

# welcome to India



## Soul Stirring

Bamboozling. There's simply no other word that captures the enigma that is India. With an ability to inspire, frustrate, thrill and confound all at once, India presents an extraordinary spectrum of encounters for the traveller. 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 veteran travellers find their sanity frayed at some point, yet this is all part of the India experience. Love it or loathe it – and most visitors see-saw between the two – India will jostle your entire being. It's a place that fires the imagination and stirs the soul like nowhere else on earth.

## Spectacularly Diverse

With its in-your-face diversity – from snow-dusted mountains to sun-washed beaches, tranquil temples to frenetic bazaars, lantern-lit villages to software-supremo cities – it's hardly surprising that this country has been dubbed the world's most multi-dimensional. For those seeking spiritual sustenance, India has oodles of sacrosanct sites and thought-provoking philosophies, while history buffs will stumble upon gems from the past almost everywhere – grand vestiges of former empires serenely peer over swarming streets and crumbling fortresses loom high above plunging ravines. Meanwhile, aficionados of the great outdoors can paddle in the shimmering waters

*India bristles with an eclectic melange of ethnic groups; an intoxicating cultural cocktail for the traveller. With such astonishing diversity, you will be taken on a journey that will linger in your mind long after you've left her shores.*

(left) Elephant Festival dancer, Jaipur (p108)

(below) Buffalo-riding on the banks of the Ganges, Varanasi (p383)



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of one of many beautiful beaches, scout for big jungle cats on blood-pumping wildlife safaris, or simply inhale pine-scented air on meditative forest walks. And then there are the festivals. With its vibrant mix of religious denominations, India is home to a formidable array of celebrations – from larger-than-life extravaganzas with caparisoned elephants and body-twisting acrobats to pint-sized harvest fairs paying homage to a locally worshipped deity.

## Too Delicious

Brace yourself – you're about to jump on board one of the wildest culinary trips of your life! Frying, simmering, sizzling, kneading and flipping a deliciously diverse

variety of regional dishes, feasting your way through the subcontinent is certainly one hell of a ride. The hungry traveller can look forward to a bountiful smorgasbord of tasty delights, ranging from the spicy goodness of masterfully marinated chicken drumsticks in North India to the simple splendour of squidgy rice dumplings in the steamy south. So what are you waiting for? Roll up your sleeves, put on your chomp-chomp hat and rumble your way down India's gastronomic highway!