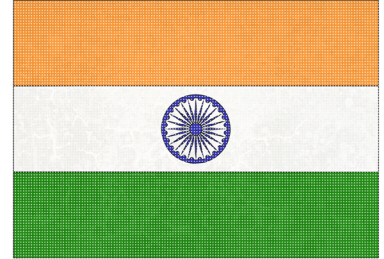# India

Living in India

India is a bright and vibrant country with an eclectic mix of different cultures and people. It is a huge country whose population currently represents a sixth of the world's total population. However, despite the large numbers of people that are living in India, it is a relatively small country that covers only 2% of the world's total land. This makes India a very crowded and busy place.

School

With more than 740,000 schools, India operates the biggest education system in the world. Literacy rates have increased since compulsory school attendance for all children until the age of 14 was introduced. However, since local boards are in control of education, there are big differences in quality of education in India. Child labour is prohibited to ensure that every child gets a chance to study in school. However, in reality only about 50 per cent of all school children actually go to school since only enrolment in schools is checked, but not school attendance.

Children attend pre-primary schools as early as at the age of five. Pre-primary schools are supposed to prepare children for everyday school life and are followed by primary schools.

At the age of eleven students in India leave primary school and go to middle school. After four years, at the age of fourteen, they have to take exams in order to successfully finish middle school. At this point, the ten years of compulsory education is finished.

Those students that want to continue their education have to go to a higher secondary school after middle school which lasts two years and prepares them for vocational colleges. Their programmes take three years and are more related to practice than universities. Students can also enrol in a university programme after college.

India's public transport systems are among the most heavily used in the world and despite ongoing improvements, several aspects of the transport sector are still riddled with problems due to outdated infrastructure and lack of investment.

Work

India has the one of fastest growing service sectors in the world. Due to the large educated English-speaking population, India provides lots of services all over the world, such as IT services, software services and support in call centres. It is also the fastest-growing part of the economy. The IT industry continues to be the largest private sector employer in India.

The agricultural sector is the largest employer in India's economy. India ranks second worldwide in farm output. The Indian automobile industry is one of the largest in the world with an annual production of 21.48 million vehicles (mostly two and three wheelers). While many people work in range of jobs, unemployment is also a serious issue in India.

Transport

Public transport remains the primary mode of transport for most of the population. Buses, cycle rickshaws, autorickshaws taxis, boats and urban trains provide transport around India's cities. Similar to the tuk-tuks of south-east Asia, the Indian autorickshaw is a three-wheeled motorised contraption with a tin or canvas roof and sides, with room for two passengers, although often many more squeeze in.

India's rail network is the 4th longest and the most heavily used system in the world. Indian Railways is owned and operated by the Government of India through the Ministry of Railways. It is one of the world's largest railway networks comprising 115,000 km of track and 7,112 stations. In 2014-15, IR carried 8.397 billion passengers annually or more than 23 million passengers a day!

The number of cars is low compared to other countries, with only 10.3 million cars on the nation's roads. In addition, only around 10% of Indian households own a motorcycle. Despite this, the number of deaths caused by traffic is amongst the highest in the world and is still increasing.

Cycling is a popular mode of transport as it is affordable for lots of people. Labourers, deliverymen and semi-skilled workers such as plumbers and carpenters use bicycles. In 2012, according to India's National Crime Records Bureau, a total of 168,301 people died on its roads. In New Delhi, that included 78 cyclists and 501 pedestrians.

There are nominal cycle lanes on some of the capital's main thoroughfares, but with seven million cars jostling for space, those lanes are often used by motorised rickshaws and scooters, leaving no safe space for bicyclists.

Sport
India is home to a diverse population playing many different sports across the country. Cricket is the most popular sport across the nation, while football is the popular sport in some of the Indian states. The country has won eight Olympic gold medals in field hockey, another popular game in India. Kabaddi is an indigenous sport that is popular in rural India. Several games originated in India including chess and snooker.

Food
India is known for its large assortment of dishes and its liberal use of herbs and spices. Cooking styles vary from region to region. Indian cuisine is influenced by many other countries. Wheat, Basmati rice and pulses with chana (Bengal gram) are important staples of the Indian diet. The food is rich with curries and spices, including ginger, coriander, cardamom, turmeric, dried hot peppers, and cinnamon. Chutneys — thick condiments and spreads made from assorted fruits and vegetables such as tamarind and tomatoes and mint, cilantro and other herbs — are used generously in Indian cooking.

Many Hindus are vegetarians, but lamb and chicken are common in main dishes for non-vegetarians. Between 20 and 40 per cent of India's population is vegetarian. Much of Indian food is eaten with fingers or bread used as utensils. There is a wide array of breads served with meals, including naan (a leavened, oven-baked flatbread) and bhatoora (a fried, fluffy flatbread common in North India and eaten with chickpea curry).

Culture and Traditions
For centuries, arranged marriages have been the tradition in Indian society. Today, the majority of Indians have their marriages planned by their parents and other respected family members. In the past, the age of marriage was young. The average age of marriage for women in India has increased to 21 years, according to 2011 Census of India.

A Hindu wedding lays emphasis on three essential values: happiness, harmony, and growth.

Months before the wedding, an engagement ceremony known as Mangni is held. This is to bless the couple, who are then given gifts of jewellery and clothing by their new family.

Jaimala (Exchange of Garlands)
The couple exchanges garlands as a gesture of acceptance of one another and a pledge to respect one another as partners.

Madhupak (Offering of Yoghurt and Honey)
The bride's father offers the groom yogurt and honey as the expression of welcome and respect.

Kanyadan (Giving Away of the Bride)
The father of the bride places her hand in the groom's hand requesting him to accept her as an equal partner. The concept behind Kanyadan is that the bride is a form of the goddess Laxmi and the groom is Lord Narayana. The parents are facilitating their union.

Havan (Lighting of the Sacred Fire)
The couple invokes Agni, the God of Fire, to witness their commitment to each other. Crushed sandalwood, herbs, sugar, rice and oil are offered to the ceremonial fire.

Rajaham (Sacrifice to the Sacred Fire)
The bride places both her hands into the groom's and her brother then places rice into her hands. Together the bride and groom offer the rice as a sacrifice into the fire.

Gath Bandhan (Tying of the Nuptial Knot)
The scarves placed around the bride and groom are tied together, symbolizing their eternal bond. This signifies their pledge before God to love each other and remain faithful.

Mangalphera (Walk around the Fire)
The couple makes four Mangalpheras around the fire in a clockwise direction representing four goals in life: Dharma, religious and moral duties; Artha, prosperity; Kama, earthly pleasures; Moksha, spiritual salvation and liberation. The bride leads the Pheras first, signifying her determination to stand first beside her husband in all happiness and sorrow.

Saptapardi (Seven Steps Together)
The bride and groom walk seven steps together to signify the beginning of their journey through life together. Each step represents a marital vow:
First step: To respect and honour each other
Second step: To share each other's joy and sorrow
Third step: To trust and be loyal to each other
Fourth step: To cultivate appreciation for knowledge, values, sacrifice and service
Fifth step: To reconfirm their vow of purity, love, family duties and spiritual growth
Sixth step: To follow principles of Dharma (righteousness)
Seventh step: To nurture an eternal bond of friendship and love

Aashirvad (Parental Blessing)
The parents of the bride and groom give their blessings to the couple. The couple touches the feet of their parents as a sign of respect.

Mehndi (Henna Ceremony)
The traditional art of adorning the hands and feet with a paste made from the finely ground leaves of the Henna plant. The term refers to the material, the design, and the ceremony. It is tradition for the names of the bride and groom to be hidden in the design, and the wedding night is not to commence until the groom has found both names. After the wedding, the bride is not expected to perform any housework until her mehndi has faded away.

Mangalasutra (Thread of Goodwill)
A necklace worn specifically by married women as a symbol of their marriage.

Traditional Dress
Indian clothing is closely identified with the colorful silk saris worn by many of the country's women. The traditional clothing for men is the dhoti, an unstitched piece of cloth that is tied around the waist and legs. Men also wear a kurta, a loose shirt that is worn about knee-length. For special occasions, men wear a sherwani, which is a long coat that is buttoned up to the collar and down to the knees. The Nehru jacket is a shorter version of a sherwani.

Festivals
The country celebrates Republic Day (26 January), Independence Day (15 August) and Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday (2 October). Diwali is the largest and most important holiday to India. It is a five-day festival known as the festival of lights because of the lights lit during the celebration to symbolize the inner light that protects people from spiritual darkness. Holi, the festival of colors, also called the festival of love, is popular in the spring.

Religion
India is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures. Religion plays a central and definitive role in the life of many of its people.

India has many different religious and ethnic groups. The most popular religion is that of Hindu (approximately 80%), followed by Muslim (12%), Christian (2%) and other religions such as Sikh, Buddhist and Jain.

Tourism

Tourism in India is economically important and is growing rapidly. It supports around 39.5 million jobs, 7.7% of India's total employment. About 22.57 million tourists arrived in India in 2014, compared to 19.95 million in 2013. This ranks India as the 38th country in the world in terms of foreign tourist arrivals. In 2014, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh were the most popular states for tourists. The Taj Mahal, Thar Desert, Himalayan Mountains and many beaches are just some of the attractions which draw people to visit India.

Comprehension Questions About India

Read the information sheet about India carefully. You might want to use a highlighter to highlight important points and facts.

Then answer the following questions, answer with as much detail as you can.

1. At what age is school compulsory to in India?

   _____

2. Which sector of India's economy is fast-growing?

   _____

3. Do most people in India travel by private or public transport means?

   _____

4. What is the most popular sport in India?

   _____

5. Give an example of an Indian tradition.

   _____

   _____

6. What is bhatoora (Indian food)?

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   _____

7. What is a kurta (Indian clothing)?

_____

8. What is the most important holiday for Indian people?

_____

9. What is the most popular religion?

_____

10. Describe one part of a Hindu wedding ceremony.

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Comprehension Questions About India- Answers

1. At what age is school compulsory to in India?
   School is compulsory until the age of 14 in India.

2. Which sector of India's economy is fast-growing?
   India has the one of fastest growing service sectors in the world.

3. Do most people in India travel by private or public transport means?
   Public transport is the primary mode of transport for most of the population.

4. What is the most popular sport in India?
   Cricket is the most popular sport in India.

5. Give an example of an Indian tradition.
   For example: Arranged marriage is common in India. Accept any appropriate answer.

6. What is bhatoora (Indian food)?
   Bhatoora is a fried, fluffy flatbread common in North India and eaten with chickpea curry.

7. What is a kurta (Indian clothing)?
   A kurta is a loose shirt that is worn about knee-length.

8. What is the most important holiday for Indian people?
   Diwali is the largest and most important holiday to India.

9. What is the most popular religion?
   The most popular religion in India is Hinduism.

10. Describe one part of a Hindu wedding ceremony.
    For example: Jaimala (Exchange of Garlands) is part of the wedding ceremony where the couple exchanges garlands as a gesture of acceptance of one another and a pledge to respect one another as partners. Accept any appropriate answer.