



Delhi

📍 011 / POP 25 MILLION / ELEV 293M

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Hotel Saravana Bhavan (p62)
- ➔ Bukhara (p64)
- ➔ Indian Accent (p65)
- ➔ Alkauter (p63)
- ➔ Sodabottleopenerwala (p63)

Best Places to Stay

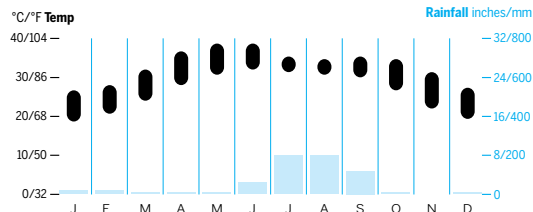
- ➔ Lodhi (p58)
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Why Go?

Mystery, magic, mayhem. Welcome to Delhi, City of Djinns, and 25 million people. Like an eastern Rome, India's capital is littered with the relics of lost empires. A succession of armies stormed across the Indo-Gangetic plain and imprinted their identity onto the vanquished city, before vanishing into rubble and ruin. Modern Delhi is a chaotic tapestry of medieval fortifications, Mughal mausoleums, dusty bazaars, colonial-era town planning, and mega malls.

Travellers sometimes leave Delhi underwhelmed, after ticking off the sights and tussling with the touts. But give the city a chance and you might fall in love. It's often the lesser-known corners that are most rewarding, such as Lodi Gardens at dusk, the *qawwali* (Islamic devotional singing) at Nizamuddin or the great fort of Purana Qila. A recommended way to glimpse beneath the surface is to take one of the city's tours, from a former street child's view of Old Delhi to a cycle tour along the Yamuna.

When to Go Delhi



Oct–Mar Delhi at its best: 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

Hindus claim Delhi as the site of ancient Indraprastha, home of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata, and 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 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 Prithvi Raj 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 – Jahanpanah and Ferozabad – 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 Shergarh (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, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was exiled to Burma (Myanmar) by the British for his role in the 1857 First War of Independence (Indian Uprising); 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.

Delhi has faced numerous challenges since Independence, from the violence of Partition to the deepening gulf between rich and poor, but the city on the Yamuna continues to flourish, with its new satellite cities adding ever increasing skyscrapers to the city's outskirts.

DELHI'S TOP FESTIVALS

To confirm dates contact India Tourism Delhi (p71).

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

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

St. Art (☺ Jan/Feb) Street-art festival.

Independence Day (☺ 15 Aug) India celebrates Independence from Britain and the prime minister addresses the nation from the Red Fort.

Dussehra (Durga Puja; ☺ Sep/Oct) Hindus celebrate the victory of good over evil with parades of colourful effigies.

Ananya Dance Festival (☺ Oct) Free classical Indian dance festival takes place at Purana Qila.

Qutb Festival (☺ Oct/Nov) Several days of Sufi singing and classical music and dance at the Qutb Minar complex.

Diwali (☺ Nov/Dec) Fireworks across the city for the festival of light.

Delhi International Arts Festival (DIAF; ☺ Dec) Three weeks of exhibitions, performing arts, films, literature and culinary events at venues Delhi-wide.