

Earthbound Expeditions

India and Nepal Tour

12 days, from US$1,297 per person

Duration
12 days

Grade
Easy

Max altitude
2,175 m

Start and end
Delhi to Kathmandu

On foot
2 to 3 hours a day

Best season
Oct to Mar

Accommodation
Three-star hotels

Meals
Breakfast and most meals

Group size
Up to 8

Getting there
Private car

India and Nepal Tour Overview

Delhi, the Taj Mahal, Jaipur, the temples of Khajuraho and the cremation ghats of Varanasi, then across the border to the temple cities of the Kathmandu Valley.

Tour overview

This is the classic north Indian circuit, followed by the Himalaya. Delhi, Jaipur and Agra form the Golden Triangle, which is what most first visits to India include. Orchha, Khajuraho and Varanasi are older and less visited, and many itineraries leave them out for lack of time. The trip then flies north to Kathmandu, which after eight days on the plains has a different climate, a slower pace and a different religious tradition with similar practices.

Why Varanasi comes before Kathmandu

The itinerary is planned around this order. Pashupatinath in Kathmandu is a Hindu riverside cremation ground, as are the cremation ghats at Varanasi, and they are the two most important such places in Hinduism. If you have seen Varanasi first, Pashupatinath on day 10 is much easier to understand. Reversing the trip would not reduce the cost and would lose this connection.

Who this trip is for

Travellers who want to see sights rather than walk long distances. There is no trekking on this itinerary and no significant altitude. It does require stamina of a different kind: eight days in Indian cities in December is tiring regardless of fitness, and the driving days are long. It is also the least expensive trip we offer by a wide margin, which makes it a good first visit to both countries.

The long driving day

Day 8, Khajuraho to Varanasi, is about nine hours by car. It is the longest transfer on any of our trips, and a forty-minute flight covers the same distance. The trip price includes the drive, and we will book the flight for anyone who asks, as most travellers do. Please decide at the time of booking rather than on the day.

Key highlights of the India and Nepal Tour

- The Taj Mahal at sunrise
- Amer Fort and the old city of Jaipur
- Dawn on the Ganges at Varanasi
- Four UNESCO sites in the Kathmandu valley

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Delhi	-	-	220 m
2	Old and New Delhi	-	-	220 m
3	Drive to Jaipur, Amer Fort	5 hrs	270 km	430 m
4	Drive to Agra, the Red Fort	4–5 hrs	240 km	170 m
5	The Taj Mahal at sunrise	-	-	170 m

6	Drive to Orchha	5 hrs	250 km	230 m
7	Drive to Khajuraho, the temples	4 hrs	175 km	280 m
8	Khajuraho to Varanasi, the long one	9 hrs, or a 40 min flight	400 km	80 m
9	Dawn on the Ganges, fly to Kathmandu	1h 15m flying	-	1,400 m
10	Kathmandu valley sites, up to Nagarkot	-	-	2,175 m
11	Sunrise, Bhaktapur, back to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
12	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Delhi

We meet you at Indira Gandhi International Airport with an Earthbound Expeditions sign and take you to your hotel. There are no activities today, so you can rest after your flight.

Altitude: 215 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Delhi Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Old and New Delhi sightseeing

Today you see two very different parts of Delhi. In the morning, Mughal Delhi: the Red Fort, the large courtyard of the Jama Masjid, and a walk or rickshaw ride through the crowded lanes of Chandni Chowk. In the afternoon, Lutyens' imperial capital, with its wide, quiet avenues: India Gate, Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Parliament building, and Raj Ghat, where Gandhi was cremated.

Altitude: 215 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Delhi Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Drive to Jaipur

A drive of about five hours south-west into Rajasthan, where the land becomes drier and browner and the buildings more colourful. In Jaipur, you visit Amer Fort on its ridge above a lake, and the Hawa Mahal, the pink honeycomb facade built so that the women of the court could watch the street without being seen.

Altitude: 430 m On foot: None, 5 hr drive Night: Hotel, Jaipur Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Drive from Jaipur to Agra

A drive of about four hours east, with a stop at Fatehpur Sikri, the abandoned Mughal capital, if time allows. In Agra, you visit the Red Fort, a fortress and palace where Shah Jahan spent his last years imprisoned by his son, with a view down the river to the tomb he built for his wife.

Altitude: 170 m On foot: None, 4–5 hr drive Night: Hotel, Agra Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

The Taj Mahal at sunrise

We visit at sunrise, when the light on the marble changes every twenty minutes and before the crowds arrive. The Taj Mahal is a tomb rather than a palace, built by Shah Jahan for Mumtaz Mahal. Look closely at the inlay work: thousands of pieces of semi-precious stone set flush into the white marble.

Altitude: 170 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Agra Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Drive to Orchha

A drive of about five hours south to a small town on the Betwa river that many itineraries leave out. Orchha has palaces and cenotaphs of the Bundela kings standing above the water. After Delhi, Jaipur and Agra, it is the first place on this trip where the monuments are not crowded.

Altitude: 230 m On foot: None, 5 hr drive Night: Hotel, Orchha Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Drive to Khajuraho

A drive of about four hours east to the temples built by the Chandela dynasty between about 950 and 1050 and abandoned when the capital moved. Around twenty of the original eighty-five temples survive. They are covered in some of the finest sculpture in India, a small and well-known part of which is erotic.

Altitude: 285 m On foot: None, 4 hr drive Night: Hotel, Khajuraho Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Drive from Khajuraho to Varanasi

This is the most tiring day of the trip: about nine hours by road east to the Ganges. A forty-minute flight covers the same journey, and we will book it for you if you prefer. In the evening, you attend the Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh ghat, where priests perform a fire ceremony to the river at dusk.

Altitude: 80 m On foot: Drive, 9 hrs, or a 40 min flight Night: Hotel, Varanasi Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Sunrise on the Ganges and fly to Kathmandu

Before sunrise, take a rowing boat along the river past the bathing ghats and the cremation ghats, where cremations take place continuously. Please treat this as a religious and personal occasion for the families present. Then fly north to Kathmandu, arriving in the Himalaya by evening.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 10

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing and drive to Nagarkot

Visit Swayambhunath on its hill above the city, the riverside temples and cremation ghats at Pashupatinath, which are easier to understand after Varanasi two days earlier, and the great dome of Boudhanath. In the afternoon, drive up to Nagarkot on the valley rim for sunset over the mountains.

Altitude: 2,175 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Nagarkot Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Sunrise at Nagarkot, Bhaktapur and farewell dinner

Rise early to see the Himalaya along the northern horizon; on a clear morning Everest is visible. Then drive down to Bhaktapur, the best preserved of the valley's three medieval cities, where you spend the afternoon. In the evening, a cultural show and farewell dinner in Kathmandu.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 12

Departure

We take you to Tribhuvan International Airport for your flight. If you are continuing on a trek, our trekking team meets you here.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers and ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits and national park fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel and rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips and personal expenses
- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
India e-Tourist visa. Apply at least four days before you fly. Use the government website: unofficial agency websites charge three or four times the fee for the same form. Applications most often fail because of the photograph, so take it against a white wall.	$25, or $10 arriving April to June	Online at indianvisaonline.gov.in, 2 to 5 days
Nepal tourist visa. Cash at a bank counter, in clean notes. Indian nationals need no visa and no fee at all.	$30 for 15 days, $50 for 30	On arrival at Kathmandu airport
Neither needs a guide by law. Unlike Bhutan and Tibet, both countries allow independent travel. The city guides on this trip are included because Khajuraho and Varanasi are difficult to understand without one, not because a rule requires it.	Inside the trip price	-
Land borders, if you would rather. The e-Visa is valid at all three border crossings. Crossing overland takes a full day rather than a flight, and we can arrange the overland route if you prefer.	Same visa fees	Sunauli, Raxaul or Kakarbhitta

Other cost	Amount	Note
India e-Tourist visa, 30 days	$25	$10 if you arrive between April and June
Nepal visa on arrival, 15 days	$30	Cash at the airport bank counter

Varanasi to Kathmandu flight	$180–260	One way. The only international flight within the trip
Private car and driver, 8 days	$65–95 a day	Air-conditioned, covering about 1,300 km
Hotels in India	$35–70 a night	Three-star, seven nights. Upgrades are easy to arrange and inexpensive
Hotels in Nepal	$40–70 a night	Three-star, three nights in Kathmandu and Nagarkot
Local guides in each city	$25–40 a day	A different guide in Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, Khajuraho and Varanasi
Indian monument fees	$70–95	The Taj Mahal alone is INR 1,300, plus Agra Fort, Amer, Khajuraho and Fatehpur Sikri
Kathmandu monument fees	$45–60	Bhaktapur is the most expensive at NPR 1,800
Ganges boat, dawn and dusk	$12–20	Two trips. The dawn trip is the main reason to visit Varanasi
Meals not included	$10–25 a day	Some lunches and dinners are at your own expense, and food in India is inexpensive
Tips, guides and drivers	$100–160	Per traveller, across both countries and five cities

Packing list

For temples and mosques

- Long trousers or a long skirt, and tops with sleeves. With shoulders and knees covered, you can enter every site on this itinerary
- A scarf or shawl, to cover your head at the Jama Masjid and to keep dust off in the car
- Slip-on shoes. You remove them at every temple and mosque, a dozen times or more
- Socks for walking on stone. Marble courtyards become very hot underfoot

For eight days in cities

- Comfortable shoes that are already worn in, for three hours a day on stone for two weeks
- A day bag that closes securely, worn on your front in Chandni Chowk and on the Varanasi ghats
- A hat and sunglasses. Even in December the middle of the day is bright
- Plenty of hand sanitiser

For the colder places

- A warm layer for Delhi in December and January, when it can be colder indoors than outside
- A fleece or light down jacket for Nagarkot, which is at 2,175 m and near freezing at dawn
- A light waterproof jacket, mainly for the shoulder months

Health

- Medicine for an upset stomach, and rehydration salts. You are likely to need them
- Your own prescription medicines in their original packaging, with a copy of the prescription
- Mosquito repellent, particularly for Varanasi and the Terai
- A refillable bottle, as the car carries bottled water and this avoids using forty single-use bottles

Papers and money

- A passport valid for six months with two blank pages, plus photocopies
- A printed copy of your India e-Visa approval. Airlines often ask to see it on paper
- Four passport photographs
- US dollars in clean notes for the Nepal visa on arrival
- A card for hotels and rupees for everything else. Indian ATM withdrawal limits are low
- A universal adaptor: India and Nepal both use types C and D, and India also uses type M

Travel between India and Nepal

The trip includes one international flight, and there are three land borders you could use instead. The long drive on day 8 can be replaced by a flight.

One flight within the trip

The flight from Varanasi to Kathmandu takes about an hour and a quarter and is the only international flight within the trip. Buddha Air and Nepal Airlines operate it, and it allows the itinerary to go from the Ganges to the Himalaya without returning to Delhi.

Day 8 by air

Khajuraho to Varanasi is about nine hours by road. A forty-minute flight covers the same distance and costs $90 to $140. The trip price includes the drive, and we will book the flight for anyone who asks. Please decide at the time of booking rather than on the day.

Land border crossings

Sunauli, near Bhairahawa, for Varanasi and Lucknow; Raxaul, near Birgunj, for Patna and Bodhgaya; and Kakarbhitta in the east for Darjeeling. All three issue Nepali visas on arrival and all three accept the Indian e-Visa. Each crossing takes a full day, which is much longer than the map suggests.

Flights to Delhi and home from Kathmandu

This trip is one way, so book an open-jaw ticket: into Delhi and out of Kathmandu. It usually costs the same as a return ticket to either city and saves a day. If your airline does not offer this, there are several flights a day from Kathmandu to Delhi, taking an hour and forty-five minutes.

Driving

About 1,300 km over eight days in India, in a private air-conditioned car with a driver who stays with you throughout. Indian highways are in reasonable condition but slower than the distances suggest. None of the roads are poor, but the total distance is long.

Accommodation

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Delhi	2	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Jaipur	1	Three-star hotel, often a converted haveli	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Agra	2	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Orchha	1	Small hotel by the river	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Khajuraho	1	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Varanasi	1	Three-star hotel, near the ghats	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Kathmandu	2	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Nagarkot	1	Hill resort on the valley rim	Twin or double, mountain-facing	Private, hot water

Air conditioning
In every Indian hotel and in the car. From October to March you will rarely need it, which is one reason to travel in those months.

Heating
Limited in India and often absent in Kathmandu. Hotels in Delhi are built for the summer and are cold indoors in January.

Hot shower
Available every night at every hotel.

Wifi
Available in every hotel, and Indian mobile data is fast and very inexpensive. No websites are blocked in either country.

Phone signal
Airtel or Jio in India, Ncell or NTC in Nepal. An Indian SIM card requires your passport and takes twenty minutes to set up; your guide can arrange it on day 2.

Water
Bottled water in the car, included. Tap water is not drinkable in either country.

Laundry
Same-day service in most hotels, charged per item and inexpensive.

Single rooms
Available every night for a supplement. Unlike on our treks, no night requires twin sharing.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	7:00–9:00	Hotel buffet. In India this includes paratha, idli, poha and eggs as well as toast
Lunch	12:30–14:00	On driving days, a highway restaurant, which in India is usually good
Dinner	19:30–21:00	Mughlai in Delhi and Agra, Rajasthani in Jaipur, and thali almost everywhere
Tea	constantly	Masala chai from a roadside stall, served in a clay cup where these are still used

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Very easy. A third of India is vegetarian, menus mark vegetarian dishes clearly, and Varanasi and Orchha are largely vegetarian towns.
Vegan	More difficult than vegetarian, because ghee, paneer and curd are used widely. Tell us at booking and your guide will order suitable dishes; south Indian food is usually a safe choice.
Jain	Well understood and easily catered for in India, and we inform the hotels in advance. More difficult in Kathmandu, where it needs advance planning.
Gluten free	Rice, dal and most south Indian food are safe. Roti, naan, paratha and anything battered are not.
Halal	Widely available in Delhi, Agra and Varanasi, and the guides know where to find it. Less available in Jaipur and Orchha.
Heat	Tell your guide on day 1. Every kitchen on this route can reduce the chilli, but they will only do so if asked.

A typical day

Time	What happens
6:00	On two mornings, for the Taj Mahal and the Ganges, you set out before sunrise
8:00	Breakfast at the hotel on most days
9:00	Sightseeing with the local guide, or driving on a travel day
12:30	Lunch. On driving days this is at a highway restaurant
14:00	The afternoon visit, or the rest of the drive
17:00	Check in, or the evening ceremony. The Ganga Aarti at Varanasi takes place at dusk
19:30	Dinner, and the guide explains the plan for the next day
21:30	Rest, or an evening walk. Indian cities remain busy late into the evening

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 1 of 5

Our easiest trip, although eight days in Indian cities is still tiring.

- No trekking and no altitude. The most walking on any day is two or three hours around a monument.
- About 1,300 km of driving over eight days, including nine hours on day 8 unless you take the flight.
- Two early starts: the Taj Mahal at sunrise and the Ganges before dawn.
- Many steps at Amer Fort, the Jama Masjid and the Khajuraho temples, though none of the climbs are long.
- Most travellers are tired by the heat, the noise and the crowds rather than by physical effort. Travelling between October and March reduces this.

Getting ready

8 weeks before: Visit a travel clinic

Typhoid, hepatitis A and tetanus vaccinations are the standard recommendations for India, and rabies is worth discussing. None of these are mandatory, and they are easier to arrange eight weeks before departure than two.

4 weeks before: Apply for the e-Visa

The e-Visa takes two to five days to process and can be applied for up to 120 days ahead, so apply early. Use indianvisaonline.gov.in only. Applications most often fail because of the photograph: it needs a white background, a square crop and no glasses.

2 weeks before: Walk regularly and wear in your shoes

This trip does not require special fitness, but you will be on your feet for three hours a day on stone. Comfortable shoes that are already worn in are more useful than training.

1 week before: Decide about day 8

Choose between nine hours by car and a forty-minute flight for $90 to $140. This decision makes the biggest difference to the second half of the trip, and it is better made now than on the day in Khajuraho.

Weather by month

These figures are for the Indian plains, where eight of the twelve days are spent. Kathmandu is milder than every figure below.

Month	Daytime on the plains	Night-time on the plains	Kathmandu, daytime	Conditions	Note
January	20°C	7°C	19°C	Good	Cool and pleasant by day and cold at night. Fog in Delhi delays flights and trains on most mornings.
February	24°C	11°C	21°C	Best	The best month on the plains. Warm days, cool nights, and no more fog.
March	30°C	16°C	25°C	Best	Warm and clear, and Holi falls in this month. The last comfortable month in Rajasthan.

April	36°C	22°C	28°C	Hard	Hot. Agra and Jaipur are above 35°C by mid-morning, which is why the e-Visa costs $10 rather than $25.
May	40°C	27°C	30°C	We do not run it	We do not run this itinerary in May. Delhi and Agra reach 45°C.
June	39°C	28°C	30°C	We do not run it	Similar to May, with added humidity as the monsoon approaches.
July	35°C	27°C	29°C	Hard	Monsoon. Cooler and very humid, with flooding on the Ganges at Varanasi.
August	34°C	26°C	29°C	Hard	Similar to July. The ghats at Varanasi are often partly under water and boats are restricted.
September	34°C	24°C	28°C	Hard	Clearing through the month, and still humid. Suitable from about the 25th.
October	32°C	19°C	26°C	Best	The main season begins. Warm and clear after the monsoon, and Diwali usually falls in this month.
November	27°C	12°C	23°C	Best	Excellent, and the clearest month in Kathmandu. Our recommended month for this trip.
December	22°C	8°C	20°C	Good	Cool and bright, and the Delhi fog begins. Hotels are not heated, and in January it can be colder indoors than outside at night.

Averages for Delhi and Agra, with the Kathmandu daytime figure alongside. Eight of the twelve days are on the plains, which is what makes May and June impossible.

Guides and porters

Your guides and driver

In India, one driver stays with you for all eight days, and a different local guide accompanies you in each city. We do this deliberately: a Delhi guide who specialises in Mughal architecture is not the right person to explain the sculpture of Khajuraho or the cremation rites at Manikarnika, and a single guide across five cities would not have the same local knowledge. In Nepal, one of our own Kathmandu guides accompanies you for the last three days.

Your driver

The driver is the only person with you for the whole Indian part of the trip. He drives about 1,300 km and knows where to find clean toilets between Orchha and Khajuraho. He is a driver, not a guide. We pay and insure him and provide his own room and meals, so he does not have to sleep in the car.

Tipping

Tipping is customary and expected. Allow about $100 to $160 per traveller for the whole trip: roughly half for the driver at the end of the Indian part, and the rest shared between the city guides as you go and the Kathmandu guide at the end.

Responsible travel

Respect at the cremation ghats

The cremation ghats at Manikarnika and Harishchandra are active cremation grounds where families grieve in public. Photography is forbidden there, and the rule is enforced by those who have the right to do so. Watch from the boat or from a distance, put your camera away, and ignore anyone who offers to take you closer in return for a donation. This is a well-known scam and is also disrespectful.

Dealing with touts

Around the Taj Mahal, Amer Fort and the Varanasi ghats you will be approached often. Your guide handles most of this. The most effective response from you is a firm no, without eye contact or an explanation. A hesitant or polite answer is taken as interest. A direct refusal is not considered rude locally.

Photographing people

Always ask first. In both countries most people are happy to be photographed. A sadhu on the ghats who poses for a photograph will expect payment, so agree the amount beforehand. Do not photograph anyone who is bathing, praying or mourning.

Supporting local communities

In India, your money is spent on Indian hotels, an Indian driver and Indian city guides, arranged by our long-standing partner in Delhi rather than a chain. Monument fees go to the Archaeological Survey of India and, in Nepal, to the trusts that maintain Bhaktapur and Patan, which is where your NPR 1,800 entrance fee at Bhaktapur goes.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us or send a WhatsApp message with your dates and the number of travellers. Nothing is payable at this stage. This itinerary is very flexible and days can be added or removed at almost any point.

Deposit

A deposit of thirty per cent secures your dates, and the balance is paid on arrival. For this trip the balance is paid in Delhi at the start rather than in Kathmandu, because most of the costs are in India.

Documents we need

A copy of your passport and your India e-Visa approval once you receive it. We do not apply for the Indian visa on your behalf: it is a simple online form, and agencies that offer this service charge three or four times the fee. We will tell you exactly what to enter.

Open-jaw flights

Fly into Delhi and out of Kathmandu. This usually costs the same as a return ticket to either city and saves you a day and an extra flight back to your starting point.

Cancellation

If you cancel more than 30 days before departure, your deposit can be transferred to any other date or trip we run, with no time limit. Within 30 days the deposit is retained, because the hotels and the internal flight have been booked. If we cancel for any reason other than weather, we refund the full amount.

Late bookings

Two weeks' notice is comfortable and one week is possible. This is the easiest of our trips to book at short notice, because there are no permits, restricted areas or mountain flights. The exceptions are Holi and Diwali, which fall on single dates and are booked up months ahead.

Optional extras

Fly on day 8 instead of driving
$90 to $140, saves 8 hours
Khajuraho to Varanasi in forty minutes rather than nine hours by road. Most travellers take this option.

Time the trip for Holi
+$150 on the price, in the itinerary
The festival of colours falls on one date in March and is the best day to be in north India. Hotels are booked up months ahead and charge higher rates.

Ranthambore National Park for tigers
from $340, +2 days
A national park between Jaipur and Agra with a good chance of seeing a tiger. The extension includes two safaris and one night and fits into the itinerary without other changes.

Bodhgaya and Sarnath
from $260, +2 days
The places where the Buddha attained enlightenment and first taught, both near Varanasi. This extension suits travellers more interested in Buddhist sites than Mughal ones.

Chitwan after Kathmandu
from $390, +3 days
Rhinos and Tharu villages in the lowland jungle, added after Kathmandu. It also gives you a break before the flight home.

Everest scenic flight
$220, 1 morning
A one-hour flight along the range from Kathmandu with a guaranteed window seat. It fits on day 11 and is the closest this trip comes to the mountains.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 20 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

Is this a good first trip to India?

Yes. It is close to the standard first itinerary. Delhi, Jaipur and Agra form the Golden Triangle and cover Mughal and Rajput India in five days. This itinerary adds the eastern part, Orchha, Khajuraho and Varanasi, which many first trips leave out for lack of time and which shows much more of India than its monuments.

How much walking is there?

Two or three hours a day around monuments, on stone surfaces. There is no trekking and no altitude, and no day is physically demanding. Travellers are usually tired by the heat, the crowds and the driving rather than by the walking.

Is it suitable for children or older travellers?

Yes, with one consideration: the driving. Every night has a bed, a private bathroom and hot water, and the sightseeing is gentle. Eight days of long car journeys suit some families better than others, and taking the flight on day 8 helps considerably.

Is it safe, including for a woman travelling alone?

Yes, with the normal caution any large Indian city requires. You are with a driver and a guide all day and in booked hotels every night, which removes most of the difficulties solo travellers face. Dress modestly at religious sites, avoid walking alone at night in the old cities, and be firm in saying no to strangers.

Is the drive on day 8 really nine hours?

Yes. Khajuraho to Varanasi is about nine hours by road, and it is the longest transfer on any of our trips. A forty-minute flight costs $90 to $140, and most travellers choose it. The trip price includes the drive, and we will book the flight whenever you ask.

How much driving is there in total?

About 1,300 km over eight days in India, in a private air-conditioned car with a driver who stays with you throughout. The longest driving days are days 3, 6 and 8; days 2 and 5, and the days in Nepal, have almost no driving.

Can I travel by train instead?

For parts of the route, yes, and we arrange it on request. The Gatimaan Express from Delhi to Agra and the Varanasi trains are good. By train you cannot stop at Fatehpur Sikri, choose your departure time or leave your bag in the car, but you do experience Indian railways. Ask and we will price both options.

What visas do I need?

An India e-Tourist visa, applied for online, costs $25 for thirty days, or $10 if you arrive between April and June. A Nepal visa on arrival at Kathmandu costs $30 for fifteen days, paid in cash. That is $55 in visas, compared with $440 in Bhutanese fees on our other two-country trip, which largely explains the difference in price.

Should I use a visa agency?

No. indianvisaonline.gov.in is the only official website, and the form takes twenty minutes. Many unofficial websites that look similar charge three or four times the fee for the same service and appear high in search results. If you are asked for $120 for a thirty-day tourist visa, you are on one of these websites.

Why do e-Visa applications get rejected?

Mostly because of the photograph. It needs a plain white background, a square crop, your face filling most of the frame, and no glasses. Take it with a phone against a white wall rather than scanning an old passport photograph. Apply at least four days before you fly, and up to 120 days ahead.

How much spending money do I need?

India is inexpensive: $10 to $25 a day covers the meals that are not included, tea, water and small purchases. Allow $100 to $160 for tips across the trip. Cards are accepted in hotels and at most tourist businesses; markets, rickshaws and small towns take cash only. Indian ATM withdrawal limits are low, so expect to use ATMs several times.

Can I take Indian rupees into Nepal?

Small notes, yes, and they are widely accepted in the border towns. Notes of INR 500 and above are not legal tender in Nepal and will be refused. Spend your larger notes before you fly.

Will I get ill?

You may have a mild stomach upset, and it is worth preparing for. Drink sealed or filtered water, choose street food stalls that are busy and serve food quickly, and carry rehydration salts and medicine for an upset stomach. Visit a travel clinic eight weeks before you leave.

What should I wear?

Long trousers or a long skirt and tops with sleeves for temples and mosques, which you visit on most days. Slip-on shoes, because you take them off often. A scarf to cover your head at the Jama Masjid. In shorts and vests you may be refused entry to important sites.

Can I photograph the cremations at Varanasi?

No. Manikarnika and Harishchandra are active cremation grounds where families grieve in public. Photography is forbidden and the rule is enforced. Watch from the boat, put your camera away, and ignore anyone offering to take you closer in return for a donation.

How should I deal with touts?

Say a firm no, without eye contact or an explanation. A hesitant or polite answer is taken as interest and can cost you twenty minutes at the Taj gate. Your guide handles most approaches. A direct refusal is not considered rude locally.

How does Pashupatinath compare with Varanasi?

They are the two most important Hindu riverside cremation grounds, and seeing them two days apart is the main reason this itinerary runs east and then north. Pashupatinath is smaller and quieter, and it is easier to understand once you have seen the Varanasi ghats.

When should I go?

October to March, and February and November are the best months. October is warm and clear after the monsoon; November is clear in both countries; February has the best weather of the year on the plains. Avoid May and June, when Delhi and Agra reach 45°C. In December and January, fog in Delhi delays flights on most mornings.

Should I plan the trip around Holi?

If you want to experience the most remarkable festival day in north India, yes. Holi falls on one date in March, the whole country stops, and everyone is covered in colour by ten in the morning. Hotels book out months ahead and charge more. We also run a shorter Holi tour in Nepal if the festival is your main interest rather than the circuit.

How late can I book?

One week before departure. This is the easiest of our trips to arrange at short notice, because there are no permits, restricted areas or mountain flights. Allow four days for the e-Visa. Holi and Diwali are the exceptions and need to be booked months ahead.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/india-and-nepal-tour