

North India trip

1-10 November 2020



Welcome to North India!

India is a country that will never leave you indifferent, either you love it or you hate it, but I will make everything possible so that you will love this country as much as I do.

Our journey will start in Delhi on the 1st November. A taxi will pick you up at the airport and take you to our boutique accommodation in South Delhi. There you will have time to rest and refresh before setting off to explore the city.

We will have time to see the magnificent monuments that give Delhi its beauty. It's a chaotic city, but there is a special beauty in chaos.



We will get to know the street food through a guided street food tour, that will take us to the streets of Old Delhi, an unforgettable experience!

After exploring Delhi, on the 3rd November we will take the train to Agra, to visit one of the wonders of the modern world, the Taj Mahal. I never get tired of visiting it, and every time I go back, it's delicate beauty moves me deeply. We will stay in a nice homestay a short ride away from the Taj Mahal, to have the opportunity to experience the Indian hospitality, as well as delicious home cooked meals. For many participants, watching our host lovingly prepare our meal was one of the highlights of the trip!

On the 5 November we will have a long road or train trip, which is an experience in itself! Depending on

availability, we will either take the train or our own private minibus to travel from Agra to Rishikesh. There we will stay in a very nice boutique hotel, located close to great yoga teachers. We will have time enough to explore the city, try the best yoga classes, go for massages, for a consultation with an astrologist, etc... And of course sample the delicious Indian cuisine. On the 10 November you will either take a taxi or the plane back to Delhi and onwards to your final destination. By then, hopefully India will have conquered your heart and you will be looking forward to your next trip!

Practicalities

Visa:

You need a visa to enter India. There is an electronic visa that you can obtain online.

Please check the following link:

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>

Advisory :

Services of e-Visa involves completely online application for which no facilitation is required by any intermediary / agents etc.

It is advised not to believe or fall in trap of any such unscrupulous elements who claim speedy/ express grant of e-Visa and charge money for it.

Do not share your personal information with any unauthorised website as it may lead to your personal data piracy. Only visit Government of India website with address indianvisaonline.gov.in for any kind of service or clarification. For any clarification or doubt, you may write to us on our email i.e. indiatvoa@gov.in.

Please make sure your passport has at least 6 months validity.

Clothing:

India is a very conservative country and the North of India even more. For women **it is important to cover up shoulders and legs as a sign of respect – especially if you visit a mosque or temple.** It is not advisable to wear very short skirts or shorts or tight-fitting clothes. Wearing loose, cotton Indian-style clothing is a good idea because these outfits keep you cool, are suitably modest and can help you fit in better — thereby increasing respect and reducing stares and unwanted attention.

Examples: long cotton pants (they are very comfy too!), long skirts, tunic style blouses (shoulders should be covered), t-shirts, etc...

In Delhi we will have the opportunity to go shopping for some beautiful Indian style clothes.

The weather won't be too hot anymore, so there is no need to expose too much skin.

Health:

I recommend you check with your doctor for any specific vaccinations you might need, depending on your medical history. It is a personal choice, so I can't advise you on that.

There is no malaria in the places we will visit, so no malaria medication is needed.

I recommend to bring activated charcoal to treat mild stomach problems. If you have a sensitive stomach, it might be useful to start taking a good probiotic pill a few weeks in advance of the trip. Please consult your doctor.

Water should always be from the bottle, even to brush your teeth. Avoid drinks with ice cubes, as they might be done with water from the tap.

After many years of travelling in India and Asia in general, my soundest piece of advice regarding what to eat is: **eat like the locals**, go to places that are packed and have a good turnover, that guarantees that the food is freshly made. Avoid eating western-like food, specially meat.

In Rishikesh there are many good local restaurants, I will take you to my favourite ones. **Rishikesh is a holy city, so no alcohol or meat is served in the restaurants in the whole city.**

Safety:

Be cautious, but don't be nervous. Be open, but don't be naive. Yes, India is overwhelming to the first-time visitor and most people experience culture shock. India is like the cave Yoda sends Luke into: **you will only find what you bring with you.** So, **don't bring fear.** Most Indians are the **nicest, friendliest and most helpful people** you will ever meet. Even when they are trying to part you from your rupees, they are mostly very nice about it.

In India, you have to be **careful about how you relate to some men** — specifically, less educated men working in service, transportation or hospitality. In other words, if you are overly friendly with an autorickshaw driver, you could inadvertently be giving him the wrong signals. It's unfortunate that foreign women are sometimes seen as more “available” than Indian women, too — which doesn't help.

Again, realise that much of India is still a traditional society, and in certain parts of society the genders do not mix.

You can never be entirely safe from pick-pockets in any country, but there are some precautions you can take.

Keep your money and credit cards in a secure pouch or money-belt, which you can hang around your neck and tuck under your shirt. At the same time, keep a small amount of cash in your wallet: if it gets pinched or lost, you won't lose very much. That said, in my 10 years of travels through India, I have never been robbed.

Before leaving home, make a few photocopies from your passport to bring along.

Don't hand out money to beggars in crowded places. You will be swarmed. In fact, authorities advise that you don't give money to anyone asking for a handout. If you want to give, by all means do so — India has many, many worthwhile charitable organisations. Your money will go to a better cause if you give it to a charitable organisation. Many beggars work for gangsters, so the money you give to them, just ends up in the gangster's pocket.

Please make sure you have **adequate travel insurance**.

Money:

The Indian currency is the rupee. Right now, 1€=78 rupees (it might fluctuate). To give you an idea of the prices, a full meal (one main and a drink) can cost something around 300 to 500 rupees, depending on the place. Rishikesh is cheaper than Delhi. You can plan

about 20-25€ daily for food and entries to monuments and sights in Delhi and Agra, less in Rishikesh.

You can take out money from the ATM using your debit or credit card, but please check first with your bank.

Some banks block your card if they think there is some suspicious transaction, so you might need to notify them beforehand that you are going to India.

You can also bring euros/dollars in cash and change into rupees.

A reminder of your inclusions:

The price includes: train ticket from Delhi to Agra, all transportation by private car (from Agra to Rishikesh, inside Delhi, in Agra), all airport transfers, all accommodation in small and charming medium-range hotels, welcome dinner in Delhi on 1st November and farewell dinner in Rishikesh on 9 November, the practical organisation of the trip, activities in Rishikesh included: 5 yoga classes

Not included: international flights, meals and drinks (some hotels include breakfast), entries to the monuments and sights, drinks, tips, other activities in Rishikesh, Delhi food walk (around 15-20€), flight or taxi from Dehradun to Delhi on the 10 November

Some Hindi words:

Learn a few words of Hindi. Most educated people speak English, but working class people and villagers rarely speak more than a few words. Namaste is a common greeting, it's used like Hello
theek hai- okay

accha- is that right?

jaa- go away

chai- tea

paani- water

Food – Khana

Give me food – Mujhe khana do

Do you speak English? – Kya apa English bolte hai

Yes – Haa

No – Nahi

Please – Kripya

Thank you – Dhanevaad

Must pack:

Earplugs

Hand sanitiser

Comfortable walking shoes that are also easy to take off, as we have to take the shoes off in all the temples and sacred sights

Your personal medication if you take any

Day backpack

Money belt

Tampons or moon cup; sanitary pads are easy to find

Comfortable yoga clothes (no need to bring a yoga mat)

In India you can find good brands for shampoo, shower gel, ayurvedic soaps, body lotion, toothpaste, mosquito repellent, etc... so don't worry if you forget some of those.

I recommend bringing very few items of clothing and making a beeline for Fabindia (the Zara of India).

Indian clothes are inexpensive, colourful, comfortable and they suit the climate and the culture. Indians will appreciate your attempt to bridge cultures and show respect and they will be even more open towards you.

Recommended books:

In no particular order, here are some books that I loved and that are good reads to prepare your trip to India:

The red sari by Javier Moro

Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts

A fine balance by Rohinton Mistry

Nine lives by William Dalrymple

A suitable boy by Vikram Seth

City of joy by Dominique Lapierre

One More Ride on the Merry-go-round by Tiziano Terzani

Holy cow by Sarah MacDonald

The white tiger by Aravind Adiga

India by V.S Naipaul

Behind the beautiful forevers by Katherine Boo

Food glossary:

Food is one of the many attractions of India. There is an immense variety of dishes, and it's a joy to sample them all!

Here is a small food glossary that might be helpful:

Indian bread:

Chapati or roti: The traditional flatbread from the Indian subcontinent is known as chapati or roti. It is normally eaten with cooked vegetables or curries; it can be called a carrier for them. It is made most often from wheat flour and water that is combined into a dough.

Paratha: Parathas are one of the most popular unleavened flat breads in India. Parathas are thicker and more substantial than chapatis/rotis and this is either because, in the case of a *plain paratha*, they have been layered by coating with ghee or oil and folding repeatedly using a laminated dough technique; or else because food ingredients such as mixed vegetables have

been mixed in with the dough, such as potato and/or cauliflower, green beans and carrots.

Naan: In parts of the Indian subcontinent it usually refers to a specific kind of thick flatbread (another well-known kind of flatbread is *chapati*). Generally, it resembles pita and, like pita bread, is usually leavened with yeast. Naan is cooked in a *tandoor*. This distinguishes it from *roti*, which is usually cooked on a flat or slightly concave iron griddle.

Papadum: A papadum is a thin, crisp, disc-shaped cracker from the Indian subcontinent; typically based on a seasoned dough usually made from peeled black gram flour (chickpea flour), either fried or cooked with dry heat.

Indian main dishes:

Dal Fry: lentils dish

Dal Makhani: lentils cooked in real punjabi style

Aloo gobi: potato with cauliflower (aloo=potato, gobi=cauliflower)

Paneer: sort of cottage cheese, cut in cubes

Palak paneer: cottage cheese cooked with spinach creamy gravy (palak=spinach)

Khadai paneer: cottage cheese cooked with capsicum, onion and tomato gravy

Kashmiri dum aloo: potatoes with cottage cheese and dry fruits served with creamy cashew nut gravy

Malai kofta: dumpling potato stuffed with dry fruits, cottage cheese, cooked in rich creamy gravy

Biryani: also known as biriyani, biriani, birani or briyani, "spicy rice" is a mixed rice dish with its origins among the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. It is popular throughout the Indian subcontinent. Main ingredients: Rice, Indian spices, Vegetables, Meat, Egg, Yoghurt, Dried Fruits

Others

Curd is the Indian word for yogurt.

Lassi: blend of yogurt, water, spices and sometimes fruit.

Raita: Raita is a common name of a condiment from the Indian subcontinent, made with creamy yogurt together with raw or cooked vegetables, spices and more seldom fruit.

Masala: any of the many spice mixes used in South Asian cuisine

Pakora: also called pakoda, pakodi, fakkura, bhajiya, bhajji or ponako, is a fried snack, very popular across the Indian subcontinent. They consist of vegetables or paneer dipped in a batter made from chickpea flour and then deep-fried.

Masala chai: (literally "mixed-spice tea") is a flavoured tea beverage made by brewing black tea with a mixture of aromatic Indian spices and herbs.

Thali: Thali is the Indian name for a round platter used to serve food. Thali is also used to refer to an Indian-style meal made up of a selection of various dishes which are served on a platter.

Final words

Recently I read on someones website the following: “If you want a vacation, go to the Caribbean. **If you want to be transformed, go to India.** You don’t visit India — you experience it. And the best way to experience India is with the right attitude — an attitude of **openness, trust, surrender.** If you view everything that happens as a learning experience, as something meant to teach you about yourself and about life, you will fare much better than if you try and control your travel experience.”

That pretty much summarises my recommendation to you. I will make my very best so that everything is perfect for you and you have the best imaginable Indian experience, but remember this is a developing country and sometimes things don’t go exactly according to plan, which usually is a blessing in disguise!

To end on a funny note: [https://youtu.be/
Uj56IPJOqWE](https://youtu.be/Uj56IPJOqWE)