

Suggested Reading List for India

Books

City of Djinns (*William Dalrymple*)

Penned by the eminent Scottish writer and historian, William Dalrymple, 'City of Djinns' is an ode to Delhi. A fascinating travelogue of the age old city, it touches upon its rich and glorious history, drawing lingering connections to its present like an enthralling spider web. The book takes its readers on a journey of India's capital through its architecture, and Dalrymple's own experiences with its inhabitants and their quirks. Liberally sprinkled with charming anecdotes, 'City of Djinns' makes for an enlightening and compelling read.

No Full Stops in India (*Mark Tully*)

Veteran journalist and writer, Sir Mark Tully provides an intriguing insight into Indian culture and politics in his book 'No Full Stops in India'. It shares the author's unique point of view of the Indian society with brilliantly written essays ranging from the Kumbh Mela to Communism in Calcutta. The book draws upon his own time and knowledge of the heartland, as a BBC correspondent. Effortlessly unravelling various aspects of a post-colonial India, it gives the readers an objective yet kind commentary on the vast subcontinent.

Shantaram (*Gregory David Roberts*)

'Shantaram' is a quasi-autobiographical novel written by Gregory David Roberts, an Australian author and erstwhile convict. Part-fact and part-philosophical in nature, the book follows the protagonist's journey of self-realisation after his escape from Pentridge Prison and subsequent fleeing to India under a false identity. Linbaba, as he is called by his newfound friend Prabaker, meets a host of interesting and colourful characters in the city of Mumbai where he lives. Studying the diverse cultural ecosystem of the city and the excellently depicted personas, the book is delightfully eloquent and a pleasurable read.

Slowly Down the Ganges (*Eric Newby*)

Eric Newby's 'Slowly Down the Ganges' is a travel memoir recounting a river expedition along the Holy Ganges that the author undertook along with his wife in the mid-60s. Navigating the shifting waters, the trip commences from the pilgrimage town of Haridwar gradually making way to the Bay of Bengal. While taking in the sights, the sounds, and the smells of India, Newby reminisces about his time as a soldier in the British army. His narrative is humorous but respectful as he describes the river and the towns he passes by.

Begums, Thugs and White Mughals (*Fanny Parkes*)

'Begums, Thugs and White Mughals' is a journal maintained by Fanny Parkes who lived in India during the early British Raj. This memoir is chockfull of minute observations about the natural splendor of the country and details the Indian culture with which she became fascinated, as she transformed from a proper English lady to an adventuring Indophile. The book illustrates Indian rites and customs of the time, from the adorning of a Hindu bride to the use of opium in getting rid of headaches, giving the readers a captivating glimpse into the past.

Hot Tea across India (*RishadSaam Mehta*)

RishadSaam Mehta's 'Hot Tea across India' is an amusing travel memoir compiled through the author's own journeys across the length of the country, from the breathtaking Himalayan terrains of Leh all the way to Kanyakumari. Interspersed with incredible escapades about his

travels from Mumbai to Manali onto Munnar with the ever present and invigorating chai in its various forms, this book is an exhilarating account of life on the road.

Chasing the Monsoon (*Alexander Frater*)

Alexander Frater takes the readers on a wonderfully curious pursuit of the summer monsoon in India in his amazing travelogue, 'Chasing the Monsoon'. The book progresses with the monsoon, as the author travels around the country from the advent of first rain showers of the season at Cape Comorin in Kerala, passing through the western coast via Goa, Mumbai, continuing over Delhi and culminating at Cherrapunji in Meghalaya, then the wettest place in the world. The book displays a potent mix of science and history, covering the places and India's multitudes with an extraordinary perspective.

Around India in 80 Trains (*Monisha Rajesh*)

'Around India in 80 Trains', written by Monisha Rajesh, is about the 40,000 km train journey she embarked on across the country. This entertaining memoir bears witness to the author's adventures with the Indian railways— from luxury trains to toy trains, from daily commuter trains to mobile hospitals. The narrative is introspective as well as insightful and documents the author's experiences with the travelling populace with dry wit and engaging commentary.

All Roads Lead to Ganga (*Ruskin Bond*)

One of the most celebrated authors of India, Ruskin Bond, creates a magical experience through his book 'All Roads Lead to Ganga'. Drizzled with spellbinding accounts of the majestic Garhwal Himalayas, the lush wilderness that surrounds those living in the foothills and the meandering courses of the gushing streams that leads the reader to the mighty Ganga, the book paints a vivid portrait of the author's travels through the villages, hill stations and the various shrines that dot the region and keeps its reader engaged with evocative descriptions of life in the valleys.

Ladakh

Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh (*Helena Norberg-Hodge*)

Addressing the idea of modernization, its impact and what it means to the people living in the Western Himalayan region of Ladakh in India, Helena Norberg-Hodge's 'Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh' is full of insightful observations. Adorned with vivid imagery of the cold desert and its inhabitants, it showcases the vibrant culture and the harmonious nature of the Ladakhi society. We follow the author as she comes to terms with the changes wrought in the name of development and later, helps set up the Ladakh Project for sustainable solutions.

A Journey in Ladakh: Encounters with Buddhism (*Andrew Harvey*)

Penned by the English author Andrew Harvey, 'A Journey in Ladakh: Encounters with Buddhism' is as much about the writer's spiritual journey as it is about his physical journey to one of the remotest corners of India. The travelogue covers the author's arduous pilgrimage and encounters with Tibetan Buddhism in the surrealistic mountainous backdrop of Ladakh. The author recounts his experiences and amazing anecdotes about the people he meets on the way in a charmingly introspective manner.

Ladakh- Crossroads of High Asia (*Janet Rizvi*)

Janet Rizvi's 'Ladakh – Crossroads of High Asia' is a comprehensive account of Ladakh, its people, its history and culture, and its traditions. It touches upon various other aspects of the region, from the flora and fauna of Ladakh to its socio-economic structure, from the lofty Himalayan mountains to the colourful monasteries. It draws attention to the unique beauty of the area, both physical and metaphysical— discussing its past, present and potential future with a keen sensibility.

Ladakh: The Culture and People of "Little Tibet" (*David Vaala*)

David Vaala captures the essence of Ladakh with his spellbinding images in the coffee table book, 'Ladakh: The Culture and People of "Little Tibet"'. From its formidable terrains to the tribals in their traditional garbs, the photo essays encapsulate Little Tibet with its stunning mountainscapes, rich culture and fascinating people, focusing on the ritual of the Cham dance, an elaborate, costumed and masked dance drama - a lively aspect of Tibetan Buddhism.

Trekking in Ladakh: Eight adventurous trekking routes (*Radek Kucharski*)

Laden with exhaustive descriptions of eight different treks across the Ladakh, Zaskar and Markha valleys, Radek Kucharski's 'Trekking in Ladakh: Eight adventurous trekking routes' is an excellent guidebook for trekking enthusiasts. The guide contains detailed information about the routes covered, the duration of each trek, environmental responsibility, safety, accessibility, and landscapes. It also provides us with an insight into the lives of the Ladakhi people, their history, as well as culture.

Films

The Darjeeling Limited (*2007*)

Starring Owen Wilson, Adrien Brody and Jason Schwartzman who play brothers Francis, Peter and Jack Whitman, Wes Anderson's comedy drama 'The Darjeeling Limited' is a visual delight. The film showcases the emotional journey of the brothers towards self-realisation and reconciliation set against the backdrop of India's striking desert terrains, jewel toned cities, gorgeous temples and colourful railways. Bringing the sights and the sounds of India to life, with many soundtracks borrowed from Indian cinema, the film's portrayal of Indians and their diverse culture rings true.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (*2012*)

Shot in the princely cities of Jaipur and Udaipur, 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' is a romantic comedy drama involving a group of Britons who travel to India to spend a life of leisure in an exotic Indian palace-turned-retirement home. The movie follows the eclectic group as they overcome culture shock, gain new experiences and fall in and out of love. It sketches a wonderful portrait of their exploits and interactions with the natives against the picturesque backdrop of Rajasthan— teeming with life, light, colours and smiles.

A Passage to India (1984)

Set in the city of Chandrapore, 'A Passage to India' explores awe-inspiring locales of the country like the Barabar caves, spectacular monuments and ancient Hindu temples to name but a few. It encapsulates an amazing portrait of pre-Independent India and touches upon many different aspects like imperialism, racism, religion and changing human relationships amidst the heavenly landscapes of India. One of David Lean's finest works, this beautifully crafted film has received universal critical acclaim and won several Academy, Golden Globes and BAFTA nominations.

The Namesake (2006)

Mira Nair's 'The Namesake', based on the novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, delves into the story of Indian expats in the USA, trying to hold on to their traditions as their son grows distant. A memorable trip to Kolkata and the Taj Mahal in Agra with his family inspires him to be an architect though he still struggles with his own identity. He reconnects with his roots and reunites with his family after a tragic incident takes him back to India. The movie portrays the literary masterpiece with élan as arresting snapshots showcase Kolkata, the Bengali people and their culture.

Eat Pray Love (2010)

Julia Roberts starrer 'Eat Pray Love' is an inspirational romantic drama based on Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir of the same name. Liz's voyage of self-discovery first takes her to Italy where she discovers the pleasure of food. She then travels to soul soothing India where she goes to an ashram to find peace, attends local weddings resplendent in elegant saris, immerses herself in the culture, tastes spirituality and, ultimately to Bali where she falls in love. It captures the natives of these places, their traditions, and their idiosyncrasies in abeguling manner.

The Lunchbox (2013)

'The Lunchbox', director Ritesh Batra's debutorial venture, is an unlikely love story between a widower and a young housewife who wants to rekindle the romance with her husband. Set against the backdrop of daily life in the city of Mumbai, the principal characters connect when Mumbai's famous lunch delivery system, the dabbawalas, make a rare mistake and deliver the wrong tiffin, thus beginning their conversation. The dabbawalas play cupid as with each dabba or lunchbox, the two come closer without having ever met. The film depicts the city, its residents, their habits in a dreamy yet matter-of-fact fashion.

Monsoon Wedding (2001)

Exploring the universal themes of family, love and human relationships, Mira Nair's 'Monsoon Wedding' is a tribute to Bollywood and takes the viewers to a modern middle-class Indian family home which is preparing for an opulent Punjabi wedding. The marriage has been arranged by the couple's parents, with relatives on both sides pouring in from all around the world and meeting in Delhi, where pre-wedding ceremonies are in full swing. The film represents the vibrant Indian culture, the colourful traditions, and the personalities with their subtle nuances superbly.

Bride and Prejudice (2004)

An Indian retelling of Jane Austen's classic *Pride and Prejudice*, Gurinder Chadha's 'Bride and Prejudice' follows the leads Lalita and Darcy who meet at a friend's wedding in India, not leaving with a good impression of each other. The film begins in the bustling city of Amritsar, with shots of the incredible Golden Temple juxtaposed against the verdant crop fields soon competing with the idyllic and fun-filled Goa. Filled with lavish Indian ceremonies like the Garbha, Indians in attractive traditional attires and the like, the film is a gallery of Indian celebration.

Slumdog Millionaire (2008)

Loosely based on Vikas Swarup's novel 'Q & A', Danny Boyle directed 'Slumdog Millionaire' is a rags-to-riches story of Jamal, told primarily in flashbacks. Facing many odds in order to survive, Jamal's highs and lows turn the film into an intense kaleidoscope of events with dazzling yet gritty tones. Throughout the film the viewers glimpse rugged vistas of Indian countryside, the Taj Mahal and Mumbai in all its glory. Appreciated all over the world, 'Slumdog Millionaire' has won several awards including Golden Globes, BAFTAs, and Oscars.

Hit the Road: India (2013)

'Hit the Road: India', is a travel documentary directed by the Baghdasaryan brothers, Mushegh and Gor, which records a 2000 km journey completed in 12 days. Two friends participate in a rally aboard a local three-wheeler, the autorickshaw, which starts from Mumbai and ends in Chennai. Covering multiple cities like Ratnagiri, Panaji, Bangalore and battling the weather, the traffic, and the lack of fuel — the duo go on the ride of a lifetime, meeting with remarkable situations and people along the way.

Riding Solo to the Top of the World (2006)

Documenting filmmaker Gaurav Jani's expedition through one of the most dangerous and difficult terrains on earth, 'Riding Solo to the Top of the World' is a travel adventure that takes one's breath away. Beginning at Mumbai, Jani's Royal Enfield Bullet takes him to the Changthang plateau in Ladakh, one of the remotest corners of the world. On the way to self-discovery, he gets lost in the cold desert, camps with the nomadic Changpas, overcomes self-doubt and hardships, and experiences the stark beauty of the region capturing moments of bliss and pain alike.

Websites

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