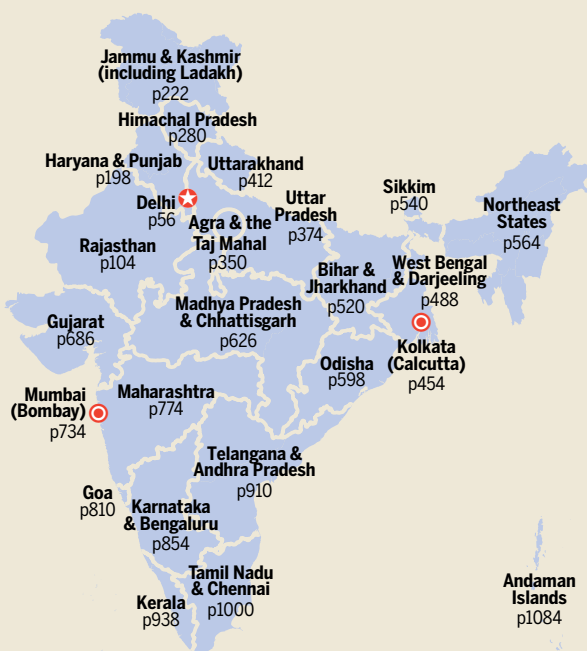




India



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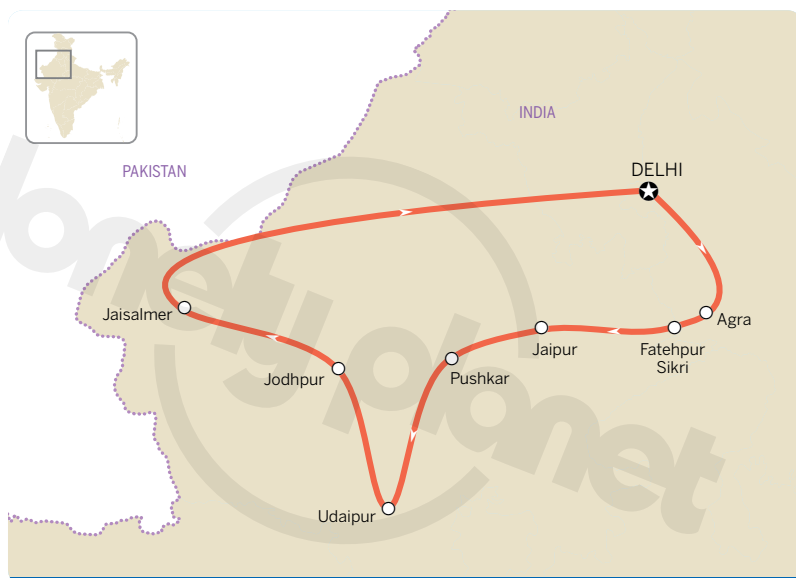
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Itineraries



Golden Triangle & Rajasthan

A tourist trail with genuine highlights to make up for the crowds, the Golden Triangle of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur combines some of India's top sights.

Kick off in **Delhi**, touring the must-sees – the Mughal-era Red Fort and Jama Masjid, and the magnificent Qutb Minar. Next, catch a train to **Agra** and gaze on the glory of the Taj Mahal, the world's most extravagant monument to love. Explore Agra Fort and devote a day to nearby **Fatehpur Sikri**, a mesmerising Mughal city. Continue on to **Jaipur**, and devote several days to the dusty bazaars and myriad monuments of the Pink City. Essential stops include the City Palace and Amber Fort.

Loop back to Delhi, or travel on to **Pushkar** for a few days of roaming around lake-side temples, then devote several days to graceful **Udaipur** and a lavish dinner at the hotel on the lake. Next visit magnificent hilltop Kumbhalgarh and the temple at Ranakpur, en route to **Jodhpur**. Soak up the colours of the Blue City from the battlements of magnificent Mehrangarh Fort. Spend the last few days in fortified **Jaisalmer** and indulge your *Arabian Nights* fantasies on a camel safari through the dunes. Finally, loop back to Delhi, with one last detour to the Qutb Minar, for a final dose of imperial splendour.



Grand Tour

With six months on your tourist visa, you can fit in a lot of India.

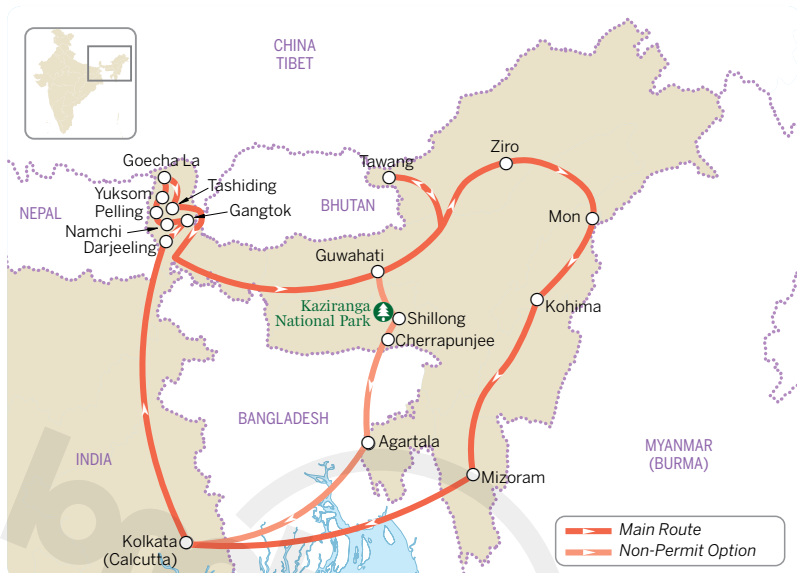
Kick off in **Delhi** and ride the rails north to **Amritsar**, to admire the gleaming Golden Temple. Connect through Chandigarh to **Shimla**, the Queen of the Hills. From this classic hill station you can roam northwest to Buddhist **Dharamsala**, home of the Dala Lama, or **Manali**, starting point for the beautiful but gruelling overland journey to rugged **Ladakh** (July to September), gateway to the high Himalaya. When you've had your fill of mountain air, head south for some yoga training in **Rishikesh**, and descend to **Agra**, for a peek at the Taj Mahal. Amble south to **Khajuraho**, with its risqué temples, and scan the jungle for tigers in **Bandhavgarh National Park**. Continue to the holy city of **Varanasi** for a boat trip along the sacred Ganges.

Take time for detours as you wander east to **Kolkata** (Calcutta), bustling capital of West Bengal. Swing north as far as **Darjeeling** or **Sikkim** for sweeping Himalayan views, then drift down the coast to the temple towns of **Konark** and **Puri** in Odisha (Orissa). Consider a flight to transport you south to **Chennai** (Madras) for a dose of southern spice.

As you loop around the bottom of India, essential stops include **Mamallapuram** (Mahabalipuram), for temple carvings; **Puducherry** (Pondicherry), for colonial quaintness; and **Madurai**, for deity-encrusted temple towers. Allow a few days to kick back on **Kerala's beaches**, then swing inland to nostalgic **Mysore** to see how maharajas lived.

Continuing north, head to **Hampi**, where temples and ruined cities are strewn among the boulders, then get a second dose of beach life on the coast of **Goa**. Onward to **Mumbai** (Bombay), fast-paced capital of the west coast; take in a Bollywood movie, then admire the glory of the cave paintings and carvings at **Ajanta** and **Ellora**.

To finish, head to Rajasthan and complete the coloured-city triple – **Jaipur** (pink), **Jodhpur** (blue) and **Udaipur** (white). There might just be time to detour to the temples and nature reserves of **Gujarat**, before closing the circle with a last train ride to Delhi.

1
MONTH

Sikkim & the Northeast States

Surprisingly few people explore mountainous Sikkim and the Northeast States. Kept from prying eyes by insurgencies and permit restrictions, India's last frontier is slowly opening up to the outside world. From Kolkata, you can swing north to Darjeeling, get a full dose of Himalayan vistas in Sikkim then enter the fascinating world of India's hill tribes. Advance planning is essential – permits are mandatory and there are security risks to consider.

Starting in **Kolkata**, make your first stop **Darjeeling** – here you can sample India's finest teas and pick up a permit for Sikkim, one of India's most serene quarters. **Gangtok**, the Sikkimese capital, is the starting point for jeep rides to a string of historic, dramatic Buddhist temples. Veer to **Namchi** to see the giant statues of Shiva and Padmasambhava, and to **Pelling** for inspiring views of the white-peaked Khangchendzonga and the beautiful Pemayangtse Gompa, ringed by gardens and monks' cottages. Take the week-long trek from **Yuksom** to **Gocha La**, a 4940m pass with incredible views, then exit Sikkim via **Tashiding**, with more wonderful views and another stunning gompa, before travelling to Siliguri for the journey east.

In **Guwahati**, the Assamese capital, arrange tours and permits for the Northeast States: the remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur. If you can't get a permit, try this loop: from Guwahati, head to **Kaziranga National Park** to spot rare rhinos. Detour to sleepy **Shillong**, and the waterfalls and incredible living root bridges of **Cherrapunjee**. From **Agartala**, capital of Tripura, return to Kolkata by air or overland through Bangladesh.

With the right permits, head from Guwahati to Arunachal Pradesh to pay your respects at the Buddhist monastery at **Tawang**, or the tribal villages near **Ziro**, where the elders have dramatic facial tattoos and piercings. A Nagaland permit opens up tribal villages around **Mon**, countryside dotted by traditional longhouses and remote settlements, and the capital **Kohima**, with its WWII relics. Manipur permits are rarely granted, but there's a fair chance of encountering Mizo culture in **Mizoram**, before you fly back to Kolkata.



3 WEEKS Central Shrines

Visit some of India's most spiritual places on this temple-hopping trip around the central plains.

Start in the chaotic but cultured city of **Kolkata**, then swap the big-city bustle for the peace of **Bodhgaya**, where the Buddha attained enlightenment. Roll across the plains to **Sarnath**, where the Buddha first taught the dharma.

Hinduism replaces Buddhism as you approach the sacred city of **Varanasi**. Meditate on the banks of the River Ganges, then ramble to **Khajuraho**, where Hindu temples drip with erotic carvings. Head southwest to **Sanchi**, where Emperor Ashoka first embraced Buddhism, then zip through Bhopal to Jalgaon, jumping-off point for the carving-filled caves of **Ajanta**.

Next, detour into Rajasthan; stop off in whimsical **Udaipur**, with its lakes and palaces, then explore the extraordinary Jain temples of **Ranakpur** or **Mt Abu**. Continue to pilgrim-crammed **Pushkar**, then make a trip to nearby **Ajmer**, one of India's most holy Islamic sites. Take a final stop in atmospheric **Jaipur**, then end the trip in **Delhi**, with its magnificent Islamic ruins.



4 WEEKS Northern Mountains

This mountainous loop takes in some of India's most spectacular views.

Start by riding the rails from **Delhi** to **Kalka**, to board the narrow-gauge train to colonial-era **Shimla**. Spend a day or two rambling around the hills, then join the traveller pilgrimage north to the **Kullu Valley** for adventurous mountain activities.

From the hill resort of **Manali**, embark on the epic, two-day journey to **Leh** in Ladakh (July to September), to hike to dramatic Buddhist monasteries and trekking peaks. For a short loop, continue from Leh to Kargil and on to Kashmir (checking first that it's safe to travel). Stay on a **Srinagar** houseboat, then loop through Jammu to elegant **Dalhousie**, and soak up Buddhist culture in nearby **Dharamsala**, before returning to Delhi.

With more time to spare, head southeast from Leh into the dramatic **Spiti Valley**, where ancient monasteries blend into the arid landscape. Ride the rattletrap bus to rugged **Kinnaur**, with its plunging landscapes, and make stops in **Dehra Dun** and **Rishikesh** to soak up some Hindu culture, before finishing in Delhi.

2
WEEKS

Southern Coastal

This trip gambols to some of India's finest beaches and charismatic coastal towns.

Start in **Mumbai** and sample *bhel-puri* (crisp noodle salad) on the sand at Girgaum Chowpatty beach. Cruise to the stunning rock-cut temples on Elephanta Island, then travel south by train to beach-blessed Goa.

Enjoy the best of the sand at **Arambol**, **Vagator** and **Palolem**, then continue along the coast to the sacred town of **Gokarna**. Now change the pace entirely; head inland to **Hampi**, with its serene Vijayanagar ruins, and witness the zenith of medieval stone-carving in the Hoysala temples of **Belur** and **Halebid**. Return by train to **Mangalore** to sample spectacular seafood, then chug south to melting-pot **Kochi** (Cochin), which draws influences from as far afield as China and the Middle East.

Cruise Kerala's backwaters from **Alappuzha** (Alleppey), before dipping your toes in the waters around beach resorts **Varkala** or **Kovalam**. Make your last stop **Thiruvananthapuram** (Trivandrum), home to often-overlooked museums, before closing the loop with a flight back to Mumbai.

3
WEEKS

The Southern Tip

Chennai is the capital of the 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 sampling incendiary thalis in **Chennai**, then surround yourself with intricate temple carvings in **Mamallapuram**, one-time home of the Pallava kings.

Next, head for the decadent grace of French-flavoured **Puducherry**, then leave the coast behind and head inland to the temple-towns of Tamil Nadu: essential stops include boulder-covered **Trichy** (Tiruchirappalli), and **Madurai**, with its soaring, deity-covered *gopurams* (temple towers). From here, it's easy to zip down to **Kanyakumari**, the southernmost point of India.

Kick back on the coast at **Kovalam** or **Varkala**, then head to **Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary**, home to tigers and elephants, or take a trip up to **Munnar**, Kerala's centre of tea plantations, to enjoy rambles in the hills. En route back to Chennai visit **Mysore**, with its maharaja's palace and giant stone Nandi (bull statue). Bingo – a neat circuit, stringing together the jewels of the south.



Isabella Noble

Tamil Nadu & Chennai Isabella's first experience of South India was a masala dosa at Shimla's Indian Coffee House. She has been travelling to India for over five years, but loves the ever-so-slightly more laid-back pace of the friendly South. This time she got lost in Valparai's tea plantations, checked out Chennai's countless bars, then got stuck in the Nilgiris thanks to landslide. Between trips, Isabella lives in London with a wardrobe of Indian shawls. She tweets @isabellamnoble.

Read more about Isabella at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/isabellamnoble>



John Noble

Himachal Pradesh, Telangana & Andhra Pradesh John, from England, has written about 20-odd countries for Lonely Planet, including covering six very different Indian states for editions of this book. He loves returning to the subcontinent because, in a nutshell, there's never a dull moment there! Biggest thrills of this trip: getting back into the Himalaya (the world's most wonderful landscapes) and travelling the unbelievable Kinnaur-Spiti loop, and, as a long-time fan of Wil-

liam Dalrymple's *White Mughals*, exploring fascinating Hyderabad. He tweets @john_a_noble and Instagrams as johnnoble11.

Read more about John at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/ewoodrover>



Kevin Raub

Agra & the Taj Mahal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Kevin Raub grew up in Atlanta and started his career as a music journalist in New York, working for *Men's Journal* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. He ditched the rock 'n' roll lifestyle for travel writing and moved to Brazil. On his 8th epic Indian journey, Kevin was only out-spiced by an Indian chef once and never outsmarted by a rickshaw driver. This is Kevin's 30th Lonely Planet guide. Follow him on Twitter (@RaubOnTheRoad).

Read more about Kevin at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/kraub>



Iain Stewart

Mumbai (Bombay), Maharashtra Iain grew up in Leicester, a very Indian town transplanted to the Midlands, UK (complete with its own curry mile). He first visited India in 1991 and explored the sights at totally the wrong time of year with temperatures approaching 50°C in parts. For this trip he wised up and travelled post-monsoon: bar-hopping in Mumbai, meandering down the Konkan coast and having several near-misses with tigers in Tadoba.

**Paul Clammer**

Rajasthan Paul Clammer has contributed to over 25 Lonely Planet guidebooks, and worked as a tour guide in countries from Turkey to Morocco. In a previous life he may even have been a molecular biologist. He first covered India for LP back in 2004, up in the Himalayas, so jumped at the chance to explore Rajasthan in more depth this time around, staying on to write the chapter in a converted temple in Pushkar, where it was necessary to lock the doors to stop monkeys

stealing his notes. Follow @paulclammer on Twitter.

**Mark Elliott**

Jammu & Kashmir, Kolkata (Calcutta) Mark has been making forays to the subcontinent since a 1984 ultra-budget adventure that lined his stomach for all eventualities. In various trips to J&K he has been stuck in two Kashmiri curfews, luckily sidestepped the 2010 Leh flash-floods and narrowly dodged the Srinagar deluge of 2014. He remains passionately enamoured of the region's people and landscapes while considering Kolkata India's most inspiring mega-city.

**Paul Harding**

Goa, Kerala Paul first landed in India in the mid-90s and has returned regularly over the years, usually writing about it. He still has a soft spot for the south, where the pace of life is slower, the food tastier and the beer (usually) colder. For this edition he was fortunate enough to return to Goa and Kerala where he researched beaches and backwaters, homestays and bamboo huts, seafood curries and chicken xacutis. This was Paul's 9th assignment on India and the second with his

intrepid young daughter.

**Trent Holden**

Karnataka & Bengaluru, Andaman Islands On his third time co-authoring the India book, Trent was assigned with the not-so-shabby task of testing out Bengaluru's microbreweries, searching for tigers in Bandipur NP and checking out Hampi's ruins before hitting the beaches in Gokarna. He then returned to the Andaman Islands for more sun, surf and sand. A freelance travel writer based in London, Trent also covers destinations such as Nepal, Zimbabwe and Japan. In

between travels he writes about food and music. You can catch him on Twitter @hombreholden.

**Anirban Mahapatra**

West Bengal & Darjeeling, Sikkim, Northeast States Anirban started his career as a newspaper reporter in 2004, but transitioned into travel journalism some years later after realising that all the good things in life awaited him on the open road.

A Lonely Planet author since 2007, he specialises on India and the Subcontinent, and loves to trundle routinely through the hinterlands of East and Northeast India, sampling the awesome culture and cuisine of the region. A closet Buddhist

(and probably a reborn lama), he takes special interest in Himalayan traditions. Apart from writing, Anirban currently also works on photographic and video projects. He lives in Kolkata.

**Daniel McCrohan**

Haryana & Punjab, Bihar & Jharkhand, Odisha Daniel has been writing for Lonely Planet about India and China for almost a decade now. Originally from the UK, he's based in Beijing these days, but has been travelling to India, on and off, since the early 1990s. This is his 23rd Lonely Planet book, and his fourth successive stint on India. Daniel is also the creator of the smartphone app Beijing on a Budget, a host on the travel show Best in China and a 'travel ninja' for planmy.

travel. You can contact him through his website, danielmccrohan.com.

Read more about Daniel at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/danielmccrohan>



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Sarina Singh

Coordinating Author After finishing a business degree in Melbourne, Sarina travelled to India where she pursued a hotel corporate traineeship before becoming a journalist. After five years she returned to Australia and completed postgraduate journalism qualifications before authoring Lonely Planet's first edition of *Rajasthan*. Apart from numerous Lonely Planet books she has written for a raft of newspapers and magazines, and has been a scriptwriter and travel columnist.

Sarina is also the author of two prestigious publications – *Polo in India* and *India: Essential Encounters*. Her award-nominated documentary film premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival before being screened internationally. Sarina wrote the Welcome to India, India's Top 17 and the India Today chapters.



Michael Benanav

Uttarakhand, Gujarat As a writer and photojournalist who covers issues affecting traditional cultures, Michael knew he hit the motherlode when he first visited Gujarat, criss-crossing the state on his way to remote tribal villages. In Uttarakhand, he's migrated with nomadic water buffalo herders in the Himalaya and joined religious worshippers on mountainous pilgrimage trails. The abundance of fascinating stories in these states – and the friendships he's formed in them – keep drawing him back. You can see his work at www.michaelbenanav.com. Michael also wrote the Trekking, India's Wildlife & Parks and The Landscape chapters.



Abigail Blasi

Delhi This is Abigail's sixth India title for Lonely Planet, and she was delighted to return to explore Delhi again, learning to love Paharganj, exploring the city's enclaves, and cycling through the mayhem of Old Delhi. She fell in love with the country on her first visit in 1994, and since then she's explored and written on India from north to south and back again. She's covered plenty of other places

for Lonely Planet too, from Mauritania and Mali to Rome and Lisbon. Abigail also wrote the Need to Know, If You Like, Month by Month, Itineraries, Booking Trains, Yoga, Spas & Spiritual Pursuits, Volunteering, Travel with Children, Regions at a Glance, History, The Way of Life, Spiritual India, Delicious India, The Great Indian Bazaar, The Arts, Sacred Architecture, Scams, Women & Solo Travellers, Directory, Transport and Health chapters.

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

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