

India Travel Prep Guide

Visas, budgeting, etiquette, and the best time to visit — the essentials for planning a first trip to India.

VISAS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Most international visitors need a visa for tourism. The simplest route is the e-Visa, applied for online before departure.

- Apply only through the official portal (indianvisaonline.gov.in) — never a third-party site charging a markup
- Standard e-Tourist Visa options include short-stay, 1-year, and 5-year validities, each with its own fee and a maximum stay per visit
- Apply several days ahead of travel — processing windows vary by nationality and season
- Check your passport has at least 6 months' validity remaining from your arrival date
- Carry a digital and a printed copy of your visa approval and passport bio page

Eligible nationalities, fees, and processing times change periodically — confirm current details on the official e-Visa portal before booking flights.

BUDGETING FOR INDIA

Rough per-person daily ranges, excluding international flights — a starting point for a budget, not a quote.

- Budget: hostels, street food & local trains — roughly \$20–40/day
- Mid-range: 3-star hotels, private cars for day trips, sit-down restaurants — roughly \$60–120/day
- Luxury: heritage hotels, private guides & drivers, fine dining — \$150+/day, with no real ceiling
- Tipping isn't mandatory but is customary — guides & drivers around ₹200–500/day; restaurant staff 5–10% where service isn't already added
- Cards and UPI-enabled apps cover most cities; carry some cash for smaller towns, markets & homestays

ETIQUETTE & CUSTOMS

- Remove shoes before entering temples, mosques, gurdwaras, and most homes
- Dress modestly at religious sites — shoulders and knees covered; some temples provide or require a head covering
- Use your right hand for eating, giving, or receiving — the left hand is considered unclean in many traditions
- Ask before photographing people, especially at religious sites or in rural areas
- Public displays of affection are uncommon outside major cities and can draw unwanted attention
- A side-to-side head tilt usually signals agreement — context tells you which
- "Namaste" with palms together is a safe, respectful greeting in almost any setting

BEST TIME TO VISIT, BY REGION

- Golden Triangle (Delhi, Agra, Jaipur): Oct–Mar for cool, dry touring weather; Delhi's air quality is worst Nov–Feb; Apr–Jun brings extreme heat
- Rajasthan desert: Oct–Feb for mild days — desert nights can still drop near freezing; avoid the May–Jun peak heat
- Kerala & the south coast: Oct–Mar is the easiest season; Jun–Aug is the main monsoon — lush and quiet, with regular rain
- Hill stations & the Himalayas: Apr–Jun and Sep–Nov bracket the monsoon; many high-altitude routes close for winter