

Gift-Giving Etiquette in India Guide

What to bring, how to present a gift, and what to avoid when giving gifts in India — for hosts, business contacts, and special occasions alike.

GIFTS AS A GESTURE, NOT A TRANSACTION

Gift-giving in India is common across social, family, and business settings, but the value of the gift usually matters less than the gesture and the way it's presented. A few habits and a few things to avoid go a long way toward getting it right. This guide covers the basics for visitors navigating gifts as a guest, host, or business contact.

WHAT TO BRING

- Sweets (mithai) are a safe, widely appreciated gift for almost any occasion, from a home visit to a festival
- If visiting from abroad, small items from your home country are often well received as a thoughtful gesture
- For business contacts, modest, good-quality items are more appropriate than anything overly expensive, which can feel like it's creating an obligation
- Flowers are appropriate for most occasions, though it's worth avoiding white flowers, which can carry funeral associations in some contexts
- For children, small toys or books are generally a safe and welcomed choice

HOW TO PRESENT A GIFT

- Give and receive gifts with your right hand, or both hands together — not the left hand alone
- Gifts are often not opened immediately in front of the giver — don't be surprised if yours is set aside to open later
- Wrapping matters; avoid black or white wrapping paper, which can carry mourning associations in some traditions
- When visiting someone's home for the first time, bringing a small gift is a thoughtful and common gesture, even if not expected
- A brief, sincere comment about why you chose the gift is appreciated and often more memorable than the item itself

WHAT TO AVOID

- Leather goods can be inappropriate gifts for Hindu or Jain recipients due to the cow's sacred status and broader principles of non-violence
- Avoid giving money in round denominations — odd numbers (like ₹101 instead of ₹100) are traditionally considered more auspicious
- Steer clear of alcohol as a gift unless you know the recipient drinks, given how common teetotalism is across religious communities
- Overly extravagant gifts in a business context can be misread as inappropriate rather than generous
- Avoid assuming a gift will be opened or reacted to immediately — a measured response isn't a sign it was unwelcome

Specific customs vary by religion and region — when gifting in a more formal or unfamiliar setting, a modest, thoughtfully chosen gift is rarely wrong.