

48 hours in...

New Delhi

A stronghold of power for centuries, this once time-worn capital has reinvented itself as the indulgent princess of India

From the vantage point of a rickshaw, New Delhi's historic sites are strangely complemented by the noise, smells and chaos so expectantly associated with the city. But it never ceases to dazzle, as the Old World is refreshed with the new – the clearest indication of this ongoing regeneration being the shiny black SUVs cruising the streets and the hordes of construction cranes dotting the skyline.

DIG UP ANCIENT HISTORY

What we now call Old Delhi is an area said to have been inhabited before the second millennium BCE. It's believed to be the site of Indraprastha, the legendary capital of the Pandavas in the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*.

The earliest architectural relics date to the Maurya period (around 300 BCE) and now form a part of this ever-changing metropolis that's best seen from one of the express rickshaws lining the streets.

Amid all this history you will find sites such as the Qila Rai Pithora (or Rai Pithora Fort), built in the 12th century; the ancient iron pillar of Delhi, dating from the Gupta Empire 1500 years ago; and the Unesco World Heritage Site of the Red Fort, built in 1648 around the central part of this enormous city.

GLIMPSE THE DAYS OF THE RAJ

New Delhi, as a planned city, had its foundation stone laid during the Delhi Durbar of 1911 (a giant gathering to

mark the coronation of King George V), when the capital of India was moved from Calcutta to Delhi. Designed largely by British architects Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker, it was inaugurated in 1931.

At the time, British supremacy was the game. Mostly, the early development of this part of the city reflects this history in its design and architecture: such as the Rashtrapati Bhavan (the residence of the viceroy, and now the president), built near the popular Buddha Jayanti Park. Today, 'New Delhi' is the official name for the greater metropolis that surrounds these historic sites – like the pulp of a fruit hemming in the pip that is Old Delhi.



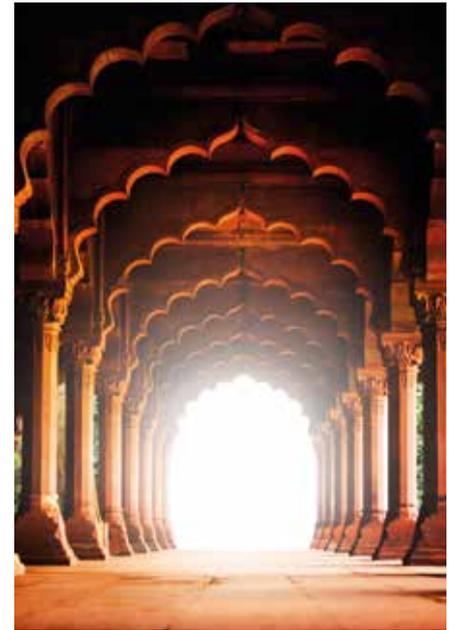
Connaught Place, with its distinctive circular design, is the financial and commercial hub of the city, where the action is

Although the city sports plenty of age-old buildings steeped in history – including the Qutb Minar, a minaret built around 1200 – it seems some of the newer buildings are drawing visitors today, becoming heritage attractions in their own right. For example, the Bahá’i House of Worship, dubbed the Lotus Temple for its flowerlike nine-petalled form and famed for the complexity of its structure; also the National Museum in Janpath with 200 000 artistic and historic artefacts covering 5 000 years. However, the colonial centre Connaught Place, with its distinctive circular design, is the financial and commercial hub of the city, where the action is concentrated.

Add the host of new designer hotels with plenty of dining options (such as The Lodhi, The Leela Palace and The Oberoi) vying for the spotlight, and the city is no longer merely an alternative to its glitzy Bollywood cousin, Mumbai, but larger than life in its own right.

INVEST IN ART

South Delhi is a haven for contemporary art, with galleries constantly opening and attracting a younger set of buyers. Found in a loop around Siri Fort, Said-ul-Ajaib and Lajpat Nagar metro station, the many venues range from grand and expensive to discreet and intimate. With India’s new presence at the world’s art fairs,



this has become one of its newest areas of exploration for visitors to the city – to admire and, of course, to purchase.

SHOP DESIGNER LABELS

Rodeo Drive of the East Prithviraj Road, with The Oberoi hotel to its east and the DLF Emporio, the city’s first zoned luxury mall, to its west, has become the most sought-after area in the city. With some designer boutique stores and all of the major brands, from Piaget to Hermès, nesting around the greater area, this is where the city comes to find its touch of luxury.

TAKE A WALK

Lodhi Garden, also near to Prithviraj Road, offers a refuge. Built during the British rule, the 40 ha park containing tombs of 15th century rulers of the area is a favourite for Delhiites’ early-morning walks – the perfect quiet moment in the bustling metropolis. ①

For travel arrangements to New Delhi, contact the Diners Club Concierge Service on 0861 DINERS (346377), complimentary for those who BELONG.

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