

FOCUS ON INDIA

AFS INTERCULTURAL PROGRAMS INDIA

NOTE: it is hard to generalise for a country with a population of one billion plus. India is also a democratic country and secular country that comprises people of many traditions, languages and religions.

SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Schooling years

- Normally, the schooling years are divided thus:
 Pre-Primary: Lower Kindergarten (LKG) and Upper Kindergarten (UKG)
 For two years from age 4. (Some people also count this as Primary)
 Primary: 1st to 6th grade (also called class or standard)
 Secondary: 7th to 10th grade
 Higher Secondary (in some states called Pre-University College): 11th and 12th grades

After 12 years of Primary and Secondary schooling above (plus 2 years of preparing in LKG/UKG), a student does

- 3 years of college studies which results in a B.A, B.Sc., B.Com. or BBA.
- Then if he/she so desires, 2 years post-graduate studies resulting in M.A., M.Sc., M.Com, etc.,
- Those wishing to do professional carriers (such as medicine, law, architecture, engineering, computer, MBA), go directly (after 12th standard grade and 12th Board Exams) on to 5 years of education for these degrees. Admissions to these professional degree courses are possible only after obtaining very high marks on the 12th Board Exams and after passing a very, very tough countrywide Common Entrance Test Exam (CET).

To get a seat in good schools, colleges and universities (almost all are government run or supervised) is very difficult as many candidates apply. The competition is tremendous.

Grading System

- It is hard to generalise, as the grading systems are decided by the schools and are very different. Some use % and some use A to F. A general overview is as follows:

Outstanding	=	A+	(90% and above)
Very Good	=	A	(75-90%)
Good	=	B+	(60-74%)
Fair/Average	=	B	(45-59%)
Poor	=	C	(35-44%)
Fail	=	F	(under 35%, in some schools under 40%)



Any student with grades about 60% should be AFS material. In some schools that are very rigorous, even 50 to 60% is acceptable. Only very exceptional students will have marks 90% and above. One cannot compare the marking system in India to that of USA or Europe.

Other AFS Partner Countries may find these grades or percentages low, as compared with their countries schools. A population of 1 billion means that the competition for school seats, university, seats and jobs is huge.

Miscellaneous

- ❖ Tutorials: It is very common that Indian students in primary and secondary schools (and in preparation for Exams) go to tutors for extra help. This does not mean that the student is weak in studies; even top students go for tutorials. Usually school is half to two-thirds of a day and in the evening students go to tutorials.
- ❖ 10th Grade has a Board Exam, generally in the month of March all over India. Schools sessions are mostly April to March in north/central and west India and June to May in south and east India
- ❖ In 11th and 12th standard/grade, called Higher Secondary, one chooses a stream: science; humanities or commerce. At the end of 12th is a final Board Exam too. A student's entire future depends on marks obtained in 12th. The first 11 years marks do not add up to the final year. A very demanding, nerve-racking and often traumatic 12th Board Exam (as it can make or break one) decides ones future, especially for those who wish to pursue science (medicine, engineering, architecture, etc) later in college or at university.
- ❖ In north and west India, a student often remains till 12th standard/grade in same school, unless parents are transferred in job or otherwise. In south and east school ends at 10th and then 11th and 12th are done in what is called Pre-University College. The only real difference is the freedom to wear what the student wishes to, as at "school", a common uniform is worn.
- ❖ What are called "public schools" in India are actually private schools. Many parents choose to send their children to these "public" schools, as the level of instruction and the facilities at these are better Government-run schools are modest and the level of instruction is usually quite poor. Some schools get some government funds but these may be very good schools. AFS India has applicants mostly from the public (= private schools) and some govt. funded church schools; these are all good schools. We also have students from Kendra Vidyalaya Schools, which are schools all over India for government servants including bureaucrats and military servants; these too are good schools.
- ❖ Fees range from free primary education in village India to anything from \$10 to \$1000 plus per year, depending on the city and type of school. All Board Exams (at end of 10th & 12th standard/grade) are controlled by the government-run Education Boards

like CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) or State Boards that draft the syllabus, prepare/write the exam papers and correct the exams.

INDIAN FAMILIES

- ❖ India with its billion people is almost like Europe with as many languages, cultures and varieties of food, life, holidays and traditions.
- ❖ Most families are big: 3 generations stay under one roof: Grandparents, parents and children. Older people are taken care of and not put in retirement homes, though in urban India and big cities this trend has started changing slowly.
- ❖ Earlier big families with several offspring were the norm. Now many urban parents chose to have only 1 or 2 children (except the less educated and in certain minorities).
- ❖ Divorce rate is as low as 1%; so most families consist of both parents.
- ❖ A household is rarely empty. There's always someone around.
- ❖ If both parents work, then grandparents are home or at least a house-help, which is easily available and affordable in India.
- ❖ Parents provide everything for children and families are the focal point of Indian existence. The schooling, subjects, college, even marriage is often decided by parents. It is not coercion, just an accepted way of life that parents know best and they decide for the child/young adult.
- ❖ Sons are generally pampered and spoiled. Most are not asked to do house chores. But in modern, urban families, girls and boys are treated equally and have the same privileges and sometimes even boys are expected to help at home.
- ❖ The head of the family generally makes all major decisions, often after discussion with all.
- ❖ Parents are rather ambitious for their children as competition is so tough. They plan the courses and careers, marriages and business of their children.
- ❖ Education in urban India is very, very important.
- ❖ It was quite normal for children to generally follow in their parents' profession. This is changing, but in business families the sons still often follow the father.
- ❖ Parents can be self-sacrificing in order to provide more for their children.
- ❖ Sometimes, families can be judgmental, domineering and rigid in their beliefs.
- ❖ Parents live for children and in turn children look after their parents.

- ❖ In difficult times, entire families come together and relatives pitch in.
- ❖ India is still a rather hierarchical society. Small towns in the north and central parts may still have a rather feudal culture. Men are important and decide most matters. Women are strong in south, west, and east, where women are more educated and where they have an important say in most matters.
- ❖ Young people have great respect for age and elders, and to show respect, they may often touch feet of the elders so as to seek their blessings.
- ❖ The age-old system of Master-Student (Guru-Shishya; teacher-taught) continues and teachers occupy a very high and dignified place in society.
- ❖ There are seldom problems with discipline and gang-like or vandal culture is not seen in schools and colleges. Of course, western influence of films and TV is all-pervasive but family values and school values are strong.
- ❖ Indian children are taught to “adjust” from childhood, so they are adaptable, easy to please, amiable and flexible. They are used to accommodating the needs of extended families and often play supportive roles.
- ❖ Asian patience is a virtue.
- ❖ Within families or with friends Indians share everything, including the food on their plates or in their tiffin/lunch boxes. The concept of yours and mine is not so pronounced as in the West.
- ❖ Indians do not say please and thank so often. Within families it is almost insulting to say thank you often, as Indians consider this understood within families. Even outside families, the use of please and thank you is not so frequent.
- ❖ Newly married couples stay often with the boy’s parents or family, although in urban India and big cities this is changing.
- ❖ Family loyalty is very important.
- ❖ Religion usually plays an important role in families, who perform some sort of worship daily at home.

FOOD HABITS

- ❖ Indians eat with their right hand. The left is considered unclean as it is used for toilet purposes. At most it is used to hold a glass of water if one is eating with the right. The left hand is usually kept on the table.

- ❖ Many Indians are vegetarian and they do not consider this as a dietary restriction. But generally it can be said that even if a person is not a vegetarian, if he/she is a Hindu then no beef will be eaten; if a Muslim, then no pork.
- ❖ Many Muslims who are non-vegetarian and eat many sorts of meat/poultry/ fish will only eat Halal (a method of slaughter, compare Kosher). They may opt to be vegetarian in countries/cultures/families where it is not possible for them to get Halal.
- ❖ Indian food tends to be spicy, pungent, oily, and often deep-fried.
- ❖ Usually the main staple of the meal is a variety of freshly made hot breads or rice. This is supplemented with a small portion of vegetables, pulses or a meat dish. Pickles and chips are often also taken. Dessert or sweet dish is not served daily.
- ❖ Meat is only an additive portion of a meal, not the main portion. So even those who eat meat are used to eating a lot of vegetable dishes plus the staple of bread and rice.
- ❖ Indians love to eat anywhere, any time and meals are a family affair or a time for socializing.

INDIAN SOCIETY

- ❖ Each part of India has its own peculiar traits, a bit like a country in Europe: north Indians are gregarious and like adventure and fun. West Indians are practical and good in business. South and east are the knowledge societies and more civilized too, as historically they have been insular (most invaders from Central Asia from 10th century onwards came over the NW frontiers and penetrated only as far south as the Indian Deccan, leaving southern India untouched.
- ❖ Indian society is family-oriented.
- ❖ Indians are group-loving people and religious festivals and fairs involve many.
- ❖ Crowds are everywhere, especially in big cities.
- ❖ The concept or “peace and quiet” is almost non-existent in urban India. There is always a myriad of noises, traffic, people, vendors/sellers, loudspeakers (places of worship or politicians), children playing, etc.
- ❖ A guest is treated like God, even in the poorest of families.
- ❖ It is generally considered impolite or rude to say ‘no’ directly or to decline an invitation (even if you know you cannot accept). In cultures that are more straightforward this can lead to confusion.
- ❖ On the other hand, it is also considered impolite to appear greedy or desirous of something. So when offered a cup of tea or a spontaneous ‘gift’, normally an Indian will say: oh no thank you! The formality of offering is usually repeated at least three times before a person will say yes, if at all. Often the tea is simply served.

- ❖ On occasions where wrapped gifts are given to someone, it is considered polite to accept the gift with a thank you, but not to open the gift then and there in front of the giver.
- ❖ People love to eat and have a good time and there are often get-togethers. Indians are hospitable and like to share.
- ❖ Socialising is usually casual, informal, warm and often spontaneous as opposed to being planned well ahead.
- ❖ Time is cyclical in India. The Indian concept of the meaning and relevance of time is different. Many Indians also believe in re-birth, so this time on earth is put in that perspective.
- ❖ Indian Standard Time (IST) is 5 and ½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT/UTC). We refer to IST as Indian Stretchable Time! Indians are not known for punctuality.
- ❖ India is now facing rapid changes due to globalisation and the invasion of technology. TV is all-invasive, especially cable TV with over 100 channels.
- ❖ The old world charm is fading fast and giving way to globalisation and consumerism. This can be seen in clothes, career choices, cars, houses and lifestyles.
- ❖ India introduced economic reforms leading to liberalization starting in 1990s and ever since the changes have been evident; but since 2000 the changes are mind-boggling.

INDIAN TEENAGERS

- ❖ Young people are respectful of elders and teachers.
- ❖ They seldom have discipline problems/issues.
- ❖ Youngsters seek guidance and permission from parents and elders. Generally, they also share most things with their parents and do not hide things.
- ❖ They may discuss and disagree but in the end they accept and go by their parent's decision in most matters.
- ❖ Dating and sex are very unusual.
- ❖ It is not common with physical contact or hugging, except within the family.
- ❖ Smoking and drugs are very unusual.
- ❖ Eating disorders and psychological problems are not common.

- ❖ The Indian youth can be mature emotionally but immature in practical matters.
- ❖ Indian youth is rather innocent and young for their age in some senses.
- ❖ Generally, the family is a cocoon and parents are protective, but it is now more common that urban parents encourage their children to be more independent within certain limits. This cannot be compared with the independence of many western teenagers, especially Europeans.
- ❖ Girls are generally more tidy and mature.
- ❖ Boys are pampered and used to being fussed over by mothers, sisters, and later, wives.
- ❖ Usually Indian teenagers are materially not so spoiled and know how to make-do with less.