



India

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- School expeditions
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- Geography tours
- Link school visits
- Religious study tours
- Cultural tours

Facts & Highlights

Full Country Name: The Republic of India

Area: 3.28m sq km.

Population: 1,095.4 million (2005 est).

Capital City: New Delhi

People: Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Mongoloid and other 3%

Languages: Hindi (official), 18 main and regional languages plus another 24 languages, 720 dialects and 23 tribal languages.

Religions: Hindus (81.3%), Muslims (12%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Other (2.5%)

Currency: Rupee

Government: federal republic, certain powers reserved to the 25 states.

Electricity: Usually 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Plugs used are of the round two- and three-pin types.

Time: GMT + 5hr 30 mins



Jaisalmer: Lose yourself in the city's fairy-tale fort before embarking on a camel safari through the desert.

Taj Mahal: A visit to "the greatest monument to love" may be cliched, but the Taj Mahal will take your breath away.

Varanasi: Pilgrims, tourists & sadhus all jostle for room on the ghats that line the holy Ganges in this sacred city.

Cochin: Colourful port on the spice route, home to synagogues, cathedrals & colonial relics & a good base for trips through the lush Kerala backwaters.

Kipling Country: Search for tigers in the National Parks of Bandhavgarh and Kanha.

Sikkim: Trek amongst the highest peaks in the world and visit the tea plantations and rolling hills of Darjeeling.

India is one of the world's most colourful and culturally diverse countries. From snake charmers and Sadhus to farmers and high-tech engineers there is contrast every where you turn. If in one part rice is the staple diet, then a few thousand miles away it will be wheat bread. If there is desert in the west then the world's rainiest place lies in the east. With a rich natural heritage, an absorbing culture and a fascinating and varied history, India is an ideal educational travel opportunity.

If you can look beyond the dirt, pollution and poverty, India delivers a challenging and eye opening opportunity for pupils and teachers alike. In terms of culture shock, Delhi is as bad as it gets anywhere in the world. However, the capital, at least from a tourist's point of view, is ideally located in the central region of northern India and provides excellent access to a whole range of amazing cities, palaces, deserts, rivers, mountains and national parks. Despite Delhi's excellent location, the sheer size of India means there are long drives when getting between the areas of interest, often on poor roads. When and where possible we can limit the road travel by taking the train, itself an experience that will not be forgotten.

The colourful north west state of Rajasthan offers a unique desert experience. The state is littered with sprawling cities, impressive forts, oases and rock shelves; and is host to some incredible spectacles, such as the Pushkar Camel Festival (see "Festivals" overleaf).

Head north from Delhi and you enter the foothills of the Himalayas and the hill stations of the Raj. They offer a welcome break from the heat of the plains and here we can arrange trekking, survival courses and rafting camps (10 day trips start at around £1150pp including international flights). Head still further north and you come to Ladakh or "Little Tibet" as it is often known. Here, there are trekking and expedition opportunities to rival the best in the world, and a rich Tibetan Buddhist culture with eye-opening project options.

South and east of Delhi lie the classic travel destinations of Jaipur, Agra and Varanasi, and these can easily be included in an itinerary along with a visit to a national park in search of Tiger. Ranthambore has been the most frequented park in recent years, but poor management has left the chance of seeing a tiger at almost zero. Although further from the beaten track, a better option is to visit the parks of Kanha or Bandhavgarh, south of Varanasi, as these parks are well managed and offer the best chance of seeing this majestic cat.

In the far north east lie the mountainous and tea plantation states of Sikkim and Assam, while further east lie the little visited and culturally unique regions of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Here remote tribes such as the Adi are only just opening their communities to the outside world and offer a rare glimpse of a life unchanged for centuries.

The southern regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu offer an altogether different Indian experience from that in the north. The pace of life is slower and the scenery more tropical. Here, Hinduism is all around with lavish temples and extraordinary festivals. Wildlife safaris at Periyar, trekking in the hills, forests and tea plantations of the Western Ghats and a cultural tour of the coastal region all go to make this region a varied and absorbing option.

Whatever the reason for travel, be it religion, culture or adventure, contact us and we will work with you to establish a suitable programme and itinerary.



Suggested Itineraries

With so many possible itineraries and areas of interest in India, it is impossible to do them any sort of justice here. Instead, we have given a few suggestions and ideas which we can elaborate on further if you are interested in finding out more.

Northern India

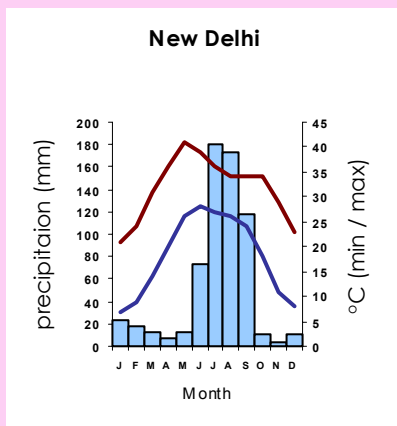
2 week cultural tour: After arriving in Delhi, head south east to Agra and the Taj Mahal, before continuing to Orchha (the ancient capital) and the erotic temples at Khajuraho. From here head east to Bandhavgarh National Park in search of tigers and then north to the sacred city of Varanasi. Return by overnight train to Delhi.

3 - 4 weeks: As above but also include an extensive exploration of the Thar desert state of Rajasthan with its colourful cities and vibrant cultures. Alternatively, after

Geography & Climate

India is the 7th largest country in the world and the 2nd most populous. Its geography ranges from glaciers and 7,800m mountains to deserts, jungles and tropical beaches. The far north of the country is dominated by the mighty Himalaya, whilst the Thar Desert covers the fascinating north west region of Rajasthan. The remainder of northern, central and eastern India consists of the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain. To the south the vast Deccan Plateau (average height approx 500m) is flanked by the Eastern and Western Ghats, coastal mountain ranges that rise to over 2,500m.

Whilst there is much local variance, India's climate can be broadly split into three seasons. "Summer" lasts from April to July and is characterised by hot temperatures. The main rainy season and Monsoon starts in June in the south west and continues through to October or early November heading progressively north and east. "Winter" is generally cooler, with clear skies in much of the country. The best time to visit is generally between November and March, although there are exceptions to this.



Varanasi, continue heading north and cross the border into Nepal. After a short elephant safari in Chitwan National Park head for Pokhara and an easy trek beneath the majestic Annapurna range, before heading for Kathmandu, a community project and the flight home.

Himalaya

Ladakh: Both geographically and culturally, Ladakh is more Tibetan than Indian. The trekking season of July and August is short, but the views and experience of the Buddhist culture more than makes up for it. The Markha Valley with its prayer flags, yak herders and white wash houses is one of the great treks of the world, crossing high passes and offering spectacular views. After completing the trek, return to Ley with its traditional Buddhist monasteries, and narrow back streets. Either before or after the trek, why not include a community project in a local village or visit the serene Golden Temple in Amritsar and the hill town of Dharamsala, home of the exiled Dalai Lama? It is sometimes even possible to arrange an audience with His Holiness.

Southern India

After a cultural tour of the coastal spice city of Cochin, head south to the tropical Kerala backwaters and a sunset cruise. Next, head inland to the hill station of Munnar and commence a trek in the mountains of the Western Ghats. On completion of the trek, perhaps a walking safari with local trackers in Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, before an extended community project in a local village or school. At the end of the project phase, the Kerala coast offers some excellent beaches for some well deserved relaxation.

National Holidays

26 Jan: Republic Day

15 Aug: Independence Day

2 Oct: Gandhi Jayanti (Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi)

Festivals

From the Himalaya to the tip of Kerala, India is alive with festivals, below are a few of the more famous ones:

"Holi" occurs throughout India in spring (usually March, date varies) and is the most colourful of the festivals. The celebrations are characterised by locals dousing each other with brightly coloured powders and throwing water balloons.

"Kumbha Mela" - the largest religious



gathering on earth. Occurs every three years in four alternating locations. It is dedicated to the cleansing of the body in the sacred river Ganges. In 2004 an estimated 80 million people took part.

"Deepavali" (or Diwali) - Festival of Lights - Candles, lamps, lanterns, fire crackers and sparklers all go to make this a most magical festival (held throughout India, usually in October, date varies).

"Pushkar Camel Festival" - Held once a year in November in the heart of the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, thousands of camel traders, holy men, travellers and pilgrims converge on the town of Pushkar for a week-long festival of colour, music and trade. A truly unique festival.

Regulations & Red Tape

A full passport (valid for six months after your return date) is required for visits to India. All visitors require a visa which must be obtained before arrival in India. Current cost for British passport holders is £30 (valid for three months).

Price Guide

Prices vary enormously depending on the length and style of trip required, as well as the number of participants involved and date of departure. A 9 day cultural tour of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur starts from around £1,150 per person inc international flights. An extended month long expedition is likely to cost in the region of £3,000 to £3,300 per person.

Useful Addresses

Office of High Commissioner for India:

India House, Aldwych, London, WC2B 4NA
Tel: 0207 836 8484, www.hcilondon.net
Hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1200 (visa enquiries); 0915-1730 (visa applications and collections).

Indian Ministry of Tourism:

7 Cork Street, London, W1S 3LH
Tel: 0207 437 3677
www.incredibleindia.org

More Information

To discuss the travel possibilities India offers in greater detail and get free, independent advice on suitable tour operators, please contact:

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