



# TradeMissions

## Mission to India New Delhi & Chennai

### Briefing Kit

19 – 27 February 2005



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## Location

India is the third largest country in the world in terms of size, with a total landmass of 3,287,590 sq km. Located in South Asia, it has land boundary of 14,107km with its neighbours (Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Bhutan) and a coastline of 7,000km, which stretches across the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. Set apart from the rest of Asia by the supreme continental wall of the Himalayas, the Indian subcontinent touches three large bodies of water and is immediately recognisable on any world map. It is the huge, terrestrial beak between Africa and Indonesia. This thick, roughly triangular peninsula defines the Bay of Bengal to the east, the Arabian Sea to the west, and the India Ocean to the south.

India's puzzle board of 26 states holds virtually every kind of landscape imaginable. An abundance of mountain ranges and national parks provide ample opportunity for eco-tourism. From its northernmost point on the Chinese border, India extends a good 2000 miles (3200 km) to its southern tip. Mostly Nepal and the Himalayas, the world's highest mountain chain, dominate India's northern border. Following the sweeping mountains to the northeast, its borders narrow to a small channel that passes between Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh, and Bhutan, then spreads out again to meet Burma in an area called the "eastern triangle." Apart from the Arabian Sea, its western border is defined exclusively by Pakistan.

India can be organised along the compass points. North India is the country's largest region. It begins with Jammu and Kashmir, a dynamic area with terrain varying from arid mountains in the far north to the lake country and forests near Srinagar and Jammu. Falling south along the Indus river valley, the North becomes flatter and more hospitable, widening into the fertile plains of Punjab to the west and the Himalayan foothills of Uttar Pradesh and the Ganges river valley to the East. In between these two states is the capital city, Delhi. The southwestern extremity of the North is the large state of Rajasthan, whose principal features are the Thar Desert and the stunning "pink city" of Jaipur. To the southeast is southern Uttar Pradesh and Agra, home of the famous Taj Mahal.

West India contains the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, and part of the massive, central state of Madhya Pradesh. The west coast extends from the Gujarat peninsula down to Goa, and it is lined with some of India's best beaches. The land along the coast is typically lush, with rainforests reaching southward from Bombay all the way into Goa. A long mountain chain, the Western Ghats, separates the verdant coast from the Vindya Mountains and the dry Deccan plateau further inland.

Home of the sacred Ganges river and the majority of Himalayan foothills, East India begins with the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, which comprise the westernmost part of the region. East India also contains an area known as the eastern triangle, which is entirely distinct. This is the last gulp of land that extends beyond Bangladesh, culminating in the Naga Hills along the Burmese border.

India reaches its peninsular tip with South India, which begins with the Deccan in the north and ends with Cape Comorin, where Hindus believe that bathing in the waters of the three oceans will wash away their sins. The states in South India are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, a favourite leisure destination. The southeast coast, mirroring the west, also rests snugly beneath a mountain range the Eastern Ghats.

## Climate

India's sheer size means the country has a varied climate and terrain, stretching from the Himalayas in the north, to deserts in the West, plains in the Central region, and plateaus in the South, about 7,500 km along coastal line and rain-fed tropical forests.

Its climate depends not only on the time of year, but also the location. In general, temperatures tend to be cooler in the north, especially between September and March. The south is coolest between November to January. In June, winds and warm surface currents begin to move northwards and westwards, heading out of the Indian Ocean and into the Arabian Gulf. This creates a phenomenon known as the southwest monsoon, and it brings heavy rains to the west coast. Between October and December, a similar climatic pattern called the northeast monsoon appears in the Bay of Bengal, bringing rains to the east coast. In addition to the two monsoons, there are two other seasons, spring and autumn.

	Jan	Feb	Mar
<b>New Delhi</b>			
Max °C	17	24	31
Min °C	7	11	17
<b>Chennai</b>			
Max °C	31	32	33
Min °C	23	22	24

## Time Difference

Sydney, Melbourne	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23
New Delhi, Chennai	20.30	23.30	2.30	5.30	8.30	12.30	13.30	17.30

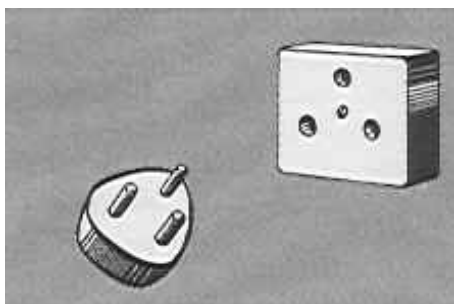
## Mobile Phones

Network accepted in India is GSM, check with your network provider for international roaming.

**TIP:** If Telstra is your network provider to retrieve voice messages send a blank text message to 101 and you will receive a call back within minutes with the message details.

## Electricity

In India, 220-volt, 50 cycles alternating current (AC) outlets are most common although socket sizes may vary widely. A universal adapter is recommended.



## Trading Hours

- Offices and larger businesses are open from 9.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday
- Many shops keep extended hours, opening from 9.30am to 7.00pm daily except for Sundays where most shopping areas remain closed.

## Currency

The unit of the Indian currency is the Rupee.

### Currency Exchange Rate

A dollar exchanges for about 33.7579 rupee. Exchange rates may change at any time according to the market conditions.

### Currency

You can use cash (rupee and dollar), credit card and traveller's cheques in India. When you need to exchange your foreign currency visit a bank, exchange service centre, or an authorised exchange dealer.

Business hours:

**Banking hours are 10.00am to 2.00pm Monday to Friday and 10.00 to 12.00pm on Saturdays.**

### Travellers Cheques

Travellers' cheques are a reliable and proven back-up, while a little cash is useful for paying taxis, porters etc. when you arrive at your destination. Remember that fees for cashing travellers cheques can vary considerably. Some bureaux de change will charge a flat fee, which can be as much as \$10 per transaction. Shop around for the best deal. Large banks are usually affiliated with a particular brand of travellers' cheque. They will charge you a minimal fee to cash them.

### Credit Card

Visa, Master Card, American Express, Diners Club credit cards are accepted at most hotels. You should be prepared to pay in Rupee when shopping in smaller shops, restaurants, and in smaller hotels.

### ATM

ATM's are available in major Indian cities. You should not rely on them as a source of cash. Check with your bank at home as to what the availability and cost of using ATMs in India is.

## Transportation around India

### Taxi

The best way to travel around India is by taxi. Yellow top taxis are generally easily available at stands, near commercial and residential areas and can be stopped on roads. A maximum of five passengers is generally permitted. Payment should be made according to the meter. Where meters are old, payments should be made in accordance with the revised tariff chart for the corresponding meter reading. Sometimes taxi drivers do not show these charts in order to charge higher amounts. Visitors are advised to insist that the revised tariff chart is shown. Night charges of 25% over and above the normal fare are payable for taxis engaged between 11.00pm to 5.00am.

Private taxis, non-metered are available in most cities. They can be hired on a journey basis, or for the day. Hotels, for their guests, can also arrange taxis for the day depending on your requirements.

## Useful Phrases

There are over 100 dialects in India with Hindi being the most common. In Chennai Tamil is the language that is commonly used.

### English

Hi or Hello  
Please  
Thank You  
Yes  
No  
Where can I find  
I am from Australia  
Are you open tomorrow  
Is this very far  
How much is this  
This is too expensive  
Make this price less  
How are you?  
Sorry  
Ok  
What?  
Where?  
How?  
When?  
Who?  
Why?  
What is the price?  
I don't understand  
Tell me the way please  
What is your name?  
My name is  
Right  
Left

### Hindi

Namaste  
Kripaya  
Shukhriya  
Haan  
Nahin  
Kahan milenge  
Main Australia se hoon  
Aap kal khule hain  
Kya ye bahut door hai  
Ye kitne ka hai  
Ye bahut mehenga hai  
Bhaav kam karo  
Aap kaise hain?  
Maaf kijiye  
Theek hai  
Kya?  
Kahan?  
Kaise?  
Kab?  
Kaun?  
Kyon?  
Iska kya daam hai?  
Mai samjha nahi  
Kripya raasta bataiye  
Aapka naam kya hai?  
Mera naam...  
Dahine  
Bayen

## Business Etiquette

### Making Appointments

- Always observe punctuality in keeping business appointments as Indians value it, even though they may arrive late themselves. Many visitors to India find it very disconcerting that often Indians themselves are quite casual in keeping their time commitments. One of the reasons for this is that in the Indian mind, time is generally not considered as the objective yardstick for planning and scheduling one's activities. Rather, for most Indians, the plans and schedules are contingent on other people and events, and therefore can and do get changed.
- Do be prepared for last minute changes in the time and place of your meeting. It is useful to leave your contact details with the secretary of the person, so that, in case there are changes, you can be informed.
- It is advisable to make the effort to be early in order to keep your appointment. In most Indian cities, the roads are quite crowded, and during high-traffic hours, it can take you a long time to reach your destination.

### Business Dress

In recent years, the dress code in Indian business settings has undergone a transformation. Moreover, it also differs widely across regions and business sectors. Therefore, it is difficult to make a generalisation about the most appropriate way to dress that will be valid across India. However, the following points should assist you in making the right decision.

- Normal business dress for men is a suit and tie. However, since India has a warm climate, often just a full-sleeved shirt with a tie is also acceptable. It is also important to select neutral colors, which are subdued and not very bright.
- For foreign women, pantsuits or long skirts, which cover the knees, are more acceptable to wear. The neckline of the blouse or the top should be high. For women, a salwar-suit is also acceptable for business dress.
- You can wear casual dress if invited to a social gathering. However, if a foreigner wears an Indian costume (kurta-pajama for men, and sari or salwar-suit for women), this kind of dress is also appreciated, and often seen as a gesture of friendship.

### Business Cards

If you are presented with business cards, accept the card with both hands. Study it for a few moments before carefully placing it away. Look up at the person who offered it to you to acknowledge the connection between the person and the information on the card. Do not hastily stuff a business card into your back pocket or write on someone's business card, as this is regarded as highly disrespectful.

### First Name or Title?

- When addressing a person, it is advisable to prefix the name with a "Mr", "Mrs", or "Miss", or the professional title of the person unless the person asks you to refer to him by his/her first name. In general, people are addressed by their name [without the prefix] only by close acquaintances, family members, or by someone who is older or superior in authority.
- The naming conventions in the southern states of India (Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala) are different when compared to other parts of the country (often broadly referred to as North India, though it also encompasses the eastern and western regions of the country).

- In North India, most people have a family name (e.g. Sharma, Patel, Singh, etc.), and the names are written in the western style, first name followed by the surname. Sometimes, there may also be a middle name, such as 'Chandra', 'Kumar', 'Prasad', etc. For instance, Mr. Praveen Chandra Kulkarni will be addressed as Mr. Kulkarni or as Praveen, if the relationship is informal.
- In contrast, in southern states, men do not have a family name. Instead, the name of one's father and/or the ancestral village/town is used for the purpose. These are normally abbreviated and prefixed before the first name. For instance, a south Indian name 'Kamundari Ranganthan Gurumurthy' will be written as 'K. R. Gurumurthy', signifying that the person's ancestral place is 'Kamundari', father's name is 'Ranganathan', and his first name is 'Gurumurthy'. He will be addressed as Mr. Gurumurthy or if the relationship is informal, as just Gurumurthy.

## Conversation

- Indians greet each other (and say good-bye) with the 'Namaste', which is formed by pressing the palms together (fingers up) below the chin and nodding the head. When greeting superiors or to show respect, a slight bow is added. When meeting foreigners, Indian men will shake hands. Indian men do not generally shake hands with or otherwise touch women as a tradition. Indian women who are educated or familiar with international customs may offer their hands to foreigners as a courtesy. When meeting a woman, a man should wait for her to initiate a handshake, if she does not, then he should just smile and nod slightly.
- The acceptable way to beckon someone is to hold your hand out, palm downward, and make a scooping motion with fingers. Beckoning someone with a wagging finger, with the palm upward is seen as an authoritarian/ condescending signal, and will be perceived as an insult.
- Do not point to someone with your finger, since that is likely to be interpreted as an accusatory gesture. Use of hand/palm or chin is a more acceptable way of pointing towards someone.
- Among Indians, it is normal for them to use their hands to gesticulate while talking with each other. Folded hands, or hands in one's pockets while talking are likely to be perceived as arrogant gestures. Standing erect with your hands on your hips is likely to be seen as an aggressive and dominating posture.
- Seniority, age and authority are respected in India, both in business and in public life.
- Feet are considered unclean in India, so avoid pointing your feet at another person. In the case that your feet or shoes touch another person, you are expected to apologise.
- Indians do not maintain continuous eye contact while talking with others. Direct eye contact may be seen as intrusive. On the other hand, do not feel uncomfortable if you find an Indian gazing at you, this is because Indians are curious to the extent of sometimes being intrusive about foreigners.
- The comfortable distance to be maintained during an interaction is much closer in India than in most Western countries. In general, a distance of about 2 or 2 ½ feet is seen as comfortable. However, since India has very high population density, in public spaces (e.g. public transport, a queue, etc.), don't be surprised if you find people almost rubbing against you.
- Most Indians enjoy good conversation on a variety of topics. Even in business meetings, it is common and normal to start discussions with 'small talk' on other unrelated issues. In fact, this is seen as a way of building rapport and trust. In general, Indians are open and friendly, and compared to many countries in the West, have a lesser sense of privacy. Sometimes, Indians ask questions which can be seen as too personal and intrusive. However, one must remember that discussing one's family and personal life is normal among Indians. In fact, often enquiring about the other person's family is seen as a sign of friendliness.

- Indians seldom express their disagreement in a direct manner; open disagreement is likely to be interpreted as being hostile and aggressive (though expression of disagreement by someone who is superior or elder is, by and large, acceptable). Normally, disagreements are openly expressed only with those with whom one has built a trusting relationship. Otherwise, disagreements are expressed in an indirect manner. In most cases - unless, it is a crucial issue - it is advisable to avoid expressing direct disagreement.
- While there are many topics of conversation, which Indians find engaging, there are a few which are quite popular. These are: Politics, Cricket, Films and, in recent times, Indian Economic Reforms. Taking the time to do some advance preparation on these subjects can be very helpful in building rapport and establishing one's acceptance. In addition to the above, it is important to appreciate that India is an ancient and rich civilisation, and most Indians are proud of their heritage. They normally enjoy discussing Indian traditions and history, especially with a foreigner.

## Deal-Making

- Always present your business card. It is not necessary, however, to have it translated into an Indian language. It is usually helpful to have an Indian intermediary.
- Of the Indian Business Community 95% fall under the following three communities: Sindhis, Marwaris and Gujratis. Sindhis, Marwaris and Gujratis are further subdivided into lots of castes. The caste system remains one of the most important influences in Indian society.
- Indians tend to think associatively, largely because the country's educational system places a heavy emphasis on rote learning. Indian businesspeople with a higher education, however, are often more abstract, analytical thinkers.
- In Indian business culture, perceptions of the truth tend to be guided by feelings; a strong faith in religious ideologies is also common. "Outside" information and new concepts will be accepted only if they do not contradict prevailing religious beliefs and social structures. An argument appealing to both feelings and faith will often be more convincing to an Indian than one using only objective facts and empirical evidence.
- Most of the business in India is family oriented, so you may negotiate with the siblings but the final say will always be with the head of the family. In Indian business culture, any final decision must be in accordance with the family, group, and social structure.
- In India everything has to be bargained. Deal with multiple businesses from different castes, and you will get more realistic prices.
- Because of the strong, coherent, social structure there is little anxiety about life because one knows and accepts one's place in society and the workplace. Each employee plays a role in the organisation; often the role is as important as the actual work the person may perform. The hierarchical nature of Indian society demands that the boss is recognised as the highest individual in authority. The boss makes all of the decisions and accepts all of the responsibility. Consequently, you'll often find that subordinates are reluctant to accept responsibility.
- Indians are generally too polite to directly answer "no". Since the word "no" has harsh implications in India, evasive answers are considered more polite. For example, if you have to decline an invitation, it's more acceptable to give a vague and noncommittal answer such as "I'll try" or "We'll see" rather than "No, I can't."
- Business in India is highly personal. It is also conducted at a much more leisurely pace than in Australia. Hospitality is an intrinsic part of doing business in India most business discussions will not begin until tea is served and there has been some preliminary "small talk". When refreshments are offered, it is customary to refuse the first offer, but to accept the second or third. To refuse any beverage will only be perceived as insult.

## Gift-Giving

Gift giving is customary in India, and is seen as a sign of friendship. However, it is generally not expected at the first meeting.

It is advisable not to give expensive gifts, unless you are very close to the person. Normally, large and expensive gifts are given only by family friends and close relatives and for specific family occasions, such as a wedding. Since Indians try to reciprocate a gift, if it is too expensive, it can cause embarrassment for the recipient.

Use red, yellow, green or blue coloured wrapping paper. White and black colors are considered inauspicious.

Normally, gifts are not opened in the presence of the giver. However, sometimes your Indian host may insist on your opening the gift, and would expect appreciation for his/her choice.

If you are invited to an Indian's home for dinner, you must take some kind of gift, such as a box of chocolates or flowers. If your host has children, carrying a gift for the child [a toy or a book] is also appreciated.

If you are visiting an Indian during a festival, it is customary to carry a box of sweets.

If you are giving money as a gift, do remember that 11, 51, 101, 501, etc. are considered auspicious numbers. Your gift would be more appreciated if it were in these denominations.

Before the opening up of the Indian economy, many foreign products were not available in India, and would have made a good gift. However, now most foreign-made products are accessible to Indians, and have, consequently, lost their value as a gift. However, Indians do appreciate a gift which is representative of your, or a specific, culture (e.g. Dutch wooden shoes/clogs, a Swiss knife, French perfume, etc.).

Ai Group has found that the following gifts are of good quality they are reasonably priced and are well received in Asia. You can purchase them from Potoroo, Shop V10, Southgate Landing, South Bank. For more information contact Jodie on 03 9690 9859 or email [info@potoroo.com.au](mailto:info@potoroo.com.au).

Pewter Kangaroo Chop Stick Rest	\$10.50	Red Gum Chop Sticks	\$9.50
Red Gum Business Card Holder	\$29.50	Small Red Gum Desk Box	\$32.00
Letter Knife with Red Gum Handle	\$19.50	Pewter Letter Knife Kangaroo/Platypus motif	\$29.95
Pewter Bottle Stopper with Aus Animal motif	\$27.50	Pewter Coaster with Aus Animal motif	\$15.95
Pewter Business Card/Letter Holder	\$25.00	Shot Glass with Pewter Aus Animal motif	\$23.50
Pewter Spoons Aus Animal motif	\$22.50	Miniature Pewter Figurines Aus Animal motif	\$10.50

Drinking alcohol is culturally not accepted in most parts of India. Many Indians do not drink at home. However, if your host drinks and keeps drinks at home, a bottle of scotch, whisky or wine will be appreciated.

Be cautious in giving a leather item as a gift. Since many Hindus are vegetarians, they may not appreciate items made of leather.

Jewellery is considered an intimate gift, and would be viewed as inappropriate if given by a man to an Indian woman. It is acceptable if a woman gives the jewellery as a gift; however, gold jewellery is normally exchanged/given only among family and relatives.

## Entertaining in India

- Hospitality is a key value in Indian culture, and the guest is considered the equivalent to a god. Indians normally go out of their way to accommodate the requirements of the guests. Any breach of etiquette by the guest is normally ignored and never brought to his or her attention.
- A foreigner visiting India is likely to receive social invitations from even minor acquaintances. This is mostly because Indians like to make a visitor feel welcome.
- A direct refusal to an invitation (e.g. “sorry, I will not be able to come”) is likely to be seen as impolite, or even arrogant. If you have to decline an invitation, it is more acceptable to give a somewhat vague and open-ended answer such as “I’ll try” or “I will confirm with you later”, etc.
- It is common practice in India to offer beverages (tea, coffee or soft-drink) with some light snacks/ refreshments to a guest, even in business settings. When refreshments/ snacks or beverages are served, it is customary (though not mandatory) to refuse the first offer, but to accept the second or third. It would, however, be a breach of etiquette not to accept it at all. Even if you don’t want to have the refreshments/ snacks, it is advisable to accept them though it is acceptable to leave these offerings untouched later on in the visit.

### Important Do's and Don'ts about Eating and Drinking

- Eating and drinking are intimately tied to Indian customs and religions. In planning any invitations, a knowledge and sensitivity to these customs are very important. For a large number of Indian Hindus, eating meat is a religious taboo. While planning a meal for your Indian guests (or placing an order in a restaurant), it is advisable to ask if they are vegetarians or non-vegetarians.
- If you are hosting a dinner or lunch party, it is advisable to have a few varieties of vegetarian dishes. It is also important to keep the vegetarian and meat dishes on separate tables, and label them to enable people to select what they can eat.
- Many Hindus keep a fast once a week, and during this time they can eat only fruits. When inviting people, do check and make arrangements for them accordingly.
- Non-vegetarian Hindus do not eat beef, and Muslims do not eat pork. Muslims eat meat, which is “halal” or ritually slaughtered. In planning for (or ordering) non-vegetarian dishes, chicken, lamb or fish are safe options.
- Indians are very particular about cleanliness. It is essential to wash both of your hands before and after meals. Traditional Indian dishes are eaten with the hands. When it is necessary to use your hands, use only your right hand, as the left hand is considered unclean. It’s considered acceptable, however, to pass dishes with the left hand.
- Drinking is prohibited among the Muslims, Sikhs and many Indian communities. However, with changing times, and especially among urban educated Indians, it is not strictly observed. It is better to ask your guest: “What would you like to drink?” rather than “Can I get you a beer?”.
- Business lunches are preferable to dinners in India. However, in recent times, business dinners and ‘power breakfasts’ are also becoming popular. In large cities (e.g., Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, etc.), restaurants offer a wide choice of cuisines, ranging from traditional Indian food to Chinese, Thai, Continental, etc. In selecting the restaurant, you must check what cuisines the restaurant offers to suit the tastes of your guests.
- Normally, excessive tipping is not encouraged, but a certain amount of tip is expected. In most restaurants, 10% is a sufficient tip, which may be added to the bill.

## New Delhi Food

Delhi is renowned for its tandoori or barbecued meats and fish, as well as the rich Mughlai cuisine, which also goes by the name of “North Indian Food”. Butter Chicken, Palak Paneer and Daal Makhni are signature dishes. Apart from this, its cosmopolitan character ensures that all other cuisines including Chinese, Continental, Italian and Thai, as well as fast foods are commonly available.

*If you have some spare time you may want to visit some of the following places.*

## New Delhi Tourist Sites

### Chandni Chowk

The main street of Old Delhi is the colourful shopping bazaar known as Chandni Chowk. At the East end of the Chandni Chowk and North of the Jama Masjid, there is a Jain Temple with a small marble courtyard surrounded by a colonnade. The west end of Chandni Chowk is marked by the Fatehpuri Mosque, which was erected in 1650 by one of Shah Jahan's wives. It is the nerve centre of old Delhi, and is really a huge marketplace. Open since 1654, it begins in front of Red Fort and is one of the largest wholesale centres in Asia. Clusters of shops sell everything from electronic products, watches and clocks to traditional Indian goods and tourist trinkets. Be warned that an afternoon in Chandni Chowk is not for the faint hearted. The homes open into the narrow alleys, and you can spot old courtyards, stone doorways and filigreed windows. This is Delhi at its most chaotic.

### Red Fort

The red sandstone walls of Lal Qila, the Red Fort, extend for two km and vary in height from 18 metres on the riverside to 33 metres on the city side. Shah Jahan started construction of the massive fort in 1638 and it was completed in 1648. The Red Fort dates from the very peak of Mughal power. Enclosed in this glorious Fort is Diwan-i-am, the hall meant for public audiences, Diwan-i-khas, where private audiences were granted; Rang Mahal, the water cooled apartment of the royal ladies, the Pearl Mosque, a lovely, ornate dream in white marble. The Prime Minister of India addresses the nation from this age old Fort, on India's Independence Day.

### Qutub Minar

Qutubuddin Aibak, a slave of the Muslim raider Mohammad Ghauri, to mark the first Muslim dynasty in India, built this imposing five-storey tower in 1193AD. Housed next to it is the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, a novel construction of Islamic domes and arches and carved decorative panels, from the Jain and Hindu temples. Qutub Minar is a World Heritage Monument.

## Chennai Food

Chennai provides a delectable range of cuisines for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Traditional meals comprise of cooked rice served with an array of vegetables, sambar, chutneys, rasam (a hot broth made with tamarind juice and pepper) and yoghurt. Non-vegetarian dishes typically include spicy mutton, chicken or fish curries cooked with Indian spices, tamarind and coconut. Chennai is famous for mouth watering Dosas.

*If you have some spare time you may want to visit some of the following places.*

## Chennai Tourist Sites

### Maamallapuram

An ancient seaport, on the shores of Bay of Bengal, built by the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, in the 7th century AD, Maamallapuram is a treasure trove of South Indian sculptural and architectural heritage. It is called Maamallapuram in tribute to its royal patron Narasimhavarman I, who was a famed wrestler ('Maa malla' means 'great wrestler. And 'puram' means place). Among the must-see works is Arjuna's penance - considered the largest sculptural panel in bas-relief in the world. Equally magnificent is the series of five monoliths, called the Pancha Paandava Rathas (five chariots named after the five Paandava brothers). Also not-to-be-missed are the Varaaha mandapa, the Krishna mandapa and the Mahishasuramardhini cave. Originally Seven Pagodas were supposed to have existed on the shore. Six of them were apparently sunken and claimed by the sea. The only visible Shore temple is a stunning two-spired shrine that houses both Vishnu and Shiva deities. Time and erosion have left their mark on these marvels in rock. But the excellence of the workmanship remains a silent testimony to the enduring nature of all that is great and beautiful in art.

### Valluvar Kottam

Opened in 1976 in memory of the poet-saint Thiruvalluvar, Valluvar Kottam is a massive auditorium, constructed on reclaimed land from an unused lake filled with the city's garbage and debris. The auditorium can seat up to 4000 people. All 1330 verses of the poet's epic - the Thirukkural, are inscribed on the granite pillars that surround the auditorium. The auditorium itself is not supported by any pillars. There is a 101-foot high temple chariot structure with a life-size image of the poet in it. The base of the chariot shows in bas-relief the 133 chapters of the Thirukkural. Over 3000 blocks of stone were used to create this memorial to Tamil culture.

### Marina Beach

Marina beach in Chennai is the second longest beach in the world. The best time to visit is in the early morning or late evening when the temperatures are cooler and the sun displays magnificent colours in the water. Between the beach and the road is a promenade created by Governor Grant-Duff, who gave Marina its name in 1884. A series of statues line the promenade. The most impressive of these being the Triumph of Labour by Debiprasad Roy Choudhry. Also on the promenade are memorials to former Chief Ministers of the State: Annadurai and MG Ramachandran. On the other side of the road is the Chennai skyline, Senate House of Madras University, Chepauk Palace, Presidency College and Vivekananda Illam (Vivekananda House).

## Taj Mahal

To people the world over, the Taj Mahal is synonymous with India. Overlooking the River Yamuna, and visible from the fort in the west, the Taj Mahal stands at the northern end of vast gardens enclosed by walls. Though its layout follows a distinctly Islamic theme, representing Paradise, it is above all a monument to romantic love. In the year 1607 when a prince of the royal Mughal household strolled down the Meena Bazaar, accompanied by a string of fawning courtiers, he caught a glimpse of a girl hawking silk and glass beads. Five years and a wife later (in those days princes did not marry for love alone) the regal 20 year old wed his 19 year old bride. It was a fairytale union from the start, one that withstood court intrigues, battles for succession and finally, the grand coronation. And when she died on the 19th year of their marriage, he etched her story in stone. The Taj Mahal is the living symbol of the monumental passion of Shah Jahan and Arjumand Banu.

The Taj is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular buildings of the world. Renowned for its architectural magnificence and aesthetic beauty, it counts among man's proudest creations and is invariably included in the list of the world's foremost wonders.

### Approach to the Taj

The walled complex is approached from the south through a red sandstone forecourt, Chowk-i Jilo Khana, whose wide paths, flanked by arched kiosks, run to high gates in the east and west. The original entrance, a massive arched gateway topped with delicate domes and adorned with Koranic verses, stands at the northern edge of Chowk-i Jilo Khana, directly aligned with the Taj, but shielding it from the view of those who wait outside. Today's entrance, complete with security checks, is through a narrow archway in the southern wall to the right of the gate.

### Garden Mausoleum

The mighty marble tomb stands at the end of superb gardens designed in the charbagh style so fashionable among Moghul, Arabic and Persian architects. Dissected into four quadrants by waterways, they evoke the Islamic image of the Gardens of Paradise, where rivers flow with water, milk, wine and honey. The "rivers" converge at a marble tank in the centre that corresponds to al-Kawthar, the celestial pool of abundance mentioned in the Koran. Today only the watercourse running from north to south is full.

### The Structure

Square in shape, with peaked arches cut into its sides, the Taj Mahal surmounts a square marble platform marked at each corner by a high minaret. Topped with a huge central dome, it rises for over 55m, its height accentuated by a crowning brass spire, itself almost 17m high. On approach, the tomb looms ever larger and grander, but not until you are close do you appreciate both its awesome magnitude and the extraordinarily fine detail of relief carving, highlighted by floral patterns of precious stones. Carved vases of flowers including roses, tulips and narcissi, rise subtly out of the marble base, a pattern repeated more colourfully and inlaid with precious stones around the four great arched recesses (pishtaqs) on each side.

### The Tomb

The south face of the tomb is the main entrance to the interior: a high, echoing octagonal chamber flushed with pallid light reflected by yellowing marble surfaces. A marble screen, cut so finely that it seems almost translucent, and decorated with precious stones, scatters dappled light over the cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal in the centre of the tomb, and that of Shah Jahan next to it. The 99 names of Allah adorn the top of Mumtaz's tomb, and set into Shah Jahan's is a pen box, the hallmark of a male ruler. These cenotaphs, in accordance with Moghul tradition, are only representations of the real coffins, which lie in the same positions in an unadorned and humid crypt below that's heavy with the scent of heady incense and rose petals.

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