

FAQs - Essence of India, March 2020 tour

Are you physically capable of taking this tour?

You may need to carry your bag/pack up and down railway station and hotel stairs. There will be plenty of walking around towns or sites, which due to the warm to hot weather in India at this time of year will make general sightseeing a little more strenuous.

Culture Shock

Conditions in India are not always as comfortable as in other countries. You may need to occasionally deal with a squat toilet, cold showers or power failure.

Trains

Train travel in India is essential considering it is such an efficient and extensive network and is also such a part of India's culture and heritage. For our overnight journeys, we travel in air-conditioned sleeper carriages with two levels of berths. They are arranged in door-less sections each of four berths. They also have a row of two-tier (upper and lower) berths along one side. A conductor ensures that nobody without a reservation gets into the carriage. Each carriage usually has one 'squat' style and one western style toilet at either end. Bedding is supplied and is clean, but for peace of mind you may wish to bring a sleeping sheet. Meals are not included during our overnight train journey, but food is usually available. Train journeys by day give us an opportunity to experience Indian life by rubbing shoulders with the locals. Travelling locally is always exciting and fascinating you never know who you will meet.

We will be taking private vehicles or flights for all other journeys.

Meals

We ensure that you experience a vast array of the gustatory treats available in India. Generally, we include either one lunch or dinner daily. More often than not we eat together as a group. For excluded meals, your leader will offer suggestions for favourite restaurants throughout the trip.

Money Matters

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Cirrus/Maestro debit cards and Visa and MasterCard) throughout India. This is a safe and convenient way to access money in India, however we suggest that you bring a small amount of money in cash (suggested \$300) in case there are times that ATMs are not available. The major currencies, including USD and CAD are no problem in general to exchange. Visa & MasterCard credit cards are accepted in major shops and restaurants in the bigger cities.

Spending money

Although entrance fees to specified sites are included in the tour price, there are additional sights that you may like to visit. Many sites levy camera fees. Spending money requirements will differ from one person to the next. You will need to take into consideration your spending habits when allowing for drinks, shopping, and optional activities. We recommend you allow

enough money for the following:

- Meals USD500 (or equivalent)
- Optional Activities USD100 (or equivalent)
- Money for drinks, shopping and incidentals
- Tipping for driver and guides (we will run a USD 150 pp tipping kitty)

Travel insurance

Travel Insurance is highly recommended whilst travelling to India.

Visas

All foreign nationals require a visa to enter India. The official Government of India e-Visa website is <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>

Health

We recommend that you consult your doctor for current medical travel information about before departure. Your leader will be carrying a basic first aid kit, but we suggest you bring along your own as well as any personal medical requirements. For more information, visit:

USA <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>

UK <http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/>

Canada <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/vaccines>

Communications / Keeping in touch

Most of our hotels have Wifi, as do many restaurants and cafes. You can also purchase a local prepaid sim card (for unlocked cell phones) and data sticks (for mobile internet on your laptop) easily and inexpensively in India. Recommended are Vodafone, Airtel and Reliance. You will need extra passport photos for this as well as photocopies of your photo and visa page from your passport.

Responsible travel

We believe strongly in responsible travel. This includes being respectful to the local culture (i.e. dressing appropriately, and learning a few basic cultural do's and don'ts), being mindful of the environment, and leaving a positive image behind. Remember we are ambassadors for our country. Bringing a few photos of your family and home with you is a great way to interact with the locals by giving them a glimpse of your world whilst you visit theirs. India is very conservative, and we ask that you dress accordingly. As a guideline, shoulders and knees should always be covered. The wearing of shorts is looked upon by locals as akin to wearing your underwear and will limit entry into mosques, temples and other places of worship. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool. Singlets, tank tops and short shorts are not suitable attire for India.

International Flights

Arrival is to GOA and departure from KOL. Best international connections may be from BOM or DEL. We are happy to assist with internal flight bookings. We can also help book your international flight if you're flying business or first. Please contact us.

Arrivals

Your airport transfer pickup will await you holding a sign with your name when you exit the baggage claim area of the arrivals hall. There may be large crowds here so please look carefully for your transfer.

Arriving early

Early arrival information

If you are arriving earlier than noon on Day 1, extra accommodation in Panjim is available at USD tba Single/Double (or equivalent) per night per room. Please notify us as early as possible if you require extra accommodation as Coconut Creek Hotel is popular and can be heavily booked up well in advance.

Departure

If you are staying on in Kolkata after the tour, extra accommodation is available at The Fairlawn Elgin for USD tba per night per room. Please inform us as soon as possible.

What to take

Try to pack as lightly as possible. A detailed packing list will be supplied. The smaller your bag in India the better, as the various modes of transport we use tend to have limited storage space. In addition, you will find that your bag probably needs space to expand for all that shopping! Note that most Indian domestic airlines have reduced their check-in baggage allowance to 15kg. If you have heavier luggage, you may need to pay the excess at the airport for your internal flights. Excess luggage charges are around Rs400 (USD 6) per kilo.

Laundry

Inexpensive laundry facilities are offered by most hotels we use and are generally available wherever we have a two night stop.

Weather

The weather during our journey should be great. Daytime temperatures will be warm to hot, in the range 25-35C. Night time temperatures will be comfortable. Rain is not very likely at this time of year, but sun is, so sunblock and a hat are essentials. Blankets are provided on the overnight train journey.

Questions? We're here to help!

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