

'A PRODUCER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE TO INDIA'

BY



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India is an astounding, ever-changing, chaotic melting pot of ideas, religions, landscapes and history that contribute to its mind-boggling diversity. Perhaps this is why so many creative minds have been attracted to the sub-continent over the years? It's impossible to run out of inspiration.

India is a veritable treasure trove of unique content and genuinely stunning film locations but has earned itself a somewhat less than favourable reputation as being a 'difficult' place to shoot. India just operates differently to many other countries and when you understand these cultural differences, and account for them in your approach and planning, things will run smoothly.



This guide aims to arm you with information, tips, and advice to help get you started. Shooting in India is an unforgettable adventure for most people. This amazing country usually leaves a lasting impression.

"India is a country where one of the greatest pleasures for a foreigner is that you're constantly surprised. Everywhere you look is something that is either funny, or very moving, but there is always so much that is unexpected. That's part of the reason why people who like it tend to love it.", - Wes Anderson -

LOCAL ADVICE

Probably the most important thing you can do is to get local advice as soon as you are actively considering a TV or film production in India. This can save you wasting many hours planning things that aren't practical or possible. Of course, the wrong advice can be catastrophic so choose wisely. Your Production Services Company, Fixer, or Local Producer should have extensive experience working on international productions. Ideally, they should also have worked outside India so that they have an international perspective. You will then be communicating with a professional that understands India inside out but also understands where you are coming from and how to prepare you and your team properly.

It's also worth bearing in mind that India is an incredibly diverse country. In fact, it's a federal union of states with each state differing in many respects. These differences can extend to most facets of life including politics, legislation, taxation, dominant religion, cuisine, climate, altitude, and language. It's advisable to choose a local advisor who understands the significance of these nuances and has team members, or associates, who are native to each state that you plan to film in.

VISAS, PERMITS, & PAPERWORK:

All foreign productions are required to seek permission to shoot in India prior to applying for cast and crew visas. Your local advisor should be fully conversant with these processes and help guide you through them. There are different routes for different types of production:-

FEATURE FILMS, SCRIPTED DRAMA, & REALITY TV



An application should be filed directly with the Film Facilitation Office (FFO) in Delhi. The FFO will push your application through the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and have your cast & crew cleared by the Ministry of Home Affairs. This process takes 21 working days. This means Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. Major Indian Festivals, such as Diwali in October/November, have quite a few holidays associated with them so you should allow extra time if your

application clashes with one. If your locations include any restricted areas such as, Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, and many of the far North Eastern states you should allow a lot of extra time for your application. It's better to avoid restricted areas all together unless absolutely unavoidable. Full list here... <http://www.boi.gov.in/content/restrictedprotected-areas>

You will need to provide a Demand Draft for USD225, four copies of the script & synopsis, passport details and three passport copies for all the cast and crew traveling to India, a schedule showing all your locations, and a list of all your equipment you require a customs exemption letter for. To avoid delays you should ensure that nothing is missing from your application. You can find a guide prepared by the FFO here... http://mib.nic.in/sites/default/files/Film_In_India_-_Step-by-Step_Guide.pdf

DOCUMENTARIES, TV COMMERCIALS, AND CORPORATE VIDEOS

An application should be filed with the Indian embassy or high commission in your home country. There is usually a Secretary in the Press & Information wing responsible for handling 'Documentary Shooting' applications. If your production doesn't include any contentious content the embassy can clear your application relatively quickly in approx. 10 to 28 days. Once you have filed your application by email, and couriered original signed documents, you should follow up with a phone call and even try to arrange a face-to-face meeting. This will ensure that your application is not overlooked.

India is 'Old School' when it comes to etiquette so if you meet the responsible Secretary please be respectful and address them as Sir or Madam and wait to be seated. It is also customary in India to offer a business card while holding it with both hands presenting the information the right way around for the recipient to read it. If one is offered in return, you should say thank you, it should be received with both hands, and you should take a couple of seconds to read it before putting it in your pocket.

If your application mentions any content considered contentious i.e. Politics, religion, poverty, or 'anything that shows India in a bad light', the embassy will refer your application to The Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi who will take, 'not less than 10 weeks' to clear it. This will also be the case if your application lists any locations in restricted areas.



Full list here...

<http://www.boi.gov.in/content/restrictedprotected-areas>

An application form, undertaking, and a full list of required documents can be found here...

<http://www.mea.gov.in/documentary-filming-in-india.htm>

You should ensure that nothing is missing from your application to avoid delays.

LOCAL SUPPORT LETTER

It is advisable, but not essential, to include a letter of support from your local Production Services Company or Fixer in India (always referred to in India as a Line Producer). Generally, bureaucrats find it reassuring to know that someone with local knowledge and a stake in the Indian film industry is on board.

CUSTOMS

If you intend to bring equipment with you the easiest way is to include a comprehensive list, showing details of all the equipment that you need to clear customs, with your permission application to the FFO or embassy. This should include all the details you would expect to have on a carnet e.g. make, model, serial no., country of origin etc. for each item of equipment. The FFO or embassy will issue a 'Customs Exemption Letter' for you to show customs officials on arrival. Please note that consumables, costumes, make-up, and other non-technical production resources, cannot be covered this way and should be packed separately and not presented to customs at the same time on arrival.

Two of the senior crew members will have their passports stamped and endorsed. They will be responsible for ensuring that the equipment is all present and correct when you depart India.

You can also use a Carnet if you like although not all ports of entry accept them so check in advance for the latest information. India specific Carnet advice can be found here... <http://www.atacarnet.in/>

If you intend to bring large quantities of equipment via cargo the services of a shipping agent, with experience of clearing temporary imports for film productions, will be invaluable.

VISAS

It's important to note that if you are travelling to India to shoot content you cannot apply for a visa until you have permission for your shoot from the Indian government (see above). If you are travelling for a scout/recce or pre-production meetings you can travel on a Business Visa or J-Visa without first applying for permission. In most countries, Visa applications have been outsourced to companies that handle the paperwork such as VFS Global and Cox & Kings. For country specific advice regarding fees, processing times, and procedure please check the visa section on the embassy or high commission web site in your home country.



If you are shooting a feature film, scripted drama, or reality TV show you should apply for a Film Visa (F-Visa). You should include the permission letter from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting that was sent by the Film Facilitation Office following your application (see above). You will also need to send a letter from your production company and a letter of invitation from your local Production Services Company or Fixer in India. Every

individual application for each cast and crew member will need a copy of all these letters attached.

If you are shooting a documentary, TV commercial, or corporate video you should apply for a Journalist Visa (J-Visa). You should include the permission letter from the Ministry of External Affairs that was sent by the embassy or high commission following your application (see above). You will also need to send a letter from your production company and a letter of invitation from your local Production Services Company or Fixer in India. Every individual application for each crew member will need a copy of all these letters attached.

It is worth noting that visa expediting companies often don't have the required experience to handle film permission applications and can often really screw things up. If you intend to use such a company always cross reference their advice with your Fixer in India.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PERMITS

As soon as you receive your permission letter from the Film Facilitation Office, or your local embassy, you should immediately brief your local Production Services Company or Fixer in India to acquire your local authority permits. These include Police, Municipalities, Panchayats (village councils), Archaeological Survey of India (for historic monuments), Forests & Parks, the committees of temples/churches/mosques, Tourism Departments, Traffic Cells, Port Authorities, Indian Railways, Airport Authority of India, National Highways Association, and many more. It all depends on your locations. If you applied through the FFO they will be able to offer assistance with state level permits.

They have appointed 'nodal officers' in many states whose responsibility it is to coordinate some, or all, local authority permits.

With so many agencies potentially involved, and considering each state has different procedures, it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the time required to acquire local authority permits. However, if you are shooting on a street corner, beach, or every day public places then 10 working days would be a good minimum time to allow. If you wish to shoot at high profile monuments, on railway property, or at airports you will need to allow much longer. Probably a month or more.

TOTAL APPLICATION TIME

It isn't really possible to estimate accurately how much time you need to allow for all the formalities above. The short answer is as much time as possible. As soon as you are actively considering a production in India contact a Production Services company or Fixer in India and get the ball rolling. Bare minimum time might look something like this: 1 month for government shoot permission + 2 weeks for visas and local authority permits = 6-7 weeks. It can take much, much, longer if restricted areas and complicated location permits are involved.

INSURANCE & OTHER LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

You should ensure that your local advisor has experience of complying with the legal requirements laid out in your Production Services Agreement (PSA). Don't present your PSA at the last minute. Send your boiler plate agreement early on in your negotiations to ensure that things like insurance, releases, and NDA's aren't overlooked. India is one of the most under insured countries on the planet. It's unlikely that your Production



Services Company or Fixer in India will have adequate annual Public Liability Insurance to satisfy the terms of your PSA. Insurance companies often express surprise when asked to underwrite a \$10M+ PLI policy for a shoot. Having said that Film Insurance policies are available from several companies in India. You should note that it is rarely possible to insure foreign cast, crew, and equipment via an Indian insurance company and when it is possible it's very complicated to achieve. Most productions are insured on a case by case basis and are underwritten according to the specifics of each production. As well as your cast, crew, imported equipment, and weather insurance from your home country you will typically need some of the following from an Indian insurance company: Public Liability, Workers Compensation including Personal Accident cover for Indian cast & crew, and All Risk Equipment cover for Indian rental equipment.

Releases for locations, appearance, cast, and crew; health & safety; and risk assessments are not given a high priority in India. A good test of your local advisors' competence to handle international productions is to ask questions to ascertain their knowledge of these issues. You might even ask them to send examples from previous productions which, will not only reassure you that they have worked on international productions, but might also give you a good starting point when it comes to writing your own paperwork. Why reinvent the wheel?

Don't forget to ensure that release forms, and area release signs, are available in the local language and script. This won't always be English and Hindi as there are 23 official Indian languages. An ink pad is handy for thumb print 'signatures' in case of illiteracy.

SCHEDULING TIPS:

India runs entirely on its own schedule. Things are habitually done at the last possible minute. This is especially true of government organisations and bureaucrats. Many productions are 'Green Lit' at the last minute so this can work to your advantage as getting things done at the last minute is systemic. It's a good idea to drive things forward and track progress regularly. Never assume that anything important is underway without evidence.

India has a bewildering array of festivals and public holidays some of which are national, state specific, or only celebrated in small communities and villages. Local advice about events and holidays that might cripple your schedule is essential. Keep an eye on the local news too. The death of a prominent local politician or movie star could mean local services shut down and unexpected public gatherings. Things can sometimes get heated around election time so it's a good idea to know where any local flash points might be, and avoid them, if your schedule coincides with one.



Seek local advice when working out travel times rather than using Google maps. Google has become more accurate over the years but there are so many factors that affect transport times in India that it's best not to use them to plan a precise schedule.

When booking your international flights don't overlook the fact that India now has international flights to many regional airports and not just the major hubs of Delhi and

Mumbai. You can fly in and out of the most convenient airports for your schedule. If you are using a Carnet make sure that your port of entry and port of exit can facilitate them. Full list of all Indian airports here... https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_airports_in_India

DOMESTIC FLIGHT TIMES ON MAJOR ROUTES

Delhi (DEL) to Mumbai (BOM): 2hrs 10 mins

Goa (GOI) to Mumbai (BOM): 1hr

Mumbai (BOM) to Kolkata (CCU): 2hrs 45mins

Delhi (DEL) to Kolkata (CCU): 2hrs 10 mins

Chennai (MAA) to Delhi (DEL): 2hrs 55mins

Thiruvananthapuram (TRV) to Delhi (DEL): 3hrs 40mins – longest direct flight in India.

If moving equipment by air always book, and pay for, excess baggage in advance. This is easy to do online, saves money, saves time at the airport, and means that your baggage will most likely travel on the same flight as you.

Expect all modes of transport to be delayed during the monsoon if the wind and rain is particularly heavy. In winter airports in the North of the country are quite often affected by delays due to fog. This is particularly true of Delhi. If travelling at high altitude roads can become blocked by landslides during the monsoon and snow during the winter. Some roads that traverse mountain passes remain closed throughout the winter.

Unit moves can take longer than expected when moving large trucks on minor roads. Power and telecom lines are often hung low overhead across roads and it's sometimes necessary to have someone walk in front of vehicles pushing up cables with a long wooden pole to let your trucks pass. This means that your entire unit moves at walking pace part of the way unless you ensure all smaller vehicles



move out from the previous location first. When considering a unit move in these circumstances always schedule the move in the early hours of the morning to avoid creating traffic chaos. You'll need high powered flashlights to see the overhead cables at night.

India has a different range of daylight hours from North to South. If you're moving around don't get caught out by this. The variation can be as much as two hours. When working in the mountains usable light can occur later and finish sooner than published sunrise and sunset times if the sun has to climb above high peaks in the morning or disappears behind them in the evening.

Midday light can be intense and extremely flat. For demanding scenes, many local DPs and Gaffers like to shoot wide at either end of the day and close in the middle of the day so that it's easier to shape available light with modifiers.

CLIMATE & ALTITUDE

Don't underestimate India's climate. One of the common mistakes people from the Northern hemisphere make is to forget about the monsoon. They assume that the summer months of June to September will provide clear blue sky when in fact these months are marked by heavy rain throughout the country. The Indian summer precedes the monsoon from March to mid-June when it's not uncommon for the temperature to rise to 40-48c with very high humidity in low lying areas. In the North winter mornings and evenings can be crisp and chilly on the plains and sub-zero in the mountains. Early morning visibility can be a problem on the Northern plains due to fog.

The great news is that outside the monsoon season, and occasional winter fog, you are practically guaranteed good light and no rain for eight months of the year.

When shooting at altitudes over 2,500m in the Himalayas don't forget to build in sufficient acclimatisation time for your crew. Local labour, native to the altitude, are worth their weight in gold to shift heavy equipment while you're having trouble just walking around and breathing. Useful information can be found here... <http://www.ismm.org/index.php/normal-acclimatization.html>

BUDGETING TIPS:

The first mistake most Line Producers make is to assume that India is a cheap place to shoot. You get what you pay for just like anywhere else so if you want international standards to be maintained you can expect nearly international budgets. You can get rock bottom rates for most common line items but you won't have a good time working with these services and you'll probably find that your savings have rapidly diminishing value. Some things are cheaper e.g. car rental, budget accommodation, meals in restaurants, some crew rates (especially manual workers), and equipment rental. But savings are often offset by expensive locations and large crew sizes.

When renting equipment in India you will find that it comes with crew attached. You will be obliged to take these crew and there's not a lot you can do about it. You can try to negotiate the numbers down but even then, crew sizes in India are larger than you would expect almost anywhere else. A camera kit comes with three assistants, lights can come with a 'Lightboy' each, a generator comes with a staff of three, all trucks have a staff of two, and a grip team is at least three or four. This will hit you especially hard if your locations are not in a city that has film infrastructure as all the crew will need to travel, stay in a hotel, be catered for, and have a per diem paid. There are many situations when you'll be pleased to have the extra crew on board. It's often impossible to get close to where you want to shoot, because of narrow streets and intense traffic, so you'll need people to carry equipment in and out. When it's hot, or you're working at altitude, extra bodies to divide manual labour are essential for an efficient schedule.

As well as crew travel, board, and lodging costs don't forget to budget for equipment transport. This can be a significant expense if your locations are far from a city with film infrastructure and it's necessary to transport heavy gear long distances by road.

For smaller documentary and TV shoots it often works out cheaper to bring in equipment and crew who will multi-task from your home country.



A local Production Accountant who knows the complex Indian tax system is important to avoid nasty gotchas a few weeks into your schedule.

Despite recent government initiatives, to push the country towards digital payments, cash is still essential. Lots of cash. Don't get caught short on days when you need to pay a lot of extras or per diems.

Locations can be expensive. I wouldn't be surprised if Mumbai is one of the most expensive cities in the world to shoot in. Once you have paid municipal fees, police fees, other local authorities, and your local production team's time to run from office to office acquiring the permits, you won't get much change from \$2,300 per location per day in the city. Thankfully Mumbai is an exception but don't underestimate how much locations and associated expenses will run to.

When shooting in busy public locations make sure you budget for adequate crowd control and security. It's not unusual for film shoots to attract attention anywhere in the world but in India crowds can reach epic proportions.

If you need toilets for an outside location its worth considering hiring a double door vanity van instead. 'Vanity Van' is the term used to describe a converted coach used in place of a trailer/Winnebago etc. There aren't really dedicated Honeywagons in India and each double door vanity van comes with two dressing rooms and two washrooms. They don't cost a great deal more than two portable toilets to rent and you get two air conditioned dressing rooms/offices into the bargain. You will need to pay for a genny to power them.

If you're shooting with lights always budget for a genny as the power supply can be erratic in India. LED lights that run off the mains and batteries are great if you want to avoid the cost of a genny on smaller shoots.



If you are shooting in India and plan to release the film here don't forget to budget for Animal Welfare of India (AWI) clearances when shooting with animals. A film shot in India featuring animals cannot be theatrically released in India without AWI clearance.

CREW & EQUIPMENT:

The Indian film industry is huge. By volume of films it's the largest film industry in the world. Finding talented English speaking senior crew, with international experience, is not difficult. However, crew with this profile are obviously at the top of their game and therefore not the cheapest. The more junior crew positions can be filled with cheaper talented people who speak little or no English. This isn't a problem if their HoD or supervising senior crew member speaks English as you can communicate via them.

The technical standard, creativity, and expertise of Indian crew is excellent if you know where to look. Wes Anderson worked with Key Grip, Sanjay Sami, on *Darjeeling Limited* and has flown him around the world for his productions ever since. Oscar nominated DP Jack Green met Gaffer, Rishi Umrana, on *The Letters* and said, 'He's excellent, as good as I've ever worked with.'

A strange quirk of narrative film & TV production in India is that sync sound still hasn't been widely adopted. This could be because of the lack of soundstages or maybe because Indian cities are so incredibly noisy when shooting on location? Whatever the reason it does mean that good location sound recordists, with extensive narrative experience, are in short supply. There are a few but they're often booked up. Many foreign productions elect to bring their sound department and equipment with them.



Hair & Make-Up is another area lacking in international standard crew. There are only a hand full of talented artists with international experience who are capable of handling demanding high profile talent. Often local HMU crew struggle when it comes to Caucasian skin and hair as they don't have many opportunities to gain experience. Beyond minor injuries and simple aging techniques SFX make-up and

prosthetics expertise is practically non-existent. For these reasons, many productions bring at least their HMU Supervisors with them.

Many foreign productions bring their stunt coordinators with them. Health & Safety standards in India might be different to those you expect at home. Some film insurance providers outside India will insist that you fly in internationally accredited coordinators to maintain standards.

It is entirely possible to bring only a few essential cast and crew with you and come away with excellent footage mainly using cast, crew, and equipment available locally. It's well worth taking the time to investigate your options before flying in large numbers of people. Your local cast and crew will be used to the environment and climate and many will know each other from previous productions. The value of local experience and knowledge should not be underestimated.

The highlight of shooting in India is often the kind hearted, hardworking, resourceful Indian crew you will encounter. Many visiting crew form lasting friendships with their Indian colleagues. On one of my shoots this even resulted in a marriage.

RENTING EQUIPMENT

Most narrative productions rent the majority of their equipment in India as it makes economic sense when large volumes of heavy equipment are required over long periods. And, In the event of equipment failure, items can be replaced quickly by your Indian supplier.

For more sensitive critical equipment choose your supplier carefully. Some suppliers service cameras and collimate lenses in a laboratory environment after each rental and some don't bother at all until something goes wrong.



Imported electrical equipment attracts very high import duty so some cheaper lighting suppliers use cheap Chinese knock-offs instead of their branded international equivalent which can yield unwanted results such as flicker and colour casts. You get what you pay for.

You will find most of the gear you use at home is available to rent in India. Some state of the art gear is quite rare but most things are available. The exception is dedicated helicopter mounts for cinema cameras. India has some talented grips who can rig a camera to shoot out of the side door using gimbals but if you need to shoot all round you'll need to bring a mount with you or use a drone instead.

OUTLOOK FOR FOREIGN PRODUCTIONS IN INDIA:

It's worth mentioning the vastly improved outlook for foreign film and TV productions in India. A few years ago, the Ministry of External Affairs relaxed the procedure for documentary applications and devolved the power to clear productions to their embassies abroad thus significantly reducing the processing time. In 2016, the government set up the Film Facilitation Office in Delhi to handle Feature Film and Scripted Drama applications more efficiently. Their long-term goal is a 'single window' process for all the permits your script requires at both national and state level. Then in 2017 the government announced a new Film Visa valid for up to one year with multiple entries which is also extendable in India. Taken together these initiatives represent very significant improvements and are a clear indication that the government intends to welcome foreign productions to the country.

India should now be able to capitalise on its gorgeous locations, and unique and fascinating culture, to become a force to be reckoned with in the international film industry.

THAT'S A WRAP

Many people have such a great time working here that they extend their stay after the shoot to allow themselves time to relax and explore further. Popular down time activities include touring on a classic Enfield motor bike or open top jeep; yoga on a tropical palm fringed beach; partying in Goa's crazy nightclubs; swimming in a waterfall in the jungle; mountain trekking & paragliding in the Himalayas; camel safaris in the Thar desert; scuba diving on paradise islands; tiger spotting in a National Park; or the perfect end to a great shoot day... an ice-cold Kingfisher and mouth-watering curry. Fantastic!

Written by Tony Cordeaux from Goa Film Services - Originally published with permission by The Location Guide in 2017. Tony has 28 years' experience in the TV & Film Industry. He worked in London from 1989 to 2006 and has been working as a Fixer in India since 2006.

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