

## Travel Tips for South Asia & the Middle East



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## About This Presentation

- Could be subtitled "What you mom probably didn't tell you about international travel."
- Not an scholarly discourse – what I've learned from others and my experience. A combination of resources and advice.
- What are your travel backgrounds? Europe? Middle East? India? Far East? Others?

2

## About This Me



- I'm an engineering educator, not Rick Steves.
- I have been the academic coordinator for our India program for 2 years and have traveled India and the Middle East twice.

3

## General Advice

- Don't be afraid, but do be alert. Street crime is probably a bigger threat the terrorism and probably no worse than in the U.S.
- Expect the unexpected, and prepare for it. Plan ahead. The purpose of this presentation.
- Cultures vary, but people are people everywhere.

4

## Travel Rules & Documents

- State Department general travel information website  
<http://travel.state.gov>.
- Visas may be required. Visit destination country embassy websites (like <http://www.indianembassy.org>) for details.
- Be aware of "visa services" but don't be afraid to use them.

5

## Safety and Health

- U.S. State Department travel warnings linked from International travel link at <http://travel.state.gov>. Changes periodical. Take very seriously.
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) travel website (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>) has health recommendations for travelers. Travel medicine clinics.

6

## Specific Health Issues

- Traveler's diarrhea. Can only be avoided in India by taking extreme precautions. Generally, assume you get it and take *Cipro* and/or Pepto-Bismol and/or Imodium AD with you.
- Malaria: Get a prescription from your doctor for a preventive.
- Vaccinations: None required. Typhoid and Hepatitis A recommended.
- Beware of sun sensitivity as a side effect of some medications.

7

## Supplies to Take

- Sanitizing wipes (use on hands and surfaces).
- Hat and/or sun screen.
- Triple antibiotic ointment and adhesive bandages (for blisters, etc.).
- Sewing kit (for your clothes, not you).
- Complete the emergency contact information in your passport.

8

## Language Issues

- English is used worldwide in business and education.
- You also might be surprised how far context and gesture will get you.
- At a minimum learn "yes" and "no" and polite greetings.
- I usually carry small language guides (Lonely Planet, Berlitz Publishing, etc.) with me, but seldom use them.

9

## Non-Roman Scripts

- A particular issue in South Asia and the Middle East is that the local languages are typically expressed in non-Roman scripts (see examples on the next slide).
- This makes "reading" streets signs and menus by pattern matching difficult.

10

## Script Examples

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.  
(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Arabic

يولد جميع الناس أحراراً متساوين في الكرامة والحقوق. وقد وهبوا عقلاً وضميراً وعليهم أن يعامل بعضهم بعضاً بروح الإخاء.

Hindi in Devanagari alphabet

सभी मनुष्यों को गौरव और अधिकारों के मामले में जन्मजात स्वतंत्रता और समानता प्राप्त है। उन्हें बुद्धि और अंतरात्मा की देन है और परस्पर उन्हें भाईचारे के भाव से बर्ताव करना चाहिये।

Kannada in Kannada alphabet

ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಮನುಷ್ಯರೂ ಸ್ವತಂತ್ರರಾಗಿಯೇ ಜನಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಹಾಗೂ ಘನತೆ ಮತ್ತು ಹಕ್ಕುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸಮಾನರಾಗಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ವಿವೇಕ ಮತ್ತು ಅಂತಃಕರಣಗಳನ್ನು ಪಡೆದವರಾದ್ದರಿಂದ ಅವರು ಪರಸ್ಪರ ಸಹೋದರ ಭಾವದಿಂದ ವರ್ತಿಸಬೇಕು.

From: <http://www.omniglot.com/index.htm>

11

## Numbers

In the Middle East, numbers are written in standard base 10 positional notation, but often using "Indian" numerals. These digits are shown below.

٠	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩	١٠
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
صفر	واحد	اثنان	ثلاثة	أربعة	خمسة	سنة	سبعة	ثمانية	تسعة	عشرة
sifr	wāhid	ithnā	thalāth	'arba'ah	hamṣah	sittah	sab'ah	tamāniyyah	tis'ah	'ašarāh
صفر	واحد	اثنان	ثلاثة	أربعة	خمسة	سنة	سبعة	ثمانية	تسعة	عشرة
sifr	wahed	zuḥ	tiṭa	reḥ'a	hemṣa	setta	seḥ'a	tmenya	tes'ud	'ašara

So the value 10.65 would be written ١٠.٦٥ as  
Also, in Egypt prices were posted in Pounds or Piastres (0.01 Pounds) without indicating which.

12

## Lakhs and Crores

- Powers of 10 are grouped differently in India, but most educated Indians know our system.
- What we call 100 thousand they call 1 lakh.
- What we call 10 million they call 1 crore.
- They use comas separate digits into lakhs and crores. For example, they would write 30 million as 3,00,00,000 and pronounce it as 3 crore.

13

## Money

- Each nation in South Asia and the Middle East has its own currency.
- Exchange rates are readily available online (for example at <http://www.xe.com/ucc/>).
- If you're math challenged, you may want to carry a small calculator.
- I like to have a little local currency on me when I arrive, but there always seem to be money exchanges at international airports.

14

## Debit Cards

- I was able to get by easily with my ATM (debit card) and credit cards, but most guides say you should have some travelers checks.
- There are at least four networks (Pulse, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus), check the logo(s) on your card.
- Get in the habit of keeping your exchange and ATM receipts (although I've never been asked for them).

15

## Credit Cards

- Credit cards are widely accepted (particularly in cities).
- **Inform your card companies of when and where you'll be traveling.** Otherwise, their fraud department may disable your card.
- Watch for excessive currency conversion fees, I switched cards over this last year.
- Have "lost or stolen" phone numbers with you.

16

## Travelers' Checks

- American Express and Visa brands are widely accepted.
- Still recommended in guide books, but I haven't used them in years.

17

## Transportation

- Check the TSA website (<http://www.tsa.gov/>) and with your airline before packing.
- Take and use TSA luggage locks.
- Use a travel agent to book your flights and accommodations and take their emergency number with you.
- If your institution requires you to use a particular one, be sure to use their "international" desk.

18

## Accommodations

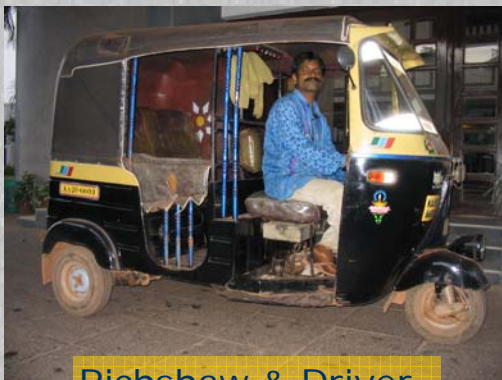
- International, business class hotels are the same everywhere.
- They cost more than local business hotels, but I recommend them unless you are somewhat adventuresome.
- Arrange in advance to have your hotel (or host) pick you up at the airport.
- Carry a hotel business card with you when traveling around town.

19

## Other Issues

- Don't even consider driving in India (if you don't believe me, go to YouTube and search for "driving in India.")
- You can get a car and driver for the day for a reasonable price (the exact amount depends on where you are).
- In India, auto-rickshaws (3 wheelers) are great for short trips.

20



Richshaw & Driver

21

## More Issues

- I had no problem traveling by train on my most recent visit to India. Travel 1<sup>st</sup> class.
- Overnight laundry service is available at most better hotels and 24 hour service is available at most others.
- Porters and carts are often available.
- Pack light so you can bring back souvenirs and gifts.

22

## Electrical Issues

- Most AC power in India and the Middle East is 240 V, 60 Hz and uses British style plugs. "Power breaks" are frequent.
- You'll definitely need plug adaptors.
- You may need a transformer (but most laptop power bricks adapt automatically (check the label)).
- Carry a security cable for your laptop.

23

## Country/Cultural Background

- A critical element in making your trip successful and enjoyable.
- Knowing what you're getting into provides comfort and confidence.
- Talk to people on your campus from the country or region you'll be visiting.
- Talk to a cultural anthropologist if you have one on your faculty.

24

## Specific Online Resources

- CIA Factbook  
(<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>)
- State Department Background Notes  
(<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>).
- Library of Congress Country Studies  
– more detailed, not as timely  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

25

## Other Sources

- Don't underestimate the value of Wikipedia (including Wikitravel) and Google in learning about countries.
- Commercial websites (directly or for guide books) are useful. These include Lonely Planet, World Travel Guide, Berlitz Publishing, Frommer's, Culture Smart!, BYU Culturegrams and CountryReports.org.
- Real Travel (<http://realtravel.com/>) and other user experience and blog sites may also be useful.

26

## Destination Country Sites

- For India these include:  
<http://indiaimage.nic.in/> (India Image), <http://goidirectory.nic.in/> (GOI directory) and <http://www.india.gov.in/> (National Portal of India).
- These often include useful links to commercial service providers like travel agents.

27

## Be Familiar with Geography

- I find it useful to familiarize myself with the local geography including location of the airport, major rivers, major highways and mountains.
- MapQuest now covers Dubai.
- Google Earth can be useful (or at least very interesting).

28

## Culture Specific Issues

- Cultural differences will generally be moderated when dealing with well educated, westernized individuals.
- Everyone will know you're foreign and generally will be tolerant of minor mistakes.
- Pay attention. Observe you hosts and, in general, follow their lead.

29

## Issues (continued)

- Be prepared for a more overt social hierarchy. Maids and others often try to be invisible.
- In the Middle East, most offices have "tea boys" that run for tea. I've heard that it is most polite to accept tea or coffee the first time it's offered, but its okay to decline later offers.
- Indian's are often find saying "no" to be impolite or embarrassing. So "I'll see what I can do" may mean no.

30



### Issues (continued)

- Indian's often nod or bob their heads while listen. Don't interpret this as agreement or disagreement.
- Only handle and pass food with your right hand. Using or left hand seems to be okay if using cutlery.
- Feet, particularly the soles, are considered unclean (and usually literally are).
- If possible, avoid wearing leather in India.

31

### Issues (continued)

- In Muslim countries, there is the issue of what to do during the calls to prayer. I've been told different things. I usually just pause at the next natural break in the conversation and let my host initiate any further conversation.
- When being introduced to a woman, wait for her to extend her hand.

32

### Issues (continued)

- Presenting small gifts to your host is often appropriate. Gifts are not generally opened in the presence of the giver.
- Some suggested gifts include:
  - "Coffee Table" books produced by your home institution or city.
  - Food products from your state (maple syrup, dried cranberries, wild rice).
  - Native American items (like dream catchers).

33

### Issues (continued)

- If you have time, watch some local television. You may pick up some subtle (and not so subtle) cultural perspective.
- There is also a lot of good popular Indian literature in English that you can read.

34

### Issues (continued)

- Be polite, but don't be afraid to ask questions (people you meet generally will want to tell you about their culture).
- For example, you can ask a Hindu to "Tell me more about how Hindu's feel about protecting cows."
- Be prepared to answer questions (some may not be polite).

35

### Issues (continued)

- Be prepared for the realities of India.
  - Extreme poverty.
  - Curable/preventable infectious disease.
  - Extensive manual labor.
  - Litter and open burning.
  - Begging.

36

## Be Familiar with your Hosts

- Visit websites of potential partner institutions.
- Research the people you'll be meeting with including their scholarly publications.
- Know the local tourist sites (when I was in New Delhi, I was asked multiple times if I was going to Agra to see the Taj Mahal).

37

## Planning

- Don't over schedule. Two meetings a day is probably the most you should preplan. Allow time for sightseeing.
- You may want to allow for jet lag. There is an 11½ hour time difference between Wisconsin and India (getting there generally involves two 8 hour flights).
- Consider shipping heavy items like documents.
- Take a lot of business cards.

38

## Telephones

- Mobile phones are widely used and you may be able to use yours with a local SIM card.
- Landline phones are available, but I have found them problematic.
  - Local/STD/ISD (meaning local, long distance and international) public phones available.
  - 5 to 10 digit phone numbers (3 tiered system?). Generally dial 0 for long distance.
  - Watch for hotel surcharges.

39

## Telephones (continued)

- I carry an international calling plan card with me (I use [www.gphone.com](http://www.gphone.com) but there are others). These services provide in-country toll free phone numbers that you call to make international calls.
- Prepaid calling cards are also available for calling overseas from the U.S. at a discount.

40

## Internet Access & VOIP

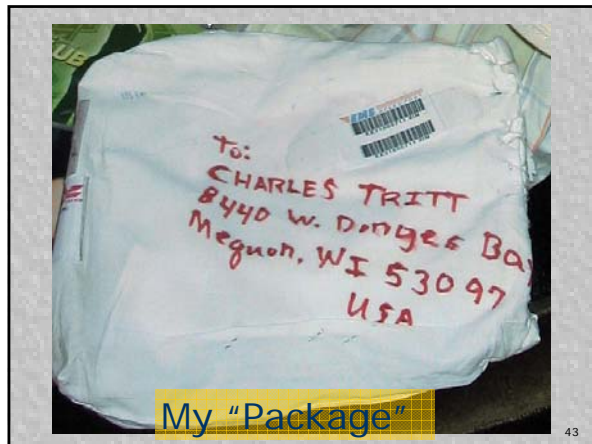
- I use e-mail a lot while traveling.
- Most hotels provide internet access (request it when you book).
- There are also numerous "internet cafés" everywhere I've visited.
- With internet access, you can try using a VoIP service like Skype (it worked about half the time on my last trip). Take a headset if you have an account.

41

## Postal & Package Services

- I bought too many books during my last visit to Mumbai and decided to mail them home. It was an adventure.
- UPS and FedEx provides service to (and I assume from India).
- I tried shipping a box with USPS. It arrived about 2 weeks after I left.
- Be aware of possible customs regulations.

42



## What to Wear

- Keep the local climate in mind.
- Most of the educators I deal with dress in what we would call business casual.
- Some business people wear very nice suits.
- Women should dress modestly in most Middle Eastern countries but it varies greatly. See the guide books for details.

44

## Holidays and Workweeks

- The dates of many religious holidays in South Asia and the Middle East are based on lunar calendars and therefore occur on different Gregorian dates each year.
- Check to assure your visit doesn't coincide with local holidays or festivals.
- The work week in India generally runs from Monday through Friday with many schools and businesses operating for a half day on Saturday. The work week in the Middle East generally runs from Sunday to Thursday.

45