

Keene Luxury Travel's Guide to India



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What to Expect in India

A Truly Exotic and Surprising Destination — Overview by Ngaire Keene



Colorful, exotic, incredible temples, elephants, happy people, traffic and luxurious accommodations with truly gracious service; this is what comes to mind when I reflect on my travels in India. The most surprising thing was all of the vivid colors of India. Color hits you immediately everywhere you look. The women in their beautiful saris waving as we passed by, the brightly painted trucks and buses, the brightly decorated elephants at temple celebrations. The people are friendly and happy; they smile and wave, and the children like to have their picture taken. The traffic is shocking at first but you adjust to camels and cows being on the road. Then the pure luxury that is offered by the [Oberoi](#) and [Taj hotels](#). This is a busy, bustling country where even in the countryside people are busy going about their very active lives. India is undergoing major changes and there is a growing middle class of well-educated professionals that are shaping a new and modern India.

Recommendations on Areas to Visit

India is divided into two main regions as far as tourism is concerned; the North and the South. The most popular is the Northern region with the South being visited as an extension to a Northern tour or on your second visit to India. Another popular destination is one of the tiger reserves to see a tiger in the wild. No guaranteed sightings, but very exciting for wildlife enthusiasts. We offer tours that combine the best of these regions.



Northern India

The North is the most popular and this contains "The Golden Triangle" of Delhi, [Agra \(Taj Mahal\)](#) and [Jaipur](#). This is the most popular tourist circuit to visit. I also feel adding [Udaipur](#) to that list of destinations as it is well worth the visit. This Northern region has all the luxury hotels to keep the modern tourist in comfort while exploring the wonders that the state of Rajasthan and modern Delhi have to offer. I would strongly recommend this Northern itinerary for first time visitors to India.

Southern India

The south of India offers the bustling port city of [Mumbai \(Bombay\)](#), the new beach resort of Goa, very popular with Europeans, [Kochi \(Cochin\)](#) and the amazing Kathakali performance, the beautiful [Kerala Backwaters](#), [Lake Periyar](#) and the surrounding spice villages. This is a less touristy area of India and the state of Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India. This perfect as an extension to a Northern tour or for a second visit to India.



Taj Mahal at Agra



Bandhavgarh National Park



Kerala Backwaters

Accommodations in India

India is a country where you should go first class.

There are many new luxury hotel properties in India that rival any 5-star experience anywhere in the world. The two key hotel chains are Oberoi and Taj Hotels. These hotels can be found in the cities of India. In New Delhi, there is also another hotel that offers an exceptional product, The Imperial Hotel. Keene Luxury Travel will only organize trips using the finest hotels to ensure your comfort and level of cleanliness and service.

OBEROI HOTELS

This is the most expensive hotel chain in India and the one we would recommend. The Oberoi chain hotels are all very new and offer a consistent level of high-quality contemporary accommodation.

The top of the line in this brand are the resort hotels classified as vilas and offer a unique experience where the hotel alone could be the destination. The hotels offer large rooms with king size comfortable beds with fine linens, air conditioning, TV, in room WIFI computer access, sitting areas and large and luxurious bathrooms. The hotels are spread out over spacious grounds with elaborate swimming pools and architecture. The service is exceptional and gracious. The hotels all feature multiple restaurants featuring fine dining, both Indian cuisine and an extensive continental menu with all the foods that Americans are accustomed to eating. Outdoor dining is featured in the most exotic and romantic settings. Each hotel features water that is safe to drink from the tap in your room. Having traveled extensively and stayed at some of the world's best hotels, I can honestly say that the Oberoi Vilas collection took my breath away.

[More Info...](#)

TAJ HOTELS

The Taj Hotels vary more from area to area in their luxury and accommodations. Many are classified as Heritage properties (over 75 years old) and offer an experience of a hotel with character and history. These hotels will generally be less expensive than the Oberoi hotels and you need to look at each property independently to decide which hotel appeals to you the most.

[More Info...](#)

THE IMPERIAL HOTEL

This hotel is not a part of chain, and is an independent hotel located in New Delhi. The basic rooms here are not that impressive but when you move up one category to the next level and above the quality of the rooms improves. The hotel itself is one of the most delightful properties. It offers a blend of the contemporary style of the Oberoi with the more traditional style of the Taj Hotels. The public rooms, restaurants, décor are exquisite. This hotel that will please even the most discerning tastes.

[More Info...](#)

Oberoi Hotels | Ultra-Luxury Hotels

These hotels can be found in major cities and tourist areas of India.

Personal Impression

Without a doubt these hotels offer a standard that I had never expected to experience in India. Ultra-luxurious rooms, with every single possibility amenity, wonderful grounds full of flowers and pools of cool water, as well as incredible spas featuring the ayurvedic treatments. The impression upon arrival in any of these hotels has an immediate "WOW" factor. These are new hotels, built with every luxury in mind. The Oberoi also has a cruise ship on the Kerala Backwaters that features large air-conditioned cabins and a luxurious way to see the backwaters of Kerala.



Internet Access

The hotels all have guest computers and offer internet access.

Dining and Wines

The food was excellent, fresh, perfectly prepared and with excellent service. My best meals were all at the Oberoi hotels. They offer the best selection of food that Americans are used to eating that I found on my travels through India. They offer fine dining in a variety of cuisines and I found their Italian restaurants to be really superb. Of course, they have a gourmet Indian restaurant for those that like to eat Indian food.

Spa

The hotels all offer a Spa with a variety of treatments available including the ayurvedic treatments that are a specialty of India.

Oberoi Properties

- [The Oberoi Delhi - New Delhi](#)
- [The Oberoi - Mumbai](#)
- [The Oberoi Rajvilas - Jaipur](#)
- [The Oberoi Amarvilas - Agra](#)
- [The Oberoi Udaivilas - Udaipur](#)
- [The Oberoi Motor Vessel \(Kerala Backwaters\)](#)
- [Trident Hotel, Cochin](#)

The Oberoi - New Delhi

A Leading Hotels of the World Property

Overview

The hotel is well suited for a business or leisure property. The hotel is located close to the city center which is the business, commercial and shopping districts. The luxury hotel overlooks Delhi's prestigious Golf Club on one side and the heritage site of Humayun's Tomb on the other.



Standard Guest Room



Italian Restaurant



Casual Dining Area

The Public Areas

The bars, lounges and restaurants are beautifully and tastefully decorated. There are award winning restaurants in the hotel featuring, Northern Indian, Chinese, Mediterranean and Italian food. The Travertino Italian restaurant was truly outstanding. The spa offers many treatments including Aromatherapy, Balinese, Hawaiian, Body massage and Chakra head and shoulder massage.

The Bedrooms

The 279 bedrooms feature all the necessities for a comfortable stay, including a comfortable king size bed and a large marble bathroom. There are larger suites available as well. All the rooms have a view of the golf club or Humayun's Tomb.

Website: [The Oberoi Delhi](#)

The Oberoi Mumbai

A Leading Hotels of the World Property

Overview

The hotel is well suited for a business or leisure property. A high-rise hotel located on the Indian ocean in the business district of Mumbai. This hotel could be anywhere in the world with the first-class facilities, nice rooms and wonderful restaurants. The flowers in this hotel were really exquisite.

The Public Areas

The bars, lounges and restaurants are beautifully and tastefully decorated. The restaurants feature all types of cuisine and the Italian restaurant, Vetro, was truly outstanding. In the evening, the view of the bay with the nickname "the queen's necklace" with lights twinkling around the curving bay that lays out in front of you is really quite lovely. This is a bustling area of Mumbai with people walking around the waterfront and activity at all times. Of course, the hotel has internet access. The spa, the Banyan Tree, has numerous treatment options.



Atrium Area



The Pool and Ocean



Atrium Area



Casual Dining at Tiffin



Standard Bedroom



Bathroom Vanity area

The Bedrooms

The 333 bedrooms feature all the necessities for a comfortable stay. A comfortable king size bed a large marble bathroom and a view over the surrounding areas. From the window of my bedroom, I saw the first wild peacock in India. The rooms are situated off the main marbled lobby and have views of either the city, bay or ocean.

Website: [The Oberoi Mumbai](http://TheOberoiMumbai.com)

The Oberoi Rajvilas

Overview

This Ultra Luxury Hotel is located about 30 minutes out of Jaipur, but once you get there it is worthwhile. The hotel is built in a Rajastani Fort setting with a temple floating in the middle of the property. Pools, flowers, and lush vegetation are everywhere surrounding the main building as you cross a small bridge with a pool filled with fish below. There is no access to the rooms without going outdoors, but golf carts can take you to your room.

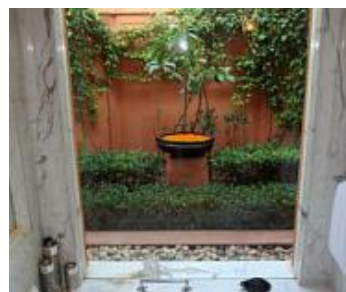


The Public Areas

The foyer and public rooms are not as lavish as some of the other Oberoi hotels, but beautifully decorated and spacious. The outdoor eating area around the pool is spectacular at night – featuring floating flames in the water and entertainment in the pool area. The swimming pool is outside the main foyer on the way to the rooms.

The Bedrooms

The 54 rooms are built in clusters that feature a center courtyard complete with fountain. Each room features a private ornamental garden that you view from the bathroom. The large sunken marble tub features candles and bath salts for a relaxing end to a day of sightseeing. The rooms are large with a king size four poster bed, a sitting room area, armoire with a television, a desk with internet connections, and the room looks out to the beautiful grounds.



Tented Accommodations

The Rajvilas Jaipur also has luxury tented accommodations that are truly spectacular. Fully air-conditioned, these tents are the same as those featured at the Oberoi property at the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve. The pictures below show the luxury of these tents.



Website: The Oberoi Rajvilas, Jaipur

The Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra

An Ultra-Luxury Hotel Near the Taj Mahal

Overview

The hotel is located very close to the Taj Mahal. It takes a short 5-minute golf cart ride to reach the Taj Mahal entrance gate. Arrival here is stunning as you step into the huge outdoor area prior to reaching the foyer of the hotel. The property is full of terraced lawns, fountains, reflection pools, and pavilions. The foyer is large, plush and inviting. This is definitely "the" place to stay when visiting the Taj Mahal.



The Public Areas

As with all Oberoi hotels the public areas are truly impressive. Huge spaces filled with comfortable seating areas and exquisite furnishings. Of course, seeing the Taj Mahal out the windows is quite stunning. The dining rooms offer Mediterranean fare and a fine Indian restaurant. The Indian restaurant here also offered standard western fare which was a nice change for those dining here who were tired of or did not like Indian food. The food was excellent. The pool area shown in the aerial view above was large, with a lot of space for enjoying some quiet time outside.



Outdoor Foyer



View upon arrival



Standard Room

The Bedrooms

The rooms are large with a sitting room area, a king-size comfortable bed, Amoire with TV, and the best turn down service we have ever experienced - featured in the picture above. The bathrooms are spacious and inviting. This is a very comfortable hotel room.

Website [The Oberoi Amarvilas](http://www.oberoi.com)

The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur

Overview

The hotel is located on the beautiful Pichola Lake. On arrival, they often take you to the hotel by way of a boat, particularly stunning if you arrive after dark. The lake with the temple of Jag Nivas, the Grand Palace and the Lake Palace Taj Hotel are beautifully lit up at night and the images are reflected in the water.

The temple that is on the mountain appears to be floating in the air and it is purely magical! Arrival here offers stunning views as you head into the courtyard and before you reach the foyer. This is one of the most beautiful hotels I have ever seen and my favorite in the Oberoi collection.



The Public Areas

The foyer and public rooms are lavish and beautifully decorated. The outdoor eating area was magical at night, with a view of the lake, torches burning, and the performers dancing during dinner. Breakfast was outstanding with a great variety of cold foods and bakery items and a wonderful hot breakfast menu. The hotel features many different areas and the shop has some exquisite articles. There is a main swimming pool with more deck chairs than could ever be filled. There is a lot to see in Udaipur but the hotel is a special destination of its own!



The Bedrooms

The rooms are large with a sitting room area, a king-size comfortable bed with an armoire containing a television, and a small window seat that looks out to the beautiful grounds. Our room also had an outside patio off the bathroom area. The bathroom featured a make-up area with plugs that would take American appliances. There was internet access in the rooms.



Standard Bedroom



Bedroom Living Area



Bathroom

Website [The Oberoi Udaivilas](http://TheOberoiUdaivilas.com)

The Oberoi Motor Vessel Vrinda

Two or Three Night Cruises of the Backwaters of Kerala

Overview

The Vrinda is operated by the luxury hotel chain Oberoi. The motor vessel sails in one of India's most enchanting areas the backwaters of Kerala which is a series of scenic canals on Vembanad Lakes. This is a peaceful and interesting journey as you see the local farmers and residents living alongside the canals.



The Public Areas of the Ship

The air-conditioned dining room offers international and regional cuisine from a menu that offers choices rather than a set menu. The bar is located at the head of the dining room. Outside is a lovely open-air lounge with comfortable chairs and seating areas to view the scenery. Massages are available onboard.

Sample 3-Night Itinerary

Day 1 - At 1 pm, once all guests are on board, Vrinda sets sail along the main waterway on Vembanad Lake and enters the Alleppey canal. Lunch will be served onboard. The cruiser sails along the scenic waterways for four hours and returns to the Vembanad Lake in time to watch the sunset. Later in the evening, guests enjoy a performance of the highly ritualized "Kathakali" dance which tells stories from the ancient Hindu epics - Ramayana and Mahabarata. Performances begin with the application of elaborate makeup which is based in traditional Ayurvedic principles. The vessel will anchor for the night at the Vembanad Lake jetty. Dinner onboard.

Day 2 - At 7 am, Motor Vessel Vrinda will sail from the Vembanad Lake jetty and head South, towards Alleppey. Breakfast will be served onboard. The vessel will enter the waterways of the Pamba river through the Alleppey canal. Sailing through scenic backwaters, guests can observe life along these "water highways" while passing through one of the few areas in the world where farming is done below sea level. The vessel will anchor near Kanjippadam and guests will be transferred to a traditional rice boat to navigate through the narrower sections of the backwaters.

For the next few hours, accompanied by a guide, guests will observe and experience a way of life unique to this region. This section of the cruise includes a visit to the half-statue of Lord Buddha at Karumadi and a traditional Kerala tharavad (family residence). Later in the day, guests return to Motor Vessel Vrinda where lunch will be served as the boat passes through picturesque stretches of the backwaters on the way back to Alleppey, known as the "Venice of the East". Motor Vessel Vrinda will anchor for the night at the Vembanad Lake jetty. Dinner onboard.

Day 3 - At 7 am, Motor Vessel Vrinda will sail from the Vembanad Lake jetty and head South, past Kanjippadam. Vrinda will anchor near Chambakulam where guests will transfer onto the rice boat once again for a pre-lunch sightseeing excursion. Guests will visit St. Mary's Church, established by St. Thomas in 1721 and Sree Bhagavathy Kshetram, a 100-year-old Hindu temple to Mother Goddess - at Nedumudy. Guests can also explore the Chambakulam snake boat yard, which displays one of the traditional long snake boats used in races.

To further the understanding and appreciation of this experience, a qualified guide will be present onboard for the full day. After cruising through the backwaters in the afternoon, Motor Vessel Vrinda will return to Vembanad Lake, where guests can enjoy a "Mohiniattam" recital on board. This classical dance form, distinctive to Kerala, is also called the 'Dance of the Enchantress'. Dancers attired in beautiful traditional costumes perform with slow, graceful movements and highly emotive expressions. Dinner onboard.

Day 4 - At 8 am, Motor Vessel Vrinda will sail North along the main waterway channel on the Vembanad Lake. Breakfast will be served onboard following which the vessel will return to the Vembanad Lake jetty. Guests will check out at 10 am and will be transported by air-conditioned vehicle back to Cochin.



Dining Room



Deck Lounge Area



Standard Cabin

The Cabins

The eight air-conditioned cabins are really quite spacious and are nicely decorated with attached bathrooms. Each cabin features a DVD and electronic safe. The cabins are better than many cabins featured on mainstream American cruise lines.

Website: [The Oberoi Motor Vessel Vrinda](#)

Route map and 2-night Itinerary: [Itineraries](#)

Trident, Cochin

Overview

The hotel is located in the town of Cochin. This is one of the Trident Hotels but is a part of the Oberoi Group. See [Trident Hotels - About Us](#). Of course, it cannot compare to the grandeur of the luxury Oberoi properties, but this is still a very comfortable and well-maintained hotel. It is a low-rise building with a center courtyard with pool and a good spa.



The Public Areas

The public areas are spacious and nicely decorated. The lobby is pleasant with big comfy chairs and couches. The main restaurant is airy and bright with a wonderful choice of food. Actually, the food here was surprisingly good. In the evenings, they sometimes offer a grill barbeque where you pick your food and it is cooked to order. You then can eat outside around the pool; it is a very pleasant way to enjoy dinner. The small gift shop carried some wonderful goods to take home for small gifts. The spa featured two treatment rooms with many different types of therapy.



Foyer



Bar



Hotel Exterior



Pool Dining Area



Main Restaurant



Pool Area

The Bedrooms

All rooms are spacious have a wireless internet, king size bed, TV, privacy safe and all the amenities you would expect in a nice hotel, the rooms offer very comfortable accommodations. They are nothing special but all that you need for a short stay in Cochin. The courtyard and pool area are quite lovely with very plush grounds.



Website: [The Trident - Cochin](#)

Taj Hotels

These hotels can be found in major cities and tourist areas of India.



Personal Impression

Without a doubt, these hotels offer a very high standard of accommodation. The rooms are luxurious rooms, offering every possible amenity. The wonderful grounds are full of flowers and pools of cool water. They also have incredible spas featuring the ayurvedic treatments. The Taj Hotel chain features Heritage Hotels that were palaces in the past and has properties that offer a history as well as the finest of hospitality and luxury. If you like a hotel that has a great deal of character, these would be the hotels to select. Many are restorations and the size and shape of the rooms vary tremendously.

Trident Hiltons

The Taj group also owns the Trident Hiltons that are not of the luxury level that the regular Taj hotels offer but are the best options in some of the smaller Southern Indian areas.

General Overview

The food was very good, fresh, perfectly prepared and with excellent service. They offer a good selection of food that Americans are used to eating and normally in a more casual atmosphere. The fine dining is always focused on Indian cuisine. The hotels all offer a Spa with a variety of treatments available including the ayurvedic treatments that are a specialty of India. The hotels all have guest computers and offer internet access.

The Taj Hotel Properties

- [Taj Rambagh Palace, Jaipur](#)
- [The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai](#)
- [Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur](#)
- [The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi](#)

Website: [The Taj Hotels](#)

Taj Rambagh Palace, Jaipur



Overview

This impressive hotel was built in 1835 as a hunting lodge and converted to a palace in 1925 as the residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur. It was converted to a hotel in 1957. It is an incredible hotel with stunning architecture.

The Rambagh Palace resort is spread over 47 acres of tranquil, landscaped gardens. Located close to the walled "Pink City", spectacular forts, and all the unique shopping bazaars of Jaipur, the

Palace unveils the rich culture and history of the past rulers of Rajasthan. The palace has been restored to its former glory with refurbished rooms with verandahs that overlook courtyards with fountains or gardens, or the idyllic front lawns. There is a warm intimate lobby and it is fun to re-live the royal lifestyle at Rambagh.



The Public Areas

The foyer and public rooms are lavish and feature many extraordinary pieces of art, sculpture, and very unique furnishings. The hotel offers a variety of dining options with some unique night time experiences. Suvarna Mahal is the grand Indian dining experience. For more casual fare, the open-air Verandah Cafe on the palace lawn is always popular as is the casual dining room, the Rajput Room. Steam is a very popular restaurant/bar experience within a restored steam engine and a Victorian style station



Delightful Sitting Area



Lobby Area



Pool Patio

The Bedrooms

The rooms feature all the amenities you would expect in a world class hotel. The luxury rooms have all been restored with plenty of space and wonderful modern marble bathrooms. The suites here are incredible and come in three different categories; Historical, Royal and Grand Royal. Some of these suites were the personal rooms of the Maharaja and his family and the opulence of these rooms is quite amazing.



Standard Bedroom



Standard Bathroom



Suite

Hotel Fact Sheet: [Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces - Rambagh Palace, Jaipur](#)

The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai



Overview

Since opening in 1903, the Taj Palace and hotel and has been a landmark building. The Taj is located right on the waterfront of the busy harbor across from the Gateway of India, a monument built to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary. The hotel features many opulent suites and has been the hotel of choice for many visiting celebrities. Indian influences are featured with vaulted alabaster ceilings, onyx columns, graceful archways, hand-woven silk carpets, crystal chandeliers, a magnificent art collection, and a dramatic cantilever stairway.

The Public Areas

The foyer and public rooms are lavish and feature many unique pieces of art, sculpture and very unique furnishings. The outdoor patio and dining area pictured below is in front of the courtyard with a pool and is a wonderful place to sit and relax. There are 9 different venues for food featuring many different types of cuisines.



Stairway To Rooms



Pool Patio



A Delightful Sitting Area

The Bedrooms

The rooms are located from corridors that go up the entire structure of the building as pictured above. 565 rooms and so many incredible configurations and prices. Below are two of the standard type rooms that are very spacious and feature nice modern bathrooms. Many of the rooms feature wireless internet access.



Standard Bedroom



Standard Bedroom



Bathroom

Hotel Fact Sheet: [The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai](#)

Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur

Overview

The Lake Palace is an exquisite white marble palace that seems to float on the still waters of Lake Pichola. Originally built as a summer palace, Taj Lake Palace has recently been transformed to its former glory whose sole purpose is the pursuit of leisure. You must arrive at the hotel by boat as it is located on the water. The hotel has a center courtyard filled with gardens and water. The palace is 250 years old.

The Public Areas

The foyer is small but elegant and the hotel features lounge and bar areas that are very comfortable. The main dining room features Indian cuisine and there is a casual restaurant that features a variety of western foods. It can be arranged for you to have dinner on a floating dock. Groups can also have dinner on the barge that is shown in front of the hotel on the picture above. The most appealing area of the hotel is the center garden courtyard with birds, flowers and trees. The Royal Spa is available with many different therapies to pamper you in royal style.



The Bedrooms

The rooms feature all the amenities you would expect in a world class hotel. The 83 rooms have been divided into standard rooms, deluxe lake-facing rooms, luxury rooms, royal suites and grand royal suites. All the rooms and suites at the hotel have colored murals, opulent silks and carved wooden furniture as an integral part of their design with plenty of space and wonderful modern marble bathrooms. Some of the larger suites are spectacular. The web site below will cover the rooms in more detail. Unfortunately, our pictures were lost from this hotel so we apologize that we will have to defer you to the image gallery on their website.

Image Gallery: [Taj Lake Palace Image Gallery](#)

Website: [Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur](#)

The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi

Overview

The Taj Mahal Hotel is a luxury 5-star hotel that has a gracious ambiance. The hotel is located in the exclusive residential area of Lutyens' Delhi, close to the seat of government. Reflecting the heritage of Mughal Delhi, this hotel offers graceful architecture with modern facilities. The white lobby of The Taj includes design details reminiscent of Mughal architecture that includes intricate motifs, golden inlay work, and a showcase of artifacts. The lobby features intricate design work complimenting the calm marble fountain streams. The hotel is a 40-minute drive from the airport and near the bustling city center.



The Public Areas

The bars, lounges and restaurants are beautiful and tastefully decorated. This is a large hotel featuring many different lounges and restaurants. The cuisine offered is varied. Indian cuisine is featured in the fine dining restaurant as well as an excellent Chinese restaurant. The spa incorporates a large area and has really unique treatment rooms, there is a full beauty shop and a huge gym with every type of machine imaginable.



Varq - Indian Restaurant



Foyer Staircase



Floral Arrangement

The Bedrooms

There are 296 rooms at the Taj Mahal Hotel and these range from the standard rooms to the presidential suite. All rooms have WIFI TV, privacy safe, large bedroom, marble bathroom, and all the amenities you would expect in a 5-star hotel. The rooms can vary in size and design within each category.



Standard Bedroom



Standard Bedroom



Standard Bathroom

Hotel Fact Sheet: [The Taj Mahal, New Delhi](#)

The Imperial New Delhi

Overview

This Luxury 5-Star Hotel is located 30 minutes from the airport in the new upscale area of New Delhi on the Janpath and very close to the renowned shopping district. This picture of the unique flowered stands in the foyer cannot do justice to these stunning floral masterpieces. The hotel is large with exquisite public areas and a huge variety of rooms with some of the most incredible, large suites I have ever seen – including the standard rooms. There are some good hotels in New Delhi but this is "the" place to stay when visiting New Delhi.



The Public Areas

The bars, lounges and restaurants are beautifully and tastefully decorated. The cuisine offered is varied and features, Indian, French, Italian and three alfresco dining venues. The chocolate afternoon tea is unforgettable! The spa incorporates an area of 2,500 square meters, 11 treatment rooms, and an exclusive Ayurvedic center. The hotel also features a state-of-the-art gym. The museum hotel houses some of the rarest works of art from the British period with each floor dedicated to an artist whose original works adorn the rooms and corridors.



Foyer Hallway



Restaurant



Atrium Area



Chocolate Tea



Bar Area



Hallway Area

The Bedrooms

There are 234 rooms in the Imperial that offer many different suites and standard rooms. All rooms have a view, wireless internet, TV, privacy safe and all the amenities you would expect in a five-star hotel. There are many types of large suites that offer the ultimate in space and luxury. Even the regular room are very comfortable accommodations. Note the picture of the hallway to the rooms, they are very wide and feature original art work from the artist that is featured for that floor.



Website: [The Imperial New Delhi](http://TheImperialNewDelhi.com)

Devi Garh by lebua, Udaipur

Overview

Devi Garh by lebua, was the 18th century Devi Garh Fort Palace, in the village of Delwara, located in the Aravali hills of Rajasthan approximately 30 - 45 minutes outside of Udaipur. When you first catch a glimpse of the Devigarh, the sight is one that will be etched in your memory. After years of restoration and reconstruction, Devigarh has regained its past glory. An imposing and impressive structure, it is now a unique, all-suite boutique hotel and a one-of-a-kind retreat that you will never forget! A stay at the Devi Garh is simply to experience the hotel – It is too far to be the hotel of choice Udaipur.



The Public Areas

This is an incredible building with some of the old murals still decorating the walls as shown in the picture. The dining room offers spectacular views of the surrounding countryside that is truly so beautiful it does not look real. The food was really good, we had a rack of lamb that was outstanding. The pool area, the lounging bar and many of the public rooms are really remarkable and focus on various precious metals. There are small private dining areas where you can have an incredible meal and be treated like a Maharaja.



Table With a View



Patio Bar Area



Delightful Pool Area

The Bedrooms

Devi Garh hotel has 30 luxurious and unique suites, each with modern facilities to make guests feel totally at home. Each suite is decorated with marble and semi-precious stones and feature a minibar, air conditioning and heating, in-room safe, marble bathroom, and satellite television. There are eight tents available on request from October to March, but I would recommend staying in the hotel. The Premium “Devi Garh” Suite has a swimming pool and Jacuzzi of its own!



Website: [lebua.com/udaipur](http://www.lebua.com/udaipur)

NORTHERN INDIA

Agra - The Taj Mahal

A sight that is awe inspiring and will not disappoint

Agra is the where the Taj is located and this is the dirtiest most unappealing town we visited. The area leading to the Taj was smelly and the street vendors here incredibly persistent. If people just arrived in from a cruise ship and just saw the Taj and Agra, their impression of India would not be good. This is not so with the Taj Mahal. It is a magnificent structure. I loved it and just could not stop looking at the Taj.



It is worth getting up in time to visit the Taj when it opens at 6:00 am. As the sun rises it was amazing how the colors of the marble changed. It is nice and cool early in the morning and there are also very few people here at this time so it makes the whole experience much more pleasant. For the picture at left, I am sitting in the same spot where Princess Diana sat and had her picture taken. See how few people are here early in the morning.

You cannot drive right up to the Taj Mahal entrance in a car or bus. The hotel in which we stayed [The Oberoi Amarvilas](#) is only 600 meters from the entrance and if you are a registered guest, they will take you to and from the entrance in a golf cart. There is a man at the entrance to the Taj that radios ahead if they need a cart to come and get you. The other hotels offer free small battery-operated vans, but the drivers do expect a tip.

Once you are at the Taj there is fairly tight security. There is a line for women and a line for men as they will pat you down. They do not allow anything but cameras, so no video cameras are allowed. They are also very serious about anything that could be used to scratch the monument, so they search every bag. I strongly suggest you take the absolute bare minimum with you when you go. The line you encounter will be very dependent on how many are in front of you and how much they all carry. There are bathrooms on your right as you enter, but they are NOT Western style. I do suggest you take care of this prior to coming to the monument. With your entrance ticket, you will receive a bottle of water and covers for your shoes to put on prior to entering the monument.

Once inside, you pass through a gateway. If you stand directly in the middle and walk it is very interesting as the Taj seems to be coming directly to you. Once you pass through this gate, there is a wonderful camera shot right in the middle of the reflecting pool. If you kneel down here, this makes for a better shot. On both sides, there are gardens and the entire area is beautifully maintained. All the way down the view is wonderful, as you get closer to the monument. There is a raised area past the pool with benches. The first bench in the middle you come to is where all the VIP like sit to have their picture taken. The bench at the front to the right is where Princess Diana sat for her picture at the Taj. These are of course very popular for pictures.

The inside is not very large and your guide will explain the two tombs and show you the places to look to see the exquisite workmanship up close.



Taj Mahal Entrance



Trick Photography



The Oberoi Amarvilas

Jaipur | The Pink City

Jaipur is considered part of the golden triangle and is visited by most tourists to India. At first the town is not that appealing. However, after a few days seeing the sights of Jaipur it is clear why this town is visited by most tourists.



The Palace of the Winds

Amber Fort

This is called a fort but is in reality is a Maharaja's Palace. Built on the top of a hill, it is also surrounded by a fort with "the great wall of India" for protection. As you arrive, there is a magnificent view of the old fort and the palace. On the drive to Amber Fort, you start to see all the elephants. It is fascinating to see these large animals on regular roads with cars and trucks. The view of the palace and fort, the lake in front, the elephants, jeeps, vendors and general confusion it is the scene at the bottom is quite remarkable.



Getting to the top – elephant or jeep?

Elephant: There is an elephant ride to the top of the fort. It is inexpensive price varies and is per elephant for up to two people per elephant. It takes about 30 minutes to get to the top. However, in order to do this, you must get there early. It's first come, first served and they only allow 2 people per elephant and only 300 people a day. It meant getting up really early so we decided to wait until we got to the safari camp to do our elephant riding.

Jeep: There are four-wheel drive jeeps for about a very reasonable fee that take you to the top. Not good for taking pictures because the jeeps are covered and you cannot see out very well.

Touring the Fort and the Amber Palace: This is a very interesting tour. There are some areas that are still in excellent condition and never been restored. All the frescos were done with vegetable dyes and have stood the test of time. The sights range from areas that are almost ruins to preserved rooms decorated with frescos and mirrors that are quite beautiful. The combination of the drive in, seeing the fort palace and all the elephants make this is a great tour. It takes about three to four hours to do the whole thing.



Elephant Rides



The Fort & Amber Palace



Amber Palace Courtyard

Old City Tour & Observatory

The other tour we took was to the Old City that was first painted in honor of the visit of the Prince of Wales. This tradition has been maintained and now every building in the Old City must be pink. When you first see the pink walls, then you know right away that you are in the "pink city". The Observatory and City Palace are in the Old City.

The observatory is interesting with the largest sundial in the world that keeps time to two seconds. It is quite fascinating. The Palace museums are housed in part of the city Palace and there are three museums. They are not large. These have items from the Maharajas of this region. One has clothing, one has weapons, and the third has paintings, rugs and howdah's (elephant saddles for carrying people). The current Maharaja still lives in this complex.



The Pink City



The Observatory



Camels on the Road

Shopping in Jaipur

Jaipur is known for the shopping. You can get tailor made clothes in a few hours, and bangles, bags, and souvenir items are everywhere. The streets are lined with vendors and with all of their brightly colored goods on display. Bargaining is the order of the day. Although there is the normal "come into my store" requests, once you say no the store owners or street vendors, they back off more than they do in other areas of the world. We had lunch at a hotel and then wandered into a store close by - two hours later I left with 3 Indian outfits being custom made for me. It is hard to buy ready-made clothing here as everything is custom made. I bought three outfits and one of the others bought an outfit. It was at about 3:00 pm we left the shop, the delivered the outfits to our hotel by 7:30 pm! One turned out well, one just okay, but the third did not work well at all. They made everything too big and one style is huge. They placed a turban on Ken as a good husband buying his wife clothing. The outfits cost about \$85 each, and included, pants, top and scarf, all made out of washable silk. Nice materials and with sequins and beads.

Accommodations in Jaipur

We stayed at the [Oberoi Rajvilas](#), a super luxury hotel. The only negative about this hotel is that it is about 20 minutes outside of town. The rooms are wonderful, large, and comfortable. There is a great bathroom with a sunken marble tub complete with candles and the tub looks out onto a private courtyard with plants and a big urn full of flowers. There was internet in the rooms. The grounds are huge, with lush green lawns, flowers and trees. The pool area is a dream for those who like to relax poolside. The décor of the hotel is contemporary and Moorish and quite stunning.

We had a fabulous outdoor candlelight dinner one night. Big urns were lighting the area with fire, they had candles floating in the water in the courtyard and it all reflected on the soft peach colored Moorish architecture. Indian music and dancers provided the entertainment. The stars were shining, the temperature perfect, the food was fantastic, this was a very romantic and magical evening.

The [Taj Rambagh Palace](#) hotel owned by the Taj Hotel group was a fascinating property. Built as a hunting villa for the Maharaja it is now a hotel that is quite stunning. Every room is different and the ambiance of the hotel is amazing. It is worth visiting this hotel even if you do not stay there.

Udaipur – Rajasthan

Venice of the East: The City of Lakes

Arriving in Udaipur, we were transferred to a boat for the final leg of our journey. In front of us, was a magical scene with the [Taj Lake Palace](#) and the Grand Palace all lit up in the middle of the lake like a massive palace that appeared to be floating in the sky as it reflected against the moonlit (full moon) water. As we came closer to the hotel we were going to be staying at, the [Oberoi Udaivillas Hotel](#), they stopped the boat and a fireworks display took place. There must have been about 20 rockets and it was spectacular. Then, we stepped off the boat into the most incredible property that I have ever seen. Contemporary and Indian at the same time, with water everywhere and tons of space.



The Inside of the Grand Palace

The lobby was breathtaking, and the rooms were fantastic. Large rooms with a window seat and a view of the pool and a private courtyard with table that opened up directly to the pool. A huge bathroom with a claw foot tub, sofa, table, and so much space. This property covers a huge area and even has a private zoo. Dinner that first night was on a terrace, with fire torches, with dancers, with everything as romantic as you can imagine. The food was also fantastic! I had a tenderloin steak and the most flavorful sorbet I have ever tasted. The next morning the breakfast was great. My husband had waffles with bananas and nuts and I had the eggs benedict.

We went on a tour of the Grand Palace. This was a very interesting palace and I enjoyed our visit here. Each area offered something new to see and the beauty of detail work on the walls was incredible. We stopped at a store called Anoke that a lady in the hotel had told me about. Great clothes, I bought one outfit.



Grand Palace Courtyard



Grand Palace Entrance



Shopping At Anoke

We went to lunch at a hotel called [Devi Garh by lebua](#). This hotel was an old refurbished fort with the local villagers actually providing most of the labor. This hotel has revitalized this little town and all the staff, waiters, and housemaids are local. The contrast of the old historic building with the highly contemporary large bedrooms works so well. The hotels and are really amazing in Udaipur and below are pictures from each one we visited.



Taj Lake Palace



Oberoi Udaivillas



Devi Garh

We ended the day with about 30 minutes of shopping in a local market. Dinner was the "Indian" fine dining experience at the Lake Palace. The service and ambiance of the restaurant and going and coming by boat was a night to remember. This town is the Venice of India. I loved it and want to come back to spend more time here!

SOUTHERN INDIA

Mumbai, Bombay

Driving to the hotel from the airport, you will see the poverty that people describe when they talk about India. There is a very busy population going about their daily activities. The traffic was something to behold. There are no lanes; it is a mass of cars, bikes, and pedestrians all fighting for their space on the road.



India Gate

Elephanta Island

Next morning, we left at 8:30 am and took a one-hour ferry ride to Elephanta Island. The ferry was slow but the seats were comfortable and the breeze and view of Mumbai from the water was delightful. On arrival at the island, we boarded a small train, Disneyland style, and took a short ride to the entrance to the Elephanta caves. Being the princess that I am, I took a "chair" ride up. This is four men carrying me on a wooden chair up the 125 steps. The cost of this luxury at the time was about \$4.00 I am sure that will continue to rise over the years. On the way up there, were the inevitable souvenir sales stalls and I was able to get an eagle eye view of the merchandise. When the rest of them arrived at the top huffing and puffing, I knew I had made a wise investment. One of the others did the same thing and the ride was really quite fun. Once at the top, just a short walk took us to the caves.

The caves were dug out of the mountain and carved as a temple to the Hindu God, Shiva. Many of the statues are damaged as the Portuguese invaders used these statues for target practice. The carvings and stories they tell were very interesting and we really enjoyed the visit here. Our guide was good and gave us the right amount of information to make it interesting without putting us into overload of information. She lived 2 years in Topeka, Kansas and comes to the USA to visit relatives so her English was perfect and she had a good understanding of Americans.

After our ferry ride we visited the Taj Hotel. This is an old hotel built in 1903 with a great deal of character and is very luxurious. It is the highest rated hotel in Mumbai. It is very large with 12 different food outlets, 565 rooms and many huge suites. We saw quite a few rooms and the hotel is beautifully maintained. The hotel has a perfect location right on the harbor across from the "Gateway of India" the principal landmark of Mumbai that was built to commemorate King George V's visit to the colony in 1911. We ate lunch here, not quite as exciting for me as it was an Indian meal and as one that does not even use pepper I was concerned about this due to the spices. However, I had Ken, the official food taster, taste it for me and it was not as spicy as I had anticipated it would be. By taking off most the sauce, I was able to get through the meal but Indian food is not my "cup of tea". I think this is my one and only Indian meal. However, everyone else in the group really enjoyed the food.



Carried 125 Steps



Cave Carvings



Locals

The Mumbai City Tour

The city has some incredible architecture, it does need cleaning up but the buildings are quite remarkable. Most were built in the late 1800's to the early 1900's. The key items of interest were the Gateway to India, a triumphal arch built to commemorate the visit of George V and Queen Mary, and the incredible central Railway station which is a huge building with amazing details. As with all major cities, there are many churches, temples, and places of interest. I enjoyed with a sitting at the children's park and watched group of ladies in their brightly colored saris sitting with their children. The Marine drive winds around the sea coast and at night you can see the view of "Queen Victoria's Necklace" and by day a panorama of Mumbai's skyline.



Kids at the Park



Mom's Watching Kids



Mumbai Architecture

Accommodations in Mumbai

Arriving at the hotel, we were surprised by the luxury and ambiance of the Oberoi Hotel. The lobby, flowers and furnishing could rival any Four Seasons Hotel. Check-in was fast and efficient. Our room was great. King-sized bed, TV, nice desk with every type of plug you could imagine and large granite bathroom. This was far more luxurious than I had imagined. A butler turned up with complimentary juice and checked to see if there was anything else we needed. WIFI internet was available in the room. This hotel has a view of the water and is located in the business district of Mumbai.



More details on this hotel can be found on our [The Oberoi Mumbai Review](#)

Kochi – Cochin

Gateway to the Kerala Backwaters

Flying in the land was very lush, green and just teeming with palm trees. You could see the water canals that they call the backwaters. Houseboats offer 3 or 4 night cruises into the backwaters to view the flora and fauna of the region. The canal cruising is becoming more and more popular. This is a quieter place and actually a prosperous area. We saw some large homes with swimming pools and large grounds. The state is called Kerala and there is a lot of IT investment in the community with many Americans working in this area. The state boasts 100% literacy.



Kathakali Dancers



We went to a show of the performers of KATHAKALI, the stately dance of Kerala. This is the only area in all of India where you can see these performers. This is unlike a typical folk-dance show. The show started with watching the men apply the make-up. This takes literally hours to do. The show starts with an explanation of the traditions of the dance and that each performance tells a legend of the Hindu religion. Then, they explain what all the actions and facial expressions mean.

The way these men could move only certain facial muscles was truly fascinating, just one cheek up and down and around. It is said it takes four years and 16-hour days to gain the muscle skills and expertise to perform. They are able to express these emotions so incredibly well it is easy to follow the story. There are no words spoken from the actors, as the stories are told only using their expressions; like a highly skilled mime. The costumes are really elaborate and the dance tells a story that you can actually follow. We all loved the show and highly recommend this to anyone who comes to Cochin!

Key Attractions

These attractions are featured on a local city tour. The most interesting are the murals at the Dutch Palace.



Chinese Fishing Nets



Local Temple Celebration



Cochin Markets

The Chinese Fishing Nets — The fishing nets are used to catch fish close to the shore on piers that stretch out onto the water. These are not very efficient but are still in use. Close by is a fish and local market.

The Jewish Synagogue — The Jewish Synagogue is in the Jewish area and the story of the Jewish community here is interesting. All the Jewish people have now left and at our visit there were only four families left from the original Jewish community. In this area there are lots of shops selling typical souvenirs, but fun to look through.

The Dutch Palace — This palace has a long history and is now being used as a museum. This is in the same Jewish area and is worth a visit. The wall paintings are the highlight of the museum depicting Hindu legends.

St. Francis Church and the Santa Cruz Basilica — Two key Christian churches in Cochin. These are both in a historical area featuring many British, Dutch and Portuguese buildings with interesting architecture.

Kerala Backwaters and Canals

This is a fascinating area and is featured in the list of the book *1,000 Things To Do Before You Die*. This is a lush, tropical area with narrow canals and people living along the canals. Most are farmers. This is a water locked area so the only means of transport is by the waterways. The children wave and smile, the residents are actively going about their daily lives. Canoes are going up and down, children are swimming, the women are doing the washing; it is truly fascinating. This area is also very scenic as the trees cross over the canals and the lushness of the foliage and all the different shades of green combine to create a magical experience. Drifting along in such comfort and style with the friendliness of the local people, it feels like a different country from the chaotic atmosphere of Mumbai. If you visit Southern India, this should be on your tour plans. Whether to do the Oberoi cruise or the Houseboats is each person's choice. The difference lies in details of the experience. The canals and what you see will be the same.

Oberoi Cruise Ship - Vrinda

About one hour out of Cochin you can board the cruise ship, Vrinda. This is a 2 or 3 night cruise that is operated by Oberoi Hotels. This is a pretty comfortable and luxurious ship that carries 18 guests. The cabins are a nice size, with king size beds, air conditioning, flat screen TV, DVD players and nice sized bathroom. The dining room is air conditioned and they have an open-air lounge and sundeck. This cruise does travel to the same backwater canals that the houseboats travel. This looked pretty good to me and a nice and easy way to see the backwaters. This cruise does travel to the same backwater canals that the houseboats travel and also offers daily excursions, a one night pre- or post at the Trident Hilton in Cochin, and you are transferred to the performance of the Kathakali Dancers on the first night on board. The excursions, and meals are included in the rate, tips and alcoholic beverages are extra. Price is expensive and constantly changing so you will need to check on the internet for details. More details are in on our [Oberoi Vrinda Review](#)



Houseboats On the Backwaters

The cruises travel along the canals and into the larger lakes and can be a 1-night up to a 7-night cruise. There are so many canals that you could do a 7 days cruise and not repeat any. They stop along the way so you can visit a village or take a walk. Most include all meals, with tips and alcoholic drinks costing extra. Prices vary according to the luxury of the houseboat. At the time we visited, a nice boat was around \$500 a night (\$250 per person). However, this is probably constantly changing.



There must be 100 houseboats. Some are basic and some are very luxurious. The sizes range from one to three bedrooms. The boats look pretty basic from the outside and are made of local products. Bamboo, coir from the coconut palms, the main rafters of the thatched roof are made from arecanut palm bark and the boat itself is crafted out of the hardwood of the evergreen tree, Anjili. The inside of the boats are very nice and comfortable.

We were on a one-bedroom, air-conditioned boat that was extremely nice. The bedroom had a wood floor, a ceiling with wood squares with a cloth tapestry inlay, a king size bed, TV, air conditioning, a small but nice bathroom with a full- sized bathtub. Upstairs from the bedroom, was a private deck area with chairs and a lounging area covered with pillows. Of course, we had to lounge on the deck and have our pictures taken. The main sitting area of the boat featured a dining table, chaise lounges and many overstuffed comfy chairs. Beautiful wooden floors and woods were everywhere on the boat and the wood was enhanced on the doors by brass hardware. We had a lot of fun on this boat, drinking wine, eating and taking pictures. The food was too spicy for me so they cooked me a piece of fish with no spice.

Lake Periyar



Lake Periyar Wildlife

This is a drive of about 4 hours from Cochin. You will see some incredible small towns full of people going about their daily routines. There are also areas of country side, rubber and tea plantations.

The only way into Periyar is to drive. The ride from the Cochin to Periyar was interesting. The roads are narrow and the traffic is heavy. You must trust in your driver as everyone honks and passes in areas where you are sure there is not enough room. Somehow it all seems to work and you arrive safely at your destination. We all thought we would nap but none of us did. The sights of India are unique. So many wild ducks and stretches of green vines with purple flowers. Just like in a post card. The rubber plantations and the tea plantations were beautiful. Particularly the tea plantations, I had never seen a tea plantation before. The tea plantations are a brilliant shade of green and are terraced on the hillsides. looked like you could bounce from plant to plant, a truly spectacular sight. This area is very Christian and so there are many fantastic churches on the way. Then there are the little towns, just full of people, and tiny little shops. India is dirty there is no getting around this fact but it is amazing the longer you are here the more you get used to that.



Bakery in Periyar



Cow Sale on Road



Tea Plantations

The Spice Plantations

When you hear this description, it is often imagined that there are large plantations of spice plants. Actually, the plots are very small and family owned and operated. The plantation walk is really just walking into a private garden except it is disorganized and jungle like. This is not a tour that I would rate that highly. If you have any difficulty walking it is on uneven ground that poses challenges and it can be a very hot. What I did love on this tour were the children of the spice farmers. They are interested in the tourists and gather around on arrival, not for a handout or to sell anything, just to say hello! On arrival a little girl about 5 was standing there saying hello. She gave me a flower and she was so sweet so I held out my hand and we started walking together. Later, we were joined by about five other children. All they can say in English hello and goodbye. They were all excited and smiling, absolutely adorable.



Lake Periyar



Kerala Dancer



Sweet Children

Boat ride on Lake Periyar

This is a pretty, man-made lake and a wildlife preserve is all around. There are not many European tourists and this is a very popular attraction for Indian tourists. The boats are very simple, covered with simple plastic chairs for seats. The boats are always full. This is not a glamour launch trip by any means. The wildlife reserve does have about 40 tigers but our guide who has been guiding for 28 years has never seen one.

You are so far away from the deer and wildlife that they were really just specks on the land. This was a 1 ½ hour boat ride.

There are two small towns in this area. They do have some tourist shops but not that many. Mostly they offer spices grown locally and these shops are where most of the tourists were spending their money. Although Saffron is not grown locally, compared to US prices it is a bargain here, what we purchased for \$5 would cost at least \$50 in the USA.

Accommodations

[The Spice Village \(an eco-friendly hotel\)](#) - This hotel has a lot of potential. The grounds are lovely and the property is spread out with paving stone paths among the trees and shrubs. Each building has two rooms. These rooms are very large with tile floors and twin or king-sized beds. There is no air conditioning as the temperature really cools down at night but they do have powerful ceiling fans over the bed which are really nice to have. Little things would help this property improve, such as a TV and better towels and amenities. It is comfortable and I would rate it about a 3-star property. There was no WIFI in the rooms and the only internet available is in the management office where they will connect you via a dial up modem. However, that is probably something that will be corrected with the dependence we are developing for internet wireless access. The dining room area is nice and they feature a buffet each night. How much you like this buffet depends on what is offered that night. One night I found it too Indian with too many hot dishes, the next night they had a pasta station and far more variety of non - Indian foods. They also feature a grill where you can pick your fish, lobster or shrimp and they will cook this for order for you.

Weather & Climate | Best Time to Visit

India has hot tropical weather with variations occurring region to region. While the coolest months are from November to mid-March, hottest are from April to June. From mid-July to September one can experience Monsoon rains. Winters in India are pleasant with plenty of sunny days. Most of the North India remains dry, dusty, and unpleasant during the summer months. For a tourist, India provides ample opportunities to participate in diverse activities in different parts of the country. You can explore India in all the seasons, but you will have to be selective about the destinations.

Northern India - Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, Udaipur

There is an extreme range in temperature. Warm from April to June. Freezing temperatures between November to February. June to September is hot with monsoons.

City		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Agra	Temp. Max	22	26	32	38	42	41	35	33	33	33	29	24
	Temp. Min.	7	10	16	22	27	29	27	26	25	19	12	8
	Rainfall avg.	16	9	11	5	10	60	2	10	26	31	51	23
Delhi	Temp. Max	21	24	30	36	41	40	35	34	34	35	29	23
	Temp. Min.	7	10	15	21	27	29	27	26	25	19	12	8
	Rainfall avg.	25	22	17	7	8	65	211	173	150	31	1	5
Gwalior	Temp. Max	23	27	33	39	43	41	34	32	32	33	29	25
	Temp. Min.	7	10	16	22	28	30	27	25	34	18	11	7
	Rainfall avg.	18	7	8	3	9	83	274	259	192	35	2	8
Jaipur	Temp. Max	22	25	31	37	41	39	34	32	33	33	29	24
	Temp. Min.	8	11	15	21	26	27	26	24	23	18	12	9
	Rainfall avg.	14	8	9	4	10	54	193	239	90	19	3	4
Jodhpur	Temp. Max	25	28	33	38	42	40	36	33	35	36	31	27
	Temp. Min.	9	12	17	22	27	29	27	25	24	20	14	11
	Rainfall avg.	7	5	2	2	6	31	122	145	47	7	3	1
Patna	Temp. Max	24	26	33	38	39	37	33	32	32	32	29	25
	Temp. Min.	11	13	19	23	26	27	27	27	26	23	16	12
	Rainfall avg.	2	20	7	8	28	139	266	307	243	63	6	2
Udaipur	Temp. Max	24	28	32	36	38	36	31	29	31	32	29	26
	Temp. Min.	8	10	15	20	25	25	24	23	22	19	11	8
	Rainfall avg.	9	4	3	3	5	87	197	207	120	16	6	3
Varanasi	Temp. Max	23	27	33	39	41	39	33	32	32	32	29	25
	Temp. Min.	9	11	17	22	27	28	26	26	25	21	13	9
	Rainfall avg.	23	8	14	1	8	102	346	240	261	38	15	2

Southern India - Mumbai, Cochin, Kerala

Southern India is pleasant during the winters (November-March) and hot during summers. The temperature is on the rise from the month of March until the monsoons break out in mid-June, which goes on until September. October offers a relief from humidity and heat.

City		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bangalore	Temp. Max	28	31	33	34	33	30	28	29	28	28	27	27
	Temp. Min.	15	16	19	21	21	20	19	19	19	19	17	15
	Rainfall avg.	4	14	63	71	19	65	93	95	129	195	46	16
Bombay (Mumbai)	Temp. Max	31	32	33	33	33	32	30	29	30	32	33	32
	Temp. Min.	16	17	20	24	26	26	26	26	26	24	18	13
	Rainfall avg.	0	1	0	0	20	647	945	660	309	117	7	1
Cochin	Temp. Max	31	31	31	31	31	29	28	28	28	29	30	30
	Temp. Min.	23	24	26	26	26	24	24	24	24	24	24	23
	Rainfall avg.	9	34	50	139	364	756	572	386	235	333	184	37
Jaisalmer	Temp. Max	24	28	33	38	42	41	38	36	36	36	31	25
	Temp. Min.	8	11	17	21	25	27	27	25	25	20	13	9
	Rainfall avg.	2	1	3	1	5	7	89	86	14	1	5	2
Madras	Temp. Max	29	31	33	35	38	37	35	35	34	32	29	28
	Temp. Min.	20	21	23	26	28	28	26	26	25	24	23	21
	Rainfall avg.	24	7	15	25	52	53	83	124	118	267	309	139
Madurai	Temp. Max	30	32	35	36	37	37	36	35	35	33	31	30
	Temp. Min.	21	22	23	25	26	26	26	25	25	24	23	22
	Rainfall avg.	26	16	21	81	59	31	48	117	123	179	161	43

East - Calcutta (Kolkata), Orissa

Cooler weather from October through February. March to May very hot. Monsoons from June through October.

City		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Calcutta	Temp. Max	26	29	34	36	36	34	32	32	32	31	29	27
	Temp. Min.	12	15	20	24	26	26	26	26	26	24	18	13
	Rainfall avg.	13	22	30	50	135	263	320	318	253	134	29	4
Darjeeling	Temp. Max	9	1	15	18	19	19	20	20	20	19	15	12
	Temp. Min.	3	4	8	11	13	15	15	15	15	11	7	4
	Rainfall avg.	22	27	52	109	167	522	713	573	419	116	14	5
Gangtok	Temp. Max	14	15	19	22	22	23	23	23	23	22	19	15
	Temp. Min.	4	5	9	12	14	16	17	17	16	12	9	6
	Rainfall avg.	44	56	142	222	493	644	63	588	476	152	35	15

Food and Water Safety

I was very concerned about food and water safety when I first went to India. As a person who does not like spicy food at all, I pictured myself living on bread and coke for my stay. My conception here proved to be completely false.

Indian Food

Of course, this is offered everywhere and the fine dining venues are often Indian cuisine. Those that eat Indian food said the food was excellent and not as spicy as they had anticipated. The menus identify those dishes that are considered highly spiced. The Oberoi chain always offers an extensive continental menu in their Indian restaurants so you always have a choice. The Taj Hotel's do not offer any continental food at all in their specialty Indian cuisine restaurants.

Continental Cuisine

Fish, pasta, steak, chicken and vegetables and almost anything you are used to eating is offered in all the hotels we offer. Presentation of the food is cutting edge and most dishes worthy of a picture. We found pastas and pizzas to be outstanding. The Italian restaurants in the Oberoi hotels in Mumbai and in New Delhi were really outstanding. Steaks were tasty but a little tougher than the prime beef we get in the States. The Olive restaurants are an upscale eating experience offering an extensive menu of continental and Indian cuisine and an exceptional dining experience.

Potential Gastrointestinal Problems

This was a high concern of mine when first arriving in India. At first, I did not want to take any chances and avoided all the things the books tell you to avoid, for example, anything washed such as salads, peeled fruits and fish. However, within a few days I was eating everything I normally ate and had no problems at all. If you eat in the luxury hotels or restaurants you will probably be fine and if you are concerned you can limit yourself to well cooked food. The variety offered allows you the choices you need to be cautious in this regard. Of course, this can happen anywhere in the world. However, if you dine at local regular restaurants, lower class hotels or from street vendors; it is highly likely you will become ill. Carry digestive aid products with you just in case you experience difficulties. Remember eating Indian food that is highly spicy can also upset your system if you are not used to that much spice in your diet. It is recommended that if you wish to eat the Indian food you ease into that slowly rather than eating a full Indian spicy meal early in your trip.

Water safety

The Oberoi hotels have tap water that is safe. They also offer large bottles of complimentary bottled mineral water. I always drank and brushed my teeth with the bottled water to be extra cautious. My husband brushed his teeth with the tap water and had no problems. I would not suggest using tap water anywhere where there is bottled water available.

The Tiger Reserves & Wildlife

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

We went on to Bandhavgarh Game Reserve and had time for two game drives, morning and afternoon and saw a tiger both times.

We had the best chance on the first game drive, they only use the elephants in the mornings. The elephants go out early in the morning to find the tigers. If they find the tigers, then the visitors load on the elephants and they go to where the tiger is located. Signs are everywhere saying, we can't promise tigers, don't be disappointed, enjoy the beauty of the reserve. Don't be disappointed if you don't see the tiger because the tiger saw you.

The process was quite different from Africa. If a tiger is sighted, it is a mad dash to first get the route to where the meeting point is to get a ticket to ride the elephant. The first to arrive, get the shortest route to this point. Lots of yelling going on amongst the guides and the government officials who assign the routes. Then, when you get your route and get to the next meeting place you get the ticket to ride the elephant.



We were in the one of the first jeeps and we were lucky. The guide did not tell us what was happening and we were so excited when we saw the elephants with people on as we knew that meant the tiger was in the jungle. The first group were getting off their elephants when we got on. That was a trick too, as you climbed on the elephant from the jeep. Big stretch for someone as small as I am. Once I was on the elephant, it was really quite comfortable as there was a big cushion pad that was easy to move around on. Normally an elephant carries four people, however this time, it was just Ken and I, why I am not sure, but we were delighted.

There was a 13-month-old female tiger very close and only about 150 feet from the jeeps but you could not have seen her without going into the bush area. She was stunningly beautiful. We were probably about 25 feet from the tiger. She was looking right at us. Such a huge animal and she was young!! The tigers do not attack humans and the noise and people walking around so close would never happen with lions in Africa. The guide said that unless the tiger was highly provoked there was nothing to worry about. We had a great "elephant driver" that obviously enjoyed what he was doing. He kept moving the elephant so Ken could get better pictures. We went down into some dips in the terrain the other elephants did not go. I really loved the elephant ride too. While we were watching the tiger, it got up and started moving. We followed and then it stopped again. Just as we left it got up and walk up the hill behind us. The guide said the next group may not get to see her as she was headed in an area that the elephants cannot go. Thank goodness we got up extra early to be one of the first jeeps.



The rest of the morning we drove the game reserve. Once the rush of the elephant rides was over, the jeeps went out on their own. It is a big park so we did not see the other jeeps. They do not use any communication between the jeeps and co-operate with each other like they do in Africa. So that highly limits your chance of seeing more tigers. We did encounter

a beautiful area teeming with monkeys and some spotted deer that had some had really big racks. Peacocks are wild here, they sure are a beautiful bird, and we saw a lot of those. Nothing else really exciting and you cannot

compare a game drive here to those in Africa. The diversity of the animals and the rangers who share so much information with you make Africa a completely different experience. However, the land had its own beauty and you cannot see tigers in Africa.

Back to the camp for a well needed rest for two hours and then we had lunch which was excellent. The camp was better than I had expected. It exceeded in comfort and amenities than many of the camps I saw in Botswana and was superior to anything I had seen in Kenya. Probably of the same caliber that the less expensive camps in South Africa would be. It was a permanent structured huge room, with a large bathroom, tiled floor, antique furniture and was very clean.



We left to go on a game drive in the afternoon at 3:30 pm. It was hot when we started out but driving in the jeep cooled it down. We saw more deer, monkeys and peacocks and were heading back thinking we would not see another tiger. The park closes at 6:30 pm. On the way out at about 6:20 pm and almost dark when we saw the tiger. She was an adult female that had two cubs. She was sitting above the road on a ledge about 12 feet high. So close to the jeeps. There were many jeeps there ahead of us as all the jeeps had to leave from this road, and all the drivers were yelling at each other while jockeying for a position to get their passengers a view of the tiger. How that tiger sat there with all that commotion is a mystery to me. Ken's camera would not focus as it was too dark. The other jeeps left and our wonderful driver let us stay when all the others were gone but said "hurry". I guess if they are late out of the park, they get fined. It was already after 6:30pm. Ken adjusted his camera to iso 1600, the driver got in the perfect position and Ken could take just one shot then the driver gunned the jeep to leave the park. I got a wonderful view of the tiger, and with all this going on I was just focused on the tiger. One of the blessings of not taking pictures.

CCA from Africa is building three new luxury camps here and building an air strip. Once that is in this will be a great place to come for those with a desire to see Tigers in the wild. The effort to get here on a very bumpy road for 7 hours plus a 3-hour flight from Delhi is only for those with a strong desire to see tigers.

Ranthambore National Park

There is another park closer to Delhi called Ranthambore National Park with an Oberoi camp with VERY luxurious tents and about a 3-hour transfer from Jaipur. That would probably be a much better choice right now. The only thing about this area is they don't use elephants, put many people in a vehicle at a time, almost a bus like situation, and the number of tigers in the park is not as great. However, I have talked to many who have been there and most have seen tigers. In both camps, you cannot go "off road" so the tiger has to be close to the road to be sighted.

Property Update

Since this original write-up of the Tiger Reserves, a new luxury tented camp has become available. Although we do not have personal experience with this property, we do have experience with the sister properties in Africa. An & Beyond Property, [Banjaar Tola Tented Camp](#).

Tourist Information | Tips for Visiting

The DOs for India

- All foreign nationals must pay hotel bills in foreign currency (cash or traveler's cheques). This can be paid in rupees if the visitor has a bank receipt as proof of currency exchange.
- Exchange money only through authorized banks or moneychangers.
- Insist on a receipt when exchanging money.
- Retain all receipts to facilitate re-conversion of unspent money on departure from India.
- Shopping is recommended from Government Emporia and suggested shops on the list of the Department of Tourism. Information on these can be obtained from tourist offices in India.
- Export of most wildlife and their products is either banned or strictly regulated. Export of the few permissible items - even as passengers' personal luggage - is allowed only under an appropriate export permit.
- Insist on getting a certificate for the legitimate sale of a particular animal product and permission for its export to avoid inconvenience on departure.
- Taxis and auto-rickshaws in cities do not all have meters, but where they do, insist on the meter being flagged in your presence. If the driver refuses to cooperate, seek the assistance of a policeman.
- In addition, the above fares change from time to time and so will not always conform to readings on the meter
- To avoid confusion, insist on seeing the latest fare chart and pay accordingly.
- If you wish to visit any prohibited or restricted areas, check with the nearest Government of India Tourist Office to ascertain details of the formalities required.
- Check with the nearest Government of India Tourist Office the rules regarding photography at archaeological monuments.
- Try to avoid the touts and brokers of shopkeepers.
- It is obligatory to cover your head before entering Sikh shrines.
- In case of any difficulty contact the nearest tourist office or police station.
- Concessionary tickets such as Indrail Pass on Railways, Youth Fare, Discover India Fare and Air Fare (Indian Airlines) are to be purchased in foreign exchange only.

The DON'Ts for India

- Don't get lured by shopping bargains on the street.
- Don't exchange money except with an authorized moneychanger.
- Don't purchase travel tickets through strangers or unauthorized travel agents or tour operators.
- Don't encourage beggars by giving them money or other articles.
- Don't buy silver/ivory articles or peacock feathers in bulk.
- Don't wear any footwear inside Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Jain places of worship. Some temples do not permit leather articles to be taken in

There are also some great e-brochures on the [Incredible India Tourism Website](#).

Entry, Exit & Visa Requirements

Please Note: These details may be constantly changing.

U.S. citizens require a passport and valid Indian visa to enter and exit India for any purpose. Visitors, including those on official U.S. government business, must obtain visas at an Indian Embassy, Consulate abroad, or online prior to entering the country, as there are no provisions for visas upon arrival.

U.S. Citizens entering India as a tourist who only plan to stay 30 days or less, may obtain an electronic travel authorization at least four days prior to their arrival. The electronic travel authorization may be presented in lieu of a tourist visa. For additional information regarding your eligibility or requirements for this type of electronic visa visit the [Indian government's website for e-Tourist Visa \(eTV\)](#).

Those arriving without a visa are subject to immediate deportation. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates in India are unable to assist when U.S. citizens arriving without visas. Each visitor should carry photocopies of the bio-data page of the traveler's U.S. passport and the page containing the Indian visa in order to facilitate obtaining an exit visa from the Indian government in the event of theft or loss of the passport.

Americans who wish to visit India are responsible for requesting the correct type of visa from the Indian Embassy or Consulate, as there are no provisions for changing one's immigration category (e.g., from tourist to work visa) once admitted. Foreign citizens whose primary purpose of travel is to participate in religious activities should obtain a missionary visa rather than a tourist visa. Indian immigration authorities have deported American citizens who were conducting religious activities while holding a tourist visa.

As requirements may change periodically, this page is simply a guide based on the information available to us at the time of publication. Therefore, for the most up-to-date information, we strongly suggest you visit [The U.S. Department of State, Country Information for U.S. Citizens Traveling to India](#).

Required Vaccinations

There are not any required vaccinations for travel to India. Except yellow fever is required, if the traveler is arriving from an infected area.

There are suggested vaccinations, and those details may be found at [CDC Traveler Health - India](#)