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India - Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture

Becky Stephen

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India’s population of 1.2 billion is as varied and colorful as the spice markets of Old Delhi. Each region, caste, and community has its own culture, reflecting unique histories shaped by conquest, creativity, and religion, expressed in distinct languages, social customs, art forms, and expectations of life.

Despite enormous recent political and economic change, in many ways India remains the same—a total sensory experience. The chaos and beauty of color and sound, the language shifts every ten miles, the household variations of spicy and sharp, sweet and sour, the insistent smells of everyday life lived very much in public, and the invasion of personal space will challenge the most experienced traveler. But it is in surrendering to your senses that you begin to embrace the essence of India and to understand its people.
Indians live with paradox. Proud traditions and patriotism commingle with tensions and prejudices rooted in age-old rivalries. Ancient temples may be plastered with signs advertising the latest technologies. The rapid urbanization of the last century has given rise to burgeoning slums and an affluent middle class that was nonexistent a few decades ago.
Steeped in tradition, exceptionally fatalistic, and intensely passionate about their culture, the Indians are an ingenious, adventurous, and creative people. Show interest in their country and most will respond with genuine warmth and friendship. But they also have indelible ties to family and community that form boundaries and determine decisions that may not always seem reasonable, or sometimes even ethical, to outsiders. *Culture Smart! India* will make you aware of basic values and behavioral norms, show you how to navigate cultural differences and connect with real people, and offer invaluable insights into this great, endlessly fascinating land.

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