



Two weeks in Sri Lanka, I thought, would allow me to acclimatise to the month I had before me in India...I was wrong. But sometimes, ignorance really is bliss.

Wide-eyed and gob-smacked, nothing could have prepared me for this country of 1.33 billion. But, don't get me wrong, I would do it all again... that sensory-overloaded adventure in one of the largest countries on earth.



The majestic Taj Mahal. Image: Akshaye Kumar

We began our journey on India's western coastline, picking the well-known tourist town of Goa. Hammocks, beach parties and markets play homage to the historical hippie's movement from the 70s. It felt safe enough for two Australian girls in their mid-20s to relax in before heading north.



Jamia Masjid of Delhi is one of the many significant places to visit in Old Delhi.

Image: Akshaye Kumar

Beginning the journey

I used **Booking.com** to find a one-week stay, close to the cafes and beach. Getting from the airport to Goa was a one-hour drive and we booked a private shuttle safely in the airport. While Goa is known for its fish curries, we decided to go vegetarian for the month. It was easier than I thought. India does vegetarian well and, if you're like me, you won't feel a lack in your diet. Be careful of cocktails though. I'd suggest sticking to beer because the server opens it in front of you.

When in India, it's best to lean on the side of precaution.



Built in 1565, Agra Fort is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Image: Akshaye Kumar

Should you do a tour?

Seasoned-travellers (and having lived in [SE Asia](#) for over six months), we felt confident once we were at our destinations. But, we didn't want to risk taking overnight trains alone or trying to navigate cities like New Delhi. We also knew many of the spots that were on our list, weren't easy to get to.

After much deliberating between "should we do it ourselves" and "we're two young girls in India", we decided on a 15-day tour with [Gap Adventures](#).

In hindsight, some of my favourite memories happened in villages I would have never visited. We were treated like royalty, on a camel ride through a town called Tordi. The locals welcomed us with smiles and waves - an unspoken dialogue that helped me understand the beauty of their culture.



We were treated like royalty when riding on camels in Tordi. Image: Hillman India Adventure

Wrapping up in New Delhi

The tour we chose wrapped around New Delhi, including Jaipur, the pink city, into the desert, and over to Agra, home to the majestic Taj Mahal. The quintessential holy city, Varanasi,



where millions of Hindus go to cremate their loved ones on the River Ganges, was the last stop on the two-week trek.



*The Taj Mahal is a globally recognised site that symbolises the rich history of India.
Image: Akshaye Kumar*

Advice for first-time visitors

I still think of many of these colourful memories, nearly three years on. For first-time visitors to India, I suggest following a similar path as we did. Those rare moments of solitude are essential on a trip to India and being with a group offers you (and your family back home) peace of mind.

You can still pick moments to explore autonomously. But, you can do it with the safety of a group knowing where you are at all times. Trust me, India isn't the place for big egos. Accept the help and enjoy making new friends in unfamiliar lands.

But before the forts, cows, spices & curries...



It's a good idea to explore in a group, Swarn Jayanti Dwar, Pathankot.

Prepare yourself!

When it comes to India, you can't overprepare. Okay, maybe, but recognise this is going to be unlike any other place you've ever been. It'll push you to the limits, but there are beautiful lessons to unravel.

Visas & onward flights

Before you book your flight (and your tour), apply for a visa. Every traveller requires a visa, so don't assume you can get this once you arrive – here's the official [website](#).

The same goes for your onward flight. We missed our first flight from Sri Lanka to India because we didn't have proof of a flight out of the country. Again, we assumed we could do this there. They won't let you on the flight, so have it printed out as you board.



Have proof of your onward flight with you when you travel to India. Image: Jovita Aranha

Vaccinations & travel insurance

As I was living in [Bali](#) at the time, all my vaccinations were up to date. I recommend visiting your doctor before you leave to find out what you need to be covered for. [Smart Traveller](#) is also a great resource, for preliminary research.

Make sure you take out a new travel insurance policy. I use [World Nomads](#).

Clothes & daily supplies

Expect to be uncomfortably hot, a lot of the time. But, you're in India, so respect cultural



norms when it comes to clothes. T-shirts are better than singlets. Long, flowy skirts are favoured over shorts. It's important to follow cultural customs, especially in religious areas. You can't expose your legs at the Taj Mahal. You'll discover 'rules' like this, along your journey. Pack accordingly.



Be conscious of what you wear, particularly in religious areas.

Money & belongings

Don't assume in a country of billions, ATMs are readily available. If you're on a tour, your guide will be able to show you the safe places to get money out. I would take out lots of \$200 at a time, leaving most of it in the hotel safe, and bringing \$20-30 out with me. Unless we were visiting major attractions with entrance fees, \$25 per day is more than enough.



The Red Fort is just one of the sights you should see. Image: Akshaye Kumar

Decompressing after your trip

Whether you're returning home or flying to another country, give yourself a couple of days to decompress after India. Trust me, you're going to need it... physically, emotionally and mentally.

For every pungent smell and chaotic, in-humane sight you'll see, there are many more heart-opening, spiritually-awakening moments that'll change you. Get ready for a full mind, body and soul adventure.

Do you plan on experiencing the sights and sounds of India for yourself?