

~ Awakening Women Yogini Winter Ashram ~  
Helpful Tips for Traveling to India

- **Let go of expectations.** A lot of people often travel to India with a sacred intention and expect India to be a soft, holy sanctuary. India is a sacred land, but also be prepared for its intensity—it is known for having the sacred and the profane exist so closely together. The people, the crowdedness, the beggars, the streets, the driving—a lot of India is described as intense for those coming from western countries who have never been to a developing country. As long as you are open to a new experience and are willing to meet it with curiosity rather than disappointment, you will be surprised and deeply moved.
- **Do some reading to prepare** (we recommend Lonely Planet traveler's guide to India) and talk to friends who have been to India. Ask them what it's like, what advice they would give, what their essential packing list was.
- **Come with an open and discerning heart.** There are many people who try to take advantage of foreigners in India, and there are also many people who are extremely generous, kind, and will treat you like family. Trust your intuition.
- **Know there is no “right” way to interact with the beggars you meet** in India. There are strong opinions and reasons to give and there are equally strong reasons not to give. Make it a part of your practice to feel deeper than this polarity and to navigate your yes or no to give money.
- **Be mindful, respectful, and curious about the many traditions and ways of behaving in India** that may feel foreign when you arrive. As long as you do this, you will find that the locals will treat you with respect. (i.e. Lack of personal space or privacy; the squat toilets without toilet paper in homes, public restrooms, and trains; bucket showers at some places; shaking hands and eating only with the right hand; the head nod that means "ok" and "yes" but looks like something between a yes and no; modesty that requires that

women cover their breasts, shoulders and legs, tie their hair up and not interact intimately with men in public).

- **Be prepared to hand-wash and line dry your laundry.** Though there is sometimes laundry service available in India, be prepared to hand wash and line dry your own clothing. A bucket will be available in your hotel, but bring your own laundry soap and clothing line/clothes pins (you can easily purchase these anywhere in India).
- **Check your pillow for mold** in the places you stay before/after the retreat (Sattva is much cleaner.) You can buy clean/new pillows as well or ask your hotel for a clean one.
- **Don't take any staring you experience from the locals personally.** If this is your first time in India, you may notice that the locals stare a lot at foreigners—staring is something in western culture we consider "rude" but here it is common and accepted.
- **Be conserving and focused with your energy when you walk on the streets.** In Rishikesh (and all over India), you will be approached by people trying to sell you random things, and will be called out to from the shops you pass. Know that you don't have to respond or try to be "polite." You can also just walk past them and say nothing. You can also bring/wear sunglasses if you like—this helps give you your own space even while walking in the streets and being approached.
- **Be prepared to bargain, both in shops and with transportation.** Usually, though not always, Rickshaw drivers will try to charge foreigners a much higher price than is standard. The actual price is usually half of what they initially ask. Don't be afraid to bargain with them and be a bit stern, even to walk away and try another driver if their price seems unfair (it can be hard to tell because they might ask 100 rupees for a 40 rupee ride, which is a difference of \$1 in the US, so it is also up to you how much energy you'd like to put into bargaining for what could be cents).
- **Bring remedies for your lungs.** The air quality in India is quite poor—there is so much pollution, smoke, smog, burning piles of trash. If your lungs are sensitive, be prepared with a handkerchief or herbal remedies like throat lozenges.

- **Bring extra remedies for your health.** Similarly, if there is a certain part of your body that you tend to feel most strongly or have a history of illness/imbalance with (the gut/digestion, the lungs, the head, skin, etc), we recommend bringing extra remedies and treatments for this part of your body. For example, if your digestion tends to be fine but your lungs are sensitive, bring plenty of medicinal support for your lungs.
- **Don't bring food across the bridge.** In Laxman Jhula, we would recommend that you hide or don't carry any food with you whenever you cross the bridge—there are monkeys that will smell it and will run towards you and try to take it from you. Know the monkeys are totally safe and harmless as long as you leave them alone and don't have food with you.
- **Be cautious when in or around cars.** If it is your first time in India, the way the cars drive there is completely different than in the West—there are no lanes, it's pretty much free for all, and honking is as common as breathing. It can be both amusing and dangerous. But also, when you are walking, cars and motorcycles will honk before passing you, but will come really close to you while passing—there isn't the same sense of spatial safety here. When you hear a horn, if you are uncomfortable with how close the cars come, just step out of the way before they pass.
- **Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving towards yourself.** Give yourself the permission, the time, and the space to acclimate to a new environment. If any fears, anxiety, worry, or difficulties arise before or during the trip, allow your practice to start here. Open into it, allow it to move through you, and bring compassion there.
- **Surrender.** India is holy in a different way from how the West usually considers holy—it is not a quiet, soft, peaceful temple paradise. Rather, She is untamable, wild, incomprehensible. To enter, She demands surrender.
- **Bring the medicine of humor and wonder.** India cannot be tamed or categorized or put into any box—simply being there mirrors the totality of truth. Piles of trash all over the most sacred river in India,

piles of cow dung in front of temples. Humor and wonder are powerful allies here.