

Chennai Tips

From Several Bose Hippies put Together

HOTELS:

Residency Towers. (walking distance to Ponday Bazaar). Raintree: a bit more pricier but very nice. Buffet and 2 different restaurants there. Pool and fitness center.

Ponday Bazaar:

Have local shops. Most interesting shop was housewares where stainless steel pots & other sundries were sold. Found some inexpensive strainers to make yocheese and it was a 3 person process to check out. I was told that there are two good stores to buy silk, one was Kumaran, sorry, forgot the other name because it was closed when I went. It is Kanchipuram silk from Tamil Nadu. The guide at the historic sites also mentioned Kanchipuram. He offered to take us, but I think it may have been 100km from the resorts. Found one shop with the Madras plaids. Pricy since the thread count was high 80 & 120. Not quite 400R/meter Found another shop across the street that had cottons from Jaipur, very cheap about 49R/meter Long cotton skirts, a variety. I bought one that had some embroider and jewels and another that had a screened elephant print. 200-250R/each Housewares store--okay, so when I travel to another country, I always try to hit a local store just to see what's different. Couldn't figure out what all the different stainless containers were for, just interesting. What I bought were some cheap fine mesh nylon strainers to make yocheese. Less than 14R each and light to pack--Indian kitchen gadgets for your foodie friends?

Spencer Plaza, Chennai

Music World. CDs were 150R. I bought some Indian fusion music--traditional & Western instruments. Jewlery, clothes, and many things here. Like an American mall. Credit cards are ok here. We had the hotel arrange a car for the trip there and back and charged it to our room.

Mahabalipuram,

The hotel driver wanted to stop at the clothing shop, we didn't want the pressure of having to buy, so we had him park by the bus station/taxi stand, then just walked down the street. There are several shops, but we only stopped at one. Mostly bags/purses from Rajasthan. Lots of different styles/colors, embroidered/ embellished. Prices were 150-250R depending on the embellishments & size. He also had pillow covers (I think they were 150R) and travel bags (350R) Silver jewelry from India & Thailand—I bought silver earrings with a cutout design (200R). Also temple items from Tibet, the workmanship is more detailed than the Indian stuff.

Mamallapuram, the sights.

5 Rathas, the vendors will approach you. Prices are very negotiable and drop as you head toward the car. Okay, so this is where I paid a little too much. Paintings on silk were 500R--think this may be an okay price. Nested elephants carved from marble or granite. The price on the double elephant in granite dropped to 300R by the time we reached the car. There were some spheres carved with gods. Possibly a unique paperweight? Just remember it is rock and therefore heavy. Seashore Temple, there is a government sanctioned store inside the park grounds. Even here, prices are negotiable. Lots of variety, silk shawls, silver enameled pill boxes, the carved elephants, etc. In the back room are silk blankets, wide selection of colors. Of course I bought the one which was a patchwork of old saris. There are also vendors set up outside the park gates. Social commentary-- money spent at the gov't shop trickles down to the artisans, not sure how much. My thought is money spent with the smaller vendors probably goes directly to feeding their families, which is how I justify the fact I paid too much :)

Ideal Beach Resort:

Specify a ground floor room. Rooms are spacious rooms. The toilet was higher in the ground floor room (#61). Not as plush as Temple Bay or Fisherman's Cove. Can have wifi access in the rooms for a laptop. Nice place to spend time after surgery. There are vendors on the beach who are the people in the fishing village. This area was devastated during the bug tsunami and will see people still trying to rebuild.

Touring the sights--Tour in the afternoon because it is cooler. Try using a pedometer to track walking. I estimate the tour to Sea Shore Temple, the 5 Rathas and the murals was not quite 3 km. The longest walk is to the Temple. My advice is plan this towards the end of your stay, I did it 7 days post-op.

If you haven't been outside the US before, be prepared for the vendors. Bargaining is an absolute must. Our driver from Ideal started at the 5 Rathas where we "picked up" a tour guide. Bala was quite knowledgeable. I'm guessing that he may get a cut from the vendors that we purchased from, I know I paid too much, but I'm okay with it since I figure families will eat. Prices will drop as you walk towards the car. Even in the government shop at the Sea Shore Temple, prices are negotiable. We tipped Bala at the end of the tour. Because I took it easy and shopped too much, we didn't see the town. We went back the next day, had the driver park near the bus station and then just walked around. Even

in these shops, some prices are negotiable. The driver wanted to drop us in front of a sari shop, but we didn't want to feel obligated to buy which is why we had him park around the corner. We returned to Chennai a day before our flight so that Dr. Bose could check my incision. This time we stayed at the Rain Tree which is in a residential area. I think it is a bit plusher than the Residency Towers. We took an autorickshaw over to Spencer Plaza to check out some Indian music & movies. The hotel negotiated the price over (60R). Coming back, we negotiated 80R, but tipped. Make sure the automan doesn't take you to "a friend's shop" just to look. That's why we paid the extra 20R. We enjoyed dinner at the Above Sea Level restaurant and plan to do it before we leave for the airport tonight. The Sunday buffet also had tasty Indian food. On Sunday we took the hotel car & driver to sight see a little. Ram, the driver was a good tour guide. We also tipped him. It may seem harsh, but we ignored the beggars. Ram indicated that we shouldn't do it because it encourages them. Coming from Bangkok, we understood the problem. In Bangkok, many of the beggars are run by a criminal element. Not so in Chennai, but I think the government doesn't want it encouraged. One other thing about my room at the Rain Tree, the full length mirror is on the entrance door, so you can practice walking & checking out your gait. Oh and we did get extended checkout until 4. My flight leaves at midnight. We plan to hang around the hotel until it's time to leave because my husband says there is nothing at the airport, especially good food.

HOSPITAL:

You can wear a hospital gown or can wear a sleep shirt when you feel like Many say satin pj's work best for sliding in and out of bed. I brought hospital scrubs and shorts to wear in the hospital. Sandals are also helpful and don't require much in the way of effort to put on.

Recommend bringing chocolates as treats for the nurses. I did bring some M&M minis which I put into some inexpensive Thai coin purses which I asked one of the ass't sisters (nurse) to distribute. I'm assuming these got to the girls. I also brought a few candy miniatures which I set on the table and became a treat for other staff. I'd just bring a big bag of chocolates, the kind you pick up at Costco/Sam's, like Kisses or something. Besides the doctors, nurses & PTs, you get visits from the cleaning staff, the meal delivery guy, the dietician and the laundry guy. Some of these people will be in several times during the day. These are probably the lowest paid staff and I think would really enjoy the treats. I'd wished I'd brought more. I admit, I did eat a few of the chocolates myself, post-op. Some people brought clothes and toys for the local orphanages, wish I thought of that

I know there has been talk about getting your system regular after surgery. I did bring a few dried fruits & nuts, but mainly I made it a point to have fresh cut fruit & yogurt (curd) several times a day. The fruit was generally a blend of pineapple, papaya & apples, sometimes a few grapes. I stashed my leftovers in the fridge so I could snack on it throughout the day. I like plain yogurt, but if you like it sweeter, bring a jar of jam. I forgot to bring oatmeal, but they have an instant cereal mix packet. I'm not sure if it's an Asian thing, but it's a blend of oats and other grains & a creamer. I did get thoroughly sick of the taste by the fourth day post-op. Scrambled eggs were dry & grainy, omeletes were much better. I liked the fish, but I think it was mackerel which is a stronger tasting fish. I tended to eat more of the Indian dishes so other than a grilled cheese sandwich, I'm not sure what the Western food was like. My helper didn't arrive until the day before I was discharged, so I was limited to whatever the hospital had.

If you stay at Ideal Beach, you need to bring small washcloths, if you use them. They provided bath, hand & pool towels. I had the princess experience at the airport. We used a car & driver from the Rain Tree. The Rain Tree has someone at the airport to meet you and handle your bags up to the check-in gate. I crutched this part. Chennai airport only allows passengers into the international terminal, so there are many Indians outside the terminal seeing of family/friends. Once at check-in, the Rain Tree guy made sure I got the wheelchair I had requested. Using a wheelchair jumps you to the head of the immigration line. At that point, I'm not sure what happens if you're flying economy because my friend's husband bumped me up to Business Class and I was wheeled to the lounge. The wheelchair driver disappeared because apparently there was only one wheelchair on the check-in side. He reappeared with a different wheelchair when it was time to board, took me to the head of the line and helped me up to the plane entrance. I did tip all the people who helped me. The driver told me that poor Indians earn 3K-5K rupees/month. One who is middle class earns 15K+. Rent for a poor person is about 1500/month. Gasoline is about 50R/liter or \$4/gal. Even though I'm doing well with the crutches, the distances certainly warranted the use of the wheelchair and the special immigration treatment meant avoiding standing in long lines. I hope never to have to experience this princess treatment until I'm well into my nineties.

FAQ:

1. How do you pay for Dr. Bose/ hospital fees?

Can pay with cash, credit /debit card, money order or cashier check?

TIPS: When using your credit/ debit cards make sure you contact your bank ahead of time and have them raise your limit and explain to them that you will be in India having major surgery and paying your hospital bill with it. You can pretty much use credit/debit cards everywhere you go in India.

2. How much money can you bring into India (is there a limit)?

Not sure about the answer to that, I know there is a limit to bringing no more than \$10k into the U.S.

3. Once in India where did you convert US money into rupees?

I did at the hotel, you can tip in U.S. Dollars too, which I did before I was able to change to rupees

4. Did you HAVE to tip in rupees or is it OK to tip in US dollars?

Just answered that one above.

5. How do I figure out an appropriate tip (is there a certain percentage like we use here in the US)?

No, they are very appreciative to whatever you tip, it is a very poor country.

6. How did you tip at the airports? I may fly to United Emirates, Germany or France to change planes so how do you tip in those airports?

I stopped in Delhi, stayed overnight there before taking a flight to Chennai, I just tipped in U.S. Dollars

6. How do I know the travel restrictions for each "leg"? Is it airport restrictions or airlines restrictions?

I believe it would be airport restrictions

7. What about electric converters to charge my cell phone, laptop, iPod, etc? Do I need that for the hospital too?

I bought the \$7 grounded India plug from walkabouttravel.com, that is all you really need. They will tell you that you need the transformer too but I never used that one which was a lot more money. the \$7 plug worked fine, make sure you get the grounded one and not the two pronged one. Your private hospital room has a computer with internet access right in your room, it also has a refrigerator and water cooler. It will probably have a lot more amenities in the new International wing.

8. As I will be fed hospital food when I'm the patient are there accommodations for your "attendant" (my daughter), like a cafeteria or can I request trays be brought to the room for her?

9. Immunizations?

I took the typhoid shot from the local health department in the US. Also the antimalarial pills (I got the script from my GP). I brought insect repellent for the mosquitoes that carry disease. Some people don't take any precautions and have done ok. Do not drink the tap water, not safe. You'll drink "Aquafina", which readily available via room service. Don't eat from street vendors.

They will feed your helper too, she can order off the menu with you and charge it to your hospital bill, it is really cheap, I mean very little. The food at Apollo Hospital was incredible to me. I love a lot of taste in my food and their food definitely had that, they have two menus, one for local cuisine and another American menu. You get to order off a menu each day and they bring you a lot of food several times during the day.

Seems like basic questions but this is my first time out of the country and I'm starting to obsess as my time draws near. It is a wonderful adventure and Dr. Bose is incredible, to me he is the best in the world.