

Travel agencies (which are plentiful in the traveler ghettos) are close and easy way to purchase tickets, but you may end up paying through the nose for vehicles reserved only for tourists. In addition, agencies (especially in India) have a tendency to push you into buying a ticket to somewhere entirely else that you have been planning to travel – they get a monetary provision if they sell tickets to certain destinations. They may insist that you stay at a certain guesthouse or hotel – again, they do this to get the provision. Do not be a pushover.

You will only be disappointed, finding yourself at a package tour to Agra or Jaipur, with bitter regrets of not buying the train ticket yourself and getting where you wanted to go in the first place.

## TRAVELING

When you are finally aboard the train, bus or boat, you can congratulate yourself. One of the greatest experiences, in our opinion, is about to begin. Advancing has to be one of the most pleasurable experiences, as the landscape slowly glides by and the road takes you to its destination, whether that road is made of iron, water or just dust and potholes. You can imagine the lives and destinies of your fellow passengers, engage in conversation with them, wonder about the hustle and bustle of the way stations with a cup of tea and tobacco in your hands or just stare out the window, mesmerized, without the need or the ability to have an effect on it all – this is what it means to be on the move, here in the now.

## GETTING AROUND: BUSES

This is the cheapest and most common mode of transport. The locals use them, so why not you? These motor vehicles come in all shapes in the Third World: from the large ones filled with animals and hoi polloi to the small third class chicken bus to air-conditioned VIP-sleepers, where stewards offer cold drinks and you have more leg room than in the airplane business class.

For us westerners accustomed to bus services being handled like any business by trustworthy entrepreneurs, the local ways may seem a bit shady. There are usually plenty of buses to the same destination, all by different service providers. You have your express routes and local buses that stop at every bend of the road. Government buses do exist, but private companies own most vehicles. Some of the so-called buses turn out to be minivans.

If you buy your ticket in advance from an agent, always inquire what kind of a bus you're about to board. Compare prices. Bought from the station tickets are most likely cheaper, when using private companies haggling may be possible. Remember, the agent's clientele comprises of every gringo in town. Instead of authentic bus experience you might end up with a busload of British football hooligans, seriously in their cups.

## Bus Survival Guide

You might want to be picky about **choosing a seat**, especially in one of the older wrecks. Madventures recommends that you do not sit in the back (the roads are bumpy and you will be bouncing all over the seats, and you can't put those backseats into anything resembling a sleeping position) or in the front (nonexistent protection in case of crash). Choose the middle ground. Try and Sherlock from which direction the sun shines from. Choose the side with shade. Try the seat before picking it, some seats lack springs, are loose or will be pain in the ass in general. The locals know how to pick the best seats first. If you bought a ticket in advance and the seats are numbered, remember that the large and small numbers will place you in the back and in the front – so avoid them! This is just one of the many things that the local travel agents will screw you on without any remorse or guilt of conscience.

The luggage is sometimes placed on the roof, sometimes in the compartment and sometimes inside: either on the aisle or in the worst case, in your lap. Usually the driver or his helping hands take your rucksack and place it among other luggage. So before you enter the bus, inspect that your property goes where it belongs, and if the bags are placed on the roof make sure they are fastened securely. If it's raining, shelter your bags from water and mud with a plastic bin bag.

Place all your valuables in the day-sack. If you sleep, tie one of the straps around your ankle or keep the bag in your lap. The evil thieving *boskiero* is most likely to attack your carry-on rather than your backpack.

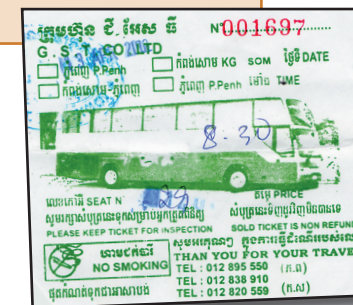
In many of the Asian countries the locals have the habit of traveling **on the roof**. This gives one the added benefits of constant air-conditioning, VIP-sized legroom and the amazing 360 view on the landscape. Should you try traveling on the roof, take with you a shawl, a sweater and a rag of some kind to protect your lungs from the constant and infernal dust. Power lines hang low in both the cities and the villages, so be prepared to duck. Be vigilant for the tree branches too.

For those who suffer from the overactive bladder, we recommend a splendid invention: URI-bag is container, roughly sized of the old-fashioned camera film can. Inside, it houses a rubber bag. You blow the bag out of the container and after the deed is done and the bag is emptied and cleaned, stuff it back to the can. This contraption has saved Tunna, the man known for his enormously active bladder, from embarrassing situations on every continent of the planet time and again. URI-bags are available for both men and women, check the net for your local supplier. Read more about the bus ride security in the chapter **Safety**.

## GETTING AROUND: MINIVANS

Avoid minivans, if you have a choice. They are always crammed and legroom is nonexistent. In the crash situation, they are the worst possible option.

Many places have no other means of transportation than minivans. Read more about minivans in the chapter **Safety**.



ON THE ROAD

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