

India: Traditional Medicine and Health Care Practices

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines Summer 2026

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

India is a vast and diverse country, made up of 29 states and home to over 1.47 billion people—the largest population in the world. While 65% of the population lives in rural areas, major urban centers include Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai. Our program begins in New Delhi, a dynamic city of 22 million.

India's cultural and linguistic diversity is striking. While Hindi is the official language, 22 other languages are also recognized, and English is widely spoken—especially in higher education and government.

India is a vibrant democracy with an active civil society. It operates under a parliamentary system, with a prime minister as head of government. Freedom of speech, press, and assembly are constitutionally protected and widely exercised.

India is the birthplace of several major world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—and is also home to large Muslim and Christian populations, among others. Religious tolerance is a common feature of daily life.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

India's terrain and climate vary widely, but North India—especially Delhi—experiences extreme seasonal shifts. Summers (May to June) can be intensely hot, often exceeding 100°F. The monsoon season runs from the last week of June to August, bringing heavy rainfall and high humidity. Our summer program will primarily take place in the Himalayan region, where temperatures are more moderate, typically ranging from 70–90°F (21–32°C). However, altitude can affect students' energy levels and hydration, and sun exposure can be strong even on cooler days. Students should come prepared for high UV levels, potential dehydration, and cooler temperatures at night in higher elevations. Weather can vary sharply during excursions, so layered clothing, sun protection, and refillable water bottles are essential.



School for International Training

1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676
Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA
P: 888 272-7881
F: 802 258-3296

studyabroad@sit.edu
studyabroad.sit.edu

LOCAL CUSTOMS

As a student in India, it is important to approach your time with respect, humility, and cultural sensitivity. Indian society is more formal and hierarchical than what many students may be used to. Elders are shown deference—standing when they enter a room, offering your seat, greeting them first, and stepping aside in shared spaces are all expected forms of politeness. Greetings are usually warm but respectful; physical contact such as hugging or handshakes may not always be appropriate, especially across genders. Behavior around Buddhist monastics and Hindu religious sites should be especially reverent. Cleanliness is also a deeply rooted value in Indian culture—regardless of wealth or setting, personal hygiene and clean, modest clothing are essential. Unkempt appearances are often interpreted as disrespectful rather than casual.

Gender roles in India tend to be more conservative and distinct than in the U.S. Interactions between men and women are typically more formal, and students—especially women—should avoid overly familiar behavior to prevent misunderstandings or unwanted attention. Modest dress and behavior are not just recommended but essential for personal safety and to maintain community respect. Public consumption of alcohol, especially by women, can carry significant social stigma and may jeopardize your reception in the community and SIT's relationship with local partners. Adhering to local expectations—especially around dress, modesty, and respectful behavior—will help ensure a more meaningful and welcomed experience in India.

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in Indonesia. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

Indian cuisine is diverse and deeply regional, typically centered around rice or various breads, and often flavored with a generous use of spices and chilies. Mealtimes tend to be later than in the U.S., with lunch around 1–2 p.m. and dinner between 8–9 p.m. Eating with the right hand is customary, and while utensils are becoming more common, traditional settings may still expect hand-eating etiquette. During the program, lunch is provided at the center/classroom and breakfast and dinner are served by homestay families in Satoli, Nainital. Meals are predominantly vegetarian, reflecting both cultural and religious practices, though a meat dish is occasionally offered to students who are not vegetarian. Lacto-vegetarian diets are easily supported, but maintaining a strict vegan, kosher, or gluten-free diet—particularly in rural areas—may be more difficult due to the widespread use of dairy and limited alternatives. Students with specific



dietary needs, especially those requiring higher protein intake or avoiding common allergens, are encouraged to bring appropriate supplements or snacks.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of [Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing](#) prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

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

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the [U.S. Department of State](#) website and search their [Countries and Areas Archive](#) for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control [Traveler's Health](#) page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on 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. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's [webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team](#). Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook on your programs [predeparture page](#).

HOUSING

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. 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. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and 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. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” 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 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

extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living.

The homestay experience is a central and transformative part of the program, offering students the opportunity to immerse themselves in daily life with a local family in rural Nainital. Homestays vary and may include nuclear or extended families from diverse caste and community backgrounds, many of whom speak limited English. Homes are modest, typically without air conditioning or Wi-Fi, and may feature squat toilets and bucket showers. Students should be prepared to adapt to a simpler lifestyle, including different diets, shared rooms, and new household routines. A curfew of 9:00 p.m. is standard, aligning with local norms for Indian college students. Homestay placements are based primarily on health and dietary needs, and final assignments may be adjusted upon arrival. Students are expected to respectfully integrate into their host families' lives, following their customs and expectations as part of a shared cultural exchange.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions.

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.

Visit our [Contact & Communication](#) page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

[Cell Phone Policy](#)

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

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.

MAILINGS

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 that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, and UPS services are available in country.** Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name

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

MONEY

India uses the Indian Rupee (INR) as its currency, and ATMs are widely available in cities and towns, making debit card withdrawals a convenient option for accessing cash. However, it's important to notify your bank and credit card companies before departure, as unnotified foreign transactions may lead to your cards being frozen for suspected fraud. Credit cards such as Visa or AMEX are recommended, particularly for medical emergencies, as payment is typically required upfront in cash or by card, with insurance reimbursements processed later. While upscale shops and some larger establishments accept credit cards, most local markets and smaller vendors operate on a cash-only basis. Students cannot open local bank accounts, so bringing a secure way to store cash and valuables—such as a lockbox—is strongly advised. Be sure to check your cards' expiration dates and make photocopies of all cards to keep with a trusted contact back home in case of loss or theft. While program fees cover most costs including room, board, local transport, and program excursions, students should plan a personal budget for textbooks, independent travel and supplies, and incidental or gift purchases.

Check current exchange rates: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, 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. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

We suggest that you budget between US\$300 to \$400 for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional

expenditures you may have on the program. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are textbooks, Field Study Project or Internship-related expenses (if applicable) not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Personal Spending	\$150
Books, printing, supplies:	Approximately \$50
Up-front medical costs:	\$500
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

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance GeoBlue, which you can read more about on our [Participant Insurance](#) page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

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 program 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 the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#).

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full [Independent Travel](#) policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancellation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any

independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

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.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a [Code of Conduct](#) and clear institutional [policies](#) regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.



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 recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

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.

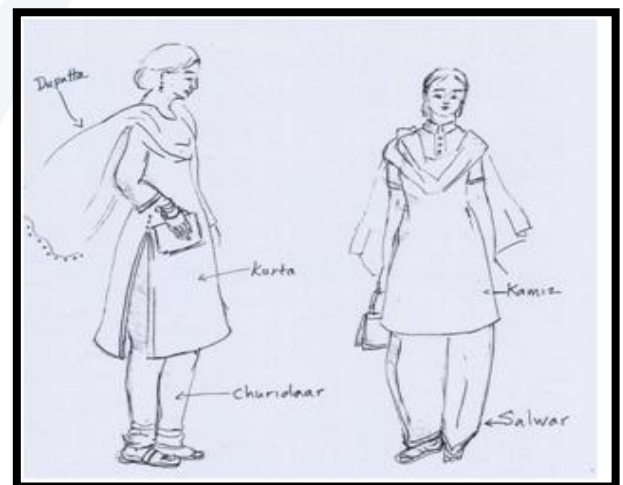
The by-word for appropriateness in India is “neat and clean” – that is, your clothing should be ironed, clean, without holes or rips, and in accordance with the guidelines below. Despite their numbers, Westerners sporting a casual hippie-look are not well regarded in India.

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/kurti 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, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

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 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, or a Frisbee.

Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

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).

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact:
<https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/>.

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

Packing List

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.

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
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- 2 passport photos
- All SIT pre-departure information
- Photocopies of credit cards, ATM cards, and airline tickets, if applicable.

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.

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.
- Students are encouraged to bring a **battery-operated carbon monoxide detector**)

OPTIONAL

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