

Best of India

Country(ies): India

Tour type: Small Group

Transport: A/C minivan/minibus, Houseboat

Group size: Min: 2 | Max: 12

Days: 16 Days

Start location: Delhi, India

End location: Kochi, India

Departs On: Saturday

Meals: Breakfasts - 15, Lunches - 2, Dinners - 2

Highlights:

Delhi, Agra, Taj Mahal, Suroth Mahal, Pink City of Jaipur, Kochi, Tea Plantations of Munnar, Town of Thekkady, Periyar NP, Kumarakom Backwaters, Houseboat stay

Places Visited: Delhi, Agra, Taj Mahal, Suroth Mahal, Pink City of Jaipur, Kochi, Tea Plantations of Munnar, Town of Thekkady, Periyar NP, Kumarakom Backwaters, Houseboat stay



Itinerary

Day 1: Welcome to Delhi, transfer to hotel included

Once you arrive in Delhi, you'll be met by one of our local staff, who will transfer you to your hotel. Once you're settled in, we'll run through the tour itinerary for the next few days, brief you on the local area and arrange a time to collect you tomorrow.

OVERNIGHT: Delhi hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Extra day in Delhi - pre-tour || Single room supplement (INSGBI)

Day 2: Exploring Delhi, Rickshaw Ride & Street Food Tasting

Your day starts with a morning tour of India's capital, New Delhi. Built on the banks of the Yamuna river, New Delhi is a beautiful blend of a historical past and a vibrant present.

We start at India Gate in the centre of New Delhi, a 42-metre high "Arc-de-Triomphe" like archway, a war memorial built to commemorate the 82,000 soldiers who partook in the undivided Indian Army. We'll drive past various government buildings such as the President's Palace and the Parliament of India, before passing Humayun's Tomb - a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Bangla Sahab Gurudwara Sikh Temple.

We'll stop at Connaught Place Station and join the locals on the metro to Old Delhi where we'll walk through one of the oldest and busiest markets in Old Delhi, Chandni Chowk, before exploring the narrow streets of Chawri Bazar which specialises in selling brass, copper and paper products. Throughout the afternoon our guide will also introduce you to the wide range of street food snacks and delicacies so you can get your first authentic taste of the delicious and varied Indian cuisine. Our walking tour will also take in a rickshaw ride and the Jama Masjid mosque, one of the largest in India.

OVERNIGHT: Delhi hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 3: Head to Agra. Sheroes Hangout, Mughal Heritage Walk. First glimpse of the Taj Mahal

We head to Agra this morning, home of the famous Taj Mahal. After arriving in Agra we'll make a stop for lunch at the Sheroes Hangout Cafe. The cafe was set up by the Chhanv Foundation and is run by victims of acid attacks. The cafe works to raise awareness of acid attacks in India and to empower those who have sadly been the victims of these heinous crimes. Prior to gaining employment in the cafe, many of the 'Sheroes' led solitary lives, rarely going outside due to shame associated with their scars. At Encounters Travel we're proud to support such an organisation, which has the sole aim of helping these women find acceptance, a supportive community and a means of income. Lunch will be included whilst at the cafe.

Once you've checked in into your hotel, we'll spend the afternoon on a Mughal Heritage Walk through the ancient village of Kachhpura and surrounding farmland on the banks of the Yamuna River across from the Taj Mahal and Red Fort. This walk has been designed by a local NGO and helps support the local community through employment and new infrastructure. During the walk one of the villagers will give a guide to their village life, the layout of their homes, with living, cooking & religious areas, the farming done, and the local cottage industry for leather shoe making which helps Agra export shoes all over the world. You'll also see some lesser known but important Mughal

era monuments. Finally today we'll stroll around the park at Mehtab Bagh - originally built by Emperor Babur as the last in a series of 11 parks on the Yamuna River's east bank, before taking in the magnificent sight of the Taj Mahal at sunset.

A special evening option is available today, where you can join a Hindu family for a Vegetarian Thali cooking lesson and meal.

OVERNIGHT: Agra hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS: Cook with a Hindu family in Agra

Day 4: Taj Mahal sunrise. Drive to Suroth Mahal, Village Walk and Camel Cart Ride

We start today early for our tour of the Taj Mahal. Truly one of the wonders of the world this elaborate monument to love was built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan and took over twenty-two years to complete. Sunrise is a great time to visit as the light changes gradually with the colours of the Taj changing too.

After breakfast we leave the region's popular tourist areas and head into the heart of rural Rajasthan to the small town of Suroth. The property was a former palace, now welcoming guests as a hotel, but retaining its heritage charm, with rooms painted with murals.

The afternoon sees us exploring the village, interacting with the local villagers, getting invaluable insight into seeing their way of life. We'll also jump aboard a camel cart for a ride around the village. In the evening we'll have a cooking demonstration before enjoying dinner at the hotel's restaurant.

OVERNIGHT: Suroth Mahal heritage hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 5: To Jaipur via the Abhaneri step well. Optional Bollywood Movie or Cooking Demo

Today we head to Jaipur, the capital and the largest city of the Indian state of Rajasthan in Western India. Enroute, we'll visit the Abhaneri step well, the largest and deepest step well in the world, which boasts 3500 steps and is 13 stories deep. You may recognise this as the place that Sonny tried to express his feelings for Sunaina in the recent movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*.

The remainder of the day in Jaipur will be free to explore at leisure or join one of our optional extras:

- A fun option this evening is to head out and watch a Bollywood movie at the Raj Mandir cinema.
- Another good choice for this evening is to visit a local family in their home for a cooking demonstration and dinner together.

OVERNIGHT: Jaipur heritage hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Hot air balloon in Jaipur || Jaipur Bollywood Movie - Raj Mandir Cinema || Jaipur Cooking demo and dinner with local family

Day 6: Amber Fort & Jaipur City. Block printing workshop

You have an option of going on an early morning hot air balloon ride over Jaipur, flying over its palaces, forts and lakes - a truly mesmerising experience.

If you chose to sleep a little later, your morning starts with a visit to the Amber Fort, the jewel in Jaipur's crown - an ancient fortress built on a hilltop in the 16th century dedicated to the ruling Kachhawa clan of Amber. Be mesmerised by this majestic architectural wonder, with its pink sandstone and marble palace shining in the sun. It's massive fortress walls sprawls across the hills, with many seeing a resemblance of the Great Wall of China.

Later, we return to the city for a tour of Jaipur, as we visit the strange Jantar Mantar monument, a collection of nineteen architectural astronomical instruments, built by the Rajput king Sawai Jai Singh II between 1724 and 1730. Jaipur was the first planned city of medieval India and we'll also explore its City Palace. Built by Raja Man Singh during 1729-1732 AD, the City Palace was once the seat of kings as it was from here that they ruled the region. This tangle of courtyards, manicured gardens and exceptionally crafted mahals is one of the most revered attractions in India.

We spend the remainder of the day walking in the walled city to discover some of Jaipur's famous crafts markets and craftsmen in action such as jewellers, silversmiths, textile workshops and bangle makers. Our tour will include a blockprinting workshop, where we learn the ways in which fabric is decorated using this ancient method and we'll also have a gemstone demonstration.

OVERNIGHT: Jaipur heritage hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Hot air balloon in Jaipur

Day 7: Return to Delhi (optional multimedia show at the Akshardam Temple)

We leave Jaipur today to head back to Delhi where our tour will end. You can use your remaining time in Delhi for last minute shopping, exploration of join our optional visit to the Swaminarayan Akshardham a Hindu mandir and a spiritual-cultural campus, home to millennia of traditional Hindu and Indian culture and architecture to witness the mesmerizing Sahaj Anand water show - which makes use of multicoloured lasers, under-water flames, video projection, water jets combine to provide a captivating experience which tells the story of Kena Upanishad - a Vedic Sanskrit text.

OVERNIGHT: Delhi hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 8: Fly from Delhi to Kochi - Welcome to Kerala!

Today you'll be transferred to Delhi Airport for your flight to Kochi, in the south of the country. Upon arrival you'll be met by a member of our local team, who will transfer you to your hotel. Once you're settled in, we'll run through the tour itinerary for the next few days, brief you on the local area and arrange a time to collect you and your fellow group members tomorrow.

OVERNIGHT: Kochi hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 9: Exploring captivating Kochi

Kochi (also known as Cochin) is a vibrant port city, with a fascinating blend of historic charm, modern energy, and coastal beauty which we'll explore today. On our tour of the city we'll make stops at the Synagogue, the spice market

and the the Dutch Palace which was built in 1555 by the Portuguese as a gift to the Raja of Kochi at the time. In 1663 the palace was captured by the Dutch but was later used as Royal Residence by the Rajas of Kochi for many more years. One sight which Kochi has become famous for are the scenes of the Chinese Fishing nets which add a unique charm to the Kochi waterfront. The origin of these nets being used in Kochi is still debated and whilst they are referred to as Chinese Fishing nets, there is actually no evidence of these nets having come from China. Some theories suggest these were introduced by the Portuguese.

Why not spend tonight at a Kathakali Dance performance. This is a unique art form, originating in Kerala which blends dance, drama, music and elaborate costumes to tell captivating stories.

OVERNIGHT: Kochi hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Kathakali Dance Performance - Kochi

Day 10: Visit Pineapple and Rubber Plantations en-route to Munnar.

Our journey today takes us from the coastal city of Kochi to the beautiful hill-station of Munnar. While Munnar is known for tea plantations, the route between Kochi and Munnar takes us through a region known for the vast rubber plantations. You'll see row after row of tall, slender rubber trees and witness rubber tapping taking place, which involves making precise cuts into the tree's bark, allowing a milky white sap to drip into a collection cup. We'll also visit a pineapple plantation today.

In the winter months, when the rivers are full, we'll make a short de-tour to visit either Cheeyappara or Valara Waterfall.

We end our day in Munnar. Imagine rolling green hills covered in a perfect blanket of tea plants, crisp mountain air with a hint of spice, and mist swirling around the peaks – well that's Munnar. Munnar's cooler climate and scenic beauty have long made it a popular escape from the tropical heat of the lower regions.

OVERNIGHT: Munnar hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 11: Exploring the markets and tea plantations of Munnar

Today is all about Munnar! We start exploring with a visit to the local market, located in the heart of town. As you enter the market you'll be greeted by a delightful mix of colors, aromas, and sounds. The air is thick with the scent of spices, fresh produce, and stalls selling vibrant fabrics. Your guide will give you a brief overview of the market and give you some free time to begin exploring at leisure. The market is known as being a treasure trove of fresh spices, but you'll also find stalls selling handicrafts, fruit/vegetables and even homemade chocolate - a Munnar speciality!

Next we'll visit one of the many tea-plantations which surround Munnar. You'll see vibrant green tea bushes, neatly trimmed into precise rows hugging the hillsides. You'll also likely see tea-pickers hard at work, moving swiftly between the tea-bushes, using their expert hands to pick the freshest of tea leaves. Next we'll learn about the processes involved in how these freshly picked leaves become the tea you're familiar with back at home. You'll see the trays on which the withering process takes places, before watching the rolling machines release the natural juices which aid the oxidation process which takes place next. Finally, you'll see the drying and packing where the leaves are sorted into different grades ready for sale. Our plantation visit ends with some tea tasting.

OVERNIGHT: Munnar hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 12: Continue to Thekkady and take a boat ride in Periyar NP

Leaving the green hills of Munnar, we'll drive to Periyar today. The route will take us through small towns and villages, past agricultural areas and of course, through the natural beauty which Kerala is famous for.

The town of Thekkady is known as the gateway to Periyar National Park which we'll see this afternoon as we take a boat ride on Lake Periyar, located in the heart of the national park. As the boat leaves the jetty area, you'll be rewarded with beautiful views of the immense lake, surrounded by lush green hillsides. The main reason for coming to Lake Periyar is for the wildlife which is in abundance in this area. An whilst we can't guarantee you'll see any specific animals, it's not uncommon to see Elephants along the lake shore, coming down for a drink or bathing in the water. Keep your binoculars on hand for sightings of water birds such as Herons, Egrets and Cormorants. Other mammals that can be found in the national park include Indian Bison, Deer, Wild Boar, Langurs and whilst it's rare, tigers have also been spotted on the lake shores. You have the remainder of the day free to explore the town of Thekkady.

OVERNIGHT: Thekkady hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 13: Craft and backwaters of Kumarakom

This morning we'll leave Periyar and head to the town of Kumarakom, synonymous with lush backwaters, a labyrinth of canals, lagoons, and lakes fringed by palm trees. This intricate, serene network of waterways is the heart of Kumarakom.

Once we reach Kumarakom we'll travel on the backwaters for around an hour, on board a Shikara. Shikaras are smaller, more traditional wooden boats, hand-paddled by skilled boatmen. With open sides and often a canopy for shade, they offer a closer, more intimate connection with the surrounding nature, before we board our larger houseboat tomorrow. We'll also explore the local village where we'll learn about some of the local crafts and industries which take place here, these include Coir Making (coir is the natural fibre extracted from coconut husks), Mat Weaving (often from the natural coir we've just learned about). We'll also learn about Toddy Tapping (this is process of extracting sap from specific types of palm trees to produce a mildly alcoholic drink called "toddy"), we'll also sample the cocounut water which is often sold by the road. The remainder of the day is free, why not try a local Ayurvedic treatment which this region is famous for.

OVERNIGHT: Kumarakom hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 14: Board a houseboat and explore the Keralan Backwaters.

A real highlight of any visit to Kerala is an overnight stay onboard one of the beautiful houseboats which this part of India has become known for. Kerala houseboats, known as Kettuvallams, are an incredible blend of tradition and modern comfort. Kettuvallams originally served as cargo boats, transporting rice and spices through the waterways. They were masterfully constructed without using a single nail, with planks of wood tied together using coir rope and coated with a protective resin made from cashew nut shells. Today's luxurious houseboats retain the traditional charm but incorporate modern amenities, transforming them into floating retreats.

Whilst the exact route the houseboat takes will be determined by local conditions at the time of your visit, a typical day onboard a houseboat is all about slow, peaceful rhythms and quiet immersion in nature. The captain will navigate the boat through the narrow waterways of the backwaters, keep your eyes peeled for vibrant kingfishers, graceful egrets, and water lilies blooming on the waters edge. We may make a stop at a local village which you can explore or you can try your hand at fishing with the rods which are available to hire onboard. As dusk approaches, the backwaters transform themselves into a painting of gold and orange. Find a perfect spot to witness the sun dip below the horizon, a truly unforgettable sight. You'll spend the night in your private en-suite cabin, lulled by the

gentle symphony of crickets outside.

OVERNIGHT: Deluxe AC Houseboat

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 15: Disembark and enjoy the Keralan beaches

After a magical night on your houseboat, we'll enjoy breakfast onboard before returning to Kochi, where our Keralan adventure will come to an end tomorrow. We'll spend our final evening at a beach resort where you'll have time to relax after spending two exploring the best of India.

OVERNIGHT: Kochi beach hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 16: Bon Voyage! Transfer to Kochi Airport for departure.

You have some free time to buy any gifts for your loved ones back home before we transfer you to the airport to catch your flight back home.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Extra day in Kochi - post-tour

Included

- All accommodation in 3 to 5-star hotels and heritage properties
- 1 Night on a Deluxe AC Houseboat on the Keralan backwaters
- All transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- Delhi to Kochi Flight Ticket
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Delhi Tour, Rickshaw Ride & Street Food Sampling in Delhi
- Agra Sherries Cafe, Mughal Heritage Walk and Taj Mahal visit
- Suroth Mahal Village tour, Camel cart ride & cooking demonstration
- Jaipur Amber Fort, City Tour & craft workshop
- See local industries with visits to Rubber, Pineapple and Tea Plantations
- Explore the markets of Munnar
- Take a boat ride on Lake Periyar and explore Thekkady Town
- See the local crafts and ride in a Shikara boat in Kumarakom
- Explore the beautiful backwaters of Kerala on a traditional houseboat
- Services of a local tour leader and specialist local guides
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary

Excluded

- International flights (available on request)
- Visa fees
- Travel insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)

- Tips for driver and/or tour guide
- Entrance fees (allow approx. US\$90)
- Any other items not mentioned above

Notes

Similar tours:

The following tours also feature this trip as part of an extended itinerary:

- [Temples & Tigers](#) - follows the same itinerary but includes an additional extension to see tigers in Ranthambore NP.

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting.

However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

Kathakali Dance Performance - Kochi

Min numbers: 1

Kathakali is a vibrant form of classical dance-drama that originated in Kerala, India, over 300 years ago. It's a captivating art form that combines storytelling, music, dance, elaborate costumes, and makeup to create a truly unique theatrical experience. Note: Pricing for this option is based on a minimum of 2 travellers. Single traveller rates apply.

Price: Starting from - \$55

Extra day in Delhi - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport arrival transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing. Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Price: Starting from - \$45

Hot air balloon in Jaipur

Min numbers: 1

Capture the spectacular views of Rajasthan's forts with an early morning hot air balloon ride over Jaipur for a different perspective of this vibrant capital. Float high above the pink painted rooftops and enjoy a bird's eye view of Jaipur. This option runs from 1st of September to 10th of May each year, subject to weather conditions.

Price: Starting from - \$315

Jaipur Bollywood Movie - Raj Mandir Cinema

Min numbers: 1

Head to the famous Raj Mandir cinema in Jaipur to enjoy a night in front of the silver screen, Bollywood style!! This option includes transportation to and from the cinema, plus your movie ticket.

Price: Starting from - \$50

Jaipur Cooking demo and dinner with local family

Min numbers: 1

Want to learn how to prepare a proper Indian dish? This cooking class with an Indian family in Jaipur will teach you the basics in a simple, easy-to-understand way, giving you the skills to create your own authentic Indian dishes once you go back home. The evening will start with a demonstration on how to prepare a meal, before enjoying the fruits of your labour by settling down with the family for dinner.

Price: Starting from - \$70

Extra day in Kochi - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the end of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport departure transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing. Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Price: Starting from - \$80

Single room supplement

Min numbers: 1

This tour is based on twin-share accommodation, with single bookers paired up with another traveller of the same sex in the group. If the final group make-up means that no room share is available, you do not need to pay this supplement. However, if you would like to guarantee yourself a single room throughout the tour, then please add this option to your booking. Note: Single supplement prices may vary seasonally.

Price: Starting from - \$720

1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the Indian 3 to 5-star level on this tour, including some carefully selected heritage style properties. We also include a night onboard a traditional house boat. The houseboats we use on this tour are Deluxe Air Conditioned Houseboats with private en-suite cabins. These heritage hotels used on this tour are often converted from former palaces or merchant houses and are full of historical character, though they may feel a little dated. They are often a highlight of your stay.

The specific hotels listed on our website are our preferred hotels for our small-group tours. However, these may be changed from time to time based on current availability and other logistics. In this event alternative hotels of a similar standard will be used. If you would like to guarantee any particular hotels for your trip, please contact us to request a tailor-made tour.

Accommodation is based on twin or double en-suite rooms with air conditioning. All couples will receive a private double room.

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

2. Transport

Our trips feature a mix of different transport options. We want you to feel like you're really experiencing the country you're travelling through, but at the same time finish journeys refreshed enough to enjoy the next stage of the tour. Due to the somewhat chaotic nature of Indian roads, we only use private vehicles for all road journeys on this tour. While we love travelling on Indian railways, the circular route of this tour means that adding a train journey (for example between Delhi and Jaipur) adds to the cost as the vehicle will be driving that route anyway. Many of our other India tours do include rail journeys.

This tour also includes a domestic flight from Delhi to Kochi.

3. Transfers

The tour price includes a 24-hour airport meet & assist service in New Delhi airport for your arrival and a departure airport transfer in Kochi and all other transfers.

4. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

We are committed to being a small group operator, as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. There's no point in us providing great guides if you've got to peer over 30-40 shoulders to see them! So, we won't ever put you in a 50-seater coach with 49 other people and just one guide. Instead, we set our India small-group departures to have a maximum of 12 travellers. The minimum group size is 2.

In India we provide a fully trained, local English-speaking tour leader/driver to accompany our groups. On this tour they will accompany you throughout the whole loop from Delhi/Agra/Jaipur/Delhi. On groups of 4 or more, a guide will accompany you for the duration of the tour, for groups of 2 to 3, you will have a driver and local guides in each city.

At Encounters Travel we have a policy of aiming to use only local Indian guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

5. Entrance Fees

The tour price does not include entrance fees to the tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. This allows for fluctuations in the prices set by the local authorities, which do change from time to time.

You should currently allow approx. US\$90 per person to cover these entrance fees (this includes one visit to the Taj Mahal). You will also need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit that are not listed in the main tour itinerary. Your guide will offer to collect the entrance fee cost from everyone at the start of the tour and pay on your behalf, or you can arrange them yourself as you go along.

6. Dates & Prices

We run small-group departures on our Indian tours throughout the year, with less frequent start dates during the hot and wet monsoon months of May to September. All departures are guaranteed to run with a minimum of 2 travellers. Departure dates and prices are listed on our website (please check the website for up-to-date prices and special offers).

Private and tailor-made tours are available on any dates and may be adjusted to fit your personal requirements, available time and budget.

7. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

8. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

9. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and

appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.

- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

10. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

[www.twitter.com/encounterstravl](https://twitter.com/encounterstravl) (yes, without the 'e')

11. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event). [More information...](#)

You may arrange your own insurance, or you can take advantage of a comprehensive policy that we can arrange for you through Endsleigh Insurance which has been designed to be suitable for our tours. The policy is available to travellers of all nationalities and you do not need to live in the UK to take out the policy. For full details of cover provided, prices and to apply for one of our policies, please complete [travel insurance application form](#).

Note: Any country that borders the Mediterranean is considered as 'Europe' for the purposes of travel insurance (including Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Morocco). If you are doing a tour that visits one country in 'Europe' and one that is 'Worldwide' (for example, an Egypt and Jordan tour), then you need a 'Worldwide' policy. When completing the form you should enter your travel dates including any extra days involved in overnight flights or connecting travel between your home and the tour. Our policies are not able to cover any extra time or activities other than your tour and options booked with us and your travel to & from home.

Note - to comply with insurance sales regulations, our travel insurance policies are only available to customers booking directly with us. If you have booked through a travel agent you will need to arrange your own insurance.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our

policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable. Details about our own policies cover levels are given [on our website](#).

12. International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to suggest flights to go with the tour. Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from.

Your airport arrival & departure transfers are included on the first and last days of the tour. Most of our Indian tours start and finish at Delhi airport (DEL).

We do also sometimes advertise flight inclusive packages from selected airports. Where these are shown on our website, prices are correct at the time of quoting, but are subject to continued availability of the fare used. Prices will be reconfirmed at the time of booking, and we will also provide the flight times and airline details before tickets are issued.

Flight inclusive prices are based on the cheapest Economy ticket class available which is generally non-refundable and non-changeable unless the flight is cancelled for reasons such as Covid-19, in which case the airlines are more flexible. More flexible ticket options, as well as Premium Economy and Business Class tickets are available on request for an additional supplement. Any changes made to flight inclusive bookings will be subject to the airline rules on your ticket.

Flight CO2 Emissions:

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

13. Tipping and Haggling

Haggling is a traditional necessity, so it's wise not to pay too much regard to initial prices. Instead fix an item's value in your mind then negotiate towards it unhurriedly and don't be afraid to simply walk away if the price isn't right. Once you have offered a price though, you should be prepared to pay it as you may cause offence if you then back

out.

While an accepted part of the culture and customs in India, tipping is always optional, and the amounts paid should reflect excellent service. We are often asked for advice on common amounts, and for assistance with tipping. Some suggested guidelines are given below.

Restaurants and taxis: Local markets and basic restaurants - leave the loose change. More up-market restaurants we suggest 5% to 10% of your bill.

Local guides: Throughout your trip you may at times have a local guide in addition to your tour guide. We suggest USD 5-10 per person per day for local guides.

Drivers: You may have a range of private drivers on your trip. Some may be with you for a short journey while others may be with you for several days. We would suggest a higher tip for those more involved with the group, for example if you don't have an extra accompanying guide. However USD 3-6 per person per day is generally appropriate.

Tour Guides: To answer your next question. . . as a guideline for tour guides who accompany you on the entire tour, we suggest you allow around USD 5-10 per person per day, but ultimately, as with all the tipping described above, its up to your satisfaction with their service and your personal budget. You should not feel pressured to tip any particular amount.

14. Health and Vaccinations - India

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

India: Additional vaccinations: Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Yellow fever rules for India are quite complicated and lengthy. Please read the [WHO guidance](#).

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the north eastern regions of India including Assam and Orissa are considered high risk, while the rest of India is generally considered low enough risk that anti-malarial tablets are not necessary for most travellers doing relatively short tours.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this [US CDC information](#) about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary.

Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

15. Passports and Visas - India

Your passport expiry date must be at least 6 months after your time in India finishes. Do not bring a full or almost expired passport. You must also have a machine-readable passport or you may be denied entry. If you have an old-style manually issued passport you will need to replace this with a new machine-readable passport before you travel.

Most nationalities (including UK, USA, European, Australian, Canadian) will need to arrange their Indian tourist visa in advance. A new online e-visa system is available which makes the process more straightforward than before. You can make your application online at [indiavisaonline](https://indiavisaonline.gov.in).

Visa requirements for India can and do change regularly and we suggest that you arrange your Indian visa early and re-check your specific visa requirements prior to travel for any changes.

16. Voltage

In Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). In Bhutan a range of different sockets can be found, including two and three round pronged and three flat pronged (Type D,F,G).

Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard UK-European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are sometimes available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already but cannot be guaranteed.

If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

17. Time

The time in India and Sri Lanka is GMT plus 5 1/2 hours.

The time in Nepal is GMT plus 5 3/4 hours.

The time in Bhutan is GMT plus 6 hours.

The time in Tibet is GMT plus 8 hours.

Daylight saving adjustments are not applied.

18. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your

destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's ['Travel Aware' campaign](#) which provides further useful and invaluable information.

19. What to take

Luggage: Suitcases are fine, though you may find rucksacks or large bags are more practical. You should also bring a small daypack/bag to take out during the day. Your main luggage will be left in the hotel during your sightseeing trips - you will not need to carry it far, and there are nearly always porters to assist.

Luggage allowances: Most international airlines restrict you to between 20kg and 23kg per person of luggage to go in the hold of the plane. Domestic flights often have smaller allowances around 15kg. As airline rules vary we recommend that you take no more than 20kg of luggage if your tour just includes international flights, and no more than 15kg if there are any domestic flights included in your itinerary. Please ask us for details if you are unsure about luggage allowances on your tour. Any excess baggage fees will be your responsibility to cover. Most airlines allow between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage so we suggest that you take no more than 5kg unless you have confirmed that your airline(s) will allow more than this.

Clothing: The weather is mainly hot most of the year with significant variations from region to region. The coolest weather lasts from around the end of November to the beginning of March, with fresh mornings and evenings, and mostly sunny days. The really hot weather, when it is dry, dusty and unpleasant, is between March and June. Monsoon rains occur in most regions in summer anywhere between June and early October.

NOTE: India is very traditional and some heads will turn if you dress provocatively in public. Short tops, short skirts / shorts, tight or body revealing clothes etc should be avoided. You might invite unwanted attention from certain men who stare and pass comments at women to amuse themselves. More detailed climate information is available on the India Country Guide page on our website.

Suggested List: This is a guide only - there's no problem if you bring more or less with you. Cheap comfortable clothing is also readily available in India and laundry is inexpensive. It is also worth having some smarter clothes for going out. Towels are provided and laundry services are available in all the hotels we use.

Men: Lightweight trousers, shorts, light shirts & t-shirts, Swimwear

Women: Light cotton skirts/dressers, loose-fitting trousers, light shirts or t-shirts, loose shorts, Swimwear

Men & Women: Jumper/sweatshirt/fleece, Long sleeved shirt(s) (for cool nights, protection from the sun & mosquitoes, and visits to religious sites etc), Handkerchiefs, socks & underwear, Comfortable trainers/sandals for daily wear, Other shoes/sandals for evening wear, Sunhat or headscarf (headscarfs come in handy for some sights which require women to cover their head)

First Aid: Although First Aid and medication is readily available in India, it may be very different to what you are used to so individuals should consider bringing along their own personal kit. Your personal kit might include: Sunscreen, sunblock & aftersun, Insect repellent/relief, Antiseptic cream/spray, Plasters and a bandage, Lomitol or Imodium against diarrhea, Pills against nausea, Aspirin for heat-stroke (or hangovers) Your kit should also include your brief medical history, including allergies, blood group, drug vaccinations etc. We suggest bringing copies of prescriptions if you will be carrying medicines on board your flight.

Toiletries: Razor, soap & box, shampoo, Toothpaste, toothbrush & container, Sanitary items

Note: If you wear contact lenses, you should consider taking or wearing glasses instead, as lenses can be uncomfortable and/or cause infections in hot and humid climates.

Other useful items: Sunglasses, Small Torch, Money belt, Camera and equipment, Toilet paper (this is not always provided in public toilets so it is a good idea to carry some spare tissues in your bag. It should be placed in the basket beside the toilet, not flushed away, for you might block the pipes).

IMPORTANT: As it can get extremely hot in India, and the sun can burn very quickly, it is very important to ensure you are protected from the sun with sun-cream & sun-hats, and do not get dehydrated.

20. Money

Rupee (INR; symbol Rs) = 100 paise. Notes are in denominations of Rs 2,000, 1000, 500, 200, 50, 20, 10 and 1. Coins are in denominations of Rs 10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50 paise (Rs 0.5). Note: The import and export of local currency is prohibited. Sometimes smaller vendors will not take bills larger than Rs 500. It is best to carry a range of rupee notes if you are shopping at bazaars and local markets.

Note: You must present your passport whenever you change currency or travellers cheques. Commission for foreign exchange is becoming increasingly rare; if it is charged, the fee is nominal.

Credit cards: In major cities, the full cadre of banks cards are generally accepted including debit cards, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. However, in smaller towns and villages, choice is generally narrowed to cash or MasterCard and Visa.

ATM: 24 hour ATM machines can be found in all the major cities and most large towns. Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus are amongst the most commonly accepted cards.

Travellers cheques: These are gradually getting less accepted but may still be changed at larger banks and some larger hotels. The most widely accepted currencies include US Dollars and Pounds Sterling. Some banks may refuse to change certain brands of traveller's cheques whilst others may exchange quite happily.

Printed on: Saturday 18th of May 2024

Note: Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.
