



## **RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDELINES FOR INTREPID TRAVELLERS TO INDIA**

### **THE COUNTRY:**

India is a country of many diverse people, landscapes, languages, customs, religions and cultures and its home to a population of more than 1 billion people. Although a rapid urbanisation is taking place in India, still about 70% of the population are rural dwellers. Most of the socio-economic and political problems are a direct reflection of the large population. India is an agrarian society; with most of the food consumed grown in India. Besides agriculture, India has a large numbers of industries that have a global presence.

### **POLITICAL & HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS:**

India, being the largest democracy in the world, has a written Constitution which includes the rights of citizens. Human rights concerns in India include addressing the mistreatment of minority ethnic groups, women, children and religious minorities. India hosts the the largest exiled Tibetan community, headed by the Dalai Lama. One of the most recent issues raised concerns gay rights, since India does not constitutionally recognise gay rights.

### **LOCAL ECONOMY:**

The national economy in India is growing, but still a very large number of people live below the poverty line, and the rapid urbanisation has created huge gaps between the rich and poor. To maximise the economic benefit to local communities, Intrepid mostly uses family-run businesses and small ventures. Using public transport including buses/trains wherever possible, using local guides, recommending Indian made products and spreading the business are other ways we can help.

Indian culture expects you to bargain, so do not hesitate to bargain if the items you're buying are handicrafts or tourist souvenirs. With packaged food and drink, look at the MRP (maximum retail price) printed on the pack.

Support local culture and tradition by watching local performances. Some Indian dance forms and crafts are under critical threat of extinction.

Remember that you cannot buy and export any items more than 100 years old from India. The Wildlife Act is also very strict in India, so do not buy anything made of materials derived from wildlife.

### **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

India is a "country of contradictions", and may even be mistakenly viewed to be a hypocritical society. This is because of the constant mixing of the various cultures; a tradition from the beginning of history when India was prized as a rich nation to conquer and occupy. Even Greeks came to the northern frontiers and started a mixed art period. Being sensitive and considerate towards society, customs, and culture gets you very far and is much appreciated by Indians. A flexible approach, relaxed and fun attitude will help you in all situations.

**Dress Standards:** India is conservative society. Both men and women need to be modestly and respectfully dressed. Cover your shoulders and knees at all times.

It is polite and courteous to remove your shoes while visiting someone's home.

### **Swimming:**

Swimming in the rivers (public areas) wearing a bikini is not recommended. Even at the beach a conservative swimsuit is advisable and you should cover up before leaving.



### **Temple Etiquette:**

- India is a very religious country. Be considerate and ask for permission before entering. Some temples do not allow foreigners to enter.
- Your body should be fully covered with long sleeves and trousers or long skirt/sarong.
- At times you may be required to cover your head.
- Removing shoes is mandatory.
- Smoking at the temple complex is prohibited.
- Never point the sole of your feet towards the deity of the temple.
- Do not touch the deity.
- Indian women do not enter the temples while menstruating. It is ethical if you follow the same custom.

### **Social Etiquette:**

- Public displays of affection between the sexes is offensive and should be kept to the privacy of your room. Public signs of friendship by the same sex, like men holding hands, should not be mistaken for homosexuality.
- Try to use your RIGHT hand when you're eating or for any exchanges.
- The western concept of personal space and the Indian concept are very different. Just imagine a population of over a billion people and the likelihood of growing up amongst an extended family. Indians therefore are very sociable and a close knit society.
- Many locals do not encounter tourists often and are fascinated to the point of staring unashamedly. This is merely curiosity and should not be misconstrued as rudeness. Smile and greet them by saying 'namaste' and you will break the ice.
- There is much language diversity with 22 official languages spoken, plus many sub-dialects. However, in most parts English is widely used and spoken. Do try to greet everyone with their local language and you will be well-received.
- Indian restaurant menus often have spelling blunders. Ask your leader for help to identify what dish is what.
- You'll find people asking a lot of personal questions. Don't feel offended by the curiosity, but take the opportunity to interact with the locals and learn more about Indian culture. It is best to be always polite.

### **Begging**

This is a reality of everyday Indian life. Giving money to beggars is discouraged when travelling as a group, but please consider the following:

- Do not give sweets, pens, money or any gifts to children as it encourages begging and will keep them out of school and from pursuing preferable livelihoods.
- Beggars at major tourist sites may be a part of the bigger mafia or organised crime units.
- Giving money to one beggar will encourage other beggars and you will be harassed.
- Giving food instead of money is a considerate gesture and directly benefits the beggar, but still should be done discriminately.
- If you do give money ie to the elderly, give coins and smaller change, not more than few coins.
- Alternatively, Intrepid directly supports charity organisations. Donating through the Intrepid Foundation will ensure your giving is most effective. [www.theintrepidfoundation.org](http://www.theintrepidfoundation.org)

### **Tipping / Baksheesh:**

Tourism culture in India is based primarily based on tipping. For many it is the tips that gives them a living. Tipping also ensures you receive good service. People to tip include hotel room boys, luggage boys, and restaurant staff. At restaurants a suggested tipping amount is 10%-15% of the total bill. There is often a 'Tip Box' at the hotel too. Intrepid leaders carry a tipping kitty and use this for group activities. You are welcome to tip above that if anyone's (eg guide, hotel staff) service is above expectation. Intrepid leaders can suggest/advise you on how, where and when to tip.

### **Shopping and Bargaining:**

- Sometimes you will find fixed price shops but in most tourist areas you can bargain. It is a skill that can be developed during the trip. Remember you are expected to bargain and you may lose money if you do not.
- Generally you should drop to a quarter or a tenth of the original price and slowly work your way upwards. Often walking away and showing disinterest works. Remember not to get stressed. Haggling should be a fun activity to both parties.
- It is always good to remind yourself of the value of your own currency that you're haggling over. Once a price is agreed upon, it needs to be honoured.
- A great way to look at it is that if you're happy with the price you've paid for the goods that you purchased, then you've paid the right amount. Please do not compare with others.
- Look for the MRP (maximum retail price) on packed food and drink. Pay what is printed.

### **Photography:**

- It is a general rule to ask for permission before taking pictures and respect them if they say no. You may be asked to pose yourself!
- Do not photograph people bathing in public, eating, Muslim women in general, certain religious ceremonies and cremations and military installations or border posts.
- Flash photography should be avoided in certain monuments/temples with priceless murals and paintings.
- The best gift you can give to Indians (city/rural) is to send back copies of their photograph. Send them to your group leader with a clear note of the location, and they can pass them on when next in the region.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Tourism can put huge pressure on already limited resources in India - putting a strain on local water supplies and adding pollution to already polluted rivers and land. Also, Indian wildlife is under constant threat because of the poachers and increasing human population.

### **Some simple ways to help:**

- Use a glass of water while brushing teeth/shaving instead of the running tap.
- Take a refreshing bucket bath instead of regular shower.
- Use the laundry service at the hotel instead of doing it yourself to avoid water usage.
- Discourage the hotel from changing towels/bed-sheets each day.
- Minimise toilet paper usage.
- Drink chai and other drinks in glass cups and avoid plastic cups.
- While shopping use the Intrepid bags instead of plastic bags from the shops.

During outdoor activities we recommend you:

- Take out everything you bring in, any extra rubbish you find.
- Use a resealable container for cigarette butts.
- Ask the local guide on the chosen site for toilets. If 'going bush' always bury your waste.
- Wash and clean yourself away from the water source (eg river) to avoid contamination.
- Avoid wood fires as this contributes towards deforestation. If this is an integral activity then use the timber sensibly (one round of small firewood). Using cow-dung is an eco-friendly alternative.
- Remain on existing paths while trekking/hiking to stop further degradation of soil.
- Do not feed wildlife. This creates dependencies and aggression among wild animals.
- Refrain from picking flowers and plants, they may look exotic but may also be last of their kind.

Other:

- Buy soft drinks in recyclable glass bottles in the restaurants/shops instead of plastic bottles. Glass bottles are also much better than aluminum cans.
- Use water filters or purifiers to refill your water bottle.
- 'Say No to Plastic' – use our RT Bags made by charity Karm Marg.
- Smoking is now illegal in public places.
- Choose fuel efficient vehicles for travelling.

## **THE INTREPID FOUNDATION'S CURRENT PROJECTS IN INDIA:**

**GOONJ** – recycling and distribution of clothing and household items for the needy. We collect donated clothing from travellers at the base hotels in Delhi for GOONJ.  
[www.goonj.org](http://www.goonj.org)

**Deepalaya** – Providing care and education to under-privileged children. Intrepid supports their Deepalaya Gram Boy's Hostel at Gusbethi, Haryana, which currently houses 65 boys. We also sponsor 8 children. This will reduce as they leave school as we'd prefer to direct our support into one of their projects - currently the Boy's Home.  
[www.deepalaya.org](http://www.deepalaya.org)

**Care for Dancing Bears**– This project is about increasing awareness of the plight of India's dancing bears and supporting programs that work to eliminate this animal exploitation. Our support goes through the World Society for the Protection of Animals who are working with WTI- the Wildlife Trust of India and their focus on education and alternative livelihoods for the Kalandar owners, and supporting the sanctuaries for rescued bears which are managed by Wildlife SOS / International Animal Rescue.  
[http://www.wspa-international.org/wspaswork/bears/dancingbears/new\\_lives.aspx](http://www.wspa-international.org/wspaswork/bears/dancingbears/new_lives.aspx)  
[www.wildlifesos.org](http://www.wildlifesos.org)  
[www.wildlifetrustofindia.org](http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org)

For more information and to donate to any of the above projects, go to:

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

Intrepid Travel will match all travellers donations dollar for dollar and as Intrepid pays for all administrative overheads, 100% of your donation will reach your chosen project.

## **OTHER COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

### **Projects/activities/issues on trips:**

Check out your trip's Specific RT Guidelines.

Ask your group leader for more information on village school visits and other local RT activities, for example Maya School in Orchha, Taragram in Orchha, school visit in Chitwan, Animal Shelter in Udaipur and Jaipur, local charity in Mammallapuram, old age home in Periyar etc.

- Intrepid is a member of the International Ecotourism Society  
[www.ecotourism.org/travelchoice](http://www.ecotourism.org/travelchoice)
- Intrepid aims to be Carbon Neutral by 2010 through our Carbon Reductions and Offset Program. We currently have 38 Carbon Offset trips available.

### **Donations of goods:**

Clothes/shoes/blankets/bandages/medical supplies – we are happy to accept just about anything which we will ensure is distributed to India's needy via various organisations such as GOONJ..

Our RT Bags (Say No to Plastic) are made by women in a village community through the grassroots charity, "Karm Marg."

Thank you.

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**Updated Mar 09**

## **RECOMMENDED 'CAMERA GUIDELINES' FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES.**



Some of the destinations that Intrepid visits are remote and it is possible that we are the only tourist groups that the locals come into contact with. To avoid being excessively invasive, we would like to limit the groups wandering through a village, everyone with a camera glued to their face, trying to get that 'perfect shot'.

We aim at giving our travellers 'real life experiences' and would like to avoid creating culture within a community where the only interaction is on the basis of their photos being taken in the hope that they will get it back later. Sometimes groups can create a barrier between themselves and the villagers by chasing photos rather than meeting or interacting with the locals. There is a rush of picture taking and then we move on, often ignoring the other interesting aspects of the community.

Bearing in mind the above, whenever we visit a small community, consider the possibility of using only one or two cameras (particularly digital) to take photos on behalf of the entire group. Besides being considerate of the community, you also get to appear in the photographs.

At the end of the visit, these digital photos can be cheaply and easily burned onto a CD for each group member or shared online. You can print photographs at home or in India in major cities/towns.

If taking photos, always ask before taking a photograph especially of women, homes, elderly men or private functions going on eg. marriage. People may ask for money to have their picture taken, but NEVER offer to give any money, instead make sure you send the photos later to the leader to be delivered to this place.

