

Indian Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: Republic of India, or Bharat in Hindu

Primary Language(s): Hindi and English, 23 recognized

Percent of Iowa's Population: 0.4% (2017)

Background

India is a country that consists of 29 states, 6 union territories, and the Delhi national capital territory. Its start dates back to 2600BC with the Indus civilization which is known as a highly sophisticated urbanized culture. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism all originated in India. It has been invaded and ruled under other countries including the British Empire (1858-1947). When British rule ended, the land known as India was split into 2 countries: India and Pakistan (with Bangladesh now split from Pakistan). It is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, home to many religions/languages/sects. Attempts have been made to increase the essence of nationhood, though tensions and outbreaks of violence have remained between differing groups. Legislation has done much to dissolution the previously disadvantaged parts of society like "untouchable" castes, tribal populations, women, etc.

Currently it lays claim to Delhi, Mumbai/Bombay, and Kolkata/Calcutta—3 of the most populous and cosmopolitan cities in the world. Mohandes Ghandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru are two of their more famous leaders.



The National Flag of India: Saffron for courage and sacrifice, white for peace and truth, green for faith and chivalry. The ashoka Chaktra in the middle represents the eternal wheel of law and need to always move forward.



Education and Literacy

Most families place a high value on education, as most Indian immigrants have strong English skills and are highly educated.

Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

It is taboo to:

- Shake hands with a member of the opposite sex unless they offer to do so first
- Wink or whistle
- Kill an animal, especially cows

It is considered polite to ask permission to use a person's first name, and to smile during the conversation.

People typically eat with their hands or with bread, though it is considered unclean to touch the communal food with the same hand you will eat with.

Holidays & Celebrations

Diwali is the most important holiday to India, which is a 5 day festival known as the festival of lights. Lights are lit during the festival to emulate the inner light that protects them from spiritual darkness. Holi, known as the festival of colors or love, happens in the spring.

India has 3 national holidays, but many other dependent on religion. Most employees receive at least 15 days of holidays per year.

Cakes and sweets are eaten for festivals

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Health Disparities

Life expectancy has increased by 25 years since WWII, and death from starvation has become rare. Malnutrition remains widespread, in 2011 it was estimated that 30% of the children population was underweight. Many lack access to safe drinking water seasonally or year round which can make bottled water preferred. Higher rates of blindness and tuberculosis are seen, as well as illnesses/death from waterborne organisms. People who migrate to the U.S. have an increased risk of Diabetes, Hypertension, CVD along with complications of these. This is thought to be from change in food habits and a more sedentary lifestyle.

Traditional Foods & Meal Patterns

There is much regional variation in Indian cuisine, the every day diet of most lack variety. 2-3 meals are consumed daily, depending on income. Staples vary by region: rice in most of east and south, flat wheat bread/chapatti in the north and northwest, bread from pearl millet in Maharashtra. Meals normally also include dal (puree of a legume), a few vegetables, and yogurt if they can afford it. Meat consumed normally includes lamb and chicken; cows are considered sacred. Fish, fresh milk, fruits, and vegetables are widely consumed. Tea is the preferred drink in the north and east, coffee is in the south.

Considerations for WIC

- Educating on benefits of colostrum—though although in India almost half of babies are exclusively breastfed to 6 months, it is normally started after the colostrum has been fully expressed and baby is given other fluids until then.
- Thriftiness is a common value, so taking this into account as motivation when discussing healthy lifestyle change can make it more likely to be successful.
- Motivating factors for parents focus around being a good role model and avoiding sickness, as they may not have much family/social support here to depend on.
- Encourage preventative care, as can be reluctant to go in for minor health issues. They put high value on considering the needs of other first.

What's the Iowa Connection?

Normally migrants from India come here to further their education or to obtain employment within the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math). Top places for Iowa include Polk County, as well as Ames and Iowa City. They normally achieve higher than average incomes vs other immigrant groups and are often the most educated.



Children celebrating Holi

How are we Living?

Both marriage partners are expected to work, with women responsible for many of the household duties. Family units may include extended family, but the nuclear family is becoming more common in urban areas. Many marriages are arranged by parents/elders, with divorce rate very low as marriage is thought to be for life.

