

Destination India

With its mind-bending diversity – from snowcapped mountains to sun-washed beaches, crusty old bazaars to chichi designer boutiques, tranquil temples to feisty festivals, ramshackle rural villages to techno-savvy urban hubs – it's hardly surprising that India has been dubbed the planet's most multidimensional country.

The subcontinent is home to more than a billion people, and its eclectic melange of ethnic groups translates into an intoxicating cultural cocktail for the traveller. For those on a spiritual quest, India has oodles of sacrosanct sites and stirring philosophies, while history buffs will discover gems from the past almost everywhere – from grand vestiges of the British Raj peering over frenetic city streets, to battle-scarred forts rising from forlorn country fields. Meanwhile, lovers of the great outdoors can paddle in the shimmering waters of one of many palm-fringed beaches, scout for big jungle cats on an adrenaline-pumping wildlife safari, or simply breathe in the scent of wildflowers on a rejuvenating forest walk. And then there's the food! From squidgy south Indian *idlis* (rice dumplings) to zesty north Indian curries, travellers are treated to a positively seductive smorgasbord of subcontinental specialities.

Demystifying India is a perpetual work-in-progress and for many travellers that's precisely what makes her so deeply addictive. Ultimately, it's all about surrendering yourself to the unknown: this is the India that nothing can quite prepare you for because its very essence – its elusive soul – lies in its mystery. Love it or loathe it – and most visitors seesaw between the two – India will jostle your entire being and no matter where you go or what you do, it's a place you'll never forget.



GREG ELMS

Getting Started

Nothing can fully prepare you for India, but perhaps the one thing that best encapsulates this extraordinary country is its ability to inspire, frustrate, thrill and confound all at once.

India is one of the planet's most multidimensional countries, presenting a wildly diverse spectrum of travel encounters. Some of these can be challenging, particularly for the first-time visitor: the poverty is confronting, Indian bureaucracy can be exasperating and the crush of humanity sometimes turns the simplest task into an energy-zapping battle. Even the most experienced travellers find their sanity frayed at some point, yet this is all part of what makes India a unique travel destination. If you haven't visited this part of the globe before, set aside the first few days to simply acclimatise to the subcontinent's bamboozling symphony of sights, sounds, tastes and smells.

Get excited and knowledgeable about your trip beforehand by reading up on India, especially its cultural framework. Doing so will augment your appreciation of the subcontinent's sights and traditions and also better equip you to hold more informed conversations with locals. Allow a few weeks of pretrip preparation to sort out immunisations and visas.

In terms of planning what to do once you arrive, the country's remarkable diversity can actually make it a veritable quagmire when nutting out itineraries. The key is to try not to squeeze in too much, as travelling often involves considerable distances and stamina. It's wise to factor in some flexibility, as things don't always run like clockwork in India – more than a few travellers have had their holidays marred by not being able to get their preferred train seats, or by being delayed by rescheduled transport services, for example. Flexibility will also allow spontaneity, whether it's simply spending an afternoon discussing samsara with a *pujari* (priest) whom you initially approached for directions after getting lost in a bazaar, or ditching travel plans with friends to join a short-staffed rural volunteer group you heard about while queuing for bus tickets in Delhi. Regardless, your Indian sojourn is going to be a whole lot more enjoyable if you give yourself some time off purely to chill.

WHEN TO GO

Climate plays a key factor in deciding when to visit India. You should keep in mind that climatic conditions in the far north are distinctly different to those of the extreme south.

Generally speaking, India's climate is defined by three seasons – the hot, the wet (monsoon) and the cool, each of which can vary in duration from north to south. The most pleasant time to visit most of the country is during the cooler period of November to around mid-February, although there are marked regional variations (see the Fast Facts boxed texts at the start of regional chapters for the best times to visit specific regions).

THE INDIA EXPERIENCE

There's a whole lot more to India than merely sightseeing:

- Activities (see p90)
- Courses (see p1129)
- Festivals (see p1136)
- Shopping (see p1144)
- Volunteering (see p1155)

Apart from the weather, the timing of certain festivals or special events may also influence when you wish to visit India (see p1136).

The Hot

The heat starts to build up in India from around February and by April it really warms up. It can get unbearably hot in May and June, with many parts of the country experiencing temperatures of 40°C and above. Late in May the first signs of the monsoon are visible in some areas – high humidity, electrical storms, short rainstorms and dust storms that turn day into night. The hot season is the time to abandon the plains and head for the cooler hills, and this is when hill stations are at their best (and busiest).

The Wet

When the monsoon finally arrives, it doesn't just suddenly appear. After some advance warning the rain comes in steadily, generally starting around 1 June in the extreme south and sweeping north to cover the whole country by early July. The monsoon doesn't really cool things down; at first hot, dry and dusty weather is simply replaced by hot, humid and muddy conditions. It doesn't rain solidly all day, but it rains virtually every day; the water tends to come down in buckets for a while, followed by periods of sun, creating a fatiguing steam bath-like environment. The main monsoon comes from the southwest, but the southeast coast (and southern Kerala) is largely affected by the short and surprisingly heavy northeast monsoon, which brings rain from around October to early December.

The Cool

Around October the monsoon ends for most of the country, and this is when India sees most tourists – however, by this time it's too cold to visit Ladakh (May to October is the optimum period; see p366). During October and November it's generally not too hot and not too cool (although October can still be quite humid in some regions). In the thick of winter (around mid-December to mid-January), Delhi and other northern cities can become astonishingly cold, especially at night. It certainly becomes bone-chillingly cold in the far north. In the far south, where it never gets truly cool, the temperatures become comfortably warm during this period.

COSTS & MONEY

When it comes to finances, India pleases all pockets. Accommodation ranges from lacklustre backpacker lodgings to sumptuous top-end hotels, with some delightful midrange possibilities that won't bust the bank. A delicious array of eateries at all prices means you can fill your belly without spending a fortune, and it's possible to zip around economically as well thanks to the country's comprehensive public transport network.

As costs vary nationwide, the best way of ascertaining how much money you'll require for your trip is to peruse the relevant regional chapters of this book. Be prepared to pay more in the larger cities such as Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi, as well as at popular tourist destinations.

In relation to sightseeing, foreigners are often charged more than Indian citizens for entry into tourist sites (admission prices for foreigners are sometimes given in US dollars, payable in the rupee equivalent), and there may also be additional charges for still/video cameras.

So how does this all translate to a daily budget? Roughly speaking, if you stick to a tight budget you can manage on around Rs 450 to 600 per day (but budget for at least double that in some big cities and tourist hubs). This means staying in basic lodgings, travelling on the cheaper buses and train

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Getting a visa (p1154) and travel insurance (p1139)
- Seeking advice about vaccinations (p1181); some must be administered over a period of weeks
- Nonrevealing clothes (women *and* men) – covering up will win you more respect and is essential when visiting sacred sites
- A well-concealed money belt (p1133)
- Sunscreen lotion and sunglasses
- A small torch (flashlight) for poorly lit streets and power cuts
- Good-quality earplugs to block out night din and for long bus/train journeys
- A little alarm clock – budget and midrange hotels often lack clocks and can be notorious for missing wake-up calls
- Flip-flops (thongs) for shared or grotty bathrooms
- A shower cap and universal sink plug (uncommon except at top-end hotels)
- Tampons – sanitary pads are widely available but tampons are usually restricted to big (or touristy) cities
- Mosquito repellent (a mosquito net can also come in handy)
- Expecting the unexpected – India has an uncanny knack for throwing up surprises

classes, eating simple meals and doing limited sightseeing. If you wish to stay in midrange hotels, dine at nicer restaurants, do a reasonable amount of sightseeing and largely travel by autorickshaw and taxi, you're generally looking at anywhere between Rs 900 and 1700 per day. Of course, you may be able to subsist on less in India's smaller, less touristy towns.

Accommodation prices may be influenced by factors such as location (see p1124). Tariffs can shoot up during festivals or other special events, with some hotels charging at least double the normal rate during these times. It would be misleading of us to pinpoint an exact countrywide average accommodation cost (due to broad regional variations), but most hotels around the country fall somewhere between the following ranges: in the budget category, single rooms roughly range from Rs 100 to 400, and doubles from Rs 200 to 600. For more comfort opt for midrange hotels, where you should expect to pay anywhere between Rs 300 and 1300 for a single and between Rs 450 and 1800 for a double. Budget and midrange hotel prices are usually higher in big cities (especially Mumbai) and tourist hot spots. At the upper end of the spectrum there's a bevy of opulent five-star properties (including some stunning palace-hotels), where you can easily spend *at least* US\$150 per night.

Eating out in India is sizzling-hot value, with meals for as little as Rs 40 at decent budget eateries, and usually little more than double that for a satiating midrange restaurant meal. Again, prices vary regionally (see the Eating sections of individual chapters).

Regarding long-distance travel, there's a range of classes on trains and several bus types, resulting in considerable flexibility vis-à-vis comfort and price – regional chapters supply specific costs and also see p1169. Domestic air travel has become a lot more price competitive thanks to recent deregulation (see p1170). Within towns there's inexpensive public transport (see p1173), or perhaps you'd like to hire a car with driver, which is surprisingly good value if there are several of you to split the cost (see p1172).

See p1129 for more climate information.

HOW MUCH?

Incense (15 sticks):
from Rs 10
Toothpaste (100g): Rs 27
Bellybutton bindi: Rs 15
Mars Bar: Rs 25
Hindi Pop CD:
from Rs 145



TOP 10

GREAT READS

With a phenomenal mix of novels offering brilliant insights into India, there's no dearth of riveting bedtime-reading fodder – the below titles are some great places to start. For additional reading recommendations see p74 and the boxed text, p771.

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| 1 <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i> by Kiran Desai | 6 <i>A Fine Balance</i> by Rohinton Mistry |
| 2 <i>Shantaram</i> by Gregory David Roberts | 7 <i>The Romantics</i> by Pankaj Mishra |
| 3 <i>The God of Small Things</i> by Arundhati Roy | 8 <i>White Mughals</i> by William Dalrymple |
| 4 <i>A Suitable Boy</i> by Vikram Seth | 9 <i>Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard</i> by Kiran Desai |
| 5 <i>Midnight's Children</i> by Salman Rushdie | 10 <i>The Alchemy of Desire</i> by Tarun J Tejpal |

MUST-SEE MOVIES

What better way to get all fired up about your trip than by holding your very own Indian movie marathon! The following top films are either in English or available with English (and sometimes other vernacular) subtitles. Mainstream video stores may not stock many (if any) Bollywood titles, but you shouldn't have any problem finding them at your local Indian video shop; if that fails, Indian grocery stores usually have at least one shelf bulging with rental DVDs.

To find out more about Indian cinema read p73.

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| 1 <i>Earth, Water and Fire</i> , a trilogy directed by Deepa Mehta | 6 <i>Lagaan</i> , directed by Ashutosh Gowariker |
| 2 <i>Gandhi</i> , directed by Richard Attenborough | 7 <i>The Legend of Bhagat Singh</i> , directed by Rajkumar Santoshi |
| 3 <i>Mr & Mrs Iyer</i> , directed by Aparna Sen | 8 <i>Hyderabad Blues (Part I & II)</i> , directed by Nagesh Kukunoor |
| 4 <i>Monsoon Wedding</i> , directed by Mira Nair; see also her acclaimed earlier films <i>Kama Sutra</i> and <i>Salaam Bombay!</i> | 9 <i>Pyaar Ke Side Effects</i> , directed by Saket Chaudhary |
| 5 <i>Black</i> , directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali | 10 <i>Meenaxi: Tale of 3 Cities</i> , directed by MF Hussain |

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

India has a tremendous variety of major and minor festivals – for comprehensive details see p1136 and the 'Festivals In...' boxed texts appearing near the start of regional chapters.

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| 1 Festival of Dance (Feb/Mar); Madhya Pradesh (p663) | 6 Dussehra (Durga Puja) (Sep/Oct); nationwide (p1137) but especially in Mysore (p882), Kullu (p303) and Kolkata (p487) |
| 2 Rath Yatra (Jun/Jul); Orissa (p646) and Kolkata (Calcutta; p487) | 7 Diwali (Oct/Nov); nationwide (p1137) |
| 3 Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race (Aug); Kerala (p984) | 8 Pushkar Camel Fair (Oct/Nov); Rajasthan (p195) |
| 4 Ganesh Chaturthi (Aug/Sep); nationwide (p1137) but especially in Mumbai (p770) and Pune (p803) | 9 Sonepur Mela (Nov/Dec); Bihar (p556) |
| 5 Ladakh Festival (Sep); Ladakh (p373) | 10 Festival of Carnatic Music & Dance (Dec/Jan); Tamil Nadu (p1028) |

TRAVEL LITERATURE

William Sutcliffe's *Are You Experienced?* is the hilarious tale of first-time backpacker Dave, who accompanies his best friend's girlfriend to India in an attempt to seduce her. It adroitly portrays the backpacker scene in India.

Inhaling the Mahatma by Christopher Kremmer is the author's fascinating and multifarious encounter with India, from his stint as a foreign correspondent in the early 1990s to his marriage to an Indian woman and life beyond.

Bedazzled by wizardry since childhood, Tahir Shah travelled through India to learn the art of illusion under the guidance of a mysterious master magician. *Sorcerer's Apprentice* is the wild and wonderful story of his journey.

The Age of Kali by celebrated travel writer William Dalrymple is a perceptive compilation of insights gleaned from a decade of travelling the subcontinent.

Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* is the engaging tale of two young Europeans, Matteo and Sophie, who go to India seeking spiritual enlightenment. While Matteo's ashram experience is spiritually affirming, Sophie's isn't quite so rosy.

Indian Summer by Will Randall is the memoir of a somewhat disenchanted English teacher who unexpectedly finds himself in Pune, teaching at a school for street kids – then suddenly fighting to save it from being shut down.

Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* amusingly and cynically describes the cultural collision as India looks to the West for technology and modern methods, and the West descends upon India in search of wisdom and enlightenment.

Chasing the Monsoon by Alexander Frater is an Englishman's story of his monsoon-chasing journey from Kovalam to Meghalaya. It offers a captivating window into the monsoon's significance and its impact on people.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Best Indian Sites (www.bestindiansites.com) Offers links to popular websites including search engines, marriage matchmakers and information technology sites.

Incredible India (www.incredibleindia.org) The official government tourism site, with national travel-related information.

Khoj (www.khoj.com) A nifty portal with links to the arts, science, business, culture, sport and much more.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Apart from plenty of useful links there's the popular Thorn Tree forum, where you can swap information with fellow travellers to India.

Maps of India (www.mapsofindia.com) A handy assortment of regional maps, including thematic offerings such as those pinpointing India's wildlife sanctuaries and Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

World Newspapers (www.world-newspapers.com/india.html) Provides links to India's major English-language national and regional publications, enabling you to stay tuned to what's happening where.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

A TAJ, A TEMPLE & A TIGER

One Week

A week is a tight schedule for this vast and vibrant country, but the following itinerary will tick off some must-have experiences. To maximise your time, arrange train travel in advance at the International Tourist Bureau (p157) at New Delhi train station.

Devote day one to Delhi's atmospheric **Old City** (p127). In the evening, dine at one of the upmarket eateries on **Connaught Place** (p135). Next morning, catch the early train to **Agra** (p394) to witness India's signature monument, the glorious **Taj Mahal** (p399).

On day three, fly from Agra to **Khajuraho** (p673) for a peek at the risqué, erotic **temples** (p675). Spend day four searching for tigers by elephant at nearby **Panna National Park** (p681). On day five, fly to **Varanasi** (p425) and explore the **ghats** (p427) on the Ganges River on foot, then by riverboat the next morning (p431).

Finish day six by flying to Delhi and travelling by train to **Amritsar** (p269). Day seven is devoted to the most sacred sight in the Sikh religion, the **Golden Temple** (p271). Then back to Delhi and you're done.

A whistlestop tour of popular sights around Delhi, travelling by plane and train. Tick off temples, tiger safaris, the sacred Ganges River and the Taj. There's a lot of travel, but you'll fill an album with pictures of some of India's most famous sights.



RAJASTHAN & THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Two Weeks

This much-loved circuit starts and ends in the bustling capital, Delhi, but extends into the heart of Rajasthan. You can cover this route in two busy weeks, but extra days are recommended.

On day one, get a dose of Mughal history at Old Delhi's evocative **Jama Masjid** (p129) then dive into the surrounding **bazaars** (p153) to absorb the sights and sounds of the Old City. On day two, visit **Humayan's Tomb** (p130) and the **National Museum** (p131), then attend the Sound and Light show at the historic **Red Fort** (p127).

Next day, catch the train to **Agra** (p394) and watch the play of light on the marble of the **Taj Mahal** (p399) and **Agra Fort** (p400). Spend day three surrounded by the ghosts of Mughals in the abandoned city of **Fatehpur Sikri** (p408).

On day four, ride the morning bus to **Jaipur** (p165) to soak up the sights of the **Old City** (p167). Fill day five by exploring the fairytale fort at **Amber** (p178), then browse Jaipur's wonderful **emporiums** (p176).

On day six, take the bus to **Ajmer** (p189), the jumping-off point for **Pushkar** (p192). Take your time over the lakeside **temples** (p193) then travel onward to eggshell-blue **Udaipur** (p217) for an extravagant lunch at the palace on the **lake** (p219).

Day-trip to the fortress and wildlife sanctuary at **Kumbalgarh** (p228), then head west to the temple-strewn hill station of **Mt Abu** (p229). On day 12, travel on to **Jodhpur** (p234) to admire the pastel-painted houses and magnificent **Meherangarh Fort** (p234).

Take the bus through the desert to the ancient fortress of **Jaisalmer** (p243) to relive your *Arabian Nights* fantasies on a **camel safari** in the dunes (p248). Finally, make your way back to Delhi, completing the two-week odyssey.



This classic circuit around Delhi visits the Delhi–Agra–Jaipur loop – affectionately dubbed 'The Golden Triangle' – and takes in some of Rajasthan's most famous sights. It's a cross-section across the northern plains for travellers short on time.

ONCE AROUND NORTH INDIA

Two Months

Start this northern extravaganza in **Kolkata** (Calcutta; p485), finishing in Delhi (p119). Time your schedule so the last leg through Ladakh falls between July and October when the mountain passes are open (see p376).

Pass a few days enjoying the atmosphere and **food** (p506) in Kolkata, home to mighty **Victoria Memorial** (p492). Then head to **Bodhgaya** (p557), where Buddha attained enlightenment. Roll across the plains to the sacred city of **Varanasi** (p425), then to **Khajuraho** (p673), where temples drip with erotic carvings.

Head southwest through **Orchha** (p670) and **Jhansi** (p669) to **Sanchi** (p689), where Emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism. In **Bhopal** (p682) pick up the train to **Jalgaon** (p815), jumping-off point for the wonderful **Ajanta Caves** (p812).

Head by train to buzzing **Mumbai** (Bombay; p766), then break north along the coast to frenetic **Ahmedabad** (Amdavad; p717). For a more peaceful slice of Gujarat, visit the mellow island of **Diu** (p739) and the tribal heartland of **Bhuj** (p760). Kick off your tour through Rajasthan in whimsical **Udaipur** (p217) and circle the sights to **Jaipur** (p165) to catch the train to Agra's **Taj Mahal** (p399).

Next, drop by **Delhi** (p119), to relish the **sights** (p127), **tastes** (p145) and **shopping** (p152) before dashing northeast to spot tigers in **Corbett Tiger Reserve** (p472) and to engage in yoga in **Rishikesh** (p459). Connect through **Dehra Dun** (p446) and **Chandigarh** (p261) to **Shimla** (p282), India's premier hill station.

Suitably rested, bus to **Manali** (p306) for some adrenalin-charged activities, then ride the mountain bus to the Buddhist city of **Leh** (p367). If the political situation allows (see p352), head to **Srinagar** (p353) in Kashmir, then through **Jammu** (p363) to **McLeod Ganj** (p319), home of the Tibetan government in exile.

Finish off the trip at **Amritsar** (p269) with its shimmering **Golden Temple** (p271) before one last train ride to Delhi. What a journey!

Kicking off in Kolkata and winding up in Delhi, this wide-ranging journey draws a snaking line through the highlights of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, northern Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Kashmir and Punjab.



CIRCLING THE SOUTH

Two Months

Mumbai is the borderline between North and South, and the easiest starting point for exploring India's steamy southern tip. Time your trip to avoid the monsoon – the sunniest skies are from October to February.

Kick off in cosmopolitan **Mumbai** (p766) and make the most of the **shopping** (p792) **eating** (p786) and **drinking** (p789) before heading inland to **Ajanta** (p812) and **Ellora** (p809) to marvel at Maharashtra's finest cave art. Sashay southwest to **Goa** (p837) to laze on palm-fringed beaches before dosing up on history inland at wonderful **Hampi** (p919), with its temple ruins and giant boulders.

Next, rub shoulders with yuppies in the party bars of **Bengaluru** (Bangalore; p890) and smell the waft of incense in spicy **Mysore** (p894) with its extravagant **Maharaja's Palace** (p895). Feast on a banana-leaf **thali** (p900) before cruising south to Kerala, stopping at enigmatic **Kochi** (Cochin; p1002) for a performance of **Kathakali dance** (p1011). Cruise Kerala's languorous backwaters from **Alappuzha** (Alleppey; p980), before dipping your toes in the warm waters around **Varkala** (p973).

For a change of pace, go northwest to **Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary** (p988) to spot elephants before boggling at the intricacy of the Tamil temples in **Madurai** (p1080). Pop into **Trichy** (Tiruchirappalli; p1073) and **Thanjavur** (p1070) before slowing down the pace in French-flavoured **Puducherry** (Pondicherry; p1057). Get more fine food in Tamil Nadu's busy capital, **Chennai** (Madras; p1038), before breaking north to admire the Mughal-era relics of **Hyderabad** (p937).

It's a long train-ride up the coast to **Bhubaneswar** (p628), leaping-off point for **Puri** (p643), site of the famous **Rath Yatra chariot festival** (p645). Drift north to the legendary Sun Temple at **Konark** (p649) before one last train-ride northeast to **Kolkata** (p485).

A slice of the steamy south featuring beaches, cave temples, jungle reserves and some of South India's best and brightest cities. Allow at least two months to soak up the sights, sounds and sensations of the tropical south.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

SIKKIM & THE NORTHEAST STATES

One Month

Surprisingly few people explore mountainous Sikkim and the tribal heartland of India's Northeast States. Permits are required, so plan your trip in advance – see p592 and p570. Also be aware of the security risks – see p595.

Obtain a Sikkim permit in **Siliguri** (p523), or **Darjeeling** (p530), where you can sample India's most famous **teas** (p541). Permit in hand, head to **Gangtok** (p571), the Sikkimese capital, and the surrounding **Buddhist monasteries** (p577).

Veer to **Namchi** (p579), for giant statues of Shiva and Padmasambhava, and to **Pelling** (p582), for **Pemayangtse Gompa** (p584) and Khangchendzonga views. Consider the week-long trek from **Yuksom** (p585) to **Goecha La** (p587). Exit Sikkim via **Tashiding** (p588), returning to Siliguri for the journey east to Assam.

In **Guwahati** (p595), the Assamese capital, arrange tours and permits for Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur. If you can't get a permit, try this loop: from Guwahati, head to **Manas** (p600) and **Kaziranga** (p602) **National Parks** to spot Indian rhinos and other rare wildlife. Detour to sleepy Meghalaya capital, **Shillong** (p607), and the waterfalls of **Cherrapunjee** (Sohra; p611). From **Agartala** (p613), capital of Tripura, head by air or land to **Bangladesh** (p615).

With the right permits, head from Guwahati to Arunachal Pradesh for the stunning Buddhist monastery at **Tawang** (p621), or the tribal villages near **Ziro** (p619). A Nagaland permit opens up the capital **Kohima** (p617), and fascinating tribal villages around **Mon** (p618). Manipur permits are rarely granted, but there's a fair chance of eyeing Mizo culture in **Mizoram** (p622).

This is a journey off the beaten track through the gorgeous hills of Buddhist Sikkim and the rarely visited Northeast, with the chance to get even further from the tourist circuit in tribal Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, providing you can obtain the required permits.



THE GREAT HIMALAYAN CIRCUIT

Four to Six Weeks

This rugged mountain odyssey can be started in **Srinagar** (p353) in Kashmir or **Manali** (p306) in Himachal Pradesh, depending on the political situation – see p352. Note that the mountain passes are only open from July to October. Acute Mountain Sickness is also a hazard – see p1181.

Assuming things are safe, start off with a houseboat stay in **Srinagar** (p356) before embarking on the epic journey into the mountains. Start with the bone-shaking ride to **Kargil** (p388), the dusty gateway to remote **Zanskar** (p389). By bus or jeep, head south through **Rangdum** (p389) to the monastery-strewn valley around **Padum** (p390), then return to Kargil for the coccyx-crunching ride on to **Ladakh** (p365). Break the journey east at **Lamayuru** (p387), **Alchi** (p386) and **Basgo** (p386), for awesome monastery paintings and sculptures.

On arrival in **Leh** (p367), take some time to unwind. Consider a **meditation course** (p373) and visit the local stupas, gompas and **palace** (p369). Join a tour over the world's highest road pass to the **Nubra Valley** (p383) and explore the Indus Valley by bus or rented motorcycle, visiting the monastery towns of **Stok** (p382), **Thiksey** (p381) and **Hemis** (p382).

Next, veer south over perilous mountain passes to **Keylong** (p340), the calm capital of Lahaul. Stroll to local **gompas** (p340), and travel by bus through parched deserts to **Kaza** (p342), the capital of Spiti. Obtain a permit for onward travel, then continue east to **Dhankar** (p344) and **Tabo** (p344) for more mesmerising Buddhist art.

With permit in hand, you can continue through knee-trembling mountain scenery to **Rekong Peo** (p295), capital of Kinnaur. Detour north to the pretty village of **Kalpa** (p296) to shake off the trail dust, then finish the journey with some creature comforts in **Shimla** (p282) – you've earned it!

A mountain odyssey, crossing over the world's highest motorable passes from Kashmir all the way to Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. Even when Kashmir is off-limits, you can travel from Manali to Ladakh and finish the circuit from there.



THE TRIBAL CENTRE

Eight to 10 Weeks

Well off the radar of most travellers, the western plains are full of offbeat sights and fascinating glimpses of tribal India (see p93 for more information). However, security can be a concern in parts of Bihar – see p551 for more advice.

Start in **Kolkata** (p485), Bengal's bustling cultural capital, before riding the rails north to **Ranchi** (p566), gateway to little-visited **Betla (Palamau) National Park** (p567). Head back via Ranchi and **Gaya** (p562) to famous **Bodhgaya** (p557), the birthplace of Buddhism. Continue north via the Buddhist ruins at **Nalanda** (p565) to Bihar's capital, **Patna** (p552), to stock up on Mithila **tribal art** (p554).

Travel on to Madhya Pradesh through **Varanasi** (p425), detouring south past tiger- and leopard-inhabited **Bandhavgarh National Park** (p711) to **Jabalpur** (p705), for a boat cruise along the **Narmada River gorge** (p708). Take a side-trip to **Kanha National Park** (p709) for another decent chance of spotting tigers.

Next, break east for **Bhopal** (p682), a surprising city that is rising above its tragic past. From here, you can detour to well-preserved Buddhist ruins at **Sanchi** (p689) and prehistoric painted caves at **Bhimbetka** (p688).

Next, trundle southeast to **Indore** (p698) for detours to the Mughal and Afghan ruins at **Mandu** (p702), the Hindu temples of **Ujjain** (p695) and the holy island of **Omkareshwar** (p700). From Indore, cut back across the state to **Jagdarpur** (p713) for visits to surrounding Bastar tribal areas.

More tribal visits are possible in nearby **Jeypure** (p654) in Orissa. For a change of scenery, head to the coast at **Gopalpur-on-Sea** (p652). Spot sea turtles at **Rushikulya** (p652) or take your binoculars to the bird-watching paradise of **Chilika Lake** (p650). Continue north through the capital, **Bhubaneswar** (p628), to the famous temples at **Puri** (p643) and **Konark** (p648). Finally, drift up the coast to Kolkata, with a final detour to animal-packed **Similipal National Park** (p656).

A looping circuit from Kolkata visiting the rarely seen sights of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa – the tribal heartland of the Indian plains. Count on temples, historic ruins, encounters with tribal culture and glorious national parks.



TAILORED TRIPS

AN INDIAN SAFARI

India is covered with captivating national parks, home to some of the wildest and most exotic creatures on earth, from tigers and lions to elephants and rhinos. Your best chances of spotting wildlife are early in the morning or late in the afternoon, preferably from the back of an elephant – see p90.

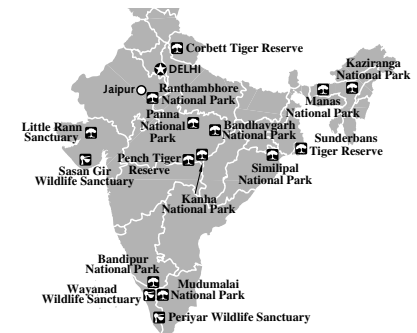
Starting from **Delhi** (p119), bag your first *bagh* (tiger) at Uttarakhand's **Corbett Tiger Reserve** (p472), then connect through **Jaipur** (p165) to **Ranthambhore National Park** (p197), where deer and tigers cavort among fort and temple ruins.

Cross over to Gujarat to see rare khurs (wild ass) at **Little Rann Sanctuary** (p765) and Asiatic lions at **Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary** (p746).

In the steamy south, spot gaur (Indian bison) in Karnataka's **Bandipur National Park** (p903) and track wild elephants in Kerala's **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary** (p1019) and **Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary** (p988). Elephants tramp the jungles of Tamil Nadu's **Mudumalai National Park** (p1104).

The jungles of Madhya Pradesh burn bright with tigers, best seen at **Pench Tiger Reserve** (p708), **Kanha National Park** (p709), **Bandhavgarh National Park** (p711) and **Panna National Park** (p681).

Further east, spot wild elephants and waterfalls at Orissa's **Similipal National Park** (p656), before taking a boat through the rain-drenched waterways of **Sunderbans Tiger Reserve** (p517). Wind up your trip with a wildlife-spotting river tour in Assam's **Manas National Park** (p600) and commune with one-horned Indian rhinos at **Kaziranga National Park** (p602).



THE BUDDHIST CIRCUIT

The Buddhist (or Lotus) Circuit is a pilgrims' trail in the footsteps of Buddha, connecting the sacred sites in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where the historical Buddha walked and talked. A logical continuation of this circuit is Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini, an easy detour across the Nepal border from **Sunauli** (p441).

Begin in **Bodhgaya** (p557), the most sacred Buddhist site. **Mahabodhi Temple** (p558) is where Prince Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became the Buddha over 2500 years ago. Start your own path to enlightenment on a **meditation course** (p559) before heading to **Rajgir** (p563), where Buddha gave many sermons about the 'middle way'. Continue north to the ruins of **Nalanda** (p565), marking the site of a vast and vanished Buddhist university.

At **Patna** (p552), see sculptures from Buddhist sites at **Patna Museum** (p554). You can detour here to **Vaishali** (p556), where Buddha preached his final sermon, and to **Kesariya** (p557), where he passed his begging bowl to his followers and began his final journey towards his birthplace at Lumbini. He died just short of the border at **Kushinagar** (p440). Heading here, you can visit **Sarnath** (p438), where Buddha first preached the middle way after achieving enlightenment.



INDIA FOR THRILL-SEEKERS

India is one big adventure playground for fans of action and adrenalin. Most activities are seasonal, so check the Activities chapter (p90) for the best times to get stuck in.

With the Himalaya looming overhead, it's little wonder that trekkers come here in droves. Start any trekking challenge in style on the high-altitude routes of **Zaskar** (p391) and **Ladakh** (p379). Go rafting on the churning Indus River near **Leh** (p372), then head south to **Manali** (p310) for more treks plus hot-air balloon rides, paragliding, rafting, rock-climbing, zorbing and skiing (January to March). Zip over to Uttarakhand for yet more excellent rafting and trekking from **Rishikesh** (p459) and ski and snowboard opportunities at **Auli** (p470).

For adventure without the mountain chill, head to the west coast. **Lonavla**

(p823) in Maharashtra is a famous paragliding launch pad. Beach resorts in **Goa** (p854) offer diving and water sports, and more paragliders launch over the ocean at **Arambol** (p867) and **Anjuna** (p861). Rafting trips up to Grade IV are possible in Karnataka's **Dubare Forest Reserve** (p907).

Next, head across the country to **Chennai** (p1026) to catch a flight to the **Andaman Islands** (p1110) for India's best scuba diving. There's more adventure north of **Kolkata** (p485) – arrange rafting trips in **Darjeeling** (p537) or trek Sikkim's **Goecha La** (p587) for eye-popping views over Khangchendzonga. Finish with something offbeat – canyoning over living tree bridges near **Cherrapunjee** (p611) in Meghalaya.



SAND, SEA & SACRED SITES

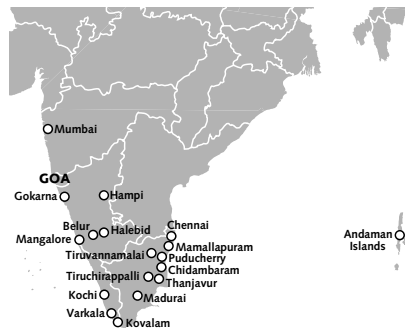
This route, from **Mumbai** (p766) to **Chennai** (p1026), blends some southern temples with the south's most beautiful beaches. To continue the beach theme, tag the sun-soaked **Andaman Islands** (p1106) to the end of this itinerary.

Start the search for sea and sand at Mumbai's **Chowpatty Beach** (p777) with a plate of the Maharashtra snack, *bhelpuri*, overlooking the Arabian Sea. Cruise to the stunning rock-cut temples on **Elephanta Island** (p797), then travel south by train to beach-blessed **Goa** (p837). Enjoy the best of the sand at **Arambol** (p866), **Vagator** (p863) and **Palolem** (p875), then continue along the coast to the sacred town of **Gokarna** (p916). Next, veer inland to the ruined Vijayanagar temples at **Hampi** (p919) and the Hoysala temples of **Belur** and **Halebid** (p909).

Connect through **Mangalore** (p912) and **Kochi** (Cochin; p1002) to Kerala's

seaside strip. Enjoy serious beach therapy in **Varkala** (p973) and **Kovalam** (p969), before jumping the train northeast to the awesome Sri Meenakshi Temple in **Madurai** (p1082). Continue north through the historic temple towns of **Tiruchirappalli** (p1074), **Thanjavur** (p1070) and **Chidambaram** (p1065) and break the journey at the French-influenced seaside town of **Puducherry** (p1057).

Continuing north, detour inland to the captivating Arunachaleswar Temple in **Tiruvannamalai** (p1055), and follow the coast to **Mamallapuram** (Mahabalipuram; p1044), home to the famous rock-carved **Shore Temple** (p1045). Finally, finish your journey with a stroll along Chennai's **Marina Beach** (p1033).



Snapshot

Apart from the cricket, the glittering star-studded world of Bollywood would have to be one of the hottest topics of discussion throughout India. Indeed the most avidly talked about subject in early 2007 was the widely publicised racist slurs that Bollywood star, Shilpa Shetty, copped from some of her fellow (British) housemates while on the UK's reality TV show, *Celebrity Big Brother*. The ensuing racism debate made front-page headlines in India and limelighted the prolific sense of national pride and identity that has been forged on the subcontinent six decades after the British were booted out.

Also making recent news headlines was the legal challenge to India's antigay law, which has been in place since the mid-19th century. There has been increasing public opposition to this controversial law which, critics purport, blatantly contradicts the government's assertion that India is a fair, tolerant and liberal nation – see p60.

Politics – whether at a national, state or village level – is the most consistently discussed topic on the subcontinent. Middle- and upper-class India also keeps its finger on the pulse of world politics, especially the USA, and there's little reticence when it comes to expressing opinions about world leaders and their respective parties' policies.

In the domestic political arena, when the renascent Congress Party snatched power from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2004 elections, the new government, headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, promised a steady economic hand. Singh was, after all, known as the father of Indian economic reform after instigating much of India's revolutionary economic liberalisation in the early 1990s as Finance Minister. However, despite the country boasting one of the world's fastest-growing economies – averaging 8.1% growth in recent years – vast sections of the population have seen little benefit from the boom. Indeed the big challenge for Singh's government is to spread both the burden and bounty of India's economic prosperity. Not an easy task given that the gap between the haves and the have-nots is far from shrinking, and poverty (see p61) is set to spiral upwards if India's population growth rate continues to gallop beyond that of its economic growth.

Despite government initiatives to rein in the ballooning birth rate, overpopulation (see p61) lies at the crux of many of India's most pressing problems. Apart from the pressure that an expanding population is placing on India's already groaning infrastructure, analysts warn that it's just a matter of time before the mounting competition for resources ignites volatile communal conflict – not to mention brings to breaking point an already overburdened healthcare system. Analysts also predict that as the population continues to soar, so too will the number of children from low-income households who leave school in order to scrape together whatever they can to supplement their family's meagre earnings (see p60).

While India has made giant economic strides, the government has attracted scathing criticism for failing to adequately address its AIDS crisis; India now records the planet's highest number of HIV-positive cases (see p59). Another recent health epidemic – primarily among the burgeoning well-to-do middle class – is diabetes. In 2007 India registered 41 million cases, a figure that's expected to swell to a staggering 75 million over the next two decades unless there are more government initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles.

When it comes to the environment, although there's legislation to protect ecosystems, activists cite government lethargy, coupled with corruption down the ranks, for invariably exacerbating environmental degradation (see p85)

FAST FACTS

Population: 1.027 billion
(2001 census)

GDP growth rate: 8.5%
(2006)

Unemployment
rate: 8.6%

Inflation: 5.2%

Population growth
rate: 1.4%

Families living in
one-room homes: 41%

India's percentage of
world population: 16.7%

Literacy rate:
53.7% (women)
and 75.3% (men)

Proportion of females to
males: 933:1000
(2001 census)

Life expectancy: 65.6
years (women) and 63.9
years (men)

and threatening endangered species (see p83). Climate change, deforestation, pollution and ever-expanding industrialisation are just some of the other issues the government is grappling with. For further details read p85.

The political challenges for India's government are no less daunting, especially in regard to ongoing communal friction, with the most worrying situation being that between India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir (see p54). Unresolved since the subcontinent's partition in 1947, the Kashmir impasse has been the catalyst for intensely rocky relations between the two countries ever since. From the time he came to power, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reiterated his government's unwavering commitment to solving the Kashmir dilemma. However bridge-building endeavours between India and Pakistan came to an abrupt halt following the July 2006 train bombings in Mumbai (Bombay) that killed more than 200 people and left more than 700 wounded. Targeting innocent commuters, the terrorists detonated seven coordinated bombs at various city rail networks. Islamabad vehemently denied accusations from Delhi that the terrorists acted with the connivance of its intelligence services. Bilateral talks concerning Kashmir later resumed, however they faced renewed pressure following the February 2007 bomb blasts on a train travelling from Delhi (India) to Lahore (Pakistan). This train service represents one of a number of confidence-building measures recently adopted by both governments to improve their shaky relations. The terrorist explosions, which occurred near the Indian town of Panipat, left 68 commuters dead and threatened to subvert the India-Pakistan peace process. However both governments refused to let the attack succeed in its objective of sabotaging relations, vowing to continue the train service and press on with constructive dialogue. At the time of writing, those responsible for the blasts had not been identified. Despite ongoing peace talks, the two separate train bombings have further heightened suspicion between India and Pakistan – it's clearly going to take an almighty reciprocal effort to resolve an issue so toxic that, in recent times, it has brought the two nuclear-armed south Asian neighbours to the brink of war.

On a more optimistic note, in 2006 more than 4.4 million foreign visitors – a record number of arrivals – came to India, accounting for around US\$6.6 billion of foreign-exchange earnings (a 14.6% increase on the previous year). Inbound tourism has witnessed a steady upward trend in recent years with pundits predicting that India's tourism growth – which is forecast to rise annually by 8.8% during the next decade – will soon be double that of worldwide tourism growth. In addition, India's ever-expanding, cashed-up middle class is increasingly embracing foreign travel, with a record seven million Indians travelling abroad in 2006 – a figure that's expected to jump to a whopping 50 million by 2020.

Another emerging market is that of medical tourism (foreigners travelling to India for competitively priced medical treatment coupled with a holiday), which has projected earnings of US\$2 billion by 2012 (it currently averages US\$330 million per annum). Newspaper reports indicate that a surgical procedure costing between US\$150,000 and US\$200,000 in the USA costs US\$10,000, or thereabouts, in India. The most commonly sought treatments include hip/knee replacements, dental implants and cosmetic surgery. Apart from the significant financial saving, another special incentive for foreigners is India's short waiting lists (compared with many other countries) for medical procedures. Wellness spas – which include postoperative Ayurvedic treatments and other internationally fashionable home-grown therapies – are set to mushroom in India as the medical-tourism sector expands.

The Authors

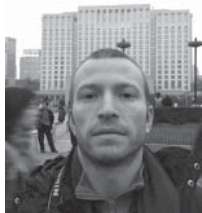


SARINA SINGH **Coordinating Author, Destination India, Getting Started, Snapshot, History, The Culture, Food & Drink, Delhi, Glossary**

After finishing a business degree in Melbourne, Sarina bought a one-way ticket to Delhi, where she completed a corporate traineeship at the Sheraton before working a journalist. After four years in the subcontinent she returned to Australia, pursued post-graduate studies and wrote/directed a documentary that premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival. Sarina has worked on several dozen Lonely Planet books, has written for many magazines and is the author of *Polo in India*; further details at www.sarinasingh.com.

Life on the Road

In India, you can unexpectedly find yourself up close and personal with moments that have the power to alter the way you view the world and your place in it... It was a sultry subcontinental afternoon in 1990. To escape a sudden monsoonal downpour, I dashed into a museum and found myself tagging behind a bunch of tourists. Suddenly the group's guide, a crinkle-faced old man with thick silvery hair and a wispy beard, pointed directly at me: 'You, with the strong Jupiter vibrations, you're on the wrong path!' I froze in puzzled embarrassment as the other tourists spun around and speared me with inquisitive stares. The somewhat agitated guide scuttled over, beseeching me to start writing – only then would I be going the 'right' way... That evening, while jostling my way through a people-packed bazaar in the old city, a willowy lady selling spice-cakes beckoned me over and insisted – with the same peculiar urgency as the museum guide – that I write about 'all this'. It was too much serendipity to ignore.



JOE BINDLOSS **Coordinating Author, Itineraries, Environment, Activities, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Directory, Transport**

Joe first visited India in the early '90s, and something clicked. He's been back a dozen times, seeking the high mountain passes, the southern badlands, the northeast backwaters and the steamy cities. Joe's lived in half a dozen countries, including the US, Australia and the Philippines, writing for Lonely Planet plus a string of dining guides and print media. When not scouring India for the perfect *kali mirch* (peppercorn) kebab, he lives in London with partner Linda and a collection of carpets, masks and musical instruments.

Life on the Road

India is intensity, at least that has always been my experience. There's a unique sensation that surges through the veins on the day you arrive in India, when you drop your bags off and step into the streets for the first time. In one direction, a cow chews meditatively in the midst of honking traffic. In the other direction, women in iridescent saris jostle for space between rickshaws and phut-phut-ing Enfield motorcycles. As you watch, a young boy rushes past with a rack of chai glasses and a fortune teller gestures towards a chart of astrological symbols. Suddenly, the call to prayer from the local mosque rises above the scene like a siren. Without prompting, a smile cracks your face from ear to ear. This is India and you have arrived.



JAMES BAINBRIDGE **Punjab & Haryana, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh**

James' first visit to India, as a long-haired student en route to Nepal, was halted by a missed connection in Frankfurt. A decade later, with a shorter fringe and more experience, his task for Lonely Planet was more successful. He got a taste for chai and philosophical conversation among the Sikhs in Punjab, before searching for temples, tigers and tribes in the forests of Madhya Pradesh. Having begun his career as a nomadic journalist with stints on magazines in London and Sydney, James has contributed to half a dozen Lonely Planet books.



LINDSAY BROWN **West Bengal, Orissa**

After completing a PhD on evolutionary genetics and following a stint as a science editor and a sojourn on the subcontinent, Lindsay started working for Lonely Planet. Lindsay is a former publishing manager of the Outdoor Activity guides at Lonely Planet, and he returns to the subcontinent to trek, write and photograph whenever possible. He has also contributed to Lonely Planet's *South India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan & the Karakoram Highway* guides, among others.



STUART BUTLER **Maharashtra, Goa**

Stuart Butler is an England-born, France-based photojournalist who has travelled extensively in India over the past decade in search of empty surf, unlikely stories and fodder for his camera lenses. When not struggling to grasp the mathematics behind Indian train timetables he writes about his travels, which have taken him beyond the borders of India to places as diverse as the coastal deserts of Pakistan and the jungles of Colombia. These stories feature frequently in the world's surfing and travel media and can be seen on his website, www.oceansurfpublishations.co.uk.

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**MARK ELLIOTT****Kolkata (Calcutta), Sikkim, Northeast States**

Mark has been making occasional forays to the subcontinent since a mad 1984 trip that lined his stomach for most eventualities. Delighted to finally have the excuse to explore the northeast, Mark was bowled over by the human warmth of Sikkim, Kolkata and Mizoram, and fascinated to compare mythical Tawang with equivalent Tibetan temples on 'the other side'. Between researching travel guides, Mark lives in blissfully quiet suburban Belgium with his beloved wife Danielle who found him at a Turkmenistan camel market. A camel would probably have been cheaper.

**PAUL HARDING****Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), Bihar & Jharkhand**

Since arriving in Delhi a decade ago, Paul's been drawn back to India regularly. A journalist, travel writer and sometime photographer for more than 15 years, he's spent lots of time on the subcontinent, particularly in South India. This time he headed north and admired the mountains in Uttarakhand's Himalaya, saw a great deal of the Ganges, and made his way through Varanasi's illuminating old city. Paul's contributed to many Lonely Planet guides, including *India*, *South India* and *Goa*. He lives by the beach in Melbourne, Australia.

**VIRGINIA JEALOUS****Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

Virginia first visited India (carrying Lonely Planet's very first *India* guide) in 1984. Infected by her father's obsession with the subcontinent, and the Books About India he dealt in, she's visited several times, equally enchanted by the wildlife, enthralled by the complex culture and flummoxed by the idiosyncrasies. Updating the Tamil Nadu and Andaman & Nicobar Islands chapters gave her the chance to revisit some birding hotspots, where the racket-tailed drongo was a big favourite but the famed Nicobar pigeon continued to elude her. She dreams of inventing one perfect adjective to describe India, but isn't even close yet.

**AMY KARAFIN****Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu (Chennai section)**

Amy Karafin grew up on the USA Jersey shore, where she developed a keen curiosity about the horizon that developed into a phobia of residence. Indian in several former lives, she headed straight to India after university for an extended trip that would turn out to be karmically ordained. She spent the next few years alternating between New York and faraway lands until, fed up with the irony of being a travel editor in a Manhattan cubicle, she relinquished her MetroCard and her black skirts to make a living closer to the equator. She currently divides her time between Mumbai (Bombay), New York and Dakar.

**SIMON RICHMOND****Karnataka**

In 1999 Simon first encountered southern India on a journey that included snorkelling in the Andaman Islands, trekking in the Nilgiri Hills and drifting through the Kerala backwaters on a *kettuvallam* (rice barge) houseboat. A year later he travelled through northern India at the tail end of an overland haul from Istanbul to Kathmandu for Lonely Planet. In 2004 he covered the maximum city of Mumbai, the beaches of Goa and the architectural and cultural wonders of Maharashtra. Simon has authored several other Lonely Planet guides.

**TOM SPURLING****Rajasthan, Gujarat**

Tom grew up in Geelong, a mid-sized city in the bottom right-hand corner of Australia, and he still goes back there to see the dentist. A freelance writer by trade – and high-school teacher by profession – he currently works as a writer-in-residence for *Amazwi*, a literary magazine in rural South Africa, though usually lives in Melbourne. As a wobbly-kneed Lonely Planet debutante, Tom always had India coming. On this, his second trip to the subcontinent, he chased monsoons through the Thar Desert and rainbows around Diu. Tom likes telling other people's stories, and he recommends travelling light.

**RAFAEL WLODARSKI****Mumbai (Bombay), Kerala**

After completing degrees in Melbourne, Rafael vowed never to use them and set off on a round-the-world trip. Seven years and four passports later, he's yet to come home. He spent most of his 20s travelling overland through the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and North and South America. Rafael relished the opportunity to return to Kerala for Lonely Planet. He currently calls 'sunny' London home and spends a lot of time in Brick Lane reliving his memories with the aid of fish curry. In between overseas jaunts, he contributes to a travel-advice and -coaching website, www.waywardcamel.com.

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