

2021 SECURITY BRIEFING

FULBRIGHT AND RELATED EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES



REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICE U.S. Consulate General, Chennai, India

Please review this RSO Security Briefing and acknowledge your completion by printing, signing, and returning only the acknowledgement page.

Ref(s):

12 FAM 422.2: Security Briefings and Directives
[Travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov): India Country Specific Information
<http://in.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/chennai/>

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION:

India, the world's largest democracy, has a very diverse population, geography, and climate. India is the world's second most populous country, and the world's seventh largest country in area.

U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO INDIA DESCRIPTION:

The U.S. Mission to India consists of a U.S. Embassy and four Consulates General. U.S. Embassy New Delhi is located in the country's capital. The Mission's four Consulates are **Chennai**, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai. Thirty-seven USG agencies are represented by Mission India.

U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL CHENNAI, INDIA:

The U.S. Consulate General in Chennai is located at U.S. Consulate General, Gemini Flyover, Teynampet, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600006; telephone +91-44-2857-4000. Chennai's hours of operation are 08:30 - 17:00, Monday to Friday, excluding American and Indian holidays (see final page).

The Chennai consular district includes the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and the Union Territories of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep Islands, and Puducherry.

The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line for police in India is "100", fire is "101" and ambulance is "102". An additional consolidated emergency number on mobiles phones only for police, fire, and ambulance service is "112". For Apollo Hospital ambulance service, the number is "1066."

CHENNAI CITY DESCRIPTION:

Chennai is the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Located on the Coromandel Coast off the Bay of Bengal, it is the biggest industrial and commercial center in South India and a major cultural, economic, and educational center. Chennai has a population of approximately 8.5 million people, and the city covers approximately 426 square kilometers.

THE REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICE:

The Regional Security Officer (RSO) is a federal law enforcement officer who is the principal advisor to the Consul General on all security and law enforcement matters. In addition to the RSO, the office is staffed with one Assistant Regional Security Officer (ARSO), one ARSO-Investigator, and one Office Management Assistant (OMA).

Some of the responsibilities of the RSO Office include: protection of all USG personnel and property; protection of classified and sensitive information; conducting criminal, terrorist, and personnel investigations for the State Department and other USG agencies; certain counter-intelligence activities; and liaison with the host-nation security elements on security matters and investigations.

CRIME:

There is moderate risk from crime in Chennai. As in any other major city, crime does occur. Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu, is regarded as one of the safest cities in India. Violent crimes in Chennai, especially ones directed against foreigners, have traditionally been uncommon.

The greater Chennai metropolitan area contains over 12 million people, making it the fourth-largest urban area in India. Petty crime, especially theft of personal property, is common, particularly on trains or buses. Pickpockets can be very adept, and women have reported having their bags snatched, purse straps cut, or the bottom of their purses slit without their knowledge. Pickpocketing occurs routinely on public transport systems. Thieves also snatch cell phones and jewelry from pedestrians while walking on busy streets. Do not carry large sums of money or display expensive jewelry or electronics.

Be self-aware and use good personal security practices to reduce your chance of becoming a target. For example, ensure all windows and doors are locked at your residence, hotel room, and vehicle, and verify valuables are secured and out of plain sight.

There are numerous reported incidents from foreign women of verbal and physical harassment by groups of men. Known locally as “eve teasing,” these incidents can be quite frightening. Eve teasing can occur anytime or anywhere but most frequently has happened in crowded areas such as in marketplaces, train stations, buses, and public streets. The harassment can range from sexually suggestive or lewd comments, to catcalls, to outright groping. South India is known for conservative and traditional social mores. Women traveling in South India are advised to respect local dress and customs and to dress modestly. Even wearing short pants in some areas can be viewed as provocative.

Females should avoid traveling alone. Police officials recommend that foreign travelers register with the local police when traveling to their district. Observe stringent security precautions, including avoiding using public transportation after dark without the company of known and trustworthy companions. Restrict

evening entertainment to well-known venues and avoid walking in isolated areas alone at any time of day. Carry a fully charged mobile phone and back-up battery with pre-programmed emergency contact numbers, and respect local dress and custom, with an emphasis on dressing conservatively.

Although reports of rape are lower in South India, recent sexual attacks against female visitors in tourist areas underline that foreign women are at risk and should exercise vigilance.

TERRORISM:

There is considerable risk from terrorism in Chennai. India continues to experience terrorist and insurgent activities that can affect U.S. citizens directly or indirectly. Terror attacks have targeted public places (e.g., hotels, trains, train stations, markets, cinemas, mosques, and restaurants in large urban areas) including some frequented by foreigners.

A number of terrorist groups operate in India. Many are seeking political recognition, and their attacks are not aimed at killing people; as a result, most terrorist attacks in India produce few casualties. Maoists (“Naxalites”) are the most active insurgent group in India. The Naxalites typically attack government officials/buildings and destroy public institutions (derailing rail lines). While they are responsible for more terrorist attacks in India than any other organization, they have not specifically targeted U.S. citizens or foreigners, but there is a risk that visitors could become unintended victims of indiscriminate targeting.

Anti-Western terrorist groups, including some on the U.S. Government's list of foreign terrorist organizations, are active in India, including Islamist extremist groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami (HUJI), Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM), Indian Mujahideen (IM), Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT).

In the past, Tamil Nadu has experienced a number of terrorist attacks, including the detonation of a small bomb under the Gemini Flyover near the U.S. Consulate in January 1998 and a series of 19 bomb explosions in the city of Coimbatore a month later.

On May 01, 2014, Chennai experienced a deadly terrorist attack at the Chennai Central Rail Station. Two improvised explosive devices were detonated in coaches on the Bengaluru–Guwahati Express killing one passenger and injuring nine. Both devices were low yield ammonium nitrate-based explosives with nails and small metal balls as shrapnel that were activated by timers.

Bengaluru has also experienced terrorist attacks. On December 28, 2014, an improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated on the street outside a popular restaurant, killing one and injuring five. In April 2013, an IED concealed inside a motorcycle exploded near the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) Karnataka New State Office in Bengaluru, the capital of the Indian state of Karnataka, injuring 16 people. Police investigation determined both devices were constructed using ammonium nitrate with timers for detonation.

In April 2019, Terrorists conducted a series of attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday killing 290 people. Many of the terrorists had links to Tamil Nadu and Kerala in South India.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE:

Demonstrations, protests, and celebrations in Chennai are commonplace and generally non-aggressive, but the potential exists for them to turn violent.

Demonstrations and general strikes, or “bandh,” can cause inconvenience. Large religious ceremonies that attract hundreds of thousands of people can result in dangerous and often life-threatening stampedes. Local demonstrations can begin spontaneously and escalate with little warning, disrupting transportation systems and city services and posing risks to travelers. In response to such events, Indian authorities occasionally impose curfews and/or restrict travel. You are urged to avoid demonstrations and rallies as they have the potential for violence, especially immediately preceding and following elections and religious festivals (particularly when Hindu and Muslim festivals coincide). Tensions between castes and religious groups can also result in disruptions and violence.

Avoid demonstrations, large crowds, or substantial gatherings of people and do not attempt to drive through them. It is strongly recommended you avoid participation in demonstrations. If you find yourself caught in the middle of one, contact the RSO immediately.

TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS:

Travel by road in India can be difficult and at times hazardous. Per a WHO global status report, more than 231,000 people lose their lives in road accidents every year in India, which means 26 people die every hour due to road accidents. Chennai has led India in reported traffic accidents for the past 13 years. Travelers should remember to keep car doors locked at all times and use seatbelts in both rear and front seats where available.

Outside major traffic areas, main roads and other roads are often poorly maintained and congested. Even main roads frequently have only two lanes with poor visibility and inadequate warning markers. On the few divided highways, one can expect to meet local transportation traveling in the wrong direction, often without lights. Heavy traffic is the norm and includes (but is not limited to) overloaded trucks and buses, scooters, pedestrians, animal-powered carts, bicycles, and free-roaming livestock.

In order to drive in India, you must have either a valid Indian driver’s license or a valid U.S. driver’s license and an international driver’s permit. Because of difficult road and traffic conditions and the limitations of driving licenses, you may wish to consider hiring a local driver or taking a ridesharing service such as UBER or OLA.

Exercise extreme caution when crossing streets, even in marked pedestrian areas. It is important to be alert while crossing streets and intersections, especially after dark as traffic laws are rarely followed. On Indian roads, the safest policy is to always assume that other drivers will not respond to a traffic situation in the same way you would in the United States. Buses and trucks often run red lights and merge directly into traffic at yield points and traffic circles.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION:

Public transportation (in the form of trains and taxis) is authorized at post although alternate, more secure, forms of travel are recommended. Travel on public buses should be avoided; they are overcrowded and

unreliable. The best recommendation is to hire reliable and registered taxis (radio taxis) and avoid traveling alone, especially at night.

Use taxis from hotels, restaurants, and airports rather than hailing them on the street, or use rideshare services Uber or Ola. If you encounter threatening situations, call “100” for police assistance and then notify the RSO. Although the use of an auto rickshaw (3-wheeled vehicle) is not prohibited, the RSO strongly discourages the use of this form of transportation due to the lack of safety and security the vehicle provides. Auto rickshaw drivers are also known to perpetrate crimes against passengers, especially at night and against women.

PERSONAL SECURITY MEASURES:

There is no evidence to suggest that criminals specifically target American citizens—most victims are merely targets of opportunity or in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, pickpockets naturally seek lucrative targets, and foreigners in general are perceived as such. Pickpockets and other petty thieves are particularly active in public markets, tourist attractions, and crowded streets. Wearing expensive jewelry and watches, as well as displays of large amounts of cash can draw unwanted attention. Limit the amount of personal belongings you carry with you. Carry your money in your front pockets and limit the amount of credit cards you carry on your person.

Of course, no place is 100% safe, so it is important to keep in mind that resisting or challenging an armed assailant may prompt a more violent response. Statistically, those who offer no resistance when confronted by armed assailants are usually not hurt. It is highly recommended that you do not venture out alone and particularly not to the less affluent parts of the city. If you wish to visit restaurants/nightspots in other less frequented areas of the city, go with a group or in pairs—there is some safety in numbers. Always remember to maintain your level of awareness and be cognizant of events around you. Furthermore, be mindful of your alcohol consumption so you do not put yourself in a situation that could have been avoided.

As with any “big city” environment, it is fundamental that all personnel take responsibility for their own actions and always remain conscious of your surroundings. Maintain a high level of self-awareness, watch for suspicious activity, vary your routes and times, and **DO NOT BECOME PREDICTABLE**. This guidance applies whether on foot or in your vehicle.

HOTEL SECURITY:

Never give out your key and keep your location, especially your hotel room number, confidential. Always make sure you use the room’s door chain, deadlock, and viewer while inside your room. Make sure you not only lock your valuables in the hotel safe but also any important travel documents and passports. Watch for suspicious activity as you enter the hotel and your room. If you have visitors, especially ones that you have just met, have them sign in at the hotel and show their identification. Do not open hotel room doors for unidentified or unexpected visitors – ask for identification first. Develop a plan or emergency course of action should a crisis situation develop such as a fire or demonstration occurs in/around your hotel. Be aware that criminals are drawn to hotel areas due to the large number of foreign tourists whom they view as affluent and easy targets.

HEALTH CONCERNS:

South India does have health concerns. One should take normal precautions with regard to drinking tap water and eating fruits, vegetables and salads. Individuals may also react adversely to increased levels of pollution. Short-term TDY travelers to South India carry an additional risk because of the lack of time to acclimatize and may require some time to adjust to the food, dehydration, and sleep patterns which all can adversely affect blood pressure, digestion, stress and energy levels.

Outbreaks of mosquito-borne viral diseases such as Dengue fever and the Chikungunya virus occur in various parts of South India each year. Outbreaks of Avian Influenza (H5N1 virus) occur intermittently in eastern India. Tuberculosis is an increasingly serious health concern in India.

The quality of medical care in India varies considerably. South India is no different. Despite reports of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in hospitals, in general travelers should not delay or avoid treatment for urgent or emergent medical situations. Contact the Consulate immediately if you have any health concerns.

PREPARING FOR AN EMERGENCY

In the event of an emergency, standard means of communication, such as email and cell phones, may be cut off. All Fulbright grantees should have a back-up communication plan and should discuss it with your Fulbright administrator. **Always be proactive in contacting your Fulbright administrator if there is a crisis or incident. The RSO recommends having a PACE plan: Primary, Alternate, Contingency and Emergency means of communication.**

Fulbright grantees do not fall under Chief of Mission (COM) authority and cannot be ordered to depart, but as U.S. government-sponsored grantees, they are strongly urged to follow procedures, as well as security and safety advice established by the COM. If grantees refuse to leave, their status and all benefits, including stipends, may be removed and they will be required to accept personal responsibility in a signed statement for remaining in country.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

For any kind of security-related problem or emergency, contact your Fulbright administrator or the RSO. *RSO staff may be reached by phone through Post One and via the e-mail Chennai_RSO_FSO@state.gov.*

1. **Consulate Post One:** +91 44 2857 4200 (Main); +91 98 4128 1120 (Duty Officer)
2. **Chennai Police Emergency:** 100
3. **Fire Department:** 101
4. **Ambulance (Apollo Hospital):** 1066

DIALING INSTRUCTION FOR CHENNAI:

Note: If calling from a phone with no “+”, replace “+” with “00”

Calling from CHN Cell Phone to CHN Cell Phone: +91 XXXXXX – XXXXX
(Dial +91 or just dial the 10-digit mobile number)

Calling from CHN Cell Phone to CHN Landline: 044 XXXX – XXXX

Calling from CHN Landline to CHN Cell Phone: XXXXXX – XXXXX
(Dial 10-digit mobile number)

Calling from U.S. Cell Phone in CHN to CHN Cell Phone: +91 XXXXXX – XXXXX

Calling from U.S. Cell Phone in CHN to CHN Landline: +91 44 XXXX - XXXX

Calling from U.S. Cell Phone to US Cell in CHN: +1 (area code) + XXX - XXXXX

Calling from U.S. to CHN Landline: +91 44 XXXX – XXXX

Calling from U.S. to CHN Cell Phone: +91 XXXXXX – XXXXX

AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL, CHENNAI, INDIA
LIST OF OFFICIAL HOLIDAYS FOR YEAR 2021

DATE	DAY	HOLIDAY	TYPE
January 1	Friday	New Year's Day	American
January 14	Thursday	Pongal	Indian
January 18	Monday	Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.	American
January 26	Tuesday	Republic Day	Indian
February 15	Monday	Washington's Birthday	American
April 2	Friday	Good Friday	Indian
April 14	Wednesday	Tamil New Year's Day and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Birthday(not applicable for USCS Bengaluru)	Indian
May 14	Friday	Id ul Fitr (Ramzan)	Indian
May 31	Monday	Memorial Day	American
July 5 *	Monday	Independence Day	American
August 16 †	Monday	Independence Day (observed)	Indian
September 6	Monday	Labor Day	American
September 10	Friday	Vinayakar Chaturthi	Indian
October 1 †	Friday	Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday (observed)	Indian
October 11	Monday	Columbus Day	American
October 14	Thursday	Ayutha Pooja	Indian
November 1	Monday	Karnataka Rajyotsava Day (for USCS Bengaluru only)	Indian
November 4	Thursday	Deepavali	Indian
November 11	Thursday	Veterans Day	American
November 25	Thursday	Thanksgiving Day	American
December 24 *	Friday	Christmas Day	American

*When U.S. holidays fall on a Saturday or Sunday, the holiday is usually observed on the preceding Friday or following Monday, respectively.