

# Overseas Adventure Travel®

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide®



Enhanced! Soul of India: The Colorful South

2026

# Overseas Adventure Travel<sup>®</sup>

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

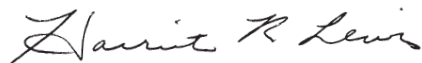
When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis

Chair

Overseas Adventure Travel

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Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai

## Soul of India: The Colorful South

### Small Group Adventure

**India:** Mahabalipuram, Trichy, Madurai, Thekkady (Periyar), Kerala Backwaters, Cochin, Mumbai

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

**18 days starting from \$4,795**

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit [www.oattravel.com/soi2026pricing](http://www.oattravel.com/soi2026pricing)

Brimming with natural splendor and cultural diversity, South India is a mystical land of rock-hewn temples, palm-fringed shores, and fragrant spices. Fall under the spell of this captivating region as you journey from the ancient temples of Mahabalipuram to the enchanting backwaters of Kerala to the lush jungles of Periyar, and more. Discover the colorful South, where the soul of India resides.

### IT'S INCLUDED

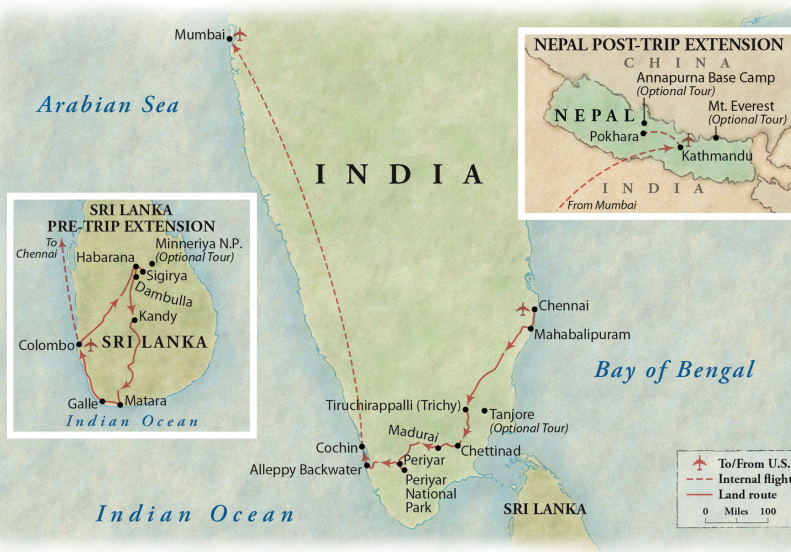
- 16 nights accommodation, including two nights aboard a houseboat in the Kerala Backwaters
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation and 1 internal flight from Cochin to Mumbai
- 33 meals—15 breakfasts, 10 lunches, and 8 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Dinner)
- 16 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next adventure

*Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.*



## ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Chennai, India
2-4	Mahabalipuram
5-6	Trichy
7-8	Madurai
9-10	Thekkady (Periyar)
11-12	Kerala backwaters
13-14	Cochin
15-17	Fly to Mumbai
18	Return to U.S.



## WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

**Pacing:** 7 locations in 18 days

**Physical Requirements:** Travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy, unpaved, dusty roads, both by bus and on foot. Several long overland drives of 5-6 hours with rest stops along the way. South India has a tropical climate and daytime temperatures range from 90-100°F

**Flight time:** Travel time will be 21-31 hours

View all physical requirements at [www.oattravel.com/soi](http://www.oattravel.com/soi)

## INDIA: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

**Unbeatable Value:** Travel at the lowest prices and per diems in the industry.

**People-to-People Experiences:** Meet the owners of a local spice plantation in Thekkady, and learn about the growing process of the region's varied, fragrant spices such as pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and cloves.

**O.A.T. Exclusives:** Spend **A Day in the Life** of a farming village near Mahabalipuram and meet with a female Communist party leader for a **Controversial Topic** discussion about Kerala's historic ties to the party.

## PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

### OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

**Sri Lanka:** Colombo, Habarana, Kandy & Matara

**PRE-TRIP:** 8 nights from **\$2,395**

**Nepal:** Kathmandu, Pokhara & the Himalayas

**POST-TRIP:** 5 nights from **\$1,495**

### ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Mahabalipuram** before your main adventure from **\$190** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Colombo** before your

# Soul of India: The Colorful South

## YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

### BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

#### 8 nights in *Sri Lanka: Colombo, Habarana, Kandy & Matara*

**Day 1** Depart U.S.

**Day 2** Arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Day 3** Explore Colombo

**Day 4** Overland to Habarana • Dambulla Cave Temple

**Day 5** Explore Sigiriya • Optional *Farm Visit & Jeep Safari* tour

**Day 6** Overland to Kandy • Visit Temple of the Tooth

**Day 7** Tea plantation visit • Explore Peradeniya Botanical Gardens

**Day 8** Overland to Matara • Local farm visit

**Day 9** Explore Galle Fort • Visit Martin Wickramasinghe Museum

**Day 10** Overland to Colombo • Fly to Chennai, India

#### **Day 1** Depart U.S.

**Morning/Afternoon:** Today, you'll depart the U.S. for your flight to Chennai, India, with a connection along the way.

#### **Day 2** Arrive in Chennai, India • Transfer to Mahabalipuram

- Accommodations: InterContinental Mahabalipuram Resort or similar

**Afternoon/Evening:** Today you'll arrive in Chennai, India. An O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer to your hotel in Mahabalipuram. Here, we'll be joined by travelers who arrived early in Mahabalipuram or took our optional *Sri Lanka* pre-trip extension. Depending on your flight schedule, you'll arrive in Mahabalipuram

late on Day 2 or very early on Day 3. Hotel rooms will be available beginning at 2pm for travelers arriving today.

#### **Day 3** Mahabalipuram • Explore Shore Temple and Five Rathas

- Destination: Mahabalipuram
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: InterContinental Mahabalipuram Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** Breakfast will be served late this morning at our hotel to give travelers a chance to rest after our very early arrival in Mahabalipuram.

**Morning:** Following a Welcome Briefing with our Trip Experience Leader, we'll set off for a brief orientation walk to get familiar with the



area around our hotel. Mahabalipuram is also known as Mamallapuram, but most refer to it as Mahabs. Whatever you call it, the coastal town of Mahabalipuram was an important seaport during the reign of the Pallava Dynasty. Its ancient archaeological wonders include a series of monolithic rock-carved temples from the seventh and eighth centuries that are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll return to our hotel for a few hours to relax or begin exploring on your own. Later in the afternoon, we'll regroup to witness the magnificent temples of Mahabalipuram, including the Five Rathas, a groups of seventh-century monolithic temples hewn out of a huge boulder; and the Shore Temple, a remarkable two-tiered temple dating from the eighth century that was named for its prime location overlooking the Bay of Bengal.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader will be glad to recommend some local dining options.

**Evening:** You are free to spend the evening as you wish.

#### **Day 4 A Day in the Life of a farming village**

- Destination: Mahabalipuram
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: InterContinental Mahabalipuram Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll enjoy an authentic glimpse of South India's vibrant culture when we experience **A Day in the Life** of an Indian farming village. After driving outside of Mahabalipuram to the small village of Vadakadambadi. We'll get to share stories and conversations with the villagers about daily life and participate in a farming activity. Then,

we'll be welcomed into a local home where we'll help to prepare a few traditional dishes that we'll enjoy for lunch.

**Lunch:** We'll sit down with some of the local women and the village chief for a community lunch.

**Afternoon:** We'll take on a more serious topic of conversation after lunch, when villagers tell us about the recent rise in suicide rates in farming communities like Vadakadambadi due to an inability to repay loans taken to purchase seeds and fertilizers and how this serious problem isn't acknowledged by the Indian government.

After returning to our hotel in Mahabalipuram, you'll have some free time to relax before dinner.

**Dinner:** This evening, we'll enjoy a festive Welcome Dinner at the hotel's restaurant.

**Evening:** Free to extend your night with a cocktail at the bar or return to your room to rest up for tomorrow's discoveries.

#### **Day 5 Overland to Trichy**

- Destination: Trichy
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Courtyard by Marriott Trichy or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll depart Mahabalipuram this morning and make our way to Trichy, an ancient city whose rich history dates back to the third century B.C. We'll break up the drive with stops at points of interest along the way.

**Lunch:** On your own. You'll have an opportunity to purchase lunch items when we stop at a popular restaurant on our way to Trichy.

**Afternoon:** We'll arrive at our hotel in Trichy (also known as Tiruchirappalli) late this afternoon, and you'll have a couple of hours to relax or begin exploring on your own before dinner.

**Dinner:** At the hotel's restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 6 Trichy • Optional Brihadishwara Temple Tour • Home-Hosted Dinner**

- Destination: Trichy
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Courtyard by Marriott Trichy or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today is yours to relax or explore Trichy independently. Or, you may choose to join an optional tour to Thanjavur's most renowned landmark (and one of India's crowning architectural jewels): the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brihadishwara Temple.

Those on the optional tour will begin with a tour of Brihadishwara Temple by your Trip Experience Leader. Built between 1003 and 1010 AD, the temple was constructed from more than 130,000 tons of granite to reflect the power of Chola king Rajaraja I and honor the Hindu god Shiva.

After touring the magnificent structure, we'll drive over to a Bronze Foundry to meet some local artisans who are keeping the bronze-making tradition alive. They'll talk to us about the craft of bronze-making what inspired them to take up this ancient art before we head to lunch.

**Lunch:** On your own. Travelers on the optional tour will have lunch at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Travelers on the optional tour will return to Trichy after lunch.

**Dinner:** We'll have an opportunity to immerse ourselves in Tamil culture this evening when some local families welcome us into their homes for a **Home-Hosted Dinner**. We'll be able to chat with them about typical middle-class life in South India and share stories about our similarities and differences over a traditional, home-cooked meal.

**Evening:** Spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 7 Overland to Madurai**

- Destination: Madurai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Regency Madurai by GRT Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today, we set out for Madurai, the second-largest city in the state of Tamil Nadu, with stops along the way. An important Hindu pilgrimage site, Madurai is a temple city that draws streams of worshippers making *puja* (prayer ceremonies) each day. This cultural hub dates back more than 2,500 years, making it one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the entire subcontinent—and also one of the most culturally diverse. You'll feel the pulse of these ancient grounds in the bustling marketplaces and streets that merge concentrically like lotus petals around Sri Meenakshi Temple, the glorious fortress-like temple in the center of the city.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Chettinad, en route to Madurai. (Fair warning; the restaurant is renowned for serving some of the spiciest cuisine in India, often served in banana leaves.)



**Afternoon:** We'll arrive at our hotel in Madurai late this afternoon, and the balance of the day is yours. You might consider a quick visit to the nearby Gandhi museum to learn about the life and legacy of the famed peacemaker.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 8 Madurai • Explore Meenakshi Amman Temple • Visit Thirumalai Nayak Palace**

- Destination: Madurai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Regency Madurai by GRT Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll begin the day with a visit to Meenakshi Amman Temple, considered one of the most beautiful and colorful temples in all of India. Home of the warrior goddess Meenakshi, the temple complex is one of the few religious monuments in India devoted to a female deity. The original temple was built by Tamil Hindus in the seventh century. After being completely destroyed by Muslim conquerors in the 14th century, the sacred site was rebuilt in the 16th century into the magnificent structure we see today. The most striking features of sprawling temple complex are 14 enormous towers—called *gopurams*—that are blanketed with thousands of elaborate sculptures depicting animals, gods, and demons. More than 1,500 statues grace the south-facing *gopuram* alone.

Next, we'll head over to Thirumalai Nayak Palace, a palace complex built in 1636 to house Nayak kings. The palace was designed in a fusion of architectural influences, including Italian, Dravidian, and Islamic. While the

massive scale of the palace shows through with its colossal 82-foot-high pillars, what we see today is only the main living quarters of the Nayad kings. The original palace complex was four times bigger.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** You're free to pursue individual interests this afternoon or relax at the hotel. You can ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommended activities, or perhaps take a cycle rickshaw ride.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish.

### **Day 9 Overland to Thekkady (Periyar) • Visit a spice plantation**

- Destination: Thekkady
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Greenwoods Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we'll embark on a scenic drive into the state of Kerala to Thekkady, a resort and spice-trading town nestled in the Cardamum Hills next to the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. We should arrive at our hotel in Thekkady early this afternoon.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for dining options. You might seek out *puttu*, a cylindrical rice cake often served with a rich sauce.

**Afternoon:** You'll have some free time this afternoon to relax and take in the natural beauty of our surroundings. Later, we'll regroup for a visit to a local spice plantation, where we can learn about the variety of spices grown

in Thekkady, including pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and cloves. A local guide will take us on a tour of the grounds and enlighten us about the history of the plantation and spice production in India. We'll also learn how to identify each spice and their use in Indian cuisine and other traditions before returning to the resort.

**Dinner:** At the resort.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. You may consider a visit to nearby Kumily Town, a district renowned for its spice and tea plantations.

### **Day 10 Nature trek in Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary • Controversial Topic: Communism past and present in Kerala with a female party leader**

- Destination: Thekkady
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Greenwoods Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** A selection of coffee, tea and cookies will be available at the resort early this morning. A full breakfast will be available later this morning.

**Early Morning:** We'll set off on an early morning nature trek in Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. One of India's largest and most beautiful wildlife sanctuaries, Periyar is spread across some 300 square miles and is centered around a vast artificial lake created by the British in 1895. As we trek along some of the myriad trails that pass through scenery that includes evergreen and deciduous forests interspersed with marshy grasslands, a local guide will point out the various species of flora and fauna that reside in this richly diverse habitat. Along with countless birds, reptiles,

amphibians, and butterflies, the park is home to more than 40 species of mammals ranging from wild Asian elephants and lion-tailed macaques to a few dozen elusive Bengal tigers.

After our hike we'll return to our resort and travelers will have the option to enjoy a full breakfast if they wish.

Then, we'll meet with a female communist party leader at our resort for a **Controversial Topic** discussion about the present state and future of the communist party and the reasons for its strong, lasting roots in Kerala.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** Your afternoon is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll visit the Connemara Tea Factory, one of the oldest in Kerala, for a tour of the property along with insights into the tea-making process, or you could witness a Kalaripayattu martial arts demonstration. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest a number of activities based on your interests. Later, we'll regroup and walk to a local restaurant for dinner together.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant that specializes in traditional Kerala dishes.

**Evening:** Enjoy the rest of the night as you please.

### **Day 11 Overland to Nedumudi • Kerala backwater cruise**

- Destination: Kerala backwaters
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Spice Route Houseboat

**Breakfast:** At the resort.

**Morning:** Today we'll journey west to India's sun-soaked coast to discover Kerala's backwaters. We'll stop along the way at a rubber plantation, where we'll meet with a



rubber tapper to learn about his integral role in rubber production, and learn about the process from start to finish. Afterwards, we'll continue our journey until we reach the small Kerala village of Nedumudi, where we'll board a *Kettuvellam* (houseboat)—our home for the next two nights. Originally designed as rice barges, these distinctive boats were later used by royalty when touring. We'll listen to a safety briefing once we board before we settle in for lunch.

**Lunch:** Onboard our *Kettuvellam* in the houseboat's dining room

**Afternoon:** Right after lunch, we'll begin our cruise of Kerala's scenic "backwaters"—a system of interconnected lagoons, lakes, and canals that stretches along the western edge of Southern India. Like Louisiana's bayou country, the waterways are a unique ecosystem, lushly overgrown and labyrinthine, but now scattered with communities ranging from small enclaves to large towns. Today, we'll drift through the backwaters of Alleppey, known as "God's own country" for its serene natural beauty.

We'll enjoy coffee, tea, and a light snack while we watch the scenery drift by. Then, after anchoring at Pally Kayal, we'll step ashore to hear from some locals about rice cultivation below sea level, collective farming, and the trials and tribulations that farmers face in this pristine area.

**Dinner:** Aboard our houseboat.

**Evening:** Enjoy the evening in the lounge with fellow travelers or retire to your cabin.

## Day 12 Cruise Kerala's backwaters • Visit backwater villages

- Destination: Kerala backwaters
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Spice Route Houseboat

**Breakfast:** Onboard our houseboat.

**Morning:** We'll continue our discoveries of Kerala's palm-fringed canals as we float past small villages and backwater communities, stopping along the way to interact with locals. Later this morning, we'll also embark on smaller *shikara* boats from a local's home to explore some of the more narrow canals. One of them will bring us to the small village of Venattukadu, where we'll visit a local toddy shop.

For centuries, people in rural Kerala have been gathering the sweet sap of the coconut palm and letting it ferment to create a mildly alcoholic brew called "toddy." The fizzy white palm wine is available throughout Kerala in "toddy shops," small, informal establishments scattered throughout Kerala that also serve some of the most flavorful—and spiciest—dishes in India. We'll sample a few dishes to accompany our toddy tasting before returning to our houseboat.

**Lunch:** Onboard our houseboat.

**Afternoon:** We'll continue our exploration of the canals this afternoon, taking note of the exotic flora and fauna. You might even spot the unique Indian giant squirrel scurrying up a palm tree. Later this afternoon, we'll drop our anchor for the evening at a canal-side village, where we can chat with the locals about life in the backwater region before returning to our houseboat for dinner.

**Dinner:** Onboard our houseboat.

**Evening:** Free for your own discoveries after dinner. You may choose to relax on the boat or venture back into the village for more exploring.

### **Day 13 Overland to Cochin • Kathakali performance**

- Destination: Cochin
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: The Killians Boutique or similar

**Breakfast:** Onboard our houseboat.

**Morning:** We'll depart our houseboat this morning and make our way to the port city of Cochin (now Kochi). Facing the Arabian Sea and a world away from the rest of India, the spices of Kerala lured traders and seafarers to Cochin's shores for centuries. It became a melting pot of far-flung cultures and religions, with Hindus, Christians, Jews, and Muslims living side by side. Eventually, the Portuguese would establish the first European settlement in India at Cochin in 1500, followed by the Dutch and then the British (Columbus thought he was heading here in 1492, but ended up in the Bahamas).

After dropping off our luggage at the hotel and enjoying a welcome drink, we'll begin exploring Cochin. Our first discovery is Mattancherry Palace. Located in the storied Jewish Quarter, Mattancherry Palace (also known as the Dutch Palace) was actually a gift to the King of Kochi by the Portuguese in 1555. Then, we'll visit the 16th-century Paradesi Synagogue. The remarkably preserved synagogue remains active, even though there are very few remaining practicing Jews in Kochi. Next, we'll head to Fort Kochi, the historic old town neighborhood, for lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Fort Kochi.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll have some free time to relax at our hotel. Then, we'll regroup and walk over to a local theater for an exclusive Kathakali performance, an Indian tradition of storytelling through dance and music. You don't need to worry about speaking the language because Kathakali dramas have no dialogue; instead, the story unfolds through the actors' dancing and gestures, called *mudras*. The dancers' elaborate movements and painstakingly crafted costumes and makeup come together to create a truly vibrant visual performance. After the performance, we'll return to the hotel and the remainder of the day is yours to explore independently.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 14 Explore Cochin • Sunset cruise**

- Destination: Cochin
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: The Killians Boutique or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel following our motorbike tour.

**Morning:** We'll see Cochin like a local this morning when a group of young residents arrive with motorbikes at our hotel. We'll hop aboard and let the "Youth of Cochin" take us through their city as it wakes up to greet the new day. We'll stop off at a local restaurant, where we'll be able to talk to our drivers and learn about their current lives and future aspirations. After they drop us off at the hotel, we can have our breakfast.



Then, we'll set off on a walking tour of the Fort Cochin area featuring a stroll along the coast to observe the fishermen and view the iconic Chinese fishing nets still in use here. We'll also visit St. Francis Church. Portuguese Franciscan friars built St. Francis in 1503, and it is thought to be India's oldest European-built church. Explorer Vasco da Gama, who died in Cochin in 1524, was buried here (his tombstone's still in the church, but his remains were moved to Lisbon).

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Fort Cochin.

**Afternoon:** You'll have most of the afternoon free to explore independently. Perhaps you'll visit Broadway Market, a lively thoroughfare lined with colorful shops hawking wares of all kinds. You could also stop by the Broadway Synagogue, a non-active synagogue that is rumored to date back to medieval times.

We'll regroup at our hotel in the early evening and set out on a sunset cruise along Cochin's backwaters.

**Dinner:** On your own after the cruise; the Fort Cochin area is teeming with dining options that reflect the town's multicultural heritage.

**Evening:** Free for your own discoveries, ask your Trip Experience Leader for their recommendations for activities.

## Day 15 Fly to Mumbai

- Destination: Mumbai
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Gordon House Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We depart Cochin for our flight to Mumbai this morning. Once a sleepy fishing village, Mumbai (formerly Bombay) has emerged as a major global powerhouse in

recent years. It is home to India's finance, fashion, and film industries—as well as more than 18 million residents, making it the nation's most populous city. Mumbai is a place of startling contrasts: Here you'll see wealthy financiers and elegant colonial architecture as well as sprawling slums and poverty. But for the traveler who is able to embrace the city's chaos and contrasts, Mumbai presents a colorful feast for the senses.

**Lunch:** On your own at the Kochi airport.

**Afternoon:** We should reach our hotel in Mumbai by mid-afternoon. After an orientation walk to get familiar with the area around our hotel, the remainder of the day is yours to relax or start exploring on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations. Perhaps you'll try butter chicken, which consists of a velvety sauce blanketing chicken and basmati rice.

**Evening:** Spend the evening as you wish.

## Day 16 Mumbai • Visit Dhobi Ghat

- Destination: Mumbai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Gordon House Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today's Mumbai discoveries feature a visit to Dhobi Ghat, Mumbai's open-air laundromat where half a million articles of clothing are laundered each day by hand. Washermen, known as *dhobis*, live in the ghat with their families, and the occupation is passed down from generation to generation. During our time here, we'll have the chance to meet a *dhobi*, hear about his daily life and struggles, and perhaps even lend a hand with the day's wash. This is sure to be an

eye-opening experience into working-class life in Mumbai. We'll continue exploring Mumbai during our walk to a local restaurant for lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll take a short walk back to the hotel and you can enjoy a few hours to relax or discover more of Mumbai on your own. You may want to stop by the nearby Gateway to India, the iconic arch which was built to honor the visit of England's King George V in 1911.

We'll reconvene at our hotel this evening and walk over to nearby restaurant.

**Dinner:** We'll enjoy a festive Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant this evening, and you can toast your India discoveries over a glass of *sula* (Indian wine) with your fellow travelers.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 17 Visit Dharavi slum

- Destination: Mumbai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Gordon House Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Some travelers may depart for the airport very late this evening. Please refer to your individual air itinerary for details.

**Breakfast:** At our hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll visit Dharavi, a sprawling urban slum that is home to an estimated one million people. An astonishing 60% of Mumbai's population live in Dharavi or another of the slums dotting the city. But with a total area of only about 1.5 square miles, Dharavi is one of the most densely populated areas on Earth. More of a city within a city, people of varied religions, trades, and ethnicities from all

regions of India live side-by-side in Dharavi. As we make our way through the maze of dusty alleys, tiny shops, and dwellings, our Trip Experience Leader will look for opportunities to speak with some of the residents of Dharavi—perhaps one of the many families who have lived here for generations.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After returning to our hotel, you'll have the remainder of the day free. Perhaps you'll shop for last-minute keepsakes in one of city's many bazaars, where haggling is encouraged.

**Dinner:** On your own. For your final night in India, you might like to seek out one of Mumbai's trendy restaurants in the Colaba or Bandra neighborhoods.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 18 Return to U.S. • Or begin post-trip extension

**Early Morning:** You'll transfer to the airport for your return flight to the U.S. Travelers who are joining our *Nepal: Kathmandu, Pokhara & the Himalayas* post-trip will transfer to the airport this morning for their flight to Kathmandu.

## END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

### **5 nights in *Nepal: Kathmandu, Pokhara & the Himalayas***

**Day 1** Depart from Mumbai, India • Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal

**Day 2** Explore Kathmandu • Kumari visit

**Day 3** Optional Mount Everest flight • Fly to Pokhara

**Day 4** Optional Heli-tour to Annapurna base camp • Phewa Lake boat ride & village visit

**Day 5** Fly to Kathmandu • Discover Pashupatinath

**Day 6** Return to U.S.



## OPTIONAL TOURS

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During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

**Please note:** *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

### Brihadiswara Temple

(Day 6 \$95 per person)

Venture to Thanjavur to explore the magnificent tenth-century Brihadiswara Temple. Built to honor the reign of a Chola emperor and dedicated to Shiva, the temple once employed as many as 400 female dancers and a total of 200 dance teachers, musicians, astrologers, accountants, tailors, laundrymen, and other ritual attendants—the names and addresses of whom were diligently inscribed on the temple wall. We'll also visit a bronze foundry to learn about the ancient art of bronze making and enjoy lunch together before returning to Trichy.

## PRE-TRIP

### Sri Lanka: Colombo, Habarana, Kandy & Matara

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » Airfare from Colombo to Chennai
- » 8 nights accommodation
- » 16 meals—8 breakfasts, 4 lunches, and 4 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » All land transportation
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

#### PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Sri Lanka is home to a range of landscapes, each more exotic than the next. Its predominantly Buddhist spirituality mingles with the remnants of its history in the spice trade. This tear-shaped island's natural bounty is a cornucopia of treasures, from the tea fields to the coconut plantations. Before you explore India, come discover the land that inspired Mark Twain to exclaim: "Dear me, it is beautiful. And most sumptuously tropical."*

##### Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. for your overnight flight to Colombo, Sri Lanka, with a connecting flight in Doha, Qatar.

##### Day 2 Arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka

- Destination: Colombo
- Accommodations: Cinnamon Lakeside or similar

**Afternoon/Evening:** Today you'll arrive in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Depending on your flight schedule, you'll arrive late on Day 2 or very early on Day 3. Hotel rooms will be available beginning at 2pm for travelers arriving today.

##### Day 3 Explore Colombo

- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Cinnamon Lakeside or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we'll meet with our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing in the hotel. During this briefing, we will introduce ourselves and review our itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur).

Then, we'll begin exploring Colombo—Sri Lanka's bustling commercial capital. While Colombo was once known as the "garden city of the East," today it's flourishing as a cosmopolitan hub. In the north lies the Fort district, with its unusual combination of modern financial intuitions (like the

World Trade Center) and colonial buildings, while the south is home to the fashionable and evocatively named Cinnamon Gardens neighborhood.

Our tour features a visit to Jami Ul-Alfar Masjid, or the Red Mosque, a true architectural wonder. Built in 1908 along the narrow streets of Pettah, one of the oldest parts of the city, the facade of the unusual mosque features swirling red-and-white patterns with pomegranate shaped domes. It is said to have been a landmark for sailors making their way to the port of Colombo.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Colombo.

**Afternoon:** After returning to the hotel, the remainder of the day is yours to relax or explore Colombo on your own. Prior to dinner, you might choose to join your Trip Experience Leader on an orientation drive.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader will point out local dining options during the drive.

**Evening:** Spend the evening as you wish.

#### **Day 4 Overland to Habarana • Dambulla Cave Temple**

- Destination: Habarana
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sigiriana Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we'll depart Colombo and make our way to Habarana, a small village known for its location at the crossroads of Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle—an area of lush green hills that was once called "The King's Land" due to its history as the bastion of early Sinhalese civilization.

**Lunch:** At the hotel upon arrival in Habarana.

**Afternoon:** After some free time, we'll gather together again for a short drive to the nearby village of Dambulla. Here, we'll visit the Dambulla Cave Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the largest of Sri Lanka's cave temple complexes. Hewn from a massive rock towering more than 500 feet above the surrounding hills, the temple is made up of more than 80 caves and contains dozens of Buddha statues. We'll explore the caves and learn more about the role of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, before returning to our hotel in Habarana.

**Dinner:** At the hotel.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

#### **Day 5 Explore Sigiriya • Optional Farm Visit & Jeep Safari tour**

- Destination: Habarana
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sigiriana Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll begin the day with an excursion to the ancient rock fortress of Sigiriya, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Rising dramatically some 600 feet above the surrounding jungle, this monolith is visible from miles away. Dubbed "The Lion Rock" because bricks and stucco were originally added to form the shape of a giant lion, we'll see all that remains of this façade as we enter: two enormous clawed, feline feet flanking the 1,001 steps to the top. We'll have time to explore the terraced gardens of the fortress, as well as the lush Water Garden and the ancient Boulder Garden. And we'll climb the spiral staircase to see the Mirror Wall and colorful frescoes of the



sensual Cloud Maidens, whose beauty inspired visitors from long ago to scribble graffiti on the polished lime wall.

After our visit, we'll depart the fortress to have lunch.

**Lunch:** At an open-air kitchen near Sigiriya run by local female chefs. While we enjoy traditional cooking, we'll meet some of these entrepreneurs and learn how they were able to grow their business with the help of the Sri Lankan government.

**Afternoon:** Following lunch, we'll return to our hotel. The remainder of the afternoon is free for your own discoveries. Or, you may choose to join an optional *Farm Visit & Jeep Safari* tour, which begins with a visit to a farmer's home to learn how elephants have made life difficult for farmers in many of the surrounding villages. Then, we'll discover the root cause of the problem when we take a jeep safari in a nearby national park.

**Dinner:** At the hotel.

**Evening:** Spend the remainder of the evening as you wish.

## Day 6 Overland to Kandy • Visit Temple of the Tooth

- Destination: Kandy
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel Thilanka or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll depart Habarana after breakfast and begin our drive to Kandy, a city encircled by mountains and the Mahaweli River. This was the last capital of the Sri Lankan kings, now designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. During the imperialist scramble of the 17th and 18th centuries, several European countries tried

to scoop up Kandy to add to their burgeoning empires. But neither the Portuguese, nor the Dutch, nor the British navy could break through Kandy's natural mountain fortress; after the Portuguese succeeded in their coastal conquests, Kandy became the last independent kingdom on the island.

En route, we'll visit a local vegetable market and speak with farmers selling their produce. This is a great opportunity to learn about local cuisine and small business, as well as enjoy cultural interactions with Sri Lankan people. Then, we'll visit a batik factory run by women, where we'll learn about this ancient artistic tradition. We'll arrive in Kandy shortly before lunch. Our Trip Experience Leader will guide us on an orientation walk around the Kandy market, pointing out lunch options along the way.

**Lunch:** On your own.

**Afternoon:** After some free time this afternoon, we'll regroup for an orientation walk around the vicinity of your hotel with your Trip Experience Leader. Then, we'll take a short drive to Temple of the Tooth, nestled within the royal palace complex. Here lies what is said to be a sacred tooth of the Buddha, which has been revered throughout the ages as a good luck charm of sorts (it's believed that whoever holds the tooth holds the country in his hands as well, and ancient kings fought over it as they did over their land).

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish.

## Day 7 Tea plantation visit • Explore Peradeniya Botanical Gardens

- Destination: Kandy
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Thilanka or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today begins with a visit to one of the many tea plantations that dot Sri Lanka's Hill Country. We'll learn about the tea-making process at the factory here, observe tea pluckers hard at work, and sample some of the estate's acclaimed tea in the cafe. After our visit, we'll drive to Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, arriving just in time for lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll begin exploring Peradeniya's lovely grounds, which were originally laid out as pleasure gardens for 14th-century Kandyan royalty. Now, some 4,000 species—including more than 300 varieties of orchids—thrive on the lush 147-acre grounds, which also boast a suspension bridge, a lake, spice beds, and a pavilion-sized fig tree.

After returning to our hotel, you'll have the remainder of the day to yourself.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** Yours to spend as you wish.

## Day 8 Overland to Matara • Local farm visit

- Destination: Matara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Amaloh by Jetwing or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we'll depart Kandy and drive to Matara.

**Lunch:** On your own en route to Matara. Your Trip Experience Leader will recommend local dining options.

**Afternoon:** We'll arrive at our hotel in Matara by mid-afternoon. You'll have a couple of hours to relax and settle in before we regroup for a visit to a local farm. Here, we'll meet with the young farmer who will talk about the challenges of traditional farming in modern-day Sri Lanka while we enjoy tea and snacks.

**Dinner:** At the farm.

**Evening:** Explore on your own or rest up for tomorrow's discoveries.

## Day 9 Explore Galle Fort • Visit Martin Wickramasinghe Museum

- Destination: Matara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Amaloh by Jetwing or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we'll explore Galle, an ancient fortified city that was the main port on the island for more than 200 years. The city experienced its heyday in the 18th century during Dutch colonial rule, erupting into an exotic hotspot for spice traders traveling between Europe and Asia. However, when the British took control of Galle in 1796, they quickly turned their attention to Colombo for most of their commercial needs, leaving Galle to flourish as Sri Lanka's secondary port. Today, the city still handles some shipping and yachts, but has refined its reputation as the island's art mecca, with artists from around the world drawn to its rich contrast of Dutch colonial architecture and breezy tropical charm.

Our time there will begin with a walking tour of Galle Fort, built by the Dutch in 1663. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site,

Galle Fort is the largest fortress in Asia built by Europeans (it covers 89-acres) and has been remarkably well-preserved over the centuries. A testament to the strength of the fortifications became apparent after the devastating 2004 tsunami that killed about 40,000 Sri Lankans and left another 2.5 million displaced. While the town of Galle was one of the areas worst-hit by the tsunami, Galle Fort was relatively unscathed.

**Lunch:** On your own at Galle Fort. Your Trip Experience Leader will recommend lunch options.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll spend some time at the Martin Wickramasinghe Museum. Named and devoted to the renowned Sri Lankan writer Martin Wickramasinghe, the museum complex includes an excellent folk museum with a range of exhibits on traditional village life on the

island up to a century ago. Then, we'll return to our hotel and you'll have some time to relax before we regroup for dinner.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Spend the remainder of the evening as you wish.

## **Day 10 Overland to Colombo • Fly to Chennai, India**

• Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning/Afternoon:** We'll depart for the Colombo airport this morning for our flight to Chennai, India. Upon arrival in Chennai this afternoon, we'll transfer to to our hotel in Mahabalipuram, where you'll begin the main trip.

## **OPTIONAL TOUR**

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### ***Farm Visit & Jeep Safari***

(Day 5 \$110 per person)

This afternoon's optional tour begins with a visit to a local farm. Over a cup of Ceylon tea, the farmer will tell us about the problems he faces due to the local elephant population. Then, we'll head over to a nearby national park, depending on the season. Here, we'll set off on a jeep safari tour of the park to witness the flora and fauna of the lush grounds and observe the herds of elephants who pass through here during various times of the year. We'll return to our hotel in time for dinner.



## POST-TRIP

### Nepal: Kathmandu, Pokhara & the Himalayas

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » Airfare between Mumbai and Kathmandu, and Kathmandu and Pokhara
- » 5 nights accommodation
- » 8 meals—4 breakfasts, 2 lunches, and 2 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

#### POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Experience the diversity and the magic of Nepal amid an unforgettable world of profound and ageless beauty. At the ancient crossroads of Asia, an enchanting kingdom gilded in Hindu and Buddhist culture nestles beneath the rugged peaks of eight of the world's ten highest mountains. On this extension, you'll experience two sides of Nepal on a journey that takes you from the modern capital of Kathmandu to the lakeside city of Pokhara.*

##### **Day 1 Depart from Mumbai, India • Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal**

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

**Morning:** We fly from Mumbai to Kathmandu this morning.

**Lunch:** On your own. You can grab food at the Mumbai airport.

**Afternoon:** Upon arrival in Kathmandu late this afternoon, we'll transfer to our hotel.

**Dinner:** On your own. You are free to dine in one of the hotel restaurants, or get your first taste of Nepali cuisine at a local restaurant. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to make recommendations.

**Evening:** Free for you to do as you'd like. You might like to explore Kathmandu during a nighttime stroll.

##### **Day 2 Explore Kathmandu • Kumari visit**

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll join our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing before taking a short orientation walk to get acquainted with the neighborhood surrounding our hotel.

Then, we'll head out for a city tour with our Trip Experience Leader to learn more about Nepal's largest city and capital, Kathmandu. Our tour begins with Patan Durbar Square, one

of the seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Nepal that are preserved within a protected Monument Zone. Within the square, we visit the residence of the medieval Malla rulers of Patan, now a historical art museum. The Patan Durbar Square is reputedly the most picturesque of all the ancient Malla cities with its intricately carved architecture, delicate wind chimes, and ornate fountains.

We'll also visit Kumari Ghar, or House of the Living Goddess, home to a young girl who is believed to be the incarnation of the demon-slaying Hindu goddess Durga. After our visit, we'll have a chance to meet and interact with a former Kumari who now lives nearby. These interactions are wonderful opportunities to see how women can be deified in Nepalese culture, as well as to ask questions about the practice.

**Lunch:** On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Afternoon:** We continue to explore the temples in Patan after lunch before returning to our hotel. The rest of the afternoon is free for you to do as you'd like.

Perhaps you will decide to visit the holiest temple in Nepal: the Boudhanath Stupa. Like Mecca is to Muslims, Boudhanath Stupa, standing 118 feet high, is the main pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists. Tens of thousands of pilgrims make the journey each year. The temple's hemispherical dome represents the emptiness from which everything begins; rising above the dome, the harmika shines the Buddha's eyes in four directions that symbolize his total awareness. When Tibetan refugees entered Nepal, they settled around the Boudhanath Stupa, creating a small village that elicits the holy atmosphere of Tibet's sacred city, Lhasa.

We'll reconvene at our hotel late this afternoon for an insightful conversation with some individuals who have summited Mount Everest. Hear about their experiences on the legendary climb, and ask any questions you may have.

**Dinner:** Enjoy traditional fare during a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You will have free time following dinner to venture into Kathmandu by night or enjoy the company of fellow travelers at the hotel.

### **Day 3 Optional Mount Everest flight • Fly to Pokhara**

- Destination: Pokhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Mount Kailash Resort or similar

**Early morning:** At dawn, you may elect to enjoy an optional flight to Everest, known in Nepal as Sagarmatha or "Goddess of the Sky." Avid climbers call this mountain "the ultimate climb," and with its summit height of 29,029 feet above sea level, Mount Everest earns the title of the tallest peak on Earth. Rising majestically out of the Himalayan range, its snowy peak and intricate geography offer us breathtaking views from the air.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We fly to Pokhara this morning, enjoying panoramic views of the Annapurna range from our plane. Once an important trade city along the India-Tibet trade route, Pokhara (4,593 feet) is now the gateway for trekkers to the Annapurna Circuit and offers a refreshingly laid-back counterpoint to Kathmandu's frenetic pace.

Upon arrival, we'll transfer to our hotel. After checking in, we'll enjoy a brief orientation walk with our Trip Experience Leader.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations during the orientation walk.

**Afternoon:** The afternoon takes us to the International Mountain Museum, which features exhibits on the world's highest peaks, the history of Everest climbs and mountaineering, the indigenous people of Nepal, and more.

We'll return to the hotel after visiting the museum, and you'll enjoy a few hours to rest or explore independently.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Free. You may venture into Pokhara by night or enjoy a nightcap with fellow travelers at the hotel bar.

#### **Day 4 Optional Heli-tour to Annapurna base camp • Phewa Lake boat ride & village visit**

- Destination: Pokhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Mount Kailash Resort or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's optional helicopter tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice depending on local conditions.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Enjoy a couple of hours of leisure time this morning. Or—weather permitting—you may choose to join an optional helicopter tour to Annapurna Base Camp. Surrounded on all sides by 26,000-foot peaks, the views from the helicopter are some of the most coveted in the world.

Then, around mid-morning we'll all set off for a boat ride on Phewa Lake. This serene body of water is ringed by trees and soaring mountains at 2,917 feet and is framed by the Sarangkot and Kaskikot hills. We'll break into even smaller groups to board paddle boats or small motorized boats for our cruise across the placid waters. Afterward, we'll visit a nearby village situated on a ridge, affording us scenic views. We'll have the chance to take in the traditional Nepali houses and observe how daily life unfolds here.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** The remainder of the day is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'd like to browse the nearby markets in search of a memento, or take a stroll along one of the city's scenic footpaths.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** During your free time, you may see more of this Nepalese city at your own pace or retire early to rest before our travels tomorrow.

#### **Day 5 Fly to Kathmandu • Discover Pashupatinath**

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We fly to Kathmandu this morning, arriving in time for lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll journey just outside Kathmandu's Ring Road for a visit to Pashupatinath, the most revered Hindu temple in Nepal. Nestled on banks of the Bagmati River, the origins of this sacred Hindu temple



complex dedicated to Lord Shiva are shrouded in the mists of time, and it continues to attract pilgrims from around the world.

After our tour concludes, we'll return to the hotel, and the remainder of the day is yours.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** You may wish to start packing for your early morning flight to Doha, Qatar tomorrow.

## **Day 6 Return to U.S.**

**Morning:** Transfer to the Doha airport for your flight to the U.S.

## **OPTIONAL TOURS**

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### **Mount Everest Flight**

(Day 3 \$280 per person)

At dawn, you may elect to enjoy an optional flight to Everest (weather permitting), known in Tibet as *Sagarmatha* or “Goddess of the Sky.” Avid climbers call this mountain “the ultimate climb,” and with its astounding summit height of 29,029 feet above sea level, Mount Everest earns the title of the tallest peak on Earth. Rising majestically out of the Himalayan range, its snowy peak and intricate geography offer us breathtaking views from the air.

**Please Note:** *This optional tour is weather dependent. A minimum of 5 travelers must participate in order for this optional tour to operate.*

*This optional tour only operates if weather permits.*

**Please note:** *This optional tour must be reserved prior to your trip's departure. A minimum (and maximum) of 5 travelers must reserve in order for the tour to operate. Should a second helicopter be necessary, it will also require a minimum of 5 travelers to operate. This optional tour is weather-dependent, and may be canceled on short notice.*

### **Heli-tour to Annapurna Base Camp**

(Day 4 \$490 per person)

Travel by helicopter among the Himalaya's iconic 26,000-foot peaks, eventually reaching Annapurna Base Camp, a coveted destination for mountaineers around the world. We'll land there, at an elevation of 13,550 feet above sea level, before returning to Pokhara via a route that takes trekkers up to a week.

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

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## Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

## Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

## Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking the main trip without any extensions, you will require 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Sri Lanka:** You will need 2 additional blank passport pages, for a total of 4.
- **Post-trip extension to Nepal:** You will need an additional blank passport page, for a total of 3.
- **Both the pre- and post-trip extensions:** You will need a total of 5 blank passport pages
- **Stopover in Dubai:** You will need an additional passport page. Add 1 to the number of pages needed for the main trip and any extensions.

## Visas Required

**We’ll be sending you a detailed Visa Packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure.** In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This information is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **India: Visa required for all travelers.** This visa must be obtained in advance. You must obtain your visa for India before you leave home; it cannot be obtained on arrival.
- **Sri Lanka (optional pre-trip extension): Visa required.** This visa must be obtained in advance. Sri Lanka will require an ETA visa (electronic travel authorization) that must be obtained before you leave home.
- **Nepal (optional post-trip extension): Visa required.** We recommend you obtain this in advance. Although a Nepal visa can be obtained on arrival, we recommend that you get your visa before you leave home to avoid problems at the border. A 15-day single-entry visa should suffice for our extension.
- **U.A.E. (optional stopover): Visa required.** We recommend you get this visa onsite. Currently the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) allows U.S. citizens to get a tourist visa free of charge on arrival in Dubai.

### Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **[www.pvsinternational.org](http://www.pvsinternational.org)**.

### Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

### Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

### Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

## RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

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### Is This Adventure Right for You?

**Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.** We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

#### PACING

- 7 locations in 18 days
- Multiple pre-dawn departures

#### PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids
- Must be able to withstand hot temperatures, including averages around and beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- Must be able to walk 2-3 miles unassisted each day and participate in 3-5 hours of daily physical activities, including scaling several steep steps without handrails
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

#### CLIMATE

- South India has a tropical climate and daytime temperatures range from 90-100°F
- The rainy season is from June to October

#### TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy, unpaved, dusty roads, both by bus and on foot
- Travel through South India via bus (no heat or toilet on board), rickshaw, Jeep, and game-viewing vehicle (locally made and the best available in the region)
- Several long overland drives of 5-6 hours

#### FLIGHT INFORMATION

- Travel time will be 21-31 hours

#### ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- All accommodations are hotel-standard with a variety of amenities including Western-style toilet facilities



- Houseboat accommodations are small and basic, but comfortable and feature private bath
- Asian squat-style toilets must be used in some villages without other facilities

### **CUISINE**

- Meals will be based on the local cuisine, which features Indian spices; milder Western food is limited but available
- A variety of vegetarian options will be available

### **CULTURAL INSIGHT**

- We may see people living in poverty, which could be distressing for some travelers

### **Steps to Take Before Your Trip**

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at **[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)** or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

### **No Vaccines Required**

#### **Recommended Vaccines**

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

### **Medication Suggestions**

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- At time of writing, the CDC did recommend discussing anti-malaria medication with your doctor for India. Check with the CDC and your doctor first because these medications can have strong side effects. The CDC also mentioned that malaria was present in Bhutan and Nepal, but not the areas we visit on this itinerary. Check with the CDC and your doctor first because these medications can have strong side effects.

## Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

## Staying Healthy on Your Trip

### Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

### Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

### Water

- Tap water is not safe to drink.
- Bottled water or treated drinking water is readily available. We suggest bringing your own reusable water bottle from home to take advantage of any safe refills when available.

- Bottled drinks and juices, and hot drinks that have been boiled, are safe to drink.

## Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals.
- Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street, and with uncooked fruit and other foods. Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe.

## Electricity Supply

**A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays.** Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) may want to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

# MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

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## Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as cash, an ATM card, and a credit card. ATMs will be available, but you may need to try a couple to find one that works.
- **Traveler's checks are not accepted** in India, Sri Lanka, or Nepal.
- **Local currency is preferred** in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. You will not be able to get Indian rupees in advance—plan on exchanging money or using an ATM when you arrive.

## Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like [www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter), your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

**India:** Indian Rupee (₹)

**Sri Lanka:** Sri Lankan rupee (Rs)

**Nepal:** Nepalese rupee (Rs)

## How to Exchange Money

Visitors (non-residents of India) are not permitted to bring Indian Rupees into or out of the country. Therefore, you must wait until you arrive to exchange money. You can change money at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices. Please note torn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills may not be accepted for exchange. For more information on what type of currency can be used on this trip, see the “Currency” section.

The easiest way to exchange money on this trip is using an ATM. Using a local ATM on an international network will allow you to withdraw money from your U.S. account in local currency; your bank at home will calculate the conversion rate and charge you in U.S. dollars.

## ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.



**India:** ATMs are readily available in cities and large towns in India but are more limited in small villages and the National Parks.

**Sri Lanka:** ATMs are common in large cities and more limited in smaller towns and villages. Some ATMs will not accept U.S. cards (we suggest that you confirm if your card will work in Sri Lanka with your bank). You will often find machines that are either out of order, or out of money, so you may need to try more than one machine. Your Trip Experience Leader will advise you on ATM availability and locations during the trip.

**Nepal:** ATM's are available in large towns or cities, such as Kathmandu and Pokhara, but are not available in rural Nepal.

## Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

**India:** Credit and debit cards are accepted everywhere in India.

**Sri Lanka:** Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Sri Lanka for major purchases and in shops associated with the tourist trade but may not be accepted by smaller restaurants or shops.

**Nepal:** Credit and debit cards are somewhat accepted in larger cities such as Kathmandu for major purchases but will be rarely accepted in the countryside.

## Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

## Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8–\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader

is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*

- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1–2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** Your Trip Experience Leader will tip waiters for included meals. If you are dining on your own remember that it is common to tip anywhere from 5%–10% in restaurants.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.

*Please Note:* Your tour price includes gratuities on the main trip and optional extensions for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters that may assist you during the scheduled activities on your adventure. All tips are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars. Please do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

## AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

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### Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

#### Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner) under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

### Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

### Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: [www.rome2rio.com](http://www.rome2rio.com)

## Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

## What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner)).

## Optional Tours: Reserve Before You Go

We strongly recommend that you reserve the following optional tours in advance. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline to do so is 45 days prior to your departure. Occasionally, space will be available for booking onsite, but this not guaranteed. Optional tours with O.A.T. can only be purchased with a credit card (Visa or MasterCard) or a debit card with credit card functionality. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "OPT Boston" (depending on your credit card company).



## Heli-tour to Annapurna Base Camp

Travel by helicopter among the Himalaya's iconic 26,000-foot peaks, eventually reaching Annapurna Base Camp, a coveted destination for mountaineers around the world. We'll land there, at an elevation of 13,550 feet above sea level, before returning to Pokhara via a route that takes trekkers up to a week.

**Please note:** *This optional tour must be reserved prior to your trip's departure. A minimum (and maximum) of 5 travelers must reserve in order for the tour to operate. Should a second helicopter be necessary, it will also require a minimum of 5 travelers to operate. This optional tour is weather-dependent, and may be canceled on short notice.*

This optional tour is offered during the *Nepal: Kathmandu, Pokhara & the Himalayas* trip extension. The cost is \$490 per person.

## Communicating with Home from Abroad

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

### Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

### Calling Apps

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype, FaceTime, or WhatsApp. We recommend you use WhatsApp to communicate with home while abroad and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

### Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

## **Internet**

Cyber cafes are available in big cities and towns throughout India. Most hotels will also offer some sort of Internet service, usually in their business center or lobby. All hotels in India offer free Wi-Fi but connections can be slow.

## **How to Call Overseas**

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

**India:** +91

**Nepal:** +977

**Sri Lanka:** +94

## PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

### Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One check bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	<b>For this adventure, you have a limit of up to 33 lbs for checked luggage and 15 lbs for carry-ons.</b>
Size Restrictions	Checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
All extensions: Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<b>Luggage rules:</b> Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.	

#### Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

## Your Luggage

### Checked Luggage

One duffel bag or suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.

### Carry-on Bag

You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.

### Locks

For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

## Clothing Suggestions

### Functional Tips

- **Weather conditions in India can vary more than you'd expect**, depending on location and season. (For example, rainfall can vary by as much as 8-12 inches from one month to the next.) We strongly recommend you check the average temperatures and rainfall for your departure month now for a ballpark estimate of what to expect. And then check the 10-day forecast a few days before you leave for more precise details.
- **If you like to hand-wash your clothes**, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.
- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction. Keep in mind that it is common to remove your shoes in temples, so you'll want a pair you can take off/get back on easily.

### Style Hints

- Dress on our trip is functional and casual.
- **Your dress should be somewhat conservative in order to be respectful of the local culture.** Sleeveless tops for ladies are acceptable in the larger cities in India, but are not appropriate in the small villages or temples. Very short shorts (on men or women) and short skirts are considered disrespectful, and will draw unwanted attention.



- **Leather not allowed in some temples.** Since the cow is a sacred animal in the Hindu religion, many Indians do not wear leather. It is OK for you to wear leather on the street, and small leather items (belts and wallets) will usually be allowed in Hindu temples. However, temple attendants may ask that you leave large leather items—such as handbags—at the entrance, so consider bringing a cloth or canvas bag instead.

## Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each travelers packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don’t forget a reusable water bottle—you’ll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

## Recommended Clothing (All Year)

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short- and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts. Sleeveless shirts are acceptable in India.
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose-fitting in a breathable fabric, like cotton or linen.
- ☐ Walking shorts: Shorts are generally acceptable in India, but in keeping with the more modest culture, please chose a longer cut (to the knee). Shorts are not allowed in mosques.
- ☐ For women—1 or 2 travel skirts: Our female Trip Experience Leaders suggest that, for India, a skirt and shirt is a great basic travel outfit. Shorts and pants are fine too, it is just that a skirt allows for air movement and is convenient when using the occasional squat toilet. Female travelers should also consider sports bras, especially for days with long overland transfers—the roads can be bumpy.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking or running shoes. We suggest you bring at least one extra pair of socks to be used as “temple socks,” because wearing shoes of any type are not allowed inside temples.
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater: The air-conditioning in restaurants and on the bus can be cold.
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor for sun protection
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear

- ☐ Optional: swimsuit, in case a hotel has a whirlpool or pool

### **For Fall and Winter (November–February)**

- ☐ A light sweater or jacket for evening. **This is especially important for the extension in Nepal.**

### **Essential Items**

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do not provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lens
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET
- ☐ Light folding umbrella, for rain and sun protection
- ☐ Moisturizer and chapstick
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues—some public restrooms will be out of toilet paper. (And out of soap, so maybe bring some hand sanitizer too.)
- ☐ Packets of moist towelettes. These are useful to clean your hands or to freshen up on a hot day.
- ☐ Flashlight, extra batteries/bulb. A flashlight is highly recommended by our Trip Experience Leaders as power outages are common.
- ☐ Electrical converter & plug adapter
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger

### **Medicines & First Aid Gear**

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.

- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: Anti-malarial medication (discuss with your doctor)

**TIP:** In India, some hotels will feature hair dryers. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, most hotels have hairdryers.

## Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

## Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

### Voltage

Electricity in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal is 220–230 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

### Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs in this region, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

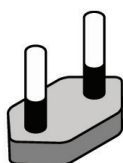
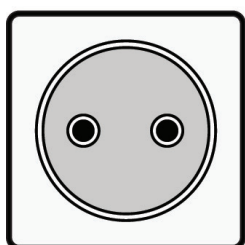
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

**India:** C or D

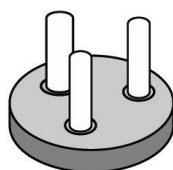
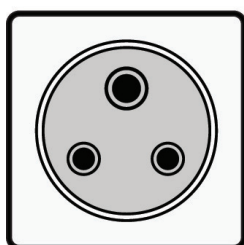
**Sri Lanka:** C or D

**Nepal:** C or D

**Type C**



**Type D**



### Availability

**A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays.** In some places, the electricity may be supplied by a generator, and lighting may not be as bright as you are used to. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different adventure or ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power.

## CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

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**Southern India:** India is characterized by hot, tropical weather, with variations from region to region. Though seasons follow similar cycles as the Northern Hemisphere, the first months of spring and fall can be very warm to hot. In the south, the driest season extends from mid-December through March. The monsoon season starts the earliest of anywhere in India, typically at the beginning of June, and it can rain heavily through the summer months. Kerala and other areas in the south also get a second or “winter” monsoon, often from November into early December.

**Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka is tropical, with distinct dry and wet seasons. The seasons are slightly complicated by having two monsoons; one from April to July and one from October to December. In the area we visit, the driest months are January, February, and August.

**Nepal:** Nepal’s weather is generally predictable and pleasant. There are two seasons—the dry season from October to May and the rainy, monsoon season from June to September. About 80 percent of the rain falls during the rainy period, so the remainder of the year is relatively dry. Spring and autumn are the most pleasant seasons; winter temperatures drop to freezing with a high level of snowfall in the mountains. Late spring and summer temperatures range from 83° in the hill regions to more than 104° in the Terai.

### Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.



## Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	MAHABALIPURAM, INDIA			MADURAI, INDIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	86 to 69	--	0.8	85 to 69	77	1.0
FEB	89 to 71	--	0.6	87 to 71	74	1.5
MAR	93 to 74	--	0.9	89 to 73	72	1.5
APR	96 to 79	--	0.9	89 to 75	73	4.9
MAY	101 to 81	--	2.1	89 to 76	75	4.7
JUN	99 to 80	--	3.4	85 to 74	75	7.3
JUL	96 to 79	--	4.3	84 to 73	74	5.4
AUG	95 to 78	--	5.4	84 to 73	75	5.1
SEP	94 to 77	--	5.3	85 to 73	76	4.6
OCT	90 to 76	--	13.2	85 to 72	78	9.7
NOV	86 to 73	--	14.7	84 to 71	80	7.5
DEC	85 to 70	--	6.0	84 to 70	82	2.6

MONTH	COCHIN, INDIA			MUMBAI, INDIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	87 to 75	85 to 60	0.9	87 to 62	75 to 42	0.6
FEB	88 to 77	87 to 64	1.0	88 to 64	73 to 41	--
MAR	89 to 79	87 to 67	1.9	91 to 69	79 to 48	--
APR	89 to 79	86 to 70	5.1	91 to 75	84 to 57	--
MAY	88 to 80	89 to 73	12.5	92 to 80	81 to 61	0.8
JUN	84 to 77	94 to 82	22.3	90 to 79	84 to 72	19.9
JUL	83 to 76	94 to 83	20.6	86 to 77	88 to 80	32.3
AUG	83 to 76	94 to 81	13.4	85 to 77	89 to 81	21.5
SEP	84 to 77	93 to 79	9.8	87 to 76	91 to 74	12.8
OCT	85 to 77	93 to 76	12.5	92 to 74	86 to 58	3.2
NOV	86 to 77	91 to 72	6.3	92 to 69	75 to 44	4.5
DEC	87 to 75	86 to 62	1.9	90 to 65	73 to 39	0.2

MONTH	COLOMBO, SRI LANKA			KATHMANDU, NEPAL		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
<b>JAN</b>	86 to 74	87 to 59	3.3	60 to 40	97 to 65	0.7
<b>FEB</b>	87 to 76	90 to 60	2.5	63 to 44	96 to 58	0.6
<b>MAR</b>	88 to 78	91 to 62	4.5	70 to 50	94 to 50	1.2
<b>APR</b>	88 to 79	91 to 67	10.0	77 to 57	90 to 48	1.5
<b>MAY</b>	87 to 80	87 to 72	13.2	79 to 63	92 to 59	4.0
<b>JUN</b>	86 to 80	86 to 73	7.5	80 to 69	93 to 70	7.9
<b>JUL</b>	85 to 80	85 to 72	5.1	79 to 70	96 to 80	14.8
<b>AUG</b>	85 to 79	85 to 72	3.8	79 to 70	95 to 79	12.8
<b>SEP</b>	85 to 79	87 to 72	6.2	78 to 67	97 to 78	7.4
<b>OCT</b>	85 to 78	91 to 72	13.9	74 to 59	97 to 73	2.2
<b>NOV</b>	85 to 77	93 to 70	12.1	68 to 49	97 to 71	0.1
<b>DEC</b>	86 to 76	91 to 64	6.0	61 to 42	98 to 68	0.4

## ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

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### O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

### Indian Culture

India is home to more than 1.3 billion people of 2,000 different ethnicities, speaking 22 languages, and practicing more than six main religions. With so much diversity, a simple cultural summary is impossible, but there are some common themes.

The most significant of these is the caste system by which all of society is classified, an outgrowth of Hindu law that is nearly 3,000 years old. For Americans reared in a democracy that outwardly values egalitarianism, this strict, hierarchical division is difficult to comprehend. Indeed, discrimination based on caste has been illegal in India since 1948, and the government has established affirmative action programs to provide opportunities to members of historically disadvantaged castes. There is much more fluidity around caste today, and also plenty of regional adaptations. It would be rude to ask an Indian person about their caste, but it is acceptable to inquire about their occupation or vocation. Nonetheless, people in India still tend to be conscious of their own social positions and of those around them. It's rare for people to question or deviate from their expected roles, with occupation, social standing, and marriage partners being largely a matter of birth.

The main caste system is called *varna*, a broad classification that divides people into four major categories; *brahmin* (the uppermost and "purest," priestly caste), *kshatriya* (warriors or nobility), *vaishya* (merchant caste) and *shudra* (artisan, servant, or laborer caste). The lowest echelons of society are the *dalit* or untouchables, which includes the most impoverished and oppressed people, and non-Hindus. Nowadays, many people considered *dalit* have reclaimed the term to assert a political identity, similar to how LGBTQ people have done in the west. How *varna* actually operates is complex and variable, and in day to day life, it manifests itself in what is called *jati*, a more nuanced caste system that breaks society down into something like 2,000 classifications based on occupation or vocation.

Many Indians seem to have a sense of acceptance about one's social position, but this is not necessarily a matter of caste. For Hindus and Buddhists, there is a widespread belief in the notion of *karma*: the idea that one's personal circumstances are due to actions in one's past life, and one's current actions will affect future lives. It is part of *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth. Today, many younger people are challenging this fatalistic approach to life. Even so, most Indians value harmony and believe that the greater good of one's family (and caste) is more important than

individual desires. To preserve harmony or to avoid offense, they may speak indirectly. In general, you will find people to be conservative, cheerful, cooperative and eager to be of help. Hospitality is of paramount importance, even among the poorest people, and a matter of pride.

### **Accommodations**

Our hotels are comfortable, but not luxurious. There can be occasional problems with electricity, hot water, and air conditioning. In restaurants, hotels, and at cultural sites, everything works according to a slower sense of time than what you are used to. It's best to wind down and adjust to the pace and philosophy.

### **Language Barrier**

You can have some great "conversations" with local people who do not speak English, even if you don't speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Your Trip Experience Leader can help get the ball rolling.

Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

### **Our Vehicles in India**

In India we travel in a 25-35 seat bus, which has air-conditioning but not a heating system, as heating is not necessary in the warm climate. Buses in India are locally assembled, smaller, and not of the same standard as those used in Europe or elsewhere. The roads are often dusty and very bumpy. Some travelers find an inflatable seat cushion to be valuable on the longer drives. There are no toilet facilities on the bus; however, we make convenience stops on a regular basis.

You may wish to bring a light sweater or jacket, as the air-conditioning can get chilly. (Likewise, mornings and evenings can also become chilly, especially in the months of November through February.)

### **A Note about India**

Adventurous travelers will find India a spiritually fulfilling destination, rich with natural wonder. However, poverty, persistent begging, pollution, and poor sanitation can be distressing. In some of the small villages where we stop during our days of touring, we must make do with Asian squat-style toilets. (We'll have Western-style toilets in all our hotels and at the restaurants we use for included meals. So squat toilets will be the exception rather than rule, but in some places they are unavoidable.) Some hotels and businesses may not have elevators, so be prepared to climb stairs.

## **The Finer Points**

Don't let the fine points of Indian etiquette worry you; locals know that visitors can't be expected to know every detail. Much of what is considered polite in India is similar to what's polite in the U.S. But as a matter of interest, we've put together a list of "finer points" that might surprise you:

- When someone hands you something, it is polite to accept it with the right hand. If you are eating with your hands, you should use your right hand to take food or to put it in your mouth. (But being a "lefty" is fine and eating left-handed with cutlery is OK too.)
- Indians are generally quiet when they eat, discussing amongst themselves before the food is served or after it is eaten.
- Kissing couples are frowned upon, but discreet displays of affection are allowed, and friends of the same gender may walk hand-in-hand or arm-and-arm.
- Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

## **Traffic**

Traffic is horrific throughout India. Exercise extreme caution when attempting to cross any street. Traffic drives on the left here. Both past travelers and tour leaders alike recommend you hire either a taxi or an auto-rickshaw (at a nominal fee) for short-distance transport. In some destinations (as you will soon see), you would be wise to utilize a transport service just to cross the street.

## **Cultural Differences in Nepal**

Be prepared to be confronted with a different standard of living. While poverty and poor sanitation can be distressing, please don't let that keep you from experiencing the amazing culture or rich natural heritage of Nepal.

## **Taking Photographs**

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

## Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

## Indian Cuisine

Considering India's varied geography, climate, religions, and outside influences, it's no wonder that the subcontinent's cuisine is one of the world's most diverse. India has 31 recognized regional cuisines, but there are common threads.

Indian cuisine is known for intense flavors, with many dishes built upon a foundation of spices such as cumin, cardamom, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, nutmeg, saffron, and rose petal essence. A popular spice mix is ***garam masala***, which varies from chef to chef. Rice is a staple; as are pulses, the edible seeds of legumes like lentils, chickpeas, and beans. A well-known pulse is ***dal***, a lentil porridge that can be eaten by itself, or used as a thickener. Lest you think Indian cuisine is all about curry, note that the word "curry" is a British invention used to describe *all* Indian cuisine. In India, curry is simply a dish with sauce.

**Northern Indian cuisine** is dominant in many states including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi (home to Jaipur, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow), and is the most prevalent Indian cuisine outside India. It has a strong Mughal influence that uses dairy staples like ***ghee*** (clarified butter), ***paneer*** (a mild cheese), and yogurt. Try some of these delicious dishes:

- **Rogan josh:** A yogurt-based lamb stew fragrant with chilies.
- **Saag paneer:** A creamy spinach and cheese.
- **Korma:** Chicken or lamb simmered in coconut milk or yogurt with cumin, coriander, and cashews or almonds.
- **Butter Chicken:** This dish originated in Delhi and is made from flavorful stew of chicken chunks in a tomato-yogurt gravy.
- **Samosas:** This famous street food dish is made from fried pastry triangles filled with potatoes, onions, meats, and spices ***chana masala*** (chickpea stew); or ***nagori halwa*** (sweet puffed bread with a buttery paste).

**Southern India is where you will find** quick vegetarian food to go that is simply called "Meals Ready." Look for dishes like these:

- **Sambar:** This dish includes a selection of vegetables including tamarind-flavored peas.
- **Rasam:** A fiery tomato-lentil soup and yogurt. It is served in a round stainless-steel tray called a thali, or on a banana leaf.
- **Dosa:** A signature dish in Southern India that is a crepe-like pancake filled with dozens of vegetables, meats, and seasonings.



- **Meen curry:** A fish curry with coconut milk.
- **Pazham pori:** Banana fritters.

In western India, the state of **Gujarat** is famed for vegetarian and seafood dishes. You will find dishes like these:

- Gujarati **thali** plate: This multi-course feast typically includes one or two steamed or fried snacks; a green vegetable; a tuber or squash **shaak** curry; **kathol** (braised beans, chickpea or peas); one or more yogurt dishes; and many side dishes, with rice and an array of chutneys and condiments.
- **Vindaloo:** A Portuguese-inspired dish whose main ingredient is meat, poultry or seafood marinated in garlic, wine, vinegar, and chilies.

**Eastern India** is known for sweets like these:

- **Lassi:** If you visit **Varanasi** try a smooth, cool puree of yogurt, fruit, sugar and cream.
- **Nimish:** Frothy, creamy pudding flavored with saffron, cardamom, and rose water.
- **Rasgulla:** This sweet treat is made from semolina and cheese curd balls simmered in a sugary syrup.
- **Dachori:** This savory side is made from a crispy fried bread stuffed with bean paste and spices.

## Sri Lankan Cuisine

Sri Lankan food features a lot of spices, with notable influences from South India, Indonesia, and the Netherlands, due to Sri Lanka's position on the oceanic silk road. Rice is served with most meals, as with many other Asian countries, with red rice being common. Sri Lanka cuisine is known for use of spices, especially its use of cinnamon, from the *cinnamomum verum* tree, a more delicate version on the cinnamon utilized by other South Asian countries. Dishes to try include:

- **Kiribath:** Also known as milk rice, *kiribath* is rice cooked in coconut milk until it's a porridge, eaten for breakfast or during special occasions. Commonly, *kiribath* is served with a relish of red onions and chiles, or *lunu miris*
- **Lamprais:** A Dutch-influence dish made by boiling rice in a stock with *fikkadels* (Dutch meatballs), mixed meat curry, aubergine curry, and *seeni sambol* (onion chili paste). This mixture is wrapped in a banana leaf and baked in an oven. This dish is for special occasions and large personal gatherings, as it is a rich and time-consuming dish.
- **Hoppers:** Also called *appam*, these are pancakes formed in a bowl shape, made with rice flour, coconut milk, and palm toddy. These can either be spicy or sweet, with eggs being a common addition.
- **Ambulthiyal:** A popular fish curry made with the local specialty, *goraka*, a sour fruit found in Indonesia.

- **Pittu:** A dessert of steamed or roasted rice flour mixed with grated coconut. This is formed into cylinders and cooked in bamboo.

## Nepalese Cuisine

Nepalese cuisine borrows from the culinary canon of its neighbors India, Tibet and China. But since the country only opened its borders in 1950, chefs had to rely on locally produced ingredients to create their unique, hybrid gastronomy. Nepali food is quite healthy, with very little fat and a variety of vegetables and lean meat. The food is often hearty and slightly spicy—just what you need to survive long, cold winters. Common ingredients include lentils, potatoes, rice, tomatoes, cumin, coriander, chilies, garlic, and peppers. Western food will be very limited, so come prepared to try some new dishes.

First and foremost among them will be ***dal bhat***, the national dish. It is really not just one item but a set meal consisting of a starch (usually rice but sometimes potato or corn meal), a lentil soup, a curry (of chicken, meat, or vegetable), and a vast array of pickles, yogurts, chutneys, and other condiments. You will also find many dishes like these:

- **Gorkhali lamb:** An intensely flavorful dish that starts by searing chunks of lamb in a chili paste, then slow cooking it in a mild curry sauce with potatoes and onions.
- **Sel roti:** A simple snack found from a street vendor. These are like a cross between a doughnut and a bagel, a deep fried ring of rice dough that is sweet and crispy on the outside, soft and puffy on the inside. They are usually served with yogurt dipping sauce.
- **Chatamari:** (a.k.a. “Nepali Pizza”) is a rice flour crepe topped with minced meat, eggs, and onions.
- **Momos:** These popular pillows of flavor are Tibetan-inspired dumplings filled with meat and vegetables (or occasionally, ***paneer*** or ***chhurpi*** cheese or potato).
- **Thukpa:** This iconic noodle soup is usually made with carefully seasoned yak, goat, lamb, or chicken, though there are vegetarian versions. *Thukpa* goes great with *momos*.

In the Kathmandu Valley, you can sample **Newari** cuisine, the most celebrated style of Nepali cooking. It takes advantage of the bounty of the valley’s rich, alluvial soil with a variety of fish, fowl, meat and produce. The Newars are known for feasting, and if you arrive on the holiday of Indra Jatra, you may be able to sample the local ***thon*** as it flows freely from the mouth of a giant mask of the Lord Shiva. This is a potent, fermented rice liquor, but it’s available year-round, so your toasting opportunities are unlimited. The feast will include dishes like these:

- **Wo or bari:** These light Newari pancakes are what you start the feast with and are made with a ground lentil batter, and filled with vegetables or chicken or meat. The most beloved Newari meat is buffalo, which is leaner and more flavorful than beef.
- **Chhwela:** A spiced grilled buffalo meat
- **Kachila:** A minced raw buffalo meat.

- **Daaykula:** A buffalo meat boiled with fried spices.
- **Jeri** (also known as **jalebi**): This sweet never fails. A deep-fried, pretzel-shaped yellow-orange dough ring dipped in saffron syrup.
- **Doodh Peda:** Is a fudge-like milk confection flavored with cardamom and pistachios.
- **Laddu:** Sugary balls of semolina baked with butter, cardamom, cashews and grated coconut. You can wash it all down with a **dahi** (yogurt) based **lassi** smoothie.

## Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

### Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

### Crafts & Souvenirs

#### India

One simple way to find nice souvenirs at fair prices is to look at where an item was made—different cities are known for specific crafts. (And even if your itinerary doesn't take you to these exact cities, you can usually find these items on sale in other parts of India.)

- Delhi is a great location for buying silk carpets and Kashmir handicrafts.
- Phulkari, a stylized geometric embroidery, is popular in Amritsar and the Punjab region, commonly found on scarves, shawls, and other types of clothing.
- In Dharamshala, you'll find Tibetan-style items such as prayer flags, singing bowls, and Buddhist icons.

**Bargaining:** Bargaining is the norm in India, where anything sold by a street vendor and almost anything in a smaller shop has a flexible price. However, larger stores will have fixed prices.

## Sri Lanka

When shopping for souvenirs in Sri Lanka, keep an eye out for the country's beautiful gems (to export them you will need a certificate typically provided by the shop), saris (for women) or sarongs (for men), moonstone carvings, ceylon tea, ceylon cinnamon, raksha masks, hand-woven dumbara mats, cinnamon tree bowls, elephant art, and coconut shell kitchen utensils. They are all great gifts for yourself or a family member back home!

## Nepal

Popular buys include locally made textile objects such as lopsided topis (caps), knitted mittens and socks, and cotton scroll paintings called mandala or thanka. Contemporary Nepalese art, saranghi (a small, four-stringed viola played with a horse-hair bow), papier mâché dance masks, Buddhist statuettes and filigree ornaments, woodcarvings, bamboo flutes and other folk objects are also popular.

**Bargaining:** Bargaining is normal in Nepal when dealing with street vendors and smaller shops, though larger stores will have fixed prices.

## U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

**Sri Lanka:** If you purchase any gems while in Sri Lanka, you will need a certificate to export them (typically provided by the shop).

## DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

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### India

#### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 1,269,219 square miles
- **Capital:** New Delhi
- **Languages:** Hindi is the official language; English is also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Other 3%
- **Location:** India is bordered by Burma, Pakistan, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal, as well as Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **Geography:** India consists of plateau and rolling plains, desert to the west, and the Himalaya Mountains in the north.
- **Population:** 1,251,695,584
- **Religion:** Hindu 79.8%, Muslim 14.2%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.7%, other and unspecified 2%
- **Time Zone:** India is on Indian Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in India will either be 9.5 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 10.5 hours ahead (in winter).

## National Holidays: India

In addition to the holidays listed below, India celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Maha Shivaratri and Diwali. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/14 Maha Sankranti with Pongal

01/26 Republic Day

Feb or March Maha Shivratri (moves each year; see note above)

March Holi (moves each year)

August Raksha Bandhan (moves each year)

08/15 Independence Day

Aug or Sept Janmashtami Festival (moves each year)

10/02 Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti

Oct or Nov Diwali (moves each year)

Oct or Nov Chath Puja (moves each year)

Nov Guru Nanak Jayanti Day (moves each year)

12/25 Christmas Day

## India: A Brief History

India has a history as sprawling as the subcontinent it inhabits. Humans first arrived here from Africa between 55,000 and 73,000 years ago. But the cradle of Indian civilization emerged in the Indus Valley around 4,500 BC. It evolved into the urban Harappan culture, which was the equal of those in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Harappan cities had brick homes, plumbing, sophisticated drainage systems, art, a system of weights and measures, and metallurgy.

Harappan civilization declined around 1500 B.C. One widely held theory ascribed its fall to invasion from the north and west of Aryan tribes, but evidence for this is scant, and Aryans may have already existed within India. They were not a racial group but Indo-Iranian people who identified along linguistic and religious lines. Aryans developed the Sanskrit literary tradition; the Vedic philosophies that are the basis of Hinduism; and the caste system. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, Aryan culture spread to 16 northern kingdoms, which became the Nanda dynasty, and witnessed the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism.

By 321 BC, most of the north united under the Maurya Dynasty; and by the reign of the third Mauryan king, Asoka, almost the entire subcontinent was united. Asoka was a Buddhist whose Edicts set moral codes that all religions could embrace, even as he spread Buddhism throughout Asia. After his death in 232 BC, the empire again split into small states. In AD 320, the Gupta dynasty reunited India, ushering in a golden age of science, literature and the arts—a time when Hinduism flourished and Buddhism all but disappeared from the subcontinent.

Over the next thousand years, India was repeatedly invaded by Huns. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Afghan Muslims established a sultanate in Delhi. But in 1526, Babur, a descendent of Genghis Khan, seized the throne. Thus began the Mughal Empire, the Islamic dynasty of Mongol origin that held sway until the 1800s. During the Mughal era, Indian culture was as brilliant as any in the world. The Mughals built lavish palaces, mosques, and mausoleums, including the Taj Mahal, constructed under Shah Jahan. The arts and sciences flourished, as did shipbuilding and trade.



The Mughal grip began to loosen with the rise of European colonialism, starting with the 1498 discovery by Vasco de Gama of an ocean route to India. By 1751, the French had forcibly taken much of India, followed by the British. The British East India Company became the dominant political force by using Indian soldiers to assert its will over the government and commercial rivals. In 1857, Indian soldiers ended the monopoly of the British East India Company, but then Britain overtook the Indian government, initiating the era of the British Raj. The British built railways, canals, irrigation works, schools, and factories. They employed thousands in the civil service, and introduced democracy. But the greatest beneficiary of this was the British ruling class, while most of India remained impoverished and landless peasants.

Indian resentment reached a pitch by the First World War. Led by Mohandas Gandhi, nationalists gained control of Congress and began a campaign of non-cooperation with the British. When World War II began, Congress agreed to serve with the British only upon the condition of India's postwar independence. Britain rejected the proposal, but 2.5 million Indians did fight against the Japanese, and India was granted independence in 1947. The new nation erupted into rioting between Hindus and Muslims, and Gandhi's attempts to create unity were cut short when he was killed in 1948. This led to a fragile peace between the religious groups.

Under the rule of Jawaharlal Nehru, India undertook a policy of non-alignment, seeking to maintain peaceful relations with all major superpowers. After Nehru's death, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, was elected prime minister. Though she boosted the economy, she also declared an "Emergency" period to suspend civil liberties. The press was censored, critics were imprisoned, and forced sterilizations were enacted against the poor. In 1977, Gandhi was removed from office and jailed, but she was re-elected in 1980. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. She was succeeded by her son Rajiv Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1991.

The Nehru-Gandhi heirs continued to hold high offices even as their Congress Party teetered. In 2014, it suffered a resounding defeat by the Bharatiya Janata Party of the charismatic Narendra Modi. As Prime Minister, Modi introduced sweeping economic reforms, mounted a nationwide sanitation campaign, and liberalized rules on foreign investment, to mixed results. He was re-elected in 2019, and again in 2024, and continues to receive high approval ratings.

## Sri Lanka

### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 25,332 square miles
- **Capital:** Colombo
- **Languages:** Sinhala is the official language; Tamil is also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Sinhalese 74.9%, Sri Lankan Tamil 11.2%, Sri Lankan Moors 9.2%, Indian Tamil 4.2%, other 0.5%
- **Location:** Sri Lanka lies in the Indian Ocean, southwest of the Bay of Bengal.

- **Geography:** The island consists mostly of flat-to-rolling coastal plains, with mountains rising only in the south-central part. Amongst these is the highest point Pidurutalagala, reaching 8,281 feet above sea level. Sri Lanka's coastline is 1,585 kilometers long. The coastline and adjacent waters support highly productive marine ecosystems such as fringing coral reefs, shallow beds of coastal and estuarine seagrasses.
- **Population:** 22,053,488
- **Religions:** Buddhist (official) 70.2%, Hindu 12.6%, Muslim 9.7%, Roman Catholic 6.1%, other Christian 1.3%, other 0.05%
- **Time Zone:** Sri Lanka is on Indian Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in Sri Lanka will either be 9.5 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 10.5 hours ahead (in winter).

## National Holidays: Sri Lanka

In addition to the holidays listed below, Sri Lanka celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Full Moon Days. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/15 Tamil Thai Pongal Day

02/04 National Day

Feb or March Mahasivarathri Day (moves each year; see note)

04/13 Sinhala and Tamil New Year's Day

05/01 Labor Day

May or June Eid al-Fitr (moves each year)

Aug or Sept Eid al-Adha (moves each year)

Oct or Nov Deepavali (moves each year)

12/25 Christmas Day

## Sri Lanka: A Brief History

### Early History

The origins of Sri Lanka are often attributed to religious myth, but archaeologists believe the island was occupied by hunter-gathers when the Sinhalese—a northern Indian tribal people—first arrived in the sixth century BC. The Sinhalese first absorbed the hunter-gather tribes and then founded a kingdom named for its capital city, Anuradhapura. By the third century BC, the kingdom drew the attention of the king of India, Asoka, who sent emissaries to the court to promote Buddhism. According to some stories, the emissaries were a son and a daughter of Asoka himself. Whoever they were, the emissaries successfully converted the Sri Lankan king, and thus are credited with converting the entire kingdom to Buddhism.

By all accounts, the conversion of the King and the kingdom to Buddhism is one of the most significant events in Sri Lankan history. Buddhism pervades Sri Lankan culture, and as Sri Lanka was one of the first nations to convert—and one of the last nations to be influenced by outside forces—the Buddhism practiced here is considered the most pure form of Theravada (the first and simpler form of Buddhism).

For the next six centuries, the kingdom of Anuradhapura continued to thrive, grow, and expand its Buddhist practices. Sometime in the first century BC the monks of the Aluvihara monastery began in-depth writings on the Theravada teachings, which are still referenced today by Theravada schools throughout the world. And in 371 AD, a tooth of the Buddha was brought to Anuradhapura as a relic; today it is still housed in a temple in Kandy.

The main rivals to Anuradhapura were the Tamil rulers in South India, and this rivalry was to deeply mark Sri Lankan history for centuries. The Tamils, who were Hindu, would often conduct raids or all-out assaults on the capital in an attempt to seize control. After centuries of repeated conflict in which the capital city was sacked and destroyed more than once, Anuradhapura was abandoned some time in the 11th century in favor of a new capital, Polonnaruwa.

### **The Middle Ages**

The Kingdom of Polonnaruwa was a short-lived study of contrasts. Although it was the capital for only two hundred years or so, the kings of Polonnaruwa represent some of the strongest and weakest of Sri Lankan royal history. The kingdom began gloriously under King Vijayabahu I (ruled 1055–1110), who drove out the invaders from Chola (a Tamil dynasty from southern India). Later under King Parakramabahu I (ruled 1153–1186), the Sinhalese army did more than just defend against the Chola—they conquered Chola territory and even reached faraway Myanmar.

Not content to be a warring king only, King Parakramabahu was also known for his vast building projects, especially the many irrigation systems, canals, and reservoirs (known as tanks) needed to cultivate the country's paddy fields. The folk saying "not even a little water that comes from the rain must flow into the ocean without being made useful to man" is frequently attributed him.

Unfortunately, the many conflicts and engineering projects left the kingdom financially depleted. The financial strain—combined with a series of weak kings ensnared in court intrigues—led to the decline of the Polonnaruwa Kingdom. As Polonnaruwa lost control of the island, the northern end turned to Jaffna, a commercial center in northern Sri Lanka.

Jaffna had very strong commercial and cultural connections to southern India, so it was the Indian Tamil culture that dominated. Thus began a Sinhalese–Tamil split between Jaffna (northern, Tamil speaking, Hindu) and Polonnaruwa (southern, Sinhalese, Buddhist). When Polonnaruwa was finally abandoned at the end of the 13th century, it split into two smaller, but related, kingdoms centered on the cities of Kandy and Kotte.

### **The Age of Colonization**

When the Portuguese first arrived in 1505, they hoped to make political use of the divisions between the three kingdoms (Jaffna, Kandy, and Kotte). They negotiated a treaty that favored the Sinhalese kingdoms (Kandy and Kotte) over the Tamil kingdom (Jaffna). Then they further enraged the Tamil rulers by trying to convert the populace from Hinduism to the Catholic faith.

In time, the Portuguese controlled large sections of the island and the lucrative spice trade with Europe. Only the kingdom of Kandy retained some independence, due to its secure location in the highlands.

When other European powers showed interest in the same trade, the local rulers tried to use the Europeans' rivalries to eject the Portuguese. Unfortunately, this only succeeded in changing one colonial power for another, as first the Dutch (in 1656) and then the British (in 1796) took over the island. In 1815, the kingdom of Kandy surrendered to the British, who established a plantation system to grow coffee, tea, and rubber. British rule exacerbated class divides between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, especially with the arrival of large numbers (some estimates state 850,000) indentured Tamil workers from India. It wasn't until after Indian independence in 1947 that Ceylon (the colonial name for Sri Lanka) gained its own independence in 1948.

## **Independence and Division**

After independence, the Sinhalese-Tamil divide came to the forefront of Sri Lankan politics. For example, with the British gone, there was a movement to quit using English as the official language and begin using Sinhala instead—a movement that would have left the Tamils, who speak Tamil and not Sinhala, out in the cold. Both sides felt threatened; the Tamils by fear of being relegated to second-class citizens and the Sinhalese by fear that India might intervene on the Tamils' behalf. An early attempt by the Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike to create a federation between the two groups provoked his assassination in 1959.

The unrest continued and eventually led to a state of emergency being imposed on Tamil lands in the north in 1971. For many Tamils, this was viewed as an act of aggression akin to an occupation, hence the formation of opposition groups such as the “Tamil Tigers” (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or LTTE). The cycle of mistrust and revenge during the next couple of decades was not unlike the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and was largely confined to the northern, Tamil-controlled Jaffna peninsula. Efforts towards a successful cease-fire treaty were mixed, and eventually abandoned. Instead, the Sri Lankan government pledged to fight the LTTE forces that remained until they surrendered. With the final surrender of the LTTE in 2009, the peace process has begun.

## **Nepal**

### **Facts, Figures & National Holidays**

- **Area:** 56,827 square miles
- **Capital:** Kathmandu
- **Languages:** Nepali is the official language; Maithali, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Magar, and Awadhi are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Chhettri 16.6%, Brahman-Hill 12.2%, Magar 7.1%, Tharu 6.6%, Tamang 5.8%, Newar 5%, Kami 4.8%, Muslim 4.4%, Yadav 4%, Rai 2.3%, Gurung 2%, Damai/Dholii 1.8%, Thakuri 1.6%, Limbu 1.5%, Sarki 1.4%, Teli 1.4%, Chamar/Harijan/Ram 1.3%, Koiri/Kushwaha 1.2%, other 19%
- **Location:** Nepal is bordered by China and India.

- **Geography:** Nepal is typically thought of as mountainous. But it is actually home to widely diverse landscapes and ecosystems. There are three geographic areas or belts running from west to east: mountain, hill, and plains.
- **Population:** 31,551,305
- **Religions:** Hindu 81.3%, Buddhist 9%, Muslim 4.4%, Kirant 3.1%, Christian 1.4%, other 0.5%, unspecified 0.2%
- **Time Zone:** Nepal is on Standard Time, 9.75 hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 3:45pm in Kathmandu.

## National Holidays: Nepal

Nepal celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Martyr's Memorial Day, Nepali New Year, Maghe Sankranti, and Buddha Day. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

2/19 Democracy Day

3/8 International Women's Day

4/21 Loktantra Diwas

5/1 Labour Day

5/28 Republic Day

9/20 Constitution Day

## Nepal: A Brief History

Nepal's heart has always remained the Kathmandu Valley, where its recorded history begins. It starts with the Kirati people, who arrived from the east during the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century BC as sheep farmers, and ended up as kings. Though other groups had long been settled in the region, the Kiratis held power for 16 centuries. They practiced Hinduism, which is still the dominant religion, but around 563 BC, a prince was born in the southern town of Lumbini. He renounced his status, preached a new philosophy, and became the Buddha. Buddhism gained a following here, but lost favor by 200 AD when the Licchavis of northern India overthrew the Kiratis, and reinstated Hinduism and its caste system. With them, a golden age of Nepali art and architecture began.

The Licchavi era ended by 879 AD when the Thakuri dynasty arose. Several hundred years later, the Thakuri King Arideva founded the Malla Dynasty, which heralded another creative burst of Nepali cultural expression. The Malla era's prosperity made Kathmandu shiny prize, but what attracted Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of the western city-state of Gorkha, was the dream of a unified kingdom. After 27 years of fighting he overtook the Kathmandu Valley in 1768. For the next 24 years, the Gurkha Shahs held power with an army that seemingly could not be conquered. The Shahs maintained Nepal's independence, at a cost: in 1792, faced with defeat by Chinese troops, they agreed to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor—and did so until 1912.

As Britain gained power in India in the early 1800s, Nepal was forced to sign the 1816 Sugauli Treaty, which surrendered Sikkim and other lands. Some of it was returned to Nepal after they helped the British subdue the 1857 Indian Mutiny. And so the Shah dynasty maintained power until 1846, when Jung Bahadur convinced them to destroy their political enemies in what came to

be known as the Kot Massacre. While the Shahs were reduced to figureheads, Jung named himself Rana and prime minister for life—and decreed that his noble title would be hereditary. Through both World Wars, the Rana-Shahs lived lavishly while the Nepalese barely survived in horrid conditions. Nepal's borders closed, and the country faded from world view.

After Britain withdrew from India in 1947, opposition toward the Ranas grew. The Shah King Tribhuvan fled to India, and worked with the Nepali Congress Party to form a new government. The next Shah King Mahendra dissolved the cabinet and wrested control of the government in 1960. Corruption continued with Mahendra's son, Birendra, who ushered in the Panchayat system, which allowed for minimal local representation but abolished all political parties, leaving real power with the monarchy. It wasn't until a 1991 election that the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal shared most of the votes. Still, Nepal's citizens remained unsettled, staging a general strike in 1992. Capitalizing on the unrest, in 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (also called "the Maoists") declared a "people's war."

In 2001, in a shocking power play that could've been torn from the pages of Shakespeare, nine members of the royal family were massacred at a family party. It was blamed on the popular Crown Prince Dipendra, who supposedly shot himself and lingered in a coma before being declared king, and then dying. But the story has huge gaps and the investigation was minimal. The right-handed Dipendra was shot in the left side of the head—with two bullets—making suicide seem unlikely. More suspicious was the fact that Dipendra's uncle (and the murdered king's brother), Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, was left unharmed, along with his entire family. Gyanendra became king and absolute ruler, dissolving the parliament in 2005.

After a year of mass strikes and demonstrations, he grudgingly restored the parliament, and on December 24th, 2007, Nepal was formally declared a federal republic by the interim government—a seven-party coalition, including the Maoists. In subsequent elections the Maoists won a majority, giving them the leverage completely abolish the monarchy. On June 11, 2008, the King left the palace, signaling the end of the royal Shah lineage. The first President of Nepal, Ram Baran Yadav, was sworn in on July 23, 2008.

In 2014, a coalition government of Maoist and National Congress Party members was formed, and almost immediately it faced major challenges in the form of multiple natural disasters, and an ensuing humanitarian crisis. The silver lining was that the crisis spurred the swift approval of a new constitution in 2015 which made Nepal a secular, federal-style republic. In 2017, Nepal held its first successful national elections in two decades, a resounding victory for a communist coalition. Today, Nepal is the world's only fully democratic, multi-party nation ruled by a communist party. Bidya Devi Bhandari became Nepal's first female president in 2015. Bidya Devi Bhandari was succeeded by Ram Chandra Poudel in March 2023.



## RESOURCES

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### Suggested Reading

#### India

***The White Tiger, A Novel*** by Aravind Adiga (2008, Fiction). Adiga explores urban India through the tale of Balram Halwa, a village pauper-turned-driver-turned-entrepreneur. Filled with black humor, it's a murderous and marvelous story of hard-fought success. Winner of the 2008 Booker Prize.

***India after Gandhi: the History of the World's Largest Democracy*** by Ramachandra Guha (2007, History). This scholarly work picks up where many other history books leave off, the rise of post-independence India, but still finds plenty of material to work with (it is over 700 pages long).

***Taj Mahal, Passion and Genius at the Heart of the Moghul Empire*** by Diana and Michael Preston (2007, History/Architecture). A complete, but easy-to-read, telling of the story behind the building of the Taj Mahal. It also offers a useful background on the Moghul Dynasty.

***The Little Book of Hindu Deities*** by Sanjay Patel (2006, Mythology/Region). Get your Hindu gods and goddesses straight with this beguiling "who's who." Filled with bold artwork (the author was an animator for Pixar studios), this book offers the colorful background to much of the art and lore you will encounter on your trip.

***Heat and Dust*** by Ruth Praver-Jhabvala (1975, Fiction). The parallel stories of a young Englishwoman backpacking through India in the 1970s, and her great-aunt Olivia, a bored colonial wife in the 1920s. Consider also the 1983 Merchant-Ivory film version starring Julie Christie and Greta Scaachi.

#### Sri Lanka

***Eight Years' Wanderings in Ceylon*** by Samuel White Baker (2021, Historical Narrative). Reissue of the vintage classic about colonial Sri Lanka, originally published in 1845.

***Island of a Thousand Mirrors*** by Nayomi Munaweera (2012, Fiction). Recounts the saga and tragedy of Sri Lanka's civil war from the point of view of two women on opposing sides.

***Tea Time with Terrorists: A Motorcycle Journey into the Heart of Sri Lanka's Civil War*** by Mark Stephen Meadows (2010, Society/History/Travel Narrative). Meadows traveled to the war zone to interview participants and witnesses on both sides in an attempt to better understand the conflict.

***Anil's Ghost*** by Michael Ondaatje (2000, Fiction). A lyrical story about a forensic scientist returning to her native Sri Lanka in the 1980s as part of a U.N. fact-finding mission.

***Cinnamon Gardens*** by Shyam Selvadurai (1998, Fiction). The novel explores what happens when personal desires clash with societal norms—specifically, a young teacher who is not certain she wants to marry and settle down, and her uncle, who is secretly gay. The same author also wrote *Funny Boy*, which is a coming-of-age novel set within an extended upper-middle-class family in Sri Lanka.

## Nepal

***The Soul of the Rhino*** (2008) and ***Bones of the Tiger*** (2010) by Hemanta Mishra (Memoir/Nature). Mishra tells of his work to save two of Royal Chitwan National Park's most endangered animals—the Asian rhino and the tiger.

***Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*** by Manjushree Thapa (2005, History) A clear first-person account of the political turmoil that rocked Nepal in the early 2000s—helpful as background reading on Nepal's recent history.

***High Adventure*** by Sir Edmund Hillary (2003, Exploration). A classic of 20th-century mountaineering from the adventurer himself. Originally written after the famous climb, when the details and the danger were still fresh. Look for the 50th anniversary edition, which includes a new preface by the author.

***Touching My Father's Soul*** by Jamling Tenzing Norgay (2001, Adventure/Memoir) A touching and thoughtful biography written by the son of Tenzing Norgay, the Sherpa guide who reached the summit of Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary.

***The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes*** by Bavara J. Scott (1993, Travel Narrative). A sudden mid-life crisis in 1990 prompted high school social studies teacher Scott to leave Portland, Oregon, for a stint teaching English in Nepal. The brief entries in this diary interweave her experiences in Nepalese society, including the inferior status of Nepali women.

## Suggested Films & Videos

### India

***A Suitable Boy*** (2020, Comedy/Drama) Based on the classic novel by Vikram Seth, this miniseries is the first BBC period drama to feature a nonwhite cast. It concerns the efforts of Mrs. Rupa Mehra to find a husband for her daughter, Lata. With more than 100 colorful characters, the story is often compared to a Charles Dickens novel. Available on streaming services such as Acorn.

***Lion*** (2016, Drama) A young man living with his adopted parents in Australia travels back to India to find a long lost family, and himself.

***Slumdog Millionaire*** (2008, Comedy/Drama). Jamal, who grew up in the slums of Mumbai, is close to winning the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. But how does a young man from such a background know the answers to questions that stumped more educated contestants? At turns sad, funny, romantic, and gritty, *Slumdog* won 8 Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

***A Passage to India*** (1984, Drama). An Indian doctor is accused of a shocking crime by an Englishwoman in 1920s India. Will he be found guilty or acquitted? Directed by David Lean with an all-star cast.

***Gandhi*** (1982, Biopic). A biopic about India's famous leader that won numerous awards, including the Oscars for Best Actor (Ben Kingsley) and Best Director (Richard Attenborough). This film begins with his early years in South Africa, and traces his development as a leader.

## Sri Lanka

***Funny Boy*** (2020, Drama). Arjie Chelvaratnam struggles with his sexuality when he falls for a male school mate, in a country where his love is illegal, on the eve of the 1983 Sri Lankan civil war.

***White Van Stories*** (2015, Documentary). Indian filmmaker Leena Manimekalai follows seven women, from the east, south, and north provinces of Sri Lanka, as they seek justice for their loved ones, who went missing during the 1983 to 2009 civil war.

***Ceylon*** (2013, War Drama). This 2013 Indian war film follows a group of teenage orphans during the Sri Lankan civil war, fought from 1983 to 2009.

## Nepal

***Even When I Fall*** (2017, Documentary). Exposes the child trafficking that lands up to 10,000 children a year in traveling Indian circuses.

***The Sari Soldiers*** (2017, Documentary). The lives of six women are explored, revealing their important roles in Nepal's civil war.

***Sherpa*** (2015, Documentary). This award-winning film explores the hardships and dangers faced by the Sherpa guides whose work is crucial to so many Himalayan mountaineering expeditions.

***Living Goddess*** (2007, Documentary). A well-received documentary about the lives of three Kumaris (girls believed to be living goddesses by the Nepalese).

***Himalaya*** (1999, Drama/Adventure). Also released under the title *Caravan*. A scenic film that combines an age-old story with an obstacle that is very Nepalese: the Himalayan Mountains. Should the villagers wait to start their all-important caravan until the auspicious day, as is their tradition? Or should they set off early to take advantage of the weather? Shot in Nepal by a former National Geographic photographer.

## Useful Websites

### **Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions**

[www.oattravel.com/faq](http://www.oattravel.com/faq)

### **International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)**

[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

### **Electricity & Plugs**

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/  
plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

### **Foreign Exchange Rates**

[www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter)  
[www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic)

### **ATM Locators**

[www.mastercard.com/atm](http://www.mastercard.com/atm)  
[www.visa.com/atmlocator](http://www.visa.com/atmlocator)

### **World Weather**

[www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com)  
[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)  
[www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com)

### **Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)**

[www.travlang.com/languages](http://www.travlang.com/languages)

### **Packing Tips**

[www.travelite.org](http://www.travelite.org)

### **U.S. Customs & Border Protection**

[www.cbp.gov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/travel)

### **Transportation Security**

#### **Administration (TSA)**

[www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)

### **National Passport Information Center**

[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

### **Holidays Worldwide**

[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)

## Useful Apps

### **Flight Stats**

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

### **LoungeBuddy**

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

### **Timeshifter**

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

### **GoogleMaps or Maps.me**

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

### **Triposo**

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

### **Rome2rio**

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

### **Flush or Sit or Squat**

Find a clean toilet anywhere

### **Uber or Bolt or Grab**

Ride sharing around the world

### **Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus**

#### **ATM locations**

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

### **TunnelBear**

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

### **What's App or Skype or Signal**

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

### **Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel**

Learn dozens of foreign languages

### **Google Translate**

Fast and simple translations

### **XE**

Currency conversions

### **SizeGuide**

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

### **Best Units Converter**

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

### **Tourlina**

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

### **Happy Cow**

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

### **Eatwith**

Dine with locals all over the world

### **Meetup**

Connects you with locals who share your interests

### **Skyview**

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

### **Travello**

Find travel friends on the road

### **ALIX for One**

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

### **TripWhistle**

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

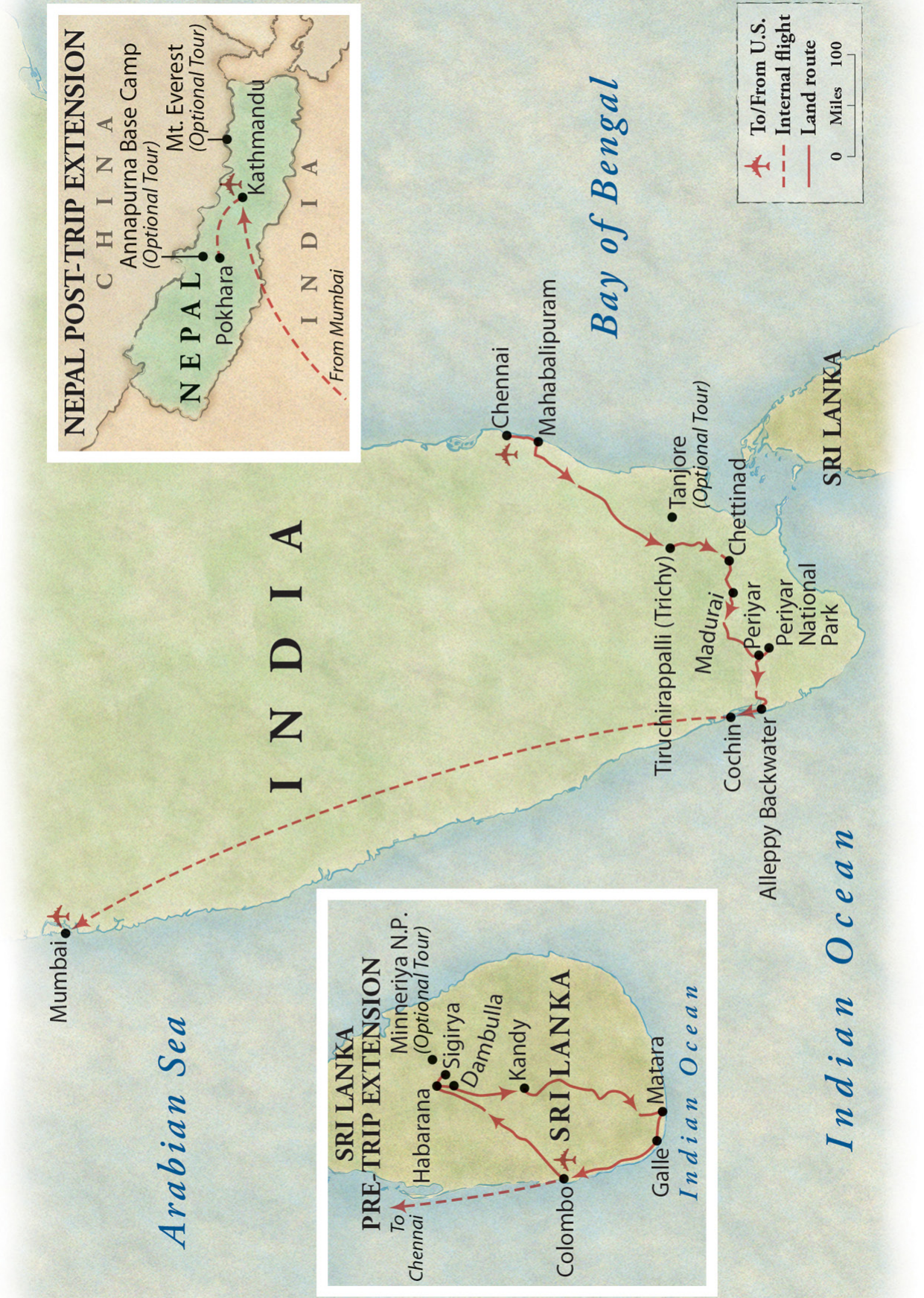
### **GeoSure**

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

### **Chirpey**

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more







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