

EXPLORE!

Treasures of Central India

14 days

India - Trip code CG



Treasures of Central India

On this trip to India we uncover the country's rich history, and cultural and religious heritage, discovering the vibrant city of Mumbai before exploring the painted caves and rock-cut temples of Ajanta and Ellora. After wandering through the extensive ruins of ancient capitals at Hampi and Hospet, we end the trip in Goa, where with its old Portuguese town and those famous long sandy beaches.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Mumbai** - Sightseeing tour including visit to Dharavi, 'Slumdog Millionaire' quarter
- ★ **Ajanta Caves** - Excursion to see famous Buddhist cave paintings
- ★ **Ellora Temples** - Explore the great Siva temple called Kailasa (the Hindu Olympus)
- ★ **Bijapur** - Visit the vast Gol Gumbaz tomb
- ★ **Hampi** - Explore the once flourishing capital of the Vijayanagar Kings
- ★ **Goa** - Sample spicy food in this old Portuguese enclave

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

12 - 18

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in Mumbai

We join the tour in Mumbai today. Mumbai, traditionally known as Bombay, is the capital of the Indian state of Maharashtra. It is the most populated and one of the most vibrant cities in India as well as the richest city in India, with this in mind it is a very exciting place to start our journey. For our first introduction of Mumbai we will have a late afternoon orientation of the Colaba area on foot. The Colaba is the gateway of Mumbai so we will start by visiting the honey-coloured Gateway of India arch. This arch was built to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911 but it was not completed until 1924. As this arch was built for a British King it was appropriately the place where the last British troops left India.



Accommodation: The Sahil Hotel Mumbai (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Sightseeing in Mumbai

Today we spend a full day sightseeing with our local guide. A highlight of the day will be our visit to the area where the film 'Slumdog Millionaire' was set, a thriving and industrious quarter called Dharavi. We also visit the Mahatma Gandhi Museum where we learn a little about the great man's life and ideas, through an impressive collection of books, photographs and letters. On Malabar Hill we drive past the Towers of Silence. Built by the Parsis fleeing persecution in Persia during the 17th century, the Towers were a mortuary for the dead. Being traditionally Zoroastrians they were deposited in these towers to allow nature to dispose of them. We also visit the municipal dhobi ghats and the Prince of Wales Museum, which has an excellent collection of Indian miniatures from the Mughal and Rajasthan schools.



Accommodation: The Sahil Hotel Mumbai (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Train to Aurangabad

This morning will be left free for you to explore Mumbai on your own. After lunch we transfer to the station to catch a train to Aurangabad (approx 7hrs).



Accommodation: Hotel Vits (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Excursion to Ajanta

This morning we make an excursion to the Ajanta Caves, spectacularly located in a pass in the Vindhya Hills. In 1819 a British soldier John Smith, on a tiger hunt stumbled on this series of remarkable caves, which have become a treasure trove of Buddhist art (2nd century BC to 7th century AD). As late as the 1920s Murray's Handbook declared them 'quite out of the range of the ordinary tourist'. Today, when we come upon this lost world, it seems as secluded and restful as a Cistercian monastery. The wall paintings lovingly illuminate the Buddhist stories in flowing colours: real, live, sensuous characterisations, without the rigid hieratic postures one normally expects - an art form sanctioned by a transcendental philosophy, where lovers drink wine together and handsome kings and beautiful princesses sit serenely on their thrones attended by adoring handmaidens.



Accommodation: Hotel Vits (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Visit Daulatabad Fort and Ellora Caves; overnight train to Hyderabad

This morning we visit the impressive Daulatabad fort - towering 250m above the surrounding countryside on a volcanic lava rock. Its three main walls have ingenious defences against elephant charges consisting of multiple, spike-studded doorways. Nearby are the World Heritage listed Buddhist group of caves, the Temples of Ellora. Dating from the 6th-8th century AD, they contain elaborate sculptures of intricate detail. These caves are not naturally formed, but have been painstakingly hewn out of the hillside over a period of five centuries. They consist of over thirty monastic chambers and shrines and are a triple record of the aspirations of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism. As Indian Buddhism entered its fatal decline, Hinduism reasserted itself once more and Siva is sculpted in his eternal dance of life and death. Here stands the amazing rock-cut masterpiece, the Kailasa, a replica of the mountain abode of Siva, probably the world's biggest monolithic structure: it measures 33m deep by 81m long and 47m wide, and the stonemasons removed some three million cubic metres of rock to create it. In spite of its massive proportions, the temple is carved all over in the most intricate detail as if it were an ivory miniature - except for the inner sanctum, the holy of holies, where Siva appears quite simply as a lingam or phallus, the symbol of regeneration. On our route back to Aurangabad we stop at Bibi-ka Maqbara (an imitation of the Taj Mahal built as a mausoleum for Aurangzeb's wife). Once we arrive back in Aurangabad we transfer to the train station where we board our overnight train for our overnight ride to Hyderabad.



Accommodation: Overnight Train: Aurangabad / Hyderabad

 Simple Overnight Train

 Meals Provided: Breakfast


DAY 6 - Arrive in Hyderabad; tour of Hyderabad

We arrive in Hyderabad and transfer to the hotel before our guided tour. Founded in 1589, the city went on to father some of the richest men in India, due in no small part to the diamond mines around nearby Golconda. In the late morning we plan to explore the lively bazaars and colourful Islamic monuments of this bustling capital. Most of the city's historical sites are found in the Old City, close to the bazaars, and are best explored on foot. We visit the Birla Temple and the Charminar, or 'Four Towers', built to celebrate the end of a plague in 1591. This magnificent cream square archway stands on four 56 metre towers near to the colossal black granite Mecca Masjid Mosque, the sixth largest mosque in India, made of huge slabs and accommodating up to 10,000 worshippers. In the afternoon we drive to visit the extensive ruins of the Golconda Fort, its citadel towering 120m above the 16th century battlements. Intriguing elements to the fort are the excellent acoustics, hot and cold water system, natural air conditioning and Turkish Baths. Built by the Qutb Shahi dynasty, the fort was once considered impregnable and even its massive gates were equipped with elephant proof spikes! Battles fought here were significant in the struggle between the Moghuls and Qutb Shahi kings, who once dominated the area. We also visit the nearby Qutb Shahi tombs. There are 10 tombs in the area, all made of black granite or greenstone and housed beneath an onion dome. The most impressive is that of King Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, the founder of Hyderabad who ruled until 1612.



Accommodation: Quality Inn Residency (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: None


DAY 7 - Drive to Bidar; Afternoon visit palaces and tombs

We start our day by driving to the town of Bidar, the roads are poor in this region and it will take us around 4 to 5 hours to complete the journey. On arrival we will visit Bidar's fort with its ruined palaces and tombs of the Bahamani kings. Large parts of the fort are now in ruins but the walls remain in good condition which gives us a good idea on how vast the fort would have been. We'll walk through the formal gardens and view the large mosque which unfortunately is no longer in use. We'll also make a short stop at cannon point to see one of the larger bastions used to protect the city against invaders.



Accommodation: Hotel Sapna International (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Drive to Gulbarga, drive on to Bijapur

This morning we leave Bidar and drive to Gulbarga, the founding capital of the Bahmani dynasty. We take an orientation tour of the city, taking in the major sights, including the Bala Hissar Citadel, the elegant domed Jami Masjid and the Tomb of Bahmani Sultans. We depart Gulbarga and continue our journey on to Bijapur.



Accommodation: Hotel Shashingag Residency (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Bijapur; visit mosque and bazaar. Drive to Badami

Before leaving Bijapur today we visit the Gol Gumbaz, the vast mausoleum of its 17th century ruler Mohammed Adil Shah. The mausoleum's unsupported dome is second in size only to St Peter's in Rome, an astounding 38 metres in diameter. It is not cast in the florid architectural style of the East, but is more Turkish in character - severely bare and restrained, with a remarkable whispering gallery. We'll test out the dome by standing on opposite sides and whispering in to the walls, the effect is incredible. We also visit the Jami Masjid Mosque, acclaimed by many as one of the finest in India, remarkable for the harmony and grace of its slender minarets and stroll through the colourful and bustling daily market in the middle of Bijapur. We depart from Bijapur and drive to Badami.



Accommodation: Anand Deluxe (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Morning in Badami and drive to Hospet

We wake up in Badami this morning. Once the capital of the Chalukyan, but now a small village with a busy bazaar nestling between sandstone hills. We will take a short drive to the famous Cave Temples of Badami. Now a World Heritage Site, the temples were hewn out of solid rock as early as 550AD and their interiors are lavishly adorned with reliefs and statues, one even containing an 18-armed Shiva. Later on this morning we drive to Pattadakal, situated on the banks of the Malaprabha River. Another World Heritage Site, its pink-tinged sandstone temples date back to the 7th century and represent a mixture of South and North Indian temple styles, confirming its importance as a meeting point of both traditions. After a guided tour here, we then stop at the temples of Aihole. The sheer number of Aihole's 70 temples vividly brings to life the glories of the post-Gupta period and reveals the genesis of Hindu medieval art (c.600). It is easy to imagine what this place would have been like in those heady days of creative construction; here is Hindu temple architecture in its most embryonic form. Stopping to visit a number of the temples, we then continue to our destination for today, the town of Hospet, our base from which we explore the astonishing archaeological site of Hampi.



Accommodation: Krishna Palace (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Day in Hampi

Hampi was once the flourishing capital of the Vijayanagar Kings (14th to 16th centuries), who ruled one of the largest Hindu empires in Indian history. Suddenly destroyed in 1565 after the battle of Talikota, the ancient ruins are almost ethereal, a place of departed spirits. We aim to visit the temples of Virupaksha and Vittala, with its remarkable carvings, and amid the desolate and fantastic boulder-heaped landscape we come upon the Queen's Bath and the richly carved King's Throne, the finely sculptured

pillars of the Ramachandra Swami Shrine, the vaulted Elephant Stables, the two-storied Lotus Pavilion and the huge granite image of Narasimha, one of Vishnu's incarnations. The city was reputedly the size of Rome at its peak, with a population of half a million people and with numerous temples and monuments in the South Indian Dravidian style of architecture, the site is one of the most remarkable in all India. We will have a full day there with a local guide and return to our hotel in Hospet at the end of the day.



Accommodation: Krishna Palace (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Train to Goa

Leaving Hospet behind, we take the early Amaravati Express train to Madgaon, arriving at the palm-fringed shores of Goa in the late afternoon, the one time Portuguese colony on the Arabian Sea. Under Alfonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese landed here in the 16th century, captured the original Arab trade settlement and began building a city with houses, gardens and fountains, monasteries, chapels and churches (most of them gone), including the white, 17th century cathedral of St Catherine, which still stands. Goa eventually became the entrepôt for East and West, where merchants could buy pearls, coral, rubies, golden jewellery, silks, China porcelain, lacquered furniture, ambergris and exotic spices. The Portuguese influence is still very much apparent - the main religion is still Roman Catholic and siestas are still widely practised in the hot afternoons. Like most areas in India, Goa has its own food specialities, you may also want to sample the locally brewed spirit feni - a spine-tingling drink made from coconut or cashews.



Accommodation: Welcome Heritage Panjim Inn (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Morning visit to Old Goa and then free afternoon

This morning we will visit Old Goa where your tour leader will take you on an orientation tour. The afternoon is then free for you to discover Goa yourself. We are based in Panaji, Goa's easy going capital; a friendly, sleepy town of narrow winding streets and whitewashed shuttered houses. Close by the capital are the superb beaches of Gaspar Dias and Dona Paula. The Malabar beaches here are very long and very white against the turquoise waters of the Arabian Sea, but be careful, as bathing in some areas can be marred by a strong undertow.



Accommodation: Welcome Heritage Panjim Inn (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

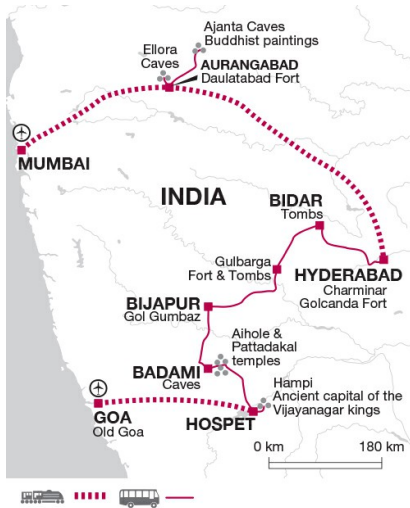


Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Tour ends in Goa

Tour ends in Goa.

 Meals Provided: Breakfast



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 12



Transport

Bus
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

12 nights standard hotel
1 nights simple overnight train

Trip information

Country information

India Holidays & Tours

Climate

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very

cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

Time difference to GMT

+5

Plugs

3 Pin Round

Religion

Catholicism, Hindu, Islam and Sikhism

Language

Hindi and English.

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

Pack mainly for \Hot Conditions\. Select your clothing carefully, bearing in mind that temperatures are hot most of the year. You should bring a light jumper/fleece for cooler evenings. You may also consider bringing a small umbrella or waterproof between October and December when the chance of rain is greater. We recommend loose fitting shirts, trousers and underwear (nothing tight or made of nylon). Local people may be offended by revealing western styles of dress. Brief shorts tight fitting clothing etc. should be avoided by both men and women. Laundry facilities are available at most hotels.

Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes and sandals/trainers.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

Torch, insect repellent, sun hat, sunglasses, sun cream and a water bottle.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow approx. £35 for gratuities for local staff. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

India Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£6

Dinner price

£8

Beer price

£1.4

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Indian Rupee Recently new 500, 1000 and 2000 rupee notes have been bought in to circulation and as the old notes are no longer accepted there have been some cash flow issues. You don't need to worry about being given old notes as it's very easy to tell the difference, the new notes are pristine in comparison with most Indian money which is fairly tatty.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

GBP/US\$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

Where To Exchange

The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best places in each town. Both GBP and USD cash are easy to exchange at the airport and at hotels however you will be restricted to changing £60 cash at a time and it's not possible to change money at these locations using a credit or debit card.

ATM Availability

ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance

Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

Travellers Cheques

Opportunities to exchange are limited.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Train

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

On this trip we are travelling to several areas that aren't on the main tourist map and accommodation options are limited. Bidar, Bijapur and Badami in particular are very simple hotels and service can be slower than normal. Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind, especially on trips that go in to less-visited areas where the choice of accommodation can be very limited. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water. Food in this region is always fresh and tasty and one may days you will find it much cheaper than at the more touristy parts of India such as Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. Whilst in Bidar, Bijapur and Badami you are less likely to find meat options and alcohol is also harder to find. You will however have lots of tasty, fresh vegetarian dishes and delicious dals. Food isn't hugely spicy but there is a good mix of spicy and mild available in most places.

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

India: Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India. The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below - You must be arriving into one of 24 selected entry points which can be found via the official Indian Government website link above. However, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India. Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process. It is valid for 60 days from the date of arrival in to India, and double entry is permitted on the e-Tourist visa. You can only obtain 2 e-visas for India in a calendar year. The visa costs \$75. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India. Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, a number of applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. Travcour will complete the on-line visa on your behalf for a fee of £25 + the visa cost. Please contact them directly if you wish to take up this service. If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html. If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

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Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth> and from your local healthcare provider.
