



THE NRI RETURN GUIDE · 2026

# Moving back to India — *everything I wish someone had told me.*

I moved back to Mumbai in 2023 after 28 years in New York — Citibank, FHLB Boston, Sanwa Securities, JPMorgan, Barclays, and finally Nomura. This guide is what I'd put in a letter to my own younger self the day I decided to come home. The decisions in the real order you'll make them. The tax window most NRIs miss. The parts that are harder than you think. And the parts that are better than you feared.

**AK** By Amish Kapadia · ~25 minute read · Updated April 2026

## WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

- ✓ NRIs returning from the US, UK, Canada, Australia, or the Gulf
- ✓ Planning a move in the next 6–24 months
- ✓ Navigating OCI, tax-window planning, banking conversion, housing in one place
- ✓ Wanting the honest version — the hard parts and the good parts



### Updated April 2026 — rules change

This guide reflects rules and numbers as of April 2026. Tax thresholds, customs allowances, and banking regulations do shift — always verify your specific situation with a qualified CA, customs broker, or SSA international benefits specialist before making financial decisions.

Why move back

Timeline

OCI + ToR

First 30 days

Banking ↗

FX transfer

Housing & car

# Why I came home — and why you might

I flew into Mumbai on a one-way ticket in October 2023. 28 years earlier I'd left for graduate school in New York and built a career I genuinely loved — six Wall Street firms over those 28 years, a family, a whole life. The decision to leave it all for India wasn't rational in the usual sense. It was a pull that kept getting stronger, toward specific things I couldn't replicate anywhere else. Talking to the returning NRIs who've reached out since, the reasons cluster into six categories. If two or more of these apply to you strongly, you're probably already further down this path than you realise.



## Aging parents

The single most common trigger. Parents who were fine at 65 aren't at 75. FaceTime stops feeling like being there. Flying in four times a year gets exhausting.



## Kids and Indian identity

Wanting kids to grow up speaking the language, knowing cousins, having grandparents nearby, eating the food as a daily thing — not a vacation performance.



## Cost of living math

Your dollar/pound income goes 3–5× further in Gurgaon or Bangalore than in the Bay Area or London. Private-school education, help at home, healthcare, leisure — all suddenly affordable.



## Career peak

India's economy, startup scene and senior talent market have transformed. VP roles that were out of reach abroad are within reach here. Founding is easier. Your foreign credentials carry weight.



### Life abroad just wearing thin

Political climate, healthcare anxiety, gun violence concerns, social isolation, the exhaustion of being the outsider even after 20 years. Sometimes it's not a pull — it's a push.



### Lifestyle quality

Help at home, community living, the actual food, weather in some cities, cultural richness, shorter weekends that feel longer. You're choosing less efficiency for more texture.



**An honest reality check.** Moving back is harder than you think *and* better than you feared. The logistical friction is real — bureaucracy, heat, traffic, the social reset. But two years in, I'm clearer than I've been in decades about why I'm here. If you're considering the move mostly because "life abroad is hard right now", a 3-month sabbatical in India first is a safer bet than a full move. Many NRIs I've met moved back in a low moment, then moved out again two years later. If you're being pulled by something specific — a parent, a role, a child's schooling, a life you want to build — keep reading. Here's the complete playbook.

## STEP 2 · YOUR TIMELINE

# When to start what — the 24-month runway

The biggest mistake I see returning NRIs make is starting too late. The OCI takes 8–12 weeks. Transfer of Residence has a 6-month window. RNOR tax planning happens *before* you move, not after. Here's the order that actually works, mapped back from your target arrival date.

## The strategic window

- Start the OCI application if you haven't already (VFS can take 60–90 days)
- Begin tax-window planning with a dual-country CPA — this is when Roth conversion + capital gains realisation get mapped out
- Decide: first year rental vs buy. Start scouting neighbourhoods on trips home
- Tell aging parents you're seriously planning this — they'll wait differently

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12 MONTHS OUT

### Start the consolidation

- File Transfer of Residence paperwork pre-approval (not required but smoother at port)
- Consolidate US accounts — close extras, keep 1 checking + 1-2 credit cards + your brokerage/retirement
- Update beneficiaries on 401k, IRA, life insurance with Indian contact info
- Start identifying the Indian bank you'll open a resident account with (month after arrival)

6

6 MONTHS OUT

### Logistics phase

- Book your shipping container (household goods need 6–10 weeks by sea)
- Sell or ship the car decision — usually sell. Importing under ToR rarely pencils
- Confirm first-month accommodation in India (service apartment while you rent-hunt)
- Give notice at work. If moving to remote-for-same-employer, formalise the EOR setup

3

3 MONTHS OUT

### Identity prep

- Apply for / update Aadhaar + PAN — file online, complete in-person on arrival
- Book Indian health insurance with policy start-date = arrival date
- Get driver's license translated if not in English (some RTOs require this)
- Set up international data on your phone — you'll need it in the first 72 hours



#### MONTH OF MOVE + FIRST 30 DAYS

### Execute the landing

- Indian SIM (Jio/Airtel) in first 48 hours — UPI runs on it, everything runs on UPI
- File ToR at customs on arrival (save receipts of shipped household goods)
- Convert NRE/NRO → resident account within 30 days of residency trigger
- File your US FBAR for the year of move (Indian accounts now become foreign accounts from US perspective)



**Pin a move date early.** Once you have a specific date (say "September 15, 2026"), every step above becomes a real calendar entry that unlocks the next. Without a date, the whole thing slides indefinitely — and the RNOR tax-planning window is too valuable to accidentally waste.

#### STEP 3 · LEGAL FOUNDATION

## OCI, Transfer of Residence and the paperwork that gates everything

If you're a citizen of another country, you don't just "move back" to India — you move back *as a foreign national*. OCI is the document that makes that workable. Everything else (bank accounts, property, driving license, schools) is downstream of this.

### OCI card — apply 3-4 months before you move

The OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) card gives you multiple-entry lifetime visa rights, parity with NRIs on most financial matters (except buying agricultural land and government jobs), and the ability to stay indefinitely. Without OCI, you're limited to tourist-visa stays.

- **Who needs it:** any NRI who has taken foreign citizenship (US, UK, Canada, Australia, Singapore, etc.) and doesn't already have one.
- **Who doesn't:** if you still hold an Indian passport, you don't need OCI — you're still an Indian citizen.
- **Apply at:** the Indian consulate in your current country via [ociservices.gov.in](https://ociservices.gov.in). Processing typically takes 4-8 weeks after consulate acknowledgement, though times vary — allow longer if possible.

VFS Global processes most applications.

- **Cost:** typically around \$275 USD total including VFS service fee — varies by country and latest fee schedule.
- **Gotcha:** minors need OCI too, separately. Budget the time and cost per family member.

## Transfer of Residence (ToR) — the customs window

ToR is a one-time customs concession that lets you bring personal household goods and used electronics into India at reduced or zero duty. You must have lived abroad for 2+ years (continuously) and bring items within 6 months of your final return.

- **Duty-free allowance (current Baggage Rules):** up to approximately ₹7.5 lakh in personal goods for NRIs returning after 2+ years abroad — graded by length of stay. Shorter stays = lower allowance. Rules have been progressively liberalised in recent years; verify current limits with a licensed customs broker.
- **What's covered:** used household goods (furniture, kitchenware, clothes), personal electronics (laptop, TV, camera). Items should be *used*, not new — new items attract regular duty.
- **Jewellery:** assessed separately by *weight*, with specific per-gram allowances. Small personal jewellery usually clears fine; large quantities of gold or high-value pieces should be declared and may attract duty.
- **Alcohol:** small personal allowance (typically 2 litres) duty-free, rest attracts duty.
- **Cars: NOT included in standard ToR.** Importing a car is a separate customs process with high duty (often ~100%+) and rarely makes financial sense unless it's a classic. Most returnees sell their foreign car and buy local.
- **Paperwork:** Form ToR filed at the port of entry. You'll need your passport with Indian entry stamp, OCI, proof of 2+ years abroad (tax returns or employment letters), and a detailed packing list with declared values.
- **Timing:** the 6-month window starts the day you return to India with intent to stay. Short visits during your abroad period don't reset this window.
- **Practical tip:** use a licensed customs broker. Don't try to clear ToR paperwork yourself — the cost (₹15,000–30,000 for a standard shipment) is worth the friction avoided.

## PAN card update (if applicable)

If you already have a PAN (most NRIs do), nothing changes structurally — but notify your tax authority and banks of your address change when it happens. If you don't have a PAN yet, apply before you move — you'll need it for banking, rentals, mobile connections and basically every transaction over ₹50,000.



**Order of operations:** OCI application first (3–4 months before move) → final exit from current country → arrive in India → file ToR within weeks of arrival → update PAN address → all downstream banking and housing steps become easier.

#### STEP 4 · FIRST 30 DAYS IN INDIA

## The actual checklist for week one through four

The first month is logistical. You'll make ~15 small decisions fast. Here they are in the order that actually works, with the gotchas noted.

### 1 Temporary address + Indian SIM card (day 1–2)

Jio or Airtel prepaid. You'll need this SIM for OTPs before anything else works. If you're staying with parents initially, use their address. Otherwise a service apartment for 30 days gives you a proof-of-address to start with.

### 2 Aadhaar card (week 1–2)

Aadhaar is the universal ID in India — required for bank KYC, gas connection, schools, almost everything. If you don't have one, book an appointment at an Aadhaar Seva Kendra ([UIDAI.gov.in](http://UIDAI.gov.in)). Need passport + address proof + OCI. Update address if you already have one.

### 3 Bank account switch: NRE/NRO → resident savings (week 2)

Within 30 days of becoming a tax resident, you must redesignate your accounts. Visit your branch (not phone — most banks still require in-person for the status change). NRE FDs can run to maturity; new deposits go into resident accounts. [See our NRI banking guide →](#)

### 4 Credit card reapplication (week 2–3)

Your NRI credit cards get converted or closed. Apply for resident credit cards with your Indian income/employment letter or a fixed deposit as security. HDFC Regalia, ICICI Sapphire, Axis Magnus are premium options for returning NRIs. [Compare cards →](#)

### 5 Gas, electricity, internet in your (rental) name (week 3)

Gas connections (Indane, HP) and broadband (Jio Fiber, Airtel Xstream, ACT in south India) need proof of address — which is why the Aadhaar/rental agreement chain matters. Internet installs take 3–10 days; plan accordingly.

## 6 Driving license conversion (week 3–4)

Your foreign license is valid in India for 1 year from arrival on a tourist visa. With OCI + resident status, convert to an Indian license at your local RTO. Most NRIs can skip the driving test if their foreign license is in English and less than ~10 years old.

## 7 Register for DigiLocker + UPI (week 4)

UPI (GPay, PhonePe, Paytm) is the default payment method now — sometimes the *only* one. Link it to your new resident account. DigiLocker stores your Aadhaar, PAN, driving license, OCI digitally — saves carrying originals.

✓ **By end of month 1** you should have: Indian SIM, Aadhaar updated, resident bank account, at least one Indian credit card application in progress, UPI working, driving license conversion filed, and a basic rental agreement. The rest is compounding on this foundation.

### STEP 5 · BANKING

## Converting from NRI to resident — and why I kept a US checking account

Within 30 days of your tax residency flipping to India, RBI requires you to redesignate your NRE/NRO accounts as resident accounts. But don't close your US-side completely — you'll need parallel banking for years. Here's what I did.

### The mandatory Indian-side conversion

When I walked into the ICICI branch in Bandra, it took about 30 minutes and a stack of paperwork. NRE savings got redesignated to resident savings. My NRE fixed deposits were allowed to run to maturity (interest is now taxable post-RNOR, but principal stayed intact). FCNR deposits, if you have them, can also be held to maturity. After that I opened a second account with Kotak for digital-first use — the app is genuinely a class above.

My full comparison of which bank works best for which type of returning NRI is at [the NRI banking guide](#). But these three cover 90% of people I've spoken to:



### ICICI Bank

Best all-round for returning NRIs. Strong NRI desk, English-speaking staff who've seen this conversion many times. My primary.

[Open with ICICI →](#)



### HDFC Bank

Best credit card ecosystem (Regalia, Infinia, Diners Club). Strongest service quality for high-net-worth clients.

[Open with HDFC →](#)



### Kotak

Best-in-class digital-first app. Seamless for everyday use. My secondary account, mostly for UPI and investing.

[Open with Kotak →](#)

## The modern fintech alternative — Jupiter

Jupiter ([jupiter.money](#)) is the spending-and-savings app most digital-native millennials in India use as their primary money app. It runs on a Federal Bank backend (so your money is RBI-insured exactly like a regular bank account), but the entire experience is app-first — instant onboarding, UPI-built-in, 0% forex on international debit-card spend, and a competitive savings yield. For NRIs returning to India, Jupiter is worth opening as a *second* account alongside ICICI/HDFC/Kotak — the day-to-day-spending workflow is meaningfully cleaner than legacy bank apps.

★ **WORTH OPENING** For your day-to-day spending account

**Jupiter — Federal Bank-backed, app-first banking**

Spending account + savings + UPI + 0% forex on the debit card. Available to resident Indians (which you are, the moment your residency flips). Open in 5 minutes from the app once your Aadhaar and PAN are sorted post-return.

Open Jupiter →

## What I kept active on the US side — and why

- **One US checking account (Chase for me).** I kept it for receiving any lingering 1099 income, my US tax refund, and maintaining credit. Charles Schwab's checking is an even better option if you're setting one up fresh — zero international ATM fees.
- **Two US credit cards.** One no-fee card and one premium. Keeps my US credit score alive in case I visit, and as pure optionality. Auto-pay for the annual fee.
- **401k, IRA, Roth IRA — untouched.** Left them at Fidelity. You can't contribute after leaving US employment, but they continue to grow. Withdrawals are planned strategically inside the RNOR window (more on that later).
- **ISAs, Premium Bonds, UK SIPs** — if you're moving from the UK, these generally lose their UK-tax-wrapper advantage once you're not a UK resident. Most advisors say unwrap before the move. Pensions generally stay put.



**FATCA/FBAR reverse kicks in.** The day you become an Indian tax resident, your Indian accounts become the "foreign" accounts from the US tax perspective. You still file FBAR (FinCEN 114) if any Indian account crosses \$10k, and Form 8938 if the aggregate crosses \$50k. This trips up almost every new returnee in year one. [Full FATCA guide →](#)

### STEP 6 · BRINGING YOUR MONEY

## The single highest-stakes financial decision of the move

Most returning NRIs are bringing somewhere between \$50k and \$500k+ across the first 24 months — housing deposit, living expenses, investment capital, parents' help. The FX spread you accept on that flow is the biggest single dollar amount you'll leave on the table if you get it wrong. I got it right mostly by accident. Here's what I've learned since.

## Lump sum or staged?

For amounts under \$50k, lump sum is fine — the spread differential of timing is small vs the cognitive overhead. Above \$100k, split into 3–4 tranches over 6–12 months. This is just dollar-cost-averaging the INR/USD rate, reducing the risk that you moved \$300k on the one day the rupee happened to be weakest. My own sequence was rough: \$50k for rental deposit + first 6 months (day 1), ~\$100k at month 3, another \$100k at month 8. The USD/INR moved about ₹2 during that window — the staging meaningfully helped.

## Never use your bank for this



**On a \$200,000 transfer, using a specialist FX service instead of your bank can save you \$2,000–\$4,000.** Banks take 1–3% on FX spread and add \$25–40 in wire fees. On my first big transfer, Citibank quoted me a rate that was 1.8% worse than XE's. That's \$3,600 on \$200k. For a 10-minute comparison.

## The three services that actually work for large transfers



### XE Money Transfer

Zero transfer fees. Competitive USD → INR. Best for transfers \$2k–\$250k. What I used for most of my initial relocation capital.

[Send via XE →](#)



### Wise

True mid-market rate, transparent per-transfer fee. Best for smaller recurring transfers (\$1k–\$10k) and the ongoing US-income flow.

[Send via Wise →](#)



[Compare today's rates](#)

XE vs Wise vs Remitly vs your bank — live rates, side by side, for your exact amount. Run this before every transfer over \$5k.

[Open the calculator →](#)

## FEMA — the paperwork side

There's no limit on how much money you can bring *into* India. It's encouraged. But document every inward remittance — your remitter (XE, Wise, your bank) will issue a Foreign Inward Remittance Certificate (FIRC) or equivalent. Save these. You'll need them to prove the source of funds when buying property, making large investments, or during any RBI scrutiny. I keep a simple Google Doc tracking every transfer with date, amount, purpose code, FIRC reference.

More FX-specific reading:

- [Live FX compare tool](#) — check rates before every transfer
- [How to send money to India guide](#) — deeper dive on provider differences
- [Wise vs Remitly vs your bank](#) — direct head-to-head

### STEP 7 · HOUSING & TRANSPORT

## Rent first. Buy later. Drive carefully.

The single biggest mistake returning NRIs make is buying property in the first 6 months. You don't know which city actually works for you yet. Don't lock in ₹2–5 crore before you have the information.

### First year = rent

Pick a neighbourhood that lets you test the city. Metro access, walkability, grocery options, hospital distance, school routes (if kids), maid/cook/driver availability — you won't know what matters until you live there. 11-month agreements are standard, easy to exit.

### The deposit reality

- **Security deposit:** 10–11 months' rent in Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi. 2–3 months in smaller cities. Refunded at end of tenancy (minus damages, minus real or imagined cleaning charges).
- **Brokerage:** 1 month's rent to the broker who found you the place. Non-negotiable on Magicbricks/99acres/NoBroker; sometimes skippable through personal referrals.

- **Society charges:** ₹3,000–15,000/month on top of rent. Clubhouse, security, maintenance. Ask upfront.

## Where to rent — the 3 portals that matter



### NoBroker

Direct owner listings, zero brokerage. Works well for 1-3 BHK premium rentals in Bangalore, Mumbai, Pune.

[Search rentals →](#)



### Magicbricks

Largest inventory nationally. Good for exploring before you land. Brokerage-based, verify before committing.

[Search Magicbricks →](#)



### 99acres

Strong in Delhi NCR and Tier-1 cities. Mix of owner + broker listings. Premium societies well-covered.

[Search 99acres →](#)

## Buying: if you're going to, do it in year 2 or 3

By year 2 you'll know your city, your neighbourhood, your real commute, and which society/builder has a track record. Buying in month 3 out of FOMO is how NRIs end up with a ₹3 crore apartment in a building that floods every monsoon. Home loans are available to returning NRIs (and to you as a resident, once your status flips) — the interest-rate game has narrowed to 60 basis points across the top 5 lenders.

- [Complete NRI property guide →](#) — what to look for, RERA, title checks, NRI-specific paperwork
- [NRI banking hub →](#) — includes home-loan-eligible banks, rates, and NRI loan criteria

## The car question

- **Importing your foreign car:** technically allowed under ToR with concessional duty, but total landed cost + port clearance + service-network absence usually makes it a bad deal. Skip unless you're bringing a classic.
- **Buying local:** new (Maruti, Hyundai, Kia, Tata) or used. New cars deliver in 2–8 weeks; used same-day.
- **Driving license conversion:** foreign license + OCI = direct conversion at RTO, usually no re-test required. Don't drive on just a foreign license for more than 1 year after arrival.
- **Traffic reality:** Indian traffic is different. Ease into it. Many returning NRIs hire a driver for the first 6 months — at ₹20–30k/month in major metros, surprisingly affordable and removes a source of daily stress.

## Where to buy the car



### CarDekho

Research-first — model comparisons, dealer network, new and used. Best starting point.

[Explore CarDekho →](#)



### Cars24

Used cars with inspection + 7-day return. Strong inventory in all metros, decent pricing transparency.

[Browse Cars24 →](#)



### Spinny

Higher-quality used car marketplace. Better condition at a 10–15% premium. Good for first-car buyers.

[Browse Spinny →](#)



**The rule I've seen most NRIs land on:** rent for year 1, buy in year 2-3 in the neighbourhood you actually ended up wanting to live in, not the one you thought you wanted before arriving. The 6-18 months of rent paid is the cheapest decision insurance you'll ever buy.

## STEP 8 · WORK & INCOME

# Three income paths — and the tax consequences of each

Your employment structure at the moment of return determines a lot downstream: tax residency timing, social security, health coverage. Most returning NRIs fall into one of three patterns.

## Path A: remote for your existing foreign employer

- **Legal:** yes, as long as your employer agrees. Most US/UK employers will require a W-2 → 1099 switch (you become a contractor) or formal offshore employment via an EOR like Deel or Remote.com.
- **Tax:** you're now earning foreign income while being an Indian tax resident. It's taxable in India once RNOR ends. US still taxes you as a citizen. Tax treaty credit prevents double taxation but paperwork doubles.
- **Practical:** keeps cash flow stable during transition. Gives you 12-24 months to figure out the next step without income pressure.

## Path B: local job in India

- **Compensation reality:** senior roles (VP / Director / Head of X) in tier-1 Indian tech or finance pay ₹80 lakh – ₹3 crore base, plus ESOPs. In PPP terms, often comparable to US senior roles. In absolute terms, lower — but your cost of living is a fraction.
- **Tax:** simpler. Single-country filing once RNOR window closes. EPF contribution (12% employee + 12% employer) becomes your default retirement vehicle.
- **Practical:** best path for people who want a clean break from the US/UK chapter and to be fully present in India.

## Path C: founder / consultant / portfolio career

- **Popular with later-career returnees:** advisory, angel investing, board seats, own company. India's startup scene has matured enough that foreign experience is valued premium capital.
- **Tax:** varies by structure (private limited company, LLP, proprietor). Get a CA set up in month 1 of landing.
- **Practical:** maximum optionality, minimum income stability in year 1. Only viable if you have 18+ months of runway saved.



**The visa trap for Path A.** If you moved back on OCI but your foreign employer still pays into a foreign bank account, your tax residency and the account-country-of-record can start to misalign. RBI is getting stricter about "real residence vs payroll location". Talk to a CA before triggering the move if you plan to stay on a US payroll for 12+ months. [How to find an NRI-specialist CA →](#)

## Where to find the local role — the 3 platforms that actually work for senior NRIs

- **LinkedIn (still #1):** India hiring managers use LinkedIn heavily for mid-to-senior roles. Update location + set "Open to work" to India 6 months before you move. Most first conversations start here.
- **Naukri.com:** the local giant. Better for tech, finance, operations roles ₹30 lakh to ₹2 crore. Less premium than LinkedIn but deeper inventory. Resume visibility matters — upload a polished version.
- **Executive search firms:** for VP and above — Heidrick & Struggles, Egon Zehnder, Korn Ferry, Michael Page, EMA Partners all have strong India practices. Get introduced through your network, not cold.

## Remote for a foreign employer — the infrastructure

If you're staying on with your US/UK employer, they'll typically move you from W-2 to a contractor arrangement or set up formal offshore employment via an Employer of Record (EOR). Get this right upfront — retro-fixing it is painful.

- **Deel / Remote.com / Rippling:** the 3 EOR platforms US/UK companies use to employ Indians legally. Your employer signs up with one; you become their "employee of record" in India with Indian payroll + statutory compliance.
- **Premium freelance platforms:** if you're going consultant rather than employee — **Toptal** (vetted senior talent), **Upwork** (broader), **Arc.dev** (tech). Indian consultants charge \$80-250/hour on these platforms for senior work.

- Our [dedicated guide for Indian freelancers getting paid by overseas clients](#) covers GST, LUT, FIRA compliance — essential reading if you go this route.

## Angel investing & startups — real talk

India's startup scene is the most interesting it's been in a decade. Returning NRIs with foreign capital and operating experience are welcomed everywhere — but most first-time angels lose money. Start small, invest through syndicates, don't chase AI hype alone.

- **AngelList India** — syndicates let you invest alongside experienced leads from ₹2.5–10 lakh tickets. Best on-ramp for first-time Indian angels.
- **LetsVenture, Inflection Point Ventures** — curated deal flow platforms for Indian angels. ₹25 lakh minimum net worth requirement.
- **Direct:** once you've seen 20–30 deals, you'll know what you actually want. Most serious NRI angels do 3–5 cheques/year across 3–4 years.
- Deeper dives: [NRI investing in startups guide](#) → · [The India investing hub](#) →

## Starting a business or buying a franchise

Two distinct paths, different capital requirements:

- **Start a company** — Private Limited is the default structure. [IndiaFilings](#) or Razorpay Rize handle incorporation in 10–15 days, ₹15,000–30,000. You'll need a resident director (you qualify once you're a tax resident). Zerodha's Rainmatter has a good "founder checklist" for new Indian startups.
- **Franchise:** lower risk, known brand. Domino's, Burger King, Café Coffee Day, Lenskart franchises typically need ₹30 lakh to ₹3 crore investment. Franchise India has the inventory; do independent due diligence on territory + margin.
- **Acquire an existing business:** India's SME market is deep — food brands, D2C companies, small service businesses regularly come up for sale ₹1–10 crore range. Less prestigious than founding but often better IRR for returning NRIs.

## Supporting your lifestyle — the cashflow math

The quiet truth: most returning NRIs don't need to match their US/UK income dollar-for-dollar in India. What you need is *enough Indian income to cover Indian expenses*, while your foreign assets appreciate separately. If you're spending ₹4–8 lakh/month in a Tier-1 metro (rent + domestic help + lifestyle + school fees), your India-earned income needs to cover that. Your US brokerage account doesn't need to be touched — it can compound for another 10–20 years before meaningful withdrawals begin.



**The typical returning-NRI money structure:** ₹X lakh/month from local Indian role or consulting covers day-to-day living. ~\$2-5k/month from US rental property or dividend income covers any dollar-denominated expenses (international travel, US credit card bills, kids' future US college). 401k/IRA untouched until retirement. This two-income split is the cleanest tax and lifestyle architecture.

## STEP 9 · INVESTMENTS & TAXES

# The RNOR window — and the 3 moves that matter inside it

This section has the highest stakes per paragraph. Mistakes here cost real money. If you read one section of this guide carefully, read this one.

## RNOR: the 2-3 year tax-favourable window

Resident But Not Ordinarily Resident (RNOR) is a transitional Indian tax status most NRIs hold for 2-3 years after returning, based on a specific residence-days formula. During RNOR, **foreign income is generally not taxable in India**. Only income that accrues or is received in India is typically Indian-taxed. For most NRIs this is one of the most valuable tax windows of their financial life — use it deliberately, and confirm your specific status with an NRI-specialist CA before making big moves.

## Three high-value moves inside the RNOR window

- **1. Roth conversion (US side).** If you have traditional 401k / IRA money, converting to Roth while in RNOR means the conversion is Indian-tax-free (foreign income, not taxable in India) — you only pay US tax on it. After RNOR ends, the same conversion would be fully taxed by India on top. Talk to a US CPA + Indian CA jointly.
- **2. Realise capital gains on foreign investments.** If you have appreciated US stocks or funds, selling inside RNOR means India doesn't tax the gains (foreign-sourced). After RNOR, all gains on those holdings become taxable globally. For long-held positions, this window is a multi-lakh decision.
- **3. Shift US mutual funds to direct equity or ETFs.** US mutual funds held by non-US tax residents get hit with PFIC rules — brutal tax treatment. Inside RNOR, you can divest and buy ETFs or individual stocks with less tax drag. Direct ETFs like VTI, VOO are usually fine.

## Indian-side investing post-RNOR

- **Mutual funds:** SIPs in direct-plan equity mutual funds (through Coin / Kuvera / ET Money). No PFIC for you if you've relinquished US tax residency. If you kept US citizenship, avoid Indian mutual funds (PFIC issue from the US side).
- **Direct equity:** via Zerodha, Groww or ICICI Direct. Cleanest option for US persons avoiding PFIC issues on the US side.
- **Fixed deposits (FDs):** resident FDs now. Interest is taxable. Senior citizens get preferential rates.
- **Real estate:** you can buy non-agricultural property freely on OCI. Pay from your resident or NRO account.

## The tax-filing reality for US persons

If you keep US citizenship or green card, you'll file *both* US and Indian tax returns every year for the rest of your life. Tax treaty provides credits but paperwork doubles. Budget \$800–2,500/year for a dual-country CPA+CA setup. This is a real cost of maintaining two passports.



**Renouncing US citizenship** is a separate, much larger decision. If your net worth is above the \$2M exit-tax threshold, renunciation triggers a deemed-sale capital gains event on your entire portfolio. Don't do this casually. If you're considering it, a US expatriation tax specialist is mandatory. This guide can't cover it safely.

More depth on specific pieces:

- [FATCA for NRIs — Form 8938, FBAR, PFIC](#)
- [NRI tax residency — the 182-day rule](#)
- [How to find a tax CPA who does NRI work properly](#)

STEP 10 · HEALTHCARE & SOCIAL SECURITY

## Losing US insurance is the pain point no one warned you about

The day you stop US employment, your US health insurance ends (COBRA extends it for 18 months at full cost). Indian health coverage is cheaper but structured completely differently. Plan this before

you land, not after.

## Indian health insurance — the 4 names you'll hear

Private health insurance in India runs ₹15–50k/year for a family of 4, depending on sum insured (typically ₹10L to ₹1Cr). Premium brands: **Niva Bupa**, **Star Health**, **HDFC ERGO**, **Care Health**. For aggregated quotes, **Policybazaar** compares all of them in one place. **Acko** is a strong digital-first alternative.

### The catches to know

- **Pre-existing condition waiting periods:** most policies have a 2–4 year wait for pre-existing conditions (diabetes, hypertension, previous surgeries). Buy earlier rather than later — the clock starts from policy inception.
- **Age-linked premium jumps:** premiums step up sharply at 45, 55, 65. If you're in your 40s/50s, locking in coverage now matters.
- **Network hospitals:** cashless only works at in-network hospitals. Confirm your preferred hospital (Apollo, Fortis, Manipal, Max, Kokilaben) is listed before buying.
- **Claim experience varies:** Niva Bupa, HDFC ERGO and Care Health generally rank well. Star Health has a mixed reputation. Read claim-settlement-ratio data before deciding.

### If you want international coverage too

Expats or frequent travellers often layer an international health policy (Cigna Global, Allianz, AXA) on top of an Indian one — ~\$2–5k/year for a family. Worth it if you split time across countries or want US/UK hospital access in emergencies.

### US Social Security after moving — what actually applies



**Important correction (April 2026):** The US and India do *not* currently have a full Social Security Totalization Agreement. Negotiations have been ongoing for years but nothing is signed. This means you **cannot** combine US and Indian work credits to qualify for benefits. What still works: if you earned 40 US credits on your own, you can receive US SS payments while living in India.

### Eligibility — what actually works

- **40 US work credits on your own** (~10 years of qualifying US employment, 4 credits/year) = fully eligible for SS retirement, disability and survivor benefits. You can receive them while living in India. Most NRIs who worked in the US for a decade+ qualify.

- **Fewer than 40 credits:** without a totalization agreement, you generally cannot qualify by combining US + Indian credits. Other paths (spousal benefits, continuing to work remotely for a US employer to earn more quarters) may apply — individual case.
- **Spouse benefits:** spouses of qualifying workers can typically claim up to 50% of the worker's benefit. International payment rules apply — your spouse's citizenship and residency affect payability.
- **Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP):** if you also earn an Indian pension (EPF/NPS), WEP may reduce your US SS benefit. Talk to an SSA international benefits specialist before claiming.

## How to claim from India

- **Apply online at [ssa.gov/international](https://ssa.gov/international)** or at the Federal Benefits Unit (Chennai consulate is the primary India contact for SS). You don't need to be in the US. Start 3–4 months before your target claim date.
- **Direct deposit to your Indian bank account:** SSA supports international direct deposit to many Indian banks. You'll provide IBAN + SWIFT on the claim form. Payments typically arrive monthly in INR after FX conversion.
- **Alternative: USD deposit to a US account,** then transfer to India yourself via [XE/Wise](#). Often gets a better rate than SSA's conversion — worth comparing.
- **Request Form SSA-1099 annually** — mailable or downloadable from [my.ssa.gov](https://my.ssa.gov). Needed for both US and Indian tax filings.

## Tax treatment

- **India side:** the India–US *tax treaty* (this is separate from the SS totalization discussion) generally exempts US SS benefits from Indian tax. The income is still reportable on your Indian return. Your Indian CA files it under "foreign income exempt under treaty."
- **US side:** if you're a US citizen, up to 85% of SS benefits can be US-taxable depending on your total income. The tax treaty protects you on the Indian side; US tax still applies.

*SS rules and international payment policies change. Always verify your specific eligibility with an SSA international benefits specialist before making claim decisions.*



**Medicare does NOT cover you in India.** This is the single biggest gap returning NRIs miss. Your US Medicare Part A is free to keep at 65+, but it only covers hospital care *in the US*. Medicare Part B (outpatient) should be dropped once you're permanently in India — you'll waste \$175/month on coverage you can't use. This is why Indian health insurance (Section 10 above) is non-negotiable. Don't rely on "I'll fly back for treatment" — for anything urgent, you won't.

If you left your 401k / IRA intact and plan to draw from it in retirement, the same treaty logic applies — withdrawals are taxable by US, but India taxes them again unless they fit treaty provisions. A US CPA + Indian CA pair, talking to each other, is essential. Our [how-to-find-a-CPA guide](#) has recommendations.

## Indian PF/EPF if you take a local job

Employees Provident Fund is automatic at most Indian employers — 12% of your basic salary deducted, matched by employer. At retirement, withdrawable with no tax. Interest is currently ~8.25% (set annually by EPFO). It's a mandatory retirement vehicle, not an option.

### STEP 11 · DAILY LIFE & THE REAL RESET

## The truth about year one — and the stuff no forum post mentions

Financial planning is the easier half. The harder half is the emotional, social and family reset. Here's what no forum post tells you.

### Kids and schools — the decision that locks in a city

- **IB / international schools** (Dhirubhai Ambani, Oakridge, Canadian, American): ₹6–15 lakh/year. Globally recognised, similar pedagogy to what kids experienced abroad. Waiting lists are real — apply 6–12 months ahead.
- **ICSE / CBSE premium schools** (DPS, Modern, Step-by-Step, Pathways): ₹2–6 lakh/year. More academic rigour, less breadth. Huge alumni networks.
- **City choice becomes school choice becomes city choice.** Bangalore and Gurgaon/Noida have the deepest IB options. Mumbai has premium CBSE/ICSE. Pune has balanced options at lower prices.

### The social reset

Your Indian friends from 20 years ago have families, kids, careers, routines. They're welcoming but busy — spontaneous dinners and weekend plans aren't how they live anymore. You'll need to rebuild some social life from scratch. WhatsApp parent groups, neighbourhood societies, work colleagues, interest clubs (running, yoga, photography). Give it 12–18 months to feel normal again.

### Identity whiplash

In the US/UK you were "Indian". In India, after 20 years abroad, you're "American" or "British". The accent gives you away. You're now the outsider in your home country. This feels strange for months, then gradually stops. If it doesn't stop after year 2, it's a signal — not always about India, sometimes about a deeper rootlessness that predated the move.

## What actually lands well in year one

- Spending time with parents without a plane ticket in the way.
- Kids developing deep relationships with grandparents and cousins.
- Food — the real thing, daily, not a performance.
- Help at home (maid, cook, driver) creating time you didn't know was possible.
- Weather in Bangalore, Pune, Goa. Monsoons that mean something.
- Cost math that makes you feel generous with family in ways you couldn't before.

## What rarely lands well in year one

- Traffic, air quality (in Delhi/Gurgaon specifically), noise.
- Bureaucracy that expects you to show up in person for things you could do online abroad.
- Social expectations (family functions, "what will people say") you'd forgotten about.
- The assumption that you moved back because you "couldn't make it there" — which NRIs hate, and is usually untrue.

## The daily-life details no one tells you about

- **UPI is a revelation.** GPay, PhonePe, Paytm — every chaiwalla, auto driver, restaurant, grocer takes UPI. Link it to your resident account on day one. Cash is increasingly awkward.
- **Get a Jio or Airtel prepaid SIM within 48 hours.** Everything — bank OTPs, UPI, ride-hailing, food delivery — runs through it. Don't try to function on your US/UK SIM + roaming.
- **A premium Indian credit card matters.** The post-return lifestyle (restaurants, travel, shopping) rewards a card like HDFC Infinia or ICICI Emerald — 3-4× points, airport lounge access, dining discounts, concierge. [Compare the top NRI/resident credit cards →](#)
- **Zomato and Swiggy are genuinely incredible.** Food from 5,000+ restaurants in your city, often in under 30 minutes, often cheaper than cooking. This is the single most pleasant surprise for returning NRIs.
- **Gifting culture is on-demand now.** Diwali, birthdays, Karva Chauth, weddings — you'll send 40+ gifts a year. [Our NRI gifts guide](#) covers flowers, sweets, jewellery and Amazon India gifting from abroad or within India.

- **Cars: buy local, don't import.** Maruti (reliability + service network), Hyundai/Kia (features), Tata (value + safety), Toyota (long-term keep). Used car market is mature — Cars24, Spinny, CarDekho. Budget ₹8–15 lakh for a good used car, ₹15–30 lakh for a decent new one.
- **Domestic help is normal and affordable.** Cook, cleaner, driver, nanny — most middle-class households have 2–3. Budget ₹15,000–40,000/month total depending on city and how much help. It creates time you didn't know was possible.
- **Delivery culture.** Groceries (BigBasket, Blinkit, Zepto), pharmacy (1mg, Netmeds), laundry, dry cleaning, repairs — all on-demand in major metros, often cheaper than doing it yourself.
- **Travel becomes cheap — explore India properly.** Goa weekends, Rajasthan palaces, Himalayan retreats, Kerala backwaters — all suddenly one-hour flights and ₹10–40k trips rather than transatlantic expeditions. [The NRI travel hub](#) has routes I actually took in year one.
- **The rest of the Lifestyle hub** — [weddings](#), [spirituality](#), [medical tourism](#), [seva](#), all the NRI-lens content organised together.



**Give it 18–24 months before deciding if the move worked.** Most returning NRIs hit a low point around month 6–9 when the novelty fades and the friction is still high. By month 18, the friction has mostly resolved and the good parts have accumulated. People who leave before month 18 usually leave in the dip. People who make it past 18 months rarely leave.

## STEP 12 · THE CHECKLIST

# Your move-back checklist — copy it into your planner

Every step from this guide, organised by phase. Print it, Notion it, stick it on the fridge. Check items as you complete them.

## 18–24 months before

- Decide on target move date — pin it, even loosely
- Apply for / renew OCI card (for all family members)

Find a dual-country CPA/CA for RNOR tax planning

Start scouting Indian cities/neighbourhoods on home trips

Have the conversation with employer re: remote or exit

## 12 months before

Model Roth conversion + capital-gains realisation inside RNOR window

Consolidate US bank accounts — close extras, keep 1 checking + 1–2 credit cards

Update beneficiaries on all retirement accounts + life insurance

Shortlist Indian bank for the resident account conversion

Research ToR paperwork + shipping companies

## 6 months before

Book shipping container (sea freight is 6–10 weeks)

Sell the car (or make the rare decision to import under ToR)

Book first 30 days accommodation in India (service apartment)

Formalise exit at work / sign EOR paperwork if going remote

Start the first major FX transfer to India (deposit + first 6 months)

## 3 months before

Apply for / update Aadhaar & PAN (file online, complete in person after arrival)

Buy Indian health insurance with start-date = arrival date

Get driving licence translated (if not already in English)

Scan + back up all important documents to cloud (multiple copies)

Confirm school admission for kids (application deadlines are brutal)

## First 30 days in India

Indian SIM (Jio/Airtel) within 48 hours

Update Aadhaar address to Indian residential address

File Transfer of Residence at customs (on arrival)

Convert NRE/NRO to resident savings account (within 30 days)

Apply for resident credit card + link UPI

Convert driving licence at RTO

Register in DigiLocker (stores Aadhaar/PAN/licence digitally)

File US FBAR for the year of move (if applicable)

## Want this as a PDF?

Subscribe to the NRI Money Matters newsletter. The full checklist, plus weekly notes on OCI timing, RNOR tax-window opportunities.

[Subscribe for Free](#)

property trends, and which financial products are working for returning NRIs right now. Free.

## FAQS

# Common questions from returning NRIs

How much money should I have saved before moving back? 

Do I need an OCI card before I move? 

What is Transfer of Residence and when should I trigger it? 

Can I keep my US 401k or IRA after moving back? 

What is RNOR status and why does it matter? 

Should I rent or buy in the first year after moving back? 

Will I still get US Social Security after moving to India? 

How do I convert my NRE account to a resident savings account? 

Is there a US-India Social Security Totalization Agreement? 

How much can I bring duty-free under Transfer of Residence in 2026? 

What is the 120-day rule for high-income NRIs?



WHAT'S NEXT

## Move in the right direction with the right tools



### Compare FX for your big first transfer

Wise vs Remitly vs XE vs your bank — side by side.

[Run the calculator →](#)



### Pick your Indian bank

ICICI, HDFC, Kotak, IDFC First — compared for returning NRIs.

[See banks →](#)



### Reapply for credit cards

Premium Indian cards that actually work for the returning lifestyle.

[See cards →](#)



### Find a tax specialist

Dual-country CA + CPA setup for the RNOR and post-RNOR years.

[Get help →](#)

## Planning to move back in the next 12 months?

Weekly notes on QOI timing, tax-window opportunities, property trends, and which financial products are working for returning NRIs right now. Free.

[Subscribe for Free](#)

*This guide reflects the current state of NRI return in 2026. Tax rules, customs regulations and bank procedures change — always verify with an NRI-specialist CA and the current [Income Tax India](#) / [OCI Services](#) sites before major decisions. Some links are affiliate; we may earn a commission at no cost to you — rankings are editorial, never paid. Built by [Amish Kapadia](#), who's had this conversation with enough NRIs that it felt worth writing down properly.*

## NRI Money Matters

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