

TRAVEL TO INDIA



A Brief Introduction to India

The Republic of India is located on the Indian subcontinent in South Asia. It is bounded by the Himalayas in the north, the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Indian Ocean in the south, and the Arabian Sea in the west. To the north it borders Bhutan, Nepal and parts of Tibet, to the west Pakistan, and to the northeast both Bangladesh and Myanmar. It covers an area of approximately 3,287,782 km², measuring 3,214 km from north to south and 2,933 km from east to west. This geographic area makes it the seventh largest country in the world. The country is divided into 27 provinces now called states and seven federally governed union territories. New Delhi is the capital.

The climate comprises a wide range of weather conditions and microclimates due to the enormous geographic scale and varied topography. Although the whole country is considered tropical, its higher elevations have more temperate weather including fog. The progress of the southwest monsoon wind drives the movement of seasons. While traditional Indian culture divides the calendar into six seasons, modern climatic studies generally divide it into three to four predominant ones: winter stretching from December through February with temperatures night and day ranging between 5-25°C; summer from March through June with temperatures from 35-48°C; autumn in October and November with temperatures between 18-35 °C. July through September, referred to as the monsoon or rainy season, usually brings relief from the stupendous summer heat.

India is the second most populous country in the world, with its 2007 population at approximately 1.136 billion people. Hindi is the official language, but English is used extensively in business and government. It is also taught in many schools. In addition to 14 semi-official languages, the over 1,600 dialects are spoken.

Visa

A Visa is needed for India, people coming to the country must at least have a tourist visa.

For Germany:

http://visum.konsulate.de/visum/visum_einreise_indien.php

<http://www.indienaktuell.de/indien-info/visum/>

Inquire at the Embassy of India in your county about visa applications etc.

Applying for a Tourist Visa is the most convenient. Please talk to us before applying or if you have any questions concerning visa applications.

A visa is mandatory for all non-resident, non-citizens of India other than citizens of Bhutan and Nepal. They are available by application in person or by post from Indian Embassies and High Commissions or through specialist visa agencies.

Your passport must have a minimum validity of six months from the time of application. Your visa must remain valid during your entire stay.

Kalimpong



Kalimpong, a pristine hill station in West Bengal, is located about 50 km east of the famous tourist destination Darjeeling. This hill town, overlooking the beautiful Teesta valley, is at an altitude of 1250 m above the sea level and is vibrant with bustling activities. Kalimpong is located at the foothills of majestic Shiwalik ranges in Lower Himalayas. It is believed that until the 19th century the area was ruled by Bhutanese kings and was a forward post of the Bhutanese Army. Enshrined with ancient Buddhist monasteries, centuries old churches and exquisite revered temples, Kalimpong was earlier a part of Bhutan until it was wrested by British rulers and joined to Indian territory. The populaces in Kalimpong are mostly of Nepalis origin. These people are all migrated to this area in search of job opportunities. Enriched with lush green forests and dense plantations of tea, Kalimpong is really marvelous and awe inspiring.

Kalimpong is renowned for many high quality educational Institutions. Students throng to this town from the entire North Eastern region of India and also from neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Burma and Bhutan to have their higher studies.

This town is bustling with flower markets, a major source of orchid flowers in the north east. One can enjoy the view of attractive flowers placed on the sideways of the street and the fragrances of the flowers make you to think about an eternal destination.



Kalimpong is a breathtaking picnic spot and one can view the panoramic picture of the down valley known as Teesta Ranjit Valley from the spot known as 7th Mile View Point. This town is a best place for shopping, one can get items like Tibetan Jewelleries, artifacts, copperwares, handicraft items and many varieties of dress materials.

Sikkim



Sikkim is a beautiful scenic location which proves to be a fantasy destination of many a tourist. The original inhabitants of Sikkim, the Lepchas called it Nye-mae-el or 'paradise'. Sikkim is the second smallest state in India and is nestled in the Himalayas. Its natural features are dictated by the most magnificent mountain range in the world which includes the Khangchendzonga, the third highest mountain in the world.

It proves to be quite an attraction to tourists with its rich culture, picturesque beauty and bio-diversity. Tourists enjoy the various adventure sports and assortment of events and festivals. Nature lovers are besotted with the calm soothing surroundings characterized by the striking greenery. It is

one of the few regions to exhibit such a large range of flora and fauna within such a small zone. Over here one can enjoy the perfect relaxing holiday away from the crowds and hurdles of daily life.

Sikkim has four districts, the west district, south district, north district and east district. These districts are further divided into sub districts. There are eight towns and nine subdivisions in Sikkim.

Rumtek



Rumtek is a town located in the Indian state of Sikkim. This town is located near the state capital of Gangtok, and for this reason, Rumtek is very famous among tourists who frequently flock to this region. Rumtek is well known among tourists mainly because of the monastery that is located here. This monastery, also known as the Rumtek Monastery, is a very large structure and a very important one.

The monastery is located atop a hill, and at a distance of around twenty four kilometers from Gangtok. Many Buddhists pilgrims frequent this monastery and visiting the place during the peak season can provide you with some insights into the local Buddhist culture. Many ancient relics and a golden stupa are also present in this monastery, and you can see this during your trip to the place. You can also get some breathtaking views of Gangtok city from atop this hill.

During your trip to Rumtek, you can also visit Gangtok and visit Do Drul Chorten in this city. A revered holy site among Buddhists, this place is an important tourist attraction that you must visit. The white stupa located in this monastery is considered very holy. You can also visit 200 year old Enchey Monastery that lies near Gangtok.



Getting There

Delhi – Kalimpong 1448 km
Katmandu – Kalimpong 627 km
Bagdogra – Kalimpong 73 km
Kalimpong - Rumtek 70 km
Rumtek - Bagdogra 117 km



The group will fly from Katmandu to Bhadrapur and then travel by jeep via Bagdogra to Kalimpong. Later the travel continues by jeep to Rumtek and from Rumtek down again to Bagdogra and then to Delhi by plane.

Even if distances are not too big in terms of kilometers, the travel by jeep still takes way longer than one would expect. Bagdogra to Kalimpong takes about 2,5 hours and the same for Kalimpong to Rumtek. It might even take longer due to hilly serpentine roads and a must-stop at the border to Sikkim at Rangpo.

Medical assistance and health recommendations

Please note that you are solely responsible for your well-being for the whole duration of your travel with the KHPC Team. Please get health insurance for India before you come. In case of an emergency there are doctors, dentists and hospitals, where one can go. Bring basic medicines and everything you have to use frequently. Stomach problems, flu, cough, fever and inflammations of the throat are very

common. When in India, please never drink tap water but either cooked water or originally bottled mineral water. You may choose to brush your teeth with cooked water also. It might be better not to eat fresh salads or drink fresh-pressed juice or drinks with ice cubes in. Do not eat fruits and vegetable without peeling or cooking it. Remember the proverb: Peel it, cook it or leave it!

Weather and what to take

The KHCP tour will take place in winter/spring, the time when the weather is still cold up in the mountains, in mornings and evenings it can drop as low as 4 or 5 °C (40°F). Bring layers of clothing to wear. Make sure that you bring an adequate amount of prescription medicines, necessary over the counter medications such as ibuprofen or artificial tears and/or an antibiotic cream for cuts, as well as nutrient supplements. Have your doctor recommend a basic travel medical kit for you. This might include an antibiotic for, a general antibiotic, cough medication and a syringe. You should make sure that your vaccinations are up-to-date, especially for Hepatitis. You should bring sun screen lotion, moisturizer, and lip balm and a good quality hand sanitizer, Pepto-Bismol tablets, sun hat, and oral rehydration sachets. You will be able to buy purified water for drinking, cleaning your teeth etc. A thermos bottle and a heating coil (with the proper adaptor) can be very handy, especially if you bring packets of instant soup or coffee or tea bags. The bottle and coil allow you to refresh in your hotel room. Sleeping bags are recommended for those choosing a budget or middle price hotel, or a guest house.

Prepare yourself for an experience that is “same, same **but** different” ☺ from what you are used to. Welcome to Incredible India, where everything is possible and just different. You might see things, that you somehow didn’t even think were possible ;) Keep your sense of humor and relax.



Getting Around in Bodhgaya

Auto-rickshaws, cycle-rickshaws, and tourist taxis are the best way to get around Bodhgaya. It is necessary to negotiate and agree on a price and all trip details before setting out. Try to keep small change in rupees for the payments. Because India is the home of the sacred cow doctrine, cows are likely to be roaming at large in the streets. It is considered a serious crime to hit a cow with a car or rickshaw so please have drivers be very cautious. Charging foreigners high penalties for hitting or hurting a cow is not uncommon.

Indian Food

Food and diet vary greatly in India, a land of such varied ethnicity, religion, geography and climate. Approximately 80% of the population is Hindu, 15% Muslim. Hindus do not eat beef or beef products—India is the home of the sacred cow doctrine so this is taken very seriously. Muslims avoid pork and pork products. In addition, many Indians are dedicated vegetarians. Indian cooking is famous for its wide variety of flavors, usually achieved by an artistic use of spices. The most common are chili pepper, cinnamon, turmeric cardamom, cloves, cumin, nutmeg, fenugreek and mustard seed. Curry is a combination of them and does not necessarily mean hot. The spiciness varies. Dhal (lentils, split peas and beans), rice and Indian breads such as naan, chapati, puri, roti, paratha are ubiquitous staples. Indians use a lot of potatoes, known as aloo, and make pancakes and breads from lentils. Lassi, a yogurt like drink, helps digestion and provides extra protein but you must be careful that it does not contain water. Chai, Indian milk tea, and masala or spiced tea (spiced with ginger, cinnamon, cardamom) are among favorite drinks, served virtually everywhere. Do not eat anything raw. It's best not to eat fruit unless it can be peeled like a banana or orange. Exercise extreme caution at all times especially concerning water. Be very certain that any plate, glass or utensil you use has been thoroughly dried so there are no water drops left on it to contaminate it. Do not drink any water that

does not come from a sealed bottle or has not been boiled. Avoid any food that might contain unboiled water.

Money

You can bring your credit card without any problems as there are functional cash dispensers around in India. Normally you can get 10.000 Rs. (aprox.180 € or 200 USD) per transaction. Alternatively, cash in Euros, US Dollar or Traveller Checks work fine. A good place to change - easy, fast and good rates - is at State Bank of India at the International Airport right after the customs. At the moment the maximum amount which can be changed at one time is 2000 US \$ or the equivalent in other currency. The exchange rate is app. 1 Euro = 65 Rs. and 1 US \$ = 45 Rs. (approx.). Check online for latest currency exchange values.

Please be advised that torn or very worn currency notes will often be rejected by local merchants, so check the notes you are given before leaving any exchange counter. A good supply of small denomination notes always comes in handy for butter lamps, rickshaw fares, small meals or needy people.

Other countries – other customs

Enjoy! India is different from anything you know. It has a 5000 year old culture with a very strong spiritual background. Please respect local habits and people. In India, people will dress very formally when meeting a spiritual master. So please bring some formal clothing and good shoes. Shoulders and legs should always be covered.

Local Customs

1. Namaste" is an all-purpose greeting. It can be used in place of "Good morning," "Good afternoon," "Good evening," "Welcome," "How are you?" and so on. **2.** When responding to a question, Indians tend to shake their heads from side to side. This can mean "OK," "No problem," or "Yes." **3.** In most areas, an Indian house doesn't have a street address, nor a sign. When giving directions, locals rely on landmarks such as bridges, temples, and markets. It's a good way to navigate the landscape. **4.** The pace of life in India is relatively slow. Allow extra time and practice patience. **5.** Do not touch the heads of children, because it is considered the sacred part of a person. **6.** Indian etiquette dictates that one uses the right hand to eat, the left is used to handle unclean matter and is thus perceived as unclean. Therefore, avoid touching others with your left hand or giving things to others with your left hand. **7.** Typical business hours are 9:00 - 13:00, 14:00 -17:30, Monday through Friday. Government agencies and many large-sized business organizations are closed on Saturdays and Sundays. **8.** Cows are considered sacred and let free to roam in India. Hurting cows in any way is a serious offense. **9.** Before entering a religious place, remove your shoes. Put them on shelves or in the designated area if available. Otherwise, carry them with you in a plastic bag or your backpack.

For more information about traveling to India: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/india>

General Safety Tips for Travel in India

1. In tourist areas, thieves and pickpockets mix in with the crowd of beggars. Keep your bags close to your body at all times. Avoid crowds or be extra careful when in the midst of crowds. **2.** When taking a taxi or rickshaw, negotiate and agree on a price, location of drop-off and pick-up, etc., before setting off to avoid conflicts later on. Be sure that the driver knows where you want to go. **3.** Bargaining is a fact of life when shopping in India. If you have no intention to buy, do NOT enter into a serious bargaining for fun especially in Bodhgaya. **4.** Food poisoning can ruin your entire trip. So, pay close attention to food safety, eat freshly cooked food, refrain from eating salads, raw food, and cold dishes unless you know for sure they are properly prepared. Bottled water is not always safe in India. Bring a bottle of safe drinking water with you is the best. **5.** Diarrhea saps energy, don't ignore it. Rehydrate your body after such incidents with electrolyte drinks (available in tablets and as powder). **6.** If you get a cold or flu, treat it with remedies that work for you. Try not to pass it on to others by wearing a mask and/or avoiding close contact. Flu bugs can go around easily and quickly in a big gathering. **7.** Clean your hands frequently with hand sanitizer or wipes. **8.** Air pollution is common in most Indian towns and cities. Use masks in congested areas. **9.** Take measures against theft. Do not assume hotel rooms are safe. Inquire if the hotel can keep your passport, travellers' checks and valuables safely and if it guarantees secure storage. Make copies of your passport and Indian visa and a list of travelers' check numbers, Leave one set with friends or keep it separate from the originals. Lock your hotel room securely whenever you leave, put on the extra security chain before you go to sleep.

Electricity

Indian plugs are different from European (they sometimes fit) and American plugs, so be prepared and buy an adapter for your electrical devices.

Mobile phone

You can bring your mobile. It is very easy to buy Indian prepaid cards and there are quite a few companies now in India. To phone to the US or Europe they even sell "World cards", which make phone calls even cheap. You need a passport photo and a copy of your passport to register.

There are also places with pay phone services everywhere.

Time zone

India has only one time zone and does not adopt daylight saving time (DST). It is 13 hours and 30 minutes ahead of the west coast of North America during non-DST period, or 12 hours 30 minutes during DST period. It is 2 hours and 30 minutes behind Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. And 3,5 or 4,5 hours ahead of Germany, depends of summer or wintertime.

Info about KHCP at the Mönlam

Inform yourself about KHCP activities at the Mönlam and at other places and projects.

<http://www.karmapa-healthcare.org/>