



Understand India

INDIA TODAY.....1080

Facts and figures to help you understand today's India at a glance.

HISTORY.....1083

Weave together the disparate strands that comprise the vibrant tapestry that is Indian history.

THE WAY OF LIFE.....1101

A window into what makes India tick, from the caste system to cricket.

SPIRITUAL INDIA.....1106

A diverse religious landscape means there's an abundance of sacred sites and festivals to discover.

DELICIOUS INDIA.....1114

India's culinary delights range from spicy street snacks to piled high pizzas. *Bon appétit!*

THE GREAT INDIAN BAZAAR.....1124

Shopaholics rejoice! Papier-mâché puppets, sumptuous textiles, twinkling gems, tribal artworks and so much more.

SACRED ARCHITECTURE.....1134

Historic and contemporary sacred architecture that captures the imagination and stirs the soul.

THE ARTS.....1139

From its ancient temple dances to dynamic performing-arts scene, India is nothing short of astonishing.

ELEPHANTS & TIGERS: INDIA'S SANCTUARIES.....1146

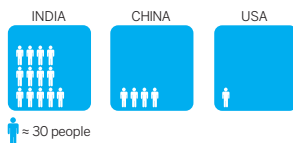
Scout for big jungle cats, elephants and other magnificent beasts on a wildlife-spotting safari.

THE LANDSCAPE.....1151

From steamy tropical rainforests to snow-capped mountains, India's landscape is as multifarious as it is spectacular.



population per sq km



India Today

The Kashmir Epic

In summer 2010, the Kashmir Valley was under near-constant curfews, and violence between proindependence protesters and Indian security forces had turned deadly. The protesters called for India to remove its more than 500,000 troops from Kashmir. They stoned police and paramilitary and burned police vehicles, all while demanding *azadi* – freedom. Security forces responded with gunfire, and more than 100 protesters died, mostly teenagers.

The predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley is claimed by both India and Pakistan – and now, Kashmiris – and the impasse has plagued relations between the two countries since Partition in 1947 (see p1099). After three India–Pakistan wars and countless skirmishes, there's still no solution in sight.

By 1989 Kashmir had an armed insurgency. A militant fringe of Kashmiris revolted against the Indian government, joined by armed supporters from Afghanistan and Pakistan. India accused Pakistan of assisting insurgents; Pakistan countered that India was denying Kashmiris the right to self-determination. Meanwhile, thousands of civilians have been killed in the conflict. India–Pakistan relations sunk even lower in 1998 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party) government detonated five nuclear devices in the Rajasthan desert and Pakistan responded in kind. A border conflict was averted, but nukes were now in the picture.

By the time the Congress Party government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came to power in 2004, relations were strained but cordial; the reopening of cross-border transport links, among other measures, helped calm the situation. But talks were derailed when in Mumbai (Bombay) in 2008 a team of terrorists killed at least 163 people, some of whom were tortured, at 10 sites around the city during three days of coordinated bombings and shootings. The one sniper caught alive, a Pakistani, had

- » Population: 1.21 billion
- » GDP: US\$1.4 trillion (2009)
- » Unemployment rate: 10.8%
- » Employed in agriculture: 52%
- » Literacy rate: 65/82% (female/male)
- » Sex ratio: 940/1000 (female/male)

Dos & Don'ts

- » Avoid tight clothes and keep shoulders and knees covered. Outside Goa, this applies to swimming, too.
- » Public kissing, cuddling or holding hands is not condoned.
- » Be humble and dress modestly at holy places.
- » Remove shoes before entering people's homes and holy sites.
- » Always ask before photographing people or holy places.
- » That head wobble? It can mean 'yes', 'maybe' or 'I have no idea'. Best to just go with the flow.

Top Fiction

Midnight's Children Salman Rushdie's allegory about Independence and Partition.

The Guide and The Painter of Signs Classic RK Narayan novels set in the fictional town of Malgudi.

A Fine Balance Rohinton Mistry's tragic Mumbai-based story.