jaipur (p177) in Rajasthan specialises in blue-glazed pottery with floral and geometric motifs. At temples across India you can buy small clay or plaster effigies of Kali, Durga and other deities.

### Carpets

Artisans have been producing carpets since at least the Mughal era, and carpet-making is a living craft, with workshops across the country producing fine wool- and silkwork in traditional and modern designs. The best carpets are produced in Kashmir and the Buddhist heartlands of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and West Bengal. Carpet-making is also a major revenue earner for Tibetan refugees; most refugee settlements have cooperative carpet workshops. You can also find reproductions of tribal Turkmen and Afghan designs in Uttar Pradesh. Antique carpets usually aren't antique – unless you buy from an internationally reputable dealer, stick to new carpets.

The price of a carpet will be determined by the number and the size of the hand-tied knots, the range of dyes and colours, the intricacy of the design and the material. Silk carpets cost more and look more luxurious, but wool carpets last longer. For more infor-



## CARPETS & CHILD LABOUR

Children have been employed as carpet weavers in India for centuries, and many childcare charities from Europe and America are campaigning against the use of child labour by the carpet industry. There are thought to be at least 30,000 child carpet weavers in India, and 10% of these children are believed to have been trafficked from neighbouring countries.

Unfortunately, the issue is more complicated than it first appears. In many areas, education is often not an option, for both economic and cultural reasons, and the alternative to child labour may not be school but hunger for the whole family. We encourage travellers to buy from carpet weaving cooperatives that employ adult weavers *and* provide education for their children, breaking the cycle of child labour.

The **Carpet Export Promotion Council of India** ([www.india-carpets.com](http://www.india-carpets.com)) is campaigning to eliminate child labour from the carpet industry by penalising factories that use children and by founding schools to provide an alternative to carpetmaking. Ultimately, the only thing that will stop child-labour completely is compulsory education for children. However, the economic and social obstacles are significant.

Unfortunately for the buyer, there is no easy way of knowing whether a carpet has been made by children. Shops are unlikely to admit using child labour and most of the international labelling schemes for carpets have been discredited. The carpets produced by Tibetan refugee cooperatives are almost always made by adults, but Uttar Pradesh is the undisputed capital of child labour in India. Government emporiums and charitable cooperatives are by far the best places to buy.

mation, see p359. Expect to pay upwards of US\$200 for a good quality 90cm by 1.5m (or 90cm by 1.8m, depending on the region) wool carpet, and US\$2000 for a similar sized carpet in silk. Tibetan carpets are slightly cheaper, reflecting the relative simplicity of the designs; many refugee cooperatives sell 90cm by 1.5m carpets for US\$100 or less.

Many people buy carpets under the mistaken belief that they can be sold for a profit back home. Unless you really know your carpets and the carpet market in your home country, buy a carpet because you love it. Many places can ship carpets home for a fee – though it may be safest to ship things independently to avoid scams – or you can carry them in the plane's hold (allow 5kg to 10kg of your baggage allowance for a 3ft by 5ft carpet).

In both Kashmir and Rajasthan, you can also find coarsely woven woollen *numdas* (or *namdas*), which are much cheaper than knotted carpets. Various parts of India produce flat weave *dhurries* (kilimlike cotton rugs), including Kashmir, Himalaya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Kashmiris also produce striking *gabbas*, made from chain-stitched wool or silk.

## Jewellery

Virtually every town in India has at least one bangle shop. These sell an extraordinary

variety of bangles made from plastic, glass, brass, bone, shell and wood for just Rs 20 to 200 for a set of 12. Traditionally, these are worn continuously until they break – Hindu widows break all their bangles as part of the mourning process.

Heavy folk-art silver jewellery can be found in parts of the country, particularly in Rajasthan – Jaipur (p176), Udaipur (p227) and Pushkar (p197) are good places to find silver jewellery pitched at foreign tastes. Jaipur is also renowned for its precious and semiprecious gems – and gem scams (see p1132 and p177). Throughout India you can find finely crafted gold and silver rings, anklets, earrings, toe rings, necklaces and bangles, and pieces can often be crafted to order.

Chunky Tibetan jewellery made from silver (or white metal) and semiprecious stones is sold all over India. Many pieces feature Buddhist motifs and text in Tibetan script, including the famous mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Some of the pieces sold in Tibetan centres such as McLeod Ganj and Leh are genuine antiques but there is huge industry in India, Nepal and China making artificially aged souvenirs, so buy something because you like it, not for its antique value. If you feel like being creative, loose beads of agate, turquoise, carnelian and silver are widely available. Buddhist meditation beads made of gems, wood or inlaid bone also make nifty souvenirs.



Pearls are produced by most seaside states. They're a speciality of Hyderabad (p947) and pearls are crafted into jewellery in many other Indian states. You'll find them at most state emporiums. Prices vary depending on the colour and shape – you pay more for pure white pearls or rare colours like black and red, and perfectly round pearls are more expensive than misshapen or elongated pearls. However, the quirky shapes of Indian pearls are often more alluring than the perfect round balls. A single strand of seeded pearls can cost as little as Rs 200, but better-quality pearls start at Rs 600.

Cuttack in Orissa (p657) is famed for its lacy silver filigree work known as *tarakasi*. A silver framework is made and then in-filled with delicate curls and ribbons of thin silver.

### Leatherwork

As cows are sacred in India, leatherwork is made from buffalos, camels, goats or some other substitute. Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh is the country's major leatherwork centre.

Chappals, those wonderful curly-toed leather sandals found all over India, are a particularly popular buy. They are sold in most cities, but they are particularly good in the Maharashtran cities of Kolhapur, Pune and Matheran; prices start at around Rs 150. The states of Punjab and Rajasthan (especially Jaipur, p176) are famed for jootis (traditional pointy-toed shoes) – buy a pair, if only as part of your genie costume for fancy-dress parties. Most big cities offer striking modern leather footwear at very competitive prices, often stitched with thousands of sequins – great partywear!

In Bikaner in Rajasthan, artisans decorate camel hide with gold to produce beautiful mirror frames, boxes and bottles, while in Indore (p699) in Madhya Pradesh, craftspeople stretch leather over wire and cloth frameworks to make cute toy animals. In all the big cities you'll find well-made, moderately priced leather handbags, belts and other leather accessories.

### Metalwork & Marble

You'll find copper and brassware throughout India. Candleholders, trays, bowls, tankards and ashtrays are particularly popular buys. In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the brass is inlaid with exquisite designs in red, green and blue enamel. *Bidri* – a form of damascening where silver is inlaid in gunmetal (an alloy of zinc, copper, lead and tin) – is used to make

boxes and ornaments in Bidar in Karnataka; see Bidri: the Art of Bidar, p934.

Many Tibetan religious objects are created by inlaying silver in copper; prayer wheels, ceremonial horns and traditional document cases are all inexpensive buys. Resist the urge to buy *kangling* (Tibetan horns) and *kapala* (ceremonial bowls) made from inlaid human leg bones and skulls – they are illegal!

In all Indian towns, you can find *kadhahi* (Indian woks, also known as *balti*) and other items of cookware for incredibly low prices. Beaten-brass pots are particularly attractive, and steel storage vessels, copper-bottomed cooking pans and steel thali trays are also popular souvenirs.

The people of Bastar in Chhattisgarh discovered a method of smelting iron some 35,000 years ago. Similar techniques are used today to create abstract depictions of animal and human figures, which are often made into functional items such as lamp stands and coat racks.

A sizable cottage industry has sprung up in Agra (p406) reproducing the ancient Mughal art form of *pietra dura* (inlaying marble with semiprecious stones). The inspiration for most pieces comes from the Taj Mahal. Expect to pay about Rs 400 for a jewellery box or miniature model of the Taj; chess sets start at Rs 2000.

### Musical Instruments

Quality Indian musical instruments are available in the larger cities, especially Kolkata (p512), Varanasi (p436) and Delhi (p154). Prices vary, but the higher the price the better the quality – and sound – of the instrument.

Decent quality tabla sets with a wooden tabla (tuned treble drum) and metal *doogri* (bass tone drum) cost upwards of Rs 3000. Cheaper sets are generally heavier and sound inferior.

Sitars range from Rs 4000 to 15,000 – a good starter sitar with quality inlay work will cost upwards of Rs 7000. The sound of each sitar will vary with the wood used and the shape of the gourd, so try a few. Some cheaper sitars can warp in colder or hotter climates. On any sitar, make sure the strings ring clearly and check the gourd carefully for damage. Spare string sets, sitar plectrums and a screw-in 'amplifier' gourd are sensible additions.

Other popular instruments include the *shennai* (Indian flute; Rs 250 upwards), the *sarod* (like an Indian lute; from Rs 8000), the

## PROHIBITED EXPORTS

To protect India's cultural heritage, the export of many antiques is prohibited. Many 'old' objects are fine, but the difficulties begin if something is verifiably more than 100 years old. Reputable antique dealers know the laws and can make arrangements for an export-clearance certificate for any old items that you are permitted to export. If in doubt, contact Delhi's **Archaeological Survey of India** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-23010822; asi@del3.vsnl.net.in; Janpath; ☹ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) next to the National Museum. The rules may seem unfair, but the loss of artworks and traditional buildings in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan due to the international trade in antiques and carved windows and doorframes is shocking. Look for quality reproductions instead.

The Indian Wildlife Protection Act bans any form of wildlife trade. Don't buy any products that endanger threatened species and habitats – doing so can result in heavy fines and even imprisonment. This includes ivory, *shahtoosh* shawls (made from the down of rare Tibetan antelopes), and anything made from the fur, skin, horns or shell of any endangered species. Realistically, the only way to be sure is to avoid animal products completely. Products made from certain rare plants are also forbidden for export.

Note that your home country may have additional laws forbidding the import of restricted items and wildlife parts. The penalties can be severe so know the law before you buy.

harmonium (from Rs 3500) and the *esraj* (like an upright violin; from Rs 3000). Conventional violins are a bargain – prices range from Rs 3000 to 15,000.

## Paintings

Reproductions of Indian miniature paintings are widely available, but quality varies – the best are almost as good as the real thing, while cheaper ones have less detail and use inferior colours. Beware of paintings purported to be antique – it's highly unlikely, and paintings over 100 years old can't be exported from India (see above). Udaipur (p227) and Bikaner in Rajasthan have particularly good shops specialising in modern reproductions on silk and paper, or you can browse Delhi's state emporiums (p152).

In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, you'll come across miniature paintings on leaf skeletons depicting domestic and rural scenes and deities. In Andhra Pradesh you can buy exquisite cloth paintings called *kalamkari*, which depict deities and historic events; see [www.kalamkariart.org](http://www.kalamkariart.org) for more on this interesting artform.

The artists' community of Raghurajpur (p648) near Puri (Orissa) preserves the age-old art of *pattachitra* painting. Cotton or *tas-sar* (silk cloth) is covered with a mixture of gum and chalk; it's then polished, and images of deities and scenes from Hindu legend are painted on with exceedingly fine brushes. Orissa also produces *chitra pothi*, where images are etched onto dried palm-leaf sections with a fine stylus.

Bihar's unique folk art is Mithila (or Madhubani) painting, an ancient artform preserved by the women of Madhubani (see p554). These interesting records of rural life are most easily found in Patna; prices start at Rs 300 for a small unframed picture on paper.

In all Tibetan Buddhist areas, including Sikkim, parts of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, you can find exquisite *thangkas* (rectangular Tibetan paintings on cloth) of Tantric Buddhist deities and ceremonial mandalas. Some perfectly reproduce the glory of the murals in India's medieval gompas (Buddhist monasteries); others look crude on closer inspection. Prices vary, but bank on at least Rs 3000 for a decent quality *thangka* of A3 size, much more for large intricate *thangkas*. The selling of antique *thangkas* is illegal, and you would be unlikely to find the real thing anyway.

Throughout the country (especially in capital cities) look out for shops and galleries selling brilliant contemporary paintings by local artists. Mumbai (p775) is the centre of the Indian contemporary art scene.

## Papier-Mâché

Artisans in Srinagar (p358) have been producing lacquered papier-mâché for centuries, and papier-mâché-ware is now sold across India. The basic shape is made in a mould from layers of paper (often recycled newsprint), then painted with fine brushes and lacquered for protection. Prices depend upon the complexity and quality of the design, and

### THE ART OF HAGGLING

Government emporiums, department stores and modern shopping centres usually charge fixed prices. Anywhere else you need to bargain, and bargain hard. Shopkeepers in tourist hubs are accustomed to travellers who have lots of money and little time to spend it, so you can expect to be charged double or triple the 'real' price. Souvenir shops are probably the least likely places of all to charge you the real going rate.

The first 'rule' to haggling is never to show too much interest in the item you want to buy. Secondly, don't buy the first item that takes your fancy. Wander around and price things, but don't make it too obvious – if you return to the first shop the vendor will know it's because they are the cheapest and the price won't go down much lower.

Decide how much you would be happy paying and then express a casual interest in buying. If you have absolutely no idea of what something should really cost, start by slashing the price by half. The vendor will make a show of being shocked at such a low offer, but the game is set and you can now work up and down respectively in small increments until you reach a mutually agreeable price. You'll find that many shopkeepers lower their so-called final price if you head out of the shop saying you'll 'think about it'.

Haggling is a way of life in India, but it should never be an angry process. Keep in mind exactly how much a rupee is worth in your home currency to put things in perspective. If a vendor seems to be charging an unreasonably high price, simply look elsewhere.

the amount of gold leaf used. Many pieces feature patterns of animals and flowers, or hunting scenes from Mughal miniature paintings. You can find papier-mâché bowls, boxes, letter holders, coasters, trays, lamps and Christmas decorations (stars, crescent moons, balls and bells). Weight for weight, these are probably the most cost-effective souvenirs in India but you need to transport them carefully. A small jewellery box will only cost around Rs 150.

Rajasthan is *the* place to buy colourful papier-mâché puppets. These are typically sold as a pair – depicting a husband and wife – and are traditionally used in *kathputli* (wooden doll) puppet dramas. Prices start from Rs 150 a pair.

### Shawls, Silk & Saris

Indian shawls are famously warm and lightweight – they're often better than the best down jackets. It's worth buying one to use as an emergency blanket on cold night journeys. Shawls are made from all sorts of wool, from lamb's-wool to fibres woven from yak, goat and angora-rabbit hair. Many are embroidered with intricate designs. However, *shahtoosh* shawls should be avoided, as rare Tibetan antelopes are killed to provide the shawl's wool.

The undisputed capital of the Indian shawl is the Kullu Valley (p305) in Himachal Pradesh, with dozens of women's coopera-

tives producing very fine woollen shawls. Prices range from about Rs 200 for a simple lamb's-wool shawl to Rs 6000 for a stylish angora shawl. The intricately embroidered shawls worn by village women cost as much as Rs 10,000.

Ladakh and Kashmir are major centres for *pashmina* (wool shawl) production – you'll pay at least Rs 6000 for the authentic 'slides through a wedding ring' article. Be aware that many so-called *pashmina* shawls are actually made from a mixture of yarns. Shawls from the northeast states are famously warm, with bold geometric designs. In Sikkim and West Bengal, you may also find fantastically embroidered Bhutanese shawls. Gujarat's Kutch region produces some distinctive woollen shawls, patterned with subtle embroidery and mirrorwork. Handmade shawls and tweeds are also found in Ranikhet (p478) and Almora (p481) in Uttarakhand.

Saris are a very popular souvenir, and they can be readily adapted to other purposes. Real silk saris are the most expensive, and the silk usually needs to be washed before it becomes soft. The 'silk capital' of India is Kanchipuram (p1051) in Tamil Nadu, but you can also find fine silk saris from Varanasi (p436) and Kolkata. Assam is renowned for its *muga*, *endi* and *pat* silks (produced by different species of silkworms), which are widely available in Guwahati (p599). You'll pay Rs 3000 or more for a quality embroidered silk sari.

The town of Patan (p728) in Gujarat is the centre for the ancient and laborious craft of *patola*-making – every thread in these fine silk saris is individually hand dyed before weaving, and patterned borders are woven with real gold. Slightly less involved versions are produced in Rajkot (p758) – only the warp threads are dyed. Gold thread is also used in the famous *kota doria* saris from Kota (p213) in Rajasthan.

Aurangabad (p808) in Maharashtra is the traditional centre for the production of *himroo* shawls, sheets and saris, which are made from a blend of cotton, silk and silver thread; prices start at Rs 500. Silk and gold-thread sari produced at Paithan near Aurangabad are some of India's finest – prices range from around Rs 6000 to a mind-blowing Rs 300,000. Other states that are famous for sari production include Madhya Pradesh for *maheshwar* (cotton sari from Maheshwar) and *chanderi* (silk sari from Chanderi) saris, and Bishnapur in West Bengal for *baluchari* saris, which use a traditional form of weaving with untwisted silk thread.

Child labour is sometimes used in silk production; see p1052 for more information.

## Textiles

Textile production is India's major industry, and around 40% of production takes place at the village level, where it is known as *khadi* (homespun cloth) – hence the government-backed *khadi* emporiums around the country. These inexpensive superstores sell all sorts of items made from homespun cloth, including the popular Nehru jackets and kurta pyjamas (long shirt and loose-fitting trousers), and sales benefit rural communities.

You will find a truly amazing variety of weaving and embroidery techniques around the country. In tourist centres such as Goa, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, textiles are stitched into items such as handbags, wall hangings, cushion covers, bedspreads, clothes and much more.

Appliqué is an ancient art in India, with most states producing their own version, usually featuring abstract or anthropomorphic patterns. The traditional lampshades and *pandals* (tents) used in weddings and festivals are produced using the same technique.

In Adivasi (tribal) areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan, small pieces of mirrored glass are embroidered onto fabric, creating vivid bags,

cushion covers and wall hangings. Jamnagar (p754) is famous for its vibrant *bandhani* (tie-dye work), used for saris, scarfs, and anything else that stays still for long enough. Ahmedabad (p725) is a good place to buy Gujarati textiles, and Vadodara (p731) is famous for block-printed textiles used for bedspreads and dress material.

Block-printed and woven fabrics are sold by fabric shops all over India, often in vivid colours. Each region has its own speciality. The India-wide chain-store **Fabindia** ([www.fabindia.com](http://www.fabindia.com)) works to preserve traditional patterns and fabrics, transforming them into highly accessible items for home decoration and Indian and Western fashions.

Orissa has a reputation for bright appliqué and *ikat* (a Southeast Asian technique where thread is tie-dyed before weaving). The town of Pipli (p643), between Bhubaneswar and Puri, produces some particularly eye-catching appliqué work. The techniques used to create *kalamkari* cloth paintings in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat are also used to make striking wall hangings and lamp shades.

Lucknow (p419) in Uttar Pradesh is noted for hand-woven embroidered *chikan* cloth, which features incredibly intricate floral motifs. Punjab is famous for the attractively folksy *phulkari* embroidery (flowerwork with stitches in diagonal, vertical and horizontal directions), while women in West Bengal use chain stitches to make complex figurative designs called *kantha*. A similar technique is used to make *gabba*, women's kurtas and men's wedding jackets in Kashmir.

Batik can be found throughout India. It is often used for saris and *salwar kameez* (a long dresslike tunic worn over baggy trousers). City boutiques produce trendy *salwar kameez* for women and the similar *kurta Punjabi* for men in a staggering array of fabrics and styles. Big Indian cities such as Mumbai (p792) and Delhi are great places to pick up haute couture by talented Indian designers, as well as moderately priced Western fashions.

## Woodcarving

Woodcarving is a living art all over India. In Kashmir, walnut wood is used to make finely carved wooden screens, tables, jewellery boxes and trays, inspired by the decorative trim of houseboats. Willow cricket bats are another inexpensive Kashmiri speciality (from Rs 150).

Sandalwood carvings of Hindu deities is one of Karnataka's specialities, but you'll pay a king's ransom for the real thing – a 10cm-high Ganesha costs around Rs 3000 in sandalwood, compared to Rs 300 in kadamb wood. However, the sandalwood will release fragrance for years. Wood inlay is one of Bihar's oldest crafts – you'll find wooden wall hangings, tabletops, trays and boxes inlaid with metals and bone. The religious icons produced from wood inlay in Goa also have a certain chintzy appeal.

In Udaipur (p227) in Rajasthan, you can buy brightly painted figures of Hindu gods carved from mango wood. In many parts of Rajasthan you can also find fabric printing blocks carved from teak wood. The carved wooden massage wheels and rollers available at many Hindu pilgrimage sites are also good presents.

Buddhist woodcarvings are a speciality of Sikkim, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh and all Tibetan refugee areas. You'll find wall plaques of the eight lucky signs, dragons and *chaam* masks, used for ritual dances. Most of the masks are artless reproductions, but you can sometimes find genuine *chaam* masks made from lightweight whitewood or papier-mâché from Rs 3000 upwards.

## Other Buys

Indian scents and spices are famous. Most towns have shops and markets selling locally produced spices at cash-and-carry prices. Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu produce most of the spices that go into garam masala (the 'hot mix' used to flavour Indian curries), while the northeast states and Sikkim are famous for black cardamoms and cinnamon bark.

Attar (essential oil made from flowers) shops can be found around India. Mysore (p900) is famous for its sandalwood oil, and Mumbai is a major centre for the trade of traditional fragrances, including valuable *oud*, made from a rare mould that grows on the bark of the agarwood tree. Tamil Nadu, Ooty and Kodaikanal produce aromatic and medicinal oils from herbs, flowers and eucalyptus.

Indian incense is exported worldwide, with Bengaluru and Mysore (p900) being major producers. Incense from Auroville, an ashram near Puducherry, is of particularly high quality. Beware, however, that there are many inferior copies of the quality brands.

One speciality of Goa is feni (liquor distilled from coconut milk or cashews), a head-spinning spirit that often comes in decorative bottles. Sikkimese liquors are also good and many come in funky-shaped bottles – the 1L bottle of Old Monk rum comes in a monk-shaped bottle with a screw-off head. Prices for Indian spirits start at around Rs 200 per litre. India is also gaining a reputation for the wines produced by vineyards in Maharashtra; Sula, Grover and Chateau Indage are all good labels. Fruit wines from Himachal Pradesh are also interesting quaffs.

Quality Indian tea is sold in Darjeeling (p541) and Kalimpong in West Bengal, Assam and Sikkim, as well as parts of South India.

In most traveller centres, you'll find traditional clay chillums (pipes of hookahs). Smoking and possessing drugs is illegal but buying the paraphernalia is not – however, used paraphernalia can land you in a lot of trouble with customs when you get back home.

In Bhopal (p687) in Madhya Pradesh, colourful *jari* shoulder bags, embroidered with beads, are a speciality. Also on the portables front, the Northeast States are noted for their beautiful hand-woven baskets and wickerwork – each tribe has its own unique basket shape. Another unique souvenir is a tribal bow and arrow, easily purchased in Shillong.

Jodhpur (p240) is famed for its antiques, with numerous large showrooms selling window frames, ornaments and furnishings. We recommend only buying reproductions – the export of many kinds of antiques is banned to preserve India's cultural heritage. Bikaner, Mumbai (p792) and Delhi also have shops selling antiques, while occasional Raj gems show up in Kolkata's auction rooms (p511). Better dealers may be able to arrange export licenses.

In towns with Buddhist populations, such as McLeod Ganj, Leh, Manali, Gangtok, Kalimpong and Darjeeling, keep an eye out for 'Buddha shops' selling religious objects such as prayer flags, wall hangings, trumpets, drums, singing bowls, hand-bells, prayer wheels and *thangkas* (see p1147), all of which make terrific souvenirs.

Fine-quality handmade paper – often made into cards, boxes and notebooks – is available in Puducherry (p1063), Darjeeling and McLeod Ganj (p328). Lavishly embellished Indian cards and paper and envelope sets are available in Delhi's Chowri Bazaar (p153) and Mumbai's Chimanlals (p793).

Hats are a popular buy through India – the Assamese make decorated reed-pith sun hats, and Tibetan refugees produce woollen hats, gloves and scarves, which are sold all over India. Also popular are the traditional caps worn by men and women from India's Himalayan tribes; they're available in many towns in Himachal Pradesh for under Rs 150.

You can find a phenomenal range of books in India, including excellent cook books and glossy coffee-table photo books. CDs by local musicians are also good value, costing Rs 100 or less – perennially popular artists include Ravi Shankar (sitar), Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (traditional Urdu vocals) and Nawang Khechog (traditional Tibetan flutist). Pirate copies of Western CDs are available in tourist towns, along with original and pirate copies of DVD movies, both Bollywood and international.

## SOLO TRAVELLERS

Tourist hubs such as Goa, Rajasthan, Manali, McLeod Ganj, Leh, Agra, Kerala and Varanasi are good places for solo travellers to network. The main traveller hotels and restaurants are good places to swap stories, get up-to-the-minute travel tips and find people to travel with. You might also try advertising for travel companions on Lonely Planet's **Thorntree forum** (<http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com>). Throughout India, people tend to move in the same direction, so you'll probably see the same faces over and over again on your trip.

Although most solo travellers experience no major problems in India, some less honourable souls (locals and travellers alike) view lone tourists as an easy target for theft. Don't be paranoid, but like anywhere else in the world, it's wise to stay on your toes in unfamiliar surroundings.

Perhaps the most significant issue facing solo travellers is cost. Single-room rates at guesthouses and hotels are sometimes not much lower than double rates; some mid-range and top-end places don't even offer a single tariff. However, it's always worth trying to negotiate a lower rate for single occupancy.

In terms of transport, you'll save money if you find others to share taxis and autorickshaws. This is also advisable if you intend hiring a car with driver.

For important information specific to women, see p1160.

## TELEPHONE

There are few payphones in India, but private PCO/STD/ISD call booths do the same job, offering inexpensive local, interstate and international calls at much lower prices than calls made from hotel rooms. Many booths are open 24 hours, and a digital meter displays how much the call is costing and provides a printed receipt when the call is finished. Faxes can be sent from some call centres, or from the local telephone exchange or BSNL Customer Service Centre.

Call centres charge the full rate from around 9am to 8pm. After 8pm the cost slides, with the cheapest time to call being between 11pm and 6am. Interstate calls are half-price on Sunday. Direct international calls from call booths range from Rs 22 to 40 per minute depending on the country you are calling. Hotels charge much more all the time. International calls for as little as Rs 5 per minute can be made through internet cafés using Net2phone, Skype and other net-phone services.

Some places also offer a 'call-back' service – you ring home, provide the phone number of the booth and wait for people at home to call you back, for a fee of Rs 5 to 10 on top of the cost of the preliminary call.

India has both **White Pages** ([www.indiawhitepages.com](http://www.indiawhitepages.com)) and **Yellow Pages** ([www.indiayellowpages.com](http://www.indiayellowpages.com)) online.

Note that getting a line can be difficult in remote country and mountain areas – an engaged signal may just mean that the exchange is overloaded, so keep trying.

## Mobile Phones

India is going mobile-phone crazy and there is roaming coverage for international GSM phones in most large towns and cities. Mobile phone numbers in India usually have 10 digits, typically starting with 9. To avoid expensive roaming costs (often highest for incoming calls), get hooked up to the local mobile-phone network. Mobiles bought in Western countries are often locked to a particular network; you'll have to get the phone unlocked, or buy a local phone (available from Rs 2300) to use an Indian SIM card.

In most towns you simply buy a prepaid mobile-phone kit (SIM card and phone number, plus an allocation of calls) for around Rs 150 from a phone shop or local PCO/STD/ISD booths, internet cafés or grocery stores.



Thereafter, you must purchase new credits on that network, sold as scratch-cards in the same shops and call centres. Credit must usually be used within a set time limit and costs vary with the amount of credit on the card. The amount you pay for a credit top-up is not the amount you get on your phone – state taxes and service charges come off first. For some networks, recharge cards are being replaced by direct credit, where you pay the vendor and the credit is deposited straight to your phone – ask which system is in use before you buy.

Calls made within the state or city in which you bought the SIM card are cheap – less than Rs 1 per minute – and you can call internationally for less than Rs 25 per minute. SMS messaging is even cheaper. The more credit you have on your phone, the cheaper the call rate. However, some travellers have reported unreliable signals and problems with international texting (with messages or replies being delayed or failing to get through).

The most popular (and reliable) companies are Airtel, Hutch (Orange in some states), Idea and BSNL. Locals swear BSNL is the best. Note that most SIM cards are state specific; they can be used in other states, but you pay for calls at roaming rates and you will be charged for incoming calls as well as outgoing calls.

As the mobile-phone industry is evolving, mobile rates, suppliers and coverage are all likely to develop over the life of this book.

## Phone Codes

Regular phone numbers have an area code followed by up to eight digits. The government is slowly trying to bring all numbers in India onto the same system, so area codes may change and new digits added to numbers with limited warning. It pays to keep abreast of new developments as you travel round the country.

To make a call *to* India from overseas, dial the international access code of the country you're in, then 91 (international country code for India), then the area code (drop the initial zero when calling from abroad), then the local number.

To make an international call *from* India, dial 00 (international access code from India), then the country code of the country you are calling, then the area code and the local number.

Also available is the Home Country Direct service, which gives you access to the international operator in your home country. For the price of a local call, you can then make reverse-charge (collect) or phonocard calls. The number is typically constructed ☎000 + the country code of your home country + 17. Some countries and their numbers:

Country	Number
Australia	☎ 0006117
Canada	☎ 000167
Germany	☎ 0004917
Italy	☎ 0003917
Japan	☎ 0008117
Netherlands	☎ 0003117
New Zealand	☎ 0006417
Spain	☎ 0003417
UK	☎ 0004417
USA	☎ 000117

## TIME

India is 5½ hours ahead of GMT/UTC, 4½ hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time (EST) and 10½ hours ahead of American EST. The local standard time is known as IST (Indian Standard Time), although many affectionately dub it 'Indian Stretchable Time'. The floating half hour was added to maximise daylight hours over such a vast country. See the world time zones map, pp1234–5.

## TOILETS

Public toilets are generally confined to the major cities and tourist sites. The cleanest toilets are at restaurants and fast-food chains, museums, upmarket shopping complexes and cinemas. There are public urinals and squat toilets in many towns (an entry fee of Rs 1 to Rs 2 applies), but they tend to be quite filthy. Upmarket restaurants almost always have sit-down toilets, but be sure to carry your own toilet paper in case there is just a tap and a jug; see p1127 for more on Indian toilets.

When it comes to effluent etiquette, locals prefer the 'hand-and-water' technique, which involves cleaning your bottom with a small jug of water and your left hand. If you choose to do the same, carry some soap for hand-washing. If you prefer to use toilet paper, it is widely available in cities and towns. However, paper (as well as sanitary



napkins and tampons) goes in the bin beside the toilet, not into the narrow and easily-blocked drains.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

### Local Tourist Offices

In addition to the excellent Government of India tourist offices, each state maintains its own network of tourist offices. These vary in their efficiency and usefulness – some are run by enthusiastic souls who go out of their way to help, others are basically a vehicle for the sale of State Tourism Development Corporation tours. Most of the tourist offices have free brochures and often a free (or inexpensive) local map. Booklets listing state-owned tourist bungalows and hotels are available for free or for a small fee.

The first stop for information should be the tourism website of the Government of India, **Incredible India** ([www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org)). Here you'll find information in English, French, German, Spanish, Korean and Hindi. For details of regional offices around India, click on 'Links' at the bottom of the homepage. You can also find useful information on the official state government websites; there's a list on [india.gov.in/knowindia/districts.php](http://india.gov.in/knowindia/districts.php).

### Tourist Offices Abroad

The Government of India operates the following tourist offices abroad.

**Australia** (☎ 02-9264 4855; [info@indiatourism.com.au](mailto:info@indiatourism.com.au); Level 2, Piccadilly, 210 Pitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

**Canada** (☎ 416-962 3787; [indiatourism@bellnet.ca](mailto:indiatourism@bellnet.ca); 60 Bloor St, West Ste 1003, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 3B8)

**France** (☎ 01 45 23 30 45; [indtourparis@aol.com](mailto:indtourparis@aol.com); 11-13 Blvd Haussmann, F-75009 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 069-2429490; [info@india-tourism.com](mailto:info@india-tourism.com); Basler Strasse 48, D-60329 Frankfurt am-Main 1)

**Italy** (☎ 02-8053506; [info@indiatourismmilan.com](mailto:info@indiatourismmilan.com); Via Albricci 9, Milan 20122)

**Japan** (☎ 03-3571 5062; [indtour@blue.ocn.ne.jp](mailto:indtour@blue.ocn.ne.jp); Art Masters Ginza Bldg, 6th-9th fl, 6-5-12 Ginza, Chuo-Ku, Tokyo 104-0061)

**Netherlands** (☎ 020-6208991; [info.nl@india-tourism.com](mailto:info.nl@india-tourism.com); Rokin 9/15, 1012 KK Amsterdam)

**South Africa** (☎ 011-3250880; [goito@global.co.za](mailto:goito@global.co.za); Craighall 2024, Hyde Lane, Lancaster Gate, Johannesburg 2000)

**UK** (☎ 020-7437 3677; [info@indiatouristoffice.org](mailto:info@indiatouristoffice.org); 7 Cork St, London W1S 3LH)

**USA** Los Angeles (☎ 213-380 8855; [indiatourismla@aol.com](mailto:indiatourismla@aol.com); Room 204, 3550 Wiltshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 900102485); New York (☎ 212-586 4901; [.com; Suite 1808, 1270 Ave of the Americas, New York, NY 100201700\)](mailto:ad@itonyc</a></p>
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## TRAVEL PERMITS

Access to certain parts of India – particularly disputed border areas – is controlled by a complicated permit system. A permit known as an Inner-Line Permit (ILP) is required to visit northern parts of Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim that lie close to the disputed border with China/Tibet. Obtaining the ILP is basically a formality, but travel agents must apply on your behalf for certain areas, including many trekking routes passing close to the border. ILPs are issued by regional magistrates and district commissioners, either directly to travellers (for free) or through travel agents (for a fee). See p282 (Himachal Pradesh), p366 (Ladakh), p483 (Uttaranchal) and p570 (Sikkim) for additional information.

Entering the northeast states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram is much harder – tourists require a Restricted Area Permit (RAP), which must be arranged through Foreigners' Regional Registration Offices (FRRO) offices. Ultimate permission comes from the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi, which is reluctant to issue permits to foreigners – without exception, your best chance of gaining a permit is to join an organised tour and let the travel agent make all the arrangements. See p592 for further details.

Most permits officially require you to travel in a group of four (married couples are also permitted in certain areas). This is enforced in some places, not in others – travel agents may have suggestions to help solo travellers get around these restrictions. Note that you can only travel to the places listed on the permit, often by set routes, and this is hard to change after the permit is issued.

It's not a bad idea to double-check with tourism officials to see if permit requirements have undergone any recent changes before you head out to these areas.

## TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

The crowded public transport, crush of humanity and variable infrastructure can test even the hardiest able-bodied traveller. If you have a physical disability or you are vision impaired, these pose even more of a challenge. However, many disabled travellers rise above these obstacles.

India has a limited number of wheelchair-friendly hotels (mostly top end). Some restaurants and offices have ramps, but most have at least one step. Staircases are often steep and lifts frequently stop at mezzanines between floors. Footpaths and pavements, where they exist at all, are riddled with holes, littered with debris and packed with pedestrians, hindering movement. Try to book ground-floor hotel rooms and, if you use crutches, bring along spare rubber caps for the tips as they will wear down quickly.

If your mobility is considerably restricted you may like to consider travelling with an able-bodied companion. Additionally, hiring a car with driver will make moving around a whole lot easier (see p1172). Note that the new petroleum gas-powered taxis in large cities have not space in the boot for a wheelchair.

Organisations that may offer further advice include the **Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation** (RADAR; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; 12 City Forum, 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AF, UK) and **Mobility International USA** (MIUSA; ☎ 541-3431284; www.miusa.org; Suite 343, 132 E Broadway, Eugene, OR 97401, USA). There are also some good websites on the net, including www.access-able.com.

## VISAS

You must get a visa *before* arriving in India and these are easily available at Indian missions worldwide; see p1134 for listings. Most people travel on the standard tourist visa, which is more than adequate for most needs. Student visas and business visas have strict conditions and also restrict your access to tourist services such as tourist quotas on trains. An onward travel ticket is a requirement for most visas, but this is not always enforced (check in advance), except for the 72-hour transit visa.

Six-month multiple-entry tourist visas (valid from the date of issue) are granted to nationals of most countries regardless of how long you intend to stay. You can enter and leave as often as you like, but you can only spend a total of 180 days in the country, starting from the date of issue. There are additional restrictions on travellers from Bangladesh and Pakistan, as well as certain Eastern European, African and Central Asian countries. Check any special conditions for your nationality with the Indian embassy in your country.

Visas are priced in the local currency; Brits pay UK£30, Americans pay US\$60, Australians pay A\$75 (an extra A\$15 service fee applies at consulates) and Japanese citizens pay just ¥1200.

Extended visas (up to five years) are possible for people of Indian descent (excluding those in Pakistan and Bangladesh) who hold a non-Indian passport and live abroad. Contact your embassy for more details.

For visas lasting more than six months, you need to register at the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO; see below) within 14 days of arriving in India; inquire about these special conditions when you apply for your visa.

## Visa Extensions

Fourteen-day visa extensions are theoretically possible at the discretion of the **Ministry of Home Affairs** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-23385748; 26 Jaisalmer House, Man Singh Rd, Delhi; ✉ inquiries 9-11am Mon-Fri) but don't get your hopes up. The only circumstances where this might conceivably happen is if you were robbed of your passport just before you planned to leave the country at the end of your visa. If you run low on time, consider doing the 'visa run' over to Bangladesh or Nepal and applying for another six-month tourist visa there.

If you do find yourself needing to request an extension, you should contact the **Foreigners' Regional Registration Office** (FRRO; Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-26195530; frodelhi@hotmail.com; Level 2, East Block 8, Sector 1, Rama Krishna Puram, Delhi; ✉ 9.30am-1.30pm & 2-3pm Mon-Fri), just around the corner from the Hyatt Regency hotel. This is also the place to come for a replacement visa if you've had your lost/stolen passport replaced (required before you can leave the country). Regional FRROs are even less likely to grant an extension.

Assuming you meet the stringent criteria, the FRRO is permitted to issue an extension of 14 days, free for nationals of all countries except Japan (Rs 390), Sri Lanka (Rs 135 to 405, depending on the number of entries), Russia (Rs 1860) and Romania (Rs 500). You must bring your confirmed air ticket, one passport photo and a photocopy of your passport (information and visa pages). Note that this system is designed to get you out of the country promptly with the correct official stamps, not to give you two extra weeks of travel.

## VOLUNTEERING

Numerous charities and international aid agencies work in India, and there are plentiful opportunities for foreign volunteers. However, there is a growing backlash against the casual volunteering that exists mainly for the benefit of the volunteer rather than the host community. It is unlikely that you will do much good by teaching children for a week – instead look for longer-term opportunities that require your specific skills. Better volunteer agencies will work to make small, sustainable changes, letting the process be guided and informed by local people. Be aware that many religious charities have a conversion agenda. Stick to manual tasks such as litter clearing and support roles unless you have time to make a real contribution. It is possible to find a placement after you arrive in India, but charities and NGOs normally prefer volunteers who have applied in advance and been approved for the kind of work involved.

### Agencies Overseas

There are hundreds of international volunteering agencies, and it can be bewildering trying to assess which ones have ethical policies. Agencies that offer short projects in lots of different countries whenever you want to go are almost certainly tailoring projects to the volunteer rather than finding the right volunteer for the work that needs to be done.

The organisation **Ethical Volunteering** ([www.ethicalvolunteering.org](http://www.ethicalvolunteering.org)) has some excellent guidelines for choosing an ethical sending agency. Always allow enough time to make a difference – a month is a reasonable minimum time period to volunteer – and look for projects where you use your existing skills, rather than signing up for something that just sounds like a fun thing to do.

There are some tried and tested international projects, such as Britain's **Voluntary Service Overseas** (VSO; [www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)), that volunteer in serious professional roles, though the time commitment can be as much as two years. The international organisation **Indicorps** ([www.indicorps.org](http://www.indicorps.org)) matches volunteers to projects across India in all sorts of fields, particularly social development. There are special fellowships for people of Indian descent living outside India. Many Indian NGOs also offer volunteer work; for listings click on [www.indianngos.com](http://www.indianngos.com).

To find sending agencies in your area, look at Lonely Planet's *Volunteer*, the *Gap Year*

*Book* and the *Career Break Book*, or use the internet – searching for 'volunteering' on Google will bring up pages of agencies and listings of volunteer opportunities. Some good starting sites include **World Volunteer Web** ([www.worldvolunteerweb.org](http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org)), **Working Abroad** ([www.workingabroad.com](http://www.workingabroad.com)) and **Worldwide Volunteering** ([www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk](http://www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk)).

### Aid Programmes in India

Following are listings of programmes in India that may have opportunities for volunteers. *Always* contact them in advance, rather than turning up on the doorstep expecting to be offered a position. Donations of money or clothing from travellers may also be welcomed. Note that unless otherwise indicated, volunteers are expected to cover their own costs (accommodation, food, transport etc).

**Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment** (Atree; ☎ 080-23533942; [www.atree.org](http://www.atree.org); 659 5th A Main Rd, Hebbal, Bengaluru 560024)

**Child Rights & You** (CRY; ☎ 022-23063647/51; [www.cry.org](http://www.cry.org); 189A Anand Estate, Sane Guruji Marg, Mumbai)

**Concern India Foundation** (☎ 022-22880129; [www.concernindia.org](http://www.concernindia.org); 3rd fl, Ador House, 6K Dubash Marg, Mumbai)

**Confederation of Voluntary Associations** (COVA; ☎ 040-24572984; [www.covanetwork.org](http://www.covanetwork.org); 20-4-10, Charminar, Hyderabad)

**Disha – Centre for Special Education, Vocational Training and Rehabilitation** (☎ 0141-2393319/2391690; [www.dishafoundation.org](http://www.dishafoundation.org); Disha Path, Nirman Nagar-C, Jaipur 302019)

**Equations** (☎ 080-25457607; [www.equitabletourism.org](http://www.equitabletourism.org); 415, 2nd C Cross, 4th Main Rd, OMBR Layout, Banaswadi Post, Bengaluru 560043)

**Family Services** (☎ 9844026222; [www.thefamilyindia.org](http://www.thefamilyindia.org); 68, 2nd fl, Transpade Towers, Koramangala Industrial Layout, Jyothi Nivas College Rd, Bengaluru 560095)

**Freedom Foundation** (☎ 044-25567228; [www.thefreedomfoundation.org](http://www.thefreedomfoundation.org); 15 United Colony, Red Hills Rd, Kolathur, Chennai)

**Global Village** (☎ 07686-274237; [globalvillage@indiatimes.com](mailto:globalvillage@indiatimes.com); Main Rd, Khajuraho)

**Help in Suffering** (☎ 0141-2760803; [hjispr@datainfo.sys.net](mailto:hjispr@datainfo.sys.net); Maharani Farm, Durgapura, Jaipur 302018)

**Ladakh Ecological Development Group** (☎ 01982-253331; Ecology Centre, Leh)

**Missionaries of Charity** Chennai (☎ 044-25956928; 79 Main Rd, Royapuram); Ahmedabad (☎ 079-27559050; 831/1 Bhimjipura, Nara Wadaj)

**Rejuvenate India Movement** (RIM; ☎ 044-22235133; [www.india-movement.org](http://www.india-movement.org); A1 Monisha Sriram Flats, 9 Kulothungan Cross St, Chittlapakkam, Chennai 600064)

**Saathi** (☎ 022-23520053; www.saathi.org; Agripada Municipal School, Farooque Umarbhoy Lane, Mumbai, 400011)

**Seva Mandir** (☎ 0294-2450960; www.sevemandir.org; Old Fatehpura, Udaipur 313004)

#### **Situational Management & Inter-Learning**

**Establishment** (SMILE; ☎ 033-30956494; www.smilengo.org; Udayrajpur, Madhyamgram, No 9 Rail Gate, Kolkata 700129)

**SOS Children's Village** (☎ 0141-2280262; www.sos-childrensvillages.org; Jhotwara Rd, Jaipur)

**Vatsalya Foundation** (☎ 022-24962115; Anand Niketan, King George V Memorial, Dr E Moses Rd, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai)

**Wildlife Society of Orissa** (☎ 0671-2311513; A-320, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar 751007)

### **ANDHRA PRADESH**

The **Confederation of Voluntary Associations** (COVA; ☎ 040-24572984; www.covanetwork.org; 20-4-10, Charminar, Hyderabad) is an umbrella organisation for around 800 NGOs, predominantly based in Andhra Pradesh, working with women, children, civil liberties and sustainable agriculture. Volunteers are matched to programmes that need their skills (long-term volunteers preferred).

With an animal hospital and sanctuary, **Karuna Society for Animals & Nature** (☎ 08555-287214; www.karunasociety.org; 2/138/C Karuna Nilayam, Prasanthi Nilayam Post, Anantapur 515134) works to rescue sick and mistreated animals. There are opportunities for volunteer vets.

### **BIHAR**

There are opportunities for volunteer teachers, carers, health professionals and other roles in schools and community projects around Bihar, both long and short term. See Schools & Institutions, p560 for details.

### **CHHATTISGARH**

The NGO-run crafts-complex **SAATHI** (☎ 07786-242852; saathibastar@yahoo.co.in; Kondagaon) encourages local employment in the production of terracotta, ironwork and other metalwork, and woodcarving. There are opportunities for volunteers to help with training (a design or craft background is preferred).

### **DELHI**

There are two branches of Mother Teresa's Kolkata-based order **Missionaries of Charity** (Nirmal Hriday Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-23812180; 1 Magazine Rd; Shishu Bhavan Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-23950181; 12 Commission-

ers Lane), which welcome volunteers. Shishu Bhavan looks after infants (female volunteers only), while Nirmal Hriday cares for the sick, destitute and dying. However, the organisation has a religious agenda that will not appeal to all volunteers.

The **Concern India Foundation** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-26210997; delhi@concernindia.org; Room A52, 1st fl, Amar Colony, Lajpat Nagar 4) may be able to link volunteers with current projects around the country; contact them well in advance for information.

Near the Hotel Namaskar in Delhi's Paharganj, **Salaam Baalak Trust** (Map p140; ☎ 011-23681803; www.salaambaalaktrust.com; Chandiwalan, Main Bazaar, Paharganj) provides shelter, food, education and other support to Delhi's homeless street children. Volunteers to teach English and other subjects are welcome. Another way you can help is by taking a tour with a street child – see p139.

**SOS Children's Village** (Map pp132-3; ☎ 011-24359734; www.soscvindia.org; A7 Nizamuddin West) assists orphan, abandoned and destitute children. There are periodic openings for volunteers to teach English for a minimum of three months (apply in advance). See p1159 for information about other SOS projects in India.

### **GOA**

Goa's leading environmental group, the **Goa Foundation** (☎ 0832-2263305; www.olb.com; c/o Other India Bookstore, Mapusa, Goa 403507), runs occasional voluntary programmes, including litter clean-ups; contact them for details.

The British-based organisation **Children Walking Tall** (☎ 01623-450944; www.childrenwalkingtall.com; 54 Clipstone Drive, Forest Town, Mansfield, Notts, NG19 0JJ, UK) has opportunities for volunteer child carers, teachers and medics at its projects for homeless children and orphans near Mapusa. The minimum placement is three months and every volunteer needs a criminal background check.

### **GUJARAT**

Mother Teresa's Kolkata-based **Missionaries of Charity** (☎ 079-27559050; 831/1 Bhimjipura, Nara Wadaj, Ahmedabad) has a branch in Ahmedabad that takes care of abandoned infants (female volunteers only). Some may be uncomfortable with the religious agenda.

Also in Ahmedabad is the **Animal Help Foundation** (Map p719; ☎ 079-2867698; www.ahfindia.org; 5 Retreat, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad 380004), which helps

destitute animals, including street dogs and the thousands of birds wounded during the Makar Sakranti kite festival. Opportunities exist for vets and animal carers.

### HIMACHAL PRADESH

McLeod Ganj is the volunteering capital of Himachal Pradesh, with numerous opportunities to work with Tibetan refugees, both long and short term. See p325 for more details.

About 6km south of Manali in the village of Rangri, the **Himalayan Buddhist Cultural School** (☎ 01902-251845; palkithakur@yahoo.com) has placements for experienced teachers who are willing to volunteer for six months or more. This is a working school, so call or email before turning up on the doorstep.

Volunteer placements for experienced teachers can be arranged at Buddhist nunneries schools in Spiti through the US-based **Jamyang Foundation** (☎ 619-260-4600; www.jamyang.org; 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110-2492); see p342 for more information.

### JAMMU & KASHMIR

Volunteering in Jammu and the Kashmir Valley is complicated by the security situation, but there are numerous opportunities in Zaskar and Ladakh. Many Buddhist monastery schools need experienced teachers of English for long-term volunteer placements, and there are also tours that clean the rubbish from remote areas; for details, see p373.

Volunteer placements for teachers at Buddhist schools for girls in Zaskar can be arranged through the US-based **Jamyang Foundation** (☎ 619-260-4600; www.jamyang.org; 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110-2492).

The British-based charity **International Society for Ecology and Culture** (☎ 01803-868650; www.isec.org.uk; Foxhole, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6EB, UK) works to promote sustainable development in rural parts of Ladakh. There are one-month placements on rural farms that aim to give Ladakhis control over their future and foster cross-cultural understanding; contact the charity directly to find out exactly how you can help.

The local NGO **Ladakh Ecological Development Group** (☎ 01982-253331; Ecology Centre, Leh) is involved in environmental education and sustainable development; contact the group directly for ways to help.

Many international volunteer sending agencies also offer placements in Ladakh; see p1155 for details.

### KARNATAKA

Bengaluru's **Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment** (Atree; ☎ 080-23533942; www.atree.org; 659 5th A Main Rd, Hebbal, Bengaluru 560024) is committed to sustainable development issues related to conservation and biodiversity. It takes volunteers with experience or a keen interest in conservation and environmental issues.

**Equations** (☎ 080-25457607; www.equitabletourism.org; 415, 2nd C Cross, 4th Main Rd, OMBR Layout, Banaswadi Post, Bengaluru 560043) works to promote 'holistic tourism' and protect local communities from exploitation through lobbying, local training programmes and research publications.

**Family Services** (☎ 9844026222; www.thefamilyindia.org; 68, 2nd fl, Transpade Towers, Koramangala Industrial Layout, Jyothi Nivas College Rd, Bengaluru 560095) runs a school for slum kids – it's possible to visit at the weekends to help out. It also runs programmes in Delhi and Mumbai.

It may also be possible to volunteer at the Bengaluru gay-and-lesbian support groups Sangama (p1138) and Swabhava (p1138).

### KOLKATA

Founded by Mother Teresa, the Missionaries of Charity has opportunities at several care homes around Kolkata, including Nirmal Hriday (home for the dying), Prem Dan (for the sick and mentally ill) and Shishu Bhavan (for orphaned children). The administrative centre for volunteers is the **Motherhouse** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 033-22497115; 54A AJC Bose Rd); register and get more information about placements at 3pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Note that this organisation has been criticised over sustainability issues and its religious agenda.

The **Situational Management & Inter-Learning Establishment** (SMILE; ☎ 033-30956494; www.smilengo.org; Udayrajpur, Madhyamgram, No 9 Rail Gate) is an NGO working with Kolkata's destitute young people. It runs a residential children's home and provides direct assistance to homeless children at Sealdah train station. Volunteers are accepted for two-week work camps and longer stays lasting up to a year (you pay a fee to participate, which covers meals and accommodation).

Started in 1979, **Calcutta Rescue** (Map p494; ☎ / fax 033-22175675; www.calcuttarrescue.com; 4th fl, 85 Collins St) provides medical care and health education for the poor and disadvantaged of Kolkata and West Bengal. The organisation has six- to nine-month openings for experienced medical staff, teachers and administrators; contact it directly for current vacancies.



Run by volunteer vets, the **Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals** (CSPCA; Map p496; ☎ 033-22367738; cspca@rediffmail.com; 276 BB Ganguly Street) cares for stray and domestic animals in Kolkata and campaigns for animal rights. Qualified vets can volunteer at the veterinary surgery on BB Ganguly Rd, but a minimum of one month is preferred.

### MADHYA PRADESH

Serious volunteers should head to Bhopal, where the **Sambhavna Trust** (Map p683; ☎ 2730914; www.bhopal.org; Bafna Colony, Berasia Rd) accepts volunteers at its clinic providing long-term care to the victims of the Bhopal chemical disaster. There are opportunities in health care, promotion, research and internet communications (two weeks minimum).

In Khajuraho, volunteers can help at workshops run by NGO **Global Village** (☎ 07686-274237; globalvillage@indiatimes.com; Main Rd, Khajuraho), which targets environmental problems such as the plastic bags left littering the town by tour groups.

Volunteers with an interest in architecture can assist the work of the **Nek Chand Foundation** (☎ 01923-856644; www.nekchand.com; 1 Watford Rd, Radlett, Herts, WD7 8LA, UK), which maintains and preserves the mosaics of the unusual Nek Chand Rock Garden in Chandigarh.

### MAHARASHTRA

Based near Phaltan, the **Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute** (☎ 02166-222396; http://nariphaltan.virtuale.net/; Phaltan-Lonand Rd, Tambal, Phaltan) has a focus on sustainable development, animal husbandry and renewable energy. Volunteer internships lasting two to six months are available for agriculture, engineering and science graduates to assist with the research.

Located 30km from Pune is **Sadhana Village** (☎ 020-25380792; www.sadhana-village.org; Priyankit, 1 Lokmanya Colony, Pune 411038), a residential-care centre for intellectually disabled adults. Volunteers assist in workshops, cultural activities and community-development programmes for women and children. Meals and accommodation are provided but the organisation receives no government funding so donations are appreciated.

### MUMBAI

In Mumbai, the independent trust **Child Rights & You** (CRY; ☎ 022-23063647/51; www.cry.org; 189A Anand Estate, Sane Guruji Marg) organises fundraising for

more than 300 projects India-wide, including a dozen projects in Mumbai helping deprived children. There are long- and short-term opportunities for people from all backgrounds.

The **Vatsalya Foundation** (☎ 022-24962115; Anand Niketan, King George V Memorial, Dr E Moses Rd, Mahalaxmi) works with Mumbai's street children, focusing on rehabilitation into mainstream society. There are long- and short-term opportunities in teaching and sports activities.

The charitable **Concern India Foundation** (☎ 022-22880129; www.concernindia.org; 3rd fl, Ador House, 6K Dubash Marg) supports development-oriented organisations working with vulnerable members of the community. The focus is on establishing sustainable projects run by local people. The foundation can arrange volunteer placements matched to your skills and interests in Mumbai and around India (six months minimum). Volunteers should preferably speak Hindi.

**Saathi** (☎ 022-23520053; www.saathi.org; Agripada Municipal School, Farooque Umarbhoy Lane) works with adolescent street children. It also has a project in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) for children affected by communal violence. Volunteers should be willing to commit at least three months and work full time for the organisation during the project.

### ORISSA

The **Wildlife Society of Orissa** (☎ 0671-2311513; A320, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar 751007) accepts volunteers to help with its work to save endangered species in Orissa, especially the olive ridley turtle (see p652).

### RAJASTHAN

The Jaipur branch of Mother Teresa's Kolkata-based **Missionaries of Charity** (☎ 0141-2365804; Vardhman Path, C-Scheme, Jaipur) provides a refuge for the destitute, many of whom are mentally ill or disabled. However, its ethos focuses on care rather than medical treatment or prevention.

Assisting people with cerebral palsy and other neural conditions, **Disha – Centre for Special Education, Vocational Training and Rehabilitation** (☎ 0141-2393319/2391690; www.dishafoundation.org; Disha Path, Nirman Nagar-C, Jaipur 302019) operates a centre providing special education, home management, staff training, counselling and advocacy. Volunteers from the fields of physiotherapy, speech therapy, special education, sports, arts and crafts and vocational counselling are welcomed.

The animal hospital **Help in Suffering** (☎ 0141-2760803; hisjpr@datainfosys.net; Maharani Farm, Durgapura, Jaipur 302018) is partly funded by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and welcomes qualified voluntary vets (three-/six-/12-month commitments). Apply first in writing.

Also in Jaipur is the **SOS Children's Village** (☎ 0141-2280262; www.sos-childrensvillages.org; Jhotwara Rd, Jaipur), located opposite Petal Factory, which cares for and educates children and young adults. Volunteers teach English and help the children with their homework for a minimum of one year. The parent organisation SOS Kinderdorf International runs more than 30 programmes across India, employing unmarried women, abandoned wives and widows as carers for orphaned, destitute and abandoned children.

The NGO **Marwar Medical & Relief Society** (☎ 0291-2545210, 0291-2571620; www.mandore.com; c/o Mandore Guest House, Mandore) works to address drug-addiction problems and provide medical services and education in the Jodhpur district. Guests at its guesthouse in Mandore and other volunteers are accepted on short-term development and education projects in local villages.

Jaipur's **Ladli** (☎ 9829011124; www.ladli.org; 74 Govindpuri, Rakdi, Sodala, Jaipur 302006) provides vocational training for abused, orphaned and destitute children. Volunteers work in child care, teach English and take children's activities, and placements last two months to a year.

**Seva Mandir** (☎ 0294-2450960; www.sevामandir.org; Old Fatehpura, Udaipur 313004) is involved in health promotion, literacy programmes and developing natural resources. Development interns can observe and participate in development work for a minimum period of two weeks; apply through the website.

Also in Udaipur, the animal hospital **Animal Aid Society** (☎ 0294-3111435; www.animalaidsociety.org; c/o Pratap Singh Rathore, 27C Neemach Mata Scheme, Dewali, Udaipur 313004) accepts trained veterinary staff and other animal-loving volunteers to help rescue and treat injured stray animals and street dogs at its veterinary clinic in Chota Hawala village.

The **Urmul Trust** (☎ 0151-2523093; Urmul Bhawan, Ganganagar Rd, Bikaner) provides primary health care and education to around 500 villages in Rajasthan, as well as promoting rights for women. Volunteer placements (minimum

one month) are available in social welfare, teaching, health care and other projects. The Urmul Trust is located inside Urmul Dairy (next to the bus terminal).

## SIKKIM

Placements for volunteer teachers at schools in Sikkim – including the Denjong Pedma Choling Academy near Pelling – can be arranged through the British-based charity **Himalayan Education Lifeline Programme** (HELP; ☎ 012-2726 3055; www.help-education.org; Mansard House, 30 Kingsdown Park, Whitstable, Kent CT5 2DF, UK). Placements last a minimum of two months (exactly two months in Sikkim), and volunteers cover all their expenses and make a contribution to the programme. English speakers over 20 years old are preferred.

Teaching placements in Sikkim can also be arranged through the **Muyal Liang Trust** (☎ 020-7229 4774; 53 Blenheim Crescent, London W11 2EG UK).

## TAMIL NADU

In Chennai, there are volunteer opportunities at the **Missionaries of Charity** (☎ 044-25956928; 79 Main Rd, Royapuram, Chennai), which is part of Mother Teresa's Kolkata-based care operation. However, the organisation has been criticised for its religious agenda.

The **Freedom Foundation** (☎ 044-25567228; www.thefreedomfoundation.org; 15 United Colony, Red Hills Rd, Kolathur, Chennai) provides services to people living with HIV/AIDs, including treatment at its clinic and work-skills training. It also campaigns for HIV education and prevention. There are opportunities for counsellors, trainers, teachers and carers.

The international eye-care charity **Unite for Sight** (www.uniteforsight.org/intl\_volunteer) has regular month-long openings for volunteer assistants, teachers, nurses and optical-health professionals to help at its partner eye-care clinics in Chennai and around India; see the website for details.

The NGO **Rural Institute for Development Education** (RIDE; ☎ 04112-268393; www.charityfocus.org/India/host/RIDE; 46 Periyar Nagar, Little Kanchipuram) works with around 200 villages in Kanchipuram to remove children from forced labour and into transition schools. Volunteers can contribute in teaching, administrative and support roles. See p1052 for more on child labour.

In Chennai, the **Rejuvenate India Movement** (RIM; ☎ 044-22235133; www.india-movement.org; A1 Monisha Sriram Flats, 9 Kulothungan Cross St, Chittlapakkam,



Chennai 600064) can arrange three week to one year placements for skilled volunteers on development projects run by partner NGOs in 14 villages in Tamil Nadu. There are also opportunities in Karnataka. Spoken Hindi is an asset.

### UTTAR PRADESH

Varanasi offers opportunities for volunteering at local schools. One such place is the **Learn for Life Society** ([www.learn-for-life.org](http://www.learn-for-life.org)) which can be contacted through the **Brown Bread Bakery** (Map p426; 17 Tripura Bhairavi, Varanasi). For more information see p432.

### UTTARAKHAND

Volunteers can help the **Uttaranchal Forest Development Corporation** ([www.uafdc.org](http://www.uafdc.org)) with animal rescue and Gujjar tribal village development projects in Rajaji National Park. For more information, write to Pratap Chauhan, EDC Chairman, PO Pulna (Bhyundai), Chamoli, Uttarakhand, or contact **Mahesh Yogi Organisation** (☎ 01334-9051335; [mohansadventure@vsnl.com](mailto:mohansadventure@vsnl.com); c/o Mohan's Adventure Tours, Railway Rd, Haridwar).

The grass-roots **Rural Organisation for Social Elevation** (ROSE) (☎ 05963-241081; [www.rosekanda.info](http://www.rosekanda.info); Sonargaon Village, PO Kanda, Bageshwar, Uttarakhand 263631) is based in Kanda village, near Bageshwar in Uttarakhand. Volunteers live with a local family for one to six months, helping out with cooking, teaching, field work and building projects.

In Ghangaria village in the Valley of Flowers in northern Uttarakhand, the Eco Development Committee runs conservation projects between June and October. Contact the Nature Interpretation Centre (p471).

### WEST BENGAL

In Darjeeling, **Hayden Hall** (Map p532; ☎ 2253228; [haydenhall@cal.vsnl.net.in](mailto:haydenhall@cal.vsnl.net.in); 42 Laden La Rd, Darjeeling) has volunteer opportunities (minimum six months) for people with backgrounds in health care and preschool teaching.

The **Tibetan Refugee Self-Help Centre** (Map p531; ☎ 0354-52346; 65 Gandhi Rd, Darjeeling) has occasional openings for volunteer nursery- and early-primary-school teachers, medical staff, and geriatric- and child-care workers. Previous experience is preferred.

**Human Wave** (☎ 033-26852823; [humanwav@cal3.vsnl.net.in](mailto:humanwav@cal3.vsnl.net.in); 52 Tentultala Ln, Mankundu, Hooghly 712136) runs community development and health schemes in West Bengal, including volunteer projects

in the Sunderbans and youth projects in Kolkata. The minimum period for volunteers is 15 days and you pay a small fee for food and accommodation. Contact the organisation directly for opportunities.

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Although things are changing, particularly in the big cities, India remains a conservative country, especially so when it comes to the role of women. Despite a long history of erotic art, female sexuality is hidden away in modern Indian society. Combined with local attitudes to sex, the skimpy clothing and culturally inappropriate behaviour of a minority of foreign women have had a ripple effect on the perception of foreign women in India. The situation hasn't been helped by the Hollywood film industry traditionally portraying Western women as sexual objects.

One unfortunate consequence of this is that many female travellers experience sexual harassment in India – predominantly lewd comments and invasion of privacy, though groping is not uncommon. Most cases are reported in urban centres of North India and prominent tourist towns elsewhere. The problem barely exists in Buddhist regions like Sikkim and Ladakh, making these areas a welcome bolt hole to escape the hassle of the plains.

While there's no need to be paranoid, you should be aware that your behaviour and dress code is under scrutiny, and that local men may have a misguided opinion of how foreign women behave. Getting constantly stared at is something you'll have to get used to. Just be thick-skinned and try to rise above it. It's best to refrain from returning male stares, as this may be considered a come-on; dark glasses can help.

Other harassment women have encountered include provocative gestures, jeering, getting 'accidentally' bumped into on the street and being followed. Exuberant special events such as the Holi festival can be notorious for this (see p1137). Women travelling with a male partner are less likely to be harassed. However, mixed couples of Indian and non-Indian descent may get disapproving stares, even if neither individual actually lives in India.

Ultimately, there are no sure-fire ways of shielding yourself from sexual harassment, even if you do everything 'right' – use your own judgement and instincts, and err on the side of caution if you are unsure. The warn-

ings in this section may seem a little daunting, but most men are not out to bother you and thousands of female travellers rise above these challenges every year.

Sanitary pads and tampons are available from pharmacies in all large cities and most tourist centres. Carry additional stocks for travel off the beaten track.

## Clothing

Warding off sexual harassment is often a matter of adjusting your behaviour to match the prevailing social norms in India. Avoiding culturally inappropriate clothing can help enormously. Steer clear of sleeveless tops, shorts, miniskirts (ankle-length skirts are recommended) and any other skimpy, see-through or tight-fitting clothing. Baggy clothing that hides the contours of your body is the way to go.

In some areas, such as Goa and Mumbai, there's generally a more liberal attitude towards dress. Beachwear is normally fine on the beach and party clothes are OK for nightclubs, but away from these areas, take your cues from local women. Most Indian women wear saris, *salwar kameez*, or long shorts and a T-shirt whenever swimming in public view. When returning from the beach, use a sarong to avoid stares on the way back to your hotel.

Indian dress, when done properly, makes a positive impression and can dramatically cut down the harassment and stares. The *salwar kameez* is regarded as respectable attire and wearing it will reflect your respect for local dress etiquette. The flowing outfit is also surprisingly cool in the hot weather, and the *dupatta* (long scarf) worn with it is very handy if you visit a shrine that requires your head to be covered.

Going into public wearing a *choli* (small tight blouse worn under a sari) or a sari petticoat (which many foreign women mistake for a skirt) is rather like strutting around half dressed – don't do it. Read personal experiences proffered by fellow women travellers on the India page at [www.journeywoman.com](http://www.journeywoman.com).

## Staying Safe

Women have reported being molested by masseurs and other therapists, especially in Varanasi and McLeod Ganj. No matter where you are, try to check the reputation of any teacher or therapist before going to a solo session. If you feel uneasy at any time, leave.

For gynaecological health issues, seek out a female doctor.

Keep conversations with unknown men short – getting involved in inane conversations with men can be misinterpreted as a sign of sexual interest. Questions such as 'Do you have a boyfriend?' or 'You are looking very beautiful' are indicators that the conversation may be taking a steamy tangent. Some women prepare in advance by wearing a pseudo wedding ring, or by announcing early on in the conversation that they are married or engaged (even if it isn't true).

If you still get the uncomfortable feeling that a man is encroaching on your space, he probably is. A firm request to keep away is usually enough, especially if your voice is loud enough to draw the attention of passers-by. Alternatively, the silent treatment (not responding to questions at all) can be remarkably effective.

When interacting with men on a day-to-day basis, adhere to the local practice of not shaking hands. Instead, say *namaste* – the traditional, respectful Hindu greeting – and bow slightly with the hands brought together at the chest or head level.

Female filmgoers will probably feel more comfortable (and decrease the chances of potential harassment) by going to the cinema with a companion. Lastly, it's wise to arrive in towns before dark and, of course, always avoid walking alone at night, especially in isolated areas.

## Taxis & Public Transport

Officials recommend that solo women prearrange an airport pick-up from their hotel if their flight is scheduled to arrive late at night. If that's not possible, catch a prepaid taxi and make a point of (in front of the driver) writing down the car registration and driver's name, and giving it to one of the airport police. The system was overhauled after the shocking murder of a female tourist by a prepaid-taxi driver in Delhi in 2004, but most solo women (especially to Delhi) still prefer to prearrange an airport pick-up or wait until daybreak before leaving the airport.

Avoid taking taxis alone late at night (when many roads are deserted) and never agree to having more than one man (the driver) in the car – ignore claims that this is 'just his brother' or 'for more protection'. Women are advised against wearing expensive-looking jewellery as it can make them a target for muggers.

On trains and buses, being a woman has some advantages. Women are able to queue-jump without consequence, and on trains there are special ladies-only carriages. Solo women have reported less hassle by opting for the more expensive classes on trains, especially for overnight trips. If you're travelling overnight in a three-tier carriage, try to get the uppermost berth, which will give you more privacy (and distance from potential gropers).

On public transport, don't hesitate to return any errant limbs, put some item of luggage in between you and, if all else fails, find a new spot. You're also within your rights to tell him to shove off – loudly enough to attract public attention and shame the guy into leaving you alone.

## WORK

Obtaining paid work in India is harder than you might expect, and local wages rarely

make this cost effective for travellers. Business trips are easy, but working for an Indian company requires visa sponsorship from an Indian employer and finding a job before you travel. Although not strictly legal, casual opportunities exist at some tourist resorts teaching adventure sports and holistic therapies. However, this may deprive locals of much needed employment.

There may be opportunities with international package holiday companies for tour reps in Goa and Kerala (though you normally need to complete seasons in Europe to qualify), and opportunities for drivers and guides with the big overland tour companies (see p1177).

If you're a Bollywood fan there may be opportunities for working as an extra in Mumbai (see p778). Film crews also visit traveller hotels in Chennai (p1036) looking for extras for the day.

# Transport

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## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The following sections contain information on transport to and around India. Flights, tours and rail tickets can also be booked online at [www.lonelyplanet.com.travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com.travel_services).

### ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Entering India by air or land is relatively straightforward, with standard immigration and customs procedures (p1131).

#### THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and the ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

### Passport

To enter India you need a valid passport, visa (see p1154) and an onward/return ticket. If your passport is lost or stolen, immediately contact your country's representative (see p1134). It's wise to keep photocopies of your airline ticket and the identity and visa pages from your passport in case of emergency. There are restrictions on entry for some nationalities – see the Visa section, p1154.

### AIR

#### Airports & Airlines

India has four main gateways for international flights (listed below), and international flights also land in Bengaluru (Bangalore), Guwahati and Amritsar – for details, see [www.indianairports.com](http://www.indianairports.com). India is a big country so it makes sense to fly into the nearest airport to the area you want to visit.

**Chennai** (Madras; MAA; Anna International Airport;

☎ 044-22560551; [www.chennaiairport.com](http://www.chennaiairport.com))

**Delhi** (DEL; Indira Gandhi International Airport;

☎ 011-25652011; [www.delhiairport.com](http://www.delhiairport.com))

**Kolkata** (Calcutta; CCU; Netaji Subhas Chandra Basu International Airport; ☎ 033-25118787; [www.calcuttaairport.com](http://www.calcuttaairport.com))

**Mumbai** (Bombay; BOM; Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport; ☎ 022-26829000; [www.mumbaiairport.com](http://www.mumbaiairport.com))

India's national carrier is **Air India** ([www.airindia.com](http://www.airindia.com)) and the state-owned domestic carrier **Indian Airlines** ([www.indian-airlines.nic.in](http://www.indian-airlines.nic.in)) also offers flights to 20 countries in Asia and the Middle East (though it has a poor safety record). The more reliable private airlines **Jet Airways** ([www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com)) and **Air Sahara** ([www.airsahara.net](http://www.airsahara.net)) offer flights to Colombo, Kathmandu and the Maldives. Jet has recently started longhaul flights to London, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. For details about India's domestic airlines, see p1169.

Other airlines flying to and from India (websites have contact details):

**Aeroflot** (code SU; [www.aeroflot.org](http://www.aeroflot.org)) Hub: Sheremetyevo International Airport, Moscow.

**Air Canada** (code AC; [www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com)) Hub:

Vancouver Airport.

**Air France** (code AF; [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com)) Hub: Charles de Gaulle, Paris.

**Air India** (code AI; www.airindia.com) Hub: Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi.

**Alitalia** (code AZ; www.alitalia.com) Hub: Fiumicino International Airport, Rome.

**American Airlines** (code AA; www.aa.com) Hub: Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

**Austrian Airlines** (code OS; www.aa.com) Hub: Vienna International Airport.

**Biman Bangladesh Airlines** (code BG; www.bimanair.com) Hub: Zia International Airport, Dhaka.

**British Airways** (code BA; www.british-airways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

**Cathay Pacific Airways** (code CX; www.cathaypacific.com) Hub: Hong Kong International Airport.

**Druk Air** (code KB; www.drukair.com.bt) Hub: Paro Airport.

**El Al Israel Airlines** (code LY; www.elal.co.il) Hub: Ben Gurion, Tel Aviv.

**Emirates** (code EK; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai International Airport.

**Finnair** (code AY; www.finnair.com) Hub: Helsinki-Vantaa Airport.

**Gulf Air** (code GF; www.gulfairco.com) Hub: Bahrain International Airport.

**Japan Airlines** (code JL; www.jal.com) Hub: Narita Airport.

**Kenya Airways** (code KQ; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi.

**KLM – Royal Dutch Airlines** (code KL; www.klm.com) Hub: Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam.

**Kuwait Airways** (code KU; www.kuwait-airways.com) Hub: Kuwait International Airport.

**Lufthansa Airlines** (code LH; www.lufthansa.com) Hub: Frankfurt International Airport.

**Malaysia Airlines** (code MH; www.malaysiaairlines.com) Hub: Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

**Pakistan International Airlines** (code PK; www.piac.com.pk) Hub: Jinnah International Airport, Karachi.

**Qantas Airways** (code QF; www.qantas.com.au) Hub: Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney.

**Qatar Airways** (code QR; www.qatarairways.com) Hub: Doha International Airport.

**Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation** (code RA; www.royalnepal.com) Hub: Kathmandu Airport.

**Singapore Airlines** (code SQ; www.singaporeair.com) Hub: Changi Airport, Singapore.

**South African Airlines** (code SA; www.flysa.com) Hub: Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg.

**Sri Lankan Airlines** (code UL; www.srilankan.aero) Hub: Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo.

**Swiss International Airlines** (code LX; www.swiss.com) Hub: Zurich International Airport.

**Thai Airways International** (code TG; www.thair.com) Hub: Bangkok International Airport.

## Departing India

Most airlines no longer require reconfirmation of international tickets, though it's still a good idea to call to check that flight times haven't changed. Most airlines ask you to check in

## CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely on, and air travel is one of the fastest-growing contributors to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but we believe that everyone has a responsibility to limit their personal impact on global warming.

### Flying & Climate Change

Every form of motorised travel generates CO<sub>2</sub> (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of fuel they consume, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. Two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

### Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes and tree planting projects that offset the effects of global warming – including projects in India.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel. For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

three hours before international departures – remember to factor in the Indian traffic when planning your trip to the airport.

Most Indian airports have free luggage trolleys, but porters will eagerly offer to lug your load for a negotiable fee. For flights originating in India, hold bags must be passed through the X-ray machine in the departures hall and baggage tags are required for the security check for all cabin bags, including cameras.

## Tickets

An onward or return air ticket is a condition of the tourist visa, so few visitors buy international tickets inside India. Only designated travel agents can book international flights, but fares are normally the same if you book directly with the airlines. The cheapest time to visit is generally the monsoon (June to August). The departure tax of Rs 500 (Rs 150 for most South and Southeast Asian countries) and the Rs 200 passenger service fee is included in the price of almost all tickets.

The fares we've given in this section represent average starting fares available at the time of research. Contact a travel agent or surf the web to get up-to-the-minute fares and flight schedules. Advertisements for discount travel agencies appear in the travel pages of major newspapers and listings magazines. Note that fares on airline websites are sometimes just as cheap as going through an agent. Alternatively, try the following international online ticket agencies:

**Ebookers** ([www.ebookers.com](http://www.ebookers.com))

**Expedia** ([www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com))

**Flight Centre International** ([www.flightcentre.com](http://www.flightcentre.com))

**Flights.com** ([www.tiss.com](http://www.tiss.com))

**STA Travel** ([www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com))

**Travelocity** ([www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com))

## Africa

There are direct flights to India from South Africa and East Africa. Return fares to Mumbai include US\$600 from Nairobi and US\$500 from Cape Town or Johannesburg.

There are international ticket agents in most African capitals. **Rennies Travel** ([www.rennies-travel.com](http://www.rennies-travel.com)) and **STA Travel** ([www.statravel.co.za](http://www.statravel.co.za)) have offices throughout southern Africa.

## Asia

There are international travel agencies in capital cities across Asia, including **STA Travel** (Bangkok ☎ 02-2360262; [www.statravel.co.th](http://www.statravel.co.th); Hong Kong

☎ 0852-27361618; [www.hkst.com.hk/statravel](http://www.hkst.com.hk/statravel); Kuala Lumpur ☎ 03-21489800; [www.statravel.co.my](http://www.statravel.co.my); Singapore

☎ 67377188; [www.statravel.com.sg](http://www.statravel.com.sg); Tokyo ☎ 03-53912922; [www.statravel.co.jp](http://www.statravel.co.jp)). Alternatively, book directly with the airlines.

## BANGLADESH

Dhaka is the air hub for Bangladesh. Biman Bangladesh and Indian Airlines offer flights between Dhaka and Kolkata (from US\$200 return) or Delhi (from US\$500 return).

## JAPAN

Tokyo/Narita is the main hub for flights between Japan and India. Flights to Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai start from US\$540.

## MALDIVES

A return or onward ticket is a condition of travel to the Maldives. Excursion fares to Malé from Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) on Indian Airlines start at US\$200 return.

## MYANMAR (BURMA)

Return flights between Yangon (Rangoon) and Kolkata cost around US\$350. Alternatively, you can connect through Bangkok, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur for around US\$500.

## NEPAL

Royal Nepal Airlines and half a dozen Indian carriers provide flights from Kathmandu to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Varanasi. One-way/return fares include: Delhi (from US\$150/300); Mumbai (from US\$230/450); Kolkata (from US\$120/240); Varanasi (from US\$200/400) and Bengaluru (from US\$230/450). You'll need an onward ticket to enter India on a one-way ticket from Nepal.

## PAKISTAN

Flights between India and Pakistan are often suspended when relations between the two countries sour. At the time of research, return fares from Karachi cost US\$300 to Delhi and US\$200 to Mumbai. Flights from Lahore to Delhi are marginally cheaper.

## SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA, HONG KONG & CHINA

There are extensive air connections between Southeast Asia and Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai or Kolkata. Return flights



between Singapore, Hong Kong or Kuala Lumpur and India start from US\$550. Several airlines have recently started flights from Beijing and Shanghai to Delhi or Mumbai (from around US\$550).

### SRI LANKA

Sri Lankan Airlines and several Indian carriers provide connections from Colombo. Return fares include Mumbai (US\$390), Delhi (US\$450), Bengaluru (US\$270) and Thiruvananthapuram (US\$200).

### THAILAND

Bangkok is the most popular departure point from Southeast Asia to India. Return fares from Bangkok include: Delhi or Mumbai (US\$500), Kolkata (US\$400) and Chennai (US\$700).

### Australia

Qantas has a flight from Sydney to Mumbai via Darwin, or you can fly to Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai or Bengaluru with a stop in Southeast Asia. Return fares to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai range from A\$1200 and A\$1700, depending on the season.

**STA Travel** (☎ 134782; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133133; www.flightcentre.com.au) have offices throughout Australia. For online bookings, try the website www.travel.com.au.

### Canada

From eastern and central Canada, most flights go via Europe; from Vancouver and the west coast, flights go via Asia. Return fares from Vancouver or Toronto to Delhi or Mumbai start at around C\$1500. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency, or try the big online agents.

### Continental Europe

There are connections to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai or Bengaluru from most European capitals, either directly or with a stop in the Middle East. For discount fares, try the agencies below or visit the big online ticket agencies. **STA Travel** (Austria ☎ 01-401486000; www.statravel.at; Denmark ☎ 33-141501; www.statravel.dk; Finland ☎ 09-68127717; www.statravel.fi; Germany ☎ 069-74303292; www.statravel.de; Norway ☎ 815-59905; www.statravel.no; Sweden ☎ 0771-474850; www.statravel.se; Switzerland ☎ 0900-450402; www.statravel.ch) and **Last Minute** (www.last-minute.co.uk) have regional websites for nations across Europe.

### FRANCE

**Anyway** (☎ 0892-302301; www.anyway.fr in French)

**Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825-000747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr in French)

**OTU Voyages** (☎ 01-55-823232; www.otu.fr in French)

**Voyageurs du Monde** (☎ 0892-235656; www.vdm.com in French)

### GERMANY

**Just Travel** (☎ 089-7473330; www.justtravel.de)

### ITALY

**CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06-44-111-66; www.cts.it)

### NETHERLANDS

**Airfair** (☎ 0900-77171717; www.airfair.nl in Dutch)

### SPAIN

**Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902-200-400; www.barceloviajes.com)

### New Zealand

Flights between India and New Zealand go via Southeast Asia. Return tickets from Auckland to Delhi start at NZ\$1200. Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800-243544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0800-474400; www.statravel.co.nz) have country-wide branches. For online bookings try www.goholidays.co.nz.

### UK & Ireland

Discount air travel is big business in London. Flights from London or Manchester to Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru or Amritsar range from UK£350 to UK£600. Good places to find competitive quotes include the following:

**Ebookers** (☎ 0871-2335000; www.ebookers.com)

**Flight Centre** (☎ 0870-4990040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

**STA Travel** (☎ 0870-2300040; www.statravel.co.uk)

**Trailfinders** (☎ 0845-0585858; www.trailfinders.com)

**Travel Bag** (☎ 0800-0825000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

### USA

America has plenty of discount travel agents, or 'consolidators', particularly in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. Fares vary – bank on US\$1100 or more from the East Coast and US\$1300 or more from the West Coast. Consult travel agents and scan the web for the best deal – **Expedia** (www.expedia.com) and **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com) are good sites.

Other good places to book:

**American Express Travel** (☎ 800-297-2977; www.itn.net)

**CheapTickets** (www.cheaptickets.com)

**Lowestfare.com** (www.lowestfare.com)

**Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com)

**STA Travel** (☎ 800-781-4040; www.sta.com)

## LAND

### Border Crossings

Although most visitors fly into India, the overland route from Nepal is extremely popular and smaller numbers of travellers enter India from Pakistan and Bangladesh. For more on these routes, consult Lonely Planet's *Istanbul to Kathmandu*, or see the 'London to India' section on [www.seat61.com/India.htm](http://www.seat61.com/India.htm).

If you enter India by bus or train you'll be required to disembark at the border for standard immigration and customs checks. You must have a valid Indian visa in advance as no visas are available at the border. The standard Indian tourist visa allows multiple entries within a six-month period.

Drivers of cars and motorbikes will need the vehicle's registration papers, liability insurance and an International Driving Permit. You'll also need a *Carnet de passage en douane*, which acts as a temporary waiver of import duty. To find out the latest requirements for the paperwork and other important driving information contact your local automobile association.

See p1172 and p1175 for more on car and motorcycle travel.

### BANGLADESH

Foreigners can use four of the land crossings between Bangladesh and India, all in West Bengal or the Northeast States. Exiting Bangladesh overland is complicated by red tape – if you enter by air, you require a road permit (or 'change of route' permit) to leave by land. This free permit can be obtained in Dhaka at the **Directorate of Immigration and Passports** (☎ 02-9131891/9134011; Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Agargaon Rd; ☎ 9am–5pm Sun–Thu) in two to three working days; bring several passport photos. Some travellers have also reported problems exiting Bangladesh overland with the visa issued on arrival at Dhaka airport.

Heading from India to Bangladesh, tourist visas should be obtained in advance from a Bangladeshi mission. Delhi's **Bangladesh embassy** (☎ 011-24121389; EP39 Dr Radakrishnan Marg, Chanakyapuri; ☎ applications 9.30am–11pm Mon–Fri) issues visas in two working days with two passport photos; fees vary depending on nationality. Visas can also be obtained from the Bang-

ladeshi missions in Kolkata (see p1135) and Agartala (see the boxed text, p615).

Heading from Bangladesh to India, you must pre-pay the exit tax at a designated branch of the Sonali Bank, which may be some distance from the border post.

### Kolkata to Dhaka

There are daily bus services from Kolkata to Dhaka, crossing the India–Bangladesh border at Benapol – see p512 for more information. Plans for a train link between Kolkata and Dhaka have dragged on for years – inquire locally for progress reports.

### Siliguri to Chengrabandha/Burimari

This minor northern border crossing is accessible from Siliguri in West Bengal. You must take a private bus from outside Tenzin Norgay central bus station to Jalpaiguri (Rs 40, two hours) and change there for the border post at Chengrabandha. See p528 for more details.

### Shillong to Sylhet

This little-used crossing offers a handy back route from northeast India to Bangladesh. Share jeeps run every morning from Bara Bazaar in Shillong to the border post at Dawki, where you can walk or catch a taxi to the bus station in Tamabil, which has regular buses to Sylhet – see the boxed text p612 for more information.

### Agartala to Dhaka

The Bangladesh border is 4km from Agartala and several daily trains run on to Dhaka from Akhaura on the Bangladesh side of the border. See the boxed text p612 for more details.

### BHUTAN

Phuentsholing is the main entry and exit point between India and Bhutan; you now need a full Bhutanese visa to enter the country, which must be obtained at least 15 days before your trip from a registered travel agent listed under the **Department of Tourism, Bhutan** ([www.tourism.gov.bt](http://www.tourism.gov.bt)).

Bhutan visas for non-Indians require a prepaid tour (minimum US\$200 to US\$240 per day, all-inclusive). Tour and visa can be arranged within two days through **RCPL Travels** (Map pp488–9; ☎ 24400665; [travelcal@vsnl.net](mailto:travelcal@vsnl.net); [www.kingdomofbhutan.info](http://www.kingdomofbhutan.info); 5/4 Ballygunge Pl, Kolkata).

### Siliguri/Kolkata to Phuentsholing

Buses from Kolkata and Siliguri to Phuentsholing are run by Bhutan Transport Services.

From Kolkata, there's a direct bus at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (Rs 300, 20 hours). See the boxed text p528 for details on travel from Siliguri. There's also a rail route from Siliguri via Alipurduar (on the main train line between Siliguri and Guwahati) connecting with local buses to the border.

## NEPAL

The security situation in Nepal has improved massively since the ceasefire in 2006. Nevertheless, it makes sense to check the security situation before crossing into Nepal by land – local newspapers and international news websites are good places to start.

Political and weather conditions permitting, there are five land border crossings between India and Nepal:

- Sunauli in Uttar Pradesh to Bhairawa in central Nepal
- Raxaul in Bihar to Birganj in central Nepal
- Panitanki in West Bengal to Kakarbhitta in eastern Nepal
- Jamunaha in Uttar Pradesh to Nepalganj in western Nepal
- Banbassa in Uttaranchal to Mahendranagar in western Nepal

Two-month single-entry visas for Nepal (US\$30) are available at all the border crossings but payment is due in US dollars and you need two passport photos. Alternatively, obtain a single-entry or six-month multiple-entry visa (US\$80) in advance from a Nepalese mission. In Delhi, the **Nepal embassy** (☎ 011-23327361; Barakhamba Rd; ☎ applications 9am-noon Mon-Fri) issues visas in one day with two passport photos. In Kolkata the **Nepal consulate** (☎ 033-24561224; 1 National Library Ave, Alipore; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) issues visas while you wait.

### Sunauli to Bhairawa

The easiest crossing for Delhi or Varanasi, with connections on to Kathmandu, Pokhara and Lumbini. There are daily buses to Sunauli from Varanasi (Rs 172, 10 hours) or Delhi (Rs 1400, 36 hours), or you can travel by train to Gorakhpur (p439) and take a local bus to Sunauli from there. See the boxed text p442 for information on crossing the border.

### Banbassa to Mahendranagar

This intriguing back route into Nepal provides access to the little-visited western Terai.

However, the route is often blocked by flooding and landslides in the monsoon and it's sensible to check the political situation before you travel. Daily buses to Banbassa leave Delhi's **Anand Vihar bus stand** (☎ bookings 011-22141611) hourly until late (Rs 210, 10 hours). See the boxed text p484 for information crossing the border.

### Raxaul to Birganj

This crossing is convenient for Kolkata, Patna and the eastern plains, and there are onward connections to Kathmandu. Daily buses run to Raxaul from Patna and Kolkata, but it's more comfortable to jump on the daily *Mithila Express* train from Kolkata's Howrah train station – see the entry under Raxaul (p557) and the boxed text (p557) for information on crossing the border.

### Panitanki to Kakarbhitta

The handiest crossing for Darjeeling, Sikkim and the Northeast States. Buses and share jeeps run to the border from Siliguri and several other towns in West Bengal, and you can explore the eastern Terai as you travel on to Kathmandu. See the boxed text p528 for details on crossing the border.

### Jamunaha to Nepalganj

Plenty of domestic tourists cross into Nepal at Jamunaha in Uttar Pradesh, but most foreign travellers stick to more convenient crossings. However, Nepalganj is a useful gateway for Nepal's Royal Bardia National Park and there are regular onward flights to Kathmandu. Buses run regularly from Lucknow to Rupaidha Bazar (Rs 160, seven hours), a short rickshaw ride from the Jamunaha border post. Alternatively, you can take a train to Nanpara, and change to a bus or taxi for the 17km trip to the border.

## PAKISTAN

Crossing between India and Pakistan by land depends on the current state of relations between the two countries. Militants regularly slip across the porous border from Pakistan to carry out attacks in India and transport between the two countries often stops in the aftermath of any attack. Assuming the crossings are open, there are routes into Pakistan from Delhi, Amritsar and Rajasthan by bus or train. The much-celebrated bus route from Srinagar to Pakistan-administered Kashmir is currently only open to Indian travellers.

You must have a visa to enter Pakistan, and it is usually easiest to obtain this in the Pakistan mission in your home country. At the time of writing, the **Pakistan embassy** (☎ 24676004; 2/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri; ✉ applications 8.30am-11.30am Mon-Fri) in Delhi was issuing double-entry, two-month tourist visas for most nationalities in around two days, but this office may stop issuing visas at times of political tension. If you apply within India, you'll need a letter of recommendation from your home embassy as well as the usual application forms and passport photos.

### Attari to Wagah (Amritsar to Lahore)

The main transit point between India and Pakistan is the border post between Attari, near Amritsar, and Wagah, near Lahore. Regular buses run from Amritsar (p269) to the border and there are regular onward connections from Wagah to Lahore. There are also through bus and train services all the way from Delhi – see below. For more information on crossing the border, see the boxed text, p275. Try to coordinate your crossing with the spectacular closing of the border ceremony – see the boxed text, p276.

### Delhi to Lahore

If you prefer to keep things simple, there are direct bus and train services between Delhi and Lahore. However, these services are extremely crowded and clearing the border formalities can take anywhere between two and five hours – compared to one or two hours if you travel independently. Security is also a serious concern – the Delhi-Lahore train was bombed by militants in February 2007, killing 67 people.

The Lahore Bus Service leaves from Delhi's **Dr Ambedkar Bus Station office** (☎ 011-23318180 or 23712228; Delhi Gate; ✉ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) at 6am on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, arriving in Lahore 12 hours later. The fare is Rs 1250 one-way (advance bookings are essential). The baggage limit is 20kg per person (Rs 60 per extra kg, maximum 15 kg) plus one piece of hand luggage.

The *Samjhauta Express* train leaves the Old Delhi train station (purchase tickets here) on Wednesday and Sunday at 10.50pm and arrives at the Indian border crossing of Attari at 7am, where passengers disembark for customs checks and visa procedures, before reboarding for the 30 minute trip to Lahore. Tickets

cost Rs 209 in sleeper class. However, services may be disrupted following the February 2007 bomb attack.

### Rajasthan to Pakistan

After 35 years of wrangling, the 4889 *Thar Express* train from Jodhpur in Rajasthan to the border crossing at Munabao/Khokraparand onto Karachi in Pakistan resumed in early 2006. Unfortunately, services were suspended almost immediately because of flood damage to the track during the 2006 monsoon. A limited service resumed in February 2007, with a maximum of 400 passengers in each direction. However, schedules are erratic so check locally in Jodhpur for departure times.

### SEA

There are several sea routes between India and surrounding islands but none leave Indian sovereign territory – see p1171. There has been talk of a passenger ferry service between southern India and Colombo in Sri Lanka but this has yet to materialise. Inquire locally to see if there has been any progress.

## GETTING AROUND

### AIR

The big three domestic airlines – Indian Airlines, Jet Airways and Air Sahara – charge rupee fares for Indian citizens and higher US dollar fares for foreigners (usually payable in rupees). Most budget airlines charge the same low rupees to everyone. Budget airline seats can be booked by telephone, through travel agents, or cheaply over the web. Fares change daily, but you usually get a better deal the further you book in advance – check the airline websites for details.

Reconfirmation is normally only required if your ticket was bought outside India, but call a few days ahead to be safe. Airlines may issue a replacement for lost tickets at their discretion, but refunds are rare. For details of discounts on airfares, see p1134.

Check-in for domestic flights is an hour before departure and hold luggage must be X-rayed and stamped before you check-in. Every item of cabin baggage needs a baggage label, which must be stamped as part of your security check. Flights to sensitive destinations (eg Kashmir or Ladakh) have extra security restrictions: cabin baggage may be completely

## HELICOPTER SERVICES IN INDIA

Several companies offer helicopter shuttle services around India. Operating under a variety of names, the state-subsidised carrier Pawan Hans Helicopters ([www.pawanhans.nic.in](http://www.pawanhans.nic.in)) connects the regional capitals of Northeast India, and there are also flights from Siliguri in West Bengal to Gangtok in Sikkim (see p526) and from Srinagar to the main pilgrimage sites in Kashmir (see p358). However, helicopter travel in India has a shocking safety record, with four major accidents since 2002, and numerous minor crashes. We won't say don't use them, but be aware of the risks.

prohibited and batteries must be removed from all electronic items and placed in the hold. You may also need to identify your bags on the tarmac before they are loaded on the plane. Officially, photography is forbidden but this is not strictly enforced.

Some smaller airlines will only take off if there are enough passengers to cover costs. Passengers usually receive a refund for cancellations, but several travellers have reported being booked onto other airlines at inflated prices by airline staff. If your flight is cancelled demand a refund and make the onward booking yourself.

The baggage allowance is 20kg (10kg for smaller aircraft) in economy class, 30kg in business.

## Airlines in India

In recently years, there has been a massive surge in domestic flights around India. The state-owned carrier **Indian Airlines** ([www.indian-airlines.nic.in](http://www.indian-airlines.nic.in)) still has the largest network, but its record on safety and reliability is unenviable and the private airlines **Jet Airways** ([www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com)) and **Air Sahara** ([www.airshahara.net](http://www.airshahara.net)) are catching up fast. Then there are India's new budget airlines, offering discounted rupee fares for flights around the country over the internet.

In fact, the whole industry is seriously over-inflated, with many airlines spiralling into debt. Until the bubble bursts, this is a great time to fly around India, but fares change daily and there is no guarantee that all the airlines will be around after the expected slump occurs. As a rough indication, fares for a one-hour

flight range from US\$150 on an established carrier to Rs 1000 with a budget airline.

New airlines seem to spring up every month, so it's worth talking to local travel agents and scanning the web for the latest routes and carriers. At the time of writing, the airlines listed below were serving destinations across India – the regional chapters and the airline websites have details of routes, fares and booking offices.

**Air Deccan** ([www.airdeccan.net](http://www.airdeccan.net)) Budget fares and a growing list of destinations, including Kashmir, the Kullu Valley and the northeast.

**Air India** ([www.airindia.com](http://www.airindia.com)) India's national carrier operating a number of domestic flights generally leaving from the international terminals of Indian airports (check in advance).

**GoAir** ([www.goair.in](http://www.goair.in)) New budget carrier, connecting Goa with major hubs across India.

**Indian Airlines** ([www.indian-airlines.nic.in](http://www.indian-airlines.nic.in)) With its subsidiary Alliance Air, the state domestic carrier has flights across India and international services to 20 neighbouring countries, but a poor record on safety and service.

**IndiGo** ([www.goindigo.in](http://www.goindigo.in)) A growing budget carrier set to expand massively with 100 new planes.

**Jagson Airlines** ([www.jagsonairline.com](http://www.jagsonairline.com)) Uses tiny Dornier planes to access small runways in Himachal Pradesh.

**Jet Airways** ([www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com)) Rated by many as India's best airline, serving the entire country, plus Sri Lanka, Nepal, Southeast Asia and the UK.

**Kingfisher Airlines** ([www.flyingfisher.com](http://www.flyingfisher.com)) Yep, it's an airline owned by a beer company, serving Kashmir, the plains, South India and the northeast.

**Sahara Airlines** ([www.airshahara.net](http://www.airshahara.net)) Hot on the heels of Jet, with a similar domestic and international network.

**Spicejet** ([www.spicejet.com](http://www.spicejet.com)) Discount seats to hubs across India.

## Air Passes

The big three Indian airlines – Indian Airlines, Jet Airways and Air Sahara – all offer air passes. However, these rarely work out cheaper than buying individual discounted tickets.

Indian Airlines' 'Discover India' pass costs US\$630/895 for 15/21 days, plus US\$21 tax for each flight sector. You can travel on any flight, except the flight to the Lakshadweep Islands, but you can't visit the same place twice. There's also the Indian Airlines 'India Wonder' fare, which costs US\$300 plus US\$21 per flight sector for one week's travel. The pass is valid for North India or South India, and you must specify one or the other when you book. Again, Lakshadweep is off-limits.

Air passes are also available from Jet Airways (foreigners and Indians) and Air Sahara (Indian nationals only).

## BICYCLE

There are no restrictions on bringing a bicycle into India, though it may be cheaper to hire or buy a bike after you arrive. Mountain bikes with off-road tires give the best protection against India's potholed and puncture-prone roads. Roadside cycle mechanics abound but you should still bring spare tires and brake cables, lubricating oil and a chain repair kit, and plenty of puncture repair patches. Bikes can often be carried for free, or for a small luggage fee, on the roofs of public buses – handy for uphill stretches. Contact your airline for information about transporting your bike and customs formalities in your home country.

Read up on bicycle touring before you travel – Rob van de Plas' *Bicycle Touring Manual* (Bicycle Books, 1987) and Stephen Lord's *Adventure Cycle-Touring Handbook* (Trailblazer Publications, 2006) are good places to start. Consult local cycling magazines and cycling clubs for useful information and advice. The **Cycle Federation of India** (☎ /fax 011-23392578; Yamuna Velodrome, IGI Sports Complex, New Delhi; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) can provide local advice.

Road rules are virtually nonexistent in India and cities and national highways are hazardous places to cycle, so stick to back roads. Be conservative about the distances you expect to cover – an experienced cyclist can cover 60km to 100km a day on the plains, 40km to 60km on sealed mountain roads and 40km or less on dirt roads.

## Hire

Big tourist centres and other places where travellers hang around – eg Goa, Hampi and Leh – are the easiest places to find bicycles for hire. Expect to pay Rs 30 to Rs 100 per day for a roadworthy, Indian-made bike. Hire places may require a security deposit (cash, airline ticket or passport). See Cycling & Motorcycling on p93 for good places to rent a bike.

## Purchase

The best place to buy anything bicycle-related is Delhi's Jhandewalan Cycle Market (Map pp120-1), which has imported and domestic new and secondhand bikes and spare parts. Mountain-bikes from reputable brands like Hero, Atlas, Hercules or Raleigh start at Rs

2000, and extras like panniers, stands and bells are readily available. Reselling is quite easy – ask at local cycle or hire shops or put up an advert on travel noticeboards. You should be able to get 50% of what you originally paid back if it was a new bike and is still in reasonably good condition.

## BOAT

Regular scheduled ferries connect mainland India to Port Blair in the Andaman Islands (see p1111). The trip takes around 60 hours from Chennai (see p1042) or around 56 hours from Kolkata (see p512). There are also sporadic ferries from Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) to the Andaman Islands (see p1111). From October to May, there are also ferry services from Kochi (Cochin) in Kerala to the Lakshadweep Islands (around 20 hours; see p1023).

There are also numerous ferry services across rivers, from chain pontoons to wicker coracles, and various boat cruises – see the regional chapters and the Activities chapter p93 for more information.

## BUS

Buses are the cheapest way to get around India, though most travellers prefer trains for long-distance journeys. Services are fast and frequent, and buses are the only way to get around many mountainous areas. However, roads are perilous, buses are driven with wilful abandon and accidents are always a risk. Avoid night buses unless there is no alternative – drivers use the quieter roads as an excuse to take even more death-defying risks. All buses make regular snack and toilet stops, providing a break from the rattle and shake but adding hours to journey times.

Buses run by the state government bus companies are usually the safest and most reliable option, and seats can be booked up to a month in advance. Private buses tend to be cheaper but drivers are notorious speed-demons and conductors cram as many passengers on as possible to maximise profits. Earplugs are a boon on all long-distance buses to muffle the deafening music. On any bus, sit between the axles to minimise the effect of bumps and potholes.

Luggage is either stored in compartments underneath the bus (sometimes for a small fee) or it can be carried free of charge on the roof. Conductors will carry your bags up for a modest tip, or you can scramble up yourself



and have peace of mind that your luggage is secure. Roof riding on public buses used to be a thrilling way to see the Indian countryside but the authorities have decided that it is (a) dangerous, and (b) too much fun. Roof-riding is now only possible on local buses between outlying villages.

If your bags go on the roof, make sure they are locked shut and securely tied to the metal baggage rack – some unlucky travellers have seen their belongings go bouncing off the roof on bumpy roads! Theft is a minor risk so keep an eye on your bags at snack and toilet stops and never leave your day-pack unattended inside the bus.

Share jeeps complement the bus service in many mountain areas – see p1177.

### Classes

Both state and private companies offer ‘ordinary’ buses – ageing rattletraps with wonky windows that blast in dust and cold air – or more expensive ‘deluxe’ buses, which range from less decrepit versions of ordinary buses to flashy Volvo tour buses with AC and reclining two-by-two seating. Travel agents in tourist towns offer expensive private two-by-two buses, which tend to leave and terminate at conveniently central stops. Be warned that agents have been known to book people onto ordinary buses at super-deluxe prices. If possible book directly with the bus company – many state tourist offices run their own reliable deluxe bus services. Timetables and destinations are usually displayed on signs or billboards at travel agencies and tourist offices.

### Costs

The cheapest buses are ‘ordinary’ government buses but prices vary from state to state – expect to pay Rs 40 to Rs 60 for a three-hour daytime journey and Rs 200 to Rs 300 for an all-day or overnight trip. Add around 50% to the ordinary fare for deluxe services, double the fare for AC and triple or quadruple the fare for a two-by-two service.

### Reservations

Deluxe buses can usually be booked in advance – up to a month in advance for government buses – at the bus stand or local travel agents. Reservations are rarely possible on ‘ordinary’ buses and travellers often get left behind in the mad rush for a seat. To maximise your chances of securing a seat, either send a

travelling companion ahead to grab some space or pass a book or article of clothing through an open window and place it on an empty seat. This ‘reservation’ method rarely fails. If you board a bus mid-way through its journey, you will have to stand until a seat becomes free.

At many bus stations there is a separate women’s queue, although this isn’t always obvious as signs are often in Hindi and men frequently join the melee. Women have an unspoken right to push to the front of any queue in India. This includes female travellers so be ready to sharpen your elbows and barge through the crowds.

### CAR

Few people bother with self-drive car rental but hiring a car with a driver is surprisingly affordable, particularly if several people share the costs. Seatbelts are rarely working – if they are, use them – or hold on tightly to the handrails.

### Hiring a Car & Driver

Hiring a car and driver is an excellent way to see several places in one day, and the cost comes down dramatically if you can find other travellers to split the fare. Most towns have taxi stands where you can arrange tours and charter trips. Some taxi companies will only operate in a designated area, dictated by their government permit. If you cross a state border, there may be an additional fee.

Try to find a driver who speaks some English and knows the region. For multi-day trips, the fare should cover the driver’s meals and accommodation, but confirm this when you book (preferably in writing). Drivers make their own sleeping and eating arrangements in the evening. Offering to buy the driver a meal is a nice gesture but it can cause embarrassment – use your judgement.

Finally, it is *essential* to set the ground rules from day one. Many travellers have complained of having their holiday completely dictated by their driver. Politely, but firmly, let the driver know from the outset that you’re the boss!

### COSTS

The cost of charter trips depends on the distance and the terrain (driving on mountain roads uses more petrol, hence the higher cost). If your destination is a remote backwater, expect a higher fare to cover petrol for the return trip. One-way trips often cost as much



fare. If this happens, find another cab. Parked taxis in tourist areas almost always ask for elevated fares – moving taxis are more likely to use their meters. On some routes, particularly to airports, it may be impossible to get a metered fare.

Costs for public transport vary from town to town. Fares usually increase at night (by up to 100%) and some drivers charge a few rupees extra for luggage. Carry plenty of small bills for taxi and rickshaw fares as drivers rarely have change.

Many taxi/autorickshaw drivers are involved in the commission racket – for more information see p1133.

### **Autorickshaw, Tempo & Vikram**

The Indian autorickshaw is basically a three-wheeled motorcycle with a tin or canvas cab, providing room for two passengers and luggage. You may also hear autorickshaws called autos, scooters, tuk-tuks or Bajaj (after the company that makes them). Autorickshaws tend to be cheaper than taxis (though not everywhere) and they are usually metered, though getting the driver to turn the meter on is a challenge.

Travelling by auto can be great fun, but the clunky two-stroke engines are smelly and noisy and the open windows allow in blasts of cold air – which can be a boon or a curse, depending on the ambient temperature and the level of pollution outside.

Tempos and *vikrams* are basically outsized autorickshaws with room for more passengers, running on fixed routes for a fixed fare. In country areas, you may also see the fearsome-looking ‘three-wheeler’ – a crude, tractorlike tempo with a front wheel on an articulated arm.

### **Boat**

Various kinds of local ferries offer transport across and down rivers in India, from big car ferries to wooden canoes and wicker coracles – see regional chapters for details. Most boats carry bikes and motorcycles for a fee.

### **Bus**

Urban buses, particularly in the big cities, are fume-belching, human-stuffed, mechanical monsters which travel at breakneck speed (except during morning and evening rush hour, when they can be endlessly stuck in traffic). It's usually

more convenient and comfortable to opt for an autorickshaw or taxi.

### **Cycle-Rickshaw**

A cycle-rickshaw is a pedal cycle with two rear wheels, supporting a bench seat for passengers. Most have a canopy that can be raised in wet weather, or lowered to provide extra space for luggage. Most of the big cities have phased out the cycle-rickshaw, but they are still the main means of local transport in many smaller towns. As with taxis and autorickshaws, fares must be agreed upon in advance.

Locals invariably pay lower fares than foreigners, but considering the effort put in by the rickshaw-wallahs, it's hard to begrudge them a few extra rupees. Around Rs 20 to Rs 40 is a fair price to pay for a one or two kilometre journey in town and tips are always appreciated.

Kolkata is the last bastion of the human-powered rickshaw, a hand-cart pulled directly by the rickshaw-wallah. Of course, some people feel that being towed around by a local is a little too colonial for comfort.

### **Taxi**

Most towns have taxis, and these are usually metered. However, getting drivers to use the meter is a major hassle. Drivers often claim that the meter is broken and request a hugely elevated fixed fare. Threatening to get another taxi will often miraculously fix it. In tourist areas, some taxis flatly refuse to use the meter – if this happens to you, just find another taxi. It is usually less hassle to use a prepaid taxi from the airport or train station.

Getting a metered ride is only half the battle. Meters are almost always outdated, so fares are

#### **PREPAID TAXIS**

Most Indian airports and many train stations have a prepaid-taxi booth, normally just outside the terminal building. Here, you can book a taxi to town for a fixed price (which will include baggage) and hopefully avoid price hikes and commission scams. However, it makes sense to hold on to the payment coupon until your reach your chosen destination, in case the driver has any other ideas! Smaller airports and stations may have prepaid autorickshaw booths instead.

calculated using a combination of the meter reading and a complicated 'fare adjustment card'. Predictably, this system is open to abuse. If you spend a few days in any town, you'll soon get a feel for the difference between a reasonable fare and a rip-off. Many taxi drivers supplement their earnings with commissions – refuse any unplanned diversions to shops, hotels or private travel agencies.

### Other Local Transport

In some towns, tongas (horse-drawn two-wheelers) and victorias (horse-drawn carriages) still operate. Kolkata has a tram network and both Delhi and Kolkata have fast and efficient underground train networks. Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai all have suburban trains that leave from ordinary train stations. See regional chapters for further details.

## MOTORCYCLE

Despite the horrendous traffic, India is an amazing country for long-distance motorcycle touring. Motorcycles handle the pitted roads far better than four-wheeled vehicles, and you'll have the added bonus of being able to stop when and where you want. However, motorcycle touring can be quite an undertaking – there are some excellent motorcycle tours (see p1176) that will save you the rigmarole of going it alone.

The classic way to motorcycle round India is on an Enfield Bullet, still built to the original 1940s specifications. As well as making a satisfying chugging sound, these bikes are fully manual, making them easy to repair (parts can be found everywhere in India). On the other hand, Enfields are less reliable than many of the newer, Japanese-designed bikes.

The most preferred starting point for motorcycle tours is Delhi, and popular destinations include Rajasthan, South India and Ladakh. Weather is an important factor to consider – for the best times to visit see the Fast Facts boxes at the start of regional chapters. At the time of research, it wasn't possible to cross into Pakistan by motorcycle – check if the law has since changed. It's still possible to cross into Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan with the correct paperwork – contact the relevant diplomatic mission for details.

### Driving Licence

You're technically required to have a valid International Driving Permit to hire a motor-

cycle in India, however, many places are happy with the driving licence from your home country. In tourist areas, you may be able to rent a small motorcycle without a driving licence, but you definitely won't be covered by insurance in the event of an accident.

### Fuel & Spare Parts

Petrol and engine oil are widely available in the plains, but petrol stations are widely spaced in the mountains. If you intend to travel to remote regions, ensure you carry enough extra fuel (seek local advice about fuel availability before setting off). At the time of writing, petrol cost Rs 30 to Rs 45 per litre.

If you're going to remote regions it's also important to carry basic spares (valves, fuel lines, piston rings etc). Spare parts for Indian and Japanese machines are widely available in towns and cities. Delhi's Karol Bagh is a good place to find parts for all Indian and imported bikes.

For all machines (particularly older ones), make sure you regularly check and tighten all nuts and bolts, as Indian roads and engine vibration tend to work things loose quickly. Check the engine and gearbox oil level regularly (at least every 500km) and clean the oil filter every few thousand kilometres. Given the road conditions, the chances are you'll make at least a couple of visits to a puncture-wallah – start your trip with new tyres (around Rs 1500) and carry spanners to remove your own wheels.

### Hire

Plenty of places rent out motorcycles for local trips and longer tours. Japanese and Indian-made bikes in the 100cc to 150cc range are cheaper than the big 350cc to 500cc Enfields. As a deposit, you'll need to leave your passport, air-ticket or a big cash lump sum. See the regional chapters for information on local rental firms.

One consistently reliable company for long-term rentals is Lalli Motorbike Exports (p1176). A 500cc Enfield costs Rs 13,000/23,000 for three/eight weeks. The price includes excellent advice and an invaluable crash course in Enfield mechanics and repairs. See the regional chapters for other recommended rental companies.

### Insurance

Only hire a bike with third-party insurance – if you hit someone without insurance, the

consequences can be severe. Reputable companies will include third-party cover in their policies. Those that don't probably aren't reputable.

You must also arrange insurance if you buy a motorcycle. The minimum level of cover is third-party insurance – available for Rs 300 to Rs 500 per year. This will cover repair and medical costs for any other vehicles, people or property you might hit, but no cover for your own machine. Comprehensive insurance (recommended) costs Rs 500 to Rs 2000 per year.

### Organised Motorcycle Tours

Dozens of companies offer organised motorcycle tours around India with a support vehicle, mechanic and a guide. Below are some reputable companies (see websites for contact details, itineraries and prices):

**Blazing Trails** ([www.jewelholidays.com](http://www.jewelholidays.com))

**Classic Bike Adventures** ([www.classic-bike-india.com](http://www.classic-bike-india.com))

**Ferris Wheels** ([www.ferriswheels.com.au](http://www.ferriswheels.com.au))

**H-C Travel** ([www.hctravel.com](http://www.hctravel.com))

**Himalayan Roadrunners** ([www.ridehigh.com](http://www.ridehigh.com))

**Indian Motorcycle Adventures** (<http://homepages.iuhug.co.nz/~gumby>)

**Indian Shepherds** ([www.asiasafari.com](http://www.asiasafari.com))

**Lalli Singh Tours** ([www.lallisingsh.com](http://www.lallisingsh.com))

**Moto Discovery** ([www.motodiscovery.com](http://www.motodiscovery.com))

**Royal Expeditions** ([www.royalexpeditions.com](http://www.royalexpeditions.com))

**Saffron Road Motorcycle Tours** ([www.saffronroad.com](http://www.saffronroad.com))

**Wheel of India** ([www.wheelofindia.com](http://www.wheelofindia.com))

### Purchase

If you are planning a longer tour, consider purchasing a motorcycle. Secondhand bikes are widely available and the paperwork is a lot easier than buying a new machine. Finding a secondhand machine is a matter of asking around. Check travellers' noticeboards and approach local motorcycle mechanics and other bikers.

In Delhi, the area around Hari Singh Nalwa St in Karol Bagh has dozens of motorcycle and parts shops, but plenty of dodgy dealers. We consistently receive good reports about **Lalli Motorbike Exports** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 011-25728579; [www.lallisingsh.com](http://www.lallisingsh.com); 1740-A/55 Basement, Hari Singh Nalwa St, Abdul Aziz Rd, Karol Bagh Market). Run by the enthusiastic and knowledgeable Lalli Singh, this place sells and rents Enfields and parts, and buyers get a crash-course in running and maintaining these loveable but temperamental machines.

A decent firm in Mumbai is **Allibhai Premji Tyrewalla** (☎ 022-23099313; [www.premjis.com](http://www.premjis.com); 205/207 Dr D Bhadkankar (Lamington) Rd, Opera House), which sells new and secondhand motorcycles with a buy-back option.

### COSTS

A well-looked-after secondhand 350cc Enfield will cost Rs 18,000 to Rs 40,000; the 500cc model will cost Rs 35,000 to Rs 65,000. Prices for new Enfield models are listed on [www.royalfield.com](http://www.royalfield.com). It's advisable to get any secondhand bike serviced before you set off (for Rs 10,000 to 15,000). When re-selling your bike, expect to get between half and two thirds of the price you paid if the bike is still in reasonable condition. Shipping an Indian bike overseas is complicated and expensive – ask the shop you bought the bike from to explain the process.

As well as the cost of the bike, you'll have to pay for insurance – see p1175. Helmets are available for Rs 1000 to Rs 1500, and extras like panniers, luggage racks, protection bars, rear-view mirrors, lockable fuel caps, petrol filters and extra tools are easy to come by. One useful extra is a customised fuel tank, which will increase the range you can cover between fuel stops. An Enfield 500cc gives about 25km/L: the 350cc model gives slightly more.

### OWNERSHIP PAPERS

There is plenty of paperwork associated with owning a motorcycle. The registration papers are signed by the local registration authority when the bike is first sold and you'll need these papers when you buy a secondhand bike. Foreign nationals cannot change the name on the registration. Instead, you must fill out the forms for a change of ownership and transfer of insurance. If you buy a new bike, the company selling it must register the machine for you, adding to the cost.

For any bike, the registration must be renewed every 15 years (for around Rs 5000) and you must make absolutely sure that there are no outstanding debts or criminal proceedings associated with the bike. The whole process is extremely complicated and it makes sense to seek advice from the company selling the bike – see the Purchase section earlier for some honest operators. Allow around two weeks to get the paperwork finished and get on the road.

## Road Conditions

Given the road conditions in India, this is not a country for novice riders. Hazards range from cows and chickens crossing the carriageway to broken-down trucks, pedestrians on the road, and perpetual potholes and unmarked speed humps. Rural roads sometimes have grain crops strewn across them to be threshed by passing vehicles – a serious sliding hazard for bikers.

Try not to cover too much territory in one day and avoid travelling after dark if at all possible – many vehicles drive without lights and dynamo-powered motorcycle headlamps are useless at low revs while negotiating around potholes. On busy national highways expect to average 50km/h without stops; on winding back roads and dirt tracks this can drop to 10km/h.

For long hauls, transporting your bike by train can be a convenient option. Buy a standard train ticket for the journey, then take your bike to the station parcel office with your passport, registration papers, international driving licence and insurance documents. Packing-wallahs will wrap your bike in protective sacking for around Rs 100 and you must fill out various forms and pay the shipping fee – around Rs 1600 for a 350cc or smaller bike – plus an insurance fee of 1% of the declared value of the bike. Bring the same paperwork to collect your bike from the goods office at the far end. If the bike is left waiting at the destination for more than 24 hours, you'll pay a storage fee of around Rs 30 per day.

## Road Rules

Traffic in India nominally drives on the left, but in reality, everyone drives all over the road. Observe local speed limits (these vary from state to state) and give way to any larger vehicles. Locals tend to use the horn more than the brake, but travellers should heed the advice of the Border Roads Organisation – it is better to be Mr Late than Late Mr! Drink and riding never go together – it's illegal as well as dangerous.

## SHARE JEEPS

In mountain areas, share jeeps supplement the bus service, charging similar fixed fares. Although nominally designed for five to six passengers, most share jeeps squeeze in eleven. The seats beside and immediately behind the driver are more expensive than the cramped

bench seats at the rear. Jeeps only leave when full, and it is not uncommon for everyone to bail out of a half-full jeep and pile onto a fuller vehicle that is ready to depart. Drivers will leave immediately if you pay for all the empty seats in the vehicle.

Jeeps run from jeep stands and 'passenger stations' at the junctions of major roads; ask locals to point you in the right direction. See the regional chapters for routes and fares. In some states, jeeps are known as 'sumos' after the TATA Sumo, India's favourite 4WD.

Be warned that many locals suffer from travel sickness, particularly on mountain roads. Be prepared to give up your window seat to queasy fellow passengers.

## TOURS

Tours are available all over India, run by tourist offices, local transport companies and travel agencies. Organised tours can be an inexpensive way to see several places on one trip, though you rarely get much time at each place. If you arrange a tour through the local taxi office, you'll have more freedom about where you go and how long you stay.

Drivers typically double as guides, or you can hire a qualified local guide for a fee. However, be wary of touts claiming to be professional guides in tourist towns. Ask the local tourist office about recommended guides and demand to see evidence from guides who claim to be accredited. Assess the experience of trekking guides by asking about routes, distances and the type of terrain involved – vague answers should set off alarm bells.

On any overnight tour or trek, ensure that all the necessary equipment is provided (eg first aid, camping gear) and inspect everything before you set off. Always confirm exactly what the quoted price includes (food, accommodation, petrol, trekking equipment, guide fees etc).

See the Tours sections in the regional chapters for information on local tours. For more on treks and tours, read the Activities chapter (p90).

## International Tour Agencies

Many international companies offer tours to India, from straightforward sightseeing trips to adventure tours and activity-based holidays. To find tours that match your interests, quiz travel agents and surf the web. Some interesting possibilities include the following:



**Dragoman Overland** ([www.dragoman.com](http://www.dragoman.com)) One of several overland tour companies offering trips to and around India on customised vehicles.

**Essential India** ([www.essential-india.co.uk](http://www.essential-india.co.uk)) Various tailor-made and special-interest trips and treks in North and South India, with a responsible-tourism ethos.

**Exodus** ([www.exodustravels.co.uk](http://www.exodustravels.co.uk)) A wide array of specialist trips, including tours with a holistic, wildlife and adventure focus.

**India Wildlife Tours** ([www.india-wildlife-tours.com](http://www.india-wildlife-tours.com)) All sorts of wildlife tours, plus horse-riding safaris, fishing tours and bird-watching.

**Indian Encounters** ([www.indianencounters.com](http://www.indianencounters.com)) Tailor-made and special-interest tours, including wildlife, cookery, arts and horse riding.

**Intrepid Travellers** ([www.intrepidtravel.com](http://www.intrepidtravel.com)) A huge range of tours, from sightseeing to cycling, river cruising, festivals, wildlife and cooking tours.

**Peregrine Adventures** ([www.peregrine.net.au](http://www.peregrine.net.au)) Trekking, wildlife and cultural tours in South India, Rajasthan, Sikkim and Ladakh.

**Sacred India Tours** ([www.sacredindia.com](http://www.sacredindia.com)) Offers tours with a spiritual or holistic focus, including yoga, meditation and Ayurvedic trips.

**World Expeditions** ([www.worldexpeditions.com.au](http://www.worldexpeditions.com.au)) Options include cooking tours, trekking tours, walking tours, cycling tours and volunteering-based trips.

## TRAIN

Train travel is one of the joys of India. The network is extensive, prices are reasonable, and the experience of travelling on an Indian train is a reason to travel all by itself. Around 14 million passengers travel by train in India every day and Indian Railways is the second largest employer in the world, with a staggering 1.6 million workers.

At first, the process of booking a seat can seem bewildering, but behind the scenes things are incredibly well organised – see Reservations later in this section for tips on buying a ticket. Trains are far better than buses for long-distance and overnight trips. Some cities also have suburban train networks, though these can get very crowded during peak hours.

Train services to certain destinations are often increased during major festivals but every year, people get crushed to death in stampedes on overcrowded platforms. Something else to be aware of is passenger drugging and theft – see p1133.

We've listed useful trains throughout this book but there are hundreds of services. It's worth buying a copy of *Trains at a Glance* (Rs 45), available at train station bookstands

### TOP FIVE SCENIC TRAIN JOURNEYS

A handful of delightful toy trains still ply the metre-gauge lines from the plains to the hills, offering fabulous views and a hint of colonial charm. Here are the top five scenic rail journeys.

- Darjeeling Toy Train (p535)
- Mettupalayam–Ooty Miniature Train (p1103)
- Shimla Toy Train (p290)
- Matheran Toy Train (p820)
- Visakhapatnam through Eastern Ghats (p954)

and better bookshops and newsstands. It contains comprehensive timetables covering all the main lines, or you can use the train search engine on the **Indian Railways website** ([www.indianrail.gov.in](http://www.indianrail.gov.in)). Another useful resource is [www.seat61.com/India.htm](http://www.seat61.com/India.htm). Big stations often have English-speaking staff who can help with picking the best train. At smaller stations, mid-level officials such as the deputy station master usually speak English.

### Classes

Trains and seats come in a variety of classes. Express and mail trains usually have general (2nd class) compartments with unreserved seating – usually a real free-for-all – and a series of more comfortable compartments that you can reserve. On day trains, there may be a chair-car with padded reclining seats and (usually) AC, or an executive chair car, with better seats and more space.

For overnight trips, you have several choices. 'Sleeper' berths are arranged in groups of six, with two roomier berths across the aisle, in air-cooled carriages. Air-conditioned carriages have either three-tier AC (3AC) berths, in the same configuration as sleepers, or two-tier AC (2AC) berths in groups of four on either side of the aisle. Some trains also have flashier 1st class AC (1AC) berths, with a choice of 2- or 4-berth compartments with locking doors.

Bedding is provided in all AC sleeping compartments and there is usually a meal service, plus regular visits from the coffee- and chai-wallah. In sleeper class, bring your own bedding (an Indian shawl is perfect for the job). In all sleeping compartments, the lower

berths convert to seats for daytime use. If you'd rather sleep, book an upper berth. Note that there is usually a locked door between the reserved and unreserved carriages – if you get trapped on the wrong side, you'll have to wait till the next station to change.

There are also special train services connecting major cities. Shatabdi express trains are same-day services with seating only, in AC executive chair and AC chair cars. Both classes are comfortable, but the tinted-glass windows cut down the views considerably. The best views are from the barred but unglazed windows of non-AC sleeper and general carriages.

Rajdhani express trains are long-distance overnight services between Delhi and state capitals, with a choice of 1AC, 2AC, 3AC and 2nd class. Reserved tickets on both Shatabdi and Rajdhani trains are more expensive but fares include meals. Prices of all tickets reflect the level of comfort – see the Costs section on p1180. In all classes, a padlock and a length of chain are useful for securing your luggage to the baggage racks.

For an excellent description of the various train classes (including pictures) see [www.seat61.com/India.htm](http://www.seat61.com/India.htm).

## Costs

Fares are calculated by distance and class of travel – as shown in the boxed text, p1180. Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains are slightly more expensive, but the price includes meals. Most air-conditioned carriages have a catering service (meals are brought to your seat, but carry some tissues to use as napkins). In unreserved classes, carry samosas or other portable snack foods. You can search for exact fares on [www.indianrail.gov.in](http://www.indianrail.gov.in). Seniors get discounted train tickets – see p1134.

Major stations offer 'retiring rooms', which can be handy if you have a valid ticket or Ind-rail Pass – see p1126. Another useful facility is the left-luggage office (cloakroom). Locked bags (only) can be stored for a small daily fee if you have a valid train ticket. For peace of mind, chain your bag to the baggage rack and check the opening times to make sure you can get your bag when you need it.

## RIDING THE RAILS IN STYLE

Riding in the private train of a Maharaj is one of those surreal travel experiences you only find in India. A number of trains have been put out of service by the switch from narrow to broad gauge, but there are still several palaces on wheels trundling around the Indian countryside.

Rajasthan's *Palace on Wheels* ([www.palaceonwheels.net](http://www.palaceonwheels.net)) operates week-long tours of Rajasthan, departing from Delhi every Wednesday (September to April). The itinerary includes tours to Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Ranthambore National Park, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Keoladeo Ghana National Park and Agra. Although the train looks like the real deal, the rolling stock is actually a convincing replica, designed to fit on the wider rails between these popular destinations. Carriages are decked out with all the expected finery and there are two restaurants and a bar, as well as private bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms.

From October to March, the total fare (seven days) per person is US\$2765/2065/1680 for single/double/triple occupancy including tours, admission fees, accommodation and all meals. In September and April it costs US\$3745/2695/2205. Book in advance online or through the **Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation** (RTDC; Delhi ☎ 011-23389525; Bikaner House, Pandara Rd, New Delhi 110011; Jaipur ☎ 0141-2202586; Hotel Swagatam Campus, Station Rd, Jaipur 302006).

In Maharashtra, the *Deccan Odyssey* offers seven nights of luxury covering the main tourist spots of Maharashtra and Goa. The train leaves Mumbai every Wednesday (October to April), heading south through the resorts and fort towns of the Konkan Coast to Goa, then looping inland to Pune, Aurangabad (for Ellora), Jalgaon (for Ajanta) and Nasik. Fares per person start at US\$485/350/285 per day for single/double/triple occupancy (US\$395/295/240 in April). You can do the trip one way for a minimum of three days; the seven-day package costs an extra US\$100 for guided tours of Mumbai and Goa. Make reservations through Mumbai's **MTDC** (☎ 022-22026713; [www.maharashtratourism.gov.in/mtdc](http://www.maharashtratourism.gov.in/mtdc); Madame Cama Rd, Mumbai 400020).

The tourist authorities in Karnataka have been planning a similar upmarket train tour for years, but nothing has so far materialised. For progress updates contact any Karnataka state tourism office.

**EXPRESS TRAIN FARES IN RUPEES**

Distance (km)	1AC	2AC	3AC	Chair car (CC)	Sleeper (SL)	Second (II)
100	400	226	158	122	56	35
200	653	269	256	199	91	57
300	888	502	348	271	124	78
400	1107	626	433	337	154	97
500	1325	749	519	404	185	116
1000	2159	1221	845	657	301	188
1500	2734	1546	1070	832	381	238
2000	3309	1871	1295	1007	461	288

**Reservations**

No reservations are required for general (2nd class) compartments. You can reserve seats in all chair-car, sleeper, and 1AC, 2AC and 3AC carriages up to 60 days in advance at any station with a computerised booking system. Advance bookings are strongly recommended for all overnight journeys.

The reservation procedure is fairly simple – obtain a reservation slip from the information window and fill in the starting station, the destination station, the class you want to travel in and the name and number of the train (this is where *Trains at a Glance* comes into its own). You then join the long queue to the ticket window, where your ticket will be printed.

In larger cities, there are dedicated ticket windows for foreigners and credit-card payments. Elsewhere, you'll have to join a general queue and pay in rupees cash. A special tourist quota is set aside for foreign tourists travelling between popular stations. These seats can only be booked at dedicated reservation offices in major cities (details are given in the regional chapters), and you need to show your passport and visa as ID. The government has recently changed the rules, allowing foreigners to pay for tourist quota seats in rupees, British pounds, US dollars or Euros, in cash or Thomas Cook and American Express travellers cheques (change is given in rupees). However, some offices still ask to see foreign exchange certificates before accepting payment in rupees.

Trains are frequently overbooked, but many passengers cancel. You can buy a ticket on the 'wait list' and try your luck. A refund is available if you fail to get a seat – ask the

ticket office about your chances. Refunds are available on any ticket, even after departure, with a penalty – the rules are complicated so check when you book.

If you don't want to go through the hassle of buying a ticket yourself, many travel agencies and hotels will purchase your train ticket for a small commission, though ticket scams abound.

Internet bookings are also possible on the website [www.irctc.co.in](http://www.irctc.co.in), and you can choose an e-ticket, or have the tickets sent to you inside India by courier. The website [www.seat61.com/India.htm](http://www.seat61.com/India.htm) has some excellent advice on online bookings – scroll down to the 'How to book – from outside India' heading.

Reserved tickets show your seat/berth number (or wait-list number) and the carriage number. When the train pulls in, keep an eye out for your carriage number written on the side of the train (station staff can point you in the right direction if you get confused). A list of names and berths is also posted on the side of each reserved carriage – a beacon of light for panicking travellers!

**Train Passes**

The Indrail Pass permits unlimited rail travel for the period of its validity, but it offers limited savings and you must still make reservations. Passes are available for one to 90 days of travel and you can book through overseas travel agents, or station ticket offices in major Indian cities – click on the Information/International Tourist link on [www.indianrail.gov.in](http://www.indianrail.gov.in) for prices. Children aged between five and 12 pay half fare. There's no refund for either lost or partially used tickets.

# Health

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There is huge geographical variation in India, from tropical beaches to the Himalayan mountains. Consequently, environmental issues such as heat, cold and altitude can cause significant health problems. Hygiene is generally poor in India so food and water-borne illnesses are common. Many insect-borne diseases are present, particularly in tropical areas. Medical care is basic in many areas so it is essential to be well prepared before travelling to India.

Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases when in the tropics, but these rarely cause serious illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents) account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is very common. Fortunately most travellers' illnesses can be prevented with some common-sense behaviour or treated with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is very useful. If carrying syringes or

needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication, bring double your ordinary needs in case of loss or theft. You'll be able to buy many medications over the counter in India without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, blood pressure medications and contraceptive pills.

## INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company will check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing and scuba diving. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive; bills of over US\$100,000 are not uncommon.

It's a good idea to find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or if it will reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In many countries doctors expect payment in cash.) Some policies offer lower and higher medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim from your insurance company later. If you do have to claim later, make sure you keep all relevant documentation. Some policies ask that you telephone back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem will be made.

## VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give specific

recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't give immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the 'yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

### Recommended Vaccinations

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends these vaccinations for travellers to

India (as well as being up to date with measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations):

**Adult diphtheria and tetanus** Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

**Hepatitis A** Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

**Hepatitis B** Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. In 95% of people lifetime protection results.

#### MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- Antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- Antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- Antibiotic for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- Antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetrizine for daytime and Promethazine for night
- Antiseptic, eg Betadine
- Antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopam
- Contraceptive method
- Decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Diarrhoea medication – consider an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine). Antibiotics for diarrhoea include Norfloxacin or Ciprofloxacin; for bacterial diarrhoea Azithromycin; for Giardia or amoebic dysentery Tinidazole.
- First-aid items such as scissors, elastoplasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers
- Ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory
- Indigestion tablets, eg Quick Eze or Mylanta
- Iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- Laxative, eg Coloxyl
- Migraine medication if you suffer from them
- Paracetamol
- Pyrethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- Steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- Sunscreen and hat
- Throat lozenges
- Thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or equivalent if prone to urine infections

**Polio** In 2007 polio was still present in India. Only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

**Typhoid** Recommended for all travellers to India, even if you only visit urban areas. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, however, the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.

**Varicella** If you haven't had chickenpox discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

These immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

**Japanese B Encephalitis** Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Rarely, an allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

**Meningitis** Single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years' protection; meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years' protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

**Rabies** Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

**Tuberculosis (TB)** A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine given in a lifetime.

## Required Vaccinations

The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow fever zone within the six days prior to entering India. If you are travelling to India from Africa or South America, you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet – [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. Some other suggestions:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC;** [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) Good general information.

**MD Travel Health** ([www.mdtravelhealth.com](http://www.mdtravelhealth.com)) Provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily.

**World Health Organization (WHO;** [www.who.int/ith/](http://www.who.int/ith/)) Its superb book *International Travel & Health* is revised annually and available online.

## FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and packed with useful information, including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Travellers' Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website of **Travelling Well** ([www.travellingwell.com.au](http://www.travellingwell.com.au)).

## IN TRANSIT

### DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights, walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

### JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag

### HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

**Australia** ([www.dfat.gov.au/travel/](http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel/))

**Canada** ([www.travelhealth.gc.ca](http://www.travelhealth.gc.ca))

**New Zealand** ([www.mfat.govt.nz/travel](http://www.mfat.govt.nz/travel))

**South Africa** ([www.dfa.gov.za/travelling](http://www.dfa.gov.za/travelling))

**UK** ([www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/](http://www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/))

**US** ([www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/))



try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), promethazine (Phenergan) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. An herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

## IN INDIA

### AVAILABILITY OF HEALTHCARE

Medical care is hugely variable in India. Some cities now have clinics catering specifically to travellers and expatriates. These clinics are usually more expensive than local medical facilities, but are worth utilising, as they will offer a superior standard of care. Additionally, they understand the local system, and are aware of the safest local hospitals and best specialists. They can also liaise with insurance companies should you require evacuation. Recommended clinics are listed under Information in the regional chapters in this book. It is difficult to find reliable medical care in rural areas.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the relevant medication and you cannot attend a recommended clinic. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria, do not waste time; travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention. It is always better to be assessed by a doctor than to rely on self-treatment.

Before buying medication over the counter, always check the use-by date and ensure the packet is sealed. Don't accept items that have been poorly stored (eg lying in a glass cabinet exposed to the sun).

### INFECTIOUS DISEASES

#### Avian Flu

'Bird Flu' or Influenza A (H5N1) is a subtype of the type A influenza virus. This virus typically infects birds and not humans; however, in 1997 the first documented case of bird-to-human transmission was recorded in Hong Kong. Currently very close contact with dead or sick birds is the principal source of infec-

tion and bird to human transmission does not easily occur.

Symptoms include high fever and typical influenza-like symptoms with rapid deterioration leading to respiratory failure and death in many cases. The early administration of antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu, is recommended to improve the chances of survival. At this time it is not routinely recommended for travellers to carry Tamiflu with them – rather immediate medical care should be sought if bird flu is suspected. At the time of writing there have been no recorded cases in travellers or expatriates.

There is currently no vaccine available to prevent bird flu. For up-to-date information check these two websites:

- [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)
- [www.avianinfluenza.com.au](http://www.avianinfluenza.com.au)

### Coughs, Colds & Chest Infections

Around 25% of travellers to India will develop a respiratory infection. This usually starts as a virus and is exacerbated by environmental conditions, such as pollution in the cities, or cold and altitude in the mountains. Commonly a secondary bacterial infection will intervene – marked by fever, chest pain and coughing up discoloured or blood-tinged sputum. If you have the symptoms of an infection seek medical advice or commence a general antibiotic.

### Dengue Fever

This mosquito-borne disease is becomingly increasingly problematic in the tropical world, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue was previously known as 'breakbone fever'). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

### Hepatitis A

A problem throughout the region, this food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment

for hepatitis A, you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to India should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

### Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

### Hepatitis E

Transmitted through contaminated food and water, hepatitis E has similar symptoms to hepatitis A, but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

### HIV

HIV is spread via contaminated body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, unsterile needles (including in medical facilities) and procedures such as tattoos. The growth rate of HIV in India is one of the highest in the world.

### Influenza

Present year-round in the tropics, influenza (flu) symptoms include fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes – vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

### Japanese B Encephalitis

This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is rare in travellers. Like most mosquito-borne diseases it is becoming a more common problem in affected countries. Most cases occur in rural areas and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die while another third will suffer permanent brain damage.

### Malaria

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. You must get expert advice as to whether your trip actually

puts you at risk. For most rural areas, the risk of contracting malaria far outweighs the risk of any tablet side effects. Before you travel, seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms, such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills, may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance and antimalaria medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with pyrethrin
- Choose accommodation with screens and fans (if not air-conditioned)
- Impregnate clothing with pyrethrin in high-risk areas
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours
- Use mosquito coils
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal

There are a variety of medications available. The effectiveness of the chloroquine and Paludrine combination is now limited in many parts of South Asia. Common side effects include nausea (40% of people) and mouth ulcers.

The daily tablet doxycycline is a broad-spectrum antibiotic that has the added benefit of helping to prevent a variety of tropical diseases, including leptospirosis, tick-borne disease and typhus. The potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to sunburn), thrush (in women), indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus – you can help prevent this by taking your tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and

never lying down within half an hour of taking it. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

**Lariam (mefloquine)** has received much bad press, some of it justified, some not. This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and having fits. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders or epilepsy should not take Lariam. It is considered safe in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Tablets must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

The new drug **Malarone** is a combination of atovaquone and proguanil. Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for scuba divers and for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

### Rabies

Around 30,000 people die in India each year from rabies. This uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence postexposure treatment. Having pretravel vaccination means the postbite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not prevaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible, and this is almost impossible to obtain in much of India.

### STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases most common in India include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine, seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels, have an STD check on your return home.

### Tuberculosis

While TB is rare in travellers, those who have significant contact with the local population (such as medical and aid workers and long-

term travellers) should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

### Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is also spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever, headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers who are spending more than a week in India. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective, so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

## TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

This is by far the most common problem affecting travellers – between 30% and 70% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom, such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions like Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as norfloxacin, ciprofloxacin or azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, though (eg if you have to go on a long bus ride). Don't take loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

### Amoebic Dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is very rare in travellers but is often misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea, ie fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reli-

### DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase
- Avoid ice
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

able medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs: Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur.

### Giardiasis

Giardia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months; the best advice is to seek medical treatment. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

### Air Pollution

Air pollution, particularly vehicle pollution, is an increasing problem in most of India's major cities. If you have severe respiratory problems, speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. This pollution also causes minor respiratory problems, such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes. If troubled by the pollution, leave the city for a few days and get some fresh air.

### Diving & Surfing

Divers and surfers should seek specialised advice before they travel to ensure their medical kit contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections, as well as the standard

problems. Divers should ensure their insurance covers them for decompression illness – get specialised dive insurance through an organisation such as **DiversAlert Network (DAN; www.danasiapacific.org)**. Have a dive medical before you leave your home country – there are certain medical conditions that are incompatible with diving.

### Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food, and avoiding shellfish and food that has been sitting in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers. See p113 for more on safe eating.

### Heat

Many parts of India are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Take it easy when you first arrive. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut); drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps. Treat cramps by stopping activity, resting, rehydrating with double-strength rehydration solution and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include feeling weak, headache, irritability, nausea or vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast, weak pulse and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat and/or sun, fanning the sufferer and applying cool wet cloths to the skin, laying the sufferer flat with their legs raised and rehydrating with water containing ¼ teaspoon of salt per litre. Recovery is usually rapid and it is common to feel weak for some days afterwards.

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits, and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and commence cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them and applying cool wet

cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. The result is an itchy rash of tiny lumps. Treat it by moving out of the heat and into an air-conditioned area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly heat powder can be helpful.

Tropical fatigue is common in long-term expatriates based in the tropics. It's rarely due to disease and is caused by the climate, inadequate mental rest, excessive alcohol intake and the demands of daily work in a different culture.

### High Altitude

If you are going to altitudes above 3000m, you should get information on preventing, recognising and treating Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). The biggest risk factor for developing altitude sickness is going too high too quickly – you should follow a conservative acclimatisation schedule such as can be found in all good trekking guides – and you should *never* go to a higher altitude when you have any symptoms that could be altitude related. There is no way to predict who will get altitude sickness and it is often the younger, fitter members of a group who succumb.

Symptoms usually develop during the first 24 hours at altitude but may be delayed up to three weeks. Mild symptoms include headache, lethargy, dizziness, difficulty sleeping and loss of appetite. AMS may become more severe without warning and can be fatal. Severe symptoms include breathlessness, a dry, irritative cough (which may progress to the production of pink, frothy sputum), severe headache, lack of coordination and balance, confusion, irrational behaviour, vomiting, drowsiness and unconsciousness.

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, which usually takes a day or two. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, however, immediate descent is necessary; even 500m can help. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

The drugs acetazolamide and dexamethasone are recommended by some doctors for the prevention of AMS; however, their use is controversial. They can reduce the symptoms, but they may also mask warning signs; severe

and fatal AMS has occurred in people taking these drugs.

To prevent acute mountain sickness:

- Ascend slowly – have frequent rest days, spending two to three nights at each rise of 1000m.
- It is always wise to sleep at a lower altitude than the greatest height reached during the day, if possible. Also, once above 3000m, care should be taken not to increase the sleeping altitude by more than 300m per day.
- Drink extra fluids. The mountain air is dry and cold and moisture is lost as you breathe.
- Eat light, high-carbohydrate meals.
- Avoid alcohol and sedatives.

### Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine. Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. They can be difficult to treat and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as pyrethrin. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas. Ticks are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches, you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergency treatment. For others pain is the main problem – apply ice to the sting and take painkillers.

### Skin Problems

Fungal rashes are common in humid climates. There are two common fungal rashes that affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas,

such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as clotrimazole or Lamisil. *Tinea versicolor* is also common – this fungus causes small, light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness), see a doctor. Divers and surfers should be particularly careful with coral cuts, as they become easily infected.

### Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm). You can get burnt very easily when you are at high altitudes so be vigilant once above 3000m. If you become sunburnt, stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. One-percent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

## WOMEN'S HEALTH

In most places in India, supplies of sanitary products (pads, rarely tampons) are readily

available. Birth control options may be limited, so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics. For gynaecological health issues, seek out a female doctor.

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transport and substandard medical facilities. Most of all, ensure that your travel insurance policy covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease for pregnant women, and WHO recommends that they do *not* travel to areas with Chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs are completely safe in pregnancy.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

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