

Dear Traveller,

India is one of the most fascinating places on earth, where your senses are constantly being filled with every imaginable experience. While India moves forward to take its place in the modern world, much of it remains as it has for thousands of years. This of course gives India its great charm but also means that some of its standards and customs are not always what many of you are used to at home.

Please enter into the spirit of India and enjoy its multitude of delights but use your common sense. We hope the following recommendations will help make your stay as comfortable, enjoyable and trouble free as possible.

In order to help you prepare for your trip please take your time to thoroughly review all of the information provided in this document. If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to email us at [athmatours@gmail.com](mailto:athmatours@gmail.com) .

## BEFORE YOU GO

- **[?] VALID PASSPORT:** Check that your passport is valid for at least six months from the last day of your trip, and that you have at least two blank pages for any necessary visa or entry and exit stamps.
- **[?] PRE TRIP SAFETY:** In the next weeks, we encourage you to do everything possible to stay healthy. Please practice social distancing, steer clear of potential Covid-19 exposure, and take an at- home antigen test before you depart.
- **[?] INSURANCE POLICY:** We strongly recommend that you purchase travel insurance so that you are compensated for last minute cancellations. Most hotels in India do not refund for cancellations beyond 45 days. Hence it is better to be insured. Besides trip insurance please purchase a medical insurance including medical evacuation which covers the extra expense of bringing you home if you require special medical assistance. Travel Guard ([www.travelguard.com](http://www.travelguard.com)) covers both trip and medical insurance for India.

Please bring a digital or printed copy of your insurance policies.

**INTERNATIONAL & INTERNAL CARRY-ON:** Valuable & essential items, such as cameras, travel documents and prescription medications, should be hand carried on your flights to avoid loss or damage.

**LUGGAGE REQUIREMENTS:** Domestic flights allow 15kg / 33 lbs. as check in baggage and 7 kg/ 15 lbs of hand baggage. + a purse. Anything above this would be chargeable.

**FACE MASK & HAND SANITIZER:** Please bring your own supply of hand sanitizer and masks (either disposable or cloth) for the duration of your trip.

## **ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE INFORMATION**

### **ARRIVAL**

#### **IF YOU MISS YOUR FLIGHT**

If you miss your flight anywhere during your journey before arriving India, please let us know so that we can arrange pick up accordingly. Please contact Mallika at +91 97877 66741 through WhatsApp.

#### **IMMIGRATION:**

After exiting the plane, please follow signs to immigration. There is a separate line for foreign passports. Here you will have to wait in line to get your passport checked and stamped. You are required to complete an arrival form and hand it to the immigration officer along with your passport and visa. Some airlines hand these out before landing or they are available as you enter the immigration area.

For address in India please put the address of the hotel where you will be staying on arrival, given in your itinerary docket. There is a separate immigration line for foreign passport holders. A representative from the hotel or Athma Tours will be waiting for you outside the airport with a name board.

## **CUSTOMS**

After immigration continue to the baggage claim area to collect your checked bags. Luggage carts are available at no charge in this area. Once you have your luggage, proceed through Customs. Use the Green Channel for 'nothing to declare'. There are places where you can change money in the baggage claim area.

## **TRANSPORTATION FROM AIRPORT TO HOTEL**

Immediately on exiting customs (still within the terminal building) you will see the crowd of people waiting to meet flights. **If you have given us your arrival information** an English-speaking driver will be there to meet you. Look for the sign with your name. **If you have not given us your arrival information** or cannot find your driver, go to the Pre-Paid taxi booth inside the terminal and have them arrange a taxi to the Hotel.

## **INTERNAL FLIGHTS**

Your internal flights in India have been booked and reconfirmed by Athma Tours. Your trip leader will take care of airport transfers, check in and luggage for the entire group. Please note that internal flights have a maximum allowable weight of 15kg (33 lbs) plus a hand luggage of 7kg (15 lbs) . Any excess baggage will have to be paid individually.

## **DEPARTURE**

Transfer from hotel to airport will be organised by Athma Tours. For international departure, you will have to be in the airport at least 3 hours prior to your flight.

## **EXTRA SERVICES / ADDITIONAL**

If you have booked extra services please refer to your documents pertaining to extension tours.

## **TELEPHONE & WIFI**

You can use WIFI (free of cost) at most hotels to communicate internationally. Sometimes wifi can be unreliable in remote locations. Please download WhatsApp on your phone prior to departure . Our WhatsApp number is +91 97877 66741. Several international carriers such AT&T, T-Mobile , etc. have international calling on a per-day charge. We recommend that you speak with your phone carrier and consider this option to make international calls.

## **EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION**

If friends or family wish to contact you during the trip, we encourage them to call, text, or email you directly. Another option to reach you is by calling the hotel (please see the enclosed Hotel List). The next option would be to email [athmatours@gmail.com](mailto:athmatours@gmail.com) and WAP Mallika at +91 97877 66741 .

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

### **GRATUITY SUGGESTIONS**

Tipping and gratuities are preferred in Indian Rupees. Most people in India rely on tips for services rendered. While tipping is optional, we recommend the following:

- 1) Restaurants don't usually add a service charge. We recommend paying 10% of the bill.
- 2) Hotel porters, doormen, laundrymen Rs.100 to 200
- 3) Massage therapists Rs.300 to 500 depending on the duration and quality of the service.
- 4) Private car with a driver and/or local guide about Rs.500 for half/day, Rs.700-1000 for a full/day.
- 5) Athma Tours guide: Rs.500 per day per person
- 6) Athma tours driver: Rs. 300 per day per person
- 7) Airport transfer drivers : Rs.300 per transfer

You may also choose to make a donation at some of the temples and ashrams that we visit. Tipping and making donations is a personal choice. However, as a general guideline, we suggest budgeting around \$250 total for tips and donations.

### **CREDIT CARDS & CURRENCY**

The unit of Indian currency is the rupee. Coins come in denominations of 1, 2, 5 & 10 rupees; paper money in 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, and 500 rupees. The rate of exchange is set each day and will be used by official moneychangers throughout India. The current rate of exchange is between 82 & 85 rupees to a dollar. Large banks and hotels will exchange bank notes in most currencies.

We recommend that you exchange about \$250 at the airport on arrival for gratuities and small purchases. While ATMs are available, it takes time away from the tour.

Visa and Mastercard are preferred over AMEX . Very few places accept AMEX. You can exchange money at some hotels if needed. It is a good idea to advise your bank and credit card company in advance of your trip that you will be traveling abroad and using your cards. This will avoid the problem of having your credit card company or bank shut down your account when they see that your card used in a foreign country. When you are at the hotels, you can use your credit cards if you charge services to your room account such as laundry, bar charges or additional tours.



## VISAS

You will need a **passport valid for 6 months and an Indian visa** to enter India. For the tour please apply for a tourist visa. Please visit <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/> to apply for an online e-visa. On the website, please click on the box that says “For e-visa by Bureau of Immigration, apply here”. This will take you through the e-visa application process. You will need to upload a current photograph and pay the visa fee by credit/debit card. The eTourist Visa will be emailed to you. When you apply for a visa, you will be asked for your address in India. Please use the following:

Athma Tours & Products  
1547-A, Avinashi Road  
Peelamedu, Coimbatore 641004, India

Contact person: Mallika P.  
Contact number: +91 97877 66741  
Email: [athmatours@gmail.com](mailto:athmatours@gmail.com)

**You must take a copy of the emailed visa with you to India and present it with your passport, on arrival to the immigration officer.**

**Please apply for the visa at least 30 days in advance**, sometimes clients have found it challenging to complete the application due to the website being down. **We strongly recommend not waiting until the last minute to start the visa application process.**

It is always advisable to carry a **photocopy of your visa and the information page of your passport** separate from your passport. If you should lose your passport, this will make it much easier to get a replacement.

## VACCINATIONS/ IMMUNIZATIONS

Vaccinations are generally a personal choice and if you have questions we suggest you contact your own physician or public health authority. Citizens and travelers from the US, Canada and Western Europe do not require vaccination certificates or inoculations. Travelers originating or transiting through Yellow Fever endemic countries should carry their Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificate. In general it is advisable to be up-to-date with your tetanus shots and you should consider vaccination against Hepatitis A and B. Malaria still exists in India and, although the areas we will be traveling in aren't particularly problem areas, there will be some mosquitoes. There is no guaranteed protection against malaria however, anti-malaria tablets can significantly reduce the possibility of contracting the disease if you are infected. Again it's a personal choice so please discuss with your doctor.



## WHAT TO BRING

As we will be moving frequently, we recommend traveling light and limiting your luggage to one medium suitcase and a small carry-on bag. Additional bags can be purchased in India for your shopping needs. Domestic airlines within India allow up to 15 kg (33 lbs) for checked-in luggage.

Expect warm, mostly dry, and sunny days, with cooler evenings and mornings. **Bring a shawl, light jacket, or sweater.** The tour will be casual, so formal clothes are unnecessary. Laundry services are available at most hotels. Pack plain cotton clothes or cotton-synthetic blends. You can also buy inexpensive, local clothes in Indian bazaars.

For sun protection, bring a **light hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen.** **Sneakers and sandals** are ideal, especially for visiting holy shrines where you need to remove your footwear easily. Bring swimwear for hotel pools. Most hotels provide toiletries (soap & shampoo) and hair dryers. It's also useful to have **wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and a small roll of toilet paper.** A good **insect repellent** is recommended.

India's electrical current is 220 volts, 50 cycles AC, with two-round-prong plugs. Ensure you have the correct converter and/or adapter for any electrical items you bring.

## DRESS CODE

Modesty is highly valued in India, so it is recommended that women avoid extra short shorts, low-cut blouses, and mini skirts. When entering holy places such as temples or ashrams, women should wear long skirts, dresses, or long pants, and avoid sleeveless or low-cut blouses.

## PHONE NUMBERS

Before the tour begins, we will send you a list of the phone numbers of all the hotels where you will be staying. You can leave a copy of this list with anyone at home who might need to contact you. We will also send you our guide's cell phone number, which we recommend you carry with you during the tour in case of any unexpected emergency.

## YOUR FIRST DAYS IN INDIA

Most of you will have had a long journey, passing through many time zones and perhaps experiencing a dramatic climate change. Get plenty of rest the first few days to allow your system to adjust to the rhythms of India. The food in India may be richer and spicier than you are used to, so eat lightly for the first days, allowing your digestion to adjust.

## FOOD AND WATER

The most common problems people have in India are stomach upsets. Although these are generally mild, there are no guarantees that you won't get sick. Taking some basic precautions and using common sense can go a long way to keep you trouble free. The old colonial adage holds very good for India, **"If you can cook it, boil it or peel it, you can eat it, otherwise, forget it"**.

We will do our best to ensure that all the food served during the tour will be of the highest standards but please ask if you aren't sure about something and, if in doubt, leave it. If you eat **outside the hotels, only eat cooked food** and avoid salads, cut fruits, garnishes, etc. Only eat fruit that you peel yourself such as bananas and oranges. Generally drinks that are boiled such as tea, chai and coffee are fine to drink. We recommend that you **do not buy/eat food from street vendors**, including ice cream.

**Tap water is NOT safe to drink anywhere in India.** Many hotels will provide drinking water in your room, we will provide it at meals and on bus journeys. Outside of the hotel, only buy bottled water and check that the cap seal is still intact. If you buy soft drinks, always ask for them in the bottle, even in restaurants. **Do not put ice in your drinks**, it is often made from tap water. We recommend that you also **brush your teeth using purified water**. Avoid the temptation to touch stray animals or, if you do, wash your hands. **Keeping your hands and fingernails clean** is a good step towards staying healthy; always wash your hands before eating. A small bottle of hand sanitizing lotion or antiseptic hand wipes, could be carried in your pocket to cleanse your hands when washing facilities are not available.

Taking Acidophilus and/or grapefruit seed extract during a trip can also be helpful in preventing mild stomach disorders. Both are available in health food stores. As a cure for mild diarrhea, we recommend bringing Imodium A-D or an equivalent. If you are concerned about more serious digestive problems, you could consider bringing a course of antibiotics such as Cipro. Your doctor or pharmacist will be able to advise you further in this regard.

## SUN

We will be spending some time in the sun, please remember to **put on sunscreen and wear a hat** or some people like to carry a small umbrella for protection. If you are not used to the warm weather, please minimize your time in the sun until you have acclimatized.

## SECURITY

Indians are amongst the friendliest and most generous people you will meet. However, to be secure **avoid leaving valuables unattended**. Lock your luggage when in transit and in your hotel room if it contains any valuable items. Do not leave your passport, tickets, cash, etc. in your room unless there is a safe in which you can lock them. A passport pouch, which fits around your waist or hangs around your neck, worn under your shirt is the safest place for these items. **Avoid carrying valuables in small hand baggage**. Please take extra care of your valuables in busy places such as airports, train stations and shopping bazaars.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography is allowed in most places. Most temples prohibit photography, especially in the inner sanctums, if in doubt, ask. Other temples, forts and palaces may levy a small fee for bringing in large cameras. Most people in India, especially the children are more than happy to be photographed but be sensitive particularly with women and holy men. Again, if in doubt, ask.

## LOCAL CUSTOMS : VISITING TEMPLES/ HOLY PLACES

Visiting temples or religious monuments demands respect, the minimum of which means **removing your shoes**. Shoes can be removed and left at the entrance of the temple or in the custody of a shoe valet for a fee. It is not appropriate to carry your shoes (even hidden in a bag) into a temple. Sometimes a portion of a temple may be off limits to non-Hindus, this is usually indicated with signs, but if in doubt, ask.

Please be appropriately dressed when visiting temples, ashrams and shrines. Women wearing shorts, sleeveless and low cut blouses will not be allowed into Hindu temples. Hats and sunglasses have to be removed when entering temples. When sitting on the floor in a temple, shrine or in the presence of a holy person, it is recommended to be cross-legged or to have your feet tucked beneath you. When entering a traditional Indian home, it is also polite to remove your shoes. Any time you see shoes outside a doorway, you should take it as a sign to remove yours before entering. In India the left hand is considered unclean and so food should be picked up with the **right hand** particularly if it is from a communal dish. Making offerings or receiving prasad (blessed items) in a temple should always be done with **the right hand**.

Overt displays of affection in public are generally frowned upon in India. Women visitors can sometimes attract unwanted attention, which can be minimized with proper dress code.



## SHOPPING

India is packed with beautiful things to buy and there will be opportunities for those of you who want to take home souvenirs. A few shops offer only fixed prices but elsewhere you can negotiate prices. Make sure you know your product when buying expensive items such as jewelry, cashmere, carpets, antiques, gold, etc. or the bargain might not be such a great deal. If you are having items shipped home, make sure you understand how long the shipment will take and what costs are, and are not, included in your payment. Expect to pay more in the more popular tourist areas and in the shops within hotels. Beware of taxi drivers who want to take you to their “brother’s shop”, they are usually receiving a commission, which will be charged to you. We will recommend the better places to shop and will point out any items unique to or less expensive in the towns we visit. If you are looking for a particular item please let us know, we may be able to help you find it.

## BEGGING

You will find some begging and beggars close to tourist monuments and temples. While you will want to help them all, the sheer numbers makes it impossible. Most beggars will just hold out a hand but be prepared for more aggressive ones to tug at your sleeve, a strong word will usually suffice to have them leave you alone. Carry a small notes in your pocket as 20 or 50 rupees. Take care if you are approached by a group of beggars (usually children or women), as giving to one can lead to you being besieged by the rest. Unfortunately begging has become a business in some tourist areas and the beseeching child or woman with a baby is sometimes part of a well-organized group. Some people prefer to carry a few inexpensive pens to give to children, which they can use for school.

## MEDICAL

Please remember to **bring any medications** you are currently taking and will require in India. We will locate a western-trained doctor should you have a medical emergency. If you wear glasses or contacts, bring your prescription in case you need to replace them. Bringing an extra, cheap pair of “pharmacy” glasses as a back-up is a good idea.

We hope this information will make your visit to India as comfortable and fulfilling as possible. We will also be with you every step of the tour to answer any other questions you have and help with any concerns that arise.



## GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

- While we will attempt to follow the program itineraries and do not anticipate changes, the tour leaders reserve the right, at their sole discretion, to make any changes, with or without notice that may become necessary in the best interest of the program.
- **Travel:** road travel will be by air-conditioned bus or car, rail travel will be in air-conditioned coaches, water travel will be in suitable boats, air travel will be in economy class
- Local guides will be used as appropriate.
- **Water:** bottled mineral water will be provided at meals and on bus journeys. Other drinks will be at the participant's own expense.
- **Meals** will be mostly buffet style with a predominance of vegetarian food.
- If the program is cancelled by the tour leaders, all tour payments will be refunded in full. Refunds will be limited to the program fees received from the participant.
- **Limits of Liability:** while every attempt will be made to keep participants safe and healthy, the tour leaders, Athma and their agents assume no liability for injury, loss, damage, delay or irregularities, which may be caused by reason of defect in any vehicle or through the act or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant, or in carrying out the arrangements of the program or otherwise. The aforementioned can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to sickness, recklessness, weather, strike, war, quarantine or other causes or acts of God.
- The tour leaders reserve the right, at their sole discretion, to decline to accept any person to join any program or to allow any person to remain as a member of any program.