

# GOING TO PUNE

Kirsten Agar Ward offers a practical guide for visitors to the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune.

## BEFORE GOING

- ☪ Apply! For details of how to apply, see page 39 of this magazine. Don't go until your place is confirmed.
- ☪ Passport & Visa. Make sure you have at least 6 months on your passport. Apply for a visa (it can save a lot of time and hassle to pay an agency to do this - ask your travel agent).
- ☪ Check what immunisations you need.
- ☪ Try to learn the Sanskrit names of the *yogāsanas*.

## GETTING THERE

### To Mumbai

- ☪ We have found it can make life a lot easier to get a direct flight to Mumbai. (for those flying from UK - currently only British Airways or Air India fly direct from Heathrow).
- ☪ Flights tend to arrive very early in the morning. You may wish to schedule a rest in Mumbai. We prefer to go direct to Pune so all the travelling is done in one go.
- ☪ Iyengar yoga practitioners are welcome to visit the Mumbai Institute (Iyengar Yogashraya, 126 Senapatti Bapat Marg. Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 013, phone 2494 8416).
- ☪ Hotels in Mumbai are expensive (prices ranging from Rs. 800 to Rs. 8000+).
- ☪ Tea at the Taj Mahal hotel adjacent to Gate of India can be fun though expensive.

### From Mumbai to Pune:

- ☪ **Coach** from the international airport directly to Pune. Tickets are Rs. 500 and can be bought at the airport
- ☪ **Bus**. Take a bus to Pune (approx. 3 to 4 hours). Catch buses at Dadar which is about 30-40 mins drive from the airport and about 10 mins from the Mumbai Institute. There are ordinary buses (Rs 125) every 15 mins and an A/C bus (Rs 300) on the hour. These generally leave on time and tickets can be booked once you reach the bus station. However, it may be slightly difficult on festive occasions. There are pre-paid taxi booths at the airport. It is BEST to take these.
- ☪ **Taxi**. Taxis are also available at Dadar opposite the bus station (approx. 3 hours). Obviously a more expensive option. Can be more comfortable only if you hire the entire taxi. You also have the option of sharing it with 4 other people.

- ☪ **Train**. The train station is CST (aka VT) or Dadar. Tickets are best booked in advance. Your travel agent may be able to do this. Travelling unreserved is tough especially after a long flight
- ☪ **Plane**. There are flights from Mumbai to Pune operated by Indian Airlines and Jet Airways. You will need to go to the domestic airport. Free coaches are available. Apart from the expense, you may have to wait a long time for the connecting flight.
- ☪ **Private car & driver**. Book from the airport or your hotel /apartment owners may be able to put you in touch with a private hire company or even arrange it for you.

## STAYING IN PUNE

Ask someone who has already been to recommend a place. These days with the internet it is easy to reserve accommodation from UK. This will make life easier when you get there.

You can stay in a hotel (from approx Rs 250 per room per night, Rs 1200 will get you a very comfortable room). Note: Indian hotel rates are given for the room not per person. See [www.bksiyengar.com](http://www.bksiyengar.com) for a list of hotels many of which have agreed to a concession of 10% to Iyengar Yoga students. No harm in asking.

Alternatively you can rent an apartment, which will enable you to do your own cooking (eating restaurant food ALL the time is not great). There are several apartments close to the Institute. Ask someone who has been before or ask at RIMYI when you get there.





## AT RIMYI

It is a good idea to call in at the Institute as soon as possible after arriving in Pune to register with Pandurang Rao (known as Pandu), the Secretary, and find out which classes you will be attending. You need to take with you the balance of fees owing and two passport-sized photos. Pandu's office is in the foyer and is open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 9-11 am and Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday 4-6 pm. The Institute is closed on Sundays. The institute is in the area of Pune called Shivajinagar. It is on Hare Krishna Mandir Road. It is helpful to say to rickshaw drivers that it is in Model Colony off FC (Ferguson College) Road or Ganesh Kind Road.

## General Dos and Don'ts at RIMYI

- ☪ First and foremost remember how fortunate you are; out of the millions of Iyengar yoga practitioners worldwide only a very few get the chance to study at RIMYI. It is not appropriate to have a demanding or complaining attitude. Remember this is not primarily a financial transaction; rather, you are here to study at the feet of our Guruji. Be appreciative, polite, ready to study.
- ☪ Footwear (including socks) must be removed and left in the area provided at the entrance. It is NOT acceptable to bring footwear into the building, even inside a bag.
- ☪ It is impolite to point the soles of your feet at others. Obviously in a class situation this is unavoidable but in other situations it should be followed.
- ☪ Clothing should be modest, especially for women. It is best to wear shorts and a T-shirt for class. The T-shirt should be tucked in. Bare midriffs are not acceptable for women in class, despite what you may have been

told or think on the basis of Indian women wearing short blouses under saris - this is different not least because there is a sari on top. Similarly it is most modest not to have bare upper arms/exposed armpits. Yoga bloomers (cotton shorts with elasticated bottoms for modesty) can be bought very cheaply in Pune (try MG Road or the Institute).

- ☪ Clothing should be clean and tidy. Torn or dirty clothing is disrespectful.
- ☪ Wash hands and feet before class (facilities in the changing rooms). Preferably bathe before coming to the Institute.
- ☪ Be punctual and regular in attendance. Be ready to start 10 minutes before the class begins.
- ☪ If you go to the (squat) toilet in the institute you should, of course wash your hands, (I say this because some people don't seem to!) and also wash your feet in the adjacent bathroom before going back into class.
- ☪ After class you should help put all the equipment neatly away before leaving.
- ☪ During class take a mat (and other equipment) from the top of the pile, do not fish around for one you feel is better.
- ☪ Don't wear a lot of jewellery. It gets in the way and if you take it off it is a risk. Don't bring more money than necessary to class.
- ☪ Don't wear perfume to class.
- ☪ It can be useful to have a mat in your room for home practice and you can then donate it to the Institute. Sticky mats are hard to come by in India.
- ☪ Keep fingernails short, otherwise they get in the way, especially for such practices as digital *prāṅāyāma*. Take a handkerchief especially to *prāṅāyāma* classes.
- ☪ Personal items should not be placed on the plinths of a *murti* (idol) as that is very disrespectful (it is something like putting your mobile phone down on the altar in a church!). Neither should the plinth of the Patanjali *murti* in the practice room be used as a wall for practising *āsanas*.
- ☪ On the last Thursday evening of each month the Institute holds a meeting on spiritual and psychological aspects of yoga and scriptures. Attendance is expected.

## Special Times - celebrations at RIMYI

- ☪ 19th January Annual Day. Anniversary of RIMYI inauguration.
- ☪ March/April Hanuman Jayanti.
- ☪ July Guru Purnima
- ☪ October/November Patanjali Jayanti
- ☪ 14th December Guruji's birthday

## Closures

☸ RIMYI is closed for the month of May. Also for the Indian holidays of:

- Independence Day - 15th August
- Ganesh Chaturthi - August/September (1 day)
- Vijaya Dashami - October
- Dussehra - October/November (1 day)
- Diwali - October/November (4 days)
- Republic Day - January 26th
- Gudi Padava - March

## Greetings

It is polite to greet Guruji, Geetaji and Prashantji when you first see them in the day. The minimum polite greeting is to put your hands in the prayer position and say Namaskar (more polite than the familiar namaste). More reverential is to raise your hands in the prayer position to your forehead before placing them at your chest. More reverential still is to bend down or kneel and touch their feet with both hands, then raise your hands in the prayer position to your forehead then chest whilst saying Namaskar. No one is going to insist on this, but if your heart says do it then do.

There are a number of *murtis* of Patanjali and others around the institute. You can if you wish, as a mark of respect, touch them with both hands then raise your hands in the prayer position to your forehead and chest. You should have bare feet to do this.

## Classes at RIMYI

Classes tend to be full and space limited so you need to be considerate of others. Equipment is kept in a room adjacent to the practice room, so if it is necessary to get some out during a class the most efficient way is to form a line and pass the equipment down it, rather than each individual trying to get in the room and just attend to their own needs.

Show respect by paying attention and doing your best to follow instructions.

When you are menstruating you should still attend class and tell the teacher at the beginning. You will be given a programme to do with the others.

## Practice at RIMYI

There are daily (except Sundays) two and a half hour own-practice sessions for those taking classes at RIMYI. It is a good idea to use this time to practise what has been taught in the previous class to help consolidate the learning, or if

applicable, do some recuperative poses if you are tired from travelling or sick but well enough to practise. Guruji, Geetaji and Prashantji also practise then so you have the benefit of seeing what they do too. You should leave promptly at the time the practice session finishes and not linger.

## Library

RIMYI has a very extensive library on yoga and yoga-related subjects. This is open for students to use during the afternoons (3.00 to 5.30 pm) except Sundays. You may be permitted to borrow certain books during your stay. You can check with the Librarian.

## GENERAL TIPS FOR PUNE

### Weather

Cooler: November - February. Dry. Cold early mornings rising to a comfortable warmth. Pollution levels tend to get higher as this season goes on.

Hot: March - June. The Institute is closed for May. The temperature can go as high as 37°C or more!

Wet: July- October. Pollution levels lower. Take special care with tummy bugs and mosquitoes. Take an umbrella!

### Getting Around Pune

☸ Auto-rickshaw: can be hailed on the road or you can approach a parked one. The meters show the kilometres not the price so need to be read in conjunction with a meter card. Each driver is expected to have a meter card and you can ask him for one. At the moment, the rates are 1:7, eg if the meter reading is Rs.1 - you have to pay Rs. 7. This is the minimum charge. It is very helpful when saying where you want to go to have a landmark rather than just the address, eg 'opposite Jehangir Clinic'

☸ Crossing the road.: this is scary at first - the roads are extremely busy and seem chaotic. The best thing is to step out confidently and hope for the best once you have detected a negotiable gap in the traffic. Traffic moves on the left. But be alert for cycles and two wheelers, they can appear from nowhere!!



## Communication

In Pune most people speak some English and some speak it very well. It can take a little while to tune into the local accent and for them to tune into yours. Actually if you note the way English is used (phraseology, intonation) locally and try to copy, it will help you to be understood. It is friendly to learn a little Hindi or the local language Marathi (eg hello, goodbye, thank you etc). Don't be impatient, argumentative or demanding. This is counterproductive.

Public physical displays of affection such as hugging and kissing are not normally made in India. Also avoid holding hands with members of the opposite sex in public.

## Doctors/ Dentists

If you need one ask at the Institute.

## Changing Money

- ☪ American express (Amex) - off FC road.
- ☪ Bank of India (Deccan).
- ☪ Mr. Pandu has made arrangements for an organisation which does the exchange at the Institute. You can ask him about the details.

## CLOTHES

### General:

- ☪ Although it may be fashionable at times to wear scruffy, torn clothing in the West, it is unlikely to be seen as a fashion statement in India. The more likely response is to wonder why someone who obviously has the money to travel to India wishes to dress like a beggar. It could be interpreted as having a lack of self-respect and is not going to help you get along there. It is definitely to be avoided in RIMYI and since you are representing yoga wherever you go (as people are likely ask you why you are in Pune) it is best to avoid this look completely.
- ☪ You will often sit on the floor so wear clothes which easily allow this. Cotton /natural materials are the most comfortable.
- ☪ If you can afford it it is good to buy, or have made, an Indian outfit which you can wear if you are invited to a special event at the institute or elsewhere. It shows respect to wear local dress on such occasions. For women this can be a sari or a shalwar kameez (loose trousers and tunic/dress). For men pyjamas (loose fitting trousers) and kurta (shirt-often calf length).
- ☪ Try clothes on if possible - sizing is different in India. You usually have to go at least one size larger - eg if you normally wear medium try large etc. There may be a tendency for shopkeepers to hike the prices on seeing

a Westerner so do not hesitate to bargain! Don't bargain in fixed price shops though.

### Women:

- ☪ The most practical clothing in Pune is shalwar kameez. There are many variations on this theme - short or medium length top, sleeves, no sleeves, tighter trousers gathered at the bottom (churridar). See 'Shopping' for where to buy. The locals also wear saris but these are much harder to carry off (and put on!). It is now more acceptable in Pune to wear t-shirts/shirts/blouses and jeans on the streets but not shorts. Mid-calf length or long dress/skirt is all right.
- ☪ You cannot assume the way you dress will be 'read' in the same way in India as it is at home; this is not the time or place to make a political point about dress. If you want to avoid hassle dress modestly. Generally it is a good idea to avoid bare arms especially if you are travelling alone. Avoid tight or low cut dresses. Western clothes are more commonly worn in Mumbai. It is also a good idea to keep long hair tied up.

### Men:

- ☪ For walking around town, trousers are the thing not shorts (in India shorts are associated with manual labour rather than casual wear). It is okay to walk through the streets in shorts when you are coming for class especially in the mornings and if you are not staying too far away. It is good to wear some Indian clothes at least some of the time and this will be appreciated.



### Food

There are many places to eat in Pune. It is very easy to get vegetarian food. In India the term 'pure vegetarian' includes no eggs, but it does include dairy. Jain food is that which has no garlic, onions, mushrooms and other *non-sattvic* ingredients.

In Indian eateries it is usual to eat with your hands or a spoon. Of course you should wash hands first! (Most



restaurants have a basin specifically for hand washing before and after meals!) It is polite to eat with your right hand. If you are not yet used to it, with a little practice it is not difficult to learn to scoop up food with chappatis or other breads or with rice. You may not get forks that easily at smaller restaurants.

Most restaurants have huge menus catering to most tastes. As well as Indian food, Chinese dishes also often appear on menus. There are also Italian restaurants and pizza places.

Punjabi dishes are similar to the Indian food generally available in UK Indian restaurants. Thali plates are good value (several small dishes of vegetable, dal, dahi (yoghurt), bread or rice), often 'unlimited' so your plate is topped up until you have had sufficient. Asha Dining Hall on Apte Road is very popular as it gives a wholesome meal of chapatti, rice, dal, 2 vegetables, yoghurt and salads - all unlimited - for only Rs. 37. Also Panchawati and Hotel Sreyas do good, but more expensive, thalis. Also try the more local South Indian specialities such as dosas, uttapa, idli (try Vaishali, Roopali).

Always eat hot food. In restaurants avoid salad or food which could have been washed in tap water unless you can be certain they have been washed in clean water. Avoid food which has been left to stand (eg Western style dishes such as lasagne can be prone to this) or made from yesterday's leftovers (often 'mix vegetable'). You will notice certain foods are eaten at certain times of day (eg Pav Bhaji is an early evening food, idli is a morning food), stick to these times so the food is more likely to be fresh. Drink only bottled or filtered water. I have usually found it okay to brush teeth in tap water. If you buy fresh milk, buy in the morning and boil it before use. UHT milk is more widely available for obvious reasons.

If you do succumb to a bug (most do at some point especially on a first trip) make sure you take in plenty of fluids (rehydration solution is best) and if you can attend classes and tell the teacher, and they will give you a programme to help the problem. You can buy oral rehydration salts from the local shops/chemists, mix it with the exact amount of clean water specified and drink. Also try to stick to plainer food until the problem works its way through, eg curd (yoghurt) and rice, bananas. In fact I am told eating a banana a day is a good preventative for stomach bugs. It seemed to work for us!

### Visiting someone's home

Indians are very hospitable and you may well be asked to

visit someone's home. It is not essential but if you wish you can take a small gift. If you are not aware of the tastes/interests of your guest then it is best to take some sweets. Most people appreciate western chocolates! (however they don't keep well in the heat so only take if you are able to give them soon after arrival) You will always be offered some refreshments. It is of course polite to accept. You may be watched as you eat without the hosts eating (especially the woman who has cooked the food), this can seem a little odd to a Westerner but see it as a gesture of politeness and hospitality from the hosts - they want to make sure you are replete before they have any. You may eat sitting on the floor. If you are invited to a party the food is usually served at the end and the guests are expected to disperse soon after eating.

In India feet are considered very dirty. Footwear is not usually worn indoors, so remove your shoes at the door. Also don't point the soles of your feet at anyone. If you accidentally touch anyone with your foot do make sure you apologise.



### Places to Visit

If you visit a temple be especially careful to dress respectfully and modestly. Shoes are removed at the entrance.

There may be certain areas that non-Hindus may not enter. Take some money to give as an offering (they usually have collection boxes near each shrine)

- ☪ Rajkelkar museum is reputedly excellent.
- ☪ Parvati Temple - involves a long walk up many steps so set out in the early morning.
- ☪ Fort.
- ☪ Cave temple in Jangli Maharaj.
- ☪ Ask the locals for other ideas and about visiting sights further afield.

### Communicating with Home

- ☪ Cheapest and quickest is to set up a temporary e-mail account in one of the many internet cafes. They charge about Rs. 15 to 20 an hour!
- ☪ Telephoning home - go to a telephone call shop and pay at the end of the call (the cost as you make the call is displayed on a meter). There are these 'STD/ISD' (International Subscriber Dialling) booths available in every nook and cranny of the city! It costs about Rs. 7 to 10 per minute to UK (landline to landline).
- ☪ Calling India from UK is very expensive. It is much cheaper in the other direction.
- ☪ Write! The post in both directions is pretty quick these days (usually around 6 days).

### Beggars

Generally Indians advise not to give money to beggars. Personally, we tend to give to someone in obvious need, eg people with leprosy. If you intend to do so carry loose change and have it easily accessible. Alternatively if you are near a food place you could give some nice food. It is probably best to give to a charity which helps street people.

### Shopping

- ☪ At RIMYI: Yogwear - eg T-shirts, photographs and filled photo albums. Iyengar yoga books & DVDs CD-ROMs etc
- ☪ Clothes: you can buy Indian outfits cheaply in Pune; try Deccan, MG Road, area near the old Holiday Inn, Sassoon Road (opposite Jehangir Clinic).
- ☪ Indian leather flip flops can be found all over. You can buy good ones from Gandhi Khadi in Mumbai which are made only from cows which have died a natural death rather than been slaughtered.
- ☪ Joss-sticks: try Phadke Haud.
- ☪ Books: Crosswords, Popular Book store, International Book Store (Deccan), excellent book shop in the Taj Mahal in Mumbai.
- ☪ Toiletries: all easily available. Try some ayurvedic stuff -

we recommend neem toothpaste! (available at all chemist shops).

- ☪ Spectacles - Indian opticians will make up your prescription much more cheaply than over here.
- ☪ Don't haggle in shops with fixed prices. Don't bother haggling over trivial amounts. But don't pay grossly over the odds as this distorts the local economy.

### Things to Take/Buy Shortly After Arrival

- ☪ Travel light - there are lots of lovely clothes and other stuff you can buy very cheaply in India.
- ☪ Photos of family (nice for you and Indians tend to be interested).
- ☪ Small gifts - for those who you get to know/ show you kindness.
- ☪ Mosquito repellent (can also be bought there) - try the plug-in units for overnight in which you put tablets or (better) liquid.
- ☪ Umbrella or waterproof coat if going in rainy season.
- ☪ Footwear for wet weather. (Leather flip-flops don't like water!).
- ☪ A notebook to take notes after class and collect contact details for all your new friends.
- ☪ A good pumice/foot file - your feet can get very hard and ingrained with dirt if you don't use one often!
- ☪ Any clothes or shoes which need mending or alteration (Richard's idea!) - Indian tailors are skilled, fast and much, much cheaper than any here.

This is a work in progress. If you have anything of interest to add, please get in touch with Kirsten on [kirsten@bath-iyengar-yoga.com](mailto:kirsten@bath-iyengar-yoga.com), so this information can be updated for the official website: [www.bksiyengar.com](http://www.bksiyengar.com).

*Many thanks to Rajvi Mehta and Richard Agar Ward for their invaluable help in compiling this guide.* ☪

