



Understand India

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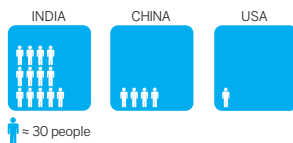
Scout for big jungle cats, elephants and other magnificent beasts on a wildlife-spotting safari.

THE LANDSCAPE.....1151

From steamy tropical rainforests to snow-capped mountains, India's landscape is as multifarious as it is spectacular.



population per sq km



India Today

The Kashmir Epic

In summer 2010, the Kashmir Valley was under near-constant curfews, and violence between proindependence protesters and Indian security forces had turned deadly. The protesters called for India to remove its more than 500,000 troops from Kashmir. They stoned police and paramilitary and burned police vehicles, all while demanding *azadi* – freedom. Security forces responded with gunfire, and more than 100 protesters died, mostly teenagers.

The predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley is claimed by both India and Pakistan – and now, Kashmiris – and the impasse has plagued relations between the two countries since Partition in 1947 (see p1099). After three India–Pakistan wars and countless skirmishes, there's still no solution in sight.

By 1989 Kashmir had an armed insurgency. A militant fringe of Kashmiris revolted against the Indian government, joined by armed supporters from Afghanistan and Pakistan. India accused Pakistan of assisting insurgents; Pakistan countered that India was denying Kashmiris the right to self-determination. Meanwhile, thousands of civilians have been killed in the conflict. India–Pakistan relations sunk even lower in 1998 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party) government detonated five nuclear devices in the Rajasthan desert and Pakistan responded in kind. A border conflict was averted, but nukes were now in the picture.

By the time the Congress Party government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came to power in 2004, relations were strained but cordial; the reopening of cross-border transport links, among other measures, helped calm the situation. But talks were derailed when in Mumbai (Bombay) in 2008 a team of terrorists killed at least 163 people, some of whom were tortured, at 10 sites around the city during three days of coordinated bombings and shootings. The one sniper caught alive, a Pakistani, had

- » Population: 1.21 billion
- » GDP: US\$1.4 trillion (2009)
- » Unemployment rate: 10.8%
- » Employed in agriculture: 52%
- » Literacy rate: 65/82% (female/male)
- » Sex ratio: 940/1000 (female/male)

Dos & Don'ts

- » Avoid tight clothes and keep shoulders and knees covered. Outside Goa, this applies to swimming, too.
- » Public kissing, cuddling or holding hands is not condoned.
- » Be humble and dress modestly at holy places.
- » Remove shoes before entering people's homes and holy sites.
- » Always ask before photographing people or holy places.
- » That head wobble? It can mean 'yes', 'maybe' or 'I have no idea'. Best to just go with the flow.

Top Fiction

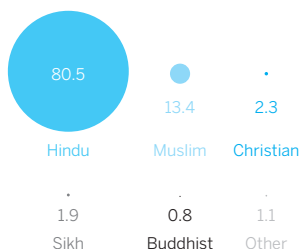
Midnight's Children Salman Rushdie's allegory about Independence and Partition.

The Guide and The Painter of Signs Classic RK Narayan novels set in the fictional town of Malgudi.

A Fine Balance Rohinton Mistry's tragic Mumbai-based story.

belief systems

(% of population)



if India were 100 people



41 would speak Hindi
 55 would speak one of 21 other official languages
 4 would speak one of around 400 other languages
 Note: 10 of these 100 will speak English as a second language

ties to Lashkar-e-Taiba, a militant group that formed to assist the Pakistani army in Kashmir in the 1990s. Pakistan denied any involvement.

Communal Tension

While Kashmir is the site of India's most persistent conflict, religion-based confrontation further south may be its most insidious. One of the most violent episodes occurred in 1992, when Hindu extremists destroyed a mosque, the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, revered by Hindus as the birthplace of Rama. The Hindu-revivalist BJP, then the main opposition, did little to discourage the acts, and rioting in the north killed thousands.

The BJP grew in popularity and won the elections in 1998 and again in 1999. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee appeared moderate, but many BJP members and supporters took a more belligerent posture. In 2002, when 58 Hindus died in a suspicious train fire, more than 2000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in subsequent riots; according to the nonprofit Human Rights Watch, BJP government officials were directly involved.

The year 2008 was one of India's darkest: bomb blasts in Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Delhi each killed dozens of people. Investigations pointed at hardline Islamist groups, but no sooner had Delhi vowed to rein in terrorism than terror struck again with the bombings and shootings in Mumbai on 26 November 2008, now known as 26/11.

At the time of writing, however, tensions have diminished post-26/11 in Mumbai, with extremists softening their rhetoric. And in 2010, when a court stated that the Ayodhya site would be split between Hindus and Muslims, the response was peaceful – India breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Congress Today

When the Congress Party regained power in 2004, it was under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi – the Italian-born wife of the late Rajiv Gandhi, who

India's national anthem, 'Jana Gana Mana' (Thou Art the Ruler of All People), was written and composed by Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

Top Films

Fire (1996), **Earth** (1998) and **Water** (2005) The Deepa Mehta-directed trilogy was popular abroad, but controversial in India.

Pyasa (Thirst; 1957) and **Kaagaz Ke Phool** (Paper Flowers; 1959) Two bittersweet films

directed by and starring film legend Guru Dutt.

Gandhi (1982) Hugely popular movie.

Niceties

» Saying *namaste* with hands together in a prayer gesture is a traditional, respectful Hindu greeting and a universally accepted way to say hello – handy since not all people shake hands with the opposite gender.

Belonging to the Sikh faith, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (of the Congress Party) was the first member of any religious minority community to hold India's highest elected office.

had served as prime minister from 1984 to 1989 (after his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was assassinated in 1984). The BJP's planned national agitation campaign against Sonia Gandhi's foreign origins was subverted when she stepped aside to allow Manmohan Singh to be sworn in as prime minister. With a reputation for transparency and intelligence, Singh is generally popular among Indians, though many believe that Gandhi still wields considerable influence over the actual decisions.

Under Singh's leadership, India has carried out a program of economic liberalisation along with a number of education, health and other social-reform initiatives. Singh made international headlines in 2006 by concluding a civilian nuclear agreement with the US, which grants India access to nuclear fuel and technology in exchange for following International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Recent times have seen Singh come under increasing criticism for weak leadership regarding a series of corruption allegations levelled towards his government.

It's the Economy

India's economy was shaken up in 1991 when Manmohan Singh, then finance minister, undertook the momentous step of partially floating the rupee against a basket of 'hard' currencies. State subsidies were phased out and the economy was opened up to foreign investment, with multinationals drawn by India's multitudes of educated professionals and low wages.

As the world's second-fastest-growing economy after China, India has made giant strides since then. But despite its healthy recent annual growth rate of around 9%, huge sections of the country's billion-plus population have benefitted little from this boom. Indeed, the government's ongoing challenge is to spread the bounty of India's fiscal prosperity, not an easy task given that the gap between the haves and the have-nots – as well as the sheer number of have-nots – is vast.

Political works

- » Hugs between strangers don't really happen (not in public).
- » 'Please' and 'thank you' aren't used much, but they never hurt.
- » Only use your right hand for eating and shaking hands; in India the left hand is the 'toilet' hand.

India after Gandhi: the History of the World's Largest Democracy An elegant post-Gandhi history by Ramachandra Guha.

Political Resources – India (www.politicalresources.net/India.htm) Links to the major parties and movements.

The Elephant, the Tiger and the Cellphone Shashi Tharoor's reflections on 21st-century India.



History

India's story is one of the grand epics of world history. Throughout thousands of years of great civilisations, invasions, the birth of religions and countless cataclysms, India has time and again proved itself to be, in the words of its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, 'a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads'. Indian history has always been a work in progress, a process of reinvention and accumulation that can prove elusive for those seeking to grasp its essential essence.

Generally speaking, Brahmanical empires and Hindu-Buddhist dynasties dominated for over a millennium before the arrival of the Islamic sultanates, which, along with the Mughals, established Muslim control over the region for several hundred years; they were overtaken by the Europeans – especially, of course, the British, who managed to conquer the peninsula. But even this chronology is deceptive: small dynasties emerged, passed away and emerged again in the shadow of larger empires; power centres shifted subtly, control changed hands back and forth between rivals, and territories expanded and contracted; religion was a big deal or not a big deal, depending on the era. Like a river, you haven't ever been able to enter the same India twice. And yet, from its myriad upheavals, a vibrant, diverse and thoroughly modern nation has emerged, as enduring as it is dynamic and increasingly geared to meet the multifarious challenges of the future.

Indus Valley Civilisation

The Indus Valley, straddling the modern India–Pakistan border, is the cradle of civilisation on the Indian subcontinent. The first inhabitants of this region were nomadic tribes who cultivated land and kept domestic animals. Over thousands of years, an urban culture began to emerge from these tribes, particularly from 3500 BC. By 2500 BC large cities were well established, the focal points of what became known as the Harappan culture, which would flourish for more than 1000 years.

TIMELINE

10,000 BC

Stone Age paintings first made in the Bhimbetka rock shelters, in what is now Madhya Pradesh; the art continues here for many centuries. Settlements thought to exist across subcontinent.

2600–1700 BC

The Indus Valley civilisation's heyday. Spanning parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Sindh province in present-day Pakistan, it takes shape around metropolises such as Harappa and Moenjodaro.

1500 BC

The Indo-Aryan civilisation takes root in the fertile plains of the Indo-Gangetic basin. Settlers speak an early form of Sanskrit, from which several Indian vernaculars, including Hindi, later evolve.

History Good Reads

- » www.harappa.com
- » *A History of India*, Romila Thapar (Vol 1) and Percival Spear (Vol 2)
- » *Empires of the Indus*, Alice Albina
- » *India: a History*, John Keay

The great cities of the Mature Harappan period were Moenjodaro and Harappa in present-day Pakistan, and Lothal near Ahmedabad. Lothal can be visited, and from the precise, carefully laid-out street plan, some sense of this sophisticated 4500-year-old civilisation is still evident. Harappan cities often had a separate acropolis, suggesting a religious function, and the great tank at Moenjodaro may have been used for ritual bathing purposes. The major Harappan cities were also notable for their size – estimates put the population of Moenjodaro at as high as 50,000.

By the middle of the 3rd millennium BC the Indus Valley culture was arguably the equal of other great civilisations emerging at the time. The Harappans traded with Mesopotamia, and developed a system of weights and measures, along with a highly developed art in the form of terracotta and bronze figurines. Recovered relics, including models of bullock carts and jewellery, offer the earliest evidence of a distinctive Indian culture. Indeed, many elements of Harappan culture would later become assimilated into Hinduism: clay figurines found at these sites suggest worship of a Mother goddess (later personified as Kali) and a male three-faced god sitting in the pose of a yogi (believed to be the historic Shiva) attended by four animals. Black stone pillars (associated with phallic worship of Shiva) and animal figures (the most prominent being the humped bull; later Shiva's mount, Nandi) have also been discovered.

Early Invasions & the Rise of Religions

The Harappan civilisation fell into decline from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. Some historians attribute the end of the empire to floods or decreased rainfall, which threatened the Harappans' agricultural base. The more enduring, if contentious, theory is that an Aryan invasion put paid to the Harappans, despite little archaeological proof or written reports in the ancient Indian texts to that effect. As a result, some nationalist historians argue that the Aryans (from a Sanskrit word for 'noble') were in fact the original inhabitants of India and that the invasion theory was invented by self-serving foreign conquerors. Others say that the arrival of Aryans was more of a gentle migration that gradually subsumed Harappan culture.

Those who defend the invasion theory believe that from around 1500 BC Aryan tribes from Afghanistan and Central Asia began to filter into northwest India. Despite their military superiority, their progress was gradual, with successive tribes fighting over territory and new arrivals pushing further east into the Ganges plain. Eventually these tribes controlled northern India as far as the Vindhya Hills. Many of the original inhabitants of northern India, the Dravidians, were pushed south.

The Hindu sacred scriptures, the Vedas (see p1108), were written during this period of transition (1500–1200 BC), and the caste system became formalised.

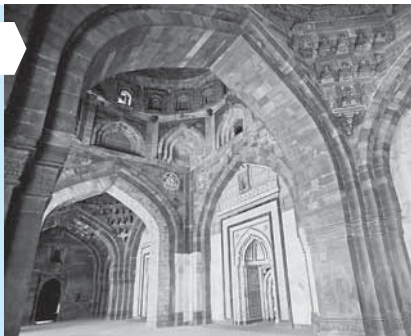
RK Narayan's 1973 *Ramayana* is a condensed and novelistic retelling of the 3rd century BC classic. The renowned novelist took on the *Mahabharata* in 1978.

1500–1200 BC

The Rig-Veda, the first and longest of Hinduism's canonical texts, the Vedas, is written; three more books follow. Earliest forms of priestly Brahmanical Hinduism emerge.

1000 BC

Indraprastha, Delhi's first incarnation, comes into being. Archaeological excavations at the site, where the Purana Qila now stands, continue even today, as more facts about this ancient capital keep emerging.



» Purana Qila (p73), Delhi

As the Aryan tribes spread across the Ganges plain in the late 7th century BC, many were absorbed into 16 major kingdoms, which were, in turn, amalgamated into four large states. Out of these states arose the Nanda dynasty, which came to power in 364 BC, ruling over huge swathes of North India.

During this period, the Indian heartland narrowly avoided two invasions from the west which, if successful, could have significantly altered the path of Indian history. The first was by the Persian king Darius (521–486 BC), who annexed Punjab and Sindh (on either side of the modern India–Pakistan border). Alexander the Great advanced to India from Greece in 326 BC, but his troops refused to go beyond the Beas River in Himachal Pradesh. Alexander turned back without ever extending his power into India itself.

The period is also distinguished by the rise of two of India's most significant religions, Buddhism (p1111) and Jainism (p1112), which arose around 500 BC. Both the Buddha and Jainism's Mahavir questioned the Vedas and were critical of the caste system, although, unlike Buddhism, the Jain faith never extended beyond India.

The Mauryan Empire & its Aftermath

If the Harappan culture was the cradle of Indian civilisation, Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the first great Indian empire. He came to power in 321 BC, having seized the throne from the Nandas, and he soon expanded the empire to include the Indus Valley previously conquered by Alexander.

From its capital at Pataliputra (modern-day Patna), the Mauryan empire encompassed much of North India and reached as far south as modern-day Karnataka. The Mauryas were capable of securing control over such a vast realm through the use of an efficient bureaucracy, organised

Mahavir and the Buddha were contemporaries, and their teachings overlapped. The Buddha lays out the discrepancies (and his critiques) in the Sankha Sutta and Devadaha Sutta, in which he refers to Mahavir as Nigantha ('free from bonds') Nataputta. You can read them at the Theravada resource www.accesstoinsight.com.

MAP DRAWING ARYAN-STYLE

While some historians dispute the origins of the Aryan presence in northern India, there's little argument that the subsequent Aryan kingdoms often adhered to one of history's more curious forms of territorial demarcation. Under the highly formalised ritual of *asvamedha* (horse sacrifice), a horse was allowed to roam freely, followed by a band of soldiers. If the horse's progress was impeded, the king would fight for the land in question. At the end of the prescribed period, the entire area over which the horse had wandered was taken to be the king's unchallenged territory. The horse was rewarded for its success or failure – which, it didn't matter – by being sacrificed. The system must have worked, because the ritual was still being performed centuries later by dynasties such as the Chalukyas of Badami (p884) to demonstrate the ruler's complete control over his kingdom.

599–528 BC

The life of Mahavir, the 24th and last *tirthankar* (enlightened teacher) who established Jainism. Like the Buddha, he preaches compassion and a path to enlightenment for all castes.

563–483 BC

The life of Siddhartha Gautama. The prince is born in modern-day Nepal and attains enlightenment beneath the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya (Bihar), thereby transforming into the Buddha (Awakened One).

5th–4th Century BC

Nanda dynasty evolves from the wealthy region of Magadha (roughly, today's Bihar) and grows to encompass a huge area, spanning from Bengal to Punjab. Falls to Maurya in 321 BC.

326 BC

Alexander the Great invades India. He defeats King Porus in Punjab to enter the subcontinent, but a rebellion within his army keeps him from advancing beyond Himachal Pradesh's Beas River.

Maurayan Remains

- » Junagadh (Gujarat)
- » Allahabad Fort (Uttar Pradesh)
- » Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh)
- » Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh)
- » Bodhgaya (Bihar)
- » Vaishali (Bihar)
- » Amaravathi (Andhra Pradesh)

Emperor Ashoka's ability to rule over his empire was assisted by a standing army consisting of roughly 9000 elephants, 30,000 cavalry and 600,000 infantry.

tiers of local government and a well-defined social order consisting of a rigid caste system.

The empire reached its peak under emperor Ashoka. Such was Ashoka's power to lead and unite that after his death in 232 BC, no one could be found to hold the disparate elements of the Maurayan empire together. The empire rapidly disintegrated, collapsing altogether in 184 BC.

None of the empires that immediately followed could match the stability or enduring historical legacy of the Mauryans. The Sungas (184–70 BC), Kanvas (72–30 BC), Shakas (from 130 BC) and Kushanas (1st century BC until 1st century AD, and into the 3rd century in a diminished form) all had their turn, with the last briefly ruling over a massive area of North India and Central Asia.

Despite the multiplicity of ruling powers, this was a period of intense development. Trade with the Roman Empire (overland, and by sea through the southern ports) became substantial during the 1st century AD; there was also overland trade with China.

The Golden Age of the Guptas

The empires that followed the Mauryans may have claimed large areas of Indian territory as their own, but many secured only nominal power over their realms. Throughout the subcontinent, small tribes and kingdoms effectively controlled territory and dominated local affairs.

In AD 319 Chandragupta I, the third king of one of these tribes, the little-known Guptas, came to prominence by a fortuitous marriage to the daughter of one of the most powerful tribes in the north, the Liccavis. The Gupta empire grew rapidly and under Chandragupta II (r 375–413) achieved its greatest extent. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien, visiting India at the time, described a people 'rich and contented', ruled over by enlightened and just kings.

Poetry, literature and the arts flourished, with some of the finest work done at Ajanta (p772), Ellora (p769), Sanchi (p639) and Sarnath (p396). Towards the end of the Gupta period, Hinduism became the dominant religious force, and its revival eclipsed Jainism and Buddhism; the latter in particular went into decline in India and would never again be India's dominant religion.

The invasions of the Huns at the beginning of the 6th century signalled the end of this era, and in 510 the Gupta army was defeated by the Hun leader Toramana. Power in North India again devolved to a number of separate Hindu kingdoms.

The Hindu South

Southern India has always laid claim to its own unique history. Insulated by distance from the political developments in the north, a separate set

321–185 BC

Rule of the Maurya kings. Founded by Chandragupta Maurya, this pan-Indian empire is ruled from Pataliputra (present-day Patna) and briefly adopts Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Ashoka.

Mid-3rd Century BC

Buddhism spreads across subcontinent and beyond via Ashoka's monastic ambassadors: monks travel to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Amaravathi, Sanchi and other stupas erected.

Mid-3rd Century BC

Bhakti movement emerges in Hinduism, following first mention in the 5th-century-BC Bhagavad Gita. It emphasises individual devotion and union with the Divine, challenging traditional hierarchy of Brahmanism.

c 235 BC

Start of Chola reign. The Tamil dynasty, known for the power and territory it accreted in the 9th to 13th centuries, ruled in India's south for more than 1500 years.

of powerful kingdoms emerged, among them the Satavahanas – who ruled over central India for about 400 years beginning in 230 BC and, though predominantly Hindu, patronised Buddhist art at Amaravathi (p915) and Sanchi (p639) – as well as the Kalingas and Vakatakas. But it was from the tribal territories on the fertile coastal plains that the greatest southern empires – the Cholas, Pandyas, Chalukyas, Cheras and Pallavas – came into their own.

The Chalukyas ruled mainly over the Deccan region of south-central India, although their power occasionally extended further north. With a capital at Badami (p884) in modern-day Karnataka, they ruled from 550 to 753 before falling to the Rashtrakutas. An eastern branch of the Chalukyas, with its capital at Kalyani in Karnataka, rose and ruled again from 972 to 1190.

In the far south, the Pallavas ruled from the 4th to 9th centuries and pioneered Dravidian architecture, with its exuberant, almost baroque, style. The surviving architectural high points of Pallava rule can be found across Tamil Nadu, including in the erstwhile Pallava capital at Kanchipuram (p1008).

The concepts of zero and infinity are widely believed to have been devised by eminent Indian mathematicians during the reign of the Guptas.

AN ENLIGHTENED EMPEROR

Apart from the Mughals and then the British many centuries later, no other power controlled more Indian territory than the Mauryan empire. It's therefore fitting that it provided India with one of its most significant historical figures.

Emperor Ashoka's rule was characterised by flourishing art and sculpture, while his reputation as a philosopher-king was enhanced by the rock-hewn edicts he used to both instruct his people and delineate the enormous span of his territory. Some of these moral teachings can still be seen, particularly the Ashokan Edicts at Junagadh in Gujarat (p702).

Ashoka's reign also represented an undoubted historical high point for Buddhism: he embraced the religion in 262 BC, declaring it the state religion and cutting a radical swathe through the spiritual and social body of Hinduism. The emperor also built thousands of stupas and monasteries across the region, the extant highlights of which are visible at Sarnath (p396) in Uttar Pradesh – on the spot where Buddha delivered his first sermon expounding the Noble Eightfold Path, or Middle Way to Enlightenment (see p1111) – and Sanchi (p640) in Madhya Pradesh. Ashoka also sent missions abroad, and he is revered in Sri Lanka because he sent his son and daughter to carry the Buddha's teaching to the island.

The long shadow this emperor of the 3rd century BC still casts over India is evident from the fact that the central design of the Indian national flag is the Ashoka Chakra, a wheel with 24 spokes. Ashoka's standard, which topped many pillars, is also the seal of modern-day India (four lions sitting back-to-back atop an abacus decorated with a frieze and the inscription 'truth alone triumphs') and its national emblem, chosen to reaffirm the ancient commitment to peace and goodwill.

3rd Century BC

The Satavahana Empire, of Andhran origin, rules over a huge central Indian area until the 2nd century AD. Their interest in art and maritime trade influences artistic development regionally and in Southeast Asia.

AD 52

Possible arrival of St Thomas the Apostle on the coast of Kerala. Christianity thought to have been introduced to India with his preaching in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

1st Century

International trade booms: the region's elaborate overland trade networks connect with ports linked to maritime routes. Trade to Africa, the Gulf, Socotra, Southeast Asia, China and even Rome thrives.

319–510

The golden era of the Gupta dynasty, the second of India's great empires after the Mauryas. This era is marked by a creative surge in literature and the arts.

Pallava Architecture in Tamil Nadu

- » Shore Temple, Mamallapuram
- » Five Rathas, Mamallapuram
- » Temples, Kanchipuram
- » Rock Fort Temple, Trichy (Tiruchirappalli)

The south's prosperity was based on long-established trading links with other civilisations, among them the Egyptians and Romans. In return for spices, pearls, ivory and silk, the Indians received Roman gold. Indian merchants also extended their influence to Southeast Asia. In 850 the Cholas rose to power and superseded the Pallavas. They soon set about turning the south's far-reaching trade influence into territorial conquest. Under the reign of Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014) they controlled almost the whole of South India, the Deccan plateau, Sri Lanka, parts of the Malay peninsula and the Sumatran-based Srivijaya kingdom.

Not all of their attention was focused overseas, however, and the Cholas left behind some of the finest examples of Dravidian architecture, most notably the sublime Brihadishwara Temple in Thanjavur (p1025) and Chidambaram's stunning Nataraja Temple (p1022). Both Thanjavur and Chidambaram served as Chola capitals.

Throughout, Hinduism remained the bedrock of South Indian culture.

The Muslim North

While South India guarded its resolutely Hindu character, North India was convulsed by Muslim armies invading from the northwest.

At the vanguard of Islamic expansion was Mahmud of Ghazni. Today, Ghazni is a nondescript little town between Kabul and Kandahar in Afghanistan. But in the early years of the 11th century, Mahmud turned it into one of the world's most glorious capital cities, which he largely funded by plundering his neighbours' territories. From 1001 to 1025, Mahmud conducted 17 raids into India, most infamously on the famous Shiva temple at Somnath (p698) in Gujarat. The Hindu force of 70,000 died trying to defend the temple, which eventually fell in early 1026. In the aftermath of his victory, Mahmud, not particularly intent on acquiring new territory at this stage, transported a massive haul of gold and other booty back to his capital. These raids effectively shattered the balance of power in North India, allowing subsequent invaders to claim the territory for themselves.

Following Mahmud's death in 1033, Ghazni was seized by the Seljuqs and then fell to the Ghurs of western Afghanistan, who similarly had their eyes on the great Indian prize. The Ghur style of warfare was brutal: the Ghur general, Ala-ud-din, was known as 'Burner of the World'.

In 1191 Mohammed of Ghur advanced into India. Although defeated in a major battle against a confederacy of Hindu rulers, he returned the following year and routed his enemies. One of his generals, Qutb ud-din Aibak, captured Delhi and was appointed governor; it was during his reign that the great Delhi landmark, the Qutb Minar complex (p102), was built. A separate Islamic empire was established in Bengal and within a short time almost the whole of North India was under Muslim control.

4th to 9th Centuries

The Pallavas, known for their temple architecture, enter the shifting landscape of southern power centres, establishing dominance in Andhra Pradesh and northern Tamil Nadu from their base in Kanchipuram.

500–600

The emergence of the Rajputs in Rajasthan. Hailing from three principal races supposedly of celestial origin, they form 36 clans which spread across the region to secure their own kingdoms.

610

Prophet Mohammed establishes Islam. He soon invites the people of Mecca to adopt the new religion under the command of God, and his call is met with eager response.



» Hawa Mahal (p111), Jaipur

Following Mohammed's death in 1206, Qutb ud-din Aibak became the first sultan of Delhi. His successor, Iltutmish, brought Bengal back under central control and defended the empire from an attempted Mongol invasion. Ala-ud-din Khilji came to power in 1296 and pushed the borders of the empire inexorably south, while simultaneously fending off further attacks by the Mongols.

North Meets South

Ala-ud-din died in 1320, and Mohammed Tughlaq ascended the throne in 1324. In 1328 Tughlaq took the southern strongholds of the Hoysala empire, which had centres at Belur, Halebid and Somnathpur. India was Tughlaq's for the taking.

However, while the empire of the pre-Mughal Muslims would achieve its greatest extent under Tughlaq's rule, his overreaching ambition also sowed the seeds of its disintegration. Unlike his forebears (including great rulers such as Ashoka), Tughlaq dreamed not only of extending his indirect influence over South India, but of controlling it directly as part of his empire.

After a series of successful campaigns Tughlaq decided to move the capital from Delhi to a more central location. The new capital was called Daulatabad and was near Aurangabad in Maharashtra. Tughlaq sought to populate the new capital by forcefully marching the entire population of Delhi 1100km south, resulting in great loss of life. However, he soon realised that this left the north undefended and so the entire capital was moved north again. The superb hilltop fortress of Daulatabad (p768) stands as the last surviving monument to his megalomaniac vision.

The days of the Ghur empire were numbered. The last of the great sultans of Delhi, Firoz Shah, died in 1388, and the fate of the sultanate was sealed when Timur (Tamerlane) made a devastating raid from Samarkand (in Central Asia) into India in 1398. Timur's sacking of Delhi was truly merciless; some accounts say his soldiers slaughtered every Hindu inhabitant.

After Tughlaq's withdrawal from the south, several splinter kingdoms arose. The two most significant were the Islamic Bahmani sultanate, which emerged in 1345 with its capital at Gulbarga, and later Bidar, and the Hindu Vijayanagar empire, founded in 1336 with its capital at Hampi. The battles between the two were among the bloodiest communal violence in Indian history and ultimately resolved nothing in the two centuries before the Mughals ushered in a more enlightened age.

The Mughals

Even as Vijayanagar was experiencing its last days, the next great Indian empire was being founded. The Mughal empire was massive, at its height covering almost the entire subcontinent. Its significance, however, lay not only in its size. Mughal emperors presided over a golden age of arts

In its 800-year history, the Qutb Minar has been damaged by two lightning strikes and one earthquake and has been repaired or built up by four sultans, one British major and one governor general.

A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar by KA Nilakanta Sastri is arguably the most comprehensive (if heavy-going) history of this region.

850

The Chola empire emerges anew in South India, establishing itself as a formidable economic and military presence in Asia under Rajaraja Chola I and his son Rajendra Chola I.

1026

Mahmud of Ghazni raids India for the last time, ransacking on this occasion the Hindu Somnath Temple in Gujarat, where he purportedly smashes the temple's idol with his own hands.

12th–19th Centuries

Africans are brought to the Konkan Coast as part of trade with the Gulf; the slaves become servants, dock workers and soldiers and are known as Siddis or Habshis.

1192

Prithviraj Chauhan loses Delhi to Mohammed of Ghori. The defeat effectively ends Hindu supremacy in the region, exposing the subcontinent to subsequent Muslim invaders marching in from the northwest.

and literature and had a passion for building that resulted in some of the finest architecture in India: Shah Jahan's sublime Taj Mahal (p350) ranks as one of the wonders of the world.

The founder of the Mughal line, Babur (r 1526–30), was a descendant of both Genghis Khan and Timur (Tamerlane). In 1525, armed with this formidable lineage, he marched into Punjab from his capital at Kabul. With technological superiority brought by firearms, and consummate skill in simultaneously employing artillery and cavalry, Babur defeated the numerically superior armies of the sultan of Delhi at the Battle of Panipat in 1526.

Despite this initial success, Babur's son, Humayun (r 1530–56) was defeated by a powerful ruler of eastern India, Sher Shah, in 1539 and forced to withdraw to Iran. Following Sher Shah's death in 1545, Huma-

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF INDIA

Founded as an alliance of Hindu kingdoms banding together to counter the threat from the Muslims, the Vijayanagar empire rapidly grew into one of India's wealthiest and greatest Hindu empires. Under the rule of Bukka I (c 1343–79), the majority of South India was brought under its control.

The Vijayanagars and the Bahmani sultanate, which was also based in South India, were evenly matched. The Vijayanagar armies occasionally got the upper hand, but generally the Bahmanis inflicted the worst defeats. The atrocities committed by both sides almost defy belief. In 1366 Bukka I responded to a perceived slight by capturing the Muslim stronghold of Mudkal and slaughtering every inhabitant bar one, who managed to escape and carry news of the attack to Mohammad Shah, the sultan. Mohammad swore that he would not rest until he had killed 100,000 Hindus. Instead, according to the Muslim historian Firishtah, 500,000 'infidels' were killed in the ensuing campaign.

Somehow, Vijayanagar survived. In 1484, following much intrigue and plotting in the royal court, the Bahmani sultanate began to disintegrate, and five separate kingdoms, based on the major cities – Berar, Ahmadnagar, Bidar, Bijapur and Golconda – were formed. Bijapur and Bidar still bear exceptional traces of this period of Islamic rule. With little realistic opposition from the north, the Hindu empire enjoyed a golden age of almost supreme power in the south. In 1520 the Vijayanagar king Krishnadevaraya even took Bijapur.

Like Bahmani, however, Vijayanagar's fault lines were soon laid bare. A series of uprisings divided the kingdom fatally, just at a time when the Muslim sultanates were beginning to form a new alliance. In 1565 a Muslim coalition routed the Hindu armies at the Battle of Talikota. Hampi was destroyed. Although the last of the Vijayanagar line escaped and the dynasty limped on for several years, real power passed to local Muslim rulers or Hindu chiefs once loyal to the Vijayanagar kings. One of India's grisliest periods came to an end when the Bahmani kingdoms fell to the Mughals.

1206

Ghori is murdered during prayer while returning to Ghazni from Lahore. In the absence of an heir, his kingdom is usurped by his generals. The Delhi Sultanate is born.

13th Century

The Pandyas, a Tamil dynasty dating to the 6th century BC, assumes control of Chola territory, expanding into Andhra Pradesh, Kalinga (Odisha [Orissa]) and Sri Lanka from their capital in Madurai.

1321

The Tughlaqs come to power in Delhi. Mohammed bin Tughlaq expands his empire but becomes known for inelegant schemes: moving the capital to Daulatabad and creating ferry-prone currency.

1336

Foundation of the mighty Vijayanagar empire, named after its capital city, the ruins of which can be seen today in the vicinity of Hampi (in Karnataka).

yun returned to claim his kingdom, eventually conquering Delhi in 1555. He died the following year and was succeeded by his young son Akbar (r 1556–1605) who, during his 49-year reign, managed to extend and consolidate the empire until he ruled over a mammoth area.

True to his name, Akbar (which means ‘great’ in Arabic) was probably the greatest of the Mughals: he not only had the military ability required of a ruler at that time, but was also a just and wise ruler and a man of culture. He saw, as previous Muslim rulers had not, that the number of Hindus in India was too great to subjugate. Although Akbar was no saint – reports of massacres of Hindus at Panipat and Chitrod tarnish his legacy – he remains known for integrating Hindus into his empire and skillfully using them as advisers, generals and administrators. Akbar also had a deep interest in religious matters, and spent many hours in discussion with religious experts of all persuasions, including Christians and Parsis.

Jehangir (r 1605–27) ascended to the throne following Akbar’s death. Despite several challenges to the authority of Jehangir himself, the empire remained more or less intact. In periods of stability Jehangir spent time in his beloved Kashmir, eventually dying en route there in 1627. He was succeeded by his son, Shah Jahan (r 1627–58), who secured his position as emperor by executing all male relatives who stood in his way. During his reign, some of the most vivid and permanent reminders of the Mughals’ glory were constructed; in addition to the Taj Mahal, he also oversaw the construction of the mighty Red Fort (Lal Qila) in Delhi (p62) and converted the Agra Fort (p352) into a palace that would later become his prison.

The last of the great Mughals, Aurangzeb (r 1658–1707), imprisoned his father (Shah Jahan) and succeeded to the throne after a two-year struggle against his brothers. Aurangzeb devoted his resources to extending the empire’s boundaries, and thus fell into much the same trap as that of Mohammed Tughlaq some 300 years earlier. He, too, tried moving his capital south (to Aurangabad) and imposed heavy taxes to fund his military. A combination of decaying court life and dissatisfaction among the Hindu population at inflated taxes and religious intolerance weakened the Mughal grip.

The empire was also facing serious challenges from the Marathas in central India and, more significantly, the British in Bengal. With Aurangzeb’s death in 1707, the empire’s fortunes rapidly declined, and Delhi was sacked by Persia’s Nadir Shah in 1739. Mughal ‘emperors’ continued to rule right up until the First War of Independence (Indian Uprising) in 1857, but they were emperors without an empire.

The Rajputs & the Marathas

Throughout the Mughal period, there remained strong Hindu powers, most notably the Rajputs. Centred in Rajasthan, the Rajputs were a proud warrior caste with a passionate belief in the dictates of chivalry,

Architecture of the Deccan Sultanates

- » **Bijapur** Citadel, Golgumbaz, Ibrahim Rouza, Jama Masjid
- » **Bidar** Fort, Bahmani Tombs
- » **Hyderabad** Golconda Fort, Qutb Shahi Tombs, Charminar

White Mughals by William Dalrymple tells the true story of an East India Company soldier who married an Indian Muslim princess, a tragic love story interwoven with harem politics, intrigue and espionage.

1345

Bahmani Sultanate is established in the Deccan following a revolt against the Tughlaqs of Delhi. The capital is set up at Gulbarga, in today’s northern Karnataka, later shifting to Bidar.

1398

Timur (Tamerlane) invades Delhi, on the pretext that the Delhi Sultans are too tolerant with their Hindu subjects. He executes tens of thousands of Hindus before the battle for Delhi.

1469

Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith, which has millions of followers within and beyond India to the present day, is born in a village near Lahore (in modern-day Pakistan).

1484

Bahmani Sultanate begins to break up following independence movements; Berar is the first to revolt. By 1518, there are five Deccan sultanates: Berar, Ahmadnagar, Bidar, Bijapur and Golconda.

Persian was the official language of several empires, from Mahmud of Ghazni to the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughals. Urdu, which combines Persian, Arabic and indigenous languages, evolved over hundreds of years and came into its own during Mughal reign.

Amar Chitra Katha, a hugely popular publisher of comic books about Indian folklore, mythology and history, has several books about Shivaji, including *Shivaji – The Great Maratha*, *Tales of Shivaji and Tanaji*, *the Maratha Lion*, about Shivaji's close friend and fellow warrior.

both in battle and state affairs. The Rajputs opposed every foreign incursion into their territory, but were never united or adequately organised to deal with stronger forces on a long-term basis. When they weren't battling foreign oppression, they squandered their energies fighting each other. This eventually led to their territories becoming vassal states of the Mughal empire. Their prowess in battle, however, was acknowledged, and some of the best military men in the Mughal armies were Rajputs.

The Marathas were less picaresque but ultimately more effective. They first rose to prominence under their great leader Shivaji, also known as Chhatrapati Shivaji, who gathered popular support by championing the Hindu cause against the Muslim rulers. Between 1646 and 1680 Shivaji performed heroic acts in confronting the Mughals across most of central India. Shivaji was captured by the Mughals and taken to Agra but, naturally, he managed to escape and continue his adventures. Tales of his larger-than-life exploits are still popular with wandering storytellers. He is a particular hero in Maharashtra, where many of his wildest adventures took place. (Today, you'll see Shivaji's name all over Mumbai.) He's also revered for the fact that, as a lower-caste Shudra, he showed that great leaders don't have to be of the Kshatriya (soldier) caste.

Shivaji's son was captured, blinded and executed by Aurangzeb. His grandson wasn't made of the same sturdy stuff, so the Maratha empire continued under the Peshwas, hereditary government ministers who became the real rulers. They gradually took over more of the weakening Mughal empire's powers, first by supplying troops and then actually taking control of Mughal land.

The expansion of Maratha power came to an abrupt halt in 1761 at Panipat. In the town where Babur had won the battle that established the Mughal empire more than 200 years earlier, the Marathas were defeated by Ahmad Shah Durrani from Afghanistan. Maratha expansion to the west was halted, and although they consolidated their control over central India and the region known as Malwa, they were to fall to India's final imperial power – the British.

The Rise of European Power

The British weren't the first European power to arrive in India, nor were they the last to leave – both of those 'honours' go to the Portuguese. In 1498 Vasco da Gama arrived on the coast of modern-day Kerala, having sailed around the Cape of Good Hope. Pioneering this route gave the Portuguese a century-long monopoly over Indian and far-Eastern trade with Europe. In 1510 they captured Goa, followed by Diu in 1531, two enclaves the Portuguese controlled until 1961. In its heyday, the trade flowing through 'Golden Goa' was said to rival that passing through Lisbon. In the long term, however, the Portuguese didn't have the resources

1498

Vasco da Gama discovers the sea route from Europe to India. He arrives in Kerala and engages in trade with the local nobility.

1510

Portuguese forces capture Goa under the command of Alfonso de Albuquerque, whose initial attempt was thwarted by then-ruler, Sultan Adil Shah of Bijapur. He succeeds following Shah's death.

1526

Babur becomes the first Mughal emperor after conquering Delhi. He stuns Rajasthan by routing its confederate force, gaining an edge with the introduction of matchlock muskets in his army.

1540

The Sur dynasty briefly captures Delhi from the Mughals, after Sher Shah Suri's Battle of Kanauj victory over Humayun. The Mughals are forced to seek help from the Rajputs.

to maintain a worldwide empire and they were quickly eclipsed and isolated after the arrival of the British and French.

In 1600 Queen Elizabeth I granted a charter to a London trading company that gave it a monopoly on British trade with India. In 1613 representatives of the East India Company established their first trading post at Surat in Gujarat. Further British trading posts, administered and governed by representatives of the company, were established at Madras (Chennai) in 1639, Bombay (Mumbai) in 1661 and Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1690. Strange as it now seems, for nearly 250 years a commercial trading company and not the British government 'ruled' over British India.

By 1672 the French had established themselves at Pondicherry (Puducherry), an enclave they held even after the British departed and where architectural traces of French elegance remain. The stage was set for more than a century of rivalry between the British and French for control of Indian trade. At one stage, under the guidance of a handful of talented and experienced commanders, the French appeared to hold the upper hand. In 1746 they took Madras (only to hand it back in 1749), and their success in placing their favoured heir to the throne as Nizam of Hyderabad augured well for the future. But serious French aspirations effectively ended in 1750 when the directors of the French East India Company decided that their representatives were playing too much politics and doing too little trading. Key representatives were sacked, and a settlement designed to end all ongoing political disputes was made with the British. The decision effectively removed France as a serious influence on the subcontinent.

The nizams of Hyderabad ruled over this vast central-Indian state from 1720 until Independence – first under the Mughals and then on their own – and were known for their wealth; their fondness for architecture, poetry and precious gems; and, at Independence, their determination to remain independent.

ENTER THE PORTUGUESE

Just a few years after they arrived, the Portuguese were well on their way to establishing a firm foothold in Goa. On 20 May 1498 Vasco da Gama dropped anchor off the South Indian coast near the town of Calicut (now Kozhikode). It had taken him 23 days to sail from the east coast of Africa, guided by a pilot named Ibn Masjid, sent by the ruler of Malindi in Gujarat.

The Portuguese sought a sea route between Europe and the East so they could trade directly in spices. They also hoped they might find Christians cut off from Europe by the Muslim dominance of the Middle East, while at the same time searching for the legendary kingdom of Prester John, a powerful Christian ruler with whom they could unite against the Middle Eastern rulers. In India they found spices and the Syrian Orthodox community, but not Prester John.

Vasco da Gama sought an audience with the ruler of Calicut, to explain himself, and seems to have been well received. The Portuguese engaged in a limited amount of trading, but became increasingly suspicious that Muslim traders were turning the ruler of Calicut against them. They resolved to leave Calicut, which they did in August 1498.

1542–45

St Francis Xavier's first mission to India. He preaches Catholicism in Goa, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, returning in 1548–49 and 1552 in between travels in the Far East.

1556

Hemu, a Hindu general in Adil Shah Suri's army, seizes Delhi after Humayun's death. He rules for barely a month before losing to Akbar in the Second Battle of Panipat.

1560–1812

Portuguese Inquisition in Goa. Trials focus on converted Hindus and Muslims thought to have 'relapsed'. Thousands were tried and several dozen were likely executed before it was abolished in 1812.

1600

Britain's Queen Elizabeth I grants the first trading charter to the East India Company, with the maiden voyage taking place in 1601 under the command of Sir James Lancaster.

Britain's Surge to Power

The transformation of the British from traders to governors began almost by accident. Having been granted a licence to trade in Bengal by the Mughals, and following the establishment of a new trading post at Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1690, business began to expand rapidly. Under the apprehensive gaze of the nawab (local ruler), British trading activities became extensive and the 'factories' took on an increasingly permanent (and fortified) appearance.

Eventually the nawab decided that British power had grown large enough. In June 1756 he attacked Calcutta and, having taken the city, locked his British prisoners in a tiny cell. The space was so cramped and airless that many were dead by the following morning. The cell infamously became known as the 'Black Hole of Calcutta'.

Six months later, Robert Clive, an employee in the military service of the East India Company, led an expedition to retake Calcutta and entered into an agreement with one of the nawab's generals to overthrow the nawab himself. He did this in June 1757 at the Battle of Plassey (now called Palashi), and the general who had assisted him was placed on the throne. With the British effectively in control of Bengal, the company's agents engaged in a period of unbridled profiteering. When a subsequent nawab finally took up arms to protect his own interests, he was defeated at the Battle of Baksar in 1764, a victory that confirmed the British as the paramount power in east India.

In 1771 Warren Hastings was made governor in Bengal. During his tenure the company greatly expanded its control. His astute statesmanship was aided by the fact that India at this time was experiencing a power vacuum created by the disintegration of the Mughal empire. The Marathas, the only real Indian power to step into this gap, were divided among themselves. Hastings concluded a series of treaties with local rulers, including one with the main Maratha leader. From 1784 onwards, the British government in London began to take a more direct role in supervising affairs in India, although the territory was still notionally administered by the East India Company until 1858.

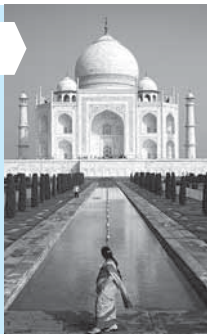
In the south, where Mughal influence had never been great, the picture was confused by the strong British–French rivalry, and one ruler was played off against another. This was never clearer than in the series of Mysore wars in which Hyder Ali and his son, Tipu Sultan, waged a brave and determined campaign against the British. In the Fourth Mysore War (1789–99), Tipu Sultan was killed at Srirangapatnam and British power took another step forward. The long-running struggle with the Marathas was concluded in 1803, leaving only Punjab (held by the Sikhs) outside British control. Punjab finally fell in 1849 after the two Sikh Wars (1845–46 and 1848–49).

Colonial-era Architecture

- » Colaba and Kala Ghoda, Mumbai (British)
- » BBD Bagh and environs, Kolkata (British)
- » Old Goa and Panjim, Goa (Portuguese)
- » Puducherry, Tamil Nadu (French)

1631

Construction of the Taj Mahal begins after Shah Jahan, overcome with grief following the death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, vows to build the most beautiful mausoleum in the world.



» Taj Mahal (p350), Agra

1672

The French East India Company establishes an outpost at Pondicherry (Puducherry), which the French, Dutch and British fight over repeatedly in the coming century.

1674

Shivaji establishes the Maratha kingdom, spanning western India and parts of the Deccan and North India. He assumes the imperial title of Chhatrapati, which means 'Great Protector'.

British India

By the early 19th century, India was effectively under British control, although there remained a patchwork of states, many nominally independent and governed by their own rulers, the maharajas (or similarly titled princes) and nawabs. While these 'princely states' administered their own territories, a system of central government was developed. British bureaucratic models were replicated in the Indian government and civil service – a legacy that still exists.

Trade and profit continued to be the main focus of British rule in India, with far-reaching effects. Iron and coal mining were developed, and tea, coffee and cotton became key crops. A start was made on the vast rail network that's still in use today, irrigation projects were undertaken, and the zamindar (landowner) system was encouraged. These absentee landlords eased the burden of administration and tax collection for the British but contributed to the development of an impoverished and landless peasantry.

The British also imposed English as the local language of administration. For them, this was critical in a country with so many different languages, but it also kept the new rulers at arm's length from the Indian populace.

The Road to Independence

The desire among many Indians to be free from foreign rule remained. Opposition to the British increased at the turn of the 20th century, spearheaded by the Indian National Congress, the country's oldest political party, also known as the Congress Party and Congress (I).

It met for the first time in 1885 and soon began to push for participation in the government of India. A highly unpopular attempt by the British to partition Bengal in 1905 resulted in mass demonstrations and brought to light Hindu opposition to the division; the Muslim community formed its own league and campaigned for protected rights in any future political settlement. As pressure rose, a split emerged in Hindu circles between moderates and radicals, the latter resorting to violence to publicise their aims.

With the outbreak of WWI, the political situation eased. India contributed hugely to the war (more than one million Indian volunteers were enlisted and sent overseas, suffering more than 100,000 casualties). The contribution was sanctioned by Congress leaders, largely with the expectation that it would be rewarded after the war. No such rewards transpired and disillusion followed. Disturbances were particularly persistent in Punjab, and in April 1919, following riots in Amritsar, a British army contingent was sent to quell the unrest. Under direct orders of the officer in charge, they ruthlessly fired into a crowd of unarmed protesters (see the boxed text on p216). News of the massacre spread rapidly throughout

Plain Tales from the Raj by Charles Allen (ed) is a fascinating series of interviews with people who played a role in British India on both sides of the table.

In 1909, the so-called Morley-Minto Reforms provided for limited Indian participation in government and introduced separate electorates for the country's different religious communities.

1707

Death of Aurangzeb, the last of the Mughal greats. His demise triggers the gradual collapse of the Mughal empire, as anarchy and rebellion erupt across the country.

1739

Nadir Shah plunders Delhi and carries away the jewel-encrusted Peacock Throne as well as the Koh-i-noor diamond, which changes many hands to eventually become property of the British royalty.

1747

Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani sweeps across northern India, capturing Lahore and Kashmir, sacking Delhi and dealing another blow to the rapidly contracting Mughal empire.

1757

The East India Company registers its first military victory on Indian soil. Siraj-ud-Daulah, nawab of Bengal, is defeated by Robert Clive in the Battle of Plassey.

India's Struggle for Independence by Bipan Chandra expertly chronicles the history of India from 1857 to 1947.

India, turning huge numbers of otherwise apolitical Indians into Congress supporters.

At this time, the Congress movement found a new leader in Mohandas Gandhi. Not everyone involved in the struggle agreed with or followed Gandhi's policy of nonviolence, yet the Congress Party and Gandhi remained at the forefront of the push for independence.

As political power-sharing began to look more likely, and the mass movement led by Gandhi gained momentum, the Muslim reaction was to consider its own immediate future. The large Muslim minority realised that an independent India would be dominated by Hindus and that, while Gandhi's approach was fair-minded, others in the Congress Party might not be so willing to share power. By the 1930s Muslims were raising the possibility of a separate Islamic state.

Political events were partially disrupted by WWII when large numbers of Congress supporters were jailed to prevent disruption to the war effort.

Mahatma Gandhi

One of the great figures of the 20th century, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar, Gujarat. After studying in London (1888–91), he worked as a barrister in South Africa. Here, the young Gandhi became politicised, railing against the discrimination he encountered. He soon became the spokesperson for the Indian community and championed equality for all.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 with the doctrine of ahimsa (non-violence) central to his political plans, and committed to a simple and disciplined lifestyle. He set up the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, which was innovative for its admission of Untouchables.

Within a year, Gandhi had won his first victory, defending farmers in Bihar from exploitation. This was when it's said he first received the title 'Mahatma' (Great Soul) from an admirer (often said to be Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore). The passage of the discriminatory Rowlatt Acts (which allowed certain political cases to be tried without juries) in 1919 spurred him to further action, and he organised a national protest. In the days that followed this hartal (strike), feelings ran high throughout the country. After the massacre of unarmed protesters in Amritsar (p216), a deeply shocked Gandhi immediately called off the movement.

By 1920 Gandhi was a key figure in the Indian National Congress, and he coordinated a national campaign of noncooperation or satyagraha (nonviolent protest) to British rule, with the effect of raising nationalist feeling while earning the lasting enmity of the British. In early 1930, Gandhi captured the imagination of the country, and the world, when he led a march of several thousand followers from Ahmedabad to Dandi on the coast of Gujarat. On arrival, Gandhi ceremoniously made salt by

Gandhian Sites

- » Raj Ghat, Delhi
- » Gandhi Smriti, Delhi
- » Anand Bhavan, Allahabad
- » Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad
- » Kaba Gandhi No Delo, Rajkot
- » Mani Bhavan, Mumbai
- » Gandhi National Memorial, Pune

1801

Ranjit Singh becomes maharaja (Great King) of the newly united Sikhs and forges a powerful new kingdom from his capital in Lahore (in present-day Pakistan).

1835–1858

Life of Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi. The queen of the Maratha state led her army against the British, who seized Jhansi after her husband's death. She died in battle.

1857

The First War of Independence (Indian Uprising) against the British. In the absence of a national leader, freedom fighters coerce the Mughal king, Bahadur Shah Zafar, to proclaim himself emperor of India.

1858

British government assumes control over India – with power officially transferred from the East India Company to the Crown – this begins the period known as the British Raj.

evaporating sea water, thus publicly defying the much-hated salt tax; not for the first time, he was imprisoned. Released in 1931 to represent the Indian National Congress at the second Round Table Conference in London, he won the hearts of many British people but failed to gain any real concessions from the government.

Disillusioned with politics, he resigned his parliamentary seat in 1934. He returned spectacularly to the fray in 1942 with the Quit India campaign, in which he urged the British to leave India immediately. His actions were deemed subversive, and he and most of the Congress leadership were imprisoned.

In the frantic Independence bargaining that followed the end of WWII, Gandhi was largely excluded and watched helplessly as plans were made to partition the country – a dire tragedy in his eyes. Gandhi stood almost alone in urging tolerance and the preservation of a single

THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE: THE INDIAN UPRISING

In 1857, half a century after having established firm control of India, the British suffered a serious setback. To this day, the causes of the Indian Uprising (known at the time as the Indian Mutiny and subsequently labelled by nationalist historians as a War of Independence) are the subject of debate. The key factors included the influx of cheap goods, such as textiles, from Britain that destroyed many livelihoods; the dispossession of territories from many rulers; and taxes imposed on landowners.

The incident that's popularly held to have sparked the Indian Uprising, however, took place at an army barracks in Meerut in Uttar Pradesh on 10 May 1857. A rumour leaked out that a new type of bullet was greased with what Hindus claimed was cow fat, while Muslims maintained that it came from pigs; pigs are considered unclean to Muslims, and cows are sacred to Hindus. Since loading a rifle involved biting the end off the waxed cartridge, these rumours provoked considerable unrest.

In Meerut, the situation was handled with a singular lack of judgment. The commanding officer lined up his soldiers and ordered them to bite off the ends of their issued bullets. Those who refused were immediately marched off to prison. The following morning, the soldiers of the garrison rebelled, shot their officers and marched to Delhi. Of the 74 Indian battalions of the Bengal army, seven (one of them Gurkhas) remained loyal, 20 were disarmed and the other 47 mutinied. The soldiers and peasants rallied around the ageing Mughal emperor in Delhi. They held Delhi for some months and besieged the British residency in Lucknow for five months before they were finally suppressed. The incident left festering scars on both sides.

Almost immediately the East India Company was wound up and direct control of the country was assumed by the British government, which announced its support for the existing rulers of the princely states, claiming they would not interfere in local matters as long as the states remained loyal to the British.

1869

The birth of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in Porbandar (Gujarat) – the man who would later become popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi and affectionately dubbed 'Father of the Nation'.



DALLAS STRIBBLEY / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

» Gandhi statue, Mumbai

1869

Opening of Suez Canal accelerates trade from Europe and makes Bombay (Mumbai) India's first port of call; trip from England goes from three months to three weeks.

1885

The Indian National Congress, India's first home-grown political organisation, is set up. It brings educated Indians together and plays a key role in India's enduring freedom struggle.

A golden oldie, *Gandhi*, directed by Richard Attenborough, is one of the few movies that adeptly captures the grand canvas that is India in tracing the country's rocky road to Independence.

A Princess Remembers by Gayatri Devi and Santha Rama Rau is the captivating memoir of the former maharani of Jaipur, the glamorous Gayatri Devi (1919–2009).

India, and his work on behalf of members of all communities drew resentment from some Hindu hardliners. On his way to a prayer meeting in Delhi on 30 January 1948, he was assassinated by a Hindu zealot, Nathuram Godse. There's a memorial at the spot where he was shot, known as Gandhi Smriti (p73).

Independence & the Partition of India

The Labour Party victory in the British elections in July 1945 dramatically altered the political landscape. For the first time, Indian independence was accepted as a legitimate goal. This new goodwill did not, however, translate into any new wisdom as to how to reconcile the divergent wishes of the two major Indian parties. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, championed a separate Islamic state, while the Congress Party, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, campaigned for an independent greater India.

In early 1946 a British mission failed to bring the two sides together, and the country slid closer towards civil war. A 'Direct Action Day', called by the Muslim League in August 1946, led to the slaughter of Hindus in Calcutta, which prompted reprisals against Muslims. In February 1947 the nervous British government made the momentous decision that Independence would come by June 1948. In the meantime, the viceroy, Lord Archibald Wavell, was replaced by Lord Louis Mountbatten.

The new viceroy encouraged the rival factions to agree upon a united India, but to no avail. A decision was made to divide the country, with Gandhi the only staunch opponent. Faced with increasing civil violence, Mountbatten made the precipitous decision to bring forward Independence to 15 August 1947.

Dividing the country into separate Hindu and Muslim territories was immensely tricky; the dividing line proved almost impossible to draw. Some areas were clearly Hindu or Muslim, but others had evenly mixed populations, and there were 'islands' of communities in areas predominantly settled by other religions. Moreover, the two overwhelmingly Muslim regions were on opposite sides of the country and, therefore, Pakistan would inevitably have an eastern and western half divided by a hostile India. The instability of this arrangement was self-evident, but it was 25 years before the split finally came and East Pakistan became Bangladesh.

An independent British referee was given the odious task of drawing the borders, well aware that the effects would be catastrophic for countless people. The decisions were fraught with impossible dilemmas. Calcutta, with its Hindu majority, port facilities and jute mills, was divided from East Bengal, which had a Muslim majority, large-scale jute production, no mills and no port facilities. One million Bengalis became refugees in the mass movement across the new border.

1911

British architect Edwin Lutyens begins work on New Delhi, the newest manifestation of Delhi, subsequently considered in architectural circles as one of the finest garden cities ever built.

1919

The massacre, on 13 April, of unarmed Indian protesters at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar (Punjab). Gandhi responds with his program of civil (nonviolent) disobedience against the British government.

1930

Beginning of Salt Satyagraha on 12 March. Gandhi embarks on a 24-day walk from his Sabarmati Ashram near Ahmedabad to the coastal village of Dandi to protest the British salt tax.

1940

The Muslim League adopts its Lahore Resolution, which champions greater Muslim autonomy in India. Campaigns for the creation of a separate Islamic nation are spearheaded by Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

The problem was worse in Punjab, where intercommunity antagonisms were already running at fever pitch. Punjab, one of the most fertile and affluent regions of the country, had large Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities. The Sikhs had already campaigned unsuccessfully for their own state and now saw their homeland divided down the middle. The new border ran straight between Punjab's two major cities, Lahore and Amritsar. Prior to Independence, Lahore's population of 1.2 million included approximately 500,000 Hindus and 100,000 Sikhs. When the dust had finally settled, roughly 1000 Hindus and Sikhs remained.

Punjab contained all the ingredients for an epic disaster, but the resulting bloodshed was far worse than anticipated. Huge population exchanges took place. Trains full of Muslims, fleeing westward, were held up and slaughtered by Hindu and Sikh mobs. Hindus and Sikhs fleeing to the east suffered the same fate at Muslim hands. The army that was sent to maintain order proved totally inadequate and, at times, all too ready to join the sectarian carnage. By the time the Punjab chaos had run

The Proudest Day – India's Long Road to Independence by Anthony Read and David Fisher is an engaging account of India's pre-Independence period.

THE KASHMIR CONFLICT

Kashmir is the most enduring symbol of the turbulent partition of India. In the lead up to Independence, the delicate task of drawing the India–Pakistan border was complicated by the fact that India's 'princely states' were nominally independent. As part of the settlement process, local rulers were asked which country they wished to belong to. Kashmir was a predominantly Muslim state with a Hindu maharaja, Hari Singh, who tried to delay his decision. A ragtag Pashtun (Pakistani) army crossed the border, intent on racing to Srinagar and annexing Kashmir for Pakistan. In the face of this advance, the maharaja panicked and requested armed assistance from India. The Indian army arrived only just in time to prevent the fall of Srinagar, and the maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession, tying Kashmir to India, in October 1947. The legality of the document was immediately disputed by Pakistan, and the two nations went to war, just two months after Independence.

In 1948 the fledgling UN Security Council called for a referendum (which remains a central plank of Pakistani policy) to decide the status of Kashmir. A UN-brokered ceasefire in 1949 kept the countries on either side of a demarcation line, called the Cease-Fire Line (later to become the Line of Control, or LOC; see p1080), with little else resolved. Two-thirds of Kashmir fell on the Indian side of the LOC, which remains the frontier, but neither side accepts this as the official border. The Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, as it has stood since that time, incorporates Ladakh (divided between Muslims and Buddhists), Jammu (with a Hindu majority) and the 130km-long, 55km-wide Kashmir Valley (with a Muslim majority and most of the state's inhabitants). On the Pakistani side, over three million Kashmiris live in Azad (Free) Kashmir. Since the frontier was drawn, incursions across the LOC have occurred with dangerous regularity.

1942

Mahatma Gandhi launches the Quit India campaign, demanding that the British leave India without delay and allow the country to get on with the business of self-governance.

1947

India gains independence on 15 August. Pakistan is formed a day earlier. Partition is followed by mass cross-border exodus, as Hindus and Muslims migrate to their respective nations.

1947–48

First war between India and Pakistan takes place after the (procrastinating) maharaja of Kashmir signs the Instrument of Accession that cedes his state to India. Pakistan challenges the document's legality.

1948

Mahatma Gandhi is assassinated in New Delhi by Nathuram Godse on 30 January. Godse and his co-conspirator, Narayan Apte, are later tried, convicted and executed (by hanging).

Deepa Mehta's 1998 film *Earth* is a dramatic retelling of the violence of Partition through the eyes of a young girl in Lahore.

its course, more than 10 million people had changed sides and at least 500,000 had been killed.

India and Pakistan became sovereign nations under the British Commonwealth in August 1947 as planned, but the violence, migrations and the integration of a few states, especially Kashmir, continued. The Constitution of India was at last adopted in November 1949 and went into effect on 26 January, 1950, and, after untold struggles, independent India officially became a Republic.

1948

Asaf Jah VII, the last nizam of Hyderabad, surrenders to the Indian government on 17 September. The Muslim dynasty was receiving support from Pakistan but had refused to join either new nation.

1948–56

Rajasthan takes shape, as the princely states form a beeline to sign the Instrument of Accession, giving up their territories which are incorporated into the newly formed Republic of India.

1949

The Constitution of India, drafted over two years by a 308-member Constituent Assembly, is adopted. The Assembly is chaired by BR Ambedkar and includes members from scheduled castes.

1950

Constitution goes into effect on 26 January, and India becomes a republic. Date commemorates the Declaration of Independence, put forth by the Indian National Congress in 1930.



The Way of Life

For travellers, one of the most enduring impressions of India is the way everyday life is intimately intertwined with the sacred: from the housewife who devoutly performs *puja* (prayers) at home each morning, to the shopkeeper who – regardless of how many eager-to-buy tourists may be in the store – rarely commences business until blessings have been sought from the gods.

Along with religion, family lies at the heart of Indian society. For the vast majority, the idea of being unmarried and without children by one's mid-30s is unthinkable. Despite the rising number of nuclear families – primarily in larger cities such as Mumbai (Bombay), Bengaluru (Bangalore) and Delhi – the extended family remains a cornerstone in both urban and rural India, with males – usually the breadwinners – generally considered the head of the household.

With religion and family deemed so sacrosanct, don't be surprised or miffed if you are grilled about these subjects yourself, especially beyond the larger cities, and receive curious (possibly disapproving) gawks if you don't 'fit the mould'. The first question travellers are usually asked is their country of origin. This may be followed by a string of queries on topics that might be considered somewhat inappropriate elsewhere, especially coming from a complete stranger. Apart from religion and marital status, frequently asked questions include age, qualifications, profession (possibly even income) and your impressions of India. This is generally innocuous probing, not intended to offend.

National pride has long existed on the subcontinent but has swelled in recent years as India attracts ever-increasing international kudos in various fields including information technology (IT), science, medicine, literature, film and, of course, cricket. In the sporting arena, although there are rising stars on the tennis front, it is cricket that by far reigns supreme, with top players afforded superhero status.

The country's robust economy – one of the world's fastest growing – is another source of prolific national pride. Also widely embraced as potent symbols of Indian honour and sovereignty are the advancements in nuclear and space technology – in 2008 India joined the elite global lunar club with its maiden unmanned mission to the moon.

India has one of the world's largest diasporas – over 26 million people – with Indian banks holding an estimated US\$55 billion in Non-Resident Indian (NRI) accounts.

RANGOLIS

Rangolis, the striking and breathtakingly intricate chalk, rice-paste or coloured powder designs (also called *kolams*) that adorn thresholds, especially in South India, are both auspicious and symbolic. *Rangolis* are traditionally drawn at sunrise and are sometimes made of rice-flour paste, which may be eaten by little creatures – symbolising a reverence for even the smallest living things. Deities are deemed to be attracted to a beautiful *rangoli*, which may also signal to sadhus (ascetics) that they will be offered food at a particular house. Some people believe that *rangolis* protect against the evil eye.

MATCHMAKING

Matchmaking has embraced the cyber age, with popular sites including www.shaadi.com, www.bharatmatrimony.com, and, more recently, www.secondshaadi.com – for those seeking a partner again.

Marriage, Birth & Death

Marriage is an exceptionally auspicious event for Indians and although 'love marriages' have spiralled upwards in recent times (mainly in urban hubs), most Hindu marriages are arranged. Discreet enquiries are made within the community. If a suitable match is not found, the help of professional matchmakers may be sought, or advertisements may be placed in newspapers and/or on the internet. The horoscopes are checked and, if propitious, there's a meeting between the two families. The legal age for marriage in India is 18.

Dowry, although illegal, is still a key issue in many arranged marriages (primarily in the more conservative communities), with some families plunging into debt to raise the required cash and merchandise (from cars and computers to washing machines and televisions). Health workers claim that India's high rate of abortion of female fetuses (despite sex identification medical tests being banned in India, they still clandestinely occur in some clinics) is predominantly due to the financial burden of providing a daughter's dowry.

The Hindu wedding ceremony is officiated over by a priest and the marriage is formalised when the couple walk around a sacred fire seven times. Despite the existence of nuclear families, it's still the norm for a wife to live with her husband's family once married and assume the household duties outlined by her mother-in-law. Not surprisingly, the mother-daughter-in-law relationship can be a prickly one, as portrayed in the various Indian TV soap operas which largely revolve around this theme.

Divorce and remarriage is becoming more common (primarily in India's bigger cities), but divorce is still not granted by courts as a matter of routine and is generally not looked upon favourably by society. Among the higher castes, widows are traditionally expected not to remarry and are admonished to wear white and live pious, celibate lives.

The birth of a child is another momentous occasion, with its own set of special ceremonies, which take place at various auspicious times during the early years of childhood. These include the casting of the child's first horoscope, name-giving, feeding the first solid food, and the first hair cutting.

Hindus cremate their dead, and funeral ceremonies are designed to purify and console both the living and the deceased. An important aspect of the proceedings is the *sharadda*, paying respect to one's ancestors by offering water and rice cakes. It's an observance that's repeated at each anniversary of the death. After the cremation the ashes are collected and, 13 days after the death (when blood relatives are deemed ritually pure), a member of the family usually scatters them in a holy river such as the Ganges or in the ocean.

INDIAN ATTIRE

Widely worn by Indian women, the elegant sari comes in a single piece (between 5m and 9m long and 1m wide) and is ingeniously tucked and pleated into place without the need for pins or buttons. Worn with the sari is the choli (tight-fitting blouse) and a drawstring petticoat. The *palloo* is the part of the sari draped over the shoulder. Also commonly worn is the *salwar kameez*, a traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination accompanied by a *dupatta* (long scarf). Saris and *salwar kameez* come in an appealing range of fabrics, designs and prices.

Traditional attire for men includes the dhoti, and in the south the lungi and the *mundu* are also commonly worn. The dhoti is a loose, long loincloth pulled up between the legs. The lungi is more like a sarong, with its end usually sewn up like a tube. The *mundu* is like a lungi but is always white.

There are regional and religious variations in costume – for example, you may see Muslim women wearing the all-enveloping burka.

The Caste System

Although the Indian constitution does not recognise the caste system, caste still wields considerable influence, especially in rural India, where the caste you are born into largely determines your social standing in the community. It can also influence your vocational and marriage prospects. Castes are further divided into thousands of *jati*, groups of 'families' or social communities, which are sometimes but not always linked to occupation. Conservative Hindus will only marry someone of the same *jati*.

According to tradition, caste is the basic social structure of Hindu society. Living a righteous life and fulfilling your dharma (moral duty) raises your chances of being reborn into a higher caste and thus into better circumstances. Hindus are born into one of four varnas (castes): Brahmin (priests and scholars), Kshatriya (soldiers and administrators), Vaishya (merchants) and Shudra (labourers). The Brahmins were said to have emerged from the mouth of Lord Brahma at the moment of creation, Kshatriyas were said to have come from his arms, Vaishyas from his thighs and Shudras from his feet.

Beneath the four main castes are the Dalits (formerly known as Untouchables), who hold menial jobs such as sweepers and latrine cleaners. The word 'pariah' is derived from the name of a Tamil Dalit group, the Paraiyars. Some Dalit leaders, such as the renowned Dr BR Ambedkar (1891–1956), sought to change their status by adopting another faith; in his case it was Buddhism. At the bottom of the social heap are the Denotified Tribes. They were known as the Criminal Tribes until 1952, when a reforming law officially recognised 198 tribes and castes. Many are nomadic or seminomadic tribes, forced by the wider community to eke out a living on society's fringes.

To improve the Dalits' position, the government reserves considerable numbers of public-sector jobs, parliamentary seats and university places for them. Today these quotas account for almost 25% of government jobs and university (student) positions. The situation varies regionally, as different political leaders chase caste vote-banks by promising to include them in reservations. The reservation system, while generally regarded in a favourable light, has also been criticised for unfairly blocking tertiary and employment opportunities for those who would have otherwise got positions on merit.

Pilgrimage

Devout Hindus are expected to go on a *yatra* (pilgrimage) at least once a year. Pilgrimages are undertaken to implore the gods or goddesses to grant a wish, to take the ashes of a cremated relative to a holy river, or to gain spiritual merit. India has thousands of holy sites to which pilgrims travel; the elderly often make Varanasi their final one, as it's believed that dying in this sacred city releases a person from the cycle of rebirth.

Most festivals in India are rooted in religion and are thus a magnet for pilgrims. This is something that travellers should keep in mind, even at those festivals that may have a carnivalesque sheen.

Kumbh Mela

If crowds worry you, stay away. This one's big. Very big. Held four times every 12 years at four different locations across central and northern India, the Kumbh Mela is the largest religious congregation on the planet. This vast celebration attracts tens of millions of Hindu pilgrims, including mendicant *nagas* (naked sadhus, or holy men) from radical Hindu monastic orders. The Kumbh Mela doesn't belong to any particular caste or creed – devotees from all branches of Hinduism come together to experience the electrifying sensation of mass belief and to take a ceremonial dip in the sacred Ganges, Shipra or Godavari Rivers.

Sati: A Study of Widow Burning in India by Sakuntala Narasimhan explores the history of *sati* (a widow's suicide on her husband's funeral pyre; now banned) on the subcontinent.

If you're keen to learn more about India's caste system these two books are a good start: *Interrogating Caste* by Dipankar Gupta and *Translating Caste* edited by Tapan Basu.

Read more about India's tribal communities at www.tribal.nic.in, a site maintained by the Indian government's Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

The origins of the festival go back to the battle for supremacy between good and evil. In the Hindu creation myths, the gods and demons fought a great battle for a *kumbh* (pitcher) containing the nectar of immortality. Vishnu got hold of the container and spirited it away, but in flight four drops spilt on the earth – at Allahabad, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. Celebrations at each of these cities last for around six weeks but are centred on just a handful of auspicious bathing dates, normally six. The Allahabad event, known as the Maha (Great) Kumbh Mela, is even larger with even bigger crowds. Each location also holds an Ardh (Half) Mela every six years and a smaller, annual Magh Mela.

Women in India

Women in India are entitled to vote and own property. While the percentage of women in politics has risen over the past decade, they're still notably underrepresented in the national parliament, accounting for around 10% of parliamentary members.

Although the professions are male dominated, women are steadily making inroads, especially in urban centres. Kerala was India's first state to break societal norms by recruiting female police officers in 1938. It was also the first state to establish an all-female police station (1973). For village women it's much more difficult to get ahead, but groups such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA; p680) in Gujarat have shown what's possible. Here, socially disadvantaged women have been organised into unions, offering at least some lobbying power against discriminatory and exploitative work practices.

In low-income families, especially, girls can be regarded as a serious financial liability because at marriage a dowry must often be supplied (see p1102).

For the urban middle-class woman, life is materially much more comfortable, but pressures still exist. Broadly speaking, she is far more likely to receive a tertiary education, but once married is still usually expected to 'fit in' with her in-laws and be a homemaker above all else. Like her village counterpart, if she fails to live up to expectations – even if it's just not being able to produce a grandson – the consequences can sometimes be dire, as demonstrated by the extreme practice of 'bride burning', wherein a wife is doused with flammable liquid and set alight. Reliable statistics are unavailable, but some women's groups claim that for every reported case, roughly 250 go unreported, and that less than 10% of the reported cases are pursued through the legal system.

The Wonder That Was India by AL Basham proffers descriptions of Indian civilisations, major religions and social customs – a good thematic approach to weave the disparate strands together.

ADIVASIS

India's Adivasis (tribal communities; Adivasi translates to 'original inhabitant' in Sanskrit) have origins that precede the Vedic Aryans and the Dravidians of the south. According to the 2001 census, India's Adivasis constitute 8.2% of the population (over 84 million people), with more than 400 different tribal groups. The literacy rate for Adivasis, as per the 2001 census, is just 29.6%; the national average is 65.4%.

Historically, contact between Adivasis and Hindu villagers on the plains rarely led to friction as there was little or no competition for resources and land. However, in recent decades an increasing number of Adivasis have been dispossessed of their ancestral land and turned into impoverished labourers. Although they still have political representation thanks to a parliamentary quota system, the dispossession and exploitation of Adivasis has reportedly sometimes been with the connivance of officialdom – an accusation the government denies. Whatever the arguments, unless more is done, the Adivasis' future is an uncertain one.

Read more about Adivasis in *Archaeology and History: Early Settlements in the Andaman Islands* by Zarine Cooper, *The Tribals of India* by Sunil Janah and *Tribes of India: The Struggle for Survival* by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf.

HIJRAS

India's most visible nonheterosexual group is the *hijras*, a caste of transvestites and eunuchs who dress in women's clothing. Some are gay, some are hermaphrodites and some were unfortunate enough to be kidnapped and castrated. Since it has long been frowned upon to live openly as a gay man in India, *hijras* get around this by becoming, in effect, a third sex of sorts. They work mainly as uninvited entertainers at weddings and celebrations of the birth of male children, and possibly as prostitutes.

Read more about *hijras* in *The Invisibles* by Zia Jaffrey and *Ardhanarishvara the Androgyne* by Dr Alka Pande.

In October 2006, following women's civil rights campaigns, the Indian parliament passed a landmark bill (on top of existing legislation) which gives women who are suffering domestic violence increased protection and rights. Prior to this legislation, although women could lodge police complaints against abusive spouses, they weren't automatically entitled to a share of the marital property or to ongoing financial support. The new law purports that any form of physical, sexual (including marital rape), emotional and economic abuse entails not only domestic violence, but also human-rights violations. Perpetrators face imprisonment and fines. Under the new law, abused women are legally permitted to remain in the marital house. In addition, the law prohibits emotional and physical bullying in relation to dowry demands. Critics claim that many women, especially those outside India's larger cities, will still be reluctant to seek legal protection because of the social stigma involved.

Despite recent legislation aimed at curtailing crimes against women, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 195,856 registered police cases across the country in 2008 – a leap from the 140,601 cases back in 2003.

Although the constitution allows for divorcees (and widows) to remarry, relatively few reportedly do so, simply because divorcees are traditionally considered outcasts from society, most evidently so beyond big cities. Divorce rates in India are among the worlds' lowest, despite having risen from around seven in 1000 in 1991, to roughly 11 in 1000 in 2009.

Cricket

In India, it's all about cricket, cricket and cricket! Travellers who show even a slight interest in the game can expect to strike passionate conversations with people of all stripes, from taxi drivers to IT yuppies. Cutting across all echelons of society, cricket is more than just a national sporting obsession – it's a matter of enormous patriotism, especially evident whenever India plays against Pakistan. Matches between these South Asian neighbours – which have had rocky relations since Independence – attract especially high-spirited support, and the players of both sides are under colossal pressure to do their respective countries proud.

India's first recorded cricket match was in 1721. It won its first test series in 1952 in Chennai against England. Today cricket – especially the recently rolled out Twenty20 format (www.cricket20.com) – is big business in India, attracting lucrative sponsorship deals and celebrity status for its players. The sport has not been without its murky side though, with Indian cricketers among those embroiled in match-fixing scandals over past years.

International games are played at various centres – see Indian newspapers or surf the Net for details about matches that coincide with your visit. Keep your finger on the cricketing pulse at www.espn-cricinfo.com (rated most highly by many cricket aficionados) and www.cricbuzz.com.

Based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel, *Chokher Bali* (directed by Rituparno Ghosh) is a poignant film about a young widow living in early 20th-century Bengal who challenges the 'rules of widowhood' – something unthinkable in that era.

Cricket lovers will be bowled over by *The Illustrated History of Indian Cricket* by Boria Majumdar and *The States of Indian Cricket* by Ramachandra Guha.



Spiritual India

From a mother performing *pūja* (prayers or offerings) for her child's forthcoming exams, to a mechanic who has renounced his material life and set off on the path to self-realisation, religion suffuses almost every aspect of life in India.

India's major religion, Hinduism, is practised by approximately 80.5% of the population. Along with Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism, it's one of the world's oldest extant religions, with roots extending beyond 1000 BC.

Islam is India's largest minority religion; around 13.4% of the population is Muslim. Islam is believed to have been introduced to northern India by Muslim rulers (in the 16th and 17th centuries the Mughal empire controlled much of North India) and to the south by Arab traders.

Christians comprise about 2.3% of the population, with approximately 75% living in South India, while the Sikhs – estimated at around 1.9% of the population – are mostly found in the northern state of Punjab. Around 0.8% of the population is Buddhist, with Bodhgaya (Bihar) being a major pilgrimage destination. Jainism is followed by about 0.4% of the population, with the majority of Jains living in Gujarat and Mumbai. Parsis, adherents of Zoroastrianism, today number somewhere between 60,000 and 69,000 – a mere drop in the ocean of India's billion-plus population. Historically, Parsis settled in Gujarat and became farmers, however, during British rule they moved into commerce, forming a prosperous community in Mumbai. Reports indicate that there are less than 5000 Jews left in India, most living in Mumbai and parts of South India.

Tribal religions have so merged with Hinduism and other mainstream religions that very few are now clearly identifiable. It's believed that some basic tenets of Hinduism may have originated in tribal culture.

For details about India's major religious festivals, see the Month by Month chapter (p20).

Hinduism

Hinduism has no founder or central authority and it isn't a proselytising religion. Essentially, Hindus believe in Brahman, who is eternal, uncreated and infinite. Everything that exists emanates from Brahman and will ultimately return to it. The multitude of gods and goddesses are merely manifestations – knowable aspects of this formless phenomenon.

Hindus believe that earthly life is cyclical: you are born again and again (a process known as 'samsara'), the quality of these rebirths being dependent upon your karma (conduct or action) in previous lives. Living a righteous life and fulfilling your dharma (moral code of behaviour; social duty) will enhance your chances of being born into a higher caste and better circumstances. Alternatively, if enough bad karma has accumulated, rebirth may take animal form. But it's only as a human that you can gain sufficient self-knowledge to escape the cycle of reincarnation and achieve moksha (liberation).

Unravelling the basic tenets of Hinduism are two books both called *Hinduism: An Introduction* – one is by Shakunthala Jagannathan, the other by Dharam Vir Singh.

The Hindu pantheon is said to have a whopping 330 million deities; those worshipped are a matter of personal choice or tradition.

Gods & Goddesses

All Hindu deities are regarded as a manifestation of Brahman, who is often described as having three main representations, the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Brahman

The One; the ultimate reality. Brahman is formless, eternal and the source of all existence. Brahman is *nirguna* (without attributes), as opposed to all the other gods and goddesses, which are manifestations of Brahman and therefore *saguna* (with attributes).

Brahma

Only during the creation of the universe does Brahma play an active role. At other times he is in meditation. His consort is Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and his vehicle is a swan. He is sometimes shown sitting on a lotus that rises from Vishnu's navel, symbolising the interdependence of the gods. Brahma is generally depicted with four (crowned and bearded) heads, each turned towards a point of the compass.

Vishnu

The preserver or sustainer, Vishnu is associated with 'right action'. He protects and sustains all that is good in the world. He is usually depicted with four arms, holding a lotus, a conch shell (it can be blown like a trumpet so symbolises the cosmic vibration from which existence emanates), a discus and a mace. His consort is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and his vehicle is Garuda, the man-bird creature. The Ganges is said to flow from his feet.

Shiva

Shiva is the destroyer, but without whom creation couldn't occur. Shiva's creative role is phallically symbolised by his representation as the frequently worshipped lingam. With 1008 names, Shiva takes many forms, including Nataraja, lord of the *tandava* (cosmic victory dance), who paces out the creation and destruction of the cosmos.

Sometimes Shiva has snakes draped around his neck and is shown holding a trident (representative of the Trimurti) as a weapon while riding Nandi, his bull. Nandi symbolises power and potency, justice and moral order. Shiva's consort, Parvati, is capable of taking many forms.

Other Prominent Deities

Elephant-headed Ganesh is the god of good fortune, remover of obstacles, and patron of scribes (the broken tusk he holds was used to write sections

COMMUNAL CONFLICT

Religion-based conflict has, at times, been a bloody part of India's history. The post-Independence partition of the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan resulted in horrendous carnage and epic displacement (see p1098).

Later bouts of major sectarian violence in India include the Hindu–Sikh riots of 1984, which led to the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi (p1081), and the politically fanned 1992 Ayodhya calamity (p1081), which sparked ferocious Hindu–Muslim clashes.

The ongoing dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is also perilously entwined in religious conflict. Since Partition (1947), India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir and have had subsequent artillery exchanges, coming dangerously close to war in 1999. The festering dispute over this landlocked territory continues to fuel Hindu–Muslim animosity on both sides of the border – for more details see p1099.

Shiva is sometimes characterised as the lord of yoga, a Himalaya-dwelling ascetic with matted hair, an ash-smeared body and a third eye symbolising wisdom.

Did you know that blood-drinking Kali is another form of milk-giving Gauri? Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology by Devdutt Pattanaik sheds light on this and other fascinating Hindu folklore.

of the Mahabharata). His animal vehicle is Mooshak (a ratlike creature). How Ganesh came to have an elephant's head is a story with several variations. One legend says that Ganesh was born to Parvati in the absence of his father Shiva, and so grew up not knowing him. One day, as Ganesh stood guard while his mother bathed, Shiva returned and asked to be let into Parvati's presence. Ganesh, who didn't recognise Shiva, refused. Enraged, Shiva lopped off Ganesh's head, only to later discover, much to his horror, that he had slaughtered his own son. He vowed to replace Ganesh's head with that of the first creature he came across, which happened to be an elephant.

Another prominent deity, Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu sent to earth to fight for good and combat evil. His alliances with the *gopis* (milkmaids) and his love for Radha have inspired countless paintings and songs. Depicted with blue-hued skin, Krishna is often seen playing the flute.

Hanuman is the hero of the Ramayana and loyal ally of Rama. He embodies the concept of bhakti (devotion). He's the king of the monkeys, but is capable of taking on other forms.

Among the Shaivite (followers of the Shiva movement), Shakti, the goddess as mother and creator, is worshipped as a force in her own right. The concept of *shakti* is embodied in the ancient goddess Devi (divine mother), who is also manifested as Durga and, in a fiercer evil-destroying incarnation, Kali. Other widely worshipped goddesses include Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

Sacred Texts

Hindu sacred texts fall into two categories: those believed to be the word of god (*shruti*, meaning 'heard') and those produced by people (*smriti*, meaning 'remembered'). The Vedas are regarded as *shruti* knowledge and are considered the authoritative basis for Hinduism. The oldest of the Vedic texts, the Rig-Veda, was compiled over 3000 years ago. Within its 1028 verses are prayers for prosperity and longevity as well as an explanation of the universe's origins. The Upanishads, the last parts of the Vedas, reflect on the mystery of death and emphasise the oneness of the universe. The oldest of the Vedic texts were written in Vedic Sanskrit (related to Old Persian). Later texts were composed in classical Sanskrit, but many have been translated into the vernacular.

The *smriti* texts comprise a collection of literature spanning centuries and include expositions on the proper performance of domestic ceremonies as well as the proper pursuit of government, economics and religious law. Among its well-known works are the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as the Puranas, which expand on the epics and promote the notion of the Trimurti. Unlike the Vedas, reading the Puranas is not restricted to initiated higher-caste males.

The Mahabharata

Thought to have been composed around 1000 BC, the Mahabharata focuses on the exploits of Krishna. By about 500 BC the Mahabharata had evolved into a far more complex creation with substantial additions,

THE SACRED SEVEN

The number seven has special significance in Hinduism. There are seven sacred Indian cities, which are all major pilgrimage centres: Varanasi (p383), associated with Shiva; Haridwar (p412), where the Ganges enters the plains from the Himalaya; Ayodhya (p376), birthplace of Rama; Dwarka (p709) with the legendary capital of Krishna thought to be off the Gujarat coast; Mathura (p368), birthplace of Krishna; Kanchipuram (p1008), site of the historic Shiva temple; and Ujjain (p646), venue of the Kumbh Mela every 12 years.

There are also seven sacred rivers: the Ganges (Ganga), Saraswati (thought to be underground), Yamuna, Indus, Narmada, Godavari and Cauvery.

OM

One of Hinduism's most venerated symbols is 'Om'. Pronounced 'aum', it's a highly favourable mantra (sacred word or syllable). The 'three' shape symbolises the creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe (and thus the holy Trimurti). The inverted *chandra* (crescent or half moon) represents the discursive mind and the *bindu* (dot) within it, Brahman.

Buddhists believe that, if intoned often enough with complete concentration, it will lead to a state of blissful emptiness.

including the Bhagavad Gita (where Krishna proffers advice to Arjuna before a battle).

The story centres on conflict between the heroic gods (Pandavas) and the demons (Kauravas). Overseeing events is Krishna, who has taken on human form. Krishna acts as charioteer for the Pandava hero Arjuna, who eventually triumphs in a great battle against the Kauravas.

The Ramayana

Composed around the 3rd or 2nd century BC, the Ramayana is believed to be largely the work of one person, the poet Valmiki. Like the Mahabharata, it centres on conflict between the gods and the demons.

The story goes that Dasharatha, the childless king of Ayodhya, called upon the gods to provide him with a son. His wife duly gave birth to a boy. But this child, named Rama, was in fact an incarnation of Vishnu, who had assumed human form to overthrow the demon king of Lanka (now Sri Lanka), Ravana.

As an adult, Rama, who won the hand of the princess Sita in a competition, was chosen by his father to inherit his kingdom. At the last minute Rama's stepmother intervened and demanded her son, Barathan, take Rama's place. Rama, Sita and Rama's brother, Lakshmana, were exiled and went off to the forests, where Rama and Lakshmana battled demons and dark forces. Ravana's sister attempted to seduce Rama but she was rejected and, in revenge, Ravana captured Sita and spirited her away to his palace in Lanka.

Rama, assisted by an army of monkeys led by the loyal monkey god Hanuman, eventually found the palace, killed Ravana and rescued Sita. All returned victorious to Ayodhya, where Rama was welcomed by Barathan and crowned king.

Sacred Flora & Fauna

Animals, particularly snakes and cows, have long been worshipped in the subcontinent. For Hindus, the cow represents fertility and nurturing, while snakes (especially cobras) are associated with fertility and welfare. Naga stones (snake stones) serve the dual purpose of protecting humans from snakes and appeasing snake gods.

Plants can also have sacred associations, such as the banyan tree, which symbolises the Trimurti, while mango trees are symbolic of love – Shiva is believed to have married Parvati under one. Meanwhile, the lotus flower is said to have emerged from the primeval waters and is connected to the mythical centre of the earth through its stem. Often found in the most polluted of waters, the lotus has the remarkable ability to blossom above murky depths. The centre of the lotus corresponds to the centre of the universe, the navel of the earth: all is held together by the stem and the eternal waters. The fragile yet resolute lotus is an embodiment of beauty and strength and a reminder to Hindus of how their own lives should be. So revered has the lotus become that today it's India's national flower.

Two recommended publications containing English translations of holy Hindu texts are *The Bhagavad Gita* by S Radhakrishnan and *The Valmiki Ramayana* by Ramesh Dutt.

SADHU

A sadhu is someone who has surrendered all material possessions in pursuit of spirituality through meditation, the study of sacred texts, self-mortification and pilgrimage. Read more in *Sadhus: India's Mystic Holy Men* by Dolf Hartsuiker.

Worship

Worship and ritual play a paramount role in Hinduism. In Hindu homes you'll often find a dedicated worship area, where members of the family pray to the deities of their choice. Beyond the home, Hindus worship at temples. *Puja* is a focal point of worship and ranges from silent prayer to elaborate ceremonies. Devotees leave the temple with a handful of *prasad* (temple-blessed food) which is humbly shared among friends and family. Other forms of worship include *aarti* (the auspicious lighting of lamps or candles) and the playing of soul-soothing bhajans (devotional songs).

Islam

Islam was founded in Arabia by the Prophet Mohammed in the 7th-century AD. The Arabic term *islam* means to surrender, and believers (Muslims) undertake to surrender to the will of Allah (God), which is revealed in the scriptures, the Quran. In this monotheistic religion, God's word is conveyed through prophets (messengers), of whom Mohammed was the most recent.

Following Mohammed's death, a succession dispute split the movement, and the legacy today is the Sunnis and the Shiites. Most Muslims in India are Sunnis. The Sunnis emphasise the 'well-trodden' path or the orthodox way. Shiites believe that only imams (exemplary leaders) can reveal the true meaning of the Quran.

All Muslims, however, share a belief in the Five Pillars of Islam: the shahada (declaration of faith: 'There is no God but Allah; Mohammed is his prophet'); prayer (ideally five times a day); the zakat (tax), in the form of a charitable donation; fasting (during Ramadan) for all except the sick, young children, pregnant women, the elderly and those undertaking arduous journeys; and the haj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, which every Muslim aspires to do at least once.

Sikhism

Sikhism, founded in Punjab by Guru Nanak in the 15th century, began as a reaction against the caste system and Brahmin domination of ritual. Sikhs believe in one god and although they reject the worship of idols, some keep pictures of the 10 gurus as a point of focus. The Sikhs' holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, contains the teachings of the 10 Sikh gurus, among others.

Like Hindus and Buddhists, Sikhs believe in rebirth and karma. In Sikhism, there's no ascetic or monastic tradition ending the cycles of rebirth.

GURU NANAK: SIKHISM'S FIRST GURU

Born in present-day Pakistan, Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, was unimpressed with both Muslim and Hindu religious practices. Unlike many Indian holy men, he believed in family life and the value of hard work – he married, had two sons and worked as a farmer when not travelling around, preaching and singing self-composed *kirtan* (Sikh devotional songs) with his Muslim musician, Mardana. He performed miracles and emphasised meditation on God's name as the best way to enlightenment.

Nanak believed in equality centuries before it became fashionable and campaigned against the caste system. He was a practical guru – 'a person who makes an honest living and shares earnings with others recognises the way to God'. He appointed his most talented disciple to be his successor, not one of his sons.

His *kirtan* are still sung in *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples) today and his picture hangs in millions of homes.

ANATOMY OF A GOMPA

Parts of India, such as Sikkim and Ladakh, are known for their ornate, colourful gompas (Tibetan-style Buddhist monasteries). The focal point of a gompa is the *dukhang* (prayer hall), where monks assemble to chant passages from the sacred scriptures (morning prayers are a particularly atmospheric time to visit gompas). The walls may be covered in vivid murals or *thangkas* (cloth paintings) of *bodhisattvas* (enlightened beings) and *dharmapalas* (protector deities). By the entrance to the *dukhang* you'll usually find a mural depicting the Wheel of Life, a graphical representation of the core elements of Buddhist philosophy (see www.buddhanet.net/wheel1.htm for an interactive description of the Wheel of Life).

Most gompas hold *chaam* dances (ritual masked dances to celebrate the victory of good over evil) during major festivals. Dances to ward off evil feature masks of Mahakala, the Great Protector, usually dramatically adorned with a headdress of human skulls. The Durdag dance features skull masks depicting the Lords of the Cremation Grounds, while Shawa dancers wear masks of wild-eyed stags. These characters are often depicted with a third eye in the centre of their foreheads, signifying the need for inner reflection.

Another interesting activity at Buddhist monasteries is the production of butter sculptures, elaborate models made from coloured butter and dough. The sculptures are deliberately designed to decay, symbolising the impermanence of human existence. Many gompas also produce exquisite sand mandalas – geometric patterns made from sprinkled coloured sand, then destroyed to symbolise the futility of the physical plane.

Fundamental to Sikhs is the concept of Khalsa, or belief in a Sikh brotherhood of saint-soldiers who abide by strict codes of moral conduct (abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and drugs) and engage in a crusade for *dharmayudha* (righteousness). There are five *kakkars* (emblems) denoting the Khalsa brotherhood: *kes*, the unshaven beard and uncut hair symbolising saintliness; *kangha*, the comb to maintain the ritually uncut hair; *kaccha*, loose underwear symbolising modesty; *kirpan*, the sabre or sword symbolising power and dignity; and *karra*, the steel bangle symbolising fearlessness. Singh, literally 'lion', is the name adopted by many Sikhs.

A belief in the equality of all beings lies at the heart of Sikhism. It's expressed in various practices, including *langar*, whereby people from all walks of life – regardless of caste and creed – sit side by side to share a complimentary meal prepared by volunteers in the communal kitchen of the *gurdwara* (Sikh temple).

Buddhism

Buddhism arose in the 6th century BC as a reaction against the strictures of Brahminical Hinduism. Buddha (Awakened One) is believed to have lived from about 563 to 483 BC. Formerly a prince (Siddhartha Gautama), the Buddha, at the age of 29, embarked on a quest for emancipation from the world of suffering. He achieved nirvana (the state of full awareness) at Bodhgaya (Bihar), aged 35. Critical of the caste system and the unthinking worship of gods, the Buddha urged his disciples to seek truth within their own experiences.

The Buddha taught that existence is based on Four Noble Truths: that life is rooted in suffering, that suffering is caused by craving, that one can find release from suffering by eliminating craving, and that the way to eliminate craving is by following the Noble Eightfold Path. This path consists of right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness and right concentration. By successfully complying with these one can attain nirvana.

SIKHISM

To grasp the intricacies of Sikhism dive into Volume One (1469–1839) or Volume Two (1839–2004) of *A History of the Sikhs* by Khushwant Singh.

RELIGIOUS ETIQUETTE

Whenever visiting a sacred site, always dress and behave respectfully – don't wear shorts or sleeveless tops (this applies to men and women) – and refrain from smoking. Loud and intrusive behaviour isn't appreciated, and neither are public displays of affection or kidding around.

Before entering a holy place, remove your shoes (tip the shoe-minder a few rupees when retrieving them) and check if photography is allowed. You're permitted to wear socks in most places of worship – often necessary during warmer months, when floors can be uncomfortably hot.

Religious etiquette advises against touching locals on the head, or directing the soles of your feet at a person, religious shrine or image of a deity. Protocol also advises against touching someone with your feet or touching a carving of a deity.

Head cover (for women and sometimes men) is required at some places of worship – especially *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples) and mosques – so carry a scarf just to be on the safe side. There are some sites that don't admit women and some that deny entry to non-adherents of their faith – enquire in advance. Women may be required to sit apart from men. Jain temples request the removal of leather items you may be wearing or carrying and may also request that menstruating women not enter.

Taking photos inside a shrine, at a funeral, at a religious ceremony or of people taking a holy dip can be offensive – ask first. Flash photography may be prohibited in certain areas of a shrine, or may not be permitted at all.

Buddhism had somewhat waned in parts of India by the turn of the 20th century. However, it saw a revival in the 1950s among intellectuals and Dalits who were disillusioned with the caste system. The number of followers has been further increased with the influx of Tibetan refugees. Both the current Dalai Lama and the 17th Karmapa reside in India (see p316 and p327).

Jainism

Jainism arose in the 6th century BC as a reaction against the caste restraints and rituals of Hinduism. It was founded by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha.

Jains believe that liberation can be attained by achieving complete purity of the soul. Purity means shedding all *karman*, matter generated by one's actions that binds itself to the soul. By following various austerities (eg fasting and meditation) one can shed *karman* and purify the soul. Right conduct is essential, and fundamental to this is ahimsa (non-violence) in thought and deed towards any living thing.

The religious disciplines of followers are less severe than for monks (some Jain monks go naked). The slightly less ascetic maintain a bare minimum of possessions which include a broom to sweep the path before them to avoid stepping on any living creature, and a piece of cloth tied over their mouth to prevent the accidental inhalation of insects.

Some notable Jain holy sites in India include Sravanabelagola (p864), Palitana (p690), Ranakpur (p167) and the Jain temples of Mt Abu (p170).

Christianity

There are various theories circulating about Christ's link to the Indian subcontinent. Some, for instance, believe that Jesus spent his 'lost years' in India (see boxed text, p234), while others say that Christianity came to South India with St Thomas the Apostle in AD 52. However, many scholars say it's more likely Christianity is traced to around the 4th century with a Syrian merchant, Thomas Cana, who set out for Kerala with around 400 families.

Set in Kerala, against the backdrop of caste conflict and India's struggle for independence, *The House of Blue Mangoes* by David Davidar spans three generations of a Christian family.

Catholicism established a strong presence in South India in the wake of Vasco da Gama's visit in 1498, and orders that have been active – not always welcomed – in the region include the Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits. Protestant missionaries are believed to have begun arriving – with a conversion agenda – from around the 18th century.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism, founded by Zoroaster (Zarathustra), had its inception in Persia in the 6th century BC and is based on the concept of dualism, whereby good and evil are locked in a continuous battle. Zoroastrianism isn't quite monotheistic: good and evil entities coexist, although believers are urged to honour only the good. Both body and soul are united in this struggle of good versus evil. Although humanity is mortal it has components that are timeless, such as the soul. On the day of judgement the errant soul is not called to account for every misdemeanour – but a pleasant afterlife does depend on one's deeds, words and thoughts during earthly existence.

Zoroastrianism was eclipsed in Persia by the rise of Islam in the 7th century and its followers, many of whom openly resisted this, suffered persecution. Over the following centuries, some immigrated to India, where they became known as Parsis.

The Zoroastrian funerary ritual involves the 'Towers of Silence' where the corpse is laid out and exposed to vultures that pick the bones clean.

RITUAL



Delicious India

Through its food, you'll discover that India is a banquet expressed in colours, aromas, flavours and textures. Like so many aspects of India, its food, too, is an elusive thing to define because it's made up of so many regionally diverse dishes, all with their own preparation techniques and ingredients. It's the ancient vegetarian fare of the south, the meaty traditions of the Mughals, the glowing tandoor (clay oven) of Punjab and the Euro-Indian fusions of former colonies. It's the divine fragrance of spices, the juice of exotic fruits running down your chin, and rich, fiery curries that will make your tastebuds stand to attention. Indeed it's the sheer diversity of what's on offer that makes eating your way through India so deliciously rewarding.

A Culinary Carnival

India's culinary story is an ancient one. The cuisine that exists today reflects an extraordinary amalgam of regional and global influences. From the traditional Indian fare faithfully prepared in simple village kitchens, to the piled-high Italian-style pizzas served in cosmopolitan city restaurants, the carnival of flavours available in the subcontinent is nothing short of spectacular.

Land of Spices

Christopher Columbus was actually looking for the black pepper of Kerala's Malabar Coast when he stumbled upon America. The region still grows the finest quality of the world's favourite spice, and it's integral to most savoury Indian dishes.

Turmeric is the essence of the majority of Indian curries, but coriander seeds are the most widely used spice and lend flavour and body to just about every savoury dish. Indian 'wet' dishes – commonly known as curries in the West – usually begin with the crackle of cumin seeds in hot oil. Tamarind is sometimes known as the 'Indian date' and is a popular souring agent in the south. The green cardamom of Kerala's Western Ghats is regarded as the world's best, and you'll find it in savouries, desserts and warming chai (tea). Saffron, the dried stigmas of crocus flowers grown in Kashmir, is so light it takes more than 1500 hand-plucked flowers to yield just one gram.

Rice Paradise

Rice is a common staple, especially in South India. Long-grain white rice varieties are the most popular, served hot with just about any 'wet' cooked dish. Rice is often cooked up in a pilau (or pilaf; spiced rice dish) or biryani (spiced steamed rice with meat or vegetables). From Assam's sticky rice in the far northeast to Kerala's red grains in the extreme south, you'll find countless regional varieties that locals will claim to be the best in India, though this honour is usually conceded to basmati, a fragrant long-grain variety which is widely exported around the world.

SPICES

Containing handy tips, including how to best store spices, Monisha Bharadwaj's *The Indian Spice Kitchen* is a slick cookbook with more than 200 traditional recipes.

Khichdi (or *khichri*), mostly cooked in North India, is a blend of lightly spiced rice and lentils. Rarely found on restaurant menus, it's mostly prepared in home kitchens to mollify upset tummies (we recommend it for Delhi Belly) – some restaurants may specially cook it if you give them adequate advance notice.

Flippin' Fantastic Bread

While rice is paramount in the south, wheat is the mainstay in the north. Roti, the generic term for Indian-style bread, is a name used interchangeably with chapati to describe the most common variety, the irresistible unleavened round bread made with whole-wheat flour and cooked on a *tawa* (hotplate). It may be smothered with ghee (clarified butter) or oil. In some places, rotis may be bigger and thicker than chapatis and possibly cooked in a tandoor.

Puri is deep-fried dough puffed up like a crispy balloon. *Kachori* is somewhat similar, but the dough has been pepped up with corn or dhal, which makes it considerably thicker. Flaky, unleavened *paratha* can be eaten as is or jazzed up with fillings such as paneer (soft, unfermented cheese). The thick, usually teardrop-shaped naan is cooked in a tandoor and is especially scrummy when flavoured with garlic.

Dhal-icious!

While the staple of preference divides north and south, the whole of India is melodiously united in its love for dhal (curried lentils or pulses). You may encounter up to 60 different pulses: the most common are *channa*, a slightly sweeter version of the yellow split pea; tiny yellow or green ovals called *moong* (mung beans); salmon-coloured *masoor* (red lentils); the ochre-coloured southern favourite, *tuvār* (yellow lentils; also known as *arhar*); *rajma* (kidney beans); *kabuli channa*; *urad* (black gram or lentils); and *lobhia* (black-eyed peas).

Meaty Matters

While India probably has more vegetarians than the rest of the world combined, it still has an extensive repertoire of carnivorous fare. Chicken, lamb and mutton (sometimes actually goat) are the mainstays; religious taboos make beef forbidden to devout Hindus and pork to Muslims.

In northern India you'll come across meat-dominated Mughlai cuisine, which includes rich curries, kebabs, koftas (minced vegetables or meat; often ball-shaped) and biryanis. This spicy cuisine traces its history back to the (Islamic) Mughal empire that once reigned supreme in India.

Tandoori meat dishes are another North Indian favourite. The name is derived from the clay oven, or tandoor, in which the marinated meat is cooked.

Deep-Sea Delights

India has around 7500km of coastline, so it's no surprise that seafood is an important staple, especially on the west coast, from Mumbai (Bombay) down to Kerala. Kerala is the biggest fishing state, while Goa boasts particularly succulent prawns and fiery fish curries, and the fishing communities of the Konkan Coast – sandwiched between these two states – are renowned for their seafood recipes. Few main meals in Odisha (Orissa) exclude fish, and in West Bengal, puddled with ponds and lakes, fish is king.

The Fruits (& Vegetables) of Mother Nature

Vegetables are usually served at every main meal across India, and *sabzi* (vegetables) is a word recognised in every Indian vernacular. They're

Spotlighting rice, *Finest Rice Recipes* by Sabina Sehgal Saikia shows just how versatile this humble grain is, with classy creations such as rice-crust ed crab cakes.

generally cooked *sukhi* (dry) or *tari* (in a sauce) and within these two categories they can be fried, roasted, curried, stuffed, baked, mashed and combined (made into koftas) or dipped in chickpea-flour batter to make a deep-fried pakora (fritter).

Potatoes are ubiquitous and popularly cooked with various masalas (spice mixes), with other vegetables, or mashed and fried for the street snack *aloo tikki* (mashed-potato patties). Onions are fried with other vegetables, ground into a paste for cooking with meats, and served raw as relishes. Heads of cauliflower are usually cooked dry on their own, with potatoes to make *aloo gobi* (potato-and-cauliflower curry), or with other vegetables such as carrots and beans. Fresh green peas turn up stir-fried with other vegetables in pilaus and biryanis and in one of North India's signature dishes, the magnificent *matar paneer* (unfermented cheese and pea curry). *Baigan* (eggplant/aubergine) can be curried or sliced and deep-fried. Also popular is *saag* (a generic term for leafy greens), which can include mustard, spinach and fenugreek. Something a little more unusual is the bumpy-skinned *karela* (bitter melon) which, like the delectable *bhindi* (okra), is commonly prepared dry with spices.

India's fruit basket is a bountiful one. Along the southern coast are super-luscious tropical fruits such as pineapples and papayas. Mangoes abound during the summer months (especially April and May), with India boasting more than 500 varieties – the pick of the juicy bunch is the sweet Alphonso. Citrus fruit such as oranges (which are often yellow-green in India), tangerines, pink and white grapefruits, kumquats and sweet limes are widely grown. Himachal Pradesh produces crisp apples in autumn, while plump strawberries are especially good in Kashmir during summer. You'll find fruit inventively fashioned into a *chatni* (chutney) or pickle, and also flavouring *lassi* (yoghurt-and-iced-water drink), *kulfi* (firm-textured ice cream) and other sweet treats.

Vegetarians & Vegans

India is king when it comes to vegetarian fare. There's little understanding of veganism (the term 'pure vegetarian' means without eggs), and animal products such as milk, butter, ghee and curd are included in most Indian dishes. If you are vegan your first problem is likely to be getting the cook to completely understand your requirements.

For further information, surf the web – good places to begin include Indian Vegan (www.indianvegan.com) and Vegan World Network (www.vegansworldnetwork.org).

Pickles, Chutneys & Relishes

No Indian meal is really complete without one, and often all, of the above. A relish can be anything from a tiny pickled onion to a delicately crafted fusion of fruit, nuts and spices. One of the most popular meal accompaniments is raita (mildly spiced yoghurt, often containing shredded cucumber or diced pineapple; served chilled), which makes a tongue-cooling counter to spicy food. *Chatnis* can come in any number of varieties (sweet or savoury) and can be made from many different vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices. But you should proceed with caution before polishing off that pickled speck sitting on your thali; it may quite possibly be the hottest thing that you have ever tasted.

Dear Dairy

Milk and milk products make a staggering contribution to Indian cuisine: *dahi* (curd/yoghurt) is commonly served with meals and is great for subduing heat; paneer is a godsend for the vegetarian majority; lassi is one in a host of nourishing sweet and savoury beverages; ghee is the

The Anger of Aubergines:

Stories of Women and Food by Bulbul Sharma is an amusing culinary analysis of social relationships interspersed with enticing recipes.

Thin and crispy, pappadams (commonly referred to as pappad) are circle-shaped lentil- or chickpea-flour wafers served either before or with a meal.

PAAN

Meals are often rounded off with *paan*, a fragrant mixture of betel nut (also called areca nut), lime paste, spices and condiments wrapped in an edible, silky *paan* leaf. Peddled by *paan*-wallahs, who are usually strategically positioned outside busy restaurants, *paan* is eaten as a digestive and mouth-freshener. The betel nut is mildly narcotic and some aficionados eat *paan* the same way heavy smokers consume cigarettes – over the years these people's teeth can become rotted red and black.

There are two basic types of *paan*: *mitha* (sweet) and *saadha* (with tobacco). A parcel of *mitha paan* is a splendid way to finish a satisfying meal. Pop the whole parcel in your mouth and chew slowly, allowing the juices to oooooooze.

traditional and pure cooking medium; and some of the finest *mithai* (Indian sweets) are made with milk.

Sweet at Heart

India has a fabulously colourful kaleidoscope of, often sticky and squishy, *mithai* (Indian sweets), most of them sinfully sugary. The main categories are *barfi* (a fudgelike milk-based sweet), soft *halwa* (made with vegetables, cereals, lentils, nuts or fruit), *ladoos* (sweet balls made with gram flour and semolina), and those made from *chhana* (unpressed paneer), such as *rasgullas* (cream-cheese balls flavoured with rose water). There are also simpler – but equally scrumptious – offerings such as crunchy *jalebis* (orange-coloured coils of deep-fried batter dunked in sugar syrup; served hot) that you'll see all over the country.

Kheer (called *payasam* in the south) is one of the most popular after-meal desserts. It's a creamy rice pudding with a light, delicate flavour, enhanced with cardamom, saffron, pistachios, flaked almonds, chopped cashews or slivered dried fruit. Other favourites include *gulab jamuns*, deep-fried balls of dough soaked in rose-flavoured syrup, and *kulfi*, a firm-textured ice cream made with reduced milk and flavoured with any number of nuts (often pistachio), fruits and berries.

Each year, an estimated 14 tonnes of pure silver is converted into the edible foil that decorates many Indian sweets, especially during the Diwali festival.

Where to Fill Up?

India has oodles of restaurants, from ramshackle street eateries to swish five-star hotel offerings. Most midrange restaurants serve one of two basic genres: South Indian (which usually means the vegetarian food of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka) and North Indian (which largely comprises Punjabi/Mughlai fare). You'll also find the cuisines of neighbouring regions and states. Indians frequently migrate in search of work and these restaurants cater to the large communities seeking the familiar tastes of home.

Not to be confused with burger joints and pizzerias, restaurants in the south advertising 'fast food' are some of India's best. They serve the whole gamut of tiffin (snack) items and often have separate sweet counters. Many upmarket hotels have outstanding restaurants, usually with pan-Indian menus so you can explore various regional cuisines. Meanwhile, the independent restaurant dining scene is mushrooming in India's larger cities, especially Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru (Bangalore), with menus sporting everything from Mexican and Mediterranean to Japanese and Korean.

Dhabas (basic snack bars) are oases to millions of truck drivers, bus passengers and sundry travellers going anywhere by road. The original

Technically speaking, there's no such thing as an Indian 'curry' – the word, an anglicised derivative of the Tamil word *kari* (sauce), was used by the British as a term for any dish including spices.

The Book of Indian Sweets by Satarupa Banerjee contains a tempting mix of regional sweet treats, from Bengali *rasgullas* to Goan *bebinca*.

dhabas dot the North Indian landscape, but you'll find versions of them throughout the country. The rough-and-ready but satisfying food served in these happy-go-lucky shacks has become a genre of its own known as '*dhaba* food'.

Street Food

Whatever the time of day, food vendors are frying, boiling, roasting, peeling, simmering, mixing, juicing or baking some type of food and drink to lure peckish passers-by. Small operations usually have one special that they serve all day, while other vendors have different dishes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The fare varies as you venture between neighbourhoods, towns and regions; it can be as simple as puffed rice or peanuts roasted in hot sand, as unexpected as a fried-egg sandwich, or as complex as the riot of different flavours known as *chaat* (savoury snack).

Devilishly delicious deep-fried fare is the staple of the streets, and you'll find satiating samosas (deep-fried pastry triangles filled with spiced vegetables and less often meat), and *bhajia* (vegetable fritters) in varying degrees of spiciness. Much loved in Maharashtra is *vada pao*, a veg-burger of sorts, with a deep-fried potato patty in a bread bun served with hot chillies and tangy chutneys. Sublime kebabs doused in smooth curd and wrapped in warm Indian-style bread are most commonly found in neighbourhoods with a large Muslim community.

Railway Snack Attack

One of the thrills of travelling by rail in India is the culinary circus that greets you at almost every station. Roving vendors accost arriving trains, yelling and scampering up and down the carriages; fruit, *namkin* (savoury nibbles), omelettes, nuts and sweets are offered through the grills on the windows; and platform cooks try to lure you from the train with the sizzle of spicy goodies such as fresh samosas. Frequent rail travellers know which station is famous for which food item: Lonavla station in Maharashtra is largely known for *chikki* (rock-hard toffeelike confectionery), Agra for *peitha* (square sweet made from pumpkin and glucose, usually flavoured with rose water, coconut or saffron) and Dhaund near Delhi for biryani.

Got the munchies? Grab *Street Foods of India* by Vimla and Deb Kumar Mukerji which has recipes of some of India's favourite snacks, from samosas and *bhelpuri* to *jalebis* and *kulfi*.

STREET FOOD: TIPS

Tucking into street food is one of the joys of travelling in India – here are some tips to help avoid tummy troubles.

Give yourself a few days to adjust to the local cuisine, especially if you're not used to spicy food.

You know the rule about following a crowd – if the locals are avoiding a particular vendor, you should too. Also take notice of the profile of the customers – any place popular with families will probably be your safest bet.

Check how and where the vendor is cleaning the utensils, and how and where the food is covered. If the vendor is cooking in oil, have a peek to check it's clean. If the pots or surfaces are dirty, there are food scraps about or too many buzzing flies, don't be shy to make a hasty retreat.

Don't be put off when you order some deep-fried snack and the cook throws it back into the wok. It's common practice to partly cook the snacks first and then finish them off once they've been ordered. In fact, frying them hot again will kill any germs.

Unless a place is reputable (and busy), it's best to avoid eating meat from the street.

The hygiene standard at juice stalls is wildly variable, so exercise caution. Have the vendor press the juice in front of you and steer clear of anything stored in a jug or served in a glass (unless you're absolutely convinced of the washing standards).

Don't be tempted by glistening pre-sliced melon and other fruit, which keeps its luscious veneer with regular dousing of (often dubious) water.

FEASTING INDIAN-STYLE

Most people in India eat with their right hand. In the south, they use as much of the hand as is necessary, while elsewhere they use the tips of the fingers. The left hand is reserved for unsanitary actions such as removing grotty shoes. You can use your left hand for holding drinks and serving yourself from a communal bowl, but it shouldn't be used for bringing food to your mouth. Before and after a meal, it's good manners to wash your hands.

Once your meal is served, mix the food with your fingers. If you are having dhal and *sabzi* (vegetables), only mix the dhal into your rice and have the *sabzi* in small scoops with each mouthful. If you are having fish or meat curry, mix the gravy into your rice and take the flesh off the bones from the side of your plate. Scoop up lumps of the mix and, with your knuckles facing the dish, use your thumb to shovel the food into your mouth.

Daily Dining Habits

Three main meals a day is the norm in India. Breakfast is usually fairly light, maybe *idlis* (spongy, round, fermented rice cakes) and *sambar* (soupy lentil dish with cubed vegetables) in the south, and *parathas* in the north. Or simply fruit, cereal and/or eggs on toast. Lunch can be substantial (perhaps the local version of the thali) or light, especially for time-strapped office workers. Dinner is usually the main meal of the day. It's generally comprised of a few different preparations – several curried vegetable (maybe also meat) dishes and dhal, accompanied by rice and/or chapatis. Dishes are served all at once rather than as courses. Desserts are optional and most prevalent during festivals or other special occasions. Fruit often wraps up a meal. In many Indian homes dinner can be a late affair (post 9pm) depending on personal preference and possibly the season (eg late dinners during the warmer months). Restaurants usually spring to life after 9pm.

Spiritual Sustenance

For many in India, food is considered just as critical for fine-tuning the spirit as it is for sustaining the body. Broadly speaking, Hindus traditionally avoid foods that are thought to inhibit physical and spiritual development, although there are few hard-and-fast rules. The taboo on eating beef (the cow is holy to Hindus) is the most rigid restriction. Jains avoid foods such as garlic and onions, which, apart from harming insects in their extraction from the ground, are thought to heat the blood and arouse sexual desire. You may come across vegetarian restaurants that make it a point to advertise the absence of onion and garlic in their dishes for this reason. Devout Hindus may also avoid garlic and onions. These items are also banned from most ashrams.

Some foods, such as dairy products, are considered innately pure and are eaten to cleanse the body, mind and spirit. Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, health and longevity, also influences food customs.

Pork is taboo for Muslims and stimulants such as alcohol are avoided by the most devout. Halal is the term for all permitted foods, and haram for those prohibited. Fasting is considered an opportunity to earn the approval of Allah, to wipe the sin-slate clean and to understand the suffering of the poor.

Buddhists and Jains subscribe to the philosophy of ahimsa (nonviolence) and are mostly vegetarian. Jainism's central tenet is ultra-vegetarianism, and rigid restrictions are in place to avoid even potential injury to any living creature – Jains abstain from eating vegetables that grow underground because of the potential to harm insects during cultivation and harvesting.

India's Sikh, Christian and Parsi communities have little or no restrictions on what they can eat.

For recipes online, try:

www.recipesindian.com

www.thokalath.com/cuisine

www.indianfoodforever.com

Food which is first offered to the gods at temples then shared among devotees is known as *prasad*.

The excellent *Complete Indian Cooking* by Mridula Baljekar, Rafi Fernandez, Shehzad Husain and Manisha Kanani contains '325 deliciously authentic recipes for the adventurous cook'. Recipes include chicken with green mango, masala mashed potatoes and Goan prawn curry.

Cooking Courses

You might find yourself so inspired by Indian food that you want to take home a little Indian kitchen know-how, via a cooking course. Some courses are professionally run, others are very informal, and each is of varying duration. Most require at least a few days' advance notice – see the regional chapters of this book for details about recommended courses and also quiz fellow travellers.

Drinks, Anyone?

Gujarat is India's only dry state but there are drinking laws in place all over the country, and each state may have regular dry days when the sale of alcohol from liquor shops is banned. To avoid paying high taxes, head for Goa, where booze isn't subject to the exorbitant levies of other states.

You'll find terrific watering holes in most big cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata (Calcutta) and Delhi, which are usually at their liveliest on weekends. The more upmarket bars serve an impressive selection of domestic and imported drinks as well as draught beer. Many bars turn into music-thumping nightclubs anytime after 8pm although there are quiet lounge-bars to be found in some cities. In smaller towns the bar scene can be a seedy, male-dominated affair – not the kind of place thirsty female travellers should venture into alone.

Stringent licensing laws discourage drinking in some restaurants but places that depend on the tourist rupee may covertly serve you beer in teapots and disguised glasses – but don't assume anything, at the risk of causing offence.

Very few vegetarian restaurants serve alcohol.

Nonalcoholic Beverages

Chai (tea), the much-loved drink of the masses, is made with bucket loads of milk and sugar. A glass of steaming, frothy chai is the perfect antidote to the vicissitudes of life on the Indian road; the disembodied voice droning '*garam chai, garam chai*' (hot tea, hot tea) is likely to become one of the most familiar and welcome sounds of your trip. For those interested in taking a tea appreciation course, see p492.

While chai is the traditional choice of most of the nation, South Indians have long shared their loyalty with coffee. In recent years, though, the

SOUTHERN BELLES

Dosas (also spelt dosais), a family of large papery rice-flour crêpes, usually served with a bowl of hot *sambar* (soupy lentil dish with cubed vegetables) and another bowl of cooling coconut *chatni* (chutney), are a South Indian breakfast speciality that can be eaten at any time of day. The most popular is the masala dosa (stuffed with spiced potatoes), but there are also other fantastic dosa varieties – the *rava* dosa (batter made with semolina), the Mysore dosa (like masala dosa but with more vegetables and chilli in the filling), and the *pessarettu* dosa (batter made with mung-bean dhal) from Andhra Pradesh. Nowadays, dosas are readily found far beyond South India, thanks to their widespread yum-appeal.

The humble *idli* is a traditional South Indian snack that can be found around India; low-cal and nutritious, it provides a welcome alternative to oil, spice and chilli. *Idlis* are spongy, round, white fermented rice cakes that you dip in *sambar* and coconut *chatni*. *Dahi idli* is an *idli* dunked in very lightly spiced yoghurt – terrific for tender tummies. Other super southern snacks, which are also popular throughout the country, include *vadas* (doughnut-shaped deep-fried lentil savouries) and *appams* or *uttappams* (thick, savoury South Indian rice pancake with finely chopped onions, green chillies, coriander and coconut).

number of coffee-drinking North Indians has skyrocketed, with ever-multiplying branches of slick coffee chains, such as Barista and Café Coffee Day, widely found in what were once chai strongholds.

Masala soda is the quintessentially Indian soft drink. It's a freshly opened bottle of fizzy soda, pepped up with lime, spices, salt and sugar. Also refreshing is *jal jeera*, made of lime juice, cumin, mint and rock salt. Sweet and savoury lassi, a yoghurt-based drink, is especially popular nationwide and is another wonderfully rejuvenating beverage.

Falooda is an interesting rose-flavoured drink made with milk, cream, nuts and strands of vermicelli, while *badam* milk (served hot or cold) is flavoured with almonds and saffron.

India has zillions of fresh-fruit juice vendors, but you need to be wary of hygiene standards (see the boxed text, p1118). Some restaurants think nothing of adding salt or sugar to juice to intensify the flavours; ask the waiter to omit these if you don't want them.

For information about safely drinking water in India, see p1192.

The Booze Files

An estimated three-quarters of India's drinking population quaffs 'country liquor' such as the notorious arak (liquor distilled from coconut-palm sap, potatoes or rice) of the south. This is widely known as the poor-man's drink and millions are addicted to the stuff. Each year, many people are blinded or even killed by the methyl alcohol in illegal arak.

An interesting local drink is a clear spirit with a heady pungent flavour called *mahua*, distilled from the flower of the *mahua* tree. It's brewed in makeshift village stalls all over central India during March and April, when the trees bloom. *Mahua* is safe to drink as long as it comes from a trustworthy source. There have been cases of people being blinded after drinking *mahua* adulterated with methyl alcohol.

Rice beer is brewed all over east and northeast India, while in the Himalayas you'll find a grain alcohol called *raksi*, which is strong, has a mild charcoal flavour and tastes vaguely like Scotch whisky.

Toddy, the sap from the palm tree, is drunk in coastal areas, especially Kerala, while *feni* is the primo Indian spirit, and the preserve of laid-back Goa. Coconut feni is light and rather unexceptional but the more popular cashew feni – made from the fruit of the cashew tree – is worth a try.

About a quarter of India's drinks market comprises Indian Made Foreign Liquors (IMFLs), made with a base of rectified spirit. Recent years have seen a rise in the consumption of imported spirits, with a spiralling number of city watering holes and restaurants flaunting a dazzling array of domestic and foreign labels.

Beer is a hit everywhere, with the more upmarket bars and restaurants stocking local and foreign brands (Budweiser, Heineken, Corona and the like). Most of the domestic brands are straightforward Pilsons around the 5% alcohol mark; travellers largely champion Kingfisher.

Wine-drinking is steadily on the rise, despite the domestic wine-producing industry still being relatively new. The favourable climate and soil conditions in certain areas – such as parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka – have spawned some commendable Indian wineries including Indage (www.indagevintners.com), Grover Vineyards (www.groverwines.com) and Sula Vineyards (www.sulawines.com). Domestic offerings include chardonnay, chenin blanc, sauvignon blanc, cabernet sauvignon, shiraz and zinfandel. See also p762.

Meanwhile, if you fancy sipping booze of the blue-blood ilk, traditional royal liqueurs of Rajasthan (once reserved for private consumption within royal families) are now sold at some city liquor shops, especially in Delhi and Jaipur. Ingredients range from aniseed, cardamom and saffron to rose, dates and mint.

WINE

The sub-continent's wine industry is an ever evolving one – take a cyber-sip of Indian wine at www.indianwine.com.

Food Glorious Food

One of the greatest pleasures of wandering around India is sampling its tremendously diverse platter of regional dishes. Apart from fantastic home-grown offerings, larger cities also have a stellar variety of global fare, from sashimi and lotus-leaf dumplings to spanakopita and blue-cheese ravioli.

India's culinary terrain – with its especially impressive patchwork of vegetarian cuisine – is not only intensely delicious, it's also richly steeped in history. From the flavoursome meaty preparations of the Mughals and Punjabis to the deep-sea delights of former southern-based colonies, Indian kitchens continue to lovingly cook old favourites, often with inventive contemporary twists.

In addition to its glorious repertoire of savoury delights, there's the wonderful world of *mithai* (Indian sweets): hot, syrupy *jalebis* (deep-fried coils of batter), creamy *kheer* (similar to rice pudding), soft, sticky *gulab jamuns* (deep-fried balls of dough), thickly cut *barfi* (fudge-like sweet), *rasgullas* (rosewater-infused cream cheese balls) and velvety *kulfi* (firm-textured ice cream) – to name just a sprinkling.

TASTE THIS

- » **Thali** Traditional all-you-can-eat meal; served in compartmentalised stainless steel (or silver) plates
- » **Dosa** (p1120) Large (usually stuffed) savoury crepe; *masala dosa* is filled with spiced potatoes
- » **Tandoori** Clay-oven-cooked meat, vegetables and flat-bread (eg naan)
- » **Idli** (p1120) Round, spongy fermented rice cake; served with fresh condiments
- » **Mithai** (p1117) Indian sweets; from crunchy *jalebis* to soft *gulab jamuns*

Clockwise from top left

1. Jalebis 2. Masala dosa 3. Goan thali 4. Market spices

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HEW JONES / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



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The Great Indian Bazaar

India is filled with bustling old bazaars and modern shopping malls that sell a staggering range of goodies: glossy gemstones, exquisite sculptures, sumptuous silks, chunky tribal jewellery, traditional shawls, beautiful woodwork and rustic village handicrafts. Many crafts fulfil a practical need as much as an aesthetic one.

Every region has its own special arts and crafts, usually showcased in state emporiums and cottage industries' (fair-trade) cooperatives. These shops normally charge fair fixed prices; almost everywhere else, you'll have to don your haggling hat. Opening hours for shops vary across the country – consult the Shopping sections of regional chapters for details.

Be cautious when buying items that include delivery to your country of residence, and be wary of being led to shops by smooth-talking touts. Exporting antiques is prohibited (see p1165).

So much to buy, so little luggage space... Happy shopping!

Crafts aren't necessarily confined to their region of origin – artists migrate and have sometimes been influenced by the ideas of other regions – which means you can come across, for example, a Kashmiri handicraft emporium anywhere in India.

Bronze Figures, Pottery, Stone Carving & Terracotta

In southern India and parts of the Himalaya, small images of deities are created by the age-old lost-wax process. A wax figure is made, a mould is formed around it, and the wax is melted, poured out and replaced with molten metal; the mould is then broken open to reveal the figure inside. Figures of Shiva as dancing Nataraja are the most popular, but you can also find images of Buddha and numerous deities from the Hindu pantheon.

The West Bengalese also employ the lost-wax process to make Dokra tribal bell sculptures; while in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, the Ghadwa Tribe has an interesting twist on the lost-wax process by using a fine wax thread to cover the metal mould, leaving a lattice-like design on the final product.

In Buddhist areas, you can find striking bronze statues of Buddha and the Tantric gods, finished off with finely polished and painted faces.

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

A number of places produce attractive terracotta items, ranging from vases and decorative flowerpots to images of deities, and children's toys.

At temples across India you can buy small clay or plaster effigies of Hindu deities.

Carpets Carpets Carpets!

Carpet-making is a living craft in India, with workshops throughout producing fine wool and silkwork in traditional and contemporary designs.

POTTERY

Rajasthan is a treasure trove of handicrafts. Its capital, Jaipur, is known for its blue-glazed pottery with pretty floral and geometric motifs.

The finest carpets are produced in Kashmir and the Buddhist heartlands of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and West Bengal. Carpet-making is also a major revenue earner for Tibetan refugees; most refugee settlements have cooperative carpet workshops. You can also find reproductions of tribal Turkmen and Afghan designs in states such as Uttar Pradesh. Antique carpets usually aren't antique – unless you buy from an internationally reputable dealer; stick to 'new' carpets.

The price of a carpet will be determined by the number and the size of the hand-tied knots, the range of dyes and colours, the intricacy of the design and the material. Silk carpets cost more and look more luxurious, but wool carpets usually last longer. Expect to pay upwards of US\$200 for a good quality 90cm by 1.5m (or 90cm by 1.8m, depending on the region) wool carpet, and around US\$2000 for a similar sized carpet in silk. Tibetan carpets are cheaper, reflecting the relative simplicity of the designs; many refugee cooperatives sell the same size for around US\$100 or less.

A number of people buy carpets under the mistaken belief that they can be sold for a profit back home. Unless you really know your carpets and the carpet market in your home country, it's best to buy a carpet simply because you love it. Many places can ship carpets home for a fee – although it may be safest to send things independently to avoid scams (depending on the shop, use your instinct) – or you can carry them in the plane's hold (allow 5kg to 10kg of your baggage allowance for a 90cm by 1.5m carpet).

In both Kashmir and Rajasthan, you can also find coarsely woven woollen *numdas* (or *namdas*), which are much cheaper than knotted carpets. Various regions' manufacture flat-weave *dhurries* (kilim-like cotton rugs), including Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Kashmiris also produce striking *gabbas* (rugs with appliqué), made from chain-stitched wool or silk.

Children have been employed as carpet weavers in the subcontinent for centuries. Ultimately, the only thing that can stop child labour is compulsory education for children. The carpets produced by Tibetan refugee cooperatives are almost always made by adults; government emporiums and charitable cooperatives are usually the best places to buy.

THE ART OF HAGGLING

Government emporiums, fair-trade cooperatives, department stores and modern shopping centres almost always charge fixed prices. Anywhere else you need to bargain. Shopkeepers in tourist hubs are accustomed to travellers who have lots of money and little time to spend it, so you can often expect to be charged double or triple the 'real' price. Souvenir shops are generally the most notorious.

The first 'rule' to haggling is never to show too much interest in the item you've got your heart set upon. Secondly, resist purchasing the first thing that takes your fancy. Wander around and price items, but don't make it too obvious – if you return to the first shop the vendor will know it's because they are the cheapest (resulting in less haggling leeway).

Decide how much you would be happy paying and then express a casual interest in buying. If you have absolutely no idea of what something should really cost, start by slashing the price by half. The vendor will, most likely, look utterly aghast, but you can now work up and down respectively in small increments until you reach a mutually agreeable price. You'll find that many shopkeepers lower their so-called 'final price' if you head out of the store saying you'll 'think about it'.

Haggling is a way of life in India and is usually taken in good spirit. It should never turn ugly. Always keep in mind exactly how much a rupee is worth in your home currency to put things in perspective. If a vendor seems to be charging an unreasonably high price, simply look elsewhere.

Dazzling Jewellery

Virtually every town in India has at least one bangle shop selling an extraordinary variety ranging from colourful plastic and glass to shiny brass and silver.

Heavy folk-art silver jewellery can be bought in various parts of the country, particularly in Rajasthan – Jaipur, Udaipur and Pushkar are good places to find silver jewellery pitched at foreign tastes. Jaipur is also renowned for its precious and semiprecious gems – and gem scams (see p1156). Chunky Tibetan jewellery made from silver (or white metal) and semiprecious stones is sold all over India. Many pieces feature Buddhist motifs and text in Tibetan script, including the famous mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* (Hail to the jewel in the lotus). Some of the pieces sold in Tibetan centres such as McLeod Ganj and Leh are genuine antiques but be aware that there's a huge industry in India, Nepal and China making artificially aged souvenirs. If you feel like being creative, loose beads of agate, turquoise, carnelian and silver are widely available. Buddhist meditation beaded strings made of gems or wood also make good souvenirs.

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

Leatherwork

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

Most large cities offer a smart range of modern leather footwear at very reasonable prices, some stitched with zillions of sparkly sequins – marvellous partywear!

The states of Punjab and Rajasthan, and especially in Jaipur, are famed for *jootis* (traditional, often pointy-toed slip-on shoes).

Chappals, those wonderful (often curly-toed) leather sandals, are sold throughout India but are particularly good in the Maharashtran cities of Kolhapur, Pune and Matheran.

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

Metal & Marble Masterpieces

You'll find copper and brassware throughout India. Candleholders, trays, bowls, tankards and ashtrays are particularly popular buys. In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the brass is inlaid with exquisite designs in red, green and blue enamel.

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

Throughout India you can find finely crafted gold and silver rings, anklets, earrings, toe rings, necklaces and bangles, and pieces can often be crafted to order.

PRETTY PEARLS

Pearls are produced by most Indian seaside states, but are a particular speciality of Hyderabad (see p905). You'll find them sold at most state emporiums across the country. Prices vary depending on the colour and shape – you pay more for pure white pearls or rare colours like black. Perfectly round pearls are generally more expensive than misshapen or elongated pearls, however, quirky shapes can actually be more alluring. A single strand of seeded pearls can cost as little as ₹400, but better-quality pearls start at around ₹1000.

Bidri – a form of damascening where silver is inlaid in gunmetal (an alloy of zinc, copper, lead and tin) – is used to make boxes and ornaments in Bidar in Karnataka.

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

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

A sizeable cottage industry has sprung up in Agra reproducing the ancient Mughal art form of *pietra dura* (inlaying marble with semiprecious stones). The inspiration for most pieces comes from the Taj Mahal.

Musical Instruments Galore

Quality Indian musical instruments are mostly available in the larger cities, especially Kolkata (Calcutta), Varanasi and Delhi. Prices vary according to the quality – and sound – of the instrument.

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

Sitars range anywhere from ₹4000 to ₹20,000 (possibly even more). The sound of each sitar will vary with the wood used and the shape of the gourd, so try a few. Note that some cheaper sitars can warp in colder or hotter climates. On any sitar, make sure the strings ring clearly and check the gourd carefully for damage. Spare string sets, sitar plectrums and a screw-in ‘amplifier’ gourd are sensible additions.

Other popular instruments include the *shehnai* (Indian flute), the *sarod* (like an Indian lute), the harmonium and the *esraj* (similar to an upright violin). Conventional violins are great value – prices start at ₹3000, while Kolkata is especially known for its quality acoustic guitars (from just ₹2500), which are exported worldwide.

Exquisite Paintings

India is known for its rich painting history. Reproductions of Indian miniature paintings are widely available but the quality varies, with the cheaper ones having less detail and mostly using inferior materials. Udaipur and Bikaner in Rajasthan have a particularly good range of shops specialising in modern reproductions on paper and silk, or you can browse Delhi’s numerous state emporiums.

In regions such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, you’ll come across miniature paintings on leaf skeletons that portray domestic life, rural scenes and deities.

The artists’ community of Raghurajpur (see p599) near Puri (Odisha) preserves the age-old art of *patachitra* painting. Cotton or *tassar* (silk cloth) is covered with a mixture of gum and chalk; it’s then polished, and images of deities and scenes from Hindu legends are painted on with exceedingly fine brushes. Odisha also produces *chitra pothi*, where images are etched onto dried palm-leaf sections with a fine stylus.

Bihar’s unique folk art is Mithila (or Madhubani) painting, an ancient art form preserved by the women of Madhubani (see p512). These captivating paintings are most easily found in Patna but are also sold in big city emporiums. In Khajuraho, the Adivart Tribal & Folk Art Museum (p629) sells original Bhili paintings.

In all Tibetan Buddhist areas, including Sikkim, parts of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, you can find exquisite *thangkas* (rectangular Tibetan paintings on cloth) of Tantric Buddhist deities and ceremonial mandalas. Some perfectly reproduce the glory of the murals in India’s medieval *gompas* (Tibetan Buddhist monasteries); others are much simpler.

Prices vary, but bank on at least ₹3000 for a decent quality *thangka* of A3 size, and a lot more for large intricate *thangkas*. The selling of antique *thangkas* is illegal, and you would be unlikely to find the real thing anyway.

Throughout the country (especially in big cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata) look out for shops and galleries selling brilliant contemporary paintings by local artists.

Sumptuous Shawls, Silk & Saris

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

The undisputed capital of the Indian shawl is the Kullu Valley in Himachal Pradesh, with dozens of women's cooperatives producing very fine woollen pieces – for further details see p304.

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

Saris are a very popular souvenir, especially given that they can be easily adapted to other purposes (from cushion covers to skirts). Real silk saris are the most expensive, and the silk usually needs to be washed before it becomes soft. The 'silk capital' of India is Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, but you can also find fine silk saris (and cheaper scarves) in centres that include Varanasi, Mysore and Kolkata. Assam is renowned for its *muga*, *endi* and *pat* silks (produced by different species of silkworms), which are widely available in Guwahati. You'll pay upwards of ₹3000 for a quality embroidered silk sari.

Patan in Gujarat, is the centre for the ancient and laborious craft of *patola*-making – every thread in these fine silk saris is individually hand-dyed before weaving, and patterned borders are woven with real gold. Slightly less involved versions are produced in Rajkot (see p705) – only the warp threads are dyed. Gold thread is also used in the famous *kota doria* saris of Kota in Rajasthan.

Aurangabad in Maharashtra, is the traditional centre for the production of *himroo* shawls, sheets and saris, which are made from a blend

In Andhra Pradesh you can buy exquisite cloth paintings called *kalamkari*, which depict deities and historic events; see www.kalamkariart.org for more on this interesting art form.

ON THE PAPIER-MÂCHÉ TRAIL

Artisans in Jammu and Kashmir have been producing lacquered papier mâché for centuries, and papier-mâché-ware is now sold right across India. The basic shape is made in a mould from layers of paper (often recycled newsprint), then painted with fine brushes and lacquered for protection. Prices depend upon the complexity and quality of the design, and the amount of gold leaf. Many pieces feature patterns of animals and flowers, or hunting scenes from Mughal miniature paintings. You can find papier-mâché bowls, boxes, letter holders, coasters, trays, lamps and Christmas decorations. These are very cost-effective souvenirs, but you need to transport them carefully. Rajasthan is *the* place to buy colourful papier-mâché puppets, which are typically sold as a pair – often depicting a husband and wife.

of cotton, silk and silver thread. Silk and gold-thread saris produced at Paithan (near Aurangabad) are some of India's finest – prices range from around ₹6000 to a mind-blowing ₹300,000. Other states that are famous for sari production include Madhya Pradesh for *maheshwari* (cotton saris from Maheshwar), *chanderi* saris (silk saris from Chanderi) and Bishnupur (West Bengal) for *baluchari* saris, which employ a traditional form of weaving with untwisted silk thread.

Terrific Textiles

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

You'll find a truly amazing variety of weaving and embroidery techniques around India. In tourist centres such as Goa, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, textiles are stitched into popular items such as shoulder bags, wall hangings, cushion covers, bedspreads, clothes and much more. For information about the beautiful embroidery and other textile work of Kutch, read the boxed text on p714.

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

In Adivasi (tribal) areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan, small pieces of mirrored glass are embroidered onto fabric, creating eye-catching bags, cushion covers and wall hangings. Jamnagar, in Gujarat, is famous for its vibrant *bandhani* (tie-dye work) used for saris, scarves, and anything else that stays still for long enough. Ahmedabad in Gujarat is a good place to buy Gujarati textiles, and Vadodra in Gujarat is renowned for block-printed fabrics that are used for bedspreads and dress material.

Block-printed and woven textiles are sold by fabric shops all over India, often in vivid colour combinations. Each region has its own speciality. The India-wide retail chain-store Fabindia (www.fabindia.com), is striving to preserve traditional patterns and fabrics, transforming them into highly accessible items for home decoration, and Indian and Western-style fashions.

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

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

Batik can be found throughout India. It's often used for saris and *salwar kameez* (traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination for women). City boutiques flaunt particularly trendy *salwar kameez* in a staggering array of fabrics and styles. Big Indian cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi are top spots to pick up haute couture by talented Indian designers, as well as moderately priced Western fashions.

Be aware that it's illegal to buy *shahtoosh* shawls, as rare Tibetan antelopes are slaughtered to provide the wool. If you come across anyone selling these shawls, inform local authorities.

Traditional Indian Textiles, by John Gillow and Nicholas Barnard, explores India's beautiful regional textiles and includes sections on tie-dye, weaving, beadwork, brocades and even camel girths.

Beautiful Woodcarving

Woodcarving is an ancient art form throughout India. In Kashmir, walnut wood is used to make finely carved wooden screens, tables, jewellery boxes and trays, inspired by the decorative trim of houseboats. Willow cricket bats are another Kashmiri speciality.

Wood inlay is one of Bihar's oldest crafts – you'll find lovely wooden wall hangings, tabletops, trays and boxes inlaid with metals and bone.

Sandalwood carvings of Hindu deities is one of Karnataka's specialities, but you'll pay a king's ransom for the real thing – a 10cm-high Ganesha costs around ₹3000 in sandalwood, compared to roughly ₹300 in kadamb wood. However, the sandalwood will release fragrance for years.

In Udaipur in Rajasthan, you can buy brightly painted figures of Hindu deities carved from mango wood. In many parts of Rajasthan you can also find fabric printing blocks carved from teak wood.

The carved wooden massage wheels and rollers available at many Hindu pilgrimage sites make good gifts for friends and family back home.

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

Other Great Finds

It's little surprise that Indian spices are snapped up by tourists. Virtually all towns have shops and bazaars selling locally made spices at great prices. Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu produce most of the spices that go into garam masala (the 'hot mix' used to flavour Indian curries), while the Northeast States and Sikkim are known for black cardamom and cinnamon bark. Note that some countries, such as Australia, have stringent rules regarding the import of animal and plant products. Check with your country's embassy for details.

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

GANDHI'S CLOTH

More than 80 years ago Mahatma Gandhi sat by his spinning wheel and urged Indians to support the freedom movement by ditching their foreign-made clothing and turning to *khadi* – homespun cloth. Like the spinning wheel itself, *khadi* became a symbol of the struggle for freedom and of Indian independence, and the fabric is still closely associated with politics. The government-run, nonprofit group Khadi and Village Industries Commission (www.kvic.org.in), serves to promote *khadi*, many politicians still wear it and the Indian flag is only supposed to be made from *khadi* cloth. In recent years the fashion world has taken a growing interest in this simple fabric, which is usually cotton, but can also be silk or wool.

Khadi outlets are simple, no-nonsense places from which to pick up genuine Indian clothing such as kurta (long, collarless shirt), pyjamas, headscarves, saris, and at some branches, assorted handicrafts. They are listed in the Shopping sections of various chapters in this book, but you'll find them all over India. Prices are reasonable and are often discounted in the period around Gandhi's birthday (2 October). A number of outlets also have a tailoring service.

PUTTING YOUR MONEY WHERE IT COUNTS

Overall, a comparatively small proportion of the money brought to India by tourism reaches people in rural areas. Travellers can make a greater contribution by shopping at community cooperatives, set up to protect and promote traditional cottage industries, and to provide education, training and a sustainable livelihood at the grassroots' level. Many of these projects focus on refugees, low-caste women, tribal people and others living on society's fringes.

The quality of products sold at cooperatives is high and the prices are usually fixed, which means you won't have to haggle. A share of the sales money is channelled directly into social projects such as schools, healthcare, training and other advocacy programs for socially disadvantaged groups. Shopping at the national network of Khadi and Village Industries Commission emporiums will also contribute to rural communities (also see the box on p1132).

Wherever you travel, keep your eyes peeled for fair-trade cooperatives and also see this book's regional chapters for recommendations, where they exist.

Indian incense is exported worldwide, with Bengaluru and Mysore, both in Karnataka, being major producers. Incense from Auroville in Tamil Nadu is also well regarded.

Meanwhile, a speciality of Goa is *feni* (liquor distilled from coconut milk or cashews) – a head-spinning spirit that often comes in decorative bottles.

Quality Indian tea is sold in Darjeeling and Kalimpong (both in West Bengal), Assam and Sikkim, as well as parts of South India. There are also commendable tea retailers in Delhi and other urban hubs.

In Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, colourful *jari* shoulder bags, embroidered with beads, are a speciality. Also on the portables front, the North-east States are noted for their beautiful hand-woven baskets and wicker-work – each tribe has its own unique basket shape.

Jodhpur in Rajasthan, among other places, is famed for its antiques, but check out the box on p1165 before buying.

Fine-quality handmade paper – often fashioned into cards, boxes and notebooks – is worth seeking out, with good places to start including Pudukcherry in Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Mumbai.

Hats are also popular – the Assamese make decorated reed-pith sun hats, and Tibetan refugees produce woollen hats, gloves and scarves, which are sold nationwide. There's also the traditional caps worn by men and women of Himalayan tribes; they're available at many towns in Himachal Pradesh.

India has a phenomenal range of books at very competitive prices, including gorgeous leather-bound titles.

Music CDs by local musicians are also super value.

In towns with Buddhist communities, such as McLeod Ganj, Leh, Manali, Gangtok, Kalimpong and Darjeeling, keep an eye out for 'Buddha shops' selling devotional objects such as prayer flags, singing bowls, hand-bells and prayer wheels.

Beautiful Handicrafts

With a long tradition of handicrafts, there's arguably nowhere else on earth that produces as prolific an array of handicrafts as India. From intricately woven shawls and beaded shoulder bags to tribal jewellery and rustic wooden masks, the shopping opportunities are as inspiring and multifarious as the country itself.

Textiles & Mirrorwork

1 Famed for its textile industry, India has an amazing range of fabric traditions: delicate chiffon saris, block-printed bedspreads, mirrorwork wall-hangings, rugged *khadi* (home-spun cloth) apparel, silk shirts, tie-dye scarves, woollen shawls and much, much more (p1131).

Papier Mâché

2 Artisans in Jammu & Kashmir are masters of lacquered papier mâché. Crafted from layers of paper then painted with vivid designs and lacquered, items range from floral bowls and letter holders to cheeky faced puppets and festive Christmas decorations (p1130).

Jewellery

3 Gold rings, ruby-studded bangles, silver anklets, emerald earrings, pearl necklaces, tribal costume jewellery...India is a treasure trove of all things sparkly. Apart from gold and silver, there's a wide variety of plastic, brass, wooden and enamelled ornamentation (p1126).

Leatherwork

4 Generations of families carry on the time-honoured practice of crafting leather. Different regions are known for their specialities, with most of India's leatherwork done in Uttar Pradesh. Handbags, belts, wallets and *chappals* (leather footwear) are popular (p1126).

Paintings

5 India has a rich legacy of ancient art techniques, including Rajasthani miniature paintings, South Indian leaf sketchings and *thangkas* (cloth paintings) (p1127).

Clockwise from top left

1. Patchwork quilt in a Goan market **2.** Papier-mâché craftsman, Srinagar **3.** Woman selling jewellery, Jaisalmer

GREG ELMS / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



1

RICHARD IANSON / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



3





Sacred Architecture

India has a remarkable collection of historic and contemporary sacred architecture that draws inspiration from a variety of religious denominations. Although few of the wooden and occasionally brick temples built in early times have weathered the vagaries of time, by the advent of the Guptas (4th to 6th centuries AD) of North India, sacred structures of a new type – better engineered to withstand the elements – were being constructed, and these largely set the standard for temples for several hundred years.

Sri Meenakshi Temple

Meenakshi Shrine

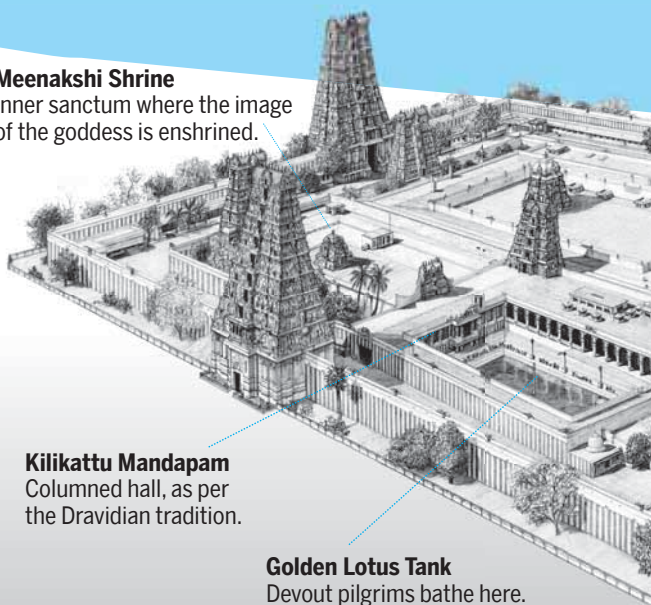
Inner sanctum where the image of the goddess is enshrined.

Kilikattu Mandapam

Columned hall, as per the Dravidian tradition.

Golden Lotus Tank

Devout pilgrims bathe here.



For Hindus, the square is a perfect shape, and complex rules govern the location, design and building of each temple, based on numerology, astrology, astronomy and religious principles. Essentially, a temple represents a map of the universe. At the centre is an unadorned space, the *garbhagriha* (inner sanctum), which is symbolic of the ‘womb-cave’ from which the universe is believed to have emerged. This provides a residence for the deity to which the temple is dedicated.

Above a Hindu temple’s shrine rises a tower superstructure known as a *vimana* in South India, and a *sikhara* in North India. The *sikhara* is curvilinear and topped with a grooved disk, on which sits a pot-shaped finial, while the *vimana* is stepped, with the grooved disk being replaced by a solid dome. Some temples have a *mandapa* (forechamber) connected to the sanctum by vestibules. The *mandapa* may also contain *vimanas* or *sikharas*.

A *gopuram* is a soaring pyramidal gateway tower of a Dravidian temple. The towering *gopurams* of various South Indian temple complexes, such as the nine-storey *gopurams* of Madurai’s Sri Meenakshi Temple (p1036), took ornamentation and monumentalism to new levels.

Commonly used for ritual bathing and religious ceremonies, as well as adding aesthetic appeal, temple tanks have long been a focal point of temple activity. These often-vast, angular, engineered reservoirs of water, sometimes fed by rain, sometimes fed – via a complicated drainage system – by rivers, serve both sacred and secular purposes. The waters

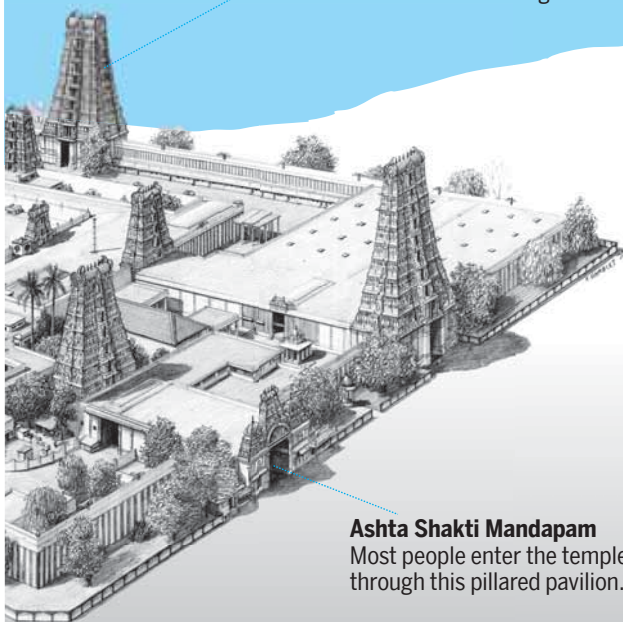
Discover more about India’s diverse temple architecture (in addition to other temple-related information) at Temple Net (www.templenet.com).

Gopurams

Nine-storey gateway towers decorated with thousands of figures.

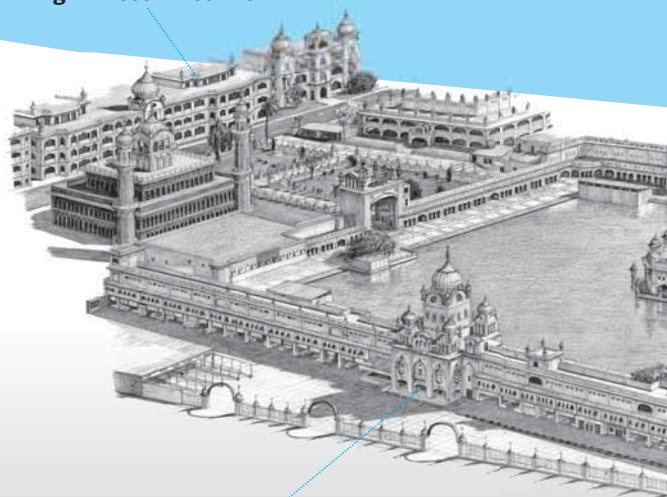
Ashta Shakti Mandapam

Most people enter the temple through this pillared pavilion.



Golden Temple

Pilgrim accommodation



Main entrance

Clock tower and Sikh museum.

of some temple tanks are believed to have healing properties, while others are said to have the power to wash away sins. Devotees (as well as travellers) may be required to wash their feet in a temple tank before entering a place of worship.

From the outside, Jain temples can resemble Hindu ones, but inside they're often a riot of sculptural ornamentation, the very opposite of ascetic austerity.

Buddhist shrines have their own unique features. Stupas, composed of a solid hemisphere topped by a spire, characterise Buddhist places of worship and essentially evolved from burial mounds. They served as repositories for relics of the Buddha and, later, other venerated souls. A further innovation is the addition of a *chaitya* (assembly hall) leading up to the stupa itself. Bodhgaya, where Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became the Buddha, has a collection of notable Buddhist monasteries and temples. The gompas (Tibetan Buddhist monasteries; see p1111) found in places such as Ladakh and Sikkim are characterised by distinctly Tibetan motifs.

In 262 BC the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (see the boxed text, p1087) embraced Buddhism, and as a penance built the Great Stupa at Sanchi, in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. It is among the oldest surviving Buddhist structures in the subcontinent.

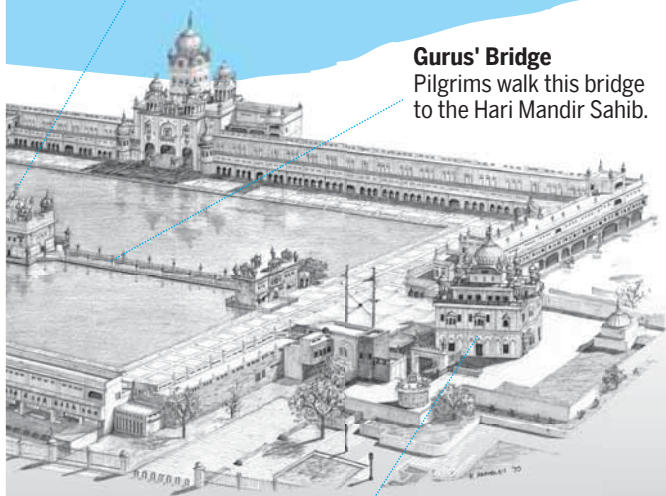
Masterpieces of Traditional Indian Architecture by Satish Grover and *The History of Architecture in India* by Christopher Tadgell proffer interesting insights into temple architecture.

Hari Mandir Sahib

The most sacred part of the temple complex, with gold-plated dome and walls encrusted with semi-precious jewels.

Gurus' Bridge

Pilgrims walk this bridge to the Hari Mandir Sahib.



Akal Takhat

Sikh parliament traditionally meets here.

India also has a rich collection of Islamic sacred sites, as its Muslim rulers contributed their own architectural conventions, including arched cloisters and domes. The Mughals uniquely melded Persian, Indian and provincial styles. Renowned examples include Humayun's Tomb in Delhi (p67), Agra Fort (p352) and the ancient fortified city of Fatehpur Sikri (p365). Emperor Shah Jahan was responsible for some of India's most spectacular architectural creations, most notably the milky white Taj Mahal (p350).

Islamic art eschews any hint of idolatry or portrayal of God, and it has evolved a rich heritage of calligraphic and decorative designs. In terms of mosque architecture, the basic design elements are similar worldwide. A large hall is dedicated to communal prayer and within the hall is a *mihrab* (niche) indicating the direction of Mecca. The faithful are called to prayer from minarets, placed at cardinal points. Delhi's formidable 17th-century Jama Masjid (p66) is India's biggest mosque, its courtyard able to hold 25,000 people.

The Sikh faith was founded by Guru Nanak, the first of 10 gurus, in the 15th century. Sikh temples, called gurdwaras, can usually be identified by a *nishan sahib* (a flagpole flying a triangular flag with the Sikh insignia). Amritsar's sublime Golden Temple (p213) is Sikhism's holiest shrine.

The focal point of a gompa is the *dukhang* (prayer hall), where monks assemble to chant passages from sacred scriptures.

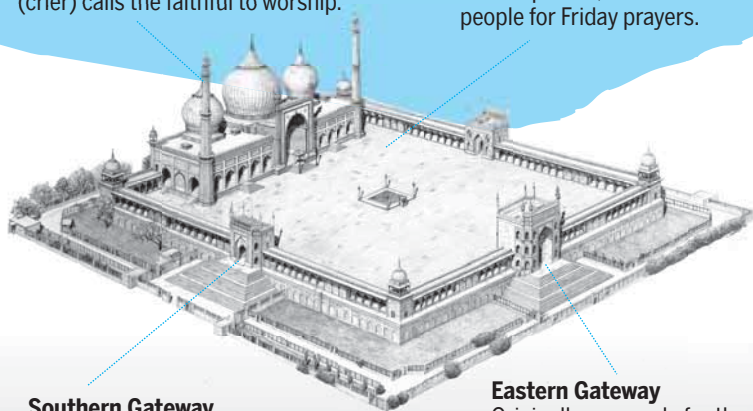
Jama Masjid

Minaret

Tower from which the muezzin (crier) calls the faithful to worship.

Central Courtyard

Holds up to 25,000 people for Friday prayers.



Southern Gateway

General public enter from here or the north.

Eastern Gateway

Originally open only for the emperor. Now open Fridays and Muslim festivals.

Sanchi

Great Stupa

Built by the emperor Ashoka in the 2nd century BC to enshrine relics of the Buddha.

Monastery Ruins

Accommodation surrounding a central courtyard.



Stupa Three

Contained the relics of two important disciples of the Buddha.

Processional path

Pilgrims circumambulated the stupa along this path.



The Arts

Over the centuries India's many ethnic groups have spawned a vivid artistic heritage that is both inventive and spiritually significant. Today, artistic beauty lies around almost every corner, whether it's the garishly painted trucks rattling down dusty country roads or the exquisite, spidery body art of *mehndi* (henna). Indeed, a glowing highlight of subcontinental travel is its wealth of art treasures, from ancient temple dances to a dynamic performing-arts scene. Contemporary Indian artists have fused historical elements with edgy modern influences, creating art, dance and music that have won acclaim in both the domestic and international arenas.

Dance

The ancient Indian art of dance is traditionally linked to mythology and classical literature. Dance can be divided into two main forms: classical and folk.

Classical dance is essentially based on well-defined traditional disciplines. Some classical dance styles:

- » Bharata Natyam (also spelt *bharatanatyam*), which originated in Tamil Nadu, has been embraced throughout India.
- » Kathakali, which has its roots in Kerala, is sometimes referred to as 'dance' but essentially is not – see p1144.
- » Kathak has Hindu and Islamic influences and was particularly popular with the Mughals. Kathak suffered a period of notoriety when it moved from the courts into houses where nautch (dancing) girls tantalised audiences with renditions of the Krishna-and-Radha love story. It was restored as a serious art form in the early 20th century.
- » Manipuri, which has a delicate, lyrical flavour, hails from Manipur. It attracted a wider audience in the 1920s when the acclaimed Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore invited one of its most revered exponents to teach at Shantiniketan (West Bengal).
- » Kuchipudi is a 17th-century dance-drama that originated in the Andhra Pradesh village from which it takes its name. The story centres on the envious wife of Krishna.
- » Odissi, claimed to be India's oldest classical dance form, was originally a temple art, and was later also performed at royal courts.

Immerse yourself in India's incredibly vibrant performing-arts scene – especially classical dance and music – at Art India (www.artindia.net).

India's second major dance form, folk, is widespread and varied. It ranges from the high-spirited bhangra dance of Punjab to the theatrical dummy-horse dances of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and the graceful fishers' dance of Odisha.

Pioneers of modern dance forms in India include Uday Shankar (older brother of sitar master Ravi), who once partnered Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova. Rabindranath Tagore was another innovator; in 1901 he

set up a school at Shantiniketan in West Bengal that promoted the arts, including dance.

Music

Indian classical music traces its roots back to Vedic times, when religious poems chanted by priests were first collated in an anthology called the Rig-Veda. Over the millennia classical music has been shaped by many influences, and the legacy today is Carnatic (characteristic of South India) and Hindustani (the classical style of North India) music. With common origins, both share a number of features. Both use the raga (the melodic shape of the music) and *tala* (the rhythmic meter characterised by the number of beats); *tintal*, for example, has a *tala* of 16 beats. The audience follows the *tala* by clapping at the appropriate beat, which in *tintal* is at beats one, five and 13. There's no clap at the beat of nine; that's the *khali* (empty section), which is indicated by a wave of the hand. Both the raga and the *tala* are used as a basis for composition and improvisation.

Both Carnatic and Hindustani music are performed by small ensembles, generally comprising three to six musicians, and both have many instruments in common. There's no fixed pitch, but there are differences between the two styles. Hindustani has been more heavily influenced by Persian musical conventions (a result of Mughal rule); Carnatic music, as it developed in South India, cleaves more closely to theory. The most striking difference, at least for those unfamiliar with India's classical forms, is Carnatic's greater use of voice.

One of the best-known Indian instruments is the sitar (large stringed instrument) with which the soloist plays the raga. Other stringed instruments include the sarod (which is plucked) and the sarangi (which is played with a bow). Also popular is the tabla (twin drums), which provides the *tala*. The drone, which runs on two basic notes, is provided by the oboelike *shehnai* or the stringed *tampura* (also spelt tamboura). The hand-pumped keyboard harmonium is used as a secondary melody instrument for vocal music.

Indian regional folk music is widespread and varied. Wandering musicians, magicians, snake charmers and storytellers often use song to entertain their audiences; the storyteller usually sings the tales from the great epics.

In North India you may come across *qawwali* (Islamic devotional singing), performed in mosques or at musical concerts. *Qawwali* concerts usually take the form of a *mehfil* (gathering) with a lead singer, a second singer, harmonium and tabla players, and a thunderous chorus of junior singers and clappers, all sitting cross-legged on the floor. The singers whip up the audience with lines of poetry, dramatic hand gestures and religious phrases as the two voices weave in and out, bouncing off each other to create an improvised, surging sound. On command the chorus dives in with a hypnotic and rhythmic refrain. Members of the audience often sway and shout out in ecstatic appreciation.

A completely different genre altogether, filmi music entails musical scores from Bollywood movies – modern (slower paced) love serenades feature among the predominantly hyperactive dance songs. To ascertain the latest filmi favourites, as well as in-vogue Indian pop singers, enquire at music stores.

Radio and TV have played a vital role in broadcasting different music styles – from soothing bhajans to booming Bollywood hits – to even the remotest corners of India.

Cinema

India's film industry was born in the late 19th century – the first major Indian-made motion picture, *Panorama of Calcutta*, was screened in

Indian Classical Dance by Leela Venkataraman and Avinash Pasricha is a lavishly illustrated book covering various Indian dance forms, including Bharata Natyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi and Kathakali.

To tune into the melodious world of Hindustani classical music, including a glossary of musical terms, get a copy of *Nād: Understanding Raga Music* by Sandeep Bagchee.

1899. India's first real feature film, *Raja Harishchandra*, was made during the silent era in 1913 and it's ultimately from this that Indian cinema traces its vibrant lineage.

Today, India's film industry is the biggest in the world – larger than Hollywood – and Mumbai (Bombay), the Hindi-language film capital, is affectionately dubbed 'Bollywood'. India's other major film-producing cities include Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru, with a number of other centres producing films in their own regional vernaculars. Big-budget films are often partly or entirely shot abroad, with some countries vigorously wooing Indian production companies because of the potential spin-off tourism revenue these films generate.

An average of 1000 feature films are produced annually in India. Apart from hundreds of millions of local Bollywood buffs, there are also millions of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) fans, who have played a significant role in catapulting Indian cinema onto the international stage.

Broadly speaking, there are two categories of Indian films. Most prominent is the mainstream movie – three hours and still running, these blockbusters are often tear jerkers and are packed with dramatic twists interspersed with numerous song-and-dance performances. There are no explicit sex, or even kissing, scenes (although smooching is creeping into some Bollywood movies) in Indian films made for the local market; however, lack of nudity is often compensated for by heroines dressed in skimpy or body-hugging attire.

The second Indian film genre is art house, which adopts Indian 'reality' as its base. Generally speaking they are, or at least are supposed to be, socially and politically relevant. Usually made on infinitely smaller budgets than their commercial cousins, these films are the ones that win kudos at global film festivals and award ceremonies.

For some film recommendations, see p1081; for information about Bollywood and working as a film extra, see p734.

Literature

India has a long tradition of Sanskrit literature, although works in the vernacular have contributed to a particularly rich legacy. In fact, it's claimed there are as many literary traditions as there are written languages.

Bengalis are traditionally credited with producing some of India's most celebrated literature, a movement often referred to as the Indian or Bengal Renaissance, which flourished from the 19th century with works by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. But the man who to this day is mostly credited with first propelling India's cultural richness onto the world stage is the Bengali Rabindranath Tagore.

India boasts an ever-growing list of internationally acclaimed authors. Some particularly prominent writers include Vikram Seth, best known for his award-winning epic novel *A Suitable Boy*, and Amitav Ghosh, who has won a number of accolades; his *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize. Indeed, recent years have seen a number of Indian-born authors win the prestigious Man Booker Prize, the most recent being Aravind Adiga, who won in 2008 for his debut novel, *The White Tiger*. The prize went to Kiran Desai in 2006 for *The Inheritance of Loss*; Kiran Desai is the daughter of the award-winning Indian novelist Anita Desai, who has thrice been a Booker Prize nominee. In 1997, Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize for her novel, *The God of Small Things*, while Salman Rushdie took this coveted award in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*.

Trinidad-born Indian writer VS Naipaul has written widely about India and won many notable awards including the Booker Prize (1971) and the Nobel Prize in Literature (2001).

Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema by Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen chronicles India's dynamic cinematic history, spanning from 1897 to the 21st century.

The brilliant and prolific writer and artist Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for *Gitanjali*. For a taste of Tagore's work, a good place to start is his *Selected Short Stories*.

Hobnob with acclaimed local and international writers at Asia's biggest literary event, the Jaipur Literature Festival (www.jaipurliteraturefestival.org), held in late January in Jaipur (Rajasthan).

ART

Get art with *Indian Art* by Roy Craven, *Contemporary Indian Art: Other Realities* edited by Yashodhara Dalmia, and *Indian Miniature Painting* by Dr Daljeet and Professor PC Jain.

Painting

Around 1500 years ago artists covered the walls and ceilings of the Ajanta caves in Maharashtra, western India, with scenes from the Buddha's life. The figures are endowed with an unusual freedom and grace, and contrast with the next major style that emerged from this part of India in the 11th century.

India's Jain community created some particularly lavish temple art. However, after the Muslim conquest of Gujarat in 1299 the Jains turned their attention to illustrated manuscripts, which could be hidden away. These manuscripts are the only known form of Indian painting that survived the Islamic conquest of North India.

The Indo-Persian style – characterised by geometric design coupled with flowing form – developed from Islamic royal courts, although the depiction of the elongated eye is one convention that seems to have been retained from indigenous sources. The Persian influence blossomed when artisans fled to India following the 1507 Uzbek attack on Herat (in present-day Afghanistan), and with trade and gift-swapping between the Persian city of Shiraz, an established centre for miniature production, and Indian provincial sultans.

The 1526 victory by Babur at the Battle of Panipat ushered in the era of the Mughals in India. Although Babur and his son Humayun were both patrons of the arts, it's Humayun's son Akbar who is generally credited with developing the characteristic Mughal style. This painting style, often in colourful miniature form, largely depicts court life, architecture, battle and hunting scenes, as well as detailed portraits. Akbar recruited artists from far and wide, and artistic endeavour first centred on the production of illustrated manuscripts (topics varied from history to mythology), but later broadened into portraiture and the glorification of everyday events. European painting styles influenced some artists, and this influence occasionally reveals itself in experiments with motifs and perspective.

Akbar's son Jehangir also patronised painting, but he preferred portraiture, and his fascination with natural science resulted in a vibrant legacy of paintings of flowers and animals. Under Jehangir's son Shah Jahan, the Mughal style became less fluid and, although the bright colouring was eye-catching, the paintings lacked the vigour of before.

Various schools of miniature painting (small paintings crammed with detail) emerged in Rajasthan from around the 17th century. The subject matter ranged from royal processions to shikar (hunting expeditions), with many artists influenced by Mughal styles. The intense colours, still evident today in miniatures and frescoes in some Indian palaces, were often derived from crushed semiprecious stones, while the gold and silver colouring is finely pounded pure gold and silver leaf.

MAGICAL MEHNDI

Mehndi is the traditional art of painting a woman's hands (and sometimes feet) with intricate henna designs for auspicious ceremonies, such as marriage. If quality henna is used, the design, which is orange-brown, can last up to one month.

In touristy areas, *mehndi*-wallahs are adept at applying henna tattoo 'bands' on the arms, legs and lower back. If you're thinking about getting *mehndi* applied, allow at least a couple of hours for the design process and required drying time (during drying you can't use your hennaed hands). Once applied, henna usually fades faster the more you wash it and apply lotion.

It's always wise to request the artist to do a 'test' spot on your arm before proceeding, as nowadays some dyes contain chemicals that can cause allergies. If good-quality henna is used, you should not feel any pain during or after the procedure.

By the 19th century, painting in North India was notably influenced by Western styles (especially English watercolours), giving rise to what has been dubbed the Company School, which had its centre in Delhi.

In 21st-century India, paintings by contemporary Indian artists have been selling at record numbers (and prices) around the world. One very successful online art auction house is the Mumbai-based Saffronart (www.saffronart.com).

Over recent years, international auction houses have been descending upon India, to either set up offices or secure gallery alliances, in order to grab a piece of the action of what they have identified as a major growth market.

Spirited Celebrations

If there's any country that knows how to throw a celebration, it's India. With one of the world's most spectacular festival calendars, there's something happening every other day, from country carnivals and temple festivals to big city extravaganzas and beachside fairs.

Diwali

1 Fondly dubbed the 'Festival of Lights' (p23), Diwali is an upbeat Hindu festival celebrated across India over five cheerful days. Homes and businesses are decked out with glittering lights and there's a surfeit of fireworks, crackers and sweets.

Wedding Processions

2 Wedding processions (p24) swiftly transform dusty streets into a swirl of colour. The groom, usually riding a white horse, is flanked by a small army of family and friends who sing and dance to the beat of a lively brass band.

Holi

3 Heralding the arrival of spring, Holi (p21) is certainly one of India's most rambunctious celebrations. During this happy Hindu 'Festival of Colours' merrymakers playfully douse one another with water and coloured powder. Bonfires symbolise the demise of the wicked demoness, Holika.

Dussehra & Durga Puja

4 These auspicious Hindu festivals (p23; falling in the Indian calendar of Asvina) celebrate the triumph of good over evil; the former commemorates Lord Rama's victory over the demon Ravana; the latter honours goddess Durga's conquest over the demon Mahishasura.

Kumbh Mela

5 This colossal Hindu festival (p1103) takes place four times every 12 years at four different locations across central and northern India. Attracting tens of millions of Hindu pilgrims (and spectators), the Kumbh Mela is the largest religious congregation on the planet.

Clockwise from top left

1. Diwali lighting ceremony **2.** A Mumbai bride's jewellery and henna **3.** Holi festival fun **4.** Dussehra prayers

RICHARD ROSS / GETTY IMAGES



1

4

RICHARD JANSON / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



2



3





Elephants & Tigers: India's Sanctuaries

The wildlife of India comprises a fascinating ragtag group, a veritable melting pot of animals from Europe, Asia and ancient Gondwanaland all swirled together in a bewildering mix of habitats ranging from lush mangrove swamps to desolate sand deserts and icy alpine meadows.

Home to many charismatic species both large and small, India harbours some of the richest biodiversity in the world. There are 397 species of mammals, 1250 birds, 460 reptiles, 240 amphibians and 2546 fish – among the highest species count for any country. India is best known for its signature species – elephants, tigers, monkeys, leopards, antelopes and rhinos. Many of the animals discussed in this chapter are among India's most endangered and charismatic wildlife.

Most of the semitropical lowland and hill forests that once dominated much of central and southern India have been cut down, endangered by human competition for land and water, but this region is still home to the majority of India's most intriguing animals, especially where the remaining forests have been protected. So take some time to chase down a rhino or sight a tiger on a traditional elephant safari, or try for something unexpected off the beaten track.

Animals

Understandably, wildlife-watching has become one of the country's prime tourist activities and there are hundreds of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries offering opportunities to spot rare and unusual wildlife. Even better, your visit helps notify the government that protected parks and wildlife have an important value.

Located almost perfectly in the centre of the country, Bandhavgarh National Park is one dynamic example of what the original Indian landscape might have been like. Here you can explore meadows, forests and rocky ridges in a thrilling search for tigers and leopards, and other big game. Or for a completely different, but equally pristine, experience check out the exotic one-horned rhinos and wild elephants in Assam's Kaziranga National Park.

So Many Cats

India is justifiably famous for its tigers, and just admit it – you secretly hope to see one. But India is actually home to 15 species of cats, so don't miss out on any opportunity to see one of the other gorgeous felines.

It could be said that the global effort to protect tigers all started in India, and many experts feel that India's sizeable population of tigers may be the species' last great stronghold.

Top Parks North

- » Corbett Tiger Reserve
- » Kaziranga National Park
- » Keoladeo Ghana National Park

Unfortunately, despite a massive and well-funded conservation effort, the black market in tigers remains an irresistible temptation for both wildlife-poaching gangs and impoverished villagers, so tiger numbers continue to fall at a precipitous rate, even in supposedly secure sanctuaries. For more information, see the boxed text, p1147

Protection efforts have been successfully made on behalf of the Asiatic lion, a thoroughly different creature than the more familiar African lion. A hundred years ago there were only 20 of these lions left in the world, but their population of 300 now seems to be doing fairly well in Gujarat's Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary (see p699), where it's also possible to see 300 or so leopards, another of India's famous big cats.

Other dramatic felines include the clouded leopard, and its smaller cousin the marbled cat, both of which lurk in the jungles of northeast India. These cats are strikingly marbled with rosettes and rings of colour for camouflage in their forested homes. Closely related but much paler in colour is the infamous snow leopard, an animal so elusive that many locals claim it can appear and disappear at will. A few snow leopards survive in Ladakh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Big Ones

If you had to pick India's top three animals, the list would inevitably include tigers, elephants and rhinos, all of which are scarce and in need of stringent protection. It's fortunate that Asian elephants – a somewhat smaller version of an African elephant – are revered in Hindu custom or they would have been hunted into extinction long ago, as they were in neighbouring China. It's true that many of India's elephants were pressed into domestication and put to work, but enough survived in the wild

Top Parks Central

- » Bandhavgarh National Park
- » Kanha National Park
- » Sunderbans Tiger Reserve

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Despite having amazing biodiversity, India faces a growing challenge from its exploding human population. Wildlife is severely threatened by poaching and habitat loss. At last count, India had 569 threatened species, comprising 247 species of plants, 89 species of mammals, 82 species of birds, 26 species of reptiles, 68 species of amphibians, 35 species of fish and 22 species of invertebrates.

Prior to 1972 India had only five national parks, so the Wildlife Protection Act was introduced that year to set aside parks and stem the abuse of wildlife. The act was followed by a string of similar pieces of legislation with bold ambitions but few teeth with which to enforce them.

A rare success story has been Project Tiger (see p1148). All of India's wild cats, from leopards to snow leopards, panthers and jungle cats are facing extinction from habitat loss and poaching for the lucrative trade in skins and body parts for Chinese medicine (a whole tiger carcass can fetch upwards of UK£32,000). Government estimates suggest that India is losing 1% of its tigers every year to poachers.

Even highly protected rhinos are poached for the medicine trade – rhino horn is highly valued as an aphrodisiac and as a material for making handles for daggers in the Gulf. Elephants are regularly poached for ivory, and 320 elephants were poached from 2000 to 2008 – we implore you not to support this trade by buying ivory souvenirs. Various species of deer are threatened by hunting for food and trophies, and the chiru, or Tibetan antelope, is nearly extinct because its hair is woven into wool for expensive shahtoosh shawls.

India's bear species are under threat and sloth bears are widely poached to be used as 'dancing bears' at tourist centres such as Agra and Jaipur. In the water, India's freshwater dolphins are in dire straits from pollution and human competition. The sea-turtle population on the Orissa coast also faces problems – see the boxed text, p603.

HOORAY FOR PROJECT TIGER

When naturalist Jim Corbett first raised the alarm in the 1930s no one believed that tigers would ever be threatened. At the time it was believed there were 40,000 tigers in India, although no one had ever conducted a census. Then came Independence, which put guns into the hands of villagers who pushed into formerly off-limits hunting reserves to hunt for highly profitable tiger skins. By the time an official census was conducted in 1972, there were only 1800 tigers left and international outcry prompted Indira Gandhi to make the tiger the national symbol of India and set up **Project Tiger** (<http://projecttiger.nic.in>). The project has since established 39 tiger reserves totalling over 32,000 sq km that not only protect this top predator but all animals that live in the same habitats. After an initial round of successes, tiger numbers have recently plummeted from 3600 in 2002 to a new low of 1500 due to relentless poaching, so another \$153 million and high-tech equipment have been devoted to the effort to help stop this slide towards extinction.

that they now seem to be doing relatively well. But because elephants migrate long distances in search of food, these 3000kg animals require huge parks and run into predictable conflict when herds of elephants attempt to follow ancestral paths that are now occupied by villages and farms. Some of the best parks for elephant viewing are Corbett Tiger Reserve (see p430) and Nagarhole National Park (p865) in Karnataka.

There are far fewer one-horned rhinos left and two-thirds (just shy of 2000) of the world's total population can be found in Kaziranga National Park (see p559), where they serenely wander the park's lush alluvial grasslands at the base of the Himalayas. They may look sedate but rhinos are unpredictably dangerous, built like battering rams, covered in plates of armour-like skin, and use their sharp teeth to tear off chunks of flesh when they attack, so let's just say that it's safest to watch rhinos from the back of an elephant.

Hoofed & Handed

By far, the most abundant forms of wildlife you'll see in India are deer (nine species), antelope (six species), goats and sheep (10 species), and primates (15 species). In the open grasslands of many parks look for the stocky nilgai, India's largest antelope, or elegantly horned blackbucks. If you're heading for the mountains, keep your eyes open in the Himalayas for blue sheep with their partially curled horns or the rare argali with its fully curled horns that can be found in Ladakh. The deserts of Rajasthan and Gujarat are home to desert-adapted species such as chinkaras (Indian gazelles); while the mangrove swamps of the Sundarban Delta have chitals (spotted deer), who cope with their brackish environment by excreting salt from their nasal glands.

India's primates range from the extremely rare hoolock gibbon and golden langur of the northeast, to species that are so common as to be a pest – most notably the stocky and aggressive rhesus macaque and the elegant grey langur. In the south, the pesky monkeys that loiter around temples and tourist sites are bonnet macaques.

Threatened species clinging on in rainforests in the south include lion-tailed macaques, glossy black Nilgiri langurs and slender loris, an adept insectcatcher with huge eyes for nocturnal hunting.

Birds

With well over one thousand species of birds, India is a birdwatcher's dream. Many birds are thinly spread over this vast country, but wherever critical habitat has been preserved in the midst of dense human activity you might see phenomenal numbers of birds in one location. Winter

Top Parks South

- » Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park
- » Nagarhole National Park
- » Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

can be a particularly good time, in Keoladeo Ghana and elsewhere in the country, because northern migrants arrive to kick back in the lush subtropical warmth of the Indian peninsula. In the breeding season look for colourful barbets, sunbirds, parakeets and magpies everywhere you travel, or make a special trip into the Himalayas in search of one of India's (and the world's) mostly highly sought-after birds, the enigmatic ibisbill.

Once considered the premier duck-hunting destination in the British Empire when royal hunting parties would shoot 4000 ducks in a single day, the seasonal wetlands of Keoladeo Ghana (see p128) were elevated to national park status in 1982. Now whittled down to a relatively small pocket of habitat amid a sea of villages and agricultural fields, this is still one of the finest birdwatching destinations in the world. Even better, Keoladeo Ghana and its abundant birdlife are ridiculously easy to explore, just hop on a bike from town or from one of the local lodges and toddle around the flat tracks that weave among the park's clearly defined ponds and marshes. In the winter there are so many ducks, herons, storks, cranes, egrets and raptors packing themselves into the park that your foremost problem will be trying to identify individual animals amid the chaos.

Plants

Once upon a time India was almost entirely covered in forest; now its total forest cover is estimated to be around 20%, although the Forest Survey of India has set an optimistic target of 33%. Despite widespread clearing of native habitats, the country still boasts 49,219 plant species, of which some 5200 are endemic. Species on the southern peninsula show Malaysian ancestry, while desert plants in Rajasthan are more clearly allied with the Middle East, and conifer forests of the Himalaya derive from European and Siberian origins.

Outside of mountain forests found in the Himalaya, nearly all the lowland forests of India are subtypes of tropical forest, with native *sal* forests forming the mainstay of the timber industry. Some of these tropical forests are true rainforest, staying green year-round, such as in the Western Ghats and in the northeast states, but most forests are deciduous and look surprisingly dusty and forlorn in the dry season. Fortunately, the leaf fall and dry vegetation makes wildlife viewing easier in otherwise dense woodlands.

High-value trees such as Indian rosewood, Malabar kino and teak have been virtually cleared from the Western Ghats, and sandalwood is endangered across India due to illegal logging for the incense and wood-carving industries. A bigger threat on forested lands is firewood

Books

» *Mammals of India* by Vivek Menon

» *A Guide to the Birds of India and Pocket Guide to Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp

A NATIVE RETURNS

India's last wild cheetahs were likely shot by the Maharaja of Surguja in 1947 and they have been absent for so long that few people think of cheetahs and India in the same sentence. But after extensive review and planning, India's minister for the environment and forests, Jairam Ramesh, announced that 18 cheetahs will be brought from Iran, Namibia and South Africa and released in 2011 in the Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh and an area in the desert near Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. There remains considerable disagreement about whether these releases are a good idea, and even the official studies concluded that most of the potential cheetah habitat is severely overgrazed by livestock and subject to poaching, but keep your fingers crossed that cheetahs have a chance to rebound in the way that Asiatic lions have.

harvesting, often carried out by landless peasants who squat on gazetted government land.

Several trees have significant religious value in India, including the silk-cotton tree, a big tree with spiny bark and large red flowers under which Pitamaha, the creator of the world, sat after his labours. Two well-known figs, the banyan and peepal, grow to immense size by dangling roots from their branches and fusing into massive multitrunked jungles of trunks and stems – one giant is nearly 200m across. It is said that Buddha achieved enlightenment while sitting under a peepal (also known as the Bodhi tree).

The foothills and slopes of the Himalaya preserve classic montane species, including blue pine and deodar (Himalayan cedar) and deciduous forests of apple, chestnut, birch, plum and cinnamon. Above the snow-line, hardy plants such as anemones, edelweiss and gentians can be prolific, and one fabulous place to see such flowers is at the Valley of Flowers National Park (see p428).

India's hot deserts have their own unique species – the khejri tree and various strains of scrub acacia. The hardy sea-buckthorn bush is the main fruiting shrub in the deserts of the Himalaya. All these indigenous species face a challenge from introduced species such as the eucalyptus, a water-hungry species introduced by the British to dry out malarial swamps.

National Parks & Wildlife Sanctuaries

India has about 100 national parks and 500 wildlife sanctuaries, which constitute around 5% of India's territory. An additional 70 parks have been authorised on paper but not yet implemented on the ground or only implemented to varying degrees. There are also 14 biosphere reserves, overlapping many of the national parks and sanctuaries, providing safe migration channels for wildlife and allowing scientists to monitor biodiversity.

We strongly recommend visiting at least one national park or sanctuary on your travels – the experience of coming face-to-face with a wild elephant, rhino or tiger will stay with you for a lifetime, while your visit adds momentum to efforts to protect India's natural resources. Wildlife reserves tend to be off the beaten track and infrastructure can be limited – book transport and accommodation in advance, and check opening times, permit requirements and entry fees before you visit. Many parks close to conduct a census of wildlife in the low season, and monsoon rains can make wildlife-viewing tracks inaccessible.

Almost all parks offer jeep/van tours, but you can also search for wildlife on guided treks, boat trips and elephant safaris. For various safari possibilities, see p19.

Resources

- » Wildlife, conservation and environment awareness-raising at www.sanctuaryasia.com
- » The Wildlife Trust of India news at www.wti.org.in
- » Top birdwatching information and photo galleries at www.birding.in



The Landscape

The Land

India is an incredibly diverse country with everything from steamy jungles and tropical rainforest to arid deserts and the soaring peaks of the Himalaya. At 3,287,263 sq km, it is the second-largest Asian country after China, and forms the vast bulk of the South Asian subcontinent – an ancient block of earth crust that carried a wealth of unique plants and animals like a lifeboat across a prehistoric ocean before slamming into Asia about 40 million years ago.

Look for the three major geographic features that define modern-day India: Himalayan peaks and ridges along the northern borders, the alluvial floodplains of the Indus and Ganges Rivers in the north, and the elevated Deccan Plateau that forms the core of India's triangular southern peninsula.

The Himalaya

As the world's highest mountains – with the highest peak in India reaching 8598m – the Himalaya create an impregnable boundary that separates India from its neighbours in the north. These mountains formed when the Indian subcontinent broke away from Gondwanaland, a supercontinent in the Southern Hemisphere that included Africa, Antarctica, Australia and South America. All by itself, India drifted north and finally slammed slowly, but with immense force, into the Eurasian continent about 40 million years ago, buckling the ancient seafloor upward to form the Himalaya and many lesser ranges that stretch 2500km from Afghanistan to Myanmar (Burma).

When the Himalaya reached their great heights during the Pleistocene (less than 150,000 years ago), they began to block and alter weather systems, creating the monsoon climate that dominates India today, as well as forming a dry rainshadow to the north.

Although it looks like a continuous range on a map, the Himalaya is actually a series of interlocking ridges, separated by countless valleys. Until technology enabled the building of roads through the Himalaya, many of these valleys were completely isolated, preserving a diverse series of mountain cultures.

The Indo-Gangetic Plains

Covering most of northern India, the vast alluvial plains of the sacred Ganges River are so seamlessly flat that they drop a mere 200m between Delhi and the waterlogged wetlands of West Bengal, where the river joins forces with the Brahmaputra River from India's northeast before dumping into the sea in Bangladesh. Vast quantities of eroded sediments from the neighbouring highlands accumulate on the plains to a depth of nearly 2km, creating fertile, well-watered agricultural land. This densely populated region was once extensively forested and rich in wildlife.

Get the inside track on Indian environmental issues at Down to Earth (www.downtoearth.org.in), an online magazine that delves into stories overlooked by mainstream media.

Gujarat in the far west of India is separated from Sindh (Pakistan) by the Rann of Kutch, a brackish marshland that becomes a huge inland sea during the wet season; the waters recede in the dry season, leaving isolated islands perched on an expansive plain.

The Deccan Plateau

South of the Indo-Gangetic (northern) plain, the land rises to the Deccan Plateau, marking the divide between the Mughal heartlands of North India and the Dravidian civilisations of the south. The Deccan is bound on either side by the Western and Eastern Ghats, which come together in their southern reaches to form the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu.

On the Deccan's western border, the Western Ghats drop sharply down to a narrow coastal lowland, forming a luxuriant slope of rainforest.

The Islands

Offshore from India are a series of island groups, politically part of India but geographically linked to the landmasses of Southeast Asia and islands of the Indian Ocean. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands sit far out in the Bay of Bengal, while the coral atolls of Lakshadweep (300km west of Kerala) are a northerly extension of the Maldives islands, with a land area of just 32 sq km.

Environmental Issues

With over a billion people, ever-expanding industrial and urban centres, and growth in chemical-intensive farming, India's environment is under tremendous pressure. An estimated 65% of the land is degraded in some way, most of it seriously degraded, and the government has been consistently falling short of most of its environmental protection goals. Many current problems are a direct result of the Green Revolution of the 1960s when chemical fertilisers and pesticides enabled huge growth in agricultural output, at enormous cost to the environment, wildlife populations and habitat.

Despite numerous new environmental laws since the 1984 Bhopal disaster (p637), corruption continues to exacerbate environmental degradation – worst exemplified by the flagrant flouting of environmental rules by companies involved in hydroelectricity, mining, and uranium and oil exploration. Usually, the people most affected are low-caste rural farmers and Adivasis (tribal people) who have limited political representation and few resources to fight big businesses.

Agricultural production has been reduced by soil degradation from overfarming, rising soil salinity, loss of tree cover and poor irrigation. The human cost is heart-rending, and lurking behind all these problems is a basic Malthusian truth: there are far too many people for India to support at its current level of development.

While the Indian government could undoubtedly do more, some blame must also fall on Western farm subsidies that artificially reduce the cost of imported produce, undermining prices for Indian farmers. Western agribusinesses also promote the use of nonpropagating, genetically modified (GM) seed stocks.

As anywhere, tourists tread a fine line between providing an incentive for change and making the problem worse. For example, many of the environmental problems in Goa (p811) are a direct result of years of irresponsible development for tourism. Always consider your environmental impact while travelling in India, including while trekking and diving.

Climate Change

Changing climate patterns – linked to global carbon emissions – have been creating dangerous extremes of weather in India. While India is a

It is estimated that India's population will reach 1.26 billion people by 2016.

India is home to 18% of the world's population crowded together on 2.5% of the world's landmass.

Noise pollution in major cities has been measured at over 90 decibels – more than one and a half times the recognised 'safe' limit. Bring earplugs!

AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution in many Indian cities has been measured at more than double the maximum safe level recommended by the World Health Organization.

major polluter, in carbon emissions per capita it still ranks far behind the USA, Australia and Europe.

Increased monsoon rainfall has caused a cycle of ever-worsening flooding and destruction, including the devastating Gujarat and Maharashtra floods in 2005 and widespread flooding across northern India in 2010. The Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh has estimated that by 2030 India will see a 30% increase in the severity of its floods and droughts. In mountain deserts of Ladakh, increased rainfall is changing time-honoured farming patterns and threatening traditional mud-brick architecture, while glaciers on nearby peaks are melting at alarming rates. Conversely, other areas are experiencing reduced rainfall, causing drought and riots over access to water supplies. Islands in the Lakshadweep group as well as the low-lying plains of the Ganges delta are being inundated by rising sea levels.

Deforestation

Since Independence, some 53,000 sq km of India's forests have been cleared for logging and farming, or damaged by urban expansion, mining, industrialisation and river dams. Even in the well-funded, highly protected Project Tiger parks, the amount of forest cover classified as 'degraded' has tripled due to illegal logging. The number of mangrove forests has halved since the early 1990s, reducing the nursery grounds for the fish that stock the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal.

India's first Five Year Plan in 1951 recognised the importance of forests for soil conservation, and various policies have been introduced to increase forest cover. Almost all have been flouted by officials or criminals and by ordinary people clearing forests for firewood and grazing in forest areas. Try to minimise the use of wood-burning stoves while you travel (this is less of an issue in areas with fast-growing pine species in the hills).

Officially, states are supposed to earmark an equivalent area for afforestation when an area is cleared, but enforcement is lax and the land set aside is sometimes unsuitable for forestry. On another front, invasive eucalyptus and other foreign plant species are swamping indigenous flora. Numerous charities are working with rural communities to encourage tree planting, and religious leaders like the Dalai Lama have joined the movement.

Water Resources

Arguably the biggest threat to public health in India is inadequate access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation. With the population set

A DAM TOO FAR?

The most controversial of India's many hydroelectric schemes is the Narmada Valley Development, a US\$6-billion scheme to build 30 hydroelectric dams along the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Despite bringing benefits in terms of irrigation to thousands of villages and reducing desert encroachment into rural areas, the project will flood the tribal homelands of some 40,000 Adivasi (tribal) villagers, many of whom worship the waters as a deity. The government has promised to provide alternative accommodation, but so far only 10% of the displaced people have found adequate farmland as compensation. The World Bank refused to fund the ongoing development, but Britain's Barclays Bank stepped in with loans and the Indian government has overruled every legal challenge to the development, despite some high-profile names joining the anti-Narmada Dam movement – including Booker Prize-winner Arundhati Roy. For the latest developments, see the Friends of River Narmada website (www.narmada.org).

Downstream of Varanasi the Ganges River is a black septic river with 3000 times the acceptable limit of faecal coliform bacteria.

to double by 2050, agricultural, industrial and domestic water usage are all expected to spiral, despite government policies designed to control water use. The World Health Organization estimates that, out of more than 3000 cities and towns in India, only eight have adequate wastewater treatment facilities. Many cities dump untreated sewage and partially cremated bodies directly into rivers, while open defecation is a simple fact of life in most rural (and many urban) areas.

Rivers are also affected by run-off, industrial pollution and sewage contamination - the Sabarmati, Yamuna and Ganges are among the most polluted rivers on earth. At least 70% of the freshwater sources in India are now polluted in some way. In recent years, drought has devastated parts of the subcontinent (particularly Rajasthan and Gujarat) and has been a driving force for rural-to-urban migration.

Water distribution is another volatile issue. Since 1947 an estimated 35 million people in India have been displaced by major dams, mostly built to provide hydroelectricity for this increasingly power-hungry nation. While hydroelectricity is one of the greener power sources, valleys across India are being sacrificed to create new power plants, and displaced people rarely receive adequate compensation.



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Scams

India has its fair share of scams, but most problems can be avoided with a bit of common sense and an appropriate amount of caution. Scams change as tricksters try to stay ahead of the game so chat with travellers and tourism officials to keep abreast of the latest cons. Look at the India branch of Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree Travel Forum** (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree), where travellers often post timely warnings about problems they've encountered on the road.

Contaminated Food & Drink

» Some private medical clinics have given patients more treatment than necessary to procure larger payments from travel insurance companies – get a second opinion if possible.

» The late 1990s saw a dangerous scam in Agra and Varanasi when several travellers died after being fed food spiked with bacteria from restaurants linked to dodgy medical clinics. The scam has been quashed, but could always reappear.

» Most bottled water is legit, but ensure the seal is intact and the bottom of the bottle hasn't been tampered with.

» Crush plastic bottles after use to prevent them being misused. Better still, use your own water bottle and water-purification tablets or a filtration system to avoid adding to India's plastic waste mountain.

Credit-Card Con

Be careful when paying for souvenirs with a credit card. While government shops are usually legitimate, private souvenir shops have been known to surreptitiously run off extra copies of the credit-card imprint slip and use them for phoney transactions later. Insist the trader carries out any transaction in front of you. Or pay with cash.

Druggings

Very occasionally, tourists (especially those travelling solo) are drugged and robbed during train or bus journeys. A spiked drink is the most commonly used method for sending them off to sleep. Use your instincts,

and if you're unsure politely decline drinks or food offered by strangers.

Gem Scams

This long-running scam involves charming con artists who promise foolproof 'get rich quick' schemes. Travellers are asked to carry or mail gems home and then sell them to the trader's (non-existent) overseas representatives at a profit. Without exception, the goods – if they arrive at all – are worth a fraction of what you paid, and the 'representatives' never materialise.

Don't believe hard-luck stories about an inability to obtain an export licence, and don't believe the testimonials they show you from other travellers – they are all fake. Travellers have reported this con happening in Agra, Delhi, and Jaisalmer among other places, but it's particularly prevalent in Jaipur (see p121). Carpets are another favourite for this con.

Overpricing

Agree on prices beforehand, particularly if eating in places without menus, flagging down an autorickshaw or arranging an airport pick-up from your hostel or hotel. This will save you money and could deflect potentially ugly misunderstandings later.

Photography

When photographing people use your instincts – some people may demand money afterwards. See also p1169.

Theft

» Theft is a risk in India, as it is anywhere else.

» Keep luggage locked on buses and trains. Be extra alert just before a train departs; thieves often take

TOP SCAMS

- » Gunk (dirt, paint, poo) suddenly appears on your shoes, only for a shoe cleaner to magically appear and offer to clean it off – for a price.
- » Shops and restaurants 'borrow' the name of their more successful and popular competitor.
- » Taxi drivers insist they don't know the way to your hotel, or that the place you're looking for has moved or is closed – but they'll happily take you to their 'friend's' place (where they'll receive a nice commission).
- » Touts claim to be 'government-approved' guides or 'tour operators' and sting you for large sums of cash. Enquire at the local tourist office about recommended guides and ask to see evidence from the guides themselves.

advantage of the confusion and crowds.

- » Take extra care in dormitories and never leave your valuables in the room when you go out unless there is a safe.
- » For lost or stolen credit cards call the international lost/stolen number; for lost/stolen travellers cheques, contact the American Express or Thomas Cook office in Delhi (p98).

Touts & Commission Agents

- » Many hotels and shops drum up extra business by paying commission to local fixers who bring tourists through the doors. Prices in these places will invariably be raised (by as much as 50%) to pay the fixer's commission.
- » Train and bus stations are often swarming with touts – if anyone asks if this is your first trip to India, say you've been here several times, even if you haven't.
- » Touts can be particularly bothersome in major tourist centres like Agra and Varanasi.
- » Telling touts that you have already prepaid your transfer/tour/onward journey can help dissuade them.

- » Where possible, arrange hotel pick-ups, particularly in big cities.
- » You'll often hear stories about hotels (those that refuse to pay commissions) being 'full' or 'closed' – check things out yourself. Be very sceptical of phrases like 'my brother's shop' and 'special deal at my friend's place'.
- » Touts can be beneficial if you arrive in a town without a hotel reservation when some big festival is on, or during the peak season – they'll know which places have beds.

KEEPING SAFE

- » A good travel-insurance policy is essential.
- » Email copies of your passport identity page, visa and airline tickets to yourself, and keep copies on you.
- » Keep your money and passport in a concealed money belt or a secure place under your shirt and never keep your wallet in your back pocket.
- » Store at least US\$100 separately from your main stash but keep the rest of your cash and other valuables on your person.
- » Don't publicly display large wads of cash when paying for services or checking into hotels.
- » Consider using your own padlock at cheaper hotels where doors are locked with a padlock.
- » If you can't lock your hotel room securely from the inside, stay somewhere else.

Transport Scams

- » Make sure you're completely clear on what is included in the price of any tour to avoid charges for hidden 'extras' later on; get it in writing.
- » Be extremely wary of anyone in Delhi and other traveller centres offering houseboat tours to Kashmir (see p236).
- » Some travel agents exploit travellers' safety concerns to make extra money from tours that you can do just as easily (and safely) on public transport.
- » When buying a bus, train or plane ticket anywhere other than the registered office of the transport company, make sure you're getting the ticket class you paid for. It's not uncommon for travellers to book a deluxe bus or AC train berth and arrive to find a bog-standard ordinary bus or a less comfortable sleeper seat.
- » Some tricksters pose as India Rail officials and insist you pay to have your e-ticket validated; ignore them.
- » Ignore taxi drivers outside airports who say they are prepaid taxi drivers; your prepaid taxi receipt will have the designated drivers' licence plate number printed on it.

Women & Solo Travellers

Women and solo travellers may encounter a few extra hurdles when travelling in India – from cost (for those travelling by themselves) to appropriate clothing (women). As with anywhere else, it pays to be prepared.

Women Travellers

Although Bollywood might suggest otherwise, India remains a largely conservative society. As such, female travellers should be aware that their behaviour and dress code are under scrutiny, particularly away from cities and towns popular with tourists.

Attention

- » Be prepared to be stared at; it's something you'll have to live with so don't allow it to get the better of you.
- » Refrain from returning male stares; this can be considered a come-on.
- » Dark glasses, MP3 players and books are useful for averting unwanted conversations.

Clothing

Avoiding culturally inappropriate clothing will help to make your travels stress-free.

- » Steer clear of sleeveless tops, shorts, miniskirts (ankle-length skirts are recommended) and anything else that's skimpy, see-through or tight-fitting.
- » Wearing Indian-style clothes makes a positive impression and can considerably deflect harassment.
- » Draping a dupatta (long scarf) over T-shirts is another good way to avoid unwanted stares – it's also handy if you visit a shrine that requires your head to be covered.
- » Wearing a *salwar kameez* (traditional dresslike tunic and trousers) will show your respect for local dress etiquette; it's also surprisingly cool in the hot weather.
- » A smart alternative is a kurta (long shirt) worn over jeans or trousers.
- » Avoid going out in public wearing a choli (sari blouse) or a sari petticoat (which some foreign women mistake for a skirt); it's like strutting around half-dressed.
- » Most Indian women wear long shorts and a T-shirt when swimming in public view; to avoid stares, wear

HANDY WEBSITES

You can read personal experiences proffered by fellow women travellers at www.journeywoman.com and www.wanderlustandlipstick.com.

a sarong from the beach to your hotel.

Health & Hygiene

- » Sanitary pads are widely available but tampons are usually restricted to pharmacies in big cities and some tourist towns (even then, the choice may be limited). Carry additional stocks for travel off the beaten track.
- » For gynaecological health issues, most women prefer to seek out a female doctor.
- » See p1194 for more information.

Sexual Harassment

Many female travellers have reported some form of sexual harassment while in India.

- » Most cases are reported in urban centres of North India and prominent tourist towns elsewhere, and have involved lewd comments, invasion of privacy and sometimes groping.
- » Other cases have included provocative gestures, jeering, getting 'accidentally' bumped into on the street and being followed.
- » Incidents are particularly common at exuberant (and crowded) special events such as the Holi festival.
- » Women travelling with a male partner are less likely to be hassled.
- » Mixed couples of Indian and non-Indian descent may get disapproving stares, even if neither individual actually lives in India.

Staying Safe

The following tips may help you on your travels:

- » Keep conversations with unknown men short – getting involved in an inane conversation with someone you barely know can be misinterpreted as a sign of sexual interest.
- » Questions and comments such as 'Do you have a boyfriend?' or 'You're very beautiful' are indicators that the conversation may be taking a steamy tangent.
- » Some women wear a pseudo wedding ring, or announce early on in the conversation that they're married or engaged (regardless of the reality).
- » If you feel that a guy is encroaching on your space, he probably is. A firm request to keep away usually does the trick, especially if your tone is loud and curt enough to draw the attention of passers-by.
- » The silent treatment can also be very effective.
- » Follow local women's cues and instead of shaking hands say namaste – the traditional, respectful Hindu greeting.
- » Avoid wearing expensive-looking jewellery.
- » Check the reputation of any teacher or therapist before going to a solo session (get recommendations from other travellers). Some women have reported being molested by masseurs and other therapists. If you feel uneasy at any time, leave.
- » Female filmgoers will probably feel more comfortable (and lessen the chances of harassment) going to the cinema with a companion.
- » At hotels keep your door locked, as staff (particularly at budget places) can knock and automatically walk in without waiting for your permission.
- » Try to arrive in towns before dark. Don't walk alone

at night and avoid wandering alone in isolated areas even during daylight.

Taxis & Public Transport

Being a woman has some advantages; women are able to queue-jump for buses and trains without consequence and on trains there are special ladies-only carriages.

- » Solo women should prearrange an airport pick-up from their hotel if their flight is scheduled to arrive after dark.
- » Delhi and some other cities have prepaid radio cab services such as Easycabs (see p102) – they're more expensive than the regular prepaid taxis, but promote themselves as being safe, with drivers who have been vetted as part of their recruitment.
- » If you do catch a regular prepaid taxi, make a point of writing down the car registration and driver's name – in front of the driver – and giving it to one of the airport police.
- » Avoid taking taxis alone late at night and never agree to have more than one man (the driver) in the car – ignore claims that this is 'just my brother' or 'for more protection'.
- » Solo women have reported less hassle by opting for the more expensive classes on trains, especially for overnight trips.
- » If you're travelling overnight in a three-tier carriage, try to get the uppermost berth, which will give you more privacy (and distance from potential gropers).
- » On public transport, don't hesitate to return any errant limbs, put an item of luggage between you and others, be vocal (attracting public attention, thus shaming the fellow), or simply find a new spot.

Solo Travellers

Travellers often move in roughly the same direction throughout India, so it's not unusual to see the same faces over and over again on your trip. Tourist hubs such as Goa, Rajasthan, Kerala, Manali, McLeod Ganj, Leh, Agra and Varanasi are good places to meet fellow travellers, swap stories, get up-to-the-minute travel tips and find others to travel with. You may also be able to find travel companions on Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree Travel Forum (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree).

Cost

The most significant issue facing solo travellers is cost.

- » Single-room rates at guest houses and hotels are sometimes not much lower than double rates.
- » Some midrange and top-end places don't even offer a single tariff.
- » Always try negotiating a lower rate for single occupancy.

Safety

Most solo travellers experience no major problems in India but, like anywhere else in the world, it's wise to stay on your toes in unfamiliar surroundings.

- » Some less honourable souls (locals and travellers alike) view lone tourists as an easy target for theft.
- » Single men wandering around isolated areas have been mugged, even during the day

Transport

- » You'll save money if you find others to share taxis and autorickshaws, as well as when hiring a car for longer trips.
- » Solo bus travellers may be able to get the 'co-pilot' (near the driver) seat on buses, which not only has a good view out front, but is also handy if you've got a big bag.

Directory

A-Z

Accommodation

Accommodation in India ranges from grungy backpacker hostels with concrete floors and cold 'bucket' showers to opulent palaces fit for a Maharaja. In this guide, we've listed reviews by author preference; standout options are indicated by .

Categories

As a general rule, budget (₹) covers everything from basic hostels and railway retiring rooms to simple guest-houses in traditional village homes. Midrange hotels (₹₹) tend to be modern-style concrete blocks that usually offer extras such as cable/satellite TV and air-conditioning (although some just have noisy 'air-coolers' that cool air by blowing it over cold water). Top-end places (₹₹₹) stretch from luxury five-star

chains to gorgeous heritage havelis.

Costs

Given that the cost of budget, midrange and top-end hotels varies so much across India, it would be misleading of us to provide a 'national' price strategy for each category. The best way to gauge accommodation costs is to go directly to the Fast Facts and the Sleeping sections of this book's regional chapters. Keep in mind that most establishments raise tariffs annually, so the prices may have risen by the time you read this.

Price Icons

The price indicators in this book refer to the cost of a double room, including private bathroom, unless otherwise noted. The table on p1161 is based on price indicators for Bihar, Tamil

Nadu and Rajasthan and gives an example of the difference in accommodation costs across India.

Reservations

» The majority of top-end and some midrange hotels require a deposit at the time of booking, which can usually be done with a credit card.

» Some midrange places may ask for a cheque or cash deposit into a bank account to secure a reservation. This is usually more hassle than it's worth.

» Some budget options won't take reservations as they don't know when people are going to check-out; call ahead to check.

» Other places will want a deposit at check-in – ask for a receipt and be wary of any request to sign a blank impression of your credit card. If the hotel insists, consider going to the nearest ATM and paying cash.

» Verify the check-out time when you check-in – some hotels have a fixed check-out time (usually 10am or noon), while others offer 24-hour check-out.

» Reservations by phone without a deposit are usually fine, but call to confirm the booking the day before you arrive.

Seasons

» Rates in this guide are full price in high season. High season usually coincides with the best weather for the area's sights and activities – normally summertime in the mountains (around June to October), and the cooler months in the plains (around October to mid-February).

» In areas popular with foreign tourists there's an additional peak period over Christmas and New Year; make reservations well in advance.

» At other times you may find significant discounts; if the hotel seems quiet, ask for one.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews by Lonely Planet authors, check out hotels.lonelyplanet.com/India. You'll find independent reviews, as well as recommendations on the best places to stay. Best of all, you can book online.

» Some hotels in places like Goa shut during the monsoon period.

» Many temple towns have additional peak seasons around major festivals and pilgrimages; for festival details see the Month by Month chapter and festivals sections of regional chapters.

Taxes & Service Charges

» State governments slap a variety of taxes on hotel accommodation (except at the cheaper hotels), and these are added to the cost of your room.

» Taxes vary from state to state and are detailed in the regional chapters.

» Many upmarket hotels also levy an additional 'service charge' (usually around 10%).

» Rates quoted in this book's regional chapters exclude taxes unless otherwise noted.

Budget & Midrange Hotels

Apart from some traditional wood or stone guesthouse in remote mountain areas, most budget and midrange hotels are modern-style concrete blocks. Some are charming, clean and good value, others less so.

» Room quality can vary considerably within a hotel so try to inspect a few rooms first; avoid carpeted rooms at cheaper hotels unless you like the smell of mouldy socks.

» Shared bathrooms (often with squat toilets) are usually only found at the cheapest lodgings.

GET TO KNOW YOUR BATHROOM

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

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

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

Many places use wall-mounted electric geysers (water heaters) that need to be switched on up to an hour before use. Note that the geyser's main switch can sometimes be located outside the bathroom.

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

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

» Most rooms have ceiling fans and better rooms have electric mosquito killers and/or window nets, though cheaper rooms may lack windows altogether.

» Bring your own sheet or sleeping-bag liner. Sheets and bedcovers at cheap hotels can be stained, well worn and in need of a wash.

» Sound pollution can be irksome (especially in urban hubs); pack good-quality earplugs and request a room that doesn't face a busy road.

» It's wise to keep your door locked, as some staff (particularly in budget accommodation) may knock and automatically walk in without awaiting your permission.

» Blackouts are common (especially during summer and the monsoon) so double-check that the hotel has a back-up generator if you're paying for electric 'extras' such as air-conditioners and TVs.

» Note that some hotels lock their doors at night. Members of staff might sleep in the lobby but waking them up can be a challenge. Let

SAMPLE ACCOMMODATION COSTS

CATEGORY	BIHAR	TAMIL NADU	RAJASTHAN
₹ budget	<₹800	<₹1000	<₹1000
₹ midrange	₹800-1500	₹1000-3000	₹1000-5000
₹ top end	>₹1500	>₹3000	>₹5000

the hotel know in advance if you'll be arriving or returning to your room late in the evening.

» Away from tourist areas, cheaper hotels may not take foreigners because they don't have the necessary foreigner-registration forms.

Camping

» There are few official camping sites in India, but campers can usually find hotels with gardens where they can camp for a nominal fee and use the bathroom facilities.

» Wild camping is often the only accommodation option on trekking routes.

» In mountain areas, you'll also find summer-only tented camps, with accommodation in semipermanent 'Swiss tents' with attached bathrooms.

Dormitory Accommodation

» A number of hotels have cheap dormitories, though these may be mixed and, in less touristy places, full of drunken drivers – not ideal conditions for women.

» More traveller-friendly dorms are found at the handful of hostels run by the YMCA, YWCA and Salvation Army as well as at HI-associated hostels.

Government Accommodation & Tourist Bungalows

» The Indian government maintains a network of

PRACTICALITIES

» **Newspapers & Magazines** Major English-language dailies include the *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Hindu*, *Statesman*, *Telegraph*, *Daily News & Analysis (DNA)* and *Economic Times*. Regional English-language and local-vernacular publications are found nationwide. Incisive current-affairs magazines include *Frontline*, *India Today*, *the Week*, *Teelka* and *Outlook*.

» **Radio** Government-controlled All India Radio (AIR), India's national broadcaster, has over 220 stations broadcasting local and international news. Private FM channels broadcast music, current affairs, talkback and more.

» **TV & Video** The national (government) TV broadcaster is Doordarshan. More people watch satellite and cable TV; English-language channels include BBC, CNN, Star World, HBO, and Discovery.

» **Weights & Measures** Officially India is metric. Terms you're likely to hear are: lakhs (one lakh = 100,000) and crores (one crore = 10 million).

guesthouses for travelling officials and public workers, known variously as rest houses, dak bungalows, circuit houses, PWD (Public Works Department) bungalows and forest rest houses.

» These places may accept travellers if no government employees need the rooms, but permission is sometimes required from local officials and you'll probably have to find the *chowkidar* (caretaker) to open the doors.

» 'Tourist bungalows' are run by state governments – rooms are usually midpriced (some with cheap dorms) and have varying standards of cleanliness and service.

» Some state governments also run chains of more expensive hotels, including some lovely heritage properties. Details are normally available through the state tourism office.

Homestays/B&Bs for Paying Guests

» These family-run guesthouses will appeal to those seeking a small-scale, uncommercial setting with home-cooked meals.

» Standards range from mud-and-stone huts with hole-in-the-floor toilets to comfortable middle-class homes.

» In places like Ladakh, homestays are increasingly the way to go but standards are fairly simple.

» Be aware that some hotels market themselves as 'homestays' but are run like hotels with little (or no) interaction with the family.

» Contact the local tourist office for a full list of participating families, or see entries in the regional chapters.

CARBON-MONOXIDE POISONING

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

Railway Retiring Rooms

- » Most large train stations have basic rooms for travellers holding an ongoing train ticket or Indrail Pass. Some are grim, others are surprisingly pleasant, but suffer from the noise of passengers and trains.
- » They're useful for early-morning train departures and there's usually a choice of dormitories or private rooms (24-hour checkout).

Temples & Pilgrims' Rest houses

- » Accommodation is available at some ashrams (spiritual retreats), gurdwaras (Sikh temples) and *dharamsalas* (pilgrims' guesthouses) for a donation
- » These places have been established for genuine pilgrims so please exercise judgement about the appropriateness of staying (some regional chapters have further details).
- » Always abide by any protocols.

Top-End & Heritage Hotels

- » India has plenty of top-end properties, from modern five-star chain hotels to glorious palaces and unique heritage abodes.
- » Most top-end hotels have rupee rates for Indian guests and US dollar rates for foreigners, including Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).
- » Officially, you're supposed to pay the dollar rates in foreign currency or by credit card, but many places will accept rupees adding up to the dollar rate (verify this when checking in).
- » The Government of India tourism website, [Incredible India](http://www.incredibleindia.org) (www.incredibleindia.org), has a useful list of palaces, forts and other erstwhile royal retreats that accept paying guests – click on the 'Royal Retreats' heading.

Activities

India covers every terrain imaginable, from sun-baked deserts and moist rainforests to snow-dusted mountains and plunging ravines. With all this to play with, the opportunities for outdoor activities are endless. Choose from trekking, paragliding, mountaineering, jungle safaris, scuba diving, surfing and elephant rides as well as yoga, meditation and much, much more. For details on regional activities, courses, equipment hire, clubs and companies, see this book's Plan Your Trip and If You Like... chapters.

Business Hours

- » Official business hours are from 9.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday but many offices open later and close earlier.
- » Most offices have an official lunch hour from around 1pm.
- » Bank opening hours vary from town to town so check locally; foreign-exchange

offices may open longer and operate daily.

- » Some larger post offices have a full day on Saturday and a half-day on Sunday.
- » Curfews apply in some areas, notably Kashmir and the Northeast States.
- » All timings vary regionally; exceptions are noted in the regional chapters.

Courses

You can pursue all sorts of courses in India, from yoga and meditation to cooking and Bollywood dancing. See the Courses section of the regional chapters for details.

Language Courses

The following places listed offer language courses, some requiring a minimum time commitment.

Delhi Basic Hindi classes at Delhi's Central Hindi Directorate (p78).

Himachal Pradesh Long and short courses in Tibetan at McLeod Ganj (p321).

Mumbai (Bombay) Beginners' courses in Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (p731).

STANDARD HOURS

We've only listed business hours where they differ from the following standards.

BUSINESS	OPENING HOURS
Airline office	9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat
Bank	9.30am or 10am-2pm or 4pm Mon-Fri, to noon or 1pm Sat
Government office	9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, closed alternative Sat (usually 2nd and 4th)
Post office	9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat
Museum	10am-5pm Tue-Sun
Restaurant	lunch noon-2.30pm or 3pm, dinner 7-10pm or 11pm
Sights	10am-5pm
Shop	10am-7pm, some closed Sun

Tamil Nadu Tamil courses in Chennai (Madras; p991).

Uttar Pradesh Various places in Varanasi offer Hindi courses (p389).

Uttarakhand Hindi courses in Mussoorie (p409) and Rishikesh (p421).

West Bengal Tibetan courses in Darjeeling (p493).

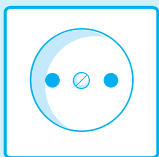
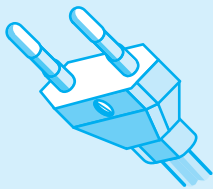
Customs Regulations

» Technically you're supposed to declare any amount of cash/travellers cheques over US\$5000/10,000 on arrival.

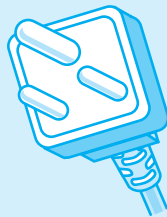
» Indian rupees shouldn't be taken out of India; however, this is rarely policed.

» Officials very occasionally ask tourists to enter expensive items such as video cameras and laptop computers on a 'Tourist Baggage Re-export' form to ensure they're taken out of India at the time of departure.

Electricity



230v/50hz



230v/50hz

Embassies & Consulates

Most foreign diplomatic missions are based in Delhi, but several nations operate consulates in other Indian cities (see websites, where provided, in the following Delhi addresses). Many missions have certain timings for visa applications, usually mornings; phone for details. The following are just some of the many foreign missions found in India.

Australia Chennai (☎044-43913200; 512 Alpha Wing, Raheja Towers, 177 Anna Salai); Delhi (☎011-41399900; www.india.highcommission.gov.au; 1/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-61167100; 36 Maker Chambers VI, 220 Nariman Point)

Bangladesh Delhi (☎011-24121394; www.bhcdelhi.org; EP39 Dr Radakrishnan Marg, Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (☎033-40127500; 9 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Sarani)

Bhutan (☎011-26889230; www.bhutan.gov.bt; Chandragupta Marg, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

Canada Chennai (☎044-28330888; 18, 3rd fl YAFA

Tower, Khader Nawaz Khan Rd); Delhi (☎011-41782000; www.canadainternational.gc.ca/india-inde; 7/8 Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-67494444; 6th fl, Fort House, 221 Dr DN Rd)

France Delhi (☎011-24196100; http://ambafrance-in.org/; 2/50E Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-56694000; Wockhardt Towers, East Wing, 5th fl, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra East)

Germany Chennai (☎044-24301600; 9 Boat Club Rd, RA Puram); Delhi (☎011-44199199; www.new-delhi.diplo.de; 6/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (☎033-24791141; 1 Hastings Park Rd, Alipore); Mumbai (☎022-22832422; 10th fl, Hoechst House, Nariman Point)

Ireland Delhi (☎011-24626733; www.irelandindia.com; 203 Jor Bagh)

Israel Delhi (☎011-30414500; http://delhi.mfa.gov.il; 3 Aurangzeb Rd); Mumbai (☎022-22822822; Earnest House, 16th fl, NCPA Marg, 194 Nariman Point)

Malaysia Chennai (☎044-28226888; 44 Tank Bund Rd, Nungambakkam); Delhi (☎011-2611291/97; www.kln.gov.my/web/ind_new-delhi/home; 50M Satya Marg, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-26455751/2; 4B, 4th fl, Notan Plaza, Turner Rd, Bandra West)

Maldives Delhi (☎011-41435701; www.maldiveshigh.com.in/; B2 Anand Niketan)

Myanmar Delhi (☎011-24678822; 3/50F Nyaya Marg); Kolkata (☎033-24851658; 57K Ballygunge Circular Rd)

Nepal Delhi (☎011-23327361; Mandi House, Barakhamba Rd); Kolkata (☎033-24561224; 1 National Library Ave, Alipore)

Netherlands Chennai (☎044-43535381; 76 Venkata Krishnan Rd, Mandaveli); Delhi (☎011-24197600; http://india.nlembassy.org/; 6/50F Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-22194200; Forbes Bldg, Charanjit Rai Marg, Fort)

New Zealand Chennai (☎044-28112472; Rane Engine Valves Ltd, 132 Cathedral Rd); Delhi (☎011-46883170; www.nzembassy.com/india; Sir Edmund Hillary Marg, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-66151155; 1007, 10th fl, Dalamal House, Nariman Point)

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

Singapore Chennai (☎044-28158207; 17-A North Boag Rd, T Nagar); Delhi (☎011-46000915; www.mfa.gov.sg/newdelhi; E6 Chandragupta Marg, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-22043205; 152, Maker Chambers IV, 14th fl, 222 Jammal Bajaj Rd, Nariman Point)

Sri Lanka Chennai (☎044-24987896; 196 TTK Rd, Alwarpet); Delhi (☎011-23010201; www.newdelhi.mission.gov.lk; 27 Kautilya Marg, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-22045861; Mulla House, 34 Homi Modi St, Fort)

Switzerland Delhi (☎011-26878372; www.eda.admin.ch; Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri); Mumbai (☎022-22884563-65; 10th fl, 102 Maker Chambers IV, 222 Jammal Bajaj Marg, Nariman Point)

Thailand Chennai (☎044-42300730; 21/22 Arunachalam Rd, Kotturpuram); Delhi (☎011-26118103-4; www.thaiemb.org.in; 56N Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (☎033-24407836; 18B Mandeville Gardens, Ballygunge); Mumbai (☎022-22823535; 1st fl, Dalamal House, Jammal Bajaj Marg, Nariman Point)

UK Chennai (☎044-42192151; 20 Anderson Rd); Delhi (☎011-24192100; http://ukindia.fco.gov.uk; Shantipath, Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (☎033-22885172-6; 1A Ho Chi Minh Sarani); Mumbai (☎022-66502222; Naman Chambers, C/32 G Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra East)

USA Chennai (☎044-28574000; Gemini Circle, 220 Anna Salai); Delhi (☎011-24198000; http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/; Shantipath,

PROHIBITED EXPORTS

To protect India's cultural heritage, the export of certain antiques is prohibited. Many 'old' objects are fine, but the difficulties begin if something is verifiably more than 100 years old. Reputable antique dealers know the laws and can make arrangements for an export-clearance certificate for any old items that you're permitted to export. If in doubt, contact Delhi's **Archaeological Survey of India** (☎011-23010822; www.asi.nic.in; Janpath; ☎9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) next to the National Museum. The rules may seem stringent but the loss of artworks and traditional buildings in places such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan, due to the international trade in antiques and carved windows and doorframes, has been alarming. Look for quality reproductions instead.

The Indian Wildlife Protection Act bans any form of wildlife trade. Don't buy any products that endanger threatened species and habitats – doing so can result in heavy fines and even imprisonment. This includes ivory, shahtoosh shawls (made from the down of chirus, rare Tibetan antelopes), and anything made from the fur, skin, horns or shell of any endangered species. Products made from certain rare plants are also banned.

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

Chanakyapuri); Kolkata (☎033-39842400; 5/1 Ho Chi Minh Sarani); Mumbai (☎022-23633611; Lincoln House, 78 Bhulabhai Desai Rd, Breach Candy)

Gay & Lesbian Travellers

In July 2009 Delhi's High Court overturned India's 148-year-old antihomosexuality law. Prior to this landmark ruling, homosexual relations for men were illegal, with penalties for transgression theoretically up to life imprisonment (there's no law against lesbian sexual relations).

However, the country remains largely conservative and public displays of affection are generally frowned upon for heterosexual

couples as well as gay and lesbian couples.

There are low-key gay scenes in a number of cities including Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru (Bangalore) and Chandigarh (Gay Pride marches have been held at some of these centres).

Publications

Time Out Delhi (www.timeoutdelhi.net) Fortnightly listing of gay events in Delhi.

Time Out Mumbai (www.timeoutmumbai.net) Gay events in Mumbai.

Websites

Delhi Frontrunners & Walkers (www.delhifrontrunners.org) Weekly running and walking club for Delhi's LGBT crowd.

Gay Bombay (www.gaybombay.org) Lists gay events

as well as offering support and advice.

Gay Delhi (gaydelhi-subscribe@yahoo.com) Send a blank email to join and tap into the capital's gay scene.

Indian Dost (www.indian.dost.com/gay.php) News and information including contact groups in India.

Indja Pink (www.indjapink.co.in) India's first 'gay travel boutique' founded by a well-known Indian fashion designer.

A number of Indian cities have support groups, including the following:

Bengaluru

Good As You (www.good.asyou.in) Support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. It's part of the NGO **Swabhava**, which works for the LGBT community and operates the **Sahaya Helpline** (☎080-22230959).

Sangama (www.sangama.org) Deals with crisis intervention and provides a community outreach service for gay and bisexual men and women, transgenders and *hijras* (transvestites and eunuchs).

Chennai

Shakti Center (☎044-45587071; www.shakticenter.org) A collective of LGBT activists and artists, which holds workshops, exhibitions and other activities.

Delhi

Nigah (http://nigahdelhi.blogspot.com) Autonomous collective that holds monthly queer events and organises the annual **Nigah Queer-fest** (www.thequeerfest.com).

Kolkata

Counsel Club (counsel.club93@hotmail.com) Support group for gays, lesbians, transgenders and bisexuals, and arranges monthly meet-ings. The affiliated **Palm**

Avenue Integration Society offers health advice.

Sappho (www.saphhokolkata.org) Operates as a support group for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

Mumbai

Humsafar Trust (☎022-26673800; www.humsafar.org) Runs gay and transgender support groups and advocacy programs. The drop-in centre in Santa Cruz East hosts workshops and has a library – pick up a copy of the pioneering gay-and-lesbian magazine *Bombay Dost*. It's also one of the venues for 'Sunday High', a monthly screening of queer-interest films.

Insurance

» Comprehensive travel insurance to cover theft, loss and medical problems (as well as air evacuation) is strongly recommended; also see the Health chapter.

» Some policies specifically exclude potentially dangerous activities such as scuba diving, skiing, motorcycling, paragliding and even trekking: read the fine print.

» Some trekking agents may only accept customers who have cover for emergency helicopter evacuation.

» If you plan to hire a motorcycle in India, make sure the rental policy includes at

least third-party insurance; see p1184.

» Check in advance whether your insurance policy will pay doctors and hospitals directly or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditure (keep all documentation for your claim).

» It's crucial to get a police report in India if you've had anything stolen; insurance companies may refuse to reimburse you without one.

» Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you're already on the road.

Internet Access

Internet cafes are widespread and connections are usually reasonably fast, except in more remote areas. Wireless (wi-fi) access is available in an increasing number of hotels and some coffee shops in larger cities. In this book, hotels offering internet access are marked by @.

Practicalities

» Internet charges vary regionally (see regional chapters); charges fall anywhere between ₹15 and ₹90 per hour and often with a 15- to 30-minute minimum.

» Power cuts are not uncommon; avoid losing your email

LEGAL AGE

» **Age of Majority** 18

» **Buying Alcohol** 18 to 25 depending on state (25 in Delhi)

» **Driving** 18

» **Sexual Consent** 16 heterosexual sex, 18 homosexual sex

» **Voting** 18

Travellers should note that they can be prosecuted under the law of their home country regarding age of consent, even when abroad.

by writing and saving messages in a text application before pasting them into your browser.

» Bandwidth load tends to be lowest in the early morning and early afternoon.

» Some internet cafes may ask to see your passport; carrying photocopies of the relevant pages (information and visa) saves you having to dig your passport out each time.

» See p15 for useful India-specific web resources.

Security

» Be wary of sending sensitive financial information from internet cafes; some places are able to use keystroke-capturing technology to access passwords and emails.

» Avoid sending credit-card details or other personal data over a wireless connection; using online banking on any nonsecure system is generally unwise.

Laptops

» Many internet cafes can supply laptop users with internet access over a LAN Ethernet cable; alternatively join an international roaming service with an Indian dial-up number, or take out an account with a local Internet Service Provider (ISP).

» Make sure your modem is compatible with the telephone and dial-up system in India (an external global modem may be necessary).

» Companies including Reliance, Airtel and Vodafone offer 3G Data Cards, which can be plugged into the USB port of your laptop and will allow you to access the internet.

- Tariffs start from ₹800 per month for 3GB up to ₹1500 per month for 15GB.
- Make sure you check whether the area you're travelling to is covered by your service provider.

» Consider purchasing a fuse-protected universal AC adaptor to protect your circuit board from power surges.

» Plug adaptors are widely available throughout India, but bring spare plug fuses from home.

Legal Matters

If you're in a sticky legal situation, contact your embassy as quickly as possible. However, be aware that all your embassy may be able to do is monitor your treatment in custody and arrange a lawyer. In the Indian justice system, the burden of proof can often be on the accused and stints in prison before trial are not unheard of.

Antisocial Behaviour

» Smoking in public places is illegal throughout India but this is very rarely enforced; if caught you'll be fined ₹200.

» People can smoke inside their homes and in most open spaces such as streets (heed any signs stating otherwise).

» A number of Indian cities have banned spitting and littering, but this is also variably enforced.

Drugs

» Indian law does not distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' drugs; possession of any illegal drug is regarded as a criminal offence.

» If convicted, the *minimum* sentence is 10 years, with very little chance of remission or parole.

» Cases can take months, even several years, to appear before a court while the accused may have to wait in prison. There's also usually a hefty monetary fine on top of any custodial sentence.

» Be aware that travellers have been targeted in sting operations in Manali and other backpacker enclaves.

» Marijuana grows wild in various parts of India, but consuming it is still an offence, except in towns where bhang is legally sold for religious rituals.

» Police are getting particularly tough on foreigners who use drugs, so you should take this risk very seriously.

Police

» You should always carry your passport; police are entitled to ask you for identification at any time.

» If you're arrested for an alleged offence and asked for a bribe, the prevailing wisdom is to pay it as the alternative may be a trumped-up charge; there are no 'rules' guiding how much you should pay.

» Corruption is rife so the less you have to do with local police the better; try to avoid all potentially risky situations.

WARNING: BHANG LASSI

Although it's rarely printed in menus, some restaurants in popular tourist centres will clandestinely whip up bhang lassi, a yoghurt and iced-water beverage laced with cannabis (occasionally other narcotics). Commonly dubbed 'special lassi', this often potent concoction can cause varying degrees of ecstasy, drawn-out delirium, hallucination, nausea and paranoia. Some travellers have been ill for several days, robbed, or hurt in accidents, after drinking this fickle brew. A few towns have legal (controlled) bhang outlets such as the Bhang Shop in Jaisalmer (p189).

Maps

Maps available inside India are of variable quality. These are some of the better map series:

Eicher (<http://maps.eicherworld.com/>)

Nelles (www.nelles-verlag.de)

Nest & Wings (www.nestwings.com)

Survey of India (www.surveyofindia.gov.in) Decent city, state and country maps but some titles are restricted for security reasons.

All of these maps are available at good bookshops, or you can buy them online from Delhi's **India Map Store** (www.indiamapstore.com). Throughout India, most state-government tourist offices stock basic local maps.

Money

The Indian rupee (₹) is divided into 100 paise (p), but paise coins are becoming increasingly rare. Coins come in denominations of ₹1, ₹2 and ₹5; notes come in ₹5, ₹10, ₹20, ₹50, ₹100, ₹500 and ₹1000 (this last is handy for paying large bills but can pose problems when getting change for small services). The Indian rupee is linked to a basket of currencies and has been subject to fluctuations in recent years; see p15 for exchange rates.

ATMs

- » ATMs are found in most urban centres.
- » Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus are the most commonly accepted cards.
- » The ATMs listed in this book's regional chapters accept foreign cards (but not necessarily all types of cards).
- » Banks in India that accept foreign cards include Citibank, HDFC, ICICI, HSBC and the State Bank of India.
- » Before your trip, check

whether your card can reliably access banking networks in India and ask for details of charges.

- » Notify your bank that you'll be using your card in India (provide dates) to avoid having your card blocked; take along your bank's phone number just in case.
- » Always keep the emergency lost-and-stolen numbers for your credit cards in a safe place, separate from your cards, and report any loss or theft immediately.
- » Away from major towns, always carry cash or travellers cheques as back-up.

Black Market

» Black-market money-changers exist but legal moneychangers are so common that there's no reason to use them, except perhaps to change small amounts of cash at land border crossings. If someone approaches you on the street and offers to change money, you're probably being set up for a scam.

Cash

- » Major currencies such as US dollars, pounds sterling and euros are easy to change throughout India, although some bank branches insist on travellers cheques only.
- » Some banks also accept other currencies such as Australian and Canadian dollars, and Swiss francs.
- » Private moneychangers deal with a wider range of currencies, but Pakistani, Nepali and Bangladeshi currency can be harder to change away from the border.
- » When travelling off the beaten track, always carry an adequate stock of rupees.
- » Whenever changing money, check every note. Don't accept any filthy, ripped or disintegrating notes, as these may be difficult to use.
- » It can be tough getting change in India so keep a stock of smaller currency;

₹10, ₹20 and ₹50 notes are helpful.

» Officially you cannot take rupees out of India, but this is laxly enforced. You can change any leftover rupees back into foreign currency, most easily at the airport (some banks have a ₹1000 minimum). You may have to present encashment certificates or credit-card/ATM receipts, and show your passport and airline ticket.

Credit Cards

- » Credit cards are accepted at a growing number of shops, upmarket restaurants, and midrange and top-end hotels, and they can usually be used to pay for flights and train tickets.
- » Cash advances on major credit cards are also possible at some banks.
- » MasterCard and Visa are the most widely accepted cards.

Encashment Certificates

- » Indian law states that all foreign currency must be changed at official money-changers or banks.
- » For every (official) foreign-exchange transaction, you'll receive an encashment certificate (receipt), which will allow you to change rupees back into foreign currency when departing India.
- » Encashment certificates should cover the amount of rupees you intend to change back to foreign currency.
- » Printed receipts from ATMs are also accepted as evidence of an international transaction at most banks.

International Transfers

- » If you run out of money, someone back home can wire you cash via money-changers affiliated with **Moneygram** (www.moneygram.com) or **Western Union** (www.westernunion.com). A fee is added to the transaction.

» To collect cash, bring your passport and the name and reference number of the person who sent the funds.

Moneychangers

» Private moneychangers are usually open for longer hours than banks, and are found almost everywhere (many also double as internet cafes and travel agents).

» Upmarket hotels may also change money, but their rates are usually not as competitive.

Tippling, Baksheesh & Bargaining

» In tourist restaurants or hotels, a service fee is usually already added to your bill and tipping is optional. Elsewhere, a tip is appreciated.

» Hotel bellboys and train/airport porters appreciate anything around ₹50; hotel staff should be given similar gratuities for services above and beyond the call of duty.

» It's not mandatory to tip taxi or rickshaw drivers, but it's good to tip drivers who are honest about the fare.

» If you hire a car with driver for more than a couple of days, a tip is recommended for good service – details on p1181.

» Baksheesh can loosely be defined as a 'tip'; it covers everything from alms for beggars to bribes.

» Many Indians implore tourists not to hand out sweets, pens or money to children, as it encourages them to beg. To make a lasting difference, donate to a reputable school or charitable organisation (see p39).

» Except in fixed-price shops (such as government emporiums and fair-trade cooperatives), bargaining is the norm.

Travellers Cheques

» All major brands are accepted, but some banks may only accept cheques from American Express (Amex) and Thomas Cook.

» Pounds sterling and US dollars are the safest currencies, especially in smaller towns.

» Keep a record of the cheques' serial numbers separate from your cheques, along with the proof-of-purchase slips, encashment vouchers and photocopied passport details. If you lose your cheques, contact the Amex or Thomas Cook office in Delhi.

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

Photography

For useful tips and techniques on travel photography, read Lonely Planet's guide to *Travel Photography*.

Digital

» Memory cards for digital cameras are available from photographic shops in most large cities and towns. However, the quality of memory cards is variable – some don't carry the advertised amount of data.

» Expect to pay upwards of ₹500 for a 1GB card.

» To be safe, regularly back up your memory card to CD; internet cafes may offer this service for ₹60 to ₹120 per disk.

» Some photographic shops make prints from digital photographs for roughly the standard print-and-process charge.

Restrictions

» India is touchy about anyone taking photographs of military installations – this can include train stations,

bridges, airports, military sites and sensitive border regions.

» Photography from the air is officially prohibited, although airlines rarely enforce this.

» Many places of worship – such as monasteries, temples and mosques – also prohibit photography. Taking photos inside a shrine, at a funeral, at a religious ceremony or of people publicly bathing (including rivers) can also be offensive – ask first.

» Flash photography may be prohibited in certain areas of a shrine, or may not be permitted at all.

» Exercise sensitivity when taking photos of people, especially women, who may find it offensive – obtain permission in advance.

Post

India has the biggest postal network on earth, with over 155,500 post offices. Mail and poste-restante services are generally good, although the speed of delivery will depend on the efficiency of any given office. Airmail is faster and more reliable than sea mail, although it's best to use courier services (such as DHL) to send and receive items of value – expect to pay around ₹3000 per kilogram to Europe, Australia or the USA. Private couriers are often cheaper, but goods may be repacked into large packages to cut costs and things sometimes go missing.

Receiving Mail

» To claim mail you'll need to show your passport.

» Ask senders to address letters to you with your surname in capital letters and underlined, followed by poste restante, GPO (main post office), and the city or town in question.

» Many 'lost' letters are simply misfiled under given/first

names, so check under both your names and ask senders to provide a return address.

- » Letters sent via poste restante are generally held for around one to two months before being returned.
- » It's best to have any parcels sent to you by registered post.

Sending Mail LETTERS

- » Posting letters/aerogrammes to anywhere overseas costs ₹20/15.
- » International postcards cost around ₹7.
- » For postcards, stick on the stamps *before* writing on them, as post offices can give you as many as four stamps per card.
- » Sending a letter overseas by registered post costs an extra ₹15.

PARCELS

- » Posting parcels can either be relatively straightforward or involve multiple counters and lots of queuing; get to the post office in the morning.
- » Prices depend on weight (including packing material).
- » A small package (unregistered) costs ₹40 (up to 100g) to any country and ₹30 per additional 100g (up to a maximum of 4000g; different charges apply for higher weights).
- » Parcel post has a maximum of 20kg to 30kg depending on the destination.
- » Airmail takes one to three weeks, sea mail two to four months and Surface Air-Lifted (SAL) – a curious hybrid where parcels travel by both air and sea – around one month.
- » Express mail service (EMS; delivery within three days) costs around 30% more than the normal airmail price.
- » Parcels must be packed up in white linen and the seams sealed with wax – local tailors offer this service if the post office doesn't.

» Customs declaration forms, available from the post office, must be stitched or pasted to the parcel. No duty is payable by the recipient for gifts under the value of ₹1000.

- » Carry a permanent marker to write on the parcel any information requested by the desk.
- » Books or printed matter can go by international book post for ₹350 (maximum 5kg), but the package must be wrapped with a hole that reveals the contents for inspection by customs – tailors can do this in such a way that nothing falls out.
- » **India Post** (www.indiapost.gov.in) has an online calculator for domestic and international postal tariffs.

Public Holidays

There are officially three national public holidays. Every state celebrates its own official holidays, which cover bank holidays for government workers as well as major religious festivals. Most businesses (offices, shops etc) and tourist sites close on public holidays, but transport is usually unaffected. It's wise to make transport and hotel reservations well in advance if you intend visiting during major festivals.

Public Holidays

- Republic Day** 26 January
- Independence Day** 15 August
- Gandhi Jayanti** 2 October

Major Religious Festivals

- Mahavir Jayanti** (Jain) February
- Holi** (Hindu) March
- Easter** (Christian) March/April
- Buddha Jayanti** (Buddhist) April/May
- Eid al-Fitr** (Muslim) August/September
- Dussehra** (Hindu) October

Diwali (Hindu) October/November

Nanak Jayanti (Sikh) November

Christmas (Christian) 25 December

Safe Travel

Travellers to India's major cities may fall prey to petty and opportunistic crime but most problems can be avoided with a bit of common sense and an appropriate amount of caution; see p1156 for more information. Women and solo travellers should read p1158. Also have a look at the India branch of Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree Travel Forum** (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree), where travellers often post timely warnings about problems they've encountered on the road. Always check your government's travel advisory warnings.

Rebel Violence

India has a number of (sometimes armed) dissident groups championing various causes, who have employed the same tried and tested techniques of rebel groups everywhere: assassinations and bomb attacks on government infrastructure, public transport, religious centres, tourist sites and markets. For further information read p1081.

- » Certain areas are particularly prone to insurgent violence – specifically Kashmir, the Northeast States, some remote tribal regions, Bihar and, less frequently, parts of West Bengal.
- » Curfews and strikes can close the roads (as well as banks, shops etc) for days on end in sensitive regions like Kashmir.
- » International terrorism is as much of a risk in Europe or the USA, so this is no reason not to go to India, but it makes sense to check the local security situation care-

fully before travelling (especially in high-risk areas).

Telephone

- » There are few payphones in India (apart from in airports), but private PCO/STD/ISD call booths do the same job, offering inexpensive local, interstate and international calls at lower prices than calls made from hotel rooms.
- » These booths are found around the country. A digital meter displays how much the call is costing and usually provides a printed receipt when the call is finished.
- » Costs vary depending on the operator and destination but can be from ₹1 per minute for local calls and between ₹5 and ₹10 for international calls.
- » Some booths also offer a 'call-back' service – you ring home, provide the phone number of the booth and wait for people at home to call you back, for a fee of around ₹10 on top of the cost of the preliminary call.
- » Getting a line can be difficult in remote country and mountain areas – an engaged signal may just mean that the exchange is overloaded, so keep trying.
- » Useful online resources include the **Yellow Pages**

(www.indiayellowpages.com) and **Justdial** (www.justdial.com).

Mobile Phones

- » Indian mobile phone numbers usually have 10 digits, typically beginning with 9.
- » There's roaming coverage for international GSM phones in most cities and large towns.
- » To avoid expensive roaming costs (often highest for incoming calls), get hooked up to the local mobile-phone network.
- » Mobiles bought in some countries may be locked to a particular network; you'll have to get the phone unlocked, or buy a local phone (available from ₹2000) to use an Indian SIM card.

GETTING CONNECTED

- » Getting connected is inexpensive but increasingly complicated, owing to security concerns, and involves a lot of paperwork.
- » Foreigners must supply between one and five passport photos, their passport, and photocopies of their passport identity and visa pages
- » You must also supply a residential address, which can be the address of the hotel where you're staying (ask the hotel to write a letter confirming this).
- » Some phone companies send representatives to the

listed address, or at the very least call to verify that you are actually staying there.

- » Some travellers have reported their SIM card being suspended once the phone company realised that they had moved on from the hotel where they registered their phone. Others have been luckier and used the same SIM card throughout their travels.
- » Another option is to get a friendly local to register the phone using their local ID.
- » Prepaid mobile-phone kits (SIM card and phone number, plus an allocation of calls) are available in most Indian towns from around ₹200 from a phone shop or local PCO/STD/ISD booth, internet cafe or grocery store.
- » You must then purchase new credits on that network, sold as scratch cards in shops and call centres.
- » Credit must usually be used within a set time limit and costs vary with the amount of credit on the card.
- » The amount you pay for a credit top-up is not the amount you get on your phone – state taxes and service charges come off first.
- » For some networks, recharge cards are being replaced by direct credit: you pay the vendor and the credit is deposited straight to your phone. Ask which system is in use before you buy.

CHARGES

- » Calls made within the state or city in which you bought the SIM card are cheap – ₹1 per minute – and you can call internationally for less than ₹10 per minute.
- » SMS messaging is even cheaper – usually, the more credit you have on your phone, the cheaper the call rate.
- » The most popular (and reliable) companies include Airtel, Vodaphone and BSNL.

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

The following government websites offer travel advice and information on current hot spots.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs

(www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (www.fco.gov.uk/en)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs

(www.voyage.gc.ca)

German Foreign Office (www.auswaeriges-amt.de)

Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mofa.go.jp)

Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

(www.government.nl/Subjects/Advice_to_travellers)

Switzerland (www.eda.admin.ch)

US State Department (<http://travel.state.gov>)

- » Most SIM cards are state-specific; they can be used in other states, but you pay for calls at roaming rates and you'll be charged for incoming as well as outgoing calls.
- » If you buy a SIM card in Delhi, calls to anywhere outside Delhi will be around ₹1.50 per minute, while the charge to receive a call from anywhere in India (outside of Delhi) is ₹1 per minute.
- » Unreliable signals and problems with international texting (messages or replies being delayed or failing to get through) are not uncommon.
- » As the mobile-phone industry continues to evolve, mobile rates, suppliers and coverage are all likely to develop during the life of this book.

JAMMU & KASHMIR AND ASSAM

- » Due to ongoing terrorist threats, mobile phone use in Jammu & Kashmir, as well as Assam, is more strictly controlled.
- » Roaming on foreign mobiles won't work here, nor will pay-as-you-go SIM cards purchased elsewhere in India (post-paid ones will, if you're an Indian resident).
- » To purchase a SIM card you'll need a photocopy of your passport and visa, four or five passport photos and a reference from a local who has known you for at least one month.
- » You may be able to tip a local to apply for a SIM in their name and sell it on to you – although they will need all the photos and ID documents too.
- » An additional stumbling block is that your ID is supposed to provide proof of your father's name – if this detail isn't in your passport (as is the case for many Western nationals) you might not get the SIM at all.
- » During times of tension you will not be able to send or receive SMS text messages.

Phone Codes

- » Calling India from abroad: dial your country's international access code, then 91 (India's country code), then the area code (without the initial zero), then the local number.
- » Calling internationally from India: dial 00 (the international access code), then the country code of the country you're calling, then the area code (without the initial zero if there is one) and the local number.
- » Phone numbers have an area code followed by up to eight digits.
- » Toll-free numbers begin with 1800.
- » The government is slowly trying to bring all numbers in India onto the same system, so area codes may change and new digits may be added to numbers with limited warning.
- » A Home Country Direct service, which gives you access to the international operator in your home country, exists for the US 000 117 and the UK 000 4417.
- » To access an international operator elsewhere dial 000 127. The operator can place a call to anywhere in the world and allow you to make collect calls.

Time

India uses the 12-hour clock and the local standard time is known as Indian Standard Time (IST). IST is 5½ hours ahead of GMT/UTC. The floating half-hour was added to maximise daylight hours over such a vast country.

Toilets

- » Public toilets are most easily found in major cities and tourist sites; the cleanest (usually with sit-down and squat choices) are usually at modern restaurants, shopping complexes and cinemas.

- » Beyond urban centres, toilets are of the squat variety and locals may use the 'hand-and-water' technique, which involves cleaning one's bottom with a small jug of water and the left hand. It's always a good idea to carry your own toilet paper, just in case.

Tourist Information

In addition to the Government of India tourist offices (also known as 'India Tourism'), each state maintains its own network of tourist offices. These vary in their efficiency and usefulness – some are run by enthusiastic souls who go out of their way to help, others are little more than a means of drumming up business for State Tourism Development Corporation tours. Most of the tourist offices have free brochures and often a free (or inexpensive) local map.

The first stop for information should be the tourism website of the Government of India, [Incredible India](http://www.incredibleindia.org) (www.incredibleindia.org); for details of its regional offices around India, click on the 'Help Desk' tab at the top of the homepage.

See regional chapters for contact details of relevant tourist offices.

CITY	NOON IN DELHI
Beijing	2.30pm
Dhaka	12.30pm
Islamabad	11.30am
Kathmandu	12.15pm
London	6.30am
New York	1.30am
San Francisco	10.30pm
Sydney	5.30pm
Tokyo	3.30pm

Travel Permits

» Access to certain parts of India – particularly disputed border areas – is controlled by an often-complicated permit system.

» A permit known as an Inner-Line Permit (ILP) is required to visit certain parts of Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim that lie close to the disputed border with China/Tibet.

» Obtaining the ILP is basically a formality, but travel agents must apply on your behalf for certain areas, including many trekking routes passing close to the border.

» ILPs are issued by regional magistrates and district commissioners, either directly to travellers (for free) or through travel agents (for a fee). Refer to the Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Andaman Islands sections for further information.

» Note that entering parts of the Northeast States is much more complex – for comprehensive details read p553.

» We recommend that you double-check with tourism officials to see if permit requirements have undergone any recent changes before you head out to these areas.

Travellers with Disabilities

India's crowded public transport, crush of humanity and variable infrastructure can test even the hardest-abled traveller. If you have a physical disability or you are vision impaired, these can pose even more of a challenge. If your mobility is considerably restricted, you may like to ease the stress by travelling with an able-bodied companion.

Accommodation Wheelchair-friendly hotels are almost exclusively top end.

Make pretrip enquiries and book ground-floor rooms at hotels that lack adequate facilities.

Accessibility Some restaurants and offices have ramps but most tend to have at least one step. Staircases are often steep; lifts frequently stop at mezzanines between floors.

Footpaths Where pavements exist, they can be riddled with holes, littered with debris and packed with pedestrians. If using crutches, bring along spare rubber caps.

Transport Hiring a car with driver will make moving around a lot easier (see p1181); if you use a wheelchair, make sure the car-hire company can provide an appropriate vehicle to carry it.

For further advice pertaining to your specific requirements, consult your doctor before heading to India.

The following organisations may be able to offer further information or at least point you in the right direction.

Mobility International USA (MIUSA; www.miusa.org)

Access-Able Travel Source (www.access-able.com)

Global Access News (www.globalaccessnews.com)

Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation (RADAR; www.radar.org.uk)

Accessible Journeys (www.disabilitytravel.com)

Visas

A pilot scheme is currently in place to provide visas on arrival to nationals of Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Luxembourg and Finland at Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and New Delhi airports. This scheme has been introduced on a one year 'experimental' basis, so double-check before you fly. All other nationals – except

Nepal and Bhutan – must get a visa *before* arriving in India. These are available at Indian missions worldwide.

Note that your passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your intended stay in India, with at least two blank pages.

Entry Requirements

» In 2009 a large number of foreigners were found to be working in India on tourist visas, so regulations surrounding who can get a visa and for how long have been tightened. These rules are likely to change, however, so double-check with the Indian embassy in your country prior to travel.

» Most people travel on the standard six-month tourist visa.

» Student and business visas have strict conditions (consult the Indian embassy for details).

» Tourist visas are valid from the date of issue, not the date you arrive in India. You can spend a total of 180 days in the country.

» Five- and 10-year tourist visas are available to US citizens *only* under a bilateral arrangement; however, you can still only stay in the country for up to 180 days continuously.

» Currently you are required to submit two passport photographs with your visa application; these must be in colour and must be 2in x 2in.

» An onward travel ticket is a requirement for most visas, but this isn't always enforced (check in advance).

» Additional restrictions apply to travellers from Bangladesh and Pakistan, as well as certain Eastern European, African and Central Asian countries. Check any special conditions for your nationality with the Indian embassy in your country.

» Visas are priced in the local currency and may have an added service fee (contact

your country's Indian embassy for current prices).

» Extended visas are possible for people of Indian origin (excluding those in Pakistan and Bangladesh) who hold a non-Indian passport and live abroad.

» For visas lasting more than six months, you're supposed to register at the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO; see p1174) within 14 days of arriving in India; enquire about these special conditions when you apply for your visa.

Re-entry Requirements

» Current regulations dictate that, when you leave the country, you will receive a stamp in your passport indicating you may not re-enter India for two months, regardless of how much longer your visa is valid for.

» If you wish to return to India before the two-month period has passed, you will have to visit the Indian High Commission or consulate in the country you are in, or

where you are a resident, and apply for a Permit to Re-enter. This permit is only granted in urgent or extreme cases.

» If you're travelling to multiple countries, a permit is not needed as long as your trip follows an itinerary, which you can show at immigration (eg if you're transiting through India on your way home from Nepal).

» If granted a permit, you must register with the FRRO/FRO within 14 days.

Visa Extensions

» At the time of writing, the **Ministry of Home Affairs** (☎011-23385748; Jaisalmer House, 26 Man Singh Rd, Delhi; ☎enquiries 9-11am Mon-Fri) was not granting visa extensions. The only circumstances in which this might conceivably happen are *extreme* medical emergencies or if you were robbed of your passport just before you planned to leave the country (at the end of your visa).

» In such cases, you should contact the **Foreigners'**

Regional Registration Office (FRRO; ☎011-26195530; frrodeldhi@hotmail.com; Level 2, East Block 8, Sector 1, Rama Krishna (RK) Puram, Delhi;

🕒9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri), just around the corner from the Hyatt Regency hotel. This is also the place to come for a replacement visa if you need your lost/stolen passport replaced (required before you can leave the country). Regional FRROs are even less likely to grant an extension.

» Assuming you meet the stringent criteria, the FRRO is permitted to issue an extension of 14 days (free for nationals of most countries; enquire on application). You must bring your confirmed air ticket, one passport photo (take two, just in case), and a photocopy of your passport identity and visa pages. Note that this system is designed to get you out of the country promptly with the correct official stamps, not to give you two extra weeks of travel.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Getting to India is increasingly easy, with plenty of international airlines servicing the country and overland routes open between India and Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan. Flights, tours and other tickets may also be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/bookings.

Entering India

Entering India by air or land is relatively straightforward, with standard immigration and customs procedures (p1164).

Passport

To enter India you need a valid passport, visa (p1173) and an onward/return ticket. Your passport should be valid for at least six months beyond your intended stay in India. If your passport is lost or stolen, immediately contact your country's representative (p1164). Keep photocopies of your airline ticket and the identity and visa pages of your passport in case of emergency. Better yet, scan and email copies to yourself. Check with the Indian embassy in your home country for any special conditions that may exist for your nationality.

Air

Airports & Airlines

As India is a big country, it makes sense to fly into the airport that's nearest to the area you'll be visiting. India has four main gateways for international flights (see the following list); however, a number of other cities service international carriers – for details see regional chapters and www.indianairports.com.

Chennai (Madras; MAA; Anna International Airport; ☎044-22560551; www.chennaiairportguide.com)

Delhi (DEL; Indira Gandhi International Airport; ☎91-124-3376000; www.newdelhiairport.in)

Kolkata (Calcutta; CCU; Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport; ☎033-25118787; www.calcuttaairport.com)

Mumbai (Bombay; BOM; Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport; ☎022-26264000; www.csia.in)

India's national carrier is **Air India** (www.airindia.com), of which the former state-owned domestic carrier, Indian Airlines, is now a part, following a merger deal. Air India has had a relatively decent air safety record in recent years.

Tickets

An onward or return air ticket is usually a condition of the Indian tourist visa so few visitors buy international

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Every form of transport that relies on carbon-based fuel generates CO₂, the main cause of human-induced climate change. Modern travel is dependent on aeroplanes, which might use less fuel per kilometre per person than most cars but travel much greater distances. The altitude at which aircraft emit gases (including CO₂) and particles also contributes to their climate change impact. Many websites offer 'carbon calculators' that allow people to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey and, for those who wish to do so, to offset the impact of the greenhouse gases emitted with contributions to portfolios of climate-friendly initiatives throughout the world. Lonely Planet offsets the carbon footprint of all staff and author travel.

OVERLAND TO/FROM BANGLADESH

ROUTE/BORDER TOWNS	TRANSPORT	VISAS	MORE INFORMATION
Kolkata-Dhaka/ Haridaspur (India) & Benapole (Bangladesh)	Regular daily buses Kolkata to Dhaka; twice- weekly train via Darsana border post.	Must be obtained in ad- vance. To buy train ticket, Darsana must be marked on your Bangladesh visa.	p470, p470
Siliguri-Chengra- bandha/Burimari/ Chengrabandha (India) & Burimari (Bangladesh)	Regular direct buses Siliguri-Chengrabandha; then bus to Rangpur, Bogra & Dhaka.	Must be obtained prior to travel.	p484. Departure tax payable on exit- ing Bangladesh.
Shillong-Sylhet/Dawki (India) & Tamabil (Bangladesh)	morning share jeeps run from Bara Bazaar, Shillong to Dawki. From Dawki walk (1.5km) or taxi to Tamabil bus station for regular buses to Sylhet.	Must be obtained prior to travel.	p578
Agartala-Dhaka/ Nearest town Agartala, 3km from border along Akhaura Rd (India) & Akhaura, 5km from border (Bangladesh)	Akhaura is on Dhaka- Comilla train line. Dhaka- Sylhet trains run from Ajampur train station, 3km further north.	Must be obtained prior to travel.	p578

tickets inside India. Only designated travel agencies can book international flights, but fares may be the same if you book directly with the airlines. Departure tax and other charges are included in airline tickets. You are required to show a copy of your ticket or itinerary in order to enter the airport, whether flying internationally or within India.

Land

Border Crossings

Although most visitors fly into India, it is possible to travel overland between India and Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan. The overland route from Nepal is the most popular. For more on these routes, consult Lonely Planet's *Istanbul to Kathmandu*, or see the

'Europe to India overland' section on www.seat61.com/India.htm.

- » If you enter India by bus or train you'll be required to disembark at the border for standard immigration and customs checks.
- » You *must* have a valid Indian visa in advance, as no visas are available at the border – see p1173 for more information.
- » Drivers of cars and motorbikes will need the vehicle's registration papers, liability insurance and an international drivers' permit in addition to their domestic licence. You'll also need a *Carnet de passage en douane*, which acts as a temporary waiver of import duty on the vehicle.
- » To find out the latest requirements for the paperwork and other important driving information, contact your local automobile association.

» See p1181 and p1182 for more on car and motorcycle travel.

BANGLADESH

- » Foreigners can use four of the land crossings between Bangladesh and India, all in West Bengal or the Northeast States (see above).
- » Heading from India to Bangladesh, tourist visas should be obtained in advance from a Bangladeshi mission (see p1164).
- » Heading from Bangladesh to India, you have to prepay the exit tax; this must be paid in advance at a Sonali Bank branch (either in Dhaka, another big city, or at the closest branch to the border).
- » Exiting Bangladesh overland is complicated by red tape – if you enter by air, you require a road permit (or 'change of route' permit) to leave by land.

» To apply for visa extensions and change of route permits you will need to visit the **Immigration and Passport Office** (☎88-02-8159525; www.dip.gov.bd; Agargaon Rd; ☹Sat-Thu) in Dhaka.

» Some travellers have reported problems exiting Bangladesh overland with the visa issued on arrival at Dhaka airport.

BHUTAN

» Phuentsholing is the main entry and exit point between India and Bhutan (see below).

» All non-Indian nationals need a Bhutanese visa to enter the country and are required to book a tour with a registered tour operator in Bhutan; this can be done directly through an affiliated travel agency abroad.

» As entry requirements need advance planning and are subject to change, we recommend you consult a travel agent or Bhutanese embassy for up-to-the-minute details. Also see www.tourism.gov.bt and Lonely Planet's *Bhutan*.

NEPAL

» Political and weather conditions permitting, there are five land border crossings between India and Nepal. Check the current security status before crossing into Nepal; local newspapers and websites are good sources of information (see more details on p1178).

» Travellers entering Nepal may purchase 15-day (US\$25), one-month (US\$40) or three-month (US\$100) multiple-entry

visas at the border. Payment is in US dollars and you need two recent passport photos. Alternatively, obtain a visa in advance from a Nepalese mission (see p1164).

» Travellers have reported being harassed crossing into India at the Sunauli border and having to pay inflated prices for bus and train tickets. Consider taking a taxi to Gorakpur and getting a train or bus from there.

PAKISTAN

» Given the rocky relationship between India and Pakistan, crossing by land depends on the current state of relations between the two countries – check locally. Crossing details are on p1179.

» If the crossings are open, you can reach Pakistan from Delhi, Amritsar (Punjab) and Rajasthan by bus or train.

The bus route from Srinagar to Pakistan-administered Kashmir is currently only open to Indian citizens.

» You must have a visa to enter Pakistan; it's easiest to obtain this from the Pakistan mission in your home country.

» Previously, the **Pakistan embassy** (☎011-26110601; www.mofa.gov.pk/india; 2/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri) in Delhi was issuing 90-day tourist visas for most nationalities in around five days, but at the time of writing tourist visas were not being granted. This may well change again.

» If you do apply within India, you'll need a letter of recommendation from your home embassy as well as the usual

application forms and two passport photos.

Sea

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

GETTING AROUND

Air

Airlines in India

India has a very competitive domestic airline industry. Some well-established players are Air India (which now includes Indian Airlines), Kingfisher and Jet Airways. Hosts of budget airlines offer discounted fares on various domestic sectors. Airline seats can be booked directly by telephone, through travel agencies or cheaply over the internet. Domestic airlines set rupee fares for Indian citizens, while foreigners may be charged US dollar fares (usually payable in rupees).

At the time of writing, the following airlines were operating across various destinations in India – see regional chapters for specifics about routes, fares and booking offices. Keep in mind, however, that the competitive nature of the aviation industry

OVERLAND TO/FROM BHUTAN

ROUTE/BORDER TOWNS	TRANSPORT	VISAS	MORE INFORMATION
Siliguri/Kolkata-Phuentsholing/Jaigon (India) & Phuentsholing (Bhutan)	From Kolkata, direct bus 7pm. From Siliguri daily buses, possible shared jeeps to Jaigon.	non-Indian nationals need visa & tour booking (p1177).	p470 and the boxed text p484

OVERLAND TO/FROM NEPAL

ROUTE/BORDER TOWNS	TRANSPORT	VISAS	MORE INFORMATION
Delhi/Varanasi-Kathmandu/Sunauli (India) & Bhairawa (Nepal)	Trains Delhi-Gorakhpur, half-hourly buses to border. Buses from Varanasi to Sunauli leave early morning & eve (uncomfortable ride). Buses & jeeps Bhairawa-Kathmandu.	Nepal available at border. Indian must be acquired in advance.	p395
Kolkata (Patna & the eastern plains) to Kathmandu & Pokhara/Raxaul (India) & Birganj (Nepal)	Daily buses from Patna & Kolkata to Raxaul. <i>Mithila Express</i> train daily from Kolkata. Regular day/night buses from Birganj to Kathmandu & Pokhara.	as above.	p514, p515
West Bengal-Eastern Nepal/Panitanki (India) & Kakarbhitta (Nepal)	Regular buses Kakarbhitta-Kathmandu (17hr) & other destinations. Bhadrapur airport (23km away) flights to Kathmandu.	Nepal available at border (7am-7pm).	p498, p484
Jamunaha, Uttar Pradesh-Nepalganj, Western Nepal/Rupaidiha (India) & Nepalganj (Nepal)	Good gateway for Nepal's Royal Bardia National Park. Flights to Kathmandu.	Nepal available at border. Indian must be acquired in advance.	
Uttarakhand-Western Nepal/Banbassa (India) & Mahendranagar (Nepal)	Border is 5km from Banbassa, then an autorickshaw to Mahendranagar. From there, buses to Kathmandu & Pokhara (1 daily).	Border open 24hr, officially staffed 9am-5pm.	p441

means that fares fluctuate dramatically. Holidays, festivals and seasons also have a serious effect on ticket prices so check for the latest fares online.

Air India (☎1800 1801407; www.airindia.com) India's national carrier operates many domestic and international flights.

GoAir (☎1800 222111; www.goair.in) Reliable low-cost carrier servicing Goa, Cochin, Jaipur, Delhi and Bagdogra among other destinations.

IndiGo (☎1800 1803838; www.goindigo.in) Good, reliable budget airline flying to numerous cities including Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai.

Jagson Airlines (☎011-23721593; www.jagsonairline.com) Among other destinations, it uses tiny Dornier planes to access small runways in Himachal Pradesh.

Jet Airways (☎011-39893333; www.jetairways.com) Rated by many as India's best airline, with growing domestic and international services.

JetLite (☎1800 222020; www.jetlite.com) Jet Airways' budget carrier flies to numerous destinations including Amritsar, Dehradun, Chennai and Jodhpur.

Kingfisher Airlines (☎1800 2093030; www.flyingfisher.com) Domestic and international flights.

Kingfisher Red (☎1800 2093030; www.flyingfisher.com) Kingfisher Airlines' low-cost option.

Spicejet (☎1800 1803333; www.spicejet.com) Budget carrier whose destinations include Bangalore, Varanasi, Srinagar, Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Kathmandu (Nepal).

Security at airports is generally stringent. All hold baggage must be x-rayed prior to check-in and every item of cabin baggage needs a label, which must be stamped as part of the security check (don't forget to collect tags at the check-in counter). Flights to sensitive destinations, such as Kashmir and

Ladakh, have extra security restrictions: cabin baggage may be completely prohibited and batteries usually need to be removed from all electronic items and placed in the hold. You may also need to identify your bags on the tarmac before they are loaded on the plane.

The recommended check-in time for domestic flights is one hour before departure. The usual baggage allowance is 20kg (10kg for smaller aircraft) in economy class, and 30kg in business.

Bicycle

There are no restrictions on bringing a bicycle into the country. However, bicycles sent by sea can take a few weeks to clear customs in India, so it's better to fly them in. It may actually be cheaper – and less hassle – to hire or buy a bicycle in India itself. Read up on bicycle touring before you travel – Rob Van Der Plas' *Bicycle Touring Manual* and Stephen Lord's *Adventure Cycle-Touring Handbook* are good places to start. Consult local cycling magazines and clubs for useful information and advice. The **Cycling Federation of India** (☎011- 23753529;

www.cyclingfederationofindia.org; 12 Pandit Pant Marg; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Fri) can provide local information.

Hire

- » Tourist centres and traveller hang-outs are the easiest spots to find bicycles for hire – simply enquire locally.
- » Prices vary: between ₹40 and ₹100 per day for a road-worthy, Indian-made bicycle; mountain bikes, where available, are usually upwards of ₹350 per day.
- » Hire places may require a cash security deposit (avoid leaving your airline ticket or passport).

Practicalities

- » Mountain bikes with off-road tyres give the best protection against India's puncture-prone roads.
- » Roadside cycle mechanics abound but you should still bring spare tyres, brake cables, lubricating oil, chain repair kit, and plenty of puncture-repair patches.
- » Bikes can often be carried for free, or for a small luggage fee, on the roof of public buses – handy for uphill stretches.
- » Contact your airline for information about transporting your bike and customs

formalities in your home country.

Purchase

- » Delhi's Jhandewalan Cycle Market has imported and domestic new and secondhand bikes and spare parts.
- » Mountain bikes with reputable brands that include Hero (www.herocycles.com) and Atlas (www.atlascyclesonepat.com) generally start at around ₹3500.
- » Reselling is usually fairly easy – ask at local cycle or hire shops or put up an advert on travel noticeboards.
- » If you purchased a new bike and it's still in reasonably good condition, you should be able to recoup around 50% of what you originally paid.

Road Rules

- » Vehicles drive on the left in India but otherwise road rules are virtually nonexistent.
- » Cities and national highways can be hazardous places to cycle so, where possible, stick to back roads.
- » Be conservative about the distance you expect to cover – an experienced cyclist can manage around 60km to 100km a day on the plains, 40km to 60km on sealed

OVERLAND TO/FROM PAKISTAN

ROUTE/

BORDER TOWNS

Delhi/Amritsar-Lahore/Attari (India) & Wagah (Pakistan)

Jodhpur-Karachi/Munabao (India) & Khokrapar (Pakistan)

TRANSPORT

direct bus & trains Delhi-Lahore. Lahore Bus Service dep Delhi 6am daily for Lahore (12hr). Advance bookings essential. *Samijhauta Express* train twice weekly Old Delhi train station-Lahore, customs & immigration stop at Attari (Indian border).

Weekly *Thar Express* Jodhpur-Karachi (schedule erratic).

MORE INFORMATION

Security tightened but still a concern after 2007 bomb attack on Delhi-Lahore train. Border formalities can be quicker for independent travellers.

p180

RIDING THE RAILS WITH YOUR BIKE

For long hauls, transporting your bike by train can be a convenient option. Buy a standard train ticket for the journey, then take your bike to the station parcel office with your passport, registration papers, driver's licence and insurance documents. Packing-wallahs will wrap your bike in protective sacking for around ₹50 to ₹250 and you must fill out various forms and pay the shipping fee – around ₹2000 to ₹3500 (charges are less on an ordinary train) – plus an insurance fee of 1% of the declared value of the bike. Bring the same paperwork to collect your bike from the goods office at the other end. If the bike is left waiting at the destination for more than 24 hours, you'll pay a storage fee of around ₹50 to ₹100 per day.

mountain roads and 40km or less on dirt roads.

Boat

- » Scheduled ferries connect mainland India to Port Blair in the Andaman Islands (p1070).
- » There are sporadic ferries from Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) to the Andaman Islands (p913).
- » Between October and May, there are boat services from Kochi (Kerala) to the Lakshadweep Islands (see p979).
- » There are also numerous shorter ferry services across rivers, from chain pontoons to coracles, and various boat cruises – see the regional chapters for more information.

Bus

- » Buses go almost everywhere in India and are the only way to get around many mountainous areas. They tend to be the cheapest way to travel; services are fast and frequent.
- » Roads in curvaceous terrain can be especially perilous; buses are often driven with wilful abandon, and accidents are always a risk.

- » Avoid night buses unless there's no alternative: driving conditions are more hazardous and drivers may be suffering from lack of sleep.
- » All buses make snack and toilet stops (some more frequently than others), providing a break but possibly adding hours to journey times.
- » Shared jeeps complement the bus service in many mountain areas – see p1184.

Classes

- » State-owned and private bus companies both offer 'ordinary' and more expensive 'deluxe' buses. Many state tourist offices run their own reliable deluxe bus services.
- » 'Ordinary' buses tend to be ageing rattletraps while 'deluxe' buses range from less decrepit versions of ordinary buses to flashy Volvo buses with AC and reclining two-by-two seating.
- » Buses run by the state government are usually the more reliable option (if there's a breakdown, another bus will be sent to pick up passengers), and seats can usually be booked up to a month in advance.
- » Private buses are either more expensive (but more comfortable), or cheaper but

with kamikaze drivers and conductors who cram on as many passengers as possible to maximise profits.

- » Travel agencies in many tourist towns offer relatively expensive private two-by-two buses, which tend to leave and terminate at conveniently central stops.
- » Some agencies have been known to book people onto ordinary buses at super-deluxe prices – if possible, book directly with the bus company.
- » Timetables and destinations may be displayed on signs or billboards at travel agencies and tourist offices.
- » Take earplugs on long-distance buses, to muffle the often deafening music.
- » On any bus, try to sit between the axles to minimise the bumpy effect of potholes.

Costs

- » The cheapest buses are 'ordinary' government buses, but prices vary from state to state (consult regional chapters).
- » Add around 50% to the ordinary fare for deluxe services, double the fare for AC, and triple or quadruple the fare for a two-by-two service.

Luggage

- » Luggage is stored in compartments underneath the bus (sometimes for a small fee) or carried on the roof.
- » Arrive at least an hour before departure time – some buses cover roof-stored bags with a canvas sheet, making last-minute additions inconvenient/impossible.
- » If your bags go on the roof, make sure they're securely locked, and tied to the metal baggage rack – unsecured bags can fall off on rough roads.
- » Theft is a (minor) risk: watch your bags at snack and toilet stops; never leave day-packs or valuables unattended inside the bus.

Reservations

» Most deluxe buses can be booked in advance – government buses usually a month ahead – at the bus station or local travel agencies.

» Reservations are rarely possible on 'ordinary' buses; travellers can be left behind in the mad rush for a seat.

» To secure a seat, send a travelling companion ahead to claim some space, or pass a book or article of clothing through an open window and place it on an empty seat. This 'reservation' method rarely fails.

» If you board a bus midway through its journey, you may have to stand until a seat becomes free.

» Many buses only depart when full – passengers might suddenly leave yours to join one that looks nearer to departing.

» Many bus stations have a separate women's queue (not always obvious when signs are in Hindi and men join the melee). Women have an unspoken right to elbow their way to the front of any bus queue in India, so don't be shy, ladies!

Car

Few people bother with self-drive car hire – not only because of the hair-raising driving conditions, but also because hiring a car with driver is wonderfully afford-

able in India, particularly if several people share the cost. Seatbelts are either nonexistent or of variable quality. International rental companies with representatives in India include **Budget** (www.budget.com) and **Hertz** (www.hertz.com).

Hiring a Car & Driver

» Most towns have taxi stands or car-hire companies where you can arrange short or long tours (see regional chapters).

» Not all hire cars are licensed to travel beyond their home state. Those that are will pay extra state taxes, which are added to the hire charge.

» Ask for a driver who speaks some English and knows the region you intend visiting, and try to see the car and meet the driver before paying anything.

» Ambassador cars look great but are rather slow and uncomfortable if travelling long distances – keep them for touring cities.

» For multiday trips, the charge should cover the driver's meals and accommodation. Drivers should make their own sleeping and eating arrangements.

» It is *essential* to set the ground rules from day one; politely but firmly let the driver know that you're boss in order to avoid anguish later.

Costs

» The price depends on the distance and the terrain (driving on mountain roads uses more petrol, hence the higher cost).

» One-way trips usually cost the same as return ones (to cover the petrol and driver charges for getting back).

» Hire charges vary from state to state. Some taxi unions set a time limit or a maximum kilometre distance for day trips – if you go over, you'll have to pay extra.

» To avoid potential misunderstandings, *get in writing* what you've been promised (quotes should include petrol, sightseeing stops, all your chosen destinations, and meals and accommodation for the driver). If a driver asks you for money for petrol en route because he is short of cash, get receipts for reimbursement later.

» For sightseeing day trips around a single city, expect to pay upwards of ₹800/1000 for a non-AC/AC car with an eight-hour, 80km limit per day (extra charges apply).

» A tip is customary at the end of your journey; ₹125-150 per day is fair (more if you're really pleased with the driver's service).

Hitching

For a negotiable fee, truck drivers supplement the bus service in some remote areas. However, as drivers rarely speak English, you may have difficulty explaining where you wish to go, and working out a fair price to pay. Be aware that truck drivers have a reputation for driving under the influence of alcohol. As anywhere, women are strongly advised against hitching alone or even in pairs. Always use your instincts.

THE BRAVE BRO

In Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) 'build(s) roads in the sky', including some of the world's highest motorable passes. Risking life and limb to keep the roads open, the BRO has a wicked sense of humour when it comes to driver warnings:

- » Overtaker beware of Undertaker
- » Better to be Mister Late than a late Mister
- » Go easy on my curves
- » Love thy neighbour, but not while driving

Local Transport

» Buses, cycle-rickshaws, autorickshaws, taxis, boats and urban trains provide transport around India's cities.

» Costs for public transport vary from town to town (consult regional chapters).

» For any transport without a fixed fare, agree on the price *before* you start your journey and make sure that it covers your luggage and every passenger.

» Even where meters exist, drivers may refuse to use them, demanding an elevated 'fixed' fare. Insist on the meter; if that fails, find another vehicle.

» Fares usually increase at night (by up to 100%) and some drivers charge a few rupees extra for luggage.

» Carry plenty of small bills for taxi and rickshaw fares as drivers rarely have change.

» Some taxi/autorickshaw drivers are involved in the commission racket – see p1157.

Autorickshaw, Tempo & Vikram

» The Indian autorickshaw is a three-wheeled motorised contraption with tin or canvas roof and sides, with room for two passengers (although you'll often see many more squeezed in) and limited luggage.

» They are also referred to as autos, scooters, riks or tuk-tuks.

» They are mostly cheaper than taxis and usually have a meter, although getting it turned on can be a challenge.

» Travelling by auto is great fun but, thanks to the open windows, can be smelly, noisy and hot!

» Tempos and *vikrams* (large tempos) are outsized autorickshaws with room for more passengers, running on fixed routes for a fixed fare.

» In country areas, you may also see the fearsome-looking

'three-wheeler' – a crude tractorlike tempo with a front wheel on an articulated arm.

Boat

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

Bus

Urban buses, particularly in the big cities, are fume-belching, human-stuffed mechanical monsters that travel at breakneck speed (except during morning and evening rush hours, when they can be endlessly stuck in traffic). It's usually far more convenient and comfortable to opt for an autorickshaw or taxi.

Cycle-Rickshaw

» A cycle-rickshaw is a pedal cycle with two rear wheels, supporting a bench seat for passengers. Most have a canopy that can be raised in wet weather, or lowered to provide extra space for luggage.

» Many of the big cities have phased out (or reduced) the number of cycle-rickshaws, but they are still a major means of local transport in many smaller towns.

» Fares must be agreed upon in advance – speak to locals to get an idea of what is a fair price for the distance you intend to travel. Tips are always appreciated, given the slog involved.

» Kolkata is the last bastion of the hand-pulled rickshaw, known as the *tana rickshaw*. This is a hand-cart on two wheels pulled directly by the rickshaw-wallah.

Taxi

» Most towns have taxis, and these are usually metered, however, getting drivers to use the meter can be a major hassle. If drivers refuse to use the meter, find another cab.

» To avoid fare-setting shenanigans, use prepaid taxis where possible (regional chapters contain details).

Other Local Transport

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

Motorcycle

Despite the traffic challenges, India is an amazing country for long-distance motorcycle touring. Motorcycles generally handle the pitted roads better than four-wheeled vehicles, and you'll have the added bonus of being able to stop when and where you want. However, motorcycle touring can be

MANNING THE METER

Getting a metered ride is only half the battle. Meters are almost always outdated, so fares are calculated using a combination of the meter reading and a complicated 'fare adjustment card'. Predictably, this system is open to abuse. If you spend a few days in any town, you'll soon get a feel for the difference between a reasonable fare and a blatant rip-off.

PREPAID TAXIS

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

quite an undertaking – there are some popular motorcycle tours for those who don't want the rigmarole of getting it alone.

The most preferred starting point for motorcycle tours is Delhi, and popular destinations include Rajasthan, South India and Ladakh. Weather is an important factor to consider – for the best times to visit different areas see the Climate Chart at the start of regional chapters. To cross from neighbouring countries, check the latest regulations and paperwork requirements from the relevant diplomatic mission.

Driving Licence

To hire a motorcycle in India, technically you're required to have a valid international drivers' permit in addition to your domestic licence. In tourist areas, some places may rent out a motorcycle without asking for a driving permit/licence, but you won't be covered by insurance in the event of an accident, and may also face a fine.

Hire

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

» Plenty of places rent out motorcycles for local trips and longer tours. Japanese- and Indian-made bikes in the 100–150cc range are cheaper than the big 350–500cc Enfields.

» As a deposit, you'll need to leave a large cash lump sum (ensure you get a receipt that also stipulates the refundable amount), your passport or air ticket. We strongly advise not leaving these documents, in particular your passport which you need for hotel check-ins and if asked by the police.

» For three weeks' hire, a 500cc Enfield costs from ₹22,000; a European style is ₹23,000; and a 350cc costs ₹15,000. The price includes excellent advice and an invaluable crash course in Enfield mechanics and repairs.

» See the regional chapters for other recommended rental companies and their charges.

Purchase

» For longer tours, consider purchasing a motorcycle.

» Secondhand bikes are widely available (and paperwork is simpler than for a new machine).

» To find a secondhand motorcycle, check travellers' noticeboards and ask motorcycle mechanics and other bikers.

» A well looked-after secondhand 350cc Enfield costs ₹25,000–₹50,000. A more modern version, with Europe-

an-style configuration, costs ₹45,000–₹65,000; the 500cc model ₹60,000–₹85,000. You will also have to pay for insurance.

» Get a secondhand bike serviced before you set off.

» When reselling, if the bike is in reasonable condition you can expect between half and two-thirds of the price you paid.

» Shipping an Indian bike overseas is complicated and expensive – ask the retailer to explain the process.

» Helmets are available for ₹500–₹2000; extras (panniers, luggage racks, protection bars, rear-view mirrors, lockable fuel caps, petrol filters, extra tools) are easy to come by.

» A customised fuel tank will increase the range you can cover between fuel stops. An Enfield 500cc gives about 25km/L; the 350cc model gives slightly more.

» A useful website for Enfield models is www.royalenfield.com.

In Delhi, the area around Hari Singh Nalwa St in Karol Bagh has dozens of motorcycle and parts shops, but plenty of dodgy dealers.

The following dealers come recommended:

Delhi Run by the knowledgeable Lalli Singh, **Lalli Motorbike Exports** (☎011-28750869; <http://lallisingh.com>; 1740-A/55 (basement), Hari Singh Nalwa St, Abdul Aziz Rd, Karol Bagh) sells and rents out Enfields and parts, and buyers get a crash course in running and maintaining these lovable but temperamental machines. He can also recommend other reputable dealers in the area.

Mumbai **Allibhai Premji Tyrewalla** (☎022-23099313; www.premjis.com; 205 Dr D Bhadkamkar (Lamington) Rd) sells new and secondhand motorcycles with a buy-back option.

Jaipur **Rajasthan Auto Centre** (☎0141-2568074;

Sanjay Bazaar, Sangneri Gate) comes recommended as a place for hiring, fixing or purchasing a motorcycle. To hire a 350cc Bullet costs ₹400 per day (including helmet).

OWNERSHIP PAPERS

» There's plenty of paperwork associated with owning a motorcycle. The process is complicated so it's wise to seek advice from the company selling the bike. Allow around two weeks to tackle the paperwork and get on the road.

» Registration papers are signed by the local registration authority when the bike is first sold; you need these when you buy a secondhand bike.

» Foreign nationals cannot change the name on the registration but you must fill out forms for change of ownership and transfer of insurance.

» If you buy a new bike, the company selling it must register the machine for you (adding to the cost).

» Registration must be renewed every 15 years (for around ₹5000); make absolutely sure that it states the 'road-worthiness' of the vehicle, and that there are no outstanding debts or criminal proceedings associated with the bike.

Fuel, Spare Parts & Extras

» Petrol and engine oil are widely available in the plains, but petrol stations are widely spaced in the mountains. If travelling to remote regions, carry enough extra fuel (seek local advice about fuel availability before setting off). At the time of writing, petrol cost around ₹55 per litre.

» If you're going to remote regions it's also important to carry basic spares (valves, fuel lines, piston rings etc). Parts for Indian and Japanese machines are widely available in cities and larger

towns; Delhi's Karol Bagh is a good place to find parts for all Indian and imported bikes.

» For all machines (particularly older ones), regularly check and tighten all nuts and bolts: Indian roads and engine vibration work things loose quite quickly.

» Check the engine and gearbox oil level regularly (at least every 500km) and clean the oil filter every few thousand kilometres.

» Given the road conditions, the chances are you'll make at least a couple of visits to a puncture-wallah – start your trip with new tyres and carry spanners to remove your own wheels.

» It's a good idea to bring your own protective equipment (jackets etc).

Insurance

» Only hire a bike with third-party insurance – if you hit someone without insurance, the consequences can be very costly. Reputable companies will include third-party cover in their policies; those that don't probably aren't trustworthy.

» You must also arrange insurance if you buy a motorcycle (usually you can organise this through the person selling the bike).

» The minimum level of cover is third-party insurance – available for ₹300 to ₹600 per year. This will cover repair and medical costs for any other vehicles, people or property you might hit, but no cover for your own machine. Comprehensive insurance (recommended) costs upwards of ₹800 per year.

Road Conditions

» Given the varied road conditions, India can be challenging for novice riders. Hazards range from cows and chickens crossing the carriageway to broken-down trucks, pedestrians on the road, and perpetual potholes and unmarked speed humps. Rural roads sometimes have

grain crops strewn around them to be threshed by passing vehicles – a serious sliding hazard for bikers.

» Try not to cover too much territory in one day and avoid travelling after dark – many vehicles drive without lights, and dynamo-powered motorcycle headlamps are useless at low revs while negotiating around potholes.

» On busy national highways expect to average 40 to 50km/h without stops; on winding back roads and dirt tracks this can drop to 10km/h.

Organised Motorcycle Tours

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

Blazing Trails
(www.blazingtrailstours.com)

Classic Bike Adventure
(www.classic-bike-india.com)

Ferris Wheels
(www.ferriswheels.com.au)

H-C Travel
(www.hctravel.com)

Himalayan Roadrunners
(www.ridehigh.com)

Indian Motorcycle Adventures
(www.indianmotorcycleadventures.com)

Lalli Singh Tours
(www.lallisingh.com)

Moto Discovery
(www.motodiscovery.com)

Royal Expeditions
(www.royalexpeditions.com)

Saffron Road Motorcycle Tours
(www.saffronroad.com)

Shepherds Realms
(www.asiasafari.com)

Wheel of India
(www.wheelofindia.com)

Shared jeeps

» In mountain areas, shared jeeps supplement the bus service, charging similar fixed

fares – see regional chapters for routes and fares.

» Although nominally designed for five to six passengers, most shared jeeps squeeze in many more. The seats beside and immediately behind the driver are more expensive than the cramped bench seats at the rear.

» Jeeps only leave when full; people often bail out of a half-full jeep and pile into one with more passengers that is ready to depart. Drivers will leave immediately if you pay for all the empty seats.

» Jeeps run from jeep stands and 'passenger stations' at the junctions of major roads; ask locals to point you in the right direction.

» In some states, jeeps are known as 'sumos' after the Tata Sumo, a popular jeep.

» Travel sickness, particularly on winding mountain roads, may mean you are asked to give up your window seat to queasy fellow passengers.

Tours

» Tours are available all over India, run by tourist offices, local transport companies and travel agencies. Organised tours can be an inexpensive way to see several places on one trip, although you rarely get much time at each place. If you arrange a tailor-made tour, you'll have more freedom about where you go and how long you stay.

» Drivers may double as guides, or you can hire a qualified local guide for a fee. In tourist towns, be wary of touts claiming to be professional guides (see p1157). See the Tours section in the regional chapters for details about local tours. For information on treks and tours see p33.

International Tour Agencies

Many international companies offer tours to India, from straightforward sightseeing

trips to adventure tours and activity-based holidays. To find current tours that match your interests, quiz travel agents and surf the web. Some good places to start your tour hunt:

Dragoman (www.dragoman.com) One of several reputable overland tour companies offering trips in customised vehicles.

Exodus (www.exodustravels.co.uk) A wide array of specialist trips, including tours with a holistic, wildlife and adventure focus.

India Wildlife Tours (www.india-wildlife-tours.com) All sorts of wildlife tours, plus jeep, horse or camel safaris and birdwatching.

Indian Encounter (www.indianencounters.com) Special-interest tours that include wildlife spotting, river-rafting and ayurvedic treatments.

Intrepid Travel (www.intrepidtravel.com) Endless possibilities, from wildlife tours to sacred rambles.

Peregrine Adventures (www.peregrine.net.au) Popular cultural and trekking tours.

Sacred India Tours (www.sacredindia.com) Includes tours with a holistic focus such as yoga and ayurveda, as well as architectural and cultural tours.

Shanti Travel (www.shanti-travel.com) A range of tours including Family and Adventure run by a Franco-Indian team.

World Expeditions (www.worldexpeditions.com.au) An array of options that includes trekking and cycling tours.

Train

Travelling by train is a quintessential Indian experience. Trains offer a smoother ride than buses and are especially recommended for long journeys that include overnight

travel. India's rail network is one of the largest and busiest in the world and Indian Railways is the largest utility employer on earth, with roughly 1.5 million workers. There are around 6900 train stations scattered across the country.

We've listed useful trains throughout this book but there are hundreds more services. The best way of sourcing updated railway information is to use relevant internet sites such as **Indian Railways** (www.indianrail.gov.in) and the useful www.seat61.com/India.htm. There's also *Trains at a Glance* (₹35), available at many train station bookstands and better bookshops/newsstands, but it's published annually so it's not as up to date as websites. Nevertheless, it offers comprehensive timetables covering all the main lines.

Booking Tickets in India

You can either book tickets through a travel agency or hotel (for a commission) or in person at the train station. Big stations often have English-speaking staff who can help with choosing the best train. At smaller stations, midlevel officials such as the deputy stationmaster usually speak English. It's also worth approaching tourist-office staff if you need advice about booking tickets, deciding train classes etc. The nationwide railways enquiries number is 139.

For information on the ins and outs of booking tickets from outside India and recommended websites for booking tickets online see p31.

AT THE STATION

Get a reservation slip from the information window, fill in the name of the departure station, destination station, the class you want to travel and the name and number of the train. Join the long queue for the ticket window where

FARE FINDER

To find out which trains travel between any two destinations, go to www.trainenquiry.com and click on 'Find Your Train' – type in the name of the two destinations (you may then be prompted to choose from a list of stations) and you'll get a list of every train (with the name, number and arrival/departure times). Armed with these details you can find the fare for your chosen train by going to www.indianrail.gov.in and clicking on 'Fare Enquiry'.

your ticket will be printed. Women should take advantage of the separate women's queue – if there isn't one, go to the front of the regular queue.

TOURIST RESERVATION BUREAU

Larger cities and major tourist centres have an International Tourist Bureau, which allows you to book tickets in relative peace – check www.indianrail.gov.in for a list of these stations.

Reservations

» For details of classes of travel see p31.
 » Bookings open 90 days before departure and you must make a reservation for all chair-car, sleeper, and 1AC, 2AC and 3AC carriages. No reservations are required for general (2nd class) compartments.

» Trains are always busy so it's wise to book as far in advance as possible, especially for overnight trains. There may be additional services to certain destinations during major festivals but it's still worth booking well in advance.

» Reserved tickets show your seat/berth and carriage number. Carriage numbers are written on the side of the train (station staff and porters can point you in the right direction). A list of names and berths is posted on the side of each reserved carriage.

» Refunds are available on any ticket, even after depar-

ture, with a penalty – rules are complicated, check when you book.

» Trains can be delayed at any stage of the journey; to avoid stress, factor some leeway into your plans.
 » Be mindful of potential drugging and theft – see p1156.

If the train you want to travel on is sold out, make sure to enquire about:

TOURIST QUOTA

A special (albeit small) tourist quota is set aside for foreign tourists travelling between popular stations. These seats can only be booked at dedicated reservation offices in major cities (see regional chapters for details), and you need to show your passport and visa as ID. Tickets can be paid

for in rupees (some offices may ask to see foreign exchange certificates – ATM receipts will suffice). British pounds, US dollars or euros, in cash or Thomas Cook and American Express travellers cheques.

TAKTAL TICKETS

Indian Railways holds back a (very) small number of tickets on key trains and releases them at 8am two days before the train is due to depart. A charge of ₹10–300 is added to each ticket price. First AC and Executive Chair tickets are excluded from the scheme.

WAITLIST (WL)

Trains are frequently over-booked, but many passengers cancel and there are regular no-shows. So if you buy a ticket on the waiting list you're quite likely to get a seat, even if there are a number of people ahead of you on the list. Check your booking status at www.indianrail.gov.in/pnr_stat.html by entering your ticket's PNR number. A refund is available if you fail to get a seat – ask the ticket office about your chances.

RESERVATION AGAINST CANCELLATION (RAC)

Even when a train is fully booked, Indian Railways

EXPRESS TRAIN FARES IN RUPEES

DIS-TANCE (KM)	1AC	2AC	3AC	EX-ECUTIVE CHAIR	CHAIR CAR (CC)	SEC-OND (II)
100	541	322	267	424	212	65
200	814	480	363	594	297	90
300	1077	633	473	764	382	115
400	1313	770	572	918	459	135
500	1499	879	650	1040	520	150
1000	2451	1432	1048	NA	760	230
1500	3069	1791	1306	NA	825	224
2000	3316	1935	1410	NA	893	243

sells a handful of seats in each class as 'Reservation Against Cancellation' (RAC). This means that if you have an RAC ticket and someone cancels before the departure date, you will get his or her seat (or berth). You'll have to check the reservation list at the station on the day of travel to see where you've been allocated to sit. Even if

no one cancels, as an RAC ticket holder you can still board the train and, even if you don't get a seat, you can still travel.

Costs

Fares are calculated by distance and class of travel; Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains are slightly more expensive, but the price includes meals.

Most air-conditioned carriages have a catering service (meals are brought to your seat). In unreserved classes it's a good idea to carry portable snacks. Seniors (those over 60) get 30% off all fares in all classes on all types of train. Children below the age of five travel free, those aged between five and 12 are charged half price.

Health

There is huge geographical variation in India, so environmental issues like heat, cold and altitude can cause health problems. Hygiene is poor in most regions so food and water-borne illnesses are common. Many insect-borne diseases are present, particularly in tropical areas. Medical care is basic in many areas (especially beyond the larger cities) so it's essential to be well prepared.

Pre-existing medical conditions and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents) account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is very common. Fortunately, most travellers' illnesses can be prevented with some common-sense behaviour or treated with a well-stocked travellers' medical kit – however, never hesitate to consult a doctor while on the road, as self-diagnosis can be hazardous.

The following advice is a general guide only and certainly does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

You can buy many medications over the counter in India without a doctor's

prescription, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, blood-pressure medications and contraceptive pills. Bring the following:

- » medications in their original, labelled containers
- » a signed, dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names
- » a physician's letter documenting the medical necessity of any syringes you bring
- » if you have a heart condition, a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling
- » any regular medication (double your ordinary needs)

Insurance

Don't travel without health insurance. Emergency evacuation is expensive – bills of over US\$100,000 are not uncommon. Consider the following when buying insurance:

- » You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing and scuba diving.

» In India, doctors usually require immediate payment in cash. Your insurance plan may make payments directly to providers or it will reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. If you do have to claim later, make sure you keep all relevant documentation.

» Some policies ask that you telephone back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem will be made.

Vaccinations

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of up-to-date information; they stock all available vaccines and can give specific recommendations for your trip. Most vaccines don't give immunity until *at least* two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the 'yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

Medical checklist

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- » Antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- » Antibacterial cream, eg Mupirocin
- » Antibiotic for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- » Antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetirizine for daytime and Promethazine for night
- » Antiseptic, eg Betadine
- » Antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopam
- » Contraceptive
- » Decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- » DEET-based insect repellent
- » Diarrhoea medication – consider an oral

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The only vaccine required by international regulations is **yellow fever**. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days prior to entering India. If you are travelling to India from Africa or South America, you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers going to India (as well as being up to date with measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations):

» **Adult diphtheria & tetanus** Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

» **Hepatitis A** Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

» **Hepatitis B** Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. In 95% of people lifetime protection results.

» **Polio** Only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

» **Typhoid** Recommended for all travellers to India, even those only visiting urban areas. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, but the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.

» **Varicella** If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

These immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk (seek further advice from your doctor):

» **Japanese B Encephalitis** Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. In rare cases, an allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

» **Meningitis** Single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years' protection; meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years' protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

» **Rabies** Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

» **Tuberculosis (TB)** A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine given in a lifetime.

rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine). Antibiotics for diarrhoea include Ciprofloxacin; for bacterial diarrhoea Azithromycin; for giardia or amoebic dysentery Tinidazole.

» First-aid items such as scissors, elastoplasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers

» Ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory

» Iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water

» Migraine medication if you suffer from migraines

» Paracetamol

» Pyrethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets

» Steroid cream for allergic or itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone

» High-factor sunscreen

» Throat lozenges

» Thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet

» Ural or equivalent if prone to urine infections

Websites

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the internet. www.lonelyplanet.com is a good place to start. Some other suggestions:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; www.cdc.gov) Good general information.

MD Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com) Provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country, updated daily.

World Health Organization (WHO; www.who.int/ith) Its helpful book *International Travel & Health* is revised annually and is available online.

Further Reading

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and packed with useful information, including pre-trip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Travellers' Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website of **Travelling Well** (www.travellingwell.com.au).

IN INDIA

Availability of Health Care

Medical care is hugely variable in India. Some cities now have clinics catering specifically to travellers and expatriates; these clinics are usually more expensive than local medical facilities, and offer a higher standard of care. Additionally, they know the local system, including reputable local hospitals and specialists. They may also liaise with insurance companies should you require evacuation. It is usually difficult to find reliable medical care in rural areas.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the relevant medication and you cannot attend a recommended clinic. If you suspect

a serious disease, especially malaria, travel to the nearest quality facility.

Before buying medication over the counter, check the use-by date, and ensure the packet is sealed and properly stored (eg not exposed to the sunshine).

Infectious Diseases

Malaria

This is a serious and potentially deadly disease. Before you travel, seek expert advice according to your itinerary (rural areas are especially risky) and on medication and side effects.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms, such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills, may also occur. Diagnosis can only be properly made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria: mosquito avoidance and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

» Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as citronella can be effective, but must be

applied more frequently than products containing DEET.

» Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with pyrethrin.

» Choose accommodation with proper screens and fans (if not air-conditioned).

» Impregnate clothing with pyrethrin in high-risk areas.

» Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours.

» Use mosquito coils.

» Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

There are a variety of medications available:

Chloroquine & Paludrine combination Limited effectiveness in many parts of South Asia. Common side effects include nausea (40% of people) and mouth ulcers.

Doxycycline (daily tablet) A broad-spectrum antibiotic that helps prevent a variety of tropical diseases, including leptospirosis, tick-borne disease and typhus. Potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to sunburn), thrush (in women), indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus – take your tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and never lie down within half an hour of taking it. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Lariam (mefloquine) This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and seizures. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders or epilepsy should not take Lariam. It is considered safe in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Tablets must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Malarone A combination of atovaquone and proguanil.

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

UK (www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas)

US (www.cdc.gov/travel)

Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for scuba divers and for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

Other diseases

Avian Flu 'Bird flu' or Influenza A (H5N1) is a subtype of the type A influenza virus. Contact with dead or sick birds is the principal source of infection and bird-to-human transmission does not easily occur. Symptoms include high fever and flu-like symptoms with rapid deterioration, leading to respiratory failure and death in many cases. Immediate medical care should be sought if bird flu is suspected. Check www.who.int/en/or www.avianinfluenza.com.au.

Coughs, Colds & Chest Infections Around 25% of travellers to India will develop a respiratory infection. If a secondary bacterial infection occurs – marked by fever, chest pain and coughing up discoloured or blood-tinged sputum – seek medical advice or consider commencing a general antibiotic.

Dengue Fever This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache and sometimes a rash and diarrhoea. Treatment is rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin or ibuprofen as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. Make sure you see a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Hepatitis A This food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There

is no specific treatment for hepatitis A, you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to India should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B This sexually transmitted disease is spread by body fluids and can be prevented by vaccination. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E Transmitted through contaminated food and water, hepatitis E has similar symptoms to hepatitis A, but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is no commercially available vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV Spread via contaminated body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, unsterile needles (including in medical facilities) and procedures such as tattoos. The growth rate of HIV in India is one of the highest in the world.

Influenza Present year-round in the tropics, influenza (flu) symptoms include fever, muscle aches, a runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes – vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

Japanese B Encephalitis This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is rare in travellers. Most cases occur in rural areas and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and it may result in permanent brain damage or death. Ask your doctor for further details.

Rabies This fatal disease is spread by the bite or

possibly even the lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence postexposure treatment. Having pre-travel vaccination means the postbite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not pre-vaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible, and this is very difficult to obtain in much of India.

STDs Sexually transmitted diseases most common in India include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine, seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels, have an STD check on your return home.

Tuberculosis While TB is rare in travellers, those who have significant contact with the local population (such as medical and aid workers and long-term travellers) should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended to have pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and fatigue.

Typhoid This serious bacterial infection is also spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever and headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers who are spending more

than a week in India. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective, so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

Travellers' Diarrhoea

This is by far the most common problem affecting travellers in India – between 30% and 70% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. It's usually caused by a bacteria, and thus responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics.

Travellers' diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom, such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions like Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin or azithromycin should kill the bacteria quickly. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, though (eg if you have to go on a long bus ride). Don't take loperamide if you have a fever or blood in your stools.

Amoebic Dysentery Amoebic dysentery is very rare in travellers but is often misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea: fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs: Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur.

Giardiasis Giardia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months; the best advice is to seek medical treatment. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option.

Environmental Hazards

Air Pollution

Air pollution, particularly vehicle pollution, is an increasing problem in most of India's urban hubs. If you have severe respiratory problems, speak with your doctor before travelling to India.

Diving & Surfing

Divers and surfers should seek specialised advice before they travel to ensure their medical kit contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections. Divers should ensure their insurance covers them for decompression illness – get specialised dive insurance through an organisation such as **Divers Alert Network**

(DAN; www.danasiapacific.org). Certain medical conditions are incompatible with diving; check with your doctor.

Food

Eating in restaurants is a big risk for contracting diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include:

- » eating only freshly cooked food
- » avoiding shellfish and buffets
- » peeling fruit
- » cooking vegetables
- » soaking salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes
- » eating in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heat

Many parts of India, especially down south, are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut); drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps. Treat cramps by resting, rehydrating with double-

DRINKING WATER

- » Never drink tap water.
- » Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase.
- » Avoid ice unless you know it has been safely made.
- » Be careful of fresh juices served at street stalls in particular – they may have been watered down or may be served in unhygienic jugs/glasses.
- » Boiling water is usually the most efficient method of purifying it.
- » The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- » Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size (less than four microns).

strength rehydration solution and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Recovery is usually rapid and it is common to feel weak for some days afterwards. Symptoms include:

- » feeling weak
- » headache
- » irritability
- » nausea or vomiting
- » sweaty skin
- » a fast, weak pulse
- » normal or slightly elevated body temperature.

Treatment:

- » get out of the heat
- » fan the sufferer
- » apply cool, wet cloths to the skin
- » lay the sufferer flat with their legs raised
- » rehydrate with water containing one-quarter teaspoon of salt per litre.

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms include:

- » weakness
- » nausea
- » a hot dry body
- » temperature of over 41°C
- » dizziness
- » confusion
- » loss of coordination
- » seizures
- » eventual collapse.

Treatment:

- » get out of the heat
- » fan the sufferer
- » apply cool, wet cloths to the skin or ice to the body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat trapped under the skin. Treat it by moving out of the heat for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly-heat powder can be helpful.

Altitude Sickness

If you are going to altitudes above 3000m, Acute Moun-

tain Sickness (AMS) is an issue. The biggest risk factor is going too high too quickly – follow a conservative acclimatisation schedule found in good trekking guides, and *never* go to a higher altitude when you have any symptoms that could be altitude related. There is no way to predict who will get altitude sickness and it is often the younger, fitter members of a group who succumb.

Symptoms usually develop during the first 24 hours at altitude but may be delayed up to three weeks. Mild symptoms include:

- » headache
 - » lethargy
 - » dizziness
 - » difficulty sleeping
 - » loss of appetite.
- AMS may become more severe without warning and can be fatal. Severe symptoms include:
- » breathlessness
 - » a dry, irritative cough (which may progress to the production of pink, frothy sputum)
 - » severe headache
 - » lack of coordination and balance
 - » confusion
 - » irrational behaviour
 - » vomiting
 - » drowsiness
 - » unconsciousness.

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, which usually takes a day or two. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, immediate descent is necessary; even 500m can help. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

The drugs acetazolamide and dexamethasone are recommended by some doctors for the prevention of AMS; however, their use is controversial. They can reduce the symptoms, but they may also mask warning signs; severe

and fatal AMS has occurred in people taking these drugs.

To prevent acute mountain sickness:

- » ascend slowly – have frequent rest days, spending two to three nights at each rise of 1000m
- » sleep at a lower altitude than the greatest height reached during the day, if possible. Above 3000m, don't increase sleeping altitude by more than 300m daily
- » drink extra fluids
- » eat light, high-carbohydrate meals
- » avoid alcohol and sedatives.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs Don't carry disease but their bites can be very itchy. They live in furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.

Lice Most commonly appear on the head and pubic areas. You may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as pyrethrin. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks Contracted walking in rural areas. Ticks are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and have a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches, you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches Found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bees and wasp stings

Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an injection of adrenalin (eg an EpiPen). For others pain is the main problem – apply

ice to the sting and take painkillers.

Skin Problems

Fungal rashes There are two common fungal rashes that affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas, such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as clotrimazole or Lamisil. The second, *Tinea versicolor*, causes light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches These become easily infected in humid climates. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If

you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness), see a doctor.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always adhere to the following:

- » Use a strong sunscreen (factor 30) and reapply after a swim
- » Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses
- » Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm)
- » Be vigilant above 3000m – you can get burnt very easily at altitude.

If you become sunburnt, stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and, if necessary, take painkillers for the discomfort. One per cent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

Women's Health

For gynaecological health issues, seek out a female doctor.

Birth control Bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception.

Sanitary products Pads, rarely tampons, are readily available.

Thrush Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan).

Urinary-tract infections These can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

Language

The number of languages spoken in India helps explain why English is still widely spoken there, and why it's still in official use. Another 22 languages are recognised in the constitution, and more than 1600 minor languages are spoken throughout the country.

Major efforts have been made to promote Hindi as the national language of India and to gradually phase out English. However, while Hindi is the predominant language in the north, it bears little relation to the Dravidian languages of the south such as Tamil. Consequently, very few people in the south speak Hindi.

Many educated Indians speak English as virtually their first language. For the large number of Indians who speak more than one language, it's often their second tongue. Although you'll find it very easy to get around India with English, it's always good to know a little of the local language.

HINDI

Hindi has about 600 million speakers worldwide, of which 180 million are in India. It developed from Classical Sanskrit, and is written in Devanagari script. In 1947 it was granted official status along with English.

Most Hindi sounds are similar to their English counterparts. The main difference is that Hindi has both 'aspirated' consonants (pronounced with a puff of air, like saying 'h' after the sound) and unaspirated ones, as well as 'retroflex' (pronounced with the tongue bent backwards) and nonretroflex consonants. Our simplified pronunciation guides don't include these distinctions – read them as if they were English and you'll be understood.

WANT MORE?

For in-depth language information and handy phrases, check out Lonely Planet's *Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook* and *India Phrasebook*. You'll find them at shop.lonelyplanet.com, or you can buy Lonely Planet's iPhone phrasebooks at the Apple App Store.

Pronunciation of vowels is important, especially their length (eg *a* and *aa*). The consonant combination *ng* after a vowel indicates nasalisation (ie the vowel is pronounced 'through the nose'). Note also that *au* is pronounced as the 'ow' in 'how'.

Word stress in Hindi is very light; we've indicated the stressed syllables with italics.

Basics

Hindi verbs change form depending on the gender of the speaker (or the subject of the sentence in general) – meaning it's the verbs, not the pronouns 'he' or 'she', which show whether the subject of the sentence is masculine or feminine. In these phrases we include the options for male and female speakers, marked 'm' and 'f' respectively.

Hello./Goodbye.	नमस्ते ।	<i>na-ma-ste</i>
Yes.	जी हाँ ।	<i>jee haang</i>
No.	जी नहीं ।	<i>jee na-heeng</i>
Excuse me.	सुनिये ।	<i>su-ni-ye</i>
Sorry.	माफ़ कीजिये ।	<i>maaf kee-ji-ye</i>
Please ...	कृपया ...	<i>kri-pa-yaa ...</i>
Thank you.	थैंक्यू ।	<i>thayn-kyoo</i>
You're welcome.	कोई बात नहीं ।	<i>ko-ee baat na-heeng</i>

How are you?
आप कैसे/कैसी है?

aap kay-se/kay-see hayng (m/f)

Fine. And you?

मैं ठीक हूँ।
आप सुनाइये।

mayng teek hoong
aap su-naa-i-ye

What's your name?

आप का नाम क्या है?

aap kaa naam kyaa hay

My name is ...

मेरा नाम ... है।

me-raa naam ... hay

Do you speak English?

क्या आपको अंग्रेज़ी
आती है?

kyaa aap ko an-gre-zee
aa-tee hay

I don't understand.

मैं नहीं समझा/
समझी।

mayng na-heeng sam-jaa/
sam-jee (m/f)

Accommodation

Where's a ...? ... कहाँ है? ... ka-haang hay

guesthouse गेस्ट हाउस gest haa-us

hotel होटल ho-tal

youth hostel यूथ हास्टल yoot haas-tal

Do you have a ... room? क्या ... कमरा है? kyaa ... kam-raa hay

single सिंगल sin-gal

double डबल da-bal

How much is it per ...? ... के लिय कितने पैसे लगते हैं? ... ke li-ye kit-ne pay-se lag-te hayng

night एक रात ek raat

person हर व्यक्ति har vyak-ti

air-con ए० सी० e see

bathroom बाथलूम baat-room

hot water गर्म पानी garm paa-nee

mosquito net मसहरी mas-ha-ree

washerman धोबी do-bee

window खिड़की kir-kee

Directions

Where's ...? ... कहाँ है? ... ka-haang hay

How far is it? वह कितनी दूर है? voh kit-nee door hay

What's the address? पता क्या है? pa-taa kyaa hay

Can you write it down, please? कृपया यह लिखिये? kri-pa-yaa yeh li-ki-ye

Can you show me (on the map)?

(नक्शे में) दिखा सकते हैं? (nak-she meng) di-kaa sak-te hayng

Turn left/right.

लेफ्ट/राइट मुड़िये। left/raa-it mu-ri-ye

at the corner कोने पर ko-ne par

at the traffic lights सिगनल पर sig-nal par

behind के पीछे ... ke pee-che

in front of के सामने ... ke saam-ne

near के पास ... ke paas

opposite के सामने ... ke saam-ne

straight ahead सीधे see-de

Eating & Drinking**What would you recommend?**

आपके ख्याल में क्या अच्छा होगा? aap ke kyaal meng kyaa ach-chaa ho-gaa

Do you have vegetarian food?

क्या आप का खाना शाकाहारी है? kyaa aap kaa kaa-naa shaa-kaa-haa-ree hay

I don't eat (meat).

मैं (गोश्त) नहीं खाता/खाती। mayng (gosht) na-heeng kaa-taa/kaa-tee (m/f)

I'll have ...

मुझे ... दीजिये। mu-je ... dee-ji-ye

That was delicious.

बहुत मजेदार हुआ। ba-hut ma-ze-daar hu-aa

Please bring the menu/bill.

मेन्यू/बिल लाइये। men-yoo/bil laa-i-ye

Key Words

bottle बोतल bo-tal

bowl कटोरी ka-to-ree

breakfast नाश्ता naash-taa

dessert मीठा mee-taa

dinner रात का खाना raat kaa kaa-naa

drinks पीने की चीज़ें pee-ne kee chee-zeng

food खाना kaa-naa

fork काँटा kaan-taa

glass गिलास glaas

knife चाकू chaa-koo

local eatery ढाबा daa-baa

lunch दिन का खाना din kaa kaa-naa

market बाज़ार baa-zaar

plate प्लेट plet

Numbers – Hindi

1	१	एक	ek
2	२	दो	do
3	३	तीन	teen
4	४	चार	chaar
5	५	पाँच	paanch
6	६	छह	chay
7	७	सात	saat
8	८	आठ	aat
9	९	नौ	nau
10	१०	दस	das
20	२०	बीस	bees
30	३०	तीस	tees
40	४०	चालीस	chaa-lees
50	५०	पचास	pa-chaas
60	६०	साठ	saat
70	७०	सत्तर	sat-tar
80	८०	अस्सी	as-see
90	९०	नब्बे	nab-be
100	१००	सौ	sau
1000	१०००	एक हजार	ek ha-zaar

restaurant	रेस्टोरेंट	res-to-rent
set meal	थाली	taa-lee
snack	नाश्ता	naash-taa
spoon	चम्मच	cham-mach
with/without	के साथ/बिना	ke saat/bi-naa

Meat & Fish

beef	गाय का गोश्त	gaai kaa gosht
chicken	मुर्गी	mur-gee
duck	बतख	ba-tak
fish	मछली	mach-lee
goat	बकरा	bak-raa
lobster	बड़ी झींगा	ba-ree jeeng-gaa
meat	गोश्त	gosht
meatballs	कोफ़ता	kof-taa
pork	सुअर का गोश्त	su-ar kaa gosht
prawn	झींगी	jeeng-gee
	मछली	mach-lee
seafood	मछली	mach-lee

Fruit & Vegetables

apple	सेब	seb
apricot	खुबानी	ku-baa-nee
banana	केला	ke-laa
capsicum	मिर्च	mirch
carrot	गाजर	gaa-jar

cauliflower	फूल गोभी	pool-go-bee
corn	मक्का	mak-kaa
cucumber	ककड़ी	kak-ree
date	खजूर	ka-joor
eggplant	बैंगन	bayng-gan
fruit	फल	pal
garlic	लहसुन	leh-sun
grape	अंगूर	an-goor
grapefruit	चकोतरा	cha-kot-raa
lemon	निम्बू	nim-boo
lentils	दाल	daal
mandarin	संतरा	san-ta-raa
mango	आम	aam
mushroom	खुंभी	kum-bee
nuts	मेवे	me-ve
orange	नारंगी	naa-ran-gee
papaya	पपीता	pa-pee-taa
peach	आड़ू	aa-roo
peas	मटर	ma-tar
pineapple	अनन्नास	a-nan-naas
potato	आलू	aa-loo
pumpkin	कद्दू	kad-doo
spinach	पालक	paa-lak
vegetables	सब्जी	sab-zee
watermelon	तरबूज	tar-booz

Other

bread	चपाती/ नान/रोटी	cha-paa-tee/ naan/ro-tee
butter	मक्खन	mak-kan
chilli	मिर्च	mirch
chutney	चटनी	chat-nee
egg	अंडे	an-de
honey	मधु	ma-dhu
ice	बर्फ	barf
ice cream	कुल्फी	kul-fee
pappadams	पपड़	pa-par
pepper	काली मिर्च	kaa-lee mirch
relish	अचार	a-chaar
rice	चावल	chaa-val
salt	नमक	na-mak
spices	मिर्च मसाला	mirch ma-saa-laa
sugar	चीनी	chee-nee
tofu	टोफू	to-foo

Drinks

beer	बियर	bi-yar
coffee	काईफी	kaa-fee
juice	रस	ras

milk	दूध	dood
red wine	लाल शराब	laal sha-raab
sugarcane juice	गन्ने का रस	gan-ne kaa ras
sweet fruit drink	शरबत	shar-bat
tea	चाय	chaai
water	पानी	paa-nee
white wine	सफ़ेद शराब	sa-fed sha-raab
yoghurt	लस्सी	las-see

Emergencies

Help!

मदद कीजिये! *ma-dad kee-ji-ye*

I'm lost.

मैं रास्ता भूल गया/गयी हूँ। *mayng raas-taa bool ga-yaa/ga-ye hong (m/f)*

Go away!

जाओ! *jaa-o*

There's been an accident.

दुर्घटना हुई है। *dur-gat-naa hu-ee hay*

Call a doctor!

डॉक्टर को बुलाओ! *daak-tar ko bu-laa-o*

Call the police!

पुलिस को बुलाओ! *pu-lis ko bu-laa-o*

I'm ill.

मैं बीमार हूँ। *mayng bee-maar hong*

It hurts here.

इधर दर्द हो रहा है। *i-dar dard ho ra-haa hay*

I'm allergic to (antibiotics).

मुझे (एंटीबायोटिक्स) की एलर्जी है। *mu-je (en-tee-baa-yo-tiks) kee e-lar-jee hay*

Shopping & Services

I'd like to buy ...

मुझे ... चाहिये। *mu-je ... chaa-hi-ye*

I'm just looking.

सिर्फ़ देखने आया/आयी हूँ। *sirf dek-ne aa-yaa/aa-ye hong (m/f)*

May I look at it?

दिखाइये। *di-kaa-i-ye*

Do you have any others?

दूसरा है? *doos-raa hay*

How much is it?

कितने का है? *kit-ne kaa hay*

It's too expensive.

यह बहुत महंगा/महंगी है। *yeh ba-hut ma-han-gaa/ma-han-gee hay (m/f)*

Can you lower the price?

क्या आप दाम कम करेंगे? *kyaa aap daam kam ka-reng-ge*

There's a mistake in the bill.

बिल में गलती है। *bil meng gal-tee hay*

bank	बैंक	baynk
post office	डाक खाना	daak kaa-naa
public phone	सार्वजनिक फ़ोन	saar-va-ja-nik fon
rupee	रुपया	ru-pa-yaa
tourist office	पर्यटन ऑफ़िस	par-ya-tan aa-fis

Time & Dates

What time is it?

टाइम क्या है? *taa-im kyaa hay*

It's (10) o'clock.

(दस) बजे हैं। *(das) ba-je hayng*

Half past (10).

साढ़ (दस)। *saa-re (das)*

morning	सुबह	su-bah
afternoon	दोपहर	do-pa-har
evening	शाम	shaam
Monday	सोमवार	som-vaar
Tuesday	मंगलवार	man-gal-vaar
Wednesday	बुधवार	bud-vaar
Thursday	गुरुवार	gu-ru-vaar
Friday	शुक्रवार	shuk-ra-vaar
Saturday	शनिवार	sha-ni-vaar
Sunday	रविवार	ra-vi-vaar

January	जनवरी	jan-va-ree
February	फरवरी	far-va-ree
March	मार्च	maarch
April	अप्रैल	a-prayl
May	मई	ma-ee
June	जून	joon
July	जुलाई	ju-laa-ee
August	अगस्त	a-gast
September	सितम्बर	si-tam-bar
October	अक्टूबर	ak-too-bar
November	नवम्बर	na-vam-bar
December	दिसम्बर	di-sam-bar

Question Words – Hindi

How?	कैस?	kay-se
What?	क्या?	kyaa
Which?	कौनसा?	kaun-saa
When?	कब?	kab
Where?	कहाँ?	ka-haang
Who?	कौन?	kaun
Why?	क्यों?	kyong

Transport

Public Transport

When's the ... (bus)?	... (बस) कब जाती है?	... (bas) kab jaa-tee hay
first	पहली	peh-lee
next	अगली	ag-lee
last	आखिरी	aa-ki-ree

bicycle	साइकिल	saa-i-kil
rickshaw	रिक्शा	rik-shaa
boat	जहाज़	ja-haaz
bus	बस	bas
plane	हवाई जहाज़	ha-vaa-ee ja-haaz
train	ट्रेन	tren

At what time does it leave?

कितने बजे जाता/ जाती है? *kit-ne ba-je jaa-taa/ jaa-tee hay (m/f)*

How long does the trip take?

जाने में कितनी देर लगती है? *jaa-ne meng kit-nee der lag-tee hay*

How long will it be delayed?

उसे कितनी देर हुई है? *u-se kit-nee der hu-ee hay*

Does it stop at ...?

क्या ... में रुकती है? *kyaa ... meng ruk-tee hay*

Please tell me when we get to ...

जब ... आता है, मुझे बताइये। *jab ... aa-taa hay mu-je ba-taa-i-ye*

Please go straight to this address.

इसी जगह को फौरन जाइए। *is-ee ja-gah ko fau-ran jaa-i-ye*

Please stop here.

यहाँ रुकिये। *ya-haang ru-ki-ye*

bus stop बस स्टॉप *bas is-taap*

ticket office टिकटघर *ti-kat-gar*

timetable समय सारणी *sa-mai saa-ra-nee*

train station स्टेशन *ste-shan*

a ... ticket के लिये ... टिकट दीजिये। *ke li-ye ... ti-kat dee-ji-ye*

1st-class फर्स्ट क्लास *farst klaas*

2nd-class सेकंड क्लास *se-kand klaas*

one-way एक तरफ़ा *ek ta-ra-faa*

return आने जाने का *aa-ne jaa-ne kaa*

I'd like a/an ... seat. मुझे ... सीट चाहिये। *mu-je ... seet chaa-hi-ye*

aisle किनारे *ki-naa-re*

window खिड़की के पास *kir-kee ke paas*

Driving & Cycling

I'd like to hire a ... मुझे ... किराये पर लेना है। *mu-je ... ki-raa-ye par le-naa hay*

4WD फोर व्हील ड्राइव *for vheel draa-iv*

bicycle साइकिल *saa-i-kil*

car कार *kaar*

motorbike मोटर साइकिल *mo-tar saa-i-kil*

Is this the road to ...?

क्या यह ... का रास्ता है? *kyaa yeh ... kaa raas-taa hay*

Can I park here?

यहाँ पार्क कर सकता/ सकती हूँ? *ya-haang paark kar sak-taa/ sak-tee hoong (m/f)*

Where's a service station?

पेट्रोल पम्प कहाँ है? *pet-rol pamp ka-haang hay*

I need a mechanic.

मुझे मरम्मत करने वाला चाहिये। *mu-je ma-ram-mat kar-ne vaa-laa chaa-hi-ye*

The car/motorbike has broken down at ...

कार/मोटर साइकिल ... में खराब हो गयी है। *kaar/mo-tar saa-i-kil ... meng ka-raab ho ga-yee hay*

I have a flat tyre.

टायर पंकचर हो गया है। *taa-yar pank-char ho ga-yaa hay*

I've run out of petrol.

पेट्रोल खत्म हो गया है। *pet-rol katm ho ga-yaa hay*

TAMIL

Tamil is the official language in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu (and also a national language in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore). It is one of the major Dravidian languages of South India, with records of its existence going back more than 2000 years. Tamil has about 62 million speakers in India.

Like Hindi, the Tamil sound system includes a number of 'retroflex' consonants (pronounced with the tongue bent backwards). Unlike Hindi and most other Indian languages, however, Tamil has no 'aspirated' sounds (pronounced with a puff of air). Our simplified pronunciation guides don't distinguish the retroflex consonants from their nonretroflex counterparts; just read the guides as if they were English and you'll be understood. Note that **aw** is pronounced as in 'law' and **ow** as in 'how'. The stressed syllables are indicated with italics.

Basics

Hello.	வணக்கம்.	<i>va-nak-kam</i>
Goodbye.	போய் வருகிறேன்.	<i>po-i va-ru-ki-reyn</i>
Yes.	ஆமாம்.	<i>aa-maam</i>
No.	இல்லை.	<i>il-lai</i>
Excuse me.	தயவு செய்து.	<i>ta-ya-vu sei-du</i>
Sorry.	மன்னிக்கவும்.	<i>man-nik-ka-vum</i>
Please.	தயவு செய்து.	<i>ta-ya-vu chey-tu</i>
Thank you.	நன்றி.	<i>nan-dri</i>

How are you?
நீங்கள் நலமா? *neeng-kal na-la-maa*

Fine, thanks. And you?
நலம், நன்றி.
நீங்கள்? *na-lam nan-dri neeng-kal*

What's your name?
உங்கள் பெயர் என்ன? *ung-kal pe-yar en-na*

My name is ...
என் பெயர் ... *en pe-yar ...*

Do you speak English?
நீங்கள் ஆங்கிலம் பேசுவீர்களா? *neeng-kal aang-ki-lam pey-chu-veer-ka-la*

I don't understand.
எனக்கு விளங்கவில்லை. *e-nak-ku vi-lang-ka-vil-lai*

Question Words – Tamil

What's that?	அது என்ன?	<i>a-tu en-na</i>
When?	எப்பொழுது?	<i>ep-po-zu-tu</i>
Where?	எங்கே?	<i>eng-key</i>
Who?	யார்?	<i>yaar</i>
Why?	ஏன்?	<i>eyn</i>

Accommodation

Where's a ... nearby?	அருகே ஒரு ... எங்கே உள்ளது?	<i>a-ru-ke o-ru ... eng-ke ul-la-tu</i>
guesthouse	விருந்தினர் இல்லம்	<i>vi-run-ti-nar il-lam</i>
hotel	ஹோட்டல்	<i>hot-tal</i>
Do you have a ... room?	உங்களிடம் ஓர் ... அறை உள்ளதா?	<i>ung-ka-li-tam awr ... a-rai ul-la-taa</i>
single	தன	<i>ta-ni</i>
double	இரட்டை	<i>i-rat-tai</i>
How much is it per ...?	ஓர் ... என்னவிலை?	<i>awr ... en-na-vi-lai</i>
night	இரவுக்கு	<i>i-ra-vuk-ku</i>
person	ஒருவருக்கு	<i>o-ru-va-ruk-ku</i>

air-conditioned குளிர்சாதன வசதியுடையது *ku-lir-chaa-ta-na va-cha-ti-yu-tai-ya-tu*

bathroom குளியலறை *ku-li-ya-la-rai*

bed படுக்கை *pa-tuk-kai*

window சன்னல் *chan-nal*

Directions

Where's the ...?
... எங்கே இருக்கிறது? *... eng-key i-ruk-ki-ra-tu*

What's the address?
விலாசம் என்ன? *vi-laa-cham en-na*

Can you show me (on the map)?
எனக்கு (வரைபடத்தில்) காட்ட முடியுமா? *e-nak-ku (va-rai-pa-tat-il) kaat-ta mu-ti-yu-maa*

How far is it?
எவ்வளவு தூரத்தில் இருக்கிறது? *ev-va-la-vu too-rat-til i-ruk-ki-ra-tu*

Turn left/right.
இடது/வலது புறத்தில் திரும்புக. *i-ta-tu/va-la-tu pu-rat-til ti-rum-pu-ka*

It's ...
அது இருப்பது ... *a-tu i-rup-pa-tu ...*

behind ...
... க்குப் பின்னால் *... kup pin-naal*

in front of ...
... க்கு முன்னால் *... ku mun-naal*

near (to ...)
(... க்கு) அருகே *(... ku) a-ru-key*

on the corner ஓரத்தில் *aw-rat-til*

straight ahead நேரடியாக முன்புறம் *ney-ra-di-ya-ha mun-pu-ram*

there அங்கே *ang-key*

Numbers – Tamil

1	ஒன்று	<i>on-dru</i>
2	இரண்டு	<i>i-ran-tu</i>
3	மூன்று	<i>moon-dru</i>
4	நான்கு	<i>naan-ku</i>
5	ஐந்து	<i>ain-tu</i>
6	ஆறு	<i>aa-ru</i>
7	ஏழு	<i>ey-zu</i>
8	எட்டு	<i>et-tu</i>
9	ஒன்பது	<i>on-pa-tu</i>
10	பத்து	<i>pat-tu</i>
20	இருபது	<i>i-ru-pa-tu</i>
30	மூப்பது	<i>mup-pa-tu</i>
40	நாற்பது	<i>naar-pa-tu</i>
50	ஐம்பது	<i>aim-pa-tu</i>
60	அறுபது	<i>a-ru-pa-tu</i>
70	எழுபது	<i>e-zu-pa-tu</i>
80	எண்பது	<i>en-pa-tu</i>
90	தொண்ணூறு	<i>ton-noo-ru</i>
100	நூறு	<i>noo-ru</i>
1000	ஓராயிரம்	<i>aw-raa-yi-ram</i>

Eating & Drinking

Can you recommend a ...? நீங்கள் ஒரு ... *neeng-kal o-ru ...*
பரிந்துரைக்க *pa-rin-tu-raik-ka*
முடியுமா? *mu-ti-yu-maa*

bar	பார்	<i>paar</i>
dish	உணவு வகை	<i>u-na-vu va-kai</i>
place to eat	உணவகம்	<i>u-na-va-ham</i>

I'd like (a/the) ..., please. எனக்கு தயவு *e-nak-ku ta-ya-vu*
செய்து ... *chey-tu ...*
கொடுங்கள். *ko-tung-kal*

bill	விலைச்சீட்டு	<i>vi-laich-cheet-tu</i>
menu	உணவுப்- பட்டியல்	<i>u-na-vup- pat-ti-yal</i>
that dish	அந்த உணவு வகை	<i>an-ta u-na-vu va-hai</i>

(cup of) coffee/tea ... (கப்) காப்பி/
தேனீர் ... *(kap) kaap-pi/
tey-neer ...*

with milk	பாலுடன்	<i>paa-lu-tan</i>
without sugar	சர்க்கரை- இல்லாமல்	<i>chark-ka-rai- il-laa-mal</i>

**a bottle/
glass of
... wine** ஒரு பாட்டில்/
கிளாஸ் ... *o-ru paat-til/
ki-laas ...*
வைன் *vain*

red	சிவப்பு	<i>chi-vap-pu</i>
white	வெள்ளை	<i>vel-lai</i>

Do you have vegetarian food?

உங்களிடம் சைவ *eng-ka-li-tam chai-va*
உணவு உள்ளதா? *u-na-vu ul-la-taa*

I'm allergic to (nuts).

எனக்கு (பருப்பு *e-nak-ku (pa-rup-pu*
வகை) உணவு *va-kai) u-na-vu*
சேராது. *chey-raa-tu*

alcohol	சாராயம்	<i>chaa-raa-yam</i>
breakfast	காலை உணவு	<i>kaa-lai u-na-vu</i>
dinner	இரவு உணவு	<i>i-ra-vu u-na-vu</i>
drink	பானம்	<i>paa-nam</i>
fish	மீன்	<i>meen</i>
food	உணவு	<i>u-na-vu</i>
fruit	பழம்	<i>pa-zam</i>
juice	சாறு	<i>chaa-ru</i>
lunch	மதிய உணவு	<i>ma-ti-ya u-na-vu</i>
meat	இறைச்சி	<i>i-raich-chi</i>
milk	பால்	<i>paal</i>
soft drink	குளிர் பானம்	<i>ku-lir paa-nam</i>
vegetable	காய்கறி	<i>kai-ka-ri</i>
water	தண்ணீர்	<i>tan-neyr</i>

Emergencies

Help! உதவ! *u-ta-vi*
Stop! நிறுத்து! *ni-rut-tu*
Go away! போய் விடு! *pow-i vi-tu*

Call a doctor!

ஐ அழைக்கவும் *i a-zai-ka-vum*
ஒரு மருத்துவர்! *o-ru ma-rut-tu-var*

Call the police!

ஐ அழைக்கவும் *i a-zai-ka-vum*
போலீஸ்! *pow-lees*

I'm lost.

நான் வழி தவறி *naan va-zi ta-va-ri*
போய்விட்டேன். *pow-i vit-teyn*

It hurts here.

இங்கே வலிக்கிறது. *ing-key va-lik-ki-ra-tu*

I have to use the phone.

நான் தொலைபேசியை *naan to-lai-pey-chi-yai*
பயன்படுத்த வேண்டும். *pa-yan-pa-tut-ta veyn-tum*

Where are the toilets?

கழிவறைகள் எங்கே? *ka-zi-va-rai-kal eng-key*

Shopping & Services

Where's the market?

எங்கே சந்தை *eng-key chan-tai*
இருக்கிறது? *i-ruk-ki-ra-tu*

Can I look at it?

நான் இதைப் *naan i-taip*
பார்க்கலாமா? *paark-ka-laa-maa*

How much is it?இது என்ன விலை? *i-tu en-na vi-lai***That's too expensive.**ஆது அதிக விலையாக இருக்கிறது. *a-tu a-ti-ka vi-lai-yaa-ka i-ruk-ki-ra-tu***There's a mistake in the bill.**இந்த விலைச்சீட்டில் ஒரு தவறு இருக்கிறது. *in-ta vi-laich-cheet-til o-ru ta-va-ru i-ruk-ki-ra-tu*

bank	வாங்கி	<i>vang-ki</i>
credit card	கிரேடிட் அட்டை	<i>ki-rey-tit at-tai</i>
internet	இணையம்	<i>i-nai-yam</i>
post office	தபால் நிலையம்	<i>ta-paal ni-lai-yam</i>
tourist office	கற்றுப்பயண அலுவலகம்	<i>chut-rup-pa-ya-na a-lu-va-la-kam</i>

Time & Dates**What time is it?**மணி என்ன? *ma-ni en-na***It's (two) o'clock.**மணி (இரண்டு). *ma-ni (i-ran-tu)***Half past (two).**(இரண்டு) மூப்பது. *(i-ran-tu) mup-pa-tu*

yesterday	நேற்று	<i>neyt-tu</i>
today	இன்று	<i>in-dru</i>
tomorrow	நாளை	<i>naa-lai</i>
day	நாள்	<i>naal</i>
morning	காலை	<i>kaa-lai</i>
evening	மாலை	<i>maa-lai</i>
night	இரவு	<i>i-ra-vu</i>

Monday	திங்கள்	<i>ting-kal</i>
Tuesday	செவ்வாய்	<i>chev-vai</i>
Wednesday	புதன்	<i>pu-tan</i>
Thursday	வியாழன்	<i>vi-yaa-zan</i>
Friday	வெள்ளி	<i>vel-li</i>
Saturday	சனி	<i>cha-ni</i>
Sunday	ஞாயிறு	<i>nyaa-yi-ru</i>

Transport

Is this the ... to (New Delhi)?	இது தானா (புது-டில்லிக்குப்) புறப்படும் ...?	<i>i-tu taa-naa (pu-tu til-lik-kup) pu-rap-pa-tum ...</i>
bus	பஸ்	<i>pas</i>
plane	விமானம்	<i>vi-maa-nam</i>
train	இரயில்	<i>i-ra-yil</i>

One ... ticket (to Madurai), please. (மதுரைக்கு) தயவு செய்து ... டிக்கட் கொடுங்கள். *(ma-tu-raik-ku) ta-ya-vu chey-tu ... tik-kat ko-tung-kal*

one-way	ஒரு வழிப்பயண	<i>o-ru va-zip-pa-ya-na</i>
return	இரு வழிப்பயண	<i>i-ru va-zip-pa-ya-na</i>

What time's the first/last bus?

எத்தனை மணிக்கு முதல்/இறுதி பஸ் வரும்? *et-ta-nai ma-nik-ku mu-tal/i-ru-ti pas va-rum*

How long does the trip take?

பயணம் எவ்வளவு நேரம் எடுக்கும்? *pa-ya-nam ev-va-la-vu ney-ram e-tuk-kum*

How long will it be delayed?

எவ்வளவு நேரம் ஆது தாமதப்படும்? *ev-va-la-vu ney-ram a-tu taa-ma-tap-pa-tum*

Please tell me when we get to (Ooti).

(ஊட்டிக்குப்) போனவுடன் தயவு செய்து எனக்குக் கூறங்கள். *(oot-tik-kup) paw-na-vu-tan ta-ya-vu chey-tu e-nak-kuk koo-rung-kal*

Please take me to (this address).

தயவு செய்து என்னை இந்த (விலாசத்துக்குக்) கொண்டு செல்லுங்கள். *ta-ya-vu chey-tu en-nai in-ta (vi-laa-chat-tuk-kuk) kon-tu chel-lung-kal*

Please stop/wait here.

தயவு செய்து இங்கே நிறுத்துங்கள்/காத்திருங்கள். *ta-ya-vu chey-tu ing-key ni-ru-tung-kal/kaat-ti-rung-kal*

I'd like to hire a car (with a driver).

நான் ஒரு மோட்டார் வண்டி (ஓர் ஓட்டுநருடன்) வாடகைக்கு எடுக்க விரும்புகிறேன். *naan o-ru mowt-taar van-ti (awr aw-tu-na-ran-tan) vaa-ta-haik-ku e-tuk-ka vi-rum-pu-ki-reyn*

Is this the road to (Mamallapuram)?

இது தான் (மாமல்லபுரத்துக்கு) செல்லும் சாலையா? *i-tu taan (maa-mal-la-pu-rat-tuk-ku) chel-lum chaa-lai-yaa*

airport	விமான நிலையம்	<i>vi-maa-na ni-lai-yam</i>
bicycle	சைக்கிள்	<i>chaik-kil</i>
boat	படகு	<i>pa-ta-ku</i>
bus stop	பஸ் நிறுத்தும்	<i>pas ni-ru-tum</i>
economy class	சீக்கன வகுப்பு	<i>chik-ka-na va-kup-pu</i>
first class	முதல் வகுப்பு	<i>mu-tal va-kup-pu</i>
motorcycle	மோட்டார் சைக்கிள்	<i>mowt-taar chaik-kil</i>
train station	நிலையம்	<i>ni-lai-yam</i>

GLOSSARY

Adivasis – tribal people
ahimsa – discipline of nonviolence
AIR – All India Radio; the national broadcaster, government controlled
Ananta – snake on which Vishnu reclined between universes
Ardhanarishvara – Shiva's half-male, half-female form
Arjuna – Mahabharata hero and military commander; he had the Bhagavad Gita related to him by Krishna.
Aryan – Sanskrit for 'noble'; those who migrated from Persia and settled in northern India
ashram – spiritual community or retreat
ASI – Archaeological Survey of India; an organisation involved in monument preservation
attar – essential oil usually made from flowers and used as a base for perfumes
autorickshaw – noisy, three-wheeled, motorised contraption for transporting passengers, livestock etc for short distances; found throughout the country, they are cheaper than taxis
Avalokitesvara – in Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva of compassion
avatar – incarnation, usually of a deity
ayurveda – ancient and complex science of Indian herbal medicine and holistic healing
azad – Urdu for 'free', as in Azad Jammu and Kashmir
azadi – freedom
azan – Muslim call to prayer

Baba – religious master or father; term of respect
bagh – garden
bahadur – brave or chivalrous; an honorific title
baksheesh – tip, donation (alms) or bribe
bandh – strike
bandhani – tie-dye
banyan – Indian fig tree; spiritual to many Indians
baoli – see baori
baori – well, particularly a step-well with landings and galleries; in Gujarat it is more commonly referred to as a baoli
barasingha – deer
basti – slum
bearer – like a butler
Bhagavad Gita – Hindu Song of

the Divine One; Krishna's lessons to Arjuna, the main thrust of which was to emphasise the philosophy of bhakti; it is part of the Mahabharata
bhajan – devotional song
bhakti – surrendering to the gods; faith, devotion
bhang – dried leaves and flowering shoots of the marijuana plant
bhangra – rhythmic Punjabi music/dance
Bharat – Hindi for India
bhavan – house, building; also spelt bhawan
Bhima – Mahabharata hero; the brother of Hanuman, husband of Hadimba, father of Ghatotkach, and renowned for his great strength
bindi – forehead mark (often dot-shaped) made from kumkum, worn by women
BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party
Bodhi Tree – tree under which Buddha sat when he attained enlightenment
bodhisattva – enlightened beings
Bollywood – India's answer to Hollywood; the film industry of Mumbai (Bombay)
Brahma – Hindu god; worshipped as the creator in the Trimurti
Brahmanism – early form of Hinduism that evolved from Vedism (see Vedas); named after Brahmin priests and Brahma
Brahmin – member of the priest/scholar caste, the highest Hindu caste
Buddha – Awakened One; the originator of Buddhism; also regarded by Hindus as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu
Buddhism – see Early Buddhism
bugyal – high-altitude meadow
burka – one-piece garment used by conservative Muslim women to cover themselves from head to toe

cantonment – administrative and military area of a Raj-era town
Carnatic music – classical music of South India
caste – a Hindu's hereditary station (social standing) in life; there are four main castes: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra
chaam – ritual masked dance performed by some Buddhist monks in gompas to celebrate the victory of good over evil and of Buddhism over pre-existing religions

chaitya – prayer room; assembly hall
chakra – focus of one's spiritual power; disc-like weapon of Vishnu
Chamunda – form of Durga; armed with a scimitar, noose and mace, and clothed in elephant hide, her mission was to kill the demons Chanda and Munda
chandra – moon, or the moon as a god
Chandragupta – Indian ruler in the 3rd century BC
chappals – sandals or leather thong-like footwear; flip-flops
char dham – four pilgrimage destinations of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri
charas – resin of the marijuana plant; also referred to as 'hashish'
charbagh – formal Persian garden, divided into quarters (literally 'four gardens')
charpoy – simple bed made of ropes knotted together on a wooden frame
chedi – see chaitya
chhatra – cenotaph (literally 'umbrella')
chikan – embroidered cloth (specialty of Lucknow)
chillum – pipe of a hookah; commonly used to describe the pipes used for smoking ganja
chinkara – gazelle
chital – spotted deer
chogyal – king
choli – sari blouse
chorten – Tibetan for stupa
choultry – pilgrim's rest house; also called 'dharamsala'
chowk – town square, intersection or marketplace
chowkidar – night watchman, caretaker
Cong (I) – Congress Party of India; also known as Congress (I)
crore – 10 million
crorepatis – millionaires

dacoit – bandit (particularly armed bandit), outlaw
dagoba – see stupa
Dalit – preferred term for India's Untouchable caste; see also Harijan
dargah – shrine or place of burial of a Muslim saint
darshan – offering or audience with a deity
desi – local, Indian
deul – temple sanctuary

Devi – Shiva's wife; goddess

dhaba – basic restaurant or snack bar

dham – holiest pilgrimage places of India

dharamsala – pilgrim's rest house

dharma – for Hindus, the moral code of behaviour or social duty; for Buddhists, following the law of nature, or path, as taught by Buddha

dhobi – person who washes clothes; commonly referred to as dhobi-wallah

dhobi ghat – place where clothes are washed

dhol – traditional double-sided drum

dholi – portable 'chairs' with two bearers; people are carried in them to hilltop temples

dhoti – long loincloth worn by men; like a lungi, but the ankle-length cloth is then pulled up between the legs

dhurrie – kilimlike cotton rug

Digambara – 'Sky-Clad'; Jain group that demonstrates disdain for worldly goods by going naked

dikpala – temple guardian

diwan – principal officer in a princely state; royal court or council

Diwan-i-Am – hall of public audience

Diwan-i-Khas – hall of private audience

dowry – money and/or goods given by a bride's parents to their son-in-law's family; it's illegal but still widely exists in many arranged marriages

Draupadi – wife of the five Pandava princes in the Mahabharata

Dravidian – general term for the cultures and languages of the deep south of India, including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada

dukhang – Tibetan prayer hall

dun – valley

dupatta – long scarf for women often worn with the salwar kameez

durbar – royal court; also a government

Durga – the Inaccessible; a form of Shiva's wife, Devi, a beautiful, fierce woman riding a tiger/lion; a major goddess of the Shakti order

Early Buddhism – any of the schools of Buddhism established directly after Buddha's death and before the advent of Mahayana; a modern form is the Theravada (Teaching of the Elders) practised in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia; Early Buddhism differed from the Mahayana in that it did not teach the bodhisattva ideal

fakir – Muslim who has taken a vow of poverty; may also apply to other ascetics

filmi – slang term describing anything to do with Indian movies

gabba – appliquéd Kashmiri rug

gali – lane or alleyway

Ganesh – Hindu god of good fortune; elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati, he is also known as Ganpati and his vehicle is Mooshak (a ratlike creature)

Ganga – Hindu goddess representing the sacred Ganges River; said to flow from Vishnu's toe

ganj – market

gaon – village

garh – fort

Garuda – man-bird vehicle of Vishnu

gaur – Indian bison

Gayatri – sacred verse of Rig-Veda repeated mentally by Brahmins twice a day

geyser – hot-water unit found in many bathrooms

ghat – steps or landing on a river; a range of hills or a road up hills

giri – hill

godown – warehouse

gompa – Tibetan Buddhist monastery

Gopala – see Govinda

gopi – milkmaid; Krishna was fond of them

gopuram – soaring pyramidal gateway tower of Dravidian temples

Govinda – Krishna as a cowherd; also just cowherd

gufa – cave

gumbad – dome on an Islamic tomb or mosque

gurdwara – Sikh temple

Gurmukhi – script of the Guru Granth Sahib; Punjabi script

guru – holy teacher; in Sanskrit literally 'goe' (darkness) and 'roe' (to dispel)

Guru Granth Sahib – Sikh holy book

haat – village market

haj – Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca

haji – Muslim who has made the haj

hammam – Turkish bath; public bathhouse

Hanuman – Hindu monkey god, prominent in the Ramayana, and a follower of Rama

Hara – one of Shiva's names

Hari – another name for Vishnu

Harijan – name (no longer considered acceptable) given by Mahatma Gandhi

to India's Untouchable caste, meaning 'children of god'

hartal – strike

hashish – see charas

hathi – elephant

haveli – traditional, often ornately decorated, residences, particularly those found in Rajasthan and Gujarat

hijab – headscarf used by Muslim women

hijra – eunuch, transvestite

hookah – water pipe used for smoking marijuana or strong tobacco

howdah – seat for carrying people on an elephant's back

ikat – fabric made with thread which is tie-dyed before weaving

imam – Muslim religious leader

imambara – tomb dedicated to a Shiite Muslim holy man

Indo-Saracenic – style of colonial architecture that integrated Western designs with Islamic, Hindu and Jain influences

Indra – significant and prestigious Vedic god; god of rain, thunder, lightning and war

jagamohan – assembly hall

Jagannath – Lord of the Universe; a form of Krishna

jali – carved lattice (often marble) screen; also refers to the holes or spaces produced through carving timber or stone

Jataka – tale from Buddha's various lives

jauhar – ritual mass suicide by immolation, traditionally performed by Rajput women at times of military defeat to avoid being dishonoured by their captors

jhula – bridge

ji – honorific that can be added to the end of almost anything as a form of respect; thus 'Babajji', 'Gandhiji'

jihad – holy war (Islam)

JKLF – Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

jooti – traditional, often pointy-toed, slip-in shoes; commonly found in North India

juggernaut – huge, extravagantly decorated temple 'car' dragged through the streets during certain Hindu festivals

jiyoti linga – naturally occurring lingam believed to derive currents of shakti

kabaddi – traditional game (similar to tag)

Kailasa – sacred Himalayan mountain; home of Shiva

Kali – ominous-looking evil-destroying form of Devi; commonly depicted with dark skin, dripping with blood, and wearing a necklace of skulls

Kama – Hindu god of love

Kama Sutra – ancient Sanskrit text largely covering the subjects of love and sexuality

kameez – woman's shirtlike tunic; see also *salwar kameez*

kapali – sacred bowl made from a human skull

karma – Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh principle of retributive justice for past deeds

khadi – homespun cloth; Mahatma Gandhi encouraged people to spin this rather than buy English cloth

Khalsa – Sikh brotherhood

Khan – Muslim honorific title

kho-kho – traditional game (similar to tag); less common variation on *kabbadi*

khool – black eyeliner

khur – Asiatic wild ass

kiang – wild ass found in Ladakh

kirtan – Sikh devotional singing

koil – Hindu temple

kolam – see *rangoli*

kompu – C-shaped metal trumpet

kos minar – milestone

kot – fort

kothi – residence or mansion

kotwali – police station

Krishna – Vishnu's eighth incarnation, often coloured blue; he revealed the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna

Kshatriya – Hindu caste of soldiers or administrators; second in the caste hierarchy

kumkum – coloured powder used for *bindi* dots

kund – lake or tank; Toda village

kurta – long shirt with either short collar or no collar

lakh – 100,000

Lakshmana – half-brother and aide of Rama in the *Ramayana*

Lakshmi – Vishnu's consort, Hindu goddess of wealth; she sprang forth from the ocean holding a lotus

lama – Tibetan Buddhist priest or monk

Laxmi – see *Lakshmi*

lhamo – Tibetan opera

lingam – phallic symbol; auspicious symbol of Shiva; plural 'linga'

lok – people

Lok Sabha – lower house in the Indian parliament (House of the People)

Losar – Tibetan New Year

lungi – worn by men, this loose, coloured garment (similar to a sarong) is pleated by the wearer at the waist to fit

madrasa – Islamic seminary

maha – prefix meaning 'great'

Mahabharata – Great Hindu Vedic epic poem of the Bharata dynasty; containing approximately 10,000 verses describing the battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas

Mahakala – Great Time; Shiva and one of 12 *jioti linga*

mahal – house or palace

maharaja – literally 'great king'; princely ruler

maharana – see *maharaja*

maharani – wife of a princely ruler or a ruler in her own right

maharao – see *maharaja*

maharawal – see *maharaja*

mahatma – literally 'great soul'

Mahavir – last *tirthankar*

Mahayana – the 'greater-vehicle' of Buddhism; a later adaptation of the teaching that lays emphasis on the *bodhisattva* ideal, teaching the renunciation of *nirvana* in order to help other beings along the way to enlightenment

maidan – open (often grassed) area; parade ground

Maitreya – future Buddha

Makara – mythical sea creature and Varuna's vehicle; crocodile

mala – garland or necklace

mali – gardener

mandal – shrine

mandala – circle; symbol used in Hindu and Buddhist art to symbolise the universe

mandapa – pillared pavilion, temple forechamber

mandi – market

mandir – temple

mani stone – stone carved with the Tibetan-Buddhist mantra 'Om mani padme hum' ('Hail the jewel in the lotus')

mani walls – Tibetan stone walls with sacred inscriptions

mantra – sacred word or syllable used by Buddhists and Hindus to aid concentration; metrical psalms of praise found in the Vedas

Mara – Buddhist personification of that which obstructs the cultivation of virtue, often depicted with hundreds of arms; also the god of death

Maratha – central Indian people who controlled much of India at various times and fought the Mughals and Rajputs

marg – road

masjid – mosque

mata – mother

math – monastery

maya – illusion

mehndi – henna; ornate henna designs on women's hands (and often feet), traditionally for certain festivals or ceremonies (eg marriage)

mela – fair or festival

memsahib – Madam; respectful way of addressing women

mihrab – mosque 'prayer niche' that faces Mecca

mithuna – pairs of men and women; often seen in temple sculpture

Moghul – see *Mughal*

Mohini – Vishnu in his female incarnation

Mohiniyattam – classical dance of the temptress

moksha – liberation from *samsara*

monsoon – rainy season

mudra – ritual hand movements used in Hindu religious dancing; gesture of Buddha figure

muezzin – one who calls Muslims to prayer, traditionally from the minaret of a mosque

Mughal – Muslim dynasty of subcontinental emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb

mullah – Muslim scholar or religious leader

Mumbaikar – resident of Mumbai (Bombay)

mund – village

muntjac – barking deer

murti – statue, often of a deity

nadi – river

Naga – mythical serpentlike beings capable of changing into human form

namaskar – see *namaste*

namaste – traditional Hindu greeting (hello or goodbye), often accompanied by a respectful small bow with the hands together at the chest or head level; also *namaskar*

namaz – Muslim prayers

Nanda – cowherd who raised Krishna

Nandi – bull, vehicle of Shiva

Narayan – incarnation of Vishnu the creator

Nataraja – Shiva as the cosmic dancer
nautch – dance

nautch girls – dancing girls
nawab – Muslim ruling prince or powerful landowner
Naxalites – ultra-leftist political movement begun in West Bengal as a peasant rebellion; characterised by violence
nilgai – antelope
nirvana – ultimate aim of Buddhists and the final release from the cycle of existence
niwas – house, building
nizam – hereditary title of the rulers of Hyderabad
noth – the Lord (Jain)
NRI – Non-Resident Indian; of economic significance to modern India
nullah – ditch or small stream

Om – sacred invocation representing the essence of the divine principle; for Buddhists, if repeated often enough with complete concentration, it leads to a state of emptiness
Osho – the late Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, a popular, controversial guru

paan – mixture of betel nut and leaves for chewing
padma – lotus; another name for the Hindu goddess Lakshmi
pagoda – see stupa
paise – the Indian rupee is divided into 100 paise
palanquin – boxlike enclosure carried on poles on four bearer's shoulders; the occupant sits inside on a seat
Pali – the language, related to Sanskrit, in which the Buddhist scriptures were recorded; scholars still refer to the original Pali texts
palli – village
panchayat – village council
pandal – marquee; temple shrine
Parsi – adherent of the Zoroastrian faith
Partition – formal division of British India in 1947 into two separate countries, India and Pakistan
Parvati – another form of Devi
pashmina – fine woollen shawl
patachitra – Orissan cloth painting
PCO – Public Call Office, from where you can make local, interstate and international phone calls
peepul – fig tree, especially a bo tree
peon – lowest-grade clerical worker
pietra dura – marble inlay work characteristic of the Taj Mahal

pir – Muslim holy man; title of a Sufi saint
POK – Pakistan Occupied Kashmir
pradesh – state
pranayama – study of breath control; meditative practice
prasad – temple-blessed food offering
puja – literally 'respect'; offering or prayers
pujari – temple priest
pukka – proper; a Raj-era term
pukka sahib – proper gentleman
punka – cloth fan, swung by pulling a cord
Puranas – set of 18 encyclopaedic Sanskrit stories, written in verse, relating to the three gods, dating from the 5th century AD
purdah – custom among some conservative Muslims (also adopted by some Hindus, especially the Rajputs) of keeping women in seclusion; veiled
Purnima – full moon; considered to be an auspicious time

qawwali – Islamic devotional singing
qila – fort
Quran – the holy book of Islam, also spelt Koran

Radha – favourite mistress of Krishna when he lived as a cowherd
raga – any of several conventional patterns of melody and rhythm that form the basis for freely interpreted compositions
railhead – station or town at the end of a railway line; termination point
raj – rule or sovereignty; British Raj (sometimes just Raj) refers to British rule
raja – king; sometimes rana
rajkumar – prince
Rajput – Hindu warrior caste, former rulers of northwestern India
Rajya Sabha – upper house in the Indian parliament (Council of States)
rakhi – amulet
Rama – seventh incarnation of Vishnu
Ramadan – Islamic holy month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting (no eating, drinking or smoking); also referred to as Ramazan
Ramayana – story of Rama and Sita and their conflict with Ravana; one of India's best-known epics
rana – king; sometimes raja
rangoli – elaborate chalk, rice-paste or coloured powder design; also known as kolam

rani – female ruler or wife of a king
ranns – deserts
rath – temple chariot or car used in religious festivals
rathas – rock-cut Dravidian temples
Ravana – demon king of Lanka who abducted Sita; the titanic battle between him and Rama is told in the Ramayana
rawal – nobleman
rickshaw – small, two- or three-wheeled passenger vehicle
Rig-Veda – original and longest of the four main Vedas
rishi – any poet, philosopher, saint or sage; originally a sage to whom the hymns of the Vedas were revealed
Road – railway town that serves as a communication point to a larger town off the line, eg Mt Abu and Abu Road
Rukmani – wife of Krishna; died on his funeral pyre

sadar – main
sadhu – ascetic, holy person, one who is trying to achieve enlightenment; often addressed as 'swamiji' or 'babaji'
safa – turban
sagar – lake, reservoir
sahib – respectful title applied to a gentleman
salai – road
salwar – trousers usually worn with a kameez
salwar kameez – traditional dress like tunic and trouser combination for women
samadhi – in Hinduism, ecstatic state, sometimes defined as 'ecstasy, trance, communion with God'; in Buddhism, concentration; also a place where a holy man has been cremated/buried, usually venerated as a shrine
sambar – deer
samsara – Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs believe earthly life is cyclical; you are born again and again, the quality of these rebirths being dependent upon your karma in previous lives
sangeet – music
sangha – community of Buddhist monks and nuns
Sankara – Shiva as the creator
sanyasin – like a sadhu; a wandering ascetic who has renounced all worldly things as part of the ashrama system
Saraswati – wife of Brahma, goddess of learning; sits on a white swan, holding a veena
Sat Sri Akal – Sikh greeting

Sati – wife of Shiva; became a sati ('honourable woman') by immolating herself; although banned more than a century ago, the act of sati is still (very) occasionally performed

satra – Hindu Vaishnavite monastery and centre for art

satyagraha – nonviolent protest involving a hunger strike, popularised by Mahatma Gandhi; from Sanskrit, literally meaning 'insistence on truth'

Scheduled Castes – official term used for the Untouchable or Dalit caste

sepoj – formerly an Indian soldier in British service

seva – voluntary work, especially in a temple

Shaivism – worship of Shiva

Shaivite – follower of Shiva

shakti – creative energies perceived as female deities; devotees follow Shaktism order

sharia – Islamic law

sheesha – see hookah

shikara – gondola-like boat used on lakes in Srinagar (Kashmir)

shikhar – hunting expedition

Shiva – Destroyer; also the Creator, in which form he is worshipped as a lingam

shola – virgin forest

shree – see shri

shri – honorific male prefix; Indian equivalent of 'Respected Sir'

shruti – heard

Shudra – caste of labourers

sikhara – Hindu temple-spire or temple

Singh – literally 'lion'; a surname adopted by Sikhs

Sita – Hindu goddess of agriculture; more commonly associated with the Ramayana

sitar – Indian stringed instrument

Siva – see Shiva

sonam – karma accumulated in successive reincarnations

sree – see shri

sri – see shri

stupa – Buddhist religious monument composed of a solid hemisphere topped by a spire, containing relics of Buddha; also known as a 'dagoba' or 'pagoda'

Subhadra – Krishna's incestuous sister

Sufi – Muslim mystic

Sufism – Islamic mysticism

Surya – the sun; a major deity in the Vedas

sutra – string; list of rules expressed in verse

swami – title of respect meaning 'lord of the self'; given to initiated Hindu monks

swaraj – independence

Swarga – heaven of Indra

sweeper – lowest caste servant, performs the most menial of tasks

tabla – twin drums

tal – lake

taluk – district

tandava – Shiva's cosmic victory dance

tank – reservoir; pool or large receptacle of holy water found at some temples

tantric Buddhism – Tibetan Buddhism with strong sexual and occult overtones

tempo – noisy three-wheeler public transport vehicle, bigger than an autorickshaw; see Vikram

thakur – nobleman

thangka – Tibetan cloth painting

theertham – temple tank

Theravada – orthodox form of Buddhism practised in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia that is characterised by its adherence to the Pali canon; literally 'dwelling'

thiru – holy

tikka – mark Hindus put on their foreheads

tirthankars – the 24 great Jain teachers

tonga – two-wheeled horse or pony carriage

torana – architrave over a temple entrance

trekkers – jeeps; hikers

Trimurti – triple form or three-faced; the Hindu triad of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu

Uma – Shiva's consort; light

Untouchable – lowest caste or 'casteless', for whom the most menial tasks are reserved; the name derives from the belief that higher castes risk defilement if they touch one; formerly known as Harijan, now Dalit

Upanishads – esoteric doctrine; ancient texts forming part of the Vedas; delving into weighty matters such as the nature of the universe and soul

urs – death anniversary of a revered Muslim; festival in memory of a Muslim saint

Vaishya – member of the Hindu caste of merchants

Valmiki – author of the Ramayana

varna – concept of caste

Varuna – supreme Vedic god

Vedas – Hindu sacred books; collection of hymns composed in preclassical Sanskrit during the second millennium BC and divided into four books: Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Atharva-Veda

vihara – Buddhist monastery, generally with central court or hall off which open residential cells, usually with a Buddha shrine at one end; resting place

vikram – tempo or a larger version of the standard tempo

vimana – principal part of Hindu temple; a tower over the sanctum

vipassana – insight meditation technique of Theravada Buddhism in which mind and body are closely examined as changing phenomena

Vishnu – part of the Trimurti; Vishnu is the Preserver and Restorer who so far has nine avatars: the fish Matsya; the tortoise Kurma; the wild boar Naraha; Narasimha; Vamana; Parasurama; Rama; Krishna; and Buddha

wallah – man; added onto almost anything, eg dhobi-wallah, chai-wallah, taxi-wallah

wazir – title of chief minister used in some former Muslim princely states

yagna – self-mortification

yakshi – maiden

yali – mythical lion creature

yantra – geometric plan said to create energy

yatra – pilgrimage

yatri – pilgrim

yogini – female goddess attendants

yoni – female fertility symbol; female genitalia

zakat – tax in the form of a charitable donation, one of the five 'Pillars of Islam'

zamindar – landowner

zenana – area of an upperclass home where women are secluded; women's quarters

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