

Guidelines for Visiting Hariharananda Gurukulam in Balighai



Visa:

In order to travel to India you will need a valid visa. It is recommended to apply for a tourist visa at the nearest Indian consulate or embassy in your country. Please contact us if you require assistance in completing the visa application form.

Please note the Indian visa is valid beginning on the day it is issued and stamped in the passport, not from the date you arrive in India. So a six-month visa issued on January 1 would be valid until June 30.

Your passport must have a minimum validity of six months from the date of your departure from India to ensure your entry into India. It is your responsibility to check whether your passport is valid for your travel.

Travel to India:

There are various ways of traveling to India and then on to the ashram, depending on the level of comfort and cost desired. Below you will find several options. Please choose the one that best fits your needs.

✈ Traveling by Plane:

from Europe and North and South America: The best ways to reach the ashram is to fly to either Kolkata (Calcutta), Mumbai (Bombay) or Delhi and then fly on to Bhubaneswar. Flying to Chennai (Madras) is also possible.

from Australia and California: You can fly to Chennai (Madras) or Kolkata (Calcutta) and then continue on to Bhubaneswar. There are non-stop connection flights throughout the day from Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, and Chennai.

To get from the international to the domestic airports, you can use the bus shuttle service for international passengers. However, it is important that you do NOT leave the airport terminal, as you will not be allowed back in and shuttle passengers are collected INSIDE the airport! Pre-paid taxis are also available between international and domestic airports at reasonable rates. Although the baggage will be checked through to Bhubaneswar, you will need to collect the baggage at the international airports, go through customs, and then again check it in for Bhubaneswar.

Most international flights arrive in India very late at night and the connecting domestic flights to Bhubaneswar do not continue until the next morning. Therefore, it is necessary to book a hotel for that night or find other accommodation near the airport (if you need help with this, please contact us).

The taxi rate from the Bhubaneswar airport to the ashram in Balighai is approximately Rs 800. The coolie (porter) in the airport is free, but you may give them Rs 50 as a tip if you want to. Do not encourage them with international currency. The tip must be given only after all the luggage is loaded into the taxi and securely fastened. Four people can comfortably travel in one taxi along with the luggage.

Airline Baggage Allowance: Before booking your domestic flight to Bhubaneswar, check the airline policy on baggage allowance. Some of the domestic airlines in India have limited baggage allowance for both carry-on and checked baggage. If you have excess baggage weight, the fee can be quite high. If you plan to have more baggage, then consider booking with a domestic airline that permits more baggage allowance.

When booking your flight you can choose vegetarian or Asian vegetarian meals if you so wish. Some airlines even provide Hindu vegetarian meals.

Please be aware that during the summer ticket prices are higher.

✈ **Traveling by Train:**

Once you are in India, it is much cheaper to travel by train than by plane. When planning your trip take into consideration the cost of the flight as well as the cost and duration of the trip by train.

There is an official Indian railways website (www.indianrail.gov.in) where you can find all the necessary information, including train schedules and fare information. Print the necessary information and bring it with you to India.

It is not possible to book the train ticket online. Generally train tickets need to be purchased in India.

If you are staying at a hotel in Delhi or Kolkata, ask the hotel management if they can book a train ticket for you. They may charge a little for this service, but it will save you a lot of time and inconvenience. Please make sure that they book the ticket on a tourist quota, because there are special seat contingents reserved for tourists, which you can get immediately without having to wait for days for your reservation. Usually they will be able to get the train ticket the same day.

At www.indianrail.gov.in you can search for the availability, fares, and dates of the trains between the originating station and your destination. If you want to find connections from/to Kolkata (Calcutta) you may need to write Howrah JN (HWH), instead of Kolkata (Calcutta), otherwise the system will not find any trains for this route.

The trains available from Delhi to Puri are as follows:

1) **Purshottam Exp.** (super fast) leaves New Delhi on Day 1 usually in the late evening and arrives at Puri on Day 3 early in the morning (the distance is about 1866 kms).

2) **Puri Express** (super fast) leaves New Delhi on Day 1 usually early in the morning and arrives at Puri on Day 2 in the afternoon (the distance is about 1799 kms).

3) **Neelachal Exp.** leaves New Delhi on Day 1 usually early in the morning and arrives at Puri on Day 2 in the evening (the distance is about 1918 kms)

The following trains are available from Kolkata (Calcutta) to Puri:

1) **Howrah-Puri Exp.** (mail express) leaves Kolkata on Day 1 usually in the late evening and arrives at Puri on Day 2 in the morning (the distance is about 502 kms),

2) **Howrah-Puri SriJagannath Exp.** (mail express) leaves Kolkata on Day 1 usually in the early evening and arrives at Puri on Day 2 early in the morning (the distance is about 502 kms).

☞ Travel Tips:

- There are different classes/categories of compartments on the trains in India. For example, AC means air conditioning, and the air conditioned class is more expensive than the regular one. If you are traveling at night, you may find that it is too cold and you don't need air conditioning. But if you are traveling for several days, you will definitely need air conditioning. In both cases one should reserve a sleeping-car.
- Second-class AC is more expensive than regular second class, but first time visitors will find it more convenient; especially since the air-conditioned coaches provide blankets and pillows and the bathrooms are cleaner.
- You can also buy bottled water on the train, but be careful that the cap is sealed and is sold by vendors who are wearing the Indian Railways uniform (grey blue).
- It is also important to bring a metal chain with a lock to fasten your luggage to your seat and protect it from thieves. A pouch that can be worn around the neck and hidden under the shirt containing all important documents – passport, tickets, money, and credit cards – is also strongly advised; especially when traveling second class, where beggars and others will frequently walk through the train. Thieves have many tactics, and one precaution is to try to refrain from drinking and eating the food that is available on the trains; especially if it is given to you by other passengers. For example, if someone offers you biscuits only take it if the package is still sealed.
- The Calcutta railway station is called Haora (Howrah), and the International Airport in Calcutta is called Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (in spoken language Dum Dum Airport).
- Check carefully to find out when the tickets have to be purchased. Most tickets have to be bought or reserved at least two weeks in advance (2A Class often requires more than a month advance booking).
- **Pre-paid taxi:** The rates are pre-set according to kilometers and paid for before you ride in the taxi from the airport to the train station. This will eliminate any worry you may have about getting lost.
- It is good to travel with a person who has been to India before, if possible.
- There are many other websites that will help you to organize your trip. The following two sites may be of assistance:
<http://www.webindia123.com>
<http://www.calcuttaairport.com>
- Travel guide books are really useful for everything concerning traveling: train, flights, fees, hotels, etc..
- The rate for loading and unloading one suitcase from a taxi or train (maximum weight 40 kilo) is 10 rupees. If you decide to make the porter wait for half an hour, then for each half hour an additional 10 rupees is charged per suitcase. This is the rate set by the Indian government.
- Do not encourage any beggars by giving them money. If you want to donate money, give it to the ashram, which is doing a lot of charity work for poor people.
- For the first few days, carry your vitamin and/or antibiotic supply if you are accustomed to taking them.. As soon as you land in India, drink only bottled water that has a sealed plastic cap until you reach the ashram.

- Do not get excited by peddlers and entertainers who carry monkeys, bears or snakes. Stay away from all until you reach the ashram.

☞ Useful Items to Bring:

- Cap or hat for protection from the sun
- During the summer months it can be extremely hot, so bring clothing that is thin (cotton clothing is cooler). A shawl is advisable if the material is transparent. During the colder periods, sweaters, warm trousers and socks are advisable. It is better to bring these items with you rather than purchasing them in India.
- Garden or work clothes (preferably not white, because they get dirty easily) for doing *seva* (selfless work). Garden or other work gloves are necessary for gardening, picking up trash, using disinfectants for cleaning bathrooms and so on.
- Bed sheets and a pillow case are always useful. Some people prefer to bring a sleeping bag.
- Towels (2-3). Thin towels that dry faster are best – these can be purchased in India.
- Cotton handkerchiefs help during the hot summer days.
- Flashlight and extra batteries. Due to the heat and humidity, it is better to keep them in a metal can or box.
- Umbrella/raincoat. An umbrella is more practical than a raincoat and is only necessary during the rainy season. Bring 2 small umbrellas, because they damage easily.
- Shoes and sandals. It is advisable not to bring leather shoes because they can easily get damaged. Shoes are always left outside buildings, even in some shops; therefore, do not bring expensive shoes or shoes you do not want to part with. Slip-on shoes and sandals are a must. Inexpensive sandals can be purchased in Puri. You should bring walking shoes.
- A blanket for colder nights, especially during the winter months, can also be purchased or borrowed at the ashram.
- Notebooks, binder with loose-leaf paper, pens, pencils, etc.
- A bag or small backpack to carry personal items and notebooks, etc.
- Alarm clock
- Penknife and a string to hang your laundry in the room.
- Mosquito repellent (also available in Puri).
- It is better to bring shampoo and other personal hygiene items with you. If necessary, they are also available in Puri.
- Toilet paper (there is none at the ashram) and washing powder (laundry soap) are available in Puri. Please note that there is only cold water at the ashram, including for the washing machines.
- Although dishes for the meals are provided, some people prefer to bring their own metal cup, spoon and fork.
- A foldable mat is useful for sitting when waiting for a train or during trips.
- Needle, thread, safety pins, rubber, string for fixing some things, small scissors (if no penknife)
- During the trip to the ashram, it is better not to wear white clothes as they get dirty easily,
- Bottled water can be bought at the ashram – water is also available from a pump and a water filter on the ashram grounds.
- Most ATM (bank withdrawal machines) and credit cards can be used in India.
- A compatible adapter or converter for electrical items. Please note that the voltage levels may be different in India than in your country.

☞ Medicine to Bring:

Although medical treatment is available at the Hariharananda Charitable Health Centre, situated right next to the ashram, you may find it easier to deal with minor health problems on your own.

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Suggested medicine to bring:

- Analgesic and antipyretic medicines for pain and fever (Tylenol is not available in India).
- Medicine for diarrhea, stomach disorders, and bacteria/stomach flu
- Cold and cough medicine
- Oxygenated water, band-aids and cotton wool for minor injuries
- Medicine for insects bites
- Vitamins
- If you have problems with water retention or bloating, you may consider bringing water pills and fiber tablets. Puri is very humid.

- Although the ashram is not in a “malarial region” some people prefer to take precaution and take medicine against malaria or get vaccinated prior to their trip.
- Some people prefer to get vaccinated against tetanus and diphtheria and hepatitis (A and B) before they start their journey to India.

**** Although most items can be purchased in India, it is best to bring what you need with you.**

☞ **Exchanging Money:**

It is best to convert foreign currency into Indian Rupees at the International airports, because only local currency (rupees) is accepted in most places, including the domestic airports. You will need rupees to pay porters, taxis, buy bottled water, etc.

After you arrive at the ashram, you can make arrangements to go to Puri (to CT Road) to convert foreign currency.

Please note:

- If using a camera with a film roll, do not develop your prints in Puri.
- If you want to buy toys or gifts for the children in Balashram, it is best to buy them in Bhubaneswar. Toys in India are of the same quality as in Europe and North and South America. The teachers and Kriyavans at the Gurukulam will be able to better suggest what is needed and useful.
- To help the ashrams defray high shipping costs, please consider if you are willing to bring some Kriya books with you to the ashram in India, or to bring back books for the Kriya Yoga ashrams in Europe or USA. Please contact the ashram near you, if you are willing to carry some books, and they will give you more information.

Staying in the ashram gives you the opportunity to live a disciplined spiritual life. To make the best use of your stay there, prepare yourself to be in seclusion. It is a great opportunity to be free from worldly distractions. If it is necessary, it is possible to have contact with others.

If you have a mobile (cellular) telephone in India, please only use it at the ashram for emergencies so that it does not disturb others.

We wish you all the best during your stay at the Gurukulam, as you savor each breath in the divine company and atmosphere.

Pranams

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