

## **The SEEKER'S INDIA -- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **TRAVEL & VISAS**

#### **QUESTION: What is the situation concerning travel insurance?**

**ANSWER:** It is not obligatory. But if you so wish, you would need to take out your own comprehensive travel insurance to cover you for the tour. Consider shopping around and comparing carefully what is covered and not covered.

#### **QUESTION: What is the situation regarding obtaining a receipt for my payment?**

**ANSWER:** A printed letter showing the payments made will be sent in the post once the final tour balance has been received.

#### **QUESTION: Why do I need to book my flights myself, can't this be done collectively?**

**ANSWER:** Booking flights directly on the Internet is often considerably cheaper than group bookings. Some participants may be starting from different countries and need to book their individual overall journey to secure the best price. Flight booking rules are strict and tickets may not be booked using a credit/debit card of a third party. (However, last time our stalwart regular, Mayananda Crombie: [may@stirling.co.uk] was able to get most UK pilgrims on the same flight through a helpful agency).

#### **QUESTION: What flight booking agency should I use?**

**ANSWER:** You can use any agency you wish. Some people have used a local travel agency but most use a useful on-line agency such as:-

**Expedia:** [www.expedia.co.uk](http://www.expedia.co.uk) 0871 226 0808

**Opodo:** [www.opodo.co.uk](http://www.opodo.co.uk) 0871 277 0090

**LastMinute.Com:** [www.lastminute.com](http://www.lastminute.com) 0871 222 5969

**FlightDirect.Com:** [www.flightsdirect.com](http://www.flightsdirect.com) 0871 226 2674

#### **QUESTION: Will I need a visa for India?**

**ANSWER:** *Certainly.* More information comes with the Tour Itinerary.

#### **QUESTION: Who should we put for the two referees in India on our tourist visa application form?**

**ANSWER:** Seasoned travellers to India advise that you can leave this blank; others have found officials asking for it! If needed you could use the following two addresses:

##### **First address:**

Uthandi Ashram, (Samvit Sagar Trust), East Coast Road, UTHANDI, Chennai 600 119, Tamil Nadu.

##### **Second address:**

Anantha Niketan Ashram, Periya Paliyapattu Village, Pachal P.O., 606704 (Off Chengam Road) Tiruvannamalai.

Just use the two addresses and leave it at that. It really is not necessary to bother about any other details. The embassy officials will be happy enough with that. Do not make problems by saying any more than necessary.

**QUESTION: On the visa application form: what does it mean by 'No. of entries'; for the duration, do I put 6 months or just the 3-4 weeks that the trip lasts for? And what do I put for the purpose of visit?**

**ANSWER:** 'No. of entries' means the number of times you will be entering India during the validity of the visa. For example, one might enter India then go to Sri Lanka and back to India and then home, which would be two entries. In this case, unless you are planning any more trips to India the number of entries will be one.

The visa duration is from the day it is issued (i.e. processed by the visa service). So don't send for your Visa in June, or it will have run out by January. October-November is the best time. Unless you have some special requirements, put 6 months for the duration (which is the normal period of validity of tourist visas for India).

For the purpose of the visit it is preferable to put "Tourism." Officials are not interested in people going for 'spiritual purposes' and not even for voluntary work. They basically want people who are going to spend money in India.

Remember the same form is being used for different types of visa applications and some sections are more relevant to some type of visa applications than others.

## **CLOTHING**

**QUESTION: What are *Salwar* and *Kameez* and are they necessary?**

**ANSWER:** They are common Indian dress, for women, consisting of a long tunic top and cuffed trousers. They, or similar attire, are necessary for the ashrams. White cotton trousers and *kurta* shirt, or kaftan suit, or a white *saree* are perfectly acceptable alternatives. Muz says that the dress code is not so strict in some ashrams, but simple, modest white attire is preferred for householders, in order that the group doesn't look like a bunch of tourists.

**QUESTION: Does our underwear need to be white?**

**ANSWER:** No, it is doubtful that you will be parading around an ashram in it.

Sources of clothing (feedback from previous trips) included:-

**The Ethnic Clothing Shop**, 181 Canon Street Road, London, E1 2LX . Tel. 020 7481 8176 / 020 7481 9703 (<http://www.ethnic-shop.co.uk/> )

**Devotional Trading Limited**, 15 Hildreth Street, Balham, SW12 9RQ. Tel. 020 8675 7069 ( <http://devotion.co.uk/> )

**Barbara** ( [postmaster@theindianconnection.co.uk](mailto:postmaster@theindianconnection.co.uk) ) at the Indian Connection, 103B High Street, Totnes, TQ9 5SN. Tel. 01803 868020 ( <http://www.english-rivieraco.uk/shops/indian/> )

**Denny Andrews** ( [denny.andrews@virgin.net](mailto:denny.andrews@virgin.net) ) Clock House, Coleshill, Swindon, SN6 7PT. Tel. 01793 762476 ( <http://www.dennyandrews.co.uk/> )

**Barbara** ( [postmaster@theindianconnection.co.uk](mailto:postmaster@theindianconnection.co.uk) ) at **The Indian Connection**, 103B High Street, Totnes, TQ9 5SN. Tel. 01803 868020 ( <http://www.english-rivieraco.uk/shops/indian/> )

**Denny Andrews** ( [denny.andrews@virgin.net](mailto:denny.andrews@virgin.net) ) Clock House, Coleshill, Swindon, SN6 7PT. Tel. 01793 762476 ( <http://www.dennyandrews.co.uk/> )

Try Indian shops in Belgrave Road, London

And then there have been those who have made their own.

**QUESTION: What nightwear is needed for India?**

**ANSWER:** None: it is usually too hot. If you want to be separated from ashram sheets and mattresses, take a cotton wrapped-over 'sheet-sleeping bag'; a lightweight cotton sheet sewn in the form of a long sack. Available from Camping or YHA shops. Do NOT bring a conventional sleeping bag.

**QUESTION: What are 'Sanctum socks'?**

**ANSWER:** In temple premises one is not allowed to wear shoes. And in the hotter weather walking on the baking ground can really make you hop! But wearing old rough socks on the hot flagstones is acceptable. Hence, socks for entering the 'inner *sanctum*.'

**QUESTION: Is the path to enlightenment compatible with a *yoginis*'s desire to swim in the sea or the river, and if so is a bikini in order?**

**ANSWER:** No problem with swimming. But bikinis would not be considered appropriate beachwear. Modest body swimming suits may be okay. They don't need to be white (as there are no swimming pools in ashrams). Indian women tend to go in the sea fully clothed wearing their *sarees*. A sarong may be worthwhile considering for use with a swimming suit. Of course, it would be wise to check it is safe to swim in a given location first. River bathing is not safe on account of pollution and dodgy bacteria.

**QUESTION: Do cardigans, pullovers, wraps or shawls for the chilly nights have to be white?**

**ANSWER:** No. When you have been accepted as a serious group in modest white, then a bit of evening colour is no problem.

**QUESTION: Are we allowed to wear shorts - normal (Western) clothes for hot weather?**

**ANSWER:** Shorts for women would be considered shocking in an ashram and attract too much curiosity elsewhere. As you have to get on and off the coach several times it's best to avoid attracting more gawkers than necessary. Even shorts for men are not appreciated. It is cooler to wear thin skirts or thin cotton trousers anyway. And they can be knocked up overnight for next to nothing at a street tailor's cubicle in India.

**QUESTION: If we are bringing just a few clothes, are we washing them ourselves? And do we need to bring washing powder to do so?**

**ANSWER:** You can either wash your own clothes (a bar of soap would do), or there is often a '*dhobi*' or washerman service in ashrams. But delicate items usually come back looking ten years older, after having been beaten clean on rocks! Washing powder is available in Indian shops.

**MEDICS**

**QUESTION: And should we bring all the listed diahorrea remedies?**

**ANSWER:** Muz has all four of them, but has not yet had occasion to use them for anyone on any of his tours. So unless there is an epidemic, he probably has enough for the odd emergency. [Like house insurance, you take it out just in case; not because you expect to use it!]

**Is *Malaria Officinalis* really effective?**

The drug-free, homoeopathic *Malaria Officinalis 200* is the best preventative I know of. Otherwise you can cut a fresh lemon in half and rub it over your skin in the evenings. Also wear socks and long sleeves. Some find Citronella useful.

**QUESTION: Is there an alternative to Citronella that maybe more effective?**

**ANSWER:** There is an alternative, details of which can be found at:-

<http://www.neemco.co.uk/shop/insectrepellent>

This may be useful for those who have a reaction to Citronella or have not found citronella sufficiently effective. It is also worth mentioning that one should be careful with the use of perfumed toiletries, lotions, cosmetics or use of scents as these could attract insects and negate the use of repellents

**QUESTION: What is calendula cream for?**

**ANSWER:** Calendula cream is generally for healing wounds and scrapes and is generally good for the skin: "The key actions of this brilliant plant are the following: anti-inflammatory, astringent, heals wounds, antiseptic, antifungal, antibacterial, antiviral, constricts the capillaries, (an action that explains its effectiveness for cuts, wounds, varicose veins, and various inflammatory conditions). The calendula provides effective treatment for most minor skin problems. It is used for cuts, scrapes, wounds, red and inflamed skin, including minor burns and sunburn, for acne, rashes, and fungal conditions. It is helpful for diaper rash and soothes nipples that are sore from breast feeding."

**QUESTION: What is homeopathic Nux Vomica for?**

**ANSWER:** It is excellent for Gastric upset: "Digestive complaints include indigestion, vomiting, diarrhoea, cramps and constipation. It can also be used for colds and headaches, especially when brought on by over-indulgence."

**Note:** Boots normally stock Nelsons *Calendula* cream and *Nux Vomica*.

On-line/ mail order sources of homeopathic remedies include Helios <http://www.helios.co.uk/> and Nelsons <http://www.nelsons.co.uk/>

## CURRENCY

**QUESTION: What is the situation on foreign currency?**

**ANSWER:** You are not allowed to exchange Indian currency outside of India

In India, US dollars, Euros and Sterling are quite acceptable. If you take Sterling bank notes take **English** notes, *not* Scottish. Indians are unused to Scottish currency and are unwilling to change it. American Express Travellers' cheques are readily acceptable, but are difficult to

change outside the main centres (and you will generally be away from main centres until you get to Tiruvannamalai). You may be more limited as to where you can exchange other kinds of currency and less well-known travellers' cheques. Changing money is no problem in Tiruvannamalai, but you may want to change about twenty pounds at the airport on arrival, just to be going on with. Many shops in India now take debit/credit cards and past pilgrims found it useful to have a debit/credit card with them.

**QUESTION: How much money should I take?**

**ANSWER:** It depends upon how many goodies you want to bring back! Reports from past pilgrimages suggest that £100 (easily covers a *lot* of simple goodies); and £200 (enough for a larger number of goodies) might be suitable budgets. Some people did spend considerably more, on *sarees*, materials, statues, much cheaper books and DVDs (at two or three pounds each!). But bear in mind there is a limit on the value of gifts and souvenirs that you can bring in free of duty: and remember to save your receipts. Also think of your baggage allowance. So come with as little baggage as possible to begin with. As ever, it is always best to have the contingency for extra spend, so a bit of extra cash or having a credit/debit card may be a good idea. You will also need to remember to save a little for any travel between the airport and home on the way back.

**TIME & FLIGHTS**

**QUESTION: Which Time Zone is India in?**

**ANSWER:** Indian time is five and a half hours ahead of UST (GMT).

**QUESTION: Have you any advice on Jet Lag?**

**ANSWER:** Here is a bit from the World Health Organisation's website about Jet Lag for you:-

“Jet lag refers to the disruption of sleep patterns and other circadian rhythms (the body's internal clock) caused by crossing multiple time zones in a short period of time, e.g. when flying east–west or west–east. The adverse effects of jet lag may lead to indigestion, general malaise, insomnia, and reduced physical and mental performance. There are useful strategies for reducing the effects of jet lag (see below). Travellers who take medication according to a strict timetable (e.g. insulin, oral contraceptives) should seek medical advice.

General measures to reduce the effects of jet lag:

Be well rested before departure and have as much rest as possible during the flight, including short naps. Ensure the same total amount of sleep in every 24 hours when travelling as when staying at home.

Drink plenty of water and/or juices before and throughout the flight.

Eat light meals and avoid consumption of alcohol before and during the flight.

Short-acting sleeping pills may be helpful in assisting the adjustment of sleeping should be used only in accordance with medical advice.\*

\* Melatonin, at present available in very few countries (sold, but not approved by the Food and Drug Administration, in the USA) is used by some travellers to resynchronize the body's

internal clock although its benefit is unproven and side-effects unknown.”

In order to avoid upsetting your digestion, it is better not to eat the meal served in the middle of the night (unless you really are starving for some reason!) And take some nibbles in your hand luggage in case the in-flight food is inadequate (or more likely, inedible).

As you will be travelling West to East out to India [India is five and a half ahead of UST (GMT)] then it will doubtless be beneficial to be early to bed and early to rise for a few well rested days before your travel.

### **SOCKET to Me**

**QUESTION: What is the electricity supply and what types of sockets are used in India?**

**ANSWER:** The electricity supply is 220-240 volts 50 Hertz. The plugs and sockets are types C, D, M (that is, basically the French two-pronged round pin types). As always with foreign travel, take a worldwide plug adaptor with you, if you are bringing anything that requires mains electricity. Obtain the adaptor before you go in the country where you live; adaptors are normally specific to the plug standard of the equipment in countries in which they are sold. Remember to leave those non-essentials like hairdryers at home.