

Welcome to India

India pulsates with a spectacular mix of people, traditions and landscapes. Your journey through this mind-stirring country will blaze in your memory long after you've left its shores.

The Great Outdoors

From the soaring snow-dusted peaks of the northern mountains to the sultry sun-washed beaches of the southern coast, India's dramatic terrain is breathtaking. Along with abundant natural beauties, exquisitely carved temples rise majestically out of pancake-flat deserts and crumbling old fortresses peer over plunging ravines. Aficionados of the great outdoors can scout for big jungle cats on wildlife safaris, paddle in the shimmering waters of one of many beautiful beaches, take blood-pumping treks high in the Himalaya, or simply inhale pine-scented air on meditative forest walks.

Food, Glorious Food

Brace yourself – you're about to take one of the wildest culinary trips of your travelling life. Here you'll fry, simmer, sizzle, knead, roast and flip across a deliciously diverse repertoire of dishes. The hungry traveller can look forward to a tasty smorgasbord of regionally distinct creations, each with their own traditional preparation techniques and presentation styles – from the competing flavours of masterfully marinated meats and thalis to the simple splendour of vegetarian curries and deep-sea delights.

Expect the Unexpected

India tosses up the unexpected. This can be challenging, particularly for the first-time visitor: the poverty is confronting, Indian bureaucracy can be exasperating and the crush of humanity may turn the simplest task into a frazzling epic. Even veteran travellers find their nerves frayed at some point; yet this is all part of the India ride. With an ability to inspire, frustrate, thrill and confound all at once, adopting a 'go with the flow' attitude is wise if you wish to retain your sanity. Love it or loathe it – and most travellers see-saw between the two – to embrace India's unpredictability is to embrace her soul.

Simply Soul Stirring

Spirituality is the common characteristic painted across the vast and varied canvas that is contemporary India. The multitude of sacred sites and rituals are testament to the country's long, colourful, and sometimes tumultuous, religious history. And then there are the festivals! India hosts some of the world's most dazzling devotional celebrations – from formidable city parades celebrating auspicious events on the religious calendar to simple harvest fairs that pay homage to a locally worshipped deity.



Why I Love India

By Sarina Singh, Writer

The moment I start to think I'm right on the precipice of unravelling one of India's deep mysteries, she has an uncanny way of reminding me that it would take more than just a few lifetimes to do so. Indeed, demystifying India is a perpetual work in progress. And that is precisely what makes the country so deeply addictive for me. The constant exploration. The playful unpredictability. And knowing that, just when it's least expected, you can find yourself up close and personal with moments that have the power to alter the way you view the world and your place in it.

For more about our writers, see page 1248.

Above: Spectators at Dussehra festival (p28), Himachal Pradesh