

# INDIA'S LONG-DISTANCE SLEEPER TRAINS: COMPLETE TRAVEL FACT SHEET

Your essential quick-reference guide to navigating one of the world's largest rail networks.

## NETWORK OVERVIEW & SCALE

- **Daily Passengers:** Every single day, over 20 million passengers travel on the network.
- **Train Services:** There are more than 13,000 train services running daily.
- **Network Reach:** The system stretches over 70,000 km (43,495 miles), connecting large cities and tiny rural villages.
- **Cultural Role:** For millions of Indians, trains serve as an affordable hotel, a restaurant, a social gathering, and a comfortable way to travel.

## MAJOR TRAIN TYPES

- **Rajdhani Express:** The highest premium conventional overnight services connecting New Delhi with state capitals and major cities. Meals are usually included in the fare, stops are limited, and they receive high priority on the network, making punctuality better than average.
- **Duronto Express:** Second-tier services designed to provide fast, point-to-point connections with limited intermediate stops.
- **Superfast Express:** An Indian Railways classification for trains that meet a higher average speed, resulting in faster schedules and fewer stops than ordinary Express services (note: these are not high-speed bullet trains).
- **Mail and Express Trains:** The true backbone of the network, stopping at towns and cities both big and small. They are slower but offer excellent value and an authentic experience.
- **Modern Additions:** New night train concepts include the premium Vande Bharat Sleeper for comfort, and the budget-focused Amrit Bharat Express for non-air-conditioned travel.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CLASSES

- **First AC:** The premium option, equivalent to a small hotel room on rails. Features compartments with two or four berths, lockable doors, air conditioning, and bedding. Available on selected trains like Rajdhani and Duronto. *Note: Cabin allocations are finalised just a few hours before departure, meaning travelling groups cannot always guarantee a private compartment.*
- **AC 2 Tier:** Features air conditioning and wide berths with curtains for privacy, but lacks lockable compartment doors. Widely considered the "sweet spot" between comfort and price.
- **AC 3 Tier:** Highly popular among international visitors and backpackers. Each bay contains six berths arranged across three levels, plus two side berths next to the aisle. It is air-conditioned, affordable, and highly social.

- **Sleeper Class:** The legendary non-air-conditioned class featuring open windows and ceiling fans. It is incredibly affordable and authentic, but can become extremely hot and crowded during peak periods.

## BUYING TICKETS & QUOTAS

- **Booking Window:** Tickets for most sleeper and long-distance trains go on sale 60 days before departure. Popular routes can sell out within hours, especially during festivals or holidays.
- **Booking Platforms:** Official booking is done via the IRCTC website or app. Third-party services like 12Go are often used by visitors for a more user-friendly interface.
- **Foreign Tourist Quota (FTQ):** A dedicated allocation of tickets reserved for international travellers on selected routes and classes. FTQ tickets must be bought through the official IRCTC platform and carry a small additional booking fee.
- **Waiting List System:** If a train is full, passengers can join a waiting list and move up the queue as cancellations occur.
- **RAC (Reservation Against Cancellation):** Guarantees you a seat on the train, with a strong chance of being upgraded to a full sleeping berth before departure if enough passengers cancel.
- **Requirements:** Passengers must carry their ticket (printed or electronic) and their passport for potential inspection.


## ONBOARD EXPERIENCE & LIFE ON THE RAILS

- **Social Atmosphere:** Trains are highly social; English is widely spoken, and passengers frequently chat, share travel stories, and offer homemade snacks.
- **Food and Drinks:** Onboard vendors constantly walk through the aisles selling fresh chai (costing 10 rupees), coffee, water, samosas, biryani, ice cream, and fresh fruit.
- **E-Catering:** Passengers can use the IRCTC app to order food online, which is then delivered directly to the train at designated station stops.
- **Station Stops:** Longer stops can last up to 15 minutes, allowing passengers to step onto platforms to buy refreshments from stalls.
- **Toilets:** Onboard facilities are a mixture of Asian squat toilets and Western-style seated toilets.
- **Toilet Amenities:** Toilet paper and soap might not be guaranteed, so you might want to bring your own.
- **Charging Devices:** Some trains do have power sockets for charging devices. However, you are advised to bring a fully charged power bank.
- **Connectivity:** WiFi is generally unavailable onboard. However, 4G and 5G mobile network coverage is typically good along the majority of the routes.

- **Sleeping Logistics:** Seats convert into beds at night. While bedding packs are distributed in the air-conditioned classes, passengers must make their own beds. It is highly recommended to pack earplugs and an eye mask to block out night announcements and ongoing vendor calls.

### **RECOMMENDED ICONIC ROUTES**

- **Delhi to Mumbai (Rajdhani Express):** A classic premium rail experience running on one of India's busiest rail corridors.
- **Mumbai to Goa (Konkan Railway):** One of the world's most scenic coastal railways, offering stunning ocean and landscape views.
- **Kolkata to New Jalpaiguri:** The gateway route to the Himalayas and the world-famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway "toy train" mountain line.
- **Kanyakumari to Dibrugarh (Vivek Express):** The single longest train route in India, covering more than 4,000 km (2,500 miles) and taking just over three days to complete.

 **Traveller Tip:** Indian trains face delays that can sometimes last many hours. Avoid planning tight travel connections immediately after a scheduled train arrival.

Watch the full video on the Asian Train Guide YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkCS6vDM2EU>

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