

AGRA

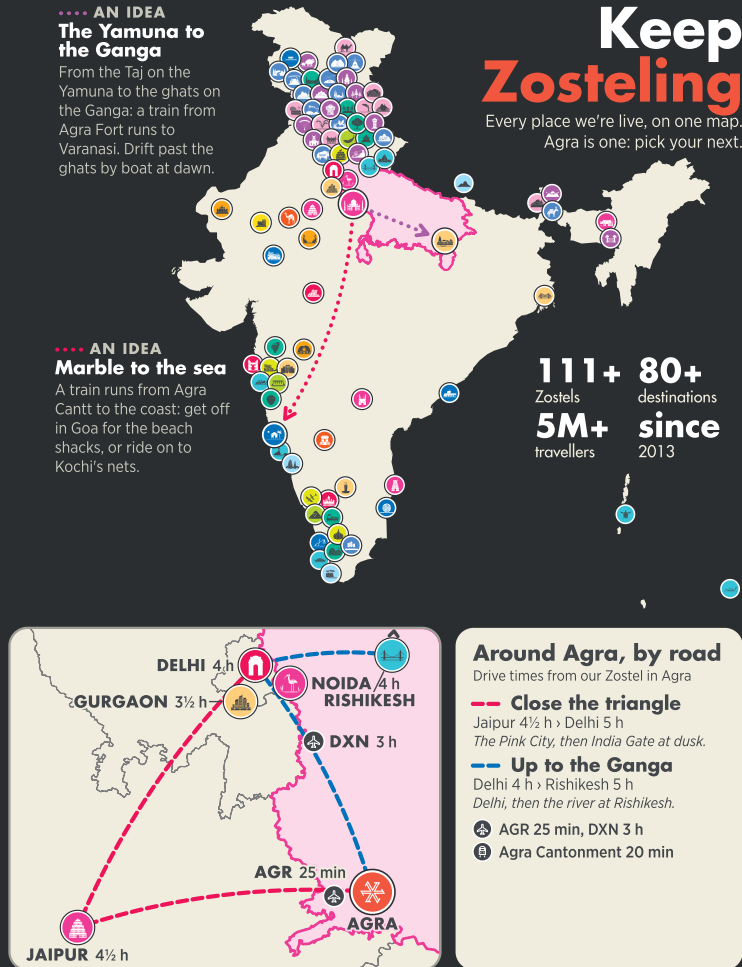
a map made by Zostel
for young travellers

FREE MAP · UTTAR PRADESH



LIVE IT. NOW

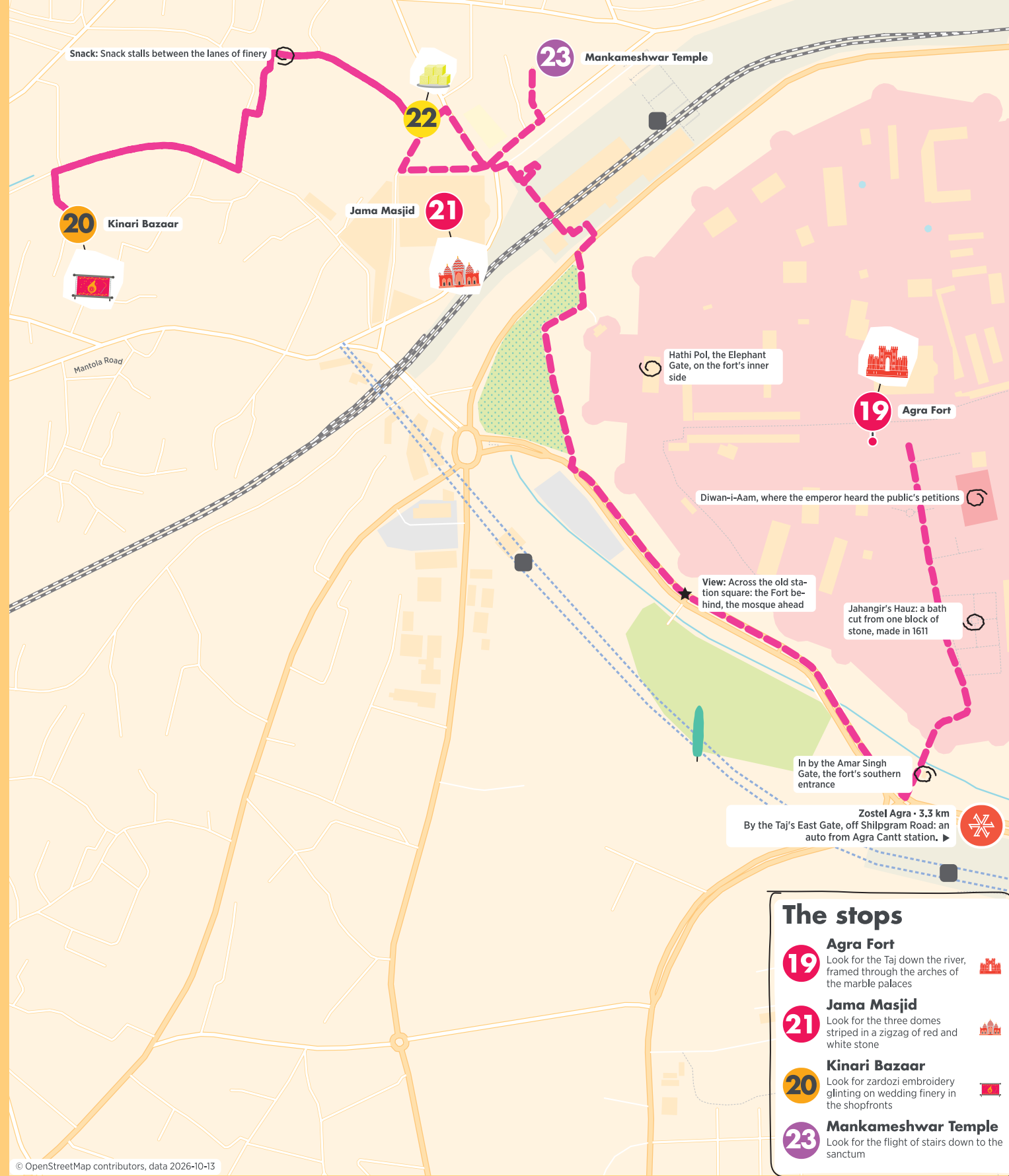
ZOSTEL



The old city: the Fort, the Jama Masjid and the bazaars

3.4 km · about 4 hours with stops · 4 stops

Metro to Agra Fort and in by the Amar Singh Gate: Akbar's walls, Shah Jahan's marble, his tower over the river. Then the Jama Masjid's zigzag domes, Kinari Bazaar's wedding-finery lanes and the Mankameswar temple, and the metro home.



Namaste, Agra!

Namaste! We're the Agra Zobus, and yes, the Taj lives here: from our roof by its East Gate we watch it go pink at dawn and gold under the moon. But Agra was a Mughal capital before the Taj was a plan. Akbar's red fort holds the river bend; across the Yamuna, Babur laid out the oldest Mughal gardens in India, and Nur Jahan built the Baby Taj, inlay and all. Behind the Jama Masjid the old bazars sell wedding finery, spices and shoes, because Agra makes shoes by the lakh. Eat bedai and jalebi for breakfast, cross the river for sunset, and keep Friday for everything else: the Taj takes the day off.



Stay with us in Agra

One Zostel by the Taj's East Gate, with a rooftop cafe that looks at the dome.

Zostel Agra

A rooftop cafe with the Taj Mahal straight ahead: sunrise over breakfast, the dome under the moon at dinner. Dorms, private rooms, Mughal-inspired art. In the quiet back lane near the East Gate, right behind Oberoi Amarvilas, just off Shilpgram Road.

Maps: © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), data fetched 2026-10-13 (UTC). Terrain: Terrain Tiles on AWS (Mapzen/Tilezen), from SRTM courtesy of NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey. Walk lines routed by FOSSGIS OSRM on OpenStreetMap. Drawings: the Zostel brand's own. Things change; check the day's timings at the gate.

Practical tips

Getting in, getting round

Trains stop at Agra Cantt and Agra Fort, buses at Billighar and the ISBT. Agra has its own airport too. Delhi is a straight run up the Yamuna Expressway. In town: autos, e-rickshaws, cycle rickshaws and tongas, and the metro from Taj East Gate to Mankameswar by the Jama Masjid. Agree the fare before you get in.



The last 500 metres

No petrol or diesel vehicle may come within 500 m of the Taj. Park at Shilpgram for the East Gate, or at Amrood ka Teela for the West, and ride the battery buses and golf carts to the gate, or walk. From our home it's a short walk.

Friday is the Taj's day off

The Taj is closed every Friday; the Fort, the Baby Taj, Sikandra, Mehtab Bagh and Fatehpur Sikri stay open all week. Make Friday the east bank, or the red city. Check the day's timings at the gate.

Tickets, only the official way

Buy Taj tickets at the windows at the gates or on the Archaeological Survey's own website, nowhere else. Keep bags small: no food, tripods, drones or big bags inside, and no photos inside the dome. Full-moon nights need a separate ticket, booked ahead.

Touts and 'guides'

Touts at the gates offer cheap tours that end in shops. Hire only approved guides who show their ID card, and never let anyone walk you to a shop: their commission goes on your price. Stones get faked; buy from a workshop you chose.



Heat, and when to come

October to March is the season. April to June is scorching: Agra hit 48.6 °C in May 2024. July to September brings the monsoon and the damp. Winter nights get cold. Go out early, carry water, and keep the middle of the day for shade.

The Yamuna: look, don't swim

The river is lovely from the ghats and Mehtab Bagh and no place to swim or wade: it carries the city's waste and rises fast in the monsoon. At Poiya Ghat, a cremation ground, keep your distance and your camera away.

Money, and travelling as a woman

UPI works almost everywhere; small stalls want cash, and our home takes cards and UPI. Dress modestly for the Taj and the mosques. Women travelling alone: be careful late at night, as anywhere in India; our home has a women-only dorm.

Every number is a tip on the map overleaf, in the colour of its kind: ● More Than the Taj ● Gardens and the River ● Bedai to Bhalla ● Marble, Thread, Leather ● Mughal and Braj ● Sunrise People. A drawing beside a line shows what you will find there:



5 minutes of history

1504
A sultan moves in
Sikandar Lodi, Sultan of Delhi, rebuilds Agra and makes it his seat of government, a generation before the Mughals arrive.

1526
Babur's garden
After Panipat, Babur takes Agra and lays out a garden on the Yamuna's east bank: Aram Bagh, the oldest Mughal garden in India.

1565
Akbar's red fort
Akbar orders the old brick fort rebuilt in red sandstone. About 4,000 workers a day finish it eight years later, on a bend of the river.

1571
A capital on a ridge
Akbar founds Fatehpur Sikri, about 40 km away, and rules from it until 1585. By 1610 the red city stands empty.

1613
Akbar's tomb
Jahangir finishes his father's tomb at Sikandra: a deep red sandstone pyramid in a vast walled garden, its gate crowned by white minarets.

1628
The Baby Taj
Nur Jahan completes the white marble tomb of her parents on the east bank, inlaid with stone flowers: a rehearsal for what comes next.

1632
The Taj begins
Shah Jahan commissions a tomb for Mumtaz Mahal in 1631 and building starts the next year. The tomb is done in 1648, the whole complex by 1653, with more than 20,000 workers.

1648
A mosque, and a move
Jahanara Begum's Jama Masjid is finished facing the fort. The same year Shah Jahan moves his capital to Shahjahanabad, today's Old Delhi.

1658
A view from the tower
Aurangzeb seizes power and keeps his father in Agra Fort until his death in 1666, by legend gazing at the Taj from the Musamman Burj.

1761
The Jats of Bharatpur
Maharaja Suraj Mal's Jats take Agra and its fort. The Marathas follow in 1785, and re-name Babur's Aram Bagh the Ram Bagh.

1803
The British arrive
The East India Company takes Agra Fort from the Marathas. Agra later serves as capital of the North-Western Provinces, until 1858.

1983
On the world's list
UNESCO inscribes the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort as World Heritage; Fatehpur Sikri follows in 1986.



Talk like a local

Namaste

Hello, the everyday one

nah-muhss-teh

Radhe Radhe

Hello, the Braj one

raa-dhay raa-dhay

Aadaab

Hello, the Urdu one, with a raised hand

as-daab

Shukriya

Thank you

shook-ree-yaa

Kitne ka hai?

How much is it?

kit-nay kaa hai

Bahut mehnga hai

That's too expensive

buh-hoot mehn-gaa hai

Bagh

Garden: Ram Bagh, Mehtab Bagh

Rauza

Tomb: Chini ka Rauza

row-zaa

Darwaza

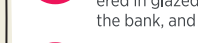
Gate: Buland Darwaza

dur-waa-zaa

Ganj

Market town: Taj Ganj

ganj



Eat like you're from Agra

Agra eats in two moods. Mornings are bedai and jalebi on a pavement, chai at Dilli Gate, a puri thali near the Fort; evenings are chaat in Sadar and kebabs off the coals. In between, petha, the city's own sweet, from the old makers of Noori Darwaza, and dalmotho to carry home. The old counters first, then the dishes to hunt down.

18 Deviram Sweets. Our destination page's breakfast: bedai with spicy potato curry, then jalebi, at one of the city's oldest sweet shops.

"Bedai first, jalebi after. Eat them in that order, standing up."

34 Bhagat Halwai. Dates itself to 1795. Our city guide's picks: its chaat, and bedai with a glass of lassi.

"Chaat first, then a lassi to cool down. Taste the petha home."

24 Panchhi Petha. Our city guide's petha, since 1926; the first shop is at Noori Gate. Plenty of shops borrow the name.

"Read the board before you buy. Then buy two boxes."

Chimman Lal Puri Wale. Hot puris, one stuffed with methi, potato and pumpkin sabzis, raita: Agra's everyday thali, near the Fort.

"Puris, two sabzis, raita. Agra's lunch hasn't changed in a long time."



6 Joney's Place. Since 1978. A pocket-sized Taj Ganj kitchen by the South Gate: banana lassi, malai kofta.

"Banana lassi after the sunrise. That's the Taj Ganj way."

33 Dilli Gate Chai Waala. Our city guide's chai: ginger, long pepper and cardamom, with a bun maska toasted on coals.

"Chai with ginger and long pepper. Dunk the bun."

Mughal Nihari. Mutton nihari cooked through the night, with khamiri roti; haleem at a stand in Kashmiri Bazaar.

"Nihari is a morning thing here. Come late and the pot is empty."

Ram Babu Paratha Bhandar. Fried parathas fried in ghee, with sabzis, chutneys and pickle; one plate feeds two.

"One paratha plate, two people. Trust the count."

15 Mama Chicken Mama Franky House. Sadar's late-night rolls: double chicken frankies, seekh kebabs and tandoori chicken off the coals.

"A double chicken roll on the kerb is a Sadar dinner."

13 Pinch of Spice. Mughlai at a table: mutton seekh kebab and rogan josh.

"Kebabs at a table, for once. Order the rogan josh too."

22 Gopaldas Petha. Petha wrapped in gulabjal, rose water: food walkers' petha stop.

"Petha that smells of roses. Taste before you choose."



Munna Lal Mithai Waala. Bedami puri stuffed with urad dal and fried in desi ghee, with potato, pumpkin and curd; moong dal halwa.

"Bedami puri, then moong dal halwa. Breakfast is serious here."

Brijasayanam Mishthan Bhandar. Our city guide's pick for traditional sweets and mithai.

"Mithai the old way. Ask what's fresh today."

Dishes to hunt down

24 Petha. Agra's own sweet: ash gourd soaked in edible lime, boiled till translucent, steeped in sugar syrup and dried, crisp outside and moist within.

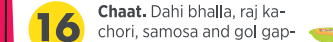
Plain and angoori are the classics; it keeps for months.

18 Bedai. Agra's breakfast: a puffed, crisp kachori with a lentil filling, eaten with spicy potato curry.

18 Jalebi. Bedai's other half: fried coils of batter soaked in syrup, eaten after the bedai to put the fire out.

Dalmotho. Agra's salty answer to petha: fried spiced lentils with nuts and fine sev. Agra's is peppery rather than chill-hot, its sev thin and soft. It travels well.

16 Chaat. Dahi bhalla, raj kachori, samosa and gol gappa: Sadar's Chaat Gali has them all in one lane.



Nihari and haleem. Agra's Mughlai breakfast: mutton cooked through the night with khamiri roti, and haleem from a roadside stand.

"Puri thali. Hot puris with potato and pumpkin sabzis and raita: the city's everyday plate."

A joda of paan. After a meal, Agra takes its paan in a joda, a pair.



Agra's sweet tooth

24 How petha is made. Ash gourd cut up and pricked, soaked in edible lime, boiled till translucent, steeped in syrup, then dried.

24 Plain or angoori. Plain ivory petha, or angoori, small and soaked in syrup; kesar, paan and chocolate are newer.

24 A cottage trade. The old makers are families round Noori Darwaza; the city's petha comes from well over a thousand small units by one count.

Moving for the Taj. Coal smoke dims the Taj's marble, so the courts have asked petha makers to move their stoves out of the city.

The legend. A story says Shah Jahan's kitchens made petha for the Taj's builders; it is not in the emperor's own cookbook, so take it with sugar.

22 Rose-water petha. Petha wrapped in gulabjal at Gopaldas in Subhash Bazaar.



18 Jalebi. Hot coils in syrup, eaten after the morning bedai.

34 Peda and barfi. From the old halwai counters, Bhagat Halwa's among them.

Dalmotho. Spiced fried lentils, nuts and fine sev: the salty box to carry home.



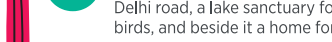
Got a day to spare?

40 Fatehpur Sikri. About 40 km west, Akbar's red sandstone capital, ruled from for fourteen years and then left empty. Climb to the Buland Darwaza, his gate of victory.

Keoladeo, Bharatpur. About 55 km west, a World Heritage wetland with more than 370 kinds of birds: painted storks, sarus cranes, and in winter, flocks from the far north.

41 Sur Sarovar and the bears. About 20 km north out on the Delhi road, a lake sanctuary for birds, and beside it a home for sloth bears rescued from the streets, where they once had to dance.

42 Mathura and Vrindavan. About 50 km north-west, the heart of Braj: the city Fateh to be Krishna's birthplace, and the temple town where he is believed to have spent his childhood.



39 Batekshwar and the Chambal. About 70 km south-east, over a hundred temples line a bend of the Yamuna; ten km on, boats on the Chambal look for gharials and river dolphins.

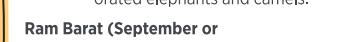
Festivals worth timing a trip for

10 Taj Mahotsav (February). Ten days at Shilpgram by the East Gate, every February since 1992: artisans from across India, music and dance each evening, and a procession of decorated elephants and camels.

Ram Barat (September or October). Before Dussehra, Rama's wedding procession rolls through the old city with lit-up tableaux and bands, to a neighbour-dressed as the bride's home. A new one every year.

Kailash fair (August or September). In the monsoon, the Kailash temple on the river at the city's edge holds its fair, and Agra walks out to it.

Batekshwar fair (October and November). About three weeks round Diwali: cattle, camels and horses traded by the river, then a village fair with rides and stalls. One of north India's biggest.



Inlay, gold thread and shoes

11 Parchin kari. The Taj's craft, still alive: coloured stones cut and fitted into white marble as flowers, so tight the joins all but vanish.

Zardozi. Gold sewing, word for word: metal thread, sequins and beads worked on velvet and silk. Agra's is shown at the Mahotsav every year.

Shoes. Agra makes over a lakh and a half pairs a day, in factories and thousands of homes. Every part of a shoe has its own lane.

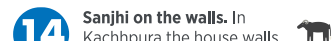
Carpets. Carpets are one of Agra's listed crafts. If you buy one, carry it home yourself: so the one that arrives is the one you chose.

37 Carvers at work. At Soami Bagh a white marble memorial is still being built by hand: watch the carvers bring fruit and flowers out of the stone.

14 Sanjhi on the walls. In Kachhpura the house walls are painted with sanjhi, the Braj art, in earth colours and lime.

The other bank

25 The Baby Taj. A small white marble tomb covered in inlay, built by Nur Jahan for her parents a few years before the Taj. The rehearsal.

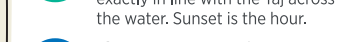


26 The China Tomb. A poet-minister's tomb, once covered in glazed tiles. A kilometre up the bank, and rarely visited.

27 The Garden of Rest. Babur's terraced garden, the oldest Mughal garden in India, a short walk on from the China Tomb.

8 The Moonlight Garden. A square Mughal garden laid exactly in line with the Taj across the water. Sunset is the hour.

14 The eleven steps. What is left of Humayun's observatory, in a field by the river, reached on Kachhpura's village walk.



The Taj, the honest way

3 Three gates, one quiet. The West Gate is nearest the city and the busiest. The East Gate, by us, is usually the quietest.

1 Closed on Fridays. Every Friday the Taj is shut to visitors. The Fort and the east bank stay open.

1 Five moonlit nights. On the full moon and the two nights either side, small groups see the Taj after dark, from well back. Not in Ramzan.

1 The garden's line. A four-part garden with a raised marble tank in the middle and a long pool running to the tomb: the reflection everybody photographs.



1 Shoes off, or covers on. On the tomb's platform go barefoot or in the covers you're given, and keep the camera down inside.

1 A mosque in the complex. Off the two red sandstone buildings beside the tomb, one is a mosque; its twin is there for symmetry. Dress for it.

Only in Agra

1 Leaning on purpose. The Taj's minarets tilt a little outward, so that if one ever fell it would miss the tomb.

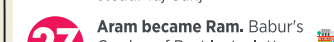
8 No Black Taj. The black twin across the river is a myth, helped along by a British archaeologist who mistook an old pond for its foundations.

12 Nobody's hands were cut off. The grim story about the builders has no evidence. They got a market town of their own instead: Taj Ganj.

27 Aram became Ram. Babur's Garden of Rest lost a letter under the Marathas, and Ram Bagh stuck.

A poet's birthplace. Mirza Ghalib, the great poet of Urdu and Persian, was born in Agra in 1797.

A colony planted with a mulberry. Dayalbagh began in 1915 with one mulberry tree on sand dunes, and now calls itself the Lungs of Agra.



A school of song. The Agra gharana, one of Hindustani music's great singing traditions, takes its name from the city.

Markets by what they sell

20 Kinari Bazaar. The lanes behind the Jama Masjid: wedding fabrics, zardozi, jewellery, shoes, spices, marblework. Bargain.

17 Sadar Bazaar. By Agra Cantt station: leather shoes, bags and wallets, handicrafts, clothes, petha, and the Chaat Gali. Best in the evening.

29 Raja ki Mandi. Agra's own market: produce, spices, clothes, household goods, street food, and durries.

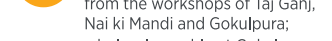
Rawatpura. The wholesale lanes for spices, grain and pulses, and a place for petha.

Hing ki Mandi. The shoemakers' market: laces, insides, soles, every part of a shoe.

Subhash Bazaar and Hospital Road. Clothes, near Agra Fort station.

11 Inlay workshops. Parchin kari boxes, plates and tables from the workshops of Taj Ganj, Nai ki Mandi and Gokulpura: wholesale marble at Gokulpura.

29 Durries. Agra's flat, re-verged woven rugs. Gifted in 2013; families in Tajganj still weave them. Look at both sides.



QUESTS

Dares for the brave and the curious. The map marks each with a star; tick them off as you go.

3 **Be at the East Gate before the sun.** The gates open before sunrise and the East Gate is the quiet one. Be first in, and have the garden almost to yourself.

1 **Catch the Taj in three colours.** Pinkish in the morning, milky white by evening, golden under the moon: so says the Taj's own website. Collect all three, one from our roof.

1 **Work out which way the minarets lean.** The four minarets tilt very slightly outward, on purpose: if one ever fell, it would fall away from the tomb. Stand at a corner and squint.

8 **Find the Taj in Mehtab Bagh's pond.** Across the river, a big octagonal pond lies in line with the dome. Crouch at its edge at sunset and frame the Taj twice.

25 **Find the vases in the Baby Taj's walls.** Stone vases of flowers and bowls of cut fruit are inlaid into the white marble. Count the vases on one wall, then give up.

26 **Hunt for the last blue tiles.** Chini ka Rauza was once covered in glazed tiles, the 'chini' in its name. Only patches survive: find the brightest one left.

27 **Sit in India's oldest Mughal garden.** Babur laid out Aram Bagh, the Garden of Rest, on the east bank. Find the terraces where water was made to run down in cascades, and rest.

14 **Find Humayun's eleven steps.** Gyarah Sidi, eleven steps of an old observatory, sits in a field by the river near Mehtab Bagh. Walk there through Kachpura with a village guide.

19 **Find the tower where Shah Jahan watched the Taj.** Kept in the fort by his son, Shah Jahan is said to have spent his last years at the Musamman Burj, looking down the river at the Taj.

19 **Walk in by the Amar Singh Gate.** The Amar Singh Gate is the fort's only way in today. Look up as you pass between its towers.

21 **Spot the zigzag domes.** The Jama Masjid's three domes are striped in a herringbone of red and white stone. Best seen from the street outside, by Kinari Bazaar.

31 **Spot the deer on Akbar's lawns.** Akbar's tomb stands in a huge garden where deer, rabbits and langurs live. Walk the lawns slowly, and don't feed.

40 **Climb the steps to the Buland Darwaza.** Akbar's victory gate at Fatehpur Sikri stands on a long flight of steps, one of the highest gateways in the world. Count them, then look up.

11 **Watch a stone petal being cut.** Parchin kari, Agra's pietra dura, sets cut stones into marble like a jigsaw. Watch an artisan shape one petal; buy only if you want to.

17 **Walk in shoes made in Agra.** Agra makes over a lakh and a half pairs a day, many in workshops at home. Buy a pair made here, and wear them out of town.

2 **Read one Ghalib couplet in his own city.** Mirza Ghalib, the great poet of Urdu and Persian, was born in Agra in 1797. Find one couplet you love and read it aloud by the river.

10 **Meet a maker at the Taj Mahotsav.** Every February Shilpgram fills with artisans, musicians and dancers from across India for ten days. Ask one maker how long their piece took.

18 **Eat bedai and jalebi before the sun climbs.** Agra's breakfast is bedai, a puffed, crisp kachori with spicy potato curry, and jalebi hot from the oil. Eat it standing, early.

REACHING US

Behind Amarvilas, off Shilpgram Road
Zostel Agra. A rooftop café with the Taj Mahal straight ahead: sunrise over breakfast, the dome under the moon at dinner. Dorms, private rooms. Mughal-inspired art. In the quiet back lane near the East Gate, right behind Oberoi Amarvilas, just off Shilpgram Road.

MORE THAN THE TAJ

1 **Yes, it really is that good**
Taj Mahal, Shah Jahan's tomb for Mumtaz Mahal, finished by 1648: Makrana marble inlaid with 28 kinds of stone, minarets leaning slightly outward. Closed Fridays. Tickets online or at the gate windows only; licensed guides show ID. Come at sunrise, no food, tripods or drones.

4 **Shah Jahan had other wives, too**
The tombs of Shah Jahan's other wives. Most people race past: smaller tombs for Shah Jahan's other wives; Sirihindi Begum by the east side, Fatehpur Begum on the west, Kandhari

Begum, his first wife, just east. Almost empty. Walk round them while the main queue shuffles.

7 **How they built it, in one room**
Taj Museum. Inside the Taj's garden, on the west side: a small museum of Mughal-era objects and miniature paintings, with the story of how the Taj was built. Shaded and quiet even on busy days. Duck in when the marble gets too bright.

12 **The Taj's own neighbourhood, unpolished**
Taj Ganj's lanes. The quarter at the Taj's gates: tight, noisy lanes with rooftop cafés, small hotels and shops for marble boxes and chai. Look up for glimpses of the dome. Keep a polite no ready: friendly offers often end in a shop.

19 **Red walls, white palaces, one view**
Agra Fort. Akbar's red sandstone fort (1565 to 1573), with Shah Jahan's white marble palaces inside. Aurangzeb kept Shah Jahan in the Musamman Burj, in sight of the Taj. Enter by the Amar Singh Gate: much of it is still the army's. Find the Taj through the arches.

21 **Jahanara's mosque, the old city's anchor**
Jama Masjid. Jahanara Begum's mosque, finished in 1648: red sandstone and white marble under three domes striped in a red and white zigzag. It faces the Fort, by Agra Fort station. Dress modestly, shoes off, avoid prayer times. Jahanara starts behind it.

25 **The jewel box that came first**
Tomb of Itimad-ud-Daulah (the Baby Taj). Nur Jahan's tomb for her parents (1622 to 1628) on the east bank: thought to be the first Mughal building all in white marble, its outside covered in pietra dura inlay and jali screens, a forerunner of the Taj. Come late in the day; get close.

26 **Blue tiles, mostly gone, still lovely**
Chini ka Rauza. A kilometre up the east bank from the Baby Taj: the 1630s tomb of Afzal Khan Shirazi, Persian poet and Shah Jahan's grand vizier, named for its glazed 'chini' tiles. Weather has taken most of the colour, but blue patches still cling on. Hardly anyone comes.

27 **India's oldest Mughal garden, quietly**
Aram Bagh (Aram Bagh). Babur's riverside garden, the oldest Mughal garden in India: first Bagh-e-Gul Afshan, then Aram Bagh, the Garden of Rest, then the Marathas' Ram Bagh. By tradition, Babur's body rested here before Kabul. Pair it with the Baby Taj and Chini ka Rauza.

30 **The Amer princess, near Akbar**
Tomb of Mariam-uz-Zamani. The tomb of Mariam-uz-Zamani, the Amer princess who married Akbar and bore Jahangir: a Lodi pavilion of 1495, made her tomb by her son in the 1620s, later a British printing press. Quiet, red sandstone, a short hop from Akbar's tomb.

31 **Akbar's tomb, with black-buck on the lawns**
Akbar's Tomb, Sikandra. Begun under Akbar, finished by Jahangir in 1613: a red sandstone and white marble tomb in a vast garden at Sikandra, about 10 km up the Mathura road. Four marble minarets crown its great south gate, and blackbuck graze the lawns. Pair it with Mariam's tomb.

35 **A church on land Akbar gave**
Akbar's Church. Built around 1600 by Jesuits on land Akbar gave them: one of north India's oldest churches. Pulled down by Shah Jahan in 1635, rebuilt the next year, looted in 1758, rebuilt again. The 1848 cathedral stands beside it.

36 **A Taj in red, for a Dutchman**
The Red Taj (John Hessing's tomb), Roman Catholic Cemetery. Agra's Roman Catholic cemetery is older than the Taj. Its best-known grave: the Red Taj, a red sandstone mausoleum built after 1803 by his widow for John Hessing, a Dutch commander of Agra Fort. A working cemetery: walk softly, ask at the gate.

38 **A Rajput chhatra in Mughal Agra**
Jaswant Singh ki Chhatra. Up the east bank past Ram Bagh: a domed memorial pavilion, said to be the only Hindu monument built in Mughal Agra, raised by Raja Jaswant Singh in 1644 to 1658 for Rani Hada, his brother Amar Singh Rathore's wife. Well off the usual round.

39 **A forest with Taj-shaped clearings**
Taj Nature Walk. Minutes from the East Gate: the forest department's walk through a wooded park, with landscaped mounds and watchtowers that lift you over the canopy, so the dome floats on the green. Almost no crowds. Carry water; go early.

39 **A temple town, then gharials**
Bateshwar and the Chambal. South-east on the Yamuna: Bateshwar's long row of Shiva temples (101 or 108, depending on whom you ask) and a big animal fair in October and November. Beyond, the National Chambal Sanctuary: take a

with a guide to see gharials and river dolphins.

40 **Akbar's red city, then empty**
Fatehpur Sikri. About an hour west: Akbar's red sandstone capital from 1571, left in 1585, abandoned by 1610. See the Panch Mahal, the Diwan-i-Khas pillar, Salim Chishti's white marble tomb and the Buland Darwaza, about 54 m high. Go early; fix a guide's fee first.

41 **Bird lake, and bears that stopped dancing**
Sur Sarovar (Keethan Lake) and the bear rescue. About 20 km up the Delhi highway: a bird sanctuary and Ramsar wetland, busy with migrants in winter. Inside, the Agra Bear Rescue Facility cares for more than a hundred sloth bears saved from the 'dancing bear' trade. Small-group visits: check with Wildlife SOS first.

42 **Krishna country, up the Yamuna**
Mathura and Vrindavan. North up the Yamuna: Mathura, Krishna's birthplace in Hindu tradition, then Vrindavan, where he grew up, with thousands of temples, from the red sandstone Radha Vallabh of 1585 to the Prem Mandir, and Keshi Ghat. At Holi, flower petals fly.

BEDAI TO BHALLA

5 **Dinner with the dome over your shoulder**
The rooftop cafés of Taj Ganj. Taj Ganj's small hotels and cafés climbed onto their roofs for the view. Some look straight at the dome, some past the next building: look before you order. The Taj shuts on Fridays; the view from a roof never does.

6 **A tiny kitchen near the South Gate**
Joney's Place, Taj Ganj. A pocket-sized Taj Ganj institution by the South Gate, pouring lassi since 1978. The banana lassi and the mala kofta are what everyone names; the menu has stretched to travellers' cravings from Korea to Italy. Small, cheap, a walk from the gate.

13 **Kebabs at a tablecloth, for a change**
Pinch of Spice. Mughlai at a table, not a kerb: a North Indian family restaurant on Fatehabad Road, another in the city. Order the meat: mut-tun seekh kebab and rogan josh. Our Golden Triangle guide's advice for Agra: kebabs and Mughlai food.

15 **Sadar's roll counter, for dinner**
Mama Chicken Mama Franky House, Sadar. Sadar Bazaar's street kitchen for meat, in a small parking lot: frankies, rolls wrapped in paratha, chicken, mutton or paneer. Seekh kebabs and tandoori chicken off the coals. A vegetarian counter across the lot.

16 **One lane, most of Agra's chaat**
Chaat Gali, Sadar Bazaar. Our destination page's street-food lane, in Sadar Bazaar by Agra Cantt station, liveliest in the evening. Dahi bhalla under curd and chutney, gol gappe one at a time, raj kachori, samosa, pay bhaji. Point at what the next person ordered.

18 **Breakfast is fried first, then sweet**
Deviram Sweets, Pratappura. Agra's breakfast in two courses: bedai, a crisp lentil-stuffed kachori with spicy potato curry, then jalebi to put the fire out. Our destination page sends you here; the Pratap Pura shop dates from 1965 by one count. Come early: it is a morning dish.

22 **Petha that smells of roses**
Gopaldas Petha, Subhash Bazaar. Food walkers stop in Subhash Bazaar, by Agra Fort station, for petha, wrapped in gulabjal, rose water. Once called the dessert of the poor: a gourd and sugar cost little. Taste first.

24 **Where white pumpkin turns into candy**
Noori Darwaza, the petha quarter. Agra's own sweet: ash gourd soaked in lime, boiled translucent, steeped in syrup, dried. The old family makers cluster round Noori Darwaza, where Panchhi opened its first shop in 1926. Plain or angoori first. Many shops borrow the names: read the board.

33 **The chai shop with no shutter**
Dilli Gate Chai Wala. Our city guide's first food stop, and where food walkers start their breakfasts: a small, busy shop with no shutter. Chai: boiled with ginger, long pepper and cardamom, and a bun maska toasted on coals. Dunk it, then walk into the lanes.

34 **Two centuries of sweets, by its own count**
Bhagat Halwai. Dates itself to 1795 and acts like it. Our city guide names its chaat, and a breakfast of bedai, with a glass of lassi. Peda, barfi and rasgulla on one side, samosa, kachori and namkeen on the other. Several counters carry the name.

20 **A wedding's worth of shopping, behind the mosque**
Kinari Bazaar. The lanes behind the Jama Masjid, many small markets in one: our city guide's hub for wedding and festive shopping. Shimmering fabrics, zardozi embroidery, jewellery, shoes, spices, marblwork, snack stalls. Narrow lanes, thick crowds: bag in front, bargain with a smile.

29 **Where Agra does its own shopping**
Raja ki Mandi. Agra's own market: our city guide's lively chaos of produce, spices, clothes, household goods and street food. Look here, and in Sadar Bazaar, for Agra's durries, flat reversible rugs with a GI tag. Check both sides.

11 **The Taj's flowers, still being cut**
The parchin kari workshops. Semi-precious stones cut by hand and set into white marble, as on the Taj. Artisans in Taj Ganj, Nai ki Mandi and Gokulpura make boxes, plates and tables; many claim the Taj's inlaiders as ancestors. Never let anyone lead you to a shop.

17 **Leather by day, chaat by night**
Sadar Bazaar. Agra's evening market, in the Cantonment by Agra Cantt station. Our city guide's pick for leather goods, handicrafts, clothes and street food in one walk: shoes, bags, wallets, petha, and the Chaat Gali in the middle. Shop first, then eat.

10 **Ten days of crafts, dance and music**
Shilpgram and the Taj Mahotsav. A crafts village a few hundred metres from the East Gate, home to the Taj Mahotsav every February: artisans, folk dancers and musicians from across India, a procession of decorated elephants and camels. Agra's marble work and zardozi.

