



COUNTRY OVERVIEW

& PACKING GUIDELINES

**India: Traditional Medicine and Health Care Practices
Summer 2024**

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

There are few places that offer the complexity of history, geography and culture which is India. India is a large country, comprised of 29 states. It includes a diversity of ethnicities, languages, and religions. The official language of India is Hindi, although 22 other “official” languages are also recognized. Many people speak English, and most national universities conduct their classes in English.

At over 1.42 billion, India is the country with the largest population. Sixty five percent of Indians still live in rural areas, but large cities include Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai. The capital city of New Delhi, where our program starts, is a mega-city of 22 million people. Some areas of the country, such as the far North, are sparsely inhabited, but most of the country is densely populated with busy urban areas and densely farmed rural areas.

India is a democracy with a parliamentary system governed by a prime minister; the president holds a purely ceremonial position. Indians exercise their democratic rights with great enthusiasm: freedom of the press, speech and assembly are hallmarks of the society.

India was the birthplace of Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. It is also home to a large Muslim population, as well as small communities of Parsees (Zoroastrians), Baha'is, Jews, and Christians. By necessity, most people are tolerant of other religious traditions.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

India is about half the size of the continental U.S., with widely varying terrain and climatic conditions. The climate of North India and Delhi is extreme, with painfully hot months in summer and surprisingly cold temperatures in winter. June to mid-September is the monsoon season, while November to February is the driest, coolest period; the period from March to June is the hottest. The summer program will mostly be based in the Himalayan region with moderate temperature ranging from 70-90° F.

DIET

Indian cuisine is regionally varied, based on either rice or bread. Indian food can be spicy and hot; chilies are used liberally. While cutlery is now becoming common, one is often expected to eat with the right hand (the left hand resting in the lap). Meals are eaten later in the day, with lunch served between 1pm and 2pm, and dinner between 8 pm and 10 pm. Many Indian households employ a cook.

When at the program center, lunch is provided by the program (our cook is excellent); breakfast and dinner are provided by the homestay while in Satoli, Nainital. The meals provided by the program center



are generally focused on vegetarian food, although we will include a meat dish several times a week. Many Indian families also maintain a vegetarian diet for religious, rather than health reasons. For those with specific needs for additional protein or animal protein, it is advisable to bring supplements and/or snacks. Milk products such as milk, cream, yogurt, butter, ghee (clarified butter) and cheese, are in many dishes; for this reason, it is challenging to maintain a vegan diet particularly in rural Himalayas. A lacto-vegetarian diet is easily manageable in India.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context. In some locations, we cannot guarantee zero exposure to certain foods or a given allergen.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends doing your own research to stay up to date on [CDC guidelines](#). It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. SIT encourages students to have an informed discussion with your doctor and/or a travel clinician about what vaccines and other prophylactic medication you should receive.

Consider your normal routines for maintaining your physical and mental health & wellbeing. How might your program impact your ability to continue these routines? With this in mind, SIT strongly recommends bringing a full semester's supply of prescription medication(s). Getting a prescription filled outside of one's home country is very difficult, if not impossible. Equally challenging is receiving medication from home by mail. Therefore, students should bring an entire semester's worth of medication with them. Students are also advised to bring several extra inhalers and/or Epi-pens if prescribed.

Students should speak with their health care provider and/or a travel clinician and consult [CDC guidelines](#) regarding required and recommended immunizations and country regulations. Students participating on programs that require the yellow fever vaccine, will receive a signed and stamped "yellow card" after getting vaccinated, known as the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP, which can be printed here). It is important to bring this card with you when traveling to the program. SIT recommends that students insert this document into their passport so that it is easily accessible when requested by immigration officials. Even if yellow fever is not a requirement for your program, it is good practice to bring a copy of your immunization record with you, including your Covid 19 immunization card(s).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health Office](#).

Remember, you are a guest in India and representative of American culture. You should behave with dignity, good manners and common sense. While India is a generally safe country, as in crowded urban environments anywhere, you should be careful. For example: avoid going to an ATM late at night, don't take taxis alone late at night (always sit in the back of the taxi), keep your money in a safe place. Streets in all big cities in India are full of all imaginable types of traffic, animals and people- including vendors and beggars.

Female students in particular may attract unwelcome attention; this topic will be addressed extensively during orientation.

Remember that you are an ambassador of your home country.

Gender roles: Gender role are different from the United States. Relations between the sexes are distanced and formal. To avoid sexual harassment, students must be cognizant of modesty in both dress and behavior. Students must be careful not to cause unintentional insult by behaving in an overly familiar manner with Indian men/women.

Good Manners: India is a formal hierarchical society: younger members of the society are not privileged to be casual with elders. For example: You will be expected to stand when an elder enters the room, offer a chair to an elder, express greetings first, give way in a lunch line, and open doors. Behavior towards Buddhist monastics is especially formal.

Alcohol: The Drinking age in several states in India is 25. Alcohol consumption is dangerous at high altitude. Failure to respect norms regarding consumption of alcohol may compromise the student's reception in Indian society and may jeopardize SIT's standing in the community. This is especially important for female students, as the reputation of young women in India is especially vulnerable to charges of immorality regarding public alcohol consumption.

Cleanliness: Indians are bewildered and disgusted by the grubby "hippie" look. Cleanliness is not just the privilege of the wealthy: you will see even the poor washing under village pumps. It is therefore expected that you will keep your person, hair, and clothing clean. In a dusty climate it is also a necessity of personal health to wash hands, body,

and especially feet regularly with a good strong soap.

Clothing: As you will be highly visible in the local community, strict adherence to standards of dress is expected for students, according to the guidelines outlined above. Revealing, ripped, or stained clothing is unacceptable.

HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. You will learn firsthand the joys and responsibilities of being a guest, a family member, and a friend. You will also have the opportunity to share your culture and to learn from another's culture. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture, and SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families. For example, your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. They may be quite familiar with your hometown or with international students, or your homestay family may not know much about where you come from. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a "home" (i.e., the physical nature of the house) may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and possibly new priorities and expectations.

Each program's homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the greatest extent possible. **Please note: SIT will not have information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

In this program, you will be staying in one homestay. Like many people in Asia, a few rural Indians speak some English. Most of our homestay families are from lower middle-class backgrounds. They represent various castes and communities of rural

Nainital. Some are "nuclear" families, living in small houses, while others are "joint" and extended families.

As is culturally appropriate for Indian college students in rural Himalayas, you will be expected to conform to an 8:00 pm homestay curfew.



OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students will stay at a guest house near the program center during Orientation. During the program, when students are not doing a homestay they will stay in hotels, NGO dorms or small guesthouses, generally two students per room.

TRANSPORTATION

Students use trains, buses and taxis as the mode of transportation. The program uses travel and tour agencies with local expertise and good safety records.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, **all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program.** For that purpose students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) work with the academic director within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone locally, or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. **DO NOT purchase an international plan** unless you have a dual SIM phone. We discourage this for regular smart phones because your homestay family will not be able to communicate with you as they would have to call internationally.

During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their smart phone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

Keep in mind that telephone, cell phone and internet may often be unavailable in the mountains. Please be ready to cope realistically with this inconvenience.

When coming to India, it is important for you to know about mobile connections and how they work. It is useful to have one, as it gives a sense of security while navigating across India, besides keeping you in touch with loved ones.

You can check with your local service provider (in the US) to find out if the same number and phone will work in India or not. If you find that your phone will not work in India, phones with basic smart phone features are available in many stores across India and cost around Rs 5700 (70 Dollars). These will give you a local phone number and will allow you to receive free incoming calls.

When you are in the process of buying an Indian prepaid SIM card, it is critical to know that your signature on the SIM card paperwork must be identical to that which is present in your passport. **The signature in the subscription form should exactly match the one in the passport; otherwise the service will not be activated.** The Xerox copy of the front page of the passport should be submitted along with the subscription form.

You have chosen to experience a foreign culture as thoroughly as possible; constant telephoning, Skyping, e-mailing and/or blogging can hinder that experience. We encourage you to "unplug" and learn the slower and more meditative pleasures of journal and letter writing.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the programs and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See Attendance Policy.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.



MAILINGS

Posted letters should be sent to the following address. However, please be aware that students may not receive mail until the very end of the program:

Student Name

Ground floor 168, Pocket- 2
Jasola Vihar
New Delhi- 110025 (India)

Sending and receiving packages is another matter, however. Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient (due to customs delays) that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, unless it is an emergency, sending packages should be done on a needs basis. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. (This certainly includes laptops! For this reason, make sure you bring your laptop **with you** on the plane if you think you'll want it in country). If you will be celebrating a birthday during the program, please inform parents, grandparents, significant others, and anyone else who might think of sending you packages, of the above.

For this program, **DHL and FEDEX services are available in country**. Reliance on the U.S. Postal Service is not advised; while they may send packages for a cheaper price, timeliness and

reliability have been more inconsistent than with the preferred express mailing agencies. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you a package, it should be sent to the above address.

The delivery services listed above sometimes require a phone number to mail a package internationally. If the student has a cell phone in country, please use that number. In instances in which student participants do not have individual cell phones, please contact the SIT Study Abroad Office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing at 802-258-3212 or call toll-free at 1-888-272-7881.



MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. The program will cover travel costs for excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary.

The local currency is the Indian Rupee. ATMs are widely available in India and are usually a reliable way to get funds in larger cities. A major credit card (AMEX, Visa) is often necessary in emergencies and is highly recommended. If you have a medical situation that requires an overnight visit to the clinic you must have a credit card. Your program insurance will reimburse your expenses upon return home, but you must pay your bill in cash or credit card before leaving the clinic. You should be able to use a credit card at many upscale shops as well.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. This is very important; if you don't inform these companies that you will be away, when they see charges from another country, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. If they will expire while you are overseas, please contact your bank and/or credit card companies for early renewal. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust just in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages**.

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US\$250 to \$300**. To determine where

you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical term at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program.

Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Please budget approximately:

Personal Spending	\$150
Books, printing, supplies:	Approximately \$50
Up-front medical costs:	\$30-40 for clinic visits; Approx. \$150 for overnight stays; plus medicines
Bottled Water:	Drinkable water is provided at the program center/NGOs and guest houses.
Typical Internet usage:	The program provides cell phone-based internet with data, rural areas in the Himalayas will have limited internet access

PACKING GUIDELINES

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

We request that you pack in a backpack, not a suitcase. You will be traveling by train and will need to move quickly up and down train station staircases

and you must load your bags onto the train without any help – students in previous terms have missed the train because of heavy or bulky luggage. Some new backpacks have a wheel option, which is convenient.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

For many Americans, choice of dress is an expression of individuality. In India, appropriate dress is a simple way of displaying your knowledge of Indian cultural norms. Many of the homestay families

are quite liberal, but we also want you to be comfortable with standards observed by the more conservative sectors of Indian society, so that you will be well received in the widest variety of social settings. However, what it means to be respectfully dressed will not be obvious to you at first! The following details will help you get started.

The by-word for appropriateness in India is “neat and clean” – that is, your clothing should be ironed, clean, without holes or rips, and in accordance with the guidelines below. Despite their numbers, Westerners sporting a casual hippie-look are not well regarded in India.

Guidelines for All Students:

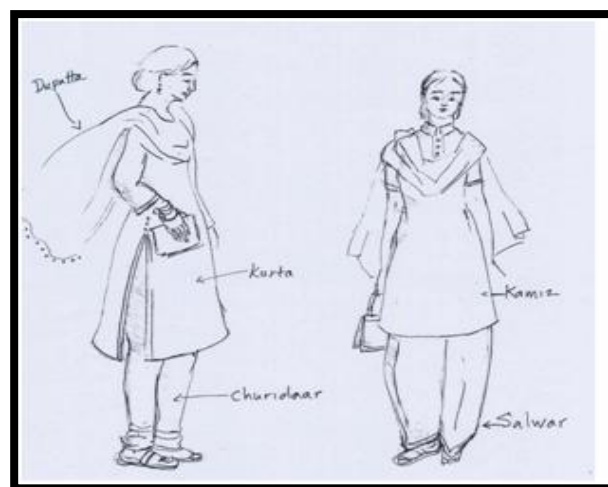
- Styles that show the midriff or backside, such as low-rise pants, are not culturally sensitive.
- Shirts may be tucked in (for men), or if they are left hanging, they must be long enough to come down past your bottom (for women).
- Shorts and sleeveless tops are never appropriate for either men or women. Collared shirts are always preferred over t-shirts.
- Bring your jeans, but make sure they are not too tight, low, ripped, ragged, or full of holes. Please be sure to have neat hems on your pants. Pants should completely cover your ankles – no capri pants.

Special Guidelines for Female Students:

- Indian clothing is world famous for its beauty: in flattering fit and exquisite fabrics. Asking you to observe the norms of Indian dress should not impose a burden on your sense of style, love of fashion or your pocketbook. While you are a participant on this program, we will insist that you meet the standards of conservative modest dress. This is for your reputation and safety as well as for the reputation of this program and your homestay. **You do not have to wear Indian clothing; Western clothing is fine, if it meets the modesty guidelines listed below.**
- By all means, bring your jeans; many Indian college women wear jeans and a kurta/kurta as typical on-campus attire. Jeans are fine if you wear a top long enough to cover your bottom.
- Tight or revealing clothing is seen as an explicit invitation for sexual attention. For your own protection and reputation, we will ask you to

change your clothes if you wear tight jeans, tight t-shirts or other forms of revealing clothing.

- Ankle-length skirts are considered appropriate Western wear – as long as they are patterned and not transparent. Skirts with side slits are not acceptable.
- Necklines must not show bosom cleavage. All shirts must be long enough to cover the hips and amply cover your bum.
- A bra-less look is never appropriate. Low-rise jeans are not acceptable. Displaying bra straps or underwear is not appropriate.
- Jogging clothes should consist of long pants and baggy top.



EQUIPMENT

It is a good rule whenever you travel to pack all your gear inside your pack in waterproof bags. If you are bringing expensive camera gear or other equipment, have a strategy to protect it from dust, heat and humidity.

You do not need to bring bed linens or pillows, but a small fast-drying travel towel is handy. You do not need sleeping bags, tents, or other camping equipment.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft. SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

If you choose to bring a laptop to India, please be aware that the current is 220v. AC 50 Hz, and that voltage is wildly unstable.

If you do bring your laptop, please be sure to back up all of your data, and remember to do so throughout the term, as computer crashes are frequent. You will be very busy during the first weeks of the program, so be aware that it may take you the first two weeks or so to set up your computer and Internet access.

Please also note that there is not a computer tech support resource available through the program; if you run into difficulties with set up or maintenance, it is your responsibility to trouble-shoot. We cannot arrange computer repair, parts, or Internet hook-up. Please **bring all necessary adapters**, as we cannot provide you with accessories.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters.

<http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>

The electrical current in India is 220v, AC 50 Hz. The plug types used are C and D.

Any electronic item you want to bring from the US must run on 220 Volts or exclusively on batteries (most camera chargers, computers, iPhones, BlackBerrys and iPods are dual system). Batteries are widely available and are relatively inexpensive. You can also purchase small plastic plug converters cheaply in India that will allow you to use a U.S. plug adapter. If you must bring some equipment that only runs on 110 volts, you will need to find a voltage adapter, called a **step-down transformer**. These can be quite heavy, so think twice before bringing 110 Volt appliances. You may want to bring a small digital recording device for recording interviews, lectures or language classes.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy; you do not need a gift for each member. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple

of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, a Frisbee, etc. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will meet them along the way. Once you are on the program and learn more about the culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Most toiletries and health supplies such as shampoo, shower gel, soaps, band-aids, razorblades, deodorant and toothpaste are widely available. Most American over-the-counter medications are found in Indian equivalents.

Medicines not available include: Pepto-Bismol; Malarone; acidophilus (a probiotic that may aid in digestion).

Don't miss the suggested packing list on the next page! These packing guidelines are compiled with suggestions from past students and your Academic Director. The clothing you bring may be adapted to your own style, within cultural norms of acceptable dress.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact:

<http://studyabroad.sit.edu/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/>.

PACKING LIST

GENERAL

- Sunhat: this is very important, the sun is brutal and you must have protection
- Sunglasses
- Sandals, sneakers
- Sleepwear
- Underwear and socks
- Bathing (medium size) towel

WOMEN

- Long non-transparent skirts, or long dress with short or long sleeves
- Long shirts or sleeved blouses that are adequate to cover your bum
- Full pajamas or long opaque nightie for homestay
- Modest, loosely cut jeans or pants with neat hems and no holes

MEN

- Collared shirts, polo shirts
- Khakis or clean neat jeans, with neat hems

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO card/International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis
- Two photocopies of your passport (both the photo page and the visa page), stored separately from your actual passport
- All SIT pre-departure information
- Photocopies of credit cards, ATM cards, and airline tickets, if applicable.
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination and/or booster encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- An adequate supply of any medication you use regularly, including birth control
 - A small portable medical kit, kept in your day pack at all times. It will be checked at Orientation for completeness, and should include:
 - A small supply of your prescribed medications.
 - Adhesive bandages
 - antibiotic cream
 - disinfectant moist wipes
 - small container of bug repellent

- over-the-counter drugs as approved by your doctor:
 - minor pain medication
 - antacids
 - anti-diarrhea medication
 - electrolyte mix
 - anti-itching ointment
 - antihistamine
 - motion sickness medication
 - cold and sore throat medication

- High SPF sunscreen
- For women: Tampons and pads, if you use a brand other than OB or Stayfree.

Some individual venues may still require masks for entrance. The CDC recommends a close-fitting and protective mask that is comfortable for daily use.

Remember to place all valuable items and any prescriptions in your carry-on luggage while traveling and all sharp items in your checked bag.

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Visa, AMEX, or MasterCard for emergencies.
- ATM card, if your bank is linked to international networks such as Cirrus or Plus. Be sure you know the four-digit code for international access.
- Money belt/passport holder or pouch.
- 1-liter water bottle that won't leak.
- Small flashlight and batteries.
- Notebook and pen in order to begin taking notes right away.

OPTIONAL

- Small traveler's watercolor set
- TSA-approved luggage zipper locks.