

# First-Time India Travel Mistakes to Avoid

The avoidable mistakes that trip up first-time visitors to India most often — and the simple fixes for each.

## WHY THIS GUIDE

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Most first-time-in-India advice is either too vague ("keep an open mind") or too narrow (one packing list). The mistakes that actually derail a first trip tend to repeat across travelers: over-packing the itinerary, underestimating travel time between sites, and a handful of etiquette slips that are easy to avoid once you know them. This guide collects the patterns.

## PLANNING MISTAKES

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These show up before you even land.

- Packing too many cities into too few days — India's distances and traffic make overland travel slower than the map suggests
- Not accounting for travel time between sights within a single city, especially in Delhi, Mumbai, and other large metros
- Booking the cheapest possible internal transport without checking realistic journey times and connection buffers
- Skipping travel insurance to save money, despite it being one of the lower-cost parts of the trip
- Assuming every region's climate is the same — India spans desert, monsoon coast, and Himalayan cold within the same calendar month
- Not pre-booking your e-Visa with enough lead time before departure

## ON-THE-GROUND MISTAKES

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These are easy to avoid once you know to expect them.

- Drinking tap water or using it to brush teeth — stick to sealed bottled or filtered water
- Eating from a stall with no visible turnover or queue — busy stalls with fresh, hot food are generally the safer bet
- Using your left hand to eat, hand over money, or pass objects — the right hand is customary for these in most of India
- Underdressing at religious sites — covering shoulders and knees, and removing shoes before entering, is expected at temples, mosques, and gurdwaras
- Haggling aggressively at fixed-price stores, or not haggling at all in markets where it's expected
- Accepting the first price quoted by an unmetered taxi or auto-rickshaw without negotiating or insisting on the meter

## MONEY & COMMUNICATION MISTAKES

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- Relying solely on cards — carry some cash for small towns, markets, and tipping
- Not notifying your bank of international travel before relying on a foreign card
- Forgetting that mobile data and a local SIM or eSIM make navigation, ride-hailing, and translation apps far easier — arrange this early in the trip

Assuming English alone covers every interaction — a translation app or a few local phrases go a long way outside major hotels