

# Need to Know

## **i** Quick Facts

### LANGUAGES

Kashmiri, Dogri, Urdu, Balti, Ladakhi, Tibetan, Punjabi, Garhwali, Kumaoni, Pahari, Rajasthani (several dialects) are the main languages in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Hindi and English are also spoken in all the states.

### MONEY

ATMs of ICICI, HDFC, SBI, AXIS Bank, IDBI are easily accessible in the cities, but it's better to carry sufficient cash when you are travelling to smaller towns and hill stations of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Leh only has three ATMs.

### MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

Airtel, BSNL, Vodafone, Idea and Aircel are the main service providers. BSNL is most reliable in offbeat places. Only postpaid connections work in Jammu & Kashmir.

### INTERNET ACCESS

Most hotels have business centres or offer free wi-fi facility in core destinations, but in remote places connectivity is erratic. Homestays may not have this facility.



**|** Kashmiri shawls are a popular shopping item

## When to Go

Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan can get really hot and humid during the summer months, but this is a good time to visit the Himalayan states of Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Some of the hill stations are best visited in winter for skiing. Monsoons are a delight in the mountains.

- **October–February:** This is the best time to explore Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan. It might get very cold in December and January, but it is still a better option than the scorching heat in summer. These months are best suited for solitude and adventure in the hill states. Higher areas of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand are covered in snow. It's high on the chill factor, but compensated well by pocket friendly rates and winter sports. Leh shuts down almost completely this time.

- **April–July:** Though it clashes with the summer holidays it's the best time to visit Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. It's warm in the days and slightly chilly at night. Kashmir's lakes and gardens are at their most resplendent. The roads to Ladakh open by end of May before which it's too cold in any case. Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Punjab are best avoided as temperatures are very high.

- **June–September:** For those who love the monsoon season, the plains are the greenest in these months. This is also the right time for river rafting and trekking to the Valley of Flowers which is at its efflorescent best. The hill stations are also pleasant.

## First Time in North India

If you are travelling to North India for the first time, here are some things to keep in mind.

### ADVANCE PLANNING:

- **Two to three months before:** If you are travelling to any of the states in the peak season, book your air tickets and hotels. Last minute tickets can be very expensive, especially to Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal. Start planning your itinerary especially if you're travelling to remote hill stations in Himachal Pradesh.

- **One month before:** Chalk out a more specific and detailed itinerary. If you are out on a wildlife or trekking trip, check for timings and access; adventure activities like rafting, trekking, paragliding, etc. may be closed during the rains. Book your chopper tickets if you intend to fly to Vaishno Devi or Amarnath. Book all accommodation.

- **One week before:** Make your calls to hotels and homestays to confirm bookings. Reconfirm flight and hotel bookings. If you're driving, check for landslide updates on Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Scan local news for updates on the security situation in Kashmir.

### HEALTH & SAFETY

- **Travelling alone:** The Himalayan states are mostly safe to travel alone in India. Still it would be prudent to be on your guard at night and be sure to book your stay ahead if you are arriving

## Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ Carry extra petrol and a full toolkit while driving within Himachal Pradesh or Ladakh.

- ✓ Give way to vehicles going uphill as it is their right.

- ✓ The routes can be confusing within regions: taking directions from locals is advisable in remote areas as the GPS tends to fail.

- ✓ Do try the local food (even though most restaurants are multi-cuisine).

- ✓ Respect local customs: dress modestly when visiting temples, mosques and monasteries.

- ✓ Carry hand sanitiser and tissues with you. Public toilets on the roadside are best avoided.

- ✓ Cameras are not allowed inside several places. Check before hand.

- ✗ Do not buy antiques and precious stones in Kashmir or Ladakh unless you're certain they're authentic.

- ✗ Avoid plastic use as it is banned in Himachal Pradesh.

- ✗ Avoid driving at high speed and using the horn while driving on mountain roads.

- ✗ Do not eat brazenly in public during Ramzan anywhere in Kashmir.

- ✗ Don't litter wildlife parks, talk loudly during hikes or encourage banter by your children.



# *This is North India*

*Blessed with nature's bounty, rich cultural traditions and magnificent architecture, the northern states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan offer abundant diversity. Hemmed in by the mighty Himalayas in the north, the sandy desert to the west and the fertile Gangetic plains below, the region offers spectacular scenery, heritage sites, music, dance and food.*

## **Jammu & Kashmir**

Welcome to three incredibly different worlds – Kashmir, Ladakh and Jammu – all in one state. India's 'crown' is bedecked in some of the most stunning natural finery found in the country. Kashmir's sheer beauty belongs to its chinar-lined vales, alpine meadows and turquoise lakes in Srinagar, Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonamarg. Further north, Ladakh's moonscapes present another arresting spectacle. The vast swathes of barren plains, snow covered peaks, blue lakes and green valleys have visitors rubbing their eyes in amazement.

Jammu, better known as the City of Temples, attracts a stream of pilgrims. Every year, many devotees dock at Katra to make the day's climb to the famed Vaishno Devi shrine.

Gulmarg is a riot of colours in summer

## **Himachal Pradesh**

With its amazing array of landscapes, Himachal Pradesh is an astounding slideshow of Himalayan splendour. From the scrub-lined foothills of the Shivaliks to the alpine heights and vales of Kullu and Kinnaur, from lofty snowbound passes such as the Kunzum La to the moonscaped cold deserts of Spiti, the state throws up stunning terrain.

Indelibly marked by colonial footprints dating back to the early 19th century, Shimla and its surrounds offer a nostalgic reflection of the life and times of the Raj. Dharamsala is home to the world's most famous exile, Manali offers a range of adventure sports while Dalhousie is all about long walks.

## **Uttarakhand**

Centuries-old shrines nestling in highlands draw and many pilgrims, while quaint colonial homes and endless trekking trails beckon travellers all year round. This is where Ved Vyas

# 15 Top Experiences



## 1 Golden Temple, Amritsar

A mere glimpse of the Golden Temple (p292), the most sacred Sikh shrine, is stunning. A dip in the Amrit Sarovar, the holy tank reflecting the gleaming temple, is an unforgettable experience. Ringed by a marble walkway, the tank is said to have healing powers. The temple contains the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs which is continuously read out. The holy book is installed in the temple every morning and returned at night to the Akal Takht (Timeless Throne) in a ceremony worth witnessing. Don't leave without taking the kara prashad and having the langar meal.



## 2 Pangong Tso, Ladakh

There's not much to do at Ladakh's most famous lake, Pangong Tso (p97), but gaze at the mountain valley scenery and the surreal blue waters. Yet, when it's time to leave you'll probably have to tear your eyes away from the ever-changing hues of the 'enchanted

lake', emphasised by natural reflecting pools. In stark contrast to Pangong Tso's tranquil setting, you'll always find people congregated at the 3 Idiots Point (where the climax of the eponymous Bollywood blockbuster was shot), often jumping and clowning around and thereby doing justice to the locale's epithet – although there are usually more than three.



## 3 Jaisalmer Fort

Rajasthan abounds in impressive forts, but only a few can beat the beauty of the Jaisalmer Fort (p458). When bathed in sunlight, its yellow sandstone walls glitter like gold, a phenomenon from which the historic fort draws the name 'Golden Fort'. This is one of the only forts where you can experience what life inside a walled city looked and felt like in the days of yore. A walk through its bustling lanes dotted with little shops, rooftop restaurants, havelis and hotels is an incredible experience.

# Lucknow

*Lucknow's reputation as a city that is the embodiment of culture, gracious living and rich cuisine lives on to this day. Liberally sprinkled with British Raj-era buildings – including the famous Residency – and boasting two superb imambaras (Shia shrines), it is a pleasant peek into history. Eating out is a major highlight, especially for the kebab lover.*

## Trip Planner

### GETTING THERE

Amausi airport is 15km from Lucknow, connected via daily flights to all metros. The two main railway stations, Charbagh and Lucknow Junction, are next to each other. Trains run to most of the major cities from either of these stations, mainly Charbagh, and include several daily trains to Agra, Varanasi, Faizabad, Gorakhpur and New Delhi.

### SUGGESTED ITINERARY (3 DAYS)

On the first day, cover sightseeing places in Hussainabad and the Chowk area. You can also shop at the Chowk bazaar and try the kebabs that Lucknow is famous for. Next day, get

up early and go on a heritage walk organised by UP Tours. Later in the day, stop by at Aminabad and Hazratganj to taste some delicious Awadhi cuisine and shop for exquisite chikan work. Leave the last day for an exclusively gastronomic experience where you pick and choose whatever places you might want to try and also to shop some more.

### BEST TIME TO GO

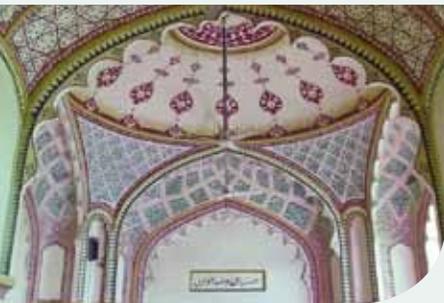
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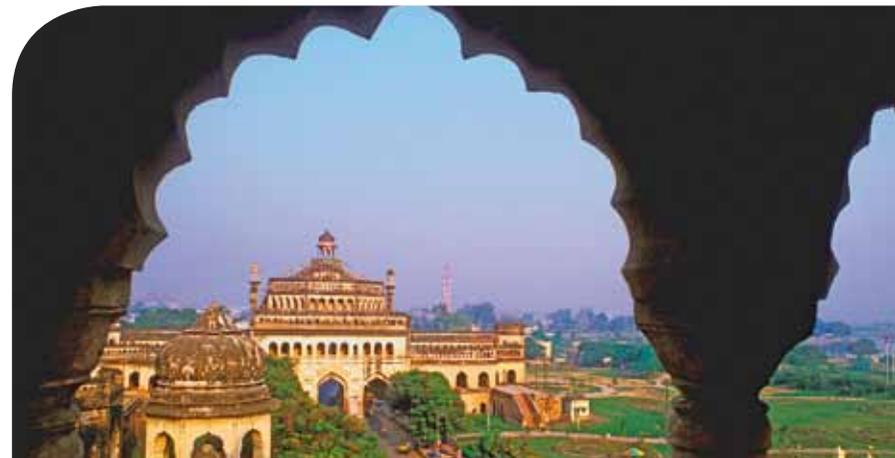


## Top 5 highlights

- **Bara Imambara** (p359)
- **Chhota Imambara** (p360)
- **La Martiniere College** (p361)
- **Kebabs** (p366)
- **Shopping** (p368)



# A Royal Engagement



Home to many British Raj-era buildings and two mausoleums, the capital of Uttar Pradesh caters well to history buffs. By contrast, **Lucknow's** modern side boasts grand monuments, overstated parks and gardens, many with marble sidewalks and pink sandstone. The city spreads on both sides of the River Gomti.

Lucknow is better known as the city of nawabs. It gained prominence when Nawab Asif-ud-Daulah shifted the capital of Awadh from Faizabad to this city in 1775. They were great patrons of arts and laid the foundation from which a distinct Lucknawi culture emerged.

This period became known for its 'adab' and 'tehzeeb' (sophistication and gentility) in manners, language, lifestyle, cuisine and the performing arts. It is during this cultural renaissance that many palaces and grand buildings were constructed. Styles of dance and music such as kathak, thumri, khayal, dadra, qawali, ghazal and shairi (Urdu poetry) evolved and acquired class and grace. The craftsmanship of artisans, whether in making jewellery or

View of Rumi Darwaza from Bara Imambara

## *If You Like: Kebabs*

- **Kakori kebab:** These kebabs are made adding papaya as a tenderizer to raw mincemeat and a mix of spices. They are then put on skewers and barbecued over charcoal.
- **Galawati kebab:** Galawati is the name of the tenderizer that's used for these kebabs. Essentially, they are the same as kakori kebabs, except that rather than being barbecued they are made into patties and shallow fried in oil or ghee.
- **Shami kebab:** Raw mincemeat is boiled with spices and black gram lentil. It is then ground on stone before being mixed with finely chopped onions, coriander leaves and green chillies. Shaped into patties, it is then shallow fried.

- **Pasanda kebab:** Fillets (pasanda) of beef or mutton are marinated with papaya and salt, then washed and marinated with yoghurt, spices, ginger and garlic paste and finally roasted gram flour. The preparation is added to heated ghee with bay leaves and cooked slowly.
- **Nargisi kebab:** A mix of mincemeat, roasted gram flour and spices is coated over boiled eggs and gently tied with thread. After each egg has been deep fried, the thread is removed and the egg is cut to resemble the nargis (the daffodil flower).
- **Seekh kebab:** The mincemeat is mixed with garlic, ginger, onion and other spices, and then wrapped around skewers and cooked over charcoal or in a tandoor.

### King of Chat

Chaat ₹

 9415016362; near KD Singh Stadium, opp Tulsi Theatre, MG Marg, Hazratganj; 5–9pm A favourite among locals, this is one of the places for chaat in the city. They serve a huge variety, including dahi batasha, matar tikki, aloo chaat and many more.

### Dastarkhwan

Awadhi ₹₹

**UP Press Club, China Bazaar Gate, Hazratganj; 1–10.30pm** Don't go by the ambience, you may have to turn a blind eye to cleanliness, but the food more than makes up for it. You can try anything here and you won't regret it, be it chicken korma, kakori or galawati

kebabs or the well-known chicken masala. Its popularity has caused quite a few spin-offs of the same name at several places in Lucknow.

### Moti Mahal

Mughlai ₹₹

 0522 2610371; 75, Hazratganj; 11am–11pm This is one of the few places which has an extensive vegetarian menu. Apart from the usual range of kebabs and curries you can try the navratan korma, arhar dal and adraki paneer. From the chaat, a good bet is khasta with choley. The restaurant is usually extremely busy with waiters scuttling up and down the stairs. It's best to avoid peak hours when it gets packed.

### Oudhyana

Awadhi ₹₹₹

 0522 6711000; Vivanta by Taj, Vipin Khand, Gomti Nagar; 12.30–2.45pm, 7.30–11.30pm Oudhyana gives Lucknow's famous Awadh cuisine its royal due. The flavours of each dish served here, from the famous galawati and kakori kebabs to an entire menu of long-lost heritage dishes, is authentic. The intimate room is quite striking.

### Falaknuma

Awadhi ₹₹₹

 0522 2620131; Clarks Avadh (top floor), 8, Mahatma Gandhi Marg; 12.30–3.30pm, 8–11pm Lucknow's best hotel also lays claim to having one of its best restaurants. The stylish rooftop dining room has a fabulous bird's-eye views and serves up sumptuous nawabi cuisine, such as kakori and galawati kebabs. There's a

 Kebabs, the crowning glory of Lucknawi cuisine



small bar area (beer from ₹200) if you just want to enjoy the views.

## Nightlife

Saqi

Lounge ₹₹₹

 0522 6711000; Vivanta by Taj, Vipin Khand, Gomti Nagar; 5pm–midnight Saqi is probably the classiest lounge bar of Lucknow, perfect for a drink with colleagues or catching up with a friend. It has a huge stock of liquor from all around the world, but the food menu is minuscule by comparison. On select weekends there is a DJ as well and good lounge music on other nights.

## Activities

Tornos

Walks

 0522 2346965; [www.tornosindia.com/www.lucknowwalks.com](http://www.tornosindia.com/www.lucknowwalks.com); C-2016, Indira Nagar ₹1000 and above per person Tornos organises a range of innovative walks that showcase Lucknow in an intimate manner. Apart from the usual heritage walk, they have created a culinary, Victorian, shop-history and flea market walk. They also have a studio where they organise experimental dining and film screenings among other activities. The walk leaders are friendly and professional. You have to book in advance.

### Heritage Walk of Lucknow

Walks

 0522 2615005; Hotel Gomti, 6, Sapru Marg ₹15 per person To