

## North India Highlights

**Country(ies):** India

**Tour type:** Small Group

**Transport:** A/C minivan/minibus and train

**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 16 days

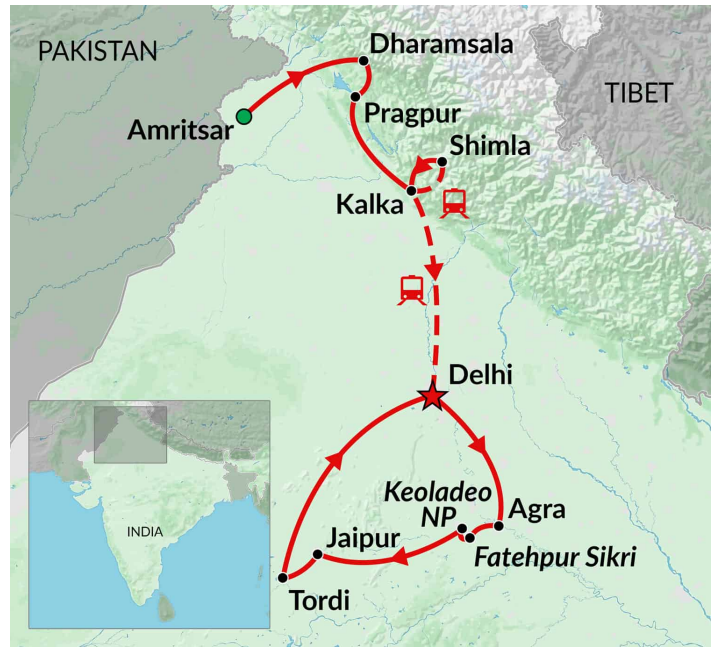
**Start Location:** Amritsar, India

**End Location:** Delhi, India

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 15, Lunches - 1, Dinners - 2

### Highlights:

Golden Temple in Amritsar, Buddhist sites at Dharamsala, Pragpur and Garli heritage villages, Toy train to Shimla, Himalayan Foothills, Old and New Delhi, Pink city of Jaipur, Tordi Garh, Keoladeo NP, Taj Mahal at sunrise, Agra



# Itinerary

## Day 1: Welcome to Amritsar, airport to hotel transfer included

After landing in the holy city of Amritsar, one of our staff members will meet and greet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel for the day. You'll have some time to settle in, before we discuss what you're going to experience over the next few days and arrange a time to collect you tomorrow.

**OVERNIGHT:** Amritsar hotel

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** Single room supplement (INSGIS) Extra day in Amritsar - pre-tour

## Day 2: The legendary Golden Temple

Your day starts with a visit to the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion - the Golden Temple. Its roof has been made of pure gold and if you explore its interior, you'll notice that it's laden with jewels and gold leaf. As you walk around the palace, you'll feel the calming atmosphere of this holy place - regardless of your religious beliefs.

After taking in the beauty of the Golden Temple, you'll spend an hour at the Temple's community kitchen, which feeds over 100,000 people every day. You'll have a meal here before participating in Langar Seva - where you'll serve and prepare food as well as clearing and washing afterward - a small gift of time and effort.

You'll then head to the rural Punjab farmlands, stopping to see the rows of produce, before we watch the Wagah Border ceremony at sunset, a military practice which the Indian and Pakistan security forces have done since 1959. It involves colourful, quick dance-like maneuvers, which highlights the brotherhood and cooperation between the two countries.

As you make your way back to Amritsar, you have the choice of heading back to your hotel, have supper at a local eatery or visit the Golden Temple once more to watch the Palki Sahib Ceremony, where the Holy Book - the Guru Granth Saab - is taken from the main shrine in the Hari Mandir to the sanctum, its resting place until the ceremony starts again in the morning. It's a great opportunity to browse the inside of the Golden Temple, which may have been busy earlier in the day.

It also gives you a golden opportunity to explore the inside of the Golden Temple, which may have been busy with pilgrims earlier in the day.

**OVERNIGHT:** Amritsar hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 3: Drive to McLeod Ganj. Free afternoon

After breakfast we'll drive to McLeod Ganj, where you'll have some free time today to explore the town, situated at the foothills of the towering Himalayas. You can visit its Buddhist monasteries, museums, temples, waterfalls, lakes, and Tibetan settlements. You can visit the local markets which sell exotic sculptures, souvenirs and Thangka paintings.

McLeod Ganj is also the home of the Tibetan Government in Exile and the Dalai Lama's residence, which is well worth a visit as well.

**OVERNIGHT:** McLeod Ganj hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 4: A visit to the Dalai Lama Monastery

Your day starts with a visit to the Dalai Lama Monastery to attend a puja - a prayer session, that includes chanting mantras, bowing and making offerings. We'll offer lamps and Khagat religious cloth, made of silk and worn around our necks as a show of respect.

You'll then visit the Bhagsunag Waterfall and Shiva Temple, which is a kilometre away from the waterfall. If you're up for it, have a swim in its icy waters. The Temple is home to a freshwater spring - its waters are believed to have healing powers and many devotees bathe in it to cleanse their ailments.

Your last stop for the day is a visit to the Naddi View Point, which offers spectacular views of the Dhauladhar mountain ranges and the pristine Dal Lake below.

**OVERNIGHT:** McLeod Ganj hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 5: Heritage walks through the villages of Pragpur & Garli

Today you'll spend some time at the Norbulingka Institute, which is dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan arts and culture, before making our way to the Pragpur Heritage Village, which was founded in the 16th century by the Kuthiala Soods in memory of Princess Prag Dei of the Jaswan royal family. If there's time before lunch, you also have the opportunity of viewing the murals and miniature wall paintings at the Dada Siba Temple.

After some refreshments, we'll explore the village further, before we transport you to Garli, another Heritage Village situated within the Kangra Valley. Garli is known for its colonial style architecture, which can be seen in its residences and places of worship.

You'll have some time to check in at your hotel for the day, before joining up with a local guide, who will take you on a tour of the village.

**OVERNIGHT:** Garli hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 6: Himalayan Queen toy train to Shimla

You'll travel to Dharampur Himanchal to board a 'toy' train to Shimla, one of India's most beautiful hill stations located at the base of the Himalayan Mountains. This is undoubtedly one of the main highlights of the tour.

Take in the stunning scenery around you as you'll be surrounded by thick forests of pine, Himalayan Oak, flowering rhododendron and tall cedar trees. Watch how the train steams its way up the hills, passing hundreds of bridges and tunnels along the way, every turn providing you with more breathtaking views.

The narrow gauge railway is one of the most iconic train journeys on the planet and has since been declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

You'll catch the Himalayan Queen service, missing the lowest section from Kalka, which will shorten your journey, but takes you on the most scenic route. The train stops regularly, so you can jump off and buy some snacks from one of the local vendors on the platforms.

Once you arrive in the Shimla, you'll have some time to explore, visiting a pedestrian avenue, its craft shops and markets which specialize in wooden toys.

**OVERNIGHT:** Shimla hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 7: Discovering Shimla

You have the morning free to explore Shimla or as an option, hike to the Tara Devi Temple, which is situated in a thick oak forest. It's well worth the effort though, as you'll be treated to scenic views of the lofty Himalayas surrounding the town.

Today you'll also explore Shimla on foot, visiting its main attractions such as the Vice Regal Lodge, the Christ Church, the Gaiety Theatre, before taking a cable car ride to Jakhu Temple located on Shimla highest peak.

**OVERNIGHT:** Shimla hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 8: A train ride to Delhi, transfer to hotel

Your morning is free to explore Shimla further, and we'll depart just before midday, driving down out of the hills to Kalka where we board an evening fast train to Delhi. Once you arrive, we'll transfer you to your hotel for the night.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 9: Exploring India's capital city & unique street food

If you're looking for one place to experience the diversity of India, then the capital city of New Delhi should be right at the top of your list. You'll start with a morning tour of the city, which has been built on the banks of the Yamuna River.

We'll visit the towering India Gate Monument, which is inspired by the famous Arc de Triomphe in Paris. India Gate is dedicated to the 82,000 soldiers who participated in the undivided Indian Army.

Since New Delhi is the home of India's government, we'll drive past important buildings such as Parliament, the Bangla Sahab Gurudwara Sikh Temple and Humayun's Tomb - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

After exploring the New Delhi, you'll hop onto a metro train to visit Old Delhi as well, exploring its old and busy markets and bazaars such as the Chandni Chowk and the Chawri Bazaar, famous for its brass, copper and paper products.

This afternoon, you'll have a chance to try Delhi's unique street food cuisine, tasting various snacks and delicacies for lunch. Once you're nice and full, your tour continues with a rickshaw ride and a visit to the Jama Masjid Mosque - one of the largest mosques in India.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 10: The Pink City of Jaipur & a visit to an ancient fortress

You'll say goodbye to Delhi and head towards Rajasthan's largest city - Jaipur. On our way there, we'll stop at Amber Fort, also known as Amer Palace. The fort got its name from Amba Mata, the goddess of earth and fertility.

Built in the 16th century by the ruling Kachhawa clan of Amber, it's one of the best hilltop forts in India, with its breathtaking architecture and marble palaces enthralling visitors from all corners of the earth. It overlooks the Maota Lake, a water source for the palace.

You also have the chance to taste Lassi and MI Road, the pride and joy of Punjabi cuisine. Lassi is a yogurt-based, sweet or salty drink made with water, spices and sometimes fruit. You'll then head to your accommodation for the night or as an option, you can watch a Bollywood movie at the Raj Mandir cinema.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 11: Exploring the city of Jaipur

You have some options today. You can either choose to go on an early morning hot air balloon over the Jaipur's palaces and forts, taking in the architectural beauty of the pink city, or sleep a little later, before heading out on a sightseeing tour.

During the sightseeing tour, you'll head to the unique Jantar Mantar Monument, an astronomical observatory built by the Rajput king Sawai Jai Singh II between 1724 and 1730. You'll also visit the architecturally brilliant City Palace, built between 1729-1732 AD, which was once the seat of the King of Jaipur and the leader of the renowned Kachwaha Rajput clan.

You'll have lunch, before exploring Jaipur's famous craft markets, where you can see craftsmen such as as jewellers, silversmiths, textile workshops and bangle makers conjuring up some of the most unique creations. While you're here, we'll also stop at fruit, vegetable and spice markets.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Hot air balloon in Jaipur

## Day 12: Visiting the ancient village of Tordi

Today, we'll head to the village of Tordi, situated in rural region of Rajasthan. Tordi was built in the 16th century by Th. Akhey Singh, a descendant of Khangar Singh who overthrew the regional chief and built a hilltop fortress. All that's left are ruins, which can still be seen today.

The family still lives in the palace and fort built in the plains below, and we'll stay in a section of the palace which has been redesigned for guests.

This afternoon, you'll explore the local village of Tordi, visiting a temple, a school and a potter's house before chatting to the locals, learning about their way of life here in rural Rajasthan.

There are a few optional activities that can be arranged by the family at the palace, such as camel cart riding, a jeep safari to a 300-year-old step well as well as a visit to a shepherds village. Other optional activities include watching the sunset at the Tordi Sagar Dam and the sand dunes, hiking to the 400-year-old Tordi Fort for drinks and snacks at sunset or sunrise. Horse-riding and henna hand art is also available.

**OVERNIGHT:** Tordi Garh hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 13: Abhaneri step well and a guided cycle rickshaw ride in Keoladeo NP

Say your final goodbyes to the village of Tordi as we make our way to Bharatpur to visit the Keoladeo Ghana National Park - one of the top places for birdwatching in India.

You'll first visit the Abhaneri step well though, which is the largest of its kind on the entire planet. It has 3,500 steps and is 13 stories deep.

You'll arrive at your accommodation for the day before heading out on a guided cycle rickshaw ride through Keoladeo, which was once a duck hunting reserve, but is now a sanctuary for over 360 species of birds and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Keoladeo is a strategic location on the Central Asian migratory flyway, making it a vitally important location for wintering water birds, most notably the endangered Siberian crane and its huge heronry which in good years can host more than 20,000 nesting birds of various species. Apart from its diverse birdlife, the park is also home to wild boar, black buck, sambar, chital, mongoose, porcupine, several different wild cats, and some huge pythons.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel next to Keoladeo National Park

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Extra day in Delhi - post-tour

## Day 14: Your first view of the Taj Mahal

After being mesmerised by the unique wildlife of the Keoladeo National Park, we'll head to the city of Agra, famous for being the home of India's Taj Mahal.

You'll head to your hotel and settle in, before spending the afternoon on the Mughal Heritage Walk through the ancient village of Kachhpura and surrounding farmland on the banks of the Yamuna River, which will give you your first view of the Red Fort and the impressive Taj Mahal Mausoleum.

The Mughal Heritage Walk was designed by a local NGO who supports the local community with job opportunities and new infrastructure. One of the locals will give you a tour of the village, showing you their architecture, cooking and religious areas as well as how they farm. You'll also be introduced to the local cottage industry for leather shoe making which helps Agra export shoes all over the world.

As the afternoon comes to an end, we'll walk around the Mehtab Bagh Park, which is one of 11 parks built by Emperor Babur on the east banks of the Yamuna River, to take in the breathtaking views of the Taj Mahal at sunset.

Tonight, you have an option to join a local Hindu family for a vegetarian cooking lesson and a tasty meal before settling in for the night.

**OVERNIGHT:** Agra hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Cook with a Hindu family in Agra

## Day 15: Sunrise at the Taj Mahal & a visit to Agra Fort

You had a glimpse of the Taj Mahal at sunset, now it's time to witness its majesty at sunrise.

You'll head for an early morning tour of the Taj Mahal, which was built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan and took over twenty-two years to complete. Watch how the colours of the Taj Mahal changes as the light of the day gradually gets brighter.

You'll have breakfast before we visit Agra Fort - a towering complex which once served as the main residence of the emperors of the Mughal Dynasty until 1638 when the capital was shifted from Agra to Delhi. It's also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

After lunch, you'll head back to Delhi to visit 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:**

## Day 16: Time to say goodbye! Airport transfer included

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. Some additional half day tour options are available this morning if you have a late flight, and extensions are also available to go on safari looking for tigers in Ranthambore National Park, visiting the holy city of Varanasi, or heading to the beach at Goa.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Goa beach extension Ranthambore National Park Safari Extra day in Delhi - post-tour Spinmonkey cycling tour Salam Balak Trust walk

## Included:

- All accommodation in mid-range hotels and heritage properties
- All transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- Himalayan Queen toy train journey to Shimla
- 2nd class AC train journey from Chandigarh to Delhi
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Services of a local tour leader and specialist local guides
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary (15 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners)

## 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 drivers and guides
- Entrance fees (allow approx. US\$154)
- Any other items not mentioned above

## Notes

### Restoration of the Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal, one of India's most iconic structures, is getting a much need facelift. The almost-four-century-old Taj Mahal is finally showing signs of ageing. Air pollution is unfortunately turning its ivory-white complexion - yellow. Adding to the colouration problems, the Yamuna River, with which the Taj Mahal shares a river bank, is contaminated and the insects that breed in its waters are leaving patches of green residue on its marble. In order to restore the Taj Mahal's glistening white marble, mud-pack therapy is being used. If you're worried that it might affect your India tour, this handy [Taj restoration guide](#) will tell you everything you need to know.

# Options

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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.

## No Options

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## 1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the Indian 3-star and 4-star level on this tour as well as some heritage properties. These heritage hotels 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.

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## 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.

The tour also features two journeys on India's famous railway network, on the narrow gauge 'toy train' to Shimla, and a fast train from Chandigarh to Delhi (~4hrs).

On the toy train journey we book chair seats on the Himalayan Queen service. The full journey from Kalka to Shimla takes around 5 hours, but we join the train about half way into the journey once it has started getting into the hills properly. We feel this provides a better experience all round. Your luggage will continue to Shimla with the tour vehicle, so you do not need to worry about carrying or storing it on the train.

For the fast train journeys we aim to always book seats in the AC2 chair class (2<sup>nd</sup> class air-conditioned carriage). This is relatively clean, comfortable and not overcrowded. Due to the huge distances some trains cover, Indian trains are subject to delays. These can be longer in the winter months if the weather is foggy.

Tickets are issued 120 days in advance and are subject to full cancellation fees after you have arrived in India (US\$10 up until that point). If you book within 120 days of departure we cannot guarantee that you will be allocated a seat next to other people in the group, though the carriage stewards are generally very helpful in arranging to swap you with another traveller.

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## 3. Transfers

The tour price includes a 24-hour airport meet & assist service in Amritsar airport, your arrival and departure airport-hotel transfers and all other transfers.

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## 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 from Amritsar through to Chandigarh where you will be shown to your seat on the train. You will then be met on arrival in Delhi station and a further tour leader/driver will accompany you on the tour circuit from Delhi/Jaipur/Tordi/Agra/Delhi. Additional specialist local guides are used for some of the sightseeing tours and national park activities included in the tour.

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.

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## 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\$154 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.

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## 6. Dates & Prices

We run small-group departures on our Indian small-group tours throughout the year, with less frequent start dates during the hot 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.

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## 7. Health and Vaccinations

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: Diptheria, 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 transited 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.

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## 8. 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, Lomotil 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.

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## 9. 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.

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## 10. 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.

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## 11. 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.

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## 12. 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).

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### 13. 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](http://www.facebook.com/encounterstravel)

<https://x.com/encounterstravel> (yes, without the 'e')

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### 14. 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).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? [World Nomads Travel Insurance](#) offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

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.**

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## **15. 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.



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## **16. Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles**

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

### **How Water-to-Go Technology works:**

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

### **The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:**

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can't fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon's efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

### **Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide**

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

### **Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!**

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

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## **17. Private & Tailor-made Tours**

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please [contact us](#).

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## **18. 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.

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## **19. Tipping - India**

Haggling is a traditional necessity, so its wise not to pay too much regard to initial prices. Instead fix an items 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.

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## **20. 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](http://indiavisaonline).

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.

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## **21. 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 adaptors 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.

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## **22. 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.

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**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.

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