

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY - INDIA

Submitted by Sylvia Mazuera. Source: Culture Grams.

- ⇒ India is roughly one third the size of the United States. It has the second largest population in the world, behind China, with 1.05 billion residents.
- ⇒ It is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. India is home to several hundred languages. Eighteen languages have official status. English is also official and is the language of government and national communication.
- ⇒ Indians are religious, family oriented and philosophical. Women generally wear a *saree* (draped long length of fabric) or a colorful pant-suit with a knee-length shirt. Women also wear considerable jewelry. Hindu women may have a *bindi* (red dot), on their foreheads, traditionally a sign of femininity, gracefulness and marital status.
- ⇒ The *Namaste* is India's traditional greeting. One presses the palms together (fingers up) below the chin and says *Namaste*.
- ⇒ Visits in the home between friends or family are often unannounced. It is impolite to say "no" to an invitation; if one cannot attend one more likely say's "I'll try". Many Indians do not wear shoes inside the home.
- ⇒ The basic social unit in India is the family. Families generally are large, and extended families often live together or near each other. The elderly are respected and cared for by their families. The father is head of the household. A middle or upper class father expects to provide financially for his children until they finish their education and take a job -regardless of how long it takes. Education is very important to most Indians. Few women work outside the home, but that is slowly changing in cities.
- ⇒ Western-style dating is not common in India. Traditional marriages are still arranged by parents, often with the consent of the bride and groom. Marriage is sacred to most Indians and is considered to endure beyond death. Weddings are cause for celebration, expense and feasting.
- ⇒ Diet depends on culture and region. For example, rice is a staple in the south, while wheat bread (*roti*) is a staple in the north. Indian meals are usually very spicy. Onions are used in most dishes. Different types of curry (eggs, fish, meat, or vegetables in a spicy sauce) are popular. Vegetarianism is widely practiced, often for religious reasons.
- ⇒ The favorite sports in India are soccer, cricket, and hockey. Women do not generally play sports. India's motion picture industry (popularly known as "Bollywood") is one of the world's largest, and cinemas are well attended. Every major city has numerous modern theaters, some equipped with elevators and restaurants. Indians appreciate a variety of dance and music performances.
- ⇒ India's national holidays include International New Year's Day (1 Jan), Republic Day (26 Jan), Independence Day (15 Aug), and Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday (2 Oct). Numerous spring and harvest festivals are common between January and March, celebrated with dancing, feasting and many colorful events.