

Agra : The City of the Taj Mahal

Languages Spoken	Hindi, English, Urdu
Long Distance Code	+91-562
Importance	City of Taj
International Access	Delhi International Airport
Area	62 sqkm
Best Time To Visit	October To March



Location: Agra is located just 200 kms from Delhi, the capital of India. Situated on the west bank of River Yamuna, Agra was once the flourishing capital of the Muslim rulers of India. It is more than 350 kms away from the state capital of Lucknow and is in the northern plains of India with extreme climate. It is best visited in the winter months of October to March.

Description: Agra...the majestic capital of the Mughals has placed it self in the world map as the most sought after destination in the world. The city of Taj Mahal as it is known to the world, it is also a city of magical splendours and city having the most magnificent monuments in India, standing testimony to its glorious past. The first establishment possibly was some 5,000 years ago. Basically it has a strategic location and therefore the Aryans must have come and settled here then. It finds a mention in the epic of Mahabharata as Agravana, which the say is the origin of the present name Agra. Agravana means Paradise in Sanskrit. Later the city was also referred to as Arya Griha as the place of Aryans. It is also said that the town was founded by the King Ugrasen. But the town rose to prominence from the time that the Muslim rulers established themselves over here.

The present city of Agra was founded by Sikandar Lodhi of the Lodhi dynasty. The Lodhis ruled the area till the Mughals seized it in the mid of the 16th century. It was the mighty Babur who laid the foundation of building forts and gardens in this city. The Mughals loved this city and beautified it as per their requirements by building huge forts and lovely and shapely gardens. The architects were specially brought from Persia to construct the dream buildings of every emperor.

Agra remained the seat of almost four Mughal emperors. While Babur settled here, Humayun and Akbar guarded it and Jehangir and Shahajehan beautified it. It remained the capital till emperor Shahajehan shifted the capital to Delhi in the later years of his life. But nonetheless, he could not find a better place than Agra to build the great monument, as tribute to his love, the exotic Taj. And till date for tourists all over the world India is synonymous to the great Taj Mahal.

But there is more to Agra than only the Taj. Not only other huge edifices that dot the town, but also something to satisfy the connoisseur for good things in life. Agra is the birth place of the Tandoor cuisine that is famous all over the world. Another famous item of Agra is the sweet prepared of white pumpkin called petha. The spicy snack of dal moth is also tasty.

Under the patronage of the Mughal rulers many arts and craft forms were encouraged which still form the handicraft industry of Agra. Brass ware, embroidered clothes, marble curios, intricately designed jewellery and the original Persian carpets are few of the things which can be carried from Agra.

Attractions of Agra :

- The Taj Mahal
- The Red Fort
- Fatehpur Sikri
- The Sikandara
- Mathura and Vrindavan

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The Taj Mahal : The grandeur called the Taj is perhaps the most photographed, filmed, described and sketched building of the world. Taj Mahal is where fantasy coincides with reality in perfect harmony. An inspiration for innumerable artists over the centuries, the Taj is an ode to love. An epitome of love the world has ever seen which no monument in the world can match. The splendour and the beauty of this pleasant edifice brings one back to experience the magic of this majestic structure. The beauty of the Taj is in its simplicity. It is rare that a person would not fall in love with the pure and simple beauty in white. <p align=left>More about Taj</p>

The Red Fort : From the sight of it the magnificent structure in Red Sand Stone looks strong and invincible. The common belief goes that it was built by the Mughal emperor Akbar and further developed by his heirs. But in reality the fort was actually a small fortress which a Hindu war lord had built long back around the 5th century viewing the strategic importance of Agra on the banks of River Yamuna.

Later when the Hindu kings and their dynasties were taken over by the Muslim rulers, the small fortress was developed which took the shape of a massive fortress. The Lodhis rebuilt it in the 13th century and Mughal emperor Akbar renovated the Fort in 1565 A.D. Though Akbar built it for military purposes, his heir son Jehangir and grandson Shahajehan turned it into a palatial fort.

The majestic structure is in the area of nearly 3 km and the walls are 20 feet high. It is surrounded by a moat full of water and crocodiles. The fort is built with Red Sand stone and is supposed to be the predecessor of the Red Fort of Delhi. Many buildings inside the fort were built by Shahajehan, unique among which is the stunning pearl mosque. The only building that remains which was built by Akbar is the Jehangiri Mahal, which stands in stark contrast with the rest as it has dominating Hindu architecture. The Diwan - e - Aam and the Diwan - e - Khas are the audience halls built by Shahajehan. The Sheesh Mahal near the Diwan - e - Khas is a beautiful palace with inlaid mirror work on the walls. The Mussaman Burj built by Shahajehan holds significance in the Agra Fort. This octagonal tower built by Shahajehan was supposed to be his bed room. This is also the place where he was detained by his son in his last days. This particular pavilion gives commanding views of the Taj, which the emperor would stare lying on his death bed.

Fatehpur Sikri : Around 40 km from the main city of Agra stands the ephemeral capital of Emperor Akbar, the Fatehpur Sikri or the city of Victory. Built by Akbar in the 16th century, it is a beautiful city made in brilliant red coloured sand stone that was available around. The city is built on the ridge of a hill within 5 sq. km area, next to a lake which has now dried up. The rapid construction of the city is mysterious and equally mysterious is its desertion.

It is said that Akbar decided to build a mosque for the Sufi saint Salim Chisti on the spot where it stands now, as a gesture of gratitude. Akbar did not have an heir to his kingdom and after the saint's prophecy he was blessed by three sons. As he started building the palaces, harems, courtyards, pools and places of public and private audience after the construction of the huge mosque and the tomb, his ministers too started building their houses around it; thus constructing a huge city within no time.

But this beautiful city which was fully operational was deserted soon. The reason for desertion is not clear although it is said to be shortage of water in the royal palaces. Was it a whim of an emperor to build a city and then suddenly leave it or was it his unfulfilled dream, no one knows. A huge gate, a unique piece of Mughal architecture, of around 40 meters in height, was constructed after Akbar's victory over Gujarat, which probably gave the city its name of Fatehpur Sikri.

Fatehpur Sikri is the amalgamation of many architectural styles. Primarily used are the Gujarat and the Rajput kind of architectures in the construction of its various palaces. The Mosque and especially the tomb of Salim Chisti hold a lot of importance. It is said that if a devotee with whole heartedness prays on the tomb and ties a thread to the carved pane making a wish, his wish definitely gets fulfilled. One can see innumerable threads tied and visitors of all the religions coming over to fulfill their wishes.

The other important structures on the campus are the Jodhabai Mahal, the Panch Mahal and the Birbal Mahal. All have a distinctive quality of architecture which differs from the rest of the Mughal architecture built during that time. The city also known as the ghost city due to its mysterious abandonment holds a unique charm. Whatever may be the reason of the desertion of the city by the emperor, he definitely left behind one of the finest specimens of architecture of that era.

The Sikandara : Around 14 kms from Agra is the place where the great emperor of the Mughal dynasty has been put to rest. The Sikandara is Emperor Akbar's mausoleum. It was Akbar who designed his own mausoleum and also had selected the place of the site. The structure and the architecture show the secular characteristic of the great emperor. Both Hindu and Islamic types of architectures are used to build the mausoleum. Although Akbar had started building the structure when he was still alive, it was his son and heir of the kingdom, Jehangir who eventually completed after the death of Akbar in 1613 A.D. The beautiful structure has striking inlay work of white marble on red sandstone, and perfect calligraphic ornamentation. The unique pyramidal tomb structure is topped by an open terrace contained within large panels of jail screens. The area where it was built is the gateway or the beginning of the city of Agra which was once ruled by Sikandar Lodhi. Hence it has acquired the name of Sikandara, the last resting place of one of the greatest Emperors of the Mughal dynasty.

Mathura and Vrindavan : Around 60 kms from Agra on the road to Delhi are the holy twin cities of Mathura and Vrindavan. Associated with the birth place of Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, these twin cities are special pilgrimage centers and are thronged by devotees round the year. Mathura, in the ancient days was the nucleus of the Brajbhoomi area.

The ancient temples, the picturesque Ghats on the bank of River Yamuna, the invoking prayers and songs for the God and the Pedhas, sweets prepared of milk is what Mathura is famous for today.