

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

India has a broad spectrum of accommodation, from grungy backpacker hotels with concrete floors and cold 'bucket' showers to opulent palaces with every conceivable comfort. Most big towns and tourist centres have something for all budgets, but rates vary widely around the country making it best to see this book's individual chapters (Sleeping sections) for accommodation costs in the areas you intend visiting. Also see p1141. Keep in mind that popular tourist centres usually witness a significant price hike during the tourist season and can fill up fast at these times, making advance reservations wise.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the insider low-down on the top places to stay. Best of all, you can usually book online.

Room quality can vary considerably *within* hotels so try to inspect a few rooms first. Avoid carpeted rooms at cheaper hotels unless you like the smell of mouldy socks. For the low-down on hotel bathrooms, read p1140. Sound pollution can be irksome (especially in urban hubs); pack good-quality earplugs and request a room that doesn't face a busy road. It's a good idea to keep your door locked, as some staff can have the annoying habit of knocking and automatically walking in without first seeking your permission.

Credit cards are accepted at most top-end hotels and many midrange places; budget hotels invariably require cash. Most hotels ask for a deposit at check in – ask for a receipt and be wary of any request to sign a blank impression of your credit card. If the hotel insists, consider going to the nearest ATM and paying cash. Verify the check-out time when you check-in – some hotels have a fixed check-out time (usually 10am or noon), while others give you 24-hour check-out. Reservations by phone without a deposit are usually fine, but call to confirm the booking the day before you arrive.

Be aware that in tourist hot spots (eg Rajasthan, Varanasi), hotels may 'borrow' the name of a thriving competitor to confuse travellers, paying commissions to taxi and rickshaw drivers who bring them unsuspecting customers. Make sure that you know the *exact* name of your preferred hotel, and confirm that you have indeed been taken to the right hotel before you pay the driver (p1140).

Accommodation Options

As well as conventional hotels, there are atmospheric guest houses in traditional village homes and colonial-era properties with faded

PRACTICALITIES

- Electricity is 230V to 240V, 50 Hz AC, and sockets are the three-round-pin variety (two-pin sockets are also found). Blackouts are common, particularly during summer and the monsoon.
- Officially India is metric. Terms you're likely to hear are: lakhs (one lakh = 100,000) and crores (one crore = 10 million).
- Major English-language dailies include the *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Hindu*, *Statesman*, *Telegraph*, *Daily News & Analysis (DNA)* and *Economic Times*. Regional English-language and local-vernacular publications are found nationwide.
- Incisive current-affairs reports are printed in *Frontline*, *India Today*, the *Week*, *Tehelka* and *Outlook*.
- The national (government) TV broadcaster is Doordarshan. More people watch satellite and cable TV; English-language channels include BBC, CNN, Cartoon Network, Star Movies, HBO, Discovery and MTV. TV program (and radio) details appear in most major daily newspapers.
- Government-controlled All India Radio (AIR) nationally transmits local and international news. There are also private FM channels broadcasting music, current affairs, talkback and more.

Raj charm. Standout options in this book are indicated by **our pick**.

BUDGET & MIDRANGE HOTELS

Apart from some character-filled exceptions – such as traditional wood or stone guest houses in remote mountain areas – most budget and midrange hotels are modern-style concrete blocks. Shared bathrooms (often with squat toilets) are usually only found at the cheapest lodgings. Most rooms have ceiling fans and better rooms have electric mosquito-killers and/or window nets, though cheaper rooms may lack windows altogether. Bringing your own sheet (or a sleeping-bag liner) is a sound policy – some cheap hotels have sheets with more holes and stains than a string vest at an oyster-eating contest! Apart from that, many budget hotels don't provide a top sheet so you could find yourself sleeping under (dodgy) bed-covers that haven't been washed for years. Away from tourist areas, cheaper hotels may

not take foreigners because they don't have the necessary foreigner-registration forms.

Midrange hotels usually offer extras such as cable/satellite TV and air-conditioning, although some just have (noisy) 'air-coolers' that cool air by blowing it over cold water. They're better than nothing, but no challenge to real air-conditioning, especially during the monsoon.

Note that some hotels lock their doors at night. Members of staff may sleep in the lobby but waking them up can be a challenge. Let the hotel know in advance if you'll be arriving or coming back to your room late in the evening.

CAMPING

There are few official camping sites in India, but campers can usually find hotels with gardens where they can camp for a nominal fee and use the bathroom facilities. Wild camping is often the only accommodation option on trekking routes. In mountain areas, you'll also find summer-only tented camps, with accommodation in semipermanent 'Swiss tents' with attached bathrooms.

DORMITORY ACCOMMODATION

A number of hotels have cheap dormitories, though these may be mixed and, in less touristy places, full of drunken drivers – not ideal conditions for single women. More traveller-friendly dorms are found at the handful of hostels run by the YMCA, YWCA and Salvation Army as well as at HI-associated hostels. Tourist bungalows run by state governments and railway

CARBON-MONOXIDE POISONING

Some mountain areas rely on charcoal burners for warmth, but these should be avoided due to the risk of fatal carbon-monoxide poisoning. The thick, mattresslike blankets used in many mountain areas are amazingly warm once you get beneath the covers. If you're still cold, improvise a hot-water bottle by filling your drinking-water bottle with boiled water and covering it with a sock.