

Rooted in Consciousness

Dear Yogi,

It is my great joy to welcome you to the Svaroop® Vidya Ashram Ganeshpuri, India 2019 retreat, "**Rooted in Consciousness!**"

Here is information about Ganeshpuri, as well as general information concerning our travel to India which will be useful to you in preparing your trip and while you are there.

Some of this information is very important, such as vaccinations, and some is more colorful, like shopping in Ganeshpuri. All of it helps you prepare for an extraordinary time in an amazing place, saturated in the blessings of the Masters of this lineage.

With great love,

Sadguru Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

1 PASSPORT & TRAVEL VISA INFORMATION

- a) **Make sure your passport is valid for six months beyond your stay in India.** For this retreat in December 2019, your passport should be valid into July 2020. If you need to renew your passport, you may use an agency or go through the Post Office (USA residents). **This is the time to do this!**
- b) **You must have an Indian tourist visa**, which you get from the government of India. They use an outside agency to process applications. While there are services that offer an online application, this is not tried and true. Most yogis have successfully used Trivisa www.trivisa.com
Apply for the Indian TOURIST VISA, completing the application and following their mailing requirements. You will send your passport to them, with photos and other information. They will return your passport, with the visa document pasted to one page of your passport, in about 2 weeks.

2 TRAVEL INFORMATION

2.1 Travel to India

Here's the group flight we've selected. Make your reservations early! Fares begin going up in October, and seats become scarce!

To India: United Airlines Flight 48 nonstop, depart EWR (Newark) on 11/30/18 at 8:10 pm, arrive 9:40 pm on Dec 1 BOM (Mumbai)

To USA: United Airlines Flight 49 nonstop, depart BOM (Mumbai) on 12/12 at 12:10 am. Please note that this is 10 minutes after midnight, so you go to the airport on 11/11. Arrives EWR (Newark) on 12/12 at 5:40 am.

Excess baggage charges will apply, depending on your mileage status and the number of bags you are bringing. Each additional bag can cost \$100 or more.

You may travel independently if you prefer, but will need to make arrangements to get from the Mumbai (Bombay) airport to Ganeshpuri (see more information below).

2.2 Passport Photos and copies

- a) You will need extra personal photos and copies of your documentation in order to complete the official tourist registration in Ganeshpuri. Bring all of the following:
 - i. **Three (3) photocopies of your passport**
 - ii. **Three (3) photocopies of your Indian visa**
 - iii. **Four (4) additional loose passport photos.**
- b) If you wish to purchase an Indian SIM card for your mobile phone, bring **two (2) more passport photos** in addition to the others named

2.3 Ground Transportation

Your retreat tuition includes round-trip group ground transportation between Mumbai Airport and Ganeshpuri if you are arriving and departing on the group flights.

All other ground transportation or local taxi within Ganeshpuri is not included. Our Tour Manager will assist you in securing local taxi service whenever needed. Most of Ganeshpuri is easily walkable.

If you are arriving in Mumbai or departing at a different time than group flight, our Tour Manager will arrange separate transport for you from Mumbai airport to Ganeshpuri at your cost, generally 2000 – 2500 rupees (between \$25-\$35 each way).

3 HEALTH INFORMATION

3.1 Vaccinations and anti-malarial treatment

You must visit your General Practitioner or Travel Doctor 4-8 weeks prior to departure so you can make an informed decision about available vaccinations and anti-malarial treatment. Let them know you are visiting rural Maharashtra India, an area about 1 hour north of Mumbai.

The CDC and WHO recommend you are current on the following vaccinations for India; hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid, cholera, yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis, rabies, meningitis, polio, measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis), chickenpox, shingles, pneumonia and influenza, as well as anti-malarial medication

Check with your physician or travel doctor to see what is necessary for your personal situation, and for travel to Maharashtra India. It is up to you and your physician to decide which of these to take.

3.2 Pre-existing health conditions and prescription medication

If you have any pre-existing health conditions, including asthma and serious allergies, please let us know on the questionnaire or email rukmini@svaroopayoga.org.

You must bring all medication that you require with you. If you are bringing prescription medication, also bring a letter from your doctor specifying the medication you require. This will be important information for any medical professionals you may need while in India. We have access to excellent Western-trained physicians within a one-hour drive of Ganeshpuri.

It is often very dusty in Ganeshpuri which could trigger asthmatic symptoms. Even if you rarely suffer from asthma, it is recommended you bring your inhaler with you. You may need to wear an asthma or allergy face mask at times.

3.3 First aid kit medication

Assemble and bring a personal first aid kit containing medication you may require on this trip. We are in village-India, with no local medical facilities. This may not be a complete list, so check with your travel doctor.

Suggested items for a personal first-aid kit include:

Medication / Purpose

- Antibiotic (compulsory)* To treat diarrhea and bladder infections
- Antibiotic To treat chest infections
- Antidiarrheal To control diarrhea
- Antiemetic To stop nausea and vomiting
- Antihistamine To treat allergic reactions
- Fluid and electrolyte replacement to treat dehydration caused by
- gastrointestinal and other illnesses
- Laxative (herbal or medical) To treat constipation
- Paracetamol For general pain relief and to treat fever

Optional supplements and items if you wish:

- Charcoal Tablet (to take with food) / relief of gas
- Acidophilus Powder (to take with food) / protection against gastrointestinal distress
- Probiotics (in a form that does not require refrigeration) / herbal supplements
- Garlic Pills Tablet / nausea
- Vitamin C / boosts immunity
- Echinacea or propolis / herbal treatments
- Throat spray / sore throat or cough

*** Please note:**

It is compulsory for everyone to bring their own supply of antibiotics to treat gastrointestinal illness.

The Ashram is unable to supply antibiotics. Some Westerners visiting rural India end up needing antibiotics, so please don't take the risk of coming without them.

Other items you may wish to include in your first aid kit:

- Nonadherent dressings and tape for cuts and blisters in difficult places, e.g. toes
- Band-Aids or Liquid Bandage
- Sterile eyewash solution (10 ml single use ampoules)
- Antiseptic ointment and swabs
- Tweezers (for splinters)
- Scissors

3.4 Optional supplements and items

- Hand sanitizer
- Snacks for upset stomach (e.g. instant oats, power bars, crackers)

4 SECURITY

It is recommended that you:

Keep your money and passport secure in a money belt

Lock your suitcases before you travel (use TSA approved locks). Also keep them locked when they are in your room when in Ganeshpuri

Tell your credit card company the dates you will be visiting India (otherwise they might put a stop on your card because it shows overseas usage)

Record your credit card hotline number (if you call, your credit card company will advise you what to do if your card is lost or stolen while in India)

Do not bring valuables or anything you would be devastated to lose

it is always prudent during any travel to be aware of your surroundings

5 INDIA INFORMATION

5.1 Money

The current exchange rate between US Dollars and Indian Rupees is approximately:

\$1 US = 70 Indian rupees.

100.00 INR = \$1.40 USD approx.

Check the exchange rates online prior to departure.

You can change dollars to rupees at the international airport when you arrive in India. Our tour manager, Iqbal Memon, also provides licensed money exchange services for us while in Ganeshpuri, usually at a better rate. The closest ATM to our Ganeshpuri destination is a 20-60 minute drive away, requiring a taxi. It is open only sporadically. Our Tour Manager Iqbal can accommodate cash draws against your credit card, at prevailing rates.

Most Ganeshpuri shops do not accept credit cards. The bookstore at Gurudev Siddha Peeth does, as does one or two of the more expensive vendors. All others accept rupees only.

5.2 Mobile Phones

It is possible to set up your American mobile to work in India (contact your carrier prior to departure), or to rent an international mobile phone from a mobile company.

You may get a local Indian SIM card for your mobile phone. However, some American cell phone companies “lock” their phones, which means you cannot change the SIM card without ruining the phone for USA usage.

SIM cards do not work with most iPhones, though the newer iPhones feature dual SIM, with an eSim card which may be used in India. Check with your carrier for details.

Another option is to bring an old “stupid” phone, or to buy an inexpensive phone at a Ganeshpuri mobile phone booth. They will set you up with an Indian mobile phone company, though it may work only in Maharashtra (not in other areas of India). The cost is about \$35, and you get with plenty of international minutes to last you for your whole trip.

If you want a local Indian SIM card for your mobile phone (for unlocked phones):

The cost of the SIM card is approximately \$10 + additional funding up to \$5.

You must provide 2 passport size pictures, a photocopy of your Indian visa and a photocopy of your passport.

Many Indian cell phone companies require a 3-5 day waiting period to get a SIM card, so it is best to pre-arrange it with our Tour Manager. We recommend you contact him by November 20.

Mr. Iqbal Memon at ganeshpuritour2019@gmail.com.

Iqbal will confirm the cost of the SIM card and have it for you when you arrive in Ganeshpuri. You will fill out an application form for the phone company, which Iqbal will have available.

5.3 Weather

Mumbai is on the ocean and more moderate than Ganeshpuri, which is rural and arid. The weather is high-desert. Hot is hotter in Ganeshpuri and cold is colder. There is no heat in any of the rooms, so you may want to bring a hot water bottle for your bed at night. You will be easily able to fill it with hot water in the bathroom.

This below temperature range is for Bhiwandi, a nearby city which has weather similar to Ganeshpuri.

December – Low 65 degrees Fahrenheit High 91 degrees Fahrenheit

Please note: It will be chilly in the early mornings and evenings and becomes very warm during the day as the sun comes out.

5.4 Eating in India

To decrease your chance of getting Delhi belly:

Do not eat food from street stalls.

Only drink bottled water or packaged drinks (even to brush your teeth). Make sure the seal has not been broken prior to you getting the bottle. **Daily bottled water is provided, and already included in your trip cost.**

Do not drink freshly squeezed juices.

Only eat fruit that you can remove the peel personally, without using water.

Do not eat any uncooked food such as salad that could have been washed with river water.

Our Tour Manager is very experienced in making food suitable for Western bellies, so the above precautions are not necessary with the food he is serving.

5.5 Temple Prasad

“Can I eat the prasad?”

This is one of the most commonly asked questions. After the arati (candle ceremony) in the Nityananda Temple each person is given prasad, a blessed offering of milky water and a sweet. There is no correct answer about whether or not it is “safe” to eat. Lots of Westerners eat it and swear that it is fine. Others are convinced it made them sick. **It is up to you to decide.**

However, it can be considered rude not to accept the prasad when it is offered by the priests. Here are a few tips:

- a) Ask for a little bit. They are used to Westerners and their strange ways.
- b) Accept the milky water in your right palm, transfer it to your left, and then use your right fingers to touch a few drops on your eyelids.
- c) For the sweet, ask for a little, and then dispose of it discreetly once you step out the door (it’s one of the reasons that the dogs hang around all the time).

5.6 Giving Money to Beggars or Locals

Do not give money or gifts to beggars or local residents. This group strategy will only work with everyone’s agreement. When you give them money, you teach them to beg, and you reinforce that lifestyle. Smile at them and say a clear and definitive, “No”.

5.7 Donations

Part of your enrollment fee is set aside to make a donation on the group’s behalf to three temples:

Nityananda’s Mahasamadhi Shrine
Gurudev Siddha Peeth
Vajreshwari’s Devi Temple.

However, you may want to give daily donations in either or all places, even a small amount daily. The garlands you purchase do not support the temple; they support the flower vendors.

- When you place a donation on the arati plate, it is like a tip that goes to the Brahmin Priests.
- When you place a donation in the big offering box, it goes to the temple’s charitable projects.
- When you give a donation in the office behind the temple, it supports the temple.

If you would like to donate to an additional charity or give more than we have planned to a specific temple or an individual, please discuss it with Iqbal first. He can give you advice on the best and most effective way to do so. He will also discuss it with Swami Nirmalananda, so she understands the impact our presence and generosity is having on the village.

5.8 Tipping and What’s Included

Your “Rooted in Consciousness” retreat is all inclusive EXCEPT for:

- a) Airfare
- b) Local taxi services (see section 5.9),
- c) Your own shopping, laundry and money changing,
- d) Personal pujas
- e) If you would like to contribute to blankets (see section 5.14)

Your enrollment fee includes all tips for all staff in all locations, no tipping is allowed. If you are taking a separate tour, independently and outside of our group curriculum, it is then your decision to tip or not. Consider the following as it can help you make your decision: Indians do not tip, Europeans do not tip; most travelers are Indian or European.

5.9 Transportation

Also see section 2.3 above.

For local transportation, in and around Ganeshpuri, both air-conditioned cars as well as “tuktuks” are available for hire. Tuktuks are motorized covered rickshaws. Local taxi service is very inexpensive, but please see our Tour Manager to familiarize yourself with the going rates so that you don’t overpay or underpay.

5.10 Accommodations

All Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram activities and meals will be held at Kauthawalla’s (KO-taw-WAW-law’s) Hot Springs and Resort, which is located behind Nityananda’s Mahasamadhi shrine.

Housing is at several local B&B’s, in the town of Ganeshpuri, or at Fire Mountain Ashram (which is a tuktuk ride away). The accommodations are simple and clean, but not 2-star or 5-star hotels. These are local guesthouse owners that we know very well, and who have great respect and love for Swamiji and our community.

You are staying in their homes. Please remember that you are ambassadors for Swamiji and the Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram community. Reach out to our [Enrollment Advisors](#) with any questions about local customs. If they don’t know, they will find out for you.

Your bathroom has a western style toilet and shower in either an ensuite bathroom or sharing a hall bathroom with another room. Prior to the retreat we will be asking you about your sleep needs and if you want to request a specific roommate. All rooms are two, three or four people sharing. It is recommended to bring a padlock to secure your room when you are out.

5.11 Clothing

Modest dress is suitable for village India:

Women should wear long pants or long skirts, covering their ankles. Also you should cover your shoulders. Your blouse or top should be long enough to cover your hips and buttocks, reaching all the way down to mid-thigh. Low cut tops and sleeveless tops should not be worn, as they are not respectful of village India culture. Additionally, women cover their chest area with a scarf, called a dupatta, or with a shawl.

You might like to bring some cotton “Punjabi suits” (tunic top and matching pant). These are also called “salwar-kameez”. Bring about 3 outfits to get started, then you can easily buy more in Ganeshpuri at very reasonable prices. A 3-piece outfit (with embroidered tunic, pants and a matching dupatta/scarf) costs about \$8 - \$15 US.

Men should also wear long pants and have covered shoulders (shorts are only for young boys in India). No sleeveless shirts. You may also wear a lungi (long skirt-like garment) once you learn how to tie it!

Nights and early mornings are very cool, so bring a shawl that can serve as an extra blanket or to use as a seat cushion on the temple floor. In the early morning you will need a sweater or coat.

While in Ganeshpuri, clothes washing can be done by hand in a bucket (which is in your bathroom). You hang your clothes to dry in your room or outside on the porch. Or we can make arrangements to have the local village women do laundry as in past retreats. You pay by piece. It’s very affordable but you may end up with broken buttons because your clothes are pounded on the rocks in the river.

Suggested clothing items to bring

- Cotton shirts
- Warm tops
- Shawl
- Long skirts
- Punjabis (tunic top and pants)
- Walking shoes
- Long pants
- Sari (can also be purchased and tailored locally)

- Slip on shoes for temple (bring 2 pairs, as one pair may get “lost.” It’s best to have comfortable sandals that can be rinsed off and dry easily)
- Some yogis like to bring a wool or fleece hat for early mornings

5.12 Suggested items

General

Backpack/suitcase

Shawl & cloth (asana) or a cushion to sit on

Plug and power adaptors suitable for India (which has 220 current as well as a different prong configuration)

Flashlight

Earplugs

Padlock for your room

Mosquito repellent (the best kind can be purchased locally — Odomos brand)

A couple of plastic hangars

Sun protection:

Sunscreen

Hat

Yoga props (see 5.14 below)

Guru Gita chant book

You may bring your own Guru Gita chant book along or purchase one at the shop for Shree Gurudev Siddha Peeth (Gurumayi’s Ashram).

Snacks

There is plenty of food provided at each meal, but you may want to bring your own snacks (nuts, muesli bars, protein powder, chocolate, etc.). Bottled water will be provided daily.

Toiletries (bring all personal hygiene items; don’t rely on local shops)

Shampoo and conditioner

Liquid soap for shower

Feminine hygiene needs

Clothes detergent (for hand washing, if you plan to do it)

Please don’t bring:

Anything too precious, which you would be devastated to lose

Laptops. The internet connection is not consistent, but if you have cellular internet capability you may be able to email, Facebook, etc. (iPhone, iPad). Check with your service provider for fees.

Please note:

Electricity in Ganeshpuri comes and goes. Don’t rely on rechargeable batteries, hair dryers, etc. Bring an adapter made for Indian electrical outlets, which you can easily order online.

5.13 Shopping in Ganeshpuri

Bring some spending money with you if you wish to buy things. There are plenty of wonderful things to buy in Ganeshpuri’s shops.

You will need Indian rupees (see section 5.1 above). Most stalls and stores only take Indian rupees.

Often recommended:

- Vaishali’s has men’s and women’s Indian clothes and sarees, including large sizes and designs appropriate to Western tastes. The owner also does custom tailoring.
- Many other local shops sell ready-made clothing items and can do tailoring.

- Iqbal and Fire Mountain Ashram are setting up a shop at Kauthawalla's for us.
- Iqbal has a wide selection of shawls from Kashmir. He can accept payment in any currency and by credit card.
- You may want to order a mala (bead necklace), japa ring, or other jewelry custom-made by our jeweler, Sunil Anaokar. Swamiji has known him for almost 40 years. If you bring gold or silver jewelry that you no longer want, he can melt it down and create what you would like. Place your order with him early in the trip, so he has time to create it for you.

5.14 YOGA PROPS

We are purchasing yoga blankets in Mumbai, to be delivered to the retreat location for you. These are not the plaid Mexican blankets; they are Indian blankets. We are planning for 5 blankets per yogi.

If you would like to offer a donation of \$75, (\$15 per blanket x 5 blankets), it would be most appreciated.

It has become our tradition to leave the blankets in Ganeshpuri after the retreat and donate them to the local villagers and the homeless.

You can bring your own yoga props if you prefer. Excess baggage charges will apply, depending on your mileage status and the other bag(s) you are bringing. Each additional bag can cost \$100 or more.

5.15 Daily Schedule

Your day's rhythms are built on the Ashram's daily flow with a special Ganeshpuri flair. This is a very deep spiritual immersion, so plan to invest yourself fully:

4:20 - 6:30 am Join Swamiji for the wonderful morning abhishek at Nityananda Temple

6:30 - 8:30 am Recess. This is a wonderful time to meditate in Nityananda's home or the Shiva temple located next to Nityananda's Mahasamadhi shrine, or to take care of your personal needs.

8:30 am Nourish your body with breakfast, followed by recess.

9:30 - 10:30am Step deep in the flow of Grace with the Sri Guru Gita.

11:00 am - 12:30 pm Svaroopa® yoga class, beginning and ending with Shavasana and the Guided Awareness.

12:30 pm Enjoy a satisfying lunch before using your free time to rest or to visit Ganeshpuri's treasures

4:00 - 5:30pm Satsang: Swamiji enlivens the Tantric teachings of the ancient sages to render them meaningful and relevant to your life and today's world. Chant and meditation included

6:00pm Carry the sweetness of your day with you into dinner. Your evening is free.

We will have several group events:

a group ritual at Nityananda's Mahasamadhi Temple, with Swamiji leading the event.

a traditional Vedic yaj~na (fire ceremony).

a group visit to Gurudev Siddha Peeth with Swamiji for chanting "Srii Guru Gita.

a visit to a local school or women's group to observe our charitable project "Yoga in the Village."

an open Darshan at Nityananda's Mahasamadhi Temple (an extremely rare and precious event!)

and other wondrous events as they manifest!

Activities during your free time may include:

Visiting Gurudev Siddha Peeth — daily arati, weekend Guru Gita chants, weekend meditations in Muktananda's Mahasamadhi shrine

Bookstore at Gurudev Siddha Peeth (open daily)

Nityananda's 3 main sites: the house where he lived, the room where he left his body, and the temple in which his body is interred.

Vajreshwari Devi Temple

Akloli Dam

River hot springs or hot spring bathing facilities at Kauthawalla's
Nearby villages, Ashrams and Temples
Shopping at the local bazaars
Receiving visits from guests
shopping

CHECKLIST

Before you depart, check that you have your:

- Passport
- Indian Visa
- Airline Ticket
- Luggage (labeled)
- Hand Luggage
- Money/Credit card
- Meditation cloth (asana) or pillow
- Prescription medication
- First aid kit

It is sure to be an amazing and transformational retreat!

If you have further questions, please ask our Enrollment Advisors: email programs@svaroopayoga.org or 610.806.2119