

Should I Go to India?!

Top 10 Traveler Concerns About India

By Dan Friesen

India is incredible!! India is a kaleidoscope of contrasts and contradictions.

The subcontinent of India is literally that – a piece of the continent below Asia. India is cut off from the rest of the world by a semi-circular ring of mountains in the north – Himalayas, Hindu Kush, and Karakoram – the Arabian Sea on the southwest, and the Bay of Bengal on the southeast. The result is a historically-isolated, incomparably complicated tapestry of language, culture, ethnicity, and cuisine. As we presented our first visit to India, however, we've received a variety of traveler responses. I've been a bit preoccupied the past few months leading trips and getting brochures ready for other 2012 Adventures. Consider the following my belated encouragement to resist the voices of apprehension. Below are 10 potential reasons (some tongue-in-cheek!) a traveler might have to NOT visit India, followed by my responses.

I don't like crowds and I've heard there are over a billion people crowded into India

Yes, India is a densely populated country – on track to surpass China in terms of total population in less than a decade. You will feel a sense of the dense population, but the feeling is different than what one feels in China or even Japan, where you can encounter huge masses of people in one place. India tends to be more spread out; the majority of people still live outside urban areas. Furthermore, even though our program does visit a few of India's large cities – Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur – most of our time is spent in smaller villages and in rural areas in the state of Rajasthan. This is the heart of our program!



Malaria and mosquitoes: Taking malaria meds is NOT on my bucket list!

Okay – I think we agree that malaria is not one of the more enticing selling points of any trip to a warm weather destination. And it's true that your medical advisor will likely recommend prophylactic meds in some form. What we experienced, however, is that mosquitoes are only a problem closer to the monsoon season. We will be there during the cooler times of year and locals tell us that malaria is NOT an issue. We are not giving medical advice, but want to point out that even in April, when we did the scouting trip, we opted not to take our Malarone pills. We'll be in India in February and November, when temperatures are much lower.



I get enough rain where I live and prefer NOT to get caught in a monsoon

If you've seen the Hollywood movie, "City of Joy", starring Patrick Swayze, you'll remember the amazing scenes of monsoon rains that flooded Calcutta. Truly, the whole geographic and meteorological concept of the "monsoon" is a fascinating phenomenon and has had a massive impact on India's agriculture, economy, and especially its history, starting from the medieval period. The monsoon winds were discovered and exploited by early sailors – Arab and European explorers and traders – whose incursions into India had a massive impact on the course of history in India.



But rest easy, we are in India during seasons opposite the monsoons. Monsoons affect northern India, where we are traveling, between the months of June and September. [Click here](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsoon_of_Indian_subcontinent) (or go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsoon_of_Indian_subcontinent) for more reading on the monsoons of the India subcontinent.



Bollywood movies are soooo corny!

Agreed. During the scouting trip, we took in a theatrical presentation of the building of the Taj Mahal, Bollywood-style. It was, shall we say, “over-acted”. We discovered, however, that “corny” Bollywood movies are an intriguing indicator of cultural differences between India and the West. Our guide explained that the Indian viewpoint prefers NOT to have realism in their entertainment. They get enough realism in day-to-day life. They see the purpose of movies as an idealistic escape from reality, a respite into a place of drama and emotion that transports them rather than challenging or educating them. So we promise NOT to take you to the Taj Mahal Bollywood presentation!

Poverty is so depressing and I’ve heard a lot about filth and mind-numbing poverty in India

It’s undeniable that a trip to India involves exposure to very different standards of hygiene and some heart-rending standards of living. What we discovered, however, is that India is changing. Depending on how you crunch the numbers, India has the largest middle class on the planet. Everywhere we went, we encountered new roads being built and signs of a culture adapting to 21st century technology and international standards of education and business. India’s economy has been on an upward trend now for years, and millions of people are being lifted out of poverty annually. Still, the reality remains that suffering is part of the human condition, with which we’ll have some unavoidable encounters during our time in India. What I look forward to on my return visit, however, is developing a better understanding of how India came to be what it is (e.g. in spite of the fact that it is a net exporter of agricultural products) and what I might do to help make a difference.



I don’t like curry and I heard all the food has curry in it

Almost every meal will be a buffet, and all buffets have many choices of food, including what the Indians call “continental”, by which they mean “European” cuisine. You should have no problem avoiding curry, but you also might want to experiment a bit with some of the delicious Indian cuisine.

Delhi-Belly (diarrhea) is also NOT on my bucket list

Truthfully, it is likely you will have some degree of contact with Delhi-Belly (traveler’s diarrhea). We will be sending out advice on how to guard against Delhi-Belly, but one thing that helps a lot is the high quality of hotels and restaurants we are using. Many variables can affect your system, and traveler’s diarrhea in general is a factor in many destinations we visit simply because travel can stress your body’s systems. And even though we were fairly adventurous in our food choices on our scouting trip, and were in India during the hottest time of the year, Delhi-Belly was only a minor issue for us. *NOTE: To help offset this concern, we have paid a premium on this Adventure to procure a high-quality Volvo coach with a toilet! There are very few of these in India.*



There have been terrorist attacks in some of the big cities and I’d rather not get caught in a small arms crossfire or have the bus caught in the crosshairs of a rocket launcher

A terrorist act, by definition (root word “terror”) creates a volatile psychological response completely out of proportion with the actual damage done. This is why it has been such an effective political weapon. Yes, there have been terrorist attacks in India, as there have been in England, Germany, the USA, and many places over the past 20 years. The ongoing friction between predominantly Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan (which used to be part of India prior to 1948) has been at the core

of terrorist activities. But anxiety over terrorism assumes that any potential attack would be geographically

widespread and that the risk of that attack is higher than an amazingly wide range of other day-to-day negatives that can impact us at any time in any place.

A study that received attention after the 9/11 tragedy in New York showed that the two most dangerous places you can be in terms of life-threatening injury is in your car and in your home; this study included the risk of flying in the post 9/11 era. Yet, we “feel” safe in those two places because they are familiar and, over time, we have factored the risk of accidents into our decisions to go about our normal 21st century lives. So at the risk of sounding calloused, yes there is a chance of a terrorist attack. But the chances of a traffic incident are infinitely higher. The risk of falling down the stairs in your home is also higher. Please be assured that the risk of a terrorist attack impacting us in India is far down the list of bad things that can happen in life. Please join me in resisting the media-driven urge to panic when something bad happens. Remember all the good things that are not reported and share the blessed adventure of travel with us! (If you want my full speech, give me a call when you have an hour or two). 😊



What about snakes? I am not Rikki-Tikki-Tavi (the snake-killing mongoose in Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book*) and can’t abide the thought of bumping into a cobra on the trail!

As mentioned above, we are traveling out of the monsoon season and in the cooler time of year (temps in the 80’s), when snakes are quiet or hibernating. Even in April, when it was around 100 degrees F, we saw no snakes. You can relegate this to the “little-to-no risk” category.

All those colors the women wear are so garish and hard on the eyes!

This is one I don’t have an answer for. From my point of view, this is the most photogenic culture I have ever encountered!! I guess you’ll just have to bring your sunglasses. 😊



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