

Travelling to India

The following is some information that will be helpful for you in preparing for your trip to India! Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. We look forward to meeting you!

Passports and Visas

Naturally, you will need a valid passport to travel to India. Further, you will need a tourist visa from the Indian Embassy or High Commission nearest your home. The standard Indian tourist visa length starts upon issue, and takes some weeks to apply for and receive. You should apply for the tourist visa two months in advance of the trip due to expected delays in processing. However, you should note that you would then need to apply for a 3 or 6-month tourist visa (depending on what is available in your jurisdiction), making sure that the date of issue is not further in advance of the trip than would accommodate your travel plans.

Please note: YOU NEED A TOURIST VISA (visitor's visa). Indicate that you will be visiting Rishikesh for yoga and tourism.

To find more information about getting the tourist visa and to fill out an online application, you can google "Tourist Visa to India from (name of country of origin)". If you are applying in person, call the Consulate to enquire what you need to bring and the cost of the visa. You will most likely need 2 passport sized photos, your passport, a completed application form and the fee in cash. Also, in the slot for your address in India, you can write the address of the ashram, which is at the end of this document. It is best to arrive at the Consulate or BLS early in the morning when they open to avoid lines.

E-visa

You can also apply for an E-visa, which comes by e-mail and takes less time to process, but you have to wait longer in line upon arrival at Customs with e-visas. Also, e-visas are for shorter durations, such as 2 months. If you are getting close to the date of departure, opt for the e-visa. There is a spot on e-visa forms for "short term yoga program". The link for applications is:

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>

Flying

There are now a lot of direct flights to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, such as Chicago-Delhi or Vancouver-Delhi or Toronto-Delhi if flying from the US or Canada. **Please bring a printed copy of your ticket with you as you'll need it to get into the Delhi airport upon return – security checks tickets, departure times and matching passport names at the door.**

Airport pickup is at **Dehradun Airport** on arrival day between 7AM and 2PM (or later if required) so that you can arrive for Ashram checkin and orientation at 3PM and jetlag Yoga at 4PM. Those arriving from international cities will most likely fly into India at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport and connect to Dehradun. Flights from Europe and Asia may arrive in Delhi in the morning, making easy connections to Dehradun. However, flights from North America may in the evening or in the wee hours, making for a long wait till the first morning connector flights. If necessary, we can recommend hotels near the airport that offer pickup and dropoff services if you need to overnight in Delhi. If you have questions, please email Chétana: info@akhandayoga.com.

DO NOT BOOK A FLIGHT LEAVING DELHI on the graduation day, as classes and festivities go till 6PM. We recommend planning to stay at least until checkout day at 10AM. You could then transit to Dehradun for a flight out of Delhi that evening (for YTT 200/300 – Sat. evening). Remember if flights leave in the wee hours of the morning after midnight, the ticket date will then be Sunday.

You will not need much luggage. Please try to stick to one piece of checked luggage and one piece of cabin luggage (a knapsack). No sharp objects, aerosol cans or liquids are permitted in the in-cabin luggage. Put all camping knives or nail scissors in the large bag to be checked. You can buy shampoo and cream easily in Rishikesh. Avoid alcohol when flying and drink lots of water on the plane. Students have found it useful to use homeopathic jet lag tablets.

Airport Pickup and Transportation at the End of the Course

Let us know of your flight arrangements as soon as possible. We will confirm them and arrange for you to be met at Dehradun Airport. The driver will carry a sign with the words: **“Akhanda Yoga Family”**.

While airport pick up in Dehradun and transit to the Ashram is included in your fees for YTT 200 and 300, students must make their own way **from** the ashram to the airport or on to further travel on their own or in groups. The Ashram Office can help with these arrangements. Students often find it most convenient to get the office to arrange a private car for two or three students to take them directly from the ashram to the Dehradun or Delhi airport for their flight time. For YTT 100, you can arrange for paid pickup in Dehradun by emailing ashram@akhandayoga.com. The cost of a hired car between the Ashram and Dehradun is about 700 rupees (~\$15) and to Delhi is about 3500 rupees (~ \$70).

Ashram Stay

We recommend, if time prevails, for students to stay on at the Ashram or in Rishikesh to integrate and rest for 3-4 days after trainings. You should only plan to stay on longer if you intend to stick to the routine and lifestyle at the Ashram. **You may be able to continue to stay on at the Ashram by making an individual booking for after your course checkout date with the Ashram Office. Bookings should be made in advance at ashram@akhandayoga.com.** As October and March are peak seasons and we have YTT 100 Trainings starting after graduation in those months, the Ashram may offer a list of neighbouring guest houses and offer day-pass at the Ashram for Yoga and food.

Weather

Rishikesh has a mountain climate and there is very fresh air that comes down from the Himalayas through the Ganges River Valley. In the late fall and winter, it may be warm in the day and cool at night. In the sun you will feel warm, but in early morning and evening, and when in buildings you will want a sweater, fleece, and/or shawl and hat from November through early February.

October – 25 – 30 degrees Celsius during the day dropping to 15 - 20 degrees at night. Just post monsoon, late September can have still a few rainy days. October is sunny and the forest is very green. The Ganges is full and rushes quickly.

February – 15 - 25 degrees Celsius during the day dropping to 8-10 degrees at night, with the temperature changing quite a bit between the beginning of the month to the end of the month. The Ganges is a bright turquoise in this dry season and the weather is usually sunny with a few rainy or

misty days at the beginning of the month. The forest has deep green and turns spring-like into March.

March/April – 25 – 35 degrees Celsius during the day dropping to 20 – 25 at night. March is probably the most popular season in Rishikesh as it is dry and sunny, but still not too hot.

August – 30 – 35 degrees Celsius during the day. This is the late monsoon season in Rishikesh and the daily rains bring relief of the heat leading to sunny warm parts of the day. Many people enjoy this lush warm season and fruits like mango.

Clothes

It is preferred that all Yoga Teacher Trainees will wear white clothing around the Ashram and to class throughout the training. Some Indian-style Yoga clothes may be purchased at the market in Rishikesh, but please also bring plenty of loose fitting white clothing for your stay in the ashram. You will also need to respect the **Ashram's Dress Code**, out of respect for the local culture. This includes covered legs and shoulders (no spaghetti straps), pale undergarments not visible above clothing, tops not too low-cut or exposing midriff. If wearing tighter leggings, have a shirt or kurta that covers the hips. Men must wear shirts with short sleeves even on balconies, and pants that reach the knee.

Sample packing list:

- A warm track suit, or thick yoga pants and a sweatshirt or fleece (October – March)
- A hat/toque (October – March)
- Meditation shawl and a sweater (you can buy shawls in Rishikesh) (October – March)
- Fall jacket or shell (not a winter jacket as it will be too bulky) (November – February)
- Sturdy thick soled sandals with a back, and flip flops
- Warm socks in a grey or dark colour (just a few pairs) (October – March)
- Light-colour yoga pants (loose fitting, not legging-type that are tight all the way down the leg)
- Long-sleeved shirts (October – March)
- Several t-shirts (with appropriate coverage)
- Pajamas and under garments
- One set of clothes for touring, such as pants or a long skirt. Women may want to bring palazzo pants that can be worn under their smocks or shorter dresses (similar to a salwar kameez).
- In India, appropriate colours are lighter. There will be an opportunity to buy Indian clothes.

- Please leave any leather products other than shoes at home in accordance with the yogic principle of Ahimsa (non-violence). Bringing leather products or any clothing item derived from animal products is contrary to this principle and alters the sattvic energy of the ashram.

Equipment:

- Bring a smaller day pack that can be carry-on luggage in the plane.
- Yoga mat (they fold well or fit rolled in a large backpack – ashram does have some mats)
- Mosquito net and/or use the plugins in the room or ask Ashram Office about plugin repellent
- DEET Repellent or Picaridin repellent if you choose (non-aerosol due to air travel restrictions). Natrapel with Picaridin and Care Plus with over 20% Icaridin are becoming more widely available at MEC and on Amazon. There are also clothes and socks bonded with repellent.
- Small flashlight, combination padlock, alarm clock
- Travel money belt in cotton (available at luggage stores)
- Homeopathic Jet Lag tabs
- Probiotics for digestion and activated Charcol in case you get diahroea
- Thermal water bottle and travel mug suitable for tea in the ashram
- One bath towel (not too thick, i.e. quick-drying)
- A journal and several pens (different colours may be useful)
- A camera and charger (the smaller the better as you will keep it with you)
- Dried fruits, nuts, protein bars, dried sea weed (snack foods with iron and protein). Dried fruits and nuts are available at the general store in Rishikesh, but you may want to bring some supplements especially if you are not used to a light vegetarian diet.
- Swiss army knife or camping knife (do not pack in carry-on luggage) for peeling fruits etc.

Water

We will have bottled and/or filtered water available at all times. However, it is important while in India to avoid uncooked food and juices, especially those from markets. You will be eating specially prepared food at the ashram, but on the tour days (or if you arrive early or stay after the tour) if you have a snack outside of the scheduled meals, make sure the plate or glass that it is served on is dry and not just washed and still wet. The highest risk foods in India for non-locals are juices. This is because they are commonly mixed with ice or water; a vendor may rinse his mango press, and then peel and press your mango, adding a bit of water to help it move through the press. Local people may not understand that even a drop of water could make you sick. In order to enjoy the Indian fruits and

flavours, you can buy fruits with a peel, and wash them with bottled water at the ashram and/or peel them (bananas, tangerines, apples, papaya). You may also want to drink coconut juice if you're in the area south of Delhi (from young coconuts it is just like sweet water) after watching the vendor create the hole and insert a dry straw. This is safe and quite delicious.

Remember to brush your teeth with your bottled water. When you shower, be aware of keeping the lips closed, and dry the face and lips first when finished.

Do not worry too much about water or getting ill. Have a positive and pro-active attitude, knowing that you are doing everything possible to keep yourself well.

Medical Preparations

Consult your doctor or local travel clinic before the trip to know their recommendations. You will have to use your own informed judgment regarding your health as we cannot advise in these matters. Currently there are no required vaccinations for Northern India. Doctors may recommend Hepatitis A and B, and to be up to date with other regular vaccines. To date, as far as we know, Malaria has not been common in Rishikesh, but as the climate shifts, there have been changes, such as an increase in Dengue. For this reason, it is important you inform yourself. Please **bring and wear** repellent with DEET or, if you choose, a product with 20% or more Picaridin (Icaridin). Plug-in repellents are available in the Ashram to use in the bedrooms.

It is not unusual for those staying several months to experience a bit of stomach upset. This may pass after a few days with Ayurvedic remedies, or some of the recommendations I gave in the Equipment section of this letter. If not, you can visit a doctor in Rishikesh. Please purchase **travel health insurance** unless you are already covered for travel.

Money

Please pay the final amount for the trip at least one month prior to your trip. As this will be paid, you will not need much money during the trip unless you plan to continue your travels. I recommend that everyone bring a few hundred dollars of American cash or cash of your country's money. You can change your major currencies in Rishikesh. Ask for some small denominations. Keep this in a money belt **inside** your pants when traveling, and keep some rupees in your pocket. That way if you want to buy something small like a souvenir or some water, you will not have to bring out your money belt in the middle of the market, you will have some rupees in your pocket. You can pay the Ashram fee by credit card. As an aside, most things in India are up for bargain, except foods in restaurants.

Telecommunications

There is Wi-fi at the Ashram (9AM – 9PM), and in the town of Rishikesh, you will Internet facilities, should you wish to call or send a message home to let loved ones know that you have arrived safely at the ashram. You may wish to bring a lap-top, Ipad or Phone for communications. **We recommend however, that you let people know that you are embarking on a contemplative stay at the ashram, and will only be checking email or calling about once a week. Please do not carry cellphones around the Ashram – use sparingly in your room or occasionally to take pictures.** This way you will have created sacred space and time to focus on the transformative experience of living at an ashram.

Distractions

The ashram community of Rishikesh is a dynamic, international place full of spiritual seekers, shops catering to spiritual tourists and restaurants. The Ashram is set a bit apart from this community, and provides a sanctuary for contemplation and spiritual practices. **It will be strongly requested that you stay in the Ashram during the week (class days) except to go out for fruit or for contemplative walks on the beach or on the ghat (steps down to the Ganges).** On weekends or days off, there will be time to eat out, explore the markets many wares, and go on other tourist-type excursions. We ask that you prepare yourself to have this discipline to focus on the program so that you allow yourself enough opportunity for transformation. This will maintain the intensity and unity of the yogic group experience. Going out of the Ashram may be a way to diffuse the intensity of the yogic process – we recommend staying with it, and exploring any challenges or calls for transformation that arise. There will be support available for you in this process.

Culture

India is often described as a place of harmonious contradictions. We recommend taking a yogic approach to any culture shock, which is to observe things you enjoy and things that challenge you and reflect on this over time. In Asia, generally men and women take great pride in humbleness, loyalty, and the appropriacy of their social interactions, dress and behaviour. Therefore, we recommend that one dress and behave with perhaps more modesty than usual, especially in the white clothes of a yoga student. This will garner respect and offset any inappropriate stereotypes of Westerners.

It is not appropriate to visit the rooms of a student of the opposite gender, or talk loudly in the halls or at night, for example. There will also be plenty of light-hearted fun at evening programs, on side trips and when we go for dips in the Ganges! The old adage, ‘when in Rome do as the Romans do’ suits here, as we are the tourists who have opted to learn about Indian culture. All travel is a learning experience – observe, adapt and enjoy!!

Om Shanti!

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