



INSIDER'S GUIDE TO INDIA

By thinking a little about your holiday destination before you travel, and taking some simple steps when you are there, you can gain so much more from your holiday. You will also be making a positive contribution to the people and the places you visit.

INDIA

India is the seventh largest and second most populous country in the world. Few countries in the world have such an ancient and diverse culture as India's. Stretching back in an unbroken sweep over 5000 years, India's culture has been enriched by successive waves of migration which were absorbed into the Indian way of life. It is this variety which is a special hallmark of India.

Mark Twain wrote, "India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grand mother of tradition."

– TAKE AS LITTLE EXCESS PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE

The country's waste disposal methods, especially in rural areas, are not always very sophisticated. Before you leave home, remove any unnecessary external packaging from anything you're taking with you. All non-degradable litter such as empty bottles, tins, plastic bags etc. must not litter the environment or be buried. They must be disposed in municipal dustbins only.

– HELP PRESERVE INDIA'S CULTURE AND HERITAGE

India is an ancient country and there is a lot for visitors to learn and enjoy. Ask lots of questions and show enthusiasm! Guidebooks are a useful source of information, but get 'insider' knowledge by talking to local people, explore places away from the main tourist 'sights' and get closer to the country you have come to visit. Indian culture treats guests with reverence and respect and serves them and takes care of them as if they are a part and parcel of the family itself. Elders and the respect for elders is a major component in Indian culture. Elders are the driving force for any family and hence the love and respect for elders comes from within and is not artificial. An individual takes blessings from his elders by touching their feet.

– RELIGION IN INDIA

In India, religion is a way of life. It is an integral part of the entire Indian tradition. From chores to education and politics secular India is home to Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and other innumerable religious traditions. Hinduism is the dominant faith, practised by over 80% of the population. After Hindus, Muslims are the most prominent religious group and major part of Indian society. In fact India has the second largest population of Muslims in the world after Indonesia. Common practices have crept into most religious faiths in India and many of the festivals that mark each year with music, dance and feasting are shared by all communities. Each has its own pilgrimage sites, heroes, legends and even culinary specialties, mingling in a unique diversity that is the very pulse of society.

– PLEASE WEAR MODEST CLOTHING, ESPECIALLY IN SACRED SITES OR RURAL AREAS.

Clothes covering the knees and shoulders are most appropriate. India is a very diverse country, and you will see local people wearing a wide variety of clothes. Please observe the sanctity of holy sites, temples and local cultures.

– PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE.

Animals and plants could be rare, fragile, sacred, or even harmful to your health. Please be sure that you don't buy any products made from endangered plants or wild animals, including hardwoods, corals, shells, starfish, ivory, fur, feathers, skins, horn, teeth, eggs, reptiles and turtles. For more information on endangered species and the WWF-UK Souvenir Alert Campaign for tourists and to find out how to report a concern, visit www.wwf-uk.org. Do not take away flora and fauna in the forms of cuttings, seeds or roots. It is illegal, especially in the Himalayas. The environment is really delicate in this region and the bio-diversity of the region has to be protected at all costs.

– PLEASE DON'T GIVE GIFTS, MONEY OR SWEETS DIRECTLY TO SMALL CHILDREN

This encourages begging and it is much better to play with the kids and make a contribution towards a local project – ask your tour representative or at your accommodation to find out how best to do this.



– ASK PERMISSION BEFORE TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

Indian people are very hospitable but please respect their privacy and ask before snapping – what seems strange or exotic to visitors, is just daily life for local families.

– LOOK FOR GIFTS AND SOUVENIRS MADE IN INDIA

The well-being of the country is greatly influenced by the spending habits of its visitors. When you're buying gifts and souvenirs, look for goods that originate in India. Buying local crafts and produce – particularly in small villages - will help local families make a decent living out of tourism. Asking at hotels etc., is also a good way of encouraging hotel staff to take these interests and needs into account. Indian handicrafts have withstood competition from machines over the years. The skills are passed on from one generation to the next. The handicraft and handloom sector is a major source of rural employment. Traditional textiles are popular as are hand-knotted carpets, art metalware, hand-printed textiles and leather, wood and cane wares.

– CHOOSE LOCAL FOOD AND DRINK

Make sure you drink and eat in locally-owned cafes, bars and restaurants. This will give you the real taste of India and will help put money into the local economy.

– WILD ANIMALS

Please don't have your photograph taken with any 'wild' animals used as photographic props on the beach. Many of these animals live in appalling conditions and are often mistreated and disposed of when they get too large or difficult to handle. Having your photo taken with them only serves to propagate their suffering. Think twice about taking camel rides on the beach, as you do not know how these animals are treated once out of sight.

Please don't feed or touch wild animals, particularly monkeys around your hotel – This can lead to increased aggression as they compete for food, which is detrimental to both animals and people. Some monkeys will be carrying rabies and other diseases that are transmissible to humans, so please keep your distance.

– PLEASE USE WATER SPARINGLY

There are often water shortages of water due to the excessive demand from tourism. These shortages may not reach visitors, but they will certainly affect local families, so please take care. Take quick showers instead of baths and inform staff if you are happy to re-use towels and bed linen rather than having them replaced daily.

– USE ENERGY WISELY

Turn down / off heating or air conditioning when not required. Switch off lights when leaving a room and turn the TV off rather than leaving it on standby

FOR MORE INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
www.incredibleindia.org
www.tourindia.org