



# Agra & the Taj Mahal

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## Why Go?

The magical allure of the Taj Mahal draws tourists to Agra like moths to a wondrous flame. And despite the hype, it's every bit as good as you've heard. But the Taj is not a stand-alone attraction. The legacy of the Mughal empire has left a magnificent fort and a liberal sprinkling of fascinating tombs and mausoleums; and there's also fun to be had in the bustling *chowks* (marketplaces). The downside comes in the form of hordes of rickshaw-wallahs, touts, unofficial guides and souvenir vendors, whose persistence can be infuriating at times.

Agra straddles a large bend along the holy Yamuna River. The fort and the Taj, 2km apart, both overlook the river on different parts of the bend. The main train and bus stations are a few kilometres southwest.

## Best Places to Eat

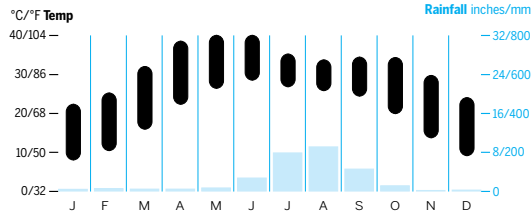
- ➔ Pinch of Spice (p366)
- ➔ Mama Chicken (p366)
- ➔ Esphahan (p366)
- ➔ Vedic (p366)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Tourists Rest House (p364)
- ➔ N Homestay (p363)
- ➔ Oberoi Amarvilas (p363)
- ➔ The Retreat (p363)

## When to Go

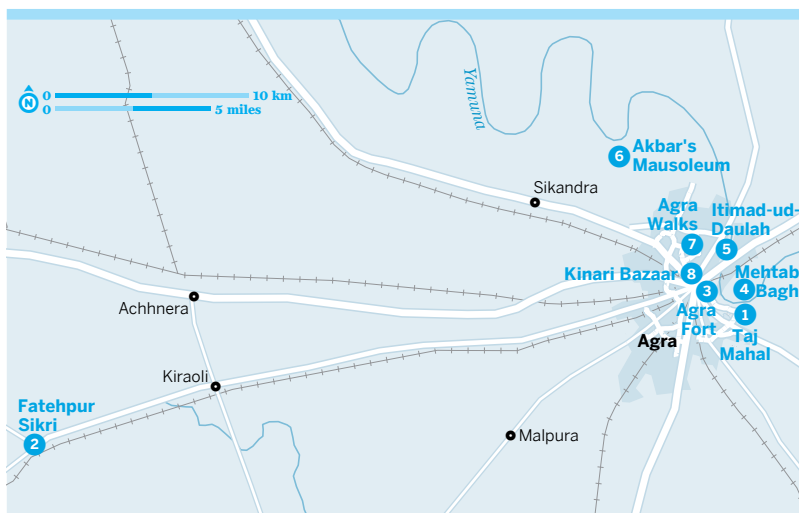
### Agra



**Sep–Oct** The best time to visit. Most of the monsoon rains are over and summer temperatures have cooled.

**Nov–Feb** Daytime temperatures are comfortable but big sights are overcrowded. Evenings are nippy.

**Mar** Evening chill is gone but raging-hot mid-summer temperatures haven't yet materialised.



## Agra & the Taj Mahal Highlights

### 1 Taj Mahal (p354)

Basking in the beauty of one of the most famous buildings in the world – a must-see!

### 2 Fatehpur Sikri (p371)

Roaming a sprawling palace complex from Mughal times, with an immense and fascinating 450-year-old mosque next door.

### 3 Agra Fort (p358)

Wandering the many rooms of one of India's most impressive ancient forts.

### 4 Mehtab Bagh (p358)

Relaxing in gardens with perfect sunset views of the Taj.

### 5 Itimad-ud-Daulah (p360)

Marveling at the marble-work of an exquisite tomb nicknamed the Baby Taj.

### 6 Akbar's Mausoleum (p360)

Visiting the impressive resting place of the greatest Mughal emperor.

### 7 Agra Walks (p361)

Strolling deeper into ancient Agra with local guides.

### 8 Kinari Bazaar (p367)

Boggling your senses in one of India's most mesmerising – and hectic – markets.

## History

In 1501 Sultan Sikander Lodi established his capital here, but the city fell into Mughal hands in 1526, when Emperor Babur defeated the last Lodi sultan at Panipat. Agra reached the peak of its magnificence between the mid-16th and mid-17th centuries during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. During this period the fort, the Taj Mahal and other major mausoleums were built. In 1638 Shah Jahan built a new city in Delhi, and his son Aurangzeb moved the capital there 10 years later.

In 1761 Agra fell to the Jats, a warrior class who looted its monuments, including the Taj Mahal. The Marathas took over in 1770, but were replaced by the British in 1803. Following the First War of Independence of 1857, the British shifted the administration of the province to Allahabad. Deprived of its ad-

ministrative role, Agra developed as a centre for heavy industry, quickly becoming famous for its chemicals industry and air pollution, before the Taj and tourism became a major source of income.

## Agra

☎ 0562 / POP 1.7 MILLION

## 👁 Sights

The entrance fee for Agra's five main sights – the Taj, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's Tomb and Itimad-ud-Daulah – comprises charges from two different bodies: the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Agra Development Association (ADA). Of the ₹1000 ticket for the Taj Mahal, ₹500 is a special ADA ticket, which gives you small savings on the other four sights if visited in the