

Delhi: a transition through time

Every crumbling wall here has a story to tell. Every yesterday of Delhi is replete with history. Rulers have come and gone. The city has lived through wars and resurrection, repeatedly rising from the ashes. Delhi is a city of contrast. One of the oldest cities in the world and now one of the most progressive; it combines uniquely the ancient and the modern side by side. High-rise buildings now stand cheek-by-jowl with about 1300 monuments. Delhi is India's show-window. Being a truly cosmopolitan city, it has brought within its fold people of all ethnic groups and their traditions and culture, reflected in a variety of arts, crafts, cuisines, festivals, and lifestyles. (See DTTDC Site <http://www.delhitourism.nic.in/>)

A tale of eight cities

As we trace history of Delhi through the passage of time, we light upon one of the oldest living cities in the world with its 20,000 ruins. Delhi is not a single city but a combination of eight cities that have been established between as early as 900 BC and 1930 AD when the British completed the construction of New Delhi as the capital of imperial India. It is, therefore, not surprising that the monuments of Delhi successfully mirror the development of the architectural styles in the country.

The earliest references to Delhi are in Buddhist and Jain scriptures, but these sources cannot be precisely dated. In the great Indian epic Mahabharat composed around 900 BC, there is mention of Indraprastha, a city founded by the Pandavas on the banks of the river Yamuna. The first city of Delhi, Lal Kot was founded by the Tomar ruler Anangpal, in the 11th century. It was extended to Qila Rai Pithora by King Vignaraja IV (Circa 1153–64). Qutbuddin Aibak became Delhi's first Sultan in 1206 and laid the foundations of the Qutb Minar, India's tallest stone tower at the site of the first city of Delhi; and subsequently the rulers of the Sultanate dynasties, Khaljis, Tughluqs Sayyids, and Lodis continued the work to its completion.

New cities assumed as Delhi grew. The second city, Siri rose by the time of Alaud-Din Khalji (1296–1316); during the Tughlak rule (1320–1412) the third and fourth cities of Delhi were founded. Ghyas-ud-din Tughlak founded Tughlakabad, which took four years to build but was deserted soon due to scarcity of water. Sultan Mohammad-bin-Tughlak constructed Delhi's fourth city called Jahanpanah close to the Qutab Minar to protect his people living in the open plains from attacks by invaders; Firuzabad, the fifth city of Delhi, is now represented by Kotla Firuz Shah, founded by Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351–88). Constructed in an area said to be the ancient city of Indraprastha, Purana Quila was erected in 1533–34 by the Mughal Emperor Humayun who was forced to flee from Purana Quila by the invading Afghan warrior Sher Shah Suri (1530–39). Sher Shah Suri built a beautiful hall and mosque in the fort and ruled from here till 1555 when Humayun returned and recaptured the fort.

While some construction activities did continue during the reign of Akbar (1556–1605) and Jehangir (1605–27), it was Shah Jehan (1628–58) who built the seventh city, Shahjahanabad, or Old Delhi as it is now called. It was built between 1638 and 1649 and remained the Mughal capital until 1857. This city comprises the famous Red Fort and Jama Masjid that exhibits many fine examples of Mughal architecture.

Delhi's eighth city, now known as New Delhi, was formally inaugurated in 1931. Following the British decision to shift the capital of imperial India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, two British architects, Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker were commissioned to design a city in keeping with the grandeur of India. This new city is today the capital of modern India.

Source: Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Authority web site.

Delhi: general information

STD code: 011

Weather conditions: Winter 7⁰C–30⁰C; Summer 21⁰C–41⁰C

Getting there

By air : Delhi is a major international and a major domestic airport, well connected with cities all over the world.

By rail : Delhi is well connected with all cities of India by rail. Trains leave to all parts of the country from New Delhi station, Old Delhi station, Sarai Rohilla station, and Nizamuddin.

By road: Delhi is well connected by an extensive network of roads with all the main cities in India. There are bus services to Agra, Ajmer, Amritsar, Bharatpur, Chandigarh, Dehradun, Gwalior, Hardwar, Jaipur, Jammu, Kulu, Mathura, Mussoorie, Nainital, Rishikesh, Shimla, and several other places of interest.

203 km from Agra
399 km from Ajmer
603 km from Allahabad
373 km from Almora
446 km from Amritsar
190 km from Bharatpur
741 km from Bhopal
249 km from Chandigarh
297 km from Corbett National Park
319 km from Gwalior
250 km from Jaipur
586 km from Jammu

604 km from Jodhpur
596 km from Khajuraho
505 km from Kota
569 km from Lucknow
147 km from Mathura
269 km from Mussoorie
318 km from Nainital
348 km from Shimla
876 km from Srinagar
663 km from Udaipur
765 km from Varanasi.

Sight seeing

- **Jantar Mantar :** An astronomical observatory with instruments built of stone by the great royal astronomer, Maharaja Jai Singh of Jaipur in 1724
- **Safdarjung's Tomb:** A tomb built in the 18th century by Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula, the last monument of Mughal style
- **Qutab Minar :** A 11th century victory tower, the tallest (73 metres) stone tower in India; a mosque is attached to it
- **Purana Qila:** An old fort built by Sher Shah, in the 16th century; houses a library also
- **Humayun's Tomb:** A sandstone tomb built by the widow of the second Mughal Emperor, Haji Begum; in the Indo-Persian style; a forerunner for the location of the Taj Mahal; designed by Misak Mirza Ghiyas; built by Humayun's wife.
- **Feroze Shah Kotla, Tughlakabad:** Situated in two different parts of the city, ruins of abandoned cities founded by Ferozshah Tughlaq in 1354.

- **Raj Ghat** : A black marble platform marks the site where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated in 1948
- **Red Fort** : Built by the great Mughal Emperor, Shahjahan; houses the Diwan-i-Aam (the Hall of the public audience), the Diwan-i-Khas (the Hall of private audience), Rang Mahal (water-cooled apartment of royal ladies), the Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque) built of white marbles, Lahore Gate (the main gate of the fort), Khas Mahal, and Hammam (royal baths)
- **Jama Masjid**: Situated in Old Delhi, a mosque built by Shahjahan, which can accommodate 20 000 worshippers
- **India Gate**: A memorial raised in honour of the Indian soldiers who were martyred in the Afghan War, famous as the All India War Memorial, designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1921, height 42m
- **Rashtrapathi Bhavan**: Official residence of the President of India
- **Quwwat-Ul-Islam**: Earliest existing mosque in India; also situated here is the iron pillar of Ashoka, which has not rusted over more than two thousand years
- **Aliminar** : A 27-metre tall, incomplete structure built by Ala-ud-din as a rival to Qutab Minar.
- **Lotus Temple**: Situated atop Kalkaji Hill, also known as Baha'i Temple, completed in 1986
- **Dilli Haat** : Famous for its extensive range of Indian handicrafts and culinary delights; also houses an open theatre and a children's play area

For more detailed information please visit the following sites

- <http://www.delhitourism.nic.in/>
- <http://travel.indiamart.com/>
- <http://www.tourisminindia.com/indiainfo/cityguide/delhi/index.htm>