

KOTLA FIROZ SHAH

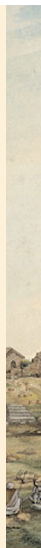
and its surroundings



दिल्ली विरासत
DELHI HERITAGE

The name Firoz Shah Kotla to most people today suggests an extremely popular cricket stadium of the city. In fact the stadium overlooks a 14th century citadel, from which it gets its name, Firoz Shah Kotla. Among its ruins stand a pillar from the 3rd century B.C., and a functioning mosque. A little to the north of this citadel is the southern edge of the 17th century imperial city of Shahjahanabad, delineated by a stretch of the old city wall. The Delhi Gate, one of the main gates that led into the city, marks the entrance into the quarter known as Daryaganj. The name literally means 'the mart by the river', but most of the characteristic architecture here, seen along Netaji Shubhash Marg and the streets leading off it, dates from the late Colonial period. Dotted through it are older buildings — including royal mosques. Daryaganj also boasts a Sunday Book Bazaar which has a 50-year history and is a must-do for bibliophiles.

Just south of Firoz Shah Kotla is Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, a broad, busy street that touches the very heart of Delhi's commerce. On this road are the giants of the Indian press and media. The Central Revenues Building gives the area its popular name, ITO (for Income Tax Office), but there are other major government offices here too. Other attractions in the vicinity include the International Dolls Museum, and also Bal Bhavan — a great place to keep children occupied and happy.





1. KOTLA FIROZ SHAH

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. Today little remains of Firozabad – the Kalan Masjid fell within the walls of Shahjahanabad and the Khuni Darwaza was left stranded in the middle of the road. Nevertheless, the citadel, Firoz Shah Kotla, contains some impressive structures.

Also known as Kushak-e-Firoz (the Palace of Firoz), Firoz Shah Kotla was built in 1354, along the banks of the river Yamuna (which has since changed its course further westwards). The main palaces faced the riverfront, with stairs leading down to the river. All around were enclosing walls (parts of which are still standing), 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, a mosque, a pigeon-tower and a *baoli* (stepwell) in the citadel. Mostly in ruin, all that's now visible is traces of plaster clinging to rubble masonry. Part of the reason for this is that most of the material from Firoz Shah Kotla was carted away a couple of kilometres north to build Shahjahanabad in the mid 1600s.

Every Thursday hundreds of local people come to offer milk and grain, light candles and incense, and leave strips of thread or coloured cloth, often with petitions scribbled on bits of paper, at various places within the complex to appease the *djinns* that are said to inhabit the place. These beliefs and practices are relatively recent, according to one source having begun only in the 1970s.

Timings: Sunrise – Sunset, open daily. Wheelchair access, parking.

Tickets: Indian Citizens – Rs. 5.00, Foreigners – Rs. 100.00.

a. Pyramid of Cells

The Pyramid of Cells is probably the most well-known and most visible structure in Firoz Shah Kotla, with the Ashokan pillar that stands atop it. The Pyramid of Cells does look like a pyramid, with three levels of small vaulted chambers surrounded by corresponding terraces, tapering up above the ground. A staircase winds through the structure up to the summit, where the pillar stands. Today, a metal fence surrounds the pillar and keeps it secure from inquisitive visitors; 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, so you'll probably see burning candles and incense, coloured thread, and earthenware vessels of milk and grain lying just about everywhere. The structure is now unstable, and to prevent possible accidents, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has erected a high metal fence all around the Pyramid of Cells, with bars across each of the lowermost cells and a locked door at the bottom of the staircase, thus effectively barring entry both to the cells and to the pillar at the top.



b. Ashokan Pillar

The stone monolith, approximately 13m tall, that stands atop the Pyramid of Cells, was set up in Ambala district by the Emperor Ashoka (r. 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, involved using forced labour from all the inhabitants of the district. The 27-tonne pillar, along with its base, had to be lowered onto a bed of silk cotton fibres and then wrapped in reeds and rawhide before hauling it to Delhi, a distance of 90 kos (a kos being about 2 miles). The fact that they then erected the pillar at Firoz Shah Kotla without damaging it, says a lot. Firoz Shah then went on to top the pillar with a golden dome, which has (not surprisingly) 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 *Mahabharata*) 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.



c. Jami Masjid

Adjacent to the Ashokan pillar is the Jami Masjid, the congregational mosque of Firoz Shah Kotla. Even though this building is far from intact (only the west and south walls now remain), it's one of the few structures in Firoz Shah Kotla that are recognisable, 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 Junaan Shah. The mosque, at any rate, is an impressive domed building that rests on a block of cells. If you're prone to claustrophobia, avoid these cells: they are very dark and gloomy.

The main entrance to the mosque is from the north, up a flight of steps next to the block of cells. The mosque is now mainly rubble masonry covered with a veneer of grubby plaster, but in Firoz Shah's time, the plaster would have been a bright white, similar to marble. Contemporary historians also report that the doorways of the mosque were covered with carved stone, and that an account of Firoz Shah's reign – in particular the public works he executed – was inscribed in the centre of the open quadrangle beyond. Legend has it that the invader Timur 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. The far side of the *sehan* has a series of low arches, now outlined in bright green paint, but that's about all.



d. Baoli

In front of the Pyramid of Cells, and separated from it by a stretch of neat 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 off limits to the public, because of past accidents where visitors fell in. A high fence encircles the entire well, and if you want to be allowed in to get a closer view, you'll need to obtain permission from the ASI office at the main gate of the citadel.



2. JAMIAT ULAMA HIND MASJID

On Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, at the ITO crossing, stands a fairly prominent building with a squat plastered dome, covered over with a yellowish paint. This is the Jamiat Ulama Hind Masjid, a mosque not as well known perhaps as the Jama Masjid or even the Zeenat-ul-Masajid, but with a historical importance nonetheless, since this is one of the few buildings in Delhi that date back to the time of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The Jamiat Ulama Hind Masjid was built in 1575, by an official of Akbar's, known as Sheikh Abdun Nabi, who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina several times. The mosque is therefore also known as the Mosque of Abdun Nabi.

Not very much can be seen of the original ornamentation of the mosque, since a number of modern additions and alterations have been made to the building. High, imposing arched doorways lead into a three-compartmented interior, topped with a dome above the central chamber. The interior of the mosque was originally intricately and profusely decorated, but nothing of this ornamentation remains.

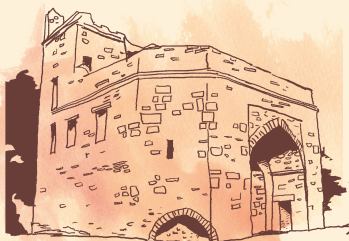
Timings: 24 hrs, open daily.

3. KHUNI DARWAZA

Almost opposite the entrance to Firoz Shah Kotla, on a traffic island on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg is a large gateway known as the Khuni Darwaza ('bloody gate'). Built in 1540 as the northern gateway of Sher Shah Sur's capital city (Sher Garh), it was originally called the Kabuli Darwaza. The current epithet came after the revolt of 1857, when two sons and a grandson of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor, were killed here.

The gate 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 north face. On the other side is a marble plaque, which says that in 1857, Captain Hodson was escorting the princes as prisoners 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.

According to popular legend, the Khuni Darwaza still runs red with the blood of the princes whenever it rains!



4. DELHI GATE

When the Mughals shifted their capital from Agra to Delhi and built Shahjahanabad in the 1650's, the new city was ringed with sturdy walls pierced by 13 gates. Of these, only the Ajmeri, Turkman, Delhi and Kashmiri Gates remain intact. The Delhi Gate, at the south-eastern corner of the walled city is the most imposing. The name of the gate is derived from the direction the gate faces – 'Delhi' referring to the old city, south of Shahjahanabad.

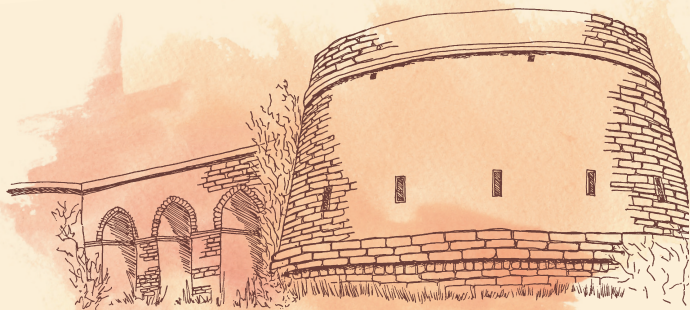
The gate is of dressed stone, i.e. grey Delhi quartzite and red sandstone, with battlements along the top and formidable bastions framing the central pointed arch opening that leads into the gate. There are solid stone staircases at the sides, leading to the top.



5. CITY WALL, SOUTH DARYAGANJ

The section of the City Wall along Ansari Road is one of the few intact portions of the wall that once linked the gates of the city. You will have to walk due east along the line of the Delhi Gate to get to the wall.

Built by the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan in the 1650s, this section of the City Wall was strengthened by British engineers in the early 19th century. Arched *dalans* (shallow cell-like structures) stretch all along the lower half of the wall; the wall itself looms to a height of about 13m from the ground. It's good, solid rubble masonry, with arrow slits and battlements atop the ramparts. Wide ramps, floored with thin Lakhori bricks, reaching up from the ground to the top of the wall were used to haul up cannons that were mounted atop the wall.



6. MARTELLO TOWER

About half way down this stretch of wall is a Martello tower, a British defence construction that was inspired by a similar structure at Mortella Point in Corsica during the Napoleonic wars. The British constructed hundreds of such towers at home and in their far flung dominions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Called Martello towers as a result of a mis-spelling, these were free-standing structures on the coastline, built to accommodate a few men within, and a heavy piece of artillery on top. The eight Martello towers built in Delhi were quite atypical, because they were constructed as adjuncts to the wall, and were not self-contained forts. And of course they were nowhere near a coast.

The tower seen here is a tapering circular bastion dressed in Delhi quartzite. A little higher than the wall, it stands slightly apart from it, but can be approached via a ramp, though the final gap between the two is now not bridged as it would have been earlier.

7. SUNEHRI MASJID — NEAR THE DELHI GATE OF RED FORT

Near the Delhi Gate is a secluded three-domed mosque of delicate pink sandstone, the Sunehri Masjid (the 'golden mosque', so called because its domes were originally copper plated). There are three mosques in Shahjahanabad called Sunehri Masjid. This one was built in 1751 by Qudsia Begum, the mother of the Mughal Emperor Ahmad Shah (r. 1748-54), who was the real power behind the throne, and her trusted courtier Javed Khan.

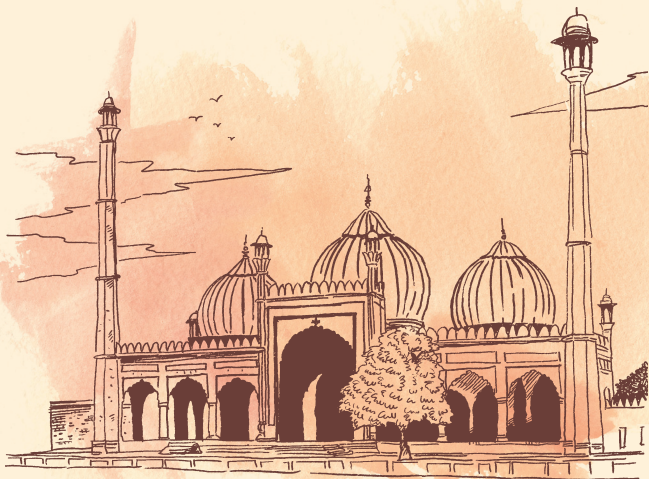
Mosques were traditionally built on slightly higher ground, so that worshippers had to climb up to them – a sign of humility. In the case of the Sunehri Masjid that Qudsia Begum built, there was no high ground on which to place the mosque, so a broad flight of steps leads down into a courtyard, from where another flight of steps leads up to the mosque. The domes were originally of wood covered with gilded copper. Since in time these became worn and shabby, in 1852, the emperor Bahadur Shah II had them covered with the sandstone you see today.

Timings: 4.00 am –12.00 pm, open daily.



8. ZEENAT-UL-MASAJID

Shahjahanabad has its fair share of Mughal-era mosques. A number of them – the Fatehpuri Masjid, the Sunehri Masjid, and the later destroyed Akbarabadi Masjid owe their existence to the ladies of the royal family. Another, the Zeenat-ul-Masajid, also known as the Ghata Masjid ('cloud mosque') sits on a broad sloping road named after the mosque. It was built quite close to the city wall, near the gate known as Khairati Ghat Darwaza or Masjid Ghat Darwaza. This also suggests that the name 'Ghata' could be derived from the nearby *ghat* (steps leading down to the river).



This striking mosque was commissioned by Zeenat-un-nissa Begum, the daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb, in 1707 and is said to have been the next most important mosque after the Jama Masjid. It was also one of the first buildings that came into view when the city was approached from the river.

After the Revolt of 1857, the British administration confiscated it (just as it did the Jama Masjid). The Akbaradi Masjid, a large Shahjahan period mosque that had stood not far away was destroyed altogether. The tomb of Zeenat-un-Nissa, which was within the Zeenat-ul-Masajid complex, to the north, was destroyed. The building was then turned into a commissariat bakery. By 1875, the bakery had been moved out, but as late as 1929, visitors were reporting that the grounds of the mosque were being used for purposes as varied as a stable for *tongas* (horse-drawn carriages), an arena for wrestlers, and a tennis court.

Timings: 24 hrs, open daily.

9. SUNEHRI MASJID – ALSO KNOWN AS QAZI-ZADON-KI-MASJID

This mosque was constructed in 1744-45 by Raushan-ud-daulah Zafar Khan, a powerful nobleman during the reigns of some of the later Mughals. He built another mosque on the Chandni Chowk street and both these mosques had gilt domes and thus were popularly called Sunehri masjid or 'golden mosque'. It is recorded that soon after its construction the main dome of the Chandni Chowk mosque collapsed, and was replaced using the dome from the Daryaganj mosque. This odd circumstance has left the latter dome-less, giving it a very peculiar look. Also, the exterior of the mosque has been painted white and green.

Timings: 24 hrs, open daily.

Other attractions in the area

10. DARYAGANJ SUNDAY BOOK BAZAAR

The stretch of road beyond Delhi Gate, Netaji Subhash Marg, along with the larger neighbourhood of Daryaganj is an important business district. Some of India's leading publishers and book distributors have their head offices in Daryaganj. This may have a bearing on the fact that every Sunday, come rain or shine, summer or winter – Daryaganj is the venue for a huge book bazaar.

The Daryaganj Sunday book bazaar has been an institution for about half a century now. Every Sunday, dozens of booksellers, most of them with just a large tarpaulin on which to spread out their wares, come here to sell used books, low-priced books, antique books, new books: just about anything printed, and you're likely to find it here. The range of subjects too is mind-boggling. You'll find classic literature, academic books on physics and mathematics, management, self help, health and fitness, computers, history, art and architecture, cookery, wildlife, travel: name it and its there. Fiction too is widely available, all the way from P.G. Wodehouse to Agatha Christie, Stephen King, Ruth Rendell, and Michael Crichton, to one-book wonders and relatively unknown authors. The trick here is to arrive at Daryaganj by about 11.30 AM, by when most booksellers have set up their stalls. Browse around, be patient: take your time, go through piles of books, and you may unearth a gem. A must-do for a book-lover!

Timing: open only on Sunday



11. SHANKAR'S INTERNATIONAL DOLLS MUSEUM

The International Dolls Museum occupies a large part of the first floor in the Children's Book Trust building on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg. It is an interesting little museum, and generally a hit with small children who can't quite get over the sheer variety of dolls here – more than 6,500 exhibits from over 85 countries across the world.

The museum was established by the political cartoonist K. Shankar Pillai, who began collecting dolls in the early 1950's after he was gifted a doll by the then Hungarian Ambassador to India. Within a decade he had a collection of more than 500 dolls. It was Indira Gandhi, later Prime Minister of India, who suggested to Shankar that he might set up a museum. The museum was inaugurated in 1965, and since that time it has seen many thousands of visitors, some of whom have even gifted dolls to the collection.

The dolls are lined up, in order of geographical region and country, in over a hundred glass cases. Mostly, these are dolls representing human figures – everything from fierce samurai warriors to elegant geishas, wicked witches and haggard mendicants, baseball players, soldiers, queens, matadors and flamboyant flamenco dancers, and many more. Occasionally, you'll come across animals: a Norwegian polar bear, a Spanish bull. The variety of dolls is fascinating, in material, style, and size. There are dolls of clay, wood, straw, cloth, porcelain, plastic. Dolls form tableaux depicting Thai dancers, Indian people celebrating festivals, even the first man on the moon. Do look out, very especially, for the dolls from Ireland and West Bengal, which have the most amazing expressions! The dolls from Eastern Europe wear exquisitely embroidered clothes, and the Korean and Japanese dolls are by far the most elegant. The museum's star attractions are the Hungarian doll that started off Shankar's collection; and dolls gifted to the museum by Madame Tito, by the Queen of Thailand, and by Queen Frederika of Greece.

Timings: 10.00 am – 5.30 pm. Monday closed.

Ticket: Adult/child: Rs. 10/5.

Food at Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg

While in this area you might like to take advantage of the round-the-clock food kiosks that cater mainly to the crowds of office-goers during the day, and journalists working till late into the night in the large print media offices in the vicinity.

12. BAL BHAVAN

Inaugurated by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1958, Bal Bhavan is a large complex, spreading out across a series of interconnected lawns, buildings and designated activity areas, where thousands of children come to explore, learn, and understand – the emphasis being on unleashing a child's creativity by allowing him/her to 'learn by doing'. Each activity area, whether it's dramatic arts or tie-and-dye work, or even basketball or football – is supervised by one or more adults.

There is a small 'wildlife enclosure', mainly with common birds like geese, pigeons and parakeets, along with a small pond of turtles.

The Integrated Activities zone is where children pursue a variety of art activities, from theatre, classical and folk dances, instrumental and vocal music, painting, stitching, handicrafts, to even publication of Bal Bhavan's own newspaper.

The Wood Park is a small open area with logs of wood, some carved and others left intact, arranged around pathways in a small park. There are stunning murals that adorn the walls enclosing the park, which have all been made by highly talented children.

In the Traffic Park children can learn about road signs and can even borrow bicycles and tricycles from the office next door and navigate the road and its roundabouts, complete with traffic lights, for themselves!

In the Science and Solar Energy Park, outdoor exhibits include a kaleidoscope, a periscope, a solar-powered water pump and a working rainwater harvesting system, that help explain the basics of science in a hands-on way.

The Jawahar Aquarium, has a small collection of fish and its own calendar of activities.

Timings 10:00 am – 5:00 pm. Ticket: Free and open to all, open daily.

Nearest Bus Stops

(i) Delhi Gate

(ii) **Ambedkar Stadium Terminal:** 39, 118 Ext, 225, 301, 307, 309, 312, 423, 322, 343, 51 347, 348, 353, 363, 783, 447, 503, 85, 857, 936, 949, 949A, 949 Ext, 960, 533, 621

(iii) **Darya Ganj:** 26, 51, 62, 104, 118 Ext, 164, 171, 172, 185, 204, 210, 113, 216, 241, 245, 246, 260, 261, 266, 270, 301, 312, 322, 339, 347, 363, 402, 403, 404, 404 Ext, 405, 409, 419, 425, 436, 502, 602, 605, 622, 632, 729, 753, 760, 838, 901, 012 LTD



Bus Stand



Petrol Pump



Toilets



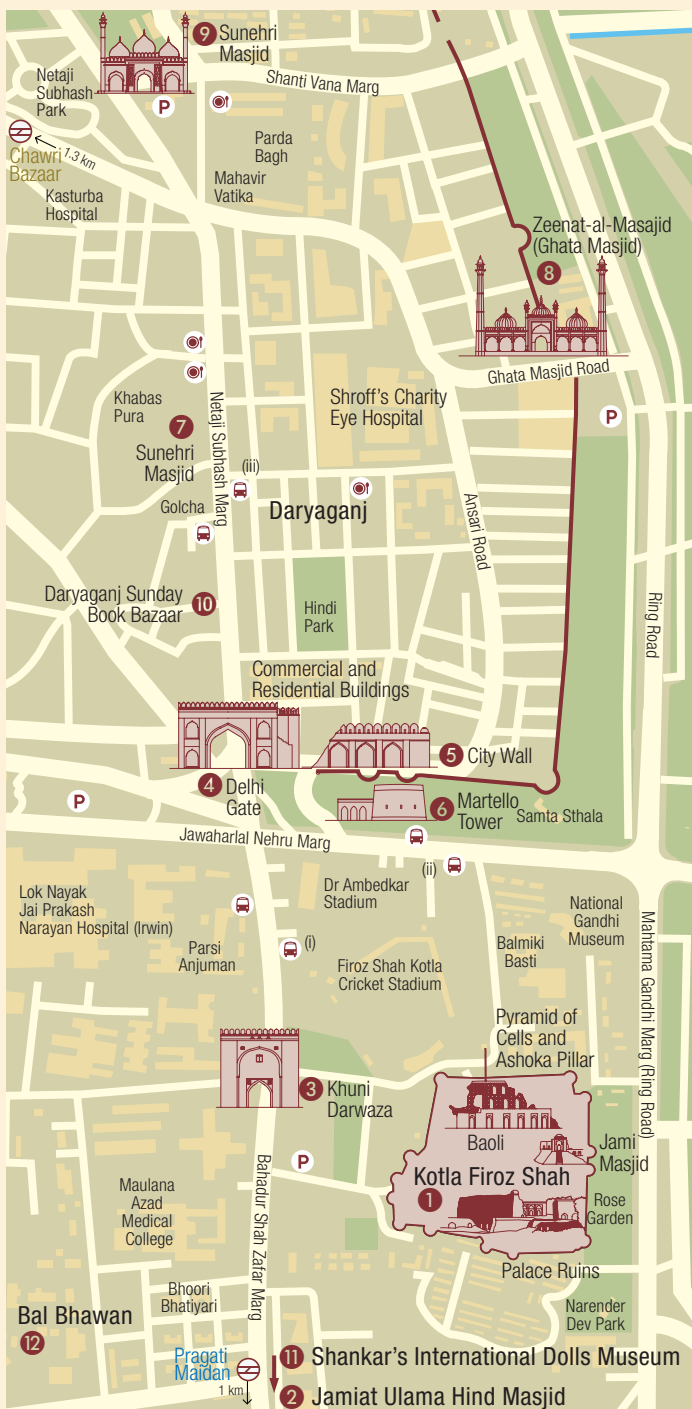
Cafeteria



Metro Station



Parking





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