

India

Worth knowing from A - Z

Accommodation

Accommodation at the project/host family will be simple, but comfortable.

Alcohol

Alcohol use should be restricted at all times.

Allergies

Please inform us of any allergies you may have, so that the team leaders are prepared.

Banks

Banks are usually open 9:30 a. m. to 2:30 p. m, department stores 10:00 a. m. to 7:00 p. m, and shops 8:00 a. m. to 8:00 p. m. All except tourist shops are closed on Saturday and Sunday.

Business Hours

Usual business hours are from 9:00 a. m. to 5:00 p. m., Monday to Saturday, only Sunday is a regular holiday.

Climate

India is so vast that the climate is very varied. However, one could classify the seasons as Hot, Wet & Cold. February is generally a period of fine cool weather with clear blue skies, in the north it would be very low with temperatures in some places dipping to below 0° C, in the south and along the coasts, the temperature will be about 25° C, minimum. It is a period of little or no rainfall.

The hot weather season begins in March and ends in June, the temperature varies: in Delhi and Rajasthan, temperature could rise up to 50° C. On the hills a moderate 15° C. The Southwest monsoon starts from mid-June until September; during this time, most parts of the Sub-Continent receive continuous rainfall.

Clothes

Clothes are comparatively cheaper in India, so you could buy some of them here. However, bring along a couple of jeans and shirts and T-shirts. It is advisable to carry a decent set of clothes that you could wear for Indian functions, such as weddings etc. It could get nippy at times so a light sweater is recommended.

During the monsoon from July to October, a rain jacket would be helpful. Girls are encouraged to dress culturally sensitive, especially in small towns.

Cost of Living

Your money goes a long way in India.

Thanks to an extremely advantageous exchange rate costs are considerably lower than in Europe. (See following price indications).

Hotel Room (basic)	Rs. 250,00
Bread (One Loaf)	Rs. 10,50
Coffee/Tea (per cup)	Rs. 4,00
Milk (per liter)	Rs. 12,00
Soap	Rs. 10,00
Shampoo	Rs. 60,00
Bus fare (minimum)	Rs. 3,50
Auto-rickshaw fare (min.)	Rs. 10,00
Inland mail (minimum)	Rs. 4,00
Aerogramme	Rs. 7,00
Airmail Envelope	Rs. 15,00
Local Call (telephone)	Rs. 2,00
Cigarettes (10's)	Rs. 28,00
Beer	Rs. 50,00
Tooth paste	Rs. 20,00
Sanitary Napkins	Rs. 45,00
Movie Ticket	Rs. 50,00
T-Shirt	ca. Rs. 150,00
Shirt	ca. Rs. 175,00
Skirt	ca. Rs. 150,00
Salwar Kameez (Indian Dress)	ca. Rs. 300,00
Disco Entry Fee	ca. Rs. 350,00
Thali Meals	ca. Rs. 15,00
Average Meal for 2	ca. Rs. 90,00
Rubber slippers	ca. Rs. 100,00
Shoes	ca. Rs. 250,00
CDs	ca. Rs. 400,00
Music Tapes	ca. Rs. 100,00
Doctor's Consultation	ca. Rs. 150,00
Internet Browsing (per hour)	ca. Rs. 30,00

(1,00 Euro ≈ 60 Rs.)

Credit cards

Major credit cards such as American Express, Bank of America, Diners, MasterCard, Standard Bank Card, Visa and their affiliates are accepted at leading hotels, restaurants and stores. However use is restricted in small towns and country areas.

Driving

Driving is on the left similar to other commonwealth countries. Volunteers are not allowed to drive in India under any circumstances.

Drugs

Don't even think about it. All forms of narcotics are illegal in India.

Emergency

In case of emergency you can always call your local coordinator on his mobile phone.

Throughout the country, dial 100 for police, medical, fire, and other emergencies.

Environment

Respect for the environment is expected at all times.

Expectations

Please don't come with too many expectations. That is the only way you will learn to accept your surroundings. Don't force your culture on others, instead accept Indian culture and be ready to learn. Indian children and youth are generally not given the amount of freedom you may be used to. Your host parents may make an exception in your case... DON'T make a habit of it. For example smoking in front of elders is not appreciated.

Food

Food is as varied as the geography. India boasts of one of the most exotic and varied cuisines in the world next to the Chinese. Rice is the staple food in the south and wheat is the staple food in the north. Wheat is used to make a variety of unleavened bread. Rice or Indian bread (rotis) is served with curry dishes, spiced with red pepper, garlic, ginger and numerous other assortments of spices and masalas.

In the north food is generally less spicy. The coastal areas are famous for their seafood. The 'curry' sprinkled on French fries (Pommes-frites) has nothing to do with the Indian curry. Be prepared to face a bewildering array of names like chapatti, naan, paratha (unleavened bread), pullav, biriyani (rice preparations), or dosa, idli, vada, sambar, papad, uttapam, raitha, or even sweets like jilebi, barfi, gulab-jamun, faluda, kunda, rasogolla, peda, all made from milk. The various meat dishes that are commonly consumed in India by most people are mutton, chicken and fish. Beef is a taboo to all believers in Hinduism and its sects. Jains and Buddhists are strict followers of vegetarianism.

Geography

India has a total area of 3.287.263 km². It is bordered by Pakistan to its west, China, Tibet, Nepal, Myanmar and Bangladesh to its northeast and the island nation of Sri Lanka to its south.

The foothills of the Himalayas, the dense rain forests that join Myanmar, define the northeast boundary of India. To the north west of the country is the Tar

desert, in complete contrast to the high mountains; there is the Ganges Plain, which starts near Delhi, and stretch along the Bay of Bengal, the slope is so gradual that it drops only about 200 meters, the Deccan Plateau, which leads to the hilly tropical rain forests in Western Ghats and the plains to the south.

History

India "the land beyond the Indus", as the Greeks knew it, derives its name from the river Indus. The Republic of India is 54 years old. The history of India begins from around 3500 BC. The recent excavations of the Indus valley civilization pertaining to Harappa & Mohenjodaro (now part of Pakistan) shows evidence of the Indus valley Civilization dated from around 3000 to 4000 BC.

The original settlers were the Dravidians who subsequently moved over to Southern India following the massive influx from Aryans who entered the country around 2000 BC.

In 544 BC, Prince Siddhartha attained Nirvana (Enlightenment) and came to be known as "Buddha". However, the religion of Buddhism taught by Buddha went out of the country of its origin and spread over to other parts of Asia Minor including China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, and Burma.

In 326 BC, Alexander the great from Macedonia sought to conquer India and came up to the banks of the river Indus.

In 232 BC, the Mauryan Empire ruled the Indian sub-continent. Its Emperor Ashoka, along with Akbar is one of the greatest rulers India has ever witnessed. Ashoka's army was victorious in the battle of Kalinga, after seeing the destruction caused by the war, Ashoka became a Buddhist. From then on, Ashoka promoted Buddhism and its message of non-violence. He" was instrumental in promoting Buddhism in the Far East Asian countries.

Another great dynasty after the Maurya's was the Gupta Empire, between 320 and 495 AD. This period is still known as the 'Golden Age' of Indian history during which period art flourished. Sculpture's can still be seen at Ajantha and Ellora caves even to this day. Islam entered India in the eighth century A.D. The Arab traders were the first to come followed by the Turkish and Afghan invaders. By the 10th century, Muslims established their kingdom at Delhi. The Moguls established their empire in 1526 and is considered as one of the greatest dynasties in the Indian sub-continent. Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal built the famous Taj Mahal.

The British came to India in the early 17th century. They came as traders and established the British East India Company. Over the years they established themselves as the undisputed rulers of the Indian

subcontinent. In 1858, India came under the British Crown.

Apart from Ashoka & Akbar, the British were the only other rulers to bring the whole subcontinent under one rule.

India got its independence from the British on 15th August 1947.

Hotels

In all cities of India, you will find decent hotel accommodation, ranging from budget hotels (Rs. 150 – 250) to very expensive ones.

Indian People

Indians in general are very informal, helpful and hospitable people and are brought up to respect and treat guests as a God in Indian culture. Your hosts therefore, go out of their way to make you feel comfortable. Don't feel uncomfortable, but accept it. Indians are very warm and talkative people who like to gather a lot. Families and friendships are very important to Indians.

Indian children and youth are generally not given the amount of freedom like in western society. For example smoking and drinking alcohol in the presence of elders is not appreciated. Girls are normally expected home before sunset. Unnecessary association with the opposite sex can lead to misunderstandings.

Indians in general, are very helpful and hospitable. If your hosts go out of their way to make you feel comfortable, DON'T feel awkward, and accept it.

Internet

Internet cafes can be found all across the country in all major towns and cities. The rates for browsing can range between Rs. 20 – 30, depending on the location.

Languages

The main languages in India are Hindi & English.

There are 18 major languages recognized by the constitution. This falls into two main categories i.e. Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. According to the last census there are over 1.600 minor languages and dialects. Each state has its own language and associated dialect. The average city-dweller normally speaks at least three languages English, and 2 other regional languages. North Indian languages have an Indo-European origin, south Indian languages are Dravidian, and East Indian is Sino-Tibetan and Monokhymer based.

Medicines

Medicine is easy to get at all medical shops and pharmacies. But bring any special medicines from home if necessary.

Money

The currency in India is the Rupee (Rs.), which consists of 100 paisa. Notes are available in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000. Coins are in denominations of 25, 50 Re.1 and Rs.5.

Foreign visitors may bring up to 2,000 USD per person in cash inside the country, but this should be declared at the customs in the airport.

Phone, Passport & Visas

Your passport should be valid at least minimum 6 months for issuing a Visa.

Regular Tourist Visas are given for either 3 or 6 months at the nearest Indian Embassy/Consulate. Your purpose of visit should be TOURISTIC, nothing else.

The visa is given from the date of issue and not from the dates you mention in the application.

Extension of this visa in India is not possible. This can only be obtained in Indian Embassies outside India.

If you are a long term volunteer, please give the coordinator a copy of your passport and your air ticket for the files, so we can help you in case you have any problems.

All volunteers must have a return ticket.

Post

Post offices can be found in almost every town and city in India.

Problems

Any problem that rises is to be discussed at the meetings. Any problem with another volunteer, check first if there's a misunderstanding. If necessary talk with the coordinator.

Realize that India is completely different from Europe but life can be comfortable even though less is available.

Public Transportation

Indian railways are one of the largest undertakings in the world. The network covers a distance of over 60.000 Km. Road covers 5,5 million kilometers and over 10.000 km of inland navigable waterways. Using rail and bus services, one can reach almost any point on the Indian map though not always on time. All large cities are also connected with domestic air services. Buses operate frequently to all smaller towns to/from major cities. There are also inter-state buses which take you from one city to another (non stop). Before booking your bus tickets, always check the time it would take from one point to the other.

Religion

Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism are the major religious communities in the country. According to the 1990 census, Hindus constitute about 80% of the population followed by Muslims with 11% and Christians with 2%. Sikhs constitute about 1,6 %, Buddhists 0,6%, Jains 0,3% and Zoroastrians (Parsees) 0,085% of the entire population. The rest constitute other minor religions.

India is a land of bewildering diversity. It is a jigsaw puzzle of people of every faith and religion, living together creating a unique and colorful mosaic. There is a festival for every reason and season. Many festivals celebrate the various harvests, signifying great historical figures and events while many express devotion to the deities of different religions. Every celebration involves rituals of prayer, seeking blessings, exchanging goodwill, and decorating houses, wearing new clothes, music, dance and feasting.

Safety

Organizations worldwide are working hard to coordinate international exchange of volunteers for social projects and in providing opportunities for young people to travel for personal development and interests.

Do not behave in any manner which is going to disturb other volunteers, the camp, the organizations behind the exchange and most of all your personal health & well being, please avoid any high risk factors during your stay.

Smoking

Cigarette use should be limited at all times.

Time-Indian Standard Time

Indian people are very informal, to others it may seem that they are undisciplined and unreliable. The point is that it works two ways. Sometimes planning is changed without clear reasons and arbitrarily.

But then again, nice opportunities open up which are not part of the planned schedule.

So please try to be flexible. There is a schedule at every camp which mentions eating and meeting times, excursions or otherwise. Try to be on time. The camp is a social effort and you are not on a holiday

and time is important in the sense that others have to wait when you are late, especially if it's you who are always late others have to wait when you are late, especially if it's you who are always late.

Time Zone

Indian Standard time is 6.30 hours ahead of Central European Time (CET) or Copenhagen.

Tipping

Generally tipping is not compulsory, except in big hotels and restaurants. However, service providers at hotels and restaurants, taxi drivers, and others who have been exposed to tourism are now expecting tips. The tips are not added in your bills, so the decision to tip or not is yours.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks may be cashed at all provincial banks and authorized moneychangers (in the bigger cities only!).

Water

Drinking water should always be boiled and filtered. Drinking straight off the tap is not safe. Shops have a wide range of mineral water that costs about Rs. 15-20 per bottle.

What to bring???

- Clothes, both casual and formal.
- Medicines you may require.
- Small gifts for your host/friends etc.
- Sleeping Bag.
- Camera.
- Sun Tan/Sun Screen Lotion.
- Any specific items from your home country for the intercultural party.
- Photos from your home.

Working Hours

Expected working hours differ from 5 – 7 hours/day in schools up to 8 hours in other projects. In some projects there may be more than one volunteer but this cannot be guaranteed because you can be the only one to sign up for a certain project at that time.

Normally, the volunteers can work in the project he/she applied for. There is, however, not a 100% guarantee because it may be that projects are full or don't need a volunteer for the specific period.