

Travel to India - Practical Advice

When planning a trip to India, apply well in advance for a visa at the Embassy of India in Reykjavik. Processing of a visa application may take up to three weeks. Visas are not issued on arrival in India.

Certain immunizations are recommended before traveling for the first time to India; see the website of the Icelandic Directorate of Health (Landlækniseimbættið).

On arrival, don't be surprised by the degree of chaos that can reign in the arrival hall of airports. Make sure to fill out immigration documents properly. Many international flights arrive in India at around midnight local time.

The Indian rupee is not yet a fully convertible currency. Therefore, on arrival, make use of the exchange facilities open at most airports. Exchange rates may not be optimal. Therefore, exchange only the necessary amount of money into rupees. ATMs are generally available in most Indian cities and Travelers Checks and VISA / MASTERCARD are widely accepted.

Before departing for India, it is advisable to make arrangements for a pick-up at the airport, a service usually offered by hotels.

Don't forget that Indians drive on the left side of the road. This is particularly important to keep in mind when crossing a road on foot.

Taxis are generally available but hotels also offer to provide a car during your stay. When using a taxi, check for air-conditioning in the taxi if traveling during the summer months, especially if you will be driving longer distances. Also check with the hotel to refer reputable Taxi companies.

Indian food is popular world-wide. Generally, food is not an issue in India but can cause foreigners gastrointestinal adjustment problems. Beware of food from street vendors. Bottled water from recognized brands is recommended in all instances. Make sure that bottles are sealed and beware of ice in beverages in restaurants.

Many Indians are vegetarians. Given the politeness of Indians, no offence is taken if you have a non-veg meal while your counterparts are enjoying a vegetarian meal. Keep in mind that Indian food can be very spicy. It is rare that business luncheons include alcoholic beverages, although moderate drinking is not frowned upon.

Be prepared to see poverty-stricken multitudes when visiting India. Beggars can be a heartbreaking sight in all major cities in India.

Indians are professional traders and bargainers. Do not hesitate to negotiate prices, except in state-run shops. In India, bargaining is an art, not an insult.

Traffic in India can be exciting or nightmarish, depending on your perspective. Plan

your journeys accordingly, especially if going to the airport or to an important meeting where Embassy of Iceland, New Delhi, March 2007
you have to be on time. Keep in mind that queues and delays are to be expected at most destinations.

There are many excellent sources of information on India. However, double-check most guidebook information, be it schedules, addresses, opening hours or something else.

India is 5 and ½ hours ahead of Iceland in terms of time difference.

Two words commonly used in India are lakh and crore. A lakh is one hundred thousand rupees and a crore is one hundred lakhs or ten million rupees. Both are part of the old Indian numbering system, based on hundreds rather than thousands. An understanding of lakh and crore is essential for a foreigner doing business in India.

Dress code in India depends, as always, on the occasion and the nature of the meeting. A general rule; if in doubt, err on the more formal side.

Different names of the largest cities in India can be confusing to newcomers. Chennai is frequently also referred to as Madras, the city's old name. This also applies to Mumbai/Bombay, Kolkata /Calcutta, and most recently Bengalooru/Bangalore.

Keep in mind national and religious holidays, formal and informal, when planning your trip to India. Consult with your Indian partners

Tipping is a common practice in India and expected when a service is provided for you - in hotels, in taxis, at restaurants (unless service charge is included in your bill) etc. Nominal tips are about Rs. 20, but at larger hotels and restaurants tips expected are 10% of the bill.

In case of an emergency, ask hotel staff for immediate assistance or contact the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs, **tel. +354 5459900**, which will provide an emergency phone number for the Embassy in New Delhi.