

# Indian Greetings & Body Language Guide

How people greet each other in India, what common gestures mean, and how personal space norms differ — a quick reference for first-time travelers.

## GREETINGS VARY BY CONTEXT

How people greet each other in India shifts depending on setting, generation, and region — a namaste at a temple, a handshake in a business meeting, a head nod between strangers. Reading the room and mirroring what's offered to you is usually the safest approach. This guide covers the common patterns and a few gestures worth understanding.

## COMMON GREETINGS

- Namaste — palms pressed together at chest level with a slight bow — is a widely recognized and always-appropriate greeting, especially with elders or in religious settings
- Handshakes are common in business and urban social settings, generally between men or between people of any gender in more international contexts
- Touching an elder's feet as a sign of respect is a tradition you may see among family members, especially during festivals — not something visitors are expected to do
- A slight head nod or tilt is a common, casual acknowledgment between people who don't otherwise have a set greeting
- Regional and religious greetings also exist (such as 'Sat Sri Akal' among Sikhs or 'Salaam' among Muslims) — a generic namaste or hello is always a safe default

## GESTURES AND BODY LANGUAGE

- The side-to-side head tilt or 'head wobble' can mean yes, agreement, or simple acknowledgment depending on context — it isn't a 'no'
- Pointing with a single finger is considered rude in many contexts; an open hand or a nod of the chin is more polite
- Public displays of affection between couples are generally more reserved than in many Western countries, especially outside major cities
- Touching someone's head, including children's, is best avoided, as the head is considered a sensitive or even sacred part of the body in some traditions
- Showing the soles of your feet toward people, shrines, or books is generally considered impolite — tuck your feet under when sitting on the floor

## PERSONAL SPACE AND TOUCH

- Physical contact between people of the same gender (a handshake, a hand on the shoulder) is more common than cross-gender contact in many social settings
- In crowded public spaces — markets, trains, festivals — personal space norms are generally closer than in less densely populated countries; don't read incidental contact as impolite
- When greeting a group, it's polite to acknowledge elders first

- Use your right hand for handshakes, handing over items, and gestures — the left hand carries different associations in many contexts
- Queues and lines can feel less strictly ordered than in some countries — gentle persistence rather than visible frustration tends to work better