



TOURIST ATTRACTIONS



India, always warm and inviting, is a place of infinite variety - one that favours you with a different facet of its fascinating diversity every time you come on a visit. India's rich and varied natural, cultural, historical and religious heritage provides a unique opportunity for tourism.

India holds virtually every kind of landscape imaginable. From the eternal snows of the Himalayas to the cultivated peninsula of far South, from the deserts of the West to the humid deltas of the East, from the dry heat and cold of the Central Plateau to the cool forest foothills, Indian lifestyles clearly glorify the geography.

An abundance of mountain ranges and national parks provide ample opportunity for eco-tourism and trekking, and the country's sheer size promises something for everyone. From north to south, India extends a good 2000 miles (3200 km). The food, clothing and habits of Indians differ in accordance to the place of origin.

Business travelers will find a slice of India's history within easy access of most cities. Ranging from prehistoric Vedic India to glorious medieval India to refined Mughal India, the architecture of its temples, palaces, and forts, the grandeur of its sculptures and rock-cut buildings, the beauty of its paintings and miniatures all offer an unparalleled experience. Scenic diversities and natural wonders abound, from the majesty of the snow-bound Himalayas to the stark beauty of the Rajasthan deserts, from the gentle tea-estates of Eastern India to the lush tropics of the South, from the exquisite beaches of Goa to the rugged terrain of the central plateau.

The renowned Taj Mahal in Agra, one of the 'Wonders of the World', has become a symbol of eternal love and is an imperative for the first-time visitor to India. A magnificent yet intricately delicate composition in marble, its beauty captivates and entralls immediately. The impressive Agra Fort and nearby Fatehpur Sikri add to the attractions of Agra.

The Himalayas in the north are endowed with some of the most beautiful hill stations in the world. Escapes for the British rulers from the summer heat, these little towns, such as Chamba, Dalhousie, and Darjeeling, still retain some of that old-world charm. The pretty valleys of Kullu and gushing mountain rivers provide rare opportunities for trekking, white-water rafting, skiing, or adventure sports amid splendid mountain vistas. For the historically-inclined, ancient temples and monasteries are to be found along traditional trade routes to Central Asia.

Rajasthan, the desert State in the west, with its rich heritage of majestic forts, imposing palaces and historic temples, is an immensely popular tourist destination. Its colourful people and crafts enrich the arid desert landscape. Camel rides and camping in the dunes offer a romantic escapade.

Goa, situated along the Arabian Sea, is a prominent beach resort and offers a perfect fusion of East and West. The erstwhile Portuguese colony still reflects the unique cuisine and beautiful cathedrals of its earlier masters, while the laidback atmosphere on the beaches provides the ultimate relaxation.

South India offers beautiful beaches, palaces, traditional temples, and places of pilgrimage. Kerala on the Arabian Sea has become a centre for traditional medicine, massage, and relaxing spas, while a few days aboard a houseboat on its serene backwaters offer an ideal calming experience.

The states of West Bengal, Assam and Sikkim in the East are endowed with beautiful hill stations, tea gardens, and wildlife sanctuaries. Many of these States have base points for treks to Mount Everest and Kanchenjunga.

Islam in India is the second-most practiced religion, with approximately 150 million Muslims in India's population (according to government census 2001), i.e., 13.4% of the population. Currently,





India has the second largest population of Muslims in the world next only to Indonesians. Since its introduction into India, Islam has made significant religious, artistic, philosophical, cultural, social and political contributions to Indian life. Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan, Fatehpur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh, Jama Masjid in Delhi and Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai are some of the most popular Islamic pilgrimage sites.

Buddhism was a major religion in India in ancient days and a tour of important Buddhist sites has become a highlight for travelers interested in Buddhism. The famous cities include Bodhgaya in Bihar where the Buddha attained enlightenment, Sarnath where he delivered his first sermon, Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh, the site of a historical stupa, and Kushinagar where he attained nirvana, besides other centres of learning and memorials.

For more information on Indian travel destinations, please log on to the following sites: www.tourisminindia.com, www.travel.indiamart.com, www.all-india-tour-travel.com, www.indianhighcommission.com.my/visiting.php.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

The range and dimension of leisure in India is different from that in the West. To savour the real India one should seek out the auditoriums and theatres, which host a variety of cultural programmes, plays as well as Indian dance and music. Classical Indian dance is an enriching experience and the highly evolved dance-forms of Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi etc. require years of training to attain competency. Similarly, Indian classical music is rendered by instrumentalists and vocalists after intensive practice. As the notes are not written, each performance by the artiste is his own unique interpretation.

For those interested in sports, facilities for squash, tennis, snooker, bowling alleys, swimming and workouts are easily available. In

addition, most large cities have golf courses, with plans for more to keep pace with the growing popularity of the game.

The introduction of cable television has brought TV shows and news from around the world into the living rooms of Indian households. Many popular international channels, including Star TV, BBC, CNN, Discovery, National Geographic, and CNBC are accessible in India.

SHOPPING

Shopping is one of the greatest pleasures of travelling in India. The range of handicrafts, fabrics, jewellery and antiques on offer at India's teeming bazaars at astonishingly low prices are literally overwhelming. For the discerning tourist, Government-owned shops or emporia in large cities stock high-quality handicrafts at fixed prices. Eager tourists can venture into the myriad stalls and little shops surrounding most tourist destinations and bargain for the best deals.

Different parts of India specialize in different kinds of items. Textiles have been a much sought-after item from ancient days and a variety of rich fabrics are available all over the country. Heavy brocades are found in Uttar Pradesh, intricately embroidered woollens in Kashmir, cool cottons in the mills of Gujarat, lush silks in the form of crepes, raw silk, chiffons, etc. in South India. Earthier folk arts are revealed in the tie-and-dye fabrics and mirror-work embroidery of Rajasthan. Readymade clothes in these fabrics are also ubiquitous.

Carpets are another specialty, hand-knotted wool or silk with delicate designs, or colourful woven cotton durries. Precious and semi-precious stones and jewellery are also a perennial favourite. Other popular handicraft and souvenir items are metalware from Hyderabad, tribal art, inlaid stoneware, leather items, woodcarvings – indeed, an infinite variety in every city.

Jaipur in Rajasthan is famous for traditional jewellery, furniture and clothes known as bandhani (tie-and-dye). One could buy fine Banaras silk from Varanasi and cotton fabrics from Kolkata, exquisite





pashmina and woolen shawls from Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, stone sculpture from Orissa, bronze from Uttar Pradesh and leather goods from Chennai.

In addition, Indian markets are well stocked with consumer durables and non-durables. A number of international brands have their outlets in shopping centres all over India. Many of these are manufactured within the country now.

SELECT CITIES – A SNAPSHOT

Delhi

Sprawling on the banks of the river Yamuna, Delhi, the capital of India, typifies the soul of the country. In time, the city conceals within its bosom annals of civilizations that flourished for more than three thousand years. Delhi is an important gateway into the country. It is a vibrant metropolis - juxtaposing fast paced modernization with well-preserved antiquity.

The impressive Lutyen's Delhi which includes the President's palace, the Secretariat, India Gate, and the Parliament building, is one of the popular tourist spots. The modern buildings and flyovers interspersed with well-laid gardens, magnificent domes and Victorian buildings, give the city a unique character. Dilli Haat (permanent fair for crafts, food and cultural activities), Qutub Minar, Connaught Place, India Gate, National Museum, Red Fort, Teen Murti House, Jama Masjid, etc. are some of the places of tourist interest. Most States of India maintain marketing outlets in Delhi for handicrafts. These are housed in the state Emporia complexes on Baba Kharak Singh Marg, just off Connaught Place. Delhi's strategic location allows easy access to the rest of the country by road, rail, and air.

For further details, visit www.delhitourism.nic.in

Mumbai

Mumbai, a cluster of seven islands, derives its name from Mumbadevi, the patron goddess of the Koli fisher folk, its oldest inhabitants. A lovely natural harbour and winding creek set off the city of Mumbai from the long, narrow coast of Western India. Mumbai is the country's financial, technological, industrial, and commercial hub and economic nerve centre, with specialties ranging from textiles to petrochemicals.

Mumbai accounts for the second largest production of films in the world, earning it the sobriquet of Bollywood. With a bustling entertainment industry, the city has undertaken new initiatives in the area of e-infotainment. Dazzling shopping arcades, exciting sport activity, night clubs and discotheques, theatre and music, gourmet restaurants and interesting sightseeing - Mumbai offers the visitor a heady mix of all this and more. A walk on the Marine Drive, the Gateway of India, Warden Road, the races, Haji Ali is a must. In addition, Mumbai's unique architecture is exhibited in buildings like Taj Hotel, the Times of India building, etc.

For more details, visit www.maharastratourism.gov.in

Chennai

The largest city in southern India located on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal, Chennai is an important business city with a large of automobile and IT firms including MNCs. Chennai is the capital of the State of Tamil Nadu. Planning an itinerary with Chennai as the gateway will put you in touch with a different face of India – classical and ancient yet one of the most-developed cities of India.

Chennai is one of the important trade centres of South India and is a good place to shop for a large variety of things. Mount Road has many retail outlets for traditional handicrafts and handlooms from the south. For silk, the main centres are Srinivasa Silk, Nalli and Kumaran at Theyagaraya Nagar and B.M. Silks at Mylapore. For the famed





South Indian textiles and exquisite gold ornaments, the best place to shop is Mount Road and Theyagaraya Nagar, which has retail outlets for all major textile mills in India.

There are many new shopping complexes that have come all over the growing city. Such shopping centres as Alsa Mall on Montieth Road in Egmore, Spencer Plaza on Mount Road, Prince Plaza on Pantheon Road, the Nilgiris and Chintamani offer a large range of shopping to be done under a single roof. For those who are looking for traditional bell metal items, bronze icons, and stone sculpture, as well as other crafts of the southern region, the best place to shop would be the Tamil Nadu State Emporia - Poompuhar.

For more details, please visit: www.chennaionline.com; tamilnadutourism.com.

Kolkata

A city of love and warmth, sorrow and despair, dreams and hopes, grandeur and glory, Kolkata is compelling, effervescent, teeming with life and traditions, a medley of moods, styles, cultures, politics, industry and commerce. Kolkata, often termed as the intellectual and cultural capital of India, has some of the finest remnants of British colonial architecture. The city also has the heaviest concentration of poets and artists. Once the national capital, it is also known as the City of Palaces. Victoria Memorial, Howrah Bridge, Eden Gardens, and Kali temple are some of the city's well-known landmarks. On the international circuit, it is the most convenient connecting point for places like Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Yangon. It is also the gateway for road travel to the neighboring city of Dhaka in Bangladesh.

Dalhousie Square (renamed Benoy-Badal-Dinesh Bagh after the three martyrs of Bengal), Writers' Building, Raj Bhavan (residence of the Governor), Calcutta High Court, St John's Cathedral are some of the popular tourist spots in the city.

For more details visit: www.calcuttaweb.com

Bengaluru

Called 'The Garden City' and formerly known as Bangalore, it is the hub for Information Technology industry in India. A major industrial and commercial centre in the South, with increasing scientific and research activities, Bangalore is multifaceted with modern marvels, historical monuments, bustling shopping plazas, a race-course and golf courses. Places of tourist interest in and around Bengaluru are the Bull Temple, Lal Bagh (botanical garden), Cubbon Park, the Planetarium, the Vidhana Soudha and Tipu Sultan's Palace. Bangalore is a good place to shop for the various specialties of this state. Among these are Mysore silks, sandalwood items, inlay work with rose wood, brass and ivory artifacts, and lambani jewellery.

For further details, please visit www.onlinebangalore.com

