

Taj Mehal



The Taj Mahal is an ivory-white marble mausoleum on the right bank of the river Yamuna in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India. It was commissioned in 1631 by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan to house the tomb of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal; it also houses the tomb of Shah Jahan himself. The tomb is the centrepiece of a 17-hectare (42-acre) complex, which includes a mosque and a guest house, and is set in formal gardens bounded on three sides by a crenellated wall.

The Taj Mahal complex is believed to have been completed in its entirety in 1653 at a cost estimated at the time to be around ₹32 million, which in 2023 would be approximately ₹35 billion (US\$498 million).[8] The construction project employed some 20,000 artisans under the guidance of a board of architects led by Ustad Ahmad Lahori, the emperor's court architect. Various types of symbolism have been employed in the Taj to reflect natural beauty and divinity.

THE TAJ MAHAL WAS COMMISSIONED BY SHAH JAHAN

Inspiration

The Taj Mahal was commissioned by Shah Jahan in 1631, to be built in the memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died on 17 June that year, while giving birth to their 14th child, Gauhara Begum.[14][15] Construction started in 1632,[16] and the mausoleum was completed in 1648, while the surrounding buildings and garden were finished five years later.[17] The imperial court documenting Shah Jahan's grief after the death of Mumtaz Mahal illustrates the love story held as the inspiration for the Taj Mahal.[18] According to contemporary historians Muhammad Amin Qazvini, Abdul Hamid Lahori and Muhammad Saleh Kamboh, he did not show the same level of affection to others as he had shown her while she was alive. He avoided royal affairs for a week due to his grief, along with giving up listening to music and dressing lavishly for two years. Shah Jahan was enamored by the beauty of the land at the south side of Agra on which a mansion belonging to Raja Jai Singh I stood. This place was chosen for the construction of Mumtaz's tomb by Shah Jahan and Jai Singh agreed to donate it to the emperor.[19]

Tourism

The Taj Mahal attracts a large number of tourists. UNESCO documented more than 2 million visitors in 2001,[81] which had increased to about 7–8 million in 2014.[82] A three-tier pricing system is in place, with a significantly lower entrance fee for Indian citizens and more expensive ones for foreigners. As of 2022, the fee for Indian citizens was ₹50, for citizens of SAARC and BIMSTEC countries, it was ₹540 and for other foreign tourists, it was ₹1,100.[83] Most tourists visit in the cooler months of October, November and February. Polluting traffic is not allowed near the complex and tourists must either walk from parking areas or catch an electric bus. The Khawasspuras (northern courtyards) are currently being restored for use as a new visitor centre.[84][85] In 2019, to address overtourism, the site instituted fines for visitors who stayed longer than three hours.[86]

The small town to the south of the Taj, known as Taj Ganji or Mumtazabad, was initially constructed with caravanserais, bazaars and markets to serve the needs of visitors and workers.[87] Lists of recommended travel destinations often feature the Taj Mahal, which also appears in several listings of seven wonders of the modern world, including the recently announced New Seven Wonders of the World, a recent poll with 100 million votes.[88]

The grounds are open from 06:00 to 19:00 hours on weekdays, except on Friday when the complex is open for prayers at the mosque between 12:00 and 14:00 hours. The complex is open for night viewing on the day of the full moon and two days before and after,[89] excluding Fridays and the month of Ramadan.

Architecture And Design

Architecture

The Taj Mahal incorporates and expands on design traditions of Indo-Islamic and earlier Mughal architecture. Specific inspiration came from successful Timurid and Mughal buildings including the Gur-e Amir (the tomb of Timur, progenitor of the Mughal dynasty, in Samarkand),[20] Humayun's Tomb which inspired the Charbagh gardens and hasht-behesht (architecture) plan of the site, Itmad-Ud-Daulah's Tomb (sometimes called the Baby Taj), and Shah Jahan's own Jama Masjid in Delhi. While earlier Mughal buildings were primarily constructed of red sandstone, Shah Jahan promoted the use of white marble inlaid with semi-precious stones. Buildings under his patronage reached new levels of refinement.[21]

Construction

The Taj Mahal is situated to the south of the walled city of Agra. Shah Jahan presented Maharaja Jai Singh I with a large palace in the centre of Agra in exchange for the land.[49] An area of roughly 1.2 hectares (3 acres) was excavated, filled with dirt to reduce seepage, and levelled at 50 metres (160 ft) above the riverbank level. In the tomb area, piles were dug and filled with stone and rubble to form the footings of the tomb. Instead of lashed bamboo, workmen constructed a colossal brick scaffold that mirrored the tomb. The scaffold was so enormous that foremen expected it to take years to dismantle.[50]