

WHAT TO TAKE (AND NOT TO TAKE) TO INDIA

The question of what to take to India is a difficult one on which to give advice because peoples' needs vary considerably. These guidelines may help you to evaluate your own needs and to pack accordingly. Keep in mind that you will be doing **a lot** of traveling in India: on train, plane, and by van. It will be important that you can manage to carry your own luggage. While porters will be helpful sometimes, you will need to handle your bags most of the time.

The temperatures in India during the summer range from 85-105°F. It's usually hot, humid and sometimes rains in June-July, although this is not monsoon time.

There are lots of ways to minimize the weight and size of items by being aware of packaging. Bring things in plastic bottles--glass ones are heavy and breakable. Throw away the boxes that come around bottles and jars. Put soft things in plastic bags rather than boxes because the shapes are more adaptable and take up less space. If you are taking rolls of film with you take films out of boxes but leave them in their plastic cans for protection.

This list should help you to decide which things you want to bring and which you want to buy there by giving you an idea of what's available in India and what isn't. But just remember: there are over 1,000,000,000 people living in India right now who are writing letters, bathing, shaving, getting haircuts, having their clothes washed, riding bicycles, carrying umbrellas, taking pictures, and dressing up for formal occasions without bringing anything from the United States. And lastly, don't take things to India you'd be heartbroken to lose. People misplace their own belongings, and thefts do occur.

MONEY

The program will cover most of your in-country expenses that are related to the program schedule, including: transportation costs, lodging accommodations, and most meals while in India. We suggest bringing \$300 - \$500 in cash or travelers' checks for spending money (small bills are not necessary). The exchange rate is usually the same for cash or travelers' checks. In most major cities you will find ATM machines at which you can make cash advances on debit cards and credit cards. REMEMBER to notify your credit card and debit card company that you will be traveling and that foreign charges may appear during the time of your program. Be aware that for every charge on your cards that there is a service charge for foreign withdrawals and charges. Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted all over India. If you want to see pictures of Indian Rupee notes go to: <http://www.travelpics.net/> and double click on the left-hand menu link to "banknotes." The current exchange rate is 1.00 USD = 43.733 INR (Indian Rupees). You will be able to exchange money in the airports, at hotels, and at foreign currency centers.

LUGGAGE

The luggage limit between the U.S. and India is usually two bags, neither of which is to exceed 70 pounds, and the total measurements of both bags added together (height, width & length) is

not to exceed 106 inches.* Please double check this information with the current information posted on the airlines website. Luggage should be as flexible as possible for travel on the train in India; we recommend backpack (soft-framed), duffle bags, and suitcases. We recommend buying TSA approved luggage locks for all of your checked baggage. Bring a smaller bag/backpack for excursions and short trips.

CLOTHING

In South Asia, dress is an important social marker. A neat appearance is very important to South Asians, and, unless people are completely destitute, they will bathe and wash and iron their clothes daily. Men in India tend to wear western-style dress. But women (especially in the south) wear more traditional outfits. Dressing in Indian clothing can be a fun adventure and people will be flattered that you are trying their style of clothing. In fact, clothes worn in South Asia are more suited than Western cloths for the climate and most women find that they are more comfortable. However, the most important factor is that you are comfortable in what you wear. You should not feel forced to wear anything you do not like or feel comfortable in. However, there are some no-no's! When visiting a temple or mosque any other sacred or historical place we will ask everyone in our group to adhere to a dress code: no shorts, sleeveless shirts, or short skirts. If women are wearing skirts or dresses—please wear a slip if the material is see-through.

Here is a minimal packing list:

2 pair khaki slacks, long (mid-calf length – not at knee or above) skirt or dress (women, if your skirt or dress is even remotely see-through bring a slip!!)
1 pair shorts (to be worn in hotels, and periodically while traveling by men)
2 long-sleeved button down or cotton shirts
2 short-sleeved button down, cotton shirts, or presentable T-shirts
1 sweatshirt, lightweight sweater, lightweight jacket
1 raincoat, or poncho
cotton underwear and socks
presentable sleepwear (double-room accommodations)
2 pair comfortable walking sandals/shoes (easy to remove – for temples, houses, etc.)
bathing suit

Keep in mind the following:

- Comfortable cotton clothes are readily available everywhere in India. Western clothes are widely available for men; and ready-made Indian-style dress is available for women. Tailors are also widely available to stitch just about anything you want.
- You will visit a few places that are higher altitude and cooler climates, a light jacket, long-sleeved shirt, and pants will be useful.
- Sandals are readily available, including dressy leather ones and rubber flip-flops that most people wear. You'll be wearing sandals most of the time; so one pair of walking shoes should be enough. Hiking boots are unnecessary and will be too cumbersome and hot to wear. When visiting temples and homes (some shops too), it is customary to remove your shoes.

Therefore in a given day you might find yourself taking your shoes on and off very frequently. People find it awkward to deal with shoes/sandals with lots of buckles and laces.

PERSONAL SUPPLIES

The following supplies are *not* available or not very good in India: contact lens solution, dental floss, deodorant, suntan lotion, sun glasses, chapstick, nail files, bug repellent with DEET, soft terry cloth towels, black and white film, and 8 ½ x 11 paper or notebooks (the size is different in India – but paper, notebooks are widely available).

These supplies *are* readily available in India: shampoo, conditioner, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, Q-tips (or “buds” as they are called in South Asia), handkerchiefs, handspun cotton towels, notebooks, pens, pencils, and color film.

PERSONAL SUPPLIES FOR WOMEN

Sanitary napkins are widely available in India. Tampons can *sometimes* be found. The Indian plumbing system is not compatible with cotton products. Many women get comfortable carrying around their waste in newspaper and in a plastic cover until they find a discreet place to dispose of them. While this may seem strange here, when you get to India it will make perfect sense.

MEDICINE

If you are on a prescription drug, take with you a 6-weeks supply, since you can't count on getting it there. Remember to pack it in your carry-on in case something happens to your checked luggage. Carry your prescription with you so you can produce it on demand if asked in customs. The prescription drug industry in India is large, so the chances are quite good that you will be able to get any common medicine you need--and that it will be much cheaper there. This includes cold medicine, allergy medicine, antibiotic ointment, aspirin, and vitamins, cough medicine and Lomotil or Immodium. If you wear glasses, bring a copy of your prescription in case something happens. Good glasses are available for 300 – 500 rupees (roughly 5-10 dollars) Contact lenses are okay, but keeping them dust-free can be a problem, and contact fluid is hard to come by! Its suggested to get daily disposables to wear in India.

MISCELLANEOUS

Alarm clock: might want to bring your own.

Hat: a good idea to protect your head from the sun.

Flashlight: a small flashlight will be very useful.

Gatorade packets: some people have found it handy to have Gatorade packets, or a vitamin called Recharge-C, or flavored water additives to encourage the intake of water!!

Snacks: some people who are sensitive to spicy or flavored foods like to have a personal stash of snacks, like: granola or energy bars, plastic bottle of peanut butter, nuts or trail mix... you can find all kinds of chips, biscuits, cookies, Indian mixtures/snacks.... But when it comes to your favorite health food snack you might not find it. **PACK YOUR SNACKS IN ZIPLOCK BAGS!**

Coffee, tea and sugar: In India you will not find decaf coffee or decaf or herbal tea, and seldom will you find sugar alternatives. If you want this during your trip you should bring it along with you. Also please be prepared to drink coffee and tea with milk and sugar. This is how it is served in homes, restaurants, offices and in tea stalls along the streets. You can always request "black" coffee or tea... or "no sugar" or "milk and sugar separate"... but be prepared that your beverage may not always arrive as requested.

Recording Equipment: Although cameras and accessories are available in India, selections and qualities are limited; so you will probably want to take them with you from the States. Color film is widely available, while Black and white film is not, now you can find memory cards all over India – often they cost the same as they do in the States. If you bring any electrical appliance, remember that the local power supply is 220 volts (50 cycles), so you should bring a small step-down transformer (sometimes called a converter). This can also be purchased in your first few days in India.

Bring pictures of yourself, your family, your childhood, your school and students, your city, of America, etc.

GIFTS

Many people have asked about bringing gifts to India. As it is not sure where or when you will find it appropriate to give gifts – it is suggested that you only bring a few gifts and should you want more you can ALWAYS buy things along your trip in India.

People love getting gifts from America, such as: Calendars (with pretty pictures), datebooks (I have brought people UNICEF date books and they have loved them), T-shirts (hometown, college, Obama, etc.), small coffee-table books of America (or of your State or your city), souvenir pens (pens are abundantly available in India), chocolates/candy (make sure they are wrapped very well and the harder the better to ward of melting), bags (for market shopping), perfume or cologne, are just some ideas. Children are usually as into cartoons as they are in the States: Dora, Pokeman (among other old favorites Mickey Mouse, Spiderman, etc.) are very popular: pencils, stickers, buttons, etc.

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