

COMPUTERS IN INDIA

If you are thinking of bringing a computer to India, consider these things:

1. There are Internet cafes all over India, perhaps even in or near your hotels, and calling home from India is very easy and not expensive.
2. If you are unfamiliar with traveling with a computer, there are a number of problems that can occur, including electrical, software, hardware, etc. problems. Computers are extremely difficult and expensive to get repaired in India (and next to impossible if they are Macintoshes).
3. There is always the possibility of theft and, even more possible, breakage.
4. You are fully responsible for your computer and its maintenance. There is no tech-support phone line.
5. There will be very few places where wi-fi is available, so if you are still thinking of bringing your computer – think of it as a typewriter or heavy journal.

If, though, you still decide that you need a computer on the program (and please do consider this carefully), there are a number of precautions that you should take. NONE are fail-safe. Before you leave the U.S.A., call your computer dealer to verify the latest conventional wisdom regarding traveling with a computer.

Note on IBM/MAC: IBM is the standard computer in India. You would be hard-pressed to find anyone who owns a Macintosh. There are only a couple of places in the whole country (Bombay, Pune, perhaps Delhi and Bangalore) that can service a Macintosh—but you won't have time to have your computer serviced due to our heavy travel schedule.

Before Going to India

If you are taking a laptop, make sure you have a battery that works properly. This may help prevent some problems (a functioning battery can absorb power outages without crashing your computer and risking software corruption). You may even want to have an extra battery (electrical fluctuations can, over time, cause damage to your battery).

Bring extra disks for backup (although they are available easily in India). The weather in India can cause damage to disks. Your best bet is to keep disks in a sealed plastic bag out of direct sunlight. Make backups of important files before you leave the States.

You may want travel insurance for your computer (preferably for both theft and breakage). Filing proper police forms for the in-India theft of your computer and explaining to the customs officials why you are leaving India without the computer you entered with may be a difficult

matter. You will also want to make sure that your computer is under warranty (most companies sell extended warranties for their machines when the purchase warranty runs out). While you will not be able to get your computer serviced in India, you will be able to get your computer serviced when you return to the states.

Verify that your computer can function on 220 volts (India's voltage). Many computers can work on both 110v and 220v (where the power-supply self-adjusts to the voltage level), and all you will need is a plug-adaptor and a CVT (see below). If your computer does not self-adjust to the voltage level, you will need a converter. Look into buying a good one made for a computer and not just a \$20 one at a travel store.

When you get to India

When in an Indian airport or other airports that use old X-ray machines (this does not hold true for most American and European airports), you may need to show security officials that the computer works, rather than putting it through an X-ray machine. Usually this means turning on the computer for them, or taking out the battery. Be sure to make back-ups of files on diskettes – just in case. Some old X-ray machines have magnets in the drive-belts that could cause problems to the hard drive and disks (new X-ray machines do not have this problem). When it comes down to it, though, you may have to put your laptop through the airport X-ray machine and cross your fingers (customs officials can be quite determined to do it their way; this is a battle you cannot always win).

You may have your computer (and other valuables, usually only expensive electronics) marked on your passport when you enter India. If this happens, you **MUST** have the computer with you when you depart from India, otherwise you pay approximately 300 - 500% of the computer's original value (custom officials have up-to-date lists of products, but often old price. For example, a brand new computer will be listed by its retail price and an old computer will most likely have a much higher price than it is actually worth). If the computer is stolen in India, you need to file police reports, have them with you at customs when you leave India, and hope for the best. You may still be forced to pay (the assumption being that you really sold it, rather than lost it). Even if the computer is broken in many pieces, you will have to bring it with you through customs on your way out to avoid paying those heavy penalties.