



**BIRDING TOURS INDIA:
GENERAL INFORMATION**



PASSPORT AND VISA

Most people will require a visa for visiting India depending on your country of origin or length of stay. Please check your government's advice; this may be achievable via the e-visa system (there is a small fee for most visas). Your passport must be valid for a period of at least 6 months after the date of your arrival in India. Please make sure that there is at least one empty page available in your passport. Please make sure that you also bring a photocopy of your passport, to be kept in a different location from your hard copy of your passport, in case of loss/damage.

Passports should be kept on your person for safety and ease of use. You will need to show passports and give passport details at most accommodation, trains, and national park entrance gates.

Note: If your passport changes between the time you book a tour and provide your information and your trip you must let us know ASAP so we can update the details on the national park and train tickets. Failure to do so could result in difficulties on arrival at parks or train stations.

For details on visa see the following website: <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/index.html>

TRAVEL INSURANCE

We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against accidents, medical, illness, loss of valuables, luggage, etc., and travel interruptions or delays of all kinds.

HEALTH

Please consult your doctor regarding any vaccine requirements. All travelers should be up to date with routine vaccination courses and boosters (e.g. tetanus). There is no risk of yellow fever transmission in India; however, there is a certificate requirement if travelers have visited/come from any of the following countries: <http://www.who.int/ith/2015-ith-annex1.pdf?ua=1>. Some travelers may require Hepatitis B, Japanese Encephalitis, and Rabies. Risk of Malaria is considered low, although you should seek the recommendations of your doctor and please read <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2018/infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/yellow-fever-malaria-information-by-country/india#seldyfm879> carefully. Please also read <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/india> or a UK site that gives great info as well: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/india/health>. Note that these pages are only a guide, so do consult your usual source for travel health advice.

Sunscreen should be carried, and a hat should be worn to protect from the powerful rays of the sun with sunglasses to help prevent glare. A plentiful supply of water should be carried at all times to maintain hydration. Insect repellent is recommended.

Due to air pollution in and around New Delhi it is advised to purchase a face mask to reduce the potential for breathing in dirty air. These face masks can be purchased from most chemists. A bandana can also help reduce dust intake in dusty areas such as in national parks if they are dry.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Please make sure that you are covered by medical insurance in case of an emergency while on this trip. Without insurance the cost of medical care can be extremely high. Please notify us at the time of registering for this tour of any medical conditions you think we should know about (including allergies, heart conditions, epilepsy, etc.). This will greatly help us to cater to your needs and update emergency services if required.

CURRENCY

Indian Rupee. Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted, including for drawing cash from ATM's (as everywhere, bank charges may apply). Note: US dollars or British pounds cannot be used for purchases. We will be able to exchange or draw money at the airport upon our arrival and in the various cities we pass through. But it is worth noting that ATMs will give you large denomination notes, and getting smaller change (e.g. useful for tips) is quite difficult to obtain. Most ATMs only allow a maximum withdrawal of 10,000 rupees in one go. The ATM at the airport (in the arrivals lounge) can be a bit temperamental but does accept Visa and MasterCard cards.

WEATHER/CLIMATE

We will experience a range of temperatures in India, including some cold/very cold mornings in the mountains of the north on the North India and Northeast India tours. Game drives here can be very cold in the early morning (the jeeps are open-top). It is advisable to bring layers, including a warm coat, woolen hat, gloves, etc., for these tours. Birding sites south of New Delhi will be hot during the day but can drop to be fairly cold overnight and early in the morning, and it may get a bit chilly in the southern Indian hills on the Western Ghats tour. A bandana or face mask would be helpful for time spent near New Delhi due to pollution but also for keeping dust out of your face while in any national parks on the jeep safaris.

ELECTRICITY

230 V at 50 Hz. Two- or three-pronged round sockets. Adaptors are needed for overseas appliances. See the following link for details and photos: <https://www.power-plugs-sockets.com/india/>. Types D and M seem to be the most common sockets where we stay on our tours. The electricity can go off unexpectedly due to power shortages. A decent torch (flashlight) is essential. Power surges can be common, so ensure your devices are suitable to withstanding these.

LENGTH OF DRIVES

Whenever there are moderate or lengthy drives they are broken up where possible with birding stops and stops for refreshments, etc. Driving in India is not as good as in most of the rest of the world and can take some getting used to. Our drivers are used to the road conditions and driving style and do a great job of keeping everyone safe. Distances traveled are not particularly huge in most cases, but the roads are often in a poor condition, making drives take longer than they would in more developed areas. Many roads are in the process of getting upgraded, and there are a few very good toll roads we will likely use.

COMMUNICATIONS

Many but most certainly not all of the places visited on our tours have WIFI in some form. This may just be in the hotel lobby and can be a bit hit-or-miss. If you want more reliable internet connection it is possible to purchase a SIM card at the airport, e.g. Airtel works well through most of the country and is fairly cheap.

WHAT TO BRING

Clothing

This is not a fashion statement trip! Casual and informal, practical dress is fine in the hotels. Loose lightweight field clothing works best, with a warm fleece or jacket for cooler weather and warm

clothing for early-morning game drives. Shorts and T-shirts are fine in the south. You will also need to bring some warmer clothing and a rain jacket. Rain is always a possibility, so an umbrella and/or rain gear is always useful to have. Early mornings can feel very chilly in some areas, so come prepared, especially in the northern mountains at higher elevations.

Sunglasses, sunhat and sunscreen (rated SPF 30 or higher) are useful. A pair of pants/trousers or a long skirt and a long-sleeved shirt should be included to help protect against forest vegetation and the sun. Swimwear can be brought as there are swimming pools at some of the hotels.

We would recommend lightweight walking boots when out on foot. You might like to consider sandals/trainers (tennis shoes) for use in the vehicles and for walking between your room and restaurant in the hotels and lodges.

Do not forget – Binoculars, prescription drugs (also bring the generic names for these drugs), toiletries, prescription glasses (and a spare pair), insect repellent, sunscreen and sunglasses, camera, flashlight (torch), batteries (for electronic equipment and chargers for re-chargeable batteries if required), converter plug set if needed and plug adaptors, alarm clock, money pouch, field guide(s), daypack. While our guides typically carry a scope, if you have your own scope you might wish to bring it too as this will speed up observations.

Key Documents and Cash – Passports, your travel or health insurance cards, photocopies of which can be carried by the tour leader in case of emergency, credit cards (see info above). US dollars, euros, or British pounds can be exchanged into Indian rupees if you prefer not to simply draw cash from ATMs for drinks, gifts, tips, items of a personal nature, etc., which are not included in the tour cost.

LUGGAGE

Due to restricted space in the vehicles please pack as lightly as possible. A medium soft-sided duffle bag (not the hard-sided cases) works best for packing in the vehicles. This allows us to better fit the bags. Please bring a daypack to keep items that you wish to use or need on a daily basis.

DANGEROUS ANIMALS

There are several dangerous animals in India such as tiger, leopard, and Asian elephant. We will endeavor to see these beautiful creatures but remain a respectful distance from them. There are several species of venomous snakes in India, so all snakes should be viewed from a safe distance with care taken when walking in forests, scrub, and grassland (e.g. check where you are putting your hands and feet).

CRIME

India is generally a safe place to travel with very friendly people. However, as anywhere in the world it is advisable to take care and remain cautious and observant for the unexpected, especially in busy areas with lots of people, e.g. train stations, airports, markets, monuments, etc.

LANGUAGE

English is widely spoken. Our local guide will assist with communication with some jeep drivers who may not speak English.

TIPS

It is expected to tip practically everyone who provides any form of service in India, so try and get as many small notes as possible as early as possible (but this is not always easy!). The following

is a guide, and if you feel like a service provided was better/worse than expected you can adjust accordingly. Note: Examples of tips below are per group (2-4 persons) and not per traveler and are in Indian Rupee (INR). Nature Guide (full day) 750-1250 INR, Jeep Guide (3 – 5 hours) 200 – 300 INR, Monument Guide (full day) 500-1000 INR, Monument Guide (half day) 300-500 INR, Driver 500-1000 INR/day, Hotel porters 50 INR/bag/porter (extra if lots of heavy bags), Hotel Staff (2 to 3 nights duration of stay) usually 250 INR per room per night as a consolidated amount to be put into the box or handed to the hotel manager to share among his staff, Hotel greeting staff 50-100 INR for car door opening at plush hotels, Railway porters (pay them once they have shown you to your seat and carried your bags into the carriage) expect around 100 INR/bag but agree about the price in advance, Rickshaw guides (Bharatpur) 500-750 INR per day.

MONUMENT VISITS

The entrance fees for monument visits (e.g. Fatehpur Sikri, the Taj Mahal, and any others we may decide to visit) are not included in the tour price and are to be paid on arrival at the monument. For example, on the Northern India tour at the Taj Mahal a local monument guide is included in your tour price (he will talk to you about the history of the building, and point out interesting features etc.), but the actual entrance fee is not included.

Note: On the Northern India tour the visit to the Taj Mahal is just to walk around the outside with lots of nice photo opportunities, but it does not go inside as there simply isn't enough time for this. If you would like to go inside the Taj Mahal we can arrange a pre- or post-tour extension where this would be possible.

ALCOHOL

Some of the places visited are 'dry', i.e. they do not serve alcoholic drinks. Some places will allow you to bring purchased alcohol into their restaurants, others will only allow it in your room. There are bottle shops in most towns we go through, so it is easy to buy wine, beer, or spirits here. The local Sula red/white wine is quite nice, especially in the cold evenings in the north!

PHOTOGRAPHY

There are many good photo opportunities on our tours, ranging from natural and human-made landscapes to birds and other wildlife. Depending on the size of your camera (e.g. if you have a huge lens) you may be charged a fee at some locations. The fees for this are usually very small.

GENERAL USEFUL INFORMATION

Take a toilet roll from the first hotel with you for roadside/emergency stops; there are plenty of toilets at gas stations but most are basic with no toilet roll.

Take a bottle of hand sanitizer and use after shaking people's hands and touching money/doors/taps etc., and use it before eating. General hygiene and sanitation levels in India are much lower than in most of the rest of the world.

Never drink any water coming out of taps. Only drink bottled water or purified water. You will be provided with a couple of bottles of water by your local guide each day. Note that sometimes hotels will provide a couple of bottles of water for free, but sometimes additional bottles will be charged for, so just be sure what is or isn't included by discussing it with the hotel.

Laundry services are available at a number of hotels we stay at during our tours, and the costs for this are fairly reasonable.

On arrival you'll be met by our ground agent, who'll take you to your hotel or wherever you need to be. They will have a sign with your name.

DEPARTURE

Ensure that you arrive at the airport three hours before your international flight, as there is a lot of red tape to go through and it can take a while getting through check in, immigration, and security. There should be no departure tax, which should be included in your flight ticket, but it's worth it confirming this with your chosen airline.