

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR TRAVELLING IN

INDIA

These notes should help you prepare for your holiday.

Please read the BEFORE YOU GO section with particular care.

We have endeavoured to make this information as accurate as possible but cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by anyone using this guide. If you find that any of the information is no longer up-to-date, we would be grateful if you would inform us.

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BEFORE YOU GO

Indian Visa

Visa requirements and validity change quite often. The following is only a guide to the requirements at the time of writing. Before applying you should check with the Indian Embassy or Consulate in your own country about the latest regulations & fees.

All foreign nationals, except those of Nepal and Bhutan require a visa for entry into India. **Tourist visas are issued for a period of six months and are valid from the date of issue. You should not apply for your visa too early. You need to make sure its validity covers your entire trip. Always specify that you require a multiple entry visa,** for which there is no extra charge.

You must apply for the visa individually, by filling in the application form and taking it, or sending it, to your nearest Indian Embassy or Consulate (addresses below) together with your passport, two passport-sized photographs and the visa fee. Your passport must be valid for at least six months from your date of travel and have at least two blank facing pages for the visa. The safest and quickest method of obtaining a visa is to apply in person. Check before you go to make sure that the consulate is not closed for a national holiday. If you apply in the morning (before 12 noon), your visa will normally be issued the same day. The process sometimes takes as little as 30 minutes but you may have to come back to collect it in the late afternoon. If you apply by post, processing will normally take a minimum of 15 working days but may take considerably longer.

It is advisable to obtain your visa in your normal country of residence, if possible, otherwise it involves the extra time and cost to you of the local Indian consulate contacting the consulate in your home country for 'clearance'.

The cost of a visa varies and often depends on your nationality and the current relationship between India and your country.

If you are resident in the UK and unable to apply in person, we can recommend The Visa Service, who will process your visa application quickly and efficiently for a handling fee of approx. £40 per visa. They will need your passport, the correct number of photographs and a cheque for the amount of their handling fee, postage charges and the visa fee. Please check rates with them before sending any money. The address is:

2 Northdown Street, Kings Cross.London. N1 9BG

Tel: 020-7833-2709

Fax: 020-7833-1857

Opening times: Monday to Friday 09.00 – 18.00

If you wish them to return the passport to you by registered post, you must supply them with a return registered post envelope, available from the Post Office.

Alternatively, you can use the Visa Service's own insured mailing service with a fixed charge, regardless of the number of passports. They will only return passports to you by normal post if you write a letter stating that you authorise this and accept full responsibility.

**ALSO TRAILFINDERS LONDON HAS AN EXCELLENT VISA SERVICE –
PLS CONTACT DIRECT FOR FEES FORMS ETC. Tel. 0845 0505905**

Addresses of Indian Embassies and Consulates in the UK: for updated forms/fees:-

High Commission of India
India House
Aldwych
London
WC2B 4NA
Tel: 020-7836-8484
24-hr recorded visa info: 0891-444-544
Fax: 020-7240-6312
Visa form Fax back no.: 0891-444-543
Website: www.hcilondon.org
Opening times: 08.30-13.00 & 14.00-17.30 Monday to Friday

Consulate General of India
20 Augusta Street
Jewellery Quarters
Hockley
Birmingham
B18 6JL
Tel: 0121-212-2782
Fax: 0121-212-2786
Opening times: 09.30-17.30 Monday to Friday

Consulate General of India
India House
17 Rutland Square
Edinburgh
EH1 2BB
Tel: 0131-229-2144
Opening times for visa application: 09.00-12.30 Monday to Friday

In Eire:

Embassy of India
6 Lesson Park
Dublin 6
Tel: ++353-(0)1-497-0843/0806
Fax: ++353-(0)1-497-8074

Documents

Always carry your passport with you. This is normally required when changing money or checking into a hotel. A valid certificate of inoculation against yellow fever is necessary if coming from an affected area. No other health certificates are required.

Vaccinations

It is highly advisable to take all possible precautions against diseases that you may come in contact with while travelling in India. Currently recommended vaccinations are against Tetanus, Typhoid, Polio, and Hepatitis A. Vaccination against Rabies may also be worth considering. Smallpox has been eradicated and immunisation is not necessary. Vaccination against Cholera is no longer required, recommended or even available in most countries. Malaria is a serious problem in some regions and you should take a course of prophylactics. If you are going to be in the Indian Subcontinent for several months, enquire about the current situation regarding Meningitis and Japanese Encephalitis B which may be prevalent in some rural areas, especially during the Monsoon. Ideally, 6-8 weeks before you intend to depart, you should check with your doctor to decide on a suitable course of vaccinations, or consult one of the specialised travel clinics such as:

One of British Airways' many travel clinics. For details of your nearest call 01276-685040

Trailfinders' Immunisation Centre
194 Kensington High Street
London
W8 7RG
Tel: 020 7938 3999

Berkeley Travel Clinic
32 Berkeley Street
London
W1X 5FA
Tel: 020 7629 6233

See also the section on Health.

Customs

The traveller may bring in duty-free one bottle (0.95 litres) of spirits and 200 cigarettes. Personal effects such as binoculars, telescopes, camera with a reasonable amount of film, personal stereo and video camera are allowed on condition that they are re-exported. If carrying an unusually large amount of equipment, it may be wise to fill in a Tourist Baggage Re-Export Form on arrival to avoid complications on departure. Customs may check all baggage.

Currency and Exchange

The unit of currency is the Indian Rupee, which is subdivided into 100 Paise. In June 2009 one pound sterling was approximately equivalent to Rs 75. Money can be exchanged on arrival at the airport, in banks and at better hotels. The latter are more convenient but give a slightly lower rate. Outside major cities it is best to exchange money at the State Bank of India or another nationalised bank. Currency exchange at banks can be very time consuming, especially in the smaller cities, so you may wish to change enough each time to avoid repeating the painful process too often.

Pounds sterling and US dollars are widely recognised in India, but you may have trouble exchanging other currencies outside the big cities. For safety take the larger part of your money in the form of travellers' cheques as these are insured in case of

loss or theft. It is advisable to bring only the better known brands such as Thomas Cook or American Express as those of lesser known companies may not be accepted in some banks. Take some cash in case there is a problem exchanging your brand. Credit cards are becoming more widely known and can often be used to pay bills at the 'better' hotels, but this cannot be relied upon. It can be useful to have a small supply of US dollars in various denominations to cover unforeseen eventualities. You are not allowed to take Indian Rupees in and out of India. There is no restriction on the amount of foreign currency you are allowed to bring into India, but amounts exceeding US\$2,500 in cash/travellers' cheques per person must be declared on arrival to facilitate re-export. When changing money, ask for and keep your official Foreign Exchange Certificate. This will allow you to re-exchange unspent Rupees on your departure, and is generally required by airlines, some hotels and by officialdom when extending a visa or suchlike. Rupees may be accepted if backed up by a FEC. Do not take damaged banknotes in your change, as you may experience difficulty in getting these accepted and even the banks sometimes refuse to change them. Notes worn to a hole in the centre are a particular problem. The banks themselves staple notes together in bundles, and the resulting holes in the side are not a problem.

Time

All of India is within one time zone (Indian Standard Time) 5½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT/UTC), 10½ hours ahead of American EST and 4½ hours behind Australian EST.

The local concept of time differs from that of Westerners and you should not always expect a high degree of punctuality. The pace of life is generally much slower. Road and traffic conditions are such that average travelling speed is relatively low, typically 30-50 km/h, and can be even less in the mountains. The traveller who can relax and adjust to this rhythm will benefit from the experience.

Electricity

230-240 volts AC at 50 cycles. Power cuts and fluctuations and outages do occur regularly in some areas, though in better hotels these are covered by their own electricity generators. Sockets are of the round three-pin variety, often in two sizes. European round two-pin plugs will often fit, though not very well, so that it can be difficult to obtain a good contact. It is best to use a universal adapter.

Food and Drink

With the wide availability and popularity of Indian cuisine in the UK, it doesn't really need any introduction. Throughout India the better hotels and restaurants serve a wide selection of Indian, Western and Chinese food. In these one can generally assume that the food is safe to eat. In less salubrious establishments, or if in doubt, avoid meat, fish, salad and ice cream, which are the main causes of stomach upsets. A vegetarian lifestyle has much to recommend it in a country where most of the population does not eat meat.

Always carry drinking water. Do not drink water served at table at any other than the best establishments. Bottled 'mineral' water is widely available at restaurants, grocery stores and pharmacies, stick to this and bottled soft drinks. Tea and coffee are generally fine because they are boiled. Cold milk may be un-pasteurised. A refreshing drink is fresh lime soda (not lime water), plain or with sugar. Make sure

that ice is not added, as it is not always safe. Beer, of the lager type, is generally available in most of the better hotels and restaurants, although prohibition is in force in some Indian states. Other alcoholic drinks are best avoided, although you may wish to taste a small sample a local speciality. In southern India, green coconuts (tender coconuts) served at the side of the road give safe, refreshing drinking fluid. If buying bottled drinks from a roadside vendor, check that the cap is not rusty. This is an indication that the cap has been recycled and the bottle may have been refilled with a drink using unsafe water. Freshly pressed cane sugar and fruit drinks are not always safe.

Make sure that drinking water has been boiled. The answer to the question 'has the water been boiled' will usually be 'yes', but this is not an indication that it has! It is more likely an indication of the fact that people do not like to say 'no'. Filtering does not remove the bugs. If in doubt, use water purification tablets bought from a chemist or camping suppliers in your own country. Micropur is a general-purpose tablet that is silver-based with no unpleasant aftertaste. Chlorine-based tablets (Puritabs or Steritabs) are more widely available. If you suspect water may be less pure, use iodine-based tablets (e.g. Potable Aqua), and only ones effective against some pathogens such as Giardia and Amoebae, but try not to use these too often, and always follow the manufacturers instructions.

Health

For recommended immunisations, see section on Vaccinations. Travel to India, as with all tropical countries, presents the Westerner with particular health hazards, but with a little care most can be avoided. The most common problems are stomach bugs due to insanitary preparation of food, and especial care must be taken regarding food hygiene. Most stomach upsets are fairly mild and usually last 24 hours and are best treated by resting, eating little, avoiding fruit and dairy products and drinking plenty of fluid with a little added sugar and salt. However, cases of stomach upsets on our tours are extremely infrequent as long as you stick to the meals provided.

Drugs such as Imodium do not cure the cause of diarrhoea but simply alleviate the symptoms. They should only be used when absolutely necessary – on long journeys or in other circumstances where access to a toilet may be difficult. If symptoms are particularly severe with the stool containing blood or mucus, or last for more than three days, seek the advice of a doctor. If you are in a situation where no doctor is within reach, a course of antibiotics may be appropriate – Ciprofloxacin 500mg or Norfloxacin 400mg twice a day for three days. Giardiasis (Giardia) can also cause diarrhoea with frequent foul smelling wind. The symptoms usually appear one to two weeks after infection and may disappear and return for a few days at a time. The cure is a single dose of Flagyl (metronidazole) or Fasigyn (tinidazole).

Malaria is prevalent in India especially during the monsoon and it is essential to take precautions including the currently recommended prophylactic drugs (consult your doctor for the latest recommendations). Start taking the tablets a week before your trip and continue the course of treatment for six weeks after leaving the malarial zone. It is unlikely, but possible to catch malaria while taking treatment. Avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes. They are particularly active between dusk and dawn when you should cover exposed skin by wearing light-coloured long-sleeved shirts of a dense weave, long trousers and mosquito repellent. Sleep under a mosquito net, or use a

mosquito coil or plug-in tablet. The same precautions are helpful against the risk of Dengue Fever for which there is no prophylactic. If affected by fever, shivering or severe headaches together with joint or muscle pain, seek immediate medical advice. Disinfect cuts and scratches, but only cover with a plaster if there is a serious danger of dirt entering the wound. Healing takes place much faster if the skin is exposed to the sun and air.

Aids is spreading fast in India, mainly through heterosexual transmission. Practice safe sex and if you need an injection, make sure a sterile needle is used.

Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) is a serious threat at high altitudes. It can affect anyone without regard to age or fitness, normally at altitudes of above 3500m though fatal cases have been known at 3000m. If going on a trek in the High Himalaya, or travelling in Ladakh, make sure that you spend some time acclimatising by spending two or three nights at each altitude above 2000 m for every 1000m climbed. Drink more than you would normally to compensate for the moisture lost through your breath in the dry air. Avoid alcohol and sedatives in spite of possible sleeplessness. The low levels of oxygen will mean that most people will experience breathlessness, but the other main symptoms of AMS are severe headache, dizziness, confusion, loss of appetite, a dry cough, nausea and vomiting. Mild symptoms usually subside after a couple of days' acclimatisation but anyone suffering more acutely, should immediately descend to a lower altitude. Even a few hundred metres can help.

Jet lag, sun and heat can cause problems. Acclimatise by taking it easy for the first few days. Wear loose cotton clothes, drink plenty of fluid and make sure you take sufficient salt in your food. Sunburn can happen surprisingly fast in the tropics. Wear a wide brimmed hat, keep arms and legs covered and use a high-factor sun cream. Apply a zinc sun-block to the nose, lips and forehead and anywhere else you burn quickly. Use sunglasses. Spending too much time out in the sun can also cause heat-stroke, particularly during the middle of the day. Victims are likely to feel unwell with a throbbing headache, be unable to sweat, have a high body temperature with flushed skin and become confused and aggressive. They should be taken immediately to a doctor or hospital. An itchy rash called prickly heat is not uncommon and can be prevented by keeping cool, wearing loose cotton clothing, using talcum powder and bathing regularly.

Fungal infections can cause an itchy rash, particularly between the fingers and toes, around the groin or on the scalp. Wear loose clothes of natural fibres and use plastic or rubber thongs in the bathroom and shower. Infections are best treated with a fungicide such as Tinaderm and by regular washing with medicated soap and exposure to as much air as possible. Clothes and towels should be washed as frequently as possible

Intestinal worms are common and caused by ingestion of unhygienically prepared food or walking barefoot. Possible symptoms include an itching around the anus, particularly at night, and diarrhoea. De-worming tablets are available at pharmacies.

Leeches can be a problem, mainly in rainforests during and after the rainy season. They are not known to transmit any diseases, but are a nuisance as the ensuing bleeding is difficult to stop. Coating feet and legs with insect repellent containing

Deet can offer effective protection for a few hours. Remove leeches by applying a squirt of insect repellent, salt or a lighted match.

The change of climate often makes visitors prone to catching colds and coughs. Cold remedies are readily available at pharmacies, but the strongest cough lozenges which can be bought locally are usually Strepsils, so you may prefer to bring your own. Although there are doctors and hospitals in most towns, standards of hygiene can often leave a lot to be desired. Most hotels can put you in touch with a good English-speaking doctor. Fees are usually reasonable though luxury hotels are likely to work together with doctors whose fees reflect their high-class treatment. If you have a serious problem and are in a place that does not have the standard of healthcare that you require, the best solution may be to get on a plane to somewhere that does. The largest metropolises have good clinics and your country's embassy or consulate should be able to recommend one.

Common remedies are inexpensive and available over-the-counter at pharmacies in most towns, but care is not always taken regarding storage and expiry date. If you need a specific medicine, take sufficient supplies with you in case it is not available locally. New prescription glasses can be made up the same day in Delhi and some other big cities but it is best to take a spare pair from home with you.

A small travel medical kit should include the following:

- Antacid tablets – for acid indigestion
- Antibiotics – in case of serious infection off the beaten track, take a copy of the prescription with you
- Aspirin or Paracetamol – pain killer and fever depressant
- Calamine lotion or Antihistamine cream – to reduce itching from insect bites
- Diarolytes – for rehydration after diarrhoea
- Dequacaine – for severe sore throats and coughs
- Imodium or Lomotil – to control diarrhoea
- Insect repellent – containing Deet
- Plasters and bandages – for dressing wounds
- Scissors
- Sterile packed syringes – in case you need injections in less than hygienic circumstances. Ask for a note from your doctor to explain what they are for.
- Sun block
- Sun cream
- Tweezers
- Water purification tablets.

Safety

It is generally safe to travel, although petty theft is common in some of the bigger cities and on public transport where items may be pilfered from unattended baggage, or more seriously, baggage has been stolen from sleeping passengers. A good method of avoiding total theft is to attach your bag to the luggage rack with a cycle lock. All side pockets should be individually padlocked. Theft from hotel rooms can occur (usually only in the cheaper establishments) so keep luggage locked. Make sure your travel insurance gives adequate cover for valuables and equipment. In better class hotels, deposit valuables in the hotel safe, but don't forget to claim them before your departure. Otherwise, keep valuables on your person and out of sight in a money belt.

Keep smaller amounts of money for the day in a separate wallet or purse. This avoids displaying large amounts of cash in public. Expensive cameras and optical equipment should be kept out of sight when not in use. Binoculars often attract requests for a look, but beware of the risk of transmitting eye infections. Bring a photocopy of the main pages of your passport with extra passport photos in case your passport is lost. Do not wear expensive-looking jewellery.

Climate

India's huge size and varied topography means the climate varies from place to place quite markedly. Broadly speaking India has a hot tropical climate, with the exception of the Himalayan Region. One can divide the year into three periods: the hot, the wet and the cool. During the hot and dry summer from the end of March to the end of May/beginning of June temperatures can reach the 40's (centigrade) during the middle of the day.

The onset of the southwest monsoon usually begins in South India at the end of May and works its way to Delhi by late June/early July. During the monsoon it can rain every day – heavily, lightly or not at all. It can be hot and humid although temperatures are not usually as high as the summer. Travel at this time can be difficult in out-of-the-way areas of the peninsula, and many national parks are closed. The southwest monsoon usually lasts until September retreating from the northwest to the southeast. It is usually followed by a short northeast monsoon which normally only affects the east coast of South India and the northeastern states.

From October to February is the cool season when daytime temperatures in the south can be in the mid 20's – 30's. At this time of year it can be quite cold in the north with night time temperatures in Delhi regularly below 10°C. The cool season is relatively dry.

Clothing

Due to the varied climate, clothing needed depends on where and when you go. Three or four weeks in Delhi and Rajasthan from March to May require only light summer clothing, plus a warm sweater or jacket for early morning activities. At the other extreme a winter visit to the Himalaya dictates very warm clothing and a four season sleeping bag.

Indian sensibilities may be offended by the sight of too much bare skin and whereas a pair of longish shorts and a t-shirt are suitable for a man, women should keep legs and shoulders covered as far as possible and not wear clothing that is too tight or otherwise immodest. In any case, it is best to wear long sleeved shirts and long trousers as protection against the sun and biting insects. A sun hat, sunglasses and sun cream should always be carried in your day pack. For high altitude trekking, you need an outer breathable waterproof jacket, an inner fleece or down jacket, thermal underwear, woollen hat and gloves. Layering is best so that you can add or remove layers depending on the temperature.

Pack primarily for comfort, with lightweight cotton or cotton-rich clothing. A laundry service is available at most hotels. The items listed below are essentials. Please bear in mind that local custom in India calls for modest dress. Women should not wear sleeveless tops or short shorts.

Suggested clothing:

- 2 pairs of light-weight long trousers
- 1 pair of shorts (men only)
- 2 dresses and/or skirts and blouses (ladies)
- 3 short-sleeved shirts/blouses/t-shirts
- 3 long-sleeved shirts or blouses
- 1 sweater
- 1 windbreaker or light jacket
- 1 pair of comfortable walking shoes
- Rubber thongs/flip flops
- 1 pair of casual shoes
- Brimmed hat for sun protection
- Light raincoat or folding umbrella

Miscellaneous:

- Sunglasses
- Binoculars
- Travel alarm clock
- Sealable wet towel-wipes
- High-factor sun cream
- Zinc sun-block
- Water purification tablets
- Indigestion tablets
- Day pack
- Band-aids
- Washcloth/soap
- Water bottle
- Compact torch
- Detergent to hand wash clothes
- Penknife
- Adjustable bath plug
- Insect repellent
- Camera and film (one roll per day)

Dos and Don'ts

As a foreigner you will be forgiven most faux pas if you adhere to western codes of conduct, but it helps if you can respect local customs and standards of behaviour.

Indians dress modestly and visitors do well to follow suit. Nudity is absolutely unacceptable for adults, though you may on a very rare occasion come across a naked *sadhu* (holy man), which is a different matter. Women, and to a lesser extent men, should avoid sleeveless tops and short shorts. You will, no doubt, notice that a bare midriff is considered acceptable among the local ladies but they normally keep the shoulders covered. Men should avoid wearing shorts when entering temples or mosques, although this may be allowed in some places.

In most temples it is necessary to remove shoes before entering, if not the whole temple, then at least the holiest shrines. Follow the example of the locals in this. There is often somewhere to deposit them at the appropriate entrance. Sometimes a small fee may be charged. Some temples, or parts of temples, are reserved for adherents of the religion. In some areas women may not be allowed.

If you are invited into a person's home, you should likewise remove your shoes unless otherwise indicated. Do not go into the kitchen or water-storage area unless you are invited, in which case remove your shoes.

As in practically all of Asia it is rude to direct the soles of your feet at a person, or at anything of religious significance. When sitting, try to keep feet on the ground or tucked in. You should also avoid pointing with a finger at religious objects but rather use the open palm of the hand.

A person's head is often regarded as sacred or vulnerable and should not be touched. Try to resist the Western temptation to pat children on the head.

The symbolism of the hand, and the distinction between left and right, are considerably more important in Asia than in the west. The left hand is reserved for everything to do with the lower part of the body. Consequently, you should try to use your right hand in all social situations. Only eat with the right hand. If giving food, money, or any other object to someone, use the right hand. In special circumstances when making a presentation, it is polite to use both hands. Wash your hands before and after meals.

Do not touch anyone else's food, cutlery or cooking utensils. If you are drinking from the same container as someone else, do not touch it with your lips. Pour the liquid from a little way above your mouth. The fire and hearth are often considered sacred, hence it would be inconsiderate to throw anything into them.

The holding of hands in public by persons of the opposite sex is frowned upon.

Possibly because of the relatively overcrowded conditions in India, the interpersonal distance is much lower than in the West. You may feel that someone is being too intimate and standing too close to you. This is not deliberate aggression, it is just that this is the normal distance for locals, though somewhat mitigated by considerations of caste and rank. Traffic conditions are similarly affected.

Photography

India offers many opportunities for photography. Please respect people's sensitivities, and always ask for permission before taking a photograph of a person. Be prepared to send them a copy if requested. If you promise to do this, please do not 'forget' on returning home.

Do not take photographs at airports, military installations, bridges, railway stations and other places of a sensitive nature. Beware also of using binoculars and cameras in such areas. Inside temples photography is often not allowed; the use of flash generally banned completely. Always check, since photographing religious objects may cause offence.

Film is often available locally, but is not of particularly good value, and may be past its shelf life. It is better to bring enough rolls and spare batteries to cover your needs for the trip. Officials at the airports insist that the x-ray machines are safe for films, but you may prefer to have your films hand searched to be on the safe side.

Many sanctuaries and cultural sites charge a modest camera fee in addition to the entrance fee. Video camera fees can be extremely high, but use of a video camera without the necessary permit can result in confiscation of the equipment.

If you are carrying expensive cameras and optical equipment, it is a good idea to make sure it is covered by your insurance.

If your tour goes to high altitudes, remember to take appropriate UV filters.

Language

18 languages are officially recognised in India plus hundreds of minor tongues and dialects. Hindi has been encouraged as a national language, but English is widespread and the first language for many educated people. In most urban settings and official dealings English will see you through. A small phrasebook such as the Lonely Planet *Hindi/Urdu Phrasebook* might be useful. A knowledge of the numbers, which are broadly similar in most of the country's languages, can be of some help.

Baksheesh/Tips

Hotel porters expect a tip, and waiters expect 10-15% of the bill. It is not necessary to tip taxi drivers with whom you have agreed a price for a single journey, but if you keep the same car for a day or more, it is appropriate. If you go trekking, and use a guide and porters, reward them at the end of the trek. In some situations, the judicious use of baksheesh may expedite matters. Giving money to beggars is a personal matter, although it is not encouraged. In India beggars can be extremely tenacious and keeping loose change handy can resolve the situation. Unfortunately, some tourists misguidedly give away pens and sweets, so children now consider pestering tourists for pens (Gimme one pen!) and sweets (Mithai!) normal. Thankfully this problem has not become widespread in Bhutan. If you would really like to help the local children, consider making a direct contribution to a local school, perhaps even with a long-term commitment.

Arrival and Flight Reconfirmation

If you have arranged private transfers, you will be met by our driver/representative on arrival at the airport.

It is normally necessary to reconfirm your return international flight to the UK or your home destination at least 72 hours before departure. Our representative in India can usually assist with this.

Departure and Airport Departure Tax

Indian regulations demand that you check in for your International flights three hours before departure.

The Indian government levies an airport tax on departing international flights. Most airlines now add this to the ticket price, but in some cases you may have to pay on departure. Check with the airline to make sure you keep enough rupees for this purpose.

It is illegal to take Indian Rupees out of the country, but any excess can be re-exchanged into hard currency at the airport on production of a Foreign Exchange Certificate (which you should insist on being given on first changing your money). You can do this at the airport banks after checking in but before going through passport control.

BOOKS

India is one of the world's largest publishers of books in the English language and we cannot give more than a few recommended titles here. Books published in S Asia are often lower in price than the editions published in the West. However, one cannot always rely on obtaining specific titles there, and if you need a particular specialist work, such as a field guide, it is better to obtain it before you go.

General Travel Guides

Christine Niven *et al.* (September 1999) *India*. 8th edn. Lonely Planet, Hawthorn, Australia. ISBN: 0-86442-687-9. Paperback - 1264 pages.

This best seller caters to a wide range of people from budget travellers through to those who like to travel in luxury. Very thorough and popular with backpackers but some might find the style too familiar and frank, and the emphasis is definitely on the do-it-yourself approach.

Robert and Roma Bradnock. (October 1999) *Footprint India Handbook 2000*. Footprint Handbooks, Bath. Paperback - 1408 pages. ISBN: 1900949415

Of similar scope to the Lonely Planet guide but with more emphasis and depth on the cultural and historic aspects. Somewhat geared to travel by car, with places of interest being grouped along routes, but also gives practical details for using public transport, accommodation etc.

There are numerous other guides including ones to more specific regions such as South India, Rajasthan or the Indian Himalaya.

Architecture and Art

Inexpensive booklets on most important architectural sites produced by the Archaeological Survey of India are often available locally (frequently for sale at or near the ticket office to the sites).

Christopher Tadgell. (1994) *The History of Architecture in India*. Phaidon Press. Paperback - 336 pages. ISBN: 0714829609. Good survey.

George Michell. (1999) *The Royal Palaces of India*. Thames and Hudson. Paperback - 232 pages. ISBN: 0500279640. Comprehensive guide to the forts and palaces. Well-illustrated with photographs by Antonio Martinelli.

Roy Craven. (1997) *Indian Art*. Thames & Hudson. ISBN: 0500203024. Paperback - 256 pages. Good introduction spanning 4000 years. Well illustrated.

Birds

Salim Ali. (1996) *The Book of Indian Birds*. 12th revised and enlarged edn. BNHS, Bombay. ISBN: 0-19-563731-3. Hardback - 354 pages, Good introductory work covering 538 commoner species.

Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. (1999) *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN: 0-7136-4004-9. Hardback - 888

pages. More in the nature of a handbook. A bit too heavy for comfortable use in the field but very thorough and well worth having for reference. The Sibley and Monroe order in which the species are given is somewhat controversial and may not be familiar to all users.

Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp, and Tim Inskipp. *Birds of India*. This is the perfect field guide companion to the same authors' major reference, *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. It covers all the species (nearly 1,300) found in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives. The 153 color plates illustrate every species and face the relevant species accounts for quick reference. It also includes more than 1,200 color distribution maps and tables summarizing identification features of all species.

Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. (1999) *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN: 0-7136-5165-2. Paperback - 384 pages. Pocket version of the above guide using the same plates and a condensed text.

Krys Kazmierczak and Ber van Perlo. (2000) *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Pica Press, Robertsbridge, UK. ISBN: 1-873403-79-8. Hardback – 352 pages. True field guide illustrating all 1300+ species in traditional order. Concise text and good distribution maps. Currently the most up-to-date guide.

Krys Kazmierczak and Raj Singh. (1998) *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*. Prion, Sandy, UK. ISBN: 1-871104-08-4. Paperback – 334 pages. OUP – INDIA. An indispensable guide to all the main birdwatching sites and some more. Includes maps, practical details and information about other wildlife.

Martin Woodcock. (1980) *Collins Handguide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Collins, London. Hardback/Paperback - 176 pages. Useful for beginners with pleasant colour illustrations of the commoner species.

There are also a number of (mainly older) regional works which may be of interest. See the listing in Kazmierczak and Singh.

Butterflies

Thomas Gay, Isaac David Kehimkar and Jagdish Chandra Punetha. (1992) *Common Butterflies of India*. WWF-India/OUP, Bombay. ISBN: 0-19-563164-1. Paperback - 67 pages. Useful introduction for the beginner or someone with a passing interest but only covers relatively few of the commoner species.

Meena Haribal. (1995) *The Butterflies of Sikkim Himalaya and their Natural History*. Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun. Quite well illustrated and the only real guide for the Eastern Himalaya.

Colin Smith. (1993) *Illustrated Checklist of Nepal's Butterflies*. Rohit Kumar, Lashkar (Gwalior), India. ISBN: 974-88810-7-5. Cardboard cover - 126 pages. Reasonably good photographs of a large number of Nepal's species with distributional information.

M. A. Wynter-Blyth. (1957) *Butterflies of the Indian Region*. Reprint of the original. Today & Tomorrow's Publishers and Printers, Delhi. Although out of print, real enthusiasts will wish to try to get hold of a copy by one means or another.

Flowers and Trees

P. V. Bole and Yogini Vaghani. (1986) *Field Guide to the Common Trees of India*. WWF/OUP, Bombay. Paperback - 125 pages. Illustrated with b&w line drawings. Good beginner's guide which doesn't take up much space in the luggage.

Dorothy Mierow and Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha. (Undated, 1980s?) *Himalayan Flowers and Trees*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press. Paperback - 210 pages. Pleasant little book illustrated with many colour photographs.

K. C. Sahni. (1998) *The Book of Indian Trees*. Oxford University Press, Mumbai. ISBN: 0195645898. Hardback - 240 pages. Describes more than 150 of the commoner Indian species. Illustrated with b&w line drawings.

Oleg Polunin and Adam Stainton. (1997) *Flowers of the Himalaya*. Reprint of 1984 edn. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0195641876. Paperback. The standard reference for identifying the wild flowers of the Himalaya, from Kashmir and Ladakh in the west to the Nepal-Sikkim border in the east.

History and Current Affairs

A. L. Basham. (1985) *The Wonder that was India*. Sidgwick & Jackson, London. Readable and comprehensive.

John Keay. (2000) *India: a History*. HarperCollins. ISBN: 0002557177. Hardcover - 587 pages. Complete survey from 3000BC to the present day.

Mark Tully. (1992) *No Full Stops in India*. Penguin Books. ISBN: 0140104801. Paperback - 368 pages. Eminently readable accounts of people and places by this long-time correspondent and acknowledged expert on modern India.

Mammals

K. K. Gurung and Raj Singh. (1996) *A Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent*. Academic Press, London. Handy-sized field guide with illustrations and descriptions of most (but not all) identifiable mammals.

S. H. Prater. (1971) *The Book of Indian Animals*. OUP/BNHS, Bombay. An old favourite but still going strong. Indispensable for anyone with more than a passing interest in the mammals.

Railway Travel

Royston Ellis. (1996) *India by Rail*. 3rd edn. Bradt Travel Guides, Chalfont St. Peter, England. Essential reading for the rail enthusiast.

Religion

John R. Hinnells (Editor). (1997) *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*. Penguin Books. ISBN: 0140512616. Paperback - 800 pages. Succinct summary of all the world's religions.

K.M. Sen. (1991) *Hinduism*. Penguin Books. Paperback - 160 pages. ISBN: 0140136509. A compact guide.

Reptiles

J. C. Daniel. (1983) *The Book of Indian Reptiles*. OUP/BNHS, Bombay. The standard work and companion book to Prater's *Animals*.

Rom Whitaker. (1978) *Common Indian Snakes*. Macmillan, New Delhi. Compact useful little book.

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MAPS

The Lascelles, Bartholemew and Nelles maps covering the Indian Subcontinent in one sheet at a scale of 1:4,000,000, are fairly good general maps but may not be detailed enough for everyone's needs. The Nelles series of maps or the Lonely Planet *India Travel Atlas* should be suitable for most purposes. The former cover India in five sheets at 1:1,500,000 and are sold as separate maps. The Lonely Planet production covers the whole country in a single book at 1:1,250,000 and shows slightly more detail than the Nelles maps but is more bulky and unnecessary if your trip is restricted to one region. The 'Road Guide' series produced by T. T. Maps & Publications Ltd., Chennai (Madras) covers most of India but the production quality does not match that of its rivals. It occasionally indicates roads not shown on the Nelles maps, but the opposite is also true.

More detailed trekking maps of Himachal Pradesh and other Himalayan regions are sometimes available locally, but this cannot be guaranteed.

The general travel guides have good maps of most sizeable towns. Other maps vary in availability, accuracy and quality. Please note that no map is entirely reliable.

Stanfords, 12-14 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 9LP ☎ 0207-836-1321 have a good selection of maps and travel guides and provide a mail order service. Try also The National Map Centre, 22-24 Caxton Street, London, SW1H 0QU ☎ 0207-222-2466, Fax 0207-222-2619. One of a number of good mapsellers in the US is Map Link, 30 So. LaPatera Lane, Santa Barbara, CA 93117 ☎ 805-965-4402.