



Advice about travelling to India

By Yogi Sarveshwarananda Giri

The following is some information that will be helpful for you in preparing for your trip to India.

I look forward to welcome you to Mother India!



I. TRAVELLING TO INDIA

A. Before leaving

1. Passport and Visa

Naturally, you will need a valid passport to travel to India. Further, you will need a tourist visa from the Indian Embassy or High Commission nearest your home. You should not apply for this until one month before, as it is only valid for three of six months from the date of issue, *unless* you live in the United States in which case you *might* be able to get a 10-year visa. Before going to the Consulate, call to enquire what you need to bring and the cost of the visa. You will most likely need 2 passport sized photos, your passport, a completed application form and the fee in cash. Also, in the slot for your address in India, you can write the address of the “Matri Chhaya Gurukulam” orphanage, which is at the end of this document. It is best to arrive at the Consulate early in the morning when they open to avoid lines. The visas takes anywhere from one day to one week.

2. Luggage

You will not need much luggage. Please try to stick to one piece of checked luggage (preferably a large back pack) and one piece of cabin luggage (a smaller knapsack). No sharp objects, aerosol cans or liquids are permitted in the in-cabin luggage. Put all camping knives or nail

scissors in the large bag to be checked. You can buy shampoo and cream easily from Ayurvedic stores in India. You may want to bring a folded duffle bag in your luggage to bring back the things you buy in India.

a. Clothes

- A warm track suit, or thick yoga pants and a sweatshirt or fleece
- Meditation shawl and a sweater (you can buy shawls there)
- Fall jacket or shell (not a winter jacket as it will be too bulky)
- sturdy thick soled sandals with a back, and flip flops
- Warm socks in a grey or dark color (just a few pairs)
- Lighter yoga pants (preferably loose fitting)
- Several t-shirts and long-sleeved shirts
- Pajamas and under garments
- One set of clothes for touring, such as khaki pants or a long skirt. Women may want to bring palazzo pants that can be worn under their smocks or shorter dresses (similar to a salvar kameez).
- In India, appropriate colors are lighter (not black). T-shirts should have a short sleeve (not tank tops or tops with plunging V-necks).
- There are always many opportunities to purchase Indian clothes here, which are very inexpensive, comfortable, and more appropriate for the culture.

b. Equipment

- Bring a smaller day pack that can be carry-on luggage in the plane.
- Yoga mat (they fold well or fit rolled in a large backpack)
- Small flashlight, combination padlock, alarm clock
- Travel money belt in cotton (available at luggage stores)
- Grapefruit Seed Extract (available at health food stores if you want extra water safety)
- Homeopathic remedies such as Bach Rescue Remedy or Jet Lag tabs
- Acidophilus, Activated Charcol, Para-Free (by Organika), and PARAZyme (by Renew Life). (Highly recommended, especially charcoal, and available at health food stores)
- Mosquito repellent (non-aerosol due to air travel restrictions, such as Muskol)
- One bath towel (not too thick, i.e. quick-drying)
- A journal and several pens (different colors may be useful)
- A camera and film or charger (the smaller the better as you will keep it with you)
- Ear plugs (to block out the noise while traveling)
- A small personal water filter is a good idea and reduces dependence on bottled water
- Toys for our little ones... if you have room to spare! The most appreciated are jigsaw puzzles, educational toys, dolls, books/tapes to learn English, cheap digital cameras, etc... For more ideas, please go to www.hariharanandakriyayoga.org/english/join_us/materials/materials_index.html

3. Money

Once you have paid for your airfare and train tickets or taxi fares, you will not need much money during the trip unless you plan to make major purchases. If you stay in ashrams, most of them

function on a donation basis (as in our Matri Chhaya Gurukulam) to help cover their food, maintenance, and electricity costs. A reasonable donation is 500 rupees per person and per day. Other ashrams have a fixed price for food and lodging—the Aurobindo ashram in Delhi charges around 600 rupees per person and per day for instance.

People who have been accepted in our full-time volunteer program (see www.hariharanandakriyayoga.org/english/join_us/services/services_index.html) are not expected to give anything for their stay—although donations are always welcome.

I recommend that everyone bring a few hundred US dollars, British pounds, or Euros in cash. You can change these major currencies in all major cities. You can also change your money at the New Delhi airport at any time of the day or night, but not at the best rate. Don't change it there all at once, you will find money changers with better rates later in your trip.

Keep this in a money belt **inside** your pants when traveling, and keep some rupees in your pocket. That way if you want to buy something small like a souvenir or some water, you will not have to bring out your money belt in the middle of the market, you will have some rupees in your pocket.

If you are staying longer or know you will buy a lot of high-price items, bring the amount you want to spend in travellers' cheques, and/or bring a VISA card to draw on at a bank or to use in some select shops. Banking is sometimes slow in India, but you do not want to carry more than a few hundred dollars in cash. As an aside, most things in India are up for bargain, except foods in restaurants.

4. Medical Preparations

You will have to use your own judgment regarding your health. Currently there are no required vaccinations for Northern India. Malaria is not a concern in Northern India either. I would recommend **homeopathic** anti-malarial drops if you feel the need, not the allopathic pills, as they have significant side effects. With all of our precautions, we hope you will stay well. It is not unusual, however, for those staying several months to experience a bit of stomach upset. This may pass after a few days with Ayurvedic remedies, or some of the recommendations I gave in the Equipment section of this letter. Please purchase **travel health insurance** unless you are already covered for travel.

B. While flying

For a comfortable journey and to avoid jet lag, I recommend:

- avoid drinking alcohol or overeating on the plane
- drinking lots of water during the flight
- setting your watch to the time of your destination as soon as you sit in the plane, and avoiding referring to what is the time in your country of origin
- practicing pranayama continuously during the entire duration of the flight
- doing some shoulder and leg stretches in your seat
- taking homeopathic jet lag tablets if necessary.

C. Arrival in India

Depending on where you are heading, you might want to arrive in Kolkata (to visit Orissa and the East coast of India), Delhi (to visit the Himalayas and the North of India), or Mumbai (to visit the South and West coast of India).

Once you have cleared immigration and customs, ask for the “PRE-PAID TAXI” counter to book a reliable and inexpensive taxi to take you wherever you need.

II. TRAVELLING AND STAYING IN INDIA

A. Train travels in India

Trains in India are reliable, quite comfortable, and extremely cheap. For wonderful tips about travelling by train in India, please visit this website site FIRST: www.seat61.com/India.htm

Go to www.indianrail.gov.in to look up train availability, then book your ticket online from your own country in advance using the site www.irctc.co.in. Or buy the ticket in India from a reputable travel agent (consult your ashram or hotel).

B. Delhi

1. Staying in Delhi

If you want to spend a few days in Delhi, I can recommend the "Aurobindo Ashram"—it is very inexpensive and absolutely superb!

The address is: Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110 016

The telephone number is +91 (11) 2656-7863, or +91 (11) 2656-9225, or +91 (11) 2652-4810

The email is aurobindo@vsnl.com

In order to stay at the ashram, you have to send them BEFORE an email requesting a room for the dates you want. Send the email addressed to "Reception in-charge" at aurobindo@vsnl.com. It is the *ONLY* way to get rooms at the ashram.

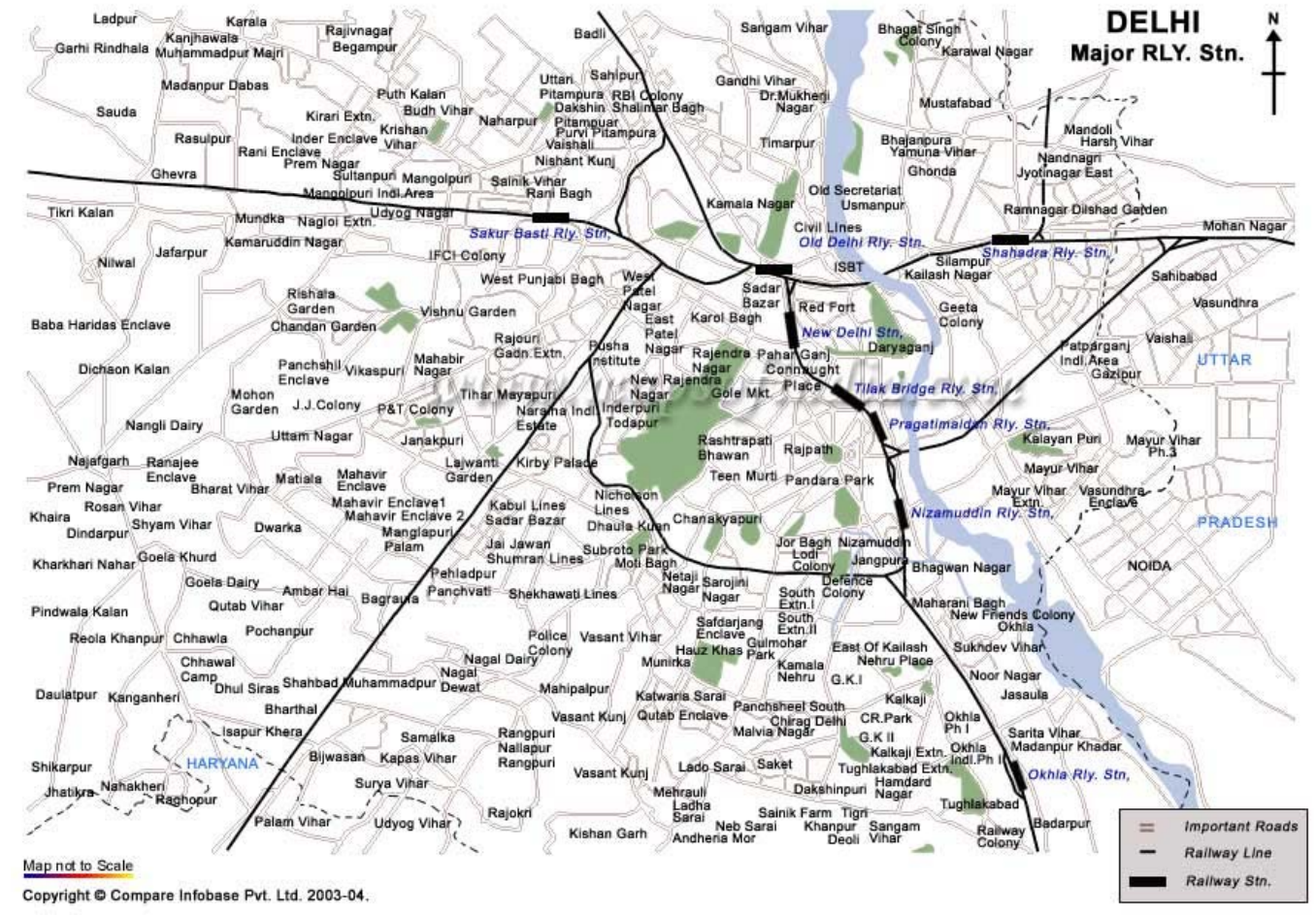
In case of emergency, you can contact a disciple in Delhi, Mr. Janardhan Reddy at +91 (98) 6814-7729 (cellular)

2. Train stations in Delhi

Please note that there are *three major train stations in Delhi*—make sure you go to the correct one:

1. “New Delhi”, also known by its code name as “NDLS”, is in central Delhi
2. “Old Delhi” (also known as “Delhi”), also known by its code name as “DLI”, is in north Delhi

3. “Hazrat Nizamuddin”, also known by its code name as “NZM”, is in south Delhi
Here is a map of Delhi showing the different train stations:



C. Going to Haridwar and the Himalayas

1. Travelling from Delhi to Haridwar

For more information about Haridwar, one of India’s seven holiest cities, you can visit the Wikipedia page at <http://wikitravel.org/en/Haridwar>

a. By train

It will only cost you between 150 to 500 Indian rupees for the train from Delhi to Haridwar. There are two very fast trains going from Delhi to Haridwar:

- The daily morning train (called the “Dehradun Shatabdi Express”, train No. 2017) **leaves New Delhi (NDLS) at 6:50 am** and reaches Haridwar around 11:25 am.

- The daily afternoon train (called the “Dehradun Jan Shatabdi Express”, train No. 2055) **leaves New Delhi (NDLS) at 3:25 pm** and arrives in Haridwar around 7:35 pm.

A third option is to take a sleeper car on the daily overnight train (called the “Mussoorie Express”, train No. 4041) **leaving OLD Delhi (DLI) at 9:25 pm** and arriving **the following morning** in Haridwar around 5:52 am. It is quite comfortable to sleep in, but do bring your own shawl or blanket as it gets cool at night.

Once you arrive at the Haridwar train station, take an auto rickshaw to the Matri Chhaya Gurukulam. It will cost you around 100 Indian rupees.

b. By taxi

You can also book a taxi to travel the 215 kms from Delhi to Haridwar, at a very low cost (around 3000 to 4000 rupees). The road is in good condition. It is almost as fast as a train (5 to 6 hours depending on traffic), and more comfortable. Ask the ashram or the hotel where you are staying in Delhi to book it for you.

2. Staying at the Matri Chhaya Gurukulam

This is our orphanage-ashram where I stay most of the time while in India.

The address is: Laksar Road (opposite Shivedale school), Jagjeetpur, Haridwar, Uttarkhand 249408.

Swami Sharad Puri is the swami in charge of the Matri Chhaya Gurukulam, and his telephone number is +91 (93) 1902-2436.

Another useful number is the Reception at the Matri Chhaya Gurukulam: +91 (99) 9798-6539. Any sincere seeker is welcome there, whether initiated in Kriya yoga or not, but are expected to abide by the ashram’s code of conduct.

The donation per day is 500 Indian rupees per day, including accommodation and all meals and snacks (approved full-time volunteers are staying free of charge).

3. Travelling from Haridwar back to Delhi

Again there are three options by train:

- A daily morning train (called the “NDLS Jan Shatabdi Express”, train No. 2056) **leaves Haridwar at 6:22 am** and reaches NEW Delhi (NDLS) around 11:15 am.

- A daily afternoon train (called the “Dehradun Shatabdi Express”, train No. 2018) **leaves Haridwar at 6:13 pm** and arrives in NEW Delhi (NDLS) around 10:45 pm.

- A daily overnight train (called the “Mussoorie Express”, train No. 4042) **leaves Haridwar at 11:20 pm** and arrives **the following morning** in OLD Delhi (DLI) around 7:45 am.

D. Going to Banabira, Orissa

From Delhi

You can either: 1) Fly from Delhi to Bhubaneswar (2 hours flight), and then take a train to

Sambalpur (5 hours ride) and then a taxi to Banabira (2 hours drive); or 2) Take a train from Delhi to Sambalpur (**TWO to THREE DAYS ride!**), and then a taxi to Banabira (2 hours drive).

Go to www.yatra.com to find some of the cheapest flights and book your flight in advance.

From Kolkota

You can take a train from Kolkota to Sambalpur (11 hours ride), and then a taxi to Banabira (2 hours drive).

1. Travelling from Delhi to Banabira, Orissa

a. From Delhi to Bhubaneshwar

Take a taxi or auto rickshaw to the DOMESTIC airport (it is a different airport than the INTERNATIONAL airport where you arrived) and take a plane to Bhubaneshwar (in the state of Orissa). The flight is two hours-long and will cost around 6,000 Indian Rupees for the round trip Delhi-Bhubaneshwar-Delhi.

In case of emergency, you can contact a disciple in Bhubaneshwar, Mr. Vidyasagar Shaw at +91 (97) 7802-4555 (cellular) or Mr. Binod Shaw at +91 (98) 6139-5171 (cellular).

b. From Bhubaneshwar to Sambalpur

Once you are in Bhubaneshwar, you will need to take a taxi to a local hotel. The next morning, take a taxi to the train station and take a train to Sambalpur.

There is a morning train that runs every day of the week (week-ends included) which departs at 6:50 am from Bhubaneshwar railway station (BBS) and arrives at Sambalpur (SBP) at 11:25 am. The train number is 2893 and the train name is "BBS BLGR SUPER".

c. From Sambalpur to Banabira

From Sambalpur, take a taxi to the small village of Banabira. It is about a two hours-taxi ride and will cost you around 1,000 Indian rupees.

The address of the Hariharananda Kriya Yoga Mission ashram is Banabira, P.O. Tabada, Via Sohela, Dist. Bargarh, Orissa 768033.

The local contacts in Banabira are:

1. Mr. Yogananda Sahu. Cell phone: +91 (97) 7829-3191
2. Mr. Chitrasen Debta. Cell phone: +91 (99) 3722-3217

2. Travelling from Banabira, Orissa back to Delhi

a. From Banabira to Sambalpur

From Banabira, take a taxi to the Sambalpur train station.

b. From Sambalpur to Bhubaneswar

There is a morning train that runs every day of the week (EXCEPT SUNDAYS), which leaves Sambalpur at 6.10 a.m. and arrives in Bhubaneswar at 10:45 am. The train number is 8303 and the train name is "SBP PURI INT EXP".

c. From Bhubaneswar to Delhi

From there you take a taxi to the Bhubaneswar airport. There are a couple of flights in the afternoon from Bhubaneswar to Delhi, so you can reach Delhi the same night if you wish. The flight is two hours-long.

III. OTHER PRACTICAL INFORMATION

A. Phone and telecommunication

In most cities, you will find long-distance call booths and Internet facilities, should you wish to call or send a message home to let loved ones know that you have arrived safely at the ashram. We recommend however, that you let people know that you are embarking on a contemplative stay at the ashram, and will only be checking email or calling about once a week. This way you will have created sacred space and time to focus on the transformative experience of living at an ashram.

When calling India from abroad, you need to dial your international dialing code first ("00" in some countries, or "011" in others, etc.), followed by "91" (India's country code), followed by the telephone number.

When calling a number in India from INSIDE India, do NOT dial the international dialing code NOR the "91" country code of India. Instead, dial "0" first, then the telephone number.

B. Health

Most foreigners getting sick in Asia do so because of reliance on unhealthy restaurant practices and unclean water. To prevent this, we will be accompanied by our own trained cooks who will cook all our vegetarian meals according to the highest standards of hygiene, spiritual purity, and nutrition, using only the freshest local foodstuffs. Drinking water will be only bottled or filtered water.

It is highly advisable to get international health insurance to cover your stay in India—it is very inexpensive but a good precaution. Consult your travel agent.

A pre-trip general medical checkup might be prudent but not necessary.

For general health needs, prescription and over-the-counter drugs are available.

About the over-publicized avian flu: only people who handle diseased poultry on a regular basis are at risk. As we are not going anywhere near poultry farms and all our meals are vegetarian, there is no risk whatsoever.

C. Water

In order to cut down on the plastic waste incurred by buying bottled water, we encourage you to bring your own small portable water filter, if possible. You can find such types of small portable water filters such as the Katadyn Water Bottle, item #FH321 at <http://www.magellans.com> for instance.

We will have bottled and/or filtered water available at all times. However, it is important while in India to avoid uncooked food and juices, especially those from markets. You will be eating specially prepared food at the ashrams and schools, but on your touring days if you have a snack outside of the scheduled meals, make sure the plate or glass that it is served on is dry and not just washed and still wet. The highest risk foods in India for non-locals are juices. This is because they are commonly mixed with ice or water; a vendor may rinse his mango press, and then peel and press your mango, adding a bit of water to help it move through the press. Indian people may not understand that even a drop of water could make you sick. In order to enjoy the Indian fruits and flavors, you can buy fruits with a peel, and wash them with bottled water at the ashram and/or peel them (bananas, tangerines, apples, papaya). You may also want to drink coconut juice if you're in the area south of Delhi (from young coconuts it is just like sweet water) after watching the vendor create the hole and insert a dry straw. This is safe and quite delicious.

Grape Fruit Seed extract can be added to even your filtered or bottled water (10 drops or so per liter) in order to help ensure that it is clean to drink. This would be important for you if you are travelling before or after your stay with us. If you suspect that you have eaten or drunk something that doesn't agree with you, put 20 drops of GSE in a glass of water and drink it. This will help to kill the bacteria in the stomach if done immediately. Taking charcoal pills right away also helps!! Remember to brush your teeth with your bottled water. When you shower, be aware of keeping the lips closed, and dry the face and lips first when finished.

Do not worry too much about water or getting ill. Have a positive and pro-active attitude, knowing that you are doing everything possible to keep yourself well.

D. Temperatures and precipitations

1. Temperature range in Delhi (alt. 233 m)

- Winter (December-February): 7 to 24 degrees Celsius
- Hot season (May-August): 26 to 41 degrees Celsius

2. Temperature range in Haridwar (alt. 295 m)

Here the climate is moderate all year round. The best period to visit is September to June.

- Winter (December-February): 6 to 16 degrees Celsius
- Hot season (May-August): 15 to 40 degrees Celsius

3. Temp. range in Uttarkashi (alt. 1550 m) or Champawat (alt. 1610 m)

Here the climate is much colder in winter, but very pleasant during the hot season. In the sun you will feel warm, but in the early morning and evening, and when in buildings you will need a sweater, socks, woolen hat, and a shawl.

- Winter (December-February): 5 to 7 degrees Celsius
- Hot season (May-August): 17 to 19 degrees Celsius

4. The monsoon season

It is from mid-June to mid-September—try to avoid this period if you can, as landslides in the mountains and water pollution can become a major problem.

IV. ADOPTING A SPIRITUAL LIFESTYLE

A. Attitude

Attending a spiritual program, joining a pilgrimage, or volunteering in our schools or ashrams are not tourist package deals where everything and anything goes. It is a deeply transformative experience providing the opportunity to learn first-hand about the great spiritual tradition of India, and to live a simple, healthy yogic lifestyle. A personal commitment to following the daily spiritual discipline is a must, and an attitude of respect and modesty should be maintained at all times.

Although every effort at ensuring the highest standard of comfort, safety, and hygiene have been made, please bear in mind that you will be visiting a country with few of our modern conveniences—in particular, few accommodations in India have air-conditioning or heating, so plan accordingly. Some places are located in rustic and rigorous conditions, and would best be approached with a spirit of tolerance, open-mindedness, and adventure.

Smoking is not permitted in ashrams (indoors or outdoors), in hotels rooms or tents, in temples, holy shrines and caves, or during lectures, games, or cultural programs (indoors or outdoors).

No alcohol or recreational drugs is allowed at any time and in any place.

Food is strictly vegetarian and sattvic (without garlic, onion or hot spices).

B. Seva and Sadhana

If you come to India to be with your teacher for a meditative stay in an ashram, there are a certain number of expectations on your part:

- to practice daily your *sadhana* (meditation) under the guidance of your teacher whenever he is available (there will be guided Kriya Yoga meditation twice a day, at 5:15 am and 6:30 pm, whenever I am in residence at the Matri Chhaya Gurukulam)
- to offer a number of hours daily for *seva* (selfless service)
- to stay in the ashram most of the time, except to go out for contemplative walks in nature or on the banks of sacred rivers, or to go on pilgrimage tours.
- On certain days you may explore the market's many wares, and go on other tourist-type excursions.

We ask that you prepare yourself to have this discipline to focus on the program so that you allow yourself enough opportunity for transformation. This will maintain the intensity and unity of the spiritual experience. Going out of the ashram may be a way to diffuse the intensity of the yogic process – we recommend staying with it, and exploring any challenges or calls for transformation that arise.

C. Culture

India is often described as a place of harmonious contradictions. As with any culture, it appears at first exotic and exhilarating, and then later perplexing. These are the first two stages of culture shock. To help you move more easily into the third stage, understanding, we recommend taking a yogic approach, which is to observe as if from a third place (not the mythic view of the native, or the comparative view of the outsider) and try to see the country and culture for its strengths and weaknesses and enjoy your time on that basis. This experience may even give you insights into the myths you hold about your own culture and allow you to grow as an amateur anthropologist!

Indian women pride themselves in their grace, elegance and modesty, and are respected often as Ma (Divine Mother) or auntie, or sister (regardless of one's actual relationship or non-blood relation). In Asia, generally men and women take great pride in humbleness, loyalty, and the appropriateness of their social interactions, dress and behavior. Therefore, we recommend that one dress and behave with more modesty than usual, especially in the white clothes of a yoga student. This will garner respect and offset any inappropriate stereotypes of Westerners.

It is not appropriate to visit the rooms of a student of the opposite gender, or talk loudly in the halls or at night, for example. It is best to come on this yoga experience in India with the concept that we are immersing ourselves in a yogic ashram in order to explore yogic aspects of our nature and to be fully engaged in posture, meditation, contemplation, mantra, and study. There will also be plenty of light-hearted fun at evening programs, on side trips and when we go for dips in the Ganga! Quick dry shorts or palazzo pants and shirts may be suitable for dipping. The old adage, 'when in Rome do as the Romans do' suits here, as we are the tourists who have opted to learn about Indian culture. The onus is therefore not on the Indian hosts to understand us (although they will if we meet them half way). What I am relating here is good advice for all tourists of any country, but especially in Asia. All travel is a learning experience – observe, adapt and enjoy!!

Om shanti shanti shanti

Matri Chhaya Gurukulam

Behind "Shivedale School"
Laksar Road, Jagjeetpur
Haridwar, Uttarkhand 249408
India

Phone: +91 (99) 9745-9486 or +91 (99) 9798-6539
(Please give this number to your relatives for emergencies only)