



## India

### Travel Information

Here are some travel tips to make your journey to India safer and more pleasant. First, we provide travel information on India in general. Second, we provide information especially for travel in the Himalayan region.

### Getting There

The closest international airport to the Himalayas is Indira Gandhi International in New Delhi.

### Budget Guidebooks

Lonely Planet India

Lonely Planet Indian Himalaya

The Rough Guide to India

Fodor's and other high-budget guidebooks are great reading, but not as good for practical information.

### Travel Agents in India

In McLeod Ganj: Potala Tours and Travels on Bhagsu Road in McLeod Ganj.

In Delhi: Potala Tours and Travels in Paharganj and in Manjnu-ka-Tilla (new Tibetan camp).

See guidebook for addresses.

### Air Tickets to Leh and Other Destinations in India

Jet Airways is far preferable to Indian Airlines. There are several Jet Airways offices in Delhi.

### Air Tickets to India

For cheap plane tickets in your area, check the travel section of the Sunday newspaper. Also check online: [www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com), [www.lowestfares.com](http://www.lowestfares.com), [www.koreanair.com](http://www.koreanair.com), etc. Student and under-25 rates come from agencies like Council Travel and STA Travel. One rule of thumb is that \$2000 round trip is too much and under \$1000 is a lucky steal. It is usually wise to purchase a round-trip ticket. Be sure to check the expiration date of the ticket. If you don't know when you will be returning, you can purchase a one-way ticket and buy the return ticket from Trips Out Travels in Delhi.

### Air Tickets from India

Sunny Budhreja, Trips Out Travel, 90 Janpath Lane (near Connaught Place), New Delhi

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<http://www.jamyang.com>

## Indian Visas

An Indian visa is available from the Indian Embassy or Consulate or High Commission in your area. You can get it by mail, but be sure to send your passport by Fedex or some other method that is traceable, and make sure it is returned to you the same way. For visa information, check the Government of India website. In the United States, the San Francisco consulate is the fastest. Tourist visas are issued for 3, 6, or 12 months. The cost depends on the length of the visa. A ten-year multiple-entry visa is available for frequent visitors to India. It is best not to get the visa too far in advance, lest it expire before you travel. Apply for a tourist visa, not a business or student visa. It is best simply to go as a tourist, and not mention volunteer work, Tibet, Dharmasala, Buddhism, Ladakh, research, or social service. Since Jamyang Foundation volunteers are not paid, there is no need to apply for a business visa. For any visa longer than six months, you are required to register at the Foreign Registration Office (FRO) of the town where you are staying within 7 days of arrival. The Foreign Registration Office in Delhi is recommended. Take six passport-size photos with you. Explain that you plan to travel many places during your stay, rather than settle in any particular place. The FRO in Dharamsala is generally quite inconvenient and many border areas do not have one. If you register upon arrival, you generally need to visit the office again before departure to obtain a "No Objection to Leave India" stamp in your passport.

It is good to save your passport with all the Indian visas, arrivals, and departures to show in case you plan to apply for a long-term visa in the future. Frequent visitors to India may be eligible for a 10-year visa.

## Student Loans

Many volunteers request advice about deferring their student loan payments. Please check with your bank or loan processing company. Each organization has different rules for loan deferrals. You may merit a deferral because you are doing charitable work or because you will have no income. One American volunteer managed to get an "economic hardship deferral" by sending the processing company a copy of her Indian visa, which states that visa holders are not allowed to earn money in India, thus her monthly income would be \$0. There are many other ways to handle the loan problem. If you find a way to defer your loans, please help us advise future volunteers.

## Accommodations in Delhi

If this is your first trip to India, the YMCA Tourist Hostel, Jaisingh Road, New Delhi, is recommended. It is clean and centrally located. A single room is about \$10 with common bath and no air conditioning. Phone: 91-11-336-1915, 336-1847, 374-6668. Fax for reservations in advance: 91-11-23746032. (Please check your guidebook to see if the numbers have changed). Another place is the YWCA Blue Triangle nearby. A single room with attached bath and air-conditioning is about \$20. Better hotels in Delhi run from \$50-200 per night or more. Some better hotels provide airport shuttle service.

## Arrival in Delhi

International flights often arrive in Delhi in the middle of the night. A pre-paid taxi from the airport to the YMCA is recommended. This ought to ensure that you arrive at your destination without difficulties, although there are sometimes problems. The pre-paid taxi counters are straight ahead, just as you step out the door after Customs. The Delhi City taxi (the one that is not yelling at you) is cheapest. Be sure that the amount you pay and the receipt amount are the same, and hang onto your receipt.

The fare to the YWCA or YMCA is about Rs.185. You will be given a chit to show the driver, which you give him after you arrive at your destination. There is a foreign exchange counter in the lobby. To save time, if possible, bring about 500 Indian rupees with you to avoid the delay of changing money. Keep your baggage on the trolley and push it out the airport exit to the taxi stand across the way. Ignore all the commotion.

Outside the airport, there is a booth where you present your chit and are given your taxi number. Before getting into the taxi, write down the number of the taxi very conspicuously and also a description of the driver. Luggage charge is included in the fare. If you arrive in the middle of the night, the gate of the YMCA may be closed, but insistently tell the driver and the doorman that you have reservations. Have the taxi to take you right to the door. Bring a copy of your fax request or room confirmation.

Sometimes taxi drivers take passengers to a closed gate and tell them the YMCA has closed down, then try to take you to an expensive hotel. This gate is just a few hundred feet from the main entrance of the YMCA. Do not be afraid or intimidated, just insist firmly and with conviction that the YMCA is open just down the street and make the driver take you there immediately. Don't leave the taxi until you are sure you are at your destination. The manager there will be expecting those who have reservations.

## Indian Railway Tickets

India has an extensive system of railways. Train tickets are now available at the tourist reservation counter just as you exit the lobby at Indira Gandhi International Airport upon arrival. If you know when you will be traveling, it is very convenient to purchase tickets just as you arrive. Seats in 2nd class A/C are highly recommended for first-time visitors. You may need to change money at the foreign exchange counter across the way and show the exchange certificate when purchasing your ticket. Keep your train ticket and all valuables in a safe place.

Train tickets are also available at New Delhi Station. The Tourist Reservation Office is located upstairs inside the main station building. The office opens at 7:30 am and gets crowded by 9 am, but you may meet interesting people there. Take your passport and some US dollars or British pounds with you. Check the big board showing the trains and fill out a form with the name and date of the train you wish to take. Book a 2nd class A/C ticket if you have not yet traveled on Indian trains. Make sure the train leaves from New Delhi Station, if possible. Old Delhi station is far away and traffic is very congested.

The Tourist Reservation Office sells tourist quota tickets without any extra fee, which travel agents will charge. Do not go to any fake "government tourist office" across the street that someone may try to lure you to, where you will be charged much more. Tickets here must be purchased in US dollars and you must show your passport. Trains-at-a-Glance contains schedules and route information for all Indian trains. It is available at book and magazine shops in India. Hard to read at first, but invaluable.

Plan to be at the station about an hour before your train is scheduled to depart. Take some snacks and drinks with you for the evening and next morning. Your passport and other valuables should be with you everywhere you go. Watch your baggage carefully on the platform and in the train until after the train has left the station. Pillow, sheets, and blanket are provided on sleeper compartments. Just request them from the conductor. There is generally not much danger in 2nd A/C, but keep your baggage nearby and valuables concealed. Delays are common on Indian trains.

### **Safety**

The way of life in India is quite different from what you may be used to. Wherever you stay or travel in India, be sure to keep your passport, tickets, and money in a safe place on your body. Keep small amounts (Rs.200-300 in small denominations) in your bag for incidental expenses and keep the rest of your money and passport concealed. Be sure to watch your belongings carefully at all times, including trips to the bathroom or shower. It is best not to be out after dark in India, especially for women.