AN INTRODUCTION

Whether you’re new to travel or not, every country comes with a unique set of challenges for its visitors. India is one of the most unique challenges of all—take our word for it, we’ve been doing business there for 15 years! In many ways, the cultural diversity in India exceeds the range found in the United States. Imagine the amount of diversity cultivated by 29 states with different climates, terrain, and religions—could you even comprehend learning all 122 of India’s languages?

As you read this guide keep in mind that experiences are unique depending on where your adventure takes you. If you’re headed to the south, you should pack differently then if you were going to the north.

All this to say, India can be a tricky puzzle to solve, and we want to help. Whether you’re going to India for business or pleasure, keep reading for advice on getting your visa, flights, avoiding cultural faux pas, packing necessities and more!

(if you’re curious about our company and what we do, visit our website www.ecgroup-intl.com)
Tom has been to India more times than he can remember. North, south, east, west...he's done it all, folks.

Lynda is Tom's better half. Her attention to detail and travel logistics ensures nothing falls through the cracks.

Mike goes to India mostly for the food and the thrill of riding on the back of a motorcycle through the crazy streets of Chennai.

Maria is no stranger to travel, but is a newbie to India. She's got tips from her first trip to Chennai, plus advice on traveling with lots of camera gear.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Regardless of where in India you might be headed, we want our guide to be helpful to you. But we also want to make sure to include personalized advice based on our experiences. As you follow our trip planning timeline, look for the four faces below for our unique travel tips. Print off the reference section at the end of the guide and take it with you as you travel. There you’ll find info about currency exchange, time differences, cultural faux pas, and more!
Have your passport, visa, and flight booked.

Check the average seasonal weather to know what you might need to buy. Get any immunizations you want taken care of.

Check the forecast and pack for it. Good thing we have two packing lists for you to consult!


Sit back and enjoy the flight, but arrivals and customs can be a tricky business…

This timeline is safe, but I like to get my paperwork done as soon as possible once I know I’m making a trip. Unless your trip is very last minute, 60 days should be your minimum timeframe for getting your paperwork done.
I prefer flying Emirates through Dubai. The service is unbeatable—you might as well be comfortable if you’re going to be on a flight for so long.

BOOKING YOUR FLIGHT
In case you didn’t realize yet, this is going to be a long flight. Booking through travel sites to find the best rates works well, but also consider a travel agent. It’s the travel agent’s job to make sure that everything will go as smoothly as possible. If something bad does happen, the travel agent will work tirelessly on your behalf to correct the situation.

GETTING YOUR VISA
A valid passport and an Indian visa are required to enter and exit India. You get one of these by applying at an Indian embassy; you cannot apply for one once you reach the country. Indian visa regulations have been known to change out of the blue quite frequently, so make sure to look over all the information when you apply (tourist visas generally last for six months). You can get your visa either in person at the embassy (this can take 1-3 days) or process your visa by mail through a contractor that works directly with the Indian embassy to process your visa (this can take 1-2 weeks if there are no complications).

I advise using the service Travisa. Follow instructions exactly as given, and keep copies of everything that’s submitted.

WEATHER
Even though you won’t know the predicted forecast until a few days before you take off, it can be helpful to know the seasonal averages further in advance. You might need to order something online that you don’t have or hunt for some out-of-season clothing.

IMMUNIZATIONS
The Indian government doesn’t require any immunizations to enter the country unless you come from somewhere with yellow fever. However, you might want to check with the U.S. Department of Health to see what they recommend for travelers. It’s also recommended to take malaria medication and some antacids for those spicy foods!
If you're planning on taking lots of camera gear or electronics, invest in a backpack or bag specially designed for traveling with a camera body and lenses. Security won't go smoothly unless everything is charged, organized, and easily accessible.

**7 DAYS Packing**

Packing for a climate and culture that is different from your own can be tricky (especially if you're going on business). Tom and Lynda packing list has been honed and polished over the past 15 years. (Keep in mind that their lists are for a warm and humid region, for business travel, and they do laundry.)

### Clothing

**Tom:**
- Pants (2) — plus light travel pants
- Shorts (1) (only to be worn at hotel or westernized places)
- Belt (1)
- Shirts (4)—short sleeve
- T-shirts (2)
- Underwear (3)
- Long sleeve pullover (1)
- Handkerchiefs (4)
- Socks (4)
- Shoes (1)
- Sandals (1)

**Lynda:**
- Long skirts (2-3)
- Business pants (2-3)
- Short sleeve shirts—must have sleeves for modesty. No sleeveless! (5)
- Light cardigan type sweaters (2)
- Jeans or casual pants for outings
- Sandals or shoes for office
- Causal shoes/sandals/flip-flops for hotel
- Exercise clothes for fitness room
- Sunglasses
- Scarves (2-3)
- Socks and underwear

### Personal Care and Medications

- Laundry soap
- Granola bars
- Instant coffee
- 3-4 purse-size Kleenex (for TP)
- Medications—malaria, antacid, vitamins, etc.
- Hand sanitizer—take this everywhere!
- Toiletries
- Travel Towel
- Wrist watch
- Small flashlight

### Documents

- Passport w/ India visa
- Copy of Passport w/ visa to be kept in luggage
- Paper copy of flight itinerary (needed to enter the Indian airport)
- Rupees—$30 worth of small bills for tips, $300 worth of larger bills
- Debit card—for ATM withdrawals (notify bank)
- Credit Card—notify bank
- List of key phone numbers (in event phone is lost or stolen)
- Business cards

### Stuff for During Travel

- Carry on suitcase (18”-22”)—keep essentials in here just in case your checked luggage gets lost.
- Small bag—for essentials within carry on bag
- Backpack

### Technology

- Indian SIM card (if no international phone plan
- iPad/kindle/laptop
- iPhone
- Phone headset
- Electrical outlet adapter/converter (power is 220v, check your chargers 110/220v)

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Better safe than sorry—check for events and closures you might run into on your trip. India has a lot of holidays (check out the reference section for a full list).
It doesn’t hurt to double check. Also, you should probably go through your hand luggage to make sure you have everything you’ll need for your trip. It’s a long one.

- Passport
- Printed trip Itinerary
- Hotel information
- Credit card
- $20 cash

Rule of thumb: As long as you have these 5 things, don’t be paranoid about forgetting any other stuff. That’s what the credit card is for.

Tag your luggage—baggage claim can be nuts. Sometimes they take the bags off the carousel so if you don’t see your bag check around the end of the carousel.

There’s a likely chance that all the forms you need won’t be handed to you, so you might have to hunt them down. I ended up getting my immigration form from a stranger in line with an extra.

Sometimes in life it seems like everyone else knows something you don’t. This is how immigration and customs feel in Indian airports. Make sure you have two forms: one for immigration, and one for customs. At this point you’re probably exhausted from your flights, but there’s a high chance that the “line” for immigration will look more like a mob. You could get through in two minutes, or two hours. Life is unpredictable sometimes.
Transportation and Lodging

Cities are crowded, and to say traffic is chaotic is an understatement. Cars, buses, trucks, motorcycles, scooters, bikes, carts, pedestrians, and livestock all compete for space on the road. Traffic laws seem to be known to natives only, so as you travel, stay on your toes.

**Buses**
Buses are the cheapest transportation option for getting around. Though many people prefer trains for longer trips, buses offer some flexibility that other commuting options do not. There is a government-sponsored bus system as a multiplicity of private busing companies. While private buses offer more competitive fares, government-sponsored buses tend to be safer.

**Motorcycles**
For touring purposes, motorcycle rental is hugely popular. Renting a motorcycle can be a fun, exciting way to give yourself an overview of India. There are several reputable motorcycle rental services which offer third party insurance as a feature of your rental. Be sure to avoid rental services that don’t offer insurance.

**Cars/Auto Rickshaws**
If you’re new to the country, the learning curve for driving your own rented car in India can be quite overwhelming. Many visitors prefer to call a cab or hail an auto rickshaw. The price is usually surprisingly low, and this is a quick and convenient way to for commuting needs around urban centers.

**Trains**
Getting around India can present unexpected troubles, but its train network can certainly help mitigate any difficulties! Trains are a great option for traveling across the country, as well as through urban areas. Do some research into different booking options, be it a rail pass, booking through a website, or having your trip professionally arranged.

**Lodging**
Finding a hotel shouldn’t be difficult, especially if you’re in a popular tourist destination. Unless you’re booking through a travel agency, then the best way to go is researching the area online on sites like Lonely Planet, Trip Advisor, or hotels.com. If you want to be adventurous and stay at a small-sized hotel, then make sure to be careful when it comes to food and water sanitation.

We stay at the Marriott in Chennai. We used to stay at a smaller hotel close to our office, but with busyness of every day it's nice to be taken care of. I don't have to worry about my food or water.
# List of Indian Holidays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date &amp; Month</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 01</td>
<td>New Year</td>
<td>The celebration of the new calendar year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 03</td>
<td>Milad-un-Nabi</td>
<td>“Birth of the Prophet” Birthday of the Islamic prophet Muhammad which is celebrated often on the 12th day of Rabi’ al-awwal, the third month in the Islamic calendar. The celebration of this birthday was initiated by the Fatimids and it was celebrated in lands under their control.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 26</td>
<td>Republic Day</td>
<td>Republic Day honors the date on which the Constitution of India came into force on 25 January 1950 replacing the Government of India Act (1935) as the governing document of India.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17</td>
<td>Maha Shivratri</td>
<td>A Hindu festival celebrated every year in reverence of Lord Shiva. It is the day Shiva was married to Parvati.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 06</td>
<td>Holi</td>
<td>A spring festival also known as the festival of colors or the festival of love. It is an ancient Hindu religious festival which has become popular with non-Hindus in many parts of South Asia, as well as people of other communities outside Asia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 02</td>
<td>Mahavir Jayanti</td>
<td>In Jainism, Mahavir Jayanti, also known as Mahavir Janma Kalyanak, is the most important religious holiday. It celebrates the birth of Mahavira. On the Gregorian calendar, the holiday occurs either in March or April.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 03</td>
<td>Good Friday</td>
<td>Good Friday is a religious holiday, observed primarily by Christians, commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is also known as Holy Friday, Great Friday, Black Friday or Easter Friday though the last term properly refers to the Friday in Easter week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 01</td>
<td>May Day</td>
<td>On May 1 is an ancient Northern Hemisphere spring festival and usually a public holiday. May Day coincides with International Workers’ Day, and in many countries that celebrate the latter, it may be referred to as “May Day”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan)</td>
<td>Also called Feast of Breaking the Fast, is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide which marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. The holiday celebrates the conclusion of the 29 or 30 days of dawn-to-sunset fasting during the entire month of Ramadan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 15</td>
<td>Independence Day</td>
<td>Observed annually on 15 August, is a National Holiday in India commemorating the nation’s independence from the British Empire on 15 August 1947. The holiday is observed throughout India with flag-hoisting ceremonies, parades and cultural events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 05</td>
<td>Janmashtami (Sri Krishna Jayanti)</td>
<td>Annual celebration of the birth of the Hindu deity Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu. The festival is celebrated on the eighth day (Ashtami) of the Krishna Paksha (dark fortnight) of the month of Shravana (August–September) in the Hindu calendar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>Ganesh Chaturthi</td>
<td>Ganesha Chaturthi is the Hindu festival celebrated in honor of the god Ganesha, the elephant-headed, remover of obstacles and the god of beginnings and wisdom. The modern festival involves installing clay images of Ganesha in public pandalas (temporary shrines), which are worshipped for ten days with different variety of herbal leaves, plants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 24</td>
<td>Eid al-Adha (Bakrid)</td>
<td>Also called the Feast of the Sacrifice is the second of two religious holidays celebrated by Muslims worldwide each year. Bakrid is celebrated in commemoration of Abraham’s willingness to offer his only son as a sacrifice at God’s command. On this day, goats are sacrificed as an offering.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 02</td>
<td>Gandhi Jayanti</td>
<td>Gandhi Jayanti is a national holiday celebrated in India to mark the occasion of the birthday of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the “Father of the Nation”. Gandhi Jayanti is celebrated yearly on 2 October. It is one of the three official declared national holidays of India, observed in all of its states and union territories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 13</td>
<td>Muharram</td>
<td>Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. Muharram is observed by the Muslim community across the world in commemoration of the martyrdom of Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Imam Hussain along with his family and followers, who were killed in the Battle of Karbala in AD 680.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 22 &amp; 23</td>
<td>Dussehra (Vijaya Dashami)</td>
<td>One of the most important Hindu festivals celebrated in various forms, across India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. This day marks the end of Durga Puja so people immerse the idols and go to each others' house and exchange gifts and sweets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 10</td>
<td>Diwali</td>
<td>Diwali is also known as Deepavali and the “festival of lights” is an ancient Hindu festival celebrated in autumn every year. The festival spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 24</td>
<td>Milad-un-Nabi</td>
<td>Birth of the Prophet is the observance of the birthday of the Islamic prophet Muhammad which is celebrated often on the 12th day of Rabi’ al-awwal, the third month in the Islamic calendar. The celebration of this birthday was initiated by the Fatimids and it was celebrated in lands under their control.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 25</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Christmas is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas Day is a public holiday in many of the world's nations is celebrated culturally by a large number of non-Christian people and is an integral part of the Christmas and holiday season.</td>
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Money
If you've traveled overseas before, you already know that you must declare any cash you're carrying that exceeds the amount of $10,000. Bear this in mind as you plan out how much cash you plan to carry with you while you travel.

Once you arrive in India, you'll likely want to exchange your USD (assuming you're traveling from the U.S.) currency for INR; rupees. As to be expected, currency exchangers are commonly found in international Indian airports. However, the airport exchange rates are generally higher than what you might be able to find in other locations. If you can wait until then, you may want to consult a cab or auto-rickshaw driver on where to find the best and most reputable location to exchange your currency.

Cultural Faux Pas
Left hands are considered dirty in India. Why you ask? For the same reason that a lot of public restrooms don’t have toilet paper. So refrain from using your left hand for any type of greeting or dining. Indians eat with their right hands, and have amazing dexterity. But don’t worry—if you’re a foreigner, they’ll give you some slack, and probably a fork.

Refrain from wearing shoes as you step into a religious establishment. It’s also a good idea to be aware of your surroundings in Indian homes, as shoes may not be welcome there either.

Though it likely won’t be an issue in most major urban areas, wearing shorts (for men and definitely for women) is a bad practice. Indians are traditionally conservative in their dress, so dressing immodestly in any sense poses a risk to offend some. Shorts also are seen as a “low-class” garment for men.

In India the word “chai” and “tea” mean the same thing, so spare yourself the embarrassment of repeating yourself when ordering in a coffee/tea shop.

Time Difference
Fun fact: India only has one time zone, and doesn’t observe daylight savings time. One reliable way to keep track of the time in India is to keep track of UTC, and simply add 5:30. (There is only one time zone in India)

If you have access to the internet, it is more convenient to use a search engine like Google, or you can use a website such as Time and Date (ex: http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/india/new-delhi)

Safe Travels &

NAMASTE!

From the Team at ecgroup-intl.com