

Did You Know?

- India is the world's seventh largest country and home to the second largest population in the world.
- The Taj Mahal, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is actually a tomb built back in the 17th century for the wife of Shah Jahan. The structure is entirely covered in white marble.
- At home, most Indian families eat with their right hands instead of with forks.
- The famous board game chess was invented in India.
- India is where the religions of Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism began.
- Tamil, spoken in southeast India, is one of the world's oldest written languages.
- Hindus believe the waters of the Ganges River are holy. Pilgrims travel from all over the world to bathe in the river.
- India's national fruit is the mango. There are over one hundred varieties of mangoes in India.
- Bailey Bridge is located in the Himalayas at 18,379 feet (5,602 m) above sea level, the highest elevation of any bridge in the world.
- The Indian National Calendar has 365 days in it just like the Gregorian calendar, but the new year begins on 22 March instead of 1 January.
- India has more post offices than any other country.
- The Indian film industry is the largest in the world, producing thousands of movies every year. The most famous of these hail from Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai.
- Yoga originated thousands of years ago in ancient India.
- India is the only nation in its region never to have invaded a neighboring country.

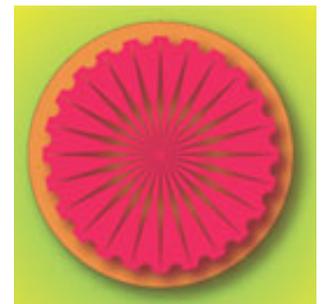
Flag

India's flag was adopted officially on 22 July 1947. Orange stands for courage and sacrifice, white represents truth, and green symbolizes faith and new life. The blue *chakra* symbolizes the wheel of life. The law states that the flag must be made of *khadi*, a kind of hand-spun cloth made popular by Gandhi.



National Image

The *dharma chakra*, found in the middle of India's flag, is the Buddhist wheel of life. It is one of the oldest symbols found in Indian art. The 24 spokes represent the hours in one day.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 1,269,219
Area (sq. km.): 3,287,263

India is roughly one-third the size of the United States. India has everything from deserts to rain forests. The Ganges River is important for India's many farmers. The majority of the population lives on the Ganges Plain, south of the Himalayas. The nation's major rivers flow through these plains, and farms cover the region. Rice, wheat, sugarcane, and cotton are all grown here. The Thar Desert is located in the west and is one of the largest deserts in the world. Covered in sand dunes, the desert sees very little rainfall. India also has a long coastline, bordering the Arabian Sea on the west and the Bay of Bengal on the east. India has a lot of huge earthquakes, floods, and droughts.

The climate varies widely depending on where you are. In the Thar Desert, the weather is very hot, sometimes reaching about 120°F (49–54°C), while in the Himalayas (some of the world's tallest mountains), along India's northern border, the weather can be below freezing, and the peaks are permanently covered with snow. But in most parts of the country, it is hot from March to May, the *monsoons* (heavy rains) come between June and September, and a mild winter lasts from October to February.

Population

Population: 1,236,344,631

Only China has more people than India. In fact, India's "middle class" is about as large as the entire population of the United States. Most Indians live in the north or along the coasts. Each Indian is born into one of hundreds of different groups called *castes* (social classes). Often, whom you marry, what kind of house you live in, what job you have, and where you work depend on your *caste*. If you belong to a high *caste*, you have a lot of privileges. If you belong to one of the lowest, your opportunities are limited. A person's *caste* is not necessarily tied to how much money they have, and people in each *caste* can be rich or poor. The *caste* system is slowly changing, especially in the cities. The majority of Indians belong to the Indo-Aryan ethnic group, while a quarter are members of the Dravidian ethnic group.

Language

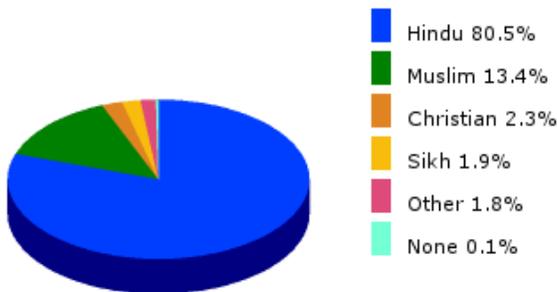
Several hundred languages are spoken in India! And that's not counting different *dialects* (ways of pronouncing or speaking). In fact, there are 22 official languages in India. Many states have their own official languages as well. Sometimes Indians have a hard time communicating with each other, but most speak Hindi or English or both. Hindi (spoken by about 41 percent of the population) is written using the *Devanagari* alphabet. Quite a few Hindi words have become common in the English language, including jungle, loot, pajamas, and shampoo. English is important as the language of government, business, science, education, and national communication.



Can You Say It in Hindi?

Hello	<i>Namaste</i>	(nah-mah-STAY)
Good-bye	<i>Alavidha</i>	(AHL-vee-DAH)
Please	<i>Kripyaa</i>	(krip-eye-YAH)
Thank You	<i>Dhanyavaad</i>	(duh-nyah-VAAHD)
Yes	<i>Ha</i>	(hah)
No	<i>Nahi</i>	(nuh-HEE)

Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.*

India is the birthplace of four religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Walking down a street in India, it is common to see Christian churches, Muslim *mosques* (houses of prayer), and Hindu temples all in one block! More than 80 percent of Indians are Hindu. Hinduism is not just a religion but a way of life for most Indians. *Reincarnation* (the belief that a person's soul has many lives on earth) and *karma* (the belief that a person's circumstances in life are determined by his or her actions) are important to Hinduism. Cows are considered sacred in the Hindu religion, and Hindus do not eat beef. Rama, Krishna, Shiva, and Vishnu are just a few of the most important Hindu gods.

Close to 13 percent of Indians are Muslims. They follow the teachings found in the *Qur'an* (Muslim scripture) and regard Muhammad as the last messenger of *Allah* (God). Around 2 percent of the population is Christian. Nearly 2 percent are Sikhs. Sikhism stresses simple teachings, tolerance, and devotion.

History

Time Line

3500 BC	
3500 BC	Settlement of the Indus River Valley begins
2500	
ca. 2500–1700	The Indus Valley Civilization thrives
ca. 1500	The Aryans settle in India and rule for more than five hundred years
530	Persians invade India

ca. 500	Buddhism is founded in India
327	Alexander the Great invades India
269–232	Ashoka rules, conquers new territory, and spreads Buddhist teachings throughout his kingdom



AD 300

AD 300s	The Gupta Dynasty is founded in northern India
900s	Invaders from Turkey introduce Islam to the region
1398	Tamerlane (Timur) invades and destroys Delhi
1498	Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese navigator, is the first European to sail to India



1500

ca. 1500	Guru Nanak founds the Sikh religion
1526	Babur begins the Mughal Empire; the Mughals govern until 1707
1542	Saint Francis Xavier is the first Christian missionary in India
1608	The British East India Company lands its first ship in India
1632	Construction begins on the Taj Mahal

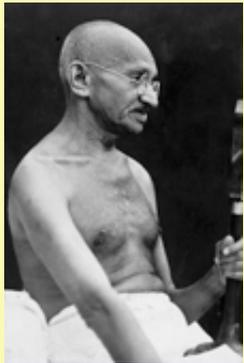


1800

1849	The British begin to govern India
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1857–59	<i>Sepoys</i> (Indian soldiers working for the British East India Company) revolt in the First War of Independence; the British forces win and take over rule of India from the East India Company
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1900	
1914–18	More than one million Indian soldiers fight on the side of the British in World War I
1920–30s	Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru lead the independence movement
1947	India gains independence from Great Britain; Jawaharlal Nehru becomes India's first prime minister
	
1947–49	India and Pakistan are separated into two countries; rioting leaves many dead; India and Pakistan fight over Kashmir
1948	Gandhi is assassinated
	
1950	India's constitution is adopted
1965	India fights a second war with Pakistan over Kashmir
1966	Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, becomes India's first female prime minister
1971	India and Pakistan go to war for a third time
1974	India detonates its first atomic bomb in an underground test
	
1984	Indira Gandhi is assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards; her son Rajiv Gandhi becomes the next prime minister
1991	Rajiv Gandhi is assassinated
1997	Mother Teresa dies
2000	
2000	India marks the birth of its one billionth citizen
2001	An earthquake in Gujarat kills more than 30,000 people and leaves more than a million homeless

2004	A strong undersea earthquake in the Indian Ocean causes huge tidal waves that kill more than 15,000 people in India and leave thousands more homeless; Manmohan Singh becomes India's first Sikh prime minister
2005	An earthquake in Kashmir kills 75,000 people and leaves more than 3.5 million homeless
2006	India and the United States sign a nuclear deal during a visit by U.S. president George W. Bush
2007	India and Pakistan reach an agreement intended to decrease the risk of an accidental nuclear war; Pratibha Patil is the first woman to be elected president of India
2008	Terrorist attacks by gunmen from Pakistan leave almost two hundred people dead in Bombay, straining India's already-tense relationship with Pakistan
2014	After widespread immunization campaigns, India is declared polio-free; the new state of Telangana is formed, becoming India's 29th state
PRESENT	

Ancient India

A lot about the early Indians is still a mystery. What we do know is that thousands of years ago, the Indus Valley people lived in mud-brick homes in planned cities. Some even had indoor plumbing such as toilets. Shops sold beautiful pottery and toys, among other things. Inscriptions on clay tables reveal that these peoples had a system of writing, measuring, and counting. No one is sure exactly why the Indus Valley Civilization began to decline around 1700 BC.

Hundreds of years later, the Aryans came. They were animal herders from Central Asia who moved to northern India. The Aryans took control of the region and established their capital at Delhi. They had a large influence on India's history when they wrote the *Vedas*, Hindu scripture. These texts are written in the Aryan language of Sanskrit.

Maurya Dynasty

Ashoka was the name of a king who lived more than two thousand years ago during the Maurya Dynasty. His grandfather had conquered almost all of India. Ashoka led battles to conquer the rest. He succeeded but was sad when he saw all the death and destruction his battles caused. So he became a Buddhist, built temples, and tried to teach his people peace and respect. After his death, the Mauryan Dynasty split apart. The various kingdoms and states were not reunited until Chandragupta I founded the Gupta Dynasty in the AD 300s. This period was a time of great learning and artistic and scientific discovery. Music and dance flourished, while mathematicians developed the decimal system.



Mughal Empire

Babur was only 12 years old in 1526, when he became king of what we now call Uzbekistan. After losing part of his father's kingdom, he went south to India to create an empire. His son and male *posterity* (a family's future generations) constantly fought for a larger empire and soon ruled almost all of India. They were known as Mughals, and they ruled for more than 150 years. The empire began to fall apart after a series of internal revolts followed by the arrival of the powerful British East India Company.



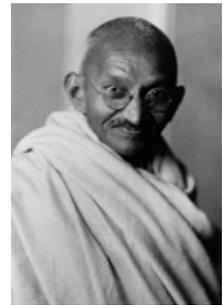
The Arrival of Europeans

A Portuguese navigator named Vasco da Gama was the first European to sail to India. The spices, silks, and other riches he found soon led other Europeans to India. Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and England all established trading centers in India during the following years. After the fall of the Mughal Empire, India was divided up into many kingdoms, whose princes fought each other often. Over time, the British established several trading posts throughout the land. They set up many agreements with local leaders and gradually took over the many kingdoms and gained control over the country. The British *discriminated* (treated people differently because of their race or religion) against the Indians, who began to fight for independence.



Independence and Partition

Mahatma Gandhi became India's leader for independence from the British. He taught the people not to fight violently for freedom but to resist the British peacefully. Gandhi encouraged Indians to not buy British goods and to disobey British laws that were unfair to Indians. Many of his followers were killed, but India finally gained independence in 1947.



However, Muslims and Hindus fought each other so much that India split into two countries: a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India. This break was known as *Partition*. Pakistan was actually made up of two separate land areas on different sides of India. They were known as West Pakistan and East Pakistan. At the time of *Partition*, millions of Muslims and Hindus were stranded on the wrong sides of the border. Violence broke out, and close to one million people lost their lives, their homes, and their land in the religious fight. India and Pakistan have since gone to war several times over the region of Kashmir, which they both claim. Kashmir's borders were not finalized at the time of *Partition*, and the two nations have fought over the region ever since. East Pakistan eventually broke away from Pakistan and became Bangladesh. Today, India struggles with religious differences, natural disasters, and corrupt politicians.

Lifestyle

Games and Sports

Offer to play a game of soccer, *cricket* (similar to baseball), or field hockey in India and you'll have takers. The British introduced *cricket* to India, but it's almost a national obsession now. People play *cricket* all over the country, and they like to watch it, too. When India defeats its rival Pakistan, there are big celebrations with fireworks, music, and parties. *Kabaddi*, another popular game, is played often in the countryside. It's like a cross between tag and wrestling. Teams compete to see who can touch the most players from the opposing team. Girls don't participate in sports as often as boys, but they play hopscotch or a game called *gallery*, a cross between hopscotch and tag.



Holidays

India has many festivals. People dance, sing, prepare feasts, and wear colorful costumes. People of different religions often celebrate each other's holidays, and they are a time of coming together despite people's differences. One fun festival is *Holi*, or the Festival of Colors, which celebrates the end of the cold season. Children throw colored powder and water on strangers and friends. They also light bonfires and tell the story of King Prahlad and his defeat of his evil aunt Holika. Some people throw dolls of Holika on the bonfires. The ashes are considered good luck.



Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is popular among Hindus and Sikhs. People celebrate it by putting up lights in their homes and businesses, buying new clothes (if they can afford them), setting off firecrackers, and giving sweets to their kids, family, and friends. At this time, special offerings are made to the goddess Lakshmi, who is believed to bring happiness and plenty.

New Year celebrations differ depending on which region you are from. In the north, the holiday is called *Baisakhi*, and it falls at the same time as the harvest season. People visit their places of worship and give thanks for the harvest and offer prayers for the future. Folk dancers and acrobats take to the streets and perform at fairs. In the south, the holiday is called *Ugadi*. On this day, people wrap and give gifts to their friends and family as well as visit temples to pray. They also prepare by cleaning their homes and decorating with mango leaves.

Food

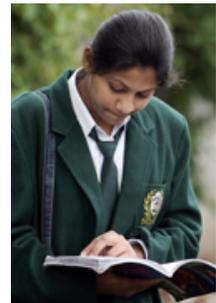
For religious reasons, Hindus don't eat beef and Muslims don't eat pork, so many people don't eat meat at all. Instead, they eat vegetables such as green bell peppers, squash, cabbage, potatoes, and onions. In the north, most meals include *roti* (a flat, circle-shaped wheat bread) and *lentils* (like beans and peas). In the south, they eat rice. Spicy *curries* (a spice mixture) are used in many Indian dishes. Desserts like *kheer* (rice pudding) with raisins, almonds, and milk are favorites.



Schools

Adult Literacy: 63%

Indian kids always wear uniforms to school. Uniforms are usually white shirts with colored skirts (for girls) or pants or shorts (for boys). Teachers are always called *Sir* or *Madam*. Many kids go to school at least two Saturdays a month. Students have math, science, social studies, gym, and English classes. They also study at least one other language. Each class has about 40 to 50 students. Many kids, especially girls, can't attend school because they are expected to help at home or to earn money for their families.



Life as a Kid

What life is like in India depends on a person's religion, *caste* (social class), income, and hometown. But some things are common across the country. Families are usually large, and *extended families* (including aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins) are very important. Children from poor families have to work on farms or in shops, or even have to beg on the streets. There isn't a lot of time to study. Children from upper-class families might come home from school and play video games, spend time on their computers, watch television, or play with friends. American movies are very popular with many Indian kids. Movie theaters are also favorite places to hang out with friends.



Society

Government

Capital: New Delhi

Head of State: Pres. Pranab Mukherjee

Head of Government: PM Narendra Modi

India is the largest *democracy* (government by the people) in the world and one of the youngest. It celebrated its 50th birthday in 1997. A prime minister runs the country. The president of the country, who doesn't have much power, is elected by members of Parliament and state representatives. The president represents the country at ceremonies or other events. Parliament is split into two houses: the *Rajya Sabha* (Council of States) and the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People). India has 29 states and 7 union territories. All citizens may vote starting at age 18.

Money and Economy

Currency: Indian rupee

India is mainly an agricultural country. More than half of the adults work in farming. India grows more rice, tea, peanuts, wheat, rubber, and tobacco than any other country in the world. Other adults work in high-tech industries like computers and software. In fact, Indian software engineers are in great demand around the world. Large numbers of people are also employed in industries such as textiles, chemicals, food processing, and steel. India has a lot of diamonds, oil, and natural gas, which bring in needed *rupees* (Indian money). The word *rupee* comes from the Sanskrit word for "silver."



Getting Around

Crowded buses, taxis, motor scooters (like mini-motorcycles), and horse-drawn carts all help Indians get around. In Mumbai, trains carry around seven million people to and from work every day! Some people also use *rickshaws* (three-wheeled vehicles that are either pedaled like a bike or have motors). To travel between cities, many Indians ride the train. Roads in the cities are paved but not always in the countryside. So when it rains, the unpaved roads can be difficult or impossible to drive on. Indians drive on the left side of the road.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Hinduism

Most Indians are Hindu, but not all worship the same way. Hinduism has no central authority or organization. Teachings from the *Vedas* (Hindu scripture) guide people on how to act. Each Hindu belongs to a class that has duties and responsibilities called *dharma*. Hindus believe in many gods, such as Shiva and Vishnu. They believe that for everything good or bad you do, there is either a reward or a punishment. Hindus believe that after they die, people are reborn in different lives until they become completely good.



Learn More

Contact the Embassy of India, 2107 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 939-7000; web site www.indianembassy.org.

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India



India and Pakistan have been arguing for more than 50 years over who owns the land of Kashmir.

India tested its first nuclear bomb in the Thar Desert, one of the driest places on earth.

Have you ever wanted to dig for gold? Some of the world's deepest gold mines are in the Kolar Gold Fields, near Bangalore.

In Cherrapunji, more than 146 inches (371 cm) of rain fell in just four days in 1974.

Many devout Hindus bathe in the Ganges River, which starts in a Himalayan ice cave, to wash away their sins.

