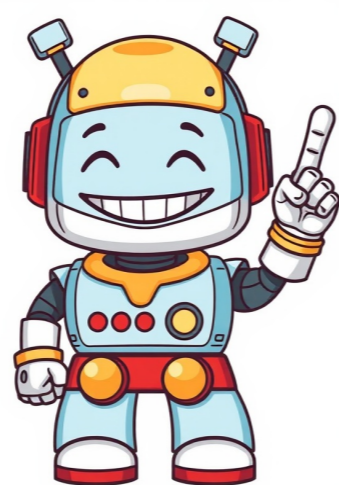


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From fascinating facts and deep symbolism of the Taj Mahal to practical visitor insights, here's your guide to the much-loved wonderSituated on the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra, India, the iconic white marble mausoleum complex dates back to the 17th century. It was commissioned by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife and later became his own resting place, as well. But the structure's fame has much more to do with its impressive, historically significant design than the people who are buried there "It's this incredible synthesis that really defines the early modern world, which is a story about contact," says Kishwar Rizvi, a professor of Islamic art and architecture at Yale University. "The Taj Mahal represents Timurid architecture from Central Asia, it builds on Safavid architectural trends from Iran, as well as craftsmanship from Italy. And it's part of the history of Islam in India, building on the funerary tombs that had existed since the 12th century. It's a fabulous example of this historical moment."To learn more about the Taj Mahal, AD chatted with Rizvi and local licensed tour guide BK Jain. Here's everything you need to know.The Taj Mahal, located in Agra, India, is among the most famous buildings in the world.Photo: Kriangkrai Thitimakorn/Getty ImagesWhere is the Taj Mahal located?The Taj Mahal is located in Agra, a city in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It sits on the right bank of the Yamuna River, the second-largest tributary of the Ganges, which is an atypical spot for a mausoleum. "The Taj Mahal is a very self-aware structure that breaks away from tradition," explains Rizvi. "Rather than having the tomb at the centre of a garden, it's been pushed to the edge, right on the riverfront. The architecture invites a new and different view. You can see it from the other side of the river."When and why was the Taj Mahal built?In 1631, Shah Jahan ordered that the Taj Mahal be built to house the tomb of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. "She was the second queen of the emperor," Jain notes. "She died when she was delivering her 14th child. There was an excess of bleeding due to complications in the womb. She was not in Agra at that time, and was instead accompanying Shah Jahan to Burhanpur. While she was pregnant, she spent almost a month on the back of an elephant to reach there."According to legend, Mumtaz Mahal requested that Shah Jahan build her a funerary tomb while she was on her deathbed. "She said, 'You have to make some commitments to me,'" recounts Jain. "First, 'Please don't marry again. This way, you can remember me in the afterlife.' Second, 'Take care of the children.' Third, 'Build a funerary tomb over my grave. This should be a symbol of love.' That is the reason for the Taj Mahal."Where is Taj Mahal? What is the history and architecture of Taj Mahal Palace? Let Living Nomads tell you the story of Taj Mahal – a symbol of romantic love in India through The ULTIMATE Taj Mahal travel guide: How to get there, Tickets, Things to do, Tips & MORE. The ULTIMATE Taj Mahal travel guide: How to get there, Tickets, Things to do, Tips & MORE Leaning down to reflect on the Yamuna River in Agra city, Taj Mahal was built by Emperor Shah Jahan. This is not only a majestic architectural work but also an eternal symbol of love for Indians, when the king built it to commemorate his deceased wife. Behind the existence of Taj Mahal Palace is a classic love story, sculpted in marble and precious stones. Coming to Taj Mahal, you will both see a majestic architectural work and feel a part of Indian history and culture. Let's find out more interesting information about this place with Living Nomads. Taj Mahal travel guide: Where is Taj Mahal? | taj mahal travel guide Reflecting the Yamuna River, located in the city of Agra, Uttar Pradesh state in Northern India, the Taj Mahal palace perfectly combines traditional Indian architecture with spontaneous touches of Persian style. No one knows when it started, but the name "Taj Mahal" has carried the meaning of eternal love for the Indian people. This architectural wonder was built in the 17th century, in place of the oath and proof of love of Emperor Shah Jahan for his late wife - Queen Mumtaz Maha. Only go to the Taj Mahal as soon as possible to hope for a "clean" photo. | taj mahal travel guide From Delhi: Taj Mahal & Agra Private Day Trip with Transfers It is not an exaggeration to say that "the most beautiful mausoleum in the world" Taj Mahal is a sad and aesthetic love song, eternally hummed by precious stones and the superior construction techniques of ancient artisans. With a history of more than four centuries, Taj Mahal attracts millions of tourists from all over the world to visit every year. The Love Story Behind the Taj Mahal | taj mahal travel guide The Taj Mahal, one of the wonders of the world, is not only a magnificent architecture work but also an eternal testament to the touching love story between Emperor Shah Jahan and his beloved wife, Queen Mumtaz Mahal. In 1631, Queen Mumtaz Mahal died while giving birth to their 14th child, leaving Emperor Shah Jahan with endless grief. To commemorate his wife, he decided to build the most magnificent mausoleum ever. The Taj Mahal was built by a huge team, estimated to have more than 20,000 artisans and craftsmen mobilized from all over India, Persia and Central Asia, spanning 22 years, from 1632 to 1653. The work used white marble, transported from Makrana, Rajasthan. Thousands of precious stones such as jade, emeralds and turquoise have been intricately inlaid on the wall, creating a unique work of art. image by: iamkoo.net | taj mahal travel guide Old & New Delhi Private Luxury Tour By Car How to get to Taj Mahal The Taj Mahal is one of the wonders of the world and a symbol of eternal love. To help you have a smooth journey of discovery, below is a detailed guide on how to travel from Vietnam to this famous landmark. From Vietnam to India Indira Gandhi International Airport (Delhi Airport) | taj mahal travel guide From Vietnam, you will fly to Indira Gandhi International Airport (DEL) in the capital city of New Delhi, India. Currently, there are no direct flights from Vietnam to New Delhi, so you will have to transit in another city. Popular airlines include Vietnam Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Qatar Airways, Emirates, Malaysia Airlines. Flight time and transit location will depend on your choice. From New Delhi to Taj Mahal (Agra) | taj mahal travel guide The Taj Mahal is located in Agra city, about 200km from New Delhi. You can choose one of the following means of transport to travel. Train This is the most popular means of transport for tourists thanks to its convenience and cost savings. The journey takes about 2-3 hours, allowing you to admire the rural landscape of India. Gatimaan Express: The most modern high-speed train, taking only about 1 hour 40 minutes. Shatabdi Express: Another popular option, with a travel time of about 2 hours 10 minutes. These trains depart from Hazrat Nizamuddin or New Delhi Railway Station and arrive at Agra Cantt. It is advisable to book train tickets online in advance through official websites to ensure availability, especially during peak tourist seasons. In the distance is the main gate to the Taj Mahal, source: iamkoo.net | taj mahal travel guide New Delhi Old Delhi & India Gate Full-Day Private Tour Rent a Car If you are traveling in a group or want comfort and privacy, renting a car is the ideal option. The trip takes about 3-4 hours, depending on traffic conditions. Alternately, you can book a package tour from New Delhi to Agra, which includes a driver, tour guide and tickets to other famous attractions in the city such as Agra Fort. Taj Mahal Opening Hours | taj mahal travel guide From Delhi/Agra: Private Taj Mahal & Agra Day Trip with 5* Lunch The Taj Mahal opens to visitors 30 minutes before sunrise and closes 30 minutes before sunset on weekdays. The Taj Mahal is closed on Fridays for prayers. The Taj Mahal is open on the rest of the week. Taj Mahal Entrance Fees | taj mahal travel guide Here are the suggested entrance fees to the Taj Mahal, including the entrance fee to the main mausoleum: Foreigners: 1100 Rupees Indian citizens: 50 Rupees Note: You have to pay an additional 200 Rupees (approx. 60,000 VND) to enter the main mausoleum area. This ticket is optional. Discount when buying tickets online: 5 Rupees discount for each ticket for Indian citizens and 50 Rupees discount for each ticket for foreign visitors when buying tickets online. Children under 15 years of age (including foreign visitors and Indian citizens) are free of charge. Where to Buy Taj Mahal Tickets? To ensure your trip goes smoothly, please refer to the following ways to buy Taj Mahal tickets. Buy Tickets Online | taj mahal travel guide This is the best way to save time and avoid long queues, especially during peak seasons. Official Website: You should buy tickets online through the official website of Taj Mahal. This website provides full information about ticket prices, opening hours and necessary regulations. Klook: You can also book package tours on Klook. These tours usually include entrance tickets, a tour guide, and transportation services. Buy Tickets Directly At The Counter As soon as it was dawn, the Taj Mahal was crowded with people. | taj mahal travel guide You can buy tickets directly at the ticket counters at the gates of the Taj Mahal. Western Gate: Tickets are sold at the counter near Saheli Burj, Eastern Gate: Tickets are sold at the counter at the gate. Southern Gate: This gate is currently for exit only, there is no ticket counter. The ticket counters are open from 1 hour before sunrise until 45 minutes before sunset. When you buy tickets and enter the gate, you will see that there are separate entrances for international and domestic tourists. What to do at the Taj Mahal Coming to the Taj Mahal, you will not only admire the architectural beauty but also have many other memorable experiences. Below are the activities that cannot be missed at this wonder. Explore the Exquisite Architecture | taj mahal travel guide Step inside the Taj Mahal and you will admire the sophistication of Mughal architecture. Every detail from the jade-inlaid stone pillars to the flower carpets is meticulously cared for. This great work was built over 22 years, from 1631 to 1653, with the participation of more than 20,000 workers and craftsmen. The artisans used up to 28 types of precious and semi-precious stones to inlay on the white marble surface, creating sophisticated and luxurious motifs. source: mariam-uz-zamani.blogspot.com | taj mahal travel guide The architecture inside the Taj Mahal is a harmonious combination of Islamic art and Indian cultural elements. Standing out in the center is the mausoleum of King Shah Jahan and Queen Mumtaz Mahal made of white marble. The main dome of the work is in the traditional Mughal style, shaped like an onion. The patterns, carvings and inscriptions praising Allah are delicately carved, contributing to creating a sacred and solemn space. Watch the Beautiful Sunrise at Taj Mahal Delhi Taj Mahal & Agra Fort Private Day Tour The best time to see the Taj Mahal is at dawn. When the first rays of the new day shine on the white marble dome, the entire structure will change from pale pink to pure white, then gradually turn to golden yellow. The early morning sunlight spreads through the doors and graceful curves of the Taj Mahal, creating a space filled with light and romance, while at the same time being elegant and solemn. Stroll at the Taj Mahal Garden Designed in the Mughal style, the Taj Mahal garden is an indispensable part of this architectural complex, with deep symbolic meaning. The garden is called Charbagh, meaning "four-part garden", symbolizing the Garden of Eden in the Quran. | taj mahal travel guide Agra Taj Mahal & Fort Full-Day Private Tour The garden is divided into four perfectly symmetrical areas by canals and paths, meeting at a central lake. The entire space is decorated with fountains, ornamental plants and lush green lawns. This is an ideal place for you to walk, take pictures and admire the majestic beauty of the Taj Mahal from a wide and peaceful perspective. Explore the Mosque and Guest House In addition to the Taj Mahal mausoleum, the complex also has two symmetrical structures built of red sandstone. One is the mosque in the west, the other is the guest house in the east. Both of these structures have a contrasting architecture with the pure white color of the main mausoleum, creating a harmonious and impressive whole. You can visit and admire the typical details of Mughal Islamic architecture, such as onion domes, large arches and intricately carved patterns. This is also where visitors can find a unique, panoramic view of the Taj Mahal. Famous Tourist Attractions Near Taj Mahal After admiring the magnificent beauty of Taj Mahal, you can easily explore many other famous landmarks in Agra city and neighboring areas. Agra Fort | taj mahal travel guide Just about 2.5km from Taj Mahal, Agra Fort is another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built with red sandstone, this fort was once the residence of Mughal emperors. Inside the fort is a complex of palaces, mosques and beautiful gardens. This is a combination of Indian, Persian and Mughal architectural styles. You can admire the Taj Mahal from several locations inside the fort, creating unique perspectives. Fatehpur Sikri | taj mahal travel guide Built by Emperor Akbar in the 16th century, Fatehpur Sikri is one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986. The citadel is built mainly of red sandstone, with notable structures such as the Jama Mosque, the Buland Darwaza Gate and the tomb of Salim Chisti. Fatehpur Sikri also has well-arranged gardens and fountains. Itimad-ud-Daulah Mausoleum The Itimad-ud-Daulah Mausoleum, also known as the "Little Taj Mahal", was built in the 17th century by Empress Nur Jahan in memory of her parents. The mausoleum is a major step forward in Mughal architecture, combining Islamic and Indian architecture, with intricate patterns inlaid with precious stones on a white marble base. The grandeur of the Taj Mahal, especially when viewing this work from the banks of the poetic Yamuna River. The Taj Mahal will always be an attractive and fascinating destination for each person to explore and feel in their own way. Are you ready to visit the Taj Mahal palace in India? Some best day tours, trips, activities and transfer services, tickets in, from and to New Delhi you can refer to Read more India guide here. An illustration of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan. Photo: Dinodia Photo/Getty ImagesRizvi, however, points out another motivation for the Taj Mahal's construction. "In the 19th century, there were romantic British stories about this being a monument to love, which, yes, it was built for his wife, but he was always going to be buried there too," she explains. "I think it's more important to see this as an imperial monument that tells us something about the ambitions of Shah Jahan himself and the worlds that he wanted to create."The mausoleum was completed in 1648, but it was another five years before the rest of the complex was finished. Overall, the project lasted 22 years and required over 20,000 workers. It cost an estimated 32 million rupees at the time, which would be 52.8 billion rupees—or \$827 million—now. "These days, you can say it's priceless," adds Jain. Who designed the Taj Mahal?Shah Jahan appointed Ustad Ahmad Lahori to lead the team of architects and artisans who designed the Taj Mahal. "He was a renowned Persian architect," Jain says. "He presented a model to Shah Jahan, who made some modifications and then approved it. The emperor supported Lahori and checked in from time to time."What does the name Taj Mahal mean?The name Taj Mahal is believed to be of Persian origin. "Taj" means 'crown' and mahal is 'palace,'" explains Jain. "It's 'crown palace' because the building itself looks like a palace and there are four minarets in the corners, which look like a crown for the building. The real name of the building was Rauza-e-Munawwara, but later on it became known as Taj Mahal."What are the different elements of the Taj Mahal complex?The complex consists of the mausoleum, gardens, and two identical buildings (one a guest house, one a mosque) that create a sense of symmetry. Video: Getty ImagesThe Taj Mahal complex includes a mausoleum, a main gateway, a red sandstone mosque, a jawab (which translates to "answer," and looks just like the mosque), and a garden. "When you enter the main gate, there is a mosque and an identical building that looks like a mosque," describes Jain. "The real name of that second building was Mehmaan Khana, but when the English ruled over India, they called it the guest house. That building just maintains the symmetry. The mosque, the mausoleum, and the guest house are in one line. In the front, there's a beautiful garden with water fountains."What materials were used to build the Taj Mahal?White marble was used to build the Taj Mahal mausoleum, giving it a luminous, ethereal quality. "The marble is from a quarry in Makrana, a place in Rajasthan about 240 miles away from Agra," Jain specifies. "At the time, there was no modern transportation, so the marble got there by camel carts and burro carts." At Hearst Networks EMEA, we share stories that matter. A global broadcaster since 1995, we reach audiences in over 100 countries, including the UK, Nordics, Benelux, Central & Eastern Europe, Spain, Italy, Germany, Africa and the Middle East. Our stories are global and local, linear and digital, and always compelling. Personalities shine at Hearst Networks EMEA. Our culture embraces individuals, in all their different, passionate, ambitious glory. Our people are our strength, and our differences are celebrated. 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We offer a range of benefits such as a generous pension plan, life assurance and holiday allowance, and there are useful local perks in various offices, and summer Fridays across the whole company. But most of all, we will support you to develop and grow throughout your time with us. Learning is part of the journey at Hearst Networks EMEA and you'll be offered personal and professional development opportunities throughout your career with us. We'll do everything we can to see you thrive and grow. The Taj Mahal is a symbol of endless love, built by Shah Jahan for his wife Mumtaz Mahal.Shah Jahan was inspired by his deep grief to create a magnificent mausoleum, unique in its dedication to a woman.The Taj Mahal's construction required 20,000 workers and incorporated precious stones from around the world. The Taj Mahal is a breathtaking white-marble mausoleum commissioned by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Located on the southern bank of the Yamuna River near Agra, India, the Taj Mahal took 22 years to build and finally reached completion in 1653. This exquisite monument, considered one of the New Wonders of the World, astounds visitors with its symmetry, structural beauty, intricate calligraphy, inlaid gemstones, and magnificent garden. More than just a memorial dedicated to a spouse, the Taj Mahal was a declaration of lasting love from Shah Jahan to his departed soulmate. In 1607, Shah Jahan, grandson of Akbar the Great, first met his beloved. At the time, he was not yet the fifth emperor of the Mughal Empire. Sixteen-year-old Prince Khurram, as he was then called, fled around the royal bazaar, flirting with the girls from high-ranking families that staffed the booths. At one of these booths, Prince Khurram met Arjumand Banu Begum, the 15-year-old young woman whose father was soon to be the prime minister and whose aunt was married to Prince Khurram's father. Although it was love at first sight, the two were not allowed to marry right away. Prince Khurram first had to marry Kandahari Begum. He later took a third wife as well. On March 27, 1612, Prince Khurram and his beloved, to whom he gave the name Mumtaz Mahal ("chosen one of the palace"), were married. Mumtaz Mahal was beautiful, smart, and tender-hearted. The public was enamored with her, largely because she cared for the people. She diligently made lists of widows and orphans to ensure they received food and money. The couple had 14 children together but only seven lived past infancy. The birth of the 14th child killed Mumtaz Mahal. In 1631, three years into Shah Jahan's reign, a rebellion led by Khan Jahan Lodi was underway. Shah Jahan took his military out to the Deccan, about 400 miles from Agra, to crush the usurper. As usual, Mumtaz Mahal accompanied Shah Jahan's side despite being heavily pregnant. On June 16, 1631, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl in an elaborately decorated tent in the middle of the encampment. At first, all seemed well, but Mumtaz Mahal was dying. The moment Shah Jahan received word of his wife's condition, he rushed to her side. Early in the morning on June 17, just one day after the birth of their daughter, Mumtaz Mahal died in her husband's arms. She was buried immediately, according to Islamic tradition, near the encampment at Burhanpur. Her body would not stay there long. Reports say that in Shah Jahan's anguish, he went to his tent and cried for eight days without ceasing. When he emerged, he was said to have aged considerably, sporting white hair and glasses. In December 1631, with the feud against Khan Jahan Lodi won, Shah Jahan asked that Mumtaz Mahal's body be dug up and brought 435 miles or 700 kilometers to Agra. Her return was a grand procession with thousands of soldiers accompanying her body and mourners lining the route. When the remains of Mumtaz Mahal reached Agra on January 8, 1632, they were temporarily buried on land donated by nobleman Raja Jai Singh, near where the Taj Mahal would be built. Shah Jahan, filled with grief, poured his emotion into designing an elaborate and expensive mausoleum grander than any other. It was also unique because it was the first large mausoleum dedicated to a woman. Although we know of no primary architect for the Taj Mahal, it's believed that Shah Jahan, passionate about architecture himself, worked on the plans directly with the input and aid of a number of the best architects of his time. The intention was for the Taj Mahal, "the crown of the region", to represent Heaven, Jannah, on Earth. Shah Jahan spared no expense in making this happen. The Mughal Empire was one of the richest empires in the world at the time of Shah Jahan's reign, and this meant that he had the resources to make this monument incomparably grand. But though he wanted it to be breathtaking, he also wanted it erected quickly. To speed up the production, an estimated 20,000 workers were brought in and housed nearby in a town built especially for them called Mumtazabad. Both skilled and unskilled craftsmen were contracted. Builders first worked on the foundation and then the giant, 624-foot-long plinth or base, which would become the base of the Taj Mahal building and the pair of matching red sandstone buildings that would flank it, the mosque and guest house. The Taj Mahal, sitting on a second plinth, was to be an octagonal structure constructed of marble-covered brick. As is the case for most large projects, the builders created a scaffolding to build higher. Their choice of bricks for this scaffolding was unusual and remains perplexing to historians. White marble is one of the most striking and prominent features of the Taj Mahal. The marble used was quarried in Makrana, 200 miles away. Reportedly, it took 1,000 elephants and an untold number of oxen to drag the extremely heavy marble to the building site. A giant, 10-mile-long earthen ramp was built for the massive marble pieces to reach higher spaces of the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal is topped with a huge double-shelled dome that stretches 240 feet and is also covered in white marble. Four thin, white marble minarets stand tall at the corners of the second plinth and surround the mausoleum. Most pictures of the Taj Mahal show only a large white building. Though lovely, this image doesn't do the structure justice. These photos leave out many intricacies that make the Taj Mahal astoundingly feminine and opulent. Passages from the Quran (the holy book of Islam) written in calligraphy appear on the mosque, guest house, and large main gate at the southern end of the complex. Shah Jahan hired master calligrapher Amanat Khan to work on these inlaid verses. Masterfully done, the finished verses from the Quran are inlaid with black marble. They are a stately yet soft feature of the building. Although made of stone, the curves mimic real handwriting. The 22 passages from the Quran are said to have been chosen by Amanat Khan himself. Interestingly, Amanat Khan was the only person Shah Jahan allowed to sign his work on the Taj Mahal. The delicate inlaid flowers throughout the Taj Mahal complex are almost more impressive than the calligraphy. In a process known as parchin kari, highly-skilled stone cutters carved intricate floral designs into the white marble and then inlaid these with precious and semi-precious stones to form interwoven vines and flowers. There are 43 kinds of precious and semi-precious stones—sourced from around the world—used for these flowers, including lapis lazuli from Sri Lanka, jade from China, malachite from Russia, and turquoise from Tibet. Islam holds the image of Paradise as a garden. Thus, the garden at the Taj Mahal was an integral part of making it Heaven on Earth. The Taj Mahal's garden, situated south of the mausoleum, has four quadrants. These are divided by four "rivers" of water (another important Islamic image of Paradise) that gather in a central pool. The Yamuna River filled these gardens and rivers via a complex underground water system. Unfortunately, no records remain to tell the exact plants in these gardens. Shah Jahan remained in deep mourning for two years and never fully healed after the death of his favorite wife. This gave Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan's fourth son, Aurangzeb, the opportunity to successfully kill his three elder brothers and imprison his father. After 30 years as emperor, Shah Jahan was usurped and placed in the luxurious Red Fort in Agra in 1658. Forbidden to leave but with most of his usual luxuries, Shah Jahan spent his final eight years gazing out a window at the Taj Mahal. When Shah Jahan died on January 22, 1666, Aurangzeb had his father buried with Mumtaz Mahal in the crypt beneath the Taj Mahal. On the main floor of the Taj Mahal above the crypt now sits two cenotaphs (empty burial tombs). The one in the center of the room belongs to Mumtaz Mahal and the one just to the west is for Shah Jahan. Surrounding the cenotaphs is a delicately carved, lacy marble screen. Originally it had been a gold screen but Shah Jahan had that replaced so thieves would not feel tempted to steal it. Shah Jahan was wealthy enough to support the Taj Mahal and its mighty maintenance costs, but over the centuries, the Mughal Empire lost its riches and the Taj Mahal fell into ruins. By the 1800s, the British ousted the Mughals and took over India. The Taj Mahal was dissected for its beauty—the British cut gemstones from its walls, stole silver candlesticks and doors, and even tried to sell the white marble overseas. This was Lord Curzon, the British viceroy of India, who put and to this. Rather than looting the Taj Mahal, Curzon worked to restore it. The Taj Mahal has once again become a magnificent place with 2.5 million visitors each year. People can visit during the daytime and watch as the white marble appears to take on different hues throughout the day. Once a month, visitors have the opportunity to make a short visit during a full moon to see how the Taj Mahal seems to glow from the inside out in the moonlight. The Taj Mahal was placed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1983, but this protection has not guaranteed its safety. It is now at the mercy of pollutants from nearby factories and excessive humidity from the breath of its visitors. DuTemple, Lesley A. The Taj Mahal. Lerner Publications Company, 2003.Harpur, James, and Jennifer Westwood. The Atlas of Legendary Places. 1st ed., Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989.Ingpen, Robert R., and Philip Wilkinson. Encyclopedia of Mysterious Places: The Life and Legends of Ancient Sites Around the World. Metro Books, 2000. The Taj Mahal is one of the most beautiful monuments in India. Let's have a look at its history, architecture, location, opening hours, entry fee, myths, legends and other interesting facts. When was it built : between 1632 and 1653 AD Who built it : Shah Jahan, 5th Emperor of the Mughal Dynasty Time taken : 21 years Where is it located : Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India Why was it built : As a memorial to Shah Jahan's beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal after her death in 1631 Dimensions : situated in a 170000 sq. m complex; 57 m at the base; 68 m in height and raised platform height 6 m Materials used : White Marble for the main mausoleum, Red Sandstone for fortifying structure and accents Architect : Ustad Ahmed Lahouri Architectural Style : Mughal Cost of Construction : 32 crore rupees Maintained By : Archeological Survey of India (ASI) Special Recognitions : Declared UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983 and winner of the New7Wonders of The World List Initiative between 2000 and 2007. Visit Timing : Sunrise to Sunset. Closed on Fridays; Night tours are permitted between 8:30 pm to 12:30 am for a limited duration of 30 mins. Entry Fee : By day, foreign citizens are charged Rs. 100, citizens from countries are charged Rs. 530, Indian citizens Rs. 40 and entry for children upto 15 yrs of age is free. At night, entry fee for foreign, SAARC and BIMSTEC citizens remain same. Rs. 500 is charged for Indian citizens and children below the age of 3yrs have free entry. How to Reach: Agra can be reached by air as well as land. The city has an airport, Kheria Air Force Station, which is catered by daily flights from all over India through multiple airlines. By land one can avail bus, train and private cars from the nearest metro cities like Delhi (176.7 km), Jaipur (219.7 km), and Lucknow (289.5 km). Within the Agra city one can avail auto, cycle rickshaw and taxis to reach the monument. Image Credit: worldofunderlust.comFamous as one of the wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal at Agra, India, is epitome of true love and passion. The Taj Mahal was built by the famous Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaj Mahal. The architectural beauty and magnificence of the Taj Mahal has never been surpassed. It is said to be the most wonderful monument built by the Mughal rulers and represents the zenith of the Mughal architecture. Built entirely out of white marbles, the beauty of the Taj Mahal is beyond description. The beauty of the Taj Mahal has been aptly summarized by the famous English poet, Sir Edwin Arnold, as "Not a piece of architecture, as other buildings are, but the proud passions of an emperor's love wrought in living stones." Image Credit: fantasysarts.net Architecture and Design Taj Mahal, synonymous with India's identity, is the crowning jewel of Mughal architecture in India. The Mughal tradition of erecting majestic mausoleums in memory of Royal members found its culmination in the Taj's majestic form. The Humayun's tomb built in 1562 was a major influence over Taj's design. An architectural marvel, the structure incorporated elements of Persian influences like the design of the Dome and incorporation of arched entrances or 'Iwans' along with inspiration from contemporary Hindu design elements like chhatris and copious incorporation of the lotus motif. Described by Tagore as "the tear-drop on the cheek of time", the monument embodies funeral austerity turned into the most beautiful reminder of eternal love. Taj Mahal is part of an elaborate complex consisting of a decorative gateway, a beautifully designed garden, a wonderful water system and a mosque. The complex is situated on the southern banks of river Yamuna. The complex stretches in a south to north incline towards the river and is constructed in steps. Image Credit: drwallpapers.comExterior of the Taj Mahal The central focus of the complex is the Tomb structure. Made completely out of white marble, its beauty lies in the symmetry of its architecture. The structure is situated on a raised square plinth, also made of white marble, at a height of 50 m from the river level, at one end of the complex. The tomb itself is situated at the center of the plinth, framed by four equidistant minarets. The Taj Mahal is a square structure with sides measuring 55 m. The minarets are spread at a distance of 41.75 m from the tomb wall and have a height of 39.62 m. There is a bulbous central dome in the main building, 18.28 m in diameter and 73 m in height. The dome is elevated from the top of the building by a 7 m high cylindrical base. It is decorated at its top by lotus motif and ends in a gilded finial topped with the Islamic half-moon. The spherical and grand aspect of the central dome is emphasized by incorporation of smaller domes on both sides in the form of chhatris, also capped in gilded finials. Each minaret is divided into three equal segments by two balconies and has an octagonal base. The delicate curve of the dome is emphasized by the tapering structure and slightly angular placement of the minarets. The entrance to the main tomb is framed by a huge arched vault or Iwan which in turn is again framed by two similar but smaller arches on each side. These arches indicate stacked balconies along two different levels. This is called pishtaq, which is replicated on all the eight edges of the building affording it another dimension of symmetry. Image Credit: thecrazyfacts.com The juxtaposition of solids and voids in combination with concave and convex design elements create a breathtaking effect of contrast. The marble exterior changes color periodically reflecting the light conditions of the day and produces an astonishing pearly diaphanous effect at night. The exteriors of the Taj are inlaid with intricate decorations. Generously inlaid with precious gemstones like opals, lapis lazuli and jade, the decorations offer stunning flashes of color against a white background. Stucco and paintings cover the exterior walls along with calligraphy of verses from Quran or excerpts from poems in black marble. Murals of herringbone inlays and marble jaalis, mosaics of colored stones in geometric patterns along with abstract tessellations cover the exterior floors and surfaces. Image Credit: wallpaperscraft.com Interior of the Taj Mahal The interior of Taj mahal is dominated by a cavernous octagonal central chamber with eight smaller chambers radiating from it. The smaller chambers are leveled across two floors making a total of 16 such niches. The central chamber is the main funerary chamber housing the cenotaphs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan. The two ornate marble cenotaphs are enclosed within a marble screen and face the south. The actual sarcophagi are housed below the tomb as a relatively simple crypt. Image Credit: inspirationseek.com Although Islam prohibits elaborate decoration of tombs, Shah Jahan flamboyantly overlooked the dictate and commissioned opulent detailing of the interior surfaces. Inlays of Pietra dura and lapidary adorn the floors and works of the walls and floors. Copious amounts of gemstones were used for the design along with colored stones. Highly polished surfaces reflect the light filtered through marble lattice work in the windows and arches. Calligraphic inscriptions of the 99 names of God is carved on the tombs itself and on Shah Jahan's tomb an additional passage has been inscribed in impeccable calligraphy reading "He travelled from this world to the banquet-hall of Eternity on the night of the twenty-sixth of the month of Rajab, in the year 1076 Hijri.". Image Credit: fatsaloon.com The Garden (Mughal Garden) at the Taj Mahal The garden is an intricate part of Mughal mausoleums and is commonly known as Charbagh. Raised red sandstone pathways divide the Mughal garden into four segments which are in turn fractioned into 16 symmetrical sections. A raised square marble pool is situated midway between the Taj Mahal and the Entrance. The Hawd al-Kawthar or 'Tank of Abundance' positioned on the north-south axis offer beautiful reflection of the Taj in all its glory. Various fruit bearing trees and Cypress trees symbolizing life and death respectively are arranged in symmetrical equidistant patterns along the raised central pathway. The garden is designed in such a way that it offers unhindered view of the Taj from any random point. Image Credit: Other Buildings in the Taj Complex Every element of the Taj complex was designed to uphold the majesty and beauty of the Taj Mahal. The main entrance gateway or Darwaza-e-Rauza is constructed with red sandstone and is designed in such a way that standing outside the archway one cannot see the Taj, but upon entering it manifests offering a breathtaking effect. The mosque on the western side of the Taj Mahal and the Nakkar Khana or guest house on the eastern side are made with red sandstone. They are mirror images of each other in design, which in Mughal architectural terms is called Jawab, and enhance the symmetry of the Taj along with emphasizing the translucent beauty of the white marble structure. Image Credit: topworldresort.com Construction of the Taj Mahal Construction of the Taj Mahal started in the year 1632. Around 22,000 masons, stonecutters, calligraphers and artisans, from all over India and Central Asia were employed during the construction period of 22 years. The marble used for the building was sourced from various parts of India and around 1000 elements were employed for this purpose. A board of architects oversaw the design elements under imperial supervision. The main tomb took 10 years to build and other ancillary buildings took another 12 years to complete. Image Credit: askideas.com Taj Mahal - Myths & Legends Several myths surround the Taj Mahal. The most wide spread of them is that after completion of construction, Shah Jahan ordered the tomb builders of the architects and workers to be cut of so that they cannot reproduce the work they did for him. This however does not have any historical evidence. There is also the myth of Shah Jahan commissioning a Black Taj Mahal, but was unable to finish it since his rule was overthrown by his son Aurangzeb. Some historians believe that the ruins excavated in the Mehtab Bagh, situated on the opposite bank of river Yamuna, are the incomplete remains of the structure owing to its similarity with Taj Mahal's symmetrical architecture. Image Credit: askideas.com An Indian writer, P. N. Oak claimed that the Taj Mahal was built on the site of a Shiv Temple called Tejo Mahalaya that was originally built by a Hindu king Parmar Dev. However, this claim was dismissed by the Supreme Court of India despite petitions for excavations. Last eight years of Shah Jahan was spent in confinement in the Shah Burj of the Agra Fort. It is said that he spent his days gazing towards the Taj Mahal from a small jharokha in his cell and remembering his beloved Mumtaz Mahal.

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