

The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

Our top 15 Insider Tips

INSIDER TIP ► **Hindustani-style design**

Nomen est omen – ‘Play Clan’ design shops have fun and games with hackneyed Indian clichés. Very bright and breezy, very cool, very Indian → p. 126

INSIDER TIP ► **Creative country folk**

The Tribal and Folk Arts Museum in Khajuraho has one of the best collections anywhere in the country – full of colour and fabulous, traditional works of art → p. 53

INSIDER TIP ► **Exquisite jewellery**

The descendants of jewellers who worked in the court of the Maharajas of Jaipur lack none of their ancestors’ skills. Gleaming jewels fit for a king can be found in the Bhuramal Rajmal Suranas showroom in Jaipur → p. 77

INSIDER TIP ► **‘Silent Noise’ beach party**

Clubbing at Neptune’s Point is the answer for dance freaks in Goa who want to party through the night – with infrared headphones → p. 130

INSIDER TIP ► **Flower power**

More than 600 different types of orchid make quite a splash at the annual show in Sikkim’s capital. The seeds of rare plants can be bought at the White Hall Flower Exhibition Centre → p. 62

INSIDER TIP ► **Before sunrise**

Light a small oil lamp and float it down the Ganges like thousands of others and, from a boat, watch how the holy Hindu city of Varanasi becomes bathed in the gleaming golden yellow morning sun. This sight certainly makes up for having to get up early (photo above) → p. 63

INSIDER TIP ► **Oriental palace feel**

Step back to the days of great caravans and stay in the Hotel Castle Mandawa in Shekawati → p. 73

INSIDER TIP ► **Miles from anywhere**

Riding out into Thar Desert you will find nothing but sand, stones and sky (photo opposite page) → p. 80

INSIDER TIP ► **3300 steps up to a marble wonderland**

The temples on the mountain in Palitana in Gujarat look particularly beautiful in the early morning light when their exceptional artistic craftsmanship fuses with the countryside → p. 70

INSIDER TIP ► **India’s first ‘heritage village’**

Paved alleyways and green gardens set against the backdrop of the snowy Himalayas – Pragpur in the Kangra valley → p. 58

INSIDER TIP ► **Drama near Hyderabad**

A son et lumière conjures up the heroic deeds of yesteryear every evening above the medieval walls of the formidable fort in Golconda → p. 92

INSIDER TIP ► **On the Arabian Sea**

The huts at Nikki’s Nest near Trivandrum are wonderfully situated above a lovely wide beach the perfect place to unwind → p. 146

INSIDER TIP ► **Biodiversity and animal watching**

Periyar National Park lies at the point where the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala meet. You’ll need quite a bit of luck to catch sight of one of the forty or so Bengal tigers that live here but the odds are much higher at seeing herds of elephants on the banks of the lake in the middle of the park → p. 139

INSIDER TIP ► **Scenic train journey**

The Konkan Railway from Mumbai to Mangalore via Goa passes through forests of palm trees and crosses many a bridge. This is one way of seeing something of the lovely countryside → p. 129

INSIDER TIP ► **The artistic physical skills of warriors of old**

In Kerala, Kalaripayattu is performed with leaps, jumps and whirling swords and it takes years of training to master this form of martial art, considered to be one of the oldest in the world → p. 145



BEST OF ...

GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

FREE FOR FREE

● Contemporary art

Immerse yourself in the world of contemporary art when in India – and all for nothing. Stop by at *CIMA* in Kolkata, one of India's most renowned galleries with ever-changing exhibitions, or at *Jehangir Art Gallery* in Mumbai, probably the city's most famous gallery → p. 94, 117

● Chowpatty Beach

In the finance metropolis of Mumbai there's not a lot free of charge. But you can watch acrobats and beach musicians perform for nothing at the locals' favourite beach → p. 93

● Be an 'Old Salt' in Kochi

Fishing with nets but without a boat – you'll only find this here. Many centuries ago, an innovative fisherman discovered that the currents in the old city of Kochi – and only here – drove the fish literally into his nets. A fascinating spectacle which you can watch free of charge. You only have to get up early (photo) → p. 135

● Camel racing

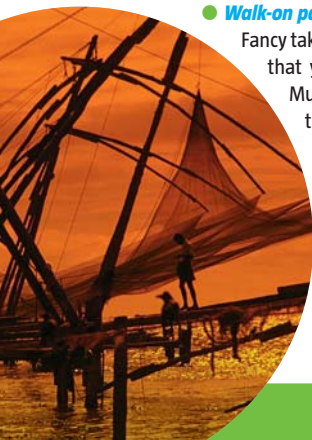
Festivals are basically all free in India. But have you every had the chance of watching a camel race without paying anything? Just head for the *Desert Fair* in Jaisalmer → p. 160

● Walk-on part in a Bollywood film

Fancy taking part in a Bollywood production? Then make sure that you can 'see and be seen' in *Colaba Causeway* in Mumbai, especially in *Leopard's Café*. It may well happen that you are offered a role here as western extras are highly sought-after! → p. 94

● Elephant polo

It's not easy to grasp the rules of polo. So why not take up the offer made by most clubs and watch players training – for free? The oldest polo club in India, *The Rajasthan Polo Club* in Jaipur even offers free admission to matches → p. 77



●●● Dots in guidebook refer to 'Best of ...' tips

ONLY IN INDIA

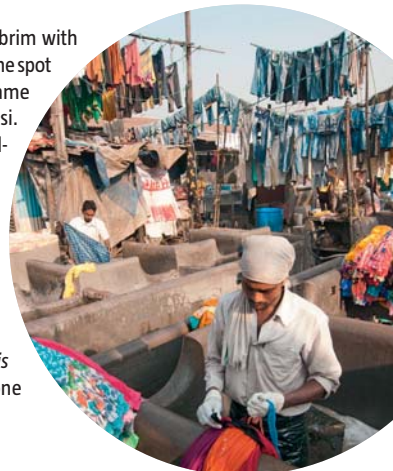
Unique experiences

● Sari Emporiums

Every city has several 'palaces' full to the brim with fantastic sari material which is hemmed on the spot and a matching blouse tailored at the same time too, e.g. in *Vishvanath Gali* in Varanasi. The silk is more or less tightly woven depending on the region and the patterns also reveal where it has come from → p. 65

● Mahalakshmi Dhobi Ghat

There are laundries in every larger town in India. The biggest *open air laundry* is next to Mahalakshmi station in Mumbai (photo). The best place to watch the *dhobis* (laundry workers) doing the washing in stone troughs is from the road bridge → p. 94



● Bazaars

Immerse yourself in this sensual experience of intensive smells and brilliant colours to the confusing cacophony of thousands of voices. Most of the colourful bazaars are divided into various sections for fruit, medicinal herbs, spices – piled into fascinating mounds – jewellery, etc., such as in *Sardarpura Bazaar* in Jodhpur → p. 81

● Ayurveda

This ancient form of natural medical therapy is generally practiced largely in Rishikesh und Kerala but many hotels and holiday resorts have picked up on the trend and Ayurveda can be found throughout India, e.g. in *Indeco Mahabalipuram* → p. 141

● Auto rickshaws

They clatter around everywhere in India, squeeze through the narrowest of alleyways and can transport a surprising number of people and masses of other things. The three-wheeled auto rickshaws can be found on every street corner and are one of the best ways to get around busy Chennai, for example → p. 124

● Temple rituals

Temple rituals in the morning and evenings with offerings, prayers and singing are fixtures in the everyday life of many Indians. Not everywhere is it forbidden for non-Hindus to go inside a temple or the sanctuary. In *Kalighat Kali Temple* in Kolkata, for instance, you can even allowed to be blessed with holy ash → p. 111

ONLY IN INDIA

THE PERFECT ROUTE

THE TRADITIONAL AND MODERN WORLD

The *Gateway of India* was built to honour King George V and Queen Mary who first set foot on Indian soil here, landing at the jetty in **1 Mumbai → p. 92** in 1911.

Then it's off to **2 Panjim → p. 130** in Goa, leaving from Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, the economic metropolis' majestic station from the days of the British Raj. Relax on the beaches to the north and south and enjoy the Portuguese-style way of life. Take the night train to

3 Hampi → p. 132. Explore the ruined city of the long-lost Vijayanagara Empire located in magnificent surroundings (photo left). A bus or train journey will bring you back into the modern world. The metropolis **4 Bangalore → p. 119** is one of India's high-tech centres, once favoured by the British for its pleasant climate.

AS FAR AS THE INDIAN OCEAN

5 Mysore → p. 141 (easily reached by train in approx. 3 hrs.) is the right place for sandalwood souvenirs. Then take a bus to **6 Kochi → p. 134**, famous for its traditional theatrical dances, *kathakali*. The **7 Backwaters**

→ **p. 135** start further to the south around Alappuzha. Here, 'the path is the goal'. Just let

the lush vegetation drift pass on a punted houseboat, a *kettuvalam* – perhaps on a trip lasting several days. **8 Kanyakumari → p. 146** can be reached via Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram (unless of course you can't bring yourself to leave the beaches in Kerala). You can't get any further south than here. This is where the waters of the Arabian Sea meet the Indian Ocean.

MEDITATION & METROPOLISES

Now it's off to the east coast. A train will take you to the former French colony **9 Pondicherry → p. 143**. Auroville nearby is a long-term alternative lifestyle experiment that has now been going on for more than forty years. Join in for a few days. Now that you have gathered enough energy from all that meditating you can probably face up to chili-hot **10 Chennai → p. 123**, the fourth largest city in the country (approx. 4–5 hrs. by bus/train). Take a plane to the characteristically Muslim city **11 Hyderabad → p. 90**, often nicknamed 'Cyberabad' today – battling it out with Bangalore for

Experience the many facets of India, from Mumbai to Delhi, the Backwaters in the south and Darjeeling in the north

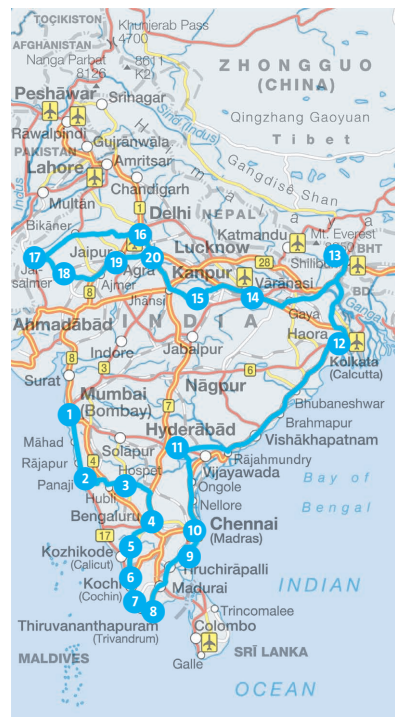
the reputation as *the* high-tech metropolis. Fly on to **12 Kolkata → p. 109**, the former capital of British India and now a boomtown and a haven to many new immigrants.

HIMALAJAS AND GANGES

For the next stage you have to take the train – and head off to **13 Darjeeling → p. 107**. Watch the famous tea being harvested (photo left) at an altitude of more than 2000m (6500ft) – or just take in the sight of the highest mountains. The panorama of the Himalayas is simply breathtaking. From Bagdogra Airport, 100km (62mi) to the south, take a plane to **14 Varanasi → p. 62** and watch the morning sun rising over the ghats in the holy city from a boat on the Ganges. The only comfortable way to reach **15 Khajuraho → p. 52** is by plane. Visit the unique Hindu temples with their depictions of erotic scenes.

HINDUS, MUGHAL EMPERORS AND THE TAJ MAHAL

The next plane journey takes you **16 Delhi → p. 43**, the city of Hindu rulers, Muslim Mughal emperors and the British Raj. Today Delhi and New Delhi, India's capital city, stand for the country's hard-won independence. To get to **17 Jaisalmer → p. 79** on a branch of the Silk Road in Thar Desert, it's best to take a plane. From there you can take a bus to the 'Blue City' of **18 Jodhpur → p. 80** and its spice markets. The state capital **19 Jaipur → p. 75** and its open-air observatory Mantar Jantar is a good place to end a trip to Rajasthan. But no visit to India would be complete without having seen the Taj Mahal in **20 Agra → p. 36**.



9000km (5600mi). Travel time only: 6 days. Recommended time for the trip: 3–4 weeks. Detailed map of the route on the back cover, in the road atlas and the pull-out map