



THE FREELANCER'S GUIDE TO DELHI

Words by *Mridu Khullar Relph*

When F. Scott Fitzgerald once said: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposite ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function," he might as well have been talking about Delhi, a city brimming with contradictions.

He might as well have been talking about Delhi, a city brimming with contradictions. If you're ready for a challenge, to take each day as an adventure, to start walking without knowing where the path is leading, to know where you're heading and still be surprised at where you reach, Delhi is the city for you. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it.

It's that sense of adventure that brought freelance journalist Nilanjana Bhowmick back to India after a stint in the UK. "I was working with the World Today programme in BBC radio as a producer and dabbling in news [from India]. I was involved in the region and yet I could only do so much," she says. She missed the excitement of being with the people she was reporting on and so she returned home to become a freelancer. "News wise, India is a much more vibrant place than the UK. I wanted to be where the action was."

And action there is. Whether you're a journalist reporting on the politics and economy of a growing nation or a designer who simply wants the bustle of being in a new city, Delhi offers a wide variety of experiences and a guarantee that no two days are ever the same.

GETTING SET UP

Your first few days in Delhi are also likely to be your most difficult. If you can get yourself set up quickly, it gets a lot easier.

Initially, you need to find yourself a hotel. "If budget permits, then [stay at the] Hyatt, which has a good business centre or the Diplomat hotel in Chanakypuri," says Nilanjana. "If budget is a constraint, then try Paharganj. I personally prefer Paharganj because of the people." Paharganj is the first stop for backpackers in India, and it is for that very reason that locals are often available to help make the transition easier and enable a connection with other new arrivals to the country who may be able to help you get set up. If you're in Delhi only for a short time, it's preferable to keep your status as a sole trader or limited company in your country of origin and hire an Indian accountant to see if you can



benefit from any tax treaties to avoid paying taxes in two countries. If you're only in India for a short while, ask your clients if they'll pay you via PayPal or direct bank transfers instead. But if you plan to stay longer term, opening a bank account is a good idea to ensure that you can get paid in rupees. The process is easy and quick and requires only your passport and proof of address, assuming that you're renting a place.

Freelancers in Delhi are young and middle class so more likely to be making plans online

Although there is work to be found in Delhi, Nilanjana says it's a good idea for freelancers to make contacts before they arrive. Having international clients while living in Delhi can allow you to benefit from the currency conversion rates and make the transition much smoother.

WHERE TO WORK AND GETTING AROUND

Nilanjana says she's worked from her home office for almost the entirety of the past decade. Most freelancers in Delhi, in fact, prefer this arrangement. There are coworking spaces everywhere in India but they're mostly used by start-ups, and the functionality and dynamic of coworking spaces isn't quite what it is in the UK.

Coffee shops are a great alternative, according to Nilanjana. There are several small independent ones with a lot of character, but if you're looking for some quiet space and a reliable Wi-Fi connection, you can't go wrong with one of the many multinational coffee chains in the city. Getting around is not too difficult either. The metro connects much of the city, but for places where the trains don't go, you can hire auto rickshaws or taxis without breaking the bank.

It can take a while to get the lay of the land and you'll be overcharged in the beginning, but once you start moving around more you will be able to judge how much the fare should be between different parts of the city.

Remember, in Delhi, everything is a negotiation. If you're not sharpened up on those skills yet, don't worry. The city teaches you.

NETWORKING AND SUPPORT

The best way to find like-minded people in Delhi? Strangely, it's the internet. There are tonnes of freelancer meet-ups and events happening all over the city at any point in time, but it is a big place and if you're new, you may not hear about them immediately.

Meeting people online first, joining groups, and then participating in meet-ups is far more effective than old-school networking because most of the freelancers in Delhi are young and middle class so more likely to be making plans online.

If you're a writer or journalist, check out the Foreign Correspondents' Club, where you can find other expats and journalists who live and work in Delhi. Every Thursday evening, journalists from around the city come together to chat, talk and have a few drinks. New people are always welcomed. Do go with an existing member your first time, however.

SUMMING UP

Delhi is not the easiest of cities to navigate or live in but ask anyone who has ever spent time there and they will tell you that it is one of the most memorable.

You will be challenged. Nothing will ever go to plan. You will find yourself becoming more self-assured and resourceful. And you will grow. As a freelancer, nothing can ever compare with the excitement of that.