

BIG FIVE

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys



Republic of India

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions, and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

For anyone who read Kipling as a child, and became convinced they wished to see the kind of unusual cultures and wild places found in his stories...For anyone who has traveled extensively and seeks destinations beyond the ordinary...For anyone who possesses that intangible richness of spirit and a readiness to engage in the unfamiliar...There is India.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES & RAINFALL

Calcutta, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	67	73	81	86	86	86	85	84	84	82	76	68
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.3	0.8	1.2	1.6	4.6	11.9	13.1	10.4	11.7	4.4	1.2	0
Delhi, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	68	73	83	95	101	101	93	91	92	90	81	71
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.6	2.7	7.9	7.9	4.8	0.7	0.1	0.4
Mumbai, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	75	77	81	84	86	85	83	82	82	84	81	78
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	---	---	---	---	0.5	22.3	25.6	19.2	14	3.5	0.2	---
Chennai, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	76	79	83	87	91	90	87	86	85	83	79	77
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.7	1.7	2.1	3.9	4.9	4.9	11.2	13.2	5.4

WEATHER

The climate of India ranges from snowy Himalayan Mountains to temperate coastal regions to continental climate of inland areas. Most areas of India enjoy a pleasant and sunny climate during the months of October through March, which are the most popular times for tourists. Summer months in India are hot and humid but thanks to air-conditioned hotels and transportation, India has become a year round destination for travel.

Monsoon rains usually start in mid-June in southern India and travel north. They last until August or early September. Because of India's enormous size, rains and weather do vary greatly according to region.

TIME ZONES & FLIGHT TIMES

Standard Time in India is 5½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. This puts India 10½ hours of New York and Eastern Standard Time. Flying time to India is approximately 16 hours total -- eight hours to London from New York, plus another eight hours to India.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: Many countries require that travelers obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Zierer Visa Service (ZVS) to process required visas for our passengers. The Visa Application Kit is included with your pre-trip confirmation packet. You can also download the necessary forms from the website: <http://www.zvs.com>. Click on the "members" section to log in. For user name, enter bigfive, and the password is 55509. You will enter the visa section for Big Five Tours & Expeditions. Here you will find a list of country-specific forms. You will also discover useful hints such as how to obtain a passport, adding passport pages, and other tips.

Important: Please look at your passport before you submit it to ZVS to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

When leaving India, remember Rupees are not allowed out of the country. You must exchange them before you leave. Banking facilities for the conversion of rupees into foreign currency are usually located in the same airport hall as the check-in counters. You have no access to these facilities once you pass through Immigration.

Note: If you are traveling with items that have batteries, i.e. camera, video equipment, walkman radio, etc., please be sure to remove them and pack them in a separate plastic bag inside luggage to be checked. Do not carry them with you because the airlines will take them away from you. They regard these as potential weapons.

CUSTOMS ARRIVING INDIA:

Travelers may mail, duty free, packages valued at up to \$200 to themselves and up to \$100 to others with a limit of one parcel per addressee per day. Packages must be identified as being for personal use or an unsolicited gift, specify the contents and retail value. Mailed items do not count as part of your exemption.

Duty-Free Items: (a) 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250 grams of tobacco; (b) Alcoholic liquor & wine up to 1 liter each. Personal effects and travel souvenirs are allowed if: (a) These goods are for personal use of the tourist, and (b) These goods, other than those consumed during the stay in India, are re-exported when the tourist leaves India for a foreign destination. (c) Gifts up to a value of Rs.4000.

Please note: You may be asked at security to turn on a laptop computer or a video camera to prove that they are what they appear to be. X-rays do not harm hard disk or floppy disk storage.

If you are bringing dutiable articles or high value articles into India with you, they must be entered on a Tourist Baggage Re-Export Form (TBRE). These articles must be re-exported at the time of departure. Failure to re-export anything listed on the TBRE form means you'll have to pay a duty levied for each missing item.

Prohibited Items: You absolutely may not bring in dangerous drugs, firearms, gold coins, gold and silver bullion, silver coins not in use, any Indian currency, or any live plants.

DEPARTING INDIA / ARRIVING USA:

Duty-Free: Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. Travelers 21 or older may bring back 1 liter of alcohol duty free, 100 non-Cuban cigars and 200 cigarettes. Regulations frequently change.

For a list of exempt items & current regulations you can Contact the nearest Customs Office, write US Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044, or visit the website for The US Customs & Border Protection at www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml.

Prohibited Items: Although widely available for purchase, animal skins and ivory are not allowed in the United States. Generally items more than 100 years old cannot be exported without a permit.

LUGGAGE

On domestic flights in India, you have to identify your bags, and then they will be loaded on the aircraft.

Traveling light is always the first and best rule! We recommend passengers limit their luggage to one medium-sized soft bag per person or two small duffle bags. In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Generally speaking, from the US, economy class passengers are allowed to check in two (2) normal size pieces of luggage (each piece measuring no more than about 62 linear inches, which means length plus width plus height), and not exceeding 70 pounds per bag.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions apply for

charter flights. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

Most airlines now allow only one carry-on bag in addition to one personal item such as a laptop or handbag. Most bags within the 22 x 14 x 9 (or, a total of 45 linear inches) size restriction will be considered legal carry-on size by major domestic U.S. airlines. Many US airlines check-in desks have sizing boxes within which your bag must fit. Obviously, no knives or cutting instruments are allowed in carry-on baggage.

All luggage should have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside. Please note that the US National Transportation and Safety Board now suggests that you do not lock your checked luggage. If a screener has to open your bag, the locks may have to be broken. This applies to flights within the US and international flights originating in the US. This, however, does not address other international travel issues. We suggest that you lock your luggage and bring a couple of spare locks in the event one or more are cut off. But the choice is up to each individual traveler to make.

CURRENCY

The units of Indian currency are the Rupee (Rs) and Paisa. 100 Paisa equal one Rupee. Paper money comes in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 rupees: coins in denominations of 25 and 50 paise, and one, two, and five rupees.

India has strict rules against importing or exporting its currency. Always exchange money with an authorized money-changer and insist on receiving an encashment slip.

International airports have currency exchange booths that are open for arriving or departing overseas flights. When you change money, remember to get some money in small denominations. Your hotel or a bank can also exchange money for you.

At hotels, it can be done quickly and during most times. Banks offer a better rate, however, the process takes longer and is done mainly in the mornings. Do not accept torn bills. Many merchants, hotels, and restaurants won't accept worn or torn bills.

Do not plan to use personal checks. Use cash to rural areas and small towns, and travelers' checks in cities. Credit cards and travelers' checks are accepted at hotels, big department stores, and some fine restaurants. U.S. travelers' checks are recommended.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Currently, no official health certificates are required of travelers coming from U.S. and Canada. Recommended inoculations are Hepatitis A Booster and a Malaria prescription. Any inoculations should be recorded in an official Vaccination Certificate and carried with you at all times. Keep a copy of it as well as other important documents in a safe place.

It is recommended that visitors obtain a prescription for malaria precaution. The best protection against malaria is to take a course of anti-malaria tablets. Most travelers to the Indian Subcontinent at risk should take mefloquine to prevent malaria. In a malaria region, you should avoid wearing perfume or after-shave lotion that attracts mosquitoes. It's advisable to wear long sleeves and long trousers at night for the same reason. Malaria risk exists in some urban and many rural areas, depending on elevation.

A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required for entry if you are coming from countries in tropical South America or sub-Saharan Africa. (There is no risk for yellow fever in the Indian Subcontinent.)

Dengue, filariasis, Japanese encephalitis, leishmaniasis, and plague are carried by insects and also occur in this region. Protecting yourself against insect bites will help to prevent these diseases.

Altitude sickness: If you visit the Himalayan Mountains, ascend gradually to allow time for your body to adjust to the high altitude, which can cause insomnia, headaches, nausea, and altitude sickness. In addition, use sun block rated at least 15 SPF, because the risk of sunburn is greater at high altitudes.

We strongly recommend that you consult with your local county health department or a doctor specializing in travel medicine close to your departure to see if the inoculation status has changed. Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta has a fax information service with updated travel information. To receive these documents, call 404-332-4565.

STAYING HEALTHY

All tourist places in India are equipped with superb medical facilities. Visitors should be in generally good health. It is strongly recommended that you consult with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended, depending on your personal health profile.

Travelers' diarrhea and stomach upsets are the most common complaints. To prevent these, be careful what you eat. Stay away from ice, uncooked food, salads that have been washed in tap water, and milk not pasteurized.

Drink only bottled water from reputable hotels or shops and make sure the cap has not been tampered with. A little bit of personal hygiene can also go a long way in preventing stomach upset. Remember to wash your hands frequently or carry along a supply of pre-moistened towelettes.

You may wish to talk to your doctor about a general antibiotic to take to treat travelers' diarrhea or take one of the many medications on the market such as Pepto-Bismol. It is advisable to drink only bottled mineral water, soft drinks, bottled beer, coffee or tea. Bring tablets or medicine for stomach ailments. Keep medications in their original containers for customs inspection.

The sun in India can be intense. Be aware of overexposure even in cloudy days. Avoid sunburn. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 24. If traveling higher than 10,000 feet, use zinc oxide or lip balm with sun block and keep your eyes protected behind sunglasses that block ultraviolet rays. When you're in snow, remember that UV rays reflect from below.

We also recommend a personalized, small medical kit containing items such as aspirin, motion sickness medication, antibiotics, antacid tablets, diarrhea medication, lip salve, Band-Aids, insect repellent, and hydrocortisone cream.

To avoid problems with Customs officials, carry medications in original packaging. Don't forget the addresses of offices that handle refunds of lost travelers' checks.

SAFETY

Common-sense safety precautions you normally observe should be followed when traveling to minimize the risk of personal injury or property loss. Don't put valuables or prescription drugs in checked luggage. Carry them with you.

Carry passports, exchange vouchers, itinerary, air tickets, travelers' checks, visas and permits, and insurance policies with you in your carry on baggage.

Never leave an unlocked suitcase in a hotel room. Never leave suitcases unattended in airports or train stations. Women traveling alone should never get into a taxi or rickshaw if there's a second man accompanying the driver. Women should also chain-lock their door when they are in their hotel room. Everyone should be alert in crowds for pickpockets. Wear a money belt. Women should keep their purses close to their body and securely closed. Be careful when you use your credit cards for payment. Make certain that the card isn't used to make an impression on more than one credit card charge form. Do not accept food or drink from a stranger.

Leave your jewelry at home! Do not leave cash, travelers' checks, airline tickets, etc., in an unattended room, even in a locked suitcase – keep them with you or in hotel safe. Do not carry large amounts of currency or valuables. Use common sense.

Be careful on streets and highways. Traffic in India moves on the left side of the road. There is no general speed limit for cars apart from the 30-mph limit in cities, which is generally ignored. Slow-moving cyclists, bullock carts, and occasional elephants share the road with daredevil, long-distance trucks and buses. The horn is used as a warning before a vehicle passes. It's also used to warn pedestrians to get out of the way.

COMMUNICATION

Officially, India has 16 languages, 12 of which originate from Sanskrit. These are: Assamese, Gujarati, Benjali, Kashmiri, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil, and Urdu. More than 840 other languages and dialects are spoken around the country. The most widely spoken language is Hindi. English is one of the original languages and is widely spoken.

In Nepal, most people (above all in the Kathmandu Valley) speak some English.

In India, surnames are listed last. Men in Hindi are known as "Sahib" which indicates Mr. and is used after the surname. Women are known as "Ji" which is used after the first name.

ELECTRICITY

The electrical current in India is 220V, 50 cycles alternating current (AC), so you will need to bring a converter and an adapter. Some areas might have DC supply as well. Many large hotels have 110V and some hotels produce step-down transformers so you may use voltage that is suitable for your appliance. Be sure to check with your hotel to see if the stabilizers are functioning in your room before plugging in your appliance. Wall outlets take plugs with two round prongs. Blackouts and loss of power is very common.

Never plug in your computer into any socket before asking about surge protection. Some hotels do not have built-in current stabilizers, and extreme electrical fluctuations and surges can short your adapter or even destroy your computer.

CAMERAS & FILM

Always ask permission before taking photographs of people. Carry some change for people who demand money for the privilege of taking their picture. If someone asks you to send a copy of the photo, don't say yes unless you intend to keep that promise. Most Indians are good-natured about posing for a

picture, but some women and tribal people may object. Ask before you shoot any picture. Remember that photography is not permitted in airports or at sensitive military sites, including some bridges and at some religious sites and events.

Equipment: Bring cameras and lenses you are comfortable using. If you get new equipment before you go, do so as far in advance as possible. Shoot and develop at least a dozen rolls before departure to work out problems. And, don't forget your camera operation manual, filters, and a flash unit. Cameras should be packed with good cushioning. The roads are sometimes rough, and constant vibration can do damage. Keep your camera with you as much as possible.

Dust is a problem in India. Keep delicate equipment covered when not in use. Make sure you have lens caps for all your lenses. Clean equipment frequently. Bring a blower brush and lens-cleaning tissues.

Lenses: A combination of fixed and/or zoom lenses with focal lengths from 28 mm to 200 mm is a good for general travel photography, although you can take excellent photographs with only a 50 mm lens. Zoom lenses such as 35-80mm, 70-210 mm, or 100-300 mm will help you capture the sights in a variety of different settings. A macro lens is helpful for shooting close-ups, but a good set of extension tubes will work very well. A 2x converter is also a handy. Point and shoot cameras are nice for a group or indoor shots, but leave something to be desired when photographing scenics, close-ups, or animals. Bring a small cleaning kit and blower brush to keep equipment clean.

Film: Bring whatever you need with you. Film is generally more expensive abroad and it may be hard to locate. Even those not all that interested in photography will probably shoot a couple of 36-exposure rolls per day, and enthusiastic shooters will easily double or triple that amount. Be sure film is fresh and, when possible, keep it refrigerated. A film speed of ASA/ISO 64 is an excellent choice for color slide film. Use this speed when possible rather than higher speed films. There is a noticeable difference in quality that it is worth the extra effort to keep your camera steady at a somewhat slower shutter speed than you would otherwise use. For color prints, there are several good choices, including Kodak and Fuji films (ASA/ISO 100 & 200) for daylight photography, ASA/ISO 400 & 1000 are good for lower light and nighttime situations.

It is helpful to set up a numbering system for your film, marking each roll with masking tape and numbers or letters, before leaving home. This way you can code the rolls of film and where they were shot. It's quite a job to sort through hundreds of pictures with no clue where or when they were taken.

Avoid airport x-ray machines whenever possible, and request a hand search of your film only. Requests are honored most of the time at US airports (allow a little extra time), but rarely in India. X-rays are cumulative on exposed and unexposed film so the more times film is x-rayed, the more risk of damage. This is especially true with older machines found in many countries. Lead bags for film are available for purchase and are worth the small investment. Do not have film in your camera because it may be opened for inspection.

Video: If you are planning to shoot video on a safari, be sure to bring plenty of tape and batteries with you. Videotape is not affected by airport x-rays; only magnetic fields or prolonged exposure to heat will damage videotape. Your battery charger should be capable of automatically adjusting to 240 volts.

Batteries: Put fresh photo-quality batteries in your camera and other electric equipment before you leave and bring at least two sets of spare batteries with you. Your camera will be useless without them. Batteries tend to be expensive and hard to find in India.

FOOD & DRINK

Once again, make sure that your food and drinking water are safe so that, eating in India can be the delightful experience it should be.

To fully understand the wonder and delight of the Indian cuisine, one must know something of the history, geography, sociology and religion of different parts of India.

Indians care about food. It has become a personal and traditional experience. Home-cooked breads have become a fine art.

Ingredients commonly used in Indian cuisine are curry powders, ginger, yogurt and garlic. Indians give a great deal of consideration what combinations of ingredients should be used in each dish for a balance of flavor and texture.

In major cities, restaurants normally stay open until 11:00 PM or midnight. In other areas, expect an earlier dinner unless you're staying in a Western-style hotel. Some Indian states observe a weekly meatless day, when no slaughtering is done and no red meat is sold or served in most restaurants.

Indian dishes vary throughout the country. For example, in Southern India, vegetable dishes are common. A few popular dishes are: Dhansak, specialty of western India's Zoroastrian community, is lamb or chicken cooked with curried lentils and served with steaming rice. Tandoori, spicy shah jahani pullao, is spiced saffron rice steamed with portions of mutton or chicken, and garnished with silvered boiled eggs. Many of us have had kebabs, skewered meats cooked over a brazier. Haleem is a dish of pounded wheat cooked and blended with lightly spiced mutton gravy.

Interesting drinks include lassi, a deliciously cold beverage made from yogurt, milk, and fresh lime juice (Nimbu pani). Western alcoholic beverages are expensive. Indian beer can be bought for a much cheaper price. Dry days, when alcohol is not available in India, are observed on January 26, August 15 and October. Some states observe additional dry days, while other states only allow consumption of beer.

Fruits are some of the best grown in the world, including mango, papaya, pineapple, apples, guava, oranges, peaches, cherries, grapefruit, strawberries, and bananas.

It is usual custom to eat with your right hand, and using bread as a scoop.

In restaurants, avoid raw vegetables and fruit that have been peeled before they are brought to you. At many restaurants, the vegetables are imported or presoaked in an iodine preparation to kill parasites. Be sure to ask the waiter before you indulge.

Pork products should be avoided, and all meats should be thoroughly cooked. Eat hot foods when they are hot. Many hotels tend to cook Indian food with a large amount of oil, which can trigger "Delhi Belly".

One final reminder -- in all places, it is highly recommended that you drink bottled water and beverages only. Be sure the seal on the bottle is not broken when you receive it.

CLOTHING CONSIDERATIONS

Your wardrobe should be planned according to itinerary and season. Light and loose-fitting clothes are suitable most of the year in India.

In winter, one light and one heavy sweater plus a jacket or windbreaker is necessary, especially in the North, where daily temperatures vary widely. Lighter clothing would be sufficient in the south and along the coast. Cottons are good for summer, but try to avoid synthetics as they do not "breathe."

In India, delicate fabrics do not stand up well to laundering facilities. Leave clothes that need dry cleaning at home as they will be subjected to harsh fluids here. Sneakers and comfortable walking shoes are recommended. Please be aware that you will have to remove your shoes to enter the sanctorum when visiting temples.

Remember that what is appropriate in the West isn't necessarily appropriate in the East. Only children can get away with short shorts. Men should dress in comfortable jeans or long shorts. Tee shirts are okay. If it's warm, women should stick to skirts and lightweight slacks. To enter a holy shrine, women should wear a below-the-knee skirt, dress, or neat pants. Do not wear tops with scooped or plunging necklines. While many women wear shorts in the mountains or coastal areas, women in cities who reveal any bare legs will attract undesired attention. Bathing suits should be conservative. Travel in a Muslim community calls for even more discretion.

During mid-September to March, light clothing is fine in Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. Evenings and early mornings, a heavy woolen sweater or jacket will be necessary. From April to September, only light clothes, preferably cotton, are needed in Nepal.

Cold lowland nights in December and January make a sweater and jacket essential. Special gear for trekking can be hired or bought in Kathmandu in standard Western sizes. The same applies for sweaters, ponchos, caps, and other woolen or down clothing. Good walking shoes are a must!!!

In colder weather, you can make the most of your wardrobe by triple layering. The layer next to your skin should be made of synthetic fibers that carry moisture away from your skin. Cotton soaks up perspiration and makes you wet. The second layer, should be wool, fleece or a synthetic fabric knitted into thick pile. The third layer can be a well-made, generously sized windbreaker or lightweight, insulated parka that not only allows moisture to escape but is waterproof, not merely water-repellent.

In winter, you need light wool clothes. A high-altitude trekker needs down jacket, windproof jacket, wool shirts & trousers, lightweight trekking boots (plastic boots for peak climbing), wool or wool-blend socks, sun & snow goggles, sun hat and glasses, light rain coat (for monsoon season), gloves, scarves, and water bottle. For all treks, hikers need sleeping bags that fit the altitude as well as the season.

TIPPING

Tipping is a personal expense and is up to each individual. Amounts should be based on the quality of service. Below is a general guide.

Hotel / Restaurant staff: All hotel taxes and service charges have been included in the cost of your tour. You need not tip unless someone provides an extra service such as room service. Always check your bill first to see if a service charge has been already added. We suggest Rs.10-Rs.20 for room service. Restaurant service is generally 7 to 10 percent of total bill.

Baggage Handling: Porters at airports or hotels generally receive Rs.5 per bag; railway porters Rs.5-Rs.10 per bag, depending on weight. Set the rate before he takes your bags.

Driver / guides: For a car and driver, tip him Rs.50 for half day and Rs.100 for a full day. For out of town trips, calculate around Rs. 150 to Rs.200 per day. Local Guides receive Rs.40 for half day and Rs.80 for full day.

Escorts: An average gratuity to an escort is USD\$10.00 per person per day.

SHOPPING

Leave plenty of space in your luggage for items you are sure to buy. Look around before you buy. Shopping is recommended at the Government Emporia and shops on the approved list of the Department of Tourism. It is worth buying the best and avoiding junk produced for tourists and sold from stalls besides monuments.

Handicrafts are beautiful and include top-quality silk, cotton, and leather goods as well as wood and horn carvings, brass, marble, and ceramic items.

"Birdi" work, a metal craft exclusively Indian, has a jet-black surface streaked with silver. Handloom fabrics include cotton, silk, wool, lace, and brocades. Gauze scarves and saris from Kashmir, Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Mysore as available as are exquisite "Chikan" work and delicate hand embroidery from Lucknow.

Carpets from Kashmir and traditional as well as modern jewelry set in both gold and silver can be found at irresistible prices. Rosewood and walnut carvings and paper mache objects are also readily available.

You may ship goods directly to your home by paying a deposit (usually 50 percent of the cost), and balance payable upon receipt (COD) back home. Do not buy wild animal skins or ivory; it is illegal.

Before purchasing any item that a shopkeeper claims is 100 years old or older, ask for an export permit. A reputable shopkeeper will have the permit or help you secure one. Otherwise, the item is either a fake or has not been approved by the government for export.

In bazaars, bargaining is expected. Try offering a third of the price, and settle for 60%.

NOTES ON VISITING HOLY SITES

Visiting religious monuments demands respect. Remove your shoes before entering a shrine, even if it seems in ruins. In some places, such as the Taj Mahal, cloth overshoes are provided for a small charge. All religions ask that you do not smoke or drink alcoholic beverages on the premises or speak in raised voices. Some structures are off-limits to visitors who do not practice the faith. Please respect this.

Women should always be dressed properly, and should cover their heads before entering a Sikh (gurdwara) temple or mosque.

When you enter a mosque, you are supposed to step right foot first over the threshold into the courtyard. Some Hindu and Jain temples prohibit all leather products inside a shrine -- shoes, belts, handbags, camera cases.

Many temples also expect you to purify yourself by washing your hands and feet in a nearby tap or tank before you enter.

No visitor in a gurdwara should point his or her feet toward the Holy Book or step over any one sitting in prayer or meditation. In general, play it safe. If you decide to sit on the floor of a Hindu or Sikh temple, sit cross-legged or with your

feet tucked beneath you. In some religious shrines, sexes are separated. Look around before you sit, and let the situation govern what you do.

Many unthinking tourists commit an unforgivable sacrilege when they visit a Buddhist monastery. You are welcome to spin any prayer wheel, but be aware that just as you must circumambulate the interior and exterior of a monastery, stupa, or mani wall in a clockwise direction, you must follow this rule when you spin a prayer wheel.

Inside the monastery, interior cushions and chairs are reserved for lamas (monks). Sit on the steps outside or on the floor. If you have the opportunity to meet a rimpoche (head lama), or a respected monk, it's polite not to turn your back on him when you leave. Also remove your hat and lower an umbrella within the confines of a monastery.

A journey to an exotic country is a very spiritually enriching and emotionally stimulating experience. This kind of travel necessitates that travelers be good-natured realists as well as romantics, who can appreciate the very differences they encounter. Travelers who possess positive attitudes and eagerness to learn make for an enjoyable travel experience for everyone. Please observe simple rules of common courtesy to better insure the success of the journey for everyone.

OVERVIEW OF INDIA

The Indus Valley civilization, one of the oldest in the world, goes back at least 5,000 years. Aryan tribes from the northwest invaded about 1500 B.C.; their merger with the earlier inhabitants created the classical Indian culture. Arab incursions starting in the 8th century and Turkish in 12th were followed by European traders beginning in the late 15th century. By the 19th century, Britain had assumed political control of virtually all Indian lands. Nonviolent resistance to British colonialism under Mohandas GANDHI and Jawaharlal NEHRU led to independence in 1947. The subcontinent was divided into the secular state of India and the smaller Muslim state of Pakistan. A third war between the two countries in 1971 resulted in East Pakistan becoming the separate nation of Bangladesh. Fundamental concerns in India include the ongoing dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, massive overpopulation, environmental degradation, extensive poverty, and ethnic and religious strife, all this despite impressive gains in economic investment and output.

THE NORTH

Delhi: probably the most important cultural center of India. It is the capital and third largest city. First inhabited around the third or fourth century BC, the city's name was given to the first in a series of seven medieval cities. Old Delhi, the seventh site, is a walled city constructed by Moghul Emperor Shah Jahn in the 17th century, and is a maze of temples, mosques and bazaars. New Delhi, the eighth city, is the country's political hub. The British established and inaugurated it in 1911.

Delhi is indeed a cosmopolitan city with wide avenues lined with impressive government buildings, modern skyscrapers and hotels make evident its 20th century style.

Agra: Tradition ascribes the founding of the present city of Agra to Raja Badal Singh, around 1475 AD. With the arrival of the Mughals in 1526, led by Babar, Agra entered a new epoch, and became a much-sought-after destination in contemporary times.

Agra reached its zenith between 1556 and 1658 as a great center of learning, art, commerce, and culture. Most of

the famed monuments including the Taj Mahal belong to this period. The Taj Mahal is world renowned for its beauty and romantic history. Built by Shah Jahan as a memorial to his queen Mumtaz Mahal, the monument is made of white marble and took from 1630 to 1652 to complete.

Bharatpur and Sariska Wildlife Sanctuaries: Bharatpur harbors 250 varieties of birds and is the country's most famous water-bird sanctuary. Ninety-five species of migratory birds, some from as far away as Siberia and northern-Asia, arrive to spend the winter. Sariska has leopards, deer, and four-horned antelope and a population of tigers.

Corbett National Park: India's oldest wildlife sanctuary. Exploring the park can be done on the back of an elephant, in an open Jeep, or from a stationary watchtower. Wild Asian elephants, tigers, leopards, black bear, wild boar, snakes, python, deer, monkeys, birds, and crocodiles inhabit the park.

Jaipur: fantasy city of red ornamental stone, this heart of Rajput chivalry has an 18th century observatory, museums, and palaces. Nearby the old capital, Amber, founded in the 11th century, whose citadel encompasses palaces with inlaid marble walls and a superbly carved temple. It is also known as the "pink city".

Udaipur: romantic 16th-century city on the shores of Lake Pichola. It is the site of the Maharana's palace, which is decorated with multi-colored mosaic and mirror work.

Varanasi: formerly Benares, is the holy city of the Hindus on the banks of the sacred River Ganga. Nearby is Sarnath, where Buddha preached his first sermon.

THE WEST

Ajanta & Ellora: 2nd century BC, 30 rock-hewn caves at Ajanta are adorned with Buddhist sculpture and frescoes portraying life in epic form through eight centuries. Ellora encompasses 34 rock-cut shrines, which represent Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain art. The most remarkable is the massive, monolithic Kailasa temple, one of the noblest monuments of Hindu art.

Bombay (Mumbai): financial hub of India, and one of the largest manufacturing centers in the East. Unique unto itself, Bombay hits you with an intensity all its own. Its culture is new, vibrant, and often aggressive, reflecting the affluence and energy of a busy city of 10 million people.

Gir National Park: has the only surviving population of lions outside of the continent of Africa. This is the last stand for the majestic Asian lion. Other wildlife include bull, wild bear, panther, leopard, and deer.

Khajuraho: home to 22 temples that preserve the finest expression of medieval Indian sculpture. This is a celebration in stone of celestial and terrestrial passion by the 10th century Chandella kings.

THE EAST

Calcutta: three centuries of history, and it has grown from a mere fishing village into the largest city in India and indeed one of the largest cities in the world. Population- 10.5 million. It has been home to Mother Theresa, birthplace of an empire, a playground for the rich, and a haven for the destitute.

Darjeeling: Himalayan resort, celebrated for its magnificent scenery, is where the mighty Kanchenjunga mountain range

pierces the sunrise. Gardens, a museum, and the Tibetan Monastery at Ghoom are also there.

Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary: characterized by flat country with elephant grass and shallow swamps interspersed with large patches of semi-evergreen forest. National park is famous for one-horned rhinoceros but also harbors tigers, wild buffaloes, deer and elephants.

THE SOUTH

Bangalore: called a garden city, it has a mild and healthy climate. This cosmopolitan, charming city is an excellent base to explore the temple wonders of Belur and Halebid.

Madras (Chennai): largest city in southern India developed after 1639 when the British East India Co. established a fort and trading post in Chennai, a small fishing village. One cannot fail to notice the British influences. Madras remains a port town as it has been since the British arrived. Despite a population of four million people, it has a gentle pace, and is ideal for people watching.

Madurai: home to the celebrated Meenakshi Temple with its gigantic towers and Hall of a Thousand Pillars, each pillar was individually carved.

Mysore: long history of being home to important dynasties that ruled from here. They created a city that even today is one of the finest in southern India. It has tree-lined boulevards, beautiful gardens, parks, and stately palaces. Nearby is Ranganathitto Bird Sanctuary, a water-bird sanctuary that allows close views of exotic and familiar birds and of crocodiles that resemble mud banks.

Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary: famous for wild elephants. The sanctuary is also home to gaur, bison, sambar, and occasional leopards. A unique feature here is wildlife viewing from a motorboat on the lake as well as excellent fishing for mahser.

Puduchcheri (Pondicherry): a former French settlement with a seaside Mediterranean flavor, it is also known for the new international city of Auroville.

The temperate middle hills are inhabited by many different tribes, but most of them are farmers. Farming is also the main livelihood of the Terai people, whose rigid system of values and attitudes make them more conservative than the hill people.