



# Delhi

📍 011 / POP 25.7 MILLION / ELEV 293M

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## Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Indian Accent (p90)
- ➔ Masala Library (p88)
- ➔ Cafe Lota (p89)
- ➔ Andhra Pradesh Bhawan Canteen (p88)

## Best Places to Sleep

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- ➔ Stops @ The President (p80)

## Why Go?

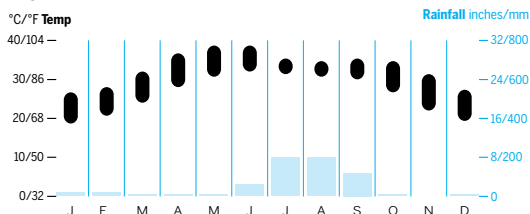
Delhi is a city where time travel is feasible. Step aboard your time machine (the sleek and efficient metro) and you can go from Old Delhi, where labourers haul sacks of spices and jewellers weigh gold on dusty scales, to modern New Delhi, with its colonial-era parliament buildings and penchant for high tea. Then on to the future: Gurgaon, a satellite city of skyscraping offices and glitzy malls.

This pulsating metropolis has a bigger population than Australia, and is one of the world's most polluted cities. But woven into its rich fabric are moments of pure beauty: an elderly man threading temple marigolds; Sufi devotional songs; a boy flying a kite from a rooftop.

So don't be put off. Delhi is a city that has been repeatedly ravaged and reborn, with vestiges of lost empires in almost every neighbourhood. There's so much to experience here, it's like a country in itself.

## When to Go

### Delhi



**Oct–Mar** Delhi at its best: it's warm with clear skies. Morning fog can play havoc with flight schedules.

**May–Aug** The months to avoid – hot, humid and uncomfortable.

**Jun–Sep** Monsoon season sees high temperatures and regular rain – a sticky combination.

## History

Delhi is said by Hindus to be the site of ancient Indraprastha, home of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata. Excavations near the Purana Qila have revealed evidence of human habitation dating back 3000 years. The name Delhi is linked to the Maurya king Dhillu, who ruled the region in the 1st century BC, but for most of its existence, the city has been known by the multiple different names given to it by its conquerors.

The first city for which clear archaeological evidence remains was Lal Kot, or Qila Rai Pithora, founded by the Hindu king Prithviraj Chauhan in the 12th century. The city fell to Afghan invaders in 1191, and for the next 600 years, Delhi was ruled by a succession of Muslim sultans and emperors. The first, Qutub-ud-din Aibak, razed the Hindu city and used its stones to construct Mehrauli and the towering Qutb Minar.

Qutub-ud-din Aibak's 'Mamluk' (Slave) dynasty was quickly replaced by the Khilji dynasty, following a coup. The Khiljis constructed a new capital at Siri, northeast of Mehrauli, supplied with water from the royal tank at Hauz Khas. Following another coup, the Tughlaq sultans seized the reins, creating a new fortified capital at Tughlaqabad, and two more cities – Jahanpurah and Firozabad – for good measure.

The Tughlaq dynasty fell after Tamerlane stormed through town in 1398, opening the door for the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties, the last of the Delhi sultanates, whose tombs are scattered around the Lodi Gardens. The scene was set for the arrival of the Mughals. Babur, the first Mughal emperor, seized Delhi in 1526, and a new capital rose at Sher-

garh (the present-day Purana Qila), presided over by his son, Humayun.

Frantic city building continued throughout the Mughal period. Shah Jahan gained the Peacock Throne in 1627 and raised a new city, Shahjahanabad, centred on the Red Fort. The Mughal city fell in 1739, to the Persian Nadir Shah, and the dynasty went into steep decline. The last Mughal emperor, Badahur Shah Zafar, was exiled to Burma (Myanmar) by the British for his role in the 1857 First War of Independence; there were some new rulers in town.

When the British shifted their capital to Delhi from increasingly rebellious Calcutta in 1911, it was time for another bout of construction. The architect Edwin Lutyens drew up plans for a new city of wide boulevards and stately administrative buildings to accommodate the colonial government – New Delhi was born.

In 1947 Partition – the division of India and Pakistan – saw Delhi ripped apart as many inhabitants fled to the north and migrants flooded inwards, a trauma from which some say the city has never recovered. The modern metropolis certainly faces other challenges too – traffic, population, crime and the deepening chasm between rich and poor. However, the city on the Yamuna River continues to flourish, with its new satellite cities spreading Delhi further and further outwards.

## Sights

Most sights in Delhi are easily accessible by metro, though to reach some you'll have to take a rickshaw or taxi from the stop, even though it bears the same or similar name

### DELHI'S TOP FESTIVALS

To confirm exact dates contact India Tourism Delhi (p97).

**Republic Day** (☀️26 Jan) A spectacular military parade in Rajpath.

**Beating of the Retreat** (☀️29 Jan) More military pageantry in Rajpath.

**St. Art** (☀️Dec-Mar) Street art festival.

**Independence Day** (☀️15 Aug) India celebrates its Independence from Britain.

**Dussehra** (Durga Puja; ☀️Sep/Oct) Hindu celebration of good over evil with parades of colourful effigies.

**Qutb Festival** (☀️Oct/Nov) Sufi singing and classical music and dance at the Qutb Minar complex.

**Diwali** (Festival of Light; ☀️Oct/Nov) Fireworks across the city for the Festival of Light.

**Delhi International Arts Festival** (DIAF; [www.diaf.in](http://www.diaf.in); ☀️Nov/Dec) Exhibitions, performing arts, film, literature and culinary events.