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India's top 10 cities guide

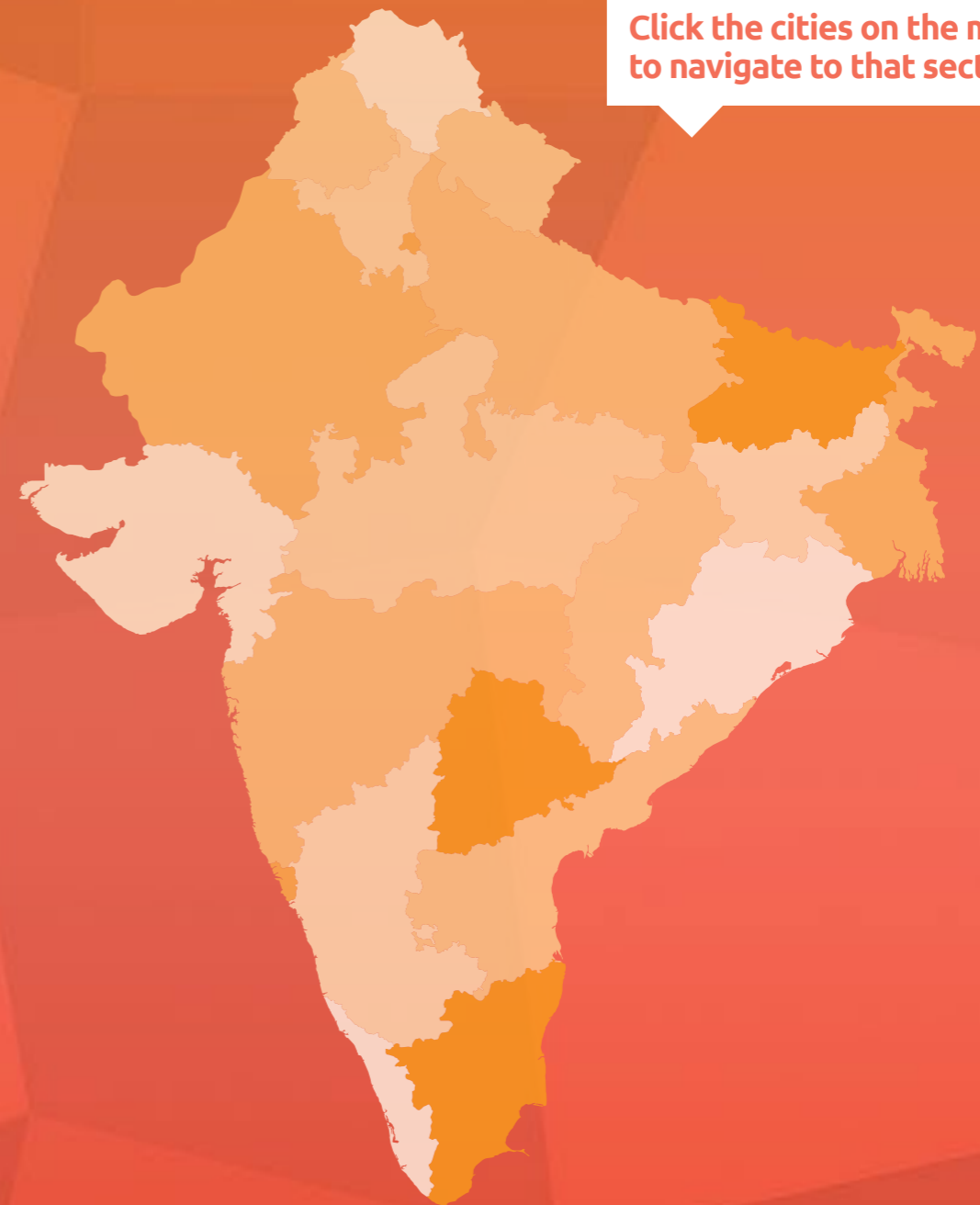
Experienced travellers know that if you get through the first 24 hours, the rest is a breeze. So if you're heading to India for the first time, here's our essential guide to India's top ten cities to help you travel smarter and get more from your adventure.

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First 24 Hrs in: **New Delhi**

Arrivals

New Delhi has a modern and well-equipped airport with all the amenities including food, drinks, money exchange (with reasonable rates) and duty-free shops.

Transport to the city

Time: 30-45 minutes.

Taxi: It's best to hire a government-authorized taxi (black and yellow), available at the counter just before the main exit. Look out for the official government taxi signs and don't get confused with the private fleets which are more expensive.

Metro: The Airport Express drops you at New Delhi Railway Station and from there you can catch the metro to your destination. Download the friendly Delhi Metro app on your phone for detailed route planning, fares and train times.

Transport within the city

Metro: This is the best way to commute. If you're planning on taking multiple trips a

day, get a tourist-specific pre-paid Metro Smart Card for Rs. 100 per day to get unlimited trips.

Auto-rickshaws (3-wheeler): Negotiate well before boarding as very rarely would you come across a rickshaw with a working meter. Expect to pay Rs. 25 for a 2 km distance.

Accommodation

Paharganj (near the railway station) is a backpacker's hub with cheap hotels and hostels from Rs. 600 per night onwards. Don't settle for the shady ones as there are plenty of options – just walk around.



Alternatively, opt for a B&B scattered throughout Southern Delhi, the cleaner and more modern neighbourhood of the two. Try to pre-book to get the best rates and choose accommodation that's close to any of the metro stations for a safe and smooth travel across the city.

Day 1 in the city

Food: Go to Old Delhi (North Delhi) to see the old quarters and try some great Mughlai food at Karim's and Parathewali Galli (Rs. 50 onwards).

You should also try Khan Chacha's stall at Khan Market (Central Delhi) for kebabs (Rs. 80 onwards), Hauz Khas Village (South Delhi) for a trendy mix of all cuisines (Rs. 200 onwards) and head to German Bakery (Rs. 80 onwards) in Paharganj for tasty yet cheap breakfasts. For a taste of the British Raj period, look for restaurants around Connaught Place (Rs. 200 onwards).

Shop: Janpath street at Connaught Place is great for souvenir shopping, curios and accessories, but be prepared to negotiate. Dilli Haat is a more organised setup. For branded and upscale shopping, head to the malls in Saket and Vasant Kunj.



See and do

- **History:** Visit Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Humayun's Tomb, National Museum, India Gate and Qutub Minar.
- **Culture:** Visit Old Delhi quarters, Dilli Haat, Connaught Place and Lutyen's Delhi.
- Spend an evening in the eclectic neighbourhood of Hauz Khas Village, with its trendy offerings of food, designer boutiques, art cafés, galleries, curio shops and bars with live music – all with an enchanting backdrop of Mughal ruins and the lake.

Nightlife: Delhi has a vibrant nightlife with several live music bars and cafés at Hauz Khas Village. Go clubbing at Blue Frog, Shiro or Kitty Su. Friday and Saturday nights are often more lively and transport late at night tend not to be very reliable, so book a radio-cab before the clubs close at 1 am.

Be aware

- Avoid walking alone in dark street corners.
- Avoid drug peddlers roaming in Paharganj.
- Keep your bags safe at all times, but especially in crowded markets.



- Avoid touts or scammers just outside the railway and bus stations.
- Do not give money to beggars.

City-based cult read

'City Of Djinn's' by William Dalrymple.

Cost guide

Street food: (Chaat, Kulcha Chana) Rs. 20 onwards.

Simple restaurant: Rs. 100 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 250 onwards.

International fast food chains: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 250 onwards for a pint.

Metro Smart Card: Rs. 100, including Rs. 50 refundable security fee.



First 24 Hrs in: Chennai

Arrivals

There are only a few direct international flights into Chennai airport, but it's well-connected to all domestic routes, so most visitors arrive this way. Chennai is a small and fairly old airport with only a few amenities like snacks and forex.

Transport to the city centre

Time: 30- 40 minutes.

Prepaid taxi: Pick black and yellow taxis as they are government-authorised and cheaper. It's about 12 kms to the city so expect to pay Rs. 300-400. Private taxis are also available, but expensive. Don't be tempted by the drivers crowding around you at the exit offering 'better rates' – stick to pre-paid.



Transport within the city

Buses: Well-managed and cheap. Expect to pay about Rs. 5 (regular non-A/C) to Rs. 30 (Volvo A/C) for 3km.

Auto-rickshaw (3 wheels): Flag-off rates are Rs. 25 for the first 1.8 km with an extra 50% surcharge at night between 11 pm to 5 am. Sometimes drivers ask Rs. 20-30 extra due to traffic or poor road conditions.

Accommodation

T Nagar and Mylapore areas are popular with tourists. Expect to pay Rs. 800 per night for a decent place and pre-book for the best rates.

Day 1 in the city

Food: You'll find some really good and affordable vegetarian dishes from South India at Murugan Idli (Rs. 60 onwards), Karpakambal Mess (Meal Platter Rs. 20

onwards), Matsya (Rs. 50 onwards) and Sarvana Bhavan (Rs. 75-100 onwards).

For non-vegetarian and spicy local Chettinad cuisine, head to the Karaikudi Restaurant (Rs. 200 onwards).

Alternatively, head to Eco Café for pastas, salads, sandwiches or full english breakfasts or Tuscana Pizzeria for nice Italian (Rs. 300 onwards). For upscale restaurants, head to Bike & Barrel or Q Bar (Rs. 300 onwards for a snack as well as drinks).

Shop: Buy handmade and organic clothes, bags, diaries, gift items and famous Kanchipuram silk sarees from Kalakshetra or Naturally Auroville.



You can also get famous Madras cotton cloth or garments from T Nagar, Mylapore or Pondy Bazaar (Nalli Sarees, Fabrics). Chennai is also famous for its intricate and antique gold jewellery at old shops in Pondy Bazaar, so be sure to check them out.

See and do

- **History:** Check out the ancient temples including Kapaleshwar, Parthasarathy and Marundeshwar.
- **Culture:** Visit Kalakshetra to watch Indian classical dance, vocal and instrumental performances, or drive to Dakshin Chitra (an art village 30 mins out of the city) and the Theosophical Society.

- Walk through the various beaches such as Marina, Golden or Besant Nagar beach.
- Try taking a trip to the cultural city of Pondicherry, easily accessible from Chennai by road with a pit stop at the historical ruins of Mammalapuram.

Nightlife: Nightlife in Chennai is not very vibrant – the streets will be mostly deserted by 9 pm. However, if you're keen for a night out, try Bike & Barrel or Q Bar, which are both open till midnight. Note, access to the beaches are prohibited after 11 pm.

Be aware

- Avoid walking alone in dark, seedy street corners at night.
- Keep your bags safe at all times, but especially in crowded places.
- Avoid touts or scammers just outside the airport exit.
- Do not give money to beggars.

Cost guide

Street food: (Idli, Dosa, Appam) Rs. 20 onwards.

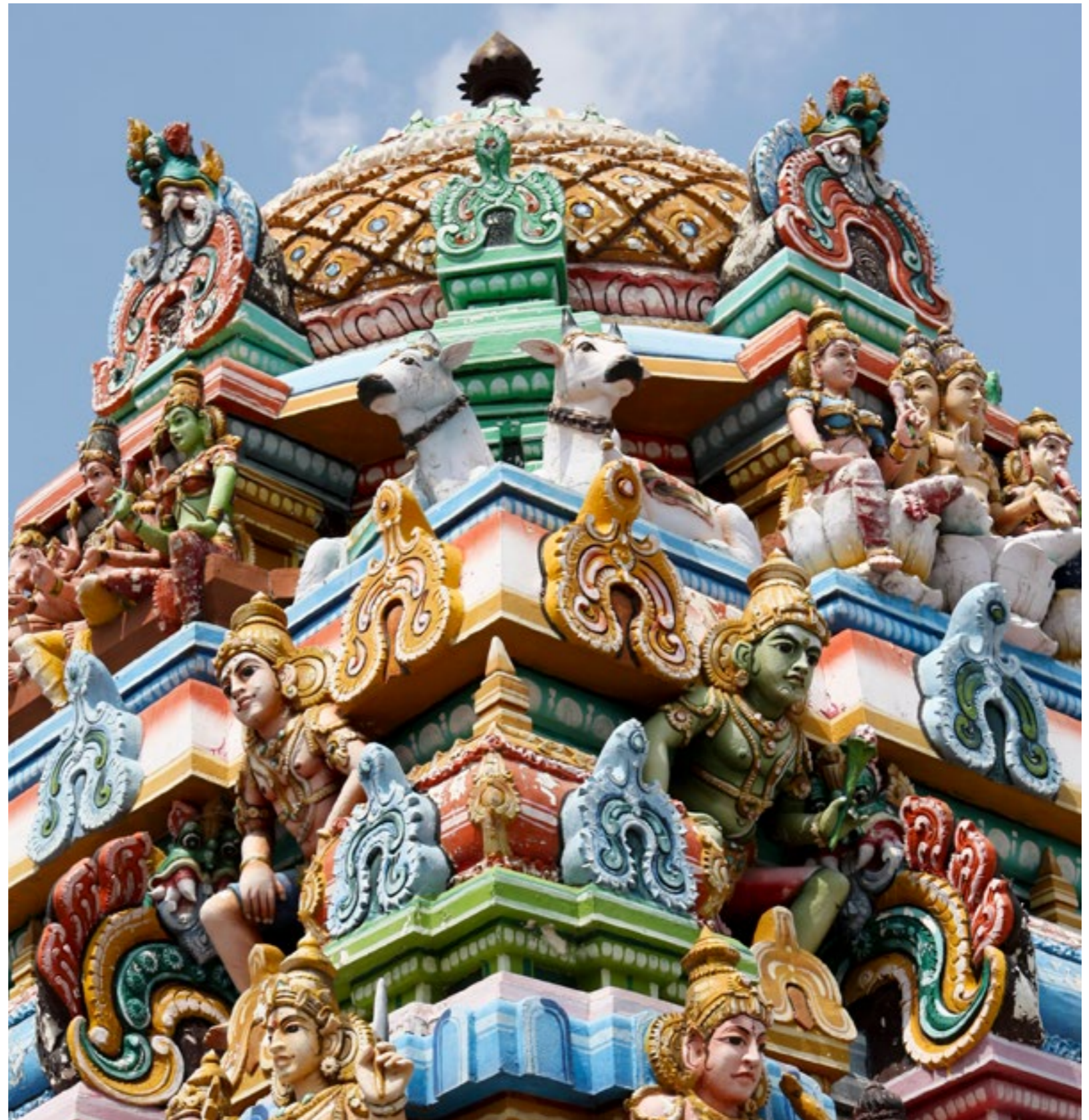
Simple restaurant: Rs. 20 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 200 onwards.

International fast food chains: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 150-450 for a pint.

Night-time surcharge for taxis: Additional 50% (11 pm to 5 am).



First 24 Hrs in: Bengaluru (Bangalore)

Arrivals

Bengaluru has a new, modern and well-equipped airport with all the amenities including food, drinks, money exchange (with reasonable rates) and duty-free shops, which are cheaper than most others in South East Asia.

Transport to the city

Time: 1.5 hours.

Bus shuttle: Hop onto a Vayu Vajra A/C Volvo bus shuttle service to the city, which runs every 15-30 mins (Rs. 250-300).

Taxi: At the moment, all taxis offer 'with A/C' option only, so there's not much difference in price between government or radio taxis. Opt for Meru, Easy Cabs or Mega Cabs – they are private operators but quite reliable.

Transport within the city

Bus: Local bus services, both with and without A/C, are great. They're the cheapest way to commute within the city, but be

aware that sometimes the signage is only written in the local language, not English. Fares range from Rs. 6-65 depending on your destination.

Auto-rickshaws (3 wheelers): More convenient with flag-off rates of Rs. 25 for the first 1.9 kms. There's a 50% surcharge at night between 11 pm – 5 am. Sometimes drivers could ask for an additional Rs 20-30 if

there's too much traffic.

Accommodation

Look for hotels around MG road and Brigade road – that's the city centre and hub of all activities in Bangalore. Expect to pay Rs. 2000 onwards for a decent room and pre-booking will get you the best rates.



Alternatively, opt for private B&Bs from Rs. 2200 onwards.

Day 1 in the city

Food: Try authentic south Indian food at Vidyanthi Bhavan, Mavalli Tiffin Rooms or Maiya's (Rs. 30 onwards). Head to one of the many trendy cafes and restaurants lined up on MG road and Brigade road.

Try Koshy's (Indian food Rs. 100-350) and Sunny's (Mediterranean food Rs. 150-700, beer Rs. 160).

Shop: Head to Brigade road (street and small shops), Koramangala (upscale branded shopping malls) or Indiranagar (street shopping). Go to Cauveri Emporium to buy various traditional art and craft products.

See and do

- **History:** Take a trip to Bengaluru Palace and Bull Temple for some history and architecture.
- **Relax:** Stroll through Cubbon Park or Lalbagh Botanical Gardens for some quiet time.
- There's a new Hop-on-Hop-off bus service, which is a great way to explore the city.

Nightlife: Bengaluru has a vibrant nightlife. On weekdays, bars and nightclubs are open till 11 pm and till 1 am on weekends. Bengaluru has several micro breweries – try 3 Monkeys Brewpub, Prost Brew Pub or Arbor Brewing Co (Rs. 300 for a pint). For live music, try Habanero or Hard Rock Cafe.

For some quiet coffee and conversation, try Chaipatty, Bistro Claytopia or Dyu Art Café.

Be aware

- Avoid walking alone in dark, seedy street corners.
- Keep your bags safe on you at all times, especially in crowded places.
- Do not give money to beggars.

Cost guide

Street food: (Idli, Dosa) Rs. 20 onwards.

A simple restaurant: Rs. 60 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 200 onwards.

International fast food chain: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 150 onwards for a glass.



First 24 Hrs in: **Goa**

Arrivals

Goa has a modern airport with basic amenities including snacks and money exchange (with reasonable rates). There are few direct international flights into Goa, with most tourists coming via Mumbai (1 hr flight).

Goa is also accessible by train (9-13 hrs) via a beautiful, scenic ride. The Konkan route passes through rolling hill ranges and winds along the scenic coastline.

Transport to the city

Airport: Hire a pre-paid taxi for between Rs. 600-1700 – it's about a 25 mins to 1.5 hours trip depending on your destination.

Train station: Taxis from the train station are Rs. 600 onwards and scooters are also available from Rs. 100 onwards.



Accommodation

Goa is divided into two main regions. The North is more party-centric with great nightlife and a very eclectic crowd, while the South is quieter and has more open spaces. Accommodation is easily available at shacks and local houses. In the North, head to Anjuna or Arambol (Rs. 500 onwards) and in the South, go to Palolem or Agonda (Rs. 500 onwards). Alternatively, if you want to be a bit further from the tourist crowds and

get to know the real locals, go to Aldona (Cancio's House) in the North and Canacona (Turia Homestay) in the South.

Transport within the city

Scooters, motor bikes and cars: All available for hire at Rs. 150-1200 a day depending on the vehicle and season. Fuel costs are extra. Taxis are available too but tend to be more expensive.

Day 1 in the city

Food: You'll find a really good mix of food at the beach shacks (Rs. 150 onwards) and nice, affordable trendy cafes and bars everywhere in Goa. Alcohol is cheaper in Goa than in other states (beer Rs. 60 a pint, vodka Rs. 60 a small shot, cocktail Rs. 120 a glass, local Fenny Rs. 30 a small shot). Goan cuisine includes lots of seafood, so try different curries like Xacuti and Vindaloo or spicy Goan sausages.

Shop: Head to the famous Saturday Night Markets of Anjuna, or try flea shops everywhere near popular beaches – remember to always negotiate (Rs. 150 onwards).

See and do

As well as swimming, adventure sports or just chilling on any of the beaches, there's plenty to see and do. Head to Ponda to visit the spice plantations (including an authentic Goan lunch – Rs. 500 package), Panjim to see the old Latin Quarters, Siolim for old Portuguese architecture and Old Goa for beautiful old churches. There's also a Go-Karting race track on a cliff in Nuven, South Goa.

Nightlife: Goa has a vibrant nightlife. There's always an open beach party or two, as well as several clubs in the city which hosts all-night parties during the peak seasons.

Most of them are free to enter except for music festivals, which are ticketed events. You could also opt for some live music in the beach shacks or at the restaurants.

Be aware

- Goa is very safe, however avoid walking alone in dark, seedy street corners at night.
- It's easy to be tempted in Goa's party circuit, but stay away from drugs or prostitution. It's illegal.
- Make sure you check the condition of rented vehicles – it's not uncommon for the speedometer or fuel tank indicator to be broken.

Cost guide

A simple beach shack: Rs. 150 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 300 onwards.

International fast food chains: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 60 onwards for a glass.



First 24 Hrs in: Hyderabad

Arrivals

Hyderabad has a modern and well-equipped airport with all the amenities including food, drinks, money exchange (with reasonable rates) and duty-free shops. It's built on the outskirts of town, far away from the main city.

Transport to the city

Time: 1.5 hours.

Airport liner: Take the A/C Pushpak buses for a very good service to the city, departing every 30 mins (Rs. 200-250).

Pre-paid private taxis: Good but expensive (Rs. 20 per km), although it may work out cheaper if you're travelling in a group of 3 or more.

Transport within the city

Auto-rickshaws (3 wheelers): Shared ones are hugely popular but are generally overloaded. Expect to pay Rs. 10 for up to



2 kms. For reserved auto-rickshaws, flag-off rates are Rs. 20 for first 1.6 km. Insist on using meters, otherwise always negotiate in advance.

Accommodation

Abids and Begumpet are good areas to find clean and affordable hotels (Rs. 800 onwards). Alternatively, there are a few B&Bs and homestays starting from Rs. 700.

Day 1 in the city

Food: Eat biryani (spiced rice dish with meat or vegetables) at Paradise Restaurant (Rs. 250) or join the locals at Bawarchi on RTC Cross Roads, Café Bahar in Basheer Bagh, Hotel Shadaab near Charminar, Parvez Hotel at Nampally or Hotel Sohail in Malakpet at Rs. 150 a plate (a full meal in itself).

Local cuisine includes pathar-ka-gosht and shikampuri kebab, which are all meat dishes.

For coffee and casual dining, check out Café Cubano (Rs. 100-250).

Shop: Head to Abids and Necklace Road for clothes, shoes, knick-knacks and famous Hyderabadi pearls. In Old Town, visit Lad Bazaar for all sorts of trinkets, Indian bangles, traditional perfumes and old books. GVK mall is your go-to for upscale, branded shopping.



See and do

History: Visit Charminar, Golconda and Salarjung Museum to walk through the old princely era.

Culture: Check out Ramoji Film City (South Indian film studios) to see some great traditional dance, music and magic shows. It's 2 hours away from the city though via regular bus services, so remember to allocate a whole day. Alternatively, visit the arts and crafts village in Shilparamam.

Nightlife: Hyderabad has a vibrant nightlife with many clubs and pubs. Try Hard Rock Cafe, Rio, Bottles & Chimney and Kismet – all with a closing time of 1 am.

Alternatively, head to Tulips in Hotel Green Park, Begumpet (Rs. 225, open till 3am) and Ohri's Banjara (Rs. 300) for the 'Midnight Biryani Feast', or stroll around Hussain Sagar Lake and enjoy dinner at one of the local eateries.

Be aware

- Hyderabad is a safe city, but avoid walking alone in dark, seedy street corners.
- Keep your bags safe on you at all times, especially in crowded places.



- Avoid touts in Old City or scammers pretending to have lost their belongings or having a sick child.
- Do not give money to beggars.

Cost guide

Street food (kebabs, rolls, sandwiches): Rs. 25 onwards.

A simple restaurant: Rs. 100 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 250 onwards.

International fast food chain: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 200 onwards for a pint.

First 24 Hrs in: Jaipur

Arrivals

Jaipur is well-connected to New Delhi by buses (6 hrs), taxis (5 hrs), trains (4.5 hrs) and flights (55 mins).

Trains (A/C chair car Rs. 450) and buses (Volvo A/C Rs. 500-800) are the best way to reach the city. The buses will drop you at a stop nearest to your destination if the driver is informed in advance.

Transport to the city

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Hop onto a cycle-rickshaw (manual) and get dropped at the city centre for approx Rs. 30-40. Auto-rickshaws will be faster but be sure to negotiate the price beforehand at around Rs. 20 for 2 kms.

Transport within the city

Auto rickshaws (3 wheelers): Runs on fixed routes on a sharing basis (Rs. 10).

Cycle-rickshaw (manual): Expect to pay Rs. 10 for about 2 kms.

Accommodation

Jaipur is a small city and you can opt to stay anywhere from around Rs. 1000 onwards. There are plenty of small hotels and guesthouses, so remember to pre-book for the best rates and don't let auto-rickshaw drivers guide you to hotels of their choice. For those who want to splurge a little, there are also several old, exquisite palaces that have been converted into luxury hotels.

Day 1 in the city

Food: For some traditional Rajasthani cuisine (opt for a meal platter) head to Natraj or Surya Mahal (Rs. 190-425) or Thali House (Rs. 130-145). For good non-vegetarian Rajasthani cuisine, go to Handi (Rs. 500-600 for a meal).

Alternatively, for casual dinners try Anokhi Café (fresh organic ingredients Rs. 250-400), Tapri Central (Rs. 150 onwards) and Home Café by Mr. Beans (Rs. 250 onwards).



Shop: Bapu Bazaar (all sorts of knick-knacks, special blue pottery, souvenirs, gifts and textiles) and Johari Bazaar (all types of gems and jewellery) are the two main markets. Negotiate prices everywhere.

See and do

Take a tour of City Palace, Hawa Mahal, Nahargarh Fort, Jaigarh Fort and Amber Fort. Entry fees varies between Rs. 30-300. Amber and Nahargarh Forts also have restaurants on the premises. In most places, there's a nominal fee for the use of cameras – additional to the ticket price– so be aware.

Nightlife: Jaipur's nightlife is not too vibrant. There are only a few pubs like Polo Bar, Aza Bar and Tablu Bar (beer Rs. 350 onwards, food Rs. 400 onwards).



Alternatively, it's highly recommended to check out Chokhi Dhani – about 22 kms from city – which is a mock Rajasthani village where you can enjoy traditional food and cultural performances (Rs. 450 per person– entry fee including a meal).

Be aware

- Avoid walking alone in dark, seedy streets.
- Keep your bags safe on you at all times, especially in crowded markets.
- Avoid touts, scammers or drivers in busy street markets offering good deals on gems and jewellery.
- Do not give money to beggars.

City-based cult read

'A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of The Maharani of Jaipur', by Gayatri Devi.

Cost guide

Street food: Rs. 20 onwards.

A simple restaurant: Rs. 150 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 250 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 300 onwards for a pint.

First 24 Hrs in: Mumbai

Arrivals

Mumbai has a new, modern and well-equipped airport with all the amenities including food, drinks, money exchange (with reasonable rates) and duty-free shops.

Transport to the city

Time: 40-50 minutes.

Taxi: Hire a taxi from the taxi stand just outside the arrivals hall and pay by meter – flag-off rates are R. 19 for the first 1.6 kms.

Black and yellow taxis are non-A/C while the blue cabs, known as “cool cabs” are air-conditioned.

Transport within the city

Taxi (black and yellow): Pay by meter.

Local trains and buses: Cheapest but very crowded.

Accommodation

Colaba and Churchgate areas are popular with tourists and well-connected to all the sights. Expect to pay Rs. 1200 per night for a decent place and pre-book for best rates. Alternatively, opt for B&Bs scattered throughout the city starting at Rs. 1500 per night, preferably if not in South Mumbai then look to stay in Bandra – not beyond.

Day 1 in the city

Food: You'll find a great mix of street food (Rs. 10 onwards) and nice, affordable cafes in Colaba and Churchgate areas. Eat and drink at Leopold Café and Café Mondegar (food starting from Rs. 350, beer from Rs. 250).

For traditional seafood, go to Mahesh Lunch Home (Rs. 400 onwards). Try Mughlai food at Bade Miyan and Dilli Darbar (Rs. 150 onwards) and for a taste of Parsi and Irani cuisine, head to Britannia & Co. or Kooler & Co. (Rs. 100 onwards).





- **Culture:** Walk through Kala Ghoda arts district. There are several good cafes and art galleries here; be sure to visit Jehangir Gallery with its historic Café Samovar. Other must-see cultural sites include the Tata Theatre, Bhabha Auditorium and NCPA to get a grasp of Mumbai's rich theatre and performing arts scene.

Nightlife: Mumbai has a vibrant nightlife, with the most popular pubs and bars located in the Colaba district. Go clubbing at Blue Frog, Aer, Liv or Shiro (food Rs. 400 onwards, drinks Rs. 400 onwards). Friday and Saturday nights are more lively. Other popular clubs are scattered across Linking Road, Bandra.

Shop: Head to the flea markets of Fashion street, Crawford Market or Colaba Causeway for cheap clothes, shoes and gifts. For all types of antiques, go to Chor Bazaar and for upscale, branded shopping, head to Palladium and Phoenix Mills in Lower Parel.

See and do

- **History:** Visit Fort area, Prince of Wales Museum, Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST), Bhau Daji Lad City Museum, Mani Bhavan (Gandhi museum), Haji Ali Dargah and Kotachi Wadi (old district).

If clubbing is not for you, head for some beautiful walks along the Marine Drive Promenade (Queen's Necklace), Bandra Bandstand or Worli Seaface.

Be aware

- Mumbai is a safe city, but avoid walking alone in dark, seedy street corners.
- Do not indulge in drugs.
- Keep your bags safe at all times, especially in the crowded markets.
- Avoid touts or scammers just outside the railway, bus stations or busy street markets.



City-based cult read

'Shantaram' by Gregory David Roberts and 'Maximum City' by Suketu Mehta.

Cost guide

Street Food: (Vada Pav, Bhel Puri) Rs. 10 onwards.

Meal in a simple restaurant: Rs. 60 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 250 onwards.

International fast food chain: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 250 onwards for a glass.

Night-time surcharge for taxis: 25% (11 pm. to 5 am.)



First 24 Hrs in: Pune

Arrivals

By air: Pune has a small Air Force base also used for civilian aircrafts. Only a few direct international routes fly to Pune, but there are many good domestic connections.

By road: Luxury A/C bus service from Mumbai (5 hrs) is about Rs. 400-450 person. Private taxis (4 hrs) are about Rs. 2200 one-way.

By rail: From Mumbai (4 hrs) costs Rs. 180 (A/C) and Rs. 70 (non-A/C).

For forex, go to any Western Union branch in Pune.



Transport to the city

From the airport or train station, take a pre-paid auto-rickshaw to the city centre (Rs. 70 for 7 kms and Rs. 40 for 4 kms respectively). For buses or coaches, tell the driver your destination in advance and he will drop you at the nearest point. The bus connectivity in Pune is not very good and can be infrequent, so it's best used with a local guide by your side.

Transport within the city

Auto-rickshaws (3 wheelers): Pay by meter. Flag-off rates are Rs. 17 for the first 1.5 km.

Accommodation

Koregaon Park is where most tourists stay. Expect to pay Rs. 1500 per night for a decent place – Sunderban Hotel, right next to Osho ashram is a great find but as with all these places, prebook to get the best rates. Alternatively, opt for a good quality B&B scattered throughout the city starting at Rs. 1000 per night.



Day 1 in the city

Food: Find some really good street food (Rs. 10 onwards) or cheap food joints (Rs. 80 onwards) in the Camp area. Head to Koregaon Park for really nice, trendy cafes, restaurants and bars like Malaka Spice, Dario's (at Sunderban Hotel) and Terttulia (food starting Rs. 400, drinks from Rs. 250). Go to German Bakery for good quality grub at affordable prices (Rs. 150 onwards).

Shop: Head to Camp for all kinds of clothing and accessories, or Laxmi Road to get a feel of Old City (Tulsi Baug) with all kinds of knick-knacks. For upscale, branded shopping, head to the malls in Viman Nagar.

See and do

- **History:** Visit Shaniwar Wada, Lal Mahal, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Ambedkar Museum and Aga Khan Palace.
- **Culture:** Check out the old markets of Laxmi Road for traditional performing arts venues like Bal Gandharva, Rang Mandir and Shaniwar Wada, as well as the older parts of the city like Kothrud and India's oldest film school, FTII in the Deccan area.
- For meditation and yoga retreats, head to Osho's Ashram in Koregaon park. Make sure you pre-arrange your visit though to avoid disappointment.

Relax: The quiet and green neighbourhood of Koregaon Park is also home to several good spas and salons. Try Cologne Spa for an independent, mediterranean setup with well-trained staff.

Nightlife: Pune has a buzzing night life with its many students, IT professionals and expats from all over the world. There are several pubs and bars in Koregaon Park and Koregaon Park Annex, with Friday and Saturday nights being the busiest. Go clubbing at Swig, Stone Water Grill, Ouzos, Hard Rock Cafe and Kue Bar.

Alternatively head to Doolally's, one of the country's best micro-breweries. Closing time in Pune is generally 1 am.

Be aware

- Do not indulge in drugs.
- Keep your bags safe on you at all times, but especially in crowded places.
- Do not give money to beggars.

Cost guide

Street food: Rs. 10 onwards.

A simple restaurant: Rs. 80 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 300 onwards.

International fast food chains: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 250 onwards for a pint.



First 24 Hrs in: **Varanasi**

Arrivals

Flight: The airport is new, but mostly used for domestic connections. Very few international flights fly directly into Varanasi and the airport itself does not have many amenities, although forex is available.

Train: Very busy train station, located in the city centre.

Transport to the city

Airport: You can hire a pre-paid taxi to the city (25 kms away) for around Rs. 750, but sometimes an additional Rs. 40 is charged for parking. Check your receipt for details.

Train: Hire a cycle-rickshaw or auto-rickshaw (reserved) to your destination. Negotiate prices before your trip and expect to pay around Rs. 150 to Assi for a reserved rickshaw.



Transport within the city

Cycle-rickshaw: Rs. 20 for about 2 kms.

Auto-rickshaws (shared): Rs. 10-12 per head for fixed routes (aprox 3 kms).

Auto-rickshaw (reserved): Rs. 50 for about 2-3 kms.

Accommodation

Hotels near various ghats (river passages) are popular with tourists – Assi Ghat has the best options. Simple rooms can be hired starting from Rs. 600 in a hotel and Rs. 350 in a hostel or guesthouse.

Always pre-book your accomodation in order to avoid touts harassing you on arrival at the



railway station. B&Bs on Tulsi Ghat are neat and in a more quiet, peaceful area of town.

Day 1 in the city

Food: Head to Godowlia for some really good street food (Rs. 20 onwards) or walk ahead to Dashaswmedh for the Brown Bread Bakery – a popular organic bakery and restaurant. Head to Assi Ghat for some pizza (Vatika Pizzeria – Rs. 180 onwards), organic breakfast and meals (Aum Cafe – Rs. 120 onwards) or breakfast and coffee (Open Hand Cafe – Rs. 100 onwards).

Most cafés and restaurants will have only vegetarian options and no alcohol. Be sure to look around while walking through the narrow lanes of Varanasi and you'll be sure to discover some really unique cafes and restaurants.

Shop: Look around the streets and alleys of the ghats for cheap accessories and clothing. For genuine, home-spun fabric and fashion, head to Gandhi Ashram; they also sell organic cosmetics and have a range of street food on offer. For traditional, world-famous Indian silk sarees, pay a visit to Chowk.



See and do

- Take a boat ride (Rs. 700 for 2 hrs). Morning tours are perfect for watching the sunrise as well as the holymen and yoga students start their day. Evening tours are great for seeing the ghats light up with earthen lamps and witnessing the famous Ganga Arti (prayer) at Dashaswamedh or burning pyres at Manikarnika.
- Head to the back streets of Bengali Tola to see the preserved tradition of music and dance. Visit the International Music Centre Ashram to watch traditional dance and music performances every Wednesday and Saturday evenings.

- Walk through the narrow by-lanes of the city – it's astonishingly crowded, crazy, colorful and entertaining.
- At around sunrise, start walking from Tulsi Ghat up to Raja Harishchandra Ghat to experience the unique way of life at each of the 10-12 ghats you'll cross.

Be aware

- Avoid walking alone in dark, seedy street corners at night.
- Do not indulge in any form of drugs, even if you see some holymen smoking marijuana.
- Keep your bags safe, especially in crowded markets.
- Avoid touts and conmen outside the railway station or around ghats offering discounted hotels, Ayurvedic medicines, or other hard-to-believe offers.
- Do not give money to beggars or street kids.

City-based cult read

'Banaras: City of Lights' by Diana L. Eck.



Cost guide

Street food: Rs. 20 onwards.

A simple restaurant: Rs. 50 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 150 onwards.

Beer (available in bigger hotels): Rs. 250 up.

First 24 Hrs in: **Kolkata (Calcutta)**

Arrivals

Flight: Kolkata has a new terminal with basic amenities like food, snacks, shops and forex. The airport is mainly busy with domestic connections, not too many direct international ones.

Train: Arrive at the very busy and big Howrah station—well connected to the rest of India. From New Delhi, Kolkata is 17 hrs on the fastest train.

Transport to the city

Airport (17 km, 40 mins): Get a yellow pre-paid taxi from the counter just outside the exit for Rs. 350-400 to city centre. A/C taxis will cost about 350- 450.

Train Station (6 km, 15 mins): Take a yellow pre-paid taxi to the city centre at Rs. 90 from there.

Transport within the city

Calcutta has one of the best public transport systems in India, with frequent buses (fare



starts at Rs.5) to every part of the city. Where the bus won't go, shuttle autos will (fare Rs.5 onwards). For reaching into tiny lanes, you have cycle/hand pulled rickshaws which will take you right to the doorstep. They are all safe, frequent and easily available.

Trams: Perfect old-school way to explore the city (Rs. 4 any distance. Also offers hop-on hop-off heritage tours Rs. 260 for A/C, Rs. 100 for non-A/C).

Taxi: Easily available and commonly used. Pay by the meter, flag off rate Rs. 25 for first 2 km.

Accommodation

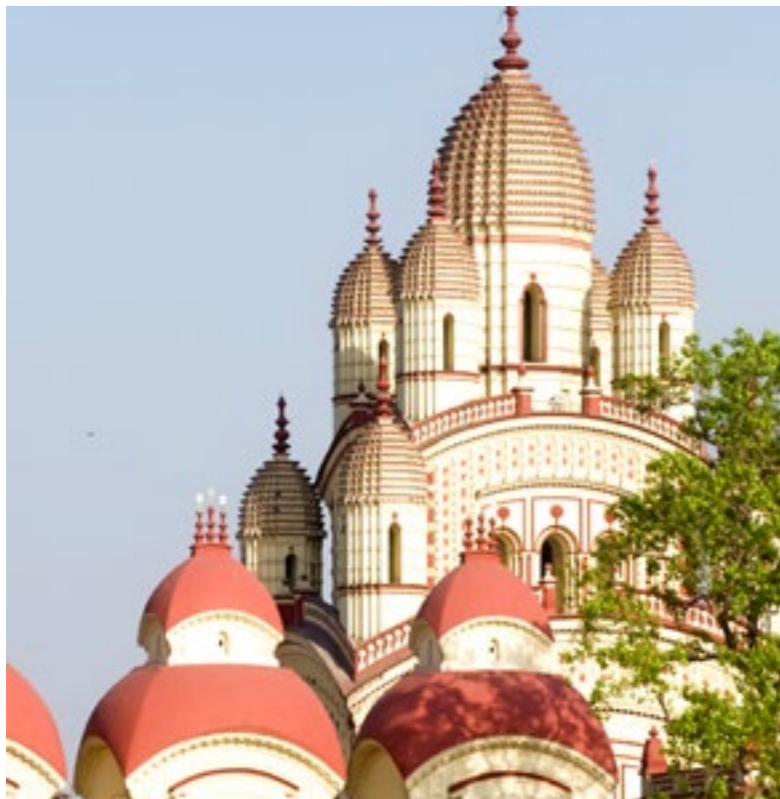
Park Street (would suggest this and neighbouring areas over Park circus) and Park Circus from the city centre with mostly old colonial architecture has several affordable hotels (Rs. 800 onwards).



Alternatively try B&Bs or Homestays for Rs. 1200 onwards. Pre-booking is recommended.

Day 1 in the city

Food: You can eat a full meal platter of rice and curry with fish at Rs. 25—easily available around the city in small restaurants. Go to Bhojohari Manna (near Gariahat) for authentic Bengali food (lot of fish and seafood—Rs. 150 onwards), Aminia for good Mughlai Food (Rs. 125 onwards), Flurys (since 1927) for sandwiches and baked items (Rs. 200 onwards). Park Street has a lot of places to eat and various cuisines on offer.



Park Circus has several restaurants that serve better biryani and kebab paratha than many places in North India do.

Kolkata is also famous for its many Indian sweets—try Roshogulla, Mishti Doi and Sandesh (Rs. 5 a piece) at any sweet shop. Ask the shopkeeper to give you a sample piece of any sweet you want to try; people here in general are very helpful. Prices will vary depending on the size of the sweet and the ingredients.

Shop: Explore New Market in the city centre to find all kinds of knick knacks, curios and old rare books. Alternatively, head to south Kolkata for some upscale branded shopping.

See and do

Get into the vibe of the city by taking a trip to Victoria Memorial, followed by some snacks at Indian Coffee House. The very busy and legendary café. St. Paul's Cathedral opposite Victoria Memorial is a must-see.

There are several old-school printing presses still working in city centre, which are worth a visit.

Head to Nandan, Academy of Fine Arts and Rabindra Sadan Cultural Centre in evening for a dose of Bengali culture with theatre, dance and other classical performing arts.

Plan a visit to spend time and see Shanti Niketan – the school of nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (preferably in Winter – it's very humid during the other seasons).

Also, visit Dalhousie area for some great British architecture.

Nightlife: Kolkata has a vibrant nightlife; head to Shisha, Roxy, Nocturne, Underground or Backstage (pub) for a good dose of cocktails and music (food Rs. 250 onwards, beer Rs. 280 onwards). Clubs and bars open till 2 am.

Be aware

- Kolkata is a safe city, however avoid walking alone in dark street corners.
- Keep your bags safe on you, especially in crowded places.
- Avoid touts and scammers just outside the railway station and busy street markets. Airports and stations have a pre-paid cab system, so there's no need to entertain the touts.
- Do not give money to beggars.

City-based cult read

'City of Joy' by Dominique Lapierre.



Cost guide

Street food: Rs. 10 onwards (You MUST have chowmein, fish chop and rolls from the thela walas... they are brilliant!)

A simple restaurant: Rs. 25 onwards.

Trendy place: Rs. 200 onwards.

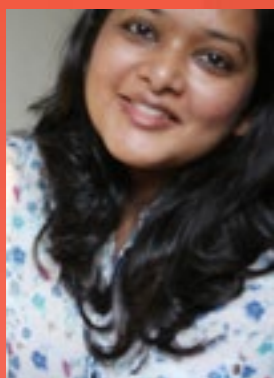
International fast food chain: Rs. 100 onwards.

Beer: Rs. 150 onwards for a glass.

Extra Night Charges for Taxi: 15% (midnight to 6am).

About the authors:

Richa Gupta



Richa is one of the lucky, dedicated and talented few who have transitioned from corporate life to life as a traveller and writer. She's been published in newspapers, magazines and online journals. She's travelled extensively around India and makes a point of going somewhere new every couple of months. You can read about her travels on her blog travelsandstories.com.

She also believes very strongly in travelling responsibly. She founded The Blue Dawn initiative which promotes alternative travel – encouraging travellers to opt for local homestays, use public transport, try local food and to support the local community. Check out TheBlueDawn on Facebook.

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Eeshit Narain



One half of the winning team in the 2013 World Nomads Travel Film Scholarship, Eeshit is a cinematographer and documentary maker extraordinaire. A native of Mumbai, he's travelled throughout India and the world, telling travel stories through the medium of film.

We leveraged Eeshit's love for India to double-check the information in this guide and to ensure it is the best it can be.

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