Taj Mahal

A Marvel



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# Taj Mahal, Agra Overview

What is widely considered as the most beautiful building in the world, the Taj Mahal is located in the historical city of [Agra](https://www.holidify.com/places/agra). Called the "symbol of love", it was built by the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, as a memorial for his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

"Taj Mahal" means "Crown of Palaces" in the Persian language. It rises from the dust-beaten earth of Uttar Pradesh, but even their wildest imaginings leave visitors unprepared for this world wonder. It is a breath-taking moment when you enter the gates of this monument, and the Taj Mahal comes into focus. It is considered the finest example of Mughal architecture and is now a UNESCO world heritage site. Stretching over 60 bighas (measurement used in India), the Taj Mahal was constructed using white marble obtained from Makrana in Rajasthan. Every year thousands of visitors want to catch a glimpse of this breath-taking monument.

Rabindranath Tagore[[1]](#footnote-1) described it as "*a teardrop on the cheek of eternity*" while Rudyard Kipling said it is "*the embodiment of all things pure*". The tomb is laid out in a rectangular shape, and that can be approached through a massive gateway which has an arch and alcoves on either side of it. The Taj, so majestic from the exterior, has equally splendid artistic work done in the interior. There are water channels and fountains in the entrance which makes the monument even more spectacular. Simply said, *it is the most beautiful building in the world, and it's impossible to see it without feeling awestruck!* Shah Jahan said about the Taj that it made *"the sun and the moon shed tears from their eyes".*

# History of Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal was built as a mausoleum by Shah Jahan for his wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died while giving birth to their 14th child in 1631. Her death left the emperor completely heartbroken, and his hair is said to have turned grey overnight. The construction of the Taj began in 1632. It took almost 17 years to complete the construction of the Taj Mahal. The main building was completed in eight years, but the whole complex was not completed until 1653. Soon after the construction was completed, Shah Jahan was overthrown by his son Aurangzeb and imprisoned in the Agra Fort. For the rest of his life, he could only gaze at his wondrous creation through a window. Shah Jahan died in 1666, after which his mortal remains were buried here alongside Mumtaz.

Over 20 000 people from all over India and Central Asia worked on this striking building. Specialists who produced the beautiful marble screens and marble inlay (pietra dura) which is made of thousands of semi-precious stones, were brought in from as far away as Europe. The Taj Mahal was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983. It looks as pristine today as when it was first constructed. The monument underwent a massive restoration project in the early 20th century.



Figure 1: Light reflecting on jewelled walls

# Structure of Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal can be accessed through east, west and south gates. Inside the grounds, the ornamental gardens are set on the classic Mughal charbagh lines (formal Persian garden). The monument stands on a raised marble platform at the northern end of the garden, with its back to the Yamuna River. Its raised position is a master-stroke of design as it leaves the sky as its only backdrop. Each corner of the platform is graced with 40m high white minarets. The Taj itself is made of semi-translucent white marble, inlaid with thousands of semi-precious stones and carved with flowers. The four indistinguishable faces of the Taj are in perfect symmetry, featuring impressive vaulted arches containing pietra dura scrollwork and the quotations from the Quran. The whole structure is topped off by four small domes.

The cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal lies directly below the main dome. It is an elaborate false tomb which is surrounded by an elegant marble screen inlaid with various types of semi-precious stones, offsetting the symmetry of the Taj. The light enters the central chamber through finely cut marble screens. The tomb of Mumtaz Mahal and of Shah Jahan in the cenotaph are false tombs as the real tombs lie in a locked room below the main chamber.

The complex houses a red sandstone mosque to the west which is a significant gathering place for the Muslims residing in Agra. There is an identical building to the east, the Jawab, which was built to maintain symmetry. Within the Taj lies the small Taj Museum which houses many original Mughal miniature paintings. Its primary attraction is a pair of 17th-century ivory portraits of the emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. It also has some Caledon plates which are said to break into pieces or change colour if the food served on them contains poison.



Figure 2: False tombs

# Taj Mahal Garden

The garden that beautifies the monument of love, begins at the entrance and spreads across to the base of the mausoleum. It is one of the leading highlights of a visit to the Taj Mahal. The concept of this garden (popularly known as Paradise Garden), built in the Persian Timurid style, was brought in by Babur. The unique principle followed while constructing this garden is e using the number four and its multiples. This was done as four is considered as the holiest number in Islam. The enchanting garden is divided into four parts, with two marble channels studded with fountains in the centre. Each quarter portion of the garden has 16 flowerbeds each of which was planted with 400 plants. The Taj Garden abounds with lush trees, chirping birds, fruits, flowers and symmetry, signifying the abstract meaning of paradise. This quaint setting makes for a wonderful backdrop for those perfect shots.



Figure 3: Beautiful Gardens

# Myths about Taj Mahal

There is a well-publicized theory that Taj Mahal was a Shiva Temple built in the 12th century which was later converted into the memorial for Mumtaz Mahal. This theory was developed by Purushottam Nagesh Oak. He filed a petition to have the sealed basement rooms opened to prove his theory, but it was rejected by the Supreme Court in 2000. Another famous story is that of the Black Taj. Many people believed that Shah Jahan planned to build a mirror image of the monument in black marble on the opposite side of the river, the work for which began before he was imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb. Extensive excavations were carried out at Mehtab Bagh, but no traces were found of any such construction.

# Taj Mahal Night Tour

Viewing the Taj Mahal at night is possible on five days on a month, including a full moon night and two nights before and after the full moon. The dates and the timings for the night viewing of the Taj are decided by the Archaeological Survey of India. Viewing the Taj Mahal at night takes place between 8:30 PM to 12:30 PM in 8 batches of about 50 people for about 30 minutes each. Therefore, only 400 people are allowed on a single night.

While visiting the Taj Mahal at night, visitors are required to reach the Shilpagram complex half an hour before their scheduled time. They aren't allowed inside the monument at night and can view the Taj Mahal only from a little distance. All belongings and luggage have to be deposited at a security counter before the night viewing starts. Video cameras are not allowed inside the complex during the night viewing.

# Photos of Taj Mahal

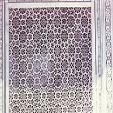


Figure 4: Structure of Taj Mahal

Adapted from https://www.holidify.com/

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)