

# Destination India

Bamboozling. There's simply no other word that convincingly captures the enigma that is India. With its in-your-face diversity – from snow-dusted mountains to sun-washed beaches, tranquil temples to feisty festivals, lantern-lit villages to software-supremo cities – it's hardly surprising that this country has been dubbed the world's most multidimensional. Love it or loathe it – and most visitors see-saw between the two – India promises to jostle your entire being, and no matter where you go or what you do, it's a place you'll never forget.

Home to more than one billion people, the subcontinent bristles with an eclectic melange of ethnic groups, which translates into an intoxicating cultural cocktail for the traveller. For those seeking spiritual sustenance, India has oodles of sacrosanct sites and stirring philosophical epics, while history buffs will encounter gems from the past almost everywhere – from grand vestiges of the British Raj serenely peering over swarming spice bazaars to crumbling fortresses looming high above plunging ravines. Meanwhile, aficionados of the great outdoors can paddle in the shimmering waters of one of many balmy beaches, scout for big jungle cats on a blood-pumping wildlife safari, or simply inhale pine-scented air on a meditative forest walk. And then there's the food! From squidgy south Indian *idlis* (fermented rice cakes) to zesty north Indian curries, foodies can look forward to savouring a seductive smorgasbord of specialities.

Once you touch down on subcontinental soil, you'll quickly discover that cricket – India's sporting obsession – is one of the most spirited topics of conversation, along with the latest shenanigans in the razzle-dazzle world of Bollywood. However, it is politics – whether at the national, state or village level – that consistently dominates news headlines, with middle- and upper-class India also keenly keeping its finger on the pulse of international events. On the home front, economic matters feature high on the national political agenda. With one of the world's fastest-growing economies, India has certainly made giant strides over the past decade. However, despite averaging an annual growth rate of around 9% in recent years, vast sections of the country's billion-plus population have seen little benefit from the economic boom. Indeed, the government's ongoing challenge is to spread both the burden and bounty of India's fiscal prosperity. Not an easy task given that the gap between the haves and the have-nots is far from shrinking, and poverty (see p65) is set to spiral upwards if India's population rate continues to gallop beyond that of its economic growth.

For decades, overpopulation (see p66) has been at the core of many of the country's most pressing problems. Apart from the pressure that an expanding population is placing on India's already groaning infrastructure, analysts warn that it's just a matter of time before the mounting competition for resources ignites interminable communal conflict – not to mention bringing to cracking point an already overstretched health-care system. Analysts also predict that as the population continues to climb, so too will the number of children from low-income households who drop out of school in order to scrape together whatever they can to supplement meagre family earnings (see p63).

While India has unquestionably made laudable economic advancements, the government has been criticised for failing to sufficiently address its AIDS crisis (see p63) as well as a far more prolific and recent health epidemic – diabetes. Currently recording the world's highest number of diabetics, India

## FAST FACTS

Population: 1.027 billion  
(2001 census)

Unemployment rate:  
7.2% (2008)

Average annual income:  
US\$977

Population growth rate:  
1.6%

Literacy rate: 65.38%  
(2001 census)

Families living in one-  
room homes: 42%

India's percentage of  
world population: 16.9%

Average cost of a big-city  
wedding: US\$12,500

Life expectancy: 66 years  
(women) and 63 years  
(men)

Proportion of females to  
males: 933:1000 (2001  
census)

registered close to 45 million cases in 2008, with health officials warning that this figure is likely to exceed 100 million in the next few years. Given its alarming growth rate, the government has pledged to beef up public risk awareness and prevention programmes.

When it comes to the environment, although there's legislation to protect ecosystems, activists cite government lethargy, paired with corruption down the ranks, for invariably exacerbating environmental degradation (see p102) and threatening endangered species (see p98). Climate change, deforestation, pollution and ever-expanding industrialisation are just some of the other issues the government is wrestling with.

The political challenges for India's government are no less daunting, especially in relation to ongoing communal friction, with the most incessant case being that between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir (see p53). Unresolved since the subcontinent's partition in 1947, the Kashmir impasse has been the catalyst for intensely rocky relations between the two countries ever since. While recent years have seen promising dialogue between Delhi and Islamabad, the November 2008 commando-style terrorist attacks in Mumbai swiftly saw hope turn to suspicion – see p57 for details.

On a more optimistic note, despite the dip in tourist arrivals immediately following the deadly 2008 Mumbai attacks, coupled with the global economic slump, government data indicates that India's foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 were pegged at 5.37 million – a 5.7% jump from the previous year. One of the most lucrative growth sectors is that of medical tourism (foreign travel to India for competitively priced medical treatment), which has projected earnings of a staggering US\$2 billion by 2012. Furthermore, the World Travel & Tourism Council forecasts that India will secure the number-one position in regards to 10-year tourism growth potential.

So, what is it that's drawing more and more people to India? While the reasons vary intimately from person to person, for many it's the challenge of getting up close and personal with one of the planet's most intriguing countries...and quite possibly unravelling oneself along the way. But in all its chaotic glory, you'll soon discover that India is an eternal – and, if you tune into its unique rhythm, curiously melodic – work in progress. Indeed, for many visitors, this is precisely what makes her so deeply rewarding, so surprisingly addictive. Ultimately, it's all about taking a leap of faith and surrendering to the unknown: this is the India that nothing can ever prepare you for because its very essence – its elusive soul – lies cradled in its mystery.

# Getting Started

Nothing can fully prepare you for India, but perhaps the one thing that best encapsulates this extraordinary country is its ability to inspire, frustrate, thrill and confound all at once.

Mind-bendingly multidimensional, India presents a wildly diverse spectrum of travel encounters. Some of these can be challenging, particularly for the first-time visitor: the poverty is confronting, Indian bureaucracy can be exasperating and the crush of humanity sometimes turns the simplest task into an energy-zapping battle. Even the most experienced travellers find their sanity frayed at some point, yet this is all part of the India experience. If you haven't visited this part of the planet before, set aside the first few days to simply acclimatise to the subcontinent's bamboozling symphony of sights, sounds, tastes and smells.

Get excited and knowledgeable about your trip beforehand by reading up on India, especially its cultural framework. Doing so will augment your appreciation of the subcontinent's sights and traditions and also better equip you to hold more informed conversations with locals. Allow a few weeks of pretrip preparation to sort out immunisations and visas.

In terms of planning what to do once you arrive, the country's remarkable diversity can actually make it a veritable quagmire when nutting out itineraries. The key is to try not to squeeze in too much, as travelling often involves considerable distances and stamina. It's wise to factor in some flexibility, as things don't always run like clockwork in India – more than a few travellers have had their holidays marred by not being able to get their preferred train seats, or by being delayed by rescheduled transport services, for example. Flexibility will also allow spontaneity, whether it's simply spending an afternoon discussing samsara with a *pujari* (priest) whom you initially approached for directions after getting lost in a bazaar, or ditching travel plans with friends to join a short-staffed rural volunteer group you heard about while queuing for kebabs in Delhi. Regardless, your Indian sojourn is going to be a whole lot more enjoyable if you give yourself some time off purely to be.

## WHEN TO GO

Climate plays a key factor in deciding when to visit India. You should keep in mind that climatic conditions in the far north are distinctly different to those of the extreme south.

Generally speaking, India's climate is defined by three seasons – the hot, the wet (monsoon) and the cool, each of which can vary in duration from north to south. The most pleasant time to visit most of the country is during the cooler period of November to around mid-February, although there are marked regional variations (see the Fast Facts boxes at the start of regional chapters for the best times to visit specific regions). If you're in India during the (hot) summer and (wet, humid) monsoon, cool relief can be found in the northern Himalayan region – consider pursuing 'The Great Himalayan Circuit' on p33.

Apart from the weather, the timing of certain festivals or special events may also influence when you wish to visit (see p26 and the Festivals In...boxes in regional chapters).

## The Hot

The heat starts to build up in India from around February and by April it seriously warms up. It can get unbearably hot in May and June, with many

See p1143 for more climate information.

### THE INDIA EXPERIENCE

There's a whole lot more to India than merely sightseeing:

- Activities that span from blood-pumping trekking to mind-soothing meditation (see p105)
- Courses – from getting sitar savvy to aligning your chakras (see p1142)
- Festivals that range from the wildly upbeat to the spiritually serene (see p26)
- Shopping, shopping and more shopping! (see p1154)
- Volunteering, whether it's teaching English at schools, lending a hand to clean up the countryside, or caring for injured animals (see p1165)

parts of the country experiencing temperatures of 40°C and above. Late in May the first signs of the monsoon are visible in some areas – high humidity, electrical storms, short rainstorms and dust storms that turn day into night. The hot season is the time to flee the baking plains and head for the cooler hills, and this is when hill stations are at their best (and busiest).

### The Wet

When the monsoon finally arrives, it doesn't just suddenly appear. After some advance warning, the rain comes in steadily, generally starting around 1 June in the extreme south and sweeping north to cover the whole country (except Ladakh) by early July. The monsoon doesn't really cool things down; at first hot, dry and dusty weather is simply replaced by hot, humid and muddy conditions. It doesn't rain solidly all day, but it rains virtually every day; the water tends to come down in buckets for a while, followed by periods of sun, creating a fatiguing steam bath-like environment. The main monsoon comes from the southwest, but the southeast coast (and southern Kerala) is largely affected by the short and surprisingly heavy northeast monsoon, which brings rain from around October to early December.

### The Cool

From around October the monsoon ends for most of the country and this is when India receives most tourists – however, by this time it's too cold to visit Ladakh (see p299). During October and November it's generally not too hot and not too cool (although October can still be uncomfortably warm and humid in some regions; see regional chapters). In the thick of winter (around mid-December to mid-January), Delhi and other northern cities can become astonishingly cold, especially at night. It certainly becomes bone-chillingly cold in the far north. In the far south, where it never gets truly cool, the temperatures become comfortably warm during this period.

### COSTS & MONEY

On the financial front, India pleases all pockets. Accommodation ranges from simple backpacker lodgings to sumptuous top-end hotels, with some appealing midrange possibilities that won't bust the bank. A delicious array of eateries at all prices means you can fill your belly without emptying your moneybelt, and it's possible to zip around economically, as well thanks to the country's comprehensive public transport network.

As costs vary considerably nationwide, the best way of ascertaining how much money you'll require for your trip is to peruse the relevant regional chapters of this book. Be prepared to pay more in the larger cities such as Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi, as well as at popular tourist destinations during peak season.

**DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...**

- Getting a visa (p1164) and travel insurance (p1149)
- Seeking advice about vaccinations (p1192) and taking adequate stock of prescription medication
- Nonrevealing clothes (women *and* men) – covering up will win you more respect and is essential when visiting sacred sites
- A well-concealed money belt (p1146)
- Sunscreen lotion and sunglasses
- A small torch (flashlight) for poorly lit streets and power cuts
- Good-quality earplugs to block out night din and for long bus/train trips
- Flip-flops (thongs) for shared or grotty bathrooms
- A shower cap and universal sink plug (uncommon except at top-end hotels)
- Tampons – sanitary pads are widely available but tampons are usually restricted to big (or touristy) cities
- Mosquito repellent (a mosquito net can also come in handy)
- A water bottle – if you use water-purification tablets or filters (see p1191) you'll help in the antiplastic crusade
- Sleeping-bag sheet – if you're unsure about hotel linen (especially at budget places) and for overnight train journeys
- Expecting the unexpected – India loves to toss up surprises

In relation to sightseeing, foreigners are often charged more than Indian citizens for entry into tourist sites (admission prices for foreigners are sometimes given in US dollars, payable in the rupee equivalent), and there may also be additional charges for still/video cameras.

When it comes to bedding down, hotel tariffs are usually higher in big cities (especially Mumbai) and tourist hot spots and may also be influenced by factors such as location, season and festivals. Given the vast differences nationwide, it's misleading for us to pinpoint a countrywide average accommodation price – see p1141 for more information, as well as the regional chapters 'Sleeping' sections. If you've got cash to splash, some of India's top-end hotels are among the world's finest, but be prepared to fork out at least US\$200 per night at the better properties before even getting a whiff of room service. Surf the internet to investigate possible internet discounts.

**HOW MUCH?**

Toothpaste (100g): Rs28

Jute shoulder bag: from Rs50

One dozen bananas: Rs25

Small brass Ganesha: from Rs50

Sandalwood incense (15 sticks): from Rs20

So how does this all translate to a daily budget? Given the vast accommodation price differences across India, it's impossible to arrive at one neat figure. However, as an example, in Rajasthan you can expect to pay roughly between US\$20 and US\$25 per day if you stay in the cheapest hotels, travel on public buses, do limited sightseeing and eat basic meals. If you wish to stay at salubrious midrange hotels, dine at nicer restaurants, do a reasonable amount of sightseeing and largely travel by autorickshaw and taxi, you're looking at anywhere between US\$40 and US\$65 per day.

Eating out in India is sizzling-hot value, with budget restaurant meals for as little as Rs40 (even less at the more basic street eateries), and usually from around double that for a satiating midrange restaurant feed. At the more suave urban restaurants, main dishes generally hover between Rs150 and Rs350 to which you'll need to add the cost of side dishes, such as rice, and (usually) a tax of 10% to 12.5%.

# TOP 10



## GREAT READS

With a riveting array of novels offering varied insights into India, there's no dearth of excellent bedtime-reading fodder – the below titles are just some of our favourites. For additional reading recommendations see p77, p24 and the boxed text, p782.

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|---|--|
| 1 <i>The White Tiger</i> by Aravind Adiga         | 6 <i>Midnight's Children</i> by Salman Rushdie |
| 2 <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i> by Kiran Desai   | 7 <i>A Fine Balance</i> by Rohinton Mistry     |
| 3 <i>The God of Small Things</i> by Arundhati Roy | 8 <i>White Mughals</i> by William Dalrymple    |
| 4 <i>Shantaram</i> by Gregory David Roberts       | 9 <i>Sea of Poppies</i> by Amitav Ghosh        |
| 5 <i>Six Suspects</i> by Vikas Swarup             | 10 <i>A Suitable Boy</i> by Vikram Seth        |

## MUST-SEE MOVIES

What better way to get all fired up about your trip than by holding your very own Indian movie marathon! The following is a small selection of acclaimed films that portray a diverse mix of Indian themes. Mainstream video stores outside India may not stock many (if any) Bollywood titles, but you shouldn't have any problem finding them at your local Indian video shop; if that fails, Indian grocery stores usually have at least one shelf bulging with rental DVDs.

To find out more about Indian cinema read p76.

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|--|--|
| 1 <i>Earth, Water and Fire</i> , a trilogy directed by Deepa Mehta   | 6 <i>Lagaan</i> , written and directed by Ashutosh Gowariker   |
| 2 <i>Slumdog Millionaire</i> , directed by Danny Boyle   | 7 <i>Gandhi</i> , directed by Richard Attenborough; see also <i>Gandhi, My Father</i> , directed by Feroz Khan |
| 3 <i>Being Cyrus</i> , directed by Homi Adajania   | 8 <i>Mr &amp; Mrs Iyer</i> , directed by Aparna Sen  |
| 4 <i>Monsoon Wedding</i> , directed by Mira Nair; see also her other acclaimed films <i>The Namesake</i> , <i>Kama Sutra</i> and <i>Salaam Bombay!</i> | 9 <i>The Darjeeling Limited</i> , directed by Wes Anderson   |
| 5 <i>Welcome to Sajjanpur</i> , directed by Shyam Benegal  | 10 <i>Black</i> , directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali  |

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

India has a phenomenal variety of festivals – for further details see p26 and the 'Festivals In...' boxed texts in regional chapters. The following is just a drop in India's spectacular festival ocean.

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|--|--|
| 1 Kumbh Mela (for dates see p837)  | 6 Dussehra & Durga Puja (Sep/Oct); nationwide (p27) but especially in Mysore (p901), Kullu (p353) and Kolkata (p503) |
| 2 Festival of Dance (Feb/Mar); Madhya Pradesh (p671)                             | 7 Diwali (Oct/Nov); nationwide (p27)   |
| 3 Rath Yatra (Jun/Jul); Orissa (p655) and Kolkata (Calcutta; p503)               | 8 Pushkar Camel Fair (Oct/Nov); Rajasthan (p199)   |
| 4 Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race (Aug); Kerala (p1001)                             | 9 Sonepur Mela (Nov/Dec); Bihar (p574)   |
| 5 Ganesh Chaturthi (Aug/Sep); nationwide (p26), in Mumbai (p779) and Pune (p815) | 10 Festival of Carnatic Music & Dance (Dec/Jan); Tamil Nadu (p1043)  |

Regarding long-distance travel, there's a range of classes on trains and several bus types, resulting in considerable flexibility vis-à-vis comfort and price – regional chapters supply specific costs and also read p1178. Domestic air travel has become a lot more price competitive over recent years thanks to deregulation and good internet deals (see p1178). Within towns there's inexpensive public transport (see p1182), or perhaps you'd like to hire a car with driver, which is surprisingly good value if there are several of you to split the cost (see p1181).

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Bedazzled by wizardry since childhood, Tahir Shah travels through India to learn the art of illusion under the guidance of a mysterious master magician. *Sorcerer's Apprentice* chronicles his most extraordinary journey.

Edgy and engaging, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh explores the fortitude of the human spirit in the watery labyrinth of the Sunderbans, where crocodiles and man-eating tigers lurk.

*Sacred Games*, by Vikram Chandra, is a skilfully crafted and gripping thriller that takes the reader on an exhilarating journey through modern-day Mumbai's seedy underworld and beyond.

William Dalrymple's beautifully written travelogue, *City of Djinns*, traverses time to unpeel Delhi's intriguing layers, while *The Age of Kali* is a compilation of Dalrymple's insights gleaned from a decade of travelling the subcontinent.

Christopher Kremmer's *Inhaling the Mahatma* reveals the Australian author's multifarious encounters with India – that include a hijacking, riots, and falling in love – during and beyond his stint as a Delhi-based foreign correspondent in the early 1990s.

*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, by Kiran Desai, follows a bored post-office clerk and dreamer who retreats to the branches of a secluded guava tree in search of the contemplative life, only to be pursued by crowds of people seeking enlightenment.

William Sutcliffe's *Are You Experienced?* is the humorous tale of first-time backpacker Dave, who accompanies his best friend's girlfriend to India in an attempt to seduce her.

Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* amusingly and cynically illustrates the cultural collision as India looks to the West for technology and modern methods, and the West descends upon India in search of wisdom and enlightenment.

*An Area of Darkness*, by VS Naipaul, published in 1964, describes the Nobel and Booker Prize-winning author's first visit to the subcontinent. Opinionated and unflinching, it's certainly a thought-provoking read as is his later travelogue, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, published in 1990.

*Chasing the Monsoon* by Alexander Frater is an Englishman's story of his monsoon-chasing journey from Kovalam to Meghalaya, offering a captivating window into the monsoon's impact.

Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* is the tale of two young Europeans, Matteo and Sophie, who go to India seeking enlightenment. While Matteo's ashram experience is spiritually affirming, Sophie's isn't quite so rosy.

Also see 'Great Reads' in the Top 10 box (p23).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Events in India** ([www.eventsinindia.com](http://www.eventsinindia.com)) A handy site covering current happenings in major Indian cities.

**Incredible India** ([www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org)) The official Indian government tourism site.

**IndiaMike** ([www.indiamike.com](http://www.indiamike.com)) A popular forum which is a great place to tap into India's traveller grapevine.

*'Chasing the Monsoon by Alexander Frater is an Englishman's story of his monsoon-chasing journey from Kovalam to Meghalaya'*

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Useful links, including the popular Thorn Tree Travel Forum, where you can swap information with fellow travellers.

**Maps of India** ([www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com)) Regional maps which includes thematic offerings such as the locations of wildlife sanctuaries and hill stations.

**World Newspapers** ([www.world-newspapers.com/india.html](http://www.world-newspapers.com/india.html)) Provides links to India's major English-language national and regional publications, enabling you to stay tuned to what's happening where.

**123india** ([www.123india.com](http://www.123india.com)) A portal with links to the arts, science, sport and more.

# Events Calendar

Most festivals in India follow the Indian or Tibetan lunar calendars, tied to the moon's cycle, or the (changeable) Islamic calendar. Consequently, exact dates vary from year to year (consult tourist offices). Those listed here represent major national festivals, arranged according to the Indian lunar calendar; for details of regional festivals, see the regional chapters' Festivals in... boxed texts.

## CHAITRA (MARCH/APRIL)

### MAHAVIR JAYANTI

Jain festival that commemorates the birth of Mahavir, the founder of Jainism.

### RAMANAVAMI

Hindus celebrate the birth of Rama with processions, music and feasting, and readings and enactments of scenes from the Ramayana.

### EASTER

Christian holiday marking the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## VAISAKHA (APRIL/MAY)

### BUDDHA JAYANTI

Celebrating Buddha's birth, enlightenment and attainment of nirvana (final release from the cycle of existence); this festival can fall in April, May or early June.

## JYAISTHA (MAY/JUNE)

Only regional festivals fall in this period; see the regional chapters' Festivals in... boxed texts.

## ASADHA (JUNE/JULY)

### RATH YATRA (CAR FESTIVAL)

Effigies of Lord Jagannath (Vishnu as lord of the world) are hauled through cities on man-powered chariots, most famously in Puri (p646) in Orissa.

## SRAVANA (JULY/AUGUST)

### NAAG PANCHAMI

Hindu festival dedicated to Ananta, the serpent upon whose coils Vishnu rested between universes. Snakes are venerated as totems against monsoon flooding and other evils.

### RAKSHA BANDHAN (NARIAL PURNIMA)

On the full moon, girls fix amulets known as *rakhis* to the wrists of brothers and close male friends to protect them in the coming year. Brothers reciprocate with gifts. Some people also worship the Vedic sea god Varuna.

### RAMADAN (RAMAZAN)

Thirty days of dawn-to-dusk fasting mark the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Celebrated around 12 August (2010), 1 August (2011) and 20 July (2012).

## BHADRA (AUGUST/SEPTEMBER)

### INDEPENDENCE DAY

15 Aug

This public holiday marks the anniversary of India's Independence (from Britain) in 1947. Celebrations are a countrywide expression of patriotism.

### DRUKPA TESHI

A Buddhist festival celebrating the first teaching given by Siddhartha Gautama.

### GANESH CHATURTHI

Hindus celebrate the birth of the elephant-headed god, Ganesh, with verve, particularly in Mumbai (see p841). Clay idols of Ganesh are paraded through the streets before being ceremonially immersed in rivers, tanks (reservoirs) or the sea.

### JANMASTAMI

Hindus celebrate Krishna's birthday, particularly at his birthplace, Mathura (p425).

### SHRAVAN PURNIMA

On this day of fasting, high-caste Hindus replace the sacred thread looped over their left shoulder.

### PATETI

Parsis celebrate the Zoroastrian new year at this time, especially in Mumbai.

## ASVINA (SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER)

### NAVRATRI

This Hindu 'Festival of Nine Nights' leading up to Dussehra celebrates the goddess Durga in all her incarnations. Special folk dances are held, and the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati also receive

special praise. Festivities are particularly vibrant in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

### DUSSEHRA

A Vaishnavite festival, celebrating the victory of the Hindu god Rama over the demon-king Ravana and the triumph of good over evil. Dussehra is big in Kullu (p353) and Mysore (p914), where effigies of Ravana and his cohorts are ritually burned.

### DURGA PUJA

The conquest of good over evil, with the goddess Durga's victory over buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura. Celebrations occur around Dussehra, particularly in Kolkata (see p507), where thousands of images of the goddess are displayed then ritually immersed in rivers and water tanks.

### GANDHI JAYANTI

2 Oct

This public holiday is a solemn celebration of Mohandas Gandhi's birth, with prayer meetings at his cremation site (Raj Ghat) in Delhi (see p134).

### EID AL-FITR

Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan with three days of festivities, starting 30 days after the start of the fast.

## KARTIKA (OCTOBER/NOVEMBER)

### DIWALI (DEEPAVALI)

On the 15th day of Kartika, Hindus joyfully celebrate the 'festival of lights' for five days, giving gifts, lighting fireworks, and burning butter and oil lamps to lead Lord Rama home from exile.

### GOVARDHANA PUJA

A Vaishnavite Hindu festival commemorating the lifting of Govardhan Hill by Krishna; celebrated by Krishna devotees around India.

### EID AL-ADHA

Muslims commemorate Ibrahim's readiness to sacrifice his son to God. It is around 16 November (2010), 6 November (2011) and 26 October (2012).

## AGHAN (NOVEMBER/DECEMBER)

### NANAK JAYANTI

The birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, is celebrated with prayer readings and processions.

### MUHARRAM

Shi'a Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam. Dates

are around 7 December (2010), 26 November (2011) and 15 November (2012).

## PAUSA (DECEMBER/JANUARY)

### CHRISTMAS DAY

25 Dec

Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

## MAGHA (JANUARY/FEBRUARY)

### REPUBLIC DAY

26 Jan

This public holiday commemorates the founding of the Republic of India in 1950; the most spectacular celebrations are in Delhi, which holds a huge military parade along Rajpath and the Beating of the Retreat three days later.

### PONGAL

A Tamil festival marking the end of the harvest season. Families in the south prepare pots of *pongal* (a mixture of rice, sugar, dhal and milk), symbolic of prosperity and abundance, then feed them to decorated and adorned cows.

### VASANT PANCHAMI

Honouring Saraswati, the goddess of learning, Hindus dress in yellow and place books, musical instruments and other educational objects in front of idols of the goddess to receive her blessing.

### LOSAR

Tibetan New Year – celebrated by Tantric Buddhists all over India, particularly in Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Ladakh and Zaskar. Dates can vary from region to region.

## PHALGUNA (FEBRUARY/MARCH)

### EID-MILAD-UN-NABI

Islamic festival celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. It falls around 26 February (2010), 15 February (2011) and 4 February (2012).

### HOLI

One of North India's most ecstatic festivals; Hindus celebrate the beginning of spring by throwing coloured water and *gulaal* (powder) at anyone within range. On the night before Holi, bonfires symbolise the demise of the evil demoness Holika.

### SHIVARATRI

This day of Hindu fasting recalls the *tandava* (cosmic victory dance) of Lord Shiva. Temple processions are followed by the chanting of mantras and anointing of linga (phallic images of Shiva).

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### BEYOND THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

10 Days

The Golden Triangle (Delhi–Agra–Jaipur–Delhi) is the all-time classic India quickie, but this trip goes that bit deeper.

Day one, take it slowly: visit tranquil **Humayun's Tomb** (p135), then later attend the sound-and-light show at the historic **Red Fort** (p134).

Next day, catch the train to **Agra** (p399) and gaze at the shimmering **Taj Mahal** (p404), before visiting the **Agra Fort** (p407). Spend day three surrounded by the ghosts of Mughals in the abandoned city of **Fatehpur Sikri** (p423).

On day four, return to Delhi and then fly direct to **Udaipur** (p213), to relax for a couple of days in Rajasthan's lake city, wander its bazaars and watch sunset from the **Monsoon Palace** (p217) before taking a train to visit the fascinating Dargah at **Ajmer** (p192). Then spend a day or two in the enchanting pilgrimage town of **Pushkar** (p195), before wending your way back to Delhi.

A twist on the classic 'Golden Triangle' (Delhi–Agra–Jaipur–Delhi) route. This geometric journey has a wider scope, going from Delhi to Agra, then flying into Rajasthan, to the gleaming white town of Udaipur, with a stop at pilgrimage centres Ajmer and Pushkar on the return.



## A RAJASTHANI RAMBLE

Two Weeks

This much-loved circuit, which explores India's most colourful state, starts and ends in the bustling capital, Delhi.

Spend day one in Delhi, visiting the calm site of **Humayun's Tomb** (p135), before attending the sound-and-light show at the historic **Red Fort** (p134).

On day two, take the train to **Jaipur** (p168) to soak up the sights of the **Old City** (p169). Fill most of day three by exploring the fairy-tale fort at **Amber** (p182), then browse Jaipur's wonderful **emporiums** (p179).

On day four, take the bus to **Ajmer** (p192), where you can visit extraordinary Muslim shrine known as **Dargah** (p193), before taking a short bus ride to relax in the holy town of **Pushkar** (p195). Spend a few days here, chilling out and taking your time over the lakeside **temples** (p196) and then, on day seven, travel onward to the graceful lakeside whimsy of **Udaipur** (p213). Again, you can relax and sightsee here for a couple of days. Make time for an extravagant meal at the palace on the **lake** (p221).

Next, on day nine, take a taxi and visit **Kumbalgarh** (p224) and the temple at **Ranakpur** (p225) en route to the blue city, **Jodhpur** (p230). In Jodhpur you can admire the pastel-painted houses and magnificent **Mehrangarh Fort** (p231).

On day 11, take the bus or train through the desert to the ancient fortress of **Jaisalmer** (p240) to relive your *Arabian Nights* fantasies on a **camel safari** (see the boxed text, p246) in the dunes. Finally, on day 13, make your way back to Delhi, where you can visit the **Jama Masjid** (p134), dive into the surrounding **bazaars** (see the boxed text, p156), and finish off doing some last-minute **shopping** (p153).



This route starts in Delhi, then surveys Rajasthan's greatest hits: it takes in pink, blue, white and golden cities, and visits the region's mightiest forts and most exquisite temples. The circuit finishes on a high with a camel safari in the desert, before a day's exploration in Delhi.

## A TASTE OF NORTH & SOUTH

Three Weeks

This north and south cocktail begins with a cultural feast, and ends with pure relaxation. Start by visiting the sights of **Delhi** (p129), then head to **Agra** (p399) and the **Taj Mahal** (p404), **Agra Fort** (p407) and **Fatehpur Sikri** (p423), as for the first itinerary. Next, if you have time, stop at **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** (p185), to see the rich birdlife, and then **Ranthambore National Park** (p201), to spot tigers, before heading to the Pink City of **Jaipur** (p168). Visit **Amber fort** (p182), browse the amazing **bazaars** (p179) of Jaipur and peek from behind the shutters at the **Hawa Mahal** (p169) before returning to Delhi to start the southern part of your trip.

Prepare to relax: fly south to **Kochi** (Cochin; p1013), where you can stay in evocative **Fort Cochin** (p1015), catch a **Kathakali performance** (p1023), and spend a couple of nights exploring this exotic spice port and eating in its delicious restaurants, before launching off into the backwaters of Kerala: head to **Alappuzha** (Alleppey; p999), and take a slow cruise in a houseboat, watching life on the water and kicking back. Next stop, the beach: try the less-visited sands around **Varkala** (p993), with its sea-cliffs and laid-back beaches. To experience Zenlike calm before taking your return flight from Kochi, do yoga and meditation at a local ashram and revel in **Ayurvedic treatments** (p994) such as synchronised massage.

For a smattering of the north, and a sprinkling of the south, this trip is ideal. Wallow in the cultural and artistic wealth of Delhi, Agra and Rajasthan before flying south for some serene relaxation, including boating in tranquil backwaters, yoga, massage and the beach.



## ONCE AROUND NORTH INDIA

Two Months

Start this northern extravaganza in **Kolkata** (Calcutta; p501), finishing in **Delhi** (p119). Time your schedule so that the last leg through Ladakh falls between July and October, when the mountain passes are open (see p312).

Pass a few days enjoying the atmosphere and **food** (p522) in Kolkata, home to the **Victoria Memorial** (p508). Then head to **Bodhgaya** (p576), where Buddha attained enlightenment. Roll across the plains to the sacred city of **Varanasi** (p440), then to **Khajuraho** (p680), where temples drip with erotic carvings.

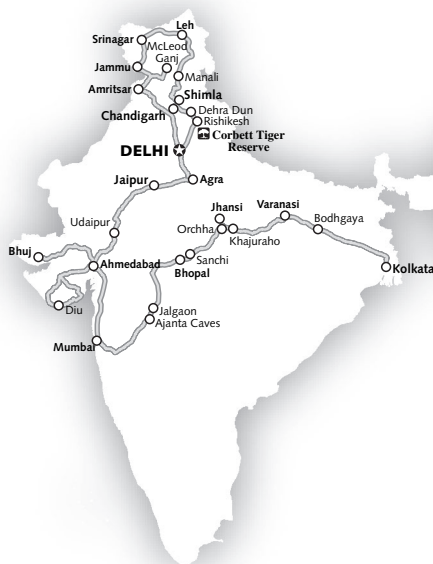
Head southwest through **Orchha** (p677) and **Jhansi** (p439) to **Sanchi** (p695), where Emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism. In **Bhopal** (p689) pick up the train to **Jalgaon** (p828), a jumping-off point for the wonderful **Ajanta Caves** (p825).

Train it to **Mumbai** (Bombay; p777), then break north along the coast to **Ahmedabad** (Amdavad; p727). For a more peaceful slice of Gujarat, visit the mellow island of **Diu** (p749) and the tribal heartland of **Bhuj** (p770). Start your tour through Rajasthan in whimsical **Udaipur** (p213) and meander between here and **Jaipur** (p168), from where you can catch the train to Agra's **Taj Mahal** (p404).

Next, drop by **Delhi** (p119) to relish the **sights** (p129), **tastes** (p146) and **shopping** (p153) before dashing northeast to spot tigers in **Corbett Tiger Reserve** (p487) and practise yoga in **Rishikesh** (p475). Connect through **Dehra Dun** (p461) and **Chandigarh** (p256) to **Shimla** (p334), India's premier hill station.

Bus it to **Manali** (see the boxed text, p362) for some adrenalin-charged activities, then ride the mountain bus to Buddhist city, **Leh** (p301). If the political situation allows (see the boxed text, p283), head to **Srinagar** (p286) in Kashmir, then through **Jammu** (p282) to **McLeod Ganj** (p369).

Finish off the trip at **Amritsar** (p268) with its shimmering **Golden Temple** (p270) before one last train ride to Delhi. What a journey!



**Kicking off in Kolkata and winding up in Delhi, this wide-ranging journey draws a snaking line through the highlights of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, northern Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Kashmir and Punjab.**

## CIRCLING THE SOUTH

Two Months

Mumbai is the borderline between north and south, and the easiest starting point for exploring India's steamy southern tip. Time your trip to avoid the monsoon – the sunniest skies are from October to February.

Kick off in cosmopolitan **Mumbai** (p777) and make the most of the **shopping** (p804), **eating** (p798) and **drinking** (p801) before heading inland to **Ajanta** (p825) and **Ellora** (p822) to marvel at Maharashtra's finest cave art. Sashay southwest to **Goa** (p858) to laze on palm-fringed beaches before dosing up on history inland at wonderful **Hampi** (p938), with its temple ruins and giant boulders.

Next, rub shoulders with yuppies in the party bars of **Bengaluru** (Bangalore; p910) and smell the waft of incense in spicy **Mysore** (p914) with its extravagant **Maharaja's Palace** (p916). Feast on a banana-leaf **thali** (p919) before cruising south to Kerala, stopping at enigmatic **Kochi** (p1013) for a **Kathakali performance** (p1023). Cruise Kerala's languorous backwaters from **Alappuzha** (p999) before dipping your toes in the warm waters around **Varkala** (p993).

For a change of pace, go northwest to **Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary** (p1006) to spot elephants before visiting the Tamil temples in **Madurai** (p1094). Pop into **Trichy** (Tiruchirappalli; p1087) and **Thanjavur** (Tanjore; p1084) before slowing down the pace in French-flavoured **Puducherry** (Pondicherry; p1071). Dine on fine food in Tamil Nadu's busy capital, **Chennai** (Madras; p1052), before breaking north to admire the Mughal-era relics of **Hyderabad** (p959).

It's a long ride by train up the coast to **Bhubaneswar** (p645), the leaping-off point for **Puri** (p652), site of the famous **Rath Yatra chariot festival** (see the boxed text, p646). Drift north to the legendary Sun Temple at **Konark** (p657) before one last train ride northeast to **Kolkata** (p501).

A slice of the steamy south featuring beaches, cave temples, jungle reserves and some of South India's best and brightest cities. Allow at least two months to soak up the sights, sounds and sensations of the tropical south.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### SIKKIM & THE NORTHEAST STATES

One Month

Surprisingly few people explore mountainous Sikkim and the tribal heartland of India's Northeast States. Permits are required, so plan your trip in advance, see p610 and p587. Also be aware of the security risks, see the boxed text, p611.

Obtain a Sikkim permit in **Siliguri** (p541), or **Darjeeling** (see the boxed text, p558), and sample India's most famous **teas** (p557). Then head to **Gangtok** (p588), the Sikkimese capital, and the surrounding **Buddhist monasteries** (p594).

Veer to **Namchi** (p596) for giant statues of Shiva and Padmasambhava, and to **Pelling** (p598), for **Pemayangtse Gompa** (p600) and Khangchendzonga views. Take the week-long trek from **Yuksom** (p602) to **Goecha La** (p603). Exit Sikkim via **Tashiding** (p605), returning to Siliguri for the journey east to Assam.

In **Guwahati** (p612), the Assamese capital, arrange tours and permits for Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur. If you can't get a permit, try this loop: from Guwahati, head to **Manas** (p617) and **Kaziranga** (p618) National Parks to spot rare wildlife. Detour to sleepy **Shillong** (p637), and the waterfalls of **Cherrapunjee** (Sohra; p640). From **Agartala** (p633), capital of Tripura, head by air or land to **Bangladesh** (see the boxed text, p636).

With the right permits, head from Guwahati to Arunachal Pradesh for the stunning Buddhist monastery in the **Tawang Valley** (p626), or the tribal villages near **Ziro** (p623). A Nagaland permit opens up the capital **Kohima** (p627), and fascinating tribal villages around **Mon** (p629). Manipur permits are rarely granted, but there's a fair chance of eyeing Mizo culture in **Mizoram** (p631).



This is a journey off the beaten track through the gorgeous hills of Buddhist Sikkim and the rarely visited Northeast. You have the chance to get even further from the tourist circuit in tribal Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, providing you can obtain the required permits.

## THE GREAT HIMALAYAN CIRCUIT

Four to Six Weeks

This rugged mountain odyssey can be started in Kashmir's **Srinagar** (p286), or in **Manali** (p357) in Himachal Pradesh, depending on the political situation – see the boxed text, p283. Note that the mountain passes are only open from July to October. Acute Mountain Sickness is also a hazard – see p1198.

Assuming things are safe, start off with a houseboat stay in **Srinagar** (p290) before embarking on the epic journey into the mountains. Start with the bone-shaking ride to **Kargil** (p295), the dusty gateway to remote **Zaskar** (p296). By bus or 4WD, head south through **Rangdum** (p296) to the monastery-strewn valley around **Padum** (p297), then return to Kargil for the coccyx-crunching ride on to **Ladakh** (p299). Break the journey east at **Lamayuru** (p322), **Alchi** (p321) and **Basgo** (p320), for awesome monastery paintings and sculptures.

On arrival in **Leh** (p301), take some time to unwind. Consider a **meditation course** (p307) and visit the local stupas, gompas and **palace** (p303). Join a tour over the world's highest road pass to the **Nubra Valley** (p323) and explore the Indus Valley by bus or rented motorcycle, visiting the monastery towns of **Stok** (p318), **Thiksey** (p326) and **Hemis** (p327).

Next, veer south over perilous mountain passes to **Keylong** (p391), the calm capital of Lahaul. Stroll to local **gompas** (p392), and travel by bus through parched deserts to **Kaza** (p393), the capital of Spiti. Obtain a permit for onward travel, then continue east to **Dhankar** (p395) and **Tabo** (p395) for more mesmerising Buddhist art.

With permit in hand, you can continue through knee-trembling mountain scenery to **Rekong Peo** (p345), capital of Kinnaur. Detour north to the pretty village of **Kalpa** (p346) to shake off the trail dust, then finish the journey with some creature comforts in **Shimla** (p334) – you've earned it!

A mountain odyssey, crossing over the world's highest motorable passes from Kashmir all the way to Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. Even when Kashmir is off limits, you can travel from Manali to Ladakh and finish the circuit from there.



## THE TRIBAL CENTRE

**Eight to 10 Weeks**

Well off the radar of most travellers, the western plains are full of offbeat sights and fascinating glimpses of tribal India (see p109 for more information). However, security can be a concern in parts of Bihar – see p568.

Start in **Kolkata** (Calcutta; p501), Bengal's bustling cultural capital, before training it northeast to **Ranchi** (p582), gateway to **Betla (Palamau) National Park** (p583). Head back via Ranchi and **Gaya** (p575) to famous **Bodhgaya** (p576), the birthplace of Buddhism. Continue north via the Buddhist ruins at **Nalanda** (p581) to Bihar's capital, **Patna** (p568), to stock up on Mithila **tribal art** (p573).

Travel on to Madhya Pradesh through **Varanasi** (p440), detouring south past tiger- and leopard-inhabited **Bandhavgarh National Park** (p719) to **Jabalpur** (p713), for a boat cruise along the **Narmada River gorge** (p715). Take a side trip to **Kanha National Park** (p717) for another decent chance of spotting tigers.

Next, break east for **Bhopal** (p689), a surprising city that is rising above its tragic past. From here, you can detour to well-preserved Buddhist ruins at **Sanchi** (p695) and prehistoric painted caves at **Bhimbetka** (p695).

Next, trundle southeast to **Indore** (p704) for detours to the Mughal and Afghan ruins at **Mandu** (p709), the Hindu temples of **Ujjain** (p702) and the holy island of **Omkareshwar** (p707). From Indore, cut back across the state to **Jagdalpur** (p721) for visits to surrounding Bastar tribal areas.

More tribal visits are possible in nearby **Jeypore** (p663) in Orissa. For a change of scenery, head to the coast at **Gopalpur-on-Sea** (p660). Spot sea turtles at **Rushikulya** (p660) or take your binoculars to the bird-watching paradise of **Chilika Lake** (p659). Continue north through the capital, **Bhubaneswar** (p645), to the famous temples at **Puri** (p652) and **Konark** (p657). Finally, drift up the coast to Kolkata, with a detour to animal-packed **Similipal National Park** (p665).



**A looping circuit from Kolkata visiting the rarely seen sights of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa – the tribal heartland of the Indian plains. Count on temples, historic ruins, encounters with tribal culture, and glorious national parks.**

## TAILORED TRIPS

### THE BUDDHIST CIRCUIT

The Buddhist (or Lotus) Circuit is a pilgrims' trail in the footsteps of Buddha, connecting the sacred sites in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where he walked and talked. A logical continuation of this circuit is Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini, an easy detour across the Nepal border from **Sunauli** (p456).

Begin in **Bodhgaya** (p576), the most sacred Buddhist site. **Mahabodhi Temple** (p576) is where Prince Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became Buddha, over 2500 years ago. Start your own path to enlightenment on a **meditation course** (p578) before heading to **Rajgir** (p580), where Buddha gave many sermons about the 'middle way'. Continue north until you reach the ruins of **Nalanda** (p581), marking the site of a vast and vanished Buddhist university.



At **Patna** (p568), see sculptures from Buddhist sites at **Patna Museum** (p570). You can detour here to **Vaishali** (p573), where Buddha preached his final sermon, and to **Kesariya** (p574), where he passed his begging bowl to his followers and began his final journey towards his birthplace at Lumbini. He died just short of the border at **Kushinagar** (p455). Heading here, you can visit **Sarnath** (p453), where Buddha first preached the middle way after achieving enlightenment.

### INDIA FOR THRILL-SEEKERS

India is one big adventure playground for fans of action and adrenalin. Most activities are seasonal, so check the Activities chapter (p105) for the best times to get stuck in.

With the Himalaya looming overhead, it's little wonder that trekkers come here in droves. Start any trekking challenge in style on the high-altitude routes of **Zaskar** (p298) and **Ladakh** (p315). Go rafting on the Indus River near **Leh** (p307), then head south to **Manali** (see the boxed text, p362) for more treks plus hot-air balloon rides, paragliding, rock climbing, zorbing and skiing (the latter from January to March). Visit Uttarakhand for yet more excellent rafting and trekking from **Rishikesh** (p478), and ski and snowboarding at **Auli** (p485).

For adventure without the mountain chill, head to the west coast. **Lonavla** (p836) in Maharashtra is a famous paragliding launch pad. Beach resorts in **Goa** (p858) offer diving and water sports, and more paragliders launch over the ocean at **Arambol** (p887) and **Anjuna** (p882). Rafting trips up to Grade IV are possible in Karnataka's **Dubare Forest Reserve** (p930).

Next, head across the country to **Chennai** (p1042) to catch a flight to the **Andaman Islands** (p1124) for India's best scuba-diving. There's more adventure north of **Kolkata** (p501) – arrange rafting trips in **Darjeeling** (p554) or trek Sikkim's **Goecha La** (p603) for eye-popping views over Khangchendzonga. Finish with something off-beat – canyoning over living tree bridges near **Cherrapunjee** (p640) in Meghalaya.



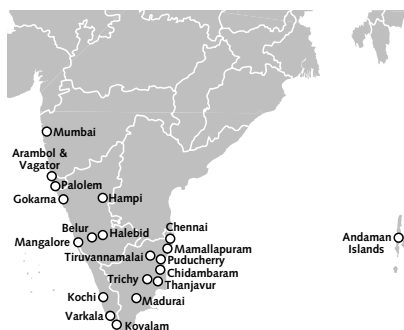
## SAND, SEA & SACRED SITES

This route, from **Mumbai** (p777) to **Chennai** (p1042), blends some southern temples with the south's most beautiful beaches. To continue the beach theme, tag the sun-soaked **Andaman Islands** (p1120) to the end of this itinerary.

Start the search for sea and sand at Mumbai's **Chowpatty Beach** (p788) with a plate of the *bhelpuri* (crisp fried thin rounds of dough mixed with puffed rice, fried lentils, lemon juice, onion, herbs and chutney) while overlooking the Arabian Sea. Cruise to the stunning rock-cut temples on **Elephanta Island** (p809), then travel south by train to beach-blessed **Goa** (p858). Enjoy the best of the sand at **Arambol** (p887), **Vagator** (p885) and **Palolem** (p895), then continue along the coast to the sacred town of **Gokarna** (p935). Next, veer inland to the ruined Vijayanagar temples at **Hampi** (p938) and the Hoysala temples of **Belur** and **Halebid** (p924).

Connect through **Mangalore** (p930) and **Kochi** (p1013) to Kerala's seaside strip. Enjoy serious beach therapy in **Varkala** (p993) and **Kovalam** (p988), before jumping onto the train northeast to the awesome Sri Meenakshi Temple in **Madurai** (p1095). Continue north through the historic temple towns of **Trichy** (p1087), **Thanjavur** (p1084) and **Chidambaram** (p1079) and break the journey at the French-influenced seaside town of **Puducherry** (p1071).

Continuing north, detour inland to the captivating Arunachaleswar Temple in **Tiruvannamalai** (p1069), and follow the coast to **Mamallapuram** (Mahabalipuram; p1059), home to the famous rock-carved **Shore Temple** (p1060). Finally, finish your journey with a stroll along Chennai's **Marina Beach** (p1049).



# The Authors



## SARINA SINGH

**Coordinating Author, Haryana & Punjab**

After finishing a business degree in Melbourne, Sarina bought a one-way ticket to India where she completed a Sheraton corporate traineeship before working as a freelance journalist and foreign correspondent. After four years in the subcontinent she returned to Australia, pursued postgraduate journalism qualifications and wrote/directed an award-nominated documentary film. She has worked on 30 Lonely Planet books, is the author of *Polo in India*, and has also written articles for many international publications including *National Geographic Traveler*. For this book, Sarina commissioned Christopher Kremmer and William Dalrymple and also wrote Destination India, Getting Started, Events Calendar, History, The Culture, Food & Drink, Activities, Directory, Transport, Glossary, and the Delicious India and Festive India sections.



## LINDSAY BROWN

**Rajasthan, Gujarat**

After completing a PhD on evolutionary genetics and a stint as a science editor and a sojourn on the subcontinent, Lindsay started working for Lonely Planet. Lindsay is a former Publishing Manager of the Outdoor Activity guides at Lonely Planet, and he returns to the subcontinent to trek, write and photograph whenever possible. He has also contributed to Lonely Planet's *South India, Nepal, Bhutan, Rajasthan, Delhi & Agra* and *Pakistan & the Karakoram Highway* guides, among others.



## MARK ELLIOTT

**Kolkata (Calcutta), Jammu & Kashmir**

Mark has been making forays to the subcontinent since a 1984 trip that lined his stomach for all eventualities. For this edition he returned to the underrated metropolis of Kolkata, was utterly inspired by the deep yet light-hearted spirituality of Ladakh and managed to dodge riots, hartals and curfews around Kashmir. After weeks of delay due to blockades and political unrest, he finally managed to travel the Srinagar to Jammu road soon after it reopened. When not researching travel guides Mark lives a blissfully quiet suburban life with his beloved Belgian bride, Danielle, who found him at a Turkmen camel market. The camel would have been cheaper!



## PAUL HARDING

**Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand**

Paul has been drawn back to India and all its chaos many times since first landing in Delhi more than a decade ago. As a travel writer and photographer, he's travelled from Kanyakumari to the Himalaya, slept in palaces and fleapits and consumed plenty of Kingfisher beer. On this trip Paul explored the wonderful Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, riding knee-trembling mountain roads, managing to get a round of golf in near Shimla, and wishing he had more time for trekking. Paul has written for numerous magazines and Lonely Planet guides, including *South India, Goa* and *Istanbul to Kathmandu*. He lives near the beach in Melbourne, Australia.



### ABIGAIL HOLE

**Delhi**

Abigail Hole visited India around 15 years ago, rattling around the north – to Delhi, Manali, Kashmir and Punjab – before melting in Rajasthan during the hot season. She's returned at least every couple of years. This is the third time she's contributed to Lonely Planet's *India*, and she wrote the first edition of the *Rajasthan, Delhi & Agra* guide. Having researched the capital for this book, she now can't wait to get an excuse to return, explore some more, shop some more, wander through more Mughal gardens and try more *Dilli-ki-chaat*. She has also written on India for various magazines and newspapers.



### PATRICK HORTON

**Bihar & Jharkhand, Sikkim, Northeast States**

Patrick, writer and photographer, was born with restless feet. He travelled extensively in his native Britain before hitting the around-the-world trail and ending up in Melbourne. His journeys lead him to the more arcane areas of the world including North Korea, Eritrea, Kosovo, East Timor, Serbia, Tonga, Cuba and riding a motorcycle over the Himalaya. But he is forever returning to India, a place that he considers another home. This research trip to uncover the jewels of Northeast India, Sikkim, Bihar and Jharkhand completes a long-held ambition to visit every state in India.



### KATE JAMES

**West Bengal, Orissa**

Melbourne-born Kate grew up in Ooty, where her parents taught at an international school. Her family holidayed across the subcontinent for eight years, carrying the very first edition of Lonely Planet *India* and memorably spending Christmas 1980 in a tribal village on the border of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Country and suburban journalism in Australia led Kate to an in-house editing job at Lonely Planet and then into a freelance writing and editing career. She is the author of *Women of the Gobi*. This is her first book as an author for Lonely Planet.



### AMY KARAFIN

**Mumbai (Bombay), Andhra Pradesh**

Indian in several former lives, Amy Karafin headed straight to India after university for an extended trip that would turn out to be karmically ordained. She spent the next few years alternating between New York and faraway lands until, fed up with the irony of being a travel editor in a Manhattan cubicle, she relinquished her MetroCard and her black skirts to make a living on the road. She's been freelancing seminomadically ever since, spending big chunks of time in Senegal, Guinea and India. She lives mostly in Brooklyn now, but also sometimes in Mumbai and Dakar.



### ADAM KARLIN

**Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

Adam was a 23-year old backpacker in South India when the Tamil bandit Veerappan was killed near his hostel. A few days later, he filed his first international news story on the 'Jungle Cat's' death. A month later, Adam was being interrogated by Tamil Tigers while reporting on the Sri Lankan civil war. The Tamils and their homeland have had a place in his heart ever since, and he jumped at the opportunity to go back to South India for Lonely Planet. While he'll always love Tamil Nadu, he was pleasantly surprised to discover Eden umpteen times during his first visit to the Andamans, too.



### ANIRBAN DAS MAHAPATRA

**Maharashtra, Karnataka**

Six years into his career as an Indian journalist, Anirban Mahapatra has almost perfected the art of selling outlandish story ideas to his editors to routinely beat the confines of his office cubicle and scoot off to far-flung corners of the country. Now based in Delhi, he's trundled through Maharashtra and Karnataka several times in the past, once even in a mad-hat attempt to retrace the steps of 15th-century Russian explorer Afanasy Nikitin. His primary reason for going south, however, is to significantly endanger the local marine life (oh the crabs!) while he's there, and wash it all down with some fresh draught in beer-town Bengaluru. He's also a writer and photographer, and this is his first Lonely Planet assignment on the road.



### DANIEL MCCROHAN

**Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh**

Straight out of school and with the travelling experience of...well, a school-boy, Daniel's first trip to India blew him away. Complete pandemonium was the best way he could describe it at the time. Fifteen years later and with numerous India trips under his money belt, he still revels in trying to make sense of the chaos. Daniel has now travelled extensively throughout almost half the states in India. Exploring tribal Chhattisgarh was a first for him this time, and a major highlight, but he will forever remember this particular research trip as the one that finally gave him his first tiger-sighting – after 14 unsuccessful attempts.



### AMELIA THOMAS

**Goa**

Amelia Thomas is a writer and journalist working throughout India and the Middle East. She has worked on numerous Lonely Planet titles, and her book *The Zoo on the Road to Nablus*, telling the true story of the last Palestinian zoo, was published in 2008. Her four small children, aged between 10 months and five years, enjoy accompanying her on assignments – particularly the Goan kind, which sees them conducting their own research into sandcastles, rock pools and Indian ice cream. Her forthcoming book, *'Hypnosis!'* tells the incredible, colourful tale of Abbé de Faria, Goan priest and hypnotist extraordinaire.



## RAFAEL WLODARSKI

Kerala, Tamil Nadu (Chennai)

After completing degrees in marketing and psychology in Melbourne, Rafael vowed never to use them and set off on a short around-the-world trip. Nine years and five passports later, he is yet to come home. Rafael spent his entire 20s travelling overland through the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and North and South America. He managed to get lost in India for six months along the way, and relished coming back to Kerala to update this edition. He currently lives somewhere between San Francisco, London and Zanzibar.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**William Dalrymple** was born in Scotland and wrote the highly acclaimed bestseller *In Xanadu* when he was 22. *City of Djinns* won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award and the *Sunday Times* Young British Writer of the Year Award. *White Mughals* won the Wolfson Prize for History 2003 and his most recent book, *The Last Mughal*, won the Crossword Indian Book of the Year Prize and the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize. His next work, *Nine Lives*, will be published by Bloomsbury in October. William wrote the 'Last Mughal' boxed text in the History chapter.

**Christopher Kremmer** is the author of four books imbued with the history, culture and conflicts of modern Asia. They include the bestselling *Inhaling the Mahatma*, a journey to the heart of the Indian identity, and *Bamboo Palace*, a ground-breaking quest to uncover the fate of the missing royal family of Laos. His superb portrait of Afghanistan, *The Carpet Wars*, follows the lives of Afghan carpet weavers and sellers amid the torment of war and religious extremism. He is currently writing a novel set in Australia. Christopher wrote the 'India' boxed text in The Culture chapter.

**David Lukas** lives on the edge of Yosemite National Park where he studies and writes about the natural world. He has contributed environment chapters to about 28 Lonely Planet guides and is the author of the recent *A Year of Watching Wildlife*. When not writing about plants and animals, he leads nature tours and programs. David wrote the Environment chapter.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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