

BIG FIVE[®]

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Destination Information Guide

India



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Welcome to the World of Big Five!

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



AVERAGE TEMPERATURES & RAINFALL

Calcutta, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	67	73	81	86	86	86	85	84	84	82	76	68
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.3	0.8	1.2	1.6	4.6	11.9	13.1	10.4	11.7	4.4	1.2	0
Delhi, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	68	73	83	95	101	101	93	91	92	90	81	71
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.6	2.7	7.9	7.9	4.8	0.7	0.1	0.4
Mumbai, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	75	77	81	84	86	85	83	82	82	84	81	78
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	---	---	---	---	0.5	22.3	25.6	19.2	14	3.5	0.2	---
Chennai, India												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	76	79	83	87	91	90	87	86	85	83	79	77
Average Precipitation												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.7	1.7	2.1	3.9	4.9	4.9	11.2	13.2	5.4

WEATHER

The climate of India ranges from snowy Himalayan Mountains to temperate coastal regions to continental climate of inland areas. Most areas of India enjoy a pleasant and sunny climate during the months of October through March, which are the most popular times for tourists. Summer months in India are hot and humid but thanks to air-conditioned hotels and transportation, India has become a year round destination for travel. Monsoon rains usually start in mid-June in southern India and travel north. They last until August or early September. Because of India's enormous size, rains and weather vary greatly with region.

TIME ZONES & FLIGHT TIMES

Standard Time in India is 5½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least 3 blank pages are necessary.

Visas: Many countries require travelers to obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Trivisa to process required visas for our passengers. You can find the necessary forms from Trivisa's website at: www.trivisa.com. Please use account code JP1551, and follow the directions.

Important: Even if you do not need a visa prior to departure, please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

Note: Remember to carry with you in a safe place photocopies of all important documents in the event your passport or other documents are lost or stolen. Also, it's a good idea to have a passport photo with you. As a tourist, you will need to produce your passport when booking in at hotels, changing money or travelers' checks and prove your identity whenever requested by a policeman.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

When leaving India, remember Rupees are not allowed out of the country. You must exchange them before you leave. Banking facilities for the conversion of rupees into foreign currency are usually located in the same airport hall as the check-in counters. You have no access to these facilities once you pass through Immigration.

Note: If you are traveling with items that have batteries, i.e. camera, video equipment, walkman radio, etc., please be sure to remove them and pack them in a separate plastic bag inside luggage to be checked. Do not carry them with you because the airlines will take them away from you. They regard these as potential weapons.

CUSTOMS INTO INDIA

Travelers may mail, duty free, packages valued at up to \$200 to themselves and up to \$100 to others with a limit of one parcel per addressee per day. Packages must be identified as being for personal use or an unsolicited gift, specify the contents and retail value. Mailed items do not count as part of your exemption.

Duty-Free Items: (a) 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250 grams of tobacco; (b) Alcoholic liquor & wine up to 1 liter each. Personal effects and travel souvenirs are allowed if: (a) These goods are for personal use of the tourist, and (b) These goods, other than those consumed during the stay in India, are re-exported when the tourist leaves India for a foreign destination. (c) Gifts up to a value of Rs.4000.

Please note: You may be asked at security to turn on a laptop computer or a video camera to prove that they are what they appear to be. X-rays do not harm hard disk or floppy disk storage. If you are bringing dutiable articles or high value articles into India with you, they must be entered on a Tourist Baggage Re-Export Form (TBRE). These articles must be re-exported at the time of departure. Failure to re-export anything listed on the TBRE form means you'll have to pay a duty levied for each missing item.

Prohibited Items: You absolutely may not bring in dangerous drugs, firearms, gold coins, gold and silver bullion, silver coins not in use, any Indian currency, or any live plants.

US CUSTOMS

Duty-Free: Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. Travelers 21 or older may bring back 1 liter of alcohol duty free, 100 non-Cuban cigars and 200 cigarettes. Regulations frequently change. For a list of exempt

items & current regulations you can Contact the nearest Customs Office, write US Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044, or visit the US Customs Border Protection website: www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml.

Prohibited Items: Although widely available for purchase, animal skins and ivory are not allowed in the United States. Generally items more than 100 years old cannot be exported without a permit.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Visitors to India should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date.

Currently, no official health certificates are required of travelers coming from U.S. and Canada. Recommended inoculations are Hepatitis A Booster and a Malaria prescription. Any inoculations should be recorded in an official Vaccination Certificate and carried with you at all times. Keep a copy of it as well as other important documents in a safe place. It is recommended that visitors obtain a prescription for malaria precaution. The best protection against malaria is to take a course of anti-malaria tablets. Most travelers to the Indian Subcontinent at risk should take mefloquine to prevent malaria. In a malaria region, you should avoid wearing perfume or after-shave lotion that attracts mosquitoes. It's advisable to wear long sleeves and long trousers at night for the same reason. Malaria risk exists in some urban and many rural areas, depending on elevation. A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required for entry if you are coming from countries in tropical South America or sub-Saharan Africa. (There is no risk for yellow fever in the Indian Subcontinent.)

Dengue, fiariasis, Japanese encephalitis, leishmaniassis, and plague are carried by insects and also occur in this region. Protecting yourself against insect bites will help to prevent these diseases.

The sun in India can be intense. Be aware of overexposure even in cloudy days. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 24. If traveling higher than 10,000 feet, use zinc oxide or lip balm with sun block and keep your eyes protected behind

sunglasses that block ultraviolet rays. When you're in snow, remember that UV rays reflect from below.

Altitude sickness: If you visit the Himalayan Mountains, ascend gradually to allow time for your body to adjust to the high altitude, which can cause insomnia, headaches, nausea, and altitude sickness. In addition, use sun block rated at least 15 SPF, because the risk of sunburn is greater at high altitudes.

Please Note: If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage. Tourist places in India are equipped with superb medical facilities.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

Your wardrobe should be planned according to itinerary and season. Light and loose-fitting clothes are suitable most of the year in India. In winter, one light and one heavy sweater plus a jacket or windbreaker is necessary, especially in the North, where daily temperatures vary widely. Lighter clothing would be sufficient in the south and along the coast. Cottons are good for summer, but try to avoid synthetics as they do not "breathe." In India, delicate fabrics do not stand up well to laundering facilities. Leave delicates and dry cleanable clothing home. Sneakers and comfortable walking shoes are recommended. ***Please be aware that you will have to remove your shoes to enter the sanctorum when visiting temples.*** Remember that what is appropriate in the West isn't necessarily appropriate in the East. Only children can get away with short shorts. Men should dress in comfortable jeans or long shorts. Tee shirts are okay. If it's warm, women should stick to skirts and lightweight slacks. *To enter a holy shrine, women should wear a below-the-knee skirt, dress, or neat pants.*

Do not wear tops with scooped or plunging necklines. While many women wear shorts in the mountains or coastal areas, women in cities who reveal any bare legs will attract undesired attention. Bathing suits should be conservative. Travel in a Muslim community calls for even more discretion. In colder weather, you can make the most of your wardrobe by triple layering. The layer next to your skin should be made of synthetic fibers that carry moisture away from your skin. Cotton soaks up perspiration and makes you wet. The second layer should be wool, fleece or a synthetic fabric knitted into thick pile. The third layer can be a well-made, generously sized windbreaker or lightweight, insulated parka that not only allows moisture to escape but is waterproof, not merely water-repellent. In winter, you need light wool clothes. A high-altitude trekker needs down jacket, windproof jacket, wool shirts & trousers, lightweight trekking boots (plastic boots for peak climbing), wool or wool-blend socks, sun & snow goggles, sun hat and glasses, light rain coat (for monsoon season), gloves, scarves, and water bottle. For all treks, hikers need sleeping bags that fit the altitude as well as the season.

LUGGAGE

Please see general luggage and clothing sheet in your pre-departure materials.

MONEY

The units of Indian currency are the Rupee (Rs) and Paisa. 100 Paisa equal one Rupee. Paper money comes in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 rupees: coins in denominations of one, two, and five rupees.

Always exchange money with an authorized money-changer and insist on receiving an encashment slip.

Do not accept torn bills. International airports have currency exchange booths. When you change money, remember to get some money in small denominations. Your hotel or a bank can also exchange money for you. At most hotels, you can change money, but banks offer a better rate. However, the process takes longer and is done mainly in the mornings. Many merchants, hotels, and restaurants won't accept worn or torn bills. Do not plan to use personal checks. Use cash to rural areas and small towns, and travelers' checks in cities. Credit cards and travelers' checks are accepted at hotels, big department stores, and some fine restaurants. U.S. travelers' checks are recommended.

COMMUNICATION

Language: Officially, India has 16 languages, 12 of which originate from Sanskrit. These are: Assamese, Gujarati, Bengali, Kashmiri, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil, and Urdu. More than 840 other languages and dialects are spoken around the country. The most widely spoken language is Hindi. English is one of the original languages and is widely spoken. India, surnames are listed last. Men in Hindi are known as "Sahib" which indicates Mr. and is used after the surname. Women are known as "Ji" which is used after the first name.

ELECTRICITY

The electrical current in India is 220V, 50 cycles alternating current (AC), so you will need to bring a converter and an adapter. Some areas might have DC supply as well. Many large hotels have 110V and some hotels produce step-down transformers so you may use voltage that is suitable for your appliance. Be sure to check with your hotel to see if the stabilizers are functioning in your room before plugging in your appliance. Wall outlets take plugs with two round prongs. Blackouts and loss of power is very common. Never plug in your computer into any socket before asking about surge protection. Some hotels do not have built-in current stabilizers, and extreme electrical fluctuations and surges can short your adapter or even destroy your computer.

FOOD & DRINK

Travelers' diarrhea and stomach upsets are the most common complaints. To prevent these, be careful what you eat. Stay away from ice, uncooked food, salads that have been washed in tap water, and milk not pasteurized. It is advisable to drink only bottled mineral water, soft drinks, bottled beer, coffee or tea. Drink only bottled water from reputable hotels or shops and make sure the cap has not been tampered with. Use bottled water to brush teeth and clean contacts. You may wish to talk to your doctor about a general antibiotic to take to treat travelers' diarrhea or take one of the many medications on the market such as Pepto-Bismol. Bring tablets or medicine for stomach ailments.

Indians care about food. It has become a personal and traditional experience. Home-cooked breads have become a fine art. Ingredients commonly used in Indian cuisine are curry powders, ginger, yogurt and garlic. Indians give a great deal of consideration what combinations of ingredients should be used in each dish for a balance of flavor and texture.

Some Indian states observe a weekly meatless day, when no slaughtering is done and no red meat is sold or served in most restaurants. Indian dishes vary greatly throughout the country. Western alcoholic beverages are expensive. Indian beer can be bought for a much cheaper price. Dry days, when alcohol is not available in India, are observed on January 26, August 15 and 2 October. Some states observe additional dry days, while other states only allow consumption of beer. Fruits are some of the best grown in the world, including mango, papaya, pineapple, apples, grapefruit, strawberries, and bananas. But, in restaurants, avoid raw vegetables and fruit that have been peeled before they are brought to you. At many restaurants, the vegetables are imported or presoaked in an iodine preparation to kill parasites. Be sure to ask the waiter before you indulge. Pork products should be avoided, and all meats should be thoroughly cooked. Eat hot foods when they are hot. Many hotels tend to cook Indian food with a large amount of oil, which can trigger "Delhi Belly." Note that it is usual custom to eat with your right hand, and using bread as a scoop.

TIPPING

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to:
www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide

SHOPPING

Leave plenty of space in your luggage. Look around before you buy. Shopping is recommended at government approved emporiums and shops. It is worth buying the best and avoiding junk produced for tourists and sold from stalls besides monuments. Handicrafts are beautiful and include top-quality silk, cotton, and leather goods as well as wood and horn carvings, brass, marble, and ceramic items. "Birdi" work, a metal craft exclusively Indian, has a jet-black surface streaked with silver. Handloom fabrics include cotton, silk, wool, lace, and brocades. Gauze scarves and saris from Kashmir, Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Mysore as available as are exquisite "Chikan" work and delicate hand embroidery from Lucknow. Carpets from Kashmir and traditional as well as modern jewelry set in both gold and silver can be found at irresistible prices. Rosewood and walnut carvings and paper mache objects are also readily available.

You may ship goods directly to your home by paying a deposit (usually 50 percent of the cost), and balance payable upon receipt (COD) back home. **Do not buy wild animal skins or ivory; it is illegal.** Before purchasing any item that a shopkeeper claims is 100 years old or older, ask for an export permit. A reputable shopkeeper will have the permit or help you secure one. Otherwise, the item is either a fake or has not been approved by the government for export. In bazaars, bargaining is expected. Try offering a third of the price, and settle for 60%.

TRADITIONS VISITING HOLY SITES

Visiting religious monuments demands respect. Remove your shoes before entering a shrine, even if it seems in ruins. In some places, such as the Taj Mahal, cloth overshoes are provided for a small charge. All religions ask that you do not smoke or drink alcoholic beverages on the premises or speak in raised voices. Some structures are off-limits to visitors who do not practice the faith. **Please respect this.** Women should always be dressed properly, and should cover their heads before entering a Sikh (gurdwara) temple or mosque. When you enter a mosque, you are supposed to step right foot first over the threshold into the courtyard. Some Hindu and Jain temples prohibit all leather products inside a shrine -- shoes, belts, handbags, camera cases. Many temples also expect you to purify yourself by washing your hands and feet in a nearby tap or tank before you enter. No visitor in a gurdwara should point his or her feet toward the Holy Book or step over any one sitting in prayer or meditation. In general, play it safe. If you decide to sit on the floor of a Hindu or Sikh temple, sit cross-legged or with your feet tucked beneath you. In some religious shrines, sexes are separated. Look around before you sit, and let the situation govern what you do. **Many unthinking tourists commit an unforgivable sacrilege when they visit a Buddhist monastery.** You are welcome to spin any prayer wheel, but be aware that just as you must circumambulate the interior and exterior of a monastery, stupa, or mani wall in a clockwise direction, you must follow this rule when you spin a prayer wheel. Inside the monastery, interior cushions and chairs are reserved for lamas (monks). Sit on the steps outside or on the floor. If you have the opportunity to meet a rimpoché (head lama), or a respected monk, it's polite not to turn your back on him when you leave. Also remove your hat and lower an umbrella within the confines of a monastery.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com, and Longitude Books, www.longitudebooks.com, have collections of books, searchable by country.

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

E. M. Forster

A group of English visitors want to see the "real" India, and in Dr. Aziz they find a highly civilized companion. During a visit to the Marabar caves, one of the women accuses Dr. Aziz of sexually assaulting her, triggering a chain of events that will change the lives of people on both sides of this complex conflict. Arguably Forster's greatest novel, *A Passage to India* transforms the personal into the political and actor Sam Dastor brilliantly evokes the mood, setting, and accents of this Forster classic.

ALL THE FISHES COME HOME TO ROOST: AN AMERICAN MISFIT IN INDIA

Rachel Manija Brown

In the bestselling tradition of *Running with Scissors* and *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, this is hilarious, affecting memoir of the author's upbringing in an ashram in India. In 1980, when she was seven, the author's parents, 60s-holdover hippies, leave California for an ashram in a cobra-ridden, drought stricken spot in India. Rachel is the only foreign child in a hundred-mile radius. The ashram is devoted to Meher Baba, best known as the guru to Pete Townsend and thus for having inspired some songs by the Who, for having kept a lifelong vow of silence, and for having coined the slogan, "Don't worry, be happy." Cavorting through these pages are some wonderfully eccentric characters - including a holy madman permanently doubled over from years of stooping to collect invisible objects; a senile librarian who nightly sings scales outside Rachel's window, only with grunts instead of notes; and a middle-aged male virgin who begs Rachel to critique his epic spiritual poems. Somehow, Rachel manages to keep her wits and humor about her when everyone else seems to have lost touch with reality. Astutely observed and laugh-out-loud funny, this astonishing debut memoir marks the arrival of a major new literary talent.

GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Arundhati Roy

The international publishing sensation of 1997 -- translated into 18 languages -- a magical, sophisticated tour de force now available in a stunning Vintage Canada edition. The *God of Small Things* heralds a voice so powerful and original that it burns itself into the reader's memory. Set mainly in Kerala, India, in 1969, it is the story of Rahel and her twin brother Estha, who learn that their whole world can change in a single day, that love and life can be lost in a moment. Armed only with the invincible innocence of children, they seek to craft a childhood for themselves amid the wreckage that constitutes their family. Sweet and heartbreaking, ribald and profound, this is a novel to set beside those of Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

EYEWITNESS: INDIA

Manini Chatterjee, Anita Roy

Here is a compelling and visually stunning guide to the rich diversity of life in India. Superb, full-color photographs show fascinating customs and rituals together with exquisite artworks, artifacts, and temples -- offering a unique "eyewitness" view of this intriguing nation. See: the biggest silver object in the world - the lost ruins of the Harappa civilization - the home of the Bengal tiger the elephant god Ganesh - the beauty of the Taj Mahal Learn: how Buddha gained enlightenment - about the history of the British Raj - why Indians love Bollywood - how India gained its independence - about the beautiful art of miniature painting Discover: the splendor of the Mughal dynasty - the art of Indian storytelling - Gandhi's philosophy - how India has embraced the computer revolution - what Kathakali is and much, much more.

INDIA: A HISTORY

John Keay

John Keay's *India: A History* is a probing and provocative chronicle of five thousand years of South Asian history, from the first Harrapan settlements on the banks of the Indus River to the recent nuclear-arms race. In a tour de force of narrative history, Keay blends together insights from a variety of scholarly fields and weaves them together to chart the evolution of the rich tapestry of cultures, religions, and peoples that makes up the modern nations of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Authoritative and eminently readable, *India: A History* is a compelling epic portrait of one of the world's oldest and most richly diverse civilizations.

MAXIMUM CITY: BOMBAY LOST AND FOUND

Suketu Mehta

A brilliantly illuminating portrait of Bombay and its people—a book as vast, diverse, and rich in experience, incident, and sensation as the city itself—from an award-winning Indian-American fiction writer and journalist. Native of Bombay, Suketu Mehta gives us a true insider's view of this stunning city, bringing to his account a rare level of insight, detail, and intimacy. He approaches the city from unexpected angles—taking us into the criminal underworld of rival Muslim and Hindu gangs who wrest control of the city's Byzantine political and commercial systems . . . following the life of a bar dancer who chose the only life available to her after a childhood of poverty and abuse . . . opening the doors onto the fantastic, hierarchical inner sanctums of Bollywood . . . delving into the stories of the countless people who come from the villages in search of a better life and end up living on the sidewalks—the essential saga of a great city endlessly played out. Through it all—as each individual story unfolds—we hear Mehta's own story: of the mixture of love, frustration, fascination, and intense identification he feels for and with Bombay, as he tries to find home again after twenty-one years abroad. And he makes clear that Bombay—the world's largest city—is a harbinger of the vast megalopolises that will redefine the very idea of "the city" in the near future. Candid, impassioned, funny, and heartrending, *Maximum City* is a revelation of an ancient and ever-changing world.

For Young Readers

MOLLY MOON'S HYPNOTIC TIME TRAVEL ADVENTURE

Georgia Byng

Molly Moon meets...Molly Moon? In this third book in the New York Times best-selling series, Molly Moon may have finally met her match. She heads to India to learn more about the ancient art of hypnosis, and runs into her arch nemesis...and, through time-travel experiments, younger versions of herself! Who is the real Molly Moon? Ages: 8 – 12.

HOMELESS BIRD

Gloria Whelan

A National Book Award winner. Age: 10

In India, it's not so strange for a girl Koly's age to be getting married -- even if she is only 13. She leaves home forever full of courage and hope...until she discovers there's been a terrible mistake. The husband chosen for her is too young, and he's very ill. And as tradition dictates, it's too late to turn back. Koly's future, it would seem, is lost. Alive with the crush of marketplace crowds, the thick smell of funeral garlands, the cooling rush of the holy river Ganges, and the sting of injustice as a girl's life is forsaken, master storyteller Gloria Whelan transports readers into the heart of a gripping tale of hope. Here is the story of one rare woman who, standing against the powerful current of tradition, discovers her own remarkable future.