8. The Archaeological Museum

The interesting Archaeological Museum next to Bada Darwaza is devoted to the archaeological finds at Purana Qila, and also the history of Delhi.

The exhibits at the museum trace in chronological order the history of Delhi. Another interesting part of the museum is its collection of photographs of work at the Purana Qila archaeological site. The Museum is housed in part of Purana Qila itself. The hall is part of the original fort and there is fine incised plaster, in the form of medallions, on the vaulted roof of the museum.

9. Khaibul Manazil

Also opposite Purana Qila, stands the building known as Khaibul Manazil (‘most auspicious of houses’). This was built between 1561 and 1562, on the orders of Maham Angah, one of the wet nurses of the Mughal emperor Akbar, to house a mosque and a madrasa, a school of learning. The mosque spreads across five bays, with the central bay being topped by a squat dome. The central courtyard – the sehan – has a shallow tank, used for wuzu (ablutions), and is enclosed by double-storeyed colonnades on the northern, southern and eastern sides. These colonnades housed the madrasa, which no longer exists, although the mosque itself is used for namaz on Fridays.

The impressive gate of Khaibul Manazil is an arched one made of red sandstone and quartzite, with sparse carving. The inside of the gate has some fine incised plaster. The five arched bays of the mosque too have similar incised plaster work, but the main ornamentation in the mosque is in the form of glazed tilework in yellow, green, white and blues above the mihrab.

10. Lal Darwaza

On Mathura Road opposite Purana Qila is another structure that is often associated with Purana Qila: Lal Darwaza (‘red gate’). It was built during the reign of Sher Shah Sur (the early 16th century) and is one of the few remains of Sher Garh outside of Purana Qila.

It is approached via a short road flanked by thick walls made of rubble and marked by a series of recessed arches forming kiosk-like structures, which may have been shops. At the end of this short stretch is the gate, which stands between two curving bastions.

The gate is dressed with red sandstone, with some buff sandstone and grey Delhi quartzite, and there are signs of decorative elements such as jharokhas and medallions which have since fallen off. Very minor traces of ornamentation do remain, for instance on the jharokha to the left is some fine blue glazed tile, along with carving.

Nearest metro station: Pragati Maidan, Indraprastha
Nearest bus stop: National zoological park
Other places of interest: Zoo, Matka Pir, Dargah, National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, National Science Centre, Bhairon Mandir, Pragati Maidan
1. Bada Darwaza

The Bada Darwaza – the ‘large gate’ – is currently the only entrance to the fort. Prior to the 1900s, a drawbridge here spanned the moat that encircled Purana Qila. This gate is a triple-storied structure tucked between two massive, curving bastions made of rubble masonry, and primarily dressed with deep red sandstone, relieved by inlays of white and greyish black marble. The two six-pointed stars on either side of the main arch are a common cosmic symbol used by Mughal-period builders. The second story of the gate is pierced by three openings, of which the two outer ones are faced by jharokha (oriel windows) with some lovely tilework in blues and green.

2. Talaaqi Darwaza

This is the northern gate of the fort, and its name means ‘forbidden gate’. There are differing stories regarding the reason behind the name. On the inside the Talaaqi Darwaza is reached by going down a short flight of semi-circular steps (similar to a Roman amphitheatre). On the outside, each of the eight sides has a recessed arch decorated sparingly with carving and inlays (mainly of five- and six-pointed stars) in white marble. The gate is flanked by bastions and decorated with jharokha on the second storey. The opening in the head of the main archway would be used in battle to drop missiles or boiling water on attacking armies.

3. Qila e Kohina Masjid

This mosque was built by Sher Shah in 1542. The back view reveals jharokha and bands of carved marble. In front of the mosque is a tank for ablutions (ablutions) and a well that was dug in the early 1900s. The facade of the mosque is extensively decorated with carving and inlay, and the juxtaposition of red sandstone, grey Delhi quartzite and marble, apart from geometric shapes, the ornamentation consists of bands of Quranic verses. The ceiling of the covered area is decorated with glazed tiles in blue, green, yellow and white, and the mihrab – which indicates west, the direction of prayer – is intricately carved and inlaid with red sandstone and black and white marble.

4. Baoli

The baok or stepwell is made mainly out of Delhi quartzite stone. Eighty-nine steps separated by eight landings lead down to the water. Stepwells like this one were typically fed by rainwater, sometimes supplemented by water from underground springs. The water was covered over with a roof to reduce evaporation and to keep the hole clean.

5. Sher Mandal

Sher Mandal is a double-storied, squat octagonal tower made of red sandstone and topped with a diminutive dome. The upper storey is now kept locked and is off limits to visitors. On the outside, each of the eight sides has a recessed arch decorated sparingly with carving and inlays (mainly of five- and six-pointed stars) in white marble. Sher Mandal was built by Sher Shah in 1541, possibly to function as a viewing tower for astronomical observations. When Humayun regained Purana Qila in 1555, he converted this building into his library, and a year later tripped and fell down its stairs to his death.

6. Hammam

The Hammam or bathhouse, was another important aspect of life in the citadel. It is a square, low building covered over on the outside with thin Lakhori bricks. Earthenware pipes originally used to carry water through the Hammam can still be seen in places. The interior of the Hammam includes a chute in one of the walls. This structure had been built over and was unearthed only in 1913 when the British began clearing Purana Qila of modern buildings.

7. South Gate (Humayun Darwaza)

This gate overlooks the National Zoological Park and is best seen from there. Ornamental chhatris top the gate, which is decorated with blue tilework and carving (including one of an elephant, on a marble tablet) and inlays of black and white marble.