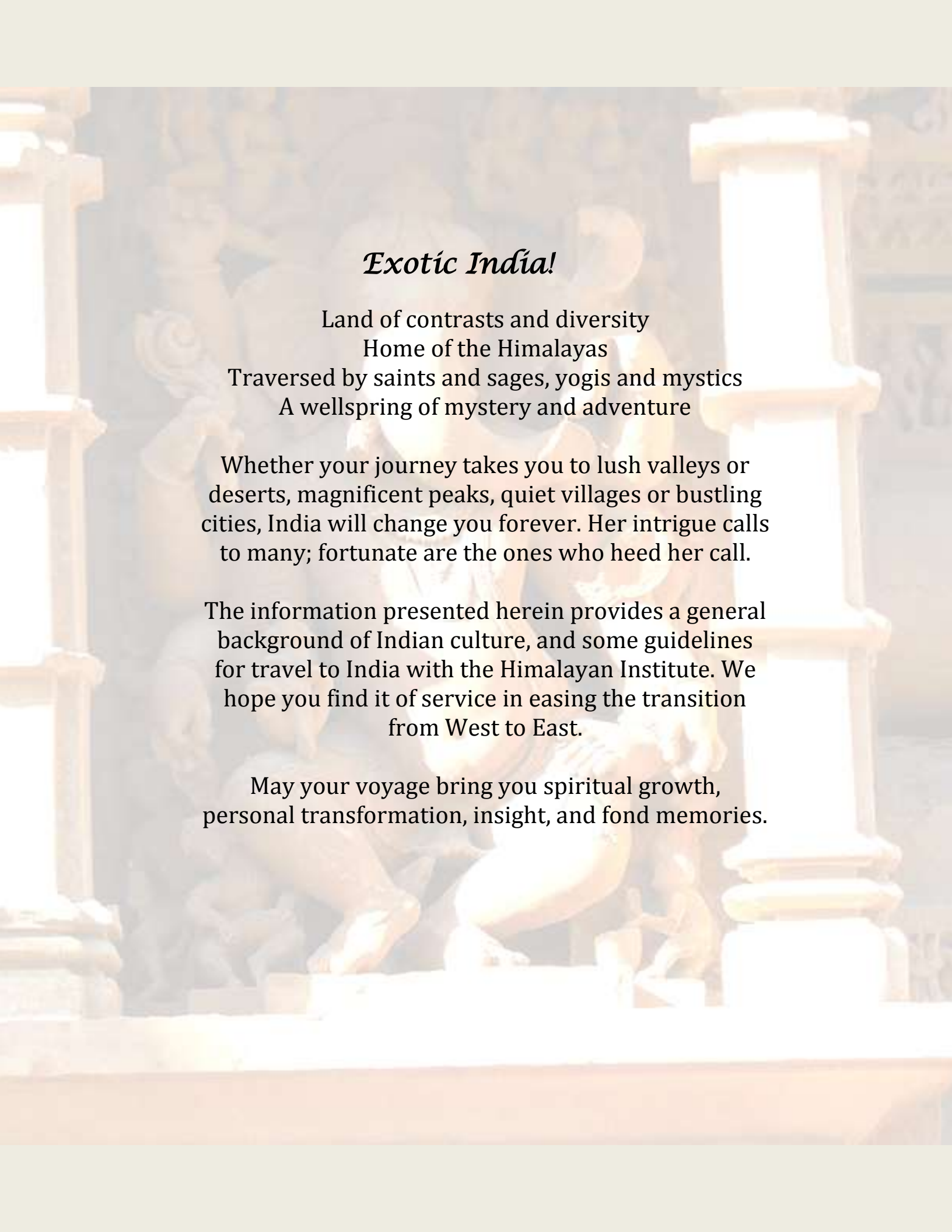




HIMALAYAN
INSTITUTE®

*Himalayan Institute
Spiritual Excursions*

Travel Guide to India



Exotic India!

Land of contrasts and diversity

Home of the Himalayas

Traversed by saints and sages, yogis and mystics

A wellspring of mystery and adventure

Whether your journey takes you to lush valleys or deserts, magnificent peaks, quiet villages or bustling cities, India will change you forever. Her intrigue calls to many; fortunate are the ones who heed her call.

The information presented herein provides a general background of Indian culture, and some guidelines for travel to India with the Himalayan Institute. We hope you find it of service in easing the transition from West to East.

May your voyage bring you spiritual growth, personal transformation, insight, and fond memories.

Getting Familiar with the Culture

Language

English is widely spoken throughout India. Hindi is the predominant language in northern India, however, there are over 1,600 minor languages and dialects spoken across the country. Other than English and Hindi, the most frequently spoken languages are: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. Here are a few Hindi words that you will hear:

<i>Namasté</i>	greeting; used for hello or goodbye
<i>kripya</i>	please
<i>dhanyawad</i>	thank you
<i>haan</i>	yes
<i>nahin</i>	no
<i>achcha</i>	good, ok, general acknowledgement
<i>theek hai</i>	ok
<i>pani</i>	water
<i>khana</i>	food
<i>or(aur)</i>	more
<i>ho gaya</i>	done
<i>garam</i>	hot
<i>aaj</i>	today
<i>kal</i>	tomorrow
<i>kaha hai</i>	where is (add place, thing, or person in front – ie. Airport kaha hay)
<i>cub hai</i>	when is (add place, thing, or person in front – ie. flight cub hay)
<i>ye kya hai</i>	what is this?
<i>kitnay ka hai</i>	how much is this?
	My name is
	What's your name?

Etiquette

Indian culture differs from Western culture in numerous ways. While the intimacy of a handshake between men and women is not appropriate, you will find yourself brushing shoulders and hips with everyone in a crowd. Rather than offering a handshake when greeting someone, hold your hands, palms pressed together, at the center of your chest, and say “*namasté*” or “*namaskar*” (formal) for the greeting. Avoid standing too close, especially during interactions between men and women (an arm’s length is a good rule of thumb). Pointing a finger at someone would be considered rude. If you need to get the attention of someone, gesture with your right hand, arm stretched out, palm facing down, moving your fingers toward yourself.

When out in public, particularly outside of large cosmopolitan areas such as Delhi, you will rarely or never see a man and woman touching. It is not unusual, however, to see two men

friends or brothers hand-in-hand. You will notice that men are gathered together and are more visible, while women stay together and are often indoors. To respect local customs, be mindful to refrain from public displays of affection.

Making periodic brief eye contact is appropriate when conducting activities such as shopping. Women making eye contact when walking past people, particularly men, is considered suggestive and best avoided. You will also notice that smiles and hellos are best left for your fellow travelers, as this manner of salutation is generally not reciprocated by strangers.

Always use your right hand when giving something to someone, even if you are left-handed (the left hand is kept for bathroom use).

The head is considered the seat of the soul. Never touch someone's head, or pat the head of a child.

You'll notice that the word "No" is not used in India. Rather, than saying "no" or directly refusing an invitation, give an evasive or vague response.

Sacred Spaces

When visiting a sacred site or temple, and when in the presence of saints and teachers, it is best to approach such an environment with a spirit of reverence. Always remove your shoes before entering the site/temple area or lecture hall. As a sign of respect, avoid sitting with your feet, or the soles of your feet, pointed the towards the devotional object of the site/temple, the teacher, or the fire in the havan kunda.

Usually there is a source of water near the entrance of temples for washing/rinsing your hands, feet and face before entering. (If possible, bathe before your visit and wear fresh, clean clothes. **Men:** wearing shorts when visiting temples/holy places is discouraged. **Women:** observe modest, conservative dress as recommended below.) After entering the temple, observe silence and withdraw the mind from the outer world. Notice whether men and women are sitting in separate areas before you sit. Before leaving the temple, it is suggested that devotees sit quietly and meditate. Exit the temple (back-out so as not to turn your back to the deity), and circumambulate the main shrine with the shrine on your right, then bow to the deity.

Generally, temples do not allow leather to be carried or worn inside (including belts, handbags, and camera case. This is not strictly enforced at all temples but may be an issue at more orthodox sacred sites. Smoking is not permitted on the grounds of any holy place. Observe posted restrictions regarding photography and exercise restraint and respect while photographing at holy places. Some temples may prohibit photography and cell phones, inside or outside. Turn off cell phones and other devices before entering holy places.

Dress

Social norms are very important in India's traditional culture. To dress outside the norm, especially when away from large urban, cosmopolitan cities, may cause unwanted attention. Dressing conservatively within the local standards will go far to show respect for India's culture. For men and women, conservative clothing that covers your shoulders, back, chest, and legs is recommended (i.e., avoid plunging or deep scoop necklines, mini or short skirts, shorts, strapless or spaghetti strap tops, or tank tops.) *Women:* loose fitting pants or skirts that cover the legs are recommended. Cap sleeves are a good alternative for sleeveless.

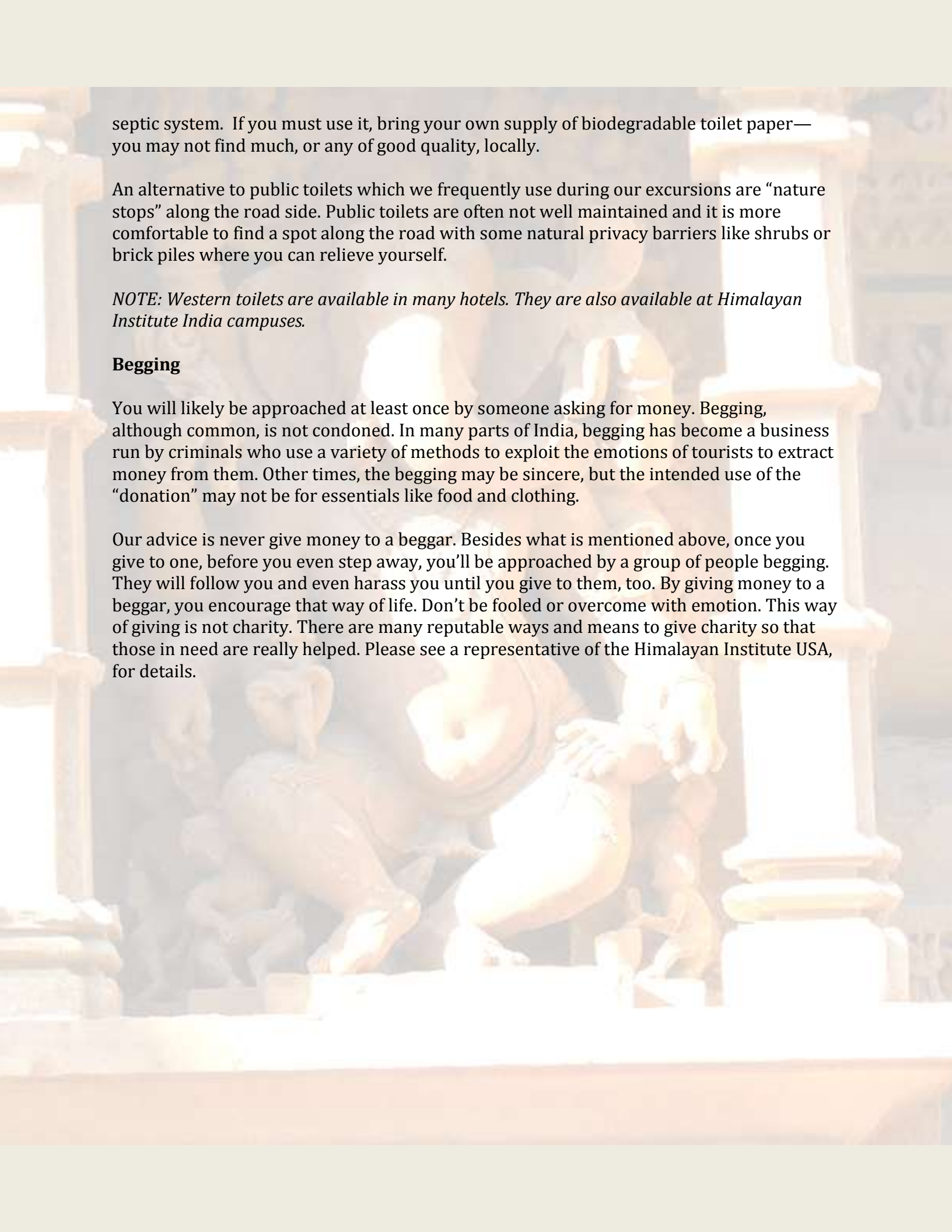
Traditional Indian clothing: *kurta* pajama for men and *sarwal kameez* for women are practical, especially in warmer temperatures. For men, khakis and cotton pants are recommended; shorts are generally inappropriate (except when exercising); avoid wearing shorts when visiting temples or holy places. Long or short sleeved cotton shirts, and a sweater or shawl for cooler weather and when on air-conditioned coaches, are good choices. For women, long flowing skirts worn with a top is a practical dress solution during warmer months. Leggings can be worn underneath long skirts, particularly if temperatures are cooler.

In general, plan to layer clothing to accommodate temperature variables from morning to night. Wear several layers (i.e., T-shirt or polypropylene underwear when necessary, shirt, sweater or polar fleece, lightweight jacket or shell), gradually removing layers as the day warms up. The layering system also eliminates the need to travel with heavier winter outerwear. Hats are valuable for retaining body heat in cold temperatures and to protect from the sun.

Bathroom Facilities

Bathroom facilities in India are strikingly different from the West. In public toilets, which may not offer Western-style fixtures, you will find that the "toilet" is in the floor as a piece of tile with a hole in it. There are two "wings" for foot placement on either side of the tile. To use the "toilet", have your back to the wall, place one foot on each of the "wings," balance, squat, and go. Next to the "toilet" is a water spigot and a mug or jug. To rinse yourself using the Indian method, fill the mug with water, and rinse by pouring the water down your backside while maintaining the squat. The left hand is used to assist in the rinsing. Dry off with a small towel or toilet paper (which you will need to carry with you) or air dry. Wash your hands well – soap and water are not always available in all public toilets so always carry hand sanitizer with you.

Considering that the plumbing systems in India are very fragile, and even a small amount of toilet paper can create a big clog, so adapting to using no or less toilet paper is helpful. Tampons and sanitary napkins should be wrapped and placed in trash containers. Flushing them, or other objects, down the toilet is certain to cause a back-up to the plumbing or



septic system. If you must use it, bring your own supply of biodegradable toilet paper—you may not find much, or any of good quality, locally.

An alternative to public toilets which we frequently use during our excursions are “nature stops” along the road side. Public toilets are often not well maintained and it is more comfortable to find a spot along the road with some natural privacy barriers like shrubs or brick piles where you can relieve yourself.

NOTE: Western toilets are available in many hotels. They are also available at Himalayan Institute India campuses.

Begging

You will likely be approached at least once by someone asking for money. Begging, although common, is not condoned. In many parts of India, begging has become a business run by criminals who use a variety of methods to exploit the emotions of tourists to extract money from them. Other times, the begging may be sincere, but the intended use of the “donation” may not be for essentials like food and clothing.

Our advice is never give money to a beggar. Besides what is mentioned above, once you give to one, before you even step away, you’ll be approached by a group of people begging. They will follow you and even harass you until you give to them, too. By giving money to a beggar, you encourage that way of life. Don’t be fooled or overcome with emotion. This way of giving is not charity. There are many reputable ways and means to give charity so that those in need are really helped. Please see a representative of the Himalayan Institute USA, for details.

The Essentials

Climate

Northern India is generally cooler than Southern India. Temperatures in Northern India can range from the 30's at night and in early morning to the mid 90's during the day depending on the time of year. The monsoon (rainy) season is from June/July to September. Autumn is from late September to the end of October. November and February are transition months. December and January are the colder winter months. If you plan on being in India for an extended period of time or are traveling to different parts of the country, be prepared for a full range of temperatures. Most buildings do not have heating or cooling systems to plan accordingly.

Electricity

The electric current in India is 220-240 volts, 50 cycles. Sockets have a variety of round-pin openings. While electricity is widely available in India, breaks in flow and blackouts are common whether in larger cities, rural, or mountainous areas. Functional electrical outlets are sometimes unavailable in hotels. Electricity, in mountainous areas, if available, is generally limited. Be prepared for lapses in electricity by carrying a flashlight in the evening. Always check the currency range that your devices can support and be sure to bring a plug adapter with a built in surge protector. If you will be traveling to rural or mountainous areas without reliable electricity consider carrying a power bank with you.

Staying Healthy

As a rule of thumb, drink plenty of water (filtered/purified or bottled), slowly, throughout the day, every day, even when you are not thirsty. It is easy to become dehydrated, even in moderate temperatures, and dehydration will make you weak and more susceptible to other health problems. You will need to drink more water than you are used to drinking in order to combat the elements encountered throughout your travels. Your body will absorb most of what you drink. Remember, if you're feeling thirsty, you are probably not drinking enough water!

The air quality in India varies and some areas are dustier or more polluted than others. To reduce respiratory issues consider bringing a disposable dust mask with you.

Avoid eating food purchased from street vendors or in the markets. Although you may think it is safe because it has been cooked, it has most likely been prepared with local water, not necessarily heated to a high temperature, and exposed to flies and local bacteria. Even where there is refrigeration, its reliability is questionable. Dishes are washed with local water with no standards for sanitation, and chai (tea) glasses are usually rinsed in a bucket of water rather than washed. ***Be smart about where you choose to eat and choose reliable hotels and restaurants that cater to tourists for greater assurance of food quality and hygiene.*** You may wish to wipe your hands with a "Wash N' Dry" novelette or

hand cleanser prior to eating. Wash fruits well and/or peel them with a knife prior to eating them. In general, one should avoid raw, uncooked foods, unboiled milk and cold milk products. Again, we advise all participants to eat only the food provided as a part of our excursion, and to drink only the water provided to participants at our campuses or carefully inspected bottled water.

The proper frame of mind, awareness, diligent hygiene, and good health prior to travel are all important components of a healthy journey. If you are currently under medical supervision, get a release to travel from your physician or healthcare practitioner. Keep yourself in good health with proper diet, rest, and aerobic exercise before and during your journey. Relaxation exercises, hatha yoga and meditation help to sustain deeper levels of health. If you are not doing so already, you may wish to learn and systematically practice hatha yoga and some pranayama techniques. In particular, the pranayama practices of nadi shodhanam, kapalabhati, bhastrika, and agni sara are suggested. To learn more about these practices, call the Himalayan Institute Press at 570-253-5551 or 800-822-4547 (press 2) for instructional books, CDs, or DVDs, or visit www.HimalayanInstitute.org.

The sun in India is strong, even on overcast days. Keep the skin protected with long sleeves and sunscreen. Don't forget lip protection, sunglasses, and a sun hat. Jet lag is an inevitable aspect of international travel. To assist with the adjustment, familiarize yourself with your destination to reduce culture shock upon arrival. Read up, and talk with others who have already been to India. Drink plenty of water throughout the international flight. Adjust your watch to reflect the local time while you travel across time zones. Be mindful not to overeat while traveling, and avoid alcoholic and caffeinated drinks which are drying and drain energy. Stretch your body throughout the flights, and walk during layovers. After landing in India, sleep according to local time and spend time outside in natural light to help adjust more quickly. Eat lightly the first day or two to help the body adjust (do eat, even if only a small amount to nourish and nurture yourself during the adjustment period.)

Crime and Safety

The staggering difference in the economies of India and western countries makes Westerners tempting targets to thieves. Random street violence is not a likely concern, however, be mindful about pickpockets, who are extremely skillful, and being taken advantage of. Keep in mind that a full time laborer in India may make Rs 600 monthly, the equivalent of about US \$15. The value of the material wealth you wear and carry on you is greater than what one resident of India may earn in one year. In this vein, leave all valuables at home. While in India, cameras and other expensive items are best kept out of sight and in a day pack when not in use.

Always keep your passport and money/credit cards in a safe location and not easily accessible when you are out and about. Many companies now offer RFID and slash-proof purses and backpacks; alternatively, you may also choose to keep your passport and money on your body in a waist or neck wallet you keep under your clothing. Keep small amounts of money for immediate/daily use in a secure, but more easily accessible place for quick

purchases and to avoid showing those on the street where your main valuables are kept. Be alert and mindful of what you are carrying at all times. Men, if you carry a typical wallet, and wish to keep it in your pocket, carry it in a side or front pocket and consider pinning your pocket closed when out and about to thwart pickpockets.

Do not leave any valuables or luggage unattended and be discreet with money or valuables when in public. Lock luggage while traveling from one place to another. (This also helps to keep bags from opening unexpectedly during handling.)

Be aware of monkeys. They're cute to watch, but can snatch a purse, camera, food, or anything you are carrying faster than you can blink an eye. Watch for traffic when crossing the roads or walking on them—cars, trucks, rickshaws, and 3-wheeled scooters (called vikrams) swerve for cows, but not for pedestrians. Safety is *your* responsibility.

Money and Currency Exchange

The local currency is Indian Rupees. The exchange rate fluctuates, and is currently about Rs 60-70 per US \$1. Credit cards are accepted in large cities, at major establishments such as hotels and larger cottage industries. ATMs can be found in most large or medium size cities so having a debit card with you is a good idea. Changing US Dollars to Indian Rupees is possible at most hotels, some banks, and through money changers. \$100 bills are preferred. When exchanging your currency for rupees, always count the money you receive, and check the quality of the rupee notes for authenticity and tears. Torn rupee notes are not accepted by most vendors, so better to start out with good-quality notes. You will be required to present your passport when exchanging money. If exchanging money at the airport, be sure to keep the encashment certificate as it will be needed should you exchange rupees to dollars (or your local currency) at the airport prior to departure. If possible, get a supply of rupee notes in smaller amounts (Rs 20, Rs 10, Rs 5) as these are helpful in small towns and villages where change for larger bills will be an issue. Small notes are also convenient for rickshaw and taxi fares, and making purchases. It's better to give the exact amount than to ask for change, which may not be exact.

Westerners are often overcharged. Paying more than a market value for anything—transportation or merchandise—is not helpful to the local economy overall, and only encourages these tactics. Bargaining is a part of the Indian culture, and should be done with any purchase or payment, unless a “Fixed Prices” sign is displayed. Be assured that when the merchant gives you a price, it is higher than what he/she expects to receive. Never pay the initial asking price! Offer a rate at one-quarter the quote given, and negotiate from there. It can be helpful to pre-determine the amount you are happily willing to pay before you begin bargaining with a shopkeeper.

Preparing to Travel - General Tips and Recommendations

Packing

Travel light and travel smart! Items that are easy to wash and dry quickly are essential as most of the laundry you will do in India will be by hand and air dried. Bring layers to have clothing options for a variety of temperatures and reduce the need to pack bulky warm items. Have luggage locks for your checked bag and carry-on and plan to travel with one checked bag and one day pack only. The less baggage you have the easier it will be for you to maneuver through airports, train stations, etc. Wear your bulkiest items and heaviest shoes while in transit from your home city to India. Have important phone number and/or addresses (ex. Your hotel in India, HI excursion leader contact information, travel agent) noted down on paper in case your phone runs out of battery during transit. Keep printed copies of your passport bio and signature page, Indian visa, flight itinerary, and 1-2 copies of your passport photo in a safe spot separate from your actual passport.

Below is a general list of essentials to bring, followed by a list of things to leave at home. High altitude excursions may require additional essentials. Check with the Tour Organizer in advance of high altitude excursions. Depending on the time of year you are traveling to India, and where you are going, some items may not be necessary such as down jackets and sleeping bags.

Essentials

- comfortable light-weight clothing (ie. light cottons, quick dry, performance wear)
- hat for sun protection
- sunglasses
- warm sweater or shawl (and/or fleece as listed below)
- comfortable, sturdy walking shoes
- wool or cotton socks
- rain poncho or travel umbrella
- warm outerwear: fleece/waterproof shell combo or separates; or packable down jacket
- warm hat, scarf, and gloves for cold evenings and mornings
- sleeping bag (rated to 20° F or lower); and compression sack for packing
- sunscreen
- lip balm
- insect repellent
- water bottle or hydration pack
- toiletries and a carrying bag
- Wash N' Dries or similar wipes
- flashlight or headlamp
- Pack™ backpacker or travel towel

- notebook and pens
- alarm clock/watch
- items of a personal nature, including medications, homeopathic remedies, etc.

Things to consider

- day pack
- gloves (for cool evenings and mornings)
- powder or liquid laundry soap (for hand laundry)
- clothes pins
- ear plugs
- bandana
- one-piece bathing suit and cover-up (women)
- swim trunks (men)
- powdered energy drinks or electrolytes
- extra ZipLock or plastic bags
- rubber sandals/slippers for bathing and/or “indoor” use
- camera and accessories
- international converter kit for rechargeable items, or bring extra batteries (packed in checked bag)
- TSA luggage locks (locks keep zippers closed during handling, and help prevent accidental opening)
- pocket knife (packed in checked baggage, not in carry-on)
- toilet paper

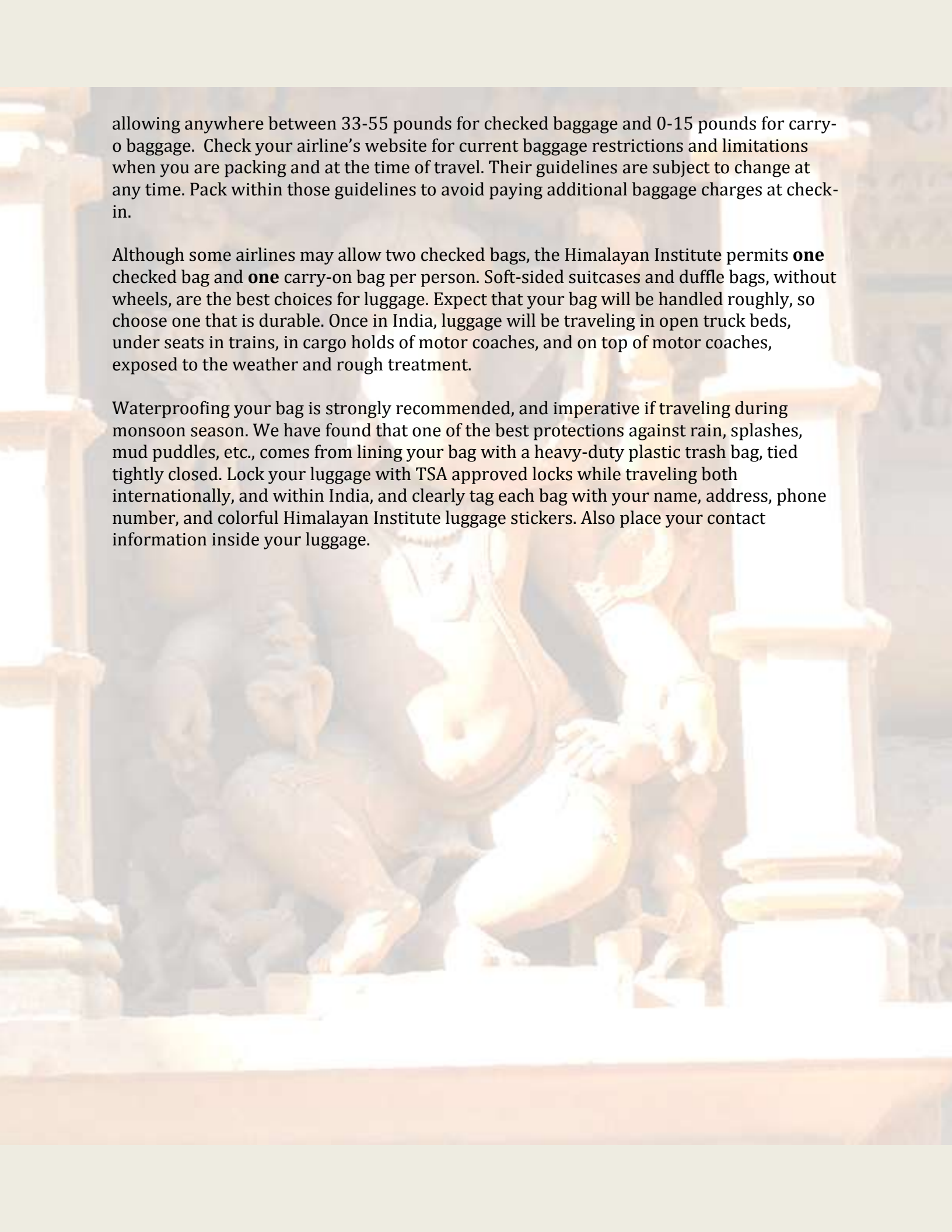
Things to leave at home

- hair dryer, electric shaver, or anything requiring electricity
- too much clothing
- incense and candles
- excess valuable like jewelry
- non-essential electronics (this is the perfect time to “unplug”)

NOTE: If you are taking any prescription medications or homeopathic remedies, you must bring an adequate supply with you. Although some medicines are available in India, their supply is not reliable. Do not rely on finding medicines in India; bring all that you will need with you.

Luggage

International and domestic baggage allowance will vary between airlines and depending on whether you booked your international and domestic tickets separately or together. Within India, the baggage allowance varies by carrier and the type of ticket you buy, with airlines



allowing anywhere between 33-55 pounds for checked baggage and 0-15 pounds for carry-on baggage. Check your airline's website for current baggage restrictions and limitations when you are packing and at the time of travel. Their guidelines are subject to change at any time. Pack within those guidelines to avoid paying additional baggage charges at check-in.

Although some airlines may allow two checked bags, the Himalayan Institute permits **one** checked bag and **one** carry-on bag per person. Soft-sided suitcases and duffle bags, without wheels, are the best choices for luggage. Expect that your bag will be handled roughly, so choose one that is durable. Once in India, luggage will be traveling in open truck beds, under seats in trains, in cargo holds of motor coaches, and on top of motor coaches, exposed to the weather and rough treatment.

Waterproofing your bag is strongly recommended, and imperative if traveling during monsoon season. We have found that one of the best protections against rain, splashes, mud puddles, etc., comes from lining your bag with a heavy-duty plastic trash bag, tied tightly closed. Lock your luggage with TSA approved locks while traveling both internationally, and within India, and clearly tag each bag with your name, address, phone number, and colorful Himalayan Institute luggage stickers. Also place your contact information inside your luggage.

About Himalayan Institute Spiritual Excursions

Since 1972, the Himalayan Institute has been organizing pilgrimages for spiritual seekers from around the world. Our spiritual excursions follow the traditional pilgrimage routes where adepts of the Himalayas lived and practiced. Join us and retrace the footsteps of the sages as you immerse yourself in the beauty and joy that radiates from the home of the Himalayan Tradition.

Swami Rama, founder of the Himalayan Institute, was raised in the sacred Himalayas by a great sage, Bengali Baba, and studied with a variety of other Himalayan saints and sages. He wrote about his extraordinary experiences in the best-selling book *Living with the Himalayan Masters*.

Inspired by the love and wisdom he received from these great masters, Swamiji founded Himalayan Institute Spiritual Excursions to help guide modern seekers to experience the vibrant energy that is still alive in these ancient sites. Since 1994, Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, successor to Swami Rama as Spiritual Head of the Himalayan Institute, has led numerous pilgrimages throughout India, Tibet, and Nepal.

In the last 45 years, notable pilgrimage destinations include the shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Valley of Flowers, Manali, Varanasi, Allahabad, Khajuraho, Kamakhya, Mysore, Mount Kailash in Tibet, and more. The Maha Kumbha Mela in 2001 was a hallmark milestone with over 600 pilgrims from around the world joining us at the Himalayan Institute campus in Prayagraj (Allahabad). Since then we have continued to host large group excursions during the Kumbha Mela in Prayagraj with 500 guests joining us in 2013 in Prayagraj and at the Himalayan Institutes Khajuraho campus to attend the consecration of the Sri Vidya Shrine, and over 300 attending the Rudra Yaga at the Kumbha Mela excursion in 2019.



INDIA:
NUMBER OF TRIPS
TO EACH SITE

Haridwar



1973, 1987, 1992,
1994, 2005, 2006

Rishikesh



1972, 1987, 1992,
1994, 1995, 1996

Allahabad



2001, 2003, 2007,
2009, 2013

Khajuraho



2003, 2007, 2013,
2015, 2016

Sarnath



1995, 2001, 2003,
2015, 2016

Varanasi



1995, 2001, 2003,
2015, 2016

Gangotri



1984, 1987, 1992,
2016

Kathmandu



1982, 1983, 1999,
2004

Agra



1995, 2001, 2013,

Badrinath



2005, 2006

Kedarnath



2005, 2006

Mt. Kailash



1999, 2004

Valley of Flowers



2005, 2006

Aurangabad



1970s/1980s

Bodhgaya



1995

Calcutta



2009

Dharmasala



1995

Gauwahati



2009

Kanpur



1972

Jaipur



2001

Ladakh



1993

Mysore



2010

Shimla



1972



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