



# Uttar Pradesh

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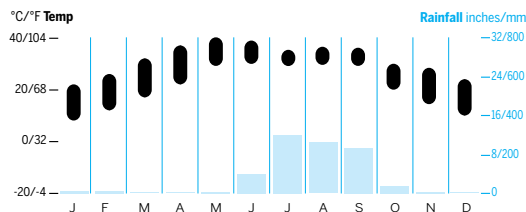
## Why Go?

The enormous state of Uttar Pradesh is one of India's mystical cradles and, as a result, is justifiably one of India's roads most taken. Its unmistakable spirituality and religious fervour leaves long-lasting impressions: being wow-ed along atmospheric riverside ghats such as Manikarnika and Dashashwamedh in India's holiest city, Varanasi; the contemplative aura that emanates from ancient Buddhist stupas in Kushinagar and Sarnath; the serenity of waking up before dawn to watch locals perform *puja* (offerings or prayers) in sacred Chitrakut; or the intense power of piety in Allahabad, where throngs of feverish devotees bow to the chaotic confluence of two of India's holiest rivers, the Ganges and Yamuna.

Along the way, a groundswell of Mughal and Nawab architectural and gastronomic highpoints – notably in Lucknow, Allahabad and of course Agra – ensure all-sensory satisfaction in India's imperial heartland.

## When to Go

### Varanasi



**Sep & Oct** Monsoon rains are mostly over and temperatures have cooled...just enough.

**Nov–Feb** Comfortable winter days and nippy nights means it's cool but overcrowded.

**Mar & Apr** With evening chills subsided and raging midsummer heat still at bay, some say it's perfect.

## History

Over 2000 years ago this region was part of Ashoka's great Buddhist empire, remnants of which can be found in the ruins at the pilgrimage centre of Sarnath near Varanasi. Muslim raids from the northwest began in the 11th century, and by the 16th century the region was part of the Mughal empire, with its capital in Agra, then Delhi and, for a brief time, Fatehpur Sikri.

Following the decline of the Mughal empire, Persians stepped in briefly before the Nawabs of Avadh rose to prominence in the central part of the region, notably around the current capital of Lucknow. The Nawabs were responsible for turning Lucknow into a flourishing centre for the arts, culture and culinary delights, which continues to this day. But their empire came to a dramatic end when the British East India Company deposed the last nawab, triggering the First War of Independence (Indian Uprising) of 1857. During the 147-day Siege of Lucknow, British Chief Commissioner Sir Henry Lawrence was killed defending the British Residency, which remains in remarkable preservation in Lucknow.

Agra was later merged with Avadh and the state became known as United Province. It was renamed Uttar Pradesh after Independence and has since been the most dominant state in Indian politics, producing half of the country's prime ministers, most of them from Allahabad. The local population doesn't seem to have benefited much from this, though, as poor governance, a high birth rate, a low literacy rate and an erratic electricity supply have held back economic progress in UP in the past 60 years.

In 2000, the mountainous northwestern part of the state was carved off to create the new state of Uttaranchal.

## LUCKNOW

☎ 0522 / POP 2.9 MILLION

Liberally sprinkled with British Raj-era buildings – including the famous Residency – and boasting two superb mausoleums, the capital of Uttar Pradesh plays a somewhat unwarranted third fiddle to Agra and Varanasi, but caters well to history buffs, without attracting the hordes of tourists that sometimes make sightseeing tiresome. By contrast, Lucknow's modern side boasts a unique Iron Curtain-esque feel, with grandiose monuments and overstated parks and

### SLEEPING PRICE RANGES

Accommodation price ranges for this chapter are:

\$ below ₹1500

\$\$ ₹1500 to ₹4000

\$\$\$ above ₹4000

gardens, many boasting marble sidewalks and pink sandstone a plenty (we imagine they were going for a Washington, DC aesthetic but ended up more Pyongyang). It's nothing if not interesting.

The city rose to prominence as the home of the Nawabs of Avadh (Oudh) who were great patrons of the culinary and other arts, particularly dance and music. Lucknow's reputation as a city of culture, gracious living and rich cuisine has continued to this day (it conveniently rhymes in Hindi: '*Nawab, Aadaab [Respect], Kebab and Shabab [Beauty]*').

### 👁 Sights

#### ★ Residency

HISTORIC SITE

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; ☀ dawn-dusk) The large collection of gardens and ruins that makes up the Residency offers a fascinating historical glimpse of the beginning of the end for the British Raj. Built in 1800, the Residency became the stage for the most dramatic events of the 1857 First War of Independence (Indian Uprising), the Siege of Lucknow, a 147-day siege that claimed the lives of thousands.

The compound has been left as it was at the time of the final relief and the walls are pockmarked from bullets and cannon balls.

The focus is the well-designed **museum** (open 8am to 4.30pm) in the main Residency building, which includes a scale model of the original buildings. Downstairs are the huge basement rooms where many of the British women and children lived throughout the siege.

The cemetery around the ruined St Mary's church is where 2000 of the defenders were buried, including their leader, Sir Henry Lawrence, 'who tried to do his duty' according to the famous inscription on his weathered gravestone.

#### ★ Bara Imambara

ISLAMIC TOMB

(Hussainabad Trust Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹50/500; ☀ 6am-6.30pm) This colossal *imambara*