

Dear Yogi,

Welcome to the Ashram's India 2015 Retreat: Ganeshpuri's Grace! 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.

Thank you to the Shiva Ashram of Melbourne Australia who originally put much of this information together for their group.

Some of this information is very important, such as vaccinations, and some is more colorful, like shopping in Ganeshpuri.

With great love,
Swami Nirmalananda

1 PASSPORT & TRAVEL VISA INFORMATION

Make sure your passport is valid for six months after leaving India. For those departing in February, your passport must be valid through August 2015.

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 take care of this!

You must have a visa, which you get from the government of India. They use an outside agency to process applications:

<https://indiavisa.travisaoutsourcing.com/homepage>.

Apply for a 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 flight we've selected if you want to travel with the group. Make your reservations early! Fares begin going up in October, and seats become scarce!

To India: United Flight UA48 out of Newark departing 8:10 pm Sat., Feb. 7, 2015 | New York/Newark, NJ (EWR - Liberty) to Mumbai (Bombay), India (BOM)

To USA: United Flight UA49 out of Mumbai departing 11:40 pm Thu., Feb. 19, 2015 | Mumbai (Bombay), India (BOM) to New York/Newark, NJ (EWR - Liberty)

We will have an optional Props Package available for you in November, or you can bring your own yoga props. 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.

2.2 Passport Photos and copies

Bring three (3) photocopies of your passport and three (3) copies of your Indian visa with you (in case you lose it).

Besides the photos you will have taken for your passport and your visa, you will also need to bring four (4) more passport photos.

If you wish to purchase an Indian SIM card for your mobile phone, bring (2) more in addition to the others named.

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.

The following vaccinations are likely to be recommended for travel to India. It is up to you to decide which of these you will take:

Tetanus

Hepatitis B

3 injections 1st and 2nd at mthly intervals prior to travel and 3rd 3-6 months later

WHO (World Health Organization) advises you'll probably have lifetime coverage after the full series of vaccinations

Hepatitis A

2 injections: 1st prior to travel and 2nd 6-12 months later.

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Poliomyelitis

One-time booster if your childhood series was complete and you haven't received polio vaccine as an adult

Typhoid

1 vaccination prior to travel

Diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough)

Anti-malarial medication

Swami Nirmalananda stays current on Tetanus and Polio, has completed the Hepatitis vaccinations, and gets the Typhoid vaccination. She does not use Anti-Malarial medication, but uses Indian mosquito lotion at sunrise and sunset and in buildings or outdoor locations where there are a lot of mosquitoes.

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.

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.

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. The medication recommended by the travel doctor includes:

<i>Medication</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
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:

Supplement	Additional info	Purpose
Charcoal	Tablet, with food	Relief of gas
Acidophilus, with meals	Powder, with food	Protection against gastrointestinal illness
Probiotics	Form that does not require refrigeration	Protection against diarrhea, nausea, vomiting
Garlic Pills	Tablet	Nausea
Vitamin C	1-2G/DAY	Boosts immunity
Echinacea/propolis	Throat spray	Sore throat / 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:

- Non-adherent dressings and tape for cuts and blisters in difficult places, eg toes
- Band-Aids
- 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, eg instant oats, power bars, crackers

4 TRAVEL INFORMATION

4.1 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 (they could 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)

5 INDIA INFORMATION

5.1 Money

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

1.0 USD – 59.00 INR approx.

100.00 INR = 1.70 USD approx.

Money Changing

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.

The closest ATM to our Ganeshpuri destination is a one-hour drive away, with a taxi charge.

Only one shop will accept credit cards while in Ganeshpuri. All others are cash only.

5.2 Mobile Phones

It is possible to set up your American mobile to work in India, or to rent an international mobile phone from a mobile company. Swamiji does have an Indian mobile phone and can make it available in case of an emergency.

For a local Indian SIM card for your mobile phone, contact Iqbal's son Yusuf 91-996-701-8786, email: ganeshpuri.tour2015@gmail.com. Some American cell phone companies "lock" their phones, and you cannot change the SIM card without ruining the phone for USA usage.

Cost of SIM card: \$10 + additional funding: up to \$50

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

You will fill out an application form for the phone company; Yusuf will have them available.

SIM cards do not work with iPhones. Another option is to bring an old "stupid" phone, or to buy an inexpensive phone at the mobile phone booth with an Indian mobile phone company in Ganeshpuri. The cost is about \$35 with plenty of international minutes to last you for your whole trip.

5.3 Weather

Mumbai weather is detailed below, but it is on the ocean and more moderate than Ganeshpuri, which is rural and arid. The hots are hotter in Ganeshpuri and the colds are 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:

MUMBAI WEATHER	LOW	HIGH
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This chart shows Bhiwandi, which is closer to Ganeshpuri highs and lows.

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Please note: It can be chilly in the early mornings and evenings and warms up during the day as the sun comes out. Our 4am start every morning will make you wish you had long underwear! This is the cold time of the year.

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 broke prior to you getting the bottle
- 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.

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:

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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 their lifestyle. Smile at them and say a clear and definitive, “No.”

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 and Vajreshwari’s Devi Temple. However, you may want to give daily donations in either or both places, even a small amount.

Your trip is all-inclusive and your enrollment fee includes this group donation and all tips for all staff in all locations and transport vehicles.

No tipping is required. However, if you are hiring a separate tour, independently and outside of what is planned as part of the group, 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.

If you would like to donate to an additional charity or give more than we have planned for a specific individual, please discuss it with Iqbal first. He can give you advice on the best and most effective way to do so or discuss it with Swami Nirmalananda first.

5.7 Accommodation

All accommodations will be at Kauthawalla's Hot Springs and Resort or in B&B's in the town of Ganeshpuri, or in Fire Mountain Ashram. The accommodation is simple and clean. Your bathroom has a western style toilet and shower in the ensuite bathrooms or sharing a hall bathroom with another room. Only our group will be housed in our facility, so you are sharing with other Svaroopis. In November we will be asking you if you want a particular roommate.

All rooms are two, three or four people sharing. Bring a padlock to secure your belongings when you are out.

5.8 Clothing

Modest dress is suitable for village India:

- Women* should wear long pants or long skirts, and cover their shoulders. Your top should be long enough to cover your hips and buttocks, all the way down to the top of your thighs.
- Men* should also wear long pants and have covered shoulders (shorts are only for young boys in India).

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) and you hang your clothes to dry in your room or outside on the porch. Or you can have it done by the local village women. We've made arrangements to have the local village women do laundry as we did in 2013. You pay by piece- it's very affordable.

If you haven't been to India before you might like to purchase some cotton Punjabi suits (Indian pant and shirt outfits) before you depart. These are also called "salwar-kameez." Buy about 3 outfits to get you started and then you can buy more in Ganeshpuri. You can purchase Indian style clothing at very reasonable prices in the Ganeshpuri stalls and shops.

<i>Suggested clothing items</i>		
Cotton shirts	Warm tops	Shawl
Long skirts	Punjabis (tunic top)	Walking shoes
Long pants	Sari	Slip on shoes for temple (bring 2 pairs, as one pair may get "lost")

5.9 Suggested items

General

- Backpack/suitcase
- Shawl & asana or cushion to sit on
- Power adaptor suitable for India (which has 220 current as well as a different prong configuration)
- Flashlight
- Earplugs
- Mosquito repellent

Sun protection

- Sunscreen
- Hat

Yoga Supplies We will have a yoga prop package available to purchase; a duffle bag with 6 blankets, 2 blocks and a knee pad. If you purchase this package, we donate the blankets to needy villagers upon departing. More details concerning the yoga prop package will be available in November, as well as information on how you can bring your own props to India if you prefer to do that. There are no *Svaroopa*[®] props on site, so it's necessary to either buy and bring the yoga prop package, or to bring your own. You may incur extra baggage charges for the extra bag.

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 & Drinks

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

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 (there is no free internet connection). However, 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; so don't rely on rechargeable batteries, hair dryers, etc.

5.10 Shopping in Ganeshpuri

Bring some spending money with you if you wish to buy things. You will need Indian rupees. There are plenty of things to buy in Ganeshpuri. Most stalls and stores only take Indian rupees. Stores selling more expensive items may be likely to take US Dollars BUT only one store accepts credit cards.

We've arranged for Fire Mountain Ashram to set up their charming shop at Kauthawalla's Hot Springs and Resort for us, which will have men's and women's Punjabi outfits, saris, and lots of wonderful things. The shop only accepts rupees.

Iqbal will have shawls. He can accept payment in any currency and by credit card.

You may want to order a mala (bead necklace) 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.

5.11 Planned Daily Schedule

Your day's rhythms are built on the Ashram's daily flow with a special Ganeshpuri flair:

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

8:30am Nourish your body with breakfast, followed by a personal break

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

11-12:30pm *Svaroopā*[®] yoga asana class

12:30pm 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

We will have several group events:

- a group Abhishek at Nityananda's Mahasamadhi Temple, with Swamiji doing the ritual bath for us.
- a traditional Vedic yajña (fire ceremony)
- a group visit to Gurudev Siddha Peeth with Swamiji
- a performance by Ganeshpuri Music School
- an all-night Shivaratri Celebration
- 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:

[Ganeshpuri Siddha Peeth](#)

Nityananda's sites

[Vajreshwari Devi Temple](#)

Akloli Dam

River hot springs or hot spring bathing facilities

Nearby villages, Ashrams and Temples

Shopping at the local bazaars

[Ganeshpuri Music School](#) will also invite you to observe their classes throughout the week!

Doing charity work

Receiving visits from guests

CHECKLIST

Before you leave, check that you have your:

- Passport

- Air Ticket

- Luggage - labeled

- Hand Luggage

- Money/Credit card

- Meditation cloth (asana) or pillow

- Prescription medication

- First aid kit

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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.

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- Men* should also wear long pants and have covered shoulders (shorts are only for young boys in India).

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) and you hang your clothes to dry in your room or outside on the porch. Or you can have it done by the local village women. We've made arrangements to have the local village women do laundry as we did in 2013. You pay by piece- it's very affordable.

If you haven't been to India before you might like to purchase some cotton Punjabi suits (Indian pant and shirt outfits) before you depart. These are also called "salwar-kameez." Buy about 3 outfits to get you started and then you can buy more in Ganeshpuri. You can purchase Indian style clothing at very reasonable prices in the Ganeshpuri stalls and shops.

<i>Suggested clothing items</i>		
Cotton shirts	Warm tops	Shawl
Long skirts	Punjabis (tunic top)	Walking shoes
Long pants	Sari	Slip on shoes for temple (bring 2 pairs, as one pair may get "lost")

5.9 Suggested items

General

- Backpack/suitcase
- Shawl & asana or cushion to sit on
- Power adaptor suitable for India (which has 220 current as well as a different prong configuration)
- Flashlight
- Earplugs
- Mosquito repellent

Sun protection

- Sunscreen
- Hat

Yoga Supplies We will have a yoga prop package available to purchase; a duffle bag with 6 blankets, 2 blocks and a knee pad. If you purchase this package, we donate the blankets to needy villagers upon departing. More details concerning the yoga prop package will be available in November, as well as information on how you can bring your own props to India if you prefer to do that. There are no *Svaroopa*[®] props on site, so it's necessary to either buy and bring the yoga prop package, or to bring your own. You may incur extra baggage charges for the extra bag.

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 & Drinks

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

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 (there is no free internet connection). However, 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; so don't rely on rechargeable batteries, hair dryers, etc.

5.10 Shopping in Ganeshpuri

Bring some spending money with you if you wish to buy things. You will need Indian rupees. There are plenty of things to buy in Ganeshpuri. Most stalls and stores only take Indian rupees. Stores selling more expensive items may be likely to take US Dollars BUT only one store accepts credit cards.

We've arranged for Fire Mountain Ashram to set up their charming shop at Kauthawalla's Hot Springs and Resort for us, which will have men's and women's Punjabi outfits, saris, and lots of wonderful things. The shop only accepts rupees.

Iqbal will have shawls. He can accept payment in any currency and by credit card.

You may want to order a mala (bead necklace) 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.

5.11 Planned Daily Schedule

Your day's rhythms are built on the Ashram's daily flow with a special Ganeshpuri flair:

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

8:30am Nourish your body with breakfast, followed by a personal break

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

11-12:30pm *Svaroopā*[®] yoga asana class

12:30pm 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

We will have several group events:

- a group Abhishek at Nityananda's Mahasamadhi Temple, with Swamiji doing the ritual bath for us.
- a traditional Vedic yajña (fire ceremony)
- a group visit to Gurudev Siddha Peeth with Swamiji
- a performance by Ganeshpuri Music School
- an all-night Shivaratri Celebration
- 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:

[Ganeshpuri Siddha Peeth](#)

Nityananda's sites

[Vajreshwari Devi Temple](#)

Akloli Dam

River hot springs or hot spring bathing facilities

Nearby villages, Ashrams and Temples

Shopping at the local bazaars

[Ganeshpuri Music School](#) will also invite you to observe their classes throughout the week!

Doing charity work

Receiving visits from guests

CHECKLIST

Before you leave, check that you have your:

- Passport

- Air Ticket

- Luggage - labeled

- Hand Luggage

- Money/Credit card

- Meditation cloth (asana) or pillow

- Prescription medication

- First aid kit