

## No 7 Agra and Delhi

We arrived in Agra mid afternoon and after checking into our hotel we headed out to visit the Baby Taj, built on the bank of India's second longest river the Yamuna. Officially this building is called the Tomb of Itmaud Ud Daula, and it houses the tomb of the parents of the Mughal Empress Noor Jahan for whom the Taj Mahal was built. Built by Noor Jahan for her parents, it incorporates many of the features which were later incorporated in her own tomb by her husband. The carvings on this monument are said to be even more impressive than on the Taj Mahal. After an hour of visiting this tomb, we drove on down the river to a spot opposite the Taj where we could see the sun setting behind it with a warm glow turning the white marble pink.

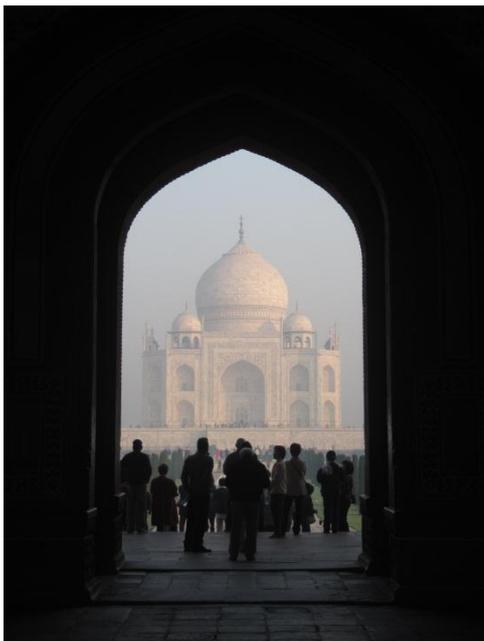


*The Baby Taj late in the afternoon*



*The Taj Mahal from across the river at dusk*

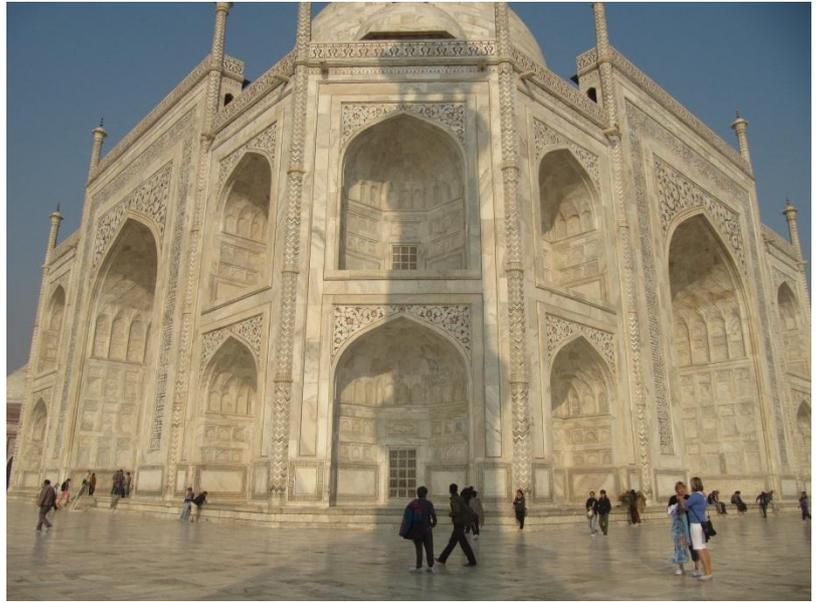
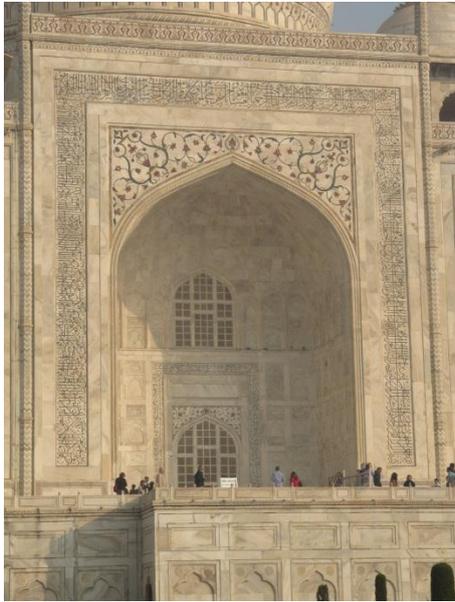
The following morning we visited the Taj itself in mid morning to get the full effect of the sun on the southern face. The grounds around the mausoleum are enormous and include a number of other important buildings and mosques. The whole complex took 22 years to build, starting in 1631 and in total 20,000 people worked on it for a total cost of 3,000,000 rupees or \$70 million in today's money. The Taj was built by Emperor Shah Jahan for his wife who died in childbirth with their 14<sup>th</sup> child at the age of 39, after 19 years of marriage. The central Taj structure is made of semi-translucent white marble, carved with flowers and inlaid with thousands of semi-precious stones in beautiful patterns. The Emperor himself died in 1666 and he is buried beside his wife. He had hoped to build an identical Taj in black marble across the river from his wife's mausoleum but his son imprisoned him in a dispute to take over his title and so a black Taj was never built.



*First view of the TM through the entrance gate*

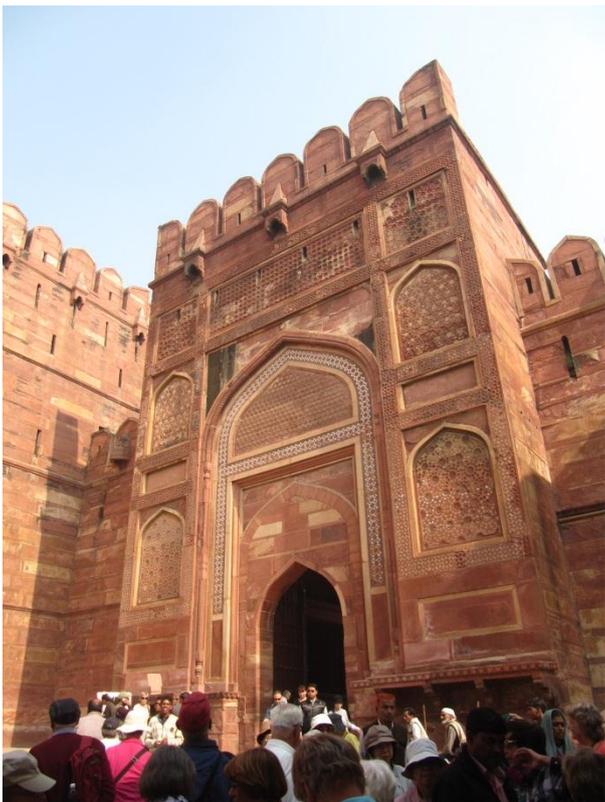


*Morning sun on the south face*



*Some of the inlaid coloured stones and gemstones in the translucent white marble.*

After this highlight we moved on to an inspection of the Agra Fort. This huge red sandstone complex was constructed by Emperor Akbar in 1565 primarily as a military structure although later emperors built a palace complex inside. This is the part which is open to the public and some 80% of the original fort is still used by the Indian Army today and is off limits. The palace section blends Hindu and Central Asian architectural styles in a reminder of the Mughal emperors Afghani roots. The outer wall is 2.5km long and 20m high.



*Entrance gate to the Agra Fort*

*The outer moat had water and crocodiles and the inner moat had wild animals – tigers!*

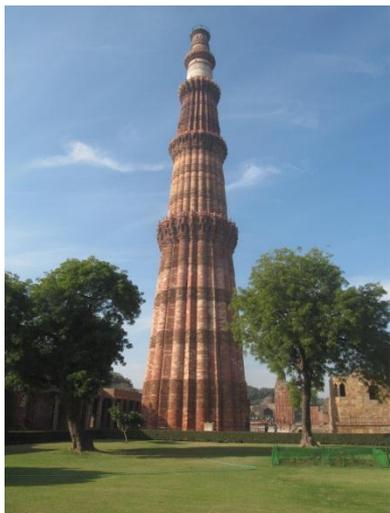
On the way back to the hotel we stopped at a shop called Vishal Mega Mart - it was a supermarket on the ground floor and a Big W quality clothing store on the first floor. We all had a lovely time looking around both floors and I bought three lengths of fabric for making up into salwar kameez - the tunic and baggy trousers with scarf that Indian women look so elegant in! Not sure if I will, but got to give it a go.

The following day we were off for our last big bus trip, to Delhi. It took about four hours including a 100km section of freeway which Indians think is so expensive to drive on that it was virtually vehicle free. It cost our bus 500 rupees or approx \$10. It saved a couple of hours of travelling through small towns and villages.

Delhi has a population of 17,000,000 plus about 4,000,000 'informal' residents who have arrived from places like

Nepal, poorer rural areas and refugees from Tibet. All public transport including the masses of tuk tuk style taxis must use CNG (compressed natural gas) in an effort to reduce the levels of pollution in the air. Mind you we passed a huge coal fired power station pouring out black smoke into the atmosphere so that isn't helping much. Also on the outer fringes people cook with dried cow dung fires and burn their rubbish outside their houses. In Delhi cows are banned and there are large fines for roaming cows, so the traffic doesn't have that to slow things down, although there are enough slow moving tuk tuks, pedal rickshaws and push carts that hold things up. This is the traffic we should have experienced in Mumbai but were spared due to the funeral of Bal Thackeray. We are staying in the Oberoi Maidens Hotel which was built by the British in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is very grand. It is the centre for the Oberoi hotel chain operations world wide, including The Windsor in Melbourne.

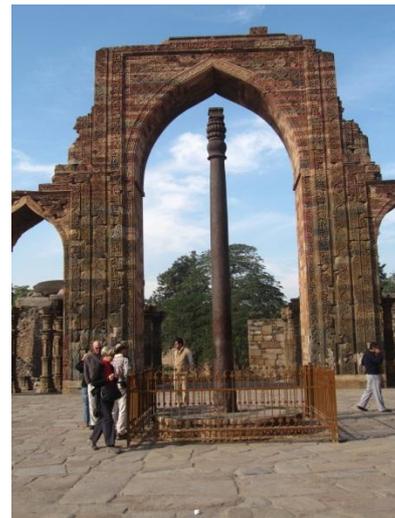
On our last full day of sightseeing we headed down to south Delhi to the Qutub Minar, a five storey stone tower, 72.5m tall built in 1192 to celebrate victory over the Rajputs. Within the grounds is a famous iron pillar which has stood for millenia without rusting. Actually it looks rusty on the outside, but this must have formed a film which stopped further deterioration.



*Qutub Minar*

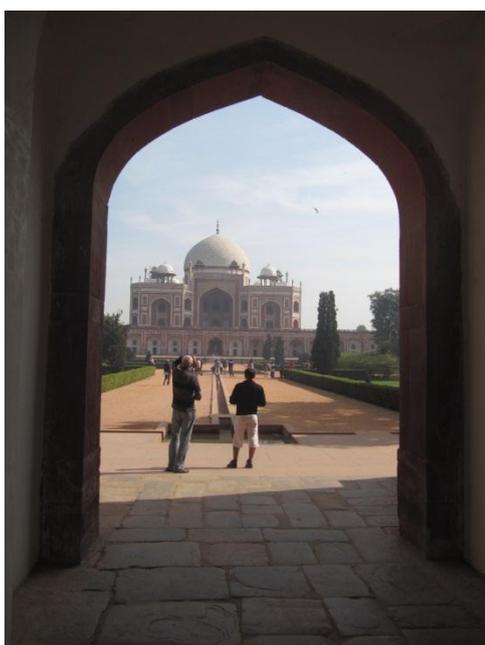


*It might be Bill's birthday, but we both got garlands*



*The uncorroded iron pillar*

Our next stop was to Humayun's tomb. This predated the Taj by about 100 years and was the first garden tomb built on the Indian subcontinent by the invading Moghuls from Persia and the Middle East. There are some obvious elements which were used later when the Taj was built by the grandchildren of the Emperors who built this one.



*Humayun' tomb from the entrance gate*



*Red sandstone and white marble*

On to India Gate built by the British after WWI where the names of the 90,000 Indian soldiers who made final sacrifice for their country are listed. After a short stop we visited a carpet and textile showroom showcasing the work of Kashmiri craftsmen and then on the cremation site of Mahatma Gandhi, which is one of the most visited sites in Delhi. Every visiting prime minister or premier is brought here to pay their respects. There must have been 5,000 Indian

schoolkids also paying respects in the 10 - 15 minutes we were there. They all say hello and want to high five us, also have their pictures taken with us!



*Simple black granite slab where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated*



*Mobbed by school kids*

After we got away from the kids we drove on to the largest mosque in Asia. It was built by Shah Jahan in 1648 which was during the final years of his construction of the Taj - what a busy builder emperor he was. It is built primarily of the local red sandstone with white marble sections. The forecourt area holds 25,000 people praying or probably three times that standing. Once more we had to 'open our shoes' as our guide so charmingly put it! That is, take your shoes off and walk around the filthy paved area in your socks! A couple of the travellers threw away the socks which they were wearing at the rat temple! The ladies in the group had the indignity of being wrapped in voluminous long sleeved garments before we could enter the precincts.

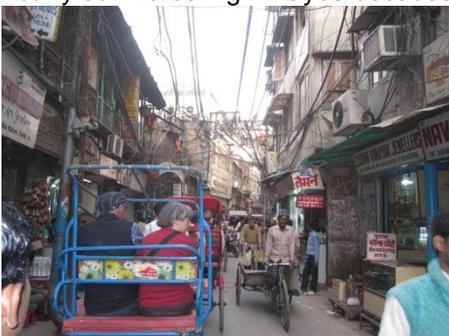


*Inside the mosque*



*Covering ourselves up!*

Once we had struggled back out of our colourful tents we climbed aboard bicycle rickshaws to travel through the market on our way to the Red Fort, our last stop of the day. This huge fort was also built by Shah Jahan and like the Agra Fort (which he also built) it has an outer wall some 3km long and 20m high. The palace complex inside wasn't nearly so interesting - maybe because it had been a long day and we'd had enough!



After barely an hour to wash up we headed for our last official function - the farewell dinner. After the main course we celebrated Bill's birthday with a cake.

By the time we headed for breakfast the next morning, half of our party had headed off to the airport to other parts of India or back to other parts of Australia. We had to wait for a flight at 11.30pm so we had plenty of time to rest, relax and write up this little travelogue.