

Taj Mahal - Overview

Taj Mahal is a beautiful monument built on the bank of Yamuna River in Agra. It is made up of white ivory marble. It was built as a tomb for Mumtaz Mahal, the beloved wife of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. The monument includes a mosque and a guest house along with a garden which surrounds the monument from three sides.



Visiting Hours

Taj Mahal is opened for the public from sunrise to sunset on all days except Friday. Taj Mahal is also opened from 8:30pm to 12:30 am at night on the full moon day and two days before and after the full moon day.

Tickets

Tourists have to buy tickets in order to visit the monument. A foreigner has to pay a thousand rupees while citizens of SAARC and BIMSTEC countries have to pay Rs. 530. For Indians, the cost of the ticket is Rs. 40 only.



The tourists can buy the tickets from the eastern and the western gates all the time. At the southern gate, the tickets are available from 8am to 5pm.

Recommendations

Visiting the Taj Mahal is not as easy as it was in previous days. Due to strict security reasons, the tourists have to make sure that they shall not carry the things that are prohibited inside the monument. Big bags and video cameras are not allowed but tourists can carry still cameras and mobiles. Small bags having essential things could be taken inside. The items that cannot be taken inside are edibles, mobile charger, ipad, headphones, knives, torches, pens, etc.

Best Time to Visit

The best time to visit Agra is from February to April and from October to December as the weather remains pleasant during this time of the year. In the rest of the months, the climate is either very hot, humid or very cold which can lead to the discomfort of the tourists.

Taj Mahal - History

Taj Mahal is built on the banks of river Yamuna and is surrounded by a beautiful garden. Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan constructed it for the commemoration of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The construction was started in 1631 and in 1643, the construction of main building was completed. The construction of the whole complex was completed in 1653. Mumtaz Mahal is buried in Taj Mahal.



History says that more than 22,000 men from India and Central Asia worked together to complete the monument. The artisans include mason, stone cutters, dome builders, painters, carvers etc.

Mumtaz Mahal

Mumtaz Mahal was the beloved wife of Shah Jahan. Her real name was **Arjumand Banu Begum**. She was given the title of **Mumtaz Mahal** by Shah Jahan due to her beauty and character. She was the daughter of **Abdul Hasan Asaf Khan** and was married to Shah Jahan in 1612 though the engagement was organized in 1607. The palace given to Mumtaz Mahal was named **Khas Mahal** whose decoration was very sophisticated in comparison the palaces of the other wives of Shah Jahan.



Mumtaz Mahal

Shah Jahan

Mumtaz Mahal was the wife whom Shah Jahan trusted very much. She went with him to many campaigns. She also enjoyed elephant fights and other such entertainments. She was the mother of fourteen children and died in Burhanpur while giving birth to her fourteenth child. Shah Jahan mourned for his wife for a year due to which his hair turned white and the back was bent. Previously, her body was buried in Burhanpur but in 1631, it was brought to Agra and again buried in a small building.

Imprisonment of Shah Jahan

Soon after the completion of the building, Aurangzeb, son of Shah Jahan, overthrown him and put him in prison in Agra Fort. Shah Jahan used to see the Taj through the window of the prison. After the death of Shah Jahan, he was buried beside Mumtaz Mahal.

Taj Mahal - Architecture and Design

The Taj is constructed on the banks of River Yamuna and it is said that more than 22,000 workers were involved in the construction. Artisans and materials from all over India came for its construction. The Taj is a combination of Islamic, Persian, and Indian architecture. Other structures included in the Taj are garden, mosque, main gateway, and tomb.



Dimensions

Taj Mahal is constructed in an area of 42 acres. The main building stands on a platform having a height of 50 meters. The four minars have the height of 137 feet each while the height of the tomb is 58 meters.

There is a mosque in the west and a naqqar khana or guest house in the east. The mosque and the guest house are made up of red sandstone. There is a garden covering the area of 580 meters by 300 meters. The construction of the garden is of Islamic style. It is wellwatered and green.

Gateway of Taj

The main gateway of Taj Mahal is 30 meters high and its construction was completed in 1648. The topmost part of the gateway includes **chhatris**. The gateway is decorated with the verses of the Holy Quran. The door of the gateway is made up of silver with letters engraved on it. After entering the gateway, there is a courtyard.



In Mughal period, during and after the reign of Shah Jahan, a huge amount of charity was given on the death anniversary of Mumtaz Mahal. The poor were also given food on that day.

Mosque

There is a mosque on the west side of the Taj Mahal that faces the holy city of Mecca. Historians believe that the mosque was constructed by Isa Muhammad. There are two small arches on both sides of the mosque and a portal on its exterior known as **Iwan**. The three domes and four kiosks are coated with marble.

The interiors of the mosque are also well-designed as 569 prayer mats have been designed on the floor and the walls are engraved with the names of Allah and the verses of the Holy Quran. There is a mihrab in the mosque that tells the direction of Mecca. Along with it, there is a minbar from where a maulana delivers his speech. The minbar has three steps that leads to a flat platform on which the maulana sits and deliver the speech. There is a stone of the size of 19feet by 6.5 ft that denotes the temporary grave of Mumtaz Mahal. There is a pool in front of the mosque where the Muslims perform ablution before prayers.



The floor of the mosque consists of 539 prayer carpets made up of black marble. Name of Allah and verses of the Holy Quran are also inscribed on the walls. There two towers, one is in north and other is in south.

Garden

The garden in which the Taj Mahal is situated has spiritual symbol as the greenery symbolizes paradise mentioned in the Holy Quran. People can reach the garden after the main entrance. The garden is spread in the area of 580 into 300 meters. The garden is divided into sixteen flower beds and is separated by water courses.



Mausoleum

After crossing the garden, people reach the tomb which covers the area of 95 square meter. People can enter the tomb through a double staircase. There are four minarets each of 137 feet. They are made in such a way that they will not fall on the main tomb during a mishap or a natural calamity. One letter is engraved on each minar and on combining we get the name **Ar-Rahman** which is one of the many names of Allah.

There is a central chamber having four rooms below it for the graves of other family members. Aurangzeb replaced the original screen with octagonal screen which was made up of marble and precious stones.

Tomb

The tomb of the Taj Mahal is one of the beauties of the monument. The dome has the circumference of 110 yards and height is 107 yards. The tomb is based on Islamic structure which symbolizes the unification of heaven and earth. The square on which the tomb stands symbolizes the universe.



In total, the whole dome symbolizes the throne of Allah as it is supported by pillars at four corners which symbolizes the flow of grace. The tomb also includes the verses from the Holy Quran. The tomb is well-furnished with carpets, lamps, silver doors and others.

Taj Mahal - How to Reach?

Agra is connected to many cities through road and rail transport. Agra has also got its domestic airport called as Agra Civil Enclave which is five kilometres away from the city. The cities nearby Agra with their distance are as follows –

- Agra to Lucknow
 - By road – 334km
 - By rail – 299km
 - By air – 296km
- Agra to Delhi
 - By road – 217km
 - By rail – 195
 - By air – 180km
- Agra to Mathura
 - By road – 58km
 - By rail – 50km
 - By air – 46km

- Agra to Jaipur
 - By road – 242km
 - By rail – 228km
 - By air – 222km
- Agra to Ajmer
 - By road – 371km
 - By rail – 363km
 - By air – 341km
- Agra to Jodhpur
 - By road – 600km
 - By rail – 554km
 - By air – 504km
- Agra to Gwalior
 - By road – 121km
 - By rail – 118km
 - By air – 106km
- Agra to Jhansi
 - By road – 233km
 - By rail – 215km
 - By air – 201km

By Air

Agra has its own airport which is directly connected with Delhi, Varanasi, and Khajuraho. Nearby places connected by national and international airports are Delhi, Jaipur, Lucknow, and Gwalior. Many national and international flights arrive to and depart from these airports.

By Train

Agra has three main railway stations which are Agra Cantt, Agra Fort, and Raja Ki Mandi which are connected to all the major cities of India. Many premium, superfast, mail and express trains pass through these railway stations. Premium trains like Rajdhani, Shatabdi, and Double-Decker express connects nearby as well as distant places to Agra.

By Road

Agra is connected to Delhi, Jaipur, Lucknow and other nearby cities by road. Tourists can either book taxis or take a bus to reach Agra.

The major bus stands of Agra are –

- Idgah Bus Stand
- Taj Depot
- Ford Depot
- Inter State Bus Terminal

Local Transportation

After reaching Agra, the tourist can get local transport such as auto-rickshaw, cyclo-rickshaw, tempo, or taxi to reach Taj Mahal or other nearby monuments. Bicycles can also be hired in order to visit the Taj as petrol and diesel vehicles are not allowed nearby the monument. To provide convenience to the tourists, tongas, buses operated by battery, and cycle-rickshaws are used to reach the Taj Mahal.

Taj Mahal - Nearby places

Taj Mahal is one of the beautiful monument constructed in the Mughal period. There are other monuments besides Taj Mahal that provides information about the architecture and design during the Mughal period. Some of these monuments are as follows –

Agra Fort

Agra Fort was built by Lodi dynasty and Mughal dynasty elaborated its construction areawise as well as architecture-wise. The red sand stone of the fort were replaced with marbles and other Mughal art has been embedded in the fort.



Aurangzeb imprisoned his father Shah Jahan in this fort who looked at the Taj Mahal from the window of the fort. The distance between the fort and the Taj can be covered in 15 to 20 minutes as the distance between both the monuments is around 7km. Many structures like pillars, mosques, halls and others are included in the fort.

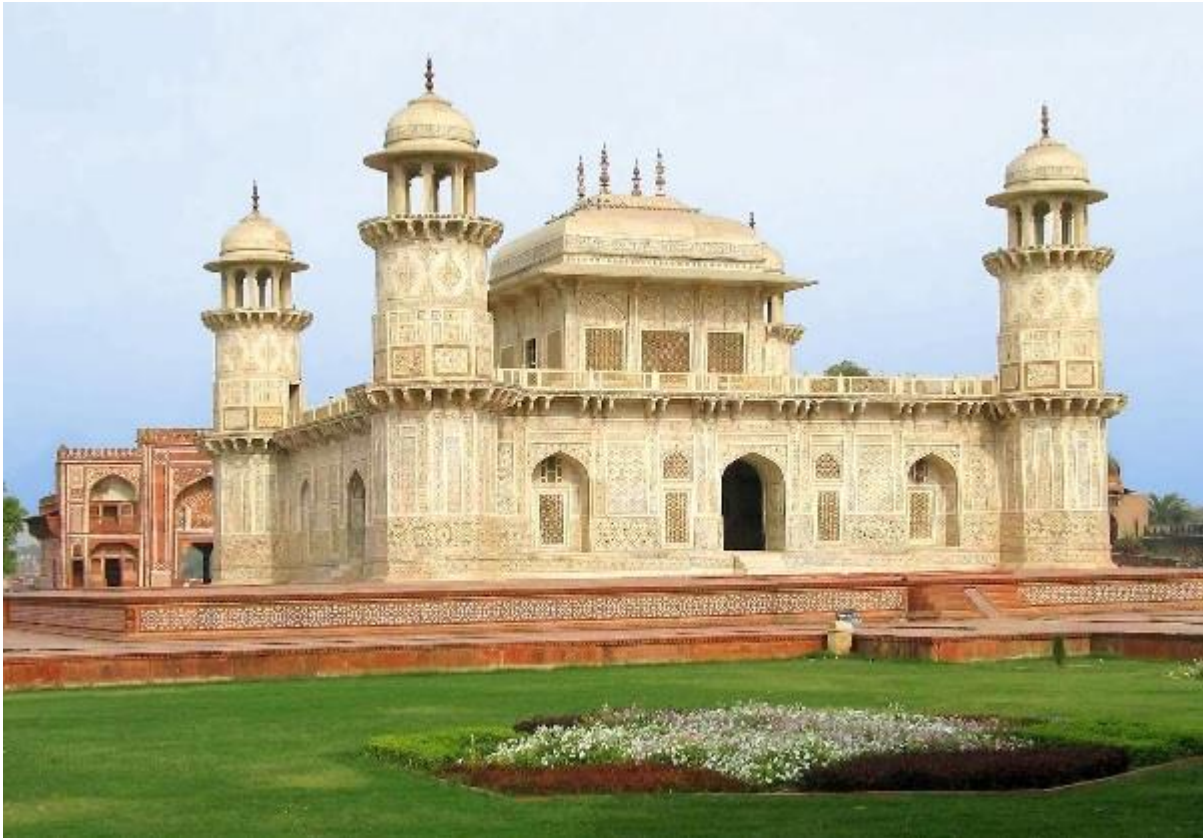
Sikandra

Sikandra is the mausoleum of Emperor Akbar which combines the themes of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Jain. The tomb has four minarets with great artwork. Sikandra is located on the highway from Delhi to Agra. The distance between Taj Mahal and Sikandra is 19 km.



Itmad-ud-Daulah

Itmad-ud-Daulah is the tomb of the father of Nur Jahan, wife of Jahangir. In Indian history, it is considered as the first monument built of white marble. It is built on the banks of Yamuna River. The tomb is surrounded by a garden which is a picnic spot nowadays. The distance between Taj Mahal and Itmad-ud-Daulah is around 11km.



Fatehpur Sikri

Fatehpur Sikri was founded by Akbar. It includes public hall, private hall, a mosque, buland darwaza and other structures. There is a tomb of Salim Chishti, one of the Sufi saints. Along with these there are many other monuments that show the culture of different communities.



The distance between Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri is around 44 km and people can get there through various means of local transport and buses.

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