



**Volunteer Handbook Supplement
for
Delhi, India**

Like all big cities around the world, Delhi is a mixture of the good, the bad and the ugly.

You will experience unbearable heat, heaps of trash on the ground, dusty and polluted air, crazy traffic, non-stop horns, packs of street dogs, occasional beggars and touts, and see the poverty and struggle of many locals.

But you will also find incredibly friendly people, an endlessly fascinating culture, warm and supportive host families, worthwhile volunteer projects, delicious food, beautiful landscapes, museums and ancient temples to visit, the arts, classes for yoga and meditation – the list goes on and on!

Of all the countries where I send volunteers, India to me is the most challenging for foreign travelers. It's a place you might have some long days – but even before you leave India, you'll already be making plans to return!

Regards,

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Culture Shock

The first 24-48 hours in Delhi are critical in your cultural adjustment, so please try not to make any negative judgments about India during this period. You are likely to feel tired, hot and sweaty, and somewhat overwhelmed by the new sights, sounds, etiquette, etc.

*** Expect the unexpected at all times ***

The best way to handle any culture shock is to have an open mind and relaxed attitude.

A common pattern for volunteers is as follows:

- First few days: They do not like India at all and cannot wait to go home.
- By end of first week: They find the country tolerable, maybe even pleasant.
- Rest of stay: They fall in love with the country's culture and people.
- End of stay: They wish they could stay longer and often shed tears upon leaving.

All of this can drive foreigners crazy, especially when they first arrive. Hopefully, you will eventually find, as myself and hundreds of other volunteers have, that Delhi (and India overall) is one of the friendliest, safest places to travel anywhere in the world, where you can make some lifelong friendships while helping out Indians through your volunteer work.

Major things to keep in mind

- Always carry your passport on your person during air travel (not your bags)
- Never drink tap water (at airports and of course while in Delhi)
- PREPARE TO BE UNPREPARED!

The last phrase was told to me in Delhi by a 19 yr old volunteer in April 2011. Before she left her parents' home in the UK a month ago for Delhi, she felt she had consumed as much info as possible in preparation for her trip. Then she arrived in Delhi -- and it was like she hadn't prepared at all! But after a week or so in Delhi, she truly started to feel like an insider who could actually give tours of the place -- and she was right. So please try not to be too concerned about not knowing enough, etc. That's why you're going there, to learn about India -- as a volunteer and an insider!

Packing List

In terms of what to bring from home, there are three things that I would highly recommend:

- Your laptop (our host families all has WIFI)
- Bug spray with DEET
- Small lock(s) - so you can lock valuable in your suitcase during the day

Suggested packing list:

Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Plane Ticket
- Contact information of India Coordinators, Scott Burke, Family/friends
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Cash (at least \$100 USD or equivalent)
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Copies of all of the above (as a backup – either hard copy or in your email)
- Any prescription medicine
- Any electronic equipment (laptops, mobile phone, camera, mp3 player)
- Toiletries (Toothbrush/paste, contact lens solution/case)
- Reading materials
- Pen(s)

Checked Baggage

- 4-6 pair of long pants (a pair of jeans is OK but can be hot)
- 1-2 pairs shorts
- 7-10 short-sleeved tops/t-shirts
- 1-2 long-sleeve shirts
- 4-6 pair of socks
- Sturdy sneakers / shoes for walking
- Sandals / flip-flops
- Sleepwear: long-sleeved shirt(s) and long bottoms (avoid mosquitoes)
- Sun screen
- Bug spray with DEET (I use Jungle Juice)
- Hat (for sun)
- Paper journal / pens
- Eye re-wetting drops (whether you wear contacts or not) because Uganda is very dusty.
- Hand sanitizer
- Over-the-counter medications for pain relief, fever, diarrhea
- Toiletries (soap, shampoo etc)
- Notebooks, pens, paper
- Small travel pack/day pack
- Lightweight, quick-dry towel for bathing

Other Packing Tips

- > There is no need to bring bedding, pillows etc.
- > Theft can be a problem on flights to destinations like India, so do not pack anything valuable in your checked luggage. Pack valuables in a carry-on bag such as a laptop, camera, cash, jewelry, gifts etc.
- > Do not over-pack. Except for some prescription medicine, you can buy anything in India that you forget or leave home on purpose, including toiletries, clothes, electronics, etc.
- > Luggage seems to get really roughed up on these international trips (ripped, wheels missing etc). Instead of new, nice luggage, I suggest buying a cheap suitcase at a thrift store, especially a hard-shell suitcase that will protect your stuff. Duffel bags are too soft and things tend to get broken inside. I am not a fan of huge backpacks in lieu of a larger suitcase, as they seem very hard on one's back. For a carry-on, a small backpack is a good idea (for laptop, any electronics, a few toiletries).
- > What NOT to bring:
 - 1) Plug adapter for electrical appliances. But them in India, as they cost only \$1 USD there and will definitely work. Most host families even have extra.
 - 2) Things like items for donation or sports equipment etc: you can buy them cheaply in Delhi.

Passport

- When flying, always carry your passport on your person and not your bags. Cargo pants with deep/secure pockets are a good place to hold the passport.
- I also put my own passport in a Ziploc baggie at all times, to protect it from sweat, dirt, humidity, and spilled drinks – both when flying and when in India.
- You do not need to carry your passport to your volunteer job each day.
- If you travel outside Kpando, carry your passport with you (on your person). There sometimes police checkpoints between towns and they might ask you for a passport.
- Almost all hotels in India require you to surrender your passport to them at check-in; you get it back when you check-out.
- Lock your passport, cash, camera and other valuables inside your luggage when you are out during the day from your host family or hotel. It is usually best to bring small locks from home.

Traveling to India

Getaway Day

- **Before you leave home, make sure you have your passport!**
- Make sure to bring any prescription medicines.
- Everything else can be replaced easily: clothes, toiletries, etc.

Check-in at airport

- Arrive at the airport at least 3 hours before your flight.
- Assume the airline will be strict with luggage weight rules.

Keep Away Germs on the Flight(s)

The air circulating on airplanes is actually very clean and sanitary (despite public perception). But you still must take steps to avoid germs that might lead to cold or flu. The reasons? The dry air plus the germs from fellow passengers. This is what I do on all of my flights:

- Drink lots of water (nasal membranes need to be moist to work well)
- Use saline nasal spray (ditto)
- Use hand sanitizer
- Wipe down trays and seat handles (with hand sanitizer or anti-bacterial wipe)
- Increase the ventilation at your seat (to avoid saliva droplets from sneezing, coughing and conversation from passengers).

Passing Time on the Flight

- The obvious: sleeping, reading, movies, music, writing, drawing.
- Stay awake and sleep according to the time zone in your destination, in order to adjust more quickly to the time zone there.
- Walk around and exercise your calf muscles every hour in order to prevent [Deep Vein Thrombosis](#).
- Talk to fellow passengers. Perhaps you'll make a new friend, and maybe learn about your destination – especially if they are a local returning home.
- Look out the window! You are 30,000 feet above the earth! Isn't it amazing to see the clouds, stars, the moon, even other planes from this perspective? You're traveling perhaps half-way around the world in less than 24 hours. These things were unfathomable to humans not even a century ago. Consider yourself very fortunate.
- Take photos – some of you, some out the window, maybe even a new friend. You might not realize it now, but in 5, 10, 20+ years these photos will become part of your memories of this special trip.

Afraid of Flying?

I was deathly afraid of flying until 2005. My two fears? I thought turbulence would cause a crash AND I thought the wings flexing meant they might crack from stress. I got “cured” when I educated myself. I read [articles about turbulence](#) – it (almost) never causes jetliners to crash. I also found videos of wing stress tests ([like this one](#)) that show just how strong they are. My favorite author on air-travel is Patrick Smith, who writes a popular [blog on Salon.com](#), published a book, and has his own [website](#).

Arrival Process in Delhi

- > While on the plane into Delhi, staff will give you the Immigration form to fill out. You will present this to Immigration officials at Delhi's airport upon arrival. On the form:
 - Have our coordinator's address and tel number with you to write on the form.
 - Indicate that your "Purpose of Visit" is Leisure/Holiday.
- > After leaving the plane in Delhi, you'll go to the Immigration counters to get your passport stamped. It's extremely rare that the officer will even talk to you. If they ask why you're coming to India, just tell them for holiday.
- > Next go to baggage claim to get your luggage.
- > Next go to a currency exchange counter and exchange \$100 USD in cash (or equivalent) for Indian Rupees.
- > Next walk thru the exit doors and look for our Coordinator – who will be holding a sign with your name on it. Don't panic if you don't see him/her at first -- there are often big crowds there.
- > Our Coordinator will take you in a taxi to the neighborhood in Delhi called East of Kailash where you will stay during your time in Delhi. It's about a 20+ minute ride. If you want to call back home right away to let them know you arrived fine, our Coordinator will allow you to use their cell phone.
- > Once in East of Kailash, our Coordinator will drop you at your host family – to get acquainted and/or to rest. Then at some point that day, our Coordinator will meet with you to start your orientation, sightseeing, take you to buy a mobile, go over safety issues etc.
- > Emergency Plan: If you do not meet our Coordinator at the airport (for whatever reason), please call their mobile number 24 hours. If you cannot reach them, call my mobile 24 hours. I will call either one of my assistant coordinators to come immediately to the airport to pick you up. (Note: this has never happened, but we need to have a backup plan anyway.)

Your Neighborhood

Delhi overall and your neighborhood especially – [East of Kailash](#) (EOK) – is a very safe place with friendly locals who genuinely love to interact with foreigners. It is a "modern" Indian big-city neighborhood, with many types of shops, restaurants, universities, large hospitals, apartment blocks etc. It's about a 20 minute train ride to the center of New Delhi. My volunteers and I experience regular acts of kindness in EOK, with nothing expected in return. Indians will love to share their culture and lives with you – their religion, sports, way of life, even just a cup of tea. EOK is a residential area, with mostly middle and upper-middle class families, so there is no one here from the "tourist" industry to bug you -- in terms of beggars and touts etc. In fact your walks around the EOK area may perhaps be one of the best parts of your trip.

Jet Lag

Flying across multiple time zones disrupts your body's circadian rhythm, leading to sleep problems and other symptoms which fall under the condition known as "jet lag."

Symptoms often include insomnia, waking early, excessive sleepiness, headaches, irritability, digestive problems like constipation or diarrhea, muscle aches, and difficulty concentrating. Younger travelers and female travelers are more susceptible to jet lag, while some travelers are not affected much.

As a general guideline, the recovery rate from jet lag is one day per time zone traveled. So if you live in New York (approx 9 hours behind India), it will take you about four days to recover from the jet lag.

To recover from jet lag:

- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flight
- Try to sleep on the plane if it's nighttime in India
- Adjust to the local day/night schedule immediately
- Try not to sleep until nighttime in India no matter how tired you are
- Exercise daily (during daylight hours, especially early morning)
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol

Big Things to Keep in Mind now that You Are in India

- Only drink water that is bottled or boiled
- Do not go swimming under any circumstances
- Wash your hands frequently (bring hand sanitizer)
- Don't be flashy with cash, cameras, jewelry etc.

Discreet Culture

India has a very discreet culture, along with strong concepts of "saving face" and social hierarchy. For example, things like arguing, yelling, profanity, embarrassing someone, showing any nudity, and being romantic in public are totally frowned upon and rarely seen. Ironically though, you will sometimes see straight male friends holding hands. Elders, males, and people in positions of authority are highly respected and deferred to - whether in a family, office, or social setting. They are never called by their first name, as we often do in the west -- so a teacher is called "Sir", a female boss "Madame", and a coach "Sir" as well. Some sons-in-law greet their mother-in-law by literally touching her foot.

Bad Stuff

The worst parts of India and Delhi from a visitor's perspective are usually the physical things – the heat, trash on the ground, the smells, air pollution, dust, traffic and noise. Not to mention of course the poverty and struggle you will see some people going through daily. Also the spicy food can be a challenge for some. Mosquitoes are a problem and start to bite as soon as the sun goes down, so you must put on bug spray and sleep with long sleeves and pants. You will likely be dehydrated often, so drink at least 3 liters of water daily, even more if you're doing a lot of walking or exercising. Female travelers will get some unwanted attention from men, mostly limited to things like comments from construction workers on the street etc.

Free Time

Our coordinators host dozens of volunteers and interns at any given time, many more in summers. So there are always other young people around for activities like sightseeing, going to night clubs, out to dinner etc. Delhi has lots of museums, malls, cinema, live performances, just about any type of leisure activity any big city would have. Also, there are plenty of facilities where you can take classes (some for free) for things like yoga, meditation, Bollywood dancing, sports etc. If you're into nature and the outdoors, you should visit Lodi Gardens regularly which is a hugely popular park with locals.

Religion

Religion is everywhere in India and it dominates locals lives in thought and action. Most people are Hindus, while some are Muslim and Buddhists, with temples and mosques all over the city, some as small as a bathroom and some as large as an office building. Some families even have temples inside their houses. There are literally over 300 million documented gods in Hinduism (that is not a typo), and people tend to pick one and focus on them their whole lives. In EOK, one of the largest temples is ISKON temple, which has 3 tall structures that can be seen from far away and are good navigation landmarks. ISKON is run by the Hare Krishnas who run a religion that was started in the 1960s (and some still consider a cult!).

Getting Around

Walking is one of the best and safest ways to get around. For longer distances, the most popular for short rides are the 3 wheeled "auto rickshaws" (always agree on the fare before getting in; they don't like to use meters). Next is the "metro" which is their train / subway line that is fantastic and cheap and air-conditioned and runs all over Delhi. Buy a smart card at the station in your area for cheaper fares and fast travel. There are taxis too, but they are usually too expensive for volunteers after a while.

Age of Innocence

Indians seem to have a sense of innocence, something that parts of the western world have lost in our post-post ironic cultures. It can be subtle but you'll start to notice it if you make yourself aware. For example, most people really are excited to be around a foreigner. Even in a huge town like Delhi, we are considered exotic and many people are really interested to talk to us and perhaps snap a photo with us. But because of their generally reserved culture – it is usually up to us to break the ice, so try it often. Only those Indians at the extremes – those who have traveled abroad a lot and those in severe poverty - don't seem to share/display this feeling – but they're certainly not unfriendly. The newspapers there love to include photos of foreigners, even if they had nothing to do with the story, because it gets people to notice! [One day, as I sat in a park watching a cricket match, a family came up to me and sat down, so their daughter could take photos of all us - without even asking me. It was very endearing.]

Life at the Host Family

- Breakfast: served between 7-8am.
- Dinner: served between 7-9pm.
- Lunch: most volunteers don't eat with their host family's; they go to local shops
- Most families are vegetarian
- Most food is spicy - although they will tone it down for you upon request
- They will have clean, filtered water for you
- Beds are usually hard as a rock
- There is air-conditioning but you have to pay for it - there's a meter in your room
- When not in your room, lock valuables in closet or suitcase (passport, cash, laptop)
- Cleaning ladies come in almost everyday -- don't leave valuables around
- Mosquitoes are a problem! They start biting at sundown, so put bug spray on
- You can use the family's washing machine once a week
- Absolutely no guests are allowed overnight at your host family
- Toilets are western style, with the option of toilet tissue or your left hand (with water)
- Ask host family how to turn on the hot water
- Don't expect much water pressure out of the shower
- Some families have a small temple inside their house

Internet

You will have WIFI access at your host family. So feel free to bring your laptop. If not, you can always get online at one of the Internet cafes which are all over the city. Our host families strongly prefer that volunteers do not use the family's computer.

Phones

I strongly encourage you to have a mobile phone in India. This can be a phone you bring from home or a phone you purchase in India.

Phone from home

If your phone from home is "locked," you can take the phone to shops in India who will "unlock" the phone for a small fee. With an unlocked phone, you just need to buy a SIM card in India. The SIM card will have a local Indian telephone number.

Phone bought in India

I RECOMMEND THIS OPTION.

New mobile phones in India start at around \$25 USD. The shops will require you to give them a copy of your passport and visa as well as a passport sized photo. (Don't waste the time or money on getting the copies and photo done at home – our Coordinator will show you where to do it in EOK.) Mobile phone usage in India is mostly pay-as-you-go. You buy "talk time" credits from any phone shops. Incoming calls and texts are free – including international ones.

We have found the phone infrastructure in India to be spotty and sometimes unreliable, with regular dropped calls or no connectivity. **Do not rely on text messages as a means of communicating, whether local or international, because they often do not go through.** Voice calls are the most reliable way to communicate by phone both in India and back home.

The best ways for people back home to call your cell phone is to:

- 1) call phone-to-phone: by buying a phone card from a place like www.nobelcom.com, or
- 2) Skype-to-phone: they would use Skype to call your cell phone (they need to buy credit on Skype).

Dress Code

For your volunteer work, I recommend long pants, short-sleeve shirt, and closed-toe shoes. Please do not wear tight fitting or revealing clothes – even if you see other volunteers breaking these rules. It is really disrespectful of the culture.

Misc Travel Tips for India

- Only drink water that is bottled or boiled
- Do not go swimming under any circumstances
- Wash your hands frequently (bring hand sanitizer)
- Don't be flashy with cash, cameras, jewelry etc.

Money Matters

India is largely a cash-based society, so expect to pay cash for everything. Credit cards are not always accepted, except at higher-end hotels and travel companies. Even where credit / debit cards are accepted, I still recommend cash because of the security risk. There are ATM's available everywhere in Delhi (although not all of them work with foreign cards). If you reach your ATM withdraw limit and need more cash, you can walk into most banks with your passport and ATM card and have a teller do a larger transaction. We've found that the ATM daily limit is about \$200 USD.

Safety

Delhi is overall a safe city if you use common sense. Even female volunteers have never had any serious issues with security in Delhi and throughout India. I encourage you to walk around with our coordinators and other trusted locals to see the place on ground level and get to know the place intimately.

Please follow these safety precautions:

- Lock your passport, cash, camera and other valuables inside your luggage when you are not in your room. It is usually best to bring small locks from home.
- Beggars and touts are only a problem at tourist monuments and backpacker areas.
- Be careful about street dogs at night! They are territorial and might follow you - don't run though, just stop.
- Do not walk alone at night - say after 9pm (hire a vehicle).
- Watch for pickpockets on crowded streets, markets, bus stations, and tourist venues.
- For females mostly: Never admit to strangers to being alone; tell them your friend / parents will join you in a few minutes.
- Do not go swimming at all. (Drowning and traffic accidents are the leading causes of injury and illness for travelers abroad.)

Photos, Video, Electronics

- Always ask before taking a photo or video of someone.
- Be very careful when wielding your camera in public -- for anti-theft purposes.
- The worst place for a camera abroad is usually around your neck, as it's visible and easy to snatch from you.
- When flying or on a bus: always pack electronic equipment in your carry-on bag (laptop, cameras, mp3 player etc) so they are always in sight.
Always back-up your photos/video regularly -- even on a daily basis! Transfer them to a laptop, smart phone, pen drive -- anything so that you have backups in case your camera is lost/stolen/damaged.

The biggest news stories in India in Early 2011

- India just won the cricket World Cup.
- Long-time activist Anna Hazare is the most famous person in India at the moment. He recently went on a hunger strike to fight government corruption.
- Corporate execs have been jailed in the "2G Scam" re: wireless contracts
- Actress Sonam Kapoor claimed "I have no rivals in Bollywood"!