



India

The Himalayas, the Taj Mahal, sacred rivers and a thousand kitchens, in the country with more people than any other.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

New Delhi

POPULATION

More than 1.4 billion (as of 2025), the largest in the world

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hindi and English for the central government; 22 languages are recognised in the constitution, and there is no single national language

CURRENCY

Indian rupee

AREA

About 3.29 million km²

GOVERNMENT

Federal parliamentary republic, with a president as head of state and a prime minister leading the government

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Kangchenjunga, 8,586 m, on the border with Nepal: the highest peak in the territory India administers

LONGEST RIVER

The Ganges, about 2,525 km, the longest river flowing mostly through India

NEIGHBOURS

Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Across the sea: Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and near the Andaman Islands, Thailand and Indonesia

DRIVES ON THE

Left

CALLING CODE

+91

A 45-minute trip to India

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find India together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story:
2600 BC: The Indus Valley cities flourish; 1632: Work begins on the Taj Mahal; 2023: Chandrayaan-3 lands near the Moon's south pole. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Masala dosa and Idli. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Namaste" (Hello, and also goodbye), "Dhanyavaad" (Thank you), "Shukriya" (Thanks). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/india/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

India and its cities



- New Delhi (National Capital Territory of Delhi): Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President's palace, India Gate, The Red Fort and Old Delhi, The Qutb Minar
- Mumbai (Maharashtra): Bollywood films, The Gateway of India, Vada pav and pav bhaji, The Elephanta Caves
- Kolkata (West Bengal): The Howrah Bridge, The Victoria Memorial, Durga Puja, Sweets such as rasgulla
- Chennai (Tamil Nadu): Marina Beach, Fort St George, Car factories, South Indian breakfasts
- Bengaluru (Karnataka): Information technology, The nickname Garden City, A mild climate
- Hyderabad (Telangana): The Charminar, Hyderabadi biryani, Pearls, Golconda Fort
- Jaipur (Rajasthan): The Pink City, The Hawa Mahal, the Palace of Winds, Amber Fort,

Jewellery and textiles

- Agra (Uttar Pradesh): The Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Marble inlay work, Fatehpur Sikri nearby
- Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh): The ghats on the Ganges, Evening prayers by the river, Silk saris, Sarnath nearby
- Amritsar (Punjab): The Golden Temple, The Wagah-Attari border ceremony, Jallianwala Bagh, Punjabi food
- Kochi (Kerala): Chinese fishing nets, Black pepper and spices, The Kerala backwaters, The Paradesi Synagogue
- Panaji (Goa): Beaches, Portuguese-style houses, The Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa, Goan fish curry

A short history of India

India's story is one of the longest in the world. The first great cities rose in the Indus Valley more than 4,500 years ago. Later came the empires of the Mauryas and the Guptas, the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals, then European traders and almost two centuries of British rule. In 1947 India became independent, and in 1950 it became a republic.

2600 BC **The Indus Valley cities flourish**

From about 2600 BC, cities with straight streets, brick houses and covered drains grew along the Indus and its rivers. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro are in today's Pakistan; Dholavira and Lothal in Gujarat and Rakhigarhi in Haryana are in India. Their writing has still not been deciphered.

322 BC **The Maurya Empire is founded**

Around 322 BC Chandragupta Maurya took power in Magadha, in the Ganges valley. Under his grandson Ashoka, the empire controlled the main cities and routes of the subcontinent, except in the deep south.

261 BC **Ashoka's war in Kalinga**

Around 261 BC the emperor Ashoka conquered Kalinga, in today's Odisha, at a terrible cost in lives. Filled with remorse, he turned to Buddhism and non-violence and carved his teachings on rocks and pillars across his empire. The wheel on India's flag comes from one of his pillars.

AD 320 **The Gupta Empire begins**

Chandragupta I came to the throne around 320 AD and made the Gupta kingdom an empire. Under the Guptas, scholars such as the astronomer Aryabhata did important work, and the place-value numerals that became today's 0 to 9 took shape. Some historians call it a golden age, though others dispute the label.

1206 **The Delhi Sultanate is founded**

Qutb ud-Din Aibak became the first sultan of Delhi. He began building the Qutb Minar, and his successor Iltutmish raised it higher. The sultanate ruled much of northern India for over 300 years.

- 1498** **Vasco da Gama reaches Calicut**
On 20 May 1498 the Portuguese explorer landed near Calicut, today's Kozhikode in Kerala, after sailing around Africa. It opened a sea route from Europe to India's spices.
- 1526** **The Mughal Empire begins**
On 21 April 1526 Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi, the Sultan of Delhi, at the First Battle of Panipat, using cannons and firearms against war elephants. His Mughal dynasty ruled for more than 200 years.
- 1600** **The East India Company is founded**
On 31 December 1600 Queen Elizabeth I gave a group of London merchants a charter to trade in the East. The company began with trading posts and in time came to rule large parts of India with its own army.
- 1632** **Work begins on the Taj Mahal**
After his wife Mumtaz Mahal died in 1631, the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan ordered a white marble tomb for her in Agra. The mausoleum was finished around 1648 and the whole complex in 1653.
- 1757** **The Battle of Plassey**
On 23 June 1757 Robert Clive's East India Company army defeated Siraj ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, helped by the betrayal of the Nawab's commander, Mir Jafar. It gave the company control of Bengal, the start of its rule in India.
- 1857** **The uprising of 1857**
In May 1857 Indian soldiers of the company's army rose up at Meerut, and the revolt spread across northern and central India. It is also called the Indian Rebellion or the First War of Independence. It was put down, and in 1858 the British Crown took over from the company.
- 1885** **The Indian National Congress is founded**
In December 1885, 72 delegates met in Bombay, today's Mumbai, to found the Indian National Congress. It became the main voice of the movement for self-rule and, later, independence.
- 1930** **Gandhi's Salt March**
From 12 March to 6 April 1930, Mahatma Gandhi and 78 followers walked 387 km from his ashram in Ahmedabad to the sea at Dandi, where he made salt against the British salt tax. Thousands joined on the

way, and the march drew attention around the world.

1947

Independence and partition

On 15 August 1947 India became independent, and British India was divided into two countries, India and Pakistan. The provinces of Punjab and Bengal were split. Between 12 and 20 million people were displaced, and hundreds of thousands, by some estimates up to 2 million, died in the violence.

1950

The Constitution comes into force

On 26 January 1950 India became a republic. The drafting committee of its constitution was chaired by B. R. Ambedkar. The day is celebrated every year as Republic Day.

2023

Chandrayaan-3 lands near the Moon's south pole

On 23 August 2023 India's Vikram lander touched down on the Moon and released the Pragyan rover. India became the fourth country to land softly on the Moon and the first to do so near its south pole.

What people eat in India

There is no single Indian cuisine: every region has its own. The north eats more wheat breads, the south and east more rice, and spices such as turmeric, cumin and cardamom are used everywhere (chilli came only in the 1500s, with the Portuguese). A home meal is not served in courses: rice or roti, dal, vegetables, yoghurt, pickle and perhaps a sweet all arrive together, often in small bowls on a round metal tray called a thali. In Kerala a feast is served on a banana leaf. Vegetarianism is widespread but not universal: in a 2021 survey about 4 in 10 Indians called themselves vegetarian, with big differences between regions and communities.

Masala dosa

South India

A large, thin, crisp pancake made from a fermented batter of rice and lentils, rolled around a spiced potato filling and served with coconut chutney and sambar, a lentil and vegetable stew. A favourite breakfast across the south.

Idli

South India

Soft, round, steamed cakes made from fermented rice and black lentils, about four parts rice to one part lentils. They are mild on their own and are eaten for breakfast with sambar and chutney.

Dal tadka

All over India, especially the north

Dal means dried split lentils, peas or beans, and the soup made from them. For dal tadka, cooked lentils are finished with a tadka: spices, garlic and onion fried in hot ghee or oil and poured over the top. Eaten with rice or roti, it is one of India's everyday staples.

Butter chicken)

Delhi, made famous in the 1950s

Pieces of tandoori chicken in a smooth, mild sauce of tomatoes, butter and cream, flavoured with garam masala and dried fenugreek leaves (kasuri methi). Usually eaten with naan.

Hyderabadi biryani

Hyderabad, in the Deccan

Long-grain rice and meat, often goat or chicken, layered with spices, saffron, fried onions and mint. In the kacchi style the meat goes into the pot raw, after marinating in yoghurt and spices, and cooks together with the rice in a pot sealed with dough, a slow method called dum.

Rogan josh

Kashmir, from a Persian dish brought by the Mughals

Lamb or goat braised slowly with garlic, ginger, cloves, bay leaves, cardamom and cinnamon. Its deep red colour comes from mild Kashmiri chillies or from ratan jot, a dried root.

Chole bhature

North India, especially Punjab and Delhi

Spiced chickpeas in a thick gravy, served with bhature: large, puffy breads of fermented dough, deep-fried until they balloon. Mainly a hearty breakfast, and a favourite street food.

Pav bhaji

Mumbai

A thick, buttery mash of vegetables cooked with spices on a big griddle, eaten with soft bread rolls (pav) toasted in butter, with chopped onion and lime.

Vada pav

Mumbai, Maharashtra

A spiced potato dumpling fried in chickpea batter, tucked into a bread roll with chutneys and a fried green chilli. Cheap, filling and easy to eat on the move.

Samosa

Came from Central Asia and the Middle East in the 1200s or 1300s

A triangular pastry, deep-fried until crisp, filled in India most often with spiced potatoes, onions and peas. Sold at tea stalls everywhere, with chutney.

Dhokla

Gujarat

A soft, spongy savoury cake of fermented rice and chickpea batter, steamed, cut into squares and topped with mustard seeds, green chillies and fresh coriander.

Machher jhol

Bengal and Odisha, in the east

A light, spicy fish curry of river fish such as rohu or hilsa, cooked with turmeric, ginger, garlic and potatoes. In Bengal it is everyday comfort food, always eaten with rice.

Naan

North India, from the time of the Delhi Sultanate

A soft, leavened flatbread slapped onto the inside wall of a very hot clay oven, the tandoor, where it puffs and chars in minutes. At home most Indians eat roti or chapati, unleavened breads cooked on a flat pan; naan is more of a restaurant bread.

Masala chai

All over India

Black tea boiled with milk, sugar and spices such as cardamom, ginger, cinnamon and cloves. Sold in small cups by chaiwalas at stalls and railway stations across the country.

Lassi and mango lassi

Punjab

A cool yoghurt drink with the thickness of a smoothie. It can be salty, with cumin and black pepper, or sweet, with cardamom, rosewater or saffron. Mango lassi, made with ripe mango, is a favourite far beyond India.

Gulab jamun

North India, found all over the subcontinent

Small balls of khoya (milk cooked down to a soft dough) and flour, fried slowly in ghee or oil until dark brown, then soaked in a warm syrup scented with cardamom and rosewater.

Rasgulla

Eastern India: both West Bengal and Odisha claim it

Soft, spongy balls of chhena, a fresh cheese, cooked in a light sugar syrup until they soak it up.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Many Indians eat with their hand, and only with the right one. The left hand stays dry and is used for passing dishes or holding a glass of water.
- Wash your hands before and after the meal. Tear roti with the fingers of your right hand and use it to scoop up food; rice is mixed with curry and eaten with the

fingertips.

- Do not put food, a spoon or fingers that have touched your mouth back into a shared dish. Food that has touched someone's mouth is called jootha and should not be shared.
- Whole spices such as cloves, bay leaves and cinnamon sticks are not eaten. Set them aside on your plate.
- At a Kerala feast (sadya) on a banana leaf, the leaf is folded at the end of the meal. Which way you fold it is a message to the host, so watch what your neighbours do.
- Many Hindus do not eat beef, many Muslims do not eat pork and many people are vegetarian. Ask before offering food, and expect separate spoons for vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes.

Dal tadka

Dal means dried split lentils, peas or beans, and the soup made from them. For dal tadka, cooked lentils are finished with a tadka: spices, garlic and onion fried in hot ghee or oil and poured over the top. Eaten with rice or roti, it is one of India's everyday staples.

Ingredients

- 200 g split red lentils (masoor dal), rinsed, or yellow split lentils (toor dal), soaked for 30 minutes
- 1 litre water
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons ghee or vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic and a thumb of ginger, finely chopped
- 1 tomato, chopped
- ½ teaspoon chilli powder (or less, to taste)
- ½ teaspoon garam masala
- A handful of fresh coriander, chopped

Method

1. Put the lentils, water and turmeric in a pan, bring to the boil and skim off the foam.
2. Simmer, half covered, stirring now and then, until the lentils are soft and falling apart: about 25 minutes for red lentils, 40 to 50 minutes for toor dal. Add the salt and a little more water if it is too thick.
3. For the tadka, heat the ghee or oil in a small frying pan. Add the cumin seeds and let them sizzle for a few seconds.
4. Add the onion and fry until golden, then the garlic and ginger for 1 minute, then the tomato and chilli powder. Cook until the tomato is soft.

5. Pour the tadka over the dal, stir in the garam masala, sprinkle with coriander and serve with rice or roti.

Butter chicken

Pieces of tandoori chicken in a smooth, mild sauce of tomatoes, butter and cream, flavoured with garam masala and dried fenugreek leaves (kasuri methi). Usually eaten with naan.

Ingredients

- 600 g boneless chicken thighs, cut into large pieces
- 100 g plain yoghurt
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger and 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 1 teaspoon mild chilli powder (Kashmiri chilli if you can find it)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 50 g butter
- 400 g tomato passata
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon dried fenugreek leaves (kasuri methi)
- 100 ml single cream

Method

1. Mix the yoghurt, lemon juice, ginger, garlic, 1 teaspoon of the garam masala, the chilli powder and the salt. Coat the chicken and leave it in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.
2. Heat the grill or oven to high. Spread the chicken on a tray and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, turning once, until lightly charred and cooked right through, with no pink inside.
3. Meanwhile melt the butter in a pan, add the passata and sugar and simmer for 15 minutes, until thick.
4. Crumble in the fenugreek leaves, add the rest of the garam masala and stir in the cream.
5. Add the chicken to the sauce and simmer for 5 minutes. Taste for salt and

serve with naan or rice.

Masala chai

Black tea boiled with milk, sugar and spices such as cardamom, ginger, cinnamon and cloves. Sold in small cups by chaiwalas at stalls and railway stations across the country.

Ingredients

- 300 ml water
- 200 ml milk
- 2 teaspoons loose black tea (Assam is best) or 2 tea bags
- 3 green cardamom pods, lightly crushed
- 3 thin slices of fresh ginger
- A small piece of cinnamon stick and 2 cloves
- 2 to 3 teaspoons sugar, to taste

Method

1. Put the water, cardamom, ginger, cinnamon and cloves in a small pan and bring to the boil. Simmer for 2 minutes.
2. Add the tea and simmer for 1 minute more.
3. Pour in the milk and sugar and bring back to the boil, watching carefully so it does not boil over. Let it rise and fall two or three times.
4. Strain into cups and serve hot.

Lassi and mango lassi

A cool yoghurt drink with the thickness of a smoothie. It can be salty, with cumin and black pepper, or sweet, with cardamom, rosewater or saffron. Mango lassi, made with ripe mango, is a favourite far beyond India.

Ingredients

- 250 g plain yoghurt, chilled (use pasteurised yoghurt and milk, as sold in shops)
- 250 g ripe mango flesh or canned mango pulp
- 100 ml cold milk
- 1 to 2 teaspoons sugar or honey, to taste
- A pinch of ground cardamom

Method

1. Put the yoghurt, mango, milk and sugar in a blender.
2. Blend until smooth and frothy. Add a little more milk if it is too thick.
3. Pour into glasses, sprinkle with cardamom and serve straight away, well chilled.

Useful phrases

Namaste

nuh-muh-STAY · Hello, and also goodbye

Dhanyavaad

DHUN-yuh-vahd · Thank you

Shukriya

shook-REE-yah · Thanks

Kripya

KRIP-yah · Please

Maaf kijiye

MAHF kee-jee-yay · Sorry, excuse me

Aap kaise hain?

ahp KAY-say hain · How are you?

Main theek hoon

main TEEK hoon · I am fine

Mera naam ... hai

MAY-rah nahm ... hai · My name is ...

Aapka naam kya hai?

AHP-kah nahm KYAH hai · What is your name?

Aapko angrezi aati hai?

AHP-koh un-GRAY-zee AH-tee hai · Do you speak English?

Main samjha nahin

main SUMJ-hah nuh-HEEN · I don't understand

Yeh kitne ka hai?

yay KIT-nay kah hai · How much is this?

Toilet kahan hai?

TOY-let kuh-HAHN hai · Where is the toilet?

Kam mirch, please

kum MIRCH · Less chilli, please

Paani dijiye

PAH-nee DEE-jee-yay · Water, please

Bill dijiye

BILL DEE-jee-yay · The bill, please

Bahut badhiya!

buh-HOOT BUD-hee-yah · Very good! Excellent!

Theek hai

TEEK hai · OK, all right

Phir milenge

pheer mi-LEN-gay · See you again

Things you might not know

1. As of 2023, India has the largest population in the world. The United Nations estimated that it overtook China in April 2023.
2. More than 968 million people were eligible to vote in India's 2024 general election, held in seven phases over six weeks. As of 2024 it was the largest election ever held.
3. Chess most likely began in India. Its ancestor, chaturanga, is first known from the 6th or 7th century, and its name means 'four parts', after the four branches of an ancient army: elephants, chariots, horses and foot soldiers.
4. Snakes and ladders comes from India, where it was a game about virtue and vice called Moksha Patam. The ladders stood for virtues such as generosity, the snakes for vices such as anger.
5. The numbers we write every day, 0 to 9, were invented by Indian mathematicians and reached Europe through the Arab world. That is why they are called Hindu-Arabic numerals.
6. Shampoo, bungalow, jungle, pyjamas and loot are all English words that come from Hindi or Urdu. Shampoo first meant a head massage with oil.
7. As of 2024, Indian Railways employed about 1.25 million people, and in 2023 to 2024 it carried about 6.9 billion passengers.
8. India makes more feature films than any other country: 2,886 were certified for release in 2021 to 2022. Bollywood, in Mumbai, is only the Hindi-language part of it.
9. Mawsynram, a village in the hills of Meghalaya, gets about 11,870 mm of rain a year on average and is often called one of the wettest places on Earth.
10. The Kumbh Mela, a Hindu pilgrimage to bathe in sacred rivers, is on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. At Prayagraj in 2025 an estimated 660 million people took part, according to official figures.
11. In 2004 Darjeeling tea became the first product in India to receive legal protection as a geographical indication, like Champagne.
12. The International Day of Yoga, 21 June, was proposed by India and adopted by the United Nations in December 2014.

13. India's constitution is the longest written national constitution in the world.
14. In 2023 India became the first country to land a spacecraft near the Moon's south pole.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to India, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Masala dosa or Idli? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Independence and partition (1947). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- The Constitution comes into force (1950). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Taj Mahal, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of India, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know India?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Most people in India are vegetarian.

- A) True
- B) False

2. When you greet someone with namaste, what do you do with your hands?

- A) Shake their hand
- B) Wave with one hand
- C) Put a hand on their shoulder
- D) Press your palms together in front of your chest

3. The Constitution of India makes Hindi the national language of India.

- A) True
- B) False

4. Chilli is used all over India today, but it is not native. Who brought it to India in the 1500s?

- A) The Mughals
- B) The British
- C) The Dutch
- D) The Portuguese

5. Which is the highest mountain in India?

- A) Annapurna
- B) Kangchenjunga
- C) Nanda Devi
- D) Mount Everest

6. India's constitution is one of the shortest national constitutions in the world.

- A) True
- B) False

7. How do you say 'thank you' in Hindi?

- A) Maaf kijiye
- B) Dhanyavaad
- C) Theek hai
- D) Namaste

8. Namaste can be used to say both hello and goodbye.

- A) True
- B) False

9. Indians who eat with their hands traditionally use the right hand, keeping the left hand dry for passing dishes.

- A) True
- B) False

10. In 1930 Gandhi walked 387 km to the sea at Dandi to protest against a British tax on what?

- A) Cotton
- B) Tea
- C) Salt
- D) Land

11. What is a thali?

- A) A sweet made of milk solids
- B) A round tray of small dishes served together
- C) A spiced tea with milk
- D) A clay oven for baking bread

12. Where should you apply for an Indian e-Visa?

- A) Any agency that promises a faster visa
- B) The Government of India's official website
- C) From the airline when you board
- D) At a hotel in India after you arrive

Quiz answers

1. False

False. In a 2021 Pew survey about 4 in 10 Indians called themselves vegetarian. It varies a great deal: among Hindus, from about 71 percent in the north to 18 percent in the east.

2. D) Press your palms together in front of your chest

You press your palms together in front of your chest, fingers pointing up, usually with a slight bow.

3. False

False. The constitution names no national language. Hindi and English are the official languages of the central government, and 22 languages are recognised in its Eighth Schedule.

4. D) The Portuguese

The Portuguese brought chilli from the Americas in the 16th century, and it spread across the whole country.

5. B) Kangchenjunga

Kangchenjunga, 8,586 m, stands on the border between Sikkim in India and Nepal. It is the third-highest mountain in the world. Everest and Annapurna are in Nepal.

6. False

False. It is the longest written national constitution in the world.

7. B) Dhanyavaad

Dhanyavaad means thank you; shukriya is a warm everyday alternative. Namaste is hello, theek hai is OK and maaf kijiye is sorry.

8. True

True. Namaste, from Sanskrit for 'bowing to you', works as a greeting and as a farewell, at any time of day.

9. True

True. Only one hand is used for eating. The left hand stays dry and is used to pass dishes or hold a glass of water.

10. C) Salt

It was the tax on salt. At Dandi Gandhi made salt from the sea, breaking the law, and the Salt March drew attention around the world.

11. B) A round tray of small dishes served together

A thali is a round tray of small dishes served together: rice or roti with dal, vegetables, yoghurt, pickle and often a sweet, all at the same time.

12. B) The Government of India's official website

Apply on the Government of India's official website, indianvisaonline.gov.in, at least 4 days before you arrive. The government warns against sites that promise faster visas.

India visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

Play the interactive version, collect a stamp in your passport:

<https://worldstroll.com/countries/india>