



INDIA

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

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Welcome to India

A land of remarkable diversity – from ancient traditions and artistic heritage to magnificent landscapes and culinary creations – India will ignite your curiosity, shake your senses and warm your soul.

From the icy peaks of the northern mountains to the sun-washed southern beaches, India's dramatic terrain is breathtaking – and frequently enhanced by humanity as majestic temples rise out of pancake-flat deserts and crumbling fortresses peer over plunging ravines. Aficionados of the great outdoors can scout for big cats on jungle safaris, paddle in the waters of beautiful beaches, or trek exhilarating routes high in the Himalaya.

Everywhere you go, India tosses up the unexpected. This can be challenging: the poverty is confronting, bureaucracy can be exasperating and the crush of humanity may turn the simplest task into a frazzling epic. Yet this is all part of the India ride. Love it or loathe it (and most travellers see-saw between the two), to embrace India's unpredictability is to embrace its soul.

Spirituality is the common thread woven through this vast canvas. The multitude of sacred sites and rituals are testament to India's long, colourful, sometimes tumultuous religious history.

As you travel, you'll be taking one of the wildest culinary trips of your life. The hungry traveller can look forward to a delicious smorgasbord of regionally distinct recipes, from masterfully marinated meats to the simple splendour of vegetarian curries and deep-sea delights.

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External boundaries shown reflect the requirements of the Government of India.



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Plan Your Trip India's Top 12



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Agra & Taj Mahal

A timeless monument to love

The exquisite tomb of an emperor's beloved wife, the Taj Mahal (p68) is arguably the world's most beautiful building, and has been enshrined in the writings of Tagore and Kipling. Built by Emperor Shah Jahan in adoration of his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal, this white marble mausoleum is inlaid with calligraphy, precious stones and intricate floral designs representing paradise, and represents the pinnacle of Mughal architecture as well as romance.

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Varanasi

City of life and death

Welcome to one of India's most revered sacred cities (p227). Pilgrims flock here to worship, take a holy dip in the Ganges River, or cremate loved ones. Hindus believe the Ganges' waters cleanse away sins, and dying here is deemed particularly propitious as it offers liberation from the life-and-death cycle. Varanasi will sweep you into its dizzying spiritual whirlwind – just take a deep breath and immerse yourself in pondering the meaning of life, death...and beyond. Ritual bathing in the Ganges (p230)



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Goa

Palm-fringed tropical beach paradise

With palms nodding on one side of the sugar-white sands and powder-blue waves lapping on the other, Goa's (p159) coastline is lined by beautiful beaches and has an easy-going hedonistic atmosphere like nowhere else in India. It's not an undiscovered paradise: this cool coastal strip bustles with fellow travellers, vendors and beach-shack eateries. Goa appeals to social creatures and fans of creature comforts who like their seafood fresh and their holidays easy. Palolem (p172)

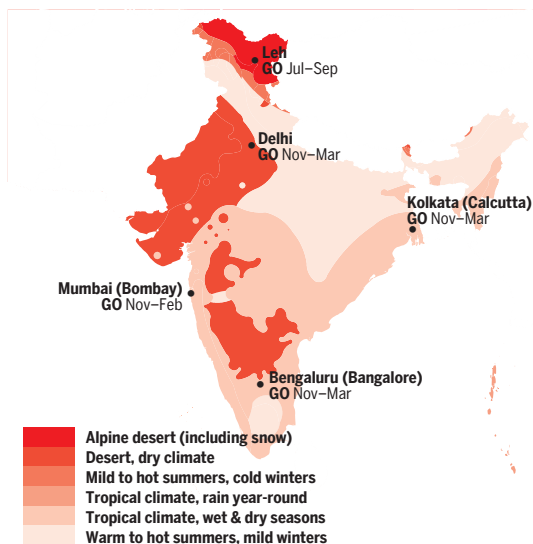


Plan Your Trip

Need to Know



When to Go



High Season (Dec–Mar)

- Pleasant weather – warm days, cool nights. Peak tourists. Peak prices.
- December and January bring chilly nights in the north.

Shoulder Season (Jul–Nov)

- Passes to Ladakh and the high Himalaya open from July to September.
- Monsoon rain showers persist through to September.

Low Season (Apr–Jun)

- April is hot; May and June are scorching. Competitive hotel prices.
- From June, the monsoon sweeps from south to north, bringing draining humidity.
- Beat the heat (but not the crowds) in the cool hills.

Currency

Indian rupee (₹)

Languages

Hindi, English (official languages)

Visas

Apart from citizens of Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives, everyone needs to apply for a visa before arriving in India. More than 100 nationalities can obtain a 30-day e-Tourist visa/Visa on Arrival, applying online prior to arrival; this is valid from the day you arrive. For longer trips, you'll need to obtain a six-month tourist visa.

Money

There are ATMs in most towns; carry cash as back up. MasterCard and Visa are the most accepted credit cards.

Mobile Phones

Roaming connections are excellent in urban areas, poor in the countryside and Himalayas. Local prepaid SIMs are widely available; they involve straightforward paperwork and a possible wait of up to 24 hours for activation.

Time

India Standard Time (GMT/UTC plus 5½ hours)