

GATEWAY TO INDIA

An Exploration of Practical Considerations



ABOUT NCI

The Nordic Centre in India is a consortium of leading universities and research institutions across the Nordic region. NCI was established in 2001 with the aim of facilitating cooperation between the Nordic region and India in research and higher education. For the past two decades, NCI has been working towards encouraging cooperation in higher education, research and in international student recruitment between India and the Nordic Regions. We facilitate and support a wide range of study and research activities in both regions. Our strength has been in creating and running short term and longer programmes while also customising and creating opportunities as per specific needs of member universities. We are also useful as networking platform for researchers.

Our primary aim is to assist students, researchers and member university staff interested in qualitative engagement with India's higher education landscape.

Our presence in India is in the form of a liaison office in New Delhi and our Nordic secretariat is currently located at Tampere University, Finland.





DISCLAIMER

The information provided by NCI in this Orientation Package—"Gateway to India" is for general information purposes only and is provided in good faith, without making any particular claims to be wholly representative of India and its culture. India is too complex a society to make any kind of universal statements in the manner of an introduction, and all statements made can easily be seen as a poor caricature of the complex reality. While apologising for the reductionist approach in this text, we also feel that there is a need for a document like this for people who are completely new to India and who are unfamiliar with its complexities and nuances.

The information provided is merely indicative and not prescriptive; under no circumstance shall NCI have any liability for any loss or damage for any discrepancies herewith. Any such loss incurred will solely be at the risk of user.

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

<i>Introduction</i>	01
<i>Aim of the Booklet</i>	02

PART A REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

<i>Visa to Study- An Introduction</i>	03
<i>Types of Visa</i>	04
<i>FRRO Registration</i>	07
<i>E-FRRO</i>	08

PART B PRACTICAL INFORMATION

<i>What to Pack</i>	16
<i>Healthcare in India</i>	18
<i>Sars Coronavirus</i>	22
<i>Travel</i>	23
<i>Accommodation</i>	29
<i>Food and Drink</i>	32
<i>Drugs and Alcohol</i>	35
<i>Bank Accounts and Money</i>	37
<i>Internet Connectivity</i>	39
<i>Local Language</i>	44

PART C SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN INDIA

<i>Negotiating Public Space in India</i>	46
<i>Gender in India</i>	54
<i>Academic Milieu</i>	64
<i>Contact Us</i>	69

INTRODUCTION

India, the land of colours and traditions is known for its mantra of unity in diversity. From the peak of the Himalayas to the tip of Kanyakumari and from the sand dunes of Rajasthan to the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, people celebrate their unique identities. Hence, the educational institutions in India also encompass the essence of these regional multiplicities. A typical student in India has to go through the tripartite system of primary, secondary and higher education to complete their academic training. There are various eminent institutions funded by government and private bodies, which are producing new insights of looking at the world every day.

With the ideal of Atithi Devo Bhava (Guests are God), the people continue to practise the empathy and compassion which glows vividly in most rural areas and the countryside. With the bright colours of ethnicity, and the love for spices, atrangi achar and local delicacies of different regions, India is as much a place of delight as much a hub of chaos.

As a foreigner, coming to India could be a very unique and enriching experience in itself. The country's wholesome culture would also make them feel at home most of the time. A long list of divergent festivals celebrating lights, colours, peace and nature keeps the ambience of the country aesthetically flourishing despite all odds.

AIM OF THE ORIENTATION BOOKLET

The aim of this booklet is to ensure that students coming from the Nordic region have an easily accessible guide to help them understand the core dynamics of India as a complex socio-cultural nation. Keeping in mind the unique culture of India which is substantantively different from the Nordic region, this booklet aims to sensitise students to the same while also providing suggestions that could make their stay in India more comfortable. The booklet covers a wide array of topics including regulatory provisions determining their stay as well as practical and cultural themes.



PART A

Regulatory Requirements VISA and FRRO Registration

VISA TO STUDY/RESEARCH IN INDIA & RESIDENT PERMIT

All foreign nationals entering India are required to possess a valid international travel document in the form of a national passport with a valid visa obtained from an Indian Mission or Post abroad. All Individuals wishing to apply for an Indian visa needs to complete the procedure of the online visa application. To apply for an Indian visa online, go to the following link: [<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>]



TYPES OF VISA

STUDENT VISA

A student visa is granted to individuals who wish to come to India to study (including the study of Yoga, Vedic Culture and Indian system of dance and music) in a recognized educational institution. If a student visa is valid for more than 180 days, one needs to register in the Foreigner's Regional Registration Office (FRRO) within 14 days of arrival in India.

In order to apply for the Visa, it is required to provide proof of admission in a full-time course in an educational institution recognized by a statutory regulatory body. Moreover, a letter stating the financial guarantee either from the parents or the bank is needed, along with proof of transfer of funds for atleast four months stay in India is required to be produced.

An Indian Student Visa is for nationals of all countries and is granted for a maximum period of five years. For more information, you can go to the following link:
[https://www.mha.gov.in/PDF_Other/AnnexIII_01022018.pdf]

INTERNSHIP VISA

Foreign students/individuals who are interested to apply and pursuing internships in Indian educational institutions, NGOs and Indian companies can now get an Internship visa provided they meet the conditions and regulations laid out for the same.

The period of the intern visa would be restricted to the duration of the internship program or a year whichever is less. As with other types of visas, if the internship duration exceeds 180 days, FRRO registration with the concerned Foreigner's Registration Office (FRO) is required within 14 days of arrival. For further details, you can go to the following link: https://www.mha.gov.in/PDF_Other/AnnexIII_01022018.pdf



RESEARCH VISA

Research Visas are provided for a maximum of three years to conduct research in India.

The applicant needs to provide the following information while applying: The subject/topic of the research, admission document/research affiliation from a recognised educational institution in India for research, the places required to be visited during the course of the research and details of any other former visits to India.

For further details, go to the following link: <https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/FAQs-ResearchVisa.pdf>

APPLYING FOR YOUR VISA

Upon receipt of the Visa Application through Indian Visa Application Center or directly, the Indian Mission/ Post requires a minimum of three working days to process the case and issue a visa depending upon the nationality, excluding special cases.

- For visa and application submission related queries of India in Finland, contact the embassy at [<https://www.indembhelsinki.gov.in/index.php>]
- For visa and application submission related queries of India in Denmark, contact the embassy at [<https://www.indianembassycopenhagen.gov.in/>]
- For visa and application submission related queries of India in Norway, contact the embassy at [<https://www.indianembassyoslo.gov.in/>]
- For visa and application submission related queries of India in Iceland, contact the embassy at [<https://indianembassyreykjavik.gov.in/category/visa-consular-services/visa-services/>]
- For visa and application submission related queries of India in Sweden, contact the embassy at [<https://www.indembassysweden.gov.in/>]

Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) provides visa related services and registration facilities for foreigners in India. Any individual coming for a period of more than 180 days on a Student visa, Intern visa or Research visa needs to register themselves in the FRRO.

The documents which are required for the registration includes the original passport on which the visa is endorsed, a photocopy of the passport and initial visa, four photographs of the applicant, details of residence in India and a bonafide certificate from the University/College/Institution in case of a student visa. For more information about the required documents, go to the following link: [<https://boi.gov.in/sites/default/file/u4/Supporting%20documents%20required%20for%20Registration.pdf>]

To know more details on FRRO registration formalities, go to the following link: [<https://www.mea.gov.in/checklist-for-FRRO-FRO-Registration-Formalities-menu.htm>]

REGISTRATION OFFICERS

The authorities concerned with the registration of a foreigner in India are the Foreigners Regional Registration Officers (FRROs) at Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Amritsar, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram, Calicut, Goa, Lucknow and Ahmedabad and the District Superintendents of Police designated as Foreigners Registration Officers (FROs) in all their districts in the country.

E-FRRO

Online FRRO or e-FRRO aims to provide an accessible and centralized online visa service experience. The process could be undertaken from the ease at home in certain metropolitan cities where there is no need to visit the FRRO Office until specifically called upon for an appointment.

- To know more about the registration process for an e-FRRO, copy the following link:
[<https://indianfrro.gov.in/eservices/home.jsp>]
- To know about the payment procedure, copy the following link: [<https://indianfrro.gov.in/eservices/home.jsp>]
- For any other additional queries, go to the following websites:

1. Ministry of External Affairs
[<https://www.mea.gov.in/checklist-for-FRRO-FRO-Registration-Formalities-menu.htm>]

2. Ministry of Home Affairs- Foreigners Division
[https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/foreigners_division.htm]

3. Ministry of Tourism [<https://tourism.gov.in/>]

4. Bureau of Immigration, Govt Of India
[<https://boi.gov.in/>]

Supporting Documents Required for FRRO Registration

S. No.	Visa Type Mandatory documents required	Help (Refer mandatory documents listed in the column to the left)
Student Visa (Provisional Registration)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photo 2. Passport & Visa 3. Residence Proof 4. Bona fide certificate 5. NOC 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant's Photo 2. Photo Page, Page indicating validity, Page bearing arrival Stamp of Indian Immigration, Visa with endorsement 3. Provisional address issued by the Head of Department or Principal or the Director of the International Studies Centre of the University/ Educational Institution concerned 4. Bona fide student Certificate from the Educational Institution concerned 5. If the student is coming for MBBS/BDS course on a provisional student visa, then NOC from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare is mandatory
Student Visa (Final Registration)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photo 2. Passport & Visa 3. Residence Proof 4. Form S/Bona fide certificate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant's Photo 2. Photo Page, Page indicating validity, Page bearing arrival Stamp of Indian Immigration, Visa with endorsement 3. Form C copy from Hotel or Lodge/ Electricity bill / Landline Telephone / Municipal Bill of the landlord in case of staying in a house of a relative or friend along with a letter and photo-id card of the landlord. In case of rented accommodation copy of the Lease and License agreement (1st and last page & page containing its validity). In case of staying in a hostel in the University/Educational Institution, a letter from the authority concerned in the University/Educational Institution confirming accommodation in the hostel 4. Form S / Bona fide certificate

Employment Visa(VIE Intern)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photo 2. Passport & Visa 3. Residence Proof 4. Contract paper 5. Request letter 6. Undertaking letter 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant's Photo 2. Photo Page, Page indicating validity, Page bearing arrival Stamp of Indian Immigration, Visa with endorsement 3. Form C copy from Hotel or Lodge/ Electricity bill / Landline Telephone / Municipal Bill of the landlord in case of staying in a house of a relative or friend along with a letter and photo-id card of the landlord. In case of rented accommodation copy of the Lease and License agreement (1st and last page & the page containing its validity) 4. Proof of monthly salary/stipend is required 5. Request letter from the company for registration 6. Letter of undertaking from the company signed by Indian host or authorized signatory with name and contact number
Research Visa	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photo 2. Passport & Visa 3. Residence Proof 4. Bona fide Certificate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant's Photo 2. Photo Page, Page indicating validity, Page bearing arrival Stamp of Indian Immigration, Visa with endorsement 3. Form C copy from Hotel or Lodge/ Electricity bill / Landline Telephone / Municipal Bill of the landlord in case of staying in a house of a relative or friend along with a letter and photo-id card of the landlord. In case of rented accommodation copy of
		<p>containing its validity). In case of staying in a hostel in the University/ Educational Institution, a letter from the authority concerned in the University/ Educational Institution confirming accommodation in the hostel</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Form S / Bona fide certificate

WHY PRIORITIZE FRRO REGISTRATION?

NCI requires that students understand the need for, and follow the requirements placed on them by the FRRO. If for some reason one has failed to register themselves with the FRRO the legal consequences and ensuing challenges make for an unpleasant circumstance. NCI, thus, would like to stress the importance of completing the FRRO registration at the earliest, which is within 15 days of arrival in India.

PENALTIES

For the ease of students who will be spending a considerable period of time in India, a list of different visas and FRRO related infractions and their corresponding penalties are mentioned below in a tabular form:

Financial Penalty for Overstay¹

<u>S. No.</u>	<u>Duration of Overstay</u>	<u>Financial Penalty (in Indian Rupees)</u>
1.	1 day up to 15 days	Nil
2.	16 days up to 30 days	10,000/-
3.	31 days up to 90 days	20,000/-
4.	Above 90 days	50,000/-

Financial Penalty for Non-Registration

<u>S. No.</u>	<u>Duration of non-Registration Period</u>	<u>Financial Penalty (in Indian Rupees)</u>
1	1 day up to 15 days	500/-
2	16 days up to 30 days	5,000/-
3	31 days up to 90 days	10,000/-
4	Above 90 days	20,000/-

¹ Retrieved from Bureau of Immigration, Government of India, *e-FRRO Online Portal*, New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, as on 13th November, 2021, <https://indianfro.gov.in/eservices/home.jsp>

CHANGE IN REGISTERED ADDRESS

According to the regulations, a foreigner shall be deemed to have changed their registered address if there is a change in residence from one place to another place in India. Additionally, it would be deemed as having no residence if they leave their registered address knowing that they are not likely to return within six months of leaving it. In such a case, the mandate is to register at the new place of residence. The Registration Officer will issue a permit for the same.



DUPLICATE CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION

If in any case such a certificate of registration issued under these rules is lost or destroyed, it becomes pertinent for the holder of the certificate to make or send to the Registration Officer of the district of their registered address a report of circumstances in which it was so lost or destroyed together with an application in writing. A copy of the police report would also be necessary in order to issue a duplicate copy of the certificate of registration.

MARK OF ABSENCE FROM REGISTERED ADDRESS

In case of absence from the registered address for a continuous period of more than two weeks, one should submit a report in writing to the registration officers before leaving.

The report should consist of details of the proposed place to visit, the duration of the stay and the expected date of return. The Registered officer will issue a permit for the mobilization.

POLICE RESIDENT PERMIT (PRP) OR CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION

This is the document that will be issued to an applicant once the FRRO registration process is completed. This document is the Resident Permit as well as an exit permit document. Keeping this document safe should be of utmost importance because, without the original copy of this document, one will not be permitted to exit India. In cases of loss or misplacement, an applicant will have to reschedule flight tickets and do the needful formalities to request for a duplicate copy of the same through proper channels, as no other alternative is provided in such cases.

SURRENDER OF CERTIFICATES OF REGISTRATION ON DEPARTURE

All foreign applicants/students who are about to depart finally from India shall surrender this Registration Certificate either to the Registration Officer of the place where they are registered or of the place from where they intend to depart, or to the Immigration Officer at the Port/Check post of exit at the time of final departure from India.

- The necessary immigration/Visa document e.g., Registration Permit/Certificate (RP/RC), Visa Extension Certificate etc. will be sent by post to the address mentioned. It would also be electronically sent to the foreigner to his registered email ID.
- Foreigners would not be required to mandatorily visit FRRO/FRO office for a grant of service. However, in certain exceptional cases, the foreigner will be intimated to visit the FRRO/FRO on a scheduled date and time for the interview.
- In case of exigency, the foreigner can visit the FRRO/FRO office directly for a grant of service.

A photograph of a person in profile, wearing a patterned headscarf and a light blue shirt, playing a stringed instrument, possibly a veena, against a sunset background. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the center-right of the frame. The instrument has two long necks with many frets. The person's hands are visible, one holding the neck and the other near the strings. The overall mood is serene and artistic.

PART B

Practical information



WHAT TO PACK

NCI recommends that students travel light without any items of great value. It would be useful to carry a laptop for the purpose of the course but otherwise, we recommend that you stick to a minimalist style of packing. Personal hygiene products and toiletries of various international brands are cheap and easily available in India so it would not be necessary for you to pack these items. A pouch or money belt that can be easily hidden would be useful for carrying money, passport, credit cards and other valuables.

For foreigners, there is a certain amount of curiosity regarding clothing in India. It is the hub of multiple converging traditions and fashions. It is important to note here that Indians tend to associate full-length clothing with their culture and hence is a priority for many. Hence, wearing full-length clothes is polite and is considered important in most formal and public places. For example, in a temple or mosque, it is expected that one comes in full-length clothing. Therefore, it is recommended to be vigilant of the environment and dress up accordingly to avoid inconvenience.





There is a lot to explore Indian clothing which is, mostly exclusive to the country's culture, is exciting for students coming from abroad. There is the Salwar Kameez or Kurta Pajama, which is comfortable for the Indian weather and is quite popular among all age groups in divergent colours and styles. Shops like FabIndia, the Bombay Store, Anokhi target the style sensibilities of the West and therefore, are more convenient to shop than the local markets.

Another option is getting clothes stitched according to one's own specifications. Tailors are readily available and hence getting a Salwar Kameez or Kurta Pajama stitched by a specialized tailor will do the job in a cost-effective fashion. Lastly, the most convenient option to get everything at hand is through the online mode. All kinds of clothing starting from Indian to Western is available on most of the shopping websites and is just one click away. Also, now it comes with the added advantage of exchange/return policies on most of the items.

It would also be practical to get a hardy umbrella/raincoat, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, a shawl/sweater, sturdy walking shoes, mosquito repellent, etc. to protect oneself from the changes in the environment. Seasons are well marked but it is not uncommon to have torrential rains in the hot summers or a warm spell in the winter months, therefore, it is good to be prepared. Students coming for the summer courses arrive during the monsoon season and need to be particularly prepared for heavy rainfall.

It is foreseeable that students will make some friends while staying in India, so it would be nice to carry some small gifts and souvenirs that could be used as a token of affection or gratitude.



One of the most common health-related problems that foreign students face in India is diarrhoea. It usually occurs due to a change in diet, water, and climate, and sometimes also because of a bacterial infection caused by the consumption of stale food and impure water. Therefore, it is advised that students check with their healthcare policy provider to see the hospitals in the host country that are compatible with their policy before they travel to India. Students may also want to intimate their respective embassies regarding the details of their stay, so as to ensure diplomatic support in times of emergency.

Private healthcare facilities in India are easily accessible and provide round-the-clock services in terms of checkups, consultation, and other medical services.

MEDICATION AND VACCINATION

Please check with your local healthcare service about the vaccines you require before coming to India. Being vaccinated against several tropical diseases, especially communicable ones, would lessen the chances of an avoidable medical scenario. The link below might help you get a larger picture of prevalent communicable diseases in India, go to the following link

[<https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/india/default.htm>]

For common infections like diarrhoea, doctors in India tend to prescribe lactobacillus pills to settle the stomach, loperamide hydrochloride for stopping the diarrhoea, Ciprofloxacin, if there is an infection to control, and domperidone for nausea and vomiting. One could also consult with their own doctors back home about the required dosage beforehand so that they feel more in control of the situation.






It is advisable to take a course of ORS (oral rehydration salts), commercially available under the popular brand name of Electoral or Electrobion. An effective alternative is drinking a solution made of one teaspoon of salt and eight teaspoons of sugar dissolved in one litre of water as it is considered to be an effective remedy to arrest dehydration. In this situation, it is best to eat bread, boiled food, and a lot of yoghurts and avoid oily and/or spicy foods.

Students are advised to carry all their personal medication, aspirin, painkillers for fevers and minor aches and pains, calamine lotion for cuts and bites, and antihistamines for allergies. One must also carry the medicines one would require while staying in India. Some prescription drugs that would be easily available back home might not be in India and it would be better to plan accordingly while also bringing the necessary paperwork from your doctor with you. People with allergies must be very careful while eating outside as most people will not be able to understand your particular needs. Make sure to inform the staff at your place of stay, and ask somebody reliable about the ingredients in the food whenever you need to eat outside.


SARS CORONAVIRUS


The COVID-19 situation in India has started to improve to a great extent. However, it would be advisable that students follow all COVID related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) like wearing a mask at all times and avoiding areas that might be too crowded. For further guidelines, go to the following link [<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>]. A government-approved SOP is given below for the students' perusal:




NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Protect yourself and others!
Follow these Do's and Don'ts


Do's 




Practice frequent hand washing. Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol based hand rub. Wash hands even if they are visibly clean




Cover your nose and mouth with handkerchief/tissue while sneezing and coughing




Throw used tissues into closed bins immediately after use




See a doctor if you feel unwell (fever, difficult breathing and cough). While visiting doctor wear a mask/cloth to cover your mouth and nose




If you have these signs/symptoms please call State helpline number or Ministry of Health & Family Welfare's 24X7 helpline at 011-23978046




Avoid participating in large gatherings


Don'ts 



Have a close contact with anyone, if you're experiencing cough and fever



Touch your eyes, nose and mouth




Spit in public

Together we can fight Coronavirus

For further information :
Call at Ministry of Health, Govt. of India's 24X7 control room number
+91-11-2397 8046
Email at ncov2019@gmail.com

It becomes pertinent to mention here that the information provided here with respect to vaccination guidelines, COVID-19 protocols, and travel restrictions are dynamic and subject to change.

The list might be updated from time to time, and one must check the particular websites (especially <https://www.mohfw.gov.in> and the website of the airport that is your first port of entry) before planning a trip to India. (The information provided here is as retrieved from the website of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare as on 13th November, 2021. <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>).



Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India

Help us to help you

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

COVID-19 testing - when and how?

All individuals need not be tested, because
Disease is primarily reported in Individuals with travel history to the affected countries or close contacts of positive cases

WHOM TO TEST

ALL symptomatic people who

- Have history of international travel in last 14 days
- Had come in contact of confirmed cases
- Are healthcare workers
- Are hospitalized patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) or Influenza Like Illness (ILI) or severe pneumonia.

Asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of confirmed cases should be tested once between day 5 and day 14 of coming in his/her contact. Direct and high-risk contact include:

- Those living in same household with a confirmed case
- Healthcare workers who examined a confirmed case without adequate protection as per WHO recommendations

List of labs (Govt. & Private) can be accessed at: icmr.nic.in

For further information:
Call the State helpline numbers or Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India's 24x7 helpline numbers

1075 (Toll Free) | 011-23978046
Email to: ncov2019@gov.in , ncov2019@gmail.com

mohfw.gov.in @MoHFWIndia @MoHFW_INDIA mohfwindia

dayp 17/02/13/0031/1920



DOMESTIC TRAVEL

- **AIRWAYS**

There are many domestic airports within India that facilitate domestic travel across the length and breadth of India. Usually, one would find these located in Tier-1 cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Jaipur etcetera. They are available in lesser populated cities too, like Ahmedabad, Puducherry, Imphal, Agartala, Mangalore etcetera. Bookings can be done either through the websites of domestic airlines like IndiGo, Air India, Spicejet, Vistara and GoAir, or from third party applications like MakeMyTrip, Yatra.com, Goibibo, Cleartrip etcetera. It is strongly recommended not to rely on in-person booking at the airport itself since ticket availability is never guaranteed, compounded by the reality of exorbitant pricing at the last moment. Some airlines do provide food in economy class while others do not, so be sure to check airline policy before booking a ticket.



- RAILWAYS

India has one of the largest railway networks in India, allowing both freight and passenger transport. Though it is more time consuming when compared to airways, cheap ticket rates make it a popular means of transport. Moreover, it connects inaccessible locations that cannot be reached via airways travel. However, if a foreigner desires to travel by Indian railways, taking certain precautions will leave one in good stead. Railway stations are particularly crowded in India, so beware of snatchers and thieves. It is advisable that one prefer travel in A/C First Class, 2nd A/C or 3rd A/C for long journeys as far as possible since the alternative- Sleeper Class, is almost always crowded with too many passengers. Take stock of your luggage intermittently, while traveling. Keep your ticket, passport and valid visa ready for inspection by the Travelling Ticket Examiner, who will approach you during the course of travel. Tickets can either be booked through the website of IRCTC or directly from railway stations. Tickets are classified into Confirm ticket, Reservation against Cancellation ticket (RAC), Waiting List ticket, Tatkal ticket, among others. Travelling on a Confirm ticket is the most hassle free, so try to make sure that the ticket status is confirmed before travel.





Foreign students can also avail of the ‘Foreigner Quota’ in Indian Railways to book tickets in advance up to 365 days by producing a valid Passport Number during the booking of tickets online. For more information on the foreigner quota, go to the following link: [<https://contents.irctc.co.in/en/ForeignTouristQuotaBooking.pdf>]

LOCAL TRAVEL

- **MASS RAPID TRANSIT (METRO RAIL/SUBWAY/TUBE)**

One of the most widely used and fastest means of local transport within urban cities, popularly known as Metro Rail functions as the daily commuter’s preferred means of transport in metropolitan cities. In India, developed cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Kochi, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Kolkata (though not limited to) all have their mass rapid transit systems.

The commuter/passenger has the option of either taking a ‘token’ for each journey or getting issued a ‘metro card’ against their name, that is routinely recharged at the metro counter itself. While the former suits the needs of a single time traveller, the latter is more suited for someone who resides in that particular city and would be required to travel regularly within the city. During peak hours, Metro Rail can also be crowded, so judiciously decide when to use this mode of transport. However, during peak hours the frequency of trains is increased, making the commute easier. It is usual to find that there are coloured lines like ‘Pink Line’, ‘Yellow Line’ etcetera on a metro map that indicates a particular route of travel, so identify your destination as well as the line on which it falls, so as to travel without any hindrances.



Various apps on Google Play will be useful here, which display the particular route or line to be taken once the destination and starting points are put in. They also show the fare, approximate time taken, interchange stations, and the shortest possible route that can be taken between two points. Some of these apps are listed below:

1. Delhi Metro Navigator - Fare, Route, Map, Offline
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.tilzmatictech.mobile.navigation.delhimetronavigator>]
2. Delhi Metro Route Map and Fare
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.navigator.delhimetroapp>]
3. Delhi Metro MapRoute, DTC Bus Number Guide - 2021
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.delhi.metro.dtc>]
4. Delhi Metro Rail
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sraoss.dmrc>]



Some substances are prohibited in the Metro Rail like alcohol, inflammable liquids, pets, corrosives, sharp objects etcetera, so make sure that one does not have any of these while travelling.

- CAB SERVICES (UBER, OLA)

Respective apps can be downloaded from either Google Play Store or Apple Store and the journey is scheduled accordingly. Some cab drivers also support e-wallet payment services like Paytm and Google Pay through which the fare can be digitally paid, which might require a foreigner to start a bank account in India in any commercial bank prior to using the e-wallet facility. In some countries, Google Pay does not require one to start a new account in the host country since money can be seamlessly transferred. However, for domestic e-wallet services, having a registered domestic bank account is mandatory. India is heading towards a cashless economy, so availing of this feature is advisable since it can be used for purchasing any goods and services in metropolitan cities.



- BUSES AND E-RICKSHAWS/AUTO-RICKSHAWS

These are generally used to cover short distances. While the former can transport one over a relatively large area, the latter two are used for travelling very short distances. The latter two can at most carry three passengers at a time, so choose accordingly the desired mode of transport.



It is recommended to choose the accommodation provided by the respective University in which one is admitted as all the basic amenities like food, recreation, peer group etcetera can be found at one place itself. One is most likely to find fellow international students in this social space. However, if other options are required, flats and Paying Guest facilities are also available in major metropolitan cities. It is noteworthy that University might act in your best interest whereas the latter two would generally be interested in profit-making.

- **RENTED ACCOMMODATION**

While choosing the locality, it would be a fruitful enterprise to opt for a residential area with good connectivity over commercial neighbourhoods. One needs to ensure that electricity, water supply, gas connection (if required) and such other facilities are available before finalising a deal with the broker.





It is a common prevalent practice among brokers to levy a 'token' amount from the customer at the initial stage itself which may not be refundable, so make sure that unless and until one is certain of renting a particular flat, no 'token' amount is given. If one could directly have a word with the landlord initially regarding requirements on the tenant's end and restrictions from the landlord's end, the overall living experience would be cordial. Try to opt for a fully furnished apartment since furnishing it yourself might prove to be difficult. Make sure that the rental agreement is carefully read, ensuring that no hidden clauses are present. Almost all such deals require a 'security deposit' (equivalent to a month's rent approximately) to be paid by the tenant for protection against damage of property, which is refundable on vacating the rented apartment, as per the rental agreement. However, it is common practice to not refund it fully citing flimsy reasons, so a wise way to handle this situation would be to not pay the last month's rent, instead ask the broker/landlord to deduct the rent from the 'security deposit'. Also, a clause is usually seen in the rental agreement that if the tenant is vacating the apartment before a stay of a minimum period, the security deposit would not be refunded. So, read the rental agreement very carefully and transact payments only if one is satisfied with all the conditions and clauses of the agreement. Brokers might indirectly pressurise you into paying an advance amount before even being presented with the rental agreement, by claiming that the apartment is highly in demand and unless the advance is paid, the apartment/flat could be rented to a different tenant. Try not to capitulate to these pressure tactics. Burglary is also not unheard of, so make sure that doors, balconies and windows are never left opened, even if you are in the apartment.

PAYING GUEST FACILITY AND AIRBNBS

Besides the hostel accommodation provided by the host University, there are paying guest facilities available in the near vicinity which generally provides, a safe living space for outstation students. Airbnbs would be more ideal for travellers looking for accommodation since they house customers for a short period of time. Airbnb is known for the quality of service provided globally, but still, verify that online reviews of the property testify for the quality of service being advertised.



FOOD AND DRINK



India is known for its large variety of cuisines and dishes that vary geographically from the north to south in taste, texture, and zest. It also boasts of a unique street food culture which has been widely documented now, attracting tourists from all over the world.

However, it would not be completely incorrect to state that foreigners are particularly susceptible to waterborne infections in India, and NCI's past experience with Nordic students is a testament to this. Since the palette and the cuisine is entirely new and, at times, stronger than what students are accustomed to, stomach related health conditions can be expected. It is advisable to always inform someone at the host institution in India when this occurs so that they can gauge the severity of the problem.

The best ways to circumvent these issues and beat the trend of sickness would be to only drink from sealed mineral packaged water bottles. Carry one or two bottles with you wherever you go so as to stay hydrated. One can get mineral water, regular and diet Coke and Pepsi, sugary and sugarless juices/milk/soy milk at several big supermarkets and smaller shops, but it is advisable to always buy sealed plastic bottles or tetra packs that are not puffy. One needs to check the expiry dates as well before purchasing such items from the stores. When it comes to fruits and vegetables, choose the ones which are peel-able. Bananas are the best option and are cheap and easily available. Students can also consider the use of probiotics like Yakult that are easily available in supermarkets and grocery shops in India. Such drinks can also be ferried from home, if the students deem necessary.



Another important rule to remain healthy would be to constantly use an alcohol-based hand gels/wash. These clean, sterilize, and disinfect, making one's hands relatively germ free and greatly reducing the probability of falling sick. This has really worked for us as we have hardly had anybody falling sick once students strictly started using a hand-wash before eating. In times of a global pandemic, use of such precautions becomes all the more important.

Although it becomes pertinent for us to warn foreign students from consuming food-items from roadside vendors that might be unhygienic, we also understand that the experience of a foreign country—and that too one like India—will not be complete without experiencing the varieties of cuisines and delicacies it has to offer. Therefore, it is advisable that students try and stick to more viable options such as popular restaurants and prominent Indian food chains that are authentic and hygienic. One can use food-delivery apps like Swiggy or Zomato where a wide variety of options are made available to the user. The added advantage of using such apps is that one can check customer feedback and rating of particular eateries and food-chains before ordering.



In Indian states where alcohol prohibition is not in force, alcohol is typically available in 'wine shops' and in some cases larger departmental stores. While the sale and consumption of opiates, cannabis, chewing tobacco, and other drugs are illegal in India, cigarettes, bidis, and liquor are available for sale for consumers above the age of 21 in areas without prohibition. Not only smoking and drinking in public, is a punishable offence in India, Indians also formally tend to look down on the consumption of drugs and alcohol.

Alcohol can be consumed in restaurants with a liquor license and pubs/bars, but it would be sensible to limit public consumption of alcohol even in these places.

Moreover, educational institutions prohibit the consumption of alcohol/drugs and/or smoking within campus limits. Students found contravening these rules will be strictly punished. Furthermore, there is a very real danger of police involvement in these kinds of offences.





It is important to note here that, consumption of alcohol by women specifically, may be looked upon as an indication of sexual availability and therefore, could attract unwanted attention. Be wary of people offering you alcohol and drugs in pubs and bars. There are a growing number of cases of women and men being assaulted and robbed after unknown substances are mixed in drinks offered to them.

NCI recommends that students stay away from alcohol as much as possible during their stay in India. NCI also strictly prohibits the use of drugs among students.



BANKING AND MONEY

Money can most easily be changed when you arrive at the Thomas Cook or State Bank of India money changing counters at the airport.

Visa and Master Cards are accepted in most commercial establishments in India. One can also withdraw money from 24-hour ATMs that are very easy to locate especially in the big cities. There is a limit on how much money one can withdraw in a day, and it is usually INR 20,000. Instructions are displayed in English, and cash is disbursed in INR. It would be advisable to use ATMs that require you to swipe your card so as to prevent the card from getting captured in rare cases of power failure. It is also advisable to use ATMs during the day when there are people around and in places that are not very lonely.





Having a bank account in India would be a great asset for foreigners planning to stay in India for a year and above. It would essentially translate into easy access of foreign exchange services, the ability to operate digital wallets that are gaining currency during contemporary times, to name two. There are three major types of accounts a foreigner can have in India- Non-Resident External Account (NRE), Non-Resident Ordinary Account (NRO) and Foreign Currency Non-Resident Account (FCNR). The money in NRE accounts is denominated in Indian currency (after conversion from the external account/foreign currency) and re-converted from Indian currency to foreign currency upon closure of the account. The account can be jointly held with an NRI, but not exclusively by the resident foreigner. The second one, NRO, is a type of account where you can deposit income earned in India, which is taxable by the Government of India depending on the tax bracket. The third and last, FCNR account, allows one to park their foreign currency in an Indian bank in its original denomination. It is a form of fixed deposit from which interest can be derived, irrespective of fluctuations in the foreign exchange rate. Therefore, multiple finance options are available for a foreigner in India, when it comes to maintaining an Indian bank account.

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY



The best solution is to get a local SIM card for your mobile phone. Major service providers include Vodafone, Airtel, BSNL, and Reliance Jio. The process for getting a connection usually requires a copy of your passport, visa, passport size photographs, and sometimes, a proof of residence. Most cities also have 4G bandwidths with tariffs for surfing the internet being quite low. One could also get a broadband connection for Wi-Fi, if the stay is in a private property for a prolonged period.





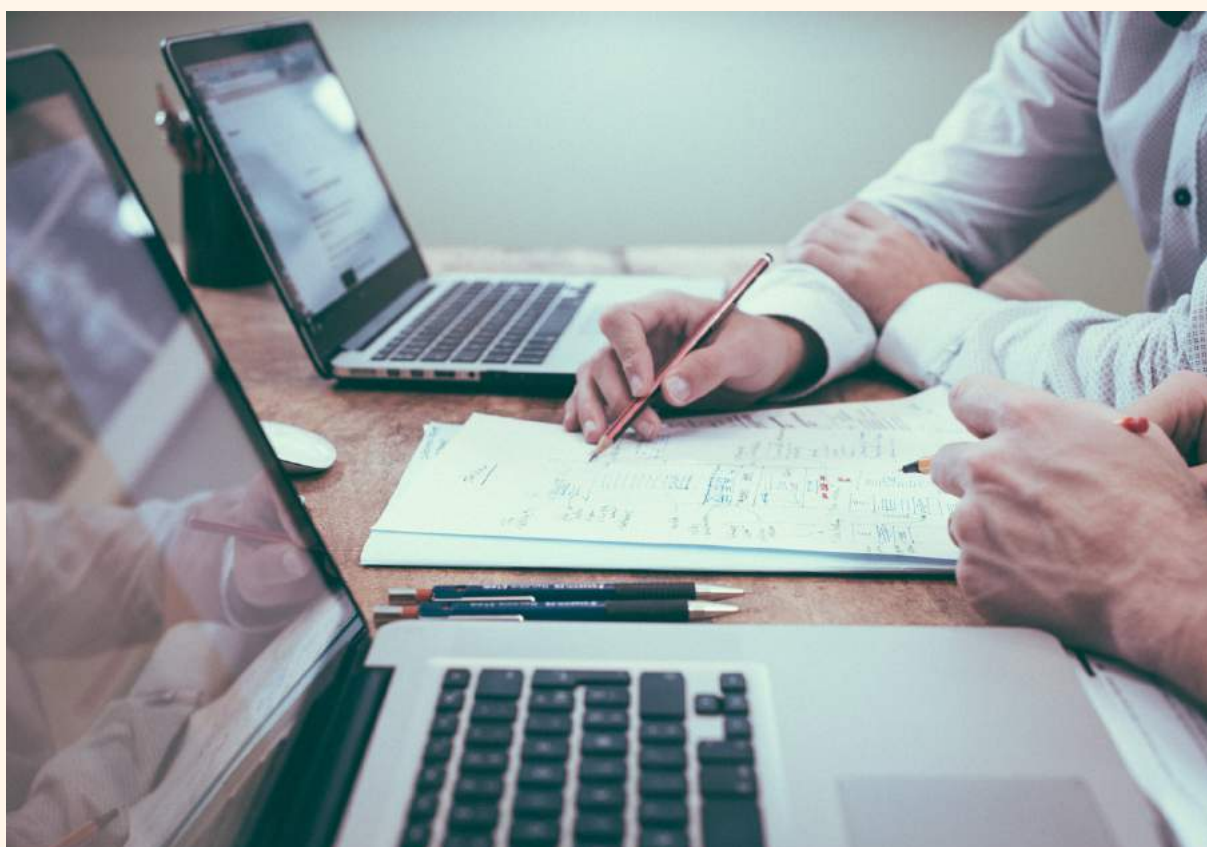
In cities, towns, railway stations, metro stations, and other such public spaces, one can also find networks that have free Wi-Fi access. Most of the bigger Indian universities also have password protected Wi-Fi access and usually one gets registered on the network when taking part in a programme hosted by the university. Carrying a laptop or a smartphone can, therefore, be useful in India. However, public Wi-Fi and common university Wi-Fi systems might be subject to close surveillance by the state and the administration, so one must be careful about their activity on the internet while connected to public Wi-Fi portals.





Online gambling/sport/gaming is gaining popularity in India where many platforms use betting as a way of monetisation, which is neither banned nor encouraged by the government. Many platforms exploit this vacuum in regulation and purposefully fail to explicitly state the financial risks involved in playing these games. They are often designed to be addictive and in the end, a player might find oneself cheated, so try to stay away from these platforms.

The dark web is another part of the internet that is not accessible by ordinary browsers but accessed using other means, which poses a threat to netizens. It has built a reputation for conducting gruesome illegal activities like the sale of private photos, fake identities, financial information, drugs, child pornography etcetera. The advent of cryptocurrencies and the social sanction it has garnered in some countries attract individuals to the dark web that hosts transactions in cryptocurrencies, but be wary of the danger inherent to the dark web.





It is important to note that, not just in India, but the world across, the boom of the internet has drastically transformed the way we eat, shop, make payments, gather information and voice our political opinions. But the rules of the game are not uniform across the world, with challenging variations. The virtual space in India is in many ways a mirrored image of its social space, with its many pitfalls and opportunities. Navigating through the online realm might not pose unexpected technical difficulties, but the dearth of a 'practical sense' of do's and don'ts, ramifications of seemingly innocuous acts online etcetera might land you in uncharted territories.

One can fall victim to cybercrimes like phishing, spoofing, DNS poisoning, identity theft, Ransomware and Trojan horse attacks, regardless of the nation they are residing in.

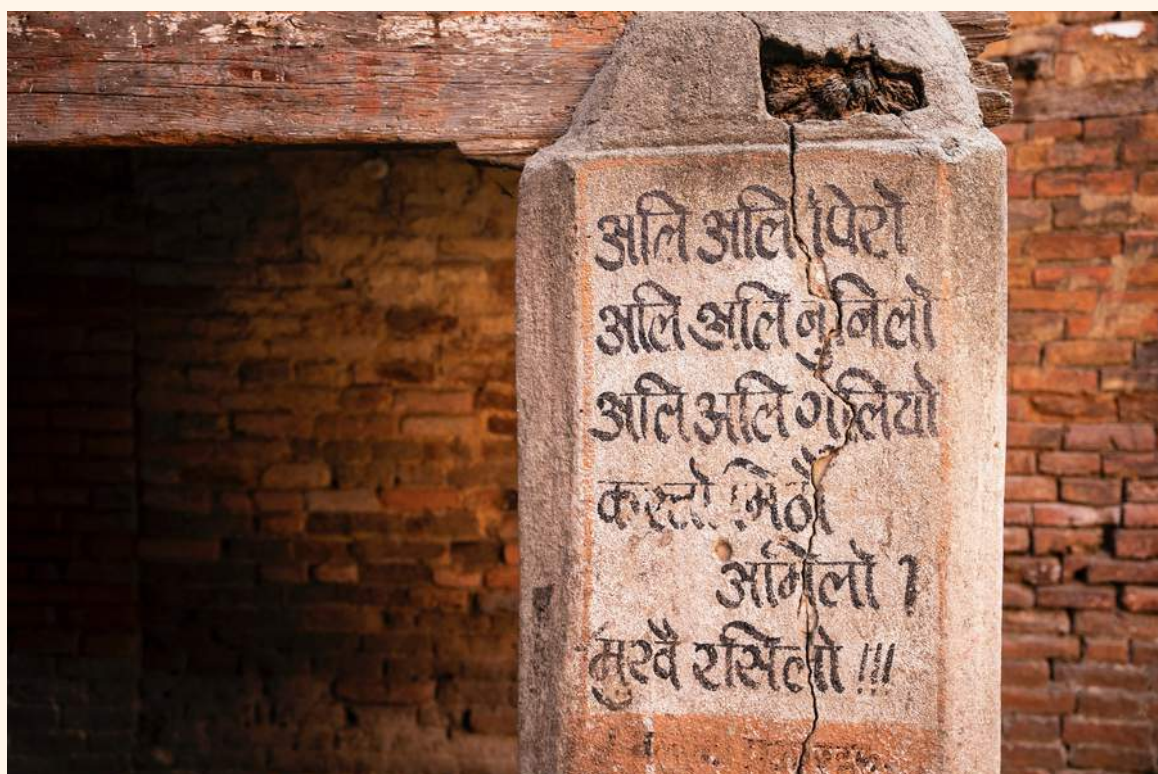
A preliminary precaution as a netizen while surfing the internet is to ensure that there is a locked padlock sign on the websites you visit, the web address begins with <https://> instead of <http://>, check and update software (OS as well) frequently, desist from clicking on spam emails etc. For more information on cyberspace in India, visit CERT-In, the nodal agency responsible for handling cyber security related issues [<https://www.cert-in.org.in/>].

Another aspect of safe use of the internet relates to your activity on social media. Kindly refrain from explicitly voicing political opinions concerning India and Indian society as there have been instances where individuals were targeted for various reasons. Social media is rife with posts having communal overtones and criticism of the government, commenting on them could lead to a flurry of reactions ranging from verbal abuse to making death/rape threats against you.




It is good to familiarize oneself with the political scenario and its tumultuous nature in India. It is advised not to put across strong opinions about any issue, either in the online space or general public, or attend mass protests. Social media is also used by fringe groups to recruit followers into various fundamentalist sects, hence it is recommended to not respond to unwarranted messages one gets.

Online dating is also an area that one needs to navigate cautiously. Do not take for granted the details listed on profiles to be true. Identity theft is a common practice and if you decide on meeting someone, always ensure that it is in a public space and not a private one.



India is home to a variety of cultures and its natural corollary is the presence of a large number of vernacular languages. At present, there are twenty-two scheduled languages recognised by the Indian Constitution. According to the 2001 Census, India has 122 major languages and 1599 other languages. So naturally, not everyone in India is wholly versed in all these languages. A working knowledge of a couple of them should see one through their needs, be it while travelling or interacting with neighbours or the local population in general.

Hindi is predominantly spoken in the Central and Northern parts of India, Bengali in parts of Eastern India and Dravidian languages in the South. Dravidian languages are Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam, respectively spoken in the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.



Provided below are some resources that will help one to grasp the basics of some of the languages conversational purposes. One could also use Google translate, though it is not very accurate.

- Assamese: Axomia Karan
[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.jigyasan.axomiyakaran&hl=en_US&gl=US]
- Bengali: Learn Bengali Online Free with Ling [<https://ling-app.com/learn-bengali/>]
- Gujarati: Learn Gujarati from English
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.devstudios.learn Gujarati from English&hl=en&gl=US>]
- Hindi-Learn Hindi Speak Hindi
[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.atistudios.mondly.hi&hl=en_US&gl=US]
- Marathi: Learn Marathi
[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.marathi_apps.learn_marathi&hl=en_IN&gl=US]
- Malayalam: Speak Malayalam 360
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bigknol.malayalam360&hl=en&gl=US>]
- Oriya: Learn Oriya Language
[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.eduven.ld.lang.oriya&hl=en_IN&gl=US]
- Kannada: Learn Kannada
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=io.bhasha&hl=en&gl=US>]
- Tamil: Speak Tamil 360
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bigknol.tamil360&hl=en&gl=US>]
- Telugu: Learn Telugu quickly
[<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.altergyan.learn Telugu quickly&hl=en&gl=US>]

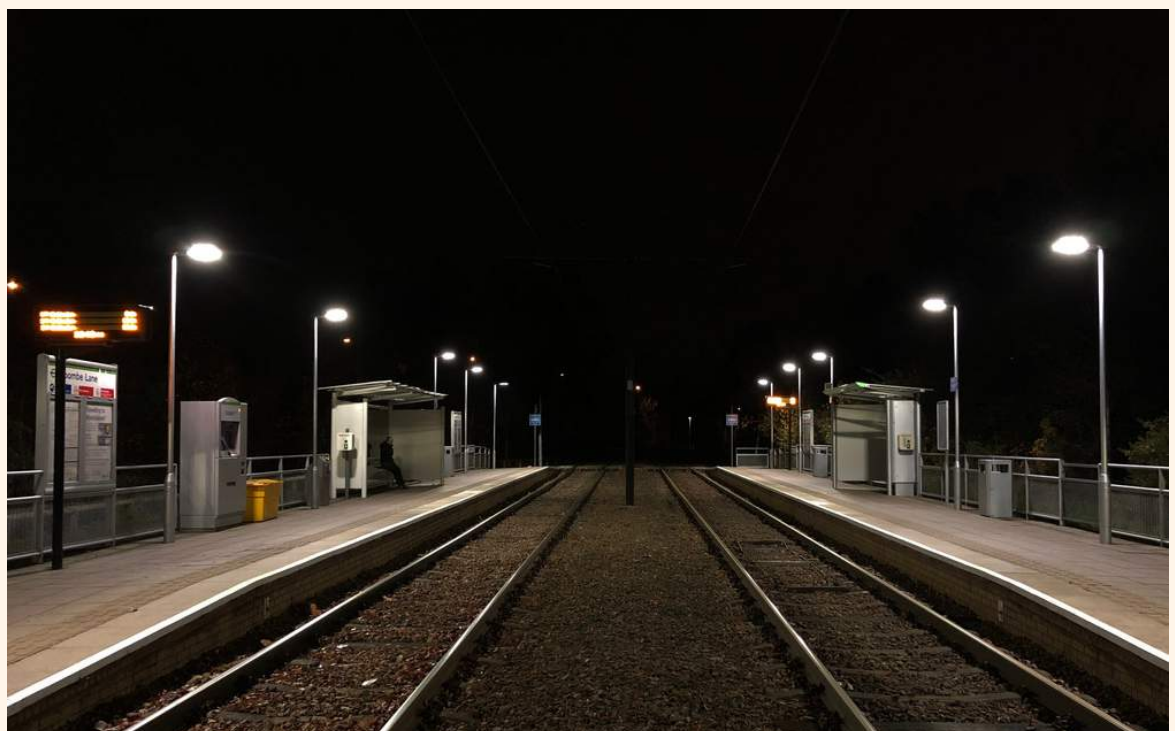
PART C

Society and Culture in India



NEGOTIATING PUBLIC SPACE IN INDIA

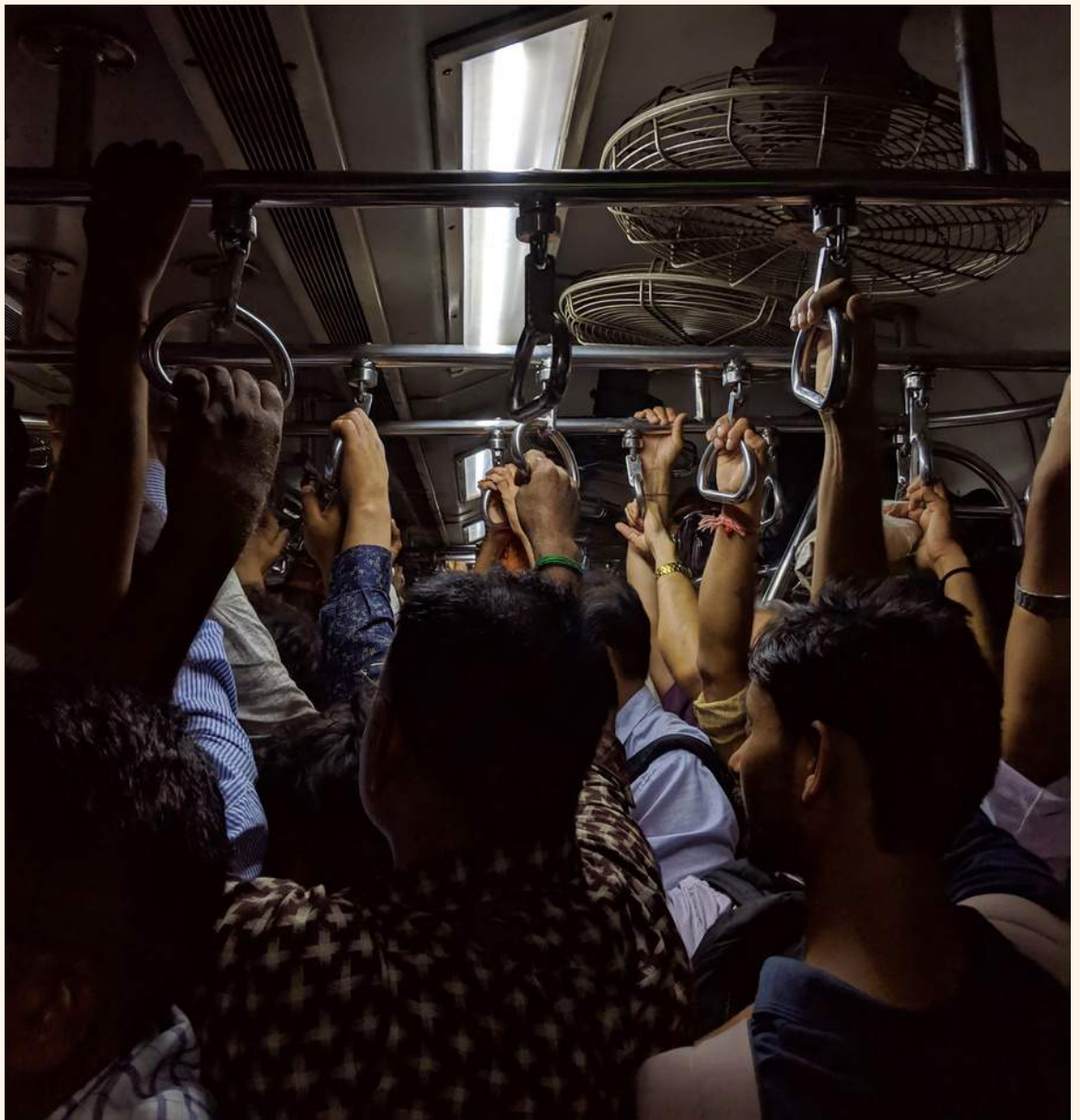
India is renowned for the diversity of experiences it offers to natives as well as foreigners, be it the vibrancy reflected in topographical features, culinary delights, museums and places of historical significance, flora and wildlife and so much more. From the northern mountainous regions of the Great Himalayas to the Southern peninsular regions famous for its beaches, and from the western saline marshy deserts of Rann of Kachchh to the root bridges of Meghalaya in the east, India is home to different social, cultural and demographic features; therefore it is very difficult to find homogeneous characteristics in nature that *prima facie* bind this nation. The regional disparity that differentiates University spaces thus becomes a microcosm of that particular state and district in which the university is located. The immediate material conditions of the region are reflected in the larger cultural milieu followed in the locality which then permeates into the University spaces.





Therefore, some cities and villages may be more welcoming than others, some more free and liberating than the others, some hostile and notorious for their lack of safety and so on.

In a developing country like India, the unequal distribution of wealth and income disparities manifest through the way a city is designed, wherein some areas might seem to be highly urbanized and developed with palatial buildings, radial roads, and high-end facilities, while other areas hosts the slums and temporary shelters of the working class population. This is, however, in no way unique to India and is representative of a nation in socio-economic flux.





India, being one of the most densely populated countries has its most cities jostled with the crowd. One might be taken aback to see the crowded alleyways and roads that are chaotic with cab drivers, rickshaw wallahs, and motorists honking in active frustration at a traffic signal, or when stray animals walk into the roads with a care-free attitude. In cities, it is also not uncommon to find small alleyways posing as roads littered with garbage and waste. These may also be sites of noise pollution and one may want to be careful while visiting such places. However, it is important to understand that these aspects are an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric of India and pause a moment to take it in. Furthermore, one might find that there is very little space for privacy when in public, as you will find hawkers, roadside sellers and persons of other professions, touts and beggars accosting you, at times even being intrusive. Moreover, pick-pocketing might be practised by even the most unassuming persons including children. Snatchers who come on bikes and grab onto jewellery, handbags, mobile phones and such valuable possessions are also not totally unheard of.

While travelling, when in doubt of directions, refer to Google maps and if connectivity is an issue, seek directions from shopkeepers instead of the natives you see on the street. Also, hygienic conditions in some public lavatories could be deplorable, so try your best not to rely on them. Some cities in India like Delhi and Chennai have buses that indicate route number instead of the destination it is travelling to, so make sure that in such cases you know respective route numbers and the places you can travel by it. In public places or while on a journey, you might also find people approaching you coming for selfies, so say yes only if you are comfortable.



When it comes to shopping, India has different types of markets. There is the normal market where shops sell items at a fixed price, others where one can haggle and lastly, the weekly markets (found in villages) also called mandis. Though language might act as a limiting cultural barrier, with the help of Indian friends or online resources one should fairly be able to navigate through these markets. Usually, in markets like Palika Bazar, Sarojini Nagar (both situated in Delhi), commodities being sold go for very cheap prices, its natural corollary being most articles turning out to be of poor quality. However, markets located in Sarojini Nagar, Lajpat Nagar, INA, Connaught Place, and Karol Bagh in New Delhi also flaunt branded and quality goods that see a lot of customers throughout the week. Students may find these markets most suitable to buy things of everyday need and also authentic Indian goods.





There is a prevalent commercial custom in Indian markets called *bohni*-based on the belief that the first sale of a day (or another selling period) establishes the seller's luck for subsequent small transactions during the remainder of the day. The customer can exploit this while bargaining as sellers are usually reluctant to let go of the first customer since they believe it to be a bad omen. Also, make sure that you know the approximate prices of things in Rupees (can ask Indian friends) since sellers might try to exploit a foreigner's unawareness of prevailing price levels. In fact, there are tourist destinations that have a 'foreigner price' (up to three times the actual price) and 'normal price' where the price differential alone will induce knee jerk reactions, forget other externalities.





Another important point to note is that in India, the price of a commodity (indicated as M.R.P. on the product itself) is inclusive of all taxes, so one need not pay anything additional to Minimum Retail Price, abbreviated as M.R.P.

Regarding eating out, one will find international outlets like Subway, KFC, Burger King, McDonald's, etcetera in major cities where one need not worry about the quality of food being served. Avoid food sold on roadsides and crowded marketplaces since one cannot be certain of the quality of water and other ingredients used in the preparation of dishes. A very important piece of information to note is that the consumption of cattle meat (beef) is a highly political and communal issue in certain parts of India and avoid eating it. In India, people belonging to some religious groups regard cows to be holy, and hence this particular vexation towards eating beef.





In many northern cities, however, beef is rare meat that is not usually served in restaurants, so one need not be too worried. However, owing to regional differences, states in the East and South of India (especially in Kerala and Tamil Nadu) do not seem to police the consumption of beef as much as in the northern states.



It is quite normal for an individual to find oneself at crossroads when being introduced to a different and new socio-cultural milieu. However, with time, one adapts to these conditions and gets accustomed to the new climate, customs, tradition, values, food, standards of living among many other such factors. It is the symbiosis of variegated experiences that enable one to appreciate different cultures while being rooted in one's cultural identity. It is advised that one feel free to seek assistance with either the host/home institution or NCI during these times. Feeling overwhelmed in a new place is quite common, and we would not want students to deal with it alone.





GENDER IN INDIA

It is not general in India but there are problematic situations we need to keep in mind. A majority of students who come for NCI's programmes are women, and given the growing media attention given to women's and LGBTQIA+ community's safety concerns in India, some pointers are provided below that will acquaint one with gender concerns in India and equip them with the means to handle them, in case it arises. Kindly bear in mind that these are exceptions and not the norm, and since it is better to be aware and prepared than be sorry, this section is included.

The condemnable reality of India is mired in incidents of rape. Saying without taking away from the horror of the crimes taking place, they are rather symptomatic of a country in flux where women in increasing numbers are confidently asserting their presence in the public space.





The feudal patriarchal structure threatened by this reacts by attempting to teach the 'errant' woman a lesson in what they consider a just punishment⁴⁶ for flouting the norms they have enforced for centuries. And, then there are the men who are just looking for an opportunity to misbehave with women as their understanding of how to treat women is informed by misogynistic cultural stereotypes and exasperated by the lack of actual healthy relationships with the opposite sex simply because there are few, if any, avenues for the same for men and women while growing up.

Owing to various socio-cultural factors, like in many other developed and developing countries, the LGBTQI+ community in India remains a minority group and have to face many impediments in integrating themselves into mainstream life.





At present in India, homosexuality is decriminalised legally, while the right to marriage and reproductive rights still remains a far cry. Public display of affection that can be interpreted even remotely as 'obscene' is a crime according to the Indian Penal Code. One needs to understand that these issues stem from the dichotomous duel between conceptions of the ideal way of life: a conservative viewpoint that emphasises the tradition and family as the fundamental unit of social organisation, religion as the sole guide to morality; versus a liberal outlook that values freedom, considers an individual as the basic unit of social organisation, and places a premium on the individual to find their own moral compass/es. Living as an LGBTQI+ identifying person in India comes with its own challenges, so a little preparation along the lines of what to expect and how to handle certain situations will be an added bonus. Please be careful about whom you come out to, even the so-called liberal 'woke' individual can turn out to be as bad as a homophobe. Try to accept and love yourself for who you are, it is only a matter of time till you find a safe space in India. In certain situations, passing as cisgender/straight might become important for safety, especially in rural areas and in smaller towns and cities. Do not meet people on dating apps unless you are very certain of their identities (and the fact that they're safe and will not rob or harm you). If you get in trouble with the police, ask to contact your embassy and NCI. You'll get pockets of safe spaces with queer collectives, NGOs, reading groups etc. It's best to socialize with them, rather than being on your own. In case you prefer being on your own, always remember to charge your phone (and carry a power bank) - Google has pretty much everything significant you need to know about being in Delhi; could consider carrying a pepper spray/mace. If you are more interested in understanding queer spaces in India and their history, feel free to check the queer archive QAMRA [<https://qamra.in/>].



Given this context it would be necessary that women and members of the LGBTQI+ community take certain precautions. On a general note, it is recommended to not stay out at night alone or try to explore places which look desolate without company. It is safer to not trust even the seemingly nice, educated and cosmopolitan stranger offering help and prefer using public transport unless you have hired your own cab. Listen to your gut instinct in most circumstances. Indians, as such, are generally amicable and helpful in nature, however just to be on the safe side please consider the following pointers that are being advocated for the safety of Women and LGBTQI+ identifying students. It becomes pertinent to understand here that some of the pointers mentioned may sound offensive and outrightly sexist, but these pointers must be treated as nothing more than safety precautions that work to some degree in India:



- It would be safer for female and LGBTQI+ identifying students in India to live or travel with at least 1 or 2 other people. Often if you have a male companion, you are usually less likely to be sexually harassed and/or molested.
- If you are travelling on assignment, or have moved to a new town or city for work, ask your company or organization to ensure your safety by making the arrangements for your stay through their local contacts. Or ask them for known and reliable contacts through whom you can make your arrangements. In the hotel, make sure your door has a latch or chain on the inside, and once you are in your room, ensure that it is locked and no one can enter from outside without you knowing. If it is a room on the ground level or 1st floor, make sure that the windows have grills or are bolted.



- Do not leave your balcony door open while sleeping at night, burglary and forced entry unfortunately do take place in India. When ordering food etc. do not leave the door open, have the delivery person knock on the door and take your items from the door. Even if you are stepping out to the gate, make sure that the door is locked.
- In budgeting your travel or rent expenses, make safety your number one priority. It is usually seen that the lower the cost the bigger the risk with safety. Hence it may seem like a good, cheap deal on a rented house, apartment, hotel/guide/transportation/tour package, but the more obscure it is – the bigger the risk with safety. You are better off with a known place. Also prefer something that other single women or LGBTQI+ identifying students you personally know have used and have recommended.



- Never accept food and drinks from complete strangers (especially on buses, trains and in hotels), even if they seem friendly or are very insistent. There have been cases where food and drinks were laced with drugs, and the unwary travellers robbed and/or sexually assaulted. Visit bars and restaurants which have more customers (that way your food will also be fresher) and whatever you drink, insist on a sealed bottle (check the seal carefully).
- It is advisable that female and LGBTQI+ identifying students avoid physical contact with other people. It is to be kept in mind that public displays of affection are still a punishable offence under the penal code in India, so if you are a couple, try to keep physical contact to a minimum in public spaces.





- It is advised that all students avoid travelling at night. Overnight trains that would ferry passengers to their destinations early in the morning are most convenient, but the journey itself may be unsafe especially if travelling alone. It is better to mindfully gauge the people who are with you in your cubicle during train journeys, and if you feel uncomfortable it's best to stay on your guard.
- While taking cabs or other means of public transport it is advisable that students always use certified apps like Uber or OLA as mentioned above and never hail taxis or hitch a ride. Even with cars that Uber or OLA provide, it would be advisable to double-check the name of the driver and the registration number of the car before one gets in. During daytime autos and buses might also serve as a good alternative.
- If you need to find your way somewhere, ask for directions or use Google Maps. It would be better not to rely on people both because in most cases they might not be able to help you out and for your own safety. Never agree to meet people you barely know at a house or hotel they invite you to. If you must meet and talk, ask them to meet you in some café of your choosing. Keep a speed dial option ready on your phones at all times. There are various apps available on Google play store and Apple play Store that serve multiple functionalities like sending distress signals to selected contacts, providing a database of important government contact numbers, police, Central and State Women Commissions and other NGOs. It would be wise to have these installed.



- Avoid intensely crowded places—like buses, festivals and college fests—where men take the opportunity to molest women. Also, be very careful about a direct, angry confrontation in these kinds of situations, for mobs in India are notoriously unpredictable. Indian women often don't complain because the crowd begins to blame them. In a festival try to stay on the edges of the crowds. In a bus or marketplace, loudly but firmly and politely say "What are you doing?" And remember guilt works better than anger.
- The Golden Rule of Safety for women and LGBTQI+ identifying persons is wherever you are, be alert to your environment and the people around you at all times. Listen to your gut instinct and don't second guess it. (It is better to be wrong and safe than wrong and sorry!); And act on your observations and instincts intelligently.

NCI, through its programmes, puts in effort in making you as secure as possible. The hostel and the classroom are safe spaces and the university/institute itself has guards round the clock. We will arrange for your airport pick up and drop by coordinating with a trustworthy cab service and we personally keep tabs on the driver by following up with them from the time you get picked up from the airport. We, at NCI, are always available by telephone, E-mail and Whatsapp, and we encourage all students to communicate without the slightest hesitation for anything even if it is not specifically related to the course.

Furthermore, we assist in getting you all local SIMs so that you can keep in touch with us. All the field trips are supervised by us.



The local coordinators also help out with your plans to travel in the city or for short visits outside during the weekends by giving you solid practical travelling advice. We tend to sometimes go overboard with this, and every year we get students saying that we should trust their Nordic sense of independence and not coddle them so much. We may get negative feedback for too many classes or assignments, but never have we had any issues with regard to the safety of our students.

Hope this makes you feel more confident and prepared for your trip to India.





Traditionally, Indian academic culture has been known to be marked by strong hierarchical, patriarchal and paternalistic attitudes, but with evolving times, the outlook has changed to a considerable extent, and has inculcated a culture of more inclusive representation in the academic milieu, which is clearly visible in the bigger cities.

Firstly, it would be wise to note that classroom dynamics are subject to change, depending on the region, course, and the administration. The atmosphere within the classroom may vary from humanities courses to science courses. It is generally observed that humanities students get to have a more informal and liberal academic space; tendency to question and counter-question the taught material, inquisitiveness and out-of-syllabus discussions that include general conversations on current events are encouraged; nothing is expected to be accepted at face value without challenging it.



For instance, in liberal arts colleges—and to a small extent in engineering universities—situated in metropolitan cities students may not face issues with regard to personal space and freedom in the university. However, in universities located in small cities and towns, certain restrictions can be imposed on students, which may be as trivial as deciding the dress code for students and whom the student can or cannot interact with. In most of the places barring big metro cities and some developed areas, socializing with teachers, asking them out for dinner/drinks, accepting their offer for dinner/drinks especially on a one-to-one basis might not be received well and hence is not recommended. However, a healthy student-teacher relationship with bounded limits according to the environment is always encouraged and could help know and better judge situations.

Although Indian universities are becoming more inclusive in terms of female representation in higher education, regional variations sometimes show that in some smaller cities, the sex ratio tends to be tilted more towards male students than females. In an attempt to have an enriching Indian campus experience, Nordic students would like to befriend the Indian student, which is a good idea in itself, but it would be better to do that in a group. Indian students are typically very helpful, hospitable and understanding of the foreign students' needs. They will bend backwards to accommodate a foreign friend and will protect them in case of any conflict with a fellow Indian.

Science courses on the other hand encourage knowledge seeking by employing a different methodology, which might seem more formal and rigorous. Professors might not be willing to extend deadlines, might continue classes even beyond the allotted time, punish errant behaviour like coming late to class etc. Discussions would still be an integral part of the pedagogy, but it may not extend out of the classroom or the course material being taught. One must learn to accept these differences and adjust to the norms of different academic spaces for a comfortable experience in India.

On the other hand, regional disparities, class & caste differences, socio-economic backgrounds, and other such aspects also play a part in the dynamics within a university in terms of its student demography, educational culture, and the liberty with which students and professors can mingle on or off-campus.



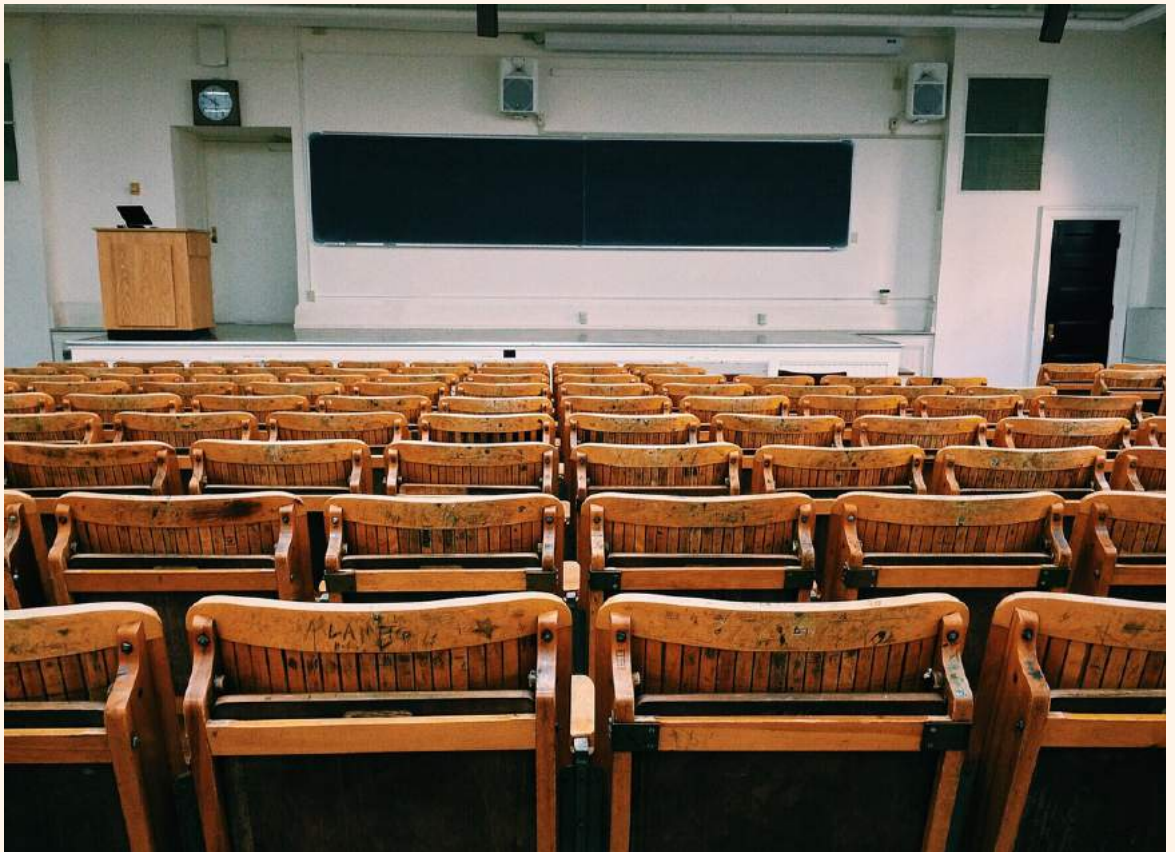


The only suggestion here is to read the situation and be on guard while outside or when in a new unfamiliar place. It would be advisable for Nordic students to befriend a mixed group of Indian students and socialize accordingly till one is sure that there is no cross-cultural confusion in verbal and non-verbal communication.

In general, it would be beneficial for foreign students to understand some unspoken and unwritten social norms to adjust better to the environment here. Firstly, a formal way of dressing is preferred in academic spaces in India. Moreover, during lectures, most teachers may not allow eating in the classroom, having personal discussions with peers, messaging and surfing the internet. It would be advisable to refer to teachers as Sir/Ma'am rather than using their first names and it would be good to be circumspect around teachers.



It is important to understand that university campuses in India have historically been sites of political activism. Some political parties have their student wings operating on campus, and things can get uncomfortable when two political groups clash on campus. It would be wise to not indulge in political activism on campus or actively support a particular student wing, however just the cause, since your stay is short and it would be a hassle to get into trouble involving the police and the judiciary. It becomes pertinent to mention here that any such participation may also lead to cancellation of visas, as it would violate the norms governing your stay in India.



CONTACT US



For more information or for any clarifications, please do not hesitate to reach out to NCI.

Nordic Centre in India Secretariat
Study Affairs Office/NCI Secretariat
Kalevantie 4
33100 Tampere
Finland

Nordic Centre in India
Director's Residence
B-2, Nizamuddin East,
New Delhi 110 013, India

Email: contact@nordiccentreindia.com
<http://www.nordiccentreindia.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/NordiccentreIndia/>
<https://www.facebook.com/NCI.ForIndia/>
<https://twitter.com/NordicCtrIndia>
<https://www.instagram.com/nordiccentreindia/>
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/nordic-centre-in-india>