

PURANA QILA

and its surroundings



दिल्ली विरासत
DELHI HERITAGE



Sandwiched between two of modern Delhi's most prominent landmarks – Pragati Maidan and the National Zoological Park – the Purana Qila ('old fort') is appropriately named. It is old, of course; the citadel here dates back to the 1530's – but there are many older monuments in Delhi.

What makes Purana Qila special, as far as antiquity is concerned, is that this is believed to be the site of one of the oldest settlements in Delhi: Indraprastha, the legendary capital of the Pandavas. Within Purana Qila itself there's enough to see: one of the most elegant and exquisite mosques in Delhi; the building in which the second of the Mughal emperors,

Humayun, fell to his death; three fine gateways; and more.

Around Purana Qila are further attractions, both new and old. The National Zoological Park spreads across 240 acres along the southern edge of Purana Qila. On the northern side of the fortress is Pragati Maidan, almost a perpetual venue for trade shows, expositions and exhibitions. Clustered around Pragati Maidan are the excellent Crafts Museum and the National Science Centre and two sites of religious importance: Matka Pir and the Dargah. Also opposite Purana Qila,

across Mathura Road, are a couple of other monuments that are little known but worth seeing: the Khairul Manazil mosque and the Lal Darwaza.



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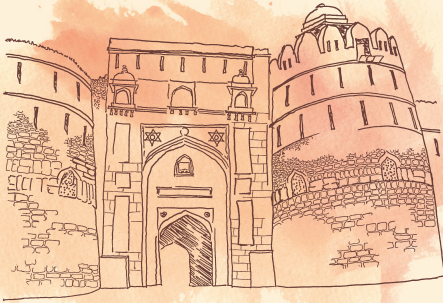
1. PURANA QILA

The second Mughal emperor, Humayun, probably had the least stable reign. As a result of his ongoing feud with Sher Shah, Humayun ended up being ruler of Delhi for not very long. However, he managed to build a city known as Dinpanah ('asylum of the faith') on the site of the ancient Indraprastha (supposedly the capital of the Pandavas around 1450 BC; excavations at the site have revealed signs of human habitation dating back to 300-200 BC, when the Maurya empire held sway). Work on Dinpanah began in 1530 and carried on till 1538; two years later, in 1540, Sher Shah Sur defeated Humayun and appropriated Dinpanah. In the five short years that Sher Shah ruled Delhi, he made substantial additions to the city, including the striking Qila-e-Kohna mosque and the octagonal tower known as Sher Mandal. Sher Shah built his own city too, which he named Dilli Sher Shahi or Sher Garh.

Fifteen years after he had been forced out, Humayun was back in Delhi, having defeated the Surs at Panipat. He embarked on a round of renovations at Dinpanah, which lasted only about a year, till his death in 1556.

Today, Dinpanah is known as Purana Qila (also sometimes referred to as Pandavon ka Qila – 'the fort of the Pandavas'), an oblong octagonal fort and an important landmark of Delhi. The rubble and dressed stone walls of the fort complete a circuit over a mile long, pierced by three impressive gates: the Bada Darwaza, the Talaqi Darwaza, and the Humayun Darwaza (also known as the South Gate). The walls themselves are as high as 20m in places, and approximately 4m thick.

Timings: Sunrise – Sunset, Open daily. Tickets: Indian Citizens – Rs. 5.00, Foreigners – Rs. 100.00, Museum – Rs. 2.00. Amenities: wheelchair access, parking, small canteen inside fort.



Bada Darwaza

The Bada Darwaza – the ‘large gate’ – was built in 1533-4 and is the first structure you’ll see when you enter. It is currently the only entrance to the fort. It stands tall at the end of a short road that

slopes up from just beyond the gate to the National Zoological Park, facing Mathura Road. This road, dates back only to the early 1900’s; prior to this, drawbridges spanned the moat that encircled Purana Qila. All you can see of the moat now is a water body used by the Delhi Tourism Boating Club.

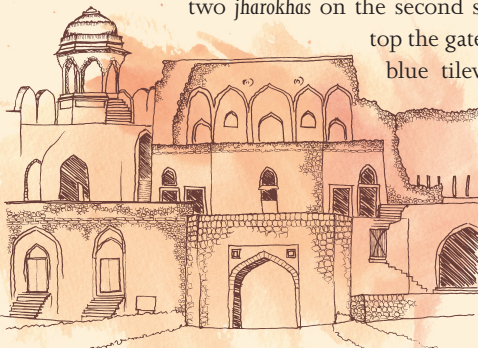
The Bada Darwaza is a triple-storeyed structure tucked between two massive, curving bastions made of rubble masonry. Though very little ornamentation remains on the bastions (one of them has a *chhatri* – a small domed pillared pavilion – on top), it is pleasantly decorated with inlay, carving and tilework. The gate is dressed with deep red sandstone, relieved by inlays of white and greyish black marble. The two six-pointed stars you see inlaid on either side of the main arch are a common Mughal cosmic symbol. The second storey of the gate is pierced by three openings, of which the two outer ones are fronted by *jharokhas* (oriel windows) with tilework in blues and green. If you look closely, you’ll be able to see traces of similar tilework on the *chhatri* that surmounts the bastion next to the gate. The vaulted rooms on the inside were once used as guardrooms.

South Gate (Humayun Darwaza)

Also known as Humayun Darwaza, this gate overlooks the National Zoological Park and is best seen from there. Humayun Darwaza is flanked by bastions, has a high arch in the middle, and two *jharokhas* on the second storey. Ornamental *chhatris*

top the gate, which is decorated with blue tilework, carving (including

one of an elephant, on a marble tablet) and inlays of black and white marble. The gate was built in 1533-4, and provides a good view of Humayun’s Tomb, to the south.



Talaaqi Darwaza

If you turn left from the Bada Darwaza and walk along the periphery of the fort, you'll come to the northern gate of Purana Qila, the Talaaqi Darwaza ('forbidden gate'), built in 1533-4. Nobody seems sure of how this gate received its name, a fictional legend has it that a princess shut the gate on her husband who was defeated in a battle and said that it would be opened only when he returned victorious; he was killed shortly after and the gate has remained shut ever since.

Although the Talaaqi Darwaza looks dilapidated, it merits a closer look. Sir Edwin Lutyens actually aligned the central vista of New Delhi with Talaaqi Darwaza when planning the layout of New Delhi.

To get to the Talaaqi Darwaza, you'll need to go down a short flight of semi-circular steps. The gate is closed, so you can't go through and admire it from the outside, but the interior of the gate is exquisite enough. If you look up, you'll see that the ceiling still has traces of some fine ornamentation: medallions of incised plaster, mirrorwork, and strips of bright blue glazed tile. The exterior shows remains of incised plaster and blue tiles on the upper storeys.





Qila e Kohna Masjid

Built by Sher Shah in 1542, it was described by Abdulla in *Tarikh-i-Daudi* as a ‘magnificent masjid (mosque)’. Apart from being an exceptionally beautiful monument, it offers an interesting glimpse into how mosque architecture in Delhi evolved from the earlier Lodhi period to that of the Mughals.

The Masjid stands roughly opposite the Bada Darwaza. As you walk down the road leading east from the gate, you will approach the mosque from the back.

In front of the mosque is a grassy stretch, with a tank for wazu (ablutions) and a well that was dug in the early 1900’s. Beyond is the mosque, its façade a typical odd-numbered arched one, with the central arch, the *iwān*, being the largest. The two sets of arches on either side of the *iwān* are completely symmetrical and are known as the *sawaal* – the question – and the *jawaab* – the answer – respectively.

The central arch at Qila-e-Kohna is the largest and most ornate, with the extensive use of white marble in its decoration. The outer arches use more red sandstone and grey Delhi quartzite. The

exquisite façade of the mosque is decorated with bands of Quranic verses carved in sandstone and marble, along with inlay work.

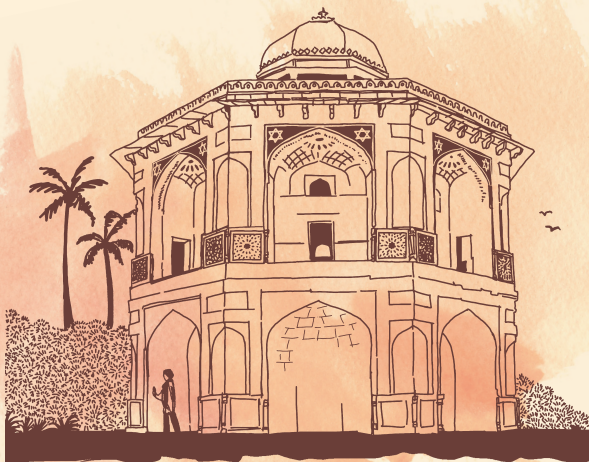
Inside, the Qila-e-Kohna mosque is equally striking. The ceiling of the area behind the *iwan* is decorated with glazed tiles in blue, green, yellow and white, and the *mihrab* (arch which indicates the direction of prayer) – is intricately carved and inlaid with red sandstone and black and white marble. All five bays of the mosque are decorated with carving and show traces of painting on the ceilings, particularly the southernmost bay which has a beautiful painted ceiling and finely carved squinches at the corners of the outer bays.

Sher Mandal

Sher Mandal lies south of the Qila-e-Kohna Masjid, a squat octagonal tower made of red sandstone and topped with a diminutive dome. Compared to the mosque, Sher Mandal doesn't look too alluring, but this structure's significance lies in its history – the fact that it was the scene of the death of a Mughal emperor.

Sher Mandal was built by Sher Shah in 1541, probably to function as a pleasure resort. When Humayun regained Purana Qila in 1555, he converted this double-storeyed building into his library. A year later, in 1556, Humayun tripped and fell down the stairs of Sher Mandal to his death.

The upper storey of Sher Mandal is off limits to visitors. 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. Although you won't be able to see it, the second storey of the building consists of a cruciform chamber decorated with glazed tiles and stucco. The ground floor of Sher Mandal is supposedly solid.





Baoli

The *baoli* or stepwell at Purana Qila lies between the Qila-e-Kohna Masjid and Sher Mandal. It is an interesting example of medieval water management. Stepwells like this one were typically fed by rainwater, sometimes supplemented by water from underground springs. A series of steps – in this case, eighty nine – separated by landings (this *baoli* has eight of them) lead down to the stepwell, allowing people to descend to the *baoli* to fetch water. Typically (as you'll see in this *baoli*), the water was covered over with a roof to reduce

evaporation and to keep the *baoli* clean.

The *baoli* is made mainly out of Delhi quartzite stone. It's closed to visitors, so you can't go down to the water, but the fence surrounding the *baoli* is low enough for you to look over and see most of it. The water's now stagnant and dirty, but the well beyond – on the north-eastern end of the *baoli* – is still in use.

Hammam

Like the *baoli*, the *hammam* – the bath complex – seems to pale into insignificance in comparison with Sher Mandal or the Qila-e-Kohna mosque. Also like the *baoli*, however, the *hammam* was an important aspect of life in the citadel.

The *hammam* lies to the west of Sher Mandal, at the base of the low hillock on which Sher Mandal stands. It is a square, low building covered all over on the outside with thin Lakhori bricks. There are no decorative elements – this is obviously a solidly practical building – but earthenware pipes originally used to carry water through the *hammam* can still be seen in places. The interior of the *hammam* also includes a chute in one of the walls.

Interestingly enough, the *hammam* is a relatively new discovery; it had been built over and was unearthed only in 1913 when the British began clearing Purana Qila of modern buildings.

The Archaeological Museum

The Purana Qila is one of the most important archaeological sites in Delhi, and excavations over the years have brought to light artefacts from as far back as the 3rd century BC. The Archaeological Museum's focus is, not surprisingly, the archaeological finds at Purana Qila; but there's more here too, on the history of Delhi per se.

The exhibits at the museum trace in chronological order the history of Delhi beginning with the Mauryan (300-200 BC) empire, through the Sunga, Kushana, Gupta, Rajput, Sultanate and Mughal dynasties. Each set of exhibits is supported by a brief history and description of the corresponding dynasty, along with details of archaeological finds at the Purana Qila excavation site that pertain to the dynasty. These include a lot of terracotta and earthenware (there are some fine figurines here, along with pots, plates, tiles and even glazed pottery from later eras), some glassware, and even Chinese porcelain from the Mughal period.

Another interesting part of the museum is its collection of photographs of work at the Purana Qila archaeological site: you'll see here not just what was unearthed, but also how it was done, which probably makes for some very interesting stories!

Lastly, do keep in mind that the Archaeological Museum is housed in part of Purana Qila itself. The hall is part of the original fort, and though it's been painted and panelled and modernised, the ceiling and walls are still very much what they were in Humayun's time. Look up, and you'll see some fine incised plaster, in the form of medallions, on the vaulted roof of the museum.



2. KHAIRUL MANAZIL

At the intersection of Subramanya Bharati Marg and Mathura Road, opposite Purana Qila, stands a monument that is often mistaken to be part of Purana Qila. The Khairul Manazil ('most auspicious of houses') mosque, however, is not part of Purana Qila; it was, in fact, built after Purana Qila was constructed. It was built in 1561–1562 by 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 *wazu* (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 arched gate of Khairul Manazil is made of red sandstone and quartzite, with sparse carving, mainly in the form of medallions on both sides of the arch. Once inside, do turn around and look at the gate; the inside of it has some fine incised plaster. The 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*.





3. LAL DARWAZA

Next to Khairul Manazil is another structure that is often associated with Purana Qila: Lal Darwaza ('red gate'). Unlike Khairul Manazil, however, Lal Darwaza was built during the reign of Sher Shah Sur (mid 16th century) and is one of the few remains of Sher Garh outside of Purana Qila. Lal Darwaza possibly separated the area of the citadel from the rest of Sher Garh.

It is approached by 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. Lal Darwaza is obviously named for the red sandstone with which the gate is dressed. Buff sandstone and grey Delhi quartzite have also been used to some extent, and if you look closely, you'll see signs of decorative elements such as *jharokhas* and medallions which have since fallen off. Very minor traces of ornamentation do remain, though: if you look up at the *jharokha* on your left, you'll see signs of some fine blue glazed tile, along with carving.



4. DARGAH

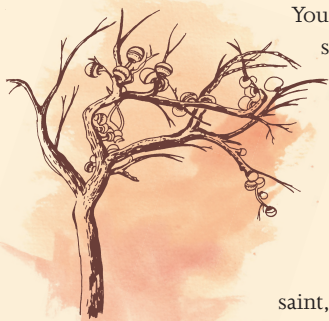
Opposite Matka Pir, across Mathura Road, lies yet another shrine, but with a very different character to it. This is the grave of the 17th – 18th century poet and philosopher Mirza Abdul Qadir ‘Bedil’; known



simply as the *dargah* (shrine). South of the gate to the National Sports Club lies a stretch of greenery, mainly scrub and trees run wild. This is known as Bagh-e-Bedil, and within this stands the *dargah* along with a number of other graves. As you follow the path from the entrance, you’ll see the green and white painted *dargah* off to your left. This is a small rectangular structure made of stone (although you can hardly see the stone because of the paint), with cusped arches all around—three on the longer sides, one each on the shorter sides. The arches are supported on slender fluted Shahjahani columns. Compared to Matka Pir, the *dargah* is mostly deserted; very few people visit.

5. MATKA PIR

At the south-west corner of Pragati Maidan, opposite the National Sports Club, is one of the most unusual shrines in Delhi: Matka Pir. *Matka* literally means an earthenware water pot, and this humble utensil is very much in evidence all across this shrine.



You’ll see shops selling earthenware *matkas* as soon as you enter, and as you walk up the broad marble steps to the shrine, you’ll notice that the trees alongside are all festooned with *matkas*. At the top, beside the green and white painted chamber that houses the shrine, is a bare tree laden with even more *matkas*.

Matka Pir is the burial place of a Sufi saint, Hazrat Sheikh Abubakar Tusi Haidari Qalandari, believed to have been a contemporary of the emperor Ghiyasuddin Balban, who reigned from 1266 to 1287. The saint’s shrine attracts a large number of devotees, many of whom come with the prescribed votive offering: two *chaadars* (coverlets), *gur* (jaggery), roasted *chana* (chickpeas), sugar, milk and—of course—a *matka*. These *matkas* are the ones that eventually end up all across the shrine, making it a landmark with a very unique character all its own.

Other places of interest

6. NATIONAL HANDICRAFTS AND HANDLOOMS MUSEUM

Popularly known simply as the Crafts Museum, this is a showcase of Indian arts and crafts. The museum consists of outdoor areas and indoor galleries. The outdoor sections of the museum spread out beside trees, courtyards and gardens, depicting Indian villages and samples of traditional wall paintings such as Madhubani. In addition, artisans and craftsmen from across India sell their wares – including traditional textiles, paintings on cloth, palm leaf paintings, and carpets. There are four excellent indoor galleries, each highlighting a different aspect of Indian craftsmanship. These include The Folk and Tribal Art Gallery, The Cultic Objects Gallery, The Courtyl Crafts Gallery and The Textile Gallery

7. NATIONAL SCIENCE CENTRE

The National Science Centre is justifiably popular with schools across Delhi: there's a lot here for children (and adults, for that matter) to learn. Attractions are spread across galleries such as the Heritage of Science gallery and the Emerging Technologies section. There are many opportunities for children to engage with science through hands-on exhibits.

8. BHAIRON MANDIR

Lying alongside the eastern wall of the Purana Qila is the Bairon Temple, dedicated to Bhairon Baba. This deity is believed to be a demon who was slayed by the goddess Durga but was pardoned as he died. The temple building is modern but the site is believed to be ancient. The offerings at the temple interestingly, consist of alcoholic spirits.

9. NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK

The National Zoological Park, popularly known as the Delhi Zoo, spreads across 240 acres to the south of Purana Qila. It has approximately 1,700 creatures, belonging to about 185 species including white tigers, elephants, Asiatic lions, and the great one-horned rhinoceros. Battery-operated buses are available to tour the zoo. Another option on foot is to follow the defined path – marked by bold yellow arrows on the road – to see the zoo's highlights. This route goes past the different species of deer and gazelle, Royal Bengal tiger, hippopotamus, one-horned rhinoceros, leopard, jaguar, sloth bear, white tiger, Asian elephant, Asiatic lion, small cats, langurs, and different species of birds.





Nearest Bus Stops

(i) National Zoological

Park: 044, 101, 323, 356, 374, 402, 403, 404, 405, 409, 419 Ltd, 423, 425, 429, 436, 438, 447, 453, 457, 458, 461, 966

-  Bus Stand
-  Petrol Pump
-  Toilets
-  Cafeteria
-  Metro Station
-  Parking



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