

VARANASI, INDIA

Travel Packet

Varanasi, India: the oldest living city on earth; a place of tranquility and beauty. Floating down the Ganges River at dawn, the morning rituals unfold: the washing of clothes, the playing of children, the meditation of monks. One can see why this place is so important for so many. For Buddhists, it is the birthplace of their religion—the place that Buddha gave his first sermon. For Hindus, it is the culmination of life’s journey—to be cremated in Varanasi and have your ashes spread over the river, you are welcomed into heaven. And for Muslims, it is home to a 500-year old weaving tradition.

In Varanasi, Nest is working with an organization dedicated to saving the dying craft of silk weaving through the creation of a centralized weaving facility. This facility will be a focal point for the weaving business, a way to help improve the capacity and ability of the weavers of Varanasi, and a place to train the next generation of artisans – a community center in every sense.

This travel packet has been assembled in order to provide you with practical travel information about Varanasi, India. The information enclosed will help you figure out what you need to bring, make travel and accommodation decisions, and determine whether this opportunity is financially feasible for you. We **hope** that it is! If travel is not feasible, there are many jobs that can be undertaken state-side or from wherever your home may be. Many jobs for which travel is an option do not necessarily need travel in order to be completed.

A Nest International Development Fellowship is a volunteer position that maintains a pay-your-own-way structure. Though there is no program or administrative fee that Nest requires, you will incur travel and living expenses. A Nest fellow is responsible for booking and managing his/her own travel arrangements.

Please contact Julie Meyer (julie@buildanest.org) with any questions you may have related to a Nest fellowship.



<i>Select Lodging Options</i>		
Budget	Mid-range	High-End
Guest Room in the house of Nest's Program Manager (if available) Rs 250, includes wifi + private bedroom and private bathroom	Hotel Surya Deluxe tripadvisor.com/hotelsurya Rs 2200—3500	Hotel Ganges View www.hotelgangesview.com Rs 4000—5500 (breakfast + tax included)
Scindhia Guest House scindhiaguesthouse.com Rs 600—Rs 1349	Rashmi Guest house www.palaceonriver.com/ Rs 2500	Radisson www.radisson.com Rs 6000+
Sahi River View Guesthouse www.tripadvisor.in/Hotel_Review-g297685-d1052308-Reviews-Sahi_River_View_Guesthouse-Varanasi_Uttar_Pradesh.html Rs 1000—1500	Hotel Pradeep www.hotelpradeep.com/index.htm Rs 2400	Ramada www.ramadajhvns.com/superior-rooms.htm Rs 7000+
Ganga Fuji Home www.gangafujihomevaranasi.com/index-en.htm Rs 550—Rs 1200		Taj Gateway www.thegatewayhotels.com/gangesvaranasi/hotel-offers.aspx Rs 7000+
Hotel Divya www.hoteldivya.com/ Rs 850 - 1300		

Travel to Varanasi

- To reach Varanasi from an international locale, fly to either Delhi or Mumbai and take a train or a flight to Varanasi. Flights can be booked as packages rather than purchasing separate legs, which may be cheaper.
- Train tickets can be purchased at www.cleartrip.com. Tickets can only be purchased from this site using American Express credit card and booking requires creating an IRCTC account (Indian Rail Travel Site: www.irctc.co.in). In order to ensure transport, train tickets should be purchased in advance. For information on how to ride trains in India and a link to step by step directions on how to purchase tickets from outside of the US, see www.seat61.com.
- Recommended Flight Websites:
 - Make My Trip: <http://us.makemytrip.com> (great for booking any Indian travel)
 - Sky Scanner: <http://skyscanner.com>
 - Clear Trip: <http://cleartrip.com>
 - Kayak: <http://kayak.com>
- India requires a tourist visa for entry from the USA and many other countries. All instructions on how to obtain a tourist visa can be found at <https://indiavisa.travisaoutsourcing.com/guidelines>

Sample Budget
(Costs represent approximations in US\$)

Recurring Weekly In-Country Costs	Assumptions & Comments	
Room & Board¹		
Accommodations	\$140–\$840	Budget ~\$140/week; Moderate ~\$350/week; High-End ~\$840/week. See lodging options.
Breakfast	\$21	Traditional western style breakfast. Many guest houses will serve a simple breakfast upon request.
Lunch	\$28	Indian dish + rice, veggie burgers/fries, pizza, Chinese dishes in the \$3-\$4 range.
Snacks	\$28	Fresh fruit Rs 5-30/piece, chips/crackers/candy/cookies Rs 20, nuts Rs 100, ice cream Rs 50, local street food Rs 5 - 50 ²
Dinner	\$9	See Lunch (same menu as dinner) food footnote below.
Transportation		
Bicycle Rickshaw (<i>2 trips/day to work site</i>)	\$14	A private auto rickshaw can cost \$3/trip. A bicycle rickshaw costs \$1/trip.
Communication		
Cell Phone Minutes (<i>Indian cell phone</i>)	\$6	Local call are approx. \$0.02/minute. \$6.00 assumes 5 hours of local calls.
Internet	-	WiFi available at the office & at most cafes free of charge.
Total Recurring Costs	\$286–\$986	Varies based on accomodation choice. Also varies based on food choices but only one option presented.
One-Time Costs		
Communication³		
Nokia phone (<i>for local use</i>)	\$30	
SIM card	\$10	
Tourist Visa	\$76	Good for 6 months, multiple entries.
Travel & Emergency Medical Insurance	\$49	Cost varies by length of trip (\$49/1 wk, \$100/1 mon). Check www.worldnomads.com for accurate pricing.
Flight: NYC to Delhi (<i>round trip</i>)	\$1,200	Varies depending on starting city and time of year.
Train: Delhi to Varanasi (<i>round trip</i>)	\$50	Flight: Delhi to Varanasi ~\$130 round trip. 13 hours by train; One way: Class 3AC is \$17; Class 2AC is \$25; Class 1AC is \$42.
Taxi: Varanasi Airport to Hotel (<i>round trip</i>)	\$36	
Total One-Time Costs	\$1,451	
Estimated range for one week of travel	\$1,737– \$2,437	Range based on assumptions noted above. Includes one-time costs and recurring costs.

Notes:

¹Food: if a fellow decides to stay with the Nest program coordinator, there will be access to her kitchen and can prepare their own food. Prices even more reasonable and you know the food will be well cooked and safe (though there are many safe restaurants for Western tummies in Varanasi). If you get tired of Indian food, you can find pizza, Japanese, Korean, German, American, Middle Eastern as well as your standard fast food chains. These restaurants will be approx. \$4 - \$16 per meal. You can also find a more extravagant meal at one of the 5-star hotels for \$8 - \$30.

²Any prices given in Rs (rupees) can be divided by 50 for an approximation in US \$

³International calls cost approx. \$0.30/minute on a local cell phone, so Skype is the better option (most internet connections are fast enough for voice-skyping). To use a US phone, it must be unlocked and able to hold a sim card. You may be able to find unlocked phones on eBay or talk to your phone provider for more details on how to use your phone abroad.

Travel and Emergency Medical Insurance

- Nest requires that you purchase Travel & Emergency Medical Insurance for your journey. Nest has purchased this from www.worldnomads.com in the past, though there are other reputable companies that provide similar insurance.
- Insurance sold by World Nomads is sold by the week up to 7 weeks and then by the month.
- Review the policy located on the website and print out the certificate of coverage to carry with you on your journey.
- The five key parts of travel insurance are:
 1. Medical emergencies & evacuation (If there is one reason to buy travel insurance, this is it. Please take the time to read this section of your travel insurance in detail).
 2. Trip cancellation
 3. Baggage & personal belongings
 4. Personal liability
 5. Coming home early & resuming your trip

What to Bring

- **Clothing.** Varanasi is a conservative town in terms of dress. Common dress for women is a long shirt (locally called a kurta or kurti) and leggings. The basic rule of thumb is no tank tops and no shorts. Sleeveless shirts are ok, but you must ensure that they have thick straps and cover your chest well. Pants and full length skirts are acceptable. Capris that are mid-calf length or longer are acceptable.
- **Footwear.** Sandals are most commonly worn as it is warm most of the year. Nest recommends something sturdy and comfortable, as you may do a bit of walking. A shoe with a hard bottom is preferable, as there can be debris in the streets. Streets are pretty dusty and dirty, so don't bring anything you absolutely love or can't be washed easily. Sneakers are a good option if you plan on walking a lot, especially during the colder season.
- **Recommended Packing List.** Sunscreen, plug converter, bug repellent, loose cotton shirts/long tunic style tops (summer season), undershirts (for absorbing sweat in hot season), cardigan sweater or zip up sweatshirt, sturdy/comfortable sandals, 1 pair of closed toe shoes, a few pairs of socks, breathable pants/full length skirts/mid-calf capris and/or leggings, umbrella (for sun & rain), feminine products, computer, external hard drive for backing up, passport/visa, backpack for every day use w/ a zipper (waterproof handy in monsoon season), yoga gear if you so desire (mats can be purchased in India), hand sanitizer, bandanas (for sweat rags/cover hair in dusty travels), camera. Most Western brand toiletries can be found in Varanasi. There is also a local ayurvedic line of beauty products that are widely available.

Miscellaneous Information

- **Travel Guide.** Check out the Lonely Planet guide to Varanasi: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/uttar-pradesh/varanasi> and the Wiki travel link: <http://wikitravel.org/en/india>
- **Culture.** Varanasi is located in the Uttar Pradesh state in northern India, a state which is also the home of the Taj Majal in the city of Agra. The language most commonly spoken is Hindi. The rich cultural traditions of Varanasi make it a cultural center of India. Though Varanasi is mainly associated with spirituality and religious worship, it also has a rich and unique style of art forms including craftsmen famous for their beautiful saris, handicrafts, textiles, ornaments, woodwork, clay and metalwork.
- **Medical/Vaccinations.** Travel and health information for India can be found on the CDC website <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/india.htm>. There are no required vaccinations, however consult with your doctor or a travel clinic to see what is recommended. Malaria and Dengue Fever are present, especially during the rainy season so protection is recommended. Anti-malaria drugs are an option. Additional protection may be achieved through good bug repellent, a bug net and/or plug in mosquito room repellents that can be purchased in country.

During the first week in India, many westerners encounter some stomach discomfort from the change in food. Nest recommends bring a bottle of Pepto Bismal to help get through these bouts of 'Delhi Belly.' There are plenty of safe food options in Varanasi, however.

Clean water is extremely important in India. Bottled water is widely available. Filtered water is available at the work site office. Do not drink any water or eat any food made with unreliable fresh water or uncooked.

- **Currency Exchange.** Money can be exchanged in the airport upon arrival in Delhi. The recent exchange rate has been between 50 and 56 rupees to the dollar. Credit cards can be used at a few locations, primarily the major stores or restaurants, however your US bank account will usually charge an international fee.
- **Banking.** ATMs are easy to find and will let you take out a maximum of Rs 10,000 per transaction (you can do multiple transactions per day). Before leaving your home country, contact your credit/debit card company and notify them that you will be out of the country to avoid having any hassles withdrawing money. You may also want to ask them if they have any partnerships in India that can offer lower rates.
- **Laundry.** There is a Laundromat that offers pick up and delivery, free wifi, and costs about Rs 150 per 6 kilos of laundry. Hand wash laundry services are commonly offered at guesthouses and hotels.