

TRAVEL GUIDELINES TO INDIA, NEPAL, BHUTAN & SRI LANKA

VISA FORMALITIES

INDIA

All foreign nationals entering India are required to possess a passport with a valid visa obtained from an Indian Mission or Post abroad.

Immigration check is carried out for all passengers at the port of arrival in India. Foreigners arriving in India are required to furnish true particulars in the Disembarkation Card (Arrival Card) as to their name and nationality, age, sex, place of birth and address or intended address in India.

E-Tourist Visa facility is available for nationals of following countries / territories:

Albania, Andorra, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Cayman Island, Chile, China, China- SAR Hong Kong, China - SAR Macau, Colombia, Comoros, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, East Timor, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kiribati, Laos, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Montserrat, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niue Island, Norway, Oman, Palau, Palestine, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Singapore, Slovakia,

Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos Island, Tuvalu, UAE, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, USA, Vanuatu, Vatican City-Holy See, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Basic eligibility criteria for availing e-Tourist Visa facility is mentioned on the website:

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>

Below are some of the important points to be aware of while applying for e-Tourist Visa (eTV). Please go through detailed instructions on the website:

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/>

1. Applicants of the eligible countries / territories may apply online minimum four days in advance of the date of arrival with a window of 30 days.
2. eTV fees is country / territory specific. Bank transaction charges of 2.5% will be charged additional on applicable e-Tourist Visa fees.
3. The validity of eTV will be 30 days from the date of arrival in India.
4. eTV is valid for entry through 16 designated airports i.e. Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Bengaluru, Chennai, Cochin, Delhi, Gaya, Goa, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Tiruchirapalli, Trivandrum & Varanasi. However, foreigners can exit from any of the authorized Immigration Check Posts (ICPs) in India.
5. eTV is allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year.
6. eTV once issued on arrival is only single entry, non-extendable, non-convertible and not valid for visiting Protected / Restricted and Cantonment Areas.
7. Nationals of Yellow Fever affected countries must carry yellow fever vaccination card at the time of arrival in India, otherwise they may be quarantined for six days upon arrival in India.

NEPAL

All travellers to Nepal must hold a valid passport. Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your expected date of departure from Nepal. An entry visa for Nepal is also required. It can be obtained either in advance from your local embassy or upon arrival in Nepal. If you plan to obtain it in Nepal be sure to bring one extra passport-size photo with you for this purpose.

BHUTAN

Your passport should be valid for at least six months after your proposed date of departure from Bhutan.

Visa applications are cleared in advance, and a Visa Clearance document will be forwarded two weeks prior to the arrival date. The Visa Clearance document must be carried at the time of arrival into the country. The Visa Clearance document is required for check-in / boarding of flight and at the border town Immigration Check Point at Phuntsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar. Upon arrival at the port of entry (Paro Airport / border town Immigration Check Point at Phuntsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar), the actual visa will be stamped on the passport. Note that passport-size photo is NOT required for Bhutan Immigration at the port of entry. Biometrics (finger prints and photos) will be taken only at the border town Immigration Check Points at Phuntsholing & Samdrup Jongkhar for the moment.

Please make sure to travel with the same passport on which the Bhutan Visa was issued. We will not be held responsible if the passport on which the visa was issued does not match the passport used to travel to Bhutan. In such an event, boarding the flight or entering Bhutan at the border towns of Phuntsholing and Sandrup Jhonkar will not be entertained.

Entry / Exit by Land:

Phuntsholing / Samdrup Jongkhar – The Visa Clearance documents will be provided by us. The entry/exit formalities will be handled by our representative for arrival/departure at the border towns (Phuntsholing/Samdrup Jongkhar). The passport, along with the Visa Clearance documents provided by us, have to be produced at the Immigration Check Point. As an added measure, our guide will also carry a copy of the Visa Clearance document.

Entry by Air:

The Druk Air e-Tickets and Visa Clearance documents will

be sent by us. The schedule for the onward flight must be confirmed from the nearest Druk Air/Bhutan Airlines Office (highly recommended). Please be at the check-in counter two hours before the expected departure time for the flight with your passport, e-ticket and Visa Clearance document. Check-in/boarding the flight will not be entertained without the valid passport and Visa Clearance document.

Exit by Air:

The schedule for the return flight will be confirmed by us. Please be at the check-in counter two hours before the expected departure time for the flight with the passport, e-ticket and Visa Clearance document.

SRI LANKA

All holiday and business travellers must possess Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) at the time of entering Sri Lanka. It can either be organized online before arriving into Sri Lanka or procured upon arrival. For more details, please see the following website: <http://www.eta.gov.lk>.

TIME ZONE

INDIA

Indian Standard Time is 5:30 hours ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone throughout the country.

NEPAL

Nepal Standard Time is 5:45 hours ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone throughout the country.

BHUTAN

Bhutan Standard Time is 6:00 hours ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone throughout the country.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka Standard Time is 5:30 hours ahead of GMT and there is only one time zone throughout the country.

MEET AND GREET

Upon arrival at any of the International Airports in South Asia, you will first go through immigration before proceeding to collect your baggage and then pass through customs. Later, you will be greeted by one of our Airport Representatives, who will be holding a paging board with your name, outside the Arrival Hall. Please move slowly so that you can spot your Airport Representative in midst of the crowd outside the Arrival Hall. In the rare event that our Airport Representative

cannot be located, please contact our emergency numbers mentioned in the contact details. This procedure will be followed for domestic flights as well, which however, does not involve customs and immigration counters.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

INDIA

Before embarking upon a vacation in India, the travellers must get familiar with different diseases that are common in the warm and humid Indian climatic conditions. Here is a comprehensive list of the vaccinations one should have taken before arriving in India.

- Hepatitis A: This vaccination is recommended for all travellers to India.
- Hepatitis B: Travellers who may have intimate contact with local residents should take this vaccination, especially if their period of stay is more than six months.
- Typhoid: All travellers are recommended to take Typhoid vaccination.
- Yellow Fever: All international travellers arriving in India within six days of departure from any yellow fever endemic country are required to possess (in original) a valid Yellow Fever certificate of vaccination or prophylaxis as per the model released by WHO from a Yellow Fever vaccination centre designated by the country.
- The citizens of Yellow Fever affected countries must carry a Yellow Fever vaccination card at the time of arrival in India otherwise they may be quarantined for six days upon arrival in India.
- Japanese Encephalitis: This vaccine is recommended for travellers staying for more than one month and travelling to rural areas or travellers engaging in extensive unprotected outdoor activities in rural areas, especially after dusk.
- Rabies: Any traveller who may have direct contact with animals should take this vaccination.

There are some health risks in India like Cholera, Dengue Fever, Dysentery, Malaria and Meningitis. Travellers are advised to take precautionary measures against the same. Always keep a mosquito repellent with you and be sure to pay special attention to mosquito protection between dusk and dawn. It can also be quite warm when

sightseeing, but using sun-protection, including wearing a hat and sunglasses, and drinking lots of water can help minimize the impact of the weather. Public toilet facilities are rare. You are encouraged to take every opportunity to use a clean toilet in places such as hotels and restaurants. Most hotels catering to an international clientele provide western style restroom facilities.

NEPAL

The altitude in the capital city Kathmandu is 4500 feet above sea level. A lot of people come to Nepal for trekking, between 3500 – 7000 feet where altitude sickness is not a problem. However, almost everyone suffers from mild breathlessness on some uphill sections. Anyone with breathing difficulties should consult a physician to determine their fitness for travel. Although no inoculations are required for Nepal, you should consult your local health department or your personal physician for the updated recommendations. The most important inoculations are gamma globulin (for hepatitis) and tetanus.

Un-boiled water is not safe to drink anywhere in Nepal. Most hotels provide a flask of purified drinking water in each room: when in doubt, stick with bottled drinks. Local mineral water is perfectly safe to drink or treat your own water with purification tablets. Remember that ice must be avoided as well. Uncooked vegetables are also not safe to consume, unless they've been properly treated by soaking in a solution of iodine. You should always peel your own fresh fruit. A pocket knife would be useful.

In the event of an emergency while trekking, a helicopter will be summoned. You will then be flown, with your guide, to Kathmandu where you will be taken to an International Hospital. If necessary, an onward international medical flight will be arranged. Anywhere else on the trip, you will be taken by road to Kathmandu where the same process will occur. Ensure that your insurance policy covers you for such unlikely eventualities. Medical evacuation by helicopter has to be paid for by the guests prior to departure from Kathmandu.

BHUTAN

Visitors coming from an area infected with Yellow Fever or Cholera are required to have had the required vaccinations. (Yellow Fever vaccination should have been taken at least 10 days before arrival). Antimalarial medication is also recommended for all travellers who will

be visiting rural areas of districts bordering India.

SRI LANKA

It can get warm while sightseeing; use protection from the bright rays of the sun. You may wear a hat and/or sunglasses. Drinking lots of water can help minimize the impact of the tropical weather. Vaccinations are not mandatory for travel to Sri Lanka. Always keep a mosquito repellent with you and be sure to pay special attention to mosquito protection between dusk and dawn. Public toilet facilities are rare. You are encouraged to take every opportunity to use a clean toilet in places such as hotels and restaurants. Most hotels catering to an international clientele provide western style restroom facilities.

CURRENCY AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE

INDIA

The official currency of India is called Indian National Rupee (or simply Rupee) which is symbolised by sign ₹. The notes (bills) currently in circulation are in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 (new note) & 2000 Rupees.

Banks, Hotels, and authorized Money-Changers can exchange foreign currency for Rupees. Receipts (called 'Encashment Certificates') should be retained, as these will enable you to reconvert the balance into dollars, or any other foreign currency, when you leave the country, provided the receipt is no more than 30 days old. Almost all the cities and towns in India have ATMs that accept Visa and MasterCard as well as American Express. International Airports have currency exchange booths that are always open for arriving or departing overseas flights.

NEPAL

The unit of currency in Nepal is also called Rupee, divided into 100 paisa. Commonly circulated coins are of 5, 10, 25 and 50 paisa, and one rupee denominations. Paper notes come in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 rupees.

Major credit cards and travellers checks are accepted by most local hotels, but only accepted in some restaurants and shops. Master and Visa Cards are the most widely accepted credit cards. All foreign currency taken into Nepal must be declared on arrival. It is essential that you save at least one exchange receipt, for you must produce

a receipt when reconvert money upon departure. The exchange receipt needs to be of the same value or greater than the amount that you are changing back. USD300 should be enough for meals in Kathmandu, extra snacks, soft drinks or Tibetan curios along the way.

This should be carried in small denominations as change is hard to come by in the villages (100 rupee notes are the easiest to trade). If you enjoy shopping, you may want to bring extra money as there are very good deals to be found both in Kathmandu and Pokhara (wall hangings, carvings, clothes etc.). You can spend anything from USD 50 to USD 3000. We urge travellers to carry all purchases home with them and not have anything shipped. Shipping can be unreliable and is a cause of great frustration. Keep some free space in your baggage for bringing back your purchases.

BHUTAN

Bhutan's currency is called Ngultrum (Nu), with 100 Chetrum = 1 Ngultrum. The Ngultrum is fixed to the value of Indian rupee. Travellers are advised to carry their money in the form of Traveller's Cheques (preferably American Express) and cash (US dollars would be best), which might be used for incidental purchases / expenses. Daily expenditure varies from person to person, but in general you should allow US\$5-10 daily. The banks are the only place to change money with the same exchange rates everywhere. There are bank branches in all major towns.

A few hotels and shops may accept payment by credit card, but with a surcharge added. Visa and MasterCard are more widely accepted. Bank of Bhutan ATMs in Thimphu and Paro now allow the withdrawal of local currency from MasterCard and Visa card (both Debit & Credit). The maximum amount per withdrawal per day is Nu. 18,000 – Nu. 30,000 (USD 300–500). USD 2.5 – 3 will be charged per withdrawal.

SRI LANKA

The island uses Sri Lankan Rupee (abbreviated to SLR or LKR) divided into 100 cents.

Bank notes: Rs. 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000.

Coins: Rs. 25 and 50 cents and 1, 2, 5 and 10 rupees.

The simplest system of changing money is to use the hotel's cashier desk. They offer a slightly lower rate than

banks, but may charge commission. Banks are found in the main cities and the hotel reception will point you in the right direction. Major credit cards like Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in Sri Lanka. The ATM network is very good – you are more likely to run into an ATM machine in most areas you visit where you may use your credit card or Maestro Card.

ELECTRICITY

INDIA

The electrical current in the hotels in India is 220v, 50 Hz, AC. If you bring electrical devices that do not meet these standards, you may need to bring the appropriate converters and adapters.

NEPAL

Electricity is mainly available in the Kathmandu Valley, where the current is 220 v / 50 cycles. Sockets have either three round pins or two thick round pins. If you are travelling with any electrical appliances, an international converter kit and a set of adapter plugs will be required. Alternatively, it is more practical to travel with battery-operated appliances where possible. While trekking, you can recharge your batteries in the hotels as they use generators.

BHUTAN

In Bhutan, electricity runs on 220 / 240 v, with round hole two-pin and three-pin power outlets. If you bring electrical appliances, also pack appropriate adapter plugs. In Thimphu, electrical appliance shops stock adapter plugs, but they are unlikely to be available elsewhere.

SRI LANKA

The standard current is 230 – 240 V. Three-pin UK plugs and sometimes two-pin plugs are used.

DINING

INDIA

Most hotels in India offer a choice of cuisine in their restaurants. In the metropolitan cities, we would be pleased to recommend suitable restaurants for meals outside your hotel. Meals in remote areas and wildlife parks will invariably be table d'hote. We suggest that you avoid undercooked meat or vegetables, eat fruit you can peel and make sure fresh fruit has been washed in bottled water. We strongly recommend that you drink only bottled water during your travel through India.

Always wash your hands before and after eating. Minor stomach ailments are the most common affliction of visitors to India. It is a nuisance and can dampen your enjoyment of the trip for a few days. We suggest you to carry water-sterilizing tablets and medicines for possible stomach upsets or indigestion. Most hotels have a doctor on call to attend to your immediate medical needs.

NEPAL

Kathmandu has a surprising variety of restaurants serving many types of international cuisine. Remember that Nepal is a relaxed culture and service is usually much slower than what Westerners are used to. Outside of the cities, the food is primarily a combination of Nepalese (which has a large Indian influence) and Tibetan.

Rice, lentils and vegetables are staples, with a variety of meats used somewhat sparingly. Tasty soups, fresh breads and steamed dumplings filled with meat or vegetables are among the local favourites. The national drink is a sweet tea brewed with milk. The local beer is quite good, though it's not always served ice cold. Locally produced rum, vodka and gin are of good quality. Imported spirits are also available but are rather expensive, so if you have a favourite brand, consider using your duty-free allowance to bring a bottle with you. While Coke and Fanta sodas are available in Nepal, diet and decaffeinated beverages are not. Coffee is usually instant.

BHUTAN

The most distinctive characteristic of Bhutanese cuisine is its spiciness. Chillies are an essential part of nearly every dish in Bhutan. Rice forms the main body of most Bhutanese meals. It is accompanied by one or two side dishes consisting of meat or vegetables. Pork, beef and chicken are the meats that are eaten most often. Vegetables commonly eaten include spinach, pumpkins, turnips, radishes, tomatoes, river weed, onions and green beans. Grains such as rice, buckwheat and barley are also cultivated in various regions of the country depending on the local climate.

Some of the most popular Bhutanese dishes are:

EMA DATSHI: This is the National Dish of Bhutan. A spicy mix of chillies and local cheese known as Datshi. This dish is a staple of nearly every meal and can be found throughout the country.

MOMOS: These Tibetan-style dumplings are stuffed with

pork, beef or cabbage and cheese and are cooked during special occasions.

PHAKSHA PAA: Pork cooked with spicy red chillies

JASHA MARU: Spicy minced chicken, tomatoes and other ingredients that is usually served with rice.

RED RICE: The rice is similar to brown rice and is extremely nutritious and filling. When cooked it is pale pink, soft and slightly sticky.

SRI LANKA

There are many restaurants and outlets in Sri Lanka where you can find some really decent food. Ranging from local restaurants to international restaurant chains, Sri Lanka has it all covered – Thai, Chinese, German, English, French, Italian or authentic Sri Lankan. Colombo might be an exquisite destination when it comes to the varieties of food tossing between simple outlets to gourmet restaurants. If you're touring Sri Lanka, it is safer to know that the smiling locals treasure spicy food with delicious dishes of fish, chicken, beef, pork or mutton tagged along with boiled or steamed rice. Vegetables and fruits mostly accompany the dishes that come out of Sri Lankan kitchens garnished at times with chutneys and 'Coconut Sambal' – a paste of ground coconut mixed with chilli peppers, dried Maldivian fish and lime juice.

KOTTU – A special Sri Lankan stir-fry prepared with shredded roti bread mixed with meat, vegetables egg and cheese.

HOPPERS – This is a mixture of rice flour and coconut milk tempered into a fermented batter before it is pan fried or steamed. Normally, yeast is used to ferment the batter and hoppers extend from milk hoppers, string hoppers, egg hoppers as well as vandu appa which is simply the sweeter version. Hoppers often accompany a mixture – *lunu miris* – made of red onions and spices. String Hoppers are a unique food made of wheat or rice flour which is pressed out of a string mould onto wicker mats before they are steamed.

PITTU – Lining up as a delicious meal of Sri Lankans, Pittu is made with steamed rice and grated coconut in the shape of a cylinder and devoured mostly with either milk or chicken/fish/beef curry.

ROTI – Roti is a type of Sri Lankan flat bread usually made of wheat flour. There are many variants of Roti extending

from Gothamba Roti, Pol Roti (made of coconut) as well as Uraippu Roti (Spicy Roti).

VISITING PLACES OF WORSHIP

INDIA

Travellers must be aware of the local customs while visiting places of worship. Removing one's shoes before entering temples, mosques or gurdwaras (Sikh temple) is essential. Avoid taking leather goods of any kind (bag, belt etc), cigarettes and tobacco into places of worship, as these are often not permitted. Do not wear shorts, mini-skirts or sleeveless tops in places of public worship.

NEPAL

While Nepal is generally a relaxed and informal country, there are a few practices the visitor should be aware of. When visiting temples you must remove your shoes. The same applies when you are entering a Nepali house. In some temples, it is forbidden to wear any leather goods. Other temples, such as those in Pashupatinath, do not allow non-Hindus to enter. These are normally marked with a sign in English, and we urge you to respect such practices. Always ask permission before taking photos inside any temples. Many villagers are unfamiliar with cameras and are unwilling to be photographed for religious reasons or for reasons of personal modesty. When permission is granted, always be sensitive when photographing people, and non-intrusive when shooting inside temples when prayers are in progress. Generally, photography is allowed outside Buddhist and Hindu temples and at religious ceremonies and festivals.

BHUTAN

The giving of alms to mendicants and holy men in the vicinity of markets and outside temples is an accepted practice. In exchange for your contribution of a small coin, a prayer will be intoned for you. Take your cue from the Bhutanese on such occasions and, when in doubt, ask your guide what would be the appropriate thing to do.

Photography is usually permitted in public areas, such as courtyards and dance grounds, but not permitted inside the chapels of religious complexes. Check first with your guide to avoid inadvertently offending.

Dress modestly and wear full sleeved collared shirts (covered arms, no shorts or short skirts) and remove hats, caps, sunglasses before entering the precincts of Dzongs or religious complexes. Do not smoke. Walk clockwise

around Chortens (stupas) and Mani (prayer) walls. If you see a prayer flagpole on the ground waiting to be erected, do not step over it, as this is considered extremely disrespectful, walk around it instead.

Shoes are not allowed inside the chapels of religious complexes, you will need to take them off at entrance.

SRI LANKA

Be respectful of all religious objects and buildings by behaving and dressing modestly. Perceived insults to Buddhism—such as taking photos of your friend kissing Buddha, or with your back to him, are taken as serious offences.

TIPPING

INDIA

It is usual to tip the waiters, porters, guides and drivers. Tips are not included in the bills of hotels, transport companies or any other suppliers. At hotels and restaurants, about 10% of the bill total is usually acceptable as a tip. For establishments that have a service tax or charge included in the bill, a separate tip may not be required.

An approximate tipping guideline would be as follows:

Porters: Rs. 100 per piece of luggage

Local Guides: Rs. 500 per half day / Rs. 1000 per full day

Local Guides for Groups: Rs. 1000 per half day / Rs. 2000 per full day

Drivers: Rs. 500 per half day / Rs. 1000 per full day

Representatives at airports & railway stations: Rs. 300 per service

Driver for outstation trips: Rs. 500 per day (for a minimum of two guests).

Helpers in tempo travellers, minivans and coaches: Rs. 300 per day

NEPAL

A 10% service charge for hotels is included in the hotel tariff. This service charge is divided equally amongst all hotel staff. Local restaurants add a 10% service charge to the bill, which is equally divided amongst the entire restaurant staff. A small service charge is included for your representatives. However, you may wish to tip a little extra if you have received excellent service. Service charge for your city sightseeing guide and driver is not included. Tipping for these individuals is at your discretion.

Tipping for the trek guide and porter is not included.

Tipping for the raft guide and crew is also not included.

Tipping for these individuals is at your discretion and would be done at the end of the raft trip before your onward transfer. A small service charge for your camp staff and driver is included.

An approximate guideline would be as follows:

Porters: US\$ 1 per piece of luggage

Drivers: US\$ 5 per day

Guides: US\$ 10 per day

Representatives at Airports: US\$ 2 per service

Helper in Coaches: US\$ 3 per day

BHUTAN

Hotel and restaurant bills include service charges varying from 5% to 10%. There is no need to add anything further on this. Tipping your guide, driver and trek crew (on treks) is a purely at your discretion, based on your experience.

An approximate guideline would be as follows:

Porters: US\$ 2 per piece of luggage

Drivers: US\$ 5 per day

Guides: US\$ 10 per day

SRI LANKA

Hotels and restaurants have a Service Tax of 10% added to the bill. A separate tip may not be required. There is no need to tip local taxis and rickshaw drivers.

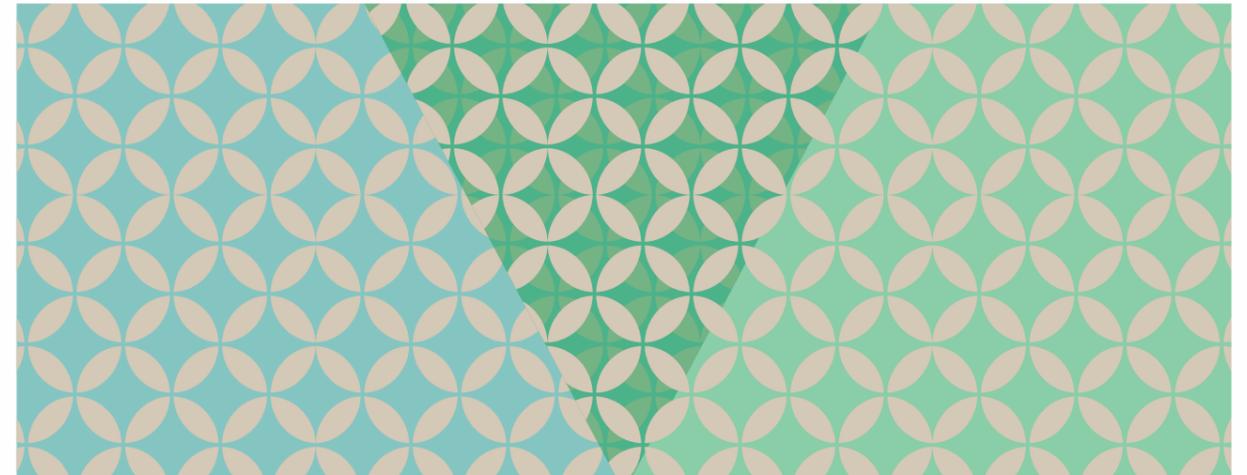
An approximate guideline on tipping is as follows:

Porters: LKR. 100 per piece of luggage

Drivers / Guide (FITs): LKR. 2000 per day

National Guides (Groups): LKR. 3500 per day

Helper in coaches: LKR. 500 per day.



CLIMATE & WHAT TO EXPECT

January, February, March

The month of January can be surprisingly cold and foggy in the plains of North India with temperatures dropping down to as low as 1 degree Celsius (33 degree Fahrenheit). The mountains have snow and freezing temperatures. Expect disruptions in the itinerary with train and flight delays. It is the best time to head to the south of India or plan a beach holiday where day temperatures hover around 30 degree Celsius (86 degree Fahrenheit). February is bright and sunny in north India with an average day temperature of 25 degree Celsius (77 degree Fahrenheit) while south India is still at 30 degree Celsius. The flowers are in full bloom and it is one of the best months to visit India, although very busy. Unless you plan well in advance, you may be disappointed as accommodation gets sold out very fast. Our pick of the lot in February is Hampi in south India with its magical surreal landscape.

The plains of north India start to get warm during daytime in the month of March after Holi, the festival of colours. But evenings and mornings are still pleasant. Don't pack too much into your day's sightseeing if you are travelling in the plains of north India during the month of March. However, the mountain views in the foothills of the northern and the eastern Himalayas are precious during the month of March and the rhododendrons are in bloom. It is a great time to be in the foothills of the Himalayas if you are an outdoor person with terrific opportunities for walks and hikes. Be aware of the sharp

sun during the day time, and the chilly evenings and mornings. Ensure you carry enough sun screen. Mid February onwards and the entire month of March are great for photography tours in both north and south India.

April, May, June

In April, temperatures in the plains of north India can go up to more than 40 degrees Celsius (104 degree Fahrenheit). South India too is hot and sultry with intermittent rainfall during late afternoon or evening. Not the best time to visit south India. Back in north India, if you are happy to do less; some of India's finest luxury hotel chains float great deals starting mid-April till September. April is also a great time to be in the foothills of the northern Himalayas for the outdoors and the eastern Himalayas for orchids and blooms. May and June is full on summer in the plains of north India and monsoon arrives in south India by the first week of June with heavy rainfall which lasts till September. Whilst temperatures in North India can go up to 50 degree Celsius (122 degree Fahrenheit), our pick of the lot are the Tiger Parks of Central India where sightings of the gorgeous cat are simply terrific. Remember to drink lots of liquid and do expect crowds since June is also the summer break for most schools in India. During May, June and July one can also head higher up in the north to Leh at 11,800 feet above sea level. Expect bright clear days and blue skies with the average temperature hovering around 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit). Relax, acclimatise, be aware of the sharp sun during the day time and the chilly evenings and mornings. Carry your sunscreen.

July, August, September

The monsoon is in its full glory in July and August in India, but it is also a great time for Ayurveda in Kerala because your body pores are most receptive to the oils at this time. Mid-August till mid-September is particularly great for Leh with the crowds having receded. Whilst the days are still bright with deep blue skies, beautiful white clouds occasionally add to the drama.

You can also plan a trip to north India from mid-August onwards when the monsoon ebbs. Expect humidity and an average temperature of 34 degrees celsius (94 degree Fahrenheit). Our pick of the lot is a tour of southeastern Rajasthan during September. Everything is lush and green and the water bodies are full. This part of Rajasthan which is yet to be overrun by hordes of tourists has some superbly comfortable heritage properties lovingly restored by its owners who are great hosts and serve excellent home-style cooked food. There will be intermittent rains but definitely not the holiday spoilers.

October, November, December

While the rest of the country remains dry, October and November is the time when Tamil Nadu in south India

witnesses heavy rainfall due to the northeast monsoon. October, November till mid-December is great time to plan your north India holiday with the weather remaining moderate. Remember to book well in advance as accommodation is sold out very fast, particularly during the month of November.

The highlight of this period is Diwali, the festival of lights, celebrated during the month of November. It is a terrific time to be in Rajasthan during Diwali. Our pick of the lot is a tour of north India starting from Delhi, the heart of modern India and ending in the *ghats* of the ancient holy city of Varanasi, with Diwali in Jaipur. October is when Kolkata in India's east celebrates Durga Puja, the 10 day festival dedicated to the Mother Goddess. While most wildlife parks in India open mid-October, the Kaziranga National Park in Assam – home to the one horned Rhino – opens for visitors only in mid-November.

FURTHER READING

HISTORY

A Discovery of India, Jawaharlal Nehru | A History of India (Vol 1), Romila Thapar | A History of India (Vol 2), Percival Spear | The Wonder that was India, A. L Basham | Gems in the Lotus: the seeding of Indian civilization, Abraham Eraly

CULTURE & SOCIETY

India: A Million Mutinies Now, V S Naipaul | No Full Stops in India, Mark Tully | A Taste of India, Madhur Jaffery | Twilight in Delhi, Ahmed Ali | Empires of the Indus: the story of a River, Alice Albinia | Sea of Poppies, Amitava Gosh

ARCHITECTURE

Indian Architecture, Percy Brown | The Penguin Guide to the Monuments of India, George Michell & Phillip Davies

ARTS & CRAFTS

India: Art and Culture 1300-1900 (Exhibition Catalogue), Stuart Cary Welch | The Art of India: Traditions of Indian Sculpture, Painting and Architecture, Stella Kramrisch

LITERATURE

A Passage to India, E M Forster | A Suitable Boy, Vikram Seth | Cuckold, Kiran Nagarkar | Gitanjali, Rabindra Nath Tagore | Malgudi Days, R K Laxman | Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie | The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy Train to Pakistan, Khushwant Singh

NATURE & WILDLIFE

Handbook of Birds of India & Pakistan, Salim Ali & S Dillon Ripley | Indian Wildlife, S Israel & T Sinclair | Trees of Delhi, Pradip Krishen | The Photographic Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent, Bill Harvey, Bikram Grewal & Otto Pfister | The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, Amitava Ghosh

BIOGRAPHYS / MEMOIRS

My Experiments With Truth, M K Gandhi | Holy Cow, Sarah Macdonald | Waterhouse Albums: Central Indian Provinces, James Waterhouse | A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur, Gayatri Devi | Man-eaters of Kumaon, Jim Corbett | El Sari Rojo (the Red Sari), Javier Moro

TRAVELOGUES

Chasing the Monsoon, Alexander Frater | City of Djinn, William Dalrymple | India Rail, Royston Ellis | Travels on my Elephant, Mark Shand | Around India in 80 Trains, Monisha Rajesh | Travelling In, Travelling Out - a book of unexpected journeys, Namita Gokhale | Chai Chai – Travels in Places Where You Stop But Never Get Off, Bishwajit Ghosh

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Complete Adventures of Feluda, Satyajit Ray | Our Incredible Cow, Mahasweta Devi | Granny's Sari, Asha Nehemiah (All ages) | Why Why Girl, Mahashweta Devi (5 plus) | Moin and the monster, Anush Ravishankar (7 plus) Haroun and the Sea of Stories, Salman Rushdie (age 10 plus)

FOOD

Eating with India, Chitrira Banerji | Korma Kheer Kismet, Pamela Timms | Prasada, Jiggs Kalra | Indian Cooking, Madhur Jaffery | Flavors First: An Indian Chef's Culinary Journey, Vikas Khanna

