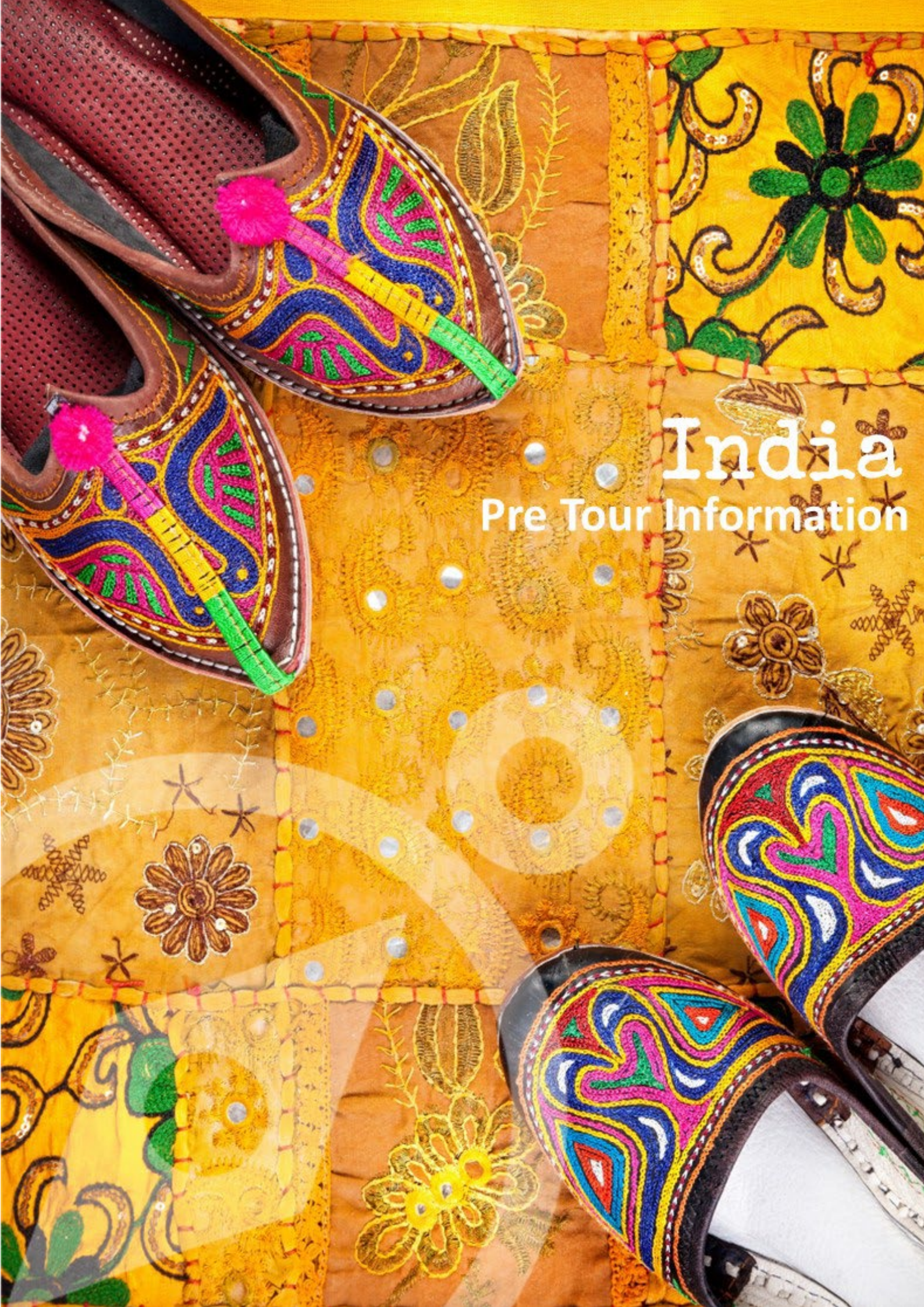

India

Pre Tour Information

A journey through time and culture...

India bristles with an eclectic melange of ethnic groups; an intoxicating cultural cocktail for the traveller. With such astonishing diversity, you will be taken on a journey that will linger in your mind long after you've left her shores. India overflows with royalty and grandeur, a place where Maharaja palaces, forts and havelis abound, a region rich in culture. Witness the spectacular sunrise over the Taj Mahal, India's most famous landmark, or marvel at the ornate palaces of Jaipur and Udaipur. Witness Indian religious rituals and daily life on the Holy River Ganga in Varanasi or explore the desert forts of Jaisalmer and Jodhpur with the chance to traverse the vast sands of the desert on a camel. For a complete contrast, Southern India offers quieter backwaters and golden beaches.

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What to Expect When Visiting India for the First Time

India is an assault on the senses — in the best possible way. It's a country of dazzling colours, intoxicating spices, chaotic streets, and jaw-dropping beauty. But first-time travellers should know: India plays by its own rules. Traffic moves in a free-flowing dance of honking rickshaws, overpacked buses, and fearless pedestrians. Queues are more of a suggestion than a rule. Negotiating prices is a daily workout. And yes, "Delhi Belly" is real—but so is the best street food you'll ever eat. This is a country where everything happens all at once, and plans are just a rough sketch rather than a fixed itinerary.

Here's what you should know before you go.

India: A Feast for Your Senses (and Then Some) - India is a full-throttle sensory explosion! Think dazzling colours, a symphony of honking horns, and the mouth-watering smells of street food wafting through the air. It's exciting, chaotic, and beautifully unique—kind of like being in a Bollywood movie, but with less dancing and more traffic.

To Squat or Not to Squat - Let's talk toilets. In many places, squat toilets are the standard. Toilet paper? Optional. Water? Absolutely. It's the kind of cultural immersion you'll never forget—literally. Pro tip: keep tissues handy and embrace the adventure!

Wealth, Poverty, and Everything in Between - India is a land of jaw-dropping contrasts. You might see luxury hotels rubbing shoulders with bustling slums, especially in cities like Mumbai. As of recent Oxfam reports, the richest 1% in India continue to own over 40% of the country's wealth, underscoring the stark inequality that persists. It isn't something that you can miss. And yes, begging is common and can tug at your heartstrings. It's a powerful reminder of the resilience of the people here, even in the face of extreme challenges.

Move Over, Pedestrians: The Cows Are Here - Cows rule the roads in India, and they know it. They'll wander through bustling streets like VIPs, completely unfazed by the chaos around them. And stray dogs? They're just there for the vibes. Most of them are friendly, but if they give you the side-eye, maybe just let them win this round.

Traffic Jam? More Like Traffic Jelly - Indian traffic is less "flow" and more "standstill with occasional honks." Your driver's creative use of the horn is all part of the show. Relax, settle in, and treat it as a chance to sightsee from your car window.

Tip Like a Local - Tipping is a big deal here. Got a guide, driver, or someone who carried your bags? Tip away! Keep some rupees handy.

Street Food: Delicious but Dare Carefully - Indian street food is legendary, but so is Delhi belly. Stick to stalls with a crowd (locals know best), choose cooked food over raw, and hydrate with bottled water. Your reward? The most flavourful dishes you've ever had—just maybe not every *single* one on day one.

Guides Who Keep It Real - Our local guides are brimming with enthusiasm, ready to share their culture, stories, and favourite places. While they might not come armed with history degrees, they'll make sure your journey is packed with personality and unforgettable moments.

Chaos, Charm, and a Dash of Magic - India isn't just a destination; it's an experience. From the bustling streets to tranquil temples, it's equal parts heartwarming and eye-opening. It's the kind of trip that'll fill your camera roll—and your soul.

General Travel Information

Local Emergency

- All Emergencies: Call 112
- Fire and Rescue Services: Call 101
- Medical Emergencies: Call 102 or go directly to the hospital
- Police: Call 100 or go to your local police station

Consular & Embassy Assistance

We strongly advise all travellers to take a proactive approach to their safety and well-being by familiarizing themselves with the contact details and address of their local embassy within their destination before embarking on their journey. Knowing how to reach your embassy can provide invaluable support in case of emergencies, unexpected situations, or the need for consular assistance. This essential information ensures that you're well-prepared and equipped to navigate any challenges that might arise during your travels. Your embassy is your lifeline in a foreign land, offering guidance, assistance, and a sense of security while you explore new horizons.

Staying in Touch

Before departing your home country, check with your phone supplier to see if it is compatible with the mobile phone networks in the countries that you are travelling to, and how much it will cost to use abroad. In some of the more rural reaches of India, cell phone coverage is not possible.

Internet access is generally available; it's important to note that the quality and speed of the Internet can vary depending on your location, with urban areas having better connectivity than rural or remote regions. Additionally, during peak hours, network congestion can affect internet speed.

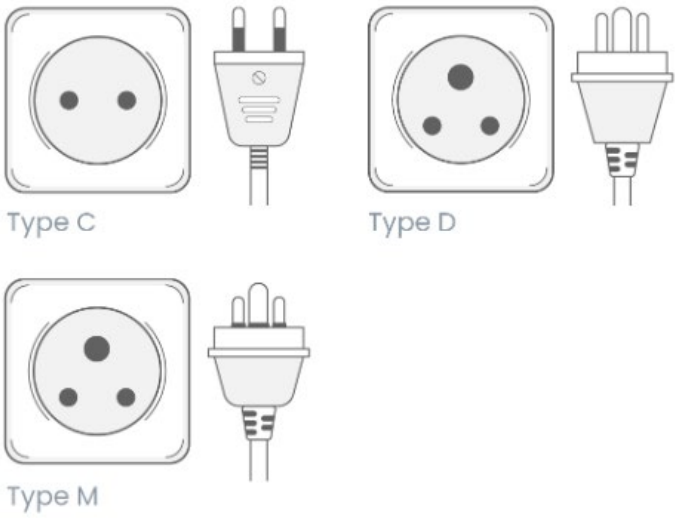
Mobile Data: Prepaid SIM cards are readily available at airports, major cities, and local shops; you'll need identification, such as a passport and a visa. SIM activation is usually completed within a few hours. Ensure your phone is unlocked and supports GSM 900/1800 bands. eSIMs are also supported by major providers like Airtel and Jio, offering a convenient option for travellers with compatible phones. Data plans are affordable, with 4G widely available in urban areas, but coverage may be limited in rural regions. Consider using an international roaming plan if staying short-term. Note: Internet speeds and network reliability can vary.

Wi-Fi: Many hotels, cafes, and restaurants offer free or paid access. Major cities have good connectivity, but speeds can vary. Airports, train stations, and shopping malls often provide public Wi-Fi, though registration with a mobile number might be required. For secure browsing, consider using a VPN. Public Wi-Fi can be less secure, so avoid accessing sensitive information on these networks. If you need constant connectivity, portable Wi-Fi devices are available for rental in major cities.

Electrical Voltage & Plug Adaptors

India operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz frequency.

The country uses three plug types: C (two round pins), D (three round pins in a triangular pattern), and M (a larger version of type D). To use your devices, you'll need an adaptor that fits Indian sockets. A universal adaptor/converter combo is a smart choice, especially for multi-country trips. These are widely available at electronics stores and airports if you forget to pack one.



Responsible Tourism

We believe strongly in low-impact or rather positive-impact tourism. Broadly speaking, this means that we aim to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects. Please visit our website for further details and suggestions on how you can be a responsible traveller.

☞ Responsible Tourism (https://www.crooked-compass.com/responsible-tourism/)

Facts & Figures

Geography

India is the seventh-largest country in the world, covering approximately 3.28 million square kilometres. It shares borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, with the Indian Ocean to the south. The country has an incredibly diverse landscape, ranging from the towering Himalayas in the north to the vast Thar Desert, the fertile Gangetic plains, the tropical beaches of Goa and Kerala, and the remote Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

Population

With a population of approximately 1.39 billion as of 2025, India remains the most populous country in the world.. The capital is New Delhi, but the largest city is Mumbai, India's financial hub and home to Bollywood. Other major cities include Bangalore, a global tech powerhouse; Chennai, known for its cultural heritage and coastal charm; Kolkata, the intellectual and artistic heart of the country; and Hyderabad, a blend of history and modern innovation. Each city has its distinct identity, language, and traditions.

Government & Economy

India is a democratic republic with a parliamentary system of government. The President is the head of state, while the Prime Minister is the head of government. The country has a mixed economy, with major industries including technology, pharmaceuticals, textiles, agriculture, and tourism. India is also a global leader in software development and space technology.

Language

India has 22 official languages, with Hindi and English being the most widely used at the national level. However, each state has its own primary language, such as Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu, and Gujarati. English is commonly spoken in urban areas, particularly in business, tourism, and government settings.

Useful Phrases

Hello: Namaste (Nuh-muh-stay)

Thank you: Dhanyavaad (Duh-nyuh-vaad)

Yes: Haan (Hah-n)

No: Nahin (Nuh-heen)

Please: Kripya (Krihp-yah), but in casual use, “please” in English is widely understood and commonly used.

Excuse me / Sorry: Maaf kijiye (Mahf kee-jee-yay)

How are you?: Aap kaise hain? (Aahp kai-say hain?)

I don't understand: Mujhe samajh nahi aaya (Moo-jhay suh-maj nah-hee aah-yaa)

Where is...?: ...kahaan hai? (...kaa-han hai?)

How much is this?: Yeh kitne ka hai? (Yeh kit-nay kaa hai?)

Remember that while these phrases can be helpful, the local language and culture may vary across different regions of India. It's always a good idea to be respectful and open to learning more about the local customs and expressions.

Time Zone

India follows Indian Standard Time (IST), which is GMT +5:30. The country does not observe daylight saving time.

Religion

India is home to several major religions, with Hinduism being the most widely practiced (about 80% of the population). Other significant religions include Islam (14%), Christianity (around 2%), Sikhism (nearly 2%), Buddhism (under 1%), and Jainism (less than 0.5%). Religion plays a central role in daily life, and festivals, rituals, and places of worship are an integral part of Indian culture.

National Holidays

India's national holidays are significant cultural events that can impact travel plans. Key holidays include:

- **Republic Day (26 January)**: Celebrates the adoption of the Indian Constitution with parades and ceremonies, especially in Delhi. Government offices and many businesses are closed, and there are increased security measures and road closures in major cities.
- **Independence Day (15 August)**: Marks India's independence from British rule, with flag-hoisting ceremonies and patriotic events. Similar to Republic Day, expect road closures and heightened security, especially in Delhi, and limited business operations.
- **Gandhi Jayanti (2 October)**: Commemorates Mahatma Gandhi's birthday with various events and ceremonies. It's a national holiday with many offices closed, and some cities may have commemorative events impacting traffic.
- **Diwali**: The Hindu festival of lights, occurring in October or November, involves fireworks and celebrations. It's a busy travel period, with crowded transportation and higher demand for accommodations.
- **Holi**: The festival of colours, usually in March, is marked by vibrant celebrations. Expect crowded public areas and potential disruptions to services.
- **Eid**: Celebrated by Muslims, dates vary based on the lunar calendar. Eid involves special prayers and feasts, with many businesses closing for the day and possible travel congestion.

Please note: Be aware that alcohol sales may be restricted in certain regions due to local elections, religious holidays, or government regulations. If you'd like a drink upon arrival, consider purchasing duty-free alcohol before leaving the airport, just in case.

Medical Information

Medical Supplies

This is one adventure where you don't want to forget your medications; it may be hard to get them in the remote reaches of India.

- Pack medications in your carry-on bag to avoid loss and to have them handy. Ensure any liquids or gels are less than 100ml.
- Keep medicines in their original, labelled containers for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- Bring copies of your prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name, to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.
- Carry a letter from your doctor explaining the medications you are using and that they are for personal use.
- Consider bringing a filled prescription antibiotic for gastrointestinal illness, electrolytes and motion sickness medicine if you are susceptible.

Crooked Compass highly recommends that you travel with your first aid kit.

Please refer to a travel vaccination specialist for the most up-to-date advice about vaccinations for your destination(s). We encourage you to check with your healthcare provider and take their advice based on your current state of health.

Please follow the link to check the TravelVax website:
TravelVax (https://www.travelvax.com.au/)

Medical Care

Medical facilities in major cities have adequate treatment standards, but facilities in remote and rural areas can be very limited or unavailable. If you're seriously ill or injured, you may be evacuated to a place with better facilities. Medical evacuation can be very expensive with long lead times. Due to airspace restrictions in areas like Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir, commercial air evacuations may be delayed or limited. In rare cases, evacuation by the Indian Air Force may be necessary and could incur significant cost.

Decompression chambers are available at the Indian Navy base in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the Goa Medical College in Goa.

Water Safety

Tap water is generally unsafe to drink, even in high-end hotels. Stick to bottled water from trusted brands like Bisleri, Aquafina, or Kinley, and always check that the seal is intact. Most hotels provide complimentary bottled water. Boiled or filtered water is safer, and ice should be avoided unless you're sure it’s made from purified water. Purification tablets or portable filters are useful alternatives. When in doubt, ask staff about the water source.

Food Safety

Food in India is a highlight for many travellers, but it’s also important to take precautions to avoid foodborne illness, commonly referred to as “Delhi Belly.”

Street food is a beloved part of Indian culture and can be delicious, affordable, and authentic. However, it's also a common source of stomach issues. Choose vendors that are busy with locals, as high turnover means fresher food. Stick to items that are cooked in front of you and served hot. Avoid raw chutneys, salads, and anything that has been sitting out uncovered.

In **restaurants**, opt for freshly prepared, hot meals over buffet items. Buffets, especially in warm climates, may have inconsistent refrigeration. High-end and well-reviewed establishments in cities tend to have safer kitchen practices, but even then, it's wise to avoid risky items like uncooked dairy, raw shellfish, or anything with ice cream unless you're confident in the source.

Stick to hot **beverages** like chai or coffee when in doubt, and avoid fresh juices from street vendors, as the fruit or equipment may be washed with unsafe water. Eat only fruits you can peel yourself (like bananas or oranges). Avoid raw salads or unpeeled fruits that may have been washed in tap water. Cooked vegetables are generally safer than raw.

Dietary Considerations

Special dietary requests must be advised at the time of booking. While we will make every reasonable effort to accommodate your needs, we cannot guarantee that all requests will be met by our local suppliers. It is your responsibility to ensure that any food or beverages consumed do not contain allergens or ingredients that may affect your health.

India offers a wide variety of **vegetarian** and **vegan**-friendly dishes, as a large part of the population follows plant-based diets. However, ingredients such as ghee (clarified butter), paneer (cheese), yoghurt, and cream are widely used in vegetarian cooking. Vegans should ask for these to be omitted when ordering meals. Gluten-free options are less common, as many breads are made from wheat flour (e.g., roti, naan, paratha). While alternatives such as rice, lentils, millet, and South Indian dishes like dosa and idli may be naturally gluten-free, cross-contamination is a serious risk, particularly for those with coeliac disease.

Peanut and cashew pastes are frequently used in curries and sauces. Kitchens rarely follow allergen-safe preparation standards, and food is often made using shared oils, utensils, and cooking surfaces, increasing the risk of exposure to nuts, dairy, gluten, or seafood. Packaged foods may not be reliably labelled for allergens.

If you have severe allergies, coeliac disease, or strict dietary requirements, we strongly recommend the following:

- Carry written dietary information or allergy cards translated into Hindi (and other regional languages if applicable)
- Bring essential medications such as antihistamines, anti-diarrhoeals, or EpiPens
- Avoid street food, buffets, and unlabelled items
- Bring snacks or staples that meet your dietary needs (e.g., gluten-free or nut-free products)
- Consult your guide or group leader at the start of your trip so they can assist with communicating your needs
- Consider downloading food allergy apps or dietary translation tools to help when ordering food

Your safety is our priority, but ultimately, it is your responsibility to make informed choices and take precautions to protect your health throughout your journey.

Altitude Sickness

If on your travels, you ascend altitudes higher than 2000m, you may feel some effects of altitude. Even if you've been to high elevations previously, you could have a different reaction each time. For most people, the symptoms are mild and will pass in a day or so.

You should take it easy, avoid smoking and alcohol, and drink plenty of fluids. Some people take altitude sickness medication, starting when they arrive or one day before. Don't take sleeping medications, as they suppress respiration. The most common symptoms are lightheadedness, shortness of breath, headache, nausea, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. If these are bothersome, you should start taking medication. Even though you may experience a decreased appetite, force yourself to eat soups and some basic foods.

If these 'normal' altitude symptoms become unmanageable, you must inform your Trip Leader. Please let the leader know if you experience any of the following: serious difficulty breathing, mental confusion, a severe and unremitting headache, continued difficulty breathing after a period of rest, or poor physical coordination.

TIP: Even if your risk is medium to low, it may be worthwhile to bring a medication with you so that you have it on hand for immediate use if needed. No one wants to buy medication they don't need, but on the other hand, no one wants to interrupt their trip for a doctor's visit.

Altitude in India: India's geography is diverse, ranging from coastal plains to the towering Himalayas. The northern region features the Himalayan range, with several peaks exceeding 8,000 metres, including Mount Kanchenjunga. Popular high-altitude tourism destinations include Leh and Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir, both over 3,000 metres. The Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats have hill stations like Ooty and Kodaikanal, above 2,000 metres. The Deccan Plateau in the south offers elevations up to 1,000 metres. Travellers should be prepared for varying altitudes and potential altitude sickness in higher regions.

Safety & Security

Reasonable Precautions

- Travellers are advised to exercise good sense, take some reasonable precautions and avoid irresponsible behaviour like carrying too much cash and displaying valuables like cameras, phones and expensive jewellery
- Always exercise caution
- Do not take unnecessary valuables with you
- A money belt or something similar, worn close to your body, is the best way to carry passports, airline tickets and money
- DO NOT leave any valuables in ANY hotel room, please use SAFETY DEPOSIT BOXES - items are left at the individual's risk
- Pickpockets operate everywhere, particularly in tourist areas and crowded markets. You must always exercise care
- Be aware that anything left unsupervised may be liable to theft

Travel Advisories

Please use the link below to check the Smart Traveller website and register your travel.

☞ Smart Traveller (http://smartraveller.gov.au)

LGBTQIA+

Risks can be higher for LGBTQIA+ travellers in some destinations. In India, same-sex relationships are legal, but social stigma and discrimination can persist, especially in rural areas. Please check local laws and the Smartraveller.

☞ Advice for LGBTQIA+ travellers (https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/before-you-go/who-you-are/LGBTQIA)

Drug and Alcohol Policy

Under no circumstances are any illegal drugs allowed on any part of the trip. Anyone discovered in possession of any such drugs will be asked to leave the tour immediately without question or refund. Remote communities and some cultures are deemed as ‘dry’, meaning that no alcoholic drinks may be purchased or consumed. Please be respectful of this.

Note: Some Indian states (e.g., Gujarat, Bihar, Nagaland) enforce partial or full alcohol bans. Always check local laws and respect cultural norms, especially in dry or religious regions.

Entry Requirements

Crooked Compass does not provide visa or health advice. The information in this section is for general guidance only.

Please ensure you check and comply with visa requirements for the country you are visiting. For the most accurate and up-to-date information, contact your nearest embassy or consulate. If you need assistance, we recommend using a specialist visa agency such as CIBT Visas.

Visas

If applicable, you must obtain the appropriate visas before embarking on your trip. Country entry regulations can change daily; your travel agent can provide you with visa information. Please consult your relevant embassy for all details, such as opening hours or costs. Certain visas cannot be obtained on arrival, and during the peak months, it may take longer than normal to get them. Please allow extra time to do this. Crooked Compass encourages the use of a visa specialist service such as CIBT Visas to ensure you have the correct and up-to-date information surrounding visa requirements for your destination(s). Visa and other entry and exit conditions (such as currency, customs and quarantine regulations) can change at short notice.

EACH CLIENT IS SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR OBTAINING ALL NECESSARY VISAS BEFORE JOINING A TOUR. Crooked Compass does not accept responsibility for changes in regulations or requirements for visas.
The information provided is given in good faith.

Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all Crooked Compass itineraries. You must be covered for personal accident, medical expenses, cancellation, curtailment, repatriation, and more. In remote areas, your policy must include helicopter evacuation in case of emergency.

Be aware that many adventure activities — such as trekking, white-water rafting, or bungee jumping — are often excluded from standard insurance policies. If you plan to join such activities, please check your coverage or purchase additional protection. We also recommend keeping a photocopy of your insurance documents separate from the original while travelling.

Global Rescue

Have you considered evacuation coverage? Crooked Compass partners with Global Rescue, a world leader in medical and security evacuation and advisory services. Unlike most standard travel insurance, Global Rescue offers field rescue from the point of injury or illness, anywhere in the world.

Global Rescue

Passports

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return
- Must have 4 blank pages
- By law, you must carry your passport at all times when travelling in India.

We recommend you carry colour photocopies of key documents, including the photo page of your passport, plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards, and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel insurance plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

Money

Local Currency

Currency: Indian Rupee
Currency code: INR
Central Bank: Reserve Bank of India
Currency symbol: ₹ (Rupee)
Currency subunit: Paise (100 paise = 1 rupee)
Nicknames: Rupee, Paisa
Banknotes: ₹10, ₹20, ₹50, ₹100, ₹200, ₹500
Coins: 50 paise, ₹1, ₹2, ₹5, ₹10, ₹100

The Indian rupee (INR), symbolised as ₹, is issued by the Reserve Bank of India. Banknotes in circulation include ₹10, ₹20, ₹50, ₹100, ₹200, and ₹500, while coins come in denominations of ₹1, ₹2, ₹5, and ₹10. ₹100 coins exist but are commemorative and not in general circulation. Paise coins are increasingly rare.

The rupee, one of the world's oldest currencies, dates back to the 6th century BC. Its name derives from the Sanskrit word 'rupya,' meaning 'wrought silver.' Historically, based on silver coins, India retained this standard even during global devaluation in the 1800s.

Indian Rupees are classified as a "locked" currency, meaning they cannot be exported or imported without strict regulations. You cannot take INR out of India, and you should be cautious about carrying large amounts of cash in rupees when you leave.

Be aware that some countries are more expensive than others and that if you are travelling through several, your expenses will vary enormously. Similarly, there will be some days when you spend nothing at all and others when you exceed your budget.

As a rough guideline, we suggest between US$15-30 per day for personal expenses, souvenirs, evenings out, alcoholic drinks, etc.

It is often a good idea to have a small amount of the currency of the country you are visiting before arrival. This will cover you for any initial expenses at or from the airport.

Cash

Using cash in India is essential, especially in smaller towns and markets where credit cards may not be accepted. Always carry small denominations, as getting change for larger notes like ₹500 or the now-discontinued ₹2,000 can be difficult. Be cautious of counterfeit notes; familiarise yourself with the security features of Indian currency.

ATMS

ATMs are generally available in urban areas. In rural regions, though they can be scarce, plan accordingly. Look for machines inside banks or malls for added security. Major networks like Visa, MasterCard, and Cirrus are commonly supported. Be aware that some ATMs may have withdrawal limits and charge fees, especially for international cards. It's advisable to carry multiple cards in case one isn't accepted. Always shield your PIN and stay vigilant against skimming devices. Withdraw cash during the day and avoid secluded ATMs to ensure safety.

Banks

Banks are generally open Monday to Friday, and some are open on Saturday morning. In the main cities, travellers' cheques can be exchanged at banks and some exchange bureaus, but this can be very difficult in small towns. Some hotels may also change money. Travellers' cheques are no longer widely accepted and are difficult to exchange in most places. ATMs or prepaid travel cards are more practical options.

Credit cards

Major credit cards like Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are widely accepted at hotels, restaurants, shops, and for online transactions. However, it's advisable to carry some cash as well, as smaller businesses and local markets may prefer cash payments.

Notify your credit card company: Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges, such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank that you will be using your cards abroad.

Tipping

We realise that tipping is a sensitive subject for all travellers. While tips are widely accepted, we would like to stress that this is at your own personal discretion. While everyone is recommended to tip based on services rendered, our clients often ask us to provide some basic guidelines. While tipping in India is certainly not compulsory, doing so is a nice gesture and can ensure that you receive better service in the future.

Tipping in India is typically referred to as 'baksheesh' and is generally just a small token of your appreciation for good service. It is best to separate your money; carry a few small bills in a pocket so that you can give baksheesh quickly without digging through your money in view of everyone. When giving a tip in India, do so subtly and quietly without making a big production of it. Someone asking you on the street for 'baksheesh' without providing a service is simply begging.

General Guidelines for Tipping in India:

- Large eateries may add a service charge or gratuity of around 10% to your final bill; your waiter may or may not receive that money. If you want to make sure someone receives your tip for excellent service, give it to them directly or leave some small change on the table. A tip of 5 to 10% in restaurants is considered excellent. Some restaurants include a 10% service charge on the bill, but this is optional under Indian consumer protection law. If it’s automatically added, you're not obligated to pay it, especially if the service was unsatisfactory.
- Anyone who carries your bags will expect a tip of at least 20 rupees per bag. Do not allow someone to grab your bags for you if you do not wish to pay them.
- Tip your drivers and boatmen if they got you where you wanted to go quickly without too much of a hair-raising ride. It is also customary to round up a fare or allow them to keep the change when paying.
- Anyone providing a direct service to you, such as spa staff and barbers, will appreciate a small tip at the end of their service.

Tipping in India is an art and doesn't follow rigid guidelines, but you'll catch on quickly enough. Some situations may even call for you to tip in advance so that you receive faster or better service later -- use your judgment -- and make sure that your proactive tipping is not misconstrued as a bribe! Whatever you do, smile, and try to never cause a losing face incident during your interactions.

A note about tipping your guide: We realise that tipping is a sensitive subject for all travellers. While tips are widely accepted, we would like to stress that this is at your own personal discretion. While everyone is recommended to tip based on services rendered, our clients often ask that we provide some basic guidelines. As a guideline, we suggest tipping ₹300-400 per day per person for your tour guide and ₹200-300 per day for your driver. Always tip in local currency and adjust based on service quality.

Spending money

We recommend planning for US$30–50 per day on discretionary expenses, such as local meals, snacks, souvenirs, transport, and entertainment. In tourist hubs like Delhi or Mumbai, daily costs may lean toward the higher end, while in smaller towns, it could be lower.

Item	Price Range (INR)	Description
Bottle of water	15 - 30	1-litre bottled water from brands like Bisleri or Aquafina.
Coffee	50 - 150	A cup of coffee at a local cafe; international chains may charge more.
Beer	100 - 300	A bottle of domestic beer in a bar; imported brands cost more.
Massage	1,000 - 3,000	60-minute session at a mid-range spa; higher at luxury resorts.
Souvenir	100 - 1,000+	Handmade items or small crafts; prices vary widely.
Movie	100 - 500	Cinema ticket, depending on location and seating class.
Taxi (per km)	15 - 25	Standard fare in cities; additional charges for night travel.
Street food	30 - 150	A meal from a street vendor; popular dishes include chaat, dosas, and samosas.
Mid-high restaurant	500 - 2,000 per person	Dining at a mid-range to high-end restaurant; includes main course and drink.

These prices are approximate and can vary depending on the location and quality of service. It's always advisable to carry a mix of cash and digital payment options.

Money Requested on Tour

Whilst every precaution is taken to ensure all services as per your itinerary are prepaid before your arrival, in areas where tourism is still being developed, you may, on occasion, be asked for additional funds for incidentals such as fuel and water. Under no circumstances are you to part with cash to any crew or local person claiming to work for Crooked Compass. Should you be requested to provide such funds, please contact the emergency contact number immediately for support. Crooked Compass is unable to take responsibility without prior authorisation from head office for monies handed over to the crew or local persons.

Airports and Border Crossings

Airports

India's main airports include Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai, Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru, and Chennai International Airport. These airports are modern and well-equipped, offering a range of facilities like free Wi-Fi, lounges, and numerous dining options. Security checks can be time-consuming, so arriving at least three hours before international flights is advisable.

Departure taxes are included in the cost of international flight tickets from India and are not paid separately at the airport.

Border Crossings

India's main border crossings are Attari-Wagah with Pakistan, Moreh with Myanmar, Petrapole-Benapole with Bangladesh, and Raxaul-Birgunj with Nepal. These crossings are busy and can be slow, with lengthy customs and immigration checks. Facilities may be basic, especially compared to airports, so prepare for minimal amenities.

Internal Flights

For internal flights in India, major domestic carriers include IndiGo, Air India, Vistara, SpiceJet, and GoAir. Expect varying levels of service; IndiGo and SpiceJet are budget-friendly with basic amenities, while Vistara and Air India offer more comfort. Domestic flights are generally punctual, but delays can occur, especially during the monsoon season. Baggage allowances vary by airline and fare class, so check in advance to avoid extra fees. Security is strict, with thorough checks, so arrive at the airport at least two hours before departure. Many airports have limited food options and shopping.

Many of our tours run without changes, but please be advised that due to weather and other unforeseen circumstances, domestic internal flights may not always run to schedule or on time. Your trip leader will keep you informed of any schedule changes as they happen.

Luggage Allowance

For most domestic flights in India, economy passengers are allowed 15 kg of checked baggage and 7 kg of cabin baggage. Baggage allowances may vary depending on airline and fare class, so check your ticket carefully. Excess baggage is chargeable, and rates vary by airline. Passports are required for all domestic flights. Arrive at the airport at least two hours before departure.

Climate

India's climate is shaped by its vast geography, stretching from the snowbound Himalayas in the north to the tropical shores of the Indian Ocean in the south. In the far north, high-altitude regions like Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh experience sub-zero temperatures and snowfall during winter — in some locations, temperatures can fall below –20°C, while summer brings mild days and cool nights. The central plains, including Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, have a continental climate — dry winters, blistering summers, and a dramatic monsoon.

To the west, Rajasthan is dry and arid, with scorching desert heat and sparse rainfall. In contrast, the northeast receives some of the highest rainfall in the world, particularly in Meghalaya. Southern India, including Kerala and Tamil Nadu, enjoys a tropical climate — hot, humid, and influenced by both the southwest and northeast monsoon cycles. The Western Ghats and coastal states experience heavy rainfall and lush vegetation during the monsoon, while inland regions like Karnataka and Telangana are drier and more seasonal.

This climatic variation affects everything from travel logistics and scenery to clothing and hydration needs.

Month	Record high (°C)	Average high (°C)	Daily mean (°C)	Average low (°C)	Record low (°C)	Average rain (mm)	Precipitation days	Relative humidity (%)	Sunshine hours
Jan	32.7	23.3	18.9	12.2	-29.9	13.6	2.4	56.7	9.4
Feb	34.5	26.2	21.8	14.4	-26.2	17.7	2.8	53.1	10.6
Mar	37.3	30.2	26.1	18.0	-23.8	22.7	4.4	47.5	11.2
Apr	41.5	33.6	29.9	22.0	-19.7	44.0	7.2	47.0	11.8
May	43.0	35.2	31.9	24.7	-15.4	79.1	9.3	50.0	12.5
Jun	42.8	33.5	30.9	25.6	-9.1	153.8	15.6	60.3	12.4
Jul	39.5	30.8	28.6	24.6	-3.3	219.4	20.9	72.9	11.5
Aug	36.3	30.1	27.9	23.8	-1.1	215.3	20.8	76.9	10.9
Sep	35.7	29.9	27.2	22.6	-7.5	155.7	16.6	74.8	10.5
Oct	35.1	29.2	25.8	20.1	-17.0	80.5	10.2	64.5	10.0
Nov	32.9	26.8	22.8	16.6	-23.2	26.7	4.1	58.0	9.4
Dec	32.7	24.1	19.8	13.6	-27.6	16.2	2.5	55.6	9.2

Seasonality

India experiences four distinct seasons: Winter, Summer, Monsoon, and Post-Monsoon.

Winter (December to February)

In the north, temperatures range from 5°C to 20°C, with fog common in cities like Delhi and Varanasi. The Himalayan region sees heavy snowfall and sub-zero conditions — perfect for snow-based activities but requiring serious cold-weather gear. Southern India remains much warmer, ranging from 20°C to 30°C, making it an ideal time for beach visits and backwater cruising in Kerala. Rajasthan is dry and mild, offering sunny days and crisp nights — great for sightseeing. Pack layers, including a warm jumper or jacket, especially if visiting higher altitudes.

Summer (March to June)
This is the hottest period across much of India. North and central regions such as Delhi and Rajasthan often exceed 40°C, with intense, dry heat. Travel in these areas can be physically demanding — lightweight, breathable clothing and hydration are critical. Hill stations like Shimla, Darjeeling, and Ooty offer respite with cooler daytime temperatures between 15°C and 25°C. Southern India is slightly cooler but very humid, with coastal areas like Chennai and Goa hovering around 30–35°C. Many domestic travellers head to higher elevations to escape the heat.

Monsoon (June to September)
Driven by the southwest monsoon, this season brings heavy rain, especially to the west coast and northeast. Goa, Mumbai, and Kerala can receive over 300 mm of rainfall in a single month. While temperatures drop slightly (averaging 25–30°C), high humidity and flooding can disrupt travel, especially in rural areas or where infrastructure is poor. North India receives less rain but still experiences short, intense downpours. Be prepared for delays, slippery surfaces, and occasional closures. Waterproof gear is essential.

Post-Monsoon (October to November)
This shoulder season brings clearer skies and retreating rains, especially in the north and west. Temperatures are pleasant — 15°C to 30°C in the north, 25–30°C in the south — with drier air and cooler nights. The landscapes, particularly in places like the Western Ghats and central India, remain lush and green. This is an excellent time for travel — ideal for photography, trekking, and exploring cultural sites. Southern states may still receive some rain from the northeast monsoon, but it's generally less disruptive.

Terrain & Travel

India’s terrain is incredibly diverse. In the north, the Himalayas rise sharply, with narrow, winding roads that connect remote villages. The central and southern regions have flat plains, forests, and rivers, while the west is dominated by arid deserts. Coastal areas are lined with sandy beaches and fertile deltas. Rural roads can be rough, often unpaved, making some places difficult to reach by car. In the countryside, hills, jungles, and valleys add to the mix, meaning conditions can change quickly from smooth highways to bumpy paths.

Travelling in India is an adventure, and the roads are a big part of that experience. You’ll find everything from smooth, modern highways to narrow, pothole-filled streets that make even short distances feel long. India has made major improvements to its road infrastructure, now hosting the world’s longest road network. Key expressways like the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway and national corridors are well-maintained, with signage, lighting, and rest stops. However, rural and city roads can still be affected by poor drainage, monsoon damage, and inconsistent maintenance, leading to unexpected delays and detours.

The type of road depends on where you're travelling. The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway and Yamuna Expressway make long-distance travel faster and smoother, designed with wide lanes, proper lighting, and service stations. National highways link major cities, though conditions vary—some are newly constructed with proper maintenance, while others are older, with potholes and unpredictable traffic. Rural roads and mountain passes can be rough, narrow, and winding, often due to a lack of consistent upkeep and natural wear from heavy monsoons. In cities, streets are often congested because of mixed traffic, with everything from buses to bicycles crammed into limited space. Some areas still have unpaved roads, especially in remote villages where infrastructure development is slower.

Traffic moves in a way that might feel unpredictable at first. Trucks, buses, rickshaws, motorbikes, and pedestrians all share the road, often weaving in and out without much warning, largely due to a lack of strict enforcement of traffic rules. Lane markings are more of a suggestion, and overtaking can happen from any direction due to informal driving habits and inconsistent rule enforcement, especially in congested areas. In big cities, expect to see people crossing anywhere since pedestrian crossings are rare or ignored, and motorbikes making sudden U-turns because traffic congestion makes planned turns difficult. Large trucks, often overloaded due to high transport demands, sometimes break down in the middle of the road, causing sudden traffic jams, especially at night when help is harder to find.

Cows are a part of daily life in many regions, especially rural areas, and often roam freely on roads due to their sacred status in Hindu culture. While urban management has improved in larger cities, animals like cows, goats, and stray dogs can still appear unexpectedly on roads, particularly in less-developed areas. You’ll see them standing in the middle of highways, strolling through intersections, or even taking a nap on a busy street. Drivers either wait patiently or steer around them because harming a cow can lead to serious legal and social consequences. In rural areas, stray dogs, goats, and sometimes even elephants can appear on the road, as villages often lack barriers to keep animals away from traffic.

Getting from one place to another can take longer than expected. A short drive on the map might turn into a slow crawl due to congestion, road conditions, or random delays like a broken-down truck blocking a lane. Travel times vary not just because of distance but also because roads, traffic behaviour, and even unexpected

events can slow things down. It can feel chaotic, but with a little patience, you'll start to see the rhythm in it all. It's all part of the adventure.

Suggested Packing Items

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection. Merino clothing is wonderful for layering, keeping you warm and cool, as well as being incredibly multi-purpose. Merino clothing does not sweat or retain odour. Dress on this trip is functional and casual, consisting of basic pants or everyday skirts, shirts, and sportswear. Your clothing should be modest to respect local cultural norms, especially in religious or rural areas.

Travel Documents & Money:

- ☐ Passport (with photocopies)
- ☐ Travel insurance (with photocopies)
- ☐ Airline tickets (e-ticket number)
- ☐ Cash in INR (Indian Rupees) (small denominations for tipping)
- ☐ Credit Card & ATM Card (See Money Matters section)
- ☐ Money belt or secure travel pouch

Luggage & Bags:

- ☐ 1 soft-sided bag (medium size approx. 80–100 litres) – for group tours
- ☐ Daypack (10–20 litres) – for daily essentials like water, camera, and snacks
- ☐ Lightweight reusable shopping bag (for markets or day use)

Clothing & Footwear:

- ☐ Shirts: A mix of short and long-sleeved breathable fabric (cotton/linen)
- ☐ Pants: Loose-fitting, lightweight trousers (avoid tight jeans for comfort)
- ☐ Comfortable walking or hiking shoes (sturdy for uneven terrain)
- ☐ Socks (moisture-wicking recommended)
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor
- ☐ Lightweight scarf or shawl (for religious sites, sun, or dust protection)
- ☐ Light rain jacket or windbreaker with hood (for unexpected cool weather)
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater (for cooler evenings)
- ☐ Fleece jacket or heavy sweater (if travelling to the Himalayan region)
- ☐ Swimsuit & cover-up
- ☐ Sturdy sandals
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Flip-flops or slippers for indoor use (especially for dusty cities or heritage sites)
- ☐ Close-toed shoes that you don't mind getting dirty (urban walking or street conditions)

Health & Personal Care:

- ☐ Prescription medications (enough for the trip)
- ☐ Sunscreen & lip balm (high SPF)

☐ Insect repellent
☐ ORS (Oral Rehydration Salts)
☐ Reusable water bottle with filter
☐ Personal first-aid kit (pain relievers, Band-Aids, antihistamines, diarrhoea relief, rehydration salts, etc.)
☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush/comb, shaving items, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, etc.
☐ Hand sanitiser & antibacterial wipes
☐ Pocket-size tissues (for toilets without paper)
☐ Wet wipes or cooling face mist
☐ Dramamine or motion sickness bands

Tech & Gear:
☐ Camera (with spare batteries & SD cards)
☐ Charger for devices & power bank (for areas with limited charging access)
☐ Plug adaptors
☐ Small flashlight or headlamp
☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses

Optional Items
☐ Gifts from home (for hosts or guides)
☐ Small notebook & pen (for journaling or note-taking)
☐ Snacks or energy bars (useful during long travel days)
☐ Small padlocks (for securing luggage)
☐ Earplugs (useful for light sleepers)
☐ Sewing kit & hand wash laundry soap (e.g., bar of sunlight soap)
☐ Travel journal
☐ Hand fan or battery-operated mini fan
☐ Sarong or Dupatta
☐ Temple socks
☐ Small umbrella
☐ Nasal mask or scarf for pollution
☐ Activated charcoal or probiotics – Helps with adjusting to different food hygiene standards.

Footwear

You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. We recommend you wear sturdy walking shoes, light hiking boots, or similar supportive sports shoes that offer good traction.

Also, pack a pair of sandals for hot weather and a pair of closed-toe shoes that can handle dust and rough streets. The sandals are nice for hot weather and look better with Indian-style clothing. Close-toed shoes are a necessity if you are going anywhere with colder weather, and are good to wear on the streets to protect your feet from the dust. Bring a pair of flip-flops or slippers to wear specifically indoors, since your outdoor shoes become very dirty from dust and debris on the roads.

Baggage Whilst on Tour

Our baggage allowance policy stipulates that each traveller is allowed to bring no more than 20kg of luggage per person. To ensure smooth logistics and efficient use of space in our vehicles, we recommend opting for a

soft-sided bag, as it offers greater flexibility when packing the vehicles. It's important to note that some accommodations may not have lifts or porterage, so it's important that you can carry your own bag. Being able to manage your own luggage is crucial.

Culture & Etiquette

In India, you'll encounter a fascinating mix of ancient tradition and modern life. In cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, you'll see global fashion and tech start-ups operating alongside centuries-old temples and family customs. In urban centres like Mumbai and Bangalore, fast-paced business culture, global fashion, and contemporary lifestyles are embraced, yet traditional values remain strong, particularly within families and social interactions. In rural villages, life moves more slowly and community ties run deep. You may witness daily rituals at roadside shrines, local festivals in full colour, or families gathering for meals cooked over open fires. Regardless of where you are, hospitality is a cornerstone of Indian culture. You'll likely be offered food and tea—sometimes more than once—as welcoming guests is considered a social duty.

Social Etiquette & Greetings

Indians typically greet each other with a warm "Namaste" (palms pressed together in front of the chest with a slight bow). It is a respectful and widely accepted greeting, especially in social and religious settings. In formal or business settings, a handshake is common, particularly in urban areas and among men. When greeting someone of the opposite gender, especially in more traditional or rural areas, it is best to wait and see how they initiate the greeting. Physical contact may be avoided by either person due to cultural or religious reasons.

Family plays an immense role in Indian society, often extending beyond immediate relatives. Decisions, especially regarding marriage, career, and finances, are often made collectively. Respect for elders is paramount, and younger people often touch the feet of elders as a sign of reverence. When visiting an Indian home, it's customary to remove your shoes at the entrance and accept any food or drink offered. Declining once or twice is often part of the hospitality ritual, but a firm and polite refusal is generally accepted after that. Accepting a small portion is usually appreciated.

Religion & Traditions

Religion permeates daily life in India, influencing everything from festivals to food habits. While Hinduism is the most widely practiced faith, India is also home to large Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, and Jain communities. Each religion brings its own traditions, temples, mosques, churches, and shrines, contributing to the country's vibrant spiritual landscape.

The daily schedule for many Indians revolves around prayer, and it's common to see people stopping to visit a temple or mosque on their way to work. During Ramadan, many Muslim-run businesses may have altered hours, and in Hindu-majority areas, major festivals like Diwali, Holi, and Navratri bring cities to life with lights, colours, and celebrations. Religious sensitivities should always be respected—visitors should dress modestly at places of worship, refrain from pointing their feet toward religious idols, and avoid touching holy objects without permission.

Public Behaviour & Sensitivities

Public behaviour in India is shaped by strong social customs. While people are generally warm and curious, there are a few unwritten rules worth keeping in mind. Public displays of affection between couples, such as kissing or hugging, are widely frowned upon, especially in smaller towns and rural areas. On the other hand, holding hands between same-gender friends is completely normal and seen as a sign of close friendship.

You may find that locals ask personal questions such as where you are from, whether you are married, or what you do for work. This is usually a friendly gesture, not an invasion of privacy. Raising your voice or arguing in public is considered poor manners, and confrontation is often avoided in favour of indirect communication.

At religious sites, remain quiet and respectful. If you are attending a religious festival or ceremony, be mindful that some events are meant only for participants and may not be open to visitors.

Dressing Respectfully

India's approach to dress varies by region. In larger cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, Western clothing is commonly worn, especially among younger people. However, modest clothing is still expected in many settings, particularly in religious sites, traditional neighbourhoods, and smaller towns.

For women, it is advisable to cover their shoulders and avoid short skirts or low necklines. Long skirts, loose-fitting trousers, and lightweight tops are considered appropriate and comfortable. In places of worship, a scarf or shawl may be required to cover the head. For men, long trousers and shirts are recommended. Shorts should be avoided in religious or rural areas. At mosques and Sikh temples, both men and women may need to cover their heads, so carrying a lightweight scarf is useful.

It is considered inappropriate to show too much leg or wear clothing with open necklines. Avoid short skirts, skimpy tank tops, and tight or revealing clothes. Fabrics like cotton and linen are best for staying cool while providing sufficient coverage. For women, suitable outfits include long skirts or trousers with a T-shirt. For men, long trousers and a short-sleeved shirt or T-shirt are widely accepted. Footwear must be removed when entering temples and other religious spaces.

Western clothes are worn alongside traditional Indian attire throughout the country. It is common to see locals in jeans, T-shirts, shirts, and sweaters. The key consideration is whether your clothing aligns with local expectations around modesty.

If you wish to try Indian clothing, consider the following options:

- **Kurta or kurti** – a long tunic available in various lengths and fabrics, often worn with leggings, salwar, or jeans. Styles range from everyday wear to more formal versions.
- **Churidar** – fitted leggings that gather at the ankles, typically worn under longer tunics.
- **Salwar** – loose-fitting trousers with a tighter fit at the ankle, usually worn with a tunic (salwar kameez) and a dupatta (long scarf).
- **Harem pants** – loose, flowing trousers that taper at the ankle, offering comfort and coverage.
- **Sari (or saree)** – a traditional unstitched garment wrapped around the body. While elegant, saris can be difficult to wear without practice, so they may not be ideal for short stays.

Markets offer clothing at very affordable prices, often between ₹100–₹200. However, quality may vary. Department stores such as Fab India and Anokhi provide higher-quality garments that are better suited to longer use but are priced more like Western retail outlets.

Quick-drying clothes are recommended, especially in humid regions or during the monsoon. Many hotels offer laundry services, and your tour leader can advise where facilities are available.

At beaches in places like Goa or Kerala, swimwear is acceptable on the beach but not in nearby streets or public areas. Topless sunbathing is not permitted. Away from the beach, women should wear a cover-up over swimwear.

Use your discretion and be respectful of cultural norms, especially when visiting religious sites or photographing people. Your tour leader will guide you on any specific expectations.

Dining & Social Customs

Food is an integral part of Indian hospitality, and meals are often a social affair. Whether eating at a restaurant or in someone's home, expect to be encouraged (sometimes insistently) to eat more. In traditional settings, meals are often served on banana leaves or metal thalis (platters), with multiple small dishes placed around rice or bread.

Many Indians eat with their right hand, using their fingers to mix rice with curry or scoop food with roti. The left hand is traditionally considered unclean, so it's best to use only your right hand when eating or handing things to others. If eating with a spoon and fork, the fork is used to push food onto the spoon.

If invited to someone's home, it's polite to bring a small gift, like sweets or fruit. Flowers can be a good option, but avoid gifting frangipani (plumeria), as they are associated with funerals. When drinking tea (chai), it is common to pour it into a saucer and sip if it is too hot—a practice that may seem unusual but is completely acceptable.

Visiting Etiquette

When visiting someone's home in India, it is customary to remove your shoes before entering. Greet your hosts with a polite "Namaste," palms together and a slight bow. If possible, bring a small gift, such as sweets or fruit, as a token of appreciation. Flowers are also a good option, though avoid frangipani, which is associated with funerals in some communities.

Arrive on time, but don't be surprised if the gathering starts later than scheduled — social timing can be flexible. If offered food or drink, it is polite to accept, even if only a small amount. Refusing entirely may be considered disrespectful. Avoid touching religious items or altars in the home unless invited, and always ask for permission before taking photographs indoors.

Photography

India offers remarkable opportunities for photography, from vibrant festivals and bustling markets to quiet village scenes and intricate temple architecture. However, it is important to be respectful and aware of local sensitivities.

Always ask permission before taking close-up portraits, particularly of women, older individuals, or in rural areas where people may be less comfortable being photographed. Many people are happy to pose for photos, but a polite request goes a long way.

Photography is generally allowed at temples and religious sites, though certain areas, such as sanctums or inner chambers, may be off-limits. The Golden Temple in Amritsar and some Hindu shrines restrict photography in specific zones. Look for signage or ask a guide before taking photos.

It is illegal to photograph border areas, government buildings, military facilities, or airports. These sites are considered sensitive and protected, and violations can result in serious penalties. Always follow local instructions, and when in doubt, ask before reaching for your camera.

Do:

- Greet with "Namaste": Use the traditional Indian greeting "Namaste" with a slight bow and folded hands when meeting locals.
- Remove Shoes Indoors: In homes, temples, and some restaurants, remove your shoes before entering.
- Dress Modestly: Wear modest clothing, covering shoulders and knees, especially when visiting religious sites.
- Respect Elders: Show respect to elders by touching their feet or with a simple nod.
- Eat with Your Right Hand: When eating with your hands, use your right hand, as the left is considered unclean.
- Ask for Permission: Seek permission before taking photos of people, especially in rural areas.
- Haggle Politely: Bargaining is common in markets, but do it respectfully and with a smile.

Don’t:

- Public Displays of Affection: Avoid public displays of affection, as they may be considered offensive in some areas.
- Point with Feet: Never point your feet at people or religious objects; it's considered disrespectful.
- Disrespect Religious Sites: Dress appropriately and behave respectfully when visiting temples or religious sites.
- Ignore the Caste System: Avoid discussing the caste system and don't ask people about their caste.
- Touch Heads: Do not touch people's heads, as it's considered sacred and impolite.
- Show the Soles of Your Feet: Avoid showing the soles of your feet to others, as it's considered disrespectful.
- Eat with Your Left Hand: Using your left hand for eating or offering items is considered impolite.
- Disregard Local Customs: Be mindful of local customs and practices; always ask for guidance when uncertain.

Daily Life & Essentials

Accommodation & Facilities

India offers a broad mix of accommodation styles, ranging from sleek city hotels to more culturally immersive stays. While your trip includes quality four-star and above hotels, you may also stay in heritage properties, converted havelis (traditional mansions), desert camps, or homestays, depending on your itinerary.

In large cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, international hotel chains and boutique hotels provide modern comforts like air conditioning, hot showers, and Wi-Fi. Service levels vary — in some places, staff are highly attentive and eager to assist, often expecting tips for extra services such as carrying luggage.

In smaller towns and rural areas, even higher-end hotels can feel a little dated. You might encounter older plumbing, occasional maintenance issues, or slower internet. Many heritage stays, including palaces and former royal residences, offer charm and atmosphere, but not always the conveniences of a modern hotel. Rooms may have antique furniture, heavy wooden doors, or unusual layouts that reflect the property's original structure.

Homestays are common in regions like Kerala and the Himalayas, offering clean, simple rooms and a warm introduction to local life. Meals are often homemade, and while privacy is more limited than in hotels, the hospitality is usually exceptional. In some religious or spiritual regions, you may also encounter ashrams, which offer very basic accommodation and a quiet, contemplative environment — these are not typically included in standard itineraries, but are part of India's broader lodging landscape.

In Rajasthan, itineraries may include nights in desert camps, with walk-in tents, proper beds, and en-suite bathrooms. Though hot water can be limited, the desert setting, traditional music, and camel rides make for a memorable experience.

A few things to keep in mind:

- Hotel check-out is typically by noon, with check-in from 2.00 to 3.00 pm.
- Power cuts are rare in cities but still possible. Many hotels have backup generators, though a portable power bank is useful.
- Street noise is common, especially in cities. Earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones are a good idea.
- Some older hotels may not appear on maps or have easy-to-find addresses. Keep your hotel's phone number handy for drivers.
- Smaller hotels may not have alcohol licences.
- Internet speeds can be slower than expected, particularly in rural areas.
- Mattresses are often firmer than what you may be used to.
- Room service and housekeeping can be slower than Western standards — flexibility and patience are helpful.

Cuisine

We've selected trusted local restaurants and food outlets for group meals throughout your trip, and consider these establishments safe to eat at. However, do exercise caution with street food and raw produce. Fruit you peel yourself is generally fine, but it's best to avoid raw salads, unpeeled fruit, and any uncooked items that may have been washed in tap water, as waterborne illness remains a common concern.

India’s cuisine is deeply regional, with dishes shaped by geography, religion, and centuries of trade and migration. Meals are often rich in flavour, featuring bold spice blends, slow-cooked vegetables, and layered textures. Food is a key part of Indian culture, and sharing meals is considered an act of hospitality, but visitors should also be mindful of common digestive upsets, sometimes referred to as “Delhi Belly.”

North and South

India's north and south have distinct culinary traditions. In the north, dairy plays a central role — many dishes include curd, cream, paneer (cottage cheese), and ghee. Bread is a staple, with roti, naan, and paratha served at nearly every meal. Northern curries tend to be thicker and less spicy than their southern counterparts.

In contrast, southern Indian food is typically hotter and tangier, with tamarind, mustard seeds, and curry leaves featuring heavily. Coconut is used widely, both in cooking and as oil. Rice is the staple grain, often served alongside lentil-based stews like sambar or thin, spicy rasam. Dosas, idlis, and uttapams — made from fermented rice and lentil batter — are common breakfast options.

Western India

Western cuisine also varies widely. Goa is known for its Portuguese-influenced fish curries and the local spirit feni, distilled from cashew apples or coconut. In Maharashtra, seafood is common along the coast, while vegetarian thalis dominate in interior regions. Rajasthan’s arid climate has shaped a cuisine that relies on dried lentils, pickles, ghee-rich curries, and hearty meat dishes like laal maas (spicy mutton curry). Dishes are often designed to last without refrigeration.

Eastern India

Eastern India is especially famous for its sweets, many of which are made from curdled milk (chhena) or semolina. Popular options include gulab jamun, sandesh, and rasgulla. Fish is a staple in Bengali cuisine, typically cooked with mustard seeds, mustard oil, and green chillies. Rice remains central to most meals, often paired with light vegetable curries and fried snacks.

Drinks

Chai (sweet spiced tea with milk) is the most widely consumed drink across India and is served in homes, roadside stalls, and train stations alike. Lassi — a cooling yoghurt-based drink — is especially popular in the north, with mango lassi being a tourist favourite. Fresh fruit juices are widely available, including sugarcane, guava, and mango, though it's best to avoid fresh juices unless you’re confident they’re made with filtered or bottled water and clean equipment. Other traditional drinks include jal jeera (a tangy cumin-flavoured water) and coconut water, especially in coastal regions.

Coffee is more common in southern India, particularly in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, where filter coffee is brewed strong and served with milk and sugar.

Shops & Souvenirs

When shopping for souvenirs in India, explore local markets, artisan workshops, and government emporiums for authentic and culturally significant treasures that will remind you of your journey through this enchanting country. Some popular souvenirs are:

- Handwoven Textiles: Silk saris, intricate pashmina shawls, or colourful Rajasthani turbans.
- Handcrafted Gold jewellery featuring traditional Indian motifs.
- Spices and Tea, such as saffron, cardamom, or turmeric, and sample high-quality Indian teas like Darjeeling and Assam.
- Rajasthan, in particular, is famous for its intricate miniature paintings. These art pieces often depict scenes from Indian mythology or regal life.
- Ayurvedic products, such as oils, soaps, and beauty products, are rooted in ancient Indian medicinal practices.
- Hand-Carved Wooden Items, such as furniture, sculptures, or kitchenware.
- Indian Musical Instruments: If you have a penchant for music, consider bringing home traditional Indian instruments like sitars, tabla drums, or flutes.
- Artisan Pottery: Explore pottery from regions like Khurja in Uttar Pradesh, known for its hand-painted ceramic creations.
- Mughal-Style Carpets: Kashmir produces exquisite hand-knotted carpets, featuring intricate designs and vibrant colors.
- Decorative Items: Embellish your living spaces with unique Indian decor, including brass idols, marble inlays, or vibrant glass bangles.

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to manage the transport of any items you purchase, including compliance with fumigation, customs, and quarantine regulations. If you plan to ship souvenirs home, use only licensed international courier services that provide insurance and tracking. Do not ask guides, hotel staff, or unregistered individuals to carry or send items on your behalf, as this may breach customs laws and void any coverage.

Any artefacts or goods purchased on a Crooked Compass tour are carried at your own risk. This includes responsibility for transportation, damage, insurance, and compliance with local or international import laws.

The export of wildlife products and game trophies, including animal teeth, horns, shells, claws, bones, feathers, or skins, is strictly regulated under Indian law and international agreements such as CITES. These items cannot be taken out of India without an official permit. Violations may result in serious legal penalties. Souvenirs made from non-wildlife materials like textiles, wood or metal can usually be exported without restriction.

Crooked Compass does not take responsibility for the transportation or delivery of any goods purchased or shipped during your tour.

Toilets & Bathrooms

One aspect unique to India is the prevalence of squat toilets in various regions. While squat toilets are found in several countries, they are particularly common in India, especially in rural areas and older establishments. These toilets require users to squat over a hole or drain in the floor, which can be a distinct experience for travellers who are not accustomed to this style of toilet. Squat toilets are common in rural areas, train stations, and roadside rest stops, while most hotels and urban establishments provide Western-style toilets. It's important to be prepared for this variation in toilet facilities when visiting India and to adapt to local customs and practices.

High-end hotels in major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Jaipur have fully equipped modern bathrooms, often with rainfall showers, good water pressure, and Western-style toilets. Hot water may not be available around the clock, especially in older or heritage-style accommodations. Some properties may only provide hot water during set hours, so it's a good idea to confirm this at check-in.

In older heritage hotels, bathrooms may have a quirky, vintage feel, with large bathtubs, old-fashioned plumbing, or lower water pressure. These hotels offer charm and character, but don’t always have the sleek modernity of a chain hotel.

If staying in a homestay or guesthouse, bathrooms may be simpler, and in some cases, you may need to request hot water in advance. Bucket showers (a large bucket filled with warm water and a smaller jug for pouring) are still common in some homes, especially in rural areas.

Many Indians do not use toilet paper, instead relying on a water hose (bidet spray) or a small bucket of water. In hotels and tourist areas, toilet paper is usually provided, but it’s best not to flush it—many plumbing systems can’t handle it, so you’ll often see bins provided for disposal. Additionally, the practice of using a bucket and mug for personal hygiene after using the toilet, instead of toilet paper, is unique to India and some other Asian countries.

Public restrooms in India can range from basic to non-existent. In airports, high-end restaurants, and shopping malls, you’ll generally find clean, Western-style toilets with toilet paper and soap. In major cities, clean public toilets are increasingly available through government-run apps or smart toilet initiatives. However, in smaller towns, markets, and remote areas, facilities may still be basic or unavailable. It’s best to carry tissues, hand sanitiser, and small change, as many public toilets charge a small fee (5–10 INR).

Recommendations

Reading

- ***A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth** – An epic family saga set in post-partition India, rich in cultural and political detail.
- ***The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy** – A Booker Prize-winning novel exploring childhood, caste, and tragedy in Kerala.
- ***India After Gandhi* by Ramachandra Guha** – A compelling modern history of India from independence to the present day.
- ***Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo** – A powerful non-fiction account of life in a Mumbai slum, told with literary precision.
- ***Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts** – A fast-paced novel (partly autobiographical) set in the underworld of Bombay.

Viewing

- ***The Lunchbox* (2013)** – A quiet, beautifully acted story about an unlikely connection formed through Mumbai's lunch delivery system.
- ***Gandhi* (1982)** – A historical biopic tracing Mahatma Gandhi's life and India's path to independence.
- ***Pather Panchali* (1955)** – The first film in Satyajit Ray's acclaimed Apu Trilogy, offering a moving glimpse into rural Bengali life.
- ***Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)** – A gritty and energetic film exploring life in Mumbai through a game show twist.
- ***Monsoon Wedding* (2001)** – A joyful, chaotic portrait of a big Punjabi family preparing for a modern arranged marriage.
- ***Kumaré* (2011)** – A thought-provoking documentary about spiritual identity and authenticity, filmed in India and the U.S.

Final Word

India is a journey for all the senses—a place where ancient traditions and modern life exist side by side in a whirlwind of colour, sound, and energy. From the serenity of the Ganges at sunrise to the bustling chaos of Delhi's streets, every moment in India offers something new to discover.

At Crooked Compass, we believe travel is about immersing yourself in the extraordinary, stepping beyond the expected, and experiencing a country in a way that stays with you long after you leave. India will challenge, surprise, and inspire you—it's a destination where patience, curiosity, and an open mind will reward you with unforgettable encounters and breathtaking sights.

We'd love to hear about your experience! If you enjoyed your journey, please consider leaving a Google review to help fellow travellers discover what makes Jordan and Crooked Compass special. You can share your thoughts here:

Review us here

We also encourage you to share your photos and stories with us on social media so we can follow along on your adventure!

Facebook: @Crookedcompasstravel #FollowADifferentPath #crookedcompass
X: @CrookedCompass #FollowADifferentPath #crookedcompass
Instagram: @crooked_compass #FollowADifferentPath #crookedcompass

Emergency Contact Procedure Reminder and Information

Ensuring the safety and well-being of our guests is of paramount importance to us at Crooked Compass. We would like to take this opportunity to remind you about our emergency contact procedure and where to find your contact details, as well as provide guidance on what to do in different emergency situations.

Local Crooked Compass 24/7 Assistance Contact can be found on the **first and fourth page** of your detailed itinerary. This is the **first point** of contact for any concerns or queries whilst in destination for all types of assistance.

Emergency Services Page 6 in this document.

Notify Crooked Compass (Non Urgent)
For any non-urgent enquiries, please contact our office within Australian office hours (Mon – Fri, 9am – 5.30pm AEST) on +61 2 8089 1370 or via email info@crooked-compass.com

Consular Assistance Please familiarize yourself with your local embassy's details before travel.