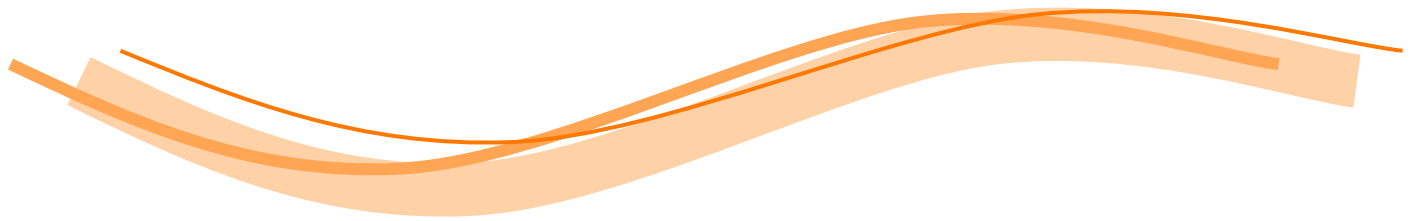




INDIA with INSIGHT VACATIONS





<p>INDIA</p>	<p>This is an incredible land that overwhelms visitors with an intoxicating mix of exotic culture, unfamiliar history and equally magnificent landscapes and architecture. This land assaults every sense with an intense pot-pourri of experiences. It's immersive. It's ecstatic. It's Incredible India!</p> <p>It's a great choice if you want to visit somewhere truly unique and different. India offers a different aspect of her personality to each traveller to the country – exotic, extravagant, elegant and eclectic.</p> <p>There is so much discover and a great place to start to discover this fascinating country is at the immersive website www.incredibleindia.org which has wonderful photography and video as well as a depth of content.</p> <p>The different facets of the jewel that is India draw visitors for many reasons. Some come to discover the history that dates back 5,000 years – leaving fascinating stories written in the stones of Hindu Temples, fabulous Mughal monuments or fantastic palaces of Maharajahs.</p> <p>Others are drawn by the spirituality of a culture that spawned 4 major world religions - the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain religions all originated in India and have shaped its future ever since. Linked to this mysticism is India's culture of wellness. For instance, imagine visiting an ashram in Rishikesh, home to a 2,000-year-old Vishnu Shrine and also the "Yoga capital of the world". It's an ideal destination, not only for pilgrims, but also for those who want to delve deeper into meditation, yoga and other ancient practices.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>India covers an area of 3,287,590 sq. km, extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to the tropical rain forests of the south. As the 7th largest country in the world, India stands apart from the rest of Asia, marked off as it is by mountains and the sea, which give the country a distinct geographical entity. Bounded by the Great Himalayas in the north, it stretches southwards and at the Tropic of Cancer, tapers off into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west.</p> <p>Lying entirely in the northern hemisphere, the mainland extends between latitudes 8° 4' and 37° 6' north, longitudes 68° 7' and 97° 25' east and measures about 3,214 km from north to south between the extreme latitudes and about 2,933 km from east to west between the extreme longitudes. It has a land frontier of about 15,200 km. The total length of the coastline of the mainland, Lakshadweep Islands and Andaman & Nicobar Islands is 7,517 km.</p>

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Geography	India is hugely diverse in its geography. The mainland comprises of four regions, namely the great mountain zone, plains of the Ganga and the Indus, the desert region, and the southern peninsula.
Name	The name India is derived from Indus, which originates from the Old Persian word Hinduš. This word comes from the Sanskrit word Sindhu, which was the historical local name for the Indus River. The ancient Greeks referred to the Indians as Indoi, which translates as "the people of the Indus".
Population	India's population, as at 2011 stood at 1,210,000,000 i.e.1.2 billion. India will overtake China as the world's most populous country around 2020, although the birth rate is slowing.
Language	There are 22 different languages that have been recognised by the Constitution of India, of which Hindi is an Official Language. There is a 75% literacy level.
Currency	The Indian Rupee is the national currency. Currently (May 2015) one Canadian Dollar buys 52 Indian Rupees. You cannot obtain Indian currency anywhere outside India, and you may not carry rupees beyond India's borders.
Tipping	Always carry some small denomination Rupee bills with you for tipping and "baksheesh". Bear in mind that many of the people who serve you are possibly living on the bread line, and your monetary contribution will be greatly appreciated; handing over a Rs 10 or Rs 20 note will hardly dent your pocket. Obviously it's not worthwhile to tip someone who hasn't eased your journey, but do reward those drivers, guides, and hotel staff who go out of their way to make your stay an enjoyable one. A driver or guide who's been with you an entire day will be most grateful for an extra Rs 200 to Rs 300 which is \$4 - \$6 CDN
Government	India is the world's most populous democracy. A parliamentary republic with a multi-party system, it has six recognised national parties, including the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and more than 40 regional parties. There are 29 States and 7 Union Territories.
Documentation	Canadians wishing to travel to India are required to possess a valid passport of their country and a valid Indian visa. The Consular Passport and Visa (CPV) Division of the Ministry of External Affairs is responsible for issuing Indian visas to foreign nationals for their visit for various purposes. This facility is granted through various Indian missions abroad. See more at: http://www.incredibleindia.org/en/india-essentials-travel-tip/travel-tips/getting-your-visa#sthash.mgTPF8Qh.dpuf
Time zone	The whole sub-continent is 9.5 hours ahead of EST or 10.5 hours when daylight saving time is in effect.
Health	This is a big concern for many considering a trip to India – but it really

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	<p>needn't be. The first thing to do is to consult your doctor or local travel clinic concerning precautions against diseases that are prevalent in India. However, don't be alarmed: millions of travellers leave India having suffered nothing more than an upset stomach -- even this small inconvenience should settle within a few days, your system the stronger for it.</p> <p>Vaccinations: you will almost certainly be advised to be vaccinated against hepatitis A, cholera, tetanus, and typhoid; also make sure your polio immunization is up to date.</p> <p>Packing a First-Aid Kit: take an antidiarrheal medication, of which the most important are rehydration salts. It's also worthwhile to take an antiseptic cream. Pack prescription medications in your carry-on luggage in their original containers with pharmacy labels, so they'll make it through airport security.</p> <p>Malaria -- Most doctors will advise you to take a course of antimalarial tablets, but it depends on where you are travelling. For instance, in the "Golden Triangle" around Delhi, the current advice is that no tablets are necessary.</p> <p>Tummy Troubles: many visitors to India fall victim to the ubiquitous "Delhi belly," an unfortunate reaction to unfamiliar rich and spicy foodstuffs that can overwhelm the system and cause symptoms ranging from slight discomfort and "the runs" to extreme cases of nausea. To avoid this, simply be sensible. Adjust slowly; move on to spicy foods in small doses. You should also be on your guard about where you eat; if you have any fears at all, stick to the upmarket restaurants, usually those in five-star hotels. Remember that uncooked vegetables or fruit can be hazardous if washed in water that has not been boiled, so peel all your own fresh fruit and avoid salads.</p> <p>I travelled for two weeks recently in India and following these precautions I was fine throughout the trip.</p>
Safety tips	<p>Considering its poverty and population size, India enjoys an amazingly low incidence of violent crime, and the vast majority of visits to India tend to be trouble-free. The usual rules apply: do not wander around back alleys at night and ensure that you wear no flashy jewellery.</p>

CLIMATE	
General climate	<p>The climate of India can broadly be classified as a tropical monsoon one. But, in spite of much of the northern part of India lying beyond the tropical zone, the entire country has a tropical climate marked by relatively high temperatures and dry winters. There are four seasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - winter (December-February) - summer (March-June) - south-west monsoon season (June-September) - post monsoon season (October-November)

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Today's weather	Agra's temperature today (May 9, 2015) is 40C and sunny.
Best time to visit	<p>This depends on which part of India you are intending to visit. India's vastness means that the climate varies greatly from region to region, and sometimes even from day to night, as in the desert regions. The Indian year features six seasons: spring, summer, the rainy season, early and late autumn, and winter, but effectively there are but three: summer, winter, and monsoon.</p> <p>You'll be better off visiting during the high-season winter months (Nov-Mar), when most of the country experiences pleasant, moderate temperatures (still hot enough to luxuriate in the pool), though cities in the north get chillier days as snow falls in the Himalayas. As a rule, always be prepared for warm to hot days, with the possibility of cooler weather at night. As with all season-driven destinations, there is a downside to travelling during peak months: from December to January, for example, Goa swells to bursting point with foreigners and city folk who arrive for the sensational beaches and parties. Lodging rates rise during these periods, so you may want to wait until the shoulder season (Sept-Oct, Mar-Apr), when there are fewer people and rates are very negotiable.</p> <p>Summer (generally Apr-June) sees little traffic, because the daytime heat, particularly in India's north-central regions, is debilitating, even for the locals. This is the time to plan your trip to the Himalayas instead, particularly to high altitude provinces such as Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir. Ladakh, a magical region in the far north of the country, can only be visited June through September.</p> <p>The monsoon drenches much of the country between June and September, usually starting its season in Kerala. Tamil Nadu and parts of Andhra Pradesh don't get too much rain during this period; instead they get more rainfall from a second monsoon that hits just this region around mid-October and runs through December. In Rajasthan, central India, and the northern plains, the rains typically arrive by July and fall until early September. Some of the regions are at their most beautiful during the monsoon, but it can be difficult to move around, and there is a higher risk of malaria.</p>

GETTING AROUND	
Getting There	<p>There is great news for anyone with India on their bucket list! Air Canada has announced that from November 2015 they will offer non-stop flights from Toronto to Delhi aboard their state of the art B787 Dreamliner aircraft. This will be the only non-stop service to India from Canada and tickets are already on sale! If you aren't based in Toronto don't worry – Air Canada has set the flight times to fit in with convenient connections both within Air Canada's North American network (a network that includes Montreal amongst 60 other Canadian cities).</p>

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	<p>Air Canada's flight timings on the Toronto Delhi route are excellent. Flights depart Toronto at 20.55 and arrive in Delhi at 21.55 the next day. Flights depart Delhi at 00.45 and arrive in Toronto at 05.00 same day. Flight time is approximately 14 hours. Flights depart four times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.</p>
<p>Cities</p>	<p>Most people visit the "Golden Triangle" of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur on their first visit to India.</p> <p>Delhi Delhi is one of the oldest cities in the world, yet the extraordinary progress India is making towards modernization is also apparent. This interweaving blend of old and new worlds makes for a fascinating visit. New Delhi has gracious colonial buildings built by the British and the foundation stone of the city was laid by George V, Emperor of India in 1911. New Delhi is considered the masterpiece of British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. Stately and historic, Delhi boasts an array of historical sites including three UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The first is the Red Fort - the ultimate symbol of Mughal power in India, with its 60 foot high watchtowers and massive battlement walls stretching over 2.5 kms. The second is Hamayun's Tomb, which is considered to be the prototype for the Taj Mahal. It is the tomb of the second Mughal Emperor, Hamayun, and was built by his wife. And Qutub Minar, India's tallest minaret and a miracle of architectural achievement in its time, is made of red sandstone and marble and inscribed with verses from the Qur'an. Delhi also provides the visitor with the opportunity to learn about how modern India achieved independence and to glimpse the extraordinary life of Ghandi, the father of the nation. Ghandi Smriti was Ghandi's last home in 1947-1948 and shows his footprints to the exact spot where he was shot by an assassin and killed. His study and his bedroom in a colonial bungalow were simple rooms and his few possessions are still in place.</p> <p>Agra Agra is an ancient city that came into the limelight during the reign of the Mughals. It is famous for one of the Seven New Wonders of the World - the Taj Mahal. The Taj is a monument of such incredible elegance that it is considered synonymous with beauty itself. Emperor Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal to be the final resting place of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal who died bearing their 14th child. Ultimately, it is a testament to love and devotion. They lie here side by side – together forever in endless love. Today it is recognized as a</p>

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	<p>UNESCO World Heritage Site. Agra's second UNESCO World Heritage Site is its own Red Fort built by Akbar, the 3rd Mughal Emperor between 1565 to 1573.</p> <p>Jaipur Jaipur is known as the "Pink City" because in 1876 the whole city was painted pink to welcome Edward, Prince of Wales. The Maharajas of Jaipur had incredible wealth and Jaipur was designed in 1727 as Asia's first planned city. The Maharajas created a lake for the city and built an island palace. Jaipur's famous Palace of the Wind has a beautiful frontage with 365 windows - but it's a mere façade to allow women of the Islamic court to view the city's street life unobserved. The Amber Fort is yet another UNESCO World Heritage site in this country that seems to have an endless supply of them. The fort itself was constructed 1588-1710 and includes The Hall of Public Audiences is an elegant colonnaded space with views down to the exquisite gardens on an island in the lake below the ramparts. And the Maharajah's Mirrored Palace is fabulous – the Maharajah imported countless mirrors to India at huge expense to beautify the ceiling with glass inlaid panels and mirrors. The mirrors are of convex shape and designed with coloured foil and paint so they glitter brightly under candle light.</p>
<p>Distances</p>	<p>Toronto to Delhi: 11,650 kms Delhi to Kolkata: 1,300 kms Delhi to Mumbai: 1,160 kms</p>
<p>Trains</p>	<p>India's rail network is the second largest in the world, and you can pretty much get anywhere in the country by train. Generally, you should only consider long-distance train travel if you are assured of exotic scenery (like the Konkan Railway, which connects Mumbai with Goa, Karnataka, and Kerala, running along the Konkan coast); or if the journey is overnight (like Delhi to Varanasi) and you have reserved a first-class air-conditioned sleeper or second-class air-conditioned sleeper berth. You will be particularly comfortable aboard the overnight Rajdhani: the superfast train connects Delhi to Mumbai for Rs 2,145 or to Kolkata (Howrah) for Rs 2,180 in the two-tier A/C (air-conditioned) class; it also connects Delhi with Chennai, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Thiruvananthapuram, Abu Road, Ahmedabad, and Ajmer.</p> <p>The best daytime travel train is the Shatabdi; these intercity trains have several routes between important tourist destinations. Book a seat in the air-conditioned Chair Car class; small meals, tea, coffee, and bottled water are included in the ticket price, seats are comfortable and clean, and toilets are usually usable. I travelled from Jhansi to Agra on the Shatabdi and it was a great experience!</p>

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	<p>Luxury Trains Evoke the luxury of a bygone era in the luxury trains of India. You can soak in the sights of various parts of India on trains take you to the times of the Maharajas with the same impeccable service and luxury that they were accustomed to. You can choose from the following: The Deccan Odyssey The Palace on Wheels Golden Chariot Royal Rajasthan on Wheels Maharaja Express Check out the last one here: www.the-maharajas.com For roughly \$6,000 US the Maharajas' Express package provides accommodation in double or twin bedded cabins with en-suite bathrooms and is inclusive of all meals, soft beverages, house brands of wines, beer and spirits. It also includes butler service, paramedic services on-board, guided off-tour excursions, entrance fees, transport and services of a guide & portorage at stations.</p> <p>Mountain Trains If you have some time to spare, take a slow toy train up to the hill resort of Shimla, Ooty (Udhagamandalam), Darjeeling or Matheran. There is nothing to match the experience of chugging up the hills, past little hamlets and terraced fields, making your way through tunnels and over breathtaking bridges. Its leisurely pace offers you a panoramic view of changing vistas. The invigorating air and the delights of scenic hill resort provide a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the city.</p> <p>Darjeeling The most famous of the little trains, is the one linking the town of New Jalpaiguri the plains to the lovely hill station of Darjeeling. With a 2 ft gauge, the Darjeeling Hill Railway is indeed a 'toy train' being the narrowest of the regular narrow gauges. The tiny century old engine is connoisseur's delight. The 86 km Darjeeling line has no tunnels, thus allowing the traveller an uninterrupted view of the breathtaking scenery of the Himalaya. The 7.5 hour ride is a journey especially for rail buffs.</p>
Car Rental	<p>Although car rental is extensively available, this is one country where even I would think twice before driving myself around! I recommend hiring a driver and a car together – the rates are very reasonable and you can relax as someone else navigates the perils of Indian roads!</p>
Buses	<p>Not recommended in India, as they tend to be overcrowded and uncomfortable. Tour operator coaches are a notable exception to this rule.</p>

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<p>ACCOMMODATION TYPES</p>	<p>There are accommodations to fit every traveller's choice and wallet. They range from the simplest of hostel style city accommodations to the most palatial imaginable – and then some. One of the hotel types that India is particularly rich in are heritage hotels.</p> <p>Staying in a medieval palace or fort is a unique and wonderful option among India's accommodations (particularly in Rajasthan), especially when your host is the aristocrat whose forebears built the palace or fort in which you're overnighing. Many were built centuries ago, so it's not surprising that heritage hotels are seldom the most luxurious option, with the possibilities of many stairs, dodgy plumbing, low ceilings, strange room layouts, and other eccentricities. Acting principally as marketing agencies for privately owned palaces, forts, and havelis (Indian mansions), as well as a number of small resorts around the country (primarily North India), it's worth checking out www.heritagehotels.com as well as the portfolio of properties that are bookable through WelcomHeritage www.welcomheritagehotels.com .</p> <p>Most heritage properties are individually owned, but a group that enjoys an excellent reputation for selecting and renovating these is Neemrana; check out www.neemranahotels.com to view their select collection of lovely boutique heritage hotels, often located in off-the-beaten-track destinations; rates generally represent excellent value.</p>
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<p>LIFESTYLES</p>	
<p>Families</p>	<p>Don't imagine that you cannot take children to India. There is so much in this great country to engage youngsters of all ages. Indians love kids too, and you will find that having children with you will open many doors to locals and their families.</p>
<p>Romance</p>	<p>It is difficult to imagine anything more romantic than seeing the moonlight on the Taj Mahal, or staying on a Victorian houseboat in Kashmir, or watching dawn over the Khajuraho temples, or sunset over a palm-fringed Indian Ocean beach...or a hundred and one other such unique locales that India can conjure up.</p>
<p>Zoomers</p>	<p>In many ways, this is an ideal destination for Zoomers. It is not an easy country to travel around, but Zoomers bring an experience and a depth of understanding that help make sense of the overwhelming diversity of Indian experiences. Guided tours can ease the way, but however Zoomers choose to see India – most will return for more.</p>

<p>UNIQUES</p>	
<p>Surprising</p>	<p>India is a rare and refreshing example of a country where almost everyone seems to love their elected head. Prime Minister Narendra Modi seems to enjoy an almost universal popularity not only in India but also in the neighbouring countries too.</p>

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History

History is richly laid upon this land. It is almost impossible to give a quick summary of such a lengthy and eventful history of a sub-continent, but here goes...

India's history and culture is dynamic, spanning back to the beginning of human civilization. It begins with a mysterious culture along the Indus River and in farming communities in the southern lands of India. The history of India is punctuated by constant integration of migrating people with the diverse cultures that surround India. Available evidence suggests that the use of iron, copper and other metals was widely prevalent in the Indian sub-continent at a fairly early period, which is indicative of the progress that this part of the world had made. By the end of the fourth millennium BC, India had emerged as a region of highly developed civilization.

The Indus Valley Civilization

The History of India begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization, more precisely known as Harappan Civilization. It flourished around 2,500 BC, in the western part of South Asia, what today is Pakistan and Western India. The Indus Valley was home to the largest of the four ancient urban civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China. Nothing was known about this civilization till 1920s when the Archaeological Department of India carried out excavations in the Indus valley wherein the ruins of the two old cities - Mohenjodaro and Harappa - were unearthed. The ruins of buildings and other things like household articles, weapons of war, gold and silver ornaments, seals, toys, pottery wares, etc., show that some four to five thousand years ago a highly developed Civilization flourished in this region.

The Indus valley civilization was basically an urban civilization and the people lived in well-planned and well-built towns, which were also the centers for trade. The ruins of Mohenjodaro and Harappa show that these were magnificent merchant cities-well planned, scientifically laid, and well looked after. They had wide roads and a well-developed drainage system. The houses were made of baked bricks and had two or more storeys.

The highly civilized Harappans knew the art of growing cereals, and wheat and barley constituted their staple food. They consumed vegetables and fruits and ate mutton, pork and eggs as well. Evidences also show that they wore cotton as well as woollen garments. By 1500 BC, the Harappan culture came to an end. Among various causes ascribed to the decay of Indus Valley Civilization are the invasion by the Aryans, the recurrent floods and other natural causes like earthquake.

Vedic civilization

The Vedic civilization is the earliest civilization in the history of ancient

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India associated with the coming of Aryans. It is named after the Vedas, the early literature of the Hindu people. The Vedic Civilization flourished along the river Saraswati, in a region that now consists of the modern Indian states of Haryana and Punjab. Vedic is synonymous with Aryans and Hinduism, which is another name for religious and spiritual thought that has evolved from the Vedas. The largely accepted view is that a section of Aryans reached the frontiers of the Indian subcontinent around 2000 BC and first settled in Punjab and it is here, in this land, where the hymns of Rigveda were composed.

The Aryans lived in tribes and spoke Sanskrit, which belonged to the Indo-European group of languages. Gradually, the Aryans intermingled with the local people and a historic synthesis was worked out between the Aryan tribes and the original inhabitants. This synthesis broadly came to be known as Hinduism. The Ramayana and Mahabharata were the two great epics of this period.

The Buddhist Era

During the life time of Lord Gautam Buddha, sixteen great powers (Mahajanpadas) existed in the 7th and early 6th centuries BC. Among the more important republics were the Sakyas of Kapilavastu and the Licchavis of Vaishali. Besides the republics, there were monarchical states, among which the important ones were Kaushambi (Vatsa), Magadha, Kosala and Avanti. These states were ruled by vigorous personalities who had embarked upon the policies of aggrandisement and absorption of neighbouring states. However, there were distinct signs of the republican states while those under the monarchs were expanding.

Buddha was born in BC 560 and died at the age of eighty in BC 480. The place of his birth was a grove known as Lumbini, near the city of Kapilavastu, at the foot of Mount Palpa in the Himalayan ranges within Nepal. Buddha, whose original name was Siddhartha Gautama, was the founder of Buddhism, the religion and the philosophical system that evolved into a great culture throughout much of southern and eastern Asia.

Alexander's Invasion

In 326 BC, Alexander invaded India, after crossing the river Indus he advanced towards Taxila. He then challenged king Porus, ruler of the kingdom between the rivers Jhelum and Chenab. The Indians were defeated in the fierce battle, even though they fought with elephants, which the Macedonians had never before seen. Alexander captured Porus and, like the other local rulers he had defeated, allowed him to continue to govern his territory.

During this trip to rivers Hydaspes and Indus in the south, Alexander

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sought out the Indian philosophers, the Brahmins, who were famous for their wisdom, and debated with them on philosophical issues. He became legendary for centuries in India for being both, a wise philosopher and a fearless conqueror.

One of the villages in which the army halted belonged to the Mallis, who were said to be one of the most warlike of the Indian tribes. Alexander was wounded several times in this attack, most seriously when an arrow pierced his breastplate and his ribcage. The Macedonian officers rescued him in a narrow escape from the village.

Alexander and his army reached the mouth of the Indus in July 325 BC, and turned westward for home.

The Mauryan Empire

The period of the Mauryan Empire (322 BC-185 BC) marked a new epoch in the history of India. It is said to be a period when chronology became definite. It was a period when politics, art, trade and commerce elevated India to a glorious height. It was a period of unification of the territories which lay as fragmented kingdoms. Moreover, Indian contact with the outside world was established effectively during this period.

The confusion following the death of Alexander gave Chandragupta Maurya an opportunity to liberate the countries from the yoke of the Greeks, and thus occupy the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. He later overthrew the power of Nandas at Magadha with the aid of Kautilya, and founded a glorious Mauryan empire in 322 BC. Chandragupta, who ruled from 324 to 301 BC, thus, earned the title of liberator and the first emperor of Bharata.

At a higher age, Chandragupta got interested in religion and left his throne to his son Bindusar in 301 BC. Bindusar conquered the Highland of Deccan during his reign of 28 years and gave his throne to his son Ashoka in 273 BC. Ashoka emerged not only as the most famous king of the Maurya dynasty, but is also regarded as one of the greatest king of India and the world.

His empire covered the whole territory from Hindu Kush to Bengal and extended over Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the whole of India with the exception of a small area in the farthest south. The valleys of Nepal and Kashmir were also included in his empire.

The most important event of Ashoka's reign was the conquest of Kalinga (modern Odisha) which proved to be the turning point of his life. The Kalinga war witnessed terrible manslaughter and destruction. The sufferings and atrocities of the battlefield lacerated the heart of Ashoka. He made a resolve not to wage war any more. He realised the wickedness of worldly conquest and the beauty of moral and spiritual triumph. He was drawn to the teachings of Buddha and devoted his life to the conquest of men's heart by the law of duty or piety. He evolved a

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policy of Dharma Vijaya, 'Conquest by Piety'.

End of the Mauryan Empire

Ashoka was succeeded by weak rulers, which encouraged the provinces to proclaim their independence. The arduous task of administering such a vast empire could not be executed by the weak rulers. The mutual quarrel among the successors also contributed to the decline of the Mauryan Empire.

In the beginning of the 1st century A.D., the Kushanas established their authority over the north-west frontier of India. The most famous among the Kushana kings was Kanishka (125 A.D.-162 A.D.), who was the third in the Kushana dynasty. The Kushana rule continued till the middle of 3rd century A.D. The most notable achievement of their rule was the development of Gandhara School of Art and further spread of Buddhism into distant regions of Asia.

Gupta Dynasty

After the Kushanas, the Guptas were the most important dynasty. The Gupta period has been described as the Golden Age of Indian history. The first famous king of the Gupta dynasty was Ghatotkacha's son Chandragupta I. He married Kumaradevi, the daughter of the chief of the Licchavis. This marriage was a turning point in the life of Chandragupta I. He got Pataliputra in dowry from the Licchavis. From Pataliputra, he laid the foundation of his empire and started conquering many neighbouring states with the help of the Licchavis. He ruled over Magadha (Bihar), Prayaga and Saketa (east Uttar Pradesh). His kingdom extended from the river Ganges to Allahabad. Chandragupta I also got the title of Maharajadhiraja (King of Kings) and ruled for about fifteen years.

Chandragupta I was succeeded by Samudragupta in about 330 A.D., who reigned for about fifty years. He was a great military genius and is said to have commanded a military campaign across the Deccan, and also subdued the forest tribes of the Vindhya region.

Samudragupta's successor Chandragupta II, also known as Vikramaditya, conquered the extensive territories of Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiawar. This provided exceptional wealth, which added to the prosperity of the Guptas. The Guptas in this period engaged in sea trade with the countries of the west. It was most probably during his reign that Kalidas, the greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist, as well as many other scientist and scholars flourished.

The decline of the Gupta power in northern India between the close of 5th and the 6th century A.D. gave rise to various small independent kingdoms and attracted foreign invasions of Huns. Toramara was the leader of the Huns and was successful in annexing large parts of the

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Gupta Empire. His son, Mihirakula was a cruel barbarian and one of the worst tyrants known. Two native powerful princes, Yasodharman of Malwa and Baladitya of Magadha crushed his power and put an end to his reign in India.

The Rise of Islam in South-Asia

The initial entry of Islam into South Asia came in the first century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The Umayyad caliph in Damascus sent an expedition to Baluchistan and Sindh in 711 led by Muhammad bin Qasim. He captured Sindh and Multan. Three hundred years after his death Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, the ferocious leader, led a series of raids against Rajput kingdoms and rich Hindu temples, and established a base in Punjab for future incursions. In 1024, the Sultan set out on his last famous expedition to the southern coast of Kathiawar along the Arabian Sea, where he sacked the city of Somnath and its renowned Hindu temple.

Muslim Invasion In India

Muhammad Ghori invaded India in 1175 A.D. After the conquest of Multan and Punjab, he advanced towards Delhi. The brave Rajput chiefs of northern India headed by Prithvi Raj Chauhan defeated him in the First Battle of Terrain in 1191 A.D. After about a year, Muhammad Ghori came again to avenge his defeat. A furious battle was fought again in Terrain in 1192 A.D. in which the Rajputs were defeated and Prithvi Raj Chauhan was captured and put to death. The Second Battle of Terrain, however, proved to be a decisive battle that laid the foundations of Muslim rule in northern India.

The Delhi Sultanate

The period between 1206 A.D. and 1526 A.D. in India's history is known as the Delhi Sultanate period. During this period of over three hundred years, five dynasties ruled in Delhi. These were: the Slave dynasty (1206-90), Khilji dynasty (1290-1320), Tughlaq dynasty (1320-1413), Sayyid dynasty (1414-51), and Lodhi dynasty (1451-1526).

The Slave Dynasty

The concept of equality in Islam and Muslim traditions reached its climax in the history of South Asia when slaves were raised to the status of Sultan. The Slave Dynasty ruled the Sub-continent for about 84 years. It was the first Muslim dynasty that ruled India. Qutub-ud-din Aibak, a slave of Muhammad Ghori, who became the ruler after the death of his master, founded the Slave Dynasty. He was a great builder who built the majestic 238 feet high stone tower known as Qutub Minar in Delhi.

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The next important king of the Slave dynasty was Shams-ud-din Iltutmush, who himself was a slave of Qutub-ud-din Aibak. Iltutmush ruled for around 26 years from 1211 to 1236 and was responsible for setting the Sultanate of Delhi on strong footings. Razia Begum, the capable daughter of Iltutmush, was the first and the only Muslim lady who ever adorned the throne of Delhi. She fought valiantly, but was defeated and killed.

Finally, the youngest son of Iltutmush, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud became Sultan in 1245. Though Mahmud ruled India for around 20 years, but throughout his tenure the main power remained in the hands of Balban, his Prime Minister. On death of Mahmud, Balban directly took over the throne and ruled Delhi. During his rule from 1266 to 1287, Balban consolidated the administrative set up of the empire and completed the work started by Iltutmush.

The Khilji Dynasty

Following the death of Balban, the Sultanate became weak and there were number of revolts. This was the period when the nobles placed Jalal-ud-din Khilji on the throne. This marked the beginning of Khilji dynasty. The rule of this dynasty started in 1290 A.D. Ala-ud-din Khilji, a nephew of Jalal-ud-din Khilji hatched a conspiracy and got Sultan Jalal-ud-din killed and proclaimed himself as the Sultan in 1296.

Ala-ud-din Khilji was the first Muslim ruler whose empire covered almost whole of India up to its extreme south. He fought many battles, conquered Gujarat, Ranthambhor, Chittor, Malwa, and Deccan. During his reign of 20 years, Mongols invaded the country several times but were successfully repulsed. From these invasion Alla-ud-din Khilji learnt the lessons of keeping himself prepared, by fortifying and organizing his armed forces. Alla-ud-din died in 1316 A.D., and with his death, the Khilji dynasty came to an end.

The Tughlaq Dynasty

Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, who was the Governor of Punjab during the reign of Ala-ud-din Khilji, ascended the throne in 1320 A.D. and founded the Tughlaq dynasty. He conquered Warrangal and put down a revolt in Bengal. Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq succeeded his father and extended the kingdom beyond India, into Central Asia. Mongols invaded India during Tughlaq rule, and were defeated this time too.

Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq first shifted his capital from Delhi to Devagiri in Deccan. However, it had to be shifted back within two years. He inherited a massive empire but lost many of its provinces, more particularly Deccan and Bengal. He died in 1351 A.D. and his cousin, Feroz Tughlaq succeeded him.

Feroz Tughlaq did not contribute much to expand the territories of the

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empire, which he inherited. He devoted much of his energy to the betterment of the people. After his death in 1388, the Tughlaq dynasty came virtually to an end. Although the Tughlaqs continued to reign till 1412, the invasion of Delhi by Timur in 1398 may be said to mark the end of the Tughlaq empire.

Timur's Invasion

It was during the reign of the last king of the Tughlaq dynasty that the mighty king Timur or Tamerlane invaded India in 1398 A.D. He crossed Indus and captured Multan, and just walked over to Delhi without much resistance.

Sayyid Dynasty

Then came the Sayyid dynasty founded by Khizar Khan. The Sayyids ruled from about 1414 A.D. to 1450 A.D. Khizar Khan ruled for about 37 years. Last in Sayyid dynasty was Muhammad-bin-Farid. During his reign there was confusion and revolts. The empire came to an end in 1451 A.D. with his death.

Lodhi Dynasty

Bahlul Khan Lodhi (1451-1489 A.D.)

He was the first king and the founder of the Lodhi dynasty. With a view to restoring the Delhi Sultanate its past glory, he conquered many territories including the powerful kingdom of Jaunpur. Bahlul Khan extended his territories over Gwalior, Jaunpur and Uttar Pradesh.

Sikander Khan Lodhi (1489-1517 A.D.)

After Bahlul Khan's death, his second son Nizam Shah was proclaimed the king, under the title of Sultan Sikander Shah, in 1489. He made all efforts to strengthen his kingdom and extended his kingdom from Punjab to Bihar. He was a good administrator and a patron of arts and letters. He died in 1517 A.D.

Ibrahim Khan Lodhi (1489-1517 A.D.)

After the death of Sikandar, his son Ibrahim ascended the throne. Ibrahim Lodhi did not prove to be an able ruler. He became more and more strict with the nobles. He used to insult them. Thus, to take revenge of their insults, Daulat Khan Lodhi, governor of Lahore and Alam Khan, an uncle of Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi, invited Babar, the ruler of Kabul, to invade India. Ibrahim Lodhi was killed at Panipat in 1526 A.D. by Babar's army. Thus came the final collapse of Delhi Sultanate and paved the establishment of Mughal Empire in India.

The Mughal Empire

In India, the Mughal Empire was one of the greatest empires ever. The Mughal Empire ruled hundreds of millions of people. India became

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united under one rule, and had very prosperous cultural and political years during the Mughal rule. There were many Muslim and Hindu kingdoms split all throughout India until the founders of the Mughal Empire came. There were some men such as Babar, grandson to the Great Asian conqueror Tamerlane and the conqueror Genghis Khan from the northern region of Ganges, river valley, who decided to take over Khyber, and eventually, all of India.

Babar (1526-1530): the great grandson of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, was the first Mughal emperor in India. He confronted and defeated Lodhi in 1526 at the first battle of Panipat, and so came to establish the Mughal Empire in India. Babar ruled until 1530, and was succeeded by his son Humayun.

Humayun (1530-1540 and 1555-1556): the eldest son of Babar, succeeded his father and became the second emperor of the Mughal Empire. He ruled India for nearly a decade but was ousted by Sher Shah Suri, the Afghan ruler. Humayun wandered for about 15 years after his defeat. Meanwhile, Sher Shah Suri died and Humayun was able to defeat his successor, Sikandar Suri and regain his crown of the Hindustan. However, soon after, he died in 1556 at a young age of 48 years.

Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545): was an Afghan leader who took over the Mughal Empire after defeating Humayun in 1540. Sher Shah occupied the throne of Delhi for not more than five years, but his reign proved to be a landmark in the Sub-continent. As a king, he has several achievements in his credit. He established an efficient public administration. He set up a revenue collection system based on the measurement of land. Justice was provided to the common man. Numerous civil works were carried out during his short reign; planting of trees, wells and building of Sarai (inns) for travellers was done. Roads were laid; it was under his rule that the Grand Trunk road from Delhi to Kabul was built. The currency was also changed to finely minted silver coins called Dam. However, Sher Shah did not survive long after his accession on the throne and died in 1545 after a short reign of five years.

Akbar (1556-1605): Humayun's heir, Akbar, was born in exile and was only 13 years old when his father died. Akbar's reign holds a certain prominence in history; he was the ruler who actually fortified the foundations of the Mughal Empire. After a series of conquests, he managed to subdue most of India. Areas not under the empire were designated as tributaries. He also adopted a conciliatory policy towards

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the Rajputs, hence reducing any threat from them. Akbar was not only a great conqueror, but a capable organizer and a great administrator as well. He set up a host of institutions that proved to be the foundation of an administrative system that operated even in British India. Akbar's rule also stands out due to his liberal policies towards the non-Muslims, his religious innovations, the land revenue system and his famous Mansabdari system. Akbar's Mansabdari system became the basis of Mughal military organization and civil administration.

Akbar died in 1605, nearly 50 years after his ascension to the throne, and was buried outside of Agra at Sikandra. His son Jehangir then assumed the throne.

Jehangir: Akbar was succeeded by his son, Salim, who took the title of Jehangir, meaning "Conqueror of the World". He married Mehr-un-Nisa whom he gave the title of Nur Jahan (light of the world). He loved her with blind passion and handed over the complete reins of administration to her. He expanded the empire through the addition of Kangra and Kistwar and consolidated the Mughal rule in Bengal. Jehangir lacked the political enterprise of his father Akbar. But he was an honest man and a tolerant ruler. He strived to reform society and was tolerant towards Hindus, Christians and Jews. However, relations with Sikhs were strained, and the fifth of the ten Sikh gurus, Arjun Dev, was executed at Jehangir's orders for giving aid and comfort to Khusrau, Jehangir's rebellious son. Art, literature, and architecture prospered under Jehangir's rule, and the Mughal gardens in Srinagar remain an enduring testimony to his artistic taste. He died in 1627.

Shah Jahan: Jehangir was succeeded by his second son Khurram in 1628. Khurram took the name of Shah Jahan, i.e. the Emperor of the World. He further expanded his Empire to Kandhar in the north and conquered most of Southern India. The Mughal Empire was at its zenith during Shah Jahan's rule. This was due to almost 100 years of unparalleled prosperity and peace. As a result, during this reign, the world witnessed the unique development of arts and culture of the Mughal Empire. Shah Jahan has been called the "architect king". The Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, both in Delhi, stand out as towering achievements of both civil engineering and art. Yet above all else, Shah Jahan is remembered today for the Taj Mahal, the massive white marble mausoleum constructed for his wife Mumtaz Mahal along the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra.

Aurangzeb: Aurangzeb ascended the throne in 1658 and ruled supreme till 1707. Thus Aurangzeb ruled for 50 years, matching Akbar's reign in longevity. But unfortunately he kept his five sons away from the

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	<p>royal court with the result that none of them was trained in the art of government. This proved to be very damaging for the Mughals later on. During his 50 years of rule, Aurangzeb tried to fulfill his ambition of bringing the entire Sub-continent under one rule. It was under him that the Mughal Empire reached its peak in matter of area. He worked hard for years but his health broke down in the end. He left behind no personal wealth when he died in 1707, at the age of 90 years. With his death, the forces of disintegration set in and the mighty Mughal empire started collapsing.</p> <p>The Decline of Mughal Empire The Mughal Empire started disintegrating with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. His son and successor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was already old when he took the throne and was confronted with one rebellion after another. At that time, the Empire was facing challenges from the Marathas and the British. The inflated taxes and religious intolerance weakened the grip of Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire was split into numerous independent or semi-independent states. Nadirshah of Iran sacked Delhi in 1739 and exposed the fragility of the power of Mughals. The empire rapidly shrank to the extent of being reduced to only a small district around Delhi. Yet they managed to rule at least some parts of India until 1850s, although they never regained the dignity and authority of their early days. The imperial dynasty became extinct with Bahadur Shah II who was deported to Rangoon by the British on suspicion of assisting the sepoy mutineers. He died there in 1862.</p>
<p>Recommended Reading</p>	<p>A paradise on earth and home to over 300 species of wild flowers, the Valley of Flowers offers a once-in-a-lifetime experience to naturalist and nature enthusiasts. The Valley of Flowers was introduced to the world by Frank S. Smythe, mountaineer, explorer, botanist, who camped here for several weeks in the monsoon of 1937 and did valuable exploratory work. He authored a book called The Valley of Flowers which unveiled the beauty and floral splendours of the valley and thus threw open the doors of this verdant jewel to nature-enthusiasts all over the world.</p>
<p>1000 Places to See Before You Die</p>	<p>Patricia Schultz has many entries for this mesmerizing country. Here are just a few: Red Fort and Chandni Chowk, Delhi The Beaches of Goa Shimla, the Raj summer capital Ladakh, or “Little Tibet” The Backwaters of Kerala Bandhavgarh and Kanha National Parks The Temples of Khajuraho The Cave Temples of Ajanta and Ellora</p>

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	<p>The Golden Temple of Amritsar Palace of the Winds, Jaipur Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur The Ghats of Varanasi ...and of course, The Taj Mahal</p>
Must Sees	<p>India boasts 32 UNESCO World Heritage Sites:</p> <p>Agra Fort Ajanta Caves Ellora Caves Taj Mahal Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram Sun Temple, Konârak Kaziranga National Park Keoladeo National Park Manas Wildlife Sanctuary Churches and Convents of Goa Fatehpur Sikri Group of Monuments at Hampi Khajuraho Group of Monuments Elephanta Caves Great Living Chola Temples 12 Group of Monuments at Pattadakal Sundarbans National Park Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi Humayun's Tomb, Delhi Qutb Minar and its Monuments, Delhi Mountain Railways of India Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) Red Fort Complex The Jantar Mantar, Jaipur Western Ghats Hill Forts of Rajasthan Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area Rani-ki-Vav (the Queen's Stepwell) at Patan, Gujara On my recent two week trip to Northern India I saw no less than nine of these sites!</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	
Cricket	Cricket is, by far, the most popular sport of India. The Indian national cricket team won the 1983 and 2011 Cricket World Cup events, the

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	<p>2007 ICC World Twenty20, shared the 2002 ICC Champions Trophy with Sri Lanka, and won 2013 ICC Champions Trophy. Do try to take in a game if you can.</p>
<p>Golf</p>	<p>Golfing in India goes back to the colonial period when the Royal Calcutta Golf Club (RCGC) was founded in 1829 – the first golf club established outside the British Isles. India Tourism produce a booklet, available online, of Golfing Destinations in India, intended for the golf tourist. It catalogues the major 18-hole golf courses in the country, highlighting their key features and giving necessary information, as well as listing the tourist attractions around the courses to project them as 'total' holiday destinations. The 42 courses covered are listed according to their location – courses in north, south, east and west India. Here are just two of these unique courses:</p> <p>The Delhi Golf Club DGC as it is better known, is barely a kilometer from India Gate. Built in 1931, it was a part of the new capital city the British had built for themselves in New Delhi. The course was laid out around numerous small, and some not so small, Tughlaq and Lodhi period monuments, a location chosen by the then Chief of the Horticulture Department, who was also a keen excavator. The rich flora and fauna in the course give it a charming character, with an occasional peacock sauntering across the greens or a nilgai seen disappearing behind the trees. Originally known as the Lodhi Golf Course, it was patronised by viceroys, princes and generals, and has a certain degree of nostalgia about it. Old members would recall golfers arriving on bicycles with their golf kits strapped on the back. The course was redesigned by Peter Thompson in 1976-77, and a 9-hole Peacock course added to the existing 18-hole course. Undulating, narrow fairways and deep bunkers make it challenging, requiring accurate play. It is also one of the busiest courses in India, perhaps one of the busiest in Asia. DGC has seen the likes of Ernie Els and DarrenClarke on its fairways. Interestingly, in 1923 the Nizamuddin Railway Station was located on the present 13th fairway, known as the 'Monkey hole' because of the occasional presence of monkeys here. The charming course made headlines in February 2014 when the legendary golfer, Tiger Woods, played an exhibition match here on his maiden visit to India. He claimed that the narrow fairways of the course made it challenging and exciting. While the course is open to visitors, a handicap certificate is needed to play on the 18-hole course here.</p> <p>Gulmarg Golf Course Gulmarg has the world's highest golf course, situated at an altitude of 2,650 m. The historic Gulmarg Golf Club was built in 1911 by the British,</p>

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	<p>who used the place as a holiday resort. Redesigned in 2011, the 18-hole golf course welcomes golfing enthusiasts on a daily basis. The origin of Gulmarg as the 'Golfing Mecca' of India can be traced to the late 19th century, when a 6-hole course was established here by Colonel Neville Chamberlain. The first golf championship was played in Gulmarg in 1922, and it hosted the Northern India Championship until 1989. The course remains closed from December to April, when it is covered with snow. A limited amount of golfing equipment is available for hire, so it is advised that you bring your own kit.</p>
Fishing	<p>Fishing varies from oceans to lakes to mountain rivers. The British stocked the Himalayan streams and rivers with trout in the nineteenth century and these have become world famous now for their huge fish.</p>
Horse riding	<p>The Himalayan foothills provide a range of opportunities for horse riding from hourly trail rides to multi day expeditions.</p>
Hiking	<p>India boasts some of the most amazing hiking and trekking opportunities in the world, particularly in the north where the Himalayas provide opportunities for the most modest and the most extreme hikers. The Valley of the Flowers in one particular unique region for hiking in the mountains surrounded by the most amazing flora.</p>
Cycling	<p>This is not the best place in the world to plan a biking trip: the roads and the driving makes it too risky in my opinion.</p>
Other Activities	<p>For the adventurous, Rishikesh is also the starting point for trekking expeditions and excursions towards the Himalayan peaks. India merges stunning scenery with the opportunity for unique adventure – whether you are drawn by sports such as white water rafting or trekking in the Himalayas. India's rich wildlife viewing also provides opportunities for wildlife safaris (you might see the rare Indian Rhino) and to visit tiger sanctuaries.</p>

CULTURE	
Arts	<p>The earliest Indian religion to inspire major artistic monuments was Buddhism. Soon after the Buddhists initiated the rock-cut caves, Hindus and Jains started to imitate them at Badami, Aihole, Ellora, Salsette, Elephanta, Aurangabad and Mamallapuram.</p> <p>The Chola period, remarkable for its sculptures and bronzes, is represented by some of the finest figures of Siva in various forms, Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi, Siva saints, etc., created by using the lost wax technique</p> <p>The 2nd century BC Ajanta Caves marked the beginnings of cliff paintings in India. There are known more than 20 locations in India with paintings and traces of former paintings of ancient and early medieval times (up to 8th - 10th century AD such as Bagh Caves (Madhya Pradesh), Ellora Caves (Maharashtra) and Sittanavasal (Tamil Nadu). The huge range of folk and tribal art in India is manifested through</p>

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varied media such as pottery, painting, metalwork, dhokra art, paper-art, weaving and designing of objects like jewellery and toys. The subjects of this art range from puranic gods, local deities, festivals, fairs, myths, nature and legends.

Mughal art and architecture a characteristic Indo-Islamic-Persian style that flourished on the Indian subcontinent during the Mughal Empire (1526-1857). This new style combined elements of Islamic art and architecture, which had been introduced to India during the Delhi Sultanate (1192-1398) and had produced great monuments such as the Qutb Minar, with features of Persian art and architecture. A special aspect of Mughal painting is a particular style of South Asian painting, generally confined to miniatures either as book illustrations or as single works to be kept in albums, which emerged from Persian miniature painting, with Indian Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist influences, and developed largely in the court of the Mughal Empire, and later spread to other Indian courts, both Muslim and Hindu, and later Sikh.

British colonial rule had a great impact on Indian art as old patrons of art became less wealthy and influential, and Western art more ubiquitous. Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), referred to as the father of Modern Indian art introduced reworked Asian styles, in alignment with a developing Indian nationalism and pan-Asianism to create a new school of art, which is today known as the Bengal school of art. Other artists of the Tagore family, such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Gaganendranath Tagore (1867–1938) as well as new artists of the early 20th c such as Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941) were responsible for introducing Avant Gardewestern styles into Indian Art. Many other artists like Jamini Roy and later S.H. Raza took inspiration from folk traditions.

In 1947 India became independent of British rule. A group of six artists - K. H. Ara, S. K. Bakre, H. A. Gade, M.F. Husain, S.H.Raza and Francis Newton Souza founded the Progressive Artist's Group, to establish new ways of expressing India in the post-colonial era. Though the group was dissolved in 1956, it was profoundly influential in changing the idiom of Indian art. Almost all India's major artists in the 1950s were associated with the group. Some of those who are well-known today are Bal Chabda, Manishi Dey, V. S. Gaitonde, Krishen Khanna, Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta, Devender Singh, Akbar Padamsee, John Wilkins, Himmat Shah and Manjit Bawa. Present-day Indian art is varied as it had been never before. Among the best-known artists of the newer generation include Sanjay Bhattacharya, Bose Krishnamachari, Narayanan Ramachandran, Geeta Vadhera, Devajyoti Ray, Satish Gupta, and Bikash Bhattacharya.

Contemporary Indian art takes influence from all over the world. With many Indian artists immigrating to the west, art for some artists has

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	<p>been a form of expression merging their past with their current in western culture.</p>
<p>Music</p>	<p>Indian music is very different to Western traditions. Said to be one of the oldest unbroken musical traditions in the world, Indian classical music has its origins in the Vedas (ancient scriptures of the Hindus). Over the centuries, Indian classical music has also evolved through interaction between different races and cultures.</p> <p>The foundation of Indian music is 'sangeet,' a combination of three art forms: vocal music, instrumental music and dance. Although these three art forms were originally derived from stagecraft, today they represent different, highly complex individual art forms.</p> <p>The system of Indian music is based on raag and taal with the former being the melodic form and the latter the rhythmic.</p> <p>Raag can be roughly equated with the Western term mode or scale. There is a system of seven notes which are arranged similar to Western scales. The taals are complex and revolve around repeating patterns of beats.</p> <p>The different interpretations of the raag and the taalhas led to the distinction of two major traditions of classical music: Hindustani sangeet of the north and Carnatic sangeet of the south.</p> <p>Instruments typically used in Hindustani music include the sitar, sarod, surbahar, tanpura, bansuri, shehnai, sarangi, santoor, pakhavaj and tabla. Instruments typically used in Carnatic music include venu, gottuvadyam, harmonium, veena, mridangam, kanjira, ghatam and violin.</p>
<p>Film</p>	<p>Bollywood is world famous for its production of extravagant, colourful, musical films that are rooted in the Indian culture.</p> <p>For western style films and series, try some of the following:</p> <p>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel and its new sequel, The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, which is as delightful as the first.</p> <p>The Jewel in the Crown (BBC) Epic and colourful series.</p> <p>Passage to India: Based on the book by E.M. Forster, directed by David Lean and with an all-star cast that includes Victor Banerjee, Alec Guinness and Peggy Ashcroft, Passage to India is about the clash between the British colonizers and their Indian subjects in the years just before independence.</p> <p>Slumdog Millionaire: Directed by Danny Boyle, famous for Trainspotting and the London Olympics opening ceremonies. Though made by a "foreigner," this film really captures something truthful about the realities of life in modern-day India. Plus, it is entertaining,</p>

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	<p>well-made, fast-paced and engaging.</p> <p>Million Dollar Arm: starring Jon Hamm. Based on a true story, it sees JB Bernstein, a struggling sports agent, travels to India to find a young cricketer to turn into a Major League Baseball star.</p> <p>Octopussy: James Bond does India in this 1983 film, starring Roger Moore. Viewers get a glimpse of the Taj Mahal before being whisked to Udaipur. The Shiv Niwas Palace, the Jag Mandir Palace and the "floating" Taj Lake Palace all appear.</p> <p>Gandhi: Richard Attenborough's epic - starring a peerless Ben Kingsley - features many locations where the real events took place, including Porbandar, Gandhi's birthplace, the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, where Gandhi was imprisoned in 1942, and the gardens of Gandhi Smitri, where he was assassinated.</p> <p>Life of Pi: Based on Yann Martel's novel, Life of Pi tells the story of a young castaway who forms an unlikely friendship with a Bengal tiger. Much of the film was shot in the Indian state of Kerala, known for its beaches, lagoons and laid-back lifestyle.</p> <p>The Jungle Book: Walt Disney's classic - based on Rudyard Kipling's book - follows Mowgli, a child raised in the Indian jungle by wolves, who meets a Bengal tiger (Shere Khan), a python, a bear and orangutans. Tiger spotting tours are popular among visitors to India, although they will be less keen to run into Kaa the python. Baloo was probably a sloth bear, which are found in several parts of the country, but orangutans are not native to India - so don't expect to spot King Louie!</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>India is famous for its museums that are indicative of the rich culture of the country. The museums of India are an archive of India's history and government and archaeology. Here are some suggestions:</p> <p>National Museum Delhi: National Museum is located on Janpath, New Delhi. The National Museum is the largest museum in India. It holds exhibits ranging from pre-historic era to modern works of art. The impressive building of National Museum houses unique artifacts of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the Mughal era. Some of the other museums in Delhi are the National Rail Museum, Museum of Natural History, Nehru Museum, and Gandhi Darshan.</p> <p>The Prince of Wales Museum, Mumbai: The Prince of Wales Museum is renamed as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya and has the art, sculpture, old firearms, rare coins and a priceless collection</p>

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	<p>of antiques from across Indian history. Mumbai has several more museums that depict its rich art and culture, such as Jehangir Art Gallery and INS Vikrant. The Bhau Daji Lad Museum, earlier known as the Victoria & Albert Museum, is the oldest museum in Mumbai.</p> <p>Indian Museum, Calcutta: The Indian Museum is one of the most famous museums in India and the 9th oldest museum in the world.. Kolkata is a city of museums. Also recommended: Calcutta Museum (also known as Kolkata Panorama), Victoria, Birla Museum, Shahid Minar and Nehru Children Museum.</p> <p>Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad: One of the Seven Wonders of Hyderabad includes Salar Jung Museum, which has an exquisite collection of priceless articles such as ivory and marble sculptures.</p> <p>Government Museum, Chennai: Also known as Madras Museum, Government Museum is positioned in Egmore, which is among the busiest spots of Chennai. It was established in 1851 and exhibits different varieties pertaining to geology, zoology and anthropology and botany. The museum has excellent sections showcasing the main South Indian times encompassing, Chaulkyas, Chola and Vijaynagar. There are separate sections for children also.</p>
Festivals	<p>Being a highly spiritual country, festivals are at the heart of people's lives in India. The numerous and varied festivals that are held throughout the year offer a unique way of seeing Indian culture at its best. The following popular festivals in India will provide you with a truly memorable experience.</p> <p>1. Diwali Diwali is a five day festival that represents the start of the Hindu New Year. It's known as the "Festival of Lights" for all the fireworks, small clay lamps, and candles that are lit during the celebrations. These lights are said to represent the victory of good over evil, and brightness over darkness. The candlelight makes Diwali a very warm and atmospheric festival, and it's observed with much joy and happiness.</p> <p>2. Ganesh Chaturthi The spectacular eleven day Ganesh Chaturthi festival honours the birth of the beloved Hindu elephant-headed god, Lord Ganesha. The start of the festival sees huge, elaborately crafted statutes of Ganesha installed in homes and podiums, which have been especially constructed and beautifully decorated. At the end of the festival, the statutes are paraded through the streets, accompanied by much singing and dancing, and then submerged in the ocean.</p>

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3. **Holi**

Holi is a two day festival that also celebrates the victory of good over evil, as well as the abundance of the spring harvest season. It's commonly referred to as the "Festival of Colours". People exuberantly throw coloured powder and water all over each other, have parties, and dance under water sprinklers. Bhang (a paste made from cannabis plants) is also traditionally consumed during the celebrations. Holi is a very carefree festival that's great fun to participate in if you don't mind getting wet and dirty!

4. **Navaratri, Dussehra, and Durga Puja**

The first nine days of this festival are known as Navaratri, and are filled with dance in honour of the Mother Goddess. The tenth day, called Dussehra, is devoted to celebrating the defeat of the demon king Ravana by Lord Rama. It also coincides with the victory of the revered warrior Goddess Durga over the evil buffalo demon Mahishasura. In eastern India, the festival is observed as Durga Puja. Huge statues of the Goddess are made and immersed in the holy Ganges River. The festival is an extremely social and theatrical event, with drama, dance, and cultural performances held throughout the country.

5. **Onam**

Onam is a traditional ten day harvest festival that marks the homecoming of the mythical King Mahabali. It's a festival rich in culture and heritage. People strikingly decorate the ground in front of their houses with flowers arranged in beautiful patterns to welcome the King. The festival is also celebrated with new clothes, feasts served on banana leaves, dancing, sports, games, and snake boat races.

6. **Krishna Janmashtami/Govinda**

Krishna Janmashtami, also known as Govinda, commemorates the birthday of Lord Krishna. An extremely fun part of the festival involves people climbing on each other and forming a human pyramid to try and reach and break open clay pots filled with curd, which have been strung up high from buildings.

7. **Kerala Temple Festivals**

The south Indian state of Kerala is filled with temples that are renowned for their exotic temple festivals. The large processions of elephants, resplendent in ornaments, are the main attractions of these festivals. The processions are accompanied by colourful floats, drummers and other musicians.

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	<p>8. Pushkar Camel Fair An astonishing 50,000 camels converge on the tiny desert town of Pushkar, in India's state of Rajasthan for the Pushkar Camel Fair. For five days, the camels are dressed up, paraded, shaved, entered into beauty contests, raced, and of course traded. It's a great opportunity to witness an old, traditional style Indian festival.</p>
<p>Learning Opportunities</p>	<p>There are many things to learn that interest foreigners all over India, but there are a few destinations that become known for certain things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yoga is popular in Haridwar and Rishikesh. - Ayurveda is popular in Kerala. - Hindi in Delhi and Varanasi. - Classical musical instruments in Varanasi. - Classical vocal music and classical Dance forms in Tamilnadu. - Sanskrit at 'Samskrita Bharati' in Bangalore and Delhi. - Buddhism in Dharamsala and Bir in Himachal Pradesh as well as in Bodhgaya in Bihar. - Cooking classes are also popular. The most well-known exported type of Indian food is Punjabi, as the Sikhs have been the most successful in spreading Indian restaurants throughout the western world. However, styles vary a lot throughout the country, so if you have the time and appetite it's worth checking out courses in a variety of areas such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal.

<p>ATTRACTIONS</p>	
<p>Beaches</p>	<p>There are literally thousands of kilometers of beaches around India. India's coastline measures 7,517 kilometres in length; of this distance 43% is comprised of sandy beaches!</p> <p>The best known beach destination with the most developed tourism infrastructure is Goa. Many travelers to India plan a week on the beaches here at the end of their Indian tour to rest and relax after their tour of the sights of India.</p> <p>Goa, situated on the west coast of India, is one of the most delightful states in India. Formerly a Portuguese colony, it is endowed with variety of attractions, like palm-fringed beaches, kilometers of golden sands, lush green countryside, an incredible mosaic of cultural heritage, magnificent churches, temples, forts and monuments and a unique cultural synthesis of the east and west. With its tropical climate, Goa is a tourist's destination for all seasons. The capital, Panjim (Panaji), for many, has the edge over many cities in the country. Replete with colonial architecture, the city is known for its vibrancy that attains its pinnacle in the annual Goa Carnival festival.</p>
<p>Nature</p>	<p>The forests of India are wild, magnificent and diverse. Strwn across the country, the wild trails of India can be found in varied landscapes, from the high Himalayas in the north to the rich Terai region in its</p>

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	<p>foothills, from salt marshes of Kutch in the west to the mangroves in the east and the unexplored and impenetrable jungles in northeast, to the fascinating landscape of the peninsular region in the south. While the pride of Indian forests is the royal Bengal tiger, these wild tracts are home to a thousand other species of fauna, avifauna, reptiles, bees and butterflies. Several endangered species such as the great Indian bustard, Bengal florican, paradise flycatcher, barasingha, Himalayan tahr, gharial, blue sheep, kiang and red panda call it home.</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>There 112 National parks in India, a number planned to rise to 166 – so wherever you journey in this huge country, you will not be far from one of them. Here are some examples:</p> <p>Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh and Ranthambhore in Rajasthan are two tiger reserves saturated in history, myth and legend. Both reserves have forts as a surviving reminder of dynasties that ruled in ancient days. Bandhavgarh also has an imposing stone statue of a reclining Sheshashai Vishnu from where it is believed that the Charanganga, the lifeline of Bandhavgarh originates. One of the most popular tiger destinations of the world, Bandhavgarh has a varied habitat of grassland and forests that support large herds of chital and sambars, and several other species like the Indian striped hyena, jungle cat, jackals, plentiful varieties of avifauna and reptiles.</p> <p>At the eastern part of India the coastal line concludes in the Sundarbans and the world’s largest mangrove swamp forest - the ultimate land of the tiger. Mangroves are salt tolerant woody plants that exist in conditions of high salinity, extreme tides, strong winds, high temperatures and depleted soils. The pneumatophores, the buttress roots, the aerial roots, the stilt roots are visual treat for the eyes. Water rises and recedes every six hours in this estuary. The elusive Bengal tiger rules the mangrove kingdom. It is very hard to spot, but people sometimes get to see tigers swimming across the tidal creeks. Eight species of kingfishers are found here making Sundarbans a kingfisher country. On winter afternoons, one can see the mammoth salt-water crocodile basking on the mudflats. Sundarbans is wildlifer’s paradise.</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Beautiful gardens in India talk about the country’s aesthetic richness. Emperors and dynasties that have ruled the Indian land had patronized gardening and developed varied floral landscapes across the country. India also has numerous historic gardens that depict the best of the Islamic architecture and includes the Mughal gardens of North India such as Nishat Bagh in Srinagar. The gardens are now a storehouse for several exotic species of flora that has collected from various regions across the country. Here are some of the top gardens of India:</p>

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Brindavan Garden, Mysore

About 20 km from Mysore, downstream of Krishnaraja Sagar Dam is situated the wonderful Brindavan Garden, visited by more than two million people each year. The 60 acres garden is modeled on the design of the Shalimar Gardens of Kashmir in the Mughal style, and is beautified with terraces, fountains, parterres, running and cascading water channels, lush green lawns, water chutes, flower beds trees and shrubs. The whole garden when illuminated is an enthralling site to see. The musical and dancing fountain is a prime attraction among the visitors. It is worth visiting twice – the morning and the evening for the illumination.

Botanical Garden, Ooty

Constructed in 1847 in Ooty, the Botanical Garden is spread over 55 acres of land. It houses more than 2000 exotic species of trees and plants from all over the world. With a wide diversity of plants including different varieties of roses, rare flowering plants, shrubs, the garden is favourite among visitors. Every year during the month of May the “Summer Festival” is held and the prime attraction is the Flower Show.

Gulab Bagh, Udaipur

Gulab Bagh, also known as Sajjan Niwas Garden, is one of the most beautiful gardens of Udaipur. During 1850s, Maharana Sajjan Singh took the initiative to build this beautiful garden spread across 100 acres of land. It is largest garden of Rajasthan and renowned for its copious varieties of roses – which is how this garden got the name of Gulab Bagh or Rose Garden. Situated on the banks of Pichola Lake on Lake Palace Road, the arrangement of flower beds is a world class attraction. The garden also provides ample kids amusements including toy train trips and a zoo with many wild animals and birds.

Hanging Gardens, Mumbai

Hovering at the top of Malabar Hill in Mumbai, just opposite the Kamala Nehru Park, these terraced gardens, also known as Ferozeshah Mehta Gardens, offer exquisite sunset views over the Arabian Sea. The park was laid out in the early 1880s over Bombay’s main reservoir. The garden serves as an excellent retreat for the Mumbaikars and also offers a stupendous view of Mumbai city. Special attractions for the children are the hedges fashioned into the shape of varieties of animals and the flower clock located in the middle of the garden.

Lodhi Gardens, Delhi

Lodhi garden is a park located in Delhi. Established by the Sayyids and Lodis in the 16th century, the vast grounds of Lodi Garden are famous

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	<p>for several tombs that are situated in the garden belonging to that era. It contains Mohammed Shah's Tomb, Sikander Lodhi's Tomb, Sheesh Gumbad and Bara Gumbad tombs and the architectural works of the 15th century of Sayyids and Lodis. The park is also a popular place for wellness followers and houses a spiral shaped lake, a National Bonsai Park and a Glass House. It is one of the few places in Delhi to relax in the laps of nature and hear the birds chirping.</p> <p>Indian Botanical Garden, Kolkata The Indian Botanical Garden is located at Shibpur in the Howrah district of the city of Kolkata. The garden is famous for its varied collections of orchid's palms, bamboos and plants of the screw pine genus. The garden is sprawled over 270 acres on the west bank of the River Hooghly over which 1,700 plant species are cultivated. The garden was founded in 1787 by the East India Company for getting accustomed with new plants of commercial value and growing spices for trade. Apart from the varieties of birds housing in this garden, one of the major attraction of the Botanical Garden is the world`s largest Banyan Tree.</p>
<p>Historical Sites</p>	<p>Where to start in a country that seems jam-packed with historical sites of every kind and age? India is a diverse country steeped in history. Its past has seen a melting pot of different religions, rulers and empires -- all of which have left their mark on the countryside. Many historical places in India are listed as World Heritage sites due to their cultural importance. Visit these popular historical places in India and take a trip back in time to ancient India. You'll marvel at the architecture of what are some of the most stunning and captivating historical attractions that India has to offer.</p> <p>Here is my subjective pick of the top five:</p> <p>1. The Taj Mahal The Taj Mahal looms fairytale-like from the banks of the Yamuna River. It's actually a tomb that contains the body of Mumtaz Mahal – the wife of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. He had it built as an ode to his love for her. Dating back to 1630 AD, the Taj Mahal is made out of marble and took 22 years and 20,000 workers to complete. One of the most captivating things about it is the way its color appears to gradually alter in the changing light of the day.</p> <p>2. Hampi Now a laid back village, Hampi was once the last capital of Vijayanagar, one of the greatest Hindu empires in India's history. It has some extremely captivating ruins, intriguingly intermingled with large boulders that rear up all over the landscape. The ruins, which date back to the 14th century, stretch for just over 25 kilometers and</p>

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	<p>comprise more than 500 monuments. An incredible energy can be felt at this ancient place.</p> <p>3. Khajuraho Temples If you want proof that the Kama Sutra originated in India, Khajuraho is the place to see. Erotica abounds here with over 20 temples devoted to sexuality and sex. The temples are best known for their erotic sculptures. However, more than that, they show a celebration of love, life and worship. They also provide an uninhibited peek into ancient Hindu faith and Tantric practices. Nowhere else will you find such unique temples with meticulously detailed carvings.</p> <p>4. Ajanta and Ellora Caves Astonishingly carved into hillside rock in the middle of nowhere are the Ajanta and Ellora caves. There are 34 caves at Ellora dating from between the 6th and 11th centuries AD, and 29 caves at Ajanta dating back to between the 2nd century BC and 6th century AD. While the Ajanta caves are rich in paintings and sculpture, the Ellora caves are renowned for their extraordinary architecture. The most incredible thing about these caves is that they were crafted by hand, with only a hammer and chisel.</p> <p>5. Fatehpur Sikri A city that was once the proud capital of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century, Fatehpur Sikri now stands deserted as a well preserved ghost town. It was abandoned by its occupants after only 15 years due to insufficient water supply. Constructed out of red sandstone, Fatehpur Sikri is full of regal palaces and courtyards. You can almost feel yourself being transported back to medieval times here.</p>
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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wood Carvings: India produces a striking variety of carved wood products that can be bought at very low prices. Examples include decorative wooden plates, bowls, artwork, furniture and miscellaneous items that will surprise you.. - Clothing: It depends on the state/region you are visiting. Most of the states have their speciality to offer. For example go for silk sarees if you are visiting Benaras; Block prints if you are in Jaipur - Paintings: Paintings come on a wide variety of media, such as cotton, silk or with frame included. Gemstone paintings incorporate semi-precious stone dust, so they have a glittering appearance to them. - Marble and stone carvings: Common carved items include elephants, Hindu gods/goddesses. - Jewellery: Beautiful necklaces, bracelets and other jewellery are very

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	<p>inexpensive in India. - Pillow covers, bedsets: Striking and rich designs are common for pillows and bed covers.</p>
<p>Markets</p>	<p>Every city, town and village has its own market and they are wonderful places to observe Indian life, even if you do not buy a thing. Here are some of the markets of just one Indian city: Delhi.</p> <p>Connaught Place aka Rajiv Chowk: A unique cross between a European shopping arcade, an Indian bazaar, and an upmarket shopping mall. With all shops laid out in 2 circles, it's easy to get around and explore.</p> <p>Paharganj, (opposite New Delhi Railway Station). Oriented toward backpackers, this strip of shops sells items such as Indian perfumes, shawls, tablas, rugs, jewelry, etc.</p> <p>Kamla Nagar, (next to Delhi University's North campus). Popular with college students and known for its spicy street food.</p> <p>Rajouri Garden Market - Excellent place to shop for wedding as well as everyday clothing.</p> <p>Central Market, Lajpat Nagar – Middle-class Indians do their shopping here. Great deals for apparel, whether ethnic Indian or otherwise.</p> <p>Sarojini Nagar market is great for export surplus garments, and green grocery.</p> <p>Khan Market is where the foreign diplomats and Tibetan lama's go for lunch and to shop for dog supplies, groceries (great choice of vegetables), clothes (upper class Indian style, not expensive, Fabindia and Anohki for women's clothing), housewares (Good Earth), jewellery/accessories, and books (many bookshops).</p> <p>Janpath is a bargain-hunter's dream and just a two minute walk from Connaught place. Think of it as a vast flea market, where you can get all kinds of knick-knacks and clothes. Janpath is not a place for those unwilling or unable to bargain ruthlessly. Also, as in any flea market, quality will vary greatly. There are also some bookshops.</p> <p>Karol Bagh, West Delhi Market known for traditional Indian Wear, sarees and shawls. Huge area and big brand showrooms.</p> <p>Palika Bazaar, Connaught Place – This is a large underground market</p>

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	<p>in the center of Connaught Place. One can hunt for DVDs, VCDs and Audio CDs of Hindi, English and a few regional and foreign language films and PC-based games.</p> <p>Chandni Chowk, Metro Yellow Line. The heart of Old Delhi, this is the place to go for the full-on Indian experience of crowded, twisting alleys and tiny shops. The Fountain serves as a useful orientation point, and there are great Delhi-style snacks to be found in the vicinity too.</p> <p>Khari Baoli walking away from the Red Fort through Chandni Chowk will lead you here, which is the main spice market in Old Dehli where most restaurants shop from. Great place to buy individual spices (especially cardamom in bulk), masala chai mix, and various masala mixes for vegetables, meat, fish, meat, chicken, and rice.</p>
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CUISINE	
Food	<p>The cuisine of India is a revelation to jaded Western palates! It varies widely over the country, so here are some insights into regional cuisines around India.</p> <p>Central India The cuisine in Madhya Pradesh varies from region to region, with the north and west of the state being mainly based around wheat and meat, and the wetter south and east being dominated by rice and fish. Gwalior and Indore abound in milk and milk-based preparations. Bhopal is known for meat and fish dishes such as rogan josh, korma, keema, biryani pilaf and kababs such as shami and seekh. A popular dish is the bafla (wheat cakes) dunked in rich ghee which are eaten with daal (a pungent lentil broth). Another popular dish in the Malwa region is poha (flattened rice), served mostly for breakfast. Diet in Chhattisgarh is rice based. Fish and pork constitute a large part of Chhattisgarhi cuisine. Pork forms a major item in their diet and almost every major ceremony starts with the sacrifice of a pig.</p> <p>Northern India Kashmiri cuisine has evolved over hundreds of years, and strongly represents several influences such as Central Asian, Persia, and the North Indian plains. The most notable ingredient in Kashmir cuisine is mutton (lamb), of which there are over 30 dishes. Wazwan, a multi-course meal in Kashmiri cuisine and a matter of pride in Kashmiri culture and identity, includes dishes that are meat-based (lamb, chicken, fish). Punjabi cuisine, on the other hand, can be non-vegetarian or completely vegetarian. Some favourites include stuffed paranthas and dairy products (especially paneer- Indian cottage cheese), Mah Di Dal (lentil) and Sasron Da Saag (mustard leaves).</p>

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Tandoori food is a Punjabi speciality. Uttar Pradesh has also been greatly influenced by Mughal (Mughlai cuisine) cooking techniques which is very popular worldwide. The Samosa and Pakora, among the most popular snacks in all of India, are also originally from Uttar Pradesh.

Southern India

Food from Andhra Pradesh is known for its heavy use of spices and chillies. Telugu cuisine has evolved separately from Hyderabadi cuisine, the most famous of which is the Hyderabadi biryani, a mixture of rice, yoghurt, onions, meat and spices. In Karnataka, Masala Dosa, Rave Idli, and Maddur Vade are popular while the Coorg district is famous for spicy pork curries and coastal Karnataka has seafood specialities. Kerala cuisine has a multitude of dishes prepared using fish, poultry and meat. Kerala also has a variety of breakfast dishes like Appam, Idiyappam, Puttu, and Pathiri. The cuisine of the union territory of Puducherry, a French settlement for centuries, has an innovative French and Indo style. Tamil food is characterised by the use of rice, legumes and lentils, its distinct aroma and flavour achieved by the blending of spices. Sambhar (lentils cooked with vegetables) and Vathalkuzhambu are popular curries, eaten with plain or mixed rice while Idli, Dosa, Uthappam and Pongal are popular breakfasts. A distinct form of cuisine in Tamil Nadu comes from the Chettinadu area famous for its use of meat marinated in spices.

Western India

Seafood, coconut milk, rice and paste are main ingredients of Goan delicacies and use of Kokum is a distinct feature. Goan cuisine is mostly seafood based and incorporates several Portuguese influences. Well known dishes include Pork Vindaloo and the Xacuti style of cooking. Maharashtrian cuisine covers a range from mild to very spicy dishes. Popular dishes include puranpoli, ukdichemodak and batatawada. Coastal Maharashtra, loosely called the Konkan, boasts of its own Konkani cuisine, while the interior – the Vidarbha area -- has its own distinctive cuisine known as the Varadi cuisine. Gujarati cuisine is primarily vegetarian and dhokla is indisputably the most popular snack. The typical Gujarati Thali consists of roti (a flat bread made from wheat flour), daal or kadhi, rice, and sabzi/shaak (a dish made up of different combinations of vegetables and spices, which may be stir fried, spicy or sweet).

Eastern India

With an emphasis on fish and lentils served with rice as a staple diet, Bengali cuisine is known for its subtle flavours, its confectionaries and

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	<p>desserts, and use of panchphoran (or five spices - fenugreek, Nigella seed, cumin seed, radhuni and fennel seed in equal parts). Bengalis prepare fish in innumerable ways – steamed or braised, or stewed with greens or other vegetables and with sauces that are mustard-based or thickened with poppyseeds. Oriya cuisine is similar to that from Bengal. Pakhala, a dish made of rice, water, and yoghurt, that is fermented overnight, is very popular in summer, particularly in the rural areas. Dairy products, such as yoghurt, buttermilk, butter, ghee (clarified butter), and lassi, are consumed in Bihar throughout the year. The traditional poha (flattened rice) with yoghurt and sugar is popular. Bihar is famous for Sattuparanthas, which are paranthas stuffed with fried chickpea flour, Chokha (spicy mashed potatoes).</p>
<p>Drink</p>	<p>Lassi: A delicious drink of liquefied sweetened yogurt, this is almost a meal in a glass and should definitely be sampled. Some of the best come from Amritsar, Goa, and Jaipur. Make sure that no water has been added, including ice.</p> <p>Beer: Kingfisher is my favourite brand, but there are many others that taste divine after a hot day's seeing the sights.</p> <p>Tea: everywhere you can get tea (chai in most North Indian languages) of one variety or another. Most common is the "railway tea" type: cheap, sweet and uniquely refreshing once you get the taste for it. It's made by brewing up tea leaves, milk, and sugar altogether in a pot and keeping it hot until it's all sold. Masala chai will also have spices added to the mix, such as cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, and black pepper. For some people, that takes some getting used to.</p> <p>While Masala chai is popular in Northern and Central India, it must be noted that people in Eastern India (West Bengal and Assam) generally consume tea without spices, the English way. This is also the part of India where most tea is grown.</p> <p>In South India, coffee (especially sweet "filter coffee") replaces tea as a standard beverage.</p>
<p>Restaurants</p>	<p>The cuisine of India was a wonderful surprise for me on my recent journey to India. I am not enthusiastic about Indian restaurants generally in Canada – but here in India I was amazed at the quality and variety of the dishes in the restaurants I experienced. Here are my four favourites from my own journey:</p> <p>Veda Restaurant, Delhi Situated on Connaught Circus, this is a great place to ease yourself gently into the new cuisine as they are accustomed to serving foreigners and provide a vast array of small sampler dishes.</p> <p>Orchha Resort, Orchha In this magical place we lunched on a vegetarian buffet as the hotel is</p>

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	<p>owned by a Jain family who avoid meats – it was one of the best vegetarian meals I have enjoyed and was followed by a walk in their gardens overlooking the Betwa River.</p> <p>Laxmi Villas Palace, Baharatpur. This restaurant is in the 19th century home of the Maharajas of Bharatpur where they still live to this day. It's an oasis of gardens and fountains and pools in the increasingly arid countryside of Rajasthan. The splendid meal was accompanied by music from outside on the verandah where a drummer boy and accordion player provided a musical background.</p> <p>1135 AD Restaurant, Jaipur Perhaps the most memorable restaurant I enjoyed on this trip was the 1135 AD Restaurant in the Amber Fort in Jaipur. It's not every day you get to eat in a palace room that was built nearly a thousand years ago! The Thali plate they served was a mix of tasty Indian regional fare.</p>
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CHRIS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	<p>I travelled in India in November 2014 after a gap of many years – what a difference! My two week journey with Insight Vacations took me to Delhi, capital of the sub-continent, across Northern India to the holy city of Varanasi, the oldest continually inhabited city in the world. I travelled to Khajuraho's carved temples, to the palaces of Orchha and of course to Agra, home of the world's most beautiful building, the Taj Mahal. From there, on to the great abandoned city Fatehpur Sikri, and then south and west into Rajasthan, to the Pink City of Jaipur. I travelled by air, by coach, by boat, by train, by cycle rickshaw and even by elephant! See my photos on Pinterest at https://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/india/ And see my Travel Blog at http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/86/India.aspx</p>
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<p>INSIGHT VACATIONS IN INDIA</p>	<p>For over 35 years Insight Vacations has been known as the provider of some of the world’s finest escorted tours. They are particularly regarded as experts in touring Europe - with tours covering 43 countries they offer more European nations than any other any operator. They are also the leading escorted tour operator in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as offering tours in North America, North Africa, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Now they offer the same legendary high standards and perfectly planned touring itineraries to guests travelling to India.</p> <p>You can be confident that Insight will bring you quality hotels, luxury transport and the most in-depth local knowledge. Enjoy unique escorted vacations, with signature business class travel, expert Tour Directors and hand-picked hotels in the best locations.</p> <p>Insight’s Classical India provides a journey into the mysterious and enigmatic, full of strange fascination - from the erotic temples of Khajuraho and the splendid Taj Mahal, to the spiritual presence of Hindu holy men and the world's only official living goddess.</p>
<p>The India Specialist</p>	<p>Insight Vacations is the India Specialist! India is a sensory overload of sights and sounds, but once you give yourself over to its magical pull you won’t be disappointed. Unforgettable food, pulsing cities, exotic temples, beaches, mountains, incredible wildlife, and a myriad of colourful festivals throughout the year make India a diverse destination with a seemingly endless array of things to discover. Put the Taj Mahal on your must-see list while in India. The ultimate monument to love in the city of Agra is a breathtaking sight to behold and something you’ll never forget.</p> <p>Here are their tours of this fascinating country:</p> <p>Classical India with Nepal A journey into the mysterious and enigmatic, full of strange fascination - from the erotic temples of Khajuraho and the splendid Taj Mahal, to the spiritual presence of Hindu holy men and the world's only official living goddess.</p> <p>Imperial Rajasthan a Heritage Journey A heritage journey though timeless Rajasthan, where Maharajahs built forts and lavish palaces towering over desert cities.</p> <p>Colours of Rajasthan Beyond a pot pourri of palaces and far pavilions, pink cities and painted elephants, lies Rudyard Kipling's realm of the Bengal Tiger.</p>
<p>What makes Insight Different?</p>	<p>Insight is a premium tour - like traveling in business class. These premium tours reach back to the “Golden Age of Touring”</p>

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	<p>What makes Insight different?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smaller groups – maximum 40 guests - More legroom and comfort - First-class hotels in central or scenic locations - More inclusions and sightseeing - More meals - delicious dining and more choice - Impeccable service - International fellow guests - Insight tours are better value, and often actually cheaper when you compare with buying the individual trip components - Insight tours are leisurely, some with 2 or 3 night stays in each city - Insight's average age is 47 years old - Significant free time is built into every tour - Insight offers 6 distinct touring styles – see below - Insight sells only through travel agents such as tripcentral.ca
<p>Insight Touring Styles</p>	<p>Insight Vacations premium tours offer you the chance to experience Europe's finest cities, sights, hotels and culinary delights. Whether you want to explore Europe at a leisurely pace, experience as much as possible or get off the beaten track, Insight Vacations offers a complete range of six touring itineraries to suit all holiday dreams.</p> <p>Discovery Tours are designed to provide a balanced 'snapshot' of several countries in one itinerary.</p> <p>Regional Experiences are for those seeking to focus on a specific region or country.</p> <p>Easy Pace Tours contain predominately three or four nights in each city centre for exploring at leisure.</p> <p>Country Roads Tours visit all the main sights but also take you off the beaten track;</p> <p>Insight Gold is an exceptional range of uniquely tailored deluxe tours. You'll appreciate luxury hotels, dine in authentic restaurants and enjoy leisurely days with premium included sightseeing.</p> <p>City Breaks – Select Choices is a unique series of linked city-stay itineraries bringing freedom, choice and flexibility while avoiding the hassles, headaches and unforeseen costs normally associated.</p> <p>Special Interest Itineraries - Insight Vacations bring you several exclusive departures that allow you to hone in on some of the most notable things a destination or region is known for.</p>

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<p>History of Insight Vacations</p>	<p>In 1978, its first year, the company had a handful of staff in London and carried just 5700 passengers. Today, Insight has a team of professionals throughout the world, plays host to over 100,000 guests per year and has offices in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore and the UK. The company has also appointed specialist agents in Argentina, Brazil, Mauritius, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan and China.</p> <p>Insight has achieved many important Tour Operator 'Firsts' over the years including, in 1983, being the first scheduled tour operator to win 'the Queen's Award for Export Achievement' from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.</p> <p>Rediscovering a Golden Age - Insight invites you to rediscover the Golden Age of European Travel</p> <p>Group touring in Europe was started in 1841 by an Englishman, Thomas Cook, when he took a party from Leicester to Loughborough, a grand journey of 12 miles and back! In the golden age of touring that followed, those early travellers expected and received personal service, well planned itineraries, good quality, well located hotels and enjoyed the benefit of travelling in small select friendly groups - with no attention to detail spared. Since then, much has changed, not all for the better!</p> <p>In this fast paced world of the 21st century, most of these desirable touring principles have been forgotten - but not by Insight. They are justifiably proud of their commitment to give you that something 'extra' when you travel with them, and for 2015 they are featuring the very best. All Insight tours feature itineraries perfectly paced for your complete satisfaction.</p>
<p>Who goes on an Insight Vacation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average age is 47 - Core over 55 - Baby boomers - free time and central hotels are important - 65% are past Cruise vacationers – Insight is like Land Cruising - Discerning clients - 5% are single - no supplement - Average of two Honeymooners per Europe Tour - More Families - discounts and Super Savers are popular - Guests are often “time poor, not money poor”
<p>Brochures</p>	<p>You can view the brochures online here or request copies by post: https://www.insightvacations.com/ca/tours/request-a-brochure</p>
<p>Special Offers</p>	<p>Check here https://www.insightvacations.com/ca/special-offers/red-hot-deals</p>

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	<p>for details of their current special deals – there is always an offer to tempt you!</p>
<p>Lisa Ray – Insight’s Global Brand Ambassador</p>	<p>Insight Vacations recently announced Bollywood star and philanthropist, Lisa Ray as their new Global Brand Ambassador for the Exotics and Gold Collections. Lisa is an internationally acclaimed film actress, TV host, entrepreneur and humanitarian. She began her career in Mumbai when she was catapulted into a high profile modelling career at the age of 16. During her time in India, she went on to excel in the world of fashion and entertainment including notable television and film roles. Named one of the ‘10 Most Beautiful Indian Women of the Millennium’ by a Times of India poll, she heightened her profile as an iconic figure in India before leaving for drama school in London and other opportunities around the world. Lisa also starred in Canada’s Oscar-nominated film, Water, amongst other prestigious credits. A world traveller, Lisa has lived in Paris, Milan, London and Los Angeles, and maintains residences in Mumbai and Toronto. She recently returned from India and Italy experiencing two of Insight Vacations’ most popular trips, Imperial Rajasthan and Italian Vogue. "I'm pleased to be Insight Vacations’ first ever Global Brand Ambassador since I've been an avid traveller and nomad for most of my life – having lived in several continents – yet, my recent experiences with Insight have given me a unique perspective on travel." says Lisa Ray, "I'm proud to be associated with this premium escorted journeys company that takes care of all the hassles of modern travel and this is the best way to truly experience a new country while indulging the 'travelista' in me."</p>
<p>Classical India Tour</p>	<p>Here is the detail of the itinerary – it is a perfect tour if it is your first visit and you are looking for an introduction to India.</p> <p>Classical India Tour</p> <p>Day 1 Your Journey Begins</p> <p>Board your flight.</p> <p>Day 2 Delhi, a Rich Melting Pot of Old and New</p> <p>Welcome to India! On arrival at Indira Gandhi International Airport, you are greeted with a traditional floral garland and transferred to your hotel. Tonight, join your Tour Director for a Welcome Reception with a delicious meal. Hotel: Le Méridien, Delhi Welcome Reception and Dinner</p>

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Day 3 Delhi Sightseeing

After a restful night's sleep, ride by rickshaw through the lanes of Chandni Chowk bazaar in Old Delhi. See the Red Fort, visit the Gandhi memorial at Raj Ghat and the Jama Masjid, India's largest mosque. See the Qutub Minar and drive along the Rajpath past the India Gate and Parliament House to visit the Tomb of Humayun. This evening, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Hotel: Le Méridien, Delhi

Buffet Breakfast, Highlight Dinner

Day 4 Kathmandu, Gateway to Mountains, Monasteries & Temples

Transfer to the airport after breakfast for your flight to Nepal - a mystical country nestled in the folds of the Himalayas. Relax at your exquisite, centrally located hotel.

Hotel: Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu

Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 5 Durbar Square and Holy Shrines

This morning, explore Durbar Square and the ancient Royal Palace complex, laced with a myriad of temples, courtyards, statues and home to the Kumari (the living Goddess). On the outskirts of town visit Swayambhunath, the most ancient and enigmatic of the valley's holy shrines. Continue to Patan to visit to the sky piercing temple of Teleju, Statue of Yogendra Malla and Tibetan Handicraft Centre.

Hotel: Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu

Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 6 Magnificent Temples and Splendid Stupas

If weather permits the following morning, maybe take an optional flight over Mt Everest? Later, view Pashupatinath Temple on the banks of the Bagmati, one of the holiest Hindu shrines. Continue to Bodhnath, a colossal stupa, and Nepal's most important Buddhist site. Round off your sightseeing with a visit the ancient capital of Bhadgaon, the main square containing innumerable temples and architectural showpieces.

Hotel: Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu

Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 7 Varanasi, the oldest Living City in the World

This morning, relax and take advantage of some of the facilities in your

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5 star hotel before being transferred to the airport for the flight to India's holy city of Varanasi. This evening take in a special spiritual experience as you witness the holy Hindu Aarti ceremony at the riverside steps of the Ganges.

Hotel: The Gateway Hotel Ganges, Varanasi
Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 8 Ganges and City Sightseeing

Early in the morning, enjoy tea or coffee at the hotel before embarking on a boat cruise to witness the scenes of devotion on Ganges River. Return to the hotel for breakfast followed by a brief city tour visiting some famous temples. Your adventure continues at nearby Sarnath, the deer park where the Buddha preached his first sermon. Visit the museum which rates among the most important in India.

Hotel: The Gateway Hotel Ganges, Varanasi
Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 9 The Spectacular Carvings & Erotic Sculptures of Khajuraho

For those who wish, there's an early morning yoga session at the Ganges Ghats (if possible) where the air is filled with spirituality. Later board a short flight to Khajuraho, where you enjoy a tour of one of India's 'seven wonders' - the medieval Hindu and Jain temples, celebrated worldwide for their intricate and erotic carvings. Tonight, why not witness the Sound and Light show?

Hotel: Radisson, Khajuraho
Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 10 Orchha - Agra

After breakfast, en route to Jhansi, visit the citadel at Orchha, containing grand 16th Century palaces and temples. Afterwards, transfer to the train station in Jhansi and board the Shatabdi Express to Agra.

Hotel: ITC Mughal - Luxury Collection, Agra
Buffet Breakfast, Dinner

Day 11 Agra & the Taj Mahal

After breakfast, Agra's fine heritage is revealed. Appreciate the flawless marble symmetry of the exquisite Taj Mahal, built by an emperor in memory of his beloved wife. Move on to the impressive Agra Fort to explore the palatial Royal Pavilions and gardens. This afternoon you are free to explore this vibrant city. Another option is to attend a spectacular

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	<p>stage musical production which follows the 'Saga of Love' that inspired the construction of the Taj Mahal. Hotel: ITC Mughal - Luxury Collection, Agra Buffet Breakfast, Dinner</p> <p>Day 12 Jaipur, the 'Pink City'</p> <p>Set off this morning for the ancient Mughul capital of Fatehpur Sikri, a deserted city full of architectural wonder. Afterwards, drive to the 'Pink City' of Jaipur where there is time to freshen up. Later, visit a private estate for a sunset elephant safari. Board your elephant's cushioned seat for the trek through the forest, past village hamlets and fields to the camp where high tea awaits. Hotel: Fairmont, Jaipur Buffet Breakfast, Afternoon Tea, Dinner</p> <p>Day 13 Jaipur Sightseeing</p> <p>This morning, ascend by jeep to the Amber Fort, its royal halls decorated with intricate ivory, mirrors, glass and exquisite paintings. Back in Jaipur, see the 'Hawa Mahal' (The Palace of Winds) and visit the city Palace Museum and royal observatory. At this evening's Celebration Dinner enjoy drinks and authentic cuisine. Hotel: Fairmont, Jaipur Buffet Breakfast, Celebration Dinner</p> <p>Day 14 Depart Jaipur-Delhi</p> <p>Your tour draws to a close after breakfast. Departure transfers arrive at Delhi Airport at 17:00. The transfer will continue on to your chosen extra night hotel. Buffet Breakfast</p>
<p>My India Experience</p>	<p>I travelled in India in November 2014 after a gap of many years – what a difference! My two week journey with Insight Vacations took me to Delhi, capital of the sub-continent, across Northern India to the holy city of Varanasi, the oldest continually inhabited city in the world. I travelled to Khajuraho's carved temples, to the palaces of Orchha and of course to Agra, home of the world's most beautiful building, the Taj Mahal. From there, on to the great abandoned city Fatehpur Sikri, and then south and west into Rajasthan, to the Pink City of Jaipur. I travelled by air, by coach, by boat, by train, by cycle rickshaw and even by elephant! See my photos on Pinterest at https://www.pinterest.com/TravelShow/india/ And see my Travel Blog at</p>

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<http://www.chrisrobinsontravelshow.ca/Blog/tabid/400/EntryId/86/India.aspx>

<p>Singles</p>	<p>If you wish to share with another tour member you can advise Insight Vacations at the time of booking. Insight believes that traveling solo doesn't have to cost you more. They will try to match you with someone of the same sex in order to avoid having to pay the single supplement. If they are not able to provide a suitable roommate, they will provide a single room at no extra cost.</p>
<p>Tour Director</p>	<p>This is Insight's appointed tour escort who manages your entire trip, and is responsible to see that your vacation runs smoothly. He or she travels with you, coordinating your day-to-day itinerary, hotel check-in and language translation; as well as giving practical advice on everything from 'do's and don'ts' to the best restaurants and sights.</p>
<p>Hotels</p>	<p>All Insight hotels are carefully selected to be appropriate for your tour and for the destination. They are mainly First Class, Superior First Class and Deluxe standard, but some will be selected because they particularly reflect the region or country. Even in the more remote areas such as the Scottish Highlands and islands or countryside areas around Europe, Insight chooses from the best touring hotels available. It's worth remembering that room sizes in Europe, UK & Ireland tend to be smaller than in many areas of the world, and can vary within the same hotel, particularly in older, character hotels.</p>
<p>Meals</p>	<p>Insight tours feature an abundance of dining experiences. You'll enjoy included three course Table d'hôte dinners where we arrange the ideal complement of local foods such as soups and salads, pasta, paella, fish, chicken or various meats, plus appetizing desserts and coffee or tea.</p> <p>In Scandinavia, Spain, Germany and elsewhere, mouth-watering buffets are often provided.</p> <p>On some tours Insight features a 'Dine-Around Evening' with a choice of two or three restaurants. Your Tour Director will advise you of each menu so you can pre-select and make your reservation. Even if your first choice is unavailable you will enjoy any of the other delicious options also with wine, beer or soft-drinks.</p> <p>Other tours may offer a 'Highlight Dinner' at a restaurant, which usually features a menu typical of the region, similarly with wine, beer or soft-drinks.</p> <p>Hearty breakfasts are always included, from delicious traditional full-cooked breakfasts in Britain and Ireland to substantial buffets or continental style breakfasts as is the usual custom throughout Europe.</p>

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	In North America breakfast will consist of a full American breakfast. Should you require special dietary menus your tour director can arrange these for you when informed in advance.
Luggage	Handling is included for one suitcase per person.
Tipping	<p>On an Insight Vacation, some gratuities are included in the price of your trip: baggage handling, meal service for all meals listed in the tour itinerary, and hotel service charge. Room service, however, is not included in the tour price.</p> <p>Tipping is a widespread practice in Europe and is a customary way of acknowledging service. Here are some guidelines:</p> <p>Taxi fare, on meter 10-15%</p> <p>Restaurant, total bill 10-15%</p> <p>Tour Director €4.00 per person per day</p> <p>Motor-coach Driver €2.50 per person per day</p> <p>Local Sightseeing Guide €1.00</p>
Coaches	Insight's coaches are safe and comfortable and the drivers are highly experienced professionals. To give each passenger an equal opportunity, they rotate seats daily. A non-smoking policy is in place. Regular rest stops are provided so that you can stretch your legs.
Passports	The Chris Robinson Travel Show always advises listeners to carry their passport with them at all times. This ensures against loss or theft in hotels. For added protection, keep a photocopy of your passport in your suitcase. Hotels are sometimes required to hold your passport in order to comply with local regulations.
Sustainable Travel	<p>Protecting the environment and the people and places Insight visit is a top priority for the company. They want to help ensure these remain for future generations to enjoy and are committed to ensuring they minimize the environmental impact of their own operations around the world.</p> <p>Insight's Responsibility</p> <p>Every time we travel, whether by car, train, plane or coach, we are burning fossil fuels and contributing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. And while there are many ways to travel while on holiday, by choosing an Insight escorted tour, you are opting for one of the most environmentally friendly ways to go. Their website has a grid that shows you the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per km for a passenger traveling on various forms of transport which clearly shows coach transport as emitting significantly less carbon dioxide than other forms of transport. It's over five times more efficient than car travel for instance. With carbon dioxide being one of the main causes of global warming, it's good to know that buying an escorted tour holiday is a better way to travel.</p> <p>They are reducing the carbon footprints and environmental impact of</p>

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	<p>their offices by introducing recycling, energy reduction and waste minimisation projects as well as supporting local community projects where they live and work. Insight staff are involved in making a difference and starting in 2008 they are encouraging staff to spend two working days a year volunteering for charitable projects.</p> <p>Conservation Foundation: To demonstrate commitment and ongoing investment, Insight are supporting and contributing to The Leading Travel Companies of the World Conservation Foundation www.tlwc.com a not-for-profit organisation that will invest in supporting long term sustainable tourism.</p> <p>The Insight group of companies is donating US\$1 million per year to fund much-needed conservation, community and sustainable tourism projects that will create a better world for future generations to enjoy. To ensure every dollar goes to people and places in need, each project is carefully vetted by the Foundation's Members of the Board.</p>
Contacts	<p>Address: Insight Vacations, 33 Kern Rd, Toronto, Ontario M3B 1S9 Website: www.insightvacations.com Tel: 1-866-747-8120 Email: info@insightvacations.ca Connect with Insight Vacations on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/InsightVacations Follow Insight Vacations on Twitter: https://twitter.com/insightvacation</p>

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