The Red Fort
a walk around

9. Hammam
Though out of bounds for visitors, and plain-looking on the outside, these semi-private royal baths have richly inlaid and carved floors and ceilings within. The hammam was traditionally a place where the emperor not just had his bath, but also often discussed important matters of state with the courtiers who attended him. This building comprises three main chambers, intersected by corridors, with a central basin for hot and cold baths.

10. Hira Mahal
This four-sided pavilion of white marble beyond the Hammam was built in 1842, during the reign of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II. It is sparingly decorated, with carving along the arches and below the oblongs (overhang).

11. Shah Burj
At the far end of the line of buildings along the wall, north of Hira Mahal, stands Shah Burj. In this tower was installed the hydraulic system that drew up water from the river below into the channel known as the Nahar-i-Bihisht, the ‘Stream of Paradise’, which flowed through much of the fort. Shah Burj consists of two distinct sections: the main section is a five-arched pavilion of white marble supported on fluted columns and with low whaleback roofs. Attached to this, on the river-facing side, is the actual burj, the tower. The latter was seriously damaged in an earthquake in 1904, as a result of which it had to be rebuilt almost from scratch.

12. Moti Masjid
Next to the Hammam, and also like it off limits to visitors, the ‘Pearl mosque’ was built by Shahjahan’s son and successor Aurangzeb in 1659-60. It is a small three-domed mosque of elaborately carved white marble and was used as a private chapel by the Mughal emperors and the ladies of their household.

13. Hayat Baksh Bagh
The largest of the gardens in the Red Fort, the Hayat Baksh Bagh (‘bestower of life’ garden) was laid out by Shahjahan. Very little of the original layout survives. Barracks built for the use of British troops after 1857 still occupy half of the garden.

14. Sawan and Bhadon Pavilions
At either end of the Hayat Baksh Bagh are two almost identical open pavilions of carved white marble, facing each other across the water channel that runs from one to the other. These are named Sawan and Bhadon after the two rainy months in the Hindu calendar. A notable feature is a section of wall carved with niches. Lit lamps at night and vases of golden flowers during the day were placed here, and water from the channel would flow like a fine curtain in front.

15. Zafar Mahal
Midway between the Sawan and Bhadon pavilions stands a red sandstone pavilion known as Zafar Mahal. This was built in 1842 by Bahadur Shah Zafr, in the middle of a pre-existing tank. The use of red sandstone in its construction is an indication of the straitened financial circumstances of the last Mughal emperor who was emperor only in name. After the occupation of the fort in 1857, British troops in the Red Fort used the tank as a swimming bath for many years.

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An oblong, irregular octagon in shape, the Red Fort has a perimeter of 2.41 km and has two main gates, the Lahore Gate and the Delhi Gate. In Shahjahan’s time the Yamuna flowed beside the fort and water was channelled from it into the surrounding moat. The main palaces – those occupied by the royal family – were situated along what was then the river front.

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1. Lahore Gate

The original main entrance to the fort looked down the main street of Chandni Chowk. It is a three-storied structure of red sandstone flanked on either side by half-octagonal turrets topped by open pavilions. The central portion of the gateway has a row of small niches, each topped by a white marble dome, and with a minaret at either end of the row. This gate is now partly obscured by the 10.5 m high barbican constructed by Aurangzeb.

2. Chhatar Chowk

Just beyond the Lahore Gate lies the marquee that is today known as Chhatar Chowk, but in Shahjahan’s time it was also known as Meena Bazara or the Bazara- e-Mosahka. In the 17th century, the shops along this covered, vaulted arcade sold relatively exotic wares: midgets, eunuchs, jewellery, brocades, etc.

3. Naubat Khana

The Naubat Khana or Naqqar Khana originally housed the music gallery and was the main entrance to the Diwan-e-Aam beyond. Musicians at the Naubat Khana would play drums throughout the day on special occasions like the emperor’s birthday. On other days, drums would be played five times a day if the emperor was in residence, thrice if he was travelling. Visitors to the fort would alight at the Naubat Khana, leaving their transport, including elephants here – which is why it was also known as the Hathi Pol (‘elephant gate’).

4. Diwan-e-Aam

The Diwan-e-Aam, the Hall of Public Audience, where the emperor met with his most select courtiers, is made completely of white marble embellished with carving, gilt and fine pietra dura inlay. In its length, the Diwan-e-Khas was carpeted, replete with mirrors and gold-embroidered curtains, and with a vast canopy of red cloth stretching across the front. Here, on a marble platform, sat the legendary Tahkt-e-Ta’as, the Peacock Throne, described by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier as being surmounted by a ‘peacock with elevated tail made of blue sapphires and other coloured stones, the body being of gold inlaid with precious stones...’. This throne was carried off by the invader Nadir Shah in 1739.

At the northern and southern ends of the hall is the imperial seraglio. Today, it houses the Archaeological Museum, an interesting collection of artefacts from different periods of the Mughal era.

5. Mumtaz Mahal

This is a much altered, plain building that was originally a part of the imperial seraglio. Today, it houses the Archaeological Museum, an interesting collection of artefacts from different periods of the Mughal era.

6. Rang Mahal

The name of this chief building of the imperial harem or seraglio (sing – ‘colour’; and mahal – ‘palace’) refers both to the paint work that decorated its walls, and probably the colorful private life it once contained. In Shahjahan’s time, the palace was ablaze with paint and mirrorwork, its length partitioned by heavy drapes. A wide, shallow water channel ran through it, with a central marble basin carved into the floor. In one small chamber, fine strips of silvery mirror are inlaid on the ceiling and upper walls, forming arabesques and geometrical patterns. Under the Rang Mahal was a thikana or basement, to which the ladies of the harem would move in the hot summer days.

7. Khassa Mahal

Next to the Rang Mahal are four contiguous white marble structures that together form the Khassa Mahal, the private palace of the emperor. The Tashah Khana consists of three rooms facing the Diwan-e-Khas, and behind the Tashah Khana are the three rooms that form the Khwabghah, or the sleeping chambers. Adjacent to the Khwabghah is the Bairhak or Tooha Khana, and at the east end of the Khaas Mahal is the Musamman Burj, a semi-octagonal tower with carved marble (‘screens’) and a jharoka (oriel window) in the centre. The Musamman Burj was originally topped with a dome of gilded copper. The jharokha of the Musamman Burj was known as the jharoka-e-dushan, where the emperor would appear at sunrise daily to show himself to his subjects.

8. Diwan-e-Khas

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