

Khuni Darwaza

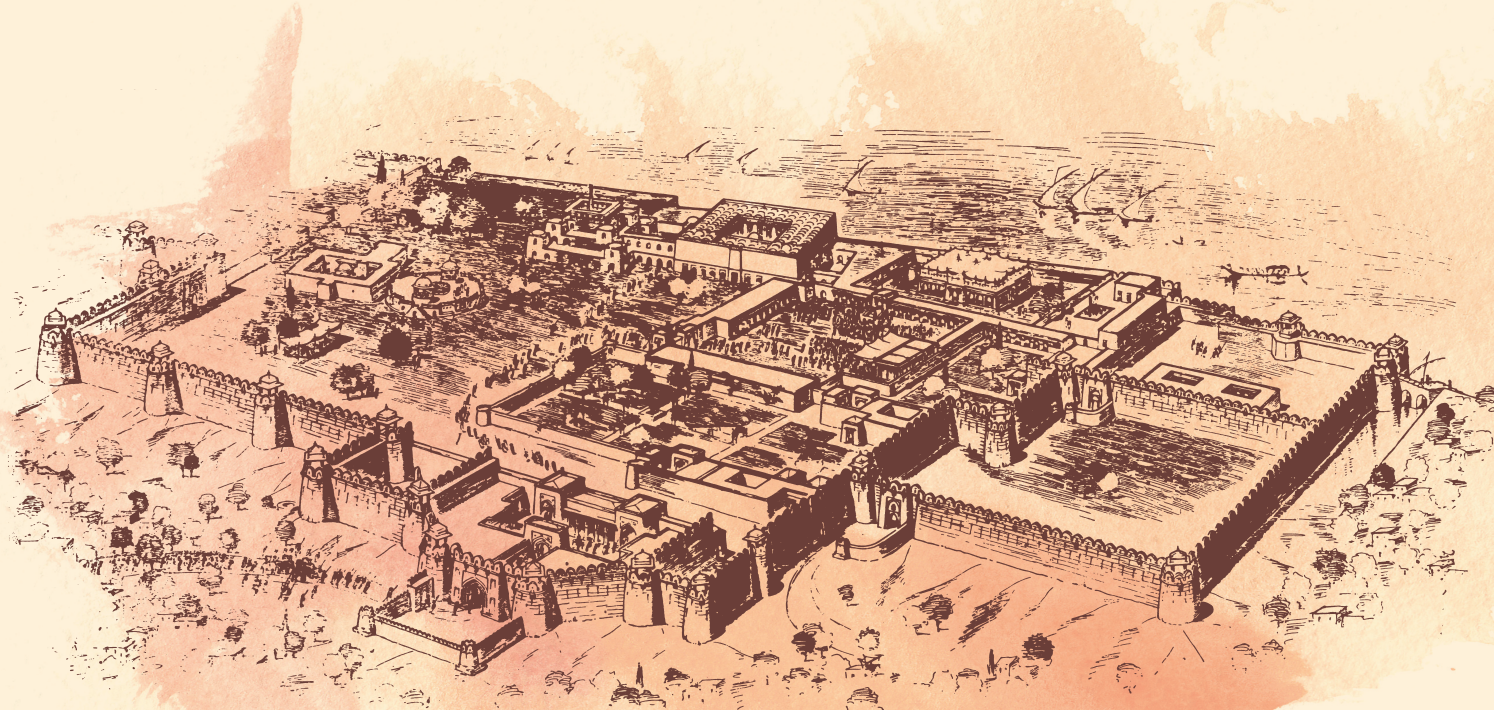
## 6. KHUNI DARWAZA

This gateway, which stands on an elongated traffic island on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg just outside the entrance to Firoz Shah Kotla, is actually a remnant of Sher Shah Sur's capital city (Sher Garh), built

around 1540. This gate was the northern extreme of the city, and was originally called the Kabuli Darwaza. The current epithet (Khuni means 'bloody') became more popular after the revolt of 1857, during which two sons and a grandson of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor, were killed here.

The structure is dressed in Delhi quartzite and red sandstone. The decorative elements – finely carved pilasters, jharokhas (oriel windows) and carved medallions – are mainly concentrated on the side of the gate facing the Delhi Gate. The other side is relatively short on ornamentation, but does have a plaque, carved with an inscription on white marble, to the effect that in 1857, a Captain Hodson was escorting three of Bahadur Shah's sons along this route in a bullock cart. At the Kabuli Darwaza, Hodson found himself surrounded by a mob, and fearing that it would try to free the princes, had them quickly stripped and executed.

If popular legend is to be believed, the Khuni Darwaza still runs red with the blood of the princes whenever it rains. A quaint story, but it helps add to the fascination of the gate.



Courtesy: ASI

**Kotla Firoz Shah:** *Timings:* Sunrise – Sunset, open daily. Wheelaccess, parking. *Tickets:* Indian Citizens – Rs. 5.00, Foreigners – Rs. 100.00.



**Nearest metro Station:** Pragati maidan

**Nearest bus stop:** Firoz shah Kotla

**Bus route nos.:** 026, 051, 053, 101, 103, 104, 164, 120, 173, 216, 241, 260, 270, 404, 405, 409, 419, 423, 425, 429, 438, 447, 451, 453, 454, 457, 458, 501, 502, 503, 515, 603, 605, 621, 622, 706, 722, 770, 773, 786, 790, 851

**Other places of interest:** Khuni darwaza, Delhi gate, Masjid Bhoori bhatiyari, National Gandhi museum, Samta Sthal.



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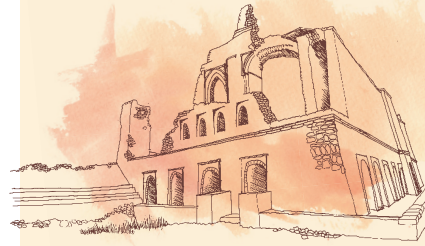


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# a walk around KOTLA FIROZ SHAH







## 1. PALACE RUINS

There are many ruined buildings just within the entrance to the Firoz Shah Kotla, and beyond to the right. They are all solidly built but in ruins, so that the original structures and their functions are difficult to make out. They lead right up to the eastern edge of the citadel, which would have overlooked the riverfront.

## 2. JAMI MASJID

This was the congregational mosque of Firoz Shah Kotla. Even though this building is far from intact (only the west and south walls now remain), it is one of the few structures in Firoz Shah Kotla that are recognizable, and still in use.

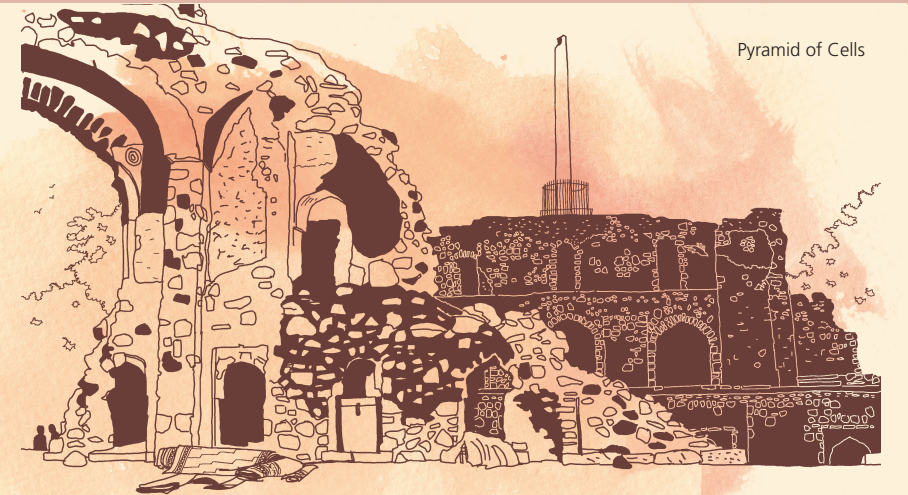
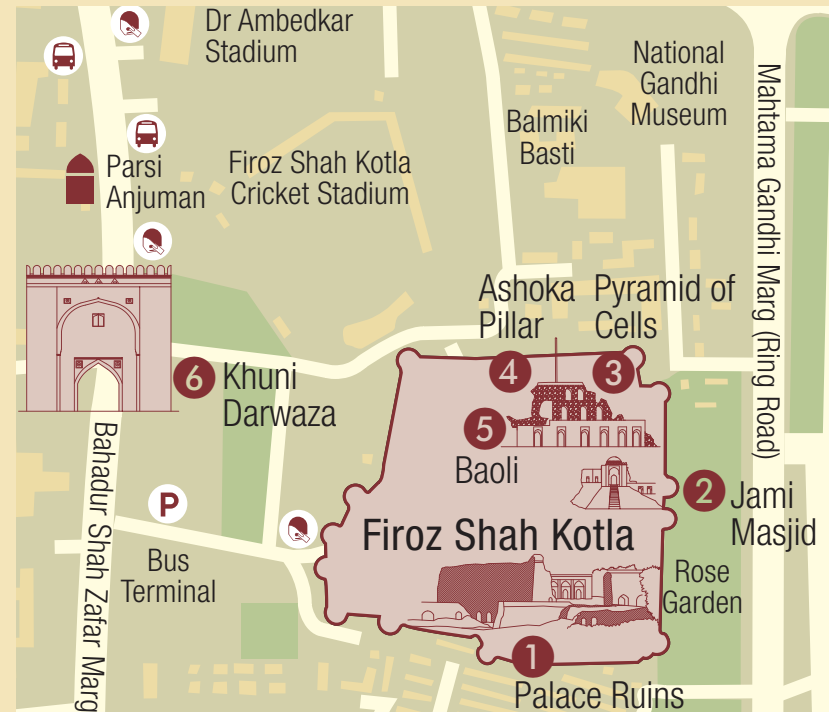
The Jami Masjid is believed by some historians to have originally resembled the Kalan Masjid, built by Firoz Shah's prime minister, Khan-e-Jahan Junan Shah. It is still an impressive domed building that rests on a block of cells that are very dark and gloomy. The main entrance to the mosque is from the north, up a flight of steps. The structure of the building is mainly rubble masonry covered with a plaster that would originally have been white and polished, though it is now much discoloured and crumbling. It is said that the invader Timur (Tamerlane) was so impressed by the Jami Masjid that he had a mosque built along the same lines in Samarqand, employing masons whom he took back with him from India.

At the top of the steps, a domed chamber leads into the courtyard or *sehan* of the mosque, which is still used as a place of worship. The far side of the *sehan* has a series of low arches, now outlined in bright green paint.

In the mid 14th century, when Firoz Shah Tughlaq ascended the throne of Delhi, he (like many of his predecessors and successors) decided to leave his mark by building his own city, Firozabad, with its accompanying citadel. Little remains of Firozabad the city. This is largely because two subsequent cities were built – Sher Shah's capital in the 16th century and Shahjahanabad in the 17th, overlapping or closely adjoining its boundaries on the south and north respectively. Firozabad's buildings were consequently broken up to supply building materials for these new cities. Only a few structures survived: the more important ones being the Kalan Masjid which fell within the walls of Shahjahanabad, and the citadel (Firoz Shah Kotla) and its prominent buildings.

Also known as Kushak-e-Firoz, Firoz Shah Kotla was built in 1354 and lay along the banks of the river Yamuna (the river has since changed its course eastwards). The main palaces held pride of place along the riverfront, to which a flight of stairs led down. All around were enclosing walls (parts of which are still there), 15m high and pierced by a double row of arrow slits, with circular bastions at the corners. You can still see the ruins of the palaces, pillared halls, mosques, a pigeon-tower and a baoli (stepwell) in the citadel.

Sometime in the twentieth century (according to one source, only in the 1970s) this fortress developed a curious reputation as the abode of spirits to whom petitions could be addressed, and who had to be appeased. Every Thursday hundreds of local people from the neighbourhood come to offer milk and grain, light candles and incense, and leave little strips of thread or coloured cloth, often with petitions scribbled on bits of paper, at various places within the complex.



Pyramid of Cells

## 3. PYRAMID OF CELLS

The Pyramid of Cells is probably the most well-known and visible structure in Firoz Shah Kotla. This building appears to have been built primarily to support the Ashokan pillar that stands atop it. The Pyramid of Cells, has three levels of small vaulted chambers, tapering up above the ground, with the pillar on the summit. In Firoz Shah's time the pillar was surrounded by a colonnade.

Locals believe the pyramid to be one of the main inhabitations of the djinns of Firoz Shah Kotla. Those who come to propitiate the djinns leave votive offerings in the cells all along the lowest level - burning candles and incense, coloured thread, and earthenware vessels of milk and grain. The entire structure is somewhat unstable, and therefore normally inaccessible to the public.

## 4. ASHOKAN PILLAR

The stone monolith, approximately 13m tall, that stands atop the Pyramid of Cells, was originally set up in Ambala district by the Emperor Ashoka (reign: 273-232 BC) of the Mauryan dynasty. Firoz Shah Tughlaq, on one of his excursions into the countryside, noticed the pillar and decided to bring it back to Delhi, to be erected at Firoz Shah Kotla. The task – a gargantuan one involving forced labour from all the inhabitants of the district – consisted of lowering the 27-tonne pillar, along with its base, onto a bed of silk cotton

fibres, then wrapping the pillar in reeds and rawhide before hauling it to Delhi, a distance of 90 kos (a kos being about 2 miles). Firoz Shah then went on to top the pillar with a golden dome, which has since disappeared.

The pillar is now commonly known as the *lat* (staff), but in previous centuries, it's been also called 'Bhim's walking stick' (after the legendary hero of the Mahabharat) and 'Firoz Shah's walking stick'. The *lat* tapers upward and is of a pale tan sandstone, flecked with black and inscribed with seven of Ashoka's edicts. These range from 'the Principles of Government' to 'Regulations restricting slaughter and mutilation of animals', all inscribed in the Pali script.

## 5. BAOLI

In front of the Pyramid of Cells, and separated from it by a stretch of lawn, is the round stepwell or *baoli* of Firoz Shah Kotla. The outer wall of the *baoli* has arched recesses, and the *baoli* itself is three storeys deep, with a staircase descending down to the water level at the western end. The water from the *baoli* is nowadays pumped up to irrigate the gardens of Firoz Shah Kotla. Like the Ashokan pillar, the *baoli* is also normally off limits to the public.



Baoli